

Construction of adenovirus vectors carrying VEGF₁₂₁-FLAG and hrGFP-1 and their expressions in bone marrow stromal stem cells[☆]

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Abstract

BACKGROUND: Vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF) can promote angiogenesis, and has been extensively used in treatment of bone defect. However, few studies have addressed its isomer VEGF₁₂₁.
OBJECTIVE: To construct adenovirus vector carrying VEGF₁₂₁-FLAG and humanized Renilla reniformis green fluorescent protein 1(hrGFP-1) and observe its expression in bone marrow stromal stem cells (BMSCs).
METHODS: Using polymerase chain reaction technique, VEGF₁₂₁ gene contained in the plasmid of pTG19T-VEGF₁₂₁ was used to remove termination codon. *NotI* and *XhoI* restriction sites were added before and after gene sequence. Obtained gene subclone was moved onto pMD19-T plasmid. The pMD19-T-VEGF₁₂₁ and pShuttle-CMV-IRES-hrGFP-1 plasmids underwent double enzymatic digestion. Small fragment and big fragment were retrieved utilizing gel. Subsequently, coupled reaction was conducted to complete the construction of shuttle plasmid. After measuring virus titer, BMSCs were transfected and the fluorescence intensity was observed under fluorescence microscope.
RESULTS AND CONCLUSION: Recombinant adenovirus plasmid was successfully constructed by enzymatic digestion determination and gene sequence. Fluorescence microscope has shown that BMSCs transfected with recombinant adenovirus presented significantly green fluorescence expression. Thus, adenovirus vector carrying VEGF₁₂₁-FLAG and hrGFP-1 gene can express in eukaryotic cells, which can be used for gene therapy for ischemic disease.

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INTRODUCTION

Factors that contribute to angiogenesis contain direct inducing factor and indirect inducing factor^[1-3]. Vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF) is a powerful vascular permeability factor. In particular, VEGF₁₆₅ and VEGF₁₂₁ effects are significant. VEGF₁₆₅ is half soluble and half insoluble proteins in a body, and can secrete *in vitro*. Some are combined with cell membrane or intercellular substance. However, VEGF₁₂₁ is completely soluble, does not bind with the weak acidic protein of heparin, completely secrete outside cells and float in intercellular substance, can better exert paracrine effects, and promote angiogenesis^[4-8]. Flt-1 receptor of VEGF could be found in osteoblasts; VEGF induced chemotaxis through strongly expressed Flt-1 receptor in osteoblasts. Thus, osteoblasts gathered in defect sites, and differentiated into osteogenic tissue affected by VEGF^[9-25]. The present study used humanized Renilla reniformis green fluorescent protein (hrGFP-1) as report gene, constructed adenovirus expression system containing VEGF₁₂₁-FLAG and hrGFP-1 gene, and observed its expression in bone marrow stromal stem cells (BMSCs) *in vitro*, in the hope of providing experimental evidences for gene therapy for ischemic disease in the Department of Orthopaedics.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design

A cytological *in vitro* observational study.

Time and setting

Experiments were performed at the Central Laboratory, First Affiliated Hospital, Liaoning Medical University from April 2008 to October 2009.

Materials

One clean male Japanese rabbit weighing 1.2 kg was supplied by the Laboratory Animal Center, Liaoning Medical University (animal license No. SCXK (Liao) 2003-2007). Protocols were conducted in accordance with the *Guidance Suggestions for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals*, formulated by Ministry of Science and Technology of the People's Republic of China^[26].

Plasmid, strain, main reagents and kits are listed as follows:

Plasmid, strain, main reagent and kit	Source
pTG19T-VEGF ₁₂₁ plasmid	Institute of East Hepatobiliary Surgery, Shanghai, China
pAdeasy-1, adenovirus shuttle plasmid	Stratagene, USA
pShuttle-CMV-IRES-hrGFP-1	Shanghai Genmed Gene
BJ5183 electroporated competence bacteria	Pharmaceutical Technology Co. Ltd., China
<i>Pme I</i> and <i>Pac I</i> enzyme	New England Biolabs Inc., Beijing, China
various restriction enzyme, DNA Ligation Kit Ver.2.0, high-fidelity DNA polymerase, Agarose Gel DNA Purification Kit Ver.2.0	TaKaRa DNA Fragment Purification Kit Ver.2.0
plasmid small-volume extraction kit	TaKaRa, USA
dNTP, DNA marker	TaKaRa, USA

Methods

VEGF₁₂₁ gene mutation and pMD19-T plasmid subclone containing VEGF₁₂₁ gene following mutation (as +VEGF₁₂₁)

① Using polymerase chain reaction (PCR) technique, VEGF₁₂₁ gene contained in the plasmid of pTG19T-VEGF₁₂₁ was used to remove termination codon TAG sequence. *NotI* and *XhoI* restriction sites were added before and after gene sequence:

Primer sequence:

F: 5'-GCG GCC GCA TGA ACT TTC TGC TGT CTT G- 3'

R: 5' -CTC GAG CCG CCT CGG CTT GTC ACA TT- 3'

Using pTG19T-VEGF₁₂₁ as a template, PCR was performed; reaction condition is as follows: 98 °C, 10 seconds for 30 cycles; 55 °C, 5 seconds for 3 030 cycles; 72 °C, 30 seconds for 30 cycles; 72 °C, 5 minutes for 1 cycle. The samples were identified utilizing agarose gel electrophoresis.

② PCR products + "A" and purification: PCR products were retrieved. An "A" was added at the end of 3' of PCR products. The samples were then refined using TaKaRa DNA Fragment Purification Kit Ver.2.0.

③ Connection, transformation, and screening of positive clone: Solution I of TaKaRa DNA Ligation Kit Ver.2.0 was employed to connect PCR products and pMD19-T plasmid. Competent cells were transfected, and flat plate was smeared, followed by incubation at 37 °C overnight.

④ Plasmid extraction and sequencing.

Construction and identification of pShuttle CMV-⁺VEGF₁₂₁-IRES-hrGFP-1

Plasmid pMD19-T-⁺VEGF₁₂₁ and shuttle vector pShuttle-CMV-IRES-hrGFP-1 underwent *NotI* and *XhoI* double enzymatic digestion, and received agarose gel electrophoresis. Following gel retrieval, the samples were mixed with T4 DNA Ligase and buffer at molar ratio 10: 1 at 16 °C overnight. On the following day, the samples were transformed into bacteria DH5α, and clone was extracted. Following sequencing identification, target gene was inserted into shuttle vector using correct reading frame.

Adenoviral recombination and identification

Shuttle plasmid containing target gene was linearized using *PmeI* enzymatic digestion. pAdeasy-1 was transformed into BJ5183 bacteria to obtain BJ5183 bacteria containing pAdeasy-1. Correct pShuttle CMV-⁺VEGF₁₂₁-IRES-hrGFP-1 was transformed into BJ5183 containing pAdeasy-1. Following mixture, the samples were added in a cup for electrotransformation. After electrotransformation, the medium supplemented with kanamycin was rapidly added in the pool, blew and hit evenly, overnight. A small colony was selected and amplified to extract plasmid. Following *PacI* enzymatic digestion, recombinant plasmid received agarose gel electrophoresis. A comparison with standard spectrum of recombinant adenovirus enzymatic digestion was done to identify the accuracy of obtained recombinant adenovirus.

Package and amplification of recombinant adenovirus

Package of adenovirus: 293A cells were incubated in a 6-well plate at 4×10⁵. On day 2, recombinant adenovirus plasmid

was linearized using *PacI* enzymatic digestion, followed by gel retrieval and purification. Linearized plasmid DNA was transformed into 293T cells by using liposome lipofectamine 2000. On day 4, the medium was replaced. On day 11, cells were collected. Virus was collected following repeatedly freezing and thawing.

Amplification of adenovirus: 1/3 obtained virus was applied to infect new 293T cells. On 48 hours, cells were collected. A total of 4 amplifications were done. All cells were harvested, followed by repeatedly freezing and thawing, to obtain recombinant adenovirus.

Determination of physical titer of recombinant adenovirus

Recombinant adenovirus was greatly amplified, followed by twice CsCl₂ gradient centrifugation. After removal of CsCl₂ by dialysis, the samples were stored in buffer (10 mmol/L Tris, 4% sucrose, 2 mmol/L MgCl₂, pH 8.0). Titer of Ad -⁺VEGF₁₂₁-IRES-hrGFP-1 was measured by bacteriophage plaque analysis: 6.50×10⁹ pfu/mL.

Collection and detection of bone marrow

Japanese rabbits were anesthetized with SU-MIAN-XIN II (0.2 mL/kg) by intramuscular injection. Internal side of inferior extremity of bilateral femurs was selected as puncture site. Following shaving hair, povidone iodine sterilization and paving aseptic towel, a total of 4.0 mL bone marrow was collected using No. 16 needle. On a superclean bench, 4.0 mL bone marrow was infused into 20 mL aseptic bottle, and incubated with 4.0 mL DMEM supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum, and then triturated. 1.0 mL samples each were added in eight 30 cm² bottles, with an additional 3.0 mL DMEM, and finally incubated in an incubator containing 5% CO₂ at 37 °C for 5 days. The medium was replaced on day 5, and the medium was replaced every three days from then on. Cell growth was observed under an inverted microscope. The spindle-shape cells were BMSCs. Cells were subcultured 5 days later. Ad-⁺VEGF₁₂₁-IRES-hrGFP-1 was used to transfect the third passage of BMSCs, and gene expression was observed under a fluorescence microscope.

Main outcome measures

Enzymatic digestion pattern and sequencing site during the construction of adenovirus vector carrying VEGF₁₂₁-FLAG and hrGFP-1 genes were analyzed. Expression of recombinant adenovirus vector in BMSCs was measured.

Design, enforcement and evaluation

The first and third authors designed this study, collected data and performed this study. The first, second and fourth authors assessed results. They were professionally trained. The blind method was not used.

RESULTS

Package of recombinant adenovirus

Following Ad -⁺VEGF₁₂₁-IRES-hrGFP-1 lipofectamine 2 000 cotransfection into 293T cells, cytopathic effects occurred at 2 weeks in most cells. 293 cells were repeatedly

infected, and 293T cells suffered from cytopathic effects at 3 days following the third infection, and fluorescence intensity became strong significantly (Figure 1).

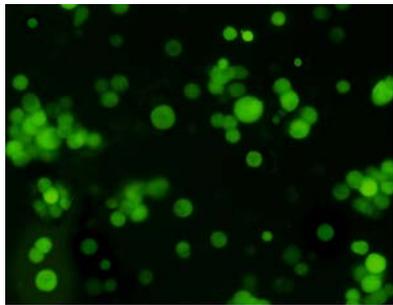


Figure 1 Strong fluorescence and cytopathic effects at 2 wk after transfection into 293T cells under fluorescence microscope

Gene expression in BMSCs

Strong green fluorescence could be detectable in the third passage of BMSCs at 48 hours following transfection of Ad-*VEGF₁₂₁-IRES-hrGFP-1 under the fluorescence microscope (Figure 2).

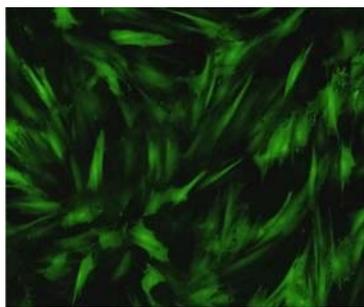


Figure 2 Strong fluorescence in bone marrow stromal stem cells at 48 h after transfection

Changes in pTG19T-VEGF₁₂₁ termination codon prior to and following mutation

Termination codon GTA was replaced by CTCGAG at *Xho*I locus following mutation (Figures 3, 4).

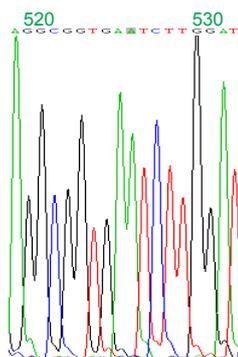


Figure 3 Partial sequencing map containing termination codon before mutation

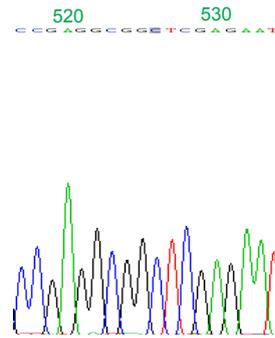
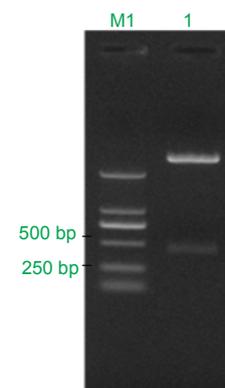


Figure 4 Partial sequencing map containing *Xho*I locus of termination codon removal after mutation

Electrophoresis results of pMD19-T-*VEGF₁₂₁ following *Not*I and *Xho*I double enzymatic digestion

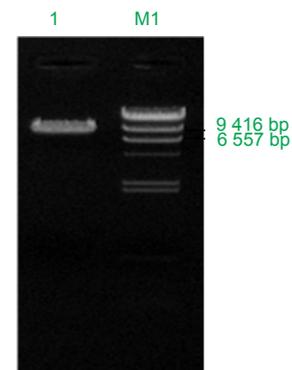
Target genes between 250 bp and 500 bp were visible (Figure 5).



M1: DL2000 DNA Marker; 1: pMD19-T-*VEGF₁₂₁ *Not*I/ *Xho*I

Figure 5 Electrophoresis result after pMD19-T-*VEGF₁₂₁ was cleaved by *Not*I and *Xho*I

Electrophoresis results of pShuttle-CMV-IRES-hrGFP-1 following *Not*I and *Xho*I double enzymatic digestion (Figure 6)



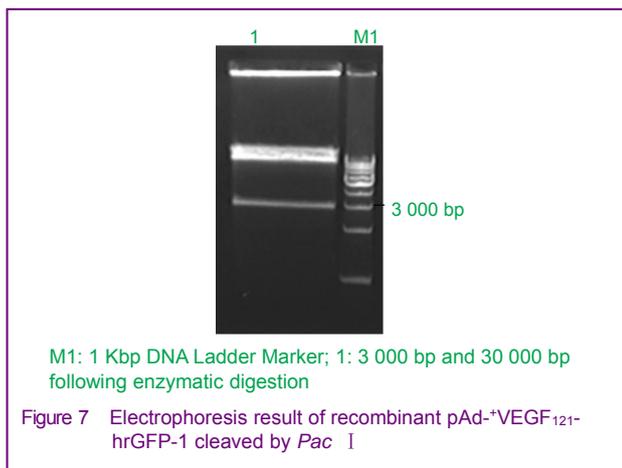
M1: λ -Hind III digest DNA Marker; 1: pShuttle-CMV-IRES-hrGFP-1 *Not*I/ *Xho*I

Figure 6 Electrophoresis results after pShuttle-CMV-IRES-hrGFP-1 was cleaved by *Not*I and *Xho*I

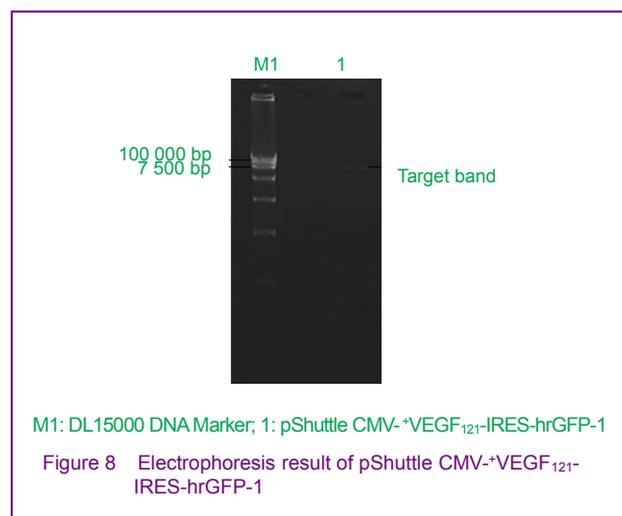
*Pac*I enzymatic digestion results of pAd-*VEGF₁₂₁-hrGFP-1

Two bands, 3 000 bp and 30 000 bp, confirmed successful

homologous recombination (Figure 7).



Electrophoresis results of pShuttle CMV-⁺VEGF₁₂₁-IRES-hrGFP-1 (Figure 8)



DISCUSSION

In the process of gene therapy, report gene-GFP was used to study intensity or time of exogenous gene expression *in vivo*. Enhanced GFP is commonly utilized to monitor *in vivo* gene expression and report gene of intracellular protein localization^[27-28]. This study used hrGFP-1, which is twice lighter than enhanced GFP, can be easily detected, and has a small toxicity on mammalian cells. Following Ad-⁺VEGF₁₂₁-IRES-hrGFP-1 transfection into BMSCs, target gene and hrGFP-1 transcription were on the same mRNA; internal ribosome IRES sequencing was bound with ribosome, which completed the simultaneous translation of target gene^[29-32]. Utilizing PCR technique, VEGF₁₂₁ gene termination codon was removed. *NotI* and *XhoI* restriction sites were added before and after gene sequence. Gene can localize between *NotI* and *XhoI* of pShuttle CMV-IRES-hrGFP-1 multiple clone sites. FLAG antigen labeling sequence is visible prior to shuttle vector internal ribosome entry site sequencing. Following translation removal and termination codon, base sequence from VEGF₁₂₁ gene order translation initiation codon to FLAG epitope gene cannot lead

to frameshift mutation of FLAG epitope gene, but result in read-through of two genes, and finally confluence of VEGF₁₂₁ and FLAG proteins. The isomers of VEGF contain six types, but lack of antibody of VEGF₁₂₁. Thus, FLAG antigen labeling is very important for VEGF₁₂₁ specificity test. As a vector of mediating VEGF gene, adenovirus is characterized by ① extensive host cells in adenovirus; infection on dividing and nondividing cells; ② high target gene expression; ③ carried gene cannot integrate into genome of host cells, without the risk of insertion mutation; ④ big adenoviral genome, whereas viral reproduction-needed cis element area is small^[33-34]. Up to now, no reports have addressed that recombinant adenovirus lead to tumor or other genetic diseases. Thus, it can be utilized as a satisfactory vector for VEGF gene, and introduced into host cells to satisfy the requirement of VEGF during the treatment of ischemic disease in the Department of Orthopaedics. The present study successfully constructed recombinant adenovirus vector containing VEGF₁₂₁ and hrGFP-1 gene, and verified this recombinant adenovirus expressed target gene in eukaryotic cells. Therefore, author constructed recombinant adenovirus can be employed in following studies, and lay the foundation of *in vivo* local application of VEGF₁₂₁ gene therapy for ischemic disease.

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构建携带 VEGF₁₂₁-FLAG 和 hrGFP-1 基因腺病毒表达载体在骨髓基质干细胞中的表达[☆]

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摘要

背景: 血管内皮生长因子具有促进血管生成的作用, 在骨缺损的治疗研究中运用较多, 但其异构体 VEGF₁₂₁的研究较少。

目的: 构建携带 VEGF₁₂₁-FLAG 和 hrGFP-1 基因的腺病毒表达载体并观测其在骨髓基质干细胞中的表达。

方法: 以 pTG19T-VEGF₁₂₁ 为模板利用 PCR 技术突变 VEGF₁₂₁ 基因以去除 VEGF₁₂₁ 基因

中终止密码子, 之后在基因序列前后分别加入 *Not*I 和 *Xho*I 酶切位点, 并将得到的基因亚克隆至 pMD19-T 质粒上, 双酶切 pMD19-T-VEGF₁₂₁ 和 pShuttle-CMV-IRES-hrGFP-1 质粒, 凝胶回收小片段和大片段, 后进行连接反应, 完成穿梭质粒的构建。重组病毒物理滴度测定后感染骨髓基质干细胞, 在荧光显微镜下观察荧光强度。

结果与结论: 经酶切鉴定及基因测序证实重组腺病毒质粒构建成功, 荧光显微镜下观察表明, 感染重组腺病毒的骨髓基质干细胞有明显的绿色荧光表达。可见构建的携带 VEGF₁₂₁-FLAG 和 hrGFP-1 基因的腺病毒表达载体可在真核细胞表达, 有可能用于缺血

性疾患的基因治疗。

关键词: 骨缺损; VEGF₁₂₁; hrGFP-1; 腺病毒载体; 绿色荧光蛋白; 基因治疗

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