

pcDNA_{3.1}-osteogenic growth polypeptide eukaryotic expression vector in bone marrow mesenchymal stem cells**★

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Abstract

BACKGROUND: Osteogenic growth polypeptide (OGP) had clear effect on promoting osteoblast proliferation, differentiation and mature.

OBJECTIVE: To explore the expression of OGP gene, which was transfected into rabbit bone marrow mesenchymal stem cells (BMSCs) and to evaluate the effects of OGP on differentiation of rabbit BMSCs.

METHODS: pcDNA_{3.1}-OGP was constructed using gene cloning and recombination techniques. Rabbit BMSCs were transfected with pcDNA_{3.1}-OGP mediated by lipofectamine 2000. The transfection positive cell clones were selected with G418. The expression of OGP gene was detected using reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction analysis on an mRNA level. Differentiation of pcDNA_{3.1}-OGP transfected BMSCs into osteoblast lineage was observed.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION: The pcDNA_{3.1}-OGP plasmid was constructed successful and OGP expression was detected in rabbit BMSCs. Hydroxyproline content was increased, and alkaline phosphatase activity was also increased. These indicate that pcDNA_{3.1}-OGP transfected BMSCs expressed OGP, and could differentiate into osteoblast lineage.

INTRODUCTION

Bone marrow mesenchymal stem cells (BMSCs) are widely used progenitor cells in bone tissue engineering studies^[1]. Osteogenic growth polypeptide (OGP) is one of the osteogenic polypeptides which promote proliferation of osteoblasts *in vitro* and *in vivo*. OGP was first isolated by Bab *et al*^[2-3] from healing bone marrow cells. Its molecular formula is H₂N-ALKRQGR₁LYGFGG-COOH^[4] and its molecular weight is 1 523. In physiological condition, 80%–97% of OGP exists in the OGP-OGPBP compound in human and mammalian serum^[2-3]. OGP was proved to promote osteoblast proliferation, differentiation and sophistication *in vitro*, and increase whole body bone quantity *in vivo*^[5]. As the development of gene therapy and tissue engineering technology, it becomes an ideal method for bone regeneration and bone defect restoration to introduce bone induction factor genes into BMSCs and expect local OGP expression to exhibit bone tissue induction activity. In this study, synthetic OGP was recombined into the eukaryotic expression vector as the pcDNA_{3.1}-OGP plasmid, which was subsequently transfected into rabbit BMSCs. Expression of OGP in BMSCs could lay the foundation of gene therapy for bone repair and regeneration.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design

Cytological level, contrast observational study.

Time and setting

Experiments were performed at the Harbin Medical University in China in July 2006.

Materials

One healthy 4–8 weeks-old male New Zealand rabbit, weighing 2.0 kg, was provided by the Laboratory Animal Center, Harbin Medical University. Experimental protocol was in accordance with animal ethical standard.

Reagent and instrument:

Reagent and instrument	Source
pcDNA _{3.1} eukaryotic expression vector, liposome Lipofectamine™ 2000 tranfection kit, G418	Invitrogen, USA
Competent E coli JM 109, restriction enzyme, T4 DNA ligase	Takara, USA
Alkaline phosphatase (ALP) assay kit, hydroxyproline assay kit	Nanjing Jiancheng, China
Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) technology and gene amplification analysis instrument	Bio-Rad, USA

Methods

Selections of target gene and eukaryotic expression vector

Synthetic OGP gene was provided by the Biochemical Department of Harbin Medical University. The sequences of target gene were as follows: sense: 5'-AGCT ATG GCG CTT AAA CGC CAG GGC CGC ACA CTC TAC GGC TTC GGT GGT TAA-3'; antisense: 5'-TCGA TTA ACC ACC GAA GCC GTA GAG TGT GCG GCC CTG GCG TTT AAG CGC CAT-3'. pcDNA_{3.1} was used as eukaryotic expression vector. Target gene was ligated into Hind III and Xho I double digestion sites, which were two of the more distant sites in pcDNA_{3.1} vector.

Purification of the eukaryotic expression vector pcDNA_{3.1} and recycling of target gene fragment

Eukaryotic expression vector pcDNA_{3.1} was digested with Xho I and Hind III restriction enzymes at 37 °C for 6 hours. The samples were electrophoresed in

0.8% agarose gel for 30 minutes, stained with bromophenol blue and DL2000 marker, and then illuminated with ultraviolet light to check if the digestion was complete. Electrophoretic bands were instantly cut and recycled with DNA Purification Recycling Kit for digested eukaryotic expression vector pcDNA_{3.1}.

Construction and identification of pcDNA_{3.1}-OGP plasmid

After annealing, phosphorylated target gene was incubated with purified eukaryotic expression vector pcDNA and T4DNA joinase at 16 °C for 12 hours. JM109 bacteria were coated on LB agar plate containing 100 mg/L of ampicillin and 20 g/L of X-gal. After evaporated at room temperature for 30 minutes, the plate was placed invertedly in the incubator for 12 hours before bacteria colonies appeared. Randomly picked colonies were amplified by shaking. pcDNA_{3.1}-OGP plasmid was extracted using plasmid extraction kit. There were single restriction site losses between *Hind* III and *Xho* I sites which could not be digested by relevant enzymes. Therefore, BamHI was used to test the purification of pcDNA_{3.1}-OGP plasmid. pcDNA_{3.1}-OGP plasmid was single digested with BamHI and the results were observed using agarose gel electrophoresis and then sent to Shanghai Biology Engineering for sequencing.

Isolation and culture of rabbit BMSCs

Rabbit BMSCs were isolated and amplified using the density gradient centrifugation technique. The rabbits were injected with sodium pentobarbital (30 mg/kg) intravenously for anesthesia. No. 16 bone marrow puncture needle was connected with 10 mL syringe which contained 2 mL of heparin sodium (2 500 U/mL). In aseptic conditions, lateral tibial tubercle was punctured and 2.0–3.0 mL of bone marrow fluid was collected. Cell suspension was then slowly adherently injected into equal volume of Percoll solution (Density=1.082). A clear interface was formed between the cell suspension and Percoll solution. After centrifuged at 2 500 r/min for 20 minutes, the white film formed by mononuclear cells in the middle of the mixture was drawn and washed twice with PBS. The mononuclear cell suspension was centrifuged at 1 500 r/min for 10 minutes. Supernatant was discarded and 10 mL of DMEM culture solution with 15% of FBS was added to form single-cell suspension, which was incubated in 50-mL culture bottle at 37 °C in humidified atmosphere of 5% CO₂. After 3 days of incubation, half volume of the medium was changed and all the non-adherent cells were discarded. Total volume of the medium was changed every third to fifth days thereafter. Cells were passaged twice and subsequently used at passage three for gene transfer studies.

Liposome mediated pcDNA_{3.1}-OGP transfection into BMSCs

When the third generation of BMSCs reached 80%

confluence, pcDNA_{3.1}-OGP plasmid was transfected into BMSCs using Lipofectamine 2000. 24 hours after transfection, G418 (300 µg/mL) was added in the culture medium of part of the cells for screening. Two weeks later, G418-resistant cell clones were collected and cultured with normal medium. BMSCs were transfected with pcDNA_{3.1}-OGP plasmid, vehicle or left un-transfected as a control group.

Reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) analysis of OGP expression of BMSCs

Seventy-two hours after transfection, 2×10^6 of rabbit BMSCs were obtained from pcDNA_{3.1}-OGP transfected group, vehicle and control groups respectively. BMSCs of three groups in culture were lysed with TRIzol solution. First strand cDNA was reverse-transcribed from the total RNA with SuperScript™ II RNase Reverse Transcriptase. The primer was compounded by Bei-Jing Ying Jun Co. 31ogps9: ACTCTACGGCTTCGGTGGTT 31ogps113: CCACTGCTTACTGGCTTATCG 31ogpa266: GTGAGGGTGACAGGAAAGGA 31ogps9 and 31ogpa266 can augment the cDNA of primitive plasmid and restructuring of plasmids. 31ogps113 and 31ogpa266 only can augment the cDNA of restructuring of plasmids. PCR amplification was carried out using Invitrogen's PCR Kit. Samples were incubated at 94 °C for 4.5 minutes and at 55 °C for 30 seconds, and then at 72 °C for 30 seconds as one cycle. After 35 cycles of amplification, the amplified products were electrophoresed in 1% agarose gel, stained with 10% ethidium bromide, and the gel was illuminated with ultraviolet light.

Detection of ALP activity

Cells were inoculated into a 24-well plate at a density of 2×10^4 /well. Four parallel wells were set for each group. Supernatant was taken at 1, 2, 3, and 4 days to detect ALP activity by ALP assay kit.

Detection of hydroxyproline content by Chloramine-T method

Two weeks later, cells were inoculated into a 24-well plate at a density of 2×10^4 /well. Four parallel cells were set in each group. Hydroxyproline content was detected using hydroxyproline assay kit.
$$\text{Hydroxyproline (mg/L)} = \frac{\text{Absorbance}_{\text{detected tubes}}}{\text{Absorbance}_{\text{standard tubes}}} \times \text{concentration of standard tubes} \times \text{diluted times}.$$

Main outcome measures

OGP mRNA expression, ALP activity and hydroxyproline content were measured in pcDNA_{3.1}-OGP BMSCs.

Statistical analysis

All data were statistically processed by the first author using SPSS 10.0 software and expressed as Mean ± SD. Transfection effects of different

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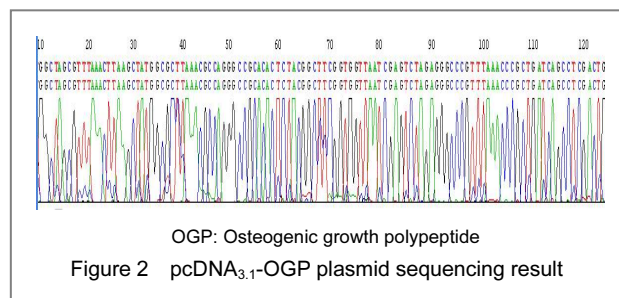
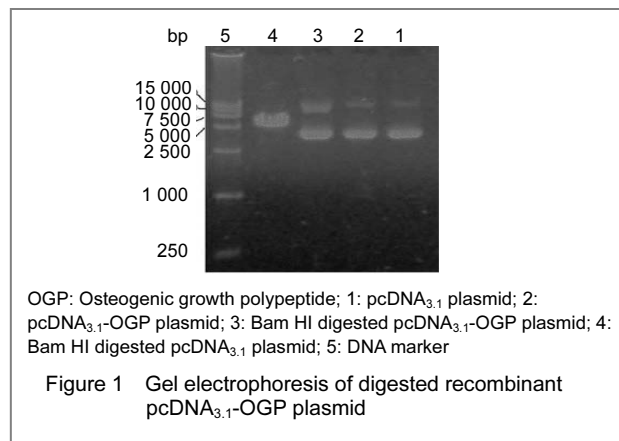
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groups were compared using *t* test. The level of significance was set at $P < 0.05$.

RESULTS

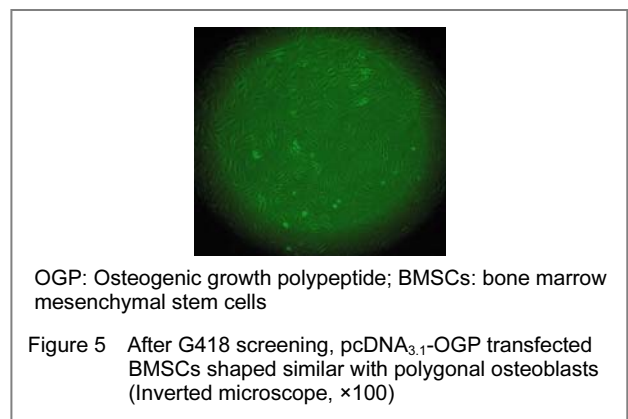
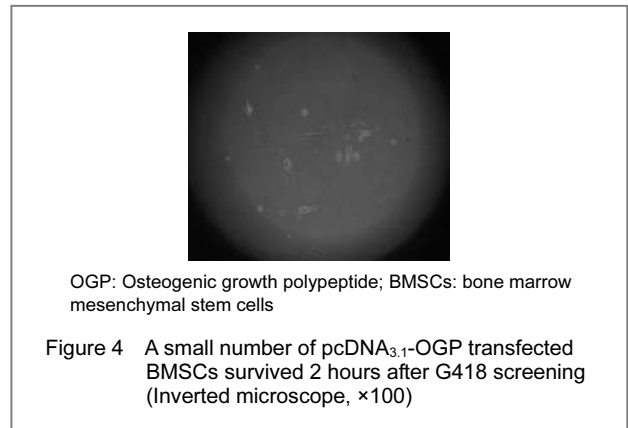
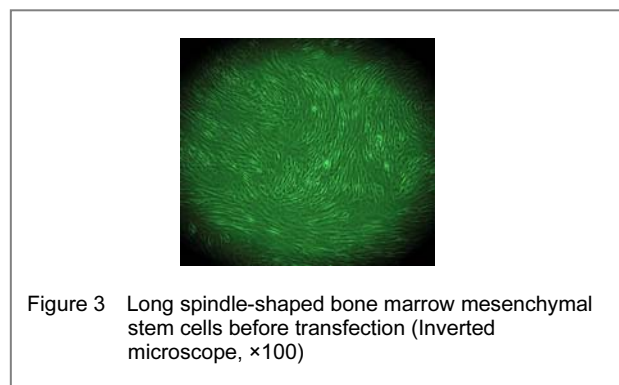
Identification and sequencing of pcDNA_{3.1}-OGP plasmid

Plasmid was single digested with BamHI and electrophoresed on agarose gel. pcDNA_{3.1} plasmid was digested into chains with molecular weight of approximately 5.4 kb, while recombinant pcDNA_{3.1}-OGP plasmid could not be digested and remained in circle shape (Figure 1). The sequencing of the digested products showed a match with the sequence designed (Figure 2), which indicated that eukaryotic expression vector was constructed successfully.



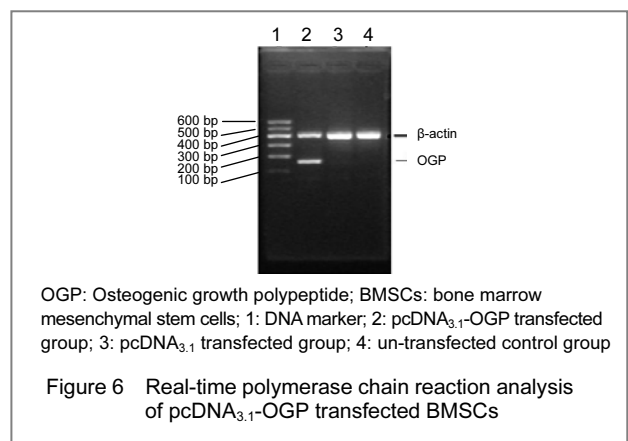
BMSCs morphology

Original rabbit BMSCs were round-shaped. 48 hours after inoculation, BMSCs were adherent, stretching in the triangle, polygon and gradually turning into long spindle-shaped shapes. Adherent BMSCs proliferated at day 3 and formed scattered fibroblast colony at day 7. At day 14, colonies integrated and confluent. Post-transfection BMSCs had similar shapes with polygonal osteoblasts (Figures 3–5).



RT-PCR analysis of pcDNA_{3.1}-OGP transfected BMSCs

RT-PCR of pcDNA_{3.1}-OGP transfected group and pcDNA_{3.1} transfected group both had positive results using primers 31ogps9 and 31ogpa266, and the amplification products were 280 bp and 258 bp respectively. The PCR results of original plasmid were negative using primers 31ogps113 and 31ogpa266, while the amplification products of recombinant plasmid were 154 bp. Results of electrophoresis showed that both original and reconstructed plasmid group had gene transcription. Results of pcDNA_{3.1}-OGP transfected group showed specific bands at 154 bp, which indicated that exogenous OGP gene was transfected in rabbit BMSCs at the mRNA level. Results of pcDNA_{3.1} transfected and un-transfected control group were negative (Figure 6).



Detection results of ALP activity (Figure 7)

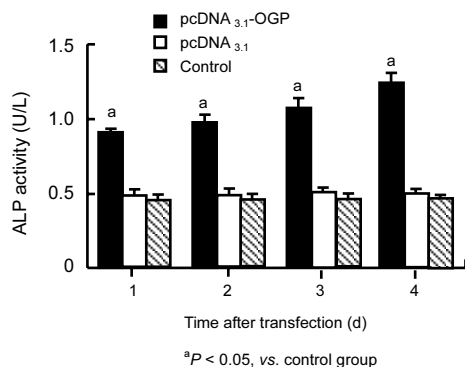


Figure 7 Effect of osteogenic growth polypeptide (OGP) gene transfection on alkaline phosphatase (ALP) activity in bone marrow mesenchymal stem cells

ALP activity in the pcDNA_{3.1}-OGP transfected group significantly increased at 2 days after transfection, and still increased at 4 days. ALP activity in the pcDNA_{3.1}-transfected, and untransfected control group was basically unchanged. At each time point, ALP activity was significantly higher in the pcDNA_{3.1}-OGP transfected group than in the pcDNA_{3.1}-transfected, and untransfected control group ($P < 0.05$).

Detection of hydroxyproline content by Chloramine-T method

Hydroxyproline content was significantly higher in the pcDNA_{3.1}-OGP transfected group than in the pcDNA_{3.1}-transfected, and untransfected cells ($P < 0.01$; Figure 8).

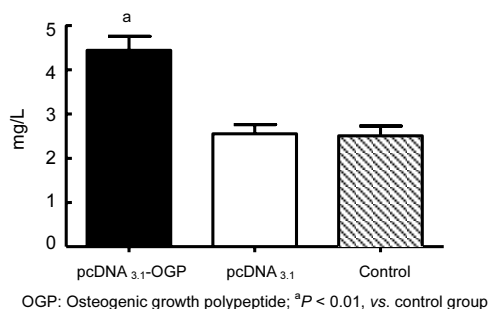


Figure 8 Osteocalcin production in pcDNA_{3.1}-OGP transfected group, pcDNA_{3.1}-transfected group, and un-transfected control group

DISCUSSION

With the rapid development of tissue and genetic engineering technology, the joint application of bone tissue engineering, which is centered with the combination of progenitor cells and biological materials, and gene modification, which is centered with DNA recombination becomes a hot spot of extensive research^[6]. The key of the combination of these two emerging technologies is transferring bone growth factor gene into progenitor cells in bone tissue engineering, so that the proliferation of these cells in the body can promote the secretion of growth factors and bone healing. The problems caused by

low implantation effect and short duration can be solved^[7]. Bone marrow stromal cells become ideal progenitor cells in bone tissue engineering because of their convenient isolation, small injury when obtained, and strong osteogenic capacity^[8]. BMSCs have the potential to differentiate into multiple cells. But their differentiation is not a completely spontaneous process, but can be promoted by a number of cytokines and certain environment *in vivo*. Studies showed that the ossification process was slow using only BMSCs, and transformation was needed for BMSCs to become ideal progenitor cells^[9-10]. Therefore, how to enhance the osteogenic potential of BMSCs and secure their transformation to osteoblasts stably and massively are the keys to researches in bone tissue engineering.

OGP is 14-polypeptide growth factor which promotes proliferation of osteoblasts *in vitro* and *in vivo*. Results of domestic and foreign researches demonstrated that OGP had clear promoting effect on osteoblast proliferation, differentiation and sophistication. OGP was used to accelerate fracture healing and prevent osteoporosis because of its capacity of increasing whole body bone mass through affecting ROS, MC3T3, E1 and NH3T3 osteoblast cell lines^[11-12]. The mechanism of OGP effects *in vitro* and *in vivo* is still not clear. Brager *et al*^[13] observed increasing TGF- β 1 expression in the whole body and in the local partial fracture when OGP was used. Expression of 11A, 11B collagen and other factors were also increased, so they considered that OGP had effect on TGF- β system, which contributes to proliferation and differentiation of bone marrow and callus-derived osteoblast cells. OGP is a 14-peptide small molecule. Because of the technical difficulty and high cost, OGP used for research and treatment is all synthetic in domestic and abroad. Nobody has transferred OGP into BMSCs for gene therapy use so far. Direct application of synthesized OGP is highly cost, complex operated, plus the level of drug concentration is hard to maintain stably. Gene therapy can avoid these drawbacks.

In this study, rabbit BMSCs were liposome-mediated transfected with pcDNA3.1-OGP eukaryotic plasmid *in vitro*. 72 hours after transfection, OGP gene transcription in rabbit BMSCs was detected with RT-PCR on the mRNA level. ALP, type I collagen are considered as early enzymes of osteoblastic differentiation, and their expression is an important indicator of osteoblast differentiation and function, and a specific indicator of the tissue calcification and osteogenesis activity^[14]. Hydroxyproline is the unique composition of collagen, and detection of hydroxyproline content can reflect the synthetic collagen ability of BMSCs.

In this study, the expression level of ALP in the supernatant of pcDNA3.1-OGP transfected BMSCs was significantly higher than those in the vehicle and control groups. Hydroxyproline content was significantly higher in the pcDNA3.1-OGP transfected group. From the detection of these two osteoblast-specific markers, we considered that BMSCs were differentiated into osteoblasts under the direction of OGP expression. Thus we deduced that transfected BMSCs can express exogenous OGP gene stably.

Generally, this study constructed pcDNA3.1 plasmid successfully, transfected the plasmid into rabbit BMSCs and detected the transcription of OGP gene on the mRNA level. Transfected BMSCs expressed OGP mRNA and they have the characteristics of osteoblast-cells. This study may lay a

foundation for OGP gene therapy. In the future, we still need to work on the following issues: optimizing the purification of BMSCs, exploring the mechanism and conditions of signal transduction of osteoblast differentiation, improving the efficiency of target gene transfection and detecting the expression of OGP more directly. We believe that in the near future, with further studies in OGP, it can be used widely in the gene therapy of bone defects and nonunion.

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pcDNA_{3.1}-成骨生长肽真核表达载体在骨髓基质干细胞中的表达***

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摘要

背景: 成骨生长肽具有明显的促进成骨细胞增殖、分化、成熟的作用。

目的: 观察成骨生长肽基因转染兔骨髓基质干细胞后的表达及表达产物对骨髓基质干细胞向成骨细胞分化的影响。

方法: 构建重组真核表达载体 pcDNA_{3.1}-成骨生长肽, 并在脂质体介导下, 将其导入兔骨髓基质干细胞。通过 G418 筛选获得阳性克隆。RT-PCR 方法检测成骨生长肽基因在骨髓基质干细胞内的表达, 并观察转染 pcDNA_{3.1}-成骨生长肽后骨髓基质干细胞向成骨细胞分化的情况。

结果与结论: 实验成功构建了真核表达载体

pcDNA_{3.1}-成骨生长肽, 转染 pcDNA_{3.1}-成骨生长肽的骨髓基质干细胞可见成骨生长肽 mRNA 的表达, 同时羟脯氨酸的分泌水平增加, 碱性磷酸酶活性增高。证实经 pcDNA_{3.1}-成骨生长肽转染的兔骨髓基质干细胞不仅可以表达成骨生长肽, 而且具有向成骨细胞分化的特性。

关键词: 成骨生长肽; pcDNA_{3.1}载体; 骨髓基质干细胞; 基因转染; 表达

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