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研究課題名(和文) 生体内でキメラ抗原受容体制御性T細胞を作り出す自己免疫疾患治療のmRNA療法

研究課題名(英文) mRNA therapy for the treatment of autoimmune diseases that produces chimeric antigen receptor regulatory T cells in vivo

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研究成果の概要(和文)：本研究では、抗CD3 F(ab')<sub>2</sub>抗体でコーティングした高分子ミセルを用いて、制御性T細胞(Treg)を産生するためのmRNAをT細胞に送達した。mRNAは、Foxp3タンパク質をコードするプラスミドから *in vitro* 転写によって調製した。Foxp3タンパク質はTreg表現型を誘導することができる。抗CD3 F(ab')<sub>2</sub>を導入したミセルは、*in vitro* と *in vivo* の両方でCD3<sup>+</sup> T細胞を標的としてmRNAを送達した。ミセルは *in vitro* と *in vivo* の両方でTregを産生した。改変されたT細胞は、IL-10、IL-4などのサイトカインを分泌し、抗炎症性プロフィールを示した。

研究成果の学術的意義や社会的意義

By using micelles to deliver mRNA encoding Foxp3 protein, we can induce Tregs that mediate immunosuppression, which has potential for treating autoimmune diseases, allergies and inflammatory disorders. The approach could reduce costs and burden of cellular therapies by *in situ* generation of Tregs.

研究成果の概要(英文)：Herein, we used polymeric micelles installed with anti-CD3 F(ab')<sub>2</sub> antibodies to effectively deliver mRNA to T cells, aiming to induce the production of regulatory T cells (Tregs). The mRNA was derived from *in vitro* transcription of a plasmid encoding Foxp3 protein. Foxp3 can facilitate the generation of Tregs, known for their immune regulatory role. The micelles loaded the mRNA by self-assembly in aqueous conditions. Moreover, the surface of the micelles was modified with anti-CD3 F(ab')<sub>2</sub> by click chemistry. The resulting micelles were around 100 nm in diameter. These micelles selectively targeted CD3<sup>+</sup> T cells, both *in vitro* and *in vivo*, resulting in the production of Tregs. Remarkably, the modified T cells displayed an anti-inflammatory profile, characterized by the secretion of cytokines such as IL-10, IL-4, and Tgf-beta. These findings support the potential of this approach for generating immunomodulating T cells in various disease contexts.

研究分野：Drug and gene delivery

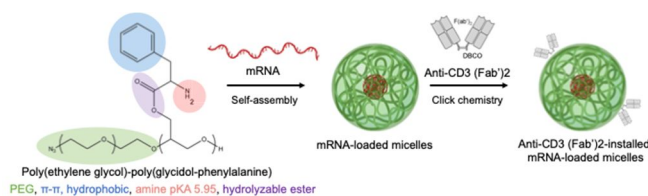
キーワード：mRNA polymeric micelles *in situ* Treg Immunosuppression

### 1. 研究開始当初の背景

Regulatory T cells (Tregs) can mitigate immune-related disorders, such as autoimmune diseases, allergies, and inflammation. Existing methods for inducing Tregs often lack specificity or entail systemic side effects, necessitating the exploration of innovative approaches. Major efforts have been dedicated to generate Treg cells *ex vivo* and inject them in animal models. Particularly, T cells can be modified with pDNA encoding FoxP3 and anti-insulin scFv to target pancreas in diabetic mice [1]. However, such approaches are costly and would need personalized preparation of Tregs for each patient. Nanotechnology offers a promising approach for targeted immune modulation by modifying T cells inside the body directly. This approach has been used for generating chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T cells *in vivo* by delivering mRNA and pDNA. In this regard, mRNA offer significant advantages compared to pDNA due to its higher safety, low insertional mutagenicity and transient protein expression. However, targeted mRNA to T cells *in vivo* is challenging and most carrier systems, like virus, lipid nanoparticles and polyplexes show high translation in the tissues of the reticuloendothelial system [2]. Therefore, there is an imperative need for nanocarriers that are able to selectively target CD3+ T cells and deliver mRNA to induce antiinflammatory proteins.

### 2. 研究の目的

The purpose of this research is to explore a novel approach for immune modulation *in vivo* by using polymeric micelles as delivery vehicles for mRNA. The delivered mRNA encodes Foxp3, which is a key regulator of Treg



**Figure 1.** Preparation of anti-CD3 F(ab')2-installed mRNA-loaded micelles for T cell targeting

development and function. By specifically targeting CD3+ T cells with anti-CD3 F(ab')2 antibodies-coated micelles, the aim is to induce the production of Tregs both *in vitro* and *in vivo*. We also seek to investigate the anti-inflammatory profile of the modified T cells. The ultimate goal is to harness the therapeutic potential of Tregs in mitigating immune-related disorders like diabetes while minimizing off-target effects and systemic side effects associated with conventional therapies.

### 3. 研究の方法

To prepare the micelles, we first synthesized azide-poly(ethylene glycol)-poly(glycidol) block copolymers. These block copolymers were modified with phenylalanine by ester formation between the hydroxyl groups in the poly(glycidol) backbone and the carboxylate in phenylalanine-FMOC. The modified block copolymer was then deprotected by piperidine and purified by dialysis. The polymer was characterized by <sup>1</sup>H-NMR and GPC. Next, mRNA encoding Foxp3 protein was prepared through *in vitro* transcription from a plasmid encoding Foxp3. Moreover, we used mRNA encoding GFP and luciferase (Luc) as reporter agents. The mRNA payload was encapsulated within the micelles just by mixing mRNA and the block copolymers in HEPES buffer at different amine to phosphate (N/P) ratio. The micelle formation and the micelle size were checked by dynamic light scattering (DLS).

The selection of anti-CD3 F(ab')2 antibodies as targeting ligands capitalizes on their specificity for CD3 receptors on T cells, ensuring precise delivery of therapeutic cargo. To introduce anti-CD3 F(ab')2 antibodies, we used click chemistry between the azide group in the polymers and a DBCO moiety that was pre-conjugated to the anti-CD3 F(ab')2 antibodies. The anti-CD3 F(ab')2 antibodies were added at different ratio to the polymers. The conjugation density was checked by fluorescence correlation spectroscopy (FCS) using Cy5-labeled anti-CD3 F(ab')2 antibodies. The size of the anti-CD3 F(ab')2 antibodies-installed micelles was confirmed by DLS.

To test the micelles *in vitro*, we cultured CD3+ T cells extracted from mice spleen and exposed them to the micelles carrying the mRNA, followed by assessing the expression of GFP, Luc and Foxp3 protein. The expression of GFP was tested by microscopy and flow cytometry. The expression of Luc was measured by luminescence. And the expression of Foxp3 was assessed by western blotting. Moreover, the secretion of anti-inflammatory cytokines, such as IL-10, IL-4, and Tgf-β, by the modified T cells was evaluated using ELISA.

*In vivo*, the anti-CD3 F(ab')<sub>2</sub> antibodies-installed micelles were administered subcutaneously or intravenously to determine their ability to target T cells. For analyzing the targeting, we used GFP-encoding mRNA as a surrogate and test the GFP-positive fraction of T cells by flow cytometry. To test the micelles delivering Foxp3 mRNA, we stained permeabilized T cells with anti-Foxp3 antibodies and tested by flow cytometry. Moreover, the anti-inflammatory cytokines in blood were tested by ELISA.

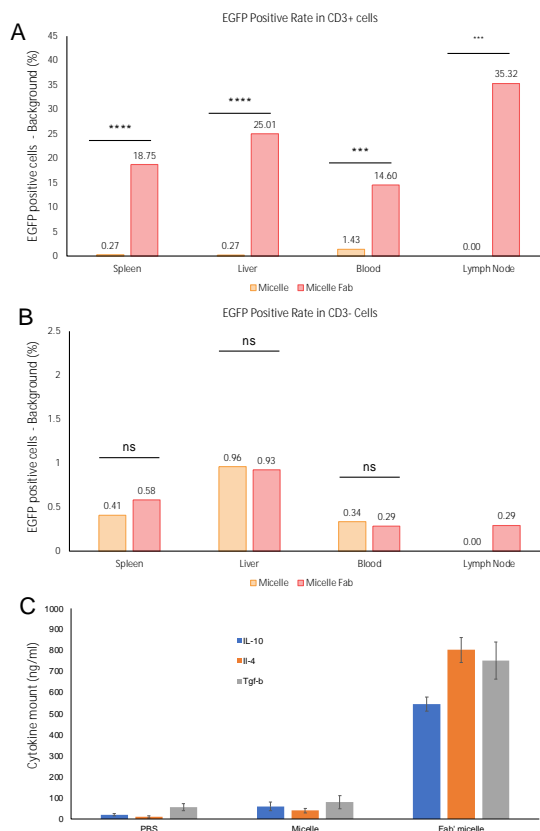
#### 4. 研究成果

The results obtained from the study highlight several key findings regarding the synthesis and characterization of polymeric micelles, as well as their efficacy in delivering mRNA encoding Foxp3 protein to T cells, both *in vitro* and *in vivo*. Firstly, the synthesis of azide-poly(ethylene glycol)-poly(glycidol) block copolymers modified with phenylalanine, followed by deprotection and purification, yielded polymers with a poly(ethylene glycol) block of 10,000 Da, a poly(glycidol) block of 86 units and 90% of modification with phenylalanine, as confirmed by <sup>1</sup>H-NMR and GPC analysis. The polymer allowed the successful preparation of mRNA encoding Foxp3, GFP, and Luc, and their encapsulation within the micelles at different N/P ratios. Particularly, at N/P = 6 we confirmed the formation of uniform micelles of around 100 nm. We then used N/P = 6 for our following experiments [3]. The conjugation of anti-CD3 F(ab')<sub>2</sub> antibodies to the micelles using click chemistry was assessed by FCS verified the conjugation density, which reached a plateau at 10% modification of the polymers. This modification degree corresponds to 2-3 anti-CD3 F(ab')<sub>2</sub> antibodies on the surface of each micelle.

Moreover, DLS confirmed that the size of the anti-CD3 F(ab')<sub>2</sub> antibodies-installed micelles was increased to around 120 nm, which corresponds with the expected size.

In the *in vitro* experiments, the CD3<sup>+</sup> T cells exposed to the micelles carrying mRNA encoding Foxp3, GFP, and Luc demonstrated successful transfection and expression of the respective proteins. Particularly, the Foxp3 was detected in the CD3<sup>+</sup> cells for more than 24 h. Additionally, the modified T cells with Foxp3 mRNA exhibited secretion of anti-inflammatory cytokines (IL-10, IL-4, and Tgf-β), indicating an anti-inflammatory phenotype. Moreover, the selectivity was confirmed by exposing whole splenocytes to the anti-CD3 F(ab')<sub>2</sub>-installed micelles loading GFP mRNA. The CD3<sup>+</sup> T cells showed more than 10-fold higher levels fluorescent levels than the of CD3<sup>-</sup> cells.

*In vivo* experiments showed the ability of the anti-CD3 F(ab')<sub>2</sub> antibodies-installed micelles to target T cells when administered subcutaneously or intravenously. Flow cytometry analysis confirmed the presence of GFP-positive T cells. Particularly, around 20% and more than 30% of the T cells in the spleen and lymph node of mice, respectively, were modified after systemic injection of the anti-CD3 F(ab')<sub>2</sub> antibodies-installed micelles, as determined by flow cytometry (Figure 2). On the other hand, non-targeted micelles showed minimal mRNA delivery and negligible protein expression. The Foxp3 expression in T cells was also confirmed by flow cytometry. ELISA assays further confirmed the presence of anti-inflammatory cytokines in the bloodstream (IL-10, IL-4, and Tgf-β) indicating the systemic impact of the modified T cells.



**Figure 2.** A. GFP expression in CD3<sup>+</sup> T cells after intravenous injection of the micelles. B. GFP expression in CD3<sup>-</sup> T cells after intravenous injection of the micelles. C. Cytokine levels in blood 48 h after injection

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〔産業財産権〕

〔その他〕

6. 研究組織

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7. 科研費を使用して開催した国際研究集会

〔国際研究集会〕 計0件

8. 本研究に関連して実施した国際共同研究の実施状況

共同研究相手国	相手方研究機関
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