TABLE 3. CLASSIFICATION OF TWENTY-FOUR HCV-DERIVED CTL EPITOPES ON THE BASIS OF CURRENT DATA (*CONT'D*)

Peptide	*Affinity (high)*	*Lysis (low/ND)*	*ICS (medium)*	*Stability*
Type IV Antigens				
NS5-1992	37.8	8.9	0.71	10.2
Core-35	42.5	ND	0.22	24<
Type V Antigens				
NS5-2252	19.8	10.3	0.06	11.9
Core-178	23.0	7.5	ND	17.7
NS5-2145	51.2	ND	ND	2.5
NS3-1169	60.0	11.2	ND	9.7
NS3-1131	60.3	ND	0.02	5.5
E1-220	166.6	ND	0.02	NT
Type VI Antigens				
E2-728	204.5	ND	ND	NT

[a]Type I: High or medium in the affinity, high or medium in the lysis, and high or medium in the ICS. Type II: High or medium in the affinity, high or medium in the lysis, and low or ND in the ICS. Type III: Low in the affinity, and high in the lysis. Type IV: High in the affinity, low or ND in the lysis, and medium in the ICS. Type V: High or medium in the affinity, low or ND in the lysis, and low or ND in the ICS. Type VI: Low in the affinity, ND in the lysis and ICS.

[b]BL_{50} in peptide-binding assays. High, less than 100 μM; medium, 100–200 μM; low, more than 200 μM.

[c]Percentage of specific lysis of target cells pulsed with each peptide minus percentage of specific lysis of target cells pulsed with no peptide at an *E*:*T* ratio of 150 in CTL assays. High, more than 30%; medium, 20–30%; low, less than 20%; ND, not detected.

[d]ICS, intracellular cytokine staining; percentage of intracellular IFN-γ-positive cells in $CD8^+$ T cells in mice immunized with Adex1SR3ST or Adex1CA3269 minus that in control mice injected with Adex1w. High, more than 1.0%; medium, 0.1–1.0%; low, less than 0.1%; ND, not detected.

[e]Data of complex stability assays. NT, not tested.

levels of peptide-specific CTL responses. On the other hand, modest numbers of IFN-γ-producing $CD8^+$ T cells were observed in response to Core-35 (0.22%), NS3-1073 (0.11%), NS4-1671 (0.17%), NS4-1920 (0.31%), and NS5-1992 (0.74%) (Table 2). None of the remaining peptides significantly induced IFN-γ-producing $CD8^+$ T cells (Table 2).

DISCUSSION

In the current study, a number of HLA-A*0201-restricted, HCV-derived peptides were evaluated by examining the peptide-binding affinity for MHC class I molecules, the stability of the peptide–MHC complexes, killing activities of peptide-induced CTLs and frequencies of intracellular IFN-γ-positive $CD8^+$ T cells. On the basis of these results, 24 peptides tested have been classified into 6 types (Table 3).

Among 24 peptides, 15 peptides containing type I, II, and III epitopes induced high or medium killing activities of peptide-specific CTLs. On the other hand, the remaining nine peptides from types IV to VI could not induce good CTL responses (Table 3), although all the peptides had previously been defined as epitopes for HCV-specific CTLs (2,10,27,32). Thirteen of the 15 peptides that stimulated good peptide-specific CTL responses exhibited high or medium binding affinities for HLA-A*0201 molecules (Table 3, types I and II), whereas only 2 of them were low binders (Table 3, type III). On the other hand, type IV and type V peptides did not elicit any effective CTL response although they were high or medium binders of HLA-A*0201. These data confirm that high binding affinity for MHC class I mol-

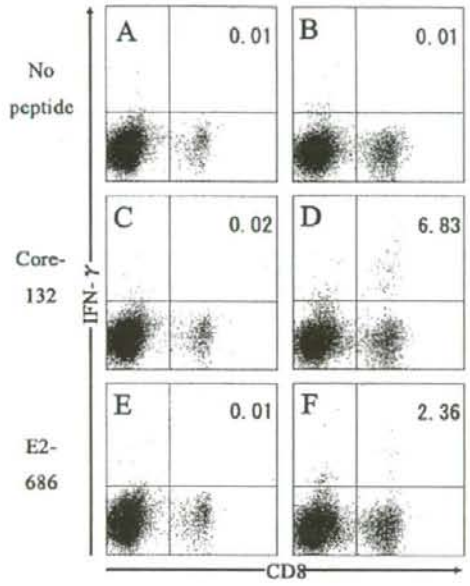

FIG. 2. Intracellular IFN-γ staining of $CD8^+$ T cells in response to HCV-derived peptides. Mice were injected with p3XFLAG-IL-12 and immunized intraperitoneally with 5×10^7 PFU of either Adex1w (**A**, **C**, and **E**) or Adex1SR3ST (**B**, **D**, and **F**). One week later, spleen cells were prepared and cultured with or without (**A** and **B**) either Core-132 (**C** and **D**) or E2-686 (**E** and **F**) for 5 h. After stimulation, cells were stained for their surface expression of CD8 (x axis) and intracellular IFN-γ (y axis). Numbers shown indicate the percentages of $CD8^+$ cells that are positive for intracellular IFN-γ. Data shown are representative of three independent experiments. Three mice per group were used in each experiment, and spleen cells of all mice per group were pooled.

ecules is essential but not sufficient for a peptide to be highly immunogenic. Because the mice in this study were immunized with adenovirus expressing HCV proteins, there could be a number of factors influencing immunogenicity here, including the fact that HCV proteins and other adenoviral proteins are necessarily expressed together in the immunization process. Therefore, finding high-affinity binders that do not express high-level CTL killing may not be due solely to binding affinity. One possible explanation is that there might be potential competition for multiple epitopes including HCV epitopes in the antigen processing and presentation. Further, it must be considered that murine versus human processing, presentation, and, ultimately, immunodominance may differ. It is obvious that a low capacity for binding to HLA-A*0201 should explain why E2-728 (Table 3, type VI) was so poorly immunogenic. In contrast to the binding affinity, the stability of peptide–MHC class I complexes was not correlated with killing activities of peptide-induced CTLs.

Surprisingly, only a limited number of peptides could induce high or medium frequencies of IFN-γ-producing $CD8^+$ T cells (Table 3, types I and IV), although the sensitivity of this assay might have been too low. Gruener *et al.* (9) reported that HCV-specific $CD8^+$ T lymphocytes in HCV-infected individuals showed reduced synthesis of IFN-γ as well as TNF-α after *in vitro* stimulation, compared with responses to Epstein–Barr virus and cytomegalovirus, and suggested that this behavior of HCV-specific CTLs might contribute to viral persistence through failure to effectively suppress viral replication. Furthermore, HCV-specific CTLs derived from chronically infected patients displayed impaired effector functions including IFN-γ production and peptide-specific cytotoxicity when compared with HCV-specific CTLs of recovered patients (33). These data strongly suggest that IFN-γ secreted by HCV-specific CTLs plays a crucial role in the clearance of HCV. In this regard, type I and type IV epitopes in Table 3 might be preferable. Overall, our data suggest that five peptides classified in the type I epitope (Table 3) should be useful candidates for a peptide-based HCV vaccine for the reasons described above. In particular, four peptides including Core-132, E2-686, NS4-1671, and NS4-1920 should be suitable because their amino acid sequences are highly conserved [(11); and our unpublished data]. However, it must be taken into account that there may be differences between the immunogenic variation observed in HLA class I transgenic mice and that in humans, mainly because the antigen processing and presentation may differ between them.

There is almost no doubt that the early appearance of escape mutation, particularly within regions encoding CTL epitopes, is closely associated with the establishment of HCV chronicity. Several studies of escape mutation in HCV-infected chimpanzees (7) and humans (6,22,29,31) clearly indicated that HCV-specific CTLs exerted immune selection pressure on viral mutation. This implies that strong HCV-specific CTL responses may result in generation of HCV escape variants and HCV chronicity. However, some HCV-derived epitopes seem to stay conserved despite consistently detectable CTL responses. This may presumably reflect the balance between the strength of immune responses and the ability of virus to escape. For the development of a CTL-based, HCV vaccine, delivery of immunodominant multiple epitopes to increase the breadth of the immune response, rather than strong but narrowly focused epitopes, should be considered. On this point, the extensive analyses of CTL epitopes such as in the current study might be of great significance.

In conclusion, we investigated 24 kinds of HLA-A*0201-restricted, HCV-derived peptides for their immunogenicity. Among 24 peptides, 5 were categorized as type I epitopes (Table 3), which showed good binding affinity for MHC class I molecules and effectively induced peptide-specific, IFN-γ producing CTLs. This study might provide important information in the design of HCV vaccine that could induce vigorous and broad $CD8^+$ T cell-mediated responses.

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Induction of Differential T-Cell Epitope by Plain- and Liposome-Coupled Antigen

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The T-cell receptors of $CD4^+$ T lymphocytes recognize immunogenic peptide sequences bound within the groove of MHC class II molecules, and the peptides that bind to these molecules are known to share common structural motifs. For example, $OVA_{323-339}$, an I-A^d-binding peptide, involves a motif of the I-A^d peptide-binding groove. In the present study, OVA peptides of up to 26-mer were sequentially synthesized and screened, and two additional I-A^d binding OVA peptides, OVA_{20-43} and $OVA_{264-286}$, were found to stimulate $CD4^+$ T cells of OVA-immune BALB/c mice. OVA_{20-43} involved structural motifs of the I-A^d peptide-binding groove, while $OVA_{264-286}$ did not. The ability of these three I-A^d binding OVA peptides to induce antigen-specific cytokine production was compared among $CD4^+$ T cells of mice immunized either with alum-adsorbed OVA (OVA−alum) or OVA chemically coupled to the surface of liposome (OVA−liposome). $CD4^+$ T cells of mice immunized with OVA−alum produced more cytokines when stimulated with $OVA_{264-286}$ than with $OVA_{323-339}$, while $CD4^+$ T cells of mice immunized with OVA−liposome conjugates produced more cytokines when stimulated with $OVA_{323-339}$ than with $OVA_{264-286}$. OVA_{20-43} induced production of comparable levels of cytokines in mice immunized either with OVA−alum or OVA−liposome. Confocal laser scanning microscopic analysis demonstrated that chemically coupled OVA and liposomes were colocalized in APCs until OVA received processing. Three-dimensional structural analysis demonstrated that both $OVA_{264-286}$ and $OVA_{323-339}$ were present on the surface of OVA, but OVA_{20-43} was not. These results suggested that the chemical coupling of OVA to liposome affected antigen processing in APCs and thus resulted in the induction of differential T-cell epitopes as compared with those induced by plain OVA.

INTRODUCTION

In general, T-cell receptors (TCRs) of $CD4^+$ T cells do not recognize native protein antigens, but do recognize antigenic peptides displayed in association with major histocompatibility complex (MHC) class II molecules by antigen-presenting cells (APCs). TCRs occur as either of two distinct heterodimers, $\alpha\beta$ or $\gamma\delta$. The $\alpha\beta$ TCR heterodimer-expressing cells predominate in most lymphoid compartments (90% to 95%) of humans and mice and are responsible for the classical helper or cytotoxic T cell responses. In most cases, the $\alpha\beta$ TCR ligand is a peptide antigen bound to the class I and class II MHC molecule (*1*). Class I and II molecules encoded by genes within the MHC play a central role in regulating immune responses through their ability to bind and display small peptides derived from foreign antigens.

Grey and co-workers identified ovalbumin (OVA) peptide 323−339 as being immunodominant in H-2^d mice (*2*) and showed that this peptide binds to I-A^d, but not I-E^d, the latter of which is an Ia molecule that will not present this peptide (*3*). Ever since $OVA_{323-339}$ was identified, it has been used extensively to study the nature of class II MHC-peptide binding and T-cell activation (*4*−*9*). However, this peptide is responsible for 25−35% of the T-cell responses in BALB/c mice immunized with whole ovalbumin (*2*), suggesting the presence of other I-A^d binding OVA peptides with T-cell stimulatory activity while, at present, no other I-A^d binding OVA peptides have been reported.

We previously reported that OVA chemically coupled to the surface of liposomes via glutaraldehyde (OVA−liposome conjugates) induced IgE-selective unresponsiveness in mice (*10*). The IgE-selective unresponsiveness was induced by antigen−liposome conjugates, regardless of the coupling procedure of antigen and liposomes (*11*), using liposomes of different lipid formulations (*12*), or using different antigens such as tetanus toxin (*13*) or Shiga-like toxin (*14*). Thus, antigen−liposome conjugates are expected to be applicable as part of a novel protocol for the development of vaccines that would induce minimal IgE synthesis.

In the present study, sequentially synthesized OVA peptides were screened for the ability to stimulate OVA-specific $CD4^+$ T cells of BALB/c (H-2^d) mice and two additional I-A^d binding OVA peptides, OVA_{20-43} and $OVA_{264-286}$, were found. The ability of these three OVA peptides to stimulate $CD4^+$ T cells of OVA-immune BALB/c mice was compared among the $CD4^+$ T cells of mice immunized either with OVA−alum or with OVA−liposome conjugates. The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of antigen modification on the in vivo induction of T cell epitopes.

EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES

Mice. BALB/c mice (female, 8 weeks of age) were purchased from Charles River, Kanagawa, Japan. The mice were maintained in sterile cages under specific pathogen-free conditions at the Division of Experimental Animals Research (National Institute of Infectious Diseases, Tokyo, Japan).

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Antigens. Ovalbumin (OVA, Grade VII) was purchased from Sigma (St. Louis, MO). For analysis of the processing of liposome-coupled OVA by macrophages, DQ−OVA, which exhibits green fluorescence upon proteolytic degradation, was purchased from Molecular Probes, Inc. (Eugene, OR).

OVA Peptides. OVA peptides consisting of 20−26 amino residues were sequentially synthesized, and the ability of each peptide to induce cytokine production by $CD4^+$ T cells of BALB/c mice immunized with OVA was investigated. All OVA peptides used in the present study were synthesized and supplied by Operon Biotechnologies, K. K. (Tokyo, Japan). Precursor peptide material attached to polystyrene resin was synthesized by an automated peptide synthesizer (model 433A; Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA) using Fmoc (9-fluorenylmethoxycarbonyl) chemistry. Then, the resins on the peptide C-terminus and the building blocks on the peptide side chain were removed by trifluoroacetic acid. The purification of the peptide was performed by high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) using an automated system (HPLC-10A; Shimazu Co., Kyoto, Japan) with a 35−55% acetonitrile gradient in the acidic aqueous phase. As a result, the highly purified material was obtained with a >95% area ratio on the HPLC elution chart and was determined by mass spectroscopic analysis with the matrix-assisted laser desorption/ionization time-of-flight method using Applied Biosystems Voyager DE. The peptide solution was lyophilized and used for the subsequent experiments.

Fluorescence Labeling of OVA. OVA were labeled with fluorescence using an Alexa Fluor 488 protein labeling kit (Molecular Probes, Inc.) following the manufacturer's protocol. The estimated F:P ratio of Alexa Fluor 488−OVA conjugate was 1.4:1.

Chemicals. All phospholipids were obtained from NOF Co., Tokyo, Japan. Reagent grades of cholesterol were purchased from Wako Pure Chemical Industries, Osaka, Japan.

Liposomes. The liposomes used in the present study consisted of dipalmitoyl phosphatidylcholine, dipalmitoyl phosphatidyl ethanolamine, cholesterol, and dimyristoyl phosphatidyl glycerol in 4:3:7:2 molar ratios. The crude liposome solution was passed through a membrane filter (Nucleopore polycarbonate filter, Coster, Cambridge, MA) with a pore size of 0.2 μm.

Red-Labeled liposome. Red-labeled liposomes were prepared by adding 1,2-dimyristoyl-sn-glycero-3-phosphoethanolamine-*N*-(lissamine rhodamine B sulfonyl) (Product Number: 810157, Avanti Polar Lipids Inc, Alabaster, AL) into the above lipid constituent of liposomes.

Coupling of OVA to Liposomes. Liposomal conjugates with plain OVA, Alexa−OVA, or DQ−OVA were prepared essentially in the same way as described previously (*15*) via glutaraldehyde. Briefly, to a mixture of 90 mg of liposomes and 6 mg of OVA in 2.5 mL of phosphate buffer (pH 7.2) was added 0.5 mL drops of 2.5% glutaraldehyde solution. The mixture was stirred gently for 1 h at 37 °C, and then 0.5 mL of 3 M glycine−NaOH (pH 7.2) was added to block excess aldehyde groups. This was followed by incubation overnight at 4 °C. The liposome-coupled OVA and uncoupled OVA in the resulting solution were separated using CL-4B column chromatography (Pharmacia Fine Chemical Co., Upsala, Sweden). The amount of lipid in the liposomal fraction was measured using a Phospholipid-Test-Wako phospholipid content assay kit (Wako Pure Chemical Industries). The OVA−liposome solution was adjusted to 10 mg lipid/mL in RPMI-1640, sterile-filtered using a Millex-HA syringe filter unit (0.45 μm, Millipore Corp., Bedford, MA), and kept at 4 °C until use.

Immunization. The mice were immunized intraperitoneally (ip) with 200 μL of 10 μg of OVA adsorbed with 100 μg of alum (Alhydrogel, Superfos Biosector, Vedbaek, Denmark) in PBS or with 200 μL of OVA−liposome conjugates, at 0 and 4 weeks.

Preparation of Splenic Adherent Cells. Splenic adherent cells (SACs) were used as antigen-presenting cells in the cultures of the $CD4^+$ T cells and OVA peptides. SACs were obtained from naive BALB/c mice as follows. Spleen cell suspensions were prepared in RPMI-1640 containing 10% fetal calf serum (FCS). Cells (5×10^7) in 5 mL of medium containing 10% FCS were plated into 50-mm plastic tissue culture dishes (No. 3002; Becton-Dickinson Labware, Franklin Lakes, NJ) and incubated at 37 °C in a humidified 5% CO_2 atmosphere for 2 h. After culture, nonadherent cells were removed by three vigorous washings in warm media, and adherent cells were then harvested with a cell scraper.

Preparation of $CD4^+$ T Cells. $CD4^+$ T-cell purification from spleen cells of mice immunized with OVA−alum was performed with the MACS magnetic cell sorter system (Miltenyi Biotec GmbH, Bergisch Gladbach, Germany) according to the manufacturer's protocol and using anti-CD4 antibody-coated microbeads (No. 492-01; Miltenyi Biotec). $CD4^+$ T cells were suspended in RPMI-1640 containing 10% FCS at a cell density of 2×10^6/mL. In the present study, OVA peptides at a final concentration of 10 μM with 1 and 5 d culture periods were employed for the production of the Th1 (IL-2, IFN-γ) and Th2 (IL-4, IL-5) cytokines, respectively. The $CD4^+$ T-cell suspension was plated at 250 μL per well onto 48-well culture plates (No. 3047; Becton-Dickinson Labware), and 500 μL of 20 μM OVA peptide solution and 250 μL of 8×10^5/mL SAC in the same medium were added to the plates. After incubation in a CO_2 incubator, the culture supernatants were collected and assayed to determine the concentrations of cytokines.

Cytokine Assays. IL-5 and IFN-γ in the culture supernatant were measured using the Biotrak mouse ELISA system (Amersham International, Buckinghamshire, UK). All test samples were assayed in duplicate, and the standard error in each test was always less than 5% of the mean value.

Cloned Macrophage Hybridoma. Macrophage hybridoma clone No. 39, obtained from the fusion of splenic adherent cells from CKB mice and $P388D_1$ (*16*), was maintained in RPMI-1640 (Gibco Laboratories, Grand Island, NY) supplemented with 10% heat-inactivated FCS (Hyclone Laboratories, Logan, UT), 100 U/mL of penicillin, and 100 μg/mL of streptomycin (Gibco Laboratories) in a 75 cm^2 flask (No. 3111; Becton Dickinson Labware, Franklin Lakes, NJ).

Flow Cytometry. To investigate the processing of OVA coupled to liposome by macrophages, #39 macrophage clone was incubated for 15 to 60 min at 37 °C in the presence of DQ−OVA−liposome conjugates that contained a final concentration of 4 μg/mL OVA. After incubation, the cells were washed with ice-cold PBS and then were analyzed on a FACS Calibur flow cytometer (BD Biosciences, Mountain View, CA). The histograms of fluorescence distribution were plotted as the number of cells versus fluorescence intensity on a logarithmic scale.

Confocal Laser Scanning Microscopy. To investigate the processing of liposome-coupled OVA by macrophages, macrophage clone No. 39 was cultured for 18 h at 37°C on 8-hole heavy Teflon-coated slides (Bokusui Brown, New York, NY) and then incubated with DQ−OVA−liposome conjugates for 2 h at 37 °C. The slides were washed with MEM and fixed with 4% paraformaldehyde in PBS for 10 min at room temperature. After fixation, they were incubated for 10 min in 0.1 M glycine-HCl, pH 7.0, to block the remaining ardehyde residue. They were then washed two times in PBS. After washing, the slides were sealed with PBS/glycerin (PBS:glycerin = 1:9). They were then analyzed under a confocal laser scanning

Table 1. OVA Peptides Investigated in the Present Study

OVA peptides	amino acid sequence
1–20	GSIGAASMEFCFDVFKELKV
20–43	VHHANENIFYCPIAIMSALAMVYL
53–78	INKVVRFDKLPGFGDSIEAQCGTSVN
61–85	KLPGFGDSIEAQCGTSVNVHSSLRD
164–181	SSVDSQTAMVLVNAIVFK
190–207	DEDTQAMPFRVTEQESKP
220–245	ASMASEKMKILELPFASGTMSMLVLL
264–286	LTEWTSSNVMEERKIKVYLPRMK
302–327	ITDVFSSSANLSGISSAESLKISQAV
323–339	ISQAVHAAHAEINEAGR

Table 2. Induction of Cytokine Production by OVA Peptides[a]

OVA peptides	IL-2	IL-4	IL-5	IFN-γ
1–20	ND	ND	ND	ND
20–43	278.3 ± 53.5	221.2 ± 78.1	1201.5 ± 58.3	1275.5 ± 507.9
53–78	ND	ND	ND	ND
61–85	ND	ND	ND	ND
164–181	ND	ND	ND	ND
190–207	ND	ND	ND	ND
220–245	ND	ND	ND	ND
264–286	511.7 ± 85.0	140.3 ± 28.3	1073.4 ± 156.3	1321.6 ± 260.7
302–327	ND	ND	ND	ND
323–339	215.6 ± 35.5	27.8 ± 15.1	560.1 ± 51.1	302.6 ± 72.6
OVA	856.7 ± 60.8	78.0 ± 30.1	1133.4 ± 39.1	2457.0 ± 667.3

[a] Each peptide was assessed for its ability to induce cytokine production by CD4 T cells of mice immunized with OVA–alum. CD4 T cells were cultured in the presence of OVA peptides as described in Experimental Procedures. Data represent mean cytokine concentration (pg/mL) and SE of triplicate cultures. ND, not detected.

microscope system, LSM410 (Carl Zeiss Co., Germany). Internalization of Alexa–OVA–red liposome conjugates in the macrophages was investigated in essentially the same manner as above.

Analysis of Three-Dimensional Structure of OVA. The three-dimensional structure of OVA reported by Stein et al. (*17*, *18*) was obtained from DBGET database links (http://www.genome.jp/dbget/), and the locations of the OVA peptides were displayed using ProteinAdviser (Fujitsu Kyusyu System Engineering Ltd., Fukuoka, Japan).

RESULTS

OVA Peptides Capable of Inducing Cytokine Production by OVA-Specific CD4$^+$ T Cells of BALB/c Mice. A series of sequentially synthesized OVA peptides shown in Table 1 were screened for the ability to induce cytokine production by CD4$^+$ T cells of BALB/c mice immunized with OVA–alum. Since, under the culture conditions described in Materials and Methods, no cytokine production was observed in the absence of OVA, nor by the use of CD4$^+$ T cells of naive BALB/c mice, the data shown in Table 2 were considered to represent antigen-specific cytokine production. In addition to well-known $OVA_{323-339}$, two OVA peptides, OVA_{20-43} and $OVA_{264-286}$, were found to induce significant production of all cytokines tested. The levels of cytokines induced by OVA_{20-43} and $OVA_{264-286}$ were even higher than those induced by $OVA_{323-339}$ in all cytokines tested. OVA_{20-43} involved the core motif of the I-A^d peptide-binding groove, OVA_{31-36}, but $OVA_{264-286}$ did not.

Cytokine Production by OVA-Specific CD4$^+$ T Cells Of Mice Immunized with OVA–Alum or OVA–Liposome, after Stimulation with OVA Peptides. The next attempt was performed using newly found OVA peptides, OVA_{20-43} and $OVA_{264-286}$, and a well-known OVA peptide, $OVA_{323-339}$. Splenic CD4$^+$ T cells were obtained from mice immunized either with OVA–liposome or OVA–alum and were cultured with OVA_{20-43}, $OVA_{264-286}$, or $OVA_{323-339}$ in the presence of APCs. As shown in Figure 1, the levels of cytokines produced by CD$^+$ T cells of mice immunized with OVA–liposome were significantly ($p < 0.01$) higher when the T cells were cultured either with OVA_{20-43} or $OVA_{323-339}$ than when they were cultured with $OVA_{264-286}$. On the other hand, in the culture of the CD4$^+$ T cells of mice immunized with OVA–alum, OVA_{20-43} and $OVA_{264-286}$ induced significantly higher levels of IL-5 and IFN-γ as compared to those induced by $OVA_{323-339}$, consistent with the results shown in Table 1. Similar results were obtained for the other cytokines, IL-2, IL-4, and IL-10 (data not shown).

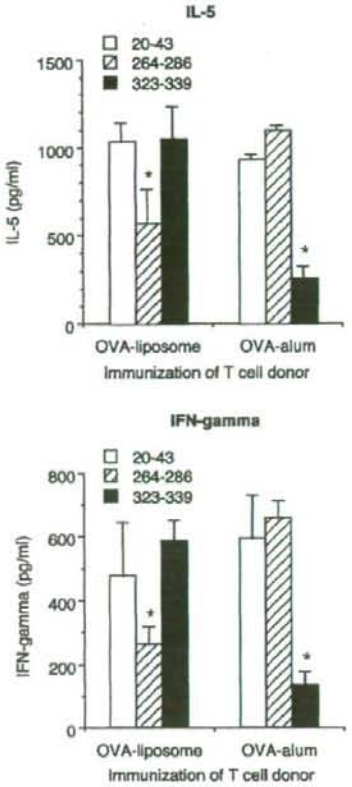

Figure 1. Cytokine production by CD4$^+$ T cells of mice immunized with OVA–liposome or OVA–alum, after in vitro stimulation with OVA peptides. CD4$^+$ T cells were taken from OVA-immune mice and cultured with OVA peptides as described in Materials and Methods. Data represent mean cytokine concentration (pg/mL) and SE of triplicate culture. Data are representative of three independent experiments.

Duration of Processing of Liposome-Coupled OVA in APCs. DQ–OVA coupled to liposome was cultured for 15 to 60 min with macrophage clone No. 39, and FACS analysis was performed. Figure 2a shows the fluorescence intensity of macrophages. A maximal processing of OVA was observed at 60 min. A consistent result was observed by confocal microscopic analysis (Figure 2b); the green fluorescence in the macrophages increased gradually within 60 min, suggesting that liposome-coupled OVA received processing significantly within 60 min after onset of the culture.

Internalization of Alexa–OVA–Red Liposome Conjugates in Macrophages. Alexa–OVA–red liposome conjugates, which appear yellow due to association with the green in Alexa–OVA and the red in the liposome, were cultured with macrophage clone No. 39 for 15 to 60 min, and confocal

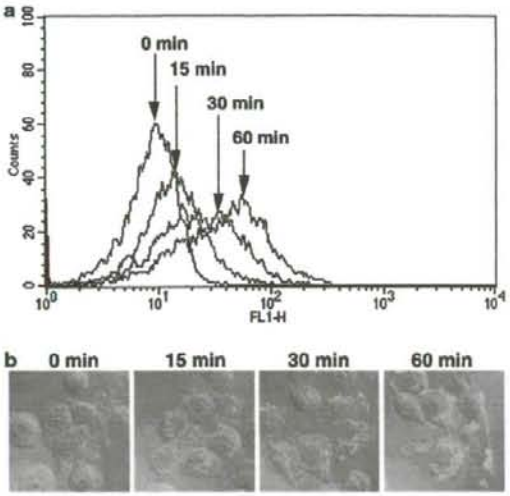

Figure 2. Digestion of liposome-coupled OVA by macrophages. DQ–OVA coupled to the surface of liposomes were added to the macrophage culture. Zero to 60 min after the onset of the culture, the macrophages were recovered and analyzed using flow cytometry (a) and confocal laser scanning microscopy (b).

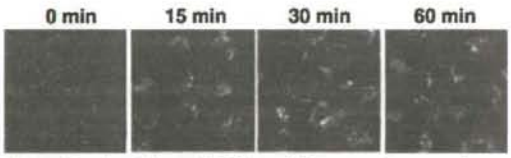

Figure 3. Association of OVA and liposomes in macrophages. Conjugates of Alexa488-labeled OVA and red-labeled liposomes were added to the macrophage culture. Zero to 60 min after the onset of the culture, the macrophages were recovered and analyzed using confocal laser scanning microscopy. The yellow spots observed in the macrophages are the result of the association with the Alexa488 (green) and red-labeled liposomes.

scanning microscopic analysis was performed. As shown in Figure 3, yellow spots were observed up to 60 min, suggesting that the OVA and liposomes were associated until liposome-coupled OVA received processing (Figure 2).

OVA Peptides in Three-Dimensional Structure of OVA. The locations of the three OVA peptides, OVA_{20-43}, $OVA_{264-286}$, and $OVA_{323-339}$, in the three-dimensional structure of OVA were analyzed. As shown in Figure 4, both $OVA_{264-286}$ and $OVA_{323-339}$ located on the surface of OVA in the three-dimensional structure, while OVA_{20-43} was situated inside the three-dimensional structure of OVA.

DISCUSSION

In the present study, OVA_{20-43} and $OVA_{264-286}$ were newly found among sequentially synthesized OVA peptides to stimulate $CD4^+$ T cells of OVA-immune BALB/c mice for cytokine production. A length of six residues has been proposed for core motifs of the I-A^d peptide-binding groove, with the first, third, and fourth residues being hydrophobic and the sixth generally being alanine or serine (*5*, *19*). OVA contains at least eight different epitopes with the I-A^d-binding motif, including $OVA_{327-332}$ which is involved in $OVA_{323-339}$. OVA_{20-43} involved core motifs of the I-A^d peptide binding groove, OVA_{31-36} and OVA_{32-37}, while $OVA_{264-286}$ did not. In addition, although OVA_{1-20}, OVA_{53-78}, $OVA_{220-245}$, and $OVA_{302-327}$

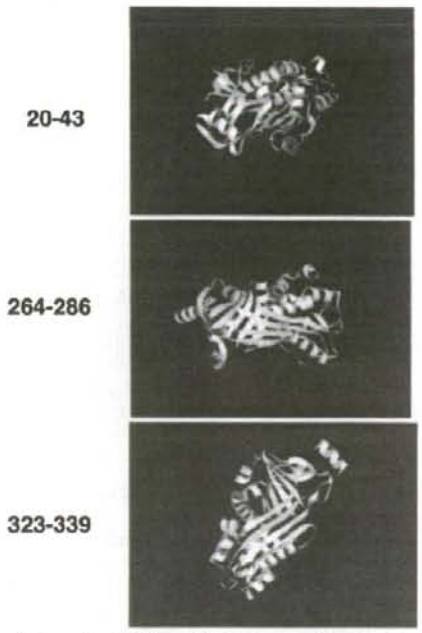

Figure 4. Location of OVA peptides in the three-dimensional structure of OVA. The OVA peptides in the three-dimensional structure of OVA are indicated as yellow strings.

involved the core motifs OVA_{1-6}, OVA_{63-68}, $OVA_{230-235}$, and $OVA_{312-317}$, respectively, none of them induced OVA-specific cytokine production by $CD4^+$ T cells of OVA-immune BALB/c mice (Table 2). These results suggest that the involvement of structural motifs of the MHC class II peptide binding groove in an antigenic peptide is not an essential condition for the activation of antigen-specific $CD4^+$ T cells. Also, regarding class I, although OVA contains six potential epitopes with the H-$2K^b$-binding motif (*20*), the CTL response is dominated by just one, $OVA_{257-264}$ (*21*–*23*). Thus, immunodominance would be directed by more than just the presence of an appropriate class I- or class II-binding motif.

The $\alpha\beta$ TCR comprises disulfide-linked α and β chains, each of which has a membrane-distal variable (Vα or Vβ) and membrane-proximal constant (Cα and Cβ) immunoglobulin superfamily (IgSF) domain, transmembrane regions, and short cytoplasmic segments (*24*). The peptide-MHC binding site is formed primarily from three complementary-determining regions (CDRs) or loops contributed by each Vα and Vβ domain. TCRs dock to the peptide-MHC in a topologically constrained manner, i.e., with the Vα domain of the TCR positioned over the N-terminal half of the peptide and the Vβ domain over the C-terminus (*25*, *26*). Thus, the shape of the TCR and/or peptide-MHC binding surfaces might limit the number of docking orientations (*24*). Therefore, the processing of both OVA_{20-43} and $OVA_{264-286}$ in APC to produce the "essential" length of the I-A^d-binding peptides sequence would be indispensable for the presentation of those peptides to $CD4^+$ T cells via the interaction between the peptide-MHC and TCRs.

Each Ia is considered to possess a single peptide binding site, based on the observation that unrelated peptides restricted by the same Ia molecule are capable of inhibiting the binding of one another to that particular Ia (*27*). This in turn supports the concept that a single site on Ia is capable of recognizing a structural motif common to many antigens (*5*). However, in the

present study, among two newly found I-A^d-binding OVA peptides, although each were found capable of stimulating antigen-specific $CD4^+$ T cells, one was demonstrated to involve a structural motif of the I-A^d peptide-binding groove but the other was not, suggesting the existence of another motif of the I-A^d peptide-binding groove.

$OVA_{323-339}$ induced a significantly higher level of cytokine production by $CD4^+$ T cells of mice immunized with OVA−liposome than that induced by $OVA_{264-286}$. However, in contrast, $OVA_{323-339}$ induced a significantly lower level of cytokine production by $CD4^+$ T cells of mice immunized with OVA−alum than that induced by $OVA_{264-286}$. These results suggest that the modification of OVA by the chemical coupling of OVA with liposomes may interrupt or alter antigen processing in APCs and result in the presentation of a differential set of peptides to T cells. In fact, the results of the present study demonstrated that the OVA and liposomes were associated until liposome-coupled OVA was processed (Figures 2 and 3). In the previous study (*13*), antigen−liposome conjugates were shown to be stable for at least 6 months if stored at 4 °C, and, if tetanus toxoid was coupled to liposomes and lyophilized, their efficacy was maintained for 6 months at 37 °C. The fact that both $OVA_{264-286}$ and $OVA_{323-339}$ were present on the surface of the three-dimensional structure of OVA made it reasonable to consider the effect of antigen-modification on the antigen processing in APCs. On the other hand, OVA_{20-43}, which induced a comparable level of cytokine production in both OVA−alum- and OVA−liposome-immune mice, was present inside the structure of OVA and likely not affected by the antigen-modification.

It is unlikely that the antigen-modification by the chemical coupling of antigen to liposomes detracts from the efficacy of vaccines when liposome-coupled antigen is applied to the vaccination protocol, since liposome-coupled toxins successfully induced protection against the tetanus toxin (*13*) or Shiga-like toxin (*14*, *28*, *29*) in mice (*13*, *14*) and also in monkeys (*28*). Nor it is unlikely that the difference between the two OVA peptides, $OVA_{264-286}$ and $OVA_{323-339}$, in the ability to induce cytokine production by $CD4^+$ T cells is reflected by the difference of immunodominance (i.e., affinity to bind I-A^d) in these two OVA peptides, since these peptides yielded opposite results in the stimulation of OVA-specific cytokine production by $CD4^+$ T cells of mice immunized by two different ways of immunization, i.e., OVA−alum and OVA−liposome. Thus, the results in the present study suggested that the modification of antigen affects antigen processing in APCs and results in the induction of differential T-cell epitopes as compared with those induced by plain antigen.

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Antigen Chemically Coupled to the Surface of Liposomes Are Cross-Presented to CD8$^+$ T Cells and Induce Potent Antitumor Immunity[1]

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We have previously demonstrated that liposomes with differential lipid components display differential adjuvant effects when Ags are chemically coupled to their surfaces. In the present study, Ag presentation of liposome-coupled OVA was investigated in vitro, and it was found that OVA coupled to liposomes made using unsaturated fatty acid was presented to both CD4$^+$ and CD8$^+$ T cells, whereas OVA coupled to liposomes made using saturated fatty acid was presented only to CD4$^+$ T cells. Confocal laser scanning microscopic analysis demonstrated that a portion of the OVA coupled to liposomes made using unsaturated, but not saturated fatty acid, received processing beyond the MHC class II compartment, suggesting that the degradation of OVA might occur in the cytosol, and that the peptides generated in this manner would be presented to CD8$^+$ T cells via MHC class I. The ability to induce cross-presentation of an Ag coupled to liposomes consisting of unsaturated fatty acid was further confirmed by in vivo induction of CTL and by the induction of tumor eradication in mice; E.G7 tumors in mice that received combined inoculation with $OVA_{257-264}$-liposome conjugates, CpG, and anti-IL-10 mAbs were completely eradicated. In those mice, the frequency of CD8$^+$ T cells reactive with $OVA_{257-264}$ peptides in the context of H-2K^b was significantly increased. These results suggested that, by choosing lipid components for liposomes, surface-coupled liposomal Ags might be applicable for the development of tumor vaccines to present tumor Ags to APCs and induce antitumor responses. *The Journal of Immunology*, **2006, 177: 2324–2330.**

Although it has long been a matter of debate whether the human immune system is capable of recognizing and managing spontaneously arising tumors, a number of compelling findings (1–4) have recently indicated that the immune system is clearly capable of recognizing and eliminating tumor cells. Therefore, adoptive immunotherapy could potentially provide a controlled and highly specific stratagem for the treatment of cancer. However, at present, there are some problems to overcome before immunotherapy can be applied to cancer therapies. Successful elimination of experimental tumors in animal models by use of adoptive immunotherapy requires repeated administration of IL-2 to maintain cell survival because, for solid cancers, the capacity of tumor rejection may soon be exhausted unless CTL are rapidly and efficiently recruited to the tumor bed. Also, in humans, adoptive immunotherapy has been (5) plagued by extreme toxicities associated with the simultaneous administration of high doses of IL-2. Second, most of the characterized human tumor Ags have been classified as tumor-associated, because of their demonstrable expression at low levels in some normal cells (6). Thus, the challenge for immunotherapy is to develop strategies that effectively and safely augment antitumor responses (7).

Immunotherapy for the treatment of cancer involves adoptive T cell transfer, tumor-associated-Ag-pulsed dendritic cells (DC[3]; DC-based vaccines), and peptide-based vaccines. In the case of the peptide-based cancer vaccines, the vaccine Ag (e.g., tumor Ag) should be presented via the MHC class I pathway for the induction of Ag-specific CTL. In general, extracellular Ags are presented via MHC class II molecules to CD4$^+$ T cells, whereas intracellular Ags are presented via MHC class I molecules to CD8$^+$ T cells. To induce Ag-specific CTL, the tumor Ag must be loaded onto the class I MHC processing pathway in the APCs via so-called cross-presentation (8). In cross-presentation, exogenous proteins cross over to the endogenous pathway to gain access to MHC class I. Using this phenomenon, a generation of Ag-specific, primary CD8$^+$ CTL responses might be applicable for the development of vaccines for prevention of viral diseases and for the induction of potent protective antitumor immunity.

As for the vaccine adjuvant, the currently approved alum adjuvants are known to be effective only for the induction of humoral immunity, not for the induction of cell-mediated immunity (9–11). Consequently, the development of a novel vaccine adjuvant is essential for the induction of cell-mediated immunity. Among the candidates for adjuvants, liposomes have garnered recent attention (12–18) for their capacity as carriers of vaccines. We previously (19–22) reported that Ags chemically coupled to the surface of liposomes induced Ag-specific IgG but not IgE Ab production.

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[3] Abbreviations used in this paper: DC, dendritic cell; DPPE, dipalmitoyl phosphatidyl ethanolamine; DOPE, dioleoyl phosphatidyl ethanolamine; DSS, disuccinimidyl suberate; SAC, splenic adherent cells; TAA, antitumor-associated Ag.

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The inducibility of Ag-specific IgG Ab production by Ag-liposome conjugates varied among the liposome preparations used for the production of Ag-liposome conjugates; the greater the membrane mobility in liposomes, the more Ab production induced by Ag-liposome conjugates (23). In fact, alteration of lipid composition has been reported to modulate immune responses (24–27).

In the present study, OVA was coupled to liposomes consisting either of saturated or unsaturated fatty acid, and the inducibility of cross-presentation by these OVA-liposome conjugates was investigated by monitoring vitro cytokine production by OVA-specific $CD4^+$ or $CD8^+$ T cells cocultured with Ag-liposome conjugates in the presence of APCs. OVA coupled to liposomes consisting of unsaturated fatty acid was presented to both $CD4^+$ and $CD8^+$ T cells. We then made conjugates of $OVA_{257-264}$ with liposomes consisting of unsaturated fatty acid, and investigated in vivo CTL induction and the effect of administrating these conjugates to E.G7-bearing mice.

Materials and Methods

Mice

BALB/c mice (8 wk of age, female) were purchased from Charles River Laboratories. C57BL/6 mice (6–8 wk of age, female) were purchased from SLC (Shizuoka, Japan). All mice were maintained under specific pathogen-free conditions.

Chemicals

All phospholipids were obtained from Nippon Oil and Fat. Reagent grades of cholesterol were purchased from Wako Pure Chemical.

Reagents

Synthetic CpG ODN (5002: TCCATGACGTTCTTGATGTT) was purchased from Hokkaido System Science and was phoshorothioate protected to avoid nuclease-dependent degradation. Mouse MHC class-I (K^b)-binding peptide $OVA_{257-264}$ (SIINFEKL) was also obtained from Hokkaido System Science. FITC-conjugated anti-mouse CD8 mAb or PE-conjugated $H\text{-}2K^b/OVA_{257-264}$ tetramer was purchased from BD Biosciences or MBL, respectively.

Antigens

OVA (grade VII) was purchased from Sigma-Aldrich. For the analysis of the processing of liposome-coupled OVA by macrophages, DQ-OVA, which exhibits green fluorescence upon proteolytic degradation, was purchased from Molecular Probes.

Fluorescence labeling of OVA

OVA was labeled with fluorescence using an AlexaFluor 488 protein labeling kit (Molecular Probes) according to the manufacturer's protocol.

Liposomes

Liposomes with two different lipid components were used in the present study. Saturated liposomes consisted of dipalmitoyl phosphatidylcholine, dipalmitoyl phosphatidyl ethanolamine (DPPE), dimyristoyl phosphatidyl glycerol, and cholesterol in a 4:3:2:7 molar ratio, and unsaturated liposomes consisted of dioleoyl phosphatidylcholine, dioleoyl phosphatidyl ethanolamine (DOPE), dioleoyl phosphatidyl glycerol, and cholesterol in a 4:3:2:7 molar ratio. The crude liposome solution was passed through a membrane filter (Nucleopore polycarbonate filter; Costar) with a pore size of 0.2 μm.

Coupling of OVA to liposomes

Liposomal conjugates with plain OVA, Alexa-labeled OVA, or DQ-OVA were prepared essentially in the same way, as described previously (19), via glutaraldehyde. Briefly, 6 mg of OVA in 2.5 ml of phosphate buffer (pH 7.2) was added to a mixture of 90 mg of liposomes, in a dropwise fashion, and 0.5 ml of 2.5% glutaraldehyde solution. The mixture was stirred gently for 1 h at 37°C and then 0.5 ml of 3 M glycine-NaOH (pH 7.2) was added to block excess aldehyde groups. This was followed by incubation overnight at 4°C. The liposome-coupled OVA and uncoupled OVA in the resulting solution were separated using CL-4B column chromatography (Pharmacia). The amount of lipid in the liposomal fraction was measured using a Phospholipid-Test-Wako phospholipid content assay kit (Wako Pure Chemical). The OVA-liposome solution was adjusted to 10 mg lipid/ml in RPMI 1640, sterile-filtered using a Millex-HA syringe filter unit (0.45 μm; Millipore), and kept at 4°C until use.

Coupling of $OVA_{257-264}$ to liposomes

Liposomal conjugates with $OVA_{257-264}$ were prepared essentially in the same way as described previously (20) via disuccinimidyl suberate (DSS). Briefly, a mixture of 10 ml of anhydrous chloroform solution containing 0.136 mM DPPE (saturated liposomes) or DOPE (unsaturated liposomes) and 24 μl of triethylamine was added in drops to 26.6 ml of anhydrous chloroform solution containing 0.681 mM DSS and stirred for 5 h at 40°C. The solvent was evaporated under reduced pressure, and 18 ml of a 2:1 mixture of ethyl acetate and tetrahydrofuran was added to dissolve the residue. Thirty six milliliters of 100 mM sodium phosphate (pH 5.5) and 90 ml of saturated NaCl aqueous solution were added to the solution, shaken for 1 min, and allowed to separate. To remove undesirable materials, the upper layer was washed with the same buffer and, after evaporation of the solvent, 3 ml of acetone was added to dissolve the residue. Ice-cold acetone (100 ml) was added in drops and kept on ice for 30 min to precipitate. Crystals were collected and dissolved in 5 ml of chloroform. After evaporation, 34.4 mg of DPPE-DSS was obtained. 0.18 mM dipalmitoyl phosphatidylcholine, 0.03 mM DPPE-DSS, 0.21 mM cholesterol, and 0.06 mM dimyristoyl phosphatidyl glycerol were dissolved in 10 ml of chloroform/methanol (saturated liposomes). For unsaturated liposomes, DOPE-DSS, dioleoyl phosphatidylcholine, dioleoyl phosphatidyl glycerol, and cholesterol were used and the preparation was done in the same manner as above. The solvent was then removed under reduced pressure and 5.8 ml of phosphate buffer (pH 7.2) was added to make a 4.8% lipid suspension. The vesicle dispersion was extruded through a 0.2-μm polycarbonate filter to adjust the liposome size. A 2-ml suspension of DSS-introduced liposome and 0.5 ml of 5 mg/ml $OVA_{257-264}$ solution were mixed and stirred for 3 days at 4°C. The liposome-coupled and -uncoupled peptides were separated as described above using CL-4B column chromatography.

Quantification of OVA coupled to liposome

For the measurement of OVA coupled to liposome, radiolabeled OVA (*methyl*-^{14}C; purchased from New England Nuclear) was mixed with cold OVA and used for coupling with liposome and for determining the calibration curve. The radioactivity of the resulting OVA-liposome solution was counted using a calibration curve. The amounts of OVA coupled to saturated and unsaturated liposomes were 48.1 and 47.8 μg/mg lipid, respectively.

Cell culture

All incubations were performed in RPMI 1640 (Invitrogen Life Technologies) supplemented with 10% heat-inactivated FCS (HyClone), 100 U/ml penicillin, and 100 μg/ml streptomycin (Invitrogen Life Technologies).

Preparation of splenic adherent cells (SAC) and $CD4^+$ and $CD8^+$ T cells

Spleen cell suspensions were prepared in RPMI 1640 containing 10% FCS. Cells (5×10^7) in 5 ml of medium containing 10% FCS were plated into 50-mm plastic tissue culture dishes (no. 3002; BD Biosciences) and were incubated at 37°C in a humidified 5% CO_2 atmosphere for 2 h. After culture, nonadherent cells were removed by vigorous washing in warm medium, and adherent cells were then harvested with a cell scraper. $CD4^+$ and $CD8^+$ T cell purification from spleen cells of mice immunized with OVA-alum was performed with the magnetic cell sorter system MACS according to the manufacturer's protocol using anti-CD4 and anti-CD8 Ab-coated microbeads (Miltenyi Biotec). T cells were suspended in RPMI 1640 containing 10% FCS at a cell density of 2×10^6/ml.

Culture of $CD4^+$ and $CD8^+$ T cells with SAC pulsed with OVA

OVA-liposome conjugates made using saturated or unsaturated liposomes were added to the culture of SAC and incubated for 2 h. The final concentration of OVA-liposome added to the macrophage culture was 500 μg of lipid/ml, which included 24 μg of OVA/ml. For controls, OVA was added to the culture at final concentrations of 24 μg/ml. SAC were then washed three times in ice-cold medium and 2×10^5 cells were cocultured with 5×10^5 $CD4^+$ or $CD8^+$ T cells in a 48-well plate (no. 3047; BD Biosciences). A preliminary experiment showed that the optimal culture period in the above culture condition was 2 days for IFN-γ production by $CD4^+$ T cells and 5 days for IL-5 production by $CD4^+$ and $CD8^+$ T cells

and IFN-γ production by $CD8^+$ T cells. After incubation in a CO_2 incubator for 2 or 5 days, the culture supernatants were collected and assayed for cytokines.

Cytokine assays

IL-5 and IFN-γ in the culture supernatant were measured using the Biotrak mouse ELISA system (Amersham International). All test samples were assayed in duplicate, and the SE in each test was always <5% of the mean value.

Cloned macrophage hybridoma

Macrophage hybridoma clone 39, obtained from the fusion of SAC from CKB mice and P388D1 (28), was maintained in RPMI 1640 supplemented with 10% heat-inactivated FCS, 100 U/ml penicillin, and 100 μg/ml streptomycin in a 75-cm^2 flask (no. 3111; BD Biosciences).

Construction and expression of a fusion protein, DM-DsRed, in macrophage clone 39

The DNA fragment coding the full-length H2-DMβ2 (29) was amplified by PCR with two primers (5'-ATGGCTGCACTCTGGCTGCTGCTGCT GGT-3' and 5'-GATGCCGTCCTTCTGGGTAGGTGGATCC-3'). The PCR product was cloned into the CMV promoter-driven expression plasmid pDsRedN1 (BD Clontech). This construct omitted the stop codon of H2-DMβ2 and encoded the H2-DMβ2 fused with DsRed. The cloned plasmid DNA was transfected to macrophage hybridoma clone 39 with Effectene transfection reagent (Qiagen) according to the manufacturer's protocol. During the transfection to clone 39, the medium containing cDNA and the transfection reagent was replaced with fresh medium after an 8-h transfection, and then clone 39 was cultured for 40 h. To obtain stable cell lines, clone 39 was passaged at 1:5 into RPMI 1640 containing 10% FCS with 50 μg/ml geneticin (G-418; Sigma-Aldrich). Cells showing the best fluorescence were selected by using a FACSVantage cell sorter. After cell sorting, clone 39 that expressed DM-DsRed was cultured in RPMI 1640 containing 10% FCS with 200 μg/ml geneticin.

Confocal laser scanning microscopy

To investigate the internalization of OVA-liposome conjugates by macrophages, the DM-DsRed-expressing cloned macrophages 39 were cultured for 18 h at 37°C on 8-hole heavy Teflon-coated slides (Bokusui Brown) and was then incubated with Alexa-OVA-liposome conjugates or with DQ-OVA-liposome conjugates, prepared using saturated or unsaturated liposomes, for 2 h at 37°C. The slides were then washed with MEM and fixed with 4% paraformaldehyde in PBS for 10 min at room temperature. After fixation, they were incubated for 10 min in 0.1 M glycine-HCl (pH 7.0) to block the remaining aldehyde residue. They were then washed two times in PBS. After washing, the slides were sealed with PBS:glycerin (1:9) and analyzed under an LSM410 confocal laser scanning microscope system (Zeiss).

In vivo cytotoxicity assay

Splenocytes of C57BL/6 mice were labeled with either 0.5 or 5 μM carboxylfluorescein diacetate succinimidyl ester (Sigma-Aldrich) for 15 min at room temperature and washed twice. $CFSE^{bright}$ cells (M2) were subsequently pulsed with 0.5 μg/ml $OVA_{257-264}$ for 90 min at 37°C. $CFSE^{dull}$ cells (M1) were pulsed with irrelevant $NP_{366-374}$ (ASNENMDAM) peptide for 90 min at 37°C as a control. Cells were mixed at a 1:1 ratio, and then a total of 5×10^6 cells was injected i.v. into mice that had been injected 1 wk earlier with 100 μg of the anti-IL-10 mAb 2A5 (30), 5 μg of CpG, and the indicated liposomal Ags. Eight hours later, splenocytes from each mouse were analyzed by flow cytometry.

Tumor cells

E.G7 cells, generated by transducing the chicken OVA gene into the murine lymphoma cell line EL4, were purchased from American Type Culture Collection.

Tumor challenge experiment

Female C57BL/6 mice were inoculated s.c. in the right flank with 1×10^6 E.G7 cells. When the tumor mass had grown to 5 mm in diameter, the mice were injected with 100 μg of anti-IL-10 mAbs and 5 μg of CpG with or without 200 μl of liposome-coupled $OVA_{257-264}$. The same treatment was repeated 2 days later. The size of the tumor mass was measured every day, and the average diameter of the tumor mass in each group was calculated. Inoculation of anti-IL-10 mAbs and CpG without $OVA_{257-264}$ in the condition used in the present study did not affect growth of E.G7 in mice.

Cellular staining with MHC tetramer

Spleen cells from tumor-bearing mice with or without the treatment were treated with anti-FcγRII/III mAb (2.4G2) and then stained with FITC-conjugated anti-CD8 mAb and PE-conjugated $H\text{-}2K^b/OVA_{257-264}$ tetramer at room temperature for 30 min. After two washes in PBS, cells were examined to quantify OVA-specific CTL by flow cytometry. Flow cytometric analyses were performed using a FACScan flow cytometer (BD Biosciences). Data were presented as dot plots using CellQuest software (BD Biosciences).

Statistical analysis

The Student's *t* test was used for the statistical analysis.

Results

Cytokine production by splenic $CD4^+$ and $CD8^+$ T cells of mice immunized with OVA after coculture with OVA-pulsed SAC

Splenic adherent cells of BALB/c mice were cocultured with OVA-liposome conjugates made using liposomes with two different lipid components for 2 h. The donor mice used as a source of $CD4^+$ and $CD8^+$ T cells in this experiment were immunized with OVA-alum, since in the preliminary experiment, $CD8^+$ T cells of C57BL/6 mice immunized with OVA-alum responded significantly to in vitro stimulation with $OVA_{257-264}$, a mouse MHC class I (K^b)-binding peptide, and produced cytokines such as IL-5 and IFN-γ in an Ag-specific manner. As shown in Table I, OVA-liposome conjugates made using liposomes with two different lipid components induced production of comparable levels of IL-5 and IFN-γ by $CD4^+$ T cells, whereas OVA solution with the same Ag concentration as OVA-liposome induced a much lower level of IL-5 production and no IFN-γ. In contrast, OVA-liposomes made using saturated liposomes did not induce either IL-5 or IFN-γ production by $CD8^+$ T cells, whereas OVA-liposomes made using unsaturated liposomes induced a significant production of both IL-5 and IFN-γ.

Confocal laser scanning microscopic analysis of macrophages cocultured with Alexa-OVA-liposome or with DQ-OVA-liposome conjugates

Alexa-labeled OVA was coupled with liposomes of two different lipid components and added to the culture of cloned macrophages

Table I. *Cytokine production by splenic CD4/CD8 T cells of mice immunized with OVA after coculture with OVA-pulsed SAC*[a]

In Vitro Ag	Liposomes	CD4		CD8	
		IL-5	IFN-γ	IL-5	IFN-γ
None		ND	ND	ND	ND
OVA solution		96.2 ± 12.5	ND	ND	ND
OVA-liposome	Saturated	910.2 ± 23.0	88.7 ± 45.0	ND	ND
OVA-liposome	Unsaturated	1065.5 ± 31.9	115.1 ± 28.6	163.3 ± 99.1	149.9 ± 83.8

[a] Splenic CD4/CD8 T cells were taken from mice immunized with OVA and were cultured with OVA-pulsed SAC as described in *Materials and Methods*. Data represent the mean cytokine concentration (picograms per milliliter) in the culture supernatants and SE of triplicate culture. ND, Not detected.

that expressed DM-DsRed. After incubation for 2 h, the recovered macrophages were analyzed using confocal laser scanning microscopy. Macrophages expressed DM-DsRed (Mϕ alone in Figs. 1 and 2). The yellow spots in the panel labeled saturated in Fig. 1 illustrate that Alexa-OVA coupled to liposomes were colocalized with DM. In contrast, in the panel labeled unsaturated in Fig. 1, both green and yellow spots were observed, suggesting that a portion of the Alexa-OVA coupled to unsaturated liposomes was not colocalized with DM. In the next experiment, DQ-OVA, which exhibits green fluorescein upon proteolytic degradation, was coupled to liposomes instead of Alexa-OVA, and similar investigations were performed. Interestingly, the results shown in Fig. 2 demonstrate that a portion of the DQ-OVA coupled to unsaturated liposome received processing beyond the class II compartment.

In vivo CTL induction by OVA-liposome conjugates

Cross-presentation of OVA coupled to unsaturated liposomes was further confirmed using experiments of in vivo CTL induction. As shown in Fig. 3, both $OVA_{257-264}$ (*D*) and whole OVA (*E*) coupled to unsaturated liposomes successfully induced CTL against target cells pulsed with $OVA_{257-264}$ but not with control $NP_{366-374}$. In contrast, a mixture of $OVA_{257-264}$ and unsaturated liposomes (Fig. 3*B*), and $OVA_{257-264}$ coupled to saturated liposome (Fig. 3*C*) failed to induce CTL against target cells pulsed with $OVA_{257-264}$.

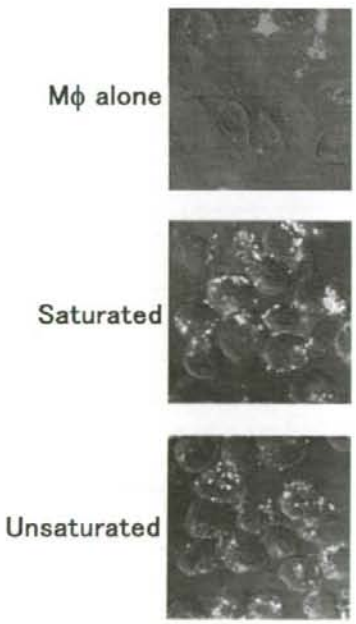

FIGURE 1. Confocal laser scanning microscopic analysis of macrophages cocultured with Alexa-OVA-liposome conjugates. DM-DsRed-expressing macrophages were cocultured with Alexa-OVA-liposome made using saturated or unsaturated liposomes, as described in *Materials and Methods*. Two hours after the onset of the culture, macrophages were recovered and analyzed using confocal laser scanning microscopy. These optically merged images are representative of most cells examined by confocal microscopy. Yellow, colocalization of green (Alexa-OVA) and red (macrophage DM); Mϕ alone, macrophages without coculture with Alexa-OVA-liposome.

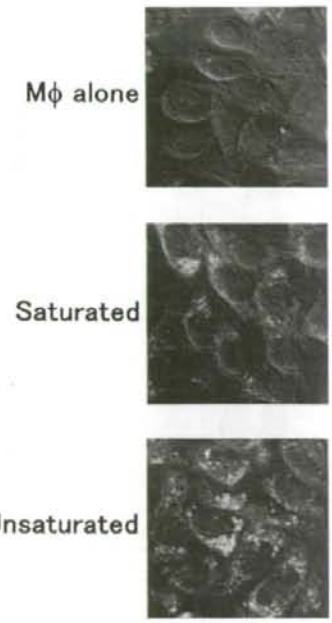

FIGURE 2. Confocal laser scanning microscopic analysis of macrophages cocultured with DQ-OVA-liposome conjugates. DM-DsRed-expressing macrophages were cocultured with DQ-OVA-liposome made using saturated or unsaturated liposomes, as described in *Materials and Methods*. Two hours after the onset of the culture, macrophages were recovered and analyzed using confocal laser scanning microscopy. These optically merged images are representative of most cells examined by confocal microscopy. Yellow, colocalization of green (DQ-OVA received processing) and red (macrophage DM); Mϕ alone, macrophages without coculture with DQ-OVA-liposome.

Tumor-specific, liposome-coupled Ag peptides induce eradication of tumors in C57BL/6 mice

To examine the effectiveness of liposome-coupled peptides in vivo, we performed tumor-rejecting experiments. B6 mice were injected s.c. with E.G7 cells transfected with OVA DNA, and solid tumors with a diameter of >5 mm were established ~7–10 days after the injection. Liposome-coupled peptides, $OVA_{257-264}$ with CpG and anti-IL-10 Ab, were injected twice around the tumor mass as described in *Materials and Methods*. As shown in Fig. 4, a significant ($p < 0.001$) decrease of mean tumor diameter was observed as early as 7 days after inoculation of liposome-coupled $OVA_{257-264}$ with CpG and anti-IL-10 Ab, and the tumors were completely eradicated in 12 days. In contrast, injection of CpG and anti-IL-10 Ab with peptide solution containing the same amount of $OVA_{257-264}$ as liposome-coupled $OVA_{257-264}$ did not eradicate the established tumors. These results suggested that the liposome-coupled $OVA_{257-264}$ might effectively present $OVA_{257-264}$ to CTL, resulting in tumor rejection.

To determine whether liposome-coupled $OVA_{257-264}$ contributes to CTL activation, we analyzed splenic T cells in tumor-bearing mice with or without the treatment. CD8-gated cells were analyzed with a tetramer-detecting $OVA_{257-264}$ plus H-$2K^b$-specific T cells. As shown in Fig. 5, spleen cells in normal mice were slightly stained with the tetramer at a background level. The tetramer-positive cells accounted for 5.2% of the total $CD8^+$ cells of tumor-eradicated mice, whereas they made up 1.8 and 2.3% in normal mice and nontreated, tumor-bearing mice, respectively.

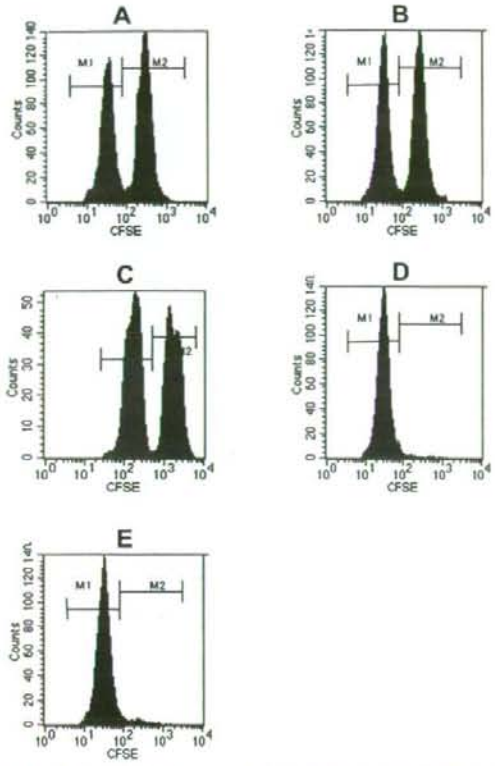

FIGURE 3. In vivo CTL induction in mice immunized with OVA-liposome conjugates. Mice were injected with 100 μg of anti-IL-10 mAbs and 5 μg of CpG with PBS (*A*), a mixture of $OVA_{257-264}$ and unsaturated liposomes (*B*), $OVA_{257-264}$-saturated liposome conjugates (*C*), $OVA_{257-264}$-unsaturated liposome conjugates (*D*), and OVA-unsaturated liposome conjugates (*E*). Target cells were prepared as described in *Materials and Methods*. $CFSE^{bright}$ cells (M2) were pulsed with $OVA_{257-264}$, and $CFSE^{dull}$ cells (M1) were pulsed with $NP_{366-374}$ peptide as a control. Data represent the results of flow cytometric analysis for splenocytes from each mouse.

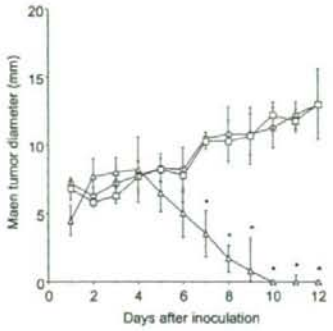

FIGURE 4. The effect of peptide-liposome conjugates on the growth of E.G7 tumor in mice. The tumor was established as explained in *Materials and Methods*, and a mixture of CpG and anti-IL-10 were inoculated around the tumor mass with liposome-coupled peptide (△), peptide solution containing the same amount of peptide as liposome-coupled peptide (□), or with nothing (○). *, $p < 0.001$ as compared with the mean diameter of mice without inoculation of liposome-coupled peptides. Data represent the mean and SE of four mice per group.

Discussion

In most APCs, exogenous Ags cannot be presented by the MHC class I because the exogenous Ags are unable to gain access to the cytosolic compartment. This segregation of exogenous Ags from the class I pathway is important to prevent CTL from killing health cells that have been exposed to foreign Ags but are not infected (31). Consequently, in general, exogenous Ags do not prime CTL responses in vivo. However, there are several exceptions to this rule, reflecting an ability of the Ags to be delivered into the cytosolic compartments (32–36). In the present study, Ags coupled to liposome consisting of unsaturated fatty acid were presented to both $CD4^+$ and $CD8^+$ T cells (Table I). Confocal laser scanning microscopic analysis demonstrated that a portion of the OVA coupled to liposomes received processing beyond the MHC class II compartment (Fig. 2), suggesting that degradation of OVA occurs in the cytosol and that peptides generated in this manner would be presented to $CD8^+$ T cells via MHC class I. Cross-presentation induced by OVA coupled to liposomes consisting of unsaturated fatty acids was further confirmed in the in vivo CTL induction experiments (Fig. 3). CTL were successfully induced in vivo only when OVA or $OVA_{257-264}$ chemically coupled to unsaturated liposomes were inoculated into mice. It is unlikely that the results were affected by contamination of the liposome preparation with endotoxin, since the liposomes used in the present study were produced using endotoxin-free materials in the GMP-verified production facilities of Nippon O.I. & Fats, which produces injection-grade liposomes for clinical use. In fact, SAC incubated for 2 h with OVA-liposome and subsequently cultured for 24 h did not produce any detectable cytokines, and the addition of polymixin B in the experiments shown in Table I did not affect the results (data not shown).

We next investigated the ability of Ag-liposome conjugates to induce antitumor immunity. The aim of cancer vaccination is to generate an immune-mediated antitumor-associated Ag (TAA) response resulting in the elimination of the tumor. The Ag of choice may be the whole protein alone or with immune stimulatory components, or defined epitopes (e.g., peptides) of the target Ag (7). Recent preclinical studies (37) have demonstrated that combined therapies involving the use of vaccines with cytokines, activators of DC such as TLR ligands or mAb to CD40, or recombinant vectors that provide a stimulus to the innate immune system resulted in enhanced antitumor responses. In the present study, antigenic peptides were chemically coupled to the surface of liposomes and inoculated into tumor-bearing mice in combination with CpG and anti-IL-10 mAbs. This treatment successfully induced eradication of the tumor mass, whereas inoculation of mice with CpG and anti-IL-10 mAbs with peptide solution containing the same amount of $OVA_{257-264}$ as liposome-coupled $OVA_{257-264}$ did not affect E.G7 tumor growth (Fig. 4). It has been reported that CpG and anti-IL-10 receptor Ab reverse tumor-induced DC paralysis, resulting in tumor rejection by CTL activated by the DC (38). However, under the conditions used in the present study, a combined inoculation of CpG and anti-IL-10 Abs in tumor-bearing mice did not inhibit the growth of the E.G7 tumor. In addition, the same Ag dose of plain peptide solution did not affect tumor growth even when inoculated in combination with CpG and anti-IL-10. Thus, liposome-coupled OVA peptide might be critical for the tumor eradication observed in the present study, suggesting that the administration of tumor Ag is indispensable for the induction of Ag-specific CTL, and peptide-liposome conjugates might effectively induce cross-presentation in APCs and induce a CTL response. In fact, tetramer staining (Fig. 4) demonstrated that Ag-specific CTL were significantly generated in mice that received

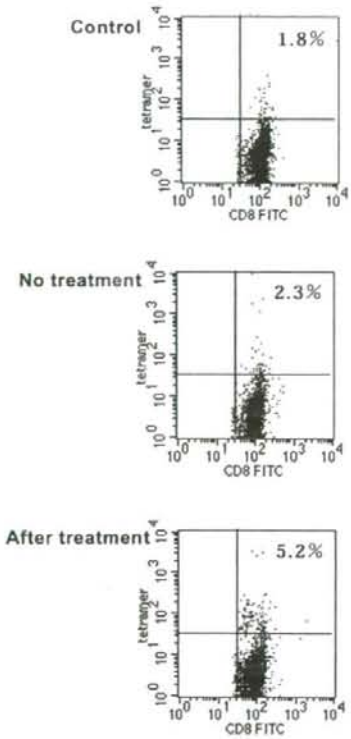

FIGURE 5. Induction of CTL by peptide-liposome conjugates inoculated in combination with CpG and anti-IL-10. CD8-gated cells were analyzed with a tetramer-detecting $OVA_{257-264}$ plus H-$2K^b$-specific T cells. Spleen cells of normal mice (Control), tumor-bearing mice without treatment (no treatment), or tumor-bearing mice that received inoculation with peptide-liposome conjugates in combination with CpG and anti-IL-10 (after treatment) were stained with PE-conjugated, tetramer-detecting $OVA_{257-264}$ plus H-$2K^b$-specific T cells and FITC-conjugated anti-CD8 Ab. The experiment was repeated three times with similar results.

combined inoculation with peptide-liposome conjugates, CpG, and anti-IL-10 Abs.

We have investigated (25, 39) the potential ability of surface-linked liposomal Ags for the application to vaccine development, whereas most of the investigations regarding liposomes as a drug-delivery system have been done by encapsulating Ags into liposomes. During the course of this investigation, several advantages of the liposome-coupled Ags over the liposome-encapsulated Ags became apparent. First, a predominant coupling efficiency of Ags to liposomes: following our previously reported procedure (20) for coupling Ags to liposomes, ~50% of the Ags bound to the surface of liposomes, whereas in the Ag encapsulation, a 60-fold higher volume of Ags was required to obtain the same amount of conjugates (our unpublished observation). Second, Ag-specific and IgE-selective unresponsiveness induced by surface-linked liposomal Ags: Ags chemically coupled to the surface of liposomes induced Ag-specific IgG but not IgE Ab production in mice (19) and also in monkeys (40), suggesting the potential ability of surface-linked liposomal Ags for application to the development of vaccines with minimal allergic side effects. In addition, during the course of an investigation intended to clarify the mechanism of IgE-selective unresponsiveness induced by surface-linked liposomal Ag, we found the existence of an alternative mechanism, not involving T cells, in the regulation of IgE synthesis (41). Third, an enhanced recognition of liposomal Ags by APCs: because liposomes basically consist of immunologically inert fatty acid, they are hardly recognized by APCs. Therefore, some contrivance, such as the introduction of mannose on the surface of liposomes (42), is required in Ag-encapsulated liposomes to enhance the recognition of liposomes by APCs. In contrast, in surface-linked liposomal Ags, Ags expressed on the surface of liposomes might be recognized more efficiently by APCs, which might result in an enhanced presentation to T cells. In fact, surface-linked liposomal Ags induced a significantly higher level of Ag-specific IgG production than that by liposome-encapsulated Ags in mice (our unpublished observation). In addition, a significant difference, which correlated closely with the adjuvant activity of liposomes, was observed in the recognition of liposomal Ags by APCs between liposomes with different lipid components; more Ags coupled to the unsaturated liposomes were engulfed by macrophages in vitro and a higher level of Ag-specific Ab production was induced in vivo than when saturated liposomes were used, suggesting that the adjuvant effects of liposomes are exerted at the beginning of the immune response, i.e., recognition of Ag by APCs (43). In addition to this quantitative difference between liposomes with differential lipid components, in the present study, a qualitative difference (i.e., the differential ability to induce cross-presentation) was observed between saturated and unsaturated liposomes. Although the precise mechanism underlying this difference is currently unclear, the significant difference in membrane mobility observed between these liposomes (23) might affect their ability to induce cross-presentation.

Because a detailed characterization of many tumor cell surface molecules that act as TAAs is now available (44), immunotherapy has become an increasingly essential component of cancer therapies (7). Emphasis to date has been placed on the development of cancer vaccines to enhance the immunogenicity of weak TAAs. In this context, surface-linked liposomal Ag might potentially serve as a candidate protocol for tumor vaccine preparation to present tumor Ags to APCs and induce effective antitumor responses.

Disclosures

The authors have no financial conflict of interest.

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Peptides coupled to the surface of a kind of liposome protect infection of influenza viruses

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Abstract

In our previous study, OVA conjugated on the surface of a liposome, we termed Oleoyl liposome, which consisted of dioleoyl phosphatidyl choline, dioleoyl phosphatidyl ethanolamine, dioleoyl phosphatidyl glycerol acid and cholesterol in a 4:3:7:2 molar ratio, induced OVA-specific IgG antibody production but not OVA-specific IgE antibody production that is detrimental to the host. Furthermore, $OVA_{257-264}$–Oleoyl liposome elicited CTL responses in the presence of CpG and rejected E.G7 tumors in mice. In this study we tested whether a peptide–Oleoyl liposome conjugates are capable of inducing protection against viral growth. Subcutaneous inoculation of $NP_{366-374}$–Oleoyl liposome with CpG inhibited growth of influenza viruses in lungs of mice. Thus, surface-linked liposomal peptide might serve as an effective vaccine without detrimental effects in the presence of immune potentiators.

Keywords: CTL; Peptide; Vaccine; Liposome

1. Introduction

Liposomes have been extensively used as delivery systems or adjuvant for vaccine antigens against bacterial [1,2] and viral [3,4] infections and tumors [5,6]. The reason for such extensive usage is that liposomes protect antigens from degradation, and epitopic peptides encapsulated in liposomes can be easily phagocytosed by antigen-presenting cells and transferred into the classical MHC class I pathway via the phagosome-cytosol pathway [7–9]. Thus, liposomes are thought to provide peptide vaccines even in mucosal tissues.

Most of the liposomal vaccines proposed have been prepared by antigen entrapment within the aqueous lumen of liposomes. However, it is known that immune responses induced by encapsulated liposomal antigens are different from those induced by surface-linked liposomal antigens. We have demonstrated that surface-linked liposomal antigens

Abbreviations: CFSE, carboxyfluorescein diacetate succinimidyl ester; CTL, cytotoxic T lymphocyte; CpG, cytosine-phosphate-guanine; OVA, ovalbumin; MDCK, Madin–Darby canine kidney; NP, nucleoprotein; PFU, plaque-forming units; TLR, toll-like receptor

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induce antigen-specific IgG antibody production but not antigen-specific IgE antibody production [10]. The greater the membrane mobility in the liposomes is, the greater is the antibody production induced by antigen–liposome conjugates, although the membrane fluidity of the liposomes might not affect the induction of IgE-selective unresponsiveness [11]. Indeed, ovalbumin (OVA) conjugated on the surface of a liposome, we termed Oleoyl liposome, which consisted of dioleoyl phosphatidyl choline, dioleoyl phosphatidyl ethanolamine, dioleoyl phosphatidyl glycerol acid and cholesterol in a 4:3:7:2 molar ratio, sufficiently induced OVA-specific IgG antibody production but not OVA-specific IgE antibody production. In addition, treatment with OVA–Oleoyl liposome 1 and 3 weeks after cholera toxin-combined OVA administration also suppressed IgE antibody responses. The suppression of anti-OVA IgE antibody production by OVA–Oleoyl liposome was accompanied by a simultaneous enhancement of specific IgA and IgG (IgG1 and especially IgG2a) antibody production [12]. Thus, surface-linked liposomal antigens are expected to serve as a novel protocol for the development of vaccines to induce minimal allergic response.

A synthetic peptide is expected to be a potential vaccine candidate because it has several advantages compared with other types of vaccines [13]. First, because of their simple and small molecular structures, synthetic peptides rarely cause serious complications. Second, small peptide fragments without mutation in microorganisms can be selected to serve as vaccines. By means of rapid and frequent mutations, microorganisms, especially influenza virus or HIV, can escape from the host immune system. Thus, the second advantage is critical to circumvent the limitation resulting from the use of native proteins of microorganisms as vaccines. However, such small peptide fragments do not always induce potent immune responses in the host. A peptide vaccine should be protected against degradation *in vivo* by certain carriers (vehicles).

In our previous study, an OVA peptide, $OVA_{257-264}$, conjugated on the surface of Oleoyl liposome elicited CTL responses in the presence of CpG and anti-IL10 in mice. Furthermore, this treatment rejected E.G7 tumors, generated by transducing the chicken OVA gene into the murine lymphoma cell line EL-4 [14]. In this study, we further examined the capacity for CTL activation of peptide–Oleoyl liposome in the presence of various immune potentiators (adjuvants) and compared the capacity for CTL activation with that of other liposomes carrying peptides. Subcutaneous inoculation of peptide–Oleoyl liposome in the presence of CpG elicited most effective CTL responses in mice. Furthermore, a nucleoprotein (NP) peptide derived from A/Aichi/2/68 (H3N2) influenza virus, $NP_{366-374}$, conjugated on Oleoyl liposome in the presence of CpG protected against infection of the influenza virus. Collectively, the results suggest that peptide–Oleoyl liposome in the presence of some sort of immune potentiators might serve as an effective vaccine without detrimental effects, such as allergic reactions.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Liposomes

Oleoyl liposomes, we termed, consisted of dioleoyl phosphatidyl choline, dioleoyl phosphatidyl ethanolamine, dioleoyl phosphatidyl glycerol acid, and cholesterol in a 4:3:2:7 molar ratio [11]. In some experiments, PS–Oleoyl liposomes were prepared by altering dioleoyl phosphatidyl choline to dioleoyl phosphatidyl serine in Oleoyl liposomes. The crude liposome solution was passed through a membrane filter (Nucleopore polycarbonate filter; Coster, Cambridge, MA) with a pore size of 0.2 μm. Liposomal conjugates with peptides were prepared via disuccinimidyl suberate as described previously [15]. In addition, multilamellar liposome containing OVA peptide was prepared by mixing with peptide (100 nmol/mouse), 1.25 μmol/mouse phosphatidylserine (Avanti Polar Lipids, Alabaster, AL), and 2.75 μmol/mouse phosphatidylcholine (Avanti Polar Lipids) in chloroform as previously described [16]. The mixture in a glass tube was blown with N_2 gas, evaporated at 40 °C, and aspirated for 1 h. The peptides incorporated in the multilamellar liposome that adhered to the inside of the glass tube were dissolved in 50 μl of PBS by vortex mixing.

2.2. Immunization

C57BL/6 mice (B6) (6–10 weeks old) were obtained from Japan SLC, Inc. (Hamamatsu, Japan). CpG5002 (5′-TCCATGACGTTCTGATGTT-3′, Hokkaido System Science, Sapporo, Japan) (5–10 μg/mouse) [17] and various peptides conjugated on Oleoyl liposome (0.6 mg/ml) in 100 μl saline were subcutaneously inoculated into mice. Peptides used in this study were $OVA_{257-264}$ (SIINFEKL), $NP_{366-374}$ (ASNENMDAM) of an H3N2 influenza virus, $NP_{366-374}$ (ASNENMETM) of an H1N1 influenza virus, VSV-NP_{52-59} (RGYVFQGL) or LCMV-$NP_{396-404}$ (FQPQNGQFI). In some experiments, LPS (10 μg/mouse) (Wako Pure Chemical Ind., Osaka, Japan), Flagellin (10 μg/mouse) (Calbiochem, Darmstadt, Germany) or Poly(I:C) (10 μg/mouse) (Invivogen, San Diego, CA) were used as an adjuvant instead of CpG. Since all experiments were performed with the approval of the Shiga University of Medical Science Animal Experiment Committee, we usually used three mice in each group of experiments to reduce number of experimental animals.

2.3. In vivo CTL assay

Spleen cells (2×10^7 cells/ml) from naïve B6 mice were incubated with 0.5 μM peptide for 2 h at 37 °C. After washing twice with HBSS, the recovered cells (2×10^7 cells/ml) were labeled with different concentrations of carboxyfluorescein diacetate succinimidyl ester (CFSE) (0.25 μM or 2.5 μM, Molecular Probes, Eugene, OR) at room temperature for 10 min. Labeling was stopped with one

half volume of FCS followed by two additional washes. Five million cells carrying each peptide were mixed and injected intravenously into immunized mice. At 12 h after injection, the spleens were harvested and single cell suspensions were prepared. CFSE-positive cells were analyzed by a flow cytometer with exclusion of dead cells with propidium iodide. For example, NP-specific killing was calculated as follows: %killing = [1 − {(number of cells carrying $NP_{366-374}$ in immunized mice (CFSE high))/(number of cells carrying $OVA_{257-264}$ in immunized mice (CFSE low))}/{(number of cells carrying $NP_{366-374}$ in normal mice (CFSE high))/(number of cells carrying $OVA_{257-264}$ in normal mice (CFSE low))}] × 100.

2.4. Influenza viruses

Influenza virus, A/Aichi/2/68 (H3N2), was propagated in the allantoic cavities of 10-day-old embryonated hen's eggs at 35 °C for 48 h. Then the viruses were purified by ultracentrifugation of allantoic fluid passed through a 10–50% sucrose density gradient. The viruses were suspended in PBS. The viruses were prepared from culture supernatant of Madin–Darby canine kidney (MDCK) cells for experimental infection [16].

2.5. Virus challenge and protection tests

B6 mice were challenged intranasally with 15 μl of 10^4 plaque-forming units (PFU) of A/Aichi/2/68 (H3N2) under anesthesia. Since A/Aichi/2/68 (H3N2) did not kill mice without systemic infection, it was adequate for assessing virus growth in mouse lungs at 5 days after challenge. Lungs were collected from three mice of each group and used for the measurement of virus titers. In the measurement of virus titers, 10% suspensions of the tissue homogenates were prepared.

2.6. Titration of virus

MDCK cells were grown in minimal essential medium (MEM) supplemented with 10% bovine calf serum. Suspensions of the lungs serially diluted from 1:10 were inoculated into confluent MDCK cell monolayers on 6-well plates and incubated at room temperature for 1 h for adsorption. After 1 h, the inoculum was removed and cells were overlaid with MEM containing 1% bacto agar (BD Diagnostic Systems, Sparks, MD) and 5 μg/ml of trypsin (BD Diagnostic Systems). After incubation at 35 °C for 2 days in 5% CO_2, the plaques were counted. The limit of detection in this assay was 0.5×10^3 PFU/g [16].

2.7. ELISA

Enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA). 96-Well plates were coated with 50 μl of purified A/Aichi/2/68 (H3N2) (20 μg/ml) disrupted with 0.05 M Tris–HCl (pH 7.8) containing 0.5% Triton X-100 and 0.6 M KCl. After washing three times with PBS containing 0.05% Tween20, PBS with 3% BSA was added for blocking. Sera were collected 5 days after infection following subcutaneous immunization twice with NP–liposome and CpG. Serially diluted sera were incubated overnight. For measuring total IgG, horseradish peroxidase-conjugated rabbit anti-mouse IgG (Bio-Rad Laboratories, Hercules, CA) (1/2000× 50 μl) was added after washing 5 times. For measuring IgE, biotinylated anti-mouse IgE (clone 23G3) (eBioscience) (0.5 μg/ml × 50 μl) was added. Horseradish peroxidase-conjugated Extravidin (Sigma–Aldrich) (1/3000× 100 μl) was incubated for 3 h. Horseradish peroxidase activity was assessed by 3,3′,5,5″-tetramethyl benzidine substrate (100 μl). The reaction was stopped by 1 N HCl (100 μl). Optical density was measured at 450 nm.

2.8. Statistical analyses

Statistical analyses were carried out using Student's *t*-test. p values <0.05 were considered significant.

3. Results

3.1. Comparison of CTL activation capacities of surface-linked liposomal OVA peptide and OVA peptide entrapped within the aqueous lumen of liposomes

In a previous study, we intranasally inoculated anti-CD40 antibody and multilamellar liposome containing $NP_{366-374}$ peptide, resulting in induction of protective CTL responses against influenza A virus in mouse lungs [18]. Thus, firstly we compared the capacity for activating CTL *in vivo* of liposome with chemically bound peptides on the surface (peptide–Oleoyl liposome) and that of the multilamellar liposome containing peptides inside. B6 mice were injected subcutaneously with either liposome with chemically bound $OVA_{257-264}$ on the surface or multilamellar liposome containing $OVA_{257-264}$ inside in the presence of CpG and anti-CD40 antibody, and then 7 days later CFSE-labeled target cells pulsed with $OVA_{257-264}$ were injected intravenously. Viability of the target cells in the spleen was examined at 12 h after injection. Injection of liposome with chemically bound $OVA_{257-264}$ on the surface induced CTL activity more effectively than did multilamellar liposome containing $OVA_{257-264}$ inside ($p = 0.049$) (Fig. 1A).

3.2. Comparison of CTL activation capacities of liposomes consisting of different components of surface-linked liposomal OVA peptide

Some scavenger receptors recognize phosphatidyl serine and support phagocytosis. Thus, we altered phosphatidyl choline to phosphatidyl serine of Oleoyl liposome this liposome was termed PS–Oleoyl liposome. However, we could