

*KLF2*, zinc finger protein 36, *C3H type 2 (TIS11d)*, and *connexin40 (Cx40)* were induced by COMP-Ang1 selectively in confluent cells (Fig. 7d, e, f). *Cx40*, the product of which is involved in intercellular communication, is known to be repressed by Foxo1 in endothelial cells<sup>39</sup>. Indeed, overexpression of a constitutively active mutant of Foxo1 decreased *Cx40* expression (Fig. 7g). Thus, we investigated whether a PI3K-Akt-Foxo1 signal axis is involved in COMP-Ang1-induced *Cx40* expression. LY294002 and Akt inhibitor prevented COMP-Ang1-induced *Cx40* induction in confluent cells (Fig. 7h, i). Collectively, these microarray analyses and real-time PCR validation clearly demonstrate a difference in induction of gene expression by Ang1 in the presence or absence of cell-cell contacts, and indicate that *trans*-associated Tie2 at cell-cell contacts regulates Foxo1-dependent gene expression through preferential activation of Akt.

## DISCUSSION

Localization of Tie2 upon Ang1 stimulation depends upon the presence or absence of cell-cell contacts (Figs 1a, 3a). Tie2 localization at cell-cell contacts appears to be due to Ang1-bridged Tie2 *trans*-association. Tie2 activation at cell-cell contacts resulted in preferential activation of Akt, which in turn led to inhibition of Foxo1-mediated gene regulation and phosphorylation of eNOS. The Akt-Foxo1 pathway is known to be involved in Ang1-induced endothelial cell survival and blood vessel stability<sup>39</sup>. It has been also reported that the Akt-eNOS pathway is required for vascular maturation<sup>40</sup>. Thus, *trans*-associated Tie2 may contribute to maintenance of vascular quiescence through the Akt-Foxo1 and Akt-eNOS signalling pathways.

Ang1 also locates Tie2 to cell-substratum contacts that are different from FCs, FAs and FBs and preferentially activates Erk in the absence of cell-cell contacts. This Tie2 localization was resistant to detergent<sup>27,28</sup>, indicating Tie2 is anchored to cell-substratum contacts. Moreover, Ang1 could bind to ECM such as fibronectin and collagen, as previously reported<sup>41,42</sup>. Upon being anchored to ECM by Ang1, Tie2 activated Erk partly through FAK. Formation of the Ang1-Tie2 complex at cell-substratum contacts accelerated FC formation (Fig. 5b, e), and probably vice versa, resulting in the implicating FAK in Ang1-induced Erk activation in isolated cells. This notion is consistent with recent reports revealing a role for FAK in vascular development<sup>43,44</sup>.

During angiogenesis, endothelial cells sprouting from the pre-existing blood vessels lose cell-cell adhesion and need to proliferate and migrate to form neovasculature. Erk is responsible for endothelial proliferation and migration during angiogenesis<sup>34,45</sup>. Inhibition of Erk resulted in decreased migration by substratum-anchored Ang1. As several lines of evidence suggest that Tie2 signalling mediates pathological and physiological angiogenesis<sup>14,15,17-20</sup>, Ang1-Tie2-ECM complexes at cell-substratum contacts may accelerate angiogenesis by promoting proliferation and migration of isolated endothelial cells. However, regulation of angiogenesis by Ang1-Tie2 might be more complex, since it has been reported that Tie2 is expressed in stalk cells, but not in tip cells, which proliferate and migrate during angiogenesis<sup>46</sup>. Thus, further investigation is required to resolve this mechanism.

We propose that *trans*-associated Tie2 bridged by Ang1 and cell-substratum contact-anchored Tie2 by Ang1 might be preferable for vascular quiescence and for angiogenesis via Akt and Erk activation, respectively (Fig. 8). □

Note added in proof: a related manuscript by Saharinen et al. (Nature Cell Biol. 10, 527-537; doi:10.1038/ncb1715; 2008) is also published in this issue.

## METHODS

**Immunocytochemistry and fluorescence imaging.** HUVECs and CHO cells grown on a collagen-coated glass-base dish (Asahi Techno Glass Corporation, Chiba, Japan) were transfected with expression plasmids encoding Tie2-GFP, Tie2 $\Delta$ cyto-GFP, Tie2 $\Delta$ cyto-HA, RFP-Crk, GFP-tensin and RFP-FAT as indicated in the figures. HUVECs starved for 3 h in medium 199 containing 0.5% BSA and CHO cells in Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium (DMEM)/F12 nutrient mixture (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO) were stimulated for the time periods as indicated in the figures. After stimulation, the cells were fixed in PBS containing 2% formaldehyde for 30 min at 4 °C, washed with PBS, and permeabilized with 0.05% Triton X-100 for 30 min at 4 °C. To examine the detergent insolubility of Tie2-GFP anchoring to the substratum, the cells were washed with PBS, and extracted in 0.5% Triton X-100 in cytoskeleton stabilizing buffer containing 10 mM PIPES at pH 6.8, 300 mM sucrose, 100 mM NaCl, 3 mM MgCl<sub>2</sub>, 1 mM EGTA and 1 x protease inhibitor cocktail (Roche Applied Science, Indianapolis, IN) for 3 min at room temperature (RT). After washing with PBS, the cells were fixed with 2% formaldehyde in PBS for 30 min at 4 °C. Cells were blocked with PBS containing 4% BSA for 1 h at RT and immunostained with anti-Tie2, anti-VE-cadherin, anti-HA, anti-FLAG, anti-vinculin, anti- $\alpha$ 5 integrin, anti- $\beta$ 3 integrin, anti-PECAM-1, anti-VASP, anti-talin, anti-fibronectin, anti-phosphoTie2, and anti-FAK antibodies for 1 h at RT and with rhodamine-phalloidin for 20 min at RT. Protein reacting with antibody was visualized with species-matched Alexa 488- or Alexa 546-labelled secondary antibodies. Fluorescence images of GFP, RFP, rhodamine, Alexa 488 and Alexa 546 were recorded with an Olympus IX-81 inverted fluorescence microscope (Olympus Corporation, Tokyo, Japan) with a cooled CCD camera CoolSNAP-HQ (Roper Scientific, Tucson, AZ), and appropriate filter sets for GFP, Alexa 488 and Alexa 546, and with a FluoView FV1000 confocal microscope (Olympus Corporation) with a 60x oil immersion objective lens. HUVECs and CHO cells transfected with plasmids expressing fluorescently tagged proteins (GFP, HcRed, and RFP) were time-lapse imaged on an Olympus IX-81 inverted fluorescence microscope as described previously<sup>47,48</sup>.

**In vitro Ang1-bridged Tie2 association assay.** To produce recombinant sTie2-HA protein (extracellular domain of Tie2 tagged with HA), 293F cells were transfected with pcDNA3.1-sTie2-HA vector, and cultured in Free Style 293 expression media for 7 days. sTie2-HA protein secreted into the medium was collected every 2 days, and incubated with ProBond resin (Invitrogen Corp., Carlsbad, CA) overnight at 4 °C. sTie2-HA protein bound to the beads was eluted with 500 mM imidazole, concentrated with Amicon Centriplus (Millipore, Billerica, MA), and buffer exchanged into PBS by dialysis.

Ang1-bridged Tie2 association was analysed as described in Supplementary Information Fig. S3a. Initially, protein G sepharose beads (GE Healthcare Life Science, Piscataway, NJ) were incubated with 0.1  $\mu$ g of Fc, sTie1-Fc or sTie2-Fc protein in binding buffer (50 mM Tris-HCl at pH 7.5, 100 mM NaCl, 0.02% Triton X-100) for 2 h at 4 °C, washed three times with binding buffer, and incubated with 1  $\mu$ g of Ang1 or its variants (COMP-Ang1, GCN4-Ang1 and MAT-Ang1) for 2 h at 4 °C. The beads were extensively washed with binding buffer four times, and subsequently incubated with 3  $\mu$ g of sTie2-HA protein for 2 h at 4 °C. After washing, the precipitates were subjected to Western blot analysis with anti-Flag and anti-HA antibodies to quantify the co-precipitated Ang1 and its variants and sTie2-HA protein, respectively. Proteins reacting with primary antibodies were visualized by the ECL system (GE Healthcare Life Science) for detecting peroxidase-conjugated secondary antibodies and analysed with an LAS-1000 system (Fuji Film, Tokyo, Japan).

**Cell aggregation and in vivo Tie2 *trans*-association assays.** Suspension 293F cells transfected with the plasmids expressing GFP, Tie2-GFP, Tie2 $\Delta$ cyto-GFP, Tie2KD-GFP, or VEGFR2 plus IRES-driven GFP were suspended in Free Style 293 expression media and placed on 6 well-plates in a density of  $5.0 \times 10^5$  cells per well (1 ml per well). Then, the cells were agitated for 4 h using a gyratory shaker in the presence of vehicle, Ang1, COMP-Ang1 or VEGF. After the incubation, the phase-contrast and the fluorescence images were recorded by Olympus IX-81 inverted fluorescence microscope. The differential interference contrast (DIC) and the fluorescence images were also obtained with a FluoView

EV1000 confocal microscope. The numbers of cell aggregates including more than 4 cells were counted in, at least, 10 different fields. The size of cell aggregates was measured using MetaMorph 6.1 software.

For the *in vivo* Tie2 trans-association assay, 293F cells transfected with the vectors encoding either GFP, Tie2Δcyto-GFP, or Tie2Δcyto-HA were washed and resuspended in DMEM in a density of  $10^6$  cells per ml. The cells expressing Tie2Δcyto-HA were mixed with either those expressing Tie2Δcyto-GFP or those expressing GFP in a 6 well-plate ( $2 \times 10^4$  cells well<sup>-1</sup>). The cell suspensions were agitated for 1 h in the presence or absence of 400 ng ml<sup>-1</sup> COMP-Ang1. After the incubation, the cells were collected in a 15 ml-conical tube, washed with ice-cold PBS and lysed at 4°C in lysis buffer containing 50 mM Tris-HCl at pH 7.5, 150 mM NaCl, 0.5% Triton X-100 and 1 x protease inhibitor cocktail. BaF-Tie2Δcyto-HA cells ( $1.5 \times 10^6$  cells) were also mixed with either BaF3 cells ( $1.5 \times 10^6$  cells) or BaF-Tie2Δcyto-GFP cells ( $1.5 \times 10^6$  cells) in RPMI1640 (Nissui, Tokyo, Japan) supplemented with 2 ng ml<sup>-1</sup> murine IL3, and stimulated with or without 400 ng ml<sup>-1</sup> COMP-Ang1 for 5 h. After the incubation, the cells were washed with ice-cold PBS and lysed as described above. Preclarified cell lysates were subjected to immunoprecipitation with anti-GFP antibody followed by immunoblot analysis with anti-HA antibody.

**Microarray analysis.** Confluent and sparse HUVECs on a collagen-coated dish were starved in HuMedia-EB2 medium (Kurabo, Kurashiki, Japan) containing 0.5% fetal calf serum (FCS) for 15 h, and stimulated with vehicle or COMP-Ang1 (200 ng ml<sup>-1</sup>) for 1 h. After the stimulation, total RNAs were purified from the pooled RNA of triplicate samples using Trizol reagent (Invitrogen Corp.) and reverse-transcribed to cDNAs. Biotin-labelled RNAs derived from cDNAs were fragmented according to the manufacturer's instructions (Affymetrix, Santa Clara, CA). Labelled cRNA probes were hybridized to Affymetrix U133plus 2.0 array (Affymetrix). The microarray data scanned through an Affymetrix GeneChip scanner 3000 7G were globally normalized by Affymetrix Microarray Suite 5.0 software and were scaled to a target intensity of 100. Microarray analysis was performed in duplicate from independent RNA preparations. Data were analysed according to the minimum information about a microarray experiment (MIAME) rule. To identify the genes regulated by Ang1-Tie2 signal, we picked up the genes which fulfill the two criteria: (1) the hybridization signal after COMP-Ang1 stimulation was higher than 80 in duplicate experiments and (2) the induction was greater than 1.5-fold under either confluent or sparse conditions upon COMP-Ang1 stimulation in duplicate experiments. The genes that conformed to the two criteria were further clustered on the basis of similar regulation patterns using Gene cluster (created by M. B. Eisen, University of California, Berkeley, CA) and Java Tree View software according to the manual on the default settings. The complete microarray data sets are available from the Gene Expression Omnibus (GSE9677).

Note: Supplementary Information is available on the Nature Cell Biology website.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to T. Suda (Keio University, Tokyo, Japan) for the Tie2 cDNA, to A. Fukamizu (University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba, Japan) for the Foxo1 cDNA, to K.M. Yamada (National Institute of Health) for GFP-tensin, to J. Nakae (Kobe University Graduate School of Medicine, Kobe, Japan) for the adenovirus encoding Foxo1 mutant, to A. Mizushima, M. Sone, M. Maeoka, and Y. Matsuura for technical assistance, to M. Masuda, H. Hanada, and S. Yamamoto for helpful advice and to J.T. Pearson and J.S. Gutkind for critical reading of the manuscript. This work was supported in part by grants from the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture of Japan; the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare of Japan; and the Program for the Promotion of Fundamental Studies in Health Sciences of the National Institute of Biomedical Innovation (to S.F., T.M., T.K., N.M.); the Naito Foundation (to S.F.); Takeda Medical Research Foundation (to N.M.); and KOSEF through the NRL Program (2004-02376 to G.Y.K.) funded by the MOST.

#### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

S.F. and N.M. designed and wrote the paper. S.F. performed the all cell biological and biochemical analysis. K.S. and K.N. helped with the experiments performed by S.F., T.M. and T.K. performed microarray analyses. M.S. and N.T. helped with VEGF-related and Tie2-BaF experiments. H.Z.K. and G.Y.K. prepared several forms of recombinant Ang1.

#### COMPETING FINANCIAL INTERESTS

The authors declare no competing financial interests.

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# Interaction of Scaffolding Adaptor Protein Gab1 with Tyrosine Phosphatase SHP2 Negatively Regulates IGF-I-dependent Myogenic Differentiation via the ERK1/2 Signaling Pathway<sup>\*[5]</sup>

Received for publication, May 21, 2008, and in revised form, June 18, 2008. Published, JBC Papers in Press, June 23, 2008, DOI 10.1074/jbc.M803907200

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Grb2-associated binder 1 (Gab1) coordinates various receptor tyrosine kinase signaling pathways. Although skeletal muscle differentiation is regulated by some growth factors, it remains elusive whether Gab1 coordinates myogenic signals. Here, we examined the molecular mechanism of insulin-like growth factor-I (IGF-I)-mediated myogenic differentiation, focusing on Gab1 and its downstream signaling. Gab1 underwent tyrosine phosphorylation and subsequent complex formation with protein-tyrosine phosphatase SHP2 upon IGF-I stimulation in C2C12 myoblasts. On the other hand, Gab1 constitutively associated with phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase regulatory subunit p85. To delineate the role of Gab1 in IGF-I-dependent signaling, we examined the effect of adenovirus-mediated forced expression of wild-type Gab1 (Gab1<sup>WT</sup>), mutated Gab1 that is unable to bind SHP2 (Gab1<sup>ΔSHP2</sup>), or mutated Gab1 that is unable to bind p85 (Gab1<sup>Δp85</sup>), on the differentiation of C2C12 myoblasts. IGF-I-induced myogenic differentiation was enhanced in myoblasts overexpressing Gab1<sup>ΔSHP2</sup>, but inhibited in those overexpressing either Gab1<sup>WT</sup> or Gab1<sup>Δp85</sup>. Con-

versely, IGF-I-induced extracellular signal-regulated kinase 1/2 (ERK1/2) activation was significantly repressed in myoblasts overexpressing Gab1<sup>ΔSHP2</sup> but enhanced in those overexpressing either Gab1<sup>WT</sup> or Gab1<sup>Δp85</sup>. Furthermore, small interference RNA-mediated Gab1 knockdown enhanced myogenic differentiation. Overexpression of catalytic-inactive SHP2 modulated IGF-I-induced myogenic differentiation and ERK1/2 activation similarly to that of Gab1<sup>ΔSHP2</sup>, suggesting that Gab1-SHP2 complex inhibits IGF-I-dependent myogenesis through ERK1/2. Consistently, the blockade of ERK1/2 pathway reversed the inhibitory effect of Gab1<sup>WT</sup> overexpression on myogenic differentiation, and constitutive activation of the ERK1/2 pathway suppressed the enhanced myogenic differentiation by overexpression of Gab1<sup>ΔSHP2</sup>. Collectively, these data suggest that the Gab1-SHP2-ERK1/2 signaling pathway comprises an inhibitory axis for IGF-I-dependent myogenic differentiation.

Skeletal muscle differentiation is a multistep process in which multipotent mesodermal cells give rise to myoblasts that subsequently withdraw from the cell cycle and differentiate into multinucleated myotubes. Most skeletal muscle cell lines from rodents proliferate in high serum conditions containing various mitogens, and post-confluent cells spontaneously differentiate after several days in low serum conditions (1, 2). Among various growth factors, the insulin-like growth factors (IGFs),<sup>3</sup> includ-

<sup>\*</sup> This work was supported by grants from the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture of Japan (to Y. N., K. Y.-T., and N. M.); the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare of Japan (to N. M.); the Program for the Promotion of Fundamental Studies in Health Sciences of the National Institute of Biomedical Innovation (to N. M.); the Takeda Medical Research Foundation (to N. M.); the Uehara Memorial Foundation (to Y. N.); the Japan Heart Foundation Young Investigator's Research Grant (to Y. N.); the Suzuken Memorial Foundation (to Y. N.); the Astellas Foundation for Research on Metabolic Disorders (to Y. N.); the Senri Life Science Foundation (to Y. N.); and the Miyata Cardiology Research Promotion Funds (to Y. N.). The costs of publication of this article were defrayed in part by the payment of page charges. This article must therefore be hereby marked "advertisement" in accordance with 18 U.S.C. Section 1734 solely to indicate this fact.

<sup>[5]</sup> The on-line version of this article (available at <http://www.jbc.org>) contains supplemental text, references, and Figs. S1 and S2.

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<sup>3</sup> The abbreviations used are: IGF, insulin-like growth factor; Gab1, Grb2-associated binder 1; Grb2, Grb2-associated binder 2; WT, wild-type; PI3K, phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase; MAPK, mitogen-activated protein kinase; MEK1/2, MAPK/extracellular signal-regulated kinase kinase 1/2; ERK1/2, extracellular signal-regulated kinase 1/2; SH2, Src homology 2; SHP2, SH2-containing protein-tyrosine phosphatase 2; EGF, epidermal growth factor; VEGF, vascular endothelial growth factor; IRS-1, insulin receptor substrate-1; MHC, myosin heavy chain; DMEM, Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium; FBS, fetal bovine serum;  $\beta$ -gal,  $\beta$ -galactosidase; HS, horse serum; FGF2, fibroblast growth factor 2; IP, immunoprecipitation; ANOVA, analysis of variance; siRNA, small interference RNA; RNAi, RNA interference.

ing IGF-I and IGF-II, have been reported to be quite unique in that they stimulate both proliferation and differentiation of muscle cells in culture (3, 4). IGF-I receptor belongs to the receptor tyrosine kinase family and utilizes two major cytoplasmic signaling pathways, namely the phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase (PI3K) cascade and mitogen-activated protein kinase (MAPK) cascade, which consists of Raf-MAPK/extracellular signal-regulated kinase (ERK)-kinase1/2 (MEK1/2)-ERK1/2 (5). PI3K is one of the primary signaling molecules promoting skeletal muscle differentiation, as demonstrated by pharmacological and genetic methods (3, 6, 7). On the other hand, activation of Raf-MEK1/2-ERK1/2 MAPK cascade has been reported to have inhibitory effects on the myogenic differentiation induced by insulin or IGFs (3, 8–10).

Grb2-associated binder 1 (Gab1) belongs to the scaffolding adaptor protein family. Gab1 has an N-terminal pleckstrin homology domain, as well as multiple tyrosine-based motifs and proline-rich sequences, which are potential binding sites for various Src homology 2 (SH2) domains and Src homology 3 domains, respectively. Gab1 undergoes tyrosine phosphorylation upon stimulation with various growth factors, cytokines, G protein-coupled receptor agonists, and various immuno-antigens (11,12). Tyrosine-phosphorylated Gab1 provides docking sites for multiple SH2 domain-containing signaling molecules, such as SH2-containing protein-tyrosine phosphatase SHP2, PI3K regulatory subunit p85, phospholipase C- $\gamma$ , Crk, and Ras GTPase-activating protein (11–17). Among these binding partners, SHP2, a ubiquitously expressed protein-tyrosine phosphatase, has crucial roles for receptor tyrosine kinase-dependent activation of ERK1/2 in association with Gab1 (18, 19). The functional significance of Gab1-SHP2 interaction has been extensively studied using the Gab1 mutant that is unable to bind SHP2. This Gab1 mutant is defective in delivering signals for hepatocyte growth factor-c-Met-dependent morphogenesis, epidermal growth factor (EGF)-dependent epidermal proliferation, and leukemia inhibitory factor-gp130-dependent cardiomyocyte hypertrophy (20–23). These findings underscore the importance of Gab1-SHP2 interaction and strongly suggest that the primary role of Gab1 might be to recruit SHP2 (24). On the other hand, it has been reported that Gab1 also regulates the PI3K-AKT signaling pathway through association with p85 downstream of various growth factors (25–29). Gab1 has been reported to be required for both EGF-dependent activation of PI3K-AKT signaling pathway and migration of keratinocytes (28–30). In addition, Gab1 plays a key role for vascular endothelial growth factor-dependent activation of the PI3K signaling pathway and is required for endothelial cell migration and capillary formation (25, 27).

Gab1 knockout (Gab1KO) mice died *in utero* and displayed developmental defects in the heart, placenta, liver, skin, and skeletal muscle (31, 32). Furthermore, Gab1KO mice displayed reduced and delayed migration of muscle progenitor cells into the limbs and diaphragm, resulting in the immature formation of limb muscles. These data suggest that Gab1 might have a key role in skeletal muscle development (32). We created cardiomyocyte-specific Gab1/Gab2 double knock-out mice and revealed that Gab1 and Gab2 play redundant, but essential roles

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in postnatal maintenance of cardiac function via the neuregulin-1/ErbB signaling pathway (33). In addition, liver-specific Gab1 knock-out mice displayed enhanced hepatic insulin sensitivity with reduced glycemia and improved glucose tolerance as a result of insufficient insulin-elicited activation of ERK1/2 (34). However, it remains elusive whether Gab1 has a specific role in skeletal muscle differentiation. In this study, we demonstrate for the first time that Gab1-SHP2 interaction exerts an inhibitory effect on IGF-I-induced myogenic differentiation via activation of the ERK1/2 signaling pathway.

### EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES

**Reagents and Antibodies**—Anti-phospho-p44/42 ERK1/2 (Thr-202/Tyr-204), anti-phospho-AKT (Thr-308), anti-ERK1/2, and anti-AKT antibodies were purchased from Cell Signaling Technology. Anti-Gab1 and anti-Gab2 sera for immunoprecipitation were described previously (15, 16, 22). The antibodies against the following molecules used for immunoblotting, Gab1, Gab2, insulin receptor substrate-1 (IRS-1), and p85 PI3K were from Millipore; PY99, SHP2, MEK1, and myogenin were from Santa Cruz Biotechnology. Anti-myosin heavy chain (MHC) monoclonal antibody (MF20) was purchased from the Developmental Hybridoma Bank (Dr. D. A. Fischman, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA). Hoechst 33342 nuclear dye was from Sigma. Horseradish peroxidase-conjugated anti-mouse and anti-rabbit antibodies were from GE Health Science. U0126 was from Promega (Madison, WI). Serum and cell culture reagents were from Invitrogen. Human recombinant IGF-I was kindly provided by Astellas Pharmaceuticals.

**Adenovirus Vector Construction**—The generation of adenovirus vectors expressing human Gab1<sup>WT</sup> and Gab1<sup>ΔSHP2</sup> (mutated on the two tyrosine residues responsible for binding with SHP2) were described previously (22). In this study, we constructed the adenovirus vectors expressing Gab1<sup>Δp85</sup>, which can't bind with p85 due to the substitution of tyrosine residues 447, 472, and 589 of human Gab1, corresponding to the YXXM motifs, to phenylalanines by PCR-based mutagenesis described previously (35). Substitution of these tyrosine residues by phenylalanine renders the molecule incapable of binding with p85. We also constructed adenovirus vectors expressing wild-type SHP2 (SHP2<sup>WT</sup>) and phosphatase-inactive SHP2 (SHP2<sup>C/S</sup>) using the plasmid vectors described previously (15). For adenovirus production, the sequence encoding Gab1<sup>Δp85</sup>, SHP2<sup>WT</sup>, or SHP2<sup>C/S</sup> was subcloned into the shuttle plasmid pACCMVpLpA. Recombinant adenoviruses were then obtained according to the homologous recombination system described elsewhere (36). The adenovirus vectors expressing constitutive-active MEK1 and dominant-negative MEK1 were kindly provided by Dr. S. Kawashima (Kobe University) and described previously (37). The construction of adenovirus vector expressing human Gab2<sup>ΔSHP2</sup>, which can't bind with SHP2, is described in the supplemental data.

**Cell Culture, Stimulation, and Adenoviral Infection**—C2C12 murine myoblast cells were maintained as subconfluent monolayers in Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium (DMEM) containing 4.5 g/liter glucose, 0.58 g/liter L-glutamine, 100 units/ml penicillin, and 100  $\mu$ g/ml streptomycin supplemented with

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20% fetal bovine serum (FBS). Before stimulation, cells were serum-starved overnight. Stimulations were performed using 80 ng/ml IGF-I for 10 min, unless otherwise indicated. For adenoviral infection of C2C12 myoblasts, subconfluent cells were cultured in DMEM with 20% FBS at a multiplicity of infection of 50 for 24 h. In the dual infection of adenovirus vectors, C2C12 cells were cultured in DMEM with 20% FBS with each virus at a multiplicity of infection of 30. Then, the myoblasts were serum-starved overnight and stimulated with or without IGF-I for the experiments examining ERK1/2 and AKT phosphorylation. Infection efficiency, determined by *lacZ* gene expression in cultured myoblasts, is consistently >90% with this method. Adenovirus vector expressing  $\beta$ -galactosidase ( $\beta$ -gal) was used as a control. For the induction of myogenic differentiation, cultured medium was switched from DMEM containing 20% FBS to DMEM containing 2% horse serum (HS) or 80 ng/ml IGF-I, when cell density reached confluency. The differentiation medium containing 2% HS was exchanged every other day, and that containing IGF-I was exchanged every day.

**Cell Lysis, Immunoprecipitations, and Immunoblotting**—Cells were scraped off in lysis buffer containing 20 mM Tris (pH 7.4), 150 mM NaCl, 3 mM EDTA, 1% Nonidet P-40, 2 mM sodium orthovanadate, and protease inhibitor mixture Complete (Roche Applied Science). Cell lysates were collected from confluent 6-cm dishes and precleared by 15,000  $\times$  g centrifugation for 15 min. For immunoprecipitation, the cleared lysates of 500  $\mu$ l containing 1 mg of protein, were rotationally incubated with 1  $\mu$ l of anti-Gab1 antiserum, or 1.2  $\mu$ g of SHP2 antibody, or 5  $\mu$ l of p85 antibody, or 10  $\mu$ l of IRS-1 antibody and with 20  $\mu$ l of protein A-Sepharose (GE Healthcare) overnight at 4 °C. The antigen-antibody complexes were collected by centrifugation, washed three times with lysis buffer without protease inhibitor mixture, and boiled in standard electrophoresis sample buffer. All the proteins immunoprecipitated were then resolved by SDS-PAGE and subjected to immunoblotting using a standard procedure. Blots were developed using ECL system (GE Healthcare). For direct immunoblotting analyses, the crude cell lysates were collected from 3.5-cm dishes and subjected to 15,000  $\times$  g centrifugation. The precleared lysates containing 30  $\mu$ g of protein were loaded in each lane for immunoblotting.

**Immunocytochemistry**—Cells cultured on 3.5-cm collagen type I-coated plastic dishes (Iwaki Asahi Glass Co.) were fixed with 2% formaldehyde in phosphate-buffered saline and permeabilized with 0.1% Triton X-100 for 10 min. Cells were blocked with phosphate-buffered saline containing 1% bovine serum albumin for 1 h and incubated with anti-MHC antibody (MF20), followed by incubation with Alexa 488-labeled goat anti-mouse secondary antibody (Molecular Probes). Cells were post-stained with Hoechst 33342 nuclear dye and viewed by fluorescence microscopy.

**siRNA-mediated Protein Knockdown**—Stealth Select small interfering RNAs (siRNAs) targeted to murine Gab1 (#1, MSS204497; #2, MSS204499) and siRNA duplex with irrelevant sequences (Stealth<sup>TM</sup> RNAi negative control) as a control were purchased from Invitrogen. Stealth siRNAs targeted to murine SHP2 were purchased from Invitrogen, and the detailed sequences are described in the supplemental data. C2C12 myo-

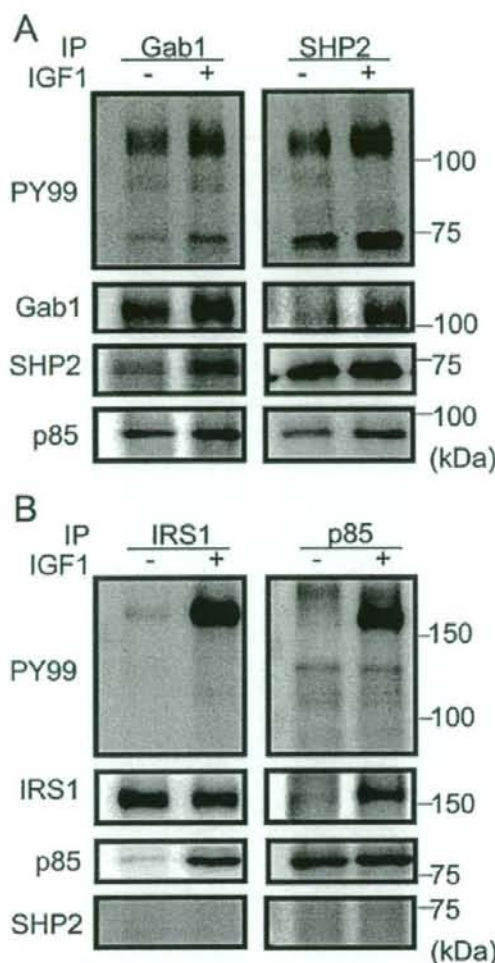
blasts were transfected with 10 nM siRNA duplexes using Lipofectamine<sup>TM</sup> RNAiMAX reagent according to the manufacturer's instructions for reverse transfection. Briefly, C2C12 myoblasts ( $1.5 \times 10^5$  cells per each dish) were diluted in 860  $\mu$ l of DMEM containing 20% FBS and plated on 3.5-cm collagen type I-coated plastic dishes. To each dish, 140  $\mu$ l of RNAi duplex-Lipofectamine<sup>TM</sup> RNAiMAX complex diluted in Opti-MEM I medium was added. After incubation for 72 h, the cells were used for the experiments.

**Statistics**—All data are expressed as mean  $\pm$  S.D. Differences among multiple groups were compared by one-way ANOVA followed by a post hoc comparison tested with Scheffe's method. Values of  $p < 0.05$  were considered significant.

## RESULTS

**Gab1 Undergoes Tyrosine Phosphorylation and Subsequently Associates with SHP2 upon IGF-I Stimulation in C2C12 Myoblasts**—We examined the effect of IGF-I on tyrosine-phosphorylation of Gab1 and its association with SH2 domain-containing signaling molecules in C2C12 myoblasts. IGF-I indeed induced tyrosine phosphorylation of Gab1 and subsequent association of Gab1 with SHP2 in C2C12 myoblasts (Fig. 1A, left panel). Furthermore, SHP2 was also tyrosine-phosphorylated and associated with Gab1 after stimulation with IGF-I (Fig. 1A, right panel). On the other hand, Gab1 constitutively associated with p85 both before and after IGF-I stimulation (Fig. 1A, left panel). In the IGF-I-dependent signaling pathway, IRS-1 has been reported to be a major binding partner of p85 and essential for IGF-I-dependent PI3K-AKT signaling in skeletal muscle cells (38). Consistently, IRS-1 underwent strong tyrosine phosphorylation after stimulation with IGF-I in C2C12 myoblasts. In clear contrast to Gab1, IRS-1 associated with p85 in a manner dependent on IGF-I stimulation (Fig. 1B). In addition, we could not detect the complex formation of IRS-1 with SHP2 either before or after stimulation with IGF-I (Fig. 1B). These results demonstrate that IGF-I induces tyrosine phosphorylation of Gab1, leading to complex formation of Gab1 with SHP2 in C2C12 myoblasts.

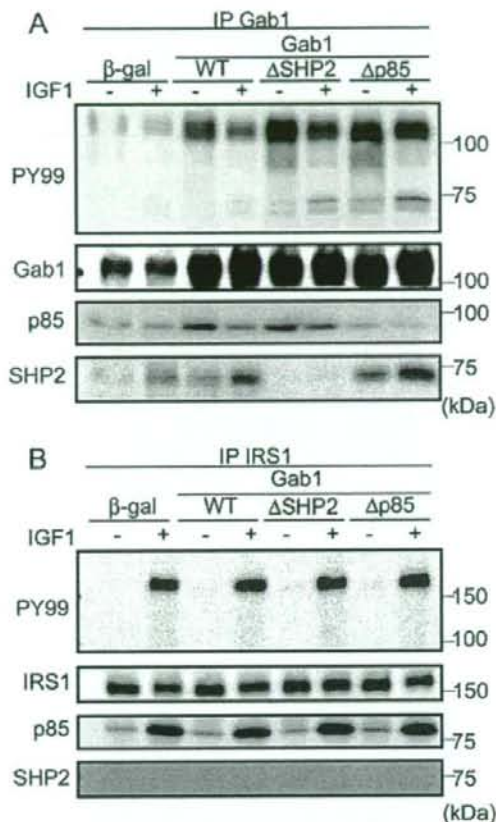
**IGF-I-induced Tyrosine Phosphorylation of Gab1 and Association of Gab1 with SH2 Domain-containing Molecules in the C2C12 Myoblasts Infected with Adenovirus Vectors**—IGFs have been reported to stimulate both proliferation and differentiation of cultured skeletal muscle cells (3, 4). The effect of IGF-I on the proliferation of myoblasts has been reported to be attributed mainly to ERK1/2 pathway (3). In the present study, we tried to reveal the role of Gab1 in IGF-I-dependent differentiation from myoblasts into myotubes. To discern the role of Gab1-SHP2 interaction from that of Gab1-p85 interaction in IGF-I-dependent differentiation, we used recombinant adenovirus vectors carrying  $\beta$ -gal (control), Gab1<sup>WT</sup>, or Gab1<sup>ASHP2</sup> as described previously (22) and created an adenovirus vector overexpressing Gab1<sup>p85</sup>. We examined tyrosine phosphorylation of Gab1 upon stimulation with IGF-I in myoblasts overexpressing  $\beta$ -gal, Gab1<sup>WT</sup>, Gab1<sup>ASHP2</sup>, or Gab1<sup>p85</sup>. As shown in Fig. 2A, tyrosine phosphorylation of Gab1 and the amount of co-immunoprecipitated SHP2 with Gab1 were increased after stimulation with IGF-I in control myoblasts expressing  $\beta$ -gal. On the other hand, tyrosine phosphorylation of Gab1 in the



**FIGURE 1. IGF-I induces tyrosine phosphorylation of Gab1 and complex formation of Gab1 with SHP2 in C2C12 myoblasts.** Serum-starved C2C12 myoblast cells were stimulated with 80 ng/ml IGF-I for 10 min, and cell lysates of 500  $\mu$ l harvested from 6 cm dishes were subjected to immunoprecipitation analysis with anti-Gab1 serum (A, left panel), anti-SHP2 antibody (A, right panel), anti-IRS-1 antibody (B, left panel), or anti-p85 antibody (B, right panel). Immunoprecipitates were subjected to SDS-PAGE followed by immunoblot analysis with anti-phosphotyrosine antibody (PY99). The same membrane was reprobed with the antibodies indicated at the left (anti-Gab1, anti-SHP2, and anti-p85 antibodies). A, both Gab1 and SHP2 were tyrosine-phosphorylated and co-immunoprecipitated with each other in an IGF-I-dependent manner. On the other hand, the association of Gab1 with p85 did not change either before or after IGF-I treatment. B, upon stimulation with IGF-I, IRS-1 became strongly tyrosine-phosphorylated and co-immunoprecipitated with p85. However, co-immunoprecipitation of IRS-1 with SHP2 was not detected. Experiments were repeated three times with similar results.

myoblasts overexpressing Gab1<sup>WT</sup>, Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ SHP2</sup>, or Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ p85</sup> increased much more at baseline compared with in those overexpressing  $\beta$ -gal. In these cells, tyrosine phosphorylation of Gab1 decreased after stimulation with IGF-I. The IGF-I-induced association of Gab1 with SHP2 increased in the C2C12 myoblasts overexpressing Gab1<sup>WT</sup>, or Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ p85</sup> compared

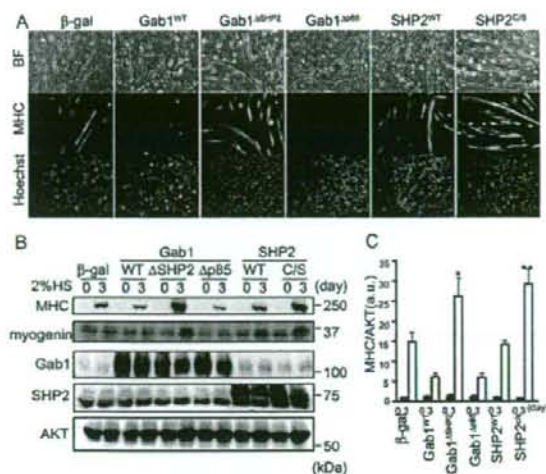
### Gab1 in IGF-I-dependent Myogenic Signaling



**FIGURE 2. Overexpression of Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ SHP2</sup> or Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ p85</sup> specifically perturbs the IGF-I-dependent molecular association of Gab1 with SHP2 or p85, respectively.** C2C12 myoblasts were infected with adenovirus vectors expressing  $\beta$ -gal, Gab1<sup>WT</sup>, Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ SHP2</sup>, or Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ p85</sup>. Serum-starved C2C12 cells were stimulated with vehicle (-) or IGF-I for 10 min, and cell lysates of 500  $\mu$ l were collected from 6-cm dishes. Cell lysates were subjected to immunoprecipitation with anti-Gab1 serum (A) or with anti-IRS-1 antibody (B), followed by immunoblotting with anti-phosphotyrosine antibody (PY99). A, blots were reprobed with anti-Gab1, anti-p85, and anti-SHP2 antibodies. B, blots were reprobed with anti-IRS-1, anti-p85, and anti-SHP2 antibodies. Experiments were repeated three times with similar results.

with those overexpressing  $\beta$ -gal, but was almost abrogated in those overexpressing Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ SHP2</sup> (Fig. 2A). The co-immunoprecipitation of Gab1 with p85 was increased in cells expressing Gab1<sup>WT</sup> or Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ SHP2</sup> compared with those expressing  $\beta$ -gal, but was almost abrogated in those expressing Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ p85</sup> at the baseline. The association of Gab1 with p85 decreased in response to IGF-I in the cells overexpressing Gab1<sup>WT</sup> or Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ SHP2</sup> (Fig. 2A). We observed much more dissociation of p85 from Gab1 in myoblasts overexpressing Gab1<sup>WT</sup> compared with those overexpressing Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ SHP2</sup>, which might be attributed to the increased activation of SHP2. Presumably, SHP2 dephosphorylates the tyrosine residues for p85 binding site of Gab1 consistent with the previous report on EGF-dependent signaling (39). These data demonstrate that overexpression of

## Gab1 in IGF-I-dependent Myogenic Signaling

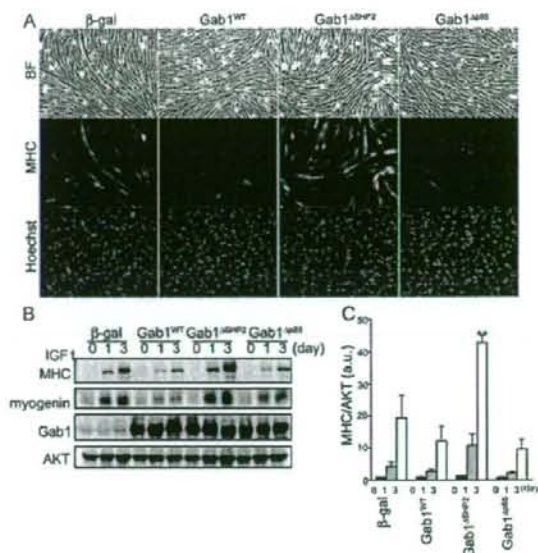


**FIGURE 3. Myogenic differentiation in a low serum condition is negatively regulated by Gab1-SHP2 complex through activating phosphatase activity of SHP2 in C2C12 myoblasts.** *A*, Immunocytochemical analysis of C2C12 myoblasts using anti-MHC antibody. C2C12 myoblasts were infected with adenovirus vectors expressing  $\beta$ -galactosidase ( $\beta$ -gal), Gab1<sup>WT</sup>, Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ SHP2</sup>, Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ p85</sup>, SHP2<sup>WT</sup>, or SHP2<sup>C/S</sup> and induced into myogenic differentiation by switching the growth medium containing 20% fetal bovine serum to the differentiation medium containing 2% horse serum. On the third day after induction, cells were immunostained with anti-MHC antibody and post-stained with nuclear dye Hoechst 33342. *BF*, bright field image. Experiments were repeated three times with similar results. *B*, Western blot analysis of myoblasts infected with indicated adenovirus vectors before and after low serum-induced myogenic induction for 3 days. Cell lysates were subjected to Western blot analysis using anti-MHC and anti-myogenin antibodies. The membrane was stripped and reprobed with anti-Gab1 or anti-SHP2 antibodies for confirmation of adenoviral overexpression of Gab1 or SHP2. AKT expression was also examined for loading control. *C*, the relative expression level of MHC was quantified by normalizing the expression of MHC by that of AKT. Values are expressed as means  $\pm$  S.D. of three independent experiments (\*,  $p < 0.05$  or \*\*,  $p < 0.01$  compared with control cells expressing  $\beta$ -gal on the same day after myogenic induction, by one-way ANOVA). a.u., arbitrary unit(s).

Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ SHP2</sup> or Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ p85</sup> sufficiently suppresses the association of Gab1 with SHP2 or p85, respectively.

On the other hand, tyrosine phosphorylation of IRS-1 and interaction between IRS-1 and p85 were comparable among the four groups of cells after stimulation with IGF-I (Fig. 2*B*). Thus, these findings indicate that overexpression of Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ SHP2</sup> or Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ p85</sup> specifically perturbs the IGF-I-dependent interaction of Gab1 with SHP2 or p85, respectively.

**Myogenic Differentiation Induced by a Low Serum Condition Is Negatively Regulated by Gab1-SHP2 Complex through Activating SHP2 in C2C12 Myoblasts**—C2C12 myoblasts undergo myogenic differentiation under a low-serum condition such as 2% HS (1, 2). Therefore, we examined the effects of overexpression of Gab1<sup>WT</sup>, Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ SHP2</sup>, or Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ p85</sup>, on myogenic differentiation under low serum condition. After infection with adenovirus vectors for 24 h, confluent C2C12 myoblasts were cultured in the DMEM containing 2% HS. On the third day after induction of myogenic differentiation, cells were immunostained with anti-MHC antibody for evaluation of myogenic differentiation. The extent of myogenic differentiation was enhanced in myoblasts overexpressing Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ SHP2</sup>, but inhibited in myoblasts overexpressing either Gab1<sup>WT</sup> or Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ p85</sup>,

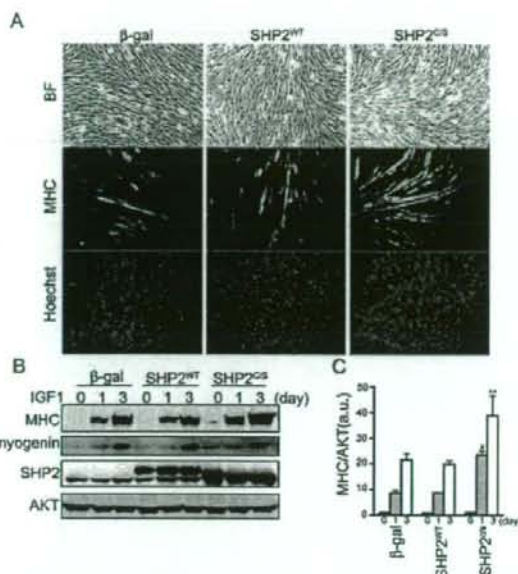


**FIGURE 4. IGF-I-induced myogenic differentiation is negatively regulated by interaction of Gab1 with SHP2 in C2C12 myoblasts.** *A*, Immunocytochemical analysis of C2C12 myoblasts overexpressing various Gab1 proteins. C2C12 myoblasts infected with adenovirus vectors overexpressing  $\beta$ -gal, Gab1<sup>WT</sup>, Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ SHP2</sup>, or Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ p85</sup> (as indicated at the top), were cultured in differentiation medium containing IGF-I. On the third day after exposure to the differentiation medium containing IGF-I, cells were immunostained with anti-MHC antibody and post-stained with Hoechst 33342 nuclear dye. Experiments were repeated three times with similar results. *B*, Cell lysates were collected from C2C12 cells overexpressing  $\beta$ -gal, Gab1<sup>WT</sup>, Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ SHP2</sup>, or Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ p85</sup> at the indicated time after cultivation in the differentiation medium containing IGF-I. Cell lysates were subjected to Western blot analysis for analyzing the expression of MHC and myogenin. The membrane was reprobed with anti-Gab1 antibody for confirmation of adenoviral overexpression of Gab1. AKT was also examined as a loading control. *C*, the relative expression level of MHC was quantified by normalizing the expression of MHC by that of AKT. Values are shown as mean  $\pm$  S.D. of three independent experiments (\*\*,  $p < 0.01$  compared with control cells expressing  $\beta$ -gal on the same day after myogenic induction, by one-way ANOVA). a.u., arbitrary unit(s).

compared with myoblasts infected with control adenovirus vector expressing  $\beta$ -gal (Fig. 3*A*). Western blot analysis also revealed that the expression of MHC was significantly increased by the overexpression of Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ SHP2</sup>, but seemed to be repressed by the overexpression either Gab1<sup>WT</sup> or Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ p85</sup>, compared with control (Fig. 3, *B* and *C*). These findings indicate that Gab1-SHP2 interaction exerts an inhibitory effect on myogenic differentiation induced by a low serum condition.

Gab1-SHP2 complex formation has been reported to result in an increase of phosphatase activity of SHP2 upon stimulation with EGF (20, 21, 24). To confirm the requirement of catalytic activity of SHP2 for inhibition of myogenesis, we created adenovirus vectors expressing wild-type SHP2 (SHP2<sup>WT</sup>) and phosphatase-inactive SHP2 (SHP2<sup>C/S</sup>). After infection with adenovirus vectors for 24 h, confluent C2C12 myoblasts were cultured in the DMEM containing 2% HS. The extent of myogenic differentiation determined by immunocytochemistry was enhanced in myoblasts overexpressing SHP2<sup>C/S</sup> compared with myoblasts overexpressing  $\beta$ -gal or SHP2<sup>WT</sup> (Fig. 3*A*). Consistently, Western blot analysis showed that overexpression of SHP2<sup>C/S</sup> in C2C12 cells induced significant increase of MHC



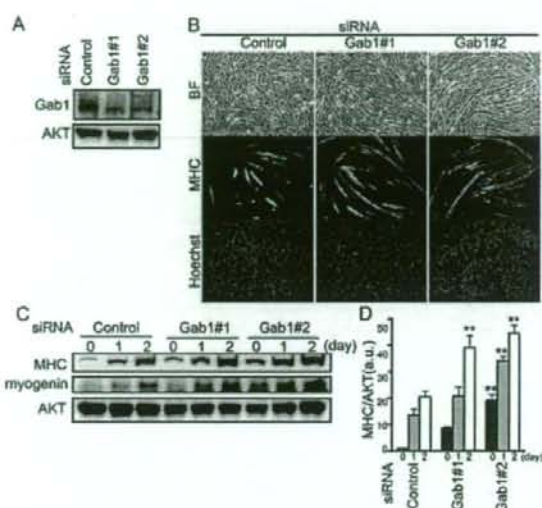


**FIGURE 5. SHP2 phosphatase activity is required for inhibition of myogenic differentiation.** *A*, C2C12 myoblasts overexpressing  $\beta$ -gal, SHP2<sup>WT</sup>, or SHP2<sup>CS</sup> were cultured in differentiation medium containing IGF-I. On the third day after exposure to the differentiation medium, cells were immunostained with anti-MHC antibody and post-stained with Hoechst 33342 nuclear dye. Myogenic differentiation was enhanced in myoblasts overexpressing SHP2<sup>CS</sup> compared with myoblasts overexpressing  $\beta$ -gal and SHP2<sup>WT</sup>. Experiments were repeated three times with similar results. *B*, cell lysates were collected from C2C12 cells overexpressing  $\beta$ -gal, SHP2<sup>WT</sup>, or SHP2<sup>CS</sup> at the indicated time after cultivation in the differentiation medium containing IGF-I. Cell lysates were subjected to Western blot analysis for analyzing the expression of MHC and myogenin. The membrane was reprobed with anti-SHP2 antibody for confirmation of adenoviral overexpression of SHP2. AKT was examined as a loading control. *C*, the relative expression level of MHC was quantified by normalizing the expression of MHC by that of AKT. Values are shown as means  $\pm$  S.D. (\*,  $p < 0.05$  or \*\*,  $p < 0.01$  compared with control cells expressing  $\beta$ -gal on the same day after myogenic induction, by one-way ANOVA). a.u., arbitrary unit(s).

expression, compared with control (Fig. 3, *B* and *C*). Taken together, these findings suggest that Gab1 exerts an inhibitory effect on myogenic differentiation of C2C12 myoblasts under low serum condition through association with SHP2 and increase of SHP2 catalytic activity.

**IGF-I-induced Myogenic Differentiation Is Negatively Regulated by Gab1-SHP2 Complex through Increasing Catalytic Activity of SHP2 in C2C12 Myoblasts**—The IGF family, including IGF-I and -II, induces myogenic differentiation of myoblasts after myoblasts fully proliferate and become ready for differentiation (1–3). Therefore, we examined the effect of overexpression of various Gab1 proteins on the myogenic differentiation of C2C12 myoblasts cultured in IGF-I-containing differentiation medium. After infection with adenovirus vectors for 24 h, post-confluent C2C12 myoblasts were cultured in the DMEM containing 80 ng/ml IGF-I. On the third day after induction of myogenic differentiation, cells were immunostained with anti-MHC antibody. The extent of myogenic differentiation was enhanced in myoblasts overexpressing Gab1<sup>ΔSHIP2</sup> but inhibited in myoblasts overexpressing Gab1<sup>WT</sup> or Gab1<sup>Δp85</sup>, compared with control (Fig. 4*A*). MHC expression

## Gab1 in IGF-I-dependent Myogenic Signaling

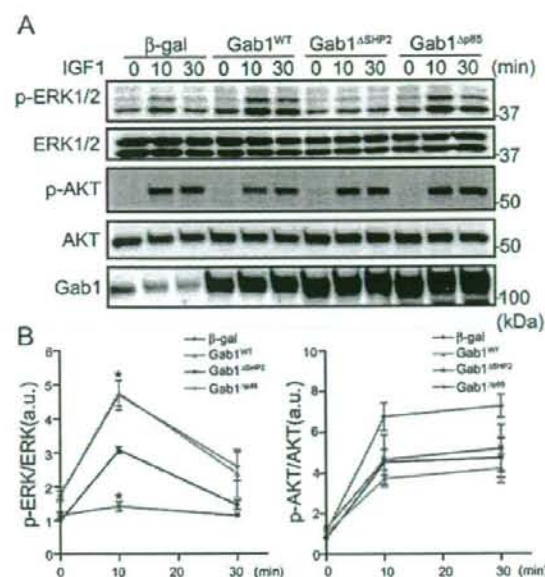


**FIGURE 6. siRNA-mediated Gab1 knockdown enhances myogenic differentiation.** *A*, C2C12 myoblasts were transfected with control siRNA (control) or with two independent siRNAs targeting different sequences of Gab1 (Gab1#1 and Gab1#2) for 72 h. Cell lysates were subjected to Western blot analysis. AKT was also checked as a loading control. *B*, C2C12 myoblasts were transfected with siRNAs as described in Fig. 6*A*. On the third day after transfection, the medium was changed from growth medium containing 20% FBS to differentiation medium containing 80 ng/ml IGF-I. Cells were cultured in the presence of IGF-I for 2 days. Cells were immunostained with anti-MHC antibody and post-stained with Hoechst 33342 nuclear dye. Experiments were repeated three times with similar results. *C*, cell lysates were collected at the indicated time after induction of myogenic differentiation and subjected to Western blot analysis. On the first and second day after myogenic induction, the expression level of MHC and myogenin were increased in cells transfected with Gab1 siRNAs (#1 or #2) compared with control. AKT was examined as a loading control. *D*, the relative expression level of MHC was quantified by normalizing the expression of MHC by that of AKT. Values are shown as means  $\pm$  S.D. (\*\*,  $p < 0.01$  compared with control cells on the same day after myogenic induction, by one-way ANOVA). a.u., arbitrary unit(s).

was significantly increased in the myoblasts overexpressing Gab1<sup>ΔSHIP2</sup>, although it seemed to be repressed in those overexpressing Gab1<sup>WT</sup> or Gab1<sup>Δp85</sup>, compared with control (Fig. 4, *B* and *C*). Furthermore, the expression of myogenin was enhanced in myoblasts overexpressing Gab1<sup>ΔSHIP2</sup>, but repressed in myoblasts overexpressing Gab1<sup>WT</sup> or Gab1<sup>Δp85</sup>, compared with control (Fig. 4*B*). These data coincide with the results observed in the low serum condition, suggesting that Gab1-SHP2 complex has an inhibitory role in the IGF-I-induced myogenic differentiation.

Gab2, another Gab family protein, has been reported to complement the function of Gab1 in some signaling pathways such as EGF-dependent signaling (33, 40). To confirm the specific role of Gab1 in myogenic differentiation, we examined the effect of overexpression of Gab2<sup>ΔSHIP2</sup>, the Gab2 mutant that cannot associate with SHP2 (41), on IGF-I-induced myogenic differentiation. The extent of myogenic differentiation was comparable between myoblasts overexpressing Gab2<sup>ΔSHIP2</sup> and those expressing  $\beta$ -gal (supplemental Fig. S1, *A* and *B*). We also confirmed that Gab2<sup>ΔSHIP2</sup> did not associate with SHP2 either before or after stimulation with IGF-I (supplemental Fig. S1*C*). These data suggested that IGF-I-induced myogenic differenti-

## Gab1 in IGF-I-dependent Myogenic Signaling

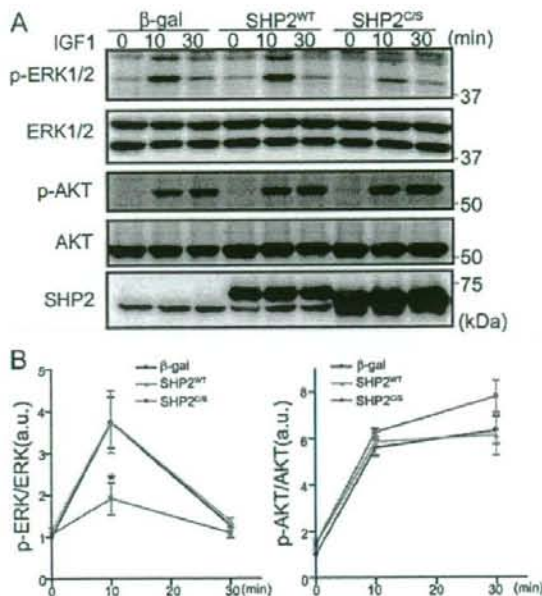


**FIGURE 7. IGF-I activates ERK1/2 via complex formation of Gab1 with SHP2 in C2C12 cells.** A, C2C12 cells infected with the indicated adenovirus vectors were serum-starved overnight and stimulated with IGF-I (80 ng/ml) for the indicated period. Cell lysates were collected at the indicated time and subjected to Western blot analysis using the antibodies indicated at the left. Expression level of Gab1 was almost comparable in the cells overexpressing Gab1<sup>WT</sup>, Gab1<sup>ΔSHP2</sup>, or Gab1<sup>Δp85</sup>. B, phosphorylation of ERK1/2 (left) and AKT (right) in A was quantified. Values are expressed as means  $\pm$  S.D. of three independent experiments (\*,  $p < 0.05$ , compared with control cells expressing  $\beta$ -gal at the same time after stimulation, by one-way ANOVA). a.u., arbitrary unit(s).

ation in C2C12 myoblasts might be regulated specifically by Gab1-SHP2 complex, but not by Gab2-SHP2 complex.

To confirm the requirement of SHP2 catalytic activity for the inhibitory effect of Gab1-SHP2 complex on myogenesis, C2C12 myoblasts were infected with adenovirus vectors expressing  $\beta$ -gal, SHP2<sup>WT</sup>, or SHP2<sup>C/S</sup> and then treated with IGF-I-containing differentiation medium for the induction of myogenesis. Myogenic differentiation was enhanced in myoblasts overexpressing SHP2<sup>C/S</sup> compared with myoblasts overexpressing  $\beta$ -gal or SHP2<sup>WT</sup> (Fig. 5A). Western blot analysis also demonstrated that the MHC expression was significantly increased in the myoblasts overexpressing SHP2<sup>C/S</sup>, but not in those overexpressing SHP2<sup>WT</sup>, compared with control cells expressing  $\beta$ -gal (Fig. 5, B and C). Consistently, myogenin expression also seemed to be enhanced in those expressing SHP2<sup>C/S</sup>, compared with myoblasts expressing  $\beta$ -gal or SHP2<sup>WT</sup> (Fig. 5B). These data indicate that Gab1-SHP2 complex has an inhibitory effect on IGF-I-elicited myogenic differentiation through activation of SHP2 in C2C12 myoblasts.

**siRNA-mediated Knockdown of Gab1 Enhances Myogenic Differentiation in C2C12 Myoblasts**—To examine the effect of Gab1 protein depletion in C2C12 myoblasts, we performed siRNA-mediated Gab1 knockdown. Gab1 protein expression was reduced by 80% in the myoblasts transfected with Gab1-targeted siRNAs compared with control cells (Fig. 6A). On the second day after induction of differentiation, cells were immunostained with



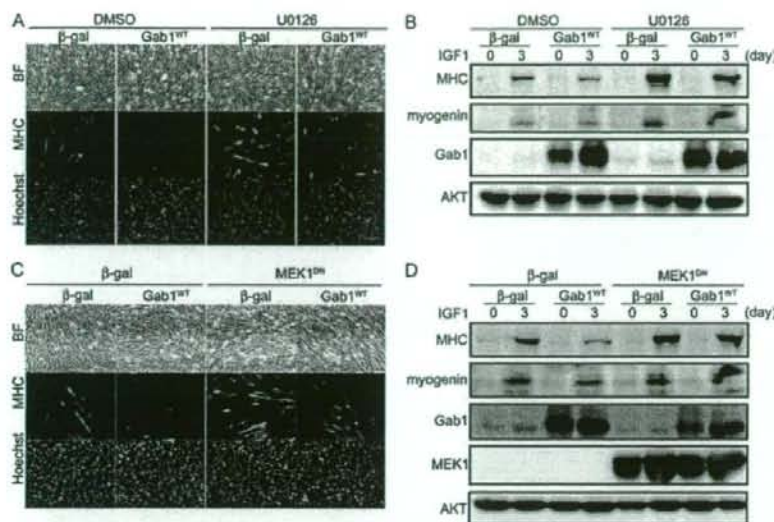
**FIGURE 8. IGF-I activates ERK1/2 via activation of SHP2 in C2C12 cells.** A, C2C12 cells infected with indicated adenovirus vectors were treated the same as in Fig. 7. Cell lysates were collected and subjected to Western blot analysis for analyzing ERK1/2 and AKT phosphorylation using the antibodies indicated at the left. Adenovirus-mediated overexpression of SHP2 was almost comparable in cells expressing SHP2<sup>WT</sup> or SHP2<sup>C/S</sup>. B, phosphorylation of ERK1/2 (left) and AKT (right) in A was quantified. Values are shown as means  $\pm$  S.D. from three independent experiments (\*,  $p < 0.05$  compared with control cells expressing  $\beta$ -gal at the same time after IGF-I stimulation, by one-way ANOVA). a.u., arbitrary unit(s).

anti-MHC antibody. The extent of myogenic differentiation was enhanced in myoblasts transfected with Gab1-targeted siRNAs compared with control (Fig. 6B). Consistently, Western blot analysis also revealed a significant increase of MHC expression in myoblasts transfected with Gab1-targeted siRNAs compared with control (Fig. 6, C and D). Furthermore, the expression of myogenin was increased in myoblasts transfected with Gab1-targeted siRNAs (Fig. 6C). These data coincide with the results obtained via overexpression experiments using adenovirus vectors and suggest that Gab1 has an inhibitory role in the IGF-I-induced myogenic differentiation.

Moreover, we performed siRNAs-mediated SHP2 knockdown in C2C12 myoblasts. SHP2 protein expression was reduced by 70% in the myoblasts transfected with SHP2-targeted siRNAs compared with control cells (supplemental Fig. S2A). On the contrary to the results obtained by Gab1-targeted siRNAs experiments, SHP2 knockdown inhibited proliferation of C2C12 myoblasts. Therefore, we could not evaluate the myogenic differentiation in C2C12 myoblasts transfected with SHP2-targeted siRNAs (supplemental Fig. S2B).

**IGF-I-induced Activation of ERK1/2 Is Regulated by Gab1-SHP2 Complex through Activation of SHP2 in C2C12 Myoblasts**—To elucidate a potential mechanism how Gab1 is involved in IGF-I-mediated myogenic differentiation of C2C12 myoblasts, we examined the effects of adenovirus-mediated overexpression of Gab1<sup>WT</sup>, Gab1<sup>ΔSHP2</sup>, and Gab1<sup>Δp85</sup> on the

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**FIGURE 9. ERK1/2 inhibition reverses the inhibitory effect of overexpression of Gab1<sup>WT</sup> on IGF-I-induced myogenic differentiation.** *A*, C2C12 myoblasts were infected with adenovirus vectors overexpressing either  $\beta$ -gal or Gab1<sup>WT</sup>. These cells were cultivated with or without a MEK1/2 inhibitor, U0126 (3  $\mu$ M), under the differentiation medium containing 80 ng/ml IGF-I. On the third day after myogenic induction, the cells were immunostained with anti-MHC antibody and post-stained with Hoechst 33342 nuclear dye. Experiments were repeated three times with similar results. *B*, C2C12 cells overexpressing  $\beta$ -gal or Gab1<sup>WT</sup> were cultured in the IGF-I-containing differentiation medium with or without U0126 (3  $\mu$ M). Cell lysates were collected and subjected to Western blot analysis for analyzing the expression of MHC and myogenin. The membrane was probed with anti-Gab1 antibody for confirmation of adenoviral overexpression of Gab1. AKT was also checked as a loading control. *C*, C2C12 myoblasts were subjected to dual infection of adenovirus vectors expressing either  $\beta$ -gal or dominant-negative MEK1 (MEK1<sup>DN</sup>) with Gab1<sup>WT</sup>. On the third day after myogenic induction, the cells were immunostained with anti-MHC antibody and post-stained with Hoechst 33342 nuclear dye. Experiments were repeated three times with similar results. *D*, C2C12 myoblasts were subjected to dual infection of adenovirus vectors similarly to *B*. The cell lysates were collected and subjected to Western blot analysis for analyzing the expression of MHC and myogenin. The membrane was probed with anti-Gab1 and anti-MEK1 antibodies for confirmation of adenoviral overexpression of Gab1 and MEK1. AKT was also checked as a loading control. Experiments were repeated three times with similar results.

IGF-I-dependent signaling pathways downstream of Gab1. IGF-I induced activation of ERK1/2 and AKT in control myoblasts expressing  $\beta$ -gal. IGF-I-induced activation of ERK1/2 was significantly augmented in myoblasts overexpressing Gab1<sup>WT</sup> or Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ p85</sup> compared with control myoblasts expressing  $\beta$ -gal. On the other hand, activation of ERK1/2 was significantly reduced in myoblasts expressing Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ SHP2</sup> (Fig. 7, *A* and *B*). On the other hand, activation of ERK1/2 was not changed in myoblasts expressing Gab2 <sup>$\Delta$ SHP2</sup> compared with control myoblasts expressing  $\beta$ -gal (supplemental Fig. S1D). These data indicate that Gab1 plays a critical role in IGF-I-induced ERK1/2 activation through interaction with SHP2 in C2C12 myoblasts.

IGF-I-induced AKT activation was almost comparable in myoblasts expressing  $\beta$ -gal, Gab1<sup>WT</sup>, or Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ SHP2</sup>. On the contrary, activation of AKT seemed to be enhanced in cells overexpressing Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ p85</sup>, compared with the other three groups (Fig. 7B). These data indicate that Gab1 might have a competitive role for sequestering p85 in the cytoplasm from other scaffolding adaptor proteins such as IRS-1.

To confirm the requirement of SHP2 activity for activation of ERK1/2 upon IGF-I stimulation, we examined the effects of adenovirus-mediated overexpression of SHP2<sup>WT</sup> or SHP2<sup>C/S</sup>

on ERK1/2 activation. IGF-I-induced activation of ERK1/2 was comparable in myoblasts overexpressing SHP2<sup>WT</sup> and those expressing  $\beta$ -gal, but almost inhibited in cells overexpressing SHP2<sup>C/S</sup> compared with control (Fig. 8, *A* and *B*). On the other hand, activation of AKT was almost comparable among the three groups (Fig. 8, *A* and *B*). These findings indicate that SHP2 catalytic activity is indispensable for activation of ERK1/2 after stimulation with IGF-I in C2C12 myoblasts. Taken together, our findings indicate that IGF-I activates ERK1/2 via complex formation of Gab1 with SHP2 and activation of SHP2 in C2C12 myoblasts.

**Gab1-SHP2-ERK1/2-signaling Pathway Is an Inhibitory Axis of IGF-I-dependent Myogenic Differentiation in C2C12 Myoblasts**—It has been reported that ERK1/2 has an inhibitory role for myogenic differentiation of mesenchymal cells to date (3, 10). Therefore, we assumed that Gab1-SHP2 complex might have the inhibitory effects on myogenic differentiation via activation of ERK1/2. To confirm the inhibitory role of ERK1/2 downstream of Gab1-SHP2 complex, myoblasts overexpressing Gab1<sup>WT</sup> were treated with or without a MEK1/2

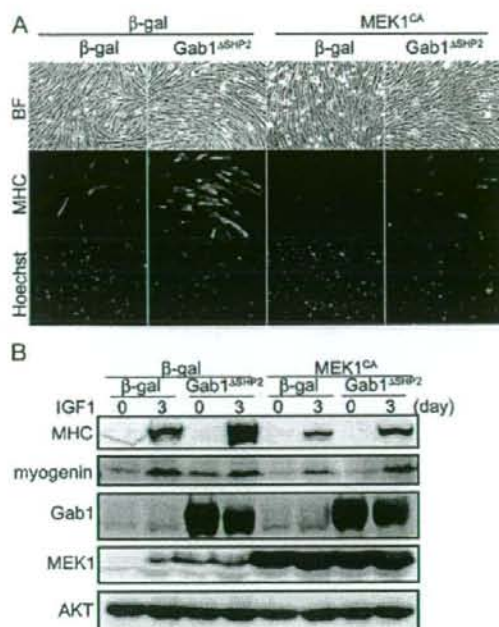
inhibitor, U0126, before inducing myoblasts into myogenic differentiation in the presence of IGF-I. U0126 enhanced IGF-I-induced up-regulation of MHC and myogenin in control myoblasts expressing  $\beta$ -gal (Fig. 9, *A* and *B*). Furthermore, U0126 reversed the inhibitory effect of Gab1<sup>WT</sup> overexpression on up-regulation of MHC and myogenin (Fig. 9, *A* and *B*). We also confirmed that adenovirus-mediated overexpression of dominant-negative MEK1 (MEK1<sup>DN</sup>) reversed the inhibitory effect of Gab1<sup>WT</sup> overexpression on IGF-I-induced myogenic differentiation (Fig. 9, *C* and *D*). These findings suggest that Gab1 inhibits IGF-I-dependent myogenesis through activating MEK1/2-ERK1/2 pathway.

Finally, we examined the effect of adenoviral overexpression of constitutively active MEK1 (MEK1<sup>CA</sup>). Overexpression of MEK1<sup>CA</sup> repressed the enhanced myogenic differentiation observed in myoblasts overexpressing Gab1 <sup>$\Delta$ SHP2</sup> (Fig. 10, *A* and *B*). Collectively, interaction of Gab1 with SHP2 negatively regulates IGF-I-dependent myogenic differentiation in C2C12 myoblasts via activation of the MEK1/2-ERK1/2 pathway (Fig. 11).

## DISCUSSION

In this study, we investigated the role of Gab1 in skeletal muscle differentiation. To our knowledge, this study demon-

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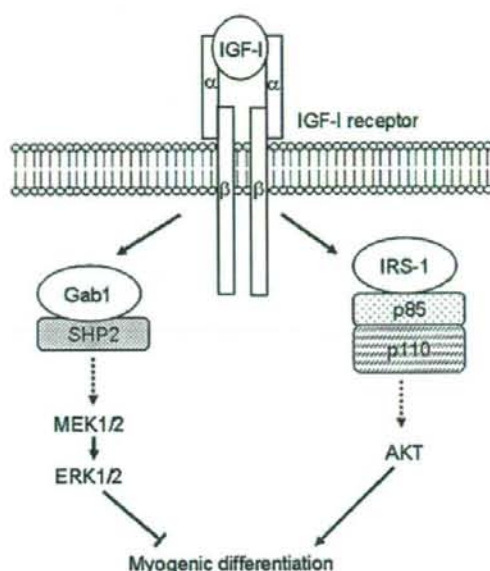


**FIGURE 10. Overexpression of constitutively active MEK1 abrogates the promoting effect of Gab1<sup>ΔSHP2</sup> on myogenic differentiation in C2C12 cells.** A, C2C12 myoblasts were subjected to dual infection of adenovirus vectors expressing either  $\beta$ -gal or constitutively active MEK1 (MEK1<sup>CA</sup>) with Gab1<sup>ΔSHP2</sup>. On the third day after myogenic induction, the cells were immunostained with anti-MHC antibody and post-stained with Hoechst 33342 nuclear dye. Overexpression of MEK1<sup>CA</sup> in C2C12 significantly repressed the promoting effect of the overexpression of Gab1<sup>ΔSHP2</sup> on IGF-I-induced myogenic differentiation. B, C2C12 myoblasts were subjected to dual infection of adenovirus vectors similar to A. The cell lysates were collected from 3.5-cm dishes and subjected to Western blot analysis. Dual overexpression of MEK1<sup>CA</sup> with Gab1<sup>ΔSHP2</sup> repressed the promoting effect of Gab1<sup>ΔSHP2</sup> on the induction of MHC protein. Experiments were repeated three times with similar results.

strates for the first time that Gab1 has an inhibitory role in IGF-I-induced myogenic differentiation through activating SHP2-MEK1/2-ERK1/2 signaling pathway.

IGF-I induced complex formation of Gab1 with SHP2 in C2C12 myoblasts. It has been reported that Gab1 undergoes dramatic tyrosine-dephosphorylation upon changing growth medium to differentiation medium containing 2% HS in C2C12 cells (42). This finding indicated that Gab1 might have a key role in myogenic differentiation. Recently, it has been reported that Gab1 itself is a substrate of SHP2 (39). Furthermore, it has been reported that phosphorylation of ERK1/2 decreases while phosphorylation of AKT increases during differentiation with either insulin or 2% HS (9). Therefore, tyrosine dephosphorylation of Gab1 and subsequent dissociation of SHP2 from dephosphorylated Gab1 might be essential steps for the diminution of ERK1/2 activity during myogenic differentiation.

The Gab1-SHP2 complex formation is indispensable for IGF-I-induced activation of ERK1/2. It has been reported that Gab1-SHP2 interaction has an essential role for ERK1/2 activation downstream of EGF family/ErbB receptor signaling or hepatocyte growth factor/c-Met signaling (20–23). Furthermore, the recent study creating liver-specific Gab1 knock-out mice



**FIGURE 11. Schematic models of the roles of Gab1 in IGF-I-dependent myogenic differentiation.** IGF-I induces tyrosine phosphorylation of Gab1 and subsequent association of Gab1 with SHP2. Gab1-SHP2 complex plays a critical role in activation of ERK1/2 in C2C12 myoblasts. Furthermore, Gab1-SHP2 complex negatively regulates myogenic differentiation via activation of MEK1/2-ERK1/2 pathway. On the other hand, IGF-I stimulation also induced tyrosine phosphorylation of IRS-1 and subsequent association with p85 PI3K subunit. IRS-1-p85 complex formation has been reported to be indispensable for PI3K-AKT signaling, which might result in promotion of myogenic differentiation.

also demonstrated that Gab1 is required for both insulin-elicited ERK1/2 activation and subsequent inhibition of IRS-1-PI3K-AKT signaling (34). Here, we demonstrated that overexpression of Gab1<sup>ΔSHP2</sup>, which is incapable of associating with SHP2, repressed IGF-I-dependent activation of ERK1/2 in C2C12 myoblasts. In a similar context, SHP2 itself has been reported to have crucial roles for ERK1/2 activation downstream of various growth factors, including IGF-I (24, 43–46). We also observed that overexpression of phosphatase-inactive SHP2 (SHP2<sup>C/S</sup>) inhibited IGF-I-dependent activation of ERK1/2 in C2C12 myoblasts. These findings demonstrate that Gab1-SHP2 complex formation is requisite for both activation of SHP2 itself and ERK1/2 upon IGF-I stimulation in C2C12 myoblasts. Because the mechanism how SHP2 regulates receptor tyrosine kinase-mediated ERK1/2 activation remains controversial (18, 19), further analyses are needed for uncovering the mechanism how Gab1-SHP2 complex regulates IGF-I-induced activation of ERK1/2.

The Gab1-SHP2 complex exerts an inhibitory effect on the IGF-I-induced myogenic differentiation through activation of ERK1/2. IGFs have been reported to stimulate both proliferation and differentiation of skeletal muscle cells in culture (3, 4). IGFs activate two major cytoplasmic signaling pathways, PI3K-AKT cascade and Raf-MEK1/2-ERK1/2 MAPK cascade. The former has been reported to have positive effects on myogenesis, and the latter MAPK-signaling cascade has been reported to have detrimental effects on the myogenic differentiation

induced by insulin or IGFs (3, 9, 10). SHP2 has been also reported to play an inhibitory role for myogenic differentiation in the presence of fibroblast growth factor 2 (FGF2) in C2C12 myoblasts partly in an ERK1/2-dependent manner (44). We found that IGF-I-induced myogenic differentiation was inhibited by overexpression of either Gab1<sup>WT</sup> or Gab1<sup>Δp85</sup>, but not by that of SHP2<sup>WT</sup>. In addition, IGF-I-induced ERK1/2 activation in C2C12 myoblasts was enhanced by overexpression of either Gab1<sup>WT</sup> or Gab1<sup>Δp85</sup>, but not by that of SHP2<sup>WT</sup>. SHP2 can be specifically activated through binding directly with tyrosine-phosphorylated docking proteins such as Gab1 or FRS2α (18), suggesting that a sufficient amount of Gab1 is required to fully activate SHP2 by binding with SHP2 and that an insufficient amount of endogenous Gab1 might be the major limiting factor in overexpressed SHP2<sup>WT</sup>-mediated myogenic differentiation. Collectively, these data suggest that Gab1 is a crucial negative regulator for IGF-I-dependent myogenic differentiation through activation of the SHP2-MEK1/2-ERK1/2 signaling pathway (Fig. 10).

The migration of muscle progenitor cells into the limb anlage from somites is strongly impaired in Gab1-knock-out embryos similarly in c-Met-knock-out mice (32). Furthermore, it has been reported that the knock-in mice, which carry mutant Gab1 incapable of binding with SHP2, displayed quite similar defects in migration of muscle progenitor cells from somites into the limb anlage during embryogenesis as observed in Gab1-knock-out mice (29). In clear contrast, the knock-in mice, which carry mutant Gab1 incapable of binding either Grb2 or c-Met, did not show any defects in migration of muscle progenitor cells, suggesting the specific role of Gab1-SHP2 complex in the migration of muscle progenitor cells (29). These previous data coincide with our findings that Gab1-SHP2 interaction has an inhibitory effect on IGF-I-induced myogenic differentiation. Taken together, Gab1 might play a key role not only for inhibition of myogenesis but also for maintenance of the undifferentiated state of mesenchymal cells through activation of SHP2.

Although the PI3K-AKT signaling pathway is central to IGF-I-dependent signaling and myogenic differentiation, our data demonstrate that the diminution of ERK1/2 activity is a prerequisite for IGF-I-induced myogenesis. IGFs promote skeletal muscle differentiation through PI3K-AKT-dependent signaling pathway (3, 6, 7, 47–49). It has been reported that the activity of AKT increased during myogenic differentiation under cultivation in 2% HS or IGF-I-containing differentiation medium (9). We found that overexpression of Gab1<sup>Δp85</sup> in C2C12 myoblasts resulted in enhanced activation of AKT upon stimulation with IGF-I, compared with those overexpressing Gab1<sup>WT</sup> or Gab1<sup>ΔSHP2</sup>. However, overexpression of Gab1<sup>Δp85</sup> did not enhance, but repressed IGF-I-induced myogenic differentiation to a similar extent to Gab1<sup>WT</sup>. In clear contrast, overexpression of Gab1<sup>ΔSHP2</sup> significantly enhanced IGF-I-induced myogenic differentiation compared with control. These findings indicate that myogenic differentiation requires the diminution of Gab1-SHP2-ERK1/2 signaling pathway prior to full activation of PI3K-AKT signaling pathway. It has been reported that the blockade of ERK1/2 signaling pathway enhances myogenic differentiation (3, 8–10). Inhibition of the ERK1/2 path-

way has been reported to up-regulate Mirk/dyrk1B, a RhoA-dependent serine/threonine kinase that positively regulates skeletal muscle differentiation and inhibits apoptosis of myoblasts (50). Mirk/dyrk1B might be one of the candidate molecules through which ERK1/2 exerts an inhibitory effect on skeletal muscle differentiation.

In conclusion, the present study reveals that Gab1-SHP2 interaction exerts an inhibitory effect on IGF-I-dependent myogenic differentiation via activation of ERK1/2 signaling pathway.

**Acknowledgments**—We are grateful to S. Kawashima (Kobe University) for adenovirus vectors expressing dominant-negative MEK1 (MEK1<sup>DN</sup>) and constitutively active MEK1 (MEK1<sup>CA</sup>); T. Saito and S. Yamasaki (RIKEN Research Center for Allergy and Immunology) for Gab2<sup>ΔSHP2</sup> cDNA; J. T. Pearson for his critical reading of this manuscript; Yoko Matsuura and Masako Suto for secretarial work; and Maki Yoshida, Y. Mizushima, and Manami Sone for their technical assistance.

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## Spatial and temporal role of the apelin/APJ system in the caliber size regulation of blood vessels during angiogenesis

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Blood vessels change their caliber to adapt to the demands of tissues or organs for oxygen and nutrients. This event is mainly organized at the capillary level and requires a size-sensing mechanism. However, the molecular regulatory mechanism involved in caliber size modification in blood vessels is not clear. Here we show that apelin, a protein secreted from endothelial cells under the activation of Tie2 receptor tyrosine kinase on endothelial cells, plays a role in the regulation of caliber size of blood vessel through its cognate receptor APJ, which is expressed on endothelial cells. During early embryogenesis, APJ is expressed on endothelial cells of the new blood vessels sprouted from the dorsal aorta, but not on pre-existing endothelial cells of the dorsal aorta. Apelin-deficient mice showed narrow blood vessels in intersomitic vessels during embryogenesis. Apelin enhanced endothelial cell proliferation in the presence of vascular endothelial growth factor and promoted cell-to-cell aggregation. These results indicated that the apelin/APJ system is involved in the regulation of blood vessel diameter during angiogenesis.

*The EMBO Journal* (2008) 27, 522–534. doi:10.1038/sj.emboj.7601982; Published online 17 January 2008

**Subject Categories:** development

**Keywords:** angiogenesis; angiopoietin-1; apelin; APJ; lumen size

### Introduction

The vascular system of vertebrates has a highly organized and hierarchical structure, ranging from large blood vessels down to finely sized capillaries. The intraluminal cavity of blood vessels is lined almost exclusively with endothelial

cells (ECs). The formation of blood vessels is initiated by the assembly and tube formation of ECs, or EC progenitors. This process is termed vasculogenesis and is followed by angiogenesis, which results in the emergence of new vessels through sprouting and elongation from, or the remodelling of, pre-existing vessels (Risau, 1997).

Many genes involved in these processes have been isolated and their roles in the specification of vascular lineage from mesodermal cells and vascular morphogenesis have been analysed (Wang *et al.*, 1998; Adams *et al.*, 1999; Gale and Yancopoulos, 1999; Oettgen, 2001; Zhong *et al.*, 2001; Carmeliet, 2003; Gerhardt and Betsholtz, 2003; Simon, 2004). Among many molecules, vascular endothelial growth factors (VEGFs) and their cognate receptors (VEGFRs) play central roles in the differentiation (arterial), proliferation, migration and survival of ECs in physiological and pathological conditions (Ferrara *et al.*, 2003). Based on the diverse functions of VEGFs in blood vessel formation, the VEGF/VEGFR system has proved effective in the clinical management of cancer patients by negatively regulating angiogenesis (Ferrara and Allitalo, 1999; Jain, 2005). Therefore, these results indicate the importance of developmental studies for understanding blood vessel formation.

In the maturation process involved in blood vessel formation, the ECs, which form the tube, recruit supporting mural cells (MCs) such as periendothelial cells (pericytes) or vascular smooth muscle cells, by releasing platelet-derived growth factor (PDGF)-BB (Lindahl *et al.*, 1997). MCs subsequently adhere to ECs resulting in the formation of a structurally stable blood vessel. It has been proposed that this cell adhesion between ECs and MCs is induced when angiopoietin 1 (Ang1), produced from MCs, stimulates Tie2, a receptor tyrosine kinase on ECs (Dumont *et al.*, 1994; Sato *et al.*, 1995; Suri *et al.*, 1996).

During angiogenesis, blood vessels need to be able to adjust their caliber, in order to allow them to respond adequately to the changes in demand for oxygen and nutrients made by the organs and tissues. This caliber adjustment is involved in the maturation process during angiogenesis; however, the molecular mechanism involved in the determination of blood vessel size has not been elucidated. A potent regulator of the enlargement of blood vessel caliber is the Ang1/Tie2 system, because transgenic overexpression of Ang1 in the keratinocyte-induced enlarged blood vessels in the dermis (Suri *et al.*, 1998) and administration of a potent Ang1 variant were also reported to induce enlargement of blood vessels (Cho *et al.*, 2005; Thurston *et al.*, 2005). Therefore, the analysis of the precise molecular mechanism of how the Ang1/Tie2 system induces enlargement of blood vessels would allow us to understand the process of determination of blood vessel size during angiogenesis.

In this report, by the analysis of downstream signalling of Ang1/Tie2 in ECs, we found that apelin, a recently isolated bioactive peptide from bovine gastric extract working as a

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Received: 19 April 2007; accepted: 18 December 2007; published online: 17 January 2008

ligand for APJ, is upregulated by Ang1 stimulation of human umbilical vein endothelial cells (HUVECs). A sequence of apelin cDNA encodes a protein of 77 amino acids, which can generate two active polypeptides: the long (42–77) and the short (65–77) forms of apelin (Tatemoto et al, 1998; Kawamata et al, 2001; Masri et al, 2005). Both forms activate APJ.

APJ is a G protein-coupled receptor, which has been reported to be expressed in the cardiovascular and central nervous systems (O'Dowd et al, 1993; Devic et al, 1999). In brain tissues, APJ expression is observed in neurons (Edinger et al, 1998) as well as in oligodendrocytes and astrocytes (Croitoru-Lamoury et al, 2003). In the brain, the apelin/APJ system plays a role in maintaining body fluid homeostasis and regulating the release of vasopressin from the hypothalamus (De Mota et al, 2004). In the cardiovascular system, APJ is expressed in an endothelial lineage in various species such as amphibian, mouse and human (Devic et al, 1996, 1999; Katugampola et al, 2001). In the mouse and human, the expression of the receptor has also been detected by immunocytochemistry in vascular smooth muscle cells and cardiomyocytes (Kleinz and Davenport, 2004). Apelin/APJ function in cardiomyocytes is thought to be associated with a very strong inotropic activity (Szokodi et al, 2002; Ashley et al, 2005). The function of apelin/APJ in EC lineage is reported to be associated with the hypotensive activity of apelin (Ishida et al, 2004), as the activation of APJ leads to nitric oxide (NO) production by the ECs (Tatemoto et al, 2001), and this possibly plays a role in the relaxation of smooth muscle cells.

Using the morpholino antisense oligonucleotide, requisite roles of the apelin/APJ system have been reported in the cardiovascular system of *Xenopus laevis* (Cox et al, 2006; Inui et al, 2006) and zebrafish (Scott et al, 2007). *Xenopus apelin* (*Xapelin*) was detected in the region around the presumptive blood vessels during early embryogenesis and overlapped with the expression of *Xmsr*, the *Xenopus* homolog of APJ. Overexpression of *Xapelin* disorganized the expression of the endothelial precursor cell marker *Xifli* at the neurula stage. Knockdown of *Xapelin* or *Xmsr* induced abnormal heart morphology and attenuated the expression of *Tie2*, resulting in the disruption of blood vessel formation in the posterior cardinal vein, intersomitic vessels (ISVs) and vitelline vessels. By contrast, apelin protein has been shown to induce angiogenesis in the chicken chorioallantoic membrane assay (Cox et al, 2006). Although the involvement of apelin/APJ in angiogenesis and the regulation of proliferation of ECs has been suggested, the precise function of apelin/APJ in the morphology of blood vessels in mammals is not clear.

Here, using various *in vitro* and *in vivo* assays, we show that apelin induces enlargement of blood vessels. Moreover, the physiological function of apelin has been studied through the generation of apelin-mutant mice and the relationship of Ang1/Tie2 signalling to apelin has been studied by mating apelin-mutant mice with Ang1 transgenic mice. Finally, using the para-aortic splanchnopleural mesoderm (P-Sp) organ culture system that mimics *in vivo* vasculogenesis and angiogenesis and various *in vitro* HUVEC culture systems, we have studied how apelin regulates the enlargement of blood vessels.

## Results

### Ang1 induces apelin expression on ECs

To elucidate the molecular mechanism by which Tie2 regulates the caliber change of blood vessels from small to larger

ones, and in order to isolate the genes encoding proteins that are involved in caliber change and specifically expressed in HUVECs stimulated by Ang1, we constructed a subtraction library from HUVECs with Tie2 stimulated by Ang1 as a tester, and HUVECs with no stimulation of Tie2 as the driver (Figure 1A). One of these isolated cDNA clones was the human gene encoding apelin (Figure 1B–D). Real-time polymerase chain reaction (PCR) analysis revealed that apelin mRNA was potentially increased in HUVECs after stimulation by Ang1 in a time-dependent manner (Figure 1B) and we confirmed that the expression of apelin protein was markedly upregulated on HUVECs stimulated by Ang1 (Figure 1C). Moreover, the dose-dependent effect of Ang1 on apelin production from HUVECs was confirmed by enzyme immunoassay, using the culture supernatant of HUVECs (Figure 1D).

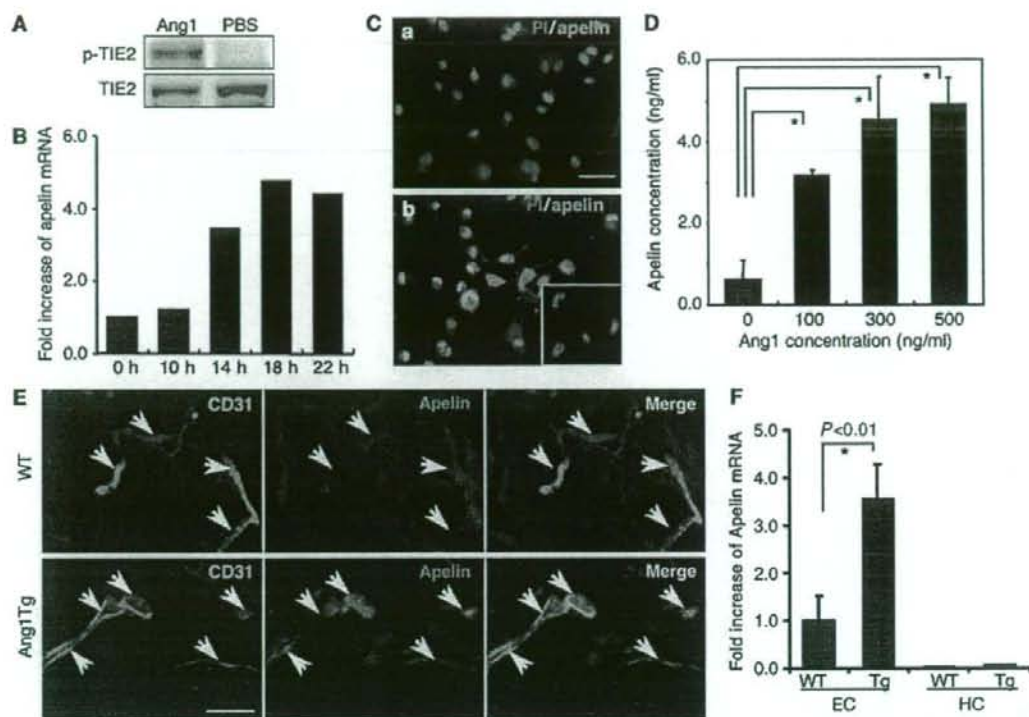
In order to confirm further the upregulation of apelin in ECs *in vivo*, we analysed apelin expression in the dermis of Ang1 transgenic (Ang1Tg) mice, in which Ang1 was overexpressed in the keratinocytes under the transcriptional control of K14 promoter (Suri et al, 1998). As shown in Figure 1E, apelin expression on ECs in the dermis at postnatal day 7 was increased in Ang1Tg mice compared to that in wild-type (WT) mice. We confirmed the overexpression of apelin mRNA in Ang1Tg mice by quantitative real-time RT-PCR using ECs fractionated from the dermis by a cell sorter (Figure 1F). As it is well known that Ang1 is involved in angiogenesis, next we observed the effect of other proangiogenic molecules on the expression of apelin on ECs. bFGF induced apelin expression on HUVECs; however, VEGF, PDGF-BB or EGF did not affect apelin expression (Supplementary Figure 1A and B).

### Apelin with VEGF induces proliferation of ECs

With respect to the enlargement of blood vessels, it seems likely that apelin causes the proliferation of ECs. To test this ability, firstly we studied the proliferation of ECs using HUVECs. As shown in Figure 2A, apelin was not effective in inducing proliferation of HUVECs. However, upon stimulation with VEGF, the expression level of APJ was upregulated in HUVECs, at both the mRNA and protein levels (Figure 2B–D and Supplementary Figure 2). Cell surface expression of APJ on HUVECs was confirmed by both cell surface biotinylation experiment (Figure 2D) and confocal laser scanning analysis (Supplementary Figure 2). Consistent with this result, VEGF-induced proliferation of HUVECs was enhanced by the addition of apelin in a dose-dependent manner (Figure 2A). Among proangiogenic cytokines, such as Ang1, EGF, bFGF, PDGF-BB and VEGF, only VEGF induced APJ expression on HUVECs (Figure 2B–D and Supplementary Figure 1C and D).

These results suggested that APJ is expressed and affects ECs during angiogenesis in which VEGF levels are upregulated. Next we observed the proliferation of primary ECs from the culture of the AGM region (aorta-gonad-mesonephros region) followed by P-Sp region at embryonic day (E) 10.5 to E11.5 in which angiogenesis was actively taking place. APJ was highly expressed in the AGM region compared to other tissues, such as E10.5 yolk sac, head region and heart, and adult heart (Figure 3A). Furthermore, APJ was expressed strongly in CD45<sup>+</sup>CD31<sup>+</sup> ECs from the AGM region compared to those from E10.5 heart and adult heart. Although ECs in E10.5 yolk sac and head region expressed APJ, the





**Figure 1** Ang1 stimulation induces apelin expression in ECs *in vitro* and *in vivo*. (A) Tie2 phosphorylation on HUVECs by Ang1 in our system. HUVECs, serum-starved for 2 h, were either treated or not treated with 500 ng/ml Ang1 for 10 min. Phosphorylation was studied by immunoblotting using phosphospecific antibody (p-Tie2). (B) Quantitative real-time RT-PCR analysis of apelin mRNA in HUVECs. Total RNA was extracted from HUVECs that had been stimulated with Ang1 for 0–22 h. Results are shown as fold increase in comparison with basal levels of HUVECs (0 h). (C) Immunocytochemical analysis of apelin expression in HUVECs, non-stimulated (a) and stimulated (b) by Ang1 (500 ng/ml) for 20 h. Cells were stained with anti-apelin mAb (green). The inset in (b) shows HUVECs stained with secondary antibody as a negative control. Nuclei were stained with propidium iodide (PI; red). Scale bar indicates 50  $\mu$ m. (D) Quantitative enzyme immunoassay of apelin production from HUVECs stimulated by various doses of Ang1. \* $P < 0.001$  ( $n = 3$ ). (E) Immunohistochemical detection of apelin peptide in the dermis. Sections of skin from WT and Ang1Tg neonatal mice were stained with anti-CD31 (green) and anti-apelin (red) mAb. Arrows indicate CD31<sup>+</sup> blood vessels. Scale bar indicates 30  $\mu$ m. (F) Quantitative real-time RT-PCR analysis of apelin mRNA in ECs and hematopoietic cells (HCs) of Ang1Tg mice. RNA was prepared from sorted CD31<sup>+</sup>CD45<sup>-</sup> ECs or CD31<sup>+</sup>CD45<sup>+</sup> HCs from the dermis of WT or Ang1Tg neonatal mouse skin. \* $P < 0.01$  ( $n = 3$ ).

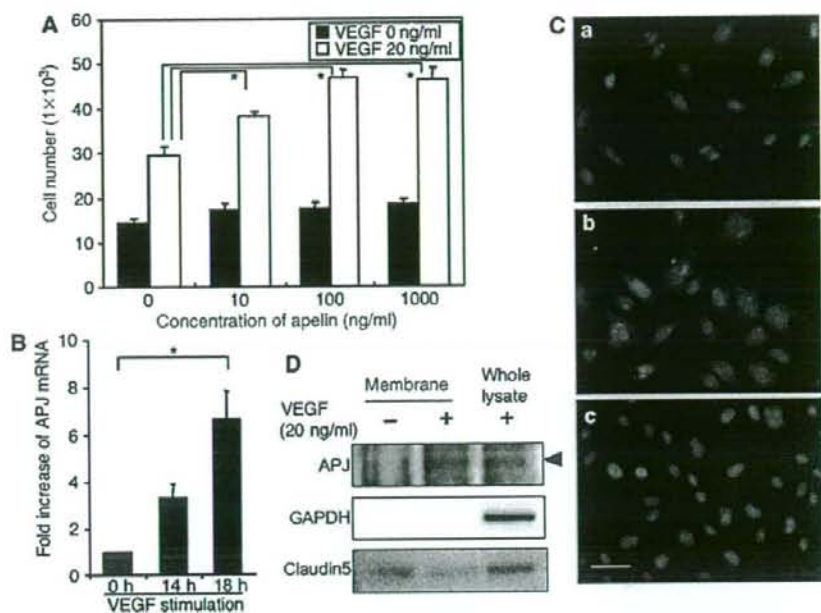
expression level was weaker than that in the AGM region. When cells from the AGM region were cultured on apelin-expressing OP9 cells (Figure 3B), proliferation of CD45<sup>-</sup>CD31<sup>+</sup> was increased compared with that on control OP9 cells and this proliferation by apelin was abrogated by the addition of anti-apelin blocking antibody (Figure 3C and D), suggesting that this action of proliferation by apelin is specific to the apelin/APJ system. Moreover, as APJ expression was weaker in ECs from adult heart (Figure 3A) or adult liver (data not shown) than in those from the AGM region, apelin did not induce proliferation of ECs in such adult tissues compared to those in the AGM region (Supplementary Figure 3).

#### Apelin induces the assembly of ECs

Although the proliferation of ECs is one of the factors involved in the construction of larger vessels, it is not the only one. The assembly or aggregation of ECs or endothelial progenitors, resulting in abundant cell-to-cell contact, is also necessary for the induction of a caliber change of blood vessels into larger ones. Therefore, next we tested the ability

of apelin to regulate cell-to-cell contact. When cells from the AGM region were put on OP9 feeder cells, the control OP9 cells induced a cord-like structure of ECs, in contrast to the OP9 cells expressing apelin, which induced a sheet-like layer of ECs in abundance (Figure 4A and C). When cell-to-cell contact was observed using anti-VE-cadherin or -claudin5 antibodies, we confirmed that the sheet-like structure was composed of ECs connected with the junctional proteins, VE-cadherin (Figure 4B) or claudin5 (Supplementary Figure 4). Moreover, the addition of anti-apelin monoclonal antibody (mAb) inhibited the sheet-like layer formation of ECs induced by apelin (Figure 4B and Supplementary Figure 4). This sheet-like structure was already observed in the early stage of this culture (Figure 4C), suggesting that cell aggregation was initiated when ECs were seeded on OP9 cells expressing apelin.

Among many adhesion molecules tested, we found that the expression of the junctional protein, claudin5, was significantly induced by apelin on HUVECs, while that of VE-cadherin was only slightly induced, at both the mRNA



**Figure 2** Apelin induces proliferation of HUVECs in a VEGF-dependent manner. (A) Proliferation of HUVECs by apelin. HUVECs ( $5 \times 10^3$ ) were cultured with apelin (0–1000 ng/ml) in the presence or absence of VEGF (20 ng/ml) for 48 h and the number of cells was counted.  $*P < 0.001$  ( $n = 3$ ). (B) Quantitative real-time RT-PCR analysis of the induction of APJ expression by VEGF in HUVECs. HUVECs were stimulated with VEGF (10 ng/ml) for 0–18 h. Results are shown as fold increase in expression in comparison with levels in stimulated HUVECs at 0 h.  $*P < 0.001$  ( $n = 3$ ). (C) APJ expression on HUVECs. HUVECs were cultured in the absence (a) or presence (b, c) of VEGF (20 ng/ml) for 24 h and stained with anti-APJ antibody (green) (a, b). (c) Cells stained with a secondary antibody alone as a negative control. Nuclei were stained with propidium iodide (red). Scale bar indicates 50  $\mu$ m. (D) Western blot analysis of cell surface APJ expression on HUVECs that had been stimulated with VEGF (20 ng/ml) for 24 h. The purity of cell membrane protein was confirmed by the lack of intracellular protein GAPDH expression. Claudin5 expression was analysed for the experimental control of another cell surface protein. Note that the expression of a 60 kDa APJ protein was increased in HUVECs in the presence of VEGF.

and protein levels (Supplementary Figure 5). *In vitro* sheet-like formation of ECs and upregulation of cell-to-cell adhesion molecules by apelin indicated the involvement of the apelin/APJ system in the assembly of ECs. Next, we performed the cord formation assay of HUVECs on Matrigel in the presence or absence of apelin (Figure 5A). After 20 h of culture of HUVECs on Matrigel, they formed a cord-like structure in the absence of apelin (Figure 5Aa). However, in the presence of apelin, the HUVECs formed an enlarged cord-like structure (Figure 5Abd). In this assay, by using confocal laser scanning analysis, we confirmed that enlargement of this cord-like structure was induced by cell aggregation, but not by cell spreading (Supplementary Figure 6). This enlargement was completely blocked by anti-VE-cadherin blocking antibody (Figure 5Ac), suggesting that the enlarged cord-like formation induced by apelin was initiated by cell-to-cell contact. Moreover, in the spheroid assay (Korff and Augustin, 1998), HUVECs formed large spheroids in the presence of apelin (Figure 5B) and this action was abrogated by anti-apelin antibody. Therefore, these results strongly support the notion that the apelin/APJ system induces EC-to-EC assembly.

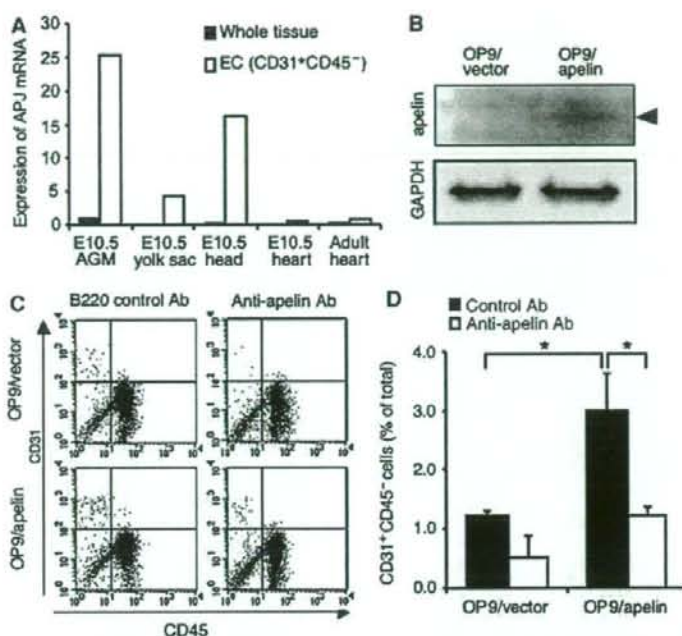
#### APJ expression in ECs during early embryogenesis

As APJ expression was observed in ECs during early embryogenesis (Figure 3), we studied which vessels expressed APJ in mouse embryos. At E8.5, cells committed into the

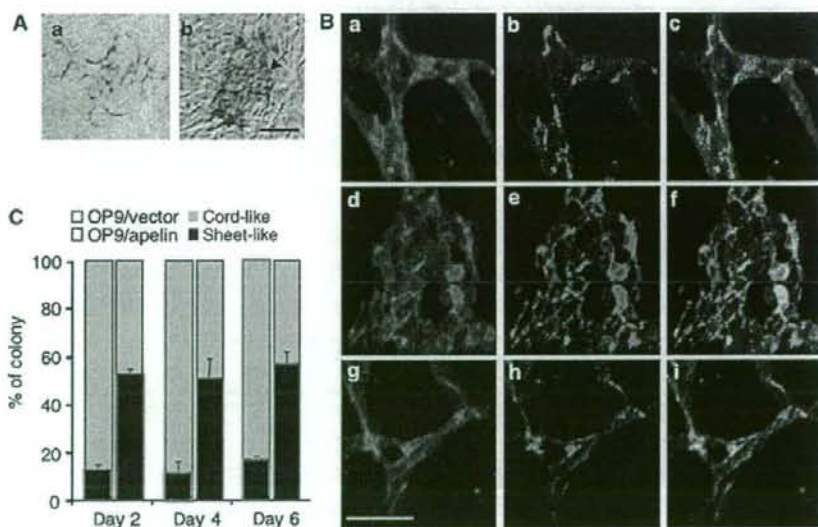
endothelial lineage formed the dorsal aorta (DA), from which ECs started to sprout. As observed in Figure 6A, APJ expression was observed in those ECs that had sprouted from the DA but not in those that were forming the DA. At E9.5, APJ expression was observed in the migrating end region of ISVs sprouting from the DA (Figure 6B). Besides the expression of APJ in the ISVs, weak APJ expression was observed in the somites. These expression profiles were not very different from the results obtained by *in situ* hybridization analysis, as reported previously (Devic et al, 1999). In another area of the E9.5 embryo, we found that the anterior cardinal vein (ACV) expressed APJ. However, when compared to CD31 expression in ECs, APJ-positive ECs were observed in the migrating end of the ACV, but not in the base (Supplementary Figure 7). These expression profiles suggest that the apelin/APJ system may be associated with angiogenesis but not with vasculogenesis. Moreover, when apelin expression was observed in the somite region at E9.5, we found that apelin protein was detected in ISV (Supplementary Figure 8), suggesting that the apelin/APJ system may be associated with the formation of ISV.

#### Narrow blood vessels are induced in apelin-mutant mice

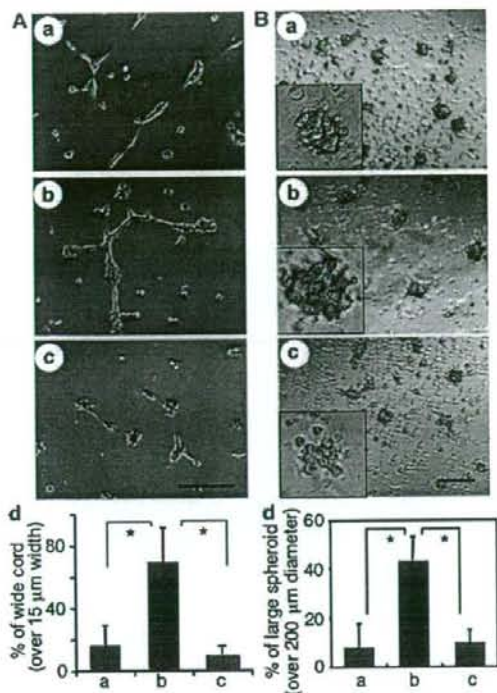
In order to understand the physiological function of apelin, we generated apelin-mutant mice (Supplementary Figure 9)



**Figure 3** ECs from the AGM region express APJ and are induced to proliferate by apelin. (A) Quantitative real-time RT-PCR analysis of APJ expression in various tissues, as indicated. RNA from whole tissue, or CD45<sup>-</sup>CD31<sup>+</sup> ECs sorted from various tissues, was evaluated for the expression of APJ. (B) Western blot analysis of apelin expression on OP9 cells induced by mock vector (OP9/vector) or apelin expression vector (OP9/apelin). An 8 kDa apelin protein was detected in OP9/apelin. GAPDH was used for the internal control. (C) Apelin-induced proliferation of ECs from E10.5 AGM region. Cells from the AGM region were cultured for 7 days, on an OP9/vector or OP9/apelin, in the presence or absence of anti-apelin or control B220 mAb. AGM cells harvested from cultures were stained with anti-CD31 and -CD45 mAbs and analysed by FACS. (D) Quantitative evaluation of the percentage of CD31<sup>+</sup>CD45<sup>-</sup> vascular ECs cultured as described in (C). \**P* < 0.001 (*n* = 5).



**Figure 4** Endothelial sheet formation by apelin. (A) Cells from E11.5 AGM region were cocultured with an OP9/vector (a) or OP9/apelin (b) for 2–6 days, and CD31 immunostaining was performed. The arrow indicates the aggregated EC sheet. Scale bar indicates 100  $\mu$ m. (B) Cells from E11.5 AGM region were cocultured for 6 days with an OP9/vector (a–c), OP9/apelin in the presence of B220 control antibody (d–f) or OP9/apelin in the presence of anti-apelin blocking antibody (g–i). ECs on OP9 cells were stained with anti-CD31 (a, d, g) and anti-VE-cadherin (b, e, h) antibodies. (c, f, i) Merged images of (a) and (b), (d) and (e), or (g) and (h), respectively. Scale bar indicates 50  $\mu$ m. (C) The proportion of sheet-like or cord-like structures of ECs on OP9/apelin or OP9/vector stromal cells (*n* = 3).



**Figure 5** Morphological change of HUVECs stimulated with apelin. (A) Cord formation analysis of HUVECs cultured on Matrigel. HUVECs were cultured in the presence of VEGF (20 ng/ml) for 20 h, harvested, transferred onto Matrigel and cultured in the absence (a) or presence of apelin (b, c) for 10 h. Anti-VE-cadherin antibody (c) or control anti-B220 mAb (b) was added. Scale bar indicates 200 μm. (d) Quantitative evaluation of the width of the cord-like structure observed in the various culture conditions (a: control; b: apelin + anti-B220 mAb; c: apelin + anti-VE-cadherin antibody) described above. The percentage of wide cord (width > 15 μm) among the total cord-like structure was calculated. \* $P < 0.01$  ( $n = 3$ ). (B) HUVEC spheroid assay. HUVECs stimulated with VEGF for 24 h were harvested and cultured on nonadhesive dishes in the absence (a) or presence of apelin (b, c) for 10 h. Anti-apelin antibody (c) or control anti-B220 mAb (b) was added. Scale bar indicates 500 μm. The inset in each panel shows higher magnified representative spheroid under each condition. (d) Quantitative evaluation of the size of spheroid observed in the various culture conditions (a: control; b: apelin; c: apelin + anti-apelin antibody) described above. The percentage of large spheroid (diameter > 200 μm) among the total spheroid was calculated. \* $P < 0.01$  ( $n = 3$ ).

and observed blood vessel formation. Mice heterozygous for apelin were intercrossed and their offspring were obtained. The frequency of mutant homozygotes obtained in heterozygote intercrosses was close to the expected 25%, suggesting that apelin-deficient mice are not embryonically lethal. Although a small population of apelin-mutant mice lacked eyes and lost a great deal of weight, for reasons that have not been determined as yet, generally, the mutant animals appeared healthy as adults. Crosses between homozygous apelin-mutant animals were also fertile, indicating that implantation and embryonic development can apparently occur normally even when apelin is absent from both the embryo and the mother.

As apelin deficiency in *Xenopus* leads to severe disorganized blood vessel formation (Cox *et al*, 2006; Inui *et al*, 2006) and might induce embryonic lethality, it is possible that other unknown molecules compensate and rescue apelin deficiency in mammals. Before a compensatory effect was investigated, we studied the ISV at E9.5 (Figure 7A–C and Supplementary Figure 10), because we found that APJ expression was clearly observed in vessels sprouted from the DA into the somite (Figure 6). The results showed that body size and number of somites were equivalent between WT and apelin-deficient embryos compared with WT embryos. The expression of APJ was observed in all ECs of ISV sprouted from the DA, ranging from the base region of the sprout to the migrating end at E8.5; the expression had disappeared in the base region near the DA at E9.5 (Figure 6). This expression pattern in the phenotype of apelin-deficient embryos suggests that APJ expression is regulated by VEGF or other unknown molecules in ECs at the migrating end, in order to regulate the caliber size of blood vessels.

General Ang1 administration has been reported to induce enhancement of blood vessel formation in the trachea of adult mice (Cho *et al*, 2005). This indicates that tracheal blood vessels are active in angiogenesis in adulthood and it is possible that apelin deficiency affects blood vessel formation in this region. As expected, the blood vessels observed in the trachea of apelin-deficient mice were narrower than those in WT mice and, in addition, the capillary density was lower (Figure 8). Moreover, the blood vessels observed in the dermis (Figure 9 and Supplementary Figure 11) and heart (data not shown) of apelin-deficient mice were narrower than those in WT mice.

Through the use of the *in situ* hybridization method of APJ expression, it has been reported that APJ is not expressed on larger vessels such as DA, except for the posterior cardinal vein during early embryogenesis at around E9.5 (Devic *et al*, 1999). This result is consistent with our immunohistochemical analysis. The caliber sizes of the aorta and vena cava, and their major branches such as brachiocephalic, subclavian and common iliac arteries and veins, were not affected by the lack of apelin (data not shown). Therefore, this suggests that apelin may not be involved in the regulation of caliber size of larger vessels. Moreover, although apelin deficiency in *Xenopus* led to severely disorganized blood vessels in the vitelline (Cox *et al*, 2006; Inui *et al*, 2006), it did not affect the remodelling of blood vessels in the yolk sac (Supplementary Figure 12).

In order to analyse precisely the function of the exogenous apelin in the *in vitro* culture system, it was necessary to exclude from the analysis any confounding effects of the contaminating apelin from the culture serum, as well as the endogenous apelin produced from cultured cells. In order to achieve this, we tried to culture the aorta ring from apelin-deficient mice under quite low serum-containing conditions (Figure 7D and E). Although VEGF induced sprouting of ECs from the aorta, apelin on its own did not. However, the caliber size of VEGF-induced sprouts was enlarged upon the addition of apelin. Most of the sprouts induced by VEGF plus apelin contained large luminal cavities (data not shown). Therefore, we confirmed that apelin regulates caliber change in angiogenesis and this effect is induced in the