ポソーム/ gp46　siRNA 複合体における細胞選択的 siRNA デリバリーの機能のための評価系として選択し、以下の実験を行った。

まず、様々な比率(5%, 10%, 15%, 20%)で M6P-Chol を含有する M6P 修飾カチオン性リポソームを調製し、gp46 siRNA と複合体を形成させた。リポソームの脂質組成は、DOTAP　/DOPE/Chol/M6P-Chol (40:20:x:y)で、x:y (x+y=20) において Chol と M6P-Chol を置換して実験に用いた（Fig.19A)。そこで、NRK 細胞における gp46 のノックダウン効果を定量的 PCR により評価を行った。その結果、M6P-Chol 含量が 10%において遺伝子ノックダウン効果が認められ、また、15%, 20%において最も強い値を示した。また、M6P 修飾カチオン性リポソーム/scrambled siRNA 複合体では、遺伝子ノックダウン効果は認められなかったため、この遺伝子ノックダウン効果は、siRNA の配列特異的なものであった。また、リポソームの脂質組成を DOTAP/Chol/M6P-Chol (60:x:y) （x と Y は Chol or M6P-Chol, x+y=20）として、DOPE を含有していないものを調製したが、上記の結果とほぼ同じで、M6P-Chol 含量依存的な遺伝子ノックダウン効果が認められた。これは、M6P-Chol をある程度含有させることで（Fig.19B）糖修飾リポソームとしての機能が脂質組成に依存せず発揮できることを示唆している。

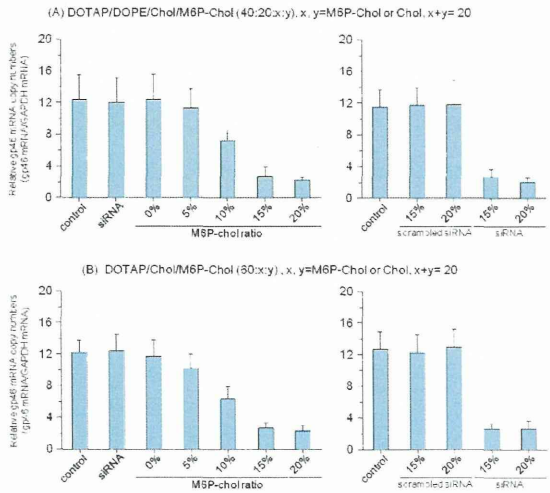

Fig. 19 NRK 細胞における M6P(0, 5, 10, 15, 20)修飾カチオン性リポソーム/gp46 siRNA 複合体投与後の gp46 mRNA ノックダウン効果

2012 1-a　M6P 修飾リポソームの肝臓内分布の評価

肝星（伊東）細胞は、コラゲナーゼ灌流法において、肝臓非実質細胞区分に回収されると考えられる。そこで、各種リポソームの肝硬変マウスにおける肝臓内分布の評価をおこなった。未修飾リポソーム(Bare-liposomes) は、肝臓実質細胞(PCs)と非実質細胞(NPCs)にほぼ同程度分布したのに対し、M6P 修飾リポソームでは、肝非実質細胞選択的なリポソームの分布が認められ、また、肝非実質細胞への移行割合は、M6P 修飾率の増大に従い増加することが示された (**Fig. 20**)。

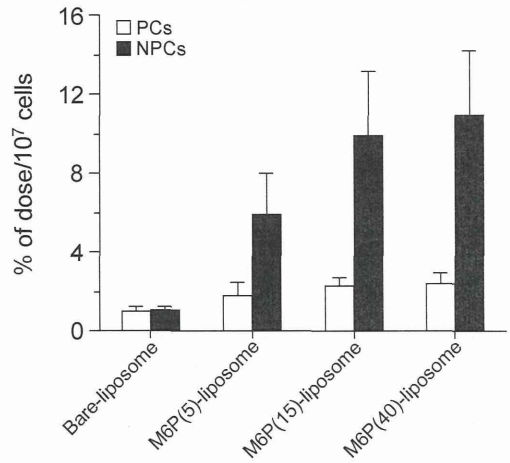

Fig. 20 M6P 修飾リポソームの肝硬変病態時の肝臓内移行特性

2012 1-b　M6P 酸修飾コレステロール誘導体含有リポソーム/gp46 siRNA 複合体による四塩化炭素誘導肝硬変モデルマウスにおける gp46 発現抑制効果、並びに肝硬変治療効果の評価：

gp46はコラーゲン産生に関与するシャペロンタンパク(ヒトにおいてはHSP47)であり、肝硬変病態時において発現誘導されることが報告されており（Niitsu et. al., Nature Biotech.. 26, 431-442, 2008）、当該遺伝子の抑制によりコラーゲン産生が抑制され、肝硬変進行の抑制並びに治療が達成さ

れると考えられる。そこで、gp46に対するsiRNAを設計し、肝星（伊東）細胞へ送達後のgp46遺伝子ノックダウン効果と肝硬変に関連する各種マーカー遺伝子の発現変動の評価を行った。

糖修飾リポソーム/siRNA複合体の物理化学的性質は、細胞選択的ターゲティングを実現する上で重要な因子である。そこで、M6P修飾リポソーム/gp46 siRNA複合体での細胞選択的ターゲティングを行う為、細胞選択的核酸ターゲティングに適している範囲の電荷比である1.0:3.1(-:+)で調製した(S. Kawakami et al., Pharm Res, 17 (3), 306-313, 2000; S. Kawakami et al., Pharmazie, 59 (5), 405-408, 2004, Y. Kuramoto et al., J Gene Med. 10 (4), 392-399, 2008 他)。

実験の結果、四塩化炭素（CCl_4）誘導肝硬変モデルマウス(control)においてgp46の発現誘導が認められた。一方、M6P修飾コレステロール誘導体含有リポソーム/gp46 siRNA静脈内投与により、mRNA並びにタンパク質レベルで抑制された(**Fig. 21**)。また、このgp46発現抑制効果はM6P修飾コレステロール誘導体を方法に記載しているように、5, 10, 15, 20%と増加させ、M6P修飾コレステロール誘導体の含有量の影響を検討したところ、M6P含量に依存してgp46遺伝子ノックダウン効果は増大し、M6P修飾コレステロール誘導体含有量15-20%（M6P (15)-liposome, M6P (20)-liposome）で最大となった。一方、gp46 siRNA scrambled siRNAでは、gp46の発現抑制効果は認められず、この遺伝子ノックダウン効果は、siRNAの配列に依存したものであることが示された。

gp46遺伝子ノックダウンの結果を基に、M6Pの修飾割合を15%に固定し(M6P (15)-liposome)、肝硬変モデルマウスに対し、M6Pリポソーム/gp46 siRNA複合体を頻回静脈内投与後の、肝臓内gp46、α-SMA、procollagen-1並びにTIMP-1発現量を評価した結果、M6P修飾リポソーム/gp46 siRNA静脈内投与に伴うgp46の発現抑制に伴い、いずれの因子も顕著抑制された（Fig.22）。一方、gp46 siRNA scrambled siRNAでは、gp46の発現抑制効果は認められ、これらの遺伝子ノックダウン効果は、siRNAの配列に依存したものであることが示唆された。

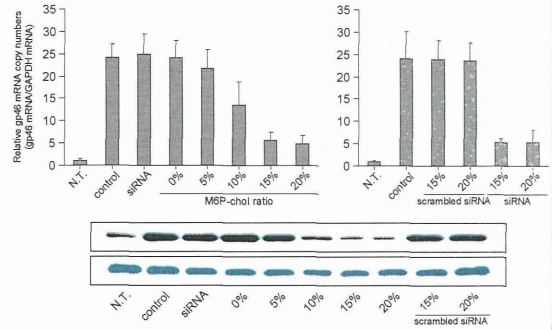

Fig. 21 M6P修飾リポソーム/gp46 siRNA複合体による肝臓内gp46発現抑制効果

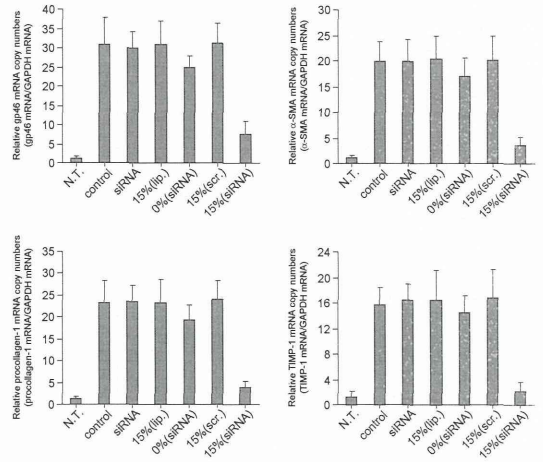

Fig. 22 M6P修飾リポソーム/gp46 siRNA複合体による各種肝硬変マーカー抑制効果

2012 2-a　生体適合性材料を用いたナノバブルリポポリプレックス調製法の開発：

2010年度に肝類洞血管内皮細胞を標的として核酸の高効率なin vivo送達を実現できる超音波応答性マンノース修飾バブルリポプレックス調製法を開発に成功した（K. Un, S. Kawakami et al., Hepatology, 56(1), 259-269, 2012)。しかしながら、本製剤はカチオン性を示すことから赤血球と静電的な相互作用により毒性を示すことが考えられ、物理化学的性質に関して改善する余地が残されている。

そこで本研究成果の臨床応用に向けて本年度は、生体適合性材料を用いたアニオン

性のナノバブルリポポリプレックス調製法の開発を行った。

ナノバブルリポポリプレックスの最適な組成をプロタミン硫酸、DSPGを用いたアニオン性リポソームを用いて調製することで、安定な超音波造影ガス封入が可能であることを見出した。また本製剤は、赤血球との相互作用も無く、安全な核酸デリバリーが行えることが示唆された。今後は、本研究成果の臨床応用に向け、アニオン性バブル製剤の調製に成功した。

今後、このアニオン性のナノバブルリポポリプレックスをプラットホーム製剤として臨床応用に向けたDDSの開発を進める予定である。

E．結論

平成22年度は、超音波(US)応答性マンノース修飾バブルリポソームを用いたsiRNAの肝臓類洞血管内皮細胞への高効率な細胞選択的送達法の構築に成功した。また、ICAM-1 siRNAを送達することで、LPS誘発性肝炎、CCl_4、DMN誘導急性炎症、並びにIR性肝傷害モデルマウスにおいて有意な抗炎症効果を発揮することが示された。

平成23年度は、肝星（伊東）細胞を標的としたsiRNAのDDSを構築するため、Man6P修飾リポソームを開発し、Man6Pレセプター介在性エンドサイトーシスを利用したMan6P発現B16BL6細胞への細胞取り込みを確認した。また、得られた情報を基にMan6P修飾脂質カチオン性脂質と組み合わせて、Man6P修飾カチオン性リポソームを調製し、静電的相互作用を介してsiRNA (gp46)との複合体の形成を確認した。また、Man6Pレセプターを発現するNRK細胞を用いて、gp46のノックダウン効果を評価したところ、Man6P脂質含量が15, 20(mol)%において有意なノックダウン効果を得ることができた。一方、scramble配列のsiRNAではノックダウン効果は認められず、このノックダウン効果はoff target効果によるものではなく、配列特異的であることが示唆された。

最終年度となる平成24年度は、23年度に開発したM6P修飾リポソームが肝硬変モデルマウスにおいて肝星（伊東）細胞へ細胞選択的に移行し、siRNA複合体を用いることで肝硬変治療へ応用できる可能性が示された。さらに、平成22年度の超音波応答性バブルリポソーム製剤に関する研究成果の臨床応用への展開を目的に、アニオン性バブルリポソーム製剤の新規調製法に成功した。

本製剤は、生体内に分布するM6P受容体発現細胞に対して効率的に低分子化合物やタンパク質、核酸化合物を送達することができると考えられる。また、これらの方法論は超音波造影ガス封入バブルリポソーム製剤化により、外部刺激の利用によるターゲティングの精度を大きく向上させることができる。今後、得られた知見を基に、M6P受容体を標的とした細胞選択的ターゲティングシステムに基づく新たな肝疾患治療法を開発していく予定である。

F．健康危険情報　なし

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2. 実用新案登録 なし

3. その他 なし

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発表者氏名	論文タイトル名	発表誌名	巻号	ページ	出版年
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川上 茂† († corresponding authors)	外部刺激を利用したin vivo核酸デリバリー法の開発と評価	薬剤学	73 (3)	153-160	2013

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Development of an ultrasound-responsive and mannose-modified gene carrier for DNA vaccine therapy

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ABSTRACT

Development of a gene delivery system to transfer the gene of interest selectively and efficiently into targeted cells is essential for achievement of sufficient therapeutic effects by gene therapy. Here, we succeeded in developing the gene transfection method using ultrasound (US)-responsive and mannose-modified gene carriers, named Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes. Compared with the conventional lipofection method using mannose-modified carriers, this transfection method using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure enabled approximately 500~800-fold higher gene expressions in the antigen presenting cells (APCs) selectively in vivo. This enhanced gene expression was contributed by the improvement of delivering efficiency of nucleic acids to the targeted organs, and by the increase of introducing efficiency of nucleic acids into the cytoplasm followed by US exposure. Moreover, high antitumor effects were demonstrated by applying this method to DNA vaccine therapy using ovalbumin (OVA)-expressing plasmid DNA (pDNA). This US-responsive and cell-specific gene delivery system can be widely applied to medical treatments such as vaccine therapy and anti-inflammation therapy, which its targeted cells are APCs, and our findings may help in establishing innovative methods for in-vivo gene delivery to overcome the poor introducing efficiency of carriers into cytoplasm which the major obstacle associated with gene delivery by non-viral carriers.

1. Introduction

In the post-genome era, the analysis of disease-related genes has rapidly advanced, and the medical application of the information obtained from gene analysis is being put into practice. In particular, the development of effective method to transfer the gene of interest selectively and efficiently into the targeted cells is essential for the gene therapy of refractory diseases, in-vivo functional analysis of genes and establishment of animal models for diseases. However, a suitable carrier for selective and efficient gene transfer to the targeted cells is still being developed. Although various types of viral and non-viral carriers have been developed for gene transfer, they are limited to use by viral-associated pathogenesis and low transfection efficiency, respectively. For the cell-selective gene transfer, many investigators have focused on ligand-modified non-viral carriers such as liposomes [1–4], emulsions [5], micelles [6] and polymers [7], because of their high productivity and low toxicity. On the other hand, since the gene transfection efficiency by non-viral carriers is poor, it is difficult to obtain the effective therapeutic effects by gene therapy using non-viral carriers. Moreover, in the gene transfection using conventional ligand-modified non-viral carriers, since the carriers need to be taken up into cells via endocytosis following by interaction with targeted molecules on the cell membrane, the number of candidates which are suitable as ligands for targeted gene delivery is limited.

Some researchers have attempted to develop the transfection method using external stimulation, such as electrical energy [8], physical pressure [9] and water pressure [10], to enhance the gene transfection efficiency. Among these, gene transfection method using US exposure and microbubbles enclosing US imaging gas, called "sonoporation method", have been focused as effective drug/gene delivery systems [11–14]. In the sonoporation method, microbubbles are degraded by US exposure with optimized intensity, then cavitation energy is generated by the destruction of

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microbubbles. Consequently, the transient pores are created on the cell membrane, and large amount of nucleic acids are directly introduced into the cytoplasm through the created pores [13,15,16]. However, the in-vivo gene transfection efficiency by conventional sonoporation method administering the nucleic acids and microbubbles separately is low because of the rapid degradation of nucleic acids in the body [17], the large particle size of conventional microbubbles [15] and the different pharmacokinetic profiles of the nucleic acids and microbubbles. Moreover, to transfer the gene into the targeted cells selectively by sonoporation method in vivo, the control of in-vivo distribution of nucleic acids and microbubbles, which are separately administered, is necessary.

In our previous report [16], we have demonstrated the effective transfection by combination-use method using our mannosylated lipoplexes composed of Man-C4-chol: DOPE [1], and conventional Bubble liposomes (BLs) [12] with US exposure. However, this combination-use method is complicated because of the necessity for multiple injections of mannosylated lipoplexes and BLs; therefore, it is difficult to apply for medical treatments using multiple transfections. In addition, the difference of in-vivo distribution characteristics between mannosylated lipoplexes and BLs might be decreased its transfection efficacy. Therefore, it is essential to develop the US-responsive and cell-selective gene carriers constructed with ligand-modified gene carriers and microbubbles.

Taking these into considerations, we examined the gene transfection system for effective DNA vaccine therapy using physical stimulation and ligand-modification. First, we developed US-responsive and mannose-modified gene carriers, Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes (Fig. 1), by enclosing perfluoropropane gas into mannose-conjugated PEG_{2000}-DSPE-modified cationic liposomes (DSTAP: DSPC: Man-PEG_{2000}-DSPE (Fig. 1))/pDNA complexes. Then, we evaluated the enhanced and cell-selective gene expression in the APCs by intravenous administration of Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and external US exposure in mice. Finally, we examined high anti-tumor effects by applying this method to DNA vaccine therapy using OVA-expressing pDNA.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Mice and cell lines

Female ICR mice (4~5 weeks old) and C57BL/6 mice (6~8 weeks old) were purchased from the Shizuoka Agricultural Cooperative Association for Laboratory Animals (Shizuoka, Japan). All animal experiments were carried out in accordance with the Principles of Laboratory Animal Care as adopted and promulgated by the US National Institutes of Health and the guideline for animal experiments of Kyoto University. CD8-OVA1.3 cells, T cell hybridomas with specificity for OVA 257~264-kb, were kindly provided by Dr. C.V. Harding (Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH, USA) [18]. EL4 cells (C57BL/6 T-lymphomas) and E.G7-OVA cells (the OVA-transfected clones of EL4) were purchased from American Type Culture Collection (Manassas, VA). CD8-OVA1.3 cells and EL4 cells were maintained in Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium and E.G7-OVA cells were maintained in RPMI-1640. Both mediums were supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum (FBS), 0.05 mM 2-mercaptoethanol, 100 IU/mL penicillin, 100 μg/mL streptomycin and 2 mM L-glutamine at 37 °C in 5% CO_2.

2.2. pDNA

pCMV-Luc and pCMV-OVA were constructed in our previous reports [19,20]. Briefly, pCMV-Luc was constructed by subcloning the HindIII/Xba I firefly luciferase cDNA fragment from pGL3-control vector (Promega, Madison, WI, USA) into the polylinker of pcDNA3 vector (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA, USA). pCMV-OVA was constructed by subcloning the EcoRI chicken egg albumin (ovalbumin) cDNA fragment from pAc-neo-OVA, which was kindly provided by Dr. M.J. Bevan (University of Washington, Seattle, WA, USA) into the polylinker of pVAX I. pDNA were amplified in the E. coli strain DH5α, isolated and purified using a QIAGEN Endofree Plasmid Giga Kit (QIAGEN GmbH, Hilden, Germany).

2.3. Synthesis of Man-PEG_{2000}-DSPE and preparation of Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes

Man-PEG_{2000}-DSPE was synthesized in a one-step reaction by covalent binding with NH_2-PEG_{2000}-DSPE (NOF Co., Tokyo, Japan) and 2-imino-2-methoxyethyl-1-thiomannoside (IME-thiomannoside). IME-thiomannoside was prepared according to the method of Lee [21]. Next, NH_2-PEG_{2000}-DSPE and IME-thiomannoside were reacted, vacuum dried and dialyzed to produce Man-PEG_{2000}-DSPE, and then, the resultant dialysates were lyophilized. To produce the liposomes for bubble lipoplexes, DSTAP (Avanti Polar Lipids Inc., Alabaster, AL, USA), DSPC (Sigma Chemicals Inc., St. Louis, MO, USA) and Man-PEG_{2000}-DSPE or NH_2-PEG_{2000}-DSPE were mixed in chloroform at a molar ratio of 7:2:1. For construction of BLs, DSPC and methoxy-PEG_{2000}-DSPE (NOF Co., Tokyo, Japan) were mixed in chloroform at a molar ratio of 94:6. The mixture for the construction of liposomes was dried by evaporation, vacuum desiccated and the resultant lipid film was resuspended in sterile 5% dextrose. After hydration for 30 min at 65 °C, the dispersion was sonicated for 10 min in a bath sonicator and for 3 min in a tip sonicator to produce liposomes. Then, liposomes were sterilized by passage through a 0.45 μm filter (Nihon-Millipore, Tokyo, Japan). The lipoplexes were prepared by gently mixing with equal volumes of pDNA and liposome solution at a charge ratio of 1.0:2.3 (−:+). For preparation of BLs and bubble lipoplexes, the enclosure of US imaging gas into liposomes and lipoplexes was performed according to our previous report [16]. Briefly, prepared liposomes and lipoplexes were added to 5 mL sterilized vials, filled with perfluoropropane gas (Takachiho Chemical Industries Co., Ltd., Tokyo, Japan), capped and then pressured with 7.5 mL of perfluoropropane gas. To enclose US imaging gas into the liposomes and lipoplexes, the vial was sonicated using a bath-type sonicator (AS ONE Co., Osaka, Japan) for 5 min. The particle sizes and zeta

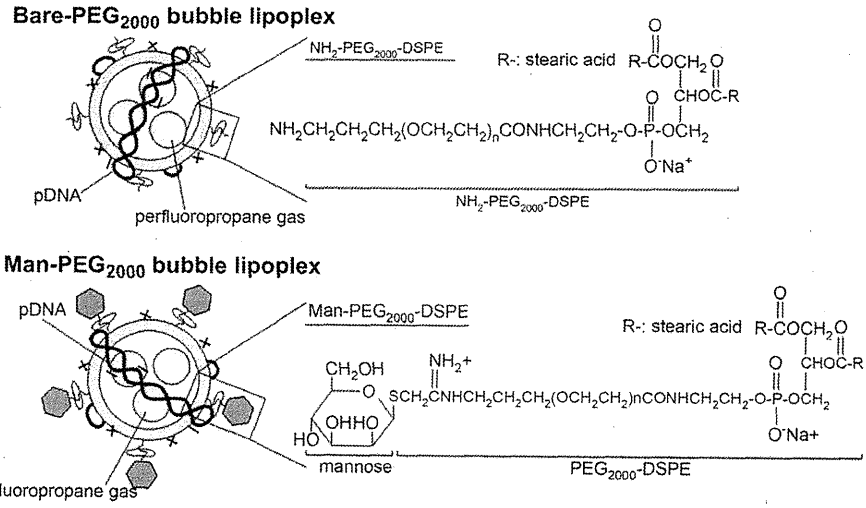

Fig. 1. Structure of Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplex containing NH_2-PEG_{2000}-DSPE and Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplex containing Man-PEG_{2000}-DSPE used in this study.

potentials of liposomes and lipoplexes were determined by a Zetasizer Nano ZS instrument (Malvern Instrument, Ltd., Worcestershire, UK).

2.4. Harvesting of mouse peritoneal macrophages

Mouse peritoneal macrophages were harvested and cultured according to our previous report [16]. Briefly, the macrophages were harvested from mice at 4 days after intraperitoneal injection of 2.9% thioglycolate medium (1 mL). The collected macrophages were washed and suspended in RPMI-1640 medium supplemented with 10% FBS, 100 IU/mL penicillin, 100 μg/mL streptomycin and 2 mM L-glutamine, and plated on culture plates. After incubation for 2 h at 37 °C in 5% CO_2, non-adherent cells were washed off with culture medium, and the macrophages were incubated for another 72 h.

2.5. In-vitro gene transfection

After the macrophages were collected and incubated for 72 h, the culture medium was replaced with Opti-MEM I containing bubble lipoplexes (5 μg pDNA). The macrophages were exposed to US (frequency, 2.062 MHz; duty, 50%; burst rate, 10 Hz; intensity 4.0 W/cm^2) for 20 s using a 6 mm diameter probe placed in the well at 5 min after addition of bubble lipoplexes. In the transfection using naked pDNA and BLs, at 5 min after addition of naked pDNA (5 μg) and BLs (60 μg total lipids) were added, and the macrophages were immediately exposed to US. US was generated using a Sonopore-4000 sonicator (NEPA GENE, Chiba, Japan). Then, 1 h later, the incubation medium was replaced with RPMI-1640 and incubated for an additional 23 h. Lipofectamine® 2000 (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA, USA) was used according to the recommended procedures, and the exposure time of Lipofectamine® 2000 was 1 h, which is the same exposure time in other experiments using lipoplexes. Following incubation for 24 h, the cells were scraped from the plates and suspended in lysis buffer (0.05% Triton X-100, 2 mM EDTA, 0.1 M Tris, pH 7.8). Then, the cell suspension was shaken, and centrifuged at 10,000g, 4 °C for 10 min. The supernatant was mixed with luciferase assay buffer (Picagene, Toyo Ink Co., Ltd., Tokyo, Japan) and the luciferase activity was measured in a luminometer (Lumat LB 9507, EG&G Berthold, Bad Wildbad, Germany). The luciferase activity was normalized with respect to the protein content of cells. The protein concentration was determined with a Protein Quantification Kit (Dojindo Molecular Technologies, Inc., Tokyo, Japan). The level of luciferase mRNA expression was determined by RT-PCR.

2.6. Inhibitory experiments of endocytosis in vitro

Endocytosis was inhibited by chlorpromazine (50 μM) as clathrin-mediated endocytosis inhibitor [22], genistein (200 μM) as caveolae-mediated endocytosis inhibitor [23] and 5-(*N*-ethyl-*N*-isopropyl)amiloride (EIPA, 50 μM) as macropinocytosis inhibitor [24]. Each endocytosis inhibitor was added to the macrophages at 30 min before the addition of lipoplexes.

2.7. Fluorescence photographs of pDNA in mouse peritoneal macrophages

To visualize the cellular association of pDNA by fluorescence microscopy (Biozero BZ-8000, KEYENCE, Osaka, Japan), lipoplexes were constructed with TM-rhodamine-labeled pDNA prepared by a Label IT Nucleic Acid Labeling Kit (Mirus Co., Madison, WI, USA).

2.8. Evaluation of cytotoxic effects by MTT assay

The cytotoxicity was evaluated by MTT assay. Briefly, 3-(4,5-dimethyl-2-thiazol)-2,5-diphenyltetrazolium bromide (MTT, Nacalai Tesque, Inc., Kyoto, Japan) solution was added to each well and incubated for 4 h. The resultant formazan crystals were dissolved in 0.04 M HCl-isopropanol and sonicated for 10 min in a bath sonicator. Absorbance values at 550 nm (test wavelength) and 655 nm (reference wavelength) were measured and the results were expressed as viability (%).

2.9. In-vivo gene transfection

Four-week-old ICR female mice were intravenously injected with 400 μL bubble lipoplexes via the tail vein using a 26-gauge syringe needle at a dose of 50 μg pDNA. At 5 min after the injection of bubble lipoplexes, US (frequency, 1.045 MHz; duty, 50%; burst rate, 10 Hz; intensity 1.0 W/cm^2; time, 2 min) was exposed transdermally to the abdominal area using a Sonopore-4000 sonicator with a probe of diameter 20 mm. In the transfection using naked pDNA and BLs, at 4 min after intravenous injection of BLs (500 μg total lipid), naked pDNA (50 μg) was intravenously injected and US was exposed at 1 min after naked pDNA injection. At predetermined times after injection, mice were sacrificed and their organs collected for each experiment. The organs were washed twice with cold saline and homogenized with lysis buffer (0.05% Triton X-100, 2 mM EDTA, 0.1 M Tris, pH 7.8). The lysis buffer was added in a weight ratio of 5 mL/g for the liver or 4 mL/g for the other organs. After three cycles of freezing and thawing, the homogenates were centrifuged at 10,000g, 4 °C for 10 min. The luciferase activity of resultant supernatant was determined by luciferase assay and the level of luciferase mRNA expression was determined by RT-PCR.

2.10. In-vivo imaging

At 6 h after transfection, anesthetized mice were administrated D-luciferin (10 mg/300 μL PBS) (Promega Co., Madison, WI, USA). At 10 min after injection of D-luciferin, organs were excised and luminescent images were taken by NightOWL LB 981 NC instrument (Berthold Technologies, GmbH, Bad Wildbad, Germany). The pseudocolor luminescent images were generated, overlaid with organ images and the luminescence representation was obtained using WinLight software (Berthold Technologies GmbH, Bad Wildbad, Germany).

2.11. Separation of mouse hepatic PCs and NPCs

The separation of mouse hepatic PCs and NPCs was performed according to our previous reports [19]. Briefly, at 6 h after in-vivo transfection using bubble lipoplexes and US exposure, each mouse was anesthetized with pentobarbital sodium (40~60 mg/kg) and the liver was perfused with perfusion buffer (Ca^{2+}, Mg^{2+}-free HEPES solution, pH 7.2) for 10 min. Then, the liver was perfused with collagenase buffer (HEPES solution, pH 7.5 containing 5 mM $CaCl_2$ and 0.05% (w/v) collagenase (type I)) for 5 min. Immediately after the start of perfusion, the vena cava and aorta were cut and the perfusion rate was maintained at 5 mL/min. At the end of perfusion, the liver was excised. The cells were dispersed in ice-cold Hank's-HEPES buffer by gentle stirring and then filtered through cotton mesh sieves, followed by centrifugation at 50g for 1 min. The pellets containing the hepatic PCs were washed five times with Hank's-HEPES buffer by centrifuging at 50g for 1 min. The supernatant containing the hepatic NPCs was similarly centrifuged 5 times and the resulting supernatant was centrifuged twice at 300g for 10 min. Then, the PCs and NPCs were resuspended separately in ice-cold Hank's-HEPES buffer.

2.12. Isolation of mouse splenic CD11c$^+$ cells

The isolation of mouse splenic CD11c$^+$ cells was performed according to our previous reports [25]. Briefly, At 6 h after in-vivo transfection using bubble lipoplexes and US exposure, the splenic cells were suspended in ice-cold RPMI-1640 medium on ice. Red blood cells were removed by incubation with hemolytic reagent (0.15 M NH_4Cl, 10 mM $KHCO_3$, 0.1 mM EDTA) for 3 min at room temperature. The CD11c$^+$ cells were isolated by magnetic cell sorting with anti-mouse CD11c (N418) microbeads and auto MACS (Miltenyi Biotec, Inc., Auburn, CA, USA) following the manufacturer's instructions.

2.13. Quantitative RT-PCR

Total RNA was isolated from separated cells using a GenElute Mammalian Total RNA Miniprep Kit (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA). Reverse transcription of mRNA was carried out using a PrimeScript® RT reagent Kit (Takara Bio Inc., Shiga, Japan). Real-time PCR was performed using SYBR® Premix Ex Taq (Takara Bio Inc., Shiga, Japan) and Lightcycler Quick System 350S (Roche Diagnostics, Indianapolis, IN, USA) with primers. The primers for luciferase and gapdh cDNA were constructed as follows: primer for luciferase cDNA, 5′-TTCTTCGCCAAAAGCACTC-3′ (forward) and 5′-CCCTCGGGTGTAATCAGAAT-3′ (reverse); primer for gapdh, 5′-TCTCCTGCGACTTCAACA-3′ (forward) and 5′-GCTGTAGCCGTATTCATTGT-3′ (reverse) (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA). The mRNA copy numbers were calculated for each sample from the standard curve using the instrument software ('Arithmetic Fit Point analysis' for the Lightcycler). The results were expressed as the ratio of luciferase mRNA copy numbers to the housekeeping gene (gapdh) mRNA copy numbers.

2.14. Tissue distribution of radio-labeled pDNA

Lipoplexes constructed with ^{32}P-labeled pDNA ([α-^{32}P]-dCTP, PerkinElmer, Inc., MA, USA) [26] were injected intravenously into mice. At predetermined times after injection, blood was collected from the vena cava under pentobarbital anesthesia. Then, mice were sacrificed and the organs were collected, rinsed with saline and weighed. The tissues were dissolved in Soluene-350 and the resultant lysates were decolorized with isopropanol and 30% H_2O_2, and then neutralized with 5 N HCl. The radioactivity of ^{32}P-labeled pDNA was measured in scintillation counter (LSA-500, Beckman Coulter, Inc., CA, USA) after addition of Clear-Sol I solution.

2.15. Measurement of transaminase activity in the serum

At predetermined times after transfection, the serum was collected from the anesthetized mice. Alanine aminotransferase (ALT) and aspartate aminotransferase (AST) activities in the serum were determined using Transaminase CII-Test Wako kit (Wako Pure Chemical Industries Ltd., Tokyo, Japan) according to manufacturer's instructions.

2.16. Antigen presenting assay

The evaluation of antigen presentation on MHC class I molecules in the splenic dendritic cells was performed by in-vitro antigen presentation assay using CD8-OVA1.3 cells, which are T cell hybridomas with specificity for OVA. The $CD11c^+$ cells isolated from immunized mice were plated in a 96-well plate at various cells numbers and co-cultured with CD8-OVA1.3 cells (1×10^5) for 20 h. The antigen presentation on MHC class I molecules was evaluated by IL-2 secreted from activated CD8-OVA1.3 cells measured by a commercial IL-2 ELISA Kit (Bay bioscience Co., Ltd., Hyogo, Japan).

2.17. Evaluation of OVA-specific cytokine secretion from the splenic cells

At 2 weeks after the last immunization, the splenic cells collected from immunized mice were plated in 96-well plates and incubated for predetermined times at 37 °C in the presence or absence of OVA (100 μg). IFN-γ and IL-4 in the culture medium were measured by the commercial ELISA Kit, respectively (Bay bioscience Co., Ltd., Hyogo, Japan).

2.18. OVA-specific CTL assay

At 2 weeks after the last immunization, the splenic cells harvested from immunized mice were plated in 6-well plates and co-incubated with mitomycin C-treated E.G7-OVA cells or EL4 cells for 4 days. After co-incubation, non-adherent cells were collected, washed and plated in 96-well plates with target cells (E.G7-OVA cells or EL4 cells) at various effector/target (E/T) ratios. The target cells were labeled with ^{51}Cr by incubating with $Na_2^{51}CrO_4$ (PerkinElmer, Inc., MA, USA) in culture medium for 1 h at 37 °C. At 4 h after incubation, the plates were centrifuged and the resultant supernatant of each well was collected and the radioactivity of released ^{51}Cr was measured in a gamma counter. The percentage of ^{51}Cr release was calculated as follows: specific (lysis (%) = [(experimental ^{51}Cr release − spontaneous ^{51}Cr release)/(maximum ^{51}Cr release − spontaneous ^{51}Cr release)] × 100). The percentage of OVA-specific ^{51}Cr release was calculated as (% of ^{51}Cr release from E.G7-OVA cells) − (% of ^{51}Cr release from EL4 cells).

2.19. Therapeutic effects

C57BL/6 mice were immunized three times biweekly. At 2 weeks after last immunization, E.G7-OVA cells and EL4 cells were transplanted subcutaneously into the back of mice. The tumor growth and survival of mice were monitored up to 80 days after transplantation of E.G7-OVA cells and EL4 cells.

2.20. Statistics

Results were presented as the mean ± SD of more than three experiments. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test the statistical significance of differences among groups. Two-group comparisons were performed by the Student's *t*-test. Multiple comparisons between control groups and other groups were performed by the Dunnett's test and multiple comparisons between all groups were performed by the Tukey-Kramer test.

3. Results

3.1. In-vitro gene transfection properties by Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes

Polyethylene-glycol (PEG) modification of particles is necessary to enclose US imaging gas stably and to prepare the

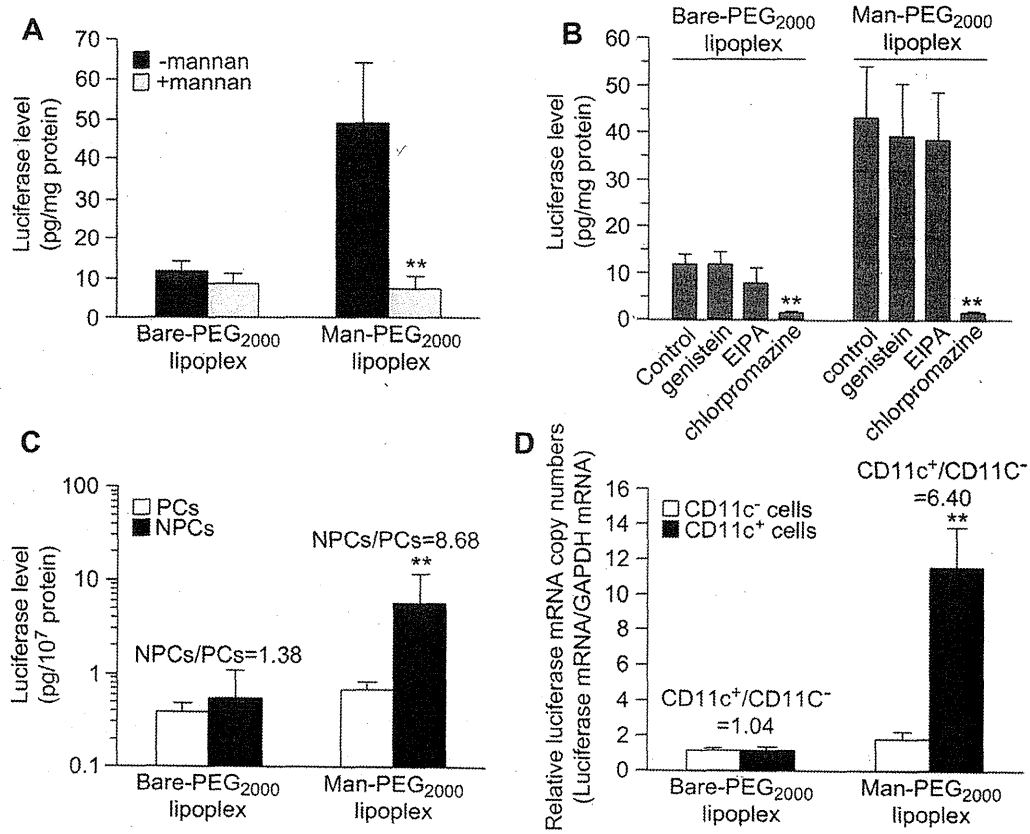

Fig. 2. The mannose receptor-expressing cell-selective gene expression by Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes containing Man-PEG_{2000} lipids in vitro and vivo. (A) The level of luciferase expression obtained by Bare-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes and Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes (5 μg pDNA) in the absence or presence of 1 mg/mL mannan in mouse cultured macrophages at 24 h after transfection. $^{**}p < 0.01$, compared with the corresponding group of mannan. (B) Inhibition of luciferase expression obtained by Bare-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes and Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes (5 μg pDNA) in addition of various endocytosis inhibitors in mouse cultured macrophages at 24 h after transfection. $^{**}p < 0.01$, compared with the corresponding group of control. (C) The level of luciferase expression in mouse hepatic PCs and NPCs after intravenous administration of Bare-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes and Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes (50 μg pDNA) in mice at 6 h after transfection. $^{**}p < 0.01$, compared with the corresponding group of PCs. (D) The level of luciferase mRNA expression in mouse splenic $CD11c^+$ cells and $CD11c^-$ cells after intravenous administration of Bare-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes and Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes (50 μg pDNA) in mice at 6 h after transfection. $^{**}p < 0.01$, compared with the corresponding group of $CD11c^-$ cells. Each value represents the mean + SD ($n = 3–4$).

small-sized microbubbles for in-vivo administration [12]. Firstly, we developed mannose-conjugated PEG_{2000}-modified lipids (Man-PEG_{2000}-DSPE (Fig. 1)) to prepare the APC-targeted small-sized microbubbles and determined the in-vitro and in-vivo transfection characteristics of mannose-conjugated PEG_{2000}-modified lipoplexes (Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes) containing Man-PEG_{2000} lipids. The particle sizes and zeta potentials of Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes and non-modified PEG_{2000}-lipoplexes (Bare-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes) were approximately 150 nm and +40 mV, respectively (Supplementary Table 1). In mouse cultured macrophages expressing mannose receptors abundantly, the level of gene expression obtained by Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes were significantly higher than those by Bare-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes (Fig. 2A and B). Then, the level of gene expression obtained by Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes was suppressed to same extent as that by Bare-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes in the presence of an excess of mannan (Fig. 2A). Moreover, this level of gene expression obtained by Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes was also suppressed to same extent as that by Bare-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes in the presence of chlorpromazine (Fig. 2B), which is the inhibitor of clathrin-mediated endocytosis [22]. These results agreed with the results of cellular association of pDNA (Supplementary Fig. 1), and suggest that Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes are taken up into the cells via clathrin-mediated endocytosis following the interaction with mannose receptors.

3.2. In-vivo gene transfection properties by Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes

Since the degradation of pDNA by nuclease in the blood is one of the critical factors in the in-vivo gene transfection by intravenously administration of lipoplexes, we investigated the stability of Bare-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes and Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes against nucleases. Following electrophoresis of naked pDNA and lipoplexes after incubation with DNase I, although naked pDNA underwent the degradation by DNase I, lipoplexes did not undergo the degradation and retained the complex forms (Supplementary Fig. 2). Then, we investigated the gene expression characteristics of Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes in the liver and spleen, which are the targeted organs of mannose-modified carriers [27]. In this study, liver was separated in the parenchymal cells (PCs) and non-parenchymal cells (NPCs), and spleen was separated in the dendritic cells ($CD11c^+$ cells) and other cells ($CD11c^-$ cells). As shown in Fig. 2C and D, following intravenous administration of Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes, selective gene expression was observed in the hepatic NPCs and the splenic $CD11c^+$ cells, which are the APCs expressing mannose receptors abundantly [28–30].

3.3. In-vitro gene transfection efficiency by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure

Although Man-lipoplexes showed the APC-selective gene transfection properties in vivo, this level of gene expression was

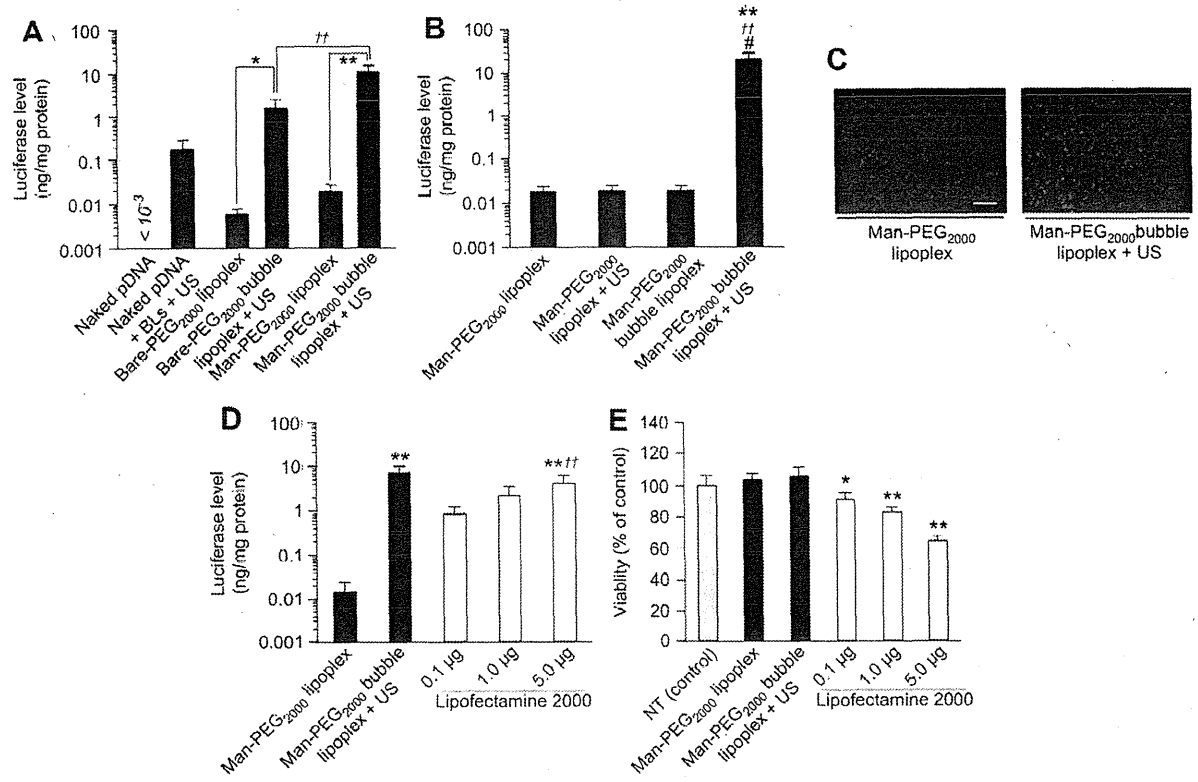

Fig. 3. Enhancement of gene expression by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure in vitro. (A) The level of luciferase expression obtained by naked pDNA, naked pDNA + BLs with US exposure, Bare-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes, Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure, Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes and Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure (5 μg pDNA) at 24 h after transfection. Significant difference; $^*p < 0.05$; **, $^{\dagger\dagger}p < 0.01$. (B) The level of luciferase expression obtained by Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes and Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with or without US exposure (5 μg pDNA) at 24 h after transfection. $^{**}p < 0.01$, compared with Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplex, $^{\dagger\dagger}p < 0.01$, compared with Man-$PEG_{2000}$ lipoplex + US, $^{\#}p < 0.01$, compared with Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplex. (C) Representative fluorescent images of cellular association of pDNA obtained by Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes and Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure (5 μg pDNA) at 2 h after treatment. Lipoplexes were constructed with TM-rhodamine-labeled pDNA. TM-rhodamine-labeled pDNA (red), nuclei counterstained by DAPI (blue). Scale bars, 100 μm. (D) Comparison of the level of luciferase expression obtained by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes (5 μg pDNA) and US exposure with that by Lipofectamine 2000. $^{**}p < 0.01$, compared with Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes, $^{\dagger\dagger}p < 0.01$, compared with Lipofectamine 2000 (0.1 μg). (E) Comparison of cell viability by transfection using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes (5 μg pDNA) and US exposure with that by Lipofectamine 2000. N.T., non-treatment. $^*p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$, compared with N.T. Each value represents the mean + SD ($n = 4$).

low compared with our previous reports [1,19,25]. To enhance the level of gene expression by sonoporation method, we developed Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes (Fig. 1) by enclosing US imaging gas (perfluoropropane gas) into Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes. The lipid composition of lipoplexes is important for the stable enclosure of US imaging gas. Following optimization of lipid composition, lipoplexes constructed with the saturated lipids only, which have a high melting temperature (T_m), were enclosed US imaging gas stably (Supplementary Table 2). Following enclosure of US imaging gas in lipoplexes, lipoplexes became cloudy and their particle sizes were increased (from 150 nm to 550 nm, approximately) (Supplementary Fig. 3A and Table 3). Then, since the zeta potentials of bubble lipoplexes were lower than that of bubble liposomes and same as that of lipoplexes (Supplementary Tables 1 and 3), it is considered that pDNA is attached on the surface of bubble liposomes. Moreover, the stability against nucleases observed in Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes (Supplementary Fig. 2) was maintained after enclosure of US imaging gas into lipoplexes (Supplementary Fig. 3B).

The level of gene expression obtained by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure was 500-fold higher than that by Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes in mouse cultured macrophages expressing mannose receptors abundantly, and also higher than that by non-modified bubble lipoplexes (Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes, Fig. 1) and US exposure or conventional sonoporation method using naked pDNA and BLs (Fig. 3A). This enhanced gene expression was observed when bubble lipoplexes and US exposure were used for in-vitro gene transfer (Fig. 3B). The cellular association of pDNA obtained by transfection using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure was also 10-fold higher than that by Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes, and also higher than that by Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure or conventional sonoporation method using naked pDNA and BLs (Fig. 3C and Supplementary Fig. 4A). Moreover, this level of gene expression obtained by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure was comparable to that by Lipofectamine® 2000, which is widely used as a gene transfection reagent (Fig. 3D). On the other hand, the cytotoxicity by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure was lower than that by Lipofectamine® 2000 (Fig. 3E).

3.4. Intracellular uptake properties of pDNA by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure

The gene expression obtained by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure was significantly suppressed in the presence of an excess of mannan (Fig. 4A). Therefore, the interaction with mannose receptors on the cell membrane is involved in the gene transfection by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure, similar to the gene transfection by Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes. On the other hand, unlike Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes (Fig. 2B), the gene expression obtained by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure was not suppressed in the presence of chlorpromazine (Fig. 4B), which is a clathrin-mediated endocytosis inhibitor [22]. These results agreed with the results of cellular association of pDNA (Supplementary Fig. 4B), and indicated that pDNA delivered by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes was directly introduced into the cytoplasm without mediating endocytosis by the gene transfection using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure.

3.5. In-vivo gene transfection efficiency by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure

As shown in Fig. 5A and B, the level of gene expression obtained by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure was

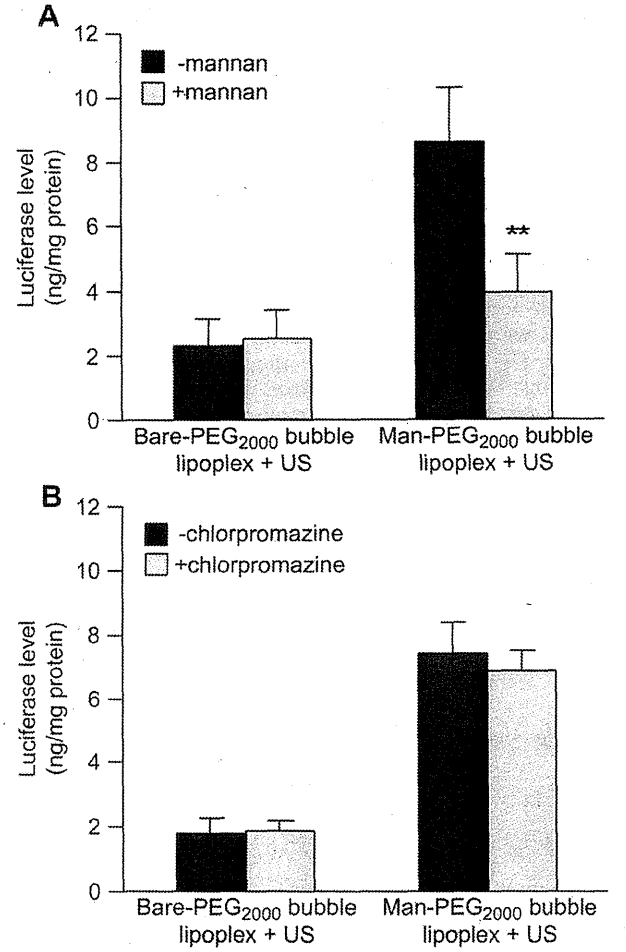

Fig. 4. Effects of mannan and chlorpromazine on gene expression by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure in vitro. (A) The level of luciferase expression obtained by Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure and Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure (5 μg pDNA) in the absence or presence of 1 mg/mL mannan at 24 h after transfection. $^{**}p < 0.01$, compared with the corresponding group of mannan. (B) The level of luciferase expression by Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure and Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure (5 μg pDNA) in the absence or presence of 50 μM chlorpromazine at 24 h after transfection. Each value represents the mean + SD ($n = 4$).

500~800-fold higher than that by Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes, and also higher than that by Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure or the conventional sonoporation method using naked pDNA and BLs in the liver and spleen, which are the targeted organs of mannose-modified carriers [27]. This enhanced gene expression in the liver and spleen was observed when bubble lipoplexes and US exposure were used for in-vivo gene transfer (Fig. 5C and D). Moreover, this gene expression obtained by Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure or Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure in the liver and spleen remained higher than that by Bare-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes or Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes for at least 48 h, respectively (Fig. 5E and F). In addition, the gene expression was also enhanced in the US-exposed organ specifically following gene transfection by direct US exposure to the targeted organ after intravenous administration of Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes (Supplementary Fig. 5). On the other hand, the increase of gene expression by bubble lipoplexes and US exposure was not observed in other organ such as lung, kidney and heart (Fig. 5G and H).

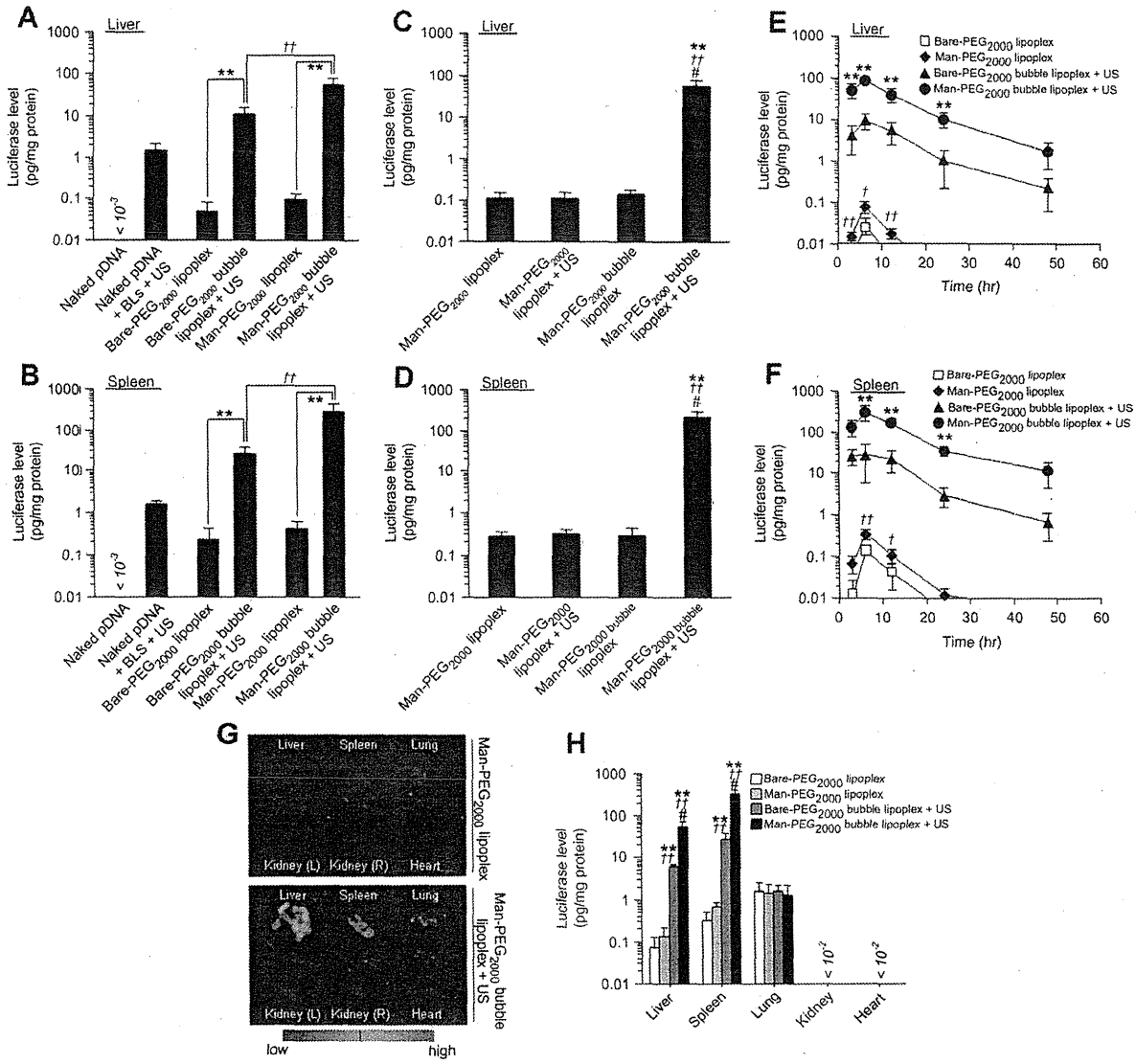

Fig. 5. Enhancement of mannose receptor-expressing cells-selective gene expression by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure in vivo. (A, B) The level of luciferase expression obtained by naked pDNA, naked pDNA + BLs with US exposure, Bare-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes, Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure, Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes and Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure (50 μg pDNA) in the liver (A) and spleen (B) at 6 h after transfection. Significant difference; **, $^{\dagger\dagger}p < 0.01$. (C, D) The level of luciferase expression obtained by Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes and Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with or without US exposure (50 μg pDNA) in the liver (C) and spleen (D) at 6 h after transfection. $^{**}p < 0.01$, compared with Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplex, $^{\dagger\dagger}p < 0.01$, compared with Man-$PEG_{2000}$ lipoplex + US, $^{\#\#}p < 0.01$, compared with Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplex. (E, F) Time-course of luciferase expression in the liver (E) and spleen (F) after transfection by Bare-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes, Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes, Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure and Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure (50 μg pDNA). Each value represents the mean ± SD ($n = 4$). $^{**}p < 0.01$, compared with Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplex + US, $^{\dagger}p < 0.05$; $^{\dagger\dagger}p < 0.01$, compared with Bare-$PEG_{2000}$ lipoplex. (G) In-vivo imaging photographs of luciferase expression in the isolated organs at 6 h after transfection by Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes and Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure (50 μg pDNA). (H) The level of luciferase expression in each organ at 6 h after transfection by Bare-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes, Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes, Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure and Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure (50 μg pDNA). $^{**}p < 0.01$, compared with the corresponding group of Bare-PEG_{2000} lipoplex, $^{\dagger\dagger}p < 0.01$, compared with the corresponding group of Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplex, $^{\#\#}p < 0.01$, compared with the corresponding group of Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplex + US. Each value represents the mean + SD ($n = 4$).

3.6. *Targeted cell-selective gene transfection properties by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure in vivo*

We investigated the mannose receptor-expressing cell selectivity of gene expression by transfection using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure. In the liver, the level of gene expression in the hepatic NPCs expressing mannose receptors was significantly higher than that in the hepatic PCs following gene transfection by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure (Fig. 6A). This difference in gene expression between the NPCs and PCs obtained by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure was similar to that by Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes, although the level of gene expression in the NPCs and PCs was markedly higher. On the other hand, selective gene expression in the NPCs was not observed by Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure.

In the spleen, the level of mRNA expression in the $CD11c^+$ cells, which are the splenic dendritic cells expressing mannose receptors, was significantly higher than that in the $CD11c^-$ cells following transfection by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure (Fig. 6B). On the other hand, selective gene expression in the $CD11c^+$ cells was not observed by Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure.

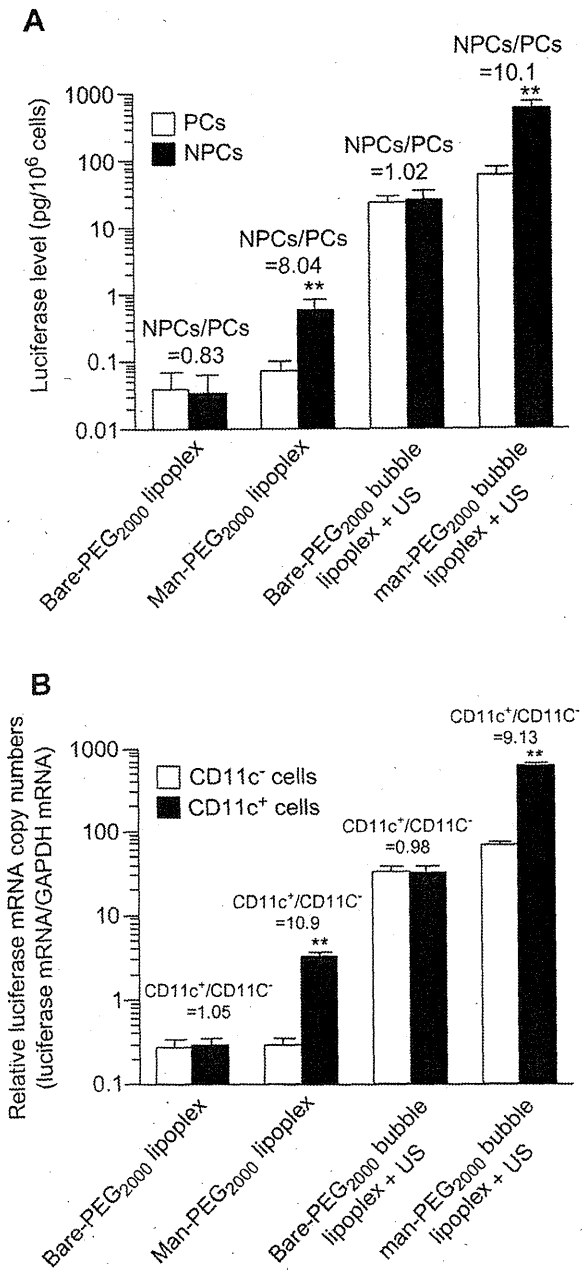

Fig. 6. Hepatic and splenic cellular localization of luciferase expression by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure. (A) Hepatic cellular localization of luciferase expression at 6 h after transfection by Bare-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes, Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes, Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure and Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure (50 μg pDNA). $^{**}p < 0.01$, compared with the corresponding group of PCs. (B) Splenic cellular localization of luciferase mRNA expression at 6 h after transfection by Bare-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes, Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes, Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure and Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure (50 μg pDNA). $^{**}p < 0.01$, compared with the corresponding group of $CD11c^-$ cells. Each value represents the mean + SD ($n = 4$).

3.7. In-vivo distribution properties of pDNA by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure

Next, to elucidate the mechanism of enhanced in-vivo gene expression using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure, we investigated the effect on the tissue distribution of pDNA followed by gene transfection. In this study, Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes constructed with radio-labeled pDNA were intravenously administrated, and then mice were subjected to external US exposure. As shown in Fig. 7, in the case of both bubble lipoplexes, the retention time of pDNA in the blood was slightly reduced and the distribution of pDNA delivered by bubble lipoplexes was significantly increased by US exposure in the liver and spleen (Fig. 7). Moreover, the amount of pDNA distributed in the liver and spleen by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure (Fig. 7A) was higher than that by Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure (Fig. 7B). On the other hand, no increase of pDNA distribution followed by US exposure was observed in the lung.

3.8. The liver toxicity by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure

We examined ALT and AST activities in the serum to investigate the liver toxicity by gene transfection using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure. ALT and AST activities in the serum were increased by gene transfection using Bare-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes and Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes. On the other hands, the increase of ALT and AST activities was not observed by gene transfection using Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure (Fig. 8).

3.9. Antigen presentation on MHC class I molecules in immunized splenic dendritic cells

To investigate the DNA vaccine effects by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure, we prepared Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes constructed with pDNA expressing OVA as a model antigen. Firstly, to investigate the antigen (OVA) presentation on MHC class I molecules in the splenic dendritic cells ($CD11c^+$ cells) by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes constructed with pCMV-OVA and US exposure, the splenic $CD11c^+$ cells isolated from once-immunized mice were co-incubated with CD8-OVA1.3 cells, which are T cell hybridomas with specificity for OVA. Following measurement of IL-2 to evaluate the activation of T cells, the IL-2 secretion from activated CD8-OVA1.3 cells co-incubated with the $CD11c^+$ cells isolated from mice immunized by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure was the highest of all (Fig. 9A). This result indicates that DNA vaccination by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes constructed with pCMV-OVA and US exposure can induce significantly high $CD8^+$-T lymphocyte activation.

3.10. Antigen-specific cytokine secretion from immunized splenic cells

We evaluated the OVA-specific cytokine secretion from the splenic cells immunized by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes constructed with pCMV-OVA and US exposure. Following optimization of immunization schedule, it was shown that a 2 week interval was necessary to achieve the same level of gene expression as former transfection in the spleen (Supplementary Fig. 6) and at least three times immunization was necessary to effective anti-tumor effects by DNA vaccination using this method (Supplementary Fig. 7). Therefore, the immunization to mice was performed according to the protocol shown in Fig. 9B. As shown in Fig. 9C, in the presence of OVA, the highest amount of IFN-γ (Th1 cytokine) was secreted from splenic cells harvested from mice immunized with Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure. On the other hand, no secretion of IFN-γ was observed in any of the groups in the absence of OVA. Moreover, the secretion of IL-4 (Th2 cytokine) was not increased in any of the groups both in the presence or absence of OVA (Fig. 9C). These results suggest that immunization by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes constructed with

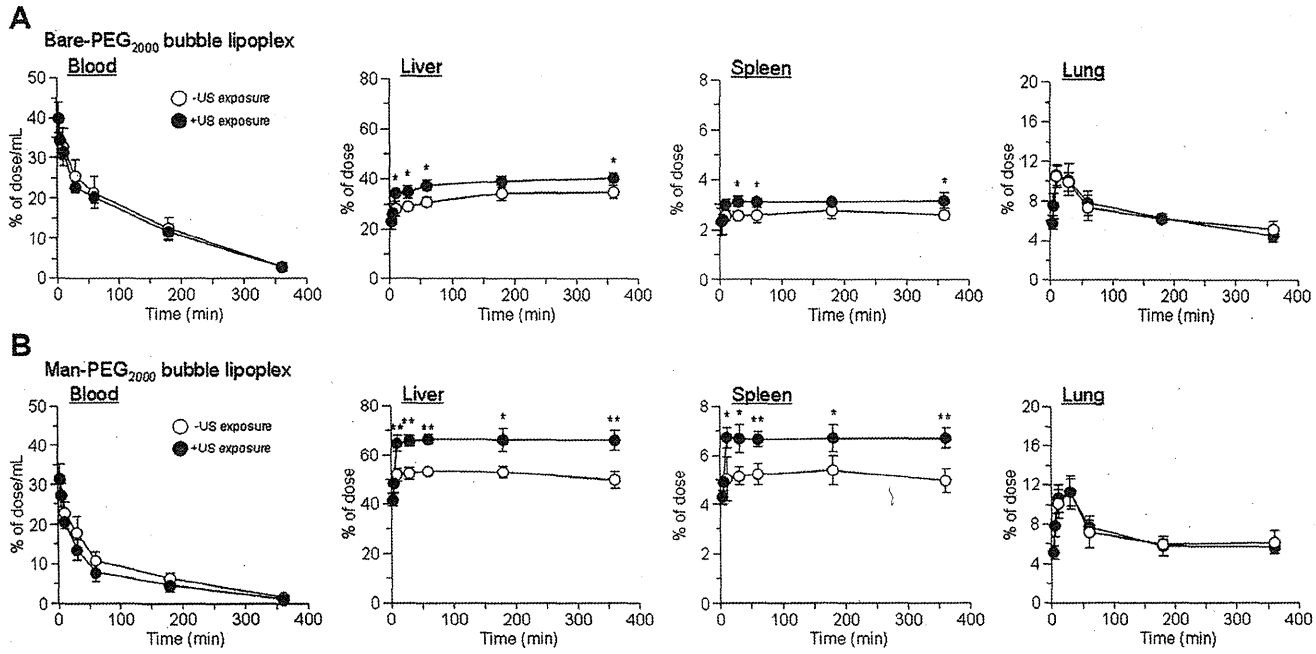

Fig. 7. Tissue distribution of pDNA by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure. Tissue distribution after intravenous administration of (A) Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and (B) Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes (50 μg pDNA) with or without US exposure in mice. US was exposed at 5 min after intravenous administration of bubble lipoplexes. Each value represents the mean ± SD ($n = 3$). $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$, compared with the corresponding group of US exposure.

pCMV-OVA and US exposure significantly enhances the differentiation of helper T cells to Th1 cells, which are pivotal cells for the activation of cytotoxic T lymphocytes (CTL) with high anti-tumor activity, by OVA stimulation.

3.11. Antigen-expressing cell-specific CTL activity in immunized splenic cells

Next, we assessed the CTL activity in the splenic cells harvested from mice immunized by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure. Following experiments according to the protocol shown in Fig. 9B, the splenic cells immunized by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes constructed with pCMV-OVA and US exposure showed the highest CTL activity in all groups against E.G7-OVA cells which are the lymphoma cells expressing OVA (Fig. 9D). In contrast, the CTL activity was not observed in EL4 cells which are the lymphoma cells not expressing OVA in all groups (Fig. 9D). These results indicate that the splenic cells immunized by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes constructed with pCMV-OVA and US exposure induce the OVA-expressing cell-specific CTL activity.

3.12. Therapeutic effects against antigen-expressing tumor by DNA vaccination

Finally, we investigated the anti-tumor effects by DNA vaccination using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure. Following experiments according to the protocol shown in Fig. 10A, significantly high anti-tumor effects against E.G7-OVA cells were observed in mice immunized by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes constructed with pCMV-OVA and US exposure (Fig. 10B). However, in mice transplanted EL4 cells, no anti-tumor effects were observed in any of the groups (Fig. 10C). Moreover, we investigated the maintenance of DNA vaccine effects following administration of Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure. According to the protocol shown in Fig. 11A, E.G7-OVA cells were re-transplanted into mice which first-transplanted tumors were completely rejected by DNA vaccination using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure. As results, high anti-tumor effects were observed in mice following re-transplantation of E.G7-OVA cells (Fig. 11B); therefore it was demonstrated that DNA vaccine effects obtained by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes constructed with pCMV-OVA and US exposure were maintained for at least 80 days.

4. Discussion

To obtain high therapeutic effects by DNA vaccination using tumor-specific antigen-coding gene, it is essential to transfer the gene selectively and efficiently into the APCs, such as macrophages and dendritic cells [31,32]. However, it is difficult to transfer the gene into the APCs selectively because of the number of APCs is limited in the organ [33]. Since the APCs are expressed a large number of mannose receptors [28,29], we and other groups have developed mannose-modified non-viral carriers for gene delivery to the APCs [7,25,34]. On the other hand, our group also reported that the gene transfection efficiency in the APCs was lower than that in other cells [35]; therefore it is difficult to achieve high gene transfection efficiency to induce high therapeutic effects by DNA vaccination in vivo. In the present study, to establish an APC-selective and efficient gene delivery system, we developed US-responsive and mannose-modified carriers, named Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes, which had selectivity to the APCs and responded to US exposure. The gene delivery system using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure enabled to achieve markedly high gene expression in macrophages and dendritic cells selectively in vivo, in spite of the handy system used intravenous administration and external US exposure. Moreover, we succeeded in obtaining high anti-tumor effects by applying this method to DNA vaccine therapy using OVA-expressing pDNA.

Firstly, since PEG_{2000}-modification is necessary to enclose US imaging gas stably [12], we prepared Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes

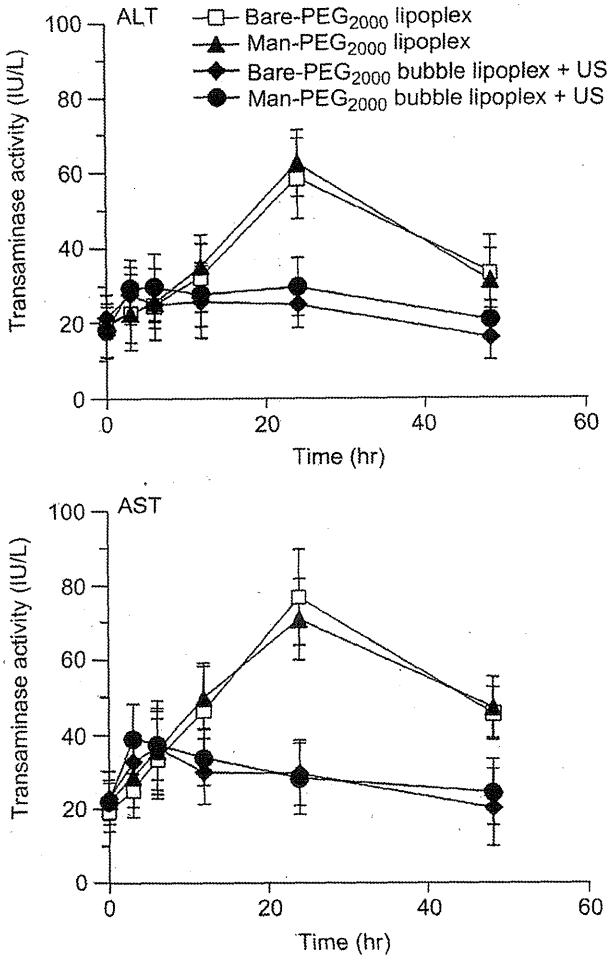

Fig. 8. Liver toxicity by gene transfection using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure. Time-course of serum transaminase activities after transfection by Bare-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes, Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes, Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure and Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure (50 μg pDNA). Alanine aminotransferase (ALT) and aspartate aminotransferase (AST) in the serum were measured at predetermined times after transfection. Each value represents the mean ± SD ($n = 4$).

containing Man-PEG_{2000} lipids. This Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes exhibited mannose receptor-expressing cell-selective gene expression both in vitro and vivo (Fig. 2). On the other hand, the level of gene expression by Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes was lower than that by mannosylated lipoplexes without PEG-modification, as reported previously by our group [1,25]. However, this result was considered to be contributed by the reduced interaction with the cell membrane and the reduction of endosomal escape efficiency by PEG_{2000}-modification [36,37]. In the sonoporation method, Tachibana et al. demonstrated that a transient pore is created on the cell membrane followed by the degradation of microbubbles [38]. Then, nucleic acids, such as pDNA, siRNA and oligonucleotides, are introduced into the cell through the generated pore [13,15,16]. Consequently, since the nucleic acids are directly introduced into cytoplasm in the sonoporation method [13,14], it is considered that the low level of transfection efficiency obtained by Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes can be overcome by applying sonoporation method. As shown in Figs. 3 and 4, a large amount of pDNA is directly introduced into the cytoplasm and high level of gene expression is observed by gene transfection using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure. Therefore, by delivering pDNA to the APCs using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes, it is suggested that high level of gene expression in the APCs can easily achieve by following US exposure in this gene transfection method.

In this study, the level of gene expression obtained by transfection using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure was higher than that obtained by Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes or Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure in the liver and spleen (Fig. 5). Moreover, gene expression by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure was observed selectively in the hepatic NPCs and the splenic dendritic cells (Fig. 6), known as mannose receptor-expressing cells [28–30]. Although this selectivity of gene expression was the same as that obtained by mannosylated lipoplexes reported previously by our group [1,25], this level of gene expression was markedly higher. It is considered that this enhanced and cell-selective gene expression is contributed by the increase of interaction with mannose receptor-expressing cells by mannose modification (Supplementary Fig. 1), by the improvement of delivering efficiency of nucleic acids to the targeted organs (Fig. 7) and by the direct introduction of nucleic acids into the cytoplasm of targeted cells followed by US exposure to Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes (Figs. 3C and 4B and Supplementary Fig. 4). Moreover, the enhanced gene expression was not observed in the lung, kidney and spleen (Fig. 5G and H). It is guessed that the reason why the enhanced gene expression was not observed in the lung is because US is not spread to the thoracic cavity by the diaphragm, and the reason why the enhanced gene expression was not observed in the kidney and heart was because the distributed amounts of bubble lipoplexes were markedly small. In addition, since the particle size of bubble lipoplexes (approximately 500 nm) is suitable for delivery to the liver and spleen, compared with stabilized liposomes (approximately 100 nm) [39], the gene transfection system using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure is a suitable method for the selective delivery of nucleic acids into the mannose receptor-expressing cells in the liver and spleen.

On the other hand, the liver toxicity followed by gene transfection using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure was lower than that by Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes (Fig. 8). It was reported that the CpG motifs in the pDNA sequence are recognized to Toll-like receptor 9 (TLR9) in the endosomes [40,41]; therefore it has been considered that the production of proinflammatory cytokines, such as TNF-α, IFN-γ and IL-12, could be induced in the lipofection method using liposomes and emulsions, and these cytokines cause liver injury [42]. However, in the gene transfection using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure, a large amount of pDNA was directly introduced into the cytoplasm not-mediated endocytosis (Figs. 3C and 4B and Supplementary Fig. 4). Therefore, it is considered that pDNA is not recognized to TLR9 in the endosomes, and consequently liver toxicity followed by transfection using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure is low.

In the previous study [16], we developed combination-use method using mannosylated lipoplexes [1] and BLs [12] with US exposure to achieve targeted cell-selective gene transfer. However, this combination-use method is complicated because of the necessity of twice injection of mannosylated lipoplexes and BLs, therefore it is difficult to apply for medical treatments using multiple injection. Moreover, it is considered that the difference of in-vivo distribution characteristics between mannosylated lipoplexes and BLs might be decreased its transfection efficacy. On the other hand, this transfection method using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure is handy because of using only once injection of Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and external US exposure. In addition, this method using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure overcame the difference of in-vivo distribution of formulations, which might lead to the decrease of

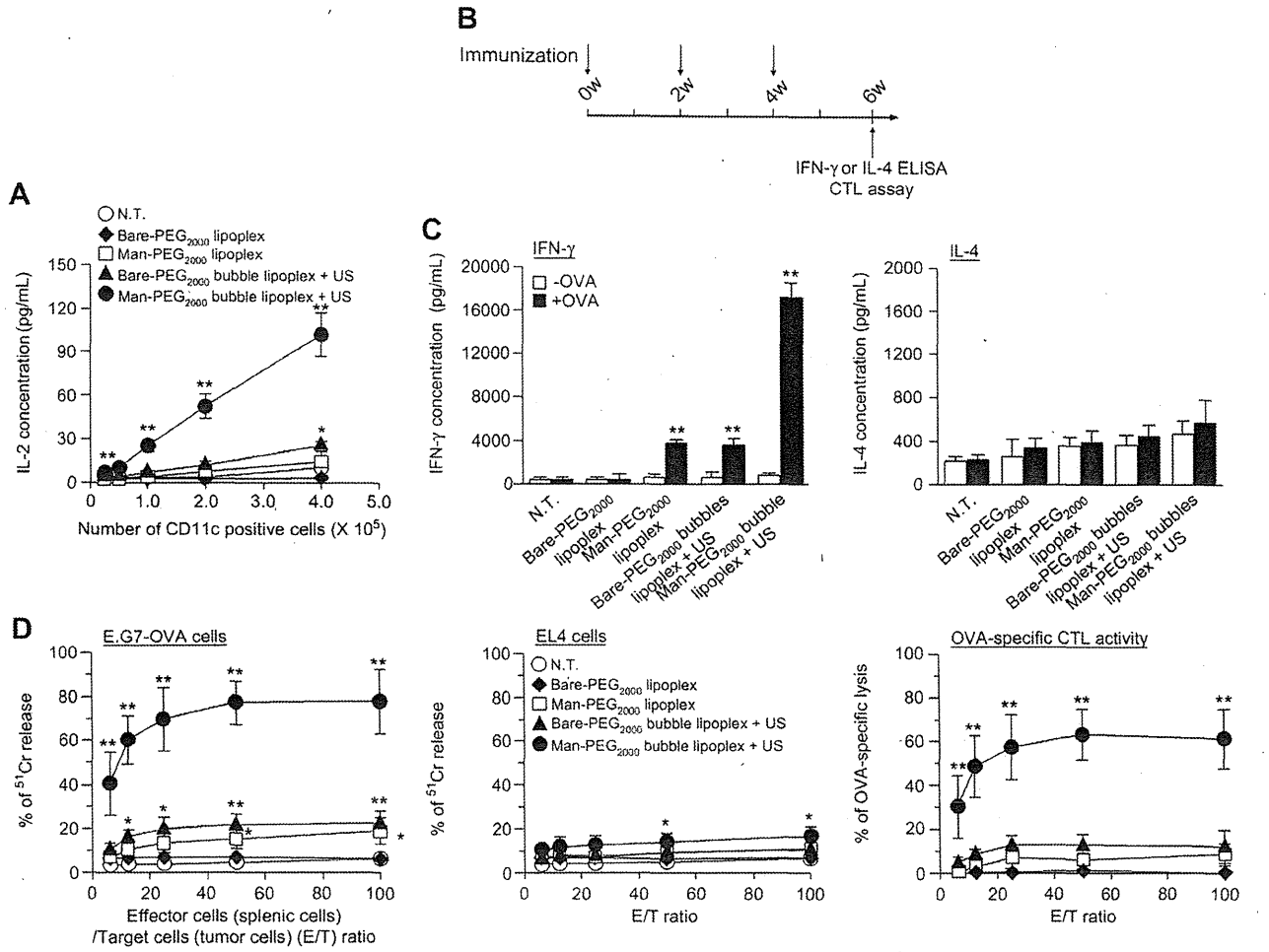

Fig. 9. Cytokine secretion characteristics and CTL activities by DNA vaccination using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure. (A) OVA presentation on MHC class I molecules in the splenic $CD11c^+$ cells at 24 h after transfection by Bare-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes, Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes, Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure and Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure (50 μg pDNA). OVA presentation on MHC class I molecules was determined by IL-2 level secreted from CD8-OVA1.3 cells co-incubated with the $CD11c^+$ cells isolated from once-immunized mice. Each value represents the mean ± SD ($n = 4$). $^*p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$, compared with the corresponding group of N.T. (B) Schedule of immunization for OVA-specific cytokine secretion experiments and CTL assay. (C) OVA-specific IFN-γ and IL-4 secretion from the splenic cells immunized three times biweekly by Bare-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes, Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes, Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure and Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure (50 μg pDNA). The splenic cells were collected at 2 weeks after last immunization. After the immunized splenic cells were cultured for 72 h in the absence or presence of 100 μg OVA, IFN-γ and IL-4 secreted in the medium were measured by ELISA. Each value represents the mean + SD ($n = 4$). $^{**}p < 0.01$, compared with the corresponding group of OVA. (D) OVA-specific CTL activities after immunization three times by Bare-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes, Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes, Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure and Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure (50 μg pDNA). CTL activities to E.G7-OVA and EL4 cells in the immunized splenic cells were determined by ^{51}Cr release assay. Each value represents the mean ± SD ($n = 4$). $^*p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$, compared with the corresponding group of N.T. N.T., non-treatment.

transfection efficiency. In fact, the level of gene expression by this method was higher than that by combination-use method reported previously in the targeted organs (liver and spleen) (Fig. 5) and targeted cells (hepatic NPC and splenic dendritic cells) (Fig. 6); therefore this gene transfection method using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure is more suitable for APC-selective gene transfer in vivo.

Since APC-selective and efficient gene expression was observed by transfection using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure, effective therapeutic effects are to be expected by applying this transfection method to DNA vaccine therapy, which the targeted cells are the APCs, using tumor-specific antigen-coding pDNA [31,32]. However, since the level of gene expression by transfection using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure was reduced sequentially (Supplementary Fig. 6), multiple transfections are essential to obtain more effective vaccine effects against cancer (Supplementary Fig. 7). On the other hand, a 2 week interval was needed to achieve the same level of gene expression by lipoplexes or bubble lipoplexes with US exposure as former transfection in the spleen (Supplementary Fig. 7B and C). Meyer et al. reported that the optimal transfection interval was necessary to achieve high gene expression by the second transfection using lipofection methods because of IFN-γ secretion by intravenous administration of lipoplexes [43]; therefore it is considered that a similar phenomenon is contributed to the sonoporation methods using microbubbles constructed with phospholipids. Based on these findings, we performed the optimization of immunization times (Supplementary Fig. 7) and determined the optimal immunization schedule as shown in Figs. 9B, 10A and 11A.

In DNA vaccine therapy, unlike cancer immunotherapy using tumor-specific antigenic peptides, the peptides expressed as gene products in the cells act as the internal antigen. Since the internal antigens are presented on MHC class I molecules, the strong activation of CTL and high anti-tumor effects are expected in DNA vaccination therapy [44,45]. In this study, by applying this gene transfection method to DNA vaccine therapy using OVA-expressing

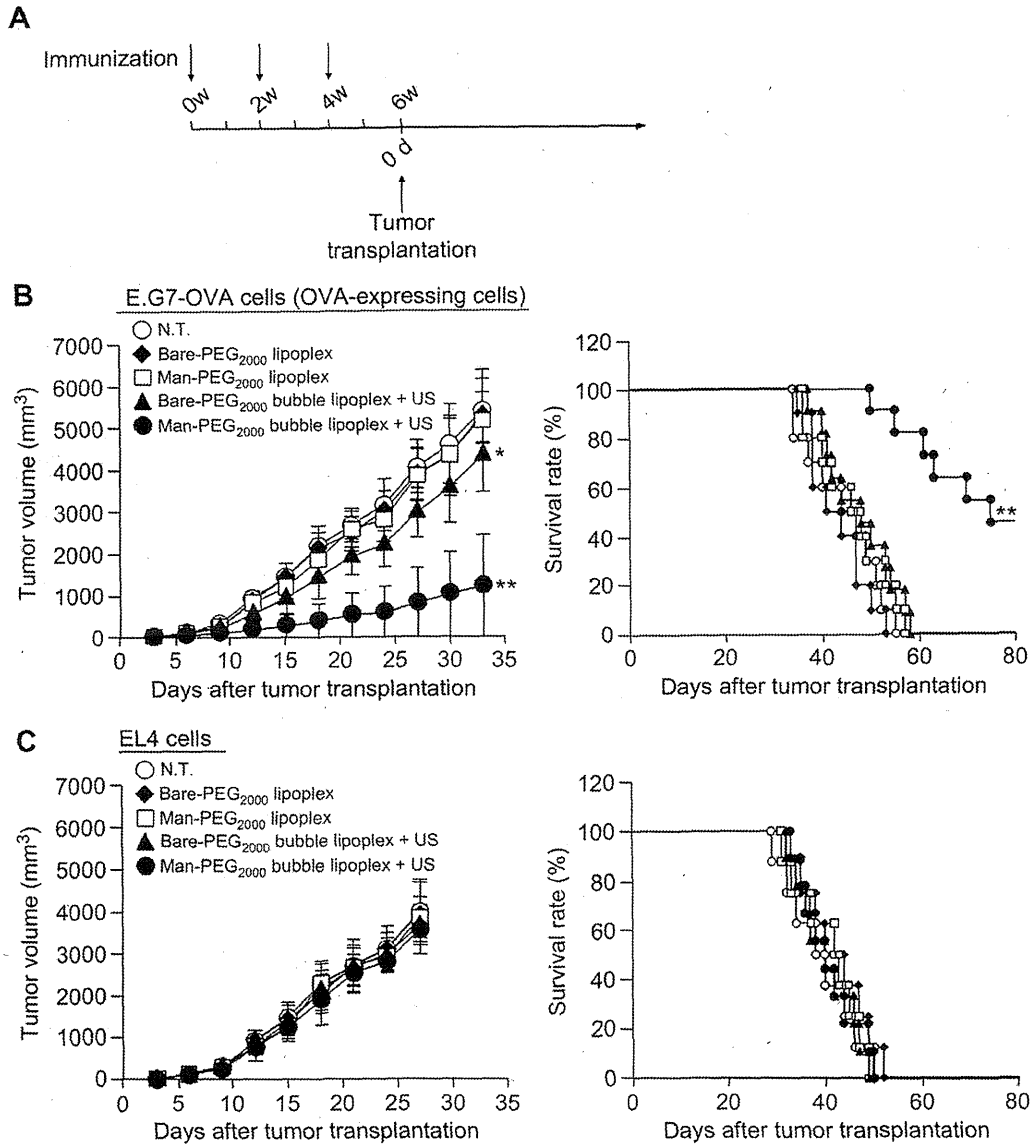

Fig. 10. Anti-tumor effects by DNA vaccination using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure. (A) Schedule of immunization for experiments of therapeutic effects. (B, C) Anti-tumor effects by immunization using Bare-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes, Man-PEG_{2000} lipoplexes, Bare-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure and Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes with US exposure (50 μg pDNA). Two weeks after last immunization, (B) E.G7-OVA cells or (C) EL4 cells (1×10^6 cells) were transplanted subcutaneously into the back of mice ($n = 8–11$). The tumor volume was evaluated (each value represents the mean ± SD) and the survival was monitored up to 80 days after the tumor transplantation. $^*p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$, compared with the corresponding group of N.T. N.T., non-treatment.

pDNA, i) the presentation of OVA-peptides on MHC class I molecules of splenic dendritic cells, ii) OVA-specific Th1 cytokine secretion from splenic cells by OVA stimulation and iii) marked activation of CTL against OVA-expressing tumor were observed by gene transfection using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes constructed with pCMV-OVA and US exposure (Fig. 9). Moreover, high and long-term anti-tumor effects against OVA-expressing tumor were observed in mice transfected by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes constructed with pCMV-OVA and US exposure (Figs. 10 and 11). It is considered that these results are contributed by APS-selective and efficient gene transfection efficiency using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure. Although more detailed examination by pDNA encoding other tumor-specific antigens, such as gp100 in melanoma or PSA in prostate cancer [45], is necessary, this transfection method by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure might be available for DNA vaccine therapy.

The gene transfection method using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure was enabled selective and efficient gene transfer to the mannose receptor-expressing cells in the liver such as Kupffer cells and hepatic endothelial cells, which are components of the APCs (Fig. 6A). Therefore, this method is also suitable for anti-inflammatory therapy targeted to Kupffer cells and hepatic endothelial cells, known to play a key role in inflammation [46,47]. In spite of low liver toxicity, since this gene transfection system showed NPC-selective and efficient gene expression in the liver (Fig. 8), better therapeutic effects could be expected by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes constructed with

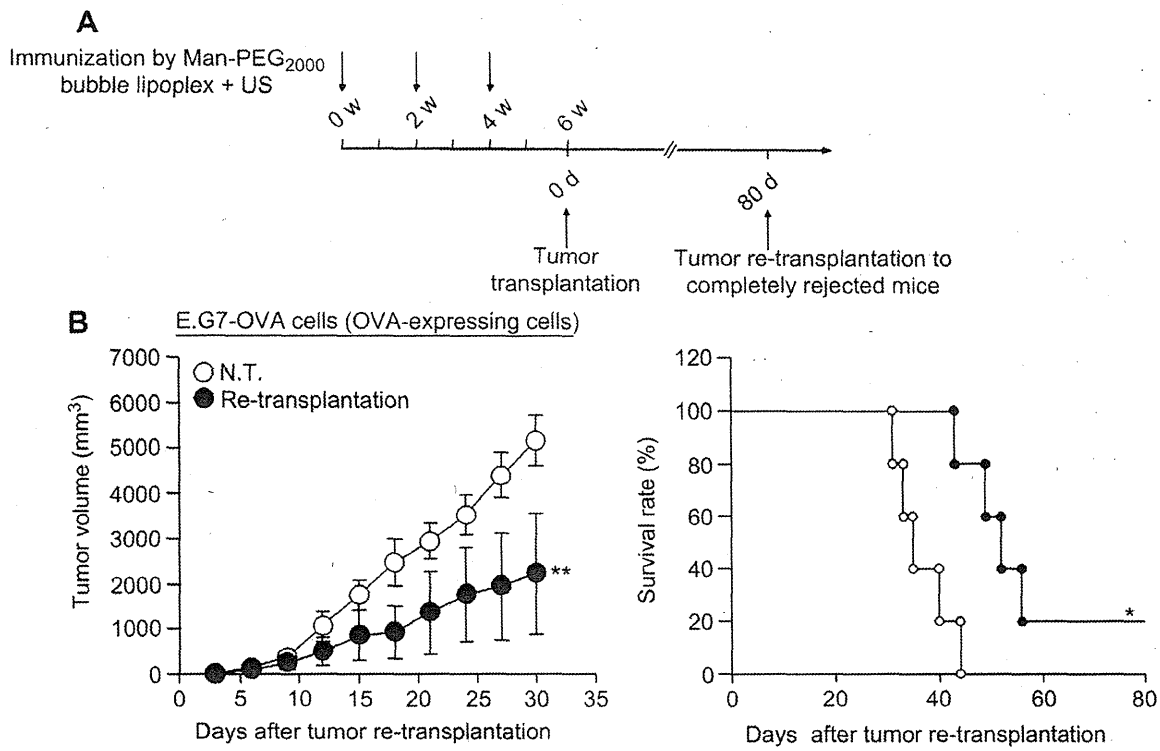

Fig. 11. Maintaining of Anti-tumor effects by DNA vaccination using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure. At 80 days after first transplantation of E.G7-OVA cells to immunized mice three times by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure, E.G7-OVA cells (1×10^6 cells) were re-transplanted subcutaneously into the back of mice which the first-transplanted tumors were completely rejected ($n = 5$). The tumor volume was evaluated (each value represents the mean ± SD) and the survival was monitored up to 80 days after the tumor re-transplantation. $^*p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$, compared with the corresponding group of N.T. N.T., non-treatment.

various types of nucleic acids, such as NF-κB decoy [48], ICAM-1 antisense oligonucleotides [49], with low doses of nucleic acids. Moreover, organ-specific gene expression was observed in US-exposed organ by exposing US to the organ directly after intravenous administration of Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes (Supplementary Fig. 5); therefore the beforehand knockdown of inflammatory factors such as NF-κB or ICAM-1 by Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure might be available for the prevention of ischemia reperfusion injury, a major problem in living donor liver transplantation.

5. Conclusion

In this study, we developed the gene transfection method using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure. This transfection method enabled APC-selective and efficient gene expression, and moreover, effective anti-tumor effects was obtained by applying this method to DNA vaccine therapy against cancer. This method could be widely used in a variety of targeted cell-selective and efficient gene transfection methods by substituting mannose with various ligands reported previously [2–6]. In addition, in this gene transfection method, pDNA can directly introduce the nucleic acids into the cells through the transient pores created by US-responsive degradation of bubble lipoplexes, therefore this method could apply to many ligands which are not taken up via endocytosis. These findings make a valuable contribution to overcome the poor introducing efficiency into cytoplasm which is a major obstacle for gene delivery by non-viral vectors, and show that this method is an effective method for in-vivo gene delivery.

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Appendix. Supplementary data

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at doi:10.1016/j.biomaterials.2010.06.058.

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ARTICLE

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Suppression of Melanoma Growth and Metastasis by DNA Vaccination Using an Ultrasound-Responsive and Mannose-Modified Gene Carrier

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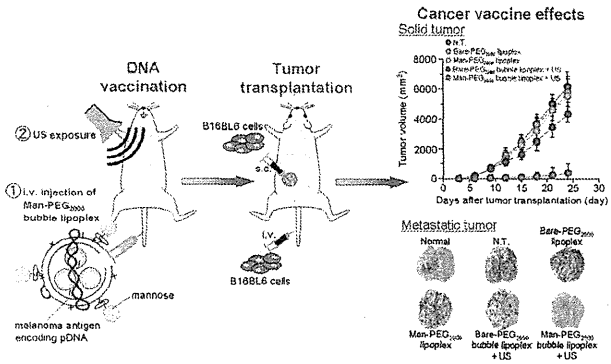
Supporting Information

ABSTRACT: DNA vaccination has attracted much attention as a promising therapy for the prevention of metastasis and relapse of malignant tumors, especially highly metastatic tumors such as melanoma. However, it is difficult to achieve a potent cancer vaccine effect by DNA vaccination, since the number of dendritic cells, which are the major targeted cells of DNA vaccination, is very few. Here, we developed a DNA vaccination for metastatic and relapsed melanoma by ultrasound (US)-responsive and antigen presenting cell (APC)-selective gene carriers reported previously, named Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes. Following immunization using US exposure and Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes constructed with pUb-M, which expresses ubiquitylated melanoma-specific antigens (gp100 and TRP-2), the secretion of Th1 cytokines (IFN-γ and TNF-α) and the activities of cytotoxic T lymphocytes (CTLs) were specifically enhanced in the presence of B16BL6 melanoma antigens. Moreover, we succeeded in obtaining potent and sustained DNA vaccine effects against solid and metastatic tumor derived from B16BL6 melanoma specifically. The findings obtained from this study suggest that the gene transfection method using Man-PEG_{2000} bubble lipoplexes and US exposure could be suitable for DNA vaccination aimed at the prevention of metastatic and relapsed cancer.



KEYWORDS: mannose modification, bubble lipoplex, ultrasound, DNA vaccination, melanoma

INTRODUCTION

Melanoma is a neoplasm arising within epidermal melanocytes of the skin, and one of several cancers exhibiting the increasing incidence in recent years.[1] Early stage melanoma is curable, but melanoma metastasis and relapse occur frequently in the patients following treatments such as surgery, and the prognosis for patients with metastatic melanoma is poor.[2,3] Although systemic therapy induces complete therapeutic responses in a minority of patients, metastatic melanoma is a devastating illness and treatment options are limited; therefore, there is a need for an effective therapy for metastatic melanoma.

Cancer vaccination has attracted much attention as a promising therapy for the prevention of tumor growth and metastasis, because it is based on an immune response provided by the cancer antigen, and consequently, its therapeutic effects are specific to the targeted cancer cells and the adverse effects followed by cancer vaccination are low.[4,5] In particular, it has been reported that DNA vaccination, which uses an exogenous gene encoding cancer antigen, can induce not only humoral immunity but also cellular immunity and, moreover, can induce cancer-specific CTLs with potent antitumor activities.[6−9] In a variety of cancers, since melanoma is known to exhibit inherent immunogenicity and the identification of melanoma-specific antigen is proceeding, such as gp100, melanoma-antigen recognized by T cells-1 (MART-1) and tyrosinase-related protein (TRP),[10−13] it is considered that DNA vaccination against melanoma is suitable for not only the

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