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# **SHORT REPORT Open Access**



# Variation in the affinity of three representative avian adenoviruses for the cellular coxsackievirus and adenovirus receptor

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# **Abstract**

According to previous studies, three representative avian adenoviral strains utilize coxsackievirus–adenovirus receptor (CAR) as a receptor and seem to exhibit diverse binding affinities and modes. Thus, further revealing the exact molecular mechanism underlying the interaction between diferent FAdVs and the attachment receptor CAR is necessary. In this study, we successfully solved the crystal structure of the FAdV-4 fber1 knob at 1.6 Å resolution. The interaction between the fbre knob and diferent domains of CAR was verifed by confocal microscopy, coimmunoprecipitation and surface plasmon resonance (SPR) analysis. The fbre knobs of the three representative fowl adenoviruses specifcally recognized CAR domain 1 (D1), but the recognition of CAR domain 2 (D2) by chicken embryo lethal orphan (CELO) strains was weak. These results provide insights into the differences in adenovirus—host cell interactions and have important implications for the exploration of viral invasion mechanisms.

**Keywords** Avian adenovirus, fbre, crystal structure, coxsackievirus–adenovirus receptor, afnity variation

# **Introduction, methods and results**

Fowl adenovirus (FAdV) belongs to the family *Adenoviride* within the genus *Aviadenovirus*. FAdVs are nonenveloped icosahedral particles containing a linear double-stranded DNA genome [1]. Along with the hexon

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and penton base, the trimeric fbre protein is a major capsid protein, and all of these proteins are known to mediate binding to host cells. FAdVs are equipped with highly diverse capsid fbres that interact with receptors via their knob domains. FAdV-4 has almost equal length fber1 and fber2 proteins, which consist of 431 amino acids (aa) and 479 aa, respectively. In contrast, fber1 of CELO has 710 aa, whereas fber2 has 410 aa [2]. Unlike FAdV-4 and CELO, egg drop syndrome virus (EDSV) carries a single type of fbre protein. Previous studies have shown that the fbre knobs of CELO, EDSV and FAdV-4 play important roles in binding to the coxsackievirus-adenovirus receptor  $(CAR)$  [3-5].

CAR is a transmembrane protein that mediates cell– cell adhesion and contains two glycosylated extracellular Ig-like domains, D1 and D2, followed by a transmembrane domain [6] and an intracellular domain (ICD) [7].



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CAR is a high-affinity primary receptor and coreceptor for human adenovirus (HAdV) groups A and C–F, as well as canine and gorilla adenovirus  $[8-10]$ . The D1 domain has been shown to be necessary and sufficient for high-affinity human adenovirus fibre knob binding [11]. Previous studies have demonstrated that the CELO virus, FAdV-4 and EDSV enter host cells by binding to CAR during infection, and the binding region and afnity between FAdVs and CAR are signifcantly diferent from those of HAdVs [2–4]. For instance, FAdV-4 utilizes fber1 to bind to the CAR-D2 domain, which is diferent from the mechanism of other adenoviruses in which fibres bind to the CAR-D1 domain  $[2]$ . Therefore, further analysing the interaction between FAdV fbre knobs and the attachment receptor CAR in vitro is necessary.

Studies of receptor–virus interactions using structural biology techniques can signifcantly advance the understanding of FAdV attachment and entry. In this study, we report the structure of the FAdV-4 fber1 knob at 1.60 Å resolution; this knob showed a similar structural conformation to the fber1 knob of CELO and EDSV. Furthermore, the binding properties of the three representative FAdVs to CAR were assessed through a series of experiments. The results presented here provide insights into the plasticity of adenovirus-host cell interactions.

## **Expression and purifcation of the FAdV‑4 fbre‑knob protein**

To investigate conservation of the fbre protein in terms of amino acid sequence and structure, we analysed the homology of the fbre knobs of three representative avian adenoviruses (Figure  $1A$ ). The predicted isoelectric points of the fbre knob proteins of the viruses were all lower than 7. This may indicate that the charge of the fibre knobs may play a role in virus–cell surface interactions [12]. Notably, the three FAdVs were also highly similar in terms of their secondary structure.

To determine whether the FAdV-4 Fiber1 knob protein could be expressed in *E. coli* BL21 (DE3) cells, we analysed the protein expression of fber1 in the collected cell lysates by SDS-PAGE and Western blotting (Figure 1C, D). The expression and purification of the fibre knobs were performed as described previously [3]. Western blot analysis revealed that the recombinant protein was found in chicken polyclonal serum against FAdV-4 (Figure 1E).

# **Overview of the structure of the knob domain of FAdV‑4 fber1**

To further elucidate the receptor-binding property of the FAdV-4 fber1 knob, its crystal structure was determined (Table 1). The crystal was obtained in 20%  $(w/v)$ PEG 4000 and 0.15 M potassium sulfate. The macromolecular structures generated during this study have been





<sup>a</sup> R<sub>merge</sub> = Σ(|I – <I>|)/Σ(I), where I is the observed intensity and <I> is the average intensity of all the measured observations equivalent to refection I.

**b** Numbers in parentheses represent values in the highest resolution shell.

deposited in the PDB under accession code 7X5T. The structure was solved by molecular replacement using a monomer of the CELO long fbre knob structure as a search model. The asymmetric unit contains one chain, which can form a trimer by generating a symmetrical mate (Figure  $2A$ ). The knob domain of each monomer formed a compact β-sandwich with a typical topology similar to that of other known structures of adenovirus fibre knob domains. The β-sandwich is comprised of seven β-strands, ABCJ and HID (Figure 2B), the nomenclature of which was proposed by Xia et al. [13]. Moreover, when superimposed, the FAdV-4 fber1 knob and the CELO fber1 knob exhibited root mean square deviations (RMSDs) of only 1.469 Å (Figure  $2C$ ), and the FAdV-4 fber1 knob and the EDSV fbre knob monomers had RMSD values of 1.316 Å (Figure 2D), which suggested that the three fbre knobs share almost identical structural folds. Taken together, these fndings revealed that the three FAdV fbre knobs exhibited high sequence identity and similar structural conformations.

To further evaluate the CAR-binding properties of the three FAdVs, the structures were superimposed onto



**Figure 1 Sequence alignment and expression of the F-F1K recombinant protein in the** *E. coli* **system. A** The secondary structures were determined via protein sequence analysis. The FAdV-4 strain sequence is shown at the top. **B** The homology and isoelectric points of the amino acids were determined. The purity of the F-F1K recombinant protein was analysed by SDS-PAGE (**C**) and Western blotting (**D**). **E** F-F1K protein was purifed to high purity by a gel fltration column (Superdex 200 10/300 GL). SDS-PAGE analysis of the elution fraction corresponding to the peak (inset) was performed.



**Figure 2 Structure of the FAdV-4 fber1 knob and comparison with other adenovirus fbre knob proteins. A** The crystal structure of the trimeric FAdV-4 fber1 knob and **B** the monomeric FAdV-4 fber1 knob are shown. **C** The FAdV-4 fber1 knob was compared with the CELO fber1 knob (PDB code 2IUN). The backbone of the FAdV-4 fber1 knob is coloured magenta (**B**), while the backbone of the CELO fber1 knob is coloured green. **D** The FAdV-4 fber1 knob was compared with the EDSV fbre knob (PDB code 6ITX). The backbone of the FAdV-4 fber1 knob is coloured magenta (**B**), while the EDSV fbre knob is coloured cyan. **E** The AA′ loop structures of the three FAdVs and the AB loops of the four CAR-binding HAdVs were compared. The AB loops of HAdV-2 (PDB code 1QHV), 5 (PDB code 1KNB), 12 (PDB code 1KAC) and HAdV37 (PDB code 1J12) are all coloured light grey. The AA′ loops of FAdV4 fber1, CELO fber1 and EDSV fbre are coloured magenta, yellow and green, respectively.

those of the human adenovirus type 2 (HAdV2)  $[14]$ , HAdV5 [13], HAdV12 [15] and HAdV37 [16], which all bind CAR (Figure 2E). In these HAdVs, the most important section in terms of CAR binding is the AB loop. Studies have shown that these adenoviral loops may not be fully flexible variable regions but rather organized receptor engagement motifs with carefully evolved structures [17]. Alignment of these loops revealed diferent topologies in these critical receptor-interacting regions. The AB loops of FAdV-4 are most homologous to those of EDSV and CELO in terms of amino acid sequence identity and spatial alignment, respectively. Figure 2E shows the HAdV AB loops (in grey) and the AA′ loops of the three FAdVs. Indeed, the A strand of the three FAdV fbre knobs is longer than that of HAdVs when the extra A′ strand is present. As shown in Figure 2E, the AA<sup> $\prime$ </sup> loop is squeezed between the β strands and adopts a totally diferent conformation from that of the CARbinding AB loops of these HAdVs. Therefore, the fibres of these three FAdVs should bind to CAR in a diferent manner than those of HAdVs.

# **Analysis of the binding capacity of the FAdV‑4 and CELO fbre knobs**

To demonstrate the binding capacity of the FAdV-4 and CELO fbre knobs with CAR-D1, D2 and D12, we analysed the interaction using coimmunoprecipitation (co-IP) and confocal methods (Figure 3). Co-IP



**Figure 3 Coimmunoprecipitation (co-IP) and colocalization analyses of CAR and the fbre knob. A**‒**K** Cells were co-transfected with pFlag-Fibre and pMyc-CAR using mouse anti-Flag and rabbit anti-Myc mAbs. After 36 h of incubation at 37 °C, immunoblotting analysis was performed to evaluate the binding of knob to diferent domains of CAR in the immunoprecipitants. **L**, **M** Analysis of the cell surface distribution and colocalization of CAR and fbre knob was performed by indirect immunofuorescence assay in CHO cells. The fbre protein (red fuorescence) colocalized with the CAR protein (green fuorescence) in the cytoplasm of 293T cells. The nuclei were labelled with DAPI (blue points).

and confocal microscopy were performed as described by Song et al.  $[3]$ . The fibre head bound specifically to chicken CAR. These results confirm the findings of previous studies showing that the extracellular domain D12 is the main functional region of CARs. Surprisingly, both the D1 and D2 domains can be inhibited by the FAdV-4 fber1 and EDSV fbre knob domains. However, the D2 domain was relatively less afected by the CELO fiber2 domain (Figures  $3A-K$ ). The FAdV-4 fiber1 knob protein (green fuorescence) was colocalized with the CAR D1 and D2 domains (red fuorescence) in the cytoplasm of CHO cells, which was diferent from the binding characteristics of CELO fiber1. Therefore, we

concluded that the knob domains of the three representative avian adenoviruses can interact with the D1 domain of CAR, and the knob domains of EDSV fbre and FAdV-4 fber1 can interact with the D2 domain of CAR. FAdV-4 fber1 can bind to CAR, while fber2 cannot (Figures 3L and M), confrming that fbre-1, but not fbre-2, is the key factor that directly mediates FAdV-4 infection [5].

## **Binding afnity of the fbre knob to CAR**

To further investigate the direct interactions and determine the affinity between the various domains of CAR and the fbre knob of the three representative avian



**Figure 4 The binding afnity between soluble CAR domains and fbre knobs was characterized by surface plasmon resonance (SPR).** The experimental curves (red lines) were ft using a 1:1 binding model (black lines). The equilibrium dissociation constant (Kd) was calculated by Biacore X100 Evaluation software. The results were calculated from the sensorgrams. The S.E. did not exceed 15% of the Kd.

adenoviruses, surface plasmon resonance (SPR) analysis was performed using a Biacore X100 instrument system with a CM5 sensor chip. The soluble CAR D1 domain, D2 domain and D12 were expressed and purifed (Figure 4). Figure 4 shows sensor grams of the interactions between fbre knobs with the CAR D1 domain, D2 domain and D12 domain. The binding affinities (Kd) of the purified FAdV-4 fber1 knob protein for the D1 domain (7.415  $\mu$ M), D2 domain (6.287  $\mu$ M) and D12 domain (0.8683 µM) were comparable to those of the EDSV fbre knob (2.757 µM, 4.767 µM and 2.670 µM, respectively). Compared to those of the FAdV-4 fiber1 knob  $(Kd=6.287)$  $\mu$ M) and the EDSV fibre knob (Kd = 4.767  $\mu$ M), the binding affinity of D2 to CELO fiber1 knobs  $(Kd=11.16 \text{ mM})$ was 1000-fold weaker than that to the D1 domain (Figure 4K). Combined with the extremely fast kinetics, this suggests a highly unstable interface. The difference in the binding affinity of CAR to CELO and FAdV-4 fiber1 knob is likely due to the key residues on the surface of the fbre proteins. CAR-D12 (in solution) interacted with all three fbre knobs (immobilized) with low micromolar Kd and higher affinity, thus demonstrating the ability of the extracellular domain of CAR to directly bind to fbre knobs.

## **Discussion**

Most recent work has shown that representative strains of avian adenovirus tend to utilize CAR as a receptor and seem to exhibit diverse binding affinities and binding modes [4, 18]. Given the uncertainty regarding the receptor binding mode of CAR-T cells, this study was performed to examine the functional use of CAR-T cells in combination with three representative FAdVs. We solved the crystal structure of the FAdV-4 fber1 knob at 1.6 Å resolution and found, as expected, that it is structurally similar to that of the long fibre knob of CELO (fiber1) and the EDSV fibre knob. The interaction between the fbre knob and diferent domains of CAR was verifed by confocal and coimmunoprecipitation analyses.

Most of the available knowledge about adenovirus receptors is still based on the heavily investigated human adenovirus  $[19, 20]$ . The binding region and affinity of FADVs for CAR-T cells are signifcantly diferent from those of HAdVs. With a few exceptions, FAdVs are equipped with a single type of capsid fbre protein that interacts with receptors via its knob domain. The three representative FAdV (CELO, FAdV-4 and EDSV) fbre knobs exhibited high sequence identity and similar structural conformations. Although all three representative adenovirus fbre knobs maintain the same topology, differences in the length and orientation of the strands and loops may lead to signifcant functional diferences in the external surfaces of the trimer unit.

Previous studies revealed that the adenovirus-binding activity of CAR is mainly localized in the D1 domain, but a lack of the D2 domain would reduce virus binding and infection. Recent fndings in FAdVs highlight the fact that CAR is likely involved in viral invasion  $[3-5]$ . In this study, we compared representative avian adenoviruses to determine whether a similar binding mechanism with CAR was possible. All three avian adenovirus fbre proteins reacted with the CAR and CAR-D1 structural domains but difered in their binding to CAR-D2. We further confrmed that both the D1 and D2 domains of CAR contribute to the interactions with the fbre proteins EDSV and FAdV-4, while CELO mainly relies on the D1 domain. These results obtained by SPR are consistent with the results of co-IP and confocal analysis. However, these fndings seem to be inconsistent with previous studies, which suggest that CAR-D2 is the active domain responsible for binding to the short fibre (fiber1) of the novel FAdV-4  $[2]$ . Therefore, in terms of the interaction between the knobs and the CAR extracellular domain, FAV-4 is diferent from CELO and more similar to EDSV. Moreover, the results suggest that the CAR-binding affinity to the avian adenovirus fbre knob is much lower than that to human adenovirus fbre knobs [15].

Together with existing structural information, we described the similarities and diferences among the three avian adenovirus fbre knobs in terms of their CAR-binding properties, revealing a much more sophisticated binding mechanism than that of HAdVs. However, further studies are required to analyse the critical residues involved in the interaction between FAdVs and CAR when FAdVs enter cells and determine whether an unknown receptor exists.

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#### **Authors' contributions**

YS, QW and XL: conceptualization; YS and QW: writing—reviewing and editing; YS and LL: methodology; YW and MT: investigation; YS and ZZ: validation; ZH, YL and WG: visualization; YS and QW: writing—original draft; XL: supervision; YS, QW and XL: funding acquisition. All the authors read and approved the fnal manuscript.

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#### **Availability of data and materials**

The GenBank accession codes AGT17758.1 and AY597011 and the PDB accession codes 1J12, 1KAC, 1KNB, 1QHV, and 2IUN were used in this study. All the

other data are available from the corresponding authors upon reasonable request.

#### **Declarations**

#### **Competing interests**

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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