



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***NUCLEOCAPSID AND MATRIX PROTEINS OF NIPAH VIRUS
PRODUCED IN *Pichia pastoris* AND THEIR INTERACTION***

NARCISSE MARY A/P SITHER JOSEPH VESUDIAN

FBSB 2016 12



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By

NARCISSE MARY A/P SITHER JOSEPH VESUDIAN

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

February 2016

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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February 2016

Chairman : Professor Tan Wen Siang, PhD
Faculty : Biotechnology and Biomolecular Sciences

Nipah Virus (NiV) is a zoonotical pathogen belonging to the family of *Paramyxoviridae* and genus *Henipavirus*. Its natural reservoir is believed to be fruit bats, *Pteropus sp.* The outbreaks of NiV in Malaysia, India and Bangladesh recorded high fatality rate imposing a major health risk worldwide. It is classified under Biosafety level 4 pathogen and the production of immunological reagents for assays using the inactivated virus requires BSL 4 facilities which are costly and limited. Recombinant proteins produced in *Escherichia coli* served as an alternative, however being a prokaryotic expression system, disadvantages such as lack of post-translational modifications are unavoidable. The nucleocapsid (N) and matrix (M) proteins produced in *E. coli* expression system were different from the native viral proteins. Thus, the aim of this study was to produce the N and M proteins of NiV in a yeast system, *Pichia pastoris*, and to study their interaction. The interaction of N and M proteins will help to reveal the role of these proteins in the production of VLPs. The N protein was successfully expressed in *P. pastoris* and purified using sucrose density ultracentrifugation but was found to be truncated at the C-terminal end. However the recombinant nucleocapsid protein assembled into tightly packed long helical structures as long as 1.5 μm . The M protein of NiV was expressed in *P. pastoris* and purified using an Immobilized Metal Affinity Chromatography (IMAC) column. The M protein also assembled into large virus-like particles resembling the native virus. However, due to the poor yield and purity of the M protein produced in *P. pastoris*, an *in-silico* method called docking was chosen to study the interaction of M and N proteins. The 3-dimensional structures of the N and M proteins of NiV are not available in the Protein Data Bank (PDB) for docking analysis and there are no similar structures available. Therefore, the structures of the two proteins were predicted based on an *ab initio* method using the I-TASSER web server. The predicted 3D structures generated using ITASSER had a confidence score (C-score) of -0.82 and 0.56 for N and M proteins, respectively. The final models also had a low root-mean-square deviation (RMSD) (9 Å for N and 5.3 Å for M protein) which shows the reliability of the predicted structure. The interaction of N and M proteins was analysed using a molecular docking employing the PatchDock method and refined with the FireDock algorithm. The two proteins were found to interact well

with a binding energy of -13.09 kcal/mol. However to validate the docking results, five peptides corresponding to the interacting residues in the M protein were synthesized to study the interaction using an *in-vitro* assay. The instability of the N protein lead to a simple and less complicated method of interaction study, using fluorescence spectroscopy analysis.. The fluorescence quenching assay demonstrated that peptides M2 and M4 show significant interactions with the NiV N protein with dissociation constant (K_d) values of $12 \mu\text{M}$ and $17 \mu\text{M}$, respectively. This indicates that the M protein interacts with the N protein and proves the M and N proteins interact during the VLP formation.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PENGEKSPRESAN PROTEIN NUKLEOKAPSID DAN MATRIKS VIRUS
NIPAH DALAM *Pichia pastoris* DAN KAJIAN INTERAKSI**

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Virus Nipah (NiV) adalah patogen zoonotikal dalam family *Paramyxoviridae* dan genus Henipavirus. NiV dipercayai berasal dari kelawar dari genus *Pteropus sp.* NiV telah menyebabkan wabak di Malaysia, India dan Bangladesh dengan mencatatkan kadar kematian yang tinggi. Ia dikelaskan sebagai patogen 'Biosafety (BSL)-4' dan penyelidikan virus tersebut memerlukan makmal dengan kemudahan BSL-4 yang mahal dan terhad. Protein rekombinan yang telah dihasilkan dalam *Escherichia coli* telah menjadi alternatif untuk kajian NiV, bagaimanapun sebagai satu sistem prokariot, kekurangan seperti modifikasi pasca translasi tidak dapat dielakkan. Protein nukleokapsid (N) dan matriks (M) yang dihasilkan dalam sistem *E. coli* adalah sangat berbeza dari protein virus sebenar. Oleh itu, tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk menghasilkan protein N dan M dalam sistem yis, *Pichia pastoris*, dan mengkaji interaksi protein-protein tersebut. Protein N telah berjaya diekspres dalam *P. pastoris* dan dipulihkan melalui proses ultra-pengemparan menggunakan sukrosa tetapi protein tersebut telah didapati dihadam pada hujung karboksi-C. Namun, protein rekombinan tersebut telah membentuk struktur heliks padat yang sangat panjang (1.5 μm). Protein M pula telah diekspres dalam *P. pastoris* dan dituliskan menggunakan sistem afiniti 'Metal Affinity Chromatography (IMAC)'. M protein juga telah bergabung sendiri membentuk partikel virus besar menyerupai virus asli. Walau bagaimanapun disebabkan oleh hasil yang tidak mencukupi dan ketulenan protein M yang dihasilkan menggunakan *P. pastoris* tidak memuaskan, kaedah *in-silico* telah dipilih untuk mengkaji interaksi protein M dan N. Struktur 3 dimensi (3D) protein N dan M telah dihasilkan menggunakan program ITASSER yang meramalkan struktur 3D protein berdasarkan jujukan asid amino. Oleh kerana tidak ada struktur yang menyerupai protein M dan N di Protein Data Bank (PDB) untuk dirujuk, struktur kedua-dua protein tersebut telah diramal dengan menggunakan kaedah *ab-initio* menggunakan pengkalan pesawang I-TASSER. Struktur 3D yang telah dijana menggunakan ITASSER mempunyai nilai keyakinan (C-skor) yang tinggi iaitu sebanyak -0,82 untuk protein N dan 0.56 untuk protein M. Model-model tersebut mempunyai 'root-mean-square deviation (RMSD)' yang memuaskan iaitu 9 \AA untuk protein N dan 5.3 \AA untuk protein M. Ini menunjukkan kebolehpercayaan struktur yang telah diramalkan. Interaksi protein N dan M dianalisis menggunakan

'docking' molekul melalui program PatchDock dan diperbetulkan dengan program FireDock. Kedua-dua protein didapati berinteraksi dengan baik dengan tenaga pengikatan sebanyak -13,09 kcal/mol. Walau bagaimanapun, lima peptida yang sepadan dari protein M yang berinteraksi dengan protein N telah disintesis untuk mengesahkan keputusan 'docking' secara *in-vitro*. Ketidakstabilan protein N telah membawa kepada penggunaan satu kaedah yang mudah dan kurang rumit untuk kajian interaksi iaitu spektroskopi 'fluorescence'. Analisa tersebut menunjukkan bahawa peptida M2 dan M4 menunjukkan interaksi yang memuaskan dengan protein N dengan nilai pemalar pengasingan (K_d) 12 μ M dan 17 μ M, masing-masing.



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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 16 February 2016 to conduct the final examination of Narcisse Mary a/p Sither Joseph on her thesis entitled "Nucleocapsid and Matrix Proteins of Nipah Virus Produced in *Pichia pastoris* and Their Interaction" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

aa	amino acids
AAHL	CSIRO Australian Animal Health Laboratory
Abs	absorbance
APS	ammonium persulfate
Bp	base pair
BSA	bovine serum albumin
BCIP	5-bromo-4-chloro-3'-indolyl phosphate
°C	degree Celsius
CBB	coomasie brilliant blue
C-terminal	carboxyl-terminal
dH ₂ O	distilled water
DNA	deoxyribonucleic acid
DNase	deoxyribonuclease
dNTPs	deoxynucleotide triphosphates
EDTA	ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid
ELISA	enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay
h	hour
HeV	Hendra virus
ICTV	International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses
IMAC	immobilized metal affinity chromatography
IgG	immunoglobulin G
IgM	immunoglobulin M
IPTG	isopropylthio- β -d-galactoside
kDa	kilodalton
L	liter
LB	luria bertani
M	molar

mA	miliampere
mg	milligram
mg/mL	milligram per milliliter
mg/L	milligram per liter
min	minute
mL	milliliter
mM	milimolar
mRNA	messenger RNA
NaCl	sodium chloride
NaoH	sodium hydroxide
NaPO ₄	sodium phosphate
NBT	nitro-blue tetrazolium chloride
NC	nitrocellulose
NiV	Nipah virus
N-termial	amino-terminal
NMR	nuclear magnetic resonance
OD	optical density
PCR	polymerase chain reaction
PAGE	polyacrylamide gel
pH	<i>puissance hydrogen</i>
PMSF	phenylmethyisulphonyl fluoride
p-npp	p-nitrophenylphosphate
RNA	ribonucleic acid
RT	room temperature
RT-PCR	reverse transcriptase-polymerase chain reaction
rpm	revolution per minute
S	second
SDS	sodium dodecyl sulfate
TBS	tris buffer saline

TAE	Tris-acetate-EDTA buffer
TEM	transmission electron microscope
TEMED	tetramethyenediamine
μg	microgram
μM	micromolar
UA	uranyl acetate
V	volt
v/v	volume per volume
w/v	weight per volume
W	watt
x g	centrifugal force (multiply gravity)

Amino acids abbreviations

Amino acid	Three letter abbreviation	One letter abbreviation
Alanine	Ala	A
Arginine	Arg	R
Asparagine	Asn	N
Aspartate	Asp	D
Cysteine	Cys	C
Glutamate	Glu	E
Glutamine	Gln	Q
Glycine	Gly	G
Histidine	His	H
Isoleucine	Ile	I
Leucine	Leu	L
Lysine	Lys	K
Methionine	Met	M
Phenylalanine	Phe	F
Proline	Pro	P
Serine	Ser	S
Threonine	Thr	T
Tryptophan	Trp	W
Tyrosine	Tyr	Y
Valine	Val	V



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Nipah virus (NiV) is a zoonotic pathogen that causes febrile encephalitis and respiratory disease in humans, pigs and many domestic animals such as cats and dogs (Field *et al.*, 2001; Chua *et al.*, 2000). It belongs to the family *Paramyxoviridae* and is grouped into the newly emerged genus *Henipavirus*. The virus was initially isolated and identified during an outbreak of febrile encephalitis in Malaysia in 1998 and 1999. Eventually, NiV reoccurred in many sporadic outbreaks in India and Bangladesh, and it exhibited an extremely high mortality rate (Luby *et al.*, 2009). A fruit bat from the genus *Pteropus* was identified as the reservoir host of the virus. High fatality rate and broad species tropism make NiV a biological threat that constitutes a major health risk worldwide.

NiV particles are pleomorphic in shape and contain a single-stranded, negative-sense RNA genome encoding six major structural proteins that are essential for particle assembly and budding, namely nucleocapsid (N), phospho-(P), matrix (M), fusion (F), attachment (G) and large (L) proteins. The structural proteins of paramyxoviruses assemble in a coordinated way via specific interactions during viral assembly and budding, which produces infectious viral particles. During viral assembly, the N protein subunits encapsidate the viral genome RNA and form a helical structure called the core protein. The N protein, not only protects the viral genome but also plays a key role during viral transcription and replication (Moeller *et al.*, 2012). The core protein binds with the RNA-dependent RNA polymerase complex that is composed of the P and L protein subunits via specific N-P interactions to form a complex called the ribonucleoprotein complex (RNP). The N-P interactions for the members of *Paramyxoviridae* including NiV have been investigated. The interaction study of P protein of NiV with its N protein revealed the presence of more than one N binding sites on the P protein; the N-terminal (amino acids 3–220) and the C-terminal (amino acids 636–709) ends (Chan *et al.* 2004).

The RNP complex which is vital for viral transcription and genome replication is then packaged within a lipid envelope derived from the host plasma membrane containing the surface proteins; F and G, which are present on the outer surface of the viral envelope (Eaton *et al.*, 2006). As is the case for most negative-strand RNA viruses, the association of the NiV RNP with the viral membrane is mediated by the M protein. The M protein is a major structural protein that plays a multi-functional role during the viral assembly and budding. M proteins coordinate the viral particle formation by assembling different viral components and organizing viral budding.

The structure and function of the structural proteins of paramyxoviruses, including the M protein, have been studied extensively in recent years. However, research on NiV M protein has progressed far less compared to research of other members in the family, such as Sendai, measles and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) viruses. This is

due to the classification of NiV as a Biosafety level (BSL)-4 pathogen due to its high fatality rate and the lack of vaccines or post-exposure therapeutics. The need for high-containment lab facilities limits the future research and makes the ability to work on this virus a challenge. Therefore, the viral assembly and budding pathways of NiV are still not fully understood.

Recent advancement of molecular techniques and recombinant protein technology enables researchers to produce non-infectious viral particles that are physically and morphologically similar to their native virus, termed virus-like particles (VLPs). The production of VLPs is an opportunity to explore the structure and function of the structural protein individually. VLP formation of an enveloped virus is highly dependent on the M protein because it acts as bridges between the envelope glycoproteins and the ribonucleoprotein complexes to self-assemble into infectious viral particles as proven in Newcastle disease virus (NDV) and also NiV (Lamb and Parks, 2007). However, the precise mechanism or the interacting domain of the N and M proteins of paramyxoviruses is still unclear. Understanding the interaction of N and M proteins would provide insights into the virus assembly and budding, thereby contributing to the development of new strategies for the inhibition of *Henipavirus* replication and also aid in the development of potential antivirals.

Escherichia coli has been used successfully to express NiV N protein which assembles into herringbone-like capsid structures, but it failed to resemble the native viral structures. The M protein was also produced using the *E. coli* expression system and similarly the VLPs were morphologically different from the native virus. This reveals that the prokaryotic expression system may not be suitable to produce VLPs due to the lack of post-translational modification systems, especially for the expression of a membrane-bound protein such as the M protein. The disparities between the recombinant proteins produced in a prokaryotic and an eukaryotic system, suggests that the N and M proteins produced in an eukaryotic expression system could assemble into VLPs resembling the native virus. Seeking an alternative for the expression system, in this study the methylotrophic yeast, *Pichia pastoris* was explored as an eukaryotic expression system to produce the N and M proteins of NiV. The simplicity of the genetic manipulations and the availability of post-translational modification are the advantages of *P. pastoris* expression system. The *P. pastoris* expression system is hypothesized to produce biologically active N and M proteins.

Thus the objectives of this study were:

1. To clone and express the coding sequences of nucleocapsid and matrix protein of Nipah virus in *Pichia pastoris*,
2. To purify the recombinant nucleocapsid and matrix proteins produced in *Pichia pastoris*,
3. To study the interaction of the nucleocapsid and matrix proteins of Nipah virus.

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