



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**DEVELOPMENT OF A UNIVERSAL INFLUENZA A VACCINE BASED ON  
VIRUS-LIKE PARTICLES OF MACROBRACHIUM ROSENBERGII  
NODAVIRUS**

**ONG HUI KIAN**

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ON VIRUS-LIKE PARTICLES OF *Macrobrachium rosenbergii* NODAVIRUS**

**By**

**ONG HUI KIAN**

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

**November 2018**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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**ONG HUI KIAN**

**November 2018**

**Chairman : Ho Kok Lian, PhD**  
**Faculty : Medicine and Health Sciences**

Influenza A virus (IAV) claims approximately 290,000 to 650,000 lives annually across the globe. Current influenza vaccines are composed of haemagglutinin (HA) and neuraminidase (NA) of the IAV and were shown to be effective in inducing strong and long-lasting HA and NA specific immunities. However, annual reformulation of the seasonal influenza vaccine is required to catch up the rapid mutations of HA and NA. Effectiveness of a seasonal influenza vaccine could vary considerably from 60 to 90% depending on the similarities of HA and NA proteins of the circulating strains and that of the vaccine strains. Seasonal influenza vaccine effectiveness could be as low as 10% in the case of incorrect prediction of IAV mutations. Therefore, a universal influenza vaccine is in urgent need. Extracellular domain of matrix 2 protein (M2e) of IAV represents a potential candidate for the development of a universal influenza vaccine due to its highly conserved amino acid sequence among IAVs. Nevertheless, M2e is poorly immunogenic in nature and requires a larger carrier to enhance its immunogenicity. Multiple copies of M2e epitopes were previously fused to the C-terminal end of *Macrobrachium rosenbergii* nodavirus capsid protein (NvC), producing a chimeric protein with three copies of M2e (NvC-M2ex3) which self-assembles into virus-like particles (VLPs). Although NvC-M2ex3 was demonstrated to be immunogenic in the presence of adjuvants, its protective efficacy has not been investigated *in vivo*. Therefore, as a continuation of the previous study, induced immune responses, protective efficacy and universality of NvC-M2ex3 against influenza A virus infections were elucidated in this project. BALB/c mice immunised subcutaneously with NvC-M2ex3 were shown to elicit strong M2e specific humoral immune responses even in the absence of adjuvant. When challenged with lethal mouse-adapted H1N1 or H3N2, NvC-M2ex3 immunised mice exhibited 100% survival with reduced morbidity and weight loss in addition to the reduced viral load and viral shedding compared to the control groups. In the histopathological aspect, NvC-M2ex3 immunised mice also experienced mitigated immunopathology in lungs upon influenza A infections. Cytokine

responses of the mice immunised with NvC-M2ex3 were found to be different when challenged with different influenza A viruses. A higher level of IFN- $\gamma$  and IL-12 but no significant difference of IL-6 was detected in the lungs of the NvC-M2ex3 immunised mice compared to the control group upon H1N1 infection. Contrarily, when challenged with H3N2, they exhibited lower level of IFN- $\gamma$  and IL-6 although a higher level of IL-12 was observed in the lungs. Collectively, this study demonstrated the protective efficacy of NvC-M2ex3 against lethal H1N1 and H3N2 infections.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

**VAKSI INFLUENZA A UNIVERSAL BERDASARKAN PARTIKEL  
MENYERUPAI *Macrobrachium rosenbergii* NODAVIRUS**

Oleh

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**November 2018**

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Virus Influenza A (IAV) meragut kira-kira 290,000 hingga 650,000 nyawa setiap tahun di seluruh dunia. Vaksin influenza semasa terdiri daripada haemagglutinin (HA) dan neuraminidase (NA) daripada IAV dan ditunjukkan berkesan untuk mendorong tindak balas imunologi khusus terhadap HA dan NA yang berkekalan. Walau bagaimanapun, pembaharuan vaksin influenza bermusim diperlukan setiap tahun untuk mengambil kira mutasi pesat HA dan NA. Keberkesanan vaksin influenza bermusim boleh berbeza jauh dari 60 hingga 90% bergantung kepada persamaan protein HA dan NA antara strain yang sedang beredar dan strain yang digunakan dalam vaksin. Keberkesanan vaksin influenza bermusim boleh serendah 10% dalam kes ramalan mutasi IAV yang salah. Oleh kerana itu, vaksin influenza universal adalah sangat diperlukan. Domain ekstrasel matriks 2 protein (M2e) IAV merupakan satu calon yang berpotensi untuk pembangunan vaksin influenza universal kerana urutan asid amino yang sangat konservatif di kalangan IAVs. Walau bagaimanapun, M2e adalah kurang imunogenik dan memerlukan pembawa yang lebih besar untuk meningkatkan immunogenisitiya. Sebelum ini beberapa salinan epitop M2e telah bersandar ke hujung karboksil *Macrobrachium rosenbergii* nodavirus kapsid protein (NvC), menghasilkan fusi protein dengan tiga salinan M2e (NvC-M2ex3) yang bercantum sendiri untuk membentuk partikel menyerupai virus (VLPs). Walaupun kajian immunisasi telah menunjukkan bahawa NvC-M2ex3 adalah imunogenik di bawah kesan adjuvan, keberkesanannya terhadap pencegahan jangkitan virus influenza A tidak dikaji secara *in vivo*. Oleh itu, sebagai sambungan kajian terdahulu, tindak balas sistem imun, keberkesanan dan keuniversalan NvC-M2ex3 terhadap jangkitan virus influenza A telah dijalankan dalam projek ini. Tikus BALB/c yang diimmunisasi secara subkutan dengan NvC-M2ex3 telah mendorong tindak balas imunologi secara humoral yang spesifik terhadap M2e walaupun tanpa penggunaan adjuvan. Ketika tikus yang telah diimmunisasi dengan NvC-M2ex3 dijangkiti dengan H1N1 atau H3N2 yang telah diadaptasi dalam tikus, 100% kadar kemandirian telah diperhatikan. Selain itu, bagi tikus yang telah diimmunisasi dengan

NvC-M2ex3, morbiditi dan penurunan berat badan tikus juga dikurangkan bersama dengan penurunan beban viral dan penumpahan virus berbanding dengan kumpulan kawalan. Dalam aspek histopatologi, tikus yang diimunisasi dengan NvC-M2ex3 juga mengalami pengurangan imunopatologi dalam paru-paru atas jangkitan influenza A. Tindak balas sitokin tikus yang diimunisasi dengan NvC-M2ex3 didapati berbeza apabila dicabar dengan virus influenza A yang berlainan. Tahap IFN- $\gamma$  dan IL-12 yang lebih tinggi tetapi tiada perbezaan yang signifikan dalam paras IL-6 dikesan di paru-paru tikus yang diimunisasi dengan NvC-M2ex3 berbanding dengan kumpulan kawalan selepas jangkitan H1N1. Sebaliknya, apabila dicabar dengan H3N2, mereka menunjukkan tahap IFN- $\gamma$  dan IL-6 yang lebih rendah walaupun paras IL-12 yang lebih tinggi telah diperhatikan di dalam paru-paru. Secara kolektif, kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa NvC-M2ex3 adalah efektif dalam pencegahan jangkitan H1N1 dan H3N2 maut.



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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follow:

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ρg	picogram (10 <sup>-12</sup> g)
μg	microgram (10 <sup>-6</sup> g)
μL	microlitre (10 <sup>-6</sup> L)
μm	micrometre (10 <sup>-6</sup> m)
μM	micromolar (10 <sup>-6</sup> M)
Abs	antibodies
ADCC	antibody dependent cell mediated cytotoxicity
ANOVA	one-way analysis of variance
APC	allophycocyanin
APCs	antigen presenting cells
AS03	adjuvant system 03
BCIP	5-bromo-4-chloro-3'-indolyphosphate p-toluidine salt
BCR	B-cell receptor
bp	basepair
BSA	bovine serum albumin
BTV	bluetongue virus
°C	degree Celsius
CD	cluster of differentiation
cDNA	complimentary DNA
Ct	cycle threshold
C-terminal	carboxyl terminal
CTL	cytotoxic T-cells
CV	column volume

cvRNA	complimentary viral RNA intermediate
DC	dendritic cells
DNA	deoxyribonucleic acid
EDTA	ethylenediamine tetraacetic acid
ELISA	enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay
Fc	fragment crystallizable
FITC	fluorescein isothiocyanate
FPLC	fast protein liquid chromatography
g	gram
G	gauge
p-NPP	p-nitrophenyl phosphate
GM-CSF	granulocyte-macrophage colony-stimulating factor
GPEI	Global Polio Eradication Initiative
GTPase	guanosine triphosphatase
HA	haemagglutinin
HAU	haemagglutination units
HCV	hepatitis C virus
HEPES	2-[4-(2-hydroxyethyl)piperazin-1-yl]ethanesulfonic acid
HEV	hepatitis E virus
HPV	human papilloma virus
HRP	horseradish peroxidase
IAV	influenza A virus
iBALT	induced bronchus-associated lymphoid tissue
IFN	interferon

Ig	immunoglobulin
IIV	inactivated influenza A vaccine
IL	interleukin
IMAC	immobilised metal affinity chromatography
IPTG	isopropyl $\beta$ -D-1-thiogalactopyranoside
ISG	interferon stimulated genes
kDa	kilo Dalton
kg	kilogram
L	litre
LB	Luria-Bertani
LD <sub>50</sub>	median lethal dose
LIAV	live attenuated influenza A vaccine
M1	matrix 1
M2	matrix 2
M2e	extracellular domain of matrix 2 protein
mA	milliampere
MA	mouse-adapted
MF59	immunologic adjuvant that uses squalene
mg	milligram ( $10^{-3}$ g)
MHC	major histocompatibility complex
mL	millilitre ( $10^{-3}$ L)
mm	millimetre ( $10^{-3}$ m)
mRNA	messenger RNA
MrNV	<i>Macrobrachium rosenbergii</i> nodavirus
Mx	<i>myxovirus</i>

NA	neuraminidase
NEP/NS2	nuclear export protein
ng	nanogram ( $10^{-9}$ g)
NK	natural killer
NLRP3	NOD-like receptor family pryin domain containing 3
NLS	nuclear localisation signal
nm	nanometre ( $10^{-9}$ m)
NOD	nucleotide-binding oligomerisation domain
NP	nucleoprotein
NPT	nitro-blue tetrazolium chloride
NS1	non-structural
N-terminal	amino terminal
OD	optical density
PA	polymerase acidic
PAGE	polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis
PB1	polymerase basic 1
PB2	polymerase basic 2
PBS	phosphate buffered saline
PCR	polymerase chain reaction
PE	phycoerythrin
pH	<i>Puissance hydrogen</i>
qPCR	real-time polymerase chain reaction
RAG	recombination-activating gene
RdRp	RNA dependent RNA polymerase
RIG-1	retinoic acid inducible gene-I

RLRs	retinoic acid inducible gene-I-like receptors
RNA	ribonucleic acid
RNP	ribonucleoproteins
SDS	sodium dodecyl sulphate
SIV-HIV	hybrid VLP between simian immunodeficiency virus and human immunodeficiency virus
TAE	tris-acetate-EDTA
TBS	tris-buffered saline
TBST	tris-buffered saline supplemented with Tween-20
TCR	T-cells receptor
Th	T-helper cells
Th1	type 1 T-helper cells
Th2	type 2 T-helper cells
TLRs	toll-like receptors
TNF	tumour necrosis factor
Treg	regulatory T-cells
USD	United States dollar
V	volt
v/v	volume/volume
VLPs	virus-like particles
w/v	weight/volume
WHO	World Health Organization
$\alpha$	alpha
$\beta$	beta
$\gamma$	gamma

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Infectious diseases are the most menacing global killers in human history. They contribute to 90% of the world's health problems and have killed more people than famine, war, accidents and crimes. Annually, it accounts for the deaths of more than 14 million people worldwide (Stefansson, 2003). To date, the most effective countermeasure against infectious diseases is still early vaccination. The first vaccine designed by the "Father of Immunology", Edward Jenner has laid the foundation of vaccinology, and eventually, in 1979, World Health Organization (WHO) declared fatal smallpox as an eradicated disease (Strassburg, 1982). Remarkably, following the introduction of polio vaccines and the launch of Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI), previously widespread poliovirus is now confined to just Afghanistan and Pakistan (Toole, 2016). These fascinating milestones imply that eradication of deadly viruses is plausible with intensive researches and education. Nevertheless, eradication of influenza remains extremely challenging to date, due to the large non-human reservoirs and rapid mutation of the influenza A virus (IAV) (Medicine, 2002). Despite the highly contagious nature of IAV is well known and investigated, a very recent study has confirmed that infectious IAV could now be detected even in the exhaled breath of the infected symptomatic patients, presenting a risk of airborne transmission (Yan et al., 2018).

Influenza A virus is a Class V virus belonging to the *Orthomyxoviridae* family. It was responsible for one of the deadliest pandemics in human history, "Spanish flu" occurred in 1918-1919 which claimed more than 50 million lives, and infected approximately one third of the world population (Taubenberger & Morens, 2006). Globally, 290,000 to 650,000 people still die from annual seasonal influenza epidemics according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Current licenced influenza A vaccines comprise inactivated vaccines and live attenuated vaccines which rely on the combination of immunogenic glycoproteins haemagglutinin (HA) and neuraminidase (NA) of the IAV (Sridhar, Brokstad, & Cox, 2015). These combinatorial vaccines are effective in eliciting strong, lasting, and specific immune responses but require annual reformulation due to overtime rapid mutation of HA and NA via a process known as antigenic drift (Houser & Subbarao, 2015). Vaccines effectiveness varies considerably from 60 to 90% depending on the similarities of HA and NA proteins of the circulating strains and that of the vaccine strains (Cox & Subbarao, 1999). Recently, seasonal influenza outbreak at Australia hit a record breaking hospitalisation and mortality rates, and the seasonal influenza vaccine effectiveness was reported to be as low as 10% due to incorrect prediction on IAV mutations (Sullivan et al., 2017). In addition, it was also previously showed that repeated annual influenza vaccinations could blunt the vaccine effectiveness in following seasons (Murray, 2015).

Seasonal influenza outbreaks due to antigenic drift often lead to mild to moderate illness with lower mortality but influenza pandemics are usually more pathogenic and cause more severe symptoms with higher fatality such as the Asian flu in 1957, Hong Kong flu in 1968, and Swine flu in 2009 (Cowling et al., 2010; Kilbourne, 2006). Influenza pandemics occur when a new highly virulent strain of IAV emerges from genetic reassortment between different strains in a common host through a process known as antigenic shift (de Silva, Tanaka, Nakamura, Goto, & Yasunaga, 2012). A large gene pool of IAV harboured by different avian species escalated the antigenic shift (Hoffmann et al., 2000). Unfortunately, in the event of influenza pandemic, seasonal influenza vaccines are often not protective and the occurrence of the next pandemic is usually unpredictable (Zhang et al., 2014). Therefore, a universal influenza vaccine which targets all IAV strains regardless of HA and NA subtypes is urgently needed.

A highly conserved viral protein, the extracellular domain of matrix 2 protein (M2e) of IAV was identified as a potential target for the development of universal influenza vaccine. It is the N-terminal segment of the matrix 2 protein and comprises 23 amino acid residues. M2e is non-immunogenic and present at a very low copy number on the virion surface compared to HA and NA, thus under natural IAV infection, M2e specific antibodies is normally undetectable (Cho et al., 2015; Feng et al., 2006). However, various approaches have been employed to enhance its immunogenicity including the use of virus-like particles (VLPs) (De Filette et al., 2006; Matic, Rinaldi, Masenga, & Noris, 2011; Petukhova et al., 2013).

VLPs are non-replicative and non-infectious nanoparticles morphologically resembling the native viruses. They are composed of repetitive protein subunits with inherent self-assembly properties but are devoid of infectious genetic materials. VLPs have been extensively used as vaccines and drug delivery platforms for decades. Many foreign epitopes or peptides that are unable to produce sufficient “danger signals” to prime the immune systems were inserted onto the larger VLPs to enhance the immunogenicity. Furthermore, VLPs were also demonstrated to be an extraordinary inducer in eliciting both B-cells and T-cells responses, even in the absence of adjuvants (Ong, Tan, & Ho, 2017). Previously, Goh, Tan, Bhassu, and Tan (2011) demonstrated that *Macrobrachium rosenbergii* nodavirus (MrNV) capsid protein (NvC) expressed in *Escherichia coli* self-assembled into VLPs of approximately 30 nm in diameter. Later, multiple copies of M2e epitopes of IAV were genetically fused to the C-terminal end of the NvC, producing a chimeric protein (NvC-M2ex3) which self-assembles into VLPs, forming a potential IAV vaccine. Immunisation studies in BALB/c mice in the presence of Freund’s adjuvant suggested that NvC-M2ex3 was indeed immunogenic and a strong M2e specific antibody response was observed (Yong, Yeap, Ho, Omar, & Tan, 2015). Nevertheless, protective efficacy of NvC-M2ex3 has yet to be evaluated and the immune responses of the potential vaccine alone without the adjuvant have never been investigated. In this study, it is hypothesised that NvC-M2ex3 alone is immunogenic and protect immunised BALB/c mice from lethal mouse adapted (MA) A/PR/8/34 (H1N1) and A/HK/8/68 (H3N2) challenges in the absence of an adjuvant. H1N1 and H3N2 were selected in this study because they are the most common subtypes emerge in annual flu seasons according to WHO.

Therefore, the objectives of this study were:

1. To investigate the immunogenicity of NvC-M2ex3 in the absence of adjuvants.
2. To evaluate the protective efficacy of NvC-M2ex3 against mouse adapted (MA) A/PR/8/34 (H1N1) and A/HK/8/68 (H3N2).
3. To study the immune responses of the vaccinated mice upon IAV challenges.





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## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

- Tan, W. S., Omar, A. R., Yong, C. Y., Ho, K. L., Yeap, S. K., & Ong, H. K. 2018. An influenza A vaccine. (Patent Application Number: PI 2018702779)
- Ong, H. K., Tan, W. S., and Ho, K. L. 2017. Virus like particles as a platform for cancer vaccine development. PeerJ 5:e4053. 10.7717/peerj.4053
- Ong, H. K., Tan, W. S., Omar, A. R., Yeap, S. K., & Ho, K. L. Immunization study of extracellular domain of influenza A virus matrix protein using nodavirus capsid as nanocarrier. 9<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Fiber and Polymer Biotechnology, Osaka, Japan. 7-9 September 2016.







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