Research Article

Camphorataimide B, a maleimide in mycelium of Antrodia camphorate, inhibits progression of human MDA-MB-231 breast cancer cells

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Competing Interests: The authors declare that there are no competing interests.

Received Oct 28, 2015; Revised Jan 7, 2016; Accepted Jan 9, 2016. Published Jan 22, 2016

ABSTRACT
Breast cancer is one of the most common malignancies among women worldwide. The degree of metastasis negatively affects a breast cancer patient’s prognosis and treatment benefits. In a previous investigation, camphorataimide B (Cam B), a maleimide derivative, was isolated from the mycelium of Antrodia camphorate, and inhibited cell cycle progression and tumor growth in MDA-MB-231 human breast cancer cells. However, it is not clear whether this compound exerts other anticancer effects. The results demonstrated that synthetic Cam B can inhibit the anchorage-independent growth of MDA-MB-231 breast cancer cells. In addition, Cam B decreased motility and invasion of MDA-MB-231 breast cancer cells. Moreover, Cam B reduced the expression of hypoxia-inducible factor-1α (HIF-1α) and its target gene product such as vimentin, cathepsin D and matrix metalloproteinase-2 (MMP-2), which play important roles in tumor progression. Additionally, Cam B reduced the phosphorylation of AKT and p65 NFκB, which associated the downregulation of HIF-1α. Furthermore, Cam B inhibited pulmonary colonization of MDA-MB-231 breast cancer cells in nude mice. By histological and gross examination of mouse lung, it showed that pretreated Cam B reduced the lung colonization of MDA-MB-231 breast cancer cells. The immunohistochemical data exhibited that pretreated Cam B decreased HIF-1α in lung section. These results demonstrate that Cam B reveals a novel role in inhibiting tumor progression.

Keywords: AKT, camphorataimide B, HIF-1α, p65 NF-κB.

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Introduction
Breast cancer is one of the most common malignancies among women worldwide. Although recent advances have been made in the diagnosis and treatment of tumors, the patients continue to experience high morbidity and mortality from this disease. Accordingly, the essential characteristics of tumor progression are associated with an increased invasiveness and metastasis, and the degree of invasion and metastasis negatively affects a breast cancer patient’s prognosis and treatment benefits (1). Consequently, there is great need to develop pharmacological compounds that could effectively block tumor progression. Furthermore, metastasis is the spread of cancer cells from a primary lesion to distant sites and is a major feature of tumor progression. In addition to cell motility, tumor invasion plays a crucial role in metastasis and involves a number of important steps including enzymatic digestion of the basement membrane by proteolytic enzymes followed by migration through the extracellular membrane with the subsequent growth and proliferation of cells at a new site. Many studies have demonstrated that the ability of a cancer cell to invade its surroundings generally results from aberrant cell signaling mechanisms. Several signaling pathways, such as the phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase (PI3K)/AKT, nuclear factor-κB (NFκB) and mitogen-activated protein kinases (MAPKs) signaling pathways, have been reported to be involved in the tumor cell invasion process (2-5). Therefore, any agent that can block the signaling pathways involved in the invasion process of cancer cells may represent a potential for anti-tumor progression.

Hypoxia-inducible factor 1 (HIF-1) is a transcription factor composed of an inducible subunit (HIF-1α), which is oxygen-sensitive, and a constitutively expressed subunit (HIF-1β). The HIF-1 transcriptional activity is determined by the regulated expression of the HIF-1α subunit. It has been found that HIF-1α is overexpressed in common human solid tumors, which is likely achieved through both intratumoral hypoxia and normoxic pathways including genetic alterations and extracellular stimuli (6). Overexpression of HIF-1α or HIF-1-dependent genes is associated with aggressive behavior in human cancers including breast cancer (7-8). Therefore, scientists approach to HIF-1α as an anti-cancer progression target.

Chang-Chih, specifically referred to as the fruiting body of *Antrodia* camphorate, is well known in Taiwan as an expensive folk medicine for hypertension and cancer. There is increasing evidence that both the fruiting bodies and the mycelium of *A. camphorate* possess an extensive range of biological activities, including anti-inflammatory, antioxidative, antihypertensive, antihepatotoxic, neuroprotective effects, and anticancer activities (9). The chemical components in *A. camphorate*, which include polysaccharides, triterpenoids, steroids, benzenoids, and maleic/succinic acid derivatives, have been identified (9). Both the fruiting bodies and the mycelium of *A. camphorate* exert potent anticancer activity against a variety of cancer cells, including breast, bladder, prostate, and lung cancer cells. Camphorataimide B (Cam B; Fig. 1), a maleimide derivative, has been isolated from mycelium of *A. camphorate* by Nakamura et al. and exhibits cytotoxic activity against LLC cells (ED_{50}=7.5 μg/mL) (10). Previously, we found Cam B exhibits cytotoxicity in MDA-MB-231 (IC_{50}= 11.4 μM) and MCF-7 (IC_{50}= 10.8 μM) breast cancer cells (11-12). Cam B also reduces tumor growth and inhibits cyclooxygenase-2 activity (COX-2) in MDA-MB-231 cells (12). Stasinopoulos et al. reported that silencing of COX-2 abolishes the metastatic potential of MDA-MB-231 cells *in vivo* (13). Recently, it has been reported that antrodin C, a maleimide, inhibits TGF-β1-induced migration and invasion of MCF-7 cells (14). Despite the emerging evidence of chemopreventive and chemotherapeutic importance of *A. camphorate* (14-16), the biological activities of the components of *A. camphorate* against cancer invasion are not well defined. In the present study, we investigated the inhibitory potential of synthetic Cam B against the motility and invasion of MDA-MB-231 breast cancer cells.

Materials and methods
Reagents. Cam B was synthesized from commercially available succinic anhydride (Fig. 1)(11). Anti-phospho-p65 NFκB, anti-phospho-AKT, anti-phospho-ERK1/2 (Thr^{202}/Tyr^{204}; p-ERK1/2), anti-Snail and anti-

![Figure 1. Structure of camphorataimide B (Cam B).](image)
E-cadherin antibodies were purchased from Cell Signaling Technology (Beverly, MA, USA). The other antibodies, such as anti-ERK1/2, AKT, p65 NFκB, MMP-2, HIF-1α, cathepsin D, vimentin and β-actin antibodies, were obtained from Santa Cruz Biotechnology (Santa Cruz, CA, USA). Matrigel was provided from Collaborative Research (Bedford, MA, USA), and the other chemical reagents were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (St. Louis, MO, USA).

Cell culture. The estrogen-independent breast cancer cell lines MDA-MB-231 (ER+, HER2/neu) and MDA-MB-453 (ER+, HER2/neu*) are metastatic breast cancer cell lines. Both cell lines were obtained from the American Type Culture Collection (ATCC; Manassas, VA, USA) and were cultured in Dulbecco’s modified Eagle’s medium (DMEM; Gibco BRL, Grand Island, NY) with 10% fetal bovine serum (FBS; Invitrogen-Gibco), 1% penicillin/streptomycin/neomycin, and 1% non-essential amino acids. Cells were maintained at 37 °C in an incubator with 5% CO2 and 95% air.

Cell viability assay. MDA-MB-231 and MDA-MB-453 cells were seeded in 24-well plates (5×10^4 cells/well), and cultured in complete grown medium for 24 h. Cells were treated with or without of Cam B (0–5 μM) for 24 h. The medium was subsequently changed and incubated in the presence of 10 μl of 3-(4,5-dimethylthiazol-2-yl)-2,5-diphenyltetrazolium bromide (MTT) dye solution (Promega, Southampton, UK) for 4 h. The number of viable cells was directly proportional to the production of formazan, which was then dissolved with DMSO and measured using a spectrophotometer at 570 nm by Emax Microplate reader (Molecular Devices, Sunnyvale, CA).

Anchorage-independent cell growth assay. The MDA-MB-231 cells were treated with Cam B (0–2.5 μM) for 24 h. The cells (5×10^3) were suspended in 1 ml of 0.33% basal Eagle medium (BEM) agar containing 10% FBS and then overlaid with 3.5 ml of 0.5% BME agar containing 10% FBS. The cells were cultured at 37 °C in 95% air and 5% CO2. After 21 days, the colonies that contained more than eight cells were photographed under an inverted microscope at 100x magnification and counted.

Scratch assay. A total of 4×10^5 MDA-MB-231 cells were plated into 6-well plates and cultured overnight in serum-containing media, and then cells were serum-starved for 24 h. The monolayer was scratched with a pipette tip, washed with PBS to remove the floating cells and photographed (0 h). Then, various concentrations of Cam B in serum-containing media were then applied for 24 h. The number of cells that migrated into the scratched area were photographed, and counted in five randomly selected fields (100x magnification) in three independent experiments. The mean value per field was calculated.

In vitro cell invasion assay. Matrigel (BD Transduction Laboratories) was diluted 1:25 with serum-free DMEM. Ten microliters of the diluted Matrigel was used to coat the top of each Boyden chamber and allowed to gel for 4 h at room temperature. The MDA-MB-231 or MDA-MB-453 cells were pretreated with or without the indicated concentration of Cam B for 24 h. The cells (2×10^5 cells/ml) were suspended in serum-free media, and 50 μl of the suspended cells was placed into the upper chamber. The complete growth medium (10% FBS) was placed in the lower chamber. After incubation for 24 h, the cells on the upper surface of the filter were wiped with a cotton swab. The cells on the lower surface of the filters were fixed for 10 min with methanol and stained with Gimsa for 1 h, and the cells that had invaded the lower surface of the filter were then counted by light microscopy. For each replicate (n=4), the cell in five randomly selected fields were determined, and the counts were averaged.

RNA isolation and reverse transcription-PCR analysis. Total RNA was isolated from individual samples using TRIzol reagent (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA, USA). The purified RNA was used as a template to generate first-strand cDNA synthesis using a GoScript reverse transcription kit (Promega, Madison, WI, USA). PCR was amplified with the primer pairs for a 441-bp fragment of HIF-1α (forward primer 5'-TGCACCTCAATCAAGAAGTTG-3' and reverse primer 5'-GTGGCATTAGCAGTTAGTT-3') and a 366-bp fragment of glyceraldehyde-3-phosphate dehydrogenase (GAPDH) (forward primer 5'-ATCCCATCACCATCTTCCAG-3' and reverse primer 5'-GAAGTCTCCACGATACCAA-3'). RT-PCR experiments were performed in triplicates for each sample. GAPDH was used as a control. The correct size of the PCR products was confirmed by agarose gel electrophoresis.

Preparation of total cell extracts and immunoblot analysis. The cells were washed with PBS plus zinc ion (1 mM) and lysed in radio immunoprecipitation assay (RIPA) buffer (50 mM Tris-buffer, 5 mM EDTA, 150 mM NaCl, 1% NP40, 0.5% deoxycholic acid, 1 mM sodium orthovanadate, 81 μg/ml aprotinin, 170 μg/ml leupeptin, and 100 μg/ml PMSF; pH 7.5). After mixing for 30 min at 4 °C, the mixtures were centrifuged (10000×g) for 10 min, and the supernatants were
collected as the whole-cell extracts. The protein content was determined with the Bio-Rad protein assay reagent using bovine serum albumin as a standard. The samples containing 50 μg of proteins were boiled in Laemmli sample buffer, separated on SDS polyacrylamide gel, electrophoretically transferred to nitrocellulose membranes (Amersham, Arlington Heights, IL, USA), and blotted with the indicated primary antibodies. The proteins were visualized with the horseradish peroxidase-conjugated secondary antibodies (Zymed Laboratory, Inc., South San Francisco, CA, USA), followed by chemiluminescence detection (ECL-Plus; Santa Cruz Biotechnology). The relative photographic density was quantitated by densitometry.

Lung colonization of breast cancer cells in nude mice. Female athymic nude mice (BALB/c-nu) were purchased from GlycoNex Inc. (Taiwan) and maintained in cages in a specifically designed pathogen-free isolation facility with a 12/12h light/dark cycle. Rodent chow and water were provided ad libitum. All experiments were conducted in accordance with the guidelines of the Chung Shan Medical University Animal Ethics Research Board. Six-week-old female nude mice were used in the experimental metastasis assay. To generate metastasis in nude mice, MDA-MB-231 cells (1x10⁶) with or without treatment of Cam B (1.0 and 2.5 μM) were resuspended in 100 μl of PBS and injected into the tail vein on day 0 (n=6). The mice were euthanized four weeks after the injection of the cancer cells. The disseminated tumors formed principally in the lung. The size and weight of the lungs were assessed. Furthermore, lung sections were fixed in formaldehyde and embedded in paraffin blocks. The slides were stained with hematoxylin and eosin, and mounted for microscopic examination. For immunohistochemical analysis, 5 μm thick sections from each subcutaneous lung specimen were fixed and incubated with monoclonal anti-HIF1-α antibodies (Santa Cruz Biotechnology) and then with 1:100 diluted avidin-biotin peroxidase mixtures for 30 min. The sections were washed thoroughly in PBS and a substrate (3-amino-9-ethylcarbazole) solution was added, and slides were counterstained with hematoxylin. Finally, slides were washed, dehydrated, and mounted for microscopic examination. The immunoreactive cells presented brown color.

Data analysis. The statistical significances were analyzed through one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and post hoc Dunnett’s test. Differences with P values less than 0.05 were considered statistically significant.
Results

Inhibitory effect of Cam B on the anchorage-independent growth of tumor cells. Our previous study showed that Cam B triggered the apoptosis in MDA-MB-231 cells above the concentration of 10 μM (12), but not in Chang liver cells which is a normal cell line. In the Fig. 2A, it showed Cam B was noncytotoxic at concentrations of 0-2.5 μM in MDA-MB-231 and MDA-MB-453 breast cancer cells, and further used in the following study. Soft agar growth assay can provide a system in which to mimic the molecular events involved in tumor metastatic dissemination, because tumor cells reside, proliferate, and invade to form colonies in soft agar. Thus, we performed soft agar assay to determine the anti-metastasis potential of Cam B. As shown in Figure 2B, Cam B inhibited the colony formation of MDA-MB-231 cells in a dose-dependent manner.

Inhibitory effect of Cam B on cell motility and invasion of MDA-MB-231 cells. Cell motility is one of the critical steps in the metastasis of cancer cells. As shown through a scratch motility assay, treatment with Cam B for 24 h significantly decreased the migrating growth of MDA-MB-231 cells as compared to control (Fig. 3). In addition, the Boyden chamber assay was carried out to determine the ability of cells to invade through biological matrices in vitro. As shown in Fig. 4A, MDA-MB-231 cells with the pretreatment of Cam B (0.5, 1, and 2.5 μM) decreased the invasion of MDA-MB-231cell significantly. 2.5 μM Cam B leded to about 50% reduction of MDA-MB-231 cell invasion compared with the untreated cells. As shown in Fig. 4B, Cam B also inhibited the invasion effect of MDA-MB-453 breast cancer cells.

Reduction in HIF-1α, vimentin, cathepsin D, and MMP-2 expression by Cam B. It has been reported that HIF-1α is highly expressed in metastatic human cancers, such as MDA-MB-231 cells (7). Therefore, we investigated whether Cam B affects the expression of HIF-1α in MDA-MB-231 cells. As shown in Fig. 5A, treatment with Cam B for 12 and 24 h decreased the expression of HIF-1α significantly. Cam B also reduced the mRNA and the protein level of HIF-1αin a dose dependent manner (Fig. 5B and 5C). Furthermore, we assessed the effect of Cam B on the expression of HIF-1α regulated protein. It showed that Cam B reduced the protein level of vimentin, cathepsin D, MMP-2 and Snail, and increased the expression of E-cadherin after treatment for 24 h (Fig. 5D).

Suppression of PI3K/AKT and NFκB signaling
pathways by Cam B. The effect of Cam B on the phosphorylation of ERK, AKT, and p65 NFκB was determined through an immunoblotting analysis. It showed the phosphorylation of AKT and p65 NFκB was decreased significantly after treatment with Cam B for 1-6 h. (Fig. 6A and 6B). The results implied Cam B inactivated the AKT and p65 NFκB signaling pathways. We further examined the effect of signaling inhibitors, including the NFκB inhibitor (pyrrolidine dithiocarbamate, PDTC) and the PI3K/AKT inhibitor (wortmannin), on the expression of HIF-1α in MDA-MB-231 cells. It showed that both inhibitors reduced the expression of HIF-1α (Fig. 6C).

Inhibitory effect of Cam B on the lung colonization of cancer cells in nude mice. We assessed whether Cam B would decrease the ability of MDA-MB-231 cells to colonize the lung of nude mice. First, nude mice were injected with MDA-MB-231 cells that were either
Figure 5. Effect of camphoratamide B on the protein expression of HIF-1α and its target genes in MDA-MB-231 cells. (A) Cells were treated with Cam B for indicated times. The level of HIF-1α was analyzed by immunoblotting analysis against anti-HIF-1α and anti-actin antibody was used as an internal control. In addition, the cells were treated with various concentration of Cam B for 24 h. (B) The mRNA level of HIF-1α was analyzed by RT-PCR as described in the text. (C) The protein level of HIF-1α and (D) the indicated protein were analyzed by immunoblotting analysis against anti-HIF-1α, -vimentin, -cathepsin D, -MMP-2, -E-cadherin, -Snail and anti-actin antibody was used as an internal control. After blotting onto NC paper, the bands were visualized using the ECL reagent. The result shown is one data set representative of three independent experiments. The average densitometric value was shown as the mean±SD.*P < 0.05, compared with the lane 1.
pretreated or not pretreated with Cam B for 24 h. Four weeks later, the mice were euthanized, and the pulmonary colonization of the cancer cells was examined to assess the development of lung metastasis. Both the total weight and the size of the lungs were increased in the positive control group compared with the normal group. Moreover, the total weight, size and nodule number of the lung of the mice injected with the cells pretreated with Cam B were significantly decreased as compared to positive control group (Fig. 7A, 7B and 7C). Furthermore, histological examination of the lung revealed that the positive control group had significantly more massive tumor cells, which exhibited a solid histological appearance. The groups that were pretreated with Cam B exhibited reduced lung colonization of the breast cancer cells (Fig. 7D). In addition, immunohistochemical analysis against HIF-1α antibody showed that pretreated with Cam B decreased HIF-1α in the lung section (Fig. 7E).

Discussion

Natural products have been the subject of many drug discovery efforts. There is an increasing body of evidence that shows A. camphorate exhibit antitumor activity. It has been reported that the triterpenoids in A. camphorate contribute to the activity (15). In addition, Hsu et al. reported that ethyl acetate extractions from the fruiting body of A. camphorate exert an anti-invasive effect in hepatoma cells (16). Yang et al. demonstrated that the fermented culture broth of A. camphorate from submerged cultures can significantly inhibit the metastatic ability of MDA-MB-231 breast cancer and B16F10 melanoma cells (17). Senthil Kumar and his co-workers found antrodin C inhibits epithelial-to-mesenchymal transition and metastasis of breast cancer cells (14). Our previous study showed that Cam B significantly inhibits the xenograft tumor growth of MDA-MB-231 cells at dose of 3 mg/kg (i.p.; thrice a week for 4 weeks) in nude mice (12). It showed administration of 10 mg/kg of Cam B (i.p.; thrice a week for 4 weeks) in mouse did not display any signs of toxicity by examination of individual organs such as liver, lung and kidney. The present study provides the demonstration that Cam B, a maleimide derivative, exerts anti-tumor progression potential in estrogen-negative breast cancer cells. According to our nude mice study, Cam B inhibited pulmonary colonization of MDA-MB-231 breast cancer cells in nude mice. By histological and gross examination of mouse lung, it showed that pretreated Cam B reduced the lung colonization of MDA-MB-231 breast cancer cells (Fig. 7). However, the in vivo study should be done in the future in order to define anti-metastatic effect of Cam B.

There is growing evidence supporting that the inflammatory activity plays a role in the development of cancer. For instance, inappropriate up-regulation of COX-2 prolongs the survival of malignant or transformed cells and leads to phenotypic changes associated with metastatic potential (18). It has been suggested that the inhibition of COX-2 can decrease breast cancer cell motility, invasion, and matrix metalloproteinase expression (13, 19). In accordance with our results, Cam B, a COX-2 inhibitor (12), demonstrates anti-migration and anti-invasion in MDA-MB-231 cells.

HIF-1α regulated many gene expression involving tumor invasion and metastasis such as vimentin, cathepsin D, MMP2 and Snail (6, 20). Vimentin is a type of III intermediate filament protein that is expressed frequently in epithelial carcinoma correlating with cell motility and invasion (21-22). Cathepsin D is a lysosomal protease known to play tumor-promoting function in cancer progression (23-24). In addition to lysosomal protease, tumor cells acquire ability to surmount extracellular matrix barriers by expressing MMPs (25). Snail affects tumor progression in diverse tumors through induction of epithelial mesenchymal transition (20). Moreover, HIF-1α plays a central role in tumor progression by activating oncogenes and inactivating tumor suppressor genes. Cancer cell invasion involves aberrant alteration in extracellular protease production. Of these proteases, the matrix metalloproteinases (MMPs), which are a group of zinc-dependent extracellular matrix (ECM)-degrading enzymes that participate in the degradation of environmental barriers are thought to play a critical role in tumor cell invasion (26). In addition, cathepsin D is one aspartic protease involved in cell invasion and metastasis, particularly in breast cancer (27). Downregulation of cathepsin D by anti-sense gene transfer inhibited tumor growth and experimental metastasis of human breast cancer (28). Cathepsin D may be a good potential therapy target for estrogen-negative breast cancer (29). In the present study, Cam B decreased the expression of MMP-2 and cathepsin D, which are target gene products of HIF-1 in MDA-MB-231 cells (Fig. 5). The data showed that anti-invasion effect of Cam B is associated with downregulation of HIF-1α and its target gene products in MD-MB-231 cells.

The development of metastasis is the major cause of
treatment failure in breast cancer patients. Metastasis is a complex multistep processes triggered by genetic and epigenetic alterations that result changes in the activity of signaling pathways. The signal transduction that leads to tumor invasion comprises a complex network. ERK, PI3K/AKT and NFκB have been reported to be important mediators of pro-invasive signaling (2-5). In a previous study, we demonstrated that ERK and NFκB inhibitor can decrease the activity of MMPs (30). In addition, our previous study found that the PI3K/AKT pathway involved in cell motility (31). Recently, a growing body of evidence demonstrates that the uncontrolled activation of the NFκB and PI3K/AKT pathway contribute to the development and progression of human cancers (32). It has been found that HIF-1α is a target gene of NFκB under normoxia. NFκB may act in concert with translation and stabilization of HIF-1α (33). In addition to hypoxia, PI3K/AKT pathway plays a key role in the control of HIF-1α translation and synthesis in certain types of cancer cells (34). In the present study, Cam B inhibits the phosphorylation of p65 NFκB and AKT, which are associated the expression of HIF1-α. Consequently, our data provide the first demonstration that Cam B can inhibit PI3K/AKT and NFκB signaling pathways, which is associated with downregulation of HIF-1α in MDA-MB-231 cells (Fig. 6). These results further imply anti-tumor progression potential of Cam B by blocking the
NFκB and PI3K/AKT signaling pathways.

Conclusion
Our previous and the present studies demonstrate that Cam B inhibits the proliferation and invasion of estrogen receptor-negative breast cancer cells. Cam B, a component in A. camphorata, reduced the expression of HIF1-α by blocking NFκB and PI3K/AKT signaling pathways in MDA-MB-231 cells. These results demonstrated that Cam B is a candidate compound for...
the prevention and treatment of breast cancer.

Acknowledgements
This study was supported by Chung Shan Medical University (CSMU-CMMC-104-03) and Chi-Mei Foundation Medical Center (CMCSMU10403). Digital Image Analyzer was performed in the Instrument Center of Chung Shan Medical University, which is supported by National Science Council, Ministry of Education and Chung Shan Medical University.

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