Orchid B\textsubscript{ister} gene \textit{PeMADS28} displays conserved function in ovule integument development

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The ovules and egg cells are well developed to be fertilized at anthesis in many flowering plants. However, ovule development is triggered by pollination in most orchids. In this study, we characterized the function of a \textit{B}\textsubscript{ister} gene, named \textit{PeMADS28}, isolated from \textit{Phalaenopsis equestris}, the genome-sequenced orchid. Spatial and temporal expression analysis showed \textit{PeMADS28} predominantly expressed in ovules between 32 and 48 days after pollination, which synchronizes with integument development. Subcellular localization and protein–protein interaction analyses revealed that \textit{PeMADS28} could form a homodimer as well as heterodimers with D-class and E-class MADS-box proteins. In addition, ectopic expression of \textit{PeMADS28} in \textit{Arabidopsis thaliana} induced small curled rosette leaves, short silique length and few seeds, similar to that with overexpression of other species’ \textit{B}\textsubscript{ister} genes in \textit{Arabidopsis}. Furthermore, complementation test revealed that \textit{PeMADS28} could rescue the phenotype of the \textit{ABS/TT16} mutant. Together, these results indicate the conserved function of \textit{B}\textsubscript{ister} \textit{PeMADS28} associated with ovule integument development in orchid.

In plants, MADS-box genes control the development of distinct organs, such as flower, ovule, fruit, leaf, and root\textsuperscript{1-3}. Plant MADS-box genes can be classified into types I and II genes on the basis of phylogenetic analysis\textsuperscript{4}. The best studied plant type II MADS-box transcription factors are those involved in floral organ identity determination. The determination of floral organ primordia by genes of the A, B, C, D and E classes led to the ABCDE model\textsuperscript{5-10}. Furthermore, most of plant type II MADS-box proteins share a conserved structure consisting of four domains: MADS (M), intervening (I), keratin-like (K), and C-terminal (C)\textsuperscript{11,12}. The DNA binding partner specificity is mediated to a large extent by the I domain, and the K domain likely promotes protein dimerization as well as tetramerization\textsuperscript{13-19}. Proteins of floral MADS-box genes participating in floral organ identity interact with each other to control downstream genes\textsuperscript{16-19}. Most of the protein–protein interactions necessary for the constitution of quaternary complexes, as recommended by the “quartet model”, are conserved\textsuperscript{20}. Proliferating ovule primordia is specified by specific ovule identity factors, such as the MADS-box family members \textit{SEEDSTICK (STK)}, \textit{SHATTERPROOF1 (SHP1)}, \textit{SHP2}, \textit{SEPELLATA (SEP)} and \textit{AGAMOUS}\textsuperscript{21-23}. Moreover, \textit{B}\textsubscript{ister} genes are “marker genes” for the development of (inner) integument structures, phylogenetically the “oldest” structures surrounding the female gametophyte of seed plants\textsuperscript{24}. 

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In dicotyledons, the first B\textsubscript{Sister} gene was isolated from Arabidopsis thaliana and was named ARABIDOPSIS BSISTER (ABS/TT16)\textsuperscript{22,28}. ABS/TT16 is expressed mainly in the innermost integument layer, the endothelium; a closely related paralog is GORDITA (GOA, formerly known as AGL63). Besides studies of eudicots, B\textsubscript{Sister} MADS-box genes have been investigated in the monocot Oryza sativa. ABS/TT16 and GOA were found not functionally redundant in ovule development\textsuperscript{24,26–28}. ABS/TT16 is required for the proper differentiation of the inner integument, and GOA is necessary for at least the early development of the outer integument\textsuperscript{28}. The single mutants abs/tt16 and goa still produce seeds, which germinate properly\textsuperscript{24,26,27}. In addition, silencing of OsMADS29, a B\textsubscript{Sister} gene in rice, led to severe phenotypes with degeneration of the pericarp, ovular vascular trace, integuments, nucellar epidermis and nucellar projection\textsuperscript{29}.

Orchids, constituting approximately 10% of all seed plant species, have enormous value for commercial horticulture and are of specific scientific interest because of their extraordinary diversity of floral morphology, ecological adaptations, and unique reproductive strategies\textsuperscript{30}. The unique reproductive strategies include mature pollen grains packaged as pollinia, pollination-regulated ovary/ovule development, synchronized timing of micro- and mega-gametogenesis for effective fertilization, and release of thousands or millions of immature embryos (seeds without endosperm) in mature pods\textsuperscript{31}.

In most flowering plants, the ovules are mature, and the egg cells are ready for fertilization at anthesis. In contrast, in orchids, ovule development is triggered by pollination. In most orchids such as Cattleya, Sophronitis, Epidendron, Laelia, Phalaenopsis, Dendrobium and Dendro\textit{tis}, ovules are completely absent in unpollinated ovaries, and the development of ovule is triggered only after pollination\textsuperscript{32}. The long-term progressive process of ovule development in orchids as compared with other flowering plants is an attractive system for investigating ovule initiation and subsequent development.

With high economic value, Phalaenopsis orchids are beautiful ornamental plants and very popular worldwide. The genome of \textit{P. equestris} was recently sequenced\textsuperscript{33} and the information provides a great opportunity to identify and characterize the genes involved in regulating orchid ovule development\textsuperscript{34}. In this study, we identified and functionally characterized \textit{PeMADS28}, a B\textsubscript{Sister} MADS-box gene, in \textit{P. equestris}. Our results indicate that the function of \textit{PeMADS28} plays an important role in ovule integument development in orchid and reveals the functional conservation of B\textsubscript{Sister} genes between monocots and dicots.

**Results**

**Identification of PeMADS28 MADS-box gene in \textit{P. equestris}**. Only one B\textsubscript{Sister} MADS-box gene, \textit{PeMADS28} (predicted proteome gene ID Peq004141), exists in the \textit{P. equestris} genome\textsuperscript{35}. The sequence of \textit{PeMADS28} was retrieved from OrchidBase\textsuperscript{45,46}. The ORF including 723 bp encodes a protein of 240 amino acids. Multiple sequence alignment with other B\textsubscript{Sister} proteins from gymnosperm, dicots and monocots demonstrated that \textit{PeMADS28} has a typical MIKC-type domain structure (Supplementary Fig. S1). B\textsubscript{Sister} proteins also contain a conserved PI Motif-Derived sequence in their C-terminal regions that are also representative of B-class MADS-box proteins (Supplementary Fig. S1)\textsuperscript{35}.

**Phylogenetic relationship of PeMADS28 and other MADS-box genes.** To determine the phylogenetic relationships of \textit{PeMADS28} and other B\textsubscript{Sister} genes, we constructed a phylogenetic tree by using the amino acid sequences of \textit{PeMADS28} with other known gymnosperm and angiosperm B\textsubscript{Sister} sequences and the AGL63-like sequence from Brassicaceae. Amino acid sequences of B\textsubscript{Sister} proteins and AGL63-like proteins were retrieved from the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI). This phylogeny has two supported major clades, one containing monocot B\textsubscript{Sister} proteins and the other dicot B\textsubscript{Sister} proteins (Fig. 1). Moreover, the B\textsubscript{Sister} and AGL63-like proteins were divided into two groups in dicots clade. \textit{PeMADS28} is close to the orchid Erycina pusilla B\textsubscript{Sister} Protein EpMADS24 (Fig. 1). These results strongly suggest that \textit{PeMADS28} belongs to the B\textsubscript{Sister} gene family.

**Spatial and temporal expression of PeMADS28 in \textit{P. equestris}**. RT-PCR and quantitative real-time RT-PCR were used to survey the spatial and temporal expression patterns of \textit{PeMADS28}. Because B\textsubscript{Sister} MADS-box genes are involved in ovule development and pollination is a key regulatory event in orchid ovule initiation, we determined the temporal mRNA expression patterns of \textit{PeMADS28} in developing ovules triggered by pollination. During ovule development, \textit{PeMADS28} transcript level was highest from 32 to 48 days after pollination (DAP) (Fig. 2a,b), then decreased from 56 to 100 DAP (Fig. 2a,b). However, \textit{PeMADS28} expression was barely observed in flower buds and was absent from vegetative tissues (Supplementary Fig. S2). Previous research showed that ovule development between 32 and 48 DAP is associated with inner and outer integument development\textsuperscript{37}. These results suggest \textit{PeMADS28} has functions in ovule integument development.

**In situ hybridization of PeMADS28 transcripts.** We further examined the detailed spatial and temporal expression patterns of \textit{PeMADS28} during ovule development by in situ hybridization with antisense RNA probes. During the early stage of ovule development, when the final branches of placental protuberances differentiate ovular primordia, \textit{PeMADS28} transcript expression was detected in all ovule primordia at their initiation (Fig. 3a,c,d). In the later stage, the expression was more concentrated in developing ovules (Fig. 3e). At 48 DAP, \textit{PeMADS28} mRNA was detected in the whole ovule including nucellus and integument (Fig. 3f). \textit{PeMADS28} transcript expression was not detected in 56-DAP ovules (Fig. 3h). The negative control was sense RNA used as a probe (Fig. 3b,g,i). These results supported that \textit{PeMADS28} might be involved in orchid ovule initiation and integument development.
Subcellular localization of PeMADS28-GFP fusion protein. As a member of MADS-box transcription factors, PeMADS28 was expected to localize in the nucleus. To test the subcellular localization of PeMADS28, a PeMADS28-GFP fusion protein was generated with a GFP reporter gene fused in-frame to the PeMADS28 coding region under control of the 35S promoter. Transient expression of PeMADS28-GFP fusion protein was analyzed in Phalaenopsis petal protoplasts. PeMADS28-GFP fusion protein signals were observed in both the nucleus and cytoplasm along with GFP signals (Fig. 4). Thus, PeMADS28 might need to interact with other proteins to exclusively localize in the nucleus.

Interaction behavior of PeMADS28 analyzed by bimolecular fluorescence complementation (BiFC) assay. A number of previous studies demonstrated that MADS-box transcription factors form dimers or higher-order complexes for their functions in flower and ovule development. To investigate the ability of homodimer formation of PeMADS28 and nuclear localization of this self-association, we used BiFC assay. A BiFC vector pair with PeMADS28 fused to N- or C-terminal halves of YFP (PeMADS28:YFPn and PeMADS28:YFPc) was prepared and used to co-transfect Phalaenopsis petal protoplasts. Fluorescence YFP signal clearly indicated an interaction between the two PeMADS28 monomers. The formed homodimer was exclusively localized in the nucleus (Fig. 5a). These results demonstrate that dimerization of PeMADS28 monomers plays an important role in retaining PeMADS28 in the nucleus. Previous reports indicated that PeMADS1 (C-class), PeMADS7 (D-class), and PeSEP3 (E-class) MADS-box genes are involved in orchid ovule development. To gain more insight into the interaction of MADS-box proteins involved in orchid ovule development, interaction behaviors among Bs and C-class, D-class, and E-class proteins were further investigated by BiFC assay. Interaction fluorescence signals were observed in the combination of PeMADS28 and PeSEP3 (Fig. 5b,c) as well as PeMADS28 and PeMADS7 (Fig. 5d,e), which suggests that the orchid Bsister protein can interact with E- and D-class MADS-box proteins. In addition, the signals were localized in the nucleus, as indicated by use of the nuclear dye propidium iodide (PI). However, interaction was not observed with the combination of PeMADS28 and PeMADS1 (Fig. 5f,g). Therefore, PeMADS28 may not form heterodimers with C-class MADS-box proteins. No fluorescence was detected with the empty vector control (Fig. 5h).

Functional analysis of PeMADS28 gene by ectopic expression and complementation in Arabidopsis thaliana. For functional characterization of PeMADS28, we constructed transgenic Arabidopsis plants expressing PeMADS28 under control of the cauliflower mosaic virus (CaMV) 35S promoter via Agrobacterium-mediated transformation. A total of 20 independent overexpressed PeMADS28 transgenic lines were obtained based on kanamycin selection and a similar phenotype. Among twenty transgenic lines, nine showed a 3:1 segregating kanamycin resistance phenotype. As compared with wild-type plants, six independent PeMADS28 overexpressed lines shows the early flowering phenotype (Fig. 6a,c [wild-type plant]; 6b,d [trans-
genic plant]) and fewer flower bud production (Fig. 6i [wild-type plant]; 6j [transgenic plant]). The rosette and cauline leaves of transgenic plants had upwardly curled profiles and were smaller than those of wild-type plants (Fig. 6a,k [wild type plant]; 6b,l [transgenic plant]). No homeotic conversion of floral organs was observed in transgenic plants. Moreover, transgenic plants had smaller flowers with cracked sepals than wild-type plants (Fig. 6e,g [wild-type plant]; 6f,h [transgenic plant]). The length of siliques was shorter in transgenic plants (Fig. 6n and Table 1). Transgenic plants also showed more undeveloped seeds in siliques than did wild-type plants (Fig. 6o and Table 1). In addition, transgenic seeds were larger and heavier (Fig. 6m and Table 1).

Previously, GORDITA and ABS/TT16 are the paralogs in Arabidopsis. Consistently, over-expressed the GORDITA or ABS/TT16 in Arabidopsis caused that the plant size shorter, and all organs are smaller than those in the wild-type24,26,28. Both two over-expressed plants were affected the fruit development, and ABS/TT16 led to the rosette leaves curled24,26,28. It is similar to 35::PeMADS28 phenotype. These results appeared that the PeMADS28 may play a role in fruit development.

To further validate the function of PeMADS28, we used complementation testing with the tt16-1 mutant and examined the seed pigmentation and development of the endothelium. A total of 8 transgenic lines were obtained and 4 showed a 3:1 segregating kanamycin-resistance phenotype. All of the T2 line seeds showed restoration of pigmentation to a brown color from the straw color of the tt16-1 mutant (Fig. 7a–c). In addition, PeMADS28 could rescue the development of endothelium in tt16-1 plants. Endothelial cells in immature wild-type seeds were small, almost rectangular in shape and regularly spaced (Fig. 7d–f). In abs/tt16 immature seeds, endothelium cells seemed to be flatter and more irregularly shaped than wild-type cells, resembled parenchymatic cells, and often seemed to collapse (Fig. 7f)26. All of the T2 line (35S:PeMADS28 transgenic tt16-1) seed coats showed the normal endothelium of the wild-type seed coat (Fig. 7e), so PeMADS28 was sufficient to complete the function of Arabidopsis ABS/TT16.

**Discussion**

In this work, we identified a B-sister-like gene, PeMADS28, from the P. equestris genome and characterized its function by sequence comparison, expression profile analysis, protein–protein interaction behavior, ectopic expression and complementation experiments in Arabidopsis. Protein sequence alignment showed that PeMADS28 is a typical B-sister protein with respect to its protein sequence because it contains a conserved sub-terminal “PI motif-derived sequence,” which is also representative of B-class MADS-box proteins25. Phylogenetic analysis with
Figure 3. In situ hybridization of PeMADS28 in developing ovules of *P. equestris*. (a,b) Placenta with ovule primordium at 4 DAP; (c) placenta with developing ovule at 32 DAP; (d) enlarged region of the dark arrow in (c); (e) placenta with developing ovule at 40 DAP; (f,g) developing ovules at 48 DAP; (h,i) developing ovules at 56 DAP. In (a), (c), (d), (e), (f) and (h), antisense probes were used to detect PeMADS28 transcripts. In (b), (g) and (i), hybridization involved sense probes (negative controls). Bars, 0.1 mm. p, placenta; op, ovule primordium; do, developing ovule; ii, inner integument; oi, outer integument; nu, nucellus; me, megaspores; DAP: days after pollination. The nucellus is highlighted by the red dash line.
sion pattern over at least 300 million years. In our study, temporal expression analysis revealed significant stage. In rice, mRNA was detected in the developing inner integument at the late floral organ developmental WBsis cots, wheat nucellus and integument. Later, the expression is confined to the endothelium in mature ovules. In snapdragon, is a putative orchid ortholog of Bsister genes like PeMADS28, expression of Bsister ovule and integuments of angiosperms. In the gymnosperm Gnetum gnemon GGM13 neo-function in shoot size and architecture. In fact, the development of orchid ovule is the typical monosporic gene. OsMADS29 was identified as a key regulator of early rice seed development by regulating the programmed cell death of maternal tissues. Arabidopsis genome contains two and rice has three Bsister genes, these homologous genes have been occurred diversified expression and functional differentiation. ABS/TT16 is involved in endothelial cell specification and control of flavonoid biosynthesis in Arabidopsis seed coat. The GOA is a young paralog of ABS/TT16 and play a role in fruit longitudinal growth. The rice OsMADS29 was identified as a key regulator of early rice seed development by regulating the programmed cell death of maternal tissues. OsMADS30 does not have a canonical Bsister function, and revealed neo-function in shoot size and architecture. In fact, the development of orchid ovule is the typical monosporic Polygonum type in which the functional megaspore passes through three mitotic divisions producing a seven celled embryo sac consisting of three antipodal cells, one central cell formed by two polar nuclei, two synergid cells, and the egg cell. In addition, the embryo sac is enclosed by inner and outer integuments. The orchid ovule structure and development is highly similar to that of Arabidopsis and cereal except that the inner integument Arabidopsis structure and development is highly similar to that of Arabidopsis and cereal except that the inner integument Arabidopsis from previous studies showed that Bsister genes are expressed in the ovule and envelope in gymnosperms and in the ovule and integuments of angiosperms. In the gymnosperm Gnetum gnemon, expression of Bsister GGM13 is specifically strong at the adaxial base of the cupules, where ovules subsequently develop. When ovules appear, GGM13 expression is limited to the developing nucellus and inner envelopes. In dicots, the Arabidopsis Bsister gene ABS/TT16 is expressed mainly in endothelium. In petunia, FBP24 is expressed in young ovule primordia, nucellus and integument. Later, the expression is confined to the endothelium in mature ovules. In snapdragon, DEFH21 expression was found in only a few inner cell layers of the inner integuments of the ovules. In monocots, wheat WBsis mRNA was detected in the developing inner integument at the late floral organ developmental stage. In rice, OsMADS29 transcripts are localized in the ovule, including integuments and nucellus throughout ovule development.

These results reveal a similarity of expression of Bsister genes suggesting conservation of the gene expression pattern over at least 300 million years. In our study, temporal expression analysis revealed significant PeMADS28 transcript expression between 32 and 48 DAP (Fig. 2a,b). In addition, in situ hybridization signals of PeMADS28 transcripts were concentrated in the developing ovules (Fig. 3c–f). Hence, Bsister genes may have conserved expression patterns in seed plants. Interestingly, although Arabidopsis genome contains two and rice has three Bsister genes, these homologous genes have been occurred diversified expression and functional differentiation. ABS/TT16 is involved in endothelial cell specification and control of flavonoid biosynthesis in Arabidopsis seed coat. The GOA is a young paralog of ABS/TT16 and play a role in fruit longitudinal growth. The rice OsMADS29 was identified as a key regulator of early rice seed development by regulating the programmed cell death of maternal tissues. OsMADS30 does not have a canonical Bsister function, and revealed neo-function in shoot size and architecture. In fact, the development of orchid ovule is the typical monosporic Polygonum type in which the functional megaspore passes through three mitotic divisions producing a seven celled embryo sac consisting of three antipodal cells, one central cell formed by two polar nuclei, two synergid cells, and the egg cell. In addition, the embryo sac is enclosed by inner and outer integuments. The orchid ovule structure and development is highly similar to that of Arabidopsis and cereal except that the inner integument gradually degenerated during the early stages of embryo proper formation and ovule initiation and development is precisely triggered by pollination. Our data considered that the Bsister gene PeMADS28 might involve in the typical ovule development including integument morphogenesis.

Previously, it has been shown that the antagonistic development of nucellus and endosperm in Arabidopsis. The endosperm delivers the signal for the differentiation of seed coat and then both of tissues orchestrates seed growth. However, the endosperm could also initiate nucellus degeneration via vacuolar cell death and necrosis. It also has been demonstrated that TT16/ABS can regulate proanthocyanidins synthesis in the seed coat and conversely TT16/ABS expression in the seed coat is sufficient to activate the nucellus degeneration. In Phalaenopsis orchids, double fertilization could be observed. However, the triple fusion nucleus of the endosperm initial is amorphous in shape and apparently begins to degenerate immediately, consequently forming no endosperm. We speculated that the signal generated by fertilization of the central cell triggers its degeneration through...
activation of the PeMADS28 expression. Because endosperm initial lives shortly, the signal might not spread to the seed coat. In fact, the *Phalaenopsis* seed coat do not accumulate proanthocyanidins. However, whether signal generated by fertilization of the central cell could reach to the nucellus and initiates the nucellus cell death should be necessary for further study.

As transcriptional regulatory proteins, a number of MADS-box proteins have been shown to localize in the nucleus. However, some MADS-box proteins are unable to translocate into the nucleus by themselves, but their dimers deposit in the nucleus; examples are AP3-PI and UNSHAVEN-FLORAL BINDING PROTEIN 9 (FBP9). In this study, we detected PeMADS28-GFP fusion proteins in the nucleus and cytoplasm (Fig. 4h). However, BiFC results showed the PeMADS28 homodimer specifically retained in the nucleus. The results suggest that homodimerization of PeMADS28 drives a conformational change to bring it into a nuclear-retaining structure. This kind of behavior of orchid *B. aster* PeMADS28 is similar to that of rice *OsMADS29*. Our data
suggest the probability of PeMADS28 being regulated at the post-translational level via its interactions, which may affect its function by regulating entry into the nucleus and regulation of its targets.

In *Arabidopsis*, previous study suggested a specific interaction of ABS with STK, SEP3, SHP1 and (much weaker) AG24,38. OsMADS29 could interact with OsMADS3 (C-class proteins) and all five E-class proteins of rice52. Our results indicate that PeMADS28 can form a homodimer in the nucleus. In addition, it could interact with D-class (PeMADS7) and E-class (PeMADS8) MADS-box proteins. However, PeMADS28 and PeMADS1 may not form heterodimers directly. These results suggest that protein interaction behaviors among Bsister, D- and E-class proteins are conserved in angiosperms. Furthermore, in previous study, protein–protein interaction analyses revealed that PeSEP3 could bridge the interaction between PeMADS1 and PeMADS7 involved in *Phalaenopsis* gynostemium and ovule development37. Thus, a higher-order protein complex formed by C-E-D-Bsister genes (PeMADS1-PeMADS8-PeMADS-PeMADS28) might have an important role in regulation of orchid ovule development.

Functional analysis of ABS has shown abnormal characteristics in vegetative and reproductive organs of ABS-overexpressing *Arabidopsis*, including curled rosette leaves, late flowering, small flowers and shrunken siliques with few developed seeds26. Overexpression of GOA, the paralog of ABS, showed similar phenotypes as ABS-overexpressed plants, except that GOA-overexpressing plants displayed early flowering27. Overexpression of the *Ginkgo* Bｓｔｒｅｔτ gene GBM10 in tobacco resulted in reduced size of transgenic seedlings, small and curled leaves, small flowers, small fruit with wrinkled surface and massive abortion of undeveloped ovules32. Similar to these phenotypes, our PeMADS28-overexpression *Arabidopsis* showed curled and small rosette leaves, early flowering, blooming, small flowers and shrunken siliques with few developed seeds.

**Figure 6.** Phenotype analysis of transgenic *Arabidopsis* overexpressing PeMADS28. (a) 20-day-old wild-type plant; (b) 20-day-old 35S::PeMADS28 transgenic plant; (c) 31-day-old wild-type plant; (d) 31-day-old 35S::PeMADS28 transgenic plant. Bars (a–d), 5 mm. (e) Side-view of wild-type flower; (f) side-view of 35S::PeMADS28 transgenic flower; (g) top-view of wild-type flower; (h) top-view of 35S::PeMADS28 transgenic flower; (i) Wild-type floral inflorence; (j) 35S::PeMADS28 transgenic floral inflorence; (k) cauline leaf of wild-type plant; (l) cauline leaf of 35S::PeMADS28 transgenic plant. Bars (e–l) 1 mm. (m) Wild-type seed (left); 35S::PeMADS28 transgenic seed (right); (n) siliqute of wild-type (upper); siliqute of 35S::PeMADS28 transgenic plant (lower); (o) siliqute of wild-type without one valve (upper); siliqute of 35S::PeMADS28 transgenic plant without one valve (lower). Bars (m–o) 1 mm.

**Table 1.** Siliqute length and seeds in OXPeMADS28 transgenic plants and wild-type (WT) plants. Asterisks indicate statistically significant differences (*P < 0.05 compared with WT by Student’s t-test); The ± standard deviation (SD) of the three biological repeats.

|                | WT                  | OXPeMADS28          |
|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Siliqute length (cm) | 1.29 ± 0.13 (n = 15) | 0.85 ± 0.16 (n = 15), decrease* |
| Seeds/siliqute   | 45.33 ± 3.81 (n = 15) | 24.26 ± 4.04 (n = 15), decrease* |
| 100 seeds (mg)   | 3.04 ± 0.4 (n = 3)    | 5.05 ± 0.2 (n = 3), increase* |
small flowers, short siliques and few developed seeds. Overexpressing *PeMADS28* in wild-type *Arabidopsis* demonstrated that *PeMADS28* has functions similar to those of *Bsister* genes in regulating ovule development. Moreover, overexpression of *PeMADS28* could restore the development of endothelial cells in the *tt16* mutant. Conserved functions of orchid *Bsister* genes for specifying integument development could occur in developing seeds of *Arabidopsis*, which indicates that a competent endothelium is needed for *PeMADS28* function to specify integument development.

In most orchids, ovary and ovule development is precisely triggered by pollination32. Previous studies showed that pollination inhibits *PeMADS6* (*B-PI* MADS-box gene) expression in the ovary via the auxin signaling pathway to promote *Phalaenopsis* ovary/ovule development32,53. In addition, expression of C-class *PeMADS1* and D-class *PeMADS7* was significantly induced by pollination37. Furthermore, the TCP gene *PeCIN8* showed a parallel expression pattern in the developing ovules of *Phalaenopsis* to that of *PeMADS28*34. Understanding the interaction as well as regulation networks of these genes, then stimulating pollination will help in further exploring the molecular mechanism of orchid ovule development. Moreover, the availability of several whole-genome sequences of orchids, including *P. equestris*, *Dendrobium catenatum*, and *Apostasia shenzhenica*33,54–56, can lead to promising exploration of more genes involved in the orchid ovule development.

**Materials and methods**

**Plant materials and growth conditions.** The plants of wild-type *P. equestris* (S82–159) were grown in greenhouses under natural light and controlled temperature from 23 to 27 °C48. *A. thaliana* ecotype Columbia was used in transformation experiments. Seeds were surface-sterilized in 10% (v/v) bleach for 15 min, then rinsed 3–4 times with sterile water. Sterilized seeds were grown on half-strength Murashige and Skoog medium (INVITROGEN, CARLSBAD CA, USA) in the presence of 1% (w/v) sucrose and 0.8% (w/v) agar. Plated seeds were incubated at 4 °C for 48 h, then maintained in a fully automated growth chamber (CHIN HSIN, Taiwan) under a 16-h light/8-h dark photoperiod at 22 °C for 10 days before being transplanted to soil37.

**Sequence alignment and phylogenetic analysis.** Sequence alignment involved use of CLUSTALW and phylogenetic analysis MEGA 6 by the neighbor-joining method. Bootstrap analysis was with 1000 replicates. The GeneBank accession numbers for amino acid sequences are AtsMADS29 (XP_020188803), TaWM25 (CAM59071), HvBsister (BAK06913), BdMADS29 (NP_001288325), OsMADS29 (NP_015624837), SbB-sister (XP_002453370), ZMM17 (NP_001105130), OsMADS30 (Q655V4), OsMADS31 (Q84NC2), MaMADS29 (XP_01867849), PdAP3-like (XP_00880798), AcpAP3-like (XP_020109780), PeMADS28 (KT865880), EmMADS24 (AHM92100), VvFBP24 (RVW42418), VrFBP24-like (XP_034698718), ABS (Q8RYD9), RsTT16-like (XP_018481949), AmDEFH21 (CACC5225), FBP24 (AAK21255), SIFBP24-like (XP_019066630), AmtGM13 (XP_006829168), CcBsister1 (ADD25185), GGM13 (CAB44459), GbMADS10 (BAD93174), GORDITA (NP_1743992), CrAGL63 (XP_006306362), LcAGL63 (APB93359).

**RNA extraction.** We collected unpollinated ovaries; ovaries and ovules at 1, 2, 4, 8 day after pollination (DAP); ovules at 16, 32, 40, 48, 56, 64 DAP; and developing seeds at 80 and 100 DAP from *P. equestris*37. Samples were immersed in liquid nitrogen, and stored at − 80 °C until the RNA was extracted. Total RNA was isolated with use of TRIzol reagent (SIGMA-ALDRICH). Briefly, frozen tissue (0.5–1 g) was ground with liquid nitrogen with a pestle and mortar and homogenized in TRIzol reagent. Then the dissolved RNA was extracted with chloroform. After centrifugation in 13,000 rpm to remove insoluble material, total RNA was precipitated with isopropanol and 0.8 M sodium citrate was added to dissolve polysaccharides at − 20 °C overnight; then samples were precipitated again with 4 M LiCl, pelleted, washed, and the final RNA precipitate was dissolved in a suitable
volume of sterilized DEPC-treated water. Before cDNA synthesis, RNA was treated with RNase-free DNase I (INVITROGEN) to remove DNA contamination.

**RT-PCR and quantitative real-time PCR.** RNA was used as a template for cDNA synthesis with reverse transcriptase and the SuperScript II kit (INVITROGEN). Transcripts of PeMADS28 were detected by RT-PCR with gene-specific primers (Supplementary Table S1) for 25–30 cycles. The RT-PCR program was 95 °C for 7 min for denaturation of DNA and activation of polymerase, then amplification at 95 °C for 30 s, 55 °C for 30 s, 72 °C for 30 s and extension at 72 °C for 10 min as described previously37. The amplified products were analyzed on 1% agarose gels. Quantitative real-time PCR involved using the ABI Prism 7000 sequence detection system (APPLIED BIOSYSTEMS) with 2X SYBR green PCR master mix (APPLIED BIOSYSTEMS)34. Reaction involved incubation at 50 °C for 2 min, then 95 °C for 10 min, and thermal cycling for 40 cycles (95 °C for 15 s and 60 °C for 1 min). The relative quantification was calculated according to the manufacturer’s instructions (APPLIED BIOSYSTEMS)34. The expression of P.equitrist (PACT4, AY134752) was used for normalization34. Primers used for amplification are in Supplementary Table S1.

**In situ hybridization.** Developing ovules and developing seeds of P. equestris were fixed in 4% (v/v) paraformaldehyde and 0.5% (v/v) glutaraldehyde for 24 h at 4 °C, dehydrated through an ethanol series, embedded in Histoplant and longitudinal sectioned at 6–8 μm with use of a rotary microtome. Tissue sections were deparaffinized with xylene, rehydrated through an ethanol series, pre-treated with proteinase K (2 μg ml⁻¹) in 1 x phosphate-buffered saline (PBS) at 37 °C for 60 min, acetylated with 0.5% acetic anhydride for 10 min, and dehydrated with an ethanol series. The resulting PCR fragments were used as templates for synthesis of both antisense and sense riboprobes with digoxigenin-labeled UTP-DIG (ROCHE APPLIED SCIENCE) and the T7/SP6 Riboprobe in vitro Transcription System (PROMEGA) following the manufacturer’s instructions. For quality control, hybridization probes were tested by using dot blot to analyze the sensitivity before in situ hybridization. Hybridization and immunological detection of signals with alkaline phosphatase were performed as described48.

**Subcellular localization of PeMADS28-GFP fusion protein.** Template-specific primers were designed by the addition of an attB1 adapter primer (5’-GGG GAC AAG TTT GTA CAA AAA AGG AGG CTG G-3’) to the 5’ end of the first 18–25 nt of the open reading frame (ORF) and attB2 adapter primer (5’-GGG GAC CAC TTT GTA CAA GAA AGC TGG GTT-3’) to the 3’ end of the first 18–25 nt of the ORF, which generated the full-length attB1 and attB2 sites flanking the ORF (Supplementary Table S1). Gateway-compatible amplified ORFs were recombined into the pDONR 221 vector (INVITROGEN) by BP cloning: 1 μl (15–150 ng) PCR products, 2 μl BP clonase II Enzyme Mix (INVITROGEN), 150 ng pDONR vector plasmid and TE buffer (pH 8.0) were incubated at 25 °C for 1 h. Entry clones were used directly for transformation of E. coli DH5α cells, and bacteria were plated on LB medium containing 50 μg/ml of kanamycin. The plasmids were transfected into DH5α cells and transfected into E. coli strain XL1-blue with gene-specific primers (Supplementary Table S1) for 25–30 cycles. The RT-PCR program was 95 °C for 10 s, 55 °C for 30 s and 72 °C for 30 s, 72 °C for 10 min as described previously37. The amplified products were analyzed on 1% agarose gels. Quantitative real-time PCR involved using the ABI Prism 7000 sequence detection system (APPLIED BIOSYSTEMS) with 2X SYBR green PCR master mix (APPLIED BIOSYSTEMS)34. Reaction involved incubation at 50 °C for 2 min, then 95 °C for 10 min, and thermal cycling for 40 cycles (95 °C for 15 s and 60 °C for 1 min). The relative quantification was calculated according to the manufacturer’s instructions (APPLIED BIOSYSTEMS)34. The expression of P.equitrist (PACT4, AY134752) was used for normalization34. Primers used for amplification are in Supplementary Table S1.

**Bimolecular fluorescence complementation assay (BiFC).** To construct the interaction vectors, we used gene-specific primers with an additional attB1 adapter primer (5′-GGG GAC AAG TTT GTA CAA AAA AGG AGG CTG G-3’) added to the 5′ end of the first 18–25 nt of the ORF.) and attB2 adapter primer (5′-GGG GAC CAC TTT GTA CAA GAA AGC TGG GTT-3’) to the 3′ end of the first 18–25 nt of the ORF by using Pfu DNA polymerase. Primers for amplification are in Supplementary Table S1. Gateway compatible amplified ORFs were recombined into the pDONR 221 vector (INVITROGEN) by BP cloning: 1 μl (15–150 ng) PCR products, 2 μl BP clonase II Enzyme Mix (INVITROGEN), 150 ng pDONR vector plasmid and TE buffer (pH 8.0) were incubated at 25 °C for 1 h. Entry clones were used directly for transformation of E. coli DH5α cells, and bacteria were plated on LB medium containing 50 μg/ml of kanamycin. The plasmids were transfected into PeMADS28 protoplasts by PEG transformation. After culturing for 16 h, signals were visualized under a confocal laser microscope (CARL ZEISS LSM780, Instrument Development Center, NCKU). Separate bright field and fluorescence images were overlaid by using Axioscope 4 Rel.4.8.

**Arabidopsis transformation.** cDNA fragments containing the coding regions of PeMADS28 were cloned into the pBI121 vector (primers are in Supplementary Table S1). Constructs were then introduced into Agrobacterium tumefaciens (strain GV3101). GV3101 was inoculated drop-by-drop into closed floral buds by using a micropipette. Arabidopsis transformation was modified by the addition of 0.05% (v/v) Silwet L-77 (LEHLE SEEDS, ROUND ROCK, TX, USA) in the transformation media. To select transformed Arabidopsis, seeds (T0) were screened on media supplemented with 50 μg/ml kanamycin (SIGMA-ALDRICH). After 2 weeks of selection, the kanamycin-resistant seedlings (T1) were transferred to soil and grown under the conditions described above. Kanamycin segregation in the T1 generation was analyzed by chi-square test. The homozygous, kanamycin-resistant T2 generation was used to confirm the integration fragment by PCR for each construct. Transformed lines with segregation ratio 3:1 were collected for further analysis. The seeds of 35S:PeMADS28 transgenic Arabidopsis plants were grown in the same environment as described previously37.
Complementation assay. The tt16-1 mutant was obtained from Dr. L. Lepiniec (Institut Jean-Pierre Bourgin, France). The pBI121-PeMADS28 construct was transformed into the tt16-1 mutant and screened on media supplemented with 50 µg/ml kanamycin. The seeds of 35S:PeMADS28 tt16-1 transgenic Arabidopsis plants were used.

Differential interference contrast (DIC) microscopy. Immature seeds were removed from different developmental stages of silique and soaked overnight in clear solution (chloral hydrate:water:glycerol, 8:2:1 [w/v/v]). The Cleared seeds were examined by using a microscope equipped with Nomarski optics.

Code availability
Accession numbers for sequence data PeMADS1 (AF234617), PeMADS7 (JN983500), PeSEP3 (KF673859), PeMADS28 (KT865880), AtsMADS29 (XP_012088830), TaW2M5 (CAM59071), HvBsister (BAK06913), BdMADS29 (NP_001288325), OsMADS29 (XP_015624837), SbBsister (XP_002453370), ZMM17 (NP_001105130), OsMADS30 (Q655V4), OsMADS31 (Q84NC2), MaMADS29 (XP_018678894), PdAP3-like (XP_00880798), AcAP3-like (XP_020109780), EpMADS24 (AHM92100), VvFBP24 (RVW42148), VvFBP24-like (XP_034698718), ABS (Q8RYD9), RsTT16-like (XP_018419499), AmDEHF1 (CAC85225), FBP24 (AAK21255), SibFBP24-like (XP_019066630), AmtGGM13 (XP_006829168.2), CcBsister1 (ADD25185), GGM13 (CAD44499), GbMADS10 (BAD93174), GORDITA (NP_174399.2), CrAGL63 (XP_006306362.2), LcAGL63 (APB93359).

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Author contributions

W.-C.T. and Z.-J.L. planned and coordinated the project and wrote the manuscript; C.-Y.S. and Y.-Y.C. conducted all experimental works; K.-W.L. prepared mRNA extracted from the collected samples; H.-C.L. conducted complementation assay; Y.-Y.H., S.-B.C., F.Y., G.Z., S.-Q.Z. and L.-Q.H. analyzed the data.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Additional information

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