Stromal C-type lectin receptor COLEC12 integrates H. pylori, PGE2-EP2/4 axis and innate immunity in gastric diseases

Lin-Li Chang1,2,3,4, Wen-Hung Hsu2,4, Mou-Chieh Kao2,8, Chih-Chung Chou4, Chung-Cheng Lin2, Chung-Jung Liu3, Bi-Chuang Weng6, Fu-Chen Kuo9, Chao-Hung Kuo2,6,10, Ming-Hong Lin1, Chun-Jen Wang7, Chun-Hung Lin11,12,13, Deng-Chyang Wu2,4,6,10,14 & Shau-Ku Huang15,16,17,18

Tissue stroma is known to be important in regulating Hp-mediated inflammation, but its interaction with Hp and dendritic cells (DCs) remains to be determined. To this end, the potential crosstalk between H. pylori (Hp) infected gastric stromal cells (Hp-GSCs) and DCs was investigated. Primary GSCs from cancerous and adjacent normal tissues were generated from gastric cancer patients, and monocyte-derived DCs were obtained from healthy individuals. Levels of cytokines and prostaglandin E2 (PGE2) were measured by ELISA, and C-type lectin expression in GSCs was assessed by flow cytometry and immunohistochemistry. In a trans-well co-culture system, significantly upregulated DC-derived IL-23 expression was found when DCs were co-cultured with Hp-infected GSCs (Hp-GSCs). Further, PGE2 from Hp-GSCs was discovered to possess the priming effect, which could be inhibited by anti-COLEC12 (Collectin subfamily member 12) Abs, COLEC12 knockdown or when alpha3-fucosyltransferase-null (futB; HP0651) strain of Hp was used. Also, the expression of COLEC12 was co-localized with CD90+ stromal cells in cancerous tissues. Hp-GSCs-conditioned DCs were able to induce the expression of IL-17 from CD4+ T cells, which could be inhibited by IL-23-neutralizing Abs. These results suggested the importance of COLEC12 as a receptor involved in Hp-stromal cell interaction and its subsequent conditioning effect on DCs.

Hp infection with chronic inflammation is still the high risk factor for gastric cancer1. Growing evidence indicates that in response to Hp infection, dendritic cells (DCs), gastric epithelial cells, and gastric stromal cells (GSCs) are important in the regulatory network, representing, collectively, the first line of defense. However, the underlying mechanisms in promoting chronic inflammation and carcinogenesis are still unclear. Studies concerning

1Department of Microbiology and Immunology, Faculty of Medicine, College of Medicine, Kaohsiung Medical University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan. 2Graduate Institute of Medicine, College of Medicine, Kaohsiung Medical University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan. 3Graduate Institute of Clinical Medicine, College of Medicine, Kaohsiung Medical University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan. 4Center for Infectious Disease and Cancer Research, Kaohsiung Medical University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan. 5Department of Medical Research, Kaohsiung Medical University Hospital, Kaohsiung, Taiwan. 6Division of Gastroenterology, Department of Internal Medicine, Kaohsiung Medical University Hospital, Kaohsiung, Taiwan. 7Institute of Molecular Medicine, National Tsing Hua University, Hsinchu, Taiwan. 8Department of Life Science, National Tsing Hua University, Hsinchu, Taiwan. 9School of Medicine, College of Medicine, E-Da Hospital, I-Shou University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan. 10Center for Stem Cell Research, Kaohsiung Medical University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan. 11Chemical Biology and Molecular Biophysics, Taiwan International Graduate Program and the Institute of Biological Chemistry, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan. 12Institute of Biochemical Sciences, National Taiwan University, Taipei, Taiwan. 13Department of Chemistry, National Taiwan University, Taipei, Taiwan. 14Department of Internal Medicine, Kaohsiung Municipal Ta-Tung Hospital, Kaohsiung, Taiwan. 15National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, National Health Research Institutes, Miaoli, 35053, Taiwan. 16Research Center for Environmental Medicine, Kaohsiung Medical University, Kaohsiung, 80708, Taiwan. 17Shen-Zhen University Lo-Hu Hospital, Shen-Zhen, China. 18Johns Hopkins Asthma and Allergy Center, School of Medicine, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, 21224, USA. Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to D.-C.W. (email: dechwu@yahoo.com) or S.-K.H. (email: skhuang@nhri.org.tw)
the contribution of GSCs in gastric diseases have been scarce, and the mechanisms through which Hp influences GSCs and DC's function remain to be elucidated.

Hp is known to be able to disrupt the epithelial barrier, leading to the transit of Hp to the sub-epithelial mucosal layer, where the contact between Hp and stromal cells is plausible and is potentially critical in controlling Hp-mediated inflammation. Indeed, stromal cells are important players in the tumor microenvironment and play a crucial role in carcinogenesis and inflammation. Moreover, it has been shown that stromal cells are able to induce Th17 during Hp infection, and CD90+ stromal cells can, perhaps, act as antigen presenting cells in the colon. It is known that inhibition of the activation of these stromal cells leads to a decrease in tumor size in colon cancer animal models. A recent study by Buczko et al. suggested that stromal factors in normal gastric mucosa are able to regulate DC activation and the subsequent T-cell response, which could contribute to the permisiveness of both gastric and intestinal mucosa to colonize microbes.

DCs are present underneath the gastric epithelium and suggested to be able to interact with Hp directly or could be regulated by Hp-infected gastric epithelium or stromal cells. Extensive efforts have been made regarding DCs' recognition of Hp, in part, through their innate pattern-recognition Toll-like receptors (TLRs) and C-type-lectin receptors (CLRs) to generate innate immunity and influence adaptive response. CLRs are known to be crucial in recognition of complex glycan structures on various pathogens through their C-type carbohydrate-recognition domains (CRDs) and influence the subsequent adaptive immune response. Much less is known, however, regarding the molecular basis of Hp and tissue stromal interaction, and it is currently unknown as to whether like DCs, stromal cells also utilize members of the CLR in recognition of Hp.

Upon Hp stimulation, DCs can produce cytokines that are important in orienting an immune response toward tolerance or immunity; Hp infection is associated with a marked mucosal induction of T helper (Th) type 1 and Th17-type cytokines that are governed by interleukin (IL)-12 and IL-23, respectively. Increasing evidence has revealed the importance of IL-23 in linking innate and adaptive immunity through its ability in regulating IL-17 expression and Th17 development. IL-23 is increased significantly in the gastric biopsies of patients infected with Hp and has been associated with several inflammatory diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) and Hp-associated gastritis. The relevance of IL-17 to Hp-associated inflammation has been proven by using animal models. The recruitment of Th17 cells early in infection has been reported to be associated with inflammation and promotion of tumor growth and poor outcome. Studies have revealed that Th17 cells are increased in gastric cancer patients, and that Hp infection increases IL-17 expression in the gastric mucosa of humans and animals experimentally. Further, regulatory immune cells, mostly regulatory Foxp3+CD4+CD25+ T cells (Treg cells), have been identified as a major regulatory component of the adaptive immune response and are involved in Hp-related inflammation and bacterial persistence, through, in part, their ability to suppress Th17 and IL-17-driven response.

These current results suggest, therefore, that mucosal gastric resident cells, such as stromal cells, may be critical in controlling mucosal immunity by virtue of their strategic location and their established role in dictating the adaptive immune response. To this end, we have utilized a trans-well co-culture system to investigate the possible role of GSCs and their secreted factors in the "cross-talk" with, and conditioning of, DCs. The results showed that PGE2, a lipid mediator, from Hp-infected GSCs was responsible for the induction of IL-23 from DCs and the subsequent generation of Th17 response, wherein a member of the CLR family, COLEC12, in GSCs was critical in mediating the crosstalk between GSCs and DCs.

Methods

Human subjects and ethical statement. Primary gastric stromal cells (GSCs) were obtained by endoscopic biopsy from gastric cancerous (GSC T2, T6, T9 and T21) or their adjacent normal tissues (GSC N2, N6, N9 and N21) of 4 patients with malignant neoplasm of the stomach after receiving total gastrectomy. In addition, a line of GSCs (GSC N1) from one Hp-negative patient with gastritis was available and used in this study for reference. Paraffin-embedded gastric surgical tissue specimens from the control and gastric cancer patients described above were also obtained. These primary GSCs and gastric surgical tissue blocks were collected with IRB-approved protocols at the Kaohsiung Medical University (KMUH-IRB-20130114). Peripheral blood samples obtained from human subjects were collected with IRB-approved protocols at the Kaohsiung Medical University (KMUH-IRB-20130308). Serum samples were collected from patients with gastritis without intestinal metaplasia [IM (−), n = 40], gastritis plus intestinal metaplasia [IM (+), n = 34] or gastric cancer (n = 83) before any treatment. Ten healthy individuals were collected and used as control (KMUH-IRB-20120176). The institutional review board of Kaohsiung Medical University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan approved these studies. Written informed consent was documented from all study subjects and all experiments were performed in accordance with relevant guidelines and regulations.

Primary GSC culture and Hp. Primary gastric stromal cells (GSCs) were cultured in keratinocyte medium (rEGF, 5 ng/mL; BPE, 50 ug/mL; 10% FBS NAC, 2 mmol/L; Asc 2 Pt, 0.2 mmol/L, Gibco–Invitrogen Corporation, Grand Island, NY, USA). The purity of GSCs was analyzed by staining for stromal cell (primary fibroblast) marker CD90 (BioLegend, San Diego, USA). Hp 26695 and mutant strain (HP0651) of Hp 26695 lacking α3 fucosyltransferase gene (futB) were identified by biochemical tests.

Generation of monocyte-derived DCs and naïve CD4+ T cell isolation. Peripheral blood samples obtained from human subjects were free of Hp infection as determined by using the carbon 14 urea breath test (C14 UBT). CD14+ cells purified by sorting using anti-CD14-labeled magnetic beads (MACS, Miltenyi, Germany) from peripheral blood of healthy donors were collected and used in the presence of GM-CSF (50 ng/mL; PeproTech, Rocky Hill, NJ, USA) and IL-4 (10 ng/mL; PeproTech, Rocky Hill, NJ, USA) to generate monocyte-derived DCs. Autologous CD4+ T cells were isolated from the PBMCs using a negative selection kit (MACS Miltenyi Biotec,
Co-culture of GSCs with DCs and measurement of cytokines and PGE₂. This study utilized a trans-well co-culture system with an insert (0.45 μm, Corning, Corning, USA) to investigate the possible role of secreted soluble factors from GSCs or Hp-GSCs in the crosstalk with DCs. In the trans-well co-cultures, 2 × 10⁵ GSCs cells/well were plated with or without Hp infection at MOI = 1:200 in the apical side of the trans-well cultures, while a total of 2 × 10⁵ DCs were cultured in basolateral side for 24 h. DCs cultured alone, treated directly with Hp (MOI = 1:200) or LPS (100 ng/ml; E. coli, Sigma, USA) were used for comparison. Supernatants from the basolateral side were collected for analyses of cytokines, including IL-23, IL-10, IL-6, and IL-12 by ELISA (R&D Inc., Minneapolis, MN, USA). Supernatants from the apical or the basolateral side were collected for analyses of PGE₂ by ELISA and of GM-CSF by cytokine array (R&D Inc., Minneapolis, MN, USA, ARY005). To investigate the effect of PGE₂ on DC function, a COX-1 inhibitor, SC 560 (100 nM; Calbiochem, USA), a nonselective COX-1 and 2 inhibitor, indomethacin (100 nM; Sigma-Aldrich, USA), EP and DP1 receptor antagonist, AH-6809 (10 μM; Cayman Chemical, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA), or EP4 receptor antagonist, AH 23848 (10 μM; Cayman Chemical, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA) was added to the basolateral side of the co-cultures.

To evaluate the possible role of COLEC12 in GSCs in regulating PGE₂ and IL-23 expression from GSCs and DCs, respectively, COLEC12-blocking Abs (100 μg/ml, R&D, USA) were added to the Hp treated GSCs or to the apical side of the trans-well co-cultures. After 24 h, supernatants from the Hp treated GSCs were collected for analysis of PGE₂, and supernatants from the basolateral side of the co-cultures were harvested and determined for the levels of IL-23 by ELISA. For COLEC12 gene knockdown experiments, negative control siRNAs panel sequences (including 5′-UGGUUUAACUGUUUUCUGA, 5′-UGGUUUAACUGUUUUCUGA, and 5′-UGGUUUAACUGUUUUCUGA), and siRNA sequences directed against COLEC12 mRNA were purchased from Dharmacon (Chicago, USA). Four COLEC12 siRNA (50 nM) pool used included 5′-CGUCGUAACCGUGCGGAU, 5′-GGUUAUCAUGUUGUGUGUA, 5′-GCCAAGAGGACACCGCAU, and 5′-UGGGAAACAUCCGCGAAAA, GSC T21, and the cells were transduced with COLEC12 siRNA pool or negative control panel siRNAs by TransIT-X2 Dynamic Delivery System (Mirus Bio LLC 545 Science Drive, Madison, WI) for 72 h, followed by stimulating the cells with H. pylori for 24 h. Supernatants were collected for the analysis of PGE₂, and supernatants from the basolateral side of the TRANS well co-cultures described above were collected and washed twice in RPMI medium, and then were co-cultured with CD4⁺ T cells at a 1:5 (DC/CD4⁺) ratio. Supernatants were collected at day 3 and day 5 for the measurement of T-cell derived cytokines, including IL-17, IFN-γ and IL-4, by ELISA (R&D Inc, Minneapolis, MN, USA). To investigate the effect of IL-23 on IL-17 induction, an IL-23-neutralizing mAbs (1 mg/mL, R&D Inc, Minneapolis, MN, USA) was added.

Analysis of CLR expression by flow-cytometry, immunohistochemistry and immunofluorescence. For flow-cytometry, 1 × 10⁵/ml GSCs were incubated with mouse anti-COLEC12 (1:50, Abnova, Taipei, Taiwan) or mouse anti-OLR1 (5 μl, R&D Inc, Minneapolis, MN, USA) Abs for 30 minutes. Secondary Abs, phycoerythrin conjugated goat anti-mouse IgG Abs (1:100, R&D Inc, Minneapolis, MN, USA), were added for 30 minutes. Surface markers on GSCs were analyzed using a FACScan flow cytometer and CellQuest software (Becton Dickinson). For immunohistochemistry, 1 × 10⁵/ml GSCs cultured on slides were incubated with mouse anti-COLEC12 (1:100, Abnova, Taipei, Taiwan) or mouse anti-OLR1 Abs (1:100, R&D Inc, Minneapolis, MN, USA), overnight at 4 °C in humidified chambers. Slides were further incubated with a biotinylated secondary Ab for 30 min at room temperature. Antigen-antibody complexes were detected by the avidin–biotin–peroxidase method using 3,3′-diaminobenzidine as a chromogenic substrate (Dako, Glostrup, Denmark). Finally, the slides were counterstained with hematoxylin. For immunofluorescence, primary GSCs cultured on slides were fixed with 95% ethanol, and the expression of COLEC12 was detected using rabbit anti-COLEC12 (1:100, Novus, Littleton, USA) Abs. For gastric surgical tissue blocks, 5 μm-thick sections were cut, deparaffinized, and rehydrated. The expression of COLEC12 on CD90⁺ GSCs was detected using rabbit anti-COLEC12 Abs (1:100, Novus, Littleton, USA), or mouse anti-CDF90 Abs (1:25, Biolegend, USA), overnight at 4 °C. Secondary Abs, goat anti-mouse IgG Cy3 (1:200, Jackson ImmunoResearch, West Baltimore Pike, USA) or Alexa 488 goat anti-rabbit Abs (1:200, Jackson ImmunoResearch, West Baltimore Pike, USA), were added for 1 h at 4 °C. Finally, DAPI (0.5 μg/ml, Sigma, Saint Louis, USA) was added to slides for 1 h for nuclear staining. The images were captured with an Olympus Fluoview 1000 confocal laser-scanning microscope (Olympus, Tokyo, Japan). As negative controls, the use of primary Abs was omitted or substituted with a relevant isotype control.

Statistical analysis. Results are presented as mean ± SE. Analytical statistics were performed using the SPSS (version 20) software package. Statistical significance was calculated by nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test and for pair-wise comparisons only. In some cases, ANOVA followed by Scheffe multiple post hoc test were used. Differences were considered statistically significant at P < 0.05.
**Results**

**Hp-infected GSCs (Hp-GSCs) regulated IL-23 expression in DCs and IL-17 expression from CD4+ T cells.** To investigate the potential crosstalk between GSCs, a likely cell type directly in contact with Hp, and DCs, a trans-well co-culture system was used. The expression of IL-23 from DCs and the subsequent generation of IL-17 response were evaluated as the experimental readouts to represent the activation of DCs and Th17 cells, respectively, as the levels of IL-23 and IL-17 have been shown to be upregulated upon Hp infection in several human and murine models.17–19,30,31

We found that the level of IL-23 secretion from DCs was increased when DCs were co-cultured with Hp-primed GSCs (Fig. 1a). The enhancing effect on IL-23 expression was particularly noted when GSCs (T21) from the cancer lesion of a gastric cancer patient and its adjacent normal tissue (N21) was analyzed, while, as expected, stimulation of DCs alone with Hp induced appreciable levels of IL-23 (Fig. 1b). This finding suggested, therefore, that soluble factor(s) from Hp-infected GSCs mediated the increase of DC-derived IL-23 expression. Similarly, significantly increased levels of IL-23 were also found in the other three sets of matched cancer GSCs (T2, T6, and T9) and adjacent normal GSCs (N2, N6, N9) obtained from gastric cancer patients. Hp-GSCs-conditioned DCs regulated IL-17 expression from CD4+ T cells. Level of IL-17 expression in CD4+ T cells co-cultured with conditioned DCs at a 1:5 (DC/CD4+ T) ratio was evaluated at day 3 (d) or day 5 (e). (f) IL-17 expression in three cancer GSCs (T2, T9, and T21) obtained from gastric cancer patients in the absence or presence of Hp stimulation (Hp:MOI = 1:200). (g) IL-17 production was measured in the presence or absence of IL-23-neutralizing Abs. The results are expressed as means ± SE, and the data shown represent independent experiments from three-five different DC donors. Mann-Whitney U test was used and for pair-wise comparisons only. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

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**Figure 1.** IL-23 secretion from DCs alone or in trans-well co-cultures with GSCs. (a) The level of IL-23 expression from DCs in trans-well co-cultures with GSCs of a non-cancer control individual (N1) and a cancer patient (T21, GSCs from cancer lesion; N21, GSCs from normal adjacent gastric tissue) in the absence or presence of Hp stimulation (Hp:MOI = 1:200) was analyzed by ELISA. Hp were added for 24 hrs in the upper chamber for stimulation of GSCs (2 × 10^5 cells/ml). (b) The level of IL-23 expression from DCs in direct contact E. coli-derived LPS (100 ng/ml) or Hp for 24 hrs were used as control. (c) IL-23 expression in the other three sets of matched cancer GSCs (T2, T6, and T9) and adjacent normal GSCs (N2, N6, N9) obtained from gastric cancer patients. Hp-GSCs-conditioned DCs regulated IL-17 expression from CD4+ T cells. Level of IL-17 expression in CD4+ T cells co-cultured with conditioned DCs at a 1:5 (DC/CD4+ T) ratio was evaluated at day 3 (d) or day 5 (e). (f) IL-17 expression in three cancer GSCs (T2, T9, and T21) obtained from gastric cancer patients in the absence or presence of Hp stimulation (Hp:MOI = 1:200). (g) IL-17 production was measured in the presence or absence of IL-23-neutralizing Abs. The results are expressed as means ± SE, and the data shown represent independent experiments from three-five different DC donors. Mann-Whitney U test was used and for pair-wise comparisons only. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.
Hp-primed GSCs were able to influence the innate DC’s response and the adaptive Th17 immunity, via likely the soluble factors from Hp-primed GSCs.

PGE\(_2\) secreted from Hp-GSCs was found to be responsible for modulating DC-derived IL-23. As PGE\(_2\), a lipid mediator, has been shown to play a key role in the regulation of inflammatory microenvironment in tumor tissues, we next examined whether PGE\(_2\) was generated from Hp-primed GSCs (Hp-GSCs) and could be one of those, thus far, a soluble factor capable of priming DCs. The same trans-well co-culture system described above was set up, and supernatants from the apical or basolateral side were collected for PGE\(_2\) measurement. When GSCs were stimulated directly with Hp, significantly increased PGE\(_2\) expression was found (Fig. 2a). Increased PGE\(_2\) expression in Hp-GSCs from cancer lesions (T2, T6, T9, and T21) was also noted as compared with their respective adjacent normal tissues (N2, N6, N9, N21) of cancer patients. PGE\(_2\) data are expressed as mean ± SE of three-five independent experiments from different DC donors. Mann-Whitney U-test was used and for pair-wise comparisons only. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

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EP2 or EP4 antagonist could significantly abrogate the IL-23 production from the DCs (Fig. 3b). Interestingly, significantly increased levels of serum PGE₂ were found (Fig. 4) in a panel of subjects with gastric cancer when compared to those with gastritis without intestinal metaplasia. COLEC12 expression in GSCs and gastric cancer tissues. Next, we determined which innate pattern recognition receptor(s) expressed on GSCs was responsible for mediating Hp’s effect, focusing on a panel of CLRs according to our previous finding in GSCs gene expression microarray (data not shown). Results showed that GSCs expressed primarily COLEC12 and ORL1 among a panel of different CLRs, which were verified by Flow cytometry (supplemental Fig. 3a) and immunohistochemistry (supplemental Fig. 3b). By immunofluorescence, the expression of COLEC12 was clearly evident in GSCs with scattered expression pattern, in stromal cells or its adjacent normal GSC of subjects with gastric cancer (Fig. 5a). Further, immunofluorescence staining of COLEC12 and CD90⁺ stromal cells in gastric surgical tissue specimens demonstrated co-localization of COLEC12 in gastric stromal cells (Fig. 5b).

COLEC12 on GSCs recognized H. pylori and primed DCs for IL-23 expression. To examine the role of COLEC12 in mediating Hp’s effect on GSCs and the secretion of IL-23 from DCs, similar Hp-GSC/DC co-cultures as described above with anti-COLEC12 blocking Abs in apical side of the trans-well were used. Results showed that the levels of IL-23 in the co-cultures of Hp-GSCs and DCs were significantly lower in the presence of anti-COLEC12 Abs than those without the addition of anti-COLEC12 Abs (Fig. 6a). In addition,
when an alpha3-fucosyltransferase-null (futB; HP0651) strain of Hp was used to stimulate GSCs, the IL-23 expression in DCs was significantly decreased (Fig. 6b). Significantly downregulated PGE2 expression from GSCs was also found when anti-COLEC12-blocking Abs were added (Fig. 6c) or when GSCs with COLEC12 knock-down (Fig. 6d) were used. The efficiency of COLEC12 knockdown was assessed in GSCs from three different individuals by q-PCR (Fig. 6e). Moreover, the enhanced level of PGE2 was inhibited by the addition of a calcium chelator, EDTA, and was significantly reversed by the addition of fucose or galactose (Fig. 6f). These results suggested, therefore, the importance of COLEC12 as a pattern recognition receptor for Hp through their LPS’ glycan structures.

Discussion
In this study, we found that a member of the CLR family, COLEC12, may play a role in Hp-mediated crosstalk between GSCs and DCs. It shares with another member of the CLR family, DC-SIGN, the ability to bind the Le\(^\text{e}^-\) epitope, but it interacts primarily with the galactose moiety of the glycan rather than the fucose residue\(^\text{32}\). Also, COLEC12 shares with the asialoglycoprotein receptor the ability to mediate endocytosis and degradation of glycoprotein ligands. While the functional significance of the COLEC12-ligand axis remains to be elucidated, our current data suggest its likely importance in the recognition of Hp by GSCs and its functional impact on GSCs and DCs, which may represent a critical regulatory mechanism in Hp-mediated immune response.

In this study, we evaluated the viability of gastric stromal cells in presence of varying doses of Hp at 24-hr time point by MTT assay, and found that at a higher dose (200 MOI), the viability was 83%-99% (supplemental Fig. 4a). Further, we found that lower doses of Hp (MOI = 50–100) induced, in fact, higher levels of PGE\(_2\) from GSCs than those of the cells treated with a higher dose of Hp (200) (supplemental Fig. 4b). The lower levels of PGE\(_2\) release could be due to the higher level of cytotoxicity. It is noted that in addition to GSC-derived soluble factors,
Hp-derived outer membrane vesicles (OMVs) in the co-cultures could play a role in stimulating DCs as it has been reported that the size of OMVs is ranged from 20 to 300 nm, significantly smaller than the transwell insert (0.45 um)\(^33,34\). In our trans-well co-cultures, the amount of OMVs in the Hp (MOI = 1:200) culture medium was calculated to be 10 ug based on their protein content. The increased levels of PGE2 secreted from GSCs were noted only when GSCs were stimulated with over 200 ug of OMVs (supplemental Fig. 4c), suggesting that OMVs at the dosage below 200 ug might not be critical, although a potential additive effect of very low doses of OMVs and Hp cannot be ruled out at this time. Moreover, in our co-culture experiments, the induction of DC-derived IL-23 could be blocked by PGE2 receptor antagonists or in trans-well culture conditions where GSCs with COLEC12 knockdown or the addition of anti-COLEC12 Abs. These results supported, therefore, the contention that the increase of IL-23 in DCs could be, at least in part, mediated through a priming event originated from Hp-infected GSCs.

Lewis x and Lewis y antigens are the main antigens expressed in the LPS of Hp strains\(^35\), which are known to display phase variation by reversible on-off switching of genes controlling LPS biosynthesis\(^{36}\). The \(\alpha_3\) fucosyltransferase is associated with phase variation of LPS, and there are two \(\alpha_3\) fucosyltransferase genes (\(futA\) and \(futB\)) in Hp 26695, and \(\alpha_3\) fucosyltransferase knockout experiment has revealed that only Hp stains with intact \(futB\) reading frame can express Lewis x and Lewis y\(^37\). In this study, when compared with wild-type strain 26695, GSCs infected with \(futB\) knockout strain showed significantly reduced capacity in priming DCs for secreting IL-23. Further, Hp-induced PGE2 in GSCs could be partially inhibited by the addition of COLEC12-blocking Abs or in GSCs with COLEC12 knockdown. While in our positive control experiments, successful transfection (supplemental Fig. 5) and potent GAPDH RNAi inhibitory activity were found (data not shown). The results from these sets of control experiments suggested that the siRNA sequence for COLEC12 currently used were suboptimal. Alternatively, the partial inhibitory effect of Ab blockade or gene knockdown may suggest the existence of additional, yet unidentified, receptors on GSCs, such as TLRs, for recognition of Hp, which awaits further investigation. Nevertheless, these results, collectively, support the potential importance of COLEC12 in conferring GSC's recognition of Hp Lewis antigen and its subsequent impact on DCs functions. It was also found that increased cytosolic levels of COLEC12 expression were seen in cancer-associated stromal cells, but the reason for this is, at present, unclear. It could be that the cytosolic COLEC12 might represent those that have been internalized upon binding to fucosylated endogenous ligands, as a part of its "clearance" mechanism for removing fucosylated ligands\(^32\). This could be due, in part, to an increased fucosyltransferase activity in the stromal cells or cancer cells from patients, and hence an increased level of COLEC12 ligands.

Figure 7. A schematic diagram illustrates a novel regulatory pathway controlling gastric mucosal immunity, wherein a C-type lectin receptor (CLR), COLEC12, is important in bridging \(H. pylori\)-mediated crosstalk between gastric stromal cells (GSCs) and DCs within the gastric mucosa. Hp can disrupt the epithelial barrier and transit to the sub-epithelial mucosal layer, where the contact between Hp and GSCs is possible and critical in controlling Hp-mediated inflammation. Subsequent to the Hp-stromal cell interaction, PGE\(_2\)-dependent conditioning effect on DCs is noted and PGE\(_2\) released from Hp treated GSCs is negatively regulated by GM-CSF and shown to be able to induce IL-23 secretion in DCs.

Accumulating evidence has indicated that the inflammatory responses are important for cancer development, wherein COX-2 and its downstream product, PGE\(_2\), are suggested to play a key role in gastrointestinal tumorigenesis, particularly in mouse gastric tumor models\(^38,39\). Furthermore, activation of COX-2/PGE\(_2\) pathway in gastric cancer cells together with TLR/MyD88 signaling in DCs have been shown to be a part of the inflammatory microenvironment\(^40,41\). Our study demonstrated that PGE\(_2\) was the important soluble factor released from Hp-infected gastric stromal cells, in a COLEC12-dependent manner, and was responsible in conditioning DCs and generating subsequent Th17 response. While the exact mechanism for the enhanced levels of PGE\(_2\) in cancer-associated GSCs was, at present, unclear, these findings provide evidence supporting the existence of a potentially critical stromal cell-associated inflammatory microenvironment in perpetuating the tumorigenesis.
It was also noted that GM-CSF secreted from Hp-GSCs was found to be important in regulating PGE₂ levels. Interestingly, in the presence of anti-GM-CSF neutralizing Abs, the levels of PGE₂ were significantly higher in comparison to those without the addition of anti-GM-CSF Abs (Supplemental Fig. 6). As a corollary, GM-CSF was found to be able to reduce PGE₂ secretion from stromal cells of the bovine endometrium⁵⁰ and also from GM-CSF-primed bone marrow-derived macrophages stimulated with TLR2 ligand⁵¹. Therefore, it appears that GM-CSF can negatively regulate PGE₂ expression.

Increasing evidence has revealed the importance of IL-23 in linking innate and adaptive immunity, possessing important roles in the differentiation and initiation of both Th1 and Th17 responses⁴². Similar to our results, other studies have indicated that PGE₂ enhances the production of IL-23⁴³,⁴⁴,⁴⁵. Interestingly, Bimczok's study⁴⁶ indicated that gastric stromal factors, independent of PGE₂, down-regulate DC responsiveness to H. pylori and dampen gastric Th1 response, contributing to the permissiveness of persistent residential microbes. Our study, in fact, suggested that GSC-derived PGE₂ is critical in eliciting DC's IL-23 expression and the subsequent Th17 response.

Conclusion

This study identified a significant cross-talk between GSCs and DCs, in which PGE₂ released from Hp treated GSCs was shown to be able to induce IL-23 secretion in DCs and modulate IL-17 expression in T cells. A schematic diagram summarizing this new regulatory pathway is presented in Fig. 7. Interestingly, COLEC12 on GSCs appeared to be responsible, in part, in mediating the effect of Hp on GSCs. Further, the COLEC12-mediated impact was decreased when the cells were stimulated with a mutant strain of Hp lacking α3 fucosyltransferase gene (futB), suggesting that the glycan structures decorated with fucose/galactose significantly confer the recognition specificity of COLEC12 on GSCs. Taken together, these results provide a strong case supporting the likely importance of COLEC12 as a receptor involved in Hp-stromal cell interaction and in its subsequent conditioning and programming effect on DCs, where the LPS Le glycoform variants play a key role.

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43. Shau-Ku Huang supervised the research program and contributed to the screening process. Deng-Chyang Wu coordinated the study, interpreted the data. Ming-Hong Lin participated in the experiment and implemented the study. Chun-Hung Lin guided intellectual discussions of the results. Mou-Chieh Kao, Chun-Jen Wang created the mutant strains of H. pylori. Chih-Chung Chou, Chung-Cheng Lin, Ming-Hong Lin participated in the clinical data evaluation. Chun-Hung Lin guided intellectual discussions of the results. Mou-Chieh Kao, Chun-Jen Wang created the mutant strains of H. pylori. Chih-Chung Chou, Chung-Cheng Lin, Ming-Hong Lin participated in the experiment and implemented the study. Deng-Chyang Wu coordinated the study, interpreted the data. Shau-Ku Huang supervised the research program and contributed to the screening process.

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Author Contributions
Lin-Li Chang was responsible for conceiving, organizing, and implementing the research protocol, interpreting the data, guiding discussions of the results, and drafting the manuscript. Wen-Hung Hsu, Chung-Jung Liu, Bi-Chuan Tseng, Fu-Chen Kuo, Chao-Hung Kuo, were responsible for the surgical specimens preparation and clinical data evaluation. Chun-Hung Lin guided intellectual discussions of the results. Mou-Chieh Kao, Chun-Jen Wang created the mutant strains of H. pylori. Chih-Chung Chou, Chung-Cheng Lin, Ming-Hong Lin participated in the experiment and implemented the study. Deng-Chyang Wu coordinated the study, interpreted the data. Shau-Ku Huang supervised the research program and contributed to the screening process.

Additional Information
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