# **Report on developed research techniques using microscopy and associated sciences in an international setting**

By

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### **Abstract:**

During the summer of 2024 I visited Dr. Yasuhiro Kamei's lab at the National Institute for Basic Biology in Okazaki, Aichi, Japan. His lab has many interdisciplinary projects focused on developing new microscopy methods such as IR-LEGO, material design, and establishing transgenic lines all using *Oryzias latipes*, also known as medaka fish, as a model organism. There are many techniques involved in the Kamei lab that I was unfamiliar with, so this summer my goal was to be exposed to as many different new techniques as possible that I am not exposed to at my home lab. These techniques include operating confocal microscopes, spinning disk microscopes, scanning electron microscopes, atomic force microscopes, light sheet microscopes, plasmid design, plasmid purification, bacteria transformation, cell culture, glass silanization, cre/loxp, and finally IR-LEGO. Being exposed to these methods has given me new tools to broaden my research ventures, and has given me reasons to reach out to other scientists at my home university of University of Central Florida for collaboration opportunities in using their equipment. Most of the projects I worked on are still in progress and as such I cannot make conclusions, so this paper will be a review of the techniques I have learned over the course of my stay in Japan.

### Introduction: **IR-LEGO**

Temperature is an important parameter for living organisms. There are vast amounts of body systems dedicated to regulating body temperature, along with many different environmental temperatures that organisms function in. Given so much variance on a large organism level, this leads to Kamei's research regarding temperature analysis on a cellular/molecular level. This field has been coined biothermology and is characterized by investigating the nature of temperatures in living organisms ranging from nano to micro. The techniques involved with biothermology that I was exposed to involved IR-LEGO. IR-LEGO: InfredRed Laser Evoked Gene Operator (Kamei et al, Nat. Methods 2009) is a local heating technique used in combination with fluorescent proteins known as gTEMP (Nakano et al, PLoS One 2017).



**Figure 1. IR-LEGO structure and gene expression induction**

The left side is displaying how heatshock factor 1 (HSF1) activates transcription inside of a cell. The right side shows the structure of the IR-LEGO machine (Kamei et al, Nat. Methods 2009)

These fluorescent proteins can rapidly respond to a wide temperature range and then be observed with various microscope systems. gTEMP can be expressed invivo through transgenic lines. The lines we used were gaudi lines, expressing multiple different fluorescent proteins. If Medaka are exposed to IR-LEGO alone, the heat shock response is transient and not traceable after a period of time. In order to create a permanent expression change, Cre/Loxp recombination system is used. Irradiated cells are permanently labeled and lineage is able to be tracked by fluorescent proteins. It was extensively used as a tool for cell-fate mapping in (Shimada et al, Nat Commun. 2013).



**Figure 2**. Long-term gene expression system with cre/loxp recombination system (Shimada et al, Nat Commun. 2013)

Light sheet microscopy is used for creating high quality 3D models of clear samples. It does this by taking many small thin slice images of the sample and compiling them into one 3d model. You can adjust how many slices you would like, but the machine is very fast at taking images and can produce high quality models in a minimal amount of time. I used confocal along with light sheet microscopy to analyze the effects of IR-Lego on a juvenile gaudi madaka. Refer to microscopy section for more information

## **Methodology** for IR:LEGO experiment

We applied a short 1, 1.5 and 2 second blast from the infrared laser across three medaka. They were anesthetized with MS.222. Three blasts were applied, evenly spaced a few milimeters, on the skin of the medaka five vertibrates from the tail fin, and the next three were targeted at the inner muscle mirrored to the previous three blasts on the opposite side of the vertibrate. The wattage of the laser was changed for each fish. 18mW, 20mW. 22.5 mW. We then observed fluorescent protein expression using confocal and light sheet microscopy.

Our positive control fish was put in a hot water bath and experienced whole body heatshock. Our negative control was only exposed to room temperature conditions



### **Results**

Figure 3. lightsheet image of negative control medaka expressing RFP lightsheet



**Figure 4.** lightsheet image of positive control medaka also expressing RFP lightsheet



**Figure 5.** lightsheet image of 20 mW IR-LEGO exposed fish showing points of exposure



**Figure 6.** 1 lightsheet image of 8 mW IR-LEGO exposed fish showing points of exposure, but also natural flourescence **Discussion**

Our results are hard to make conclusions on for multiple reasons.

The first issue was with our wattage selection. Originally we started at 20 mW and were climbing to 22.5 mW and 25mW, but at 22.5 mW we observed blasting a hole in the fish with the IR-Lego laser. This is obviously not a desired effect so we instead decided to lower the voltage and test 18mW.

Our second issue was we were unable to detect fluorescence caused by the IR-Lego using a basic laser microscope. It could only see the natural fluorescence of fish. We tested multiple wavelengths of laser, as the fish we were targeting was a Gaudi line meaning it expresses multiple fluorescent proteins, but we were unable to distinguish between our target site and the fish's normal amount of fluorescence. Our conclusion moving forwards was to use the Leica Sp8 as it is a much more sophisticated microscope and has more available wavelengths because it has more lasers attached.

The Leica SP8 had similar issues to the basic laser microscope, but some samples we thought that it could possibly be detecting the IR-Lego site. It was still unclear in the samples so we elected to take it even further by using a light sheet microscope.

Even with the light sheet microscope, we had strange occurrences such as our positive control very faintly expressing RFP (red fluorescent protein). Another occurrence is our negative control expressing this RFP while it should not be doing so, even brighter than our positive control. The transgenic line that these fish belong to should only be expressing RFP when undergoing heatshock.. Furthermore, our target points along the fish's tail have naturally occurring fluorescent protein points that are very difficult to discern from our IR-LEGO blasts. We think there may have been a mistake in the original sourcing of transgenic fish from the tank, or a silencing mutation occurred. I also accidentally squished one of our fish representing 22.5 mW so that data point is no longer available.

## Introduction: **Glass Silanization**

Glass silanization attaches an organosilyl group to a glass surface, causing it to become non-polar. Its non-polar nature will cause the surface to be hydrophilic. The reasoning behind wanting to silanize glass is to provide a clear-hydrophobic surface to spread water evenly across its surface, vs a normal hydrophilic surface that leads to beads of water. This also leads to the gel being chemically bonded to the glass and not having any imperfections (Figure 3). Combining a hydrophilic surface with a hydrophobic surface in a sandwich fashion lets us get an extremely thin layer of gel that is ideal for AFM testing.

We used this to observe the differences in shape and spread of muscle stem cells based on rigidity of the gel surface.



**Figure 7.** Visualization of molecules at the surface of silanized glass bonding to gel (191118 Masaki Nakahata & Kentaro Hayashi)

# **Methodology**

### **Cleaning:**

Immerse glass slides in following solvent and apply ultra-sonication with sonication bath

- 1. Acetone (3 minutes, room temperature)
- 2. Ethanol (3 minutes, room temperature)
- 3. Methanol (3 minutes, room temperature)
- 4. MilliQ Water (3 minutes, room temperature)
- In chemical hood, immerse glass slides into acid-base mixture H2O2:NH4OH:MilliQ = 1:1:5
- 1. Ultra-Sonicate (3 minutes, room temperature)
- 2. Hot water bath (45 minutes, 60C)

Rinse 10 times with MilliQ to remove residual solution

Dry glass slides in vacuum drying oven (70C)

We set aside half of the slides on this step as they are hydrophobic, needed for the sandwich. The other half were sialanized.

# **Silanization:**

1.Set hydrophobic glass substrates onto substrate holder, put in reaction tank

2.Add vinyltrimethoxysilane solution, 190mL Toluene, 10mL Vinyltrimethoxysilane, and shake overnight room temperature

3.Remove vinyltrimethoxysilane solution, add toluene, ultrasonic (3 minutes, room temperature)

4.Remove toluene, add ethanol. (3 minutes, room temperature)

5.Remove ethanol, add MilliQ. (3 minutes, room temperature)

6. Rinse 10 times with MilliQ

7. Dry in vacuum oven overnight (70C)

A bis-acrylamide gel solution is then created and applied to the gel

1.Make AA, bis-AA solution by mixing 1 mL of solutions

 $(AA, bis-AA) = (8, 0.8)$ ,  $(8, 0.4)$ ,  $(8, 0.2)$ ,  $(8, 0.1)$   $(w/v\%)$ 

2. Put vinyl-silanized glass substrate onto a small block on wet paper

3. Add 4 uL of 50x APS to 200uFL of (AA, bis-AA) solution

4. Add 0.9 uL of TEMD to 200 uL of AA solution, cortex 10 sec, put 45 uL onto vinyl–silanized glass substrate, quickly sandwich hydrophilic cleaned glass substrate 5.Allow to stand for 15 minutes under humid conditions, peel of hydrophilic cleaned glass substrate with care

6. Wash with 2mL of Milli-Q three times, Wait between each washing step at least 1h x3 times

An atomic force microscope was used to make sure the kPa of the gel was relatively in the ballpark of muscle stem cell conditions (8-12 kPa).

Muscle stem cells were then applied to the surface of the gel and incubated overnight

The cells were then observed under a phase contrast microscope and snapshots of the plate were taken

The snapshots were then observed in Fiji, a image processing package, where cells were circled. Fiji calculated their area and aspect ratio and then those results were averaged and created into a chart.

### **Results**





**Figure 8.** Silanized glass data

#### **Discussion**

Our findings were that the more stiff the surface, the larger the cell area. We also found that the shape of the cells was rounder the less stiff the substrate, as seen by the aspect ratio calculations. This could be due to a multitude of factors, one of them being small crevasses that formed in some of the softer substrates. This could cause the cells to sink into the creavasses and spread less and become more circular in shape. This data could be important in future experiments trying to emulate actual cellular size and spread, as the formulation AA-bisAAA ratio can effect those factors heavily.

#### Introduction: **Plasmid Design & Cell Culture**

Plasmids are small circular pieces of DNA found in bacterial cells. They are very unique as bacteria often transfer plasmids between themselves through horizontal gene transfer, making them very situated for introducing new genetic code into a baceria (Gull 2019). Multiple DNA elements can be introduced into plasmids through enzymatic cleavage and ligation, such as transcription factor binding sites and resistance genes, that makes them extremely useful for insertion into other organisms. Plasmids are manipulated primarily through purchasing a backbone plasmid from a biotechnology company, and then following their notations on recommended enzymes for certain cleavages at different points along the plasmid, and then you can add elements of your choosing to the backbone based on your desired location within the backbone as long as it is compatible with the element you want to introduce (Gull 2019). There are many

softwares to view these sites, but we used ApE. This summer I helped design a plasmid to be inserted into medaka eggs with the goal of binding mouse HSP70 (heat shock) promotor upstream of a mCherry/mNeonGreen fluorescent protein gene, along with a hygromycin resistance gene. Having a hygromycin resistance gene included in the desired plasmid allows us to introduce hygromicin into our LB agar plates, leaving only correctly transformed bacterial colonies being able to grow on the plate. The resulting transgenic line, when exposed to heat shock, would produce mCherry/mNeonGreen while being resistant to the hygromycin antibiotic.

As this was early in my summer experience, a lot of this was very new to me and moved very quickly with a large language barrier. Furthermore, when I was introduced to this project it was already in progress. Thus I am missing some information regarding the procedure list for the initial steps of enzymatic cleavage for our plasmid. This was a part of being in such a scientifically diverse lab, I was often ping-ponged to different projects rapidly.



### **Methodology**

We followed this scheme in order to make our desired plasmid. We started with a YK6

**Figure 9**. ApE plasmid design schema

plasmid backbone, and made various enzymatic cuts in order to obtain the fragments we needed. We used XbaI-Bam HI to cut our HygR promotor, and HIND III- XbaI in order to source our fluorescent protein gene. After the cuts we recovered the fragments with electrophoresis and followed the FastGene Gel/PCR Extraction kit for the recovery of those fragments. We then recombined the desired fragments with our cleaved backbone and checked through electrophoresis to see if we had the desired complete plasmid. The backbone already contained a HSP along with the HygR gene, we only needed to add a fluorescent protein gene downstream from the HSP and a HygR gene promotor. Once we had our desired plasmid, we continued according to the procedure below.

- 1.) Thaw cells for five minutes
- 2.) Add 20 ng of purified plasmid DNA to cells in tube and mix by inversion
- 3.) Incubate cells on ice for 30 minutes
- 4.) Transfer cells to tube warmer set to 37 C for 45 seconds
- 5.) Transfer cells to ice for 2 minutes
- 6.) Incubate cells at 37C for 1 hour

7.) Pipette 20 uL of cell suspension onto LB hygromycin agar plates and spread using a sterile spreader

- 8.) Incubate plates over night in incubator set to 37C
- 9.)Select colony(s) from culture
- 10.) Culture the clone
- 11.) Digest plasmid using restriction enzyme ()
- 12.) Separate by gel electrophoresis
- 13.) Cut out desired band using scalpel

FastGene Gel/PCR Extraciton Kit

- 1.) Transfer up to 300 mg of gel slice into a microcentrifuge tube
- 2.) Add 500 uL of Binding Buffer GP1 to the sample and vortex

3.) Incubate at 55C for 10-15 minutes until gel slice is completely dissolved. Invert tube every 3 minutes

4.) Place a Column into a Collection Tube

5.) Transfer up to 800uL of the sample mixture from previous steps into the Column and centrifuge at 13,000 rpm for 30 seconds

6.) Discard flow-through and place Column back to Collection Tube

7.) Add 600uL Wash Buffer GP2 to the Column and centrifuge at 13,000 rpm for 30 seconds

- 8.) Discard flow-through and place the Column into a new Collection Tube
- 9.) Centrifuge again for 2 minutes at 13,000 RPM
- 10.) Transfer Column into a new microcentrifuge tube
- 11.) Add 25 uL of Elution Buffer GP3 to the center of the column matrix
- 12.) Allow to incubate for 2 minutes
- 13.) Centrifuge at 13,000 rpm for 2 minutes to elute purified DNA

### **Discussion**

Learning about plasmid design and cell culture at the same time is very difficult, and we definitely had roadblocks along the way. Our initial batch did resist hygromycin, but did not have any bands that were suggesting the length we suggested. Essentially it seemed like our plasmids were uncut despite treating them with enzymes. We treated the plasmid with two enzymes and their desired lyse points were extremely close together, I think about 6base pairs. The plasmid instructions supplied by the manufacturer stated that despite their proximity, the two enzymes are perfectly suitable, but this was not the case in our experiment. This caused us to go back to the drawing board and inspect the plasmid with the ApE software and choose new enzymes. We repeated the process using new enzymes and it seemingly went fine, but also I started working on the sialanzied glass experiment and a Post-Doc took over the plasmid design fully, so I did not see the final results of the experiment.

### **Microscopy Techniques:**

**Light Sheet** fluorescence microscopy uses a thin sheet of light to excite flurophores within the focal volume (Stelzer et al 2021). This means that light sheet microscopy can be used for highly detailed images of cleared samples in three dimensions by rotating the sample within the machine, along with two dimensions if desired. There is minimal background and out of focus light when comparfed to confocal or widefield microscopes. You can adjust how thin your light sheets are along with how many to take images of. The thinner the light sheet and more images you take will create a higher resolution image. There are many applications for vertebrate and invertebrate embryos, brains, cells, tissues and plants. In our scenario we used it on juvenile medaka which are conveniently already clear, so we did not need to include any clearing reagents.



**Figure 10.** A light sheet microscopy imaging setup. (B. -C Chen 2014)

### **Confocal**

Confocal microscopy is used to generate high resolution images of materials stained with fluorescent probes(Elliot AD 2020) In our case our fluorescent probes were fluorescent proteins such as GFP or TDTomato. This was the primary tool used in the Kamei lab for quick imaging of a fluorescent sample. It works by projecting a laser onto the sample through an objective lens. Multiple different confocal microscopes were used because they often had different lasers with different wavelengths equipped, which correspond to different fluorescent proteins. The construction schema can be seen below



**Figure 11**. A. Construction of a confocal microscope B. Function of a scanning mirror sweeting excitation wavelength across sample (Elliot 2020)



Α

**Figure 12.** Confocal image of IR-LEGO exposed medaka with only visible natural flourescence

**Spinning disk confocal microscopy** is a form of confocal microscopy that prioritizes the safety of biological samples. It does this by rapidly spinning a disk with many

B

pinholes in it before exposure to the sample in order to reduce the time the laser is being exposed to the sample. This provides a much safer environment for the organisms, allowing for extended timelapse imaging to be taken as they are not a risk of being destroyed by the laser.



**Figure. 13** Scanning disk image of samples we observed for 24 hrs.

**Scanning electron microscopy** uses electrons instead of light in order to scan a sample's surface and produce extremely high resolution images. This is mostly used to examine dimensional topography and distribution of exposed features (Fischer 2012). This method is not a quick and easy process, often time for the best images samples need to be coated with certain reagents, along with being destructive to most biological samples. I used this technology to take images of aphids and a pillbugv for a collaborator, but we did not coat our samples as it was a quick demonstration and not a publication-quality request.



**Figure 14.** Pregnant aphid SEM photo

**Phase Contrast Microscopy** is used to enhance the contrast of transparent and colorless specimens without staining or altering. It is usually used to visualise cells and cell compotnents that would be difficult to see using an ordinary light microscope. It is versatile and very simple compared to fluorescent microscopy, not requiring any steps beforehand such as fluorescent markers or staining (Yin Z 2012) . It is ideal for thinner samples. A phase plate is used to intensify the extremely small differences in light phase caused by the specimen, and making it more apparent to the human eye.



**Figure 15.** Path of light in a phase contrast microscope (A guide to phase contras, [scientifica.uk.com\)](https://scientifica.uk.com) I used this technology to take images of our muscle stem cells on the silanized glass.



**Figure 16.** Silanized glass phase contrast image of muscle stem cells

**Atomic Force Microscopy** utilizes a photodiode to detect changes in laser position based on its reflection off of an extremely small cantilever. This type of microscopy is useful for generating images of extremely small objects such as individual molecules, or

for generating data on kPa resistance and elasticity of materials. In my applications of this technology we did not use it for imaging, but for generating data on gel rigidity and elasticity for the silanizing glass experiment.



**Figure 17.** Construction of an atomic force microscope

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# **Data index:**

## Gel spread data





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