

**Identification and characterisation of novel
transcripts involved in the proliferation,
differentiation and developmental networks of
the mouse cerebral cortex**

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Bachelor of Science (Hons.) (Biomedical Sciences)

Master of Science (Genetics)

A thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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(Discipline of Medicine)
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June 2011

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ABSTRACT

Cerebral corticogenesis involves specific influence of intrinsic and extrinsic mechanisms, which are triggered spatiotemporally. During mouse embryogenesis, the mouse cerebral cortex develops from a relatively homogenous band of mitotic multipotent progenitor cells into a complex laminated structure between embryonic day 11.5 (E11.5) and 18.5 (E18.5). Identification of molecular targets and regulatory networks involved in cerebral corticogenesis is crucial for the understanding of the development and function of the cortex.

Global transcriptome profiling of the mouse cerebral cortex at various developmental stages using Serial Analysis of Gene Expression (SAGE) technique identified 561 differentially expressed tags/transcripts (DETs). Hierarchical and genomic clustering of DETs showed common functional ontologies and molecular networks that are associated with neurological disorders in human. In addition, 4 genomic loci at *Sox4*, *Sox11*, *Nrgn* and *Camk2n1* were significantly represented by embryonic and adult-specific DETs when compared to other genomic loci. These genomic loci have multiple overlapping sense and natural antisense transcripts (NATs) featuring different polyadenylation signal sites and spatiotemporally regulated expression profiles. The study suggests that these antisense transcripts have an important role in cerebral corticogenesis and neuronal/glial cell differentiation or function.

These NATs were further characterized using Fluorescence *In situ* Hybridization (FISH) probes specific to the sense and antisense transcripts of *Sox4*, *Nrgn* and *Camk2n1* RNA in trypsinized adult brain cells. The analysis showed co-localization of sense and antisense transcripts and confirmed the formation of sense-antisense double stranded RNA (dsRNA) in the cytoplasm. Overexpression of *Sox4* antisense transcripts did not regulate *Sox4* transcription or translation processes. Instead, *Sox4* dsRNAs serve as templates for the generation of a small RNA, namely *Sox4_sir3*, which is an endogenous small interfering RNA (siRNA). Its biogenesis is dependent on Dicer1 activity as well as the formation of dsRNA between *Sox4* sense and antisense transcripts. *Sox4-sir3* is expressed specifically in the germinative zones and in specialized neurons throughout brain

development. This is the first demonstration in the mammalian system that cytoplasmic sense-NAT dsRNAs serve as templates for the production of novel endogenous siRNAs adding a new dimension to the long-debated controversial role of NATs in the genome.

Small RNAs such as microRNAs (miRNAs) can repress translation of protein-coding mRNA or direct mRNA decay by recruiting RNA-induced silencing complex (RISC) machinery. Massively parallel sequencing of an E15.5 developing mouse brain further identified 4 putative miRNAs and one of them was confirmed as a novel miRNA, M1181. M1181 was spatiotemporally expressed throughout mouse embryo development including mouse embryonic stem cells, E3.5 blastocysts, and embryos aged between E7.5 and E15.5. Between E13.5 and E17.5, M1181 expression was confined to the cortical plate of the cerebral cortex and the ventricular zone of midbrain. In adult mice, M1181 was strongly expressed in the brain, particularly the olfactory bulb, cerebrum, thalamus and midbrain. Taken together, the expression pattern of M1181 implicates its role as a potential novel regulator in early embryonic development involving ES cell pluripotency, neural tube formation and adult central nervous system function.

In a nutshell, novel transcripts involved in the developmental networks of the brain particular the cerebral cortex were identified using a variety of genomic and *in silico* approaches. A new role and related mechanism for novel *Sox4* NATs especially in the biogenesis of small RNA were described and this landmark discovery add to our understanding of the versatility of NAT function in mammalian biology.

STATEMENT

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* *Published articles*

Methods published in these articles were cited in Chapter 2.

Ling KH, Hewitt CA, Kinkel SA, Smyth GK and Scott HS. High-throughput and complex gene expression validation using the Universal ProbeLibrary and the LightCycler® 480 system. *Biochemica* 2008, 2:23-26.

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Brown CY, Sadlon T, Gargett T, Melville E, Zhang R, Drabsch Y, **Ling M**, Strathdee CA, Gonda TJ and Barry SC. Robust, reversible gene knockdown using a single lentiviral short hairpin RNA vector. *Human Gene Therapy* 2010, **21**:1005-1017.

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Ling KH, Hewitt CA, Beissbarth T, Hyde L, Banerjee K, Cheah PS, Cannon PZ, Hahn CN, Thomas PQ, Smyth GK, Tan SS, Thomas T and Scott HS. Molecular networks involved in mouse cerebral corticogenesis and spatio-temporal regulation of Sox4 and Sox11 novel antisense transcripts revealed by transcriptome profiling. *Genome Biology* 2009, 10(10):R104.

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Ling KH, Hewitt CA, Beissbarth T, Hyde L, Cheah PS, Smyth GK, Tan SS, Hahn CN, Thomas T, Thomas PQ and Scott HS. Spatiotemporal regulation of multiple overlapping sense and novel natural antisense transcripts at the *Nrgn* and *Camk2n1* gene loci during mouse cerebral corticogenesis. *Cerebral Cortex* 2010. doi:[10.1093/cercor/bhq141](https://doi.org/10.1093/cercor/bhq141).

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Ling KH, Brautigan PJ, Hahn CN, Daish T, Rayner JR, Cheah PS, Raison JM, Piltz S, Mann JR, Mattiske DM, Thomas PQ, Adelson DL and Scott HS. Deep sequencing analysis reveals novel microRNAs in the developing mouse brain. *BMC Genomics* 2011, 12(1):176.

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* *Submitted manuscript*

Materials in the submitted manuscript were reused in Chapter 5.

Ling KH, Brautigan PJ, Moore S, Fraser R, Cheah PS, Raison JM, Babic M, Daish T, Mattiske DM, Mann JR, Adelson DL, Thomas PQ, Hahn CN and Scott HS. Sense and overlapping natural antisense transcripts form double stranded RNA to produce a novel endogenous small interfering RNA during brain development. *Manuscript submitted to Nucleic Acids Research (Manuscript ID: NAR-00701-C-2011)*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am heartily thankful to my supervisor, Professor Hamish Scott, who encouraged, guided, advised and supported me from the beginning until the completion of this thesis. He has inspired and molded me from a naïve student into an independent researcher by the end of my 4-year PhD training. His never-ending encouragement and generous financial support have allowed me to attend numerous local, national as well as international seminars, meetings and conferences, hence improving my interpersonal and scientific communication skills. His kind personality and willingness to help with my work made him a very thoughtful and caring supervisor, who also played an important role in ensuring that I was not only comfortable, but was able to excel on my temporary stay in Australia. He is a man full of surprises and I enjoyed my PhD training under his supervision very much! I know this is not the end of my journey in Australia but a new beginning of our scientific venture across oceans between Australia and Malaysia. Thank you so very much for the opportunity given to me during my PhD training, which serves as a great kick-start to a wonderful scientific career in my life!

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all my co-supervisors, Dr Chelsee Hewitt, Dr Tim Thomas and Associate Professor Paul Thomas for their everlasting input during our informal and formal discussions. Thank you so much for all your time spent in troubleshooting my experiments and your enthusiasm in keeping to the deadlines for various PhD reviews and manuscript submissions throughout my studies. Special gratitude goes to Chelsee for her courage and patience each time she had to read my manuscript written in ‘Manglish (Malaysian English)’. Thank you so much for sharing all the ups and downs while we were in WEHI. Besides, I wish to say ‘terima kasih (thank you)’ to Tim for his excellent mentoring and generosity in passing me his valuable ‘secret recipe’ for *in situ* hybridization. The skill was later enriched by Paul, whom I enjoyed discussing my results with. I wish to thank him for his generosity and happy-go-lucky personality for granting me the free access to his laboratory without any hurdles. To all of you, thank you very much for your help and time spent on my work leading to a success in my thesis.

I am indebted to many of my colleagues, who supported me in various ways. Special thanks goes to Dr Chris Hahn for his continuous encouragement in pursuing the very complex and difficult subject of *Sox4*. I enjoyed each fruitful instantaneous discussion that we had in the office. I must also thank him for all the time he spent on proof-reading my manuscript and his effort in improving my writing skill. Without you, the office will be so dull, Chris! I also wish to thank my closest colleagues from IMVS; Dr Xiaochun Li, Mr Peter Brautigan, Ms Milena Babic, Mr Joseph Carolan, Mr Chan-Eng Chong and Ms Ming Lin for sharing some of my experimental load as well as all the joy that you brought to me throughout my stay in IMVS. I love the lab lunches, I enjoyed the gossip sessions with some of you and the corporate cup ‘walk’ with everyone very much! Thank you for lightening up my very short stays in Adelaide!

Thank you so much to all my friends and the previous ‘Scott labbies’ in WEHI, for their unconditional friendship and care during the very early adapting phase of my life in Australia. A special thanks goes to my fellow PhD students (who have already graduated), Dr Catherine Takahashi and Dr Sarah Kinkel for your constant gossip, complaints and help in my work. I must also thank Ms Sarah King, Ms Ella Wilkins, Dr Francois-Xavier Hubert, Ms Pauline Crewther, Mr Dillon Leong, Ms Ping Cannon, Ms Amandine Carmagnac, Ms Margareta Go and Ms Manny Hancock for helping me to establish my life in the city and adapt to the rigorous research environment in WEHI. Thank you so much for your constant encouragement, mental support and gossip-rich lunches during my stay there in Melbourne. I remember our farewell Christmas dinner in 2007, which I enjoyed the very short but meaningful gathering before I left to Adelaide. To Chelsea, Sarah King, Sarah Kinkel and Dillon, I enjoyed our trip to Adelaide in 2007 especially the moment when we were singing the unofficial lab song together - Grace Kelly! I thank all of you for all the good memories you have given me and wish you all the best!

To my other collaborators, Associate Professor Gordon Smyth, Professor Tim Beissbarth, Ms Lavinia Hyde, Professor David Adelson, Ms Joy Raison, Dr Tasman Daish, Dr Jeffrey Mann and Professor Seong-Seng Tan, thank you for your endless contribution toward the completion of my thesis. I would like to thank Dr John Rayner, Ms Sarah Moore, Mr Rachel Fraser, Mr Frank Weissborn,

Dr Ken Simpson, Mr Keith Satterly and Dr Deidre Mattiske for their technical contribution towards the success of my experiments and analysis. A special thanks also goes to all WEHI and IMVS communities for their help, technical guidance and services throughout my studies. I also wish to thank all the members of Paul Thomas's lab in the School of Molecular and Biomedical Sciences, University of Adelaide, especially Dr James Hughes, Dr Kakoli Banerjee, Ms Sandra Piltz and Mr Nicholas Rogers for their inspiring discussions, technical guidance and assistance during my visit to their lab.

I also wish to thank my closest housemates in Melbourne, Mr Karma Wangdi and family, who introduced me to their wonderful and authentic Bhutanese culture. To Mr Karma Wangdi, his wife and kids, Ms Dorji Wangmo, Ms Cherrie and Ms Phangphi, I enjoyed your companionship in 15 Sydney Road and your Bhutanese cooking very much. Special thanks must go to Karma for taking care of me while I was sick and during my preparation for the very stressful PhD confirmation seminar. It is my honour to have met this lovely and caring family and I hope we will meet again in the future. I would also like to thank Dr Xiao He and his wife, Ms Jing Hua, for their company during our weekly meal preparation and tips for getting over the PhD doldrum. Over to Adelaide, I could not possibly thank my potluck-gang more for giving me the touch of experience the very authentic Australian life in the city of churches. To Mr Chris Cirami, Ms Chee-Fong Cirami, Ms Soo-Khuen Tan, Mr Chris King, Ms Angel King and Mr Tom Heuzenroeder, thank you so much for organizing a monthly gathering in the very Australian way. All the best and may all of you be blessed with health and wealth always. My PhD studies became much easier to cope with due to all the care and friendship extended to me from these wonderful people!

Many thanks also to Associate Professor Rozita Rosli for her continuous guidance and support in my career, from my application for tutorship in Universiti Putra Malaysia to the completion of the benchworks needed for my PhD studies. Upon my return to Malaysia, my colleagues in the Medical Genetics Laboratory, Dr Abhimanyu Veerakumarasivam, Dr Syahrilnizam Abdullah and Dr Norshariza Nordin, were very kind and considerate enough to lighten my teaching/tutoring workload to facilitate my thesis writing. Thank you for your kindness and understanding!

I must also mention the financial support that I received for my PhD studies in Australia from Universiti Putra Malaysia Staff Training Scholarship (UPMSTS), Melbourne International Fees Remission Scholarship (MIFRS) and Adelaide International Fees Scholarship (AIFS) that covered my living stipends and tuition fees throughout my enrolment in the University of Melbourne and later on in the University of Adelaide. Without the financial support, I would not be able to work on this challenging project, which led me to all these wonderful people in Australia!

On a personal note, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to both of my parents and siblings who provide me with the courage to explore this new field of studies and never doubted on my abilities to complete the whole course for the degree. To Vanessa, Connie and May, thank you so very much for your generous sponsorships, which had lessen my financial burden during my preparation for the PhD degree. I must also thank my parents-in-law for their constant trust and support as well as have faith in me on my endeavor to pursue this degree. Thank you so much to all of you for being so considerate during the writing phase after my return to Malaysia. Without all of you, I would not be who I am today!

Finally, my heartiest gratitude goes to my wife, Pike See, who had waited for 2 years in Malaysia before joining me in Adelaide. There is nothing that I can say or write to thank you for your sacrifice, love and kind consideration throughout my study in Australia. I could not thank you more for your unwavering support, understanding, strength and constant encouragement as well as for instilling me with a belief in my own abilities to aim for the best in my studies. For you, I wish to say, I love you very much!

King Hwa Ling

29th November 2010

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

5' RATE	Robust analysis of 5'-transcript ends
A, G, T, C, U	Adenine, Guanini, Thymine, Cytosine, Uracil
AGRF	Australian Genome Research Facility
AMPA	α -amino-3-hydroxyl-5-methyl-4-isoxazole-propionate
BGEM	Brain Gene Expression Mapping
BLAST	Basic Local Alignment Search Tool
CAGE	Cap Analysis of Gene Expression
cDNA	complementary DNA
CP	cortical plate
cRNA	complementary RNA
DNA	deoxyribonucleic acid
dsDNA	double stranded DNA
dNTP	deoxyribonucleotide triphosphate
dsRNA	double stranded RNA
DV	dorso-ventral
E	embryonic day
ENCODE	ENCyclopedia Of DNA Elements
endo-siRNA	endogenous small interfering RNA
EST	expressed sequence tag
FISH	Fluorescence ISH
gDNA	genomic DNA
GE	ganglionic eminence
GENSAT	The Gene Expression Nervous System Atlas
GEO	Gene Expression Omnibus
IPA	Ingenuity Pathway Analysis
ISH	<i>In situ</i> hybridisation
IZ	intermediate zone
LGE	lateral GE
LNA	locked nucleic acid
lncRNA	long noncoding RNA
MGE	medial GE
miRNA	microRNA

MPS	Massively Parallel Sequencing
mRNA	messenger RNA
MZ	marginal zone
NAT	natural antisense transcript
ncRNA	noncoding RNA
NIA	National Institute of Aging of National Institute of Health
NIAID	National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
NMDA	N-methyl-D-aspartic acid
OMIM	Online Mendelian Inheritance in Man
P	postnatal day
PET	paired-end ditag
PMAGE	polony multiplex analysis of gene expression
RACE	rapid amplification of cDNA ends
RC	rosto-caudal
RNA	ribonucleic acid
SAGE	serial analysis of gene expression
SP	subplate
UCSC	University of California, Santa Cruz
UPL	UniversalProbe Library
UTR	untranslated region