

Original Article

# 7-Chloroarctinone-b as a new selective PPAR $\gamma$ antagonist potently blocks adipocyte differentiation

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**Aim:** Peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor gamma (PPAR $\gamma$ ) is a therapeutic target for obesity, cancer and diabetes mellitus. In order to develop potent lead compounds for obesity treatment, we screened a natural product library for novel PPAR $\gamma$  antagonists with inhibitory effects on adipocyte differentiation.

**Methods:** Surface plasmon resonance (SPR) technology and cell-based transactivation assay were used to screen for PPAR $\gamma$  antagonists. To investigate the antagonistic mechanism of the active compound, we measured its effect on PPAR $\gamma$ /RXR $\alpha$  heterodimerization and PPAR $\gamma$  co-activator recruitment using yeast two-hybrid assay, Gal4/UAS cell-based assay and SPR based assay. The 3T3-L1 cell differentiation assay was used to evaluate the effect of the active compound on adipocyte differentiation.

**Results:** A new thiophene-acetylene type of natural product, 7-chloroarctinone-b (CAB), isolated from the roots of *Rhaponticum uniflorum*, was discovered as a novel PPAR $\gamma$  antagonist capable of inhibiting rosiglitazone-induced PPAR $\gamma$  transcriptional activity. SPR analysis suggested that CAB bound tightly to PPAR $\gamma$  and considerably antagonized the potent PPAR $\gamma$  agonist rosiglitazone-stimulated PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD/RXR $\alpha$ -LBD binding. Gal4/UAS and yeast two-hybrid assays were used to evaluate the antagonistic activity of CAB on rosiglitazone-induced recruitment of the coactivator for PPAR $\gamma$ . CAB could efficiently antagonize both hormone and rosiglitazone-induced adipocyte differentiation in cell culture.

**Conclusion:** CAB shows antagonistic activity to PPAR $\gamma$  and can block the adipocyte differentiation, indicating it may be of potential use as a lead therapeutic compound for obesity.

**Keywords:** peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor; antagonist; surface plasmon resonance; recruitment of the coactivator; adipocyte differentiation

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## Introduction

The peroxisome proliferator-activated receptors (PPARs) belong to a superfamily of nuclear hormone receptor and function as heterodimers with the retinoid X receptor (RXR) to regulate the transcription of their target genes via binding to specific peroxisome proliferator response elements (PPRE)<sup>[1]</sup>. There are three different PPAR genes that encode four distinct proteins: PPAR $\alpha$ , PPAR $\delta$ , PPAR $\gamma$ 1, and PPAR $\gamma$ 2<sup>[2,3]</sup>. Among them, PPAR $\gamma$  is expressed at highest levels in adipose tissue and lower levels in several other tissues. It plays a key role in many metabolic processes, including insulin sensitivity and adipocyte differentiation<sup>[4,5]</sup>. PPAR $\gamma$  can be activated by

arachidonic acid-metabolites<sup>[6–8]</sup> and fatty acid-derived components<sup>[9]</sup>.

Currently, obesity is considered as the most common metabolic disease in developed nations. In 2003–2006, the US body mass index growth charts showed that 11.3% of US children and adolescents aged 2 through 19 years old were at or above the 97th percentile, and 31.9% were at or above the 85th percentile<sup>[10]</sup>. These types of statistics provide urgent impetus for the development of efficient strategies focused onto reducing the obesity epidemic. PPAR $\gamma$  is one of the important therapeutic targets against obesity. Adipocyte differentiation appears to be controlled by two major factors or groups of factors: PPAR $\gamma$  and the C/EBPs. PPAR $\gamma$  is a component of the adipogenic transcription factor ARF6<sup>[11]</sup>. C/EBP $\alpha$  promotes the adipogenic program, while expression and activation of PPAR $\gamma$  efficiently induce adipogenesis<sup>[12]</sup>, thereby confirming that PPAR $\gamma$  and the C/EBPs play important roles in terminal

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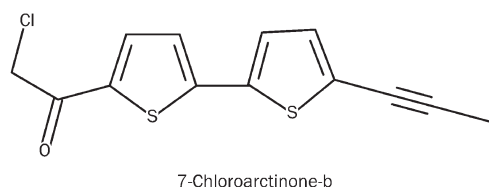
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adipocyte differentiation<sup>[13]</sup>. Thiazolidinediones (TZDs), a class of insulin-sensitizing agents, bind to and activate PPAR $\gamma$ . However, an unwanted side effect of TZD treatment is modest weight gain partly caused by increased adipogenesis and the influx of fatty acids into adipose tissue. It has been revealed that the antagonist or partial agonist of PPAR $\gamma$  might demonstrate promising applications in the discovery of novel anti-diabetic agents that may retain efficacious insulin sensitizing properties and minimize the potential side effects. For example, the published antagonists of PPAR $\gamma$  such as BADGE<sup>[14]</sup>, PD068235<sup>[15]</sup>, T0070907<sup>[16]</sup>, and SR-202<sup>[17]</sup>, exhibited the effect of blocking adipocyte differentiation. Notably, SR-202<sup>[17]</sup> could improve the insulin sensitivity and reduce glucose levels of plasma, implying its potential application in the treatment of obesity and type 2 diabetes.

The natural product 7-chloroarctinone-b (CAB, Figure 1) is a new thiophene-acetylene type of derivative isolated from the *Rhaponticum uniflorum*'s roots<sup>[18]</sup>. *Rhaponticum uniflorum* (Asteraceae family) is a perennial herbaceous plant which is widely distributed in the northern part of China. Thiophene-acetylenes (*ie* ethynylthiophenes) represent a unique class of natural products exhibiting a wide variety of biological activities ranging from antitumor, antiviral, anti-HIV, antifungal to insecticidal activities<sup>[18]</sup>.



**Figure 1.** Structure of CAB (7-chloroarctinone-b).

By random screening against our lab in-house natural product library, CAB was discovered as a new PPAR $\gamma$  antagonist. The CAB antagonistic activity against the rosiglitazone-induced recruitment of the coactivator for PPAR $\gamma$  was evaluated in both Gal4/UAS and yeast two-hybrid systems. CAB could efficiently antagonize both hormone and rosiglitazone induced adipocyte differentiation in cell culture. It is thus expected that CAB might be potentially used as a lead compound for anti-obesity agent discovery.

## Materials and methods

### Reagents

Rosiglitazone and AP2 antibody were obtained from Cayman Chem Co (Ann Arbor, MI, USA). GW9662 was obtained from Merck. Yeast nitrogen base without amino acids, yeast synthetic drop-out medium supplement without tryptophan, yeast synthetic drop-out medium supplement without leucine and tryptophan, *D*-(+)-glucose, and *p*-nitrophenyl *a*-*D*-galactopyranoside (PNP- $\alpha$ -Gal) were obtained from Sigma Chemical Co. All cell culture reagents were obtained from GIBCO.

Lipofectamine-2000 was obtained from Invitrogen. GAPDH antibody was obtained from Kangcheng Bio-tech (Shanghai, China). All other solvents and reagents were purchased commercially and used without further purifications.

### Plasmids

The yeast expression vectors pGBKT7 and pGADT7 were generously provided by Prof Y GONG (Shanghai Institutes for Biological Sciences, CAS, China). CMV-mCBP (mouse CBP) was from Prof MG ROSENFELD (Howard Hughes Medical Institute, University of California, USA). pET15bhPPAR $\gamma$ -LBD was kindly donated by Dr J UPPENBERG (Department of Structural Chemistry, Pharmacia and Upjohn, Sweden). pcDNA3.1-hPPAR $\gamma$  was a gift from Dr X GAO (Chengdu Institute of Biology, CAS, China). The reporter gene pSV-PPRE-Luc was kindly provided by Dr Ronald M Evans (The Salk Institute for Biological Studies, La Jolla, CA, USA). Gal4-PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD expression plasmid and UASE1b-TATA-Luc reporter gene were generously donated by Prof J JAMESON (Department of Medicine, Northwestern Memorial Hospital). PPAR $\alpha$ -LBD and PPAR $\delta$ -LBD were amplified by PCR from pSG-hPPAR $\alpha$  (provided by Dr X LU, Shenzhen Chip-screen Biosciences Ltd) and pAdTrack-PPAR $\delta$  (provided by Dr B VOGELSTEIN, Howard Hughes Medical Institute, US), respectively, and then subcloned into vector pET15b to express the His-tagged fusion proteins. The DNA coding for RXR $\alpha$ -LBD (aa 223–462) was subcloned into vector pET22b.

### Protein preparation

PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD, PPAR $\alpha$ -LBD, PPAR $\delta$ -LBD, and RXR $\alpha$ -LBD (aa 223–462) were prepared according to our reported methods<sup>[19]</sup>. Protein concentration was measured by the standard Bradford method.

### SPR measurements

Binding affinity of CAB towards PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD, PPAR $\alpha$ -LBD, PPAR $\delta$ -LBD, or RXR $\alpha$ -LBD was assayed by SPR technology based Biacore 3000 instrument (Biacore AB, Uppsala, Sweden). The proteins to be covalently bound to the chips were diluted into 10 mmol/L sodium acetate buffer (pH 4.5) to a final concentration of 0.10 mg/mL and then immobilized to CM5 chips using a standard amine-coupling procedure. Prior to the start of experimentation, baseline was equilibrated with a continuous flow of running buffer [10 mmol/L HEPES, 150 mmol/L NaCl, 3 mmol/L EDTA, and 0.005% (*v/v*) surfactant P20, pH 7.4]. Different concentrations of CAB were then injected into the channels at a flow rate of 20  $\mu$ L/min for 120 s, followed by disassociation for 150 s. The 1:1 Langmuir binding fitting model was used to determine the equilibrium dissociation constant ( $K_D$ ) of compounds.

In the investigation of the PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD/RXR $\alpha$ -LBD interaction, purified RXR $\alpha$ -LBD protein was immobilized on a CM5 sensor chip, and the published approach was then applied to test the binding ability of PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD towards RXR $\alpha$ -LBD in the presence or absence of compounds<sup>[19]</sup>. All the results were reflected by RU (resonance units) values recorded directly by

the Biacore 3000 instrument.

### Cell culture

HEK293T (human embryonic kidney) cells were cultured in Delbecco's modified Eagle's medium (DMEM) supplemented with 10% FBS. 3T3-L1 cells were cultured in DMEM supplemented with 10% FBS, biotin (8 mg/L) and Ca-pantothenate (4 mg/L). All cells were cultured at 37 °C in a humidified atmosphere with 5% CO<sub>2</sub>.

### Yeast two-hybrid assay

Yeast cells (strain AH109) were transformed with plasmids pGADT7-mCBP (aa 1-464) and pGBKT7-PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD (aa 204-447). The transformed yeast cells were diluted to an initial OD<sub>600</sub> value of 0.3-0.4 and incubated with vehicle (DMSO) or the tested compound. After 24-h incubation, the  $\alpha$ -galactosidase activities were evaluated following the previously published approach protocol<sup>[19]</sup>.

### Transfection and luciferase assays

Transient transfection was carried out in 24-well plates. Cells were transfected in opti-MEM with the transfection reagent Lipofectamine-2000 (Invitrogen, USA) according to the manufacturer's protocols. The renilla vector pRL-SV40 (50 ng/well) was used to normalize the transfection efficiency. After a 5-h transfection, the medium was replaced with fresh DMEM supplemented with 10% FBS, and the cells were incubated with vehicle (DMSO) or compound(s) for another 18 h. Finally, cells were lysed and luciferase activities were measured using Dual Luciferase Assay System kit.

The mammalian one-hybrid assay system was used to investigate the effects of CAB on PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD in HEK-293T cells, where the UAS-TK-Luc reporter and the fusion construct of GAL4-PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD were transiently co-transfected. In addition, the effects of CAB on the full-length PPAR $\gamma$  were also examined in HEK-293T cells that were transiently transfected with plasmids of pSV-PPRE-Luc (0.3  $\mu$ g/well), pCDNA3.1-PPAR $\gamma$  (0.2  $\mu$ g/well) and pCDNA3.1-RXR $\alpha$  (0.2  $\mu$ g/well)<sup>[20]</sup>.

### 3T3-L1 cell differentiation assays

To determine whether CAB can antagonize rosiglitazone-induced adipocyte differentiation, 3T3-L1 preadipocytes were cultured as described and induced to differentiate by treatment with rosiglitazone (1  $\mu$ mol/L) in the presence or absence of CAB for 6 days. To determine whether CAB is antagonistic on hormone-induced adipocyte differentiation, 3T3-L1 cells were stimulated with an MDI cocktail [0.115 mg/L methylisobutylxanthine (MIX), 0.39 mg/L dexamethasone (DEX) and 1 mg/L insulin] and CAB for 3 days, and medium was then changed to fresh medium containing 1 mg/L insulin and CAB for another 3 days.

Adipogenesis was determined by staining lipids with Oil Red O. The expression of adipocyte marker (aP2) was determined by Western blot analysis using anti-aP2 antibody (Cayman chemical; diluted 1:200).

## Results

### CAB is a PPAR $\gamma$ antagonist

CAB was initially identified in a screen for compounds that bound to PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD. SPR technology based Biacore 3000 instrument was used to carry out the kinetic analysis and selectivity of CAB binding to PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD. The equilibrium dissociation constant ( $K_D$ ) of PPAR $\gamma$  binding to CAB or rosiglitazone (as a positive control) was obtained by fitting the sensorgrams with the 1:1 (Langmuir) binding fit model. As shown in Figure 2B, CAB showed high binding affinity to PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD ( $K_D$ =2.63  $\mu$ mol/L, Table 1), similar to that of rosiglitazone ( $K_D$ =2.83  $\mu$ mol/L, Figure 2A, Table 1). Moreover, to further inspect the potential binding specificity of CAB to PPAR $\gamma$ , CAB binding to PPAR $\alpha$ -LBD and PPAR $\delta$ -LBD was also examined. The SPR results clearly indicated that CAB has no affinity to PPAR $\alpha$ -LBD or PPAR $\delta$ -LBD (Figure 2C and 2D), suggesting that CAB is a selective ligand of PPAR $\gamma$ .

**Table 1.** SPR technology based kinetic analysis for 7-chloroartione-b (CAB) or rosiglitazone/PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD interaction.

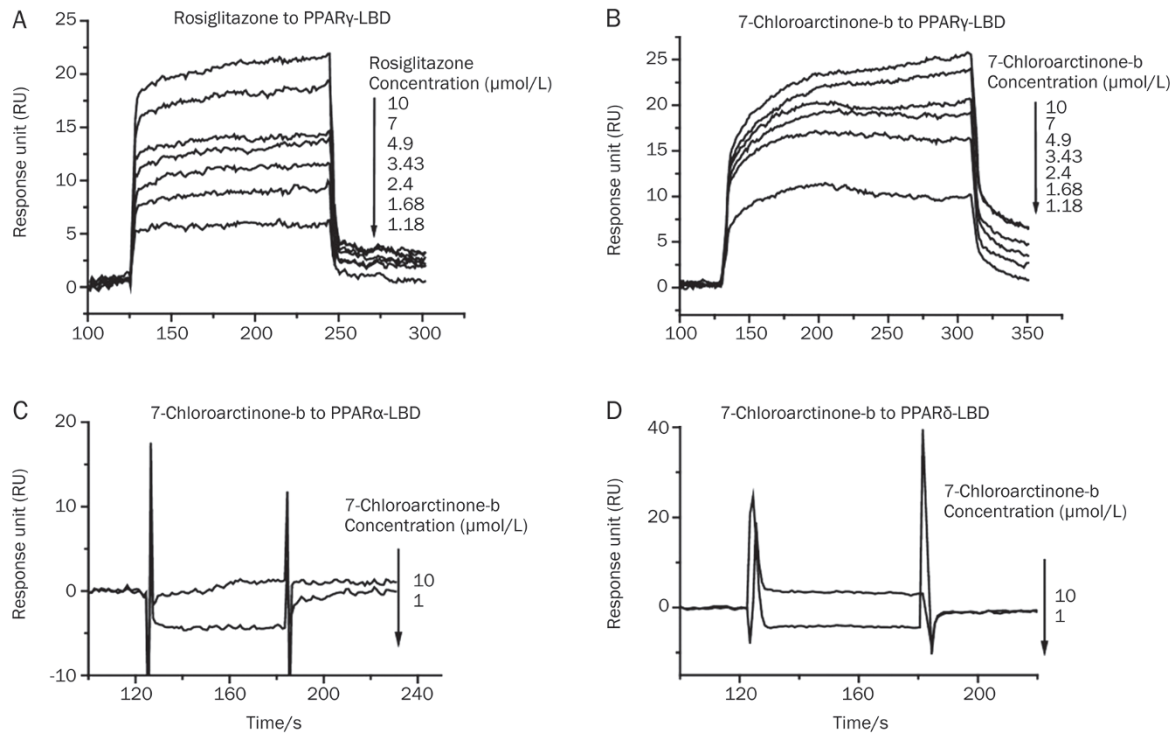
	$k_{on}$ (mol·L <sup>-1</sup> ·s <sup>-1</sup> )	$k_{off}$ (s <sup>-1</sup> )	$K_D$ ( $\mu$ mol/L)	$\chi^2$
Rosiglitazone	4.35×10 <sup>4</sup>	0.123	2.83	1.25
CAB	1.23×10 <sup>3</sup>	3.24×10 <sup>-3</sup>	2.63	0.703

$k_{on}$ , association rate constant;  $k_{off}$ , dissociation rate constant;  $K_D$ , equilibrium dissociation constant;  $\chi^2$ , statistical value in Biacore.

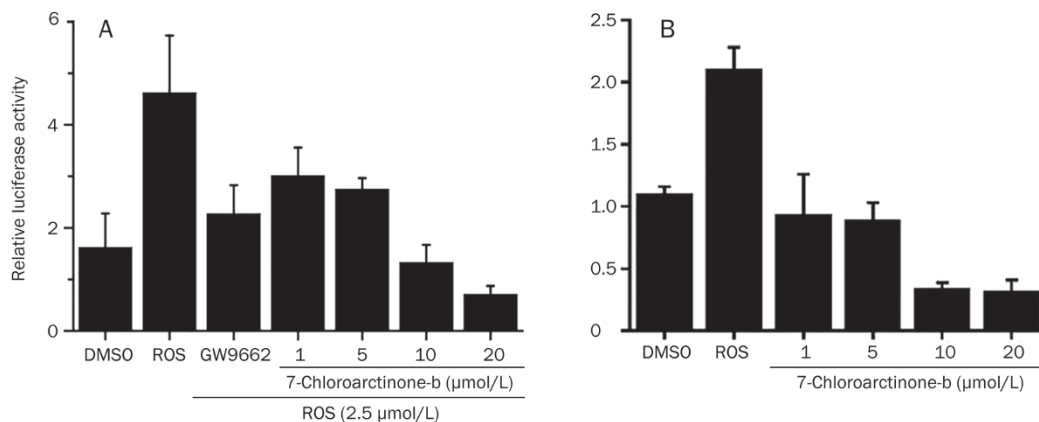
To further investigate the ability of CAB in modulation of PPAR $\gamma$  transcription, transactivation assay was performed. In the assay, HEK-293T cells were cotransfected with full-length PPAR $\gamma$ , RXR $\alpha$ , and a reporter plasmid containing the PPAR response element. Transfected cells were incubated with different concentrations of CAB with or without rosiglitazone. As shown in Figure 3A, co-treatment with 2.5  $\mu$ mol/L rosiglitazone and increasing concentrations of CAB resulted in a dose-dependent decrease in rosiglitazone-stimulated PPAR $\gamma$  transcriptional activity. As shown in Figure 3B, CAB itself could also inhibit PPAR $\gamma$  basal transcriptional activity induced by endogenous PPAR $\gamma$  ligands. These results indicate that CAB is a dose-dependent inhibitor of PPAR $\gamma$  transcriptional activity whether stimulated by its agonist, rosiglitazone, or by other ligands.

### SPR based investigation of CAB in antagonizing PPAR $\gamma$ /RXR $\alpha$ heterodimerization

As reported, PPAR $\gamma$  formed heterodimer with the nuclear receptor RXR before binding to the specific PPRE to regulate transcription of their target genes<sup>[2]</sup>. We thus used SPR technology to test the potential effects of CAB on PPAR $\gamma$ -RXR $\alpha$  dimerization. PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD/RXR $\alpha$ -LBD binding was confirmed as shown in Figure 4A, while the effects of PPAR $\gamma$



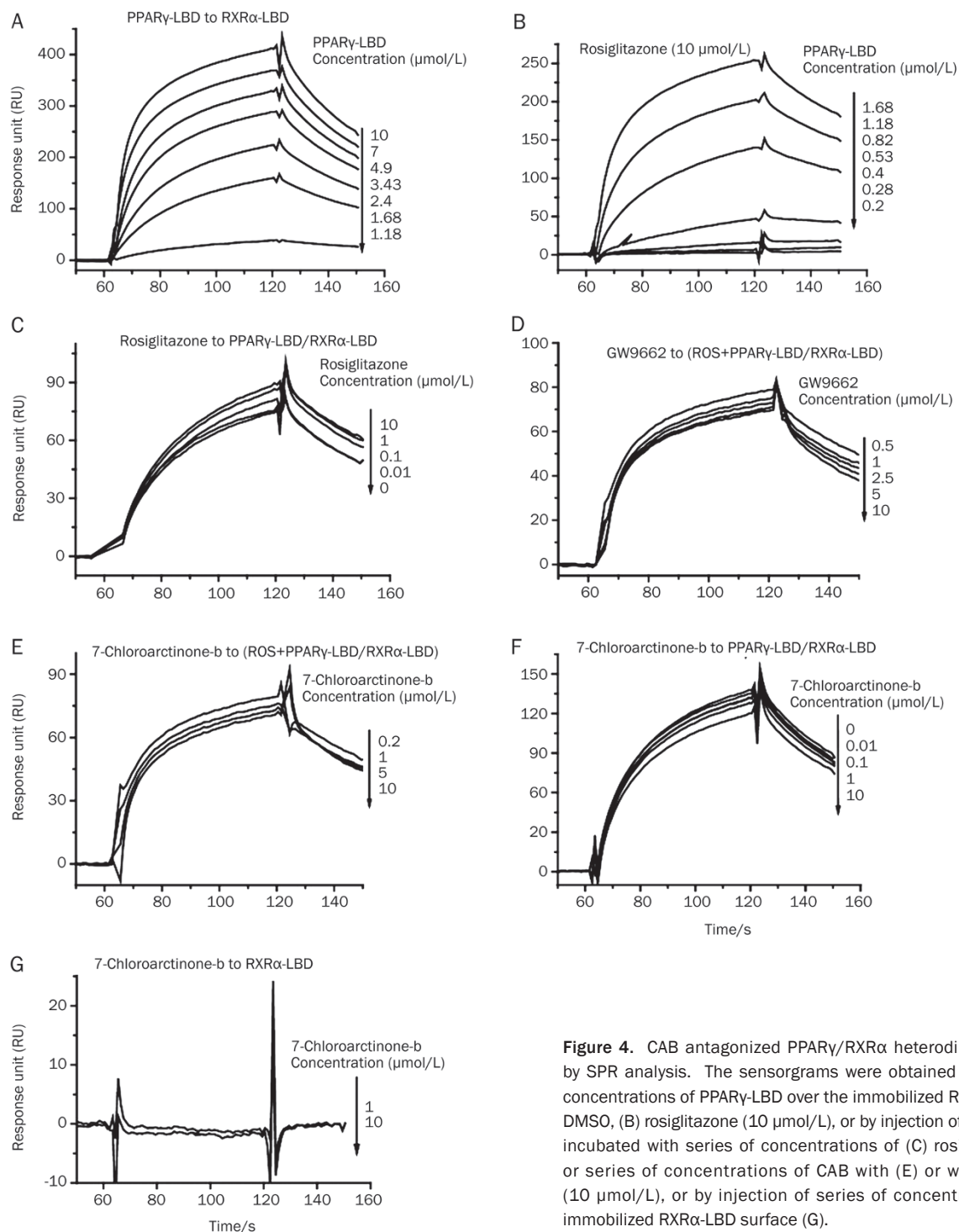
**Figure 2.** CAB exhibited a highly specific binding affinity against PPAR $\gamma$  as evaluated by SPR analysis. The sensorgrams were obtained from injection of series of concentrations of (A) rosiglitazone or (B) CAB over the immobilized PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD surface or from injection of series of concentrations of CAB over immobilized (C) PPAR $\alpha$ -LBD, (D) PPAR $\delta$ -LBD surface. The ligands were injected for 120 s, and dissociation was monitored for more than 150 s. The concentrations (μmol/L) are shown next to the arrows.



**Figure 3.** CAB inhibited PPAR $\gamma$  transcriptional activity as evaluated by transactivation assay. HEK293T cells were co-transfected with PPAR $\gamma$ , RXR $\alpha$  and reporter gene, while the control plasmids were treated (A) with or (B) without rosiglitazone (2.5 μmol/L) and increasing concentrations of CAB for 18 h. The cells were harvested for luciferase and  $\beta$ -galactosidase assays. The luciferase activity was normalized with  $\beta$ -galactosidase activity. The concentration of GW9662 (PPAR $\gamma$  antagonist) was 1 μmol/L.

agonist rosiglitazone and antagonist GW9662 on PPAR $\gamma$ /RXR $\alpha$  dimerization as positive controls were inspected (Figure 4B–4D). Rosiglitazone is the positive control in the experiment of testing the effect on inducing the PPAR $\gamma$ -RXR $\alpha$  dimerization, while GW9662 is the positive control in the experiment of testing the effect on restraining the PPAR $\gamma$ -RXR $\alpha$  dimerization stimulated by rosiglitazone. As expected, rosiglitazone

could stimulate PPAR $\gamma$ /RXR $\alpha$  interaction, whereas GW9662 restrained such stimulation. As shown in Figures 4E and 4F, in either group with or without rosiglitazone, CAB substantially decreased the affinity of PPAR $\gamma$  to RXR $\alpha$ , but had no binding to RXR $\alpha$  (Figure 4G). Therefore, combining all the above-mentioned results, we thereby concluded that CAB was able to antagonize PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD/RXR $\alpha$ -LBD dimerization by



**Figure 4.** CAB antagonized PPAR/RXR heterodimerization as evaluated by SPR analysis. The sensorgrams were obtained by injection of series of concentrations of PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD over the immobilized RXR $\alpha$ -LBD surface with (A) DMSO, (B) rosiglitazone (10  $\mu$ mol/L), or by injection of PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD (0.3  $\mu$ mol/L) incubated with series of concentrations of (C) rosiglitazone, (D) GW9662, or series of concentrations of CAB with (E) or without (F) rosiglitazone (10  $\mu$ mol/L), or by injection of series of concentrations of CAB over the immobilized RXR $\alpha$ -LBD surface (G).

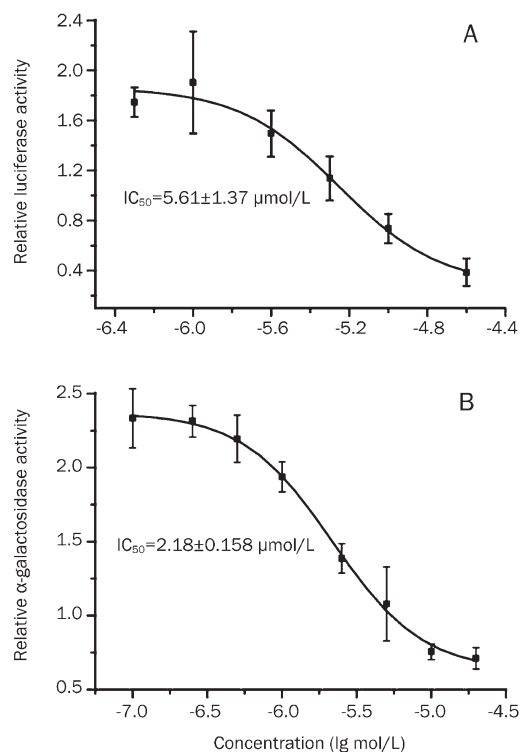
specifically binding to PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD.

#### CAB inhibited the recruitment of PPAR $\gamma$ coactivator

To investigate the effect of CAB on the ability to recruit the transcription coactivator of PPAR $\gamma$  at cell level, we co-transfected the UAS-TK-Luc reporter and the fusion construct of

GAL4-PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD into HEK-293T cells. As shown in Figure 5A, CAB could efficiently inhibit rosiglitazone's (5  $\mu$ mol/L) agonistic effects with an  $IC_{50}$  of 5.61  $\mu$ mol/L. We postulated that CAB might have blocked the binding of PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD to its coactivator.

To further confirm the above hypothesis, the yeast two-

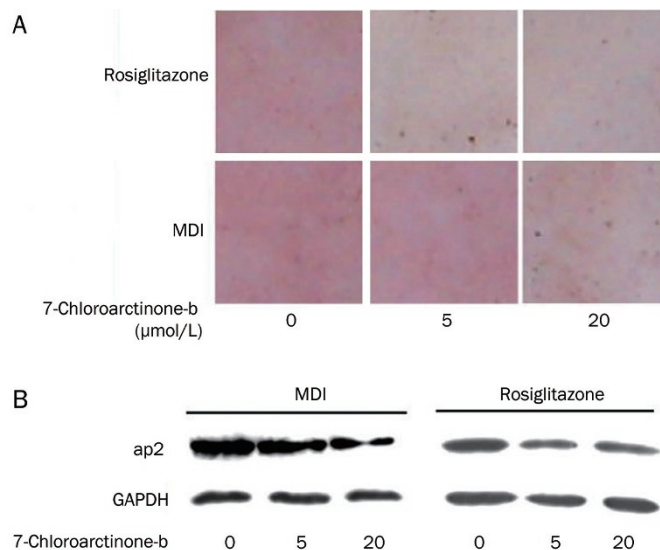


**Figure 5.** CAB inhibited the recruitment of PPAR $\gamma$  coactivator. (A) Dose-dependent effects of CAB on the ability of PPAR $\gamma$  coactivator recruitment as evaluated by UAS/Gal4 system. HEK293T cells were co-transfected with Gal4-PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD and the UASE1b-TATA-Luc reporter gene, while the control plasmids were treated with rosiglitazone (0.5  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) and increasing concentrations of CAB for 18 h. The cells were harvested for luciferase and  $\beta$ -galactosidase assays. The values shown are the means $\pm$ standard deviations from three independent experiments. (B) Dose-dependent effects of CAB on the recruitment of PPAR $\gamma$  transcription co-activator CBP as determined by yeast two-hybrid system. The overnight cultures of yeast cells containing pGADT7-CBP and pGBKT7-PPAR $\gamma$  were diluted with fresh media to an initial  $OD_{600}$  of 0.3 and treated with rosiglitazone (10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) and increasing concentrations of CAB or DMSO (as vehicle control) for 16 h at 30 °C. Relative  $\alpha$ -galactosidase activity was determined by  $OD_{410}/OD_{600}$ . The values shown are the means $\pm$ standard deviations from three independent experiments.

hybrid system regarding the PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD and its co-activator CBP (cAMP-response-element binding protein) was constructed. CBP is a critical transcription co-activator of PPAR $\gamma$ , and its interaction with PPAR $\gamma$  could be enhanced by the binding of rosiglitazone to PPAR $\gamma$ <sup>[21]</sup>. To test the antagonistic activity of CAB on this rosiglitazone-enhanced PPAR $\gamma$ /CBP binding, we transformed pGADT7-mCBP (aa 1–464) and pGBKT7-PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD (aa 204–447) plasmids into the yeast strain AH109 and investigated their interactions with or without compounds. As shown in Figure 5B, CAB could efficiently antagonize the rosiglitazone (10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) stimulated PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD/CBP interaction with an  $IC_{50}$  of 2.18  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ , consistent with the result ( $IC_{50} = 5.61 \mu\text{mol/L}$ ) from the UAS/Gal4 system based assay.

### CAB could efficiently block the differentiation of adipocyte 3T3-L1

PPAR $\gamma$  is predominantly expressed in adipose tissue, where it plays critical roles in adipocyte differentiation and fat deposition. Since PPAR $\gamma$  antagonists have ever been reported to be able to inhibit adipocyte differentiation, we then investigated whether CAB could also prevent adipogenesis induced by the standard adipogenic mixture. Confluent 3T3-L1 preadipocytes were co-treated with a standard adipogenic mixture containing dexamethasone, IBMX, and insulin in the presence of increasing concentrations of CAB. After a 6-day incubation, adipocyte differentiation was visually evaluated by Oil Red O staining for lipid content and by measuring the expression of the adipocyte differentiation marker aP2. CAB could significantly inhibit hormone-induced 3T3-L1 adipocyte differentiation in a dose-dependent manner, as reflected by the decrease in lipid content revealed by Oil Red O staining and by the reduced expression of the adipocyte differentiation marker, aP2 (Figure 6A and 6B).



**Figure 6.** CAB inhibited 3T3-L1 adipocyte differentiation. (A) Confluent 3T3-L1 preadipocytes were co-treated with 1  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  rosiglitazone in the presence of increasing concentrations of CAB for 6 days or MDI stimulus (0.115 mg/L methylisobutylxanthine (MIX), 0.39 mg/L dexamthasone (DEX) and 1 mg/L insulin) and CAB for 3 days, and medium was then changed to fresh medium containing 1 mg/L insulin and CAB for another 3-day. Adipogenesis was determined by staining of lipids with Oil Red. (B) Western blot analysis of aP2 in 3T3-L1 preadipocytes treated with the indicated compounds.

To further confirm CAB as a PPAR $\gamma$  antagonist to block 3T3-L1 cell differentiation, the ability of CAB in inhibiting rosiglitazone-activated adipogenesis was also examined. As indicated in Figure 6A and 6B, similar to the case in the inhibition of hormone-induced 3T3-L1 adipocyte differentiation, CAB could also restrain the rosiglitazone-induced adipogenesis.

## Discussion

In the current work, the natural product 7-chloroarctinone-b (CAB) was randomly screened out as a novel PPAR $\gamma$  antagonist from our lab in-house natural product library. CAB was isolated from the roots of *Rhaponticum uniflorum* (L.) DC., and exhibited a wide variety of biological activities including antitumor, antiviral, anti-HIV, antifungal and insecticidal activity<sup>[18]</sup>. SPR technology based investigation and transactivation assay demonstrated that CAB was a specific PPAR $\gamma$  antagonist. To further examine the potential antagonistic mechanism of this compound, its effects on PPAR $\gamma$ /RXR $\alpha$  heterodimerization and PPAR $\gamma$  co-activator recruitment were inspected. The results indicated that CAB considerably antagonized both rosiglitazone-induced PPAR $\gamma$ -LBD/RXR $\alpha$ -LBD binding and rosiglitazone-simulated PPAR $\gamma$  coactivator recruitment.

As previously reported, there are at least two pathways involved in 3T3-L1 adipocyte differentiation. One involves PPAR $\gamma$  and the other C/EBP $\beta$ <sup>[22]</sup>. PPAR $\gamma$  and C/EBPs are both known to be the direct transcriptional activators of several fat cell genes, and the best characterized adipocyte-specific regulatory DNA sites contain the binding sites for both factors<sup>[23]</sup>. Apart from C/EBP $\alpha$ , ectopic expression of C/EBP  $\beta$  and  $\delta$  can also induce the adipocyte differentiation of fibroblasts<sup>[24]</sup>. It has been proposed that PPAR $\gamma$  and C/EBP $\alpha$  could synergize each other to powerfully promote the adipocyte developmental program in fibroblastic cells. The PPAR $\gamma$  pathway exists in various tissues in addition to adipose and is targeted for therapeutic application in a variety of diseases, including adiposity and diabetes<sup>[25]</sup>. Several PPAR $\gamma$  target genes such as aP2, CD36, ACO, and LPL, are involved in adipocyte differentiation<sup>[26]</sup>. The adipocyte fatty acid binding protein aP2, also a target gene of liver X receptors, plays an important role in fatty acid metabolism, adipocyte differentiation and atherosclerosis<sup>[27]</sup>. We tested the potential agonistic and antagonistic effects of CAB on LXR $\alpha$ /SRC1 interaction in yeast two-hybrid system, but no obvious activities were obtained (results not shown). Therefore, the inhibition by CAB against 3T3-L1 adipocyte differentiation might be majorly ascribed to its antagonistic activity against PPAR $\gamma$ . It is noted that some PPAR $\gamma$  antagonists exhibit opposite activities in different cell lines. Bisphenol A diglycidyl ether (BADGE) is a recently discovered PPAR $\gamma$  antagonist in adipogenic cells, but acted as a PPAR $\gamma$  agonist in macrophage-like cell line RAW 264.7<sup>[28]</sup>. Thus CAB may have agonistic activity in some special cell lines.

Rosiglitazone, a PPAR $\gamma$  agonist, is currently one of the most commonly used anti-diabetic drugs. However, moderate reduction of PPAR $\gamma$  activity observed in heterozygous PPAR $\gamma$ -deficient mice prevents high-fat diet induced insulin resistance and obesity<sup>[29]</sup>, and the PPAR $\gamma$  antagonist SR202 improves insulin sensitivity and reduces plasma glucose levels<sup>[17]</sup>. Therefore, although the PPAR $\gamma$  antagonist, CAB, exhibits effects opposite to rosiglitazone, it might have potential applications in lowering blood glucose.

In summary, the new thiophene-acetylene type of natural

product, 7-chloroarctinone-b (CAB), was discovered as a selective PPAR $\gamma$  antagonist. It efficiently antagonizes both hormone and rosiglitazone induced adipocyte differentiation in cell culture.

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## Author contribution

Yong-tao LI, Jing CHEN, Jin HUANG, and Yue-wei GUO designed this study. Surface plasmon resonance (SPR) technology based assay and transactivation assay, which were used to screen PPAR $\gamma$  antagonists, were performed by Yong-tao LI and Li LI. Experiments investigating the antagonistic mechanism of CAB and evaluating the effects of CAB on adipocyte differentiation were performed by Yong-tao LI. Xu SHEN, Hua-liang JIANG, and Yue-wei GUO supervised the project. Yong-tao LI, Tian-cen HU, Jing CHEN, Jin HUANG, and Xu SHEN contributed to manuscript preparation. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

## Abbreviations

PPAR, peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor; PPRE, PPAR response element; RXR, retinoid X receptor; GW9662, 2-chloro-5-nitrobenzanilide; TZD, thiazolidinediones; BADGE, Bisphenol A diglycidyl ether; aP2, adipocyte fatty acid-binding protein.

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