# **SETDB1** in Early Embryos and Embryonic Stem Cells

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DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.21775/cimb.017.001

#### **Abstract**

The histone methyltransferase SETDB1 contributes to the silencing of local chromatin and the target specificity appears to be determined through various proteins that SETDB1 interacts with. This fundamental function endows SETDB1 with specialized roles in embryonic cells. Keeping the genomic and transcriptomic integrity via proviral silencing and maintaining the pluripotency by repressing the differentiation-associated genes have been demonstrated as the roles of SETDB1 in embryonic stem cells. In early developing embryos, SETDB1 exhibits characteristic nuclear mobilizations that might account for its pleiotropic roles in these rapidly changing cells as well. Early lethality of SETDB1-null embryos, along with other immunolocalization findings, suggests that SETDB1 is necessary for reprogramming and preparing the genomes of zygotes and pluripotent cells for the post-implantation developmental program.

# Introduction

SETDB1 (SET domain, bifurcated 1), also known as ESET/ KMT1E, is a histone H3 lysine 9 (H3K9)-specific methyltransferase that is involved in the transcriptional silencing of euchromatic genes. Since it was identified via its interaction with Erg in a yeast two-hybrid screen (Yang et al., 2002). SETDB1 has been shown to bind to various proteins, including KAP-1 (Schultz et al., 2002), SP3 (Stielow et al., 2008), mAM (Wang et al., 2003), DNMT3A (Li et al., 2006), OCT4 (Yeap et al., 2009; Yuan et al., 2009), and the MBD1/CAF-1 chaperone complex (Loyola et al., 2009; Sarraf and Stancheva, 2004), which suggests that SETDB1 is involved in multiple biological processes. In support of this suggestion, recent studies demonstrate that SETDB1 is necessary for proviral silencing and the selfrenewal and lineage specification of embryonic stem cells (ESCs). In addition, SETDB1 is attracting increasing interest owing to its genic amplification and therefore increased expression in patients with melanoma (Ceol et al., 2011; Macgregor et al., 2011) and in lung cancer cells (Rodriguez-Paredes et al., 2013). SETDB1 has also been implicated in neural diseases and development (Chase et al., 2013; Ryu et al., 2006; Tan et al., 2012). Given these findings, the role of SETDB1 is likely to be distinct from that of other H3K9-specific methyltransferases, such as SUV39H1, GLP, and G9A. Briefly, SUV39H1 (also known as KMT1A) is crucial for the establishment of pericentric

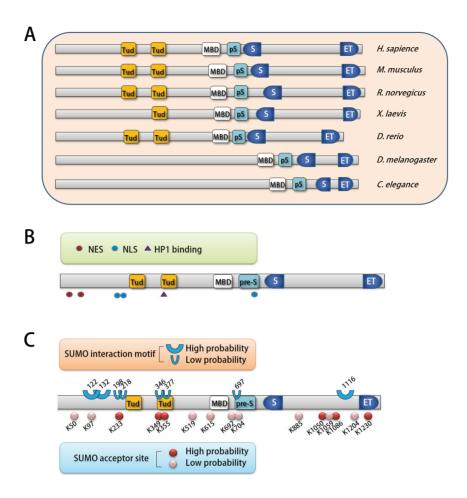
and telomeric heterochromatin (Peters et al., 2003; Peters et al., 2001; Schotta et al., 2002) and for rDNA silencing (Peng and Karpen, 2007). G9A (also named Eu-HMTase2/KMT1C), forms a heterodimer with GLP (Ueda et al., 2006), which methylates not only H3K9 but also a number of non-histone substrates, including p53, ACINUS, and LEPTIN (Huang et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2010; Rathert et al., 2008), and also functions in germ cell development (Tachibana et al., 2007). Hence, these methyltransferases seem to methylate different genomic regions and be involved in distinct cellular processes, although there are likely to be collaborations between them in some circumstances (Brower-Toland et al., 2009; Fritsch et al., 2010; Yoon et al., 2008).

SETDB1 is a genome-wide chromatin modifier that achieves target specificity via its protein partners. Hence, the existing data on SETDB1 function are, in reality, focused on the regulation of gene expression by transcription factors. However, several lines of evidence suggest that SETDB1 is involved also in other cellular processes than the transcriptional regulation. For example, SETDB1 is an essential structural component of promyelocytic leukemia-nuclear body (PML-NB) (Cho et al., 2011), which is a large proteinaceous structure involved in many diverse cellular processes (reviewed in (Bernardi and Pandolfi, 2007; de The et al., 2012)). Two studies have reported that SETDB1 is localized partly in the cytoplasm and partly in the nucleus (Cho et al., 2013; Loyola et al., 2006). Taken together, the evidence suggests that SETDB1 has additional roles that remain uncharacterized. Here, I will discuss the behavior and the possible function of SETDB1 in cells in early developmental stages, including preimplantation-stage embryos and their derivative pluripotent stem cells, focusing on the immunocytochemical observations, which provide insights into the roles of SETDB1. The molecular mechanisms of gene repression by SETDB1 are outside the scope of this article.

# Structural features in SETDB1

A protein's structure is predictive of its behavior. SETDB1 has a structure composed of evolutionarily conserved SET, pre-SET, and post-SET domain responsible for histone methylation (Rea et al., 2000) (Fig. 1A). The pre- and post-SET domains are necessary for SET domain catalytic activity (Schultz et al., 2002). As denoted in the name of the protein, the SET domain of SETDB1 is interrupted by the insertion of several hundred amino acids. Such a split in the SET domain is unique to SETDB1 and is conserved across organisms including humans, worms, and flies. It is currently unknown whether this intervening sequence is required for the catalytic activity of SETDB1, has a particular role in SETDB1 function, or is simply a way of bringing the two parts of split SET domain closer together.

SETDB1 also possesses a putative methyl-CpG-



**Figure 1. Structure of the SETDB1 protein. A,** Bifurcated SET domains conserved in SETDB1 proteins of different species. The SET domain is split in all species examined. Tud, Tudor domain; MBD, methyl-CpG-binding domain; pS, pre-SET domain; S and ET, bifurcated SET. Post-SET domain is not shown. **B–C**, Functional motifs in mouse SETDB1. In **B**, both nuclear localization signal (NLS) and nuclear export signal (NES) are indicated. An HP1 binding motif (PxVxL) is also seen. In **C**, SUMO interaction motif (SIM) and SUMO acceptor site (SAS) are denoted, each classified to high or low probability (score > 6.0 and > 0.7 for SIM and SAS, respectively, according to the GPS-SBM program).

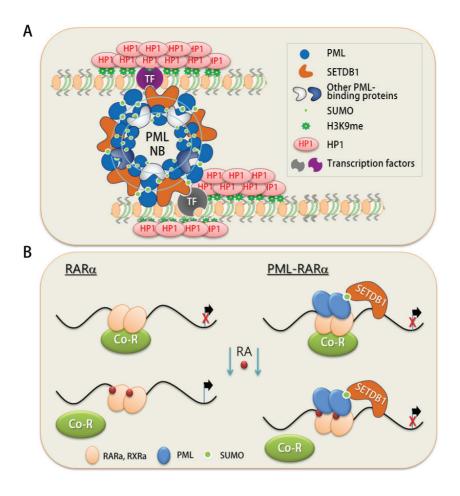
binding domain (MBD) and two consecutive Tudor domains. The MBD domain of SETDB1 is of particular interest because it represents the intra-molecular coupling of a methyl-CpG 'reader' to the H3K9 methylation 'writer', suggesting an interdependent mechanism for the establishment and/or propagation of these two epigenetic marks. However, it remains unknown whether the MBD of SETDB1 can selectively bind methylated DNA. Notably, the MBD domain of SETDB1 contains two DNA-interacting arginine residues that are conserved in the MBD domains of MBD1 (Ohki et al., 2001) and MeCP2 (Ho et al., 2008), suggesting that the MBD domain is functional.

Tudor domain proteins are functionally assigned to bind methylated arginine or lysine residues on both histone and non-histone substrates and are implicated in diverse biological processes including RNA metabolism and germ cell development (reviewed in (Chen et al., 2011; Siomi et al., 2010)). The Tudor domain of SETDB1 in mammals is present in a tandem double configuration (Fig. 1A) and, like other double Tudor domain proteins, is thought to

recognize certain type(s) of histone lysine methylation. For example, JMJD2A/JHDM3A is a histone demethylase specific for H3K9me3 and H3K36me3 that binds to H3K4me3 (Huang et al., 2006), and mammalian p53 binding protein (53BP1), which is implicated in DNA damage repair, binds to H4K20me1 and H4K20me2 (Botuyan et al., 2006), also reviewed in (Pek et al., 2012; Taverna et al., 2007). The double Tudor domains of SETDB1 might be required for binding to chromatin with double strength, or may bind different histone modifications (Botuyan et al., 2006), each with distinct preference to a certain ligand. It remains unknown which lysine residue(s) and which state(s) of lysine methylation the Tudor domains of SETDB1 recognize, or whether a totally different role is played by these domains.

# **Nuclear SETDB1 and cytoplasmic SETDB1**

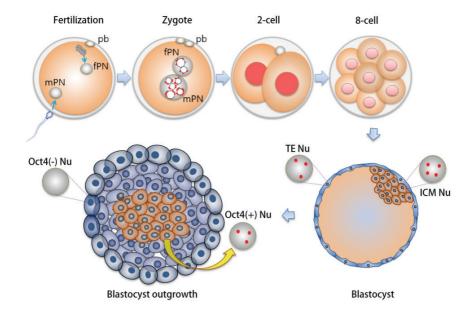
Microscopic observations suggest that transcriptional regulation via promoter methylation may not be the only function of SETDB1. Immunostaining of SETDB1 in



**Figure 2. Interaction of SETDB1 with PML. A**, SETDB1 in PML nuclear body (PML-NB). As an essential component of PML-NB structure, SETDB1 is hypothesized to be guided to targets by transcription factors (TF) and anchor itself onto target chromatin via its double Tudors and/or MBD domain. SETDB1 adds H3K9me3 and subsequently recruits HP1. PML-NB is stabilized through SUMO–SIM interactions. **B**, A hypothetical interaction between SETDB1 with PML–RARα fusion protein in acute promyelocytic leukemia (APL) cells. RARα as a dimer works together with corepressor (Co-R) to repress expression of a target gene. In the presence of retinoic acid (RA), RARα dimer releases co-repressor and shifts to express the target gene. However, the PML–RARα fusion protein, the PML moiety of which interacts with SETDB1, has a great difficulty relieving the chromatin to a transcription-permissive state after exposure to RA owing to SETDB1 activity as a transcription suppressor.

cultured cells revealed distinct modes of distribution in the nucleus-a diffuse (Schultz et al., 2002) and a punctate pattern (Cho et al., 2011; Yeap et al., 2009), which are not mutually exclusive and may co-exist in the same nucleus. The diffuse pattern fits with the known function of SETDB1 as a global transcriptional repressor that acts on the entirety of a cell's euchromatin. On the other hand, the punctate localization suggests an unknown role. Some studies have shown that punctate SETDB1 localization corresponds to PML-NB foci ((Cho et al., 2011; Cho et al., 2013), and see below), and a separate study showed that SETDB1 moves to pericentric heterochromatin displaying spot signals in a cell cycle-dependent manner (Loyola et al., 2009). This discrepancy in SETDB1 localization might be caused by different functions of the protein, or the existence of different SETDB1 variants (Blackburn et al., 2003).

The expression of epitope-tagged SETDB1 was monitored in an attempt to explain the discordant observations of endogenous SETDB1. However, this attempt unexpectedly revealed that over-expressed SETDB1 was largely located in the cytoplasm (Cho et al., 2013). Treatment with leptomycin B-a Crm1 inhibitor that can block protein export from the nucleus (Wolff et al., 1997)—provided an explanation for the cytoplasmic retention of SETDB1: the cytoplasmic GFP-bound SETDB1 proteins could partly enter the nucleus and remain bound at PML-NB foci or scattered in the nucleoplasm but even those that succeed in entering the nucleus become exported in a Crm1-dependent mechanism (Cho et al., 2013). Thus, nuclear entry and residence of exogenous SETDB1 is tightly regulated. Human SETDB1 has been predicted to contain two nuclear export signals (NESs) and two nuclear localization signals (NLSs) in its amino terminal



**Figure 3. Mobilization of SETDB1 during early mouse development.** Shortly after fertilization, SETDB1 expression is unclear. In the mid to late pronucleus stage in zygote, SETDB1 is detected as discrete, discontinuous dots at the pronucleolar rims. From the 2-cell stage, the SETDB1 signal takes a diffuse pattern in the nucleus with the intensity decreasing gradually. In the blastocyst, SETDB1 rearranges to form condensed foci in the nucleus (Nu), which coincide with PML (Cho et al., 2011), and distributes to the inner cell mass (ICM) and trophectoderm (TE) cells uniformly. Finally, in blastocyst outgrowths, SETDB1 is detected only in Oct4-positive cells of ICM origin. pb, polar body; mPN and fPN, male and female pronucleus.

region (Fig. 1B), making the nucleocytoplasmic shuttling of SETDB1 feasible. These motifs are also found in mouse SETDB1 at the preserved positions (Cho et al., 2013), and removal of the N-terminal region containing these motifs perturbs the cytoplasmic retention of SETDB1, resulting in ubiquitous expression both in the nucleus as well as the cytoplasm. Furthermore, cell fractionation experiments demonstrated that endogenous SETDB1 is both cytoplasmic and nuclear (Cho et al., 2013; Loyola et al., 2006), whereas G9A/GLP and SUV39H1 are localized to the nucleus only (Loyola et al., 2006). Thus, the cytoplasmic function of endogenous SETDB1 must be unrelated with the functions of G9A/GLP and SUV39H1. The reasons why overexpressed SETDB1 is retained in the cytoplasm, and in what condition the detained SETDB1 reenters the nucleus, are unclear.

# SETDB1 in PML nuclear bodies

PML-NB is involved in a broad range of biological processes such as the induction of cellular senescence and apoptosis, the antiviral response, and the maintenance of genome stability, through interaction with diverse proteins with distinct functions (Bernardi and Pandolfi, 2007; de The et al., 2012). PML and SETDB1 are the only essential constituents of the PML-NB structure; without either of these two, PML-NB does not form (Cho et al., 2011; Ishov et al., 1999; Zhong et al., 2000). SETDB1 knockdown causes the loss of PML-NB foci, and arsenic (As<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>) treatment, which induces PML degradation (for review, see (Lallemand-Breitenbach et al., 2012)), causes

the loss of the SETDB1 signal. The structural relationship between SETDB1 and PML-NB suggests that SETDB1 is involved in some, if not all, of the functions of PML-NB.

Small ubiquitin-related modifiers (SUMOs) are necessary for PML-NB formation (Kamitani et al., 1998: Zhong et al., 2000) and act as intermediaries between SETDB1 and PML (Cho et al., 2013; Yeap et al., 2009). Most PML-NB-associated proteins have SUMO acceptor sites, are therefore SUMOylated (Muller et al., 1998; Shen et al., 2006), and contain SUMO-interaction motifs (SIMs, (Ivanov et al., 2007)), which are essential for targeting PML-NB (Cho et al., 2009; Lin et al., 2006). SETDB1 contains several candidate sites for both motifs (Fig. 1C). SETDB1 mutated at a single SIM site showed reduced interaction with PML and disturbed the formation of PML-NB (Cho et al., 2013), which indicates that the SIM motif of SETDB1 is necessary for its association with PML. It has been hypothesized that SETDB1 proteins anchor themselves onto target chromatin via the double Tudor domains or MBD domain and, at the same time, hold the PML-NB complex together tightly through SUMO-SIM interactions (Fig. 2A). Of the several tens of proteins hitherto found to be part of PML-NB, SETDB1 appears only to form, with the aid of heterochromatin protein 1 (HP1), a solid platform of heterochromatin to which PML-NB can be riveted. SETDB1-mediated local heterochromatin formation involves a self-reinforcing mechanism in which SETDB1produced H3K9me3 marks recruit HP1 proteins, which are then bound by SETDB1. Accordingly, HP1 localizes at PML-NB foci (Luciani et al., 2006; Seeler et al., 1998).

SETDB1 proteins also participate in the repression of PML target genes such as *Id2* (Cairo et al., 2005) through H3K9-trimethylation in the promoter region, which prevents binding of RNA polymerase II (Cho et al., 2011). Therefore, embedding in PML-NB, SETDB1 appears to fulfill dual functions – the maintenance of the structural integrity of PML-NB and the transcriptional control of PML-NB-associated genes.

#### SETDB1 in early development

Mouse embryos that lack functional *Setdb1* die around peri-implantation (approximately embryonic day 4.5 (E4.5) (Dodge et al., 2004). The loss of SETDB1 causes earlier lethality than that of other H3K9 methyltransferases, such as SUV39H1 (nonessential; (Peters et al., 2001)), G9A (mutant embryos die around E9.5); (Tachibana et al., 2002)), and GLP (mutant embryos die around E9.5; (Tachibana et al., 2005)). This indicates that these functionally redundant enzymes, though expressed in blastocysts (Cho et al., 2011), cannot compensate for the loss of *Setdb1*, which highlights the uniqueness and the significance of SETDB1 function in early mouse development. Accordingly, SETDB1 is more abundant in the mouse oocyte than G9A and SUV39H1 are (Cho et al., 2011; Cho et al., 2012).

Immunofluorescence revealed that after fertilization, SETDB1 gradually appears in the pronucleus, with the stronger signal in the male pronucleus than the female pronucleus (Cho et al., 2012) (Fig. 3). It leads to a speculation that SETDB1 may participate in the reconfiguration of sperm-derived chromatin. SETDB1 at this stage is observed in discontinuous spots in the perinucleolar region, where satellite DNA sequences localize and constitute heterochromatin (Martin et al., 2006). Given that sperm-derived chromatin remains unmodified at H3K9me3 throughout the pronucleus stage (Arney et al., 2002; Liu et al., 2004; Park et al., 2007), the unique perinucleolar expression of SETDB1 seems irrelevant. A possible explanation is that SETDB1 is drawn to this region due to its ability to interact with HP1 that resides at the pronuclear nucleolar rims (Arney et al., 2002; Santos et al., 2005). Several studies in culture cells have shown that SETDB1 is funneled onto these HP1-enriched regions (Ayyanathan et al., 2003; Verschure et al., 2005), probably via the PxVxL motif (Thiru et al., 2004) of SETDB1 that is conserved between mouse and human (PMVLL; Fig. 1B). If so, it would be interesting to know the mechanism by which HP1 occupies the H3K9me2/me3-deficient nucleolar rims and the role of SETDB1 recruitment. It is worth noting that HP1 binds the H3 histone-fold (Billur et al., 2010; Lavigne et al., 2009; Nielsen et al., 2001; Zhao et al., 2000) independently of H3K9 methylation (Dialynas et al., 2006; Figueiredo et al., 2012).

The spotted SETDB1 signal around the nucleolus is transiently maintained until the 2-cell stage when the signal becomes a diffuse pattern (Cho et al., 2012) (Fig. 3). Diffuse SETDB1 expression persists until the 8-cell stage, then temporarily fades (Cho et al., 2011; Dodge et al., 2004) before appearing again in a dotted form in the blastocyst (Cho et al., 2011). At this time, SETDB1 localizes to PML-NB foci, indicating that the SETDB1-PML interaction commences at the preimplantation stage. Thus,

the timing of the beginning of SETDB1–PML interaction coincides with the timing of the occurrence of developmental failure in *Setdb1*-null embryos, which may imply a cause-and-effect relationship between the two events. However, such a relationship is unlikely considering the full-term viability of *Pml*-null mouse embryo (Wang et al., 1998a; Wang et al., 1998b).

The varying patterns of SETDB1 mobilization during the preimplantation development suggests multiple roles of SETDB1 in this stage that might depend on its interactions with other proteins. Protein-protein interactions might occur via SUMOs. SUMO-involved interaction is not likely to occur with G9A and SUV39H1; a motif-search program (GPS-SBM) predicts that SETDB1 has several SIM and SUMOvlation sites whereas G9A and SUV39H1 have no and far fewer sites, respectively (unpublished observation). However, the cellular processes in which SETDB1 is involved, and the consequence of the SETDB1 repositioning are unknown. Nevertheless, given its fundamental function as an epigenetic modifier and its abundant activity in early embryos compared with related proteins, SETDB1 is thought to play a pivotal role in reprogramming and preparing the zygotic genome for the post-implantation developmental program.

#### SETDB1 in embryonic stem cells

Blastocysts consist of an inner cell mass (ICM) and trophectoderm (TE) cells, which develop into the embryonic and the extraembryonic (trophoblast) lineages, respectively (Rossant, 2004). ESCs can be established in vitro by extended culture of ICM cells via blastocyst outgrowth. In mouse blastocysts, a punctate pattern of SETDB1 localization is seen in the nuclei of the ICM and the TE compartments (Fig. 3) (Cho et al., 2012). However, in blastocyst outgrowths, the punctate pattern is maintained only in ICM-derived Oct4-positive cells while it is lost in the surrounding cells of TE origin (Cho et al., 2012) (Fig. 3). The punctate SETDB1 expression observed in blastocyst outgrowths continues in established mouse ESCs (Cho et al., 2012; Yeap et al., 2009). Consistent with the report that Setdb1-null blastocysts fail to give rise to ESCs in vitro (Dodge et al., 2004), this observation suggests a role of this specific mobilization of SETDB1 in the establishment and/or maintenance of ESCs.

SETDB1 knockdown in ESCs resulted in the loss of the normal colony morphology and the Oct4 expression, which then accompanies the expression of various differentiation markers (Cho et al., 2012; Yeap et al., 2009; Yuan et al., 2009). Immunoprecipitation (IP) experiments demonstrated the physical interaction of SETDB1 with Oct4 in mouse ESCs (Cho et al., 2012; Yeap et al., 2009; Yuan et al., 2009). In addition, ESCs with reduced SETDB1 level, when they were aggregated into 2-cell embryos, populate exclusively to the TE rather than the ICM during in vitro development (Yuan et al., 2009). This change in cell fate appears to be intimately related to the induced expression of extraembryonic lineage-specific genes, such as Cdx2 (Strumpf et al., 2005) and Tcfap2a (Auman et al., 2002). Consistently, Oct4-associated SETDB1 was shown to bind to the promoters of Cdx2 and Tcfap2a genes, resulting in the transcriptional repression (Yeap et al., 2009; Yuan et al., 2009). Thus, it is likely that the role of SETDB1 in

keeping ESCs from differentiation to the trophoblast lineage has to do with its ability to repress the genes that are essential for trophoblast development.

SETDB1 contributes to the establishment of global H3K9me3 landscape in ESCs. Most genes in mouse ESCs have H3K4me3-modified nucleosomes, as in human ESCs (Guenther et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2005), and one-fifth of these H3K4me3-occupied genes are also occupied by H3K9me3. SETDB1 binding has been detected in about one-fifth of H3K9me3-occupied genes (Bilodeau et al., 2009). SETDB1 and H3K9me3 co-occupy and suppress a subset of the bivalent genes that are known to harbor H3K4me3- and H3K27me3-enriched nucleosomes in their promoters and that frequently encode developmental regulators (Bilodeau et al., 2009; Yuan et al., 2009). This observation indicates that, in addition to the trithorax group (TrxG)-given H3K4me3 and PcG-provided H3K27me3, SETDB1 provides the developmental regulator genes with an additional layer of the repressive mark H3K9me3.

SETDB1 is also involved in silencing the endogenous retroviruses (ERVs), especially ERV class-I and -II, in ESCs. Retrotransposition that a subset of class-I and -II ERVs makes is responsible for almost 10% of all spontaneous mutations in mice (Maksakova et al., 2006). DNA methylation has an important role in ERV silencing in somatic cells and germ-lineage cells (Bourc'his and Bestor, 2004: Walsh et al., 1998: Yoder et al., 1997) but not in ESCs where the proviral genomes are featured for H3K9me3 (Mikkelsen et al., 2007). It has been shown that SETDB1 is recruited by Krüppel-associated box (KRAB)associated protein (KAP1) and modifies the proviral genome with H3K9me3 (Matsui et al., 2010). SETDB1 depletion in ESCs resulted in not only the loss of H3K9me3 but also the induction of IAP, MLV, and MusD transcription. Interestingly, DNA methylation states at these ERV loci remain unaltered (Matsui et al., 2010), indicating that proviral silencing in ESCs occurs independently of DNA methylation (Leung and Lorincz, 2012; Pannell et al., 2000). These ERVs are not expressed in Dnmt1-/-Dnmt3a-/-Dnmt3b-/- triple knockout ESCs (Tsumura et al., 2006) where they are completely demethylated at CpG dinucleotides (Matsui et al., 2010). This type of proviral silencing is ESC-specific (Mikkelsen et al., 2007); ERV derepression does not occur in SETDB1-depleted mouse embryonic fibroblasts (Matsui et al., 2010). Proviral silencing is also SETDB1-specific; G9a-/-GLP-/- (Tachibana et al., 2005) or Suv39h1-/-Suv39h2-/- (Peters et al., 2003) double knockout ESCs are unable to derepress these ERVs (Matsui et al., 2010). A recent study found that G9A and GLP, but not SETDB1, are required to suppress the class-III ERVs including MERVL (Maksakova et al., 2013). A subset of genes that are upregulated in SETDB1depleted ESCs are involuntarily transcribed via derepression of promoter-proximal ERVs, and some of them generate LTR-genic chimeric transcripts (Karimi et al., 2011). Thus, aberrant expression of ERVs could alter the expression of neighboring genes. Part of these ERVinitiated genes act as proto-oncogenes, which transform host cells (Howard et al., 2008; Lamprecht et al., 2010; Lee et al., 1999). Thus, SETDB1 in ESCs plays an important role in keeping the genomic and transcriptomic integrity through the ERV silencing mechanism.

#### **Perspective**

After fertilization, the embryonic genomes undergo a series of remarkable epigenetic changes. Epigenetic modifiers such as SETDB1 reconfigure the genomic structure of developing embryos, and are central to reprogramming in this early period. SETDB1 is highly expressed throughout the preimplantation period and is thought to be the major protein that regulates H3K9 methylation of embryonic chromatin. The fact that SETDB1 activity is higher in the male pronucleus than in female one has led to the suggestion that it has a role in shaping the sperm-derived naive chromatin (Arney et al., 2002; Liu et al., 2004; Park et al., 2007), although this function is yet to be characterized. Notably, in Drosophila, dSETDB1 alone regulates H3K9 trimethylation in pericentric heterochromatin in germarial germline stem cells which generates the oocytes (Clough et al., 2007; Yoon et al., 2008). This function of dSETDB1 is essential for oocyte development in Drosophila, but whether SETDB1 has a similar function in mammalian germline stem cells remains to be elucidated. To explore the function(s) of mammalian SETDB1 in detail, it will be necessary to study embryos in which the SETDB1 activity is maternally depleted, because even the Setdb1null embryo from Setdb1+/- heterozygote cross contains maternally inherited SETDB1 in the cytoplasm.

PML-NB structures are known to be damaged in acute promyelocytic leukemia (APL) patients, in whom PML-RARa fusion protein is produced by chromosomal translocation and the myelocytic differentiation is therefore disturbed (de The et al., 1990). Given the intimate association of SETDB1 with PML and its ability to repress PML-NB-associated genes (Cho et al., 2011), it is possible that SETDB1 participates in the pathogenesis of APL. The PML moiety of the fusion protein might attract SETDB1 to further the repression of PML-RARα-occupied gene promoters (Fig. 2B), which leads to inhibition of transcription even in the presence of physiological levels of retinoic acid (Lin et al., 1999; Minucci and Pelicci, 2006). In a similar context, recent studies have shown that the overexpression of SETDB1 can induce cancer (Ceol et al., 2011; Macgregor et al., 2011; Rodriguez-Paredes et al., 2013) and other diseases (Chase et al., 2013; Ryu et al., 2006; Tan et al., 2012), probably via the downregulation of genes such as tumor suppressor genes. These observations emphasize the importance of achieving the right balance of SETDB1 activity and the dramatic phenotypic consequences of shifts in this balance. A cellular strategy to keep SETDB1 activity in balance might be the force that drives extra exogenous SETDB1 to the cytoplasm, as seen before (Cho et al., 2013).

#### Acknowledgement

I thank to *S. Cho* for valuable help and *S. Jeong* for critical reading of the manuscript. This work was supported by grants from National Research Foundation of Korea of MSIP (2011-0030049, 2012-0006146) and from Rural Development Administration (BioGreen21 Program, PJ009590).

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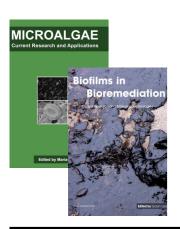
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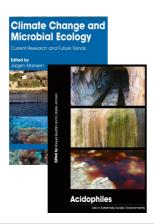
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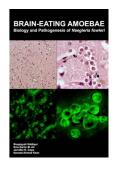














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