



# Disease-associated single amino acid mutation in the calf-1 domain of integrin $\alpha 3$ leads to defects in its processing and cell surface expression

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## ABSTRACT

Integrin  $\alpha 3\beta 1$ , a receptor for laminins, is involved in the structural and functional organization of epithelial organs, including the lung, kidney, and skin. Recently, a missense mutation that causes substitution of Arg628 with Pro (R628P) in the calf-1 domain of human  $\alpha 3$  was shown to be associated with disorders of the lung, kidney, and skin. Here, we found that the R628P mutation leads to aberrations in the posttranslational processing of  $\alpha 3$ . Specifically,  $\alpha 3$  with the R628P mutation showed hardly any cleavage at the calf-2 domain, which usually occurs in the Golgi apparatus during the delivery of de novo-synthesized  $\alpha 3$ . The mutant  $\alpha 3$  retained the ability to associate with integrin  $\beta 1$ , but not with the tetraspanin CD151, and the bound  $\beta 1$  was a partially glycosylated immature form, the maturation of which also takes place in the Golgi apparatus. Furthermore, the cell surface expression of the mutant protein was markedly reduced. These results suggest that the R628P mutation leads to a deficit in the transport of  $\alpha 3\beta 1$  from the ER to the Golgi apparatus. When Arg628 was mutated to Gln or Glu, instead of Pro, the resulting mutants did not display aberrations in processing or CD151 binding, indicating that the presence of Pro, rather than the absence of Arg, at amino acid residue 628 of  $\alpha 3$  is important for the abnormalities in the R628P mutant. In support of this notion, a homology modeling analysis of the calf-1 domain of  $\alpha 3$  showed that replacement with Pro, but not with Gln or Glu, caused partial disruption of the  $\beta$ -sheet structures. Furthermore, the ER-associated degradation of the R628P mutant was not enhanced compared with that of the wild-type protein, suggesting that the deficits in the posttranslational processing and cell surface expression of the R628P mutant are independent of the ER-associated degradation, but arise from the defect in its export from the ER. We conclude that the calf-1 domain is required for the transport of  $\alpha 3$  from the ER to the Golgi apparatus to maintain the integrity of epithelial tissues, and hence the impairment of the calf-1 domain by the R628P mutation leads to severe diseases of the kidneys, lungs, and skin.

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## 1. Introduction

Integrin  $\alpha 3\beta 1$  is a receptor for laminin-511, -521, and -332, the major components of epithelial basement membranes [1]. Integrin  $\alpha 3$  is a type I transmembrane protein with a large extracellular region, a single transmembrane helix domain, and a short unstructured cytoplasmic tail [2]. The extracellular region is composed of a seven-bladed  $\beta$ -propeller, a thigh, and two calf domains with

**Abbreviations:** DMEM, Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium; ER, endoplasmic reticulum; mAb, monoclonal antibody; pAb, polyclonal antibody; PBS, phosphate-buffered saline.

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flexible linkers, and is posttranslationally cleaved at the calf-2 domain to produce heavy (~115 kDa) and light (~35 kDa) chains that are linked by a disulfide bond [3]. The  $\alpha 3$  subunit is expressed in many epithelial organs, including the kidney, lung, and skin, during development, and  $\alpha 3$  knockout mice show severe defects in the lungs and kidneys, and aberrations in the epidermis [4,5].

Several mutations of the human *ITGA3* gene have recently been reported to lead to abnormalities of the lungs and kidneys, consistent with the phenotypes of  $\alpha 3$  knockout mice [6,7]. Has et al. [6] presented three kinds of mutations: a deletion mutation in exon 8; a point mutation in intron 11 that abolishes the splice acceptor site of exon 12, leading to exon 12 skipping; and a single base substitution in exon 14 that results in a missense mutation, in which Arg628 is changed to Pro. All three mutations produce similar clinical features, such as congenital nephritic syndrome, interstitial

lung disease, and epidermolysis bullosa. Conversely, it remains unclear how the missense mutation in exon 14 causes the disease-associated dysfunction of  $\alpha 3$ , although the other two mutations induce premature termination. Nicolaou et al. [7] reported that substitution of Ala349 with Ser in  $\alpha 3$  results in a gain of glycosylation, causing kidney and lung abnormalities that largely resemble those caused by the above-mentioned three mutations. This mutation not only abolishes the association of  $\alpha 3$  with integrin  $\beta 1$ , but also causes disorders in its posttranslational processing and cell surface expression, indicating that the biosynthetic processing of  $\alpha 3$  from the endoplasmic reticulum (ER) to the plasma membrane is important for the exertion of its biological functions.

In the present study, we found that the missense mutation (replacement of Arg628 with Pro, R628P) in exon 14 of  $\alpha 3$  led to a defect in its posttranslational processing, failure of its association with the mature form of integrin  $\beta 1$ , absence of its CD151 binding, and a reduction in its cell surface expression. Our results raise the possibility that the R628P mutation induces conformational perturbations of the calf-1 domain of  $\alpha 3$  that impair the transport of  $\alpha 3$  from the ER to the Golgi apparatus, but do not affect its ER-associated ubiquitin-dependent degradation.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. Cell culture, antibodies and reagents

A549 human lung adenocarcinoma cells were maintained in Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium (DMEM; Sigma, St. Louis, MO, USA) supplemented with heat-inactivated 10% (v/v) fetal bovine serum (JRH Biosciences, Lenexa, KS, USA) as described previously [8].

A mouse monoclonal antibody (mAb) against human CD151 (8C3) was produced as described previously [9]. A polyclonal antibody (pAb) against the cytoplasmic tail of human integrin  $\alpha 3A$  was generated as described previously [10]. An anti-integrin  $\alpha 3$  goat pAb and anti-ubiquitin mouse mAb (P4D1) were purchased from Santa Cruz Biotechnology (Santa Cruz, CA, USA). Anti-integrin  $\beta 1$  and anti-calnexin mouse mAbs were from BD Transduction Laboratories (Lexington, KY, USA). Anti-actin rabbit pAb, anti-FLAG mouse mAb (M2), and anti-FLAG mAb (M2)-conjugated agarose were from Sigma. Anti-calnexin rabbit pAb was from Stressgen (Ann Arbor, MI, USA). Peroxidase-conjugated AffiniPure anti-mouse IgG, anti-rabbit IgG, and anti-goat IgG were from Jackson ImmunoResearch Laboratories (West Grove, PA, USA). Alexa 488-conjugated anti-mouse IgG and Alexa 546-labeled anti-rabbit IgG were from Molecular Probes (Eugene, OR, USA). Lactacystin was obtained from Peptide Institute Inc. (Osaka, Japan).

### 2.2. Transfection of DNA and siRNA

cDNAs encoding full-length human integrin  $\alpha 3A$  with a C-terminal FLAG tag and full-length human CD151 were inserted into the pCAGIPuro vector (a kind gift from Dr. Hitoshi Niwa, RIKEN CDB). A cDNA for a siRNA-resistant mutant of CD151 was generated as described previously [11]. The point mutations in  $\alpha 3$  were introduced using a QuikChange Site-Directed Mutagenesis Kit (Stratagene, La Jolla, CA, USA). The expression vectors were introduced into the cells using Lipofectamine LTX (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA, USA) in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. In transient expression experiments, the cells were subjected to assays at 24–26 h after transfection. Stable transformants expressing wild-type CD151 and its siRNA-resistant mutant were obtained by selection with 2  $\mu$ g/ml puromycin after transfection.

For RNA interference against CD151, A549 cells were transfected with 50 nM siRNA using Lipofectamine RNAiMAX (Invitrogen)

in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions as described previously [11]. At 3 days after transfection, the cells were analyzed by immunoblotting as described below.

### 2.3. Immunoprecipitation and immunoblotting

Cells were washed with ice-cold phosphate-buffered saline (PBS), and lysed in a lysis buffer containing 1% (w/v) Triton X-100, 5% (v/v) glycerol, 150 mM NaCl, 1 mM EDTA, 20 mM Tris-HCl pH 7.5, and 1 mM phenylmethylsulfonyl fluoride. The lysates were then processed as described previously [11]. For immunoprecipitation, anti-FLAG mAb-conjugated beads (Sigma) were added to the lysates and incubated at 4 °C for 1–3 h. The resulting immune complexes were washed with lysis buffer. The precipitated and lysate proteins were subjected to immunoblotting as described previously [11].

### 2.4. Cell surface labeling

Cells were washed twice with PBS and surface-labeled with 2 mg/ml sulfo-NHS-LC-biotin (Pierce, Rockford, IL, USA) in PBS at room temperature for 10 min. After washing with cold DMEM and PBS, the cells were lysed in a buffer containing 1% (w/v) NP-40, 0.1% (w/v) SDS, 0.5% (w/v) sodium deoxycholate, 5% (v/v) glycerol, 150 mM NaCl, 1 mM EDTA, 20 mM Tris-HCl pH 7.5, and 1 mM phenylmethylsulfonyl fluoride. Immunoprecipitation with anti-FLAG mAb-conjugated agarose was performed as described above. The immunoprecipitates were blotted with peroxidase-conjugated streptavidin (Pierce) as described previously [10].

### 2.5. Immunofluorescence staining

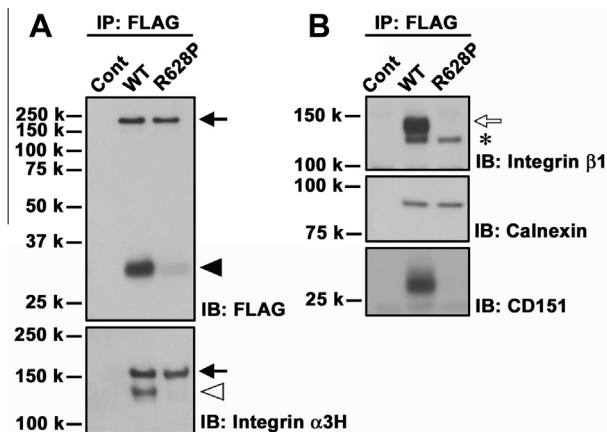
Cells were plated on glass coverslips coated with 10 nM laminin-511, which was purified from conditioned medium of human choriocarcinoma JAR cells as described previously [11]. At 12 h after plating, the cells were transfected with expression vectors for wild-type  $\alpha 3$  and its R628P mutant as described above. At 24 h after transfection, the cells were immunostained with anti-FLAG mouse mAb and anti-calnexin rabbit pAb combined with Alexa 488-conjugated anti-mouse IgG and Alexa 546-labeled anti-rabbit IgG secondary antibodies, as described previously [8].

### 2.6. Homology modeling

Modeling of the calf-1 domain of human integrin  $\alpha 3$  was carried out based on the crystal structure of human integrin  $\alpha V$  (PDB ID: 3IJE chain A). The amino acid sequences were aligned with those of human integrin  $\alpha 3$  (NCBI Reference Sequence: NP\_002195) using ClustalW (DNA Data Bank of Japan). A three-dimensional model was generated with SWISS-MODEL. Energy minimization and single amino acid substitutions were then performed using Swiss-PDB Viewer, followed by analysis with UCSF Chimera.

## 3. Results and discussion

To examine the effects of Arg628 substitution with Pro (R628P) on the expression of integrin  $\alpha 3$ , wild-type  $\alpha 3$  or its R628P mutant tagged with a C-terminal FLAG sequence ( $\alpha 3$ -FLAG) was transiently expressed in human lung adenocarcinoma A549 cells, followed by immunoprecipitation with an anti-FLAG mAb. Immunoblotting analysis of the precipitates with an anti-FLAG mAb showed that a full-length immature form was detected for both wild-type  $\alpha 3$  and its R628P mutant, while the light chain containing the C-terminal FLAG tag was detected for wild-type  $\alpha 3$ , but not for the R628P mutant (Fig. 1A). Consistent with these results, immunoblotting



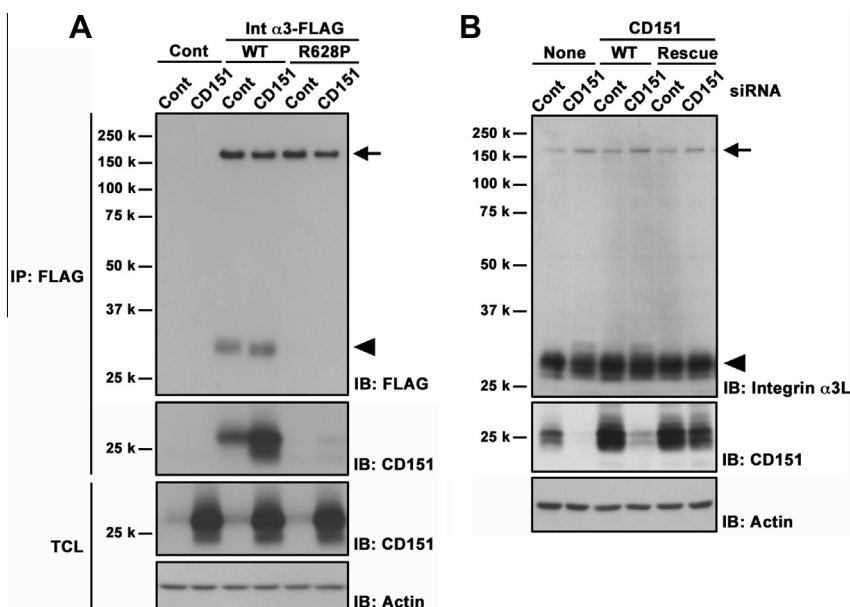
**Fig. 1.** Effects of the R628P mutation on the posttranslational processing of  $\alpha 3\beta 1$  and its binding to CD151. (A and B) A549 cells were transfected with an empty vector (Cont) or expression vector for wild-type (WT)  $\alpha 3$ -FLAG or its R628P mutant. Immunoprecipitates with an anti-FLAG mAb were subjected to immunoblotting with antibodies against the proteins indicated on the right. Molecular weights are shown on the left. (A) The anti- $\alpha 3$  pAb used recognizes the heavy chain of  $\alpha 3$  (integrin  $\alpha 3H$ ). The closed arrows indicate the immature form of  $\alpha 3$ , the closed arrowhead indicates its light chain, and the open arrowhead indicates its heavy chain. (B) The open arrow indicates the mature form of  $\beta 1$  and the asterisk indicates its immature form.

with an anti-integrin  $\alpha 3$  pAb recognizing the N-terminal region resulted in very little detection of the heavy chain in the R628P mutant. These results indicate that mutation of Arg628 to Pro leads to a defect in posttranslational cleavage between the heavy and light chains. Next, we conducted a coimmunoprecipitation assay of integrin  $\beta 1$  with  $\alpha 3$ -FLAG to examine whether the R628P mutant remained associated with  $\beta 1$  (Fig. 1B). The R628P mutant remained capable of binding to  $\beta 1$ , though the mutant failed to coprecipitate with the mature form of  $\beta 1$  but another form that migrated slightly below the mature form was detected on the immunoblot. This fas-

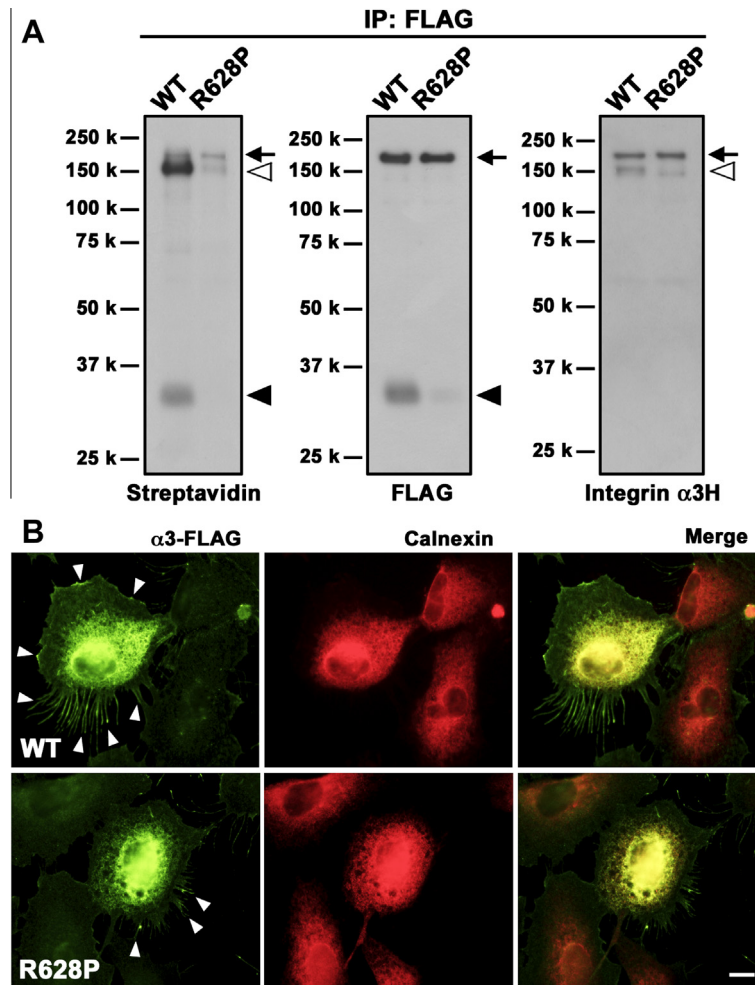
ter migrating band has been shown to represent an immature form of  $\beta 1$  arising from incomplete glycosylation [7]. These results indicate that the R628P mutant only stays associated with the partially glycosylated immature form of  $\beta 1$ . A heterodimer of  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  subunits is formed in the ER, followed by maturation of  $\beta 1$  with glycosylation in the Golgi apparatus [7]. Since the proteolytic processing of the heavy and light chains of  $\alpha 3$  also takes place in the Golgi apparatus [3], it seems likely that the R628P mutant is not completely processed posttranslationally because it is not transported from the ER to the Golgi.

Integrin  $\alpha 3$  is known to be strongly associated with the tetraspanin CD151, and this association arises in the ER [7,12]. The association with CD151 is involved in the regulation of cell adhesion and migration mediated by integrin  $\alpha 3\beta 1$  [13,14]. As shown in Fig. 1B, the coimmunoprecipitation experiments showed that the R628P mutant was incapable of binding to CD151. This result is in agreement with a report showing that CD151 binding requires the extracellular region comprising amino acids 570–705 of  $\alpha 3$  [15]. However, calnexin, a chaperone protein in the ER, was detected in immunoprecipitates from cells expressing wild-type  $\alpha 3$  and the R628P mutant to comparable extents (Fig. 1B).

To examine whether the defect in posttranslational processing of the R628P mutant arose from its failure to bind to CD151, we evaluated the possible participation of CD151 in the regulation of integrin  $\alpha 3$  processing by cotransfection of  $\alpha 3$ -FLAG and CD151. The increased expression of CD151 did not alter the amounts of the light chain of wild-type  $\alpha 3$ , although it augmented the levels of CD151 associated with wild-type  $\alpha 3$  (Fig. 2A). In the cells expressing the R628P mutant, CD151 transfection did not influence either the proteolytic processing of the mutant or the binding to CD151, as evidenced by the failure to detect the light chain of  $\alpha 3$  or CD151 in the immunoprecipitates. These results indicate that CD151 does not have the ability to promote the posttranslational processing of  $\alpha 3$ . Next, we examined the effects of siRNA-induced CD151 knockdown on the posttranslational processing of  $\alpha 3$ . To exclude possible off-target effects of



**Fig. 2.** Effect of CD151 expression on the posttranslational processing of  $\alpha 3$ . (A) A549 cells were transfected with an empty vector (Cont) or expression vector for wild-type (WT)  $\alpha 3$ -FLAG or its R628P mutant together with a control (Cont) or CD151 expression vector. Immunoprecipitates with an anti-FLAG mAb (IP: FLAG) and cell lysates (TCL) were blotted with antibodies against the proteins indicated on the right. (B) Control A549 cells (None) or cells stably expressing wild-type (WT) CD151 or its siRNA-resistant mutant (Rescue) were transfected with a control (Cont) or CD151 siRNA. Cell lysates were immunoblotted with antibodies against the proteins indicated on the right. The anti- $\alpha 3$  pAb used recognizes the light chain of  $\alpha 3$  (integrin  $\alpha 3L$ ). (A and B) Molecular weights are shown on the left. The closed arrows indicate the immature form of  $\alpha 3$  and the closed arrowheads indicate its light chain.



**Fig. 3.** Loss of cell surface expression of the R628P mutant of  $\alpha 3$ . (A) A549 cells were transfected with an expression vector for wild-type (WT)  $\alpha 3$ -FLAG or its R628P mutant, followed by cell surface labeling with biotin. Immunoprecipitates with an anti-FLAG mAb were blotted with peroxidase-conjugated streptavidin, anti-FLAG mAb, and anti- $\alpha 3$  pAb. The anti- $\alpha 3$  pAb used recognizes the heavy chain of  $\alpha 3$  (integrin  $\alpha 3H$ ). Molecular weights are shown on the left. The closed arrows indicate the immature form of  $\alpha 3$ , the closed arrowheads indicate its light chain, and the open arrowheads indicate its heavy chain. (B) A549 cells adhering to laminin-511 were transfected with an expression vector for wild-type (WT)  $\alpha 3$ -FLAG or its R628P mutant, and then immunostained with anti-FLAG mAb and anti-calnexin pAb. The arrowheads indicate cell peripheries and protrusions positive for  $\alpha 3$ -FLAG. The bar represents 10  $\mu m$ .

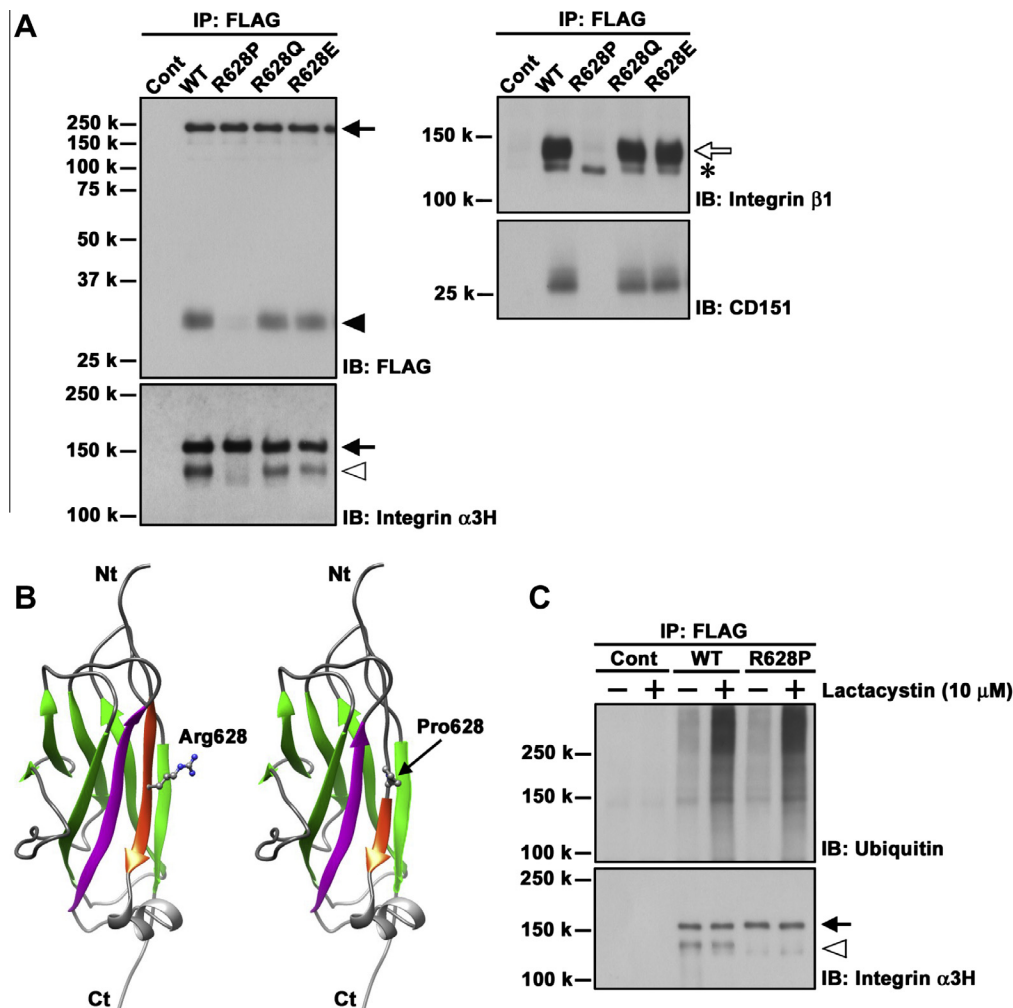
the CD151 siRNA, we also performed rescue experiments in cells stably expressing siRNA-resistant CD151, in which the sequence targeted by the siRNA was silently mutated. As shown in Fig. 2B, CD151 knockdown did not affect the production of the light chain of  $\alpha 3$ . The immature form of  $\alpha 3$  seemed to be slightly increased by CD151 knockdown, but this increase was not abolished by the expression of the siRNA-resistant CD151, implying that it was caused by an off-target effect of the siRNA. Taken together, these results suggest that the inability of the R628P mutant to bind to CD151 is not responsible for the defects in its posttranslational processing.

Next, we examined whether the R628P mutation has an impact on the cell surface expression of  $\alpha 3$ . Cells transfected with wild-type  $\alpha 3$ -FLAG or its R628P mutant were surface-labeled with biotin, followed by immunoprecipitation with an anti-FLAG mAb and blotting with streptavidin. Biotinylated heavy and light chains of  $\alpha 3$  were scarcely detected in the R628P mutant, compared with wild-type  $\alpha 3$  (Fig. 3A). Only a small amount of biotinylated full-length immature  $\alpha 3$  was detected on the blot, but at similar levels for wild-type  $\alpha 3$  and the R628P mutant. In agreement with these results, the amounts of the heavy and light chains were both greatly reduced in the R628P mutant in the immunoblot analysis with anti-FLAG mAb and anti-integrin  $\alpha 3$  pAb, while the immature

form was strongly detected in both wild-type  $\alpha 3$  and the R628P mutant to similar extents. These results indicate that the cell surface expression of the R628P mutant is greatly decreased, consistent with its defect in posttranslational processing. In addition, it appears that the  $\alpha 3$  detected on the cell surface is almost exclusively a cleaved mature form composed of the heavy and light chains.

We also performed immunocytochemical analyses with anti-FLAG mAb and anti-calnexin pAb in cells transiently transfected with wild-type  $\alpha 3$ -FLAG or its R628P mutant. The signals of wild-type  $\alpha 3$  were detected not only in the calnexin-positive ER, but also at the cell peripheries and protrusions, whereas those of the R628P mutant were almost exclusively detected in the ER (Fig. 3B). These results corroborate our conclusion that the R628P mutant is not expressed on the cell surface and is mostly retained in the ER. Consistent with these results, Glanzmann's thrombasthenia, a bleeding disorder caused by platelet dysfunction, has been shown to arise from several mutations in the calf-1 domain of integrin  $\alpha IIb$ , and these mutations also impair the transport from the ER, posttranslational processing, and cell surface expression of  $\alpha IIb\beta 3$  [16,17]. These lines of evidence suggest that similar mechanisms underlie the aberrations induced by the mutations in the calf-1 domains of  $\alpha 3$  and  $\alpha IIb$ .





**Fig. 4.** Pro-dependent defects in the posttranslational processing and protein conformation of  $\alpha 3$  after substitution of Arg628. (A) A549 cells were transfected with an empty vector (Cont) or expression vector for wild-type (WT)  $\alpha 3$ -FLAG or its R628P, R628Q, and R628E mutants. Immunoprecipitates with an anti-FLAG mAb were blotted with antibodies against the proteins indicated on the right. (B) Homology models of the calf-1 domain (amino acids 618–762) of wild-type human  $\alpha 3$  (left) and its R628P mutant (right) were generated based on the crystal structure of  $\alpha V$ . Note that the first (orange) and second (magenta)  $\beta$ -sheets are partially disrupted. Arg628 is located in the first  $\beta$ -sheet. (C) A549 cells were transfected with an empty vector (Cont) or expression vector for wild-type (WT)  $\alpha 3$ -FLAG or its R628P mutant. The cells were treated with a proteasome inhibitor, lactacystin, for 6 h before being lysed. Immunoprecipitates with an anti-FLAG mAb were subjected to immunoblotting with antibodies against the proteins indicated on the right. (A and C) The anti- $\alpha 3$  pAb used recognizes the heavy chain of  $\alpha 3$  (integrin  $\alpha 3H$ ). Molecular weights are shown on the left. The closed arrows indicate the immature form of  $\alpha 3$ , the closed arrowhead indicates its light chain, and the open arrowhead indicates its heavy chain. The open arrow indicates the mature form of  $\beta 1$ , and the asterisk indicates its immature form. (For interpretation of the references to color in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

Pro is a unique amino acid in that its side chain is cyclized back to the backbone amide position, yielding an imido group instead of an amino group. Pro residues are therefore suggested to affect protein secondary structures such as  $\alpha$ -helices and  $\beta$ -sheets. However, this is not always the case, because it has been reported that 16% and 11% of the Pro residues in the dataset examined are located in  $\alpha$ -helices and  $\beta$ -sheets, respectively [18]. To evaluate the effects of the Pro substitution on the posttranslational processing of integrin  $\alpha 3\beta 1$ , we employed other mutations in  $\alpha 3$ , namely replacement of Arg628 by Gln or Glu, producing R628Q and R628E, respectively. As shown in Fig. 4A, the light and heavy chains of the R628Q and R628E mutants were detected to similar extents to those of wild-type  $\alpha 3$ , whereas those of the R628P mutant were hardly detectable. In addition, the R628Q and R628E mutants, and wild-type  $\alpha 3$  were associated with not only the immature form but also the mature form of integrin  $\beta 1$ , while the R628P mutant was bound solely to the immature form. Furthermore, CD151 was found to associate with the R628Q and R628E mutants, and wild-type  $\alpha 3$ . These results indicate that the aberrant posttranslational processing is closely associated with the substitution of Arg628

with Pro, but not with other amino acid residues, thereby raising the possibility that the Pro substitution affects the protein conformation of  $\alpha 3$ .

To examine this possibility, we performed a homology modeling analysis of the calf-1 domain of  $\alpha 3$ , in which Arg628 is located, using the data for the crystal structure of integrin  $\alpha V\beta 3$ . As shown in Fig. 4B, replacement of Arg628 with Pro led to partial disruptions of the first and second  $\beta$ -sheet structures. However, substitution with Gln or Glu did not affect these structures (data not shown). These results suggest that the mutation of Arg628 to Pro perturbs the structure of the calf-1 domain, leading to retention of the mutant protein in the ER, and subsequent defects in the posttranslational events and cell surface expression.

Misfolded proteins are known to be removed from the ER by an ER-associated degradation system involving ubiquitin and proteasomes [19]. To examine whether the R628P mutant accelerates the ER-associated degradation of  $\alpha 3$ , cells transfected with wild-type  $\alpha 3$ -FLAG or its R628P mutant were treated with a proteasome inhibitor, lactacystin, followed by immunoprecipitation with an anti-FLAG mAb and immunoblotting with an anti-ubiquitin mAb.

As shown in Fig. 4C, the treatment with lactacystin augmented the ubiquitination levels of both the wild-type protein and R628P mutant, and, interestingly, the levels were almost the same. These results indicate that the deficits in the posttranslational processing and cell surface expression of the R628P mutant do not simply result from its increased degradation through the structural aberration. It appears likely that the Pro substitution at Arg628 does not largely perturb the structure of  $\alpha 3$ , allowing the R628P mutant to avoid the ER-associated degradation. The relatively small structural aberration in the R628P mutant is also supported by our observation that the mutant remains capable of binding to  $\beta 1$ . Proteins synthesized de novo in the ER have two possible fates: export to the Golgi apparatus for further maturation and cell surface expression or exclusion by the ER-associated degradation system for protein quality control. The Pro substitution does not appear to affect the commitment of  $\alpha 3$  to the ER-associated degradation, but does impair the exit of  $\alpha 3$  from the ER.

We conclude that the Pro substitution at Arg628 in the calf-1 domain of  $\alpha 3$  perturbs its transport from the ER to the Golgi apparatus, resulting in severe dysfunctions of epithelial cells in the kidneys, lungs, and skin, which in turn lead to congenital nephritic syndrome, interstitial lung disease, and epidermolysis bullosa. Our results provide clear evidence that the calf-1 domain is critically involved in the transport of  $\alpha 3$  from the ER.

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