EXPLORING DNA-mediated CHARGE TRANSPORT WITH FAST RADICAL TRAPS

Thesis by
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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Chemistry

California Institute of Technology
Pasadena, California
2010
(Defended November 16, 2009)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I arrived at Caltech, I had little understanding of the research endeavor, and thought of DNA more as a code than as a molecule. In Professor Jackie Barton's group I have learned how to think like a chemist, how to identify significant questions, and just as importantly how to design the experiments and controls that can answer those questions. Jackie has taught me how to create and how to communicate science.

My thesis committee members, Professor Ahmed Zewail, Harry Gray, and Rudy Marcus, have provided insightful suggestions and I appreciate the time that they have taken to help me in my academic development. Mo Renta is a fearsome advocate for us and shields us from much of the drudgery of academic paperwork and regulations. Many teachers and professors played important roles in instilling me with a love of science and chemistry, particularly Tom Roper, Professor Ahamindra Jain, Professor Paul Rablen, and my undergraduate advisor Professor Bob Pasternack.

Dr. Kate Augustyn and Dr. Amie Boal generously invited me to collaborate with them, and I am extremely grateful for these productive opportunities. Amie, in particular, provided me with materials, training and insight related to several different projects, and will one day be a terrific advisor to graduate students of her own! Pam Sontz, Dr. Fangwei Shao, and Professor Ben Elias were also welcome collaborators, with whom I've had many stimulating discussions.

Professor Eddie Merino is a source of both guidance and friendship. I appreciate the assistance and advice of many other postdoctoral fellows in the group over the past few years, including Professors Valerie Pierre, Marisa Buzzeo, Mi Hee Lim, and Maria
DeRosa, and Dr. Jason Slinker, as well as Professor Eric Stemp. Dr. Brian Zeglis, Dr. Paul Lee and Hang Song generously shared metallocomplexes, materials, advice, and good humor. Wendy Mercer was a good friend and labmate, and trained me in how to run attractive gels. Eric Olmon offered many valuable insights. Anna Folinsky provided materials and mentoring to me as a fellow teaching assistant. Being in the Barton group is a privilege; people freely share data and ideas, and I'll miss the exciting scientific discussions with the entire group. I have also had the privilege of collaborating with two smart, productive undergraduates: Molly Davis and Stephanie Wuerth.

My family have all been constant cheerleaders, supporting me through the travails of graduate school. My brothers Scott and Michael, my sister Debbie, and my mother and father have always given me unconditional love and unflagging support. My fiancée, Dr. Cindy Puckett has been my constant partner. She has critiqued the first draft of each of my manuscripts and presentations, and kept my spirits up when things were difficult. Every day is a richer one for sharing it with her.
ABSTRACT

The π-stack of double stranded DNA is a competent bridge for mediating charge transport (CT), both by single-step (coherent) and multi-step (hopping) mechanisms. The yield of long-range single-step CT from photoexcited 2-aminopurine, a fluorescent analogue of adenine, to guanine across adenine tracts has a shallow, periodic distance-measure total CT yield to the DNA bases, herein we employ the fast radical traps N2-cyclopropylguanine (CPG), N6-cyclopropyladenine (CPA), and N4-cyclopropylcytosine (CPC), which are energetically similar to the unmodified bases, but undergo rapid decomposition upon oxidation or reduction. We find that decomposition of CPG by a photoexcited rhodium intercalator across an adenine tract has a similar periodic distance dependence to the quenching of 2-aminopurine by guanine, and the same temperature dependence as well. In contrast, decomposition of CPG by photoexcited 2-aminopurine is monotonic with respect to adenine tract length, and also competes with back electron transfer. Eliminating back electron transfer by separating 2-aminopurine from the adenine tract with three high-potential inosine bases restores the non-monotonic distance dependence. We also determined decomposition of CPA along adenine tracts by photoexcited rhodium, and found the CT yield to be distance-independent, demonstrating that the periodicity associated with guanine oxidation is with respect to adenine tract length, not donor-acceptor separation. This length-dependent periodicity, and the associated temperature dependence, support a model of conformational gating in the formation of CT-active domains along the DNA.
DNA-mediated electrochemistry is facile in self-assembled monolayers on electrodes, and redox-active dyes are reduced through the DNA π-stack at potentials far lower than those of the individual bases. Since cytosine is the most readily reduced base, we incorporated \( \text{CP} \) into DNA monolayers to assay for bridge occupation, and \( \text{CP} \) decomposition was not observed.

To explore the relative contributions of single-step and multi-step mechanisms to CT yield across adenine tracts, we compared quantum yields previously collected from 2-aminopurine fluorescence quenching experiments to those from \( \text{CPG} \) decomposition. We find that for seven or eight intervening adenines, single-step CT accounts for the entire CT yield, while for four to six adenines, multi-step CT is the dominant mechanism. We interrupted multi-step CT by substituting \( \text{CP} \) for an adenine on the bridge, and found the total CT yield across five or six intervening adenines is lowered to the single-step CT yield. Blocking coherent CT by replacing the terminal guanine with redox-inactive inosine does not affect \( \text{CP} \) decomposition on the bridge. These results imply that single-step and multi-step CT processes are not in direct competition for these assemblies, consistent with the model of conformationally gated CT-active states.
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