

DOCTORAL THESIS

Study on the environmental contamination and mechanistic toxicology of 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin

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**Study on the Environmental Contamination and Mechanistic
Toxicology of 2,3,7, 8-Tetrachlorodibenzo-*p*-dioxin**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

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ABSTRACT

Polychlorinated dibenzo-*p*-dioxins, such as 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-*p*-dioxin (TCDD) has been recognized as the most toxic man-made pollutants. They are characterized by their persistent, fat-seeking and endocrine disruptive natures. Their ubiquitous occurrence in the environment can facilitate their bio-transfer and the subsequent bio-accumulation in different trophic levels, imposing health hazards to living organisms. It is well-known that the major route of human exposure to TCDD is through food consumption, resulting in about 1 – 3 pg TEQ (toxicity equivalents)/kg body weight uptake per day. With reference to TCDD, the mechanism of action is known to involve an interaction with cytosolic aryl hydrocarbon receptor (Ah-receptor), followed by heterodimerization with an Ah-receptor nuclear translocator (Arnt) and finally, bind on the *cis*-acting dioxin responsive element (DRE). The Ah-receptor pleiotropic response could lead to diverse pathological consequences, including the alteration of growth regulation, malignant cell transformation and reproductive functions. In this study, an integrative approach including environmental to mechanistic perspectives, was adopted to study and decipher the contamination profile and biological toxicities of TCDD.

For the environmental monitoring aspect, using human breast milk sample accompanied with H4IIE/EROD model, our results indicated that the dioxin contamination profile in Southeastern China was comparable to other studies conducted elsewhere in the world. Moreover our data indicated that samples collected from the Guangzhou population were in general with higher level of dioxin contamination than that of detected in Hong Kong. With the background information obtained, *de novo* biochemical interactions of TCDD

with endogenous hormones or some naturally purified/chemically synthesized compounds were examined in the same cell model. Our results identified that DEX had an additive effect on TCDD elicited CYP1A1/EROD expression. The interaction was glucocorticoids receptor dependent. Another novel pathway assessed was the receptor independent E₂-mediated suppression. It is hypothesized that the suppression was mediated by a direct hindrance of TCDD/Ah receptor complex formation. Furthermore, we have characterized the activity of a natural compound, SLY-1 that acted as a partial Ah receptor antagonist. Its action was mainly targeted at the post-transcription level. The outcome of these studies would be useful for our better understanding on the biochemical interactions of TCDD with natural hormones/compounds, shedding light on the issue of *de novo* modulation of TCDD elicited toxicities and the associated pathological consequences. In addition, the results support the notion that the natural product could be developed as an antidote for treatment of TCDD elicited diseases.

In the final part of the thesis, TCDD elicited reproductive toxicities, with special reference to the male reproductive system were investigated and discussed. It is well known that Sertoli and Leydig cells play crucial roles in regulating the process of spermatogenesis. Hence primary rat Sertoli and Leydig cell models were established for the investigation. Biological consequences evoked by direct TCDD intervention were elucidated. We have demonstrated that TCDD can modulate aromatase, MIS, sertolin and testin expressions as well as E₂ secretion in the Sertoli cells. The synthesis and secretion of progesterone and testosterone were considerably suppressed in TCDD treated Leydig cells. Along with this observation, a significant reduction of P450_{ssc} was observed.

Collectively, this study demonstrated the crosstalk of TCDD with DEX, E₂ and SLY-1 in cellular level. Its toxicities to the male reproductive system are diverse and manifold.

TABLE OF CONTENT

Declaration	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	
Table of Contents	vi
List of Figures	xiii
List of Tables	xvi

CHAPTER 1: Literature Review

1. Persistent Organic Pollutants	1
1.1. Pesticides	2
1.2. Polychlorinated Biphenyls	5
1.3. Dioxins	7
1.4. Toxicity Equivalent (TEQ)	8
1.5. Environmental Contamination and Biological Toxicity of Dioxin	11
1.5.1 Environmental contamination of dioxin in HK and China	15
1.6. Mechanistic Toxicity of Dioxin	18
1.6.1. Aryl Hydrocarbon Receptor Mediated pathway	18
1.7. Biological Effects of Dioxin	22
1.7.1. Immunotoxicity of dioxin	22
1.7.2. Neurotoxicity of Dioxin	24
1.7.3. Hepatotoxicity of Dioxin	25
1.7.4. Reproductive toxicity of Dioxin	26
1.7.4.1. Female Reproductive Toxicity of Dioxin	25
1.7.4.2. Male Reproductive Toxicity of Dioxin	27

1.8. Working Hypothesis Of The Present Study	29
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**CHAPTER 2: Dioxin-like Components in Human Breast Milk,
Collected from Hong Kong and Guangzhou**

2.1. ABSTRACT	30
2.2. INTRODUCTION	32
2.3. MATERIALS AND METHODS	35
Cell culture and validation of TCDD-Ah Receptor mediated CYP1A1 mRNA and EROD assays	35
Immunocytochemical staining	37
Sample screening	37
Statistical Analysis	38
2.4. RESULTS AND DISSCUSSION	39
Validation of TCDD-Ah Receptor mediated CYP1A1 mRNA and EROD assays	39
Immunocytochemical staining	40
Sample screening	40
Table 1	43
Figures 1-3	44

**CHAPTER 3: Modulation of AhR-Mediated CYP1A1 mRNA
and EROD Activities by 17 β -Estradiol and
Dexamethasone in TCDD Induced H4IIE
Cells**

3.1. ABSTRACT	47
3.2. INTRODUCTION	49
3.3. MATERIALS AND METHODS	52
Effects of natural hormones on EROD activities in H4IIE cells	52
Effects of the hormones on TCDD mediated EROD and CYP1A1 levels	53
Preparation of CYP1A1 and actin standards for real-time PCR	53
Real-time PCR	54
Western blot analysis	54
Effects of cycloheximide on Dex or 17 β -estradiol modulated TCDD activated CYP1A1 mRNA and EROD activities in H4IIE cells	55
Statistical analysis	56
3.4. RESULTS	57
Effects of natural hormones on EROD activities in H4IIE cells ...	57
Effects of the hormones on TCDD mediated EROD and CYP1A1 levels	57
Real-time PCR and Western blot analysis	58
Effects of cycloheximide on Dex or 17 β -estradiol modulated TCDD activated CYP1A1 mRNA and EROD activities in H4IIE	

cells	58
3.5. DISCUSSION	60
Figures 1-7	65
 CHAPTER 4: Antagonism of Ah receptor-Mediated CYP1A1 mRNA Expression and EROD activity by Natural Compound (SLY-1) in TCDD Induced H4IIE Cells	
4.1. ABSTRACT	74
4.2. INTRODUCTION	76
4.3. MATERIALS AND METHODS	78
Cell Treatment and EROD assay	78
Effects of SLY-1 on TCDD mediated EROD and CYP1A1 expressions	79
Preparation of CYP1A1,Cu-Zn-SOD, Mn-SOD, GST, catalase, GCS, GPx, GSR, p53 and GAPDH standards for real-time PCR ...	80
Real-time PCR	81
Statistical analysis	81
4.4. RESULTS	82
4.5. DISCUSSION	84
 Figures 1-4	 87

**CHAPTER 5: Effects of TCDD in Modulating the Expression
of Sertoli Cell Secretory Products and Markers
for Cell-Cell Interaction**

5.1. ABSTRACT	92
5.2. INTRODUCTION ..	94
5.3. MATERIALS AND METHODS	97
Sertoli cell culture	97
Histochemical staining of 3 β -hydroxysteroid dehydrogenase (3 β - HSD), alkaline phosphatase activities and testosterone (T) induction assay	98
Cell treatment and cytotoxicity test	98
RNA Extraction and PCR product verification	99
PCR primer dropping	100
EROD assay	101
Western blotting	101
Lactate secretion assay	102
E ₂ assay	102
Statistical analysis	103
5.4. RESULTS	104
Characterization of the Sertoli cell model	104
Induction of CYP1A1 expression	104
Expressions of aromatase, MIS, sertolin and testing	105

5.5. DISCUSSION	106
 Figures 1-5	111
 CHAPTER 6: Effects of TCDD on Steroidogenesis and Antioxidant System of Rat Leydig Cells	
6.1. ABSTRACT	119
6.2. INTRODUCTION	121
6.3. MATERIALS AND METHODS	123
Primary culture of rat Leydig cells	123
Histochemical staining of 3 β -hydroxysteroid dehydrogenase (HSD) and testosterone (T) induction assay	124
Cell treatment	124
Progesterone determination	125
Effects of TCDD on mRNA levels of steroidogenic enzymes, CYP11A1 and antioxidant system	125
Real-time PCR	127
Statistical analysis	127
6.4. RESULTS	128
Characterization of the isolated Leydig cell model	128
Effect of TCDD on testosterone secretion of hCG and hCG+DEX treated Leydig cells	128
Effect of TCDD on the expression of antioxidant enzymes and p53 in hCG-treated Leydig cells	130
6.5. DISCUSSION	131

Figure 1-8	136
CHAPTER 7: Final Discussion	149
Reference	154
Curriculum Vitae	187