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Proteasomes crossing the nuclear border

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Proteasomes localize to different compartments in eukaryotic cells, but the details of this dynamic distribution are poorly understood. Here, we discuss evidence linking proteasome activity to specific intranuclear locations and the potential mechanisms that may target these large proteolytic machines to the nucleus. Recent work has demonstrated the targeting of intact proteasome particles to newly formed nuclear compartments in a cell-free reconstitution assay. We discuss the difference between open and closed mitosis systems and the targeting of proteasomes to the nuclear periphery, as well as the nucleoplasm. Finally, we present a potential model for regulated assembly of the 26S proteasome holoenzyme inside the nucleus.

The proteasome is a highly conserved supra-molecular machine that degrades proteins in an ATP-dependent fashion in all eukaryotes.^{1,2} The proteasome holoenzyme, or 26S particle, is composed of a central barrel-shaped core particle (the 20S CP), flanked by one or two regulatory complexes (19S RPs). Polyubiquitinated proteins are targeted to the 19S RP, unfolded and inserted into the internal chamber of the 20S CP, where they are cleaved into short peptides.^{1,3,4} Proteasomes localize to different cellular compartments, including subnuclear domains, but the targeting mechanisms and the regulation of this complex distribution remain poorly understood.

Proteasome Localization and Subnuclear Domains

In rapidly growing yeast cells the majority of proteasomes have been reported to

be localized inside the nucleus.⁵⁻⁷ This is thought to be the result of nuclear import of newly synthesized proteasome subunits, which enter the nucleus as inactive precursor complexes.⁸⁻¹⁰ In higher eukaryotes, different reports have associated proteasomes with nucleoli, euchromatin, the periphery of heterochromatin and with specific intranuclear subcompartments, or nuclear bodies, such as PML nuclear bodies.^{7,11-16} The accumulation of proteasomes in ring-shaped nuclear bodies, termed clastosomes, occurs in response to stimuli that activate proteasome-dependent proteolysis and can be reversed by inhibiting this activity.¹⁷ This suggests that at least some types of nuclear bodies may represent specialized intranuclear degradation centers.^{18,19} In support of this view, nuclear bodies have been found to be enriched in specific populations of transcriptional regulators modified by ubiquitin or by the small ubiquitin-like modifier (SUMO).^{17,20} A related hypothesis is that proteasomes that are recruited into nuclear bodies may have specific configurations, which are functionally distinct from those of proteasomes that are diffusely present throughout the nucleoplasm.¹⁸

Although different lines of evidence support the view that proteasome-mediated degradation of proteins can occur inside the nucleus, it is by no means clear if this is the general rule for nuclear substrates.^{19,21,22} One established role of the ubiquitin-proteasome system within the nucleus is the rapid inactivation of regulatory factors, as exemplified by the yeast Mat α 2 and the human MyoD proteins.^{23,24} Degradation of the tumor suppressor p53 was once considered to be exclusively cytoplasmic, but is now thought to occur in both the

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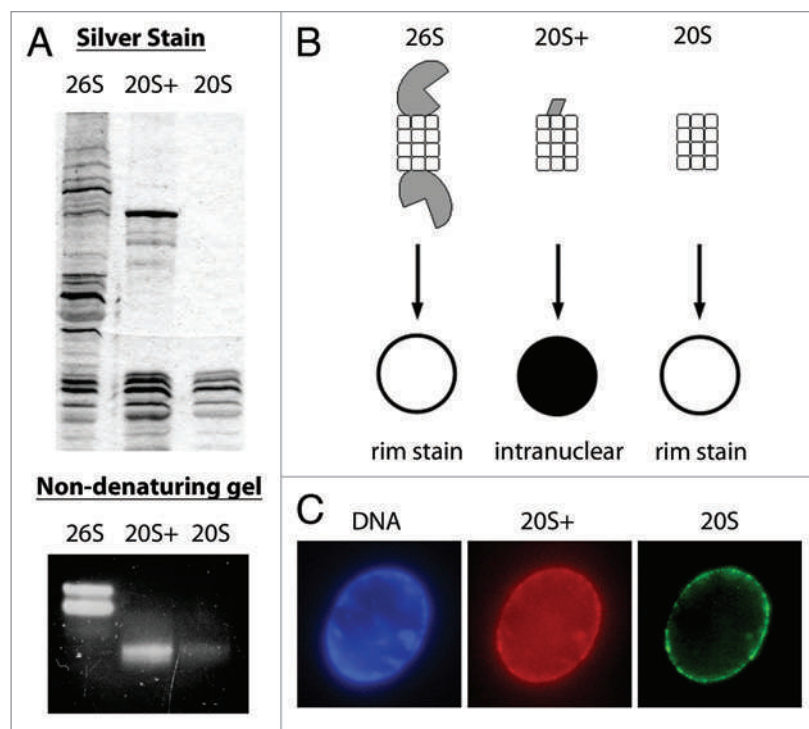


Figure 1. Nuclear targeting of intact proteasome particles in a cell-free system. (A) Silver staining pattern (top) and migration in a non-denaturing gel (bottom) of three types of active proteasome particles purified from *Xenopus* egg extract. The 26S holoenzyme and 20S CP are well known from other eukaryotic systems, while the 20S⁺ particle is a novel intermediate form. Proteasomes in the non-denaturing gel were visualized by the fluorogenic peptide Suc-LLVY-AMC. (B) Schematic representation of the three proteasome particle types and the targeting pattern obtained with fluorescently labeled particles in the cell-free system. (C) Simultaneous detection of fluorescently labeled 20S⁺ (red) and 20S CP (green) in the same nucleus. DNA was stained with Hoechst 33258. See reference 38 for further details.

cytoplasm and the nucleus.^{21,25} The complex regulation of p53 activity involves nucleocytoplasmic shuttling, mono- and poly-ubiquitination and the integration of input from multiple signaling pathways.²⁶ Individual subunits and subcomplexes of the 19S RP have also been shown to have non-proteolytic roles inside the nucleus and to be recruited to specific gene promoters in various eukaryotes.²⁷⁻²⁹

The overall picture emerging from various studies and different organisms is of complex and dynamic localization of proteasomes within the nucleus. This includes dynamically assembled modification and/or degradation foci, sequestering of specific types of substrates (and perhaps also of proteasomes) and translocation of some substrates across the nuclear envelope.^{16,18} Until recently, it has been assumed on the basis of the well-studied example of budding yeast, that active proteasomes are assembled inside the nucleus

from separately imported precursors.^{9,10} However, early work in mammalian cells has hinted at the possibility that intact proteasome particles may also be capable of crossing the nuclear border.^{30,31}

The only known gateway for nucleocytoplasmic exchange is the nuclear pore complex (NPC), a huge multiprotein assembly embedded within the double membranes of the nuclear envelope. NPCs mediate bidirectional transport of a wide array of macromolecular cargoes, including some very large particles such as ribosomal subunits, mRNPs and certain types of viral capsids.³²⁻³⁵ Importantly, in multicellular eukaryotes the whole nuclear envelope disassembles and reforms once in every cell cycle.³⁶ This creates another opportunity for nuclear targeting of whole proteasome particles or specific subunits, by a potential interaction with decondensing chromosomes at the exit from mitosis. By contrast, yeast and other unicellular

eukaryotes are characterized by a closed mitosis and maintain an intact nuclear envelope throughout the cell cycle.^{34,37} This leaves NPCs and nuclear import as the only possible means for intranuclear localization of proteasomes in unicellular eukaryotes.

Nuclear Targeting in a Cell-Free System

To study the nuclear targeting of proteasomes in vertebrates, we used a cell-free reconstitution system based on *Xenopus* egg extracts.³⁸ This *in vitro* system recapitulates the events that follow fertilization during normal development and the process of nuclear assembly at the exit from mitosis in vertebrate cells. The reconstitution assay is also amenable to biochemical manipulation and the use of specific inhibitors of nuclear assembly.³⁹⁻⁴¹ Using interphase egg extracts, we reconstituted nuclei with functional NPCs and followed the redistribution of intact proteasome particles between the nuclear and cytoplasmic compartments. We found three types of stable, proteolytically active proteasomes particles in egg cytosol and these showed differential targeting behavior towards newly formed nuclear compartments in the reconstitution system (summarized in Fig. 1).³⁸

Proteasome particles were not targeted to chromatin at early stages of nuclear assembly and showed no affinity towards pore-free nuclear membranes. However, when mature, functional NPCs were present within the nuclear envelopes, two types of proteasome particles were able to localize to the nuclear periphery. These two forms, the 20S CP and the 26S holoenzyme, were targeted to the nuclear envelope but did not reach the nuclear interior. A third, novel form of the proteasome, which we designated as the 20S⁺ particle, was imported through NPCs and accumulated in the nucleoplasm (Fig. 1).

Biochemical purification of the three proteasome particles followed by mass spectrometry analysis provided some initial clues regarding their different targeting properties. The novel 20S⁺ particle contained the 20S CP, two large 19S RP subunits and a few additional co-purifying proteins. These additional proteins

included the shuttling transport receptor importin β and the molecular chaperone Hsp90. An import-compatible form of the proteasome could be reconstituted from isolated 20S core particles and a subset of purified interaction partners. This suggests that the 20S⁺ particle represents an intermediate form, between the well-known 20S CP and 26S holoenzyme, which is recognized as a legitimate nuclear import cargo in this system derived from unfertilized amphibian eggs.

Surprisingly, 20S⁺ import was not blocked by intervention in the Ran GTPase cycle. Ran is a small GTPase which regulates most nuclear transport pathways by inducing cargo release in the target compartment.^{42,43} Our results indicate that despite the presence of importin β , the targeting of the 20S⁺ proteasome particle to the nuclear interior does not occur through one of the canonical import pathways. Specifically, cargo release within the nucleoplasm is probably not triggered by RanGTP binding. It is interesting to note that Rpn1 and Rpn2, the two 19S RP subunits identified in the 20S⁺ particle, are structurally characterized by PC repeats.^{44,45} These α -helical repeats resemble the HEAT repeats of many nuclear transport receptors of the importin β superfamily.^{33,42} One hypothesis explaining the atypical import properties of 20S⁺ particles is that these PC repeats mimic the interactions within import receptor heterodimers. Alternatively, these proteins may be able to directly interact with the NPC, as has been suggested for another HEAT-repeat protein, β -catenin.⁴⁶

A different question arising from our data concerns the functional role of the chaperone Hsp90, another unique component of the 20S⁺ proteasome particle. Hsp90 may be needed for blocking specific interaction surfaces on the proteasome core particle, thus halting the normal process of holoenzyme assembly and stabilizing an import-compatible particle form. Alternatively, Hsp90 may modulate the large proteasome particle during its passage through the NPC, or may even be involved in the termination of the import process inside the nucleus.

Further research on the specific components of the 20S⁺ proteasome and their interactions will be needed to reveal the

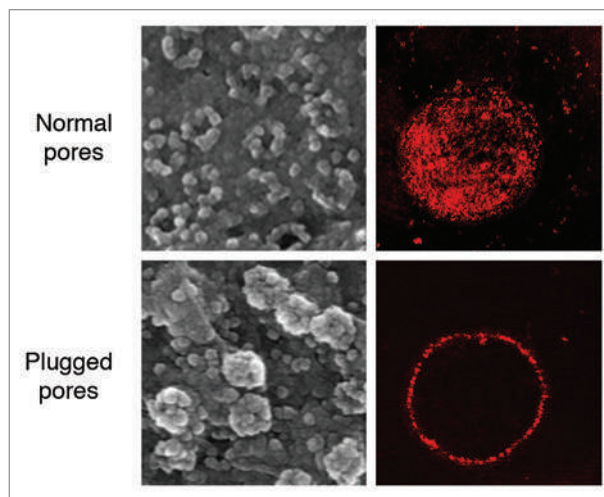


Figure 2. Proteasome docking can occur at the external surface of plugged NPCs. Nuclei were reconstituted *in vitro* and visualized by scanning electron microscopy (left), as in Rotem et al.⁴¹ Recombinant Imp β 45-462 was used to plug pre-existing NPCs (bottom). TRITC-labeled 20S⁺ particles were added into reconstitution reactions after nuclear assembly (right). The labeled proteasomes accumulated inside control nuclei containing functional NPCs and showed a punctate nuclear rim staining when pores were plugged.

unconventional pathway that leads this particle into the nucleus.

Docking on Nuclear Pores

As mentioned above, both the 26S holoenzyme and the 20S CP were targeted to the nuclear envelope in the cell-free reconstitution system.³⁸ The punctate nuclear rim staining pattern produced by these proteasome particles is suggestive of localization to NPCs. Indeed, when the known assembly inhibitor BAPTA was used to produce sealed, pore-free nuclear membranes, no proteasome targeting was observed. Therefore, both the nuclear import of 20S⁺ particles and the targeting of 26S and 20S particles to the nuclear periphery are NPC dependent.

Using another advantage of the *in vitro* assembly system, we assembled normal nuclei with functional NPCs and subsequently plugged these nuclear pores by adding the recombinant Imp β 45-462 fragment. Scanning electron microscopy demonstrates that the whole area of the central NPC channel is physically blocked by treatment with this truncated form of importin β (Fig. 2, bottom left). This confirms previous observations by atomic force microscopy and the notion that Imp β 45-462 irreversibly binds to multiple FG-repeat nucleoporins at the NPC.^{47,48}

When fluorescently labeled 20S⁺ particles were introduced to normal nuclei, they strongly accumulated in the nucleoplasm. However, when NPCs were first plugged by Imp β 45-462, the 20S⁺ particles produced a punctate nuclear rim staining pattern (Fig. 2, right; see also ref. 38).

Taken together, these results suggest that all three types of proteasome particles can dock onto normal NPCs, while only the 20S⁺ particle is able to proceed and translocate through the pore channel into the nucleoplasm. Docking can be hypothesized to occur through a common constituent of the three particle types (i.e., one or more of the core particle subunits). On the nuclear pore side, the prime suspect for mediating these putative interactions would be Nup358/RanBP2, a large multidomain nucleoporin which makes up the cytoplasmic filaments on the outer surface of the NPC.⁴⁹ As shown in Figure 2, access to most areas of the NPC is blocked by the treatment with Imp β 45-462, leaving only the outer extensions of the cytoplasmic surface as possible docking sites. This hypothesis can now be tested by immunodepleting Nup358/RanBP2 from egg extract, reconstituting cytoplasmic filament-free NPCs and testing proteasome targeting.

Intriguingly, Nup358/RanBP2 also provides a conceptual link to subnuclear

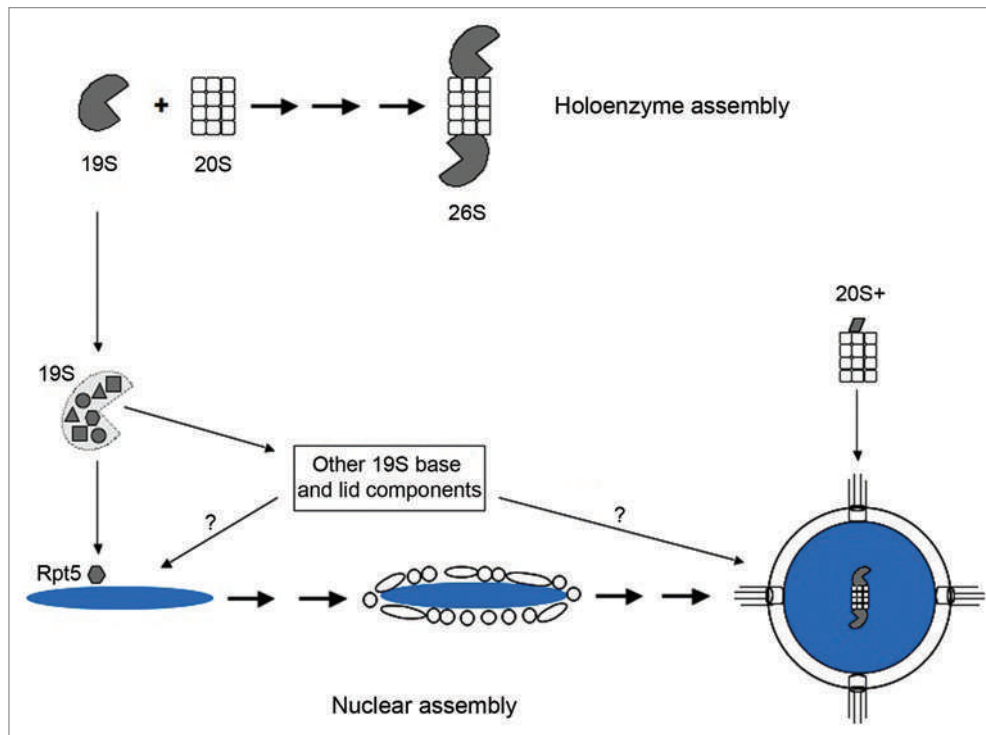


Figure 3. Potential model for 26S holoenzyme assembly inside the nucleus, following separate nuclear targeting pathways. Nuclear assembly is schematically depicted, starting from a condensed chromatin template (blue), proceeding through membrane vesicle binding and fusion and resulting in a complete nuclear envelope with functional NPCs. The Rpt5 subunit is targeted to early assembly intermediates, while the 20S⁺ particle (containing Rpn1 and Rpn2) is imported through mature NPCs. The fate of other 19S RP subunits remains to be investigated.

domains, which may serve as the ultimate destination for imported proteasome particles. As mentioned above, some types of nuclear bodies share a link to the ubiquitin-proteasome and SUMO-conjugation pathways.¹⁸ Nup358/RanBP2 itself acts as a SUMO E3 ligase in vertebrates, resulting in the localization of RanGAP1 (and therefore GTP hydrolysis on Ran) to the outer cytoplasmic side of the NPC.⁵⁰ Our work provides the first clues for a possible dynamic mechanism targeting active proteasome particles to a very strategic position on the outer cytoplasmic surface of NPCs. It will be interesting to see if additional evidence for this type of targeting can be obtained from other eukaryotic systems.

The Fast Lane into the Nucleus

Our data points to one particular form of an intact preassembled proteasome, the 20S⁺ particle, as the molecular species which is recognized as a nuclear import cargo in the egg extract system.³⁸ This suggests a specialized mechanism allowing for

the quick mobilization of intact particles into newly formed nuclei. The eggs of *Xenopus laevis* and other amphibians contain large stockpiles of materials, which are stored for use during the early developmental stages that follow fertilization. This is a static, arrested system, which is poised for the rapid changes triggered by fertilization.^{51,52} Once activated, it relies on pre-existing protein complexes until the activation of the zygotic transcription program at the ~4,000 cell stage. It is therefore logical to assume that part of the existing reservoir of proteasome particles in eggs is destined for the nucleus and may be stored in an import-compatible form.

Could this type of nuclear targeting mechanism also work in other cellular scenarios? Actively growing yeast cells, which are characterized by a closed mitosis and a constant supply of newly synthesized proteasome subunits, represent an extremely different situation. Indeed, the current model for this scenario would be holoenzyme assembly inside the nucleus from independently imported and inactive precursors. Exciting new

work from Eric Chang's laboratory suggests that even in unicellular eukaryotes a second, faster pathway into the nucleus may exist.⁵³ Working in the fission yeast, *Schizosaccharomyces pombe*, these authors have investigated Arc3-mediated mobility of proteasomes throughout the cell. Photobleaching experiments demonstrated that pre-existing proteasomes are rapidly imported into the nucleus, but exit it slowly. When Arc3 expression is silenced, proteasome import is substantially impaired and the cells become hypersensitive to DNA damage.⁵³ Thus, both in yeast and in vertebrates, rapid mobilization of intact proteasome particles may be needed for certain types of cellular response to changes in the environment. In the future, it will be interesting to see if proteasome import can be correlated to dynamic changes in specific intranuclear subcompartments, or orphan nuclear bodies.¹⁸

26S Assembly within the Nucleus

All three types of stable proteasome particles identified in *Xenopus* egg extract

are proteolytically active towards small peptides. However, in order to degrade polyubiquitinated proteins, the 19S RP would have to be complexed with the 20S CP. This suggests that the import of 20S⁺ particles observed in the cell-free reconstitution system may serve as a basis for the assembly of the full 26S holoenzyme inside the nucleus. The assembly mechanism of the 19S regulatory particle and 26S holoenzyme are still not fully elucidated and different assembly pathways, involving chaperones and accessory proteins, have been suggested.⁵⁴⁻⁵⁷ Little attention has been given to the exact intracellular location of these assembly steps, especially in vertebrates. Since most of the 19S RP subunits are missing from the 20S⁺ particle, a putative mechanism for nuclear holoenzyme assembly would presumably involve the independent import of the remaining components.

Further work in the cell-free system revealed that at least one 19S subunit, which is missing from the 20S⁺ particle, is targeted to the nucleus by a separate mechanism. Rpt5, one of the six ATPases within the base subcomplex of the 19S RP, was detected inside BAPTA-inhibited assembly intermediates.³⁸ Since these nuclei are enclosed by sealed nuclear membranes with no NPCs, Rpt5 must be recruited early on, perhaps by interacting with chromatin. This leaves an open question regarding the fate of the remaining base and lid components of the 19S RP, but allows us to suggest a working model for proteasome holoenzyme assembly within the nucleus in organisms characterized by an open mitosis (Fig. 3). According to this hypothesis, the intact, preassembled 20S⁺ particle is imported through mature NPCs, while the remainder of the 19S RP subunits may be independently targeted to the nuclear compartment. An attractive feature of this model is that the final stages of 26S assembly can be regulated by intranuclear signals, such as DNA damage detection or cell cycle transitions, and may also be directed towards specific subnuclear locations.

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