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Chloroplast cold-avoidance response in *Marchantia polymorpha* occurs independently of changes in endogenous phototropin expression

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Abstract:

When exposed to fluctuating light intensity, chloroplasts move towards weak

light (accumulation response), and away from strong light (avoidance response). In

addition, cold treatment (5°C) induces the avoidance response even under weak light

conditions (cold-avoidance response). These three responses are mediated by the

phototropin (phot), which is a blue-light photoreceptor and has also been found to act as

a thermosensory protein that perceives temperature variation. Our previous report

indicated that cold-induced changes in phot biochemical activity initiate the cold-

avoidance response. In this study, we further explored the induction mechanism of the

cold-avoidance response in the liverwort *Marchantia polymorpha* and examined the

relationship between changes in the amount of phot and the induction of the cold-

avoidance response. The switch between the accumulation and avoidance responses

occurs at a so-called 'transitional' light intensity. Our physiological experiments revealed

that a cold-mediated decrease in the transitional light intensity leads to the induction of

the cold-avoidance response. While artificial overexpression of phot decreased the

transitional light intensity as much as cold treatment did, the amount of endogenous phot

remained unchanged by cold treatment in wild-type *M. polymorpha*. Taken together, these

findings show that the cold-avoidance response is initiated by a cold-mediated reduction

of the transitional light intensity, independent of the amount of endogenous phot. This

study provides a clue to understand the mechanism underlying the switch in direction of

chloroplast relocation in response to light and temperature.

Keywords:

35   Accumulation response; Avoidance response; Chloroplast movement; Cold-avoidance

36   response; *Marchantia polymorpha;* Phototropin

1. Introduction

Plants sense ambient light and temperature to adapt to an ever-changing environment. In response to light and temperature changes, the intracellular chloroplast position is precisely controlled. Under weak light conditions (e.g., under canopy), chloroplasts move towards light to increase light capture for photosynthetic efficiency (accumulation response) [1]. Under strong light conditions (e.g., under direct sunlight), chloroplasts move away from light to avoid photodamage (avoidance response) [2]. Chloroplast position is also affected by temperature [3], notably cold. Under warm conditions, weak light induces the accumulation response; however, under cold conditions (5°C) the same light level induces chloroplast avoidance (Fig. 1). This movement, referred to as the cold-positioning (or cold-avoidance) response, has been studied in a number of plant species, including the moss *Funaria hygrometrica* [3], evergreen ferns (e.g., *Adiantum capillus-veneris*) [4], the liverwort *Marchantia polymorpha* [5] and *Arabidopsis thaliana* [6]. In *M. polymorpha*, the cold-avoidance response contributes to the reduction of photoinhibition under cold conditions [6].

Earlier studies showed that the accumulation, avoidance and cold-avoidance responses are all mediated by the blue-light (BL) photoreceptor phototropin (phot) [4,6-9]. Phot has two photosensory light, oxygen, or voltage (LOV) domains (LOV1 and LOV2) at its N-terminal region and a serine/threonine kinase domain at its C-terminal region. Phot perceives BL via its LOV domains and mediates the change of chloroplast position upon photoactivation of the LOV domains and kinase-mediated autophosphorylation [10]. A decrease in ambient temperature prolongs the lifetime of the photoactivated LOV2 domain, resulting in an increase in autophosphorylation [6]. The cold-induced enhancement of the photochemical and biochemical activities of phot (i.e., prolonged lifetime of photoactivated LOV2 and increased autophosphorylation status) is essential for induction of the cold-avoidance response [6], and further study is required to fully understand this induction.

The switch in chloroplast behavior between the accumulation and avoidance

responses occurs at their 'transitional' light intensity (Fig. 1A). In the cold-avoidance

response, because the chloroplast moves away from even weak BL (wBL) under cold

conditions [6], it is hypothesized that the cold-avoidance response is induced by a cold-

mediated reduction of the transitional light intensity (Fig. 1B). However, this hypothesis

remains to be tested. Artificial overexpression of phot has been suggested to decrease the

transitional light intensity in *A. capillus-veneris* and *A. thaliana* [11,12]. In addition,

expression levels of endogenous phot are affected by both light [7,8,13-16] and

temperature [16] conditions. Based on these findings, we postulate that a variation in the

endogenous amount of phot may be involved in the induction of the cold-avoidance

response.

The goals of this study were two-fold: first, to determine if a cold-mediated

reduction of the transitional light intensity initiates the cold-avoidance response, and

second, to determine if changes in phot amounts play a role in the induction of the cold-

avoidance response. *M. polymorpha* was chosen for this study because it has a single copy

of the gene for phot (Mpphot) that can mediate the accumulation, avoidance, and cold-

avoidance responses [6,17].

2.   Materials and Methods

2.1. Plasmid Construction

To construct a plasmid to generate the complementation line of Mpphot-Citrine

(35S::Mpphot-Citrine/Mp*phot*^{KO}), we used the Gateway cloning system (Invitrogen) and

the binary vector pMpGWB306 [18], which includes *Citrine* for fusion at the 3′-end of

the target gene under the control of the cauliflower mosaic virus (CaMV) 35S promoter.

The LR reaction (Invitrogen) was performed with a mixture of pMpGWB306 and the

donor plasmid pDONR207-MpPHOT [19], and the resulting plasmid pMpGWB306-

MpPHOT was used for transformation of *M. polymorpha*.

2.2. Plant Materials and Growth Conditions

Thalli of *M. polymorpha* were asexually cultured on half-strength B5 medium

under 75 µmol photons $m^{-2} s^{-1}$ continuous white light (FL40SW, NEC Corporation). Light

intensity was measured using a LI-250A light meter (LI-COR Biosiences). The Mp*PHOT*

knockout line (Mp*phot^{KO}*) was generated, and kindly provided, by Komatsu et al. [17]. In

this study, transformation of *M. polymorpha* was performed by the G-AgarTrap method

[20,21], which is an *Agrobacterium*-mediated transformation method used for

gemmalings. To generate the transformants, we used the binary vector pMpGWB106-

MpPHOT [19] for Mpphot-Citrine overexpression lines (35S::Mpphot-Citrine/WT), and

pMpGWB306-MpPHOT for the complementation line of Mpphot (35S::Mpphot-

Citrine/Mp*phot^{KO}*). The Citrine-expressing line (35S::Citrine/WT) was generated in our

previous study [20]. G2 gemmalings were used throughout.

2.3. Observation of Chloroplast Positioning

One-day-old gemmalings were incubated in temperature-controlled incubators

(IJ100, Yamato Scientific Co., LTD) and light conditions were adjusted using blue light-

emitting diodes (LEDs; OptoSupply Limited) and a LI-250A light meter. Chlorophyll

fluorescence images were captured using a fluorescence microscope MZ16F (Leica

Microsystems) equipped with a DP73 digital camera (Olympus) and quantification of

chloroplast positioning was performed using the P/A ratio method with ImageJ software,

as previously described [5]. Briefly, fluorescence intensity was measured at 30 points

(0.625 µm each, equivalent to 1 pixel) along the anticlinal cell walls (A) and 30 points

(39.1 $µm^2$ each, equivalent to 10×10 pixels) along the periclinal cell walls (P). This

procedure was repeated five times, and then the P/A ratio was calculated as a mean of the

five P/A values. The standard deviation was calculated using Excel software (Microsoft).

2.4. Immunoblot Analysis

Immunoblot analysis was performed as previously described [6]. Briefly, four-day-old gemmalings were collected in liquid nitrogen and kept at -80°C until use. The frozen plants were homogenized in SDS sample buffer (2% SDS, 10% glycerol, 0.01% bromophenol blue, 5% mercaptoethanol, and 0.25 M Tris-HCl pH6.8) using a mortar and pestle, and then boiled at 95°C for 5 min. The samples were centrifuged at 14,000 g for 10 min, and the supernatants used. Total protein amount was quantified by Bradford-XL assay (APRO Science). Fifteen μg of protein was subjected to SDS-PAGE with 8% gels and transferred to a polyvinylidene difluoride (PVDF) membrane. MpPHOT proteins were detected with rabbit antibody raised against the custom-made synthetic peptide (C+VDERAPPSKGSAKE) (Eurofins Genomics) and horseradish peroxidase-conjugated anti-rabbit IgG (Thermo Scientific). Both antibodies were used at dilution of 1:2000. For histone detection, anti-Histone H3 antibody (Abcam) at dilution of 1:5000 and horseradish peroxide-conjugated anti-rabbit IgG (Thermo Scientific) at dilution of 1:2000 were used. Chemiluminescent signal was detected using ECL-Select (GE Healthcare) and Light Capture (ATTO). For image of Rubisco large subunit (RBCL), fifteen μg protein was subjected to SDS-PAGE with 8% gels and stained with conventional Coomassie blue method.

3. Results

3.1. Chloroplasts avoid weak blue light (wBL) under cold conditions

Using temperature-regulated microscopy with a microbeam irradiation system, we previously reported that under cold conditions (5°C), chloroplasts moved away from wBL that induced the accumulation response at 22°C [6]. However, in the study, physiological evidence of wBL avoidance under cold conditions was limited to

microbeam analysis [6]. Here, we further analyzed whether chloroplasts move away from

wBL under cold conditions.

In *M. polymorpha*, both cold and BL were required to elicit the cold-avoidance

response [6]. Building on the result, to explore whether the cold-avoidance response is

due to avoidance from wBL under cold conditions, we tested the effects of changing light

direction. First, to induce the cold-avoidance response, wild-type (WT) cells were

incubated under 25 μmol photons m^{-2} s^{-1} of wBL (BL25) with vertical irradiation at 5°C

(Fig. 2A). In WT cells, chloroplasts were positioned along the anticlinal cell walls as

cold-avoidance response (Fig. 2B). When the light direction was changed from vertical

to horizontal (Fig. 2A), the chloroplasts along the anticlinal cell walls moved to the

periclinal cell walls (Fig. 2B), indicating chloroplast avoidance from BL25. This result is

consistent with the microbeam analysis in our previous study [6].

3.2. Cold treatment decreases the transitional light intensity between the accumulation

and avoidance responses

We hypothesized that the cold-avoidance response is induced by a cold-mediated

decrease of the transitional light intensity (Fig. 1A, B). If this is the case, the accumulation

response would be induced under much weaker BL in cold conditions. To investigate

whether the accumulation response is induced at 5°C, WT cells were incubated under

different intensities of wBL (5, 10, 15 and 25 μmol photons m^{-2} s^{-1}; BL5, BL10, BL15

and BL25, respectively) (Fig. 2C, D). Chloroplast position was quantified by a P/A ratio

method, developed in earlier studies [4,5]. The P/A ratio is an arbitrary unit calculated by

dividing the chlorophyll fluorescence intensity along the periclinal cell wall by that along

the anticlinal cell wall, with a higher value indicating periclinal positioning of

chloroplasts and vice versa. In WT cells, the cold-avoidance response was observed at

5°C under BL10, BL15 and BL25 (Fig. 2C), and at these higher BL intensity levels, we

observed a decrease in P/A ratios (Fig. 2D). However, the cold-avoidance response was

not observed at 5°C under BL5 (Fig. 2C) and the P/A ratio was unchanged during the

incubation of these samples (Fig. 2D). These results suggest that BL5 induces the

accumulation response at 5°C. However, because similar chloroplast positioning was

observed under dark conditions at 5°C [6], it is also possible that the cells were unable to

respond to the extremely weak intensity of BL5. To clarify whether the accumulation

response is induced under BL5 or not, an additional test was carried out. Following the

induction of the cold-avoidance response at 5°C for 24 h under BL25, the light intensity

was changed to BL5 or dark conditions (Fig. 2E). After incubation for 24 h, BL5

conditions induced the accumulation response at 5°C, whereas under dark conditions

there was no change in chloroplast position (Fig. 2F). These results indicate that the

accumulation response is induced under BL5 at 5°C. Taken together, these results indicate

that the transitional light intensity is modulated by the temperature change (Fig. 1A, B).

3.3. Artificial overexpression of Mpphot in M. polymorpha *induces the avoidance*

response under wBL without cold treatment

We next considered the possibility that changes in endogenous phot expression

may play a role in the change in transitional light intensity, as previous studies using *A.*

capillus-veneris and *A. thaliana* suggest that a reduction in the transitional light intensity

can be the result of artificial overexpression of phot [11,12]. In *A. capillus-veneris* at 25°C,

transient overexpression of the Ac*PHOT2-GFP* gene induced the avoidance response

under wBL [11]. Similarly, the avoidance response was observed under wBL in transgenic

A. thaliana overexpressing the At*PHOT2-GFP* gene at 23°C [12]. Consistent with these

previous studies, we found that artificial overexpression of Mpphot fused to the yellow

fluorescent protein Citrine (Mpphot-Citrine) in WT cells (35S::Mpphot-Citrine/WT)

induced the avoidance response under BL25 at 22°C (without cold treatment), and degree

of the avoidance response was dependent on Mpphot-Citrine expression levels (Fig. 3A,

B and C). The accumulation response at 22°C and cold-avoidance response at 5°C could

be induced in the overexpression line under BL5 (Fig. 3D, E), indicating that the

transitional intensity is reduced by overexpression of Mpphot-Citrine. Therefore, it is

conceivable that increase of the endogenous amount of Mpphot might play a role in

induction of the cold-avoidance response.

*3.4. Alteration of endogenous Mp*phot *is not related to the induction of the cold-*

avoidance response

To examine the role of Mpphot expression in the induction of the cold-

avoidance response, the endogenous amount of Mpphot was determined using

immunoblot analysis. In the 4-day-old gemmalings under BL25 at 22°C, the endogenous

amount of Mpphot slightly increased at 6 and 24 h (Fig. 4A). On the other hand, under

BL25 at 5°C, the endogenous amount of Mpphot was not changed at 1, 3 and 6 h, and

slightly increased at 24 h (Fig. 4A). Given that the cold-avoidance response under BL25

at 5°C was observed at 6 h (Fig. 2D), the Mpphot amount appears to be unrelated to the

induction of the cold-avoidance response. To confirm this result, we examined the

complementation lines of Mpphot-Citrine under the control of the CaMV35S promoter

with the genetic background of Mp*phot^{KO}* (35S::Mpphot-Citrine/Mp*phot^{KO}*), as

CaMV35S promoter activity is reported to be suppressed by cold treatment in tobacco

plants [22]. In transgenic *M. polymorpha* expressing Citrine under the control of the

CaMV35S promoter (35S::Citrine/WT), we also confirmed that the promoter activity is

slightly suppressed by 5°C treatment in *M. polymorpha* (Fig. 4B). In the complementation

lines (35S::Mpphot-Citrine/Mp*phot^{KO}*), the cold-avoidance response was clearly

observed (Fig. 4C) indicating that the induction of the cold-avoidance response does not

require for increase of Mpphot amount. Given that cold treatment increased the

autophosphorylation status of phot [6,23], we conclude that an increase of phot

autophosphorylation status decreases the transitional light intensity without alteration of

the endogenous amount of Mpphot.

4. Discussion

4.1. The transitional light intensity between the accumulation and avoidance responses
can be changed

Light-induced chloroplast movement is widely found in photosynthetic organisms from algae to land plants [3]. The transitional light intensity between the accumulation and avoidance responses differs among various plant species [24]. Furthermore, the transitional light intensity can be reduced in response to low temperature, inducing the cold-avoidance response [4-6]. In this study, we analyzed light fluence rate dependency of the cold-avoidance response. Under cold conditions, chloroplasts moved in a light fluence rate-dependent manner (Fig. 2C, D), as occurs during the avoidance response at a standard growth temperature [25]. This result supports the conclusion that there is a cold-induced reduction of the transitional light intensity (Fig. 1A, B). Because the cold-avoidance response has been found to moderate photodamage in *M. polymorpha* [6], plasticity of the transitional light intensity is vital for plants exposed to cold stress. In *A. thaliana*, the transitional light intensity is controlled by two types of phot: Atphot1 and Atphot2. Atphot1 specifically regulates the accumulation response, while Atphot2 regulates both the accumulation and avoidance responses [7-9]. In this context, the coordination mechanism of the transitional light intensity in *A. thaliana* appears to be more complex than that in *M. polymorpha*. Further analysis of the transitional light intensity in various plant species and genetic mutants may lead to better understanding of the transition mechanism of chloroplast movements.

4.2. Photoactivated phototropin amount changes the transitional light intensity

Intracellular phot proteins are more frequently activated under strong light than weak light conditions. Weak light irradiation at lower temperatures, prolongs the lifetime of photoactivated phot [6], and, like the effect of strong light irradiation at a standard

growth temperature, results in the increase of photoactivated phot population. Therefore,

we concluded that the intracellular amount of photoactivated phot determines the

transition from the accumulation response to the avoidance response. Furthermore,

considering the effect of phot overexpression on the transitional light intensity (Fig. 3),

the transition mechanism maybe based on the absolute amount of photoactivated phot in

the cell rather than the ratio of active/inactive phot. How an increase in photoactivated

phot proteins triggers the switch from the accumulation to avoidance responses remains

unknown. Because phot autophosphorylation is also increased under strong-light/warm

or weak-light/cold conditions [6,10,23], we speculate that in order to induce the

avoidance response, an increase of photoactivated phot amount may change the phot

phosphorylation status, possibly via intermolecular phosphorylation activity [26,27].

Notably, the recruitment of phot to microdomains at the plasma membrane is involved in

phot autophosphorylation [28]. Further autophosphorylation analysis regarding the

spatial density of photoactivated phot may clarify the switching mechanism between the

accumulation and avoidance responses.

4.3. Alteration of phot expression does not occur for induction of the cold-avoidance

response in M. polymorpha

The cold-avoidance response is initiated by the temperature-dependent

biochemistry of the phot LOV2 domain [6]. However, in *A. thaliana*, alteration of the

transcript and protein levels of Atphot1 and Atphot2 in response to light [7,8,13-16] and

temperature [16] was reported. Notably, Łabuz et al. reported that lower temperature

decreases Atphot1 expression, and increases Atphot2 expression [16]. In this study, we

showed that the cold-avoidance response can be induced regardless of change in the

endogenous Mpphot amount (Fig. 4A) and even without its own promoter (Fig. 4B),

indicating that transcriptional regulation of Mpphot is not required for the cold-avoidance

response in *M. polymorpha*. Mpphot is a phot2-type protein, which regulates both the

accumulation and avoidance responses [17]. Consistent with Mpphot, Atphot2 expression

in *A. thaliana* was reported to be unchanged at a temperature range from 4°C to 23°C

[16]. Interestingly, cold treatment had a more significant impact on the decrease of

Atphot1 expression than the increase of Atphot2 expression [16], implying that the

expression of Atphot1 might be more sensitive to cold than that of Atphot2. The gene

duplication of phot [29] and functional differentiation between phot1 and phot2 may have

enabled land plants to have different transitional light intensities and chloroplast

movements, allowing species to expand their range of habitat.

Author contributions

YK conceived and supervised the study; YF, YO and ST performed

experiments; YF and YK wrote the manuscript.

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Disclosures

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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 Figure Legends

Fig. 1. Schematic diagram showing the transitional light intensity of the

accumulation and avoidance responses. Solid vertical lines indicate points of the

transitional light intensity under warm (A; 22°C) and cold (B; 5°C) conditions.

Fig. 2. Cold-induced reduction of the transitional light intensity. (A) Diagram of the

experimental conditions used to induce the cold-avoidance response with vertical or

horizontal irradiation of blue-light. After incubation under 25 μmol photons m^{-2} s^{-1} of

blue-light (BL25) with vertical irradiation at 5°C for 24 h, the WT gemmalings were

irradiated by horizontal BL25. (B) Chlorophyll fluorescence images after irradiation of

vertical (left) or horizontal (right) BL as shown in (A). The white arrow indicates the light

direction. (C) Chloroplast positioning in WT gemmalings incubated at 5°C for 12 h with

5, 10, 15, and 25 μmol photons m^{-2} s^{-1} of blue-light (BL5, BL10, BL15, and BL25,

respectively). (D) The P/A ratios, calculated from chlorophyll fluorescence images after

incubation for 0, 2, 6, 8, 12, and 24 h. Error bars indicate standard deviations. The

representative chlorophyll fluorescence images of WT gemmalings incubated for 12 h are

shown in (C). (E) Diagram of experimental conditions used to confirm cold-induced

reduction of the transitional intensity. After pre-incubation under BL25 at 5°C for 24 h,

WT gemmalings were transferred to BL5 or dark and incubated at 5°C for 24 h. (F)

Representative chlorophyll fluorescence images of WT gemmalings after pre-incubation

(BL25) and incubation under BL5 (from BL25 to BL5) or dark (from BL25 to Dark) as

shown in (E).

Fig. 3. Overexpression of Mpphot-Citrine decreases the transitional light intensity.

(A) Immunoblot analysis of WT and Mpphot-Citrine overexpression lines (35S::Mpphot-

Citrine/WT: OX1, OX2, and OX3) with anti-Mpphot antibody. White and black

arrowheads indicate Mpphot-Citrine and Mpphot, respectively. Rubisco large-subunit (RBCL) was shown as a loading control. (B) Representative images of chlorophyll fluorescence in WT and Mpphot-Citrine overexpression lines. (C) The P/A ratios calculated from the chlorophyll fluorescence images shown in (B) after the incubation under BL25 at 22°C for 12 h. (D) Confirmation of the reduction of transitional light intensity in OX2. In the 1-day-old gemmalings from OX2, the accumulation response was induced under BL5 at 22°C (left panel). The cold-avoidance response was induced under BL5 at 5°C for 24 h (right panel). (E) Time-course of the cold-avoidance response induced under BL5 at 5°C in OX2. The P/A ratios were calculated from the chlorophyll fluorescence images after incubation for 0, 6, 12, and 24 h.

Fig. 4. Alteration of Mpphot expression is unrelated to the induction of the cold-avoidance response. (A) Immunoblot analysis of endogenous MpPHOT amount in WT gemmaling, incubated under BL25 at 22°C or 5°C. The black arrowhead and asterisk indicate MpPHOT and non-specific signal, respectively. Histone H3 protein is shown as a loading control. (B) Immunoblot analysis of cold-induced repression of activity of CaMV35S promoter. A transformant expressing Citrine under the control of CaMV35S promoter (35S::Citrine/WT) was used. Coomassie Brilliant Blue (CBB)-stained Rubisco large-subunit (RBCL) was used as a loading control. (C) Chlorophyll fluorescence images showing the cold-avoidance response in complementation lines (35S::Mpphot-Citrine/Mp*phot*^{KO}). After incubation under BL25 at 22°C, the gemmalings were transferred to 5°C under the same light conditions.

A Warm

Accumulation

Avoidance

Light intensity

B Cold

Light intensity

A Vertical BL25 → Horizontal BL25

5°C for 24 h → 5°C for 24 h

B Vertical   Horizontal

Irradiation ↓

C BL5   BL10

BL15   BL25

D

BL5   BL10
BL15   BL25

P/A ratio

1.5

1.0

0.5

0 4 8 12 16 20 24 (h)

E BL25 → BL5

Dark

5°C for 24 h → 5°C for 24 h

F BL25   BL25→BL5   BL25→Dark

A

kDa

WT	OX1	OX2	OX3

250
150 ◁
100 ◀

RBCL

B

WT 22°C   OX1 22°C

OX2 22°C   OX3 22°C

C

P/A ratio

WT   OX1   OX2   OX3

D

BL5 22°C   BL5 5°C

E

P/A ratio

0 4 8 12 16 20 24 (h)

A

22°C   5°C

0   1   3   6 24   1   3   6 24 (h)

MpPHOT

◀

*

Histone

B

          5°C   22°C

0   3   6   3   6 (h)

Citrine

RBCL

C

35S::Mpphot-Citrine/Mp*phot*^{KO}

22°C   5°C