



Identification and characterization of a nuclear localization signal of TRIM28 that overlaps with the HP1 box



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ABSTRACT

Tripartite motif-containing 28 (TRIM28) is a transcription regulator, which forms a repressor complex containing heterochromatin protein 1 (HP1). Here, we report identification of a nuclear localization signal (NLS) within the 462–494 amino acid region of TRIM28 that overlaps with its HP1 binding site, HP1 box. GST-pulldown experiments revealed the interaction of the arginine-rich TRIM28 NLS with various importin α subtypes ($\alpha 1$, $\alpha 2$ and $\alpha 4$). *In vitro* transport assay demonstrated that nuclear localization of GFP-TRIM28 NLS is mediated by importin α s, in conjunction with importin $\beta 1$ and Ran. Further, we demonstrated that HP1 and importin α s compete for binding to TRIM28. Together, our findings suggest that importin α has an essential role in the nuclear delivery and preferential HP1 interaction of TRIM28.

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1. Introduction

Tripartite motif-containing 28 (TRIM28), also known as Kruppel-box associated protein 1 (KAP1) and transcriptional intermediary factor-1 β (TIF1 β), was identified through its interaction with Kruppel-associated box (KRAB) domain found in many transcriptional factors [1–3]. All TIF1 family members, to which TRIM28 belongs, have a similar overall design characterized by an N-terminal tripartite motif (TRIM), which functions as a protein–protein and oligomerization interface. Specifically, the members of this family contain an RBCC (Ring finger, two B-box zinc fingers, and a coiled coil) domain, a TSS (central TIF1 signature sequence) domain consisting of tryptophan- and phenylalanine-

rich sequence, and a C-terminal combination plant homeodomain (PHD) and bromodomain [4].

TRIM28 acts as a scaffold protein for recruiting chromatin-modifying enzymes (like SETDB1 [5] and Mi2 α [6]) and a component of chromatin, heterochromatin protein 1 (HP1) [7–9]. HP1 interacts with various nuclear proteins through the pentapeptide PxVxL motif (HP1-box) [7–9], a structure observed in the diverse nuclear proteins including TRIM28 [10]. HP1 directly recognizes methylation of lysine 9 in histone H3 [11–13], and its interaction with TRIM28 is required for repression of reporter genes [8]. This methylation of histone H3 associated with TRIM28 repressor complex is lost when HP1 and TRIM28 interaction is disrupted, thus, suggesting the importance of both proteins and their interaction for gene silencing [14]. However, it is unknown how TRIM28 is imported into the nucleus and preferentially interacts with HP1 proteins after its nuclear translocation.

Importin α is a dynamic transport protein, which is known to transport cargo proteins from cytoplasm into the nucleus. Several subtypes of importin α s have been identified in mammals, and are classified into three subfamilies [15]. It forms a heterodimeric importin complex by binding with importin $\beta 1$ and simultaneously recognizes the nuclear localization signal (NLS) of a cargo protein, thereby, forming a ternary complex. Translocation of this ternary

Abbreviations: NLS, nuclear localization signal; HP1, heterochromatin protein 1; TRIM28, tripartite motif-containing 28; GFP, green fluorescent protein; GSH, glutathione-Sepharose.

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This paper exhibits the importin α 's essential participatory role in TRIM28 nuclear transport and its potential function in assisting the interaction between TRIM28 and HP1, which promotes transcriptional repression.

TRIM28 has been known as a transcription regulator localized in the nucleus [9]. However, it remains unclear how TRIM28 is imported into the nucleus, and whether TRIM28 possesses a functional nuclear localization signal (NLS). To identify an NLS region of the TRIM28 protein, plasmids encoding various HA- or GFP-tagged full-length or truncated mutants were transfected into HeLa cells to assess their subcellular localization. At 24 h after transfection, the

HA-tagged full-length TRIM28 (1–836 amino acid [a.a.]) protein clearly appeared in the nucleus of transfected HeLa cells (Fig. 1A, full length). Among of the HA-tagged truncated mutants; 1–295 a.a., 296–836 a.a. and 561–836 a.a., the 296–836 a.a. were localized predominantly in the nucleus similar to the full-length protein (Fig. 1A). In contrast, the other two mutants exhibited diffusely in the cytoplasm as well as in the nucleus. This indicates the presence of NLS in the region between 296 a.a. and 560 a.a. of TRIM28.

We next tested the GFP-fused TRIM28 mutants which were truncated along 296–585 a.a. regions. As shown in Fig. 1B, the GFP-TRIM28 mutants 296–494 a.a., 395–494 a.a., and 395–585 a.a. clearly showed nuclear localization, as compared to GFP-TRIM28 296–394 a.a., 495–585 a.a., which were found equally both in the nucleus and cytoplasm. The nuclear localization was further observed in the truncated mutant containing tandem (2x) GFPs fused at the N-terminus, GFP-GFP-TRIM28 428–494 a.a. and GFP-GFP-TRIM28 462–494 a.a., indicating that NLS is specifically contained within the region 462–494 a.a.. However, further narrowing

of this 33 a.a. residues abrogated clear nuclear translocation of the expressed GFP–GFP fusion protein (Fig. 1C). To further test whether this 33 a.a. (Fig. 1E) itself acts as an NLS, we examined the subcellular localization of a deletion mutant TRIM28 Δ 462–494 a.a. N-terminally tagged with HA. As shown in Fig. 1D, the mutant diffusely appeared in the cells, in contrast to the clear nuclear localization of full-length TRIM28. Together, our results indicate that the region 462–494 a.a. of TRIM28 (Fig. 1E) functions as an NLS.

3.2. TRIM28 NLS interacts with various importin α subtypes

The TRIM28 NLS contains lysine and arginine residues which are potentially recognized by importin α as a classical NLS (cNLS). To assess whether TRIM28 is recognized by importin α through the NLS region, a GST-pulldown assay was conducted (Fig. 2A). Importin α family can be classified into three subfamilies [15], which show differential substrate specificity [20]. Thus, we tested if

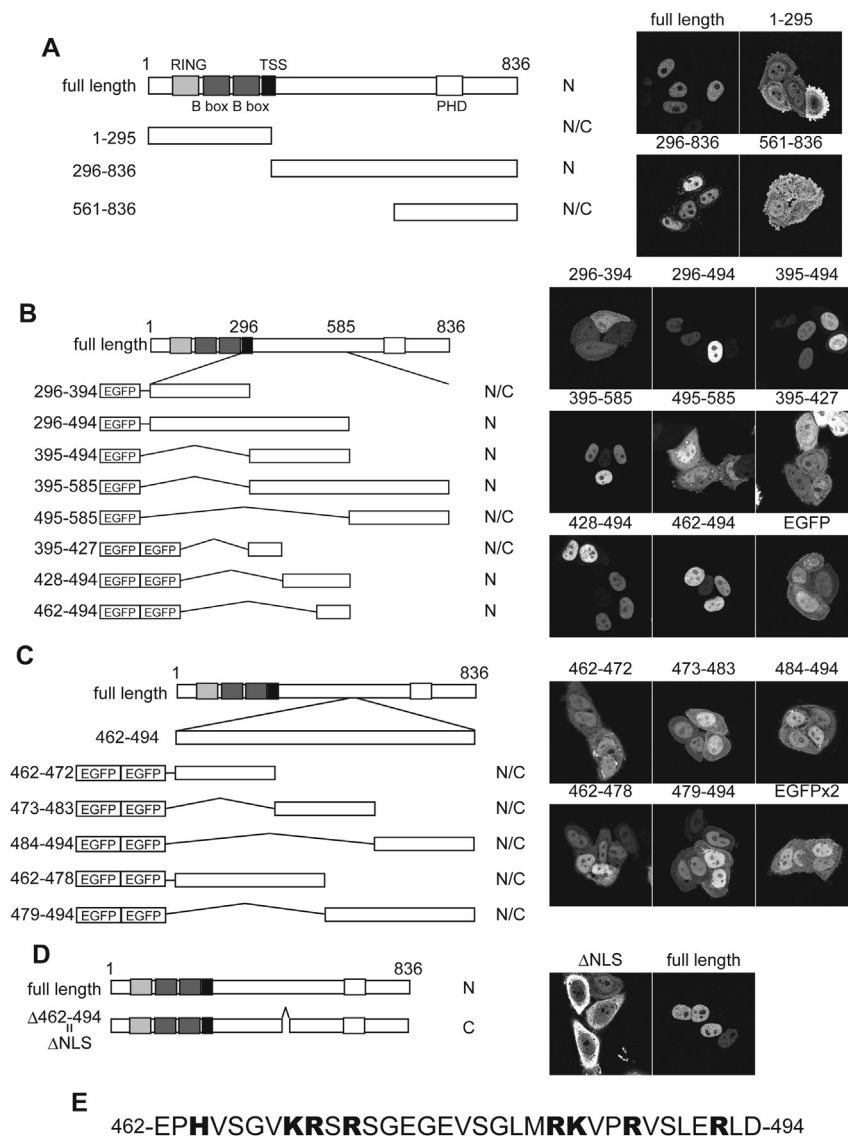


Fig. 1. Identification of an NLS in TRIM28. Immunofluorescence or fluorescence images of transfected HeLa cells expressing (A) 3xHA-tagged full-length or truncated TRIM28 mutants, (B) EGFP-fused truncated TRIM28 mutants within the 296–585 a.a. region, (C) EGFP-EGFP-fused truncated TRIM28 mutants within the 462–494 a.a. region (33 a.a. residue length), and (D) 3xHA-tagged full-length TRIM28 and 3xHA-tagged TRIM28 Δ NLS (462–494 a.a. deletion) mutant. (E) An amino acid sequence of the identified NLS region indicating the abundance of positively-charged amino acids (Bold).

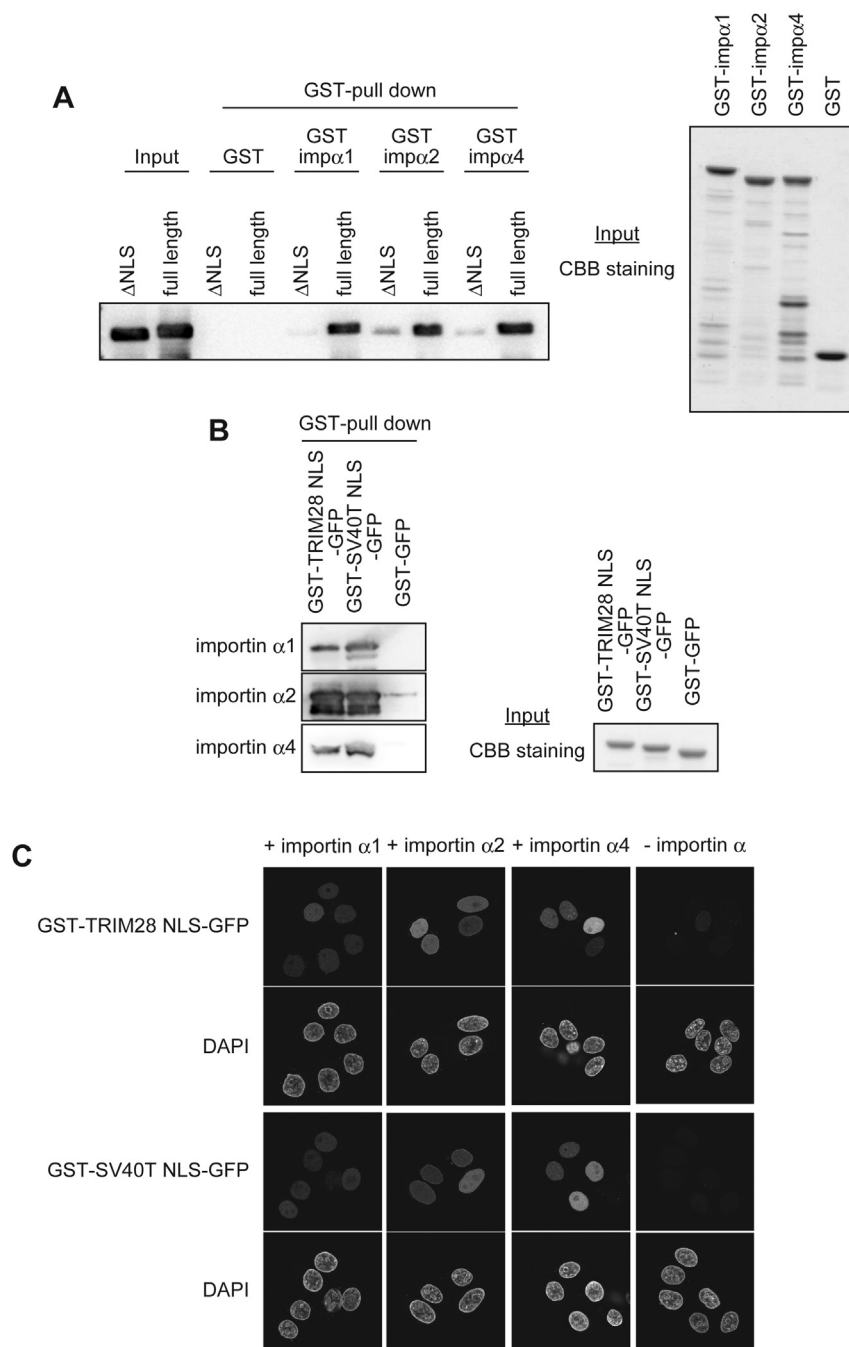


Fig. 2. Importin $\alpha/\beta 1$ mediates nuclear import of TRIM28. (A) A full-length TRIM28 but not Δ NLS mutant interacts with importin α s. GST-importin α s were immobilized on the GSH beads, and tested for interaction with 3xHA-tagged full-length TRIM28 or 3xHA-tagged NLS TRIM28 from transfected HeLa cell lysate. The input and the bound fractions were analyzed by SDS-PAGE followed by CBB staining or immunoblotting with HA antibody. (B) Direct interaction of the TRIM28 NLS with importin α s. GST-pulldown using immobilized GST-TRIM28 NLS-GFP, GST-SV40T NLS-GFP (as positive control) or GST-GFP (as negative control) with recombinant importin α s. The input and the bound fractions were analyzed by SDS-PAGE followed by CBB staining or immunoblotting with importin $\alpha 1$, importin $\alpha 2$ or importin $\alpha 4$ antibody. (C) TRIM28 nuclear transport by importin $\alpha/\beta 1$. An *in vitro* transport assay showing the nuclear localization of GST-TRIM28 NLS-GFP is dependent on importin $\alpha 1$, importin $\alpha 2$ or importin $\alpha 4$. GST-SV40T NLS-GFP was used as a positive control.

TRIM28 interacts with a representative member of each subfamily, namely, $\alpha 1$, $\alpha 2$, or $\alpha 4$. Either the full-length or the NLS deletion mutant of TRIM28 fused 3xHA was transiently overexpressed in HeLa cells and then the cell lysate was incubated either with GST-importin $\alpha 1$, $\alpha 2$, or $\alpha 4$ immobilized on glutathione-Sepharose (GSH) beads. As expected, the 3xHA-full-length protein interacted with all tested importin α s, while the NLS deletion mutant (3xHA Δ NLS) showed only weak signals (Fig. 2A).

Next, to further assess whether the binding between the NLS of TRIM28 and importin α s occurs directly, GST and GFP fused TRIM28 NLS sequences (GST-TRIM28 NLS-GFP) was immobilized on GSH beads and then mixed either with recombinant importin $\alpha 1$, $\alpha 2$, or $\alpha 4$. GST-SV40T NLS-GFP or GST-GFP proteins were used as positive or negative controls, respectively. As shown in Fig. 2B, the TRIM28 NLS protein was recognized with all importin α s examined like GST-SV40T NLS-GFP.

3.3. Importin α/β mediates the nuclear import of TRIM28 NLS

To demonstrate the functional ability of the TRIM28 NLS, we performed an *in vitro* nuclear transport assay using digitonin-permeabilized semi-intact HeLa cells. GST-TRIM28 NLS-GFP clearly accumulated in the nucleus of HeLa cells in the presence of importin $\alpha 1$, $\alpha 2$ or $\alpha 4$, together with importin $\beta 1$ and Ran (Fig. 2C). These results were comparable to the nuclear localization of GST-SV40T NLS-GFP (positive control) with the respective importin α subtypes used in assay. No nuclear localization was conferred by the TRIM28 NLS in the absence of importin α (Fig. 2C control). Taken together, we conclude that the TRIM28 NLS has an ability to be transported by importin $\alpha/\beta 1$, where all the subtypes of importin α s tested ($\alpha 1$, $\alpha 2$, or $\alpha 4$) are potentially functional.

3.4. HP1 box of TRIM28 overlaps with the identified NLS

TRIM28 contains a protein motif called HP1 box [7,9], which serves as a binding site for the HP1, a highly conserved protein found in chromatin [21]. Indeed, the binding of HP1 to HP1 box of TRIM28 causes the transcriptional repression [9]. After careful scrutiny, the reported HP1 box contained in 476–513 a.a. region of TRIM28 was seen to overlap with the NLS region (462–494 a.a.) identified in this study (Fig. 3A). Therefore, we examined the intracellular distribution of HA-tagged TRIM28 HP1 box mutant (R487E, V488E), which is defective for HP1 binding [9], in HeLa cells (Fig. 3B). The results showed the failure in the nuclear delivery of the HA-tagged TRIM28 HP1 box mutant. In a separated GST-pulldown assay, no interaction was observed between the HA-tagged TRIM28 HP1 box mutant and GST-importin α s (Fig. 3C). Together, these findings clearly indicated that the identified NLS could functionally pertain to a part of HP1 box within TRIM28. Finally, we examined if HP1 and importin α could compete with binding to TRIM28 through the HP1 box/NLS region. For this purpose, GST-TRIM28 NLS-GFP bound to GSH beads were first incubated with importin $\alpha 2$, and then recombinant HP1 β were added to the reactions. As shown in Fig. 3D, importin $\alpha 2$ was dissociated from the TRIM28 NLS by the addition of HP1 β . Collectively, our

findings revealed the unexpected overlapping between the NLS and HP1 box in TRIM28.

4. Discussion

TRIM28 does not bind directly to DNA but exerts transcriptional regulation as part of a protein complex [4]. This TRIM28 complex has been implicated in many cellular events and processes such as self-renewal and maintenance of pluripotency of stem cells [22,23], cell differentiation [24], DNA repair [25–27], and gene silencing [8,9,28]. Before TRIM28 forms the functional complex, it has to be delivered to the nucleus. This study is the first report to characterize the nucleocytoplasmic transport mechanism of TRIM28. First of all, we identified an NLS of TRIM28 that consists of a unique 33 a.a. arginine-rich residue located between 462 and 494 a.a.. We also demonstrated that TRIM28 nuclear import is mainly dependent on importin $\alpha/\beta 1$ through our identified NLS. Interestingly, we also noticed that this NLS overlaps with the reported HP1 box domain in TRIM28, and the mutation in the HP1 box domain drastically disrupts the nuclear transport of TRIM28. Furthermore, we demonstrated that HP1 and importin α competitively binds to TRIM28.

Our data suggest that importin α binding to TRIM28 may affect TRIM28-HP1 interaction, which is important for the targeting of TRIM28 to its sites of action, including heterochromatin region [29]. We speculate that importin α , aside from its well-known role as a nuclear transport factor, masks the HP1 box for TRIM28 to interact with the HP1 protein preferentially, possibly by preventing the access of other low-affinity HP1 box-binding proteins [10], during its nuclear transport and/or chromatin targeting within the nucleus. Thus, we propose a scenario as follows (Fig. 4); in the cytoplasm, importin α s recognize the TRIM28 NLS and simultaneously binds with importin $\beta 1$ to form a ternary complex that migrates into the nucleus through the NPC. Although the binding of RanGTP to importin $\beta 1$ triggers the dissociation of the complex importin α may not readily release TRIM28 NLS due to high affinity binding between importin α and TRIM28 NLS. Within the nucleus, importin α may associate with TRIM28 to mask the HP1-box of TRIM28 until they find the target binding site, where is (or will become) enriched

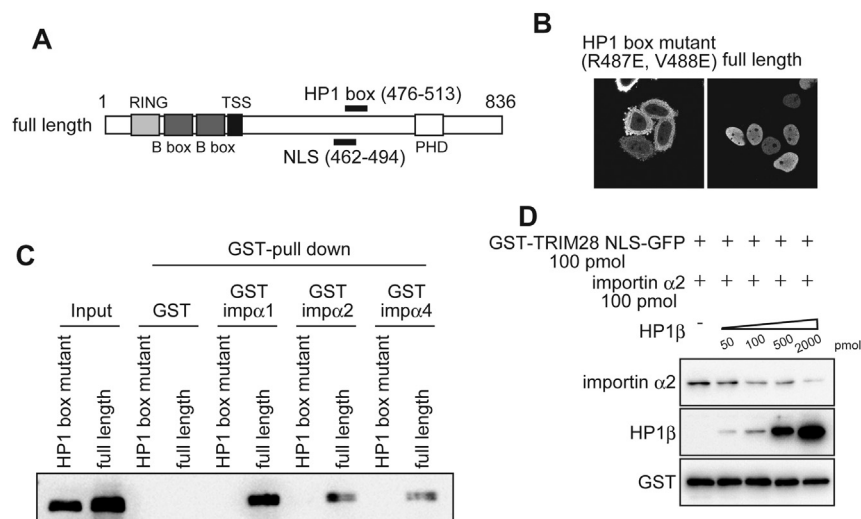


Fig. 3. Functional overlap between HP1 box and NLS in TRIM28. (A) Schematic representation of HP1 box and the newly identified NLS of TRIM28. Note that both domains overlap. (B) Immunofluorescence images showing the subcellular localization of 3xHA-tagged TRIM28 (full-length) or 3xHA-tagged TRIM28 HP1 box mutant (R487E, V488E) expressed in HeLa cells. (C) The TRIM28 HP1 box mutant fails to interact with importin α s. Either GST-importin $\alpha 1$, GST-importin $\alpha 2$ or GST-importin $\alpha 4$ immobilized on the GSH beads was incubated with HA-tagged TRIM28 and 3xHA-tagged TRIM28 HP1 box mutants from lysates of transfected HeLa cells, and analyzed by immunoblotting with HA antibody. (D) Competitive binding of importin $\alpha 2$ and HP1 β to the TRIM28 NLS. GST-TRIM28 NLS-GFP immobilized on the GSH beads was incubated with importin $\alpha 2$. After washing, the beads were further incubated with various amounts of HP1 β for 4 h at 4 °C. The bound fraction was analyzed by immunoblotting with anti-GST, HP1 β and importin $\alpha 2$ antibodies.

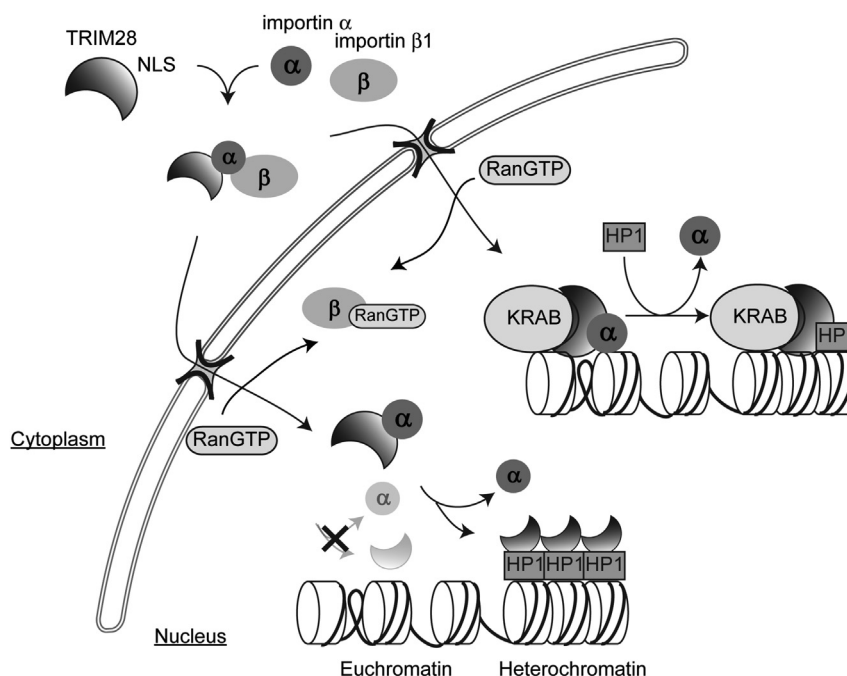


Fig. 4. A model for TRIM28 nuclear transport and chromatin targeting within the nucleus.

with HP1 that competitively interacts with TRIM28 NLS (HP1 box) to release importin α from TRIM28, resulting in the efficient TRIM28-HP1 complex formation on the target sites. That is, the dynamic interaction between the TRIM28 NLS and importin α is required not only for efficient nuclear transport of TRIM28 but also for appropriate interaction between HP1 and TRIM28 and/or targeting of TRIM28 onto HP1-rich heterochromatin region, causing the efficient and proper transcriptional regulation and/or chromatin remodeling in the nucleus.

Previously, it has been suggested that Kap114p, the yeast homologue of mammalian importin 9, may play roles in the intranuclear targeting of TATA-binding protein (TBP) after its nuclear translocation, based on the observation that the TATA-containing DNA stimulates the RanGTP-dependent dissociation of TBP from Kap114p [30]. In addition, it was also shown that GAL4-NLS binds to both DNA and importin β 1 in a mutually exclusive manner [31]. Indeed, NLSs often overlap with a DNA-binding site [32,33]. Furthermore, several importin β family members were shown to function not only as import factors but also as chaperones to prevent the aggregation of highly basic proteins, such as ribosomal proteins [34]. These observations, together with our findings in this study, suggest the significance of an NLS-importin binding beyond nuclear transport processes.

Conflict of interest

None.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data related to this article can be found at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.bbrc.2015.04.108>.

Transparency document

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