

新型冠状病毒基因组的适应性进化研究进展

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摘要: 由严重急性呼吸综合征冠状病毒 2 (severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2, SARS-CoV-2) 引起的 2019 冠状病毒病 (coronavirus disease 2019, COVID-19) 大流行给人类生命安全和全球经济造成了巨大冲击。SARS-CoV-2 基因组的快速变异引起了广泛关注, 基因组中几乎每个位点都发生过单核苷酸变异 (single nucleotide variants, SNVs), 其中刺突蛋白上的变异在病毒的适应性进化和传播中起着尤为关键的作用。本文综述了 SARS-CoV-2 及非人类动物中相关冠状病毒的系统发生关系, 并深入分析了 SARS-CoV-2 的谱系划分以及关键氨基酸变异对病毒生物学特性的影响。此外, 本文还概述了当前面临的挑战, 并展望了深度突变扫描 (deep mutational scanning, DMS) 结合人工智能方法在预测新冠病毒变异株流行趋势中的广阔应用前景。

关键词: 新冠病毒; 谱系划分; 分子进化; 适应性变异; 流行趋势

Current understanding of the adaptive evolution of the SARS-CoV-2 genome

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic, caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), has significantly impacted human life safety and the global economy. The rapid mutation of the SARS-CoV-2 genome has attracted widespread attention, with almost every site in the genome experiencing single nucleotide variants (SNVs). Among these, the mutations in the spike (S) protein are of particular importance, as they play a more critical role in the virus's adaptive evolution and transmission. In this review, we summarize the phylogenetic relationships between SARS-CoV-2 and related coronaviruses in non-human animals, and delves into the lineage classification of SARS-CoV-2 and the impact of key amino acid variations on viral biological characteristics. Furthermore, it outlines the current challenges and looks forward to the promising application of deep mutational scanning (DMS) combined with artificial

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intelligence methods in predicting the prevalence trends of SARS-CoV-2 variants.

Keywords: SARS-CoV-2; lineage designation; molecular evolution; adaptive mutations; pandemic trend

2019 冠状病毒病(coronavirus disease 2019, COVID-19)的大规模流行对全球造成了巨大的生命和经济损失,并对全球公共卫生体系构成了前所未有的挑战。截至 2024 年 8 月 3 日,全球累计确诊病例已超过 7.7 亿例,死亡病例数高达 705 万(<https://data.who.int/dashboards/covid19/cases?n=c>)。引发这场大流行的病原体是严重急性呼吸综合征冠状病毒 2 (severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2, SARS-CoV-2, 简称新冠病毒),属于冠状病毒科(Coronaviridae)、正冠状病毒亚科(Orthocoronavirinae)、Beta 冠状病毒属(*Betacoronavirus*)、*Sarbecovirus* 亚属^[1~4]。随着病毒的传播,SARS-CoV-2 经历了不断的变异和进化。深入探究新冠病毒基因组的适应性进化机制,对于人们理解其生物学特性、感染机制与传播路径、预测其未来趋势、灵活调整防控措施具有重大意义,并为应对当前疫情以及未来可能出现的新发突发传染病提供科学依据。

1 新冠病毒的基因组结构和系统发育分析

1.1 新冠病毒的基因组结构

SARS-CoV-2 是一种正义单链 RNA 病毒,基因组全长约 2.9 万个核苷酸。其 5'端具有帽状结构,而 3'端则具有 Poly-A 尾巴,与宿主细胞的 mRNA 结构相似。基因组中分布着 13~15 个开放阅读框(open reading frames, ORFs),两侧为 5'和 3'非翻译区(untranslated regions, UTRs),这些区域包含了 RNA 合成所需的顺式作用元件^[5,6]。其中,ORF1ab 占据了病毒基因组的大部分,编码一个大型多聚蛋白,可以被切割成 16 个非结构蛋白(nonstructural proteins, nsps),该过程由病毒蛋白酶 nsp3 和 nsp5 介导。nsp7、nsp8 和 nsp12 构成了复制和转录复合物(replication and transcription complex, RTC)的核心。在该复合体中,nsp12 是 RNA 依赖性 RNA 聚合酶(RNA-dependent RNA polymerase, RdRp),在 nsp7

和 nsp8 这两个病毒辅助因子的协同作用下催化病毒 RNA 的合成^[7]。这些 nsps 在病毒复制和转录过程中起着至关重要的作用。

除了 ORF1ab,病毒基因组还编码 4 种结构蛋白:刺突蛋白(spike, S)、包膜蛋白(envelope, E)、膜蛋白(membrane, M)和核蛋白(nucleoprotein, N),以及多种辅助蛋白^[5,6]。其中, S 蛋白尤为重要,它负责与宿主细胞的血管紧张素转换酶 2 (angiotensin-converting enzyme 2, ACE2)受体结合,从而侵袭宿主细胞。S 蛋白由 S1 和 S2 两个亚基组成,它们之间通过一个弗林切割位点相连。S1 亚基进一步分为 N 端结构域(N-terminal domain, NTD)和受体结合域(receptor-binding domain, RBD)。一旦 S 蛋白与受体结合,S2 亚基介导病毒与宿主细胞膜的融合,这一过程可能直接在细胞表面进行,也可能在病毒通过内吞作用进入细胞后,在溶酶体膜上完成,具体机制取决于宿主细胞内蛋白酶的活性与分布^[8,9]。

1.2 新冠病毒的系统发育关系

越来越多的研究支持 SARS-CoV-2 可能起源于动物,并在自然环境中逐渐进化而来^[10~13]。特别是,蝙蝠作为冠状病毒的自然宿主^[4,14~16],已被发现携带一系列与 SARS-CoV-2 紧密相关的冠状病毒(SARS-CoV-2 related coronavirus, SC2r-CoV),如从云南的中菊头蝠(*Rhinolophus affinis*)中采样的 RaTG13^[4],来自老挝的马氏菊头蝠(*R. marshalli*)的 BANAL-20-236^[17],马来菊头蝠(*R. malayanus*)样本中发现的 BANAL-20-52、BANAL-20-116、BANAL-20-247 和 RmYN02^[17,18],来自日本角菊头蝠(*R. cornutus*)的 Rc-o319^[19],从柬埔寨扁颅菊头蝠(*R. shameli*)中采样了 RSHSTT182 和 RSHSTT200^[20],以及来自菲菊头蝠(*R. pusillus*)的 BANAL-20-103 和 RpYN06^[17,21]。这些发现进一步支持了 SARS-CoV-2 起源于蝙蝠的假说。目前, Beta 冠状病毒属 *Sarbecovirus* 亚属的冠状病毒分为两大支系:与 SARS-CoV-2 密切相关的 SC2r-CoVs,以及与 SARS-CoV 密切相关的 SC1r-CoVs(图 1)。值得注意

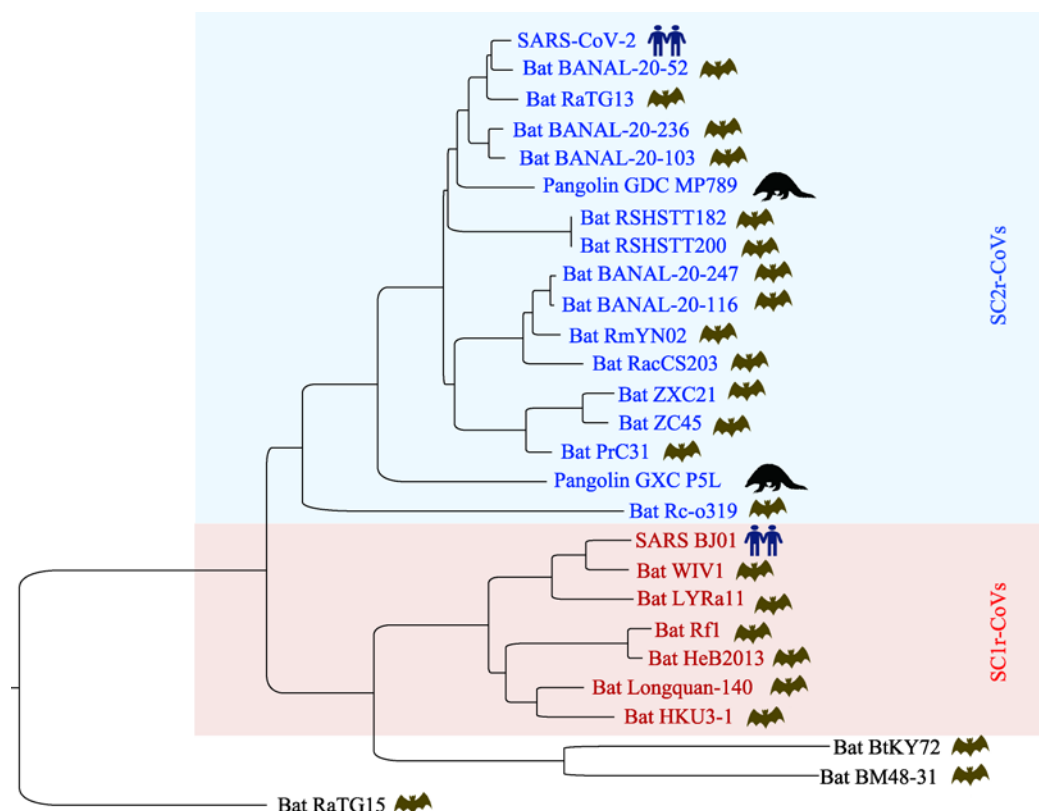


图1 新冠病毒及其近缘病毒的系统发育树

Fig. 1 Phylogeny of SARS-CoV-2 and representative related CoVs

用全基因组蛋白质序列构建系统发育树。

的是,目前已知的与 SARS-CoV-2 亲缘关系最密切的冠状病毒是 RaTG13、BANAL-20-52、BANAL-20-103 及 BANAL-20-236 等蝙蝠冠状病毒,其核苷酸序列的相似性达到了 96%^[4,17]。RaTG13 的 S 蛋白仍然能够结合人类 ACE2 (human ACE2, hACE2) 进入细胞,但其进入效率低于 SARS-CoV-2^[22-24]。BANAL-20-52 和 BANAL-20-236 的 S 蛋白在氨基酸序列上与 SARS-CoV-2 展现出高度的相似性,分别超过 98.4% 和 90.6%。特别是在与 ACE2 相互作用的 17 个关键氨基酸残基中,仅 BANAL-20-52 的 H498 位点以及 BANAL-20-236 的 K493 和 H498 位点与 SARS-CoV-2 的相应残基不同,暗示了它们的 S 蛋白可能具备利用 hACE2 作为入侵受体的潜力。

除蝙蝠外,SC2r-CoVs 也在马来穿山甲(*Manis javanica*)和中华穿山甲(*M. pentadactyla*)中被检测到^[25-28]。其中,马来穿山甲冠状病毒 CoV-GDC 与 SARS-CoV-2 的基因组序列展现出 92.4% 的相似

度^[25-27],而 CoV-GXC 的核苷酸序列与 SARS-CoV-2 的相似度则为 85.5%^[29]。尽管穿山甲冠状病毒与 SARS-CoV-2 在整体亲缘关系上较 RaTG13 更为疏远,但 CoV-GDC 的 RBD 区域氨基酸序列与 SARS-CoV-2 展现出高度相似性^[27,30],这可能是趋同进化或基因重组的结果^[29-31]。尽管 CoV-GDC 和 CoV-GXC 之间的关键功能氨基酸残基存在差异,但它们的 RBD 都能够与 hACE2 有效结合^[32,33]。在中华穿山甲中检测到的 MP20^[28]与马来穿山甲中的 CoV-GXC 亲缘关系密切。宿主内变异分析显示,穿山甲冠状病毒的遗传多样性非常高,这一发现进一步揭示了穿山甲作为潜在宿主,向人类传播致病性 SC2r-CoVs 的风险。

2 新冠病毒的变异与谱系划分

尽管 SARS-CoV-2 拥有内在校对机制,但在其

RNA 复制过程中, 突变仍不可避免。新冠疫情的暴发加速了病毒基因组数据的积累。截至 2024 年 7 月, 已有超过 1600 万条新冠病毒序列被提交至公共数据库, 如 GISAID(Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data)^[34,35] 和 NCBI(National Center for Biotechnology Information)等。这些海量的基因组数据揭示了新冠病毒几乎所有位点上都发生过突变。单核苷酸变异(single nucleotide variant, SNV)已成为众多研究的焦点^[31,36-38]。为了深入探索新冠病毒的进化轨迹, 研究人员开发了多种谱系划分系统。

2.1 S/L 谱系划分

我国科研团队率先开展新冠病毒谱系划分研究, 基于两个高度连锁的 SNV (位于参考基因组 8782 和 28144 位), 将病毒分为 S 和 L 两个主要谱系^[31,39]。L 谱系为 C8782/U28144, S 谱系为 U8782/C28144。值得注意的是, 8782 位点位于 nsp4, C 到 U 的突变不影响编码的氨基酸, 而 28144 位点位于 ORF8, U 到 C 的突变导致氨基酸从亮氨酸(Leu, L)变为丝氨酸(Ser, S), 因此得名“L”和“S”谱系。当以蝙蝠和穿山甲中的冠状病毒作为外群来构建系统发育树时, S 谱系比 L 谱系更接近祖先序列。随后其他研究证实了这一结果, 根据 Forster 等^[37]的命名法, 新冠病毒被分为 3 个谱系: A、B 和 C。其中, A 谱系等同于 S 谱系, 而 L 谱系则进一步细分为 B 和 C 谱系。

2.2 Nextstrain 谱系划分

当某个新谱系在全球流行比例超过本时期流行株总数的 20% 以上, Nextstrain^[40]就会为其命名。Nextstrain 命名通常以年份作为前缀, 在年份之后, 按照英文字母表的顺序依次命名这一年内出现的病毒变异支系。有时, 命名中还会包含关键氨基酸突变的信息, 以进一步描述变异株的特征。以 Delta 变异株为例, 在 Nextstrain 的命名体系中, 它被命名为“21A”, 这表示它是 2021 年新出现的首个谱系。Nextstrain 的命名方式能够清晰地反映病毒变异的时间顺序和进化关系, 有助于科学家追踪病毒的传播和进化趋势, 但这种命名方式可能不太直观。

2.3 Pango 命名法

在目前广泛应用的 Pango(Phylogenetic Assign-

ment of Named Global Outbreak Lineages)命名法中^[41], A 和 B 谱系的分类也基于 8782 和 28144 位点上的突变, 其中 A 谱系相当于 S 谱系, B 谱系相当于 L 谱系。Pango 采用大写英文字母与阿拉伯数字的结合方式命名新冠病毒的变异毒株。字母代表着病毒的谱系, 随后紧跟的由“.”分隔的数字序列, 则具体指代该谱系内变异子代分支的层次结构。字母排列遵循从 A 至 Z 的顺序, 随后以双重字母如 AA 至 AZ、BA 至 BZ 等继续扩展。当数字后缀超出 3 个时, 为保持命名的清晰与有序, 将依据字母顺序引入新的字母作为谱系标识, 例如 BA.2.86.1 的下一级子代分支并不直接命名为 BA.2.86.1.1, 而是被赋予 JN.1 这样的新标签。Pango 命名法提供了一种有效的工具来追踪新冠病毒的演变, 帮助理解病毒的传播和变异模式。

2.4 世界卫生组织的谱系命名

为提高对关键变异株潜在影响的监管效率并简化向公众传达变异差异的过程, 世界卫生组织(World Health Organization, WHO) (<https://www.who.int/activities/tracking-SARS-CoV-2-variants>) 将特定的可能影响病毒的传播力、免疫逃逸能力或对疫苗的反应能力的变异株定义为值得关切的变异株(variant of concern, VOC)。这些变异株主要以 S 蛋白内的氨基酸突变为特征。截至 2024 年 7 月 28 日, 已鉴定出 5 种 VOC 毒株, 按时间顺序大致可列为: Alpha(B.1.1.7)、Beta(501Y.V2 或 B.1.351)、Gamma(P.1)、Delta(B.1.617.2)和 Omicron(B.1.1.529)。

自 2021 年 11 月在南非首次发现以来, Omicron 变异株经历了持续的变异与迭代, 之后全球流行的变异株均是 Omicron 的后代谱系^[42], 包括 2022 年广泛流行的 BA.2 和 BA.5 子谱系、2023 年广泛流行的 XBB 子谱系以及当前占据主要地位的 JN.1 及其子谱系。Omicron 变异株 S 蛋白上积累了大量的突变, 尤其是在 RBD 上的关键氨基酸变异, 可能增强了病毒与宿主细胞的受体结合能力, 提升了病毒的传播力。随着 Omicron 在全球的广泛传播, 许多亚谱系在 RBD 区域表现出趋同的突变模式^[43], 这些突变可能对病毒的传播能力、免疫逃逸潜力以及致病性产生了一定的影响。

3 新冠病毒的适应性进化

3.1 新冠病毒 S 蛋白的适应性进化

冠状病毒的 S 蛋白在病毒感染过程中扮演着双重角色, 它既是病毒入侵宿主细胞的“钥匙”, 通过与细胞表面受体结合促进病毒进入; 又是抗体攻击的靶标, 可被特异性抗体结合从而被中和。进化分析揭示了 S 蛋白, 特别是其 S1 区域, 在所有冠状病毒中均经历了强烈的正选择压力。然而, 当新冠病毒从动物宿主跨越到人类宿主时, 其正选择的靶点发生了转移, 从 S1-NTD 转移到了 S1-CTD (C-terminal domain, 即新冠病毒的 RBD)^[44]。S 蛋白中的氨基酸变异不仅影响病毒的感染效率, 还深刻影响着宿主免疫系统对病毒的识别和应对^[45]。在快速突变率与增强传播、免疫逃逸等强大选择压力的驱动下, S 蛋白展现出惊人的进化速度, 不断适应并重塑其宿主环境^[44]。

3.1.1 S 蛋白突变可以影响新冠病毒的传播能力

SARS-CoV-2 的 S 蛋白上发生的突变, 通过精细调控其与人类 ACE2 受体的结合亲和力, 显著影响着病毒的传播效率^[46]。RBD 区域的变异可以通过改变分子间相互作用来增强这种结合, 有时还可能通过上位效应实现亲和力的提升^[47]。即便那些不直接参与 ACE2 相互作用的氨基酸突变, 也可以通过维持 RBD 的活性构象促进与 ACE2 的结合, 从而间接增强结合力^[48-51]。此外, S 蛋白上的氨基酸替换还可能通过促进 S1 和 S2 亚基的切割, 加速膜融合过程, 增强病毒进入宿主细胞的能力, 进而提高传播效率^[48,52,53]。这些变异还可能帮助病毒在特定组织中的复制和传播^[54], 并可能通过改善与如 TMEM106B 等其他受体的结合, 增加病毒的细胞进入途径^[55]。总体而言, VOC 毒株表现出更高的传播能力。然而, 病毒的传播能力不仅受其与人类 ACE2 的结合强度影响, 免疫逃逸能力同样在其中扮演了重要角色。

例如, 在 Delta 变异株和 Omicron BA.5 谱系中, L452R 突变为 S 蛋白引入了局部正电荷, 与 hACE2 上带负电的 E35、E37 和 D38 区域发生静电相互作用, 增强了与 hACE2 的结合强度^[56]; Beta 和 Gamma

谱系中的 E484K 突变则提高了 RBD 对 hACE2 的亲合力, 并增强了免疫逃逸能力^[56-61]。此外, Alpha、Beta、Gamma 及 Omicron 变异株共有的 N501Y 突变, 显著提高了病毒的感染性和免疫逃逸能力^[57,62], 甚至赋予了 SARS-CoV-2 感染小鼠的能力, 显示出更广泛的宿主适应性^[63]。从结构角度看, N501 与受体 hACE2 的 Y41 和 K353 残基形成非常弱的互作。然而, N501Y 突变与 Y41 形成 π - π 堆叠, 并与 K353 建立氢键, 从而增强与 hACE2 的结合亲和力^[23,64-66]。不仅如此, N501Y 突变还能与其他氨基酸突变产生上位效应。比如, 在能够感染小鼠的 SARS-CoV-2 毒株 MASCp36 中, N501Y 与 Q493H 的双重突变协同增强了与人 ACE2 的结合。但当加入 K417N 突变形成三重突变 N501Y+Q493H+K417N 时, 却观察到结合亲和力和感染性的降低。这主要是因为 Q493H 与 hACE2 的 E35 形成了新的盐桥, 而 K417N 破坏了 K417 和 D30 之间的盐桥^[67]。

值得注意的是, L455S 突变是当前广泛传播的 JN.1 变异株的特征突变, 该变异株是 BA.2.86 的子谱系, 并且在系统发育树上与 XBB 谱系有所区别。这一突变显著增强了病毒的免疫逃逸能力, 但这似乎以牺牲与人类 ACE2 的结合亲和力为代价^[68,69]。结构层面, 在 BA.2.86 的 RBD 中, L455 与 hACE2 的 H34 之间形成范德华力相互作用, 有助于受体识别。然而, L455 到 S455 的替换导致氨基酸侧链缩短, 失去了与 hACE2 的 D30 和 H34 的接触, 削弱了与 hACE2 相互作用^[70](图 2)。

3.1.2 S 蛋白突变可以影响新冠病毒的免疫逃逸能力

发生在 S 蛋白的突变会引起显著的抗原进化, 通过改变抗体识别位点和降低自然或疫苗诱导抗体的效力来提高病毒的免疫逃逸能力^[71-73]。VOC 变异株普遍展现出增强的传播效率或免疫逃逸特性。例如, 与早期的 SARS-CoV-2 变异株相比, Alpha 变异株表现出更高的传播率^[74,75]。Beta 变异株在非洲的快速传播^[76], 被认为与其卓越的传播力^[77]和免疫逃避能力^[45,76,78]有关。Gamma 变异株相较于之前的毒株, 展现出更强的传播性和对中和抗体的抵抗性^[57,79,80]。高传染性的 Delta 变异株与早期毒株相比, 对血清中和抗体的敏感性大幅降低^[81,82]。尤其是 Omicron 变异

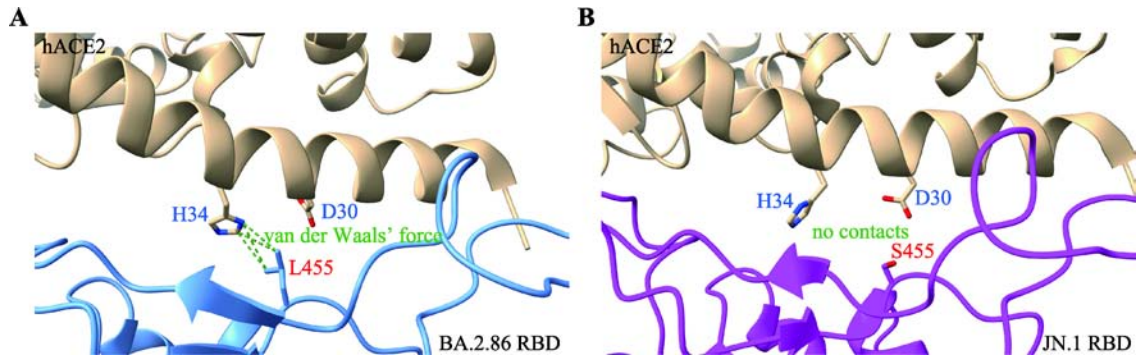


图 2 新冠病毒 S 蛋白 L455S 突变对 RBD-hACE2 结合亲和力的影响

Fig. 2 Impacts of the L455S mutation in the S protein on RBD-hACE2 binding affinity

A: 在 BA.2.86 变异株(PDB ID: 8WP8)中, 新冠病毒 RBD 区域的 L455 与人 ACE2 的 H34 形成范德华力, 促进了 RBD-hACE2 的识别; B: 在 JN.1 株系(PDB ID: 8Y18)中, S455 更短的侧链使得上述范德华力丢失, 因此减弱了 RBD 与 hACE2 的结合亲和力。

株,极大地增强了针对中和抗体的免疫逃逸能力^[83-89]。

尽管某些 S 蛋白上的突变可能会降低与人类 ACE2 受体的结合能力,但它们在整個大流行期间对增强病毒的免疫逃逸能力起到了越来越重要的作用,这反映了 SARS-CoV-2 进化压力的动态转变。例如,在某些 Omicron 亚谱系中被鉴定到的 G446S、G496S 和 Y505H 突变,尽管导致与 hACE2 的结合亲和力降低,但显著地增强了对抗体的逃避能力^[42,47,59,90,91]。从结构层面看,3 个突变都分别破坏了它们与 hACE2 的氢键,导致受体结合力下降。但 Omicron 携带的 S477N 突变通过与 hACE2 的 S19 形成两个新的氢键,增强了 RBD 与 hACE2 的结合^[92]。此外,在 Omicron

株系中出现的 E484A 突变,虽然以牺牲结合亲和力为代价,却显著增强了免疫逃逸能力。具体而言, E484A 一方面打断了与 hACE2 的 K31 之间形成的盐桥,降低了与受体的结合亲和力^[93];另一方面, E484A 破坏了与代表性中和抗体如 REGN10933 之间的氢键,减少了中和抗体的识别,从而增强了免疫逃逸^[94](图 3)。总的来说, Omicron 变异株携带了多个以降低受体结合力为代价来增强免疫逃逸的突变位点。抗原表位上的氨基酸突变削弱了基于早期毒株 S 蛋白设计的疫苗的保护效力,而 SARS-CoV-2 的持续进化为开发针对新变异株的疫苗带来了持续的挑战。

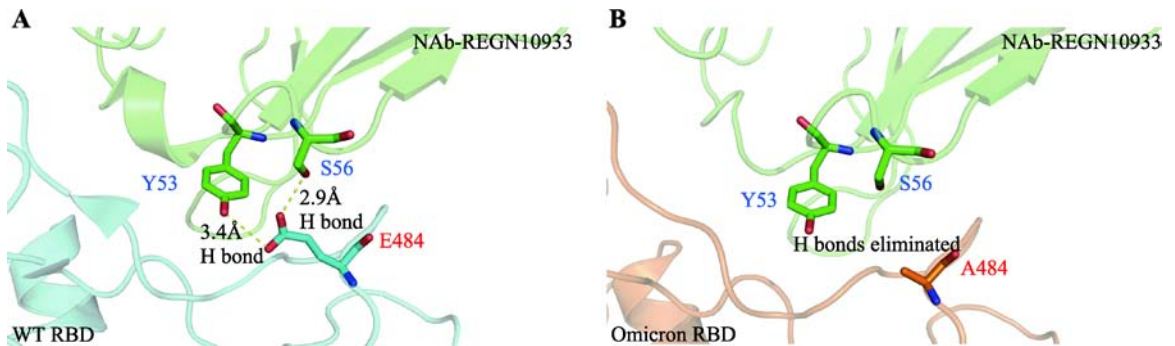


图 3 新冠病毒 S 蛋白 E484A 突变对 RBD 与代表性中和抗体 REGN10933 结合亲和力的影响

Fig. 3 Impacts of the E484A mutation in the S protein on binding affinity of RBD and representative neutralizing antibodies (NAb) REGN10933

A: 在野生型(WT)株系(PDB ID: 6XDG)中, 新冠病毒 RBD 区域的 E484 与 NAb REGN10933 的 Y53、S56 分别形成氢键; B: 在 Omicron 株系(以 6XDG 为模板, 利用 SWISS-MODEL <https://swissmodel.expasy.org> 进行同源建模)中, E484A 导致与 Y53、S56 的氢键断裂, 降低了中和抗体对 RBD 的识别能力, 进而导致免疫逃逸。

3.1.3 S 蛋白突变可以影响新冠病毒的致病性

通过改变病毒的细胞进入方式和组织趋向性, S 蛋白上的突变可能对疾病的发生机制产生影响^[87,95~99]。然而, 遗传变异与疾病严重性之间的关系由于患者年龄、性别、基础疾病等个体差异而变得复杂^[100~103]。动物模型研究为我们理解发病机制提供了重要见解。例如, 虽然 S 蛋白的 D614G 突变增强了病毒的传播力, 但在仓鼠模型中, D614 和 G614 变异株的致病性并没有显著差异^[104]。在小鼠模型中, Alpha 和 Beta 变异株相较于早期的 D614 型毒株, 引起的临床症状更为严重^[105,106]。此外, 携带 P681R 突变的 Delta 变异株, 在仓鼠模型中表现出更强的致病性^[95]。值得注意的是, 尽管动物模型为研究提供了重要线索, 但其观察结果可能与人类感染的实际情况存在差异。

关联研究为探索 SARS-CoV-2 变异株与其致病性之间的潜在联系提供了新的视角。疫情初期, SARS-CoV-2 被分为 S 和 L 两个主要谱系, 其中感染 S 谱系病毒的患者普遍展现出比 L 谱系感染患者更为严重的临床症状^[107]。与其他变异株相比, Omicron 变异株对不同组织的亲和力被认为是其致病性较低和传播率较高的一个原因。挪威和英国的研究指出, Omicron 变异株比 Delta 变异株更易传播^[108,109]。而来自加利福尼亚^[110]和南非^[111]的数据表明, Omicron 变异株引起的严重症状病例数量比 Delta 更少。

总体而言, SARS-CoV-2 的变异株相较于其原型毒株, 在致病性方面似乎展现出了减弱趋势^[112,113]。然而, 这并不意味着所有新出现的变异株都会表现出较低的致病性。为了模拟病毒种群的传播和进化动态, 研究者开发了一种新型计算模型 SIRSVIDE (Susceptible-Infected-Recovered-Susceptible-Variation-Immune Decay-Immune Escape)^[114]。模拟研究显示, 在大规模宿主人群和高突变率等特定条件下, 病毒种群会朝着传播力增强、免疫逃逸能力增强和致病力降低的方向进化。此外, 病毒进化固有的随机性导致了短期内病毒性状的波动。这些发现与新冠病毒自暴发以来所表现的进化特征基本吻合。起初, SARS-CoV-2 之所以能有效感染肺细胞, 主要归功于其 S 蛋白与肺细胞表面 TMPRSS2 蛋白酶之间的相

互作用, 这种作用可能导致了更严重的疾病表现^[95]。大多数 Omicron 变异株由于与 TMPRSS2 的亲合力相对较弱, 减少了它们在肺部细胞中的感染, 表现出较低的致病性^[87,96,97]。然而, 最近发现的 BA.2.86 亚谱系与 BA.2 的 S 蛋白上有多个氨基酸差异, 表现出增强的肺细胞感染性和对中和抗体的免疫逃逸能力, 这些特征在一定程度上使其与早期高致病性毒株相似^[98,99]。因此, BA.2.86 是否代表 Omicron 亚谱系中一个更具致病性的分支, 还需要进一步的监测和研究。

3.2 新冠病毒 ORF1ab 的适应性进化

新冠病毒 ORF1ab 编码的多聚蛋白经切割后形成多个非结构蛋白, 这些蛋白对病毒复制、组装及宿主互作过程中起到了关键作用^[115]。例如, nsp4 蛋白与内质网膜重塑和双膜囊泡形成有关, 其 T492I 突变增加了病毒的复制效率、感染能力及免疫逃逸能力^[116]。同时, 该突变还抑制了单核巨噬细胞中病毒 RNA 诱导的趋化因子产生, 这可能与 Omicron 致病性减弱的现象有关^[116]。主蛋白酶 nsp5 作为多聚蛋白切割过程的关键酶, 其 P132H 突变在 Omicron 子谱系中普遍存在。尽管这一突变导致了 nsp5 蛋白质稳定性的降低, 却并未显著影响其催化活性^[117]。RNA 聚合酶 nsp12 是病毒 RNA 复制和转录过程的核心, 也是核苷酸类抗病毒药物瑞德西韦 (remdesivir) 的主要靶点, 其 P323L 突变在全球范围内迅速普及并维持了高流行率, 具有明显的传播优势^[118]。内切核酸酶 nsp15 参与了病毒 RNA 的加工和免疫逃逸, 其 T112I 突变可能有助于病毒更有效地切割宿主的 RNA, 增强了其免疫逃逸能力^[119]。

3.3 新冠病毒其他蛋白的适应性进化

新冠病毒的 N 蛋白不仅参与病毒 RNA 的包装和保护, 还与病毒的传播性和免疫逃逸能力密切相关。R203K 和 G204R 突变在 Alpha 和 Gamma 毒株中连锁出现, 后来在 Omicron 中也被观察到, 而 R203M 突变在 Delta 中较为普遍。R203K 和 G204R 突变增强了 N 蛋白的 RNA 介导的凝聚作用^[120], 而 R203M 突变能够增强 RNA 包装和病毒复制^[121]。此外, N 蛋白的 215~235 区域对 RNA 介导的相分离至

关重要,而 G215C 突变增强了 N 蛋白的自组装及其与核酸的共组装^[122]。

膜蛋白对病毒的组装过程、形态塑造及感染能力不可或缺。在 M 蛋白的跨膜区域内,突变 Q19E、A63T 及 I82T 可能扰乱其结构稳定性,进而潜在地影响病毒的传播^[119]。E 蛋白不仅参与病毒粒子的组装,还可能涉及病毒与宿主细胞受体的结合过程。迄今为止,T9I 和 T11A 是 E 蛋白上观察到的两个显著突变。这些突变可能会增加 E 蛋白 N 端的疏水性并稳定其 α -螺旋结构,从而影响 E 蛋白的功能^[119]。

辅助蛋白在新冠病毒的生命周期中扮演着多样化的角色,包括调节宿主的免疫反应、影响病毒的复制效率以及参与病毒粒子的组装。例如,ORF3a 能够逃逸宿主干扰素反应^[123]; ORF6 通过阻断 mRNA 的输出途径,有效干扰宿主的干扰素信号传导机制^[124]; ORF7a 展现出与 CD14⁺单核细胞的特异性结合能力,从而触发炎症反应^[125];而 ORF8 在细胞中进行外源表达时,会直接导致 IFN-I 信号传导的破坏^[126]。然而,辅助蛋白上的突变对病毒适应性的影响仍然需要深入研究。

4 人工智能与深度突变扫描在新冠病毒进化研究方面的应用

理解 SARS-CoV-2 进化的核心难题之一,在于阐明病毒 S 蛋白中新出现突变的抗原特性和功能影响。深度突变扫描(deep mutational scanning, DMS)技术凭借其高通量、系统性的优势,能够全面评估新冠病毒 S 蛋白各个位点突变对病毒特性的影响,为揭示新冠病毒进化规律提供了宝贵的视角。Bloom 团队创新性地构建了一个酵母表面展示平台^[127],实现了在酵母细胞表面表达新冠病毒的 RBD 蛋白。通过 PCR 方法在 RBD 的每个位点引入全部 19 种可能的氨基酸突变,结合 PacBio SMRT 测序技术,将每个 RBD 突变与特定条形码相联系,并将突变库转染至酵母细胞以表达 RBD,利用 Illumina 测序技术识别条形码来确定突变类型。接下来,采用荧光激活细胞分选(fluorescence-activated cell sorting, FACS)技术测量突变 RBD 的表达水平和与 ACE2 的结合亲和力^[127],并为评估突变 RBD 的免疫逃逸能力进行

初步筛选^[128]。然而,当面对大量针对 RBD 不同区域的中和抗体研究时,FACS 方法显现出通量不足和效率较低的局限性。为克服这一挑战,曹云龙团队引入了基于磁性细胞分选(magnetic-activated cell sorting, MACS)的创新筛选方法,显著提高了 DMS 实验的效率和规模^[42]。此外, Bloom 团队进一步改进了实验流程,构建了基于非复制型假慢病毒的全长 S 蛋白突变库^[129],从而量化了全长 S 蛋白突变对受体结合和抗体中和作用的影响。

然而,鉴于新冠病毒变异株数量众多且不断增加,对每种毒株逐一进行 DMS 实验既不现实也缺乏实际意义。在此情境下,人工智能技术展现出了更强的适用性。这些先进的计算方法有潜力通过深入挖掘现有 DMS 数据,帮助我们更准确地预测和理解病毒变异。近年来,多个科研团队已开发出基于人工智能的模型,旨在利用 DMS 数据集来探究新冠病毒的进化。

例如,北京邮电大学与澳门科技大学联合开发的 UniBind 模型^[130],通过整合蛋白质三维结构和结合亲和力数据,预测了 S 蛋白突变对其与 ACE2 受体及中和单克隆抗体结合亲和力的影响。UniBind 模型采用蛋白质的图数据结构表示,结合几何和能量注意力机制(geometry and energy attention, GEA),融入双路径神经网络(BindFormer),并采用异构生物数据集成的多任务学习模块。该研究构建了基于亲和力的进化评分系统(evo-score),全面量化 S 蛋白与 ACE2 及抗体的结合强度。此外,阿卜杜拉国王大学与中国科学院合作开发了 MLAEP (Machine Learning-guided Antigenic Evolution Prediction)方法^[131]。该方法融合了结构建模、多任务学习和遗传算法,通过体外定向进化模拟预测病毒的适应性景观和抗原进化。MLAEP 通过分析现有的 SARS-CoV-2 变异,准确推断抗原进化轨迹,并将其与相应的采样时间相关联。瑞士研究团队的深度突变学习(deep mutational learning, DML)方法^[132]结合了实验性酵母展示筛选、深度测序和机器学习技术,全面分析了 SARS-CoV-2 RBD 的组合突变,评估了突变对 ACE2 结合能力和对中和抗体的逃逸能力。DML 揭示了 RBD 突变的多样性,并预测了抗体对未来 SARS-CoV-2 变异株的鲁棒性,为抗体治疗药物的评估和选择提供了重要工具。这些模型各具特色,为理解

SARS-CoV-2 的进化机制和预测其未来变异提供了宝贵的工具。

5 结语与展望

在过去的几年时间里, SARS-CoV-2 经历了相当复杂的进化过程, 新的变异株不断产生又不断消亡。开展新冠病毒的进化规律解析和流行趋势预测研究, 对科学防控新冠肺炎疫情等新发和突发的传染性公共卫生事件具有重要意义。通过分析 SARS-CoV-2 及其相关冠状病毒的系统发生关系以及 SARS-CoV-2 的谱系划分, 人们加深了对病毒起源、进化路径及传播机制的理解。SARS-CoV-2 的不断变异体现了病毒在宿主群体中的适应性进化, 这些变异不仅影响了病毒的传播能力, 还可能影响其致病性和免疫逃逸能力。病毒的快速变异也对公共卫生策略、疫苗开发和药物设计提出了挑战。

随着基因测序技术的飞速发展和全球科研合作的不断加强, 我们有望更及时、更全面地监测 SARS-CoV-2 的变异动态。DMS 技术结合人工智能算法的应用, 为精准预测新冠病毒变异株的流行趋势开辟了新途径, 将极大地提升我们预测新冠病毒变异株流行趋势的准确性和效率。DMS 技术能够系统地评估病毒基因组中每个位点的突变潜力及其对病毒功能的影响, 而人工智能算法则能够快速处理海量数据, 快速识别出影响病毒复制能力、传播效率及免疫逃逸能力的关键氨基酸变异, 挖掘出隐藏的变异规律并提前预警潜在的高危变异株。这种跨学科的技术融合, 将为制定精准有效的防控策略、优化疫苗设计以及开发新型抗病毒药物提供强有力的支持。

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