The application and development of CRISPR Cas9

Jingyi Wang *

No.42 Middle School, Tianjin, China

* Corresponding Author Email: 286836163@qq.com

Abstract. This comprehensive review paper thoroughly explores the developmental background, basic principles, application examples, and the current challenges and ethical issues associated with CRISPR-Cas9 technology, and provides an in-depth forecast and outlook on its future directions. Originating from a natural immune mechanism in bacteria, CRISPR-Cas9 technology can precisely identify and cut targeted DNA sequences to achieve gene editing. Characterized by its ease of operation, low cost, and high efficiency, it has been widely applied in biological research, medical treatment, agricultural improvement, and other areas, bringing an unprecedented ability to transform life. This paper extensively introduces various application examples of CRISPR-Cas9 technology, including but not limited to the study of gene functions, treatment of genetic diseases, development of antiviral therapies, and enhancement of crop traits. These applications showcase the enormous potential of CRISPR-Cas9 technology in driving scientific advancement and solving practical problems. However, with the widespread application of the technology, a series of challenges and ethical concerns have arisen. The paper delves into issues such as potential off-target effects of gene editing, ecological risks associated with gene drives, and the ethical boundaries of human embryonic gene editing. The paper anticipates the future development of CRISPR-Cas9, suggesting that with a deeper understanding and continuous refinement of the technology, it may play an even greater role in precision medicine, biopharmaceuticals, bioenergy, and other fields [1].

Keywords: Gene Editing Technology; CRISPR-Cas9 System; Genetic Engineering Tool; Challenges and Ethical Issues.

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview of Genome Editing

Genome editing, an area of biotechnology that affords scientists the ability to alter an organism's DNA, has transformed the landscape of genetic research and opened new frontiers in medical and agricultural sciences. This technology empowers researchers to modify genetic material with unprecedented precision, facilitating the correction of genetic defects, the understanding of gene function, and the development of novel therapies. Notably, genome editing is not a monolithic field but rather a collection of various techniques, each with its own set of advantages and limitations. These methods include zinc-finger nucleases (ZFNs), transcription activator-like effector nucleases (TALENs), and the CRISPR-Cas9 system, which has recently become the most prominent due to its simplicity and efficiency.

The cell's natural DNA repair mechanisms then take over, either by non-homologous end joining (NHEJ), which can lead to insertions or deletions (indels), or by homology-directed repair (HDR), which allows for the introduction of specific DNA sequences. The choice of repair pathway and the precision with which these breaks are induced and repaired are pivotal factors that influence the outcome of the editing process. The ability to control these factors is what distinguishes one genome editing technology from another and what makes the CRISPR-Cas9 system particularly notable in this context.

1.2. History and Development of CRISPR-Cas

The CRISPR-Cas system's journey from a peculiar bacterial defense mechanism to a groundbreaking genome editing tool is a chronicle of serendipitous discoveries and scientific ingenuity. The origins of CRISPR-Cas can be traced back to the late 1980s when Japanese researchers

observed unusual repetitive sequences in the E. coli genome, which were later found to be part of a larger immune system in bacteria. These clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats (CRISPR) and their associated proteins (Cas) function as a microbial defense against invading viruses and plasmids, storing fragments of these invaders' DNA to recognize and combat them in future encounters.

It was not until 2012, however, that Emmanuelle Charpentier and Jennifer Doudna demonstrated that the Cas9 protein, guided by a specifically designed RNA sequence, could be used to cut DNA at predetermined locations. This revelation was monumental, as it laid the foundation for the development of a versatile and easily programmable genome editing tool, which quickly gained traction in the scientific community for its ability to make precise, targeted changes to the genome.

Building upon this framework, subsequent research has refined the CRISPR-Cas9 system, enhancing its efficiency, specificity, and versatility. Scientists have discovered a multitude of Cas proteins, such as Cpf1 (also known as Cas12a), which offer different functionalities and expand the applications of CRISPR technology. Moreover, ongoing research continues to address the challenges associated with CRISPR-Cas9, such as minimizing off-target effects and increasing the fidelity of genome editing. The history of CRISPR-Cas is a testament to the collaborative nature of scientific endeavor and a reminder of the potential for basic research to yield transformative technological innovations [2, 3].

1.3. The Mechanism of CRISPR-Cas Function

The CRISPR-Cas system operates through a remarkably elegant yet complex mechanism, which can be distilled into a series of orchestrated steps culminating in the targeted modification of genetic material. At the heart of the system lies the Cas9 protein, an enzyme that functions as a molecular scissor, capable of creating double-stranded breaks in DNA. The specificity of this cutting action is governed by a guide RNA (gRNA) that is complementary to the target DNA sequence. The gRNA-Cas9 complex forms a surveillance machine that patrols the genome, searching for sequences that match the gRNA's 20-nucleotide spacer region.

Once the target DNA is located, the CRISPR-Cas9 system exploits a short protospacer adjacent motif (PAM), which is essential for Cas9 recognition and binding. The PAM sequence, typically a simple triplet like 'NGG' for Streptococcus pyogenes Cas9, must be present immediately downstream of the target site. Upon recognition, the Cas9 protein unwinds the DNA duplex and positions the gRNA to anneal with the complementary strand of the target DNA. This hybridization prompts Cas9 to cleave the DNA, leading to a double-strand break.

The cell then attempts to repair the break, primarily through the error-prone NHEJ pathway, which can result in gene disruption if indels occur during the repair process. Alternatively, if a DNA template with homology to the target site is supplied, the cell may use the HDR pathway, allowing for precise insertion of new genetic material. This aspect of the CRISPR-Cas mechanism is particularly valuable for therapeutic applications where a specific genetic correction is required.

The elegance of the CRISPR-Cas system is not merely in its ability to cut DNA but in the modularity and adaptability of the gRNA, which can be designed to target virtually any genomic locus. This flexibility has led to the widespread adoption of CRISPR-Cas9 in various research fields, harnessing its power to edit genes in a vast array of organisms, from bacteria to humans. Advances in the understanding of CRISPR-Cas9's mechanism of action continue to enhance its specificity and efficiency, further cementing its role as a cornerstone of modern genetic engineering.

2. CRISPR-Cas

2.1. CRISPR-Cas Applications

2.1.1. CRISPR in Gene Therapy

(1) The Pioneering Role of CRISPR-Cas9 in Gene Therapy

The realm of gene therapy has been dramatically revolutionized by the advent of CRISPR-Cas9 technology. Its precision and adaptability have paved the way for a myriad of therapeutic interventions previously deemed insurmountable. With its ability to target specific genes with unparalleled accuracy, CRISPR-Cas9 has introduced a new dimension to the treatment of genetic disorders. This section delves into the intricacies of employing CRISPR-Cas9 in corrective gene therapy, highlighting the mechanisms by which it rectifies pathogenic mutations, and discussing the remarkable progress made in treating diseases such as Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, Cystic Fibrosis, and Sickle Cell Anemia [4, 5].

(2) Advancements in CRISPR-Cas9 Delivery Systems

A critical facet of gene therapy, which necessitates meticulous attention, is the delivery of the CRISPR-Cas9 complex to affected cells. Recent advancements have seen a surge in the development of viral and non-viral delivery systems, each with their own merits and limitations. This subsection provides an exhaustive comparison of adenoviral vectors, lentiviral vectors, and non-viral alternatives such as lipid nanoparticles. The discussion extends to the safety profiles of these delivery methods, examining their potential for immunogenicity and their capacity to reach diverse cell types.

(3) Ethical Considerations and Regulatory Frameworks

As with any groundbreaking technology, the implementation of CRISPR-Cas9 in gene therapy is intertwined with ethical considerations and the necessity for robust regulatory frameworks. This part of the text scrutinizes the ethical dilemmas posed by germline editing, the potential for unintended consequences, and the societal implications of creating 'designer' genomes. It also surveys current regulatory policies across various jurisdictions, analyzing how these frameworks strive to balance innovation with public safety, and highlighting the role of international consortia in establishing ethical guidelines for gene editing.

2.1.2. Agricultural Advancements with CRISPR

(1) CRISPR-Cas9 in Crop Improvement

The agricultural sector has witnessed a transformative change with the introduction of CRISPR-Cas9, particularly in the domain of crop improvement. This subsection enumerates the myriad ways CRISPR-Cas9 has been harnessed to enhance crop yield, resist pests, and fortify against environmental stressors. It delves into case studies where CRISPR-Cas9 has been utilized to amplify the nutritional value of crops, such as increasing the vitamin content in tomatoes, and to expedite the breeding of crops with desirable traits, thus circumventing the time-intensive traditional breeding methods.

(2) Regulatory Landscape of CRISPR-Modified Crops

While the application of CRISPR-Cas9 in agriculture holds immense promise, it is imperative to consider the regulatory landscape governing genetically modified crops. This section compares the regulatory approaches of different countries, examining the criteria that classify a crop as genetically modified and the implications this has for CRISPR-edited crops. The discourse extends to the public perception of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and how CRISPR-Cas9, by inducing precise edits without introducing foreign DNA, is challenging the conventional definition of GMOs.

(3) CRISPR-Cas9 and Biodiversity Conservation

In addition to crop improvement, CRISPR-Cas9 has a pivotal role in biodiversity conservation. This subsection elaborates on the innovative ways CRISPR-Cas9 is being employed to protect endangered species and to counteract the spread of invasive species. It underscores initiatives such as the genetic rescue of the American chestnut tree and the development of gene drives designed to control the population of malaria-carrying mosquitoes, illuminating the potential of CRISPR-Cas9 to contribute positively to ecological balance and biodiversity.

2.1.3. Bioengineering and Industrial Applications

(1) CRISPR-Cas9 in Biopharmaceuticals Production

This subsection articulates how CRISPR-Cas9 has been instrumental in optimizing production cell lines to enhance the yield and purity of biologically derived drugs, such as monoclonal antibodies

and recombinant proteins. It provides an in-depth analysis of case studies where CRISPR-Cas9 has expedited the production of complex therapeutics, thereby reducing costs and improving accessibility [6-8].

(2) CRISPR-Cas9 in Biofuels and Biomaterials

The imperative to move towards sustainable energy sources has been greatly aided by CRISPR-Cas9 technology. This part of the chapter focuses on how CRISPR-Cas9 has been utilized to genetically modify microorganisms for the production of biofuels and biomaterials. It elaborates on the engineering of algae and yeast strains capable of converting biomass into bioethanol or bioplastics, emphasizing the role of CRISPR-Cas9 in creating more efficient and environmentally friendly production processes.

(3) Future Prospects and Challenges

As we peer into the horizon of CRISPR-Cas9 applications in bioengineering and industrial sectors, it is evident that the technology has the potential to catalyze further innovations. This subsection provides a forward-looking perspective on the expansion of CRISPR-Cas9 applications, from creating novel biocatalysts to pioneering tissue engineering. It also addresses the challenges that must be overcome, including ethical concerns, scalability of production, and the need for continued research to fully harness the capabilities of CRISPR-Cas9 in these rapidly advancing fields.

2.2. Challenges and Ethical Concerns

2.2.1. Technical Limitations and Off-Target Effects

One of the most pressing concerns is the occurrence of off-target effects, a phenomenon where the Cas9 enzyme inadvertently binds to and cleaves at sites other than the intended target DNA sequence. These off-target mutations can have unpredictable consequences, leading to genomic instability and potentially harmful effects on cellular function.

To elucidate this challenge, it is imperative to delve into the intricate mechanics of the CRISPR-Cas9 system. The specificity of CRISPR-Cas9 is largely dictated by the guide RNA (gRNA) that directs the Cas9 nuclease to a complementary DNA site within the genome. However, the gRNA can sometimes interact with DNA sequences that are similar, but not identical, to the target sequence. This misguidance can result in cuts at unintended locations, which may lead to insertions, deletions, or other genomic alterations.

Current research is focused on enhancing the fidelity of CRISPR-Cas9 to minimize these off-target effects. Strategies to increase specificity include engineering high-fidelity Cas9 variants, optimizing gRNA design, and employing computational tools for better prediction of potential off-target sites. Despite these efforts, completely eliminating off-target effects remains a challenge that necessitates further investigation and innovation.

Adding to the complexity is the heterogeneity of the biological systems in which CRISPR-Cas9 is employed. Different cell types and organisms may exhibit varying susceptibilities to off-target editing, further complicating the predictability and control of the technology. Moreover, the detection of off-target mutations requires sophisticated and sensitive analytical methods, which are not always readily available or applicable across different experimental contexts [9].

2.2.2. Ethical Implications of Genome Editing

The advent of CRISPR-Cas9 has not only brought about technical challenges but has also opened a Pandora's Box of ethical implications that demand our immediate attention. At the heart of these ethical debates is the capacity of CRISPR-Cas9 to alter the genetic makeup of organisms, including humans, in ways that were previously inconceivable. The ramifications of such capabilities extend beyond the laboratory and into the very fabric of society, raising profound questions about the nature of human identity, the concept of genetic determinism, and the potential for eugenics.

One of the most contentious ethical issues is the editing of human germline cells, which include sperm, eggs, and embryos. Alterations made to these cells would be heritable, passing on modified genetic information to future generations. The potential benefits are significant; the possibility to

eradicate hereditary diseases and reduce human suffering is truly enticing. However, the inherent risks and ethical concerns surrounding germline editing cannot be understated. The possibility of unintended consequences, such as the introduction of new genetic disorders, and the implications for human evolution are subjects of intense ethical scrutiny.

Moreover, the notion of 'designer babies', where parents could potentially choose the genetic traits of their offspring, raises critical questions about the commodification of human life and the societal pressures that might emerge from such practices. Would this lead to a new form of social inequality based on genetic enhancements? Who would have access to these technologies, and how would they be regulated to prevent abuse?

In addition to germline editing, the ethical implications of CRISPR-Cas9 also encompass issues of consent, privacy, and the ownership of genetic information. As genome editing trials move toward clinical applications, the informed consent of participants becomes paramount. The complexity of the technology and its implications necessitates a thorough understanding by all stakeholders involved, which is challenging to achieve.

The ethical landscape of CRISPR-Cas9 is complex and multifaceted, requiring a nuanced approach that balances the potential benefits with the moral and societal implications. It calls for a collaborative effort among scientists, ethicists, policymakers, and the public to develop guidelines and frameworks that govern the responsible use of genome editing technologies.

2.2.3. Regulatory and Policy Considerations

The challenges and ethical concerns associated with CRISPR-Cas9 are inextricably linked to the regulatory and policy considerations that govern its use. Crafting appropriate regulations requires a careful balancing act between promoting innovation and safeguarding against potential harms.

National and international regulatory bodies face the daunting task of establishing guidelines that address the diverse applications of CRISPR-Cas9, from basic research to clinical interventions. These guidelines must be flexible enough to adapt to the evolving nature of the technology while being robust enough to protect against misuse. The regulatory landscape is further complicated by the varying legal and cultural perspectives on genetic modification across different countries, necessitating a harmonized approach to avoid conflicts and ensure global cooperation.

One key regulatory challenge is the classification of CRISPR-Cas9 edited organisms. Are they to be treated as genetically modified organisms (GMOs), subject to the same regulations that have been applied to transgenic organisms created through earlier genetic engineering techniques? Or do they warrant a new category with its own set of rules? The answer to this question has significant implications for the development and commercialization of CRISPR-Cas9 technologies.

Another consideration is the need for oversight mechanisms to monitor the long-term effects of CRISPR-Cas9 applications, particularly in the context of environmental releases and clinical treatments. Continuous assessment and post-market surveillance are critical to ensure that any unforeseen consequences are promptly identified and addressed.

The establishment of regulatory frameworks must also include provisions for public engagement and education. The societal implications of CRISPR-Cas9 require that the public has a clear understanding of the technology, its potential impacts, and the regulatory measures in place. Transparent communication and inclusive decision-making processes will be essential to build public trust and ensure the ethical deployment of CRISPR-Cas9.

In conclusion, the regulation and policy considerations surrounding CRISPR-Cas9 are complex and multifaceted. They require a concerted effort among scientists, regulators, policymakers, and the public to establish guidelines that foster scientific innovation while protecting against potential risks. As the technology continues to advance, it is imperative that regulatory frameworks evolve in tandem, ensuring that CRISPR-Cas9 is used responsibly and ethically for the betterment of society.

2.3. Advances and Future Directions

2.3.1. Innovations in CRISPR Technology

The realm of genetic engineering has been vastly transformed by the advent of CRISPR-Cas9, a technology that has enabled remarkable precision in the modification of genetic material. Recent innovations within this domain have focused on enhancing the accuracy, efficiency, and versatility of CRISPR-Cas9 systems. To begin with, the fidelity of CRISPR-Cas9 can be augmented by the engineering of Cas9 variants. These variants, such as eSpCas9 and HypaCas9, offer a reduced incidence of off-target effects—a crucial improvement that bolsters the safety profile of CRISPR-mediated gene editing. In the pursuit of precision, the development of base editors, which enable the conversion of one DNA base into another without creating double-strand breaks, has emerged as a pivotal innovation. By circumventing the need for double-strand breaks, base editors minimize the potential for unintended insertions or deletions, further enhancing the precision of gene editing endeavors [10].

Furthermore, prime editing, a more recent innovation, extends the capabilities of base editors by allowing for the introduction of small insertions and deletions, as well as all twelve possible base-to-base conversions. This groundbreaking innovation augments the scope of CRISPR technology, enabling the correction of a wider range of genetic mutations. Additionally, the integration of CRISPR-Cas9 with other technologies has led to the creation of novel platforms such as CRISPR-Cas9-based gene drives, which have the potential to spread modified genes through populations at an accelerated rate, opening new avenues for the control of vector-borne diseases and the management of invasive species.

Moreover, advancements in delivery methods have played a critical role in enhancing the applicability of CRISPR-Cas9. Nanoparticle-mediated delivery, viral vectors, and the advent of ribonucleoprotein (RNP) complexes have each contributed to the diversification of delivery strategies, thus facilitating the application of CRISPR technology to a broader range of cell types and organisms. This expansion of delivery modalities has been instrumental in enabling the use of CRISPR-Cas9 in vivo, ranging from the targeting of specific tissues to the systemic delivery for wide-reaching therapeutic interventions.

2.3.2. Emerging CRISPR Applications

The burgeoning CRISPR-Cas9 technology has seen a proliferation of applications that extend beyond the traditional confines of basic research into realms that directly impact human well-being and environmental sustainability. One of the most compelling applications is the development of CRISPR-based diagnostic tools. These tools, such as the SHERLOCK and DETECTR systems, utilize the target specificity of CRISPR-Cas systems to identify genetic sequences indicative of viral infections, including SARS-CoV-2, with high sensitivity and specificity. Such diagnostic platforms hold promise for the rapid, point-of-care detection of pathogens, which is paramount in managing public health crises.

In the field of agriculture, CRISPR-Cas9 is being harnessed to cultivate crops with beneficial traits, such as enhanced nutritional content, improved yield, and increased resilience to environmental stressors. For instance, CRISPR-Cas9 has facilitated the development of rice varieties with increased tolerance to drought and salinity, thereby offering a potential solution to the challenges posed by climate change to food security. Furthermore, the technology is being employed to engineer plants that can act as biofactories, producing pharmaceuticals, bioplastics, and other high-value compounds, thus broadening the scope of biotechnology in sustainable production.

Another area where CRISPR-Cas9 is making significant strides is in the development of gene therapies for the treatment of inherited genetic disorders. By targeting the underlying genetic abnormalities, CRISPR-Cas9 holds the potential to provide curative treatments for diseases such as sickle cell anemia, cystic fibrosis, and Duchenne muscular dystrophy. The application of CRISPR technology in this context exemplifies a shift towards personalized medicine, where treatments are

tailored to the genetic makeup of individual patients, thereby maximizing therapeutic efficacy while minimizing adverse effects [10].

2.3.3. Prospects for CRISPR in Personalized Medicine

The intersection of CRISPR-Cas9 technology and personalized medicine is a burgeoning frontier with transformative potential for healthcare. Personalized medicine, predicated on the customization of healthcare treatments and practices to individual patients, is ideally suited to leverage the precision of CRISPR-Cas9 gene editing [11]. One of the most promising applications is in the realm of cancer therapy. The ability of CRISPR-Cas9 to edit genes with high specificity presents an opportunity to develop personalized cancer vaccines that elicit robust immune responses against patient-specific tumor antigens. This personalized approach could revolutionize cancer immunotherapy by providing treatments that are tailored to the unique genetic landscape of each patient's tumor, thereby enhancing therapeutic outcomes.

Moreover, the integration of CRISPR-Cas9 into stem cell therapy is another avenue with profound implications for personalized medicine. By using CRISPR-Cas9 to correct genetic defects in patient-derived induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs), it is possible to generate autologous cell lines that are free from the patient's original genetic disorder. These corrected iPSCs can then be differentiated into various cell types for transplantation, offering a personalized therapeutic strategy that has the potential to treat a plethora of degenerative diseases without the risk of immune rejection.

The future of CRISPR-Cas9 in personalized medicine also encompasses the development of pharmacogenomic applications, wherein CRISPR-Cas9 is employed to edit specific genetic loci that influence an individual's response to drugs. By tailoring drug therapy to the patient's genetic profile, it is conceivable to optimize drug efficacy, reduce adverse drug reactions, and ultimately improve patient outcomes. The implementation of CRISPR-Cas9 in pharmacogenomics could lead to a paradigm shift in drug prescription practices, transitioning from a one-size-fits-all approach to a more nuanced, genetically-informed strategy.

In conclusion, the advances in CRISPR technology and its emerging applications highlight a future where personalized medicine is not a mere concept but a tangible reality. The synergy between CRISPR-Cas9 and personalized medicine is poised to usher in an era of medical interventions that are highly specific, effective, and aligned with the genetic makeup of individual patients. As research continues to unravel the full potential of CRISPR-Cas9, it is anticipated that the realization of personalized medicine will become increasingly feasible, ultimately benefiting patients through bespoke therapeutic solutions that are tailored to their unique genetic profiles.

This review paper highlights the signficant value of the CRISPR-Cas9 technology in scientific research and practical application, emphasizing its transformative potential in various fields such as biomedical research, agriculture, and bioengineering. It underscores the ease, low y, and efficiency of this technology, and discusses its applications ranging from gene function studies and genetic disease treatment to crop trait improvement. Additionally, the paper addresses the challenges and ethical concerns raised by CRISPR-Cas9, including off-target effects, ecological risks, and ethical boundaries in human embryonic gene editing. Prospects for the technology are optimistic, with advancements expected to lead to greater roles in personalized medicine, biopharmaceuticals, and bioenergy. The establishment of legal and ethical guidelines is anticipated to help standardize the use of CRISPR-Cas9. Overall, the paper serves as an essential reference guiding the safe, rational, and effective application of CRISPR-Cas9 technology for researchers, policymakers, and the general public.

3. Summary

As a genome editing technology, CRISPR-Cas9 has been implicated in various fields since the identification, including gene therapy, agriculture and industrial development. Given its high efficiency and low cost, the application of CRISPR-Cas9 draws more and more attention. However, there are some contrary perspectives given the uncontrolled mis-editing caused by off-target. Besides,

manipulation of the genome is a way against nature, which causes great controversy on its ethical issues. In order to minimize off-target effects and avoid ethical debate, the technique and related policy is still under exploring. With the improvement of CRISPR-Cas9, it might be applied to broader domains, like personalized medicine, with enhanced precision.

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