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Ecology of viruses in deep-sea hydrothermal vents

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Since the discovery of ubiquitous and highly abundant viruses in aquatic ecosystems, many studies have been conducted to discern the role of viruses within aquatic microbial communities. As a result, viruses are now recognized to be significant components of all aquatic ecosystems. It has been suggested that they affect global nutrient and biogeochemical cycles in the world's oceans, and play a role in regulating abundance and composition of microbial communities. Viruses can also mediate lateral gene transfers and drive the diversification of microbial communities and the co-evolution between viruses and hosts.

Deep-sea hydrothermal vents are sites having great microbial biomass, high productivity, and physiologically and genetically high diversity, contrasting sharply with the surrounding sparsely populated deep-sea environments. The primary production in the deep-sea vent ecosystem is sustained by chemolithoautotrophic microorganisms that utilize reduced chemical compounds from the earth interior as energy sources. To date, the biogeochemical processes, ecophysiological functions, and evolutionary significance of deep-sea vent microbial communities have been extensively studied, but the ecological and evolutionary impacts of viruses on the deep-sea vent microbial communities remain to be fully elucidated.

Here, I provide an overview of current hot research topics related to viruses in aquatic ecosystems, and then introduce our studies on the viral functions and ecology in deep-sea hydrothermal vents in addition to several previous studies on virus-host interactions.

Keywords: virus, hydrothermal vent, chemolithoautotrophs