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**MECHANISM OF CITRIC ACID ACCUMULATION BY
ASPERGILLUS NIGER IN SOLID STATE FERMENTATION**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirement
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Process and Environmental Technology
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Abstract

The main purpose of this work was to study the mechanism of citric acid accumulation in solid state fermentation of *Aspergillus niger*. Two strains, Yang No.2 and MH 15-15, represented the high-accumulating organisms from which the low-accumulating mutants, SL-1 and SL-2, were generated by ultraviolet treatment. Comparative solid state fermentations, with a starch-containing material as the substrate, were conducted in petri-dishes, a technique which conferred a major advantage in allowing recovery of metabolically active mycelia for biochemical assays. Apart from the decreased citric acid accumulation, the selected mutants displayed lower starch consumption and enhanced production of oxalic acid, while their growth were generally equal to that of their respective parents. Evidence on elevated levels of free glucose in the cultures of the mutants, despite there being no alteration of α -amylase and glucoamylase from their parents, has prompted a hypothesis that the mutants were defective in the rates of glucose uptake.

The biochemical work started with the primary steps of carbon assimilation, *viz* measurement of glucose uptake and activity assay of hexokinase. The results confirmed the reduced glucose uptake rates by the mutants and a hypothesis that this is caused by some defects in certain components of the glucose transport mechanism, but not at membrane ATPase, has been proposed. In addition, hexokinase showed higher *in vitro* activities in the parents and, presumably, their glycolytic fluxes were greater than those of their mutants.

Investigation of activities of some selected TCA cycle enzymes and other metabolic steps *in vitro* strongly indicated the decreased activity of 2-oxoglutarate dehydrogenase and, possibly, NAD- and NADP-specific isocitrate dehydrogenases in the parents. Although most other enzymes decreased their activities during the later phase of cultivation, there was no definite difference between each parent and its mutant. However, oxaloacetate hydrolase, for oxalate formation, was at higher activity in the mutants than in the parents.

Measurements of intracellular concentrations of products of certain enzymes and adenine nucleotides were conducted in order to assess the *in vivo* catalytic function of the enzymes of interest. It was concluded that internal accumulation of citrate or oxalate is an immediate cause of its excretion. Supplemented by evidence from the ratio of ATP/AMP in the cells, a complete hypothesis describing citrate accumulation in *A.niger* Yang No.2 and MH 15-15 is proposed. Hence, the rate by which glucose is taken up into the cells is the primary trigger determining the capacity of glycolytic metabolism and it is proposed that the primary cause of citric acid accumulation in the high-accumulating strains is the deregulation of glucose uptake. When the glucose supply exceeds the requirement of the cells, i.e. when growth is slow, the TCA cycle is balanced by allosteric deactivation of isocitrate dehydrogenases by ATP which is excessively generated *via* the active glycolysis. The observed low level of activity of 2-oxoglutarate dehydrogenase is, therefore, a result of this metabolic block, rather than a cause. Because of the equilibria of the reactions, citrate is accumulated and then excreted out of the cells. In contrast, when the glucose supply is below such level, this enzyme regulation does not occur and oxalate, instead of citrate, acts as the drain of excess carbon going around the fully operative TCA cycle.

In conclusion, the current hypothesis for citric acid accumulation is basically similar to that proposed for submerged fermentation conditions. However, the rationale for carbon sink *via* oxalate is novel. Finally, it has been shown that two *A.niger* strains of different origins displayed a similar mechanism, although the fine control may be different.

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Table of Contents

	page
Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Figures	xii
List of Tables	xvii
Abbreviations	xviii
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Chapter 2 Literature Review	3
2.1 Introduction : History of Citric Acid Production	3
2.2 Uses and Properties of Citric Acid and Its Salts	4
2.3 Citric Acid-Accumulating Organisms	5
2.4 A Brief Description of <i>A.niger</i>	7
2.5 Fermentation Conditions	8
2.5.1 Carbohydrates	8
2.5.2 Nitrogen	10
2.5.3 Phosphate	10
2.5.4 Metal ions	11
2.5.5 pH and temperature	13
2.5.6 Aeration	14
2.5.7 Other additives	14
2.6 Production Processes	15
2.6.1 Introduction	15
2.6.2 The liquid surface process	15
2.6.3 The submerged process	17
2.6.4 The solid state process	18

	page
2.7 Biochemistry of Citric Acid Accumulation by <i>A.niger</i>	19
2.7.1 Introduction	19
2.7.2 The role of glycolysis	20
2.7.3 Metabolism of pyruvate	24
2.7.4 The role of the tricarboxylic acid cycle	25
2.7.5 The involvement of the glyoxylate cycle and other metabolic steps	27
2.7.6 Summary	28
2.8 General Principles of Solid State Cultivation	28
2.8.1 Introduction	28
2.8.2 Solid substrates	29
2.8.3 Fungal growth characteristics on solid substrates	31
2.8.4 Environmental factors	33
2.8.4.1 Moisture content and water activity	33
2.8.4.2 Temperature and heat removal	34
2.8.5 Reactors	34
2.9 Summary	35
Chapter 3 Materials and Methods	36
3.1 Materials	36
3.1.1 Microbiological media	36
3.1.2 Substrates	36
3.1.3 Chemicals	37
3.1.4 Enzymes	38
3.1.5 Organisms	39

	page
3.2 Methods	40
3.2.1 Cleaning procedure for glassware	40
3.2.2 Avoidance of wall growth in flasks	40
3.2.3 Preparation of spore suspension	40
3.2.4 Preparation of solid substrate	40
3.2.5 Inoculation and cultivation	41
3.2.6 Isolation and selection of mutants	42
3.2.6.1 Mutagenic treatment	42
3.2.6.2 Screening of mutants	42
3.2.6.3 Selection of mutants	43
3.2.7 Extraction and treatment of fermented- solid culture	43
3.2.8 Determination of fungal biomass	43
3.2.9 Measurement of glucose	44
3.2.10 Determination of starch	44
3.2.11 Measurement of glucose-releasing- enzymes	45
3.2.12 Measurement of starch-hydrolysing- enzymes	45
3.2.12.1 Preparation of enzyme sample	45
3.2.12.2 Assay of α -amylase	45
3.2.12.3 Assay of glucoamylase	46
3.2.13 Measurement of glucose uptake by intact mycelium	46
3.2.14 Determination of extracellular citric acid	47
3.2.15 Determination of extracellular oxalic acid	48
3.2.16 Extraction of enzymes and other cellular components from mycelium	48
3.2.16.1 Preparation of mycelium for extraction	48

	page
3.2.16.2 Extraction of enzymes (other than ATPase)	48
3.2.16.3 Extraction of ATPase	49
3.2.16.4 Extraction of metabolites and adenylates	50
3.2.17 Measurement of protein	50
3.2.18 Assay of intracellular enzymes	51
3.2.18.1 Hexokinase (E.C.2.7.1.1)	51
3.2.18.2 Aconitase (E.C.4.2.1.3)	52
3.2.18.3 NAD-specific isocitrate-dehydrogenase (E.C.1.1.1.41)	52
3.2.18.4 NADP-specific isocitrate-dehydrogenase (E.C.1.1.1.42)	52
3.2.18.5 2-Oxoglutarate dehydrogenase (E.C.1.2.4.2)	53
3.2.18.6 Pyruvate carboxylase (E.C.6.4.1.1)	53
3.2.18.7 Isocitrate lyase (E.C.4.1.3.1)	54
3.2.18.8 ATP:citrate lyase (E.C.4.1.3.8)	54
3.2.18.9 Oxaloacetate hydrolase (E.C.3.7.1.1)	54
3.2.18.10 ATPase	55
3.2.19 Measurement of intracellular metabolites	55
3.2.19.1 Citrate	56
3.2.19.2 2-Oxoglutarate	56
3.2.19.3 Oxaloacetate	56
3.2.19.4 Oxalate	57
3.2.20 Determination of adenylates	57
3.2.20.1 Adenosine triphosphate (ATP)	58
3.2.20.2 Adenosine diphosphate (ADP) and adenosine monophosphate (AMP)	58

	page
3.3 Discussion	59
3.3.1 Organisms	59
3.3.2 Determination of extracellular oxalic acid	60
3.3.3 Extraction of cellular enzymes from solid state cultures	60
3.3.4 Determination of ATPase activity	60
3.3.5 Determination of intracellular metabolites	61
 Chapter 4 Isolation and Selection of Mutants	 62
4.1 Introduction	62
4.2 Results and Discussion	63
4.2.1 Mutation and selection of mutants	63
4.2.2 Selection of mutant from <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2	65
4.2.3 Selection of mutant from <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15	66
4.2.4 Cultural characteristics on agar medium	67
4.2.5 Preliminary solid state fermentation	69
4.3 Summary	71
 Chapter 5 Production of Citric Acid Using <i>A.niger</i> In Solid State- Fermentation	 72
5.1 Introduction	72
5.2 Physical Properties of The Solid Substrate	73
5.3 Growth Morphology on Solid Substrate in Petri-dishes	74
5.4 Fermentation Time Course and Kinetic Descriptions	79
5.4.1 Fermentation using <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1	80

	page
5.4.2 Fermentation using <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15	91
5.5 Conclusions	99
Chapter 6 Primary Metabolism of Carbon and Citric Acid Accumulation in Solid State Fermentation	100
6.1 Introduction	100
6.2 Enzymatic Hydrolysis of Starch	101
6.2.1 Measurement of α -amylase activity	102
6.2.2 Measurement of glucoamylase activity	104
6.2.3 Discussion	106
6.3 Uptake of Glucose	107
6.3.1 Measurement of glucose uptake	108
6.3.2 Discussion	113
6.4 Measurement of ATPase Activity	114
6.4.1 Results	115
6.4.2 Discussion	116
6.5 Measurement of Hexokinase Activity	117
6.5.1 Results	117
6.5.2 Discussion	119
6.6 Conclusions	120
Chapter 7 Selected TCA Cycle and Other Enzymes and Citric Acid Accumulation in Solid State Fermentation	121
7.1 Introduction	121
7.2 Measurement of Selected TCA Cycle Enzymes	122
7.2.1 Results	122
7.2.1.1 Aconitase	122
7.2.1.2 NAD-specific isocitrate- dehydrogenase	125

	page
7.2.1.3 NADP-specific isocitrate- dehydrogenase	127
7.2.1.4 2-Oxoglutarate dehydrogenase	129
7.2.2 Discussion	131
7.3 Measurement of Other Selected Enzymes	134
7.3.1 Results	135
7.3.1.1 Pyruvate carboxylase	135
7.3.1.2 Isocitrate lyase	137
7.3.1.3 ATP:citrate lyase	139
7.3.1.4 Oxalaoacetate hydrolase	141
7.3.2 Discussion	143
7.4 Conclusions	147
 Chapter 8 Intracellular Metabolite and Adenine Nucleotide Concentrations and Citric Acid Accumulation in Solid- State Fermentation	 148
8.1 Introduction	148
8.2 Measurement of Intracellular Metabolites	149
8.2.1 Results	150
8.2.1.1 Citrate	150
8.2.1.2 2-Oxoglutarate	152
8.2.1.3 Oxaloacetate	154
8.2.1.4 Oxalate	156
8.2.2 Discussion	158
8.3 Measurement of Adenine Nucleotides	162
8.3.1 Results	163
8.3.1.1 Adenosine 5'-triphosphate (ATP)	163
8.3.1.2 Adenosine 5'-diphosphate (ADP)	165
8.3.1.3 Adenosine 5'-monophosphate (AMP)	167
8.3.2 Discussion	169

Table of Contents

xi

	page
8.4 Conclusions	172
Chapter 9 Final Discussion and Conclusions	173
Reference	176

List of Figures

Figure	Page
2.1 A simplified metabolic scheme for citric acid synthesis by <i>A.niger</i> (modified from Dawson (1986) and Legisa <i>et al.</i> , (1995))	21
4.1 Formation of compact colonies by <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 on the medium used for screening of acid-producing mutants	64
4.2 Formation of clear zone and white precipitate on the selection medium after incubation at 30°C for 4 days	67
4.3 Growth morphology of <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1 on ME agar after incubation at 30°C for 4 days	68
4.4 Growth morphology of <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2 on ME agar after incubation at 30°C for 4 days	69
5.1 Growth morphology of <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 during solid-state fermentation for citric acid production	75
5.2 Growth morphology of <i>A.niger</i> SL-1 during solid-state fermentation for citric acid production	76
5.3 Growth morphology of <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 during solid-state fermentation for citric acid production	77
5.4 Growth morphology of <i>A.niger</i> SL-2 during solid-state fermentation for citric acid production	78
5.5 Time course of solid state fermentation for citric acid production using <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2	81
5.6 Time course of solid state fermentation for citric acid production using <i>A.niger</i> SL-1	83
5.7 Glucose-releasing enzyme activities of <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1 during citric acid production by the solid state process	85

Figure	Page
5.8 Production of oxalic acid by <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1 during citric acid production by the solid state process	86
5.9 Gravimetric rates from the solid state fermentation for citric acid production using <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1	89
5.10 Specific rates from the solid state fermentation for citric acid production using <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1	89
5.11 Time course of solid state fermentation for citric acid-production using <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15	92
5.12 Time course of solid state fermentation for citric acid-production using <i>A.niger</i> SL-2	93
5.13 Glucose-releasing enzyme activities of <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2 during citric acid production by the solid state process	94
5.14 Production of oxalic acid by <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2 during citric acid production by the solid state process	95
5.15 Gravimetric rates from the solid state fermentation for citric acid production using <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2	96
5.16 Specific rates from the solid state fermentation for citric acid production using <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2	97
6.1 α -Amylase activities of <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1 during citric acid production by the solid state process	103
6.2 α -Amylase activities of <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2 during citric acid production by the solid state process	103
6.3 Glucoamylase activities of <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1 during citric acid production by the solid state process	104

Figure		Page
6.4	Glucoamylase activities of <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2 during citric acid production by the solid state process	105
6.5	Time course of glucose uptake by exhausted mycelia of <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1	109
6.6	Time course of glucose uptake rate by exhausted mycelia of <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1	110
6.7	Time course of glucose uptake by exhausted mycelia of <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2	112
6.8	Time course of glucose uptake rate by exhausted mycelia of <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2	112
6.9	Total membrane ATPase activities of <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1 during citric acid production by the solid state process	115
6.10	Total membrane ATPase activities of <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2 during citric acid production by the solid state process	116
6.11	Hexokinase activities of <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1 during citric acid production by the solid state process	118
6.12	Hexokinase activities of <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2 during citric acid production by the solid state process	118
7.1	Aconitase activities of <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1 during citric acid production by the solid state process	123
7.2	Aconitase activities of <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2 during citric acid production by the solid state process	124
7.3	NAD-specific isocitrate dehydrogenase activities of <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1 during citric acid-production by the solid state process	126
7.4	NAD-specific isocitrate dehydrogenase activities of <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2 during citric acid-production by the solid state process	126

Figure		page
7.5	NADP-specific isocitrate dehydrogenase activities of <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1 during citric acid-production by the solid state process	128
7.6	NADP-specific isocitrate dehydrogenase activities of <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2 during citric acid-production by the solid state process	128
7.7	2-Oxoglutarate dehydrogenase activities of <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1 during citric acid production	130
7.8	2-Oxoglutarate dehydrogenase activities of <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2 during citric acid production	130
7.9	Pyruvate carboxylase activities of <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1 during citric acid production by the solid state process	136
7.10	Pyruvate carboxylase activities of <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2 during citric acid production by the solid state process	136
7.11	Isocitrate lyase activities of <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1 during citric acid production by the solid state process	138
7.12	Isocitrate lyase activities of <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2 during citric acid production by the solid state process	138
7.13	ATP:citrate lyase activities of <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1 during citric acid production by the solid state process	140
7.14	ATP:citrate lyase activities of <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2 during citric acid production by the solid state process	140
7.15	Oxaloacetate hydrolase activities of <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1 during citric acid production by the solid state process	142

Figure	Page
7.16 Oxaloacetate hydrolase activities of <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2 during citric acid production by the solid state process	142
7.17 A metabolic scheme for the conversion of starch to citric acid by <i>A.niger</i> (modified from Kubicek (1988) and Kubicek <i>et al.</i> (1988))	146
8.1 Intracellular citrate concentrations of <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1 during citric acid production by the solid state process	151
8.2 Intracellular citrate concentrations of <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2 during citric acid production by the solid state process	151
8.3 Intracellular 2-oxoglutarate concentrations of <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1 during citric acid production by the solid state process	153
8.4 Intracellular 2-oxoglutarate concentrations of <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2 during citric acid production by the solid state process	153
8.5 Intracellular oxaloacetate concentrations of <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1 during citric acid production by the solid state process	155
8.6 Intracellular oxaloacetate concentrations of <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2 during citric acid production by the solid state process	155
8.7 Intracellular oxalate concentrations of <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1 during citric acid production by the solid state process	157
8.8 Intracellular oxalate concentrations of <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2 during citric acid production by the solid state process	157

Figure	Page
8.9 A metabolic scheme for oxalate formation involving the TCA cycle (modified from Dawson (1986))	159
8.10 A metabolic scheme for cytosolic biosynthesis of oxalate (modified from Kubicek <i>et al.</i> (1988))	161
8.11 Intracellular ATP concentrations of <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1 during citric acid production in the solid state process	164
8.12 Intracellular ATP concentrations of <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2 during citric acid production in the solid state process	164
8.13 Intracellular ADP concentrations of <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1 during citric acid production in the solid state process	166
8.14 Intracellular ADP concentrations of <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2 during citric acid production in the solid state process	166
8.15 Intracellular AMP concentrations of <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1 during citric acid production in the solid state process	168
8.16 Intracellular AMP concentrations of <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2 during citric acid production in the solid state process	168
8.17 Molar ratios of ATP to AMP of <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1 during citric acid production in the solid state process	170
8.18 Molar ratios of ATP to AMP of <i>A.niger</i> MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2 during citric acid production in the solid state process	171

List of Tables

Table	Page
3.1 Composition of SL medium for submerged cultivation of <i>A.niger</i> (Kirimura <i>et al.</i> , 1992)	37
3.2 Cultural conditions for growth and spore production of <i>A.niger</i> strains used in the study	39
3.3 Nutritional composition of sweet potato (kumara, <i>Ipomoea batatus</i>)	41
4.1 Yields of citric acid and biomass and morphology of <i>A.niger</i> strains in the preliminary solid state fermentation at 30°C for 5 days	70
5.1 Some kinetic parameters from solid state fermentation using <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 in the petri-dish (present work) and in the flask (Lu, 1995) systems	82
5.2 Summary of maximum values of kinetic parameters during fermentation using <i>A.niger</i> Yang No.2 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-1 in the solid state process	90
5.3 Summary of maximum values of kinetic parameters during fermentation using <i>A.niger</i> Yang MH 15-15 and <i>A.niger</i> SL-2 in the solid state process	98

Abbreviations

Abbreviation of Units

$^{\circ}\text{C}$	degree Celcius
cm	centimetre
g	gram
h	hour
ID	inner diameter
kg	kilogram
kJ	kilojoule
l	litre
μg	microgram
μl	microlitre
μm	micrometre
μmol	micromole
m	metre
mbar	millibar
min	minute
mg	milligram
ml	millilitre
mm	millimetre
mm^3	cubic millimetre
mM	millimolar
M	molar
nm	nanometre
rpm	revolutions per minute
%	percentage
% (v/v)	percentage, volume related to volume
% (w/v)	percentage, weight related to volume

Other Major Abbreviations

ADP	adenosine diphosphate
AMP	adenosine monophosphate
ATP	adenosine triphosphate
C	carbon
CoA	coenzyme A
DB	dry biomass
EDTA	ethylenediamine tetraacetic acid
HPLC	high performance liquid chromatography
NAD	nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide
NADH	reduced nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide
NADP	nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide phosphate
NADPH	reduced nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide phosphate
TCA	tricarboxylic acid