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Factors contribute to efficiency of specimen concentration of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* by centrifugation and magnetic beads

Shoji Yoshimatsu ^{a,*}, Tomoko Kato-Matsumaru ^{b,c}, Akio Aono ^b, Kinuyo Chikamatsu ^b, Hiroyuki Yamada ^b, Satoshi Mitarai ^{b,c}

^a Department of Epidemiology and Clinical Research, Research Institute of Tuberculosis, Japan Anti-Tuberculosis Association, Japan

^b Department of Mycobacterium Reference and Research, Research Institute of Tuberculosis, Japan Anti-Tuberculosis Association, Japan

^c Department of Basic Mycobacteriosis, Nagasaki University Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, Japan

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ABSTRACT

Background: A concentration of specimen is recommended for the effective recovery of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* (MTB), but the bacteriological efficiency is not well evaluated. The present study evaluated the factors contributing to concentration efficiency of centrifugation and bead-based technique (TB-Beads; Microsens, UK) to recover MTB by using simple *in vitro* specimens.

Methods: Four specimens were prepared (6.5×10^3 ; 8.1×10^4 ; 7.9×10^5 ; and 6.4×10^6 cfu/mL) of different concentrations with or without 5×10^4 of THP-1 cells (RIKEN BRC, Japan). Specimens were subjected to centrifugation at 2000, 3000, and 4000g for 15 min, and to TB-Beads. The concentration and recovery rate were calculated to evaluate the efficiency of each method.

Results: The specimens containing a higher number of bacteria and THP-1 cells had a tendency to yield a higher concentration and recovery rate ($p = 0.001$ – 0.083). MTB was recovered more efficiently with THP-1 cells from the 6.5×10^3 cfu/mL specimen by centrifugation ($p \leq 0.001$) than without them; 24.7–54.4% of MTB were recovered with THP-1 cells by centrifugation at 3000g for 15 min, while the recovery using TB-Beads was a maximum of 12.7%.

Conclusions: The efficiency of centrifugation depends on the bacterial density and the co-existence of THP-1 cells. The efficiency of TB-Beads was not as high as centrifugation.

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Introduction

Many diagnostic tools have been developed over the years for the detection of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* (MTB), but the diagnosis of tuberculosis (TB) still largely depends on examination

of sputum smear, especially in low- and middle-income countries, although this method lacks sensitivity [1]. To increase the sensitivity of smear and subsequent culture examination, an optimal concentration of the specimen is essential. The centrifugation technique is generally recommended to collect

* Corresponding author at: Department of Epidemiology and Clinical Research, Research Institute of Tuberculosis (RIT), Japan Anti-Tuberculosis Association (JATA) 3-1-24, Matsuyama, Kiyose, Tokyo 204-8533, Japan. Tel.: +81 42 493 5711; fax: +81 42 492 4600.

E-mail address: yoshoji@jata.or.jp (S. Yoshimatsu).

Abbreviations: MTB, *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*; RCF, relative centrifugal forces

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bacteria from clinical specimens [2,3]. However, this technique requires an expensive device, not stable in settings with irregular power supply, and has biohazard risks. At the same time, the quantitative efficiencies of centrifugation still remain to be elucidated. On the other hand, several bead-based bacterial collection techniques also have been recently developed to recover MTB from clinical specimens without centrifugation. 'TB-Beads', which are ligand-coated paramagnetic beads invented by Microsens Medtech Ltd, can concentrate MTB in any sample type and overcome the above disadvantages of centrifugation [4–8]. In this study, the factors contributing to concentration efficiency of centrifugation and bead-based technique (TB-Beads; Microsens, UK) to recover MTB from simulated specimens were evaluated.

Materials and methods

Preparation of the samples

Simple *in vitro* specimens were prepared that contain four different concentrations of MTB and saline with or without THP-1 cells (RIKEN BRC, Japan), which are human monocyte cells. First, the original MTB H37Rv (ATCC 24,279) suspension ($OD_{530\text{nm}} = 0.18$) was serially diluted with saline to prepare four specimens of different concentrations (confirmed as 6.5×10^3 ; 8.1×10^4 ; 7.9×10^5 ; and 6.4×10^6 cfu/mL by culture, and named as Specimen A, B, C, and D, respectively), imitating smear scanty, 1+, 2+, and 3+, respectively. Specimens A and B were considered as paucibacillary samples, and specimens C and D as polybacillary samples. Then, at final concentration, 1×10^4 cells/mL of THP-1 cells were added to another series of specimens. These two series (bacteria with and without THP-1) of specimens were subjected to centrifugation and magnetic bead method (TB-Beads).

The centrifugation followed the conventional procedures: 5 mL of the specimen was centrifuged at three different relative centrifugal forces (RCF): 2000, 3000, and 4000g, for 15 min at 4 °C. The sediment was re-suspended in 0.5 mL of sterile saline after discarding the supernatant. The experiment was performed in triplicate.

The TB-Beads were used according to the manufacturer's instructions. Briefly, 5 mL of the specimen was mixed with the same volume of TB-Beads solution, and left for 2 min at room temperature to enable capturing of the mycobacteria by the beads. After collecting the bead-bacteria complex by using magnetic force, the supernatant was discarded by decantation. The bead-bacteria complex was re-suspended in 5 mL of TB-Beads wash solution, and the same process was repeated for rinsing. The bacteria were removed from the beads by adding 100 μ L of elution buffer. The experiment was performed in triplicate.

100 μ L of each specimen was inoculated onto Middlebrook 7H10 agar medium supplemented with OADC enrichment (Becton Dickinson, Sparks, MD) by appropriate dilutions, and the number of recovered colonies was enumerated.

The final concentration (cfu/mL) of bacteria in each treated specimen was calculated from the colony counts. The final concentration (density) was divided by the original one to calculate concentration rate. Similarly, the number of collected

colonies after each treatment was divided by that of the original one to determine the recovery rate.

Data analysis

The mean values were compared by unpaired *t* tests. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and multiple comparisons (Tukey test) were used to analyze the different concentration methods at different concentrations of the samples. All the analyses were performed using SPSS version 16 for Windows (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA).

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was not required for this laboratory-based study.

Results

The final concentration of MTB recovered from each specimen is shown in Fig. 1. The bacterial concentration of specimen A without THP-1 cells after centrifugation was significantly lower than that of specimen A with THP-1 cells ($p \leq 0.001$), while the other different concentration specimen did not show any significant difference.

The concentration rate and recovery rate of centrifugation are shown in Figs. 2 and 3. The specimens containing a high number of bacteria (specimens C and D) with THP-1 cells had a tendency to yield a higher concentration rate and recovery rate than the specimens containing a low number of bacteria (specimens A and B) by centrifugation. MTB was recovered more effectively from specimen A with THP-1 cells than without THP-1 cells by using centrifugation at the same RCF. The concentration rate and recovery rate of MTB from specimen C with THP-1 cells by centrifugation at 3000g was lower than that obtained at 2000g ($p = 0.027$), otherwise, the concentration rate and recovery rate among specimens from the same bacterial suspension were not significantly different at the RCF of 2000–4000g.

The concentration rate and recovery rate obtained using TB-Beads decreased with an increase in the bacterial number (Figs. 2 and 3). TB-beads were more efficient in isolating MTB present at a low concentration with THP-1 cells.

24.7–54.4% of MTB with THP-1 cells were recovered by centrifugation at 3000g for 15 min. The efficiency of recovery by centrifugation was lower in the paucibacillary specimens, while the efficiency of recovery using magnetic beads was higher in the paucibacillary specimens with a maximum of 12.7%. The amount of MTB collected using TB-Beads was 51.4% of that collected using centrifugation.

Discussion

These results suggest that the efficiency of centrifugation did not depend greatly on the RCF ranging from 2000–4000g for 15 min with bacterial suspension in saline. Several studies indicated that a higher RCF resulted in better efficiency of recovery rate of MTB, and centrifugation at 3000g for 15–20 min is generally recommended [3,9,10]. However, the

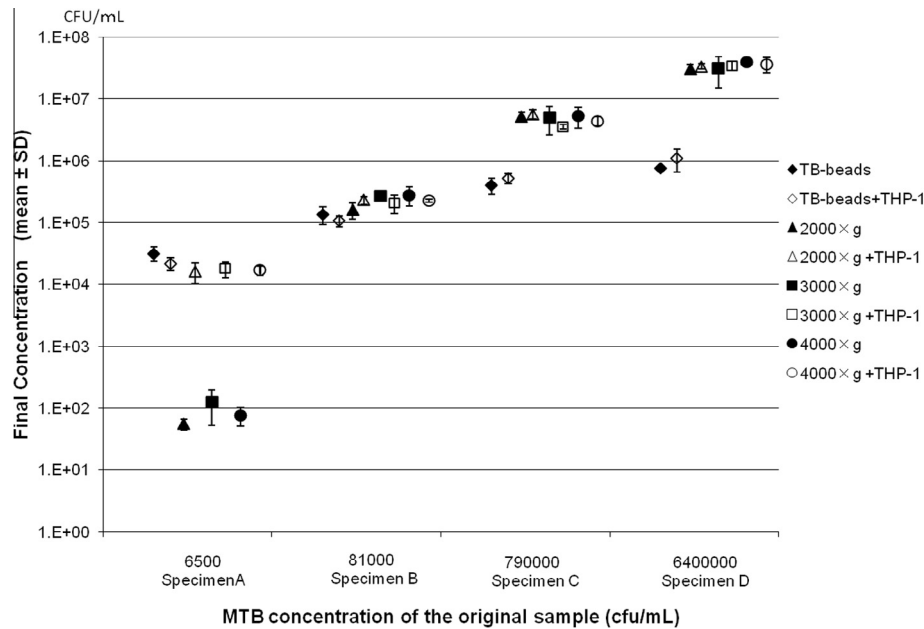


Fig. 1 – Final concentration of each method using different specimens of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* (MTB) with or without THP-1 cells. Legend: the bacterial concentration of specimen A (6.5×10^3 cfu/mL) without THP-1 cells after centrifugation was significantly lower than that of specimen A with THP-1 cells ($p \leq 0.001$), while the other different concentration specimen did not show any significant difference.

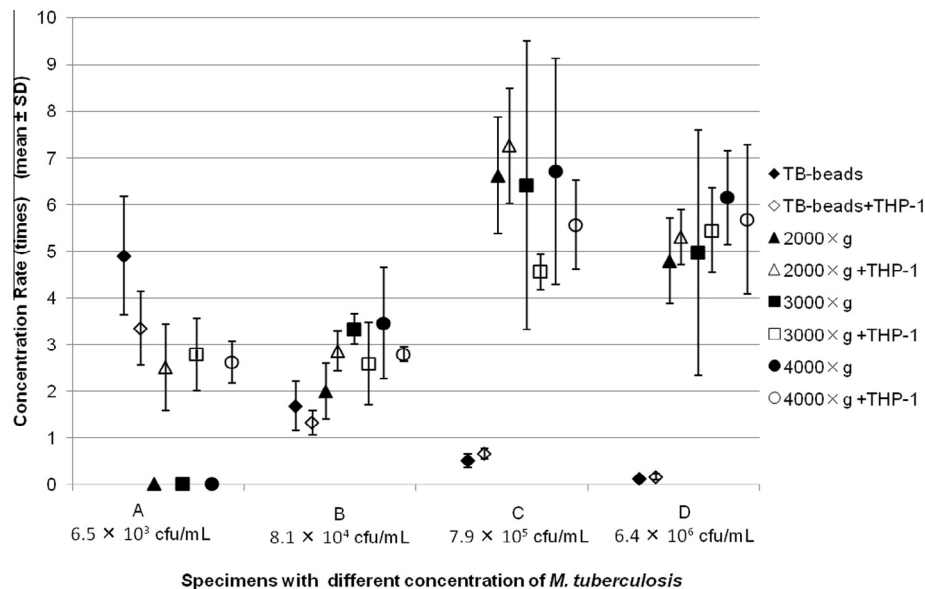


Fig. 2 – Concentration rate of each method using different concentrations of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* (MTB) compared to that of the original specimen with or without THP-1 cells. Legend: the specimens containing high number of bacteria (specimens C and D) with THP-1 cells had a tendency to yield a higher concentration rate than the specimens containing a low number of bacteria (specimens A and B) by centrifugation ($p = 0.001$ – 0.083). The concentration rate of specimen A with THP-1 cells was significantly higher than that of specimens without THP-1 cells ($p \leq 0.001$) by using centrifugation at the same RCF. The concentration rate from specimen C with THP-1 cells after centrifugation at 3000g was lower than that obtained at 2000g ($p = 0.027$); the concentration rate among specimens from the same bacterial suspension were not significantly different at the RCF of 2000–4000g ($p = 0.117$ – 0.902 by ANOVA). The concentration rate obtained using TB-Beads significantly decreased with an increase in the bacterial number.

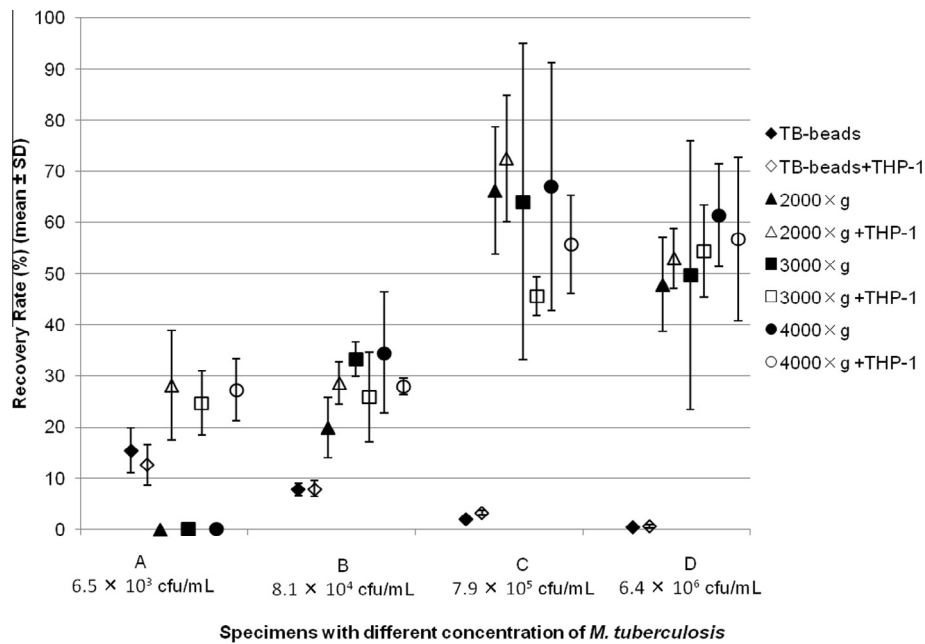


Fig. 3 – Recovery rate of each method by using different concentrations of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* (MTB) compared to the original specimen with or without THP-1 cells. Legend: the specimens containing a high number of bacteria (specimens C and D) with THP-1 cells had a significantly higher recovery rate than the specimens containing a low number of bacteria (specimens A and B) by centrifugation ($p = 0.001$ – 0.043). The recovery rate of specimen A with THP-1 cells was significantly higher than without THP-1 cells ($p \leq 0.002$) by using centrifugation at the same RCF. The recovery rate from specimen C with THP-1 cells after centrifugation at 3000g was lower than that obtained at 2000g ($p = 0.028$); the recovery rate among specimens from the same bacterial suspension were not significantly different at the RCF of 2000–4000g ($p = 0.116$ – 0.988 by ANOVA). The recovery rate obtained using TB-Beads significantly decreased with an increase in the bacterial number.

quantitative efficiencies by different RCF of centrifugation using the same MTB specimens have not been analyzed well. These results showed efficient recovery of MTB using centrifugation at 3000g from an MTB-rich specimen; however, its efficiency decreased in the paucibacillary specimen. The efficiency of centrifugation varied depending more on the bacterial density than the RCF ranging from 2000 to 4000g.

One of the obstacles for efficient sedimentation is low buoyant density of MTB. Den Hertog et al. reported that the buoyant density of MTB ranged from 1.02 to 1.13 g/cm³; bleach treatment reduced the buoyant density from 1.10 to 1.08 g/cm³ and confirmed that centrifugation at a lower speed for a short time is unlikely to result in efficient recovery [9]. MTB tends to aggregate [11], and it is assumed that specimens with high MTB concentrations tend to form dense clusters of MTB, which results in efficient sedimentation. In addition, this study showed that the centrifugation process could work more efficiently with the coexistence of human leukocytes in the paucibacillary specimen. The THP-1 cells were considered to function as carriers and formed a complex with MTB for efficient sedimentation.

The efficiency of TB-Beads on the concentration of MTB observed in this study was lower than that of centrifugation; however, Wilson et al. reported that smear microscopy by using TB-Beads is 89.4% sensitive compared with culture and 91.8% by centrifugation [4]. Mitarai et al. also concluded in his study that the TRICORE, another bead-based bacterial concentration method, was considered equivalent to

centrifugation and enabled efficient collection of paucibacillary specimens in solution [5]. In this study, these results showed a relatively high efficiency on the concentration rate and recovery rate in paucibacillary specimens, though the efficiency of TB-Beads on the concentration of MTB was inferior to that of centrifugation. The decreased concentration rate and recovery rate obtained using TB-Beads could be due to the low capacity of this method to capture bacteria in polybacillary specimens.

In the present study, no clear answer as to why the concentration rate and recovery rate of MTB from specimen C with THP-1 cells by centrifugation at 3000g was lower than that obtained at 2000g. This result is against the previous studies which indicated that a higher RCF resulted in better efficiency of recovery rate of MTB; however, it may be concluded that the efficiency of centrifugation depends more on the bacterial density than the centrifugation speed.

This experiment was conducted by using simple *in vitro* specimens to evaluate the concentration efficiency of centrifugation and the bead-based technique to recover MTB. Clear results could be obtained from this simple experiment, but they may differ from the results using clinical samples and sputum which contains mucus and different kinds of cells and substances. These results, however, follow the previous findings of other studies recommending an RCF of 3000g for 20 min and add the new finding; the bacterial density affects more than the RCF on the concentration of MTB by centrifugation.

Conclusion

The efficiency of centrifugation varied depending on the bacterial density, and the efficiency was low in the paucibacillary specimens. The existence of leukocytes in the specimens plays an important role with regard to the efficient concentrations for centrifugation methods. The importance of the purulent sputum specimen should again be emphasized. A carrier that forms a complex with MTB will help to concentrate the specimen. The development of such a carrier will improve the efficiency of the centrifugation methods.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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