

MINIREVIEW

Microbial Symbiosis in Marine Sponges

Yoo Kyung Lee, Jung-Hyun Lee, and Hong Kum Lee*

Microbiology Laboratory, Korea Ocean Research & Development Institute,
Ansan P.O. Box 29, Seoul 425-600, Korea

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Sponges are host organisms for various symbiotic microorganisms such as archaea, bacteria, cyanobacteria and microalgae. Sponges are also sources of a wide variety of useful natural products like cytotoxins, antifouling agents, antibiotics, and anti-inflammatory and antiviral compounds. Symbiotic microorganisms in sponges can be sources of various natural products, because metabolites previously ascribed to sponges have recently been demonstrated to be biosynthesized by symbionts. If a symbiotic microorganism from which some natural products are derived can be cultured, the microorganism could be used in a mass production of the bioactive compounds. We summarize recent research on isolation and cultivation of sponge-symbiotic microorganisms and the symbiotic relationship.

Key words: bioactive compound, natural products, symbiotic microorganism, sponges, symbiosis

Why sponge-symbiotic microorganisms?

Sponges (Phylum Porifera) are very fertile host animals for diverse symbiotic microorganisms. Sponges are simple multicellular invertebrates attached to solid substrates in benthic habitats. All sponges are filter feeders; numerous tiny pores on the surface allow water to enter and circulate through a series of canals where microorganisms and organic particles are filtered out and eaten. Since sponges are efficient filter feeders, any microorganisms that can resist the sponge digestive process and immune response can successfully inhabit sponges (126).

Sponges have been excellent sources for natural products that are bioactive compounds (Table 1). Their bioactivity includes enzyme inhibitors, cell division-inhibitors, antiviral, antifungal, antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, anti-tumor, cytotoxic or cardiovascular properties (79). Reports of the isolation of natural products from marine sponges have been published from the early 1950's (4), and research activities on this topic have continued to increase (79). Nowadays, several papers on new natural products from sponges are published monthly; and Faulkner (27) has published surveys on many more natural products recently isolated from sponges.

Many of these natural products have interesting biomedical potential, pharmaceutical relevance and diverse applications (44, 46). For example, arabinose-nucleosides

with antiviral and anticancer activity isolated from sponge *Cryptotethya crypta*, are used clinically; manoalide obtained from sponge *Luffariella variabilis* is a candidate for new drugs with anti-inflammatory activity (68). Also, metabolites previously ascribed to sponges have been recently demonstrated to be biosynthesized by symbionts. If some compounds are derived from a symbiotic microorganism, culturing the microorganism could provide an improved source of the bioactive compound (97). Thus, we have focused on sponge-symbiotic microorganisms as a source of various natural products in this review.

What microorganisms live in sponges?

Various microorganisms have been found in sponges (Table 2). They include a diverse range of archaea, heterotrophic bacteria, cyanobacteria, green algae, red algae, cryptophytes, dinoflagellates and diatoms (22, 70, 88, 96). The symbiotic microbial community is highly novel and diverse, and species composition shows temporal and geographic variation (121). However, only very little information exists about the taxonomic affiliation of sponge-symbiotic microorganisms (32).

One host sponge can possess diverse symbionts. For example, sponge *Theonella swinhoei* supports unicellular heterotrophic bacteria, unicellular cyanobacteria and filamentous heterotrophic bacteria at the same time (7). A sponge belonging to *Aplysina* includes heterogeneous bacteria *Bacillus* sp., *Micrococcus* sp., *Arthrobacter* sp., *Vibrio* sp., *Pseudoalteromonas* sp., and so on (46). Sponge *Rho-*

* To whom correspondence should be addressed.
(Tel) 82-31-400-6241; (Fax) 82-31-406-2495
(E-mail) hklee@kordi.re.kr

Table 1. Sponges and their natural products showing various bioactivity

Sponge	Bioactive metabolites	Biological activity	Reference
<i>Acanthella</i> sp.	Kalihinol-A	Antibiotic	16
<i>Agelas dispar</i>	Aminozooanemonin	Antibacterial	11
<i>Agelas dispar</i>	Pyridinebetaine A	Antibacterial	11
<i>Agelas mauritiana</i>	Agelasimine	Cytotoxic	25
<i>Agelas mauritiana</i>	Sceptrin	Antimicrobial	5
<i>Agelas nakamurai</i>	Ageliferine	Antibacterial	23
<i>Agelas nakamurai</i>	Debromosceptrin	Antibacterial	23
<i>Agelas nakamurai</i>	Nakamuric acid	Antibacterial	23
<i>Agelas novaecaledoniae</i>	Ageliferine	Somatostatin/VIP inhibitor	119
<i>Agelas novaecaledoniae</i>	Sceptrin	Somatostatin/VIP inhibitor	119
<i>Agelas novaecaledoniae</i>	Xestospongine B	Somatostatin/VIP inhibitor	119
<i>Agelas</i> sp.	Agelasine	Antileukemic	53
<i>Agelas</i> sp.	Agelasine F	Antituberculosis	72
<i>Agelas</i> sp.	Agelasine I	Antimicrobial	33
<i>Amphimedon</i> sp.	Pyridodemin	Cytotoxic	112
<i>Aplysina aerophoba</i>	Aeropylsinin I	Cytotoxic	69
<i>Batzella</i> sp.	Discorhabdin	Cytotoxic, enzyme inhibitor	42
<i>Batzella</i> sp.	Secobatzelline	Phosphatase inhibitor	41
<i>Crella</i> sp.	Crellastatins	Cytotoxic	38
<i>Corticium</i> sp.	Meridine	Antifungal	75
<i>Cymbastela</i> sp.	Agelastatins C, D	Insecticidal	50
<i>Discodermia calyx</i>	Calyculin A	Antitumor	59
<i>Discodermia kiiensis</i>	Discodermin A	Antimicrobial	73
<i>Discodermia</i> sp.	Discobahamins	Antifungal	43
<i>Disidea avara</i>	Avarol	Cytotoxic	77
<i>Druinella purpurea</i>	Psammaplysin C	Cytotoxic	18
<i>Dysidea</i> sp.	Furodysin	Antiparasitic	78
<i>Echinoclathria</i> sp.	Echinoclathrines	Immunosuppressive	62
<i>Erylus lendenfeldi</i>	Eryloside A	Antitumor, antifungal	13
<i>Fascaplysinopsis reticulata</i>	β -Carbolum salt	Antiparasitic	55
<i>Halichondria okadai</i>	Halichondrin B	Antitumor	48
<i>Haliclona osiris</i>	Osirisynes	Na ⁺ /K ⁺ -ATPase inhibitor	104
<i>Haliclona</i> sp.	Manzamine A	Antitumor	94
<i>Haliclona tulearensis</i>	Halitulins	Cytotoxic	58
<i>Hamacantha</i> sp.	Hamacanthin	Antifungal	40
<i>Hyrtilos erecta</i>	Heteronemin	Antiparasitic	66
<i>Ianthella basta</i>	Bastadin	Antimicrobial	87
<i>Ianthella</i> sp.	34-sulfatobastadin 13	Endothelin A receptor inhibitor	39
<i>Ircinia</i> sp.	Haterumalides	Cytotoxic	109
<i>Jaspis johnstoni</i>	Jasplakinolide	Cytotoxic	8
<i>Jaspis johnstoni</i>	Jasplakinolide	Insecticidal	19
<i>Jaspis johnstoni</i>	Toyocamycin	Cytotoxic	130
<i>Jaspis johnstoni</i>	Tubercidin	Cytotoxic	130
<i>Jaspis</i> sp.	Bengamides	Antitumor	111
<i>Jaspis</i> sp.	Bengazoles	Antiparasitic	92
<i>Jaspis</i> sp.	Cyclodepsipeptide	Antifungal	101
<i>Jaspis</i> sp.	Jaspisamides	Cytotoxic	64
<i>Jaspis</i> sp.	Psammaplin	Antibacterial	61
<i>Jaspis splendans</i>	Jaspamide	Antitumor	131
<i>Jaspis wondoensis</i>	Wondosterols	Antimicrobial	93
<i>Latrunculia magnifica</i>	Latrunculin A	Neurotoxin	57
<i>Leucetta cf. chagosensis</i>	Isonaamidine D	Antifungal	34
<i>Neosiphonia superstes</i>	Sphinxolides	Cytotoxic	12
<i>Notodoris citrina</i> - <i>Leucetta chagosensis</i>	Naamidines & naamines	Antiparasitic	13

Table 1. Continued

Sponge	Bioactive metabolites	Biological activity	Reference
<i>Pachastrissa</i> sp.	Bengamides	Antifungal	29
<i>Pachastrissa</i> sp.	Bengazoles	Antifungal	29
<i>Pandaros acanthifolium</i>	Acanthifolicin	Antitumor	99
<i>Petrosia</i> sp.	Petrocortynes	Cytotoxic, enzyme inhibitor	105
<i>Petrosia</i> sp.	Petrotetrandiols	Cytotoxic	60
<i>Petrosia</i> sp.	Petrosiacetylenes	Na ⁺ /K ⁺ -ATPase inhibitor	102
<i>Plakinastrella</i> sp.	Elenic acid	Topoisomerase II inhibitor	56
<i>Poecillastra wondoensis</i>	Wondosterols	Antimicrobial	93
<i>Psammaphysilla crassa</i>	Purealin	Antiparasitic	81
<i>Psammaphysilla purpurea</i>	Aeroplysinin I	Antiparasitic	71
<i>Psammaphysilla purpurea</i>	Bastadin	Antimicrobial	14
<i>Psammaphysilla purpurea</i>	Purealidin A	Cytotoxic	52
<i>Reidisporgia coerulea</i>	Reidisporgiolide	Cytotoxic	12
<i>Reniera cratera</i>	Dorimidazole A	Antiparasitic	17
<i>Rhaphisia lacazei</i>	Topsentins	Antiproliferative	15
<i>Spongia</i> sp.	Spongianolide	Cytotoxic	45
<i>Spongionella gracilis</i>	Gracilin B	Cytotoxic	74
<i>Stronglyophora hartmani</i>	Puupehenone	Cytotoxic	67
<i>Stylinos</i> n. sp.	Mycalamides	Cytotoxic	106
<i>Suberea creba</i>	Aeroplysinin I	Antibacterial	21
<i>Suberea creba</i>	Dibromoverongiaquinol	Antibacterial	21
<i>Tedania digitata</i>	1-methylisoguanosine	Cardiovascular effector	91
<i>Tedania ignis</i>	Tedanolide	Cytotoxic	100
<i>Tethya crypta</i>	Spongouridine, Spongothymidine	Antiviral, antitumor	4
<i>Theonella</i> sp.	Koshikamide	Cytotoxic	35
<i>Theonella swinhoei</i>	Swinholide	Antifungal	65
<i>Theonella swinhoei</i>	Theopederins	Antifungal, cytotoxic	113
<i>Verongia aerophoba</i>	Aeroplysinin I	Antibacterial	26
<i>Verongia aerophoba</i>	Dienone	Cytotoxic	110
<i>Verongia spengelii</i>	Aplysiaopsin	Cytotoxic	49
<i>Xestospongia</i> sp.	Xestospongine B	Somatostatin/VIP inhibitor	119
<i>Xestospongia</i> sp.	Ageliferine	Somatostatin/VIP inhibitor	119
<i>Xestospongia</i> sp.	Sceptrin	Somatostatin/VIP inhibitor	119
<i>Xestospongia</i> sp.	Xestoaminol A	Antiparasitic	55
<i>Zyzya fuliginosa</i>	Veitamine	Cytotoxic	120

paloeides odorabile has β -Proteobacteria, γ -Proteobacteria, Cytophaga, Actinobacteria and green sulfur bacteria (122).

Does species-specificity exist in the sponge-microorganism relationship? Some symbionts seem to inhabit specific sponges, but others don't. Wilkinson (129) found that a symbiotic microorganism was specific to a single sponge species. A species of δ -proteobacteria and the sponge *Theonella swinhoei* also show a specific association (97). Some sponges have a dominant symbiotic microorganism. A species of α -proteobacteria dominates in sponge *Rhopaloeides odorabile* over various habitats but is not detected from seawater, which strongly suggests that the symbiont is species specific (121). The marine sponge *Halichondria panicea* harbors a dominant bacterial species belonging to the genus *Rhodobacter* (1). On the other hand, one symbiont occurs commonly in various

sponges from different regions, so seems to possess a wide host range (129). For example, cyanobacteria *Aphanocapsa* sp., *Phormidium* sp., or *Oscillatoria spongeliae* are found in numerous sponges (125, 128).

Where do microorganisms live in sponges?

The symbionts locate both intra- and extra cellularly (Fig. 1), and each symbiotic microorganism seems to have a specific habitat in the host sponge. Extracellular symbionts are present on the outer layers of sponges as exosymbionts (Fig. 1A; 44, 108), or in the mesohyl as endosymbionts (Fig. 1B; 1, 30, 47, 97). Intracellular or intranuclear symbionts permanently reside in host cells or nuclei (Fig. 1C, 1D; 30, 32, 117). In the case of the sponge *Theonella swinhoei*, all populations of symbiotic bacteria are located extracellularly (7). Bacteria, e.g., *Pseudomonas* sp. and *Aeromonas* sp. inhabit as free-living cells in the mesohyl

Table 2. Sponges and their symbiotic microorganisms producing natural products

Sponge	Symbiotic microorganism ^a	Natural product ^b	Reference
<i>Aciculites orientalis</i>	Filamentous bacteria	Theonegramide	7
Antarctic sponge	B, <i>Pseudomonas aeruginosa</i>	NC	54
<i>Aplysina</i> sp.	B, <i>Arthrobacter</i> sp.	NC	46
<i>Aplysina</i> sp.	B, <i>Bacillus</i> sp.	NC	46
<i>Aplysina</i> sp.	B, <i>Micrococcus</i> sp.	NC	46
<i>Aplysina</i> sp.	B, <i>Pseudoalteromonas</i> sp.	NC	46
<i>Aplysina</i> sp.	B, <i>Vibrio</i> sp.	NC	46
<i>Cenarchaeum symbiosum</i>	Archeon	NC	88
<i>Dysidea herbacea</i>	Cyanobacterium	Chlorinated metabolites	115
<i>Dysidea herbacea</i>	C, <i>Oscillatoria spongeliae</i>	Polybrominated biphenyl ethers	30
<i>Dysidea</i> sp.	B, <i>Vibrio</i> sp.	Brominated biphenyl ethers	24
<i>Halichondria okadae</i>	B, <i>Alteromonas</i> sp.	Alteramide A	103
<i>Halichondria okadae</i>	D, <i>Prorocentrum lima</i>	Okadaic acid	63
<i>Halichondria panicea</i>	B, <i>Antarcticum vesiculatum</i>	Neuroactive compounds	86
<i>Halichondria panicea</i>	B, <i>Pseudomonas insolita</i>	NC	80
<i>Halichondria panicea</i>	B, <i>Rhodobacter</i> sp.	NC	1
<i>Halichondria panicea</i>	B, <i>Psychroserpens burtonensis</i>	Neuroactive compounds	86
<i>Homophymia</i> sp.	B, <i>Pseudomonas</i> sp.	Antimicrobial compounds	10
<i>Hyatella</i> sp.	B, <i>Vibrio</i> sp.	NC	82
<i>Rhopaloeides odorabile</i>	B, β - <i>Proteobacteria</i>	NC	122
<i>Rhopaloeides odorabile</i>	B, γ - <i>Proteobacteria</i>	NC	122
<i>Rhopaloeides odorabile</i>	A, <i>Actinobacteria</i> sp.	NC	122
<i>Rhopaloeides odorabile</i>	B, <i>Cytophaga</i> sp.	NC	122
<i>Rhopaloeides odorabile</i>	Green sulfur bacteria	NC	122
<i>Sigmatocia symbiotica</i>	R, <i>Ceratodictyon spongiosum</i>	NC	89
<i>Suberea creba</i>	B, <i>Pseudomonas</i> sp.	NC	22
<i>Suberea creba</i>	B, <i>Pseudomonas</i> sp.	Quinolones	22
<i>Tedania ignis</i>	B, <i>Micrococcus</i> sp.	Diketopiperazines	107
<i>Theonella swinhoei</i>	B, δ - <i>Proteobacteria</i>	NC	97
<i>Theonella swinhoei</i>	C, <i>Aphanocapsa feldmanni</i>	NC	7
<i>Theonella swinhoei</i>	Filamentous bacteria	Theopalauamide	97
<i>Theonella swinhoei</i>	Unicellular bacteria	Swinholide A	6
Unidentified sponge	A, <i>Streptomyces</i> sp.	Urauchimycins A and B	51
<i>Verongia</i> sp.	B, <i>Aeromonas</i> sp.	NC	117
<i>Verongia</i> sp.	B, <i>Pseudomonas</i> sp.	NC	117
<i>Xestospongia</i> sp.	B, <i>Micrococcus luteus</i>	Antimicrobial compounds	9

^aA, actinomycete; B, Bacteria; C, Cyanobacteria; D, Dinoflagellate; R, Red algae.

^bNC: It was not checked.

and/or as intracellular symbionts in sponge *Verongia* (117, 124).

The amount of symbiotic microorganisms residing in sponges varies between host species. While bacteria constitute up to 60% of the biomass of some sponges (123, 124, 125), others contain only a small number of bacteria inside their tissue (118). In the case of *Aplysina* sponges, they harbor large amounts of bacteria that constitute about 40% of the biomass and exceed the bacterial concentrations of the seawater by two orders of magnitude (32, 46).

Why do microorganisms live in sponges?

Then why do symbiotic microorganisms inhabit sponges? We can expect putative benefits to symbiotic microorgan-

isms or their hosts. The surfaces or internal spaces of marine sponges are more nutrient-rich than seawater and sediments; therefore sponges offer nourishment and a safe habitat to their symbionts (10). On the other hand, symbiotic microorganisms help in the nutritional process, either by intracellular digestion or by translocation of metabolites including nitrogen fixation, nitrification and photosynthesis (127, 128). Microorganisms also stabilize the sponge skeleton (129) and participate in the host's chemical defense system against predators and biofouling (2, 85, 90, 114). Bacteria collected from sponges have allowed isolation of antimicrobial compounds, which suggests that these bacteria may play a role in the defence mechanism of these invertebrates (10).

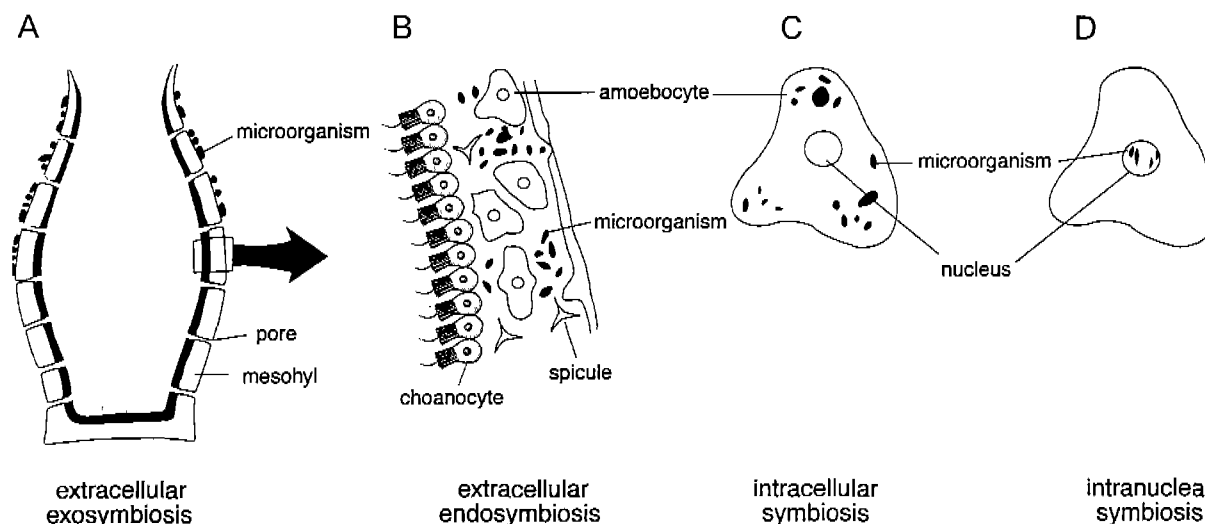


Fig. 1. Schematic diagram of symbiotic relationships between sponges and microorganisms. A, extracellular exosymbiosis; B, extracellular endosymbiosis; C, intracellular symbiosis; and D, intranuclear symbiosis.

How do microorganisms live in sponges?

How can a specific microorganism inhabit a host sponge? The process of sponge-microorganism symbiosis has not been revealed yet. Webster and Hill (121) suggested several possibilities: host selectively absorbs the specific symbiont; the specific symbiont grows more rapidly than any other symbiotic microorganism; or the host acquires the specific symbiont via vertical transmission from parent sponge to larvae. Sponges seem to acquire the symbiotic microorganisms via the feeding route (22). According to TEM observations, symbiotic microorganisms rarely seem to be digested by the sponge (125). Those microorganisms that resist the digestive process can live in sponge tissues. It is yet unclear how sponges distinguish between symbionts and food. Some experimental data suggest the involvement of lectins in this recognition system (80). A sponge can acquire the symbionts from its parent. Some cyanobacteria are transmitted vertically via the eggs of host sponges (22).

What is the symbiotic process? The molecular basis of the symbiotic relationship between sponge and microorganism is not sufficiently understood. We can analogize it from other symbiotic relationships between marine organisms and symbiotic microorganisms. In the case of squid-luminescent bacterium symbiosis, the bacterium plays an active role in the inoculation process (76). Once the appropriate bacteria arrive at the specific point of colonization, the host must present conditions that permit the symbiotic microorganism to recognize this site and be retained there. The selective process is likely to be mediated by specific receptor-ligand interactions; there is evidence that surface glycans function to recognize the specific symbiotic microorganism and facilitate their maintenance (76). Once the appropriate bacteria have established themselves in their target tissues, both the host and the sym-

biotic microorganism change from an initiation mode to a persistence mode. The bacteria induce significant remodeling of the tissues including apoptosis induced by the lipopolysaccharide (31). The developmental events are triggered by the symbiont within hours of onset of the symbiosis and conspicuous morphological changes ensue over the first few days (76). Further studies on morphological changes during symbiosis and molecular mechanisms of cell recognition will contribute to understanding the symbiotic process of sponges and microorganisms.

Natural products from sponge-symbiotic microorganisms

Marine microorganisms are good candidates for new pharmaceuticals and bioactive natural products (63). There is accumulating evidence that demonstrates the involvement of symbiotic microorganisms in the natural products originally attributed to the sponge host (64, 103, 114). For example, symbiotic bacterium *Micrococcus* sp. produces diketopiperazines previously ascribed to the host sponge *Tedania ignis* (107). Another symbiotic bacterium *Vibrio* sp. produces brominated biphenyl ethers formerly attributed to the host sponge *Dysidea* sp. (24). A dinoflagellate *Prorocentrum lima* produces okadaic acid, first isolated from the host sponge *Halichondria okadai* (63). Symbiotic bacterium *Vibrio* sp. produces an anti-*Bacillus* peptide andrimid that was found in the sponge *Hyatella* sp. extract (82).

Reports on new natural products produced by symbiotic microorganisms have recently increased. Unusual polychlorinated compounds are located in a symbiotic cyanobacterium and antibiotic polybrominated biphenyl ethers are produced by the endosymbiotic cyanobacterium *Oscillatoria spongeliae*, which is hosted by the host sponge *Dysidea herbacea* (30, 115). Cytotoxic macrolide swinholid A is found in the mixed population of unicellular het-

erotrophic bacteria, and an antifungal cyclic peptide the-onegramide in the filamentous heterotrophic bacteria (6, 7). Neuroactive compounds are detected in *Antarcticum vesiculatum* and *Psychroserpens burtonensis* isolated from the sponge *Halichondria panicea* (86). Quinolones are found in a pseudomonad isolated from the sponge *Suberea creba* (21). Antimicrobial activities are detected in *Micrococcus luteus* isolated from the sponge *Xestospongia* sp. (9). Antimicrobial compounds such as quinolones and a phosphatidyl glyceride are isolated from a *Pseudomonas* sp. collected at the surface of the sponge *Homophymia* sp. (10).

More bioactive natural products will be discovered from sponge-symbiotic microorganisms. Particularly, the involvement of microorganisms is suspected in these cases: when one sponge species contains different classes of metabolites; when taxonomically different sponges contain the same metabolite; when free-living microorganisms produce identical or similar metabolites; or when the metabolite concentrations are exceedingly low (46, 114). Taxonomic and biochemical information on these symbiotic microorganisms will help in finding new natural products. Furthermore, knowing the biosynthetic pathway of a natural product can help to develop a chemical or biotechnological synthetic method (84).

Laboratory culture and identification of symbiotic microorganisms

The culture of symbiotic microorganisms has important implications for the screening and production of symbiont-derived bioactive natural products (121). Isolation of interesting symbiotic microorganisms is the first step of a laboratory culture. Symbiotic microorganisms can be separated from sponge cells by differential centrifugation (36), by density gradient centrifugation (37), by Ficoll/Percoll density gradient centrifugation (30), or by Ficoll gradient centrifugation (116, 121). Flowers *et al.* (30) showed that the Percoll procedure gives better separation than Ficoll procedure.

Some heterotrophic bacteria are isolated and cultured for metabolite extraction. A *Micrococcus* species from the sponge *Tedania ignis*, an unidentified bacterium from the sponge *Dysidea* sp., and a pseudomonad from the sponge *Suberea creba* were isolated and cultured (21, 24, 107). Autotrophic symbionts such as photosynthetic algae also have been isolated from sponge tissue. Price *et al.* (89) cultivated the red macroalga *Ceratodictyon spongiosum* isolated from the sponge *Sigmatocia symbiotica*, and Hinde *et al.* (47) cultivate the cyanobacterium *Oscillatoria spongeliae* isolated from the sponge *Dysidea herba- cea*.

For more effective cultivation, several culture media have been developed. *Vibrio* sp. from the sponge *Hyatella* sp. was cultured in marine agar (82), and various symbiotic bacteria from the sponge *Halichondria panicea* were cultured separately in marine medium 2216 (86). The

filamentous symbiotic bacteria from the sponge *Theonella swinhoei* were cultured on agar plates containing aqueous sponge extract (97). After over 100 attempts to culture the symbionts, Schmidt *et al.* (97) could cultivate some filamentous bacteria using J agar with sodium thio-sulfate, aqueous sponge extract, and sodium silicate. To improve recoverability of microorganisms from natural marine sponges, Olson *et al.* (83) added catalase or sodium pyruvate to solid growth and isolation media. By adding sponge extracts to marine agar 2216, Webster *et al.* (122) isolated bacterial isolates not previously cultured.

In spite of these successful cultures, most symbiotic microorganisms are difficult to isolate and cultivate (98). Recent data show that only less than 0.1% of the total bacterial community was amenable to culture (121). Because most symbiotic microorganisms cannot be cultured using current and traditional techniques, culture-based techniques are inadequate for studying microbial diversity and identifying unculturable symbiotic microorganisms. To overcome this problem, symbiotic microorganisms are identified directly using culture-independent methods such as molecular taxonomy. Phylogenetic analysis of 16S rRNA genes gives data on microbial diversity and the phylogenetic position of each symbiotic microorganism (121, 122). Innovative culture techniques should be explored to obtain additional sponge-symbiotic microorganisms in cultures. These potentially novel and diverse isolates would be a useful resource for screening for bioactive natural products.

Perspectives

There are several potential drawbacks for future studies on sponge-symbiotic microorganisms and related natural products. First, identification and isolation of symbiotic microorganisms producing bioactive natural products are a crucial step for the future culture and production of these metabolites (116). Second, the origin of natural products can be assigned to symbiotic microorganisms only when synthesis has been demonstrated in cultures isolated from the host species (28). Third, the cultures for metabolites production are uncertain about whether or not the symbiotic microorganism will continue to produce the target compound in the absence of the sponge host (114). These drawbacks can be overcome by the molecular approach. Molecular cloning and analysis of the genes responsible for synthesizing the target compound also offer useful information for genetic engineering of the biosynthesis. In addition, biochemical research on bioactive natural products can contribute to understanding the biosynthesis of the natural products. *In situ* hybridization with specific probes allows the direct, cultivation-independent analysis of most natural symbiotic microbial communities. FISH (fluorescence *in situ* hybridization) based on the 16S rRNA can visualize the localization and

abundance of a specific symbiont and the composition of the symbiotic microorganisms (32, 121, 122). These studies could yield new insights in the true abundance of well-known or new symbiotic microorganisms and increase our knowledge on the species diversity and specificity of symbiotic microorganisms. But the sequence variation among 16S rRNA genes is so small that it is inadequate to distinguish exact species at the level of species or strain. To resolve this low level of sequence variation, more variable sequences such as the ITS (internal transcribed spacer) region can be used, because it contains genetic variation sufficient for differentiating species of microorganisms (3). To identify diversity among symbiotic microorganisms, RFLP (restriction fragment length polymorphism) using arbitrary primers or PCR fingerprinting using repetitive sequences can be applied (20).

Detection of the origin of natural product synthesizing organisms is also an important step. Some specific natural products can be detected directly using fluorescence, therefore the localization of the metabolites can be observed *in situ* (95, 114). Salomon *et al.* (95) detected dercitamide in cells using a combination of visualization methods, including laser-scanning confocal, epifluorescence, and transmission electron microscopy, as well as cell-separation techniques, and chemical analysis. Development of *in situ* detection methods can help identification of the cell type producing bioactive natural products.

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