Algal Culture Collections and the Environment

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Edited by Fumie Kasai, Kunimitsu Kaya & Makoto M. Watanabe



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Preface

Algae are closely related to environmental problems in several respects. Eutrophication may cause blooms of algae such as cyanobacteria and dinoflagellates. Some macroalgae are affected negatively by environmental deterioration, such as eutrophication and habitat destruction, and are threatened with extinction. Algae sometimes produce toxins that have exerted harmful effects on humans and other organisms. In contrast, some algae synthesize beneficial compounds, such as carotenoids and PUFA, which are accumulated in aquatic organisms through food webs, and humans also share in the bounty of algae. Environmental changes may result in metabolic changes in algae, which, in turn, would affect organisms at higher trophic levels through the food web. In their roles as primary producers, algal species have been used to evaluate water quality and assess chemical substances.

When experiments are conducted to resolve environmental problems, researchers often use algal strains maintained in culture collections. In this sense, culture collections play an important role in environmental studies. Another role of culture collections is *ex situ* conservation of biodiversity and threatened species. Culture collections could contribute to various other fields of research as well, such as life sciences and aquaculture.

Today, the world's major culture collections are roughly estimated to maintain no more than 5000 species (from the reported numbers of species in SAG, CCMP, CSIRO, and NIES), representing at most 14% of the described and only a small percentage of the estimated numbers of algal species (36,000–43,000 described vs. 160,000–1,200,000 estimated species; Andersen, 1992). Researchers assume that a large number of species have yet to be discovered in the tropical Asia-Oceania region. Therefore, culture collections in this region would be important for countries in the vicinity and other countries as well.

This book was compiled based on the papers presented at the symposium "Algal Culture Collections and the Environment" held at the Third Asia Pacific Phycological Forum, Tsukuba, Japan (Algae 2002). This symposium represents the first small step toward the Asia Oceania Algal Culture Collection Network, which was launched during a roundtable discussion at the Tenth International Congress for Culture Collections (ICCC-10) in October 2004. The Asia Oceania Algal Culture Collection Network has been

realized gradually over the past three years, and now seems to be a suitable time to publish this book.

In "Roles of Culture Collections," various aspects of algal culture collections are reported for representative collections in Asia and the Pacific region. In addition, cryopreservation, the most effective long-term preservation method of microalgae, and related problems of this method are discussed. This section explains efforts to maintain not only culture strains but also culture collections themselves. In "Environmental Aspects," environmental topics are reported and reviewed: the water bloom-forming cyanobacterium *Microcystis* and its toxins; the bioactive compounds produced by freshwater cyanobacteria and their chemical structures; algal responses to environmental factors; and the threatened state of algae in Japan, with suggestions for a new role of algal culture collections. We hope that this book is helpful to those working with culture collections and those interested in the relationships of algae and the environment.

The editors are grateful Dr. S. I. Blackburn, Dr. A. Mahakhant, Dr. J. G. Day, all presenters at the symposium "Algal Culture Collections and the Environment," and all members of NIES-Collection.

Fumie Kasai, Kunimitsu Kaya, and Makoto M. Watanabe

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