

Editorial

Traditional and Latest Researches on *Aspergillus oryzae* and Related *Koji* Molds

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We would like to thank all the contributors to this Special Issue on *Aspergillus oryzae* and related *Koji* molds (https://www.mdpi.com/journal/jof/special_issues/Aspergillus_Koji, accessed on 9 December 2021). Collectively, in this Special Issue, nine reviews and one article have been published to summarize traditional and latest researches about the yellow *Koji* molds *Aspergillus oryzae* and *Aspergillus sojae*, the black *Koji* mold *Aspergillus luchuensis*, and the white *Koji* mold *Aspergillus luchuensis* mut. *kawachii* (Figure 1).

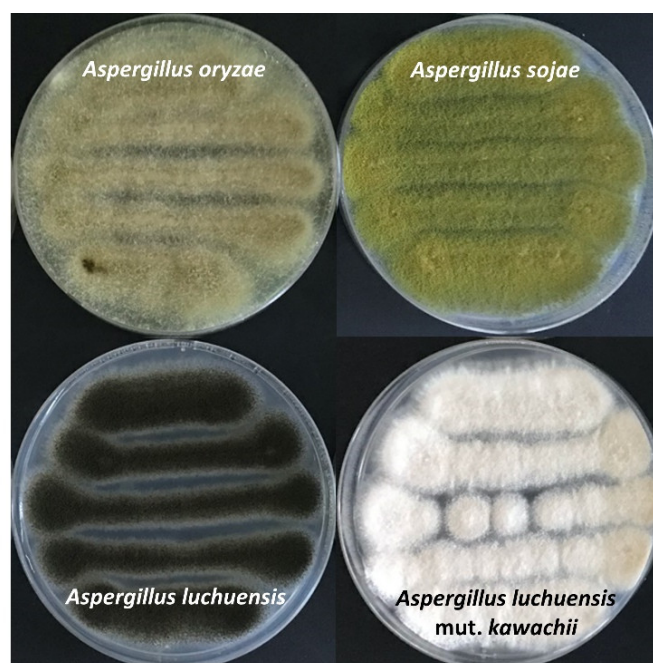


Figure 1. Plate culture images of *A. oryzae*, *A. sojae*, *A. luchuensis* and *A. kawachii*.

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Spores of *Koji* molds are called *Koji* starter, and these cultures on cereals and crops are used for fermented foods in industries. Yamashita has outlined the historical backgrounds of *Koji* starter and *Koji*, explained these varieties for preparations of fermented foods, and proposed potential uses in the future [1]. One of the fermented beverages produced by using *A. oryzae* is *amazake*, the Japanese traditional sweet drink. Kurahashi has provided the information from recent research about ingredients and functionality of *amazake* [2]. In addition, Kurahashi et al. have reported the latest research data about the improvement of defecation frequency by taking *Koji amazake* [3]. *Shochu* and *awamori*, the

Japanese traditional distilled liquors, are made by using *A. kawachii* and *A. luchuensis*, respectively. Hayashi et al. have described the preparation methods of *shochu* and *awamori* with molecular backgrounds and diverse flavor [4]. *Miso*, a traditional Japanese seasoning paste, is made of soybeans and rice fermented with *A. oryzae*. Varieties of *miso*, their preparations with responsible enzymes, and their nutritional components and functions have been covered by Kusumoto et al. [5]. Ito and Matsuyama have detailed the making processes of the Japanese soy sauce, in which *Koji* molds are essential for producing varieties of crucial enzymes [6]. They have also summarized how glutamate (umami) is generated in soy sauce making. *Koji* molds are very useful, not only for producing fermented foods and beverages, but also for supplying valuable materials. Kitagaki has listed substances for medical applications that are produced by *Koji* molds [7]. Due to a great ability in the production of valuable material, including enzyme secretion, the molecular mechanisms of secretory pathways in *A. oryzae* have been well investigated. Higuchi has covered such recent advances on cell biological aspects of membrane traffic in *Koji* molds [8]. Not only proteins but also secondary metabolites (SMs) are abundantly produced in *Koji* molds. Awakawa and Abe have introduced how *A. oryzae* is a useful heterologous host for producing SMs, such as polyketide-derived meroterpenoids in a group of bioactive natural products [9]. Lastly, Maruyama has covered the genome editing technology CRISPR/Cas9 system in *A. oryzae*, which has been a powerful molecular tool to develop industrial *Koji* mold strains [10]. All papers in this Special Issue have provided the traditional and increasing knowledge of *A. oryzae* and related *Koji* molds with insightful perspectives that will direct future research in each field of study.

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