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Rapid identification of *Staphylococcus* species isolated from food samples by Matrix-Assisted Laser Desorption Ionization-Time of Flight Mass Spectrometry (MALDI-TOF MS)

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Running title: Identification of *Staphylococcus* species by MALDI-TOF

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Abstract

Staphylococcus species have a ubiquitous habitat in a wide range of foods, thus the ability to identify staphylococci at the species level is critical in the food industry. In this study, we performed rapid identification of *Staphylococcus* species using Matrix-Assisted Laser Desorption Ionization-Time of Flight mass spectrometry (MALDI-TOF MS). MALDI-TOF MS was evaluated for the identification of *Staphylococcus* reference strains (n=19) and isolates (n=96) from various foods with consideration for the impact of sample preparation methods and incubation period. Additionally, the spectra of isolated *Staphylococcus* strains were analyzed using principal component analysis (PCA) and main spectra profile (MSP)-based dendrogram. The MALDI-TOF MS accurately identified *Staphylococcus* reference strains and isolated strains: the highest performance was by the EX method (83.3~89.5% accuracy) at species level identification (EDT, 70.3~78.9% accuracy; DT, less than 46.3~63.2% accuracy) of 24 h cultured colonies. Identification results at the genus level were 100% accurate at EDT, EX sample preparation and 24 h incubation time. On the other hand, the DT method showed relatively low identification accuracy in all extraction methods and incubation times. The analyzed spectra and MSP-based dendrogram showed that the isolated *Staphylococcus* strains were characterized at the species level. The performance analysis of MALDI-TOF MS shows the method has the potential ability to discriminate between *Staphylococcus* species from foods in Korea. This study provides valuable information that MALDI-TOF MS can be applied to monitor microbial populations and pathogenic bacteria in the food industry which contributes to food safety.

Keywords: MALDI-TOF MS, *Staphylococcus*, jeotgal, fermented food, identification, extraction method.

Introduction

The *Staphylococcus* genus consists of 47 species. *Staphylococcus aureus*, a species representative of coagulase-positive staphylococci (CoPS), regarded as the pathogenic *Staphylococcus*, has been a major foodborne pathogen among the many species [1]. However, coagulase-negative staphylococci (CoNS) have recently emerged as major nosocomial pathogens including *S. epidermidis*, *S. haemolyticus*, *S. saprophyticus*, and other species [2, 3]. Despite some benefits of certain *Staphylococcus* species, including their use as starter strains for flavor enrichment in dairy-fermented foods and for their positive effects on food quality in the fermentation process of cheese and sausage, researchers have been compelled to pay attention to the pathogenic potential and safety assessment of CoNS by the recent increase in nosocomial infection cases of CoNS [1, 3, 4]. Due to the ubiquitous habitat of CoNS in a wide range of foods as well as in niches of the human body and living areas [2, 5], the surveillance and accurate diagnostics of CoNS at the species-level within the *Staphylococcus* genus has become critical in the food industry.

For the identification of *Staphylococcus* species, mannitol salt agar (MSA) has been used and developed for the presumptive isolation of *S. aureus* and staphylococci, however, it has recently been reported that MSA is not sufficient to distinguish between *S. aureus* and CoNS [6]. In addition, the above technique is time-consuming, laborious, and requires highly trained biologists to conduct. So, additional diagnostic means are needed to accurately

distinguish between *S. aureus* and CoNS at the *Staphylococcus* species level. To overcome the drawbacks of the phenotypic method, genotypic methods that can be analyzed rapidly and accurately have been used. Among them, sequence analysis of the 16S rRNA gene, a highly conserved region present in bacteria, is most commonly used to identify bacteria [7]. However, the 16S rRNA genes of *Staphylococcus* are closely related to each other and therefore not sufficiently different to discriminate between species [7, 8, 9].

Recently, MALDI-TOF MS has emerged as a breakthrough means for the rapid and routine identification of microorganisms with regard to cost-effectiveness, time-savings, high reproducibility, and high reliability [10, 11, 12]. MALDI-TOF MS technology depends on the generation of unique mass spectra captured from a small amount of microbial colony followed by comparison to a reference database containing known microbial spectra for identification of microorganisms [10, 13, 14, 15]. Studies on clinical applications for pathogenic staphylococci diagnostics and on the identification of a variety of *Staphylococcus* species using commercial MALDI-TOF MS systems have been evaluated or compared with other diagnostics [6, 16]. The commercially available Bruker MALDI system is supported by a 38 *Staphylococcus* species database (Bruker database version 4.0.0.1). In addition to the database, sample-processing methods and growth conditions of bacterial culture can impact the biomass generation and analysis of the subsequent mass spectrum [17, 18]. These effects may lead to false microbiological identification results thus a standard protocol for sample-processing according to genus is required.

In this present study, we evaluated the identification ability of MALDI-TOF MS to *Staphylococcus* species isolated from food samples. Also evaluated were three extraction methods at various incubation periods for comparison with *Staphylococcus* reference strains

and food-isolated strains to establish an optimal methodology for the identification of *Staphylococcus* species in the food industry.

Materials and Methods

Bacterial strains

The *Staphylococcus* species used in this study included 19 reference strains shown in Table 1. The reference strains were obtained from the American Type Culture Collection (ATCC), the National Culture Collection for Pathogens (NCCP) in Korea, the Korean Collection for Type Culture (KCTC) and the Korean Culture Center of Microorganisms (KCCM) and the Leibniz Institute DSMZ-German Collection of Microorganisms and Cell Cultures (DSMZ). To prepare cells for MALDI-TOF MS analysis, the 19 reference strains were streaked on nutrient agar (BD, USA) and incubated at 37°C for 24 h.

Isolation of *Staphylococcus* species

Presumptive *Staphylococcus* strains were isolated from food products including jeotgals, salted Chinese cabbage, and raw milk by a method modified from previous studies [5, 19], briefly: a 25 g food sample was added to 225 mL of buffered peptone water (BD, USA) in stomacher filter bags (Seward Limited, United Kingdom), and the mixture was homogenized at 230 rpm for 1.5 min by a stomacher (Stomacher® 400 Circulator, Seward Limited, United Kingdom). The homogenized samples were serially diluted in buffered peptone water and spread onto Mannitol Salt Agar plates (BD, USA). The plates were then incubated at 37°C for 24~48 h and the colonies of presumptive *Staphylococcus* (yellow or red colored colonies

of 2~5 mm size) were isolated by their morphological features on Mannitol Salt Agar medium.

Sample preparation for MALDI-TOF MS

A loopful of each *Staphylococcus* strain was streaked on a nutrient agar (NA) (BD, USA) plate and incubated at 37°C. Each strain was sampled at 24 h (Day-1), 48 h (Day-2), and 72 h (Day-3). The sampled bacterial mass was prepared for MALDI-TOF MS analysis by three different sample preparation methods recommended by the manufacturer (Bruker Daltonics, Germany) and referenced by previously reported protocols [20, 21]; direct transfer (DT), extended direct transfer (EDT), and full formic acid extraction (EX). Expendable supplies used were MSP 96 target plates (Bruker Daltonics, Germany), α-acyano-4-hydroxycinnamic acid (HCCA) matrix solution in acetonitrile/water/trifluoroacetic acid (TFA) (50:47.5:2.5 [v/v]), and 70% formic acid.

For the direct transfer method (DT); a single colony was deposited directly on an assigned position of an MSP 96 target plate, followed by drying at ambient temperature. The dried sample was overlaid with 1 µL of HCCA matrix solution, followed by air-drying at ambient temperature for crystallizing.

For the extended direct transfer method (EDT); a single colony was deposited directly on an assigned position of an MSP 96 target plate and was immediately overlaid with 1 µL of 70% formic acid, then dried at ambient temperature. The sample was overlaid with 1 µL of HCCA matrix solution, followed by air-drying at ambient temperature for crystallizing.

For the full extraction method (EX); a loopful of a colony of each bacterium scraped from the agar plate was suspended in 300 µL of sterile distilled water in a micro-centrifuge tube, followed by the addition of 900 µL ethanol and vortexing. The bacterial suspension was centrifuged at 16,000 ×*g* for 10 min to remove the supernatant. The pellet was dried at ambient temperature and was re-suspended in a mixture of 25 µL of 70% formic acid and 25 µL of acetonitrile by vortexing. After centrifugation at 16,000 ×*g* for 10 min to discard the pellet, the supernatant was carefully transferred into a new tube. 1 µL of the resulting supernatant was deposited on an assigned position of an MSP 96 target plate, then dried at ambient temperature. The sample was overlaid with 1 µL of HCCA matrix solution, followed by air-drying at ambient temperature for crystallizing. The MSP 96 target plate with prepared samples was immediately applied to MALDI-TOF MS.

MALDI-TOF MS analysis

Bacterial identification of *Staphylococcus* strains was performed by the MALDI-TOF MS Microflex LT bench-top mass spectrometer (Bruker Daltonics, Germany). The measurements on the MALDI-TOF MS were performed using FlexControl software (version 3.0) within a mass range of 2,000 to 20,000 Da following calibration with a bacterial test standard (Bruker Daltonics, Germany). The generated mass spectrum of each sample was compared to a reference library in the MALDI biotyper database containing 5,627 reference spectra. The software calculated integrated pattern-matching algorithms and spectra were recorded as logarithms between 0 and 3.0. As specified by the manufacturer's instruction, log scores ≥ 2.0 were accepted for identification at the species level and log scores of < 2.0 and ≥ 1.7 were taken as identification at the genus level or presumptive species level identification. Log

scores below 1.7 were considered unreliable. Principal component analysis (PCA) and an MSP-based dendrogram using Biotyper software (Bruker Daltonics, Germany) were also performed to visualize intra-species similarities or variations between the *Staphylococcus* species and strains used in this study.

16S rRNA gene sequencing

The *Staphylococcus* isolates were cultured in nutrient broth (BD, USA) and their DNAs were extracted using the G-spin bacterial genomic DNA extraction kit (Intron Biotechnology, Seongnam, Korea) according to the manufacturer's instructions. The 16S rRNA gene of the isolate was amplified using 16S rRNA universal primer pairs (27F and 1492R) and the PCR products were purified using the QIAquick PCR purification kit (Qiagen, Hilden, Germany). Purified PCR products were sequenced and identified by comparison with the sequence of the National Biotechnology Information Center (NCBI) using the Basic Local Alignment Search Tool (BLAST) (Bionics, Seoul, Korea).

Results

MALDI-TOF MS analysis of *Staphylococcus* reference strains

The diagnostic ability of MALDI-TOF MS was evaluated with 19 reference strains by incubation period (Day-1, Day-2, and Day-3) and by sample preparation method (DT, EDT, and EX) as shown in Table 2 and Table 3. Overall diagnostic accuracy considering identification at the genus and species level revealed that almost 19 reference strains were

identified correctly. At the genus identification level, the EDT and EX sample preparation methods provided excellent identification results with almost 100% accuracy regardless of incubation period. Meanwhile, the DT method showed relatively low identification accuracy (Table 2). At the species identification level, the EX method at Day-1 revealed the best diagnostic ability (89% accuracy) (Table 3). The EDT method revealed a constant identification yield (between 78% to 89% accuracy) regardless of incubation period, whereas the DT method yielded low accuracy (less than 64% accuracy) with discrepant results. The relatively low accuracy seen when using the DT method may be due to the absence of formic acid treatment and the simple steps in the DT method that provide relatively low protein extraction from bacterial cell walls. Based on our comparison of these three preparation methods, the EX extraction method was selected for identification of *Staphylococcus* isolates.

The analyzed spectra obtained by MALDI-TOF MS and the MSP-based dendrogram for the 19 reference strains yielded by the EX method at Day-1, are shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2. The MALDI-TOF MS analysis yielded clearly different spectra. Their overall dendrogram (see Figure 2) reveals clean distinctions between *Staphylococcus* species. *Staphylococcus* strains belonging to the same species (4 strains of *S. aureus* and 3 strains of *S. epidermidis*) were clustered together apart from other *Staphylococcus* species and the dendrogram between the *S. aureus* or *S. epidermidis* strains suggested the potential for further detailed discrimination within strains by species. The clustered groups of *Staphylococcus* species were not in accord with the 16S rRNA gene sequencing dendrogram reported previously [22]. Interestingly, the dendrogram suggested clean discrimination between *S. capitis* and *S. caprae*, and between *S. saprophyticus* and *S. xylosus*, while 16S rRNA gene sequencing analysis did not distinguish between them [6, 22].

MALDI-TOF MS analysis of *Staphylococcus* strains isolated from food samples

A total of 96 *Staphylococcus* strains were isolated from food samples including jeotgals (traditional Korean fermented seafood; three kinds of jeotgal used in this study were shrimp-jeotgal, shellfish-jeotgal, and fish-jeotgal), salted Chinese cabbage, and raw milk (obtained from a local milk farm without pasteurization), purchased at local South Korea market. For identification of all *Staphylococcus* isolates, we used the EX method at Day-1. All 96 strains were subjected to analysis by MALDI-TOF MS and acquired spectra were compared with the MALDI Biotyper database. The isolates were identified as *Staphylococcus* genus and consisted of 7 *Staphylococcus* species as shown in Table 4. Various *Staphylococcus* species were isolated from three kinds of jeotgal and *S. epidermidis* was the major species isolated from jeotgal foods. By contrast, the two other foods had only a single *Staphylococcus* species (raw milk: *S. epidermidis*; salted Chinese cabbage: *S. hominis*). Additionally, the ubiquitous presence of *S. epidermidis* in various foods was confirmed in this study. The results of the log score value obtained by MALDI-TOF MS are listed in Table 5. All *Staphylococcus* isolates (100% accuracy) were correctly identified at the species or genus level, of which 78 (81.3% accuracy) were identified at the species level and 18 (18.8% accuracy) were identified at the genus level.

PCA and MSP-based dendrogram of isolated *Staphylococcus*

PCA using Biotyper software was accomplished to identify intra-species similarity and variation between the 96 isolated *Staphylococcus* strains and two-dimensional plots were

obtained as shown in Figure 3. All 96 strains of *Staphylococcus* species were separated into 6 groups (Group 1: *S. pasteuri*; Group 2: *S. warneri*; Group 3: *S. epidermidis*; Group 4: *S. equorum* Group 5: *S. capitis*; Group 6; *S. simulans* and *S. hominis*) based on PCA. In contrast to previously reported groups of *Staphylococcus* species based on 16S rRNA gene sequencing [21], the MALDI-TOF MS method used in this study revealed novel clustering between 7 species of *Staphylococcus* isolates. *S. capitis* (n=6) was separated from *S. epidermidis* (n=42). *S. equorum* (n=16), *S. simulans* (n= 12), *S. warneri* (n=1), *S. pasteuri* (n=9), and *S. hominis* (n=10) were clustered into one group, which were divided into different groups previously [21] but subdivided into *S. hominis / S. simulans* on two-dimensional plots. The MSP dendrogram of 96 isolates based on the PCR clustering results revealed more detailed relationships between *Staphylococcus* strains at the species level as shown in Figure 4. The dendrogram primarily revealed that each species derived from *Staphylococcus* isolates was clearly clustered.

16S rRNA gene sequencing

The identification results of comparing 16S rRNA gene sequencing and MALDI-TOF MS are listed in Table 6. Based on the 16S rRNA gene sequencing, 6 isolates were identified as *S. capitis* (NCBI accession no. NK318575.1 and KT027728.1), and 12 isolates were identified as *S. simulans* (KC849422.1), and 10 isolates were identified as *S. hominis* (MH715220.1 and MK318620.1), and 42 isolates were identified as *S. epidermidis* (MH118521.1, MG6452761.1, KT427443.1, and KY753228.1). The remaining isolates were identified as *S. equorum* (MK253324.1) or *S. haemolyticus* (MF578766.1) and *S. pasteuri*

(MH158278.1, KT036409.1, and KT427912.1) or *S. warneri* (MG920271.1, KT720133.1, and KT153529.1), respectively.

Discussion

A phylogenetic study of 38 species in the *Staphylococcus* genus was previously reported based on the sequence alignment of 16S rRNA genes [21]. 16S rRNA gene sequencing analysis was unable to distinguish between some *Staphylococcus* species (e.g. among *S. saccharolyticus*, *S. capitis* subsp. *urealyticus* and *S. caprae*, and between two subspecies of *S. cohnii*). Palys *et al*. described 16S rRNA gene sequencing as having relatively limited or moderate identification ability between closely related bacterial populations due to limitations in its discriminatory power [23]. In the present study, MALDI-TOF MS analysis showed a reliable ability to distinguish between closely related *Staphylococcus* species of reference strains as shown in Figure 2 (between *S. capitis*, *S. caprae* and *S. epidermidis*; between *S. hominis*, *S. heamolyticus* and *S. lugdunensis*; between *S. saprophyticus* and *S. xylosus*; and between *S. sciuri* and *S. lentus*). Additionally, the results shown in Table 2 support the ability of MALDI-TOF MS to identify *Staphylococcus* at the species level. Therefore, MALDI-TOF MS analysis could be a reliable diagnostic method and be expected a counterpart method against 16S rRNA gene analysis in classification of bacteria.

In order to accurately identify *Staphylococcus* species using MALDI-TOF MS, sample preparation methods should be established. In previous reports, the impact of protein extraction method and incubation period were compared on the yield of MALDI-TOF MS for identification in *Clostridium* spp. and gram-positive cocci [21, 24]. Chean *et al*. found that

267 both EDT and EX sample preparations showed similar performance of over 96% to 100%
268 accuracy at the species level of isolated *Clostridium* regardless of incubation period [3]. Also,
269 Schulthess *et al*. found that overall, both protein extraction methods performed similar
270 identification yields with isolated strains of gram-positive cocci [21]. These studies revealed
271 that the EX sample preparation method performed at higher or similar yield compared with
272 the EDT method. Meanwhile incubation period did not seem to be a critical factor in either
273 the EDT or EX methods for the performance of MALDI-TOF MS even at the species level of
274 bacterial identification, in contrast to the DT method.

275 We evaluated the performance of MALDI-TOF MS for the identification of
276 *Staphylococcus* by sample preparation method efficacy (DT, EDT, EX) and incubation period
277 (Day-1, Day-2, Day-3) as shown in Table 2. Overall results revealed the EX method had the
278 highest and most stable performance at the species level in *Staphylococcus* reference strains
279 similar to the results previously reported for *Clostridium* spp. and gram-positive cocci [21,
280 24]. Pre-treatment sample preparation using the EX protocol improved the mass spectral log
281 score by reducing background signals and generating sufficient protein signals. Treated
282 sample spectra also were better correlated with the Biotyper database as its spectra were
283 created by EX sample preparation [10]. We also investigated how incubation period affected
284 the improvement in identification rate and showed that 24 h yielded the most successful
285 identification rate. This culture condition may generate sufficient biomass for MALDI-TOF
286 analysis. The dendrogram created from *Staphylococcus* isolates spectra showed two major
287 clusters (see Figure 4). The PCA procedure separated all *Staphylococcus* species into 6
288 distinctive clusters, which demonstrates that the MALDI-TOF MS method used in this study
289 was reliable for *Staphylococcus* identification.

We compared identification results of *Staphylococcus* isolates by 16S rRNA gene sequencing and MALDI-TOF MS. *S. simulans*, *S. hominis,* and *S. epidermidis* were identified as one species in both methods. However, some 16S rRNA gene sequencing results revealed two candidate *Staphylococcus* species instead of providing one specific species, whereas MALDI-TOF MS clearly identified those strain as *S. equorum, S. pasteuri*, and *S. warneri*. These results are consistent with previous studies that *Staphylococcus* species cannot be accurately distinguished using the 16S rRNA gene sequence [25]. Our results conclude that MALDI-TOF MS can be used to accurately identify *Staphylococcus* to species level. In order to identify *Staphylococcus* isolates by 16S rRNA gene sequencing, a lot of time is consumed such as culture, DNA extraction, and sequencing. However, for MALDI-TOF, one target plate (96 isolates) after the strain culture can be identified by the extraction method within 3 hours [26].

The identified *Staphylococcus* species were compared to investigate bacterial diversity in various food habitats. The populations of CoNS in various types of foodstuffs including cheese, cured meat, sausage, smoked fish, fermented foods, and starter cultures in Europe have been reported in previous studies (e.g. *S.* xylosus, *S. epidermidis*, *S. lentus*, *S. saprophyticus*, *S. hyicus*, *S. simulans*, *S. carnosus*, *S. condimenti*, *S. equorum*, *S. piscifermentans*, *S. succinus*) [2, 5]. In the present study, *Staphylococcus* strains were isolated from various foods including traditional fermented foods and were identified as the seven species shown in Table 4. The dominant *Staphylococcus* species in salted Chinese cabbage and raw milk seemed unique and specific to each food matrix, while the populations of *Staphylococcus* species in jeotgal foods were diverse and revealed a different set of species compared to that found in European foods.

313 In this study, the identification of isolated *Staphylococcus* species from various foods was
314 performed using MALDI-TOF MS. Additionally, an MSP-based dendrogram and the PCA
315 procedure enabled further discrimination between *Staphylococcus* strains at the species level.
316 This study is a good example of subtyping *Staphylococcus* at the strain level and provides
317 valuable information for practical and extended application of MALDI-TOF MS for food
318 monitoring and epidemiological study.

319

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323 4).

324

325 **Conflict of Interest**

326 The authors have no financial conflicts of interest to declare.

327

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415 **Figure Legends**

416 **Figure 1.** MALDI-TOF MS spectra of 19 *Staphylococcus* reference strains in the 2,000 to
417 20,000 Da range.

418

419 **Figure 2.** Main spectra profile (MSP)-based dendrogram from MALDI-TOF MS spectra of
420 the 19 *Staphylococcus* reference strains and species clustering of the isolates analyzed with
421 the reference strains. Distance values below the dendrogram are relative and normalized to a
422 maximal value of 1,000.

423

424 **Figure 3.** Two dimensional plots of the spectra of 96 *Staphylococcus* isolates generated by
425 principal component analysis (PCA). The isolates are clearly separated into 6 groups, which
426 visually demonstrates the heterogeneity of the protein spectra among *Staphylococcus* species.
427 Each dot indicates the spectrum of one isolate.

428

429 **Figure 4.** Main spectra profile (MSP)-based dendrogram from MALDI-TOF MS spectra of
430 the 96 *Staphylococcus* strains isolated from various foods. Clusters are based on the
431 *Staphylococcus* species level. Distance values below the dendrogram are relative and
432 normalized to a maximal value of 1,000.

433

434

435 **Table 1.** *Staphylococcus* reference strains used in this study.

Bacterial strains	Strain designations or origins[a]	Cluster group[b]
Staphylococcus aureus	ATCC 6538, ATCC 6538P, ATCC 29737, NCCP 14560	*S. aureus*
Staphylococcus epidermidis	ATCC 12228, ATCC 14990, NCCP 14723	*S. epidermidis*
Staphylococcus capitis	NCCP 14663	*S. epidermidis*
Staphylococcus caprae	KCTC 3583	*S. epidermidis*
Staphylococcus haemolyticus	ATCC 29970	*S. haemolyticus*
Staphylococcus hominis	NCCP 10748	*S. haemolyticus*
Staphylococcus schleiferi subsp. *coagulans*	KCCM 41634	*S. hyicus-intermedius*
Staphylococcus lugdunensis	NCCP 15630	*S. lugdunensis*
Staphylococcus saprophyticus	NCCP 14670	*S. saprophyticus*
Staphylococcus xylosus	NCCP 10937	*S. saprophyticus*
Staphylococcus lentus	KCCM 41469	*S. sciuri*
Staphylococcus sciuri subsp. *sciuri*	KCCM 41468	*S. sciuri*
Staphylococcus warneri	KCTC 3340	*S. warneri*
Staphylococcus pettenkoferi	DSM 19554	-

436 [a] ATCC, American Type Culture Collection; NCCP, National Culture Collection for Pathogens of Korea; KCTC, Korean Collection for Type
437 Culture; KCCM, Korean Culture Center of Microorganisms; DSM, Leibniz Institute DSMZ-German Collection of Microorganisms and Cell
438 Cultures.

439 [b] Cluster Groups of *Staphylococcus* species were described from the phylogenetic study based on 16S rRNA gene sequence analysis
440 (Takahashi *et al*. 1999).

441

Table 2. Performance of MALDI-TOF MS for the identification of *Staphylococcus* reference strains at genus level (log scores ≥1.7) by sample preparation method and incubation period of bacteria culture.

Strain	Day 1			Day 2			Day 3		
	DT[a]	EDT	EX	DT	EDT	EX	DT	EDT	EX
S. aureus (n=4)	4 (100%)	4 (100%)	4 (100%)	4 (100%)	4 (100%)	4 (100%)	4 (100%)	4 (100%)	4 (100%)
S. epidermidis (n=3)	3 (100%)	3 (100%)	3 (100%)	3 (100%)	3 (100%)	3 (100%)	3 (100%)	3 (100%)	3 (100%)
S. capitis (n=1)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)
S. caprae (n=1)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)
S. haemolyticus (n=1)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)
S. hominis (n=1)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)
S. schleiferi (n=1)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)
S. lugdunensis (n=1)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)
S. saprophyticus (n=1)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)
S. xylosus (n=1)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)
S. lentus (n=1)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)
S. sciuri (n=1)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)
S. warneri (n=1)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)
S. pettenkoferi (n=1)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)
Total (n=19)	18 (94.7%)	19 (100%)	19 (100%)	18 (94.7%)	18 (94.7%)	19 (100%)	17 (89.5%)	19 (100%)	19 (100%)

[a] DT, direct transfer method; EDT, extended direct transfer method; EX, extraction method.

Table 3. Performance of MALDI-TOF MS for the identification of *Staphylococcus* reference strains at species level (log scores ≥2.0) by sample preparation method and incubation period of bacteria culture.

Strain	Day 1			Day 2			Day 3		
	DT	EDT	EX	DT	EDT	EX	DT	EDT	EX
S. aureus (n=4)	4 (100%)	4 (100%)	4 (100%)	4 (100%)	4 (100%)	4 (100%)	4 (100%)	4 (100%)	4 (100%)
S. epidermidis (n=3)	2 (66.7%)	3 (100%)	3 (100%)	1 (33.3%)	2 (66.7%)	2 (66.7%)	0 (0%)	3 (100%)	1 (33.3%)
S. capitis (n=1)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)
S. caprae (n=1)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)
S. haemolyticus (n=1)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)
S. hominis (n=1)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)
S. schleiferi (n=1)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)
S. lugdunensis (n=1)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)
S. saprophyticus (n=1)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)
S. xylosus (n=1)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)
S. lentus (n=1)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
S. sciuri (n=1)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)
S. warneri (n=1)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)
S. pettenkoferi (n=1)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)
Total (n=19)	12 (63.2%)	15 (78.9%)	17 (89.5%)	12 (63.2%)	15 (78.9%)	15 (78.9%)	10 (52.6%)	17 (89.5%)	14 (73.7%)

Table 4. Identified population of *Staphylococcus* species using MALDI-TOF MS analysis isolated from various foods in Korea.

Food source	Number of *Staphylococcus* species							Total
	S. capitis	*S. epidermidis*	*S. equorum*	*S. hominis*	*S. Pasteuri*	*S. simulans*	*S. warneri*	
Shrimp-jeotgal[a]	3	12	16	0	8	12	1	52
Shellfish-jeotgal	3	6	0	0	1	0	0	10
Fish-jeotgal	0	10	0	1	0	0	0	11
Salted Chinese cabbage[b]	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	9
Raw milk	0	14	0	0	0	0	0	14
Total	6	42	16	10	9	12	1	96

[a] Jeotgal is traditional Korean fermented sea food (Shrimp-jeotgal, Shellfish-jeotgal, Fish-jeotgal).

[b] Salted Chinese cabbage is a major ingredient of kimchi, a traditional Korean fermented food.

453 **Table 5.** Identification of 96 *Staphylococcus* isolates by MALDI-TOF MS.

Species (no. of isolates)	No. of *Staphylococcus* species with results[a]:		
	≥ 2.000	1.700-1.999	≤ 1.699
S. epidermidis (42)	40	2	0
S. pasteuri (9)	9	0	0
S. capitis (6)	6	0	0
S. hominis (10)	7	3	0
S. equorum (16)	4	12	0
S. simulans (12)	11	1	0
S. warneri (1)	1	0	0
Total isolates (96)	78	18	0

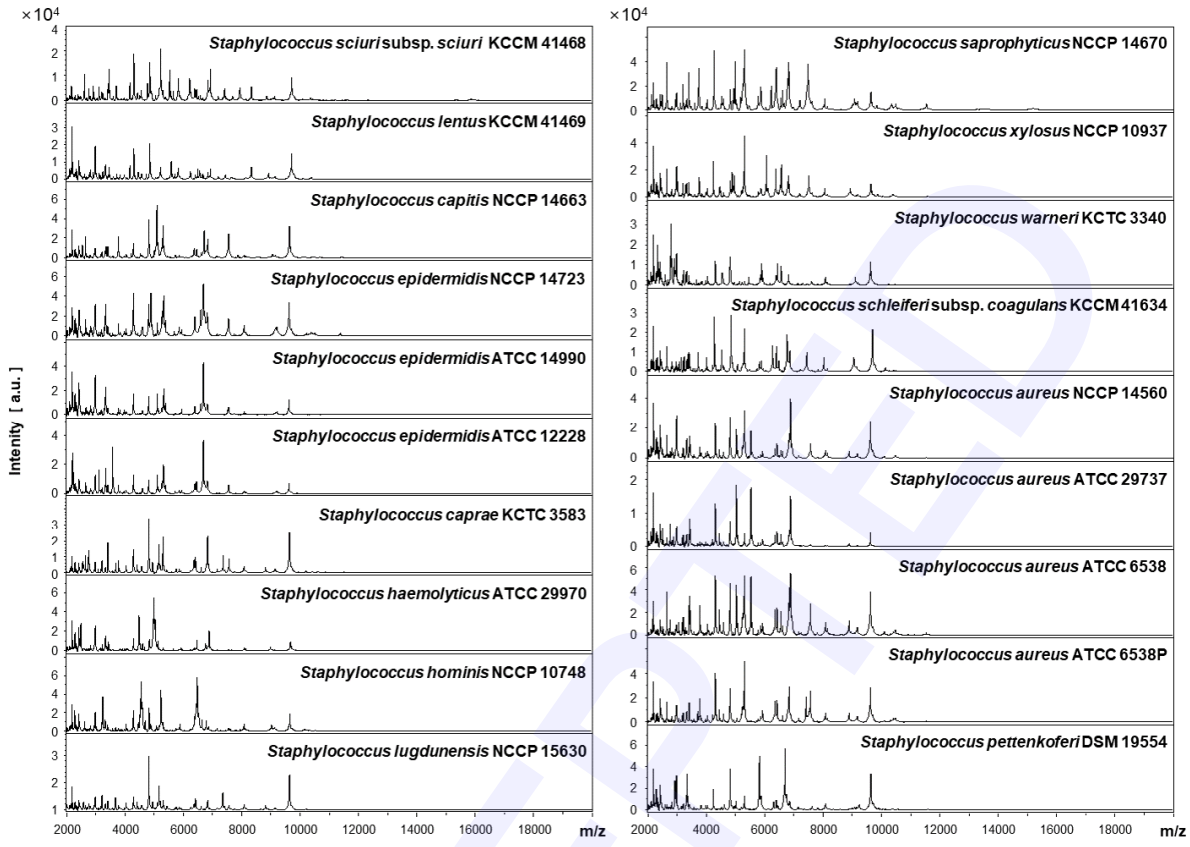
454 [a] ≥ 2.000: species-level-identification; 1.700~1.999: genus-level-identification; ≤ 1.699: not
455 reliable identification.

Table 6. Comparison of the identification results of *Staphylococcus* isolates by 16S rRNA gene sequencing and MALDI-TOF MS.

Origin	MALDI-TOF MS results (n[a])	16S rRNA gene sequencing results (NCBI accession no.)	Identity
Shrimp-Jeotgal	*S. capitis* (3)	*S. capitis* (MK318575.1)	100%
	S. epidermidis (12)	*S. epidermidis* (KY753228.1)	100%
	S. equorum (16)	*S. equorum* (MK253324.1), *S. haemolyticus* (MF578766.1)	100%
	S. pasteuri (8)	*S. pasteuri* (KT036409.1), *S. warneri* (KT720133.1)	100%
	S. simulans (12)	*S. simulans*(KC849422.1)	100%
	S. warneri (1)	*S. warneri* (KT153529.1), *S. pasteuri* (KT427912.1)	100%
Shellfish-Jeotgal	*S. capitis* (3)	*S. capitis* (KT027728.1)	100%
	S. epidermidis (6)	*S. epidermidis* (MG645276.1)	100%
	S. pasteuri (1)	*S. pasteuri* (MH158278.1), *S. warneri* (MG920271.1)	100%
Fish-Jeotgal	*S. epidermidis* (10)	*S. epidermidis* (KT427443.1)	100%
	S. hominis (1)	*S. hominis* (MH715220.1)	100%
Salted Chinese cabbage	*S. hominis* (9)	*S. hominis* (MK318620.1)	100%
Raw milk	*S. epidermidis* (14)	*S. epidermidis* (MH118521.1)	100%

[a]Number of isolates.

458 **Figure 1.**



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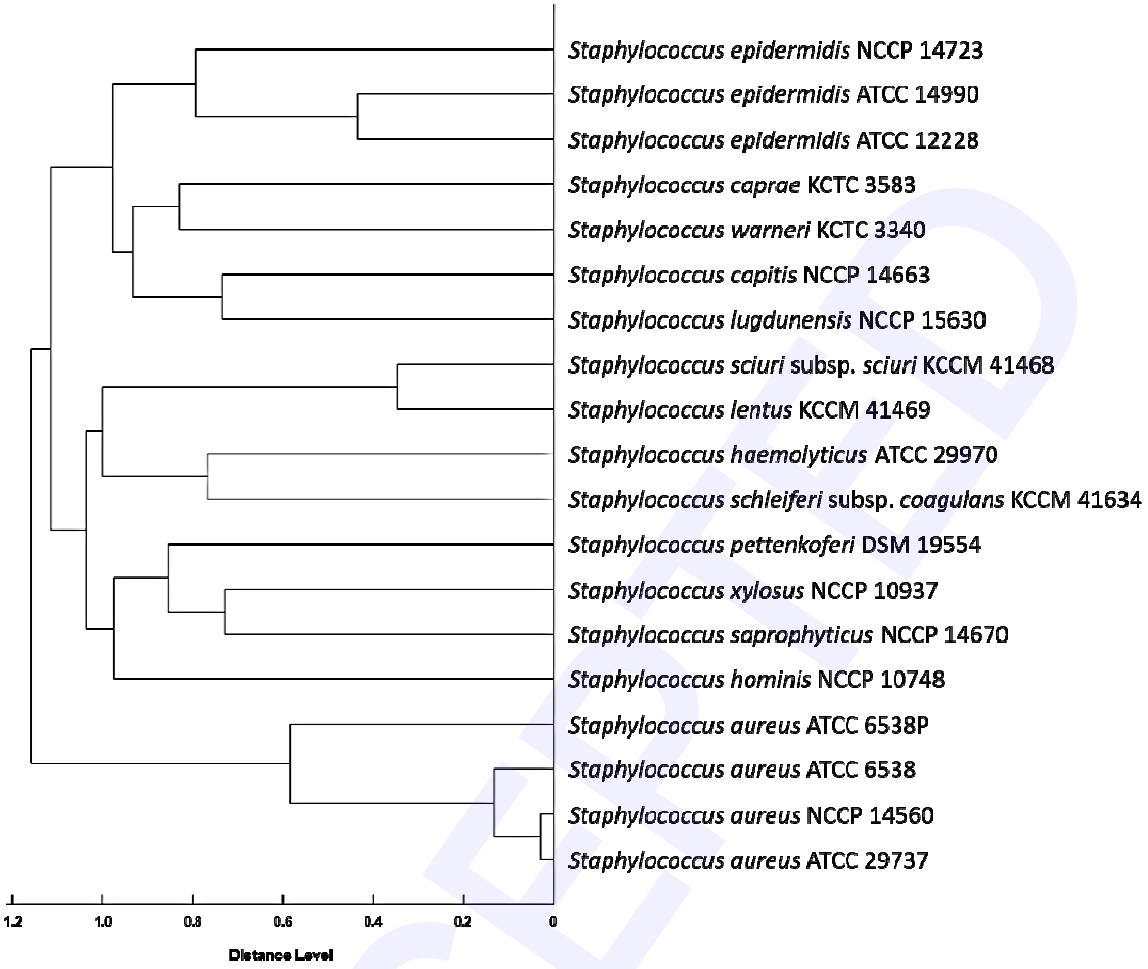
461 **Figure 2.**



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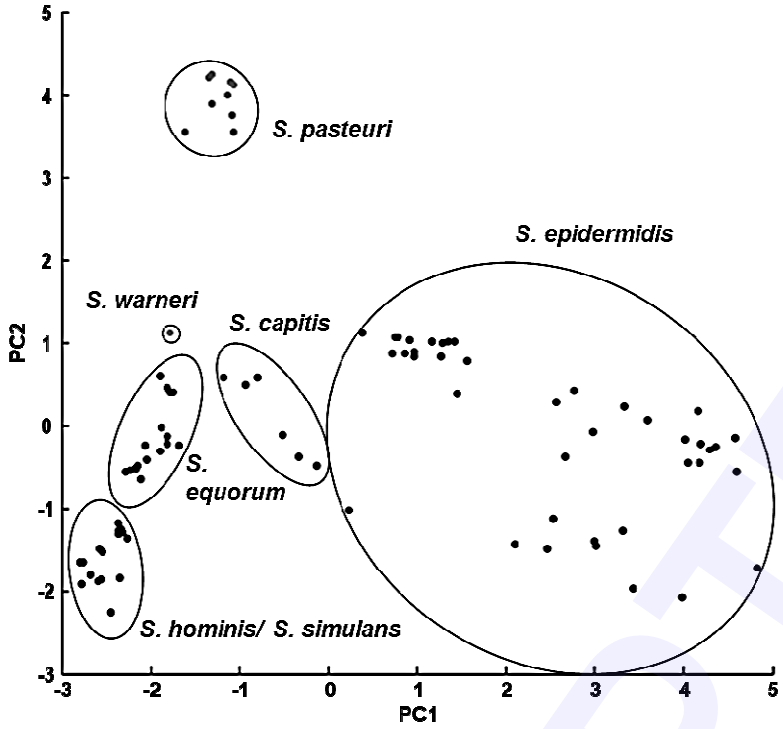
464 **Figure 3.**



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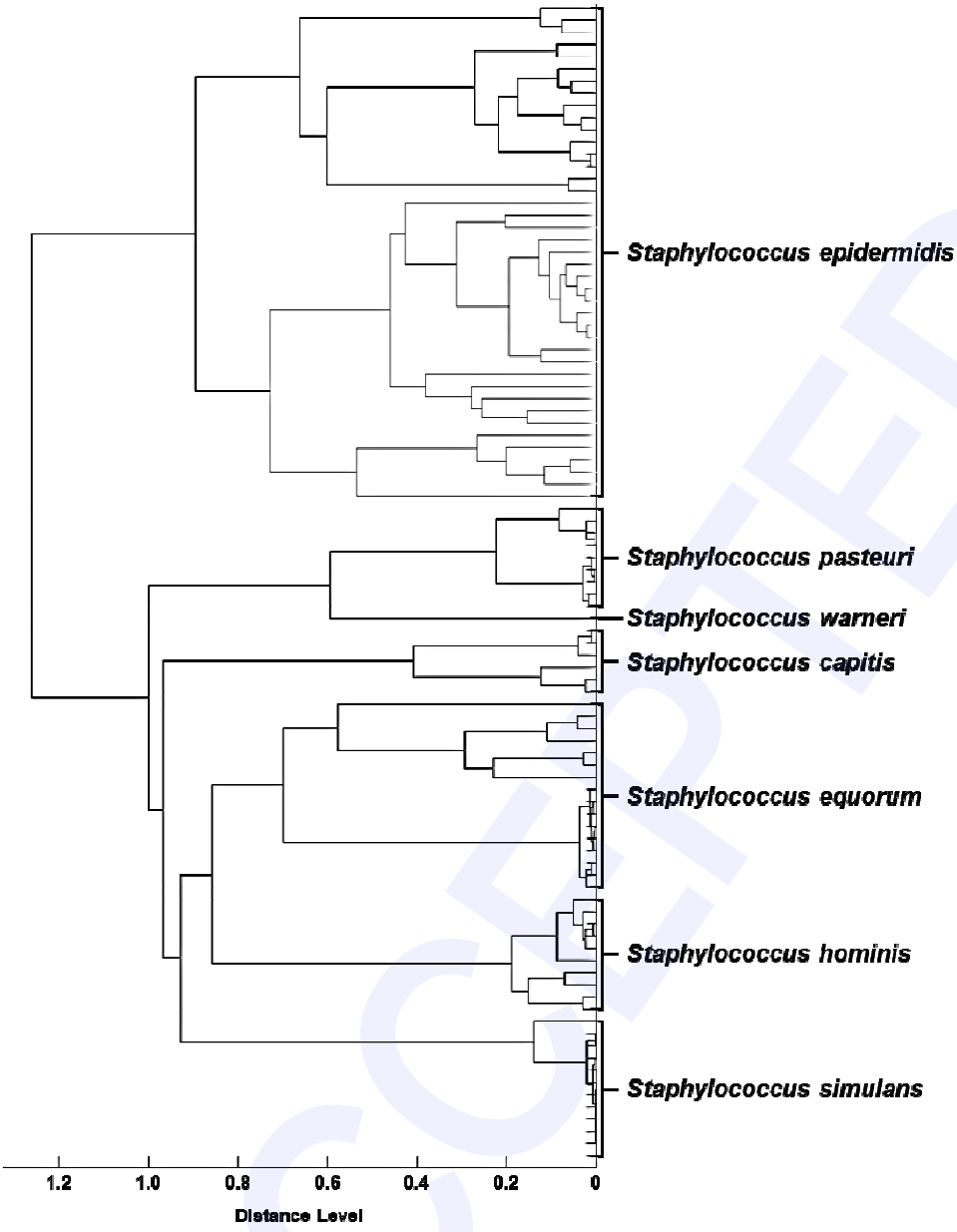
468 **Figure 4.**



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