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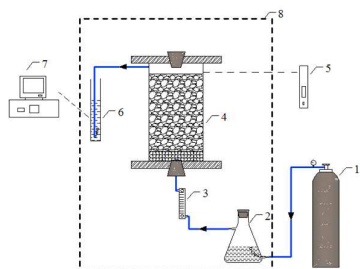
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SSSF for ethanol production using  $N_2$  stripping was mainly conducted by the synergy of hydrolytic enzymes and yeast cells.



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1 **Solid simultaneous saccharification and fermentation of rice straw for bioethanol production**  
2 **using nitrogen gas stripping**

3 Yong-Zhong Wang <sup>a, \*</sup>, Qiang Liao<sup>b</sup>, Feng-Lin Lv<sup>a</sup>, Xun Zhu<sup>b</sup>, Yao Ran<sup>b</sup>, Chang-Jun Hou<sup>a</sup>

4 <sup>a</sup>Key Laboratory of Biorheological Science and Technology (Chongqing University), Ministry of  
5 Education, Bioengineering College, Chongqing University, Chongqing 400030, China

6 <sup>b</sup>Institute of Thermophysics Engineering, Chongqing University, Chongqing 400030, China

7 \*Corresponding author: Yong-Zhong Wang. Tel.: +86 23 6511 1022; Fax: +86 23 6510 2507.

8 Email address: wangyzh@cqu.edu.cn

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## 1 Abstract

2 A solid simultaneous saccharification and fermentation (SSSF) of rice straw for ethanol production  
3 using N<sub>2</sub> stripping was developed. The effects of N<sub>2</sub> flow rate, yeast inoculation volume, and substrate  
4 moisture content on SSSF were investigated. The highest total output of ethanol was 4.78 g, and the  
5 highest ethanol yield obtained was 56.3% using an N<sub>2</sub> flow rate of 30 mL/min, a yeast inoculation  
6 volume of 20 mL, and a moisture content 4.6 mL (water)/g (substrate). The low residuals of ethanol  
7 and glucose in the substrate demonstrate that the N<sub>2</sub> carrier gas effectively stripped the produced  
8 ethanol out of the packed bed, alleviating the inhibitions caused by evolved glucose and ethanol  
9 remaining in the bioreactor. With increases in N<sub>2</sub> flow rate or substrate moisture content, the total  
10 output of ethanol and ethanol yield initially increased and then decreased. However, with the increase  
11 in yeast inoculation volume, both indexes first rose and then remained relatively constant.

12  
13 **Keywords:** solid-state fermentation, bioethanol, gas stripping, rice straw, *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*

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## 1 1. Introduction

2 Renewable energy sources are a popular topic in the world because of increasing demands for energy  
3 sources and the decreasing reserves of fossil fuels. Of all the renewable energy sources, bioethanol is  
4 an ideal substitute for liquid fuel because it has a high energy content and originates from biomass.<sup>1,2</sup>  
5 Currently, bioethanol is mainly produced from grain and creates competition with food stock grains for  
6 people and livestock.<sup>3,4</sup> However, ethanol can also be produced from abundant renewable biomass  
7 sources such as agricultural and forestry residues.<sup>5</sup>

8 The saccharification and fermentation processes of cellulosic materials have been mainly separated  
9 for bioethanol production. Previous reports of this two-step method indicate that glucose accumulation  
10 may suppress the enzymatic hydrolysis of cellulose.<sup>6,7</sup> To solve this problem, a method of  
11 simultaneous saccharification and fermentation for ethanol production has been developed.<sup>8,9</sup> In this  
12 process, the reducing sugar derived from the saccharification of cellulose was immediately utilized by  
13 yeast cells for ethanol fermentation. Thus, little glucose was accumulated in the reactor and reduced the  
14 issue of glucose inhibiting cellulose saccharification. This operation is also more convenient because  
15 the two steps (saccharification and anaerobic fermentation) were integrated, and the efficiency of  
16 lignocellulose saccharification was improved. Nevertheless, the accumulated ethanol still inhibited the  
17 growth and activity of yeast cells in a noncompetitive manner, and the cellulase activity was also  
18 decreased, reducing ethanol yield.<sup>10,11</sup> Thus, a novel ethanol stripping method using a carrier gas was  
19 developed to carry the generated ethanol out of the bioreactor to be recovered in an absorber.<sup>12</sup> Zhang  
20 et al<sup>13</sup> studied effects of different stripping gas on cell physiology and ethanol production during  
21 ethanol fermentation, and indicated that common-purity N<sub>2</sub> was the best choice for ethanol

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1 fermentation and cell growth. Later research results indicated that both of the efficiencies of  
2 saccharification and fermentation were improved using N<sub>2</sub> as carrier gas.<sup>9, 11</sup> The ethanol stripping  
3 method has many advantages such as simple operation, safe for the yeast culture, requiring low energy  
4 input, and inexpensive capital investment for facilities.<sup>14</sup> Importantly, the two issues of inhibiting  
5 saccharification and fermentation can be alleviated simultaneously, enhancing the efficiencies of  
6 saccharification and ethanol fermentation overall.<sup>15, 16</sup>

7 Traditional simultaneous saccharification and fermentation processes have generally submerged  
8 cellulosic materials in liquid. Thus, an increasing cost is incurred as a result of a decreasing substrate  
9 density and a large quantity of waste water requiring treatment.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, more energy is required  
10 in this process, which becomes another disadvantage. Solid simultaneous saccharification and  
11 fermentation (SSSF) can overcome the above problems because of the many benefits such as high  
12 substrate concentration and product yield, simple and controllable operation, less effluent wastewater,  
13 and less energy consumption.<sup>17</sup> Thus, SSSF has vast potential in bioethanol production.<sup>18</sup> Some studies  
14 on SSSF for bioethanol production have been shown that the prehydrolysis of cellulosic materials prior  
15 to simultaneous saccharification and fermentation had a positive effect on the overall ethanol yield.<sup>19, 20</sup>  
16 Mohanty et al.<sup>21</sup> investigated ethanol production using mahula flowers, and the fermentation time  
17 achieving peak ethanol concentration in solid-state fermentation was shorter than that in submerged  
18 fermentation. These investigations show that ethanol production through the SSSF of cellulosic  
19 materials can effectively reduce the production cost, improving the commercial application of  
20 bioethanol. However, most of these studies have not considered the inhibiting factors in ethanol  
21 fermentation during SSSF. There are few reports on the SSSF of cellulosic materials coupled with

1 carrier gas stripping of ethanol.

2 In the present study, a packed bed for the SSSF of rice straw coupled with N<sub>2</sub> sparging was designed  
3 to improve the saccharification of lignocellulose and bioethanol production. This study aimed to  
4 evaluate the performance of SSSF using ethanol gas stripping, and the effects of gas flow rate,  
5 inoculation amount of yeast, and substrate moisture content were analyzed.

## 6 **2. Materials and methods**

### 7 2.1 Materials and yeast strain

8 Rice straw collected in the suburb of Chongqing, China was cleaned with tap water and dried at  
9 room temperature. The straw was cut into segments 2–4 cm long. These segments were pretreated in  
10 1% NaOH solution for 24 h, rinsed with water five times and dried. The treated rice straw was ground  
11 up and sieved using a 60-mesh sieve. The rice straw powder was sterilized at 121 °C for 15 min. Yeast  
12 strain, *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, which has a high activity and high temperature resistance, was  
13 purchased from Yichang Angel Yeast Co. Ltd, Hubei Province, China. Prior to inoculation, 2 g of dried  
14 yeast powder was mixed with a glucose solution (2 g/L) at the ratio of 1 g to 25 mL and activated at  
15 38 °C for 15 min, then at 33 °C for 1.5 h in a water bath, the OD<sub>630nm</sub> value of the activated yeast  
16 solution was 4.05. Cellulase (135 u/mg dw) and cellobiase ( $\geq 250$  u/g, Novozym188) were purchased  
17 from Worthington Biochemical Corporation (New Jersey, US). The culture medium for yeast growth  
18 was the following composition: 2 g/L (NH<sub>4</sub>)<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>, 2 g/L KH<sub>2</sub>PO<sub>4</sub>, 0.2 g/L MgSO<sub>4</sub>, 0.2 g/L CaCl<sub>2</sub>, and 3  
19 g/L of yeast extract. The solution was adjusted to pH 4.8 using acetic acid–sodium acetate buffer  
20 solution and monitored using a pH meter.

### 21 2.2 Packed-bed test system

1 The test system for SSSF of rice straw with N<sub>2</sub> sparge included a packed-bed reactor, an N<sub>2</sub> canister  
2 (gas source), a humidifier, a gas flow meter, and an absorber (Fig.1). The cylindrical bioreactor (ø48  
3 mm × H190 mm) used a working volume of 280 mL and was made of transparent  
4 polymethylmethacrylate (5 mm wall thickness). Approximately 54 mL of sterile glass beads (30 mm  
5 stacking height) were placed into the bottom of the packed-bed reactor to distribute the carrier gas  
6 uniformly. The whole packed-bed bioreactor was fixed in an incubator with a constant temperature of  
7 35±2 °C. Before assembling the test system, the components were autoclaved at 121 °C for 15 min.  
8 The bioreactor body was sterilized using formalin solution. The assembled test system was cleaned  
9 three times with sterile distilled water. During SSSF, the N<sub>2</sub> gas was passed through a humidifier  
10 before sparging into the bioreactor. The N<sub>2</sub> flow rate was controlled using a gas valve. The effluent gas  
11 from the bioreactor was channeled into an absorber with distilled water to recover the stripped ethanol.  
12 Two test systems were employed and run in parallel.

### 13 2.3 Operational processes

14 A 25 g sterile rice straw powder was mixed with 20 mL acetate buffer solution (pH 4.8) containing 5  
15 mL cellobiase and 0.025 g cellulase. The mixture was poured into a conical flask for enzymatic  
16 hydrolysis for 24 h at 50 °C in an incubator, and then the activated yeast solution was mixed with the  
17 substrate. The inoculated substrate was transferred into the packed-bed bioreactor for SSSF at 35 °C.  
18 Nitrogen gas was sparged into the air-tight reactor from the bottom to strip the generated ethanol out of  
19 the bioreactor. During SSSF, ethanol concentration in the absorber was detected every 12 hours. At the  
20 end of SSSF, distilled water was added into the residual substrate to extract glucose and ethanol, and  
21 the supernatant was collected by centrifugation at 9500 ×g to detect the ethanol and glucose



1 concentrations. To avoid ethanol loss in the absorber, whenever the ethanol concentration in the  
2 absorber was detected the recovered solution of ethanol was replaced with fresh distilled water. The  
3 ethanol concentration in discharged gas from the absorber was also measured to evaluate ethanol loss.

#### 4 2.4 Analytical methods

5 Ethanol concentration in the absorber was detected at an interval of 12 hours using a gas  
6 chromatograph (SC-3000, Chongqing, China) equipped with a flame ionization detector and a 1.5 m  
7 stainless-steel column packed with porous styrene particles. For operation, N<sub>2</sub> with a 30 mL/min flow  
8 rate was used as a carrier gas, H<sub>2</sub> with a 25 mL/min flow rate as a flammable gas, and air with a 150  
9 mL/min flow rate as an oxidizing gas. The injector and oven temperatures were set to 160 °C, and the  
10 detector temperature was set to 170 °C.

11 The consumption amount of cellulose was calculated by subtracting the weight of the residual rice  
12 straw from its initial weight. The substrate was weighed using an electronic analytical balance  
13 (Sartorius BP114, Göttingen, Germany). The cellulose content of substrate was determined using Van  
14 Soest's method.<sup>22</sup> At the end of SSSF, the glucose content in the residual substrate was measured using  
15 the 3, 5-dinitrosalicylic acid method using a UV-Vis spectrophotometer (TU1950, Beijing, China). The  
16 pH value of culture medium was detected using a pH meter (Orion 3 Star, Waltham, MA, USA).

17 The recovered ethanol amount refers to the accumulative amount of ethanol stripped out of the  
18 bioreactor collected in the absorber and reveals the capacity of N<sub>2</sub> for stripping ethanol out of the  
19 packed bed.

20 The total output of ethanol is equal to the sum of the recovered ethanol amount from the absorber  
21 and the residual ethanol amount measured from the bioreactor.

1 The theoretical ethanol amount was obtained using the formula:

2 Theoretical ethanol amount (g) =  $0.51f \times \text{initial biomass weight} \times 1.111$ ,

3 where  $f$  is the cellulose fraction of dry biomass (g/g), 0.51 is the conversion factor for glucose to  
4 ethanol calculated from the stoichiometry and biochemistry of yeast, and 1.111 is the conversion factor  
5 for cellulose to equivalent glucose.

6 The ethanol yield (%) was calculated using the following expression taken from:<sup>23</sup>

7 
$$\text{Ethanol yield} = \frac{\text{total output of ethanol (g)}}{\text{theoretical ethanol amount (g)}} \times 100\%.$$

### 8 **3. Experimental results**

#### 9 3.1 Effect of gas flow rate

10 The flow rate of N<sub>2</sub> as the carrier gas was set at 10, 20, 30, and 40 mL/min, respectively, and 25 mL  
11 of activated yeast solution was inoculated into the substrate. The temperature for the SSSF was  
12 controlled at 35 °C, and the results are shown in Fig. 2. The recovered ethanol amount in the absorber  
13 gradually increased over time at a fixed gas flow rate (Fig. 2 a), demonstrating that N<sub>2</sub> sparging  
14 stripped the evolved ethanol out of the bioreactor. After 96 hours of inoculation, the recovered ethanol  
15 amount increased slower than that after 12 h. The decrease in the performance of SSSF can be ascribed  
16 to the reducing activities of enzymes and yeast cells as a result of the production of intermediates.<sup>24</sup>

17 Fig. 2 b shows that with an increase in N<sub>2</sub> flow rate from 10 to 30 mL/min, the total output of ethanol  
18 increased from 1.57 to 2.09 g. However, when the gas flow rate was increased to 40 mL/min, the total  
19 output of ethanol was 1.93 g. Thus, the highest total output of ethanol, 2.09 g, was obtained using an N<sub>2</sub>  
20 flow rate of 30 mL/min. The increase in N<sub>2</sub> flow rate dispersed more ethanol into the gas phase from  
21 the fermented substrate, then the ethanol was stripped out of the bioreactor. Consequently, the total

1 ethanol output increased with increasing N<sub>2</sub> flow rate. However, an N<sub>2</sub> flow rate of 40 mL/min caused a  
2 decrease in substrate humidity because of water evaporating in the substrate, resulting in a decrease of  
3 total ethanol output from that of 30 mL/min.

4 The residual ethanol amount and residual glucose amount are shown in Fig. 2 c. When the gas flow  
5 rate was increased from 10 to 30 mL/min, the ethanol residue in substrate decreased from 0.40 to 0.10  
6 g, and plateaued using a flow rate of 40 mL/min to a value of 0.08 g. This result further demonstrates  
7 that using N<sub>2</sub> as a carrier gas stripped the evolved ethanol from the SSSF of rice straw out of the  
8 bioreactor. Furthermore, the residual glucose amount in the fermented substrate was maintained within  
9 the range of 0.83–0.85 g for the different N<sub>2</sub> flow rates studied. Low concentrations of ethanol and  
10 glucose remained in the fermented substrate, suggesting that the SSSF of rice straw with N<sub>2</sub> sparge  
11 alleviated the issues of ethanol inhibiting glycolysis and glucose inhibiting enzymatic hydrolysis.

12 As depicted in Fig.2 d, the substrate consumption was initially increased slightly and then slightly  
13 decreased with increasing N<sub>2</sub> flow rates. The substrate consumption amount initially increased from  
14 10.5 to 11.8 g with the increase in N<sub>2</sub> flow rate from 10 to 20 mL/min and then decreased to 10.9 g  
15 with an N<sub>2</sub> flow rate of 40 mL/min. The ethanol yield initially increased from 10 to 30 mL/min and  
16 then decreased slightly for 40 mL/min. The highest ethanol yield obtained was 25.7% at 30 mL/min,  
17 which was equivalent to producing 0.19 g of ethanol per gram of initial substrate. Therefore, it was  
18 considered that the optimal N<sub>2</sub> flow rate for SSSF was 30 mL/min in this experiment.

### 19 3.2 Effect of yeast inoculation amount

20 The yeast inoculation amount has a large influence on the fermentation process. Here, the yeast  
21 inoculation amount on SSSF were set at 10, 15, 20, and 25 mL. To maintain the same moisture content

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1 of the substrate in each run, the yeast solution was made up to a total volume of 25 mL using sterile  
2 distilled water. During SSSF, the flow rate of N<sub>2</sub> was controlled at 30 mL/min, and the other operating  
3 parameters were the same as those given above.

4 The recovered ethanol amount in all four runs gradually increased with time (Fig. 3 a). The yeast  
5 inoculation amount affected the recovered ethanol amount by first showing step increases from 1.46 to  
6 2.17 g from 10 to 20 mL of inoculation amount and maintained relatively similar values for 25 mL. For  
7 example, 108 h after inoculation, the recovered ethanol increased for the yeast inoculation amount  
8 rising from 10 to 20 mL, and then slightly increased to 2.19 g for 25 mL. This result also showed that  
9 by increasing the yeast inoculation amount from 10 to 20 mL, the total output of ethanol gradually  
10 increased from 1.64 to 2.34 g, and then with an inoculation amount of 25 mL, the total output of  
11 ethanol rose slightly to 2.36 g (Fig 2 b).

12 The residual ethanol amount in the fermented substrate using different yeast inoculation amounts  
13 were generally maintained between 0.17 and 0.18 g (Fig. 3 c). This result demonstrates that the  
14 inoculation amount only slightly affected the residual ethanol amount in the substrate during SSSF  
15 coupled with N<sub>2</sub> sparge. Furthermore, residual glucose in the fermented substrate was maintained  
16 between 0.79 and 0.81 g, confirming that the accumulation of glucose, which inhibits enzymatic  
17 hydrolysis, was almost eliminated during SSSF. The substrate consumption amount and ethanol yield  
18 for 20 mL yeast inoculation amount was 10.95 g and 27.47%, respectively. For 25 mL, the  
19 consumption and yield was slightly higher at 11.02 g and 27.79%, respectively (Fig. 3 d). The highest  
20 ethanol yield recorded of 27.79% indicates that 0.21 g ethanol can be produced for one gram of  
21 substrate in this experiment.

1 The above results indicate that with the increase in yeast inoculation amount to 20 mL, more yeast  
2 cells utilize the monosaccharides derived from the saccharification of rice straw to produce ethanol by  
3 anaerobic fermentation. Correspondingly, the hydrolysis of rice straw was partly enhanced because the  
4 problem of evolved monosaccharides inhibiting saccharification was alleviated in the process of SSSF.  
5 Consequently, the recovered ethanol amount, total output of ethanol and ethanol yield increased.

6 However, a further increase of the yeast inoculation amount to 25 mL produced an ethanol yield rise of  
7 only 0.32% higher than that of 20 mL. The saccharification of rice straw did not provide any more  
8 monosaccharides for ethanol fermentation by more yeast cells because of the limited enzyme activities.

9 Therefore, in this experiment although both peaks of total output of ethanol and ethanol yield of 2.36 g  
10 and 27.79%, respectively, were obtained using 25 mL yeast inoculation amount, the optimal yeast  
11 inoculation amount was considered to be 20 mL.

### 12 3.3 Effect of substrate moisture content

13 In the process of solid-state fermentation, moisture content of the substrate affects the efficiencies of  
14 saccharification and ethanol production.<sup>25, 26</sup> Here, the substrate moisture content was fixed at 3.6, 4.6,  
15 5.6, and 6.6 mL (water)/g (substrate), respectively. The gas flow rate in the experiment was controlled  
16 at 30 mL/min, and the yeast inoculation amount was fixed at 20 mL. The other experiment conditions  
17 were the same as those given above.

18 The recovered ethanol amounts in the four runs increased gradually over time, and the rate of  
19 increase became slower after 84 h (Fig. 4 a). Moreover, by the end of the experiment, the recovered  
20 ethanol amount increased from a moisture content of 3.6 to 4.6 mL/g and then decreased with further  
21 increases in moisture content. Correspondingly, the total output of ethanol increased from 3.42 to 4.78

1 g with the increase in moisture content from 3.6 to 4.6 mL/g and then decreased to 3.64 g with further  
2 increases in moisture content up to 6.6 mL/g (Fig. 4 b).

3 Fig. 4 c shows that with the increase in moisture content from 3.6 to 6.6 mL/g, the residual ethanol  
4 amount in the substrate decreased gradually from 0.69 to 0.48 g. Furthermore, the substrate  
5 consumption amount decreased from 11.80 to 10.18 g. The ethanol yield first increased to 56.3% with  
6 an initial increase in moisture content to 4.6 mL/g and then dropped to 42.8% with further increases in  
7 moisture content up to 6.6 mL/g (Fig. 4 d).

8 The highest total output of ethanol and ethanol yield, 4.78 g and 56.3%, respectively, were obtained  
9 using a moisture content of 4.6 mL/g with an N<sub>2</sub> flow rate 30 mL/min and a yeast inoculation amount  
10 20 mL. This result corresponds to generating 0.46 g of ethanol for every one gram of rice straw.

#### 11 **4 Discussion**

12 To alleviate the problems of glucose inhibiting saccharification and ethanol inhibiting anaerobic  
13 fermentation in the conversion process of cellulosic materials to ethanol, SSSF with carrier gas  
14 sparging was used. The effects of gas flow rate, inoculation amount, and substrate moisture content on  
15 the performance of SSSF were investigated using rice straw as the substrate. The results indicate that  
16 the residual ethanol and glucose in the bioreactor were low throughout. The highest residual ethanol  
17 amount found was only 0.69 g in the fermented substrate, corresponding to 0.05 g ethanol per gram of  
18 dried residual rice straw. The highest ethanol yield obtained was 56.3%, generating 0.46 g of ethanol  
19 per gram of initial substrate, which is higher than those results in other solid-state fermentation  
20 studies.<sup>25, 27, 28</sup> All these results demonstrate the improved performance of the SSSF system.

21 The mass transfer of ethanol in the SSSF test system was divided into two steps. First, the evolved

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1 ethanol dispersed from the solid substrate to the gas phase in the bioreactor. Thus, the ethanol  
2 concentration in the gas phase in the bioreactor gradually increased. A high gas flow rate enhanced  
3 ethanol mass transfer from the solid substrate to the gas phase because of an increasing concentration  
4 difference of ethanol at the gas–solid interface. Therefore, the recovered ethanol amount, total ethanol  
5 output and ethanol yield were increased for higher flow rates. However, further increases in gas flow  
6 rate above 30 mL/min reduced the recovered ethanol amount. In this case, the high gas flow rate led to  
7 a reducing substrate humidity as more water in substrate was stripped out of the bioreactor by the  
8 carrier gas, even though the carrier gas was humidified before entering the bioreactor.

9 The second step of ethanol transfer was recovery in the absorber. When ethanol concentration in the  
10 absorber is high, the absorption efficiency of ethanol may decrease because the carrier gas may strip  
11 ethanol out of the absorber and reduce recovery. Therefore, to avoid losing ethanol, the solution used  
12 for ethanol recovery was replaced with fresh distilled water just after ethanol was detected in the  
13 absorber. We also evaluated the ethanol loss caused by discharged gas from the absorber and found that  
14 the ethanol concentration was low. The highest ethanol loss was about 0.21 g during the SSSF, which  
15 accounted for only 4.4% of the total output of ethanol.

16 During SSSF, yeast cells adsorbed on the substrate surface, diffused into the substrate for growth,  
17 and formed a biofilm on the surface of the fermented substrate.<sup>29</sup> The formation of a bacterial biofilm  
18 on the substrate surface comprises three stages: adsorption, growth, and maturity.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the  
19 growth phase of yeast biofilm was reflected in the recovered ethanol amount. For instance, as shown in  
20 Fig. 2 a, 12 h after inoculation, the recovered ethanol amount was low and accumulated slowly over  
21 time at a fixed inoculation amount, which indicates that the yeast biofilm was still in the adsorption

1 stage. Between 84 h and 96 h, the recovered ethanol amount was rising rapidly, which indicates that the  
2 yeast biofilm was in the growth stage. Consequently, the biomass of yeast cells increases rapidly in the  
3 packing layer, and increased the amount of ethanol generated during the SSSF of rice straw. Then, the  
4 increment of the recovered ethanol amount was mitigated and shows that the yeast biofilm was in the  
5 maturity stage. However, the intermediates from the enzymatic hydrolysis and ethanol fermentation  
6 processes may negatively affect the enzyme activities, which may be another reason that caused the  
7 recovered ethanol amount to decrease over time.<sup>31</sup> Thus, in conclusion, SSSF relies on the synergy of  
8 hydrolytic enzymes and yeast cells. Increasing enzymes loading or yeast inoculation amount cannot  
9 enhance the ethanol yield during SSSF. Hence, the ethanol yield did not increase with further rises of  
10 yeast inoculation amount in this study (Fig. 3 d).

11 Cellulases catalyzing cellulosic hydrolysis adsorb on the surface of the substrate during solid-state  
12 fermentation.<sup>32</sup> A low substrate moisture content affects the adsorption of cellulosic enzymes on the  
13 substrate surface and suppresses enzymatic hydrolysis.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the growth and metabolism of  
14 yeast cells were affected at a low moisture content of substrate because low water levels affect activity.  
15 Consequently, a low total output of ethanol and ethanol yield were observed. However, with the  
16 increase in moisture content, the adsorption and activities of hydrolytic enzymes were significantly  
17 improved, and the growth and activity of yeast cells were enhanced. Therefore, obtaining the highest  
18 total ethanol output and ethanol yield (Fig. 4). However, with further increases in moisture content, the  
19 adsorption of enzymes on the substrate surface was reduced because of a diluted enzyme concentration.  
20 Thus, the resistance to mass transfer was increased because of an increasing thickness of liquid film on  
21 the surface of the fermented substrate.<sup>34</sup> These factors caused the total output of ethanol to decrease. In



1 the present study, a significant agglomeration of rice straw using the moisture contents of 5.6 and 6.6  
2 mL/g was observed. The high moisture content led to a reduced porosity of the packing layer and an  
3 increase in the pressure drop of the bioreactor.<sup>33</sup> Thus, microbial growth was affected.<sup>35</sup> These effects  
4 are another contributing reason as to why the total output of ethanol and ethanol yield decreased with  
5 further increases in substrate moisture content during SSSF.

6 To summarize, the SSSF of lignocellulose coupled with the gas stripping of ethanol is a complicated  
7 process that can be influenced by many factors such as the activities and loadings of cellulase and yeast  
8 cells, the type and pretreatment methods of cellulosic material, the porosity of the packed bed, and the  
9 carrier gas flow rate. Although a high ethanol yield of 56.3% in this study was achieved, which was  
10 lower than those found in some literatures (Table 1). As shown above the synergy of hydrolytic  
11 enzymes, yeast cells, and carrier gas is important to the operation of an SSSF system. Therefore, more  
12 research into the enzymolysis mechanism of cellulose and the interaction of multiple factors will  
13 further improve the performance of SSSF.

#### 14 **4 Conclusions**

15 The effects of gas flow rate, yeast inoculation amount, and substrate moisture content on SSSF  
16 employing the gas stripping of ethanol were investigated. The low residuals of ethanol and glucose in  
17 the substrate demonstrate that the carrier gas effectively strips the evolved ethanol out of the bioreactor  
18 during SSSF, alleviating the issues of the produced glucose and ethanol inhibiting enzymatic  
19 hydrolysis and fermentation. With increases in gas flow rate and moisture content, the total outputs of  
20 ethanol and ethanol yields initially increase and then decrease, whereas with increases in yeast  
21 inoculation amount, the total output of ethanol and ethanol yield initially increase and then remain

1 relatively constant. The results reveal that SSSF was mainly conducted by the synergy of hydrolytic  
2 enzymes and yeast cells.

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## 1 **Figure Captions**

2 Fig.1 Experimental system: 1) nitrogen canister, 2) humidifier, 3) flow meter, 4) packed-bed bioreactor,  
3 5) pH meter and thermometer, 6) ethanol absorber, 7) computer, and 8) incubator.

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5 Fig. 2 Effect of gas flow rate on SSSF

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7 Fig.3 Effect of yeast inoculation amount on SSSF

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9 Fig. 4 Effect of substrate moisture content on SSSF

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1 **Table caption**

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3 Table 1 Comparison of conversion efficiency of cellulose to ethanol

Fig. 1

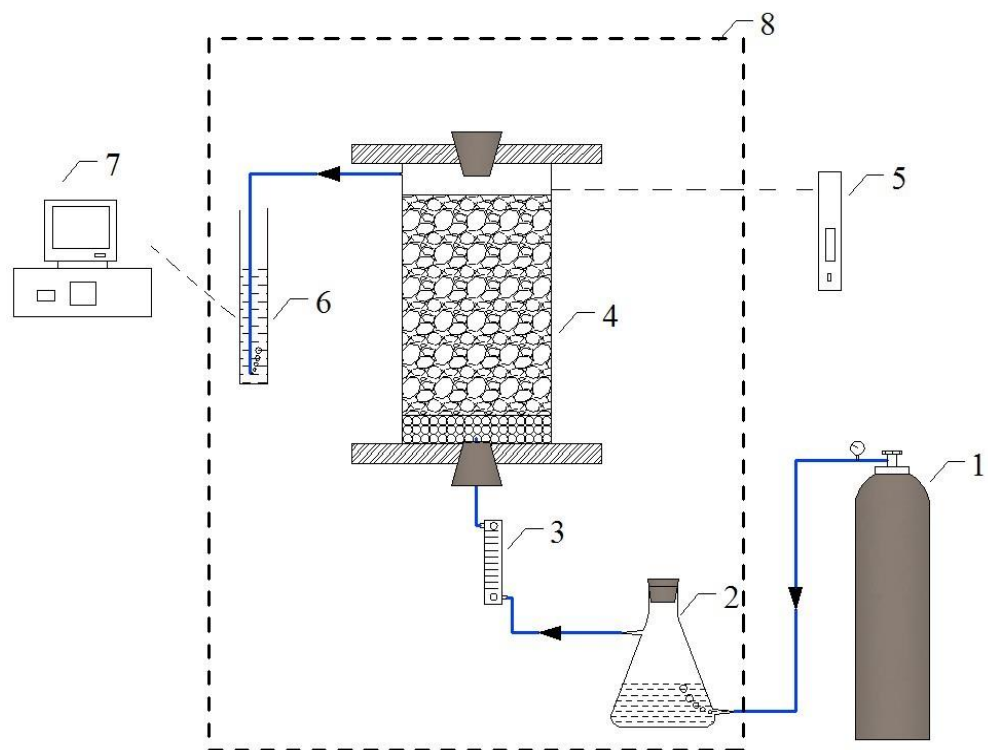


Fig. 2

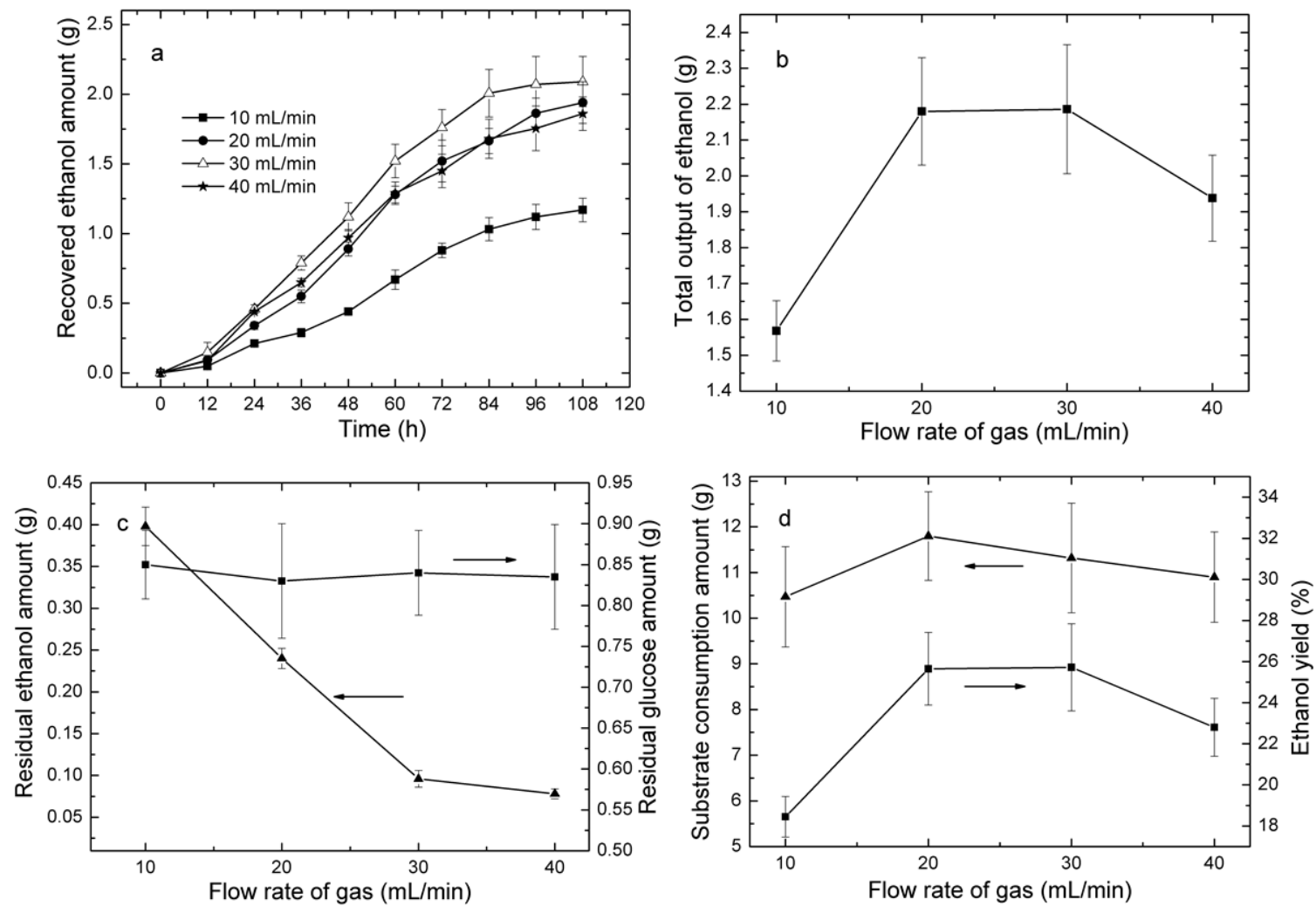




Fig. 3

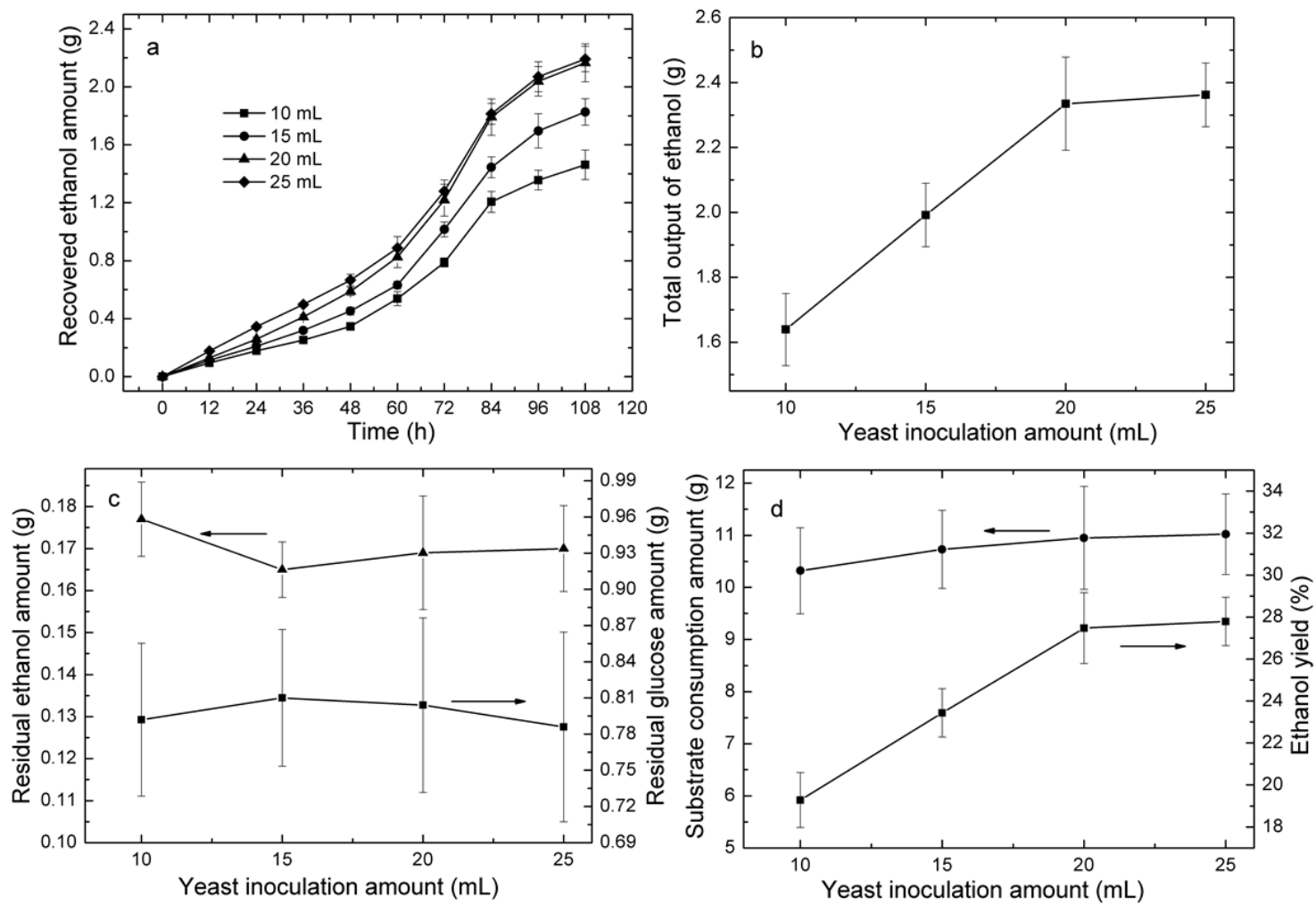
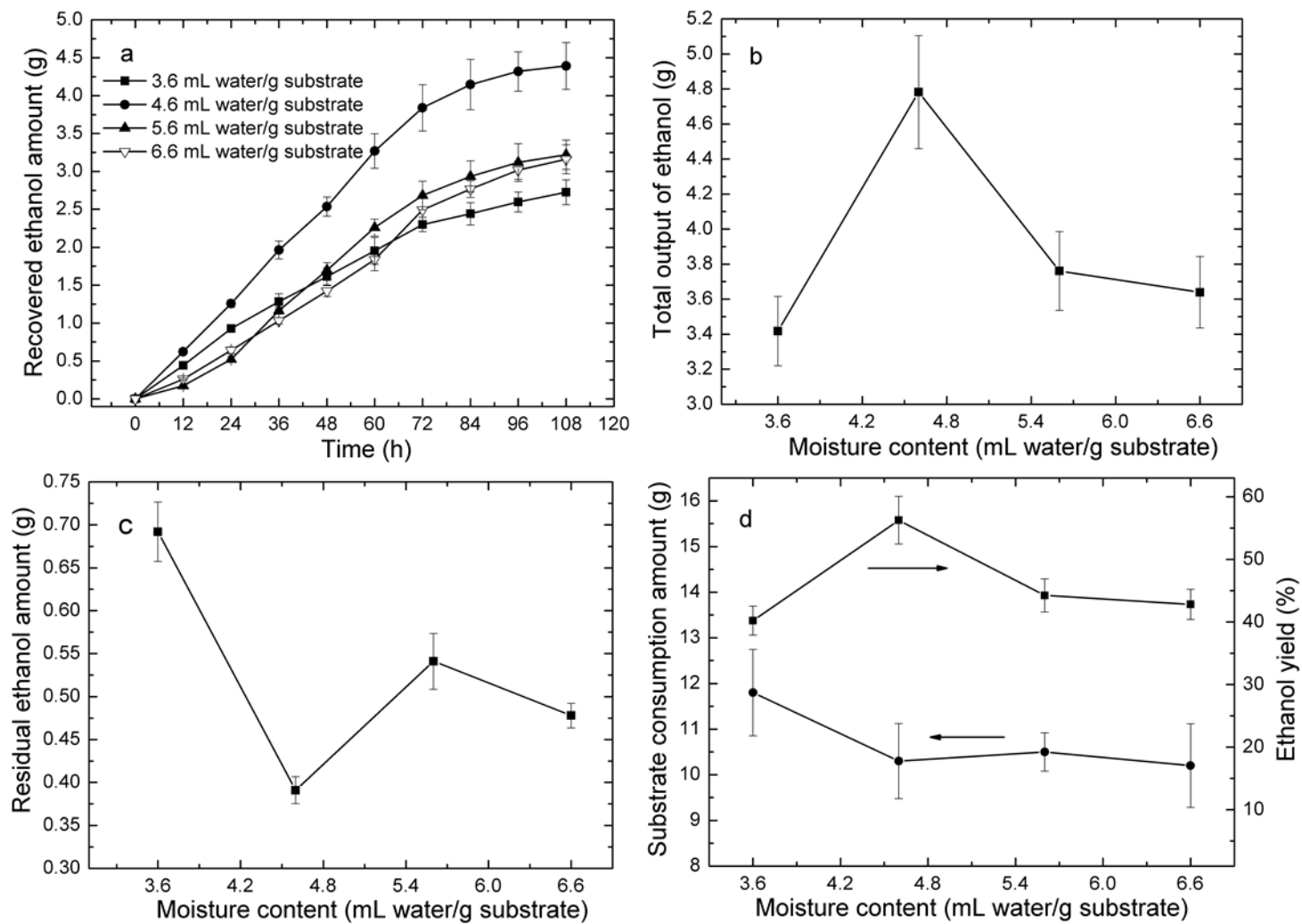


Fig. 4



**Table 1 Comparison of conversion efficiency of cellulose to ethanol**

Substrate	Pretreatment conditions	Fermentation conditions	Theoretical yield (%)	highest ethanol (g/L)	The corresponding Ethanol content	Ref
Miscanthus	1.5 M NaOH with stirring at 120 rpm and heated to 150 °C for 30 min	Liquid-state saccharification and fermentation at 42 °C with shaking at 150 rpm	86.3%		29.5	36
Paper bark tree	Subcritical water at 180 °C for 30min	anaerobic condition in an orbital shaker (150 rpm, 37 °C) for 120 h	91.25%		43.7	37
Corn stover	Steam explosion at 200 °C for 4min	Semi-continuous liquid-state simultaneous saccharification and fermentation (37 °C for 60 h)	52.1%		40.6	23
Olive tree pruning	liquid hot water pretreated at 210 °C with magnetic agitation	Liquid-state simultaneous saccharification and fermentation at 35 °C for 72 h and 150 rpm	38%		24.9	38
mature coconut fibre	sequential alkaline hydrogen peroxide (Alk-H <sub>2</sub> O <sub>2</sub> )–sodium hydroxide (NaOH)	Semi-simultaneous saccharification and fermentation at 30 °C for 40 h	89.15		9.32	39
Hinoki cypress	steam treatment (150 °C for 2 h,) with wet disk milling	yeast-based simultaneous saccharification and fermentation at 58 °C with shaking at 125 rpm	63.4% (calculated value)		--	40
Rice straw	dilute acid pretreatment, then delignification with 0.5% NaOH at 121 °C for 30 min	Simultaneous saccharification and fermentation with agitation at 120 rpm for 72 h at 42 °C	84.6%		24.63	41
Rapeseed straw	liquid hot water pretreatment at 217 °C for 42 min)	Liquid-state simultaneous saccharification and fermentation in an orbital shaker at 150 rpm.	66.6%		17.2	42
Rice straw	1% NaOH solution for 24 h	Solid-state Simultaneous saccharification and fermentation at 35 °C for 108 h	56.3%		Equivalent to 21.05	This work