

Fig. 1. Confocal fluorescence images of YC2.1, YC3er-, and YC4er-expressing cells. (A) In the YC2.1-expressed myocyte, emitted fluorescence of 530 nm was uniform in the cytosol without any significant brighter spot. Fluorescence was spared in the nucleus. (B) In the fluo-3-loaded myocyte, the fluorescence of 530 nm was homogeneous in the cytosol and intra-cellular organelles with some brighter spots. (C) The image of the YC3er-expressed myocyte showed reticular pattern around the nucleus and a ladder-like pattern in the peripheral lesion of the myocyte. The YC4er-expressing myocyte (E) was simultaneously stained with TRITC-labeled phalloidin (D). The parallel lines (arrowheads) of YC4er-expressing region were located in the middle of the I bands (Merge, (F)). Note that the distance between the neighbored cross-sectional parallel lines was about 2  $\mu$ m. Simultaneous detection of distribution of SERCA2a (G) and YC3er (H) was performed using confocal laser microscopy. The distribution of YC3er was overlapped with the expression pattern of SERCA2a (Merge, (I)).

Fig. 2.  $Ca^{2+}$ -dependent FRET signals from the YC2.1, YC3er-, and YC4er-expressing ventricular myocytes. In the YC2.1-expressing myocyte, the emission signals of 480 nm (black line) were decreased and the signals of 580 nm (red line) were increased by pacing stimulation (a). As a result, calculated  $R$  (blue line) was transiently increased during each contraction–relaxation cycle (A), and the rapid application of caffeine (20 mM) decreased both the diastolic and the amplitude of  $R$  (B) after transiently increasing the diastolic level of  $R$ . In the YC3er-expressed myocyte,  $R$  was reversibly decreased by caffeine (b). The beat-to-beat oscillation of the emission lights was observed after the caffeine-treatment (D) but not before the treatment (C). In the YC4er-expressed myocyte,  $R$  was decreased by caffeine-like in the YC3er-expressing myocyte (c), but the beat-to-beat oscillation was not observed with (F) or without (E) the treatment.

[16,17]. Treatment with 20 mM of caffeine initially and transiently increased the baseline (diastolic level) of  $R$ , resulting from an increase in the 530 nm-emission intensity and a decrease in the 480 nm-emission intensity, which was followed by a decrease in that of  $R$  with reduction in the amplitude of  $R$  transients (Fig. 2a–b). These results suggest that YC2.1 was localized in the cytosol and reflected a change in the cytosolic  $Ca^{2+}$  concentration ( $[Ca^{2+}]_{cyt}$ ) during each contraction–relaxation cycle. In the YC3er-expressing myocyte, the emission of both 480 and 530 nm did not change synchronously by pacing stimulations (Fig. 2b–c). In contrast to YC2.1, the emission of 480 nm was increased and that of 530 nm was decreased by treatment with 20 mM of caffeine (Fig. 2b–d). A beat-to-beat periodical  $R$  transient was detected during the caffeine treatment and the phase of the  $R$  transient was completely inverted to that observed in the YC2.1-expressing myocyte (Figs. 2a–b and b–d).  $R$  was increased soon after pacing stimulation in the YC2.1 expressing myocyte (Fig. 2a), while  $R$  was peaked at pacing stimulation and decreased thereafter in the YC3er-expressing myocytes (Fig. 2b). In the YC4er-expressing myocyte,  $R$  was decreased by the treatment with caffeine (Fig. 2c), but periodical transient was not observed before and after caffeine treatment (Fig. 2c–e and f). Since caffeine induces efflux of  $Ca^{2+}$  from SR and we have confirmed that caffeine of

this high concentration did not alter the emission signals from cardiac fibroblasts expressing YC3er or YC4er as well as HEK293 cells expressing YC2.1 (data not shown), the results of caffeine treatment suggest that change in the emission signals from YC3er and YC4er can be considered to be  $Ca^{2+}$ -dependent, that is, reflect the change in  $[Ca^{2+}]_{SR}$ .

#### Change of $[Ca^{2+}]_{SR}$

Next we examined the effects of  $Ca^{2+}$  modulating agents such as isoproterenol, thapsigargin, and ryanodine on  $R$ . Isoproterenol has been known to increase  $Ca^{2+}$  influx through L-type  $Ca^{2+}$  channels of sarcolemma, leading to an increase in large  $Ca^{2+}$  release from SR by the CICR mechanism. Isoproterenol also increases the pumping rate of SERCA2a by phosphorylating phospholamban through Gs protein-coupled protein kinase A activation. Addition of 100 nM isoproterenol increased  $R$  in the YC4er- and YC3er-expressing myocytes (Fig. 3A, data not shown). Thapsigargin has been widely used as an inhibitor for SERCA2a. As shown in Fig. 3B, 10  $\mu$ M of thapsigargin decreased  $R$  in the YC4er-expressing myocyte, which was not reversed after removal of thapsigargin from the perfusate. Subsequent application of caffeine further decreased  $R$  and this reduction was reversed soon

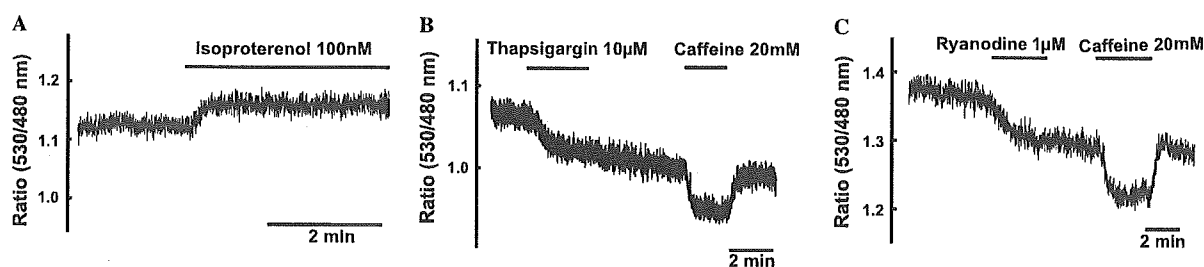


Fig. 3. Effects of isoproterenol, thapsigargin, and ryanodine on  $[Ca^{2+}]_{SR}$ . Treatment with 100 nM of isoproterenol increased  $R$  in the YC4er-expressing myocyte. (A) On the other hand, 10  $\mu$ M of thapsigargin (B) or 1  $\mu$ M of ryanodine (C) irreversibly decreased  $R$  in the YC4er-expressing myocyte and subsequent treatment with caffeine (20 mM) further decreased  $R$  reversibly.

after the end of caffeine treatment (Fig. 3B). Ryanodine at the concentration of 1  $\mu\text{M}$  has been reported to increase the open probability of SR  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  channel (ryanodine receptor) and consequently decrease  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_{\text{SR}}$ . As shown in Fig. 3C, the ryanodine treatment decreased  $R$  irreversibly and the subsequent application of caffeine further decreased  $R$ . Similar results were obtained in YC3er-expressing myocytes (data not shown).

## Discussion

In the present study, we succeeded in specifically expressing YC2.1 in the cytoplasm and YC3er/4er in SR of living ventricular myocytes, and established the method for measuring  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_{\text{cyt}}$  and  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_{\text{SR}}$ . The validity of the method for measuring  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_{\text{SR}}$  was confirmed by the reverse directions of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transient observed in YC2.1 expressing myocytes and YC3er-expressing myocytes during pacing and by the effects of isoproterenol, thapsigargin, and ryanodine on  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentration in YC4er- and YC3er-expressing myocytes.

### *Intra-cellular distribution of cameleons*

YC2.1 was expressed homogeneously in the cytoplasm, whereas YC3er and YC4er showed a characteristic expression pattern in ventricular myocytes. Expression of YC2.1 was spared in the nucleus or the intra-cellular organelles. Since molecular size of cameleons is relatively large (74 kDa), they could not get into those organelles. In contrast, conventional  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  dyes can be taken by organelles such as mitochondria and Golgi apparatus as well as the nucleus. The cytosolic homogeneous pattern of YC2.1 also suggests that YC2.1 resides in the fluid space of the cytosol without accumulation or binding to hydrophobic proteins, which is consistent with results in non-muscle cells [11]. The specific localization and the uniform distribution give the priority to the YCs as a  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  indicator as compared with conventional fluorescence indicators such as fura-2, indo-1, and fluo-3.

In mature ventricular myocytes, it has been reported that calsequestrin is a major protein to buffer  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  in SR and is predominantly (60–70%) expressed in the terminal cisternae [18–20], while calreticulin composes a minor part [21]. YC3er and YC4er possess the leading sequence and the retention signal (KDEL) of calreticulin, which introduce and detain these cameleons in the ER of nonmyocytes [11]. YC4er was located in the middle of I-bands (Figs. 1D–F), suggesting that YC4er was expressed in the part of the terminal cisternae. Immunocytochemical analysis using anti-SERCA2a antibody indicated that YC3er and YC4er were localized in the same place as SERCA2a (Fig. 1H). These results suggest

that YC3er and YC4er were expressed in terminal cisternae of SR.

### *$[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_{\text{SR}}$ transients*

Although the relatively slow changes in  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_{\text{SR}}$  were observed after several manipulations (Fig. 3), we could not observe the cyclic emission signals which were synchronized with beating in the YC3er/4er-expressing myocyte. Since treatment with caffeine unraveled beat-to-beat oscillated  $R$  in the YC3er-expressing cells, the limited speed of the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -dependent conformational change of YC3er is not a major cause of irresponsiveness to pacing stimulations. The difference in beat-to-beat oscillation after caffeine treatment between YC3er and YC4er (Figs. 2b and c) suggests that the irresponsiveness might be at least in part due to dissociation constant ( $K_d$ ).  $K_d$  of YC3er has been reported to be 4.4  $\mu\text{M}$  at 25 °C [11,13]. In the earlier reports [10,22–24],  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_{\text{SR}}$  has been reported to be 0.3–5 mM, the range of which is much higher than the  $K_d$  value for YC3er. Therefore, YC3er may be saturated with  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and it cannot follow the change in  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_{\text{SR}}$ . This interpretation seems to be reasonable, because the emission signals from YC3er actually showed beat-to-beat transients in response to pacing when  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  in SR was reduced by caffeine. However, beat-to-beat signals were not detected from YC4er-expressing cardiomyocyte in response to pacing stimulation even after the caffeine treatment, suggesting that there are other reasons. The first possibility is that YC4er was expressed so much that YC4er itself buffered  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  in SR as suggested previously [11,13], resulting in suppression of CICR and/or secondary modification of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  handling systems consisting of L-type  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  channel, ryanodine receptors, the dyadic or triadic structure, and so on. In fact, the  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_{\text{cyt}}$  transients were markedly reduced when the intra-SR buffering capacity was much increased by overexpression of calsequestrin, although the total  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  content in SR was markedly increased [25,26]. The second possibility is that the intra-SR  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentration may be out of the measurable range with YC3er and YC4er in neonatal rat ventricular myocytes. The  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  titration curve for YC4er has been reported to be a biphasic sigmoid curve with rather linear relationship at  $10^{-4}$ – $10^{-2}$  M of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentration. This suggests that YC4er could not be used as a  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  indicator in the range of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentrations below  $10^{-4}$  M or above  $10^{-2}$  M. On the other hand, the titration curve for YC3er has been reported to be well fitted with a single sigmoid curve with almost linear relationship between  $10^{-7}$  and  $10^{-5}$  M [11]. Therefore, resting  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_{\text{SR}}$  might be  $10^{-5}$ – $10^{-4}$ . We could not achieve the calibration, because of deformation and rigor of cardiomyocytes when we increased  $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_{\text{cyt}}$  up to more than  $10^{-2}$  M with ionomycin. Furthermore, both YC3er and YC4er did not

respond to high  $[Ca^{2+}]_{SR}$  ( $\geq 10^{-2}$  M) solution in the presence of ionomycin (data not shown), suggesting that the cell damage might affect the conditions of YC3er and YC4er in the SR. Further studies are necessary to establish precise calibration to use these cameleons for general measurements of  $[Ca^{2+}]_{SR}$  in cardiac myocytes.

#### $[Ca^{2+}]_{SR}$ after addition of $Ca^{2+}$ modulating agents

Although cameleons could not follow the rapid change of  $[Ca^{2+}]_{SR}$ , they could respond to the relatively slow and large change in  $[Ca^{2+}]_{SR}$ . Isoproterenol increased  $R$  in cardiac myocytes expressing YC4er and YC3er (Fig. 3A). Ten micromolars of thapsigargin has been widely used to diminish the pumping rate of SERCA2a, and has been reported to deplete SR  $Ca^{2+}$  content almost irreversibly because of its high affinity [27]. As shown in Fig. 3B, thapsigargin decreased  $R$  irreversibly. However, the subsequent application of caffeine further and reversibly decreased  $R$ , suggesting that the treatment with 10  $\mu$ M of thapsigargin for 3 min is not enough to inhibit SERCA2a completely or to deplete  $Ca^{2+}$  storage in SR. Ryanodine at 1  $\mu$ M has been thought to set the ryanodine receptor subconducting state [28], which likely accelerates the leak of  $Ca^{2+}$  from SR, and reduces  $[Ca^{2+}]_{SR}$ . As shown in Fig. 3C, ryanodine decreased  $R$  in the YC4er-expressing myocyte. The effect by subsequent application of caffeine was maintained, suggesting that ryanodine partially releases a part of  $Ca^{2+}$  in SR.

The effect of caffeine at the concentration of this range (20 mM) has been well recognized to set the ryanodine receptor subconducting state and prevent net SR  $Ca^{2+}$  reuptake [29], both of which result in  $Ca^{2+}$  release from SR and the depletion of releasable  $Ca^{2+}$  in SR. Therefore, the beat-to-beat  $[Ca^{2+}]_{cyt}$  oscillation induced by pacing in the presence of caffeine has been thought to be mediated by  $Ca^{2+}$  influx through L-type  $Ca^{2+}$  channels and reverse phase of NCX. In this study, however, CICR was detectable by cameleons even after the caffeine treatment. Caffeine has been reported to inhibit phosphodiesterases to increase cAMP, thereby activating SERCA as well as further increasing  $I_{Ca}$  through protein kinase A-dependent mechanism, both of which may contribute to maintaining the amount of releasable  $Ca^{2+}$  in SR. Reconsideration may be necessary for the effects of caffeine on  $Ca^{2+}$  regulation in cardiomyocytes, although it is not ruled out that difference in species, age, and experimental conditions might contribute to this intricate effect of caffeine.

In conclusion, we for the first time succeeded in monitoring the real-time changes of  $[Ca^{2+}]_{SR}$  in living ventricular myocytes expressing novel  $Ca^{2+}$  indicators, YC3er and YC4er. We also examined the effects of drugs which modify the function of SR  $Ca^{2+}$  handling proteins such as SERCA2a and ryanodine receptors.

Although the calibration of emission signals to  $Ca^{2+}$  concentration has not been established, this technique is useful and applicable to evaluate the  $[Ca^{2+}]_{SR}$  in cardiomyocytes of pathological and various pathophysiological conditions.

#### Acknowledgments

This work was partly supported by a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research on Priority Areas from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan, Japan Heart Foundation, Takeda Medical Research Foundation, Uehara Memorial Foundation, and Grant-in-Aid of Japan Medical Association, The Kato Memorial Trust for Nambyo Research, and Takeda Science Foundation. We thank Dr. Makoto Endo and Dr. William H. Barry for their kind suggestions on the experimental protocols and the results in this study.

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Forum Minireview

## Forefront of Na<sup>+</sup>/Ca<sup>2+</sup> Exchanger Studies: Role of Na<sup>+</sup>/Ca<sup>2+</sup> Exchanger – Lessons From Knockout Mice

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Received June 14, 2004; Accepted July 27, 2004

**Abstract.** We used Na<sup>+</sup>/Ca<sup>2+</sup> exchanger (NCX) knockout mice to evaluate the effects of NCX in cardiac function and the infarct size after ischemia/reperfusion injury. The contractile function in NCX KO mice hearts was significantly better than that in wild type (WT) mouse hearts after ischemia/reperfusion and the infarcted size was significantly smaller in NCX KO mice hearts compared with that in WT mice hearts. NCX is critically involved in the development of ischemia/reperfusion-induced myocardial injury, and therefore the inhibition of NCX function may contribute to cardioprotection against ischemia/reperfusion injury.

**Keywords:** Na<sup>+</sup>/Ca<sup>2+</sup> exchanger (NCX), knockout mouse, heart, ischemia/reperfusion injury

### Introduction

The Na<sup>+</sup>/Ca<sup>2+</sup> exchanger (NCX) is an important electrogenic transporter in maintaining calcium homeostasis in a variety of mammalian organs (1). NCX catalyzes electrogenic exchange of Na<sup>+</sup> and Ca<sup>2+</sup> across the plasma membrane in either the Ca<sup>2+</sup>-efflux (the forward mode) or Ca<sup>2+</sup>-influx (the reverse mode), depending on the electrochemical gradients of the substrate ions. In the heart, NCX plays an important role in excitation-contraction coupling as the dominant myocardial Ca<sup>2+</sup>-efflux system (2). On the other hand, the reverse mode of NCX is associated with in cytoplasmic Ca<sup>2+</sup> levels in cardiomyocytes during digitalis treatment or ischemia/reperfusion (3). It has been reported that NCX inhibitors and NCX antisense oligonucleotides protect the heart from ischemia/reperfusion injury (4, 5). However, two putative NCX inhibitors, KB-R7943 and SEA0400, have been reported to be not specific for NCX (6). Therefore, it remains unclear whether NCX indeed plays a crucial role in mediating Ca<sup>2+</sup> influx that leads to Ca<sup>2+</sup> overload and cellular injury after myocardial ischemia, reperfusion injury.

We generated *Ncx1*-deficient mice by gene targeting to determine the in vivo function of the exchanger (7). Homozygous *Ncx1*-deficient mice died between embry-

onic days 9 and 10. Their hearts did not beat, and cardiac myocytes showed apoptosis. No forward mode or reverse mode of the Na<sup>+</sup>/Ca<sup>2+</sup> exchange activity was detected in null mutant hearts. The Na<sup>+</sup>-dependent Ca<sup>2+</sup> exchange activity as well as protein content of NCX1 were decreased by approximately 50% in the heart, kidney, aorta, and smooth muscle cells of the heterozygous mice, and tension development of the aortic ring in Na<sup>+</sup>-free solution was markedly impaired in heterozygous mice. These findings suggest that NCX1 is required for heartbeats and survival of cardiac myocytes in embryos and plays critical roles in Na<sup>+</sup>-dependent Ca<sup>2+</sup> handling in the heart and aorta.

### The functional activity as well as the protein content of NCX in the myocardium of NCX KO mice is approximately half of those of WT mice

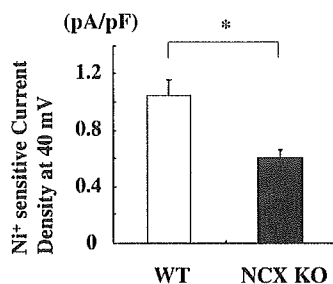
Twelve-week-old male heterozygous knockout (KO) mice and wild type (WT) littermates were used. All animal experiments were performed according to the Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals (NIH publication No. 85-23, revised 1996). Ventricular cells were prepared from adult mouse hearts by standard enzymatic digestion (8). Whole-cell membrane currents were recorded by the patch-clamp method and the current-voltage relationship was obtained by voltage clamp ramp pulses as described previously (9). Under

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these conditions, the  $\text{Ni}^{2+}$ -sensitive current represents NCX current (10). All data were acquired and analyzed by the pCLAMP (version 5.5; Axon Instrument) software.

Expression levels of dihydropyridine (DHP) receptor (L-type  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  channel) and SR  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -ATPase 2 (SERCA2) were analyzed by Western blot as described previously (11). Briefly, tissue was homogenized in lysis buffer containing 25 mM Tris-HCl (pH 7.4), 25 mM NaCl, 0.5 mM EGTA, 10 mM sodium pyrophosphate, 1 mM sodium orthovanadate, 10 mM NaF, 10 nM okadaic acid, 1 mM PMSF, 20  $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$  aprotinin, and 20  $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$  leupeptin. Protein concentration was determined using a protein assay kit (BioRad, Hercules, CA, USA) and equal amounts of total protein (40  $\mu\text{g}/\text{lane}$ ) were separated on 8% SDS-polyacrylamide gel. Separated proteins were transferred to nitrocellulose membrane (Amersham Life Science, Arlington Heights, IL, USA). Membranes were incubated with anti-mouse dihydropyridine L-type  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  channel  $\alpha$ -2 subunit monoclonal antibody (Affinity Bioreagents, Inc., Golden, CO, USA) or anti-mouse SERCA2 monoclonal antibody (Affinity Bioreagents) at 4°C overnight. After washing, the membranes were incubated with horseradish peroxidase-conjugated goat anti-mouse antibody for 1 h. Immunoreactive protein was visualized using an enhanced chemiluminescence detection kit (ECL, Amersham).

We previously reported that the protein content of NCX in NCX KO mouse hearts was approximately 50% of that in WT mouse hearts (12). To elucidate the functional activity, we examined NCX current densities from -40 mV to 40 mV in WT ( $n=9$ ) and NCX KO ventricular cells ( $n=6$ ) (Fig. 1). The densities of the reverse mode of NCX at 40 mV in ventricular cells of KO mice ( $0.57 \pm 0.07$  pA/pF) were approximately half (55.4%) compared with those of WT mice ( $1.04 \pm 0.14$  pA/pF). These results suggest that the functional



**Fig. 1.** NCX current densities. The densities of the reverse mode of NCX at 40 mV in ventricular myocytes isolated from WT ( $n=9$ ) and NCX KO mice hearts ( $n=6$ ). Values are expressed as the mean  $\pm$  S.E.M. \* $P<0.05$  vs WT mice.

activity as well as the protein content of NCX in the myocardium of NCX KO mice is approximately half of those of WT mice.

Western blot analysis revealed that there was no difference in the protein levels of L-type  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  channel and SERCA2 between the two groups (data not shown).

### The infarct size was significantly smaller in KO hearts than in WT hearts

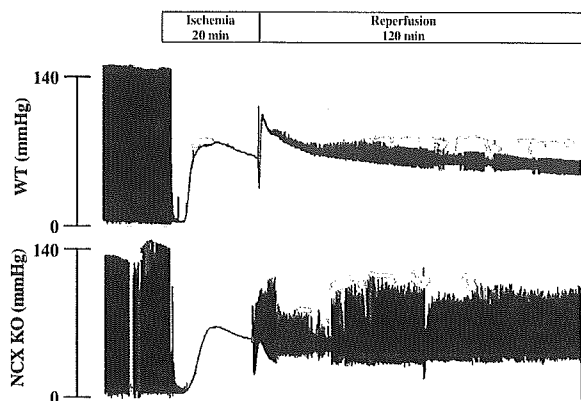
Hearts were excised from mice and connected to the perfusion canula via the aorta as described previously (8). Retrograde perfusion was maintained with Krebs-Henseleit solution. To evaluate the contractile function, a polyethylene film balloon was inserted into the cavity of the left ventricle through the left atrium. The balloon was filled with saline to adjust the baseline end-diastolic pressure to 5–10 mmHg. Hearts were subjected to no-flow, global ischemia by clamping the perfusion line. After 30 min of ischemia, the clamp was released and the hearts were reperfused for 120 min. Left ventricular developed pressure (LVDP) was designated as difference between systolic and diastolic pressures of the left ventricle. After 120 min, the heart was incubated for 5 min at 37°C in a 1% solution of triphenyl-tetrazolium chloride (TTC). The sizes of the infarcted area and viable ischemic-reperfused area were measured by computed planimetry (Scion Image 1.62; Scion Corporation, Frederick, MD, USA). Infarct size was calculated as described previously (13).

There were no significant differences in the basal hemodynamic parameters, including heart rate, left ventricular pressure, end-diastolic pressure, and positive and negative  $\text{dP}/\text{dt}$ , between WT and KO mice (Table 1). After ischemia, there was no significant difference between the two groups in several parameters such as time to no beating, time to contracture, and left

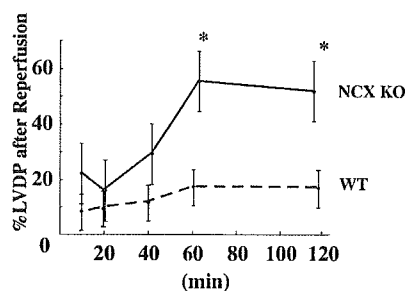
**Table 1.** Hemodynamic parameters of NCX KO mice

	WT ( $n=6$ )	NCX KO ( $n=7$ )
HR (bpm)	$356 \pm 40$	$378 \pm 77$
LVP (mmHg)	$142.8 \pm 40$	$146.3 \pm 34.5$
EDP (mmHg)	$4.4 \pm 1.5$	$4.3 \pm 1.3$
$\text{dP}/\text{dt}$ (mmHg/s)	$7368 \pm 630$	$7845 \pm 2582$
$-\text{dP}/\text{dt}$ (mmHg/s)	$5204 \pm 782$	$5539 \pm 1157$
Time to no beating (min)	$2.2 \pm 0.9$	$2.2 \pm 1.6$
Time to contracture (min)	$6.2 \pm 1.7$	$6.3 \pm 2.0$
EDP at 25 min (mmHg)	$67.3 \pm 9.2$	$63.8 \pm 10.8$

HR, heart rate; LVP, left ventricular pressure; EDP, LV end-diastolic pressure;  $\text{dP}/\text{dt}$  and  $-\text{dP}/\text{dt}$ , positive and negative first derivatives for maximal rates of LV pressure development, respectively.



**Fig. 2.** Ex vivo studies. Changes in LVP during ischemia/reperfusion. Representative LVP records of WT and NCX KO mouse hearts are shown. Note that KO mouse hearts started to contract earlier than WT mouse hearts after reperfusion.

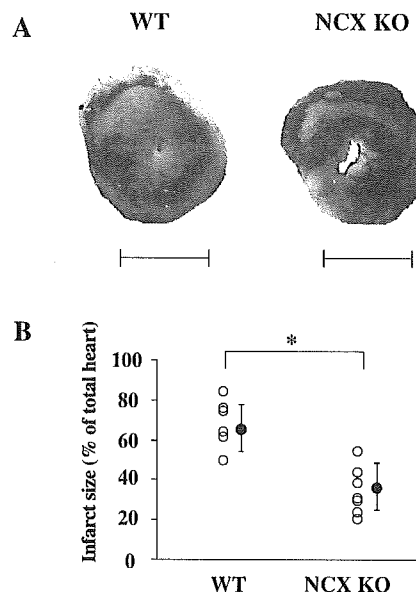


**Fig. 3.** LVDP of hearts of NCX KO mice ( $n = 7$ ) and WT mice ( $n = 6$ ) hearts after reperfusion. Values are expressed as the mean  $\pm$  S.E.M. \* $P < 0.05$  vs WT mice.

ventricular end-diastolic pressure (Fig. 2). After reperfusion, however, hearts of KO mice started to beat earlier than those of WT mice (Fig. 2). At 120 min after reperfusion, contractile function (left ventricular developed pressure) of KO mouse hearts was significantly better ( $51.7 \pm 12.7\%$  of preischemic value) than that of WT mouse hearts ( $26.3 \pm 6.9\%$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) (Fig. 3). After ischemia/reperfusion, there was much more viable myocardium in KO hearts than WT hearts (red lesion (printed in black) in Fig. 4A). The infarcted size was significantly smaller in KO hearts ( $32 \pm 9\%$ ) than in WT hearts ( $68 \pm 10\%$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) (white lesion in Fig. 4A and Fig. 4B).

### Concluding remarks

Myocardial cell injury is induced by a combination of mechanical and chemical stresses during ischemia



**Fig. 4.** Infarct size. A: Representative TTC staining photographs of WT and NCX KO mice hearts after ischemia/reperfusion are shown. Infarct area is expressed as a white lesion and viable myocardium is expressed as a red lesion (printed in black). Bar = 2 mm. B: Myocardial infarct size is expressed as percentage for the total heart of WT mice ( $n = 6$ ) and NCX KO mice ( $n = 7$ ). Values are expressed as the mean  $\pm$  S.E.M. \* $P < 0.05$  vs WT mice.

(14). Reoxygenation after extended periods of ischemia rapidly induce hypercontracture of cardiomyocytes (15) and aggravate the preexisting injury (16). The hypercontracture represents a major cause of acute lethal cell injury in the reperfused myocardium (17, 18). It has been hypothesized that an increase in intracellular Ca<sup>2+</sup> levels of cardiomyocytes through NCX induces the hypercontracture state after reperfusion but not during ischemia by the mechanism described below (5). During myocardial ischemia, anaerobic metabolism induces acidosis both inside and outside of cardiomyocytes. The Na<sup>+</sup>/H<sup>+</sup> exchanger does not operate at this moment because of no difference in H<sup>+</sup> concentration across the plasma membrane of cardiomyocytes. Reperfusion restores extracellular acidosis, leading to a disparity in H<sup>+</sup> concentration between the inside and outside of cardiomyocytes. The increase in intracellular H<sup>+</sup> concentration activates the Na<sup>+</sup>/H<sup>+</sup> exchanger, and the elevated intracellular Na<sup>+</sup> concentration triggers a rise in intracellular Ca<sup>2+</sup> by the reverse mode of NCX (5). The excessive Ca<sup>2+</sup> overload induces the catastrophic hypercontracture of cardiomyocytes. In fact, it has been reported that reduction of Ca<sup>2+</sup> concentration protects cardiomyocytes against hypercontracture evoked by reoxygenation (19). In contrast, overexpression of NCX

increased ischemia/reperfusion injury in mice (20). Pharmacological inhibition of reverse mode of NCX protected reperfusion injury in cardiomyocytes (19). These results suggest that NCX is critically involved in the myocardial ischemia/reperfusion injury; however, NCX inhibitors have been recently reported to be not specific to NCX (6). Two putative NCX inhibitors, KB-R7943 and SEA0400, depressed the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transients even in cardiomyocytes of NCX null mice (7). Although these NCX inhibitors have been reported to suppress the reverse mode but not the forward mode of NCX, the administration of high dose of these inhibitors increased infarct size possibly by inhibiting the forward mode of NCX (21). We here demonstrated an important role of NCX in myocardial ischemia/reperfusion injury by using NCX KO mice. The reverse mode of NCX current in KO mice was decreased to half that of WT mice. Loss of function of NCX is assumed to result in alleviation of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  overload, hypercontracture, and cell death after reperfusion. Our present study clearly indicates that the inhibition of NCX contributes to cardioprotection against myocardial ischemia/reperfusion injury and suggests that specific inhibitors of the reverse mode of NCX may be useful to prevent the myocardial ischemia/reperfusion injury.

### Acknowledgments

We thank to Y. Reien for the current density analysis and R. Kobayashi, E. Fujita, M. Watanabe, M. Iida, and A. Ohkubo for technical assistance. This work was supported in part by grants from the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology and the Japan Health Sciences Foundation.

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## Double Aortic Arch With a Compressed Trachea Demonstrated by Multislice Computed Tomography

Nobusada Funabashi, MD; Atsushi Ishida, MD; Katsuya Yoshida, MD; Issei Komuro, MD

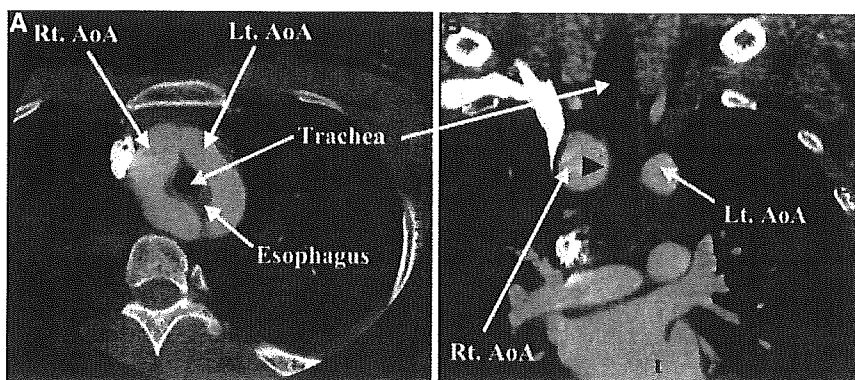
A 33-year-old man had a chest x-ray that showed an abnormal enlargement of the thoracic aorta. ECG-gated enhanced multislice computed tomography (CT) (Light Speed Ultra 16, General Electric) was therefore performed with a 0.625-mm slice thickness and a helical pitch of 3.25. Thirty seconds after intravenous injection of 100 mL of iodinated contrast material (350 mgI/mL), CT scanning was performed with retrospective ECG-gated reconstruction and volume data were transferred to a workstation (Virtual Place Office, Azemoto, Tokyo, Japan).

Axial source images (Figure 1A) and multiplanar reconstruction images of the coronal view (Figure 1B) revealed separated right and left aortic arches and a trachea and esophagus surrounded by a vascular ring made by the double aortic arches. The trachea was actually slightly compressed

by the vascular ring (Figure 1B, arrowhead). Three-dimensional volume rendering images also revealed the double aortic arch, which was separated at the distal portion of the ascending aorta (Figure 2A) and joined at the proximal portion of the descending aorta (Figure 2B). The right subclavian artery and right common carotid artery both originated separately from the right aortic arch, and the left subclavian artery and left common carotid artery originated from the left aortic arch. Because the patient did not experience symptoms of compression of the esophagus or trachea, surgical intervention is not currently planned.

### Acknowledgments

This work was supported by Japan Cardiovascular Research Foundation.



**Figure 1.** Axial source image (A) and multiplanar reconstruction image from the coronal view (B) of enhanced multislice CT revealed separate right (rt.) and left (lt.) aortic arches (AoA). The trachea and esophagus were surrounded by a vascular ring made by the double AoA (A), and the trachea was actually slightly compressed by the vascular ring (B, arrowheads).

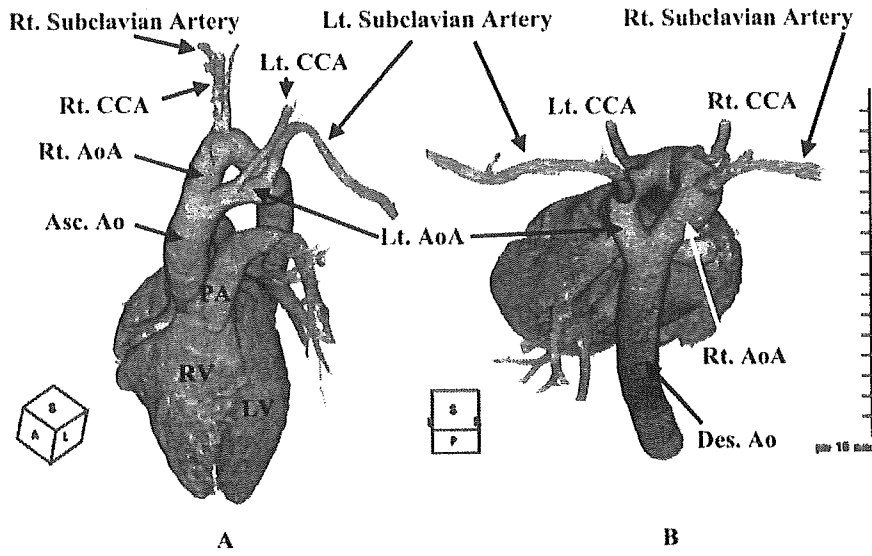
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(*Circulation*. 2004;110:e68-e69.)

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*Circulation* is available at <http://www.circulationaha.org>

DOI: 10.1161/01.CIR.0000138742.98726.5F



**Figure 2.** Three-dimensional volume rendering image of enhanced multislice CT from the left superior anterior view (A) and from the superior posterior view (B) revealed double aortic arches (AoA) separated at the distal portion of the ascending aorta (Asc. Ao) (A) and joined at the proximal portion of the descending aorta (Des. Ao) (B). The right (rt.) subclavian artery and right common carotid artery (CCA) originated separately from the right aortic arch (rt. AoA), and the left (lt.) subclavian artery and left CCA originated from the left aortic arch (lt. AoA). PA indicates pulmonary artery; RV, right ventricle; and LV, left ventricle.

# New Method of Measuring Coronary Diameter by Electron-Beam Computed Tomographic Angiography Using Adjusted Thresholds Determined by Calibration With Aortic Opacity

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Miki Asano, MT; Kiyomi Teramoto, MD; Issei Komuro, MD; Geoffrey D Rubin, MD†

**Background** In a previous study the adjusted thresholds at which the diameters of coronary arteries determined by enhanced electron-beam computed tomography (CT) scans are equal to the corresponding quantitative coronary angiography measurements were analyzed, and their correlation with maximum CT values for the vessel short axes was determined. A rapid accurate method for such measurements was sought by substituting maximum CT values for the descending aorta in the corresponding axial images for those for the short axes.

**Methods and Results** In 8 patients, 179 sites were measured. Means ( $\pm$ SD) of adjusted thresholds and the maximum CT values for vessel short axes and the descending aorta in the corresponding axial images for all vessels were  $108\pm 66$ ,  $227\pm 80$ , and  $363\pm 75$  Hounsfield Unit (HU), respectively. Adjusted thresholds correlated with the maximum CT values for the corresponding vessel short axes and the descending aorta in the corresponding axial images, with  $R^2=0.55$ ,  $0.33$ ,  $p<0.01$ , respectively. An abbreviated formula for use of maximum CT values for the descending aorta in the corresponding axial images was  $y=0.5x-75$  (HU) ( $y$ =adjusted threshold,  $x$ =maximum CT value for the descending aorta in the corresponding axial image).

**Conclusions** The abbreviated formula provided a rapid, accurate method for measurements independent of arterial enhancement. (*Circ J* 2004; 68: 769–777)

**Key Words:** Adjusted thresholds; Coronary artery; Electron beam computed tomography; Quantitative coronary angiography

Measurements of the diameters of 3-dimensional (3-D) coronary arteries using electron-beam computed tomography (EBCT) and shaded surface display (SSD) techniques have been qualitatively compared with those obtained by cine coronary angiography.<sup>1–3</sup> The threshold selection has been set at 80–100 Hounsfield Units (HU) and from quantitative analysis using different threshold selections,<sup>4</sup> it is reasonable to expect that the optimal threshold level for SSD depends on the magnitude of arterial enhancement. As a result, we hypothesized that a single threshold setting would not constitute a reliable measurement of coronary arterial luminal diameter using EBCT. We have previously reported that adjusted threshold methods using line density profile (LDP) curves in consideration of arterial enhancement provided more accurate results than fixed threshold methods.<sup>5,6</sup> However, in routine practice it is unrealistic to make an LDP curve, or to measure the maximum computed to-

graphy (CT) value for the short axis at each site in the coronary arteries.

In the present study, we analyzed the adjusted thresholds at which the diameters of coronary arteries determined by EBCT scans are equal to the corresponding quantitative coronary angiography (QCA) measurements. Calibration using aortic opacity of the opacified blood, and using maximum CT values for the descending aorta in the corresponding axial images as a substitute for the maximum CT values for the short axes of the coronary arteries, was performed to accurately resolve the measurements of coronary artery luminal diameter. Furthermore we sought to establish a simplified method for measuring coronary artery diameters that was independent of inter- and inpatient variations in arterial enhancement.

## Methods

### Patients

Under a protocol approved by the institutional committee for the protection of human subjects and after informed consent was obtained, 8 male patients aged 53–63 years old, who had previously undergone heart transplantation at a mean 3.6 years prior to enrollment, were recruited to undergo both EBCT (Imatron C-150XP, Imatron, South San Francisco, CA, USA) and cine coronary angiography within a 24-h period.

(Received February 24, 2004; revised manuscript received May 13, 2004; accepted May 28, 2004)

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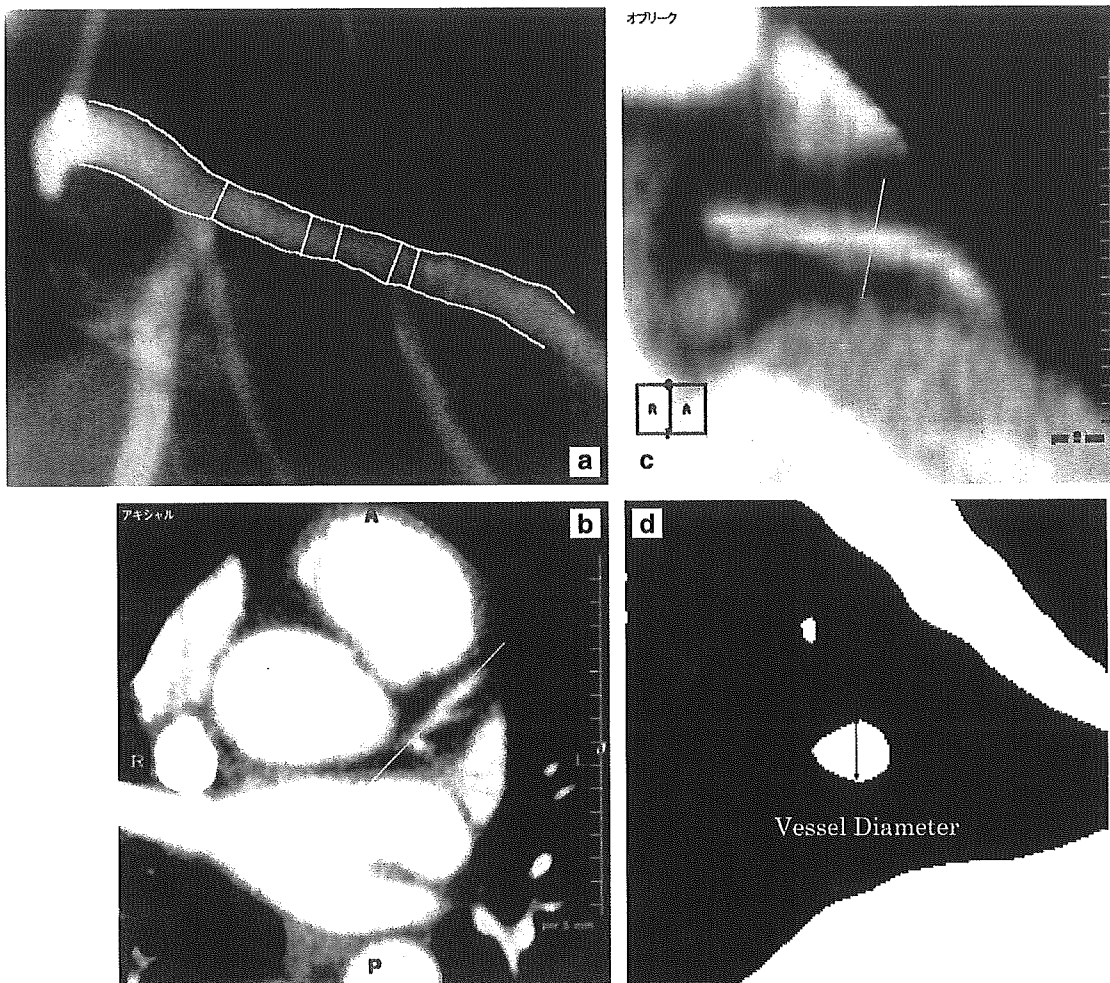


Fig 1. (a) Quantitative coronary angiogram showing the 30-degree right anterior oblique projection of the left coronary arteries. Lines indicate manual tracing. (b–d) Schema of measurement of adjusted thresholds using electron-beam computed tomography (CT). (b) Transverse source image obtained with contrast-enhanced electron-beam CT. The yellow line indicates the long axis of the LAD branch with which we measured vessel diameters. (c) Oblique planar image parallel to the long axis of the LAD branch. The yellow line indicates the axis perpendicular to the long axis of the vessel. Diameters were measured perpendicular to the median centerline of the vessel. Oblique planar reformations were generated parallel to the long axis of vessel, which approximates the oblique projections analyzed with cine coronary angiography. (d) Oblique planar image perpendicular to the long axis of the LAD branch. By setting the display width at zero, we were able to reduce the grayscale to black and white. We set the window levels at the site at which the vessel diameters were equal to the diameters measured by quantitative coronary angiography (QCA) measurement; these window levels were regarded as the adjusted thresholds. Vessel diameters were measured at each measurement site in the same direction as for the coronary angiograms.

### Cine Coronary Angiography

Cine coronary angiography was performed using the percutaneous femoral approach. Sublingual nitroglycerin (0.4 mg) was given 2–3 min before the contrast injection, to minimize the effect of varying vasomotor tone on vessel lumen diameters. Catheters of known diameters were used for calibration. Multiple projections, including cranial and caudal angulated views, were obtained for all patients. The 30-degree right anterior oblique (RAO) projection was used to assess the left coronary artery (LCA) and its branches, and the 60-degree left anterior oblique (LAO) projection was used to assess the right coronary artery (RCA).

QCA was performed off-line using a computerized edge detection program (QCA plus, Sanders Data System, Palo Alto, CA, USA) developed and validated at Stanford<sup>7</sup> and analyzed by a cardiologist (Y.K.) unaware of the EBCT results (Fig 1a). Diameters of the proximal left main (LM)

artery and its distal end just above the bifurcation of the left anterior descending branch (LAD) and the left circumflex branch (LCX) were recorded, as well as the diameter at a point between these 2 sites. Also measured were the diameters of the LAD, the LCX, and the RCA, each at their proximal ends and at 2–4 equally spaced points between their proximal ends and the first atrial side branch. Single end-diastolic cine frames, identified by an electrocardiogram-triggered mark on the frames and selected for optimal coronary vessel opacification, were focused and magnified. The digitized image was displayed on a graphic computer terminal linked to a light pen, which was used to manually trace the margins of either the catheter or coronary segment. Using these lines as initial search locations, the automatic edge-finding algorithm drew and smoothed the edges, defining the edge as the peak of the first derivative of the gray-scale density gradient, perpendicular to the long axis

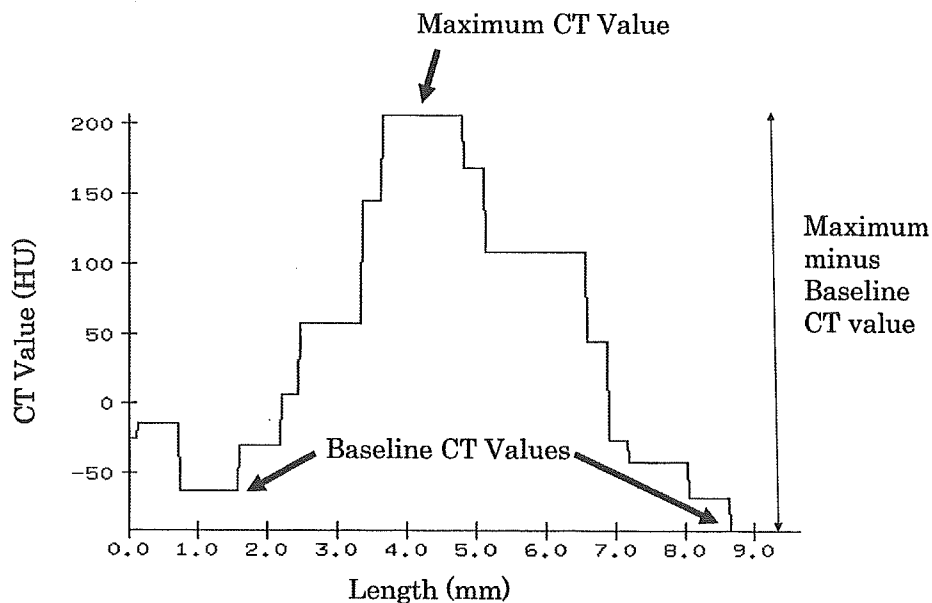


Fig 2. Schema of line density profile (LDP) method. Plot shows the voxel values along a line that is perpendicular to the median centerline of the vessel at each measurement site. In this schema, the baselines of the LDP were established as the epicardial fat immediately adjacent to the vessel on both sides. For the LDP curve, baseline computed tomography (CT) values were calculated for the right side and the left side in addition to the maximum CT value represented as the schema. We measured the maximum CT value minus baseline CT value at both sides and used both the larger and average values.

of the catheter or vessel, as estimated from the initial manual tracings. When the computer algorithm was unable to resolve vessel boundaries in areas of noise or vessel crossings, manual editing of short segments of boundary with the light pen was used to correct the computer-generated boundary. At no time did the length of a manually entered margin exceed 20% of the total length of the quantitated segment. After the light pen indicated the start and end of the segment, the mean diameter of the segment was computed from perpendiculars constructed through the length of a computer-generated centerline. The distance of each measurement point from the LM or the RCA ostium was measured.

#### EBCT Measurement

EBCT attains ultrafast scan speeds by sweeping a steered electron beam on a fixed tungsten target ring, thereby providing a moving X-ray source without mechanical motion.<sup>8</sup> The 100-ms modes are used for high-resolution cross-section imaging in a Step-Volume Scan mode with electrocardiogram gating.<sup>9</sup> EBCT was coupled to a 160 ml intravenous injection of iodinated contrast material (300 mg/ml) performed during breath holding, and was directed over 60–70 mm of the proximal and middle portions of the coronary arteries using 1.5 mm collimation, 1.0 mm table incrementation, and triggered to 80% of the R-to-R interval. The patients received nitroglycerin prior to EBCT, as in the cine angiography studies.

EBCT data were transferred to a workstation (Advantage-Windows, General Electronics, Milwaukee, WI, USA) and 18–27 measurement points per patient within the coronary tree were defined relative to identifiable branches.

Vessel diameters were measured at each measurement site in the same direction as the QCA measurements. Diameters were analyzed by a cardiologist (N.F.) unaware of the QCA results, using the workstation program described later (Fig 1 b–d). Double oblique planar reformations were

generated, firstly parallel to the long axes of the vessels, approximating the oblique projections analyzed by cine coronary angiography (Fig 1 b,c). Using the vessel origins and the major branch sites as landmarks, the loci corresponding to the QCA measurement were identified on the EBCT scans. Second, an additional oblique planar reformation was generated perpendicular to the first oblique reformation image (long axes of the vessel) (Fig 1 c). By setting the display width at zero, we were able to reduce the grayscale to black and white (Fig 1 d). We set the window levels at the site at which vessel diameters were equal to the diameters obtained by QCA measurement; these window levels were regarded as the adjusted thresholds. Furthermore, LDP curves were made perpendicular to the median centerline of the vessel at each measurement site. A plot of the voxel values along a line perpendicular to the vessel at each measurement site was created (Fig 2). The baseline of the LDP was established as epicardial fat or myocardium immediately adjacent to the artery. For the LDP curve, baseline CT values were calculated for the right and left sides in addition to the maximum CT value. We measured the maximum CT value minus baseline CT value using the larger and average values for both sides in the scatter plot. The maximum CT value for the short axis of the coronary arterial lumen at each measurement site was measured from the oblique planar reformations perpendicular to the long axis of the vessel. Also, the maximum CT value for the descending aorta at the corresponding axial level of each measurement site was measured. As some calcifications, which apparently caused a higher attenuation than the vessel lumen, were evident on the enhanced axial images of the descending aorta, we carefully excluded them and measured the maximum CT values for the descending aorta. The maximum CT value was used as an index for assessing arterial enhancement.

**Table 1 QCA Diameter With Distance From the Ostium**

Vessel type	n	QCA Diameter (mm)	Distance from Ostium (mm)
LM	11	5.07±0.75 (3.82–6.09)	3.21±2.9 (0–9.39)
LAD	62	3.3±0.85 (1.46–5.28)	34.64±17.13 (5–77.64)
LCX	46	3.53±0.76 (1.52–5.27)	23.81±15.16 (3–62.54)
RCA	60	3.61±0.58 (2.71–5.67)	28.56±20.93 (0–79.77)
Total	179	3.57±0.84 (1.46–6.09)	27.89±19.04 (0–79.77)

QCA, quantitative coronary arteriography; LM, left main; LAD, left anterior descending branch; LCX, left circumflex branch; RCA, right coronary artery.

**Table 2 QCA Diameter, Distance From the Ostium, Adjusted Threshold, and Maximum CT Values for Each Patient**

Patient no.	n	QCA Diameter (mm)	Distance from ostium (mm)	Adjusted threshold (HU)	Maximum CT value in short axis (HU)	Maximum CT value in aorta (HU)
1	18	3.31±1.19	22.2±16.3	138±44	214±37	344±28
2	23	3.25±0.73	25.9±17.4	80±35	169±57	293±22
3	20	4.06±0.9	20.1±17.6	148±32	282±33	376±31
4	20	3.57±0.46	25.2±16.6	85±46	210±37	374±14
5	26	3.57±0.69	30.2±16.9	196±41	327±92	475±40
6	24	3.57±0.56	32.5±21.4	69±39	243±65	412±25
7	21	3.57±0.48	26.1±15.7	110±59	213±56	349±27
8	27	3.57±0.64	36.2±21.8	48±59	155±43	276±76
Total	179	3.57±0.84	27.9±19	108±66	227±80	363±75

QCA, quantitative coronary arteriography; HU, Hounsfield Units.

**Table 3 QCA Diameter, Distance From the Ostium, Adjusted Threshold, and Maximum CT Values for Each Vessel**

Vessel site	n	QCA diameter (mm)	Distance from ostium (mm)	Adjusted threshold (HU)	Maximum CT value in short axis (HU)	Maximum CT value in aorta (HU)
LM	11	5.07±0.72	3.2±2.8	112±42	263±71	349±49
LAD	62	3.3±0.84	34.6±17	107±69	207±71	338±82
<30 mm from ostium	25	3.88±0.74	18.7±7.4	79±64	204±71	337±78
≥30 mm from ostium	37	2.92±0.67	45.4±12.6	127±65	209±72	339±86
LCX	46	3.53±0.75	23.8±15	85±55	203±52	368±63
<30 mm from ostium	30	3.66±0.74	14.3±6.5	80±49	208±46	355±62
≥30 mm from ostium	16	3.29±0.72	41.6±9	94±63	192±61	393±58
RCA	60	3.61±0.57	28.6±20.8	126±70	259±93	387±69
<30 mm from ostium	31	3.81±0.61	11.6±9.3	118±78	256±93	371±67
≥30 mm from ostium	29	3.4±0.44	46.7±12.7	135±59	262±92	404±68
Total	179	3.57±0.84	27.9±19	108±66	227±80	363±75

QCA, quantitative coronary arteriography; LM, left main; LAD, left anterior descending branch; LCX, left circumflex branch; RCA, right coronary artery; HU, Hounsfield Units.

### Statistical Analysis

Adjusted thresholds were correlated with arterial enhancement (maximum CT values for the vessel short axes, the descending aorta in the corresponding axial images, vessel sizes (the corresponding QCA diameter measurements), and the distances from the vessel ostium. Variations between the 2 groups (adjusted thresholds and thresholds according to the abbreviated formula) were compared using the F distribution test.

## Results

### QCA Diameters With Distances From the Ostium

All 8 cine coronary angiograms were interpreted as being normal. A total of 179 sites were measured among the 8 patients (LM, 11; LAD, 62; LCX, 46; RCA, 60).

Table 1 lists the QCA diameters with the distances from the LM or RCA ostium. The QCA diameters ranged from 1.46 mm to 6.09 mm (mean ± SD, 3.57±0.84 mm). Distances from the ostium ranged from 0 to 79.77 mm (27.9±19.04 mm).

### EBCT Measurement With Arterial Enhancement

Table 2 lists the number of vessel sites, QCA diameters (mean ± SD), distances from the ostium, adjusted thresholds, and maximum CT values for the vessel short axes and the descending aorta in the corresponding axial images for each patient.

Table 3 lists the number of vessel sites, distances from the ostium (mean ± SD), adjusted thresholds and maximum CT values for the vessel short axes and the descending aorta in the corresponding axial images for each vessel type. Values were further stratified according to the position of measurement from the vessel ostium. Adjusted thresholds, maximum CT values for vessel short axes and maximum CT values for the descending aorta in the corresponding axial images for all vessels were 108±66, 227±80, and 363±75 HU, respectively.

All sites corresponding to the maximum CT values for both the vessel short axes and the descending aorta in the corresponding axial images were located approximately at the center of the vessel lumen. After review of the cine coronary angiograms and the enhanced axial images of the

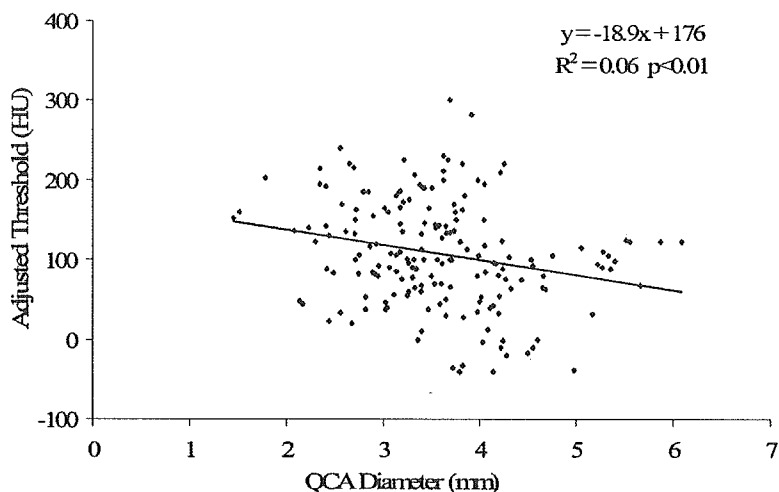


Fig 3. Scatter plot of adjusted threshold vs quantitative coronary angiography (QCA) diameter. The adjusted thresholds very weakly correlated with the QCA diameters ( $R^2=0.06$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). These mean values were distributed about a straight line given by  $y=18.9x-176$ .

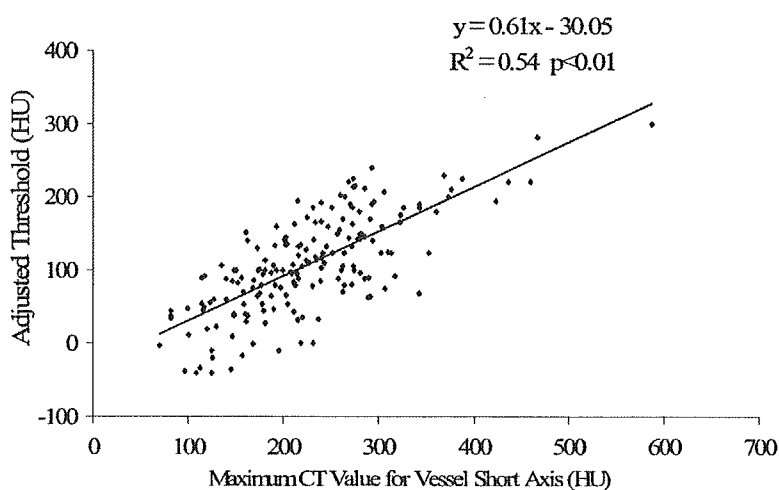


Fig 4. Scatter plot of adjusted threshold vs maximum computed tomography (CT) value for the corresponding vessel short axis. The adjusted thresholds correlated with the maximum CT values for the corresponding vessel short axes ( $R^2=0.54$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

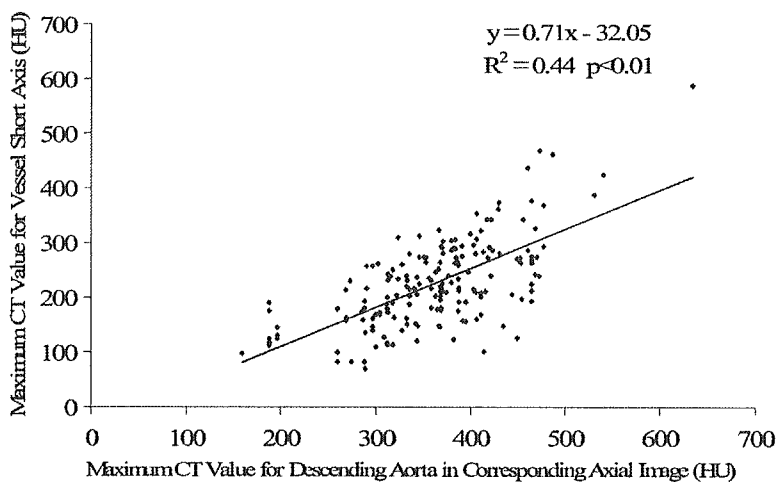


Fig 5. Scatter plot of maximum computed tomography (CT) value for the vessel short axis with maximum CT value for the descending aorta in the corresponding axial image. The maximum CT values for the vessel short axes correlated with those for the descending aorta in the corresponding axial images ( $R^2=0.44$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). These mean values were distributed about a straight line given by  $y=0.71x-32.1$ .

EBCT data sets, we concluded that the possibility of the presence of calcification or artifact in the coronary arteries might be low; nevertheless, we were careful not to adopt the CT values relating to calcification when calculating maximum CT values for the descending aorta.

As shown in Fig 3, the adjusted thresholds correlated very weakly with QCA diameters, with  $R^2=0.06$ ,  $p<0.01$ . These mean values were distributed about a straight line

given by  $y=-18.9x+176$ .

The adjusted thresholds correlated with maximum CT values for the corresponding vessel short axes, with  $R^2=0.54$ ,  $p<0.01$  (Fig 4). These mean values were distributed about a straight line given by  $y=0.61x-30.1$ . As shown in Fig 5, the maximum CT values for the vessel short axes correlated with those for the descending aorta in the corresponding axial images with  $R^2=0.44$ ,  $p<0.01$ . These mean

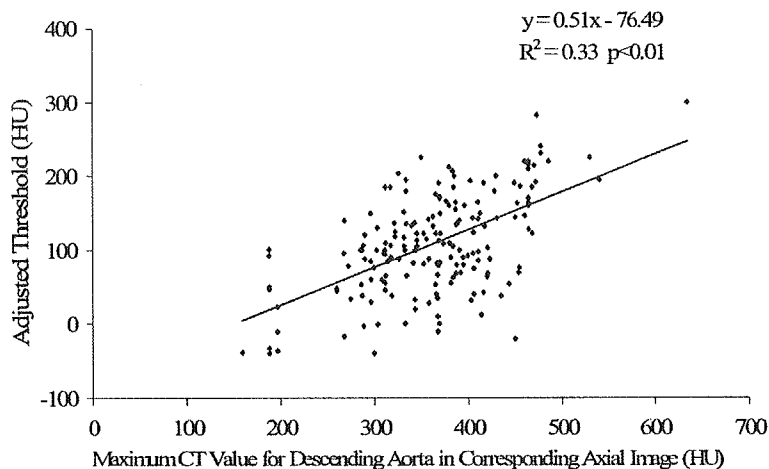


Fig 6. Scatter plot of adjusted threshold with maximum computed tomography (CT) value for the descending aorta in the corresponding axial image. The adjusted thresholds correlated with the maximum CT values for the descending aorta in the corresponding axial images ( $R^2=0.33$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). These mean values were distributed about a straight line given by  $y=0.51x-76.5$ . The slope of the adjusted thresholds vs the maximum CT values for the descending aorta in the corresponding axial images was approximately 0.5. The intercept of this line was  $-76.5$  HU.

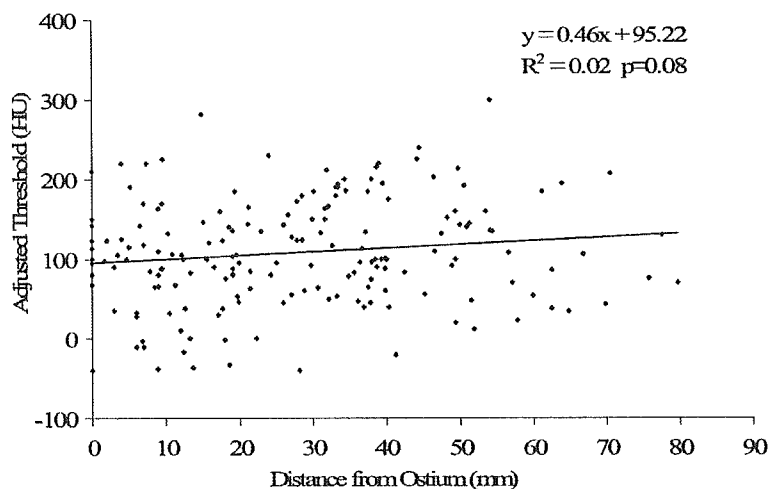


Fig 7. Scatter plot of adjusted threshold vs distance from the ostium. The adjusted thresholds did not correlate significantly with distances from the ostium ( $R^2=0.02$ ,  $p=0.08$ ).

values were distributed about a straight line given by  $y=0.71x-32.1$ .

The adjusted thresholds correlated with the maximum CT values for the descending aorta in the corresponding axial images with  $R^2=0.33$ ,  $p<0.01$  (Fig 6). These mean values were distributed about a straight line given by  $y=0.51x-76.5$ . The slope of the adjusted thresholds vs the maximum CT values for the descending aorta in the corresponding axial images was approximately 0.5. The intercept of this line was  $-76.5$  HU.

As shown in Fig 7, the thresholds did not correlate significantly with distances from the ostium, with  $R^2=0.02$ ,  $p=0.08$ .

As shown in Fig 8a, the adjusted thresholds correlated with the maximum minus the baseline CT values in the LDP (average of the 2 sides), with  $R^2=0.30$ ,  $p<0.01$ . These mean values were distributed about a straight line given by  $y=0.43x-15.8$ . As shown in Fig 8b, the adjusted thresholds correlated with the maximum minus the baseline CT values in the LDP (larger of the 2 sides), with  $R^2=0.37$ ,  $p<0.01$ . These mean values were distributed about a straight line given by  $y=0.47x-40.4$ .

From the straight line given by  $y=0.51x-76.5$  in Fig 6, ( $y$ =adjusted threshold,  $x$ =maximum CT value for the descending aorta in the corresponding axial images), we determined the thresholds according to the abbreviated formula whereby  $y=0.5x-75$  (HU) ( $y$ =adjusted threshold,  $x$ =maximum CT value for the descending aorta in the

corresponding axial image). The constant,  $-75$  HU, may reflect a complex of various baseline (or background) factors such as epicardial fat or myocardium. The mean ( $\pm$ SD) baseline CT values of the LDP of the total, the group considered to be epicardial fat and the group considered to be myocardium, were  $-61.0\pm60.4$ ,  $-82.5\pm38.6$ , and  $41.6\pm35.3$  HU with ranges of  $-181$  to  $150$ ,  $-181$  to  $-2$ , and  $0$  to  $150$  HU, respectively.

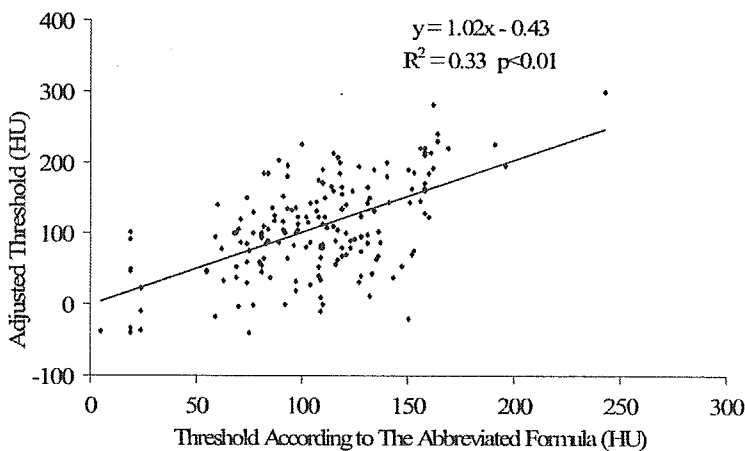
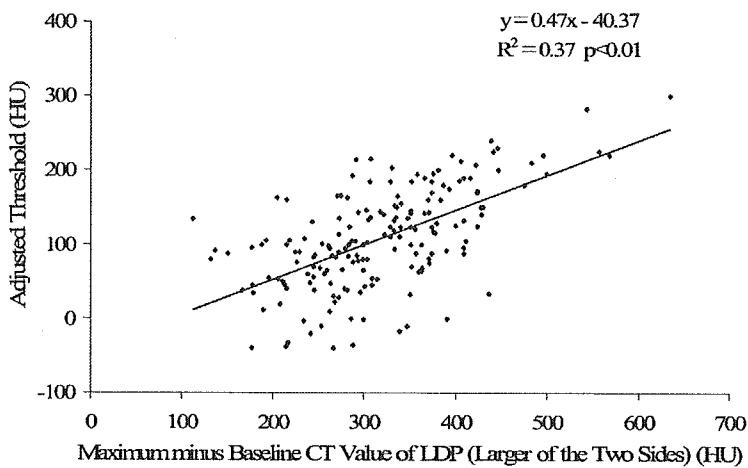
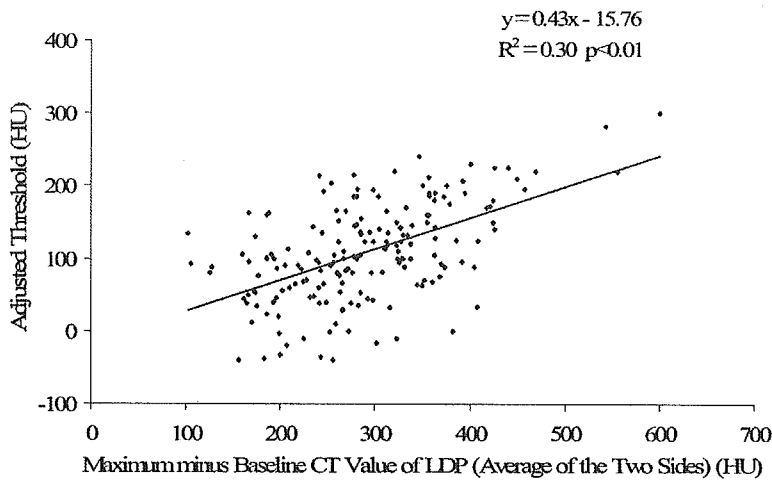
As shown in Fig 9, the adjusted thresholds correlated with the thresholds determined by the abbreviated formula, with  $R^2=0.33$ ,  $p<0.01$ . These mean values were distributed about a straight line given by  $y=1.02x-0.4$ . The slope of the adjusted thresholds vs the thresholds according to the abbreviated formula was approximately 1.0, and the intercept of this line was only  $-0.4$  HU. In addition, the mean  $\pm$  SD of thresholds by the abbreviated formula was  $107\pm37$  HU. In comparing the mean  $\pm$  SD of the adjusted thresholds, the mean of the thresholds by the abbreviated formula was similar ( $107$  vs  $108$  HU), but the standard deviation was significantly smaller ( $37$  vs  $66$  HU).

As shown in Fig 10, the CT angiography diameter correlated with QCA diameter ( $R^2=0.09$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). The mean values were distributed about a straight line given by  $y=0.50x+1.86$ .

## Discussion

Cine coronary angiography has been the standard for





a

b

Fig 8. Scatter plots of adjusted threshold vs maximum minus the baseline computed tomography (CT) value in the line density profile (LDP) ((a) average of the 2 sides) and ((b) larger of the 2 sides). In (a) and (b), the adjusted thresholds were correlated with the maximum minus baseline CT values in the LDP ( $R^2=0.30$ ,  $p<0.01$  and  $R^2=0.37$ ,  $p<0.01$ , respectively). LDP indicates line density profile.

Fig 9. Scatter plot of adjusted threshold vs threshold obtained by an abbreviated formula. The adjusted thresholds correlated with threshold according to the formula ( $R^2=0.33$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). The mean values were distributed about a straight line given by  $y=1.02x-0.4$ . The slope of the line was approximately 1.0 and the intercept was  $-0.4$  HU.

evaluating the extent of coronary artery disease, but recently 3-D visualization of coronary arteries using EBCT has emerged as a potential non-invasive alternative.<sup>1,2,10</sup> Although qualitative reports have been published regarding the utility of EBCT coronary angiography,<sup>1-13</sup> there are few reports of quantitative analysis of EBCT coronary angiography as compared with cine coronary angiography.<sup>5,6</sup> We have speculated that several factors may influence the absolute luminal caliber of coronary arteries on EBCT angiograms, such as arterial enhancement, vessel diameter, distance from the ostium, and vessel types triggered to

contract at the end of diastole<sup>6</sup>

Because the acquisition time requires 40–80 heartbeats, there must be significant differences in the state of the enhancement at the level of each slice.<sup>14</sup> We first made a short-axis image of the coronary arteries at each site and measured the adjusted threshold at which vessel diameter was equal to that obtained from the corresponding QCA measurement.

Even though the total mean of the adjusted threshold was 108 HU, we concluded that a single threshold setting could not be used reliably to measure the luminal diameter

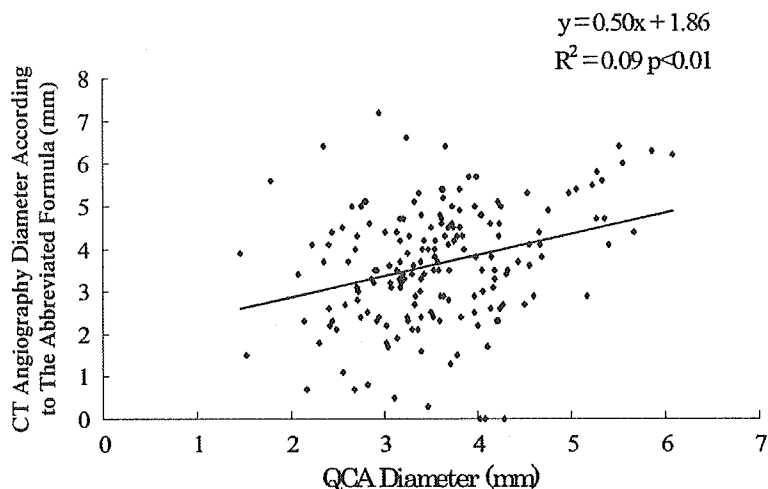


Fig 10. Scatter plot of computed tomography (CT) angiography diameter according to the abbreviated formula (mm) vs quantitative coronary angiography (QCA) diameter (mm). The CT angiography diameter according to the abbreviated formula (mm) correlated with QCA diameter ( $R^2=0.09$   $p<0.01$ ). The mean values were distributed about a straight line given by  $y=0.50x+1.86$ .

of the coronary arterial tree with EBCT. However, it is unrealistic to make an LDP curve or measure the maximum CT value for the short axis at each site of the coronary arteries in routine practice. Therefore, another, easier method was needed. For this, we focused on the maximum CT values for the descending aorta in the corresponding axial images. In theory, it would be better to use the maximum minus baseline CT values than the maximum CT values alone. Therefore, we also considered the correlation between the values of  $R^2=0.30$  for the average of the 2 sides and 0.37 for the larger of the 2 sides. Those values adjusted the thresholds with the maximum minus baseline CT values in the LDP, which gave less than the maximum CT values alone for the short axes.

To use the maximum CT values for the descending aorta in the corresponding axial images, we applied the abbreviated formula  $y=0.5x-75$  from the straight line given by  $y=0.51x-76.5$  ( $y$ =adjusted threshold,  $x$ =maximum CT value for the descending aorta in the corresponding axial image). If our abbreviated formula,  $y=0.5x-75$ , is to be adopted, it is necessary to measure the maximum CT values for the descending aorta in the corresponding axial images. By including the maximum intensity projection technique, it may be easy to measure the maximum CT values for the descending aorta at each axial image level and acquire information about arterial enhancement for every slice.

The adjusted thresholds correlated with the thresholds obtained from the abbreviated formula, with  $R^2=0.33$ , and the mean values were distributed about a straight line given by  $y=1.02x-0.4$ . The slope of the adjusted thresholds vs the thresholds according to the abbreviated formula was approximately 1.0, and the intercept of this line was only  $-0.4$  HU. In comparing the thresholds according to the abbreviated formula with the adjusted thresholds, the means were similar but the standard deviation was significantly smaller in the thresholds obtained from the abbreviated formula. Therefore, adoption of the thresholds by the abbreviated formula makes it possible to achieve accurate measurements for the evaluation of coronary arteries.

In the scatter plot of the adjusted threshold vs the QCA diameter (Fig 3), the smaller the vessel diameter, the greater the adjusted threshold. Achenbach et al reported that when using 100HU as the fixed lower threshold, they tended to underestimate small vessel diameters by the partial volume effect!<sup>5</sup> We obtained the opposite result and

we speculate that this phenomenon might also be caused by other factors such as vessel type, arterial enhancement, vessel orientation, etc. For example, as shown in Table 3, the mean of the adjusted threshold for the portions of the RCA that were 30mm or more from the ostium was 135HU, whereas that of the portions of LCX at 30mm or more from the ostium was 94HU. Thus, when we adopted 100HU as the fixed lower threshold, we overestimated the diameters of the portion of RCA that were 30mm or more from the ostium, but underestimated those of the portion of the LCX that were 30mm or more from the ostium. The adjusted thresholds correlated very weakly, or non-significantly, to the corresponding diameters measured by QCA, or the distances from the ostium, respectively.

Recently, 16-detector row multislice computed tomography (MSCT)<sup>16,17</sup> has become available and takes less than 25s to image the whole heart, even if a slice thickness less than 1mm is selected; this time interval is approximately half to one-third that required for EBCT. Therefore with MSCT, differences in the degree of arterial enhancement would influence the quality of the coronary arterial images to a lesser extent than with EBCT. Some investigators have tried to keep the same degree of arterial enhancement by improving the method of injection of the contrast material, for example via the biphasic injection protocol!<sup>18</sup> If the MSCT coronary angiogram replaced the conventional coronary angiogram only for evaluation of the coronary arterial lumen, the calibration with aortic opacity of the opacified blood would improve the quantitative accuracy of the vessel diameters. Further studies using up-to-date MSCT and EBCT are needed to quantitatively compare the coronary artery diameters with those from QCA.

Although EBCT has worse spatial resolution than MSCT, especially in the through-plane, EBCT delivers a much lower radiation dose than MSCT, so it is still an important diagnostic modality, especially for healthy subjects.

## Conclusion

We measured the adjusted thresholds at which the coronary arterial diameters on EBCT scans were equal to those obtained by a QCA measurement program. We classified a total of 179 sites among 8 patients and 4 vessel types, and further stratified measurements according to positions in relation to the vessel ostium. The means of the adjusted thresholds changed from patient to patient and from vessel

to vessel.

The adjusted thresholds correlated only very weakly, or non-significantly, with the corresponding QCA measurement diameters, or with the distances from the ostium. However, there was a correlation with maximum CT values for the vessel short axes. Therefore, we decided to use the maximum CT value for the vessel short axis as an index for assessing arterial enhancement. However, it is unrealistic in routine practice to make an LDP curve, or to measure the maximum CT value for the short axis at each site in the coronary artery. Therefore, using the maximum CT values for the descending aorta in the corresponding axial images as a substitute for the maximum CT values for the short axes of coronary arteries, and the abbreviated formula,  $y=0.5x-75$ , we developed an accurate and straightforward method for measuring the diameters of coronary arteries independent of arterial enhancement.

#### Acknowledgments

This work was supported by the Japan Cardiovascular Research Foundation, Takeda Science Foundation and GE Yokokawa Medical Systems.

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## Steroid-responsive thromboangiitis obliterans

Lancet 2004; 364: 1098 Atsuhiko T Naito, Tohru Minamino, Kaoru Tateno, Toshio Nagai, Issei Komuro

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A 41-year-old, non-smoking man came to the emergency room in June, 2003, complaining of cold, painful hands. On examination, we found nothing abnormal, apart from cyanotic, tender fingers, with poor perfusion as shown on by laser doppler and infrared thermography (figure). Blood tests showed eosinophilia; 3097/ $\mu$ L, and eosinophilic cationic protein (ECP), >150  $\mu$ g/mL (normal <14.7  $\mu$ g/mL). Acute-phase reactants, C-reactive protein and the erythrocyte sedimentation rate were within normal limits. Chest radiographs and echocardiography showed no abnormalities or evidence of eosinophilia-induced end-organ damage. Angiography showed occlusion of the distal arteries of upper and lower extremities. We searched for parasitic infections and malignancy, to no avail. We excluded vasculitis from our differential diagnosis when the results of immunological tests showed no antinuclear, anticentromere, anticardiolipin, anti-dsDNA, anti-Scl70, anti-SS-A, anti-RNP, and anti-Jo1 antibodies, rheumatoid factor, ANCA, or cryoglobulins. Serum tryptase level was low; 3.9 ng/mL, indicating no involvement of mast cells. Our patient thus fulfilled the Japanese criteria for thromboangiitis obliterans,<sup>1,2</sup> and we started treatment with intravenous heparin and alprostadil. The patient's digital ischaemia and intermittent claudication showed no improvement after 1 week and his middle finger became necrotic. At that point, his eosinophil count was 5014/ $\mu$ L. We decided to give him prednisolone 30 mg daily, to treat the eosinophilia, in case it was contributing to the distal arterial occlusion. After 2 weeks of treatment, his eosinophil count and serum ECP levels decreased to 185/ $\text{mm}^3$  and 19.5  $\mu$ g/mL, respectively. Laser doppler and infrared thermography showed a clear improvement in digital ischaemia (figure). When last seen in April, 2004, his fingers were completely healed, and he had no complaints of claudication.

A 62-year-old non-smoking man had been diagnosed with thromboangiitis obliterans in October, 1997, on the basis of angiography that showed occlusion of distal arteries in the absence of atherosclerosis. For 6 years, he had been treated with beraprost, anti-coagulants, lumbar sympathetic block, and continuous epidural block, but digital necrosis and pain persisted. He was admitted to our hospital in September, 2003. Blood tests showed eosinophilia; 2300/ $\mu$ L and ECP; 107  $\mu$ g/mL. Tests for other causes of vasculopathy were negative. We treated him with prednisolone, 30 mg daily, and after 2 weeks, his eosinophil count was 185/ $\text{mm}^3$  and serum ECP was 25.8  $\mu$ g/mL. His pain had disappeared and his digital ischaemia largely resolved by the time of discharge in December, 2003.

Both of these patients fulfilled the Japanese criteria for thromboangiitis obliterans, but they were atypical

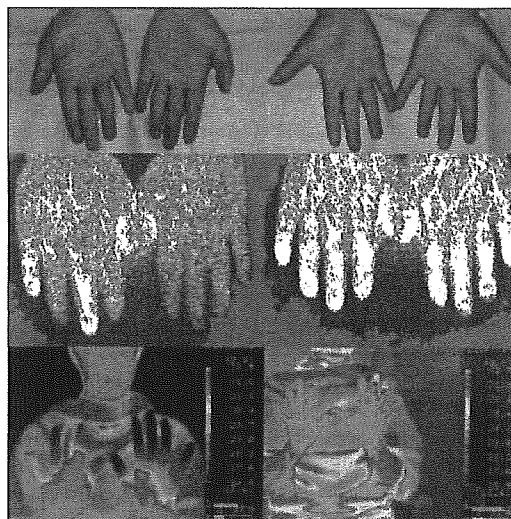


Figure: Photograph (top), laser doppler (middle), and infrared thermography (bottom), showing digital ischaemia before (left) and after steroid therapy (right).

patients because they were non-smokers at the onset of the symptoms. Current history of smoking is included in many case definitions of thromboangiitis obliterans.<sup>1</sup> Stopping smoking is the only proven strategy to prevent the progression of this disease, but 6.8% of Japanese patients diagnosed with thromboangiitis obliterans are non-smokers.<sup>2</sup> Hypereosinophilia causes end-organ damage by inducing thrombosis and endothelial damage, and simultaneous presentations of thromboangiitis obliterans with eosinophilia due to temporal arteritis have been reported.<sup>3-5</sup> However, we could find no reports of distal artery occlusion consistent with thromboangiitis obliterans and eosinophilia that responded to steroids. It will be interesting to see if patients who are diagnosed with thromboangiitis obliterans include a subset that have steroid-responsive disease, mediated by eosinophilia.

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