

光学学报

基于微流控-显微荧光技术的浮游藻细胞密度检测方法

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摘要 浮游藻类密度监测对水质状况诊断及藻华灾害预警具有重要意义。因此,提出一种基于微流控-显微荧光技术的浮游藻细胞密度检测方法。该方法基于微流控技术实现样品快速定量进样,利用共聚焦显微荧光结构实现藻细胞特征荧光信号的高信噪比采集,并通过分析荧光峰信息实现浮游藻细胞计数。以杜氏盐藻、色球藻、隐藻和赤潮藻为测试对象的结果表明:在 $1.3 \times 10^6 \text{ L}^{-1}$ 密度范围内测量相对误差均小于3.96%,且准确率不受悬浮物、藻细胞种类以及尺寸的影响;在10%允许误差下,藻类密度检测上限可提升至 $5 \times 10^6 \text{ L}^{-1}$,完全能够满足自然水体浮游藻细胞密度检测需求,为水体藻细胞密度快速准确检测提供了新途径。

关键词 浮游藻类; 显微荧光; 微流控; 藻细胞计数

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1 引言

浮游藻类是水生态系统中重要的初级生产者^[1],也是水体生态健康的指示剂^[2]。浮游藻类密度监测对水质状况诊断以及藻华灾害预警具有重要意义。

目前浮游藻细胞密度检测方法可分为直接法和间接法,间接法主要包括分光光度法、高效液相色谱法以及荧光检测法等^[3]。这些方法都是通过对叶绿素a浓度的测量反演出藻细胞密度的,但国内外已有学者证明^[4-6],叶绿素a易受藻细胞生长状态、种类以及体积等因素的影响,无法精准地反映藻细胞密度。直接法主要包括显微镜检法、库尔特计数法、流式影像法以及流式荧光细胞计数法等。显微镜检法通过人工的方式在显微镜下观察记录,工作强度大,效率低,存在较大的人为影响因素,误差较大^[7]。库尔特计数法将悬浮藻溶液通过小孔,在小孔两边设置电极,检测藻细胞通过时电阻的变化进行粒径检测和计数,该方法易受其他悬浮物的影响,实际水体藻细胞计数测量准确率低^[8-9]。流式影像法通过对单个藻细胞图像的识别进行计数,但自然水体中存在较多和藻细胞体积相近的杂质,影响藻细胞计数的准确性,同时受限于目前相机

帧率,无法实现藻细胞的快速计数。流式细胞荧光法通过激光诱导藻细胞产生荧光,然后检测微通道管中的单细胞荧光进行计数^[10-12]。这种方法工作效率高,具有快速准确的优点。但传统流式荧光法为提高检测的精准度,采用鞘液聚焦的进样方式保证单个细胞通过检测窗口^[13]。该方式首先需要对待测的悬浮液进行加压处理,然后通过喷嘴注入鞘液中,最后由加压的鞘液驱动藻细胞流经检测窗口,这就导致该进样结构非常复杂且需要消耗大量鞘液。同时流式细胞荧光法为获得多种参数,光路通常采用正交结构,该结构必须保证激发光路和荧光收集光路垂直,使用前对焦模式过于繁琐,无法适用于小型化的现场快速测量。

微流控芯片技术是近些年发展的新兴技术,通过在几平方厘米的芯片上构建微通道管道,实现进样、聚焦、分选等功能^[14-15],该技术简化了流式荧光法的复杂进样结构,已经在医药及生命科学领域上广泛应用。鉴于此,本文提出一种基于微流控-显微荧光技术的浮游藻细胞密度检测方法。利用藻细胞受激发射特征波段的叶绿素荧光,将微流控芯片和显微荧光检测技术^[16]结合,通过检测特定体积下单藻细胞荧光峰数量,实现浮游藻细胞密度快速精准检测。

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2 检测原理与方法

设计的浮游藻类微流控显微荧光检测系统原理框图如图1所示,系统由进样模块、荧光激发模块、荧光检测模块组成。1)进样模块采用步进电机精准控制高精度注射泵,实现样品的精确定量进样,主要由微流控芯片、高精度注射泵、样品池组成;2)荧光激发模块采用落射式光路将激发光源聚焦在微流控通道表面,实现藻细胞荧光的高效激发,主要由469 nm高亮单色LD、激发光源驱动、二向色镜、物镜组成,其中,激发光源驱动采用低压差线性稳压器和高速MOS管组合实现光强脉冲幅值频率连续可调;3)荧光检测模块使用显微物镜配合特定波段的窄带滤光片,收集微通道管显微视野范围内藻细胞发射叶绿素荧光,使用光电倍增管和积分放大电路实现微弱荧光信号高信噪比采

集,主要由40倍物镜、680 nm窄带滤光片、光电倍增管和积分放大电路组成。

该系统采用落射式显微光学结构,光源激发窗口和荧光收集窗口相同,均为物镜的显微视野。在注射泵推进下微流控管道中藻细胞匀速经过显微视野,细胞受激发射荧光,其强度取决于藻细胞所处位置处激发光强度和荧光收集效率,随所处位置变化而变化,具体过程如图2所示。首先,藻细胞进入显微视野边缘,荧光信号开始产生但较微弱;随着细胞流向显微视野中心,荧光信号强度逐渐上升;当藻细胞到达显微视野中心时,荧光信号强度达到峰值;当藻细胞经过中心直到离开显微视野,荧光信号逐渐减弱直到消失。由此可见,每个细胞流过显微视野均会对应出现一个荧光峰,因此通过记录特定体积样品的荧光峰数量即可计算出样品中藻细胞密度。

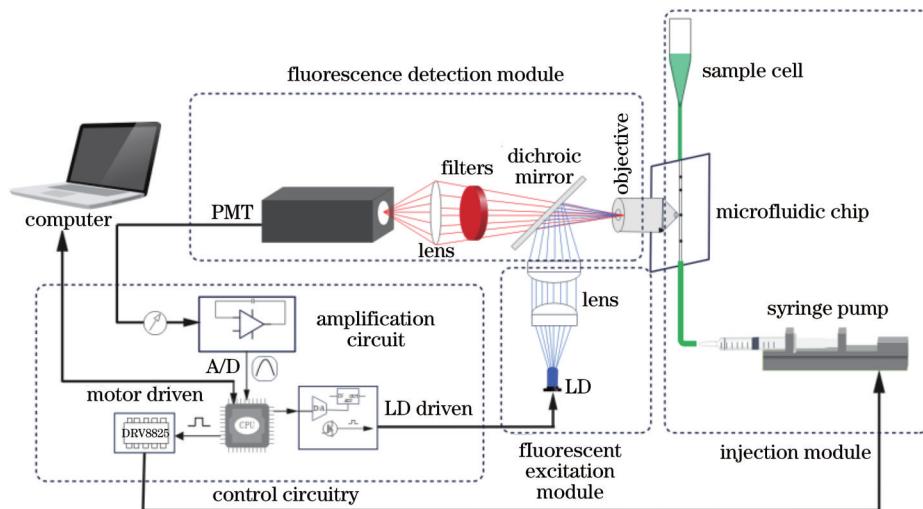


图1 浮游藻类微流控显微荧光检测系统原理框图

Fig. 1 Schematic diagram of microfluidic microfluorescence planktonic algae counting system

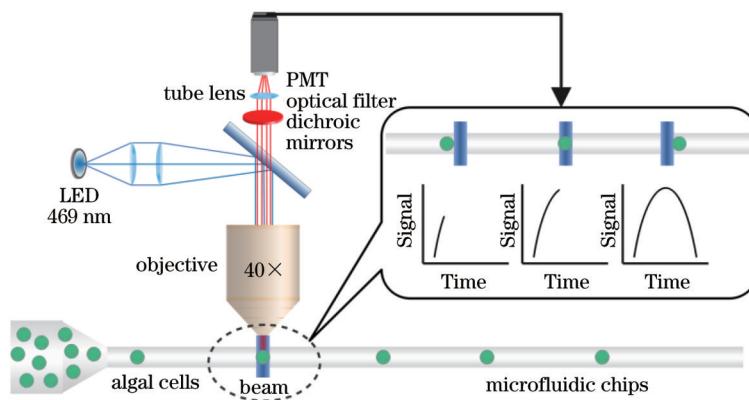


图2 基于微流控-显微荧光技术的藻细胞密度检测方法示意图

Fig. 2 Schematic diagram of algal cell density detection method

3 分析与讨论

3.1 微流控显微荧光信号获取与分析

选取杜氏盐藻作为实验对象,将藻溶液进行10、

100、1000倍的稀释获得高、中、低等3种藻密度样品,取100 μL稀释液利用图1所示流控显微荧光系统进行荧光信号检测,选取其中一段绘制荧光检测曲线,结果如图3所示。当藻细胞经过检测窗口时,产生明显荧

光峰信号:中密度样品出现了双荧光峰;高密度样品出

现了荧光峰强度明显高过中低密度样品荧光的单峰。

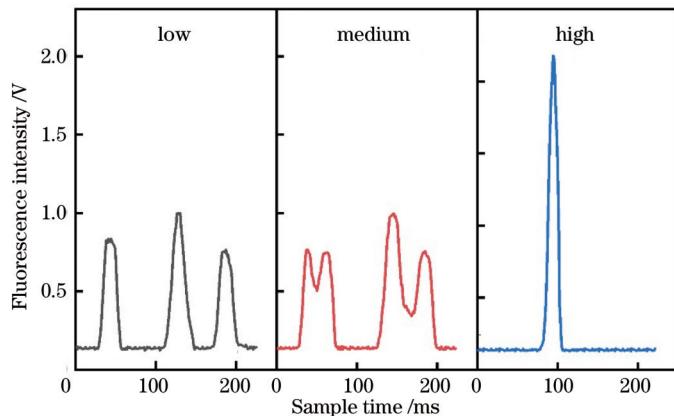


图3 不同密度下藻细胞荧光检测峰图

Fig. 3 Peak diagram of fluorescence detection of algal cells

对于中密度样品荧光双峰和高密度样品的强荧光单峰,推测为两个或多个藻细胞荧光叠加结果,为进一步分析荧光峰形成原因,利用Lighttools软件仿真单细

胞和多个藻细胞经过显微视野产生的荧光强度分布,如图4所示。

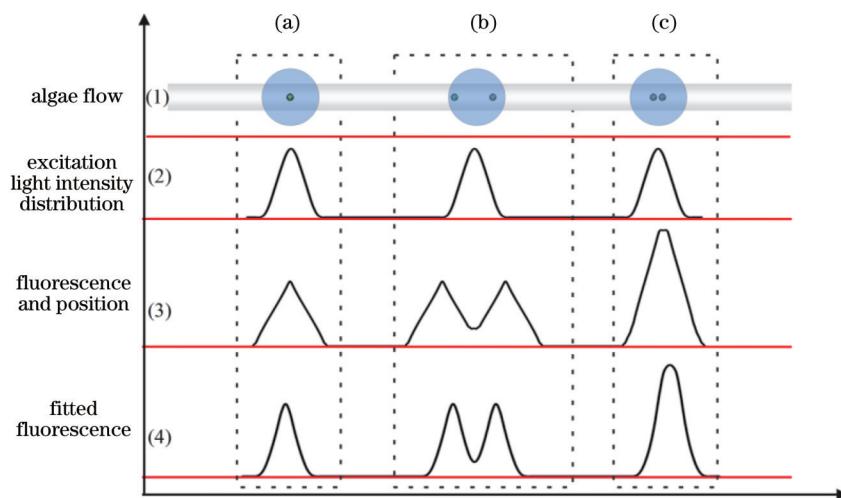


图4 光学仿真图

Fig. 4 Optical simulation diagram

根据激发光LED发光特性和聚焦透镜参数,仿真获得激发光强从显微物镜视野边缘到中心激发光强分布,具体如图4(2)所示;藻类叶绿素荧光是细胞受激后发射荧光,因此藻细胞可视为均匀发光小球,藻细胞在显微视野范围内不同位置处荧光收集效率如图4(3)所示;而荧光信号强度取决于细胞受激发光强度和荧光收集效率,因此可计算出藻细胞流过显微视野产生的荧光分布,具体如图4(4)所示。在此基础上,进一步仿真获得单细胞和多细胞流过显微物镜视野荧光强度的3种变化情况:1)单个藻细胞通过时,藻细胞从边缘到中心荧光强度逐渐变大,在中心时达到最大,形成单峰,如图4(a)所示,此时藻细胞计数精度最高;2)当两个或多个距离较远藻细胞通过时,两个藻细胞的荧光峰部分重叠,出现双峰或多峰,如图4(b)所示,此

时对多峰统计仍能保证藻细胞计数精度;3)当两个或多个距离较近藻细胞通过时,两个藻细胞荧光峰重叠部分增加,导致双峰或多峰形成较强单峰,如图4(c)所示,此时藻细胞计数精度下降,结果偏低,对于此种情况,需要对样品进行稀释处理,以保证检测结果准确性。

3.2 藻密度检测准确性测试

从图3荧光信号检测及图4仿真结果可以看出,在一定密度范围内,所提藻细胞密度检测方法具有较高的精准度。为验证该方法准确性,选取杜氏盐藻溶液进行一定比例的稀释,分别采用显微镜检法、库尔特计数法和所提方法进行对比验证。每种方法计数3次并求平均值,然后换算成原藻溶液对应的藻密度,结果如表1所示。其中,不同方法测试过程如下:

1) 显微镜检法:取1 mL的杜氏盐藻溶液加入10 μL 的Lugol试剂,混合均匀,取0.1 mL的藻溶液滴入浮游生物计数框中,采用Nikon Ni-U型荧光显微镜计数;

2) 库尔特计数法:取1 mL的杜氏盐藻溶液加入200 mL的生理盐水中进行稀释,采用Multisizer 4e粒子分析仪测量适合杜氏盐藻粒径范围的藻个数;

3) 微流控显微荧光法:取1 mL的杜氏盐藻溶液进

行500倍的稀释,取100 μL 稀释后的溶液,采用图1所示系统计数。

检测结果如表1所示。所提方法和显微镜检法、库尔特计数法的检测结果相对误差绝对值(ARE)均不超过3.49%,同时所提方法的相对标准偏差(RSD)为3.12%,均优于其他方法,说明该方法检测低浓度的藻溶液时具有较高的准确率和较好的稳定性。

表1 3种方法对比测试结果

Table 1 Comparison test results of the three methods

Detection method	1st / L^{-1}	2nd / L^{-1}	3rd / L^{-1}	Average / L^{-1}	RSD / %	ARE / %
Microscopic	1.752×10^8	1.545×10^8	1.677×10^8	1.658×10^8	6.30	3.49
Kurt counting	1.488×10^8	1.533×10^8	1.677×10^8	1.566×10^8	6.32	2.14
This system	1.650×10^8	1.550×10^8	1.600×10^8	1.600×10^8	3.12	

在此基础上,进一步研究藻类尺寸及种类在中低浓度时对检测准确度影响。选取杜氏盐藻(*Dunaliella salina*)、色球藻(*Chromococcus*)、隐藻(*Cryptoalgae*)以及赤潮易弯藻(*Heterosigma akashiwo*)等4种藻类作为实验对象,这4种实验藻种细胞粒径差异较大,门类不同、叶绿素含量差异大。本实验藻种均来自中国科学院水生生物研究所淡水藻种库,具体信息如表2所示

表2 实验藻种信息

Table 2 Experimental algal species information

Algal	Phylum	Algal cell width / μm
<i>Dunaliella salina</i>	Chlorophyta	18~28
<i>Cryptoalgae</i>	Cryptophyta	10~16
<i>Heterosigma akashiwo</i>	Xanthophyta	6~10
<i>Chromococcus</i>	Cyanophyta	<5

实验按照2倍比例逐步进行梯度稀释,以稀释到最低藻密度 $1.5 \times 10^5 \text{ L}^{-1}$ 以内为基准,获得5个杜氏盐藻、5个隐藻、4个色球藻、4个赤潮易弯藻的不同密度梯度样品,利用微流控显微荧光系统以50 $\mu\text{L}/\text{min}$ 的进样速度通过记录荧光峰信息计算获得各样品的藻细胞密度,每个样品测量10次取平均值,以显微镜检的藻细胞密度数作为标准,将镜检密度和该方法测量密度分别作为X、Y绘制点线图,同时绘制出相对误差绝对值,结果如图5所示。

由图5可知,4种藻类样品检测结果和标准曲线均高度重合,相关系数 R^2 均大于0.996,在 $1.3 \times 10^6 \text{ L}^{-1}$ 以内时不同种类的藻细胞相对误差绝对值均低于3.96%,检测结果的准确度不受藻类尺寸、种类影响。

3.3 藻密度检测范围分析

从图3荧光信号检测结果与图4(c)仿真结果可以看出,藻密度过高时,所提方法检测准确性会下降,检测结果偏低。为测试该方法的检测范围,在上述实验基础上进一步扩大4种藻类样品细胞密度范围:9个密

度梯度杜氏盐藻,最大密度 $1.612 \times 10^7 \text{ L}^{-1}$;8个密度梯度赤潮易弯藻,最大密度 $1.561 \times 10^7 \text{ L}^{-1}$;9个密度梯度隐藻,最大密度 $1.971 \times 10^7 \text{ L}^{-1}$;8个密度梯度色球藻,最大密度 $1.945 \times 10^7 \text{ L}^{-1}$ 。上述样品检测结果如图6所示,从图中可以看出,4种藻类密度较低时检测结果和标准曲线高度重合,但高密度样品的检测结果均不同程度偏低,藻密度越高检测误差越大。这与仿真分析结果相符,即随着藻类密度的增加,显微视野多个藻细胞[图4(c)]概率增大、荧光峰重叠,导致藻细胞计数和密度检测结果偏低。

进一步绘制4种藻检测结果的相对误差与藻密度散点图,具体如图7所示。可以看出,4种藻的检测相对误差均随藻密度增加而增加,变化趋势基本一致,也就是说所提方法检测结果准确性主要取决于样品的细胞密度,与藻细胞种类和尺寸无明显关系。在10%允许误差范围内,4种藻类的藻密度检测上限均在 $5 \times 10^6 \text{ L}^{-1}$ 左右,这已经能够满足实际水体^[17](水华暴发预警藻密度为 $2 \times 10^6 \text{ L}^{-1}$)藻密度检测需求。

4 结 论

由于浮游藻类个体小、数量庞大,悬浮物杂质等因素的存在,目前已有藻密度快速检测技术难以实现藻密度准确检测。提出一种基于微流控-显微荧光技术的浮游藻细胞密度检测方法,通过微流控技术实现样品快速进样,通过共聚焦显微荧光结构实现藻细胞特征荧光信号的高信噪比采集,通过检测荧光峰数量实现浮游藻细胞计数。对不同密度样品藻细胞进行荧光信号测量和光学仿真发现,该方法能够精准测量中低密度藻细胞荧光信号,高密度时多个藻细胞的荧光峰高度重叠是测量误差的主要来源,在低密度下,计数结果与显微镜检法和库尔特计数法的相对误差均不超过3.49%。对不同种类、粒径的藻细胞测试结果表明:该方法在 $1.3 \times 10^6 \text{ L}^{-1}$ 密度范围内测量相对误差均小于3.96%,且准确率不受悬浮物、藻细胞种类、尺寸的影

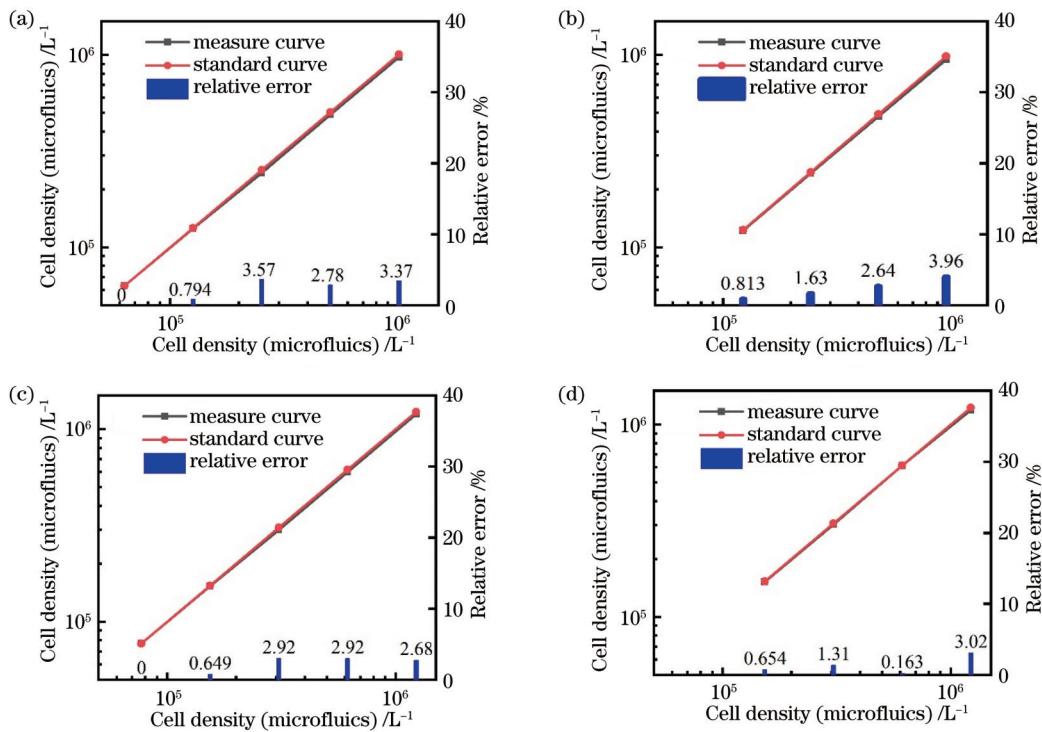


图5 低密度下镜检藻细胞密度与微流控显微荧光检测密度对比。(a)杜氏盐藻;(b)赤潮异弯藻;(c)隐藻;(d)色球藻

Fig. 5 Comparison of algal cell density under low-density microscopy and microfluidic microfluorescence detection. (a) *Dunaliella salina*; (b) *Heterosigma akashiwo*; (c) *Cryptoalgae*; (d) *Chromococcus*

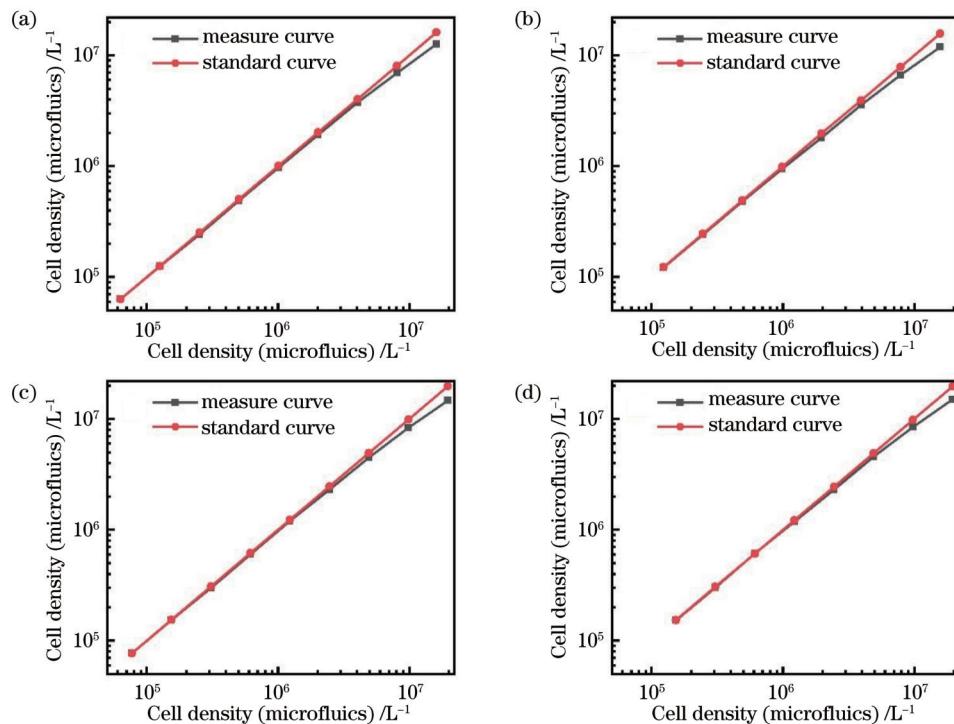


图6 高密度下镜检藻细胞密度与微流控显微荧光检测密度对比。(a)杜氏盐藻;(b)赤潮异弯藻;(c)隐藻;(d)色球藻

Fig. 6 Comparison of algal cell density under high-density microscopy and microfluidic microfluorescence detection. (a) *Dunaliella salina*; (b) *Heterosigma akashiwo*; (c) *Cryptoalgae*; (d) *Chromococcus*

响;随着检测藻密度样品范围的扩大,测量误差呈现增加趋势,即该方法测量准确率和藻密度负相关,与仿真结果相符,在10%允许误差范围内,将检测密度上

限提高至 $5 \times 10^6 \text{ L}^{-1}$,可满足实际水体藻密度检测需求。所提微流控显微荧光技术利用藻类特有的叶绿素荧光信息,有效克服了悬浮物干扰,具有进样模块和光

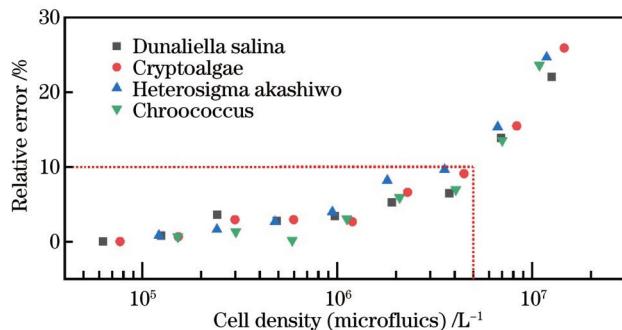


图7 4种藻检测相对误差与细胞密度关系散点图

Fig. 7 Scatter plot of the relationship between relative error and cell density in the detection of four types of algae

学结构简单的优势,是藻细胞密度快速准确检测的新途径。

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Microfluidics-Microfluorescence-Based Method for Density Detection of Planktonic Algal Cells

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Abstract

Objective As indicators of the ecological health of water bodies, planktonic algae are important primary producers in water ecosystems. The density monitoring of planktonic algae is of great significance to the diagnosis of water quality and the warning of algal blooms. Due to the presence of small individual and large numbers of planktonic algae, suspended impurities and other factors, traditional methods are difficult to achieve rapid and accurate measurements. Flow cytometric fluorescence method counts by detecting single cell fluorescence. This method features rapid, accurate, and highly efficient measurement, but it is not suitable for miniaturized field rapid measurement because of its complex injection structure and cumbersome focusing mode. Microfluidic chip technology realizes the functions of feeding, focusing, and sorting by constructing micro-channel pipelines on a square centimeter chip. This technology can simplify the complex feeding structure of the flow fluorescence method and has been widely employed in pharmaceutical and life science fields. Based on chlorophyll fluorescence in the characteristic band emitted by excited algal cells, this paper combines microfluidic chip technology and microfluorescence detection technology. It aims to realize rapid and accurate density detection of planktonic algal cells by detecting the number of single algal cell fluorescence peaks at a specific volume under a simple structure.

Methods The experimental system consists of a sample feeding module, a fluorescence excitation module, and a fluorescence detection module. The excitation light from the monochromatic high-brightness LD is focused on the surface of the microfluidic channel by the drop-in microscopic optical structure. The algal cells in the microfluidic channel pass through the excitation window at a uniform speed under the propulsion of the syringe pump, and the cells are excited to emit fluorescence. Each cell flow across the microscopic field of view corresponds to a fluorescence peak, and then the density of algal cells in the sample can be calculated by recording the number of fluorescence peaks for a specific volume of the sample.

Results and Discussions A method of detecting the planktonic algae density based on microfluidic and microfluorescence technology is studied to realize rapid and accurate density measurement of planktonic algal cells. By microfluidic chips, injection pumps, objective lenses, and photomultiplier tubes, an experimental system is established to measure the fluorescence signals of algal cells with different densities. Combined with optical simulations, this method can accurately measure the fluorescence signals of algal cells with low and medium densities. The relative errors of the counting results at low densities are less than 3.49% compared with those of microscopy and Coulter counting (Table 1), and the results of testing algal cells of different species and particle sizes show that the relative errors of the method in the density range of $1.3 \times 10^6 \text{ L}^{-1}$ are less than 3.96%. All of them were less than 3.96%, and the accuracy is not affected by the suspended matter, algal cell species, and size (Fig. 5). With the expanding range of testing algal density samples, the measurement error shows an increasing trend, which means that the measurement accuracy of the method and algal density is negatively correlated (Fig. 6). This is consistent with the simulation results, and the upper limit of the detection density is increased to $5 \times 10^6 \text{ L}^{-1}$ within the allowable error range of 10% (Fig. 7).

Conclusions Due to the existence of small individual and large numbers of planktonic algae, suspended impurities and other factors, it is difficult to accurately detect algal density through the currently available algal density rapid detection technology. This paper proposes a microfluidics-microfluorescence-based method for planktonic algae cell density detection. This method is also based on microfluidics for rapid quantitative sample injection, confocal microfluorescence structure for high signal-to-noise acquisition of algal cell characteristic fluorescence signals, and the analysis of fluorescence peak information for planktonic algae cell counting. The results show that the relative measurement error in

the density range of $1.3 \times 10^6 \text{ L}^{-1}$ is less than 3.96%, and the accuracy is not affected by the suspended matter, algal cell type, and size. The upper limit of algal density detection can be increased to $5 \times 10^6 \text{ L}^{-1}$ with the allowable error range of 10%, which can meet the demand of natural water bodies. The proposed microfluidic-microfluorescence technology that employs the unique chlorophyll fluorescence information of algae effectively overcomes the interference of suspended matters and features simple feeding module and optical structure. It is a new way for rapid and accurate detection of algal cell density.

Key words planktonic algae; microfluorescence; microfluidics; algal cell count