

CELL CULTURE SHAKING DEVICE AND SHAKING CULTURE METHOD AS CELL CULTURE METHOD

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a cell culture shaking device and a shaking culture method as a cell culture method for accelerating culture of cells in a culture vessel.

2. Description of the Related Art

In the related art, the cell culture of suspension cells used in a cell culture, specifically in an immune cell therapy is carried out by manual operation in most cases. For example, the cell culture is carried out by inoculating cells sampled from a patient in a flask to which an antibody (inducer) is immobilized together with a culture medium, storing the same in a incubator, taking out the flask every day from the incubator, observing the culture state (for example, the state of proliferation) using a microscope or the like and, when it is determined that the proliferation or the like is taken place, or after having elapsed a predetermined time period from the inoculation of the cells, and adding the culture medium to the flask to allow the cells to be cultured (for example, to proliferate). When acquirement of a large amount of cells is desired, the cells may be transferred to a culture bag from the flask and cultured therein.

The type of culture performed in the flask or the bag includes a static culture in which the culture vessel is kept standstill and a shaking culture carried out, for example, by oscillating a platform or the like for placing the culture vessel.

However, in the static culture of the cells, since the distribution of the cells and the concentration of culture medium components are unhomogeneous, the control of the culture environment is difficult. In addition, since the oxygen supply capacity is lower than the shaking culture, there are some problems for inducing the proliferation of the cells to the maximum. In contrast, in the case of the shaking culture, the cells in the culture vessel are rolled on a culture surface by oscillating the culture vessel, and hence there is a problem that extensive physical damages of the cell may be resulted.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In view of such circumstances as described above, it is an object of the invention to provide a cell culture shaking device and a shaking culture method as a cell culture method, which are capable of improving a culturing property of cells while preventing physical damages to the cells, that is, which bring the distribution of cells and the concentration of the culture medium components into a homogeneous state to simplify a control of the culture

environment, and enhances an oxygen supply capacity to accelerate the culture of the cells.

A cell culture shaking device according to an aspect of the invention includes a pressing unit for pressing a flexible culture vessel for storing culture suspension having cells inoculated therein repeatedly when culturing cells in the culture vessel, and is characterized in that the culture suspension in the culture vessel is stirred by being pressed by the pressing unit.

Preferably, the pressing unit includes a plurality of projections and the projections press the culture vessel.

Preferably, the cells are suspension cells.

Preferably, the cells are used for an immune cell therapy.

A shaking culture method as a cell culture method for culturing cells in a flexible culture vessel for storing culture suspension having cells inoculated therein according to a second aspect of the invention includes pressing the culture vessel by a pressing unit repeatedly and stirring the culture suspension in the culture vessel for culturing the cells.

Preferably, the cells are suspension cells.

Preferably, the cells are used for an immune cell therapy.

According to the first aspect of the invention, the pressing unit presses the flexible culture vessel for storing the culture suspension having the cells inoculated

therein repeatedly and stirs the culture suspension in the culture vessel. In other words, the distribution of the cells and the concentration of the culture medium components are brought into a homogenate, and hence the control of the culture environment is simplified. Furthermore, the oxygen supply capacity is enhanced, and hence the proliferation of the cells is accelerated and the efficiency of the cell culture is improved. Since the cells are just suspended in the culture suspension which is stirred by being pressed repeatedly by the pressing unit, the cells are prevented from getting damaged physically.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a drawing showing a configuration of a cell culture apparatus to which a cell culture shaking device according to a first embodiment of the invention is applied;

Fig. 2 is a perspective view showing a incubator in Fig. 1;

Fig. 3 is a perspective view showing the culture cassette stored in a canister in a incubator in Fig. 1;

Fig. 4 is a perspective view showing a culture bag tray, a culture medium cassette and a cell inoculation cassette in Fig. 3, respectively;

Fig. 5 is a layout drawing showing a configuration of

a culture unit including a canister in the incubator in Fig. 2 and the culture cassette stored in the canister;

Fig. 6 is a block diagram showing a control system of the culture unit in Fig. 5;

Fig. 7A is a perspective view of a shaking mechanism of a shaking device in Fig. 5;

Fig. 7B is a side view of the shaking mechanism of the shaking device in Fig. 5;

Fig. 8 is a process drawing showing a procedure of the culture in the culture unit shown in Fig. 5:

Fig. 9 is a procedure of the culture in the culture unit shown in Fig. 5 and is a process drawing following Fig. 8;

Fig. 10 is a procedure of the culture in the culture unit shown in Fig. 5 and is a process drawing following Fig. 9;

Fig. 11 is a procedure of the culture in the culture unit shown in Fig. 5 and is a process drawing following Fig. 10;

Fig. 12 is a flowchart showing process steps in an inducer stimulating intermittent perfusion culture process in the culture unit in Fig. 5;

Fig. 13 is a flowchart showing steps following the process steps in Fig. 12;

Fig. 14 is a flowchart showing process steps in the inducer stimulating intermittent perfusion culture process (including a cell collecting step using a cell collecting

bag) in the culture unit in Fig. 5;

Fig. 15 is a flowchart showing steps following the process steps in Fig. 14;

Fig. 16 is a flowchart showing process steps in an inducer stimulating consecutive perfusion culture process in the culture unit in Fig. 5;

Fig. 17 is a flowchart showing steps following the process steps in Fig. 16;

Fig. 18 is a layout drawing showing a configuration of the culture unit and the cell culture apparatus (the differentiation-inducing state) to which the cell culture shaking device according to a second embodiment of the invention is applied;

Fig. 19 is a layout drawing showing a configuration of the culture unit in Fig. 18 in a state before the differentiation induction;

Fig. 20 is a flowchart showing process steps of a differentiation-inducing intermittent perfusion culture process in the culture unit in Fig. 18 and Fig. 19;

Fig. 21 is a flowchart showing steps following the process steps in Fig. 20;

Fig. 22 is a configuration drawing showing a configuration of a culture unit and a cell culture apparatus to which the cell culture shaking device according to a third embodiment of the invention is applied;

Fig. 23 is a layout drawing showing a configuration

of the culture unit including a culture chamber and a low-temperature chamber spatially independent from each other, a culture bag tray stored in the culture room and a culture bag/waste water bag tray stored in the low-temperature chamber in the cell culture apparatus to which the cell culture shaking device according to the third embodiment of the invention is applied.

Fig. 24 is a perspective view showing a configuration of a platform in Fig. 23;

Fig. 25 is a flowchart showing process steps in an antibody stimulating intermittent perfusion culture process in the culture unit in Fig. 23 in a case in which a step of collecting the cells in the culture bag is included;

Fig. 26 is a flowchart showing steps following the process steps in Fig. 25;

Fig. 27 is a flowchart showing process steps of the antibody stimulating intermittent perfusion culture process in the culture unit in Fig. 23 in a case in which a step of collecting the cells in the cell collecting bag is included;

Fig. 28 is a flowchart showing steps following the process steps in Fig. 27;

Fig. 29 is a flowchart showing process steps of an antibody stimulating consecutive perfusion culture process in the culture unit in Fig. 23;

Fig. 30 is a flowchart showing steps following the

process steps in Fig. 29;

Fig. 31 is a flowchart showing process steps in an antibody stimulating simple feeding culture process in the culture unit in Fig. 23;

Fig. 32 is a flowchart showing steps following the process steps in Fig. 31;

Fig. 33 is a flowchart showing process steps in the antibody stimulating simple feeding culture process in the culture unit in Fig. 23 in a case in which a step of collecting the cells using the cell collecting bag is included;

Fig. 34 is a flowchart showing steps following the process steps in Fig. 33.

Fig. 35 is a graph showing the result of culture through the shaking method using a cell culture shaking device in comparison with the result of culture through the shaking method in the related art and the result of culture through the static culture.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring now to the drawings, a best mode for carrying out the invention will be described.

[A] First Embodiment (Fig. 1 to Fig. 17)

Fig. 1 is a drawing showing a configuration of a cell culture apparatus to which a cell culture shaking device according to a first embodiment of the invention is

applied. Fig. 2 is a perspective view showing a incubator in Fig. 2. Fig. 5 illustrates a layout of a culture unit including a canister and a culture cassette stored in the canister.

A cell culture apparatus 10 shown in Fig. 1A is specifically adapted to culture suspension cells used for an immune cell therapy, and includes a incubator 11 provided with a plurality of (eight, for example) culture units 12, an operation control panel 13 for controlling an operation of the incubator 11 and the culture units 12, an image processing computer 14 for processing images of cells, and a monitoring computer 15 being connected to the operation control panel 13 and the image processing computer 14 for monitoring the incubator 11 and the culture units 12. The operation control panel 13 and the image processing computer 14 function as a control unit.

The known suspension cells include peripheral blood mononuclear cells, LAK cells (Lymphokine Activated killer cells), neural stem cells, and ES cells. These types of suspension cells are referred simply to as "cells", hereinafter. These cells are stimulated and cultured with inducers which are suitable for the individual cells. The inducers differ from cell to cell. For example, the suitable inducer for LAK cells is anti-human CD3 antibody, the suitable inducer for the neural stem cells is epidermal growth factor such as EGF, and the suitable inducer for ES cells is fibroblast growth factor such as

FGF-8b. The cell culture apparatus 10 is also applicable to a case of culturing adherent cells other than the suspension cells.

The culture unit 12 includes a plurality of (eight, for example) canisters 16 (Fig. 2 and Fig. 5) separated so as to be apart from each other in the incubator 11, and culture cassettes 17 (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3) to be stored in the canisters 16 individually. The culture cassette 17 includes, a culture bag 18 as a proliferation culture vessel, a cell inoculation cassette 19 as an inducer stimulating culture vessel, and a culture medium cassette 20 as a culture medium storage unit. Cells in the culture vessels (culture bag 18 and cell inoculation cassette 19) are cultured under the independent culture environments for the individual canisters 16.

As shown in Fig. 2, the incubator 11 includes a plurality of tiers of shelves 23 in a incubator body 22 having a openable-closable main body door 21 installed therein, and the canisters 16 are arranged on the shelves 23 one by one. The incubator 11 maintains the environment (temperature, humidity, and CO₂ concentration) in the incubator body 22 in an environment required for the cell culture in as state in which the main body door 21 is closed.

Therefore, as shown in Fig. 5 and Fig. 6, a temperature sensor 24, a CO₂ sensor 25, a door sensor 26 and a heater 27 are arranged in the incubator body 22, and

a gas cylinder 28 installed outside is coupled to the incubator body 22. Signals from the temperature sensor 24, the CO₂ sensor 25 and the door sensor 26 are transmitted to the operation control panel 13. The operation control panel 13 controls the heater 27 on the basis of the temperature signal from the temperature sensor 24, and controls the amount of the CO₂ gas supplied from the gas cylinder 28 to the incubator body 22 on the basis of the CO₂ concentration signal from the CO₂ sensor 25.

As shown in Fig. 5 and Fig. 6, the canister 16 has an openable-closable canister door 31 mounted to a canister body 30, and an air-intake filter 32 and an exhaust filter 33 are installed to the canister body 30 and a blast fan 34 is installed on the air-intake filter 32 side of the canister body 30.

The air-intake filter 32 and the exhaust filter 33 are filters for removing bacteria, and prevent entry of bacteria from the incubator body 22 into the canister 16 when air and CO₂ gas in the incubator body 22 is taken into the canister 16 by the operation of the blast fan 34. The operation of the blast fan 34 is controlled by the operation control panel 13 and, when a signal indicating that the main body door 21 of the incubator 11 is opened is transmitted from the door sensor 26 to the operation control panel 13, the operation of the blast fan 34 is stopped and the sealed state of the canister 16 is ensured.

The function of the air-intake filter 32 and the

exhaust filter 33 to prevent entry of bacteria from the incubator body 22 into the canister 16, and the securement of the sealing property of the canister 16 due to the operation stop of the blast fan 34 bring the interiors of the individual canisters 16 to independent culture environment. Accordingly, cells in the culture cassette 17 stored in one single canister 16 in the incubator 11 are isolated from cells in other canisters 16, and cells in the culture cassette 17 stored in the canister 16 is prevented from being contaminated by bacteria. So-called cross-contamination, which is the contamination by cells of other patients, is also prevented.

The canister body 30 is further provided with a door sensor 35, a door lock sensor 36, a temperature sensor 37, a humidity sensor 38, a door lock mechanism 39, a heater 40 and a circulation fan 41. The operation control panel 13 controls the heater 40 on the basis of the temperature signal from the temperature sensor 37. The operation control panel 13 controls the operation of the circulation fan 41, and circulates air and CO₂ gas in the canister 16. The humidity sensor 38 detects the humidity in the canister 16, transmits the same to the operation control panel 13, and detects the trouble therein. In this manner, the interior of the canister 16 is maintained in an environment optimal for the cell culture.

The operation control panel 13 controls the operation of the door lock mechanism 39 so as to prevent two or more

canister doors 31 from opening at the same time in the single incubator 11. Accordingly, erroneous transportation of cells or the culture medium between the different canisters 16 is prevented. The locking operation of the door lock mechanism 39 is detected by the door lock sensor 36, and is transmitted to the operation control panel 13. The opened or closed state of the canister door 31 is detected by the door sensor 35, and is transmitted to the operation control panel 13.

A stage 42 for supporting the culture cassette 17 to be stored in the canister 16 is provided at the lower portion in the canister body 30 shown in Fig. 5, a weight meter 43 is installed on the stage 42. The weight meter 43 is adapted to weigh the culture bag 18 of the culture cassette 17 stored in the canister 16 and, actually, measures the amount of culture medium to be supplied from the culture medium cassette 20 to the culture bag 18. The measured value by the weight meter 43 is also transmitted to the operation control panel 13. A indication lamp 44 is provided in the canister body 30. When culture is carried out automatically in some canisters 16, the indication lamps 44 of the corresponding canisters 16 are illuminated, for example, in red, and the indication lamps 44 of the canisters 16 to which the operation instruction is issued and the canister 16 in which the incubation cassette 17 is not mounted are illuminated in green. Accordingly, the culture environment independent from

other canisters 16 is secured for the canisters 16 in which an automatic culture is carried out, so that the cross contamination or mix-up with specimen (cells) stored in other canisters 16 may be prevented.

The culture cassette 17 will now be described.

As shown in Fig. 3 and Fig. 5, the culture cassette 17 is composed of the culture bag 18, the cell inoculation cassette 19, and the culture medium cassette 20 mounted to a large tray 45, and is a culture vessel in which the culture bag 18 and the cell inoculation cassette 19 culture cells. The cell inoculation cassette 19 is a function expressing culture vessel for causing the cells to express the function (for example, to cause the cells to proliferate, to cause the cells to differentiate (described later)), and is an inducer stimulating culture vessel for stimulating the cells by the inducer for proliferation in this embodiment. The culture bag 18 is a proliferation culture vessel for causing the cells to proliferate stimulated by the inducer in the cell inoculation cassette 19.

The culture bag 18 is a flexible disposable vessel for storing culture suspension in which cells are inoculated, is placed on a culture bag tray 47 shown in Fig. 4A, interposing a platform 46 (Fig. 5) between the culture bag 18 and the culture bag tray 47, and the culture bag tray 47 is detachably mounted to the large tray 45 shown in Fig. 3 and Fig. 5. The culture bag 18 is

a bag formed of, for example, an oxygen permeable material. As shown in Fig. 5, a first pump 48, a second pump 49 and a third pump 50 are arranged on the large tray 45. One end of the culture bag 18 is connected to a seventh connector 57 via the second pump 49 using a tube 63. The other end of the culture bag 18 is connected to a first connector 51 using a tube 60. The first pump 48, the second pump 49 and the third pump 50 are preferably of a peristaltic-type pump from the convenience of replacement of a sterile tube.

In the large tray 45, one end of the tube 61 is connected to the third connector 53 and the other end thereof is connected to a fifth connector 55. The tube 61 is disposed on a rotating portion, not shown, of the first pump 48. The tube 63 is connected to the seventh connector 57 at one end as described above and to the culture bag 18 at the other end. The tube 63 is disposed on a rotating portion, not shown, of the second pump 49. One end of the tube 62 is connected to the tube 61 via the connector X and the other end thereof is connected to the tube 63 via connector Y. The tube 62 is disposed on a rotating portion, not shown, of the third pump 50.

As shown in Fig. 4C, the cell inoculation cassette 19 is formed into a cassette structure by immobilizing the inducer on the inner side of the bottom surface of an inducer stimulation vessel 65, putting the culture medium in the inducer stimulation vessel 65, inoculating cells on

the culture medium, and installing the inducer stimulation vessel 65 in a set frame 66. The operation to place the inducer, the culture medium and the cells in the inducer stimulation vessel 65 is carried out under aseptic conditions in a clean bench or a safety cabinet (hereinafter, referred to as clean bench etc. in this embodiment). The mixed liquid of the culture medium and cells is referred to as culture suspension.

As shown in Fig. 3, the cell inoculation cassette 19 is detachably mounted to the large tray 45. At this time, as shown in Fig. 5, the second connector 52 and the fourth connector 54 of the cell inoculation cassette 19 are coupled to the first connector 51 and the third connector 53 of the large tray 45 under the aseptic conditions, respectively. In other words, the first connector 51 and the second connector 52 are coupled, for example, by inserting a rubbery joint on one of those to a needle joint on the other one of those under the aseptic conditions. The coupling of the third connector 53 and the fourth connector 54 is the same.

By the coupling between the first connector 51 and the second connector 52, the cell inoculation cassette 19 and the culture bag 18 in the different culture environment, that is, the cell inoculation cassette 19 having a culture environment for stimulating cells by the inducer to cause the cells to express the proliferating function and the culture bag 18 having a culture

environment for causing the cells to proliferate are connected using the tube 60. Therefore, the cells which are stimulated by the inducer in the cell inoculation cassette 19 and has started the proliferation may be transferred to culture bag 18 to cause the cells only to proliferate in the culture bag 18.

As shown in Fig. 4B, the culture medium cassette 20 is formed into a cassette structure with mounting a culture medium bag 67 as a culture medium storage vessel and a used culture medium bag 68 as a used culture medium storage vessel on a culture medium bag tray 69. The culture medium bag 67 is adapted to store the culture medium to be supplied to the culture bag 18 and the cell inoculation cassette 19. The used culture medium bag 68 is adapted to store the used culture medium (supernatant) discharged from the culture bag 18. With the culture medium cassette 20 having the cassette structure, change and supply of the culture medium are enabled only by mounting the culture medium cassette 20 to the culture cassette 17 in the canister 16 in a state of maintaining the culture bag 18 in the canister 16.

The culture medium cassette 20 is detachably mounted to the large tray 45 (Fig. 3). At this time, as shown in Fig. 5, a sixth connector 56 and an eighth connector 58 of the culture medium cassette 20 are coupled to the fifth connector 55 and the seventh connector 57 of the large tray 45 under the aseptic conditions respectively in the

same manner as the case of the first connector 51 and the second connector 52. By the coupling between the sixth connector 56 and the fifth connector 55, the culture medium bag 67 and the cell inoculation cassette 19 are connected. By the coupling between the seventh connector 57 and the eighth connector 58, the used culture medium bag 68 and the culture bag 18 are connected.

With the connection among the culture bag 18, the cell inoculation cassette 19 and the culture medium cassette 20 as described above, a closed system in which the culture medium in the culture medium bag 67 in the culture medium cassette 20 is supplied to the culture bag 18 via the cell inoculation cassette 19 when the first pump 48 is activated, and the used culture medium in the culture bag 18 is discharged to the used culture medium bag 68 in the culture medium cassette 20 when the second pump 49 is activated is established. With the establishment of the closed system, the system (the culture bag 18, the cell inoculation cassette 19 and the culture medium cassette 20) is maintained under the aseptic conditions.

The cell inoculation cassette 19 described above is replaced by a dummy cassette 70 in a stage where there is no more cell therein. Accordingly, the inducer in the cell inoculation cassette 19 is prevented from being transferred into the culture bag 18. The culture medium cassette 20 is replaced by a new culture medium cassette

20 having the culture medium bag 67 filled with the culture medium and an empty used culture medium bag 68 in a stage where the culture medium bag 67 becomes empty. This replacement is carried out by the operator. The dummy cassette 70 simply has a function as a flow channel for allowing the culture medium to flow.

The culture (cell proliferation) in the culture bag 18 includes a feeding culture in which the first pump 48 is activated to supply (feed) the culture medium in the culture medium bag 67 in the culture medium cassette 20 to the culture bag 18 so that the proliferation of cells is achieved, a perfusion culture in which the first pump 48 and the second pump 49 are activated to discharge the used culture medium in the culture bag 18 to the used culture medium bag 68 in the culture medium cassette 20 and to supply the culture medium in the culture medium bag 67 to the culture bag 18 so that the proliferation of cells is achieved, a shaking culture using a shaking device 80 described later and a static culture in which the shaking operation is not carried out. The perfusion culture includes an intermittent perfusion culture in which discharge of the used culture medium and supply of the culture medium are carried out alternately, and a consecutive perfusion culture in which the discharge of the used culture medium and the supply of the culture medium are carried out simultaneously. In the consecutive perfusion culture, a filter 71 for preventing transfer of

cells is normally disposed between the culture bag 18 and the second pump 49 in the tube 63 to prevent the cells in the culture bag 18 from being discharged to the used culture medium bag 68.

The third pump 50 is activated, for example, in the case of observing the cells proliferating in the culture bag 18 using the images. In other words, the cells in the culture bag 18 is introduced from the culture bag 18 to the cell inoculation cassette 19 or the dummy cassette 70 via the tube 63, the tube 62 and the tube 61 when the filter 71 is not disposed in the tube 63, and is shot by a CCD camera 88, described later, so that the number of proliferated cells or the like is observed. When the filter 71 is disposed in the tube 63, the upstream side of the third pump 50 is connected to the culture bag 18 via a bypass tube 73, and the cells in the culture bag 18 are introduced into the cell inoculation cassette 19 or the dummy cassette 70 via the bypass tube 73 and the tube 62, and are observed using the CCD camera 88.

The used culture medium in the culture bag 18 is discharged to the used culture medium bag 68 in the culture medium cassette 20 after having completed the proliferation of cells in the culture bag 18, and the cells in the culture bag 18 is condensed. The discharge of the used culture medium is carried out by activating the second pump 49 until the amount of the culture suspension in the culture bag 18 is recued to about 1/2 to

1/3 in quantity by the control of the operation control panel 13 on the basis of the value measured by the weight meter 43. By the condensation of the cells in the culture bag 18, the number of times of centrifugation carried out by a centrifuge for the purpose of washing and condensation of cells, carried out later, is reduced.

In the culture medium cassette 20, it is also possible to replace the used culture medium bag 68 by a cell collecting bag 72 as a cell collecting vessel which is attachable to the centrifuge after having condensed the cells in the culture bag 18 as described above, and then supply the culture suspension in which the cells are condensed in the culture bag 18 into the cell collecting bag 72 by activating the second pump 49 provided that the filter 71 is not disposed in the tube 63. Accordingly, collection of the cells in the bag which is attachable to the centrifuge may be carried out within the canister 16, which is a space in the closed system, so that the labor for collecting the cells is saved.

As shown in Fig. 5 and Fig. 6, the large tray 45 of the culture cassette 17 stored in the canister 16 is provided with a cell inoculation cassette sensor 74 which detects the fact that the cell inoculation cassette 19 or the dummy cassette 70 is mounted to the large tray 45 and a culture medium cassette sensor 75 for detecting the fact that the culture medium cassette 20 is mounted on the large tray 45. Signals from the sensors 74 and 75 are

transmitted to the operation control panel 13. The operation control panel 13 confirms the fact that the cell inoculation cassette 19 or the dummy cassette 70 is mounted to the large tray 45 of the culture cassette 17 and the fact that the culture medium cassette 20 is mounted, and then activates the first pump 48, the second pump 49 and the third pump 50.

As shown in Fig. 5, the culture cassette 17 is stored within the canister 16, and the culture cassette 17 is supported on the stage 42 of the canister 16, and the stage 42 is provided with an inclined motor 76, a cam mechanism 79 and a positioning sensor 77 below a position where the culture bag tray 47 of the culture cassette 17 is installed. A part (elevating unit, not shown), of the platform 46 for placing the culture bag 18 on the culture bag tray 47 directly is adapted to be able to be moved upward and downward. The inclined motor 76 rotates the cam mechanism 79 to move the elevating unit of the platform 46 upward and downward. The position of the elevating unit is detected by the positioning sensor 77, and is transmitted to the operation control panel 13. The inclined motor 76 is controlled by the operation control panel 13 so as to move the elevating unit of the platform 46 downward in an initial stage of culture in the culture bag 18. Accordingly, a liquid reservoir 78 (Figs. 8A and 8B, Figs. 9A and 9B) is formed in the culture bag 18.

In the initial stage of culture in the culture bag 18,

the culture suspension from the cell inoculation cassette 19 is retained in the liquid reservoir 78, so that the cell density per area in the culture bag 18 is maintained at a density suitable for the proliferation and hence the cells efficiently proliferate in the initial stage of the culture. In the middle stage and the later stage of the culture in which the amount of the culture suspension in the culture bag 18 is increased to a level at least equal to a predetermined amount α (described later), the inclined motor 76 moves the elevating unit of the platform 46 upward via the cam mechanism 79 to bring the culture bag 18 into a horizontal state to eliminate the liquid reservoir 78.

As shown in Fig. 5, a shaking mechanism 91 of the shaking device 80 is installed as a pressing unit above the culture cassette 17 where the culture bag tray 47 is arranged in the canister 16.

The shaking device 80 includes the shaking mechanism 91, an operating motor 81, a cam mechanism 90 and a positioning sensor 82. As shown in Fig. 7, the shaking mechanism 91 includes an apparatus frame 83, an operating plate 85 as the pressing unit disposed on the apparatus frame 83 via a guide rod so as to be movable upward and downward, and a plurality of projections 86 projecting from the bottom surface of the operating plate 85. When the operating plate 85 is moved upward and downward alternately by an operation of the cam mechanism 90 (Fig.

5) by the operating motor 81, the projections 86 of the operating plate 85 press the culture bag 18 positioned downwardly of the shaking mechanism 91 repeatedly, that is, pressing and releasing of the culture bag 18 are repeated.

In a case in which the capacity of the culture bag 18 is set to 500 to 1500 ml and the size of the operating plate 85 is set to 30×40 cm, the number of the projections 86 projecting in the shaking mechanism 91 shown in Fig. 7A is preferably five to twenty five, for example. As shown in Fig. 7B, the diameter r of the projection 86 is preferably, for example, from 0.5 to 7 cm, more preferably, from 1 to 3 cm. The height h of the projection 86 is preferably, for example, from 0.5 to 7 cm and, more preferably, from 1 to 3 cm. The material of the projections 86 is, for example, plastic, aluminum or rubber. By forming with these materials, the culture bag 18 and the cells in the culture bag 18 are prevented from getting damaged. The shape of the projection 86 may be any shape such as a semicircular shape or a cylindrical shape as long as it does not give damages to the culture bag 18. The pressing by the projection 86 is, for example, from 10 to 180 times per minutes in velocity with a pressing width from 1 to 15 mm. These values are examples only, and the invention is not limited to the values shown above.

With the shaking mechanism 91 as described above, the culture suspension in the culture bag 18 is stirred, and

the cells in the culture bag 18 floats and moves in the culture suspension, so that the distribution of the cells and the concentration of the culture medium components are homogenized in the culture bag 18 and the oxygen supply capacity is improved, so that the proliferation of the cells is accelerated.

As shown in Fig. 6, the position of the operating plate 85 is detected by the positioning sensor 82, and is transmitted to the operation control panel 13, whereby the operating motor 81 is controlled by the operation control panel 13. The cell culture (shaking culture) in the culture bag 18 using the shaking device 80 described above may be carried out before the culture suspension is filled in the culture bag 18 to approximately a maximum level, or may be carried out after having filled therein to approximately the maximum level.

As shown in Fig. 5, an lighting LED 87 and the CCD camera 88 as an image acquiring unit are installed in the canister 16 above and below the position where the cell inoculation cassette 19 or the dummy cassette 70 of the culture cassette 17 is arranged, respectively. The lighting LED 87 illuminates the cell inoculation cassette 19 or the dummy cassette 70 from above. The CCD camera 88 shoots the cells in the cell inoculation cassette 19 or the dummy cassette 70 from below to acquire the image thereof. The illuminating operation of the lighting LED 87 and the shooting operation of the CCD camera 88 are

controlled by the operation control panel 13 (Fig. 6), and images of the cells in the cell inoculation cassette 19 or the dummy cassette 70 are acquired at predetermined time intervals (every 6 hours, for example). The cell images shot at the respective time intervals are stored in an image memory circuit 89 of the image processing computer 14.

The image processing computer 14 carries out image processing, for example, binarization or multithresholding, for the cell images shot at the respective time intervals stored in the image memory circuit 89, so that an average value of the projected areas of the single cells and the increasing rate of the non-single cell, which is a cell aggregate formed of a plurality of single cells are calculated as evaluation parameters of the cell culture. The average value of the projected areas of the single cells (the average projected area of the single cell) is calculated from the cell image taken when twenty-four hours has elapsed from the moment when the culture is started after having mounted the cell inoculation cassette 19 to the culture cassette 17 and stored the culture cassette 17 in the canister 16.

Determination of whether the cell is the non-single cell described above or not is achieved in such a manner that the cell having a projected area at least equal to $100 \mu\text{m}^2$ is determined as the non-single cells since the projected area of the single cell in the initial stage of

culture is smaller than $100\text{ }\mu\text{m}^2$. The change of the ratio of the non-single cells with respect to all the cells is computed from follow-up images of the cells (for example, images of the cells after having elapsed 24 hours, 48 hours and 72 hours from the start of culture) to calculate the increasing rate of the non-single cell.

The image processing computer 14 calculates a lag time from the average projected area of the single cell and estimates the start time of the proliferation of the cells. The lag time means a time length of an induction phase required from inoculation of cells in the inducer stimulation vessel 65 in the cell inoculation cassette 19 until the proliferation is started. The image processing computer 14 determines whether the culture state of the cells, that is, whether the cell has a capability to proliferate by the stimulation from the inducer or not, from the timing when the cells has started to proliferate. Then, the image processing computer 14 transmits the result of determination of the cells (for example, "YES" when the cells have a capability to proliferate and "NO" when the cells have no capability to proliferate) to the operation control panel 13. When the operation control panel 13 receives a signal indicating that the capability of proliferation of the cells in the inducer stimulation vessel 65 in the cell inoculation cassette 19 is determined to be remarkably low, the operation control panel 13 displays the state of the corresponding cells.

The cells demonstrating too long lag time are cells which are remarkably hard to get stimulated by the inducer, and hence are determined that the capability of proliferation is low.

The image processing computer 14 calculates a minimum doubling time of the cells from the increasing rate of the non-single cell. The doubling time in this specification means a time period required for the number of cells at a certain time to be increased to two times the number of cells. The image processing computer 14 determines the culture state of the cells, that is, the proliferation ability of the cells from the minimum doubling time and transmits the same to the operation control panel 13. Then, the operation control panel 13 that has received the signal from the image processing computer 14 decides the timing for moving the cells from the cell inoculation cassette 19 to the culture bag 18 or the feeding velocity for feeding the culture medium to the culture bag 18 on the basis of the proliferation ability of the cells. The cells demonstrating a too long minimum doubling time is determined to be cells having a remarkably low proliferation ability.

The operation control panel 13 and the image processing computer 14 functioning as control units include a CPU for executing computation or control, a storage device (memory) for storing a processing program or data, and a input/output circuit for the connection

with the input devices such as a keyboard, a mouse or a touch panel for supplying data or commands and the output devices such as a monitor. The image processing computer 14 also includes the image memory circuit 89 for storing the image data from the CCD camera 88.

The storage device of the image processing computer 14, stores a program for processing (for example, binarization or multithresholding) the images of the cells in the cell inoculation cassette 19 shot at the predetermined time intervals by the CCD camera 88, calculating evaluation parameters for the cell culture (the average projected area of the single cell, the increasing rate of the non-singe cell), and determining the culture state of the cells (the proliferation capability of the cells, and the proliferation ability of the cells) from the evaluation parameters of the cell culture.

The storage device of the operation control panel 13 stores a equipment control program for controlling equipment (for example, the first pump 48 and the second pump 49) relating to the incubator 11, the canister 16 and the culture cassette 17 according to the culture state of the cells and carrying out the culture operation. The storage device of the operation control panel 13 also stores a program for controlling the equipment relating to the incubator 11, the canister 16 and the culture cassette 17 on the basis of the signals from respective sensors in

the incubator 11, the canister 16 and the culture cassette 17, such as controlling the CCD camera 88 at predetermined time intervals and acquiring the images of the cells.

Subsequently, a process that the operation control panel 13 and the image processing computer 14 carry out the program for culturing cells will be described using process drawings shown in Fig. 8A to Fig. 11B, and flowchart shown in Fig. 12 to Fig. 17. In the cell culture process, the operation control panel 13 and the image processing computer 14 set the culture environments independently for the individual canisters 16 in the incubator 11, and control the same to culture the cells in the culture cassettes 17 stored in the individual canisters 16.

Fig. 8 to Fig. 13 show an inducer stimulating intermittent perfusion culture process carried out in the case of collecting the cells in the culture bag 18. As shown in Fig. 8A and Fig. 12, the operator places the empty culture bag 18 on the culture bag tray 47 via the platform 46, mounts the culture bag tray 47 to the large tray 45, and connects the culture bag 18 to the first pump 48, the second pump 49 and the third pump 50.

Subsequently, the operator puts the large tray 45 into the single canister 16 whose indication lamp 44 is illuminated, for example, in green, in the incubator 11, and makes the stage 42 to support the same. Then, the operator immobilizes the inducer in the inducer

stimulation vessel 65 in the clean bench or the like, puts the culture medium therein, and mounts the cell inoculation cassette 19 to which cells are inoculated to the large tray 45 in the canister 16, as shown in Fig. 8B. Subsequently, the operator mounts the culture medium cassette 20 having the culture medium bag 67 to which the culture medium is put in the clean bench or the like to the large tray 45 in the canister 16 (S1 in Fig. 12).

Subsequently, the operator confirms the output of the image from the CCD camera 88 in the canister 16 in which the culture cassette 17 having the culture bag 18, the cell inoculation cassette 19 and the culture medium cassette 20 mounted to the large tray 45 is stored (S2 in Fig. 12). Before or after the confirmation of the image output, the operator activates the inclined motor 76 of the canister 16 to move the elevating unit of the platform 46 downward and form the liquid reservoir 78 in the culture bag 18. The operator then measures the weight of the empty culture bag 18 by the weight meter 43 of the canister 16.

Then, as shown in Fig. 9A, the operator closes the canister door 31 and starts the cell culture in the corresponding canister 16 (S3 in Fig. 12). Accordingly, in the inducer stimulation vessel 65 in the cell inoculation cassette 19, the cells are stimulated by the inducer for proliferation (S4 in Fig. 12). The CCD camera 88 of the corresponding canister 16 takes images of the

cells in the inducer stimulation vessel 65 in the cell inoculation cassette 19 at predetermined time intervals (every six hours, for example), and the image processing computer 14 calculates the evaluation parameter of the cell culture from the picked-up images. In addition, the image processing computer 14 calculates a lag time from the evaluation parameter to determine whether there is a capability that the cells proliferate by the stimulation from the inducer or not, and further calculates the minimum doubling time to determine the proliferation ability of the cells (S5 in Fig. 12).

When the operation control panel 13 receives a signal determining that the proliferation capability cannot be confirmed even a predetermined time length (72 hours, for example) has elapsed since the cells are stimulated by the inducer in the inducer stimulation vessel 65 in the cell inoculation cassette 19 from the image processing computer 14, the operation control panel 13 displays so. When the operation control panel 13 receives a signal determining that the cells in the inducer stimulation vessel 65 in the cell inoculation cassette 19 has a probability to proliferate from the image processing computer 14, the operation control panel 13 decides the timing to transfer the cells to the culture bag 18 or the feeding velocity of the culture medium into the culture bag 18 on the basis of the proliferation ability of the cells. The operation control panel 13 activates the first pump 48 on the basis

of these decision and, as shown in Fig. 9B, to feed the culture medium in the culture medium bag 67 of the culture medium cassette 20 to the cell inoculation cassette 19, transfers the cells in the inducer stimulation vessel 65 in the cell inoculation cassette 19 to the culture bag 18, and feeds the culture medium in the culture medium bag 67 to the culture bag 18 (S6 in Fig. 12).

By the operation of the first pump 48, the static culture of the cells in the liquid reservoir 78 of the culture bag 18 is started (S7 in Fig. 12). The operation control panel 13 follows the program to carry out the feeding culture while feeding the culture medium, and to determine whether the weight of the culture suspension in the culture bag 18 measured by the weight meter 43 is increased to a level at least equal to a predetermined value α or not (S8 in Fig. 12). The operation control panel 13 activates the inclined motor 76 at a timing when the predetermined value α is reached, moves the elevating portion of the platform 46 upward via the cam mechanism 79 and, as shown in Fig. 10A, brings the culture bag 18 into a horizontal state to eliminate the liquid reservoir 78 (S9 in Fig. 12).

Then, the operation control panel 13 determines whether the weight of the culture suspension in the culture bag 18 weighted by the weight meter 43 is increased to a level at least equal to a predetermined value β (S10 in Fig. 12) or not, and activates the

operating motor 81 at a timing when the predetermined value β is reached. Accordingly, as shown in Fig. 10B, the shaking device 80 is activated, and the shaking culture in which the operating plate 85 in the shaking mechanism 91 of the shaking device 80 presses the culture bag 18 repeatedly is started (S11 in Fig. 12). The operation control panel 13 continues to determine whether the weight of the culture suspension in the culture bag 18 measure by the weight meter 43 is increased to a level at least equal to a predetermined value χ (S12 in Fig. 12) or not. When the predetermined value χ is reached, the first pump 48 is stopped, feeding of the culture medium from the culture medium bag 67 in the culture medium cassette 20 to the culture bag 18 is stopped, and the operating motor 81 is stopped to stop the shaking culture in the culture bag 18 (S13 in Fig. 13).

The operation control panel 13 activates the second pump 49 after the cells are settled in the culture bag 18 to discharge the used culture medium in the culture bag 18 (supernatant in the culture bag 18) to the used culture medium bag 68 in the culture medium cassette 20 as shown in Fig. 11A (S14 in Fig. 13). Then, the operation control panel 13 activates the first pump 48 and feeds the culture medium from the culture medium bag 67 in the culture medium cassette 20 to the culture bag 18, and activates the operating motor 81 to carry out the shaking culture in the culture bag 18 by the shaking device 80 (S15 in Fig.

13). After having elapsed a predetermined time length, the operation control panel 13 stops the first pump 48, stops the feeding of the culture medium from the culture medium bag 67 in the culture medium cassette 20 to the culture bag 18, and stops the operating motor 81 to stop the shaking culture in the culture bag 18 (S16 in Fig. 13).

The operation control panel 13 determines whether the desired culture term depending on the date and time of usage of the cells to proliferate is reached or not, or the image processing computer 14 determines whether the cells in the culture bag 18 reaches the desired number of cells or not (S17 in Fig. 13). When determining whether the cells in the culture bag 18 reaches the desired number of cells or not, the operation control panel 13 activates the third pump 50 (Fig. 11A), transfers a part of the cells in the culture bag 18 to the cell inoculation cassette 19 or the dummy cassette 70 (the dummy cassette 70 in most cases), and makes the CCD camera 88 to take an image of the cells. The image processing computer 14 processes the image of the cells, determines whether the number of cells is at least equal to a specified value or not, and transmits the same to the operation control panel 13. When the culture term or the number of cells is not reached, the operation control panel 13 repeats the processing operation from Step S14 to Step S17.

The Steps S13 to S17 are steps for the intermittent perfusion culture in which discharge of the used culture

medium in the culture bag 18 and supply (feed) of new culture medium to the culture bag 18 are carried out alternately.

In Steps S9 to S17, the presence or absence of the cells in the inducer stimulation vessel 65 in the cell inoculation cassette 19 is confirmed by the CCD camera 88 and, when there is no cell in the inducer stimulation vessel 65, the operation control panel 13 prompts the operator to replace the cell inoculation cassette 19 by the dummy cassette 70 so as to prevent the inducer from flowing from the inducer stimulation vessel 65 into the culture bag 18. When replacing the cell inoculation cassette 19 by the dummy cassette 70, the operation control panel 13 stops feeding of the culture medium from the culture medium cassette 20 to the culture bag 18 and the shaking culture by the shaking device 80 temporarily until the replacement of the cell inoculation cassette 19 by the dummy cassette 70 is completed.

Then, in Steps S9 to S17, when the operation control panel 13 determines that there is no more culture medium in the culture medium bag 67 in the culture medium cassette 20 from the measured value by the weight meter 43, the operation control panel 13 prompts the operator to replace the culture medium cassette 20 by a new culture medium cassette 20. When replacing the culture medium cassette 20 by the new culture medium cassette 20 as well, the operation control panel 13 stops feeding of the

culture medium from the culture medium cassette 20 to the culture bag 18 and the shaking culture by the shaking device 80 temporarily until the replacement of the culture medium cassette 20 is completed.

At the time point when the desired culture term is reached or when the desired number of cells is reached in Step S17, the operation control panel 13 stops shaking. When the cells are settled, the operation control panel 13 activates the second pump 49 as shown in Fig. 11B, discharges the used culture medium in the culture bag 18 to the used culture medium bag 68 of the culture medium cassette 20 and condenses the cells until the culture suspension in the culture bag 18 is reduced to about $1/2$ to $1/3$ on the basis of the measured value by the weight meter 43 (S18 in Fig. 12).

The operation control panel 13 then stops the second pump 49 to complete the cell culture (S19 in Fig. 12). After having completed the culture, the cells in the culture bag 18 are transferred to a vessel for the centrifuge in the clean bench or the like by the operator, and then the cells are collected by the centrifugation (S20 in Fig. 12).

Subsequently, a case in which the process of collecting the cells by the cell collecting bag 72 (Fig. 5) in the inducer stimulating intermittent perfusion culture process is include will be shown in Fig. 14 and

Fig. 15. Therefore, Steps S21 to S38 in the process shown in Fig. 14 and Fig. 15 are the same as Steps S1 to S18 in Fig. 12 and Fig. 13, and hence description is omitted.

In Step S38 shown in Fig. 15, after having condensed the cells in the culture bag 18 by the activation of the second pump 49, the operation control panel 13 stops the second pump 49, and prompts the operator to replace the used culture medium bag 68 in the culture medium cassette 20 by the cell collecting bag 72 (Fig. 5) (S39 in Fig. 13). The cell collecting bag 72 is a bag which may be used for the centrifuge by being mounted to the centrifugation.

After having replaced the used culture medium bag 68 in the culture medium cassette 20 by the cell collecting bag 72, the operation control panel 13 activates the second pump 49 and the operating motor 81, and transfers the cells in the culture bag 18 to the cell collecting bag 72 mounted to the culture medium cassette 20 together with the culture medium while shaking the interior of the culture bag 18 by the shaking device 80 (S40 in Fig. 15). The operation control panel 13 then stops the second pump 49 and the operating motor 81 and stops the cell culture (S41 in Fig. 15). After having completed the culture, the operator mounts the cell collecting bag 72 to the centrifuge and collects the cells by the centrifugation (S42 in Fig. 15).

Referring now to Fig. 16 and Fig. 17, the inducer stimulating consecutive perfusion culture process will be described. Steps S51 to S62 in the inducer stimulating consecutive perfusion culture process shown in Fig. 16 and Fig. 17 are the same as Steps S1 to S12 in the inducer stimulating intermittent perfusion culture process in Fig. 12 and Fig. 13, and hence description is omitted. In the inducer stimulating consecutive perfusion culture process, the filter 71 is disposed between the culture bag 18 and the second pump 49.

The operation control panel 13 activates the second pump 49 and discharges the used culture medium in the culture bag 18 to the used culture medium bag 68 in the culture medium cassette 20 at a moment when the weight of the culture suspension in the culture bag 18 is increased to a level at least equal to the predetermined value χ (S62 in Fig. 16) during the shaking culture by the shaking device 80 in the culture bag 18 (S61 in Fig. 16) while feeding the culture medium from the culture medium bag 67 in the culture medium cassette 20 into the culture bag 18 (S56 in Fig. 16). Accordingly, the consecutive perfusion culture which carries out feeding of the culture medium to the culture bag 18 and discharge of the used culture medium from the culture bag 18 simultaneously is started in the culture bag 18 (S63 in Fig. 17). At this time, the

cells in the culture bag 18 are prevented from flowing by the filter 71, and hence do not flow into the used culture medium bag 68. The shaking culture by the shaking device 80 is carried out simultaneously during the consecutive perfusion culture.

The operation control panel 13 determines whether the desired culture term depending on the date and time of usage of the cells to proliferate is reached or not, or the image processing computer 14 determines whether the cells in the culture bag 18 reaches the desired number of cells or not (S64 in Fig. 17). When determining whether the cells in the culture bag 18 reaches the desired number of cells or not, the operation control panel 13 activates the third pump 50, transfers a part of the cells in the culture bag 18 to the cell inoculation cassette 19 or the dummy cassette 70 (the dummy cassette 70 in most cases), and makes the CCD camera 88 to take an image of the cells. The image processing computer 14 processes the image of the cells, determines whether the number of cells is at least equal to a specified value or not, and transmits the same to the operation control panel 13. When the culture term or the number of cells as described above is not reached, the consecutive perfusion culture in Step S63 is repeated.

In Steps S59 to S64, the presence or absence of the

cells in the inducer stimulation vessel 65 in the cell inoculation cassette 19 is confirmed by the CCD camera 88 and, when there is no cell in the inducer stimulation vessel 65, the operation control panel 13 prompts the operator to replace the cell inoculation cassette 19 by the dummy cassette 70 so as to prevent the inducer from flowing from the inducer stimulation vessel 65 into the culture bag 18. When replacing the cell inoculation cassette 19 by the dummy cassette 70, the operation control panel 13 stops feeding of the culture medium from the culture medium cassette 20 to the culture bag 18 and the shaking culture by the shaking device 80 temporarily until the replacement of the cell inoculation cassette 19 by the dummy cassette 70 is completed.

Then, in Steps S59 to S64, when the operation control panel 13 determines that there is no more culture medium in the culture medium bag 67 in the culture medium cassette 20 from the measured value by the weight meter 43, the operation control panel 13 prompts the operator to replace the culture medium cassette 20 by a new culture medium cassette 20. When replacing the culture medium cassette 20 by the new culture medium cassette 20 as well, the operation control panel 13 stops feeding of the culture medium from the culture medium cassette 20 to the culture bag 18 and the shaking culture by the shaking device 80 temporarily until the replacement of the culture medium cassette 20 is completed.

The operation control panel 13 stops the first pump 48, the second pump 49 and the operating motor 81 and stops the perfusion culture and the shaking culture at a moment when the desired culture term in Step S64 is reached, or when the desired number of cells is reached (S65 in Fig. 17).

The operation control panel 13 then activates the second pump 49 to discharge the used culture medium in the culture bag 18 to the used culture medium bag 68 in the culture medium cassette 20 and condense the cells until the amount of the culture suspension in the culture bag 18 is reduced to about 1/2 to 1/3 on the basis of the measured value by the weight meter 43 (S66 in Fig. 17).

The operation control panel 13 then stops the second pump 49 to complete the cell culture (S67 in Fig. 17). After having completed the culture, the cells in the culture bag 18 are transferred into the vessel for the centrifuge in the clean bench or the like by the operator and then the cells are collected by the centrifugation (Step S68 in Fig. 17).

In this configuration, according to the embodiment shown above, the following effects (1) to (8) are achieved.

(1) The image processing computer 14 processes the images of the cells in the cell inoculation cassette 19, that the CCD camera 88 has picked up, to acquire

evaluation parameters of the cell culture (average projected area of the single cell, the increasing rate of the non-single cell), and to determine and evaluate the culture state of the cells (the capability of proliferation and the proliferation ability of the cells). The operation control panel 13 carries out the culture operation according to the culture state (the timing of transfer of the cells from the cell inoculation cassette 19 to the culture bag 18, the feeding of the culture medium at a predetermined feeding velocity from the culture medium cassette 20 to the culture bag 18 or the like). Consequently, since the culture state of the cells is determined in a non-contact and non-invasive state, the cells are prevented from getting damaged, and the risk of contamination and the loss of the cells due to the sampling are avoided. Since, the operator needs not to carry out the culture operation one by one, the labor of the operator is alleviated. Since the cells of one patient can be inoculated to the cell inoculation cassette 19 in the culture cassette 17 which is stored in the single canister 16, and the culture operation according to the culture state of the cells can be carried out on the individual bases. Therefore, the culture operation suitable for each patient is achieved, and the cross-contamination is avoided. Since the culture operation suitable for the culture state of the cells is achieved, the culture operation by the hour is enabled, and the

culture is accelerated to shorten the culture term.

(2) The culture medium cassette 20 has a cassette structure, and is connected to the culture bag 18 and the cell inoculation cassette 19, which is also has a cassette structure. Therefore, the culture bag 18, in particular, is constantly retained in the canister 16 which provides an optimal environment for the culture. Consequently, damages to the cells in the culture bag 18 in association with the environment change is reduced, and aseptic manipulation for supplying the culture medium to the culture bag 18 in the clean bench or the like is omitted.

(3) The culture medium cassette 20, the cell inoculation cassette 19 and the culture bag 18 are connected to form a closed system. Therefore, the culture medium cassette 20, the cell inoculation cassette 19 and the culture bag 18 are maintained under the aseptic conditions.

(4) The culture suspension is stored in the liquid reservoir 78 of the culture bag 18 in the initial stage of the culture in the culture bag 18, and hence the cell density per area may be maintained at a suitable density. Therefore, the cells may proliferate efficiently in the initial stage of culture.

(5) When the cells proliferated in the culture bag 18 is introduced into the cell inoculation cassette 19 or the dummy cassette 70 and the images of the cells are acquired

by the CCD camera 88, the number of cells and the form of the cells are observed by acquiring the cells proliferated in the culture bag 18 as the images without sampling.

(6) The used culture medium in the culture bag 18 is discharged and stored in the used culture medium bag 68 in the culture medium cassette 20, and hence the cells in the culture bag 18 may be condensed to increase the cell density. Therefore, the number of times of the operation of centrifugation for collecting the cells may be reduced. Consequently, the labor for collecting the cells is saved, and the damage of the cells in association with the centrifugation is reduced.

(7) When all the cells condensed in the culture bag 18 are collected to the cell collecting bag 72 mounted to the culture medium cassette 20, the cells may be collected by mounting the cell collecting bag 72 directly to the centrifuge. Therefore, the labor for collecting the cells may be saved.

(8) The culture suspension in the culture bag 18 is stirred by repeatedly pressing the flexible culture bag 18 having the culture medium to which the cells are inoculated stored therein by the projections 86 of the operating plate 85 in the shaking mechanism 91 of the shaking device 80. Therefore, the distribution of the cells and the concentration of the culture medium components in the culture bag 18 are homogenized, and the oxygen supply capacity is improved, so that the

proliferation of the cells is accelerated and the efficiency of the cell culture is improved. Since the cells are just suspended in the culture suspension stirred by being pressed repeatedly by the operating plate 85 of the shaking device 80, the cells are prevented from getting damaged.

[B] Second Embodiment (Fig. 18 to Fig. 21)

Fig. 18 is a layout drawing showing a configuration of a culture unit and a cell culture apparatus (differentiation-inducing state) to which the cell culture shaking device according to a second embodiment of the invention is applied. Fig. 19 is a layout drawing showing the culture unit in Fig. 18 in a state before the differentiation inducting. In the second embodiment, the same parts as in the first embodiment are designated by the same reference numerals and description is omitted.

A cell culture apparatus 100 according to the second embodiment is an apparatus in which the cell inoculation cassette 19 (Fig. 5) in the cell culture apparatus 10 in the first embodiment is replaced by a differentiation-inducing cassette 101 as a differentiation-inducing culture vessel in which differentiation-inducing factor is added in advance. Then, the cell culture apparatus 100 activates the second pump 49 to introduce the culture medium from the culture medium bag 67 in the culture medium cassette 20 to the culture bag 18 to cause the cells to proliferate, and then activates the first pump 48

to introduce the proliferated cells to the differentiation-inducing cassette 101 to give a role to the corresponding cells, that is, differentiates the corresponding cells. The term "differentiation" in this specification means to give a role to the cells as cells of a heart, or to give a role to the same as cells of liver. As shown in Fig. 19, a dummy cassette 102 is arranged instead of the differentiation-inducing cassette 101 before the cells proliferated in the culture bag 18 are differentiated in the differentiation-inducing cassette 101, and the used culture medium in the culture bag 18 is discharged to the used culture medium bag 68 in the culture medium cassette 20 via the dummy cassette 102 by the activation of the first pump 48. The dummy cassette 102 functions as a flow path for simply allowing the culture medium to flow as in the case of the dummy cassette 70 (Fig. 5).

In the second embodiment, as shown in Fig. 18, the CCD camera 88 takes images of the cells differentiated in the differentiation-inducing cassette 101 at predetermined time intervals. A program for carrying out the shooting is stored in a storage device of the operation control panel 13. The image processing computer 14 carries out processing such as binarization or multithresholding on the images of the cells, and acquires the form of the cells as evaluation parameters. A program for carrying out the acquisition of the evaluation parameter is stored

in the storage device of the image processing computer 14. The image processing computer 14 determines whether the corresponding cells are differentiated or not from the change of the form of the cells with time. The operation control panel 13 controls the differentiation-inducing operation by the differentiation-inducing cassette 101 upon reception of the signal from the image processing computer 14. For example, the operation control panel 13 continues the differentiation-inducing operation when the image processing computer 14 determines that the corresponding cells have a capability of differentiation. If not, the message saying so is displayed. The program for carrying out the determination of differentiation described above is stored in the storage device in the image processing computer 14, and a program for carrying out the differentiation-inducing operation is stored in the storage device in the operation control panel 13.

Referring now to Fig. 20 and Fig. 21, a differentiation-inducing intermittent perfusion culture process carried out by the cell culture apparatus 100 will be described.

First of all, the operator adds a culture medium and cells to the culture bag 18 in the clean bench or the like (S71 in Fig. 20), places the culture bag 18 on the culture bag tray 47 via the platform 46, and attaches the culture bag tray 47 to the large tray 45 (S72 in Fig. 20). Then, the operator carries the large tray 45 into the single

canister 16 illuminated by the indication lamp 44, for example, in green in the incubator 11.

Then, the operator mounts the culture medium cassette 20 to the large tray 45 in the canister 16, and mounts the dummy cassette 102 (Fig. 19) (S73 in Fig. 20). Then, the operator closes the canister door 31 of the canister 16, and the static culture of the cells in the culture bag 18 is started (S74 in Fig. 20). When carrying out the static culture, in a case in which the amount of the culture suspension in the culture bag 18 is small, the operator activates the inclined motor 76 to move the elevating unit of the platform 46 downward, and form the liquid reservoir 78 (Fig. 8) in the culture bag 18.

After having started the static culture, the operation control panel 13 activates the second pump 49, and feeds the culture medium from the culture medium bag 67 in the culture medium cassette 20 to the culture bag 18 (S75 in Fig. 20). The operation control panel 13 confirms whether the culture suspension in the culture bag 18 is increased to a level at least equal to the predetermined value α or not from the measured value by the weight meter 43 (S76 in Fig. 20), and when the measured value by the weight meter is increased to a value at least equal to the predetermined value α , the operation control panel 13 activates the inclined motor 76 to move the elevating unit of the platform 46 upward, and brings the culture bag 18 into the horizontal state to eliminate the liquid

reservoir 78 (S77 in Fig. 20).

Subsequently, the operation control panel 13 determines whether the weight of the culture suspension in the culture bag 18 weighted by the weight meter 43 is increased to a level at least equal to the predetermined value β or not (S78 in Fig. 20). At a timing when a weight is increased to a value at least equal to the predetermined value β , the operation control panel 13 activates the operating motor 81 to activate the shaking device 80 to start the shaking culture (S79 in Fig. 20). Then, the operation control panel 13 continues to determine whether the weight of the culture suspension in the culture bag 18 weighted by the weight meter 43 is increased to a value at least equal to the predetermined value χ or not (S80 in Fig. 20). At a timing when a weight is increased to a value at least equal to the predetermined value χ , the operation control panel 13 stops the second pump 49 to stop feeding of the culture medium from the culture medium bag 67 in the culture medium cassette 20 to the culture bag 18, stop the operating motor 81 and stop the shaking culture in the culture bag 18 (S81 in Fig. 20).

The operation control panel 13 activates the first pump 48 after having settled the cells in the culture bag 18 to discharge the used culture medium in the culture bag 18 to the used culture medium bag 68 in the culture medium cassette 20 (S82 in Fig. 21). Then, the operation control

panel 13 activates the second pump 49 to feed the culture medium from the culture medium bag 67 in the culture medium cassette 20 to the culture bag 18, activates the operating motor 81 to carry out the shaking culture in the culture bag 18 by the shaking device 80 (S83 in Fig. 21). After having elapsed a predetermined time length, the operation control panel 13 stops the second pump 49, stops feeding of the culture medium from the culture medium bag 67 in the culture medium cassette 20 to the culture bag 18, stops the operating motor 81 and stops the shaking culture in the culture bag 18 (S84 in Fig. 21).

The operation control panel 13 determines whether the desired culture term depending on the date and time of usage of the cells to proliferate is reached or not, or the image processing computer 14 determines whether the desired number of cells is reached in the culture bag 18 or not (S85 in Fig. 21). When determining whether the desired number of cells is reached in the culture bag 18 or not, the operation control panel 13 activates the third pump 50 to transfer part of the cells in the culture bag 18 to the dummy cassette 102 and make the CCD camera 88 to take an image of the cells. The image processing computer 14 processes the image of the cells, determines whether the number of cells is at least equal to a specified value or not, and transmits the same to the operation panel 13. When the culture term or the number of cells is not reached, the operation control panel 13 repeats the

operation from Steps S82 to S85.

The Steps S81 to S85 are steps of intermittent perfusion culture process in which discharge of the used culture medium in the culture bag 18 and supply (feed) of new culture medium into the culture bag 18 are carried out alternately.

In Steps S77 to S85, when the operation control panel 13 determines that there is no more culture medium in the culture medium bag 67 in the culture medium cassette 20 from the measured value by the weight meter 43, the operation control panel 13 prompts the operator to replace the culture medium cassette 20 by a new culture medium cassette 20. When replacing the culture medium cassette 20 by the new culture medium cassette 20 as well, the operation control panel 13 stops feeding of the culture medium from the culture medium cassette 20 to the culture bag 18 and the shaking culture by the shaking device 80 temporarily until the replacement of the culture medium cassette 20 is completed. At the time point when the desired culture term is reached or when the desired number of cells is reached in Step S85, the operation control panel 13 activates the first pump 48 to discharge the used culture medium in the culture bag 18 to the used culture medium bag 68 in the culture medium cassette 20 and condense the cells until the culture suspension in the culture bag 18 is reduced to about 1/2 to 1/3 on the basis of the measured value by the weight meter 43 (S86 in Fig.

21).

Then, after having stopped the first pump 48 by the operation control panel 13, the operator replaces the dummy cassette 102 by the differentiation-inducing cassette 101 as shown in Fig. 18 (S87 in Fig. 21).

After having completed the replacement of the dummy cassette 102 by the differentiation-inducing cassette 101, the operation control panel 13 activates the control unit 29 to feed the culture medium in the culture medium bag 67 in the culture medium cassette 20 to the culture bag 18, and activates the operating motor 81 to carry out the shaking culture in the culture bag 18 by the shaking device 80 (S88 in Fig. 21). Then, the operation control panel 13 activates the first pump 48 to transfer the culture suspension in the culture bag 18 to the differentiation-inducing cassette 101 while continuing the shaking culture in the culture bag 18 and feeding of the culture medium from the culture medium cassette 20 (S89 in Fig. 21). Accordingly, the differentiation-inducing culture is started in the differentiation-inducing cassette 101 (S90 in Fig. 21).

The operation control panel 13 causes the CCD camera 88 to take images of the cells in the differentiation-inducing cassette 101 during the differentiation-inducing culture at predetermined time intervals (every six hours, for example). The image processing computer 14 processes the picked-up image, acquires the form of the cells as

evaluation parameters, and determines whether the cells are differentiated in the differentiation-inducing cassette 101 or not from the change of the form of the cells with time (S91 in Fig. 21).

The operation control panel 13 stops the second pump 49, the first pump 48 and the operating motor 81 to stop the differentiation-inducing culture to complete the cell culture upon reception of the signal determining that the cells are differentiated from the image processing computer 14 in Step S91 (S92 in Fig. 21). After having completed the culture, the operator collects the cells in the differentiation-inducing cassette 101 by the cell collecting operation in the clean bench or the like (S93 in Fig. 21).

In this configuration, according to the second embodiment, the same effects as (2) to (6) and (8) in the first embodiment are achieved (provided that the cell inoculation cassette 19 is replaced by the differentiation-inducing cassette 101) and the following effect (9) is achieved.

(9) Since the culture state of the cells (whether the cells are differentiated or not) is determined by processing the images of the cells in the differentiation-inducing cassette 101 and acquiring the evaluation parameters (the form of the cells) of the cell culture, and the culture operation according to the culture state (the timing of culture medium feeding from the culture

medium cassette 20 to the culture bag 18 at a predetermined feeding velocity, or the cell transfer from the culture bag 18 to the differentiation-inducing cassette 101) is carried out, the culture state of the cells is determined by a non-contact, non-invasive state. Therefore, the cells are prevented from getting damaged, the risk of contamination and the loss of the cells by sampling are avoided, and the labor of the operator is alleviated. Furthermore, since the cells of a single patient proliferate in the culture bag 18 in the culture cassette 17 and are differentiated in the differentiation-inducing cassette 101 which is stored in the single canister 16, the cell culture is adequately carried out for the individual patients, and the cross-contamination is avoided.

According to the cell culture apparatuses 10 and 102 in the first and second embodiments, the following effect (10) is achieved.

(10) The cell culture apparatuses 10 and 100 are both adapted to transfer the cells cultured in one of the plurality of culture vessels for culturing the cells in different environments to another culture vessel on the downstream side. In other words, in the cell culture apparatus 10, the cells are stimulated by the inducer for the proliferation in the cell inoculation cassette 19, which is one of the culture vessels, and then the cells are transferred from the cell inoculation cassette 19 to

the culture bag 18 as still another culture vessel for causing the cells to proliferate. In the cell culture apparatus 100, the cells proliferate in the culture bag 18, which is one of the culture vessels, and then the cells are transferred from the culture bag 18 to the differentiation-inducing cassette 101, which is still another culture vessel for differentiating the cells. In this manner, according to the cell culture apparatuses 10 and 100, a variety of forms of the cell culture is achieved.

Although the invention has been described on the basis of the embodiments shown above, the invention is not limited thereto.

For example, in the first and second embodiments, the image processing computer 14 processes the images taken by the CCD camera 88 and calculates the evaluation parameters, and determines the culture state of the cells (the proliferation capability of the cells, the proliferation ability of the cells) from the evaluation parameters. However, the function of the image processing computer 14 may be carried out by the operation control panel 13. The taking of the cell images by the CCD camera 88 may be carried out in the culture bag 18. When the shaking culture by the shaking device 80 is not carried out in the inducer stimulating consecutive perfusion culture process (Fig. 16 and Fig. 17), it is not necessary to dispose the filter 71 between the second pump 49 and the culture bag

18.

In the description in the first and second embodiments, the operation control panel 13 and the image processing computer 14 control the individual canisters in the single incubator. However, it is also possible to prepare a plurality of the incubators of the same type and control the individual canisters in the incubators by the operation control panel 13 and the image processing computer 14.

[C] Third Embodiment (Fig. 22 to Fig. 34)

Fig. 22 is a drawing showing a configuration of a culture unit and a cell culture apparatus to which the cell culture shaking device according to a third embodiment of the invention is applied. Fig. 23 is a layout drawing showing a configuration of a culture unit 212 including a culture chamber 240 and a low temperature chamber 230 spatially independent from each other, a culture bag tray 241 stored in the culture chamber 240, and a culture medium bag tray 231 and a waste water bag tray 232 stored in the low temperature chamber 230 in the cell culture apparatus 200 according to the third embodiment of the invention.

The cell culture apparatus 200 shown in Fig. 22 is specifically adapted to culture suspension cells used for the immune cell therapy, and includes a culture device 210 provided with a plurality of (three, for example) the culture units 212, an operation control PLC (programmable

logic controller) 223 for controlling the operation of the plurality of culture units 212, an image processing unit 221 for processing cell images, a data collecting device 224 for collecting all the data, a touch panel 222 for displaying information of and entering the control of the operation control PLC 223 and the image processing unit 221, and a monitoring computer 226 being connected to the operation control PLC 223, the image processing unit 221 and a data collecting device 224 via a hub 225 for monitoring the cell culture apparatus 200 and the culture unit 212. The operation control PLC 223 and the image processing unit 221 function as control units. The plurality of culture units 212 are each provided with an observation camera (CCD camera) 302.

The known suspension cells include peripheral blood mononuclear cells, LAK cells (Lymphokine Activated killer cells), neural stem cells and ES cells. These types of suspension cells are referred simply to as "cells", hereinafter. The cell culture apparatus 200 is also applicable to a case of culturing adherent cells (mesenchymal stem cells, for example) other than the suspension cells.

The cell culture apparatus 200 has a structure in which a plurality of (three, for example) spatially and structurally independent culture units 212 stacked one on top of another, and the each culture unit 212 is divided into the low temperature chamber 230 and the culture

chamber 240 as shown in Fig. 23. The cell culture apparatus 200 includes a culture bag tray 241, a culture medium bag tray 231 and a waste water bag tray 232 stored therein. A culture bag 242 as an antibody stimulating and proliferation culture vessel is placed on the culture bag tray 241 as described later in detail, and a culture medium bag (new culture medium bag) 233 as a culture medium storage unit and a waste water bag (waste culture medium bag) 234 as a waste water bag tray are placed on the culture medium bag tray 231 and the waste water bag tray 232, respectively.

The culture unit 212 includes an openable and closable doors (not shown) for the culture chamber 240 and the low temperature chamber 230. The culture unit 212 maintains the environment (temperature and CO₂ concentration) in the culture chamber 240 to an environment required for culturing the cells in the state in which the door is closed, and the environment (temperature) in the low temperature chamber 230 to an environment optimal for preserving the culture medium.

Therefore, the culture unit 212 includes temperature sensors 236 and 243, a CO₂ sensor 244, a door sensor (not shown) and a heater (not shown) disposed therein. A gas cylinder (not shown) installed outside is coupled to the cell culture apparatus 200 (the culture unit 212) via a CO₂ supply system 245. Signals from the temperature sensors 236 and 243, the CO₂ sensor 244 and the door

sensor are transmitted to the operation control PLC 223. The operation control PLC 223 controls the heater on the basis of the temperature signals from the temperature sensors 236 and 243, and controls the amount of CO₂ gas supplied from the gas cylinder into the individual culture units 212 on the basis of the CO₂ concentration signal from the CO₂ sensor 244. The CO₂ in the room is discharged by a predetermined constant value by a circulation pump 246.

The operation of a stirring fan 247 is controlled by the operation control PLC 223 and, when the signal indicating the fact that the door of the culture unit 212 is opened is transmitted from the door sensor to the operation control PLC 223, the operation of the stirring fan 247 is stopped and the environmental change in the culture unit 212 is alleviated.

The cell culture apparatus 200 has a dry air sterilization function, and is able to sterilize the interior of the apparatus and the individual trays in a state in which the culture bag tray, the culture medium bag tray and the waste water bag tray are set therein, so that the proliferation of bacteria in the culture unit 212 is prevented. The individual culture units 212 have an independent space structure, the each culture unit 212 is isolated from the cells in other culture units 212 and the culture bag 242, the culture medium bag 233 and the waste water bag 234 stored in the culture unit 212 are connected

in the clean bench or the like and then is installed in the culture unit 212. Therefore, the culture bag 242 stored in the culture unit 212 is secured in a closed system (non-open system), and contamination that the cells in the culture bag 242 is contaminated by bacteria is prevented.

The culture unit 212 further includes the door sensor (not shown), the door lock sensor (not shown), the temperature sensors 236 and 243, a door lock mechanism (not shown), the heater (not shown) and the stirring fan 247 disposed therein. The operation control PLC 223 controls the heater on the basis of the temperature signal from the temperature sensors 236 and 243. The operation control PLC 223 controls the operation of the stirring fan 247 to circulate the air and CO₂ gas in the culture chamber 240. In this manner, the interior of the culture chamber 240 is maintained in an environment optimal for culturing the cells.

The operation control PLC 223 controls the action of the door lock mechanism so that two or more doors of the culture units 212 are not opened simultaneously in one single cell culture apparatus 200. Accordingly, erroneous installation of the cells or the culture medium among the different culture units 212 is prevented. The locking action of the door lock mechanism is detected by the door lock sensor and is transmitted to the operation control PLC 223. The opened or closed states of the doors of the

culture units 212 are detected by the door sensor and transmitted to the operation control PLC 223.

A frame 250 for supporting the culture bag tray 241 to be stored in the culture chamber 240 is provided in the lower portion in the culture unit 212 shown in Fig. 23, and a weight meter 251, which supports the frame 250, is installed on the frame 250 above the culture unit 212. The weight meter 251 is adapted to measure the weight of the culture bag 242 of the culture bag tray 241 stored in the culture chamber 240, and actually, measures the amount of culture medium supplied from the culture medium bag 233 to the culture bag 242 and the amount of waste water discharged from the culture bag 242 to the waste water bag 234. The measured values by the weight meter 251 are also transmitted to the operation control PLC 223. The main body of the culture unit 212 is provided with an indication lamp (not shown) for indicating the presence or absence of the culture bag 242 in the culture unit 212. The operation control PLC 223 illuminates the indication lamp, for example, in red, when the culture bag 242 is stored in the culture chamber 240, and illuminates the indication lamp, for example, in green, when the culture bag 242 is not stored in the culture chamber 240.

The culture bag tray 241 will be described here.

The culture bag 242 is mounted on the culture bag tray 241 as shown in Fig.23, and the culture bag 24 is a culture vessel to culture the cells. The culture bag 242

is a function expressing culture vessel for causing the cells to express the function (for example, to cause the cells to proliferate, to cause the cells to differentiate), and is an antibody stimulating culture vessel for stimulating the cells by the antibody for proliferation in this embodiment. It also functions as a proliferation culture vessel for causing cells to proliferate stimulated by the antibody in the same culture bag 242.

The culture bag 242 is a flexible vessel for storing the culture medium in which the cells are inoculated, and is placed on the culture bag tray 241 interposing a platform 252 between the culture bag 242 and the culture bag tray 241. The culture bag 242 is a bag formed of, for example, oxygen permeable material.

The culture unit 212 will now be described.

In the culture chamber 240, a supply pump 261 and an exhaust pump 271 are arranged as shown in Fig. 23. The culture bag 242 is connected at one end thereof to a supply system coupling 264 via the supply pump 261 using a tube 262. The culture bag 242 is also connected at the other end to an exhaust system coupling 274 via the exhaust pump 271 using a tube 272.

In the culture unit 212, the culture bag 242 is connected to the supply system coupling 264 via the tube 262, and is connected to the culture medium bag 233 via a tube 265. The culture bag 242 is connected to the exhaust system coupling 274 via the tube 272 and is connected to

the waste water bag 234 via a tube 275.

The culture bag 242 is configured into a cassette structure, as shown in Fig. 23, which is immobilized with the antibody on the inner side of the part of the bottom surface, connected to the supply pump 261 of the culture bag 242, added the culture medium in the culture bag 242, inoculated the cells on the culture medium and installed on the culture bag tray 241. The operation to immobilize the antibody and add the culture medium and the cells in the culture bag 242 is carried out under the aseptic conditions in the clean bench or the like.

The culture environment for causing the proliferation function of the cells to express, that is, by stimulating the cells by the antibody and the culture environment for causing the cells to proliferate are established in the same culture bag 242 by making part of immobilized antibody in the culture bag 242. Therefore, by supplying the culture medium to the cells which are stimulated by the antibody in a part of the culture bag 242 and started to proliferate, an efficient proliferation is enabled in the same culture bag 242.

The culture medium bag 233 as a culture medium storage vessel and the waste water bag 234 as a used culture medium storage vessel are placed on the culture medium bag tray 231 and the waste water bag tray 232, respectively, and each are configured into a cassette structure. The culture medium bag 233 is adapted to store

the culture medium to be supplied to the culture bag 242. The waste water bag 234 is adapted to store the used culture medium (supernatant) discharged from the culture bag 242. With the cassette structure of the culture medium bag tray 231, the change and supply of the culture medium is enabled only by mounting the culture medium bag tray 231 into the low temperature chamber 230 in the culture unit 212 in a state in which the culture bag 242 is maintained in the culture chamber 240.

The culture bag tray 241 is detachably mounted to the culture unit 212. At this time, the supply system coupling 264 of the culture bag 242 is coupled to a joint of the culture medium bag 233, and the exhaust system coupling 274 is coupled to a joint of the waste water bag 234 respectively under the aseptic conditions. In other words, the supply system coupling 264 and the joint of the culture medium bag 233 are coupled by, for example, inserting a rubbery joint on one of those to a needle joint on the other one of those under the aseptic conditions. Coupling between the exhaust system coupling 274 and the waste water bag 234 is also the same. The work to couple the culture bag 242 with the culture medium bag 233 and the waste water bag 234 is carried out in the clean bench or the like under the aseptic conditions.

With the connection among the culture bag 242, the culture medium bag 233 and the waste water bag 234 as

described above, a closed loop in which the culture medium in the culture medium bag 233 on the culture medium bag tray 231 is supplied to the culture bag 242 by the activation of the supply pump 261, and the used culture medium in the culture bag 242 is discharged to the waste water bag 234 on the waste water bag tray 232 by the activation of the exhaust pump 271 is established. With the configuration of this closed loop, the system (the culture bag 242, the culture medium bag 233 and the waste water bag 234) is maintained under the aseptic conditions.

The culture (cell proliferation) in the culture bag 242 includes the static culture (simple feeding) in which the supply pump 261 is activated to supply (feed) the culture medium in the culture medium bag 233 on the culture medium bag tray 231 to the culture bag 242 to cause the cells to proliferate, the perfusion culture in which the supply pump 261 and the exhaust pump 271 are activated to discharge the used culture medium in the culture bag 242 to the waste water bag 234 on the waste water bag tray 232 and supply the culture medium in the culture medium bag 233 to the culture bag 242 to cause the cells to proliferate, and the shaking culture using a shaking device 290 described later. Among these, the perfusion culture includes the intermittent perfusion culture in which discharge of the used culture medium and supply of the culture medium are carried out alternately, and the consecutive perfusion culture in which the

discharge of the culture medium and the supply of the culture medium are carried out simultaneously. In the consecutive perfusion culture, a filter for preventing transfer of cells is normally disposed in the tube 272 between the culture bag 242 and the exhaust pump 271 to prevent the cells in the culture bag 242 from being discharged to the waste water bag 234.

After having completed the proliferation of the cells in the culture bag 242, the used culture medium in the culture bag 242 is discharged to the waste water bag 234 of the waste water bag tray 232, and the cells in the culture bag 242 is condensed. The discharge of the used culture medium is carried out by the activation of the exhaust pump 271, and is carried out until the amount of the culture medium and the cells in the culture bag 242 is reduced to about 1/2 to 1/3 in quantity by the control of the operation control PLC 223 on the basis of the measured value by the weight meter 251. By the condensation of the cells in the culture bag 242, the number of times of centrifugation carried out by a centrifuge carried out later is reduced.

In the waste water bag tray 232, it is also possible to replace the waste water bag 234 by a cell collecting bag as a cell collecting vessel which is attachable to the centrifuge after having condensed the cells in the culture bag 242 as described above, and then supply the culture suspension (culture medium and cells) in which the cells

are condensed in the culture bag 242 into the cell collecting bag by activating the exhaust pump 271, provided that the filter is not disposed in the tube 272. Accordingly, collection of the cells in the bag which is attachable to the centrifuge may be carried out within the culture unit 212, which is a space in the closed system, so that the labor for collecting the cells is saved.

In this case, as shown in Fig. 23, the culture bag tray 241 is stored in the culture unit 212 and the culture bag tray 241 is supported by the frame 250 of the culture chamber 240. The platform 252 for directly placing the culture bag 242 on the culture bag tray 241 includes a non-elevating part 252a, and a plurality of area-changing parts 252b and 252c which are able to move upward and downward. The culture area of the culture bag 242 is controlled by the area-changing parts 252b and 252c. Installed below the portion of the culture tray 241 where the area-changing parts 252b and 252c are arranged are an inclined motor (elevating mechanism 280), a cam mechanism 281 and a positioning sensor (not shown). The inclined motor 280 rotates the cam mechanism 281 and moves upward and downward the area-changing parts 252b and 252c of the platform 252 separately and independently from each other. The positions of the elevating units are detected by the positioning sensor, and transmitted to the operation control PLC 223. The inclined motor 280 is controlled by the operation control PLC 223 so as to move the area-

changing parts 252b and 252c of the platform 252 downward in the initial stage of culture in the culture bag 242. Accordingly, a liquid reservoir is formed at portions of the culture bag 242 corresponding to the area-changing parts 252b and 252c. For example, the culture area of the platform 252 shown in Fig. 24 is changed in three stages by moving the heights of the area-changing parts 252b and 252c upward and downward respectively. Three or more of the area-changing parts may be provided, whereby the finer adjustment of the culture area is achieved. Fig. 24 is a perspective view showing a configuration of the platform 252 in Fig. 23.

By the cells and the culture medium being stored in the liquid reservoirs in the initial stage of culture in the culture bag 242, a culture condition suitable for antibody stimulation, that is, the cell density in the culture bag 242 is maintained to a density which is preferable for the proliferation. In the middle stage or the later stage in which the culture medium and the cells in the culture bag 242 are increased to a value larger than the predetermined value, the inclined motor 280 moves the area-changing parts 252b and 252c of the platform 252 upward via the cam mechanism 281, and maintains only the parts having the predetermined area of the culture bag 242 in the horizontal state, so that the areas of the liquid reservoirs are changed. By changing the areas of the liquid reservoirs for the cells and the culture medium

according to the progress of culture, the cell density per area in the culture bag 242 is maintained to a density preferable for the proliferation, so that the cells efficiently proliferate in the cell proliferation stage.

For example, when the platform 252 is able to form two stages of liquid reservoirs as shown in Fig. 24, first of all, the culture medium and the cells are retained in a portion of the area-changing part 252c, which is the lowest part, in Fig. 24 to avoid lowering of the density of the cells. When the cells has started the proliferation and hence the amount of the culture medium is increased, the height of the area-changing part 252c in Fig. 24 is moved upward by one stage to align the area-changing part 252b and the area-changing part 252c at the same level, so that the area of the culture bag 242 which is usable for the culture is enlarged by a predetermined amount. Accordingly, the density of the cells which is preferable for the proliferation may be maintained for a certain time length again. When the cells further proliferate and hence the amount of the culture medium is increased, the area-changing part 252b and the area-changing part 252c are moved upward by one stage to align with the part 252a, so that the culture is carried out in the entire part of the culture bag 242.

Furthermore, a shaking mechanism 291 of the shaking device 290 is installed above the culture bag tray 241 where the culture bag 242 is arranged as the pressing unit

in the culture chamber 240 as shown in Fig. 23. The shaking device 290 includes the shaking mechanism 291, an operating motor 292, a cam mechanism 293 and the positioning sensor (not shown). As shown in Fig. 23, the shaking mechanism 291 includes an operating plate 291a as the pressing unit disposed to the apparatus frame 250 via the guide rod 250a so as to be capable of moving upward and downward, and a plurality of projections 291b projecting from the bottom surface of the operating plate 291a. When the operating plate 291a is moved upward and downward alternately on the basis of the action of the cam mechanism 293 by the operating motor 292, the projections 291b of the operating plate 291a presses the culture bag 242 positioned below the shaking mechanism 291 repeatedly, that is, repeats pressing and releasing with respect to the culture bag 242. Accordingly, the culture medium in the culture bag 242 is stirred, and the cells in the culture bag 242 floats and moves in the culture medium, so that the distribution of the cells and oxygen concentration distribution in the culture bag 242 are homogenized, and hence the proliferation of the cells is promoted.

As shown in Fig. 23, the position of the operating plate 291a is detected by the positioning sensor, and is transmitted to the operation control PLC 223, and the operating motor 292 is controlled by the operation control PLC 223 on the basis of the measured value by the weight

meter 251. The cell culture (shaking culture) in the culture bag 242 using the shaking device 80 described above may be carried out before the culture medium and the cells are filled in the culture bag 242 to a maximum level, or may be carried out after having filled therein to the maximum level. The shaking device 290 is controlled by the operation control PLC 223 on the basis of the detected position of the operating panel and the measured value by the weight meter 251.

In the culture chamber 240, as shown in Fig. 23, an illuminating lamp 301 is installed at a position above the culture bag 242 where the antibody is immobilized and a CCD camera 302 as an image acquiring unit is installed below the same. The CCD camera 302 is added with optical equipment such as a lens, a prism, a barrel according to the observing mode or the like. The illuminating lamp 301 is adapted to illuminate the culture bag 242 from above. The CCD camera 302 is adapted to take images of the cells in the culture bag 242 from below and acquires the images thereof. The illuminating action of the illuminating lamp 301 and the shooting action of the CCD camera 302 are controlled by the operation control PLC 223, and the images of the cells in the culture bag 242 are acquired at predetermined time intervals (six hours, for example). The cell images taken at the predetermined time intervals are stored in an image memory circuit (not shown) of the image processing unit 221.

The image processing unit 221 carries out image processing, for example, binarization or multithresholding, for the cell images taken at the predetermined time intervals stored in the image memory circuit of the image processing unit 221, so that an average value of the projected areas of the single cells and the increasing rate of the non-single cell, which is a cell aggregate formed of a plurality of single cells are calculated as evaluation parameters of the cell culture. The average value of the projected areas of the single cells (the average projected area of the single cell) is calculated from the cell image taken when 24 hours, for example, has elapsed from the moment when the culture is started after having mounted the culture bag 242 on culture bag tray 241 and stored culture bag tray 241 in culture chamber 240.

Whether the above-described cells are the non-single cell or not is determined with reference to the projected area of $100\ \mu\text{m}^2$ in such a manner that the cells having a projected area at least equal to $100\ \mu\text{m}^2$ are determined as the non-single cells and the cells having projected area less than $100\ \mu\text{m}^2$ are determined as the single cells. It is because when the projected areas of the single cells in the initial stage of culture were measured, all the cells had projected areas less than $100\ \mu\text{m}^2$. The change of the ratio of the non-single cells with respect to all the cells is computed from follow-up images of the cells (for example, images of the cells after having elapsed 24 hours,

48 hours and 72 hours from the start of culture) to calculate the increasing rate of the non-single cells. The increasing rate of the non-single cells and the average projected area of the single cells are outputted from the image processing unit 221 to the operation control PLC 223.

The operation control PLC 223 calculates a lag time from the average projected area of a single cell and estimates the timing when the corresponding cell has started proliferation. In this specification, the lag time means a time length of an induction phase required from inoculation of cells in the portion of the immobilized antibody in the culture bag tray 241 until the proliferation is started. The operation control PLC 223 determines whether the culture state of the cells, that is, whether the cell has a capability to proliferate by the stimulation from the antibody or not, from the timing when the cells has started to proliferate, and evaluates the cells. The operation control PLC 223 stops the culture in the cell culture apparatus 200 for the cells which having a very low proliferation capability on the basis of the evaluation.

The operation control PLC 223 calculates a minimum doubling time of the cells from the increasing rate of the non-single cell. The minimum doubling time in this specification means a minimum time period required for the number of cells at a certain time instant to be increased

to two times the number of cells. The operation control PLC 223 determines the culture state of the cells, that is, the proliferation ability of the cells from the minimum doubling time and decide the timing or the velocity of the feeding of the culture medium to the culture bag 242.

The operation control PLC 223 and the image processing unit 221 functioning as control units include, although not shown, a CPU for executing computation or control, a storage device (memory) for storing a processing program or data, and a input/output circuit for the connection with the input devices such as a keyboard, a mouse or a touch panel for supplying data or commands and the output device such as the monitor. The image processing unit 221 further includes the image memory circuit for storing image data from the CCD camera 302.

The storage device of the image processing unit 221 stores a program for processing (for example, binarization of multithresholding) the images of the cells in the culture bag 242 shot at predetermined time intervals by the CCD camera 302 and calculating the evaluation parameters for the cell culture (the average projected area of the single cell, the increasing rate of the non-single cell).

The storage device of the operation control PLC 223 also stores a program for determining the culture state of the cells (the proliferation capability of the cells, the proliferation ability of the cells) from the evaluation

parameters of the cell culture and a program for controlling the equipment relating to the cell culture apparatus 200 and the culture unit 212 (for example, the supply pump 261 and the exhaust pump 271) according to the culture state of the cell and executing the culture operation. The storage device of the operation control PLC 223 further stores an equipment controlling program for controlling the equipment relating to the culture device 210 and the culture unit 212 on the basis of the signals from various sensors of the cell culture apparatus 200 and the culture unit 212. The storage device of the image processing unit 221 also stores an equipment controlling program for controlling the CCD camera 302 at predetermined time intervals and acquiring the cell images.

Referring now to flowcharts shown in the process drawings in Fig. 25 to Fig. 34, a process of culturing cells carried out by the operation control PLC 223 and the image processing unit 221 by executing the above-described programs will be described.

Fig. 25 and Fig. 26 show an antibody stimulating intermittent perfusion culture process in a case of collecting the cells in the culture bag 242. As shown in Fig. 25, the operator immobilizes an antibody in the culture bag 242 in the clean bench or the like (W01 in Fig. 25), adds the culture medium, and mounts the culture bag 242 having inoculated the cells on the culture medium bag tray 231. Then, the operator mounts the culture medium

bag 233 in which the culture medium is added in the clean bench or the like onto the culture medium bag tray 231, mounts the waste water bag 234 on the waste water bag tray 232, and couples the culture bag 242 with the culture medium bag 233 and the waste water bag 234 using the supply system coupling 264 and the exhaust system coupling 274, respectively (W02 in Fig. 25).

Then, the operator carries the culture bag tray 241, the culture medium bag tray 231 and the waste water bag tray 232 in the single culture unit 212 of the cell culture apparatus 200, illuminated by an illumination lamp, for example, in green, causes the culture bag tray 241 to be supported by the frame 250 of the culture chamber 240 and installs the culture medium bag tray 231 and the waste water bag tray 232 in the low temperature chamber 230. Then, the operator connects the pump tubes 262 and 272 of the culture bag 242 to the supply pump 261 and the exhaust pump 271, respectively, (W03 in Fig. 25).

Then, the operator confirms images in the culture bag 242 stored in the culture unit 212, which are outputted from the CCD camera 302 (W05 in Fig. 25). Before confirming the outputted images, the operator activates the inclined motor 280 of the culture unit 212 to move the area-changing parts 252b and 252c of the platform 252 downward to form the liquid reservoirs in the culture bag 242 (W04 in Fig. 25). The operator then measures the weight of the installed culture bag 242 by the weight

meter 251 of the culture unit 212.

Then, the operator closes the door of the culture unit and starts the cell culture in the culture unit 212 (W06 in Fig. 25). Accordingly, the cells are stimulated by the antibody for the proliferation in the liquid reservoirs in the culture bag 242 (W07 in Fig. 25). The CCD camera 302 of the culture unit 212 takes the images of the cells in the liquid reservoirs in the culture bag 242 at predetermined time intervals (every six hours, for example), the image processing unit 221 calculates the evaluation parameters of the cell culture from the picked-up image. The operation control PLC 223 calculates the lag time from the evaluation parameter, determines whether the cells has a capability to proliferate upon reception of stimulation from the antibody or not, calculates the minimum doubling time, and determines the proliferation ability of the cells (W08 in Fig. 25).

When the capability of proliferation cannot be seen even when a predetermined time period (24 hours, for example) has elapsed since the cells has stimulated by the antibody in the culture bag 242, the operation control PLC 223 cancels the culture of the cell in the cell culture apparatus 200 (W08' in Fig. 25). When it is determined that the cells in the culture bag 242 has a capability of proliferation, the operation control PLC 223 decides the velocity and timing of feeding of the culture medium into the culture bag 242 on the basis of the proliferation

ability of the cells. The operation control PLC 223 activates the supply pump 261 on the basis of this decision, and feeds the culture medium in the culture medium bag 233 on the culture medium bag tray 231 to the culture bag 242 (W09 in Fig. 25).

With the activation of the supply pump 261, the static culture of the cells is started in the liquid reservoir having a predetermined area in the culture bag 242 (W10 in Fig. 25). The operation control PLC 223 determines whether the weight of the culture medium and the cells in the culture bag 242 measured by the weight meter 251 is increased to a value at least equal to the predetermined value α or not (W11 in Fig. 25). At a timing when the value at least equal to the predetermined value α is reached, the operation control PLC 223 activates the inclined motor 280, moves the area-changing parts 252b and 252c of the platform 252 upward via the cam mechanism 281 and brings a predetermined area of the culture bag 242 into a horizontal state to change the liquid reservoir (W12 in Fig. 25). This process is repeated until all the steps formed on the platform 252 are eliminated and the culture bag 242 is brought into a horizontal state (W13 in Fig. 25).

Then, the operation control PLC 223 determines whether the weight of the culture medium and the cells in the culture bag 242 measured by the weight meter 251 is increased to a value at least equal to the predetermined

value β or not (W14 in Fig. 25). At the timing when the value at least equal to the predetermined value β is reached, the operation control PLC 223 activates the operating motor 292. Accordingly, the shaking device 290 is activated, and the shaking culture in which the shaking mechanism 291 of the shaking device 290 presses the culture bag 242 repeatedly is started (W15 in Fig. 25). The operation control PLC 223 continues to determine whether the weight of the culture medium and the cells in the culture bag 242 measured by the weight meter 251 is increased to a value at least equal to the predetermined value χ or not (W16 in Fig. 26). At a timing when the value at least equal to the predetermined value χ is reached, the operation control PLC 223 stops the supply pump 261 to stop the feeding of the culture medium from the culture medium bag 233 on the culture medium bag tray 231 to the culture bag 242 (W17 in Fig. 26), stops the operating motor 292 to stop the shaking culture in the culture bag 242 (W18 in Fig. 26).

The operation control PLC 223 activates the exhaust pump 271 after having settled the cells in the culture bag 242 to discharge the used culture medium (supernatant in the culture bag 242) in the culture bag 242 to the used waste water bag 234 on the waste water bag tray 232 (W19 in Fig. 26). Then, the operation control PLC 223 determines whether the weight of the culture medium and the cells in the culture bag 242 measured by the weight

meter 251 is reduced to a value at most equal to a predetermined value δ or not (W20 in Fig. 26). At a timing when the value at most equal to the predetermined value δ is reached, the operation control PLC 223 stops the exhaust pump 271 to stop the discharge of the used culture medium from the culture bag 242 (W21 in Fig. 26). Then, the operation control PLC 223 activates the supply pump 261 to feed the culture medium from the culture medium bag 233 on the culture medium bag tray 231 to the culture bag 242, and activates the operating motor 292 to carry out the shaking culture in the culture bag 242 by the shaking device 290 (W22 in Fig. 26). The operation control PLC 223 stops the supply pump 261 after having elapsed a predetermined time to stop the feeding of the culture medium from the culture medium bag 233 on the culture medium bag tray 231 to the culture bag 242 and continue the shaking culture in a state in which the operating motor 292 is activated (W23 in Fig. 26).

The operation control PLC 223 determined whether the desired culture term depending on the date and time of usage of the cells to proliferate is reached or not, or the image processing unit 221 determines whether the desired number of cells is reached in the culture bag 242 or not (W24 in Fig. 26). When the desired culture term or the desired number of cells is not reached, the process step in Steps W18 to W23 are repeated. When counting the number of cells, the shaking device 290 is stopped once to

wait until the cells are settled. Then, the images of the interior of the culture bag 242 are taken by the CCD camera 302. The image processing unit 221 estimates and calculates the number of cells existing in the bag from the acquired images.

Steps W18 to W23 are steps of intermittent perfusion culture in which discharge of the used culture medium in the culture bag 242 and supply (feed) of new culture medium into the culture bag 242 are carried out alternately.

At the time point where the desired culture term or the number of cells are reached in Step W24, the operation control PLC 223 stops the operating motor 292 as shown in Fig. 26 to stop the shaking culture in the culture bag 242 (W25 in Fig. 26). Then, the operation control PLC 223 activates the exhaust pump 271 after having settled the cells in the culture bag 242 to discharge the used culture medium in the culture bag 242 to the waste water bag 234 on the waste water bag tray 232, and condense the cells until the culture medium and the cells in the culture bag 242 are reduced to about 1/2 to 1/3 on the basis of the measured value by the weight meter 251 (W26 in Fig. 26)

The operation control PLC 223 then stops the exhaust pump 271 to complete the cell culture (W27 in Fig. 26). After having completed the culture, the operator transfers the cells in the culture bag 242 to a vessel for the centrifuge in the clean bench or the like, and then, the

cells are collected by the centrifugation (W28 in Fig. 26).

In the similar antibody stimulating intermittent perfusion culture process, the case in which the process of collecting the cells by the cell collecting bag is included is shown in Fig. 27 and Fig. 28. Therefore, since Steps W31 to W56 of the process shown in Fig. 27 and Fig. 28 are the same as Steps W01 to W26 shown in Fig. 25 and Fig. 26, description is omitted.

In Step W56 shown in Fig. 28, after having condensed the cells in the culture bag 242 by the activation of the exhaust pump 271, the operation control PLC 223 stops the exhaust pump 271 and prompts the operator to replace the waste water bag 234 on the waste water bag tray 232 by the cell collecting bag (W57 in Fig. 28). The cell collecting bag is a bag to be mounted to the centrifuge and used for the centrifugation.

After having replaced the waste water bag 234 on the waste water bag tray 232 by the cell collecting bag, the operation control PLC 223 activates the exhaust pump 271 and the operating motor 292. Then, the operation control PLC 223 shakes the interior of the culture bag 242 by shaking device 290 to transfer the cells in the culture bag 242 to the cell collecting bag mounted on the waste water bag tray 232 together with the culture medium (W58 in Fig. 28). Then, the operation control PLC 223 stops the exhaust pump 271 and the operating motor 292 to stop the collection of the cells from the culture bag 242 to

complete the cell culture (W59 in Fig. 28). After having completed the cell collection, the operator mounts the cell collecting bag to the centrifuge, so that the cells are collected by the centrifugation (W60 in Fig. 28).

Referring now to Fig. 29 and Fig. 30, process steps in an antibody stimulating consecutive perfusion culture process will be described. Since Steps X01 to X15 in the antibody stimulating consecutive perfusion culture process shown in Fig. 29 and Fig. 30 are the same as Steps W01 to W15 in the antibody stimulating intermittent perfusion culture process shown in Fig. 25 and Fig. 26, description is omitted. In the antibody stimulating consecutive perfusion culture process, a filter (not shown) is disposed between the culture bag 242 and the exhaust pump 271.

The operation control PLC 223 activates the exhaust pump 271 at a timing when the weight of the culture medium and the cells in the culture bag 242 is increased to a value at least equal to the predetermined value χ (X16 in Fig. 30) to discharge the used culture medium in the culture bag 242 to the waste water bag 234 on the waste water bag tray 232 while the culture medium is fed from the culture medium bag 233 on the culture medium bag tray 231 into the culture bag 242 and the shaking culture by the shaking device 290 is carried out in the culture bag 242. Accordingly, the consecutive perfusion culture in which the feeding of the culture medium to the culture bag

242 and the discharge of the culture medium from the culture bag 242 are carried out simultaneously is started in the culture bag 242 (X17 in Fig. 30). At this time, the cells in the culture bag 242 are prevented from flowing by the filter, and hence do not flow into the waste water bag 234. During the consecutive perfusion culture, the shaking culture by the shaking device 290 is simultaneously carried out.

The operation control PLC 223 determines whether a desired culture term depending on the date and time of usage of the cells to proliferate is reached or not, or the image processing unit 221 determines whether the desired number of cells is reached in the culture bag 242 or not (X18 in Fig. 30). When the desired culture term or the desired number of cells is not reached, the consecutive perfusion culture in Step X17 is repeated. When counting the number of cells, the shaking device 290 is stopped once to wait until the cells are settled. Then, the images of the interior of the culture bag 242 are taken by the CCD camera 302. The image processing unit 221 estimates and calculates the number of cells existing in the bag from the acquired images.

At the time point where the desired culture term or the number of cells are reached in the Step X18, the operation control PLC 223 stops the supply pump 261, the exhaust pump 271 and the operating motor 292 to stop the perfusion culture and the shaking culture (X19 in Fig. 30).

Then, the operation control PLC 223 activates the exhaust pump 271 after having settled the cells in the culture bag 242 to discharge the used culture medium in the culture bag 242 to the waste water bag 234 on the waste water bag tray 232 and condense the cells until the culture medium and the cells in the culture bag 242 are reduced to about 1/2 to 1/3 on the basis of the measured value by the weight meter 251 (X20 in Fig. 30). To stop the shaking device in the condensing process is to prevent a large amount of cells from flowing into the tube and from clogging the filter.

The operation control PLC 223 then stops the exhaust pump 271 to complete the cell culture (X21 in Fig. 30). After having completed the culture, the operator transfers the cells in the culture bag 242 to a vessel for the centrifuge in the clean bench or the like, and then, the cells are collected by the centrifugation (X22 in Fig. 30).

Referring now to Fig. 31 and Fig. 32, processing steps in an antibody stimulating simple feeding culture process will be described. Since Steps Y01 to Y15 in the antibody stimulating simple feeding culture process in Fig. 31 and Fig. 32 are the same as Steps in W01 to W15 in the antibody stimulating intermittent perfusion culture process in Fig. 25 and Fig. 26, description is omitted.

The operation control PLC 223 determines whether the weight of the culture medium and the cells in the culture bag 242 measured by the weight meter 251 is increased to a

value at least equal to the predetermined value χ or not (Y16 in Fig. 32). At a timing when a value at least equal to or larger than the predetermined value χ is reached, the operation control PLC 223 stops the supply pump 261 to stop the feeding of the culture medium from the culture medium bag 233 on the culture medium bag tray 231 to the culture bag 242 and to continue the shaking culture while activating the operating motor 292 (Y17 in Fig. 32).

The operation control PLC 223 determines whether a desired culture term depending on the date and time of usage of the cells to proliferate is reached or not, or the image processing unit 221 determines whether the desired number of cells is reached in the culture bag 242 or not (Y18 in Fig. 32). When the desired culture term or the desired number of cells is not reached, the shaking culture is continued (No in Y18). When counting the number of cells, the shaking device 290 is stopped once to wait until the cells are settled. Then, the images of the interior of the culture bag 242 are taken by the CCD camera 302. The image processing unit 221 estimates and calculates the number of cells existing in the bag from the acquired images.

At a timing when the desired culture term or the number of cells is reached in Step Y18, the operation control PLC 223 stops the operating motor 292 as shown in Fig. 32 to stop the shaking culture in the culture bag 242 (Y19 in Fig. 32). After having settled the cells in the

culture bag 242, the exhaust pump 271 is activated to discharge the used culture medium in the culture bag 242 to the waste water bag 234 on the waste water bag tray 232 and condense the cells until the culture medium and the cells in the culture bag 242 are reduced to about 1/2 to 1/3 on the basis of the measured value by the weight meter 251 (Y20 in Fig. 32).

The operation control PLC 223 then stops the exhaust pump 271 to complete the cell culture (Y21 in Fig. 32). After having completed the culture, the operator transfers the cells in the culture bag 242 to the vessel for the centrifuge in the clean bench or the like, and then the cells are collected by the centrifugation (Y22 in Fig. 32).

Subsequently, in the similar antibody stimulating simple feeding culture process, the case in which the step of collecting the cells by the cell collecting bag is included is shown in Fig. 33 and Fig. 34. Therefore, since Steps Y31 to Y50 in the process shown in Fig. 33 and Fig. 34 are the same as Steps Y01 to Y20 in Fig. 31 and Fig. 32, description is omitted.

In Step Y50 shown in Fig. 34, after having condensed the cells in the culture bag 242 by the activation of the exhaust pump 271, the operation control PLC 223 stops the exhaust pump 271 prompts the operator to replace the waste water bag 234 on the waste water bag tray 232 by the cell collecting bag (Y51 in Fig. 34). The cell collecting bag is a bag to be mounted to the centrifuge and used for the

centrifugation.

After having replaced the waste water bag 234 on the waste water bag tray 232 by the cell collecting bag, the operation control PLC 223 activates the exhaust pump 271 and the operating motor 292. Then, the operation control PLC 223 shakes the interior of the culture bag 242 by the shaking device 290 to transfer the cells in the culture bag 242 to the cell collecting bag mounted on the waste water bag tray 232 together with the culture medium (Y52 in Fig. 34). The operation control PLC 223 then stops the exhaust pump 271 and the operating motor 292 to stop the collection of the cells from the culture bag 242 and complete the cell culture (Y53 in Fig. 34). After having completed the cell collection, the operator mounts the cell collecting bag to the centrifuge, so that the cells are collected by the centrifugation (Y54 in Fig. 34).

In this configuration, according to the embodiments shown above, the following effects (1) to (7) are achieved. (1) The image processing unit 221 processes the images of the cells in the culture bag 242 taken by the CCD camera 302 to acquire the evaluation parameters of the cell culture (the average projected area of the single-cell, the increasing rate of the non-single cell), the operation control PLC 223 determines and evaluates the culture state of the cells (the proliferation capability and the proliferation ability) to carry out the culture operation

according to the culture state (the culture medium feeding at the predetermined feeding velocity or the timing from the culture medium bag 233 to the culture bag 242).

Consequently, since the culture state of the cells is determined in a non-contact state, the cells are prevented from getting damaged, and the operator needs not carry out the culture operation one by one, the labor of the operator is alleviated. Since the cells of one patient may be inoculated to the single culture bag 242 stored in the culture unit 212, and the culture operation according to the culture state of the cells may be carried out on the individual basis, so that the adequate culture operation is achieved. Since the culture operation suitable for the culture state of the cells is achieved, the culture operation by the hour is enabled, and the culture is accelerated to shorten the culture term.

(2) The culture medium bag 233, the waste water bag 234 and the culture bag 242 are coupled in the clean bench or the like and are configured into a closed loop to install in the culture unit 212. Therefore, aseptic conditions in a completely closed system are maintained.

(3) The culture process is carried out automatically since the culture bag tray 241, the culture medium bag tray 231 and the waste water bag tray 232 are installed in the culture unit 212 at the time of starting the culture

until the culture is completed. Therefore, the cells in the culture bag 242 is prevented from getting damaged due to the change of environment, and the aseptic operation for supplying the culture medium to the culture bag 242 in the clean bench or the like may be omitted.

(4) The antibody stimulation and the cell proliferation in the initial state of culture in culture bag 242 may be carried out in the same culture bag 242, and the liquid reservoirs where the cells and the culture medium are stored in the culture bag 242 may be changed into the predetermined areas. Therefore, the cell density per area during the culture is maintained at a density preferable to the proliferation, so that the cells proliferate efficiently.

(5) The used culture medium in the culture bag 242 is discharged and stored in the waste water bag 234 on the waste water bag tray 232, the cell density in the culture bag 242 may be increased and hence condensed. Therefore, the number of times of operation of the centrifugation for collecting the cells is reduced. Consequently, the labor for collecting the cells is saved, and the damage of the cells in association with the centrifugation is reduced.

(6) When all the cells condensed in the culture bag 242 are to be collected into the cell collecting bag mounted to the waste water bag tray 232, the cells may be

collected by mounting the cell collecting bag directly to the centrifuge. Therefore, the labor for collecting the cells is saved.

(7) The culture medium in the culture bag 242 is stirred by repeatedly pressing the flexible culture bag 242 having the culture medium to which the cells are inoculated stored therein by the projections 291b of the operating plate 291a in the shaking mechanism 291 of the shaking device 290. Therefore, the distribution of cells and the oxygen concentration distribution in the culture bag 242 are homogenized, so that the proliferation of the cells is accelerated and the efficiency of the cell culture is improved.

The cells only float in the culture medium stirred by being pressed repeatedly by the operating plate 291a of the shaking device 290. Therefore, the cells are prevented from getting damaged.

Examples

Referring now to Fig. 35, an example of the cell culture using the shaking device 80 in Fig. 7 will be described. Fig. 35 is a graph showing the result of the cell culture according to the shaking method using the shaking device 80 in Fig. 7 compared with the result of the cell culture according to the shaking method in the related art and the result of the static culture (the

culture method in which shaking operation is not carried out). In Fig. 35, the lateral axis represents the culture time (unit: hour) and the vertical axis represents the number of cells (unit: 10^6 pieces). In the drawing, solid square signs designate the results of the culture using the shaking device 80, a solid diamond sign represents the results of culture using a rotary shaking device in the related art, and solid circle signs represent the result of culture through the static culture, respectively.

In this example, the cell culture was carried out under the following conditions and procedures.

First of all, peripheral blood is sampled from a healthy donor, and peripheral blood monocular cells are separated using density gradient reagent for blood cell separation.

The obtained peripheral blood monocular cells 1.0×10^7 cells were suspended in 30 ml of ALyS203 medium (Cell Science & Technology Institute, Inc.) (including donor's blood plasma 2.4 ml) and inoculated in a 75T-Flask (SUMILON) immobilized with an anti-CD3 antibody for suspension cells, and were cultured (precultured) in an incubator at 37°C , $5\%\text{CO}_2$.

The preculture was carried out for three days. Then, the cells which entered the logarithmic growth phase in the fourth day of culture were collected. The collected 2.0×10^7 cells were suspended in 350 ml of new ALyS505N medium (Cell Science & Technology Institute, Inc.)

(including donor's blood plasma 3.5 ml), and transferred to 350 ml culture bags (NIPRO). Three of the same 350 ml culture bags were prepared.

Then, the cell culture through the shaking method using the shaking device 80, the cell culture in the rotary shaking method in the related art and the static culture were carried out for these three 350 ml culture bags having cell suspension contained therein, respectively, as a main culture.

Here, the number of revolution of the rotary shaking device in the related art was set to 30 rpm, and was installed with a net on a rotary table to allow oxygen to pass through from both surfaces of the culture bag.

The number of revolution of the shaking device 80 was set to 30 rpm, and three cylindrical rubber pieces (30 mm in diameter, 20 mm in height) were arranged in the shaking mechanism 91 as the projections 86 for pressing and releasing the culture bag.

Twenty-four hours, forty-eight hours and seventy-two hours after having started the main culture, 2 ml of culture suspension (including the culture medium and the cells) was sampled from the culture bags and the numbers of cells were counted. Consequently, as shown in Fig. 35, it was found that the number of cells were larger in the case of the culture using the shaking device 80 than in the cases of the static culture and the culture using the rotary shaking device in the related art after 72 hours of

main culture.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A cell culture shaking device comprising:
a pressing unit for pressing a flexible culture vessel for storing culture suspension having cells inoculated therein repeatedly when culturing the cells in the culture vessel,
wherein the culture suspension in the culture vessel is stirred by being pressed by the pressing unit.
2. The cell culture shaking device according to Claim 1, wherein the pressing unit includes a plurality of projections and the projections press the culture vessel.
3. The cell culture shaking device according to Claim 1 or 2, wherein the cells are suspension cells.
4. The cell culture shaking device according to any one of Claims 1 to 3, wherein the cells are used for an immune cell therapy.
5. A shaking culture method as a cell culture method for culturing cells in a flexible culture vessel for storing culture suspension having cells inoculated therein comprising:
pressing the culture vessel by a pressing unit repeatedly and stirring the culture suspension in the

culture vessel for culturing the cells.

6. The shaking culture method as a cell culture method according to Claim 5, wherein the cells are suspension cells.

7. The shaking culture method as a cell culture method according to Claim 5 or 6, wherein the cells are used for an immune cell therapy.