



SALVAGE OF METHYLTETRAHYDROFOLATE
FROM HOST CELLS AND METHIONINE BIOSYNTHESIS
IN *P. FALCIPARUM*

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With compliments
of

ศาสตราจารย์ ดร. สมศักดิ์

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
(BIOCHEMISTRY)

IN

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

MAHIDOL UNIVERSITY

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1991

310456



Thesis Title Salvage of methyltetrahydrofolate from host cells and methionine biosynthesis in *P. falciparum*

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Date of Graduation 24 May B.E. 2534 (1991)

ABSTRACT

Plasmodium falciparum, *P. knowlesi*, and *P. chabaudi* show low but detectable activity of methylenetetrahydrofolate reductase (MTHFR), which normally catalyzes the reduction of 5,10-methylenetetrahydrofolate to methyltetrahydrofolate. The enzyme was detected by the reverse reaction which radiolabeled methyltetrahydrofolate was used as a substrate and menadione act as artificial electron acceptor. The product, methylenetetrahydrofolate, dissociated spontaneously to tetrahydrofolate and radiolabeled formaldehyde. The formaldehyde was trapped as dimedone adduct and was measured by liquid scintillation counter. The presence of this enzyme completes the methionine synthesis cycle, in which the one-carbon fragment from serine side-chain can be transferred to methionine. However, the possible metabolic significance of this cycle in *P. falciparum* could not be

demonstrated by metabolic labeling of methionine by L-3 [^{14}C] serine. The failure to demonstrate serine conversion to methionine is possible due to the limitation in sensitivity of the assay system. By contrast, the physiological activity of the enzyme could be demonstrated by an alternative pathway in *P. falciparum* for salvage of exogenous 5-methyltetrahydrofolate from host cell. The methyl group of the taken up cofactor was incorporated into methionine. Furthermore, it could also demonstrate that the salvaged cofactor was metabolized to the final product, methyltetrahydropteroylpentaglutamate, which is the same pool as the cofactor derived from *de novo* biosynthesis started from p-aminobenzoic acid.