



## 2,3,5-Trimethoxy-4-cresol, an anti-metastatic constituent from the solid-state cultured mycelium of *Antrodia cinnamomea* and its mechanism

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Received: 28 January 2015 / Accepted: 20 April 2015 / Published online: 8 May 2015  
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**Abstract** *Antrodia cinnamomea* is a valuable and unique edible fungus originating from the forests of Taiwan. In this study, an anti-metastatic compound, 2,3,5-trimethoxy-4-cresol (TMC), was isolated from the solid-state cultured mycelium of *A. cinnamomea*. According to the results obtained from cell wound healing, cell migration and invasion assays, TMC effectively suppressed movement, migration and invasion of lung cancer cells at the dosage of 5–40  $\mu\text{M}$ , which was non-toxic to A549 cells. In addition, TMC reduced protein expression of Akt, MMP-2 and MMP-9 and enhanced E-cadherin and TIMP-1 protein expression, which are known to regulate cell adhesion, migration and invasion. Taken together, TMC effectively suppresses movement, migration and invasion of lung cancer cells, and achieves an anti-cancer metastasis effect.

**Keywords** *Antrodia cinnamomea* · 2,3,5-Trimethoxy-4-cresol · Anti-metastasis · EMT

### Abbreviations

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| DMSO          | Dimethyl sulfoxide   |
| DPBS          | Dulbecco's phosphate-buffered saline                         |
| ECM           | Extracellular matrix   |
| EMT           | Epithelial–mesenchymal transition                            |
| FAK           | Focal adhesion kinase  |
| FBS           | Fetal bovine serum   |
| GA            | Gallic acid  |
| MMP           | Matrix metalloproteinase                                     |
| MTT           | 3-(4,5-Dimethylthiazol-2-yl)-2,5-diphenyltetrazolium bromide |
| NSCLC         | Non-small-cell lung cancer                                   |
| SDS           | Sodium dodecyl sulfate                                       |
| TEMED         | <i>N,N,N',N'</i> -Tetra-methylethylenediamine                |
| TIMP-2        | Tissue inhibitor of metalloproteinase-2                      |
| TNF- $\alpha$ | Tumor necrosis factor alpha                                  |

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### Introduction

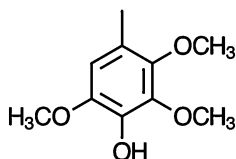
Non-small-cell lung cancer (NSCLC) is the leading cause of cancer death worldwide, and one of the most metastatic tumors. Although the 5-year survival rate for patients with localized NSCLC is more than 50 %, 57 % of patients have advanced/metastatic disease at the time of diagnosis, which carries a survival rate of less than 5 %. The primary cause of death in patients with lung cancer is tumor metastasis [1, 2]. Currently, surgery is the treatment of choice for early stage NSCLC to improve patient survival [3], but surgery also increases the risk to the patient, and therefore

chemotherapy, i.e., anti-metastatic and/or anti-invasion drugs, may be recommended to prevent local recurrence of the primary tumor and spread of the tumor cells.

*Antrodia cinnamomea* (syn. *Antrodia camphorata* and *Taiwanofungus camphorata*) is a valuable and unique edible fungus that originates from the forests of Taiwan. It has long been used as a folk remedy for treating various diseases including liver diseases, hypertension, abdominal pain and cancer [4]. Due to its high commercial value, *A. cinnamomea* has attracted much research and development interest in Taiwan over the past decade, and has been awarded a “National Health Food” certificate by Taiwan’s Department of Health. Numerous studies have been conducted on the physiology and biochemical and pharmacological properties of *A. cinnamomea* [4–11], and many compounds identified from *A. cinnamomea* have been reported to possess health-promoting activities [12, 13]. Among the various activities reported, the anti-cancer activities of *A. cinnamomea* are of particular interest. Recently, increasing importance has been attached to the anti-metastatic activity of *A. cinnamomea* and its bioactive compounds [14–16]. Our previous study demonstrate that antrocin C, a melamide derivative isolated from the mycelia of *A. cinnamomea*, inhibits the metastatic potential of human breast carcinoma (MCF-7 cells) through the inhibition of epithelial–mesenchymal transition via suppression of the Smad2/3 signaling pathway [17]. Antrodon, a glycoprotein isolated from the mycelia of *A. cinnamomea*, inhibits the metastatic potential of Lewis lung carcinoma (LLC) in vitro via down-regulation of matrix metalloproteinase (MMP)-2, MMP-9, tumor necrosis factor alpha (TNF- $\alpha$ ), interleukin (IL)-6 and IL-8, and up-regulation of tissue inhibitor of metalloproteinase (TIMP)-1 and TIMP-2 [18]. However, studies on anti-metastatic compounds of the fruiting body or mycelium of *A. cinnamomea* are limited.

In the present study, a potent anti-metastatic constituent, 2,3,5-trimethoxy-4-cresol (TMC) (Fig. 1), was isolated from the solid-state cultural mycelium product of *Antrodia cinnamomea*. The biochemical steps including the role of TMC in the metastatic process in lung cancer cells (A549) have been elucidated. Curcumin has been reported to be a potent anti-metastatic phyto-compound [19], so in the present study a non-cytotoxic concentration of curcumin was used as a positive drug control.

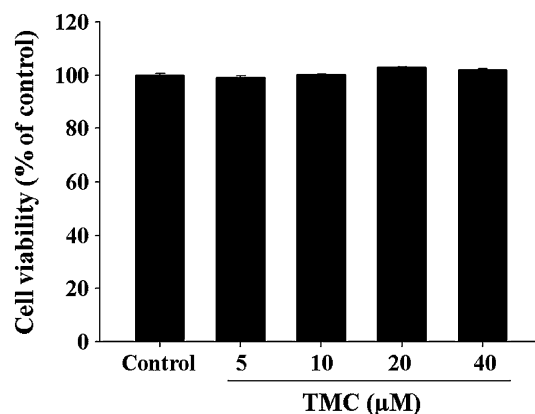
**Fig. 1** 2,3,5-Trimethoxy-4-cresol (TMC)



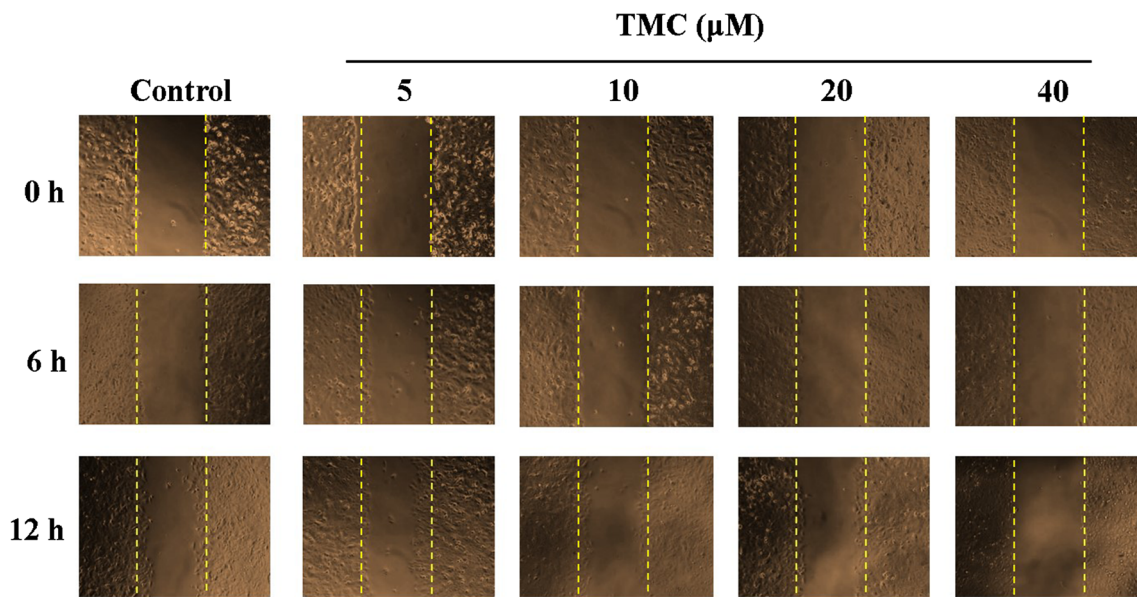
## Results and Discussion

Most cancer cells can acquire metastatic capability leading to secondary tumors. Here we first used a low dose of purified extract, pure compound TMC, to explore the cytotoxicity of the treatment. A549 cells treated with different concentrations of TMC underwent MTT assay and were analyzed after 24 h. Cell viability was not significantly different in cells treated with TMC at concentrations of 5–40  $\mu$ M compared to the control group (DMSO-treated A549 cells) (Fig. 2). This data is consistent with a previous report stating that below the concentration of 20  $\mu$ M, TMC (previously known as 2,3,6-trimethoxy-4-methylphenol) was not cytotoxic to murine colorectal CT26 and human leukemia cancer cell lines, with an IC<sub>50</sub> value of >20  $\mu$ M [20]. TMC was not cytotoxic to A549 cells at these dosages. Therefore, in subsequent experiments, TMC was applied in this concentration range. In addition, the positive drug control curcumin (10  $\mu$ M) does not show cytotoxicity to A549 cells (data not shown).

Wound healing is generally characterized by cell proliferation, remodeling of the extracellular matrix, cell invasion and migration [21]. In this study, a wound-healing assay was conducted to investigate cell migration ability. A wound line was created by scraping seeded monolayer A549 cells, which were then cultured in low serum-free medium plus TMC. The wound-healing activity of cells was observed between 0 and 12 h. The results indicated that TMC significantly decreased the wound-healing ability of A549 cells in a dose-dependent manner (Fig. 3). Next, in order to investigate the invasive and migratory capability of tumor cells, a trans-well migration assay was performed. The results showed that inhibition occurred in a concentration-dependent manner with higher doses of TMC



**Fig. 2** Effect of TMC on the viability of A549 cells. Cells were treated with or without TMC at various concentrations (0, 5, 10, 20, 40  $\mu$ M) for 24 h. Cell viability was analyzed by MTT assay. The results represent the average of three independent experiments  $\pm$  SD. \* $P$  < 0.05, \*\* $P$  < 0.005 represent significant difference relative to the control group



**Fig. 3** Effects of TMC on the morphology and migration of A549 cells in wound healing assay. A549 cell monolayers treated with or without different dosages of TMC (0, 5, 10, 20, 40  $\mu\text{M}$ ) were scraped and the number of cells in the denuded zone (i.e., the wound) was

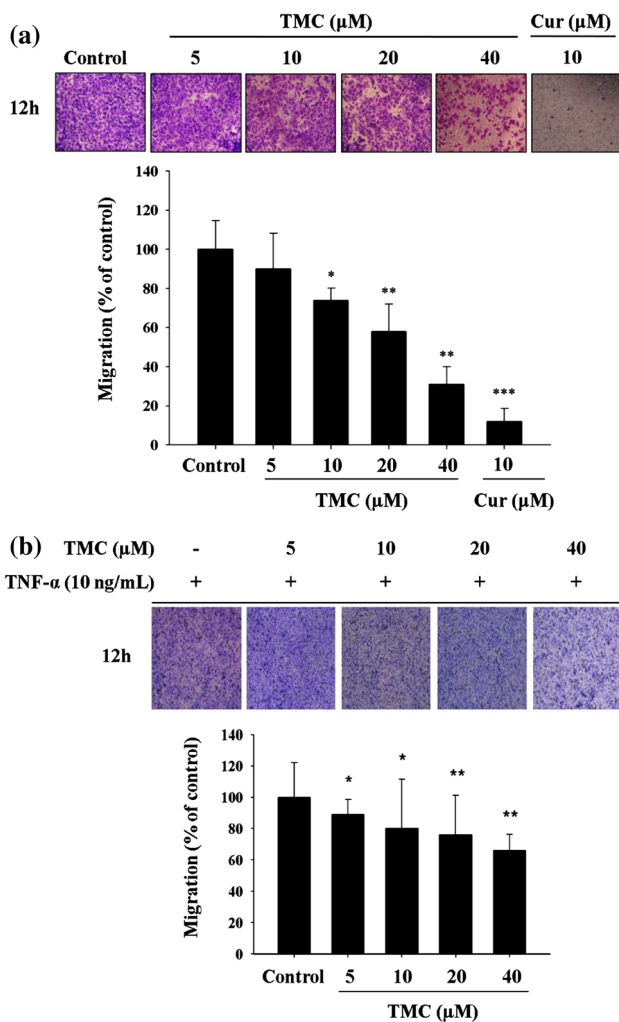
quantitated after 0, 6 and 12 h through light microscopy observation. The results represent the average of three independent experiments  $\pm$  SD.  $*P < 0.05$ ,  $**P < 0.005$  represent significant difference relative to the control group

resulting in fewer cells migrating to the lower chamber (Fig. 4a). When  $\text{TNF-}\alpha$  was added to induce A549 cell growth, the same dose of TMC was used to explore the inhibition of A549 cell migration capability (Fig. 4b). We also used a trans-well chamber coated with Matrigel to analyze the invasion capability of cells. As shown in Fig. 5, significantly fewer cells passed into the lower chamber with higher doses of TMC, in a dose-dependent manner. Previous studies have suggested that enhanced tumor cell adhesiveness correlates with metastatic ability [22]. When A549 cells were treated with different dosages of TMC (0–40  $\mu\text{M}$ ), after 8 h the adhesion ability of cells was inhibited in a dose-dependent manner (Fig. 6). The inhibition ratio of adhesion activity of cells on the Matrigel membrane was 70 % of that of the control group. This result indicates that TMC significantly reduced the cell adhesion ability of A549 cells. With reference to previous reports [23, 24], the positive drug control of this study, a non-cytotoxic concentration of curcumin (10  $\mu\text{M}$ ), showed a strong inhibition of migration, invasion and adhesion of A549 cells; the inhibitory effect of TMC was highly comparable with curcumin.

Matrix metalloproteinases (MMPs) belong to a zinc-dependent family (ECM) of endopeptidases and are the principal mediators of the alterations observed in the microenvironment during cancer progression [25]. MMPs are implicated in a variety of physiological processes, including wound healing, uterine involution and organogenesis, as well as in pathological conditions such as inflammation, vascular and auto-immune disorders, and

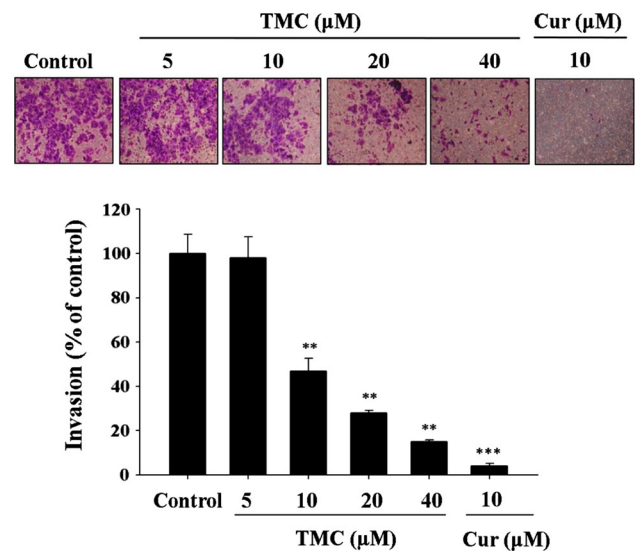
carcinogenesis [26, 27]. MMPs have been considered to be important therapeutic targets for cancer because the metastatic potential of various cancers is correlated with the ability of cancer cells to degrade the basement membrane [27]. The other key protease involved in degrading the components of the basement membrane is urokinase plasminogen activator (u-PA). u-PA is a serine protease that cleaves the ECM and converts the inactive plasminogen to active plasmin, which can directly mediate the invasion by degrading matrix components [27]. In order to investigate whether MMPs and u-PA are involved in the TMC inhibition of cancer cell invasion and motility, a gelatin and casein zymography assay was performed to check MMP and u-PA activity. As shown in Fig. 7, TMC significantly reduced the MMP-2 (Fig. 7a) and MMP-9 activity (Fig. 7b). The inhibition of MMP-2 and MMP-9 expression in A549 cells was 52 and 35 %, respectively, at the dosage of 40  $\mu\text{M}$ . The u-PA activity in A549 cells was also inhibited by TMC (Fig. 8).

Epithelial–mesenchymal transition (EMT) has an important role in the progression of tumor metastasis [28]. It has been reported that protein kinase Akt induces EMT through down-regulation of the epithelial marker E-cadherin and upregulation of the mesenchymal marker vimentin in cancer progression [29]. E-cadherin is responsible for epithelial cell–cell adhesion and maintenance of cytoskeleton organization, and it is the major transmembrane component of adherens junctions. Cancer cell proliferation, invasion and metastasis increases with loss of function of E-cadherin [30]. During the EMT process, most of the tumor suppressor proteins (E-cadherin) are down-regulated, and the

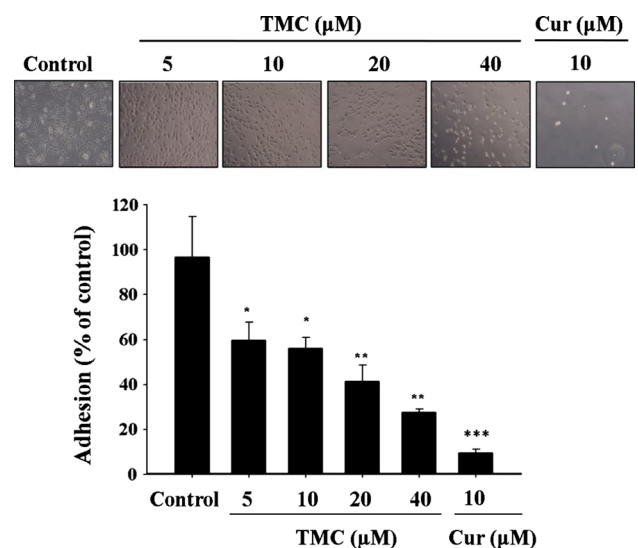


**Fig. 4** TMC inhibited the migration of A549 cells in trans-well assay. **a** A549 cells were seeded in the upper chamber of the trans-well filters (pore size, 8  $\mu\text{m}$ ) after treatment with various concentrations of TMC (0, 5, 10, 20, 40  $\mu\text{M}$ ) and curcumin (10  $\mu\text{M}$ ). Chemoattractant was placed in the bottom chamber. A549 cells migrate through the small pores in the transmembrane in response to the chemoattractant. FBS (20 %) was used as the inducer. **b** A549 cells treated with TMC (0, 5, 10, 20, 40  $\mu\text{M}$ ) for 24 h, then seeded in the upper chamber of the trans-well and incubated for 12 h; 20 % FBS and TNF- $\alpha$  were used as the inducer. \* $P < 0.05$ , \*\* $P < 0.005$  represent significant difference relative to the control group. *Cur* curcumin

oncoproteins (vimentin, N-cadherin) are up-regulated [31]. E-cadherin promotes homotypic tumor cell adhesion function to maintain intercellular contacts that confine cells to the primary tumor site and prevent metastatic potential [32]. To further confirm the inhibition mechanism of TMC in metastasis, the effects of TMC on E-cadherin, p-AKT and TIMP-1 were examined. As shown in Fig. 9a, TMC significantly enhanced levels of the epithelial marker E-cadherin, and decreased expression of p-Akt. Moreover, TIMP-1 expression was also increased (Fig. 9b). In conclusion, our data suggest that treatment of lung cancer cells with TMC



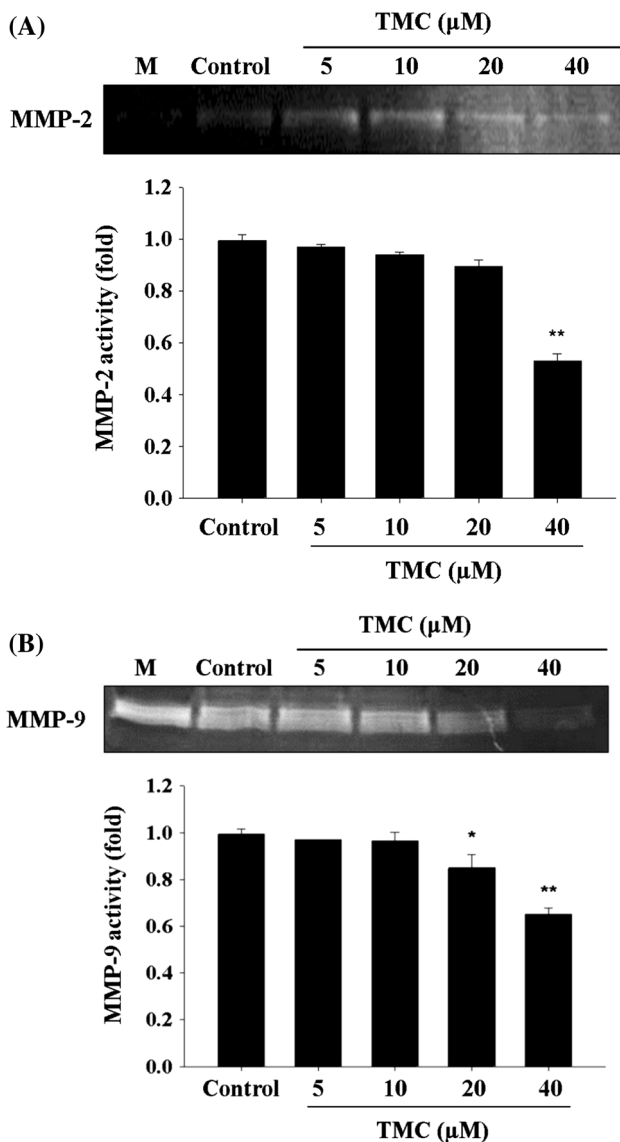
**Fig. 5** TMC inhibited the invasive ability of A549 cells. A549 cells were treated with TMC (0, 5, 10, 20, 40  $\mu\text{M}$ ) or curcumin (10  $\mu\text{M}$ ) and seeded in the upper chamber of the trans-well which was coated Matrigel, and incubated for 12 h; 20 % FBS was used as the inducer. \* $P < 0.05$ , \*\* $P < 0.005$  show significant difference relative to the control group. *Cur* curcumin



**Fig. 6** TMC inhibited the adhesion of A549 cells through Matrigel. Matrigel was coated in the 24-well incubator for 24 h, and A549 cells were treated with TMC (0, 5, 10, 20, 40  $\mu\text{M}$ ) or curcumin (10  $\mu\text{M}$ ) for 24 h, then cells were subtracted and seeded in the 24-well incubator for 8 h. Results are presented as mean  $\pm$  SD of three assays. \* $P < 0.05$ , \*\* $P < 0.005$  show significant difference relative to the control group. *Cur* curcumin

induces molecular changes, which are consistent with a less motile, migratory and invasive phenotype of lung cancer cell. In conclusion, 2,3,5-trimethoxy-4-cresol (TMC) effectively suppresses movement, migration and invasion of lung cancer cells, and achieves an anti-cancer metastasis effect.



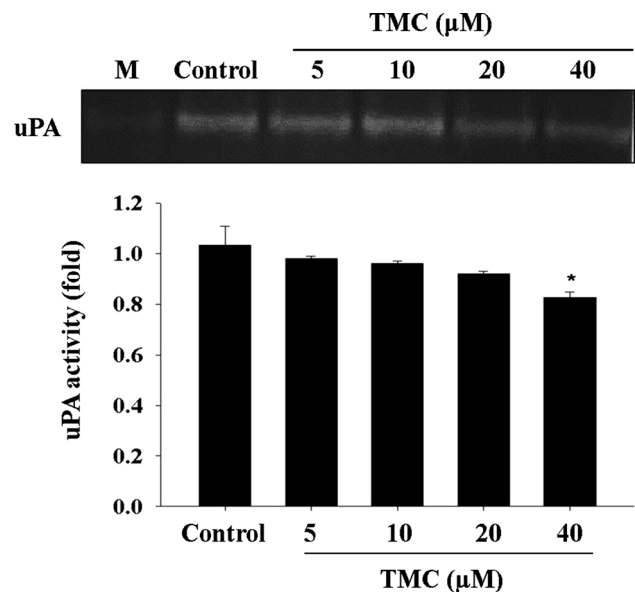


**Fig. 7** Effect of TMC-dependent MMP activity inhibition on A549 cells. A549 cells were treated with TMC (0, 5, 10, 20, 40 μM) in culture medium. After 24 h, the cells were cultured in serum-free medium and then subjected to gelatin zymography to analyze the activities of **a** MMP-2 and **b** MMP-9. The activities of these proteins were subsequently quantified by densitometric analysis. Data from 3 independent experiments are shown. \* $P < 0.05$ , \*\* $P < 0.005$  represent significant difference relative to the control

## Experimental section

### Chemical and reagents

2,3,5-Trimethoxy-4-cresol was previously isolated and identified from the solid-state cultured mycelium of *A. cinnamomea* and was known as 2,3,6-trimethoxy-4-methylphenol [20]. In this study, we also isolated it from the solid-state cultured mycelium of *A. cinnamomea* (strain no. LEACS-002) obtained from the R&D Center of Taiwan



**Fig. 8** TMC inhibited uPA activity on A549 cells. Cells were treated with up to 40 μM TMC for 24 h and were then subjected to casein zymography to analyze uPA activity, which was subsequently quantified by densitometry analysis. Data from 3 independent experiments are shown. \* $P < 0.05$ , \*\* $P < 0.005$  represent significant difference relative to the control group

Leader Biotechnology Corp. (Taichung, Taiwan). The purity of TMC was above 99 %, as confirmed by HPLC and <sup>1</sup>H-NMR analysis. Ham’s F12 medium was purchased from Amimed/BioConcept (Allschwil, Switzerland); fetal bovine serum (FBS) was obtained from Gibco-BRL (China). Antibodies against MMP-2, MMP-9, and β-actin were purchased from Santa Cruz Biotechnology (Heidelberg, Germany); Akt, cadherin, NF-κB, and TIMP1 were purchased from Cell Signaling (Danvers, MA, USA). The 3-(4,5-dimethylthiazol-2-yl)-2,5-diphenyltetrazolium bromide (MTT) and curcumin were obtained from Sigma–Aldrich (St. Louis, MO, USA). Millicell hanging cell culture insert was obtained from Millipore (Billerica, MA, USA); Matrigel was purchased from BD Biosciences (San Jose, CA, USA).

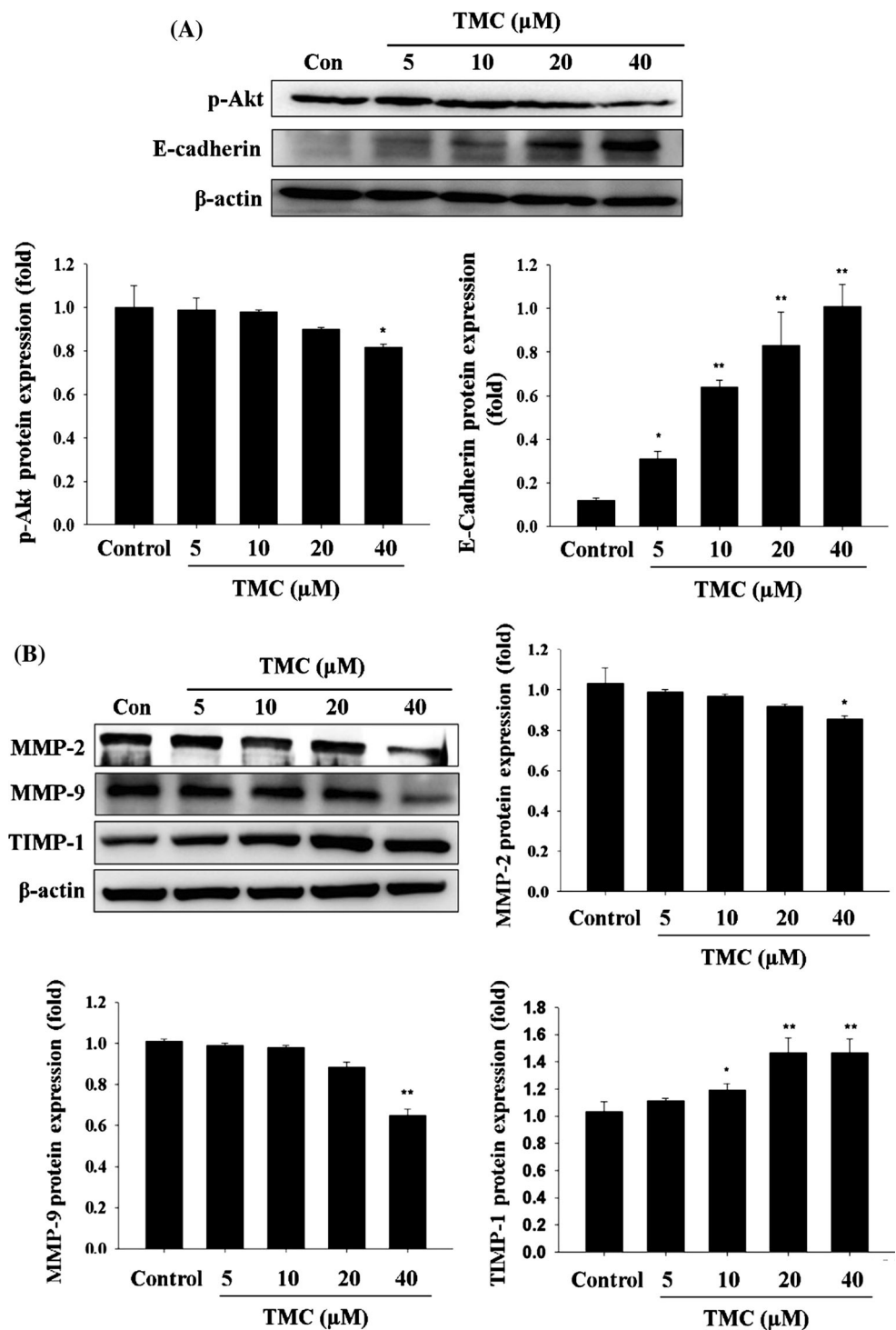
### Cell culture

The human non-small-cell lung cancer cell line A549 was obtained from the American Type Culture Collection (ATCC, Manassas, VA, USA). The cell line was cultured in Ham’s F12 medium supplemented with 10 % heat-inactivated FB and, 2 mM glutamine, and cell cultures were maintained at 37 °C in an incubator with 5 % CO<sub>2</sub>.

### MTT assay

Cell viability was determined by MTT colorimetric assay as described previously [33]. A549 cells ( $2 \times 10^5$  cells/24-

**Fig. 9** Inhibition effects of TMC on expression of proteins involved in regulation of cell motility and invasion of A549 cells. A549 cells were treated with TMC (0, 5, 10, 20, 40  $\mu\text{M}$ ) for 24 h. Immunoblots are shown for **a** p-Akt, E-cadherin, **b** MMP-2, MMP-9, TIMP-1 and  $\beta$ -actin (control) in A549 cell lines. The cell lysates were prepared for Western blotting as described in Experimental Section. Data from 3 independent experiments are shown. \* $P < 0.05$ , \*\* $P < 0.005$  represent significant difference relative to the control



well plates) were seeded and incubated overnight. Cells were then treated with various concentrations of TMC (5, 10, 20 and 40  $\mu\text{M}$ ) for 24 h. After incubation, the medium-deprived cells were incubated with MTT (10  $\mu\text{g}/\text{mL}$ ) in 100  $\mu\text{L}$  of fresh DMEM for 1 h at 37  $^{\circ}\text{C}$ . The MTT-generated violet formazan crystals were dissolved in dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO) and the absorbance was measured at 570 nm ( $A_{570}$ ) using an ELISA microplate reader ( $\mu\text{Quant}$ ,

Bio-Tek Instruments, Winooski, VT, USA). Cell viability (%) was calculated as: ( $A_{570}$  of treated cells/ $A_{570}$  of untreated cells)  $\times 100$ .

#### Cell wound-healing repair assay

Cell proliferation and migration was observed in A549 cells using the wound-healing assay [34]. A549 cells

( $2 \times 10^7$  cells/cm<sup>2</sup>) were seeded in a 12-well culture plate and grown to confluence or near (>90 %) confluence in Ham's F12 medium containing 10 % FBS. Using a sterile 200  $\mu$ L pipet tip, separate wounds were scratched, and cellular debris and FBS were removed by washing with PBS; cells were then starved in low-serum medium (0.5–0.1 % serum in Ham's F12 medium). The culture medium was then removed and cells were treated with TMC (5, 10, 20 and 40  $\mu$ M) and cell movement was observed at 0, 12, 24 and 48 h to monitor the migration of cells into the wounded area. Images were captured and the results analyzed.

### Cell migration and invasion assay

A Millipore cell culture insert was used to examine the cell migration and invasion [35]. For the cell invasion assay prior to preparation, A549 cells were pretreated with TMC (5, 10, 20 and 40  $\mu$ M) or curcumin (10  $\mu$ M) with/without TNF- $\alpha$  for 24 h, then A549 cells ( $2 \times 10^5$  cells/cm<sup>2</sup>) were seeded in the upper chamber, and Ham's F12 medium was added to the lower chamber with 10 % FBS as inducer. For the cell invasion assay prior to preparation, BD Matrigel was thawed overnight at 4 °C and kept on ice; the Millicell insert and plate was chilled to 4 °C and kept in ice; Matrigel was diluted using ice-cold serum-free Ham's F12 medium to a final concentration of 2 mg/ml. After Matrigel solidification, A549 cells ( $2 \times 10^5$  cells/cm<sup>2</sup>) were seeded in the upper chamber, and Ham's F12 medium was added to the lower chamber with 10 % FBS as inducer. Both migration and invasion assays were conducted after incubation at 37 °C with 5 % CO<sub>2</sub> for 12 h. Non-invaded cells in the upper chamber were removed with a cotton swab, and invaded cells were washed twice with PBS and fixed in methanol for 15 min. Fixed cells were stained with Giemsa. Three random fields were analyzed for each chamber.

### Cell adhesion assay

BD Matrigel was used for the cell adhesion assay. Prior to preparation, BD Matrigel was thawed overnight at 4 °C and kept on ice. Matrigel was diluted using ice-cold serum-free Ham's F12 medium to a final concentration of 2 mg/ml. A549 cells were pretreated with TMC (5, 10, 20 and 40  $\mu$ M) or curcumin (10  $\mu$ M) for 24 h. On the first day, Matrigel was added to the plate and incubated overnight at 37 °C with 5 % CO<sub>2</sub>. On the second day, after Matrigel solidification, A549 cells ( $2 \times 10^5$  cells/cm<sup>2</sup>) were seeded onto the plate. After incubation at 37 °C with 5 % CO<sub>2</sub> for 12 h, non-invaded cells and the culture medium were removed and cells were washed twice with PBS and fixed in paraformaldehyde for 15 min. Fixed cells were stained

with Giemsa. Three random fields were analyzed for each chamber.

### Zymography assay

Gelatin zymography and casein zymography protease assays were used to measure the activities of MMP-2, MMP-9 and uPA in the medium of A549 cells. A549 cells ( $2 \times 10^5$  cells/cm<sup>2</sup>) were seeded in a 6-well culture dish and incubated at 37 °C with 5 % CO<sub>2</sub> overnight. Cells were then treated with TMC (5, 10, 20 and 40  $\mu$ M) for 24 h before being starved in low-serum medium (0.5–0.1 % serum in Ham's F12 medium) for 24 h. The culture medium was then collected. Gelatin SDS-PAGE (8 % gel with 1 mg/ml gelatin) and casein SDS-PAGE electrophoresis (8 % gel with 1 mg/ml casein and plasminogen) was conducted. After electrophoresis, gels were washed with 2.5 % Triton X-100 and incubated in developing buffer at 37 °C for 24 h. The developing buffer was then removed and gels were stained with Coomassie blue R-250.

### Western blot analysis

Metastasis-associated proteins were measured by Western blotting. A549 cells ( $2 \times 10^5$  cells/cm<sup>2</sup>) were seeded in a 10-cm dish and grown in Ham's F12 medium containing 10 % FBS. When cells attached, they were treated with TMC (5, 10, 20 and 40  $\mu$ M) for 24 h. Total cell lysates were prepared using Mammalian Protein Extraction Reagent (Cayman Chemicals, Ann Arbor, MI, USA). The cytosolic and nuclear protein fractions were obtained using NE-PER Nuclear and Cytoplasmic Protein Extraction Reagent Kit (Pierce Biotechnology, Rockford, IL, USA). The protein content in each fraction was determined by Bio-Rad protein assay reagent, with BSA as the standard. Equal amounts (50  $\mu$ g) of denatured protein samples were electrophoresed by 8–15 % SDS-PAGE, followed by transfer onto PVDF membranes overnight. The membranes were blocked with 5 % non-fat dry milk for 30 min at room temperature and then reacted with primary antibodies for 2 h. They were then incubated with a horseradish peroxidase-conjugated goat anti-rabbit or anti-mouse antibody for 2 h and developed using the enhanced chemiluminescence substrate (Millipore). Images were captured with a VL Chemi-Smart 3000 gel documentation system (Vilber Lourmat, France).

### Statistical analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) followed by Duncan's test for multiple comparisons and Student's *t* test for single

comparison. The data are reported as mean  $\pm$  SD. The numbers of independent experiments assessed are given in the figure legends.

**Acknowledgments** Parts of this study were supported by the Ministry of Science and Technology, Taiwan, Republic of China (NSC-103-2911-I-005-301, NSC-102-2911-I-005-301) and the Ministry of Education, Taiwan, R.O.C. under the ATU plan.

**Conflict of interest** No competing financial interests exist.

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