

INVESTIGATION OF THE FUNGAL COMMUNITY ON DISEASE ROOT AT  
SABAH TEA PLANTATION

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DISERTASI YANG DIKEMUKAKAN UNTUK MEMENUHI SEBAHAGIAN  
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DENGAN KEPUJIAN

PROGRAM SAINS SEKITARAN  
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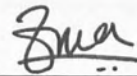
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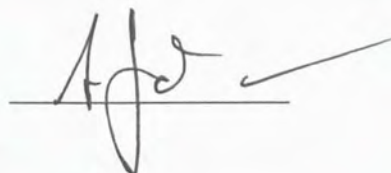
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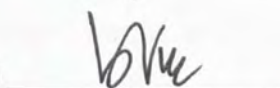
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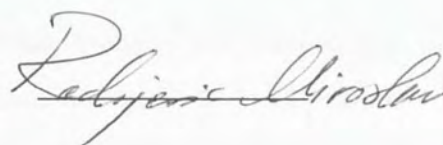
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## ABSTRACT

The study was carried out at Sabah Tea Plantation which is located at 20 km from Ranau at Kampung Nalapak, Sabah. The study is to identify the causal agent of the root rot disease occurring at Sabah Tea. 14 root samples of infected tea trees, believed to have died of *Poria* disease were collected. Whereby, 7 root samples were taken from a field under conventional farming practice and 7 from a field under organic farming practice. Extraction of pathogens was carried out by surface sterilization and subsequent culturing on PDA. Out of the 14 root samples, fungi were successfully extracted from 9 samples, whereby 4 different types were found. Based on microscopic examination the causal agent of the disease attacked could not be confirmed. It was therefore concluded that the disease at Sabah Tea was not caused by *Poria Hypolateritia*. Instead it is suggested that it is a brown root rot, caused by the fungus *Fomes noxius*.



## ABSTRAK

### KAJIAN KOMUNITI KULAT PADA PENYAKIT AKAR DI LADANG TEH SABAH.

Kajian telah dijalankan di Ladang Teh Sabah yang terletak di Kampung Nalapak, 20 km dari Ranau. Kajian telah dijalankan untuk mengenalpasti agen penyebab serangan penyakit akar di ladang Teh Sabah. 14 sampel akar yang dipercayai telah dijangkiti oleh penyakit *Poria Hypolateritia* telah diambil. Sebanyak 7 sampel akar telah diambil daripada ladang konvensional dan 7 sampel lagi diambil daripada ladang organik. Kaedah yang digunakan untuk mengekstrak patogen adalah melalui kaedah pengkulturan steril akar dan subkultur akar di dalam media Potato Dextrose Agar(PDA). Hasil yang diperolehi dalam kajian ini ialah 9 sampel telah berjaya diekstrak dan empat jenis kumpulan kulat telah ditemui. Berdasarkan pemerhatian daripada mikroskop, agen penyebab serangan penyakit kulat tidak dapat disahkan. Secara keseluruhannya, telah dicadangkan bahawa serangan penyakit kulat di Ladang Teh Sabah adalah bukan disebabkan oleh *Poria Hypolateritia* sebaliknya disebabkan oleh kulat dari spesis *Fomes Noxius*.



## TABLE OF CONTENT

	PAGES
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGED BY	iii
APPRECIATION	iv
ABSTRAK	v
ABSTRACT	vi
TABLE OF CONTENT	vii
LIST OF TABLE	x
LIST OF SYMBOL & ABBREVIATION	xi
<b>CHAPTER 1            INTRODUCTION</b>	
1.1    Introduction	1
1.2    Objectives	3
<b>CHAPTER 2            LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1    Plant Disease Epidemiology	4
2.2    Basidiomycetes	5
2.3    Soil Borne Pathogens	6
2.4    Root Disease	7
2.5    Types of Root Diseases	8
2.6    Poria Disease	9





2.7	Symptoms and Behavior of the Fungus	11
2.8	Identification of Causal Agent	12
2.9	Microscopic Technique	14
2.10	Molecular Analysis	15
<b>CHAPTER 3 MATERIAL AND METHODS</b>		<b>18</b>
3.1	Study Site Description	18
3.2	Fieldwork	23
3.3	Lab Analysis	26
	3.3.1 Media Preparation	26
	3.3.2 Culturing	26
3.4	Microscopic Analysis	27
	3.4.1 Slide Preparation	27
<b>CHAPTER 4 RESULT</b>		<b>31</b>
4.1	Comparison of method	31
4.2	Types of fungi extracted	34
<b>CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION</b>		<b>42</b>
5.1	Extraction of fungus from infected roots	42
	5.1.1 Factors of pathogen dead	42
5.2	Confirmation of the presence of <i>Poria Hypolateritia</i>	44
	5.2.1 Visual symptoms of root rot in tea	45
5.3	Management effect	52



<b>CHAPTER 6</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	54
REFERENCES		56



## LIST OF TABLE

	<b>Pages</b>
4.1 Occurrence of the pathogen in Conventional and Organic fields	34
4.2 Morphology of the fungus	35



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figures No.	Pages
3.1 Location of study site	18
3.2 Map of study site	19
3.3 Sabah Tea Plantation	21
3.4 Study Field 1(Conventional field)	22
3.5 Study Field 2 (Nalapak Organic 2 field)	23
3.6 Infected root samples 1 shown white mycelial on the surface of root	24
3.7 Infected root samples 2 shown white mycelial on the surface of root	25
3.8 Picture of diseased trees with Guatemala grass	25
3.9 Picture of hyphae	28
3.10 Picture of Clamp Connections	29
3.11 Picture of conidia	29
3.12 Picture of conidiophores	30
4.1 Picture of contaminated culture; mucus spread	33
4.2 Picture of contaminated culture; mucus spread	33
4.3 Culture of Type A fungus (C2)	35
4.4 Culture of Type A fungus (O1)	36





4.5 Culture of Type B fungus (O3)	36
4.6 Culture of Type C fungus (C5)	37
4.7 Culture of Type D fungus (C7)	37
4.8 Type A (C2) (x40); Picture of hyphae, conidiophores	38
4.9 Type A (O1) (x40); Picture of hyphae, conidiophores	39
4.10 Type B (O3) (x20); Picture of hyphae, conidia, conidiophores	39
4.11 Type B (O3) (x40); Picture of broken conidia, conidiophores	40
4.12 Type C (C5) (x40); Picture of hyphae, conidiophores	40
4.13 Type D (C7) (x40); Picture of hyphae, conidiophores	41
5.1 Picture of Black root rots ( <i>Rosellinia arcuata</i> )	48
5.2 Picture of Charcoal root rot ( <i>Ustulina deusta</i> )	49
5.3 Picture of Brown root rots ( <i>Fomes Noxius</i> )	51



**LIST OF SYMBOL AND ABBREVIATION**

HCL	Hydrochloric acid
H <sub>2</sub> O	Water
KOH	Calcium Hydroxide
°C	Degree Celsius
°F	Degree Fahrenheit
Km	Kilometer
Kmh-1	Kilometer per hour
M	Meter
cm	centimeter
mm	millimeter
µm	micrometer
ml	milliliter



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction

In Malaysia, there are two large tea plantations. The larger one is situated in Cameron Highland, Pahang Darul Makmur. Whereas the other tea plantations Sabah Tea is located close to Ranau in Sabah. Sabah Tea is the largest single commercial tea plantation in Sabah. Sabah tea is located at the foothills of Mount Kinabalu in Ranau, surrounded by the world's oldest rainforest which is rich and full of flora and fauna.

Optimal yield production at Sabah Tea is hampered by the presence of root diseases. Until now the plantation has not identified what kind of root rot disease is killing the tea trees. The causal agent of this disease is thought to be *Poria hypolateritia*, a soil born pathogen. Root rot has spread widely in the tea field of Sabah Tea. Even though this root rot disease is the most dangerous disease for the tea plantation, there is at present no sustainable control of the spread of the disease. Fumigation of infected areas with methyl bromide although very successful is not applicable with an organic farming system. The present management procedure, more environmental sound, consists of digging up the root of affected tea trees and removing the infected tea tree together with one or two rows of surrounding



apparently healthy trees. In addition Guatemala grass (*Tripsacum laxum*) is planted to reduce the *Poria* spreading as this grass is known to interrupt the life cycle of *Poria*. However, this practice needs labour energy and is time consuming and does not always prevent the spread of the disease and is not that successful in reducing the spreading of the disease.

The proposed project is to develop and implement an effective integrated pest management strategy (IPM) for the red root rot disease at Sabah Tea. To find the best and effective way for a good management strategy to control the root rot disease we have to understand the strains that are causing the root rot, the behavior and characteristic of the fungus.





## 1.2 Objectives

The overall objectives of the propose study is to identify the causal agent of the root rot disease occurring at Sabah Tea.

Meanwhile, to achieve this goal, following task will be carried out.

1. Extract fungus from infected root samples.
2. To confirm if the presence of *Poria Hypolateritia* on infected root samples.
3. To investigate the effect of management practices between conventional and organic farm on the fungi community of disease tea tree roots



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Plant disease epidemiology

The epidemiology of the plant disease is important to get a better understanding of disease problems. Plant disease epidemiology is the most effective approach to get a solution of disease problems. Epidemiology is the overall study of epidemics, the comprehensive analysis of the interaction between the three constituents of the disease triangle; the host, the pathogen and the environment (Jones, 1998). These disease triangles are related to each other in spreading disease problem and there is the primary requirement for the development of a disease. A causal agent and a favorable environment constitute two of the three requisite factors for the occurrence of infectious plant disease (Kenaga, 1974). Firstly, the pathogen must be present; secondly the host plant must be susceptible to the particular pathogen; thirdly the environment including soil and weather conditions must be favorable for infection to take place and for spread to occur (Martin, 1972).

Most of the plants are liable to be attacked by several and sometimes many different pathogens. Some pathogens can be recognized by the characteristic symptoms that they produce. Most of the plant pathogens belong to one of the three groups; fungi, bacteria and viruses and all of these groups have their main characteristics.



The fungi causing plant diseases can be grouped into four sub-groups. Fungi are separated into four classes on the basis of the morphology of their sexual structures and the sporulating organs formed after sexual reproduction (Strange, 1993). Besides that, these sub-groups are distinguished from one another by the microscopic characters of the mycelium (Martin, 1972). These are the Ascomycetes, Basidiomycetes, Phycomycetes and Zygomycetes.

## 2.2 Basidiomycetes

The fungi comprising the phylum Basidiomycota are commonly known as basidiomycetes. Basidiomycetes are a large and diverse group and include forms commonly known as mushrooms, puffballs, jelly fungi, bracket or shelf fungi and rust and smut fungi (Alexopoulos, et al., 1996). Basidiomycetes are characterized primarily by the fact that they produce their sexual spores, termed basidiospores, on the outside of a specialized, microscopic, spore-producing structure called the basidium (Alexopoulos, et al., 1996).

Meanwhile, the fungus that infected tea plantation is in basidiomycetes group (Alexopoulos, et al., 1996). The basidiomycetes are an important group of fungi including harmful as well as useful species. They also often produce two or more kinds of spores but one is always formed on a characteristic structure and known as a basidium. This group includes the smuts represented by loose smut of wheat and barley and the rusts, species of which can be found on most plants (Martin, 1972). Notorious among these diseases are stinking smut and black stem rust of wheat (Alexopoulos, et al., 1996). Many others attack a large variety of food and ornamental





plants. Besides that, several basidiomycetes are also significant in causing diseases of forest and shade trees (Alexopoulos, et al., 1996). Their causal relation between fungus and disease is relatively easy to prove as the characteristics spores, which they are usually produced in profusion, can be collected and used as inoculums for further plants. Developments of similar symptoms to those of the original diseased plant are strong evidences that collected fungus is causing the disease.

### **2.3 Soil Borne Pathogens**

Soil borne pathogens can be defined as those which undertake the major part of their life cycle in the soil (Hillocks & Waller, 1997). Typically, they infect roots or stem bases; dispersal and survival stages are primarily confined to the soil. Besides that, soil borne pathogens may also produce air or water dispersed spores which result in dispersal over larger areas.

A system of classifying the soil borne fungal pathogens is required to get the best approach to control diseases. There are two ways of grouping the soil borne fungi. One is based on their mode of parasitism and divides them into specialized and non-specialized parasites. The other is based on ecological criteria and groups them into soil inhibitors or soil invaders (Hillocks & Waller, 1997). The soil-inhibiting fungus is characterized by its ability to survive as a saprophyte and this is a specialized parasites. The soil-invading or root-inhabiting fungus is a non-specialized parasites characterized by an expanding parasitic phase and a declining saprophytic phase after the host's death.





The soil-invaders exhibit a greater degree of parasitic specialization than the soil –inhibitors and therefore have a more restricted host range. They are divided into three groups according to their aetiology; one is the vascular wilt pathogens; e.g *Fusarium oxysporum*. These pathogens are confined to the vascular tissue after initial invasion (Hillocks & Waller, 1997). Second are ectotrophic root-infecting fungi. These ectotrophic root pathogens are able to grow extensively on the outside of the root and can penetrate the root cortex. Many of them are liberated from dependence on survival in the soil by their ability to produce rhizomorphs or specialized mycelial strands, which can grow from plant to plant along adjacent roots; e.g *Armillaria mellea* .(Hillocks & Waller, 1997). The third group is the obligate parasites which produce motile zoospores; e.g *Plasmodiophora brassicae*. This group is not well represented in the tropics and these pathogens are mostly confined to the Chytridiomycetes, Oomycetes and Plasmodiophorales (Hillocks & Waller, 1997).

#### **2.4 Root Disease**

Root diseases of woody species are caused by a group of fungi that exhibit some degree of pathogenic specialization and spread from plant to plant by rhizomorphs which can usually be found under the bark of trees in the advances stages of infection. These fungi mainly belong to the genera *Fomes*, and *Armillaria* among the basidiomycetes but similar diseases are caused by *Rosellinia* and *Xylaria* among the ascomycetes. Their host range is wide among the tropical tree crops which can be affected when planted on land immediately after bush clearance (Hillocks & Waller, 1997).



## 2.5 Types of root diseases

There are several fungi which can cause root diseases in tea. There are four common root diseases of tea in Sri Lanka: Red Root disease, Black Root disease, Charcoal Root disease and Brown Root disease. Between this four root diseases, the Red Root disease is the most serious and majoring of economic importance in Sri Lanka, while White Root disease is of minor importance in tea (Mukerji & Bhasin, 1986).

There are several differences between these four root rot diseases. The red root disease is known as *Poria Hypolateritia*. This disease has been a common root disease in Sri Lanka since the first planting of tea on a plantation scale. For this root disease, the manner of the death of bush is gradually or entirely. The external appearance of root is red to black mycelial sheath or strands with white specks and there are soil particles adhere to their surface. While after the removal of bark, sometimes white patches of mycelium overlying the wood appear. The internal appearance of rot are the wood permeated by red lines or sheets, soft and it is getting moist when becoming old, (Wilson & Clifford, 1992).

The external appearance of root for the Black Root disease (*Rosellinia arcuata*) is roots that have been covered with a loose network of black and woolly mycelium. If the bark is removed the surface of the wood is found to be covered by white star-shaped patches of mycelium. In contrast, the appearance of Brown Root disease (*Fomes noxius*) is a root encrusted with soil particles and brown mycelium intermixed. Usually, after the removal of bark, scattered patches of white brownish mycelium can be seen. The wood is usually not badly decayed, but it is permeated





with yellow-brown sheets of mycelium which assumes a honey-comb structure and appears as a irregular brown lines when the wood is cut. For Charcoal root disease (*Ustilina deusta*), there are no visible symptoms on the surface. When the bark is removed the surface of the wood is found to be covered by white fan-shaped patches of mycelium. While when the wood is cut, the wood is permeated by irregular, single or double black lines, (Wilson & Clifford, 1992).

## 2.6 *Poria* disease

In Sabah Tea Plantation, the causal agent of the disease that has been attacking the plantation is thought to be *Poria Hypolateritia*. From the history, *poria* disease is undoubtedly a legacy from the jungles (Personal Communication: Warren, 2004). They come from the jungle where the fungus occurred, not as a virulent or a danger parasite but as an opportunistic species that has to struggle for its survival on such material as it could feed on. *Poria* disease occurs principally in tea grown on land which was originally jungle and it is rarely found in grassland clearings. After the jungle clearings, the *poria* disease first occurs in the neighborhood of a decaying jungle stump. This factor is the most frequent source of *poria*'s spreading. The stumps have disappeared but the *poria* disease still remains in the soil. The fungus survived as a saprophyte on decaying roots after the jungle has been cleared. It survived as a saprophyte on decaying roots which served as a food base from. Besides that, this fungus can send out hyphae through the soil in search of more food. Those hyphae can penetrate into the roots of jungle trees but they can also penetrate the tea roots. No matter in what direction the hyphae grew, some would be sure to encounter the tea roots. Actually, the clearing of the jungle was beneficial to the fungus. The fungus



gets a benefit from this change because when the penetration into the tea was achieved, they took up a parasitic mode of life. The fungus also became independent of the original food base. Then, from here the fungus started to spread by using the infected roots of one bush as a food base from which to reach the next (Personal Communication: Warren, 2004).

The current name of *Poria hypolateritia* is *Tyromyces hypolateritius* (Anon, 2005 e). It is classified under phylum Basidiomycota and family of Polyporaceae (Alexopoulos, et al., 1996). The pathogen is inseparable and without distinctive taste; margin whitish to pale yellowish and more or less myceliod. Hyphal system apparently monomitic, the context of generative hyphae which are infrequently branched with thin to thick walls and inconspicuously nodose-septate (Anon, 2005 e). The hyphae are rarely branched and thick-walled. The cystidia variously shaped and frequently with a globose head (Ryvarden & Johansen, 1980).

The validity of this species is questionable. It is different from *Poria versipora* (*P.versipora*) that only in the more decidedly cartilaginous nature of the trama, which maybe simply a product of the age when collected or the way in which the specimen was dried. The types of *P. adpressa*, *P. eyrei* and *P. hypolateritia* have badly contaminated hymenia and the spore records are not wholly certain (Anon, 2005 e). Cultural work to test the validity of the distinction is highly desirable.

The fruit body of *Tyromyces* is resupinate, effused, adnate, soft when it is fresh, drying firm and subcartilaginous. Pore surface cream drying slightly darker and with a pale sordid of greenish tint (Ryvarden & Johansen, 1980). It is glancing when





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