Characterization and biological screening of the culturable endophytic actinomycetes from *Garcinia cowa* Roxb.

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Abstract Actinomycetes associated with plants are relatively interactive sources of potential natural products. Two culturable endophytic actinomycetes strains, GcL-T1-1 and GcLT2-2, were isolated from a leaf of cowa (Garcinia cowa Roxb.). Determination of morphological and physiological properties, strains GcL-T1-1 and GcLT2-2, formed filament cells and presented spores on the mycelia which were classified to actinomycete group. In addition, strain GcL-T1-1 belonged to *Streptomyces* based on morphological and chemotaxonomic characteristics, which contained LL- diaminopimelic acid in peptidoglycan of cell wall. The molecular identification using similarity value of 16S rRNA gene, a non-streptomycete GcL-T2-2 was classified within the family *Micromonosporaceae*, genus *Micromonospora* that presented the highest similarity with M. schwarzwaldensis HKI0641^T (99.93%), follow with M. haikouensis 232617^T (99.23%), DSM 45647^T (99.16%), *M. maritima* D10-9-5^T (99.16%), *M. sediminicola* DSM M. humi 45794^T (99.16%), *M. oryzae* CP2R9-1^T (99.16%) and *M. mangrove* 2803GPT1-18^T (99.16%). In addition, neighbour-joining phylogeny confirmed that strain GcL-T2-2 formed a phyletic line within Micromonospora. Biological screening for antimicrobial and cytotoxic activities, ethyl acetate crude extract of Micromonospora sp. GcL-T2-2 exhibited activity against Bacillus cereus and NCI-H187 tumor cells at MIC of 50 µg/mL and IC₅₀ of 48.12 µg/mL, respectively. The Garcinia cowa associated Streptomyces strain GcLT1-1 exhibited cytotoxic activity with NCI-H187 tumor cells at the IC₅₀ value of 43.20 μ g/mL. However, antagonistic activity against Alternaria brassicicola and Colletotrichum acutatum was an inactive result that displayed MIC value of more than 50 μ g/mL.

Keywords: Actinomycetes, Biological activity, Endophytes, Garcinia cowa

Introduction

Actinomycetes are filamentous bacterial group, that contain high G+C DNA content. These bacteria constitute one of the largest bacterial phylum (phylum *Actinomycetota*), which can be ubiquitously found in terrestrial soil, in addition they were isolated from other source such as marine organisms, animals, and plants (AbdElgawad *et al.*, 2020; Word and Bora, 2006; Supong *et al.*, 2023; Supong *et al.*,

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2024). Actinomycetes are an interesting microbial sources of antibiotics and biologically active compounds that are diverse immense chemical structure and biological activity, in addition, many of which have applications in biotechnology, medicine, and agriculture (Afzali et al., 2021; Nazari et al., 2022). Generally, endophytic actinomycetes are mostly classified as *Streptomyces* that are widely associated with hosts. Some *Streptomyces* are associated strains with specific plants. In addition, some actinomycete groups are mutualists and display properties for plant growth factors and phytohormone producers (Nair and Padmavathy, 2014). To date, more than 10 genera of filamentous actinobacteria have been isolated from various plants (Jiang et al., 2018; Singh and Dubey, 2018) that comprised a major family Streptomycetaceae (genus Streptomyces) (Cheng et al., 2014; Worsley et al., 2020), along with other groups such as Actinoplanes, Micromonospora and Mangrovihabitans belong to Micromonosporaceae (Shen et al., 2013; Ortúzar et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2017), family Nocardioidaceae comprised Marmoricola, Nocardioides, (Jiang et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2022), Amycolatopsis and Pseudonocardia (Boonsnongcheep et al., 2017; Salam et al., 2017), and a new genus Wangella within a family Streptosporangiaceae (Jia et al., 2013). The diversity of medicinal plants-associated actinomycetes is an interesting source for their biotechnological applications, which has been the focus of several studies (Nalini and Prakash, 2017). Accumulating endophytic actinomycetes were especially isolated from medicinal plants, which had a promising new source of biologically active metabolites with antimicrobial, antiviral, anticancer, and anti-inflammatory properties (Viaene et al., 2016). In addition, actinobacterial sources have also received much attention for agriculture technology, which used to control phytopathogens and used as plant-growth-promoting agents (Shimizu, 2011).

Garcinia cowa Roxb. belongs to the family Clusiaceae, and is widely distributed in Southeast Asia countries such as India, the Philippines, Japan, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Thailand (Delhi: CSIR, 1956; Lim, 2012; Atreya and Shrestha, 2020). G. cowa Roxb, commonly known as Cha-muang in Thai, presents thick dark green leaves with glossy leaf surfaces (Bewal *et al.*, 2023). In Thailand, this plant is used in Thai food (such as Moo Cha-muang, a common Thai curry from Chanthaburi province), ingredient, and traditional medicine. Cha-muang is a source of secondary metabolites that comprises flavonoid, steroid, terpenoid, alkaloid, and xanthone compounds, which exhibit activity against bacteria, antioxidant and anti- α -glucosidase activities (Tinrat, 2022; Sriyatep *et al.*, 2015; Mahabusarakam *et al.*, 2005).

In this study, two endophytic actinomycete strains, GcL-T1-1 and GcL-T2-2, were isolated from *G. cowa* Roxb. The isolated strains were screened for biological activity and characterized morphological, physiological, partial chemotaxonomic, and molecular properties. Screening of biological activity, ethyl acetate crude extract of

the endophytic strains was assayed for anti-bacterial, anti-phytopathogenic and cytotoxic activities.

Materials and methods

Isolation and cultivation of endophytic actinomycetes

Actinomycetes were isolated from a leaf sample of *G. cowa* Roxb. collected in Chanthaburi province, Thailand (12.8377810, 102.1137192). For preparation and isolation methods, the left sample was washed with sterile distilled water three times and dried. Then, small pieces of the sample were prepared for surface-sterilized conditions according to the previously reported protocol (Supong *et al.* 2016). The crushed sample was diluted in 0.85% (w/v) NaCl solution, and the diluted suspension was spread on the isolation half-diluted ISP 2 agar medium (1 L of distilled water; 2 g glucose, 2 g yeast extract, 5 g malt extract, and 18 g agar, pH 7–8), the isolation medium supplemented with nalidixic acid and cycloheximide. After incubation at 30 °C for 21 days, the actinobacterial colonies were selected and sub-cultured onto ISP2 agar to give pure culture. The actinomycete strains (GcL-T1-1 and GcLT2-2) were preserved on ISP 2 slants and freeze-dried for long-term storage.

Morphological and physiological characterization

The substrate and aerial mycelia, and sporulation of the strains were characterized using light microscope, after activated on ISP2 agar medium for 14 days. The actinomycets were cultured on the International *Streptomyces* project ISP no. 1–7 and nutrient agar, incubated at 30 °C for 14 days to determine the cultural characteristics. The color of mycelia and the soluble pigment were compared with the ISCC–NBS Color Charts standard sample no. 2106 (Kelly, 1964). Determination of sugar degradation using the standard media was described by Shirling and Gottlieb (1966). Hydrolysis of starch and gelatin, peptonization, and reduction of potassium nitrate were determined using the methods described by Arai (1975) and Williams and Cross (1971). To determine the effect of temperature (10–50 °C), pH (0–12), and NaCl concentration (w/v, 0–10) for growth were tested on ISP 2 agar for 2 weeks.

Chemotaxonomic characterization

Preparation of biomass for diaminopimelic acid analysis, the actinobacterial strain was inoculated into ISP 2 broth and incubated at 30 °C for 7 days with a rotary shaker (200 rpm.). The culture broth was centrifuged and washed three times with

distilled water, and then the isomer of diaminopimelic acid was extracted, separated, and determined using TLC plate (Staneck and Robert, 1974).

16S rRNA gene sequences and phylogenetic analysis

The selected actinomycete, strain GcL-T2-2, was subjected to genotypic characteristics based on 16S rRNA gene and phylogenetic analysis. The 16S rRNA gene of the strain was amplified to give the target PCR product using universal 27F and 1492R primers (Inahashi *et al.*, 2010). The PCR product of the 16S rRNA gene was sequenced using primers 785F (5'-GGATTAGATACCCTGGTA-3') and 907R (5'-CCGTCAATTCMTTTRAGTTT-3'). BLAST sequences to determine the similarity values were compared and analyzed using GenBank and EzBioCloud DataBase (Yoon *et al.*, 2017). Then, the closely related sequences were selected and manually aligned using BioEdit (Ibis Biosciences). In addition, gaps and ambiguous nucleotides were eliminated before the data were used to analyze phylogenetic evolution. Phylogenetic tree based on the 16S rRNA gene was constructed with neighbor-joining (NJ) method (Saitou and Nei, 1987), and that analyzed using MEGA 11 (Tamura *et al.*, 2021). The bootstrap values at 1000 replicates were used as a stability of each tree topology (Felsenstein, 1985).

Screening of biological activity

The stock culture of actinomycete strains GcL-T1-1 and GcL-T2-2 was activated on ISP 2 agar and incubated at 30 °C for 4 days. Preparation of seed culture, the stock culture was inoculated into 250 mL Erlenmeyer flasks that contained 100 mL of ISP 2 broth. After incubation at 30 °C for 4 days with shaking conditions, the culture was transferred into 500 mL Erlenmeyer fermented flasks that contained 200 mL of broth medium/flask. After fermentation at 30 °C on a rotary shaker at the rate of 200 rpm. for 2 weeks, the whole culture was extracted three times with organic solvent (ethyl acetate, EtOAc) to give the EtOAc extract solution. The extract solution was dried over with sodium sulfate anhydrous and evaporated to the dryness of a crude extract. The crude extract was used to test with anti-bacterial, anti-phytopathogenic and cytotoxic activities. The maximum concentration of crude extract was 50 µg/mL, used to test biological activities.

Antagonistic activity against *Alternaria basilica* and *Colletotrichum acutatum* was assayed by carboxy-fluorescein diacetate (CFDA) fluorometric detection (Aremu *et al.*, 2023; Guarro *et al.*, 1998; Haugland *et al.*, 2002). Preparation and spore activation, the spore suspension of the fungus was added into a well plate and incubated at 30 °C for 3 hr. The activated spores were mixed with the crude sample and incubated at 30 °C for 18 hr. Then, the mixture was added with a

cocktail solution that comprised CFDA and glycerol, and the mixture solution was incubated for 5–10 min in the dark at room temperature. After that, the well plate was whashed and added sterile distilled water, and measured the absorption at 485 nm and 535 nm. Calculation of inhibited percentage was analyzed by a formular 1 - [(FUT / FUC)] × 100, where FUT and FUC are the fluorescent units from cells tested with the crude sample and solvent (0.5% DMSO), respectively. The inhibition values less than 90% and more than 90% were reported as inactive and positive results, respectively. In this test, MIC value was represented the lowest concentration of positive result.

Anti-bacterial activity (*Acinetobacter baumannii*, *Bacillus cereus*, and *Staphylococcus aureus*) was analysed by the standard broth microdilution assay (Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute, 2006). The crude extract and bacterial suspension mixture were added to a 384-well plate and incubated at 37 °C for 5 hr. Then, the optical density (OD) of the preparated sample test was determined by using a microplate reader at 600 nm. Inhibition values (%) were calculated following the formula $[1 - [(FUT / FUC)] \times 100$, where FUT and FUC are fluorescent units from bacterial cells and crude samples, respectively. Analysis of Inhibition results, the value less than 90% was reported as an inactive result. In addition, the minimum inhibitory concentration (MIC) was defined as the lowest concentration of the test sample with the inhibition values more than 90%.

The green fluorescent protein microplate assay (GFPMA) was used for assey anti-*Mycobacterium tuberculosis* strain H37Ra and cytotoxic activity against noncancerous cells (African green monkey kidney fibroblasts, Vero cells) (Changsen *et al.*, 2003). In addition, cytotoxic activity against tumor cells that comprised KB (oral human epidermoid carcinoma), MCF-7 (human breast cancer), and NCI-H187 (human small cell lung cancer), which were investigated by resazurin microplate assay (REMA) (O'Brien *et al.*, 2000). For anti-*M. tuberculosis*, minimum inhibitory concentration (MIC) defied the lowest concentration of the crude sample and displayed more than 90% inhibition. The IC₅₀ value was the concentration for inhibition of 50% with tested cells according to the dose-response curve, which plotted between the concentrations of the test crude and inhibition value (%) with the curve-fitting method.

Results

Isolation and characterization of the endophytic actinomycetes

Two endophytic actinomycetes, strains, designed GcL-T1-1 and GcL-T2-2, were isolated from the leaf of *G. cowa* Roxb., collected in Chanthaburi province, Thailand. Based on morphological characteristics, strain GcL-T1-1 produced

substrate mycelium, and aerial hyphae on ISP 2 agar that presented the spore chain on the mycelium. However, strain GcLT2-2 produced single spores on the substrate hyphae but did not show aerial hyphae on ISP 2 agar. Strain GcL-T2-2 presented only grayish brown substrate mycelium on ISP2 (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Characteristics of colony and hyphae of strains GcL-T1-1 (A, B) and GcL-T2-2 (C, D) grew on ISP2 agar

The cultural characteristics based on the ISP media revealed that strains GcL-T1-1 and GcL-T2-2 grew well on oatmeal agar (ISP 3) but poorly grew on ISP 1. An endophytic actinomycete strain GcLT1-1 grew moderately on ISP 2, ISP 4, ISP 5, ISP 6, and nutrient agars. Generally, strain GcLT2-2 was poor on ISP 5, ISP 6, ISP 7, and nutrient agar. This strain showed yellowish white aerial hyphae and pale yellow substrate hyphae that generally appeared white to pale yellow colonies on the standard ISP medium. The color of strain GcL-T2-2 colony formed brilliant orange-yellow to dark orange-yellow on ISP 1, ISP 2, ISP 3, ISP 4, ISP 6, and nutrient agar, but it showed white mycelium on ISP 5 and ISP 7. However, strains GcL-T1-1 and GcL-T2-2 could not produce the soluble pigment on the culture media (Table 1).

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Table 1. Cultural characteristics of strains GcL-T1-1 and GcL-T2-2

The effect of temperature for growth, strains GcL-T1-1 and GcL-T2-2 were mesophilic group that grew at 20–40 °C (optimum growth at 30 °C). The pH ranging of them was 4–10, and pH 7 was optimum condition for growth. The maximum NaCl concentration for growth of strains GcL-T1-1 was 4% (w/v) but strain GcL-T2-2 was 2% (w/v). Strain GcL-T1-1 could hydrolyze soluble starch, gelatin and reduce nitrate to nitrite. In addition, carbon utilization result showed that strain GcL-T1-1 utilized

monosaccharides D-fructode, D-galactose, D-glucose, D-xylose and L-arabinose, and disaccharides lactose and sucrose. Strain GcL-T2-2 showed positive results for carbon degradation only D-galactose, D-glucose, D-xylose, and L-arabinose (Table 2). Using morphological data revealed that these bacterial strains formed filamentous cells, strain GcLT2-2 presented only substrate mycelium but strain GcLT1-T produced both substrate and aerial mycelium.

Characteristics	GcL-T1-1	GcL-T2-2
Gelatin liquefaction	+	-
Growth temperature (°C)	20-40	20-40
Milk coagulation	+	-
Milk peptonization	-	-
NaCl tolerance (maximum, %)	4	2
Nitrate reduction	+	-
pH range	4-10	4–10
Starch hydrolysis	+	-
Utilization of:		
D-Fructose	+	-
D-Galactose	+	+
D-Glucose	+	+
D-Raffinose	-	-
D-Xylose	+	+
L-Arabinose	+	+
Lactose	+	-
Sucrose	+	-

Table 2. Biochemical and physiological characteristics of strains GcL-T1-1 and GcL-T2-2

+: Positive

w: weakly positive

-: Negative

Cell wall analysis based on diamino pimeric acid (DAP) isomer, strains GcL-T1-1 displayed *LL*-DAP, while GcL-T2-2 exhibited *meso*-DAP. On the basis of chemotaxonomic results, strain GcL-T1-1 was identified as *Streptomyces* that classified to the family *Streptomycetaceae*, but strain GcL-T2-2 was a nonstreptomycete group. To evaluate the genus level, strain GcL-T2-2 was determined using molecular identification based on 16S rRNA gene sequence, which comprised 1437 bp. Comparison of 16S rRNA gene sequences between strain GcL-T2-2 and the selected closely related type strains of *Micromonospora* species indicated that strain GcL-T2-2 displayed the highest similarity value with *M. schwarzwaldensis* HKI0641^T at 99.93%, following *M. haikouensisother* 232617^T at 99.23% and related other species at 98.82–99.16% (Table 3).

Rank	Closely related species	Strain	Similarity (%)
1	Micromonospora schwarzwaldensis	HKI0641 ^T	99.93
2	Micromonospora haikouensis	232617 ^T	99.23
3	Micromonospora humi	DSM 45647 ^T	99.16
4	Micromonospora maritima	D10-9-5 ^T	99.16
5	Micromonospora sediminicola	DSM 45794 ^T	99.16
6	Micromonospora oryzae	$CP2R9-1^{T}$	99.16
7	Micromonospora mangrovi	2803GPT1-18 ^T	99.16
8	Micromonospora harpali	NEAU-JC6 ^T	99.09
9	Micromonospora siamensis	DSM 45097 ^T	99.02
10	Micromonospora zhangzhouensis	HM134 ^T	99.02
11	Micromonospora carbonacea	DSM 43168 ^T	98.88
12	Micromonospora marina	DSM 45555 ^T	98.88
13	Micromonospora wenchangensis	2602GPT1-05 ^T	98.88
14	Micromonospora chalcea	DSM 43026 ^T	98.82
15	Micromonospora halophytica	DSM 43171 ^T	98.82

Table 3. Similarity values (%) of strain GcLT2-2 and related *Micromonospora*

The neighbor-joining phylogenetic tree analysis revealed that GcL-T2-2 was classified to the genus *Micromonospora* and formed a cluster with *M. schwarzwaldensis* HKI0641^T (Figure 2). The results of a partial taxonomic study, an endophytic actinomycete strain GcL-T2-2 was identified as *M. schwarzwaldensis*. However, the basic taxonomy of species level should be compared to the polyphasic taxonomy based on properties between strain GcL-T2-2 and highly related species *M. schwarzwaldensis* by using phenotype, chemotaxonomy, and genotype using whole-genome analysis. For morphological results, strain GcL-T2-2 and *M. schwarzwaldensis* HKI0641^T formed orange colonies, and well-developed spores and branched substrate hyphae bear black on the ISP 2 agar.

Biological activity

To screen the biological activity of the endophytic actinomycetes, *Micromonospora* strain GcL-T2-2 exhibited activity against Gram-positive *B. cereus* and *C. acutatum* using the dual culture technique. This strain showed weak activity with the inhibition zone at 3 mm. Crude extract of strain GcL-T1-1 showed inactive activity (MIC values more than 50 μ g/mL) with Gram-positive *B. cereus*, *S. aureus*, and Gram-negative *A. baumanniiwas* (Table 4). Anti-bacterial activity against *B. cereus* was found in the crude extract of an endophytic *Micromonospora* strain GcL-T2-2 that showed activity with the MIC value of 50 μ g/mL. However, anti-fungal activity against plant phytopathogens had negative results with a MIC value of more than 50 μ g/mL (Table 4). On the other hand, crude EtOAc extract of GcL-T1-1 and GcL-T2-2 showed weak cytotoxicity against tumor cells (NCI-H187) with the IC₅₀ of 43.20 and 48.12 μ g/ml, respectively (Table 5).



Figure 2. Neighbour-joining phyloginetic tree of strain GcL-T2-2 and closely related *Micromonospora* species based on 16S rRNA gene sequences. Bootstrap values are expressed as a percentage of 1,000 replications. Bar, 0.001 substitutions per nucleotide position

Compound	Anti-bacterial (MIC, μg/mL)				
Compound	B. cereus	S. aureus	A. baumannnii	M. tuberculosis	
Crude-GcL-T1-1	inactive	inactive	Inactive		
Crude-GcLT2-2	50.00	inactive	Inactive		
Rifampicin *	0.20	0.02	3.13		
Erythromycin*			25.00		
Vancomycin *	4.00	2.00		2.00	
Ofloxacin*				0.39	
Rifampicin*				6.25 x 10 ⁻³	
Isoniazid*				9.38 10 ⁻²	
Streptomycin*				0.63	
* positive contro	als				

Table 4. Anti-bacterial activity

Inactive MIC >50 wa/m

Inactive, MIC >50 μ g/mL

Table 5. Anti-fungal and cytotoxic activities

Commons	Anti-fungal (MIC, μg/mL)		Cytoto	Cytotoxicity (IC50, µg/mL)		
Compound	A. brassicicola	C. acutatum	McF7	NCI- H187	Vero	
Crude-GcLT2-2	inactive	inactive	inactive	43.20	inactive	
Crude-GcLT1-1	inactive	inactive	inactive	48.12	inactive	
Amphotericin B*	0.78	3.13				
Ellipticine*				3.19	1.33	
Doxorubicin*			8.26	0.17		
Tamoxifen*			10.44			

*, positive control

Inactive, MIC >50 µg/mL

Discussion

In some cases, plants may be able to recruit beneficial microorganisms that could inhibit phytopathogens through a range of biological mechanisms, including competition for nutrients, production of bioactive secondary natural compounds, and induction of plant resistance (Wang *et al.*, 2023). In addition, the endophytic microorganisms can produce biological sources that are used for plant growth-promoting agents such as auxin phytohormones family (indole-3-acetic acid, IAA) and siderophores (Hernández *et al.*, 2023; Sitlaothaworn *et al.*, 2023). In this study, plant-associated actinomycete strains, GcLT1-1 and GcLT2-2, were isolated from a leaf of *G. cowa* Roxb., these strains were characterized and screened to determine the biological activity. Characteristics of the isolated strains based on phenotypic and partial chemotaxonomic with

diaminopimeric acid data presented that strain GcLT1-1 produced branched substrate hyphae and developed spores on the aerial hyphae. This strain belonged to the genus Streptomyces which contained LL-DAP in the peptidoglycan of the cell wall. This genus contained cell-wall type I with no diagnostic sugar of bacterial whole-cell hydrolysates (Nouioui et al., 2018). Based on phenotypic and DAP isomer analysis, an endophytic strain GcLT2-2 could not identify to the genus level that it was confirmed by genotypic data using 16S rRNA gene sequence. BLAST and phylogenetic results indicated that strain GcLT2-2 classified to the genus Micromonospora, showed the highest similarity with M. schwarzwaldensis HKI0641^T at 99.93%. As previously reported, M. schwarzwaldensis was isolated from soil (Gurovic et al., 2013). This species produced anti-Staphylococcus aureus telomycin antibiotic. To delineate the separated species level, strain GcLT2-2 should compare the genomic data with the closely related species and display the digital DNA-DNA Hybridization (dDDH) values significantly lower than the threshold value of 70 % (Wayne et al., 1987). In this study, strain GcLT2-2 and closely related M. schwarzwaldensis showed inactive activity against Bacillus cereus with a MIC value of more than 50 µg/mL. Investigation of Biological activity of *Streptomyces* sp. strain GcLT1-1, crude extract exhibited only cytotoxicity against NCI-H187 with IC_{50} values 43.20 µg/ml.

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