

MOLECULAR CHARACTERIZATION OF LOCAL ISOLATES OF
ACANTHAMOEBA spp.

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**MOLECULAR CHARACTERIZATION OF LOCAL ISOLATES OF
ACANTHAMOEBA spp.**

SITI RUHAYA BINTI ABDUL MANAF

**Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirement for the
Degree of Master of Science in the Faculty of Science and Technology
Universiti Malaysia Terengganu**

November 2006

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Abstract of Thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Malaysia Terengganu in
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science.

MOLECULAR CHARACTERIZATION OF LOCAL ISOLATES OF
ACANTHAMOEBA spp.

STI RUKAYA BINTI ABDUL MANAP

November 2006

Chairman : Associate Professor Nakhiah Binti Mat Amin, Ph.D.

Member : Professor Abdul Malek Bin Ali, Ph.D.

Faculty : Science and Technology

The genus of *Acanthamoeba* consists of many species of amoebae and they are found in various habitats such as soil, water, free-living. These amoebae can infect humans and a variety of mammals.

A special dedication to;
My beloved husband,
Abdul Wahab Bin Abdullah

The taxonomy and classification of *Acanthamoeba* is still unclear and under review.

Although, the genus *Acanthamoeba* is easily identified by observing their morphological characters, the identification of this organisms proved to be more difficult. Therefore, other new, refined and reliable techniques such as biochemical and molecular approaches should also be incorporated to resolve its taxonomy and classification problems.

Various molecular biology techniques have been applied in this study to characterize isolates of *Acanthamoeba* using the developed DNA fingerprinting markers. The DNA markers developed in this study were then used to identify their species group. The markers obtained from the known specific primers, JDP1 and JDP2 were also used to detect the pathogenic gene of *Acanthamoeba* spp. tested.

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**MOLECULAR CHARACTERIZATION OF LOCAL ISOLATES OF
ACANTHAMOEBA spp.**

SITI RUHAYA BINTI ABDUL MANAF

November 2006

Chairman: Associate Professor Nakisah Binti Mat Amin, Ph.D.

Member : Professor Abdul Manaf Bin Ali, Ph.D.

Faculty : Science and Technology

The genus of *Acanthamoeba* comprises several species of amoebae and they are found in various habitats. Although free-living, these amoebae can infect humans and a variety of mammals and may invade brain, eyes, skin, bones and lungs. The taxonomy and classification of *Acanthamoeba* is still unclear and under review. Although, the genus *Acanthamoeba* can easily be classified by observing their morphological characteristics, but to differentiate the species of this organism proved to be more difficult. Therefore, other new, refined and reliable techniques such as biochemical and molecular approaches should also be incorporated to resolve its taxonomy and classification problems.

Various molecular biology techniques have been applied in this study to characterize isolates of *Acanthamoeba* using the developed DNA fingerprinting markers. The DNA markers developed in this study were then used to identify their species group. The markers obtained from the known specific primers, JDP1 and JDP2 were also used to detect the pathogenic gene of *Acanthamoeba* spp. tested.

A total of nine isolates of *Acanthamoeba*, including two reference strains were analyzed for their genetic variability using PCR-RAPD and PCR-based RFLP techniques. Genetic diversity among the isolates of *Acanthamoeba* was examined by genetic distance measurement using UPGMA clustering method. Although the DNA pattern bands in both the PCR-based analyses generated small differences between the isolates, the constructed dendrogram cluster revealed significant genetic distances. Thus the isolates used in this study are very closely related to each other. Therefore PCR-RAPD and PCR-based RFLP techniques followed by clustering tree analyses are useful tools for rapid characterization of new *Acanthamoeba* isolates and for assessment of genetic relatedness and differentiation among closely related isolates of *Acanthamoeba*.

The use of nuclear 18S rDNA genes to study the phylogeny of *Acanthamoeba* has been employed to improve the classification of this genus. Therefore, analysis of *Acanthamoeba* genus using specific primers based on 18S rDNA using primer FP16-RP16 and primer JDP1-JDP2 was performed to distinguish between the genus of *Acanthamoeba* and the other genera of amoebae. The results showed that all the *Acanthamoeba* isolates tested generated PCR products with a strong and clear single band at approximately 1,500 bp (for primer FP16-RP16) and 500 bp (for primer JDP1-JDP2), while genus *Hartmannella* did not show any band. A sequence analysis of the partial 18S rDNA gene of the nine isolates of *Acanthamoeba* revealed a high percentage of homology (95% and above with primer FP16-RP16, and 97% and above with primer JDP1-JDP2) compared with 18S rDNA gene sequences of *Acanthamoeba* strain deposited in the GenBank. Thus this supported the earlier findings using PCR-RAPD and PCR-based RFLP that the nine isolates tested belong

to genus of *Acanthamoeba*. The partial 18S rDNA and region df3 sequence data were also used in the species identification. The identification was done by the sequence alignment between the isolates tested and the sequences obtained in the GenBank database. The sequence alignment has successfully identified the species of four isolates from seven unknown isolates of *Acanthamoeba* tested.

In this study, molecular biology approaches were also employed to detect the pathogenic gene in *Acanthamoeba* isolates. Previous studies indicated that most of the genotype T4 from 18S rDNA in *Acanthamoeba* belongs to strains isolated from keratitis cases and classified as pathogenic *Acanthamoeba*. In this study, primer JDP1 was used to obtain the partial sequence of 18S rDNA for genotype T4 sequence alignment analysis. The results from this study indicated that six of the *Acanthamoeba* isolates tested showed the presence of genotype T4 sequence suggesting the pathogenic potential of these isolates. They were two reference strains, *Acanthamoeba castellanii* CCAP 1501/2A and *Acanthamoeba polyphaga* CCAP 1501/3A; two clinical isolates, *Acanthamoeba* AC IMR and *Acanthamoeba* AK; and two environmental isolates, *Acanthamoeba* AP and *Acanthamoeba* AW1.

To conclude, based on this study PCR-based techniques were proven to be very useful for the phylogenetic differentiation, the characterization of new *Acanthamoeba*, species identification, pathogenicity detection and the tracing of the geographical distribution of the isolates.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Malaysia Terengganu sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains.

**PENCIRIAN MOLEKUL TERHADAP ISOLAT TEMPATAN,
'ACANTHAMOEBA spp.**

SITI RUHAYA BINTI ABDUL MANAF

November 2006

Pengerusi: Profesor Madya Nakisah Binti Mat Amin, Ph.D.

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Genus *Acanthamoeba* terdiri dari beberapa spesies ameba yang boleh ditemui di kebanyakan habitat. Walaupun hidup bebas, ameba ini berupaya mendatangkan penyakit kepada manusia dan mamalia dengan memasuki otak, mata, kulit, tulang, dan paru-paru. Pengkelasan dan taksonomi *Acanthamoeba* masih tidak jelas dan masih dikaji. Walaupun diperingkat genus *Acanthameba* mudah dikenali melalui ciri-ciri luarannya, tetapi diperingkat spesies *Acanthamoeba* masih sukar untuk dibezakan. Oleh yang demikian, teknik yang terkini, diperbaharui, dan lebih baik seperti pendekatan biokimia dan molekul diperlukan dalam menyelesaikan masalah pengkelasan dan taksonomi *Acanthamoeba*.

Pelbagai teknik biologi molekul telah digunakan dalam kajian ini untuk mencirikan isolat *Acanthamoeba* melalui pembangunan penanda jejari DNA. Pembangunan penanda DNA ini juga telah digunakan untuk mengenalpasti spesies isolat ujian. Penanda DNA yang diperolehi dari pencetus khas yang diketahui, JDP1 dan JDP2 telah digunakan untuk mengesan gen patogenik pada *Acanthamoeba* spp. ujian.

Sejumlah sembilan isolat *Acanthameoba* termasuk dua strain rujukan dianalisa kepelbagaian genetiknya menggunakan teknik RAPD-PCR dan RFLP-berdasarkan PCR. Kepelbagaian jarak genetik di antara isolat *Acanthamoeba* telah diukur menggunakan kaedah perkumpulan UPGMA. Walaupun corak jejalur DNA pada kedua-dua analisis berdasarkan PCR yang dijalankan menghasilkan perbezaan yang kecil, tetapi perkumpulan dendrogram telah menunjukkan jarak hubungan genetik yang signifikan. Maka dapat disimpulkan bahawa isolat yang digunakan dalam kajian ini merupakan isolat yang berhubungkait. Oleh yang demikian teknik RAPD-PCR dan teknik RFLP-berdasarkan PCR diikuti dengan analisis perkumpulan adalah sangat berguna dalam mengenalpasti isolat baru *Acanthamoeba* dan dalam penilaian perhubungan genetik diantara isolat tersebut.

Penggunaan gen nuklear 18S rDNA dalam kajian filogeni *Acanthamoeba* telah digunakan dalam memperbaiki pengelasan genus *Acanthamoeba*. Oleh itu, analisis pencetus khas bagi genus *Acanthamoeba* berdasarkan gen 18S rDNA menggunakan pencetus FP16-RP16 dan pencetus JDP1-JDP2 telah dijalankan untuk membezakan genus *Acanthamoeba* dari genera ameba yang lain. Dari keputusan yang diperolehi menunjukkan semua isolat *Acanthamoeba* ujian telah menghasilkan produk PCR dengan satu jalur yang terang dan jelas pada saiz molekul lebih kurang 1,500 bp (Pencetus FP16-RP16) dan 500 bp (Pencetus JDP1-JDP2), manakala genus *Hartmannella* tidak menghasilkan sebarang jalur. Analisis penjujukan sebahagian dari gen 18S rDNA terhadap sembilan isolat *Acanthamoeba* ujian juga menunjukkan peratusan persamaan yang tinggi (95% ke atas dengan pencetus FP16 dan 97% ke atas dengan pencetus JDP1) apabila dibandingkan dengan jujukan didalam data GenBank. Keputusan ini menyokong penemuan ujian RAPD- PCR dan RFLP-

berdasarkan PCR dalam kajian sebelumnya, yang mana semua sembilan isolat ujian adalah merupakan genus *Acanthamoeba*. Jujukan gen 18S rDNA dan gen bahagian df3 juga telah digunakan dalam mengenalpasti kumpulan spesies. Pengenalpastian dilakukan dengan menjajarkan jujukan isolat ujian dengan data jujukan didalam GenBank. Dari penjajaran yang dijalankan telah dapat mengenalpasti spesies bagi empat isolat *Acanthamoeba* dari tujuh isolat ujian yang tidak diketahui spesiesnya.

Dalam kajian ini, pendekatan biologi molekul juga telah digunakan untuk mengesan kehadiran gen patogenik dalam isolat *Acanthamoeba*. Sebelum ini telah dikenalpasti kebanyakan gen jenis T4 dalam 18S rDNA *Acanthamoeba*, dimiliki oleh strain yang telah diasingkan dari kes-kes keratitis dan terdiri dari *Acanthamoeba* yang patogen. Dalam kajian ini, pencetus JDP1 telah digunakan untuk menghasilkan sebahagian jujukan 18S rDNA bagi analisis penjajaran jujukan gen jenis T4. Dari keputusan kajian menunjukkan enam isolat *Acanthamoeba* yang diuji memiliki jujukan gen jenis T4, ini menunjukkan bahawa isolat-isolat ini berkeupayaan untuk menjadi patogen. Isolat-isolat tersebut adalah, dua strain rujukan, *Acanthamoeba castellanii* CCAP 1501/2A dan *Acanthamoeba polyphaga* CCAP 1501/3A; dua isolat klinikal, *Acanthamoeba* AC IMR dan *Acanthamoeba* AK; dan dua isolat dari habitat semulajadi, *Acanthamoeba* AP dan *Acanthamoeba* AW1.

Berdasarkan keputusan yang diperolehi dari keseluruhan kajian ini membuktikan bahawa teknik-teknik berdasarkan PCR adalah sangat berguna dalam membezakan hubungan filogenetik *Acanthamoeba*, mengenalpasti isolat baru, mengenalpasti kumpulan spesies, untuk pengesan gen patogenik dan untuk mengesan taburan geografi isolat-isolat yang diuji .