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Tolerance of banana for fusarium wilt is associated with early H$_2$O$_2$ accumulation in the roots

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Banana plants derived from a tissue culture process possess a high rate of random variations that were widely used as popular cultivars due to the new desired traits. In this study, two near-isogenic lines, one susceptible (parental Williams-8818) and the other resistant (somaclonal variation progeny Williams-8818-1 from Williams-8818) to *Fusarium oxysporum* f. sp. *Cubense* (Foc4), were inoculated with race 4 of *F. oxysporum* (Fox). Production of O$_2$$^•$−, H$_2$O$_2$ and MDA, as well as changes in enzyme activities, and transcript levels of SOD and CAT in root extracts were monitored every 24 h over 4 days. The histochemical location of H$_2$O$_2$ was also detected. In the resistant iso-line, the accumulation of O$_2$$^•$− and H$_2$O$_2$, and the activation of SOD occurred in the first 24 h, but activation of CAT reached its maximum only after 48 h. All changes were generally lower in the susceptible iso-line when compared to the resistant iso-line. SOD transcripts were further up-regulated until 72 h in the resistant iso-line, but not in the susceptible iso-line. CAT expression was not affected in any of the two iso-lines. This suggests that expressions of the two key genes in the antioxidant system are less suitable indicators for Foc resistance in banana. In contrast, the first “oxidative burst” is a better indicator for different susceptibility of banana to Foc.

Key words: Banana, *Fusarium oxysporum*, catalase, reactive oxygen species, somaclonal variation, disease resistance.

INTRODUCTION

Banana (*Musa acuminata*) is one of the most important food crops in the world. It provides a staple food and source of income in many households especially in Africa (Jones, 2000). However, in the past decades, banana production worldwide was under the threat of *Fusarium oxysporum*, a plant fungal pathogen causing root rot, or wilt diseases in several plant species, such as tomato (*Solanum lycopersicum*), banana, and asparagus (*Asparagus officinalis*) (Di Pietro, 2003). *F. oxysporum* Schlechtend.:Fr. f. sp. *cubense* (E.F. Smith) Snyder & Hansen (Foc) is the major banana colonizer. It was first reported in Panama as early as 1890, and is now commonly known as the causal agent of the Panama disease. Among all the races, race 4 of *F. oxysporum* f. sp. *cubense* (Foc4) is the most notorious slaughterer, which destroyed thousands of hectares of bananas in tropical and subtropical countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Vietnam and China (Hwang and Ko, 2004; Viljoen, 2002).

Typically, the first symptom of infected plant is yellowing of the lower leaves. This begins along the margin, and sprawls toward the midribs. The leaf subsequently develops brown spots of various shapes and sizes, and the petiole turns brown and buckles. Yellowing and buckling progresses from older to younger leaves resulting to the death of the entire plant (Su et al., 1986). Once it invades its hosts, Foc can persist in affected fields for an extended period of time on plant surfaces as macroconidia, or even survive on soils as dormant chlamydospores in the absence of a suitable host plant, rendering the plots unsuitable for banana planting for several years (Berrocal-Lobo and Molina, 2007). Many efforts have been made to deal with this disease. Unfortunately, neither fungicide application, nor practice system, nor biological control with antagonistic bacteria
and fungi has received an optimum and grower-acceptable result, though the disease was inhibited to some extent. Therefore, it is now generally believed that the development of new resistant banana cultivars is the best way for the successful control of this disastrous disease.

Theoretically, disease resistant cultivars could be generated by means of conventional breeding, genetic transformation and somatic variation. However, cultivated banana varieties are mostly triploid and can only be propagated asexually, which makes them difficult to be improved genetically via cross-pollination (Pei et al., 2005). Moreover, this process is time-consuming and the final product often suffers from reluctance when recommended to consumers. Similarly, practices of the second method have also been hindered by the lack of resistance mechanisms, resistance markers, genetics of resistance, available resistance genes, and the poor regeneration rate during transformation (Kiggundu, 1999). In contrast, the third method is unexpectedly effective. In the past two decades, it has been widely used in countries like South Africa (De Beer et al., 2001), Malaysia (Ho et al., 2001) and China to obtain fusarium wilt resistant clones from their native banana cultivars, example two clones, GCTCV-215-1 and GCTCV-218 successfully rescued the banana industry in Taiwan from Foc4 damage (Hwang and Ko, 2004). However, this useful method is far from perfection due to its time-consuming and low efficiency in the early selection stage. To get rid of these obstacles requires probing into the basis of disease resistance and characterizing the early responses of plant attacked by *F. oxysporum*.

As it is well known, plants ward off pathogen infections by eliciting a wide array of defense strategies, which include reinforcement of the cell wall (Bradley et al., 1992), synthesis of phytoalexins (Hahlbrock and Scheel, 1989), and expression of defense-related genes (Bowles, 1990; Dixon and Harrison, 1990). These responses are usually associated with a rapid and transient production of reactive oxygen species (ROS), such as the superoxide anion radical (O$_2^-$), hydroxyl radical (‘OH) and hydrogen peroxide (H$_2$O$_2$). H$_2$O$_2$ is known to be an early messenger molecule in signaling cascades activated by several external and developmental stimuli (Lamb and Dixon, 1997; Bolwell, 1999). In the case of plant-pathogen interactions, it not only qualifies as the oxidative agent in killing, or inhibiting the growth of pathogens, but also it is centrally involved in the induction of pathogen defense genes, such as genes encoding pathogenesis-related (PR) proteins, genes regulating accumulation of phenylpropanoid compounds, and genes encoding ROS detoxifying enzymes (Levine et al., 1994; Schenk et al., 2000). For example, elevated levels of H$_2$O$_2$ mediated resistance to soft rot caused by *Erwinia carotovora* sp. *carotovara* in transgenic potato plants (Wu et al., 1995); early H$_2$O$_2$ accumulation in mesophyll cells led to hypersensitive cell death in resistance barley lines attacked by *Blumeria graminis* (Vanacker et al., 2000); early H$_2$O$_2$ accumulation was common in regulating gene expression and cell death induced by *Pseudomonas syringae* pv *syringae* in birch (Pellinen et al., 2002).

To date, plant-Foc interaction has been studied profusely in tomato. El-Khalil (2007) reported that production of ROS, mainly H$_2$O$_2$ and O$_2^-$, and activity of antioxidant enzymes (SOD, APX and CAT), increased in tomato leaves in the late stage of infection; Farag Hanaa et al. (2011) also found the increasing level of lipid peroxidation and marked increase in the activities of antioxidant defensive enzyme, that is, POX, CAT, and SOD in seedling plants. However, the early events of plant infection by Foc seem quite different. For example, ROS was quickly produced following Fox infection in *Arabidopsis*, which mediated cell death and might contribute to disease development (Berrocal-Lobo and Molina, 2007); whereas a rapid activation of anti-oxidative system was associated with restriction of *Fusarium oxysporum* f. sp. *asparagi* growth (He et al., 2001). These contradictory results indicate that the oxygen radical production and activation of the anti-oxidative system might have different effects depending on the interaction.

In order to establish biochemical markers for the identification of Foc resistance banana clones, Kavino et al. (2007) documented the roles of series of oxidative enzymes like peroxidase (PO), polyphenol oxidase (PPO), superoxide dismutase (SOD) and catalase at the late stage of infection, finding that their activity were relatively higher in resistant hybrids than susceptible hybrids. Obviously, the events that occurred in the early stage of infection might be the more key factors to determine a clone as the resistance one or not. As known, these early responses have not been reported in banana.

Williams-8818 is a popular banana cultivar wildly planted in China, but it is susceptible to Foc. In order to breed resistant line, we carried out a somaclonal variation project during which ethyl methane sulfonate (EMS) was used to mutate the Williams-8818 explants in tissue culture.

The survival plantlets from EMS treated experiments were planted in soil with controlled inoculum density in glasshouse for the selection of disease resistant clones. In turn, the second-, and third-generation (suckers) from the resistant clones were planted again in infected field for further test of the stability of resistance and other selected traits. Finally, a line named as Williams-8818-1 was obtained for its effectiveness in disease resistance in comparison with the GCTCV-218, and good agricultural traits comparable with its parental Williams-8818. Here, we reported that these two banana lines exhibited quite different responses against Foc4 during the early infection stage.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Race 4 of *F. oxysporum* f. sp. *Cubense* was collected from infested field in Xuwen city, Guangdong province, China. Two banana iso-
Treatment

Adventitious shoots of both susceptible and resistant iso-lines were propagated by tissue culture. Rooting seedlings were first planted in small plastic cups (250 mL) in glasshouse, T = 24 to 36°C. After about seven leaves, were transplanted to bigger plastic cups (2000 mL) for further growth for about two weeks. All the plantlets were later on finally cultivated using the “double-cup cultural system”—a device consisting of two plastic cups, of which a shallow inner cup (2000 mL) is suspending on a deep outer cup (3000 mL). The inner cup contains a plantlet, and the outer one holds about 800 mL MS medium at its bottom (Figure 1). This device enables the plantlet root system to go through the holes of inner cup, and grow well within the nutrient liquid of the outer cup.

Three weeks later, plantlets with well-developed roots were deemed suitable for inoculation. After gently crushing for wounds, the plantlet root system was inoculated by totally immersing into a sterile soil. The soil was replaced into the double-cup system containing 800 mL MS medium and kept in a separate greenhouse (T = 24 to 36°C) for root sampling (0, 24, 48, 72, and 96 h). Each sample consisted of six plantlets. The whole experiment was repeated three times.

Assay of O2•− production rate in roots

The method described by Elstner and Heupe (1976) was used to determine superoxide free radical (O2•−) generation rate by monitoring the nitrite formation from hydroxylamine in the presence of O2•−. The absorbance in the aqueous solution was read at 530 nm. A standard curve with NO2− was used to calculate the production rate of O2•− from the chemical reaction between O2•− and hydroxylamine.

Assays of hydrogen peroxide (H2O2) and malondialdehyde (MDA) contents in roots

Extraction of H2O2 from roots was done as described by Rao et al. (2000) with some modifications. Quantification of H2O2 was based on the method of Tana et al. (2009), and using an Amplex Red Hydrogen Peroxide Assay kit (Molecular Probes, Invitrogen Detection Technologies, Leiden, Netherlands). Briefly, 50 μL of extract was mixed with 50 μL of the solution containing 1 U·mL−1 horseradish peroxidase in 50 mmol·L−1 sodium phosphate buffer, pH 7.4. This was incubated for 15 min at 25°C. Fluorescence was measured with a fluorescence microplate reader (Fluostar Optima, BMG Labtechnologies, Germany) equipped for excitation at 520 nm and emission at 590 nm. Blank readings were taken before the reaction was initialized (T = 0 min). The concentration of H2O2 was calculated using a standard curve obtained with known concentrations of pure H2O2 (Molecular Probes) diluted in 0.2 mol·L−1 HClO4.

A modified thiobarbituric acid (TCA) reactive substance assay was used as an alternative assessment of lipid oxidation according to the method of Gutteridge and Wilkins (1982). Root (1.0 g) was ground in 80:20 ethanol:methanol (V/V) containing 0.01% (W/V) butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT). After centrifugation at 13000 × g for 15 min at 4°C, the supernatant was recovered (200 mL) and added to 1 mL of a solution of 20% (W/V) TCA and 0.01% (W/V) BHT containing 0.65% (W/V) thiobarbituric acid for 25 min at 95°C. After centrifugation, sample absorbance was measured at 532 nm. Blank measurements were performed using reagent solution without thiobarbituric acid. Nonspecific turbidity was subtracted from the 532 nm signal by using the measurements at 600 and 440 nm. The results were expressed as MDA equivalent.

Histochemical detection of H2O2 in root tips

Hydrogen peroxide production in roots was monitored using the H2O2-sensitive fluorescent probe H2DCFDA (Sigma, St Louis, MO, USA) as described by Desikan et al. (2002, 2004b). Root sample was floated in MES-KCl buffer (10 mmol·L−1 MES, 5 mmol·L−1 KCl, 50 mmol·L−1 CaCl2, pH 6.15) under light for 2 h, and then floated in the MES-KCl buffer containing 5 mM DMTU for scavenging of H2O2 under light for 25 min, followed by loading with 50 mmol·L−1 H2DCFDA for 15 min. After washing with MES-KCl buffer for 20 min, the epidermal fragments were visualized for imaging using Fluorescence microscope (OLYMPUS BX51, Tokyo, Japan).

Assays of superoxide dismutase (SOD) and catalase (CAT) activities in roots

Extraction of SOD and CAT in roots was based on the description of Mo et al. (2008). Roots (1.0 g) was ground in a mortar using a pestle in 5 mL of 50 mmol·L−1 cool phosphate buffer (pH 7.8). The homogenate was centrifuged at 13 000 × g for 15 min at 4°C and the supernatant was used for assays of antioxidant enzyme activities of SOD and CAT.

SOD activity was determined according to the method of Giannoplitis and Ries (1977) in a 3 mL reaction volume solution containing 13 μmol·L−1 methionine, 63 μmol·L−1 nitroblue tetrazolium chloride (NBT), 1.3 μmol·L−1 riboflavin, 50 mmol·L−1 phosphate buffer (pH 7.8) and 50 μL enzymes extract. The reaction solution was incubated for 10 min under fluorescent light with 80 μmol·m−2·s−1. Absorbance at 560 nm was determined by spectrophotometer (Beckman DU-7, Beckman Co., Ltd., California, USA). Blank readings were taken before the reaction was initialized (T = 0 min). One unit of SOD activity was defined as the amount of enzyme required for inhibiting photochemical reduction of NBT by 50%.
CAT activity was determined using a spectrophotometer according to the method of Chance and Maehly (1955) in a 3 mL reaction volume solution containing 15 mmol·L⁻¹ H₂O₂, 50 mmol·L⁻¹ phosphate buffer (pH 7.0) and 100 μL of enzyme extract. The reaction was initiated by adding enzyme extract at 25°C and determined with absorbance at 240 nm by Beckman DU-7. Readings were taken at 0 and 1 min. One unit of catalase activity is defined as that amount of enzyme which breaks down 1 μmol H₂O₂·min⁻¹ under the assay conditions described.

Quantitative RT-PCR check of SOD and CAT transcripts in roots

Quantitative real-time PCR was performed in triplicates with SYBR Green PCR Master Mix (TAKARA, Tokyo, Japan) using an iQ5 multicolor Real-Time PCR Detection System (BioRad, California, USA). Efficiency of each pair of primers was determined based on its standard curve obtained from a series of 4-fold diluted template cDNAs. The difference between the cycle threshold (Ct) for target gene and the Ct of β-Actin (\(^{β}Ct = Ct_{\text{target gene}} - Ct_{β-\text{Actin}}\)) was used to obtain the normalized expression of target gene, which corresponds to \(2^{-\Delta\Delta Ct}\). This value was finally expressed as fold-change relative to a ‘calibrator’, which is the expression level for the particular transcript in control Williams-8818 roots at 0 h post inoculation (hpi). Primer sequences used for β-Actin, SOD and CAT were as follows: SODs (5′-CCGAGAGTCCTTCGATCTACG-3′) and SODan (5′-GGATGTCGCAGGATGTCATCTAC-3′) for SOD (Genbank accession number DQ868813); CATs (5′-ATGATGAAATGATCCGAGAATG-3′) and CATan (5′-CTTGCCTATGCACTGATGTC-3′) for CAT (Genbank accession number EU139298); ACTInan (5′-ATGTCACGAACTGATGCCGCTG-3′) for β-Actin (Genbank accession number AB022041).

Statistical analysis

Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS V11.5 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, USA). After an analysis of variance (ANOVA), significant differences (P < 0.05) among means was determined by Duncan’s multiple range tests. All values in the figures were shown as mean±standard deviation.

RESULTS

Early responses of ROS in root attacked by Foc4

In order to get insight into the early responses of ROS in banana inoculated with Foc4, two key members of radical chain reactions family (\(O_2^-\) and \(H_2O_2\)) were tracked in the root systems of Williams-8818 and williams-8818-1. The results show that \(O_2^-\) production rate increased sharply in Williams-8818-1, which got the highest level of 5.60 nmol·g⁻¹·FW min⁻¹ at 24 hpi, then promptly dropped to its primal level at 48 hpi. By contrast, in Williams-8818, \(O_2^-\) increased slowly within the first 24 h and then creped gently to the peak of 5.12 nmol·g⁻¹·FW min⁻¹ at 72 hpi, the remaining unchanged at 96 hpi (Figure 2). Similarly, \(H_2O_2\) content in williams-8818-1 rose swiftly from 0 to 24 hpi, by 0.14 to 0.32 nmol·g⁻¹·FW, then decreased to basal levels at 72 hpi. In the case of Williams-8818, there was a slower increase in \(H_2O_2\) content until 72 hpi (Figure 3). Therefore, it was a resistant variety Williams-8818-1 rather than susceptible parental Williams-8818 that exhibited an early and quick “first oxidative burst”, likely inducing disease resistance mechanisms to set in. To further confirm this event, we examined the visual imagine of \(H_2O_2\) accumulation in root tip. Interestingly, fluorescence in Williams-8818-1 was little brighter than that in Williams-8818 at 0 hpi, but it was much stronger at 24 hpi (Figure 4). The changes correlated with that of \(O_2^-\) production rate and \(H_2O_2\) accumulation.

Inoculation induced MDA production

Radical chain reaction results in lipid oxidation which in turn produces terminal products of MDA. Thus, accumulation of MDA is an indicator of membrane injury. Our results indicate that MDA content was increased continuously in Williams-8818-1 and Williams-8818 after inoculation, but the potential was quite different (Figure 7). At the beginning of the experiment, both Williams-8818 and Williams-8818-1 had basal content of 0.8 and 0.9 nmol·g⁻¹·FW respectively of MDA which increased to 2.2 and 1.3 nmol·g⁻¹·FW respectively at the end the fourth day, suggesting that Williams-8818-1 was better at maintaining membrane integrity.

SOD and CAT expressions on pathogen attack

In order to verify whether the expressions of \(H_2O_2\)-related
genes were quickly reprogrammed after inoculation, we further determined the *SOD* and *CAT* transcript levels. The results show that *SOD* transcripts in Williams-8818-1 were restricted at basal level in the first half period tested, followed by an abrupt increase in the second half phase, that is, it was 75 folds higher than that of Williams-8818 at the very beginning. By contrast, it kept a much more gentle wave in Williams-8818 during the whole determining

**Figure 2.** Effects of inoculation with Foc4 on the production rate of superoxide anion radical.

**Figure 3.** Effects of inoculation with Foc4 on the H$_2$O$_2$ content.
Figure 4. H$_2$O$_2$ accumulation in root tips after inoculation; (A) 8818-1, 0 h; (B) 8818, 0 h; (C) 8818-1, 24 h; (D) 8818, 24 h. The bar is 100 μm in length.

Figure 5. Effects of inoculation with Foc4 on changes of SOD activity of banana.

times. Unexpectedly, the CAT transcripts were likely kept at its initial level in each line and only a little statistical significant difference was observed between the two lines during the whole process (Figure 8).

DISCUSSION

ROS production could occur extracellularly through the activities of plasma membrane-resident Rboh proteins,
which are homologs of mammalian NADPH oxidase 2, known to be the predominant mediators of apoplastic ROS production (Torres et al., 1998; Galletti et al., 2008). The first ROS production, termed as “oxidative burst”, is usually rapid and transient in resistant plants. ROS can oxidize lipid that finally result in MDA production through a series of redox reactions, in which SOD converts $O_2^•−$ into $H_2O_2$, which in turn, was removed usually by CAT. Therefore, the accumulations of $O_2^•−$ and $H_2O_2$ have been considered as the early events in plant-pathogen recognition. More importantly, their profiles in temporal and spatial environments are the key factors that decide the plant resisted to a certain pathogen or not.

Our results show that $O_2^•−$ and $H_2O_2$ contents in resistant iso-line Williams-8818-1 were changed radically following inoculation. They speedily elevated to a...
It is common that transcript levels of genes encoding antioxidant enzymes are modified when plants are challenged by adverse condition, because of their involvement in regulating ROS accumulation (Schenk et al., 2000). Of those genes, copper/zinc superoxide dismutase (Cu/Zn-SOD) and catalase (CAT) could delimit excess ROS accumulation in plants under various biotics stress (Schenk et al., 2000). Unfortunately, up till now, limited information is available in banana about genes that control the defense responses, let alone the timing of expression of these genes. Our results suggest that Cu/Zn-SOD was not up-regulated until the second day in each iso-line, but it was strikingly highly expressed in the resistant iso-line from then one (Figure 8). In the case of CAT, transcripts waved slightly around the basal level all through the days tested. Paparu et al. (2007) also showed that CAT transcripts were not up-regulated in the tolerant banana cultivar Kayinja after endophyte colonized the roots. Possibly, SOD expression lag was good for H₂O₂ accumulation at the early stage after inoculation, by which defense arrangements were onset in our resistance iso-line; and a background level of CAT transcripts was enough for detoxifying ROS generated in the first “oxidative burst”.

In conclusion, we show here that the characteristics of O₂⁻ and H₂O₂ elevations, SOD and CAT activations, low MDA accumulation, and SOD transcripts enhancement were distinguished from the resistant iso-line to the susceptible iso-line in temporal process in banana roots at the early stage of FoC4 infection. These indicators now enable us to select more directly the new germplasm with resistance to FoC4 in mutation breeding. Now that the first “oxidative burst” has represented the occurrence of up-stream defense cascade, the following questions emerged: Did the oxidative burst eventually elicit downstream defense responses in banana especially pathogenesis-related genes resulting to less sensitivity to the pathogen? Also, how did the anti-oxidative system...
and oxygen radical change during the whole infection period? These are interesting questions to be further studied.

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