

**INVESTIGATION OF ANTICANCER COMPOUNDS  
FROM NON-INFECTED AGARWOOD BRANCH  
TOWARDS DEVELOPMENT OF BREAST CANCER  
THERAPEUTICS**

**BY**

**PHIRDAOUS BIN ABBAS**

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## ABSTRACT

Agarwood; a dark-aromatic resinous substance released by *Aquilaria* trees upon infection; is one of the most treasured forest valuable resources. The plant materials from the trees were also reported to be utilized traditionally across various communities to fulfil religious, medicinal, and aromatic preparations. There has also been an increase of modern ethnomedicinal reports of agarwood or its plant materials towards various diseases. While a lot of focus has been on the resin itself, less has been focused on the agarwood non-infected branch which is abundant all year round and mostly considered as a waste from agarwood plantation. Our previous work done on *Aquilaria subintegra* non-infected branch has demonstrated profound growth inhibitory effects against Michigan Cancer Foundation-7 (MCF-7) breast cancer cells. Thus, the current study attempted to investigate the underlying cell death mechanisms behind the agarwood branch ethanolic extract (ABEE) against MCF-7 cells as well as enhance the extraction process conditions via one factor at a time analysis (OFAT) and Response Surface Methodology (RSM)-based experimental design; employing the Faced Centered Central Composite Design (FCCCD). The study also employed a bio-guided approach in an attempt to isolate and identify potential active compounds using column chromatography, thin layer chromatography, Gas Chromatography Mass Spectroscopy (GCMS), Fourier Transformed Infrared Spectroscopy (FTIR), Proton (H-NMR) and Carbon-13 (C-NMR) Nuclear Magnetic Resonance Spectroscopy, Ultraviolet-visible spectroscopy (UV) and Liquid Chromatography Mass Spectroscopy (LCMS). The study first replicated the established extraction process conditions to obtain the extract, which was then subjected to flow cytometry analysis and gene expression profiling with pathway analysis via real time Human Cell Death PathwayFinder™ RT<sup>2</sup> Profiler PCR array. It was observed that the extract caused time-dependent apoptosis-necrosis of MCF-7 cells and significantly affected 48 genes (41 down-regulated and 7 up-regulated genes) indicative of cellular responses towards stimuli of specific apoptotic signals. NF-KB1 gene was the most down-regulated gene (fold change of -26.704) and TRAF2 gene was the most up-regulated gene (fold change of 5.52). Pathway analysis conducted using online KEGG tool suggested that these differentially expressed genes (DEGs) regulated cell death mechanisms via the apoptosis and p53 signalling pathways. Then, through combination of OFAT and FCCCD; an optimal extraction process employing the temperature and solid-liquid ratio at 45 °C and 1:19 (w/v), respectively, with desirable factors; (i) safe temperature (less risk towards thermos-labile compounds) and (ii) economical solvent volume, was obtained. The model predicted ABEE yield of  $30.232 \pm 0.266$  mg/g dried materials (DM) and validation run afforded ABEE at  $25.35 \pm 1.19$  mg/g DM ( $p$ -value = 0.007). ABEE obtained from the recommended process conditions showed cytotoxicity effects on MCF-7 cells with IC<sub>50</sub> estimate of  $3.645 \pm 0.099$  µg/mL. The extract also affected MCF-7 cell attachment and viability with altered morphology. The bio-guided approach of fractionation and isolation process then led to a plethora of fractions. However, decrease of cytotoxicity was observed after each phase of fractionation suggesting synergism-dependent effect (of the crude extract) which became more apparent towards the end of the fractionation study. Nonetheless, the study isolated and identified a non-active orange-yellow needle-like crystal flavonoid, ABEE-FR4A1; characterized to be 5-hydroxy-7,4'-dimethoxyflavone (13.7 mg, 6.13 %

w/w). The parent fraction (FR 2-3, 2037 mg) and subfraction (FR 3A3, 223.5 mg) exhibited moderate cytotoxic effects ( $28.52 \pm 0.1524$  and  $23.11 \pm 0.1141$   $\mu\text{g/mL}$ ), but inferior to the crude extract. In conclusion, the study had determined the underlying cell death mechanisms of ABEE against MCF-7 cells, optimized the extraction process conditions and identified several compounds with varying cytotoxic effects. These finding would add value to the non-infected agarwood branch that is abundant in agarwood plantations thus help promote the sustainable growth of agarwood industry; and pave the way towards development of locally sourced natural anti-cancer therapeutics.



## خلاصة البحث

العود، مادة صمغية عطرية داكنة تفرزها أشجار آكيلاريا عند الإصابة بعدوى؛ هي واحدة من أكثر موارد الغابات قيمة. وتشير التقارير إلى استخدام المواد النباتية من هذه الأشجار بشكل تقليدي عبر المجتمعات المختلفة للأغراض الدينية والطبية والعطرية، وهناك أيضًا المزيد من التقارير الطبية العرقية الحديثة عن خشب العود أو مواده النباتية تجاه أمراض مختلفة. وفي حين كان الكثير من التركيز على المادة الصمغية نفسها، فقد تمّ التركيز بشكل أقلّ على فرع خشب العود غير المصاب والمتوفر بكثرة طيلة العام ويعدّ في الغالب من نفايات مزارع خشب العود. أظهر عملنا السابق الذي تم إجراؤه على فرع *Aquilaria subintegra* غير المصاب آثارًا مثبطة للنمو العميق ضد خلايا سرطان الثدي MCF-7. وبالتالي، حاولت الدراسة الحالية التحقيق في آليات موت الخلايا الكامنة وراء المستخلص الإيثانولي لفرع خشب العود (ABEE) ضد خلايا MCF-7 وكذلك تحسين ظروف عملية الاستخراج عبر عملية الاستخلاص عبر التصميم التجريبي القائم على OFAT ومنهجية سطح الاستجابة (RSM) باستخدام التصميم المركب المركزي الموجه (FCCCD). استخدمت الدراسة أيضًا نهجًا موجّهًا بيولوجيًا في محاولة لعزل وتحديد المركبات النشطة المحتملة باستخدام كروماتوجرافيا العمود، كروماتوجرافيا الطبقة الرقيقة، الكروماتوجرافيا الغازية المتصلة بمطياف الكتلة (GCMS)، مطياف فورييه للأشعة تحت الحمراء (FTIR)، التحليل الطيفي بالرنين المغناطيسي النووي: البروتوني (H-NMR) والكربوني-13 (C-NMR)، التحليل الطيفي للأشعة فوق البنفسجية المرئية (UV) و الكروماتوجرافيا السائل المزود بمقياس طيف الكتلة (LCMS). قامت الدراسة أولاً بتكرار ظروف عملية الاستخلاص المحددة المتعارف عليها للحصول على المستخلص، والذي خضع بعد ذلك لتحليل قياس التدفق الخلوي وتنميط التعبير الجيني مع تحليل المسار الفوري عبر Human Cell Death PathwayFinder™ RT<sup>2</sup> Profiler PCR. وقد لوحظ أن المستخلص تسبب في نخرٍ وقي لخلايا MCF-7، وأثر المستخلص أيضًا بشكل كبير على 48 جينًا (41 جينًا منظمًا بالإنقاص و 7 جينات منظمّة بالزيادة) مما يدل على الاستجابات الخلوية تجاه محفزات إشارات موت الخلايا المبرمج المحددة. كان جين NF-KB1 هو الجين الأكثر خضوعًا للتنظيم (تغيير بقيمة -26.704) بينما كان جين TRAF2 هو الجين الأكثر تنظيمًا بالزيادة (تغيير بقيمة 5.52). اقترح تحليل المسار الذي تم إجراؤه باستخدام أداة KEGG عبر الإنترنت أن هذه الجينات المعبر عنها تفاضليًا (DEGs) تنظم آليات موت الخلايا عبر مسارات إشارات موت الخلايا المبرمج و p53. بعد ذلك، ومن خلال الجمع بين OFAT و FCCCD؛ تم الحصول على عملية استخلاص مثالية تستخدم درجة حرارة ونسبة المادة السائلة إلى صلبة عند 45 درجة مئوية و 1:19 (وزن / حجم)، على التوالي، مع العوامل المرغوبة؛ تم الحصول على (1) درجة حرارة آمنة (مخاطر أقل تجاه المركبات المتأثرة بالحرارة) و (2) حجم اقتصادي للمذيب. تنبأ النموذج بإنتاجية ABEE تبلغ 30.232 ± 0.266 ملجم/جم من المواد المجففة (DM) وتم التحقق من صحة النموذج بالحصول على ABEE بقيمة 1.19 ± 25.35 ملجم/جم DM (القيمة الاحتمالية = p = 0.007). أظهر ABEE الذي تم الحصول عليه من ظروف

عملية الاستخلاص الموصى بها تأثيرات السمية الخلوية على خلايا سرطان الثدي MCF-7 بقيمة  $IC_{50}$  تقديريها 3.645  $\pm 0.099$  ميكروجرام/مل. وأثر المستخلص كذلك على ارتباط خلية MCF-7 ونموها مع تغير في الشكل. ثم أدى النهج الموجه بيولوجيًا لعملية التجزئة والعزل لعدد كبير من الأجزاء. ومع ذلك، لوحظ انخفاض في السمية الخلوية بعد كل مرحلة من مراحل التجزئة مما يشير إلى التأثير المعتمد على التآزر (للمستخلص الخام) والذي أصبح أكثر وضوحًا في نهاية دراسة التجزئة. ومع ذلك، قامت الدراسة بعزل وتحديد فلافونويد بلوري أصفر برتقالي غير نشط يشبه الإبر ، -ABEE FR4A1 ؛ يتميز بكونه بكونه 5-هيدروكسي-4،7-ديميثوكسي فلافون (13.7 ملجم، 6.13% وزن/وزن). وأظهر الجزء الأصلي ( 2-3، FR 2037، ملجم) والجزء الفرعي ( 3A3، FR 223.5، ملجم) تأثيرات سمية معتدلة للخلايا ( $0.1524 \pm 28.52$  و  $0.1141 \pm 23.11$  ميكروجرام/مل) ، ولكنها أدنى في قيمتها من المستخلص الخام. وختاماً، حدّدت الدراسة الآليات الأساسية لمستخلص ABEE ضد خلايا MCF-7، وحسّنت ظروف عملية الاستخلاص وحددت العديد من المركبات ذات تأثيرات سميّة متفاوتة. ستضيف هذه النتائج قيمة إلى فروع خشب العود غير المصاب والمتوفرة بكثرة في مزارع خشب العود، وبالتالي تساعد في تعزيز التنمية المستدامة في صناعة العود ؛ وتمهيد الطرق نحو تطوير علاجات طبيعية مضادة للسرطان من مصادر محلية.

## APPROVAL PAGE

The thesis of Phirdaous Bin Abbas has been approved by the following

---

Yumi Zuhanis Has-Yun Hashim  
Supervisor

---

Hazmah Mohd Salleh  
Co-Supervisor

---

Ma'an Fahmi Rashid Al-Khatib  
Co-Supervisor

---

Saripah Salbiah Syed Abdul Azziz  
Co-Supervisor

---

Noor Illi Binti Mohamad Puad  
Internal Examiner

---

Asmah Awal  
External Examiner

---

Roslina Othman  
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## DECLARATION

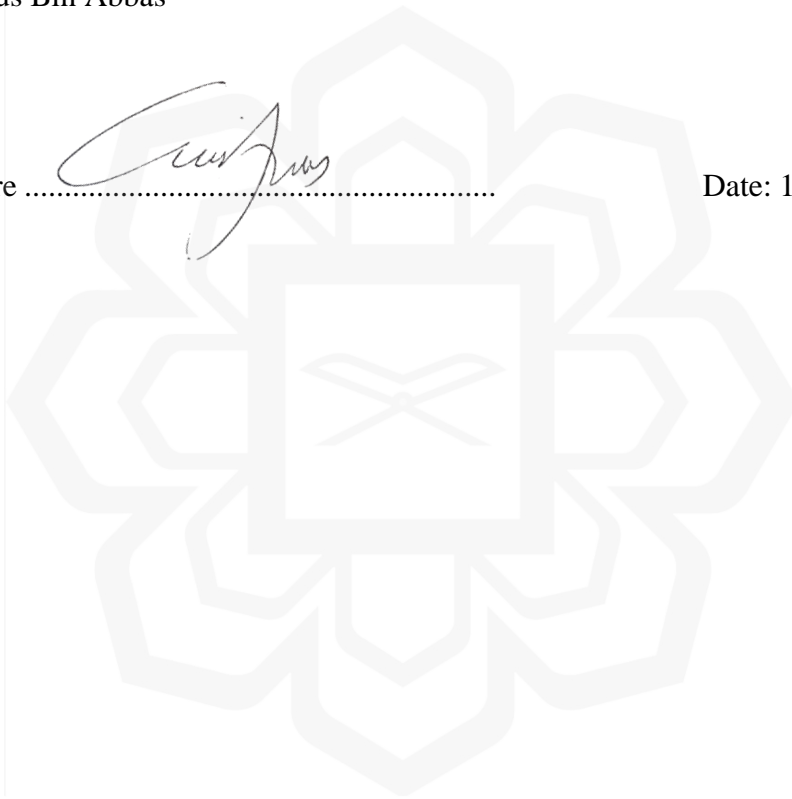
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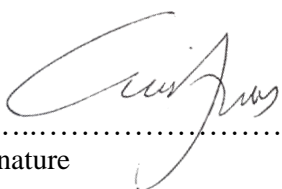
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*In The Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful*

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