

Two species of the Asian endemic genus *Keteleeria* form ectomycorrhizas with diverse fungal symbionts in southwestern China

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Abstract The ectomycorrhizal status of *Keteleeria* species is reported for the first time based on morphological and molecular analyses of root tips from southwestern China. Based on internal transcribed spacer rDNA sequences, we detected 26 ectomycorrhizal (ECM) fungal species on roots of *Keteleeria evelyniana* and *Keteleeria davidiana* collected from natural sites and a botanical garden in Kunming, China. These ECM symbionts represent six fungal lineages, including */russula–lactarius*, */inocybe*, */sebacina*, */tomentella–thelephora*, */wilcoxina*, and */cenococcum*. Our results provide the first evidence of ECM formation by *Keteleeria* and also supply ecologically important information for conservation and restoration efforts to recover populations of *Keteleeria*.

Keywords Ectomycorrhizal fungi · *Keteleeria evelyniana* Mast. · *Keteleeria davidiana* (Bertrand) Beissner · Pinaceae

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Introduction

The coniferous family Pinaceae consists of approximately 235 species in 11 genera that are distributed across the Northern Hemisphere. China is a global hotspot of conifer diversity, and four genera of Pinaceae are considered endemic to China and the adjoining countries in southeast Asia, namely *Keteleeria* Carrière, *Pseudolarix* Gordon, *Nothotsuga* Hu ex C. N. Page, and *Cathaya* Chun & Kuang (Fu et al. 1999). *Keteleeria* contains three to five species and several varieties that are known only from southern China, northern Laos, and Vietnam (Fu et al. 1999), and they all have been considered “living fossils” (Manchester et al. 2009). Based on phylogenetic analysis of chloroplast DNA, *Keteleeria* is resolved as sister to the genus *Abies* within Pinaceae (Lin et al. 2010). Among the *Keteleeria* species, *Keteleeria davidiana* var. *calcareae* (W. C. Cheng & L. K. Fu) Silba, *Keteleeria fortunei* (A. Murray bis) Carrière and *Keteleeria hainanensis* Chun & Tsiang (regarded as the juvenile growth of *Keteleeria evelyniana* by some authors), and *Keteleeria xerophila* Hsueh et S. H. Huo are listed in the China Plant Red List (Fu and Chin 1992). Besides being important components of *Pinus* forests and forests dominated by *Castanopsis delavayi* Franch, *Keteleeria* species can also form pure stands throughout China’s southern provinces. Species of *Keteleeria* provide high-quality wood and are excellent sources of lumber for construction, furniture, and wood fiber. *Keteleeria* species are also cultivated for reforestation of degraded habitats and as ornamental plants.

Mycorrhizas constitute an important root symbiosis for approximately 92% of plant families, but the ectomycorrhizal (ECM) symbiosis is phylogenetically restricted and has evolved separately in several lineages of land plants (Wang and Qiu 2006). All of the genera in the family

Pinaceae that have been surveyed form ECM symbioses, or sometimes they form both ectomycorrhizas and arbuscular mycorrhizas (Wang and Qiu 2006). Indeed, most Pinaceae are considered obligate ECM symbionts (Wang and Qiu 2006). The ECM symbiosis has been confirmed in several genera of Pinaceae, including *Abies*, *Cathaya*, *Cedrus*, *Larix*, *Picea*, *Pinus*, *Pseudotsuga*, and *Tsuga* (e.g., Vaario et al. 2006; Wang and Qiu 2006). Studies of ECM fungal communities associated with *Pineaceae* in natural forest habitats usually reveal high fungal diversity (Yamada and Katsuya 2001; Lian et al. 2006; Matsuda and Hijii 2004; Yu et al. 2007). *Keteleeria* has often been assumed to form ECM symbioses because it belongs to the Pinaceae (e.g., Brundrett 2009; Smith and Read 2008), although some researchers (e.g., Tao and Cheng 2009) have stated that *Keteleeria* is probably not ectomycorrhizal. The mycorrhizal status of the genus *Keteleeria* has never been fully documented. In the present study, we confirm the ectomycorrhizal status of two species of *Keteleeria*—*K. evelyniana* Mast. and *K. davidiana* (Bertrand) Beissner—and show that these plants associate with a wide diversity of ECM fungi.

Materials and methods

Sampling sites and sample processing

The sampling areas are all located in the vicinity of the Kunming in Yunnan Province, southwestern China (24°23' N, 102°10' E). Roots of *K. evelyniana* were sampled at two relatively undisturbed forest sites, Golden Temple Park (GT) and Xishan Park (XS). Both sites are dominated by *Keteleeria* with interspersed individuals of *Pinus armandii* Franch. Soil cores of approximately 30×20×20 cm were taken from the *K. evelyniana* rhizosphere of four trees at each site in September 2010 (GT) and February 2011 (XS). Root samples of *K. davidiana* and *K. davidiana* var. *calcareae* were sampled in a disturbed garden environment at the Kunming Botanical Garden (KBG) in June 2010. We collected eight samples from each tree species or variety, resulting in a total of 16 root samples. Excavated roots were placed in polypropylene bags, transported back to laboratory within 1.5 h, and then stored at 4°C and processed within 2 days.

The ECM roots were soaked in water and then washed over a 1-mm sieve. Root tips were further cleaned in a Petri dish using a brush and a spray bottle. Cleaned sections of ECM roots were observed under a dissecting microscope (Zeiss Stemi 1000) and macroscopically sorted into gross morphotypes based on color, surface texture, type of branching, and emanating hyphae (Agerer 2006). We selected 16 individual ECM root tips representing several different morphotypes from each tree

and transferred them to Eppendorf tubes with sterile forceps for molecular analysis. An ACT-2U Auto Camera Tame (2004 Nikon Corporation) was used to photograph ECM roots.

Molecular protocols and informatics

For *K. davidiana*, ECM root tips were ground in 1.5-ml Eppendorf tubes using a plastic pestle, and DNA was extracted using a modified CTAB extraction protocol (Gardes and Bruns 1993). For *K. evelyniana* and *K. davidiana* var. *calcareae*, DNA was extracted from ECM roots with the Extract-N-Amp kit (Sigma) following the manufacturer's protocol, except that 50% of the suggested volume was used per root tip.

For the host plant identification, two root tips for each host plant species were sampled. The chloroplast trnL region (trnC–trnD) was amplified using the primers trnC (5'-cgaaatcggtagacgctacg-3') and trnD (5'-ggggatagaggacttgaac-3') (Taberlet et al. 1991). For the molecular identification of ECM fungi, primers ITS1f, ITS4, and ITS4B were used to amplify the internal transcribed spacer (ITS) region of nuclear rDNA (Gardes and Bruns 1993; White et al. 1990). The PCR reactions were performed on an ABI 2720 thermocycler (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA, USA), using 25 µl reaction volumes each containing: 2 µl DNA template, 2.5 µl of 10× amplification buffer (Biomed, Beijing 100097, China) containing 1.5 mM MgCl₂, 0.5 µl dNTPs mix (10 mM), 1.0 µl of each primer (5 µM), 0.3 µl Taq DNA polymerase (5 U µl⁻¹; Biomed). Cycling parameters were 94°C for 3 min, followed by 35 cycles of 94°C for 40 s, 50°C for 40 s, and 72°C for 70 s, with a final extension at 72°C for 8 min. Amplification products were electrophoresed in 1% agarose gels stained with gel view (BioTeke Corporation, Beijing, China) and visualized under UV light. A 1 kb DNA ladder (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA, USA) was used as marker. Controls with ddH₂O instead of DNA were included in every set of amplifications. In most cases, PCR products were directly sent for sequencing after purification. For samples that failed in direct sequencing, the PCR products were inserted to TakaRa pMD18-T Vector after gel purification. Cloned inserts were checked by PCR using a primer combination of M13 (+)×M13 (-). Colonies were sent to Shanghai Sangon Biological Engineering Technology and Service Co., Ltd., for sequencing after incubation in liquid culture medium.

Root tip sequences were queried against the Genbank database to infer the identity of the host plants and the ECM fungal phylotypes. Molecular operational taxonomic units (MOTUs) were defined as sequences sharing 97% or greater similarity within the ITS region (Smith et al. 2007). Each MOTU was assigned to one of the ectomycorrhizal lineages defined by Tedersoo et al. (2010). The sequences

produced in this study have been deposited in GenBank with accession numbers (JN129390–JN129422).

Results

The trnL sequences (JN129422, JN129421) obtained from the host plant roots of *K. evelyniana* from XS and GT were either 99% (380/384) or 100% (336/336) similar to *K. evelyniana* sequences retrieved from GenBank (EF395417, AY013741). Similarly, the sequences (JN129420, JN129419) obtained from root tips of *K. davidiana* and *K. davidiana* var. *calcareo* in the Kunming Botanical Garden were 99% (305/308) and 99% (384/386) similar to *K. davidiana* sequences (AP010820, AP010820). These results confirm that the ECM roots we sampled belonged to the target *Keteleeria* species.

Ectomycorrhizal colonization was evident in all *Keteleeria* roots we collected, and we observed several different morphotypes (Fig. 1b–d). Microscopic examination of cross-sectioned ECM roots showed distinct hyphal mantles and well-developed Hartig's nets (Fig. 1a) both hallmark traits of classic ECM colonization. One non-ECM fungus, a species of *Termitomyces*, was found on a single ECM root at the GT site.

Out from the 256 root tips, we obtained 188 successful sequences in total, and the subsequent molecular analysis revealed 26 fungal MOTUs. Among these, five phylotypes were detected on ECM roots of *K. davidiana* in a managed

landscape and 24 from ECM roots of *K. evelyniana* growing in seminatural forest stands (Table 1). The ECM fungi we detected represent six lineages: */russula–lactarius*, */inocybe*, */sebacina*, */tomentella–thelephora*, */wilcoxina*, and */cenococcum*. Ascomycete genera detected with *Keteleeria* included *Trichophaea* and *Cenococcum*, and basidiomycete genera included *Russula*, *Lactarius*, *Inocybe*, *Sebacina*, and *Tomentella* (Table 1). Among these, *Russula* spp. were the most diverse and frequently detected (13 MOTUs) followed by *Inocybe* (4 MOTUs), *Tomentella* (3 MOTUs), *Lactarius* (2 MOTUs), and *Cenococcum* (2 MOTUs). Most of the ECM fungi were restricted to a single site, but *Trichophaea* sp. 1 was found in both of the forest sites (XS and GT) and also in the botanical garden (KMG). Three out of the five ECM MOTUs that were detected in the garden were also found in nearby forest habitats. Only two unique sequences of *Inocybe* spp. were detected in the garden.

Discussion

In this study, we confirmed that species of *Keteleeria* consistently form symbiotic root associations with ECM fungi. All of the samples from beneath *Keteleeria* contained ECM roots with classic macroscopic and microscopic morphological features (Fig. 1). Using ITS rDNA sequencing, we detected diverse fungal symionts, including 26 MOTUs associated with the roots of

Fig. 1 Morphological–anatomical characteristics of *Keteleeria* ectomycorrhizae. **a** Transverse section of ectomycorrhiza showing the mantle and Hartig net. **b–d** Simple and irregularly pinnate ectomycorrhizal roots. **a** bar=0.3 mm; **b–d** bar=1 mm

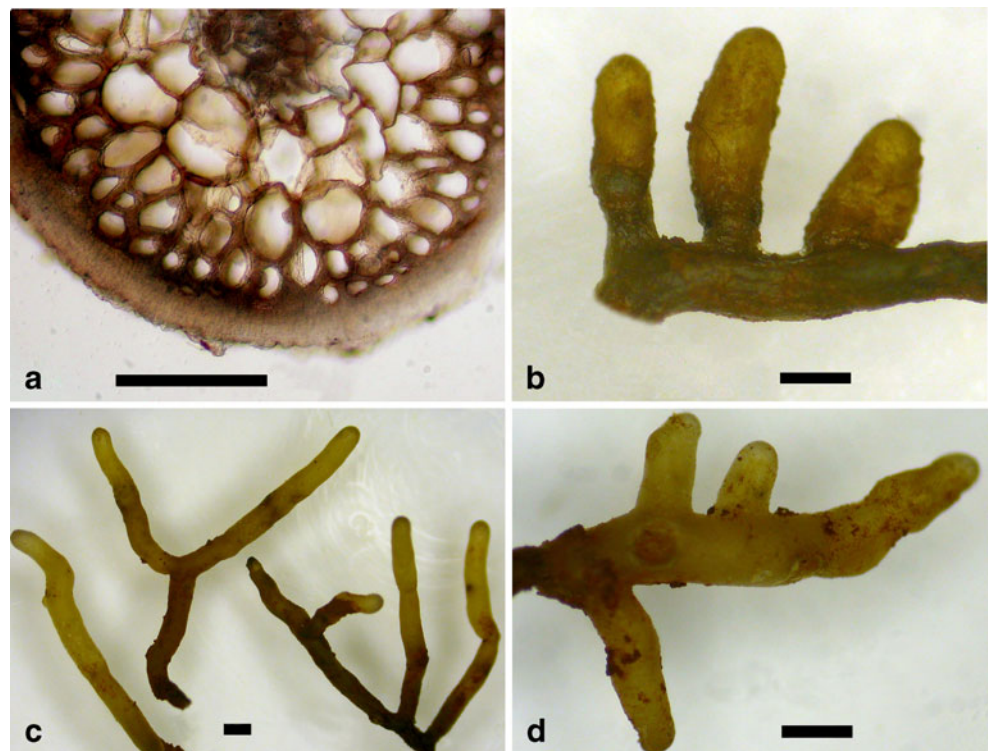


Table 1 List of the 26 species of ectomycorrhizal fungi from six fungal lineages that were detected on roots of two and a variety *Keteleeria* species (Pinaceae) in Yunnan Province, China

ECM species	ECM lineage	<i>Keteleeria davidiana</i> KBG	<i>Keteleeria davidiana</i> var. <i>calcearia</i> KBG ^a	<i>Keteleeria evelyniana</i> GT ^b	<i>Keteleeria evelyniana</i> XS	ECM voucher	BLAST match	Similarity (%)
<i>Cenococcum geophilum</i> 1	/cenococcum			JN129390		G2-3	<i>Cenococcum geophilum</i> DQ179119	965/994 (97)
<i>Cenococcum geophilum</i> 2	/cenococcum			JN129391		G1-1	<i>Cenococcum geophilum</i> AY394919	526/533 (99)
<i>Inocybe</i> sp. 1	/inocybe	JN129392				K1-1	<i>Inocybe umbrinella</i> FJ904165	585/684 (86)
<i>Inocybe</i> sp. 2	/inocybe	JN129393				K4-1	<i>Inocybe rimosa</i> FJ904155	510/613 (83)
<i>Inocybe</i> sp. 3	/inocybe			JN129394		G2-12	<i>Inocybe</i> cf. <i>pseudoreducta</i> FN550906	651/736 (88)
<i>Inocybe</i> sp. 4	/inocybe				JN129395	X3-12	<i>Inocybe</i> cf. <i>assimilata</i> FN550881	497/600 (83)
<i>Lactarius</i> sp. 1	/russula-lactarius			JN129396		G4-13	<i>Lactarius</i> sp. EF141550	702/705 (99)
<i>Lactarius hygrophoroides</i>	/russula-lactarius				JN129397	X3-4	<i>Lactarius hygrophoroides</i> . HQ318285	606/625 (97)
<i>Russula livescens</i>	/russula-lactarius		JN129398			H3-10	<i>Russula livescens</i> UDB000894	700/704 (99)
<i>Russula</i> sp. 1	/russula-lactarius			JN129399		G2-13	<i>Russula cerolens</i> HQ604834	780/825 (95)
<i>Russula</i> sp. 2	/russula-lactarius			JN129400		G2-10	<i>Russula pectinataoides</i> AY880930	584/660 (88)
<i>Russula</i> sp. 3	/russula-lactarius			JN129401		G2-14	<i>Russula</i> cf. <i>pectinata</i> HQ604835	678/779 (87)
<i>Russula</i> sp. 4	/russula-lactarius			JN129402		G1-16	<i>Russula brevipes</i> FJ845429	770/825 (93)
<i>Russula</i> sp. 5	/russula-lactarius			JN129403		G4-2	<i>Russula puellaris</i> HQ604852	718/821 (87)
<i>Russula</i> sp. 6	/russula-lactarius			JN129404		G3-6	<i>Russula</i> sp. AJ534905	814/866 (94)
<i>Russula</i> sp. 7	/russula-lactarius			JN129405		G3-2	<i>Russula integra</i> HMI189840	652/683 (95)
<i>Russula</i> sp. 8	/russula-lactarius			JN129406		G2-7	<i>Russula cerolens</i> HQ604834	798/813 (98)
<i>Russula</i> sp. 9	/russula-lactarius			JN129407		G1-6	<i>Russula</i> cf. <i>maculata</i> DQ422015	820/865 (95)
<i>Russula</i> sp. 10	/russula-lactarius				JN129408	X2-2	<i>Russula brevipes</i> FJ845429	782/831 (94)
<i>Russula</i> sp. 11	/russula-lactarius				JN129409	X3-1	<i>Russula bicolor</i> FJ845435	7555/812 (93)
<i>Russula</i> sp. 12	/russula-lactarius				JN129410	X1-6	<i>Russula</i> cf. <i>fuscobubroides</i> HQ604842	767/804 (95)
<i>Sebacina</i> sp. 1	/sebacina				JN129411	X3-15	<i>Sebacina</i> sp. DQ974768	695/716 (97)
<i>Tomentella</i> sp. 1	/tomentella-thelephora		JN129412			H1-7	<i>Tomentella</i> ECM of <i>Fagus</i> FM999497	628/651 (96)
<i>Tomentella</i> sp. 2	/tomentella-thelephora			JN129413		G2-8	<i>Tomentella orchid mycorrhiza</i> EU625857	804/833 (97)
<i>Tomentella</i> sp. 3	/tomentella-thelephora			JN129414		G1-7	<i>Tomentella</i> ECM of <i>Betula</i> EF218835	758/833 (91)
<i>Trichophaea</i> sp. 1	/wilcoxina		JN129415			X4-1	<i>Trichophaea</i> cf. <i>hybrida</i> DQ200834	522/572 (91)

^aTwo non-ectomycorrhizal fungi, *Neonectria* cf. *radicicola* (JN129416) and *Tetracladium* cf. *maxilliforme* (JN129417), were also detected on the roots (H4-4 and H4-2, respectively) of *Keteleeria calcearia* at this site

^bAn unknown species of *Agaricales* (JN129418) detected on ectomycorrhizal roots (G1-10) of *Keteleeria evelyniana* was 83% similar (516/620 bp) to *Termitomyces* sp. (AB051890). This fungus may represent a previously unrecognized group or ectomycorrhizal fungi or could represent a contaminant sequence

Keteleeria. Half of the fungal phlotypes were members of the */russula–lactarius* lineage, but others belonged to the */inocybe*, */sebacina*, */tomentella–thelephora*, */wilcoxina*, and */cenococcum* lineages. *Russula* spp. and *Lactarius* spp. are well-known ECM genera that are often abundant both above- and belowground in Pinaceae-dominated ecosystems (Matsuda and Hijii 1998, 2004; Yamada and Katsuya 2001).

We recovered far fewer ECM fungi from roots of *K. davidiana* in the botanical garden than from roots of *K. evelyniana* growing in seminatural forests (Table 1). Ectomycorrhizal diversity is often inversely related to time since site disturbance (Boerner et al. 1996) and fertilization often has strong impacts on ECM fungal diversity (Cox et al. 2010; Lilleskov et al. 2002), so it is not surprising that the garden habitat had lower ECM diversity than the forest habitats. The reduced ECM diversity on roots of *K. davidiana* is probably due to a combination of factors, including a highly disturbed soil layer, long-term fertilization, and the fact that the *K. davidiana* plants were initially transplanted into the garden with only a small founder population of ca. 20 individuals. We also cannot rule out that the particular host species, *K. davidiana*, could also be responsible in some way for the lower ECM diversity at the KBG site. However, the low sample size makes definitive statements impossible and more thorough studies will be needed to understand this phenomenon.

Despite the seminatural state of the XS and GT forests and the moderate ECM diversity we found on roots, we expect that all of our sites are influenced by anthropogenic factors. Many taxa in the */russula–lactarius* lineage respond positively to increased levels of nitrogen (e.g., Cox et al. 2010; Lilleskov et al. 2002), and it is possible that elevated nitrogen levels at our sites could have increased the proportion of *Russula* and *Lactarius* species that were recovered. Our sites are located in the Kunming metropolitan area, which has a long history of human habitation and agriculture as well as a significant population of at least six million people. Several economically important ECM fungi, including *Boletus edulis* Bull.: Fr. sensu lato (Wang et al. 1995) and *Tuber indicum* (García-Montero et al. 2010), are harvested from nearby Chinese *Keteleeria* forests and are assumed to form ectomycorrhizas with *Keteleeria*. Clearly, further studies with more intensive sampling over a wider geographic area are needed to fully assess the ECM fungal diversity and community structure with *Keteleeria* species.

Implications for *Keteleeria* propagation

Keteleeria species are important in forestry and in ornamental horticulture so there have been a number of research studies aimed at enhancing the success of *Keteleeria* nursery production and tree transplantation (e.g., Tao and

Cheng 2009; Zhang 1999; Zhu et al. 1993). Despite these efforts, *Keteleeria* nursery production remains difficult because seedlings often become highly stressed during transplantation. Since the ECM symbiosis is known to improve plant nutrient status and decrease plant stress (Smith and Read 2008), assessing ECM fungal diversity with *Keteleeria* may be important for ecological restoration, preservation, and maintenance of these endangered species. The finding that *Keteleeria* species consistently form ECM associations suggests that inoculation with ECM fungi may enhance *Keteleeria* nursery efforts and increase survival of seedlings during production and transplantation.

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