Spatial patterns of fungal endophytes in a subtropical montane rainforest of northern Taiwan

# Abstract

Fungal endophytes of plants are ubiquitous and important to host plant health. Wood-inhabiting and foliar endophyte communities from multiple tree hosts were sampled at multiple spatial scales across Fushan forest dynamics plot in northern Taiwan, using culture-free, community DNA amplicon sequencing methods. Fungal endophyte communities were distinct between leaves and wood, but the mycobiomes were highly variable across and within tree species. Despite this, host tree species was an important predictor of mycobiome community-composition. Within a single common tree species, “core” mycobiomes were characterized using co-occurrence analysis. The spatial coocurrence patterns of these few species of fungal endophytes appear to explain the strong host effect. For wood endophytes, a consistent core mycobiome coexisted with the host across the extent of the study. For leaf endophytes, the core fungi resembled a more dynamic, “gradient” model of the core microbiome, changing across the topography and distance of the study.

# Keywords:

Fungal Endophytes, Microbial ecology, ITS, Plant-fungal interactions, Fushan Subtropical Forest Dynamics Plot, Mycobiome, Core microbiome, PCNM/dbMEM spatial analysis

# Introduction

Microbial community assembly and geographic patterns in microbes remain poorly understood, despite nearly a century of discussion(Baas-Becking, 1934; De Wit and Bouvier, 2006; Green and Bohannan, 2006; Hanson et al., 2012; Martiny et al., 2006; Nemergut et al., 2013; Peay et al., 2010). Rich microbial communities appear to be associated with all multicellular organisms (Hoffman and Arnold, 2010; Rosenberg et al., 2010). Host-associated microbes present additional complexity in modeling microbial community assembly, and raise questions concerning fidelity of host-microbe interactions. Microbial community assemblage as an academic topic is important and fascinating, but this topic also takes on a new urgency in the discussion of plant microbiomes and plant health in a changing planet (Woodward et al., 2012).

The potential importance of microbes in adding ecological functions to their hosts (Johnson and Versalovic, 2012; Rodriguez et al., 2009; Woodward et al., 2012) has led some to suggest that multicellular organisms may host core microbiomes (Hamady and Knight, 2009; Shade and Handelsman, 2012; Vandenkoornhuyse et al., 2015), which are subsets of important and consistent microbial partners. Initial explorations of plant core microbiomes have been highly controlled (Edwards et al., 2015; Lundberg et al., 2012). Studies of plant-associated microbiomes in natural settings have rarely been framed in terms of core microbiomes (Bodenhausen et al., 2013; Higgins et al., 2014; Kembel and Mueller, 2014; Kim et al., 2012; Zimmerman and Vitousek, 2012, 2012). This is not a coincidence: outside of experimental settings, the prospect of detecting a cadre of microorganisms absolutely loyal to their host in the face of a complex and dynamic natural environment is daunting. This definition of the core microbiome, known as either a “substantial” or “minimal” core (Hamady and Knight, 2009) may be useful when carefully applied to long-studied symbioses such as ruminant gut communities (Liggenstoffer et al., 2010) or mycorrhizal relationships (Malloch et al., 1980; Van Der Heijden and Horton, 2009). This definition may not always serve for describing the other numerous and labyrinthine microbe-host interactions that occur between hosts and microbes. However, other definitions of core microbiomes exist that may be more useful for ecologically modeling microbiomes (Hamady and Knight, 2009).

Fungal endophytes, or fungi that live internally in plant tissues without incurring disease symptoms (Wilson, 1995), are an important component of the plant microbiome. They have been shown to be widespread and important to plant health (Arnold et al., 2003; Mejía et al., 2008, 2007; Porras-Alfaro and Bayman, 2011; Rodriguez et al., 2009). The endophytic compartment in which they reside is a distinct ecological space, in the sense that very different communities of microbes are observed outside vs. inside plant tissues (Bodenhausen et al., 2013; Lundberg et al., 2012; Santamaría and Bayman, 2005), at least partly due to host-microbe preferences (Oldroyd, 2013; Schulz et al., 1999; Venkateshwaran et al., 2013). Plant organs have been shown to host distinct communities of endophytes (Bodenhausen et al., 2013; Edwards et al., 2015; Peršoh, 2013; Tateno et al., 2015). Endophyte communities are also influenced by environmental conditions (Arnold and Herre, 2003; Carroll and Carroll, 1978; Zimmerman and Vitousek, 2012), in spite of presumed buffering from environmental stresses by host tissues. Fungal communities are also subject to spatial processes such as dispersal limitation (Higgins et al., 2014; Peay et al., 2010) at multiple scales (Mummey and Rillig, 2008; Norros et al., 2012; Tedersoo et al., 2014). Fungal endophytes, therefore, make ideal systems for studying the interplay of host-microbe interactions, environmental influences, and spatial patterning of both host and microbes in natural settings.

It must be acknowledged that plant hosts exert strong influence on community membership of their endophyte community. However, we hypothesized that even the most faithful fungal associates will uncouple from their hosts with changing environmental conditions and dispersal constraints. We predicted, on the scale of the present study, that plant mycobiomes resemble “gradient” core microbiomes (Hamady and Knight, 2009). Under this model, microbiomes can totally change across a landscape, with host-interactions mitigating but ultimately not preventing environmentally- and spatially-driven changes in the microbiome. In other words, we hypothesized that a persistent “core” of microbes shared among all members of a plant species does not truly exist in nature, on any meaningful scale. To test this, we compared community composition between wood and leaf fungal endophytes in multiple species of plant host across the landscape of the Fushan Forest Dynamics plot. We examined patterns in the total detected endophyte community of several plant hosts. Delving further within these data, we focused on a single tree host and the spatial patterns of its most strongly associated endophytic fungi.

# Materials and methods

Background/Site: Sampling occurred in summer of 2013 at Fushan forest, in Northeastern Taiwan (24º 45' 40" N, 121º 33' 28" E), which hosts a 25-ha Smithsonian-associated Forest Dynamics Plot (FDP) (Losos and Leigh, 2004; Su et al., 2007). Fushan is a humid subtropical old-growth montane site that receives 4.27 m of rain each year. Most of this precipitation falls during rainy, cool winters, though a significant fraction of this rain is due to typhoons, the main agent of disturbance in this system, during warm summer months. The flora is diverse, characterized by many evergreen broadleaf tree species and a diverse understory of lianas, ferns, tree ferns, and other herbs, graminoids, and shrubs. Vegetative communities can be broadly categorized into four community types described by dominant tree species combinations (Fig. 1). Topography is highly variable, with a maximum elevation of 733 m above sea level at an approximately central hilltop within the FDP, and a minimum of 600 m, though the present study sampled areas only as low as 650 m. The complex topography of Fushan has been summarized by classification of each 20 m x 20 m quadrant of the FDP into one of seven habitat types, based on aspect, slope, convexity, and elevation (Figs.1 and 2), which are found to influence vegetative communities (Su et al., 2010).

## Field methods

Fushan FDP was divided into 9 sub-plots, and subplots were sampled using a nested logarithmic scheme intended to detect dispersal limitation and community turnover (Rodrigues et al., 2013) (Fig. 2). Sampling of each set of nested points was undertaken in random order. Once sampling of a single set of nested squares had begun, all points within that set of nested points were sampled prior to beginning another. Six out of nine sets of nested squares were sampled, due to time constraints. For each sampling point, we located the tree with the largest DBH with canopy above the point and collected the three lowest “healthy” appearing leaves that were safely reachable. Leaves and accompanying woody stems were obtained using a 3m collapsible pole pruner. Identification of host- tree was supplied by survey data from ongoing ecological research at Fushan FDP (Su et al., 2007). All plant material was carried to a nearby field station and stored at 4°C for no longer than 5 days before processing.

## Lab methods

Preparation and sequencing of Illumina libraries for leaves and wood were undertaken separately, with differing protocols. Protocols for leaf library preparations are given in Vandegrift (2016). Protocols for wood endophytes are given in detail in Thomas et al. (2017). Briefly, all leaves were washed and surface-sterilized, and woody stem material was debarked with a sterile scalpel and phloem and sapwood were harvested. DNA was extracted from both in separate library preparations and ITS region 1 was amplified using a fungal-specific primer set with illumina© tagged, barcoded primers. Positive, “mock community” controls were included in the wood-endophyte library, and pure-water negative controls were included in both libraries. Samples were multiplexed and sequenced in separate illumina© Mi-Seq sequencer runs.

## Bioinformatics

Details of the bioinformatics pipeline are explained in Thomas et al. (2017). Full scripts are available in supplementary information, and as a jupyter notebook at: <<https://nbviewer.jupyter.org/github/danchurch/taiwan_combined_biom/blob/master/combo_biome-revived.ipynb>>.

Briefly, general bioinformatics protocols followed the USEARCH/UPARSE pipeline version 8.1 (Edgar, 2013) wherever possible. Libraries of leaf and wood fungal endophyte DNA were prepared separately, so to maximize comparability, the reads from both libraries were combined as early as possible in the bioinformatics pipeline, following merging of paired ends. Variance stabilization, the process of maximizing comparability among samples and studies while considering differences in sampling depth, was done using using the DESeq2 and phyloseq packages in R (Love et al., 2014; McMurdie and Holmes, 2013), using leaf/wood as the design variable. Positive controls were used to calibrate OTU similarity radius and minimum cutoffs, which were subtracted from all observations to reduce error from index-misassignment and artificial splitting of OTUs. Large differences in abundances remained among positive control OTUs even after variance stabilization, so all statistical analyses were conducted with incidence (presence/absence)-transformed community matrices.

Initial taxonomic assignments were assigned to all possible reads in the USEARCH 8.1 UTAX algorithm against the UNITE fungal ITS database (Edgar, 2013; Kõljalg et al., 2013). This is a high-throughput method, used here to create an aggregate, “big picture” of the endophytes communities, summarized in Figure 3. Because of the low confidence of many of the high-throughput identifications, classes containing less than 1% of total OTUs were not included in this figure, but are available for inspection in scripts. Manual curation of taxonomic calls was then required for members of the core microbiomes. For higher confidence taxonomic calls, members of the wood and leaf core microbiome were assigned taxonomy using the BLAST (Altschul et al., 1990), against the UNITE database. See scripts for details of this process.

## Statistical methods

### Overview

Ecological patterns of the entire fungal community of leaves and wood of all hosts were examined first. Analyses were then focused on patterns in the mycobiome of the most commonly-sampled host tree, *Helicia* *formosana*. Finally, host-fungus co-occurrence patterns were used to define a core mycobiome that was also examined for ecological patterns. Statistical analysis was conducted in R Statistical Software, version 3.3.1 (R Core Team, 2017), with the vegan (Oksanen et al., 2017), phyloseq (McMurdie and Holmes, 2013), cooccur (Griffith et al., 2016), igraph (Csardi and Nepusz, 2006) and ecodist (Goslee and Urban, 2007) packages. The statistical pipeline is available as a jupyter notebook, viewable at: <<https://nbviewer.jupyter.org/github/danchurch/taiwan_combine>[d\_stats/blob/master/Csrev/Csrev.ipynb](https://nbviewer.jupyter.org/github/danchurch/taiwan_combined_stats/blob/master/Csrev/Csrev.ipynb)>.

All read abundances in fungal community matrices were transformed to presence/absence (see bioinformatics, above), so all downstream community analyses were based on this incidence data. Tests and visualizations that required the use of dissimilarity included PERMANOVA and Mantel tests, NMS and Bray-Curtis map visualizations. In all cases endophyte community comparisons were conducted using Bray-Curtis distances (Bray and Curtis, 1957; McCune et al., 2002).

### Mycobiome of all hosts

Dissimilarity of leaf and wood endophyte communities were as a first step modeled and visualized using non- parametric multivariate analysis of variance (NPMANOVA or PERMANOVA) (Anderson, 2017, 2001), and non-metric multidimensional scaling (NMS). Following initial comparisons of community composition, all analyses of wood and leaf endophytes were conducted separately, in parallel. Host and environmental variables of vegetative community and topography (Fig. 1) as predictors of endophyte communities were modeled individually using PERMANOVA. However, PERMANOVA tests as employed here are not sensitive to the complexities of spatial patterns on the variable landscape of Fushan FDP. For this reason spatially-explicit tests for autocorrelation and correlations with endophyte community composition and environmental data were used.

Spatial trends in endophyte communities were first explored using multivariate Mantel tests (Legendre and Fortin, 1989; Mantel, 1967) of community dissimilarity matrices against physical distance matrices, and visualized with Mantel multivariate correlograms. For greater resolution of spatial trends, distance-based Moran’s eigenvector maps analysis, also known as Principal Components of Neighbor Matrices (PCNM) analysis, was conducted on our sampling scheme. Following the general statistical pipeline recommended by Legendre et al. (Borcard et al., 2011; Legendre and Legendre, 2012), endophyte community matrices were Hellinger-transformed (Legendre and Gallagher, 2001), and “regressed” using Redundancy analysis (RDA) (Buttigieg and Ramette, 2014; Legendre and Gallagher, 2001) against all eigenvectors (“PCNM vectors”) resulting from dbMEM analysis. Stepwise model selection was then used to filter the ecologically informative eigenvectors(Oksanen et al., 2017).

Eigenanalysis of sampling schemes such as dbMEM/PCNM used here give a portrait of what patterns can be confidently testing by a particular sampling scheme. They are useful in that they can approximate classical linear spatial patterns, but also model other, more complex spatial patterns. These eigenvectors represent a range of spatial patterns that are periodic functions of wavelengths of varying size and direction. When combined with constrained direct gradient analyses such as Canonical Correspondence Analysis (CCA) or Redundancy analysis (RDA), eigenanalyses of sampling schemes become a very sensitive tool for detecting important spatial patterns in biological communities.

As a first filter, only PCNM vectors that are in some way correlated with changes in the community matrix are considered ecologically meaningful and are retained. Following this, if a correlation is found with these PCNM vectors with either between differences in fungal community or with patterns in environmental data, we can infer that these environmental or community differences behave on the landscape somewhat like the PCNM vectors. This is especially true if a large amount of variance in the community matrix or environmental data is explained by a PCNM (i.e. R^2 is high). The wavelengths and shapes of PCNM vectors are often visualized using “bubble” plots, 2-D scatter plot with proportionally sized and colored symbols (Borcard et al., 2011). Ecological patterns of interest detected in spatial analysis were further visualized by mapping Bray-Curtis distance of all wood or leaf samples from a single point of interest on maps of the reserve and in NMS ordinations.

### Mycobiome of a single host, *Helicia* *formosana*

To exclude variation in fungal communities resulting from differing host tree species, above analyses were repeated for the fungal endophytes of a single host tree, *Helicia* *formosana* Lour. & Hemsl. This was the host tree for which the most samples (leaves, n=31; wood n=22) were available. Bray-Curtis dissimilarity values resulting from comparison were then plotted onto a map of Fushan FDP.

### Core fungi of *Helicia* *formosana*

To test for the presence of a core mycobiome, co-occurrence analysis was conducted on the all-host, all- endophyte species-using a pairwise, probabilistic model (Griffith et al., 2016; Veech, 2013). Core mycobiomes of hosts were defined as the subset of fungi that showed strong co-occurrence associations with a host. Strong associations were defined as those with probabilities under null models of random association corrected to a Benjamini-Hochberg false discovery rate (FDR) of 0.05 or less. Fungal OTUs found to be strongly cooccurring with *H. formosana* were used to populate a species composition matrix of just these core species as columns, with rows of just sites where *H. formosana* was sampled. Patterns of this subset of core fungi were then visualized by first calculating Bray-Curtis dissimilarity distance of each sample (row) of this subsetted “core matrix” from an idealized core mycobiome row that contained all members of the core fungi. These values were then mapped on the Fushan FDP plot.

# Results

## Mycobiome of all hosts:

After variance-stabilization, in the the leaf endophyte library 1302 OTUs were detected, and 2025 OTUs in the the leaf library. Both leaf and wood samples were dominated by Ascomycota (Fig. 3), but a larger proportion of remaining reads in wood OTUs matched to Basidiomycota (10% of leaf OTUs vs. 17% of wood OTUs) than in in leaves. This larger percentage of OTUs identified to Basidiomycota was due mostly to a larger percentage of OTUs identified to Tremellomycetes (<1% of leaf OTUs vs. 5.6% of wood OTUs). Within Ascomycota, both leaf and wood samples contained high percentages of OTUs identified to Sordariomycetes (24% of leaf OTUs vs. 16% of wood OTUs), Dothideomycetes (20% of leaf OTUs vs. 27% of wood OTUs), and Eurotiomycetes (7% of leaf OTUs vs. 14% of wood OTUs). Significant observations of Lecanoromycete fungi also occurred, especially in leaves (%18.5 of leaf OTUs vs. %4 of wood OTUs). At the class level 16% of leaf OTUs were unindentified, compared to 10% of wood.

Host species was the strongest single predictor of similarity within both leaf (PERMANOVA, F(33, 89) = 1.95, p < 0.01, R2 =0.42, permutations = 10000). Wood endophyte communities were also most strongly predicted by host (PERMANOVA, F(29,61) = 1.49, p < 0.01, R2 = 0.42, permutations = 10000), see NMS visualizations (Fig. 4). Vegetative community is a weak predictor of similarity in both leaf (PERMANOVA, F(3, 119) = 2.04, p < 0.01, R2 = .05, permutations = 10000) and wood endophyte community (PERMANOVA, F(3,87) = 1.71, p < 0.01, R2 = 0.055, permutations = 10000). Micro-topographic conditions are also weak predictors of similarity in both leaf (PERMANOVA, F(6, 116) = 1.23, p < 0.01, R2 = 0.06, permutations = 10000) and wood endophyte community (PERMANOVA, F(6,84) = 1.36, p < 0.01, R2 = 0.09, permutations = 10000). PERMANOVA tests cannot easily account for complex spatial patterns, some environmental correlations were uncovered in more sensitive spatial analyses summarized below.

Wood endophyte community displayed a weak pattern of community-turnover/distance-decay over the entire study area (global Mantel's r = 0.10, p < 0.01) (Supp Fig. 1). Leaf communities displayed no global distance decay relationship (global Mantel's r = -0.01, p = 0.57), but displayed local negative autocorrelation in comparisons of samples approximately 200 meters apart (Mantel correlogram, local Mantel's r = -0.10, p < 0.05). In both wood and leaf endophyte communities of all hosts, Mantel’s r approaches zero in both leaf and wood samples at comparisons around 150 m apart, indicating that positive autcorrelation is undetected beyond this.

For leaves, our sampling scheme yielded 7 biologically significant PCNM vectors, explaining a combined total of 7.1% of endophyte community variation (Redundancy analysis, constrained inertia = 0.06, Unconstrained inertia = 0.82, F(7,117) = 1.25, P < 0.01) (Supp. Fig. 2). Of these, the smallest scale vectors are uncorrelated with environmental data, and probably indicative of endogenous autocorrelation (Borcard et al., 2011), with wavelengths up to 50m. Two mid-range (300m) vectors represented north-south and east-west surface trends, unexplained by environmental data, each predicting approximately 1 % of fungal species variation. Two mid-range leaf PCNM vectors of interest correlate with environmental variables, most strongly with the presence of the steep habitat zone present mostly on the central hill of the plot (Linear model/multiple regression, adj-R2=0.23, F(9,113)=4.95, p < 0.01). The largest scale (500 m) PCNM vector ran in a NE-SW direction, resulting in a partial contrast between the southwest valley and the rest of the plot. It predicted 1.2% of leaf endophyte community variation, and was most strongly explained by the presence of the two vegetation communities dominated by the tree *Helicia formosana* ((Linear model/multiple regression, adj-R2=0.33, F(9,113)=7.68, p < 0.01).

For wood, our sampling scheme also yielded 5 biologically significant PCNM vectors, explaining 7.5% of variation (Redundancy analysis, constrained inertia = 0.07, Unconstrained inertia = 0.80, F(5,85) = 1.38, P < 0.01). Of these, the smallest scale vectors are probably indicative of endogenous autocorrelation, at a wavelength of 70 m or less. The three other PCNM vectors are large- to mid-range, with lengths from 300m to 500m. They correlated with environmental variables, and generally point to a contrast between upland and lowland habitat (Supp. Fig. 3). For more detailed results and interpretation of all-host PCNM results, see scripts.

## Mycobiome of a single host, *Helicia* *formosana*

When the community of endophytes was constrained to one host tree species, environmental variables were not found to directly explain any variance in endophyte community structure (PERMANOVA tests, permutations=10000. Leaf community ~ topography: F(4,26) = 0.93, R2 = 0.12, p = 0.66. Leaf community ~ vegetative community: F(3,27) = 1.07, R2 = 0.11, p = 0.27. Wood community ~ topography: F(4,17) = 1.06, R2 = 0.20, p = 0.20. Wood community ~ Vegetative community: F(3,18) = 1.08, R2 = 0.15, p = 0.19.).

Leaf endophyte community yielded 3 ecologically significant PCNMs explaining 13% of community variation (RDA, leaves: constrained inertia = 0.011, Unconstrained inertia = 0.67, F(2,19) = 1.32, P < 0.01). Wood endophyte community yielded 2 ecologically significant PCNMs explaining 12% of community variation (RDA, leaves: constrained inertia = 0.10, Unconstrained inertia = 0.70, F(1,29) = 1.78, P < 0.01). As with the non-spatial PERMANOVA model of *Helicia* endophytes, these PCNMs also did not correlate with any available environmental data, in either wood or leaves. However, both wood and leaf communities showed ecologically meaningful PCNM vectors that center on the southwestern valley of the FDP as a place of difference in the *Helicia* mycobiome (Fig. 5). This pattern of dissimilarity was particularly pronounced in the *Helicia* leaf endophyte community when visualized with Bray-Curtis comparisons, (Fig. 6).

## Core fungi of *Helicia* *formosana*

Out of 1302 possible fungal OTUs observed in leaves of all hosts, 426 OTUs were found in *Helicia* leaves*.* Of these 12 showed strong patterns of co-occurrence with *Helicia* *formosana.* Out of 2025 possible fungal OTUs observed in woody tissue of all hosts, 731 OTUs were found in *Helicia* wood (Supp. Fig. 4)*.* Of these 7 OTUs showed strong patterns of co-occurrence with *Helicia* *formosana* (Supp. Fig. 4)*.* These fungi were considered members of the *H. formosana* core mycobiome (Table 1).Visual inspection of patterns of dissimilarity show that only leaves within the southern valley of the plot contained relatively high proportions of core fungi (Fig. 7). Wood samples retained most of their core fungi consistently throughout the plot (Fig. 7).

## Summary comparison

The above analysis compared patterns of community dissimilarity at several levels (Table 2). Wood and leaf endophytes of all host-trees showed a similar pattern, very high levels of dissimilarity among all samples (all-host leaf endophyte mean BC=0.90, sd=0.09; wood endophyte mean BC=0.87, sd=0.07). *Helicia* *formosana* samples show a lower average level of dissimilarity (leaf mean BC=0.80, sd =0.11; wood mean BC = 0.80, sd=0.06). This variation can then be partitioned into two groups: (1) non-core fungi, which show a high average level of dissimilarity (leaf mean BC=0.89, sd =0.08 ; wood mean BC = 0.83, sd=0.06), and (2) core fungi, which show a lower mean BC (leaf mean BC=0.38, sd =0.17; wood mean BC = 0.39, sd=0.17).

# Discussion

## Patterns observed:

Contrary to our predictions, we found evidence for a consistent core of fungi in the wood of *Helicia formosana*. Closer to our predictions, we found in leaves a subset of fungi that cooccurred with *H. formosana* in just one area of the plot (Fig. 7). In leaves, these core fungi are most consistently present in the southern valley, and are often completely missing in other areas of the study. In wood, they are more "loyal", and coexist more reliably with *H*. *formosana* throughout the plot. This may perhaps be due to the high rate of turnover in leaves, which are flushed mostly sterile (Arnold and Herre, 2003), and are shed within 1 to several years, in contrast with the longer lifespan of woody tissues. Applying terminology proposed by Hamady and Knight (2009), core woody endophytes here may be best described by the “minimal” core model: they are few in number among a large and highly variable microbiome, but are consistently present throughout the study. In contrast, leaf endophytes may be described better by “gradient” or “subpopulation” core models, where a core group of associated microbes may establish with a particular host, but whose presence is highly conditional on space and environment.

When all host trees were compared, the average dissimilarity between any two trees was extremely high, (Fig. 8, Table 2). Samples become somewhat more similar on average when constrained to a single host, for wood and leaves, seemingly a result of the strong effects of host (Figs. 4 and 8). The taxonomic core of fungi behaves differently from the fungal microbiome at large. Removing these fungi from consideration brings the mycobiome of their host, *H. formosana*, nearly back to the high background levels of dissimilarity among samples of the entire study, indicating that these may be the species through which host effects are manifested (Fig. 8).

## Fungal species:

Most of the candidate core fungal species of the tree *Helicia formosana* were unidentified (Table 1), often even to the phylum level. This makes specific ecological interpretation of the individual core fungi difficult or impossible. It also speaks to an urgent and daunting challenge facing mycologists today: the need for more high-quality accessions of lesser known fungi in fungal barcode databases, to keep pace with the ongoing technical revolution of high-throughput sequencer technologies.

Within the candidates for core fungi of *H. formosana*, *Phyllosticta* were present as least three endophytes OTUs in leaves. This included *P. capitalensis*, which is a well-known endophyte of tropical woody plants (Baayen et al., 2002), that may have been transported throughout the world via nursery trade (George Carroll, pers. com.) Small differences in genotype can determine a fungal species’ tendency to a pathogenic or endophytic-mutualistic lifestyle (Carroll, 1988; Rodriguez and Redman, 2008). This has apparently resulted in genera that contain numerous examples of both pathogenic and endophytic within genera such as *Colletotrichum* (Rojas et al., 2010), *Mycosphaerella* (Crous, 1998; Lau et al., 2013), and *Phyllosticta* (Glienke et al., 2011). These differences imply that radically different ecological effects can result from small changes in a fungal genome. Rhese three *Phyllostica* species, though closely related, may have very different interactions with their host, *H. formosana,* which cannot be understood without further investigation*.*

## The value of the taxonomic Core:

Some have argued that the concept of a taxonomic core should be augmented or replaced by a *functional* core (Lemanceau et al., 2017; Lloyd-Price et al., 2016). This is an important and complementary approach to understanding microbe and host interactions, and does not contradict taxonomic delineation of cores. On either extreme of spatial scales, the search for a taxonomic core is probably meaningless – cosmopolitan species such as humans will likely show complete turnover microbiomes throughtout their global range (The Human Microbiome Project Consortium, 2012). Extremely localized searches for core species of a host are nonsensical. At well-defined, intermediate spatial scales such as examined here, a search for taxonomic core retains its usefulness to microbial ecology: patterns such as those observed here would be extremely difficult to quantify from a purely functional perspective. On some level, disagreement over taxonomic vs. functional cores is another example of a false, reductionist-versus-holistic dichotomy (Fang and Casadevall, 2011). Discarding either approach results in a loss of information.

The presence of a core taxonomic group of microbes in a host might be considered a kind of stabilization or structuring of a portion of a host’s microbiome, possibly as a result of interactions among hosts and select microbes. When defining core microbiomes as we have here, it may be important to consider the different organs of hosts as very different refugia for microbes: here the woody tissues appeared to host a more consistent assemblage of core fungi. Similarly, the leaves *Helicia* *formosana* trees in the more sheltered southwestern valley held more a consistent microbial core than in more exposed areas of the plot.

We are limited here in our ability to examine the importance of neutral spatial processes, given our coarse environmental data. However, these patterns suggest that even strong biological interactions between microbe and host can be disrupted or prevented. This disruption could stem from neutral processes such as obstacles to dispersal from topography, or environmental changes such as fierce summer storm events reseting community assembly in leaves. As such, it may be that for a consistent taxonomic core to develop in a plant microbiome, either local habitat or more persistent host tissue may need to provide some measure of stability from change. High rates of dispersal and disturbance can disrupt the tendency to local structure in communities and gene pools (Cadotte, 2006; Vellend, 2010; Wright, 1940). A parallel logic may apply for taxonomic microbiomes of large hosts.

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# Captions

Figure 1. Left: topographic map of the Fushan FDP with the four vegetation types as classified by Su et al.(2007). Right: map of the habitat type, a composite classification based on microtopographic characteristics of quadrats, defined by Su et al. (2010). The units of the coordinates and contours are in meters, with quadrats at 20x20m scale. Figures reproduced with permission from authors.

Figure 2. Left - An overview of nested-squares, logarithmic sampling scheme Vandegrift (2016). Vertices of squares are sample sites. Units are meters. Right - Perspective diagram of Fushan Forest Dynamics Plot (Su et al., 2010). Figures reproduced with permission from authors.

Figure 3. Class-level overview of taxonomic composition of wood and leaf libraries, from all trees sampled. Proportions are out of total OTUs observed in each plant organ: 2025 OTUs in wood, 1302 in leaves.

Figure 4. Non-metric multidimensional scaling diagram of endophyte communities, with all tree hosts that were sampled at least 3 times.

Figure 5. Two PCNM vectors showing patterns of variation in endophyte communities of a single host-tree species, *Helicia* *formosana*. Size and color of bubble show differences in community predicted by this spatial pattern. For some significant subset of the total endophytes species sampled, sites with large black circles contain very different fungal species assemblages than sites with large white circles. Here, both leaf and wood endophyte communities display dissimilarity between the plot at large and the southern valley. Full arrays of ecologically significant PCNM vectors are provided in Supp Figs. 1 and 2.

Figure 6. Map of Bray-Curtis dissimilarity values over the Fushan FDP, resulting from comparisons between red circled point all other *Helicia* *formosana* samples. Dark blue points (BC=1) share no fungal species in common with the circled sample, and increase in similarity from yellow to green

(BC=0).

Figure 7. Map of Bray-Curtis dissimilarity values over the Fushan FDP, resulting from comparisons between all *H*. *formosana* points and the core fungi of the *H*. *formosana*. Dark blue points (BC=1) contain no species from this set of core fungi, and increase in similarity from yellow to green (BC=0, 100% of core fungi present).

Figure 8. Distribution of Bray-Curtis dissimilarity among sample comparisons of all hosts, and of *Helicia* *formosana* only.

# Supplementary figures

Supplemental Figure 1 . Mantel correlogram, showing standardized Mantel statistics of distance classes between Bray-Curtis dissimilarity matrix from leaf and wood endophyte communities and distances among sampling sites. Positive Mantel’s r for a given set of comparisons indicates positive autocorrelation among a comparisons of this distance. Black filled circles indicate statistically significant correlations, after correction for multiple testing.

Supplemental Figure 2. All-host leaf dbMEM analysis. All vectors shown here correlate to some degree with spatial patterns found within leaf endophyte populations. See methods section for further details on interpretation of dbMEM vectors and their interpretation.

Supplemental Figure 3. All-host wood dbMEM analysis. All vectors shown here correlate to some degree with spatial patterns found within leaf endophyte populations. See methods section for further details on interpretation of dbMEM vectors and their interpretation.

Supplemental Figure 4. Co-occurrence networks of fungal endophytes and their tree hosts. Closest (first-degree) associations were used to select fungi as candidates for the core microbiome of a host.