DEVELOPMENT OF SORTING SYSTEM FOR OIL PALM IN VITRO SHOOTS USING MACHINE VISION APPROACH

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By

HAMDAN YAHYA AHMED AL-RUHAIMI

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of University Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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March 2014

Chair: Associate Professor Mohammad Hamiruce Marhaban, PhD
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There is a promising future for palm oil cultivation because of tissue culture technology that leads to increased production rates as well as enhanced quality. In spite of high demand for palm oil, cheap mass-produced plantlets of oil palm have yet to reach an attractive price. The main reason is that the processing of oil palm tissue culture is still operated manually and is considered too labour-intensive. This affects its economies, especially in developed countries where wages are high. In addition, the plantlet is susceptible to contamination throughout this process. Since a large proportion of manual work is at the in vitro shoots stage, and no commercial automated system for this task presently exists, research will develop a sorting task as a step to reach a fully efficient machine vision system.

This research targets the sorting task which is one of four tasks which have been suggested to achieve greater automation of oil palm tissue culture while in the *in vitro* shoots stages. The four are separation, classification, sorting and rooting. In this work, the type of sample involves oil palm tissue culture (OPTC) shoots obtained from the Malaysia Palm Oil Board (MPOB) tissue culture laboratory. They were acquired, recorded, and utilized throughout the system development. A manual adjusting method for image intensity is here suggested to enhance and sharpen the acquired frames, and the region of interest has been determined as well, which led to simplifying the segmentation and reduce the pre-processing time.

Region-based features, namely area, centroid, aspect ratio, extent and two cropping points have been represented in the shape of OPTC *in vitro* shoots. By using k-means algorithm the extracted features have been evaluated. A smart object tracking algorithm (SOTA) has been proposed for detecting and identifying the shoot on the conveyor belt. Based on SOTA and classification task decision, a sorting algorithm that can acquire, recognize, and eject a shoot has been improved and tested in an offline mode. Furthermore, workable values of external variables and a customized sorter have been designed to test the system in real-time mode and to smooth the ejecting process. Ultimately, the sorting algorithm performance came to be evaluated by support vector machine algorithm.

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The performance of the sorting process shows that acquiring, detecting, tracking and sorting functions operate well. The result of K-means has proven the robustness of the selected features. The resulting error of offline tests of the sorting algorithm did not exceed 4.33 per cent. The machine vision system in real-time can eject abnormal shoots from the conveyor, with a limited overall error that could reach as high as 6.6 per cent in the worst case. Close results between the performance of the developed sorting algorithm and SVM algorithm demonstrate that it is satisfactory and efficient. Automating the sorting task was achieved under the main goal which is increasing the production rate and enhancing the quality. In addition, the automated sorting system reduced the overstaffing which achieves part of the economies required to make it of interest in the industry.

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PEMBANGUNAN SISTEM PENGASINGAN UNTUK TUNAS *IN VITRO* KELAPA SAWIT MENGGUNAKAN PENDEKATAN

Oleh

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Industri penanaman kelapa sawit dilihat memiliki masa depan yang cerah disebabkan oleh teknologi kultur tisu yang mampu meningkatkan kadar dan kualiti hasil. Walaupun permintaan terhadap kelapa sawit adalah tinggi, tetapi harga anak pokok kelapa sawit masih berada di tahap yang agak tinggi. Ini adalah disebabkan oleh proses kultur tisu yang dijalankan secara manual dan memerlukan tenaga pekerja yang ramai. Faktor ini menjadikan sector penanaman kelapa sawit sangat tidak memberansangkan dari sudut ekonomi terutamanya di negara-negara maju yang mana kadar upah pekerja adalah tinggi. Selain itu, anak-anak pokok yang diproses secara manual terdedah kepada pelbagai pencemaran yang menjejaskan kualiti pokok. Sebahagian besar daripada kerja-kerja manual ini diperlukan ketika anak-anak pokok berada di peringkat tunas in vitro. Malangnya sehingga ke hari ini, tidak ada satu pun sistem automatik bagi menggantikan tenaga manusia untuk tugasan ini yang telah dikomersialkan. Justeru, kajian ini memfokuskan kepada penghasilan satu sistem automatik untuk proses pengasingan tunas in vitro yang merupakan langkah pertama ke arah satu sistem pengasingan berasaskan penglihatan mesin sepenuhnya yang cekap.

Proses kultur tisu pokok kelapa sawit melibatkan empat peringkat, iaitu pemisahan, klasifikasi, pengasihan, dan percambahan akar. Kajian ini mensasarkan tugasan pengasingan untuk meningkatkan tahap automasi keseluruhan proses. Untuk kajian ini, sampel-sampel tunas kultur tisu kelapa sawit diperoleh dari makmal kultur tisu Lembaga Minyak Sawit Malaysia (LMSM). Tunas-tunas ini telah dirakam, diperoleh, dan digunakan di sepanjang proses pembangunan sistem ini. Kaedah pelarasan kecerahan imej secara manual telah dicadangkan untuk menambah baik kualiti dan menajamkan gambar-gambar yang telah diperolehi. Selain itu, kawasan-kawasan penting atau region of interest (ROI) juga telah ditentukan bagi memudahkan proses segmentasi dan mengurangkan masa pra-pemprosesan.

Ciri-ciri berasaskan kawasan, iaitu keluasan, centroid, nisbah aspek, takat, dan dua titik potongan telah dikenal pasti dan dikeluarkan daripada imej bentuk tunas kultur tisu kelapa sawit. Ciri-ciri ini kemudiannya dinilai menggunakan algoritma k-means. Berdasarkan cirri-ciri ini, satu algoritma menjejak objek pintar atau smart object tracking algorithm (SOTA) telah dicadangkan. Dengan menggabungkan algoritma ini dengan keputusan

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klasifikasi, satu algoritma pengasingan yang mampu memperoleh, mengecam, dan melentingkan tunas telah berjaya diperbaiki dan diuji secara luar talian. Sistem ini kemudiannya telah direka bentuk dengan semua pemboleh ubah telah dilaraskan untuk diuji secara masa nyata. Pencapaian sistem ini telah dibandingkan dengan algoritma support vector machine (SVM).

Pencapaian proses pengasingan menunjukan bahawa fungsi-fungsi pemerolehan, pengesanan, penjejakan, dan pengasingan telah berjalan dengan baik. Keputusan K-means pula telah membuktikan bahawa ciri-ciri yang telah dipilih adalah teguh. Ralat-ralat yang diperoleh daripada ujian luar talian terhadap algoritma pengasingan juga tidak melebihi 4.33 peratus. Sistem penglihatan mesin yang beroperasi dalam masa nyata mampu melentingkan tunas yang tidak normal keluar dari tali sawat penghantar dengan ralat keseluruhan hanya 6.6 peratus. Keputusan ujian terhadap algoritma yang telah dicadangkan ini adalah hampir menyamai dengan keputusan yang dicapai oleh algoritma SVM, seterusnya membuktikan bahawa sistem ini adalah cekap dan memuaskan. Secara keseluruhannya, pengautomatikan sistem pengasingan tunas kultur tisu kelapa sawit ini telah mencapai objektif utamanya, iaitu untuk meningkatkan kadar dan kualiti pengeluaran kelapa sawit. Tambahan pula, sistem ini mampu mengurangkan kos pengambilan pekerja, menjadikanya satu pilihan yang menarik dari sudut ekonomi.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 12 March 2014 to conduct the final examination of Hamdan Yahya Ahmed Al-Ruhaimi on his thesis entitled "Development of Sorting System for Oil Palm *In Vitro* Shoots using Machine Vision Approach" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Master of Science.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
ABSTRACT		ii
ABSTRAK		iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT		vi
APPROVAL		vii
DECLARATION		ix
LIST OF TABLES		xiv
LIST OF FIGURES		xv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS		xvii
CHAPTER		
1	**INTRODUCTION**	1
	1.1 Overview	1
	1.2 Problem Statement	2
	1.3 Research aims and objectives	2
	1.4 Scope of Works	3
	1.4 Thesis Outline	3
2	**LITERATURE REVIEW**	4
	2.1 Preface	4
	2.2 Background of In-Vitro Tissue Culture Process	4
	2.3 Overview of Automation Systems for Plant Tissue Culture	7
	2.3.1 Factors encouraging the automation process	7
	2.3.2 Shape features extraction and selection technics	7
	2.3.3 Object detecting and tracking techanics	8
	2.3.4 Machine Vision Systems for Plant Tissue Culture	8
3	**METHODOLOGY**	13
	3.1 Methodology overview	13
	3.2 Research design	13
	3.3 Hardware and Software Preparation	14
	3.4 Data Collection	15
	3.4.1 Platform Setup	15
	3.4.2 Samples Recording and Acquiring	16
	3.4.3 Adjusting Image Intensity	17
	3.5 Image Pre-processing	18
	3.5.1 Color to Grayscale Conversion and Region of Interest	18

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3.5.2 Automatic Thresholding Algorithm 19
3.6 Feature Extraction 20
3.6.1 Shape Descriptors 20
3.6.2 Evaluating Features Using K-means Algorithm 23
3.7 Smart Object Tracking Algorithm 25
3.7.1 Creating a Dataset for Extracted Features 25
3.7.2 Finding Accurate Thresholds 27
3.8 Sorting System Design 29
3.8.1 Sorting Algorithm 29
3.8.2 Initial design of Sorting System 32
3.8.3 Final Design and Latency Calculation 32
3.8.4 Sorter Design 35
3.9 Sorting Algorithm Evaluation 38
3.10 Summary 41

4 RESULT AND DISCUSSION 42
4.1 Overview 42
4.2 Image Pre-processing 42
4.3 Features Extractions 43
4.4 Smart Object Tracking Algorithm 45
4.4.1 Defining Accurate Thresholds 45
4.5 Sorting System Design 46
4.5.1 Offline Test of Sorting Algorithm 46
4.5.2 Real-Time Test of Sorting Algorithm with Initial Design 48
4.5.3 Real-Time Test of Sorting Algorithm with Final Design 49
4.6 Sorting Algorithm Evaluation 50

5 CONCLUSION 52
5.1 Summary and conclusion 52
5.2 Technical challenges and Suggestion 53

REFERENCES 54
APPENDICES 58
BIODATA OF STUDENT 73

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LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
3.1	The Structure of the Produced Data Set That is Using for Evaluating Features	26
3.2	The SDs for Features within the Same Sample and with All Samples	27
3.3	The Initial Design Specifications	32
3.4	Latencies Calculation	33
3.5	The Final Design Specifications	34
3.6	Nozzle Specifications	35
4.1	The Accurate Thresholds as Resulting of SOTA	46
4.2	The Error of Sorting Algorithm in Offline Implementation	48
4.3	The Error of The Sorting System Based on the Initial Design	49
4.4	Results of Latencies Calculations	49
4.5	The Error of The Sorting System Based on the Final Design	50
4.6	The Comparison between Error of Sorting Algorithm and SVM	51

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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
2.1	Stages of Plant Tissue Culture Process	5
2.1	Samples of Oil Palm *In Vitro* Shoots With Normal Characteristic	6
2.3	Various Type of Abnormal Oil Palm *In Vitro* Shoots	6
2.4	Diagram of Manual Sugarcane Shoots Separation Devic	9
2.5	The Harvester in the Harvest Position Above a Tray Base	9
2.6	Diagram of Experimental Shoot Separation Mechanism	10
2.7	Proposed Commercial Shoot Separation Layout Design	10
2.8	Schematic Illustration of the Phalaenopsis Shoot Separation System	11
2.9	Schematic Diagram of the Gripper	12
3.1	Research Design of Oil Palm Tissue Culture *In Vitro* Shoot Sorting	13
3.2	A Block Diagram of System Configuration	14
3.3	Sample Images of *In Vitro* Shoots	15
3.4	Schematic Illustrates the Platform Setup	16
3.5	Photograph of Actual Platform Setup	16
3.6	The Adjusting Image Intensity Process	18
3.7	The Region of Interest (ROI)	19
3.8	Histogram of Adjusted and Pre-Processed Image	20
3.9	Flow Chart of Shape Features Extraction of the Oil Palm *In Vitro* Shoots Images	21
3.10	Shape Descriptors' Manner In Different Acquired Frames For The Same Shoot	23
3.11	Selected Features Evaluation Method Using K-Means	25
3.12	Smart Object Tracking Algorithm	29
3.13	Flow Chart Of The Sorting Algorithm	30

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3.14	The Effective External Variables	32
3.15	Illustrative Shape Of Nozzle Design	36
3.16	Photograph Of Actual Nozzle Design	36
3.17	Projection View Of Nozzle Design	37
3.18	Evaluating The Sorting Algorithm By The Svm Algorithm	39
3.19	The Leave-One-Out Cross Evaluation Method	40
4.1	Adjusting Acquired Image Intensity	43
4.2	The Clustering Of 2 Random Samples Using Two Chosen Features	44
4.3	The Area Error Of Applying Sota On The Range Of Sds Range	45
4.4	The Final Design Workable Values Of External Variables	50
4.5	The Performance Of Svm	51

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MPOB	Malaysian Palm Oil Board
ARR	Applied Agricultural Resources Sdn. Bhd
AVI	Audio Video Interleaved
HMM5	Hidden Markov Model
LOOCV	Leave-one-out cross-validation
OPTC	Oil Palm Tissue Culture
ROI	Region of Interest
SOTA	Smart Object Tracking Algorithm
W4	Who? When? Where? What?
SVM	Support Vector Machine

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

The oil palm tree produces edible oil that is widely known in commercial agriculture production as one of the healthy vegetable oils. Oil palm and palm oil manufacturing are considered as effective factors in terms of national economies in many countries. Forty-two (42) countries' palm oil production accounts for 34 per cent of world's annual production of vegetable oils and 63 per cent of the global exports of vegetable oils. In Nigeria, the oil palm industry offers a chance for millions of unskilled and semi-skilled labourers to be employed [1] and in Malaysia the palm oil industry "provides [a] job opportunity directly to 500 thousand people and indirectly to 2 million people." At the end of 1960, there were about 123,000 ha of oil palm in Malaysia and at the end of 2004, there were around 3.87m ha producing 13.9m tons of crude palm oil. Today, to raise the productivity by extending the planted land is not suitable because of multiple uses land and its many purposes. To keep and increase high-yielding palm oil, the only effective method is to increase the oil yield per hectare on the same planting area [2,3].

Plant tissue culture technology is the most suitable way to raise the productivity of crude oil palm per hectare. The production of high quality, disease-free and uniform planting material leads to high-yielding farming. For instance, Applied Agricultural Resources Sdn. Bhd (ARR) is one of the largest Tissue Culture Laboratories in Malaysia. Its oil palm clone can produce up to 10.6 t/ha/year of crude palm oil, which is 20-25% higher than the yield of conventional seedlings. This has allowed tissue cultured plants to reach many developed and developing countries. However, the technology of tissue culture is expensive compare to conventional methods. Among all the factors that cause the high cost of the OPTC production, labour is the prime factor in developed countries. Due to those costs, researchers have been tried to partially automate some steps to reduce the process cost [2].

Many oil palm tissue culture [OPTC] laboratories in several countries still use a quality of production and raises the cost because tissue culture is a labour-intensive process. Since there is high-demand for tissue cultured plants, there is enormous need to automate those operations done by hand. The high sophistication of the machine vision field offers possibilities to engineer an optimum system to facilitate the selection process and optimise its quality control.

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1.2 Problem Statement

Tissue culture allows improvement in quality and production rate for numerous agricultural products. However, OPTC is a labour-intensive process, and results in high-costs for tissue culture technology, especially in developed countries. To reduce the cost of production, labour-intensive steps in this process should be automated whenever possible. The tissue culture process is usually divided into five stages and according to Debergh and Maene, 1981. [4] Stage III of *in vitro* (shooting and rooting of the explants) accounts for 35-75% of the total production cost because it is a labour-intensive stage. Automating this stage will not only reduce the cost, it will also raise production rates of tissue culture plants. A classification algorithm has already been developed [5] to classify the shoots into normal and abnormal. For applying the classification algorithm in real time, a sorting system is required.

The difficulty of OPTC automation is caused by genetic, physical and economic factors. The process should be in an aseptic environment, and the shoots in this stage are easily damaged by touching. The shoots have flat, thin and ill-defined shapes, sizes, and dimensions making the mechanical handling (cutting, rooting, and sorting) a complicated task. The intention of this research is to suggest an economical sorting system where the classification algorithm could be applied in real time. The research reported here has resulted in an image-processing algorithm that can detect shoots on the conveyor and use a suitably designed tool for ejecting abnormal ones from a conveyor depending on the classification algorithms.

1.3 Research aims and objectives

In the manual sorting process of OPTC shoots, the skilled workers have enough experience to categorize the shoots. They can sort out the abnormal shoots from normal ones. This research has developed an image-processing algorithm to detect the arrival of a shoot on the conveyor when it is entirely within the field-of-view of camera. At the same time it generates a signal which controls a mechanical tool that ejects the abnormal shoot off of the conveyor depending on the classification algorithm decision available from related research. The objectives of the current research can be summarized as follows:

1. To develop a sorting algorithm able to detect, track, identify and eject the coming shoot on conveyor and testing its performance in both real-time and off-line simulation modes.
2. To develop an *in vitro* shoots dataset based on region-based features to be used in improving an effective tracking of OPTC samples coming along the conveyor.
3. To build a suitable tracking algorithm that can ensure a fast detecting and tracking of OPTC samples in successive frames.

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1.4 Scope of Work

The research will concentrate only on the sorting at the shoots' development stage of the oil palm tissue culture, which will eject abnormal shoots out of the conveyor depending on the decision of the classification algorithm reached previously in related research [5]. The speed of conveyor is considered a dependent variable ranging from 4 cm/s to 10 cm/s, and it must be set by the operator during the process. The research assumes that the feeding operation was done manually and considers that there is distance between the samples (OPTC shoots) during conveyor feeding.

1.5 Thesis Outline

The first chapter in this research introduces the POTC and the massive need of a full automation system in order to substitute manual operations at the stage III of tissue culture shoots. The research problem, objectives, aims and limitation are also presented in this chapter. In chapter two, the review of the literature begins with a short introduction of the OPTC process and its stages. After that, an in-depth revision of previous machine vision systems is discussed as well as the most important technics such as detection and tracking.

The chapter three explains the research methodology. It starts by introducing the data collection process for creating a database followed by acquiring data conditions and image pre-processing. The latter includes adjusting image intensity, choosing ROI, thresholding and extracting features. The sorting algorithm depending on SOTA has been discussed. At the close of this chapter, a sorter design for ejecting abnormal shoots is been introduced. In the results and discussion chapter, the results of the sorting algorithm as well as SOTA performances are presented. The results of the sorting algorithm are shown in tables and also with graphical representations as they help in visualizing the results. In the last chapter, some technical problems encountered during this research are discussed along with suggestions for overcoming them.

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