

## DOCTORAL THESIS

### DNA-binding properties and topoisomerase-I inhibitory activities of natural and synthesized protoberberine alkaloids

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**DNA-binding Properties and Topoisomerase-I  
Inhibitory Activities of Natural and Synthesized  
Protoberberine Alkaloids**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements**

**for the degree of**

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## ABSTRACT

The specific and noncovalent interactions of small organic molecules with DNA are important in medicinal chemistry since they are useful for elucidating the mechanisms of anti-tumor and anti-virus drugs and for developing promising chemotherapeutic agents. Naturally-occurring protoberberine alkaloids possess various pharmacological activities including anti-microbial, anti-cancer, and topoisomerase inhibitory activities. It was reported that DNA-binding played important role in their bioactivity. However, these natural alkaloids showed modest DNA-binding affinity and non-significant sequence selectivity. In order to improve the DNA-binding affinity and sequence selectivity of these protoberberines with the aim of obtaining promising lead compounds, a series of investigations were carried out. The results were summarized as the following:

(1) Six novel berberine homodimers (**9-14**, linked with 2-7 methylenes, respectively) were successfully synthesized. Their binding affinities with calf thymus (CT) DNA and three double-stranded oligodeoxynucleotides (d(AAGAATTCTT)<sub>2</sub>, d(AAGCATGCTT)<sub>2</sub>, and d(TAAGAATTCTTA)<sub>2</sub>) were investigated by fluorescence spectrometric titration. Compared with the monomeric parent compound berberine, these berberine dimers showed greatly enhanced binding affinities up to approximately 100-fold and showed a prominent structure-activity relationship (SAR) when they bound with short double-stranded DNAs. In all cases, ber-(CH<sub>2</sub>)<sub>3</sub>-ber exhibits the highest affinity, indicating that the propyl chain may be the most suitable linker to bridge the two berberine units. In addition, canadine showed no binding affinity with CT DNA, suggesting the quaternary ammonium cation and planar structure are important for the intercalative binding of protoberberine alkaloids with double-stranded DNA.

(2) Three demethylated protoberberine alkaloids, *i.e.*, berberrubine, jatrorubine, and palmatrubine, showed much higher EB displacement ratio than their parent compounds berberine, jatrorrhizine, and palmatine, respectively, suggesting that partially demethylation is an effective way to improve the DNA-binding affinities for these protoberberine alkaloids. The comparative study provided scientific evidence to explain why the antibiotic activities of processed Rhizoma Coptidis (制黃連) and processed Cortex Phellodendri (制黃柏) are stronger than those of the crude herbs..

(3) Both mono- and dimeric berberines form intercalating complexes with double-stranded DNA which was manifested through spectrophotometric titration and competitive EB displacement experiment.

(4) Dimeric protoberberines showed much stronger topoisomerase-I inhibitory activity than their natural congeners or mono-modified berberines, in analogy to the SAR discovered in DNA-binding studies. It demonstrated that these dimers are promising compounds which can exhibit anticancer activity. Protoberberine monomers were proved to inhibit topoisomerase-I through a mechanism of stabilizing enzyme-mediated DNA 'cleavable complex' as camptothecin does. Dimeric berberines at low concentration exhibited similar mechanism as that of CPT. At concentration above 200

$\mu\text{M}$ , obvious inhibition of the relaxation activity of topoisomerase-I was observed. This is probably due to the strong binding affinity of these dimeric protoberberines toward plasmid DNA.

In conclusion, this study is an investigation on the noncovalent interactions between the active components from Chinese herbal medicines and double-stranded DNA using medicinal, bioorganic, and biochemical methods. The results obtained in this research provided substantial evidence for exploring the action mechanism of these alkaloids at molecular level, and demonstrated that structural modifications of small organic molecules from Chinese herbal medicines is a useful tool for new drug discovery and development.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	xi
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xii
LIST OF SCHEMES.....	xvi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	xvii
<b>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 The Brief Review of Protoberberine Alkaloids.....	2
1.1.1 The Distribution of Protoberberine Alkaloids in Plant Kingdom.....	2
1.1.2 The Representative Compounds of Protoberberine Alkaloids and Derivatives after Structural Modification.....	2
1.1.3 The Pharmacological Activities of Protoberberine Alkaloids.....	6
1.2 Basic Structural Features of DNA.....	9
1.3 The Types of Ligand-DNA Interactions .....	13
1.3.1 Covalent Binding.....	14
1.3.2 Noncovalent Binding.....	16
1.3.3 Interactions Between Protoberberine Alkaloids and DNA and RNA.....	26
1.4 Methods Used for Investigating Ligand-DNA Interactions.....	30
1.4.1 Fluorescence Spectrometric Method.....	31
1.4.2 Ultraviolet/Visible (UV/VIS) Spectrometric Titration.....	32

1.4.3 Ultraviolet (UV) Melting Experiment.....	33
1.4.4 Competitive Ethidium Bromide (EB) Displacement.....	34
1.4.5 Mass Spectrometry (MS).....	35
1.4.6 Nuclear Magnetic Resonance (NMR) Spectroscopy.....	37
1.4.7 X-ray Crystallography.....	38
1.4.8 Others.....	39
1.5 The Brief Review of Topoisomerases and Their Inhibitors.....	41
1.5.1 The Types of Topoisomerases.....	42
1.5.2 The Possibility for Developing Specific Topoisomerase Inhibitors.....	44
1.5.3 The Types of Topoisomerase Inhibitors.....	45
1.5.4 The Topoisomerase Inhibitory Activities of Protoberberine Alkaloids.....	46
1.6 Aims and Design of the Research.....	48
1.6.1 Aims of the Research.....	48
1.6.2 Design of the Research.....	49
1.6.3 Structure of the Thesis.....	50
 <b>CHAPTER 2 SYNTHESIS, DNA-BINDING AFFINITIES AND BINDING</b>	
<b>MODE OF BERBERINE DIMERS</b> .....	52
2.1 Introduction.....	53
2.2 Experimental Part.....	57
2.2.1 Apparatus and Chemicals.....	57
2.2.2 Double-Stranded DNA Solution Preparation.....	58
2.2.3 Chemical Preparation of Berberrubine .....	59
2.2.4 Synthesis of Dimeric Berberines <b>9-14</b> .....	61

2.2.5 Chemical Preparation of Canadine .....	72
2.2.6 Fluorescence Spectrometric Titration Experiment.....	74
2.2.7 UV/Vis Spectrometric Titration Experiment.....	75
2.3 Results & Discussion.....	75
2.3.1 DNA-binding Affinities and Sequence Selectivities of Berberine, Palmatine, and Coptisine.....	75
2.3.2 DNA-binding Affinities of Berberine Dimers (9-14).....	82
2.3.3 DNA-binding Mode of Berberine Dimers (9-14).....	88
2.3.4 The Importance of Quaternary Ammonium Cation and Planar Structure of Berberine in DNA-binding.....	91
2.4 Conclusion.....	92
<b>CHAPTER 3 DNA-BINDING PROPERTIES OF PROTOBERBERINE</b>	
<b>ALKALOIDS AND THEIR DEMETHYLATED DERIVATIVES: A</b>	
<b>COMPARATIVE STUDY.....</b>	
3.1 Introduction.....	95
3.2 Experimental Part.....	99
3.2.1 Apparatus and Chemicals.....	99
3.2.2 Double-Stranded DNA Solution Preparation.....	100
3.2.3 Chemical Preparation of Jatrorubine and Palmatrubine.....	101
3.2.4 Competitive Ethidium Bromide (EB) Displacements Experiment.....	104
3.2.5 UV/VIS Spectrophotometric Titration Experiment.....	105
3.3. Results & Discussion.....	105
3.3.1 DNA-binding Affinities and Sequence Specificities of Berberine, Jatrorrhizine, Palmatine, and Their Demethylated Derivatives.....	105

3.3.2 DNA Binding Mode of berberine, Jatrorrhizine, Palmatine and Their Demethylated Derivatives.....	113
3.4. Conclusion.....	116
<b>CHAPTER 4 INHIBITION OF DNA TOPOISOMERASE I BY NATURAL AND SYNTHETIC MONO- AND DIMERIC PROTOBERBERINE ALKALOIDS.....</b>	<b>118</b>
4.1. Introduction.....	119
4.2. Experimental Part.....	123
4.2.1 Apparatus and Chemicals.....	123
4.2.2 Topoisomerase I-mediated DNA Cleavage Assay.....	124
4.3. Results & Discussion.....	125
4.3.1 Effects of Natural and Synthesized Protoberberine Alkaloids on the Stabilization of the Covalent Enzyme-DNA Cleavable Complex.....	125
4.3.2 Influence of Concentration of CPT, Berberine, Berberrubine, 9- <i>O</i> -2-aminoethylberberine, ber-(CH <sub>2</sub> ) <sub>3</sub> -ber, and jat-(CH <sub>2</sub> ) <sub>2</sub> -jat on the Formation of Topoisomerase I-mediated DNA Cleavage and on the Suppression of Plasmid DNA Relaxation.....	131
4.4. Conclusion.....	136
<b>CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY AND PROSPECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH.....</b>	<b>137</b>
5.1. Summary and Conclusions of the Research.....	138
5.2. Prospective for Further Research.....	149
REFERENCES.....	152
PUBLICATIONS.....	187
PRESENTATIONS AND ABSTRACTS.....	189



CURRICULUM VITAE.....190