

DOCTORAL THESIS

Integrating multi-omics to investigate the correlation between the quality and efficacy of ginseng

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Abstract

Ginseng, the root and rhizome of *Panax ginseng* C. A. Mey. (Araliaceae), is one of the most famed dietary and medicinal herbs worldwide due to its multifaceted efficacies. Ginsenosides and carbohydrates are demonstrated the major bioactive components of ginseng. Ginseng materials are always formed under various conditions, e.g. different growth years or different post-harvest processing/handling manners. These conditions can impact chemical profiles and thereby cause different quality and efficacy of ginseng. To address this issue, it will be necessary to understand the correlation between the quality and efficacy of ginseng materials formed under different conditions. Previous studies have attempted to investigate how growth years and post-harvest processing/handling manners affect the quality and efficacy of ginseng. In the most of these cases, several chemical components and biological parameters were selected as the indicators for evaluating the quality and efficacy of ginseng, respectively. However, it has been well recognized that the therapy of ginseng is featured by “multiple components against multiple targets”. Therefore, several selected indicators may fail to comprehensively characterize the quality and efficacy of ginseng, thus cannot accurately reveal their correlations. Instead, holism-based approaches should be employed.

In this study, we integrated chemomics, metabolomics and gut microbiota genomics to investigate the correlation between the quality and efficacy of ginseng in the conditions of growth years, steam-processing and sulfur-fumigation. First, chemomics approach was developed to qualitatively and quantitatively determine major ginsenosides and carbohydrates (poly-, oligo- and monosaccharides) by ultra-high performance liquid chromatography-tandem triple quadrupole mass spectrometry (UHPLC-QqQ-MS/MS) and high performance liquid chromatography coupled with evaporative light scattering detector (HPLC-ELSD) for characterizing the overall quality of ginseng. Second, ultra-performance liquid chromatography-quadrupole time-of-flight mass spectrometry (UPLC-QTOF-MS/MS)-based metabolomics and 16S rRNA gene sequencing-based gut microbiota genomics coupled with biochemical parameters determination were

performed to evaluate anti-fatigue and anti-obesity activities of the different ginseng on animal models. Third, the obtained multi-omics data were processed by multivariate statistical analysis and then were integrated to discuss the correlation between the quality and efficacy of ginseng materials in different conditions.

The results indicated that: 1) ginseng with 4-6 growth years possessed different anti-fatigue activity in multiple targets due to the different effects of ginsenosides and carbohydrates on endogenous metabolism and gut microbiota; 2) steam-processing qualitatively and quantitatively altered ginsenosides and carbohydrates in ginseng, resulting in different anti-obesity activity between white ginseng and red ginseng, and the mechanisms potentially involve chemically structural/compositional specificity to gut microbiota; 3) SO₂ residual content caused by sulfur-fumigation did not correlate with the quality, efficacy and toxicity changes of sulfur-fumigated ginseng, more specifically, less SO₂ residue did not indicate higher quality, better efficacy nor weaker toxicity. The research provides scientific insights for guiding the clinical and dietary practice of ginseng and offers new methodology for comprehensively exploring the correlation between the quality and efficacy of herbal medicines.

Table of Contents

DECLARATION.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
List of Tables.....	viii
List of Figures.....	x
List of Abbreviations.....	xiv
Chapter 1 General introduction.....	1
1.1 Ginseng.....	1
1.2 Omics strategy.....	2
1.2.1 Chemomics.....	3
1.2.2 Metabolomics.....	3
1.2.3 Gut microbiota genomics.....	4
1.3 Objectives of this study.....	5
Chapter 2 Correlation between the quality and anti-fatigue activity of ginseng in 4-6 growth years.....	7
2.1 Introduction.....	7
2.2 Materials and Methods.....	8
2.2.1 Chemicals and materials.....	8
2.2.2 Sample preparation.....	9
2.2.2.1 Ginseng extract preparation.....	9
2.2.2.2 Sample preparation for ginsenosides analysis.....	10
2.2.2.3 Sample pretreatment for polysaccharides analysis.....	10
2.2.2.4 Sample pretreatment for analysis of free monosaccharides and oligosaccharides.....	10
2.2.2.5 Acid hydrolysis of polysaccharides.....	11
2.2.2.6 PMP derivatization of reducing monosaccharides and oligosaccharides.....	11
2.2.3 Chemomics analysis.....	11
2.2.3.1 UHPLC-QqQ-MS/MS for ginsenoside analysis.....	11
2.2.3.2 UHPLC-QqQ-MS/MS for reducing monosaccharides and oligosaccharides analysis.....	12
2.2.3.3 HPLC-ELSD for non-reducing monosaccharides and oligosaccharides analysis.....	12
2.2.3.4 HPGPC-ELSD for polysaccharide analysis.....	13
2.2.3.5 Method validation.....	13
2.2.4 Animal trial.....	14
2.2.5 Biochemical parameters determination.....	15
2.2.6 Metabolomics by UPLC-QTOF-MS/MS.....	16
2.2.6.1 Sample preparation of serum, urine and feces.....	16
2.2.6.2 UPLC-QTOF-MS/MS analysis.....	16
2.2.6.3 Metabolomics method validation.....	17
2.2.7 Gut microbiota genomics by 16S rRNA gene sequencing.....	17
2.2.8 Multivariate statistical analysis.....	18
2.3 Results.....	20

2.3.1 Optimization of sample preparation procedure.....	20
2.3.2 Optimization of analytical conditions.....	21
2.3.3 Method validation.....	24
2.3.4 Quality of G4, G5 and G6.....	28
2.3.5 Anti-fatigue activity of G4, G5 and G6.....	31
2.3.5.1 Body signs and biochemical parameters.....	31
2.3.5.2 Metabolome.....	33
2.3.5.3 Gut microbiome.....	49
2.3.6 Correlation analysis between quality and anti-fatigue activity.....	52
2.4 Discussion.....	56
2.5 Conclusion.....	60
Chapter 3 Correlation between the quality and processing chemistry of ginseng.....	61
3.1 Introduction.....	61
3.2 Materials and Methods.....	62
3.2.1 Ginseng materials.....	62
3.2.2 Preparation of red ginseng.....	62
3.2.3 Sample preparation for chemical analysis of steaming liquid.....	63
3.2.4 Ginsenosides and carbohydrates analysis.....	63
3.2.5 Data analysis.....	63
3.3 Results and Discussion.....	63
3.3.1 Optimization of sample preparation procedure.....	63
3.3.2 Chemical variation in ginseng processed by 12-h steaming.....	63
3.3.3.1 Ginsenosides.....	64
3.3.3.2 Carbohydrates.....	71
3.3.4.4 Steaming liquid.....	73
3.4 Conclusions.....	76
Chapter 4 Correlation between the quality and anti-obesity activity of WG and RG.....	78
4.1 Introduction.....	78
4.2 Materials and Methods.....	80
4.2.1 Preparation of WEWG and WERG.....	80
4.2.2 Determination of carbohydrates and ginsenosides in WEWG and WERG.....	81
4.2.3 Animal treatment.....	81
4.2.4 Histological assessment.....	82
4.2.5 Cytokines and endotoxin LPS analysis.....	82
4.2.6 Enteric metabolomics analysis.....	83
4.2.7 16S rRNA gene sequencing.....	84
4.2.8 Statistical analysis.....	85
4.3 Results.....	85
4.3.1 WEWG and WERG contain structurally and compositionally specific carbohydrates and ginsenosides.....	85
4.3.2 WEWG better prevents HFD-induced fat accumulation than WERG.....	89
4.3.3 WEWG and WERG reduce HFD-induced systemic inflammation.....	90
4.3.4 WEWG better ameliorates HFD-induced enteric metabolic disorder than WERG.....	92

4.3.5 WEWG better alleviates HFD-induced gut microbiota dysbiosis than WERG	94
4.4 Discussion	98
4.5 Conclusion	102
Chapter 5 Correlations of SO ₂ residue content and quality/efficacy/toxicity of sulfur-fumigated ginseng	104
5.1 Introduction.....	104
5.2 Experimental	105
5.2.1 Experimental design.....	105
5.2.2 Chemicals, reagents, herbal materials, animals and cell lines	106
5.2.3 Sample preparation of non-fumigated ginseng (NFG) and sulfur-fumigated ginseng (SFG)	107
5.2.4 SO ₂ residue determination and quality characterization	107
5.2.5 Anti-inflammatory activity.....	108
5.2.6 Anti-shock activity	108
5.2.7 Anti-stress activity	109
5.2.7.1 Anti-fatigue stress	109
5.2.7.2 Anti-hypoxic stress.....	109
5.2.7.3 Anti-oxidative stress.....	110
5.2.8 Acute toxicity	111
5.2.9 Chronic toxicity	111
5.3 Results and discussion	112
5.3.1 SO ₂ residue determination	112
5.3.2 Quality characterization	112
5.3.3 Anti-inflammatory activity.....	122
5.3.4 Anti-shock activity	124
5.3.5 Anti-stress activity	125
5.3.5.1 Anti-fatigue activity	125
5.3.5.2 Anti-hypoxic activity	126
5.3.5.3 Anti-oxidative activity	126
5.3.6 Acute toxicity	130
5.3.7 Chronic toxicity	131
5.4 Conclusion	136
Chapter 6 Summary and future prospects	138
6.1 Summary	138
6.2 Future prospects	140
References.....	142
Publications.....	160
CURRICULUM VITAE	162