

DOCTORAL THESIS

Improved approaches and strategies for analyzing decoctions of medicinal herbs

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Date of Award:
2015

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ABSTRACT

Herbs have been the basis for medical treatments through much of human history, and even now such herbalism is still widely practiced around the world. Most frequently and traditionally, water is used as the extraction solvent for preparing medicinal herbs to generate decoction or infusion for medicinal purpose. In other words, in most cases, multiple chemical components in water extracts should be responsible for therapeutic (toxic and side, if any) effects of medicinal herbs. Phytochemical analysis of water extracts for quality control of medicinal herbs is therefore important to ensure their safeties and efficacies. Unfortunately, however, it is not given enough attention in the modern research whereas the relative current studies are intensively focused on organic solvent-extracts of medicinal herbs. In this project, analysis of medicinal herbs' water extracts is thus focused.

Various analytical approaches have been exhaustively developed for qualitative and quantitative analysis of chemicals in water extracts of medicinal herbs. However, many research challenges in methodology still exist. Polysaccharides and small molecules are two most important kinds of chemicals in water extracts of medicinal herbs, so they also widely regarded as markers for quality evaluation. For analysis of small molecules, the levels of quantitative determination are always far unsatisfactory, normally less than 10%. For analysis of polysaccharides, the existed problems are even more serious in both sample preparation and chemical analysis. Ethanol precipitation is always the first step for crude polysaccharide preparation. But it is just directly used without optimization and its capacity has never been evaluated. Following that, chemical analysis of natural polysaccharide also suffers severe methodological bottlenecks and many drawbacks occur in qualitative and quantitative characterization. Besides, polysaccharides and small molecules in medicinal herbs are always individually investigated but hardly studied together before.

Concerning these issues, here several approaches and strategies were accordingly proposed to improve the current situations using decoctions of some traditional Chinese medicines (TCMs) as the research objects and examples. In detail, first, a quantitative method was developed for quality evaluation of *Huang-Lian-Jie-Du-Tang*. In this study, quantitative levels of small molecules were greatly improved, compared with the current analogous studies for quality evaluation of medicinal herbs. Then, shifting to polysaccharides, availability of ethanol precipitation for natural polysaccharide

precipitation was critically evaluated. Parameters which could affect the ethanol precipitation results, such as structural features, molecular size of polysaccharide, and ethanol concentration were systematically investigated. Successively, a novel and rapid HPGPC-based strategy for quality control of saccharide-dominant medicinal herbs was proposed using *Dendrobium officinale* as the example. Polysaccharides in the decoction of *Dendrobium officinale* were qualitatively and quantitatively determined. The methodological superiority of the developed method compared with conventional approaches was highlighted. To facilitate this study, research on chemistry, bioactivity and quality control of *Dendrobium* was systematically reviewed in advance. After that, small molecules and polysaccharides in *Angelicae Sinensis Radix* and *Chuanxiong Rhizoma* were compared together. Lastly, effects of ginseng polysaccharides on the *in vivo* pharmacokinetics of ginsenoside Rg₁ on induced immunosuppressive model rats was investigated to provide a chemically holistic view for *Du-Shen-Tang*.

By these studies, the above mentioned predicament in chemical analysis on both small molecules and polysaccharides in water extracts of medicinal herbs were methodologically improved to varying degrees. Concerning small molecules and polysaccharides from multiple perspectives, the successive studies are helpful for enhancing quality evaluation and scientific understanding of medicinal herbs' decoctions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	i
ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	xiv
CHAPTER 1 RECENT DEVELOPMENT ON PHYTOCHEMICAL ANALYSIS OF WATER EXTRACTS OF MEDICINAL HERBS.....	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Current status.....	4
1.2.1 Small molecules	4
1.2.2 Polysaccharides	26
1.3 Research challenges concerned.....	35
1.3.1 Analysis of small molecules	35
1.3.2 Analysis of polysaccharides	36
1.3.3 Simultaneous analysis of small molecules and polysaccharides.....	37
1.4 Objectives of this study	38
CHAPTER 2 QUALITY EVALUATION OF COMMERCIAL HUANG-LIAN-JIE-DU-TANG BASED ON SIMULTANEOUS DETERMINATION OF FOURTEEN MAJOR CHEMICAL CONSTITUENTS USING HIGH PERFORMANCE LIQUID CHROMATOGRAPHY.....	40
2.1 Introduction	40
2.2 Experimental	42
2.2.1 Chemicals and materials.....	42
2.2.2 Sample preparation.....	45
2.2.3 HPLC analysis.....	45
2.2.4 Method validation	46
2.3 Results and discussion.....	47
2.3.1 Method optimization	47
2.3.2 Method validation	47
2.3.3 Quantification of fourteen analytes in commercial HLJDT samples	50

2.4 Concluding remarks	53
CHAPTER 3 STRUCTURAL DIVERSITY REQUIRES INDIVIDUAL OPTIMIZATION OF ETHANOL CONCENTRATION IN PRECIPITATION OF NATURAL POLYSACCHARIDES	54
3.1 Introduction.....	54
3.2 Experimental.....	56
3.2.1 Materials and chemicals.....	56
3.2.2 Preparation of water extracts	57
3.2.3 Ethanol precipitation.....	57
3.2.4 HPGPC analysis.....	58
3.3 Results and discussion	58
3.3.1 Impact of ethanol concentration, molecular size and structural features.....	58
3.3.2 Further tests on natural samples.....	64
3.3.3 Impact of other factors	66
3.4 Concluding remarks	67
CHAPTER 4 CHEMISTRY, BIOACTIVITY AND QUALITY CONTROL OF <i>DENDROBIUM</i>, A COMMONLY USED TONIC HERB IN TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE	68
4.1 Introduction.....	68
4.2 Chemistry.....	70
4.2.1 Alkaloids	70
4.2.2 Main aromatics	82
4.2.3 Sesquiterpenoids	86
4.2.4 Other small molecules	88
4.2.5 Polysaccharides.....	89
4.3 Bioactivity.....	95
4.4 Quality control	97
4.4.1 Qualitative analysis.....	97
4.4.2 Quantitative analysis.....	100
CHAPTER 5 A NOVEL AND RAPID HPGPC-BASED STRATEGY FOR QUALITY CONTROL OF SACCHARIDE-DOMINANT HERBAL MATERIALS: <i>DENDROBIUM OFFICINALE</i>, A CASE STUDY	106
5.1 Introduction.....	106
5.2 Experimental.....	111

5.2.1 Materials and chemicals	111
5.2.2 HPGPC analysis	114
5.2.3 Sugar composition analysis	116
5.3 Results and discussion.....	118
5.3.1 Methodology optimization	118
5.3.2 Method validation for quantitative analysis	122
5.3.3 Sugar composition analysis	123
5.3.4 HPGPC analysis	124
5.3.5 HPGPC quantitative analysis	127
5.4 Concluding remarks	129
CHAPTER 6 WHY ANGELICAE SINENSIS RADIX AND CHUANXIONG RHIZOMA ARE DIFFERENT? AN EXPLANATION FROM CHEMICAL PERSPECTIVE.....	131
6.1 Introduction	131
6.2 Experimental	133
6.2.1 Materials and chemicals	133
6.2.2 Sample preparation.....	136
6.2.3 GC-MS analysis of volatile constituents	138
6.2.4 High performance gel permeation chromatography (HPGPC) analysis of water extracts and crude polysaccharides	139
6.2.5 Sugar composition analysis of carbohydrates	139
6.2.6 HPLC method validation.....	140
6.2.7 Data analysis	141
6.3 Results and discussion.....	142
6.3.1 Methodology optimization	142
6.3.2 HPLC method validation.....	145
6.3.3 Comparative study on ASR and CR.....	147
6.4 Concluding remarks	156
CHAPTER 7 EFFECTS OF GINSENG POLYSACCHARIDES ON THE IN VIVO PHARMACOKINETICS OF GINSENOSE R1 IN INDUCED IMMUNOSUPPRESSED RATS	157
7.1 Introduction	157
7.2 Experimental	160
7.2.1 Materials and chemicals	160

7.2.2 Crude polysaccharide preparation and characterization	160
7.2.3 Animal pretreatment and modeling for immunosuppression.....	161
7.2.4 Biological sample collection.....	162
7.2.5 Biological sample treatment	162
7.2.6 LC-MS analysis	163
7.2.7 Quantitative method validation.....	165
7.2.8 Data analysis	167
7.3 Results and discussion	167
7.3.1 Sample preparation optimization and chemical characterization of ginseng polysaccharides.....	168
7.3.2 Biological sample treatment optimization	169
7.3.3 LC-MS/MS optimization	170
7.3.4 Quantitative method validation.....	171
7.3.5 Modeling evaluation	185
7.3.6 Pharmacokinetic study results	187
7.4 Concluding remarks	193
CHAPTER 8 SUMMARY AND FUTURE PROSPECTS	194
8.1 Summary.....	194
8.2 Future prospects	197
REFERENCES	200
PUBLICATIONS.....	243
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	247