

Chemical study of the Chinese medicine Pi Han Yao

TENG PENG¹, FURONG ZHAO^{1,2}, XIAOYU CHEN^{1,3}, GUIHUA JIANG¹ and SHAONAN WANG^{1,4}

¹College of Pharmacy, Chengdu University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Chengdu, Sichuan 610075;

²R&D, Sichuan Meike Pharmaceutical Co., Ltd., Chengdu, Sichuan 610000; ³Department of Project,

Mianyang Fuzheng Chinese Herbology Development Co., Ltd., Chengdu, Sichuan 610016; ⁴R&D,

Shijiazhuang Pharmaceutical Group Co., Ltd., Shijiazhuang, Hebei 050000, P.R. China

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Abstract. The aim of the present study was to investigate the chemical constituents of the Chinese medicine Pi Han Yao (*Gueldenstaedtia delavayi* Franch) decoction. Following this, the quantitative determination of the formononetin and maackiain content in Pi Han Yao was established. The chemical constituents were isolated by column chromatography and their structures were elucidated by analysis of spectrometric data and chemical evidence. High-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) was used for the determination of the formononetin and maackiain content in Pi Han Yao. Seven flavanones were isolated from the Pi Han Yao decoction. Five of the chemical structures were elucidated as 1, 7,2'-dihydroxy-4'-methoxy-isoflavanol; 2, maackiain; 3, formononetin-7-*O*- β -D-glucoside; 4, formononetin; and 5, 9-(β -D-ribofuranosyl)-adenosine. The other two compounds and their structures require further study. Additionally, the linear range of formononetin and maackiain were 0.03992-0.3992 and 0.0292-0.292 μ g, and their recoveries were 100.31 and 100.44%. To the best of our knowledge, compounds 1-5 were obtained from Pi Han Yao for the first time. The HPLC method use for determination of formononetin and maackiain in Pi Han Yao was simple, accurate and reliable. Findings from the present study suggest that these methods may be used to evaluate the quality of Pi Han Yao and provide an experience basis for quality standards of this medicinal material.

Introduction

Pi Han Yao is a traditional Chinese herbal medicine, derived from the *Gueldenstaedtia delavayi* Franch plant (1). It was first termed 'Pi Han Yao' in the early 1970s in the Xichang Chinese

Herbal Medicine book (2). As a Panzhihua-Xichang region folk medicine, Pi Han Yao is mainly used to treat exogenous diseases and has been found to be safe and effective in treating fevers, headaches, dizziness, sore throat, gasping syndrome and cough. The whole dry plant is used, and is usually consumed in a decoction daily. Although there have been studies on the fat-soluble components of the *Gueldenstaedtia delavayi* Franch plant, the pharmacologically active mechanisms for the effectiveness of Pi Han Yao in treating exogenous diseases remain to be elucidated. In addition, the full chemical constituents of Pi Han Yao have yet to be elucidated and there have been no studies on the quantitative determination of the formononetin and maackiain content, which are essentially the active components of the plant. Therefore, the present study investigated the material basis and mechanisms of the Chinese medicine Pi Han Yao by determining the chemical constituents of the plant decoction. Seven flavanone compounds were isolated from the Pi Han Yao decoction. Based on spectrum analysis, 5 of the 7 were identified. The 5 identified chemical structures were 1, 7,2'-dihydroxy-4'-methoxy-isoflavanol; 2, maackiain; 3, formononetin-7-*O*- β -D-glucoside; 4, formononetin; and 5, 9-(β -D-ribofuranosyl)-adenosine. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first time that these compounds have been isolated from Pi Han Yao. Further study is required to identify the other 2 compounds and establish their structures. Formononetin, 1 of the 7 compounds isolated from the Pi Han Yao water solution, has been shown to have estrogen-like effects (3,4), antioxidation effects (5), and it can stimulate the specific adaptive immune system (5,6). This compound has also been reported to have beneficial effects for certain cancers, as well as antiatherosclerosis, and diuresis effects (7,8). Maackiain also has a strong diuresis effect, and therefore, formononetin and maackiain were chosen as the index components in the quantitative measurement of Pi Han Yao (9).

Materials and methods

Plant materials. The plant material was identified as *Gueldenstaedtia delavayi* Franch by Professor Guihua Jiang.

Chemicals. The formononetin standard was purchased from Chengdu at Staples Biological Technology Co., Ltd. (Chengdu, China; batch no. 111703-201012). The maackiain standard was prepared by us to a purity of 99.5%, as previously described (10).

Correspondence to: Dr Guihua Jiang, College of Pharmacy, Chengdu University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, 37 Shierqiao Road, Chengdu, Sichuan 610075, P.R. China
E-mail: jiangguihua043014@163.com

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The chromogenic agent, 10% sulfuric acid ethanol and iodine steam, was purchased from Chengdu Kelon (Chengdu, China). Methanol and acetonitrile with chromatographic purification were from Fisher Scientific (Schwerte, Germany). Distilled water was used and all the reagents were of analytical grade.

Instrumentation and conditions. The following instruments were used in the study: Bruker Avance 600 probe: ^{13}C - ^1H DUL TE: 300K (Bruker, Zurich, Switzerland); Zabspec (Micromass, Waters Corp., Manchester, UK); Rotary Evaporators RE-52 (Shanghai Yarong Biochemistry Instrument Plant, Shanghai, China); Ultraviolet Instrument ZF-2 (Shanghai Anting Electron Instrument Plant, Shanghai, China); high performance liquid chromatography (HPLC; Agilent 1200 HPLC; Agilent Technologies, Inc., Santa Clara, CA, USA); Dikma C18 chromatography column (5 μm , 4.6x250 mm; Dikma, Beijing, China); and a X24 Digital display micro-melting point tester (Beijing Tech Instrument Co., Ltd., Beijing, China).

Silica gel column chromatography (200-300 mesh; Qingdao Oceanic Chemical Plant, Qingdao, China); high-performance thin-layer chromatography (HPTLC; Qingdao Oceanic Chemical Plant); thin-layer chromatography (TLC) silica gel G and silica gel GF254 (Qingdao Oceanic Chemical Plant); and Sephadex LH20 (Pharmacia, Uppsala, Sweden) were used.

Extraction and isolation. The whole dry plants of Pi Han Yao (12 kg) were extracted with 120 liters of water at 90°C three times, 30 min each time, and subsequently concentrated under vacuum to the 30 liters. Following this, the water extract was extracted with ethyl acetate (EtOAc) and n-butanol (n-BuOH), successively. The EtOAc and n-BuOH layers were concentrated to 64.1 and 141.7 g of residues, respectively, and were subsequently separated by repeated chromatography yielding 7 flavanone compounds.

Results

Investigating the chemical constituent of Pi Han Yao

Structural determination

Compound 1. White needles (methanol); melting point (mp), 195-197°C; $[\alpha]_D^{20} +210^\circ$ (c 0.10, methanol), exhibited a positive reaction to the ferric chloride-ferricyanatum kalium test. ^1H -nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR): δ : 3.56 (1H, m, H-3), 3.63 (3H, s, OCH₃-4'), 3.78 (1H, t, J=10.26 Hz, H-2a), 4.29 (1H, dd, J=10.98, 5.16 Hz, H-2a), 5.62 (1H, d, J=7.02 Hz, H-4), 6.37 (1H, d, J=2.4 Hz, H-8), 6.56 (1H, dd, J=2.22, 8.04 Hz, H-5'), 6.67 (1H, d, J=2.22 Hz, H-3'), 6.86 (1H, d, J=2.22 Hz, H-8), 6.94 (1H, dd, J=8.10, 2.58 Hz, H-6), 7.20 (1H, d, J=8.40 Hz, H-6'), 7.58 (1H, d, J=8.40 Hz, H-5). ^{13}C -NMR: δ : 162.6 (C-4'), δ : 162.4 (C-2'), δ : 161.5 (C-7), δ : 158.4 (C-9), δ : 133.8 (C-5), δ : 126.3 (C-, 6'), δ : 121.0 (C-1'), δ : 112.9 (C-10), δ : 111.9 (C-6), δ : 107.5 (C-5'), δ : 105.2 (C-8), δ : 98.2 (C-3'), δ : 80.2 (C-4), δ : 67.7 (C-2), δ : 41.0 (C-3) and δ : 56.3 (C-OCH₃). Compound 1 was identified as 7,2'-dihydroxy-4'-methoxy-isoflavanol by comparison of Heteronuclear Single Quantum Correlation, H-H-Correlation Spectroscopy and Distortionless Enhancement by Polarisation Transfer data (11,12).

Compound 2. Colorless needles (methanol, pyridine) reacted positively to FeCl₃. The compound was purple-red when exposed to the UV lamp (254 nm), mp 180-181°C (12);

^1H -NMR: δ : 7.53 (1H, d, J=8.82 Hz, H-1), 6.90 (1H, dd, J=8.46, 2.16 Hz, H-2), 6.84 (1H, s, H-7); δ : 6.83 (1H, d, J=2.22 Hz, H-4), 6.64 (1H, s, H-10), 5.91 (1H, d, J=1.14 Hz, -OCH₂O-aH); 5.88 (1H, d, J=1.14 Hz, -OCH₂O-bH), 5.57 (1H, d, J=7.32 Hz, H-11 a), 4.25 (1H, dd, J=11.04, 4.74 Hz, H-6 β), 3.77 (1H, t, J=10.62 Hz, H-6 α), 3.48 (1H, m, H-6a). ^{13}C -NMR: δ : 840.5 (C-6a), 66.5 (C-6), 79.0 (C-11a), 93.7 (C-10), 101.5 (-OCH₂O-), 104.0 (C-4), 105.3 (C-7), 110.7 (C-2), 111.8 (C-11b), 118.7 (C-6b), 132.5 (C-1), 141.9 (C-8), 148.3 (C-9), 154.7 (C-10a), 157.3 (C-4a), 160.4 (C-3). Mass spectrometry (MS): m/z: 307 [M+Na], m/z: 285 [M+H]. Compound 2 was identified as maackiain by comparison (^1H -NMR and ^{13}C -NMR) with previous data (13,14).

Compound 3. White needles (methanol) that were easily soluble in methanol, mp 217-219°C. ^1H -NMR: δ : 8.42 (1H, s, H-2), 8.04 (1H, d, J=8.76 Hz, H-5), 7.52 (2H, d, J=8.40 Hz, H-2', 6'), 7.23 (1H, s, H-8), 7.13 (1H, d, J=8.82 Hz, H-6), 6.98 (2H, d, J=8.40 Hz, H-3', 5'), 5.09 (1H, d, J=6.96 Hz, glc H-1'), 3.30 (3H, s, OCH₃). δ : 4.5-5.5: Glycosidic bond -OH, δ : 3-4 glycosidic bond -H. ^{13}C -NMR: δ : 175.1 (C-4), δ : 161.9 (C-7), δ : 159.5 (C-4'), δ : 157.5 (C-9), δ : 154.1 (C-2), δ : 130.5 (C-2', 6'), δ : 127.4 (C-5), δ : 124.5 (C-1'), δ : 123.9 (C-3), δ : 119.0 (C-10), δ : 116.1 (C-6), δ : 114.1 (C-3'5'), δ : 103.9 (C-8), δ : 100.5 (C-1'), δ : 77.7 (C-3'), δ : 77.0 (C-5'), δ : 73.6 (C-2'), δ : 70.1 (C-4'), δ : 61.1 (C-6'), δ : 55.6 (C-OCH₃). Compound 3 was identified as formononetin-7-O- β -D-glucoside by comparison (^1H -NMR and ^{13}C -NMR) with previous data (15).

Compound 4. White needles (methanol), mp 257-258°C; showed a positive reaction to the ferric chloride-ferricyanatum kalium test. ^1H -NMR: δ : 8.30 (1H, s, H-2), 7.95 (1H, dd, J=8.76, 2.22 Hz, H-5), 7.49 (2H, d, J=8.40 Hz, H-2', 6'), 6.96 (1H, d, J=8.76 Hz, H-3', 5'), 6.92 (1H, dd, J=8.76, 2.22 Hz, H-6), 6.85 (2H, d, J=2.22 Hz, H-8), 3.77 (3H, s, OCH₃). ^{13}C -NMR: δ : 175.1 (C-4), δ : 163.0 (C-4'), δ : 159.4 (C-7), δ : 157.9 (C-9), δ : 153.8 (C-3), δ : 130.5 (C-2', 6'), δ : 127.8 (C-5), δ : 124.7 (C-1'), δ : 123.6 (C-2), δ : 117.1 (C-10), δ : 115.6 (C-6), δ : 114.1 (C-3'5'), δ : 102.6 (C-8). MS: m/z: 291 [M+Na], m/z: 269 [M+H]. Compound 4 was identified as formononetin by comparison with previous data (11,16).

Compound 5. White needles (methanol), soluble in dimethyl sulfoxide; ^1H -NMR: δ : 8.32 (1H, s, H-8), 8.12 (1H, s, H-2), 7.30 (2H, s, H-NH₂), 5.86 (1H, d, J=6.24 Hz, H-1'), 5.00-5.50 (3H, OH-H), 4.59 (1H, m, H-2'), 4.12 (1H, m, H-3'), 3.94 (1H, m, H-4'), 3.65 (1H, m, H-5'), 3.53 (1H, m, H-5'). ^{13}C -NMR: δ : 156.6 (C-6), δ : 152.8 (C-2), δ : 149.6 (C-4), δ : 140.4 (C-8), δ : 119.8 (C-5), δ : 88.4 (C-1'), δ : 86.4 (C-4'), δ : 73.9 (C-2'), δ : 71.1 (C-3'), δ : 62.2 (C-5'). MS: m/z: 255 [M+Na], m/z: 237 [M+H]. Compound 5 was identified as 9-(β -D-ribofuranosyl)-adenosine by comparison (^1H -NMR and ^{13}C -NMR) with literature data (17,18).

The structures of compounds 1-5 are shown in Fig. 1. The structures of compounds 6 and 7 were complex and thus remain to be identified.

Content tests of formononetin and maackiain in Pi Han Yao

Chromatographic conditions. The detection of the compounds was performed at 310 nm. Satisfactory separation was obtained with a reverse-phase analytical column (250x4.6 mm, 5 μl , serial no. 8132964) and eluted with a methanol:water solution (70:30, v/v) at a flow rate of 1.0 ml/min. The column temperature was 25°C and the injection volume was 10 μl . Theoretical plate numbers of formononetin and maackiain were >4,000.

Standard solutions. i) Preparation of stock standard solutions: Formononetin and maackiain stock solution were

Table I. Calibration graphs for the Pi Han Yao constituents.

Constituent	Regression equation (R ²)	Linear range, μg
Formononetin	$y=4535.1x+18.587$ (0.9995)	0.03992-0.3992
Maackiain	$y=4258.3x+774.11$ (0.9995)	0.0292-0.292

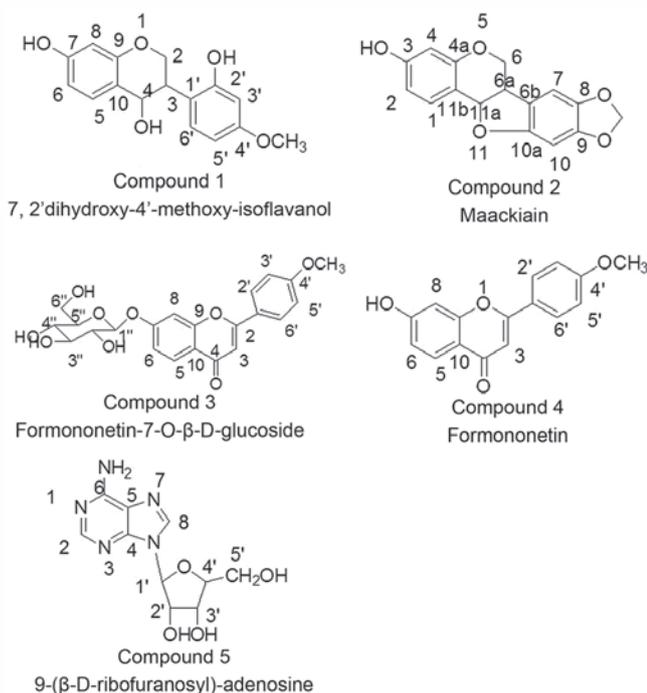


Figure 1. Structure of Pi Han Yao constituents.

prepared to a final concentration of 0.73 mg/ml in methanol. Chromatograms are shown in Fig. 2A and B.

ii) Sample preparation. The Pi Han Yao powder (3 g) was processed with ultrasonic extraction (power, 300 W; rate, 50 Hz) for 1 h in EtOAc, and subsequently recovered EtOAc *in vacuo* to yield the extract. The extract was dissolved with methanol in a

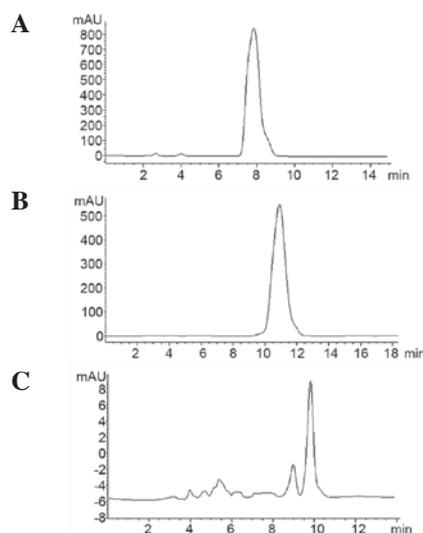


Figure 2. Chromatograms of (A) maackiain; (B) formononetin; and (C) Pi Han Yao.

10 ml volumetric flask and filtered through a 0.45- μm filter prior to injection. The chromatogram is shown in Fig. 2C.

Calibration. Calibration curves were constructed in the range of 2-20 μl for formononetin and maackiain. The regression equation curves are listed in Table I.

The data showed a linear association between peak areas and concentration over the listed range for formononetin and maackiain. The detection limit was 0.03992-0.3992 μg for formononetin and 0.0292-0.292 μg for maackiain.

Precision and accuracy. The precision of injection was evaluated by performing replicate injections of the sample solution, and the relative standard deviations of formononetin and maackiain were 0.26 and 0.55%, respectively. These results demonstrated that the method was highly precise.

Stability. To confirm that the standards remained stable over time, the concentrations of the two components were determined at 0, 2, 4, 8, 12 and 24 h, respectively, and the solution remained relatively stable. The RSD values of formononetin and maackiain were maintained at 1.59 and 2.57%, respectively. The stability of the sample solutions was also evaluated

Table II. Results of the quantitative determination of the Pi Han Yao samples (n=10).

Sample	Producing area in China	Growth	Formononetin		Maackiain	
			Peak area	Content, $\mu\text{g/g}$	Peak area	Content, $\mu\text{g/g}$
1	Te Erguo, Pu Ge	Wild	750.9	0.651	351.3	0.0211
2	Happy, Man Shuiwan, Mian Ning	Wild	853.9	0.741	339.6	0.0204
3	Dawn, Sha Ba, Mian Ning	Cultivated	660.4	0.573	206.8	0.0124
4	Victory, Sha Ba, Mian Ning	Wild	867.7	0.753	368.5	0.0212
5	Li Zheng, Hong Mo, Mian Ning	Wild	879.0	0.762	476.3	0.0286
6	Long Feng, Sha Ba, Mian Ning	Wild	711.8	0.617	481.7	0.0289
7	Shi an, Da Xing	Cultivated	664.3	0.576	382.1	0.0229
8	Min Yun, Xi Ning	Wild	719.6	0.624	421.8	0.0253
9	Lang Huan, Lang Huan	Cultivated	728.0	0.631	318.3	0.0191
10	A Yue, De Chang	Cultivated	709.8	0.616	369.0	0.0222

in the same manner by determining the concentrations of the two components at 0, 2, 4, 8 and 12 h, respectively. The test solution remained relatively stable. The RSD values of formononetin and maackiain were maintained at 2.18 and 5.98%, respectively.

Recovery study. The percentage of recovery was determined by adding a known concentration of the formononetin and maackiain standards to selected samples during the extraction process. The amounts added were ~50% of the actual concentration of the samples. The concentration of the formononetin and the maackiain standards in the mixture were subsequently determined using the same methods described for the sample analysis. Without exception, recovery rates of 100.31% were achieved for the compound analyzed.

Quantitative determination of samples. The formononetin and maackiain contents of Pi Han Yao from plants collected from 10 different sources were determined in the same way as the sample analysis. The results are shown in Table II.

Analysis of the different Pi Han Yao plants from the 10 locations showed that the contents of formononetin and maackiain varied depending on the source. The content of formononetin ranged from 0.576-0.762 $\mu\text{g/g}$ with an average value of 0.6544 $\mu\text{g/g}$. The content of maackiain ranged from 0.0124-0.0289 $\mu\text{g/g}$, with an average value of 0.02221 $\mu\text{g/g}$. Overall the content of the two chemicals in wild Pi Han Yao was generally higher compared to cultivated plants. However, the difference was not significant. Furthermore, the content of formononetin and maackiain in Pi Han Yao was lower compared to the plant itself.

Discussion

To the best of our knowledge, the chemical constituents of the Chinese medicine Pi Han Yao decoction were investigated for the first time in this study. Five flavanone compounds were identified as follows: 1, 7,2'-dihydroxy-4'-methoxy-isoflavanol; 2, maackiain; 3, formononetin-7-*O*- β -D-glucoside; 4, formononetin; and 5, 9-(β -D-ribofuranosyl)-adenosine. These compounds were obtained from Pi Han Yao for the first time, in accordance with previous studies (19-24).

The result of the formononetin and maackiain contents of Pi Han Yao from 10 different areas is shown in Table II. A method to determine formononetin and maackiain in the Pi Han Yao by HPLC has been reported in the present study, and this method is convenient, efficient, accurate, reliable and provides good replications, and thus, can be used for the quality control of Pi Han Yao.

The formononetin and maackiain contents were scanned from 200 to 400 nm by UV-1100. The maximum absorption wavelength of formononetin was 250 nm, and the maximum absorption wavelengths of maackiain were 310 and 215 nm. In order to determine the formononetin and maackiain content at the same conditions, the detection at 310 nm exhibited high sensitivity and little interference. Therefore, formononetin and maackiain were detected at 310 nm.

In conclusion, the present study examined the extraction efficiency in solvents, the extraction method and the extraction time. The results showed that ethyl acetate ultrasound extraction had the highest extraction efficiency for constituents of Pi Han Yao.

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