580

A DNA Microarray for the Authentication of Toxic Traditional Chinese Medicinal Plants

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Abstract

A silicon-based DNA microarray was designed and fabricated for the identification of toxic traditional Chinese medicinal plants. Species-specific oligonucleotide probes were derived from the 5S ribosomal RNA gene of Aconitum carmichaeli, A. kusnezoffi, Alocasia macrorrhiza, Croton tiglium, Datura inoxia, D. metel, D. tatula, Dysosma pleiantha, Dy. versipellis, Euphorbia kansui, Hyoscyamus niger, Pinellia cordata, P. pedatisecta, P. ternata, Rhododendron molle, Strychnos nux-vomica, Typhonium divaricatum and T. giganteum and the leucine transfer RNA gene of Aconitum pendulum and Stellera chamaejasme. The probes were immobilized via dithiol linkage on a silicon chip. Genomic target sequences were amplified and fluorescently labeled by asymmetric polymerase chain reaction. Multiple toxic plant species were identified by parallel genotyping. Chip-based authentication of medicinal plants may be useful as inexpensive and rapid tool for quality control and safety monitoring of herbal pharmaceuticals and neutraceuticals.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is an integral part of Chinese diet and culture [1]. It has been used to meet medical needs for several millennia. TCM drugs are derived from natural sources (plant, animal and mineral). To date, more than 8,000 medicinal species are used in China in TCM prescriptions. About 500 species have been categorized as "toxic TCMs" [2]. Nonetheless, some are still commonly used in certain prescriptions due to their unique therapeutic effects [3]. Even though these herbs are classified as "toxic or regulated", they can often be acquired in TCM dispensaries and are contained in various "patent medicines", the TCM version of over-the-counter drugs [4].

Although, in China, medicinal herbs are usually prescribed and sold by experienced TCM practitioners, unintended poisonings occur due to the presence of contaminants or inclusion of toxic herbs that were mistaken for a similar looking non-toxic species

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[5], [6], [7]. In many Western countries, herbal products are considered as dietary supplements and therefore not subject to the same stringent safety controls as drugs [8]. Furthermore, herbal products are most often self-administered by patients without the proper guidance by a TCM practitioner and the knowledge of a physician, who may be treating the patient in parallel with Western medicines [9].

Traditionally, medicinal plants are identified and authenticated by experienced collectors, botanists or trained TCM experts. Initially, these experts identify the samples by their characteristic morphology, appearance, smell, taste, texture, size and color. The inspection may be followed by anatomic dissection, microscopic analysis of the structure and shape of the cells as well as specific physical and/or chemical assays. Morphological methods of identification/authentication of TCMs are only applicable to unprocessed raw materials and require expertise from well-trained experts. Detailed chemical analyses require expensive equipment and the chemical composition of herbs often varies with environmental conditions, time of harvest, and post-harvest processing. Moreover, TCMs used for the preparation of prescriptions are usually dried and highly processed, making their identification in some cases very difficult.

Recently, DNA polymorphism-based assays have been developed for the identification of herbal medicines [10], [11]. In this approach, small amounts of DNA are amplified by the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) and the reaction products are analyzed by gel electrophoresis, sequencing, or hybridization with species-specific probes. In particular, the 5S ribosomal RNA (5S-rRNA) gene has been used for species identification [12], [13], [14], [15], [16], [17].

In an effort to develop methods for the reliable, rapid and inexpensive authentication of medicinal herbs [18], we report the development of a DNA microarray for the identification of common toxic traditional Chinese medicinal plants. We determined the nucleotide sequences of the 5S-rRNA from multiple specimens each of the toxic TCM herbs Aconitum carmichaeli, A. kusnezoffi, Alocasia macrorrhiza, Croton tiglium, Datura inoxia, D. metel, D. tatula, Dysosma pleiantha, Dy. versipellis, Euphorbia kansui, Hyoscyamus niger, Pinellia cordata, P. pedatisecta, P. ternata, Strychnos nux-vomica, Typhonium divaricatum and T. giganteum. Comparative sequence alignment revealed species-specific nucleotide sequences, which we used to design and synthesize probes for the construction of a DNA microarray for the authentication of these herbs. Sequence-specific oligonucleotides consisted of a set of 3 primers per species: a primer pair used in the asymmetric PCR reaction (reverse primer-fluorescently labeled) and the immobilization primer or "probe" (Table 1).

Each silicon chip for the identification of these herbs contained probes corresponding to 20 plant species. Oligonucleotides serving as molecular probes for each species were spotted in columns containing five rows. An additional row was added to each column consisting of a fluorescently labeled control oligonucleotide indicating the quality of probe immobilization. The target sequences were labeled with a fluorescent dye by asymmetric PCR using genomic plant DNA as templates. After hybridization and stringent washing of the microarray, the presence of hybridized target sequence was detected with a confocal laser

scanner. Quantification of the fluorescence images indicated that the molecular probes used on the chip unequivocally distinguished between the different plants with a high signal to noise ratio. Some cross-hybridization was observed under the hybridization conditions used between *Datura innoxia* and *D. metel* of which the target and probe sequences differed by only two nucleotides. Nonetheless, the sensitivity of the assay allowed the unequivocal identification of both species (Fig. 1).

The use of DNA microarrays should make it relatively easy and cost-effective to incorporate the DNA-based authentication of medicinal herbs into a series of measures aimed at the quality assurance and quality control of medicinal herbs [8]. The unequivocal identification of the precise nature of medicinal herbs can constitute a first step before more elaborate and expensive testing methods are applied. In cases of poisoning, this method may be useful for the *post hoc* positive identification of toxic herbal or animal material.

Materials and Methods

All chemicals were purchased from Fluka and Sigma-Aldrich (Milwaukee, WI). 5'-Thiol-modified oligonucleotides and fluorescently labeled probes (Texas RedTM) were purchased from Synthetic Genetics (San Diego, CA). All other oligonucleotides were synthesized using an ABI Nucleic Acid synthesis system (Expedite 8909).

Experienced botanists collected plant specimens from China and Hong Kong as follows: Aconitum carmichaeli Debeaux (Ranunculaceae) from Jiangyou (Sichuan), A. kusnezoffi Reichb. (Ranunculaceae) from Badaling (Beijing), Alocasia macrorrhiza Schott (Araceae) from Clear Water Bay (Hong Kong), Croton tiglium L. (Euphorbiaceae) from Xinglong (Hainan), Datura metel L. (Solanaceae) from Fengtai (Beijing), D. inoxia Mill. (Solanaceae) and D. tatula L. (Solanaceae) from Xibeiwang (Beijing), Dysosma pleiantha R. E. Woodson (Berberidaceae) and Dy. versipellis M. Cheng (Berberidaceae) from Yulin (Guangxi), Euphorbia kansui S. B. Ho (Euphorbiaceae) from Guangzhou (Guangdong), Hyoscyamus niger L. (Solanaceae) from Anguo (Hebei), Pinellia cordata N. E. Br. (Araceae) from Conghua (Guangdong), P. pedatisecta Schott (Araceae) from Xibeiwang (Beijing), P. ternata Ten. ex Breitenb. (Araceae) from Badaling (Beijing), Strychnos nux-vomica L. (Loganiaceae) from Xinglong (Hainan), Typhonium divaricatum Decne. (Araceae) from Clear Water Bay (Hong Kong), and T. giganteum Engl. (Araceae) from Conghua (Guangdong). At least five individuals of each species were authenticated again by one of us (T. T. X. Dong) and used for the experiments. Voucher specimens have been deposited in the Department of Biology at the Hong Kong University of Science & Technology. The sequences of the 5S-rRNA gene of Dysosma versipellis, Dy. pleiantha, and Rhododendron molle G. Don. (Ericaceae), and the leucine tRNA gene of Aconitum pendulum Busch (Ranunculaceae) and Stellera chamaejasme L. (Thymelaeaceae) were obtained from GenBank. Plant DNA was extracted from the leaves of fresh plants as described [12]. The 5S-rRNA gene intergenic spacer domain was amplified by PCR (amplicons ranged from 200 – 360 bp). The PCR primers had the following sequence: 5S-rRNA-forward: 5'GGA TCC GTG CTT GGG CGA GAG TAG TA 3'

 Table 1
 Sequences of the immobilization, forward and reverse primers of the TCM species

Acontium comitodecil	Sequence	Primer	% GC	
5-Totals Red-CITCACTCCCGTGCCACCG-3' immobilization 55 5-SHARTCACTCCCTTCACTCCACCG-3C-3' immobilization 55 5-SHARTCACTCCCCTCACCCCACCG-3C-3' immobilization 55 5-SHARTCACCCCACTTTTTTCAAAAG-3' toward primer 30 5-SHARTCACCCACTCTCTTTTTTCAAAAG-3' toward primer 30 5-Totals Red-CGACACTTACTCCGTTG-3' reverse primer 30 5-SHARCACTCCCCCCCCGCG-3' immobilization 85 5-SHARCACTCCCCCCCCGG-3' floward primer 85 5-SHARCACTCCCCCCCCCGG-3' floward primer 85 5-SHARCACCCCGCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCC	Aconitum carmichaeli			
	5'-SH-CGTCGCACCCCGTCAACCAC-3'	immobilization	70	
\$58HGTTCACTCCCTTCACTCACCACCACT immobilization 55 ************************************	5'-Texas Red-GTGGTTGACGGGGTGCGACG-3'	reverse primer	70	
5-Fease Red-CCTCACTACACCACTCAAC-3* reverse primer 55 Annotes momeration 30 5-SH-CCCCCAATTTTTCAAAAC-3* format primer 30 5-Flaces Red-CACACTTTCTCCACCCCTCTCCCCCCCCCC-3* reverse primer 30 5-Flaces Red-CACACACTTTCCTCCCCCCCCCCCC-3* forward primer 85 5-Flaces Red-CACACCCCTTCCCCCCCCCCC-3* forward primer 85 5-Flaces Red-CACACCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCC	Aconitum pendulum			
Abocase morannihize	5'-SH-GTTGACTGCGTTGATCGAGG-3'	immobilization	55	
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Syste-CACCTCCCCCCCGC-3' mmobilization 85	5′-TGCGCAATTTTTTGAAAAG-3′	forward primer	30	
5-SH-CACTGCCCCCCCCCCCG-3' forward primer 85 5-Fleaxs Red-CGCCCTTACTGCTGGTATCCCCA-3' reverse primer 50 5-Fleaxs Red-CGGCCTTACTGCTGTGCATCCCCCT-3' finmobilization 58 5-FLACCTGCGCTCTTCGTGTTCCATCCCCCCT-3' finmobilization 58 5-FLACCTGCGCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCCC	5'-Texas Red-GGACAACTTACTCCGTTTGC-3'	reverse primer	50	
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Pinellia cordata 5'-SH-TTTTTGCAGCCGCACCAG-3' immobilization 50 5'-TTTTTTGCAGCGCACCAG-3' forward primer 50 5'-Texas Red-CTGAGAGGTGTCGAAAAG-3' reverse primer 50 Pinellia pedatisecta ************************************	5'-GCTATCGCTCGGCGAATCTC-3'	forward primer	53	
5'SH-TTTTTGCAGCGCACCAG-3'immobilization505'TTTTTTGCAGCGCACCAG-3'forward primer505'Texas Red-CTGAGAGGTGTCGAAAAG-3'reverse primer50Pinellia pedatisecta*********************************	5'-Texas Red-GGATCCTTAGTGCTGGTATGATCGCA-3'	reverse primer	50	
5'TTTTTTTGCAGCGCACCAG'forward primer505'Texas Red-CTGAGAGGTGTCGAAAAG-3'reverse primer50Pinellia pedatisecta5'SH-TTGCCGCATGTCCCATTTTT-3'0immobilization455'-TTGCCGCATGTCCCATTTTT-3'forward primer455'-Texas Red-CCGAGTCTGCTTTCG-3'reverse primer60Pinellia ternata***5'-SH-ACAGTGCACCATCGTG-3'immobilization565'-ACAGTGCACCATCGTG-3'forward primer565'-Texas Red-CTGAGAGGTGTCGAAAAG-3'reverse primer50Rhododendron molle***5'-SH-CGACTCTCGGCAACGGATAT-3'immobilization555'-Texas Red-ATATCCGTTGCCGAGAGTCG-3'reverse primer555'-Texas Red-ATATCCGTTGCCGAGAGTCG-3'reverse primer555'-Stellera chamaejasme***555'-SH-GCCGACCCAAACCCGTATTT-3'immobilization55	Pinellia cordata			
5'Texas Red-CTGAGAGGTGTCGAAAAG-3' reverse primer 50 Pinellia pedatisecta 5'SH-TTGCCGCATGTCCCATTTTT-3'0 immobilization 45 5'-TTGCCGCATGTCCCATTTTT-3' forward primer 45 5'-TEXAS RED-CCGAGTCTGCTTTCG-3' reverse primer 60 Pinellia ternata 5'-SH-ACAGTGCACCATCGTC-3' immobilization 56 5'-ACACAGTGCACCATCGTC-3' forward primer 56 5'-ACAGTGCACCATCGTC-3' reverse primer 50 **Rhododendron molle** 5'-SH-CGACTCTCGGCAACGGATAT-3' immobilization 55 5'-TEXAS Red-ATATCCGTTGCCGAGAGTCG-3' reverse primer 55 \$*Stellera chamaejasme 5'-SH-GCCGACCCAAACCCGTATTT-3' immobilization 55 \$*Stellera chamaejasme 5'-SH-GCCGACCCAAACCCGTATTT-3' immobilization 55	5'-SH-TTTTTGCAGCGCACCAC-3'	immobilization	50	
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5'-SH-CGACTCTCGGCATGTTCCCATTTTT-3'0 immobilization 45 5'-TTGCCGCATGTCCCCATTTTT-3' forward primer 45 5'-TTGCCGCATGTCCCATTTTT-3' reverse primer 60 Pinellia ternata 5'-SH-ACAGTGCACCATCGTC-3' immobilization 56 5'-ACAGTGCACCATCGTC-3' forward primer 56 5'-Texas Red-CTGAGAGGGTCGAAAAG-3' reverse primer 50 Rhododendron molle 5'-SH-CGACTCTCGGCAACCGATAT-3' immobilization 55 5'-Texas Red-ATATCCGTTGCCGAGAGTCG-3' reverse primer 55 Stellera chamaejasme 5'-SH-GCCGACCCAACCCGTATTT-3' immobilization 55	5'-Texas Red-CTGAGAGGTGTCGAAAAG-3'	reverse primer	50	
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5'-SH-ACAGTGCACCATCGTC-3' immobilization 56 5'-ACAGTGCACCATCGTC-3' forward primer 56 5'-Texas Red-CTGAGAGGTGTCGAAAAG-3' reverse primer 50 Rhododendron molle 5'-SH-CGACTCTCGGCAACGGATAT-3' immobilization 55 5'-Texas Red-ATATCCGTTGCCGAGAGTCG-3' reverse primer 55 Stellera chamaejasme 5'-SH-GCCGACCCAAACCCGTATTT-3' immobilization 55	5'-Texas Red-CCGAGTCTGCTTTCC-3'	reverse primer	60	
5'ACACGTGCACCATCGTC-3' forward primer 56 5'Texas Red-CTGAGAGGTGTCGAAAAG-3' reverse primer 50 Rhododendron molle 5'-SH-CGACTCTCGGCAACGGATAT-3' immobilization 55 5'Texas Red-ATATCCGTTGCCGAGAGTCG-3' reverse primer 55 Stellera chamaejasme 5'-SH-GCCGACCCAAACCCGTATTT-3' immobilization 55				
5'-Texas Red-CTGAGAGGTGTCGAAAAG-3' reverse primer 50 Rhododendron molle 5'-SH-CGACTCTCGGCAACGGATAT-3' immobilization 55 5'-Texas Red-ATATCCGTTGCCGAGAGTCG-3' reverse primer 55 Stellera chamaejasme 5'-SH-GCCGACCCAAACCCGTATTT-3' immobilization 55	5'-SH-ACAGTGCACCATCGTC-3'	immobilization	56	
Rhododendron molle 5'-SH-CGACTCTCGGCAACGGATAT-3' immobilization 55 5'-Texas Red-ATATCCGTTGCCGAGAGTCG-3' reverse primer 55 Stellera chamaejasme 5'-SH-GCCGACCCAAACCCGTATTT-3' immobilization 55		forward primer		
5'-SH-CGACTCTCGGCAACGGATAT-3' immobilization 55 5'-Texas Red-ATATCCGTTGCCGAGAGTCG-3' reverse primer 55 Stellera chamaejasme 5'-SH-GCCGACCCAAACCCGTATTT-3' immobilization 55		reverse primer	50	
5'-Texas Red-ATATCCGTTGCCGAGAGTCG-3' reverse primer 55 Stellera chamaejasme 5'-SH-GCCGACCCAAACCCGTATTT-3' immobilization 55				
Stellera chamaejasme 5'SH-GCCGACCCAAACCCGTATTT-3' immobilization 55		immobilization		
5'-SH-GCCGACCCAAACCCGTATTT-3' immobilization 55		reverse primer	55	
	•			
5'-Texas Red-AAATACGGGTTTGGGTCGGC-3' reverse primer 55				
	5'-Texas Red-AAATACGGGTTTGGGTCGGC-3'	reverse primer	55	

Table 1 Cont.

Sequence	Primer	% GC
Strychnos nux-vomica		
5'-SH-GCTATCGCTCGGCGAATCTC-3'	Immobilization	60
5'-GCTATCGCTCGGCGAATCTC-3'	forward primer	60
5'-Texas Red-GGATCCTTAGTGCTGGTATGATCGCA-3'	reverse primer	50
Typhonium divaricatum		
5'-SH-ACACCCCGTGGACACACGCC-3'	immobilization	70
5'-ACACCCCGTGGACACACGCC-3'	forward primer	70
5'-Texas Red-GGATCCTTAGTGCTGGTATGATCGCA-3'	reverse primer	50
Typhonium giganteum		
5'-SH-ATCCCATCACCTGCATGGAC-3'	immobilization	55
5'-ATCCCATCACCTGCATGGAC-3'	forward primer	55
5'-Texas Red-CTACGTCGACGCAGGTCTTC-3'	reverse primer	60

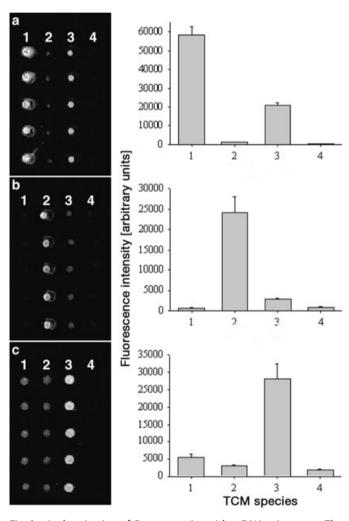


Fig. 1 Authentication of *Datura* species with a DNA microarray. The left panel shows fluorescent micrographs of microarrays containing probes for 1) Datura metel, 2) Datura tatula, 3) Datura inoxia, 4) Rhododendron molle. DNA from Datura metel (a), Datura tatula (b) or Datura inoxia (c) was hybridized to the microarrays. The right panel shows the histograms of the measured fluorescent intensities of the corresponding microarray in the left panel.

and 5S-rRNA-reverse: 5'GGA TCC TTA GTG CTG GTA TGA TCG CA 3'. PCR products were purified, sub-cloned and electrophoresed into E. coli. Plasmid DNA from positive clones was subjected to DNA sequencing. The DNA sequences were deposited in Gen-Bank with accession numbers: AB020374, AY334493, D8449, AY334501, AY334496, AY334494), AY334495, AF328968, AY334497, AY334499, AY334500, AY334498, AF072489, AJ308657, AY334503, and AY334502.

The species-specific 5S-rRNA sequences of the toxic TCM species were amplified and labeled by asymmetric PCR [19]. Microarrays were fabricated, hybridized and analyzed as described previously [19], [20].

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