Research Article

Effect of Chinese Medicine Xinmaitong on Blood Pressure in Spontaneously Hypertensive Rats

Bin Zhang,1,2 Dong Li,3,4 Gexiu Liu,5 Wenfeng Tan,1,4 Jun Guo,2 and Gaoxing Zhang1,4

1Department of Cardiovascular Disease, Jiangmen Central Hospital, Affiliated Jiangmen Hospital of Sun Yat-sen University, Jiangmen 529030, China
2Department of Cardiology, First Affiliated Hospital of Jinan University, Guangzhou 510630, China
3Department of Intensive Care Unit, Jiangmen Central Hospital, Affiliated Jiangmen Hospital of Sun Yat-sen University, Jiangmen 529030, China
4Clinical Experimental Center, Jiangmen Central Hospital, Affiliated Jiangmen Hospital of Sun Yat-sen University, Jiangmen 529030, China
5Institute of Hematology, Medical College, Jinan University, Guangzhou 510632, China

Correspondence should be addressed to Gaoxing Zhang; zhanggaoxing11@sohu.com

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Objective. To investigate the effect of traditional Chinese antihypertensive compound Xinmaitong on blood pressure and vasoactive factors of vasoconstrictor endothelin-1 (ET-1) and vasodilator calcitonin gene related peptide (CGRP) in spontaneously hypertensive rats (SHRs) with early stage hypertension. Methods. Twenty male SHRs were randomly divided into two groups: 10 for hypertensive control group and 10 for hypertensive treatment group. In addition, 10 Wistar rats were used as the normal control group without any intervention. SHRs of hypertensive treatment group were orally treated with Xinmaitong, while the hypertensive control group was treated with the normal saline (NS) for a total of eight weeks. The blood pressure in SHRs was examined before and after the end of the eight-week study. After treatment, the rats were killed and the blood samples were collected to measure plasma levels of ET-1 and CGRP by ELISA method, respectively. Meanwhile, the aorta rings were isolated for measuring the mRNA expression of ET-1 and CGRP by PCR. Moreover, the protein levels of ET-1 and CGRP were studied by immunohistochemical. Results. Daily oral administration of Xinmaitong resulted in significant fall in the SHRs’ blood pressure, including systolic and diastolic blood pressures (SBP and DBP), mean blood pressure (MBP), and pulse pressure (PP). The plasma ET-1 levels were reduced and CGRP increased. In parallel, the mRNA and protein expression of ET-1 were decreased, whereas the mRNA and protein expression of CGRP were enhanced in SHRs treated with Xinmaitong. Conclusion. The present study demonstrated for the first time that Xinmaitong leads to the fall in blood pressure of SHRs and that this antihypertensive effect is, at least in part, due to improvement of arterial tone.

1. Introduction

Hypertension continues to be a classic worldwide problem and a major global health burden. Hypertension (HTN) or prehypertension (PreHTN) alone combined with other metabolic diseases such as obesity and diabetes is one of the major risk factors for the pathogenesis of atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease (ASCVD) [1, 2]. PreHTN, the intermediate stage between HTN and normal blood pressure, is associated with subclinical atherosclerosis and target-organ damage [3]. PreHTN and HTN pose significant clinical and public health challenges for both economically developing and developed nations. Reduced vasodilator [4] as well as increased vasoconstrictor [5] is the hall marker of hypertensive vascular injury. Therefore, effective blood pressure-lowering intervention together with the balance of
vasoactive materials towards enhanced production of va-
sodilator has significant clinical implication in order to
prevent and treat ASCVD.

Xinmaitong is a traditional Chinese medicine compound
preparation consisting of Angelica sinensis, Salvia miltior-
rhiza, Uncaria Chinensis, Panax notoginseng, cassia seed,
Pueraria lobata, Sophora pubescens, Mao Holly, Prunella
vulgaris, and Achyranthes bidentata, which were usually
used for antihypertension and has been also used to treat
hypertension and ASCVD patients [6–13]. Clinical applica-
tions and experimental studies have shown that it has a
significant effect on myocardial ischemia injury; in addition,
clinical studies have also confirmed that Xinmaitong can
improve the elastic index of large and small arteries and
reduce the hypersensitivity CRP in patients with coronary
heart disease. Another study shown that candesartan
combined with Xinmaitong has a higher control rate in
patients with simple diastolic hypertension. This suggests
that Xinmaitong is an effective drug that can effectively
protect the function of vascular endothelial cells and may
play an antihypertensive effect [6, 14–18].

Calcitonin gene related peptide (CGRP) is one of the
strongest vasodilators ever known, with the effects of low-
ering blood pressure, lowering peripheral resistance, dia-
Stolic renal arteries, and significantly increasing renal blood
flow. CGRP also has a strong diastolic effect on the coronary
arteries, and it is also effective on the coronary arteries of
atherosclerosis. This diastolic effect does not depend on the
presence of vascular endothelium, and it is not affected by
serotonin receptor blockers. This indicates that CGRP binds
to a specific CGRP receptor [19–22]. However, no study was
performed to investigate the effects of Xinmaitong on blood
pressure and vasoactive materials in spontaneous hyper-
tensive rats (SHRs). Therefore, the present study was
designed to observe the impact of Xinmaitong on blood
pressure and vasoactive factors of vasoconstrictor endo-
thelin-1 (ET-1) and vasodilator calcitonin gene related
peptide (CGRP) in spontaneously hypertensive rats (SHRs).

2. Materials and Methods

Twenty male SHRs and 10 Wistar rats, aged four weeks and
weighed 140–150 g, were purchased (Vital River Laborato-
ries, Charles River Company, Beijing, China). All rats were
housed in controlled temperature (23 to 25°C) and lighting
(8:00 AM to 8:00 PM light; 8:00 PM to 8:00 AM dark) and
had free access to standard food and drinking water. All
animal experiments were approved by the Administrative
Committee of Experimental Animal Care and Use of our
hospital and conformed to the National Institute of Health
guidelines on the ethical use of animals.

2.1. Experimental Protocol. Chinese herbal compound
Xinmaitong was provided by Guizhou Yibai Pharmaceutical
Co., Ltd. SHRs were bred in the Experimental Animal
Center, Medical School of Sun-Yat Sen University,
Guangzhou, China. After they were bred for seven days of
adaptation, 20 SHRs were randomly divided into 2 groups:
10 for SHR control (SHR-C) group and 10 for SHR Xin-
maitong (SHR-X) group. The 10 Wistar-Kyoto (WKY) rats
were used as the normal control group. The WKY was fed
without any intervention, The SHR-X were administered by
gavage with 10 ml/kg body weight of 4.536% Xinmaitong
suspension. The dosage of the drug was converted with the
amount of the clinical routine drug (Xinmaitong 72 mg/kg)
with reference to the conversion factor 6.3 between rats and
humans. Furthermore, in consideration of rat generally
administration volume is 1 ml/100 g, we choose dose of
Xinmaitong at 10 ml/kg of body weight of 4.536% Xin-
maitong suspension. In order to reduce the variability of
the difference between the two groups, the SHR-C group was
administered 10 ml/kg of body weight of 0.9% NS at the
same time. The intervention time lasted eight weeks.

After eight weeks of intervention, all of the rats were
killed and blood samples were harvested from the rats to test
the plasma levels of ET-1 and CGRP. The aortas of the rats
were isolated for the PCR and immunohistochemistry.

2.2. Biochemical Measurement. To observe the safety and
side effects of Xinmaitong therapy, after eight weeks of
intervention, all of the rats were killed and blood samples
were harvested from the rats to measure hepatic and renal
functions of the rats such as AST/GOT, ALT/GPT, TP, TBA,
UREA, BUN, and CREA. The kits for these parameters were
provided by Nanjing Jiancheng Bioengineering Institute,
China.

2.3. Blood Pressure Measurement. To demonstrate the
beneficial effect of Xinmaitong treatment on arterial blood
pressure, we used a special sphygmomanometer called
BP98A intelligent noninvasive blood pressure monitor to
measure the rat’s tail artery blood pressure (TAP) according
to the machine manual. The first step is to open
the device and software. The second step is to fix the rat so
that it cannot move and fix the tail artery detector to the rat’s
tail. The third step is to keep the rat in a calm state and judge
it to be in a stable state according to the software waveform.
If the waveform is unstable, the measurement is delayed
until the waveform is stable. The fourth step is to start the
measurement, repeat the measurement three times, and take
the average value. In order to ensure the accuracy of the
measurement and to handle stress of animals, the mea-
surement is guaranteed to be performed by the same op-
erator in the same time period and environment. In
addition, all rats had a two to three days’ adaption mea-
surement test before each measurement was performed.
Furthermore, we take the performance three times only
when the software shows the blood flow of the rat is stable; if
the blood flow is unstable, the stabilization time can be
appropriately extended and measured after the blood flow is
stable.

Before and at the termination of eight-week treatment,
all rat’s TAP were measured by the same researcher. The
systolic blood pressure (SBP), diastolic blood pressure
(DBP), mean blood pressure (MBP), and pulse pressure (PP)
were recorded.
2.4. ET-1 and CGRP Measurement. To evaluate the impact of Xinmaitong on vascular function, the plasma levels of vasoconstrictor ET-1 and vasodilator CGRP were examined. The ELISA kits were provided by Uscn Life Science Inc. Wuhan and we did the test according to the manufacturer’s instructions.

2.5. PCR of ET-1 and CGRP. The thoracic aortas of the rats were isolated, and the isolated blood vessel was cut into three pieces of 3–4 mm wide vascular rings. Determination of thoracic aorta ET-1 and CGRP mRNA were detected by PCR while the protein expression of them were examined by immunohistochemistry. A semiquantitative determination was carried out with a gelatin image analyzer, and the relative density grey value of ET-1 and CGRP was used to stand for the relative expression quantity of ET-1, CGRP mRNA, and protein.

2.6. Immunohistochemistry of ET-1 and CGRP. Tissue sections were prepared of the thoracic aortas after fixation in 4% paraformaldehyde, dehydration, and embedding in paraffin. The expression of ET-1 and CGRP in the aorta tissue was examined using the SP immunohistochemistry kit according to the manufacturer’s instructions. Densitometric analysis of immunocytochemical staining of ET-1 and CGRP mRNA was carried out, and ET-1 and CGRP mRNA staining intensity was expressed in optical density (OD) units.

2.7. Statistical Analysis. All the data were expressed as mean ± standard deviation and analyzed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 12.0 (SPSS 12.0). Comparisons between groups or between pre- and post-treatment were performed by t-test. The persons who analyzed the data were blinded to treatment-group assignment. For the graph made, Graphpad Prism 5 software was used. Throughout this study, a P-value less than 0.05 was considered statistically different.

3. Results

3.1. Safety Evaluation. The body weight and food intake of three groups were recorded before and after intervention. After eight weeks of treatment, the hearts of the rats were harvested. Weight of rats were measured and compared. For further safety and side effects evaluation, AST/GOT, ALT/GPT, TP, TBA, UREA, BUN, CREA, and γ-GT/γ-GT’ were tested as the indicators for hepatic and renal function. Results show there were no significant differences in all the previously mentioned parameters in rats between the two groups (P > 0.05, Table 1).

3.2. Effects on SBP, DBP, MABP, and PP. SBP, DBP, MABP, and PP had no significant differences before treatment between SHR-C and SHR-X groups (P > 0.05) while they showed statistically significant differences after treatment (SBP lowering 46 mmHg, DBP lowering 41 mmHg, MABP lowering 42 mmHg, PP lowering 6 mmHg, P < 0.05,

| Table 1: The hepatic and renal functions in experimental groups. |
|--------------------|-------------|-------------|
|                   | WKY         | SHR-C       | SHR-X       |
| TP (mg/ml)        | 59.2 ± 11.6 | 51.0 ± 15.4 | 46.5 ± 20.3 |
| CREA (μmol/l)     | 1.6 ± 0.3   | 1.5 ± 0.4   | 1.7 ± 0.2   |
| BUN (mmol/L)      | 7.7 ± 1.1   | 9.9 ± 3.0   | 9.0 ± 2.3   |
| TBA (μmol/L)      | 37.6 ± 5.5  | 43.6 ± 14.0 | 35.5 ± 18.6 |
| ALT/GPT (IU/L)    | 106.9 ± 20.2| 103.1 ± 8.9 | 92.7 ± 7.8  |
| AST/GOT (IU/L)    | 7.7 ± 2.7   | 7.4 ± 3.1   | 6.4 ± 6.1   |

Values are means ± SD. TP: total protein; CREA: creatinine; BUN: blood urea nitrogen; TBA: total bile acid; ALT: alanine transaminase; GPT: glutamate pyruvate transaminase; AST: aspartate aminotransferase; GOT: glutamic oxalo acetic transaminase. WKY: Wistar-Kyoto rats; SHR: spontaneously hypertensive rats; SHR-C: SHR control; SHR-X: SHR Xinmaitong treatment.

Figure 1). This indicates that Xinmaitong had an antihypertensive effect, including SBP, DBP, MABP, and PP.

3.3. Impact on Vasoconstrictor ET-1 and Vasodilator CGRP. After eight weeks of treatment, the content of vasoconstrictor endothelin-1 (ET-1) in the SHR-C group was higher than that of WKY and SHR-X groups, while the content of vasodilator calcitonin gene related peptide (CGRP) in SHR-C group was lower than that of WKY and SHR-X groups, showing a statistically significant difference (P < 0.05, Figure 2).

3.4. Comparison of the mRNA and Protein Expression Levels of ET-1 and CGRP. In SHR-X group, the mRNA expression level of ET-1 was decreased and CGRP was increased significantly compared with the SHR-C (P < 0.05, Figure 3), which were consistent with protein expression results. The aorta immunohistochemistry shows the protein expression of ET-1 was decreased and CGRP was increased in SHR-X (P < 0.05, Figure 4).

4. Discussion

The major findings of the present study are the following. 1. Xinmaitong treatment markedly reduces the arterial blood pressure in SHRs. 2. Meanwhile, the increase in plasma CGRP levels together with upregulation of CGRP mRNA and protein are associated with the decline in ET-1 levels and ET-1 mRNA and protein expression. The present study demonstrates for the first time that Xinmaitong leads to the fall in blood pressure of SHRs and that this antihypertensive effect is, at least in part, due to improvement of arterial tone. Xinmaitong is a traditional Chinese herbal medicine, which is extracted, concentrated, freeze-dried, and standardized from a mixture of 10 medicinal constituents and has been widely used in the treatment of ASCVD over the recent years [23]. Here, we found that Xinmaitong clearly results in the fall in arterial blood pressure in SHRs, suggesting that compared with western medication therapy traditional Chinese herbal intervention might also probably have a salutary effect on the blood pressure reduction in patient with hypertension.
Accumulating evidence indicates that patients with hypertension are characterized by endothelial dysfunction [24]. ET-1 and CGRP are vascular endothelium-derived vasoactive factors. ET-1 has a strong endogenous biological vasoconstrictive effects. Endothelial cell damage is an important mechanism to increase the release of ET-1 [25]. CGRP is a strong endogenous vasodilatory neuropeptides, which has a strong dilation effect on blood vessels. In this study, we investigated the effects of Xinmaitong on ET-1 and CGRP. We found that Xinmaitong can not only improve the blood pressure but also reduce the secretion of ET-1 and promoting release of CGRP. Furthermore, mRNA and protein expression of CGRP and ET-1 were modulated after Xinmaitong treatment in SHRs. We supposed that these alterations are responsible for the vasoactive factors regulation of plasma CGRP and ET-1. The data reported here provide the preliminary evidence to show that Xinmaitong may protect endothelial function by maintaining the balance of vasoconstrictor ET-1 and vasodilator CGRP thus helping blood pressure control.

There are some limitations in the present study. Firstly, the exact mechanism underlying Xinmaitong-mediated
reduction in blood pressure of SHRs is not clear and beyond the present investigation, which remains to be further elucidated. Second, although our current data suggest that Xinmaitong treatment contributes to the improvement of vasoactive factors, the effect of Xinmaitong on endothelial function also needs to be investigated. Finally, in clinical practice, it is necessary to confirm whether patients with hypertension displayed the fall in blood pressure with Xinmaitong intervention alone.

In summary, the present study for the first time provide data to confirm the beneficial impact of traditional Chinese herbal medicine Xinmaitong treatment where it reduces the blood pressure in SHRs, and this antihypertensive effect might be partly related to the improvement of arterial tone.
Further investigation is under way in our laboratory in order to unravel the potential mechanism and clinical application of Xinmaitong in hypertension.

**Data Availability**

The data used to support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

**Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

**Authors’ Contributions**

Both Bin Zhang and Dong Li contributed equally to this study. Bin Zhang and Dong Li performed the study and statistical analysis and wrote the manuscript. Wenfeng Tan and Gexiu Liu investigated the study subjects and performed laboratory analysis and statistical analysis. Gaoxing Zhang and Jun Guo designed the study and reviewed the manuscript.

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