Phytochemical investigation of the active constituents from *Caesalpinia sappan* on stimulation of osteoblastic cells

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**Abstract**

Heartwood of *Caesalpinia sappan* L. has been traditionally used to many diseases such as homoptysis, syphilis, eye disease, dysentery, deparative and prevention of osteoporosis. Our previous in vitro screening of Indonesian plants revealed that an ethanolic extract of the heartwood of *C. sappan* exhibits a proliferation stimulating activity against primary osteoblastic cells. In our continued interest to this plant, we further fractionated the extract and isolated active constituents on the basis of the stimulating activity in the osteoblastic cells. The fractionation and isolation were carried out with various chromatography methods and the structure of isolated compounds was elucidated based on NMR, IR, UV and MS spectroscopic data. From an active fraction, a new biphenyl dimer, namely caesappanin C (1), along with two known compounds, protosappanin A (2) and sappanchalcone (3), were isolated. Among them, the new compound 1 exhibited the strongest activity and significantly increased the cell viability up to 276±5%. The other two compounds 2 and 3 also stimulated the cell proliferation and increased the cell viability up to 233±8% and 187±4%, respectively.

**Key words:** *Caesalpinia sappan*, caesalpiniaceae, biphenyl dimer, osteoblast.

_Caesalpinia sappan_ L. is a medicinal and dye yielding plant that belongs to Caesalpiniaceae family. This plant is widely distributed in Southeast Asia including Indonesia. Its heartwood, also known as Sappan Lignum, has been used as a traditional medicine for a long time to many diseases such as homoptysis, syphilis, eye disease, dysentery, deparative and prevention of osteoporosis (PT Eisai 1995). Previous phytochemical studies on the heartwood of _C. sappan_ indicated the presence of homoisoflavanoids, triterpenoids, steroids and other phenolic compounds such as brazilin and brazilein (Badami et al. 2004; Namikoshi et al. 1987). Among the reported compounds, the major compound, brazilin, in the heartwood of _C. sappan_ has been utilized as a dye. This compound also reported to show a pharmacological effect as hypoglycemic and antiproliferative agent for treatment of vascular diseases (Guo et al. 2013). Various biological activities, such as antibacterial (Xu and Lee 2004), anti-hepatotoxic (You et al. 2005), antioxidative (Badami et al. 2003) and anticonvulsive (Baek et al. 2000) effects have also been reported in the extracts of the heartwood of _C. sappan_.

Osteoporosis is the most frequent bone-remodeling disease that enhances bone fragility and increases the risk of fracture by both the loss of bone mass and the micro-architectural deterioration of the skeleton (Baylink et al. 1999). Patients who lost a substantial amount of bone are thus necessary to increase bone mass by stimulating new bone formation. For the formation of the bone, osteoblast plays a crucial role in creating the new bone and maintaining the bone structure. Osteoblast covers the resorption area and begins the process of new bone formation by secreting osteoid. This osteoid and the adjacent bone cells are eventually mineralized and developed into the new bone tissue (Manolagas 2000). The hormone preparation such as calcitonin and estrogen preparations is one of the drugs that have been used for osteoporosis treatment. However, recent studies have begun to reveal that the long-term use of calcitonin-containing medicines increases the risk of cancer (European Medicines Agency 2012). Therefore, non-hormonal or alternative therapies are more acceptable for...
preventing osteoporosis than the hormonal replacement therapy. Natural products such as volatile compounds, resveratrol, daidzein and glabridin from licorice root have been reported to increase the function of the osteoblastic MC3T3-E1 cell (Choi 2005; Mizutani et al. 1998; Sugimoto and Yamaguchi 2000; Wu et al. 2012).

Primary osteoblast cultures reflecting more phenotypic properties of normal osteoblast than osteoblastic cell lines can be used as an experimental tool for investigating the osteoblastic function in vitro (Ho et al. 1999). Interestingly, in our previous investigation, the Ethanolic extract of heartwood of Indonesian C. sappan has exhibited the activity against primary osteoblastic cells in vitro (Subehan et al. 2013). To the best of our knowledge, this is the first demonstration of the in vitro osteoblast activity by the extract from C. sappan. In our continuous interest to this plant, this study is thus performed and reports the isolation and structural elucidation of three constituents including a new compound from this plant, as well as their in vitro effect that stimulates the proliferation of osteoblastic cells prepared from the neonatal mouse calvaria of male mice.

Materials and methods

General experimental

The optical rotations were measured using a JASCO DIP-140 digital polarimeter (Japan Spectroscopic Co., Ltd., Tokyo, Japan). The IR spectra were recorded using a Shimadzu IR-408 spectrophotometer (Shimadzu Co., Kyoto, Japan) with tetramethylsilane (Japan Spectroscopic Co., Ltd., Tokyo, Japan) as an internal standard. The column chromatography was performed using silica gel 60 (Nacalai Tesque, Inc., Kyoto, Japan). Analytical and preparative TLCs (Merk, Darmstadt, Germany) was conducted using precoated Merck Kieselgel 60F254 and RP-18F 254 plates (0.25- or 0.50 mm thick).

Chemicals and biochemicals

Alpha-Modified minimal essential medium (α-MEM), phosphate-buffered saline (PBS) and fetal bovine serum (FBS) was purchased from Gibco BRL Products (Gaithersburg, MD, USA). Pennicillin G potassium salt, streptomycine sulphate, 17β-estradiol and 3-(4,5-dimethylthiazol-2-yl)-2,5-dimethyltetrazolium bromide (MTT) were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich, Inc. (St. Louis, MO, USA). A WST-1 cell counting kit was purchased from Dojindo (Kumamoto, Japan). Cell culture flasks and 96-well plates were from Corning, Inc. (Corning, NY, USA).

Plant material

C. sappan was collected from the rain forest in South Sulawesi Province, Indonesia and was authenticated by Ms. Sri Suhandiyah, Yayasan Keragaman Hayati Sulawesi, Indonesia. This plant was collected based on its ethnopharmacological use as a treatment for osteoporosis. A voucher sample (SL-11-002) is preserved at the Biofarmaca Research Center of Faculty of Pharmacy, Hasanuddin University, Makassar, Indonesia.

Extraction and isolation

The stems of C. sappan were greater than 8 cm in diameter. The heartwood was then separated, cut into small pieces, and dried in the room at room temperature. The dried heartwood (100 g) was extracted three times by sonication with 500 ml of 70% ethanol for 3 h. All the extracts were combined and lyophilized to yield the ethanol extract. The extract (5 g) was subjected to a medium pressure liquid chromatography (MPLC) of normal-phase silica gel (4.5 cm × 30 cm) with gradient system at a flow rate of 100 ml min⁻¹. Gradient elution was performed with n-hexane–EtOAc (0–15 min, linear gradient from 0 to 30% EtOAc; 15–23 min, linear gradient from 30 to 40% EtOAc; 23–32 min, linear gradient from 40 to 50% EtOAc; 32–44 min, linear gradient from 55 to 75% EtOAc; 44–54 min, linear gradient from 75 to 90% EtOAc; 54–64 min, linear gradient from 90 to 100% EtOAc; 64–70 min, 100% MeOH) to give six fractions (Fr.1: 0–30% EtOAc, 1200 mg, Fr.2: 30–40% EtOAc, 570 mg, Fr.3: 40–55% EtOAc, 710 mg, Fr.4: 55–75% EtOAc, 750 mg, Fr.5: 75–90% EtOAc 630 mg, and Fr.6: 90–100% EtOAc 670 mg). Each fraction was tested for their in vitro activity against the osteoblastic cells. The active fraction (Fr.4, 500 mg) was rechromatographed by a MPLC of normal-phase silica gel (4.0 cm × 15 cm) with CHCl₃–MeOH gradient system (0–40 min, linear gradient from 0–100% at a flow rate of 25 ml min⁻¹) and three subfractions (Fr.4.1: 0–5% MeOH, 52 mg, Fr.4.2: 5–80% MeOH, 320 mg, and Fr.4.3: 70–100% MeOH, 70 mg) were obtained. Fr. 4.2 then was purified with normal- and reversed-phase preparative TLCs (n-hexane–EtOAc, 8:2 and CH₂CN–MeOH–H₂O, 4:4:2, respectively) to give a new biphenyl dimer, namely caesappanin C (1, 8.0 mg), along with two known compounds, protosappanin A (2, 12.2 mg) and sappanchalchone (3, 15.6 mg).

Caesappanin C (1). Yellow powder; [α]D¹⁰ = +0.05, CH₃OH); IR (KBr) νmax 3530, 3160, 1500 cm⁻¹; HR-ESI-MS m/z: 631.1783 [M+Na]⁺ (Calcd. for C₂₉H₂₄O₃Na: 631.1791). ¹H NMR (CD₃OD, 400 MHz) δ 6.97 (2H, d, J = 8.8 Hz, H-12, 12'), 6.73 (1H, s, H-6), 6.72 (1H, s, H-3), 6.71 (1H, s, H-6'), 6.66 (1H, s, H-3'), 6.65 (1H, dd, J = 8.8, 2.2 Hz, H-11), 6.53 (1H, dd, J = 8.8, 2.2 Hz, H-11'), 6.50 (1H, dd, J = 2.2 Hz, H-9), 6.44 (1H, dd, J = 2.2 Hz, H-9), 4.38 (1H, d, J = 12 Hz, H-15), 4.14 (1H, d, J = 12 Hz, H-15), 3.85 (1H, d, J = 12 Hz, H-15), 3.56 (3H, m, H-15', 16'), 3.46 (1H, d, J = 12 Hz, H-16'), 3.39 (1H, d, J = 12 Hz, H-16), 2.68 (2H, s, H-13'), 2.57 (1H, d, J = 13.6 Hz, H-13), 2.49 (1H, d, J = 13.6 Hz, H-13). ¹³C NMR (CD₃OD, 100 MHz) δ 159.3 (C-8), 158.1 (C-8'), 157.9 (C-10'), 157.8 (C-10), 143.7 (C-4, 4', 5'), 143.6 (C-5), 132.0 (C-12), 131.5 (C-12'),
131.3 (C-1), 130.8 (C-1’), 126.9 (C-2’), 126.2 (C-2), 124.0 (C-7’), 122.8 (C-7), 118.7 (C-3), 117.8 (C-3’), 116.6 (C-6’), 116.3 (C-6), 110.8 (C-11’), 110.2 (C-11), 107.6 (C-9’), 106.9 (C-9), 75.6 (C-15’), 75.3 (C-15), 72.0 (C-14’), 71.7 (C-14), 67.2 (C-16), 64.6 (C-16’), 41.5 (C-13’), 38.7 (C-13).

Assay for stimulation of osteoblastic cell proliferation

Mouse primary osteoblasts were isolated from neonatal mouse calvaria of male mice (2–3 d old) using the reported method (Takahashi et al. 1998). Briefly, the isolated osteoblasts were suspended in α-MEM, and 8000 cells well−1 were plated in 96-well plates in a total volume of 198 µl. The cells were preincubated in α-MEM containing 10% FBS for 24 h at 37 °C under a humidified atmosphere of 5% CO₂ to allow the attachment, and then subsequently incubated in α-MEM without FBS. After 24 h, the cells were exposed to the test compounds at a final concentration of 100 µM for 48 h. MTT was then added to each well, and were incubated for 4 h. The formation of formazan was measured at 590 nm in a plate reader. The samples were dissolved in 5% DMSO and diluted with the medium. The proliferation was calculated based on the mean of three wells. The cell viability without any treatment was set as 100%.

Results and discussion

In our previous in vitro screening for the osteoblastic activity, the extract of heartwood of C. sappan has exhibited the stimulating activity on proliferation of osteoblastic cells by 164 ± 5% in a concentration of 100 µg ml⁻¹ (Subehan et al. 2013). The active extract was thus fractionated with the silica gel in the gradient system to give 6 fractions. Their stimulation activity revealed that the fraction 4 exhibits the strongest activity in the osteoblastic cells by 200 ± 2% at a concentration of 100 µg ml⁻¹. Finally, further purification of chemical constituents in this fraction afforded three compounds, a new biphenyl dimer, caesappanin C, (1) and two known compounds, protosappanin A (2) (Nagai et al. 1986; Fu et al. 2008) and sappanchalcone (3) (Namikoshi et al. 1987) (Figure 1). Spectral data of the known compounds has been confirmed with the reported data. The purity of each compound was determined by TLC and NMR, which showed purities greater than 95%.

New compound caesappanin C (1) was obtained as yellow powder, having [α]D 0° (c=0.05, CH3OH). The IR spectrum showed absorption bands corresponding to hydroxyl group (3350 cm⁻¹) and aromatic ring (1610 and 1500 cm⁻¹). The 1H NMR spectrum showed the presence of ten aromatic protons, four oxygenated methylene protons, and two methylene protons. The 13C NMR spectrum showed 32 carbon signals with eight oxygenated aromatic carbons, sixteen aromatic carbons, four oxygenated methylene carbons, two methylene carbons, and two oxygenated quatenary carbons. Double pair peaks pattern was observed in the 13C NMR spectrum. Its molecular formula was determined to be of C32H32O12 using HR-ESI-MS from its positive HR-ESI-MS m/z: 631.1783 [M+Na]+ (Calcd. for C23H22O9Na: 631.1791). MS/MS (positive) displayed the high intensity at m/z 327 [(M/2+Na)+, 63%] of the parent ion peak m/z 631 (M+Na)+. These spectral features suggested the possibility of symmetrical nature of 1.

The 1H NMR and 1H 1H correlation spectroscopy (COSY) spectra showed the presence of two ABX-type coupling systems at δH 6.97 (d, J=8.8 Hz), 6.53 (dd, J=8.8, 2.2 Hz), and 6.44 (d, J=2.2 Hz) and at δH 6.97 (d, J=8.8 Hz), 6.56 (dd, J=8.8, 2.2 Hz), and 6.50 (d, J=2.2 Hz). Furthermore, the heteronuclear single quantum coherence (HMQC) and heteronuclear multiple bond correlation (HMBC) connectivity of the proton and carbon signals between δH 6.97, 6.53, and 6.44 and δC 159.3, 157.8, 132.0, 122.8, 110.2, and 106.9 and between δH 6.97, 6.56, and 6.50 and δC 158.1, 157.9, 131.5, 124.0, 110.8, and 107.6, respectively, suggested the presence of two tri-substituted aromatic moieties (rings
A and B) (Figure 2). On the other hand, the two aromatic protons at $\delta_H 6.73$ (s) and 6.72 (s) showed correlations with $\delta_C 143.7$, 143.6, 131.3, 126.2, 118.7, and 116.3. The remaining two aromatic protons at $\delta_H 6.71$ and 6.66 also connected with the carbon signals at $\delta_C 143.7$ (2C), 130.8, 126.9, 117.8, and 116.6 indicated the presence of two 1,2,4,5-substituted aromatic moieties (rings C and D) in addition to the two tri-substituted aromatic moieties in the structure. Moreover, the HMBC long range correlations of $\delta_H 6.97$ on the ring A to $\delta_C 131.3$ on the ring C and $\delta_H 6.73$ on the ring C to $\delta_C 122.8$ on the ring A indicated that these two aromatic moieties directly link each other. The same case was also observed at $\delta_H 6.97$ on the ring B to $\delta_C 130.8$ on the ring D and $\delta_H 6.71$ on the ring D to $\delta_C 126.9$ on the ring B, suggesting that I has two biphenyl skeletons.

Further analyses of the HMQC and HMBC spectra revealed that the methylene protons at $\delta_H 2.49$ (d, $J=13.6$ Hz) and 2.57 (d, $J=13.6$ Hz) attach to the methylene carbon at $\delta_C 38.7$ with germinal coupling, and connect to the aromatic carbons at $\delta_C 131.3$, 126.2, and 118.7 on the ring C. They also correlated with the oxygenated quaternary carbon at $\delta_C 71.7$ and the oxygenated methylene carbon at $\delta_C 75.3$. The methylene protons at $\delta_H 3.56$ (d, $J=12.0$ Hz) and 3.39 (d, $J=12.0$ Hz) showed an attachment to the oxygenated carbon at $\delta_C 67.2$. These two protons also correlated with the methylene carbon at $\delta_C 38.7$ and the oxygenated methylene carbon at $\delta_C 75.3$. On the other hand, the methylene protons at $\delta_H 3.85$ (d, $J=12.0$ Hz) and 4.14 (d, $J=12.0$ Hz) showed an attachment to the oxygenated carbon at $\delta_C 75.3$ and displayed connectivity with the aromatic carbon at $\delta_C 158.1$ on the ring B, together with correlations between oxygenated carbon at $\delta_C 67.2$ and methylene carbon at $\delta_C 38.7$. These observations suggested that I contains a $-\text{CH}_{2}-\text{C(OH)}(\text{CH}_{2}\text{OH})-\text{CH}_{2}O-$ partial structure linked to the rings B and C. A very similar connectivity including the rings A and D was observed in the remaining proton and carbon signals. This supported the presence of other $-\text{CH}_{2}-\text{C(OH)}(\text{CH}_{2}\text{OH})-\text{CH}_{2}O-$

Figure 2. The selected key HMBC correlations of 1.

Figure 3. Effect of the isolated compounds on proliferation of osteoblastic cells in vitro. The osteoblastic cells were prepared from the neonatal mouse calvaria of male mice (2–3 d old). The cells were seeded in 96-well plates and treated for 48 h with 100$\mu$M of the indicated compounds, except for 17β-estradiol. The cell viability was measured using the MTT assay. Percentage of the cell viability control (without treatment) was set as 100% cell viability. Data are presented as the mean±SD ($n=3$).

All the isolated compounds were tested for their stimulation activity on proliferation of primary osteoblastic cells isolated from the fetal calvaria bone at the concentration of 100$\mu$M (Figure 3). The cell viability was measured using the MTT assay. The stimulation activity of 17β-estradiol as a positive control (1$\mu$M) was 179±23%. All the isolated compounds showed the stimulation effect. Among them, I exhibited the strongest activity of 276±5% and significantly increased the
proliferation of the osteoblastic cells. 2 also showed the significant activity in the cells by 233±4%. On the other hand, 3 exhibited the proliferation stimulating activity in the osteoblastic cells by 187±5%. It has been reported that natural products such as daidzein, glabridine and resveratrol exhibit the stimulation effect on osteoblastic cell at concentration less than 10 µM (Choi 2005; Mizutani et al. 1998; Sugimoto and Yamaguchi 2000; Wu et al. 2012). The isolated compounds 1–3 thus showed moderate osteoblastic in vitro proliferation stimulating activity.

Conclusion

In this research, we isolated three compounds, caesappanin C (1), protosappanin A (2), and sappanchalcone (3) from the ethanolic extract of the heartwood of Indonesian C. sappan that showed the proliferation stimulating activity against the primary osteoblastic cells in vitro. All the isolated compounds exhibited the moderate activities, in which the new compound 1 showed the strongest in vitro proliferation stimulating activity. These observations suggest that C. sappan and the isolated compounds may have the potential to stimulate bone formation and regeneration.

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