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Partial Structure of Panaxan A, A Hypoglycemic Glycan of *Panax ginseng* Roots*

Masashi Томода, Kazuyo Shimada, Chohachi Konno**, Kazuhiko Sugiyama** and Hiroshi Hikino**

友田正司,嶋田和代,今野長八**,杉山和彦**,ヒキノヒロシ**

The crude drug "Ninjin" (ginseng), the roots of *Panax ginseng* C.A. MEYER (Araliaceae), has been utilized as an indispensable remedy since olden times in Oriental medicine.

Although this crude drug has long been noticed to possess the ability to reduce blood sugar level in normal and experimentally-induced hyperglycemic animals and several constituents have been claimed to have such effects, no remarkable hypoglycemic principle has been isolated.

Recently, we have clarified the hypoglycemic activity of ginseng to be due to the peptidoglycans, panaxan A, B, C, D and E.

The structure of the main peptidoglycan, panaxan A, is studied in the present paper.

Gel chromatography of panaxan A over Sephacryl S-200 gave a value of approximately 14000 for the molecular weight.

Panaxan A was found to consist of mainly D-glucose (92.1%) by quantitative determination and to contain also a small amount of protein moiety (1.7%).

It showed a high positive specific rotation $([\alpha]_D+187^\circ)$ and its ¹H-NMR spectrum exhibited two anomeric hydrogen singnal at δ 4.89 (doublet, J 3 Hz) and 5.20 (doublet, J 3 Hz), the ratio of their integrals being *ca.* 3:1. These results suggested that all p-glucose units are α -linked.

In the ¹³C-NMR spectrum of panaxan A, nine singnals at δ 60.6, 65.6, 69.7, 70.6, 71.9, 73.3, 81.1, 97.9 and 99.9 were visible. From the chemical shifts, it was apparent that the C-6 carbons occurred at δ 60.6 and 65.6, the C-3 carbons appeared at δ 73.3 and 81.1, and the C-1 carbons arised at δ 97.9 and 99.9, indicating that, in panaxan A, α -glucose units are linked at the 1, 3 and 6 positions.

Panaxan A was methylated with methylsulfinyl carbanion and methyl iodide in dimethyl sulfoxide. The fully methylated derivative was hydrolyzed with dilute sulfuric acid in acetic acid. The products were analyzed by gas-liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry (GLC-MS) after conversion into alditol acetates ; 2,3,4,6-tetra-O-methyl-D-glucose, 2,3,4-tri-O-methyl-D-glucose and 2,4-di-O-methyl-D-glucose were identified in a

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^{**} 東北大学薬学部

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molar ratio of 1.0:2.0:1.2.

Further, panaxan A was oxidized with periodate. In this oxidation, 1.37 mol of periodate per mol of component anhydro sugar unit was consumed with liberation of 0.74 mol of formic acid. When the periodate-oxidized product was reduced, hydrolyzed and analyzed, the yield of the residual glucose was 25.6%.

Based on these results, it can be concluded that panaxan A is mainly composed of α -1 \rightarrow 6 linked p-glucopyranose units and has branches linked in part through the 3 position. The ratio of terminals, branching positions and intermediate units must be about 1:1:2 on the average. Thus, panaxan A contains the following three possible structural fragment (Chart 1).



Chart 1. Three Possible Structural Fragments of the Polysaccharide Moiety of Panaxan A Glcp=glucopyranose