

Letter to the Editor

**Preparative Resolution of Gatifloxacin Enantiomers with Pre-Column Esterification Strategy and Comparing Their Enantioselectivity to Bacteria and Antibody***ZHANG Chi Jian¹, LEI Hong Tao^{1,#}, HUANG Xiao Long¹, LIU Ying Ju²,
CAI Kai³, XU Zhen Lin¹, and SUN Yuan Ming¹

Gatifloxacin (GFX) is a kind of chiral fluoroquinolones compound due to the methyl group at the C-3 position of the piperazine ring^[1]. Although the enantiomers of GFX show similar levels of antimicrobial activity and pharmacokinetics^[2], the other biological activities (i.e., toxicity or enantioselective recognition to various receptors *in vivo*) of GFX enantiomers have not yet been studied. With this in mind, we developed a rapid and cost-effective high performance liquid chromatographic (HPLC) separation procedure for GFX enantiomers with a pre-column esterification strategy. With significant enhancement of drug solubility and optimization for chromatographic conditions, the proposed method was scaled up to preparative HPLC to obtain optical active S(-) and R-(+)-GFX. The antibacterial activities of GFX enantiomers after preparative separation were further verified by measuring the Minimum Inhibitory Concentration (MIC) values against *Escherichia coli* ATCC 25922. In addition, the binding selectivity of GFX enantiomers to protein receptor were evaluated by antibody using enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) for the first time.

In the current study, GFX was found to be only slightly soluble in methanol (MeOH), ethanol (EtOH), acetonitrile (ACN), and hexane (HE). Due to the limited solubility, GFX was not suitable for the cost-effective and rapid HPLC resolution. Therefore, GFX methyl ester (Figure 1) was synthesized to be subjected on the column in order to enhance the solubility and resolution efficiency, followed by the hydrolysis of the separated ester to obtain GFX

enantiomers.

To achieve the best possible separation of the enantiomers of GFX methyl ester, 5 types of mobile phase were evaluated on four types of chiral stationary phases (CSPs). The resultant resolution factor (R_s), retention time (t), and enantioselectivity (α) have been summarized in Table 1. It was found that the Chiralpak AS-H and the AD-H were the only columns that were capable of sufficiently resolving the enantiomers of GFX methyl ester. No separation signal was observed when the Chiralcel OD-H and the Chiralpak IA columns were tested with this multimodal elution system. Compared to the performance on the AD-H column, the AS-H column demonstrated higher chiral recognition ability toward the enantiomers of GFX methyl ester. The racemate could be baseline-separated ($R_s \geq 1.39$) on the AS-H column under both normal and polar organic mode, while only partially separated on the AD-H column under normal phase conditions. This result indicated that the enantioseparation of GFX methyl ester was significantly affected by the position and number of substituents introduced on the phenyl groups of the carbamate derivatives^[3]. The AS-H column consisting of (s)- α -methyl group as substituent may provide better spatial structure to recognize GFX methyl ester than the AD-H column (3, 5-dimethyl group as substituent). From Table 1, it could be also noted that the relative short retention times of the two enantiomers occurred using ACN or hexane with 30% ethanol as mobile phase on the AS-H column ($R_s \geq 1.80$). The enantiomers of GFX methyl ester could be well resolved in 5 min under

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1. Key Risk Assessment Laboratory of Agricultural Product Preservation, Ministry of Agriculture/Guangdong Provincial Key Laboratory of Food Quality and Safety, South China Agricultural University, Guangzhou 510642, Guangdong, China; 2. College of Sciences, South China Agricultural University, Guangzhou 510642, Guangdong, China; 3. College of Life Science, Shaanxi Normal University, Xi'an 710062, Shaanxi, China

these two conditions. Although the resolution was better when ACN was used, the solubility of GFX methyl ester in hexane was higher than that in ACN. Furthermore, it has been reported that highly polar solvents could partially or totally dissolve the coated-type CSPs when applied to a continuous separation, and that this could lead to a reduction in the life time of the column^[4]. Considering the separation time, the solubility of the racemate and the CSP stability in preparative application, the enantioselectivity ($\alpha=1.36$) and resolution ($R_S=1.80$) were acceptable when n-hexane was used. For this reason, the mobile phase of hexane with ethanol as organic modifier was selected for the additional optimization work on the AS-H column.

Next, the effect of the ethanol concentration in the mobile phase was evaluated. 15%, 20%, and 30% of ethanol were tested and the result showed that the increasing amount of ethanol in the mobile phase led to reduction in the retention times as well as the resolution of the two enantiomers. Considering the resolution efficiency, HE/EtOH/DEA (80:20:0.1, v:v:v) giving a resolution of 2.59 at 7 min was finally selected as the optimized mobile phase for the preparative separation of GFX methyl ester enantiomers on AS-H column. The separation time per run in current study was relatively shorter than those of the published data (>10 min)^[5].

The optimized method was used to resolve the racemic sample on the preparative scale. GFX methyl ester was injected as a 9.5 mg/mL sample onto a preparative HPLC column (AS-H) and the separation was performed at a flow rate of 10 mL/min using hexane with 20% ethanol as mobile phase. After a selection of different volumes of column loading, 13 mL of GFX methyl ester in hexane was found to be the best one considering retention, production rate and purity of enantiomers (data not shown). Through extracting and drying in vacuo, 79.2 mg of the first eluted enantiomer and 69.4 mg of the second eluted enantiomer were obtained from the collected elution in 1 h. Individual fractions of enantiomers isolated were re-injected onto the analytical chiral column to determine their enantiomeric purity. Both of the collected fractions provided an enantiomeric excess more than 99% (Figure 2). The collected enantiomers of GFX methyl ester were also hydrolyzed to afford the corresponding enantiomers of GFX. The absolute configurations of two hydrolyzed enantiomers were confirmed by a combination of NMR and polarimetry. The ¹H NMR results for the two enantiomer hydrolysates are as follow. First eluted enantiomer hydrolysate: (600 MHz, DMSO-d₆): 8.69 (1 H, s), 7.74 (1 H, d, $J_{HF}=12.3$ Hz), 4.22-4.11 (1 H, m), 3.75 (3 H, s), 3.14-3.29 (3 H, m), 2.80-3.00 (4 H, m), 0.99-1.12 (7 H, m);



Figure 1. Esterification of GFX racemate. * Represents the Chiral Center.

Table 1. Separation Performance of GFX Methyl Ester on AS-H and AD-H Columns

Mobile Phase	CSPs							
	AS-H				AD-H			
	T_R (min)		α	R_S	T_R (min)		α	R_S
	P1	P2			P1	P2		
MeOH/DEA (100/0.1)	2.63	2.97	1.54	1.45	2.69	-	-	-
EtOH/DEA (100/0.1)	5.37	6.19	1.24	1.39	5.65	-	-	-
ACN/DEA (100/0.1)	3.67	4.34	1.40	2.85	10.3	-	-	-
HE/EtOH/DEA (70/30/0.1)	3.56	4.11	1.36	1.80	7.51	8.23	1.13	1.97
HE/IPA/DEA (70/30/0.1)	6.72	8.66	1.41	2.59	6.42	6.75	1.08	0.78

Note. Flow rate: 1.0 mL/min; column temperature: 35 °C; UV: 254 nm; injection: 2.0 μ L; ‘-’ means unretained.

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