Predicting Chemical Change in Herbal Formulas

Jasmine Walton, DAOM, MS[1,2]; Tonia Smith[2]; Ariana Zungia[2]
[1]Five Branches University, San Jose USA [2]Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science, Los Angeles, USA

Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science

BACKGROUND

Herbal decoctions contain complex, variable chemistry. Changes in composition may affect key measureable compounds, fingerprint reproducibility, and quality control, complicating consistent characterization

Lifecycle Sources of Chemical Variability

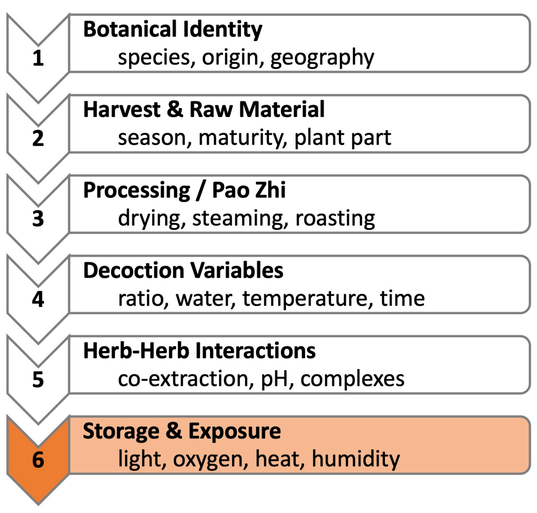

Figure 1. Six stages where variability can alter the chemical composition of herbal formulas.[1]

KNOWLEDGE GAP

Current analytical methods can detect chemical variability after it occurs, but they do not efficiently predict which compounds are most vulnerable before testing. Since exhaustive testing is impractical, computational prediction may help prioritize targeted experimental validation.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Can computational chemistry help predict which key compounds in an herbal decoction are most likely to change after controlled light exposure?

OBJECTIVE

To develop a proof-of-concept framework that computationally ranks key compounds by predicted light susceptibility and compares the ranking with observed thin-layer chromatography fingerprint changes.

COMPUTATIONAL APPROACH

Comparison of methods considered for the proof-of-concept study.

Method	Purpose	Limitation	Study Role
Cheminformatics	Compound screening	Curated data	Future work
Machine learning	Pattern prediction	Large training sets	Future work
Molecular dynamics	Molecular interactions	Computationally intensive	Next phase
DFT/TD-DFT modeling	Light-related properties	Simplified model	**Current study**

Table 1. Computational approaches considered for the proposed proof-of-concept study.[2]

DFT/TD-DFT modeling (Electronic-structure modeling) was selected because it can evaluate molecular properties related to stability, reactivity, and light responsiveness using a manageable set of key compounds

PROPOSED COMPUTATIONAL-TO-EXPERIMENTAL FRAMEWORK

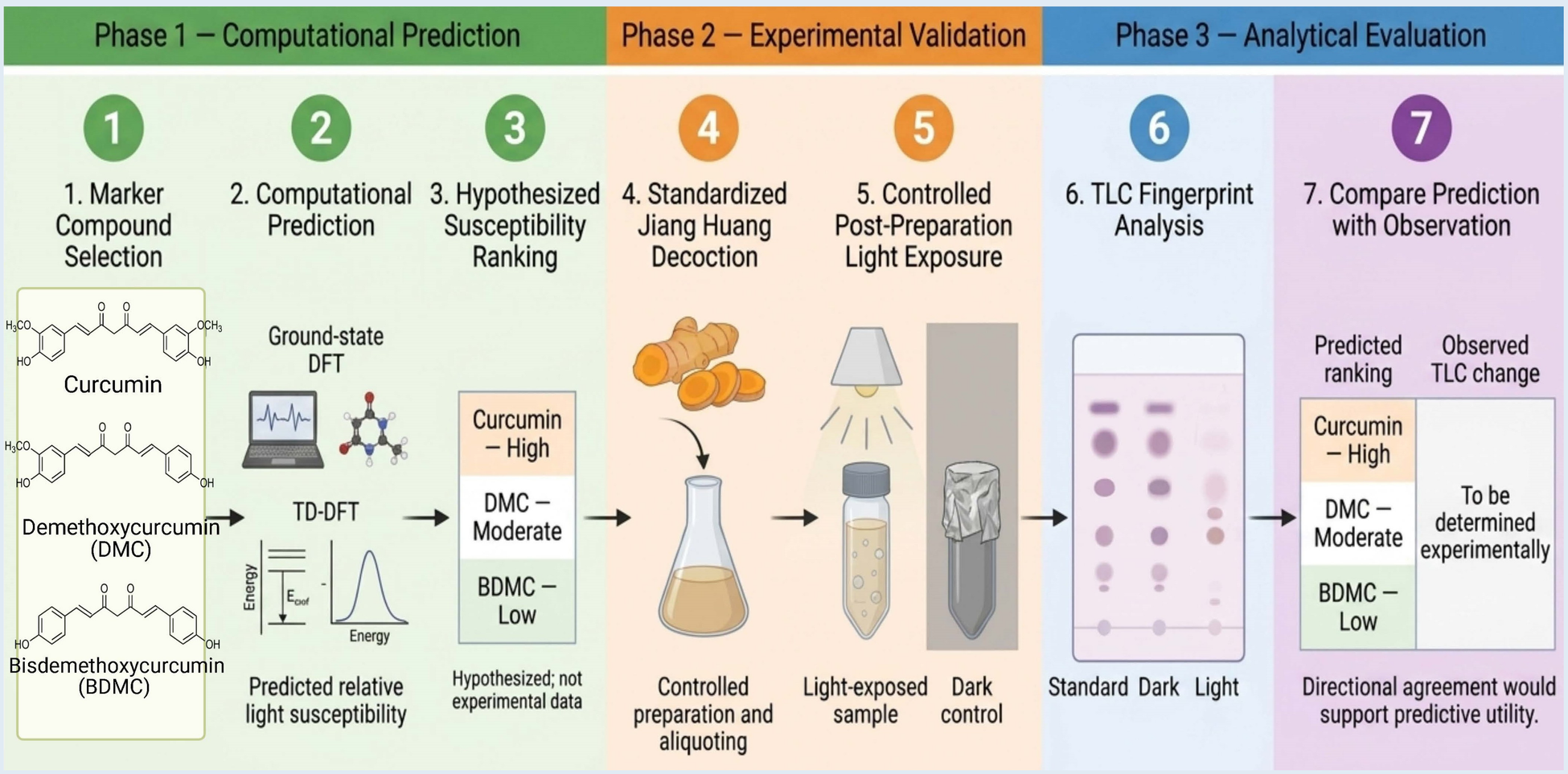

Figure 2. Proposed computational-to-experimental framework. Density functional theory (DFT) and time-dependent density functional theory (TD-DFT) rank key compounds by predicted light susceptibility, followed by controlled light exposure and thin-layer chromatography (TLC) to compare predicted and observed changes.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Differential light susceptibility among key compounds Detectable • TLC fingerprint differences after light exposure • Partial agreement between predicted and observed changes

SIGNIFICANCE

This framework may guide targeted testing of herbal decoctions, supporting more consistent characterization and greater clinician confidence in their chemical quality.

FUTURE DIRECTION

Test additional formulas and variability conditions • Confirm observed changes using HPLC, LC-MS, or NMR • Develop predictive tools for herbal formula characterization

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References 1.Muyumba NW, Mutombo SC, Sheridan H, Nachtergael A, Duez P. Quality control of herbal drugs and preparations: Methods of analysis, relevance, and applications. 2. *Talanta Open.* 2021;4:100070. Keith JA, Vassilev-Galindo V, Cheng B, et al. Combining machine learning and computational chemistry for predictive insights into chemical systems. *Chem Rev.* 2021;121(16):9816–9872.

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