

Study of Antihypertensive Activity from Red Quinoa Seed Protein Hydrolysate Digested by Various Protease Enzymes

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ABSTRACT

Proteolytic enzymes are widely used to produce protein hydrolysates that contain bioactive peptides. Some of bioactive peptides are known inhibit the angiotensin-I-converting enzyme (ACE, EC 3.4.15.1) and act as human antihypertensive. Therefore, this study aims to produce protein hydrolysates via 16 hours of digestion process using *Chenopodium formosanum* (red quinoa) seed and the proteases, namely pepsin, trypsin, α -chymotrypsin, and thermolysin. The hydrolysates profiles and ACE-I inhibitory activity were analyzed using reversed phase-high performance liquid chromatography (RP-HPLC). The SDS-PAGE was also used to analyze the main storage protein in red quinoa seed, identified as being 11S seed storage globulin. Meanwhile, the ACE inhibitor activities of red quinoa seed protein (RQSP) produced by various proteases include the hydrolysate of pepsin $17.03\% \pm 3.88\%$, trypsin $42.67\% \pm 3.19\%$, α -chymotrypsin $72.71\% \pm 2.85\%$ and thermolysin $77.67\% \pm 0.98\%$. These results show that red quinoa seed protein is a potential source of significant ACE inhibitor activity when hydrolyzed with α -chymotrypsin and thermolysin.

1. Introduction

Hypertension is a critical and widespread health problem that increases death risk, stroke, and heart failure. Some scientific evidence shows that drug treatments may be used to manage hypertension. This includes antihypertensive agents such as angiotensin-I-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors, which lower blood pressure (Heran *et al.* 2008). The renin-angiotensin system (RAS) and the kallikrein-kinin system (KKS) both work in conjunction with the ACE, a member of the zinc metallopeptidase family, to regulate blood pressure (Tu *et al.* 2018). In the RAS, ACE cleaves C-terminal dipeptide of angiotensin I, it produces the powerful vasoconstrictor angiotensin II. Furthermore, it also inactivates bradykinin which has depressor action in the KKS (Murray and FitzGerald 2007). The inhibitory activity results in a drop in angiotensin II levels, which lowers blood

pressure and blood vessel tightness (Ondetti *et al.* 1977), showing antihypertensive activity. A previous study has shown that ACE inhibitory agents can be released from food protein (Yokoyama *et al.* 1992).

Currently, several ACE inhibitor synthetic drugs such as captopril, enalapril, and lisinopril, are being used for the clinical treatment of human hypertension (López-Fandiño *et al.* 2006). However, these medications frequently have negative side effects such allergic reactions, hypotension, coughing, potassium retention (hyperkalemia), reduced renal function, and fetal abnormalities (Kim and Wijesekara 2010). Food-derived ACE inhibitors are therefore excellent candidates for such products, offering a number of benefits such as safety, affordability, and the nutritional advantages of the proteins as sources of vital amino acids. ACE inhibitory activities have been identified in different food protein such as fish (Kohama *et al.* 1988), gelatin (Himaya *et al.* 2012), casein and whey (Ferreira *et al.* 2007; Tu *et al.* 2018) soybean (Hanafi *et al.* 2018), common bean (Luna-vital *et al.* 2015) and cereals (Liu

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et al. 2013; Shamloo *et al.* 2015; Wang *et al.* 2017). Meanwhile, plant seeds, especially cereals are one of the most important sources of protein worldwide. It was also discovered that the cereal proteins are potential precursors of antihypertensive peptides (Anantharaman and Finot 1993).

Red quinoa (*Chenopodium formosanum*) is a cereal food protein grown in Taiwan, which is largely cultivated in Taitung and Pingtung districts (Chao and Hsueh 2016). Due to the nutrient content of its seeds, leaves, and stems, attention had been directed toward analyzing the potential for the biofunctional activity of various species of *Chenopodium*. This includes Vilcacundo *et al.* (2017) who identified the proteins from *Chenopodium quinoa* as possessing anti-diabetic properties, while Chirinos *et al.* (2018) discovered those from *Chenopodium pallidicaule* as possessing antioxidant and ACE inhibitor properties. This has led to the investigation of bio-functional activities derived from the *Chenopodium* genus. However, a study related to the bio-functional activity of red quinoa (*Chenopodium formosanum*) protein released by enzymatic digestion has not been carried out. Even though a variety of enzyme preparations have been utilized to make ACE inhibitors from food protein, alcalase, thermolysin, flavorzyme, and digestive enzymes such as pepsin, trypsin, and α -chymotrypsin are the most popular (Mao *et al.* 2007). Protein hydrolysates are also effective in food application and feed ingredients for animals (Mizani *et al.* 2005). Therefore, this study aims to identify the potential of red quinoa seed (RQS) protein hydrolysate as released by various proteases, namely pepsin, trypsin, α -chymotrypsin, and thermolysin for the ACE inhibition.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Sample Preparation

Red quinoa (*Chenopodium formosanum*) seed was purchased from National Pingtung University Science and Technology, Taiwan. The red quinoa seed was prepared by grinding it into powder using a grinder machine from Rong Tsong Precision Technology Co. (Taichung, Taiwan). The powder was put into a Falcon tube and placed in a vacuum chamber until used.

2.2. Obtaining Crude Protein Extract from RQS

The RQS powder was weighed into samples of 2 g, placed in a 50 ml Falcon tube, and 10 ml of 1%

sodium dodecyl sulfate (SDS) in distilled water was added. The cell walls were disrupted with Branson Digital Sonifier® (Terra Universal Inc. LA, USA) at an amplitude of 30%. The pulse duration of 15 minutes with 20 seconds pulse on and 10 seconds pulse off was applied. Subsequently, the solution was separated by centrifugation (4,000 rpm, 15 minutes), and the supernatant was frozen at 80°C, and lyophilized.

The lyophilized sample was dissolved using 20% trichloroacetic acid (TCA) in acetone at a ratio of 3:1 (v/v). The solution was mixed by vortex and incubated at 4°C for 12 hours. After incubation, the samples were centrifuged at 4,000 rpm for 15 minutes to obtain the protein pellets. Subsequently, the pellets were lyophilized to obtain the crude seed protein and kept at 20°C for hydrolysis.

2.3. Obtaining Protein Hydrolysate from Crude Protein Extract

The RQS crude protein extract was subjected to hydrolysis with various protease enzymes, namely pepsin, trypsin, α -chymotrypsin, and thermolysin as described in Table 1. Each enzyme was prepared in 1 M HCl and sample protein concentration of 1/50 (w/w). The enzyme prepared at a concentration of 100 μ g was added to 5 mg samples of protein. Based on the application of various buffers, trypsin, α -chymotrypsin, and thermolysin used 50 mM ammonium carbonate (pH 8.5), while pepsin used 20 mM NaCl (pH 2.0). The hydrolysis was performed for 16 hours at 37°C, except for thermolysin, which was kept at 60°C. Once the enzymatic reaction was completed, the hydrolysate was lyophilized (Table 1). The lyophilized hydrolysate was dissolved using 5% acetonitrile (ACN) in distilled water, vortexed, and generated through ultrafiltration with a range molecular weight cut-off (MWCO) of 3 kDa by centrifugation (15,000 rpm, 10 minutes at 4°C).

Table 1. Various proteases for red quinoa seed protein hydrolysis

Hydrolysate	Protease	Conditions
RQSP_Pep	Pepsin	37°C at pH 2.0
RQSP_Tryp	Trypsin	37°C at pH 8.5
RQSP_Cym	α -Chymotrypsin	37°C at pH 8.5
RQSP_Ther	Thermolysin	60°C at pH 8.5

*RQSP_Pep (Redquinoa seed protein digested by pepsin); RQSP_Tryp (Redquinoa seed protein digested by trypsin); RQSP_Cym (Redquinoa seed protein digested by α -chymotrypsin); RQSP_Ther (Redquinoa seed protein digested by thermolysin)

Acetonitrile (ACN) concentrations of 5%, 50%, 80%, and 95% ACN were used to desalt the hydrolysates below 3 kDa using a PepClean TMC18 spin column (Thermo Scientific, Rockwood, Tn, USA.). Out of these concentrations, 50% and 80% fractions were collected, combined, and lyophilized.

2.4. SDS-PAGE Analysis of Crude Protein

The BIO-RAD Laboratories' electrophoresis apparatus was employed in this study. Stephan *et al.* (2022), provided a description of the procedure utilized to prepare the gel. Acrylamide was employed in the application gel of the samples at a concentration of 12% in the running gel. The run took place in a 10.8 6.8 cm gel for 3 hours at a voltage of 100 V.

2.5. HPLC Analysis of RQS Protein Hydrolysate

The profile of hydrolyzed RQS was determined by RP-HPLC, where the lyophilized hydrolysate was initially resuspended in the mobile phase and dissolved in 5% acetonitrile and 0.1% ferulic acid in deionized water with a sample concentration of 10 µg/µl. The efficiency of production of RQS protein hydrolysate using various protease enzymes was confirmed on RP-HPLC chromatograms for 65 minutes at UV 214 nm with gradient elution of 0-30 minutes (10-36% B), 37-45 minutes (62-70% B), and isocratic elution at 50-60 minutes (80% B). Meanwhile, solvents A and B were 5% and 95% of acetonitrile, which contain 0.1% trifluoroacetic acid in deionized water, respectively.

2.6. Angiotensin I-converting Enzyme (ACE) Inhibitory Assay

The ACE inhibitory assay was measured by *in vitro* according to Cushman *et al.* (1977) as described by Pujiastuti *et al.* (2017) with slight modification. The ACE reaction was calculated by incubated 10 µl sampel, 30 µl HHL, and 20 µl of 0.05 mU/µl ACE in 200 mM borate buffer. The reaction was incubated at 37°C for 30 minutes without shaking and then shaken (200 rpm). Subsequently, the hippuric acid (HA) as the product released from HHL (Hippuryl-L-Histidyl-L-Leucine) was analyzed by RP-HPLC equipped with a C18 column (4.6 mm × 250 mm; particle size 5 µm, Thermo Scientific Inc) and the detection of UV-Vis wavelength was at 228 nm for 30 minutes. The mobile phase were 5% of acetonitrile, which contain 0.1% trifluoroacetic acid in deionized water. The chromatographic peak area was quantified. The ACE

inhibitory activity was calculated based on HA peaks areas as the following equation:

$$\text{ACE inhibition (\%)} = \frac{A \text{ blank} - A \text{ sample}}{A \text{ blank}} \times 100\%$$

3. Results

3.1. Red Quinoa Seed (RQS) Yield Protein

This study produced a protein yield of 16% from 1 g of RQS powder, which was extracted and precipitated using TCA to obtain 0.16 g of crude protein. Trichloroacetic acid (TCA) is commonly used to concentrate protein samples or remove contaminants, including salts and detergents before downstream application such as SDS-PAGE or 2D gels. The crude protein was profiled using SDS-PAGE analysis to observe the distribution of the protein and estimate their molecular masses. Based on the results, the main protein was identified as 11S seed storage globulin (Table 2), with subunit molecular weights of 17 kDa, 20 kDa, 31 kDa, 34 kDa, and 53 kDa (Figure 1). As stated in the Uniprot database (<https://www.uniprot.org/uniprot/Q06AW2>), the 53 kDa is similar to the protein of 11S seed storage globulin A from *Chenopodium Quinoa* (Q06AW2_CHEQI). This study assumed that RQS major protein is 11S seed storage globulin protein.

3.2. Hydrolysate Profile of RQSP Using Various Protease

The defatted RQS was hydrolyzed with four different proteases under their optimum conditions. This was carried out to generate the RQS hydrolysate with ACE inhibitory activity, which was prepared as shown in Figure 2. The three potential ACE inhibitory hydrolysate fractions of RQS, namely trypsin, α-chymotrypsin, and thermolysin were profiled using RP-HPLC. Meanwhile, Figure 3 shows the effect of various proteases on the molecular weight of hydrolysate distribution of RQS protein. The peak distribution of peptides in the hydrolysate showed the characteristics of the hydrolysate produced during the hydrolysis process. The profiles of the three hydrolysates also indicated that their contents are mostly smaller peptides.

This showed that enzymatic hydrolysis was effective in producing small molecular mass compounds and potent bioactivity of the hydrolysate. The trypsin hydrolysate produced the lowest peak, therefore, only a small amount of peptide was

Table 2. The Observed band specificity of red quinoa seed protein (RQSP) crude protein

Observed band	Mascot score	Protein number	Observed protein in mascot search
17 kDa	113	gi 45510877	11S seed storage globulin [<i>Chenopodium quinoa</i>]
20 kDa	388	gi 45510877	11S seed storage globulin [<i>Chenopodium quinoa</i>]
31 kDa	196	gi 45510877	11S seed storage globulin [<i>Chenopodium quinoa</i>]
53 kDa	53	gi 45510877	11S seed storage globulin [<i>Chenopodium quinoa</i>]

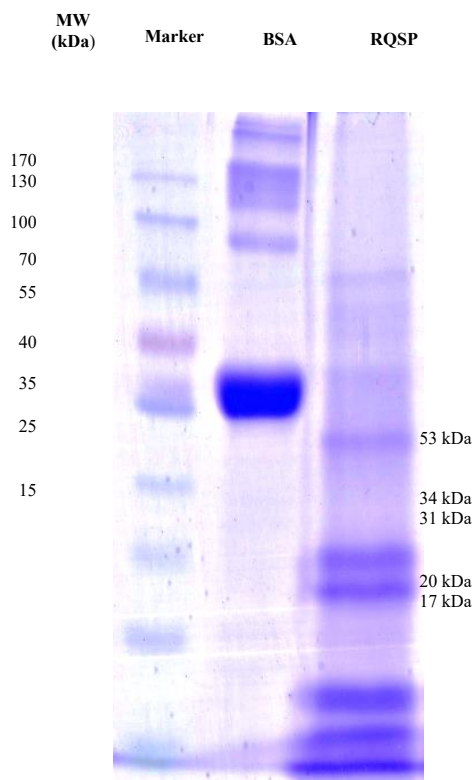


Figure 1. SDS-PAGE analysis of red quinoa seed protein (RQSP) crude protein

present. The α -chymotrypsin hydrolysate had a lower peak of peptides compared to the thermolysin hydrolysate, showing its richness in peptides. This showed that the thermolysin produced more peptides from RQS protein than pepsin, trypsin, and α -chymotrypsin. Therefore, the thermolysin is more effective at hydrolyzing the RQS proteins compare to other protease enzymes.

3.3. ACE Inhibitor Activity on RQS Protein Hydrolysate

The various proteases, namely pepsin, trypsin, α -chymotrypsin, and thermolysin usually filter the ACE inhibitor activity in RQS. The ACE inhibitor activity was calculated in three experiments using RP-HPLC. From Table 3, the results showed that pepsin, trypsin, α -chymotrypsin, and thermolysin

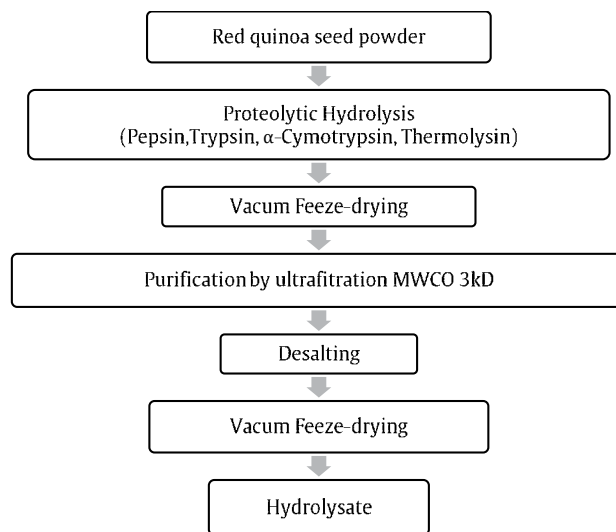


Figure 2. Flowchart for the preparation of RQSP hydrolysate with various protease

hydrolysates exhibit $17.03\% \pm 3.88\%$, $42.67\% \pm 3.19\%$, $72.71\% \pm 2.85\%$, and $77.67\% \pm 0.98\%$ ACE-I inhibitory activity, respectively. Pepsin hydrolysate had the lowest activity, with trypsin and α -chymotrypsin showing the higher levels. Therefore, thermolysin is suggested as the best in the preparation of RQS protein hydrolysate fractions for ACE-I inhibition.

4. Discussion

Red quinoa (*Chenopodium formosanum*) belongs to the Amaranthaceae family and is a cereal plant widely cultivated by Aboriginal people in southern Taiwan, especially in the Taitung and Pingtung districts (Chao and Hsueh 2016). In recent years, much attention has been given to the plant after it was discovered to be a good source of antioxidants and other health-promoting substances. RQS contains 50% starch, and its protein content of 14% is twice that of rice and similar to wheat health (Murray and FitzGerald 2007). A previous report by Tsai (2011) identified RQS protein content of 17.7%, while this study obtained a yield of 16%. The RQS protein is a superior source of essential amino

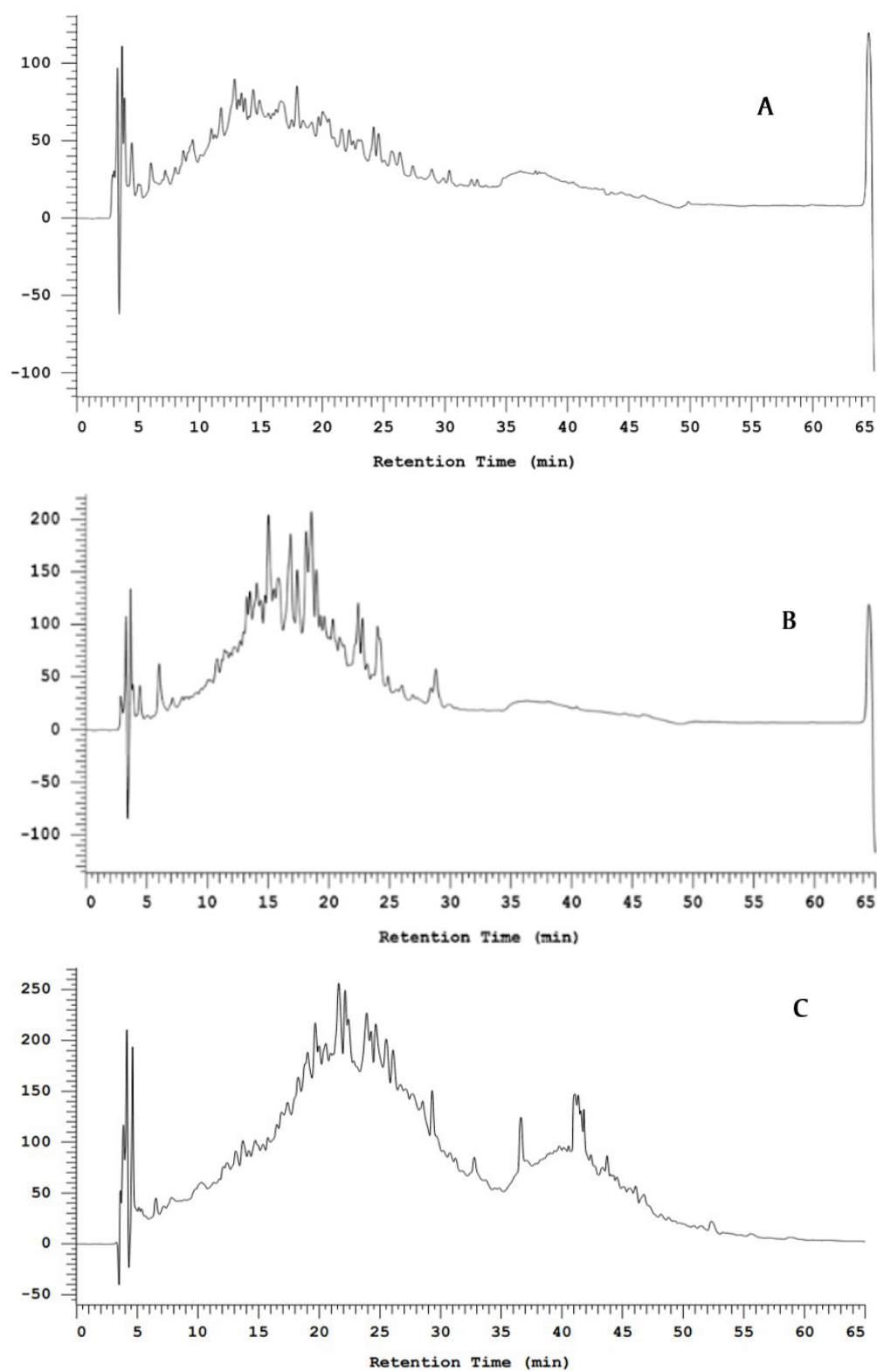


Figure 3. Reverse-phase chromatographic profile of (A) RQSP_ trypt, (B) RQSP_ chym, and (C) RQSP_ ther hydrolysate for 65 minutes

Tabel 3. Angiotensin I converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitory activity of various protease hydrolysate derived red quinoa seed protein

Hydolyasate	Observed protein in mascot search			%ACE inhibitory activity
	I	II	III	
Captopril (control)	97.93	97.94	98.50	98.12±0.32
RQSP_Pep	16.53	21.14	13.43	17.03±3.88
RQSP_Tryp	41.77	40.03	46.22	42.67±3.19
RQSP_Cym	70.66	71.49	75.97	72.71±2.85
RQSP_Ther	77.61	78.90	76.48	77.67±0.98

*RQSP_Pep (Redquinoa seed protein pepsin hydrolysate); RQSP_Tryp (Redquinoa seed protein trypsin hydrolysate); RQSP_Cym (Redquinoa seed protein α -chymotrypsin hydrolysate); RQSP_Ther (Redquinoa seed protein thermolysin hydrolysate)

acids such as lysine, which provide bio-functional properties of benefit to human health (Murray and FitzGerald 2007). Tsai (2011), also revealed that RQS protein comprises various essential amino acids such as arginine, isoleucine, leucine, methionine, valine and phenylalanine. According to the *in silico* used mascot distiller resulted RQS has four sub-proteins of 17 kDa, 20 kDa, 31 kDa, and 34 kDa. Another report showed that quinoa seed 11S globulin had a basic subunit at 17-20 kDa and 30-35 kDa (Martínez *et al.* 2019).

Protein are long polypeptide chains folded into the functional form with a hierarchical structure. Proteins contain bioactive properties that can be released from protein hydrolysate that produce by protease digestion. Several parameters that affect the bioactive properties of the protein hydrolysate are the method of production, enzyme applied for hydrolysis, proteases specificity, molecular weight, sequence of hydrolysate, and hydrolyzation conditions such as temperature, time, pH (Udenigwe and Aluko 2012). Protein hydrolysates are common intermediate products with easily digestible macronutrients (Mizani *et al.* 2005). Recently, biochemical hydrolysis by adding protease enzyme to produce hydrolysate with specific biological properties from food proteins has gained much attention. This is because the process provides the possibility of controlling the cleavage degree of protein in the substrate and the properties of the products (Shamloo *et al.* 2015). The use of commercially available microbial-derived food-grade protease to hydrolyze food proteins is advantageous because they are low-cost, safe, and have a high yield of product (Mao *et al.* 2007).

The protease digestion method is commonly used because it provides milder process conditions

and produces higher-value products (Kose and Oncel 2015). Protease is constantly being introduced and more advantageous compared to the chemical processes which might increase hydrolysis specificity, increase purity, and reduce environmental effects (Tavano 2013). Furthermore, enzymes modify the amino acid sequence and the three-dimensional structure, generates amino acids and small peptides from the intact proteins and exhibit substrate specificity, enabling the creation of protein hydrolysates with more distinct, excellent solubility, hidden hydrophobic residues, and enhances its nutritional value (Castro *et al.* 2011). On the other hand, small peptides can present inhibitors, cofactors needs, or suffer autolysis (McGeagh *et al.* 2011).

Based on a previous report, protein hydrolysates are more effective than intact proteins or free amino acids (Wang and Zhang 2012). In a report by Tejano *et al.* (2019), *Chlorella sorokiniana* protein was hydrolyzed using pepsin, bromelain, and thermolysin. The results showed that thermolysin produced the highest hydrolysate fraction of < 5 kDa of 91.67±1.34% content. Meanwhile, the thermolysin in this study also produced the richest peptide distribution from RQS hydrolysate as shown in many peaks distribution of RP-HPLC chromatogram. This indicated that thermolysin is the most effective protease for releasing high peptide fractions compared to pepsin, trypsin, and α -chymotrypsin.

The thermolysin hydrolysate of RQS protein has gained much attention because of its high level of angiotensin-I-converting enzyme (ACE-I) inhibitory activity (77.67% ± 0.98%). It was also reported that potent ACE inhibitors usually contain hydrophobic amino acid residues at their C-terminal positions.

Therefore thermolysin, a thermostable neutral metalloproteinase enzyme produced by *Bacillus thermoproteolyticus*, is being widely used for producing ACE inhibitors. This is because it specifically catalyzes the hydrolysis of peptide bonds containing hydrophobic amino acids. As proteases, thermolysin preferentially cleaves at the N-terminal side of the hydrophobic protein structure. It has been applied in protein hydrolyzation processes such in rice bran protein (Shobako *et al.* 2018), meat protein (Estell *et al.* 2019), collagen (Owen *et al.* 2007) for the release of ACE-I inhibitory peptides. Some recent investigations also showed that thermolysin effectively cleaved cereal protein, especially oat and corn germ into a fraction with high ACE inhibitory activity (Cheung *et al.* 2009). This study found that RQS shows higher ACE-I inhibitory activity compared to other herbal plants such as *Curcuma domestica* Val. (24.15±3.21%), *Andrographis paniculata* (Burm.f.) Nees. (29.38±1.82%), and *Averrhoa bilimbi* L. (71.48±1.71%) (Muthia *et al.* 2017). This indicated that red quinoa (*Chenopodium formosanum*) is a herbal plant with high antihypertensive potential.

In conclusion, the potent antihypertensives in form of bioactive peptides encrypted in food-derived protein sources were released from RQS (*Chenopodium formosanum*) protein. The results showed that pepsin, trypsin, chymotrypsin, and thermolysin have the potential to produce ACE-I inhibitory protein hydrolysate. Among the proteases investigated, the hydrolysate prepared using thermolysin showed the most prosperous molecular weight distribution of peptides, therefore, it has the highest ACE-I inhibitory activity.

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