A comparative proteomic study on the effects of metal pollution in oysters Crassostrea hongkongensis

Lanlan Xu a,b, Chenglong Ji a, Huifeng Wu a,⁎, Qiaoguo Tan c, Wen-Xiong Wang d

a Key Laboratory of Coastal Zone Environmental Processes, Yantai Institute of Coastal Zone Research (YIC), Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), Shandong Provincial Key Laboratory of Coastal Zone Environmental Processes, YICCAS, Yantai 264003, P.R. China
b University of Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing 100049, P.R. China
c Key Laboratory of the Coastal and Wetland Ecosystems, Ministry of Education, College of Environment and Ecology, Xiamen University, Xiamen 361102, P.R. China
d Division of Life Science, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST), Clearwater Bay, Kowloon, Hong Kong

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 12 June 2016
Received in revised form 4 July 2016
Accepted 6 July 2016
Available online xxxx

Keywords:
Metal pollution
Crassostrea hongkongensis
Hepatopancreas
Proteomics

ABSTRACT

The metal pollution has posed great risk on the coastal organisms along the Jiulongjiang Estuary in South China. In this work, two-dimensional electrophoresis-based proteomics was applied to the oysters Crassostrea hongkongensis from metal pollution sites to characterize the proteomic responses to metal pollution. Metal accumulation and proteomic responses indicated that the oysters from BJ site were more severely contaminated than those from FG site. Compared with those oyster samples from the clean site (JZ), metal pollution induced cellular injuries, oxidative and immune stresses in oyster hepatopancreas from both BJ and FG sites via differential metabolic pathways. In addition, metal pollution in BJ site induced disturbance in energy and lipid metabolisms in oysters. Results indicated that cathepsin L and ferritin GF1 might be the biomarkers of As and Fe in oyster Crassostrea hongkongensis, respectively. This study demonstrates that proteomics is a useful tool for investigating biological effects induced by metal pollution.

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Metal pollution in the estuarine and coastal environments in South China has posed a significant threat to coastal organisms (Luo et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2014). Previous researches reported that the oysters Crassostrea hongkongensis and Crassostrea sikamea from the metal-polluted sites along the Jiulongjiang Estuary, Fujian Province, were severely contaminated by copper, which was marked by the blue or green tissues in oysters with the high tissue Cu concentration up to 19,000 μg/g dry weight (Weng and Wang, 2014). Therefore, it is necessary to elucidate the biological effects induced by metal pollution, which may be further used to predict the consequence of metal pollution.

As a marine filter-feeder, oysters are not only edible bivalves but play an important role in maintaining the marine ecosystem health in many estuarine systems (Weng and Wang, 2014). Due to its high capacity to accumulate metals, oysters such as Crassostrea hongkongensis, Crassostrea sikamea and Saccostrea glomerata are also preferable environmental bioindicators for metals (Goldberg et al., 1983). Thompson et al. (2011) used Sydney rock oyster Saccostrea glomerata as the bioindicator to investigate the effects of metals including Cd, Cu, Zn and Pb, which suggested that this oyster was a good bioindicator of metal pollution. Evidences have indicated that the oyster Crassostrea hongkongensis distributed along the coast in South China is a hyperaccumulator of Cu and Zn (Tan et al., 2015). In this study, therefore, the oyster Crassostrea hongkongensis was selected to investigate the biological effects of metal pollution.

Using toxicity-related biomarkers of metals, such as the anti-oxidative enzyme activities and metallothioneins, to monitor metal pollution has been accepted in ecotoxicology and environmental monitoring programs (Regoli, 2000; Rank et al., 2007). Among these established biomarkers, however, few of them have adequate sensitivity, specificity and predictability for metal pollution. With the rapid development of -omic techniques, researchers can carry out a global analysis on the molecules to obtain a set of biomarkers related to the biological effects induced by metal pollution, which facilitates the detection and prediction of metal pollution (Cappello et al., 2013; Knigge et al., 2004). Among these -omic techniques, proteomics can theoretically analyze all the proteins encoded by the given genome in an organism (Knigge et al., 2004). Therefore, a comparative proteomics may compare the whole protein profiles in the selected environmental bioindicators from normal and metal pollution-stressed conditions and present the proteomic differences induced by metal pollution. Based on its applicability in ecotoxicology and environmental biology, comparative proteomics has been used as a diagnostic tool for environmental pollution assessment (Campos et al., 2012).

In this study, we applied two-dimensional electrophoresis (2-DE)-based proteomics to investigate the proteomic responses in oyster Crassostrea hongkongensis to metal pollution. The oysters Crassostrea hongkongensis were collected from three sites (Baijiao, Fugong and...
jiuzhen) along the Jiulongjiang Estuary, Fujian Province, China. Among these sampling sites, the former two sites were contaminated by different concentrations of metals (such as copper, zinc, cadmium and iron), respectively. The Jiuzhen site was a relatively clean and used as a reference. The hepatopancreas tissues of oysters were collected for metal analysis and proteomics, as the hepatopancreas tissue is the main storage and detoxification organ for metals (Jones et al., 2008). The aims of this study were to characterize the proteomic responses and biological effects in oysters C. hongkongensis exposed to metal pollution using 2-DE-based proteomics.

During the low tides, the contaminated oysters C. hongkongensis were collected from Baijiao (BJ, 24°28‘2“ N, 117°56‘19“ E) and Fugong (FG, 24°22‘58“ N, 117°54‘13“ E) sites along the contaminated Jiulongjiang Estuary, and the control oysters were collected from the harbor of Jiuzhen (JZ, 24°2‘38“ N, 117°42‘26“ E) site from the nearby relatively clean Jiuzhen estuary, Fujian Province, in December 2012 (Fig. 1). This estuary was an important area for oyster culture, and the average surface salinity ranged from 14 to 26 psu as for tidal actions (Liu and Wang, 2012). Ten individual oysters with similar sizes were sampled from each site, and the tissues of hepatopancreas were immediately dissected and flash frozen in liquid N2. After transported to the laboratory, the oyster samples were stored at −80 °C before protein extraction and metal determination. All the practical procedures for oyster sampling were strictly performed according to the guidelines suggested by Hines et al. (2007).

Total protein extraction was performed based on previous studies with some modifications (Wu et al., 2013a). Briefly, the oyster samples were homogenized quickly on ice with 1 mL of TRIzol reagent and centrifuged at 12,000 μg for 5 min at 4 °C. The supernatant was added with lute ethyl alcohol was added and the mixture was allowed to stand for 3 min. The mixture was centrifuged at 12,000 μg for 15 min at 4 °C, and its upper aqueous layer was discarded. A volume of 300 μL of isopropanol was added and the mixture was allowed to stand for 10 min at 4 °C. The pellets were washed with 1 mL of ethanol (v/v 95%) and centrifuged at 14,000 g for 10 min at 4 °C. This procedure was repeated twice. The pellets were solubilized in the lysis buffer (7 M urea, 2 M thiourea, 65 mM DTT and 0.2% W/V Bio-lyte buffer) and then incubated for 3 h at room temperature. The homogenate was centrifuged at 15,000 g for 10 min and the supernatant was applied to electrophoresis. The total concentrations of proteins were determined by Protein Assay Kit of TianGen.

For the first dimension (IEF), 130 μg of protein was loaded onto IPG strips with a linear pH gradient from 4 to 7 (Immobiline Drystrip TM 24 cm, GE Healthcare, USA) The isoelectric focusing gel solution (7 M urea, 2 M thiourea, 4% m/v CHAPS, 65 mM DTT, 0.001% m/v bromophenol blue and 0.2% W/V Bio-lyte buffer). IEF was conducted at 20 °C with an Etten IPGphor3 system for a total of 85,858 Vh (active rehydration was carried out at 30 V for 12 h, followed by 100 V for 5 h, 500 V for 1 h, 1000 V for 1 h, and a linear increase of voltage to 8000 V for 11 h and stand by 500 V for the second dimension). After the first dimension, all the strips were placed in equilibration buffer (0.05 M Tris–HCl, pH 8.8; 6 M urea; 30% glycerol; 2% (w/v) SDS; containing 1% (w/v) DTT) and were slowly shaken for 15 min. The strips were then incubated for another 15 min in the equilibration buffer with 2.5% (w/v) iodoacetamide without DTT. The second dimension was conducted on 12.5% SDS-PAGE gels using the Etten DALTSix system. After electrophoresis, the gels were silver stained by following the method of Moritz et al. (2001) and Gharahdaghi et al. (1999). Images were captured by ImageScanner III and spots were quantitatively analyzed using ImageMaster 2D Platinum 7.0. For all the matched spots, only protein spots with significant changes of at least 1.5-fold, and deemed significant by Student’s t-test at a level of 95% were accepted as differentially expressed proteins.

In gel digestion was performed according to Katayama et al. (2001). After being completely dried, the samples were re-suspended with 5 μL of 0.1% TFA followed by mixing in 1:1 ratio with a saturated solution of α-cyano-4-hydroxy-trans-cinnamic acid in 50% acetonitrile (Shevchenko et al., 1996). One microliter of mixture was analyzed by
Table 1
Metal/metalloid concentrations in hepatopancreas tissues from oysters Crassostrea hongkongensis sampled from three estuarine sites (JZ, BJ and FG).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metal/metalloid concentration (µg/g dw)</th>
<th>Sampling site</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>JZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cr</td>
<td>0.5 ± 0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mn</td>
<td>23.8 ± 11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fe</td>
<td>302.6 ± 158.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co</td>
<td>0.7 ± 0.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ni</td>
<td>1.3 ± 0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cu</td>
<td>207.9 ± 83.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zn</td>
<td>3972.3 ± 862.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**P < 0.05 and ***P < 0.01 mean the significant differences of metal concentrations between clean (JZ) and metal polluted sites (BJ or FG) (Student’s t-test).

* Data are shown as mean ± standard deviation (n = 5). Values are presented as µg/g dry weight.

The hepatopancreas tissue of marine bivalves is the most important organ for metal accumulation and detoxification. The concentrations (µg/g dry weight) of ten metals (Cr, Mn, Fe, Co, Ni, Cu, Zn, Ag, Cd and Pb) and one metalloid (As) in hepatopancreas from the oysters C. hongkongensis collected from clean (JZ) and metal contaminated (BJ and FG) sites are summarized in Table 1. To discern metal contamination situations, principal component analysis (PCA) were conducted to summarize the differences between different sampling sites, using the metal/metalloid concentrations as variables (Fig. 2). The biplot containing samples (oyster samples from the sampling sites) and variables (ten metals and one metalloid) is shown in Fig. 2, with the first two principal components (PCs) interpreting 81.6% of the variance from the original data set of metal concentrations in oyster hepatopancreas tissues. Visibly, these three groups of samples from JZ, BJ and FG sites were clearly separated along PC1 axis, which demonstrated the significant differences of tissue metal concentrations between the samples from the three sampling sites. Overall, along PC1 axis, the oyster samples from both BJ and FG contained higher average levels of Cr, Co, Ni and Cu than those from JZ site. Specifically, the metals/metalloid including Cu, Fe, Co, Pb, Ag and As, were distributed in the cluster of samples from BJ site, suggesting that the samples from BJ site contained the highest average concentrations of these six metals/metalloid, with statistical significances (Table 1). The samples from FG contained the highest concentrations of Cd as shown in Table 1.

The oyster tissue samples were dried to the constant weights and then digested in concentrated HNO3 at 80 °C for 12 h, after which a clear liquid was obtained. Metal concentrations in the samples were determined by inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (ICP-MS, Agilent 7700x). Appropriate internal standards (Sc, Ge, In, Bi) were selected to correct the sensitivity drift and matrix effect. A quality control sample was repetitively measured after every 10 samples. The recovery rate for each internal standard was greater than 95%. Appropriate blank and calibration standards were interspersed within the samples to correct the sensitivity drift and matrix effect. A quality control sample was repetitively measured after every 10 samples. The recovery rate for each internal standard was greater than 95%

Fig. 2. The biplot containing the PC scores for oyster samples from the three sampling sites, Jiuzhen (JZ, ▶), Baijiao (BJ, ●) and Fugong (FG, ◀) and the variable (eleven metals/metalloid, ⋆) contributions for the clustering of oyster samples.
Proteomic responses induced by metal pollution were determined by 2-DE-based proteomics in oyster hepatopancreas (Fig. 1). Approximately, 1000 protein spots were resolved in the 2-DE gels from the hepatopancreas of oysters Crassostrea hongkongensis. A total of 24 spots resolved in 2-DE gels were differentially expressed (>1.5 folds, P < 0.05) in the oyster samples from both BJ and FG sites. Fig. 1 shows the differential protein spots in hepatopancreas of oyster C. hongkongensis sampled from BJ and FG sites compared with those from the reference site, JZ. All the differentially expressed proteins in all three biological replicates of silver-stained gels were analyzed by MALDI-TOF/TOF mass spectrometry. The information of these proteins is summarized in Table 2.

In the oyster samples from BJ site, 22 proteins were differentially expressed, including 19 down-regulated and 3 up-regulated proteins. These proteins were basically related to oxidation-reduction process, metabolism, cytoskeleton, protein synthesis, chaperones, ion homoeostasis, antioxidant system, signal transduction and transport. Only 7 proteins were significantly differentially expressed in the oyster samples from FG site, including 4 down-regulated and 3 up-regulated proteins. Among these 7 proteins, 5 proteins (SH3 domain-binding glutamic acid-rich-like protein 3, coflin, actin, 78 kDa glucose regulated protein and mammalian ependymin-related protein 1) were common in the oyster samples from both BJ and FG sites.

SH3 domain-binding glutamic acid-rich-like protein belongs to a new family of highly conserved small proteins related to thioredoxin superfamily which is involved in the control of redox dependent processes (Mazzocco et al., 2002). The structural features of alpha-crystallin B suggest that this protein is a small stress protein related to small heat shock protein family, while the 78 kDa glucose regulated protein is another stress protein belonging to the 70 kDa heat shock protein family. Evidence indicated that the heat shock proteins are responsive to heavy metal-induced oxidative stress (Fontaine et al., 2003). Peroxiredoxin, an antioxidant enzyme reducing hydrogen peroxide (H2O2) and alkyl hydroperoxides treatments, regulates peroxide-mediated signaling cascades, while superoxide dismutase catalyzes the dismutation of superoxide into oxygen and hydrogen peroxide (Fujii and Ikeda, 2002).

These two proteins are also responsive to oxidative stress. Cytochrome b5 is involved in the cytochrome P450 monooxygenase reaction which is related to the oxidative stress induced by xenobiotics, such as Cd and Cu (Zhang et al., 2012). These 6 altered antioxidant proteins indicated the oxidative stress induced by metal pollution in oysters C. hongkongensis from BJ site. Among these 6 proteins, only SH3 domain-binding glutamic acid-rich-like protein and 78 kDa glucose regulated protein were similarly altered in the oyster samples from FG site, which suggested that the metal pollution in FG site induced less severe oxidative stress in oysters. This finding is consistent with the less severe metal pollution in FG site, as mentioned above.

Actin is an abundant cytoskeletal protein that is a component of microfilaments in cells (Puerto et al., 2011). Both F-actin-capping protein and twinfilin are actin-binding proteins that are involved in the regulation of actin dynamics (Hartmann et al., 1989; Matzavinos and Othmer, 2007). Actin-depolymerizing factor is one of the actin cytoskeleton-modulating proteins, while coflin promotes actin polymerization and defines the direction of cell motility (Allen et al., 1997; Ghosh et al., 2004). These proteins are all directly involved in cytoskeletal structure. Myosin regulatory light chains are regulators in the myosin contractile activity related to muscle contraction (Serwe et al., 1993). The tubulin-specific chaperones function as a tubulin assembly machine, marrying the α- and β-tubulin subunits into a tightly associated heterodimer (Tian and Cowan, 2013). The significant alterations of these seven cytoskeleton-related proteins (actin, F-actin-capping protein, twinfilin, actin-depolymerizing factor, coflin, myosin regulatory light chains and tubulin-specific chaperone A) confirmed the cellular injury in oysters induced by metal pollution in BJ site. In numerous previous studies, some of these proteins such as actin, actin-depolymerizing factor, myosin regulatory light chain and F-actin-capping protein, were responsive to environmental stressor (e.g., arsenic, salinity, tetramobromobisphenol A)-induced oxidative stress in animals (Wu et al., 2013b; Ji et al., 2013). In this work, these altered proteins confirmed the oxidative stress and subsequent cellular injury in cytoskeleton induced by metal pollution in oysters collected from BJ site.

Guanine nucleotide binding proteins, also known as G proteins, are involved in signaling pathways (Clapham and Neer, 1993). Recent studies demonstrated that G proteins may be critical for the stress responses, such as bacterial challenges (Clapham and Neer, 1993; Wu et al., 2013c). In marine mussel Mytilus galloprovincialis, one G protein was altered in response to bacterial challenges (Wu et al., 2013c). Cathepsin L played a major role in protein degradation of various physiological and
pathological processes and is a lysosomal cysteine protease involved in immune responses (Dorts et al., 2011). Ribosomal proteins perform the crucial function of protein biosynthesis and have been also recognized as immunogenic proteins (Ruszczyk et al., 2008). In bivalves and gastropods, the shell is mainly formed by CaCO₃ crystals. The calcium regulation is an important process for the shell formation, as well as other physiological processes including immune-defense mechanisms (Nikapitiya et al., 2010). Both EF-hand domain-containing protein and endoplasmic reticulum protein are involved in calcium homeostasis and have been found to be immune responsive in marine bivalves. The down-regulation of these two proteins indicated the immune stress in oysters exposed to arsenic pollution. Adipophilin is an adipocyte differentiation-related protein and is proposed as a general marker for the lipid load of non-adipogenic cells (Heid et al., 1998). Fatty acid-binding protein in adipocyte is a small molecular-weight protein that has a high binding affinity for long-chain fatty acids. It is shown to coordinate the lipid responses in cells and plays an important role in fatty acid metabolism by transporting fatty acids from cell membrane to mitochondria for oxidation (Kleine et al., 1992). ATP synthase is an important process for the shell formation, as well as other physiological processes including immune-defense mechanisms. In our previous study, cathepsin L was similarly down-regulated in Crassostrea hongkongensis collected from BJ site, which implied that cathepsin L might be the protein biomarker of arsenic pollution.

Table 2

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Spot ID</th>
<th>Protein name</th>
<th>Accession number</th>
<th>MW/Da</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Protein score</th>
<th>SC (%)</th>
<th>PN</th>
<th>Fold change</th>
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<td>SH3 domain-binding glutamic acid-rich-like protein 3</td>
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<td>31</td>
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<td>81</td>
<td>Cytochrome b5</td>
<td>84619354</td>
<td>14,589</td>
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<td>397</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Adipophilin</td>
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<td>216</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>40S ribosomal protein S12</td>
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<td>14,900</td>
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<td>369</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Tubulin-specific chaperone A</td>
<td>405978204</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Alpha-crystallin B chain</td>
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<td>78 kDa glucose regulated protein</td>
<td>46359618</td>
<td>73,030</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>Mammalian ependymin-related protein 1</td>
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<td>Guanine nucleotide-binding protein subunit beta</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Fatty acid-binding protein, adipocyte</td>
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<td>598</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>−2.68a</td>
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</table>

Table 2 List of protein spots that differentially expressed in oysters Crassostrea hongkongensis sampled from BJ and FG compared to those from JZ.

a Identification of differentially expressed proteins in oyster Crassostrea hongkongensis hepatopancreas from BJ and FG, compared to oyster hepatopancreas from JZ (less polluted).

b Identification of differentially expressed proteins in oyster Crassostrea hongkongensis hepatopancreas from BJ and FG, compared to oyster hepatopancreas from JZ (less polluted).

c Assigned spot ID as indicated in Fig. 3.

d GI numbers in NCBI database.

e Mascot score reported.

f Sequence coverage.

g Number of peptide sequences.

h Fold changes with significant changes (>1.5 folds and P < 0.05) were calculated using ImageMaster 2D Platinum 7.0.

Please cite this article as: Xu, L., et al., A comparative proteomic study on the effects of metal pollution in oysters Crassostrea hongkongensis, Marine Pollution Bulletin (2016), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.marpolbul.2016.07.009
Therefore the ferritin GF1 was significantly (P < 0.05) up-regulated in the oyster samples from BJ site, which suggested that ferritin GF1 could be used as a biomarker of Fe contamination in oysters. For the oyster samples from FG site, actin, collin and ependymin-related protein 1 were similarly altered compared with those in the oyster samples from BJ site. These altered proteins confirmed oxidative and immune stress induced by metal pollution in the oyster samples from FG site. However, two proteins including heat shock protein beta-1 and endoplasmic reticulum protein (ERp92) were uniquely altered in the oyster samples from FG site. Cells respond to environmental stressors including physical (e.g. heat) or chemical (e.g. heavy metals) impacts by increased transcription of genes encoding so called heat shock or stress proteins. Heat shock proteins are ubiquitous molecular chaperones that are involved in the defensive system, such as anti-oxidative system, as mentioned above (Ji et al., 2013). ERp92 is a ubiquitously expressed endoplasmic reticulum (ER) stress-inducible protein that executes protective action by binding to denatured or aggregated cellular proteins thereby facilitating their refolding (Mkrtchian et al., 1998). These two altered proteins suggested the cellular injury induced by metal pollution in the oysters from FG site, via different metalloprotein pathways compared with those in the oysters from BJ site.

The jiujiangping Estuary in South China has been severely polluted by metals, which posed great risk on the coastal organisms. As shown by the accumulations of metals/metalloid in oyster hepatopancreas, the two sampling sites, BJ and FG, were polluted by several metals, including Cd, Co, Ni, Cu, As, Ag, Cd and Pb. Especially, the oysters from BJ site were also contaminated by Fe and Zn. In this work, we applied two-dimensional electrophoresis (2-DE)-based proteomics to the oysters Crassostrea hongkongensis from metal pollution sites to characterize the proteomic responses induced by metal pollution. Proteomic responses indicated that the oysters from BJ site were more severely contaminated than those from FG site, which was consistent with the higher integrated metal contamination value of BJ site. Basically, metal pollution induced cellular injuries, oxidative and immune stresses in oyster hepatopancreas from both BJ and FG sites via different metalloprotein pathways. In addition, metal pollution in BJ site induced disturbance in energy and lipid metabolisms in oysters. Results indicated that cathepsin L and ferritin GF1 might be used as the biomarkers of As and Fe in oysters C. hongkongensis, respectively. This study demonstrates that proteomics is useful to characterize the biological effects induced by metal pollution.

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by a Key Project from NSFC (21273004), National Key Basic Research Program of China (2015CB453303) and Natural Science Foundation of Shandong Province (No. JQ201310).

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