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# Cathepsin L of the sea cucumber *Apostichopus japonicus*- molecular characterization and transcriptional response to *Vibrio splendidus* infection.

Jingwen Yang<sup>a</sup>, Huihui Liu<sup>a</sup>, Gang Zheng<sup>b</sup>, Xiaowei Xiang<sup>a</sup>, Zhenming Lv<sup>a\*</sup>, Tianming Wang<sup>a\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>National Engineering Research Center of Marine Facilities Aquaculture, College of Marine Sciences, Zhejiang Ocean University, Zhoushan, Zhejiang, 316022, China

<sup>b</sup>Ocean Research Center of Zhoushan, Zhejiang University, Zhoushan, Zhejiang, 316021, China

\* To whom correspondence may be addressed. Tel: 86-580-2261581; E-mail: nblzmnmb@163.com

\* To whom correspondence may be addressed. Tel: 86-580-2550753; E-mail: wtmzjuedu@163.com, wangtianming@zjou.edu.cn

## Abstract

Cathepsin L, a lysosomal endopeptidase, has been noted for its involvement in the innate immune response in invertebrates. Here, the cathepsin L cDNA of the sea cucumber *Apostichopus japonicus* (AjCatL) is identified from an EST library and then cloned by the rapid amplification of the cDNA ends (RACE) PCR. The full-length cDNA is 1678 bp long containing an open reading frame (ORF) of 1002 bp, an 80 bp 5' UTR and a 599 bp 3' UTR. The cDNA encodes 333 amino acid residues with a predicted molecular mass of 37.07 kDa and a theoretical isoelectric point (pI) of 5.01. The full-length AjCatL contains three active sites of eukaryotic thiol (cysteine) protease at positions 133-144, 278-288 and 295-314. Analysis of the predicted tertiary structure of prepro-CatL (17-333 aa) and mature-CatL (116-333 aa) reveals that the propeptide region (17-115 aa) blocks access to the substrate-binding cleft. Phylogenetic analysis shows that the AjCatL is clustered together with two other CatLs from *Strongylocentrotus purpuratus*. The enzymatic activity of AjCatL was verified using a substrate hydrolyzing assay with recombinant mAjCatL. Further analysis of real time-PCR demonstrates that the expression of AjCatL mRNA is significantly up-regulated in the coelomocytes in cases of infection with the common bacterial pathogen, *Vibrio splendidus*. This suggests that the AjCatL is likely to be involved in the immune response.

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