

## **Isolation of a cDNA Encoding a Chitinase Family Protein from Cuticular Tissues of the Kuruma Prawn *Penaeus japonicus***

Authors: Watanabe, Toshiki, and Kono, Michiko

Source: Zoological Science, 14(1) : 65-68

Published By: Zoological Society of Japan

URL: <https://doi.org/10.2108/zsj.14.65>

---

The BioOne Digital Library (<https://bioone.org/>) provides worldwide distribution for more than 580 journals and eBooks from BioOne's community of over 150 nonprofit societies, research institutions, and university presses in the biological, ecological, and environmental sciences. The BioOne Digital Library encompasses the flagship aggregation BioOne Complete (<https://bioone.org/subscribe>), the BioOne Complete Archive (<https://bioone.org/archive>), and the BioOne eBooks program offerings ESA eBook Collection (<https://bioone.org/esa-ebooks>) and CSIRO Publishing BioSelect Collection (<https://bioone.org/csiro-ebooks>).

Your use of this PDF, the BioOne Digital Library, and all posted and associated content indicates your acceptance of BioOne's Terms of Use, available at [www.bioone.org/terms-of-use](http://www.bioone.org/terms-of-use).

Usage of BioOne Digital Library content is strictly limited to personal, educational, and non-commercial use. Commercial inquiries or rights and permissions requests should be directed to the individual publisher as copyright holder.

---

BioOne is an innovative nonprofit that sees sustainable scholarly publishing as an inherently collaborative enterprise connecting authors, nonprofit publishers, academic institutions, research libraries, and research funders in the common goal of maximizing access to critical research.

# Isolation of a cDNA Encoding a Chitinase Family Protein from Cuticular Tissues of the Kuruma Prawn *Penaeus japonicus*

Toshiki Watanabe<sup>1\*</sup> and Michiko Kono<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Laboratory of Molecular Biology of Marine Organisms, Ocean Research Institute, The University of Tokyo, 1-15-1 Minamidai, Nakano, Tokyo 164, Japan

<sup>2</sup>Fisheries Research Laboratory, Faculty of Agriculture, The University of Tokyo, Maisaka, Shizuoka 431-02, Japan

**ABSTRACT**—To identify and characterize a chitinase related to molting in the Kuruma prawn *Penaeus japonicus*, we searched for chitinase-encoding cDNAs expressed in cuticular tissues. Using two degenerate oligonucleotide primers derived from the two conserved regions of the chitinase protein family, a RT(reverse transcription)-PCR product was obtained. This product was used as a probe to screen a cDNA library from a mixture of the tail fan and blade — two tissues which consist mainly of chitinous exoskeleton and underlying epidermis. A positive cDNA clone was analyzed for the sequence. This clone contains an open reading frame for a protein (named Pjchi-2) of 527 amino acids which exhibits sequence similarity to known chitinases. A typical signal sequence could not be found in the Pjchi-2 sequence. Significant accumulation of *Pjchi-2* mRNA was detected in the mixture of the tail fan and blade prior to molting, whereas the transcript level was much lower during the intermolt stage. This observation suggests that Pjchi-2 plays a role in molting. The mRNA was not detected in the hepatopancreas. This expression pattern of *Pjchi-2* makes a contrast to that of *Pjchi-1* which encodes another chitinase family protein in *P. japonicus*, and is expressed in the hepatopancreas but not in the tail fan or blade.

## INTRODUCTION

In crustaceans including the Kuruma prawn *Penaeus japonicus*, endo-type chitinolytic enzyme (chitinase) activities have been detected in the hepatopancreas and integument (Buchholz, 1989; Spindler-Barth *et al.*, 1990; Kono *et al.*, 1995). In the integument, the chitinase activity is induced prior to molting, presumably to degrade chitin in the old skeleton which is to be shed off. In contrast, the level of chitinase activity in the hepatopancreas does not vary significantly during the molt cycle. Chitinase expressed in the hepatopancreas is thought to be used to digest chitin-containing food.

We have been trying to isolate and characterize cDNAs encoding chitinases in the hepatopancreas and integument to address the following two questions: (i) Is the chitinase expressed in the integument the same as in the hepatopancreas, or are different chitinase isoforms expressed in different tissues? (ii) How is expression of chitinase differentially regulated in the integument and hepatopancreas? We have reported isolation of a cDNA encoding the Pjchi-1 protein from the hepatopancreas of *P. japonicus* (Watanabe *et al.*, 1996). Pjchi-1 exhibits significant sequence similarities

to known chitinases, especially to a chitinase in the tobacco hornworm *Manduca sexta* (Kramer *et al.*, 1993). The *Pjchi-1* mRNA was detected in the hepatopancreas both during the intermolt and premolt stages, but not two cuticular tissues (the tail fan and blade). This result suggests that a different chitinase is expressed prior to molting in cuticular tissues. Here we report isolation of a cDNA encoding a chitinase-like protein from cuticular tissues.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Isolation of total RNA and RT-PCR

Total RNA was isolated from a mixture of the tail fan and blade, and subjected to RT-PCR as described in Watanabe *et al.* (1996). Degenerate oligonucleotide primers CHIF (5'-ATGGTNKCNKT-NGGNGGNTGG-3') and CHIR (5'-NGGRTAYTCCCARTCNARTC-3') were designed based on the amino acid sequences of the two conserved domains of the chitinases (Watanabe *et al.*, 1996).

### Construction and screening of a cDNA library from the tail fan/blade

Poly(A)<sup>+</sup> RNA was prepared using Oligotex<sup>TM</sup>-dT30 super (Roche Japan). A cDNA library was constructed from the poly(A)<sup>+</sup> RNA as described in Watanabe *et al.* (1996) except that  $\lambda$ ZAPII (stratagene) was used instead of  $\lambda$ gt11 as the cloning vector. A product of the RT-PCR reaction was cloned into the pCR<sup>TM</sup>II vector (Invitrogen). The *EcoRI* fragment of this plasmid was self-ligated using T4 DNA ligase to generate longer fragments, radio-labeled with Multiprime<sup>TM</sup> DNA labeling system (Amersham), and used as a probe to screen the cDNA

\* Corresponding author: Tel. +81-3-5351-6534;  
FAX. +81-3-5351-6488.

library. Conditions for hybridization and subsequent washing were described in Watanabe *et al.* (1996).

#### Nucleotide sequence analysis

Recombinant pBluescript SK<sup>-</sup> phagemids were rescued from positive  $\lambda$  phage clones by *in vivo* excision according to the instruction from the manufacturer (stratagene). Insert DNA (3,357 bp) was sequenced as described in Watanabe *et al.* (1996). The nucleotide sequence of 1,229 bp in the 5' untranslated region was determined only on the sense strand, and 2,128 bp on the 3' side (containing the entire open reading frame; see Fig. 2) was sequenced on both strands. Homology search in the PIR and SWISS-PROT databases was carried out using the FASTA E-mailing service by DNA Data Bank of Japan (National Institute of Genetics, Mishima, Japan).

#### Northern hybridization

Poly(A)<sup>+</sup> RNA (1  $\mu$ g per lane) from a mixture of tail fan and blade, and hepatopancreas was run on 1% formaldehyde-agarose gel, transferred to NYTRAN membrane (Schleicher & Schuell), and probed with a cDNA fragment (corresponding to nucleotide position 1,362–2,972 in Fig. 2) that was radio-labeled with [ $\alpha$ -<sup>32</sup>P]dATP. The concentration of the probe in hybridization buffer was  $5 \times 10^6$  cpm/ml. The final wash of the membrane was done in  $0.1 \times$  SSPE and 0.1% SDS at 65°C. RNA ladder (0.24 – 9.5 kb; GIBCO BRL) was used as molecular weight markers.

## RESULTS

#### Preparation of RNA from the tail fan and blade at late premolt stages and RT-PCR

Prawns at late premolt stages (D3 and D4) were identified according to Hong (1977), and total RNA was prepared from a mixture of the tail fan and blade which consist mainly of chitinous exoskeleton and underlying epidermis.

To isolate a cDNA fragment containing a coding sequence of a chitinase, the RNA sample was subjected to RT-PCR using two degenerate oligonucleotide primers CHIF and CHIR which were designed based on the amino acid sequences of the two conserved regions of the chitinase protein family (Watanabe *et al.*, 1996). A RT-PCR product was cloned and sequenced (Fig. 1). A 111 base pair (bp) region which was bounded by the primer sequences was conceptually translated to 37 amino acids, and the sequence was compared to those of the *M. sexta* chitinase (Kramer *et al.*, 1993) and Pjchi-1, a chitinase homologue in *P. japonicus* (Watanabe *et al.*, 1996). In the 37 amino acid region, identity was found at 14 and 13 residues, respectively (data not shown), suggesting that the RT-PCR product contains a coding sequence of a chitinase homologue.

```

ATGGTCGCTGTTGGTGGATGGAACGACTCAGCCGGTGACAAGTACAGTCGCCTGGTGAAC
CHIF          N D S A G D K Y S R L V N

AACCCCGAAGCTCGAAGGAAGTTCAACGAGCATGTTATTGAGTTCATCAAGAGGCATAAC
N P E A R R K F N E H V I E F I K R H N

TTTGATGGTCTCGACATCGACTGGGAATACCTT
F D G L          CHIR

```

Fig. 1. Isolation and sequence analysis of a RT-PCR product. Total RNA from a mixture of the tail fan and blade was subjected to RT-PCR using two degenerate oligonucleotide primers CHIF and CHIR, and PCR products were cloned in pCR<sup>TM</sup>II. Nucleotide sequence of a clone is shown here. Sequences corresponding to the primers are underlined, and the inferred amino acid sequence is shown below corresponding codons.

#### Isolation and sequence analysis of a cDNA clone

This product was used as a probe to screen a cDNA library of the tail fan/blade at the late premolt stage. Six positive clones were isolated, and a clone containing the longest insert was selected for sequence analysis. Within this cDNA clone, an open reading frame (ORF) of 1,581 bp was found (Fig. 2). The ORF was conceptually translated to 527 amino acids, and this putative protein was named Pjchi-2 (*Penaeus japonicus* chitinase homologue-2) due to its sequence similarity to known chitinases (see below).

The first methionine in the ORF (amino acid position 1 in Fig. 2) is shortly preceded by a stop codon in all three reading frames (data not shown). The second and third methionines are found at amino acid positions 8 and 339, respectively (Fig. 2). Assuming that the first methionine is the translation start site, the predicted molecular weight of Pjchi-2 is 59.2 kDa and isoelectric point 8.19. A potential N-glycosylation site was found at amino acid position 230. We failed to find a typical signal peptide (von Heijne, 1986) at the N-terminus of Pjchi-2, as no noticeable stretch of hydrophobic amino acids was found following the first or second methionine.

Using the FASTA program (Pearson and Lipman, 1988), we searched in the PIR and SWISS-PROT databases for proteins which exhibit sequence similarities to Pjchi-2. Proteins with the five highest similarity scores were: (1) a chitinase precursor in a braconid wasp (optimized score 838; Krishnan *et al.*, 1994), (2) a chitinase precursor in the tobacco hornworm *Manduca sexta* (775; Kramer *et al.*, 1993), (3) the human cartilage glycoprotein gp39 precursor (762; Hakala *et al.*, 1993), (4) a swine heparin-binding protein (757; Shackelton *et al.*, 1995), and (5) a bovine oviduct-specific glycoprotein precursor (728; Sendai *et al.*, 1994). The similarity score between Pjchi-2 and Pjchi-1 (Watanabe *et al.*, 1996) was 695. In the optimized alignment between Pjchi-2 and each of the above six structurally related proteins, conserved amino acids were distributed more or less uniformly over a region of about 400 amino acids, and the identity level in the overlap was 35–40% (data not shown). Sequence similarity among Pjchi-2, Pjchi-1 and the two insect chitinases was particularly high in conserved region II (Fig. 3), the putative catalytic domain of the chitinases (Watanabe *et al.*, 1993). Reasonable sequence similarity among those proteins was also seen in conserved region I (Fig. 3).

### Expression of the Pjchi-2 mRNA

## DISCUSSION

A typical signal sequence was not found at the N-terminus of the Pjchi-2 sequence. Though the apparent absence of a signal peptide is unusual among chitinase family proteins, Pjchi-2 is not the first case. A chitinase isolated in the Gram-negative bacterium *Serratia marcescens* lacks a typical signal sequence (Brurberg *et al.*, 1995). This chitinase is exported to the periplasm, *via* an unknown mechanism, without being processed at the N-terminus. It remains to be solved whether Pjchi-2 is cytoplasmic or secreted *via* a novel mechanism to the extracellular region where old exoskeleton is digested prior to molting. We shall address this question by generating antibodies against Pjchi-2 and examining its localization using immunohistochemical techniques.

This work was partly supported by Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research (Nos. 07406009 and 08833004) from the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture of Japan, and Moritani Foundation Scholarship. We thank Drs. H. Nagasawa and K. Aida for stimulating discussion.

The cDNA sequence in Fig. 2 has been deposited in the DDBJ/EMBL/GenBank databases (accession no. D89751).

Downloaded From: <https://complete.bioone.org/journals/Zoological-Science> on 08 Jun 2025  
Terms of Use: <https://complete.bioone.org/terms-of-use>

	Region I	Region II
<b>Pjchi-2</b>	LRARGIKVTIAIGGWNSAGDKYSRLVNNPEARRFNEHVEIEFIKRHNFDGLDLWEYPMC	
<b>Chelonus sp.</b>	KKNPSV.IMV.V...AG-SVPF.QMASDQAT.EA.AQN.VK.LQQYQ...F.I.....AQ	
<b>M. sexta</b>	SSHPSV.FMV.V...AEG-SS...HM.AQKST.MS.IRS.VS.L.KYD.....GA	
<b>Pjchi-1</b>	EKYPDM.TN..V...AEG-.R...QM.MVA.R.AS.IRS.VQLLTDYG.....GA	
	* * * * *	* * * * *

Fig. 3. Alignment of the Pjchi-2 sequence with two insect chitinases and Pjchi-1. The Pjchi-2 sequence in the vicinity of the two conserved regions of the chitinase family (Leu<sup>215</sup>-Cys<sup>275</sup>) was aligned using the CLUSTAL V program (Higgins and Sharp, 1989) with a chitinase in a braconid wasp *Chelonus* sp. (Lys<sup>90</sup>-Gln<sup>159</sup>; Krishnan *et al.*, 1994), a chitinase in the tobacco hornworm *M. sexta* (Ser<sup>91</sup>-Ala<sup>150</sup>; Kramer *et al.*, 1993), and Pjchi-1, a chitinase homologue in *P. japonicus* (Glu<sup>110</sup>-Ala<sup>169</sup>; Watanabe *et al.*, 1996). Positions of the two conserved regions are indicated above the sequences. Identity of amino acids between Pjchi-2 and the other proteins is indicated by dots, and a gap by a hyphen. The amino acids which are conserved in all of the proteins are indicated with asterisks.

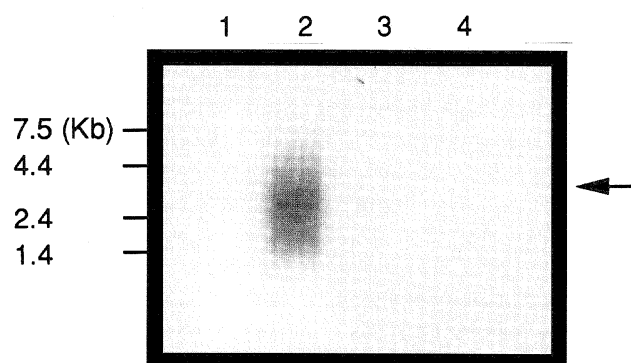


Fig. 4. Northern analysis of Pjchi-2-encoding mRNA in cuticular tissues and the hepatopancreas. A Northern blot of poly(A)<sup>+</sup> RNA (1 µg per lane) from a mixture of tail fan and blade (lanes 1 and 2), and the hepatopancreas (lanes 3 and 4) was hybridized with a radio-labeled cDNA probe which corresponds to nucleotide position 1,362-2,972 in Fig. 2. Samples in lanes 1 and 3 are from the intermolt stage (stage C according to Hong, 1977), and lanes 2 and 4 from late premolt stages (stages D3 and D4). A band was recognized at approximately 3.2 kb in lane 2 (arrow); this band was also seen in lane 1 after a long exposure. Positions of four molecular weight markers (7.5, 4.4, 2.4, and 1.4 kb, from top to bottom) are indicated.

## REFERENCES

- Buchholz F (1989) Molt cycle and seasonal activities of chitinolytic enzymes in the integument and digestive tract of the antarctic krill, *Euphausia superba*. *Polar Biol* 9: 311-317
- Brurberg MB, Eijsink VGH, Haadrikman AJ, Venema G, Nes IF (1995) Chitinase B from *Serratia marcescens* BJL200 is exported to the periplasm without processing. *Microbiology* 141: 123-131
- Hakala BE, White C, Recklies AD (1993) Human cartilage gp-39, a major secretory product of articular chondrocytes and synovial cells, is a mammalian member of a chitinase protein family. *J*

- Biol Chem* 34: 25803-25810
- Higgins DG, Sharp PM (1989) Fast and sensitive multiple sequence alignments on a microcomputer. *CABIOS* 5: 151-153
- Hong DI (1977) Ph D thesis, The University of Tokyo, Bunkyo, Tokyo
- Kono M, Wilder MN, Matsui T, Furukawa K, Koga D, Aida K (1995) Chitinolytic enzyme activities in the hepatopancreas, tail fan and hemolymph of Kuruma prawn *Penaeus japonicus* during molt cycle. *Fisheries Sci* 61: 727-728
- Kramer KJ, Corpuz L, Choi HK, Muthukrishnan S (1993) Sequence of a cDNA and expression of the gene encoding epidermal and gut chitinases of *Manduca sexta*. *Insect Biochem Molec Biol* 23: 691-701
- Krishnan A, Nair PN, Jones D (1994) Isolation, cloning and characterization of new chitinase stored in active form in chitin-lined venom reservoir. *J Biol Chem* 269: 20971-20976
- Kuranda MJ, Robbins PW (1991) Chitinase is required for cell separation during growth of *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*. *J Biol Chem* 266: 19758-19767
- Pearson WR, Lipman DJ (1988) Improved tools for biological sequence comparison. *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA* 85: 2444-2448
- Sendai Y, Abe H, Kikuchi M, Satoh T, Hoshi H (1994) Purification and molecular cloning of bovine oviduct-specific glycoprotein. *Biol Reprod* 50: 927-934
- Shackelton LM, Mann DM, Millis AJT (1995) Identification of a 38kDa heparin-binding glycoprotein (hp38k) in differentiating vascular smooth muscle cells as a member of a group of proteins associated with tissue remodeling. *J Biol Chem* 270: 13076-13083
- Spindler-Barth M, Van Wormhoudt A, Spindler KD (1990) Chitinolytic enzymes in the integument and midgut-gland of the shrimp *Palaeomonetes serratus* during the moulting cycle. *Mar Biol* 106: 49-52
- von Heijne G (1986) A new method for predicting signal sequence cleavage sites. *Nucleic Acids Res* 14: 4683-4690
- Watanabe T, Kobori K, Miyashita K, Fujii T, Sakai H, Uchida M, Tanaka H (1993) Identification of glutamic acid 204 and aspartic acid 200 in chitinase A1 of *Bacillus circulans* WL-12 as essential residues for chitinase activity. *J Biol Chem* 268: 18567-18572
- Watanabe T, Kono M, Aida K, Nagasawa H (1996) Isolation of a cDNA encoding a putative chitinase precursor in the Kuruma prawn *Penaeus japonicus*. *Mol Mar Biol Biotechnol* 5: 299-303

(Received September 9, 1996 / Accepted October 1, 1996)