

Characterization of Photosystem I and Photosystem II From Spinach: Effect of Ionic Strength and Impact on Purification*

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Abstract Our previous work has demonstrated that ultrafiltration has the potential for the isolation of photosystem I (PS I) from spinach at a large scale. In order to develop a practical bioseparation process, the “product” and the “impurity” should be characterized in order to select suitable membrane and optimize the operational and physiochemical parameters. One easily adjusted but critically important parameter, the solution ionic strength, and its effects on the properties of target protein (PS I) and the major impurity (photosystem II, PS II) were studied. Following the isolation of PS I and PS II from spinach, the aggregation size, zeta potential, atomic force microscopy imaging and thermal stability were determined. Solution ionic strength was found to have a significant influence on the activity, aggregation size and thermal stability of both PS I and PS II. The results also demonstrated that the “molecular sieve effect” played a central role in the newly developed ultrafiltration process for PS I isolation.

Key words photosystem I, photosystem II, ionic strength, characterization, purification

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Photosystem I (PS I) and photosystem II (PS II) are membrane proteins which have chlorophyll-containing reaction centers found in thylakoid membranes of oxygenic photosynthetic organisms. The former uses the light energy to oxidize plastocyanin and reduce ferredoxin, while the latter is responsible for the light-driven transfer of electrons from water to plastoquinone^[1]. To understand the molecular details of this machinery, photosystems (PS I and PS II) are needed in purified form and in large quantity to allow a detailed analysis by biophysical methods^[2]. The separation has been challenging because of structural complexity and delicacy and the need for quick separation due to their inherent instability. However, the conventional techniques used for membrane protein purification, such as chromatography and sucrose density gradient centrifugation, suffer from long time-consuming processes and difficulties associated with scale up^[3]. Therefore, the lack of

enough quantities of photosystems has significantly impeded fundamental research on photosystems and limited their applications^[4].

In our previous work, a novel membrane-based process was developed to isolate PS I from spinach^[5]. The results showed that the purity of PS I obtained was about 84% after ultrafiltration and the activity recovery of PS I was greater than 94%. In order to get a higher purity of PS I and more importantly to develop a practical and scalable bioseparation process, key physiochemical properties of photosystems (PS I and PS II) and their dependence on operational

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parameters must be determined^[6].

In this work, the effects of solution ionic strength on properties of PS I and PS II were examined after they were isolated from spinach and stabilised using *n*-dodecyl-beta-D-maltoside as detergent. The parameters studied here included the aggregation size, zeta potential and thermal stability, which are related to the mechanisms of membrane bioseparation process and membrane fouling. On the basis of our results, the mechanism of the novel membrane-based process for PSI isolation was proposed and validated, and new measures for further optimization of operating parameters were also developed.

1 Materials and methods

1.1 Materials

Fresh spinach was purchased from a local supermarket. *n*-dodecyl-beta-D-maltoside (DDM), methylviologen (MV), 3-(3, 4-dichlorophenyl)-1, 1-dimethylurea (DCMU), 2, 6-dichloroindophenol (DCIP), phenylmethane-sulfonyl fluoride (PMSF), ethylenediaminetetraacetate (EDTA), sucrose, and sorbitol were obtained from Sigma-Aldrich. Magnesium chloride, calcium chloride, sodium chloride, hydrochloric acid and other chemicals were purchased from Sinopharm Chemical Reagent Corporation and were of analytical or higher grade.

1.2 Preparation of PS I and PS II

The PS I and PS II were extracted from spinach according to the methods described by Bruce^[7] and Liu *et al.*^[3], respectively. The chlorophyll contents of final purified PS I and PS II were measured as described previously^[3]. All the purification steps of PS I and PS II were carried out in the dark at 4°C.

1.3 Low-temperature fluorescence measurements

Low-temperature fluorescence spectra of PS I /PS II samples were measured at an excitation wavelength of 436 nm using a Hitachi F-2500 Fluorescence Spectrofluorometer (Tokyo, Japan) with a slit setting of 2 nm. Each slide was cooled under liquid nitrogen in a cryostat and the fluorescence emission spectra were recorded from 600 nm to 800 nm. PS I /PS II samples prepared by normalizing chlorophyll concentrations (8 ~10 mg/L) were diluted to 50% glycerol and the path-length of cell was 6 mm. The fluorescence intensity of each sample was normalized to the integral over the wavelength shown.

1.4 PSI/PSII activity measurements

PS I /PS II activity measurements were performed

according to the method of Liu *et al.*^[5] using an O₂ electrode (Chlorolab2, Hansantech, U.K.). The working solution had a total volume of 1.01 ml. For PS I assay, the solution contained 10 μmol/L DCMU, 0.1 mmol/L DCIP, 0.167 mmol/L MV, 1 mmol/L sodium ascorbate, and 1 mmol/L sodium azide. The Chl *a* concentration in the final solution was 10 mg/L. As for PS II, the solution was changed to 400 mmol/L sucrose, 15 mmol/L NaCl, 20 mmol/L MES, 2 mmol/L MgCl₂, and 50.5 μg Chl *a*. A combination of 0.3 mmol/L DCBQ and 5 mmol/L K₃[Fe(CN)₆] was used as an artificial electron acceptor. The electrode was standardized before and after each of the measurements with air saturated water according to the manufacturer's specifications. A fiber optic illuminator with lamp power 100 W and luminous intensity of 1 800 μmol • m⁻² • s⁻¹ was used as a light source. All measurements were performed at 20 °C in 2.5 ml of liquid-phase electrode chamber under continuous stirring.

1.5 Atomic force microscopy (AFM) imaging

AFM images were collected using a Nanoscope IVa (Veeco/Digital Instruments, Santa Barbara, CA, U.S.A.) operating in tapping mode. Soft silicon probes were used with tip radius of <10 nm mounted on a single-beam cantilever. PS I /PS II sample (2 μl, Chl *a* concentration was 50 mg/L) was deposited on a freshly cleaved mica surface for 1 min prior to rinsing 10 times with Milli-Q water (resistivity: 18.2 MΩ • cm, 25°C) to remove the buffer. After drying in a gentle stream of nitrogen gas, the AFM images were acquired immediately. Cantilever deflections were recorded with a cantilever frequency of 250 Hz, horizontal scan rate of 1.2 Hz and 512 samples for per line. Imaging was performed at 20°C and the images were analyzed by Nanoscope software (Version 5.12r3).

1.6 Zeta potential measurement

Measurement of zeta potential of PS I /PS II complex were carried out with a Zetasizer Nano-ZS (Malvern Instruments, U.K.). Prior to the measurement, each sample was centrifuged at 2 000 *g* for 10 min to remove the visible particles. The Chl *a* concentration in PS I /PS II solution was 50 mg/L. The analysis was conducted at 4°C. For statistical reasons, five measurements of all samples were performed at each pH value and the mean value of these data was reported here.

1.7 Thermal stability measurements

The thermal stability of photosystems (PS I and

PSII) was studied according to the method of Liu *et al.*^[6] with a Bio-logic MOS-450 circular dichroism (CD) spectrometer at different wavelengths (689 nm for PSI and 682 nm for PSII). The temperature was automatically controlled between 20°C and 90°C using a Peltier device. PSI/PSII sample (Chl *a* concentration was 50 mg/L) was suspended in 20 mmol/L MES buffer containing 0.07% DDM, and samples were incubated for 5 min prior to recording CD spectra using 1 mm path-length fused quartz cuvettes. The spectra were recorded in 1 nm steps with an integration time of 0.2 s and a band-pass of 2 nm.

1.8 Sodium dodecyl sulfate-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (SDS-PAGE)

The SDS-PAGE analysis was performed under reducing conditions using NuPAGE 4%~12% Bis-Tris mini gels (Invitrogen, U.S.A.), following the manufacturer's instructions. Detection of the protein bands was performed with the Brilliant Blue Coomassie G-250 staining method.

2 Results and discussion

2.1 Isolation of PSI and PSII from spinach

Low-temperature fluorescence emission spectra for PSI/PSII samples are shown in Figure 1. It can be seen that each spectrum has only one peak (PSI at 725 nm and PSII at 685 nm), which are characteristics of PSI and PSII particles^[5]. The SDS-PAGE analysis (Figure 2) of the preparation showed that both PSI and PSII samples are in agreement well with literature results^[2, 8]. The chlorophyll of PSI is associated with the PsaA and PsaB polypeptides with molecular mass greater than 50 ku and a set of LHCI polypeptides shown with molecular mass in the range of 20~26 ku.

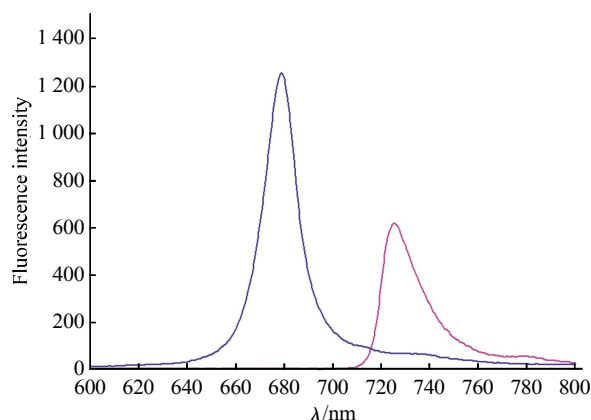


Fig. 1 Low-temperature (77 K) fluorescence emission spectra of PSI and PSII samples
—: PSI_DDM; —: PSII_DDM.

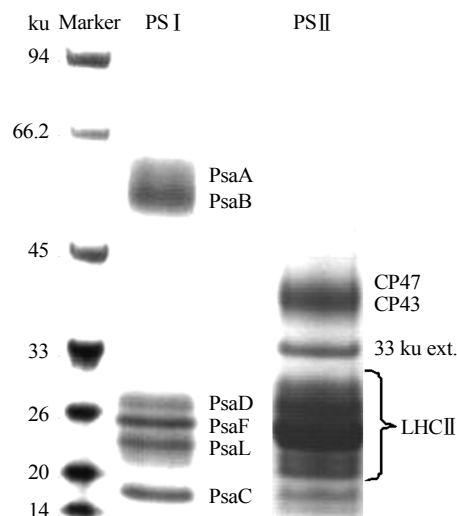


Fig. 2 SDS-PAGE analysis of prepared PSI and PSII samples

The PSII complex consists mainly of CP47, CP43, the 33 ku extrinsic protein and a set of LHCII polypeptides shown with molecular mass in the range of 23~29 ku. These results suggest that the purity of PSI/PSII is very high, and that no structural damage has happened^[5].

2.2 Activity of PSI and PSII

As a systematic effort to screen the effects of solution conditions on PSI/PSII activities, the effect of ionic strength was examined over the sodium chloride concentration range of 0~500 mmol/L (Figure 3), covering the same concentration range previously studied for PSI purification using ultrafiltration^[5]. The results show that PSI activity

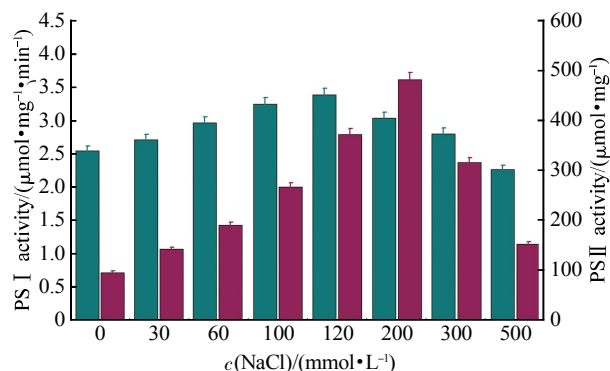


Fig. 3 Activity analysis of PSI and PSII samples at different sodium chloride concentrations
■: PSI activity; ■: PSII activity.

increases with salt concentration up to a salt concentration of 120 mmol/L. With further increase in salt concentration, the PS I activity decreases. There is little data about solution ionic strength in most published papers on PS I activity, and little attention has been paid to the effect of salt concentration on

PS I structure. However, this tendency is in good agreement with the size trend of PS I aggregates as determined by AFM imaging (Figure 4), suggesting that the activity of PS I may be related to its aggregation size.

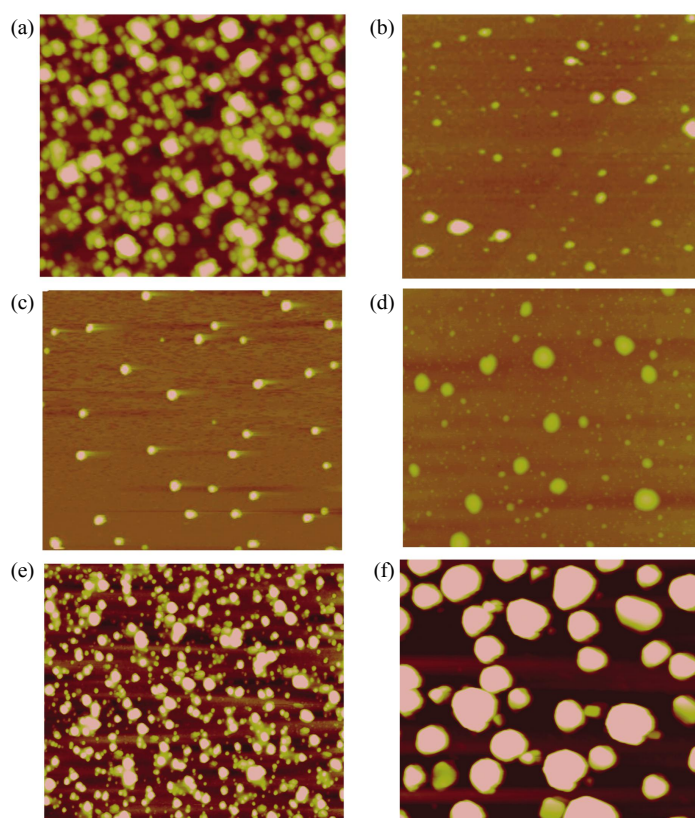


Fig. 4 AFM images of PS I samples at different sodium chloride concentrations using DDM (0.07% (w/v)) as detergent

(a) 0 mmol/L NaCl. (b) 50 mmol/L NaCl. (c) 100 mmol/L NaCl. (d) 120 mmol/L NaCl. (e) 200 mmol/L NaCl. (f) 400 mmol/L NaCl.

The oxygen-evolution activity of PS II follows the same trend of PS I, with a maximum value at sodium chloride concentration of 200 mmol/L. The small activities of PS II at lower sodium chloride concentrations (< 60 mmol/L) show that ions are necessary for PS II activity measurements^[9]. Another important feature of Figure 3 is that the PS II activity drops rapidly when sodium chloride concentration is greater than 200 mmol/L. This may be caused by the release of the 23 ku polypeptide, which is an essential component in the oxygen evolving complex^[10].

2.3 AFM imaging

The effect of ionic strength on the topological structure of PS I and PS II in the presence of DDM was imaged on the surface of mica using tapping mode

AFM. Figure 4 shows that as sodium chloride concentration increases from 0 to 400 mmol/L, the size of PS I aggregates decreases at first, but after reaching its minimum at 120 mmol/L NaCl, the size then increases. The diameters of PS I aggregates at the highest activity (120 mmol/L NaCl) are from 50 to 100 nm (Figure 4c), which is very close to the reported size of PS I particles in aqueous solution^[11]. The calculated PS I trimer has a diameter of 50 nm^[12], while the PS I particles in aqueous solution had a diameter between 30 and 60 nm^[11], suggesting that PS I from higher plants usually exists in the form of trimers or higher aggregates in solution. As for PS II, the size of aggregates was not obviously altered within the studied sodium chloride concentration range. The estimated

diameters of PS II aggregates at 120 mmol/L NaCl, as determined by AFM imaging, are in the range from 15 to 30 nm (Figure 5). This value is very close to the crystallographic data of PS II^[13].

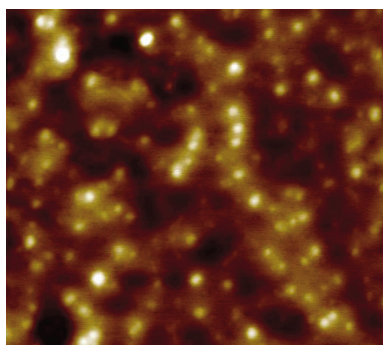


Fig. 5 AFM image of PSII at 200 mmol/L NaCl using DDM (0.07% (w/v)) as detergent

2.4 Zeta potential measurements

Figure 6 shows the zeta potentials of photosystems (PS I and PS II) as a function of sodium chloride concentration. It can be seen that the zeta potentials of both PS I and PS II are negative and they increase rapidly with salt concentration up to a salt concentration of 100 mmol/L. With further increase in sodium chloride concentration, the zeta potentials of PS I and PS II increase slowly. Another important conclusion that can be drawn from Figure 6 is that the absolute value of PS II zeta potential is greater than that of PS I within the studied sodium chloride concentration range.

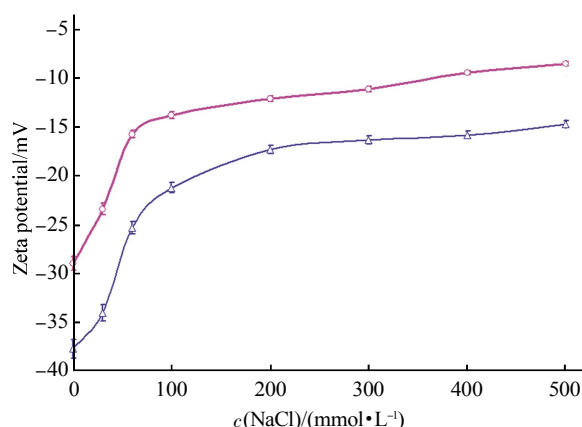


Fig. 6 Effect of sodium chloride concentration on PS I and PS II zeta potentials

○—○: PS I _Zeta potential; △—△: PS II _Zeta potential.

The zeta potential measurements were carried out at pH 10.0, which is equal to the primary optimized pH value for PS I isolation using ultrafiltration^[5]. This pH value is above the isoelectric points of PS I (4.5~4.8)^[14] and PS II (4.8)^[15]. Therefore, both PS I and PS II were negatively charged within the sodium chloride concentration range studied. In addition, PS I and PS II complexes became more negatively charged due to the adsorption of negative particles from solution environment at low sodium chloride concentrations. When sodium chloride concentration reached a certain value (*i.e.*, > 100 mmol/L NaCl), the zeta potential increase would be affected by the charge shielding effect.

2.5 Thermal stability

When we undertook ultrafiltration experiments for PS I isolation, some precipitation appeared in the feed and retentate under some experimental conditions, which might be caused by the progressive aggregation associated with PS I and/or PS II unfolding and decomposition. This phenomenon was very harmful to the membrane bioseparation process as it could result in membrane fouling and blockage. Therefore, the effects of sodium chloride concentration on thermal stabilities of PS I and PS II were also studied in this work. The wavelengths of 689 nm and 682 nm were used to characterize the stabilities of PS I and PS II in the presence of DDM, which are corresponding to the largest absorption peaks of PS I and PS II, respectively^[6].

Figure 7 shows the effect of sodium chloride concentration on thermal stability of PS I. The mid-point of the change corresponds to the melting temperature^[16]. As sodium chloride concentration increases from 0 to 100 mmol/L, the melting temperature of PS I increases from 81 °C to 86 °C, indicating that the thermal stability of PS I has been improved. With further increase in sodium chloride from 100 to 400 mmol/L, the thermal stability of PS I drops sharply, with the melting temperature decreasing from 86 °C to 76 °C. Therefore, the highest thermal stability of PS I occurred at 100 mmol/L NaCl in the presence of DDM. The thermal stability of PS II follows the same trend of PS I, with a maximum value at 200 mmol/L NaCl (Figure 8). These results indicate that the thermal stability of PS I and PS II may also be related to their aggregation sizes. Another important conclusion that can be drawn from Figure 7 and Figure 8 is that the thermal stability of PS I is

higher than that of PSII under experimental conditions.

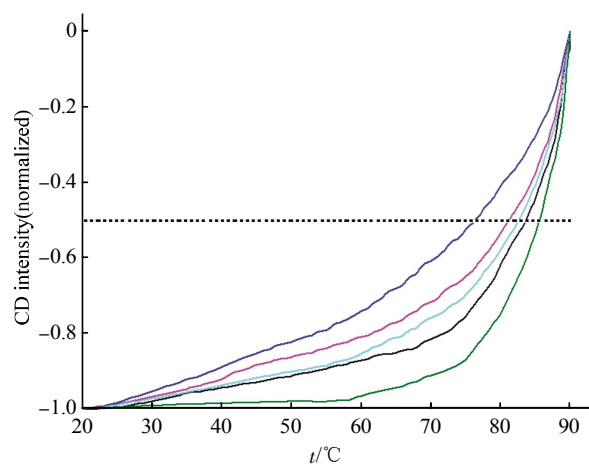


Fig. 7 Temperature dependence of CD signal of PSI at 689 nm as a function of sodium chloride concentration
— : PSI _NaCl_None; — : PSI _NaCl_50 mmol/L; — : PSI _NaCl_100 mmol/L; — : PSI _NaCl_200 mmol/L; — : PSI _NaCl_400 mmol/L.

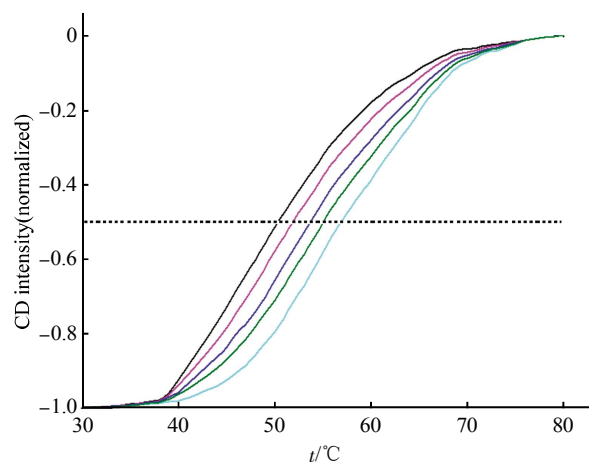


Fig. 8 Temperature dependence of CD signal of PSII at 682 nm as a function of sodium chloride concentration
— : PSII _NaCl_None; — : PSII _NaCl_50 mmol/L; — : PSII _NaCl_100 mmol/L; — : PSII _NaCl_200 mmol/L; — : PSII _NaCl_400 mmol/L.

2.6 Impact on PSI isolation

The aim for bioseparation research is not only to obtain the target protein with high purity, but also to keep the activity and structure of target protein unchanged during the isolation process. As described in “Activity of PSI and PSII”, solution ionic strength was found to have a significant effect on the activity of PSI and PSII. In order to obtain active PSI and PSII simultaneously from a single-stage

ultrafiltration process, more sodium chloride concentration values between 120 and 200 mmol/L should be evaluated. In addition, surfactants play a significant role in the solubilization and stabilization of membrane proteins during their purification and crystallization. Although some new surfactants have recently shown promise in the stabilization of membrane proteins^[17], there are no general rules for the selection of surfactants for an individual membrane protein due to the unclear understanding of the interactions between them^[16]. Therefore, the selection of surfactants to improve the stability of PSI and PSII, especially for PSII, is the remaining task to develop a practical bioseparation process for PSI isolation using ultrafiltration.

In membrane bioseparation, electrostatic interactions among the proteins and between the membrane and individual proteins affect the transmission of each protein^[3]. In our previous work, the 300 ku molecular mass cut-off polyethersulfone membranes were used for PSI isolation^[5]. The isoelectric point of the ultrafiltration membrane is about 2.5^[18], which is lower than the pH value (10.0) of the working solution used for PSI isolation. Thus, both the membrane and photosystems (PSI and PSII) are negatively charged under operating conditions (pH 10, 0.07% DDM, 120 mmol/L NaCl)^[5]. According to the “intrinsic electrostatic rejection” theory^[3], the sieving coefficients of PSI and PSII should be very small. However, our experimental results showed that most of PSII passed through the membrane. This indicates that the “molecular sieve effect” may play a central role in the newly developed ultrafiltration process for PSI isolation^[19]. Therefore, in order to develop a practical bioseparation process, more attention should be put on the “molecular sieve effect” for the further optimization of operating parameters.

3 Conclusions

In this work, the effects of solution ionic strength on properties of PSI and PSII were studied with DDM as the stabilizing detergent. The results showed that sodium chloride concentration can cast huge influence on the activity, zeta potential, aggregation size and thermal stability of PSI and PSII. Based on the measured zeta potentials and aggregation sizes of PSI and PSII, the “molecular sieve effect” was found to be the dominant mechanism for PSI

purification using ultrafiltration. These results will provide theoretical guidance to make further optimization of the operating parameters for the novel membrane-based bioseparation process for PS I production.

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溶液离子强度对光系统 I 和光系统 II 结构性质的影响^{*}

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摘要 本文运用现代分析手段系统考察了溶液离子强度对菠菜来源光系统 I (PS I) 和光系统 (PS II) 结构性质的影响, 研究的结构性质包括: 低温荧光光谱、放(耗)氧活性、聚集尺寸、聚集形貌、Zeta 电位和热稳定性等. 结果表明, 溶液离子强度对 PS I 和 PS II 的放(耗)氧活性、聚集尺寸和热稳定性具有显著影响. 此外, 根据测试结果的分析得知, “筛分效应”在光系统 I 的超滤分离过程中起决定性作用.

关键词 光系统 I, 光系统 II, 离子强度, 表征, 纯化

学科分类号 G633.91, K826.15, Q6

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