

海洋中的凝集网与透明胞外聚合颗粒物

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摘要:透明胞外聚合颗粒物(TEP)是海洋中大量存在的能被爱尔新蓝(alcian blue)染色的由酸性多糖组成的透明胶状颗粒物, 主要来源于浮游植物, 由于其透明的特性而被长期忽视。TEP 同时具有胶体和颗粒物的特性。作为胶体, TEP 为细菌提供了栖息场所与降解基质, 同时 TEP 可以吸收痕量元素, 以改变这些元素的生物地球化学过程。作为颗粒物, TEP 可以聚集并沉降, 由于其高的碳含量, 会在很大程度上影响海洋的碳通量。由于 TEP 可以被中型浮游动物所摄食, 所以 TEP 可以连接并缩短微食物环和经典食物链, 在海洋生态系统中起很重要的作用。介绍了 TEP 的定义、测量方法、来源、形成、及其与浮游植物的关系和其生态功能。

关键词:透明胞外聚合颗粒物; 浮游植物; 凝集网; 碳通量; 食物网

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Transparent Exopolymer Particles (TEP) and aggregation web in marine environments

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Abstract: The transparent exopolymer particles (TEP) are ubiquitous and abundant gel-particles in the marine ecosystem, they are defined as acid polysaccharides be stainable with alcian blue. They are mainly produced by phytoplankton. Due to its transparent property they were ignored for a long period. TEP can have the properties of dissolved polymers and particles. As dissolved polymer it can be the creation of microhabitats and adsorption of trace solute substances into the particulate pool, and play a significant role in the biogeochemical cycling of these elements. As particles, they can aggregated to form a bigger particle and promote the sedimentation of particles. Because of their high carbon content, the direct sedimentation of TEP can selective sequestration of carbon into deep water. Furthermore, TEP can also be grazed by filter feeders, such as mesozooplankton and even larger grazers. This will short the food chains and links the microbial food-web to the classical food-web. These processes will form an aggregation web and provide a more complete description of particle dynamics. The definition, quantify methods, origin, formation, relationship with phytoplankton and ecological functions of TEP were discussed in the paper. It is necessary to start the TEP research in China Seas Waters.

Key words: Transparent Exopolymer Particles (TEP); phytoplankton; aggregation web; carbon flux; food web

30a 前, Steele 对海洋经典食物链理论进行了总结^[1], 将不同的生物进行了功能群的划分, 为海洋生物资源的合理利用和海洋环境的保护奠定了重要的科学基础。10a 后, 这个理论得到了进一步的发展, Azam 在以往学者的研究基础上, 提出了微食物环理论, 突出了微型生物在食物链中的重要作用, 对经典食物链理论进行了有益补充^[2]。此后随着海洋生态学研究的深入, Passow 于 1993 年提出了新的凝集网(Aggregation Web)理论^[3], 认为有生物参与的透明聚合颗粒物在沉降过程中也耦合到了食物链中(图 1)。

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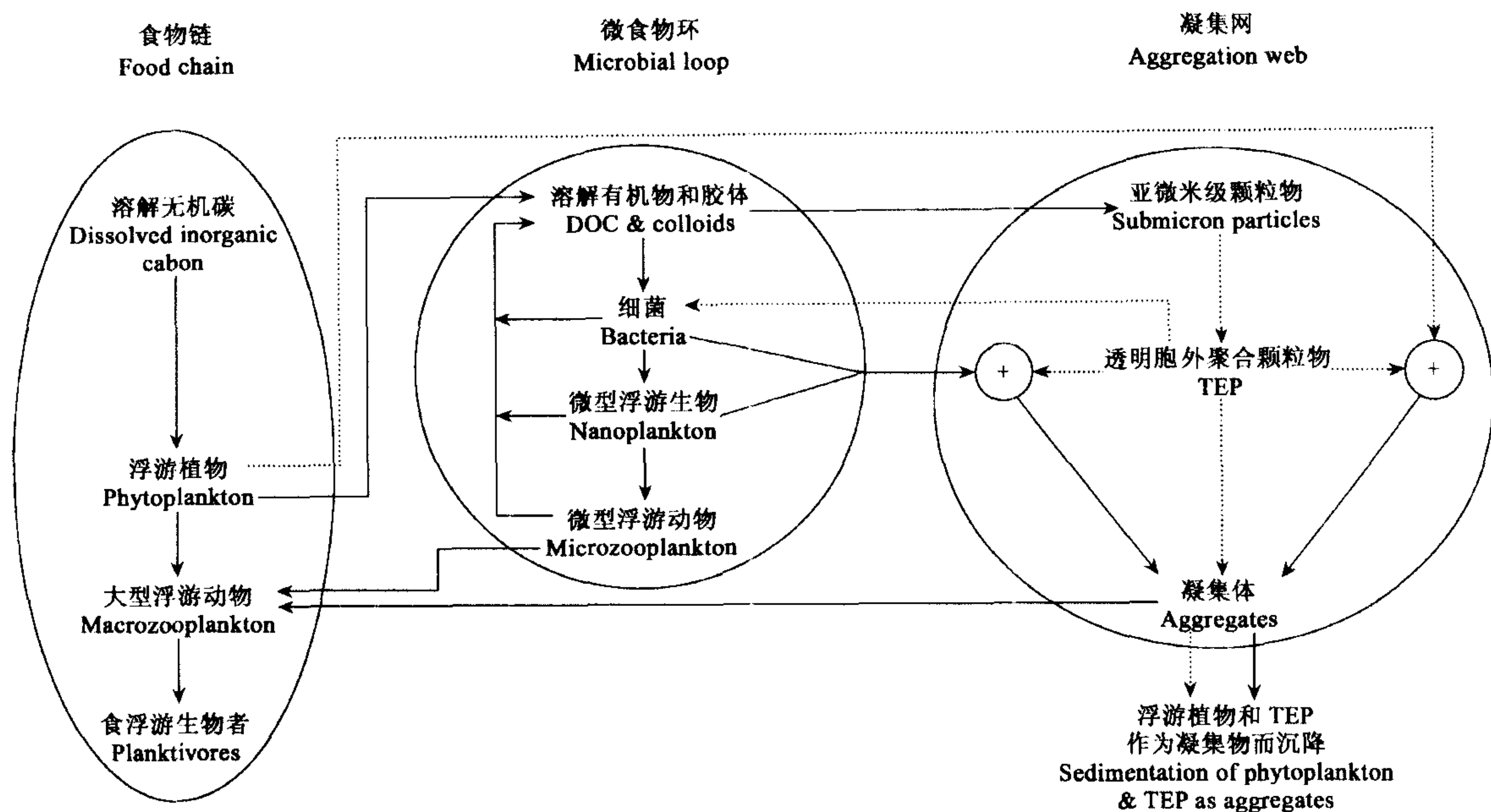


图1 凝集网与经典食物链和微食物环耦合的概念图(由 Passow^[10]重绘)

Fig. 1 The coupling conception model of aggregation web, traditional food chain and microbial loop (redraw from Passow^[10])

凝集网的核心是由透明胞外聚合颗粒物(transparent exopolymer particles, TEP)和水体中的亚微米级颗粒物与凝集体一同构成的。TEP 是指能被爱尔新蓝(alcian blue)染色的由酸性多糖组成的透明颗粒物^[4],它们绝大多数来自浮游植物,少数来自细菌等其它生物的胞外分泌物^[5~7]。由于透明的缘故,很多研究者虽然意识到它的大量存在,但无法定量描述它,因此被忽视了相当长的时间。目前,很多研究表明 TEP 不但是普遍和大量地存在着,并且它们在元素的生物地球化学循环和食物网中扮演着重要角色^[8~14]。TEP 的研究在国际上已经有了相当的基础工作。TEP 在生态系统中的作用主要表现在以下几个方面:首先,TEP 可以通过凝集作用使溶解有机物、细菌、微型鞭毛藻、浮游植物等形成凝聚体,这些凝聚体可以直接被原动物、中型和大型浮游动物、鱼类或其他海洋动物所摄食,将食物链的途径缩短,并与微食物环和经典食物链相连。其次,由 TEP 连接的凝聚体在沉降过程中形成了海洋中碳垂直通量的另外一条重要途径。它在凝聚过程中可以吸附周围的溶解有机物和黏着其他颗粒物而沉降,其 C:N 的比率远远高于 Redfield 比率,所以会有更多的碳随着 TEP 而沉降入深海,对海洋生态系统中 CO₂ 的浓度起到一种反馈调节作用。所以,TEP 及其相关过程对研究海洋生物资源、海洋环境乃至全球变化都具有重要的意义。Passow 的关于 TEP^[3],Hoagland 等关于硅藻胞外聚合分泌物^[5]和 Thornton^[13]关于硅藻凝聚等有了比较好的综述。本文下面就 TEP 的发现和概念、来源和形成、其与浮游植物的关系和生态功能等方面进行简要的介绍,以期引起国内相关研究者的注意。

1 TEP 的发现和定义

TEP 被定义为能被爱尔新蓝(alcian blue)染色的由酸性多糖组成的透明颗粒物^[4]。在海洋生态系统中,多糖是溶解有机物库中很重要的一个组分,它属于胶体,绝大多数来自浮游植物,少数来自细菌等其它生物的胞外分泌物^[5~7]。浮游植物,尤其是硅藻在其生长的各个时期都会分泌大量的胞外分泌物^[5,7,15~17],碳水化合物特别是多糖可以占到这些胞外分泌产物的 80%~90%,不同浮游植物物种分泌多糖的能力差异很大,可以相差 50 多倍。例如,窄细角毛藻(*Chaetoceros affinis*)在指数生长期分泌多糖的速率是静止时期的 5 倍。不同物种浮游植物分泌多糖的种类和结构也不相同,如窄细角毛藻和旋链角毛藻(*Chaetoceros curvisetus*)都分泌带鼠李糖、海藻糖和半乳糖残基的多糖,但这些多糖的结构是不同的。这些胞外聚合物(Exopolymeric substance, EPS)具有从溶解态的粘液到坚硬的胶鞘等各种结构形式,主要分为三大类:细胞覆盖物、溶解性的 EPS 和 TEP^[13],其中以 TEP 在生态系统中作用较为特殊,它不同于胶鞘可以作为细胞的一部分来研究,也不同于粘液溶解在细胞周围的水体中,它是一种胶状的颗粒物既具有颗粒物的特性可以沉降,又具有胶的特性可以聚集,具有恒定的体积质量比。它又不同于有机体颗粒物,可以具有不同的 C:N:P 比例。由于透明的缘故,很多研究者意识到它的大量存在,但无法定量描述它,所以被人们忽视了相当长的时间。

2 TEP 的测定

TEP 的测定到目前为止主要有 3 种方法:显微镜计数法、比色法和顺磁性功能化微球体法。显微镜计数法可以获得 TEP

的丰度和大小,从而可以推算出总表面积和体积。其基本过程是:过滤→染色→冰冻→转移→封片→显微镜观测→图象处理→计数^[18]。

TEP 的大小分布符合幂函数:

$$\frac{dN}{dL} = aL^{-b}$$

式中, N 表示 TEP 的数量, L 表示 TEP 的长度^[18~21]。所以, TEP 的丰度主要是小的组分所贡献,而体积则主要是由大的组分所贡献。

比色法较为简单,所以也是常用的一种方法^[4]。其基本过程是:过滤→染色→溶解于硫酸→梯度稀释→比色→黄原胶校正→浓度计算。由于不同批次的爱尔新蓝在纯度和溶解度方面都有不同,所以需要用黄原胶进行校正,这种方法获得的是半定量值,其单位是黄原胶当量($\mu\text{g Xeq} \cdot \text{L}^{-1}$)。

在浮游植物水华期,这两种方法具有较好的相关性:

$$\text{TEP}_{\text{显微镜计数法}} = 0.04 \times \text{TEP}_{\text{比色法}} - 16.5 \quad (r^2 = 0.99)$$

两种方法获得的 TEP 浓度可以转换为碳含量^[22,23]:

(1) $\text{TEP}-\text{C} = 0.25 \times 10^{-6} \times R^{2.55}$, 其中 R 是等效半径。

(2) $\text{TEP}-\text{C} = 0.75 \times \text{TEP}_{\text{比色法}}$, 这样就拓宽了 TEP 在生态系统研究中的应用。

Fatibello 等^[24]将此方法进行了改进,应用于淡水中 TEP 的研究,这个方法把爱尔新蓝上清液在 602nm 下进行测量并扣除,所获结果更合理。

另外还有一种新的方法——顺磁性功能化微球体法(Paramagnetic functionalized microspheres method)^[25]。这种方法分离或浓缩海水中或浮游植物培养体系中的 TEP。它的原理是利用 TEP 与顺磁性微球体的粘附特性来磁化和选择性浓缩 TEP。先利用起泡法将 TEP 和 $1\mu\text{m}$ 的微球体混合,然后将这些混合体通过强磁场,这样这些 TEP 混合体就可以浓缩于强磁场中。TEP 的体积可以通过微球体的体积进行折算。

基于以上 3 种方法的应用,人们对于 TEP 的分布也有了大致认识。TEP 广泛分布在淡水和海水中, $>5\mu\text{m}$ 的 TEP 丰度介于 $1 \sim 8000\text{ml}^{-1}$, 而 $>2\mu\text{m}$ 的 TEP 丰度介于 $3000 \sim 40000\text{ml}^{-1}$ (图 2)。如果 TEP 表达为总表面积,那么它一般介于 $0.2 \sim 2000\text{mm}^2 \text{L}^{-1}$ 。如果 TEP 表达为等效直径的体积百分比,那么它一般介于 $0.1 \times 10^{-6} \sim 300 \times 10^{-6}$ ^[3]。TEP 的峰值是和浮游植物的水华紧密相关的^[18, 19, 21, 26~32]。一般来说, TEP 的浓度在富养化区域最高,其次是近岸区域,大洋中 TEP 的浓度相对最低^[18, 23]。通常, TEP 的体积和丰度范围是同浮游植物相当或略高^[21],这也说明了 TEP 在海洋颗粒物体系中的重要性。

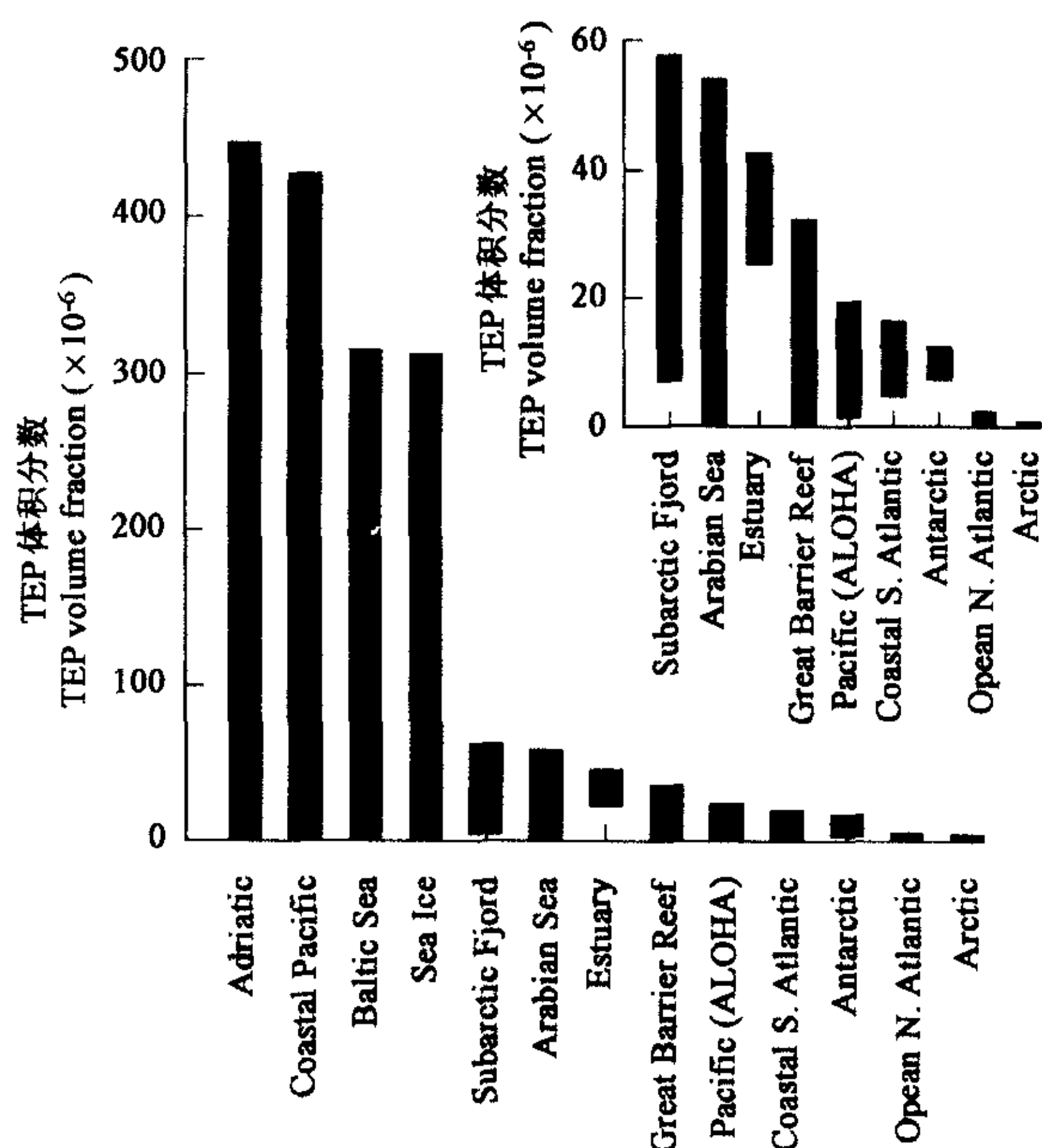


图 2 TEP 的在各海区的分布(由 Passow^[10]重绘)

Fig. 2 The distribution of TEP worldwide (redraw from Passow^[10])

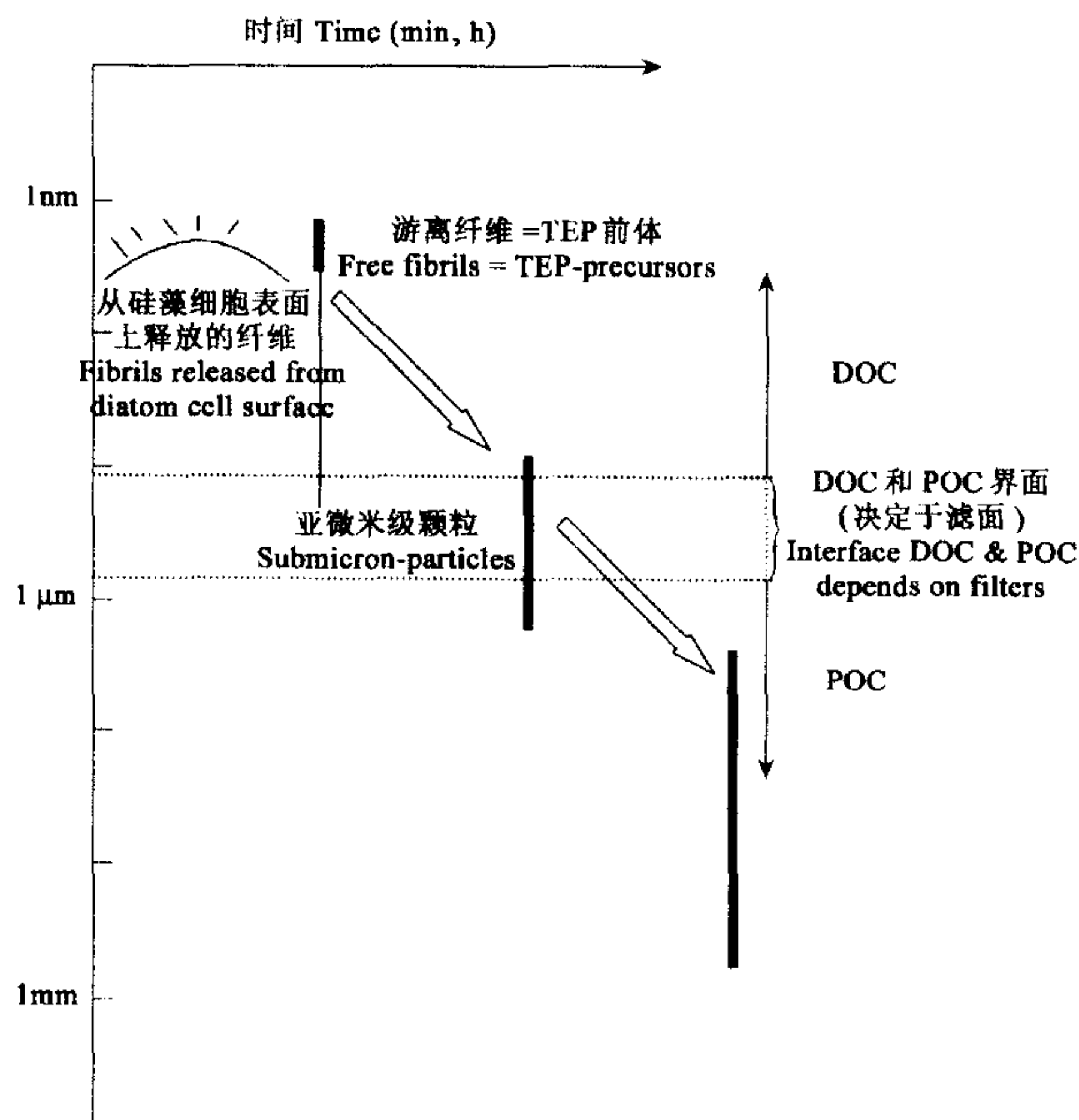


图 3 TEP 的形成过程(由 Passow^[10]重绘)

Fig. 3 The formation of TEP (redraw from Passow^[10])

3 TEP 的来源和形成

TEP 是由海水中的溶解有机物逐步形成的,它是溶解有机物和颗粒有机物之间一个主要的中间形态。以往的观点认为,在溶解有机物转化为颗粒物的过程中,细菌吸收是最主要的步骤。但由于 TEP 的大量存在,并可以通过起泡作用这种物理方式形成颗粒物^[33, 34],现在证实 TEP 的形成才是溶解有机物转化为颗粒物过程中的主要步骤^[3]。TEP 的形成一般分为两个步骤(图 3):先由浮游生物主要是浮游植物释放 TEP 前体;然后,从胶体溶解有机物通过非生物作用如凝结化、凝胶化和退火等过程聚集成 TEP。TEP 前体是 100nm,直径为 1~3nm 的纤维^[35],主要由指数生长期的浮游植物释放到水体中^[35~39],细菌也可以释放多糖纤维^[40]。此外,由细菌和病毒引起的细胞裂解也会造成 TEP 前体的释放^[41, 42]。这些 TEP 前体通过凝结化作用^[43, 44]或凝胶化和退火作用^[45]形成亚微米级凝聚物,这些亚微米级凝聚物再次凝结为更大的微米级凝聚物,最终形成了 TEP。不同大小 TEP 形成的影响因子不同,<0.2 μm 的 TEP 形成会由拉曼作用^[46]和流变剪切作用^[47]所促进,而 0.4~1.0 μm 的 TEP 形成会由起泡过程中的表层凝聚作用所促进^[22, 48, 49]。TEP 形成也会由于颗粒物的表面吸附和吸收作用而得到增强^[50, 51]。

4 TEP 与浮游植物

TEP 和浮游植物的关系非常密切,TEP 前体的主要来源是浮游植物。现场观测的结果表明 TEP 的峰值通常是和浮游植物水华特别是硅藻^[18, 19, 21, 26, 28, 32]或棕囊藻(*Phaeocystis* spp.)^[27, 29]水华联系在一起的。有些甲藻^[18, 30, 52]、蓝藻^[28, 31]和隐藻^[26, 53]水华期间 TEP 的浓度也相当的高。另外,室内培养实验也证实浮游植物是 TEP 的主要来源^[3, 18, 54]。指数生长期浮游植物的 TEP 和叶绿素 a 的浓度有显著的相关性^[3],但很难得出一般性的规律来^[52, 55],因为不同影响 TEP 生产的过程是不同而复杂的。研究结果表明^[56]TEP 的形成是浮游植物生长率而不是现存量的函数,进一步的围隔实验证实了 TEP 的产量与浮游植物生长率成反比^[57]。但是实验的结果表明在浮游植物生长的最后时期^[39],TEP 和叶绿素 a 浓度之间的相关性就不存在了,这是因为 TEP 浓度的持续增长不仅和浮游植物生长有关了,而且和细胞的裂解以及浮游动物的摄食相关。

不同浮游植物物种释放胞外多糖的能力是不同的,影响的生态条件也是不同的,所以 TEP 前体的形成也和这些物种及其影响条件是密切相关的。赫胥吏藻(*Emiliana huxleyi*)和波罗的海红隐藻(*Rhodomonas baltica*)相对于南极棕囊藻(*Phaeocystis antarctica*)和多边膝沟藻(*Gonyaulax polyedra*),其 TEP 的产量就较低,而硅藻的 TEP 产量通常会有很大的变幅(表 2)。浮游植物 TEP 的产量与其生理状态和生长条件有关,一般来说,浮游植物在生长的衰退期释放 TEP 前体^[17, 28, 31],但有些浮游植物,例如窄细角毛藻(*Chaetoceros affinis*)在生长期、平台期和衰退期都会产生 TEP。浮游植物产生 TEP 的能力常常会受到其生长的环境条件制约,如光照条件^[29]、CO₂ 浓度^[58]、营养盐和微量元素^[59]等,甚至物理因子如扰动都会影响 TEP 的生成^[17, 40, 46]。

5 TEP 的生态功能

TEP 在海水中的存在有其重要意义,它在微尺度范围上形成水环境结构的重要梯度。最近的研究表明,海水微生物的环境并不是人们想象的那样,主要由流体的水组成,其介质是均匀的,扩散作用是其主要的物理过程;而是,海水微生物生活在由连续梯度颗粒物构成的胶体和网络中,这些颗粒物提供了物理介质表面和化学物质梯度。在这个梯度连续体中,由胶质包埋的颗粒物是一个极端,而由无颗粒水构成了另外一个极端^[60~63]。正是这些 TEP 构成了这个梯度连续体的重要组成部分,它们改变了海水的流体力学属性和粘滞性^[64],改变了细胞的动力场,增加了化学团块和微圈稳定性^[65]。TEP 上常有微生物附着,但不是所有的 TEP 上都会附着有微生物,有 0.5%~25% 的 TEP 存在附着微生物的现象^[66, 18, 19]。微生物在海水 TEP 上的附着密度为 0.08~0.7 个细菌/ μm^2 ,常常发生在春季浮游植物水华末期^[3]。TEP 构成了海水中凝聚体的组成部分或核心,它会形成很多以其为核心的微环境,从而改变其周围营养盐吸收率、摄食率和扩散率^[67, 68]。另外 TEP 在下沉摇摆的过程中会形成一个相对较大的卷流区^[69, 70]。除了构建海水微生物的颗粒物环境之外,TEP 还可以通过滞留微量元素和吸收有机物而改变海水中的化学场。以上这些都说明了 TEP 在海洋环境中的重要作用。

TEP 还有一个重要的作用就是在海水颗粒物凝聚过程中可以吸收周围的溶解有机物和粘着其它颗粒物而沉降。它在沉降过程中的作用是两方面的,首先,它可以凝聚其它的颗粒物而沉降,其次,它本身可以直接通过沉降而改变垂直碳通量。浮游植物水华的终结常可以由 TEP 引起的浮游植物沉降过程所控制^[71]。TEP 随着浮游植物丰度的增加而增加,一旦达到了临界浓度,它就会大量地下沉,这一过程伴随着浮游植物的下沉,随之也终止了浮游植物的水华过程^[18]。TEP 引起的沉降是非选择性的,这意味着水体中的各种颗粒物都可以通过这种方式得到沉降,这种动力过程在海洋环境和围隔实验中都得到了证实^[28, 67, 72~74]。不同物种浮游植物分泌 TEP 前体的能力是不同的,所以不同浮游植物的水华其产生 TEP 的浓度是不一样的,最终沉降过程在水华消亡阶段的作用是不同的。美国华盛顿东湾曾经发生过孟第海链藻(*Thalassiosira mendiolana*)的春季水华,但由于这种硅藻的 TEP 产量很低,所以最终浮游植物的水华是为浮游动物摄食所控制,沉积物捕捉器中基本上没有硅藻的出现^[75, 76]。由于 TEP 的碳含量和浮游植物同处于一个范围^[22, 23],所以通过 TEP 沉降过程而损失的碳是相当可观的。根据在 Santa Barbara 海峡两年的研究显示,通过 TEP 沉降而损失的碳占到总颗粒有机碳的 30%^[32]。另外一个现象就是,TEP 沉降过程对碳元素具有选择性。许多研究显示在浮游植物快速增长的时期,真光层中溶解有机碳的积累速率要远远高于溶解有机

氮^[77, 78]。TEP 中 C:N 的比率远远高于 Redfield 比率,所以有更多的碳会随着 TEP 而沉降入深海,这是对海洋生态系统的一种反馈调节,是对全球大气 CO₂ 浓度增高的一种反应。

TEP 不但在颗粒物动力学中起到连接溶解有机物和颗粒有机物的作用,它在食物网中的作用也是不容忽视的。它可以连接微生物和浮游动物,从而缩短食物链,提高了海洋生产效率。研究结果显示 TEP 在真光层中细菌的降解速率要远远小于它对细菌的黏附速率^[19],这样 TEP 就对海洋细菌起到了一个打包的作用。不同粒级的 TEP 可以直接被原生动物^[79~81]、中型和大型浮游动物^[82, 83]、鱼类^[84]或其它海洋动物^[85]所摄食,这样溶解有机物和细菌等一些小粒级物质就可以通过 TEP 的打包连接作用进入食物网。

中国海域对 TEP 的研究基本上还是空白,但鉴于 TEP 在海洋中的重要性^[86],开展对 TEP 的研究是十分必要的。以下方向是可以重点研究的:(1)建立标准几何体积法,进一步对 TEP 的显微镜测量法进行完善和改进;(2)选取典型海域对 TEP 和浮游植物进行周年监测,了解其相互关系;(3)在典型季节对 TEP 的碳通量进行研究,如:浮游植物的 TEP 释放、细菌的 TEP 降解、浮游动物对 TEP 的摄食以及 TEP 的沉降等;(4)分离浮游植物优势物种,对不同浮游植物 TEP 释放的差异进行研究。

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