

# Differential regulation of antioxidant enzymes in *Frankliniella occidentalis* (Thysanoptera: Thripidae) exposed to thermal stress (#58282)

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# Differential regulation of antioxidant enzymes in *Frankliniella occidentalis* (Thysanoptera: Thripidae) exposed to thermal stress

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*Frankliniella occidentalis* is an invasive insect pest that incites damage to ornamental and agronomic crops on a global scale. In this study, the effects of temperature on gene expression and enzyme activity were studied for superoxide dismutase (SOD), peroxidase (POD), and glutathione-S-transferase (GST) in *F. occidentalis*. SOD, POD and GST enzyme activity increased significantly at 35-37°C but declined as the temperature increased to 41°C. In a time course study at 35°C, SOD, POD and GST activities were significantly elevated at 0.5, 1 and 2 h in comparison to the control at 26°C. Expression patterns were evaluated for the three antioxidant genes under high and low temperature stress. In a time course study at -4°C, SOD, POD and GST expression peaked at 1 h and declined at 2 h of exposure. In contrast, when transcription was monitored at 35°C, expression was lowest at 1 h and increased at 2 h. The results provide data that will be useful in deciphering the role of antioxidant enzymes in the adaptation of *F. occidentalis* to climate change.

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2 **(Thysanoptera: Thripidae) exposed to thermal stress**

3

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13

## 14 **Abstract**

15 *Frankliniella occidentalis* is an invasive insect pest that incites damage to ornamental and  
16 agronomic crops on a global scale. In this study, the effects of temperature on gene expression and  
17 enzyme activity were studied for superoxide dismutase (SOD), peroxidase (POD), and glutathione-  
18 S-transferase (GST) in *F. occidentalis*. SOD, POD and GST enzyme activity increased  
19 significantly at 35-37°C but declined as the temperature increased to 41°C. In a time course study  
20 at 35°C, SOD, POD and GST activities were significantly elevated at 0.5, 1 and 2 h in comparison  
21 to the control at 26°C. Expression patterns were evaluated for the three antioxidant genes under  
22 high and low temperature stress. In a time course study at -4°C, *SOD*, *POD* and *GST* expression  
23 peaked at 1 h and declined at 2 h of exposure. In contrast, when transcription was monitored at  
24 35°C, expression was lowest at 1 h and increased at 2 h. The results provide data that will be useful  
25 in deciphering the role of antioxidant enzymes in the adaptation of *F. occidentalis* to climate  
26 change.

27

28 **Keywords** *Frankliniella occidentalis*; thermal stress; oxidative defense; enzymatic activity; gene  
29 expression

## 31 Introduction

32 Temperature impacts the reproduction, development, and distribution of insects (Cossins & Bowle  
33 1987; Worner 1998; Bale *et al.* 2002), and extreme temperatures are known elicitors of reactive  
34 oxygen species (ROS) in invertebrates. The excessive generation of ROS can damage cellular  
35 constituents, including lipids, proteins, and nucleic acids (Halliwell 1989; Kamata & Hirata 1999;  
36 Foyer & Noctor 2005; Lopez-Martinez *et al.* 2008). In order to survive, insects reduce or detoxify  
37 ROS through the action of antioxidants; these function as enzymatic and non-enzymatic  
38 scavengers that reduce lipid peroxidation and decrease damage to nucleic acids and proteins  
39 (Felton & Summers 1995; Lyakhovich *et al.* 2006; Krishnan *et al.* 2007). Peroxidase (POD),  
40 superoxide dismutase (SOD), and glutathione-S-transferase (GST) are antioxidant enzymes that  
41 defend cells from excessive levels of ROS (Felton & Summers 1995; Wang *et al.* 2001; Dubovskiy  
42 *et al.* 2008; Liu *et al.* 2020). SOD functions by degrading superoxide anions to hydrogen peroxide  
43 ( $H_2O_2$ ) and oxygen, and  $H_2O_2$  is subsequently converted to  $H_2O$  by POD (Kashiwagi *et al.* 1997;  
44 Wang & Li 2002; Liu & Ma 2007). GSTs function to detoxify compounds that are produced from  
45 lipid peroxidation (Ahmad *et al.* 1991; Kono & Shishido 1992; Dubovskiy *et al.* 2008).

46 The western flower thrips (WFT), *Frankliniella occidentalis*, damages both vegetables and  
47 ornamental plants on a global scale and is especially problematic in greenhouses (Morse & Hoddle  
48 2006; Kirk & Terry 2015; Mouden *et al.* 2017). In addition to direct damage, WFT causes serious  
49 damage to plants by transmitting plant viruses such as the Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus (Pappu *et*  
50 *al.* 2009; Tomitaka 2019). WFT is endemic to the western region of North America and has spread  
51 globally due to the transportation of agricultural products (Reitz 2009; Kirk & Terry 2015).

52 According to the CABI Invasive Species Compendium, *F. occidentalis* has been discovered on all  
53 continents except Antarctica (<https://www.cabi.org/isc/datasheet/24426>). In mainland China, *F.*  
54 *occidentalis* was initially found in Beijing in 2003 (Zhang et al., 2003) and has since been  
55 discovered in at least ten provinces (Wu et al. 2017).



56 Previous studies indicated that temperature impacts development, sex ratios, reproduction,  
57 population growth, and mortality of *F. occidentalis* (Li et al. 2007; Li et al. 2011a; Zhang et al.  
58 2012). During the hot summers in subtropical China, high temperatures may cause oxidative stress  
59 to *F. occidentalis*, particularly in greenhouses (Wang et al. 2014). Previous studies demonstrated  
60 that the expression of genes encoding catalase (CAT) and subsequent enzymatic activity were  
61 altered in *F. occidentalis* exposed to hot and cold stress (Shi et al. 2013; Qin et al. 2017). However,  
62 the impact of high and low temperatures on other antioxidant enzymes in *F. occidentalis* is unclear.

63 In this study, we investigated the effect of temperature stress on POD, SOD, and GST in *F.*  
64 *occidentalis*. The results provide important data on how antioxidant enzymes counteract oxidative  
65 damage in the WFT and provide a more comprehensive framework for understanding thermal  
66 tolerance in *F. occidentalis*.

67

## 68 **Materials & Methods**

### 69 **Insects and temperature treatments**

70  *F. occidentalis* populations were collected in Hangzhou, China,  2008 and were reared at 25 ±  
71 0.5°C with a 16:8 h light:dark photoperiod as outlined by Li et al. (2011b). Newly emerged 2<sup>nd</sup>



72 instar larvae were collected, and pools of 100 were exposed to high (31, 33, 35, 37, 39 or 41°C) or  
73 low (0, -2, -4, -6, -8 and -10°C) temperatures for 1 h in glass tubes as described (Chang *et al.*,  
74 2017). The temporal effect of 35°C and -4°C on *F. occidentalis* was further explored by subjecting  
75 groups of individuals to 0, 0.5, 1, and 2 h of thermal stress; controls were maintained at 26°C (0 h  
76 time point). Following thermal stress, larvae were incubated at 26°C for 30 min and mortality was  
77 determined. Survivors were frozen in liquid nitrogen and stored at -80°C for future use. Four  
78 replicate pools were used for each temperature and time period.

79

#### 80 **Determination of enzyme activity**

81 Treated samples were homogenized in 0.9% saline and subjected to centrifugation as described  
82 previously (Jia *et al.*, 2011). Supernatants containing the enzyme fractions were collected, and  
83 protein content was determined using the Bradford (1976) method.

84 POD and SOD activities were assessed with commercially available kits ~~as described~~ (Qin *et*  
85 *al.*, 2017). Absorbance values were obtained using the BioTek PowerWave HT Microplate  
86 Spectrophotometer (Bio-Tek Instruments Inc., USA). GST activity was measured as a function of  
87 reduced glutathione (GSH) using 10 mg of cytosolic protein and 1-chloro-2,4-dinitrobenzene  
88 (CDNB; Shanghai Chem, Shanghai, China) as a substrate (Habig *et al.*, 1974; Attig *et al.*, 2014).  
89 GST activity was determined at  $A_{340}$  with a microplate spectrophotometer (Shanghai Xinmao  
90 Instrument, Shanghai, China), and results are shown as  $\mu\text{mol GSH-CDNB}/\text{min}/\text{mg protein}$ .

91

## 92 RNA isolation, partial cloning of *SOD*, *POD* and *GST*, and qRT-PCR

93 The SV Total RNA Isolation System was used to isolate RNA from *F. occidentalis* as  
94 recommended by the manufacturer (Promega, San Luis Obispo, CA, USA). RNA quality and  
95 concentration were determined, and cDNA was generated from total RNA with the First Strand  
96 cDNA Synthesis Kit (Clontech, Mountain View, CA, USA) as outlined previously (Zhang *et al.*,  
97 2019).

98 Gene-specific primers (Table 1) were used to amplify cDNA from *F. occidentalis* based on  
99 sequences obtained from the transcriptome (unpublished data). PCR products were cloned and  
100 sequenced as described (Zhang *et al.*, 2019).

101 Quantitative real-time reverse transcriptase PCR (qRT-PCR) was conducted using the primers  
102 in Table 1 and the protocols described by Zhang *et al.* (2019). Melting curve analysis was  
103 executed to analyze the specificity of PCR products. Expression levels were normalized using  
104 reference genes *GAPDH* and *EF-1* for high and low temperature stress, respectively.

105

## 106 Statistical analyses



107 The results of qPCR were analyzed with the  $2^{-\Delta\Delta C_t}$  method (Livak and Schmittgen 2001).  
108 Significant differences were detected by one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Duncan's  
109 multiple comparisons test. Data were analyzed with SPSS v. 16.0 and considered significant at  
110  $P < 0.05$ .



111

## 112 **Results**

### 113 **Effect of high temperature stress on antioxidant activity**

114 SOD activity increased with rising temperature from 31 to 37°C and was highest at 37°C. The  
115 activity of SOD activity began to decline at 39°C, and the level at 41°C was significantly lower  
116 than 37°C ( $F_{6,19}=4.245$ ,  $P<0.05$ ) (Fig. 1A). A similar pattern was observed with POD, where  
117 activity rose with increasing temperature, peaked at 35°C and was significantly lower at 41°C than  
118 35°C ( $F_{6,21}=7.089$ ,  $P<0.05$ ) (Fig. 1B). GST activity was highest at 35°C (Fig. 1C) and began to  
119 decline with increasing temperature ( $F_{6,21}=8.312$ ,  $P<0.05$ ).

120

### 121 **Temporal changes in antioxidant enzyme activity at 35°C**

122 Antioxidant enzyme activity was significantly higher than the control (0 h, 26°C) when insects  
123 were exposed to 35°C for 0.5, 1 and 2 (SOD:  $F_{3,10}=10.005$ ,  $P<0.05$ ; POD:  $F_{3,12}=8.037$ ,  $P<0.05$ ;  
124 GSTs:  $F_{3,10}=5.815$ ,  $P<0.05$ ). No significant differences in antioxidant activity were detected  
125 between 0.5, 1 and 2 h of exposure (Fig. 2).

126

### 127 **Expression of antioxidant genes in response to heat and cold stress**

128 The expression of antioxidant genes was evaluated at 31, 33, 35, 37, 39 and 41°C; 26°C served as  
129 a control. *SOD* expression at 31°C was significantly lower than the control temperature of 26°C


130 and showed further decreases in expression at 35°C to 37°C; however, expression peaked at 39°C  
131 and was comparable to the control (26°C) (Fig. 3A). With the exception of 39°C, *SOD* expression  
132 was inhibited by high temperatures, and the lowest expression level was observed at 35°C  
133 ( $F_{6,18}=71.329$ ,  $P<0.05$ ). In contrast, *POD* expression levels at 33°C and 39°C were significantly  
134 higher than the control at 26°C; however, expression levels at 31, 35, 37, and 41°C were  
135 significantly lower than the control and were inhibited by heat stress ( $F_{6,17}=1386.107$ ,  $P<0.05$ )  
136 (Fig. 3B). *GST* expression was suppressed relative to the control at all elevated temperatures  
137 ( $F_{6,20}=652.115$ ,  $P<0.05$ ) (Fig. 3C). All three antioxidant genes shared an interesting increase in  
138 expression at 33°C and 39°C relative to the other elevated temperatures.


139 Expression of the three antioxidant genes was also evaluated in response to low temperature  
140 stress at 0, -2, -4, -6, -8 and -10°C. *SOD* expression showed a significant decline at 0 and -2°C  
141 relative to the control at 26°C; however, expression increased at -4°C and was comparable to the  
142 control at 26°C (Fig. 4A) ( $F_{6,19}=180.242$ ,  $P<0.05$ ). Interestingly, *SOD* expression declined and was  
143 significantly lower at -6, -8, and -10°C (Fig. 4A). *POD* expression was also significantly higher at  
144 -4°C than -0, -2, -6, -8, and -10°C (Fig. 4B). Similarly, *GST* expression was significantly higher at  
145 -4°C than -0, -2, -6, -8, and -10°C and was lowest at -6°C ( $F_{6,20}=183.310$ ,  $P<0.05$ ) (Fig. 4C).



#### 147 **Temporal changes in the expression of antioxidant genes**

148 Compared to the control (0 h, 26°C), *SOD* and *GST* expression decreased significantly when 2<sup>nd</sup>  
149 instar larvae were exposed to 35°C for 0.5, 1 and 2 h (*SOD*:  $F_{3,11}=2189.970$ ,  $P<0.05$ ; *GST*:

150  $F_{3,11}=1709.476$ ,  $P<0.05$ ) and was lowest at the 1 h exposure period (Fig. 5A,C). *POD* expression  
151 was significantly upregulated at the 2 h time point and was higher than expression levels at 0  
152 (control), 0.5 and 1 h ( $F_{3,10}=3425.185$   $P<0.05$ ) (Fig. 5B). 

153 After exposure to  $-4^{\circ}\text{C}$ , the expression levels of the three antioxidant genes decreased  
154 significantly when compared to the control (*SOD*:  $F_{3,10}=814.378$ ,  $P<0.05$ ; *POD*:  $F_{3,9}=7339.947$ ,  
155  $P<0.05$ ; *GST*:  $F_{3,9}=910.209$ ,  $P<0.05$ ). Interestingly, all three genes showed a peak in expression  
156 after a 1 h exposure to  $-4^{\circ}\text{C}$ ; however, it should be noted that expression at 1 h was lower than the  
157 control (Fig. 6). 

158

## 159 Discussion

160 Insects are poikilotherms that are greatly impacted by temperature fluctuations (Cossins & Bowler  
161 1987; Worner 1998; Bale *et al.* 2002). When exposed to thermal stress, insects sustain oxidative  
162 damage at the cellular level and respond with surplus levels of ROS (Lopez-Martinez *et al.* 2008;  
163 Cui *et al.* 2011; Li & Sattar 2019). ROS can cause direct damage to biological macromolecules  
164 and can also incite genetic mutations and cell death (Ryter *et al.* 2007). Antioxidant enzymes  
165 function to eliminate or reduce ROS levels in insects. Previous studies showed that SOD, POD  
166 and GST play important roles in the response of insects to ROS (Abele *et al.* 1998; An & Choi  
167 2010; Celino *et al.* 2011; Liu *et al.* 2020). In this study, SOD, POD and GST activity increased  
168 significantly in response to high temperatures, which suggests that these enzymes function to  
169 remove excess ROS during thermal stress. Thus, our results are consistent with those reported for  
170 *Bactrocera dorsalis*, *Bombyx mori*, *Mononychellus mcgregori*, *Diaphorina citri* and *Neoseiulus*

171 *cucumeris* (Lee *et al.* 2005; Jia *et al.* 2011; Marutani-Hert *et al.* 2010; Lu *et al.* 2014; Zhang *et al.*  
172 2014 ). In a previous report, low temperature stress significantly altered SOD, POD, CAT and GST  
173 activity in *F. occidentalis* (Shi *et al.* 2013). The increase in POD activity was likely the result of  
174 elevated levels of SOD activity in response to H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>. Although increased levels of antioxidant  
175 enzymes suggests a defensive function of these enzymes in counteracting the negative effect of  
176 ROS, there were no significant differences in SOD, POD or GST activity at 0.5, 1.0 and 2.0 h of  
177 exposure to 35°C (Fig. 2). This might indicate that antioxidant enzyme activity is very sensitive to  
178 high temperature stress and reached a threshold level at 0.5 h or earlier.

179 Many researchers have shown that temperature stress can lead to changes in antioxidant gene  
180 expression in insects (Yang *et al.* 2019; Xia *et al.* 2019; Lu *et al.* 2017). Previous results showed  
181 that temperature stress inhibited the transcription of *SOD*, *POD*, *GST* and related enzymes in  
182 *Mythimna separate*, *Apis cerana cerana* and *Helicoverpa armigera* (Shen *et al.* 2016; Yang *et al.*  
183 2019; Xia *et al.* 2019). These results reflect the diversity of molecular responses in organisms  
184 exposed to external stress. In addition to recruiting antioxidant enzymes to remove ROS in  
185 response to thermal stress, insects also respond by synthesizing osmoprotectants, altering  
186 membrane lipid content, and expressing heat shock proteins (Chen & Kang 2005). A previous  
187 study demonstrated that both high and low thermal stress induced *CAT* expression in *F.*  
188 *occidentalis* (Qin *et al.* 2017); therefore, the down-regulation of *POD* in this study might be  
189 attributed to increased expression of *CAT*. In the case of *SOD* and *GST*, thermal stress may induce  
190 the synthesis of unknown substances that could inhibit transcription. Further research is needed to  
191 validate or disprove these conjectures.

192 Differential regulation of antioxidant genes and enzymes has been reported in insects; for  
193 example, *POD*, *CAT* and *SOD* expression patterns were not necessarily correlated with enzyme  
194 activity during high temperature stress in *Mononychellus mcgregori* (Lu *et al.* 2017). In larvae of  
195 *Bombyx mori*, carboxylesterase activity was not correlated with gene expression (Liu *et al.* 2010).  
196 Elevated protein levels can be stressful for the organism, and the organism may inhibit gene  
197 transcription to maintain homeostasis. Conversely, if protein levels fall to a suboptimal level, the  
198 cell may respond by promoting transcription. Furthermore, transcription is often followed by post-  
199 transcriptional processing, degradation of transcription products, translation, post-translational  
200 processing and further modifications that impact protein levels. Further research is needed to  
201 understand the mechanisms that control the response of *F. occidentalis* to thermal stress.

202

## 203 **Conclusions**

204 This study reveals differential regulation of antioxidant gene expression and enzyme production  
205 in response to thermal stress. The results confirm the importance of antioxidant enzymes in  
206 modulating the response to thermal stress in *F. occidentalis*, and provide new avenues for further  
207 study of antioxidant mechanisms and physiological responses of *F. occidentalis* during climate  
208 change. The inconsistencies between gene expression and enzyme activity further illustrate the  
209 complexity of thermal adaptation in *F. occidentalis*. Future multidisciplinary research in  
210 genomics, transcriptomics, proteomics, and metabolomics will help explain the underlying  
211 mechanisms of thermal adaptation in *F. occidentalis*.

212

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217

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**Table 1** (on next page)

Primers used in this study

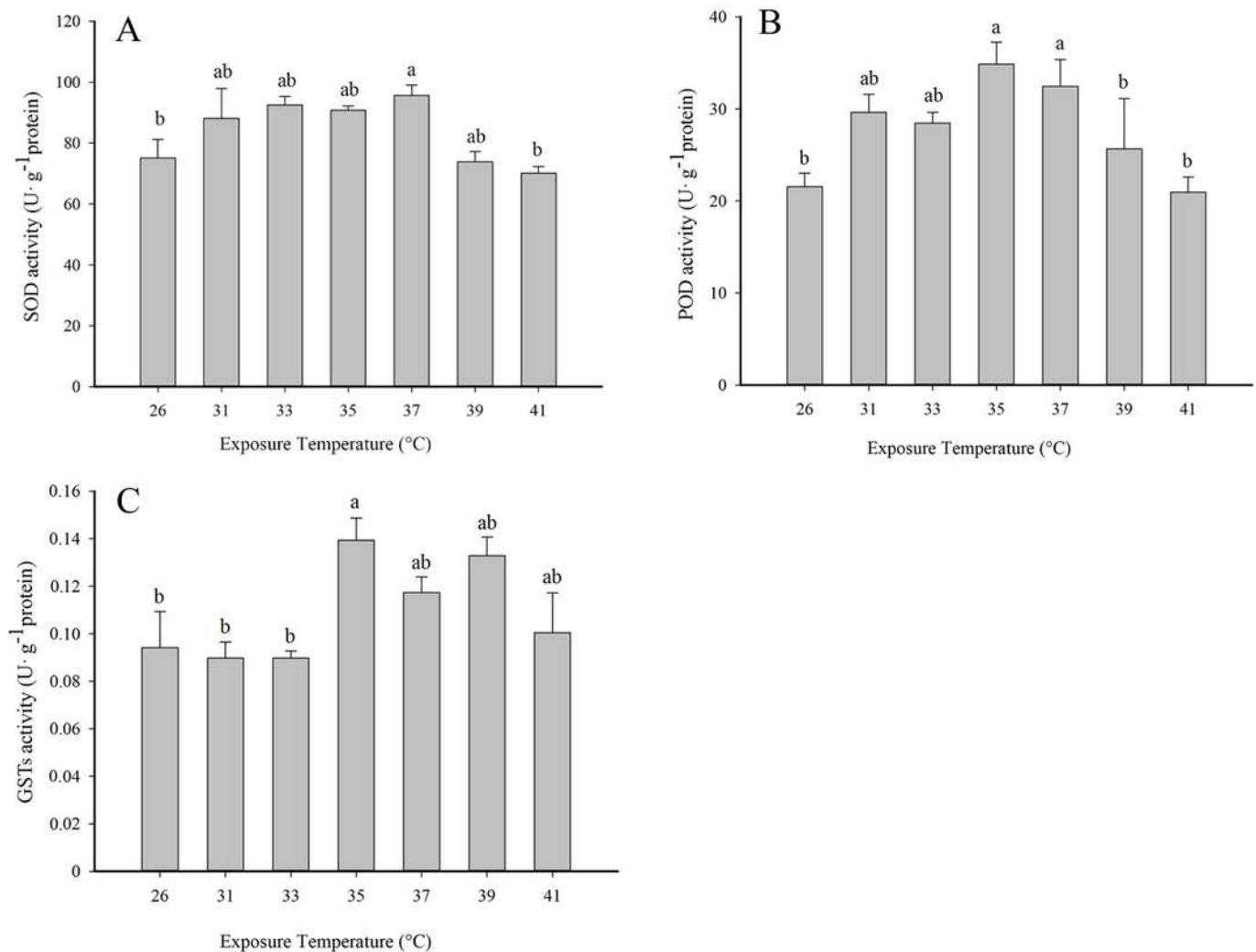
1

Primer name	Primer sequences	T <sub>m</sub> (°C)	Length (bp)
DP- <i>SOD</i> -F	AATGCTGCGTTCTCTGTTGTG	58.7	335
DP- <i>SOD</i> -R	TCTGGTTTTGTTGTTTCAGGAGT	58.4	
DP- <i>POD</i> -F	CAACCCCGACCAGCCCTAC	62.3	600
DP- <i>POD</i> -R	AAAAGGGGAAATCGGTGTCG	61.4	
DP- <i>GST</i> -F	TGACCGTGAACCAGACCGAG	61.3	431
DP- <i>GST</i> -R	GATGCCGAAAATACTGAGTGTGG	61.4	
qPCR- <i>SOD</i> -F	GAAATAACTGGTTCCAAGGCACT	59.6	125
qPCR- <i>SOD</i> -R	AATGCTGCGTTCTCTGTTGTG	58.7	
qPCR- <i>POD</i> -F	CCGCACTGGGACGACGAGAC	65.8	235
qPCR- <i>POD</i> -R	CGATGAGCGAGTGGAAGTATCTGAA	64.8	
qPCR- <i>GST</i> -F	GCTGCTGCTGTGCTGGATTA	59.7	170
qPCR- <i>GST</i> -R	ACCGTGAACCAGACCGAGAC	59.4	
<i>EF-1</i> -F	TCAAGGAACTGCGTCGTGGAT	58.6	130
<i>EF-1</i> -R	ACAGGGGTGTAGCCGTTAGAG		
<i>GAPDH</i> -F	AAGGGTGCTCAGGTTGTTGCT	56.5	89
<i>GAPDH</i> -R	CGACCGTGGGTGGAGTCATAT		

## Figure 1

Effect of high temperature stress on antioxidant enzyme activity in 2<sup>nd</sup> instar larvae of *F. occidentalis*.

Panels: (A) SOD, superoxide dismutase; (B) POD, peroxidase; (C) GST, glutathione-S-transferase. Larvae were exposed to 31, 33, 35, 37, 39, and 41°C for 1 h in glass tubes; 26°C was used as the control. Each value represents the mean ( $\pm$ SE) of four replications. Columns labeled with different letters indicate significance at  $P < 0.05$  using ANOVA (Tukey's b(K) test).

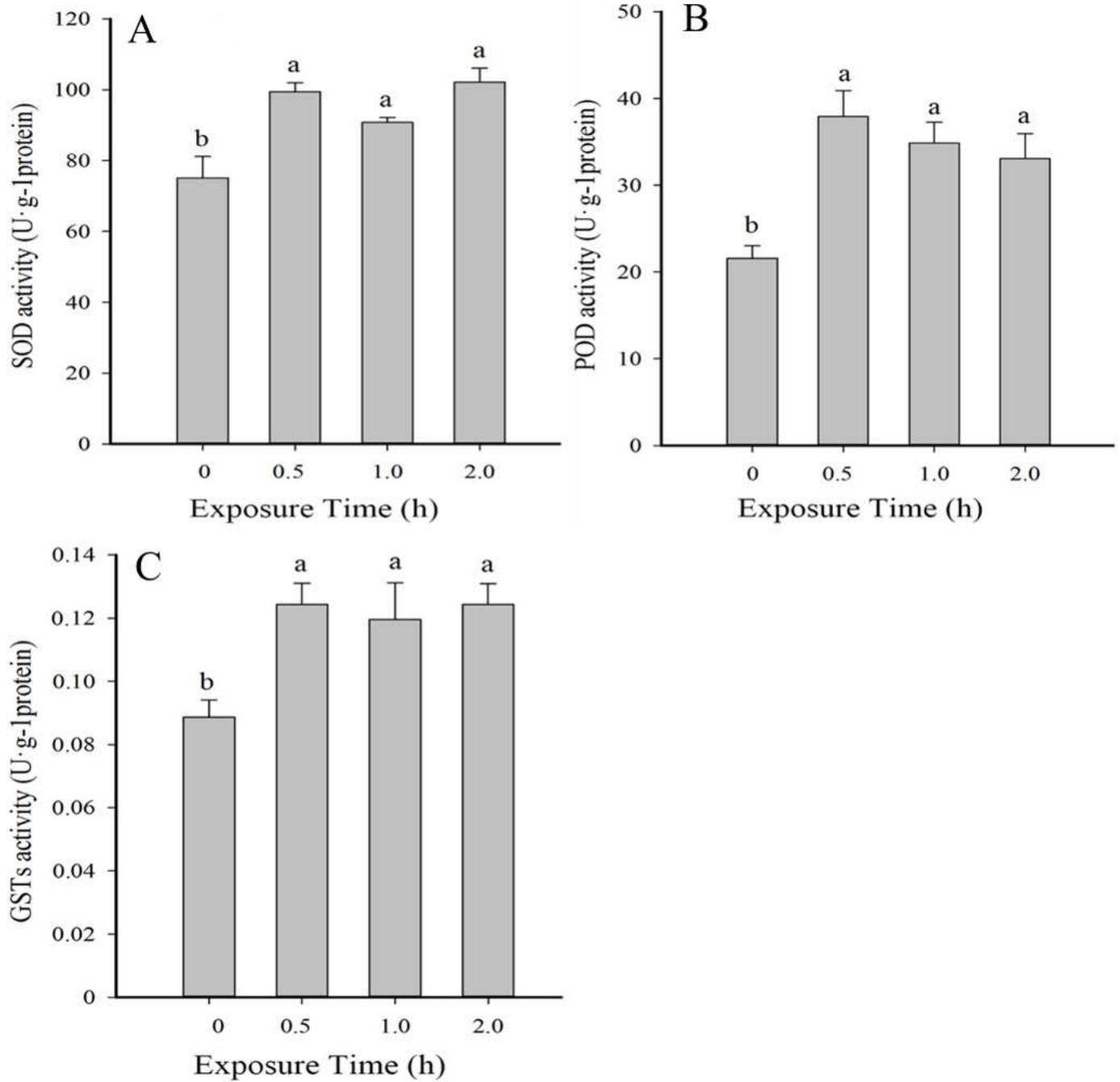




## Figure 2

Temporal changes in antioxidant enzyme activity in 2<sup>nd</sup> instar larvae of *F. occidentalis* exposed to 35°C.

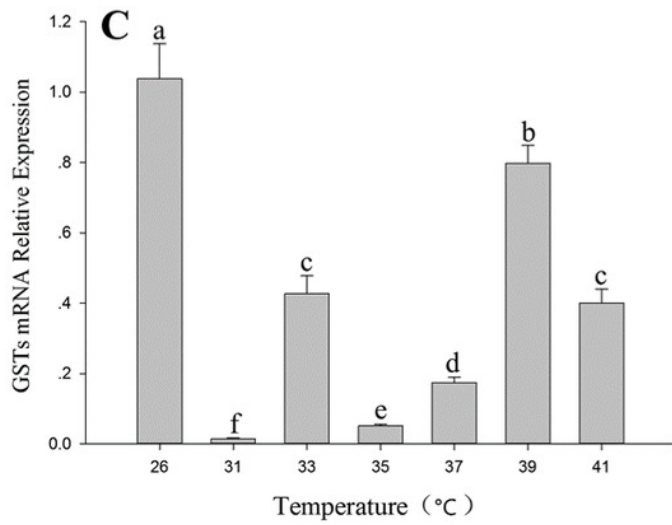
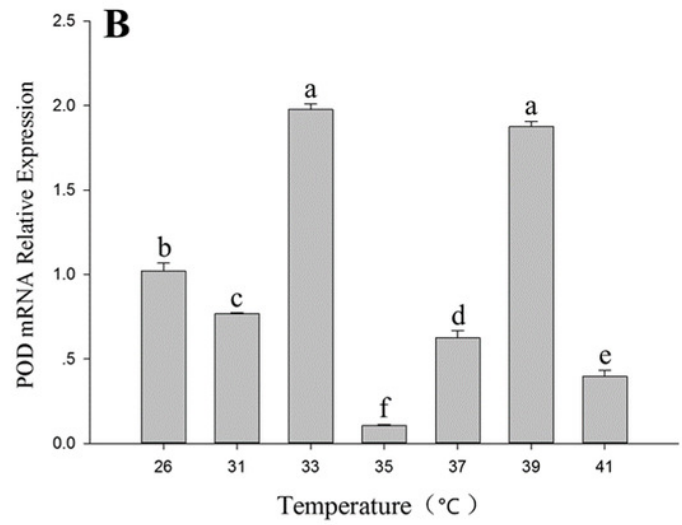
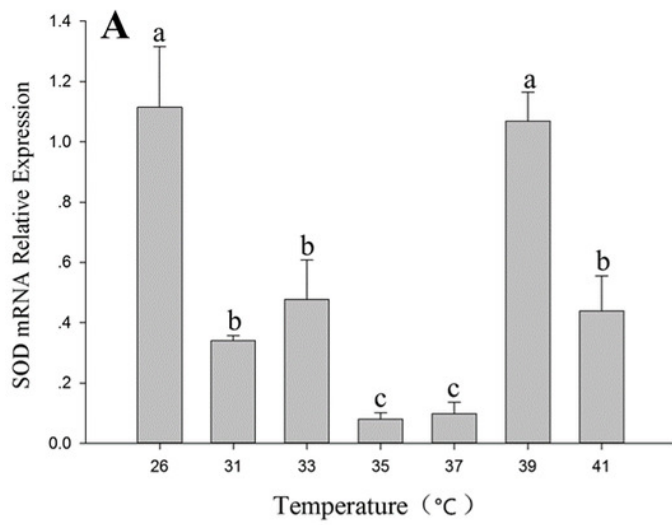
Panels: (A) SOD, superoxide dismutase; (B) POD, peroxidase; (C) GST, glutathione-S-transferase. *F. occidentalis* was exposed to 35°C for 0.5, 1, and 2 h and then analyzed for enzyme activity. The control group was maintained at 26°C (0 h time point). Columns show the mean ( $\pm$ SE) of four replications, and columns labeled with different letters indicate significance at  $P < 0.05$  in ANOVA (Tukey's b(K) test).



## Figure 3

Effect of high temperature stress on expression of antioxidant genes in 2<sup>nd</sup> instar larvae of *F. occidentalis*.

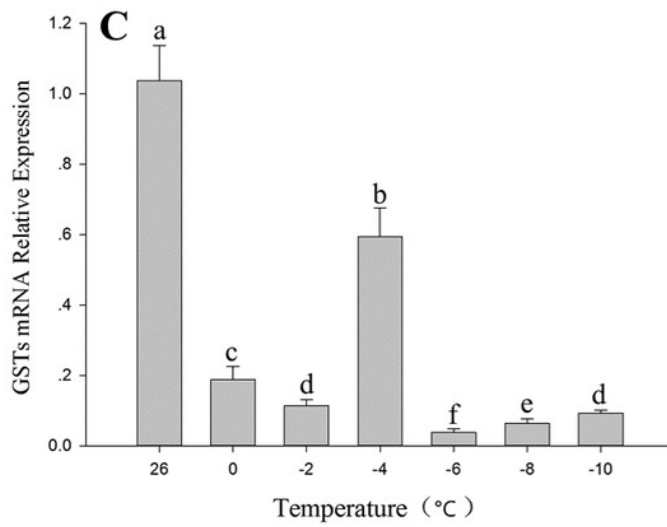
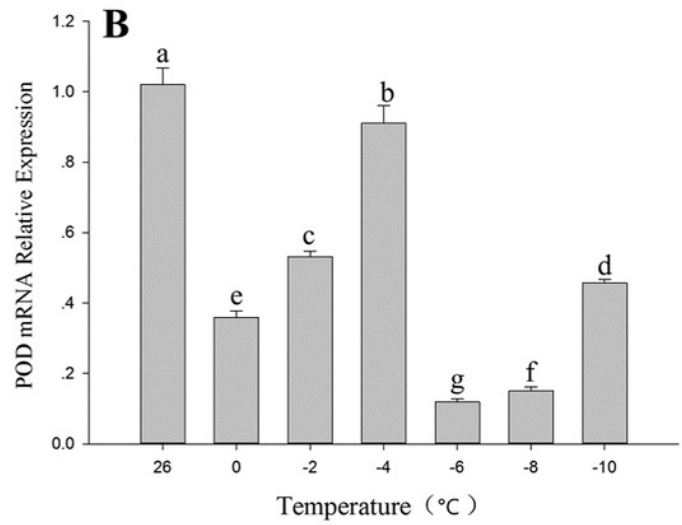
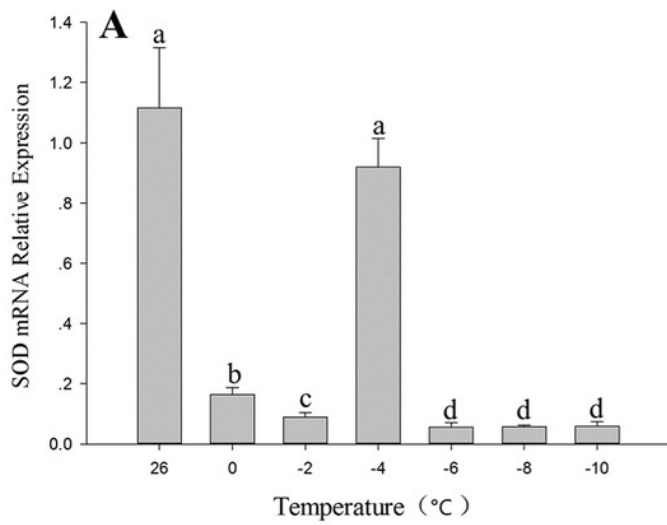
Panels: (A) SOD, superoxide dismutase; (B) POD, peroxidase; (C) GST, glutathione-S-transferase. Larvae were exposed to 31, 33, 35, 37, 39, and 41°C for 1 h in glass tubes; 26°C was used as the control. Expression levels were normalized with respect to *GAPDH*. Values represent the mean ( $\pm$ SE) of four replications, and columns labeled with different letters indicate significance at  $P < 0.05$  in ANOVA (Tukey's b(K) test).



## Figure 4

Effect of low temperature stress on expression of antioxidant genes in 2<sup>nd</sup> instar larvae of *F. occidentalis*.

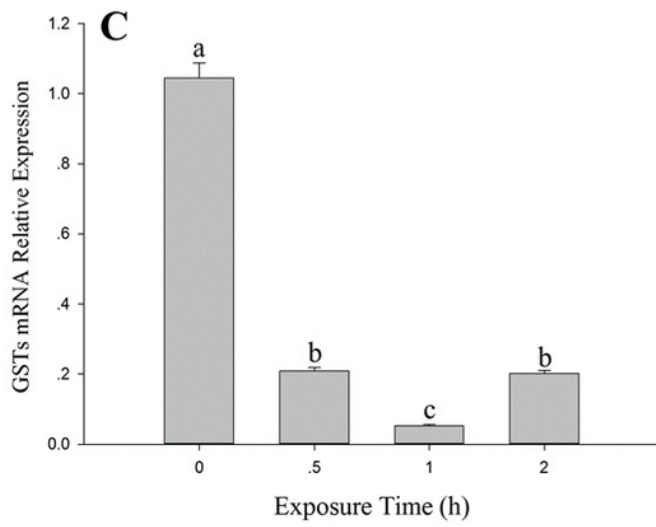
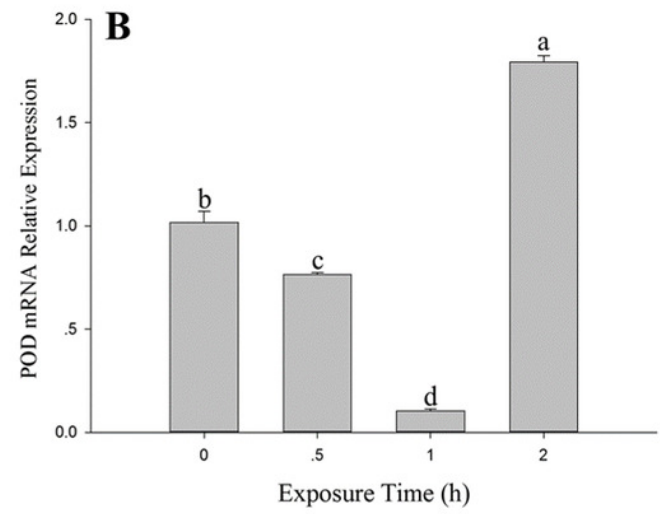
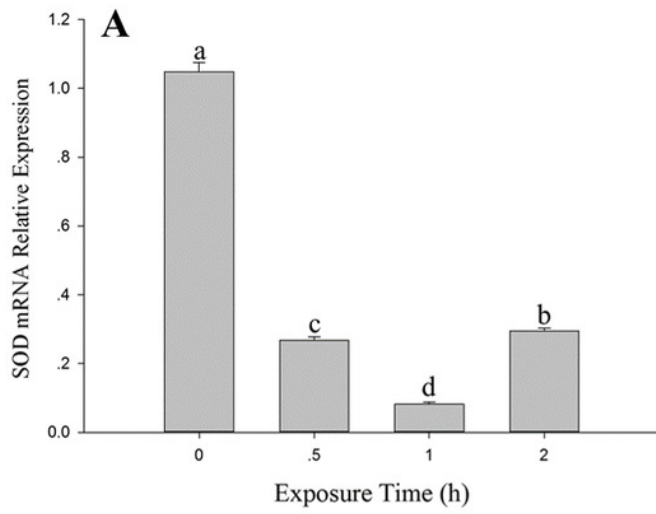
Panels: (A) SOD, superoxide dismutase; (B) POD, peroxidase; (C) GST, glutathione-S-transferase. Larvae were exposed to 0, -2, -4, -6, -8 and -10°C for 1 h in glass tubes; 26°C was used as the control. Expression levels were normalized with respect to *EF-1*. Values represents the mean ( $\pm$ SE) of four replications, and columns labeled with different letters indicate significance at  $P < 0.05$  in ANOVA (Tukey's b(K) test).



## Figure 5

Temporal changes in the expression of antioxidant genes in 2<sup>nd</sup> instar larvae of *F. occidentalis* exposed to 35°C.

Panels: (A) SOD, superoxide dismutase; (B) POD, peroxidase; (C) GST, glutathione-S-transferase. *F. occidentalis* was exposed to 35°C for 0.5, 1, and 2 h and then analyzed for gene expression; the control group was maintained at 26°C (0 h time point). Expression levels were normalized with respect to *GAPDH*. Columns show the mean ( $\pm$ SE) of four replications, and columns labeled with different letters indicate significance at  $P < 0.05$  in ANOVA (Tukey's b(K) test).





## Figure 6

Temporal changes in the expression of antioxidant genes in 2<sup>nd</sup> instar larvae of *F. occidentalis* exposed to -4°C.

Panels: (A) SOD, superoxide dismutase; (B) POD, peroxidase; (C) GST, glutathione-S-transferase. *F. occidentalis* was exposed to 4°C for 0.5, 1, and 2 h and then analyzed for gene expression; the control group was maintained at 26°C (0 h time point). Expression levels were normalized with respect to *EF-1*. Columns show the mean ( $\pm$ SE) of four replications, and columns labeled with different letters indicate significance at  $P < 0.05$  in ANOVA (Tukey's b(K) test).

