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1 **Glycoside hydrolase family 39 β -xylosidases exhibit β -1,2-xylosidase activity for**
2 **transformation of notoginsenosides: a new EC subclass**

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17 Running title: GH 39 β -1,2-xylosidases

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18 **ABSTRACT:** β -1,2-Xylosidase activity has not been recorded as an EC subclass.
19 In this study, phylogenetic analysis and multiple sequence alignments revealed that
20 characterized β -xylosidases of glycoside hydrolase family (GH) 39 were classified
21 into the same subgroup with conserved amino acid residue positions participating in
22 substrate recognition. Protein-ligand docking revealed that seven of these positions
23 were probably essential to bind xylose-glucose, which is linked by a β -1,2-glycosidic
24 bond. Amino acid residues in five of the seven positions are invariant, while those in
25 two of the seven positions are variable with low frequency. Both the wild-type
26 β -xylosidase rJB13GH39 and its mutants with mutation at the two positions exhibited
27 β -1,2-xylosidase activity as they hydrolyzed *o*-nitrophenyl- β -D-xylopyranoside and
28 transformed notoginsenosides R₁ and R₂ to ginsenosides Rg₁ and Rh₁, respectively.
29 The results suggest that all these characterized GH 39 β -xylosidases probably show
30 β -1,2-xylosidase activity, which should be assigned an EC number with these
31 β -xylosidases as representatives.

32 **KEYWORDS:** *β -xylosidase; β -1,2-glycosidic bond; enzyme commission;*
33 *notoginsenosides; glycoside hydrolase family 39*

34 INTRODUCTION

35 Xylans, abundant in many agricultural biomasses, algae, and industrial wastes, are
36 polymerized mainly by xylose with β -1,4-glycosidic or β -1,3-glycosidic linkages.¹⁻³
37 The role of β -1,4-xylosidases and β -1,3-xylosidases is to produce xylose from xylans
38 after degradation by endo-xylanases. Engineered *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* can
39 utilize xylose to produce ethanol, xylitol, lactic acid, and other chemicals.⁴ Therefore,
40 β -xylosidases are of great importance in the food, beverage, bioenergy, feed, and
41 pharmaceutical industries.⁵

42 In addition to xylans, some saponins contain xylosyl moieties at their terminals.
43 *Panax notoginseng*, well known as “Sanqi” in Chinese, is recorded in the
44 Compendium of Materia Medica (Bencao Gangmu) and traditionally used for
45 hemostasis. In China, the plant is primarily cultivated in Yunnan and Guangxi
46 provinces. Both notoginsenosides R₁ and R₂ contain a xylosyl group linked by a
47 β -1,2-glycosidic bond with a glucosyl group (Figure 1).

48 Removal of the xylosyl group from notoginsenosides R₁ and R₂ yields
49 ginsenosides R_{g1} and R_{h1}, respectively, which possess anticancer, antioxidant, and
50 anti-inflammatory activities. Recently, Shin et al.⁶ reported that the β -xylosidase
51 (TtGH39) from *Thermoanaerobacterium thermosaccharolyticum* was the first
52 β -xylosidase exhibiting β -1,4-xylosidase activity as well as the ability to remove the
53 xylosyl group from notoginsenosides R₁ and R₂. Li et al.⁷ also reported that the
54 β -xylosidase (Xln-DT) from *Dictyoglomus thermophilum* could efficiently degrade
55 xylobiose and remove the xylosyl group from notoginsenoside R₁. Both TtGH39 and

56 Xln-DT are members of the glycoside hydrolase family (GH) 39. Shin et al.⁶ and Li et
57 al.⁷ focused on the bioconversion of saponins, but they did not stress the key point that
58 the two β -xylosidases had the ability to hydrolyze β -1,2-glycosidic bonds.

59 To date, β -1,2-xylosidase or notoginsenoside xylohydrolase activity has not been
60 assigned an EC number (<http://www.enzyme-database.org>). Most β -xylosidases are
61 classified as EC 3.2.1.37 as they catalyze the hydrolysis of β -1,4-linked xylosyl
62 moieties from xylo-oligosaccharides. β -1,3-Xylosidases are classified as EC 3.2.1.72,
63 but seldom reported.^{2,3} To determine β -1,2-xylosidase activity, both notoginsenosides
64 and *o*-nitrophenyl- β -D-xylopyranoside are suitable substrates. For example, EC
65 3.2.1.191–195 show five types of ginsenoside glucohydrolases using various
66 ginsenosides as substrates.

67 This study aimed to determine whether other GH 39 β -xylosidases, like TtGH39
68 and Xln-DT, had the ability to hydrolyze β -1,2-glycosidic bonds for transformation of
69 notoginsenosides and further proposed that GH 39 β -xylosidases could be
70 representatives of the new EC subclass, β -1,2-xylosidases or notoginsenoside
71 xylohydrolases.

72

73 MATERIALS AND METHODS

74 **Sequence, Strains, and Materials.** Previously, we obtained a GH 39 β -xylosidase
75 (JB13GH39) from *Sphingomonas* sp. JB13.⁸ The sequence of JB13GH39 can be
76 retrieved from the GenBank database (accession No. MG838204). *Escherichia coli*
77 BL21 (DE3) was purchased from TransGen (Beijing, China). *p*-Nitrophenol (*p*NP)

78 and *p*-nitrophenyl- β -D-xylopyranoside (*p*NPXyl) were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich
79 (St. Louis, MO, USA). Notoginsenosides R₁ and R₂, ginsenosides Rg₁ and Rh₁, and
80 *o*-nitrophenyl- β -D-xylopyranoside (*o*NPXyl) were purchased from YuanYe
81 Bio-Technology (Shanghai, China). Mut Express® II Fast Mutagenesis Kit V2 was
82 purchased from Vazyme Biotech (Nanjing, China).

83

84 **Enzyme Activity toward *o*NPXyl.** Recombinant JB13GH39 (rJB13GH39) was
85 expressed in *E. coli* BL21 (DE3) cells using the *pEASY-E2* vector and purified by
86 Ni²⁺-NTA affinity chromatography. The details of enzyme preparation were described
87 in our previous study.⁸

88 *o*-Nitrophenol is not available to us because of its danger. Therefore, the *p*NP
89 method was used as described previously⁸ to evaluate the activity of rJB13GH39
90 toward *o*NPXyl. One unit of β -1,2-xylosidase activity was defined as the amount of
91 enzyme that releases 1 μ mol of *p*NP per minute at pH 4.5 and 50 °C.

92

93 **Enzymatic Transformation of Notoginsenosides R₁ and R₂.** The 400 μ L (pH
94 4.5) reaction included 10 μ g of rJB13GH39 and 4 mM substrate. The mixture was
95 incubated in a water bath at 30 °C for 24 h. The products were qualitatively detected
96 by electrospray ionization mass spectrometry (ESI-MS) before quantitative analysis.
97 ESI-MS was carried out in positive mode on a quadrupole time-of-flight
98 high-resolution mass spectrometer (6540 series, Agilent Technologies, Santa Clara,
99 CA, USA) with the following parameters: fragmentor, 135 V; capillary, 3500 V;

100 skimmer, 65 V; gas (nitrogen) temperature, 350 °C; drying gas, 8 L/min; and
101 nebulizing gas, 30 psi. For quantitative analysis, the products from notoginsenosides
102 R₁ and R₂ were prepared as previously described⁶ and analyzed by
103 ultra-high-performance liquid chromatography (UHPLC) at 203 nm with a Hypersil
104 ODS column (4.0 mm × 250 mm, 5 μm; Agilent Technologies). The column was
105 eluted at room temperature with 20:80 (v/v) acetonitrile/water at 1.0 mL/min for R₁
106 and R_{g1} and with 20:80 to 55:45 (v/v) acetonitrile/water for 60 min at 1.5 mL/min for
107 R₂ and R_{h1}.

108
109 **Phylogenetic Analysis.** Phylogenetic analysis of GH 39 members was performed
110 by MEGA using the built-in Jones–Taylor–Thornton model for distance matrices
111 calculation and neighbor-joining algorithm for phylogenetic tree construction with
112 1000 bootstrap replications.⁹ A total of 14 identified GH 39 β-xylosidases were
113 selected for phylogenetic analysis: TtGH39 and Xln-DT showing both
114 β-1,4-xylosidase and β-1,2-xylosidase activities for transformation of
115 notoginsenosides;^{6,7} XynB_thesa (accession no. AAA27369 or 1UHV) from
116 *Thermoanaerobacterium saccharolyticum* showing both β-1,4-xylosidase and
117 β-1,2-xylosidase activities using *p*NPXyl and *o*NPXyl as substrates;^{10,11} XynA
118 (AAB87373) and XynB (AAA23063) from *Caldicellulosiruptor saccharolyticus* as
119 well as BxyH (AEE47384) from *Cellulomonas fimi* showing β-1,2-xylosidase activity
120 using *o*NPXyl as substrate;^{12,13} XynB1 (ABI49941 or 2BS9) from *Geobacillus*
121 *stearothermophilus* having solved crystal structure with molecule

122 2,5-dinitrophenyl- β -xyloside as ligand;¹⁴ JB13GH39,⁸ SlpA (AFK86459) from *T.*
123 *saccharolyticum*,¹⁵ XylBH39 (BAB04787) from *Bacillus halodurans*,¹⁶ WSUCF1
124 (EPR27580) from *Geobacillus* sp.,¹⁷ Bxl39A (CAD48308) from *Clostridium*
125 *stercorarium*,¹⁸ Coxyl A (ADQ03734) from *Caldicellulosiruptor owensensis*,¹⁹ and
126 CcXynB2 (AAK24328 or 4EKJ) from *Caulobacter crescentus*^{20,21} showing
127 β -1,4-xylosidase activity.

128

129 **Sequence Analysis.** To illuminate patterns of amino acid conservation, the
130 multiple sequence alignment of the 14 identified GH 39 β -xylosidases were uploaded
131 to the Weblogo server²² to generate sequence logos.

132

133 **Protein Structure Modeling.** The protein homology model of JB13GH39 was
134 built using SwissModel (<http://swissmodel.expasy.org/>), followed by quality
135 estimation with GMQE, QMEAN Z-score, and a local quality plot.

136

137 **Protein-ligand Docking.** The ligand, designated as xylose-glucose, was a
138 compound linked by a β -1,2-glycosidic bond. Xylose-glucose was retrieved from the
139 PubChem database with the accessing number CID 3083150. Docking sites of
140 JB13GH39 were predicted using the Dock Ligands (CDOCKER) protocol by
141 Discovery Studio v2.5 software (Accelrys, San Diego, CA, USA).

142

143 **Site-directed Mutagenesis.** Site-directed mutagenesis was used to substitute

144 Tyr257 and Tyr311 of JB13GH39 with Thr and Pro, designated as mutants
145 Y257(Ps266)T and Y311(Ps322)P, respectively. The mutation was introduced using
146 Mut Express® II Fast Mutagenesis Kit V2 according to the manufacturer's
147 instructions. Two primer sets were designed:
148 ACAGCaccGGCGTCGATGGCGGCTTTCTCGAC and
149 ATCGACGCCggtGCTGTGCGTGGTGACGAAAT for mutant Y257(Ps266)T and
150 ATGGAGCACCAGCccaACGCCGCGCGATGCCGTG and
151 TtggGCTGGTGCTCCATTCGGTGAAATAGAGT for mutant Y311(Ps322)P.
152 Mutated nucleic acids were confirmed by DNA sequencing (Tsingke, Beijing, China).
153 Expression and purification of the mutated enzymes were performed as those of
154 rJB13GH39.

155

156 **Activity of Mutants.** The *p*NP method was used as described previously⁸ to
157 determine the activity of the mutants toward *p*NPXyl. One unit of β -1,4-xylosidase
158 activity was defined as the amount of enzyme that releases 1 μ mol of *p*NP per minute
159 at pH 4.5 and 50 °C. β -1,2-Xylosidase activity of the mutants toward *o*NPXyl and
160 notoginsenosides was detected by *p*NP method and UHPLC, respectively, as that of
161 rJB13GH39.

162

163 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

164 **β -1,2-Xylosidase Activity of rJB13GH39.** rJB13GH39 was successfully
165 expressed and purified as previously described.⁸ The specific activity of rJB13GH39

166 toward *o*NPXyl was 31.7 ± 1.2 U/mg. The ESI-MS spectra indicated that
167 notoginsenosides R₁ and R₂ were converted by the activity of purified rJB13GH39 to
168 ginsenosides R_{g1} and R_{h1}, respectively (Figure S1). Xylose was also observed in
169 those products (Figure S1). As shown in the UHPLC chromatograms, 100.0 % of
170 notoginsenoside R₁ and 90.3 % of notoginsenoside R₂ were individually hydrolyzed
171 (Figures 2A, 3A).

172 β -Xylosidases have been found in 11 families, including GH 1, 3, 5, 30, 39, 43, 51,
173 52, 54, 116, and 120.^{5,23} Why are β -xylosidases so diverse? What are the differences
174 between these β -xylosidases? One explanation may be that β -xylosidases from each
175 glycoside hydrolase family have specific activity toward certain xylose-containing
176 substances. Previous studies have shown that the xylosyl moiety of notoginsenosides
177 R₁ and R₂ can be removed by GH 39 β -xylosidases TtGH39 and Xln-DT.^{6,7} This study
178 confirmed that GH 39 β -xylosidase rJB13GH39 had the ability to degrade
179 notoginsenosides R₁ and R₂. Furthermore, Li et al.⁷ reported that three GH 3
180 β -xylosidases, Tth XyB3, Tpe Xln3, and XlnD, as well as one GH 120 β -xylosidase,
181 Tth Xyl, were unable to degrade notoginsenoside R₁. Additionally, we found that the
182 GH 43 β -xylosidase HJ14GH43 did not function as a β -1,2-xylosidase (data not
183 shown). Therefore, the functional signature of GH 39 β -xylosidases may be their
184 ability to cleave the β -xylose-(1 \rightarrow 2)- β -glucose bond. However, the function is not
185 exclusive to GH 39 β -xylosidases, as the GH 1 β -glucosidase from *Pyrococcus*
186 *furiosus* has β -xylosidase activity and can also convert notoginsenosides R₁ and R₂ to
187 ginsenosides R_{g1} and R_{h1}, respectively.²⁴

188 Transformation of notoginsenosides R₁ and R₂ by GH 39 β -xylosidases seems to
189 be highly efficient. Notoginsenoside R₁ is converted into ginsenoside Rg₁ by GH 39
190 β -xylosidase Xln-DT after 30 min with a corresponding molar conversion yield of 100
191 % in total.⁷ GH 39 β -xylosidase TtGH39 completely converts notoginsenosides R₁
192 and R₂ to ginsenosides Rg₁ and Rh₁ after 4 and 18 h, respectively.⁶ Greater than 90 %
193 of notoginsenosides R₁ and R₂ were hydrolyzed when the reactions occurred at 30 °C
194 for 24 h using rJB13GH39.

195

196 **Sequence and Phylogenetic Analyses.** Previously, GH 39 enzymes were
197 regarded as α -L-iduronidases or β -xylosidases. According to the previous
198 phylogenetic analysis performed by Ali-Ahmad et al.,²⁵ the GH 39 family has four
199 subgroups. In this study, GH 39 enzymes were also classified into 4 subgroups
200 (Figure 4). The results suggest that GH 39 enzymes should show at least 4 types of
201 activity. As shown in Figure 4, subgroup I includes two α -L-iduronidases from *Homo*
202 *sapiens*²⁶ and *Mus musculus*.²⁷ NF2152, in subgroup III from the rumen anaerobic
203 fungus *Neocallimastix frontalis*, was reported to release β -1,2-arabinobiose from
204 sugar beet arabinan and both β -1,2-arabinobiose and α -1,2-galactoarabinose from rye
205 arabinoxylan.²⁸ The GH 39 member in subgroup IV, PslG from *Pseudomonas*
206 *aeruginosa* found in chronic leg ulcers, was found to disrupt biofilm matrix
207 exopolysaccharide in bacteria.²⁹ GH39wh2 from the human gut bacteria *Bacteroides*
208 *cellulosilyticus* was classified in subgroup IV and predicted to harbor

209 endo-glycosidase activity.²⁵ TtGH39, Xln-DT, and JB13GH39, as well as other
210 characterized β -xylosidases, were classified into subgroup II.

211 On the basis of the multiple sequence alignment of the 14 identified GH 39
212 β -xylosidases in subgroup II, conserved amino acid residue positions are shown in
213 Figure 5. According to the alignment and the three GH 39 β -xylosidases
214 XynB_thesa,^{10,11} XynB1,¹⁴ and CcXynB2^{20,21} that have crystal structure data, Glu in
215 position (Ps) 317 corresponds to the catalytic nucleophile, Glu in Ps195 corresponds
216 to the general acid/base residue, and His in Ps88, Phe in Ps150, Asn in Ps194, Phe in
217 Ps201, His in Ps264, Tyr in Ps266, Tyr in Ps322, Trp in Ps356, Phe in Ps362, Glu in
218 Ps364, and Phe in Ps376 correspond to substrate recognition.

219

220 **Protein-ligand Docking.** To uncover which amino acid residue positions are
221 essential for β -1,2-xylosidase activity, protein-ligand docking was performed.

222 The homology model of JB13GH39 was built previously with CcXynB2 as a
223 template.⁸ The quality of the model was high, taking the following values into
224 consideration: 66.5 % sequence identity, 0.78 GMQE score, -1.49 QMEAN Z-score,
225 and fewer than 4 residues (0.8 % of the total residues) showing a score below 0.6 in
226 the local quality plot.⁸

227 The xylose-glucose ligand successfully docked with the catalytic pocket of
228 JB13GH39 with 91 poses (Figure 6). Each pose was analyzed to show the hydrogen
229 bond interactions of amino acid residues with the ligand (Figure 7). The results
230 revealed that His88, Glu189, Tyr257, Glu306, Tyr311, Tyr344, and Glu352 of

231 JB13GH39 bound xylose-glucose with high frequency (Figure 7). These results
232 revealed that the seven conserved amino acid residue positions were probably
233 essential for β -1,2-xylosidase activity.

234 As shown in Figure 5, the positions of His88 (Ps88), Glu189 (Ps195), Glu306
235 (Ps317), Trp344 (Ps356), and Glu352 (Ps364) are not substituted with other amino
236 acid residues, while the positions of Tyr257 (Ps266) and Tyr311 (Ps322) can be
237 substituted with Thr and Pro with low frequency, respectively. As such, it is important
238 to figure out whether β -1,2-xylosidase activity is lost when the positions of Tyr257
239 (Ps266) and Tyr311 (Ps322) are substituted with Thr and Pro, respectively.

240

241 **Expression and Purification of Mutants.** The JB13GH39 residues Tyr257 and
242 Tyr311 were successfully substituted with Thr and Pro, respectively, and confirmed
243 by DNA sequencing (Figure S2). Under the same conditions as those of the
244 expression and purification of rJB13GH39, mutants Y257(Ps266)T and
245 Y311(Ps322)P were expressed in cells and purified to an electrophoretically pure state
246 (Figure S3).

247

248 **Activity of Mutants.** Both Y257(Ps266)T and Y311(Ps322)P showed
249 β -1,4-xylosidase activity, with specific activities of 0.106 ± 0.002 and $28.641 \pm$
250 1.380 U/mg toward *p*NPXyl, respectively. The specific activities of Y257(Ps266)T
251 and Y311(Ps322)P were reduced by 99.7 % and 24.2 %, respectively, compared with
252 that of rJB13GH39 (37.8 ± 0.9 U/mg).⁸ The decrease in the activity of Y257(Ps266)T

253 may be attributed to the function of Y257 (Ps266): the tyrosine enables the catalytic
254 nucleophile to attack the anomeric center correctly.¹⁰

255 Both Y257(Ps266)T and Y311(Ps322)P showed β -1,2-xylosidase activity. The
256 specific activities of Y257(Ps266)T and Y311(Ps322)P toward *o*NPXyl were $0.073 \pm$
257 0.030 and 7.619 ± 0.429 U/mg, respectively. More than 90 % of notoginsenosides R₁
258 and R₂ were converted by purified Y311(Ps322)P to ginsenosides Rg₁ and Rh₁,
259 respectively (Figures 2B, 3B). The rates at which Y311(Ps322)P hydrolyzes
260 notoginsenosides R₁ and R₂ are almost the same as those of rJB13GH39. However,
261 just as there was a substantial reduction in β -1,4-xylosidase activity, a substantial
262 reduction in Y257(Ps266)T β -1,2-xylosidase activity was observed: 57.0 % of
263 notoginsenoside R₁ and 7.5 % of notoginsenoside R₂ were individually hydrolyzed by
264 purified Y257(Ps266)T (Figures 2C, 3C).

265 Phylogenetic analysis revealed that characterized β -1,4-xylosidases and
266 β -1,2-xylosidases of GH 39 were classified into the same subgroup. Multiple
267 sequence alignments revealed that these GH 39 β -xylosidases have conserved amino
268 acid residue positions that participate in substrate recognition. Among these conserved
269 amino acid residue positions, seven were probably essential to xylose-glucose binding
270 revealed by protein-ligand docking. Amino acid residues in five of the seven positions
271 are invariant, while those in two of the seven positions are variable with low
272 frequency. Mutation at the two positions maintained β -1,4-xylosidase and
273 β -1,2-xylosidase activity at the expense of decreased activity. These results suggest
274 that all GH 39 β -xylosidases (GH 39 subgroup II) probably show β -1,2-xylosidase

275 activity for transformation of notoginsenosides. As such, we proposed that GH 39
276 β -xylosidases could be representatives of a new EC subclass.

277 In conclusion, based on molecular analysis, conserved amino acid residue
278 positions of characterized GH 39 β -xylosidases involved in β -1,2-xylosidase activity
279 were revealed. Activity determination showed that both wild-type rJB13GH39 and its
280 mutants exhibited β -1,2-xylosidase activity. These results confirm the cleavage of
281 terminal β -xylose-(1 \rightarrow 2)- β -glucose bond by these GH 39 β -xylosidases for
282 transformation of notoginsenosides, and such cleavage activity should be assigned an
283 EC number. These characterized GH 39 β -xylosidases could be representatives of the
284 new EC subclass.

285

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296

297 **Notes**

298 The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

299

300 **Supporting Information**

301 The Supporting Information is available free of charge on the ACS Publications
302 website at DOI: .**Figure S1** shows the ESI-MS spectra of the enzymatic
303 transformation of notoginsenosides R₁ and R₂ using rJB13GH39. **Figure S2** shows
304 the DNA sequencing results for mutants Y257(Ps266)T and Y311(Ps322)P using the
305 universal sequencing primers T7 and T7t. **Figure S3** shows SDS-PAGE analysis of
306 rJB13GH39 and its mutants Y257(Ps266)T and Y311(Ps322)P.

307

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FIGURE CAPTIONS

Figure 1. The diagram of enzymatic transformation of notoginsenosides R₁ and R₂ to ginsenosides Rg₁ and Rh₁, respectively.

Figure 2. UHPLC analysis for the conversion of notoginsenosides R₁ to ginsenosides Rg₁ using rJB13GH39 (A), Y257(Ps266)T (B), and Y311(Ps322)P (C).

Figure 3. UHPLC analysis for the conversion of notoginsenosides R₂ to ginsenosides Rh₁ using rJB13GH39 (A), Y257(Ps266)T (B), and Y311(Ps322)P (C).

Figure 4. The phylogenetic tree constructed on the basis of GH 39 enzymes.

The enzyme name, accession number, and source are given. Bootstrap values (n = 1000 replicates) are reported as percentages. The scale bar represents the number of changes per amino acid position.

Figure 5. Sequence logos generated on the basis of the multiple sequence alignment of the 14 identified GH 39 β -xylosidases in subgroup II shown in Figure 4.

Arrows show the putative catalytic and substrate recognition residues. Asterisks show the conserved docking positions shown in Figure 7.

Figure 6. Xylose-glucose ligand docking with the catalytic pocket of JB13GH39 with 91 poses.

Hydrogen bonds are represented by green-dashed lines.

Figure 7. Heat plot showing the hydrogen bond interactions of amino acid residues with the 91 poses of the xylose-glucose ligand.

Arrows show the conserved docking positions.

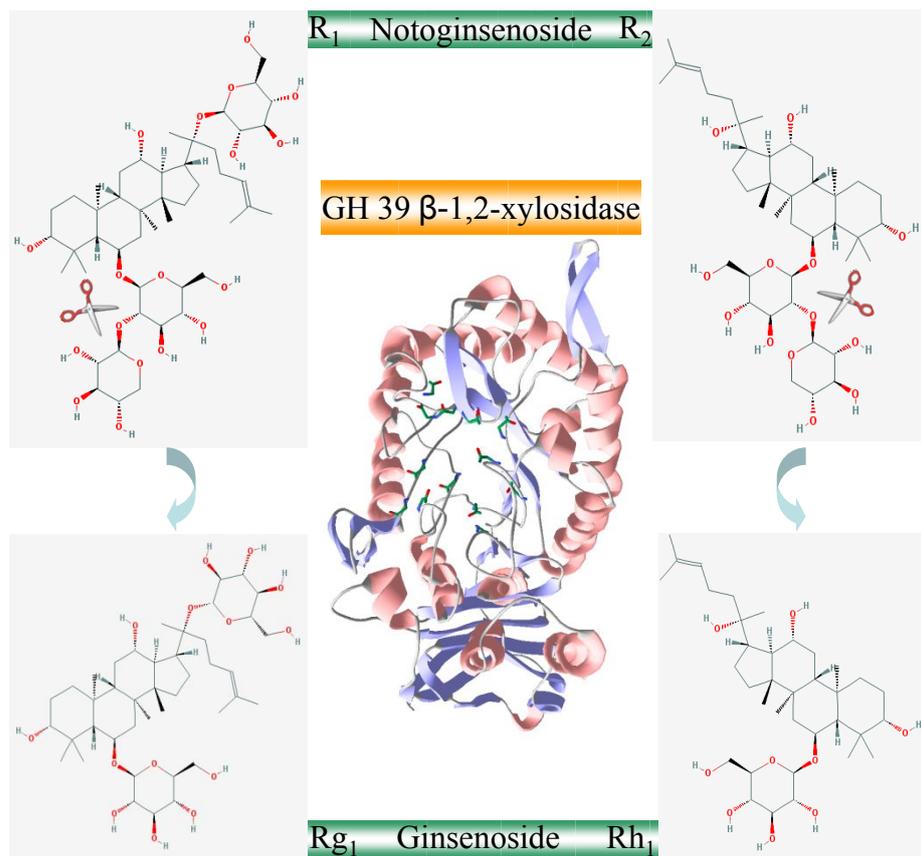
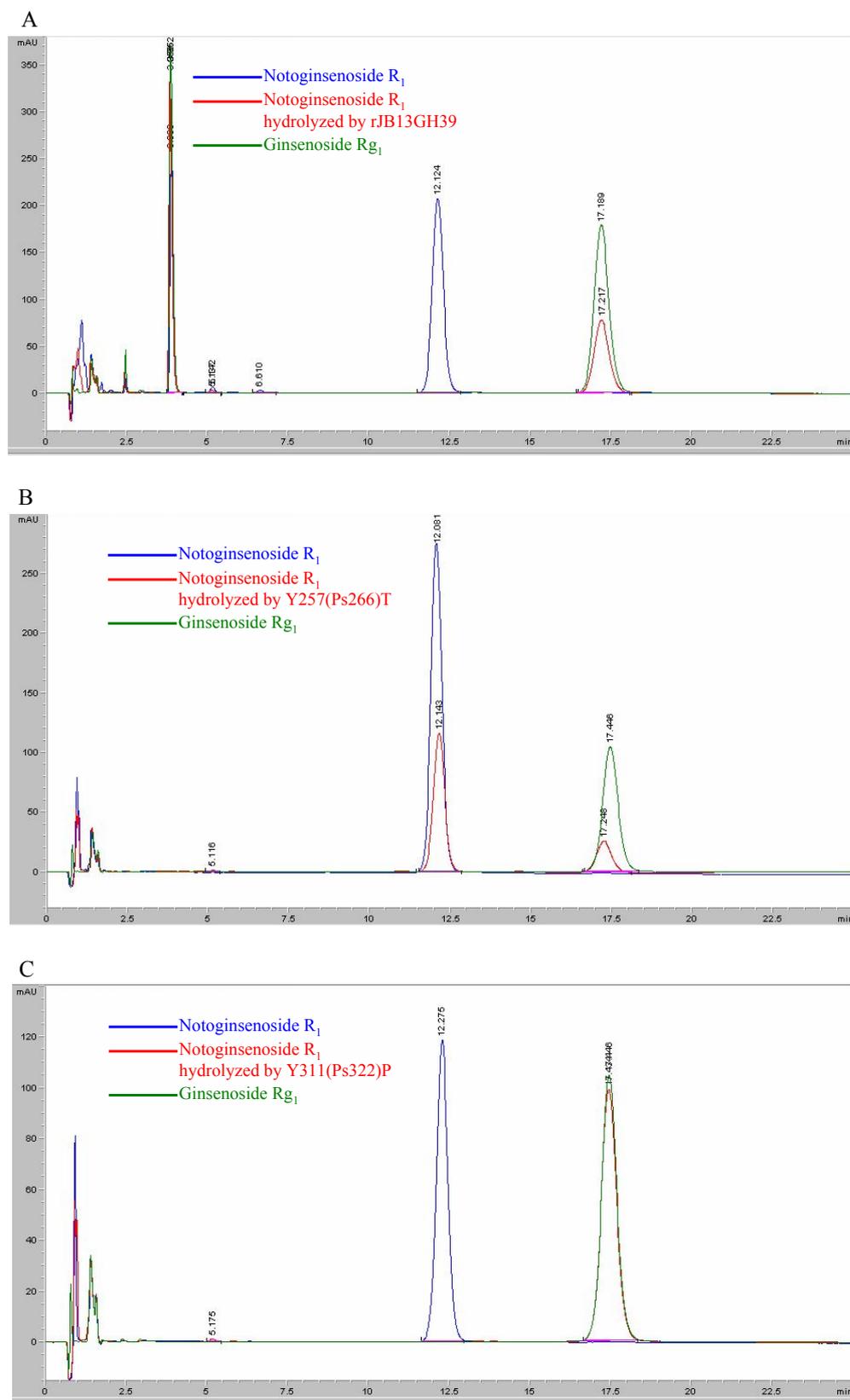
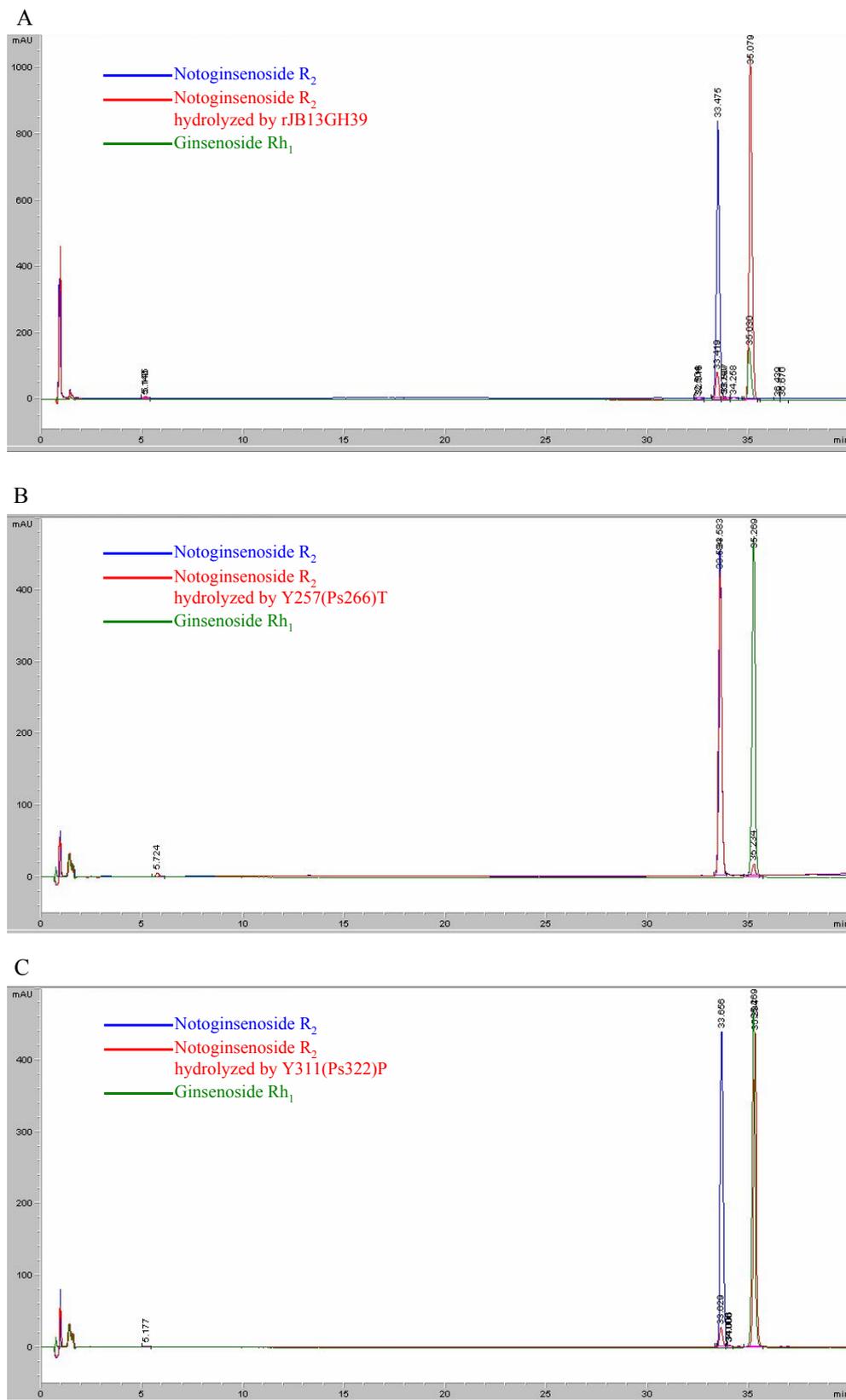


Figure 1.





Figure

3.

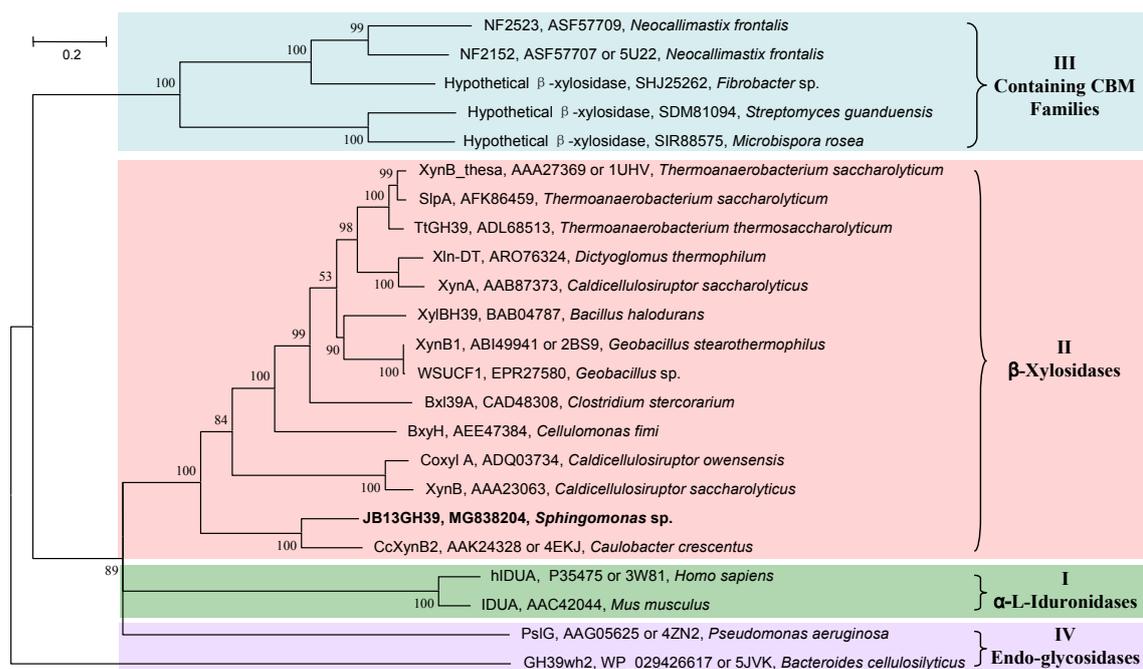


Figure 4.

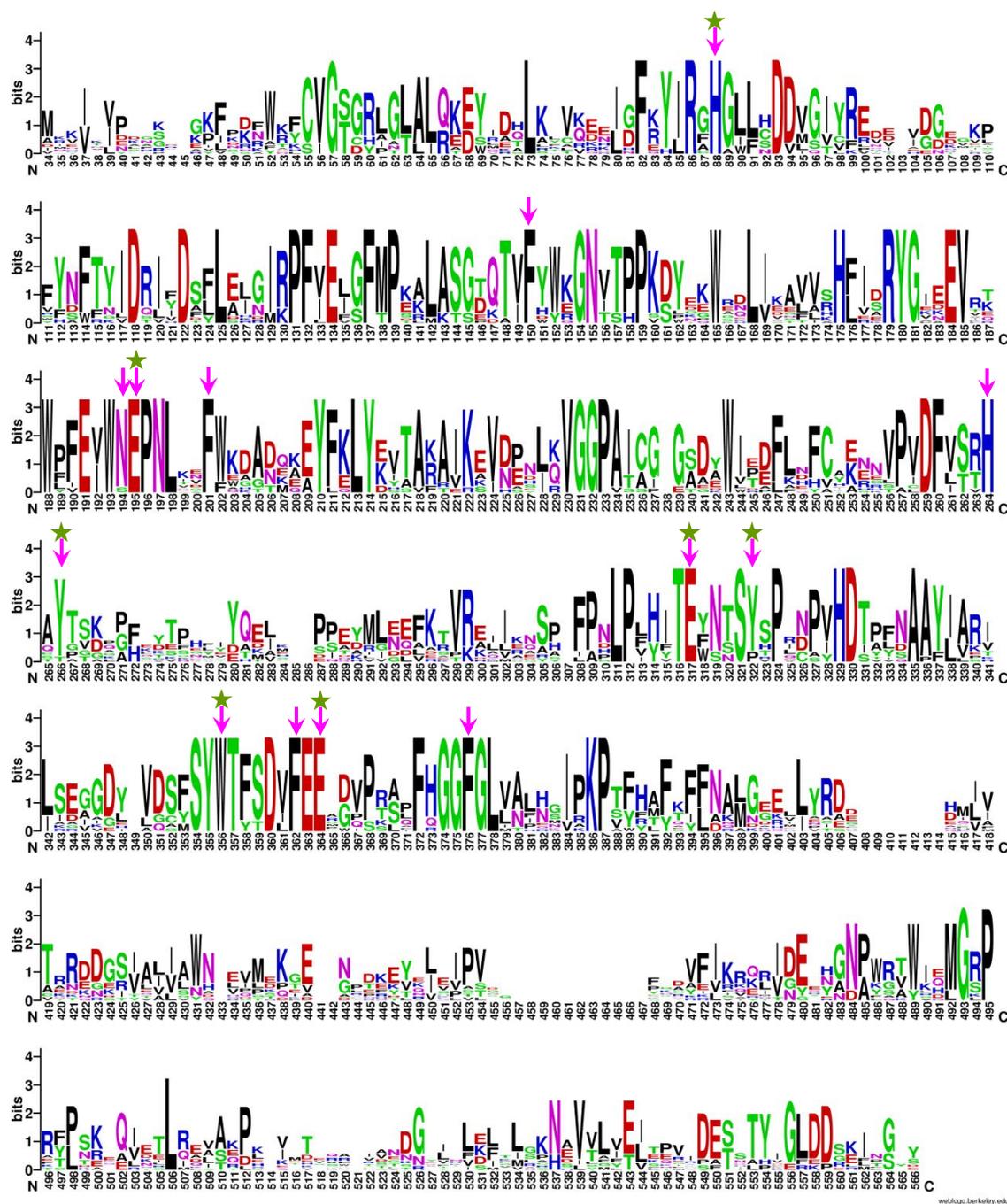


Figure 5.

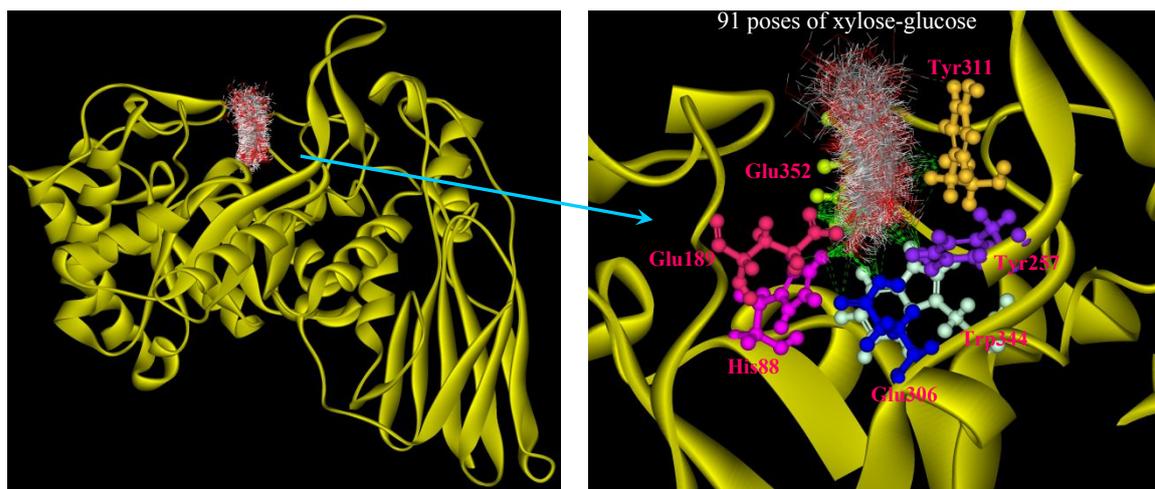


Figure 6.

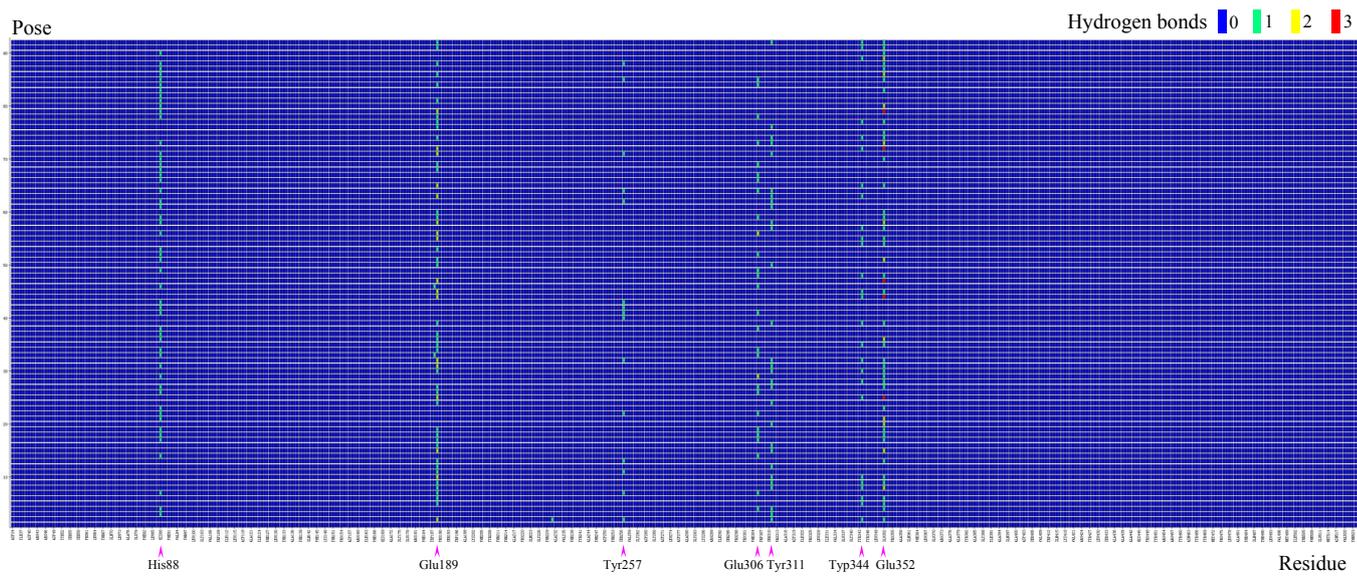
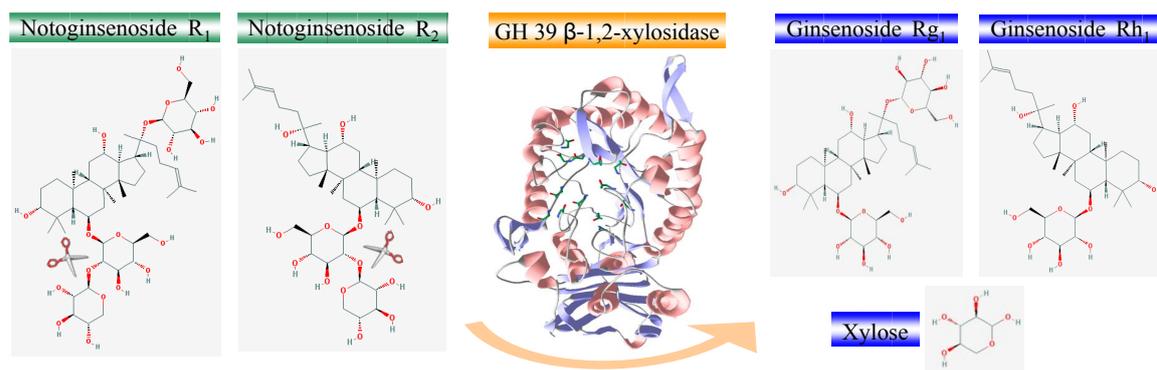


Figure 7.



TOC Graphic