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1 **Synergistic Enzymatic and Microbial Lignin Conversion**

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23 Abstract

24 The utilization of lignin for fungible fuels and chemicals represents one of the most imminent
25 challenges in modern biorefinery. However, bioconversion of lignin is highly challenging due to
26 its recalcitrant nature as a phenolic heteropolymer. This study addressed the challenges by
27 revealing the chemical and biological mechanisms for synergistic lignin degradation by a
28 bacterial and enzymatic system, which significantly improved lignin consumption, cell growth
29 and lipid yield. The *Rhodococcus opacus* cell growth increased exponentially in response to the
30 level of laccase treatment, indicating the synergy between laccase and bacterial cells in lignin
31 degradation. Other treatments like iron and hydrogen peroxide showed limited impact on cell
32 growth. Chemical analysis of lignin under various treatments further confirmed the synergy
33 between laccase and cells at chemical level. ^{31}P nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) suggested
34 that laccase, *R. opacus* cell and Fenton reaction reagents promoted the degradation of different
35 types of lignin functional groups, elucidating the chemical basis for the synergistic effects. ^{31}P
36 NMR further revealed that laccase treatment had the most significant impact for degrading the
37 abundant chemical groups. The results were further confirmed by the molecular weight analysis
38 and lignin quantification by Prussian Blue assay. The cell-laccase fermentation led to a 17-fold
39 increase of lipid production. Overall, the study indicated that laccase and *R. opacus* can
40 synergize to degrade lignin efficiently, likely through rapid utilization of monomers generated by
41 laccase to promote reaction toward depolymerization. The study provided a potential path for
42 more efficient lignin conversion and development of consolidated lignin conversion.

43 1. Introduction

44 As a main constituent of lignocellulosic biomass, lignin is the second most abundant
45 biopolymer in the terrestrial plants.¹⁻⁴ Despite the abundance, the utilization of lignin has been
46 particularly challenging due to its recalcitrance nature.³ In nature, lignin is a complex aromatic
47 heteropolymer composed of phenylpropane units cross-linked via a variety of chemically stable
48 bonds to confer recalcitrance of plant cell wall.^{5,6} The utilization of the lignin in the biorefinery
49 waste streams as feedstock for biofuels and bioproducts represents a unique opportunity to
50 improve cost-effectiveness, carbon and energy efficiency of biorefineries.^{3, 6} Bioconversion
51 recently emerged as a potentially effective strategy for lignin processing.⁷⁻⁹ Despite the lignin
52 recalcitrance, many nature biomass utilization systems including white rot fungi and termites
53 evolved capacity to degrade and utilize lignin.^{6, 7, 10, 11} Among the different systems,
54 *Rhodococcus opacus* bacteria have recently been established with the capacity to convert lignin
55 into lipid,^{8, 9, 12, 13} yet the industrial application of the platform is hindered by the low yield of
56 target compounds. The challenge can be addressed by integrating the enzymatic and chemical
57 depolymerization with bacterial conversion to achieve a simultaneous depolymerization and
58 fermentation (SDF) process. It is thus critical to understand if and how the enzymatic
59 depolymerization can be synergized with bacterial conversion. Moreover, it is also important to
60 achieve in-depth understanding of the scientific principles, chemical, and biological mechanisms
61 involved in lignin degradation in an enzyme-cell combined system. In this article, we aim to
62 address these scientific questions by investigating the potential synergistic enzymatic and
63 microbial conversion of lignin.

64 Lignin depolymerization is the key step to enable the bioconversion of the phenolic
65 heteropolymer, in a way similar to saccharification in cellulose conversion.^{4,6} However, unlike
66 cellulose with the β -1,4-glucosidic link as the chemical bond and glucose as the monomer, lignin

67 contains diverse aromatic monomers and various types of chemical bonds or interunit linkage
68 such as β -O-4, α -O-4/ β -5 (phenylcoumaran), β - β (resinol), dibenzodioxocin, 4-O-5, and 5-5.¹⁴ The
69 requirement of redox reaction to cleave these bonds further complicated the depolymerization
70 process. Previous studies have well characterized three lignin depolymerization system including
71 laccase-based, peroxidase-based and Fenton reaction-based systems.^{6, 7, 15} Model lignin
72 degradation organisms like white rot fungi have all three lignin depolymerization systems, yet
73 bacteria like *Rhodococci* generally have one or two of these systems, with a lower efficiency as
74 compared to the white rot fungi and termites. In this research, we will reverse design the
75 mechanisms in natural biomass utilization systems by combining the laccase and Fenton reaction
76 system to evaluate how the combination of enzyme, chemical, and cell treatment will synergize
77 the lignin depolymerization and promote lignin utilization by bacteria.

78 Laccase is chosen for the enzyme-cell system due to its capacity to self-generate radicals,
79 which distinguished laccase-based lignin depolymerization from Fenton reaction and peroxidase
80 (Figure S1). For both Fenton reaction and peroxidase, the reactions will depend on the radicals
81 that are often generated and recycled by other enzymatic systems. Laccase provided a
82 potentially self-sufficient system for lignin degradation. However, the unique mechanism
83 imposed a fundamental scientific question: how would laccase and cell synergize during the
84 lignin utilization? In other words, considering that both polymerization and depolymerization
85 activities exist for laccase, can the cells consume aromatic compounds generated from the lignin
86 oxidation to promote the reaction toward depolymerization? In this article, we addressed these
87 questions by demonstrating the enzyme-cell synergy on lignin degradation at both biological and
88 chemical levels.

89

90 2. Materials and supplies

91 2.1. Lignin, strain and culture medium

92 Kraft lignin (catalog#370959) and laccase from *Trametes versicolor* (catalog# 51639) was
93 purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (St. Louis, MO, USA). *Rhodococcus opacus* PD630 (DSM-
94 44193) was purchased from the Leibniz Institute DSMZ-German Collection of Microorganisms
95 and Cell Cultures (Braunschweig Germany). The *Rhodococcus* Minimal (RM) medium for lignin
96 fermentation was modified from previous publications and described with details in
97 Supplementary Material.¹⁶

98 2.2. Lignin fermentation

99 The seed culture was prepared by inoculating a single colony of *R. opacus* PD630 into 20 mL
100 Tryptic Soy Broth (TSB) medium, and cultivated at 28 °C to OD₆₀₀ 1.5. The cultured strain were
101 harvested by centrifuging and washed twice with equal volume of RM medium without lignin.
102 The washed cells were resuspended in 20 mL RM medium without lignin. 1 mL of resuspended
103 cells was added to 100 mL of lignin fermentation medium. For laccase and Fenton reaction
104 treatments, the enzyme and chemicals were added at the same time of strain inoculation. The
105 fermentation was carried out in 250 mL flask capped with eight layers of cheesecloth and one
106 layer of kraft paper at a shaking speed of 200 rpm to keep the fluent air circulation, which helps
107 to maintain the oxygen in solution. The fermentation was carried out at 28 °C for 144 h.

108 2.3. Lignin concentration analysis by Prussian Blue assay

109 The lignin was completely dissolved by adjusting the pH to 12.5 and the concentration was
110 measured by mixing the dissolved lignin with Prussian Blue reagents and reading the absorbance
111 at 700 nm with UV/vis spectrophotometer.^{17, 18} The detailed method was also presented in
112 Supplementary Material.

113 2.4. Cell concentration determination

114 To determine the number of living cell, 100 μ L of fermentation culture was serial diluted and
115 plated on Tryptic Soy agar plate. The numbers of colonies were counted from the plates and
116 converted to colony forming unit/mL (CFU/mL).

117 2.5. Total lipid extraction

118 Total lipid of the bacterial *R. Opacus* PD630 after lignin fermentation was extracted with
119 chloroform-methanol using modified Folch lipid extraction method.¹⁹ The detailed lipid
120 extraction protocol was described in Supplementary Material.

121 2.6. Lignin characterization by gel permeation chromatography

122 The lignin gel permeation chromatography (GPC) analysis was performed after acetylation
123 on a PSS-Polymer Standards Service (Warwick, RI, USA) GPC SECurity 1200 system, featuring
124 Agilent HPLC 1200 components equipped with four Waters Styragel columns (HR1, HR2, HR4
125 and HR6) and an UV detector (270 nm) as described in our previous publications.⁹

126 2.7. Lignin structure analysis by nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR)

127 All the NMR experiments were carried out at a Bruker Avance III 400-MHz NMR
128 spectrometer. Heteronuclear single quantum coherence (HSQC) and ³¹P NMR measurements of
129 lignin samples were carried out following literature methods, as described in Supplementary
130 material.^{20,21}

131

132 3. Result and Discussion

133 3.1. Laccase treatment significantly promote the cell growth on lignin

134 Laccase treatment significantly promoted the cell growth of *R. opacus* PD630 on lignin. As
135 shown in Fig. 1A, the laccase treatment significantly promoted the PD630 cell growth on kraft
136 lignin as the sole carbon source. The CFU (colony-forming unit) of *R. opacus* PD630 cells after
137 six days of growth increases exponentially in response to the activity of laccase in the enzyme-
138 cell system. The cell growth was very slow without laccase treatment due to the relatively low
139 initial inoculation. However, with the increased concentration of laccase, the CFU after six days
140 of cultivation can achieve an exponential increase to 1.85×10^7 /mL at 2 U/mL of laccase
141 treatment. Considering that kraft lignin is mostly insoluble, laccase treatment might lead to the
142 depolymerization and solubilization of lignin to provide more carbon source for *R. opacus*
143 PD630 cells, which in turn promoted the cell growth. The result clearly indicated the synergy
144 between laccase and cells, and such synergy was confirmed by further chemical analysis.

145 3.2. Fenton reaction has less synergy with cell system

146 As aforementioned, Fenton reaction is another type of widely studied lignin degradation
147 mechanisms.⁷ Fenton reaction is believed to play an important role for lignin deopolymerization in
148 termite gut and wood-degrading fungus.^{7, 22-24} We therefore examined if synergistic effect can be
149 achieved for laccase treatment and Fenton reaction during bacterial lignin conversion. The
150 classic model for Fenton reaction is that ferrous iron is oxidized by hydrogen peroxide to ferric
151 iron, forming hydroxyl radical which could attack lignin. Considering that some iron ions may
152 lead to the precipitation of lignin, the chelated iron ions using EDTA were also used in the
153 Fenton reaction experiment. Taken these into considerations, different types of iron ions and
154 H₂O₂ were combined with laccase to study their effect on lignin conversion by *R. opacus* PD630.
155 As compared to the laccase plus cell treatment, different types of iron ions have limited effects in

156 promoting cell growth when combined with laccase plus *R. opacus* PD630 cell (Figure 1B).
157 While all types of iron-laccase combination treatment increased the CFU at six days after
158 fermentation, the impacts on cell growth is marginal as compared to that of laccase plus cell
159 treatment. In addition, there was no significant difference observed in cell growth among
160 different types of iron used in the treatment. Even though some synergy can be found for Fenton
161 reaction, laccase, and cell system, the results indicated that laccase by itself has a much stronger
162 synergy with *R. opacus* PD630 for cell growth on lignin as compared to that of Fenton reaction.

163 Furthermore, study of Fenton reaction alone with cells demonstrated a much more limited
164 synergistic effect for cell growth ($\text{H}_2\text{O}_2 + \text{Fe}^{2+}$) as compared to that of laccase and cells. To
165 reveal that if this limited effects of Fenton reaction on lignin conversion was caused by the
166 radical elimination by catalase, we detected the catalase activities under different conditions. The
167 results indicated that *R. opacus* PD630 did not express significant catalase during lignin
168 fermentation (Figure S2). In nature, Fenton reaction depends on the quinone and other mediators,
169 as well as the enzyme system to regenerate these mediators, to eventually reduce the ferric iron
170 to ferrous iron for the sustainable reaction. In addition, iron catalyzed radicals are necessary for
171 effective Fenton reaction. The relatively limited synergistic effects between laccase and Fenton
172 reaction might be due to the lack of a sustainable radical or chemical mediator regeneration
173 system. Moreover, it seems that the radicals generated by laccase didn't contribute significantly
174 to the Fenton reaction. The synergy as shown by cell growth was further confirmed by the
175 chemical analysis of lignin structure during the fermentation.

176 3.3. Changes of lignin molecular weight during cell-laccase co-fermentation

177 Comprehensive lignin characterization was carried out to determine the key factors
178 contributing to synergistic effects between laccase and *R. opacus* PD630 cells. GPC analysis was

179 carried out to evaluate the changes of molecular weight under different fermentation
180 conditions.²⁵ Five different conditions were compared as shown in Table 1 and Table 2, and
181 these conditions included reference lignin sample without any bacterial or laccase treatment (no
182 cell, Treatment I), lignin after the bacterial fermentation (cell only, Treatment II), lignin after
183 bacterial fermentation with laccase treatment (cell + laccase, Treatment III), lignin after bacterial
184 fermentation with laccase and ferrous iron treatment (cell + laccase + Fe^{2+} , Treatment IV), and
185 lignin after bacterial fermentation with laccase and Fenton reaction treatment (cell + laccase +
186 Fe^{2+} + H_2O_2 , Treatment V). These five fermentation conditions represented different
187 combination of bacterial, enzymatic and chemical treatments, including PD630 only, PD630 with
188 laccase enzyme, and PD630 with both laccase and Fenton reaction.

189 As shown in Table 1, PD630 plus laccase treatment (Treatment III) led to the most
190 significant increase in molecular weight as compared to the cell-only (Treatment II) and no-cell
191 reference (Treatment I). The number average molecular weight (M_n) for cell-only fermentation
192 (Treatment II) was not significantly different from no-cell reference (Treatment I), indicating
193 that *R. opacus* PD630 has limited capacity for lignin depolymerization. However, a significant
194 increase in M_n and M_w was observed when adding laccase into the fermentation (Treatment III vs.
195 Treatment II). No significant differences in M_n were found among Treatment III, IV and V,
196 indicating limited synergy of Fenton reaction and laccase on lignin degradation. In addition, even
197 though polydispersity index and weight average molecular weight (M_w) had relatively larger
198 variation, the trends were the same as that of M_n , where *R. opacus* PD630 and laccase together
199 led to the most significant increase of molecular weight. The slightly decrease of M_w for samples
200 with Treatment V (cell, laccase, Fe^{2+} , and H_2O_2) was probably due to the effects of Fenton
201 reaction to promote the degradation of some high molecular weight lignin. The results was

202 consistent with the slightly increased cell growth upon laccase, Fe^{2+} and H_2O_2 treatment as well
203 as the functional group degradation data in the later part of the study.

204 The overall increase of lignin molecular weight upon cell and laccase treatment could be due
205 to two reasons. On one side, laccase treatment might have significantly improved the usage of
206 low molecular weight lignin, when combined with *R. opacus* PD630 fermentation. On the other
207 side, the increase of M_w and M_n might also be due to the lignin polymerization caused by laccase.
208 The laccase and cell synergy might have various impacts on different types of lignin. For low
209 molecular weight lignin, the synergy between cell and laccase might have promoted the lignin
210 degradation and subsequent consumption of degraded products. The rapid consumption of low
211 molecular weight lignin could promote cell growth and leave high molecular weight lignin in the
212 system. The overall effects will be both less low molecular weight lignin and potential re-
213 arrangement of high molecular weight lignin structure. Nevertheless, an additional control
214 experiment indicated that GPC analysis of laccase-only treated lignin showed a similar elution
215 profile of gel permeation chromatograph as compared to the untreated control lignin (Figure S3),
216 suggesting no considerable difference in the molecular weights of total lignin after laccase-only
217 treatment. In addition, the increased cell growth and lignin consumption, as well as the
218 subsequent NMR analysis all suggested that laccase and *R. opacus* PD630 synergy could have
219 led to more efficient consumption of low molecular weight lignin. The consumption of low
220 molecular weight lignin could result in relatively more high molecular weight lignin in the
221 fermentation system, and the composition changes well correlated with the increased M_n and M_w .

222 3.4. Laccase and *R. opacus* PD630 cell synergized lignin degradation as revealed by functional
223 group contents

224 In complementary to GPC analysis, ^{31}P NMR spectra of the lignin samples from the
225 aforementioned five treatments were analyzed to evaluate how laccase, cell, and Fenton reaction
226 impacted the lignin degradation (Table 2). The changes of hydroxyl group contents in lignin was
227 determined by ^{31}P NMR spectra of the lignin derivatized with TMDP (2-chloro-4,4,5,5-
228 tetramethyl-1,3,2-dioxaphospholane) as described in the Materials and supplies section. TMDP
229 reacts with the hydroxyl groups of lignin to form phosphitylated derivatives that can be detected
230 by ^{31}P NMR.²⁰ In particular, the aliphatic hydroxyl, phenolic, and carboxylic acids groups of
231 lignin were identified based on characteristic chemical shifts²⁵ and then quantified by peak
232 integration as shown in Table 2.

233 *R. opacus* PD630 cell, laccase, and Fenton reaction could all lead to lignin degradation as
234 indicated by decreased functional group contents from ^{31}P NMR analysis. As shown in Table 2,
235 *R. opacus* PD630 cell-only treatment (Treatment II vs. I) resulted in a substantial decrease of β -5
236 condensed phenolic OH and carboxylic OH groups, while other OH functional groups barely
237 degraded. The results suggested that *R. opacus* PD630 alone could cause lignin structural
238 changes, yet the lignin degradation capacity is very limited in terms of the types of chemical
239 bonds and the degree of functional group reduction. With the addition of laccase into
240 fermentation using *R. opacus* PD630 (Treatment III vs. II), the lignin had a further significant
241 decrease in the contents of aliphatic OH and guaiacyl phenolic OH groups, the two most
242 abundant hydroxyl groups in kraft lignin. For example, the degradation of aliphatic OH group
243 was increased from 2.5% (Treatment II, cell-only) to 21% (Treatment III, cell + laccase).
244 Moreover, the addition of Fenton reaction agents (Treatment IV and V) led to no further decrease
245 of these functional groups (except for carboxylic OH group at the treatment V). As compared to
246 the untreated control lignin, a slight decrease of aliphatic and guaiacyl phenolic OH groups was

247 observed in laccase-only treated lignin, as revealed by ^{31}P NMR analysis (Figure S4). Lund and
248 Ragauskas also observed a decrease in the content of condensed and guaiacyl phenolic groups
249 upon treatment of lignin with laccase alone.²⁶ In summary, the results revealed that the enhanced
250 lignin hydroxyl groups decrease was mainly due to laccase combined *R. opacus* PD630 cell
251 fermentation, suggesting the synergy of laccase with *R. opacus* PD630 cell treatment for the
252 lignin degradation.

253 The two dimensional (2D) ^1H - ^{13}C HSQC was another method used to understand the
254 mechanism of lignin degradation. HSQC spectra of lignin were measured for the aforementioned
255 treatments. Signals from guaiacyl (G) and *p*-hydroxyphenyl (H) units were readily observed in
256 the aromatic regions (Fig. S5), confirming the lignin as a typical G/H type softwood lignin with
257 G as the major monolignol units. Semi-quantitative analysis of HSQC spectra showed that the
258 cell plus laccase (Treatment III) treated lignin had a slightly decrease of H unit (~4 %) and
259 resinol subunits (~1.6 %) when compared to the control lignin sample, suggesting preferable
260 degradation of these lignin structures in the treated lignin. In addition, the cell plus laccase
261 treatment also resulted in a decrease of ~4.7 % in the relative abundance of end group cinnamyl
262 alcohol. The reduction of cinnamyl alcohol can partially contribute to the decrease of aliphatic
263 hydroxyl group content, which further supported the ^{31}P NMR results that the lignin from the cell
264 plus laccase treatment (Treatment III) had the lowest aliphatic hydroxyl group content.

265 Overall, the results revealed synergistic lignin degradation by *R. opacus* PD630 cell, laccase,
266 and Fenton reaction. Among the different treatments, the fermentation with laccase and cell
267 together led to the significant degradation of the most abundant functional groups in lignin such
268 as aliphatic OH and guaiacyl phenolic OH. The results indicated that laccase and *R. opacus*
269 PD630 could synergistically promote lignin degradation, which was consistent with the increased

270 cell growth (Figure 1), lignin molecular weight upon laccase treatment (Table 1), and Prussian
271 Blue assay (Figure 2A). As shown in Figure 2A, lignin degradation was significantly improved
272 when fermented with both laccase and *R. opacus* PD630 cell.

273 3.5. Simultaneous Depolymerization and Fermentation (SDF) significantly improved the lipid
274 production

275 It has been established that *R. opacus* PD630 fermentation of lignin produces lipid, including
276 TAG (triacylglycerol) as the biodiesel precursor.⁸ The SDF by the cell-laccase system not only
277 promoted the cell growth and lignin degradation, but also led to significantly increased lipid
278 production by 17 fold to 145 mg/L on insoluble kraft lignin (Figure 3B). The increase of lipid
279 content suggests that efficiently degraded lignin monomers provide *R. opacus* cells with
280 sufficient carbon source to accumulate lipid.

281 3.6. Potential mechanisms for synergy between laccase and cells

282 The NMR and lignin quantification analysis revealed synergistic degradation of lignin by
283 both *R. opacus* PD630 cells and laccase with the following important features. First, the
284 degradation of lignin by *R. opacus* PD630, laccase, and Fenton reaction were functional group
285 specific. Unlike cellulose degradation with glucose as the single subunit, lignin is heteropolymer
286 with diverse aromatic monomer units.^{5,6} These different monomers were further connected by
287 various types of chemical bonds and linkages.² The changes of various OH functional groups as
288 shown in Table 2 indicated that *R. opacus* PD630, laccase, and Fenton reaction each could
289 favorably degrade different chemical structures, which might be the foundation for synergistic
290 effects for cell-enzyme fermentation. Second, based on ³¹P NMR analysis, laccase played an
291 essential role for lignin degradation, because the enzyme specifically degraded both aliphatic OH
292 and guaiacyl phenolic OH groups, the two types of most abundant hydroxyl groups in lignin.^{27,28}

293 Third, the strong synergy of laccase and *R. opacus* cells on lignin degradation indicated that the
294 efficient consumption of degradation products generated by laccase promoted the
295 depolymerization direction of the reaction. Four aspects of data were consistent to support the
296 conclusion including the degradation of different hydroxyl functional groups, the significant
297 improvement of cell growth upon laccase treatment, the increases in molecular weight, and the
298 overall higher lignin consumption by the cell-laccase treatment. These features could be
299 exploited for designing efficient conversion or modification of lignin toward various functional
300 products.

301 **4. Conclusion**

302 Overall, the study unveiled an effective synergy between *R. opacus* PD630 cells and laccase
303 for lignin degradation at both chemical processing and cell growth level. As compared to Fenton
304 reaction, laccase treatment in the study has a much more significant impact on lignin degradation.
305 The synergistic lignin degradation for laccase and cells was revealed at both chemical and
306 biological level in terms of selective degradation of different functional groups and increased cell
307 growth. The mechanistic study could enable a SDF process to significantly improve lignin
308 utilization and cell growth. Laccase thus not only serves as a good enzyme for SDF, but also can
309 potentially be engineered for consolidated lignin processing.

310

311

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378 **Figure Legend**379 **Table 1.** GPC analysis of lignin molecular weights upon different treatments.380 **Table 2.** Decrease of lignin functional groups after different treatments.

381 **Figure 1.** The increase of cell growth in response to laccase and other treatments. A. laccase
382 promotes *R. opacus* PD630 cells growth using lignin as carbon source. *R. opacus* PD630 showed
383 an exponential increase of cell growth associated with laccase concentration. B. Fenton reaction
384 has limited synergistic effect with laccase treatment to promote *R. opacus* PD630 cells growth in
385 lignin fermentation. Except the no laccase control, all treatments contain laccase at a
386 concentration of 1.0 U/ml in fermentation medium. Control: only the *R. opacus* PD630 cells
387 were added to fermentation medium; H₂O₂+Fe²⁺: *R. opacus* PD630 cells supplied with 0.2 mM
388 FeSO₄ and 0.067 mM H₂O₂; Laccase: *R. opacus* PD630 cells supplied with laccase; Laccase+Fe²⁺:
389 *R. opacus* PD630 cells supplied with laccase, 0.2 mM FeSO₄ and 0.067 mM H₂O₂;
390 Laccase+FeCl₃: *R. opacus* PD630 cells supplied with laccase, 0.2 mM FeCl₃ and 0.067 mM
391 H₂O₂; Laccase+ NaFeEDTA: *R. opacus* PD630 cells supplied with laccase, 0.2 mM NaFeEDTA
392 and 0.067 mM H₂O₂.

393 **Figure 2.** Lignin degradation and lipid yield of *R. opacus* PD630 with and without laccase
394 treatment. A, Laccase treatment promoted the lignin degradation as indicated in Prussian blue
395 assay. B, Laccase increased lipid yield from *R. opacus* PD630. For the control group, *R. opacus*
396 PD630 cells was added to fermentation medium without laccase treatment. For laccase treatment,
397 the cells and laccase were added to fermentation medium simultaneously.


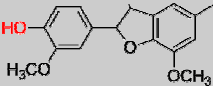
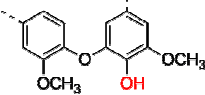
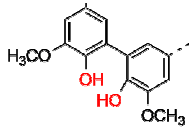



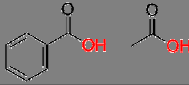
398 Table 1. GPC analysis of lignin molecular weight upon different treatments.

Lignin Sample	M_n	M_w	Polydispersity index
I ^a	1.73×10^3	8.08×10^3	4.66
II ^b	1.67×10^3	7.58×10^3	4.55
III ^c	2.12×10^3	2.68×10^4	12.7
IV ^d	2.15×10^3	3.30×10^4	15.3
V ^e	2.12×10^3	1.90×10^4	8.98

399 I^a No cell; II^b Cell only; III^c Cell + Laccase; IV^d Cell + Laccase + Fe²⁺; V^e Cell + Laccase + Fe²⁺ + H₂O₂.

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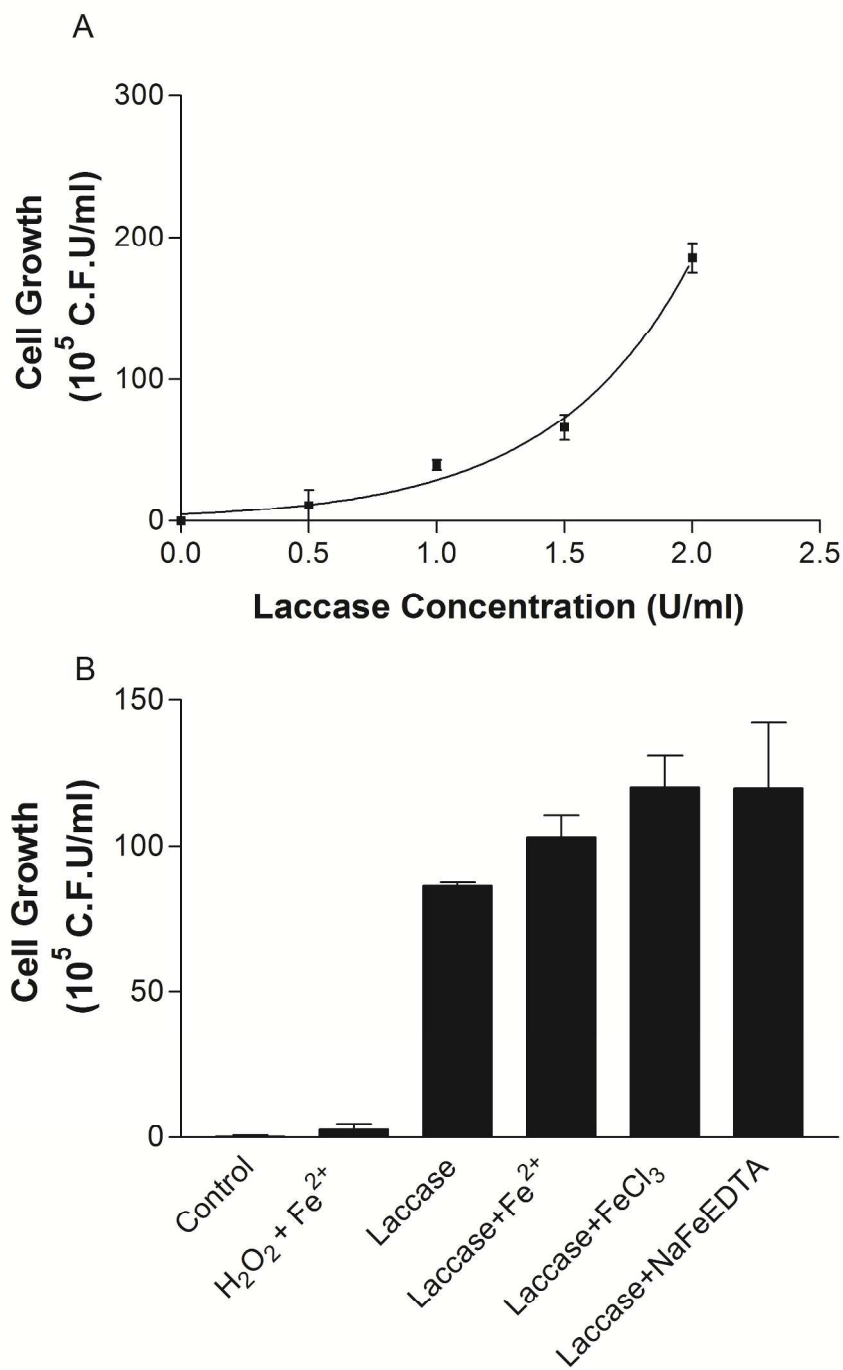
401 Table 2. Decrease of lignin functional groups after different treatments.

402	Functional Group	Integration region (ppm)	Examples	hydroxyl contents/(mmol/g lignin)					
				I ^a	II ^b	III ^c	IV ^d	V ^e	
403	Aliphatic OH	150.0-145.2		2.38	2.32	1.88	1.98	1.99	
404		β-5	144.6-142.9		0.15	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.01
405	C ₅ substituted condensed Phenolic OH	4-O-5	142.9-141.6		0.01	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.01
406		5-5	141.6-140.1		0.00	0.05	0.02	0.03	0.03
407	Guaiacyl phenolic OH	140.1-138.8		1.32	1.40	0.98	1.00	1.02	
408	Catechol type OH	138.8-138.2		0.04	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.02	
409	<i>p</i> -hydroxy-phenyl-OH	138.2-137.3		0.08	0.06	0.02	0.03	0.03	
410	Carboxylic acid OH	136.6-133.6		0.50	0.15	0.16	0.29	0.06	

413 I^a No cell; II^b Cell only; III^c Cell + Laccase; IV^d Cell + Laccase + Fe²⁺; V^e Cell + Laccase + Fe²⁺ + H₂O₂.

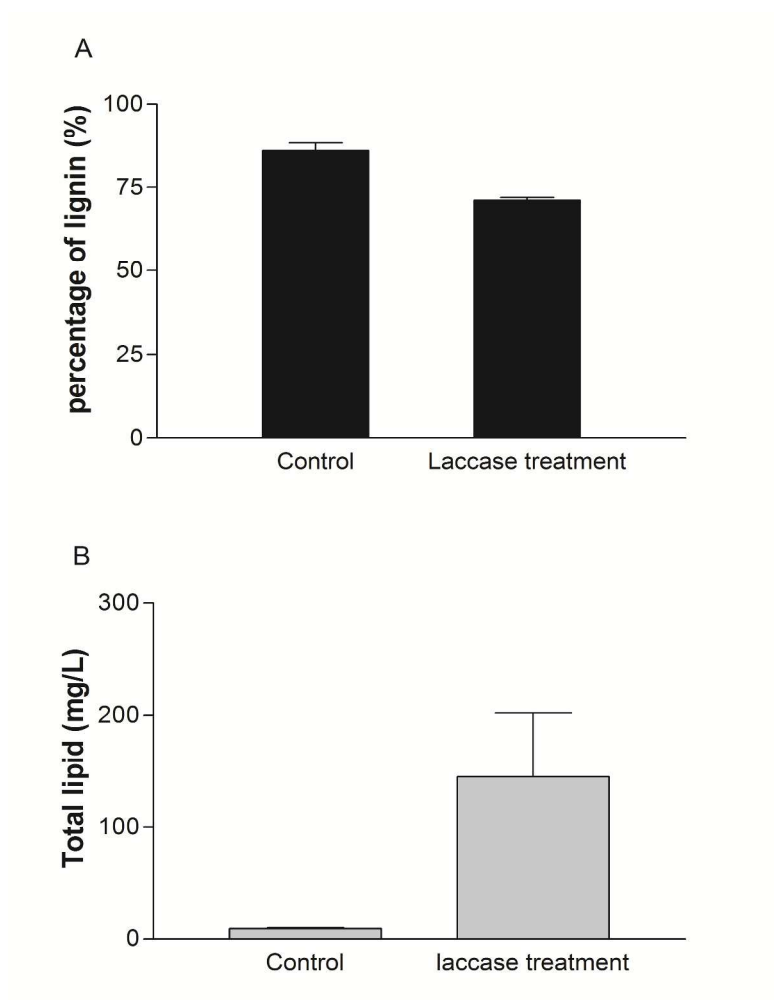
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415 Figure 1.



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417 Figure 2.



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