

# Response of phytohormone mediated plant homeodomain (PHD) family to abiotic stress in upland cotton (*Gossypium hirsutum* spp.)

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## Research article

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# Abstract

**Background:** The sequencing and annotations of cotton genomes provide powerful theoretical support to unravel more physiological and functional information. Plant homeodomain (PHD) protein family has been reported to be involved in regulating various biological processes in plants. However, their functional studies have not yet been carried out in cotton.

**Results:** In this study, 108, 55, and 52 *PHD* genes were identified in *G. hirsutum*, *G. raimondii*, and *G. arboreum*, respectively. A total of 297 *PHD* genes from three cotton species, *Arabidopsis*, and rice were divided into five groups. We performed chromosomal location, phylogenetic relationship, gene structure, and conserved domain analysis for *GhPHD* genes. *GhPHD* genes were unevenly distributed on each chromosome, however, more *GhPHD* genes were distributed on At\_05, Dt\_05, and At\_07 chromosomes. *GhPHD* proteins depicted conserved domains, and *GhPHD* genes exhibiting similar gene structure were clustered together. Further, whole genome duplication analysis indicated that purification selection greatly contributed to the functional maintenance of *GhPHD* gene family. Expression pattern analysis based on RNA-seq data showed that most *GhPHD* genes showed clear tissue-specific spatiotemporal expression patterns elucidating the multiple functions of *GhPHDs* in plant growth and development. Moreover, analysis of *cis*-acting elements revealed that *GhPHDs* may respond to a variety of abiotic and phytohormonal stresses. In this regard, some *GhPHD* genes showed good response against abiotic and phytohormonal stresses. Additionally, co-expression network analysis indicated that *GhPHDs* are essential for plant growth and development, while *GhPHD* genes response against abiotic and phytohormonal stresses may help to improve plant tolerance in adverse environmental conditions.

**Conclusion:** This study will provide useful information to facilitate further research related to the vital roles of *GhPHD* gene family in plant growth and development.

## Background

Plants often face various abiotic and biotic stress conditions. Abiotic stresses include heat, cold, drought, and salinity, whereas biotic stresses mainly come from bacteria, fungi, viruses, and insects. These abiotic and biotic stresses significantly reduce crop quality and productivity world-wide [1, 2]. In order to adapt such unfavorable environment, plants establish a comprehensive mechanisms to combat stress signals and to mitigate their effects on plant growth and development [3]. Phytohormones play significant roles in regulating developmental processes and signal transduction networks that respond to various abiotic and biotic stresses. Brassinosteroid (BR), jasmonate (JA), gibberellin (GA), salicylic acid (SA), and auxin regulate plant growth, development, stress, and defense responses [4-9], but how phytohormones mediate the growth and stress trade-off is unclear.

Zinc finger protein motifs are part of many protein families and widely distributed in eukaryotic organisms. The term “zinc finger” represents the sequence motif in which cysteines and/or histidines coordinate the zinc atom(s) to form the local peptide structure that are required for their specific

functions. The “finger” structural motif has been divided into different types, such as TFIIIA-type zinc finger (EPF1, SUPERMAN) [10, 11], WRKY family (WRKY1, 2, and 3), GATA1-type protein (NTL1) [12, 13], Dof family (Dof1) [14, 15], RING-finger type (COP1) [16], PHD-finger family (AtHAT3.1 and Zmhox1a) [17, 18], LIM family (SF3) [19, 20], and other uncategorized types. Plant homeodomain (PHD) zinc fingers are small reader domains found in several chromatin-binding proteins. In plants, PHD proteins are usually zinc finger proteins with one or more PHD domains, which have a Cys4-His-Cys3 zinc-binding motif consisting of about 60 amino acids [21]. It is worth noting that the numbers of amino acids between cysteine and histidine or between cysteine residues in the PHD domain are conserved, while second amino acid (before the penultimate cysteine residue) is usually an aromatic amino acid, such as tryptophan [22].

Since the discovery of the first PHD protein HAT3.1 in *Arabidopsis*, more PHD proteins have been identified to participate in many physiological and biochemical processes involved in the structure and transcription of chromatin [23]. In *Arabidopsis*, the PHD protein MMD1/DUET is necessary to regulate the progress of meiotic prophase I chromosome [24]. *AtMMD1* (Male meiocyte death 1) is preferentially expressed during male meiosis, *mmd1* mutant plants exhibit meiotic defects and monocytes appear normal until the diakinesis stage show apoptosis signs, which subsequently trigger the death of male meiotic cells [25]. Epigenetic regulation in eukaryotes is performed through complex signal interactions between chromatin markers and small RNA species. *AtVIM1* (Variant in methylation 1) functions in DNA methylation-histone interface to maintain the centromeric heterochromatin in *Arabidopsis* [26]. In addition, PHD proteins are involved in regulating plant response to abiotic stresses and altering plant growth and development. In soybean, six Alfin1-type PHD proteins were identified to respond against salt, cold, drought, and ABA treatment. For instance, *GmPHD2* overexpression plants showed salt tolerance in *Arabidopsis* [27]. *AtVIN3* (Vernalization insensitive 3) protein binds to modified histone *in vitro* to change the binding specificity of PHD-finger domain and accelerate the vernalization reaction *in vivo* [28]. During seed germination, the *AL PHD-PRC1* complex affect seed developmental genes from the active state associated with H3K4me3 to the repressive transcriptional state associated with H3K27me3, thereby promote seed germination [29]. PHD protein GSR1 (Germostatin resistance locus 1) is a member of auxin-mediated genetic network for seed germination and form a corepressor with *ARF16* (Auxin response factor 16) to regulate seed germination [30]. Therefore, PHD proteins play irreplaceable roles in the biological processes of life.

At present, the PHD protein family has been studied in several plants, such as *Arabidopsis thaliana*, poplar (*Populus trichocarpa*) [31], maize (*Zea mays*) [32], moso bamboo (*Phyllostachys edulis*) [33], carrot (*Daucus carota* L.) [34], potato (*Solanum tuberosum*) [35], and pear (*Pyrus bretschneideri*) [36]. However, comprehensive identification and characterization of cotton PHD protein family has not been carried out till date. Cotton is most important natural fiber and an important raw material for textile industry in the world. Recently, the availability of the complete genome sequence and annotations of *G. hirsutum* [37], *G. arboreum* [38], and *G. raimondii* [39] provided an excellent opportunity to identify and characterize *PHD* transcription factors in cotton. In this study, we performed the whole genome-wide analysis, tissue expression pattern analysis, relative expression level analysis under different stresses

and phytohormones treatment, and co-expression network analysis of *GhPHD* genes in upland cotton. Our results indicated that *GhPHD* genes are involved in various processes of plant growth and development, and phytohormones mediate responses of *GhPHD* genes against abiotic stresses.

## Results

### Genome-wide identification of PHD proteins in cotton

Based on the homology of protein sequences, 108, 52, and 55 PHD proteins were identified in three cotton species *G. hirsutum*, *G. arboreum*, and *G. raimondii*, respectively. In addition, 39 and 43 PHD proteins were identified in *Arabidopsis* and rice, respectively (**Table S1**). Among 108 GhPHD proteins, 56 members belong to the At subgenome and 52 members belong to the Dt subgenome. The predicted biophysical characteristic of *GhPHDs* (**Table 1**) indicated that the length of GhPHD proteins ranges from 159 aa (GhPHD28) to 2231 aa (GhPHD39) with an average length of 741 aa. Moreover, the molecular weight of GhPHD proteins ranges from 17.76 kD (GhPHD28) to 247.42 kD (GhPHD39) with an average value of 93.09 kD. The isoelectric point (pI) of GhPHD proteins ranges from 4.58 (GhPHD38) to 10.41 (GhPHD103) with an average value of 6.89. Furthermore, the predicted subcellular localization indicated that 93 GhPHD proteins were located in nucleus, ten in cytoplasm, and five were extracellular.

### Phylogenetic analysis, chromosomal location, and gene duplication

In order to understand the phylogenetic relationship of PHD proteins in rice, *Arabidopsis*, and cotton, we constructed a NJ phylogenetic tree and classified PHD proteins into five groups (A-E) (**Fig. 1**). Among them, most of the orthologous PHD proteins between the diploid and allotetraploid cotton were grouped in same clade exhibiting maximum homology in phylogenetic relationship. Each group contains PHD proteins of these five species, of which group A and D were the first and second largest groups, containing 97 and 79 members, respectively. While, group B, C, and E exhibited relatively fewer PHD members. Chromosome location analysis showed that 108 *GhPHD* genes were positioned on 26 chromosomes, including 13 chromosomes from the At subgenome and 13 chromosomes from the Dt subgenome (**Fig. 2** and **Table S2**). Deeper insights indicated that At\_05, At\_07, and Dt\_05 chromosomes contained more number of genes (eight *GhPHD* genes on each) and displayed a dense distribution at the top. While, some chromosomes such as At\_10, At\_11, Dt\_03, and Dt\_11 contained only two *GhPHD* genes on each.

We further investigated the whole-genome duplication (WGD) event experienced by *GhPHD* genes. As a result, 73 *GhPHD* gene pairs depicted segmental duplication and four gene pairs showed tandem duplication events (**Table 2**), indicating that WGD is the main contributor of *GhPHD* gene family expansion. Duplication gene pairs may have undergone three alternative fates during the evolution process, namely non-functionalization, neo-functionalization, and sub-functionalization [40]. In order to

study the evolutionary history of *GhPHD* genes, the *Ka/Ks* calculator 2.0 program was used to calculate the synonymous and non-synonymous substitution rates. The *Ka/Ks* ratio of 76 duplicated gene pairs was less than 1, indicating that *GhPHD* genes underwent purification selection pressure with limited functional divergence. However, only one gene pair *Ka/Ks* ratio was greater than 1 indicating the occurrence of positive selection pressure. Collectively, these results indicated that the great contribution of purification selection pressure in the functional maintenance of *GhPHD* genes in upland cotton.

## Gene structure and conserved motifs analysis

To better understand the similarity and diversity of GhPHD proteins in upland cotton, we analyzed the phylogenetic tree, exon-intron structure, and conserved motif. Phylogenetic tree grouped GhPHD proteins according to protein homology, conserved gene structure, and motif distribution (**Fig. 3**). *GhPHD49* showed longest genomic sequence with 26 exons, while *GhPHD12* displayed shortest genomic sequence with only two exons (**Fig. 3 and Table S3**). Furthermore, a total of three motifs were identified in all GhPHD proteins, and all GhPHD proteins have a typical PHD domain (i.e., motif 1). Phylogenetic tree showed that 21 GhPHD proteins were clustered in a clade. Except for GhPHD28, all other GhPHD proteins contain three motifs with similar gene structure and motif distribution (**Fig. 3**).

The protein sequence alignment results showed that GhPHD proteins have a typical Cys4-His-Cys3 motif that is composed of about 60 amino acids, has along with nine conserved amino acid residues (**Fig. S1**). The conserved histidine (H) was separated from the fourth conserved cysteine (C) by four amino acids and two amino acids from subsequent conserved cysteine (C) residue. The third and fourth conserved cysteine (C) before histidine (H) were separated by one or two amino acids, but the interval number between other conserved amino acids was uncertain. However, GhPHD17, GhPHD27, GhPHD71, and GhPHD81 exhibited maximum homology, however, showed less conserved PHD domain (**Fig. 3 and Fig. S1**).

## Cis-acting element analysis

Many studies showed that *PHD* genes are involved in various stress responses [41-43]. To elucidate the putative function of *GhPHDs* under different stresses, we first identified the *cis*-acting elements in the promoter region that respond to stresses and phytohormones. We identified many *cis*-acting elements that respond to ABA (ABRE), auxin (TGA and AuxRR-core), GA (TATC-box, P-box, CARE, and GARE), ethylene (ERE), SA (TCA), and MeJA (CGTCA). Results showed that a total of 85 *GhPHD* genes responding to ethylene, followed by ABA, GA, and MeJA. 73 *GhPHD* genes showed *cis*-acting elements that respond to three or more phytohormones. Interestingly, the promoters of *GhPHD5*, *GhPHD47*, *GhPHD56*, and *GhPHD65* genes contain *cis*-elements that respond to all above six phytohormones. In addition, we found that many abiotic stresses response elements (TC-rich repeat, MBS, and LTR), circadian control elements, and light-responsive elements (G-box) were also present in the promoters of various *GhPHD* genes (**Fig. 4 and Table S5**). These results indicated that *GhPHD* genes may involved in

multiple signal transduction pathways, phytohormones, light response, abiotic stresses, and play important roles in regulating plant growth and development.

## Tissue-specific expression pattern of *GhPHD* genes

To predict the physiological functions of *GhPHD* genes in cotton growth and development, we used the online transcriptome data to analyze the tissue-specific expression profile of *GhPHD* genes in different tissues such as root, stem, leaf, petal, stamen, pistil, ovule, and fiber. According to the expression features and hierarchical clustering (**Fig. 5**), *GhPHD* genes were mainly clustered into four groups (A-D). The nine *GhPHD* genes in group A exhibited high expression in all tissues, indicating that these genes are involved in plant growth and development. In particular, *GhPHD23* and *GhPHD77* showed maximum expression levels in ovule and fiber tissues, demonstrating that these two genes are involved in the development of ovule and fiber. Further, 43 *GhPHDs* in group B showed lower expression levels in all tissues, while six *GhPHD* genes (*GhPHD56*, *GhPHD108*, *GhPHD40*, *GhPHD93*, *GhPHD19*, and *GhPHD73*) were predominantly expressed in the early stage of ovule development, indicating that they may play important roles in ovule and seed development. Moreover, *GhPHD* genes in group C showed higher expression levels in ovule. However, *GhPHD* genes in group D showed poor expression in all observed tissues. These results indicated that *GhPHDs* may be involved in regulating cotton growth and development, especially in the development of ovule and fiber.

## Identification of stress-related *PHD* genes in upland cotton

Analysis of the transcriptome data showed that 66 *GhPHD* genes had higher expression levels under heat, cold, salt, and drought treatments (**Fig. S2**). In order to further estimate the responses of *GhPHDs* under abiotic stresses, we treated four-weeks-old cotton seedlings with heat, cold, salt, and drought, and observed the relative expression level of 12 *GhPHD* genes (**Fig. 6**). The relative expression level of *GhPHD18* was up-regulated under all stresses, indicating that *GhPHD18* may be involved in multiple stresses response mechanisms. *GhPHD23* was up-regulated only under heat treatment, indicating that *GhPHD23* respond positively to heat stimuli. Further, *GhPHD34*, *GhPHD40*, and *GhPHD43* were up-regulated after heat and salt treatment, while *GhPHD80* and *GhPHD88* were up-regulated after heat and drought tolerance at various time points. In addition, we found that *GhPHD5* was up-regulated against salt and drought, while *GhPHD72* and *GhPHD107* were up-regulated against salt and heat, respectively. These results indicated that *GhPHD* genes may be involved in abiotic stress responses to improve plant tolerance in adverse environments.

## Identification of *GhPHD* genes in response to phytohormones

To further determine whether *GhPHD* genes respond to phytohormones, we treated four-week-old cotton seedlings with GA, MeJA, IAA, SA, and BL, and observed changes in the relative expression of *GhPHD* genes (**Fig. 7**). The relative expression level of *GhPHD5* increased significantly after MeJA, IAA, and BL treatment. While *GhPHD5* exhibited higher expression after 0.5 hour after SA treatment indicating that *GhPHD5* may respond to multiple phytohormones signal transduction pathways, which is consistent with the fact that *GhPHD5* promoter contains *cis*-acting elements related to multiple phytohormones. *GhPHD40* was significantly up-regulated under SA treatment, indicating that *GhPHD40* respond positively to SA signals. Similarly, *GhPHD43* expression was significantly up-regulated under all phytohormone treatment, in particular under BL. The relative expression levels of *GhPHD80* and *GhPHD88* reached at peak after 0.5 hour of GA treatment. The relative expression level of *GhPHD88* increased gradually under SA treatment. Moreover, *GhPHD107* expression significantly increased to the maximum level after one hour of GA, IAA, and BL treatment. These results indicated that *GhPHD* genes are involved in regulating multiple phytohormone signal transduction pathways.

## Co-expression network with functional modules for *G. hirsutum* and *G. arboreum*

Gene co-expression network analysis is a network diagram constructed on the basis of similarity of expression data between genes, which reflect the relationship of expression regulation between genes [44]. We analyzed the co-expression network of *GhPHD* genes using ccNET software, and predicted many co-expressed genes and interaction proteins (**Table S6**). Among these, *GhPHD5* was positively co-expressed with a plant-specific DNA ligase, which is related to seed germination and DNA repair. In addition, *GhPHD5* was also positively co-expressed with SLOMO protein, which is a F-box protein required for auxin homeostasis and the normal timing of lateral organ initiation at the shoot meristem [45] illustrating that *GhPHD5* may be involved in the regulation of auxin signal transduction pathway, and mediate seed germination and organ formation to regulate plant growth and development. Similarly, *GhPHD18* interacted with highly hydrophilic proteins that regulate FLC (Flowering locus C) expression [46] and showed positively co-expressed with SHAGGY-related kinases involved in meristem organization, indicating that *GhPHD18* may affect the flowering time of meristem. Further, *GhPHD34* negatively co-expressed with ERF (Ethylene response factor) subfamily *B-1*, participating in ethylene signaling pathway and responding to abiotic stresses. *GhPHD107* positively co-expressed with *ARF-GAP* and *ERF* genes, and may be involved in the signal pathways of auxin and ethylene. More interestingly, we predicted many proteins that interact with *GhPHD88*, such as leucine-rich repeat protein kinase (LRRK), late embryogenesis abundant (LEA) protein, AP2/B3 transcription factor, R2R3 factor, DREB subfamily A-2, cellulose synthase, gibberellin-regulated family protein (GRP), and ethylene response factor (ERF) (**Fig. 8A** and **Table S6**), suggesting that *GhPHD88* may be involved in many physiological processes such as plant growth and development, phytohormone signal transduction, and stress response. Further, Gene Ontology (GO) analysis of *GhPHDs* indicated that protein binding and zinc ion binding were the most abundant functional terms (**Fig. 8B**), which was consistent with the existing results that the cysteine residues

exhibit high affinity for zinc ions ( $Zn^{2+}$ ), and  $Zn^{2+}$ -cysteine complexes are key medium for protein structure, catalysis, and regulation [47].

In summary, *GhPHDs* were involved in regulating cotton growth and development, especially ovule and fiber development. Further, *GhPHDs* not only respond to multiple phytohormones signal transduction pathways, but also improve cotton's tolerance to adverse environments such as heat, salt, and drought. Particularly, *GhPHD5*, *GhPHD80*, *GhPHD88* were prominent in their responses. Combining the predicted results of co-expressed genes and interacting proteins, we inferred that phytohormones can improve plant tolerance to abiotic stresses through *GhPHD* genes and their cofactors, but their regulatory mechanisms and interaction networks need further study.

## Discussion

### Phylogenetic analysis and duplication

Phylogenetic tree was used to analyze the evolutionary relationship between PHD proteins in cotton, rice, and *Arabidopsis*. A total of 297 PHD proteins were divided into five groups (A-E). The relationship between cotton PHD proteins and AtPHD proteins was closer than that of OsPHD proteins, which is consistent with the evolutionary relationship between cotton, *Arabidopsis*, and rice. Although the *G. arboreum* genome is about twice that of the *G. raimondii* genome, however, more GrPHD proteins were identified than GaPHD proteins. Most PHD proteins from two diploids and one allotetraploid were closely distributed in phylogenetic tree, which is coherent with the fact that upland cotton evolved from the hybridization of A and D genomes [48].

We identified 108 GhPHD proteins in the upland cotton genome, which are more than previously identified PHD protein family members in *Arabidopsis*, maize, potato, and pear [32, 35, 36]. The main reason for the more number of *GhPHDs* is that upland cotton underwent polyploidization and promoted gene duplication. Upland cotton is an allotetraploid cotton produced by the hybridization between *G. arboreum* ( $A_2$  genome) and *G. raimondii* ( $D_5$  genome) [48]. The At and Dt subgenome donors of upland cotton are orthologous relatives and share the same number of ortholog genes, resulting in the duplication and doubling of *GhPHD* genes in upland cotton. Therefore, the sum total of *GaPHD* genes and *GrPHD* genes was approximately equal to the number of *GhPHD* genes. Previous studies have reported that gene duplication, including whole-genome duplication, segment duplication, tandem duplication, and transposition events was the main reason for gene family expansion [49, 50]. In our study, a total of 77 duplicated gene pairs were identified in the *GhPHD* family, including 73 segmental duplicated pairs and four tandem duplicated pairs (**Table 2**). The  $Ka/Ks$  values of most *GhPHD* duplication gene pairs was less than 1, which indicated that *GhPHD* family experienced strong purification selection pressure. Purification selection dominated the expansion of *GhPHD* genes, eliminated deleterious loss-of-function mutations at both duplicated loci, increased fixation, and retained the function of the new duplicated gene [51].

# Conserved amino acid residues, protein motifs, and gene structure analysis

Conserved amino acid residues analysis showed that GhPHD domain was highly conserved during the process of evolution. The amino terminus of GhPHD domain contained Cys4-His-Cys3 zinc finger motif composed of 50 to 80 amino acids with the regular arrangement of cysteine residues, an important medium for zinc ion binding and protein structure [47]. In addition, a total of three motifs were identified in GhPHD proteins and the motif distribution was relatively conservative, indicating that GhPHD proteins may play different physiological functions, and the subtle differences between GhPHD proteins in different clade may be related to cotton growth, development, and stress tolerance.

Gene structure may be determined by the insertion/deletion events and is an important parameter to predict gene evolution and new function generation [52]. Gene structure analysis indicated that the duplication genes showed similar gene structures with varied intron length indicating that the intron length may play major roles in the functional diversification of *GhPHD* genes. In this study, we found that the intron number varies from 1 to 25, but most *GhPHD* genes contained 2 to 11 introns which supported the previous research that cotton is a new evolution species that experience a decrease in the number of introns during the early stages of evolution [53].

## *GhPHD* genes expression in tissues, abiotic and phytohormone stresses

Many studies demonstrated that PHD proteins are the main mediators of transcriptional regulation during plant developmental processes such as meiosis and postmeiotic events [54], germination [29], pollen maturation [55], flowering time [56], embryo meristem initiation, and root development [54, 57]. Gene's expression profiles showed that *GhPHDs* play important regulatory roles in cotton growth and development, especially during ovule and fiber development. *Cis*-acting elements analysis indicated that *GhPHDs* may respond to both phytohormones and abiotic stresses.

In this study, we identified some *GhPHD* genes such as *GhPHD5*, *GhPHD40*, *GhPHD43*, *GhPHD80*, and *GhPHD88* respond positively to heat, salt, and drought treatments. These genes can be important genetic materials to improve plant tolerance under adverse environments. Phytohormone treatment experiments demonstrated that *GhPHDs* may respond to various phytohormone stresses (such as GA, SA, IAA, and BL) to regulate cotton growth and development. In addition, co-expression network analysis indicated that *GhPHD* genes may improve plant tolerance to abiotic stresses by phytohormone signaling pathways. *GhPHD5* may improve tolerance to heat, salt, and drought by regulating auxin homeostasis. Similarly, *GhPHD34* and *GhPHD107* may be involved in auxin and ethylene signal transduction pathways to improve heat tolerance and promote growth and development. *GhPHD88* regulates the signal transduction of various phytohormones and abiotic stresses, and promotes growth and development.

Although *GhPHDs* are indispensable in the course of life, the physiological functions of *GhPHDs* in crosstalk between abiotic stress and phytohormone need further study.

## Conclusions

In this study, a total of 297 PHD proteins were identified in total five plant species including *G. hirsutum*, *G. arboreum*, *G. raimondii*, rice, and *Arabidopsis*. The PHD proteins were divided into five groups based on the phylogenetic analysis. Segmental duplication events were the main contributors toward the expansion of *GhPHD* gene family in upland cotton. Moreover, duplicated gene pairs of *GhPHD* gene family might have experienced functional divergence, since their expression patterns were different in different tissues. Tissues specific expression patterns indicated that *GhPHDs* are very important for growth and development, especially ovule and fiber development. The phytohormones and stresses treatment and co-expression network analysis showed that *GhPHDs* may improve the tolerance to adverse environments by phytohormones signal transduction pathways. Taken together, our study provides key basic knowledge to understand the functional mechanisms of cotton growth and development, as well as candidate genes for cotton breeding resistant to abiotic stresses and phytohormone stimulation.

## Methods

### Sequence retrieval, multiple sequence alignment, and phylogenetic analysis

The genome sequence and information of cotton (*G. hirsutum*, *G. raimondii*, and *G. arboreum*) were acquired from the CottonFGD (<https://cottonfgd.org/>) [58]. HMMER (<https://www.ebi.ac.uk/Tools/hmmer/>) software with default parameters was used to search for the corresponding protein sequences, and used the conserved PHD domain sequence as a query. We used BLAST program to further identify PHD sequences based on homology. The conserved domain of PHD proteins was predicted by Pfam [59] and SMART [60] software. Multiple sequence alignment of PHD proteins were performed using Clustal X [61]. MEGA 6.0 [62] was used to construct phylogenetic trees, using the neighbor-joining (NJ) algorithm with default parameters and 1000 bootstrap replicates. The molecular weight (MW), isoelectric point (pI), and GRAVY value of *GhPHD* proteins were predicted using Expasy [63], and the subcellular localization of *GhPHD* proteins was predicted by the CELLO v2.5 server [64].

### Chromosomal location, gene structure, and conserved motif

The positional information of *GhPHD* genes was obtained from the General Feature Format (GFF) file downloaded from the CottonFGD website [58]. *GhPHDs* were mapped on the chromosome using

MapInspect (<https://mapinspect.software.informer.com/>).

For the exon-intron structural analysis of *GhPHD* genes, the coding sequences were used to align their genomic DNA sequences and the structure diagram was drawn using the online Gene Structure Display Server (GSDS 2.0) program [65]. Conserved motifs of GhPHD proteins were investigated using the online toolkit Multiple Expectation maximization for Motif Elicitation (MEME 5.0.5) [66]. The optimized parameters of MEME are as follows: the number of repetitions, any; the maximum number of motifs, 50; and the optimum width of each motif, between 6 and 300 residues, and retaining only motifs associated with an E value  $< e^{-5}$ . The identified protein motifs were further annotated with TBtools [67].

## Identification of *cis*-acting elements and gene expression pattern

The promoter sequences of 1500 bp in length before the transcription start site of *GhPHD* genes were downloaded from the CottonFGD website [58]. The *cis*-acting elements in the *GhPHD* promoter regions were predicted using the Plant Cis-Acting Regulatory Element website [68]. The tissue expression patterns of *GhPHD* genes were analyzed using the online cotton transcriptome data, and heatmap was drawn by TBtools [67]. The transcriptome data of root, stem, leaf, petal, stamen, pistil, ovule (-3, -1, 0, 1, 3, 5, 10, 20, 25, 35 DPA) and fiber (5, 10, 20, 25 DPA) was used in this study. The ccNET software [69] was used to analyze the gene co-expression network relationship.

## Plant material, abiotic stresses and phytohormones treatment

Upland cotton ZM24 is a short-season cotton variety selected by the Cotton Research Institute of Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences. Firstly, ZM24 seeds were pre-germinated in the conical flask filled with water at room temperature for 48 hours. Pre-germinated seeds were then transferred to the liquid medium with a cultivation temperature of 30°C, a photoperiod of 16 hours light and 8 hours dark. Four-week-old cotton seedlings were treated with brassinolide (BL, 10  $\mu$ M), gibberellin (GA, 100  $\mu$ M), indole-3-acetic acid (IAA, 100  $\mu$ M), salicylic acid (SA, 10  $\mu$ M), and methyl jasmonate (MeJA, 10  $\mu$ M) for 0.5, 1, 3, and 6 hours. Similarly, four-week-old cotton seedlings were treated with heat (38°C), cold (4°C), NaCl (200 mM), and polyethylene glycol (PEG) (20% mass fraction) for 1, 2, 4, and 6 hours. The collected leaves were immediately frozen in liquid nitrogen and stored at -80°C for RNA extraction and qRT-PCR analysis. For abiotic stresses and phytohormones treatment, a total of 20 cotton seedlings were used for each treatment and three biological replicates were performed.

## RNA extraction and qRT-PCR analysis

Total RNA of the collected cotton leaves was extracted using the RNAPrep Pure Plant Kit (Polysaccharides & Polyphenolics-rich) (TianGen, Beijing, China). In order to synthesize the first-strand cDNA, the EasyScript All-in-One First-strand cDNA synthesis SuperMix for qRT-PCR kit (TransGen, Beijing, China) was used in accordance with the manufacturer's protocol and the cDNA was used as template for subsequent qRT-PCR reaction. qRT-PCR was performed using TransStart Top Green qPCR SuperMix (TransGen, Beijing, China) in LightCycler 480 (Roche, Basel, Switzerland). Each PCR reaction was performed in triplicate, and three biological replicates were quantified. *GhHis3* (GenBank accession no. AF024716) was used as an internal control. The relative expression level was calculated as described previously [70]. The primers used for PCR analysis were listed in Table S7. For statistical analysis, the qRT-PCR data was considered as normal distribution and we conducted a two-tailed Student's *t*-test in Microsoft Excel 2007.

## Declarations

### Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable. Our research did not involve in any human or animal subjects, material, or data. The plant materials used in this study were provided by the Institute of Cotton Research of Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences and are freely available for research purposes following institutional, national and international guidelines.

### Consent to publication

Not applicable.

### Availability of data and materials

The data used or analyzed during the current study has been included in this article and additional materials. The genome sequence and annotation datasets that supported the findings of this study are available in:

1. *thaliana*: <https://www.arabidopsis.org/>
2. *sativa*: <http://plants.ensembl.org/index.html>
3. *hirsutum*, *G. arboreum*, and *G. raimondii*: <https://cottonfgd.org/>

### Competing interests

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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### Authors' contributions

H.W. and G.Q. conceived and designed the experiments. H.W. and M.G. performed the experiment. H.W. and L.Z. analyzed the data. H.W. wrote the paper. Z.Y. and Z.W. revised the paper. All of the authors read and approved the final the manuscript.

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## Abbreviations

Gh: *Gossypium hirsutum*; Ga: *Gossypium arboreum*; Gr: *Gossypium raimondii*; Os: *Oryza sativa*; At: *Arabidopsis thaliana*; DPA: Day post-anthesis; PHD: Plant homeodomain; NJ: Neighbor-joining; ARF: Auxin response factor; MMD1: Male meiocyte death 1; VIM1: Variant in methylation 1; VIN3: Vernalization insensitive 3; GSR1: Germostatin resistance locus 1; BR: Brassinosteroid; BL: Brassinolide; GA: Gibberellin; IAA: Indole-3-acetic acid; SA: Salicylic acid; MeJA: Methyl jasmonate; ABA: Abscisic acid; ET: Ethylene; CK: Cytokinin; PEG: Polyethylene glycol; qRT-PCR: Quantitative real-time polymerase chain reaction; GO: Gene Ontology; WGD: Whole-genome duplication; FLC: Flowering locus C; ERF: Ethylene response factor; GRP: Gibberellin-regulated family protein; LEA: Late embryogenesis abundant; LRRK: Leucine-rich repeat protein kinase.

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## Additional Files

**Additional file 1: Fig. S1.tif** Alignment results from the conserved domain of 108 GhPHD proteins and PHD motifs with a typical C<sub>4</sub>HC<sub>3</sub> model.

**Additional file 2: Fig. S2.tif** Expression profiles of *GhPHD* genes under cold, hot, salt, and drought. The expression characteristics of 108 *GhPHD* genes under four stress treatments were investigated using available transcriptomic data. 1 h, 3 h, 6 h, and 12 h indicate hours after different stress treatments. Gene names and the subfamilies are shown on the right. Blocks with colors represent the relative expression levels of *GhPHDs*.

**Additional file 3: Table S1.xlsx** The PHD members from *G. hirsutum*, *G. raimondii*, *G. arboreum*, *A. thaliana*, and *O. sativa*.

**Additional file 4: Table S2.docx** Chromosomal location and gene annotation of *GhPHD* genes in *G. hirsutum*.

**Additional file 5: Table S3.docx** Transcript-features of 108 *GhPHD* genes.

**Additional file 6: Table S4.xlsx** Distribution of major stress-related and phytohormone-related *cis*-acting elements in the promoter regions of *GhPHD* genes.

**Additional file 7: Table S5.xlsx** Number of *cis*-acting elements in the promoters of *GhPHD* genes.

**Additional file 8: Table S6.xlsx** Co-expression network analysis results.

**Additional file 9: Table S7.docx** Primers for qRT-PCR in this study.

## Tables

Table 1. Physicochemical parameters of 108 *GhPHD* genes in *G. hirsutum*

| Name    | Protein length (aa) | Molecular weight (kDa) | Charge | Isoelectric point | Grand average of hydropathy | Subcellular localization |
|---------|---------------------|------------------------|--------|-------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| GhPHD1  | 217                 | 24.915                 | 5      | 7.895             | -0.694                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD2  | 1,033               | 114.441                | 32.5   | 8.49              | -0.274                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD3  | 1,030               | 114.182                | 36     | 8.594             | -0.306                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD4  | 815                 | 90.024                 | 5      | 6.895             | -0.323                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD5  | 1,303               | 144.878                | -9.5   | 6.002             | -0.713                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD6  | 700                 | 79.363                 | -4.5   | 6.21              | -0.308                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD7  | 700                 | 79.363                 | -4.5   | 6.21              | -0.308                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD8  | 345                 | 39.474                 | 12     | 8.648             | -0.573                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD9  | 251                 | 28.253                 | -8     | 4.891             | -0.621                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD10 | 786                 | 86.704                 | -35.5  | 4.631             | -0.966                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD11 | 216                 | 24.846                 | 8.5    | 8.262             | -0.789                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD12 | 375                 | 42.862                 | 5.5    | 7.542             | -0.708                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD13 | 237                 | 26.757                 | -4     | 5.421             | -0.596                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD14 | 959                 | 104.731                | -3     | 6.227             | -1.126                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD15 | 733                 | 82.869                 | 40.5   | 9.936             | -0.907                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD16 | 252                 | 28.482                 | -8.5   | 4.84              | -0.717                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD17 | 1,680               | 189.096                | 46.5   | 8.1               | -0.669                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD18 | 252                 | 28.35                  | -7.5   | 4.894             | -0.661                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD19 | 238                 | 27.277                 | 4.5    | 7.669             | -0.648                      | Cytoplasmic              |
| GhPHD20 | 493                 | 55.306                 | 5      | 7.03              | -0.485                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD21 | 600                 | 67.261                 | 5.5    | 7.049             | -0.611                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD22 | 1,084               | 122.987                | 34     | 8.276             | -0.574                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD23 | 253                 | 28.577                 | -5.5   | 5.132             | -0.736                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD24 | 259                 | 29.239                 | -7.5   | 4.915             | -0.708                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD25 | 224                 | 25.723                 | 6.5    | 8.087             | -0.682                      | Cytoplasmic              |
| GhPHD26 | 870                 | 95.472                 | 3      | 6.876             | -0.472                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD27 | 1,358               | 154.506                | 35     | 7.891             | -0.677                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD28 | 159                 | 17.763                 | 0      | 6.496             | -0.666                      | Extracellular            |
| GhPHD29 | 733                 | 80.954                 | 22     | 8.271             | -0.664                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD30 | 1,247               | 141.67                 | 24     | 7.655             | -0.43                       | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD31 | 949                 | 104.907                | 2.5    | 6.779             | -0.416                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD32 | 1,618               | 180.35                 | 45     | 8.404             | -0.446                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD33 | 1,618               | 180.725                | 41.5   | 8.289             | -0.442                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD34 | 216                 | 24.95                  | 8.5    | 8.399             | -0.783                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD35 | 321                 | 35.88                  | -4.5   | 5.599             | -0.049                      | Extracellular            |
| GhPHD36 | 822                 | 88.768                 | 2      | 6.651             | -0.539                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD37 | 1,305               | 143.316                | -33.5  | 4.951             | -0.624                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD38 | 705                 | 78.949                 | 22     | 8.309             | -0.315                      | Extracellular            |
| GhPHD39 | 2,231               | 247.421                | -36    | 5.321             | -0.444                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD40 | 226                 | 25.942                 | 6      | 8.086             | -0.788                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD41 | 1,685               | 187.671                | -4.5   | 6.321             | -0.389                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD42 | 1,239               | 138.122                | -0.5   | 6.487             | -0.735                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD43 | 253                 | 28.585                 | -6     | 5.13              | -0.76                       | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD44 | 531                 | 58.455                 | -4     | 5.77              | -0.564                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD45 | 389                 | 44.625                 | 26.5   | 9.906             | -0.405                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD46 | 803                 | 90.452                 | -16.5  | 5.132             | -0.836                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD47 | 851                 | 94.805                 | -26    | 4.895             | -1.011                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD48 | 212                 | 23.802                 | 26     | 10.41             | -0.745                      | Nuclear                  |
| GhPHD49 | 1,019               | 116.396                | 18     | 7.609             | -0.584                      | Nuclear                  |

|          |       |         |       |        |        |               |
|----------|-------|---------|-------|--------|--------|---------------|
| GhPHD50  | 655   | 74.308  | 11    | 7.433  | -0.207 | Cytoplasmic   |
| GhPHD51  | 1,091 | 124.448 | 45    | 8.516  | -0.59  | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD52  | 237   | 26.997  | -3.5  | 5.244  | -0.666 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD53  | 216   | 24.723  | 6.5   | 8.049  | -0.785 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD54  | 716   | 81.912  | -38.5 | 4.581  | -1.1   | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD55  | 1,367 | 152.049 | 3     | 6.689  | -0.451 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD56  | 254   | 28.492  | -6.5  | 5.136  | -0.576 | Cytoplasmic   |
| GhPHD57  | 217   | 24.929  | 5     | 7.895  | -0.684 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD58  | 1,031 | 114.246 | 33.5  | 8.459  | -0.299 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD59  | 1,031 | 113.878 | 36.5  | 8.592  | -0.306 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD60  | 1,299 | 144.45  | -11.5 | 5.886  | -0.711 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD61  | 290   | 32.821  | -8.5  | 4.832  | -0.419 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD62  | 216   | 24.835  | 8.5   | 8.262  | -0.789 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD63  | 699   | 79.319  | -4.5  | 6.21   | -0.283 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD64  | 345   | 39.311  | 13    | 8.745  | -0.544 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD65  | 1,084 | 123.101 | 34    | 8.275  | -0.579 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD66  | 237   | 26.615  | -2    | 5.973  | -0.561 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD67  | 945   | 103.676 | -2    | 6.329  | -1.136 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD68  | 684   | 77.195  | 23    | 9.073  | -0.859 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD69  | 733   | 83.057  | 34.5  | 9.713  | -0.91  | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD70  | 252   | 28.414  | -8.5  | 4.84   | -0.697 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD71  | 1,731 | 194.29  | 53    | 8.282  | -0.675 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD72  | 252   | 28.35   | -7.5  | 4.894  | -0.661 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD73  | 224   | 25.664  | 7.5   | 8.248  | -0.774 | Cytoplasmic   |
| GhPHD74  | 367   | 41.019  | 5     | 7.341  | -0.49  | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD75  | 601   | 67.379  | 2     | 6.696  | -0.611 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD76  | 241   | 27.506  | -0.5  | 6.269  | -0.502 | Extracellular |
| GhPHD77  | 253   | 28.677  | -5.5  | 5.139  | -0.752 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD78  | 252   | 28.407  | -7.5  | 4.889  | -0.682 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD79  | 186   | 21.734  | 1.5   | 6.851  | -0.752 | Cytoplasmic   |
| GhPHD80  | 237   | 27.077  | -4    | 5.221  | -0.689 | Extracellular |
| GhPHD81  | 1,356 | 154.398 | 31    | 7.737  | -0.674 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD82  | 236   | 26.789  | -12   | 4.605  | -0.598 | Cytoplasmic   |
| GhPHD83  | 676   | 74.819  | 22.5  | 8.253  | -0.665 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD84  | 1,382 | 156.796 | 34    | 7.925  | -0.467 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD85  | 949   | 104.967 | 2.5   | 6.779  | -0.426 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD86  | 1,653 | 183.656 | 37.5  | 8.15   | -0.449 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD87  | 1,618 | 180.589 | 39    | 8.234  | -0.447 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD88  | 216   | 24.836  | 5.5   | 7.902  | -0.775 | Cytoplasmic   |
| GhPHD89  | 822   | 88.688  | 0     | 6.506  | -0.531 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD90  | 1,301 | 142.837 | -35.5 | 4.873  | -0.619 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD91  | 705   | 78.888  | 23.5  | 8.373  | -0.305 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD92  | 2,182 | 241.654 | -34   | 5.362  | -0.441 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD93  | 226   | 25.984  | 6     | 8.086  | -0.767 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD94  | 1,685 | 187.566 | -4    | 6.345  | -0.397 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD95  | 1,237 | 137.855 | -0.5  | 6.486  | -0.718 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD96  | 253   | 28.613  | -6    | 5.13   | -0.75  | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD97  | 696   | 78.217  | 18.5  | 8.023  | -0.17  | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD98  | 503   | 55.441  | -5.5  | 5.455  | -0.597 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD99  | 385   | 44.394  | 31    | 10.216 | -0.428 | Nuclear       |
| GhPHD100 | 812   | 91.657  | -29   | 4.818  | -0.838 | Nuclear       |

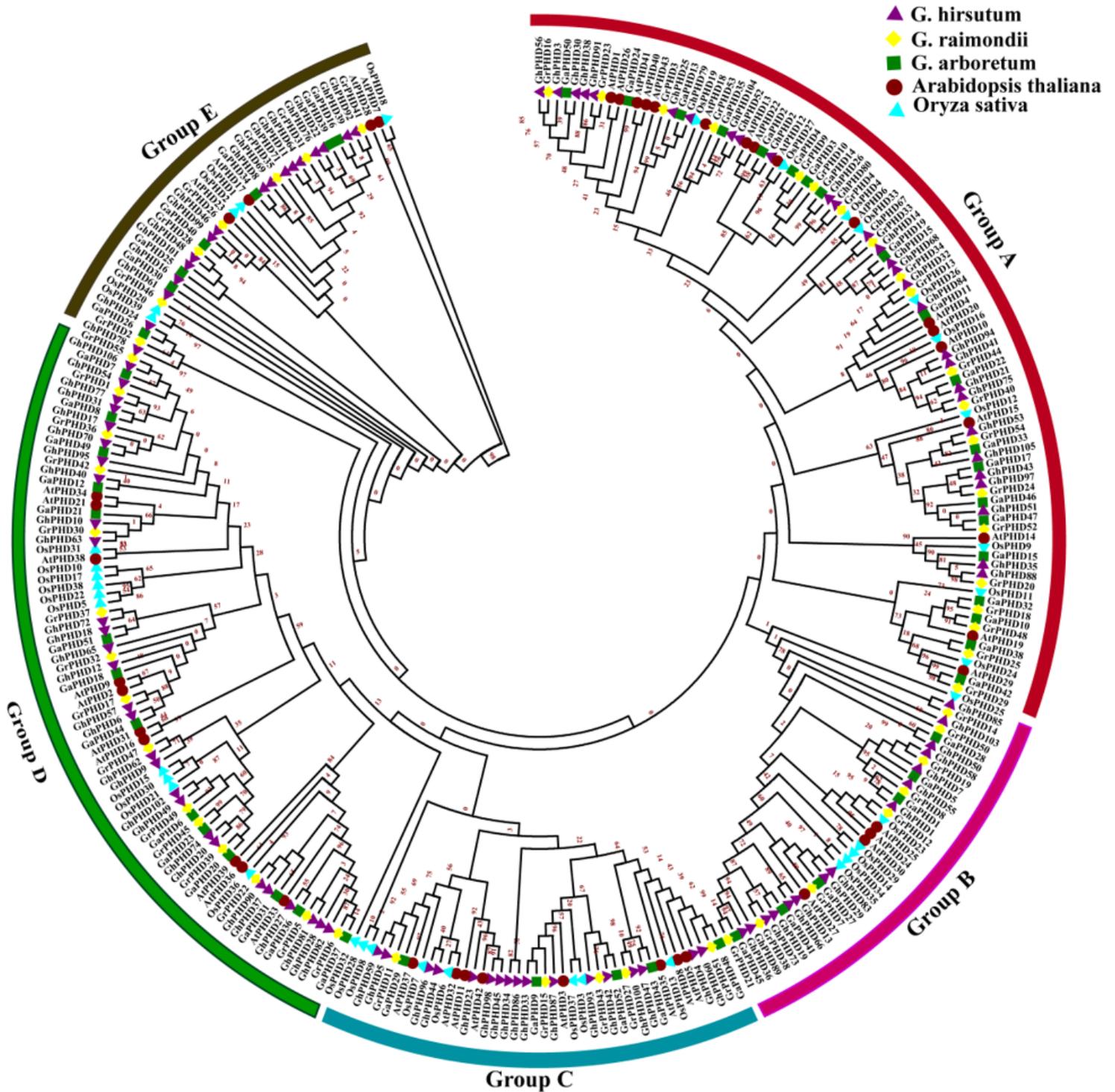
|          |       |         |       |       |        |             |
|----------|-------|---------|-------|-------|--------|-------------|
| GhPHD101 | 859   | 95.86   | -32.5 | 4.789 | -1.023 | Nuclear     |
| GhPHD102 | 1,019 | 116.3   | 19    | 7.67  | -0.593 | Nuclear     |
| GhPHD103 | 655   | 74.268  | 11.5  | 7.443 | -0.219 | Cytoplasmic |
| GhPHD104 | 1,091 | 124.625 | 43    | 8.46  | -0.581 | Nuclear     |
| GhPHD105 | 889   | 101.493 | -32   | 4.811 | -0.882 | Nuclear     |
| GhPHD106 | 1,305 | 145.225 | 9.5   | 7.121 | -0.424 | Nuclear     |
| GhPHD107 | 801   | 90.038  | -12.5 | 5.251 | -0.805 | Nuclear     |
| GhPHD108 | 252   | 28.259  | -6.5  | 5.136 | -0.619 | Cytoplasmic |

**Table 2.** *Ka/Ks* analysis for the duplicated *PHD* gene pairs from *G. hirsutum*

| Duplicated gene 1 | Duplicated gene 2 | Ka    | Ks    | Ka/Ks | Purifying selection | Duplicate type |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------|-------|-------|---------------------|----------------|
| GhPHD1            | GhPHD11           | 0.064 | 0.533 | 0.119 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD1            | GhPHD62           | 0.064 | 0.533 | 0.119 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD2            | GhPHD58           | 0.011 | 0.043 | 0.248 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD5            | GhPHD60           | 0.016 | 0.039 | 0.411 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD5            | GhPHD95           | 0.126 | 0.389 | 0.324 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD6            | GhPHD63           | 0.004 | 0.048 | 0.089 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD9            | GhPHD61           | 0.007 | 0.032 | 0.212 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD10           | GhPHD14           | 0.232 | 0.441 | 0.526 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD10           | GhPHD47           | 0.245 | 0.488 | 0.502 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD10           | GhPHD67           | 0.241 | 0.471 | 0.512 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD10           | GhPHD101          | 0.235 | 0.446 | 0.527 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD11           | GhPHD53           | 0.039 | 0.606 | 0.064 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD11           | GhPHD62           | 0.004 | 0.014 | 0.282 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD13           | GhPHD66           | 0.009 | 0.053 | 0.169 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD14           | GhPHD47           | 0.376 | 0.666 | 0.564 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD14           | GhPHD67           | 0.018 | 0.046 | 0.387 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD15           | GhPHD68           | 0.030 | 0.063 | 0.468 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD16           | GhPHD28           | 0.089 | 0.311 | 0.285 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD16           | GhPHD77           | 0.045 | 0.352 | 0.129 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD16           | GhPHD82           | 0.053 | 0.405 | 0.130 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD17           | GhPHD71           | 0.008 | 0.034 | 0.235 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD17           | GhPHD81           | 0.075 | 0.381 | 0.196 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD19           | GhPHD25           | 0.081 | 0.447 | 0.180 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD19           | GhPHD40           | 0.083 | 0.451 | 0.184 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD19           | GhPHD73           | 0.026 | 0.053 | 0.492 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD19           | GhPHD79           | 0.083 | 0.496 | 0.167 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD19           | GhPHD93           | 0.085 | 0.451 | 0.188 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD20           | GhPHD74           | 0.024 | 0.032 | 0.753 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD22           | GhPHD51           | 0.080 | 0.398 | 0.200 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD22           | GhPHD65           | 0.007 | 0.028 | 0.240 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD22           | GhPHD104          | 0.079 | 0.391 | 0.201 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD28           | GhPHD77           | 0.085 | 0.284 | 0.298 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD28           | GhPHD82           | 0.042 | 0.037 | 1.121 | No                  | Segmental      |
| GhPHD24           | GhPHD78           | 0.003 | 0.039 | 0.086 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD25           | GhPHD73           | 0.057 | 0.434 | 0.131 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD25           | GhPHD79           | 0.016 | 0.017 | 0.982 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD26           | GhPHD44           | 0.204 | 0.368 | 0.553 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD26           | GhPHD98           | 0.186 | 0.344 | 0.541 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD29           | GhPHD83           | 0.019 | 0.041 | 0.473 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD31           | GhPHD85           | 0.011 | 0.031 | 0.356 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD32           | GhPHD86           | 0.015 | 0.027 | 0.554 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD34           | GhPHD88           | 0.006 | 0.021 | 0.288 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD36           | GhPHD89           | 0.015 | 0.031 | 0.499 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD39           | GhPHD92           | 0.014 | 0.040 | 0.339 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD40           | GhPHD73           | 0.051 | 0.442 | 0.116 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD40           | GhPHD93           | 0.002 | 0.054 | 0.035 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD41           | GhPHD94           | 0.013 | 0.031 | 0.416 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD44           | GhPHD98           | 0.022 | 0.052 | 0.413 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD46           | GhPHD54           | 0.127 | 0.418 | 0.304 | Yes                 | Segmental      |
| GhPHD46           | GhPHD100          | 0.014 | 0.055 | 0.256 | Yes                 | Segmental      |

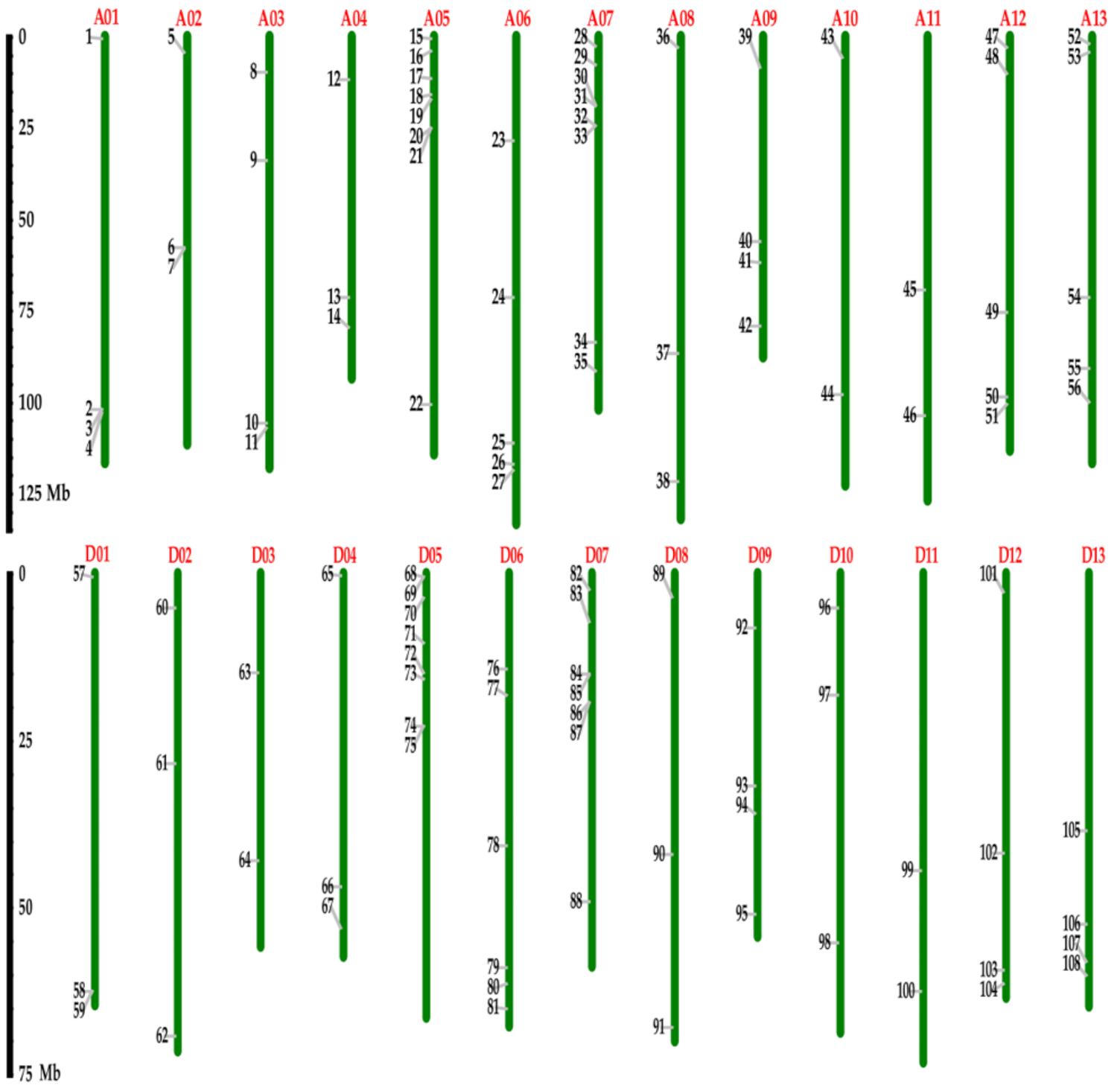
|          |          |       |       |       |     |           |
|----------|----------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----------|
| GhPHD46  | GhPHD107 | 0.101 | 0.395 | 0.256 | Yes | Segmental |
| GhPHD47  | GhPHD67  | 0.231 | 0.450 | 0.514 | Yes | Segmental |
| GhPHD47  | GhPHD101 | 0.016 | 0.030 | 0.530 | Yes | Segmental |
| GhPHD49  | GhPHD102 | 0.006 | 0.035 | 0.163 | Yes | Segmental |
| GhPHD50  | GhPHD103 | 0.011 | 0.048 | 0.233 | Yes | Segmental |
| GhPHD51  | GhPHD65  | 0.079 | 0.389 | 0.202 | Yes | Segmental |
| GhPHD51  | GhPHD104 | 0.010 | 0.036 | 0.270 | Yes | Segmental |
| GhPHD52  | GhPHD80  | 0.038 | 0.528 | 0.072 | Yes | Segmental |
| GhPHD53  | GhPHD62  | 0.039 | 0.606 | 0.064 | Yes | Segmental |
| GhPHD54  | GhPHD100 | 0.140 | 0.416 | 0.336 | Yes | Segmental |
| GhPHD54  | GhPHD107 | 0.136 | 0.405 | 0.335 | Yes | Segmental |
| GhPHD55  | GhPHD106 | 0.023 | 0.045 | 0.497 | Yes | Segmental |
| GhPHD56  | GhPHD76  | 0.236 | 0.639 | 0.369 | Yes | Segmental |
| GhPHD56  | GhPHD108 | 0.007 | 0.051 | 0.132 | Yes | Segmental |
| GhPHD60  | GhPHD95  | 0.125 | 0.397 | 0.314 | Yes | Segmental |
| GhPHD65  | GhPHD104 | 0.078 | 0.386 | 0.203 | Yes | Segmental |
| GhPHD67  | GhPHD101 | 0.225 | 0.456 | 0.492 | Yes | Segmental |
| GhPHD71  | GhPHD81  | 0.075 | 0.369 | 0.203 | Yes | Segmental |
| GhPHD73  | GhPHD79  | 0.054 | 0.486 | 0.111 | Yes | Segmental |
| GhPHD73  | GhPHD93  | 0.053 | 0.419 | 0.127 | Yes | Segmental |
| GhPHD76  | GhPHD108 | 0.237 | 0.630 | 0.376 | Yes | Segmental |
| GhPHD91  | GhPHD38  | 0.016 | 0.052 | 0.298 | Yes | Segmental |
| GhPHD100 | GhPHD107 | 0.104 | 0.379 | 0.276 | Yes | Segmental |
| GhPHD2   | GhPHD3   | 0.035 | 0.122 | 0.289 | Yes | Tandem    |
| GhPHD32  | GhPHD33  | 0.031 | 0.076 | 0.407 | Yes | Tandem    |
| GhPHD58  | GhPHD59  | 0.029 | 0.138 | 0.212 | Yes | Tandem    |
| GhPHD86  | GhPHD87  | 0.027 | 0.062 | 0.428 | Yes | Tandem    |

## Figures



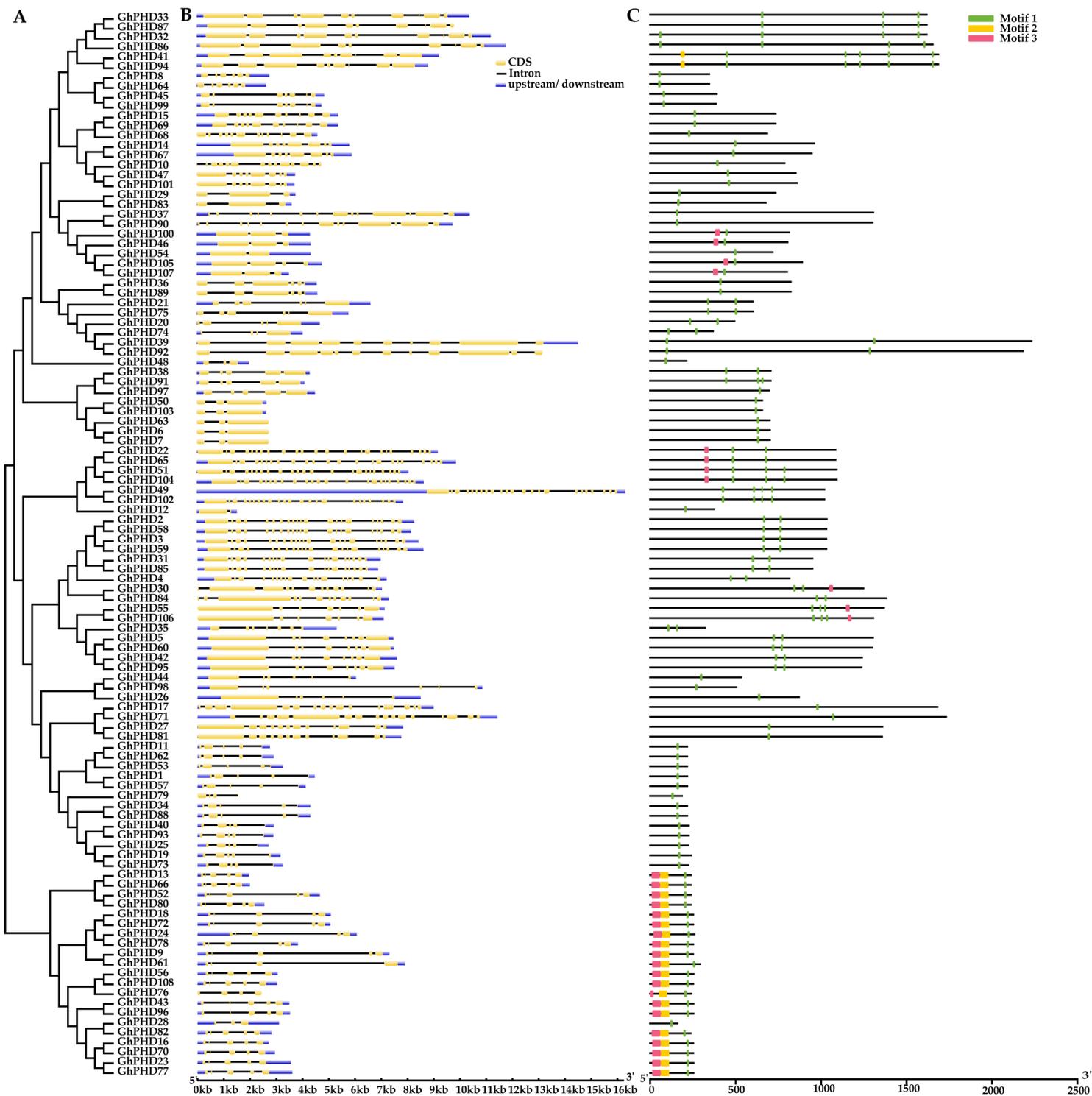
**Figure 1**

Phylogenetic tree displaying relationships between 108 *G. hirsutum*, 52 *G. arboreum*, 55 *G. raimondii*, 39 *O. sativa* and 43 *A. thaliana* PHD proteins. The phylogenetic tree was constructed in MEGA 6.0 using the neighbor-joining method. The bootstrap test was performed with 1000 iterations. The five subgroups are shown with different colours. At, *Arabidopsis thaliana*; Ga, *Gossypium arboreum*; Gr, *Gossypium raimondii*; Gh, *Gossypium hirsutum*; Os, *Oryza sativa*.



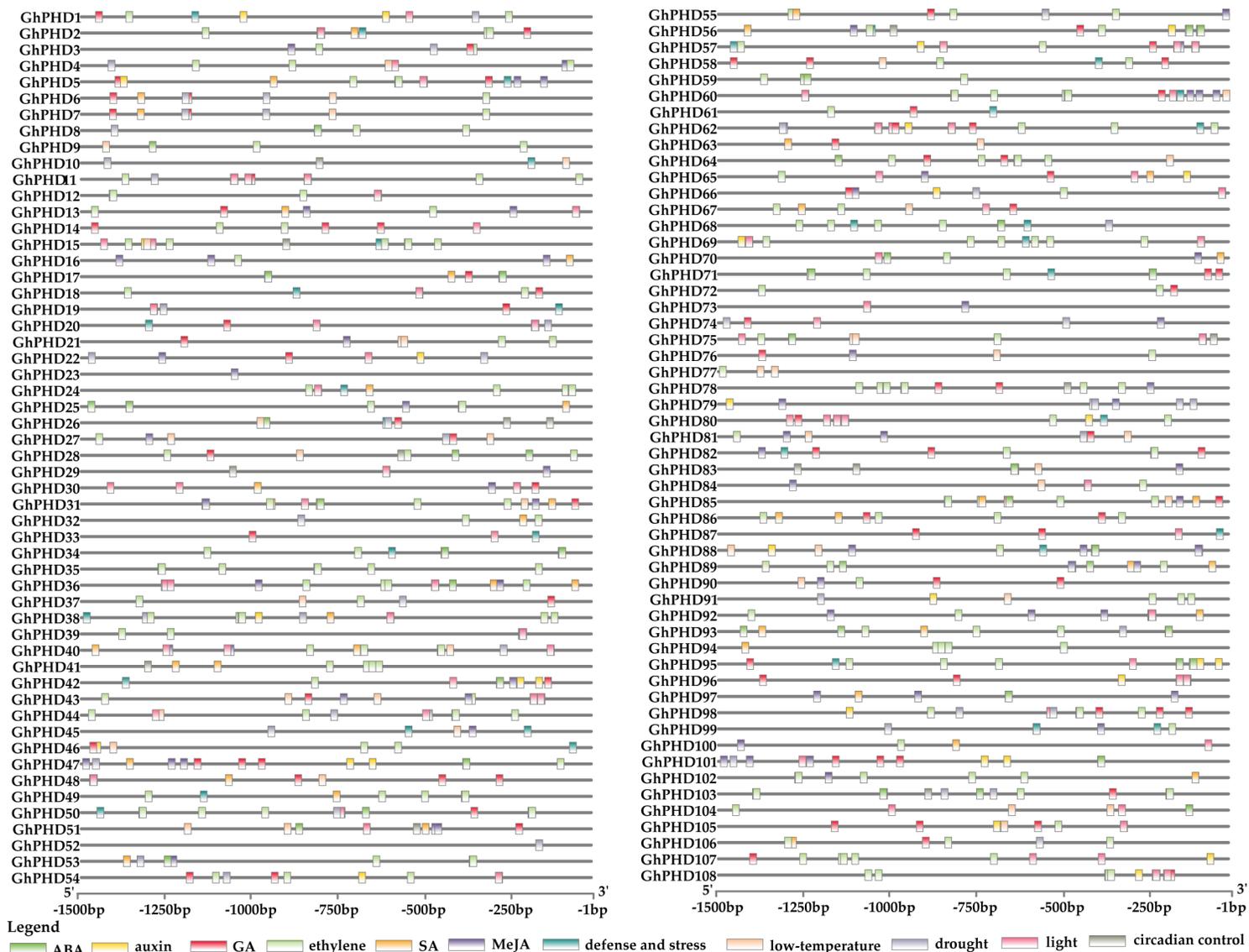
**Figure 2**

Chromosomal location of GhPHD genes on 26 chromosomes in *G. hirsutum*. The chromosome numbers were shown on the top of each chromosome. The scale bar indicated the length in megabases (Mb).



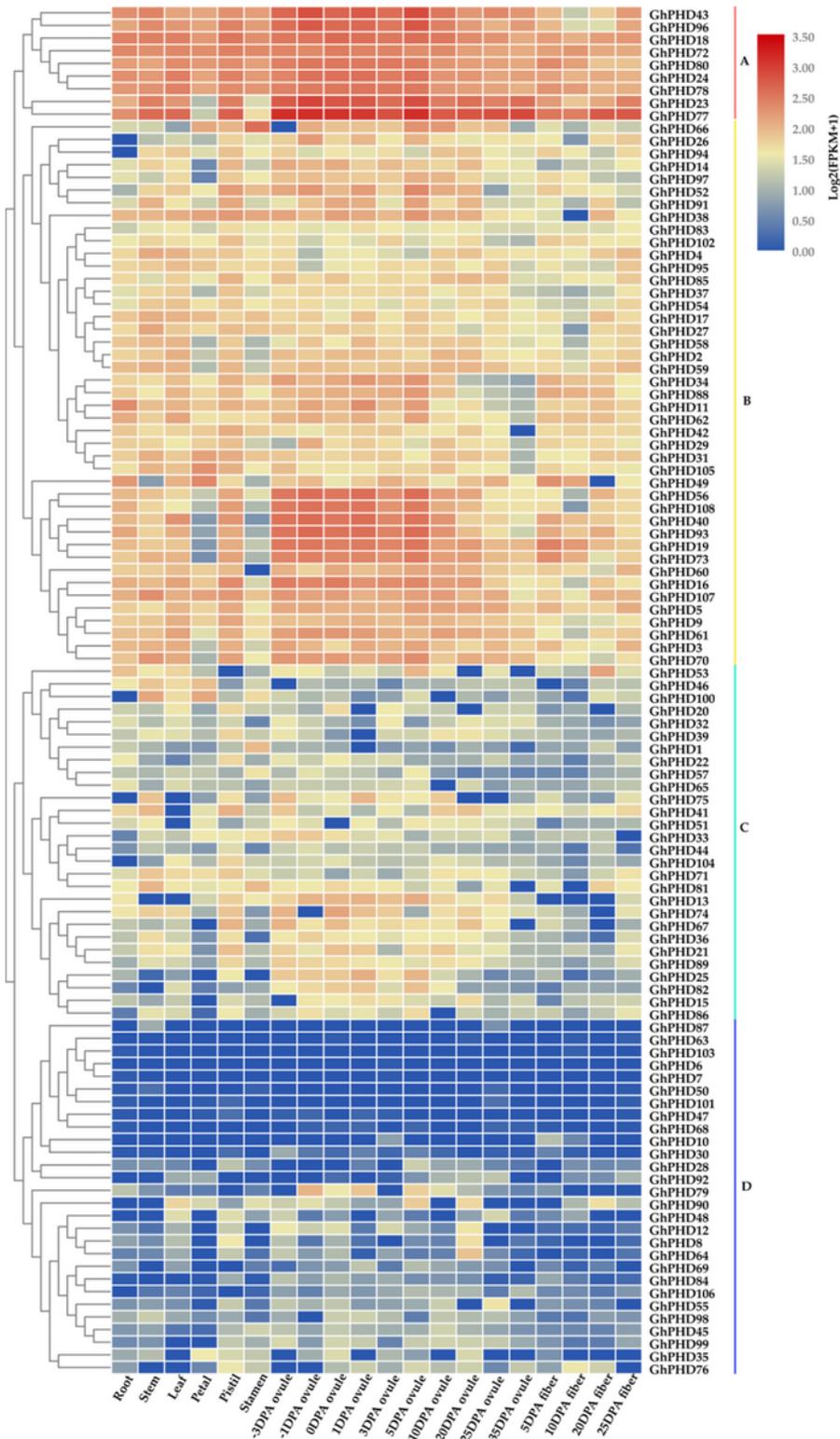
**Figure 3**

Phylogenetic tree, gene structure, and conserved motif analysis of GhPHD proteins. A An unrooted phylogenetic tree was generated in MEGA 6.0 by neighbor-joining method. B Exon-intron structure of GhPHD genes. The yellow boxes represent exons, black lines represent introns, and blue boxes represent the upstream/downstream UTRs. The sizes of exons and introns can be estimated using the scale bar at the bottom. C Motifs distribution of GhPHD proteins and different motif boxes are in different colors (motif 1 to 3). Motif 1 in (c) is the PHD domain.



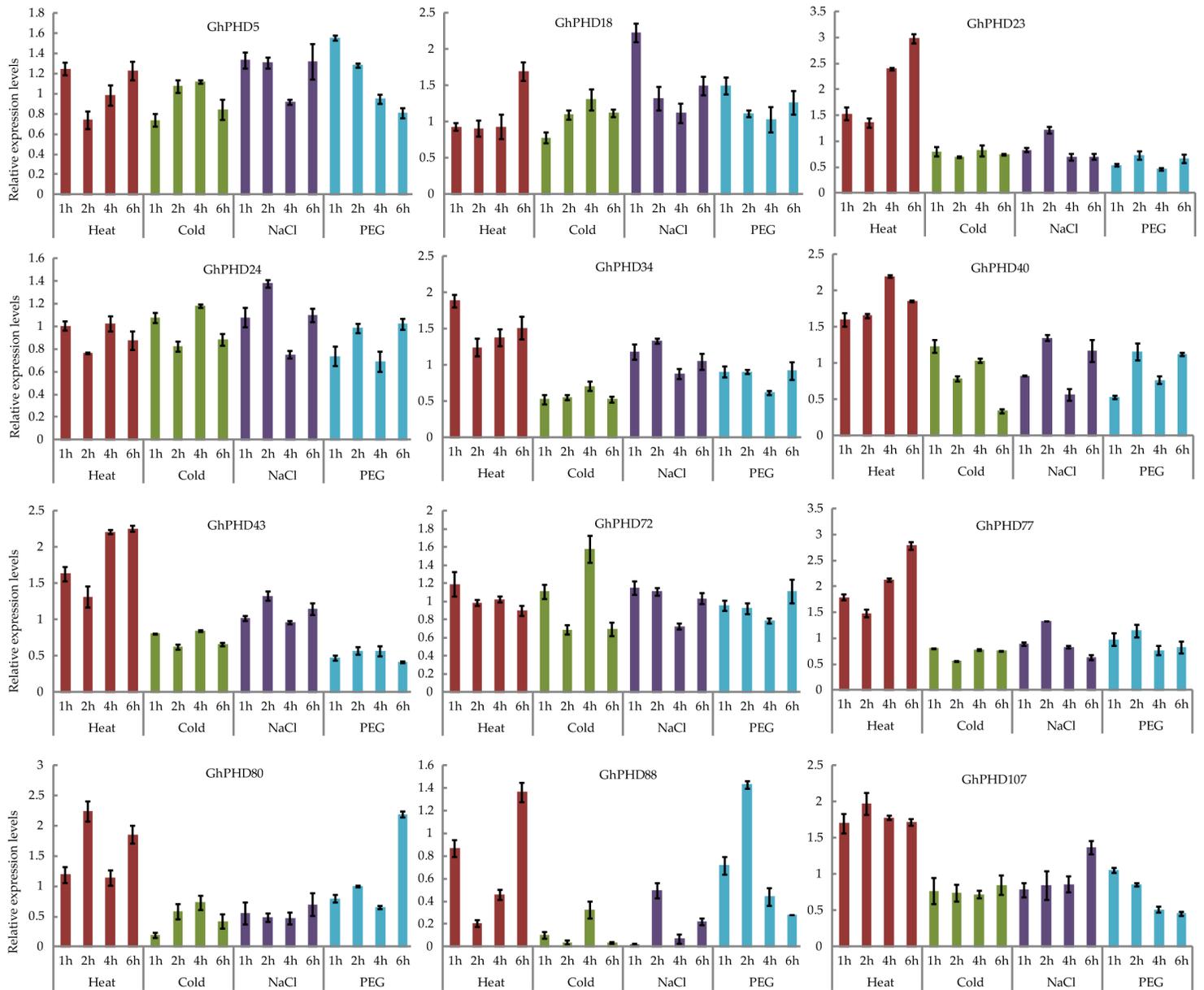
**Figure 4**

Distribution of stress-related and phytohormone-related cis-acting elements in the promoter regions of GhPHD genes. The locations of cis-acting elements were confirmed using PlantCARE database. Different cis-acting elements were represented by different color boxes.



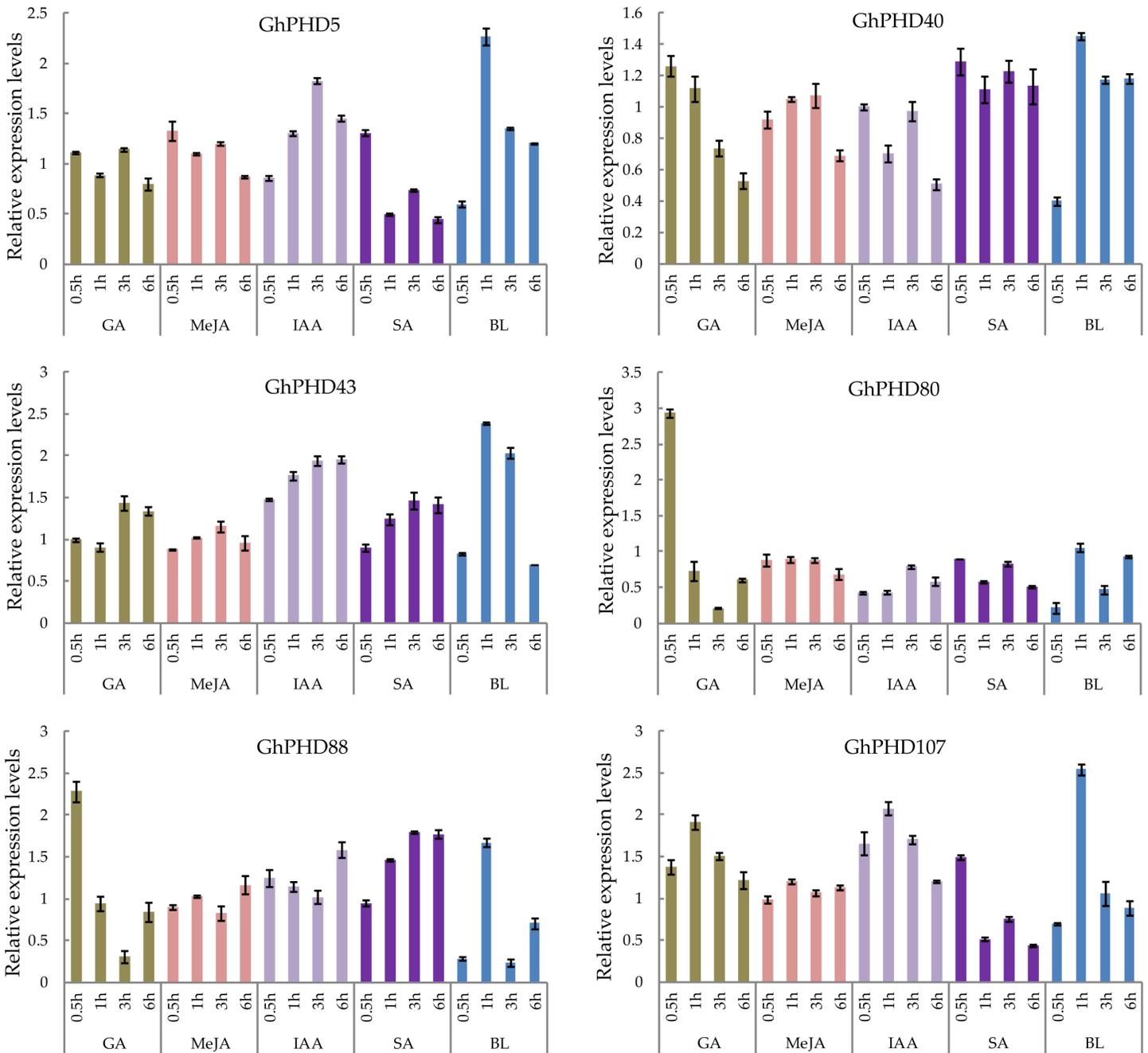
**Figure 5**

Expression patterns of GhPHD genes in cotton tissues. A heatmap indicates the clustering of 108 GhPHD genes in eight tissues (shown on the bottom). DPA is days post anthesis. Gene names are shown on the right. Scale bars at the top show  $\text{Log}_2(\text{FPKM}+1)$  values of each gene.



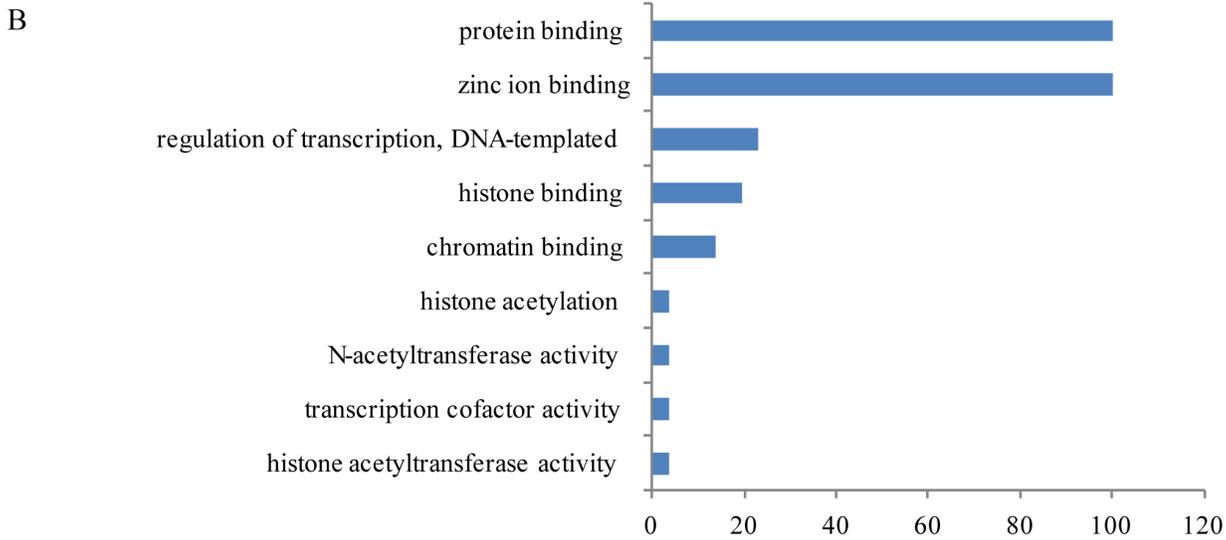
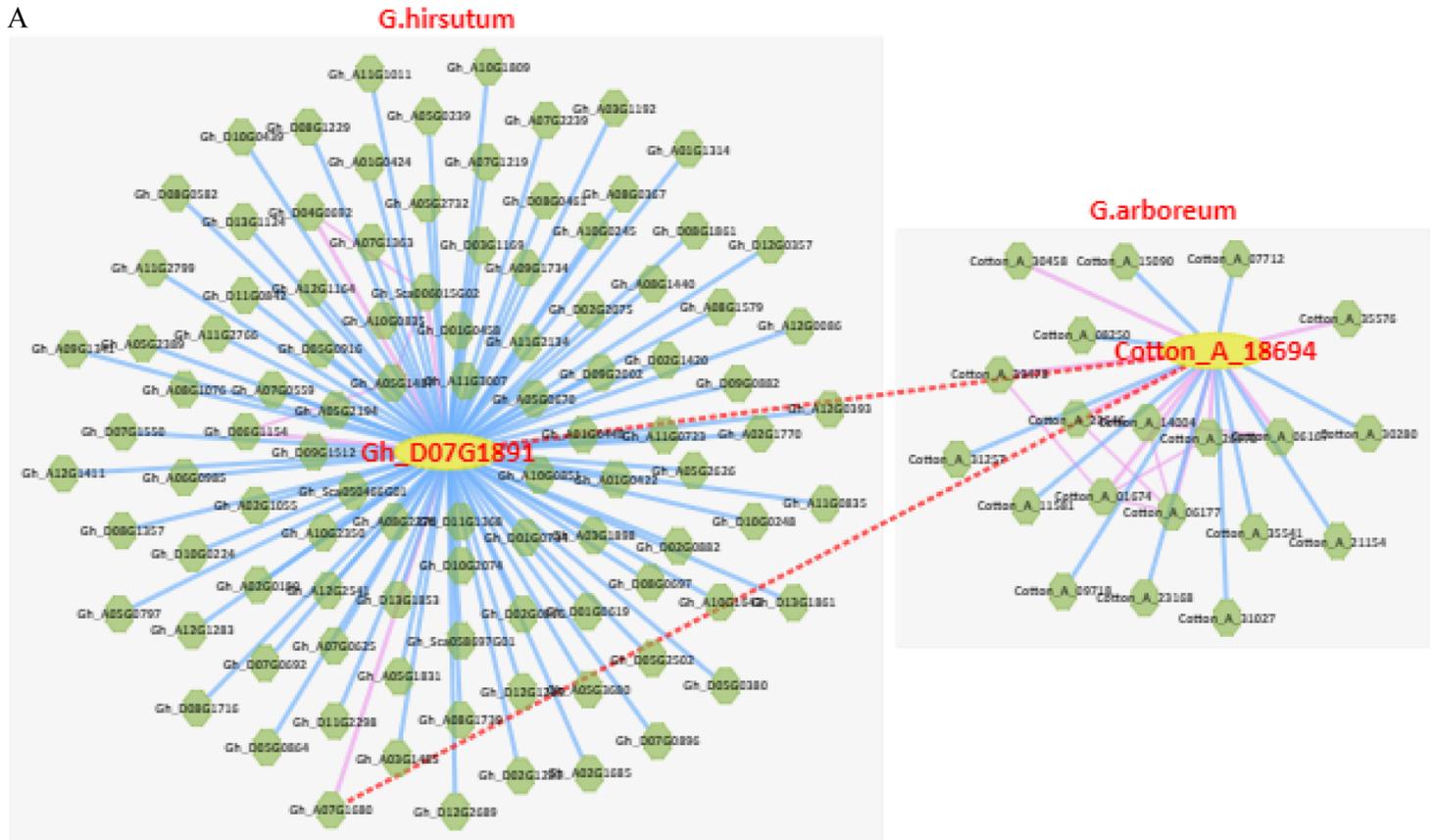
**Figure 6**

The relative expression levels of 12 GhPHD genes under heat, cold, salt, and drought treatment. The relative expression levels were estimated by qRT-PCR. The error bars represent the standard deviations of three experiments.



**Figure 7**

The relative expression levels of six GhPHD genes under GA, MeJA, IAA, SA, and BL treatment. The relative expression levels were estimated by qRT-PCR. The error bars show the standard deviation of three biological replicates.



**Figure 8**

Co-expression networks analysis of GhPHD88 and GO enrichment analysis of 108 GhPHDs. A Co-expression network analysis of GhPHD88 with functional modules for *G. hirsutum* and *G. arboreum*. Yellow and green colour indicates that query protein and interaction proteins, respectively. There are four interaction lines, red lines indicated ortholog gene pairs in *G. hirsutum* and *G. arboreum*; pink lines and blue lines indicate proteins own interaction and positive/negative co-expression relationship with target

protein; orange lines indicate proteins own interaction and protein-protein relationship with target protein.  
B GO enrichment analysis of all GhPHD genes.

## Supplementary Files

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- [TableS2.docx](#)
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- [TableS5.xlsx](#)