Population Transcriptome and Phenotype Reveal that the *Rht-D1b* Contribute a

Larger Seedling Roots to Modern Wheat Cultivars

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Running Title: *Rht-D1b* alters the modern wheat root

Short Summary: *Rht-D1b* is the major allele that contribute a larger root system and

higher root-shoot ratio to modern wheat cultivars.

ABSTRACT

The crop root system is pivotal for water and nutrient uptake. Although the breeding

selection significantly increased the yield of modern wheat cultivars, then how this

selection reshapes the root system remains largely unknown. Here we performed a

large-scale transcriptomic and phenotypical investigations on the seedling root of 406

wheat accessions, which demonstrated modern cultivars (MC) had significantly

changed in the root transcriptome and root development. The MC had a significantly

larger seedling root system than that in landraces (LA), and this was mainly due to the

Rht-D1b allele introduction. Physiological and cytological investigations showed that

the *Rht-D1b* suppressed gibberellin (GA) signaling, thus inhibiting the cell length in

above-ground tissue but increasing the cell length in roots. This distinct regulation of

GA signaling between above- and under-ground tissues contributed to MC having a

significantly larger root-shoot ratio. Moreover, *Rht-D1b* also has a GA-independent

role to enlarge root cell width that enhanced the root diameter, ultimately contribute to

a larger root surface and volume to MC seedlings. These findings provide new

insights to understand the successful application of GA-suppressing alleles in modern

wheat breeding and its futural application to form a robust wheat root system.

Key words: wheat, roots system, *Rht-D1b*, population transcriptome

INTRODUCTION

Roots are the fundamental system used for water and nutrient uptake (Den Herder et al., 2010; van der Bom et al., 2020), and play the critical role in plant abiotic stresses adaptation (Calleja-Cabrera et al., 2020; de Vries et al., 2020; Hu et al., 2019; Khan et al., 2016; Lynch, 1995). The monocotyledonous wheat root is composed of seminal and adventitious roots. The seminal root system are the first to develop and they consist of the primary root and two pairs of seminal roots (Hendel et al., 2021; Hou et al., 2019). Seminal roots penetrate the soil earlier and deeper than adventitious roots and remain active throughout the plant life cycle, thereby play crucial roles in absorbing water from deep soil layers (Watt et al., 2008) and maintaining the survival during drought (Bacher et al., 2021; Golan et al., 2018).

Modern bread wheat (*Triticum aestivum* L.) is a hexaploidy comprising A, B, and D subgenomes (IWGSC, 2018; Zhou et al., 2020). During wheat evolution and domestication, the roots had experienced a suite of complex genetic, morphological and physiological function modifications (Abbo et al., 2014; Golan et al., 2018), including increased drought tolerance (Bacher et al., 2021; Golan et al., 2018). Over the past century, wheat grain yield has been remarkably improved with the breeding activities targeting high-yield (Godfray et al., 2010; Snowdon et al., 2020; van de Wouw et al., 2010). This breeding selection largely altered the wheat genome and differentiated modern cultivars (MC) from landraces (LA) (Hao et al., 2020; Hu et al., 2019; Zhou et al., 2020). Significantly, the Green Revolution of the 1960s, by introducing semi-dwarfing genes into rice and wheat, dramatically increased cereal grain yields with the higher levels input of inorganic nitrogen-based fertilizers (Pearce et al., 2011; Van De Velde et al., 2021). Then, how the roots of MC adapt to current cultivation practices remain largely unknown.

In hexaploid wheat, dwarfing has been achieved mainly through the introduction of the *Rht* (Reduced height) alleles *Rht-B1b* and *Rht-D1b* (also named *Rht1* and *Rht2*), which introduce premature stop codons in the N-terminal coding region of DELLA proteins, blocking the gibberellin (GA) signaling (Liu et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2011).

After six decades of practices, approximately 70% of global cultivars carry one of

these two alleles (Wurschum et al., 2017), and although they significantly altered

plant structure related traits (Lanning et al., 2012; Sherman et al., 2014), their effects

on wheat root remain largely unclear.

With the increase in sequencing accuracy, large-scale population transcriptome

sequencing is becoming an option for SNP identification (Fu et al., 2013; Zhang et al.,

2017). The transcriptional data also provide a link between the traits and the SNP

variations, that cannot be readily captured at the sequence level (Azodi et al., 2020),

thus providing an important bridge from DNA to phenotypes and critical clues for the

investigation of underlying mechanisms of functional variations.

Here, we analyzed transcriptomes and phenotypes of seedlings roots of a natural

bread wheat population, revealing that the modern wheat breeding selection

substantially altered root transcriptomes and development. Our results demonstrated

that *Rht-D1b* was the major allele that conferred large root systems to modern wheat

cultivars. The population transcriptome and cytological analysis showed that *Rht-D1b*

regulates a broad of genes involved in wheat root development, and increases the root

cell width and root diameter, thereby significantly enhances the root-shoot ratio of

modern wheat, which provides new insights for *Rht-D1b* application in futural wheat

breeding practice.

RESULTS

A large-scale transcriptome sequencing reveals the gene composition and

variations in wheat seedling root

A large-scale RNA-seq was performed on 406 worldwide bread wheat

accessions (Table S1) with the seedling root samples at 14 days after germination

(DAGs), producing 15.98 billion high-quality reads, and identifying 1,232,311 single

nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) with an average density of 10 SNPs per gene (Fig.

1A). The accuracy of the identified SNP was validated as > 99% by wheat microarray

evaluation, (Table S2). About half of the SNPs (48.43%) were located in CDS (coding

DNA sequence) regions (Fig. 1B), demonstrating a feature of the transcriptome

derived SNPs.

With this population, 107,662 genes were identified as expressed gene in wheat

root, including 39,243 wheat low confidence (LC) genes, extending the number of

verified wheat genes in the current wheat genome. The expression levels of these

genes ranged from 0.5 to 21,144.5 TPM (transcripts per million). The highly

expressed genes were enriched in "response to water deprivation" and "water

transport" (Fig. 1C and Table S3) pathways, highlighting the root function as the

water uptake organ. Interestingly, the categories of "response to water deprivation"

and "water transport" were also enriched in the highly varied expression genes in the

natural population (Fig. 1D and Table S4), indicating that the water uptake processes

may be highly varied among wheat cultivars.

Modern wheat breeding substantially altered the root transcriptome and

development

Phylogenetic and population structure analyses clearly separated 190 modern

cultivars (MC) and 87 landraces (LA) from the 406 wheat accessions (Fig. 2A and

2B). Then, 10,722 differentially expressed genes (DEGs) were identified between LA

and MC groups (FDR-adjusted $P < 0.05$; Table S5).

GO enrichment analysis of the DEGs showed that the MC significantly changed

in environmental stress response, development, and phytohormones signaling

transductions (Fig. 2C and Table S6). Notably, the homologs of 41 DEGs in other

plants were identified as the key genes involved in root development (Table S7),

including *AtRCD1* (Teotia and Lamb, 2011), *AtARR10* (Yokoyama et al., 2007; Zubo

et al., 2017), *AtEXPB2* (Wu et al., 2001), *OsSHB* (Li et al., 2015), *OsAUX3* (Wang et

al., 2019) and *OsERF2* (Xiao et al., 2016), suggesting that the root development may

be altered in MC. The population phenotypic investigation showed the root number,

diameter, surface, and volume were significantly higher ($P < 0.01$) in the MC than LA

groups at 14 DAGs (Fig. 2D), supporting the modern wheat breeding substantially

altered root development.

***Rht-D1b* is the major allele that contributes a large root to modern wheat**
cultivars

With the population root phenotypes and SNP variations from transcriptome, the
genome-wide association studies (GWAS) detected a quantitative trait locus (QTL) on
4D that was significantly associated ($P < 10^{-5}$) with root surface and volume, which
contained the well-known *Rht-D1* and contributed to 17.1-25.2% variation of these
traits (Fig. 3A and Table S8).

In population, the *Rht-D1b* genotypes had significantly higher values for total
root length, diameter, surface, and volume than *Rht-D1a* genotypes (Fig. 3B).
However, if the cultivars containing *Rht-D1b* were removed from MC group, the root
surface and volume did not differ between LA and MC (i.e., comparison between LA
and *Rht-D1a* MC) (Fig. 3B), strongly supporting the hypothesis that *Rht-D1b* is the
major allele that altered the modern wheat root system.

Then, we argued that the earlier germination or the big grain size may also arise
the conclusion of bigger root system in MC. Thus, the kernel weight was treated as
fixed effects in a linear model to adjust the root phenotypes, and we found the root
surface, root volume and root diameter still be significantly higher in accessions
containing *Rht-D1b* (Fig. S1A), and the region of *Rht-D1b* still be the significantly
Loci for root surface and volume in the GWAS analysis (Fig. S1B and Table S9),
suggesting that *Rht-D1b* has a role in promoting root growth independent of the grain
size. To judge the effect of the earlier germination on root development, the seedling
root development was systematically and continuously investigated (Fig. 3C). At four
DAGs, the root length was significantly shorter in the *Rht-D1b* than *Rht-D1a*
genotypes. At seven DAGs, the *Rht-D1b* genotypes had significantly larger root
diameters and volumes than *Rht-D1a* genotypes. The total root length and surface
significantly increased until 14 DAGs (Fig. 3C). These observations suggest that the
large roots of *Rht-D1b* are due to faster growth after germination rather than earlier
germination.

Finally, the full CDS containing *Rht-D1b* allele driven by the *Rht-D1* promoter
was cloned into wheat cv. Fielder (*Rht-D1a* and *Rht-B1b* background), and this

confirmed its role in increasing total root length, root diameter, and a large root

system (Fig. 3D), supporting that the *Rht-D1b* has an important role in enlarging

wheat root system.

The large root system of the *Rht-D1b* partially depends on the inhibition of GA

signaling

Eight wheat accessions of each group of the *Rht-D1b*, *Rht-B1b,* and

*Rht-B1aRht-D1*a (marked *NO*) were randomly selected (Table S10) to form of a

sub-population, then treated by exogenous GA in a hydroponics system. The

accessions containing *Rht-B1b* and *Rht-D1b* showed significantly increased in the

number of roots, root surface and root volume than *NO* genotypes without GA

treatment (Fig. 4A). With the exogenous GA treatment, these under-ground root traits

were significantly inhibited in the *NO* group (Fig. 4A). Both cultivars containing

Rht-B1b and *Rht-D1b* had lower sensitivities to exogenous GA treatments (Fig. 4A),

although they displayed similar responsive trends with the *NO* group, suggesting that

the GA signals plays a negative effect in wheat root development, which contribute

the larger root system to cultivars containing *Rht-D1b* and *Rht-B1b*. Moreover, the

Rht-D1b accessions showed higher GA insensitivity compared to *Rht-B1b* accessions,

consistent to previous general conclusion, the *Rht-D1b* showed a stronger inhibited

effect on GA signaling. Consistently, the *Rht-D1b* accessions showed higher value in

root traits compared those in accessions containing *Rht-B1b*, further support that the

suppressed GA signaling contribute the larger root system to wheat seedling, and

implying the higher inhibited effect of *Rht-D1b* contribute the larger root system

compared to *Rht-B1b*.

The same accessions were further treated by the exogenous auxin (NAA) and

brassinosteroids (BL) with similar treatment procedure, the sensitivity to NAA (Fig.

S2) and BL (Fig. S3) among the *NO*, *Rht-D1b,* and *Rht-B1b* didn't show stable and

significant difference in these root traits, supporting that GA is the major

phytohormone that altered root development in *Rht-B1b* and *Rht-D1b* cultivars.

Intriguingly, both GA treatment and *Rht-B1b* genotype did not significantly alter

root diameters, indicating that the *Rht-D1b* allele may also have a GA-independent

role in regulating root diameter.

However, the above-ground traits leaf and coleoptile length showed an increased

in *NO* groups (Fig. 4B), and with the exogenous GA treatments the growth was

further promoted (Fig. 4B). These observations suggested the GA confers an opposite

effect on above- and under-ground tissue growth, and the large root system of

Rht-D1b genotypes is related to GA signaling, as the typical semidwarf plant height

conferred by the suppressed GA signaling (Rizza and Jones, 2019).

The increase of cell size underlies the larger root system of *Rht-D1b*

To clarify the underlying mechanism of *Rht-D1b* in regulating root development,

the root meristem was investigated in *Rht-D1b* transgenic lines, showing the meristem

length and width of *Rht-D1b* had significantly increased (Fig. 5B). Further cytological

observation showed the cell width of *Rht-D1b* in the meristem zone had increased,

which would be the reason for the larger meristem width. The number of cells in

longitudinal meristems was significantly more than the wildtype, whereas the average

cell length was similar to the wildtype. Since the half-length of cell width is used to

define the meristem region, the increased number of dividing cells and meristem

length may also be derived from the increased cell width. Indeed, for cells in the

mature root region, both the cell length and width had increased (Fig. 5C), but keep

similar ratio of length/width, highlighting the increased cell width in meristem plays

critical role for increasing the size of root cells.

In contrast, the cell length of above-ground tissues was significantly decreased in

length (Fig. 5D-F), consistent with their well-known dwarf phenotype, further

supporting the distinct regulation pattern of GA signaling between above- and

under-ground tissues.

Rht-D1b* regulates a broader gene network compared to *Rht-B1b

To characterize the underlying mechanism by which *Rht-D1b* regulates wheat

root phenotypes, co-expression analysis was performed on the transcriptomic data.

The genes co-expressed with *Rht-D1* were more than those co-expressed with *Rht-B1*

in *NO* genotypes (Fig. 6A and Table S11). Besides, genes co-expressed with *Rht-D1*

in *Rht-D1b* genotypes included almost all the genes co-expressed with *Rht-B1* in the

Rht-B1b genotypes, supporting *Rht-D1* had a bigger gene co-expression network.

Further analysis showed that the *Rht-D1* have 11,065 co-expressed genes in *Rht-D1b*

genotypes out of the whole gene network of all three *Rhts* (Rht-A1a, B1a and D1a) in

NO genotypes, whereas only 4,251 gene is co-expressed with *Rht-B1b* under this

circumstance, further support that the *Rht-D1b* has a broader regulatory gene

spectrum than *Rht-B1b*.

Consistently, the DEGs number caused by *Rht-D1b* is much more than that

caused by *Rht-B1b* (Fig. 6B, Table S12 and Table S13), GO enrichment showed a

broader influence by the *Rht-D1b* (Fig. 6C and Table S14), which contains several

phytohormones and meristem development category, further supporting that the

Rht-D1b have a broader genes network, and implying that *Rht-D1b* has more

functions in regulating root development.

Interestingly, the two major wheat regions in China, the Yellow and Huai wheat

production region (Y&H) and Yangtze River winter wheat production region (YR),

had a distinct preference for these two alleles (Fig. 6D). Modern wheat cultivars in

Y&H were predominantly *Rht-D1b,* whereas almost all YR cultivars were *Rht-B1b*,

and this may be related to the root traits of these two alleles.

Opposing GA responses to above- and under-ground tissues contribute to a high

root-shoot ratio

The opposing effects of GA on the above- and under-ground traits (Fig. 4 and 5)

suggested a role of *Rht-B1b* and *Rht-D1b* in regulating wheat root-shoot ratio. To

confirm this hypothesis, the fresh weight of shoots and roots at seven DAGs was

investigated. The root-shoot ratio had significantly increased in *Rht-D1b* and *Rht-B1b*

genotypes (Fig. 7A). GWAS identified *Rht-D1b* as the critical allele that increased the

root-shoot ratio of modern wheat cultivars (Fig. 7B and Table S15). *Rht-B1b* was also

significantly associated with the high root-shoot ratio when *Rht-D1b* genotypes were

removed from the population, suggesting a stronger effect of *Rht-D1b,* which masked

that of *Rht-B1b*. The contribution and reliability of *Rht-D1b* associations with

root-shoot ratios in GWAS clearly increased when the *Rht-B1b* genotypes were

removed, indicating interferences from *Rht-B1b*. These results suggest that *Rht-D1b*

and *Rht-B1b* significantly increased the root-shoot ratio at the early developmental

stage and provided new insights for the successful utilization of these green revolution

alleles.

Collectedly, the modification of modern wheat with *Rht-D1b* and *Rht-B1b*

suppressed GA signaling, which conferred distinct responses between above- and

under-ground tissues, increased the cell sizes in roots, but inhibited the cell length in

above-ground tissues, conferring a large root system and a high root-shoot ratio to

modern wheat cultivars (Fig. 7C). The *Rht-D1b* also have a role independent of GA

signals to promote the root diameter, confers a stronger effect in enhancing wheat root

systems and root-shoot ratios, which significantly altered root-related traits in current

wheat cultivars.

DISCUSSION

In this study, the large-scale transcriptome sequencing data availed high-density

SNP markers for subsequent gene evaluation. A total of 39,243 LC genes were

identified in the wheat root, and this not only provided transcriptional evidence for LC

genes but also expanded the wheat genome database. Based on analysis of identified

SNP and wheat root phenotypes, *Rht-D1b* was identified as the major allele for

enhancing root systems in modern wheat cultivars.

It has been suggested that targeting roots for crop improvement may be the

solution to the second Green Revolution (Den Herder et al., 2010; Lynch, 2007).

Although either an increased root length or number enlarged the root system, we

found that the large root diameters conferred by the *Rht-D1b* allele were the major

cause of large root volumes. This result enlightens a new direction for root

improvement by enhancing root cell width and root diameter, which may reconcile

the competition between the length and number of roots (van der Bom et al., 2020) to

form a large root system.

Bearing the *Rht-D1b* allele contributed to large seedling roots in modern wheat,

and was preferentially adopted in the Y&H wheat production region The drought and

cold winter ecology conditions in Y&H may be the important reason for *Rht-D1b*

adoption here. It will be an interesting and important question to clarify the

connections between the bigger root system and its geographic adoption in different

wheat regions in China (Gao et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2006), the USA (Guedira et al.,

2010) and Europe (Wurschum et al., 2015; Wurschum et al., 2018).

Although gibberellins enhanced root cell elongation (Shani et al., 2013) and root

meristem proliferation (Qin et al., 2022), it is the *Rht-D1b*-mediated increase in cell

width that results in large root systems. Similarly, the cell length reduction is the

major mechanism for the dwarf phenotypes, suggesting the critical role of GA in

controlling plant cell shape. This diverged GA signaling responses between the

above- and under-ground tissue is due to their distinct GA sensitivity (Tanimoto,

2012). The reduced GA production barely affected root growth. In contrast,

over-production of GA inhibited root growth (Qin et al., 2022), consistent with that

the root is very sensitive to GA and reaches the saturated status with low

concentration maintenance (Tanimoto, 2012). In this study, both *Rht-B1b* and

Rht-D1b genotypes showed a low sensitivity to GA treatment yet responded to the

exogenous GA (Fig. 4A) to inhibit root growth, indicating that their root development

benefited from the suppressed GA signaling. However, these findings suggest that GA

signaling seems contribute a negative effect on root growth in *NO* genotype wheat

which is contradicts to the previous conclusion that low GA concentration promoted

root growth in most plant species (Tanimoto, 2012), thus, the underlying mechanism

remains largely unknown.

In plants, the GA synthesis and transportation (Binenbaum et al., 2018; Topham

et al., 2017) is a complex gene network. Moreover, the functions of GA in the plant

are both spatial (Topham et al., 2017) and temporal dependent (Qin et al., 2022),

confounding our understanding of the regulatory mechanisms of *Rht-B1b* and

Rht-D1b. Our findings that GA distinct affects between above- and under-ground

tissues, *Rht-B1b* and *Rht-D1b* functions in enlarging both the root system and

root-shoot ratio, and *Rht-B1b* and *Rht-D1b* encode different functions, are useful not

only for research on the regulatory mechanisms of GA, but also wheat breeding and

cultivation practices.

Materials and Methods

Plant materials and Root development trait measurement

The 406 bread wheat (*Triticum aestivum* L.) accessions used in this study

included 87 landraces, 43 historical cultivars (the cultivars released before 1970), 190

modern cultivars (the cultivars released after 1970), and 60 breeding lines (Table S1).

Similar size seeds were selected for each accession, and sterilized with 2% sodium

hypochlorite for 10 min and then rinsed 3-5 times with distilled water. Then twenty

sterilized seeds of each accession were incubated at 4 □ in darkness for 2 days to

break dormancy. The germinated seeds of each accession were placed on damp filter

papers in the germination box (12×12×5 cm) and cultivated under 22 □/16 □

day/night (50% relative air humidity) and 16 h light (2000 Lux) / 8 h dark cycles.

After 14 days, seven highly similar robust seedling were collected for each accession,

one seedling root were immediately frozen in liquid N2 for the subsequent RNA

isolation, and other 6 samples were used for phenotyping total root length, root

surface, root volume, and root diameter with the Wseen LA-S image system

(Hangzhou Wseen Testing Technology Co. LTD), and manually measuring the

number of roots and the primary root length. For each accession, six independent

replications were performed, and produced 36 root sampling data and 6 independent

samples for RNA preparation. The dynamic root development measurements were

performed at 4 and 7 DAGs seedling with same procedure as above.

RNA sequencing and Reads mapping

Six independent samples from six replications (one root sample per replication)

were equally bulked for total RNA extraction, and the RNA-seq libraries generation

in collaboration with Frasergen Bioinformatics Co., Ltd. (Wuhan, China). Briefly, the

paired-end sequencing libraries with an insert size of ~250 bp were sequenced on the

Illumina HiSeq X Ten platform. Using Trimmomatic (v0.33) (Bolger et al., 2014),

raw reads were trimmed to remove sequencing adapters, and reads with low-quality

bases were culled. Reads were then aligned to the bread wheat reference genome

(IWGSC RefSeq v1.0) using the STAR software (v2.4.2a) (Dobin et al., 2013) in the

2-pass mapping mode. Reads were also mapped to the transcriptome sequence

(IWGSC RefSeq v1.1 annotation) with BWA (v0.7.17) (Li and Durbin, 2010).

Uniquely mapping reads that had the same mapping loci on both genome and

transcriptome and the proper mapping distances with the relatively paired reads (<

63,068 bp based on the largest intron length in the whole genome) in the reference

sequence alignment, were selected to reduce mapping errors and used for the

subsequential SNP calling.

SNP calling and Annotation

A two-step procedure (Fu et al., 2013) were employed with a few of

modifications. In details, the raw SNPs were called with a population SNP-calling

manner referring to the best practices of GATK (v4.0.2.0) (McKenna et al., 2010).

The "MarkDuplicates" module (Picard-2.17.11) was used to mark the duplication

alignment, "SplitNCigarReads" module (GATK v4.0.2.0) was used to remove the

sequences spanning intronic regions, and "HaplotypeCaller" module (GATK v4.0.2.0)

was used to generate individual variants for each sample. SNPs were filtered with the

following parameters: mapping quality $\geq$ 40, SNP quality $\geq$ 30, genotype quality for

each accession $\geq$ 20, QD (SNP quality/reads depth) $\geq$ 2; each SNP was more than 5

bp away from an InDel; for homozygous genotypes, the supporting reads $\geq$ 5 for each

accession; for heterozygous genotypes, the supporting reads for both the reference and

alternative alleles $\geq$3 for each accession. SNPs that did not meet these parameters

were termed missing. To further exclude possible false polymorphic sites caused by

intrinsic mapping errors which mainly resulted from the homologous on the reference

genome and mapping bias inherent to the mapping algorithm, SNPs identified in the

accession of wheat cv. Chinese Spring which was used to generate reference genome

sequence, were defined as error-prone SNP sets. Any SNPs that matched the

error-prone set were culled. The SNPs that met the filtering criteria were termed

high-quality SNPs, and annotated using the SnpEff (v4.3) (Cingolani et al., 2012).

This   SNP   calling   pipeline   could   be   downloaded   from

https://github.com/biozhp/Population_RNA-seq.

SNP validation

To evaluate and improve the reproducibility of the pipeline and the accuracy of

the final SNPs, the accession of wheat cv. Chinese Spring as the positive

transcriptome control (IWGSC RefSeq v1.1 annotation), there are only 387 alternative

alleles (0.1%) were detected in this accession in population transcriptomic data,

suggesting a low false-positive rate of our pipeline. Then, three accessions (s542,

s543 and s544) with two biological replications were selected from the population for

RNA-seq library construction and SNP identification. The results an average

concordant rate of 98.85% between two-replication RNA samples and one RNA

sample in population transcriptomic analysis, indicating that the SNP calling pipeline

was highly reproducible (Table S16). At last, four accessions (K147, K95, s542 and

s543) were selected to genotype with wheat 660□K SNP arrays, and the resultant

accuracies were > 99% (Table S2). Thus, these results corroborated the accuracy and

reliability of our SNP data. In turn, these validations provide key clues to improve the

parameters in the pipeline.

SNP imputation

Beagle (v5.4) (Browning et al., 2018) was used to impute missing genotypes. All

heterozygous genotypes were masked as missing genotypes before imputation. To get

the optimal imputation accuracy and filling rate, 28,257 sites were randomly masked

as missing, the missing rate varied from 10 to 90%, and were subsequently imputed

using default parameters. The imputation accuracy was measured by determining the

proportion of correctly inferred genotypes from the total masked genotypes, and
found that the imputation accuracy was more than 99% when the missing rate was <
0.8 (Table S17). By combining imputation accuracies and filling rates, SNPs with a
missing rate < 0.8 were imputed.

Phylogenetic analysis

RAxML (v8.2.12) (Stamatakis, 2014) was used to construct a
maximum-likelihood tree using imputed SNPs of MAF > 0.2, and the command "-f a
-m GTRGAMMA -p 12346 -x 12346 -# 100". The phylogenetic tree was visualized in
iTOL (v6) (Letunic and Bork, 2021). Imputed SNPs with MAF > 0.05 were used to
quantify and infer population structures in ADMIXTURE (v1.3.0) (Alexander et al.,
2009). The parameters K = 2 -10 were used to identify different groups, and finally K
= 4 was used in subsequent analysis.

Quantification of gene expression

Reads were aligned to high and low confidence transcripts (IWGSC RefSeq v1.1
annotation) with the default parameters in Kallisto (v0.46.2) (Bray et al., 2016). The
transcript expression values (Transcripts Per Million, TPM) were summarized to gene
expression levels using R package Tximport (v1.14.0) (Soneson et al., 2015) with the
"lengthScaledTPM" option (Ramirez-Gonzalez et al., 2018). To investigate the extent
of gene expression variation within the population, genes with TPM > 0.5 in at least 5%
of accessions (20 accessions) were selected, and the fold change of their TPM at 95th
percentiles to that of the 5th percentiles (TPM > 0.5) in the whole population was
calculated.

Identification of differentially expressed genes (DEGs)

401 Linear mixed model (Ku et al., 2021) was performed in DEGs identification for
402 its superior sensitivity in controlling the confounders:

$$y = \mu + X\alpha + P\beta + K\gamma + e$$

403 In this equation, y represents the expression values (TPM) of the compared gene
404 among the whole population, μ represents is the overall mean, X represents the two

groups, between of which the gene expression levels were compared, P is the PCA matrix and K is the relative kinship matrix. $X\alpha$ and $P\beta$ represent fixed effects, and $K\gamma$ represent random effects. The PCA matrix and kinship matrix were generated with GAPIT (v3.1) (Wang and Zhang, 2021). The top three principal components were used to build up the P matrix for population-structure correction. The K matrix was used to correct the potential familial relatedness. Analysis was performed with R using the package lmerTest (v3.1-3). The significance (P-value) of the $X\alpha$ was extracted using the "anova" function and was used to indicate whether the expression levels of target gene were significantly different between the two compared groups. The P-values were adjusted for multiple testing by controlling for FDR with the BH method and the genes with FDR adjusted P-value < 0.05 were considered as candidate DEGs. To exclude the random error from the single sample RNA-seq, only genes detected in 20 accessions at least were applied with the DEGs analysis, and all DEGs identified with the groups pairs in which each group contains more than 20 accessions at least (5% of population, presenting 20 replications for any given genotype).

GO enrichment analysis

GO annotations of high confidence genes were downloaded from the Ensembl Plants Genes 53 database, and GO annotations of low confidence genes were obtained with eggNOG-mapper (v2) (Cantalapiedra et al., 2021). GO enrichment analysis was performed using the R package clusterProfiler (v3.18.1) with the "enricher" function (Yu et al., 2012). The P-values were adjusted for multiple testing with the procedure of Benjamini and Hochberg.

Genome-wide association analyses

The GWAS analysis with the mixed linear model (PCA + kinship) implemented in GAPIT (v3.1) (Wang and Zhang, 2021) was applied on the imputed SNPs with MAF > 0.05. The PCA and kinship matrix were generated using GAPIT with the default parameters to correct the population structure and familial relatedness,

433 respectively. A Bonferroni-corrected threshold probability based on individual tests

434 was calculated to correct for multiple comparisons using 0.05/N, where N is the

435 effective SNP number calculated with the Genetic type 1 Error Calculator (v0.2). The

436 significant *P-value* thresholds for root surface and volume were 4.29×10^{-5}. Those for

437 root-shoot ratio were 4.46×10^{-5}, 4.52×10^{-5}, and 4.36×10^{-5} for the whole population

438 and the sub-populations removing either *Rht-B1b* or *Rht-D1b* genotypes, respectively.

439 The kernel weight was treated as fixed effects in a linear model to adjust the data of

440 root phenotypes with the "lm" function in R (v 3.6.1) (Chambers and Hastie, 1992),

441 and the adjust root phenotypic data was further applied into the genetic effect analysis

442 and GWAS analysis.

Permutations of the phenotyping comparison

444 To minimize false positive errors, the 1,000 permutation tests (Zhou et al., 2020)

445 were conducted in phenotyping comparison. In each permutation test, 60% of

446 accessions were randomly sampled from each of the two compared groups and the

447 significance level of the differences of target trait between the two sampled groups

448 were calculated using Student's t-tests. The total number of significant differences

449 (*P*-value < 0.01) in the 1,000 permutation tests was recorded.

Identification of genes co-expressed with *Rht-A1/B1/D1*

451 Genes co-expressed with *Rht-A1/B1/D1* were identified with the Gini correlation

452 coefficient (GCC) algorithm (Ma and Wang, 2012). The Gini correlation coefficient

453 (GCC) values calculated by the R package rsgcc (v1.0.6), and the gene pairs with the

454 |GCC| value ≥0.5 and *P-value* < 0.01 were considered as co-expressed genes.

Hormone treatment

456 Eight randomly selected accessions (Table S10) from each group of the

457 *Rht-B1aRht-D1a*, *Rht-B1bRht-D1a,* and *Rht-B1aRht-D1b*, and were treated with 0.2

458 μM and 2 μM gibberellic acid (GA3), 10 nM and 100 nM Epibrassinolide (EpiBL),

459 50 nM and 500 nM 1-Naphthaleneacetic acid (NAA). Control plants for GA3, EpiBL,

and NAA were treated with mock solutions of distilled water containing ethanol,
DMSO, and ethanol, respectively. The sterilized seeds (highly similar size seeds were
selected for each accession) were incubated in the dark at 4 °C for two days and then
cultivated in a germinating box for one day, then treatment with hormones until 14
DAGs. For each accession, three independent replications were conducted for each
treatment, and at least six plants were used for each replication.

Over-expression transgenic vector construction and plant transformation

The cDNA of *TaRht-D1b* was cloned (1872 bp from wheat cv. Kenong199) and
transferred into the pMWB111 vector with *TaRht-D1* native promoter (1876 bp from
wheat cv. Kenong199), then transformed into wheat cv. Fielder using *Agrobacterium*
tumefaciens-mediated transformation (Hayta et al., 2019). All transgenic lines were
confirmed by PCR and sequencing. To reduce different grain weight interferes on root
development, similar size seeds from transgenic lines and wild type were selected for
phenotyping.

Cytological observation of roots and shoots

Confocal laser scanning microscopy (CLSM) was used for cytological
observations of roots and shoots. CLSM samples were prepared according to previous
report (Wang et al., 2021). Samples were harvested and fixed in 4% glutaraldehyde
(in 12.5 mM cacodylate, pH 6.9), desiccated in vacuo for 30 min, after which they
were incubated overnight in a fixative at room temperature. After fixation, tissues
were dehydrated through different gradients of ethanol absolute (50%, 60%, 70%,
85%, 95% and 100% ethanol absolute) for 30 min per step. Then, tissues were
clarified with 2:1 (v/v) benzyl benzoate: benzyl alcohol for a minimum of 1 h.
Samples were observed under a confocal microscope coupled to a 488-nm argon laser
(Olympus, Fluoview1200, Tokyo, Japan). ImageJ (v1.48) software was used to
measure the length and width of the cell.

Data availability

The raw RNA-Seq data were deposited in the Sequence Read Archive
(https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sra) under accession numbers PRJNA838764.
Genotypic, transcriptomic and phenotypic data used in this analysis are publicly
available from our website (https://iwheat.net/resource/). All the code of analysis
could be downloaded from https://github.com/biozhp/Population_RNA-seq.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

S.X. and Z.K. conceived the project and designed the research. Z.K., S.X. and D.H.
collected wheat accession. X.W., P.Z., X.G., Z.L., X.M., Y.Z., X.L., L.H. and W.W.
performed the sample preparation, RNA sequencing and phenotypic data collection and
process. S.X., X.W., P.Z., X.G. organized the data and wrote the manuscript. All
authors discussed the results and commented on the manuscript. All authors read and
approved the final manuscript.

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Figure legends

Figure 1. The character of population transcriptome in wheat root.

(A) The distribution of the identified SNPs in wheat genome. The color indicates the

number of SNPs within a window size of 1 Mb. **(B)** The distribution of the identified

SNPs in gene regions. "UP" and "DOWN" represent the up- and down-stream 5 Kb

regions that flank the annotated genes. **(C)** GO enrichment of the genes with highly

and lowly expressed in seedling root. The 5% genes with highest expression (High_E)

and lowest expression (Low_E) in population transcriptome were selected for this

analysis. **(D)** GO enrichment of the genes with highly and lowly variations in

expression levels. Genes with highly variations, High_V (fold change from > 8).

Genes with lowly variations, Low_V (fold change from < 2).

Figure 2. The alterations of root transcriptome and root development in modern

wheat cultivars.

(A) The phylogenetic tree of 406 wheat accessions. The phylogenetic tree was

constructed and visualized with RAxML (v8.2.12) and iTOL (v6), respectively.

Different color lines represent different groups. LA: landraces (red); HC: historical

cultivars (green); MC: modern cultivars (blue); BL: breeding lines (orange). **(B)**

Population structure of 406 wheat accessions with K = 2, 3, and 4. Matrices of

membership coefficients of accessions corresponding to 2 - 4 hypothetical

subpopulations derived from the structure analysis (ADMIXTURE v1.3.0). Each line

represents a single accession. **(C)** GO enrichment of the differentially expressed genes

(DEGs) between LA and MC groups. "UP" and "DOWN" represent the enriched

categories of up- and down-regulated DEGs in MC group, respectively. **(D)** The

comparisons of root phenotypes between LA and MC. The data was acquired from

seedling at 14 days after germination (DAGs). Data are means ± SD, 36 samples for

six replications were measured for each accession, and the average data of each

accession was used for this comparison. Red numbers indicate the *P*-value from

Student's *t*-tests, and "NS" refer no significance detected at $P < 0.01$ level. Black

numbers indicate the observed number with significant or insignificant difference in

1,000 permutations.

Figure 3. The Rht-D1b contributes a larger seedling root system to modern

wheat cultivars.

(A) Genome-wide association analysis on root surface and volume. The phenotypic

data was acquired and performed as Figure 2D. The number indicates the phenotypic

variance explained by *Rht-D1b*. **(B)** The comparisons of root phenotypes between LA

and MC at 14 DAGs. *Rht-D1a* and *Rht-D1b* refer the accessions of MC with *Rht-D1a*

and *Rht-D1b*, respectively. Red numbers indicate the *P*-value from Student's *t*-test,

and "NS" refer not significance detected at $P < 0.01$ level. Black numbers indicate the

observed number with significant or insignificant differences in 1,000 permutations.

(C) The comparisons of root phenotypes between *Rht-D1a* and *Rht-D1b* group at 4, 7,

and 14 DAGs. **(D)** Root phenotypes of the *Rht-D1b* transgenic lines. The *Rht-D1b*

was transformed into *Rht-B1b* background (wheat cv. fielder) driven by native *Rht-D1*

promoter. WT, wild type (cv. fielder). D1 and D2, the transgenic line. Left panel is

the phenotypes at 14 DAGs. Bar $=$ 2 cm. Right panel presents the statistical data of

the phenotypes. Data are means $\pm$ SD, 18 seedlings at least from three independent

sample preparations were counted for each genotype. "*" and "**" indicate Student's

t-test $P < 0.05$ and 0.01, respectively.

Figure 4. The effects of Rht-D1b on root development partly depend on GA

signaling.

(A) The root phenotypes of different genotype with and without exogenous GA

treatment. The indicated concentrations of GA were applied on the seedlings from 1

to 14 DAGs. Left part of each panel present the phenotypic data without GA

treatment, and right part of each panel present the ratio of treated group phenotypic

data to the average of untreated group phenotypic data within the same genotype.

Data are means $\pm$ SD. Each genotype contained eight randomly selected accessions, at

least six seedlings were counted for each accession, and replicate three times. *NO*

refers *Rht-B1aRht-D1a*, *B1b* refers *Rht-B1bRht-D1a* and *D1b* refer *Rht-B1aRht-D1b*.

"*" indicates significant differences (Student's *t*-test *P* < 0.01) between with and

without GA treatment. Different letters (a, b, and c) on the top indicate significant

differences (*P* < 0.01) between different genotypes with multiple comparisons in a

treated group by least significant difference (LSD) test. **(B)** The above-ground

phenotypes of different genotype with and without GA treatment. The statistical data

as described in (A).

Figure 5. Rht-D1b enlarges the cell size of roots but reduces the cell length in

above-ground tissue.

CLSM records the cell morphology and size of above- and under-ground tissues in

WT and *Rht-D1b* transgenic lines. WT, the control wheat cultivar Fielder, the D1 and

D2 are different transgenic line of *Rht-D1b*. Seven samples were observed for each

genotype, and at least 30 clear cells in each sample were measured with ImageJ

software (v1.48). "*" in each panel indicates Student's *t*-test *P*-value < 0.05. **(A)**

Diagram of the positions for microscopic observation. **(B)** Cells of root meristem. The

average of seven samples were present in the figure and statistics. "Length" and

"Width" represent the meristem length (indicated by Red dotted line) and meristem

width (indicated by yellow dotted line), respectively. The cell length, cell number, and

cell width were measured from the cell layer indicated by the red asterisk in left

picture. Bar = 100 μm. **(C)** Cells of root maturation zone. "L1" and "L2" represent

different cell layer indicated by the red and yellow dotted line, respectively. Bar = 200

μm. **(D)** Cells of leaf at the top part. Bar = 100 μm. **(E)** Cells of the leaf at the base

part. Bar = 100 μm. **(F)** Cells of the coleoptile. Bar = 100 μm.

Figure 6. Rht-D1b had a broader regulatory gene spectrum.

(A) Venn diagrams depicting the overlap of genes co-expressed with *Rht-A1*, *Rht-B1,*

and *Rht-D1*. The first Venn diagram indicates the genes co-expressed with three *Rhts*

in the "NO" genotypic group (accessions with *Rht-B1aRht-D1a*). "*Rht-B1b*" indicates

genes co-expressed with *Rht-B1* in "B1b" genotypic group (accessions with

Rht-B1bRht-D1a). "*Rht-D1b*" indicates genes co-expressed with *Rht-D1* in "D1b"

genotypic group (accessions with *Rht-B1aRht-D1b*), and "Total" indicates the union

genes which co-expressed with three *Rhts* in "NO" genotypic group. The group of

"NO", "B1b" and "D1b" contained 200, 107 and 98 accessions, respectively. **(B)** The

numbers of DEGs caused by *Rht-B1b* and *Rht-D1b* compared to "NO" groups under

different significant level. The X-axis presents FDR adjust *P-value*. **(C)** GO

enrichment of the DEGs under $P < 0.05$ and 0.01 standard in (B). **(D)** Distribution of

MC with or without *Rht-B1b* and *Rht-D1b* alleles in Yangtze River (YR) and Yellow

and Huai (Y&H) winter wheat production regions.

Figure 7. Rht-D1b increases the root-shoot ratio of wheat.

(A) The comparisons of root weight, leaf weight and root-shoot ratio in different

genotypic group. NO refers *Rht-B1aRht-D1a*, B1b refers *Rht-B1bRht-D1a*, D1b refers

Rht-B1aRht-D1b. The data was acquired from seedling at 7 DAGs of 344 accessions,

36 samples from six replications were measured for each accession, and the average

data of each accession was used for this comparison. Red numbers indicate the

P-value from Student's *t*-tests, and "NS" refer not significance detected at $P < 0.01$

level. Black numbers indicate the observed number of significant or insignificant

differences in 1,000 permutations. **(B)** Genome-wide association analysis on

root-shoot ratio. The phenotypic data was acquired and performed as (A). The number

indicates the phenotypic variance explained by *Rht-D1b* or *Rht-B1b*. "Total", "NO

B1b", and "NO D1b" indicate the whole populations, populations removed accessions

with *Rht-B1b* and *Rht-D1b*, respectively. **(C)** Model diagram of *Rht-D1b* and *Rht-B1b*

regulating wheat seedling development. The introduction of *Rht-D1b* and *Rht-B1b*

suppressed the GA signaling, which conferred distinct GA responses between above-

and under-ground tissues. They increased the cell length in the root and decreased the

cell length in above-ground tissues. *Rht-D1b* also directly promoted the root diameter

independent of GA signaling, resulting in a large root system and a high root-shoot

ratio.

Figure S1. Root phenotype analysis after removing the influence of thousand

kernel weight.

(A) The comparisons of adjusted root phenotypes between LA and MC at14 DAGs.

Rht-D1a and *Rht-D1b* refer the accessions of MC with *Rht-D1a* and *Rht-D1b*,

respectively. The adjusted root phenotypes are correcting potential effects of thousand

kernel weight (TKW) on the root phenotypes with a linear model (R v3.6.1). Red

numbers indicate the *P*-value from Student's *t*-test, and "NS" refer no significance

detected at $P < 0.01$ level. Black numbers indicate the observed number of significant

or insignificant differences in 1,000 permutations. **(B)** Genome-wide association

analysis on adjusted root surface and volume at 14 DAGs. The phenotypic data was

acquired and performed as (A). *P-value* threshold is 1/N, N represent the effective

SNP number.

Figure S2. The above- and under-ground phenotypes of different genotype with

and without exogenous NAA treatment.

The indicated concentrations of NAA were applied on the seedlings from 1 to 14

DAGs. Left part of each panel present the phenotypic data without NAA treatment,

and right part of each panel present the ratio of treated group phenotypic data to the

average of untreated group phenotypic data within the same genotype. Data are means

± SD. Each genotype contained eight randomly selected accessions, at least six

seedlings were counted for each accession, and replicate three times. *NO* refers

Rht-B1aRht-D1a, *B1b* refers *Rht-B1bRht-D1a*, *D1b* refers *Rht-B1aRht-D1b*. "*"

indicates significant difference (Student's *t*-test $P < 0.01$) between with and without

GA treatment. Different letters (a and b) on the top indicate significant differences (*P*

< 0.01) between different genotypes with multiple comparisons in a treated group by

least significant difference (LSD) test.

Figure S3. The above- and under-ground phenotypes of different genotype with

and without exogenous BL treatment.

The indicated concentrations of BL were applied on the seedlings from 1 to 14 DAGs.
Left part of each panel present the phenotypic data without BL treatment, and right
part of each panel present the ratio of treated group phenotypic data to the average of
untreated group phenotypic data within the same genotype. Data are means ± SD.
Each genotype contained eight randomly selected accessions, at least six seedlings
were counted for each accession, and replicate three times. *NO* refers
Rht-B1aRht-D1a, *B1b* refers *Rht-B1bRht-D1a*, *D1b* refer *Rht-B1aRht-D1b*. "*"
indicates significant difference (Student's *t*-test $P < 0.01$) between with and without
BL treatment. Different letters (a and b) on the top indicate significant differences (*P*
< 0.01) between different genotypes with multiple comparisons in a treated group by
LSD test.

Supplemental Data

Table S1. Information of all accessions involved in this study.

Table S2. The validation of identified SNPs in population transcriptomic analysis.

Table S3. Gene ontology enrichment of the highly and lowly expressed genes.

Table S4. Gene ontology enrichment of the highly and lowly varied expression genes.

Table S5. The identified DEGs between LA and MC groups.

Table S6. Gene ontology enrichment of the DEGs between LA and MC.

Table S7. The DEGs related to root development between LA and MC.

Table S8. GWAS results of the root surface and volume at 14 DAGs.

Table S9. GWAS results of the adjusted root phenotypes at 14 DAGs.

Table S10. The accession list for phytohormones treatment.

Table S11. Genes co-expressed with *Rht-A1*, *Rht-B1* and *Rht-D1* genes.

Table S12. The identified DEGs between NO and D1b groups.

Table S13. The identified DEGs between NO and B1b groups.

Table S14. Gene ontology enrichment of the DEGs in D1b/NO and B1b/NO

comparisons.

Table S15. GWAS results of the root-shoot ratio at 7 DAGs.

Table S16. The validation of identified SNP by the two biological replications

RNA-seq.

Table S17. Imputation accuracy of SNPs under different cutoffs of missing rate.