# Identification of Multi-landscape and Cell Interactions in the Tumor Microenvironment through High-Coverage Single-Cell Sequencing

Wenlong Zhong[1,3#], Ligang Wang[2#], Tonglei Guo[2], Lihua Zhao[2], Daqin Wu[1,3], Fei Xie[2], Xiao Wang[2], Xiuxin Li[2], Fangxiao Wang[2], Weiyue Gu[2*], Tianxin Lin[1,3*], Xu Chen[1,3*]

1 Department of Urology, Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hospital, Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, China.

2 Beijing Chigene Translational Medical Research Center Co. Ltd., Beijing, China.

3 Guangdong Provincial Key Laboratory of Malignant Tumour Epigenetics and Gene Regulation, Guangdong-Hong Kong Joint Laboratory for RNA Medicine, Sun Yat-Sen Memorial Hospital, Sun Yat-Sen University, Guangzhou, China.

\# To whom contributed this work equally

\* To whom correspondence should be addressed. Weiyue Gu, E-mail: gwyue@163.com. Tianxin Lin, E-mail: lintx@mail.sysu.edu.cn. Xu Chen, E-mail: chenx457@mail.sysu.edu.cn.

## Abstract

Single-cell RNA sequencing (scRNA-seq) is a widely used method for classifying cell types and states and revealing disease mechanisms. However, most contemporary scRNA-seq platforms fail to explore the multi-landscape of RNA. Here, we designed a microfluidic chip combined oligo-dT primers and Random Bridging Co-labeling (RBCL) RNA sequencing to develop an innovative Chigene scRNA-seq technology that can identify gene expression, mutations, and RNA splicing landscapes at the single-cell level. The Chigene scRNA-seq platform demonstrated exceptional performance, with minimal doublet rates of 0.94% (Chigene V1) and 1.93% (Chigene V2). Both versions exhibit high sensitivity, with Chigene V2 achieving nearly 100% RNA coverage and detecting over 1800 genes per cell on average. Targeted capture of single-cell gene mutations enhances mutation detection sensitivity. Moreover, this Chigene V2 platform has been validated in clinical samples for its ability to detect mutations, gene fusions and alternative splicing. The reliability of the platform was further corroborated using known functional gene mutation (CDKN1A) and fusion (FGFR3-TACC). To validate this method's potential for discovering novel gene mutations in clinical samples, our investigation revealed an intriguing cell subpopulation carrying an ARHGAP5 mutation in urothelial carcinoma. These cells exhibited high-frequency mRNA splicing and exhibited specific crosstalk with T cells, distinguishing them from the subpopulation with the ARHGAP5 wild-type phenotype. Overall, this method provides a robust scRNA-seq platform suitable for comprehensive analyses of clinical specimens at different genetic information levels, thereby offering significant potential in the discovery of novel genes and interactions at the single-cell level.

## Introduction

Single-cell RNA sequencing (scRNA-seq) has revolutionized the field of tumor research by enabling the identification and characterization of cell types, states, lineages, and circuitry at the single-cell level[1-3]. These findings have greatly enhanced our understanding of tumor heterogeneity and the immune microenvironment. Genetic mutations[4], gene fusions, and RNA alternative splicing[5] are all critical factors that contribute to tumorigenesis and tumor progression. These molecular alterations can significantly impact cellular processes, including cell proliferation, differentiation, metastasis and treatment response. Integrating transcriptomic analysis with gene mutation data from whole exome sequencing (WES) and RNA alternative splicing data at the single-cell level holds immense potential for advancing the understanding of tumors. Although state-of-the-art scRNA-seq methods are highly sensitive and accurate for quantifying and characterizing cell states[6-9], most of these methods rely on barcoded oligo-dT primers that hybridize to polyadenylated transcripts for RNA capture and cDNA synthesis. This approach primarily detects short fragments located near the poly(A) tail or the 5' end of the transcript, leaving the remaining sequences of polyadenylated RNA molecules undetected. As a result, the accurate detection of single nucleotide variants (SNVs), gene fusions and alternative splicing events is limited[10-13]. Recently, several high-throughput scRNA-seq platforms for total transcriptome full-length sequencing have emerged [16, 31, 33]. However, these methods pose limitations in terms of sequencing depth and mRNA detection sensitivity when targeting total RNA within a fixed amount of data.

To address the aforementioned challenges and fulfil the needs of scientific research and clinical practice, we developed a microfluidics-based high-sensitivity and full-length mRNA sequencing method termed Chigene-seq. In Chigene-seq, we employed oligo(dT) primers for specific capture of mRNA during reverse transcription, followed by synthesis and specific labelling of the second strand using bridge oligo sequences on the first strand. Subsequently, amplification and sequencing were performed. Additionally, we designed targeted capture steps for specific mutations and gene fusions to further improve detection efficiency in single cell. Furthermore, we developed a simplified and cost-effective 3' sequencing approach by utilizing oligo(dT) primers only. To validate the performance and clinical applicability of our single-cell sequencing platform, multiple cell lines and human urological cancer samples were utilized. The results indicated the robustness of our

platform and allowed for the exploration of gene mutations, gene fusions, and alternative splicing

at the single-cell level. Moreover, the application value of this approach was demonstrated by the

discovery of novel functional gene mutations in clinical samples. In summary, our novel Chigene

scRNA-seq platform overcomes the limitations of current scRNA-seq technologies, enabling

comprehensive transcriptomic analysis at the single-cell level and expanding alternative methods

for discovering new functional genes in clinical samples.

## Results

**Overview of the Microfluidic Chip-based Random Bridging Co-labelling RNA Sequencing**

**Method for Full-length Coverage**

We developed a versatile workflow that enabled the amplification and fragmentation labelling of

mRNA using microbeads carrying oligo(dT) primers and random bridging primers on a microfluidic

platform. This approach allows for the detection of various natural barcodes, including somatic

mutations, fusion genes, and RNA isoforms. Based on whether random bridging primers were

utilized, the workflow was further divided into two versions: Chigene V1 (conventional 3' end

sequencing) (Figure 1A-B) and V2 (mRNA full-length transcriptome sequencing) (Figure 1C). In

Chigene V2, to further enhance the detection sensitivity of gene mutations and fusions in single

cells, we employed a targeted mutation library enrichment strategy using specific primers. In brief,

the process began with the capture of single-cell mRNA onto microbeads carrying oligo(dT) primers

through reverse transcription on the microfluidic platform. Subsequently, the excess oligo(dT) on

the microbeads was modified, followed by annealing, ligation, and extension using primer dimers

carrying random sequences that were complementary to the modified oligo(dT). This step

completed the random bridging step. The bridged and extended products were then amplified to

generate sufficient cDNA for library construction and subsequent next-generation sequencing. To

integrate the single-cell mRNA full-length gene expression profiles with the genomic features of

interest, we called the molecular features of interest based on genomic features detected by whole

exome sequencing (WES) from the same sample. Specifically, we enriched the library for the mutant

and fusion genes of interest from the transcriptome library using PCR with specific primers. By

extracting cell barcode and transcript information from the sequencing data, we improved the

detection rate of lowly expressed gene mutations. This allowed us to explore the biological functions

of cell subpopulations with specific genomic features and their interactions with surrounding cells.

**Development and validation of the Chigene V1 platform based on a microfluidic chip**

To evaluate the performance of the microfluidic chip for single-cell sequencing, the Chigene

V1 platform, which relies solely on chips and poly T primers, was first developed. To assess the cell

capture efficiency and doublet rate of the microfluidic chip, different quantities of HeLa cells

ranging from 5000 to 50000 cells were loaded. Microscopic counting revealed that the cell capture

efficiency was generally greater than 50%, and the doublet rate was mostly less than 5% (Figure

2A-B). Observations of the microbeads after loading showed micropores with both single cells and

beads (Figure 2C). The interval between micropore contamination was approximately 5 minutes,

whereas cell lysis within the chip was achieved in approximately 12 seconds[14]. After the

microbeads were loaded, cell lysis, RNA capture, and two quick washes were performed within two

minutes to minimize cross-contamination. The recovery of a large portion of the microbeads (~70%)

was achieved (Figure 2D). To evaluate the fidelity of the Chigene V1 platform, a standard mixed

species experiment was conducted using cultured human (A549) and mouse (MC38) cell lines. A

mixture of 2500 A549 cells and 2500 MC38 cells was profiled using Chigene V1-seq. Analysis

identified 2239 high-quality unique cell barcodes, indicating clear separation of true cells from

background noise (Figure 2E). The doublet rate was found to be low at 0.94% (Figure 2F), which is

lower than that observed for other scRNA-seq methods (1.6-3.1%), such as Seq-Well[15] and

VASAdrop[16]. Additionally, a high species specificity of UMI (~97%) was observed, indicating

that high-fidelity single-cell libraries were produced by the Chigene V1 platform (Figure 2G). UMI

and gene count distributions showed that the Chigene V1 platform captured a median of 20,339

UMIs and 4672 genes in single A549 cells, with an average of ~38k reads, and 17256 UMIs and

4805 genes in single MC38 cells, with an average of ~30k reads (Figure 2H-I). These results

demonstrated the high sensitivity of the Chigene V1 platform.

Next, we evaluated the ability of the Chigene V1 platform to distinguish cell populations in

complex primary samples. This was achieved by comparing its performance with that of 10x

Genomics, BD Rhapsody, and Singleron using human peripheral blood cells following erythrocyte

lysis. Compared with these mainstream scRNA platforms, Chigene V1-seq exhibited very high

cluster consistency (Figure 2J and Figure S1A-1D) and similar cell proportions (Figure 2K-L and

Figure S1E). However, the performance of the Chigene V1 platform was more similar to that of the

BD Rhapsody and Singleron platforms due to the use of the same cell capture strategy (microfluidic

chip). Furthermore, when a more complex urachal carcinoma specimen was used for performance

comparison between Chigene V1 and 10x Genomics, similar results were observed (Figure 2M-O,

Figure S1F-H).

**Development of the Chigene V2 platform based on the Chigene V1 platform and Random**

**Bridging Co-labeling technique**

To enhance the capture of full-length mRNAs, we integrated the Random Bridging Co-

labelling (RBCL) technique into the Chigene V1 platform and developed the Chigene V2

platform. The gene body coverage of the Chigene V2 platform was substantially greater than that

of the Chigene V1 and 10x platforms (Figure 3A). Moreover, species-mixing experiments were

conducted to analyse specificity on the Chigene V2 platform. The results revealed acceptable

doublet rates (1.93%) and specificity (~95%) in comparison to those of the Chigene V1 platform

(Figure 3B-C). Due to its ability to capture full-length genes, compared with the Chigene V1

platform, the Chigene V2 platform exhibited a decrease in average UMIs and gene counts per cell

at comparable sequencing depths (~36k reads per human cell and ~26 reads per mouse cell)

(Figure 3D-E). Additionally, the Chigene V2 platform demonstrated more homogeneous coverage

of gene body regions than did other high-throughput full-length single-cell RNA sequencing

platforms, such as VASA-seq, snRandom, and bulk RNA-seq (Figure 3F). Gene body coverage

analysis of the GAPDH and ACTB genes revealed that unlike poly(A)-based 10x Genomics,

which exhibited pronounced bias toward the 3'-end, Chigene V2, VASA-seq, and snRandom did

not display significant 3'- or 5'-end bias across the gene body. As expected, Chigene V2 displayed

a greater coverage depth, attributable to its emphasis on capturing mRNA within a comparable

sequencing data volume (Figure 3G-H).

The impressive ability of the Chigene V2 platform to detect full-length mRNA suggests that

it may be an ideal method for detecting mutations, gene fusions and alternative splicing at the

single-cell level. To improve the sensitivity of detecting mutations, particularly in low-abundance

transcripts and rare cells, a nested PCR method was employed for target enrichment of gene

mutations. To test this approach, a mixture of 293T, A549, and HeLa cell lines in equal

proportions was analysed using Chigene V2-seq to detect SNP sites in two housekeeping genes

(ACTB c.565G and GAPDH c.463A). The findings revealed the accurate identification of distinct

cell clusters representing the three cell lines, suggesting minimal cross-contamination associated

with the Chigene V2 platform (Figure 3I-J). Moreover, the detection of these two SNP sites in the

majority of cells underscores the strength of the Chigene V2 platform in conjunction with nested

PCR for mutation detection at the single-cell level. (Figure 3K-L). To evaluate whether the

Chigene V2 platform could provide sufficient information from clinical tissue samples similar to

the Chigene V1 platform, we collected fresh human urachal carcinoma samples and compared

their RNA profiles using Chigene V1-seq and Chigene V2-seq. The results showed a strong

correlation between the total RNA profiles obtained by Chigene V1-seq and Chigene V2-seq

(Spearman R: 0.86, Figure 3M). Furthermore, the majority of cell types were consistently

identified by both methods in the same sample (Figure 3N and Figure S2A-B). Unsupervised

clustering analysis identified ten types of cells in the merged sequencing data (Figure 3O and

Figure S2C). No significant differences were observed in the proportions of cell types between

Chigene V2-seq and Chigene V1-seq (Figure 3P).

**Identification of multi-landscape by Chigene V2 platform in the clinical samples**

To assess the performance of the Chigene V2 platform in exploring gene alternative splicing,

mutations, and fusions, fresh human urothelial cancer samples were subjected to Chigene V2-seq,

whole-exome sequencing (WES) and bulk RNA-seq. A total of 4452 cells were identified from the

single-cell suspension, with an average of 1696 genes and 4665 UMIs detected per cell. These

cells were clustered into seven distinct cell types (Figure 4A and Figure S3A). By profiling full-

length transcripts via the Chigene V2-seq platform, alternative splicing (AS) patterns across

different cell types were identified through the quantification of inclusion rates of non-overlapping

exonic regions. In this sample, seven different AS events (total: 3459 events) were detected

(Figure 4B), mainly in epithelial cells and T cells (Figure 4C). Notably, alternative first exon

(AFE) events were frequently detected (Figure 4B-C), further confirming the high coverage of

mRNA in the Chigene V2 platform. Using the combined WES and RNA-seq data, ten genes with

higher mutation frequencies at both the DNA and RNA levels were selected for targeted

enrichment in the Chigene V2 platform (Figure S3B). UMAP visualization revealed a multitude of

gene mutations and co-mutations in epithelial cells (Figure 4D). To substantiate the reliability of

the Chigene V2 platform and investigate the functions of the identified mutated genes at the

single-cell level, particular attention was given to the CDKN1A p.F53Ffs*10 mutation (Figure

4E). Compared to those in CDKN1A wild-type epithelial cells, gene ontology (GO) and KEGG

enrichment analyses revealed significant enrichment of upregulated genes related to cell cycle-

related biological processes (Figure 4F) and signalling pathways (Figure 4G) in CDKN1A-

mutated epithelial cells. Cell communication analysis revealed that compared with wild-type cells,

CDKN1A-mutated epithelial cells had a greater number of interactions with endothelial cells

(Figure 4H). Specifically, CDKN1A-mutated epithelial cells exhibited increased VEGF signalling

to endothelial cells (Figure 4I), suggesting a potential role in promoting angiogenesis.

Next, we explored the fusion gene in the Chigene V2 platform and identified the fusion gene

FGFR3-TACC in the single-cell dimension (Figure 4J and Figure S3C). GO enrichment analysis

revealed that downregulated genes in FGFR3-TACC fusion epithelial cells were significantly

enriched in antigen processing and presentation-related biological processes (Figure 4K),

potentially indicating a contribution to immune evasion. Cell communication analysis

demonstrated increased signal output from FGFR3-TACC fusion epithelial cells compared to that

from wild-type FGFR3 epithelial cells (Figure 4L). Ligand–receptor pair analysis revealed that

FGFR3-TACC fusion epithelial cells preferentially transmitted signals to both immune cells and

non-immune cells via immunosuppressive ligand–receptor pairs and promoting angiogenesis and

tumor proliferation ligand–receptor pairs (Figure 4M-N), such as SEMA4D-PLXNB1/2[17-21],

COL6A1-SDC1/CD44[22], MPZL1-MPZL1[23-25], and WNT7A-(FZD6/10+LRP5) [26]. These

findings suggested that the FGFR3-TACC fusion might hinder the efficacy of immunotherapy  and

contribute to poor prognosis by affecting both immune cells and non-immune cells. In summary,

the Chigene V2 platform has the ability to explore alternative splicing, mutations, and fusions at

the single-cell level.

**Identification of novel mutated genes via the Chigene V2 platform**

To identify novel mutated genes, a fresh specimen of urothelial carcinoma was analysed

using Chigene V2-seq. A total of 4491 cells with an average of 1821 genes and 4273 UMIs per

cell were identified. Unsupervised clustering revealed several distinct clusters representing

different cell types, including DCs, endothelial cells, epithelial cells, T cells, ILCs, and

macrophages (Figure 5A and Figure S4). Analysis of the Chigene V2-seq data revealed multiple

gene mutations in epithelial cells (Figure 5B). Our study specifically examined a mutated gene,

ARHGAP5, harboring the p.I307V mutation (Figure 5C). GO enrichment and alternative splicing

analyses demonstrated a greater frequency of RNA splicing events in ARHGAP5-mutated

epithelial cells (Figure 5D-E). Cell communication analysis further revealed that epithelial cells

with mutated ARHGAP5 displayed a distinct number of interactions with other clusters,

particularly notable in their interaction with T cells (Figure 5F-G). Subsequent examination of

ligand　receptor pairs revealed notable differences between ARHGAP5-mutated and wild-type

tumor cells regarding the signals they transmitted to both immune and non-immune cells (Figure

5H). In contrast to ARHGAP5 wild-type epithelial cells, ARHGAP5-mutated epithelial cells

tended to transmit signals to dendritic cells (DCs) via the F11R-F11R interaction, which could

impede DC migration to lymph nodes and the initiation of tumor-specific immune responses [27].

Additionally, in ARHGAP5-mutated epithelial cells, signals were specifically transmitted to T

cells through APP-CD74, which is known to exert an inhibitory impact on the activation of CD4+

T cells (Figure 5I). Moreover, ARHGAP5-mutated epithelial cells also transmitted signals to non-

immune cells involved in tumorigenesis, metastasis, and angiogenesis (Figure 5J) via MPZL1-

MPZL1[23-25], F11R-F11R[28], and COL6A1-SDC1[22]. Consequently, it is speculated that

urothelial carcinoma patients with ARHGAP5 mutations may exhibit a poorer response to

immunotherapy.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the prevalence of ARHGAP5 mutations

across various cancers, we searched the TCGA database (Figure S5A). Intriguingly, our analysis

revealed a mutation frequency of approximately 2.6% for ARHGAP5 in urothelial carcinoma

(Figure S5B). To assess the clinical implications of these mutations, propensity score matching

(1:1) was conducted, matching patients with ARHGAP5 mutations to their wild-type counterparts

based on variables including cancer type, age, sex, race, and pathological stage (Figure S5C).

Despite not reaching statistical significance, an intriguing pattern emerged: progression-free

survival (PFS) tended to be shorter in the mutant patients (Figure S5D). The associations between

ARHGAP5 mutations and immunotherapy response in cohorts of patients who underwent

immunotherapy for urothelial carcinoma[29] or advanced clear cell renal cell carcinoma[30] were

further investigated. Interestingly, no ARHGAP5 mutations were detected among the 9 responders

in the urothelial cancer cohort, whereas one such mutation was present among the 16 non-

responders. In the advanced clear cell renal cell carcinoma cohort, ARHGAP5 mutations were

identified in 5 out of 261 patients. Among these patients, 2 had stable disease (SD), and 3

experienced progressive disease (PD). The distribution of these clinical responses indicates a

possible association between ARHGAP5 mutations and unfavourable treatment outcomes. By

integrating data from the TCGA database, immunotherapy cohorts, and WES analysis, we propose

that ARHGAP5 gene mutations might be linked to decreased progression-free survival (PFS) and

poor response to immunotherapy.

**Discussion**

In this study, we introduced a microfluidic chip-based high-throughput single-cell RNA

sequencing (scRNA-seq) system designed for comprehensive analysis of mRNA expression,

mutations, alternative splicing, and even gene fusions at the single-cell level. Our scRNA-seq

platform consists of two versions. Chigene V1, a conventional single-cell sequencing platform

utilizing 3' end sequencing, demonstrated equivalent performance and scalability compared to

mainstream platforms such as 10X Genomics, BD Rhapsody, and Singleron. Chigene V2

specifically captures mRNAs with more uniform coverage across the gene body and achieves

greater sequencing depth for coding sequences. Notably, our Chigene scRNA-seq platform employs

standard molecular biology procedures and a well-established microwell barcoding platform. As a

result, the Chigene scRNA-seq platform is user-friendly and can be readily used for large-scale

applications.

Most contemporary single-cell RNA sequencing (scRNA-seq) platforms primarily depend on

the hybridization of barcoded oligo-dT primers. However, this approach limits the ability of these

methods to detect short fragments (~400-600 base pairs) near the poly(A) tail, thereby hampering

the thorough investigation of gene mutations, gene fusion, and alternative splicing at the single-cell

level. Recent advancements in total RNA full-length scRNA-seq methods have addressed these

challenges [31-33]. However, the use of total RNA sequencing techniques presents inherent

limitations in sequencing depth dedicated to mRNA due to the presence of non-coding RNAs and

alternative splicing variants in the total RNA pool. Consequently, these molecules can compete for sequencing data, resulting in a reduced sequencing depth for mRNA detection. The Chigene V2 platform introduces a novel random bridging co-labeling technique, facilitating the specific capture of full-length mRNA. This method demonstrated improved alignment with conventional 3' single-cell sequencing, effectively minimizing interference from rRNA and other transcripts. This innovation eliminates the need for additional bioinformatics or enrichment methods to remove rRNA, thereby saving time and experimental costs. Furthermore, data utilization can be enhanced by increasing the sequencing depth for mRNA within the same data volume.

The theoretical throughput of Chigene V2 is equivalent to that of conventional 3' single-cell sequencing. Among the existing single-cell sequencing platforms, the Chigene V2 platform is superior for mRNA analysis due to its more even gene body coverage and sequencing depth. These advantages enhance the analysis of alternative splicing in single-cell polyadenylated RNA species and facilitate the identification of rare subpopulations for precision diagnosis and treatment of human diseases. Moreover, when combined with targeted capture, the Chigene V2 platform achieves increased sensitivity for detecting gene mutations and gene fusions. These capabilities enable the simultaneous exploration of gene expression, gene mutations, alternative splicing, and gene fusion at the single-cell level.

To validate the potential of our platform for multidimensional clinical sample testing, we utilized our Chigene V2 platform to concurrently detect mutations, alternative splicing, and gene fusions in several human cancer samples. When we investigated known functional gene mutations, such as CDKN1A, and gene fusions, such as FGFR3-TACC, using the Chigene V2 platform, we not only confirmed the functionality of these genetic variations at the single-cell level as previously reported but also revealed their potential impact on surrounding cells at the cellular level. This has deepened and broadened our understanding of genes with known functions. Notably, using our newly developed single-cell platform, we conducted exploratory research focused on ARHGAP5 mutations and found that ARHGAP5 mutant tumor cells not only promoted tumor cell proliferation but also exhibited inhibitory effects on T cells. Further investigations into the impact of ARHGAP5 on progression-free survival (PFS) indicated that mutations in ARHGAP5 might be linked to shorter PFS and poorer treatment responses. Briefly, our platform provides a powerful tool for mapping the single-cell mutational landscape in human tumors, offering new insights and perspectives for

personalized treatment strategies and the discovery of novel targets.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations of our technique. First, the

single-cell cDNA amplification method relies on poly(T) primers, which restricts the detection of

mRNA molecules lacking a poly(A) tail, such as histone mRNAs[34]. Consequently, these specific

transcripts were not captured and detected by our mRNA-seq assay. Second, as our assay utilizes

mature mRNAs as templates, mutations present within intronic and intergenic regions are not

detected. These limitations could be addressed through future technical refinements.

In conclusion, the straightforward experimental protocols and comprehensive transcriptomic

information offered by our platform show promising potential for the significant contributions of

Chigene scRNA-seq to large-scale applications in both basic and clinical research in the future.

## Method

### Microfluidic chip device fabrication and microbeads

The chip comprised a support layer, chip microstructure layer, and chip top cover layer. The support

layer was composed of rigid glass, while all other layers were constructed using

polydimethylsiloxane (PDMS) material with mold casting. For the chip microstructure layer, a

photomask was created based on the chip design, and a mold was fabricated via traditional

photolithography methods (with an SU-8 negative photoresist). The resulting mold consisted of an

array of cylindrical microstructures with dimensions of 52 μm (height) and 38 μm (diameter) and a

center-to-center distance of 48 μm between cylinders. The PDMS mixture, consisting of a PDMS

base and curing agent at a ratio of 10:1, was adequately mixed and poured onto the chip

microstructure layer mold. After baking at 80°C for 30 minutes, the cured PDMS chip

microstructure layer was gently removed from the mold. Moving to the chip top cover layer, a mold

was prepared based on the chip design, including a chip chamber framework section and a top cover

section. Similarly, PDMS was cast onto the mold to form the chip top cover layer. To complete the

chip assembly, 1 mm diameter holes were punched in the top cover section, serving as the inlet and

outlet ports. The glass layer, PDMS chip microstructure layer, and PDMS chip top cover layer were

subsequently treated with plasma and bonded together to form the final microwell. The microbeads

were purchased from Chemgenes Corporation (MACOSKO-2011-10 B) and were filtered through

a 40 μm strainer.

**Species mixture experiment and human specimens**

HeLa cells, A549 cells, 293T cells, and MC38 cells were obtained from the CAMS Cell Culture Center and cultured in Dulbecco's Modified Eagle's medium (DMEM, Gibco, Cat #11965092) supplemented with 10% heat-inactivated fetal bovine serum (FBS, Gibco, Cat # 26010074). The cells were maintained at 37 °C in a 5% $CO_2$ incubator (Thermo Heracell 240i) and passaged every 2 days. For the species mixture experiment, A549 and MC38 cells were harvested and washed three times in PBS by centrifugation at 4 °C and 600 × g for 3 min. Subsequently, the cells were individually counted, and equal numbers of cells from each cell line were mixed. The resulting cell mixture was subjected to single-cell RNA sequencing (scRNA-seq) following the Chigene scRNA-seq protocol. The collection of human peripheral blood and urological cancer samples, as well as the research conducted in this study, was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hospital, Sun Yat-sen University (approval numbers: SYSKY-2023-396-01). Clinical information was collected after written informed consent was obtained.

**Library preparation**

The chip was first preprocessed using PBS I buffer (PBS + RNase inhibitor), and then approximately 15,000 cells and capture beads were loaded onto the chip in turn. After the redundant cells and beads were washed out, cell lysis occurred in the microwells of the chip. RNA molecules released from the lysed cells were captured by beads coated with oligo sequences in the same microwell. Then, the lysis buffer in the chip was rapidly exchanged with air and high-density wash buffer, and all beads, including the mRNA-captured beads, were recovered by washing. Approximately 80% of the beads were collected by two washes, and additional washing steps helped to obtain more beads. Next, cDNA molecules with cell barcodes and UMI sequences were obtained through reverse transcription. After ExoI digestion and amplification, full-length cDNA was enriched, and a single-cell RNA sequencing (scRNA-seq) library was constructed using modified Tn5 transposase-based methods. Briefly, 5-10 ng of cDNA was fragmented and amplified to construct the sequencing library. This approach will help to obtain more information on the gene body for mRNA isoform analysis. Sequencing was performed using PE150 bp on the MGI-T7 platform (MGI, China).

**Random bridging co-labeling for Chigene V2-seq**

To obtain full-length mRNA, after reverse transcription and template switching, the mRNA-

free barcode oligo was annealed with the tag primer using the following reaction mixture: 100,000

microbeads in 35 μl of NF-water, 5 μl of 10 μM tag primer, and 10 μl of 20X SSC Buffer (NEB).

The reaction mixture was incubated at room temperature for 15 minutes. After annealing, the

microbeads were washed with PBS. To modify the 3' end of the barcode oligo, an extension mixture

consisting of 2 μl of NEB Buffer 10X, 5 μl of dNTPs, 2 μl of Klenow (exo-), and 11 μl of NF-water

was added. The mixture was then incubated at 37°C for 30 minutes. Denature buffer (Illumina) was

added to remove the mRNA and tag primer from the microbeads. The microbeads were then washed

twice with PBS. Bridge oligo1 and bridge oligo2 were annealed to form a bridge dimer. One end of

the bridge dimer was reverse complemented to the modified barcode oligo, while the other end

contained tens of random nucleotides "N" at the 3' tail. When the modified barcode oligo annealed

with the bridge dimer, the 3' end of the barcode oligo joined the neighboring 5' end of the N-tail

hand. The bridge capture mixture, which consisted of 10 μl of 20X SSC buffer, 10 μl of 10 μM

bridge dimer, and 100,000 microbeads in 30 μl of NF-water, was incubated at room temperature for

15 minutes. The microbeads were then washed with PBS and suspended in the ligation reaction

mixture, which included 2 μl of 10X T4 DNA ligase buffer, 5 μl of ATP, 2 μl of T4 DNA ligase, and

11 μl of NF-water. This mixture was incubated at room temperature for 30 minutes. After washing

with PBS, the extension was performed using the following reaction mixture: 2 μl of NEB Buffer

10X, 5 μl of dNTPs, 2 μl of Klenow (exo-), and 11 μl of NF-water. To improve efficiency, it is

recommended to repeat the steps from bridge capture to extension 2-3 times. To block the free

barcode oligo, ddNTPs were used, and then the cDNA was amplified and purified.

**Targeted capture of specific regions of genes**

For the confirmation of mutation sites or gene fusions by WES, nested PCR primers were designed

upstream and downstream of each target region. The upstream-out primers, downstream-out primers,

upstream-in primers, and downstream-in primers were mixed separately. A total of 2.5 ng of cDNA

was used as a template for amplification with the upstream and downstream primers. Subsequently,

secondary PCRs were carried out using the upstream and downstream primers. After each round of

amplification, the reaction products were individually purified using magnetic beads. The purified

products from each reaction were then combined. Index PCR was performed on the combined

products to generate a sequencing library. All libraries were subjected to quality control analysis

using an Equalbit 1× dsDNA HS Assay Kit (Vazyme, China) and a Standard (S2) Cartridge Kit

(Bioptic, Taiwan, China). This quality control ensures that the libraries meet the desired standards

for further downstream analysis.

**Data analysis**

**Preprocessing of the Chigene V1/V2-seq data**. First, the raw read data were preprocessed using a

Python script. For each Read1, the cell-specific barcode (16 nucleotides) located at the beginning

of the read was identified. Hamming distance correction was applied by comparison to a whitelist

of 100,000 barcodes provided by the Chigene platform. Barcodes within the whitelist or with a

Hamming distance of 1 or less were considered valid cell barcodes and retained for downstream

analysis. Barcodes not present in the whitelist or with a Hamming distance exceeding 1 were

discarded to ensure accurate cell identification. The corrected barcode from Read1, along with the

UMI (8 nucleotides), was appended to the read ID of Read2. The resulting reads were aligned to the

reference genome (Chigene V1: GRCh38, Chigene V2: GRCh37, mixed human-mouse genome:

GRCh38 and GRCm39 hybrid genome) using the STAR aligner (version 2.7.1a) with default

parameters. Reads uniquely mapped to the reference genome were assigned to genes using

featureCount (version 2.0.1). UMItools (version 1.0.1) was used to correct UMI errors and perform

UMI quantification within individual cells, resulting in the generation of the raw matrix. The

EmptyDrops cell calling algorithm was utilized to identify true cells from the background and

generate a gene expression matrix for subsequent analysis.

**Clustering and downstream analysis.** The single-cell expression matrix was imported into Seurat

(version 3.0.2). Cells with fewer than 500 detected genes or more than 20% mitochondrial UMI

counts were filtered out. Genes detected in more than 3 cells were retained. The genes were then

ranked in descending order based on residual variance estimated using the "vst" method

implemented in the FindVariableFeatures function of Seurat. The top 2000 genes, identified as

highly variable genes (HVGs), were selected for further analysis. Principal component analysis

(PCA) was performed using these highly variable genes. A Shared Nearest Neighbor (SNN) graph

was constructed using the top 15 principal components, and cells were clustered using the Leiden

algorithm. The resolution parameter for clustering was set to 0.6, while all other parameters were

kept at the default values. To visualize the clusters, Uniform Manifold Approximation and

Projection (UMAP) was applied in Seurat. After completing the clustering analysis, the cell types

were annotated using celltypist (version 0.1.9).

**Expression correlation analysis for the Chigene V1/V2 platform.** To compare the gene expression correlation between the Chigene V1 and Chigene V2 platforms, we imported the expression matrices of both platforms into Seurat (version 3.0.2) and performed data normalization and standardization using the same default parameters. Then, we utilized the Seurat function "AverageExpression" to calculate the average expression levels of genes in each platform. Finally, we used the "cor" function in R (version 4.0.2) to calculate the Spearman correlation coefficient based on the natural logarithm of the average expression levels.

**Read coverage analysis of the gene body.** The public VASA-seq data can be accessed at the Gene Expression Omnibus (GEO) under the accession code GSE176588. The public snRandom-seq data can be obtained from the Genome Sequence Archive (GSA) with accession code "HRA003712". The 10x data were obtained from the PBMC data sequenced by Chigene using the 10x platform. The bulk RNA-seq data were obtained from transcriptome sequencing data. All the data sets were aligned to the GRCh38 reference genome using STAR Aligner (version 2.7.1a) with the same parameters, resulting in BAM files. For all single cells, the BAM files were used as bulk data. RSeQC (version 4.0.1) was utilized to calculate the read coverage over the gene body.

**Variant calling.** The barcode corrected from Read1, along with the UMI (8 nucleotides), was added to the read ID of Read2. These reads were aligned to the GRCh37 reference genome using STAR (version 2.7.1a) with default parameters. To remove duplicates, umi_tools' group and dedup functionalities were applied based on genomic coordinates and UMIs. This process helps eliminate PCR amplification biases and improves the accuracy of variant detection. For variant calling, BCFtools (version 1.9) was utilized to call variants at the single-cell level. The identified mutations were subsequently annotated using ANNOVAR to obtain additional information regarding mutation characteristics and potential functional impacts. Cells that harboured detected mutations were classified as mutant cells, while cells without detected mutations were defined as wild-type cells.

**Cell interaction analysis.** Cell communication analysis was performed using the R package CellChat (version 1.5.0) with default parameters.

**GO and KEGG analysis.** For the enrichment analysis of DEGs between comparison groups, the FindMarkers function in Seurat was used. This function allows the identification of differential gene sets based on specified criteria such as the percentage of cells expressing the gene (pct) and the p value (p_val). For example, genes with pct > 0.1 and p_val < 0.05 were selected. To perform Gene

Ontology (GO) and Kyoto Encyclopedia of Genes and Genomes (KEGG) enrichment analyses of the DEGs, the R package clusterProfiler was used. This package provides functions for functional enrichment analysis and visualization. By default, the package uses hypergeometric tests for enrichment analysis and includes a set of predefined gene sets from databases such as GO and KEGG.

**Reporting summary**

Further information on the research design is available in the Nature Research Reporting Summary linked to this paper.

**Data availability**

The data supporting the findings of this study have been deposited in the Genome Sequence Archive (GSA) at the National Genomics Data Center, China National Center for Bioinformation/Beijing Institute of Genomics, Chinese Academy of Sciences. The data can be accessed at https://ngdc.cncb.ac.cn/gsa-human, with the reference number PRJCA023899. The deposited data are compliant with the regulations set by the Ministry of Science and Technology of China and have been made publicly available.

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**Authors' contributions**

Weiyue Gu, Tianxin Lin, Xu Chen and Ligang Wang conceptualized the study. Ligang Wang, Xiao Wang, and Fangxiao Wang were responsible for the experimental design and execution. Tonglei

Guo, Fei Xie, and Xiuxin Li conducted the bioinformatics analysis. Wenlong Zhong, Daqin Wu, and Xu Chen contributed to the clinical tissue selection and PBMC acquisition. Lihua Zhao performed the data analysis, contributed to the overall conceptualization and design of the manuscript, and drafted the initial version. Lihua Zhao, Wenlong Zhong and Xu Chen participated in manuscript revisions and discussions related to clinical aspects. Weiyue Gu, Xu Chen and Tianxin Lin provided supervision throughout the project. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

**Conflicts of interest**

LG Wang and WY Gu have submitted a patent application to the Chinese patent office regarding the methodology described in this work (application number: CN 202311585591.9). Several authors are actively involved in the commercialization of the technique and are affiliated with Chigene, Inc. (WY Gu is the founder; LG Zang, Tonglei Guo, LH Zhao, Fei Xie, Xiao Wang, Xiuxin Li and Fangxiao Wang are employees). The remaining authors declare no competing interests.

 **Figure legends**

 **Figure 1. Schematic workflow of Chigene-seq based on the microfluidic chip platform. (A)**

 Unique mRNA capture was performed using oligo(dT) on a microfluidic chip, and the recovered

 microbeads were subjected to reverse transcription. **(B)** An intermediate cDNA library was

 amplified and subjected to next-generation sequencing for conventional 3' scRNA-seq (Chigene

 V1). **(C)** To obtain overall information of mRNA molecular features (Chigene V2), full-length

 mRNA labelling was performed by modifying the barcode oligo and performing random bridging

 ligation and extension. After amplifying the molecular feature library, one portion was used for

 identifying cell clusters, while the other portion was used for target enrichment of interesting

 molecular features. Finally, cell identity and molecular features were integrated to analyse specific

 mutations, fusions, or alternative splicing events at the single-cell level.

 **Figure 2. Development and validation of the Chigene V1 platform based on the microfluidic**

 **chip. (A)** Capture rate and doublet rate at various cell loading numbers. **(B)** Bright-field images

 depicting a region of the device after cell loading. **(C)** Bright-field images showing a cell/bead-

 loaded device. **(D)** Bead occupancy rate following bead loading, cell lysis, and two rounds of

 washing. **(E)** Barcode plot used for identifying barcodes representing true cells (blue line). The

 barcodes of the A549-MC38 mixed cells were arranged in descending order based on gene counts.

 **(F)** Species-mixing scatter plot showing the single cell capture efficiency and doublet rate of

 Chigene V1-seq. **(G)** Species specificity of UMIs in human-mouse cell mixture. Median of species

 specificity of UMIs in human cells(A549) was 0.978. Median of species specificity of UMIs in

 mouse cells (MC38) was 0.963. **(H-I)** Violin plots and box plots showing the number of UMIs and

 genes detected in individual A549 and MC38 cells. A549 cells: n = 1321, MC38 cells: n = 897. The

 data depicted in the box plots correspond to the first and third quartiles (lower and upper hinges)

 and the median (centre). **(J and K)** UMAPs displaying single-cell profiles (dots) from PBMCs with

 colors indicating the different platforms used (J) and each cell type (K). **(L)** Proportion of cells of

 each cell type (y-axis) detected using different platforms (x-axis) in the PBMC libraries. **(M and N)**

 UMAPs displaying single-cell profiles (dots) of human urachal carcinoma cells with colors

 indicating the different platforms used (M) and each cell type (N). **(O)** Proportion of cells of each

 cell type (y-axis) detected using Chigene V1 and 10x Genomics (x-axis) in human urachal

carcinoma libraries.

**Figure 3. Development of the Chigene V2 platform based on the Chigene V1 platform and**

**Random Bridging Co-labeling technique. (A)** Gene body coverage shown by read distribution

in three platforms. **(B)** Scatter plot illustrating the single-cell capture efficiency and doublet rate of

Chigene V2-seq using species mixing. **(C)** Species specificity of unique molecular identifiers

(UMIs) in an A549-MC38 cell mixture. Total number of identified A549 cells: n = 2089; total

number of identified MC38 cells: n = 1207. The median species specificity of UMIs in A549 cells

was 0.954, while the median species specificity of UMIs in MC38 cells was 0.932. **(D-E)** Violin

plots and box plots depicting the number of UMIs and genes detected in individual A549 and

MC38 cells. **(F)** Read distribution along the gene body compared between bulk RNA-seq and

three different full-length scRNA-seq methods (Chigene V2-seq, VASA, and snRandom RNA

Profiling). **(G-H)** Representative raw reads aligned to the human genes GAPDH and ATCB via

four different scRNA-seq methods. **(I-J)** Clusters representing subpopulations in an A549, A293T,

and HeLa cell mixture in Chigene V2-seq, with the coverage of ATCB c.565G (red) and GAPDH

c.463A (blue) detected in each cluster. **(K-L)** Number and percentage of cells with coverage of

ATCB c.565G and GAPDH c.463A detected in each cluster. **(M)** Correlations between gene

expression measurements via the Chigene V2-seq and Chigene V1-seq methods. **(N)** UMAPs of

single-cell profiles (dots) from human urachal carcinoma libraries colored according to different

platforms used. **(O)** UMAPs showing single-cell profiles (dots) from human urachal carcinoma

libraries colored by cell type. **(P)** Proportion of cells of each cell type (y-axis) detected using

different methods (x-axis).

**Figure 4. Identification of multi-landscape in clinical samples via the Chigene V2 platform.**

**(A)** UMAP representation of cells from the human urothelial cancer sample based on their gene

expression, with seven annotated cell types displayed. **(B)** Pie plot illustrating the number of

detected global gene AS events in Chigene V2-seq. **(C)** Abundance analysis of different classes of

AS events across cell clusters. **(D)** Landscape visualization of mutated genes at the single-cell

level in human urothelial cancer. **(E)** Detection of CDKN1A mutations in epithelial cells by

Chigene V2-seq. **(F-G)** GO and KEGG enrichment analysis of upregulated genes in CDKN1A-

mutated cells. **(H)** Heatmap displaying the total number of interactions among different cell

populations. **(I)** Heatmap showing the specific VEGF signaling network between CDKN1A-

mutated epithelial and endothelial cells. **(J)** Detection of the FGFR3-TACC fusion gene in

epithelial cells by Chigene V2-seq. **(K)** GO enrichment analysis of genes downregulated in

FGFR3-TACC fusion cells. **(L)** Heatmap revealing the total number of interactions among

different cell populations. **(M-N)** Bubble diagrams showing the probability of communication and

statistical significance of receptor–ligand pairs between FGFR3-TACC fusion/wild-type epithelial

and immune/non-immune cells. The dot color represents the communication probability, and the

dot size represents the computed p value. Empty spaces indicate a communication probability of

zero. P values were computed using a one-sided permutation test.

**Figure 5. Chigene V2 Enables the Discovery of Novel Gene Mutations in Urothelial**

**Carcinoma at the Single-Cell Level. (A)** UMAP visualization of cells from the human urothelial

cancer sample based on their gene expression, with six annotated cell types displayed. **(B)**

Landscape depiction of mutated genes at the single-cell level in human urothelial cancer. **(C)**

Detection of the ARHGAP5 mutation in epithelial cells by Chigene V2-seq. **(D)** GO enrichment

analysis of upregulated genes in ARHGAP5-mutated cells. **(E)** Comparison of AS events between

ARHGAP5-mutated and wild-type cells. **(F-G)** Total number of interactions between ARHGAP5-

mutated/wild-type cells and other cell populations. The circle sizes represent the number of cells

in each cell group, while the edge width represents the communication probability. **(H)** Heatmap

displaying the total number of interactions among different cell populations. **(I-J)** Bubble

diagrams showing the communication probability and statistical significance of receptor–ligand

pairs between ARHGAP5-mutated/wild-type epithelial cells and immune/non-immune cells. The

dot color represents the communication probability, and the dot size represents the computed p

value. Empty spaces indicate a communication probability of zero. P values were computed using

a one-sided permutation test.

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