# Chromosomal-level genome of the *Pinus massoniana* 'Minlin WY36'

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**Abstract**

Owing to conifers complex and large genomes, it is challenging to construct a comprehensive

reference genome and conduct evolutionary and genomic research. Here, we present the

chromosome-level assembly of *Pinus massoniana* 'Minlin WY36', a pioneering conifer species

used for afforestation, timber production, and oleoresin extraction. The genome size was

determined to be 23.41 Gb, with a contig N50 value of 1.15 Mb and a scaffold N50 value of 2.02

Gb. A total of 23.16 Gb of reads (98.93% of the assembled genome) were anchored and oriented

onto 12 pseudochromosomes, with chromosome lengths from 1.47 to 2.29 Gb. A total of 32,144

protein-coding genes were predicted, of which 27,173 (84.54%) were functionally annotated. The

*P. massoniana* 'Minlin WY36' genome consists of 79.41% (18.57 Gb) repetitive sequences,

among which long terminal repeat sequences (LTR) were the most abundant. Through

comparative genomic analysis, we found that the unique and significantly expanded genes in *P.*

*massoniana* 'Minlin WY36' were enriched in the metabolism related to resin synthesis. This study

offers valuable insights into conifer evolution and contributes resources for further investigations

of conifer adaptation and developmental processes.

## Introduction

Pines (genus *Pinus*) belong to the coniferous family Pinaceae of gymnosperms, with approximately 110–120 species distributed across the Northern Hemisphere (Gernandt *et al.*, 1999). Among these, *Pinus massoniana* is a unique conifer species endemic to China (He *et al.*, 2023). Its planting area ranks first in the distribution of tree species in China, and is widely distributed in southern China. As a crucial species for afforestation, timber production, and oleoresin extraction, *P. massoniana* has extensive applications in construction, papermaking, and pharmaceutical industries and has important ecological and economic significance (Peng *et al*. 2003; Zhang *et al*. 2013). In this study, we generated a high-quality *P. massoniana* 'Minlin WY36' genome sequence to elucidate the evolution of its genome structure and phylogenetic relationships within gymnosperms. This study offers profound insights into the evolution of conifers and serves as a foundation for the further exploration of their adaptive developmental strategies.

## Results and discussion

Survey analysis revealed a high level of heterozygosity in the *P. massoniana* 'Minlin WY36' genome, accounting for 1.13% of the 23.38 Gb genome size determined by *K*-mer analysis. For *de novo* whole-genome sequencing of *P. massoniana* 'Minlin WY36', we obtained 2165.08 Gb of clean reads with an average length of 12.47 Kb using PacBio technology. The final assembled genome amounted to 25.37 Gb with a contig N50 value of 1.15 Mb (**Table 1**). High-throughput and high-resolution chromosome conformation capture (Hi-C) technology was used to obtain a chromosome-level genome. Based on the Hi-C data, the genome was assembled to a total size of 23.41 Gb with a scaffold N50 value of 2.02 Gb (**Table 1**). A total of 23.16 Gb reads were mapped to 12 chromosomes, with the chromosome lengths ranging from 1.47 to 2.29 Gb (**Table 2**).

To predict gene models, we used a combination of *de novo* prediction, homology-based searches, and RNA-sequencing data, resulting in the prediction of 32,144 protein-coding genes in *P. massoniana* 'Minlin WY36' genome. The primary gene models exhibited a mean length of 37,832.39 bp, with an average exon length of 263.80 bp and an average intron length of 12,804.88 bp. Similar to other gymnosperms with large genomes, extremely long introns were also predicted in *P. massoniana* 'Minlin WY36' (**Figure 1A**). This indicates that the accumulation of long introns has led to a significant expansion of the genome (Nystedt *et al.*, 2013). On the basis of a

Benchmarking Universal Single-Copy Orthologs (BUSCO) assessment, the completeness of the

gene annotations was approximately 81.75%. We functionally annotated the protein-coding genes

using various databases, including Gene Ontology (GO), Kyoto Encyclopedia of Genes and

Genomes (KEGG), Swiss-Prot, and others, an over 84.54% of the genes could be mapped to

corresponding functional items. These analyses indicate a relatively comprehensive structural

annotation of the reference genome. A total of 113 microRNAs (miRNAs), 730 small nuclear

RNA (snRNAs), 2,011 transfer RNAs (tRNAs), and 3,307 ribosomal RNAs (rRNA) were

identified in the *P. massoniana* 'Minlin WY36' genome (**Table 3**). We estimated that 79.41%

(18.57 Gb) of the *P. massoniana* genome was composed of repetitive sequences, among which

transposable elements (TE) sequences were relatively abundant, with a long terminal repeat (LTR)

accounting for 70.94%, followed by LINE accounting for 4.88%, and DNA accounting for 2.34%.

We used complete LTR-Copia and LTR-Gypsy elements from *P. massoniana* 'Minlin WY36' to

investigate further the timing of conifer transposable element insertions and found that insertions

appear to have occurred tens of millions of years ago (**Figure 1B**).

The phylogenetic relationships among the major lineages of existing gymnosperms, particularly

Ginkgo and Gnetales, remain a subject of ongoing debate (Stull *et al*., 2021). On the basis of the

46 low-copy gene families derived from ten gymnosperms, five angiosperms, and five seedless

vascular plants, we constructed phylogenetic tree (**Figure 1C**). The results support Gnetales as a

basal lineage within gymnosperms, diverging from other gymnosperms approximately 249.7

million years ago (Mya). *Ginko biloba* and *Cycas panzhihuaensis* form a sister group to conifers,

with these two major evolutionary branches diverging around 177.3 Mya. *Taxus wallichiana* –

*Cunninghamia lanceolata* diverged from Pinaceae approximately 160.4 Mya. Approximately 51

Mya, Pinaceae rapidly diversified into other species, and *P. massoniana* 'Minlin WY36' diverged

around 12.6 Mya.

A comparative analysis of orthologous genes among *P. massoniana* 'Minlin WY36' and the

genomes of 19 species revealed that 1,011 gene families (including 3,074 genes) were unique to

the *P. massoniana* 'Minlin WY36' genome. Enrichment analyses found that these genes are

especially enriched in the Kyoto Encyclopedia of Genes and Genomes (KEGG) terms of 'plant-

pathogen interaction', 'Flavonoid biosynthesis', 'isoflavanoid biosynthesis', 'Fatty acid

biosynthesis', and 'Fatty acid degradation', 'Fatty acid elongation' (**Figure 1D**). Analysis of

orthologous gene family expansion and contraction indicated 2,022 expanded gene families in the

*P. massoniana* 'Minlin WY36' genome, of which 370 (including 3,868 genes) exhibited

significant expansion ($P<0.01$). Additionally, 467 gene families were contracted, with 108 gene

families (including 663 genes) showing a significant contraction (**Figure 1C**). Enrichment

analyses revealed that the significantly expanded gene families were enriched the KEGG

pathways related to 'terpenoid backbone biosynthesis', 'diterpenoid biosynthesis', 'flavone and

flavonol biosynthesis', and 'plant-pathogen interaction', 'fatty acid degradation' (**Figure 1E**).

Resin is a major metabolite of pine plants and serves as a physical and chemical defense barrier

against insect and pathogen attacks (Liu *et al.*, 2021). Resin mainly consist of terpenoids,

flavonoids, lignin-like compounds, and phenolic compounds, among which terpenoids are the

predominant components (Li *et al.*, 2013). The genes that are specific and significantly expanded

in *P. massoniana* 'Minlin WY36' are enriched in pathways related to plant-pathogen interactions,

terpenoid metabolism, and flavonoid metabolism.

**Methods**

**DNA extraction and sequencing**

All genome-sequencing materials used in this study were collected from adult *P. massoniana*

'Minlin WY36' grown in Youxi County, Fujian Province, China. Total genomic DNA was

extracted from young leaves using the cetyltrimethylammonium bromide method (CTAB) for

Illumina and PacBio sequencing. We used the PacBio Sequel II platform to perform 26-cell single-

molecule real-time DNA sequencing.

**Genome size estimate**

Before genome assembly, filtered Illumina reads were used to estimate the genome size,

heterozygosity, and repeat content of *P. massoniana* 'Minlin WY36'. Then, a genome survey was

performed through *K*-mer analysis using Jellyfish v2.1.4 (Marçais and Kingsford, 2011) and

GenomeScope (Vurture *et al.*, 2017).

**Genome assembly and Hi-C scaffolding**

Assemble *P. massoniana* 'Minlin WY36' genome using PacBio data. Canu v1.9

(https://github.com/marbl/canu) (Koren *et al*., 2017) was used to correct the error of the PacBio

clean data. We assembled the corrected data using Smartdenovo v1.0 (Ruan, 2016). The Contig-

level assembly results were aligned to the genome using Juicer (Kent, 2002), and the alignment

results were filtered to remove incorrectly aligned reads. Next, 3D-DNA (Ruan, 2016) was used to

perform preliminary clustering, ordering, and orientation of the genomic sequences. To prevent

excessive fragmentation of the genomic sequences, we manually adjusted the preliminary

clustering results from 3D-DNA using visualization software Juicebox

(https://github.com/aidenlab/Juicebox). This manual adjustment involved removing redundancies,

repositioning, and re-clustering, as necessary. The final pseudochromosomes were manually

constructed and adjusted. To evaluate the results of the Hi-C assembly, we constructed an

interaction heat map of Hi-C assembly chromosome.

## 155 Gene prediction and annotation

Annotation information from five closely related species (*Amborella trichopoda*, *G. biloba*, *G.*

*monatum*, *P. abies*, and *P. taeda*) was used for homology-based predictions. From the structurally

intact genes obtained through homology-based prediction, we randomly selected 5,000 genes to

train the de novo models of the target species using the ab initio prediction software, Augustus and

SNAP (Johnson *et al*., 2008). Simultaneously, the RNA-seq data were aligned to the genome using

HISAT v2.1.0 (Kim *et al*., 2015) and the resulting transcripts were assembled using StringTie

v1.3.4d (Pertea *et al*., 2015). Finally, Maker v2.31.8 (Holt and Yandell, 2011) software was used to

integrate homology-based predictions. In addition, the gene sets obtained from gene structure

annotation were aligned with known protein databases and other databases such as SwissProt

(Boeckmann, 2005) (http://www.uniprot.org/), TrEMBL (http://www.uniprot.org/) (Boeckmann,

2005), KEGG (Kanehisa and Goto, 2000) (http://www.genome.jp/kegg/), and InterPro

(https://www.ebi.ac.uk/interpro/) (Zdobnov and Apweiler, 2001) and were aligned using Blast

v2.2.26 (Altschul *et al*., 1990).

## 170 Identification of non-coding RNA, and repetitive sequences

Non-coding RNAs include RNA with a variety of known functions, such as microRNAs

(miRNAs), ribosomal RNA (rRNA), and transfer RNA (tRNA). Based on the structural

characteristics of tRNA, software tRNAscan-SE 1.3.1 (http://lowelab.ucsc.edu/tRNAscan-SE/)

(Lowe and Eddy, 1997) was used to search for tRNA sequences in the genome. Owing to the high

conservation of rRNA, rRNA sequences from closely related species was selected as reference

sequences, and BLASTN alignment was used to search for rRNA sequences in the genome.

Additionally, covariance models from the Rfam family (Sam *et al*., 2005), along with the

INFERNAL software (http://infernal.janelia.org/) provided by Rfam, can be used to predict

miRNA and snRNA sequence information in the genome.

The process involved identifying sequences similar to known repetitive sequences based on the

RepBase v21.12 (Jurka *et al*., 2005) database (http://www.girinst.org/repbase) using

RepeatMasker v4.0.7 (http://www.repeatmasker.org) and RepeatProteinMask v4.0.7

(http://www.repeatmasker.org). *De novo* prediction, on the other hand, is based on self-sequence

alignment, where a *de novo* (Price *et al.*, 2005) repetitive sequence library was first established

using RepeatModeler (http://www.repeatmasker.org) and LTR_FINDER v1.06

(http://tlife.fudan.edu.cn/ltr_) (Benson, 1997). This library was then used for prediction using the

RepeatMasker software. Additionally, Tandem Repeats Finder v4.09

(http://tandem.bu.edu/trf/trf.html) (Price *et al*., 2005) was used to search for tandem repeats within

the genome.

**Ortholog detection**

192     Single/low-copy and multicopy gene families can be obtained by identifying orthologous genes

193     and cluster analysis of gene families. A protein dataset that included ten gymnosperms, five

194     angiosperms, and five seedless vascular plants was constructed. Pairwise BLASTP (Altschul *et*

195     *al*., 1990) alignments were performed on the protein dataset, followed by a clustering analysis

196     using OrthoFinder (Emms and Kelly, 2015).

**Phylogenetic reconstruction**

We constructed a species phylogenetic tree using low-copy gene families from *P. massoniana*

'Minlin WY36' and 19 other plants and identified 46 low-copy families among the 20 species.

Then, the dataset used for phylogenetic analysis was employed in the MCMCTree program within

PAML4.9 (Ziheng, 2007) to estimate the divergence times. The nucleotide substitution model was

set as the GTR model and the molecular clock model was set as the independent rate model. The

MCMC process included 500,000 burn-in iterations and 1,500,000 sampling iterations, with

sampling conducted every 150 iterations. The same parameters were run twice to obtain stable

results. The phylogeny was calibrated using various fossil records or molecular divergence

estimates by placing soft bounds on the split nodes of *G. montanum – G. biloba* (230–282 Ma),

*Arabidopsis thaliana – G. montanum* (289–330 Ma), *Azolla pinnata – A. thaliana* (392–422 Ma),

and *Physcomitrella patens – A. thaliana* (465–533 Ma).

**Gene family expansion and contraction**

For the well-clustered gene families and the constructed phylogenetic tree structures, we

performed gene family contraction and expansion analysis on the selected 20 species using CAFÉ

4 (De Bie *et al*., 2006). We conducted KEGG and GO enrichment analyses focusing on genes

belonging to the notably expanded gene family within the *P. massoniana* 'Minlin WY36' genome.

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**Figure 1. Assembly and genome features of *Pinus massoniana*. A.** Intron length. **B.** Long

terminal repeat insertion time in *P. massoniana* 'Minlin WY36'. **C.** Phylogenetic tree showing

divergence times and evolution of the gene family size in the 20 species. Green and red numbers

indicate the number of expanded and contracted gene families, respectively. The blue portions of

the pie charts represent gene families with constant copy number. **D**. KEGG enrichment of genes

unique to *P. massoniana* 'Minlin WY36'. **E**. KEGG enrichment of significantly expanded genes in

*P. massoniana* 'Minlin WY36'.

**Table 1. The statistic of genome assembly of *P. massoniana* 'Minlin WY36'**

| | PacBio | | Hi-C | | | |
| | Contig | | Contig | | Scaffold | |
| | Length (bp) | number | Length (bp) | number | Length (bp) | number |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| N10 | 3,724,787 | 511 | 3,833,550 | 464 | 2,123,896,708 | 2 |
| N20 | 2,622,261 | 1,339 | 2,717,123 | 1,203 | 2,097,736,443 | 3 |
| N30 | 1,970,160 | 2,461 | 2,083,964 | 2,192 | 2,062,774,537 | 4 |
| N40 | 1,504,588 | 3,942 | 1,617,216 | 3,472 | 2,044,626,210 | 5 |
| N50 | 1,148,364 | 5,877 | 1,260,099 | 5,112 | 2,022,513,744 | 6 |
| N60 | 857,477 | 8,433 | 976,522 | 7,217 | 1,994,193,789 | 7 |
| N70 | 610,192 | 11,937 | 731,502 | 9,986 | 1,962,048,899 | 8 |
| N80 | 401,083 | 17,049 | 515,242 | 13,788 | 1,679,226,079 | 10 |
| N90 | 217,481 | 25,535 | 314,617 | 19,528 | 1,602,319,435 | 11 |
| Longest | 11,613,428 | - | 11,613,428 | - | 2,294,541,500 | - |
| Total Length | 25,367,207,913 | - | 23,390,460,802 | - | 23,407,722,302 | - |
| GC Rate | 0.381 | - | 0.381 | - | 0.381 | - |

288 **Table 2. The length of chromosome by Hi-C assemble of *P. massoniana* 'Minlin WY36'**

| Chromosome ID | Length (bp) |
| --- | --- |
| Chr01 | 2,294,541,500 |
| Chr02 | 2,097,736,443 |
| Chr03 | 2,022,513,744 |
| Chr04 | 1,472,222,046 |
| Chr05 | 2,123,896,708 |
| Chr06 | 1,994,193,789 |
| Chr07 | 2,062,774,537 |
| Chr08 | 2,044,626,210 |
| Chr09 | 1,602,319,435 |
| Chr10 | 1,679,226,079 |
| Chr11 | 1,807,631,255 |
| Chr12 | 1,962,048,899 |

290 **Table 3. Statistics on the annotation of non-coding RNA of the *P. massoniana* 'Minlin**

291 **WY36'genome.**

| Type | | Copy | Average length (bp) | Total length (bp) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | miRNA | 113 | 136.54 | 15,429 |
| | tRNA | 2,011 | 74.59 | 150,009 |
| rRNA | rRNA | 3,307 | 678.98 | 2,245,395 |
| | 18S | 1,070 | 1815.11 | 1,942,172 |
| | 28S | 519 | 202.94 | 105,328 |
| | 5.8S | 148 | 157.93 | 23,374 |
| | 5S | 1,570 | 111.16 | 174,521 |
| snRNA | snRNA | 730 | 123.78 | 90,363 |
| | CD-box | 73 | 127.15 | 9,282 |
| | HACA-box | 28 | 115.75 | 3,241 |
| | splicing | 629 | 123.75 | 77,840 |

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