SCOPE: a normalization and copy number estimation method for single-cell DNA sequencing

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Abstract

Whole genome single-cell DNA sequencing (scDNA-seq) enables characterization of

copy number profiles at the cellular level. This technology circumvents the averaging

effects associated with bulk-tissue sequencing and increases resolution while decreasing

ambiguity in tracking the evolutionary history of cancer. ScDNA-seq data is, however

highly sparse and noisy due to the biases and artifacts that are introduced during the

library preparation and sequencing procedure. Here, we propose SCOPE, a

normalization and copy number estimation method for scDNA-seq data. The main

features of SCOPE include: (i) a Poisson latent factor model for normalization, which

borrows information across cells and regions to estimate bias, using negative control cells

identified by cell-specific Gini coefficients; (ii) modeling of GC content bias using an

expectation-maximization algorithm embedded in the normalization step, which accounts

for the aberrant copy number changes that deviate from the null distributions; and (iii) a

cross-sample segmentation procedure to identify breakpoints that are shared across cells

from the same subclone. We evaluate SCOPE on a diverse set of scDNA-seq data in

cancer genomics, using array-based calls of purified bulk samples as gold standards and

whole-exome sequencing and single-cell RNA sequencing as orthogonal validations; we

find that, compared to existing methods, SCOPE offers more accurate copy number

estimates. Further, we demonstrate SCOPE on three recently released scDNA-seq

datasets by 10X Genomics: we show that it can reliably recover 1% cancer cell spike-ins

from a background of normal cells and that it successfully reconstructs cancer subclonal

structure from ~10,000 breast cancer cells.

Key words: single-cell DNA sequencing, copy number variation, normalization, tumor

heterogeneity, cancer genomics.

Introduction

Copy number variations (CNV) refer to duplications and deletions that lead to gains or losses of large segments of the chromosomes. CNVs are an abundant source of variations[1] and have been associated with diseases,[2] such as HIV acquisition and progression,[3] autism,[4] schizophrenia,[5] and systemic autoimmune diseases.[6,7] In cancer, somatic CNVs, also referred to as copy number aberrations (CNAs), are prevailing, as shown by the Cancer Genome Atlas[8] and the International Cancer Genome Consortium;[9] these CNAs have been associated with cancer progression and metastases.[10,11] It is, therefore, important to detect CNVs with high sensitivity and specificity.

In order to retain statistical power for association testing, CNV profiles across a large population of samples are required.[12] Recent advances in next-generation sequencing enable genome-wide CNV detection in a high-throughput manner. However, biases and artifacts are introduced during the library preparation and sequencing step, making data normalization crucial for accurate CNV profiling. Several algorithms have been developed to remove experimental noise from GC content bias,[13] sequencing depth,[14] mappability,[15] amplification efficiency,[16] and other latent systematic artifacts.[17,18] Yet profiling of somatic CNVs in cancer remains challenging, due to the heterogeneous nature of the tumor samples—the observed copy number signals from bulk DNA sequencing (DNA-seq) are averaged and attenuated across multiple genotypically distinct cancer subpopulations.[19-21] Tumor purity further dampens the CNV signals, and overall tumor ploidy leads to genome-wide gains or losses of chromosomal copies, all of which make statistical estimation and inference less tractable.[19,20]

Whole genome single-cell DNA-seq (scDNA-seq) enables the characterization of copy number profiles at the cellular level without the cell subpopulation confounding. This circumvents the averaging effects associated with bulk-tissue DNA-seq, increasing resolution while decreasing ambiguity in deconvolving cancer subclones, thus elucidating cancer evolutionary history (Supplementary Table S1).[22-24] Conventional whole-genome amplification methods for scDNA-seq include degenerate oligonucleotide primed PCR (DOP-PCR), multiple displacement amplification (MDA), and multiple annealing and looping-based amplification cycles (MALBAC).[25] MDA[26] lacks uniformity, yet has a low sequencing error rate, and it is thus better suited for calling point mutations; DOP-PCR[27]

and MALBAC,[28] on the other hand, have higher uniformity and have been successfully

used for calling CNVs;[19-21] see Supplementary Table S2 on details of the perspective

amplification methods. Recently, 10X Genomics released the Single-Cell CNV Solution

(https://www.10xgenomics.com/solutions/single-cell-cnv), which automatically uses

microfluidic droplets to barcode cells and performs library construction. In the first step,

the single cells are encapsulated into hydrogel cell beads and then lysed. This is followed

by a second step of amplification and cell bead partitioning with 10X barcoded gel beads.

The amplified and barcoded fragments are then pooled and converted to sequencing

libraries. This significantly increases throughput and offers great potential for profiling

CNVs across a large population of cells.

However, scDNA-seq data across all existing platforms and technologies is sparse,

noisy, and highly variable, even within a homogeneous cell population. The extremely

shallow and highly non-uniform depth of coverage, which is caused by the non-linear

amplification and significant dropout events during the library preparation and sequencing

step,[25,29] makes detecting CNVs by scDNA-seq challenging. Furthermore, the cancer

genomes undergo large chromosome or chromosome-arm level deletions or duplications,

as well as changes in cellular ploidy, which lead to recurrent and frequent CNAs that

disrupt a large proportion of the genome across multiple samples.[30] Existing methods for

scDNA-seq either build an optimized normal/reference set for normalization[31] or adopt a

cell-specific normalization procedure for removing systematic biases (due to, e.g., GC

content), followed by a *post hoc* procedure ploidy estimation and adjustment.[32] These

methods, which are adapted from those that are developed for bulk DNA-seq data, do not

address the challenges and complexities caused by aberrant copy number changes or

the complicating factor of tumor ploidy, and they cannot adequately and correctly remove

the artifacts, for they make the invalid assumption that all read counts are sampled from

diploid regions under the null when estimating the noise terms. The recurrent CNV signals

can either be accidentally removed during the normalization step or bias the correction

step.

To meet the widespread demand for CNV detection with single-cell resolution, we

propose a new statistical and computational framework, SCOPE, for <u>S</u>ingle-cell <u>*COP*</u>y

number <u>E</u>stimation. The distinguishing features of SCOPE include: (i) utilization of cell-

specific Gini coefficients for quality control and for identification of normal/diploid cells,
which are then used as negative control samples in a Poisson latent factor model for read
depth normalization; (ii) modeling of GC content bias using an expectation-maximization
(EM) algorithm embedded in the Poisson regression models to account for the different
copy number states along the genome; and (iii) a cross-sample iterative segmentation
procedure to identify breakpoints that are shared across cells with the same genetic
background. We evaluate the performance of SCOPE on real scDNA-seq datasets from
several cancer genomic studies, as summarized in Supplementary Table S1. Compared
to existing methods, SCOPE is shown to more accurately estimate subclonal copy
number aberrations and to have higher correlation with array-based copy number profiles
of purified bulk samples from the same breast cancer patient. We further show that the
copy number profiles by scDNA-seq are also be well recapitulated, although at low
resolution, by whole-exome sequencing (WES) and single-cell RNA-sequencing (scRNA-
seq). We finally demonstrate SCOPE on the recently released scDNA-seq data that was
produced using the 10X Genomics single-cell CNV pipeline, showing that it can reliably
recover 1% of the cancer cell spike-ins from a background of normal cells and
successfully reconstruct cancer subclonal structure across 10,000 breast cancer cells.
SCOPE is compiled as an open-source R package available at
https://github.com/rujinwang/SCOPE.
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Material and Methods
Methods overview
An overview of the SCOPE workflow is shown in Figure 1. SCOPE takes as input the
mapped reads from assembled BAM files,[33] which are pre-processed using the same
bioinformatic pipeline (see Supplementary Note S1 for details). SCOPE then generates
consecutive bins along the genome and computes the cell-by-bin read depth matrix, as
well as the mappability and GC content for each bin. For data normalization, SCOPE
adopts a Poisson latent factor model with an embedded EM algorithm to capture both
cell- and bin-specific systemic biases and artifacts, as well as GC content bias. SCOPE
also incorporates a cross-sample segmentation procedure, enabling shared breakpoints

across cells from the same cancer subclone. It then outputs integer-valued copy numbers,
allowing direct ploidy estimation without the need for *post hoc* adjustment.

In the following sections, we start with an overview of the sample-specific data
normalization and segmentation procedure by Ginkgo[32] and SCNV[31] and the cross-
sample Poisson latent factor model by CODEX[16] and CODEX2.[18] We then discuss the
limitations of the existing models and the reason that existing methods cannot adequately
capture the biases and artifacts, explaining why careful statistical modeling with further
adaptations is warranted for detecting CNVs by scDNA-seq data. Finally, we describe the
model for SCOPE, leaving algorithmic details to the supplements.

Review of existing methods
Several methods have been developed for CNV detection by scDNA-seq, including
Ginkgo[32] and SCNV.[31] To compute depth of coverage, both methods aggregate read-
depth information into variable-length bins. To generate boundaries for the bins, *in silico*
generated reads at every position of the genome are mapped back to the genome, and
the bin sizes are chosen such that each bin has the same number of uniquely mapped
reads. This step ensures that the bins have approximately the same number of mapped
reads on average. To correct for GC content bias, both Ginkgo[32] and SCNV[31] perform
normalization within each individual cell separately. Ginkgo[32] employs a locally weighted
linear regression (LOWESS curve) to fit the relationship between GC content and log-
normalized bin counts;[32] similarly, SCNV adjusts for GC content with LOWESS
regression.[31] Both methods assume that all reads are from the diploid regions, and both
control for the GC biases by modeling the unimodal relationship between GC content and
log-scaled read counts. This ignores the multiplicative effects contributed by the different
sequential copy-number states in each single cell.

In addition, because depth of coverage within each cell is normalized against its
own coverage baseline, each cell has a normalized value with mean zero and thus
completely masks the cellular ploidy. To solve this issue, both Ginkgo and SCNV adopt
a *post hoc* ploidy estimation procedure and further scale the normalized results by the
estimated ploidy to reflect the true copy numbers. In more details, they estimate the ploidy
by minimizing a cost function that measures the difference between the scaled copy

number (normalized copy number multiplied by the ploidy) and its integer rounded copy

number. However, the copy numbers and the ploidy, which is the genome-wide average

of the copy numbers, are interrelated—the normalized copy number depends on the true

underlying ploidy, and the two-step approach estimates ploidy based on the normalization

results. This leads to a chicken-and-egg problem that is cyclic.

In summary, in existing methods, the recurrent CNV signals, as well as the

complicating factor such as ploidy, can either be accidentally removed during the

normalization step, which needs a second-step recovery, or bias the correction for known

biases, such as those due to different GC content. For illustration, Figure 2 shows fitting

of GC content bias in two ways: (i) assuming all bins are from the null region and fitting a

non-parametric function using read depths across all bins, a method that, to our best

knowledge, is adopted by all existing methods; and (ii) adopting an EM algorithm with the

missing data being the carrier status for each bin, which is a simplified implementation of

SCOPE. Three cells are chosen as examples, including a diploid, a hypodiploid, and a

hyperdiploid cell. For the diploid cell, the fitting by SCOPE is the same as that by the all-

null fitting, as expected. For hypodiploid and hyperdiploid cells, however, sequential

multiplicative increments in the observed $f(GC)$—the GC content biases—are observed

due to prominent copy number changes along the genome. The "all-null" fit is biased by

the global genomics structures due to deletions and duplications, but with the embedded

EM algorithm, SCOPE is able to successfully identify the true null regions and correctly

estimate the GC bias term (Figure 2, Supplementary Figure S1).

After proper data normalization, segmentation is performed to return regions with

homogeneous copy number profiles. Existing methods adopt segmentation procedures

based on either circular binary segmentation (CBS) or hidden Markov model (HMM),[11]

and they segment each cell separately.[31,32] Specifically, Ginkgo[32], which adopts the

CBS[34] algorithm, provides either independent segmentation, where cell-specific

normalized read counts are segmented, or segmentation with reference samples, which

calibrate segmentation against the cells with the most uniform coverage and the highest

quality. SCNV[31] relies on a set of normal cells to serve as the composite control and

adapts the model proposed in Shen and Zhang[35] designed for bulk DNA-seq for bin-free

segmentation. Both of these methods lack the ability to construct CNV profiles by

integrating shared cellular breakpoints from the same genetic background. SCOPE

adopts a cross-sample segmentation procedure that simultaneously estimates

changepoints that are shared across cells. This is extremely important in the single-cell

settings, where multiple cells from the same subclone share the same genetic

background and thus the same breakpoints for CNVs. The lower panels in Figure 2 show

the cross-sample segmentation results by SCOPE across three cells, where the predicted

ploidy by SCOPE is in concordance with that from single-cell flow sorting.

SCOPE model for data normalization

The extremely low depth of sequencing coverage, the nonlinear cell-specific biases due

to amplification and sequencing, as well as other low-rank systemic artifacts that cannot

be directly measured or quantified,[36] make the *sample-specific* bias correction procedure

inadequate to successfully and unbiasedly capture all noise terms. *Cross-sample*

normalization, on the other hand, relies on multiple samples processed in the same

experiment run, and it borrows information both across regions and across samples to

estimate the bias terms. This normalization strategy based on matrix factorization has

been applied in the bulk setting for different types of omics data[16,18,37,38] to adjust for GC

content bias and other latent artifacts. Furthermore, RUV[37] and CODEX2[18] extensively

utilize negative control genes and negative control samples to estimate latent factors. For

CNV detection, it has been shown that this increases CNV signal-to-noise ratio and

achieves high sensitivity for both rare and common variants. The experience we have

gained over a decade of next-generation sequencing data analysis collectively as a

community motivates many of the ingredients of our new proposed approach for single-

cell DNA sequencing.

SCOPE is based on a Poisson latent factor model[16,18] for count-based read depth

normalization but is completely standalone and specifically adapted for the single-cell

setting. Furthermore, to estimate CNVs by bulk DNA-seq across samples and to estimate

CNVs by scDNA-seq across cells from the same sample are two different problems – in

cancer genomics, the former profiles inter-tumor heterogeneity across patients, while the

latter profiles intra-tumor heterogeneity looking at single cells within a patient. The key

innovation in SCOPE is the way it integrates both null and non-null regions, in a genome-

wide fashion, for unbiased estimation of both GC content bias and latent factors for cell-

and position-specific background correction.

Specifically, let $Y = \{Y_{ij}; i = 1, \dots m; j = 1, \dots n\}$ be the raw read count matrix, where

Y_{ij} is the read depth for cell $j \in \{1, \dots, n\}$ and bin $i \in \{1, \dots, m\}$. SCOPE assumes that

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$$Y_{ij} \sim \text{Poisson}(\lambda_{ij}),$$

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$$\lambda_{ij} = N_j \beta_i f_j(GC_i) \alpha_{ij} \exp\left(\sum_{k=1}^{K} g_{ik} h_{jk}\right).$$

N_j is a cell-specific library size factor, which can be globally estimated as the median

ratio;[39] β_i reflects bias due to bin-specific length, capture and amplification efficiency;

$f_j(GC_i)$ is a sample-specific non-parametric function to capture the GC content bias, g_{ik}

and h_{jk} ($1 \leq k \leq K$) are the kth bin- and cell-specific latent factors with orthogonality

restraints, which force identifiability; and α_{ij} specifies the sequential multiplicative

increment due to different copy number states. α_{ij} is discretized to fit the single-cell

setting with integer-valued copy numbers and to ensure identifiability with T_j different

copy number states within a specific cell j ($1 \leq j \leq n$):

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$$\alpha_{ij} = \begin{cases} 1/2 & \text{with probability } \pi_1^{(j)} \\ 2/2 & \text{with probability } \pi_2^{(j)} \\ \vdots & \vdots \\ T_j/2 & \text{with probability } \pi_{T_j}^{(j)} \end{cases},$$

where $\left\{\frac{1}{2}, \frac{2}{2}, \dots, \frac{T_j}{2}\right\}$ corresponds to the linear increments in read depths across all copy

number states in cell j, with corresponding incidence rates $\left\{\pi_1^{(j)}, \pi_2^{(j)}, \dots, \pi_{T_j}^{(j)}\right\}$ and

$\sum_{t=1}^{T_j} \pi_t^{(j)} = 1$. We denote $\pi_1^{(j)}$ as the incident rate for heterozygous deletion, $\pi_2^{(j)}$ as the

probability of a bin residing in a null region, and $\pi_3^{(j)}, \cdots, \pi_{T_j}^{(j)}$ as the incident rates for

amplifications in cell j. The optimal number of copy number groups T_j is determined by

the Bayesian information criterion (BIC) for each cell j separately (Supplementary Figure

S1). By introducing the α_{ij} term, we aim to unmask biases based on a mixture of Poisson

distributions with observed-data likelihood:

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$$\phi(Y_{ij}) = \sum_{t=1}^{T_j} \pi_t^{(j)} \phi_t(Y_{ij}) = \sum_{t=1}^{T_j} \pi_t^{(j)} \text{pPoisson}\left(Y_{ij}; N_j \beta_i f_j(GC_i) \frac{t}{2} \exp\left(\sum_{k=1}^{K} g_{ik} h_{jk}\right)\right).$$

For each individual cell j, we adopt an EM algorithm within the iterative estimation
procedure, where the missing data indicates carrier status:

$$Z_{it}^{(j)} = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if bin } i \text{ of cell } j \text{ is from copy number group } t, \\ 0 & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

For parameter estimation, SCOPE adopts an iterative procedure, where EM is
embedded as one step to estimate the GC content bias. For EM initializations, SCOPE
utilizes ploidy estimates from a first-pass normalization run to ensure fast convergence
and to avoid local optima (Supplementary Figure S2). See algorithmic details in the
Supplementary Note S2. For estimation of K, the number of latent factors, SCOPE, by its
default, adopts BIC as a model selection metric. Notably, we demonstrate that with the
EM algorithm to account for the local genomic contexts and the use of normal cells to
estimate bin-specific noise terms, the procedure outlined above by SCOPE is robust to
the different choice of K (see under Discussion for more details).

The histograms in Figure 3 show the normalization results for a breast cancer
dataset across four methods – CODEX2, Ginkgo, Ginkgo with *post hoc* adjustment by the
estimated ploidy, and SCOPE. We observe that neither CODEX2 nor Ginkgo attains
unbiased separation of different copy number states. To solve this issue and to obtain
integer-valued copy number estimates, Ginkgo[32] adopts a *post hoc* ploidy estimation
procedure, followed by a cell-specific scaling step; these ensure that the average copy
number across all bins matches the estimated ploidy, an adjustment that allows Ginkgo
to achieve better separation of CNV signals. SCOPE, on the other hand, retains precise
segregation of CNV signals from the biological and technical noise, and distributions of
the normalized z-score are centered at the expected integer copy-number values.
Furthermore, SCOPE offers direct ploidy estimates, based on the estimated copy
numbers along the genome, completely off the shelf.

Identification of negative control cells
In most, if not all, single-cell cancer genomics studies, diploid cells are inevitably picked
up for sequencing from adjacent normal tissues and they can thus serve as normal
controls for read depth normalization. However, not all platforms/experiments allow or
adopt flow-sorting based techniques before scDNA-seq, and thus cell ploidy and case-
control labeling are not always readily available. To solve this issue, SCOPE opts to *in*

silico identify normal cells as controls based on the scDNA-seq data. Specifically, for each

cell, we calculate its Gini coefficient as two times the area between the diagonal line and

the Lorenz curve, shown in Supplementary Figure S3. Equivalently, the Gini coefficient

of cell j can be calculated as

$$Gini_j = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{m} \sum_{k=1}^{m} |Y_{ij} - Y_{kj}|}{2m \sum_{i=1}^{m} Y_{ij}},$$

which serves as a robust and scale-independent measurement of coverage uniformity.

As such, cell-specific Gini coefficients can be used as good proxies for identifying cell

outliers, which have extreme coverage distribution due to failed library preparation, and

for indexing normal cells out of the entire cell population.

The utility of Gini coefficients is supported by empirical evidence showing that

diploid, hyperdiploid, and hypodiploid cells, categorized by single-cell flow sorting, can be

perfectly classified using the estimated Gini indices (Supplementary Figure S4). This

suggests that the Gini coefficient is an effective metric, with which to identify negative

control samples. In practice, SCOPE does not require identification of all diploid cells from

the cell population but requires around 10 to 20 cells to serve as normal controls; see

under Discussion for details on choice of Gini coefficient threshold. The identified normal

cells are then used as normal controls in the cross-sample normalization step to estimate

bin-specific noise terms that are free of being biased by the CNV signals. Refer to

Supplementary Note S2 for details.

Detecting simultaneous changepoints across samples

For segmentation, SCOPE adopts a cross-sample Poisson likelihood-based recursive

segmentation procedure to identify changepoints/breakpoints that are shared across cells

from the same subclone. Specifically, for cell j, let $Y_{sj}, \dots, Y_{tj}$ and $\lambda_{sj}^0, \dots, \lambda_{tj}^0$ be the

observed and normalized read depth from a region spanning bin s to bin t, where $\lambda_{ij}^0 =$

$N_j \beta_i f_j(GC_i) \exp(\sum_{k=1}^{K} g_{ik} h_{jk})$ is the "control" depth of coverage under the null, i.e., the

coverage we expect to see if there is no CNV. We further denote $Y_{s:t,j} = \sum_{i=s}^{t} Y_{ij}$ and

$\lambda_{s:t,j}^0 = \sum_{i=s}^{t} \lambda_{ij}^0$. The scan statistic for one cell is $\max_{s,t} U_j(s,t)$, where

$$294 \qquad U_j(s,t) = \sup_{\mu_{s:t,j}} \left(\log \left(\frac{\mu_{s:t,j}^{Y_{s:t,j}} \exp(-\mu_{s:t,j})}{\lambda_{s:t,j}^0 \,^{Y_{s:t,j}} \exp(-\lambda_{s:t,j}^0)} \right) \right) = Y_{s:t,j} \log \left(\frac{Y_{s:t,j}}{\lambda_{s:t,j}^0} \right) - \left(Y_{s:t,j} - \lambda_{s:t,j}^0 \right).$$

295 $U_j(s,t)$ is a generalized likelihood ratio test statistic, derived from the null model $Y_{s:t,j} \sim$

296 $\text{Poisson}(\lambda_{s:t,j}^0)$ against the alternative $Y_{s:t,j} \sim \text{Poisson}(\mu_{s:t,j})$. [40] For simultaneous

297 changepoints detection across all cells, the scan statistic is $\max_{s,t} Z_{s,t}$, where

$$298 \qquad Z_{s,t} = \sum_{j=1}^{n} U_j(s,t) = \sum_{j=1}^{n} \left[Y_{s:t,j} \log \left(\frac{Y_{s:t,j}}{\lambda_{s:t,j}^0} \right) - \left(Y_{s:t,j} - \lambda_{s:t,j}^0 \right) \right].$$

299   SCOPE performs CBS[34] given $Z_{s,t}$ as the scan statistic and uses a cross-sample

300 modified BIC (mBIC)[41] as the stopping rule:

$$301 \qquad \text{mBIC}(p) = \log \left(\frac{L_\tau}{L_0} \right) - \frac{P}{2} \log \frac{2 \log(L_\tau / L_0)}{P} - \frac{P}{2} - \log \binom{m}{p} - p(\kappa_1 - \kappa_2)$$

$$302 \qquad - \sum_{\rho=1}^{p} \log \left(\sum_{j\text{th carrier}} \hat{\delta}_{\rho,j}^2 \right) + P \log \pi + (np - P) \log(1 - \pi),$$

where $1 = \tau_0 < \tau_1 < \tau_2 < \cdots < \tau_p < \tau_{p+1} = m$ denote the changepoints that are shared

across cells; $\log(L_\tau / L_0)$ is the generalized log-likelihood ratio for the alternative model,

which has p changepoints, against the null model, which has no changepoints; P denotes

the total number of shift parameters (δ), where $\delta_{\rho,j} = \lambda_{\rho,j}^0 - \lambda_{\rho-1,j}^0$ for cell j with

changepoint ρ $(1 \le \rho \le p)$; and κ_1 and κ_2 are pre-defined numerical constants. When

the carrier probability π is not known a priori, it is estimated empirically by

$$309 \qquad \hat{\pi} = P/(np).$$

The optimal number of changepoints is determined via $\max_p \text{mBIC}(p)$. For more details

on the interpretation of the terms in mBIC, see Zhang and Siegmund.[41]

After segmentation, SCOPE reports integer-valued copy numbers and allows

direct ploidy estimation, which is calculated as the weighted average of the estimated

copy number across the genome. For further downstream analysis, SCOPE also includes

the option to cluster cells based on the matrix of normalized z-scores, estimated copy

numbers, or estimated changepoints, which returns clusters of cells from the same

subclones with the same mutational profiles. As a final step, cells from the same subclone

can be combined together to generate pseudo-bulk samples that are presumably

homogeneous. Another normalization on the *in silico* generated pseudo-bulk samples

returns copy number profiles with higher resolution. More details are described in the

Methods section. The pseudo-bulk samples also have the potential for somatic point

mutation profiling, with the sequencing sparsity averaged out. Refer to the Discussion

section for more details.

Availability of data and material

SCOPE is an open-source R package available at https://github.com/rujinwang/SCOPE

with license GPL-2.0. Breast cancer scDNA-seq data are available from the NCBI

Sequence Read Archive with accession number SRA018951 and SRP114962; breast

cancer aCGH benchmark data are available from the NCBI Gene Expression Omnibus

with accession number GSE16607. ScDNA-seq data from 10X Genomics are available

at https://support.10xgenomics.com/single-cell-dna/datasets. A detailed data summary is

provided in Supplementary Table S1.

Results

We first set out to compare the biases and differences in depth of coverage and coverage

uniformity between the conventional whole-genome amplification methods and the 10X

Genomics pipeline. Compared to protocols that use conventional methods for cell

isolation and whole-genome amplification (WGA), 10X Genomics produces data with both

higher throughput (by the number of cells captured and sequenced) and yet significantly

lower sequencing depth (Supplementary Table S1). Conventional WGA data achieves a

mean total read count of 5.3 million per cell, while 10X Genomics data achieves a mean

total read count of 0.4 million per cell (Supplementary Figure S5A). To assess coverage

uniformity, we compared the cell-specific median absolute deviation (MAD) of all pairwise

differences in read counts between neighboring bins, with a default bin size of 500kb for

all platforms and datasets (refer to the Discussion section on choice of bin size). We pre-

normalized the read count data by a cell-specific factor for library size difference and a

bin-specific factor for baseline coverage difference, then calculated the MADs across all

cells; the MADs are resilient to outliers, as the transitions between copy number states

are relatively infrequent along the genome. Strikingly, our results show that, even though

cells from the 10X Genomics pipeline are sequenced at a much shallower depth, the

coverage uniformity metrics show trivial differences between data from the 10X Genomics

and the conventional methods, except that the former has a higher number of cell outliers

(Supplementary Figure S5B).

Analysis of scDNA-seq data of breast cancer patients with aCGH for validation

We first demonstrated SCOPE on the scDNA-seq data of two breast cancer patients, T10

and T16, from Navin et al.,[22] who sequenced 100 flow-sorted single cells from each

patient. Fluorescence activated cell sorting (FACS) analysis of the single cells showed

different distributions of ploidy: hyperdiploid, hypodiploid, and diploid.[22] Furthermore,

array comparative genomic hybridization (aCGH) was applied to the same tumor sectors

from both patients, and this returned array-based copy number profiles of flow-sorted cell

populations.[42] Cell ploidy by FACS, copy number profiles of purified bulk samples by

aCGH, and initially reported copy number profiles of single cells estimated by scDNA-seq

all suggested that patient T10 had three distinct clonal subpopulations, indicating a

polygenomic tumor. In patient T16, a relatively homogeneous cancer cell population was

identified in both primary tumor and metastasis of patient T16, indicating a monogenomic

tumor.[22] We sought to apply SCOPE to this dataset to replicate previous findings, and,

further, used copy number calls by aCGH as orthogonal validations.

Figure 4 gives heatmaps of genome-wide estimated copy numbers across all cells

from T10 and T16. SCOPE identified two subpopulations of hyperdiploid cancer cells,

one subpopulation of hypodiploid cancer cells, and a normal cell subpopulation within

T10, which is consistent with the previous report. For T16, SCOPE returned two cancer

cell subclones, one for the hyperdiploid subpopulation from the primary tumor and the

other for the hyperdiploid subpopulation from the metastasis. Upon careful inspection of

the consensus copy number profiles of these two subpopulations, we find them highly

similar, indicating that the same subclone of origin from the primary tumor survived the

selection bottleneck and led to relapse. Notably, SCOPE also identified three

pseudodiploid cells (red annotation bars in Figure 4B), in concordance with the previous

report. Overall, we showed that SCOPE was able to reproduce subclonal structures that

are consistent with previous results. The normalization results by SCOPE attain better

separation of signal from noise than other existing methods, as can be seen from the

histograms of the normalized z-scores shown in Figure 3 and Supplementary Figure S6

(for T10 and T16, respectively). If we only focus on normal cells, there is an even clearer

separation of normalized copy numbers, as shown by the disappearance of the spike at

two from the normal cells (Supplementary Figure S7). In addition, the ploidy estimates by

SCOPE are highly concordant with those from previous reports based on single-cell flow

sorting (Supplementary Figure S8).

To further assess the performance of SCOPE and to benchmark against existing

methods, we adopted CNV calls from aCGH of purified bulk samples[42] as gold standards

(Supplementary Table S3). FACS revealed three cancer subpopulations (aneuploid 1,

aneuploid 2, and hypodiploid), which is, again, in concordance with SCOPE's results. This

was followed by aCGH for copy number profiling of the purified bulk samples. Relative

copy numbers from aCGH, scDNA-seq by SCOPE, and scDNA-seq by Ginkgo are shown

in Figure 5A-C across the three cancer subpopulations: for aCGH, the subpopulations

were inferred by the initial step of flow sorting; for SCOPE and Ginkgo, the subpopulations

were inferred and aggregated based on the estimated single-cell copy number profiles.

Notably, array-based intensity measurements were normalized against a sample-specific

baseline, producing copy number signals that have a mean of one for all three

subpopulations. Therefore, relative copy numbers, which are absolute copy numbers

adjusted by ploidy (shown as horizontal solid lines in Figure 5A-C for diploid regions) were

used by Ginkgo and SCOPE to mask ploidy for comparison against aCGH calls. Using

spearman correlation and root mean squared error (RMSE) as performance metrics,

SCOPE outperforms Ginkgo by the aCGH gold standards.

Analysis of scDNA-seq data of triple-negative breast cancer patients with paired

WES and scRNA-seq

We further applied SCOPE to scDNA-seq data of temporally separated tumor resections

from triple negative breast cancer patients with chemotherapy treatment.[24] Specifically,

scDNA-seq was performed on matched pre-treatment, mid-treatment, and post-treatment

tumor samples from the same patient. We applied SCOPE to four "clonal extinction"

patients, where tumor cells were previously reported to exist only in the pre-treatment

samples (Supplementary Table S1). For example, 92 cells from patient KTN302 were

sequenced at two timepoints, pre- and mid-treatment. In this case, SCOPE successfully

detected two subclones of aneuploid cells in the pre-treatment tumors and found that all

the cells from the mid-treatment group were normal, as shown in Figure 6. The consensus

copy number profiles of the two subpopulations indicate a large number of shared CNAs

between the two inferred subclones; this is, likely due to a punctuated copy number

evolution,[43] which produces the majority of CNAs in the early stages of tumor evolution.

Results for patients KTN126 and KTN129 are included in Supplementary Figure S10.

We used bulk-tissue WES and single-cell RNA-seq data to validate the copy

number profiles returned by SCOPE. For the data from patient KTN302, WES and

scRNA-seq were performed on the matched normal (blood), pre-treatment, mid-treatment,

and post-treatment bulk samples (Supplementary Table S1) and were used to profile

CNAs separately for validation. For bulk WES, a modified CBS algorithm based on

seqCBS[35] was utilized for the paired tumor-normal experimental design, which returns

relative copy numbers. Despite signal attenuation due to intra-tumor heterogeneity and

normal cell contamination, we observe large deletions on chromosome 5, 10, and 18, and

a distinct copy-number amplification on chromosome 8, in accordance with the profiles

returned by scDNA-seq (Figure 6, Supplementary Figure S10). For scRNA-seq, we used

the InferCNV toolkit[44] and employed a sliding-window approach of 50 genes[45] to infer

CNVs, using as input the transcript per million (TPM) matrix, returned by SALMON

(Supplementary Figure S9).[46] In spite of the low resolution, we observed deletions on

chromosome 5, 10, and 18, as well as duplications on chromosome 8, in accordance with

WES and scDNA-seq calls (Figure 6, Supplementary Figure S10).

To quantitatively assay the quality of the call set produced by SCOPE, we plotted

the relative copy number estimates by WES and scDNA-seq for the inferred amplified,

deleted, and copy-number-neutral regions by SCOPE. Although the copy number signals

from WES and scRNA-seq are low-resolution and are attenuated due to normal cell

contaminations, the relative copy numbers from both WES and scRNA-seq are less than

one for deletion regions, but greater than one for putative amplifications, in agreement

with results from SCOPE (Figure 7, Supplementary Figure S11). Notably, in the WES and

scRNA-seq data, the relative copy numbers in the null regions are less than one due to

over-normalization of ploidy in hyperdiploid samples (Figure 7, Supplementary Figure
S11).

Analysis of scDNA-seq data of gastric cancer spike-ins and breast cancer
dissections from the 10X Genomics

We finally demonstrated SCOPE on three recently released scDNA-seq datasets from
the 10X Genomics Single-Cell CNV Solution pipeline. We first adopted two publicly
available spike-in datasets from the 10X Genomics website, where 1% and 10% MKN-45
gastric cancer cell lines are mixed with ~500 and ~1000 normal BJ fibroblast cells,
respectively (Supplementary Table S1). The second dataset consists of ~10,000 nuclei
extracted and sequenced from five different dissections of frozen breast tumor tissue from
a triple negative ductal carcinoma (Supplementary Table S1).

As a proof of concept, we started by applying SCOPE to the two 10X Genomics
spike-in datasets—1,055 single cells with a 1% spike-in of cancer cells and 462 single
cells with a 10% spike-in of cancer cells were sequenced. We adopted stringent quality
control procedures to remove cells with extreme Gini coefficients and to remove bins that:
(i) have low mappability; (ii) reside in "blacklist" regions; and (iii) have extremely low read
depth across cells. For the two spike-in datasets, this resulted in 5,055 and 5,064 bins for
the copy number estimation, respectively. Despite the higher sparsity and lower
sequencing depth of this data, SCOPE successfully identified the cancer cell cluster from
the cluster of normal diploid cells, with heatmaps shown in Supplementary Figure S12.
Specifically, 11 and 36 cancer cells were identified from the 1% and 10% spike-in datasets
respectively, with estimated proportions as 1% and 8%. For data visualization, we
performed t-SNE projections[47] on the normalized z-scores, revealing that SCOPE
successfully recovers 1% and 10% non-diploid cancer cells from a mixture of diploid cells
in the background (Figure 8A-B). The colors in Figure 8A-B indicate the classification by
a threshold of 0.12 for the Gini coefficients. We see that while not all diploid cells are used
as negative control cells, there is a perfect separation between normal cells and cancer
cells; see under Discussion for details on setting the threshold of Gini coefficients.

We further applied SCOPE to a 10X Genomics scDNA-seq dataset of ~10,000
cells from five adjacent tumor dissections of a breast cancer patient. We followed the

same quality control procedure as previously described, which resulted in 4864, 5016,
5032, 5023, and 5026 bins from each dissection. SCOPE is then separately applied to
each dissection for identification of normal cells, read depth normalization, and copy
number estimation. The proportions of normal cells vary across the five dissections, with
mean cellular ploidy of sections A to E being 2.12, 3.13, 3.29, 3.36, and 3.53, respectively.
This indicates a gradient of normal cells contaminating the tumor (Supplementary Figure
S13). We further integrated the inferred copy number profiles by SCOPE across all tumor
cells from the five dissections and demonstrated that SCOPE was able to identify
subclonal structures. For example, the distinct duplication events on chromosome 3 and
chromosome 4 are mutually exclusive and mark a split in the tumor evolutionary history.
Hierarchical clustering based on the normalization result suggests that the different
cancer subclones consist of cancer cells from all sections. This indicates an early
branching evolutionary model, where copy number aberrations happen at a potentially
early stage in the disease advancement (Figure 8C).
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Discussion
Here we propose SCOPE, a new method to remove technical noise and improve CNV
signal-to-noise ratio for scDNA-seq data. SCOPE includes a Poisson latent factor model
for data normalization and a non-parametric functional term for adjusting GC content bias
in a context-specific manner. The EM algorithm embedded in the Poisson log linear model
accounts for the different copy number states as it adjusts for GC content bias—a step
we show to be crucial for cancer genomic studies, where recurrent copy number changes
across the genome lead to significant deviations from the null. Capacity is increasing in
single-cell isolation and single-cell whole-genome sequencing, and there is an increasing
need to profile CNVs at the single-cell level as a non-negligible source of genetic variation.
We believe that SCOPE can be a useful tool for the genetics and genomics community,
for it lays the statistical foundation that will make robust and accurate single-cell CNV
profiling possible.
We demonstrated SCOPE on two breast cancer scDNA-seq datasets, where
SCOPE successfully parsed normal cells, exposed a mixture of tumor cells based on their
inferred copy number profiles, and unmasked the ploidy. We showed that this enabled

characterization of genetically distinct populations of tumor cells that were not evident in
bulk-tissue analysis, shedding light upon tumor heterogeneity at a much finer resolution.
We benchmarked SCOPE against other existing methods using array-based CNV calls
from purified bulk samples as the gold standard, and we showed that SCOPE
outperformed those methods. We further demonstrated SCOPE on scDNA-seq data from
the recently released Single Cell CNV Solution by 10X Genomics and showed that
SCOPE could accurately detect 1% of the gastric cancer cells from the background of
normal fibroblast cells and that it successfully reconstructed the subclonal structure
across 10,000 breast cancer cells.

To systematically investigate how varying parameters (e.g., bin size, threshold of
cell-specific Gini coefficients to identify normal controls, and the number of Poisson latent
factors) influence performance, we carry out additional evaluation and benchmark
analysis on the scDNA-seq data from the breast cancer patient T10, with the aCGH calls
as gold standard. Our results indicate that a bin size of 3Mb, compared to a bin size of
200Kb, leads to smoother normalization results yet meanwhile misses smaller CNVs due
to low resolution (Supplementary Figure S14). Meanwhile, bin sizes between 200Kb to
1Mb do not affect the performance of SCOPE, especially for chromosome-arm level
CNVs (Supplementary Figure S15). For an optimal choice of the Gini coefficient threshold,
we provided empirical evidence that SCOPE does not need to include all normal cells as
negative controls – 10 to 20 normal cells suffice to achieve accurate estimation
(Supplementary Figure S16). In addition, we show that SCOPE's performance is invariant
to the choice of K, the number of Poisson latent factors (Supplementary Figure S17),
since SCOPE adopts the EM algorithm to account for genomic contexts when estimating
GC content biases and uses only the normal cells to estimate the bin-specific noise terms.
As such, we show that SCOPE is robust to the choice of Gini coefficient threshold and
the number of Poisson latent factors. In summary, compared to existing methods, SCOPE
directly provides copy number and ploidy estimates, completely off the shelf and without
much need for manual tuning by the users.

Correct inference of tumor evolution history depends on accurate copy number
estimates, which in turn depend on effective normalization. While we show that data
normalization is a first-order concern, the cross-sample segmentation procedure by

SCOPE also returns changepoints that are shared across cells, a unique feature that is
necessary for the single-cell setting, where cells from the same genetic backgrounds
share the same breakpoints. SCOPE also enables hierarchical clustering and phylogeny
reconstruction, based on the normalized log-ratios, the estimated copy numbers, or the
estimated changepoints—data that is useful for further downstream analysis. To further
reduce the ambiguity in unmasking intra-tumor heterogeneity, future research may
include force-calling somatic point mutations from scDNA-seq and integrating both copy
number and point mutation profiles for reconstructing tumor evolutionary history.

A few recently developed methods for CNV detection use single-cell RNA
sequencing (scRNA-seq).[44,48] While these gene-expression based approaches have
been successfully applied to detect chromosome or chromosome-arm level CNAs,
multimodal data alignment between scDNA-seq and scRNA-seq has the potential to
increase the resolution in detecting CNAs in a larger cell population. This alignment could
also shed light upon the interplay between genomic and transcriptomic variations in
cancer, for it is still unclear how transcriptomic variation is modulated by genetic variation
and phylogenetic evolution in cancer. The joint analysis framework would allow
quantification of clonal differences in gene expression while accounting for DNA
confounding.

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Authors' Contributions
562 YJ initiated and envisioned the study. RW and YJ formulated the model, developed and
563 implemented the algorithm. RW, DYL, and YJ performed data analysis. RW and YJ wrote
564 the manuscript, which was edited by DYL. All authors read and approved the final
565 manuscript.

Competing Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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 Figure Legends

Figure 1. A flowchart outlining the procedures for profiling single-cell CNV by SCOPE.
Bioinformatic pre-processing returns assembled BAM files as input for computing depth
of coverage. Given the reference genome, mappability and GC content are calculated for
each bin. SCOPE then adopts a Poisson latent factor model with an embedded EM
algorithm for data normalization to remove biases due to sample-specific sequencing
depth, bin-specific amplification/mapping efficiency, GC content, as well as other
systemic latent artifacts. A cross-sample Poisson likelihood segmentation is performed to
return copy number profiles, which are further used to infer cancer subclones.

Figure 2. EM algorithm for correction of GC content bias. GC content bias $f(GC)$, EM
fitting, and cross-sample segmentation results of scDNA-seq data from breast cancer
patient T10 are shown across three cells: (A) a diploid cell; (B) a hypoploid cell with four
copy number states; (C) a hyperploid cell with five copy number states. Predicted ploidy,
taken as genome-wide average, agrees with previous FACS sorting results.

Figure 3. Normalization results for scDNA-seq data of ploygenomic tumor T10.[22]
Normalized *z*-scores are shown for (A) CODEX2 as $\log(Y/\hat{\lambda})$, (B) Ginkgo, which centers
bin counts of each cell at one and further fits a locally weighted linear regression (LOESS
curve) to adjust for GC content bias, (C) Ginkgo with *post hoc* ploidy adjustment, which
scales relative copy numbers by the optimal ploidy multiplier, and (D) SCOPE as $\log(Y/\hat{\lambda})$,
which automatically takes into account and estimates ploidy.ch

Figure 4. SCOPE successfully detects subclonal structures for triple negative breast
cancer samples. (A) Inferred copy number profiles of single cells from polygenomic tumor
T10. (B) Inferred copy number profiles of single cells from monogenomic tumor T16.
Upper heatmaps show post-segmentation copy number profiles of integer values.
Hierarchical clustering separates normal cells from tumor cells and reveals three cancer
subclones in T10 and two highly similar subclones in T16. Lower heatmaps and stairstep
plots show consensus copy-number profiles of all single cells from the same cancer
subclones.

Figure 5. Orthogonal validation of single-cell copy number profiles by aCGH of purified bulk samples by FACS. FACS reveals (A) hyperdiploid 1, (B) hyperdiploid 2, and (C) hypodiploid cancer subclones within breast cancer patient T10. This is followed by aCGH on the sorted bulk samples to profile copy number aberrations, which are used as ground truth. Relative copy number (CN) estimates from the three subpopulations are shown in (A)-(C) for aCGH, SCOPE, and Ginkgo. (D) Spearman correlation and RMSE as performance metrics comparing results by SCOPE and Ginkgo against the gold standard. SCOPE achieves higher correlation and lower estimation errors.

Figure 6. Copy-number profiles of triple-negative breast cancer patients KTN302, inferred by scDNA-seq, bulk WES, and scRNA-seq. Upper three panels show heatmap of inferred copy-number profiles by SCOPE with cells clustered by hierarchical clustering, heatmap and stairstep plot of consensus copy number profiles for each cell subpopulation (N for normal cell, A, B, and C for cancer subclones). Lower two panels show copy number profiles inferred by WES and scRNA-seq, which are further used to validate CNV calls by SCOPE.

Figure 7. Orthogonal validations using copy number profiles by WES and scRNA-seq. Each genomic segment is categorized as amplification (amp), deletion (del), or copy-number neural (null) based on the copy number estimates returned by SCOPE. The boxplot shows the estimated relative copy numbers by bulk WES and scRNA-seq, which are higher in amplified regions and lower in deleted regions, compared to the null regions. Due to low resolution and high signal-to-noise ratio by WES and scRNA-seq, there is no perfect separation between the different copy number states. Furthermore, for scRNA-seq and bulk WES, the relative copy numbers are estimated comparing to a sample-specific baseline. For cases where the tumor cells are hyperdiploid/hypodiploid, the baseline is shifted up/down making the true null regions have relative copy numbers less/greater than one.

Figure 8. Visualization by t-SNE projections of normalized scDNA-seq data from the 10X

Genomics cancer spike-in datasets. (A) 1% and (B) 10% of gastric cancer cell lines were

mixed with normal fibroblast cell lines. After normalization, SCOPE successfully identified

the cancer cell population from the background of normal cells. (C) Heatmap of

normalization results by SCOPE on the scDNA-seq dataset of 10,000 breast cancer

nuclei. Cell clustering reveals cancer subclonal structure, not previously detectable by

bulk DNA-seq.

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7

(A) 10% gastric cancer cell line

(B) 1% gastric cancer cell line

tSNE2

tSNE1

tSNE2

tSNE1

Gini
- Gini<=0.12
- Gini>0.12

(C) 10,000 single nuclei of breast cancer cells

Figure 8