A multi-omics study links TNS3 and SEPT7 to long-term former smoking NSCLC survival

Sipeng Shen1,2,3,16, Yongyue Wei1,3,16, Yi Li4, Weiwei Duan5, Xuesi Dong1,6, Lijuan Lin1,6, Dongfang You1,6, Adonina Tardon6, Chu Chen6, John K. Field8, Rayjean J. Hung10, Geoffrey Liu11, Dakai Zhu12, Christopher I. Amos2, Li Su4, Yang Zhao1,3, Zhibin Hu2,3,13,14, Hongbing Shen3,13,14, Ruyang Zhang1,5,13,14, Feng Chen1,2,3,14,17,20, and David C. Christiani5,15,17,20

The genetic architecture of non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) is relevant to smoking status. However, the genetic contribution of long-term smoking cessation to the prognosis of NSCLC patients remains largely unknown. We conducted a genome-wide association study primarily on the prognosis of 1299 NSCLC patients of long-term former smokers from independent discovery (n = 566) and validation (n = 733) sets, and used in-silico function prediction and multi-omics analysis to identify single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) on prognostics with NSCLC. We further detected SNPs with at moderate association strength on survival within each group of never, short-term former, long-term former, and current smokers, and compared their genetic similarity at the SNP, gene, expression quantitative trait loci (eQTL), enhancer, and pathway levels. We identified two SNPs, rs34211819 and rs1143149, that were significantly associated with survival of NSCLC patients who were long-term former smokers. Both SNPs had significant interaction effects with years of smoking cessation (rs34211819: Pinteraction = 8.0 × 10−9; rs1143149: Pinteraction = 0.003). In addition, in silico function prediction and multi-omics analysis provided evidence that these QTLs were associated with survival. Moreover, comparison analysis found higher genetic similarity between long-term former smokers and never-smokers, compared to short-term former smokers or current smokers. Pathway enrichment analysis indicated a unique pattern among long-term former smokers that was related to immune pathways. This study provides important insights into the genetic architecture associated with long-term former smoking NSCLC.

1Department of Biostatistics, Center for Global Health, School of Public Health, Nanjing Medical University, Nanjing 211166 Jiangsu, China. 2State Key Laboratory of Reproductive Medicine, Nanjing Medical University, Nanjing 211166 Jiangsu, China. 3China International Cooperation Center of Environment and Human Health, Nanjing Medical University, Nanjing 211166 Jiangsu, China. 4Department of Biostatistics, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109, USA. 5Department of Bioinformatics, School of Biomedical Engineering and Informatics, Nanjing Medical University, Nanjing 211166 Jiangsu, China. 6Department of Environmental Health, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Harvard University, Boston, MA 02115, USA. 7University of Oviedo and CIBERESP, Faculty of Medicine, Oviedo 33003, Spain. 8Program in Epidemiology, Division of Public Health Sciences, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, Seattle, WA 98109, USA. 9Institute of Translational Medicine, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK. 10Prosserman Centre for Population Health Research, Lunenfeld-Tanenbaum Research Institute, Sinai Health System and University of Toronto, Toronto, ON M5T 3L9, Canada. 11Princess Margaret Cancer Centre, Toronto, ON MSG 2C1, Canada. 12Department of Medicine, Epidemiology Section, Institute for Clinical and Translational Research, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, TX 77030, USA. 13Department of Epidemiology, Center for Global Health, School of Public Health, Nanjing Medical University, Nanjing 211166 Jiangsu, China. 14Jiangsu Key Lab of Cancer Biomarkers, Prevention and Treatment, Cancer Center, Collaborative Innovation Center for Cancer Personalized Medicine, Nanjing Medical University, Nanjing 211166 Jiangsu, China. 15Pulmonary and Critical Care Division, Massachusetts General Hospital, Department of Medicine, Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA 02114, USA. 16These authors contributed equally: Sipeng Shen, Yongyue Wei. 17These authors jointly supervised this work: Feng Chen, David C. Christiani. 18email: zhangruyang@njmu.edu.cn; fengchen@njmu.edu.cn; dchristi@hsph.harvard.edu

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rs34211819 was in an intron region of tensin-3 (TNS3), with an MAF of 0.35; rs1143149 was an intron variant of septin 7 (SEPT7), with an MAF of 0.34. The regional plots (Fig. 1b, c) present a cluster of significant prognostic SNPs that were moderately or highly correlated with rs34211819 and rs1143149 (Supplementary Table 1). Although the chromosome locations of the two SNPs were close, they had a very low correlation ($D' = 0.017$, $r^2 = 2.27 \times 10^{-5}$). The C allele of rs34211819 was
significantly associated with better survival (HR_{discovery} = 0.66, 95% CI: 0.56–0.78, \( P = 2.01 \times 10^{-7} \); HR_{validation} = 0.84, 95% CI: 0.73–0.96, \( P = 1.36 \times 10^{-2} \); HR_{combined} = 0.73, 95% CI: 0.66–0.81, \( P = 3.90 \times 10^{-9} \)) (Fig. 1d). In contrast, the C allele of rs1143149 was associated with worse survival (HR_{discovery} = 1.42, 95% CI: 1.16–1.60, \( P = 2.04 \times 10^{-6} \); HR_{validation} = 1.33, 95% CI: 1.15–1.53, \( P = 7.88 \times 10^{-5} \); HR_{combined} = 1.36, 95% CI: 1.22–1.51, \( P = 9.75 \times 10^{-8} \)) (Fig. 1e). The associations remained significant if SNPs were coded in co-dominant, dominant, and recessive models (Supplementary Table 2), indicating the robustness of our results toward coding. The same conclusion held with analyses of subgroups, defined by age, gender, histology type, and clinical stage (Fig. 2a), as both SNPs were significantly associated with survival in almost all subgroups, except for rs1143149 among the early-stage patients.

### Genetic variants interaction with years of smoking cessation

We performed a stratified analysis by years of smoking cessation for both long-term and short-term former smokers to evaluate the modifying effect of years of smoking cessation. As years of smoking cessation increased, the protective effect of rs34211819 and the detrimental effect of rs1143149 on survival were both elevated (Fig. 2b, c). These effects of two SNPs were only significant in long-term former smokers, indicating significant heterogeneity between these two groups (rs34211819: \( P_{\text{heterogeneity}} = 0.042 \); rs1143149: \( P_{\text{heterogeneity}} = 0.034 \)). The trend test detected significant trends for both SNPs across different subgroups (rs34211819: \( P_{\text{trend}} = 0.003 \); rs1143149: \( P_{\text{trend}} = 0.045 \)). Further, we detected significant interaction effects between SNPs and years of smoking cessation, a type of gene–environment interactions (rs34211819 × years: \( P_{\text{interaction}} = 8.0 \times 10^{-4} \); rs1143149 × years: \( P_{\text{interaction}} = 0.003 \)) (Fig. 2d, e).

### Evidence of association with lung cancer survival from multi-omics studies

In meta-analysis of eQTL effects from GTEx and TCGA, the two SNPs had a significant cis-eQTL relationship with gene expression (TNS3: \( \beta = -0.09 \), 95% CI: \(-0.16 \text{ to } -0.02 \), \( P = 0.009 \); SEPT7: \( \beta = 0.04 \), 95% CI: \(0.01 \text{ to } 0.08 \), \( P = 0.033 \)) (Fig. 3b). In gene expression...
survival analysis of long-term former smokers, higher expression of TNS3 (HR = 1.84, 95% CI: 1.01–3.34, \( P = 0.045 \)) and SEPT7 (HR = 1.67, 95% CI: 1.02–3.21, \( P = 0.023 \)) were significantly associated with worse survival in the TCGA database (Fig. 3c).

In DNA methylation analysis, we extracted 94 CpG probes that were located within TNS3 and SEPT7. Two CpG sites, cg22455271 and cg07462932, had significant methylation QTL (meQTL) effects with rs1143149 (\( \beta = -0.08, 95\% \text{ CI: } -0.14 \text{ to } -0.01, P = 0.009, q\text{-FDR} = 0.034 \)) and rs34211819 (\( \beta = -0.17, 95\% \text{ CI: } -0.32 \text{ to } -0.02, P = 0.002, q\text{-FDR} = 0.039 \)), respectively (Fig. 3d). They were significantly associated with survival in long-term former smokers (HR\(_{cg22455271} = 2.40, 95\% \text{ CI: } 1.47 \text{ to } 3.93, P = 2.5 \times 10^{-4}, q\text{-FDR} = 0.001; \) HR\(_{cg07462932} = 0.47, 95\% \text{ CI: } 0.30 \text{ to } 0.74, P = 7.4 \times 10^{-4}, q\text{-FDR} = 0.018 \)) (Fig. 3e and Supplementary Table 3).

We predicted the functional relevance by SNPinfo, RegulomeDB, and HaploReg v4.1 (Supplementary Table 4). rs34211819 in TNS3 had a high score of protein binding and could bind two proteins: B cell lymphoma 3 (BCL3) and octamer transcription factor 2 (OCT2).

In the CPTAC proteomics project, the two bound proteins BCL3 (fold change = 1.69, \( P = 2.16 \times 10^{-5} \)) and OCT2 (fold change = 2.21, \( P = 3.13 \times 10^{-13} \)) were significantly upregulated in the lung cancer tumor tissues compared to the adjacent normal tissues (Fig. 3f).

Genetic similarity across patients with different smoking statuses

We first performed genetic similarity comparisons at the SNP level by extracting moderate-to-high signals from the results of survival analysis within different smoking subgroups. A total of 7789 independent SNPs was observed in the long-term former smokers, which were comparable to that of never-smokers (\( n = 7358 \)) but 31.4% and 85.5% more than that of short-term former smokers (\( n = 5343 \)) and current smokers (\( n = 4198 \)), respectively. No SNPs were shared across the four smoking subgroups. Long-term former smokers only had 23, 20, and 11 overlapping SNPs with never smokers, short-term former smokers, and current smokers, respectively (Fig. 4a), indicating that these significant prognostic SNPs for survival differred between tumor and normal tissues.
NSCLC patients who were long-term former smokers seemed to differ from those for the other smoking groups.

For gene-level comparisons, these identified SNPs were assembled to genes within each subgroup (Fig. 4b). We identified 3,837 genes in long-term former smokers, and 1,006 genes of them were shared with never-smokers, 22.1% more than those shared with short-term former smokers (824 genes) and 45.8% more than with current smokers (690 genes). A total of 187 genes were commonly shared by all the subgroups (Supplementary Table 5). Protein-coding genes showed these same patterns of similarity (Fig. 4c).

We further investigated the eQTL-related genes based on the GTEx lung tissue database (Fig. 4d) and enhancers from the FANTOM5 database (Fig. 4e). For long-term former smokers, the same trend was observed with germline-regulated genes, which may indicate the higher similarity with never-smoking subgroup than others. Only two eQTL-related genes were shared among all subgroups: ARHGAP15 and TSPAN9. We also performed sensitivity analysis under different thresholds ($P < 10^{-4}$ and $P < 10^{-5}$) and obtained the similar results (Supplementary Table 6).

**DISCUSSION**

Understanding genetic risk factors in cancer is important for uncovering its underlying biological mechanisms. We explored Kyoto Encyclopedia of Genes and Genomes (KEGG) pathways in the gene set enrichment analysis of germline-regulated genes. A total of 53 pathways were significant in long-term former smokers (Fig. 4f). A total of 18 pathways were shared across all the subgroups, including the well-known signaling pathways such as mitogen-activated protein kinase, oxytocin, Ras, Rap1, and calcium pathways (Fig. 4g). However, 11 pathways were only significant in long-term former smokers, most of which were linked to immune function such as the B cell receptor signaling pathway, human T cell leukemia virus 1 infection, human immunodeficiency virus 1 infection, and T helper type 1 and T helper type 2 cell differentiation (Fig. 4h).
detected rs34211819 in TNS3 and rs1143149 in SEPT7 which were associated with survival. Significant interactions revealed that the effects of SNPs could be modified by years of smoking cessation, perhaps indicating opportunities for clinical adjuvant therapy with immunotherapies in patients with risk alleles, while an immune function relationship was found for cis-regulated genes or SNP-binding proteins. Multi-omics analyses provided evidence of their eQTL/meQTL relationships, survival-related methylation, and expression patterns and upregulated proteins in NSCLC. Furthermore, we observed higher similarities between long-term former smokers and never-smokers, compared to short-term former smokers or current smokers. The distinct SNP patterns in long-term former smokers were linked to immune signals.

Tobacco smoking is associated with worse outcomes in lung cancer, as it leads to downregulation of proinflammatory cytokines, immunosuppression, and anti-inflammatory effects mediated by oxidants, carbon monoxide, nicotine, and transcriptional modifying compounds, especially in lung tissues. Chronic inhalation of cigarette smoke affects a wide range of immunological functions, including innate and adaptive immune responses. As a result, the immune system may be suppressed as long as individuals are exposed to smoking regardless of years of quitting or smoking, as evidenced by the same signaling pathways shared by all the smoking subgroups in our study. Tobacco smoking can affect the immune system by chemically modifying signaling pathways as well as the extracellular matrix through acetylation, nitrosylation, carbonylation, and oxidation, thereby affecting cell survival, activation, and differentiation. The identified genes were associated with NSCLC survival at the genomic, epigenomic, and transcriptomic levels and were related to immunological functions. SEPT7 is a member of the septin family of GTP-binding proteins, which form higher-order filamentous structures and function primarily in spatial organization and compartmentalization of many cellular processes. SEPT7 is structurally related to RAS oncogenes, which promote tumorigenesis. SEPT7 is also implicated in several types of cancer,

While the septin family plays a critical role in cytokinesis, SEPT7 is also involved in the cytoskeleton and participates in regulation of cytokinesis. Septin-deficient T cells fail to complete cytokinesis when prompted by pharmacological activation or cytokines. Meanwhile, SEPT7-deficient fibroblasts display incomplete cytokinesis and constitutive multinucleation by affecting the mitotic spindle and midbody rather than the contractile ring. As a result, SEPT7 plays a crucial role in immune functions including cytokinesis and mitosis, which are closely related to molecular changes from smoking exposure.

Another locus at 7p12 is marked by an intronic SNP in TNS3, which encodes tensin-3, a member of a family of focal adhesion-associated proteins that regulate cell adhesion and migration. This gene may be an activator of cell migration and a promoter of invasion in tumor metastasis. Here, we found that TNS3 acts as an oncogene, affecting regulation of methylation in lung cancer. A TNS3 methylation pattern in the promoter region can silence expression in renal cell carcinoma. Further, the binding proteins BCL3 on 19q13.32 and OCT2 on 19q13.2 of rs34211819 are strongly linked to immune function. BCL3 translocates to the immunoglobulin alpha locus in B cell chronic lymphocytic leukemia. As an oncogene, it is an atypical member of the inhibitor of nuclear factor kappa B (NF-kB) family of proteins that can activate the NF-kB signaling cascade by directly binding to the transcription factors NFKB1 and NFKB2. It is unregulated by cytokines such as tumor necrosis factor alpha, interleukin 4 (IL-4), IL-1, and IL-6. OCT2 acts as a DNA-binding transcriptional activator of immunoglobulin in B-lineage cells. It enables B cells to respond normally to antigen receptor signals and mediate the physical interaction with T cells or to produce and respond to cytokines that are critical drivers of B cell and T cell differentiation during the immune response.

Genetic similarity analysis of subgroups showed lower overlap at the SNP level but relatively higher overlap of germline-regulated genes. It is possible that each SNP is unique to each subgroup and acts as an eQTL to regulate cancer-specific genes. Additionally, the effects of somatic mutations driving lung cancer should be investigated. We also found higher similarities between long-term former smokers and never-smokers, which mainly included inflammation and immune mechanisms, as reported in the previous studies.

This study had some limitations. First, although we used the largest lung cancer consortium to date, further external cohort validation with follow-up information and smoking cessation details is warranted. Second, we selected SNPs with moderate association strengths (from $P < 10^{-5}$ to $P < 10^{-8}$); although it was a reasonable approach, some false-positive SNPs may have been included. More well-designed functional experiments are necessary to validate the biological functions.

This study also had several strengths. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first GWAS to investigate the effects of genetic variants on NSCLC patients among long-term former smokers. We included a large and relatively homogeneous study population with relatively complete and accurate follow-up, demographic, and clinical covariate information from ILCCO and HLCS. In addition, we investigated the association of candidate genes and lung cancer at the multi-omics levels, including genomics, transcriptomics, epigenomics, and proteomics. Similarity comparisons among different smoking subgroups revealed the shared genetics status at multiple levels.

In summary, our study demonstrated that TNS3 at 7p12.3 and SEPT7 at 7p14.2 are genetic regions associated with survival among long-term former smokers, and the findings with subgroup related to immune function. Our results may shed light on the important roles of genetic architecture on cancer outcomes among long-term former smokers with NSCLC, a subpopulation that has been less studied.

**METHODS**

**Study population**

In accordance with the previous studies, long-term former smokers were defined as patients who quitted smoking at least 10 years before diagnosis, whereas short-term former smokers quitted <10 years before diagnosis, and never smokers were those who smoked <100 cigarettes during their lifetime. To identify prognostic SNPs, we focused on long-term former smokers, whose characteristics are presented in Table 1. Patients in the discovery set were recruited from ILCCO, including the Cancer de Pulmon en Asturias study, Carotene and Retinol Efficacy Trial (CARET), Liverpool Lung Cancer Project, MD Anderson Cancer Center Study, and Mount-Sinai Hospital-Princess Margaret Study. While, patients in the independent validation set were recruited from HLCS (Supplementary Information). Approval for ILCCO studies was obtained from each of the participating institutional research ethics review boards. For HLCS, the Institutional Review Board of MGH and the Human Subjects Committee of the Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard School of Public Health approved the study. All the participants were provided written informed consent to take part in the study.

Of the 6129 NSCLC patients with follow-up information totally, 4351 eligible cases were with available smoking information, including 504 never smokers, 1299 long-term former smokers, 687 short-term former smokers, and 1861 current smokers (Supplementary Table 7).

**OncoArray genotype quality control and imputation**

The ILCCO study and HLCS were originally designed and genotyped as case–control studies of lung cancer risk. In this study, we extracted all NSCLC patients from these two studies with survival information. Patient genotypes were generated using the Illumina OncoArray-500K BeadChip (Illumina, San Diego, CA, USA), with standard quality control procedures performed on all eligible individuals. Briefly, excluded were samples with <95% completion and SNP assays with call rates <95% or deviating from Hardy–Weinberg equilibrium ($P < 10^{-6}$). Only SNPs with minor allele frequency (MAF) > 1% were included. More well-designed functional experiments are necessary to validate the biological functions.
frequencies (MAFs) ≥ 0.05 mapping to autosomal chromosomes were included in the analysis. A total of 416,861 SNPs passed quality control. Genome-wide imputation following the Michigan Imputation Server pipeline was performed to estimate missing genotype information. We phased haplotypes with Eagle v2.3 using 1000 Genomes Project data (phase 3) as a reference panel and then performed imputations using the Minimac (version 3) software. SNPs with an imputation quality score as a reference panel were included in the analysis. A total of 416,861 SNPs passed quality control.

Our study mainly included three parts: (1) GWAS survival study for long-term former smokers; (2) multi-omics study for candidate SNPs and genes; and (3) genetic similarity comparative analysis among different smoking status subgroups.

Table 1. Demographic and clinical characteristics of long-term former smoking NSCLC patients.

| Characteristics                  | Discovery set | Validation set | Combined set |
|----------------------------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|
| Sample size                      | 566           | 733            | 1,299        |
| Deaths (%)                       | 387 (68.4)    | 500 (68.2)     | 887 (68.2)   |
| Median survival years (95% CI)   | 2.14 (1.71–2.51) | 2.87 (2.69–3.31) | 2.64 (2.38–2.86) |
| Age (years)                      | 70.98 ± 8.79  | 70.01 ± 9.22   | 70.43 ± 9.04 |
| Gender, male (%)                 | 373 (65.9)    | 385 (52.5)     | 758 (58.4)   |
| Histology (%)                    |               |                |              |
| LUSC                             | 194 (61.4)    | 137 (18.7)     | 331 (25.5)   |
| LUAD                             | 348 (34.2)    | 529 (72.2)     | 877 (67.5)   |
| NSCLC, not specified             | 24 (4.2)      | 67 (9.1)       | 91 (7)       |
| Clinical stage (%)               |               |                |              |
| I                                | 207 (36.5)    | 258 (35.2)     | 465 (35.8)   |
| II                               | 68 (12.0)     | 72 (9.8)       | 140 (10.8)   |
| III                              | 131 (23.1)    | 165 (22.5)     | 296 (22.8)   |
| IV                               | 138 (24.3)    | 228 (31.1)     | 366 (28.2)   |
| Pack-years of smoking            | 36.49 ± 29.00 | 37.49 ± 29.03  | 37.05 ± 29.01 |
| Years of smoking cessation       | 23.18 ± 10.49 | 23.06 ± 10.39  | 23.45 ± 10.44 |

LUAD lung adenocarcinoma, LUSC lung squamous cell carcinoma, NSCLC non-small cell lung cancer.

Fig. 5 Study workflow. Our study mainly included three parts: (1) GWAS survival study for long-term former smokers; (2) multi-omics study for candidate SNPs and genes; and (3) genetic similarity comparative analysis among different smoking status subgroups.
Human SNP 6.0 Array. We performed the same quality control and imputation procedures as aforementioned. Gene expression values were normalized using the RNA-seq by expectation-maximization method\textsuperscript{46} and dichotomized, when needed, into low- and high-expression subgroups by the median values. To summarize the eQTL effects from TCGA and GTex, we used meta-analysis with the fixed-effects model. The Cox proportional hazards regression model adjusted for the same covariates as aforementioned was utilized to evaluate the prognostic effects of gene expressions in tumor tissues in TCGA.

The association between SNP and DNA methylation was tested among 155 Caucasian patients who were long-term former smokers in TCGA. DNA methylation data were profiled using Illumina HumanMethylation450 BeadChips. The details of quality control were described in \textsuperscript{12}. We used the linear regression model to assess meQTL effects and the Cox proportional hazards regression model to evaluate the association between methylation CpG probes (dichotomized by the median values) and survival. These models were adjusted for the same covariates. False discovery rate (FDR) \textit{p}-value \( \leq 5\times 10^{-3} \) was set as the meQTL association. FDR \textit{p}-value \( \leq 5\times 10^{-3} \) was set as the enhancer-related variants.

For enhancer-level analysis, the FANTOM5 human enhancer database was used to identify enhancer activities across most cell types and tissues\textsuperscript{52}. SNPs located within a permissive enhancer region ±1 kb were defined as the enhancer-related variants.

For pathway-level analysis, we performed gene enrichment pathway analysis based on the KEGG database. All enrichment analyses were performed using the R package \textit{clusterProfiler}\textsuperscript{64}.

All statistical analyses were performed using \textit{R} (v3.5.2) or PLINK (v1.9).

### Reporting summary

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

### DATA AVAILABILITY

The data generated and analyzed during this study are described in the following data record: https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.14229347\textsuperscript{64}. This study utilized subsets of the Oncoarray Consortium—Lung Cancer Studies Data available from the dpGap repository: https://identifiers.org/dbgap.phs001273.v3.p2\textsuperscript{37}. Specifically data from CAPUA study (CARET), the Roy Castle Lung Study (Liverpool Lung Cancer Project), the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center Study (MDACC study), the Mount-Sinai Hospital-Princess Margaret Study (MSM-PMH), and the Harvard Lung Cancer Study (HLCS) were accessed for this study. Prospective users of these data must apply for access, and details of how to apply can be found on the dataset landing page.

Functional prediction analyses of rs34211819 and rs1143149 (supporting Supplementary Table 4) are available from the HaploReg website https://pubs.broadinstitute.org/mammals/haploreg/haploreg.php. De-identified participant demographic and phenotype data for lung adenocarcinoma patients are available from the National Cancer Institute GDC Legacy Archive https://portal.gdc.cancer.gov/legacy-archive/files/0f5f6656-1985-4648-97d9-dbb002f184a2. The CPTAC proteomics data file (CPTAC_Prot.xlsm) can be openly accessed from the NCI Cancer Research Data Commons repository https://proteomic.datacommons.cancer.gov/pdc/study/PDC000153. The eQTL data (GTEx_Analysis_v8_eQTL.tar) can be accessed directly from https://storage.googleapis.com/gtex_analysis_v8/single_tissue_qtl_data/GTEx_Analysis_v8_eQTL.tar.

### CODE AVAILABILITY

The code that supports the findings of this study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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