

**Integrated study of group B streptococcus and  
human ureaplasmas – the paradigm shifts**

**Fanrong Kong**

A thesis submitted to the University of Sydney in fulfilment of the requirement for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Department of Medicine

University of Sydney

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## Declaration

This thesis is less than 100, 000 words in length and contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any other universities.

I declare that the author, with the following exception, conducted all the practical work incorporated into this thesis:

- All the New Zealand GBS strains were provided by Dr Diana Martin (ESR, New Zealand) and GBS conventional serotyping was mainly performed by Sonia Gowan (ESR, New Zealand). Fourteen selected isolates were serotyped by Abbie Weisner (PHLS, United Kingdom).
- Ureaplasma and mycoplasma reference strain culture was partially performed by Susannah Gordon (CIDM, Westmead Hospital).
- Gregory James (CIDM, Westmead Hospital) provided all the needed molecular equipment, reagents, softwares and some protocols.
- Zhenfang Ma assisted in some ureaplasma PCR and data analysis.
- Mark Wheeler (WMI, Westmead Hospital) performed sequencing.
- Professor Lyn Gilbert (supervisor) supervised the overall project. Assisted in research design, in the analysis and interpretation of data, and made a significant contribution to the project.

## Preface

Someone told me “a PhD thesis is just like a **story**”. From my viewpoint, the **story** formed the major part of my past six-year life, and they will significantly affect my future research career and even my whole life. I tried to make the story something that would be interesting and useful to be read. On the other hand, I tried to cut its length to save the possible readers precious time.

As a PhD student, besides to **master** or to learn the techniques and methodologies as a **Master** student or a **technician**, to think about the **philosophy** or to explain the findings (including that of the others besides myself) would be also or even more important for the future related research fields. You would find the thesis in some extent (in particular, in section 3) reflected the above considerations.

From the teacher side, the selection of **good** teachers would be very important for a **good** student. I was so lucky to be a student of Professors Lyn Gilbert and Tania Sorrell. I also want to thank so many “informal teachers”, I may only know many of them from their excellent publications (I tried my best to include their contributions in my reference sections though I might still have lost many for cutting the volume reason), and these teachers are also highly appreciated. Molecular lab – I located myself there in my past six years, all the staffs there were so kind and the conditions there were so good – the experience there will be kept in my mind as a very memorable life in my personal history.

The two **tiny** microorganisms that I selected, as my study objectives – GBS and ureaplasmas – were also my very **great** teachers! They showed me that they also had some kind of “wisdom”, which I tried to expose partial in the thesis (especially in section 3) but far from enough. No doubt, their “wisdom” deserves to be further studied – especially based on their invaluable genome resources and benefit from the new bioinformatic concepts, theory and research tools.

The thesis contains three sections. The first section of general introduction provided the background and some useful concepts of the next two sections. The second section mainly contained those so called “**traditional**” molecular microbiology study of the two microorganisms. It included mainly the genotyping studies, which included most of my previous publications (also see appendices). My past six year publications (in PDF format) had been used as appendices and were put at the end of the thesis. Their inner relationship was also given at the beginning of the appendices. So only selected parts (after modification and reorganization) that were believed to be important to explain the outline of the **story** were put into the body of the thesis (mainly in section 2). The third section of the thesis contained some so called “**novel**” genomic and bioinformatics based study of the two organisms. Because we are facing the dramatic paradigm shift in their post genomic era, the ideas contained in the study may not be absolutely correct; even for the correct ones, some of them may still look a little bit **ugly**. But at least I would like to use them to show the potential values for doing this kind of “**novel**” study.

It was not easy to be a PhD student, especially considering the era of knowledge explosion, and the so many paradigm shifts. In this case, I really feel that what I had done was far from enough. However, to get the PhD or to pass the **milestone** is my long-term dream (even from my early childhood). So could I dare to use this thesis to have a **try**?

If the thesis can be seen as a **very tiny** drop of but **useful** water comparing with the endless sea of the **truth**, I will be more than happy!

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## Abstract

Group B streptococcus (GBS, *S. agalactiae*) and human ureaplasmas (*U. parvum* and *U. urealyticum*) are two clinically and phylogenetically related, potential perinatal pathogens. Their relationships between genotypes and pathogenesis of GBS and ureaplasma infection were still not well understood, one of the reason is that both of them are still short of a very practical genotyping system. In the study, to solve the above problem we developed genotyping systems for the organisms (the second section). For human ureaplasmas, based on four genes/gene clusters (rRNA gene clusters, the elongation factor Tu genes, urease gene complexes and multiple banded antigen genes), we designed many primer pairs suitable for developing species identification assays for the two newly established human ureaplasma species (*U. parvum* and *U. urealyticum*). Further, based on the heterogeneity of ureaplasma multiple banded antigen gene (which contains species- and serovar-specific regions), we developed genotyping methods for each ureaplasma species. For GBS, based on three sets of molecular markers (capsular polysaccharide synthesis gene clusters, surface protein antigen genes and mobile genetic elements), we developed a genotyping system. The primary evaluation of the genotyping systems showed that the genotyping systems were practical alternative assays for the conventional serotyping and they will be useful to further explore the relationships between genotypes and pathogenesis of GBS and ureaplasma infection. In the study, we introduced novel data and tools into GBS and ureaplasma studies especially from genomic- and bioinformatics-based molecular microbiology

(the third section). For two newly established human ureaplasma species, based on the *U. parvum* serovar-3 genome, and using the above four important genes/gene clusters, we exposed some interesting problems in the understanding of new ureaplasma taxonomy especially in the post genomic era. For GBS, we studied the two published full genomes and exposed some new problems or possible future new research fields. In particular we found the two finished and one ongoing GBS genomes were all non-typical and suggest that future genomic project had better have genetic population structure viewpoint. Finally, we suggested that integrated studies of the two potential or conditional perinatal pathogens, from the viewpoint of evolution, would provide a new understanding angle of the pathogenesis of the two organisms. Studies suggested that during coevolution, human ureaplasmas (especially *U. parvum*) became friendlier than their ancestors to their human host (by losing most of its virulence genes); however, GBS tried to increase its invasive abilities (by getting more virulence genes) to fight against the human host attack.

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## Abbreviations

<b>ABI</b>	Applied Biosystems
<b>Alp2</b>	C alpha-like 2 antigen
<i>alp2</i>	C alpha-like 2 antigen gene
<b>Alp3</b>	C alpha-like 3 antigen
<i>alp3</i>	C alpha-like 3 antigen gene
<b>Alp4</b>	C alpha-like 4 antigen
<i>alp4</i>	C alpha-like 4 antigen gene
<b>Alp5</b>	C alpha-like 4 antigen
<i>alp5</i>	C alpha-like 4 antigen gene
<b>AmiC</b>	Amidase family protein
<b>ANGIS</b>	Australian National Genomic Information Service
<b>ATCC</b>	American Type Culture Collection (Manassas, VA, USA)
<b>Bac</b>	C beta antigen or IgA binding protein
<i>bac</i>	C beta antigen or IgA binding protein gene
<b>Bca</b>	C alpha antigen
<i>bca</i>	C alpha antigen gene
<b>BPS</b>	group B protective surface protein
<b>bp</b>	base pair
<b>BspA</b>	A cell surface associated leucine-rich repeat protein involved in adhesion to fibronectin and fibrinogen
<b>CAMP</b>	(discovered by) Christie, Atkins, and Munch-Petersen
<b>CDC</b>	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<b>CDS</b>	Coding sequences
<b>CGH</b>	Comparative genome hybridization
<b>CI</b>	Confidence interval
<b>CLD</b>	Chronic lung disease (of prematurity)
<b>Clp</b>	Clp ATPase family of molecular chaperones
<b>CNS</b>	Central nervous system
<b>CbpD</b>	Choline binding protein D
<b>CpdB</b>	Cyclo-nucleotide phosphodiesterase
<b>CPS</b>	Capsular polysaccharide
<i>cps</i>	Capsular polysaccharide synthesis (gene cluster)
<b>CS</b>	Conventional serotyping/serotype
<b>CSF</b>	Cerebrospinal fluid
<b>DNA</b>	Deoxyribonucleic acid

<b>dNTP</b>	Deoxynucleotide triphosphate
<b>EaeH</b>	EaeH of <i>Escherichia coli</i> O157:H7
<b>EF-TU</b>	Elongation factor Tu
<b>EOD</b>	Early onset disease (infection occurring within the first week of life)
<b>FbsA</b>	A fibrinogen receptor from group B streptococcus
<b>G+C</b>	Guanine plus Cytosine
<b>GBS</b>	Group B streptococcus or group B streptococci or <i>S. agalactiae</i>
<b>g</b>	Gram
<b>GIs</b>	genomic islands
<b>Human ureaplasmas</b> – <i>U. parvum</i> and <i>U. urealyticum</i>	
<b>h</b>	Hour
<b>Hsa</b>	(antigen that recognition of) sialic acid-containing host receptors
<b>IAP</b>	Intrapartum antibiotic prophylaxis
<b>Indels</b>	Insertations and deletions
<b>IS</b>	Insertion sequence(s)
<b>Lmb</b>	Laminin-binding protein
<b><i>lmb</i></b>	Laminin-binding protein gene
<b>LOD</b>	Late onset disease (infection occurring between 1 week and 2 to 3 months of age)
<b>LSU rRNA</b>	Large submit rRNA
<b>l</b>	Liter/Litre
<b>M</b>	Molar
<b>MBA</b>	Multiple banded antigen
<b><i>mba</i></b>	Multiple banded antigen gene
<b>mge</b>	Mobile genetic element(s)
<b>min</b>	Minute
<b>ml</b>	Microlitre/Microliter
<b>MLEE</b>	Mutiple locus enzyme electrophoresis
<b>MLST</b>	Multiple locus sequence typing
<b>MS</b>	Molecular serotype(s)
<b>NanA</b>	Sialic acid lyase (catalyzes the hydrolysis of sialic acid into pyruvate and N-acetylmannosamine)
<b>NCTC</b>	National Culture Type Collection (Colindale, UK)
<b>No.</b>	Number(s)
<b>NGU</b>	Non-gonococcal urethritis
<b><i>nra</i></b>	Encode a response regulator (no response to atmospheric conditions)
<b>OR</b>	Odds ratio
<b>ORF</b>	Open reading frame(s)

<b>Pas</b>	The surface protein antigen I/II of <i>Streptococcus intermedius</i>
<b>PCR</b>	Polymerase chain reaction
<b>PFBP</b>	<i>Streptococcus pyogenes</i> fibronectin-binding protein
<b>PFGGE</b>	Pulsed-field gel electrophoresis
<b>pgp</b>	Protein gene profile(s)
<b>PIs</b>	Pathogenicity islands
<b>PrtS</b>	Serine proteinase, subtilase family
<b>PspC</b>	Pneumococcal surface protein C
<b>PulA</b>	Alkaline amylopullulanase
<b>R28</b>	<i>Streptococcus pyogenes</i> surface protein R28
<b>R5 (or BPS protein)</b>	– group B protective surface protein
<b>RAPD</b>	Random amplified polymorphic DNA
<b>RFLP</b>	Restriction length fragment polymorphisms
<b>rgg</b>	Encode a response regulator
<b>Rib</b>	Rib antigen
<b>rib</b>	Rib antigen gene
<b>RNA</b>	Ribonucleic acid
<b>rof</b>	Encode a response regulator
<b>s</b>	Second
<b>ScpB</b>	Serine protease and C5a peptidase
<b>Sec10</b>	Surface exclusion protein
<b>SpaA</b>	Streptococcal protein antigen A of <i>Streptococcus sobrinus</i>
<b>Sip</b>	Surface immunogenic protein
<b>SrpA</b>	Periplasmic linker protein
<b>Srt</b>	Sortase
<b>SSH</b>	Suppressive subtractive hybridization
<b>Ssp5</b>	Agglutinin receptor
<b>sst</b>	Serosubtype(s)
<b>SSU rRNA</b>	Small subunit rRNA
<b>Ta</b>	Annealing temperature
<b>Tm</b>	Melting temperature
<b>tuf</b>	Elongation factor Tu gene
<b>U</b>	Unit
<b>UAB</b>	University of Alabama at Birmingham
<b>UP</b>	<i>Ureaplasma parvum</i>
<b>Ureaplasmas</b>	– <i>U. parvum</i> and <i>U. urealyticum</i>
<b>UU</b>	<i>Ureaplasma urealyticum</i>

**Ureaplasma broth** – 10B broth (Shepard, 1970)

**WebANGIS** – Website of Australian National Genomic Information Service

(<http://www1.angis.org.au/pbin/WebANGIS/wrapper.pl>)

**YbgE** Putative branched-chain aminotransferase

**YfkN** 2',3'-cyclic-nucleotide 2'-phosphodiesterase