

Original Article

Association between the cyclooxygenase-2 rs5275T>C polymorphism and lung cancer susceptibility: a meta-analysis involving 11,682 subjects

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Abstract: The possible correlation of cyclooxygenase-2 (COX-2) rs5275T>C polymorphism with lung cancer risk has been widely investigated. However, the results remain controversial. To identify the relationship more precisely, we carried out a pooled analysis of ten publications involving a total of 11,682 subjects. In this study, ten publications were recruited by extensive searching PubMed and EMBASE databases up to September 14, 2015. The lung cancer risk correlated with the COX-2 rs5275T>C variants was evaluated by odds ratios (ORs) with 95% confidence intervals (95% CIs). Publication bias, heterogeneity and sensitivity analysis were also assessed. The results showed that the COX-2 rs5275T>C variants were not associated with overall lung cancer susceptibility. In a stratified analysis by histology, the relationship between COX-2 rs5275T>C polymorphism and decreased lung cancer susceptibility was significant in mixed histology lung cancer. In summary, our study demonstrated that the COX-2 rs5275T>C polymorphism may be a lung cancer susceptibility factor.

Keywords: Lung cancer, polymorphism, COX-2, susceptibility, meta-analysis

Introduction

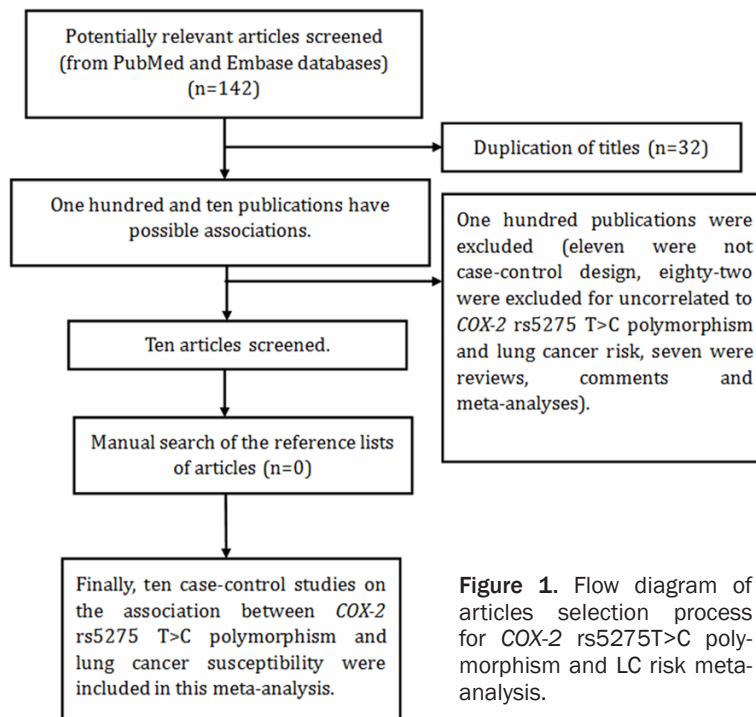
It is estimated that 1.8 million new lung cancer (LC) cases occurred worldwide in 2012, which account for about 13% of total malignancy diagnoses [1, 2]. Accumulating evidence demonstrates that LC results from complex mutual effect between multi-genetic and multi-environmental factors [2-4]. The pathogenesis of LC is extremely complicated and has not been clarified clearly, although a number of clinical and experimental investigations have kept a watchful eye on the important role of the chronic infection, inflammation and immune system [5-7]. Recently, evidence highlights that tumor immunosurveillance may be impaired in COPD, which may contribute to the increased susceptibility of LC [6].

Cyclooxygenase (COX), a key rate-limiting enzyme, plays an important role in the process of

synthetic prostaglandins (PGs). The COX family of enzymes contains two isozymes (COX-1 and COX-2). COX-1 expresses in most of normal tissues stably and influences PG synthesis, then further maintains normal physiological functions [8]. However, COX-2 is an inducible form and rarely expressed in cells, but it may be induced by pro-inflammatory and mitogenic stimuli [9]. The COX-2 genes locate on chromosome 1q25.2-q25.3 and contain 10 exons [10]. The COX-2 promoter region contains some cis-acting elements including stimulatory protein 1, suggesting involvement of a complex array of factors in its regulation and thus influences COX-2 expression [11]. Some functional polymorphisms of COX-2 have been identified to influence its expression through transcriptional and/or post transcriptional mechanisms.

COX-2 rs5275T>C (T8473C), a common single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) in the 3' un-

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translated region (UTR) of the COX-2 gene, has been identified to be correlated with the alteration of mRNA level of the gene, then influence its expression [12]. In the prior study, it was reported that the COX-2 rs5275CC genotype was correlated with a decreased susceptibility of LC [12]. However, an individual case-control study may have insufficient power to obtain a conclusive result. To further address the potentially important role of the COX-2 rs5275T>C variants in the development of lung cancer, we performed this pooled analysis including all eligible publications. To the best of our knowledge, this meta-analysis is the most comprehensive analysis considering the COX-2 rs5275T>C polymorphism and its relationship with LC susceptibility.

Materials and methods

Search strategy

We searched EMBASE and PubMed databases (updated to September 14, 2015) using the following search terms: 'cyclooxygenase-2' or 'cyclooxygenase-2' or 'COX2' or 'COX-2' and 'genetic variant' or 'polymorphism' or 'SNP' and 'lung' and 'cancer' or 'carcinoma' or 'tumor' or 'malignance' or 'neoplasm'. All the searched publications were retrieved, and their bi-

bliographies were manually screened as well for other relevant papers. Reviews were also checked to find additional papers. Only those publications in English language were included.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The major selection criteria were: (1) evaluating the COX-2 rs5275T>C polymorphism and LC susceptibility, (2) a case-control study design, (3) containing sufficient available data on genotype or allele frequency in case groups and control groups to estimate an odds ratio (OR) with its 95% confidence interval (95% CI). Accordingly, papers without usable data, reviews, letters, comments, not case-control study and overlapping data were excluded.

Data extraction

The three reviewers (H. Ding, Y. Wang and H. Jiang) independently collected data and reached consensus on all items. If they generated conflicting evaluations, they would screen the data again and have a discussion until reaching conformity on items among all reviewers. The following data was extracted: (1) the surname of first author, (2) the histology of LC, (3) published year, (4) country, (5) race, (6) case and control number, (7) numbers of cases and controls of different allele and genotype frequency and (8) genotyping method.

Statistical analysis

The HWE in controls was tested using a web-based HWE calculator (<http://ihg.gsf.de/cgi-bin/hw/hwa1.pl>). The ORs with their 95% CIs were calculated to determine the strength of correlation between COX-2 rs5275T>C polymorphism and LC susceptibility. A $P < 0.05$ (two-tailed) was defined as significant. A Chi-square-based I^2 test was harnessed to examine the heterogeneity across the studies and an $I^2 < 25\%$ indicates low heterogeneity, $25\% \leq I^2 \leq$

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Table 1. Characteristics of the individual studies included in the meta-analysis

| Study | Publication year | Ethnicity | Country | Histology | Sample size (case/control) | Genotype method |
|-----------------|------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|----------------------------|-----------------|
| Zhang et al. | 2015 | Asians | China | NSCLC | 60/62 | PCR-RFLP |
| Bhat et al. | 2014 | Asians | India | NSCLC | 190/200 | PCR-RFLP |
| Lim et al. | 2011 | Asians | Singapore | Mixed | 433/1375 | RT-PCR |
| Liu et al. | 2010 | Asians | China | Mixed | 358/716 | PCR-RFLP |
| Vogel et al. | 2008 | Caucasians | Denmark | Mixed | 428/800 | TaqMan |
| Park et al. | 2006 | Asians | Korea | Mixed | 582/582 | PIRA |
| Sorensen et al. | 2005 | Caucasians | Denmark | Mixed | 265/272 | TaqMan |
| Hu et al. | 2005 | Asians | China | Mixed | 322/323 | PIRA |
| Campa et al. | 2005 | Caucasians | Romania | Mixed | 2135/2115 | Taqman |
| Campa et al. | 2004 | Caucasians | Norway | NSCLC | 250/214 | Taqman |

NSCLC: Non-small cell lung cancer. PCR-RFLP: polymerase chain reaction-restriction fragment length polymorphism. PIRA: primer-introduced restriction analysis.

Table 2. Distribution of COX-2 rs5275T>C polymorphisms genotype and allele among lung cancer cases and controls

| Study | Year | Case | | | Control | | | Case | | Control | | HWE |
|-----------------|------|------|-----|-----|---------|-----|-----|------|------|---------|------|-----|
| | | TT | TC | CC | TT | TC | CC | C | T | C | T | |
| Zhang et al. | 2015 | 23 | 26 | 11 | 28 | 32 | 2 | 48 | 72 | 36 | 88 | No |
| Bhat et al. | 2014 | 133 | 53 | 4 | 128 | 66 | 6 | 61 | 319 | 78 | 322 | Yes |
| Lim et al. | 2011 | 182 | 100 | 15 | 462 | 228 | 28 | 130 | 464 | 284 | 1152 | Yes |
| Liu et al. | 2010 | 239 | 119 | 0 | 468 | 248 | 0 | 119 | 597 | 248 | 1184 | No |
| Vogel et al. | 2008 | 182 | 183 | 38 | 310 | 341 | 93 | 259 | 547 | 527 | 961 | Yes |
| Park et al. | 2006 | 352 | 205 | 25 | 330 | 220 | 32 | 255 | 909 | 284 | 880 | Yes |
| Sorensen et al. | 2005 | 127 | 111 | 18 | 115 | 126 | 27 | 147 | 365 | 180 | 356 | Yes |
| Hu et al. | 2005 | 234 | 83 | 5 | 209 | 107 | 7 | 93 | 551 | 121 | 525 | Yes |
| Campa et al. | 2005 | 855 | 886 | 224 | 805 | 904 | 228 | 1334 | 2596 | 1360 | 2514 | Yes |
| Campa et al. | 2004 | 31 | 107 | 112 | 65 | 99 | 50 | 331 | 169 | 199 | 229 | Yes |

HWE: Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium.

50% indicates moderate heterogeneity, and $I^2 > 50\%$ indicates large heterogeneity [13]. $I^2 > 50\%$ or $P < 0.10$ (two-sided) shows heterogeneity among the studies, the random-effects model (the DerSimonian-Laird method) [14] was used to calculate the data, otherwise the fixed-effects model (the Mantel-Haenszel method) was harnessed [15]. Sub-group analyses were carried out according to the histology of LC and ethnicity to check the source of heterogeneity. Galbraith radial plot test was harnessed to identify the major source of heterogeneity. Publication bias across the studies was examined by Begg's funnel plot [16] and Egger's linear regression [17]. One-way sensitivity analysis was used to check the stability of our findings. Additionally, for publication bias, $P < 0.1$ (two-sided) was considered as statistical significance. All statistical analyses in our study

were performed using STATA version 12.0 software (Stata Corporation LP, College Station, TX).

Results

Characteristics

The detailed selecting of literatures was shown in **Figure 1**. In total, there were ten eligible studies included in our study [12, 18-26], involving 5,023 LC cases and 6,659 controls. As for the histology of LC, three investigated non-small cell LC (NSCLC) [18-20] and seven investigated mixed histology LC [12, 21-26]. As for subjects, four were Caucasians [20, 23, 25, 26] and six were Asians [12, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24]. **Table 1** summarizes the main characteristics of the included studies. The distribution of the COX-2 rs5275T>C variants and allelisis summarized in **Table 2**.

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Table 3. Summary of results of the meta-analysis

| | No. of study | C vs. T | | | CC vs. TT | | | CC+TC vs. TT | | | CC vs. TC+TT | | |
|----------------------------|--------------|------------------|-------|------------|-------------------|-------|------------|------------------|-------|------------|-------------------|-------|------------|
| | | OR (95% CI) | P | P (Q-test) | OR (95% CI) | P | P (Q-test) | OR (95% CI) | P | P (Q-test) | OR (95% CI) | P | P (Q-test) |
| Total | 10 | 1.01 (0.85-1.20) | 0.934 | < 0.001 | 1.12 (0.70-1.77) | 0.639 | < 0.001 | 0.97 (0.81-1.16) | 0.731 | < 0.001 | 1.09 (0.74-1.59) | 0.667 | < 0.001 |
| Ethnicity | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Asians | 6 | 0.94 (0.79-1.12) | 0.489 | 0.054 | 1.06 (0.58-1.94) | 0.862 | 0.073 | 0.90 (0.79-1.02) | 0.112 | 0.208 | 1.10 (0.61-1.96) | 0.758 | 0.089 |
| Caucasians | 4 | 1.09 (0.77-1.54) | 0.623 | < 0.001 | 1.16 (0.56-2.40) | 0.698 | < 0.001 | 1.11 (0.76-1.63) | 0.594 | < 0.001 | 1.08 (0.62-1.87) | 0.794 | < 0.001 |
| Histology | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Non-small cell lung cancer | 3 | 1.43 (0.71-2.86) | 0.312 | < 0.001 | 2.77 (0.74-10.35) | 0.131 | 0.015 | 1.46 (0.58-3.66) | 0.422 | < 0.001 | 2.26 (0.83-6.16) | 0.111 | 0.064 |
| Mixed lung cancer | 7 | 0.92 (0.86-0.98) | 0.012 | 0.245 | 0.86 (0.73-1.01) | 0.062 | 0.405 | 0.90 (0.83-0.98) | 0.013 | 0.360 | 0.90 (0.77-1.05) | 0.164 | 0.526 |
| HWE | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 8 | 0.98 (0.81-1.19) | 0.849 | < 0.001 | 1.01 (0.64-1.59) | 0.967 | 0.920 | 0.96 (0.78-1.18) | 0.713 | < 0.001 | 1.00 (0.70-1.44) | 0.988 | < 0.001 |
| No | 2 | 1.18 (0.70-1.98) | 0.532 | 0.071 | 6.70 (1.35-33.31) | 0.020 | N/A | 0.98 (0.76-1.26) | 0.873 | 0.382 | 6.73 (1.42-31.83) | 0.016 | N/A |

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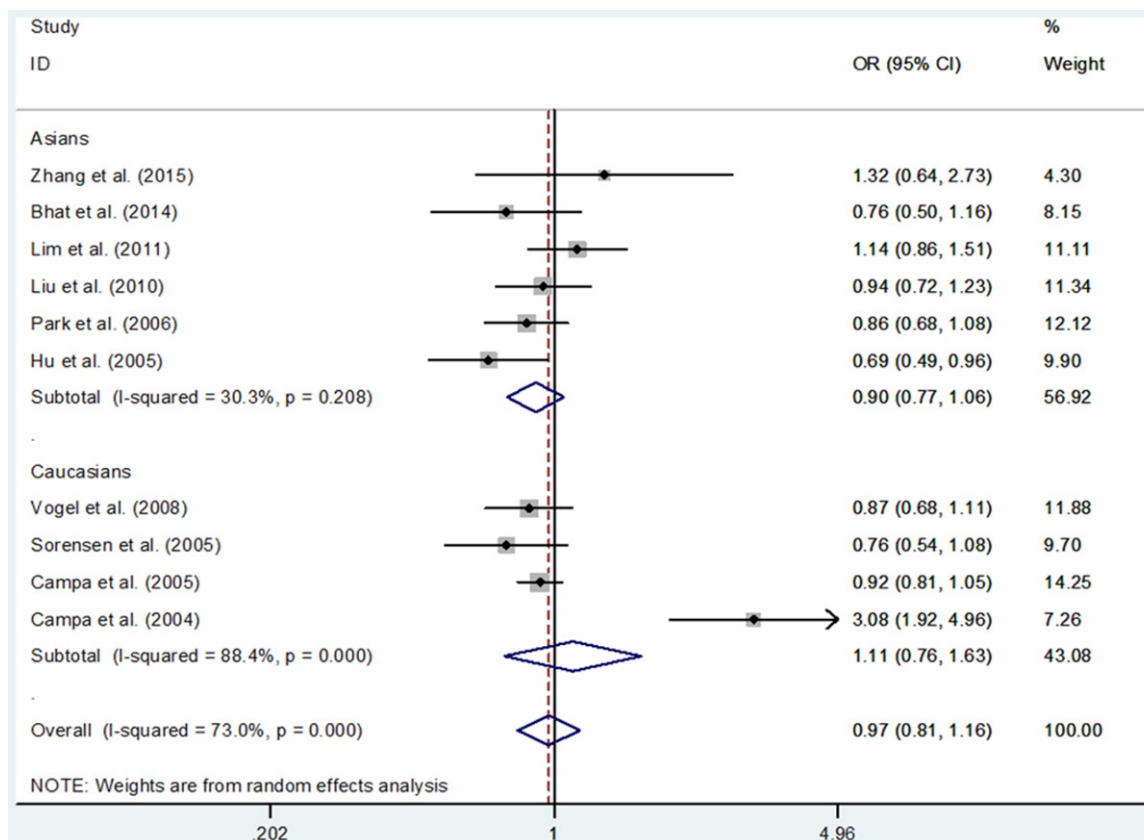


Figure 2. Meta-analysis with a random-effects model for the association between COX-2 rs5275T>C polymorphism and LC risk (CC+TC vs. TT genetic model).

Quantitative synthesis

A total of 11,682 subjects (5,023 LC cases and 6,659 controls) from ten studies [12, 18-26] were included to examine the correlation of COX-2 rs5275T>C polymorphism with LC susceptibility. After combining these eligible publications, there was null association between COX-2 rs5275T>C polymorphism and overall LC susceptibility (**Table 3** and **Figure 2**). In a stratified analysis by different ethnicity, the relationship of COX-2 rs5275T>C polymorphism with LC was also non-significant. While in a stratified analysis by the histology of LC, a significant decrease in mixed histology LC risk was detected in allele genetic model: C vs. T (OR, 0.92; 95% CI, 0.86-0.98; $P = 0.012$) and dominant genetic model (OR, 0.90; 95% CI, 0.83-0.98; $P = 0.013$), but not NSCLC (**Table 3** and **Figure 3**).

Tests for publication bias, sensitivity analyses, and heterogeneity

In our study, Begg's funnel plot and Egger's test highlighted that there was no evidence for sig-

nificant publication bias (C vs. T: Begg's test $P = 0.721$, Egger's test $P = 0.579$; CC vs. TT: Begg's test $P = 0.251$, Egger's test $P = 0.592$; CC+TC vs. TT: Begg's test $P = 0.592$, Egger's test $P = 0.441$; CC vs. TC+TT: Begg's test $P = 0.175$, Egger's test $P = 0.742$) (**Figure 4**).

One-way sensitivity analyses were also carried out by excluding an individual study at a time. The pooled ORs and CIs did not alter the final results but influenced statistical efficacy, suggesting the stability of our findings (**Figure 5**) (data not shown).

Significant heterogeneity was found in current meta-analysis. Thus, we examined the sources of heterogeneity by the histology of LC and ethnicity (**Table 3**). The findings indicated that NSCLC and Caucasians might contribute to the major sources of heterogeneity. In addition, Galbraith radial plot was also used to assess the heterogeneity (**Figure 6**) and the result showed that one outlier might lead to the significant heterogeneity [20].

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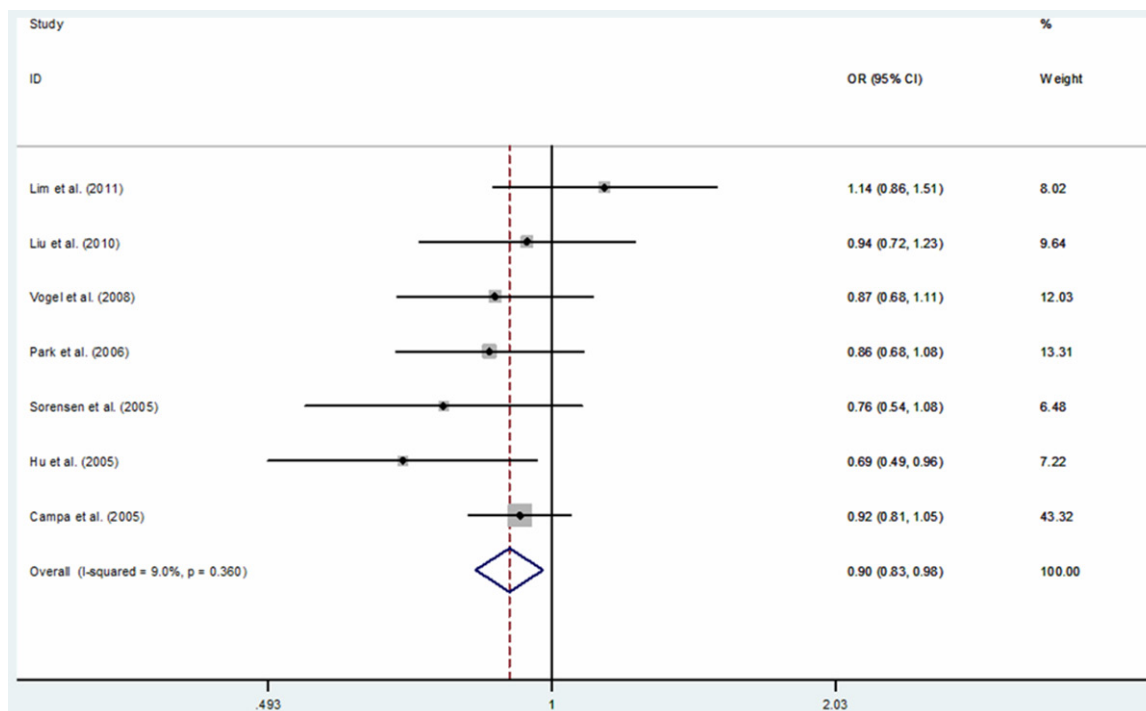


Figure 3. Meta-analysis with a fixed-effects model for the association between COX-2 rs5275T>C polymorphism and mixed histology LC risk (CC+TC vs. TT compare genetic model).

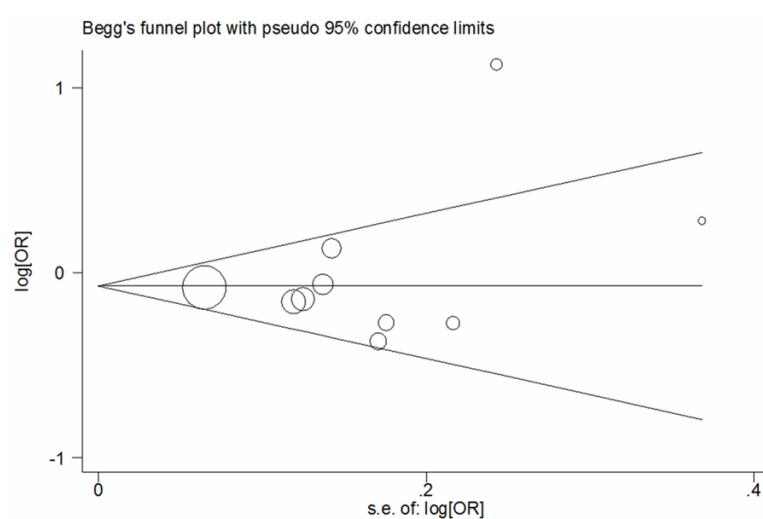


Figure 4. Begg's funnel plot of meta-analysis of between the COX-2 rs5275T>C polymorphism and the risk of overall LC in the dominant model.

Discussion

Large sample sizes with an adequate methodological quality and unbiased epidemiological investigations of predisposition SNPs could provide insight into the in vivo correlation of candidate genes with malignancy. The involvement of COX-2 enzyme in the process of synthetic PGs might underlie the vital mechanism

responsible for the correlation between COX-2 variants and LC. So far, a number of investigations have been performed on association of COX-2 rs5275T>C polymorphism with LC, but the findings of them remain conflicting. Our study is the most comprehensive pooled-analysis considered a functional SNP of COX-2 and the correlation to the risk of LC. In total, the current analysis involved ten publications for LC which provided 5,023 cases and 6,659 controls.

In the current analysis, the combined evidence indicated that COX-2 rs5275T>C variants did not contribute to the development of over all LC. However, LC is a complex disease with high heterogeneity, and the type of histology may involve in the development of LC. In a stratified analysis by the histology of LC, a significant decrease in mixed histology LC risk was found in allelic genetic model ($P = 0.012$) and dominant genetic model ($P = 0.013$), but not NSCLC (Table 3).

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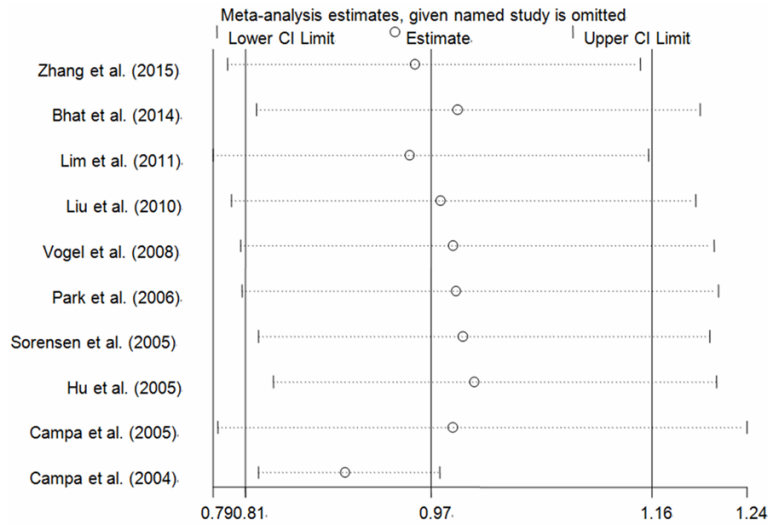


Figure 5. Sensitivity analysis of the influence of CC+TC vs. TT compare genetic model in overall LC meta-analysis (random-effects estimates).

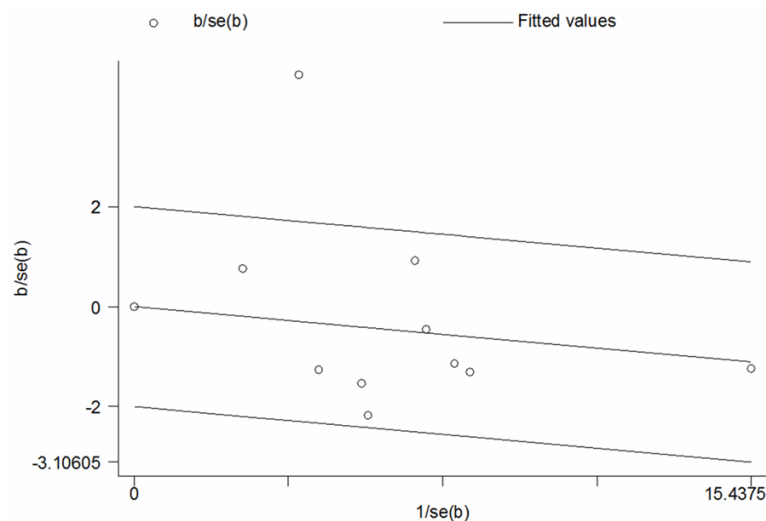


Figure 6. Galbraith radial plot of meta-analysis (CC+TC vs. TT compare genetic model).

In a stratified analysis by different ethnicity, the CC and TC genotype were correlated with a borderline statistically decreased susceptibility of LC among Asians in the dominant model (OR, 0.90, 95% CI, 0.79-1.02, $P = 0.112$).

Some possible reasons may response for the inconsistent results. Firstly, since the distributions of the COX-2 rs5275T>C variants were different between different populations, race differences might lead to these outcomes. For example, in Asians subgroup, the corresponding OR and 95% CI were 0.90 and 0.79-1.02 in

the dominant genetic model, while in Caucasians, they were 1.11 and 0.76-1.63, respectively. On the other hand, study design with small sample sizes or some confounding factors may also influence the findings. Most of these included publications did not consider these important factors, such as the histology of LC and the use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID). NSAID is one of the popular medicines, which used worldwide for the treatment and/or prevention of various diseases, such as coronary artery disease, ankylosis spondylitis and rheumatoid arthritis et al. Recently, some epidemiological studies have demonstrated that NSAID use is associated with a decreased risk of developing cancer [27, 28]. NSAID users homozygous (TT) in COX-2 rs5275T>C variants indicated significantly decreased cancer susceptibility compared with non-NSAID users and among the USA population [27]. In the included ten publications, seldom study has focused on these important environmental factors, which may lead to bias. It is possible that the different type of histology may modest effects on LC and cover the effects of COX-2

rs5275T>C variants. Different histology, like NSCLC and small cell LC (SCLC), has different biological behavior. In the current study, there were seven case-control studies which had performed on mixed type of histology. These unconsidered factors mixed together may also mask the role of COX-2 rs5275T>C variants. Thus, even if COX-2 rs5275T>C variants has a causal effect on different type of LC, it may take a long time to be identified.

In the current study, significant heterogeneity was observed (Table 3). In general, the major

sources of heterogeneity among LC involved ethnicity and the type of histology. Stratified analyses were conducted according to these important factors. Heterogeneity was reduced in some subgroups, suggesting the different influences of these important variables, even in the same SNP (**Table 3**). The analysis of a subset of NSCLC and Caucasians suggested a correlation with more noteworthy heterogeneity. According to the Galbraith radial plot (**Figure 6**) and the forest plot (**Figure 2**), one major outlier was identified [20]. Reviewing this included paper, it involved some deficiencies, such as small sample sizes, mixed histology of LC and hospital-based study design et al.

In our study, two case-control studies deviated from the HWE in controls, which showed the presence of population stratification and/or genotyping errors [18, 22]. When we discarded them, the relationship between COX-2 rs5275T>C variants and the risk of LC was not changed, attesting the robustness of our findings.

Although considerable efforts were done to analyze the possible relationship between COX-2 rs5275T>C variants and the susceptibility of LC, some limitations should be addressed. Large heterogeneity was observed in four genetic models, which indicated these results inherited from the current study should be interpreted with caution. Additionally, only ten published literatures were included in our work; therefore, certain unpublished epidemiological studies, if any, might ineluctably be discarded and lead to bias. Finally, we only focused on rs5275T>C variants in COX-2 gene, and did not dwell on other susceptibility genes or SNPs.

In summary, this meta-analysis highlighted that COX-2 rs5275C allele modestly modified the risk of mixed histology LC. However, due to insufficient environmental factors involved, a more detailed analysis of the relationship of the rs5275T>C variants with the susceptibility of LC could not be done, but the present pooled-analysis may help us to understand the effect of the COX-2 rs5275 C on LC. Nevertheless, for practical reasons, further evidences from more large-scale and well-designed epidemiological studies across different populations incorporating with different type of histology are needed to provide a characterization of the involvement of COX-2 rs5275C allele in the genetic risk to developing LC.

Acknowledgements

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

None.

Abbreviations

CI, confidence interval; OR, odds ratio; HWE, Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium; COX-2, *Cyclooxygenase-2*.

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