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**Ovarian cancer risk, ALDH2 polymorphism and alcohol drinking: Asian data from the Ovarian Cancer Association Consortium**

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79

80 **Summary**

81 The *ALDH2* polymorphism rs671 (Glu504Lys) causes ALDH2 inactivation and adverse  
82 acetaldehyde exposure among Asians, but little is known of the association between  
83 alcohol consumption and rs671 and ovarian cancer (OvCa) in Asians. We conducted a  
84 pooled analysis of Asian ancestry participants in the Ovarian Cancer Association  
85 Consortium. We included seven case-control studies and one cohort study comprising  
86 460 invasive OvCa cases, 37 borderline mucinous OvCa and 1,274 controls of Asian  
87 descent with information on recent alcohol consumption. The pooled odds ratios (OR)  
88 with 95% confidence intervals (CI) for OvCa risk associated with alcohol consumption,  
89 rs671 and their interaction were estimated using logistic regression models adjusted for  
90 potential confounders. No significant association was observed for daily alcohol intake  
91 with invasive OvCa (OR comparing any consumption to none =0.83; 95%  
92 CI=0.58-1.18) or with individual histotypes. A significant decreased risk was seen for  
93 carriers of one or both Lys alleles of rs671 for invasive mucinous OvCa (OR=0.44; 95%  
94 CI=0.20-0.97) and for invasive and borderline mucinous tumors combined (OR=0.48;  
95 95% CI=0.26-0.89). No significant interaction was observed between alcohol

96 consumption and rs671 genotypes. In conclusion, self-reported alcohol consumption at  
97 the quantities estimated was not associated with OvCa risk among Asians. Because the  
98 rs671 Lys allele causes ALDH2 inactivation leading to increased acetaldehyde exposure,  
99 the observed inverse genetic association with mucinous ovarian cancer is inferred to  
100 mean that alcohol intake may be a risk factor for this histotype. This association will  
101 require replication in a larger sample.

102 **Key Words:** A pooled analysis; ovarian cancer; Asians ; *ALDH2*; drinking habit

### 103 104 **Introduction**

105 Ovarian cancer is one of the most common gynecological cancers.  
106 Approximately 239,000 females developed a new ovarian cancer in 2012 and 152,000  
107 women died globally of the disease.<sup>1</sup> Despite its high incidence and mortality, the  
108 etiology is not fully understood; however, established epidemiological risk factors for  
109 ovarian cancer include age, parity, oral contraceptive use, tubal ligation, and inherited  
110 germline mutations in *BRCA1* and *BRCA2*.<sup>2,3</sup>

111 Alcohol consumption is one of the possible modifiable risk factors for ovarian  
112 cancer. Several studies have investigated the association between alcohol drinking and  
113 ovarian cancer risk and reported inconsistent results.<sup>4-14</sup> To resolve this inconsistency,  
114 pooled-analyses have been conducted.<sup>5, 15-17</sup> These studies failed to show a clear  
115 association between alcohol drinking and ovarian cancer risk overall, however, some  
116 showed a different trend in associations with alcohol by histological subtypes<sup>16, 17</sup>,  
117 suggesting different biological etiologies according to histology.<sup>18</sup>

118 Generally, a differential distribution pattern of the histological subtypes of  
119 epithelial ovarian cancer has been observed across ethnicities and countries.<sup>19</sup> Among  
120 Asian women, the prevalence of serous adenocarcinoma is relatively low, whereas that  
121 of clear cell adenocarcinoma is higher, compared with ovarian cancers among women  
122 of European descent. Furthermore, Asian women are likely to have different genetic and  
123 sociocultural backgrounds, which includes less alcohol consumption,<sup>20</sup> lower  
124 prevalence of hormone therapy use<sup>21</sup> and a different distribution of the aldehyde  
125 dehydrogenase 2 (*ALDH2*) polymorphism Glu504Lys (rs671).<sup>22</sup> The rs671  
126 polymorphism in *ALDH2* is more prevalent in East-Asian populations (minor allele  
127 frequency [MAF] in HapMap-JPT=0.24, and 0.15 in HapMap-HCB)<sup>22</sup> and absent

128 among Europeans (MAF HapMap-CEU=0). The Lys allele of rs671 is strongly  
129 associated with inactivation of *ALDH2*,<sup>23,24</sup> which results in prolonged exposure to the  
130 intermediate metabolite acetaldehyde, a potential carcinogen in various organs.<sup>25-30</sup> To  
131 our knowledge, there are no studies exploring the association between rs671 in *ALDH2*  
132 and ovarian cancer risk, particularly among Asian women.

133 To investigate whether there is an association between alcohol drinking, the  
134 rs671 polymorphism in *ALDH2* and ovarian cancer risk, we conducted a pooled analysis  
135 of data from women of Asian ancestry participating in the Ovarian Cancer Association  
136 Consortium (OCAC).

137

## 138 **Materials and Methods**

### 139 **Study population**

140 We conducted this pooled analysis using seven case-control studies and one  
141 cohort study with information on alcohol consumption from the Ovarian Cancer  
142 Association Consortium (OCAC). We included 460 invasive ovarian cancer cases, 37  
143 borderline mucinous tumors and 1,274 controls. Other borderline tumors (n=23) except  
144 mucinous were excluded from the analysis because, unlike other ovarian histotypes,  
145 mutational evidence suggests mucinous tumors progress along a multistep continuum  
146 from benign to borderline to invasive tumors.<sup>31</sup>

147 Information from the eight studies is summarized in Table 1. All study  
148 participants were of Asian ancestry in Japan [JPN<sup>32,33</sup>], China [SWH<sup>34</sup>], Australia  
149 [AUS<sup>35</sup>], and the USA [DOV<sup>36</sup>, HAW<sup>37</sup>, NCO<sup>38,39</sup>, NEC<sup>40,41</sup>, and USC<sup>42</sup>]. One study  
150 was a hospital-based study, six were population-based studies, and one was a defined  
151 cohort study. Informed consent was obtained from participating subjects in each of the  
152 individual studies, and local human research investigations committees approved each  
153 study. This investigation was approved by a human research investigations committee at  
154 Aichi Cancer Center.

155

### 156 **Genotyping methods**

157 Genotyping was carried out as part of the Collaborative Oncological  
158 Gene-environment Study (COGS),<sup>43</sup> a collaboration between the OCAC and three other  
159 consortia. Full details of selection of single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNP), array

160 design, genotyping and post-genotyping quality control have been described  
161 elsewhere.<sup>44</sup> SNPs on the iCOGS chip were categorized into three categories, 1)  
162 selected on the basis of pooled genome-wide association study data; 2) selected for the  
163 fine-mapping of published risk loci; and 3) selected on the basis of previous analyses or  
164 specific hypotheses. The SNP rs671 on ALDH2 was a candidate SNP selected on the  
165 basis of specific hypotheses described above.

166 ■ For the OCAC samples, genotyping of 211,155 SNPs in 47,630 samples from  
167 43 individual studies was conducted using a custom Illumina Infinium array (iCOGS;  
168 Illumina, San Diego, CA, USA) across two centers, of which 44,308 passed quality  
169 control. Genotypes were called using Illumina's proprietary GenCall algorithm.  
170 Standard quality control measures were applied across all SNPs and all samples.  
171 Samples were excluded for any of the following reasons: genotypically not female XX  
172 (XY, XXY or XO); overall call rate <95%; low or high heterozygosity ( $P < 10^{-6}$ );  
173 individuals not concordant with previous genotyping within the OCAC; individuals  
174 where genotypes for the duplicate sample appeared to be from a different individual;  
175 cryptic duplicates within studies where the phenotypic data indicated that the  
176 individuals were different, or between studies where genotype data indicated samples  
177 were duplicates; and samples from first-degree relatives. We used the program LAMP<sup>45</sup>  
178 to assign intercontinental ancestry on the basis of genotype frequencies in the European,  
179 Asian and African populations in OCAC samples. Individuals with >20% minority  
180 ancestry for the Asian ancestral group were considered mixed ancestry and excluded  
181 based on LAMP analysis. We then used a set of 37,000 unlinked markers to perform  
182 principal components analysis within the Asian ancestral group to identify residual  
183 population substructure.<sup>46</sup> For the analyses of Asian subjects, we included five principal  
184 components as covariates.

185

#### 186 **Alcohol assessment and covariate data collection**

187 The harmonization of daily alcohol intake across OCAC studies was previously  
188 described.<sup>16</sup> Briefly, daily alcohol consumption was estimated using validated food  
189 frequency questionnaires (FFQs) in AUS<sup>47</sup>, DOV<sup>48</sup>, HAW<sup>49</sup>, NEC<sup>50</sup>, SWH<sup>51</sup> and USC  
190 or from questions regarding alcohol intake embedded in a risk factor questionnaire  
191 (NCO, JPN). The exposure period was the year preceding recruitment (AUS, HAW,

192 JPN, NEC, SWH, USC) or at the time period approximately four (DOV) or five (NCO)  
193 years before the reference date. Daily alcohol consumption in grams was determined by  
194 summing the product of frequency of consumption of specified alcoholic beverages  
195 (beer, wine, and other alcoholic beverages, including liquor, Japanese Sake, Chuuhai  
196 and Shochu) by the alcohol content of each beverage using national estimates of alcohol  
197 content for that country. Total alcohol intake was calculated as the sum of each alcohol  
198 intake and used for the analysis. The AUS, DOV, HAW, and NEC studies provided the  
199 information for white and red wine separately.

200 Key clinical, demographic and questionnaire data on study subjects (see below)  
201 were merged into a common dataset by the coordinating center and checked for  
202 consistency.

203

#### 204 **Data analyses**

205 Differences in categorized demographic variables between the cases and  
206 controls were tested using the chi-square test except where there were a large number of  
207 missing observations.

208 To assess the strength of the associations of *ALDH2* polymorphism and daily  
209 alcohol consumption with the risk of invasive ovarian cancer, odds ratios (ORs) with  
210 95% confidence intervals (CIs) were estimated using unconditional logistic regression  
211 models. The alcohol consumption analyses used as the reference group women who did  
212 not consume any type of alcoholic beverage. Based on the median value of grams per  
213 day of alcohol consumed (total alcohol and alcohol from beer, wine [white, red] and  
214 other alcohol) among controls (7.57 g/day), alcohol consumption was classified into  
215 two (none, any alcohol intake) and three categories (none, up to and including the  
216 median intake, more than the median intake). Models for the main effect of alcohol  
217 were adjusted for age, five Asian principal components, smoking status (never, ever  
218 smokers), and study. Missing values for covariates were treated as dummy variables in  
219 the models. Other possible confounders were excluded from the multivariate model, due  
220 to a large number of missing observations. Risk models associated with total alcohol  
221 intake did not include other alcoholic beverage types. Risk models associated with beer,  
222 wine or liquor intake included all three beverage types and were thus adjusted for each  
223 other. Risk models associated with white or red wine intake included beer and liquor

224 intake.

225 The ORs for the main effect of *ALDH2* genotypes on ovarian cancer risk were  
226 adjusted for age, five Asian principal components, and study under both codominant  
227 and dominant genetic models using the Glu/Glu genotype as reference. We conducted  
228 stratified analyses by histological subtypes and applied a multinomial logistic regression  
229 model to evaluate heterogeneity for an association of the *ALDH2* Lys allele across  
230 histological subtypes. Models were compared using the likelihood-ratio test.

231 To assess the joint effect of genotype and alcohol intake, we created four categories  
232 combining genotype with alcohol intake: non-Lys allele carriers and no alcohol intake  
233 as a reference group, non-Lys allele carriers and any alcohol intake, Lys allele carriers  
234 and no alcohol intake, and Lys allele carriers and any alcohol intake.

235 Even though all study participants were of Asian ancestry, the heterogeneity among  
236 studies might affect the results. Therefore, we repeated all analyses using random  
237 effects meta-analyses to calculate summary study-specific estimates.

238 A *P* value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant. All analyses were  
239 performed using STATA version 13.1 (Stata Corp., College Station, TX, USA).

240

## 241 **Results**

242 Table 1 shows the distribution of cases and controls, Lys allele frequency,  
243 median age and the proportion of ever drinkers for each study. The median age of cases  
244 and controls and the Lys allele frequency varied across the eight studies with NEC  
245 showing the lowest allele frequency of 8.3% and NCO having the highest at 30%  
246 among controls. This reflects the diverse composition of participants categorized as  
247 “Asian” in these studies (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean or Pilipino). However, the two  
248 studies conducted in Asian countries (JPN and SWH) had relatively similar Lys allele  
249 frequencies (29% and 23.8%, respectively). To illustrate, the figures show the results  
250 from superimposing the data from the first two orthogonal principal components from  
251 over 30,000 unlinked markers from each Asian ancestry study participant from a single  
252 study (blue circles) onto the data from all Asian ancestry study participants in OCAC  
253 (black circles), and where the black clusters segregated according to country of genetic  
254 origin. In Figure 1, Asian participants from the two Asian countries, JPN (Japan) and  
255 SWH (Shanghai), are shown in panels A and B and participants from two other Asian



256 studies, KRA (Korea) and CHA (China), are shown in panels C and D. Figure 2 shows  
257 Asian participants from the USC (California) and DOV (Washington) studies in the  
258 United States (panels A and B) had allele frequencies mapping to regions in Japan,  
259 China and the Philippines, whereas Asian participants from the HAW (Hawaii) study  
260 had allele frequencies mapping more strongly and, not surprisingly, to regions in Japan  
261 and the Philippines and to a lesser extent to China. Subsequent statistical models  
262 controlled for this variability with the inclusion of five principal components as  
263 covariates. The proportion of ever drinkers was lower in SWH and USC, compared with  
264 other studies.

265 Demographic characteristics and selected lifestyle habits of study subjects are  
266 shown in Table 2. The distribution of histological subtypes among invasive ovarian  
267 cancer cases was 188 serous (40.9%), 42 mucinous (9.1%), 75 endometrioid (16.3%),  
268 and 69 clear cell (15.0%) adenocarcinomas. Overall, the prevalence of the Lys allele  
269 carrier was 33.9% of cases and 39.5% of controls. The median total alcohol intake  
270 among controls who consumed alcohol recently was 7.57 gram per day (g/day). Cases  
271 were more likely to drink alcohol ( $p$ -value<0.001). The proportion of ever smokers was  
272 higher among cases. Overall, the median age of cases and controls was 54.0 and 52.2  
273 years, respectively. A higher proportion of cases compared to controls were observed in  
274 the youngest and oldest age groups. The distribution of other variables (age at menarche,  
275 use of oral contraception, tubal ligation, low parity, body mass index (BMI), history of  
276 any prior cancer and family history of breast or ovarian cancer in the first-degree  
277 relatives) is shown in Table 2 but should be interpreted cautiously due to large number  
278 of missing data for both cases and controls.

279 Table 3 presents the association between daily alcohol intake and invasive  
280 ovarian cancer risk in the Asian population adjusting for age, smoking status, study and  
281 principal components. The ORs associated with total alcohol intake of 0-7.6 g/day and  
282 7.6-192.6 g/day among all ovarian cancers were 0.92 (95%CI=0.59-1.45) and 0.69  
283 (95%CI=0.42-1.14), respectively (trend  $p$ =0.188). No significant associations were  
284 observed for type of alcoholic beverage consumed. Analyses that adjusted for several  
285 covariates listed in Table 2 showed similar trends (data not shown). In addition, we  
286 performed analyses excluding younger subjects, non-drinkers, or Lys/Lys genotype, but  
287 none of the results were substantially altered (data not shown).

288 Table 4 presents the effect of *ALDH2* rs671 genotypes and total alcohol intake  
289 on invasive ovarian cancer risk overall in the Asian population. No significant  
290 association between rs671 genotypes in *ALDH2* and invasive ovarian cancer risk overall  
291 was observed (OR for dominant model=0.92; 95% CI=0.71-1.18; *p*-value=0.490). No  
292 significant interaction between any alcohol consumption and rs671 in *ALDH2* was  
293 observed (interaction *p*=0.634).

294 ■ Table 4 also presents associations between the genotype and alcoholic intake  
295 stratified by histological subtype. The Lys allele was significantly inversely associated  
296 with both invasive mucinous (OR for dominant model=0.44; 95% CI=0.20-0.97;  
297 *p*-value=0.041) and invasive plus borderline mucinous tumors (OR in dominant  
298 model=0.48; 95% CI=0.26-0.89; *p*-value=0.018). We also included alcohol intake as a  
299 covariate in this model, but none of the results were substantially altered (invasive  
300 mucinous tumor: OR for dominant model=0.46; 95% CI=0.21-1.04; *p*-value=0.062,  
301 invasive plus borderline mucinous tumors: OR for dominant model=0.46; 95%  
302 CI=0.25-0.85; *p*-value=0.014). The test for heterogeneity for the association of the  
303 *ALDH2* Lys allele between the histological subtypes was not significant (*p*-value for  
304 heterogeneity test=0.20). There was no significant association between alcoholic intake  
305 and ovarian cancer for any of the histological subtypes. The ORs associated with any  
306 alcohol intake were less than 1 with the exception of invasive mucinous cancer. There  
307 was no significant interaction with alcohol consumption with any of the associations  
308 (Table S1).

309 We also performed meta-analyses to calculate summary study-specific  
310 estimates (Tables S2-5). Overall, the results did not change substantially, but the  
311 mucinous tumor cases were too few to calculate a study-specific OR, and thus some  
312 studies were not included in meta-analyses.

313

## 314 **Discussion**

315 In this study, we did not observe significant associations between total alcohol  
316 intake and invasive ovarian cancer risk in Asian populations. We found that the Lys  
317 allele of rs671 was associated with a decreased risk of both invasive mucinous ovarian  
318 cancer and invasive plus borderline mucinous ovarian cancers, but not the other  
319 histotypes, although the test for heterogeneity was not significant. No significant

320 interactions were observed between rs671 genotypes in *ALDH2* and alcohol intake with  
321 risk of invasive ovarian cancer.

322 Results from epidemiological studies investigating the association between  
323 alcohol drinking and ovarian cancer risk among Caucasians are inconsistent, reporting  
324 either a null association,<sup>7-12</sup> a positive association<sup>13, 14</sup> or negative associations.<sup>4-6</sup>  
325 Alcohol has been hypothesized to induce carcinogenesis by increasing circulating level  
326 of estrogens,<sup>52</sup> oxidative stress, acetaldehyde, or depletion of folate.<sup>53</sup> In contrast,  
327 alcohol is reported to have protective potential against ovarian carcinogenesis by  
328 decreasing follicle stimulating hormone, luteinizing hormone and gonadotropins levels.  
329 Polyphenols contained in red wine were proposed to explain the inverse association  
330 observed between red wine and risk of ovarian cancer risk.<sup>5, 6, 10, 54</sup> We did not observe  
331 any statistically significant associations between alcohol intake and ovarian cancer in  
332 the Asian participants in our study. The evidence to support a role of alcohol in ovarian  
333 cancer epidemiology in Asian populations is scarce and may warrant additional  
334 evaluation in larger studies.

335 The present analysis also examined ovarian cancer risk using the functional *ALDH2*  
336 rs671 polymorphism. The Lys allele acts as dominant negative, because the variant form  
337 can suppress the activity of the Glu allele by the formation of heterotetramers.<sup>24</sup> Overall  
338 37.6% of our study subjects were heterozygous or homozygous for the null variant of  
339 *ALDH2* rs671. Inactive *ALDH2* results in prolonged exposure to the metabolite,  
340 acetaldehyde, following alcohol intake. Peak blood acetaldehyde concentrations post  
341 alcohol challenge are 18 times and 5 times higher among homozygous null variant and  
342 heterozygous individuals compared with homozygous wild type individuals.<sup>55</sup> This  
343 renders the consumption of alcohol unpleasant through inducing facial flushing,  
344 palpitations, drowsiness and other symptoms. Consequently, the *ALDH2* rs671  
345 genotype has been used as a surrogate for alcohol consumption in studies utilizing the  
346 Mendelian Randomization approach<sup>56, 57</sup> because its interpretation is not influenced by  
347 confounding or bias that affects the interpretation of self-reported alcohol intake.  
348 Therefore, it would be expected that carriers of the Lys allele (null variant), which  
349 associates with low alcohol intake, would be at lower risk of ovarian cancer, which is  
350 what was observed in the current study for invasive mucinous ovarian cancer and for  
351 combined invasive and borderline mucinous cancer (OR=0.48, p=0.018). This implies

352 that alcohol consumption may be associated with increased risk of mucinous ovarian  
353 cancer.

354 The strengths of this investigation include the analysis of individual-level data from  
355 a relatively large sample compared to previous studies, which allowed us to quantify  
356 risk associations of the *ALDH2* polymorphism, detailed drinking status and ovarian  
357 cancer risk. Other strengths are the uniform genotyping procedures and quality-control  
358 measures adopted. We were also able to control for population stratification by first  
359 using LAMP analysis to identify Asian ancestral membership separate from other  
360 genetically similar groups, and then including five principal components as model  
361 covariates to control for residual genetic heterogeneity within the Asian membership.  
362 This study does have some weakness. The models for alcohol intake did not adjust for  
363 all potential confounders, because a substantial number of subjects from a single study  
364 (SWH) had missing values for several covariates. Further, the self-reported alcohol  
365 quantities were either too low or measured with error and may have obscured an  
366 association with ovarian cancer if it existed whereas the genetic models are not  
367 influenced by these limitations. Despite the common prevalence of the *ALDH2*  
368 polymorphism among Asians, the small sample sizes for the histological type analysis  
369 precludes a conclusive interpretation of the results for Mendelian Randomization, which  
370 must await further study with a larger sample size. Finally, we did not adjust for  
371 multiple comparisons and a cautious interpretation of the histologic-specific results is  
372 required.

373 In conclusion, we observed an inverse association between the Lys allele of rs671 in  
374 *ALDH2* and mucinous ovarian cancer risk in an Asian population. Because the rs671  
375 Lys allele causes *ALDH2* inactivation leading to increased acetaldehyde exposure, the  
376 observed inverse genetic association with mucinous ovarian cancer is inferred to mean  
377 that alcohol intake may be a risk factor for this histotype. Future investigation using  
378 even larger epidemiological studies of Asians is warranted.

379

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404

405

**406 Disclosure Statement**

407

The authors have declared no conflicts of interest.

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**Figure legend:**

**Figure 1. Genetic ancestry of Asians in OCAC studies conducted in Asian Countries.**

Plot of the first 2 principal components from each Asian ancestry participant from a single study (blue circles) superimposed over the first 2 principal components from all Asian ancestry participants that were genotyped in OCAC (black circles). The black circles take the form of countries denoting participants with ancestrally similar allele frequencies. A. JPN (Japan). B. SWH (Shanghai, China). C. KRA (Korea). D. CHA (China).

**Figure 2. Genetic ancestry of Asians in OCAC studies conducted in the United States.**

Plot of the first 2 principal components from each Asian ancestry participant from a single study (blue circles) superimposed over the first 2 principal components from all Asian ancestry participants that were genotyped in OCAC (black circles). Ancestral membership of Asian participants in the US studies can be mapped to country of origin. A. USC (California). B. DOV (Washington). C. HAW (Hawaii).

**Supporting Information**

**Table S1.** Interaction between ALDH2 genotype and alcohol intake according to the histological subtype

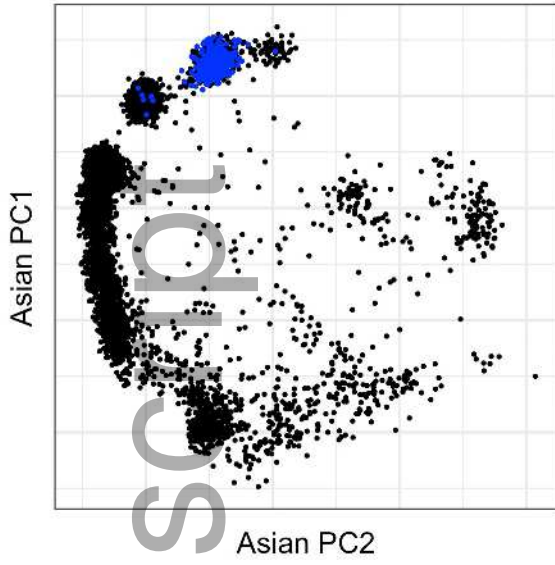
**Table S2.** Association between alcoholic beverage and invasive ovarian cancer risk (Pooled analysis and meta-analysis)

**Table S3.** Odds ratios of invasive ovarian cancer by ALDH2 genotype and alcohol intake (Pooled analysis and meta-analysis)

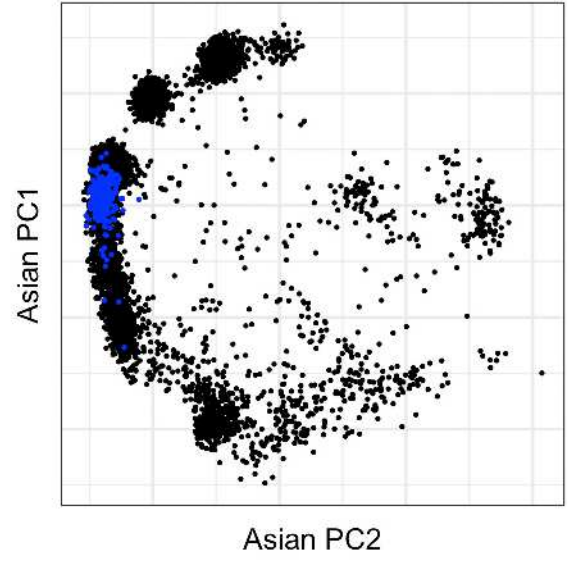
**Table S4.** Odds ratios of mucinous invasive cancer by ALDH2 genotype and alcohol intake (Pooled analysis and meta-analysis)

**Table S5.** Odds ratios of mucinous (invasive + borderline) cancer by ALDH2 genotype and alcohol intake (Pooled analysis and meta-analysis)

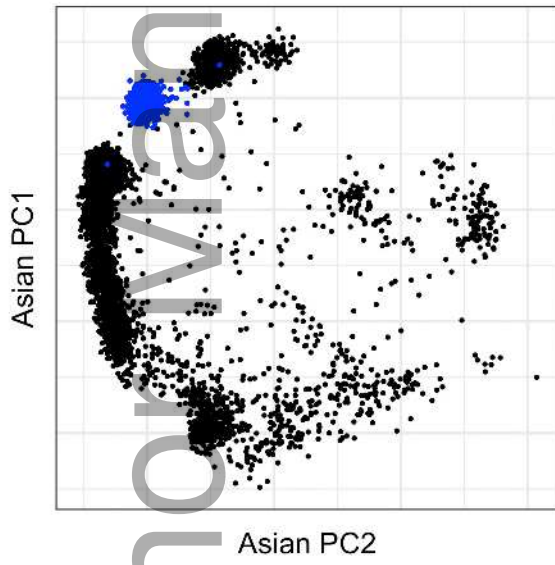
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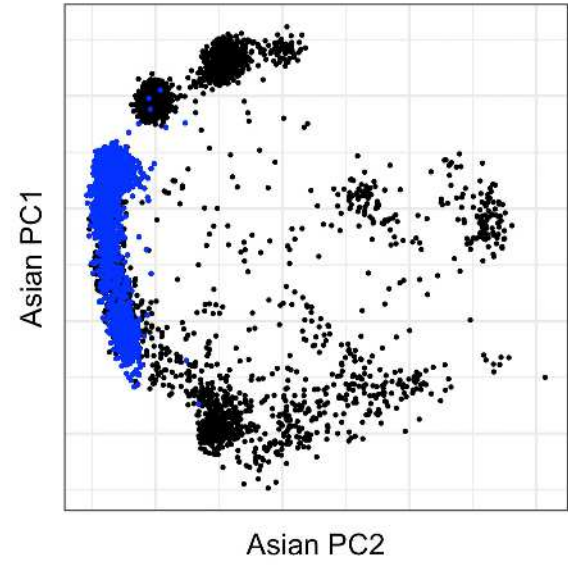
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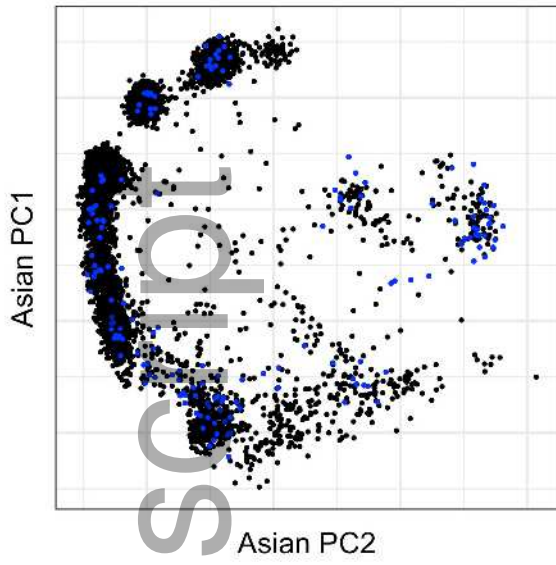


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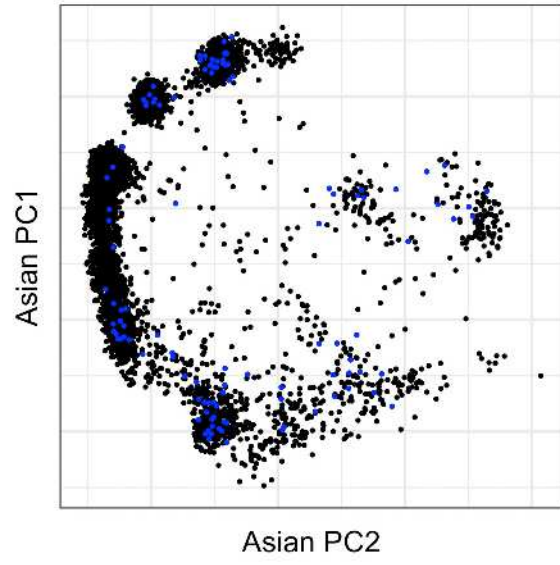


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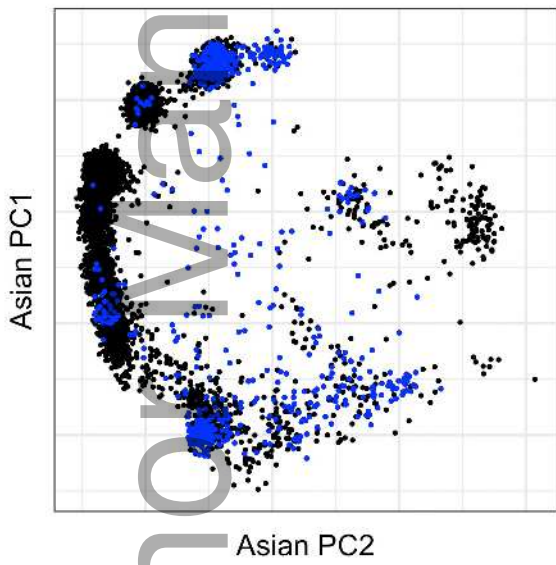
A



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