Author’s response to reviews

Title: Different prognostic implication of ypTNM stage and pTNM stage for gastric cancer: A Propensity Score-matched Analysis

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Author’s response to reviews:

We, the authors, are grateful to the editor and reviewer for their comments on our manuscript. We have addressed all the points raised by the editor and reviewer. Please see the point-to-point response below.

Editor Comments:

Unfortunately, Reviewer 1 is unable to re-review the manuscript at this point and we reached out to an Editorial Board Member for advice. The Board Member has additional essential comments we would like you to address in your point-by-point response letter as well:

1) Page 4 line 50: “had not underwent” should be “had not undergone”
The change has been made accordingly.

2) Page 13, lines 37-41: the first limitation (not having stage 4 patients) should be deleted. This is not a limitation. These patients were appropriately excluded as they did not have surgery.

This limitation has been deleted. The limitation part in the manuscript is now as follows:” There are two main limitations embedded in our study. Firstly, as previously mentioned, because information on cTNM was unavailable for this study, we cannot confirm the explanation of our results. However, this does not affect the conclusion of current study, as we only considered the prognostic value of pTNM and ypTNM stage. Secondly, Borrmann type has been considered as an important prognostic factor of gastric cancer and is one of the indications of NACT in countries such as Japan. Due to the lack of information, this factor was not included in the propensity score or the conventional multivariate analysis. However, given that NACT indications in China do not contain patient Borrmann type, omitting this factor will not introduce bias to the HR estimation.”

3) Table 1: “Thoracic-abdominal joint” should be replaced by “Thoracoabdominal”

“Thoracic-abdominal joint” has been replaced by “Thoracoabdominal” in Table 1 and 2.

4) Figure 1: 35 patients with T stage = 0 were excluded. It will be interesting to know the 3- and 5-year OS rates of these patients. Please provide in the Results section as a stand alone paragraph.

We thank the editor for this comment and agree that this part is of great interest. The following paragraph has been added to the manuscript:

“Overall survival for pT0 or ypT0

4 pT0 and 31 ypT0 patients were not included in the analysis above due to the small group size. These 4 patients had one-bite gastric cancer. 28 of the ypT0 patients were with pathological complete response and the remaining 3 had ypT0N1. The 3-year overall survival for the pT0 and ypT0 patients was 100% and 96.3%, respectively. The 5-year overall survival for the pT0 and ypT0 patients was 100% and 89.9%, respectively.”

Reviewer reports:
Reviewer 2 (Reviewer 2): REVISION ASSESSMENT FROM THE ACADEMIC PEER REVIEWER:

Has the author addressed your concerns sufficiently for you to now recommend the work as a technically sound contribution? Yes

Reviewer comments: The authors have nicely addressed the concerns raised in the prior review.

The only changes recommended is on page 12, line 29 which should read: Patients in ypStage II might consist of two groups: one group were those downstaged by NACT from stage III, and the remainder were patients who did not respond well to NACT; the mixture of these two groups resulted in a non-significant hazard ratio.

The sentence has been replaced with this sentence suggested by the reviewer. We thank the reviewer for the suggestion.

Page 13, line 43: Secondly, as previously mentioned, because information on cTNM was unavailable for this study, we cannot confirm the explanation of our results.

The sentence has been replaced with this sentence suggested by the reviewer. We thank the reviewer for the suggestion.