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SUBDUCTION

Insights from Physical Modeling

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	IX
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	XI
CHAPTER 1. SIMILARITY CRITERIA	
1.1. Introduction	1
1.2. The general approach to physical similarity	2
1.3. Derivation of similarity criteria from the equations of continuum mechanics	6
1.3.1. The linearly viscous fluid	7
1.3.2. Phase transition	13
1.3.3. The rigidly plastic body	14
1.3.4. The linearly elastic body	15
1.3.5. Complex rheologic models	15
1.4. Dilatant plasticity and brittle failure	19
1.5. Conclusions	21
CHAPTER 2. MODEL SETTING, TECHNIQUE AND FACILITIES	
2.1. Introduction	25
2.2. General modeling scheme	26
2.3. Model materials	29
2.4. Experimental installation and technique	31
CHAPTER 3. INITIATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF SUBDUCTION UNDER HORIZONTAL COMPRESSION OF THE LITHOSPHERE	
3.1. Introduction	35
3.2. Results of the experiments	35
3.3. Analysis of experimental results	48
3.4. Formation of a subduction zone in a homogeneous oceanic lithosphere	51

3.4.1. Intraplate deformation in the northeastern Indian Ocean	52
3.4.2. Polarity of subduction zones, trapped back arc basins	59
3.4.3. Application of the model to oceanic transform faults	62
3.5. Initiation of a subduction zone on an old inclined fault	63
3.6. Strain and stress in the subducting plate	66
3.7. Estimation of pressure between the plates in the subduction zone	69
3.8. Elastico-plastic bending of the subducting plate, its yield limit and modulus of elasticity	74
3.9. Conclusions	77

CHAPTER 4. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUBDUCTION REGIME AND BACK ARC DYNAMICS

4.1. Introduction	79
4.2. Experimental results	80
4.3. Hydrostatic suction of the plates	86
4.4. Stress in the overriding plate due to subduction of an old (dense) lithosphere	91
4.5. Other mechanisms for tension in the overriding plate	95
4.6. Influence of crustal thickness and density of the overriding plate on its stress state	95
4.7. Geodynamic interpretation of modeling results	99
4.8. The location of back arc rifting	100
4.9. Relationship of the back arc regime to relief and the gravity field in subduction zones	103
4.10. Benioff zone dip angle and back arc regime	107
4.11. On the cyclicity of back arc tension and compression	108
4.12. Vertical movements in subduction zones	111
4.13. On causes of the arcuate configuration of subduction zones	111
4.14. Relation of seismicity in the subduction zone with back arc dynamics	112
4.15. On the mechanism of back arc tension in some particular subduction zones	114
4.16. South-Sandwich subduction zone	115
4.17. Possible mechanism for evolution of the Scotia Sea region	120
4.18. The Aegean region	123
4.19. Conclusions	131

CHAPTER 5. JUMPS OF SUBDUCTION ZONES, SUBDUCTION REVERSAL, AND CLOSING OF BACK ARC BASINS

5.1. Introduction	134
5.2. Location of the lithospheric failure and jump of subduction zone	134
5.3. Mechanism for lithospheric failure and polarity of a new subduction zone	136
5.4. Deformation of the overriding plate in the Kuril subduction zone	144
5.5. Subduction of the continental margin: arc-continent collision in Taiwan	144
5.5.1. Geodynamic setting of the Taiwan area	146
5.5.2. Experimental setting	148
5.5.3. Experimental results	151
5.5.4. Evolutionary model for the collision in Taiwan	159
5.5.5. Comparison of the model with observations	164
5.5.6. Toward a more adequate geodynamic model of Taiwan	169
5.6. Conclusions	172

CHAPTER 6. CONTINENTAL SUBDUCTION

6.1. Introduction	174
6.2. Modeling approach	175
6.3. Similarity criteria and the model materials	177
6.4. Experimental results	178
6.5. Analysis of the results	188
6.6. Concluding remarks and possible application of the results to the India-Eurasia collision	191

REFERENCES	195
-------------------	-----

NOTATIONS	205
------------------	-----

INDEX	209
--------------	-----

PREFACE

Of the two modeling methods, mathematical (numerical) and physical (experimental), I would prefer dealing with a computer, leaving the "dirty" experimental work to those who enjoy working with real physical objects. Mathematical modeling enables us to more easily vary parameters over a wide range and create such conditions and models which can never be implemented in the laboratory. However, this method encounters serious problems in constructing ever more complex and adequate models of geologic processes in spite of the great possibilities provided by modern supercomputers. Frequently, it is not even clear how to formulate the problem mathematically, for example, in cases where it involves large transient deformations and failure of the lithosphere at the plate boundaries, in particular at the convergent boundaries. In many cases, physical modeling can in principle obviate these difficulties which makes this method more attractive and deserving of further development. The main problem is to put the experiments on a quantitative basis, i.e. to create models that satisfy the necessary requirements, the similarity criteria, in the first place.

This work represents a coherent description of the physical (mechanical) modeling of subduction and subduction-related phenomena, including the similarity criteria, the experimental technique, results of the model experiments, theoretical analysis of the results on the basis of continuum mechanics, and their geodynamic interpretation.

The problem of physical similarity is considered in the first chapter. To create a physically similar laboratory model of subduction we apply a novel technique developed on the basis of using hydrocarbon model materials for modeling the lithosphere with properties strongly dependent on temperature. This technique and experimental facilities are described in the second chapter. Experiments are performed with elasto-plastic lithospheric models underlain by a low-viscosity asthenosphere. We use both 2-D and 3-D

approaches. Driving forces of subduction are both lateral compression of the lithosphere by the piston and gravitational sinking of the subducting plate. Different modes of initiation and development of subduction under horizontal compression are studied in the third chapter. Subduction is modeled in general as well as applied to particular regions such as the Central Basin of the Indian Ocean where a new subduction zone is proposed to be initiating.

Chapter 4 concentrates on the back arc dynamics and its relation to subduction regime. The effect of hydrostatic suction between plates in the subduction zone is shown to be responsible for the back arc tension. The effect is due to the low effective strength of the lithosphere compared with the hydrostatic stresses within it. The back arc stress regime correlates with a departure from isostatic equilibrium in the arc-trench area and, hence, can be recognized in the free air gravity anomaly field. Situations in some particular regions with active back arc basins are considered as well. The Aegean region where back arc tension can not be explained using traditional models is one of them.

Chapter 5 deals with situations where the lithosphere in a subduction zone is subjected to a high compression caused by subduction of very young lithosphere, different asperities and especially of the continental margin. Under strong compression the lithosphere can fail in a new place resulting in a jump of the subduction zone to that place. Location of the jump, style of the lithospheric deformation preceding jump, as well as polarity of a new subduction zone depend on particular conditions. For example, subduction of the Asian margin under the Luzon arc seems to result in initiation of new subduction under northeastern Taiwan.

Chapter 6 presents results of the modeling of continent-continent collision with three-layer lithospheric model which includes a very weak lower crust. The crust undergoes complex deformation in the collision zone, being scraped from the underlying mantle layer while this layer itself subducts similar to the subduction of the oceanic lithosphere in "classical" subduction zones. Such a similarity justifies the title of the chapter *Continental subduction* and its inclusion in this book.

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