Origin of contorted convergent plate boundaries: insight from the Kazakhstan Orocline in the Central Asian Orogenic Belt

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Curved plate boundaries, which are commonly referred to as oroclines and result from bending of quasi-linear orogenic belts, have fascinated generations of geologists since 1950s. Such structures are widely recognized in the late Paleozoic global orogenic systems (e.g. the Tasmanides of eastern Australia, the Central Asian Orogenic Belt and the European Variscan Belt), and their origin is fundamentally important for understanding the geodynamics of convergent plate boundaries and the mechanisms that drive orogenesis and the assembly of the supercontinent. In this contribution, we focus on the Kazakhstan Orocline in Central Asia with an aim at understanding the geodynamics of orocline bending along convergent plate boundaries. This orocline is delineated by U-shaped arc systems that were quasi-linear prior to the Late Devonian as demonstrated by paleomagnetic studies. The development of the Kazakhstan Orocline was previously attributed to bucking of linear orogenic belts in response to the amalgamation of the Siberian and Tarim cratons. However, our work demonstrates that orocline bending initiated prior to the collision of the Siberian Craton with the northern limb of the Kazakhstan Orocline in the latest Carboniferous, and major phase of orocline bending occurred during subduction in the Late Devonian to Early Carboniferous. Alternatively, we suggest a new subduction-related tectonic model that involves major phase of orocline bending (~120°) driven by along-strike variation in rollback, similarly as the bending of the New Hebrides Arc in Southwest Pacific. A further ~60° bending may have been triggered by the Late Carboniferous to Permian amalgamation of Siberian, Tarim and Baltic cratons. The new tectonic model builds a link for orocline bending with the subduction dynamics, and highlights the role of trench retreat in the formation of oroclines in accretionary orogens.

Acknowledgements:
This study was financially supported by a Major Basic Research Project of the Ministry of Science and Technology of China (Grant: 2014CB448000 and 2014CB440801), Hong Kong Research Grant Council (HKU704712P, HKU704013P and HKU17303415), HKU seed funding (201111159137 and 201411159173). This work also contributes to the Joint Laboratory of Chemical Geodynamics between HKU and CAS (Guangzhou Institute of Geochemistry) and PROCORE France/Hong Kong Joint Research Scheme.