Coalescing detrital zircon geochronology and litho-structural mapping in identification of MBT in Himachal Himalayas

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Deformation associated with faults are exhibited at fault core and damage zone. A prerequisite for elucidating deformation mechanisms and fault behavior is identification of the fault core and damage zone. However, fault contacts are not always preserved or easily discernible in outcrop scale. In our current research, one such thrust contact from the regionally prominent Main Boundary Thrust (MBT) of the Himalayan fold-thrust belt, India, has been considered. Large scale mapping of the MBT indicate the occurrence of Proterozoic rocks in the hanging wall and younger Cenozoic rocks in the footwall. The current study comprises the MBT near Gambarpul town of Himachal Pradesh, India. For exact identification of the thrust contact, we conducted detrital zircon geochronology and high resolution litho-structural mapping in the study area. U-Pb detrital zircon geochronology using LA-ICP-MS of the nine sandstone samples indicate a sharp change in age of deposition from 625 (+110 -780) Ma to 61.25(+1.2 -1.5) Ma indicating the thrust contact. Considering the lithological assemblage and the age data, we have identified alternating lithology of argillaceous and arenitic sandstone and the unified depositional age from ca.700 Ma to ca. 500 Ma for the hanging wall rocks. In comparison, the footwall rocks exhibit argillaceous to calcareous sandstone and limestone, and the depositional age of ca. 61 Ma. The U-Pb age and litho-structural data thus suggest the fault contact in the current study area is part of the MBT. The fold geometry indicates the occurrence of non-cylindrical fold in the hanging wall, exhibiting intricate parasitic folds in argillaceous sandstone and fractured large wavelength folding of arenitic sandstone. The footwall exhibits buckle fold with steeper dip of sedimentary beds toward the thrust contact, and gentle dip away from the contact. Furthermore, recent study of calcite thermometry (e-twin morphology and carbonate clumped isotope thermometry) from the area have reported the depth of the fault related calcites to be 10–11 Km. Future research in the study area might help to elucidate the deformation mechanisms of the brittle-ductile transition zone that is represented by the MBT.

Keywords: MBT, U-Pb geochronology, Calcite e-twins

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