Tectonophysics xxx (2015) xxx–xxx

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Tectonophysics

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/tecto

Rapid deformation rates due to development of diapiric anticline in southwestern Taiwan from geodetic observations

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 4 March 2015
Received in revised form 16 June 2015
Accepted 26 July 2015
Available online xxxx

Keywords:
GPS
Precise leveling measurement
Hsiaokangshan fault
Chishan fault
2D kinematic fault model
Mud diapir

ABSTRACT

We adopted 106 campaign-mode GPS observations and 310 precise leveling measurements between 2002 and 2010 to understand the present-day crustal deformation in mudstone area and to estimate the earthquake potential of the Hsiaokangshan (HKSF) and the Chishan faults (CHNF) in southwest Taiwan. Horizontal velocities east of the CHNF are ~66 mm/yr, 270° and gradually decrease westward to ~15 mm/yr, N259°. A horizontal velocity gradient of ~15 mm/yr is shown between the HKSF and CHNF. Subsidence rates west of the HKSF and east of the CHNF are ~5–10 mm/yr, while the uplift is observed between these two faults in the highest elevation with the maximum rate of ~18 mm/yr. The observed deformation patterns are difficult to be fully modeled by 2D kinematic fault model. Field relationships within the vertical shear zones of the mudstone therefore indicate that the deformation pattern may be also controlled by a relic onshore mud diapir that is still experiencing vertical uplift. Consistency between the geological and geodetic vertical velocities, weak rock strength, and no destructive earthquakes over the last 100 years imply that faults (HKSF) within the mudstone area are creeping. However, the CHNF or the associated décollement may still have earthquake potential.

1. Introduction

The stress accumulated due to the high surface shortening rate measured by geodetic surveys due to the friction on reverse fault planes is proposed to be released by earthquakes in the compressive environment [e.g., Kostrov, 1974; Savage and Simpson, 1997]. In this condition, an anticlinal landform grows due to the formation of thrust-related anticline [e.g., Lacombe et al., 1997, 2004]. However, the anticlinal landform is also the apparent topographic feature of the mud diapir because of ascending of the buried sediments due to buoyancy contrast in materials [Kopf, 2002]. The mud diapir, an upward migrating mass of buoyant, clay-rich sediment but not piercing all of its overburden rock, is usually related to regional compressive stresses, too [Hedberg, 1974; Jenyon, 1986; Magara, 1978; Shih, 1967; Sumner and Westbrook, 2001; Kopf, 2002; Franek et al., 2014]. In other words, the upward migration of mud diapir will reduce the estimated seismic hazard. Therefore how to distinguish the mechanisms of the thrust-related anticline and mud diapir in the high shortening region is an important issue to evaluate the earthquake potential.

Southwest Taiwan (the Kaoping region) (inset of Fig. 1a) contains the second largest city in Taiwan, Kaohsiung metropolitan area, at the western Kaoping region with more than 2.7 million people and two national freeways and one high speed railroad pass through this area (Fig. 1a). This region is an excellent experimental field to answer the foresaid question because of the high contraction rate of ~1.0 μstrain/yr and right-lateral shearing inferred from previous sparse GPS horizontal velocities [Bos et al., 2003; Chang et al., 2003; Ching et al., 2007b, 2011b; Hsu et al., 2009], suggesting that there is a potential for a large seismic event. However, the historical earthquake records indicate that no significant earthquakes have occurred within the last century [Cheng and Yeh, 1989]. Therefore does it mean a large earthquake being coming in SW Taiwan in the near future because seldom earthquakes occurred in this area, such that the *M* 8.8 Maule earthquake occurs at a seismic gap in a subduction zone [e.g., Moreno et al., 2010]?

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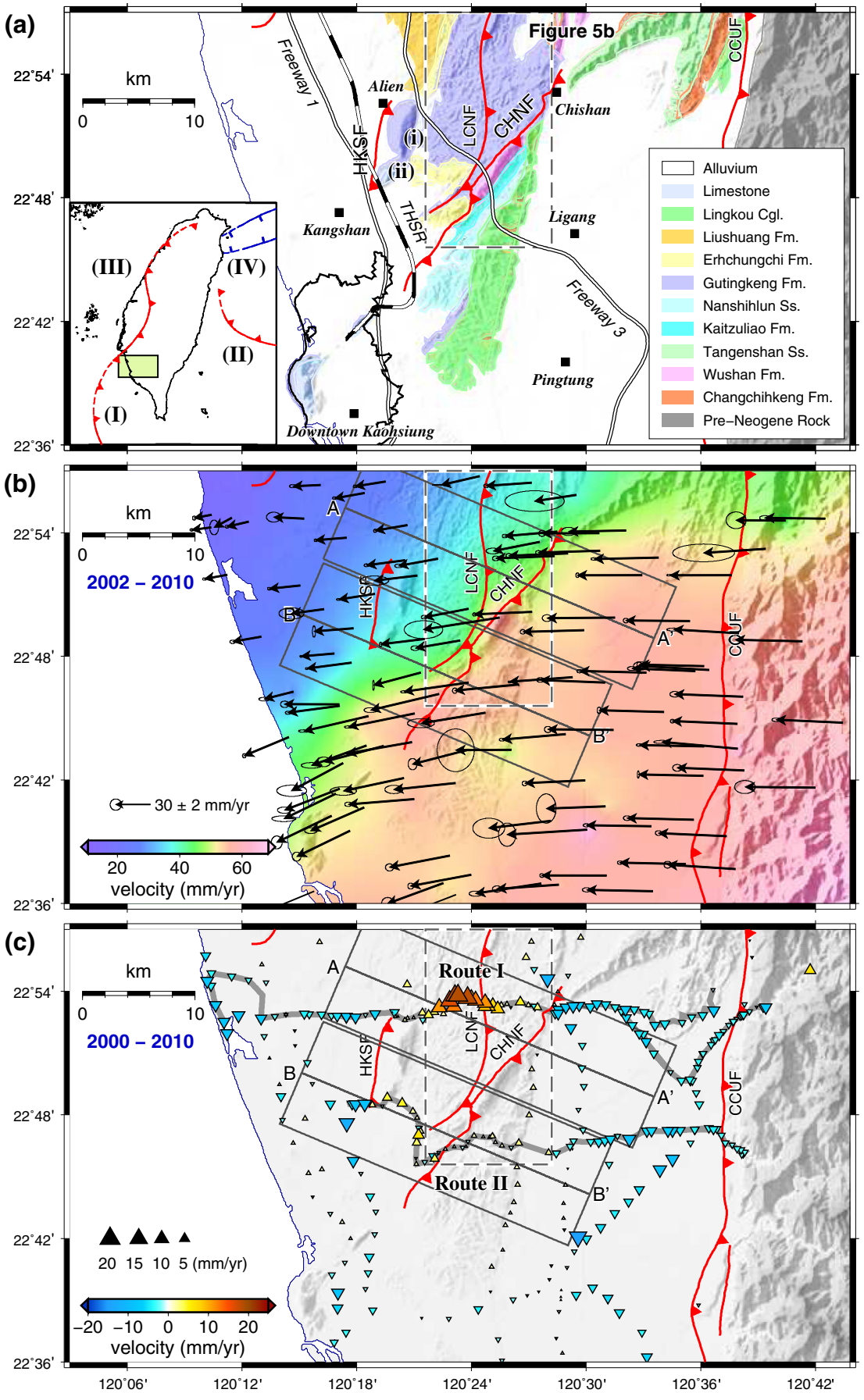
http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tecto.2015.07.020
0040-1951/



Please cite this article as: Ching, K.-E., et al., Rapid deformation rates due to development of diapiric anticline in southwestern Taiwan from geodetic observations, Tectonophysics (2015), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tecto.2015.07.020