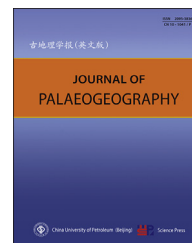




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Academic discussion

Words of the Editor-in-Chief — Academic discussion is an effective measure to promote scientific development



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Abstract Van Loon *et al.*'s paper “*The response of stromatolites to seismic shocks: Tomboliths from the Palaeoproterozoic Chaibasa Formation, E India*” with a new term “tomboliths” and original viewpoints should be published, but some contents need to be discussed. Shanmugam's paper “*The response of stromatolites to seismic shocks: Tomboliths from the Palaeoproterozoic Chaibasa Formation, E India: Discussion and liquefaction basics*” pointed out some queries and problems about Van Loon *et al.*'s paper. It is an academic discussion paper and should be published as well. However, some main problems, such as the new term “tomboliths” and its origin of seismic shocks, “whether stromatolites or tomboliths are soft-sediment deformation structures or not”, *etc.*, also need to be discussed. Academic discussion is an effective measure to promote scientific development. The more thorough academic discussions are carried out regarding academic problems, the more scientific facts and truths will become clear. All participants in this discussion are contributors. It is active to carry out the policy of “*A hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend*” by our *Journal of Palaeogeography*.

Keywords Tomboliths, Seismic shocks, Stromatolitic bioclasts, Stromatolitic gravels, Stromatolites, Soft-sediment deformation structures (SSDS), Academic discussion, A hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend, Geological practice

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1. Introduction

Prof. Van Loon *et al.* submitted a paper “*The response of stromatolites to seismic shocks: Tomboliths from the Palaeoproterozoic Chaibasa Formation, E India*” (Van Loon *et al.*, 2016) to the *Journal*

of Palaeogeography in June, 2016. This paper was specially written for the symposium of “Multi-origins of soft-sediment deformation structures and seismites” at the 14th National Conference of Palaeogeography and Sedimentology held in September, 2016 at Henan Polytechnic University, Jiaozuo, China.

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Prof. Shanmugam also wrote a paper “*The seismite problem*” (Shanmugam, 2016) for this symposium.

A thousand thanks are herein expressed to Prof. Van Loon *et al.*, Prof. Shanmugam and all other geologists who have made contributions to this symposium.

This symposium was very successful (Feng, 2017).

Van Loon *et al.*'s paper has new meaning. I, as the Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Palaeogeography*, decided to send it for peer-reviewing immediately.

However, I thought that the new term “tomboliths” is a little difficult to understand. It may be better to use another term such as “stromatolitic gravels” or “stromatolitic pebbles” which may be easier to understand. I sent my suggestion to Prof. Van Loon, but he did not accept this suggestion.

Several days later, I received one of the reviewers' comments from Prof. Shanmugam. He also thought that “tomboliths” is not suitable and suggested to use “stromatolitic clasts” instead. In addition, Prof. Shanmugam proposed some other comments as well.

I think these comments from Shanmugam are advisable, therefore I invited him to write an academic discussion paper about Van Loon *et al.*'s paper. He accepted my suggestion.

Of course, comments from Shanmugam and me did not influence the publication of Van Loon *et al.*'s paper in the *Journal of Palaeogeography*.

Shanmugam finished his academic discussion paper “*The response of stromatolites to seismic shocks: Tomboliths from the Palaeoproterozoic Chaibasa Formation, E India: Discussion and liquefaction basics*” very quickly and I sent it for peer-review at once.

Reviewers sent back their comments after some time and basically agreed with Shanmugam's comments. However they proposed at the same time that some expressions in Shanmugam's paper were too harsh which is not favorable for academic discussions, and that some viewpoints should be revised.

I agreed with these reviewers' comments.

I think that an academic discussion should “target at academic problems but not at persons”. Any different viewpoints even opposite viewpoints can be openly discussed, as long as they are “speech on grounds” and “speech on politeness”, *i.e.*, they should respect the authors with opposite viewpoints. Based on these three points, any different opinions can be discussed and free debate can be followed. Therefore, the policy of “*A hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend*” will be carried out. It will promote scientific development.

Shanmugam basically agreed with the suggestions from the reviewers and me and revised his paper. There are basically no harsh expressions in his revised paper. However, he insisted on his viewpoints. Since his

paper is an academic discussion paper, I, reviewers and editors cannot force him to revise his viewpoints. Therefore, I decided to publish his revised paper in the *Journal of Palaeogeography*.

Certainly, some academic viewpoints of Prof. Shanmugam's paper also need further discussions.

I invited Prof. Van Loon *et al.* to write a “Reply” to Shanmugam's paper with counter-criticism, discussion and contending.

I wrote this paper “*Words of the Editor-in-Chief — Academic discussion is an effective measure to promote scientific development*” and proposed my opinions about some main problems of this discussion.

In this issue of the *JoP*, the above three papers, *i.e.*, Shanmugam's paper “*The response of stromatolites to seismic shocks: Tomboliths from the Palaeoproterozoic Chaibasa Formation, E India: Discussion and liquefaction basics*” (Shanmugam, 2017), Van Loon *et al.*'s paper “*The response of stromatolites to seismic shocks: Tomboliths from the Palaeoproterozoic Chaibasa Formation, E India: Reply*” (Van Loon *et al.*, 2017), and my paper “*Words of the Editor-in-Chief — Academic discussion is an effective measure to promote scientific development*”, will be published together.

I sincerely welcome criticisms and corrections from all readers and hope the policy of “*A hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend*” will be carried out in our *Journal of Palaeogeography*.

2. Some main problems

Shanmugam questioned and commented on Van Loon *et al.*'s paper mainly about the following 5 aspects (Shanmugam, 2017). My paper will illustrate my opinions about these problems.

2.1. About tomboliths

As mentioned above, I think the term “tomboliths” is a little difficult to understand. I suggested to use “stromatolitic gravels” or “stromatolitic pebbles”.

Shanmugam originally suggested to use “stromatolitic clasts”. Now, in section 2 of his paper, he suggested to use “stromatolitic bioclasts”. I think both terms are acceptable.

The discussion about this new term “tomboliths” was set off by me. Shanmugam and I both proposed the above suggestions to make it easier for understanding and more acceptable for readers. If Van Loon *et al.* think that the “tomboliths” is meaningful, they can certainly continue to use this term, since they have the right to coin and interpret this new term.

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