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# Abiotic methane generation through reduction of serpentinite-hosted dolomite: Implications for carbon mobility in subduction zones

Weigang Peng <sup>a,b,c</sup>, Lifei Zhang <sup>a,\*</sup>, Simone Tumiati <sup>c</sup>, Alberto Vitale Brovarone <sup>d,e</sup>, Han Hu <sup>a</sup>, Yachun Cai <sup>b</sup>, Tingting Shen <sup>f</sup>

<sup>a</sup> MOE Key Laboratory of Orogenic Belts and Crustal Evolution, School of Earth and Space Sciences, Peking University, Beijing 100871, China

<sup>b</sup> Deep Sea Research Center & Laboratory for Marine Mineral Resources, Pilot National Laboratory for Marine Science and Technology (Qingdao), Qingdao 266237, China

<sup>c</sup> Dipartimento di Scienze della Terra, Università degli Studi di Milano, via Mangiagalli 34, 20133 Milano, Italy

<sup>d</sup> Dipartimento di Scienze Biologiche, Geologiche e Ambientali, Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna, Piazza di Porta San Donato 1, 40126 Bologna, Italy

<sup>e</sup> Sorbonne Université, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, UMR CNRS 7590, IRD, Institut de Minéralogie, de Physique des Matériaux et de Cosmochimie, IMPMC, 4 Place Jussieu, 75005 Paris, France

<sup>f</sup> Institute of Geology, Chinese Academy of Geological Sciences, Beijing 100037, China

## Abstract

Abiotic methane has been increasingly detected at the surface of Earth and other terrestrial planets, exerting a strong effect on the study of chemolithoautotrophic life and thus astrobiology. In contrast, abiotic methane generation in subduction zones, which is intimately linked to questions such as the mechanisms of deep carbon mobility, has received scarce attention. Experiments elucidated the significant production of abiotic methane through reduction of carbonate minerals under subduction zone conditions, whereas detailed geological conditions and processes for the reduction in natural rocks are hitherto poorly understood. Here, we report carbonate reduction and genesis of abiotic methane in dolomitized serpentinites (referred to as ophidolomites) from a fossil subduction zone (SW Tianshan, China). Detailed petrological, Raman spectroscopic, strontium and carbon isotopic, and thermodynamic results provide evidence for dolomite reduction into the phase assemblage of calcite + brucite + methane, likely associated with retrograde serpentinitization starting at 7–9 kbar and 410–430 °C in the subduction zone. Microthermometric data for dolomite-hosted fluid inclusions are consistent with petrographic observations, indicative of fluid entrapment postdating the onset of dolomite reduction during exhumation. Model calculations suggest that water-rich fluids characterized by relatively high hydrogen fugacities can create favorable conditions for the reduction process, which, however, do not exclude the possibility of carbonate methanation by hydrogen-rich fluids as reported in previous studies. The widespread occurrence of methane in these rocks gives credence to the intricate redox transformations of subducted carbon, implying that the elevated hydrogen fugacities may facilitate abiotic synthesis of methane through dolomite reduction at convergent plate boundaries. Our work shows that alteration of dolomite-bearing lithologies represents a potential source for abiotic methane in subduction zones, which may have implications for the transfer of subducted carbon.

**Keywords:** Abiotic methane; Dolomite reduction; Ophicarbonate; Hydrogen fugacity; Subduction zone; Chinese southwestern Tianshan

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: lfzhang@pku.edu.cn (L. Zhang).

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Redox transformations in subduction zones regulate the valence of carbon (C), and thus control the long term fate of subducted C (e.g., Hayes and Waldbauer, 2006; Evans, 2012; Galvez and Pubellier, 2019; Tumiati and Malaspina, 2019; Sheik et al., 2020). Carbonation of subduction zone rocks at forearc to subarc depths by interactions with slab derived carbon dioxide ( $\text{CO}_2$ ) bearing fluids gives insights into C sequestration under oxidized conditions (Tumiati et al., 2013; Piccoli et al., 2016, 2018; Scambelluri et al., 2016; Jaeckel et al., 2018; Sieber et al., 2018, 2020; Peng et al., 2020; Hu et al., 2021). On the other hand, reduction of carbonate minerals at convergent plate boundaries generates graphite and/or hydrocarbons such as methane ( $\text{CH}_4$ ), modulating the distribution of subducted C between solid and fluid inventories (Malvoisin et al., 2012; Galvez et al., 2013a, b; Vitale Brovarone et al., 2017; Tao et al., 2018a; Giuntoli et al., 2020). Graphite formation through carbonate reduction during shallow subduction offers a potential mechanism to retain C in subducted slabs, which may facilitate C transport into the deep Earth (Malvoisin et al., 2012; Galvez et al., 2013a, b). In contrast, the release of  $\text{CH}_4$  from subducted ophiolites (Western Alps, Italy; Vitale Brovarone et al., 2017; Giuntoli et al., 2020) and carbonated eclogites (SW Tianshan, China; Tao et al., 2018a), attributed to hydrogen ( $\text{H}_2$ ) induced reduction of calcite (referred to as carbonate methanation; Etiope and Sherwood Lollar, 2013 and references therein) and aqueous reduction of ferroan dolomite, respectively, provides evidences for mobile deep C reservoirs. Moreover, olivine hosted secondary  $\text{CH}_4$  bearing fluid inclusions were observed in partially serpentinized rocks within and above subducted slabs, interpreted as being due to the reduction of C bearing species in metamorphic fluids through subduction zone serpentinization (Sachan et al., 2007; Vitale Brovarone et al., 2020; Boutier et al., 2021). Therefore, investigating mechanisms for abiotic  $\text{CH}_4$  generation in subduction zones is helpful to our comprehension of the transfer of slab C.

Abiotic  $\text{CH}_4$  has been increasingly identified during the past decades, particularly at shallow geodynamic settings (such as in mid ocean ridge hydrothermal systems; e.g., Kelley et al., 2001, 2005), revealing its more extensive distribution than conventionally assumed (Etiope and Schoell, 2014; Etiope and Sherwood Lollar, 2013). In submarine environments, the hydration of exposed mantle rocks (referred to as serpentinization) commonly accompanies  $\text{H}_2$  discharge, which may favor the synthesis of abiotic  $\text{CH}_4$  with or without other short chain hydrocarbons, such as ethane ( $\text{C}_2\text{H}_6$ ), propane ( $\text{C}_3\text{H}_8$ ), and butane ( $\text{C}_4\text{H}_{10}$ ) via Fischer Tropsch type reduction of aqueous  $\text{CO}_2$  in seawater (e.g., Charlou et al., 2002, 2010; Proskurowski et al., 2008). Conversely, several metastable intermediate species (e.g., formates), instead of light hydrocarbons, have been considered to be predominantly generated by abiotic reduction of dissolved inorganic C during seawater circulation through ultramafic rocks in the subsurface (McCollom and Seewald, 2001; McDermott et al., 2015). Geological production of these organic compounds plays a potential role in the

origin of chemolithoautotrophic life on Earth and other terrestrial planets (e.g., McCollom and Seewald, 2013; McDermott et al., 2015; Ménez, 2020; Truche et al., 2020). Furthermore,  $\text{H}_2$  induced reduction of C bearing species by serpentinization within olivine hosted fluid inclusions in submarine and subaerial vent systems likely represents a widespread reservoir of abiotic  $\text{CH}_4$  over geological time scales (Klein et al., 2019; Grozeva et al., 2020). In contrast, abiotic formation of  $\text{CH}_4$  in subduction zones, which is closely related to the mechanisms of deep C mobility, has received scarce attention. Experiments demonstrated that abiotic  $\text{CH}_4$  can be generated under subduction zone conditions through reduction of subducted C (e.g., carbonate minerals, organic matter, and dissolved aqueous organic species; Sharma et al., 2009; Lazar et al., 2014; Huang et al., 2017; Li, 2017; Mukhina et al., 2017; Tao et al., 2018a). However, the manifestations of abiotic  $\text{CH}_4$  in natural subduction zone rocks, as well as the geological conditions and reaction pathways for its production, have been paid insufficient attention, even though  $\text{CH}_4$  bearing fluid inclusions are not particularly rare in metamorphic lithologies within and above subducted slabs (Shi et al., 2005; Sachan et al., 2007; Song et al., 2009; Arai et al., 2012; Vitale Brovarone et al., 2017, 2020; Tao et al., 2018a; Giuntoli et al., 2020; Boutier et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021).

In this contribution, we report dolomite reduction and genesis of abiotic  $\text{CH}_4$  in ophiolomites belonging to the ultramafic unit of Changawuzi in the Chinese southwestern Tianshan high pressure ultrahigh pressure (HP UHP) metamorphic belt. We show and discuss petrology, Raman spectroscopy, microthermometry, strontium (Sr) and C isotope geochemistry, and thermodynamic modelling to improve understanding of abiotic  $\text{CH}_4$  generation in subduction zones.

## 2. GEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND AND SAMPLES

The Chinese southwestern Tianshan HP UHP metamorphic belt is located in the northwest of China and formed due to northward subduction of the Tarim Plate underneath the Yili Central Tianshan Plate (Fig. 1A; Zhang et al., 2013). The spatial distribution of HP UHP rocks in this metamorphic belt allows the subdivision of a southern HP sub belt and a northern, coesite bearing, UHP sub belt (Fig. 1B; Lü and Zhang, 2012; Lü et al., 2012a, b; Zhang et al., 2013). The current work focuses on the Chinese southwestern Tianshan UHP metamorphic belt, which mainly experienced (1) UHP metamorphism (~30 kbar and ~500 °C) at ca. 320 Ma, (2) peak temperature metamorphism at HP conditions during exhumation (i.e., thermal relaxation; ~22 kbar and ~600 °C) at ca. 310–315 Ma, and (3) multistage exhumation to relatively shallow depths (from eclogite facies to greenschist facies) (Tan et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2019 and references therein).

The main rock types in the Chinese southwestern Tianshan HP UHP metamorphic belt are garnet phengite schists, marbles, blueschists, eclogites, and serpentinites with associated rodingites (e.g., Shen et al., 2015). Serpentinites are mostly exposed at Changawuzi in an area of about 6–10 km<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 1C), recording two stages of serpen-

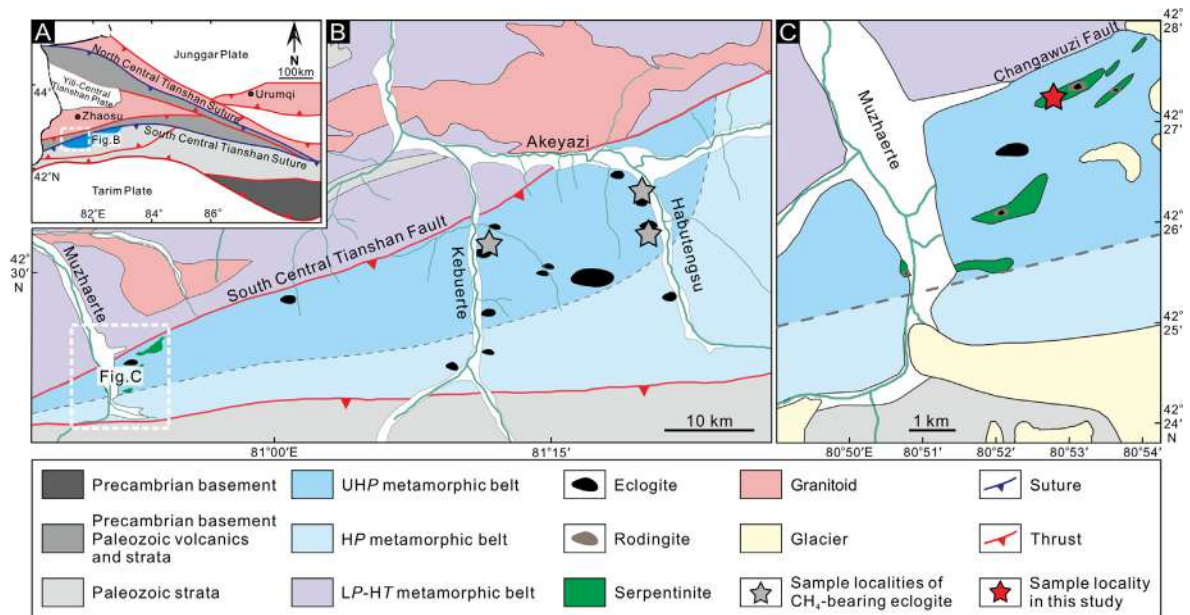


Fig. 1. Geological background of the Chinese southwestern Tianshan. (A) Simplified tectonic framework of the western part of the Chinese Tianshan (modified from Tian and Wei, 2013). (B) Schematic geological map of the Chinese southwestern Tianshan HP/UHP metamorphic belt (modified from Zhang et al., 2013). Grey stars show sample localities of  $\text{CH}_4$  bearing carbonated eclogites at Kebuerte and Habutengsu in the metamorphic belt (Tao et al., 2018a). (C) Detailed geological map of Changawuzi showing the sample locality of  $\text{CH}_4$  bearing ophiolomites in this study (modified from Shen et al., 2015).

tinization: (1) a seawater related hydration process of oceanic mantle rocks overprinted by the UHP metamorphism ( $37 \pm 7$  kbar and  $520 \pm 10$  °C) during subduction (Shen et al., 2015) and (2) a later rehydration process of metamorphic and/or primary olivine and pyroxene during exhumation (i.e., retrograde serpentinization) starting at 7–9 kbar and 410–430 °C and propagating to lower  $P$ – $T$  conditions (Li et al., 2007, 2010). Carbonated serpentinites, including HP ophiolomites and low pressure (LP) ophiomagnesites and listvenites, occur in association with the serpentinites and record two carbonation processes that happened at different stages of exhumation from a depth of ~70 km to relatively shallow crustal levels (Peng et al., 2020).

The herein studied  $\text{CH}_4$  bearing ophiolomites are intimately associated with (carbonated) serpentinites in the Changawuzi ultramafic blocks (Fig. 1C), which are surrounded by mica schists (for detailed field occurrence, see Peng et al., 2020). These ophiolomites are characterized by discontinuous and folded dolomite veins hosted in serpentinites, in which dolomite is encircled by yellowish calcite and brucite (Fig. 2A and B). Other than the studied samples at Changawuzi,  $\text{CH}_4$  bearing fluid inclusions were also reported in carbonated eclogites in adjacent localities of Kebuerte and Habutengsu (Fig. 1B; Tao et al., 2018a), indicating a relatively widespread distribution of  $\text{CH}_4$  in the Chinese southwestern Tianshan HP/UHP metamorphic belt.

### 3. METHODS

#### 3.1. Scanning electron microscopic analyses

Back scattered electron (BSE) images and compositional X ray maps were obtained using an FEI Quanta 650 FEG

scanning electron microscope (SEM) equipped with an Oxford INCA X MAX50 250+ energy dispersive X ray spectrometer at the School of Earth and Space Sciences (SESS), Peking University. The running conditions were set to an acceleration voltage of 10 kV, a beam current of 5 nA, and a working distance of ~10 mm. Compositional X ray maps were recorded with an integration time of ~360 min.

#### 3.2. Electron microprobe analyses

Mineral compositions were analyzed using a JEOL 8230 electron microprobe analyzer at SESS, Peking University. The SPI 53 mineral standards (U.S.) were adopted for the quantitative analyses (following Li et al., 2018): jadeite for sodium (Na), aluminium (Al), and silicon (Si); rutile for titanium (Ti); chromium oxide for chromium (Cr); hematite for iron (Fe); rhodonite for manganese (Mn); diopside for magnesium (Mg) and calcium (Ca); sanidine for potassium (K); and nickel silicide for nickel (Ni). The acceleration voltage and beam current were 15 kV and 10 nA, respectively. The beam diameter was 2  $\mu\text{m}$  for all minerals except for calcite (5–10  $\mu\text{m}$ ). The PRZ correction was performed at the final calibration stage.

#### 3.3. Raman spectroscopic and microthermometric analyses

Raman spectra were acquired using a Renishaw InVia Reflex microspectrometer at SESS, Peking University. Measurements were conducted on polished thin sections (30  $\mu\text{m}$  thick for mineral analyses and 100  $\mu\text{m}$  thick for fluid inclusion analyses) without any glue or resin. The laser (532 nm) was focused on the sample by a DMLM Leica microscope with a 100 fold objective (numerical aperture (N.A.) = 0.85).



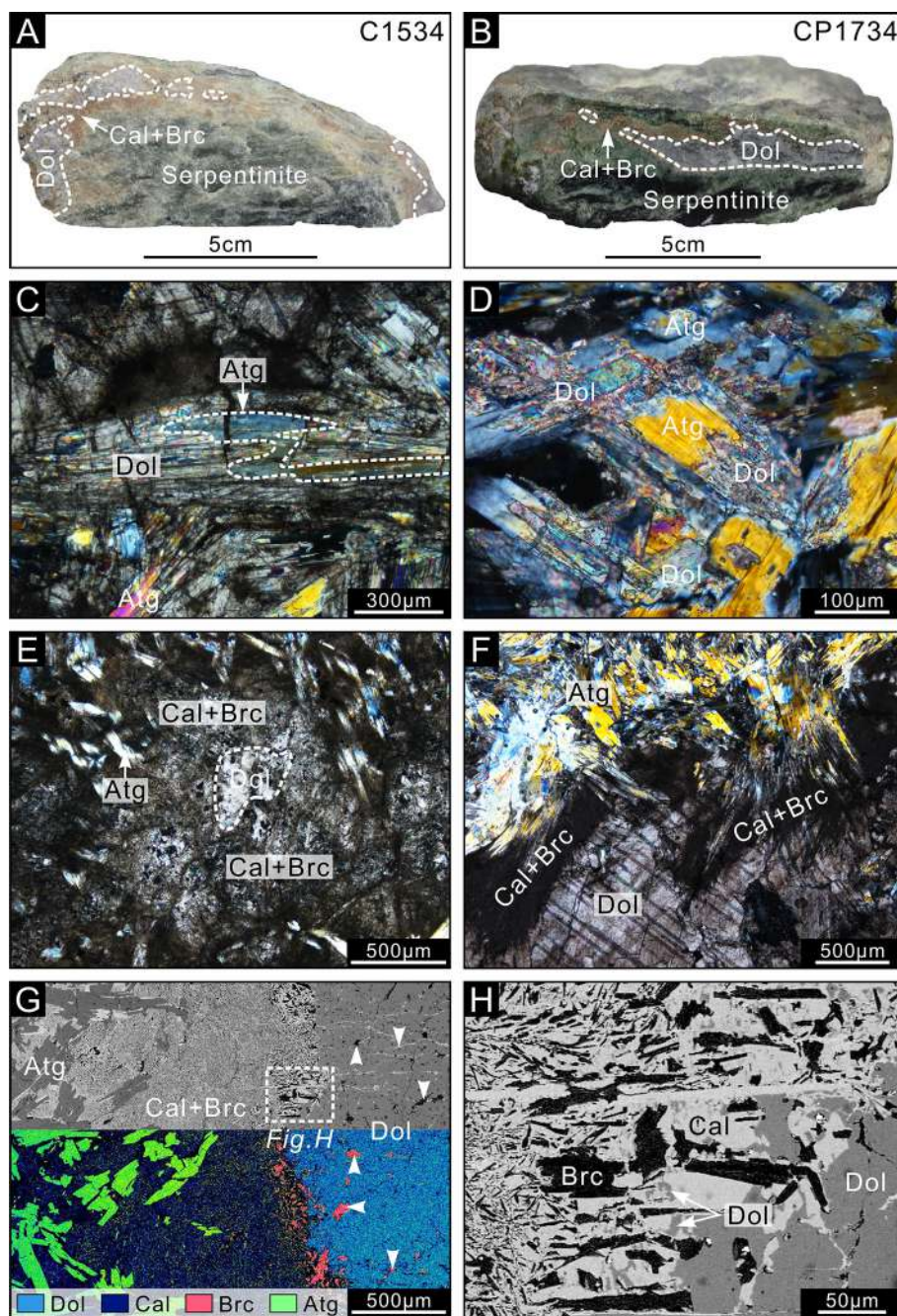


Fig. 2. Petrological characteristics of the studied ophidolomites. (A and B) Discontinuous and folded dolomite veins (with the rim encircled by yellowish calcite and brucite) filling the host serpentinites (hand specimen scale). (C and D) Dolomite growth at the expense of antigorite, with unreacted antigorite visible (cross polarized light). In some cases, antigorite shows abnormal interference colors due to the thick sections. (E and F) Decomposition of dolomite into cloudy calcite and brucite (cross polarized light). (G) Back scattered electron image (the upper part) and compositional X ray map (the lower part) of dolomite decomposition into calcite-brucite intergrowths. The newly grown calcite and brucite extend into the inner parts of dolomite along microcracks. (H) The enlargement of the box in (G) showing intergrowths of acicular calcite and brucite and patches of relict dolomite in calcite. Mineral abbreviations in this study follow Whitney and Evans (2010).

Different laser powers were set from an initial 50 mW source for opaque minerals (10%), silicates (50%–100%), carbonates (50%–100%), and fluid inclusions (100%). The spectrometer was calibrated with a synthetic Si wafer.

Fluid inclusion microthermometric studies were carried out using a Linkam THMSG 600 heating freezing stage mounted onto an Olympus microscope at Key Laboratory

of Mineral Resources, Institute of Geology and Geo-physics, Chinese Academy of Sciences (IGGCAS). The two phase (vapor and liquid) fluid inclusions with relatively large sizes were selected to determine the final ice melting temperatures and homogenization temperatures. The heating rates of 0.1–0.2 °C/min were adopted for the determination when phase transitions were approached. The

estimated errors in the measurements are  $\pm 0.1$  °C for the melting temperatures and  $\pm 2$  °C for the homogenization temperatures. Salinities, pressures at homogenization, and isochore slopes for the fluid inclusions were calculated using the procedures described by Steele MacInnis et al. (2012).

### 3.4. *In situ* Sr isotopic analyses

*In situ* Sr isotopic measurements of dolomite and calcite were performed by Nu Plasma II MC ICP MS coupled with a 193 nm ArF excimer laser ablation system (GeoLas HD) at SESS, Peking University (see Lin et al., 2021 for detailed description of the instrument and laser ablation system). Instrumental operating conditions and data acquisition protocols are similar to those described in Ramos et al. (2004) and Yang et al. (2009). The laser ablation was performed using a spot size of  $\sim 90$   $\mu\text{m}$ , a repetition rate of  $\sim 5$  Hz, and an energy density of  $\sim 10$  J/cm<sup>2</sup>. The helium (He) gas (with a flow rate of  $\sim 0.5$  L/min), carrying ablated sample aerosols and passing through the “wire” signal smoothing device (Hu et al., 2012), was merged with argon (Ar) gas before entering the plasma. Prior to each ablation, a 30 s measurement of gas blank was employed to correct for the isobaric interference of krypton (Kr). Correction of rubidium (Rb) was conducted using the natural ratio of  $^{85}\text{Rb}/^{87}\text{Rb} = 2.5926$  with an exponential law, assuming that the mass bias of Rb is identical to that of Sr (e.g., Woodhead et al., 2005). Actually, the studied samples have extremely low  $^{87}\text{Rb}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  values, indicative of the negligible interference of Rb. Previous studies have demonstrated that the interference of Ca argides and dimers in carbonate minerals is minor and thus has insignificant influence on the accuracy of  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  ratios (e.g., Ramos et al., 2004; Vroon et al., 2008; Yang et al., 2009). Double charged ions in the samples have extremely low ion signals, suggesting that they play a very limited role in interfering  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  ratios. The instrumental mass bias was corrected using the  $^{86}\text{Sr}/^{88}\text{Sr}$  ratio of 0.1194 with an exponential law. A modern Porites coral (Hainan Island, China) was used as the internal standard to evaluate the accuracy of the analyses, which yielded  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  ratios of  $0.709170 \pm 0.000016$  ( $2\sigma$ ,  $n = 33$ ), in agreement with those obtained by solution based MC ICP MS analyses ( $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr} = 0.709176 \pm 0.000016$ ; Yang et al., 2009). In this study, Sr isotope data with generally comparable  $^{88}\text{Sr}$  ion signals higher than  $\sim 1$  V were selected for dolomite and calcite to minimize the potential influence of composition induced matrix effects and brucite interference on calcite due to their intergrown textures (Section 4.1). In general, the analyzed  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  ratios of dolomite are close to those obtained by solution based TIMS analyses for dolomite in surrounding HP ophi-dolomites (Section 4.3; Peng et al., 2020).

### 3.5. C and O isotopic analyses

Microdrilling was conducted on dolomite and calcite using a standard dentist drill (0.2 mm, 0.5 mm, and 1.0 mm) under the stereomicroscope (SMZ 1500) at State Key Laboratory of Lithospheric Evolution (SKLLE), IGGCAS. Vertical holes were drilled down to thick sections

(ca. 0.3–0.5 mm) by increments and at least 2 mg of powder of each selected grain was collected. C and O isotope compositions of dolomite, calcite, and bulk carbonate were determined using a Thermo Fisher MAT 253 isotope ratio mass spectrometer coupled with a GasBench II peripheral device at SKLLE, IGGCAS, through production of CO<sub>2</sub> after reaction with phosphoric acid. The reaction vial was automatically flushed with high purity (99.999%) He gas for 10 min at a flow rate of  $\sim 0.1$  L/min to remove atmospheric contaminants including traces of CO<sub>2</sub> and water (H<sub>2</sub>O) vapor. The acid digestion was performed in the Gas Bench II using continuous flow mode at a temperature of 70 °C, through which the generated CO<sub>2</sub> was transferred by the He carrier gas into the mass spectrometer. In the analyses,  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  values of bulk carbonate were not reported because the mixture of dolomite and calcite prevents the accurate back calculation by using O isotope fractionation factors between the carbonate and phosphoric acid. Standard deviations of  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  and  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  values were calculated from replicate analyses of an internal laboratory calcite standard, which are better than 0.15‰ and 0.20‰, respectively. The measured  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  and  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  values are reported relative to the Vienna Pee Dee Belemnite (V-PDB) and Vienna Standard Mean Ocean Water (V-SMOW), respectively.

### 3.6. Thermodynamic modelling

To evaluate the role of oxygen fugacity ( $f_{\text{O}_2}$ ; log bar unit) and hydrogen fugacity ( $f_{\text{H}_2}$ ; log bar unit) in the reduction process of dolomite (nearly pure; Section 4.1), we calculated the  $f_{\text{O}_2}/f_{\text{H}_2}$  equilibrium diagram in the Ca-Mg-C-O-H system (with fixed Ca:Mg:C of 1:1:2 in molar ratio) at 8 kbar and 420 °C using Perple X software (version 6.7.4; Connolly, 2005) and the internally consistent thermodynamic database of Holland and Powell (1998) revised in 2004 (hp04ver.dat). The  $P$ - $T$  conditions were chosen based on the onset of retrograde serpentinization in the Tianshan (Li et al., 2007, 2010). Thermodynamic parameters of phases belonging to the system are provided in Supplementary Table S1, most of which are available from literatures (Robie and Hemingway, 1995; Holland and Powell, 1998; Fukui et al., 2003) while the thermal expansion coefficient of portlandite was calculated based on the cell volume changes during heating from Xu et al. (2007). Redox buffers of magnetite-hematite (MH), fayalite-magnetite-quartz (FMQ), and iron-magnetite (IM) were calculated for reference at 8 kbar and 420 °C. The thermodynamic model of H<sub>2</sub>O was performed using the Fluids routine (H-O-MRK hybrid EoS) of the Perple X software, which will be discussed in Section 4.4.

To investigate the equilibrated phase assemblages of reduced ophi-dolomites during the retrograde serpentinization, we computed  $P$ - $T$  pseudosections for a representative sample C1534 in the Ca-Fe-Mg-Si-C-O-H system. The applied solid solution models and their sources are provided in Supplementary Table S2. The bulk rock composition used for the pseudosections was measured by X-ray fluorescence (XRF) spectrometry at the National Research Center for Geoanalysis, Chinese Academy of Geological Science. The contents of major oxides and loss on ignition

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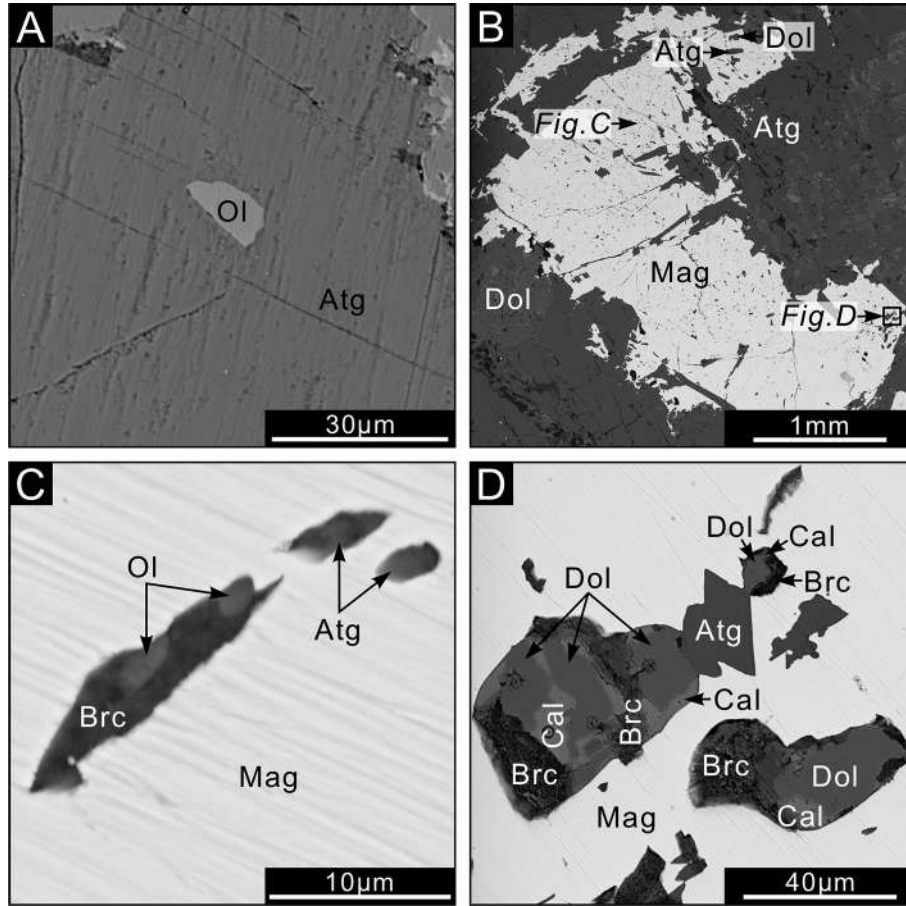


Fig. 3. Occurrence of olivine and microstructures of magnetite hosted mineral inclusions in the studied ophidolomites. (A) Olivine relicts in the antigorite matrix. (B) Coarse magnetite grains enclosing abundant minerals in the matrix of antigorite and dolomite. (C) Olivine in association with antigorite and brucite in magnetite. (D) Calcite and brucite growth at the expense of dolomite in magnetite, with dolomite relicts visible.

#### 4.3. Isotope geochemistry

Representative Sr isotope compositions of dolomite and calcite in the studied ophidolomites are listed in Table 4. Dolomite has  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  ratios of 0.70476–0.70757 (average = 0.70566,  $n = 50$ ), lower than those of Ordovician Carboniferous (lifetime of the south Tianshan paleo ocean; Xia et al., 2014) seawater ( $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr} = \text{ca. } 0.7076\text{--}0.7092$ ; Veizer et al., 1999) but similar to those of associated HP ophi dolomites and their dolomite separates ( $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr} = \text{ca. } 0.7064\text{--}0.7075$ ; Peng et al., 2020) (Fig. 6A). In contrast, calcite shows relatively higher  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  ratios of 0.70867–0.70986 (average = 0.70938,  $n = 46$ ), which are comparable to those of the seawater as well as serpentinites in the Tian shan (Peng et al., 2020) (Fig. 6A).

Detailed C and O isotope values of dolomite, calcite, and bulk carbonate in the studied ophidolomites are shown in Table 5. Dolomite and calcite have  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  values of +9.2‰ to +11.7‰ and +7.0‰ to +9.0‰, respectively, similar to those of bulk carbonate ( $\delta^{13}\text{C} = +8.6‰$  to +10.3‰) (Fig. 6B). These C isotope values are significantly higher than  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  of marine carbonates (–3‰ to +3‰; Hoefs, 2009) and carbonate bearing but  $\text{CH}_4$  absent lithologies

from the Tianshan (mostly  $\leq 0‰$ ; van der Straaten et al., 2012; Collins et al., 2015; Peng et al., 2018, 2020; Zhu et al., 2018) (Fig. 6B). Moreover, dolomite and calcite display  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  values of +8.1‰ to +9.6‰ and +8.4‰ to +12.6‰, respectively (Fig. 6B).

#### 4.4. Thermodynamic results

In the  $f\text{O}_2/f\text{H}_2$  equilibrium diagram of Fig. 7A, the stability field of dolomite, shrinking with the elevated  $\log f\text{H}_2$  values, extends down to  $\log f\text{O}_2 = 29.1$  ( $\Delta\text{FMQ } 2.5$ , where  $\Delta\text{FMQ}$  refers to the deviation of  $\log f\text{O}_2$  from the FMQ buffer) at  $\log f\text{H}_2 < 1.4$ . The boundary between dolomite and the phase assemblage of calcite + brucite +  $\text{CH}_4$  is constrained at  $\log f\text{O}_2 = 27.3$  to 20.6 ( $\Delta\text{FMQ } 0.7$  to +6.0) and  $\log f\text{H}_2 = 0.3$  to 1.4. In the H–O system, pure  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  ( $y_{\text{H}_2\text{O}} = 1$ , where  $y_{\text{H}_2\text{O}}$  is the molar fraction of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  in fluids) is characterized by an ideal  $X_{\text{O}} (= \text{O}/(\text{O} + \text{H})_{\text{molar}})$  of 1/3. In the vicinity of this value, only negligible amounts of  $\text{O}_2$  or  $\text{H}_2$  is encompassed due to the  $f\text{O}_2$  and  $f\text{H}_2$  dependent  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  dissociation, representing slightly oxidized or reduced conditions, respectively (e.g., Connolly, 1995). In this study, we superposed the thermodynamically calcu-

Table 2  
Representative mineral compositions of the studied ophidolomites.

Sample	C1534						CP1734			
Mineral	Atg	Dol	Cal	Brc	Mag	Ol	Atg	Dol	Cal	Brc
SiO <sub>2</sub>	44.31	0.00	0.00	0.12	0.00	41.76	44.44	0.00	0.00	0.01
TiO <sub>2</sub>	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.10	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.04	0.04
Al <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>	0.29	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.02	0.51	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cr <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>	0.03	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.03	0.00	0.00	0.00
Fe <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
FeO	2.43	0.64	0.00	2.54	91.25	6.59	2.21	0.68	0.04	2.09
MnO	0.00	0.49	0.16	0.42	0.35	0.63	0.03	0.24	0.12	0.57
MgO	40.03	21.77	0.09	79.94	0.68	51.40	40.33	21.91	0.19	75.50
CaO	0.02	32.23	59.48	0.52	0.02	0.04	0.01	32.39	60.09	0.24
Na <sub>2</sub> O	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.03
K <sub>2</sub> O	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.01
Total	87.13	55.13	59.73	83.56	92.42	100.49	87.58	55.23	60.48	78.49
Si	34.058	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000	1.003	33.928	0.000	0.000	0.000
Ti	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.003	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000
Al	0.263	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.459	0.000	0.000	0.000
Cr	0.018	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.018	0.000	0.000	0.000
Fe <sup>3+</sup>	n.c.	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.995	0.000	n.c.	0.000	0.000	0.000
Fe <sup>2+</sup>	1.562	0.016	0.000	0.017	0.950	0.132	1.411	0.017	0.001	0.015
Mn	0.000	0.012	0.004	0.003	0.011	0.013	0.019	0.006	0.003	0.004
Mg	45.869	0.955	0.004	0.974	0.039	1.840	45.903	0.958	0.009	0.977
Ca	0.016	1.017	1.992	0.005	0.001	0.001	0.008	1.019	1.986	0.002
Na	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.015	0.000	0.000	0.001
K	0.020	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.001	0.010	0.000	0.000	0.000
Cation	82	2	2	1	3	3	82	2	2	1
O	116	0	0	2	4	4	116	0	0	2
X <sub>Mg</sub>	0.967	0.984		0.982		0.933	0.970	0.983		0.985

X<sub>Mg</sub> = Mg/(Mg + Fe); n.d. = not determined; n.c. = not calculated.

lated model of slightly reduced H<sub>2</sub>O at  $X_O$  very close to 1/3 on the  $fO_2/fH_2$  diagram (e.g.,  $0.330 \leq X_O < 0.333...$  for the pink solid line in Fig. 7A), based on the inferred serpentinization derived fluids responsible for dolomite reduction (Section 5.2) and the widely distributed aqueous fluid inclusions but the sporadically detected H<sub>2</sub> in the studied rocks (Figs. 4 and 5; Section 4.2). Although the reactive reduced fluids may potentially contain small amounts of other components (see below), they do not significantly affect our model calculations performed in the H-O system. Firstly, the fluids are likely CO<sub>2</sub> poor, because fluid inclusions do not contain detectable CO<sub>2</sub> in the studied ophidolomites and carbonate minerals are not widely distributed in surrounding rodingites formed by interactions with fluids related to the retrograde serpentinization (Li et al., 2007, 2010; Shen et al., 2012, 2016). Alternatively, preexisting C bearing species (e.g., CO<sub>2</sub>) in the fluids may have been reduced into CH<sub>4</sub> during the serpentinization, as recorded in partially serpentinized rocks in comparable metamorphic settings (Sachan et al., 2007; Vitale Brovarone et al., 2020; Boutier et al., 2021). In this scenario, we set C concentrations of 0.001–0.05 molal in the fluids equilibrated with carbonate undersaturated to carbonate saturated serpentinites at the studied  $P$ – $T$  conditions (Vitale Brovarone et al., 2020), and the calculated mole fractions of H<sub>2</sub>O are significantly higher than those of other molecular species (e.g., CH<sub>4</sub>, CO<sub>2</sub>, and H<sub>2</sub>) at  $X_O$  close to 1/3 (Supplementary Fig. S3). Secondly, even though halo-

gens (e.g., chlorine, Cl) commonly occur in serpentinizing fluids that may decrease the activity of H<sub>2</sub>O (e.g., Lamadrid et al., 2017, 2021), CH<sub>4</sub> bearing aqueous fluid inclusions in the studied rocks contain relatively low salinities of 2.2–5.9 wt% NaCl (Table 3). These salinities correspond to H<sub>2</sub>O mole fractions of ca. 0.981–0.993 in the fluids, and thus have a negligible effect on the activity of H<sub>2</sub>O (e.g., Aranovich and Newton, 1996). Thirdly, thermodynamic calculations predicted very low electrolyte concentrations of ca. 0.004–0.03 molal (mainly Si, Mg, and Ca) in the fluids equilibrated with the Tianshan serpentinites during retrogression (Supplementary Fig. S4), indicating that these electrolytic solutes cannot profoundly affect the homogeneous equilibria among the dominant molecular species and thus the application of molecular fluid models (Connolly and Galvez, 2018). It is therefore likely that the possible existence of dissolved species (e.g., CO<sub>2</sub>, Cl, and other electrolytes) in the reactive reduced fluids have only minor effects on the calculations in our model. The  $fO_2/fH_2$  equilibrium diagram illustrates that an infiltration of H<sub>2</sub>O rich fluids characterized by relatively high  $fH_2$  values can contribute to abiogenic CH<sub>4</sub> formation through dolomite reduction at the studied  $P$ – $T$  conditions (Fig. 7A). For instance, at  $X_O = 0.3333323$  (corresponding to  $y_{H_2O} = 0.999995$  and  $y_{H_2} = 0.000005$ ; star in Fig. 7A), the H<sub>2</sub>O rich fluids buffered at  $\log fO_2 = 26.0$  ( $\Delta FMQ + 0.6$ ) show a  $\log fH_2$  value of 0.8 and equilibrate with the phase assemblage of calcite + brucite + CH<sub>4</sub>.

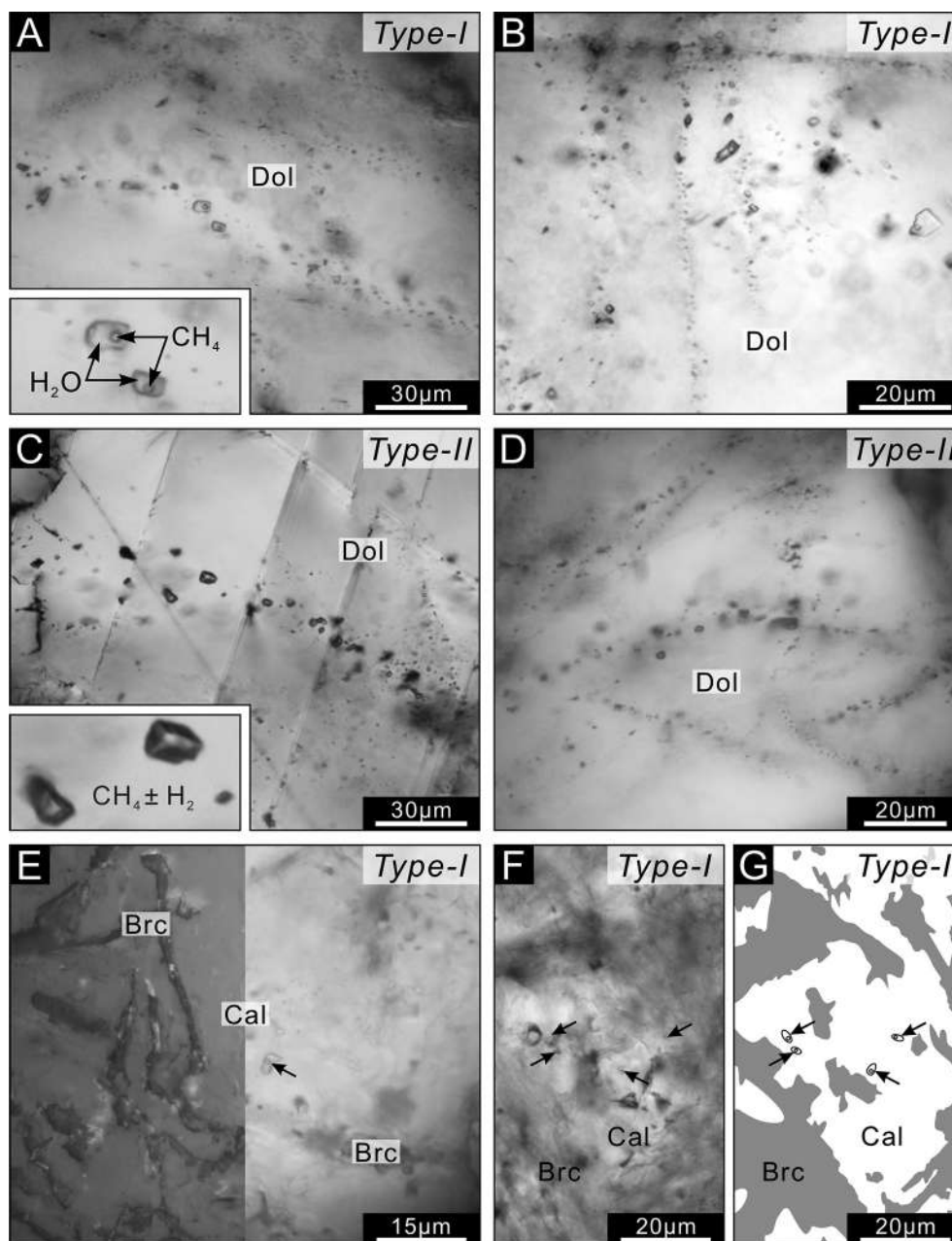


Fig. 4. Petrographic characteristics of fluid inclusions in the studied ophidolomites. (A and B) Type I two phase (vapor and liquid) fluid inclusions in dolomite. (C and D) Type II single phase fluid inclusions in dolomite. (E–G) Type I two phase (vapor and liquid) fluid inclusions in calcite intergrown with brucite.

The calculated  $P$ – $T$  pseudosection for the reduced ophidolomite (Sample C1534) at  $\log f\text{O}_2 = 26.0$  and  $\log f\text{H}_2 = 0.8$  (star in Fig. 7A) suggests that the observed phase assemblage of antigorite + brucite + calcite + magnetite +  $\text{CH}_4$  can be predicted at 7.9 kbar and 410–430 °C (Fig. 7B). Similar results computed at  $\log f\text{O}_2 = 25.8$  and  $\log f\text{H}_2 = 0.7$  (Supplementary Fig. S5A) indicate that variable  $f\text{O}_2$  and  $f\text{H}_2$  of the fluids in equilibrium with calcite + brucite +  $\text{CH}_4$  have no significant effects on the  $P$ – $T$  pseudosection. However, since the constrained  $\log f\text{O}_2$  and  $\log$

$f\text{H}_2$  values for these calculations depend on and vary with  $P$ – $T$  conditions, uncertainties may occur in the phase stabilities predicted at  $P$ – $T$  conditions considerably higher or lower than 7.9 kbar and 410–430 °C in Fig. 7B and Supplementary Fig. S5A. Further, the  $P$ – $T$  pseudosection was calculated for the sample without  $f\text{O}_2$  and  $f\text{H}_2$  constraints, demonstrating that the unreduced mineral assemblage of antigorite + brucite + dolomite + calcite + magnetite can remain stable at the studied  $P$ – $T$  conditions (Supplementary Fig. S5B).

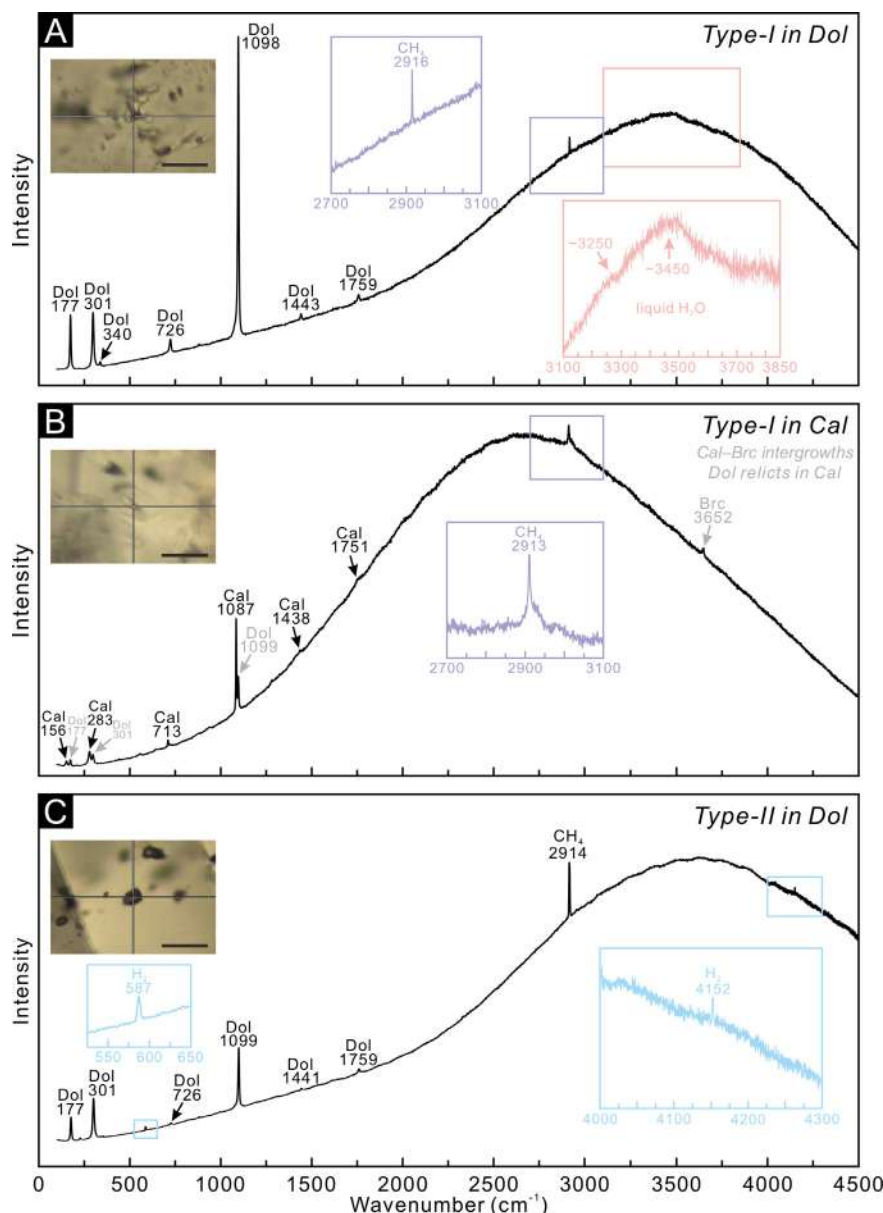


Fig. 5. Raman spectra of fluid inclusions in the studied ophidolomites. (A and B) Type I  $\text{CH}_4$  bearing aqueous fluid inclusions in dolomite (A) and calcite intergrown with brucite (B). The strong fluorescence of the host carbonates sometimes prevents conclusive Raman investigation of the liquid phase of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$ . (C) Type II  $\text{CH}_4 \pm \text{H}_2$  bearing fluid inclusions in dolomite. Weaker but crucial peaks are enlarged. Scale bars of the close up images are 10  $\mu\text{m}$ .

## 5. DISCUSSION

Ophicarbonates play a potential role in contributing to the subduction influx of C (Dasgupta and Hirschmann, 2010; Alt et al., 2012, 2013) and recording the mechanisms of C mobility and percolation at convergent plate boundaries (Scambelluri et al., 2016; Vitale Brovarone et al., 2017; Piccoli et al., 2018; Cannà et al., 2020; Peng et al., 2020). Marine originated ophicarbonates (mainly opicalcites) are typically characterized by Ca carbonate matrix cementing serpentinite clasts or Ca carbonate veins filling fractured serpentinites (Bonatti et al., 1974; Früh Green et al., 2003; Schwarzenbach et al., 2013; Clerc et al., 2014;

Lafay et al., 2017). Subseafloor mixing zones between these pristine opicalcites and serpentinites may have served as incubators for biological communities in the hydrated oceanic mantle, offering insights into deep chemolithoautotrophic life (Klein et al., 2015). Moreover, HP carbonation of subduction zone serpentinites through interactions with slab released  $\text{CO}_2$  bearing fluids has been increasingly recognized, providing implications for the distribution of subducted C (Scambelluri et al., 2016; Piccoli et al., 2018; Peng et al., 2020). The Changawuzi HP ophidolomites (15–25 kbar and 550–600 °C) have been studied in detail by Peng et al. (2020), which are characterized by carbonate growth at the expense of silicates in the host

Table 3

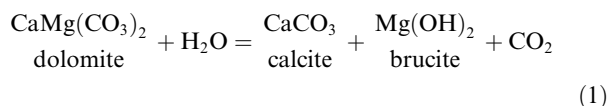
Microthermometric data of representative dolomite hosted Type I FIAs in the studied ophidolomites.

Sample	FIA	Number of analyses	Average $T_m$ (°C)	Average $T_h$ (°C)	Average salinity (wt% NaCl)	Average $P_h$ (bar)	Average $dP/dT$ (bar/°C)
C1534	1	6	3.6	204.8	5.9	16	15.7
	2	3	3.2	231.0	5.3	27	14.2
	3	4	2.4	227.4	4.0	26	14.3
CP1734	1	5	3.4	178.5	5.6	9	17.0
	2	5	2.5	183.9	4.2	11	16.5
	3	4	1.3	191.4	2.2	13	16.0

serpentinites and record interactions with  $\text{CO}_2$  bearing fluids emanating from metamafic and/or metasedimentary rocks in the subduction zone. Similarly, the replacement of metamorphic antigorite by dolomite (Fig. 2C and D) and their compositional inheritance (e.g.,  $X_{\text{Mg}}$  values; Supplementary Fig. S1) in the studied  $\text{CH}_4$  bearing ophidolomites point to dolomite formation through interactions between  $\text{CO}_2$  bearing fluids and serpentinites during metamorphism. This is reflected by Sr isotope compositions of dolomite in these rocks considerably distinct from those of seawater in the south Tianshan paleo-ocean but generally similar to those of associated HP ophidolomites and their dolomite separates (Fig. 6A), likely inheriting the low  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  values of subducted carbonate bearing lithologies in the Tianshan (Peng et al., 2020). Microstructures, mineral compositions, and Sr isotopic signatures of the studied  $\text{CH}_4$  bearing ophidolomites are comparable to those of HP ophidolomites in the same study area (Peng et al., 2020), indicating that they likely record the consistent HP carbonation of serpentinites in the subduction zone. Even though obtaining precise  $P$   $T$  constraints for dolomite formation in the studied rocks is relatively difficult, it may not considerably affect the following discussion with respect to dolomite reduction and abiotic  $\text{CH}_4$  generation in the subduction zone.

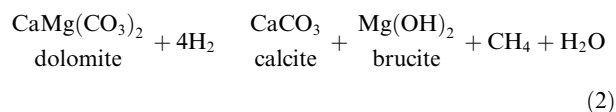
### 5.1. Abiotic $\text{CH}_4$ generation through dolomite reduction

Intergrowths of calcite and brucite in natural rocks (Fig. 2E H) are relatively hard to be preserved because these fine and soluble minerals are easily removed by an abundance of circulating fluids (Berg, 1986). The retrograde decomposition of dolomite into calcite brucite intergrowths was observed in mantle wedge ultramafic rocks and interpreted as Reaction (1), which occurred by infiltration of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  at oxidized conditions (Förster et al., 2017; Consuma et al., 2020):



In this study, by contrast, the pervasive occurrence of  $\text{CH}_4 \pm \text{H}_2\text{O} \pm \text{H}_2$  in dolomite and calcite hosted fluid inclusions (Figs. 4 and 5) likely suggests reduced aqueous fluids responsible for the decomposition of dolomite. Nevertheless, the limited distribution of  $\text{H}_2$  in the fluid inclusions (Section 4.2) is probably indicative of its minor

proportion in the reactive aqueous fluids, or, alternatively, ascribed to several other potential processes (see below). Thermodynamic calculations further demonstrate that an infiltration of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  rich fluids, characterized by a relatively high  $\log f\text{H}_2$  value of 0.8 but containing a low  $\text{H}_2$  molar fraction of 0.000005 (star in Fig. 7A), can result in the transformation of dolomite into the phase assemblage of calcite + brucite +  $\text{CH}_4$ , which is expressed by the  $f\text{H}_2$  dependent Reaction (2):



This  $\text{CH}_4$  generating reaction is endorsed by the notably high  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  values of carbonates in the studied rocks (Fig. 6B). The positive shift in  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  is exactly opposite to the typical C isotopic trend related to decarbonation reactions and/or carbonate organic matter re-equilibrations as also recorded in the Tianshan (Fig. 6B; Collins et al., 2015; Zhu et al., 2018). Similar high  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  values were interpreted as evidence for carbonate reduction forming graphite (Galvez et al., 2013b) or abiotic  $\text{CH}_4$  (Vitale Brovarone et al., 2017) in comparable metamorphic settings. Based on  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  of calcite (Table 5) and the equilibrium fractionation factor between calcite and  $\text{CH}_4$  ( $\ln\alpha(\text{CaCO}_3\text{--CH}_4) = +15.0\text{‰}$  to  $+16.0\text{‰}$  at 410–430 °C; Bottinga, 1969), we calculated C isotope compositions of  $\text{CH}_4$  ranging from 9.0‰ to 6.0‰. These values fit the range of C isotope compositions of abiotic  $\text{CH}_4$  from worldwide occurrences, which display  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  values typically higher than ca. 25‰ (e.g., Ueno et al., 2006; Étiope et al., 2011). Considering that dolomite in the studied ophidolomites is likely related to the HP carbonation of serpentinites (see above), its heavy  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  values relative to those in associated HP ophidolomites (Fig. 6B) are probably attributed to an additional reduction process of dolomite other than Reaction (2). In this process, dolomite may have been decomposed into  $\text{CH}_4$  together with aqueous species such as  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$ , which represents the reduction of dissolved C bearing species (e.g.,  $\text{CO}_3$ ,  $\text{HCO}_3$ , and/or  $\text{CO}_2, \text{aq}$ ) of dolomite (see Frezzotti et al., 2011; Ague and Nicolescu, 2014; and Facq et al., 2014 for carbonate dissolution in subduction zones). In addition to the potential dissolution induced dolomite reduction, other processes resulting in C isotopic enrichment of the residual dolomite may also be possible.



Table 4

Representative Sr isotope compositions of dolomite and calcite in the studied ophidolomites.

Sample	$^{88}\text{Sr}$ (V)	$^{85}\text{Rb}$ (mV)	$^{87}\text{Rb}/^{86}\text{Sr}$	$2\sigma$	$^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$	$2\sigma$
<i>Dolomite</i>						
C1534 B2 1 1	1.10	0.01	0.00005	0.00003	0.70524	0.00013
C1534 B2 1 2	1.38	0.02	0.00005	0.00003	0.70592	0.00011
C1534 B2 1 3	1.40	0.03	0.00006	0.00003	0.70585	0.00013
C1534 B2 2 1	1.18	0.06	0.00017	0.00003	0.70552	0.00012
C1534 B2 2 2	1.02	0.02	0.00007	0.00003	0.70554	0.00014
C1534 B2 2 3	1.13	0.05	0.00015	0.00003	0.70554	0.00013
C1534 B2 3 1	1.08	0.02	0.00005	0.00003	0.70496	0.00013
C1534 B2 3 2	1.52	0.05	0.00010	0.00002	0.70528	0.00008
C1534 B2 3 3	1.44	0.02	0.00004	0.00002	0.70572	0.00011
C1534 B2 3 4	2.02	0.01	0.00002	0.00002	0.70515	0.00009
C1534 B2 3 5	1.64	0.05	0.00010	0.00002	0.70542	0.00010
C1534 B2 4 1	1.79	0.04	0.00007	0.00002	0.70511	0.00008
C1534 B2 4 2	1.29	0.02	0.00005	0.00003	0.70534	0.00012
C1534 B2 4 3	1.63	0.06	0.00012	0.00002	0.70548	0.00009
C1534 B2 4 4	1.69	0.05	0.00011	0.00002	0.70515	0.00011
C1534 B2 5 1	1.64	0.06	0.00014	0.00002	0.70496	0.00009
C1534 B2 5 2	1.58	0.06	0.00014	0.00002	0.70509	0.00010
C1534 B2 5 3	1.79	0.04	0.00008	0.00002	0.70518	0.00008
C1534 B2 5 4	1.62	0.03	0.00006	0.00002	0.70527	0.00009
C1534 B2 6 2	1.83	0.02	0.00003	0.00002	0.70525	0.00007
C1534 C1 2 1	1.02	0.03	0.00011	0.00003	0.70590	0.00016
C1534 C1 2 2	1.08	0.04	0.00011	0.00003	0.70633	0.00013
C1534 C1 3 2	1.13	0.01	0.00001	0.00003	0.70683	0.00013
C1534 C1 6 6	1.02	0.03	0.00009	0.00003	0.70575	0.00014
CP1734 a 2 1	1.39	0.03	0.00007	0.00002	0.70705	0.00011
CP1734 a 4 2	0.95	0.02	0.00008	0.00003	0.70654	0.00014
CP1734 a 4 3	0.92	0.08	0.00030	0.00003	0.70721	0.00014
CP1734 d 5 1	0.94	0.02	0.00004	0.00004	0.70588	0.00017
CP1734 d 5 2	1.39	0.04	0.00009	0.00002	0.70757	0.00013
CP1734 d 7 2	0.94	0.04	0.00013	0.00004	0.70614	0.00019
<i>Calcite</i>						
C1534 B2 8 2	3.13	0.01	0.00001	0.00001	0.70913	0.00005
C1534 B2 9 3	2.80	0.01	0.00001	0.00001	0.70912	0.00005
C1534 B2 10 1	2.96	0.01	0.00001	0.00001	0.70932	0.00005
C1534 B2 10 2	3.12	0.03	0.00003	0.00001	0.70911	0.00005
C1534 B2 10 3	2.35	0.02	0.00002	0.00001	0.70926	0.00006
C1534 B2 11 1	3.23	0.03	0.00003	0.00001	0.70946	0.00005
C1534 B2 11 2	3.07	0.04	0.00004	0.00001	0.70938	0.00005
C1534 B2 11 3	2.80	0.01	0.00001	0.00001	0.70943	0.00006
C1534 C1 7 1	3.23	0.05	0.00005	0.00001	0.70923	0.00005
C1534 C1 7 2	3.17	0.02	0.00002	0.00001	0.70931	0.00005
C1534 C1 8 1	2.40	0.01	0.00002	0.00001	0.70895	0.00006
C1534 C1 8 2	3.30	0.03	0.00003	0.00001	0.70917	0.00004
C1534 C1 8 3	3.47	0.03	0.00003	0.00001	0.70899	0.00004
C1534 C1 10 1	2.39	0.02	0.00003	0.00001	0.70872	0.00008
CP1734 a 8 3	3.20	0.01	0.00001	0.00001	0.70951	0.00004
CP1734 a 9 1	3.96	0.02	0.00002	0.00001	0.70947	0.00004
CP1734 a 9 2	3.69	0.01	0.00001	0.00001	0.70970	0.00004
CP1734 a 10 1	3.15	0.02	0.00002	0.00001	0.70965	0.00005
CP1734 a 10 3	2.93	0.01	0.00002	0.00001	0.70984	0.00005
CP1734 a 11 1	3.19	0.02	0.00003	0.00001	0.70932	0.00005
CP1734 a 11 3	2.80	0.03	0.00003	0.00001	0.70963	0.00005
CP1734 a 12 1	3.96	0.04	0.00003	0.00001	0.70915	0.00006
CP1734 a 12 2	3.33	0.03	0.00003	0.00001	0.70944	0.00006
CP1734 a 14 1	3.90	0.01	0.00001	0.00001	0.70963	0.00006
CP1734 a 15 1	3.99	0.01	0.00001	0.00001	0.70986	0.00005
CP1734 d 10 1	3.49	0.00	0.00001	0.00001	0.70969	0.00005
CP1734 d 11 1	3.93	0.01	0.00001	0.00001	0.70970	0.00005
CP1734 d 12 2	3.71	0.03	0.00003	0.00001	0.70974	0.00005
CP1734 d 14 1	3.32	0.01	0.00001	0.00001	0.70962	0.00005
CP1734 d 15 1	2.83	0.02	0.00002	0.00001	0.70905	0.00006

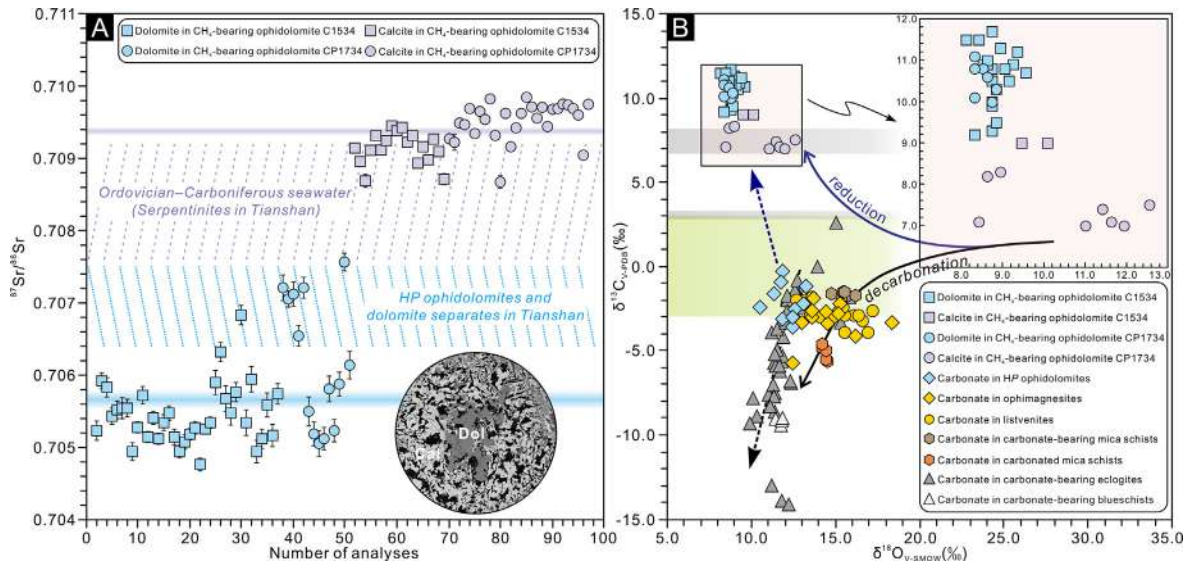
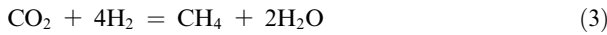


Fig. 6. Isotope compositions of the studied ophidolomites. (A) *In situ* Sr isotope compositions of dolomite and calcite. The sky blue and purple dashed lines show  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  ratios of the Tianshan HP ophidolomites and their dolomite separates (Peng et al., 2020) and the Ordovician Carboniferous seawater (Veizer et al., 1999), respectively. The Tianshan UHP serpentinites are marine originated (Shen et al., 2015) and have largely inherited Sr isotope compositions of the seawater (Peng et al., 2020). The sky blue and purple solid lines show the average  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  ratios of dolomite and calcite, respectively. Error bars represent the  $2\sigma$  internal precision. (B) C and O isotope compositions of dolomite and calcite. For comparison,  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  and  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  of carbonates in various lithologies from the Chinese southwestern Tianshan are plotted (van der Straaten et al., 2012; Collins et al., 2015; Peng et al., 2018, 2020; Zhu et al., 2018). The green and grey areas display  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  of marine carbonates (Hoefs, 2009) and carbonates in  $\text{CH}_4$  bearing ophicalcites from the Western Alps (Vitale Brovarone et al., 2017), respectively. The black and blue solid lines correspond to C isotopic trends of carbonates affected by decarbonation and carbonate reduction from Galvez et al. (2013b), while the black and blue dashed lines represent the possible trends of decarbonation and carbonate reduction in the Tianshan. Uncertainties of values are smaller than the symbol sizes.

It is apparent that Reaction (2) essentially reflects a  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  triggered decarbonation process of dolomite (Reaction (1)) coupled with a coinstantaneous  $f_{\text{H}_2}$  dependent reduction process of  $\text{CO}_2$  (Reaction (3)):



In this study, however, the decarbonation of dolomite is not spontaneous in reduced environments and thus seems unlikely to proceed independently prior to the reduction of  $\text{CO}_2$  (see below). Firstly, the fluid inclusions do not contain detectable  $\text{CO}_2$  as the intermediate product, in which  $\text{CH}_4$  occurs as the dominant C bearing species instead. The isolated and randomly distributed  $\text{CH}_4$  bearing fluid inclusions in calcite may provide further evidence for the simultaneous production of  $\text{CH}_4$  and calcite through dolomite decomposition (Fig. 4E G and Supplementary Fig. S2A and B). Secondly, the retrograde serpentinization responsible for abiogenic  $\text{CH}_4$  formation (Section 5.2) started at 7.9 kbar and 410–430 °C and propagated to lower  $P$ – $T$  conditions (e.g., 2–10 kbar and 250–350 °C; Li et al., 2007, 2010), indicating that dolomite decarbonation, if it exists, should take place at oxidized conditions prior to the retrograde serpentinization. In this scenario (i.e.,  $P > 7.9$  kbar and  $T > 410$ – $430$  °C), aragonite is likely to replace calcite as the dominant Ca carbonate products (cf. the calcite aragonite transition in Fig. 8; Johannes and Puhon, 1971), inconsistent with the observed calcite brucite intergrowths in the studied ophidolomites (Fig. 2E H). Thirdly, the elevated C isotope values of calcite, contrary to the neg-

ative shift of  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  derived from carbonate decarbonation (Fig. 6B), provide geochemical constraints on the equilibrium between calcite and  $\text{CH}_4$  in the studied ophidolomites (see above). An alternative explanation may exist for these results that dolomite has recorded  $^{13}\text{C}$  enrichment (e.g., through dissolution induced reduction; see above) prior to the decoupled dolomite decarbonation and  $\text{CO}_2$  reduction processes, but such cyclic redox transformations (i.e., reduction oxidation reduction) are not reported in the study area (Li et al., 2007, 2010).

Although our model calculations demonstrate that  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  rich fluids at relatively high  $f_{\text{H}_2}$  (e.g.,  $y_{\text{H}_2\text{O}} = 0.999995$  at  $\log f_{\text{H}_2} = 0.8$ ; star in Fig. 7A) can create favorable conditions for dolomite reduction and abiogenic  $\text{CH}_4$  generation, the possibility of carbonate methanation by  $\text{H}_2$  rich fluids cannot be excluded. The latter case has been reported in subducted ophicalcites in the Western Alps, recording a  $\text{H}_2$  induced calcite methanation process in which the equilibrated fluids are characterized by dominant  $\text{CH}_4$  while  $y_{\text{H}_2\text{O}} = y_{\text{H}_2}$  at  $X_{\text{O}} < 0.03$  at 7 kbar and 350 °C (Vitale Brovarone et al., 2017). In this scenario,  $\text{H}_2$  is not pervasively detected by Raman spectroscopy in fluid inclusions in the studied rocks (Figs. 4 and 5; Section 4.2) probably because it has been largely consumed by carbonate reduction to  $\text{CH}_4$  (e.g., Grozeva et al., 2020). Alternatively,  $\text{H}_2$  could potentially occur in the fluid inclusions but the Raman peaks have been severely obscured by the strong fluorescence of the host carbonates (Fig. 5). However, this speculation is contradictory to our petrographic

Table 5

C and O isotope compositions of dolomite, calcite, and bulk carbonate in the studied ophiolomites.

Sample	$\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{V PDB}}$	$\delta^{18}\text{O}_{\text{V SMOW}}$	Sample	$\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{V PDB}}$	$\delta^{18}\text{O}_{\text{V SMOW}}$
<i>Dolomite</i>			<i>Calcite</i>		
C1534 1 1	10.7	9.6	C1534 C 1	9.0	9.5
C1534 1 2	10.5	9.2	C1534 C 2	9.0	10.1
C1534 1 3	10.5	8.7	CP1734 S1 B	7.4	11.4
C1534 2 1	10.0	8.7	CP1734 S2 B	8.2	8.6
C1534 2 2	10.3	8.8	CP1734 S3 B	7.1	8.4
C1534 2 3	10.9	9.3	CP1734 S4 B	8.3	9.0
C1534 3 1	11.3	9.0	CP1734 T1 B	7.1	11.6
C1534 3 2	10.8	9.1	CP1734 T2 B	7.0	11.0
C1534 3 3	11.5	8.1	CP1734 T3 B	7.0	11.9
C1534 4 1	11.2	9.4	CP1734 T4 B	7.5	12.6
C1534 4 2	11.7	8.7	<i>Bulk carbonate</i>		
C1534 4 3	10.9	8.5	C1534	10.3	
C1534 A 2	9.3	8.7	CP1734	8.6	
C1534 A 4	9.9	8.7			
C1534 B 1	10.8	8.7			
C1534 B 2	11.5	8.4			
C1534 B 3	9.5	8.8			
C1534 B 4	10.9	8.6			
C1534 C 3	11.0	8.6			
C1534 C 4	9.2	8.3			
CP1734 S1 W	11.1	8.3			
CP1734 S2 W	10.8	8.5			
CP1734 S3 W	10.8	8.3			
CP1734 S4 W	10.0	8.7			
CP1734 T2 W	10.1	8.3			
CP1734 T3 W	10.6	8.6			
CP1734 T4 W	10.3	8.8			

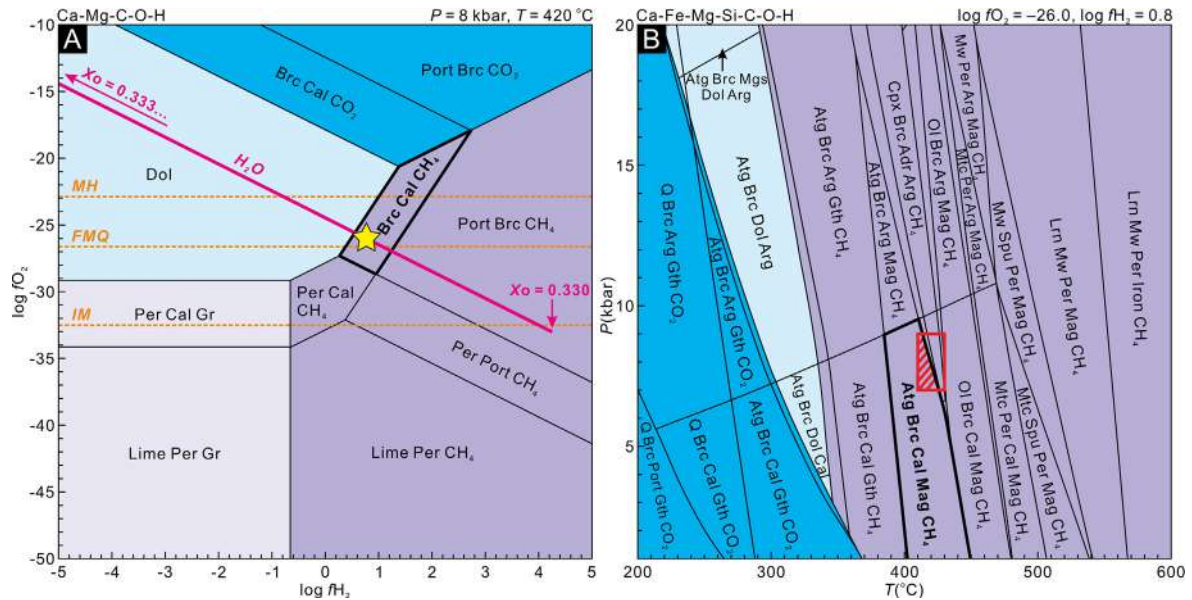
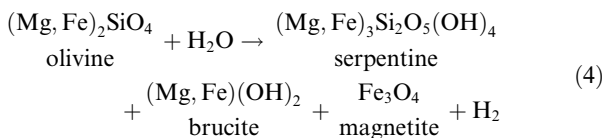


Fig. 7. (A) Stabilities of phases under variable  $f\text{O}_2$  and  $f\text{H}_2$  conditions in the Ca-Mg-C-O-H system (with fixed Ca:Mg:C of 1:1:2 in molar ratio) at 8 kbar and 420 °C. The orange dashed lines show  $\log f\text{O}_2$  of magnetite-hematite (MH), fayalite-magnetite-quartz (FMQ), and iron magnetite (IM) buffers calculated at 8 kbar and 420 °C. The pink solid line represents the thermodynamically calculated model of slightly reduced  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  at  $X_0$  greater than or equal to 0.330 but less than 0.333... in the H-O system (star:  $X_0 = 0.333323$ , corresponding to  $y_{\text{H}_2\text{O}} = 0.999995$  and  $y_{\text{H}_2} = 0.000005$ ). (B) The  $P$ - $T$  pseudosection displaying diverse phase assemblages in the Ca-Fe-Mg-Si-C-O-H system at  $\log f\text{O}_2 = -26.0$  and  $\log f\text{H}_2 = 0.8$ . The rectangle confines  $P$ - $T$  conditions for the onset of retrograde serpentinization in the Tianshan (7.9 kbar and 410–430 °C; Li et al., 2007, 2010).

observations that calcite and brucite daughter minerals representing dolomite reduction within the fluid inclusions are almost absent (Section 4.2). Overall, there is no petrographic evidence for post entrapment re-equilibrations of the fluid inclusions (e.g., stretching, leakage, and decrepitation), as supported by their relatively consistent vapor to liquid ratios (Fig. 4A and B; Section 4.2), homogenization temperatures (Table 3), and Raman peak positions of gaseous  $\text{CH}_4$  (Supplementary Table S3) within an individual FIA (e.g., Bodnar, 2003; Lin et al., 2007). Concentrations of molecular species as a function of  $X_{\text{O}}$  in the graphite buffered COH system calculated at 7 kbar and 350 °C (Vitale Brovarone et al., 2017; see Supplementary Fig. S6 for similar calculations at the studied  $P$   $T$  conditions) illustrate that mole fractions of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  in the fluids, relative to  $\text{CH}_4$  and  $\text{H}_2$ , progressively increase with  $X_{\text{O}}$  (until at  $X_{\text{O}} = 1/3$ ). Such calculations suggest that determination of proportions of these species in the equilibrated fluids may provide important insights into the reduced nature of the reactive fluids (i.e.,  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  rich fluids at relatively high  $f_{\text{H}_2}$  vs.  $\text{H}_2$  rich fluids).

## 5.2. Reduced fluid source(s) and fluid inclusion entrapment

The reactive reduced fluids are likely associated with retrograde serpentinization in the Tianshan, during which the observed phase assemblage in the studied rocks can remain stable (Fig. 7B and Supplementary Fig. S5). Even though fluid source(s) responsible for the retrograde serpentinization is(are) largely unresolved (Li et al., 2007, 2010), the preservation of Sr and O isotopic signatures of seawater in the Tianshan serpentinites (Scicchitano et al., 2018; Peng et al., 2020) suggests that these rocks may record interactions with fluids migrating upward from serpentinite dehydration at greater depths (see also Angiboust et al., 2014; Piccoli et al., 2018). Serpentinization of olivine provides a potential source for  $\text{H}_2$ , together with the concomitant formation of magnetite (Reaction (4); e.g., McCollom and Bach, 2009; Klein et al., 2013, 2020).



Although the possibility for serpentinization of olivine to produce  $\text{H}_2$  at high temperatures (400–600 °C) has been questioned (Evans, 2010), recent studies show that magnetite formation and  $\text{H}_2$  generation through HP serpentinization may be common under several subduction zone conditions (Vitale Brovarone et al., 2020; Boutier et al., 2021). Thus, olivine relicts in the antigorite matrix (Fig. 3A), as well as the occurrence of olivine (in association with antigorite and brucite) and dolomite decomposition within magnetite (Fig. 3B–D), suggest that the studied ophidolomites may have acted as a possible  $\text{H}_2$  source for the reduction process. Alternatively, the reduced fluids may be externally derived from the rehydration of surrounding serpentinites, which contain ~25 vol% metamorphic olivine (Shen et al., 2015). Moreover, the elevated

$^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  ratios of calcite, decoupled from dolomite but in general agreement with the Tianshan serpentinites that have largely inherited Sr isotope values of the seawater (Fig. 6A; Peng et al., 2020), likely reflect Sr isotope exchange with the serpentinizing fluids during dolomite reduction.

In the studied rocks, a majority of dolomite hosted fluid inclusions form trails crosscutting grain boundaries (Fig. 4A D), indicating that they were trapped along fractures of dolomite and preserved through subsequent healing of these fractures. The relative timing of fluid entrapment can be obtained by fluid inclusion isochores intersecting the retrograde path of the Chinese southwestern Tianshan (Tan et al., 2017), which constrained  $P$   $T$  conditions of about 13 kbar and 250–350 °C (Fig. 8). The  $P$   $T$  constraints, lower than 7.9 kbar and 410–430 °C, suggest that entrapment of the fluid inclusions postdates the onset of dolomite reduction (Fig. 8). Based on the localized alteration of dolomite (Fig. 2), we infer that the reactive reduced fluids may be limited and have been largely consumed by dolomite after the reduction started, leading to the stability of relict reactants until the fractures were generated to provide fluid pathways and subsequently healed to preserve the fluid inclusions. This is in agreement with our petrographic

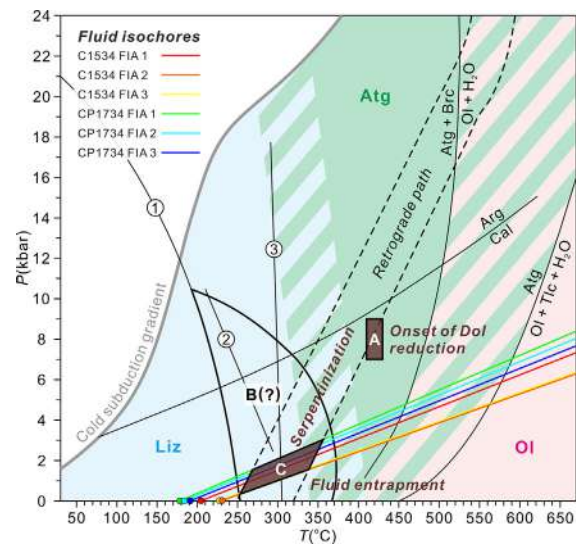


Fig. 8.  $P$   $T$  diagram showing stages of dolomite reduction and fluid entrapment during exhumation of the Chinese southwestern Tianshan. Stage A represents the onset of dolomite reduction, inferred from retrograde serpentinization starting at 7.9 kbar and 410–430 °C and propagating to lower  $P$   $T$  conditions (Stage B) in the Tianshan (Li et al., 2007, 2010). Solid lines marked with 1, 2, and 3 display the controversial  $P$   $T$  conditions for the chrysotile to antigorite transition from Li et al. (2007, 2010), Scambelluri et al. (2004), and Evans et al. (1976), respectively, resulting in uncertainties of Stage B. The constrained  $P$   $T$  conditions for fluid entrapment (Stage C) are based on the fluid inclusion isochores intersecting the retrograde  $P$   $T$  path of the Tianshan (Tan et al., 2017). The stability fields of lizardite, antigorite, and olivine, as well as the main transformation reactions and cold subduction gradient, are from Guillot et al. (2015). The calcite to aragonite transition is from Johannes and Puhani (1971).



observations that dolomite hosted fluid inclusions are nearly devoid of calcite and brucite daughter minerals representative of dolomite reduction within the inclusions (Section 4.2). Given that the retrograde serpentinization responsible for dolomite reduction could propagate to relatively lower  $P$   $T$  conditions (e.g., 2–10 kbar and 250–350 °C; Li et al., 2007, 2010), the possibility may exist that the timing of fluid inclusion trapping is slightly later than or close to that of abiogenic  $\text{CH}_4$  formation. Under this circumstance, the reduction process of dolomite probably came to a halt due to the exhaustion of the reactive reduced fluids (see above), closely followed by fluid entrapment along the fractures. Note that this possibility depends primarily on  $P$   $T$  conditions for the propagation of the retrograde serpentinization, which, however, remain uncertain despite the calculations by Li et al. (2007, 2010) based on a few reactions observed in serpentinites and associated rodingites. Uncertainties may mainly derive from the controversial  $P$   $T$  conditions for the transformation of chrysotile into antigorite (Evans et al., 1976; Scambelluri et al., 2004; Li et al., 2007, 2010) and the ignorance of several potential reactions (e.g., the lizardite to antigorite transition; Guillot et al., 2015) in rocks for the constraints (Fig. 8).

### 5.3. Implications for C mobility in subduction zones

Laboratory studies demonstrated that carbonate aqueous reduction at  $f\text{O}_2$  far below the FMQ buffer (e.g., the IM or iron wüstite (IW) buffer) under HP conditions is a potential pathway for significant production of abiogenic  $\text{CH}_4$  in subduction zones (Lazar et al., 2014; Mukhina et al., 2017). Moreover, field based investigations constrained a relatively wide range of  $\log f\text{O}_2$  values for HP abiogenic formation of  $\text{CH}_4$  via carbonate reduction in ophiolite calcites from the Western Alps ( $\Delta\text{FMQ}$  6.0 to 3.0 at 1 GPa and 400 °C; Vitale Brovarone et al., 2017) and in carbonated eclogites from the Tianshan ( $\Delta\text{FMQ}$  2.5 at 2.5 GPa and 550 °C; Tao et al., 2018a). In the present study, thermodynamic simulations suggest that abiogenic  $\text{CH}_4$  generation through dolomite aqueous reduction can occur at  $f\text{O}_2$  slightly lower than or even close to the FMQ buffer (Fig. 7A). The stability of  $\text{CH}_4$  bearing fluids at FMQ conditions is reflected by a three dimensional  $P$   $T$   $\log f\text{O}_2$  diagram calculated for graphite/diamond saturated COH fluids (Tumiati and Malaspina, 2019), displaying that the FMQ surface is below the maximum  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  activity surface where  $\text{CH}_4$  is the dominant C bearing species under the studied  $P$   $T$  conditions. Furthermore, experiments conducted on HP aqueous reduction of organic matter demonstrated that  $\text{CH}_4$  bearing fluids in equilibrium with graphite can stabilize at  $f\text{O}_2$  approaching the FMQ buffer (i.e., the Co/CoO or Ni/NiO buffer at 2.5 GPa and 600–700 °C; Li, 2017). In the studied samples, however, graphite was only sporadically detected in the cloudy calcite/brucite intergrowths (Supplementary Fig. S7), which may be attributed to the high  $f\text{H}_2$  conditions (see below).

Graphite has been observed in several  $\text{CH}_4$  absent (Malvoisin et al., 2012; Galvez et al., 2013a, b; Zhu et al., 2020) or  $\text{CH}$  bearing (Vitale Brovarone et al., 2017,

2020; Tao et al., 2018a) lithologies in subduction zones, formed by carbonate anhydrous graphitization or precipitating from the reduced COH fluids. Compared with carbonate minerals (e.g., Kelemen and Manning, 2015), graphite represents a relatively stable phase that may transfer subducted C into the deep Earth (Galvez et al., 2013a; Duncan and Dasgupta, 2017; Eguchi et al., 2020), while recent studies suggest that graphite could be partly dissolved in subduction zone fluids (Tumiati et al., 2017, 2020 and references therein). In our study, however, the widespread occurrence of  $\text{CH}_4$  compared to graphite illustrates that the equilibrium between graphite and  $\text{CH}_4$  may be largely controlled by  $f\text{H}_2$  (Fig. 7A), implying that an increase in  $f\text{H}_2$  would contribute to the transformation of graphite into  $\text{CH}_4$  at convergent plate boundaries. This is in accord with the microstructure based recognition of an additional abiogenic  $\text{CH}_4$  forming event in reduced ophiolite calcites from the Western Alps, attributed to  $\text{H}_2$  induced reduction of the newly formed graphite during ascent of the slab (Vitale Brovarone et al., 2017). Moreover, experiments performed on the hydrogenation of graphite at high  $P$   $T$  conditions (5.0–5.5 GPa and > 1500 °C) yielded considerable  $\text{CH}_4$ , indicating that  $f\text{H}_2$  may play an important role in governing abiogenic  $\text{CH}_4$  genesis in deep subduction zones (Sharma et al., 2009). Indeed, graphite has a very low content or nearly absent in several  $\text{CH}_4$   $\text{H}_2$  bearing serpentinites in subduction zones (Peretti et al., 1992; Vitale Brovarone et al., 2020), in agreement with the  $\text{CH}_4$   $\text{H}_2$   $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  equilibrated region below the graphite saturation curve predicted by the isobaric isothermal COH diagram (e.g., Holloway, 1984).

While the reduction in our study happened during exhumation of the slab, the proposed  $P$   $T$  estimates are similar to those of carbonate reduction during shallow subduction in comparable metamorphic settings (Malvoisin et al., 2012; Galvez et al., 2013a, b; Vitale Brovarone et al., 2017; Giuntoli et al., 2020), which are in general accord with the prograde  $P$   $T$  paths of subduction zones predicted by thermal models (Syracuse et al., 2010) and metamorphic rocks (Penniston-Dorland et al., 2015) (Fig. 9A). Thus, the reduction process of dolomite described here may have implications for subducted C mobility. Laboratory experiments and field observations provide evidence for dolomite formation through mineral carbonation in seafloor serpentinization systems (Grozeva et al., 2017), suggesting that subduction of these hydrothermally altered oceanic rocks represents a potential dolomite source in downgoing slabs. Indeed, dolomite, despite its variable contents (ca. 5–50 vol%), is not uncommon in several slab and mantle wedge forming lithologies including metagabbro, metagranite, and metasedimentary rocks (e.g., Li et al., 2012, 2014; Tao et al., 2014, 2018b; Falk and Kelemen, 2015; Zhu et al., 2018). Furthermore, mounting field evidence, as well as thermodynamic modelling, suggests that serpentinization of ultramafic rocks can happen at relatively shallow depths (ca. 20–30 km) in subducted slabs, or even up to ca. 70–80 km (Li et al., 2007, 2010; Vitale Brovarone et al., 2017, 2020; Lazar, 2020). Therefore, an infiltration of these serpentinization derived reduced fluids would be conducive to dolomite



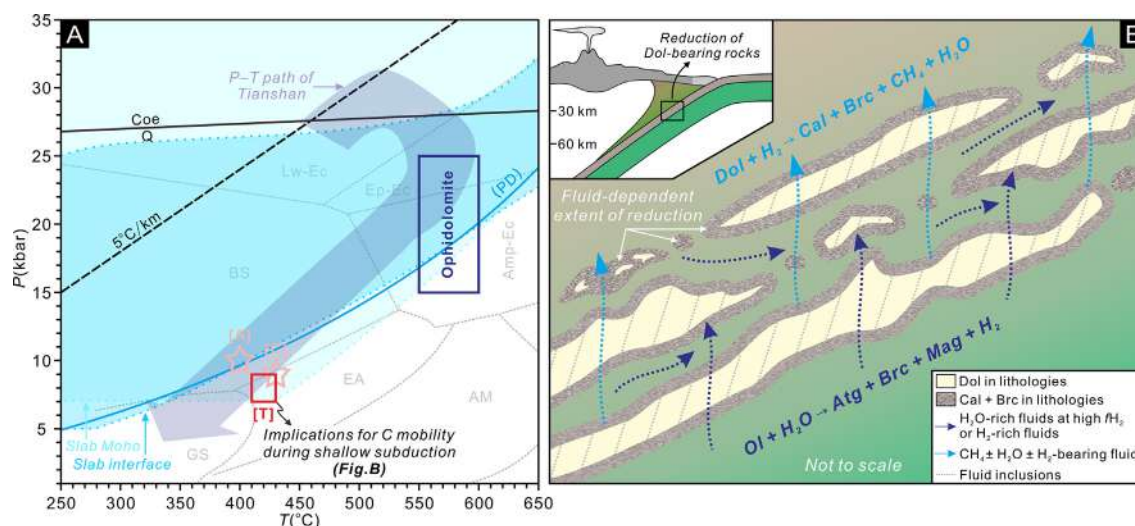


Fig. 9. (A) Summary of abiotic CH<sub>4</sub> formation through dolomite reduction in ophidolomites during exhumation of the Chinese southwestern Tianshan. The  $P$   $T$  constraints for HP ophidolomites in the Tianshan are from Peng et al. (2020). The red rectangle [T] displays  $P$   $T$  conditions for the onset of dolomite reduction, inferred from retrograde serpentinization in the Tianshan (Li et al., 2007, 2010). For comparison,  $P$   $T$  estimates for carbonate reduction during shallow subduction in Alpine Corsica [C] (Malvoisin et al., 2012; Galvez et al., 2013a, b) and the Italian Alps [A] (Vitale Brovarone et al., 2017; Giuntoli et al., 2020) are shown. The  $P$   $T$  path of the Tianshan is from Tan et al. (2017). The cyan and light cyan areas represent the modelled prograde  $P$   $T$  paths of subduction zones at the slab interface and slab Moho (7 km beneath the slab surface; Syracuse et al., 2010), respectively. The sky blue solid curve (PD) shows the global average range of prograde  $P$   $T$  paths from subduction related metamorphic rocks (Penniston Dorland et al., 2015). Facies boundaries and abbreviations are from Liou et al. (2004). (B) General model showing abiotic CH<sub>4</sub> production through dolomite reduction during shallow subduction. Due to uncertainties in the scale and extent of serpentinization in subducted slabs (Li et al., 2007, 2010; Vitale Brovarone et al., 2017, 2020; Lazar, 2020), dashed arrow lines represent fluid migration pathways instead of the steady fluid flow. The extent of alteration is dependent on the infiltration of the reactive reduced fluids. Possible CH<sub>4</sub> H<sub>2</sub> generating reactions are listed but without stoichiometric numbers. Figure is not to scale.

reduction and abiotic CH<sub>4</sub> generation during shallow subduction, which may represent a feasible mechanism for the mobility of subducted C (Fig. 9B). Moreover, release of such deep sourced reduced fluids might support the hypothesis that subduction zones potentially provide energy to sustain subsurface chemosynthetic microbial life at habitable temperatures in the overlying forearc (e.g., Curtis et al., 2013; Plümper et al., 2017; Fryer et al., 2020; Lazar, 2020; Vitale Brovarone et al., 2020; Wheat et al., 2020). However, uncertainties remain regarding the implications presented here, particularly under circumstances where the scale and extent of dolomite reduction are insufficiently quantified.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Reduction of ophidolomites in the Chinese southwestern Tianshan HP UHP metamorphic belt provides new insights into abiotic CH<sub>4</sub> generation in subduction zones. Petrological characteristics, Raman spectroscopic and microthermometric data of fluid inclusions, Sr and C isotope compositions, and thermodynamic results demonstrate dolomite reduction into the phase assemblage of calcite + brucite + CH<sub>4</sub>, likely related to retrograde serpentinization starting at 7.9 kbar and 410–430 °C in the subduction zone. The onset of dolomite reduction is prior to fluid entrapment that happened at about 1.3 kbar and 250–350 °C, leading to the widespread distribution of secondary fluid inclusions along healed fractures of dolomite.

Model calculations suggest that an infiltration of H<sub>2</sub>O rich fluids at relatively high  $f$ H<sub>2</sub> (e.g.,  $y_{\text{H}_2\text{O}} = 0.999995$  at  $\log f\text{H}_2 = 0.8$ ) can contribute to this reduction process, but the possibility of carbonate methanation by H<sub>2</sub> rich fluids cannot be excluded. The abundant CH<sub>4</sub> bearing fluid inclusions in these rocks indicate that  $f$ H<sub>2</sub> probably plays an important role in regulating the speciation of subducted C, implying that an increase in  $f$ H<sub>2</sub> may accelerate abiotic formation of CH<sub>4</sub> through dolomite reduction at convergent plate boundaries. Thus, alteration of dolomite bearing lithologies represents a potential mechanism for abiotic synthesis of CH<sub>4</sub> in subduction zones, which may have implications for the mobility of subducted C.

## RESEARCH DATA

All research data used in this study are included in tables and the appendix file.

## Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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## APPENDIX A. SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gca.2021.07.033>.

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