

[ScienceWatch Home](#)
[Inside This Month...](#)
[Interviews](#)
[Featured Interviews](#)
[Author Commentaries](#)
[Institutional Interviews](#)
[Journal Interviews](#)
[Podcasts](#)
[Analyses](#)
[Featured Analyses](#)
[What's Hot In...](#)
[Special Topics](#)
[Data & Rankings](#)
[Sci-Bytes](#)
[Fast Breaking Papers](#)
[New Hot Papers](#)
[Emerging Research Fronts](#)
[Fast Moving Fronts](#)
[Corporate Research Fronts](#)
[Research Front Maps](#)
[Current Classics](#)
[Top Topics](#)
[Rising Stars](#)
[New Entrants](#)
[Country Profiles](#)
[About Science Watch](#)
[Methodology](#)
[Archives](#)
[Contact Us](#)
[RSS Feeds](#)

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[Interviews](#)
[Analyses](#)
[Data & Rankings](#)

2009 : May 2009 - New Hot Papers : Zheng-Xiang Li

## NEW HOT PAPERS - 2009

May 2009



**Zheng-Xiang Li talks with *ScienceWatch.com* and answers a few questions about this month's New Hot Paper in the field of Geosciences. The author has also sent along images of his work.**



**Article Title: Assembly, configuration, and break-up history of Rodinia: A synthesis**

Authors: Li, ZX;Bogdanova, SV;Collins, AS;Davidson, A;De Waele, B;Ernst, RE;Fitzsimons, ICW;Fuck, RA;Gladkochub, DP;Jacobs, J;Karlstrom, KE;Lu, S;Natapov, LM;Pease, V;Pisarevsky, SA;Thrane, K;Vernikovsky, V

Journal: PRECAMBRIAN RES, Volume: 160, Issue: 1-2, Page: 179-210, Year: JAN 5 2008

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(addresses have been truncated)

### SW: Why do you think your paper is highly cited?

This paper represents the final outcome of the UNESCO/IUGS-sponsored IGCP-project 440 "Rodinia Assembly and Break-up." It summarizes 17 years of concerted global efforts in testing the validity of the supercontinent Rodinia. It provides a self-consistent geodynamic model for the assembly, configuration, and breakup history of Rodinia in the lead-up to a period of rapid changes in global climate and atmospheric composition, and the explosion of multicellular life on Earth.

The relevance of this synthesis, co-authored with 16 eminent geoscientists from around the world, to the broader geosciences community is nicely put by Professor Emeritus Eldridge M. Moores (ex-President of the Geological Society of America and ex-Vice President of IUGS) in his generous review of the work:

"This is a very exciting, even historic, comprehensive synthesis of the work of many people on the assembly and breakup of Rodinia. This paper will be a major contribution to all of geology. It breaks revolutionary new ground. It will quickly find its way into the general textbooks and be quoted for years."

### SW: Does it describe a new discovery, methodology, or synthesis of knowledge?

In writing this paper, we took a holistic approach in synthesizing all available data from various disciplines—including geology, geochronology, and paleomagnetism, and utilizing our knowledge of how tectonic plates interact in the process of supercontinent assembly and breakup, and how plate dynamics might interact with mantle dynamics. We were able to develop a feasible global paleogeographic history for the time interval of 1,100 million years to 530 million years

**SW:** Would you summarize the significance of your paper in layman's terms?

We argued in our paper that Rodinia assembled through worldwide orogenic events between 1,300 and 900 Ma. Likewise, the breakup of Rodinia was also a protracted and diachronous process. The first major break-up event occurred along the western margin of Laurentia (North America and Greenland), possibly as early as 750 Ma. Rifting between the Amazonia craton and the southeastern margin of Laurentia started at approximately the same time, but only led to break-up after ca. 600 Ma. By this time most of

The map displays Romania's administrative divisions into counties (județe) and the city of Bucharest (București). Major cities are marked with black dots and labeled. The map includes a legend for the administrative regions and a scale bar indicating distances in kilometers and miles.

 PDF

**From Rodinids to Gondwanaland  
— An animated history, 1100–530 Ma**

**Z.K.V.**  
S.V. Braginskaya, A.G. Goffin,  
A. Chaudhry, B. de Wit, L.R.F. Tjelt, J.C.W. F. Kramers,  
R.A. Fack, D.P. Steinhilber, J. Zwaan, K.E. Karlstrom, S. Liu,  
Y.M. Nakagawa, P. Foden, S.A. Pearson, K. Thirard, V. Verchokova

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 PPT

A cross-sectional diagram of Earth showing its internal layers. The outermost layer is the Crust, which is divided into the Lithosphere (top) and the Asthenosphere (bottom). Below the Crust is the Mantle, which is further divided into the Upper Mantle (top) and the Lower Mantle (bottom). The innermost layer is the Core, which is divided into the Outer Core (top) and the Inner Core (bottom). Arrows indicate the direction of heat flow from the Core towards the surface.

 PDF

the western Gondwanan continents had joined together, although the formation of Gondwanaland was not complete until ca. 530 Ma.

**SW: How did you become involved in this research, and were there any problems along the way?**

My involvement in Rodinia-related research started from the "Gondwana Eight" conference held in Hobart, Australia, in 1991. I presented a paper there with a co-worker, the late Professor Chris Powell, on the assembly of Gondwanaland, and we were excited to hear Professor Ian Dalziel's talk on the new hypothesis of a supercontinent called Rodinia, the predecessor of Gondwanaland and all later continents. We immediately started testing the hypothesis using both paleomagnetic and geological observations, leading to the establishment of the Australian Research Council-funded Tectonics Special Research Centre (1997-2006).

Expanding global-scale international collaborations further led to the establishment of the IGCP 440 project (1999-2004) with the late Professors Rafael Unrug and Chris Powell being the co-leaders and me as the project secretary. With the untimely passing away of both founding leaders, the leadership team later included Professor Svetlana Bogdanova (co-leader), Dr. Sergei Pisarevsky (project secretary), me (co-leader), and the late Professor Henri Kampunzu (co-leader). The project involved over 300 scientists from around the world, and it has been regarded as one of the most successful IGCP projects.

**SW: Where do you see your research leading in the future?**

My continued research in this field may lead in two related directions. One is further examination of the nature and evolutionary history of Rodinia and older supercontinents in Earth's history. The other is to examine the Earth's record of superplume events and their relationships to supercontinent events. Both will involve extensive international collaborations and, through working with mantle dynamists, we hope to achieve a better understanding of how the Earth works.

**SW: Do you foresee any social or political implications for your research?**

Apart from helping people to understand how the Earth evolved and how the Earth's deep mantle interacts with the tectonic plates, my research also helps in understanding the processes controlling the formation and location of mineral and energy resources, and how geological processes impact on our climate and environment.

For instance, the identification of the timing, extent, and geographic location of past mountain ranges, major volcanic provinces, and continent-ocean configurations during Earth's history helps us to understand what caused the occasional catastrophic climatic events like icehouse (even snowball Earth) conditions. The extensive international collaborations that my research involves also bring scientists from all cultural background to work together toward common goals.

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**Perth, Australia**  
**Web | Web**

KEYWORDS: DRONNING-MAUD-LAND; TRUE POLAR WANDER; SIBERIA-LAURENTIA CONNECTION; PB ZIRCON GEOCHRONOLOGY; LARGE IGNEOUS PROVINCE; ARABIAN-NUBIAN SHIELD; WESTERN NORTH-AMERICA; NEOPROTEROZOIC TECTONIC EVOLUTION; GRANULITE-FACIES METAMORPHISM; LATE PROTEROZOIC STRATIGRAPHY.

*Related information:*

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[back to top](#)

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