Japan Geoscience Union Meeting 2014
(28 April - 02 May 2014 at Pacifico YOKOHAMA, Kanagawa, Japan)

SGL42-09 Room:419 Time:April 29 11:40-11:55

Significance of external morphology and zircon chemistry for precise U-Pb zircon dating

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Improvement of U-Pb zircon dating by microbeam analysis has been provided opportunity of discussion about more detailed geological events. Recent analytical precision of less than 2% at Paleogene zircon allows us to investigate shorter period events such as crystallization differentiation in magma chamber. However, the highly precise U-Pb age data yield an importance of confirming their accuracy and assaying disturbance of U-Pb system and incorporation of exotic components. In this study, we introduce data processing method of the highly precise ages based on zircon morphology, trace element abundances as well as statistics.

The precise U-Pb zircon dating by using a sensitive high-resolution ion microprobe (SHRIMP II) at National Institute of Polar Research, Japan, was applied to igneous rocks of the Tertiary Ishizuchi Cauldron in the Setouchi volcanic belt of Miocene age in northwestern Shikoku. A primary ion beam of about 10 nA was used to sputter an analytical spot of about 40 μm diameter. A retardation lens system was utilized as a means to increase signal-to-noise ratio, and a secondary ion optics including slits of source and collector was adjusted to maximum transmission of the secondary ion under suitable mass resolution avoiding isobaric interferences on Pb isotopes. The surfaces of grain mounts were carefully washed with diluted HCl and ultra pure water to remove Pb contamination. A correction for common Pb was made on the basis of the measured ^{204}Pb and the model for common Pb composition.

Weighted mean ages were calculated from ^{206}Pb/^{238}U ratios corrected by ^{207}Pb. In order to ensure the accuracy of U-Pb age, age known zircon, OD-3, was analyzed together with unknown sample. Concentrations of Hf and rare earth element (REE) in zircons were also measured at the same analytical spot of U-Pb dating by SHRIMP.

Zircon grains from the Bansyodani-biotite-rhyolite were divided to two types based on the external morphology: sharply euhedral type and relatively rounded edge of prism and pyramid type. ^{206}Pb/^{238}U data of whole zircon grains were widely scattered beyond analytical uncertainty and show a weighted mean of 14.78 $\pm$ 0.18 Ma (mean square weighted deviation, MSWD: 3.4). On the other hand, the euhedral zircons yielded the weighted mean of 14.21 $\pm$ 0.19 Ma (MSWD: 1.0), whereas the relatively rounded zircons were older than the euhedral zircons, which suggests the incorporation of exotic components.

Zircon chemistry supported the classification by the morphology and the U-Pb dating. An average of Hf contents of the euhedral zircons were 9523 ppm ranging from 8883 to 10496 ppm and those of the relatively rounded zircons were 8475 ppm ranging from 7616 to 8803 ppm. Hf contents of the euhedral zircons were higher than those of relatively rounded zircons. C1 chondrite-normalized REE patterns of the euhedral zircons were characterized by a large fractionation between light REE and heavy REE, large positive Ce anomalies and large negative Eu anomalies. In contrast, those of the relatively rounded zircons were enrichment of light REE, weaker anomalies of Ce and Eu. Difference of the zircon chemistry between the euhedral zircons and the relatively rounded zircons reflects source melt composition. Therefore, the external morphology, Hf content, and REE abundance are useful criteria for the data processing of the highly precise U-Pb age data.