

Combining paleomagnetic and Re–Os isotope data to date hydrocarbon generation and accumulation processes

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Key Points:

- Palaeomagnetic and Re–Os isotope data were collected for a hydrocarbon carbonate reservoir to determine the hydrocarbon evolution processes.
- Oil accumulations are found to have remagnetized the reservoir carbonates during the Late Triassic and Cretaceous.
- Timing of oil generation is constrained by Re–Os dates of bitumen and oil hosted in carbonates at ~264 and ~94 Ma, respectively.

33 **Abstract**

34 Unravelling the complex relationship between orogenesis and hydrocarbon formation and accumulation
35 is challenging and is often hampered by physical and chemical overprints of younger events. The
36 Permian reservoir in the Longmen Shan orogen, South China, is such an example, and its evolution has
37 been hotly debated. In this study, we use a new combination of paleomagnetic dating analysis and Re–
38 Os isotope dating to try to resolve this. Paleomagnetic dating of the hydrocarbon-host carbonate
39 indicates two remagnetization events during: (1) the Late Triassic, and (2) the Middle Jurassic–
40 Cretaceous. These two remagnetization events are shown to represent two distinct stages of
41 hydrocarbon accumulation. The paleomagnetic estimates are supported by Re–Os dating of bitumen
42 (~264 Ma) and oil (~94 Ma). The two different Re–Os ages are associated with two periods of oil
43 generation. We interpret these data in terms of known geological processes: (1) the ~260 Ma Dongwu
44 large igneous province caused oil generation, and the Indosinian tectonic event caused the migration
45 and accumulation; and (2) the Late Cretaceous Yanshan orogenic events promoted another generation
46 and entrapment of oil in the same reservoir. This combined approach reliably tracks the sequence of oil
47 generation and accumulation, even when the source rock is uncertain, and multi-phase accumulation
48 and complex tectonism has occurred. Given that paleomagnetic and Re–Os dating are independent
49 methods which can constrain multiple geological processes, when used together they have the potential
50 to be universally applied.

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52 **Plain Language Summary.**

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54 Key to understanding complex geological processes is the dates and sequence of each event. The
55 timing of hydrocarbon formation and accumulation is one such complex geological process that can be
56 difficult to unravel, but critical to evaluate the complex orogenesis and hydrocarbon explorations. In
57 this paper, we combine for the first time two independent dating methods to study hydrocarbon
58 reservoirs of Longmen Shan orogen: (1) paleomagnetic and (2) rhenium–osmium isotope dating. The
59 two methods identified two periods of hydrocarbon formation, followed by two extended periods of
60 hydrocarbon migration. This combined method is particularly powerful as it is independent of the
61 hydrocarbon source rock and complex geological settings. Moreover, the two methods can provide
62 additional tests for each dating technique. The new combined methods can, therefore, be applied in
63 complex hydrocarbon-bearing regions worldwide.

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73 **1 Introduction**

74 Determining the spatial and temporal evolution of hydrocarbon reservoir systems helps us to improve
75 yield from mature reservoir systems, thus reducing the need for further exploration as the world moves
76 towards a carbon-free future. The evolution of such hydrocarbon systems can be problematic due to a
77 number of processes, which can contribute to, for example, the maturation history of the source rocks,
78 oil migration and accumulation patterns, hydrocarbon cracking or gas generation in reservoir rocks, and
79 the destruction of hydrocarbon reservoir systems (e.g., Zhang et al., 2018, 2019).

80
81 Key to understanding hydrocarbon reservoir evolution is quantifying the timing of formation of the
82 hydrocarbon and reservoir itself (Bhullar et al., 1999). There is no single method that consistently
83 yields correct ages for hydrocarbon and reservoir formation. We propose combining two different
84 complementary methods for determining hydrocarbon evolution ages: (1) paleomagnetic dating
85 methods, and (2) Re–Os geochronology. Paleomagnetic dating has previously been carried out on
86 hydrocarbon-bearing rocks to provide time ranges of hydrocarbon generation, accumulation, and
87 destruction (Elmore et al., 1987; Elmore & Leach, 1990; Zhang et al., 2016, 2018, 2019). This method
88 requires isolation of the characteristic remanent magnetization (ChRM), assuming hydrocarbon
89 activities are related to remagnetization, and then comparison with the apparent polar wander paths
90 (APWP) of the region. Given the availability of quantitative relationships between magnetic and
91 hydrocarbon parameters, paleomagnetic ages can often be directly linked to hydrocarbon evolution
92 processes (e.g., Manning & Elmore, 2015; Zhang et al., 2016). However, the effectiveness of this
93 method is limited by the accuracy of published APWP paths. Rhenium–osmium (Re–Os)
94 geochronology can be applied directly to crude oil and bitumen in reservoir rocks to determine absolute
95 ages (Georgiev et al., 2016; Selby et al., 2005). Interpreting these ages in the context of geological
96 processes is often difficult, however, as the hydrocarbon undergoes continuous modifications, which
97 could modify the Re–Os systematics throughout the petroleum history (Ge et al., 2016; Li et al., 2017;
98 Lillis & Selby, 2013). By combining these two entirely independent methods we aim to compensate for
99 each methods' limitations, allowing for temporal variations in hydrocarbon evolution to be more
100 accurately dated.

101
102 To determine the effectiveness of these combined approaches, we used paleomagnetic and Re–Os
103 dating methods to study the Longmen Shan foreland thrust belt in South China (Figure 1), which
104 contains a complex hydrocarbon system in its northern part (Jia et al., 2006). The generation and
105 migration history of the hydrocarbons is uncertain. They may be the product of several accumulation
106 processes, and have been affected by multiple tectonic events since the Ediacaran, including the
107 Dongwu large igneous province and Caledonian, Indosinian, Yanshan and Himalayan orogenies
108 (Figure 1d; Jia et al., 2006). In addition to paleomagnetic and Re–Os dating, we also measured the total
109 organic carbon (TOC) content, bitumen reflectance and $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ isotope ratios to better characterize the
110 relationship between the remagnetization and hydrocarbon activities.

111 **2 Geological Setting**

112 The Longmen Shan foreland thrust belt is on the western boundary of the Sichuan Basin close to the
113 Tibetan Plateau. It is marked by a NE striking thrust belt with fault-related folds and the western
114 Sichuan foreland basin (Burchfiel et al., 1995; Jia et al., 2006; Figure 1a–c). Multiple tectonic events
115 have happened in this area from the Permian to present, including the Dongwu large igneous province,
116 and the Indosinian, Yanshan, and Himalayan orogenies (Figure 1d). The ~260 Ma Dongwu large
117 igneous province relates to the mantle plume which produced the extensive Emeishan flood basalts
118 around the Sichuan Basin, and the unconformities in the Middle Permian strata (He et al., 2007;
119 Shellnutt, 2014). Subsequently, due to the closure of the Paleotethys between the South China, North
120 China, and Qiangtang continental blocks, the Late Triassic Indosinian orogeny initiated deformation of
121 the Longmen Shan belt (Jia et al., 2006; Figure 1b). Meanwhile, Late Triassic Sichuan foreland basin
122 formed in the eastern part of Longmen Shan belt because of tectonic loading (Jia et al., 2006; Zhang et
123 al., 2015a; Figure 1c). The subsequent Yanshan orogeny, which occurred during Jurassic–Cretaceous in
124 this region, is the result of the East Asian and Siberia continent-continent collision and subduction of
125 paleo-Pacific plate (Dong et al., 2018). The Yanshan orogeny was tectonically relatively quiet,
126 generally lacking intense deformation. However, some unconformities, metamorphism and igneous
127 intrusions indicate that thrusting occurred; there was slow uplift of the Longmen Shan thrust belt and
128 the continuous subsidence of the adjacent foreland basin (Li et al., 2012). The Cenozoic Himalayan
129 orogeny resulting from the India-Asia collision is the most recent event recorded in this region (Yan et
130 al., 2011, 2018). During this event, the present Longmen Shan belt formed through rapid uplift,
131 exhumation and deformation (Li et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2012).

132

133 The Permian marine carbonate rocks in the Sichuan Basin are one of the most important reservoir rocks
134 in South China as they host the largest gas field of China — the Puguang gas field in the eastern
135 Sichuan Basin (Figure 1b). These reservoir rocks are well exposed in the northern portion of the
136 Longmen Shan belt (Figure 1), and comprise dolostone and bioclastic limestone of the Qixia Formation,
137 and limestone of the Maokou Formation (Figure 1d). However, the superimposed tectonism mentioned
138 above, results in a complex hydrocarbon system, whose formation is a matter of debate. For example,
139 the hydrocarbon source rock has been proposed to be: (1) the black shales of the lower Cambrian strata
140 (Tan et al., 2022), (2) the Permian rocks in the region (Gao et al., 2020), (3) Silurian source rocks in
141 other regions (Xie et al., 2020), or (4) a mixture of these (Hu et al., 2021). Additionally, a wide range
142 of hydrocarbon generation and accumulation dates have been proposed primarily from basin modeling,
143 with no consensus, for example, the Permian (Qiu et al., 2021), Triassic–Jurassic (Li et al., 2022), the
144 Cretaceous (Luo et al., 2020) and the Paleogene (Lu et al., 2017).

145 **3 Samples and Methods**

146 **3.1 Paleomagnetism**

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148 To characterize the remagnetization of the Permian reservoir, 182 hydrocarbon-bearing carbonate
149 samples were collected from 23 sites distributed along both limbs of three folds in the thrust belt, i.e.,
150 the Zhuyuan, Changjianggou, and Chejiaba folds (Figure 1). Samples were either demagnetized
151 thermally in an ASC TD-48 thermal demagnetizing oven at steps of 20–50°C to a maximum
152 temperature of 570°C, or demagnetized in an alternating field (AF) at steps of 3–10 mT to a maximum

153 of 100 mT. Magnetic measurements were conducted using a 2G-755 cryogenic rock magnetometer in
154 the magnetic shielded room of Nanjing University. Orthogonal-projection plots were used to identify
155 ChRM directions using a principal-component analysis of Kirschvink (1980) and software of Enkin
156 (1994). For constraining the ages of the ChRMs with respect to folding, the fold test and progressive-
157 tilt tests were applied (Enkin, 2003; Tauxe & Watson, 1994; Tauxe et al., 2016).

158

159 **3.2 Rock magnetic analysis**

160

161 For estimating the magnetic mineralogy and the magnetic-minerals' grain-size distribution,
162 isothermal remanent magnetization (IRM) acquisition curves were measured on 16 representative
163 specimens at the paleomagnetic laboratory of Nanjing University. The IRM acquisition curves were
164 obtained using an impulse magnetizer (ASC IM-10-30) and a spinner magnetometer (AGICO JR-
165 6A). The unmixing methods were used to analyze the results (Kruiver et al., 2001).

166

167 To better quantify the mineralogy, a 'Lowrie test' was conducted (Lowrie, 1990). The specimens
168 were magnetized firstly along the z-axes using a field of 2.4 T, and then along y-axes with a field of
169 0.4 T and ultimately along x- axes using a field of 0.12 T. The samples were then heated to 680°C
170 during stepwise thermal demagnetization.

171

172 **3.3 Re-Os isotopes**

173

174 Re-Os analysis was conducted to determine the ages of hydrocarbon formation. We undertook Re-Os
175 analysis on four oil and eleven bitumen samples from reservoir carbonate rocks where paleomagnetic
176 measurements were done, i.e., oil from the Zhuyuan fold, and bitumen from the Changjianggou and
177 Chejiaba folds (Figure 1). At the Durham Geochemistry Centre laboratory, ~100 mg of oil and ~150
178 mg of bitumen were dissolved in Carius tubes using 6 ml HNO₃ and 3 ml HCl for 24 hours at 220°C,
179 and then equilibrated by the given amount of ¹⁸⁵Re and ¹⁹⁰Os tracer solution. Chloroform and micro-
180 distillation were used to extract and purify Os from the acid solution. Subsequently, the NaOH-acetone
181 extraction and anion exchange chromatography were used to isolate the remaining Re bearing solution.
182 The Ni and Pt filaments were applied to load the isolated Re and Os fractions, and the isotope ratios
183 were measured via a Thermo Scientific TRITON-Electron mass spectrometer. Finally, Re-Os data
184 were regressed via a toolkit (Isoplot V. 4.15) of Ludwig (2008) and a ¹⁸⁷Re decay constant (1.666×10^{-11}
185 a⁻¹) of Smoliar et al. (1996).

186

187 **3.4 Scanning electron microscopy (SEM)**

188

189 For further identifying the magnetic remanence carriers, scanning electron microscopy (SEM) was
190 used to image typical polished sections. This was done using a field-emission-gun scanning electron
191 microscope (Supra-55 Sapphire) equipped with an energy dispersive spectrometer (Oxford Aztec X-
192 Max 150) at Nanjing University. Backscatter-electron images were used to easily identify the iron
193 oxides or sulfides, and energy-dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (EDS) to describe the elemental
194 contributions.

195

196 **3.5 The Analysis of Total Organic Content, Bitumen Reflectance in oil and Strontium Isotopes**

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198 To estimate the amount of hydrocarbon present in the samples, total organic content (TOC) was
199 determined on 20 representative carbonate samples on which ChRMs were also determined. The
200 bitumen reflectance (Rob) of five bitumen samples was measured to quantify maturity; this was
201 accomplished at Nanjing University using an incident light microscope (Zeiss Axiokop 40 Pol) with a
202 50×0.85 oil immersion objective and at a wavelength of 546 nm. The Rob values were converted to
203 the vitrinite reflectance (Ro) by using an equation $Ro = 0.618 \times Rob + 0.4$ of Jacob (1985).
204

205 To characterize the fluids that potentially caused the remagnetization, we measured strontium isotope
206 ratios ($^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$) of 14 representative hydrocarbon-bearing carbonate samples on a TRITON mass
207 spectrometer at Nanjing University. The values were normalized relative to SRM 987 = 0.710250 (± 13)
208 (SRM = standard reference material). In order to calculate Permian $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ ratios from present-day
209 values, the Sr concentration of the samples was measured using an inductively coupled-plasma mass
210 spectrometer (Aurora M90).
211

212 4 Results

213 4.1 Paleomagnetic analysis

214
215 From thermal and AF demagnetization data, most samples yielded reliable remanence directions
216 (Figure 2). A low temperature component was isolated $< 250^\circ\text{C}$, which was similarly isolated for
217 alternating fields < 15 mT (Figures 2a and 2b). The site-mean direction of this component (Declination
218 = 356° , Inclination = 51° , number of sites = 27, $\alpha_{95} = 3^\circ$) is similar to the present-day field. Higher-
219 temperature components with direction differences were isolated between $\sim 280^\circ\text{C}$ and 370°C – 480°C ;
220 there were corresponding components identified using AF demagnetization, i.e., AF = 15–50 mT.
221 These components were the characteristic magnetizations, the ChRMs (Table 1). Two ChRMs were
222 identified: (1) ChRM-1 was found in 13 sites, and is characterized by mean values of declination (Dg)
223 = 41° , inclination (Ig) = 47° ($\alpha_{95} = 4^\circ$) in geographic coordinates, and a declination (Ds) = 43° ,
224 inclination (Is) = 48° ($\alpha_{95} = 20^\circ$) in stratigraphic coordinates (Figures 2c and 2e); (2) ChRM-2 was
225 found in 10 sites, with a mean $Dg = 18^\circ$, $Ig = 48^\circ$ ($\alpha_{95} = 4^\circ$) in geographic coordinates, and $Ds = 44^\circ$, Is
226 = 49° ($\alpha_{95} = 34^\circ$) in stratigraphic coordinates (Figures 2d and 2f). Most ChRM-1 directions occur in
227 samples from the Chejiaba and Changjiagou folds, while most ChRM-2 occur in samples from the
228 Zhuyuan fold. To constrain the ages of the ChRMs with respect to folding, a fold test and progressive
229 tilt test were conducted. The results of the fold test are negative for the ChRMs (Figures 2c–f),
230 suggesting that these carbonate rocks were remagnetized after the formation of the folds during the
231 Triassic (Enkin, 2003; Tauxe et al., 2016; Tauxe & Watson, 1994). The progressive tilt test exhibits
232 similar results, with maximum K values at 4.4% and 3.9% unfolding (Figure 3). The fold test of Tauxe
233 and Watson (1994) show maximum K values at -3% ~8% unfolding for ChRM-1 and maximum K
234 values at -1%~7% unfolding for ChRM-2 (Figure 4).
235

236 4.2 Rock magnetic analysis

237
238 Representative samples from different regions and lithology were chosen for IRM analysis, and typical
239 curves are shown in Figure 5. Most samples show a typical curve of low to medium coercivity
240 magnetic minerals, as they reach $\sim 80\%$ of saturation IRM before 0.2 T (Figures 5a and 5b). In contrast,

241 two samples (CJG04 and CJG06; Figures 5b) did not reach saturation in a field of 1.0 T and 2.4 T,
242 which is a characteristic of hard coercivity remanence carriers (e.g., Yang et al., 2004). To analyze the
243 IRM acquisition curves, the unmixing approach of Kruiver et al. (2001) was applied (Figures 5c–h;
244 Table S1). In this approach, the IRM acquisition curves are manually unmixed into components
245 assuming lognormal distributions; the components are characterized by their mean coercivity ($B_{1/2}$),
246 saturation IRM and half-width of the distribution (DP). For example, for sample CJG06 two
247 components were identified. There is a ‘hard’ magnetic component with $B_{1/2} \sim 1737$ mT and $DP \sim 0.2$,
248 which potentially corresponds to hematite, and a ‘soft’ component (18%) with $B_{1/2} \sim 56$ mT and $DP \sim$
249 0.36 . Generally, for most samples two components were identified (e.g., CJB04 and CJB08 in Figures
250 5e and 5g): (1) a ‘soft component’ making up 65%–99% of IRM contributions with $B_{1/2} \sim 40$ to 56 mT,
251 and (2) a ‘hard component’ with $B_{1/2} \sim 501$ to 2512 mT. The ‘soft’ component is indicative of a
252 magnetite-like phase, and the ‘hard’ a hematite-like phase.

253
254 The samples were subjected to a ‘Lowrie’ test (Lowrie, 1990; Figure 6) to try to identify the magnetic
255 mineralogy. Most samples were dominated by the soft fraction, demagnetizing between 400–570°C,
256 and likely indicating magnetite. There was also a medium and hard fraction. For the samples CJB04
257 and CJB07, the unblocking temperatures of the hard fractions were $\sim 680^\circ\text{C}$, indicating the presence of
258 hematite. For the samples CJB04, CJB07 and ZY02, the soft or medium fractions at $\sim 325^\circ\text{C}$ suggest an
259 iron-sulphide ferromagnetic (*s.l.*) phase likely pyrrhotite or greigite. For samples CJB08 and ZY02, the
260 final demagnetization temperature of both medium and hard fractions was at $\sim 350^\circ\text{C}$, indicating an
261 absence of hematite in these samples.

262 263 4.3 Re–Os isotopes

264
265 The Re–Os isotopic analysis of oil and bitumen produced two sets of date results. The four oil samples
266 contain between 8.4–46.8 ppb Re and 198.0–600.6 ppt Os, with $^{187}\text{Re}/^{188}\text{Os}$ and $^{187}\text{Os}/^{188}\text{Os}$ ratios of
267 194.8–562.7 and 1.29–1.87, respectively (Table 2). The Re–Os data of the oil samples produce a Model
268 3 date of 94 ± 10 Ma, with an initial $^{187}\text{Os}/^{188}\text{Os}$ value of 0.994 ± 0.061 (MSWD = 3.7; Figure 7a). The
269 eleven bitumen samples contain 7.7–80.7 ppb Re and 97.3–669.0 ppt Os, with $^{187}\text{Re}/^{188}\text{Os}$ and
270 $^{187}\text{Os}/^{188}\text{Os}$ ratios of 102.5–2903.6 and 2.3–15, respectively. The bitumen samples produce a Re–Os
271 date of 268 ± 17 Ma (Model 3), with an initial $^{187}\text{Os}/^{188}\text{Os}$ value of 1.60 ± 0.35 (MSWD = 541; Figure
272 7b). The bitumen Re–Os date estimate does, however, have a large MSWD and a Model 3 fit,
273 indicating that significant geological scatter exists in addition to analytical uncertainties (Ludwig,
274 2008). The bitumen originating from several different source rocks is suggested to be the primary cause
275 of the scatter in the dataset, which resulted in large variation of initial $^{187}\text{Os}/^{188}\text{Os}$ ratios (Selby et al
276 2005). The initial $^{187}\text{Os}/^{188}\text{Os}$ ratios of 6 out of the 11 bitumen samples at 268 Ma are similar, ranging
277 from 1.2 to 1.6 (samples Bitumen-1, 2, 4, 6, 7 and 9), indicative of a similar origin. This subset of
278 samples produces a Re–Os date of 264 ± 16 Ma, with a lower degree of scatter (MSWD = 42; Figure
279 7b).

280 281 4.4 SEM analysis

282
283 SEM imaging found that the matrix for the reservoir rock is typically constituted by carbonate,
284 fractures and pores (Figure 8). In most hydrocarbon-bearing samples, bitumen can be observed along
285 the fractures or in the pores (Figures 8a–c); EDS analysis of the bitumen identified sulfur and carbon

286 (Figure 8g). Fine-grained iron oxides (generally <10 μm in diameter) occur as disseminated grains and
287 framboidal clusters along bitumen-filled fractures and pores (Figure 8). Together with the rock
288 magnetic results, most of these iron oxides are likely authigenic magnetite, although a few hematite
289 grains may occur (Elmore et al., 1987, 2012). Iron sulfides can also be observed presented in
290 framboidal forms in the matrix, some of which are not in the fractures. Together with the EDS analysis,
291 most of the iron sulfides should be pyrite (Figures 8a and 8h), ferrimagnetic iron-sulfides may also be
292 present (Figures 8f and 8j), e.g., greigite.

294 **4.5 The analysis of Total Organic Content, Bitumen Reflectance in oil and Strontium Isotopes**

296 A group of 20 hydrocarbon-bearing samples were selected for the TOC measurement. The values range
297 from 0.01 to 0.78 wt. % (Table S2), and is positively correlated with the natural remanent
298 magnetization (NRM) with a Pearson's correlation coefficient $R = 0.78$ (Figure 9). This phenomenon
299 has been reported previously for hydrocarbon-rich rocks (Emmertson et al., 2012; 2013)

301 The vitrinite reflectance (R_o) was converted from bitumen reflectance, which was measured on five
302 representative bitumen samples. The mean R_o values range from 0.9% to 1.2%, maximum R_o values
303 range from 1.0% to 1.4%, and minimum R_o values from 0.7% to 0.9% (Table S3). Thirteen carbonate
304 samples yielded $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ ratios in a narrow range of 0.70704–0.70731, and the sample of ZY4-10
305 yielded a higher ratio of 0.70794 (Table S4). All of these values are inside the isotopic scope of
306 contemporaneous Permian seawater (0.7070–0.7080) (McArthur et al., 2012; Figure 10).

307 **5 Discussion**

308 Based on the paleomagnetic demagnetization data, two ChRM directions were identified in the
309 hydrocarbon-bearing carbonate samples from the northern portion of Longmen Shan belt. Fold tests
310 suggest that both ChRMs were acquired post-folding. The ChRM directions are thought not to be the
311 result of regional block rotations, due to the similarity between the primary geomagnetic result of
312 Permian–lower Triassic strata in the studied region and those in the stable areas in South China (Heller
313 et al 1988; Li & Wang, 1989; Steiner et al., 1989). Disregarding vertical axis rotations, a comparison of
314 the paleopole determined from the ChRMs with the APWP of South China (Figure 2g) indicates that
315 the two mean ChRM directions were acquired during two separate time periods, the Late Triassic and
316 Middle Jurassic–Cretaceous. The ages of both ChRMs post-date the deposition of the hydrocarbon-
317 bearing carbonate, which, together with the negative fold test results, indicates that both ChRMs are
318 secondary remanent magnetizations. Based on the rock magnetism, the ChRMs are mainly carried by
319 magnetite, which can be observed as authigenic magnetite in the back-scatter images. The evidence that
320 the ChRMs are chemical remagnetizations is twofold: (1) the low vitrinite reflectance values of
321 bitumen, i.e., 0.9–1.2%, indicate temperatures < 200°C, and (2) authigenic magnetite – the main carrier
322 of the ChRMs – was widely observed within bitumen-filled fractures (Figure 8).

324 **5.1 The origin of the remagnetization events in the reservoir carbonate**

326 This remagnetization was most likely due to the migration and accumulation of hydrocarbon fluids
327 within the Permian carbonates (Machel, 1995; Zhang et al., 2018). This argument is supported by three
328 lines of evidence: (1) in the oil- and bitumen-rich carbonate rocks, authigenic magnetite was commonly

329 observed co-existing with hydrocarbons (Figure 8), (2) the Permian carbonate contains a high amount
330 of oil and bitumen, with NRM intensities (a reflection of magnetite content) correlated with TOC (a
331 reflection of the hydrocarbon content; Figure 9), and (3) the Sr isotope composition of the carbonate
332 rocks indicate that they were not significantly altered by chemically evolved orogenic fluids (Figure
333 10). These three characteristics have previously been used to associate the acquisition of chemical
334 remagnetization to hydrocarbon accumulation (Elmore et al., 1987; Elmore & Leach, 1990; Zhang et
335 al., 2018). The same association can be employed here; we link the two remagnetization events to two
336 stages of hydrocarbon migration and accumulation, one during the Late Triassic and the other during
337 the Middle Jurassic–Cretaceous.

338 The chemical processes leading to magnetic mineral formation in the presence of hydrocarbons is
339 complex, and depends on the complex interplay between the host reservoir rocks, sulfur content of the
340 hydrocarbons, origin of the hydrocarbons, the redox conditions and temperature/depth of
341 remagnetization (Machel, 1995; Badejo et al., 2021; Abdulkarim et al., 2022; Perkins, 2022). Generally,
342 hydrocarbons produce reductive environments leading to the formation of iron sulphides (Machel, 1995;
343 Zhang et al., 2018), however, in very low-sulfur hydrocarbon environments, magnetite formation has
344 been widely observed and reported (e.g. Perkins, 2022). Perkins (2022) suggest that the magnetite is
345 formed in relatively small quantities during the dehydroxylation of goethite to hematite, however,
346 given magnetite’s relatively strong magnetic properties, it dominates the NRM.

347

348 **5.2 Linking Re–Os isotope ages to hydrocarbon evolution**

349

350 Rhenium–Os data from crude oil in the remagnetized carbonates yielded an absolute age of 93.8 ± 9.8
351 Ma (Figure 7a), which indicates that hydrocarbon evolution reset the Re–Os system. Two potential
352 mechanisms which are thought to reset the Re–Os geochronometer are oil generation (e.g., Cumming et
353 al., 2014; Georgiev et al., 2016; Selby & Creaser, 2005) and hydrothermal alteration (e.g., Lillis &
354 Selby, 2013). Given that the $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ isotope compositions of the Permian carbonate rocks are within
355 the isotopic range of Permian seawater, significant hydrothermal alteration of crude oil seems to be less
356 likely. Recent geochemical analysis of the same reservoir, also found no evidence for hydrothermal
357 alteration (Xiao et al., 2021). Oil generation is therefore suggested as the most likely origin of crude oil
358 Re–Os age.

359

360 The bitumen samples show a Re–Os age of 264 ± 16 Ma (Figure 7b). As bitumen is a secondary
361 product that evolves from liquid oil following oil generation and migration, various formation
362 mechanisms are possible. These mechanisms are generally divided into two categories: 1) thermal
363 cracking resulting in pyrobitumen marked by higher vitrinite reflectance values, and 2) mechanisms
364 unconnected to thermal cracking such as water washing and biodegradation (Jacob 1985; Larter et al.,
365 2006; Li et al., 2020; Mastalerz et al., 2018; Shalaby et al., 2012). Neither water washing nor
366 biodegradation was considered to notably influence Re–Os isotope systematics (Finlay et al., 2011;
367 Lillis & Selby, 2013; Selby et al., 2005). Additionally, post-accumulation disturbances that chemically
368 react with hydrothermal fluids can alter Re–Os systematics (Lillis & Selby, 2013); however, using the
369 same reasoning given above for oil, we dismiss hydrothermal alteration as a likely origin of bitumen
370 Re–Os age. Therefore, bitumen Re–Os ages are primarily associated with oil generation and thermal
371 cracking (Ge et al., 2016; Selby et al., 2005). Of the two remaining possible mechanisms, we suggest

372 that the oil generation is the most likely, because the vitrinite reflectance data for the bitumen samples
373 are generally lower than those for gas generation and oil cracking ($R_o > 1.3$; Mastalerz et al., 2018).

374

375 **5.3 Combined remagnetization and Re–Os isotopes age analysis**

376

377 It is likely that the Re–Os ages for the hydrocarbon samples and the remagnetization data for the
378 hydrocarbon-bearing carbonate yield ages are related to the same process of hydrocarbon evolution. In
379 this natural process, the hydrocarbon generation should occur prior to or coeval with hydrocarbon
380 accumulation, and the oil cracking and hydrothermal alteration should occur after oil accumulation.
381 Therefore, we determined that the age of earlier oil generation is ~264 Ma based on the Re–Os age of
382 bitumen, which agrees with the oil accumulation age during the Late Triassic based on the
383 remagnetization ChRM-1 (Figure 11). Similarly, the second oil-generation age based on the Re–Os data
384 for crude oil is ~94 Ma, which agrees with the broad age range for ChRM-2, i.e., covering the Middle
385 Jurassic–Cretaceous. This combined study can now limit the age range into the Late Cretaceous.
386 ChRM-2 is broad because of overlapping pole positions for the APWP of South China during Middle
387 Jurassic–Cretaceous (Figure 2g).

388

389 By using the combined method, we can track two periods of hydrocarbon evolution, even without prior
390 knowledge of the source rocks and complexity of the system. In the first stage, the oil generated at the
391 age of ~264 Ma and possibly migrated into an initial reservoir. Until the Late Triassic, the oil
392 subsequently migrated into the Permian reservoir rocks studied here. In the second stage, another
393 generation of oil occurred at the age of ~94 Ma, which migrated and then was trapped in the same
394 Permian reservoir. These new ages are big improvements on previous age estimates for hydrocarbon
395 evolution in the Longmen Shan belt, based mainly on basin models, which themselves rely on often
396 poorly constrained parameters such paleo-heat flow, strata thickness *etc.* (Li et al., 2022; Lu et al., 2017;
397 Luo et al., 2020; Qiu et al., 2021). These poorly constrained models yield a wide range of hydrocarbon
398 evolution ages from the Permian to Paleogene, although there is a consensus on three characteristics: (1)
399 multiple hydrocarbon activities have occurred; (2) a secondary migration for the earlier hydrocarbon
400 activity happened; (3) faults are the primary migration pathways.

401

402 **5.4 Hydrocarbon evolution and tectonic events in the studied regions**

403

404 Hydrocarbon generation and accumulation is a dynamic process relying on depth and temperature, and
405 pathways and trapping, all of which can be related to tectonic events (Philippi, 1965). Here we link
406 hydrocarbon evolution to three phases of tectonism mainly based on temporal links and the results of
407 the fold test (Figures 3, 4 and 11). Firstly, our study shows hydrocarbons were initially generated
408 at ~260 Ma, which is similar in age to the ~260 Ma Dongwu large igneous province which occurred
409 around the Sichuan Basin (Li et al., 2015; Shellnutt, 2014). It is very likely that the study region was
410 significantly influenced by this thermal event, leading to the oil generation. This is supported by U–Pb
411 ages for nearby diabase dykes (~261 Ma; Shen et al., 2018). Secondly, based on the negative fold test
412 (Figures 3 and 4), we suggest that the Late Triassic Indosinian thrusting would have faulted and folded
413 the region to form the suitable migration paths and entrapment structures, e.g., the Changjianggou and
414 Chejiaba folds (Yan et al., 2011). These Indosinian event connected the initial reservoir through faults,
415 resulting in the hydrocarbon's secondary migration and accumulation in the studied Permian reservoir.

416 Thirdly, continued thrusting during the Cretaceous Yanshan event led to subsidence of the adjacent
417 foreland basin (Li et al., 2012), increasing burial depth and temperature promoting a second phase of
418 oil generation at 94 ± 10 Ma. The oil was subsequently mobilized and trapped in the pre-existing folds
419 formed by the Indosinian events, indicating that the Yanshan event may not significantly change the
420 pre-existing folds, but have re-activated existing thrust faults to provide migration paths. The apatite
421 fission track ages in the Longmen Shan belt also indicate that the Late Cretaceous was the most intense
422 episode of the Yanshan orogeny (Li et al., 2012; Xu, et al., 2018).

423

424 In summary, although the northern portion of Longmen Shan orogen records extensive superimposed
425 tectonism, it is during the Indosinian tectonic event that the main geological structures that allowed for
426 migration and entrapment of hydrocarbon, formed. The Dongwu magmatism and Yanshan tectonism
427 provided the heat for hydrocarbon maturation, and the latter may also have re-activated migration paths.
428 It is suggested that the Cenozoic Himalayan, which is thought to be significant in the formation of the
429 Longmen Shan belt (Li et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2013), did not significantly affect the hydrocarbons in
430 the region.

431

432 **6. Conclusion**

433

434 A combination of paleomagnetic and Re–Os isotope data acquisition and analysis has been conducted
435 on a complex carbonate reservoir in the northern portion of the Longmen Shan belt. With the new data
436 we determined the sequence of hydrocarbon evolution, from generation to migration to accumulation,
437 and we relate these processes to regional orogenesis. We show that there are two periods of
438 hydrocarbon generation at ~ 264 Ma and ~ 94 Ma, the former associated with the ~ 260 Ma Dongwu
439 large igneous province, and the latter with the Yanshan orogenic events; there are also two periods of
440 hydrocarbon accumulation during the Late Triassic and Cretaceous, the former associated with the Late
441 Triassic Indosinian orogeny. Such geochronological information can be used to calibrate uncertain
442 basin modelling parameters, and reduce uncertainty associated with exploration in the future.

443

444 Due to other possible mechanisms of remagnetization and resetting of Re–Os isotope systems,
445 including hydrocarbon generation, cracking and hydrothermal alteration, combining these two methods
446 has the potential to constrain a range of critical hydrocarbon processes, providing more credible
447 information than a single method alone. The combined methods employed here should be applicable
448 globally, when: 1) complex hydrocarbon evolution process need to be characterized, especially without
449 a firm understanding of geological settings, and 2) the interpretation of each single method needs to be
450 strengthened.

451

452 **Acknowledgments**

453

454 We would like to express our gratitude to Shuxin Shen, Jingping Zi, Xuzhi Hu, Geoff Nowell, and
455 Chris Ottley for their assistance during field and experimental work. Funding: This study was funded
456 by the National Science Foundation of China (U22B6002; 42272235; 41902206); Foundation of
457 Chinese Academy of Science (E22117).

458

459 **Data Availability Statement**

460 The data for this work could be downloaded on the website of
461 <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.21905895>.

462

463 **References**

464

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689

690 **Table Captions**

691

692 **Table 1.** Summary of site-mean ChRM directions of Permian shale and carbonate rocks from the
693 northern portion of the Longmen Shan Belt. Strike/dip are the bedding as measured in the field (right
694 hand rule), N is the number of directions used to determine the ChRM, Dg and Ig are the geographic
695 declination and inclination, and Ds and Is the stratigraphic declination and inclination, k the precision
696 parameter and α_{95} the standard confidence error.

697

698

699 **Table 2.** Rhenium–Osmium content and isotopic composition for oil and bitumen samples from
700 Permian reservoir rocks, which paleomagnetic measurements were done. ppb = part per billion, ppt =
701 part per trillion and rho = the associated error correlation.
702
703

704 **Figure Captions**

705 **Figure 1.** Simplified geological maps of: (a) China, (b) the Sichuan Basin and its surrounding blocks,
706 PGF is the Puguang gas field. (c) The northern Longmen Shan belt, (d) a stratigraphic column of the
707 western Sichuan Basin (modified from Jia et al., 2006). In (c) the distribution of Cambrian–Cretaceous
708 units and faults are shown, in addition to the sampling locations for this study. Each sampling location
709 symbol in the map contains 1–7 sampling sites, which are spaced tens of meters to several kilometers
710 apart.

711

712 **Figure 2.** Paleomagnetic data: (a) progressive thermal demagnetization data of sample CJG5-5, which
713 is a typical ChRM-1-bearing sample; (b) progressive alternating demagnetization data of sample
714 CJB05-9-IS, which is a typical ChRM-2-bearing sample; (c) site–mean data in situ coordinates for
715 ChRM-1-bearing samples; (d) site–mean data in situ coordinates for ChRM-2-bearing samples; (e)
716 site–mean data in tilt-corrected coordinates for ChRM-1-bearing samples; (f) site–mean data in tilt-
717 corrected coordinates for ChRM-2-bearing samples; (g) In the APWP of South China Block (Zhang et
718 al., 2015b), virtual geomagnetic poles were plotted. In (a) and (b), the blue lines represent viscous
719 remanent magnetization and the red (ChRM-1) and orange (ChRM-2) lines highlight the picked ChRM
720 directions. In (c), (d) and (g), the red and orange stars denote the average directions of the ChRM-1 and
721 ChRM-2, respectively.
722

723 **Figure 3.** Results for the progressive tilt test and direction-correction test (Enkin, 2003) of ChRM1 (a–
724 b) and ChRM2 (c–d). In (a) and (c), the maximum value of precision parameter (K) occurs at ~0%
725 untilting. In (b) and (d), the 95% confidence region constrained by the dashed lines do not coincide
726 with black solid line, indicating a negative tilt test.
727

728 **Figure 4.** Results of the fold test using the approach of Tauxe and Watson (1994) for: (a) ChRM-1
729 samples and (b) ChRM-2 samples. The black line is the maximum eigenvalue as an unfolding function.
730 The red lines are the boot-strapping estimates used to estimate the green line, which is the cumulative
731 distribution function of the unfolding percentage. The blue lines are the 95% confidence boundaries for
732 the green line.
733

734 **Figure 5.** (a–b) IRM acquisition curves of typical samples from the three folds and different lithologies
735 as labeled in the legends; (c–h) typical IRM analysis charts through the approach of Kruiver et al.
736 (2001). As exhibited are linear acquisition plot, gradient acquisition plot and standardized acquisition
737 plot for (c) CJG01, (d) CJG02, (e) CJB04, (f) CJB07, (g) CJB08 and (h) ZY02. The data were listed in
738 the Table S1, which were available on the website of <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.21905895>.
739

740 **Figure 6.** Triaxial IRM thermal demagnetization curves of representative samples from three folds and
741 different lithology: (a) CJG01, (b) CJG02, (c) CJB04, (d) CJB07, (e) CJB08 and (f) ZY02. Three
742 perpendicular fields were applied before thermal demagnetization: 0.12 T, 0.4 T and 2.4 T. The
743 coercivity value of soft fraction should be in the range of 0-0.12 T, the medium fraction is in the range
744 of 0.12-0.4 T and the hard fraction is in the range of 0.4-2.4 T.
745

746 **Figure 7.** $^{187}\text{Re}/^{188}\text{Os}$ versus $^{187}\text{Os}/^{188}\text{Os}$ binary diagrams for oil (a) and bitumen (b) from Permian
747 carbonate reservoir samples. Ellipses on data points represent 2σ absolute uncertainty. MSWD = mean
748 squared weighted deviation. See Table 2 for the Re-Os data.
749

750 **Figure 8.** Backscatter electron images of representative Permian carbonate reservoir samples. Bitumen
751 and iron oxide grains are distributed along fractures (a–c) and in pore spaces (d, e). The iron oxides
752 often occur around the fractures, pores and bitumen. Typical EDS spectra for bitumen, magnetite and
753 iron sulfides are depicted in figures (g)–(j); the locations are shown in (a)–(f).
754

755 **Figure 9.** NRM versus TOC for carbonate reservoir samples. A linear regression trend-line is plotted.
756

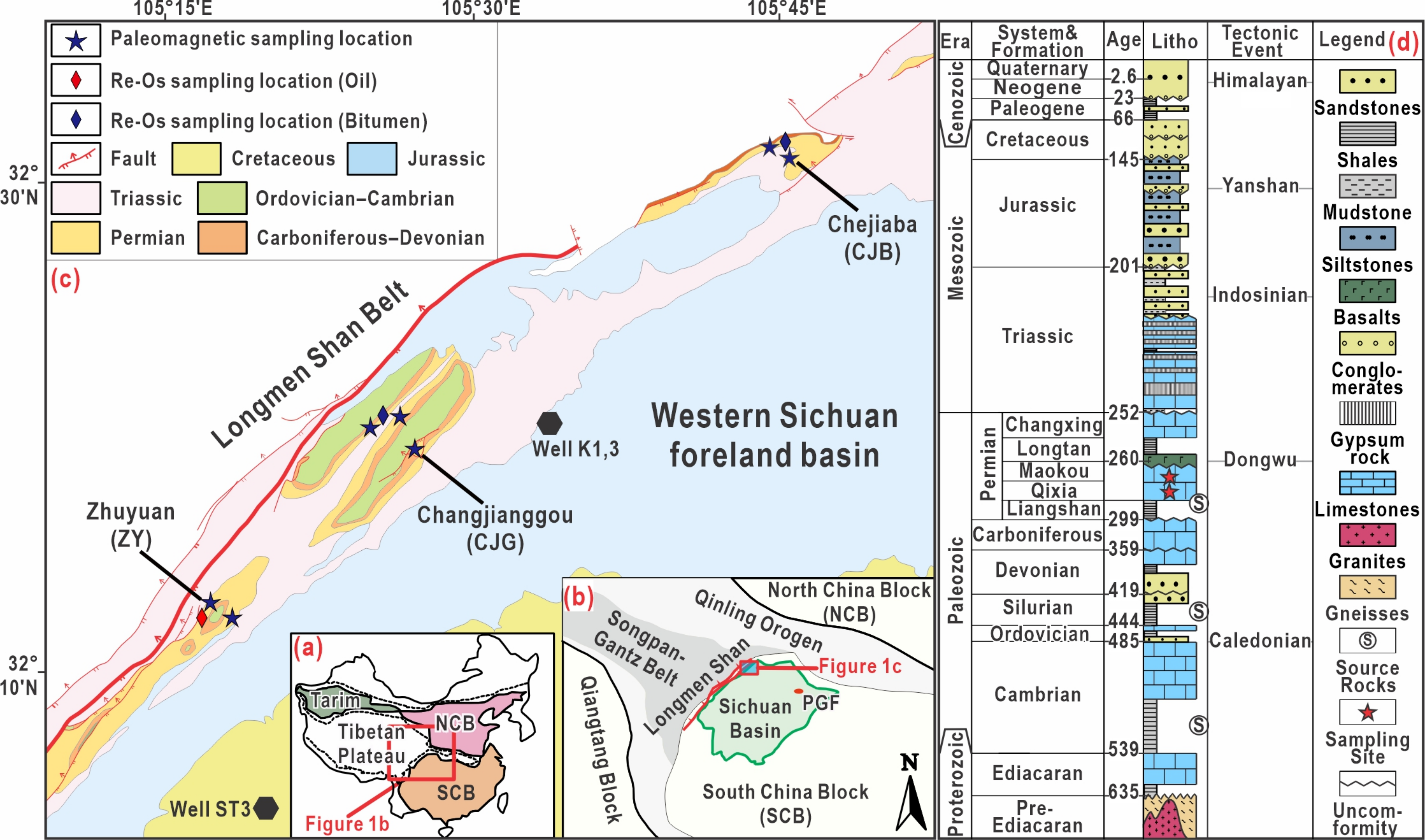
757 **Figure 10.** $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ curves of Permian strata in this study and contemporaneous seawater. The orange
758 lines exhibit the Sr isotope values for our representative samples. The black and yellow lines show the
759 Sr isotope values of coeval seawater, which were modified from Wang et al. (2018) and McArthur et al.
760 (2012). The grey and blue fields exhibit the Sr error scopes.

761

762

763 **Figure 11.** Relationship between hydrocarbon evolution and tectonic events, showing a comparison of
764 the remagnetization time, Re–Os ages, U–Pb ages (Shen et al., 2018), ^{40}Ar – ^{39}Ar (Yan et al., 2011) and
765 apatite fission track ages (Li et al., 2012).
766
767

Figure 1.



- [Star] Paleomagnetic sampling location
- [Red Diamond] Re-Os sampling location (Oil)
- [Blue Diamond] Re-Os sampling location (Bitumen)
- [Red Arrow] Fault
- [Yellow Box] Cretaceous
- [Light Blue Box] Jurassic
- [Pink Box] Triassic
- [Light Green Box] Ordovician-Cambrian
- [Yellow Box] Permian
- [Orange Box] Carboniferous-Devonian

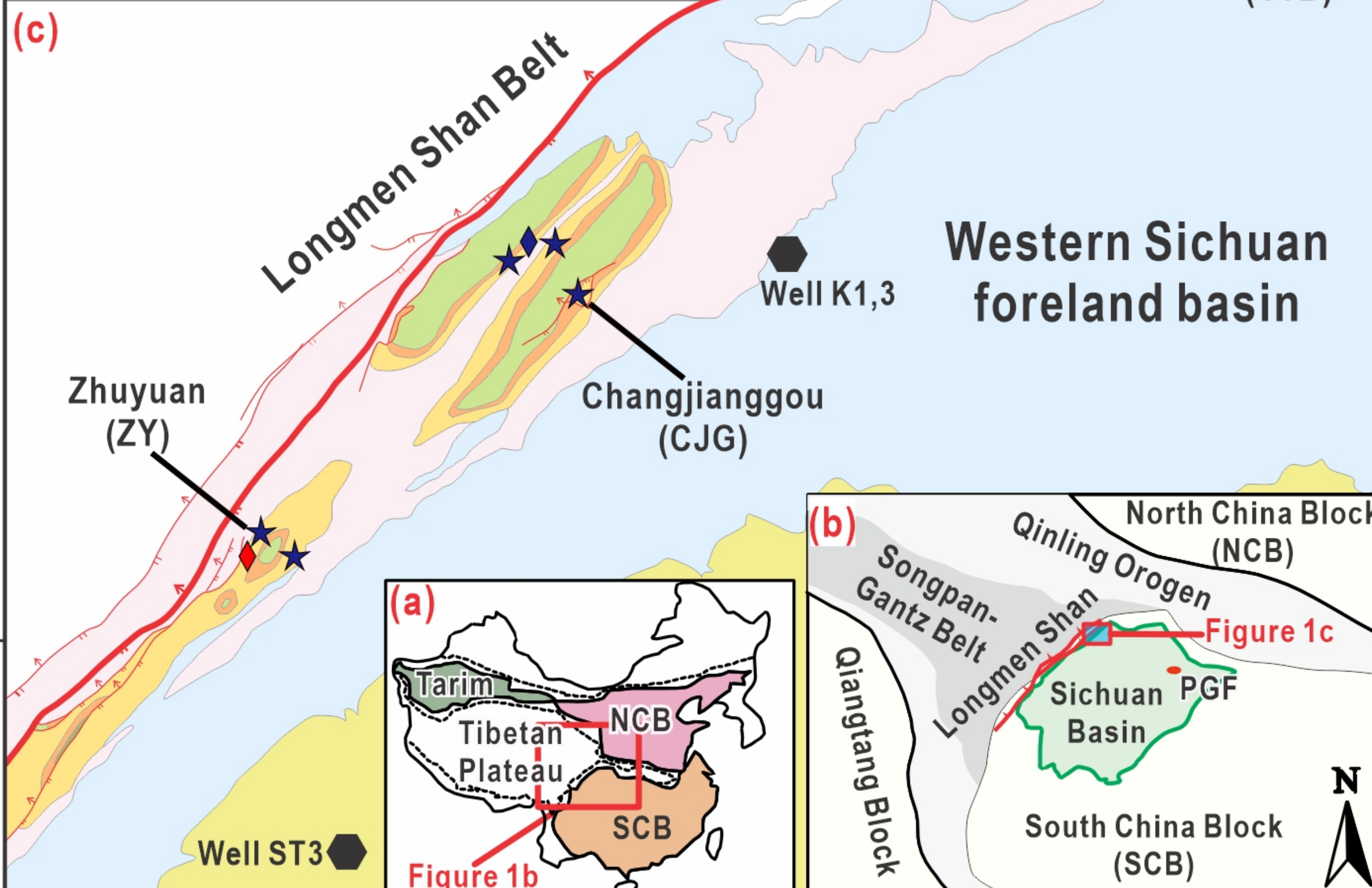


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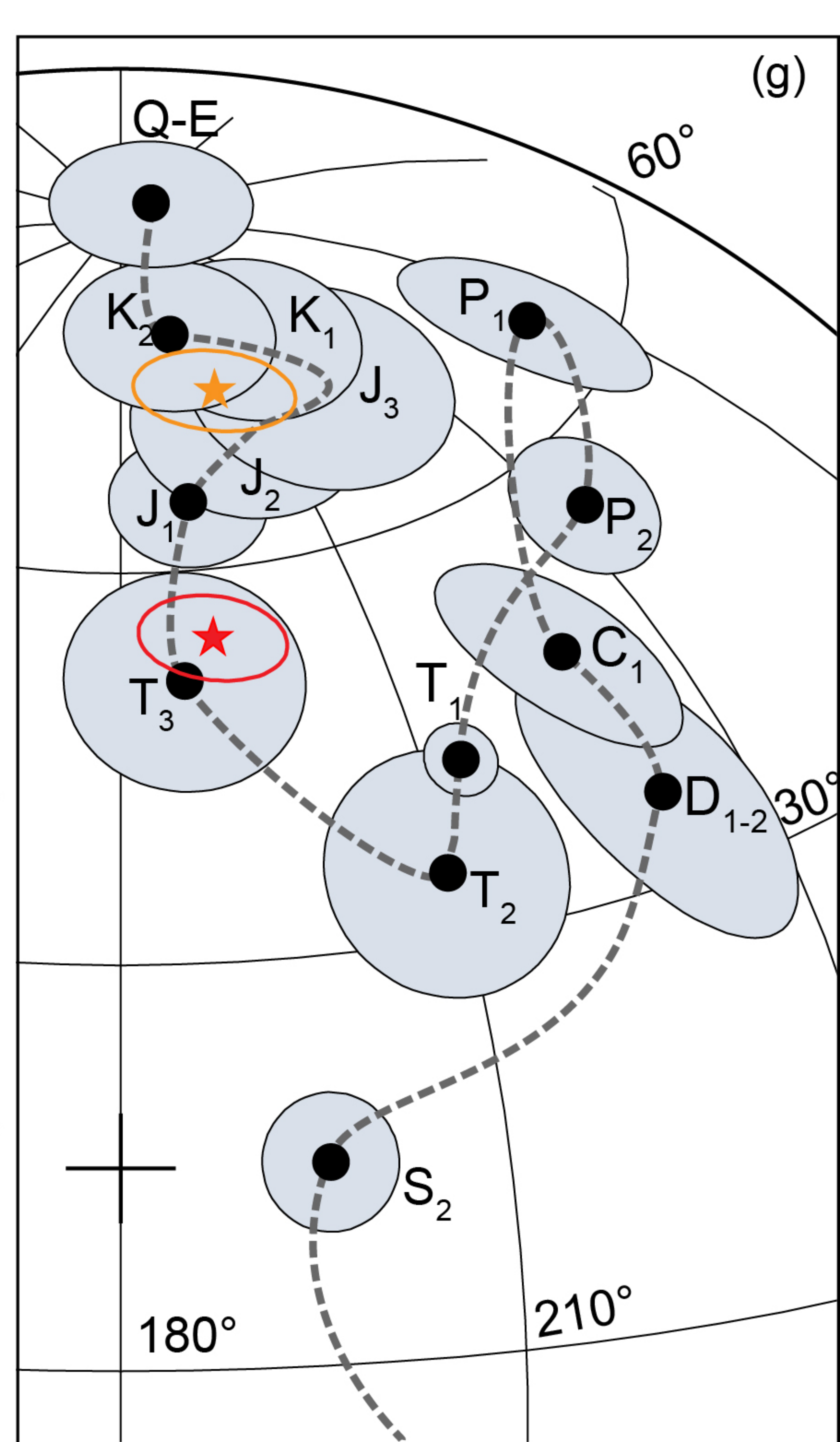
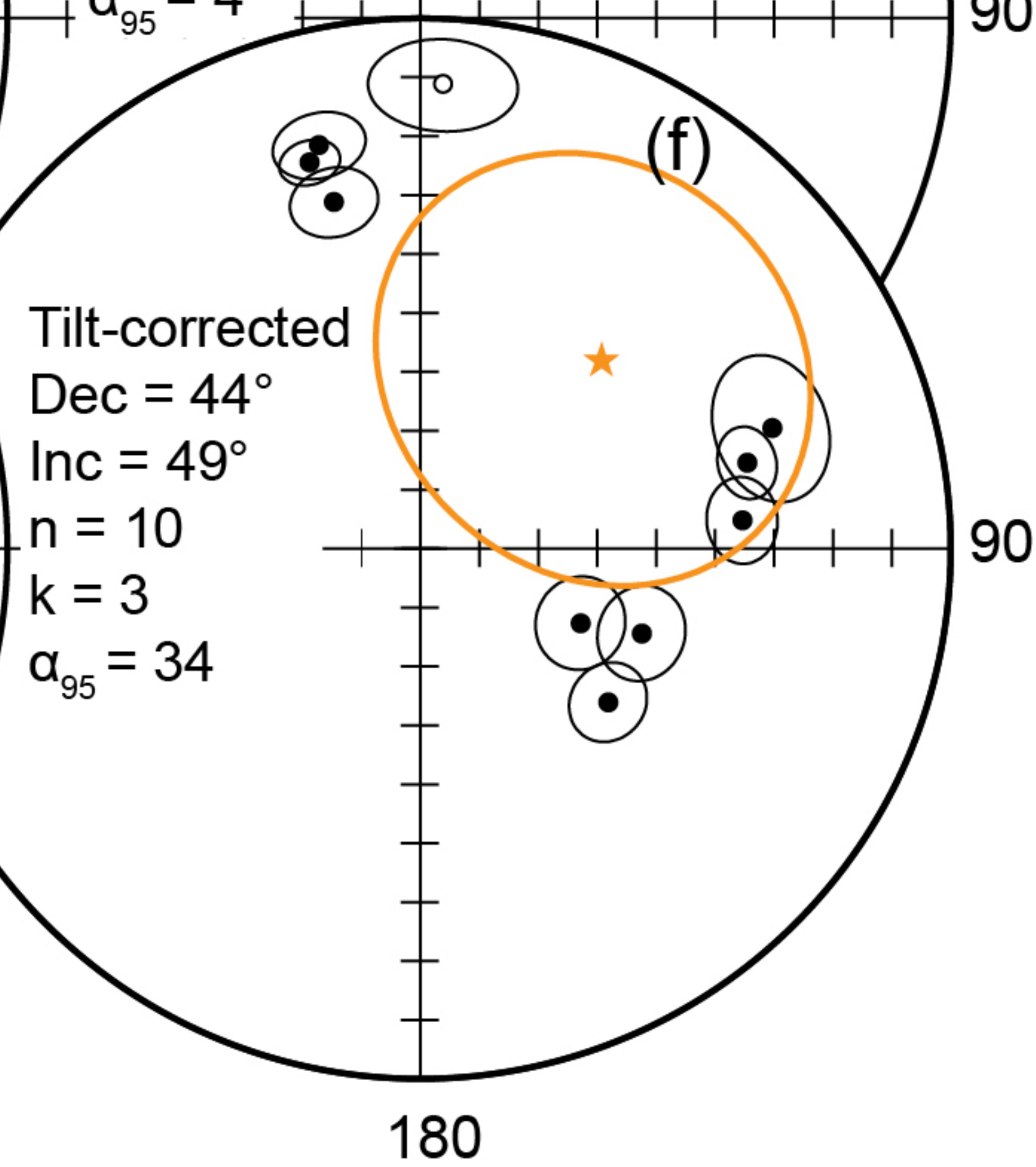
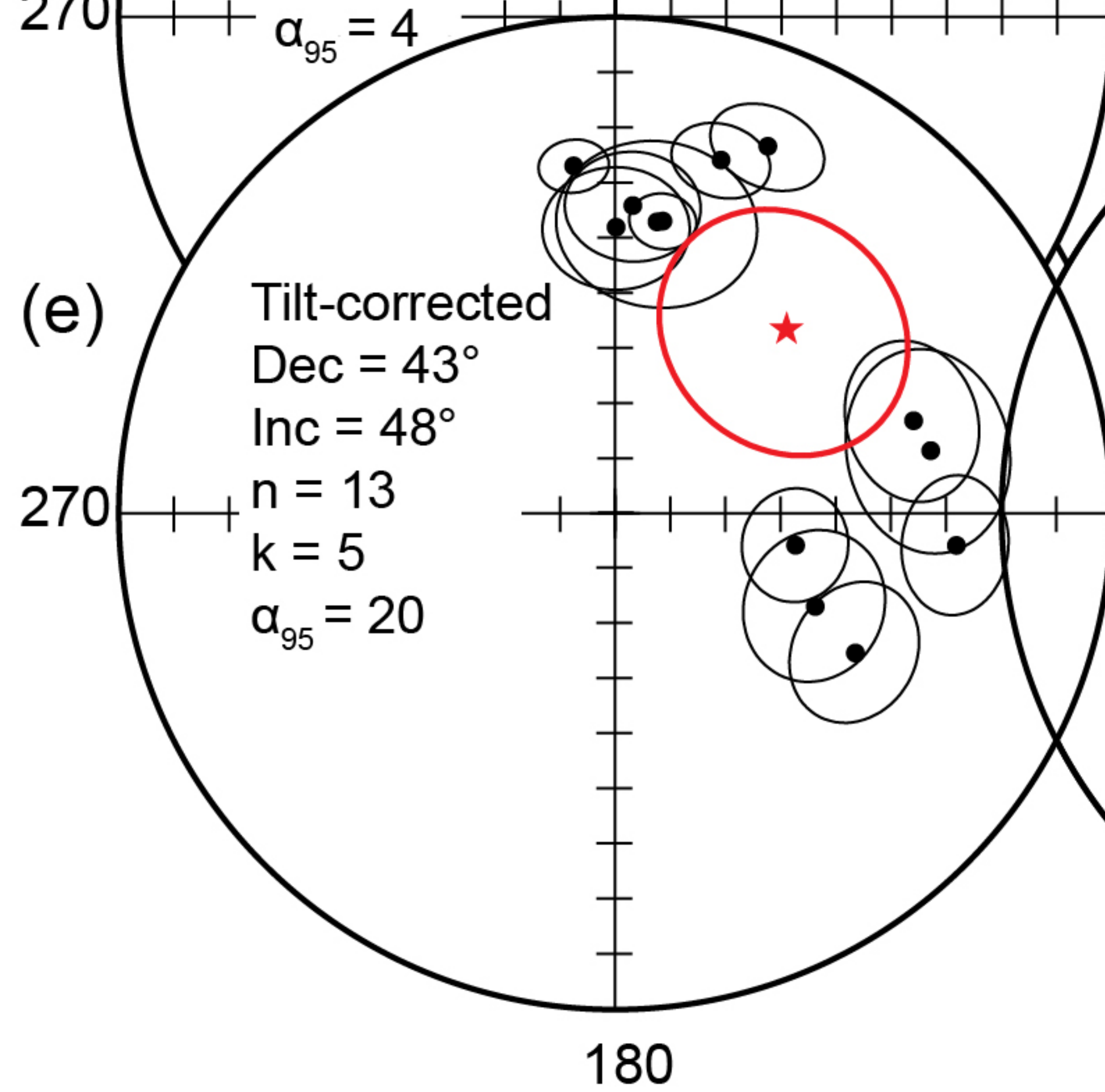
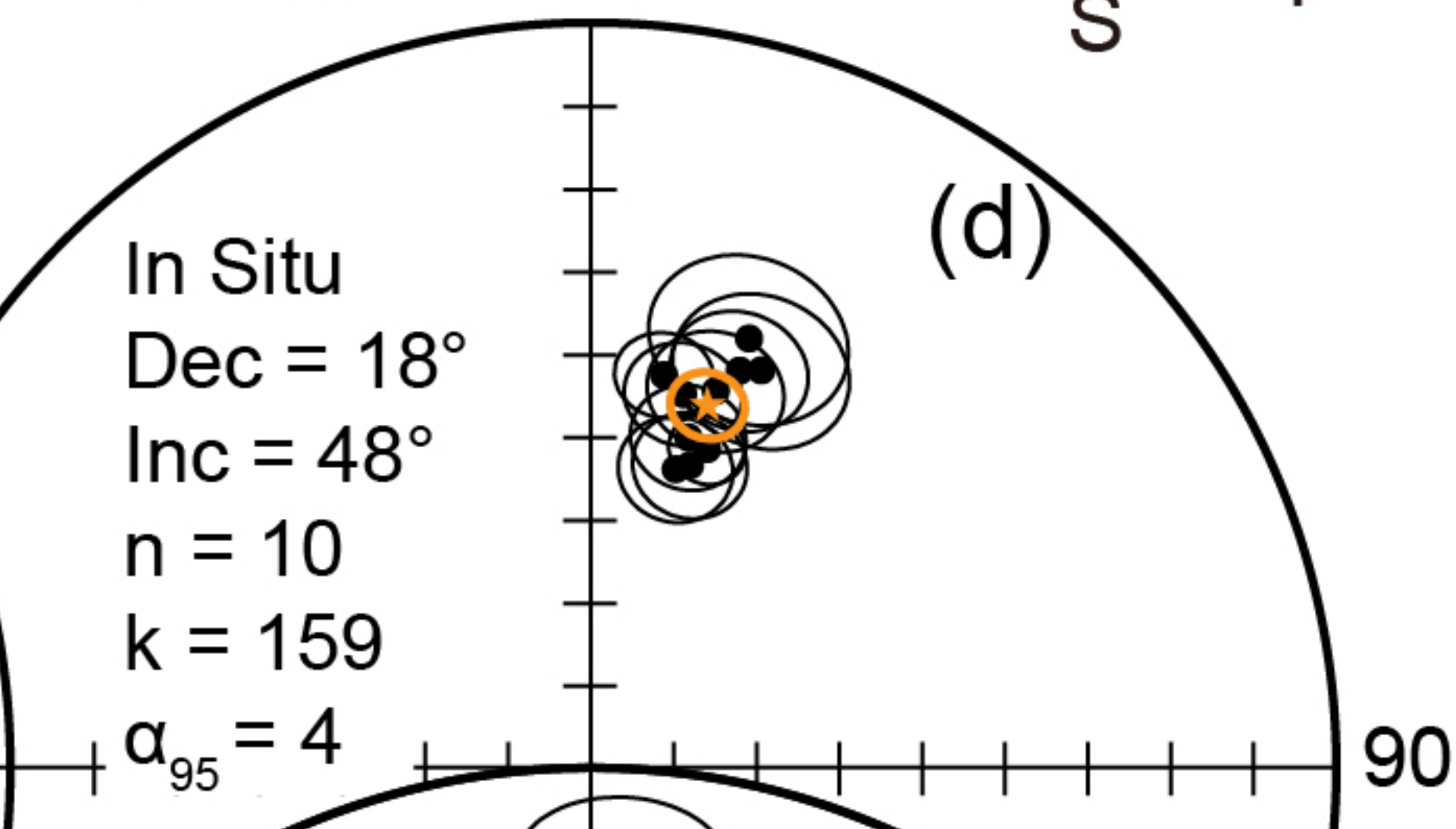
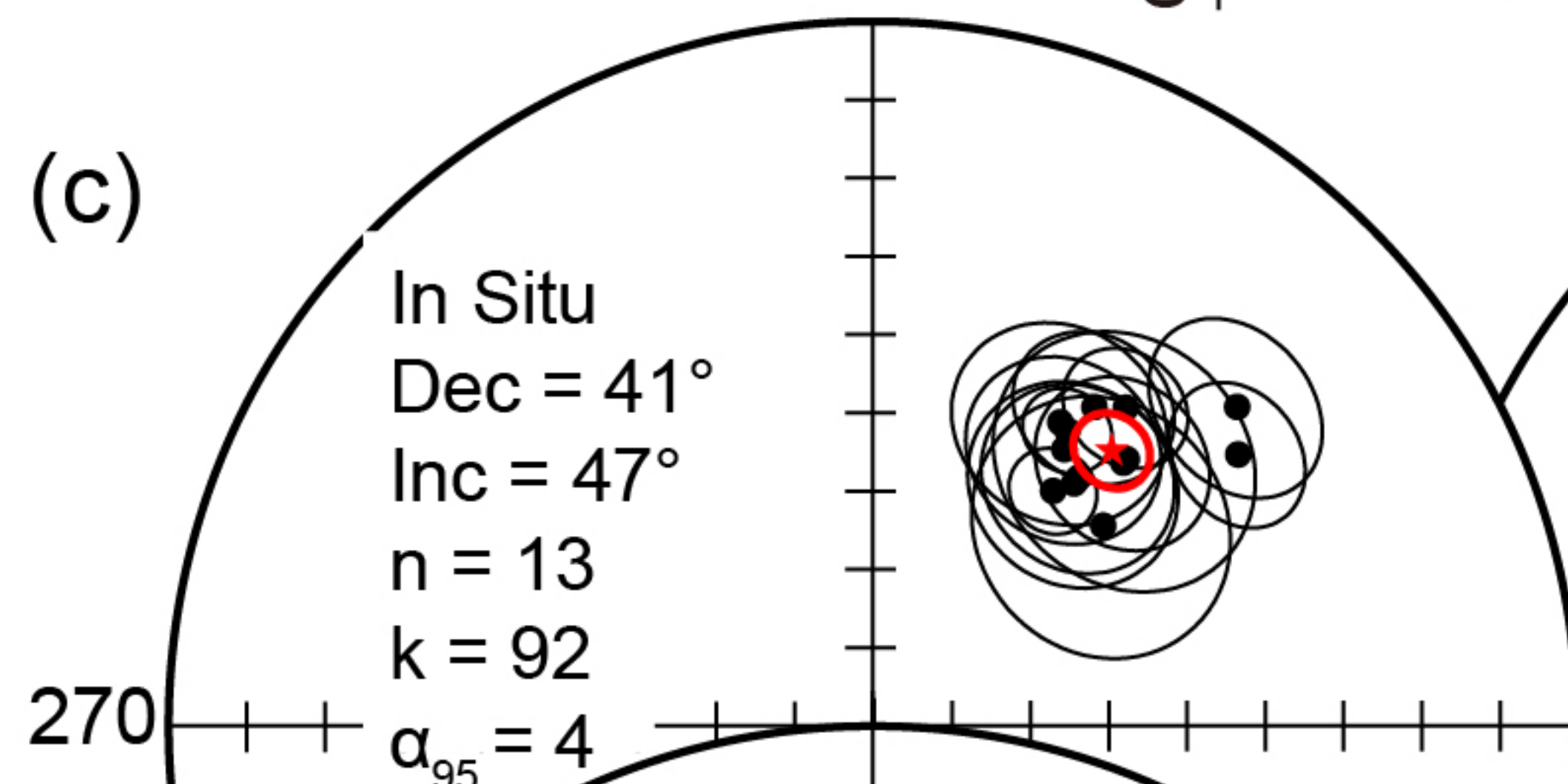
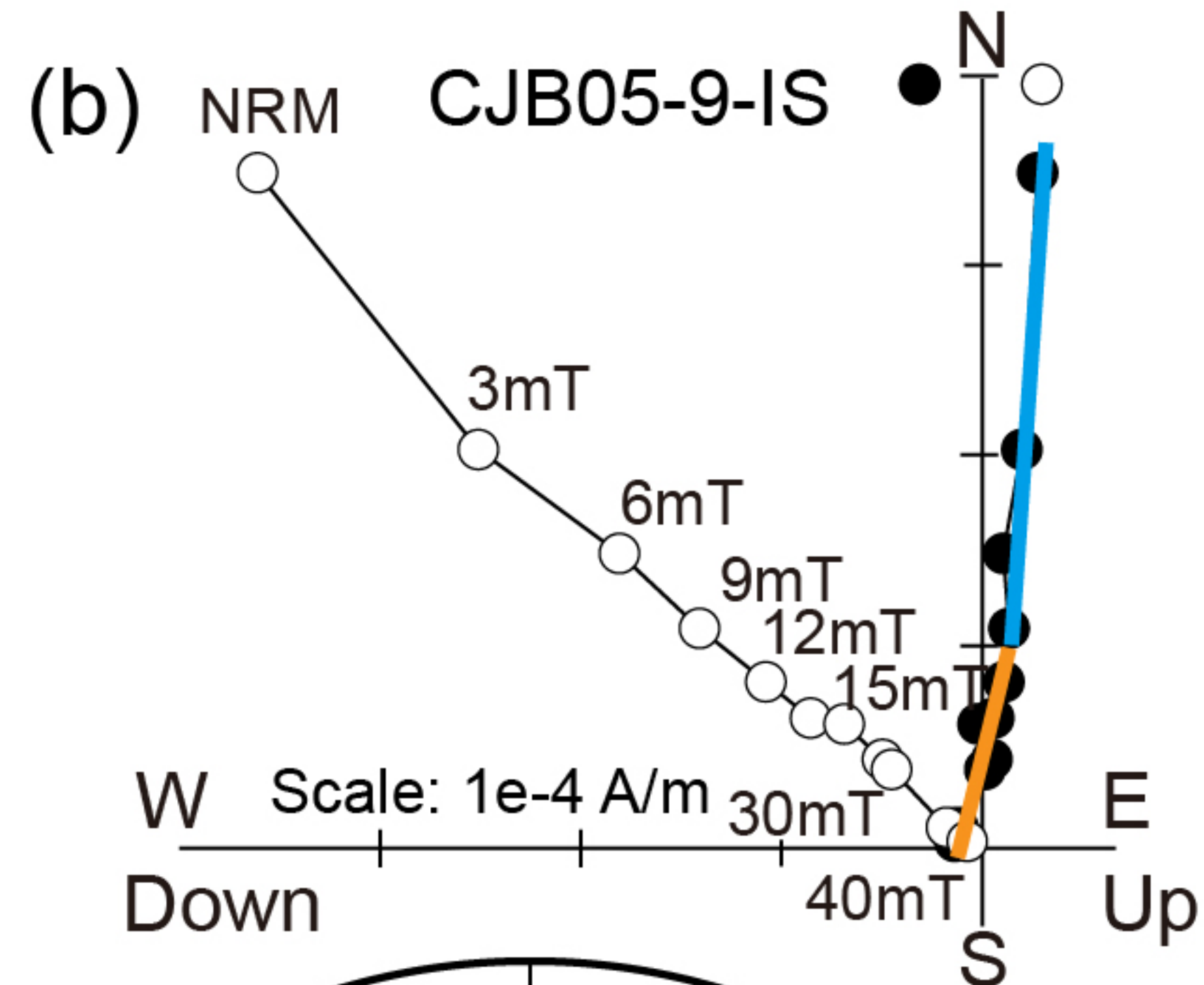
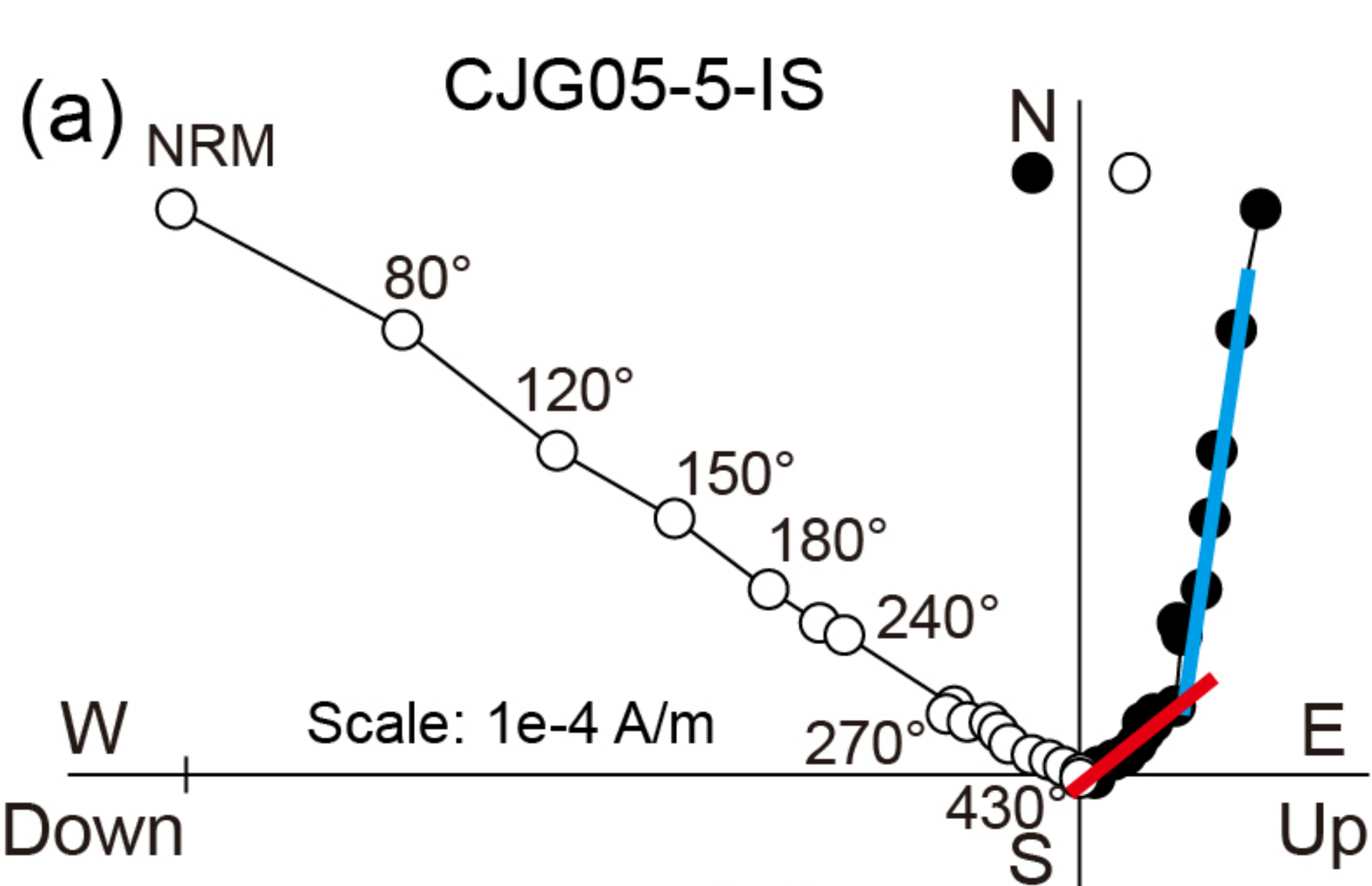


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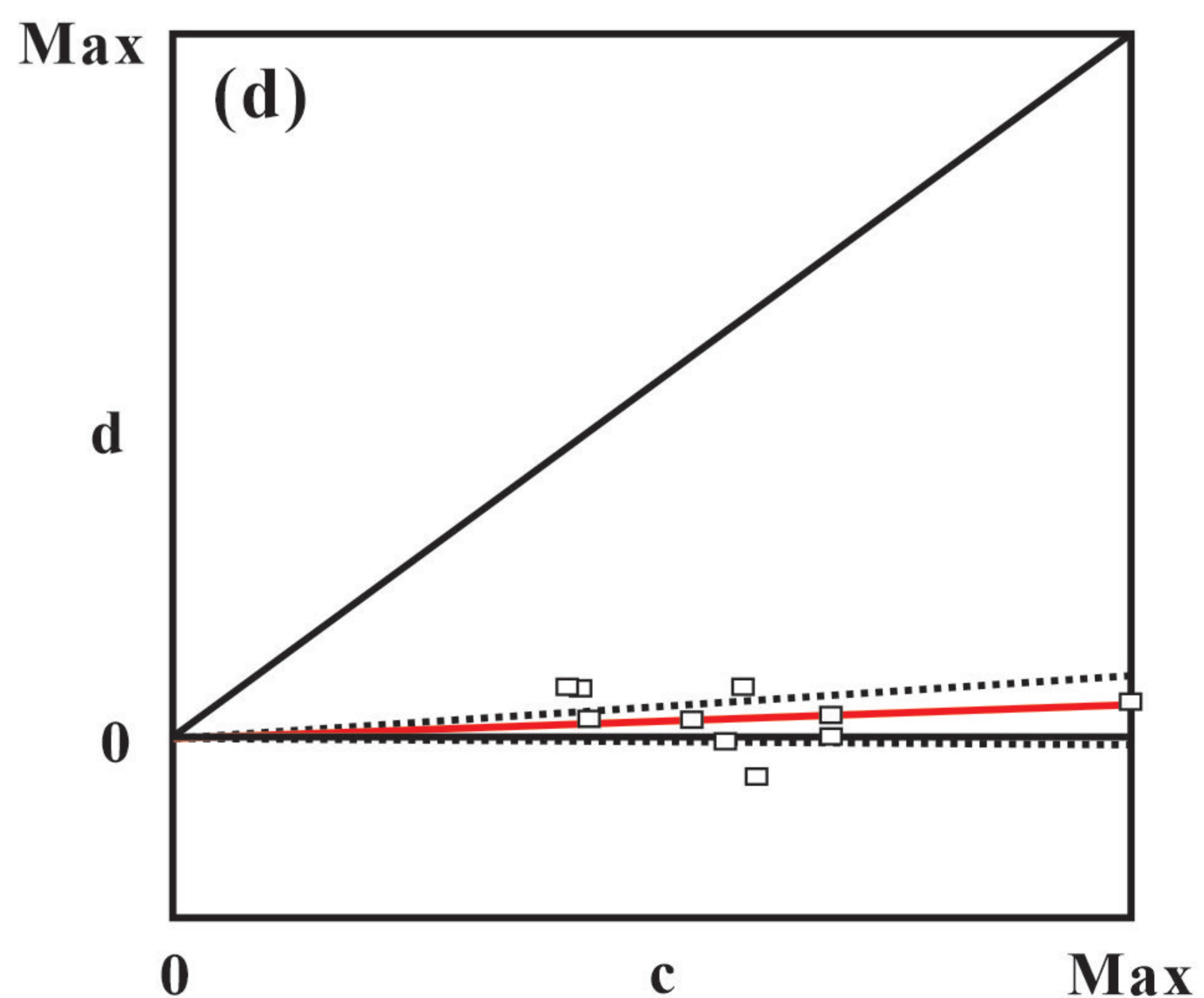
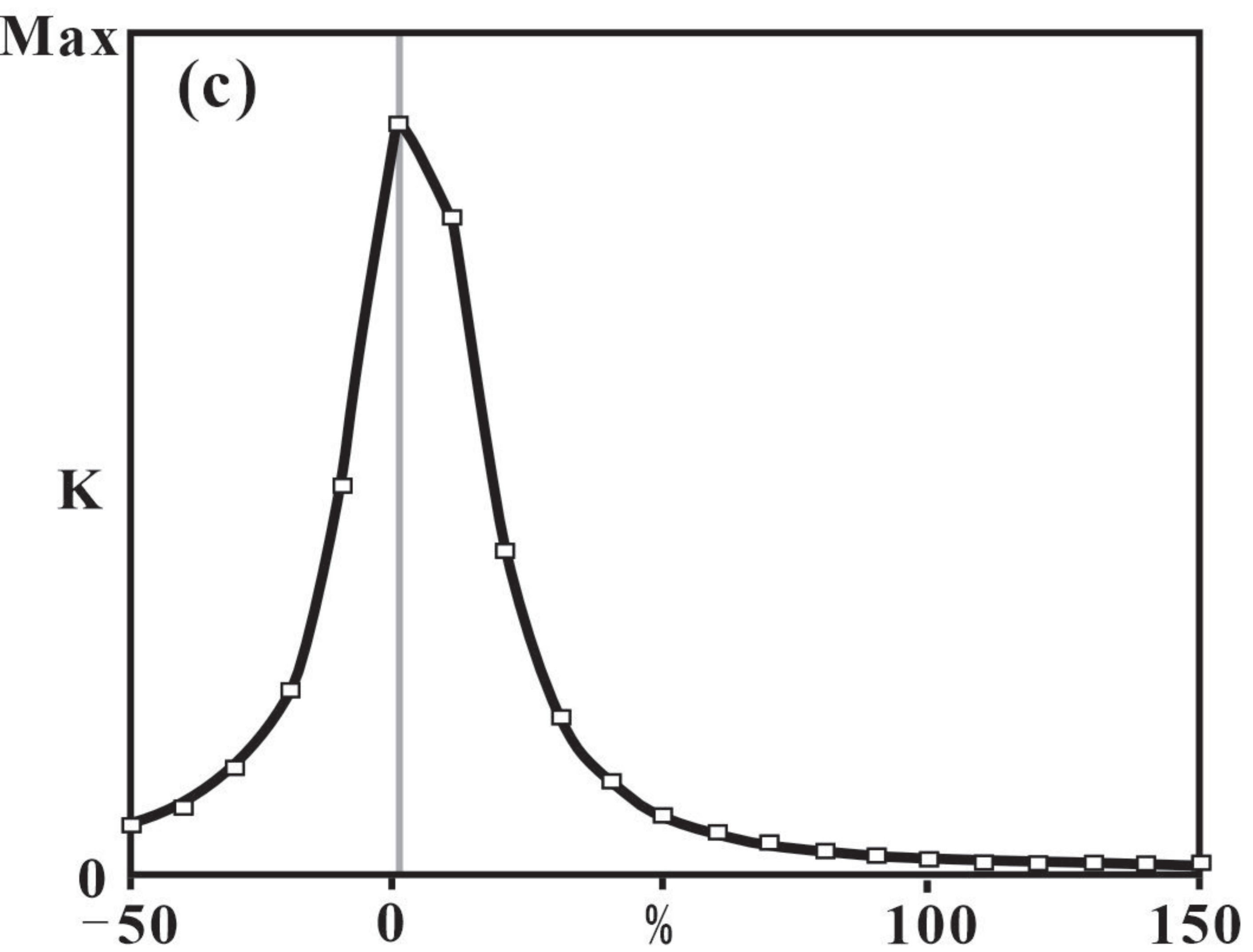
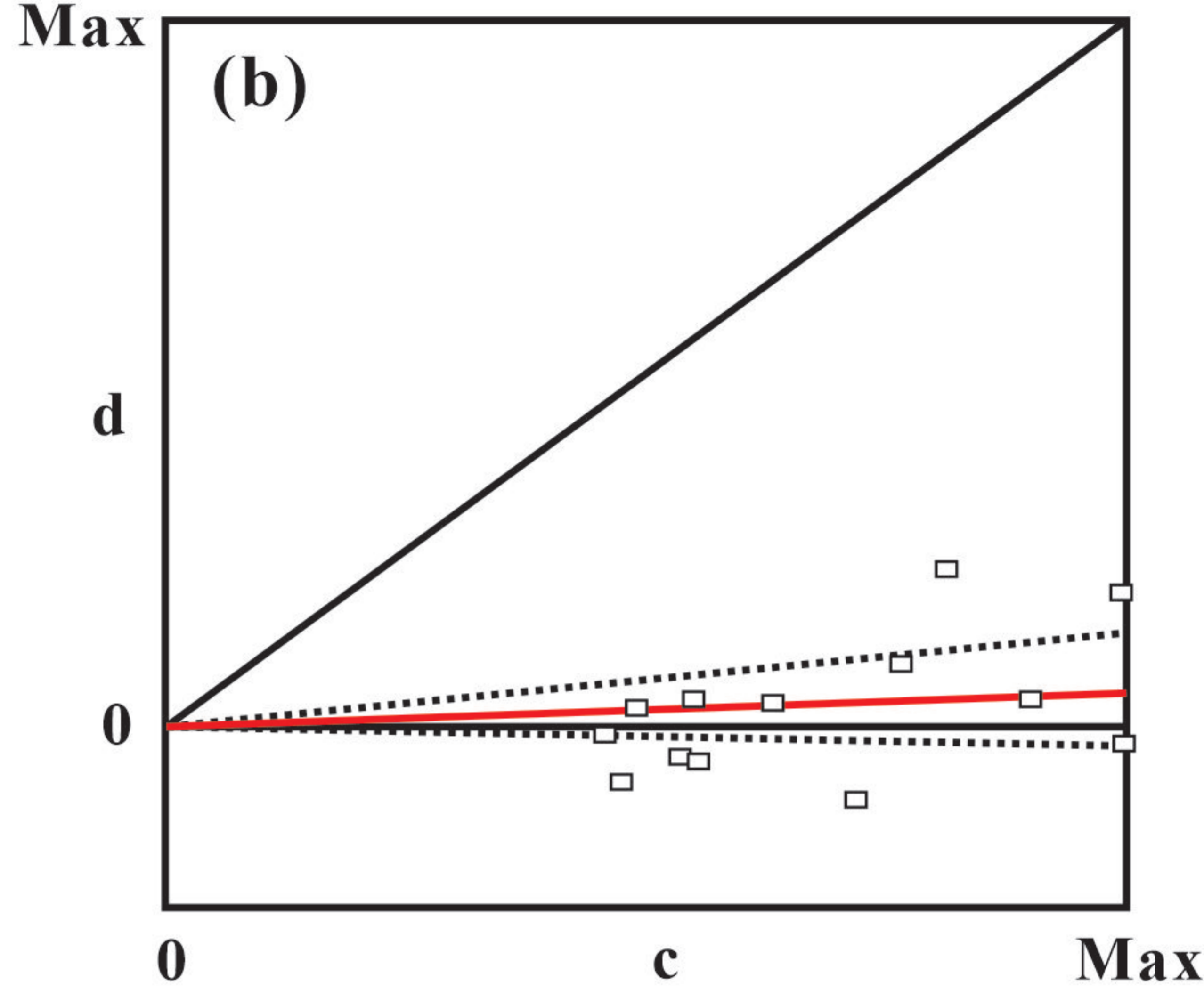
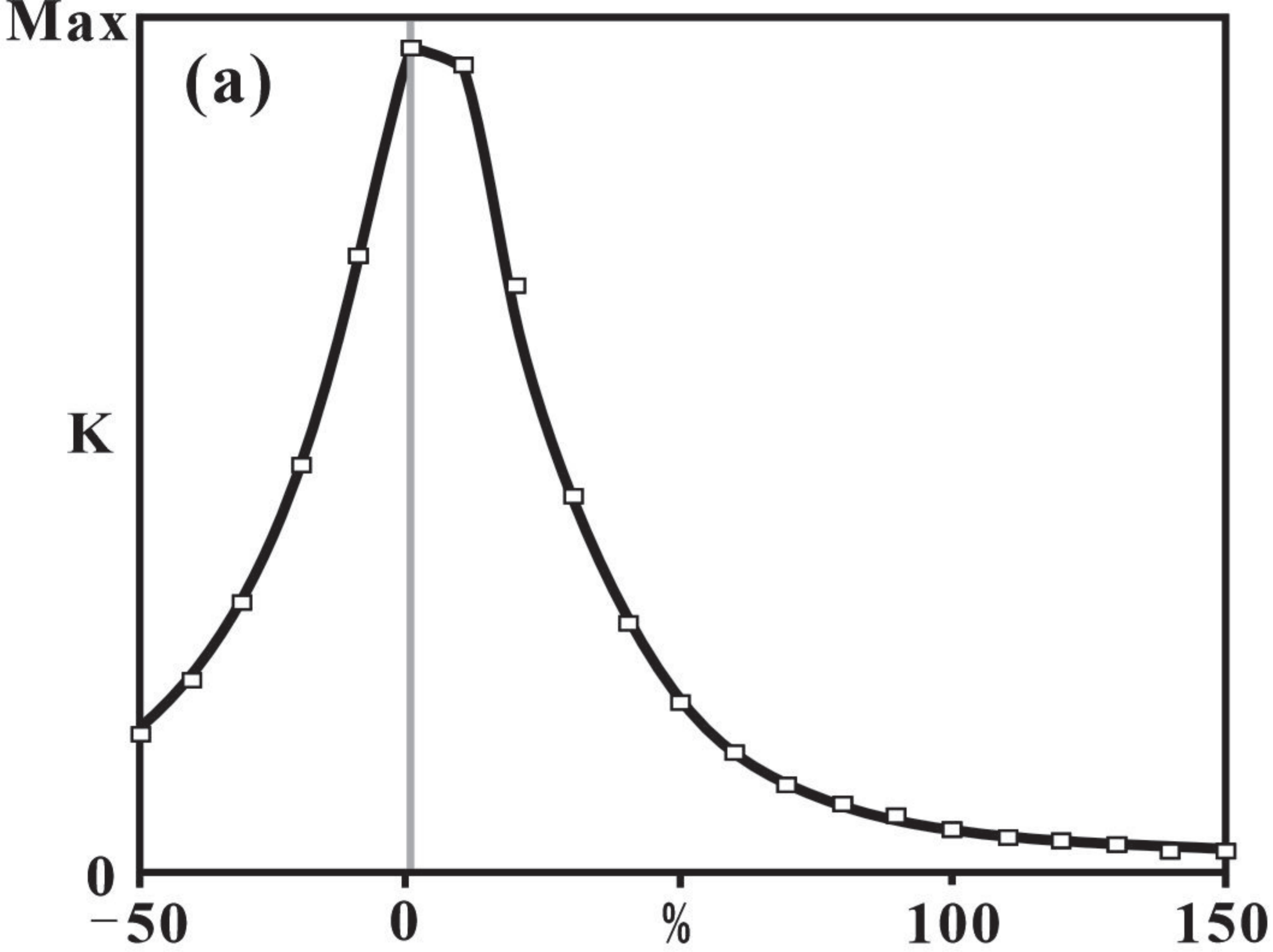
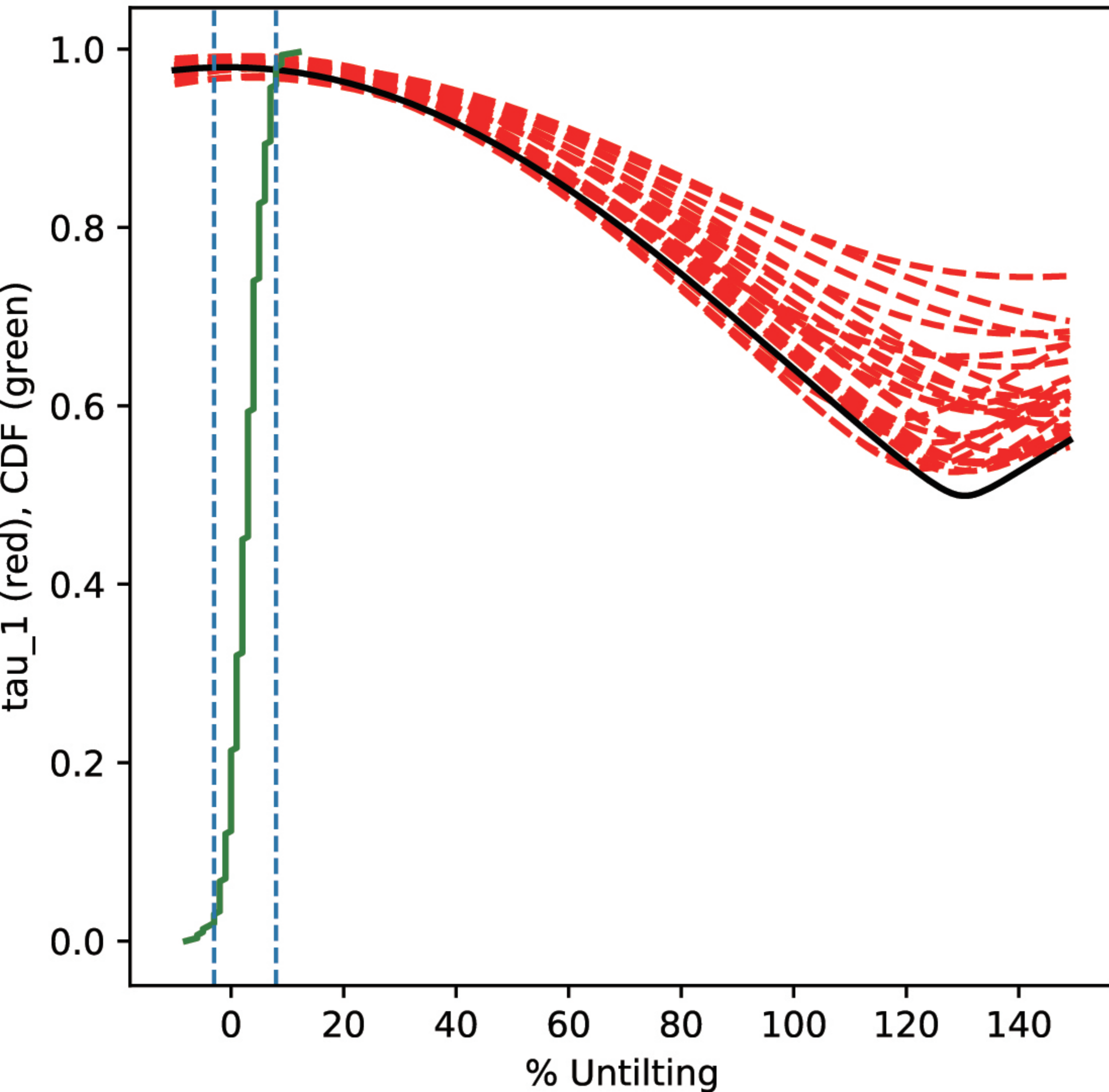


Figure 4.

(a) -3 - 8 Percent Unfolding



(b) -1 - 7 Percent Unfolding

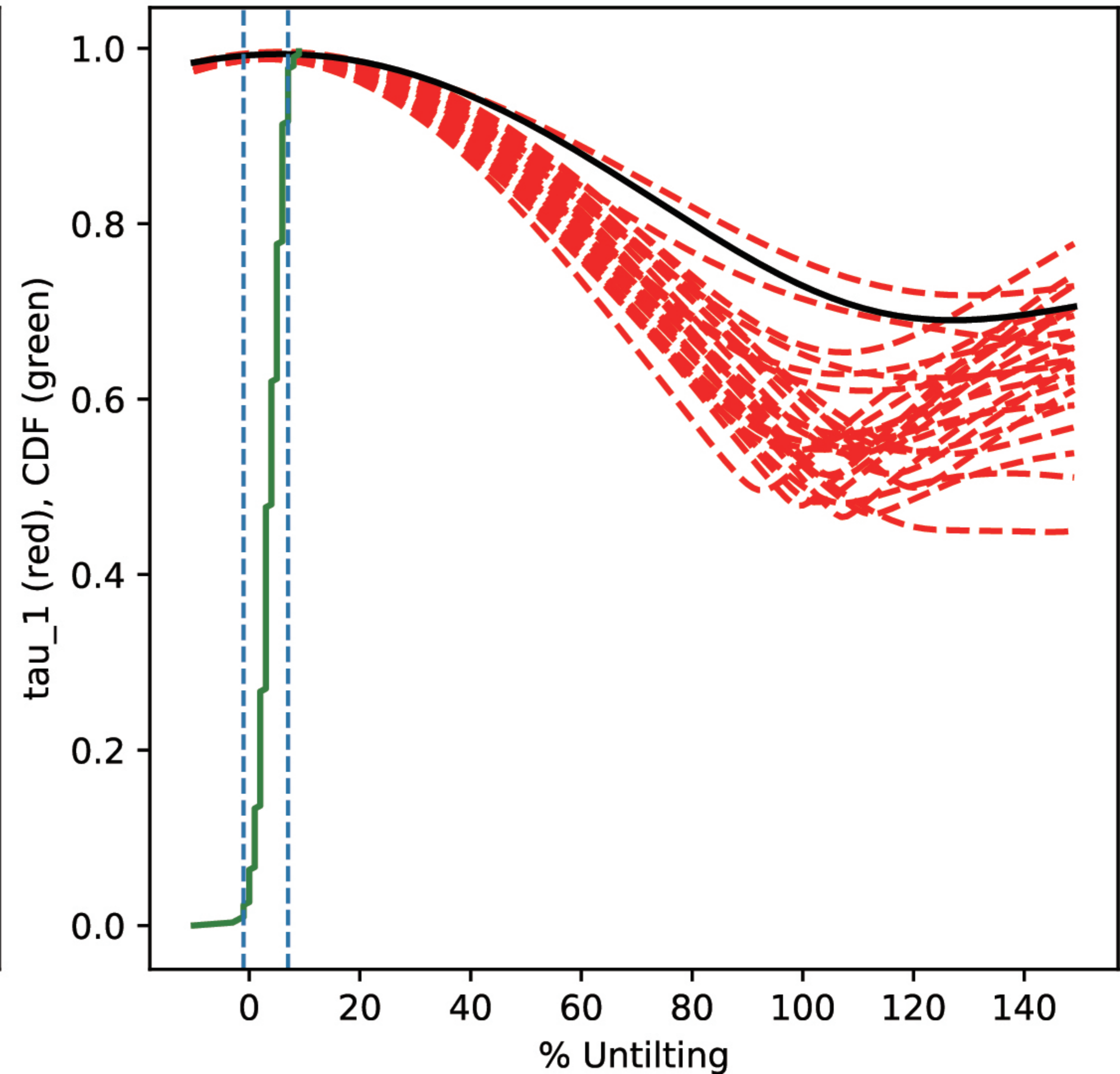
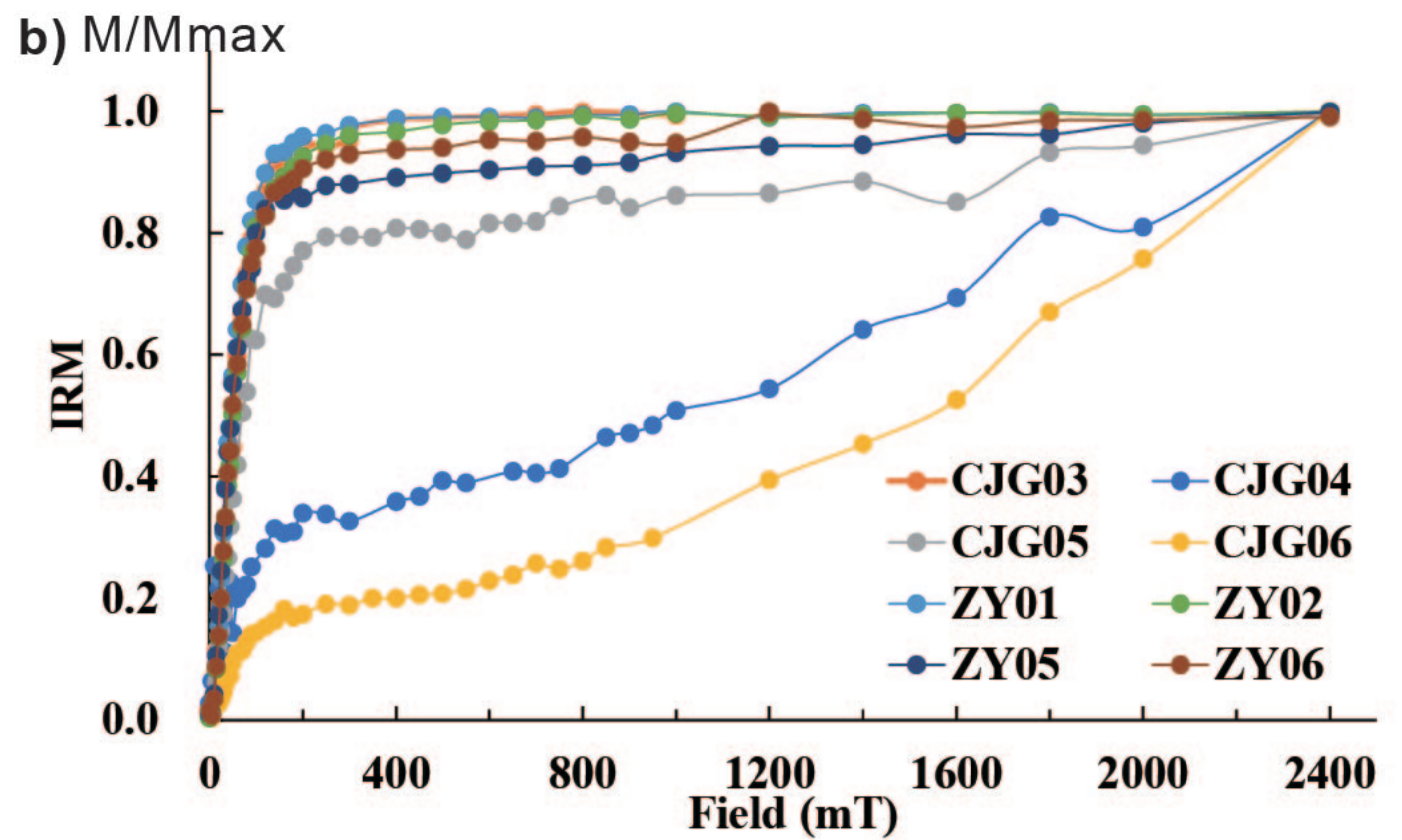
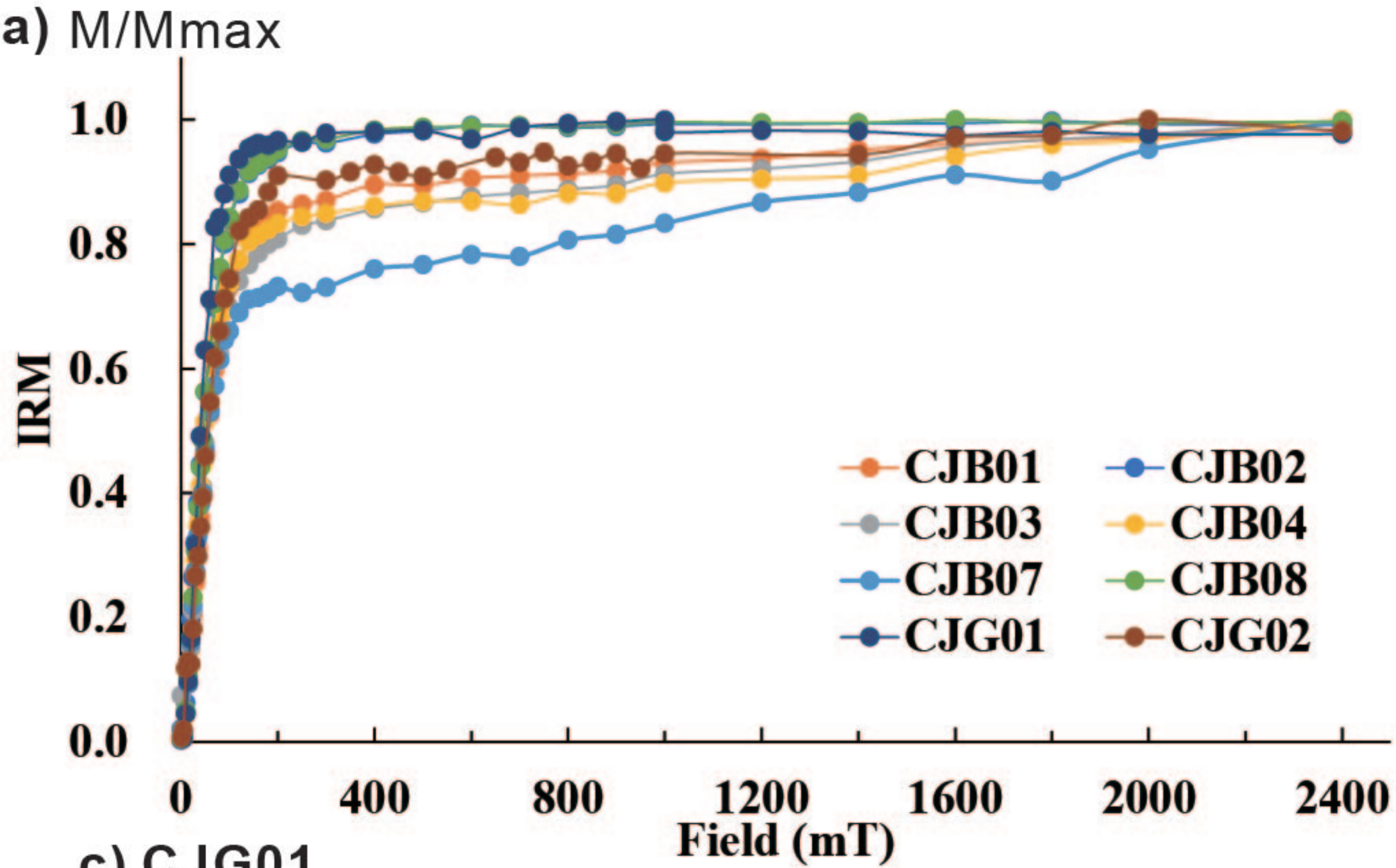
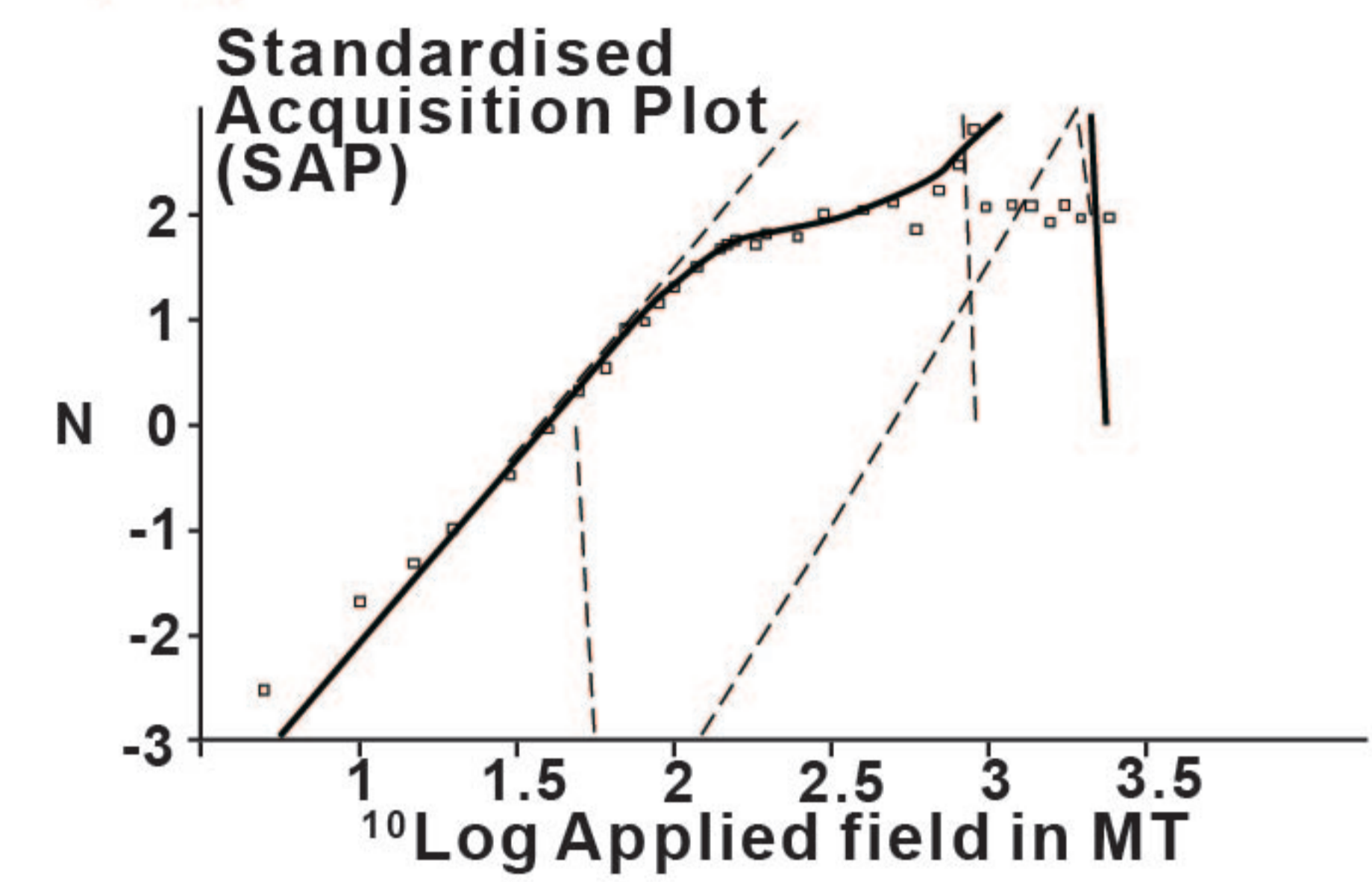
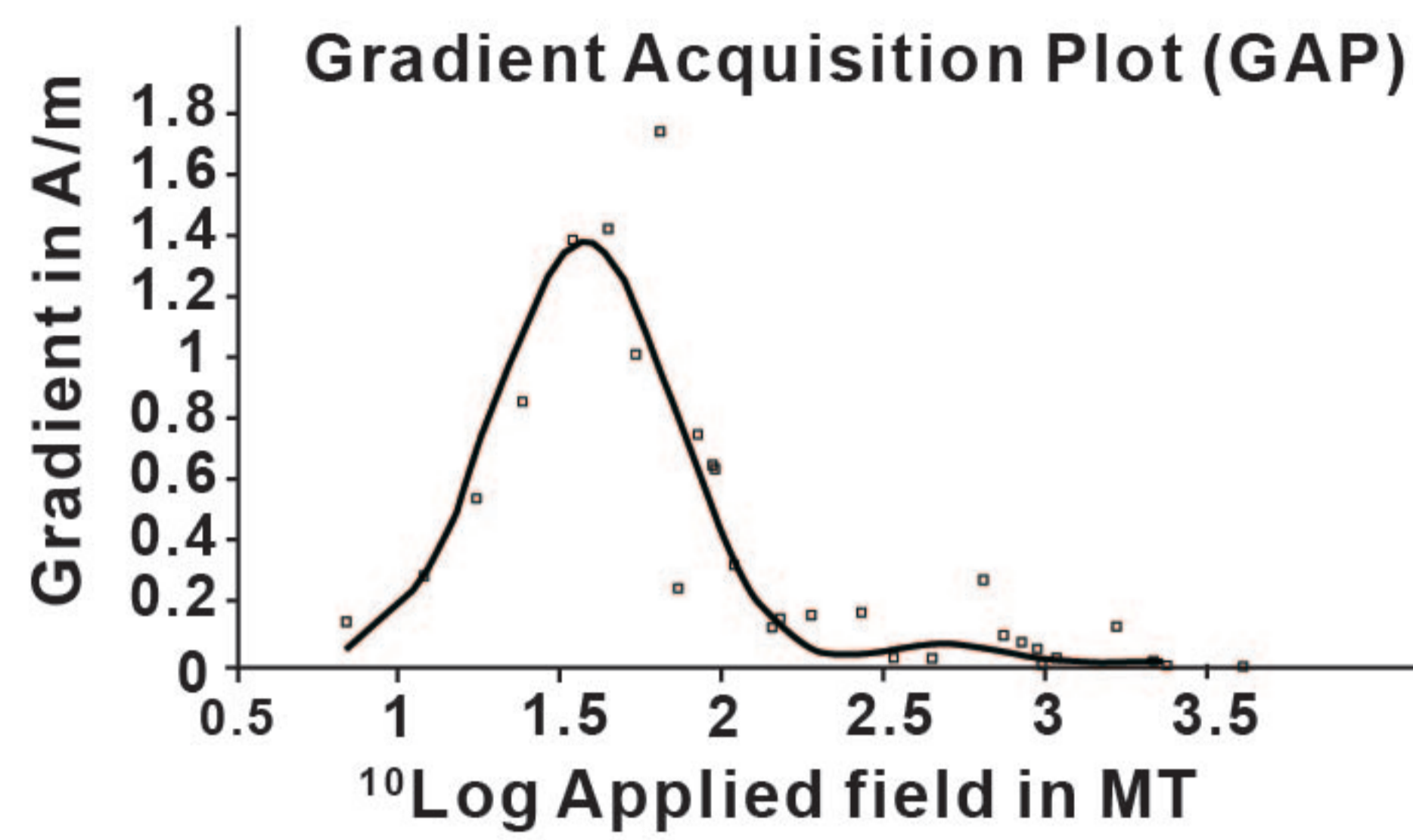
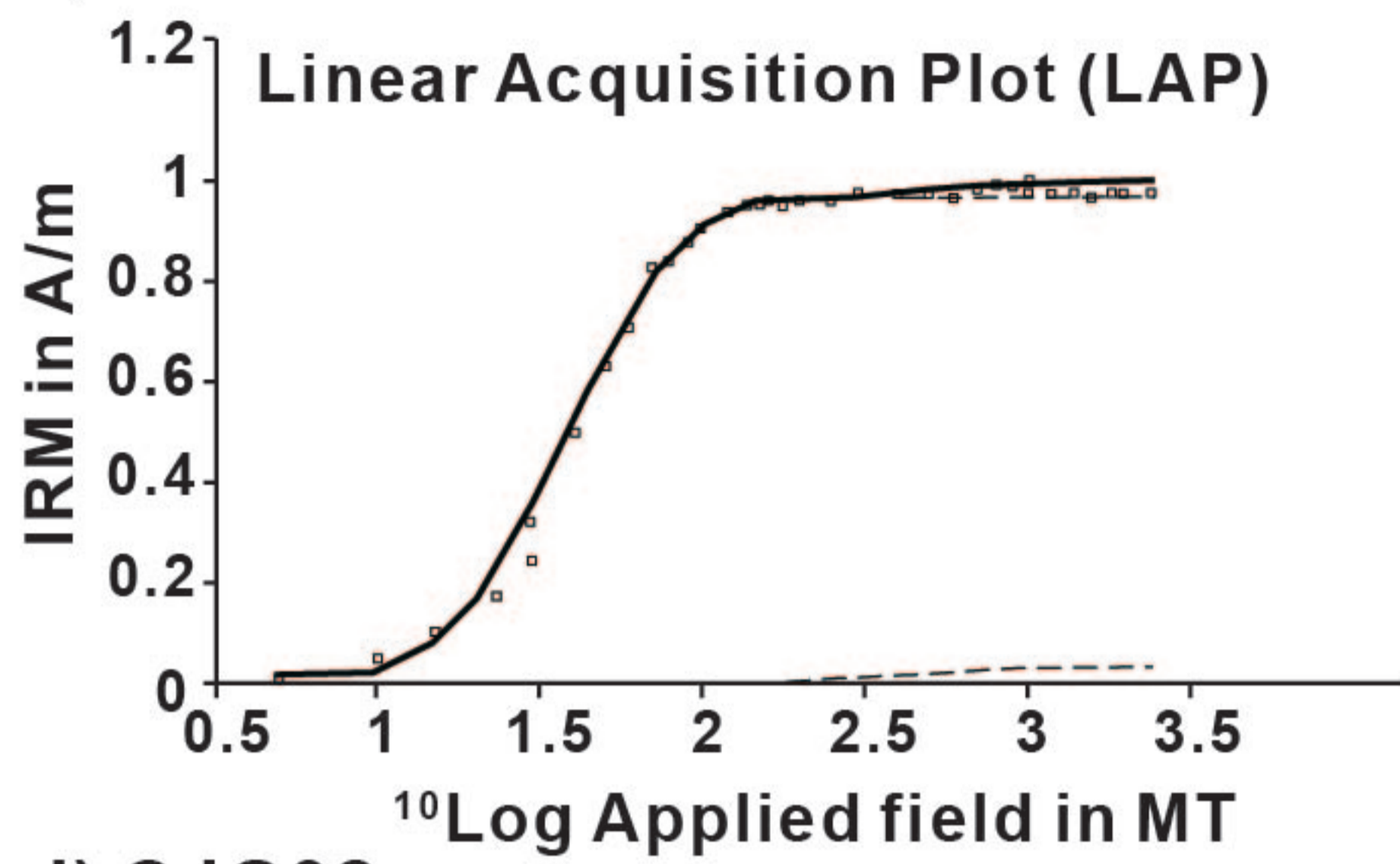


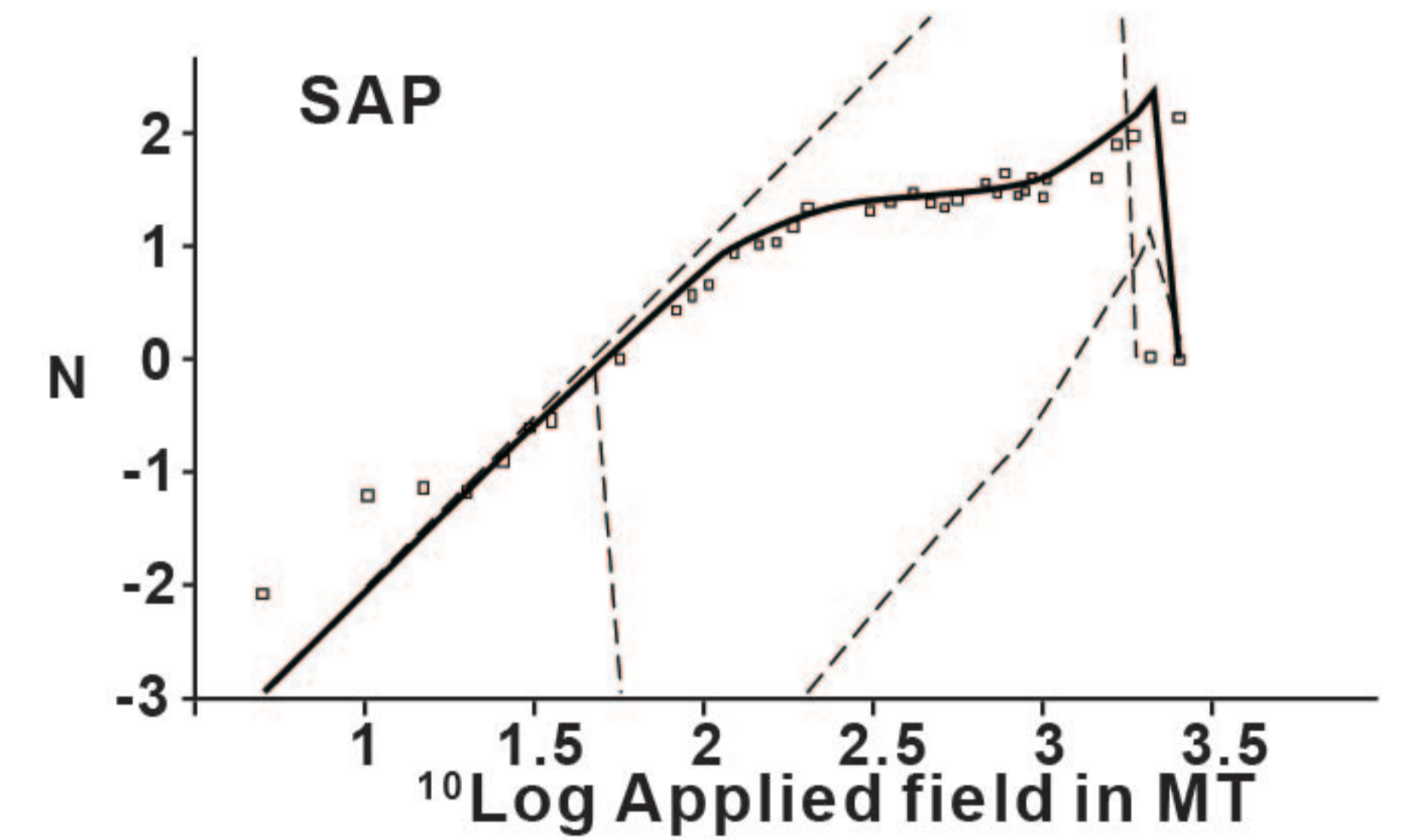
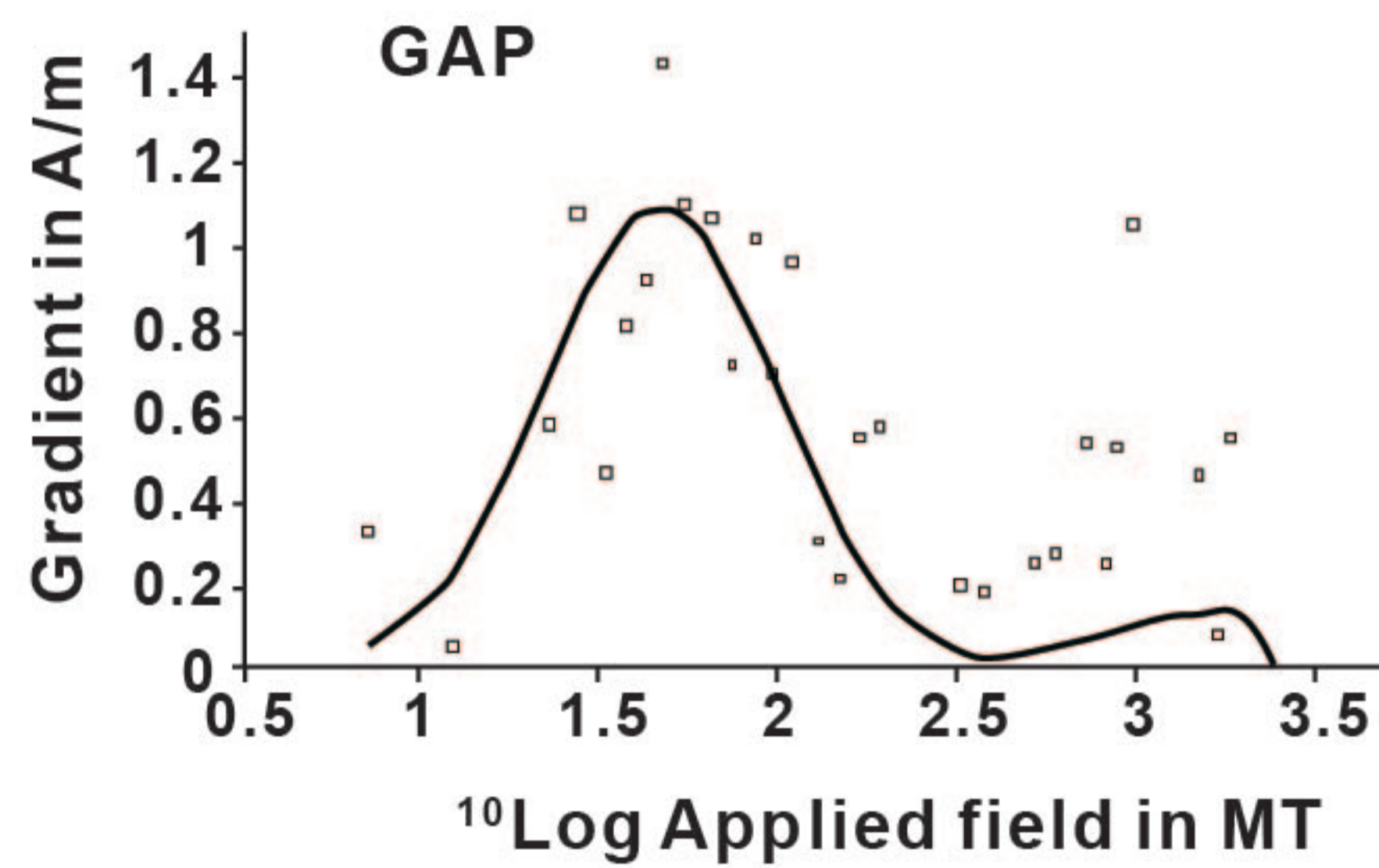
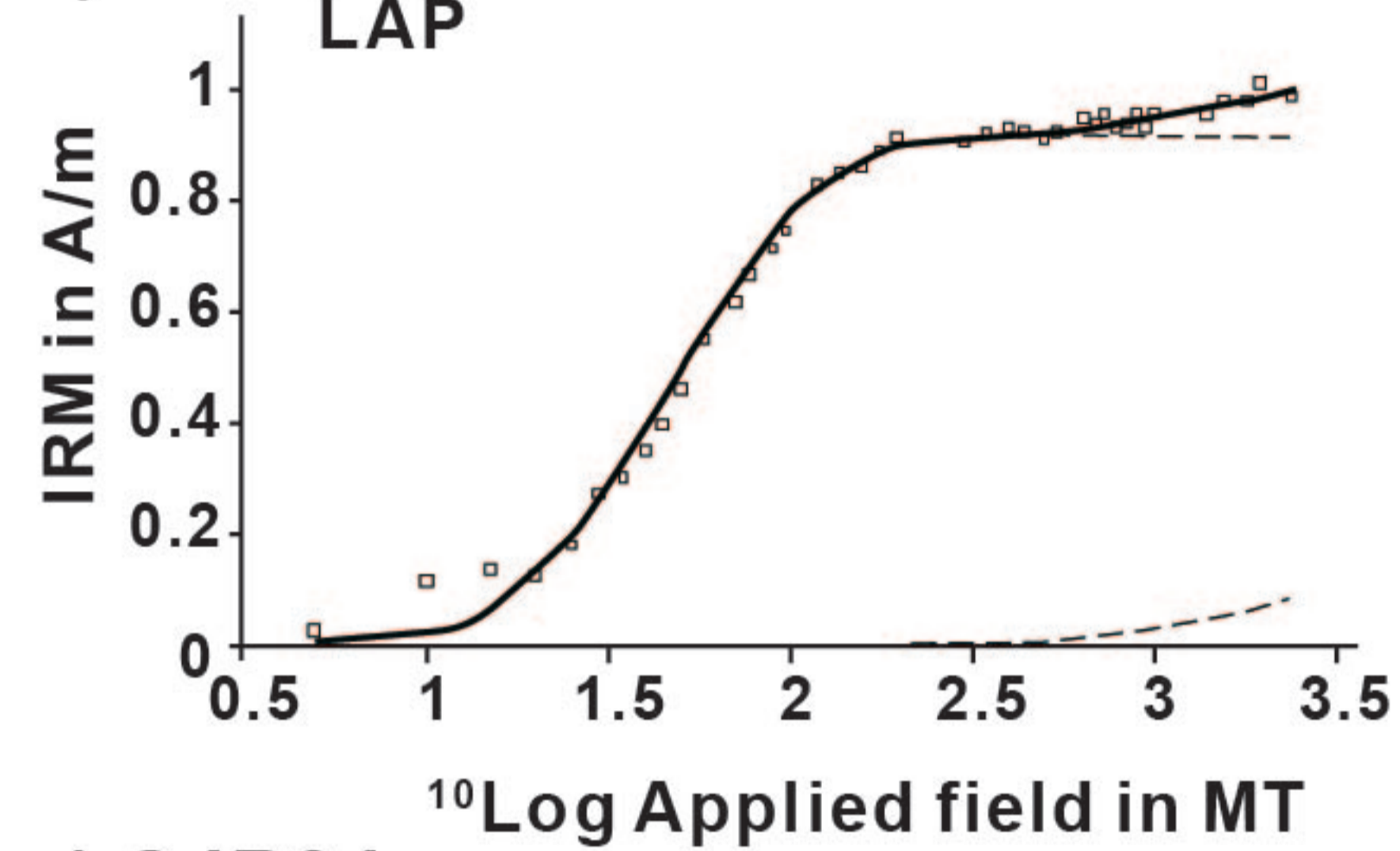
Figure 5.



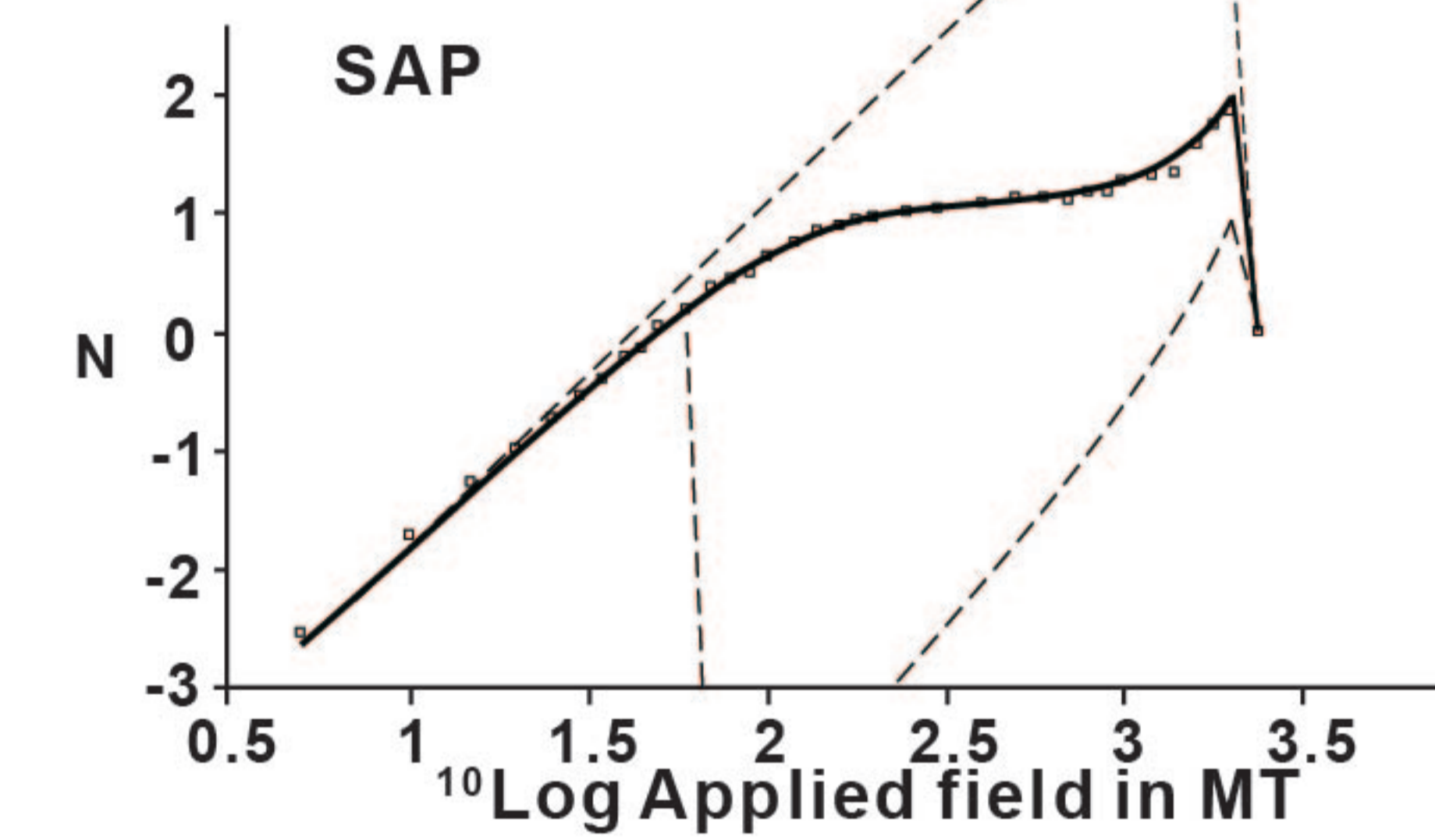
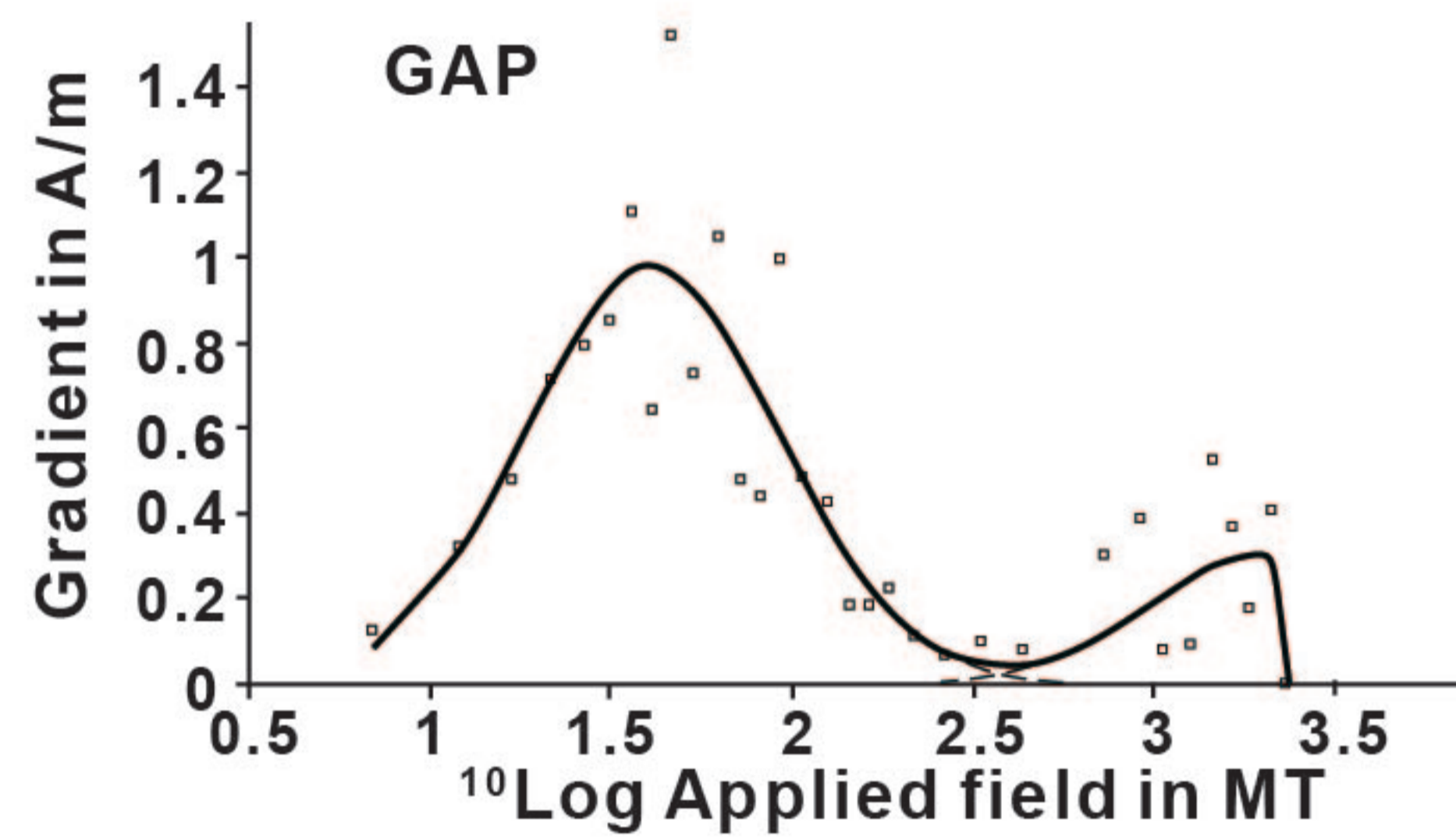
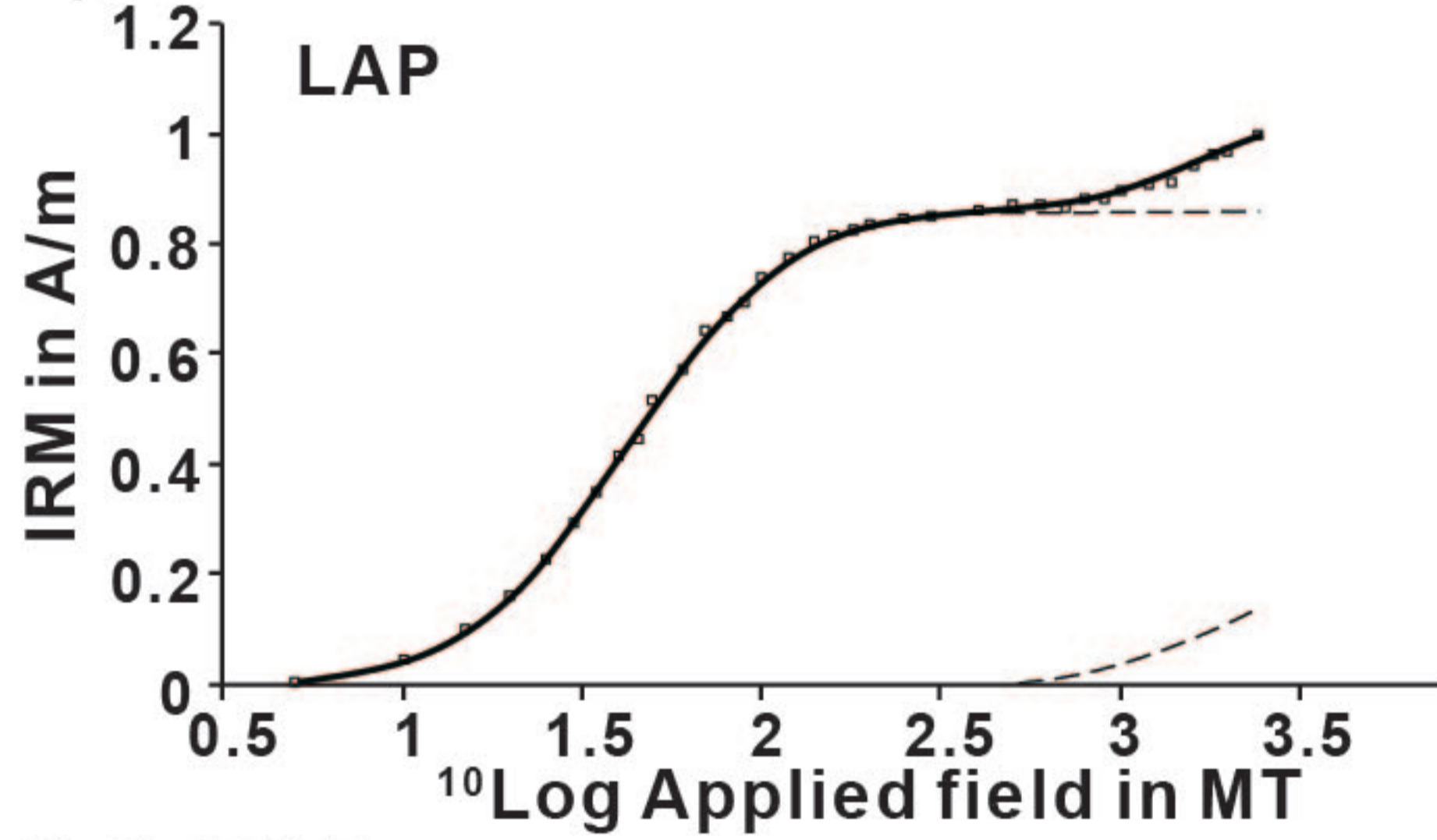
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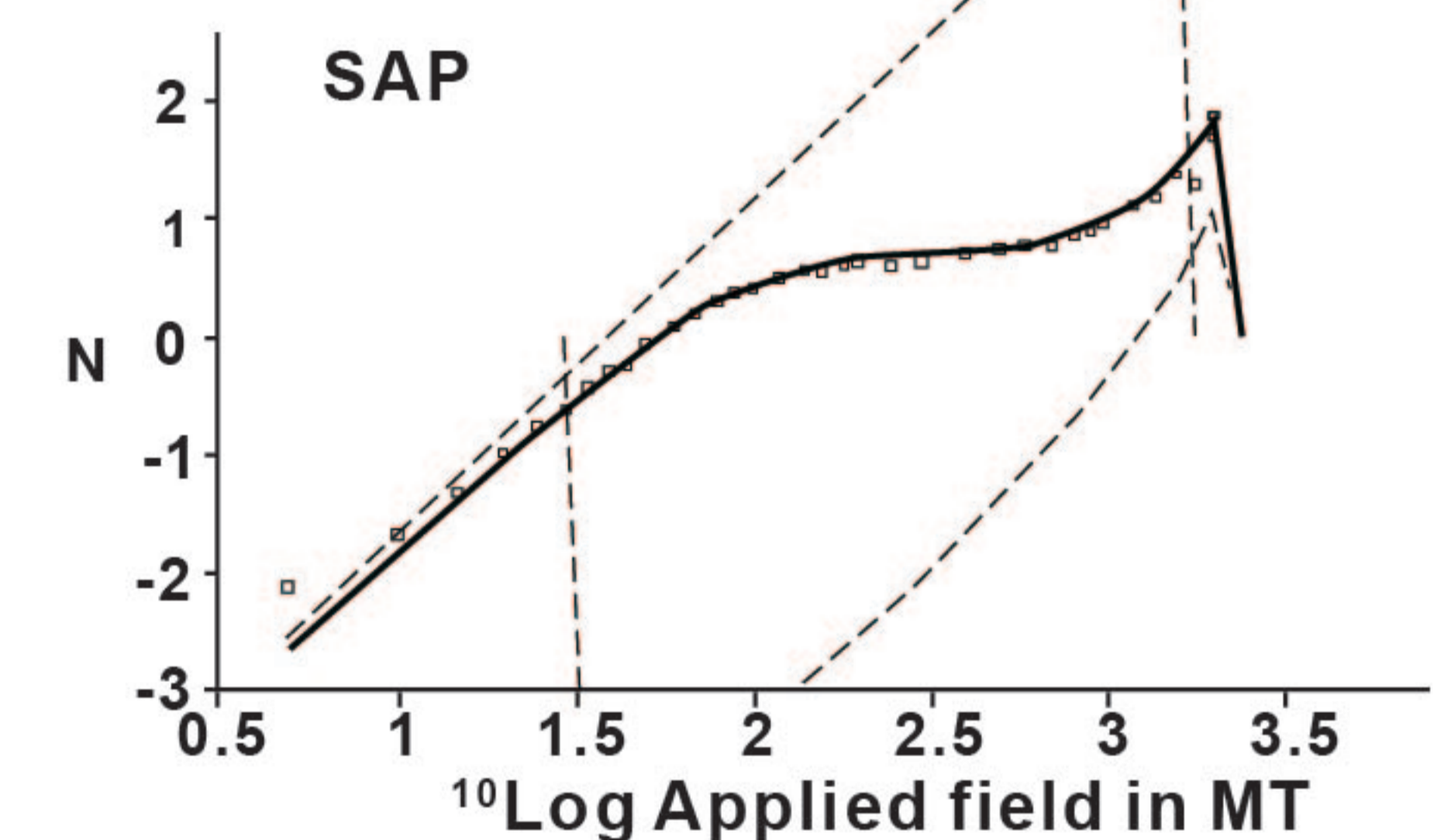
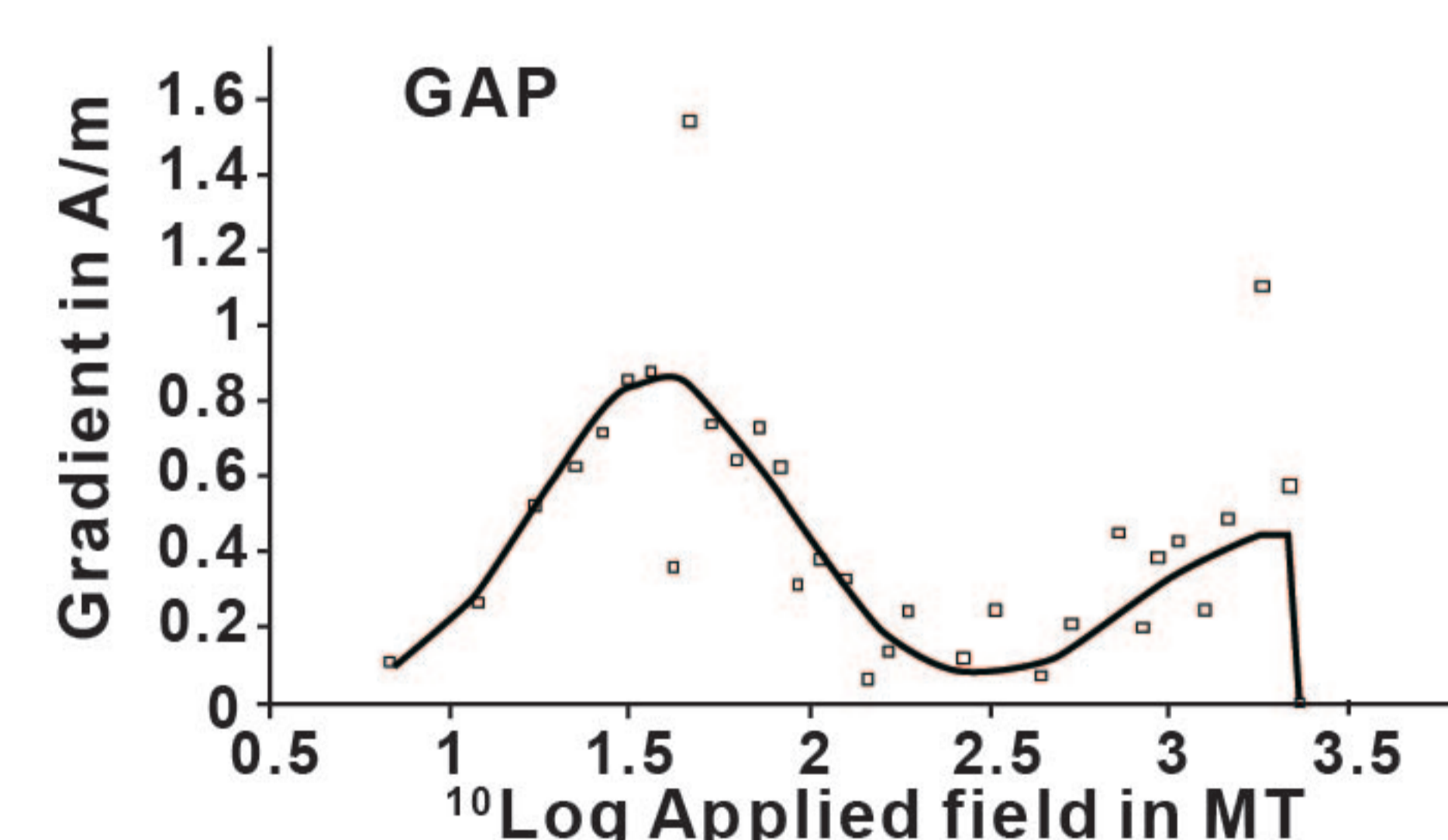
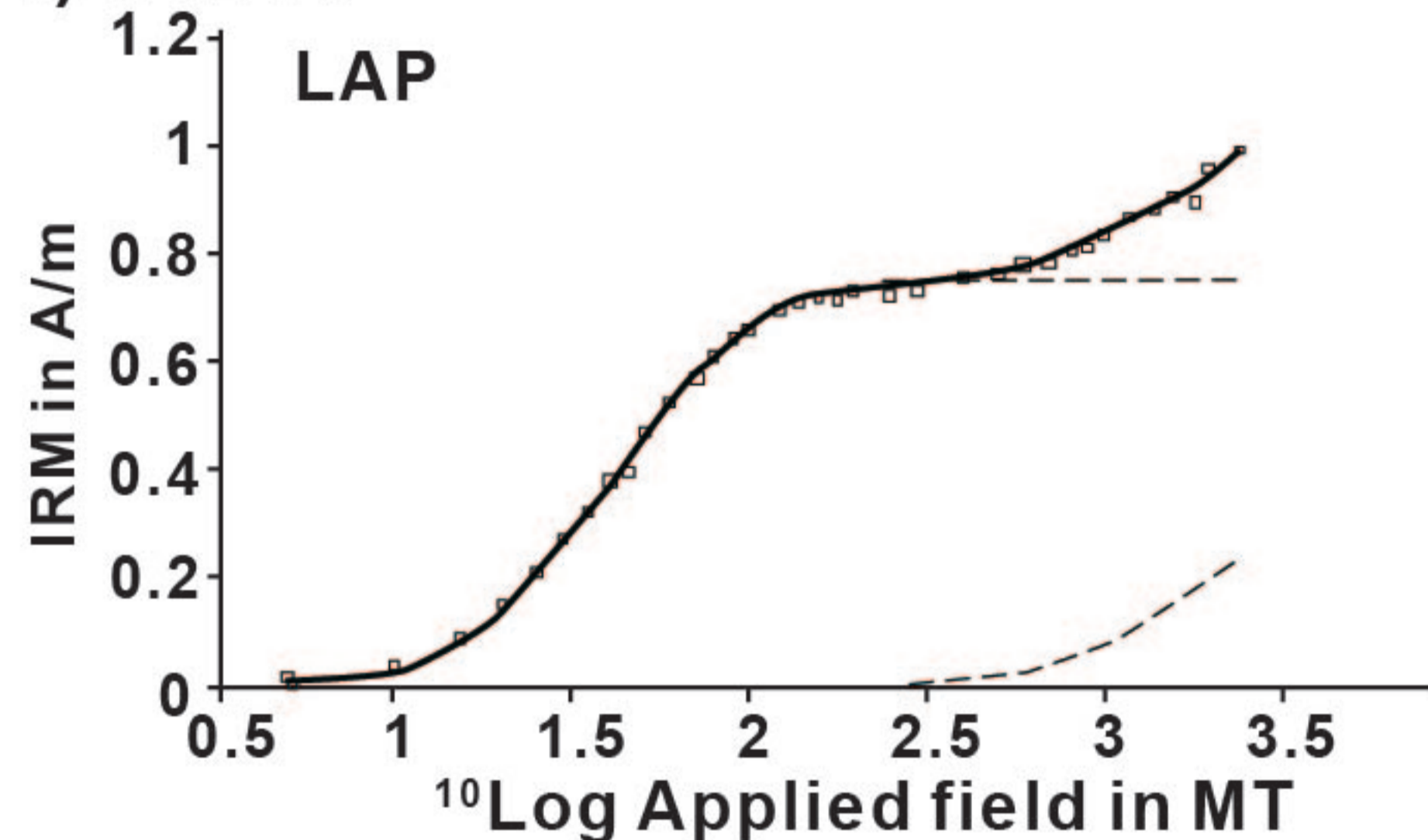
d) CJB02



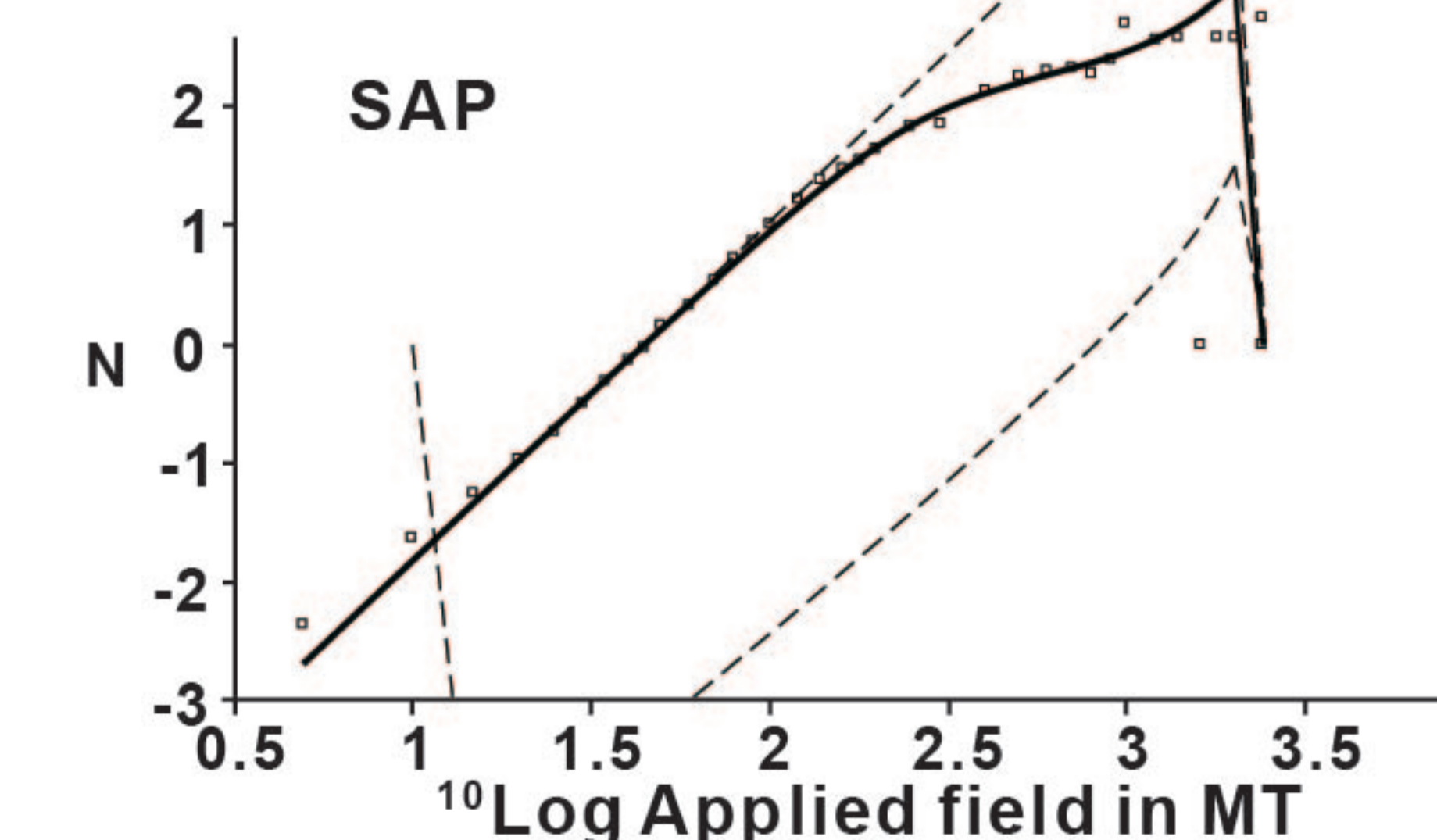
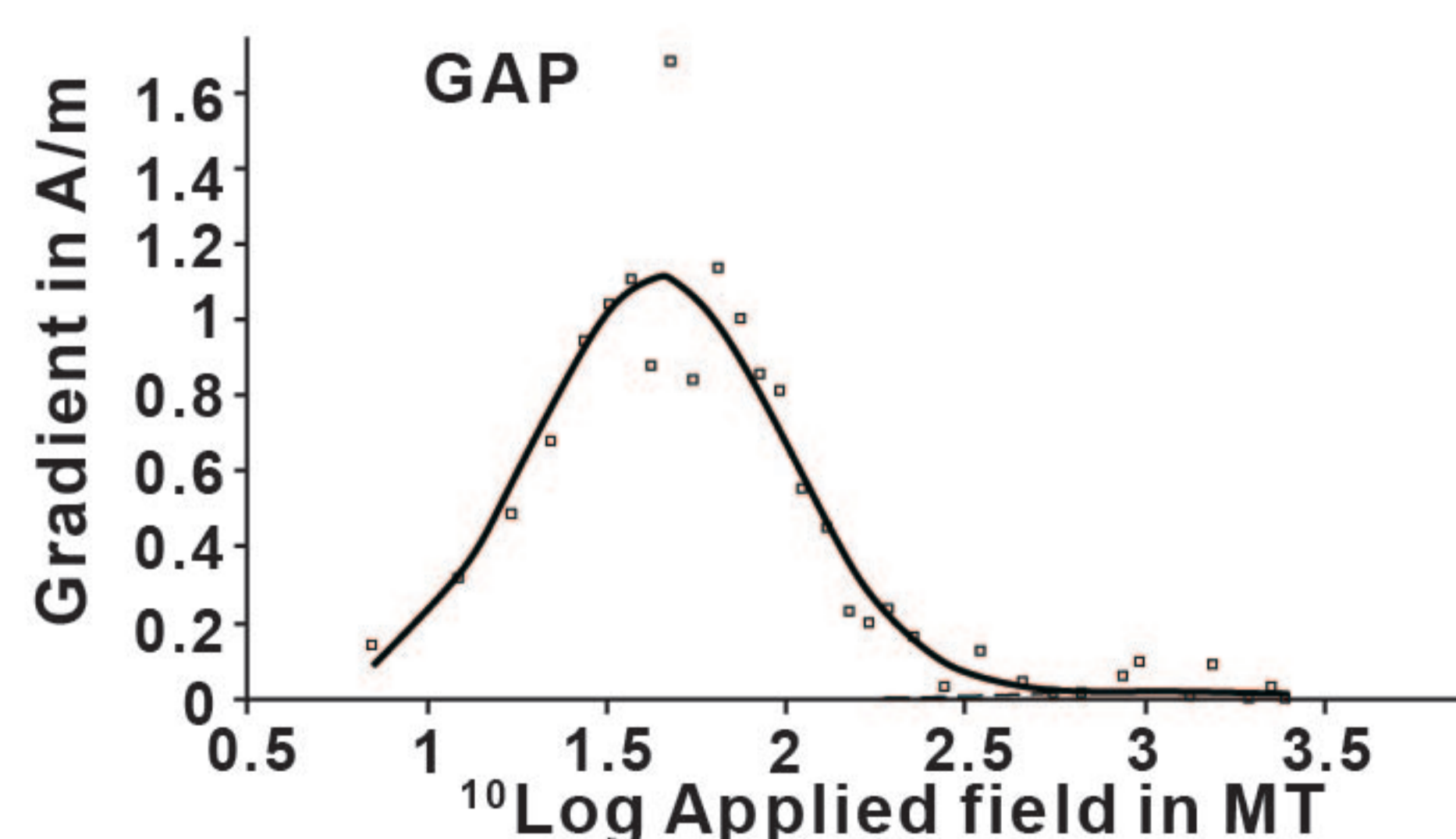
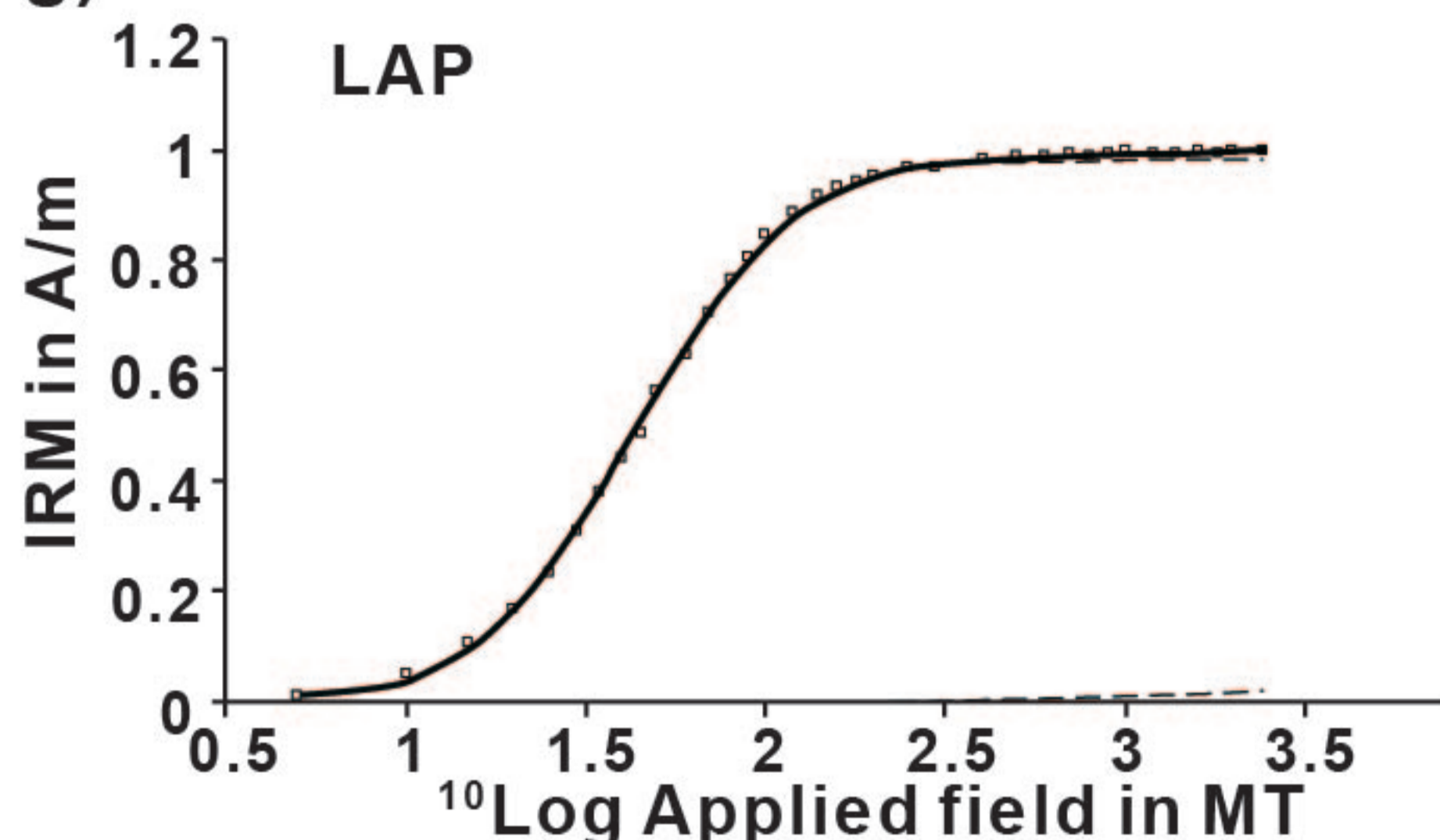
e) CJB04



f) CJB07



g) CJB08



h) ZY02

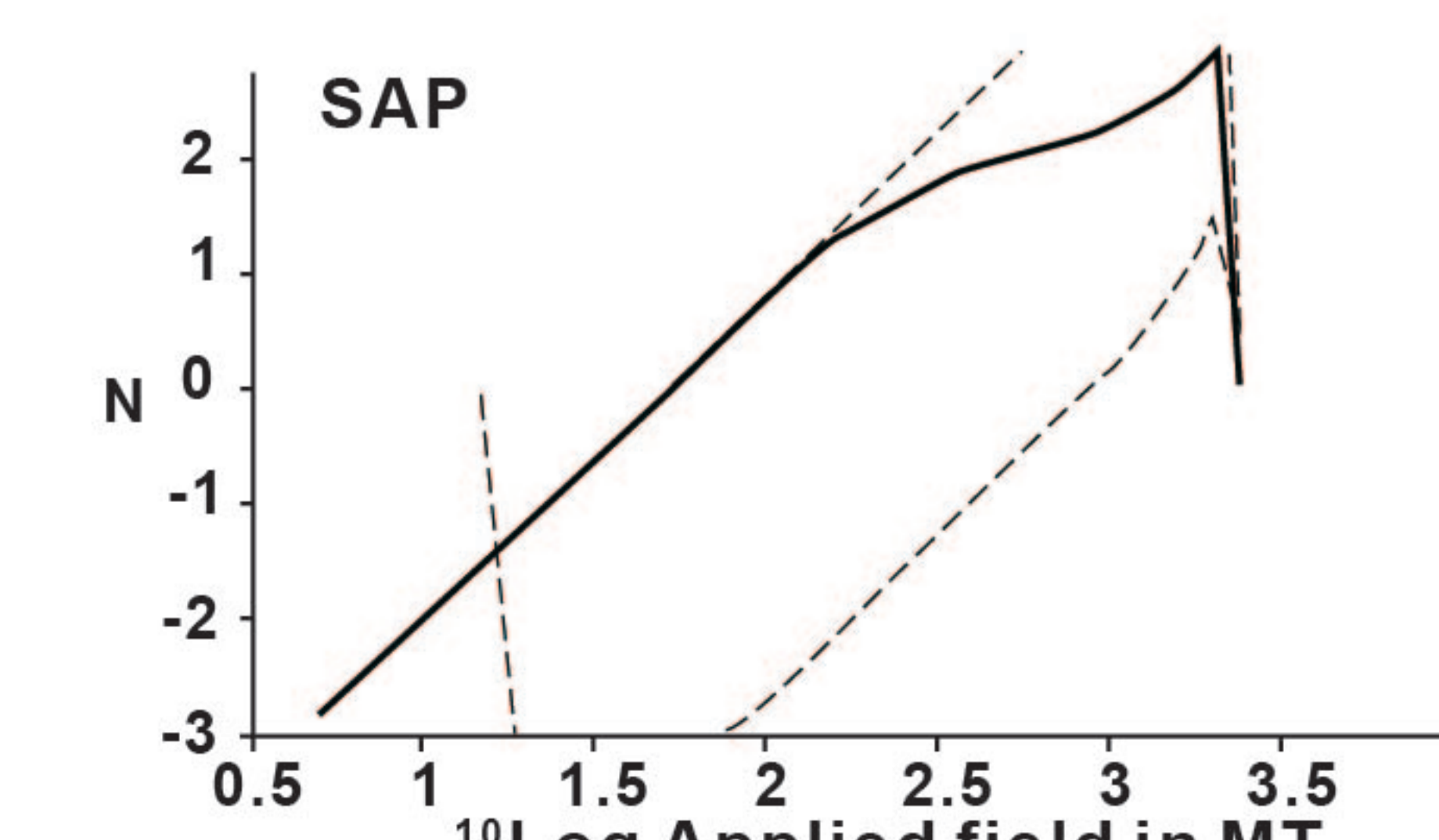
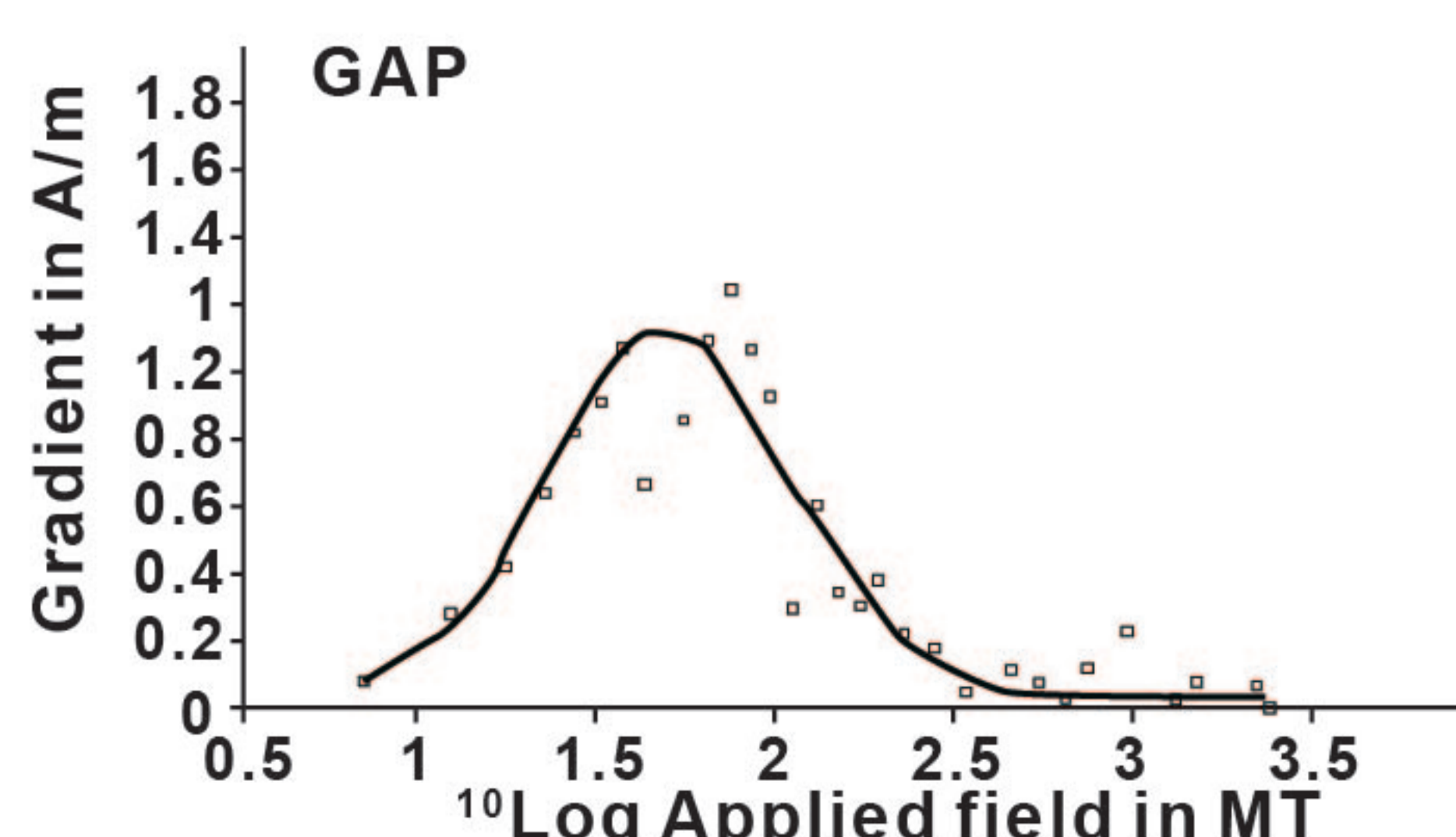
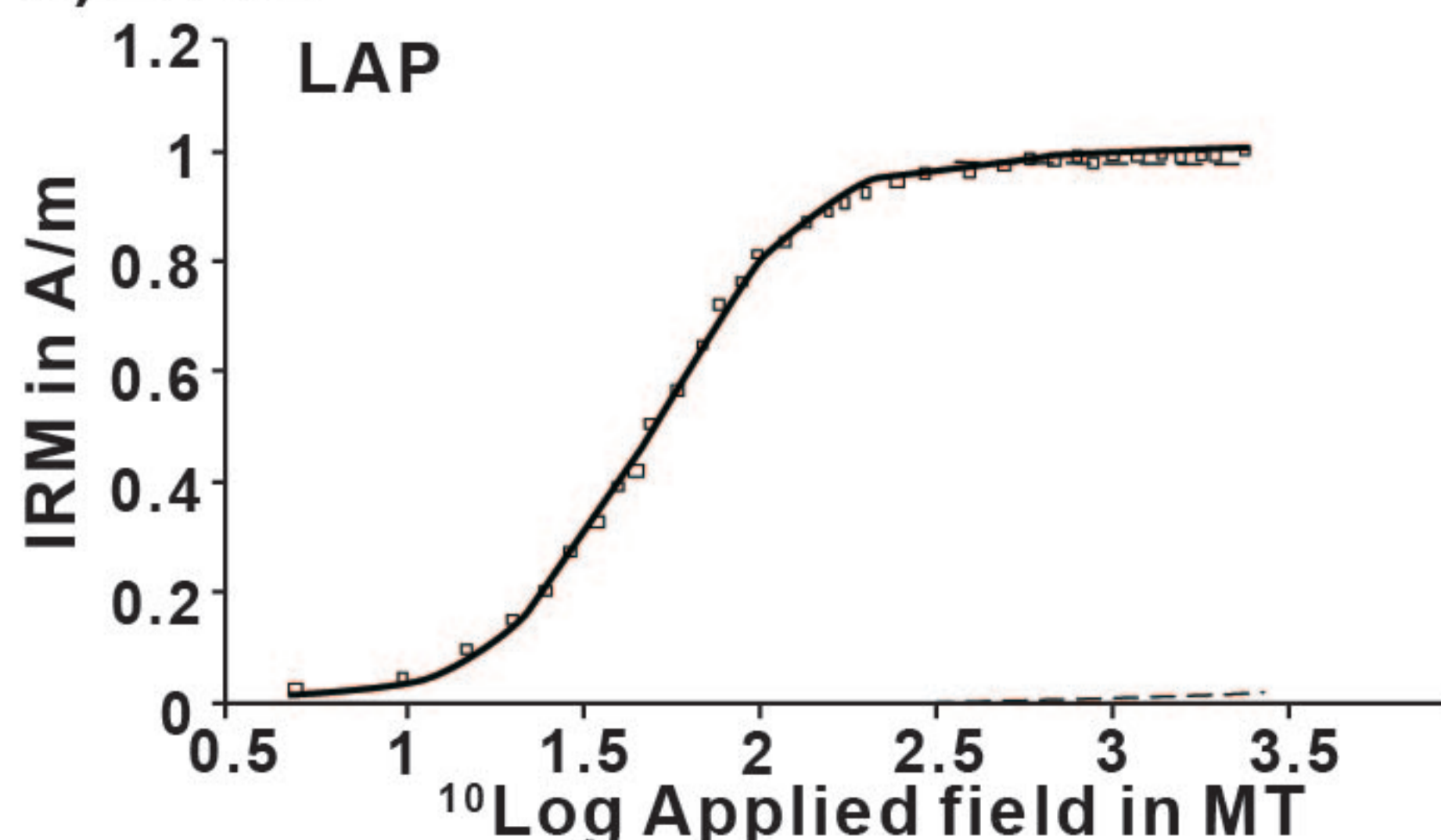


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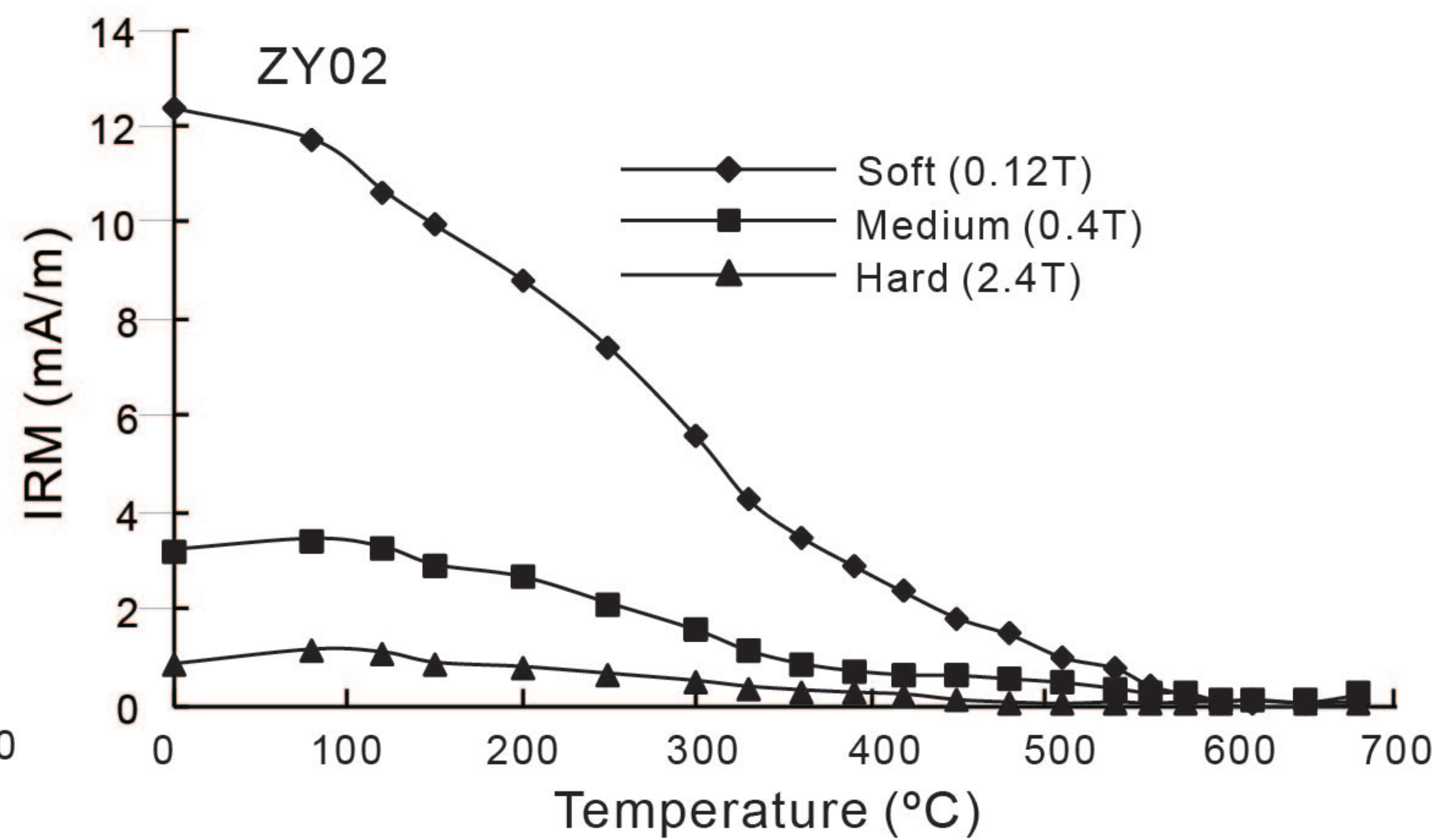
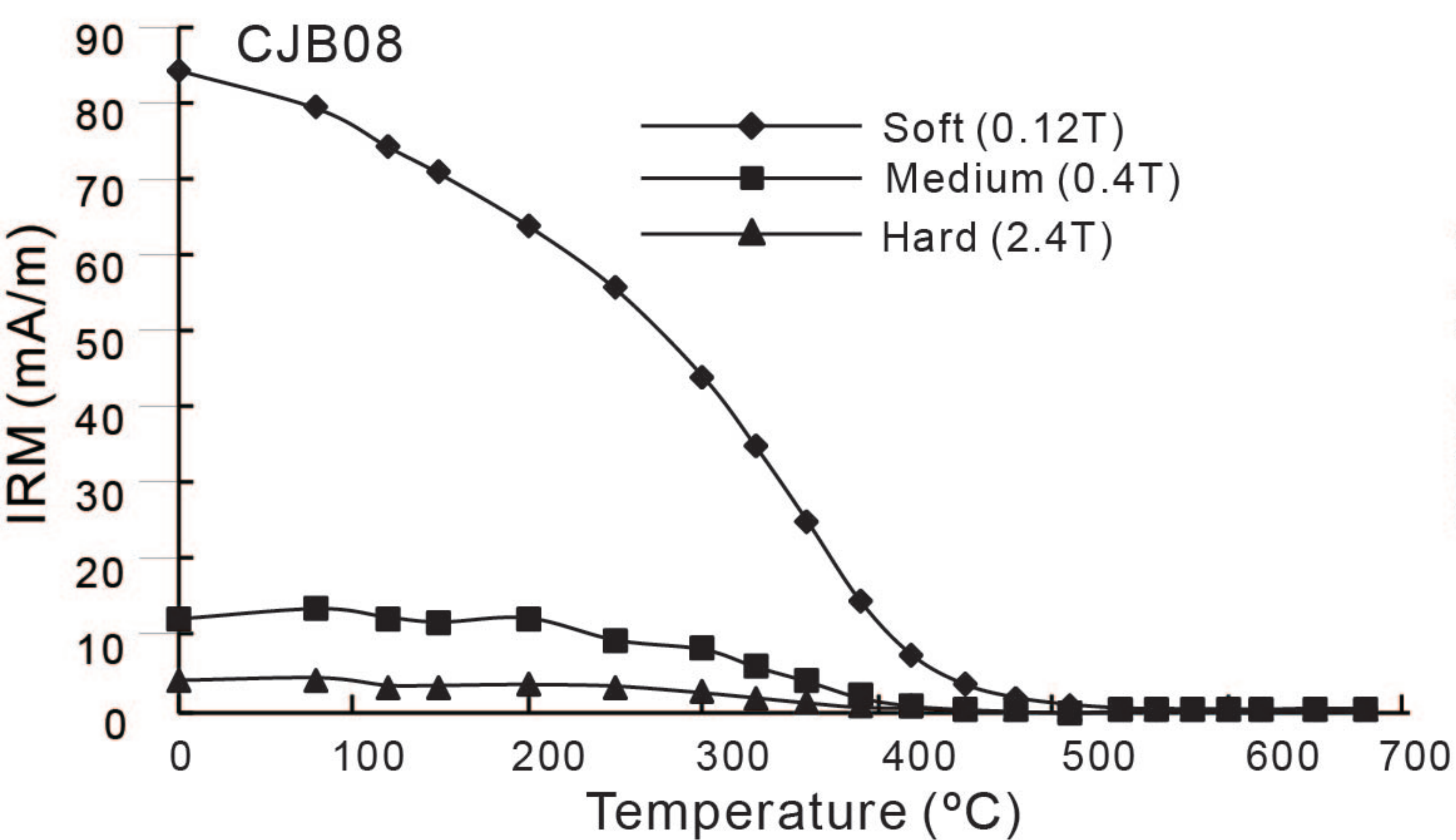
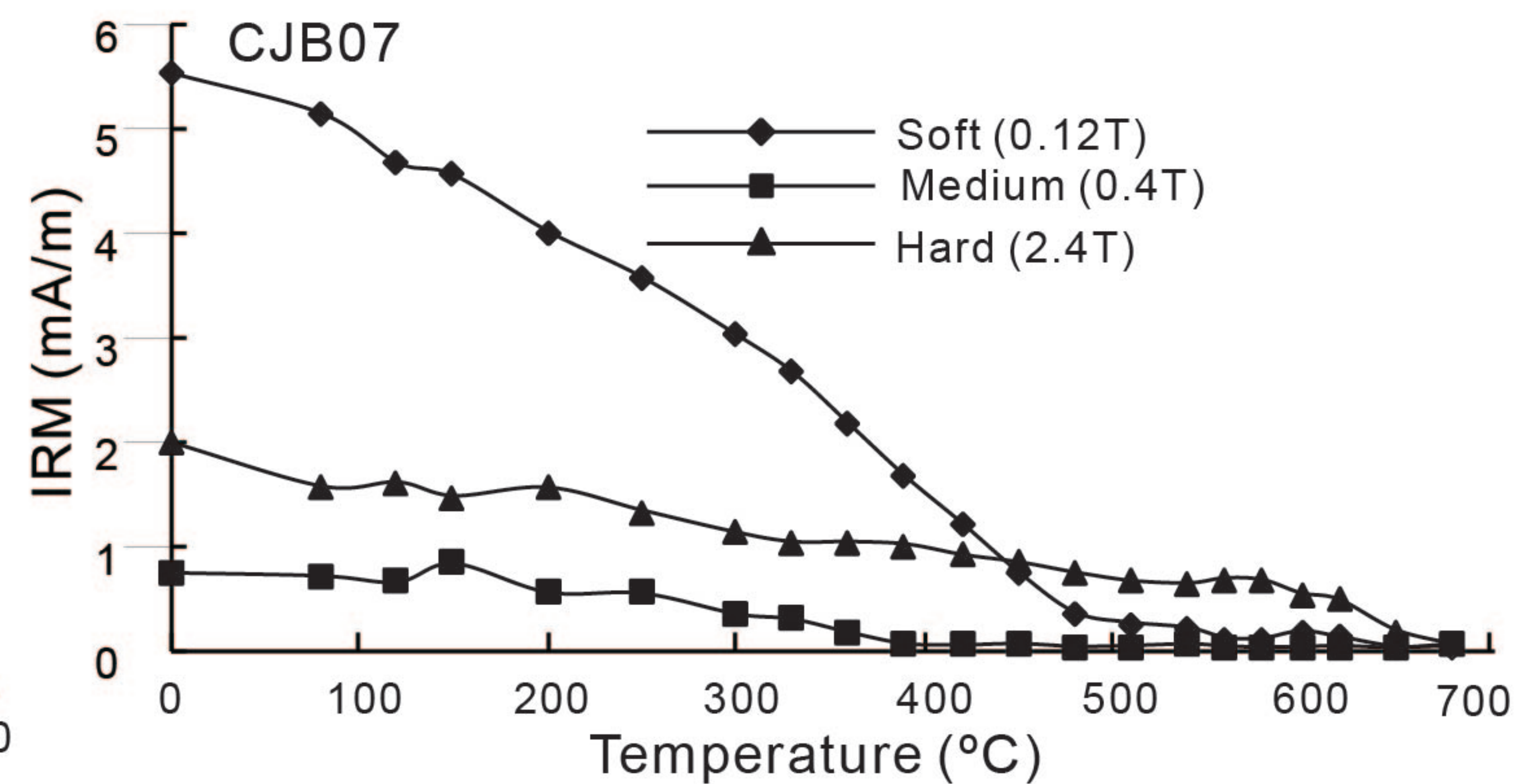
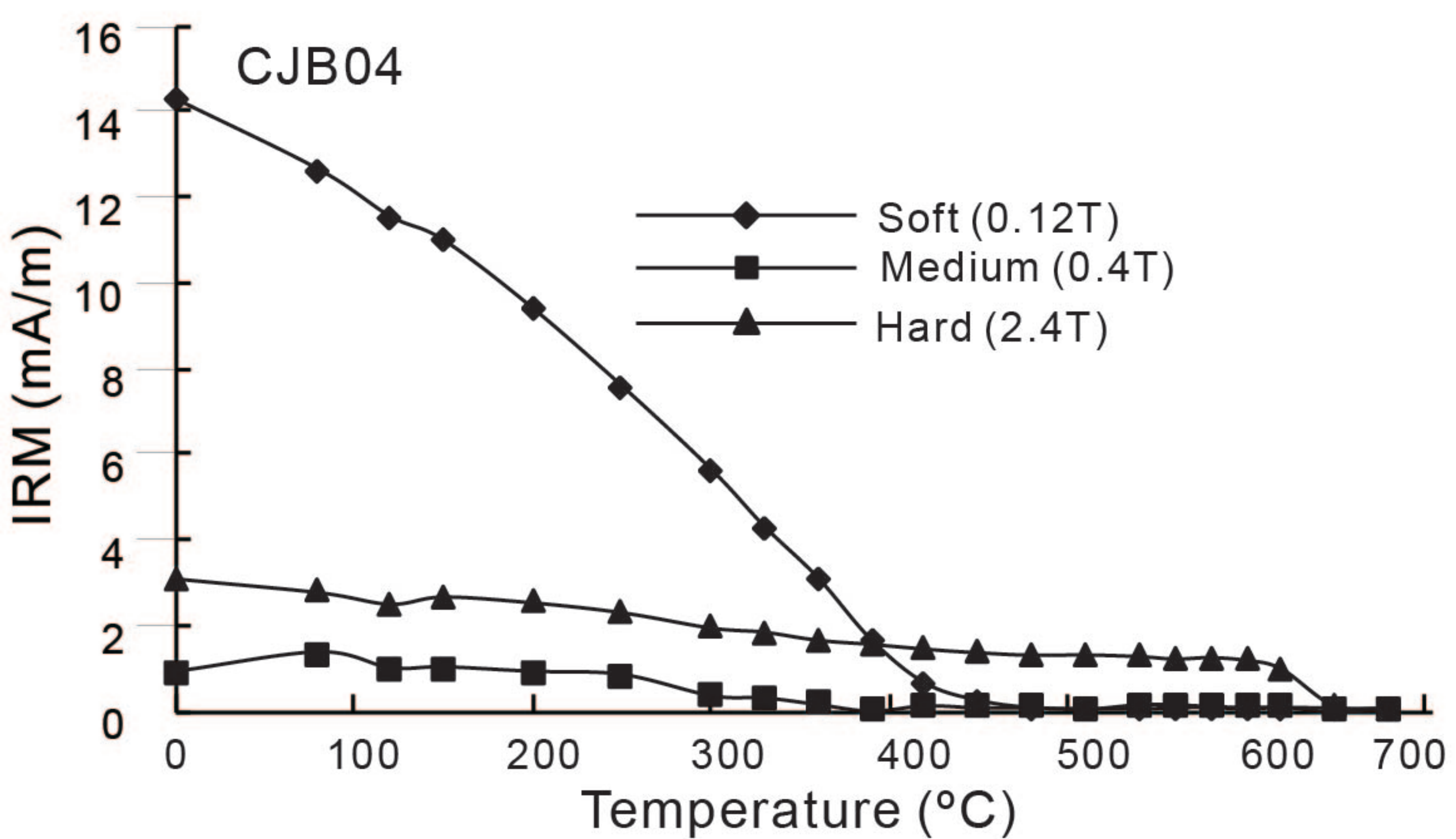
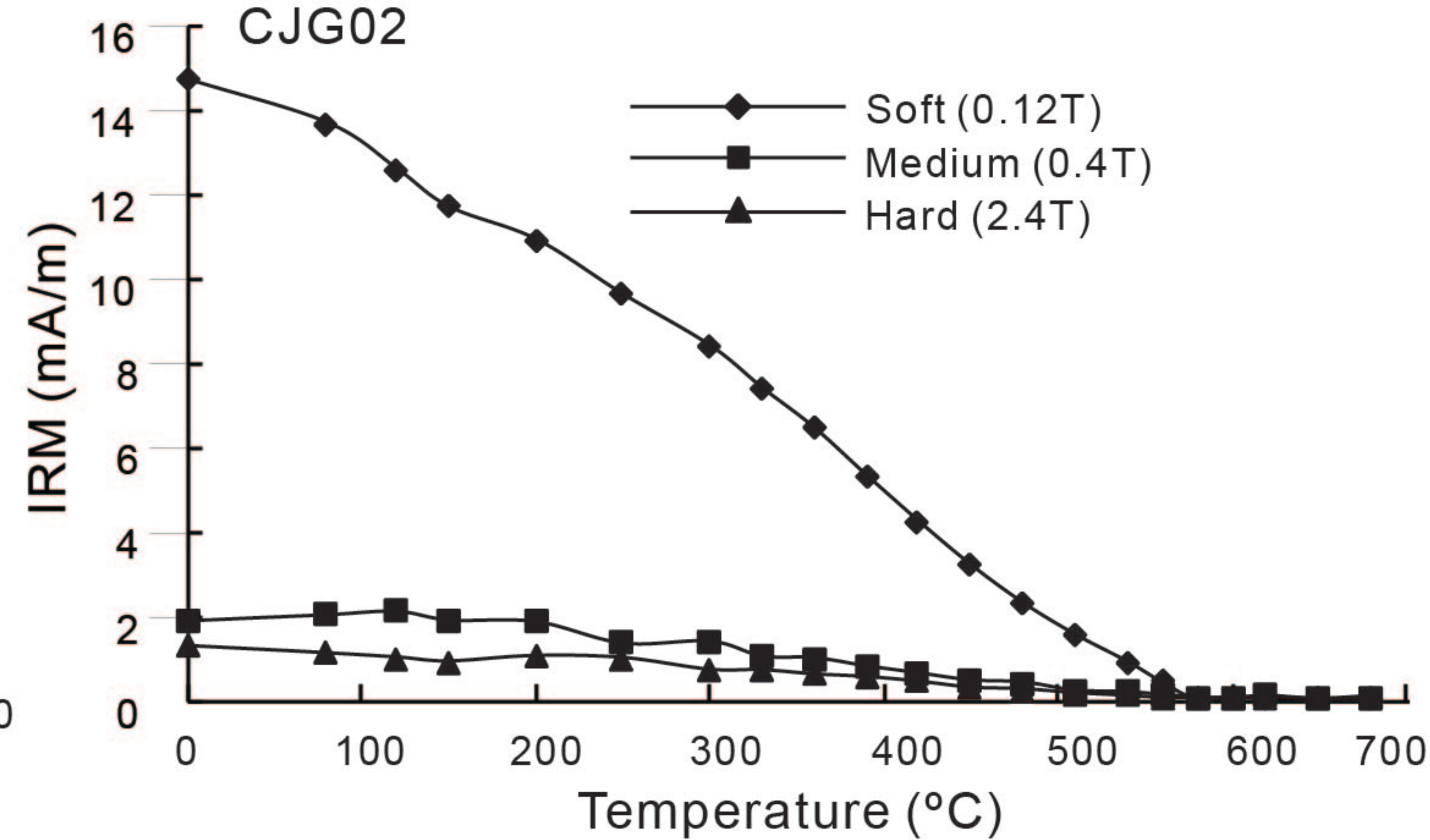
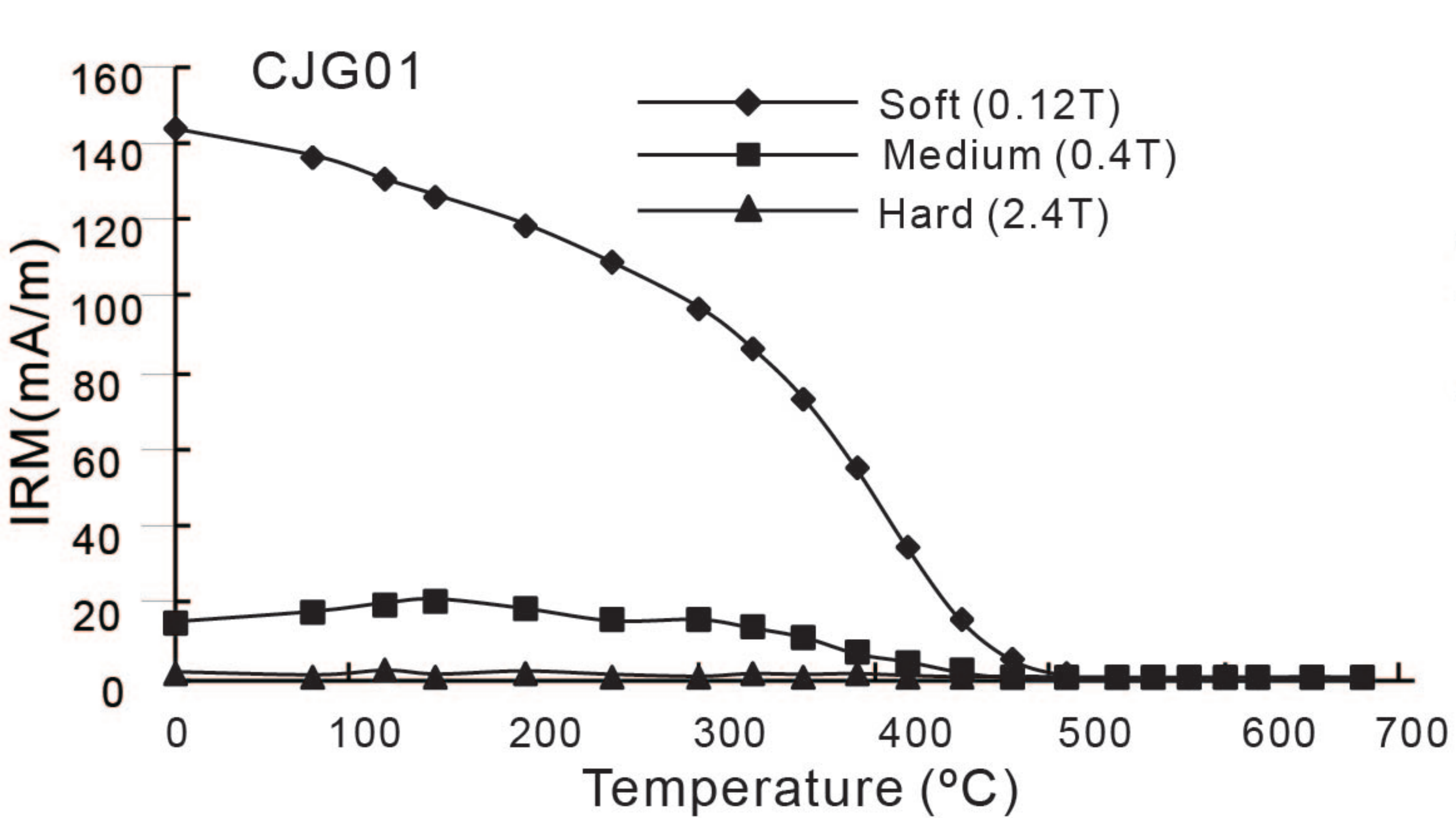


Figure 7.

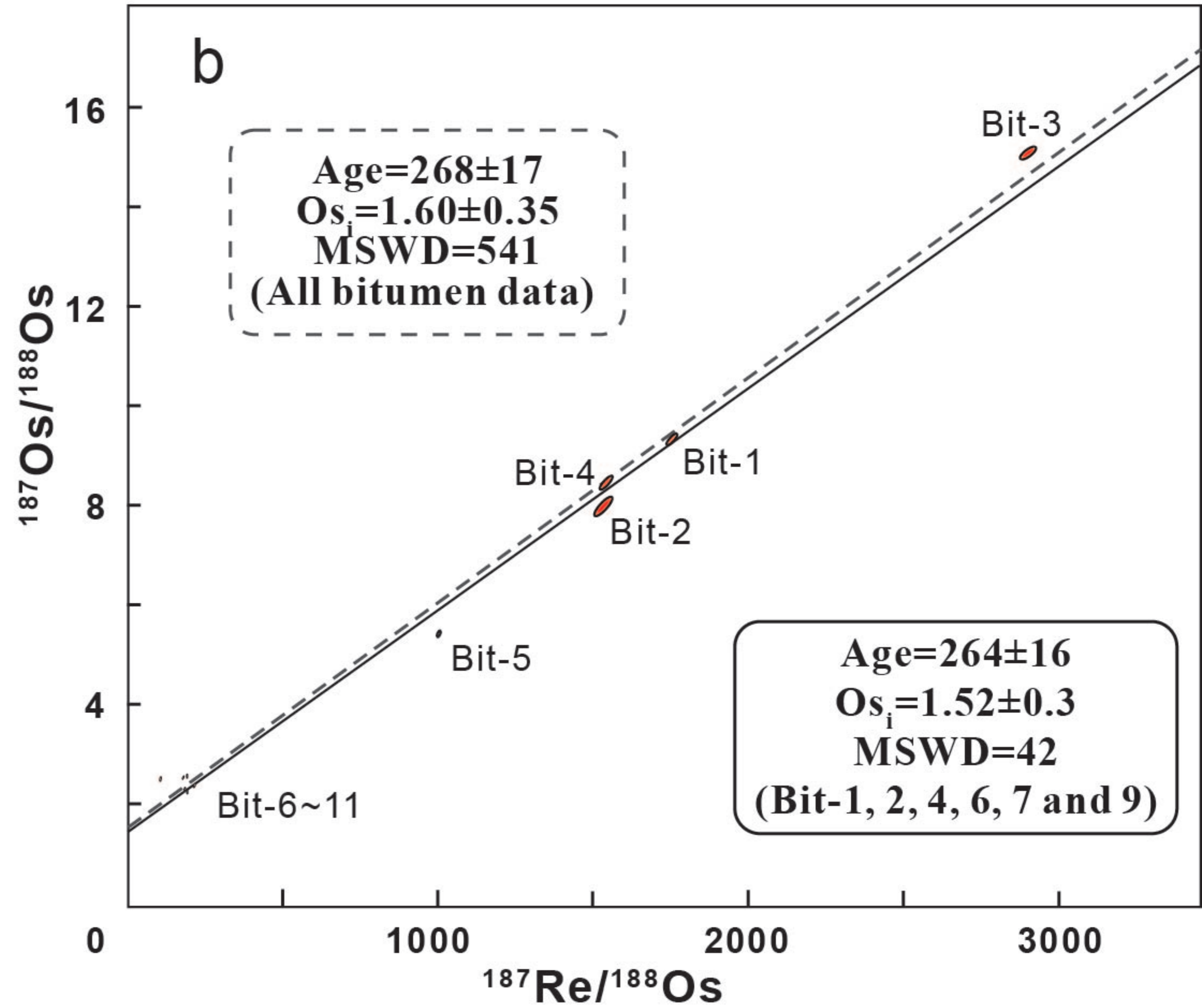
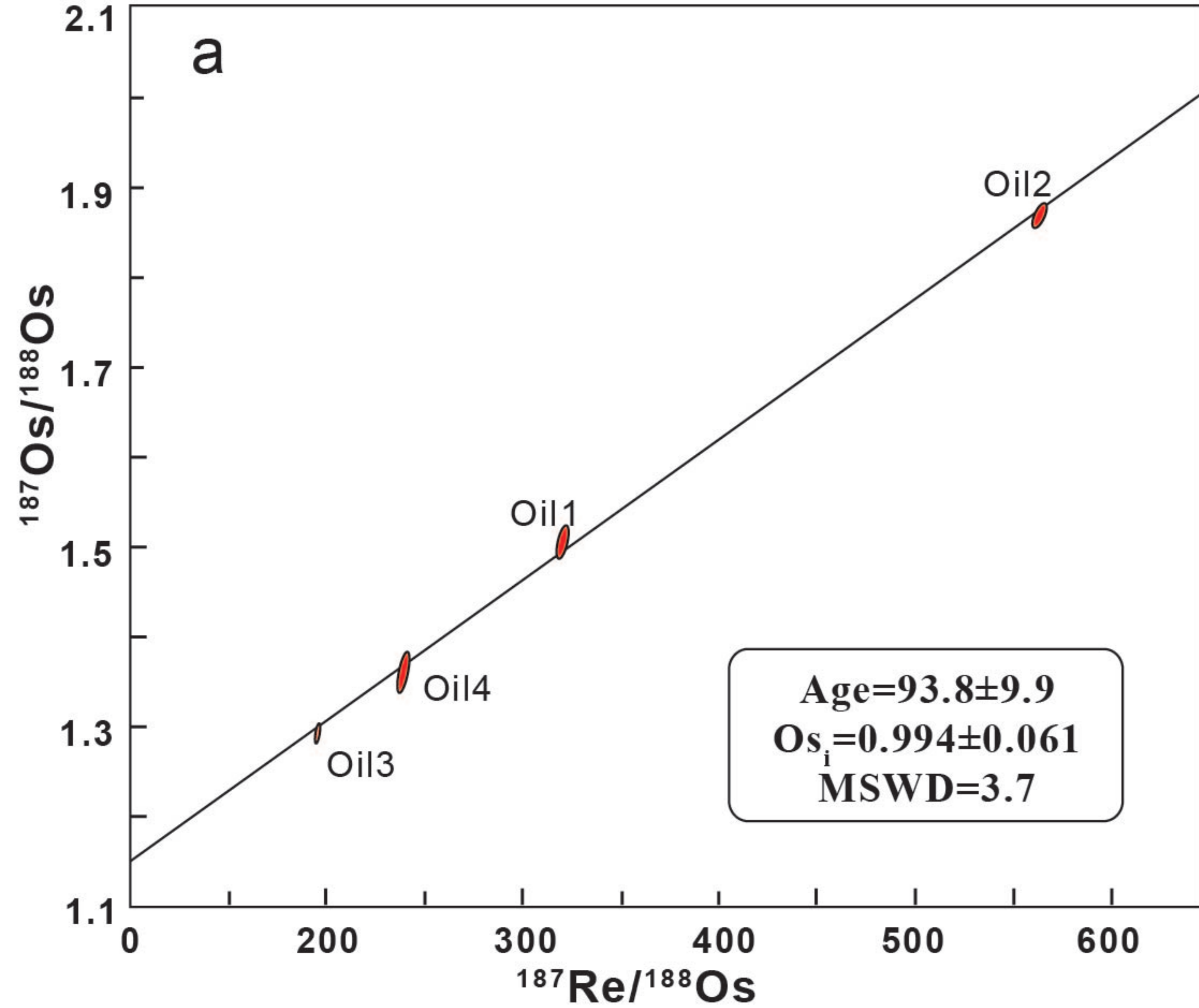


Figure 8.

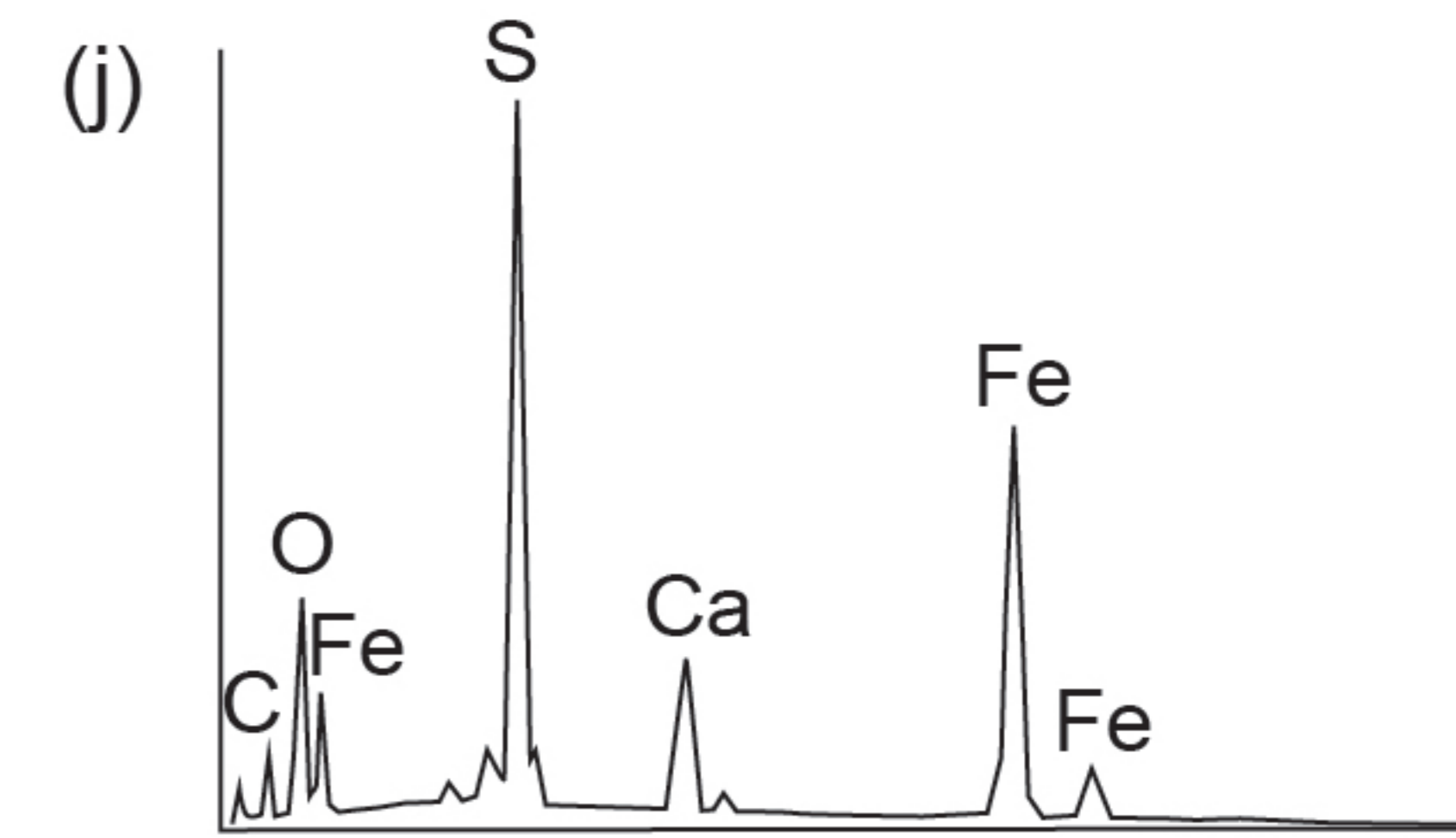
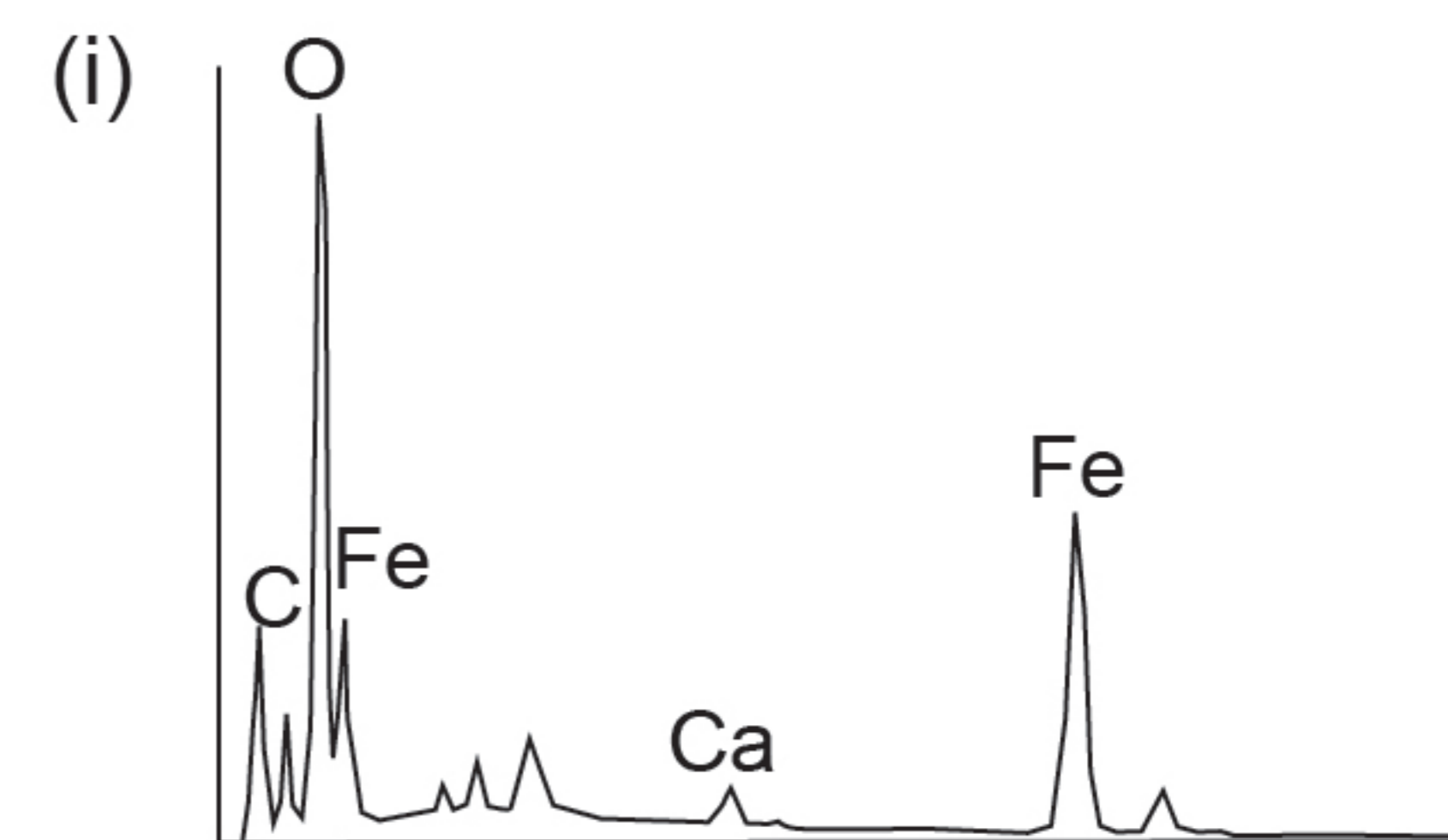
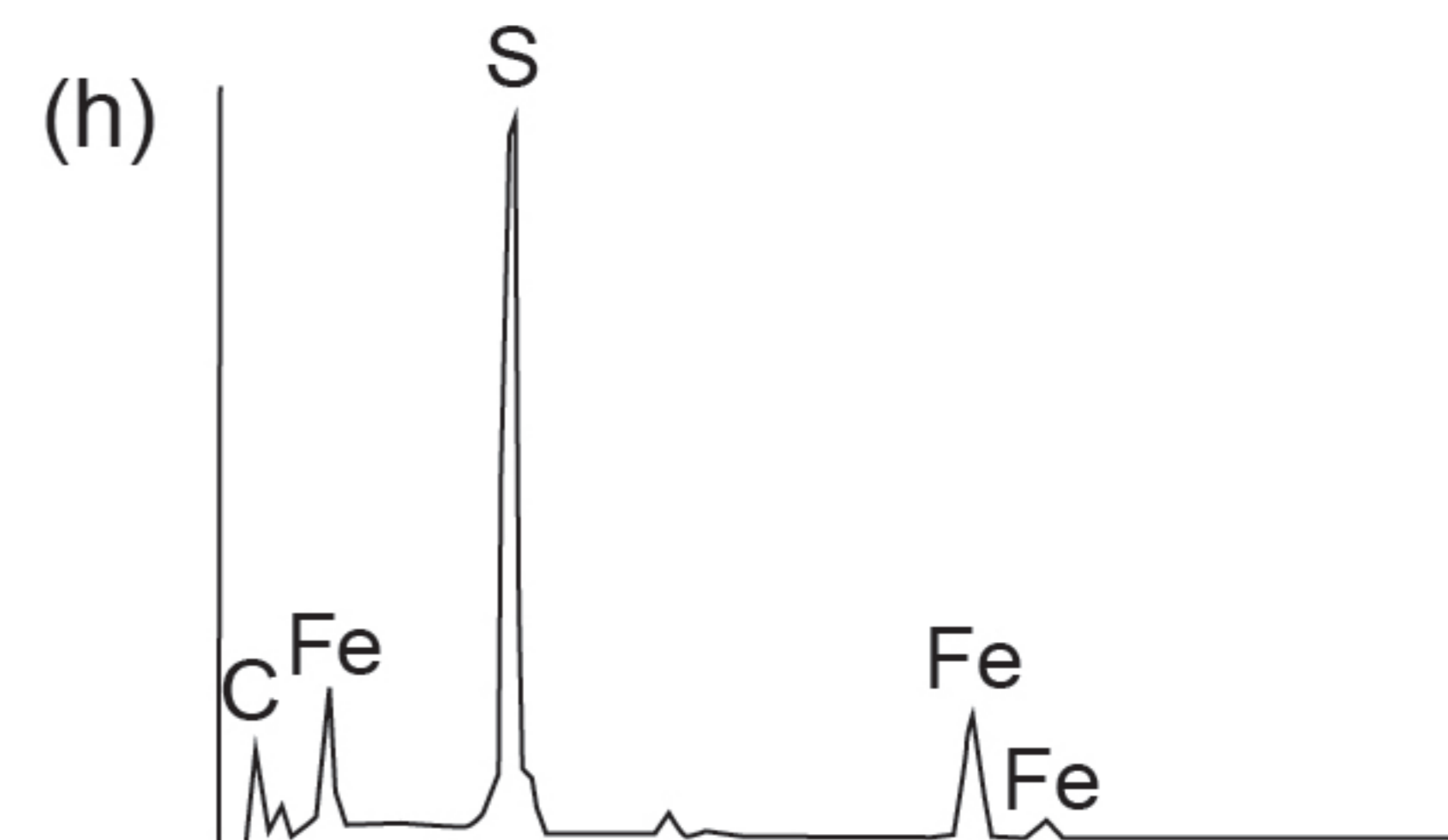
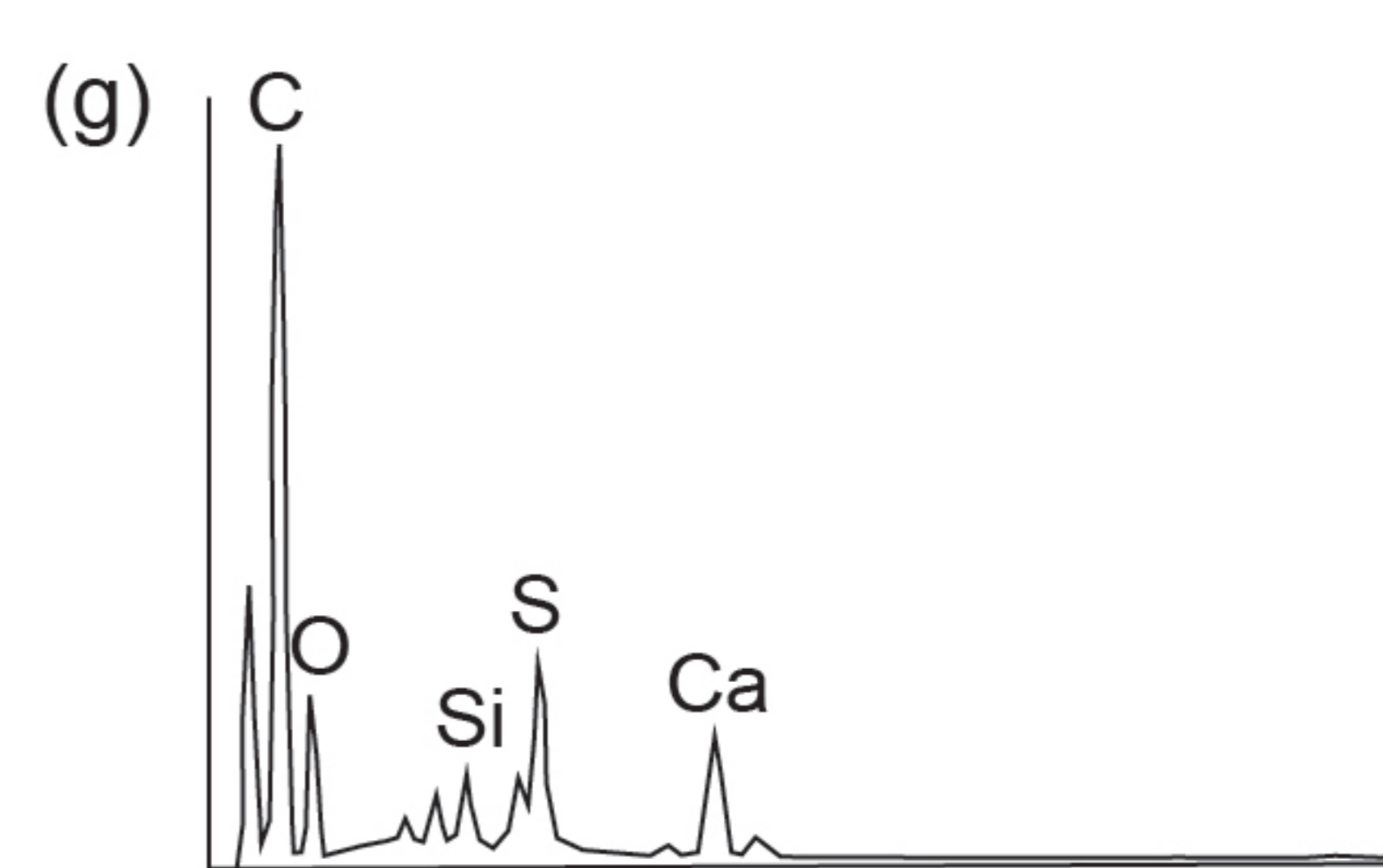
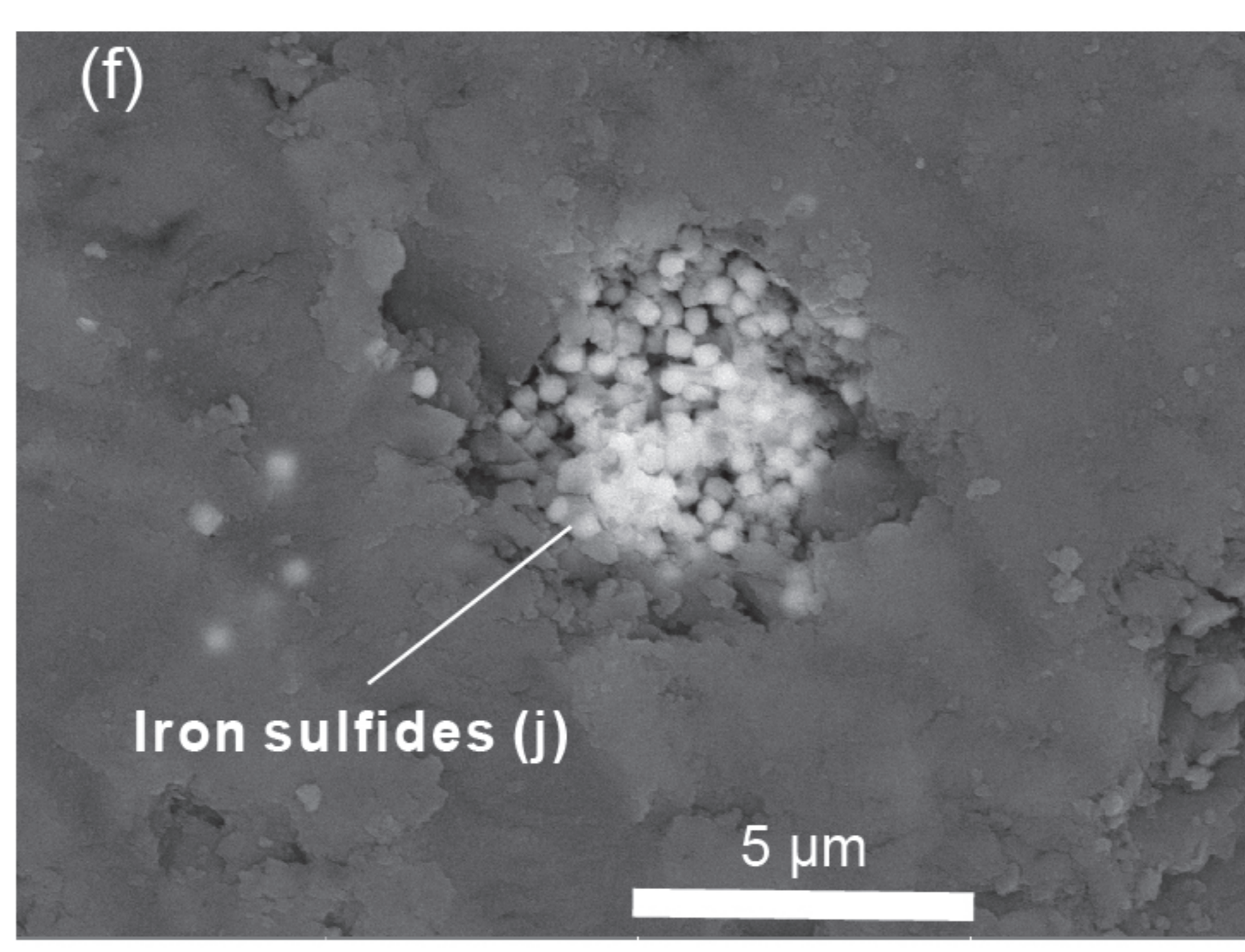
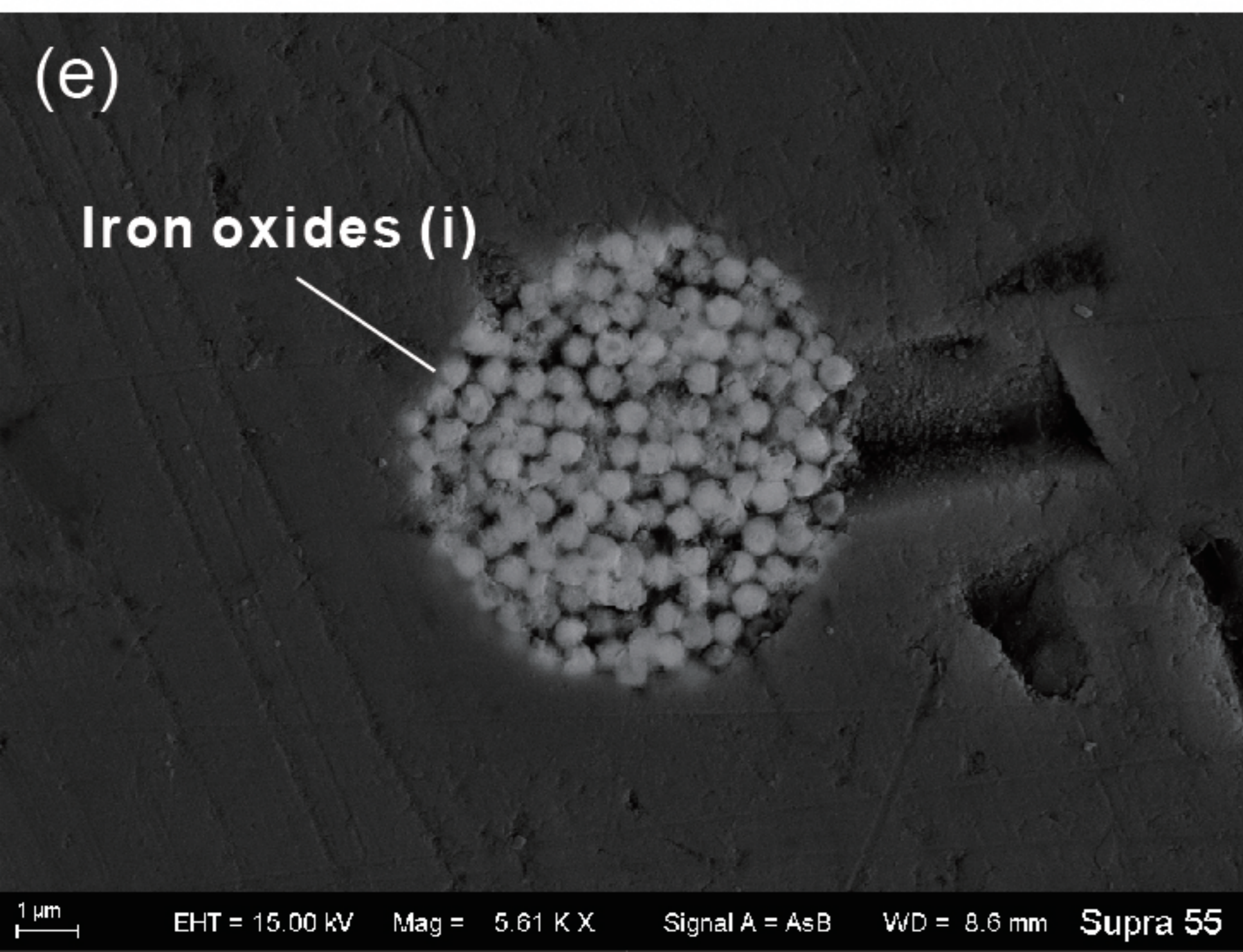
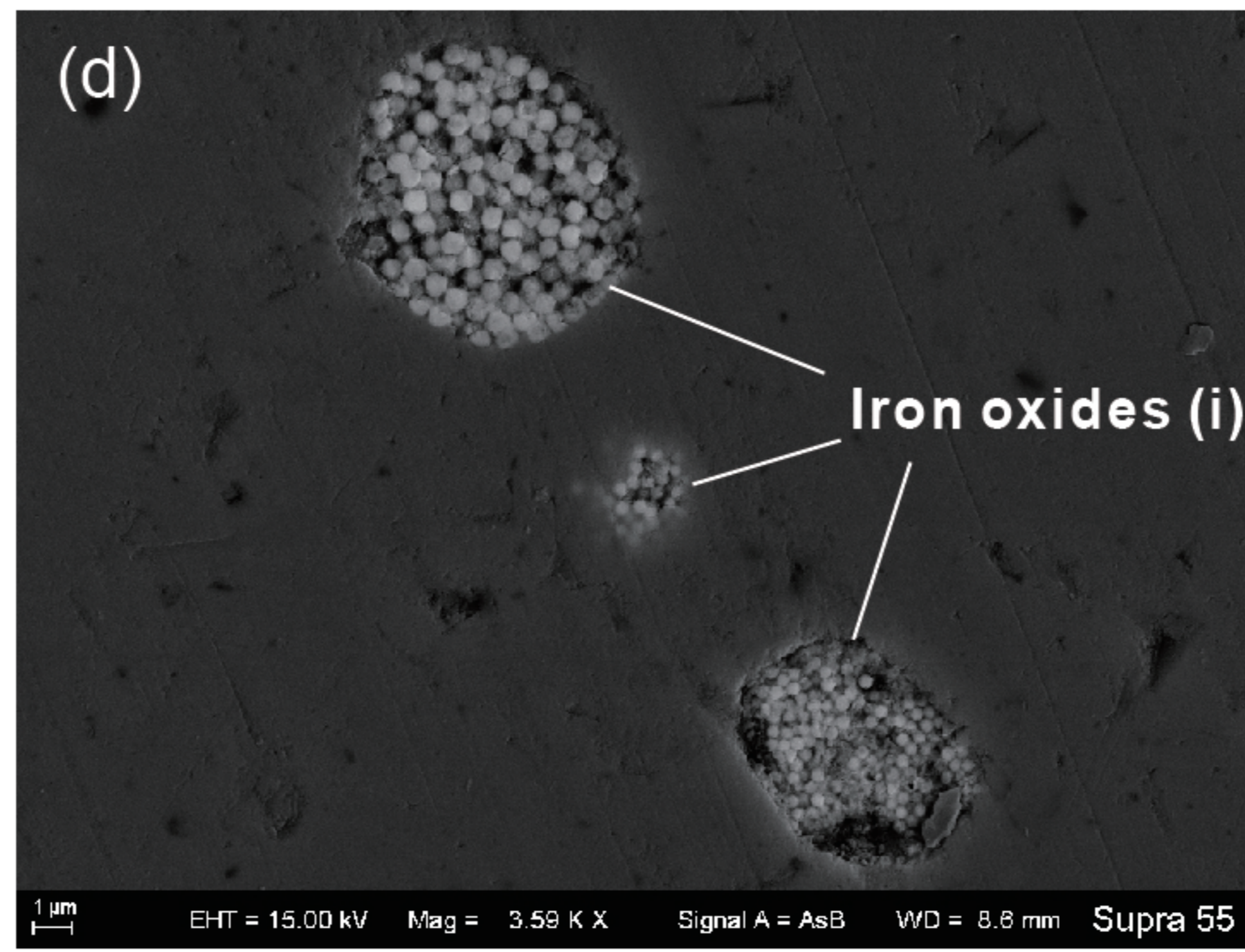
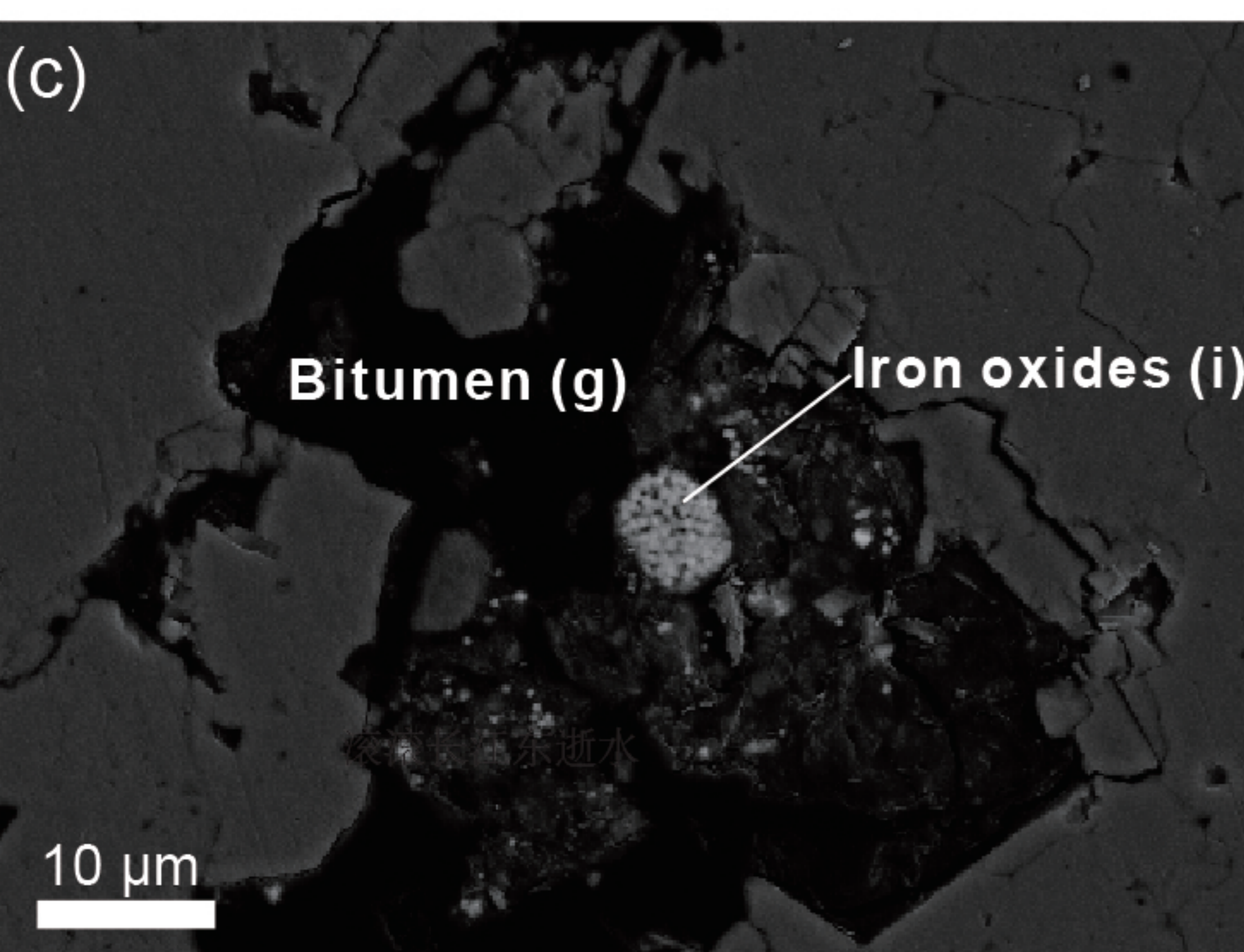
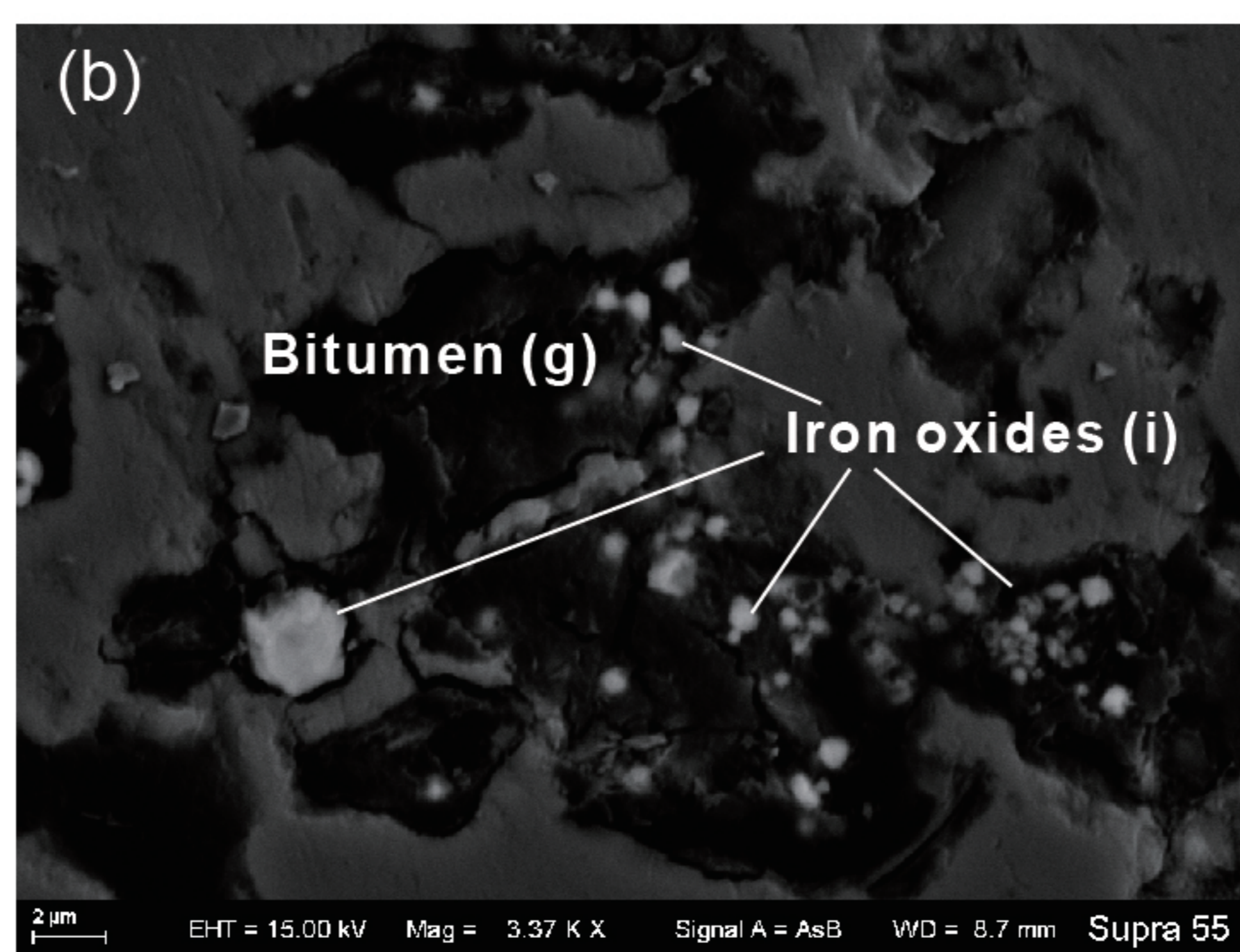
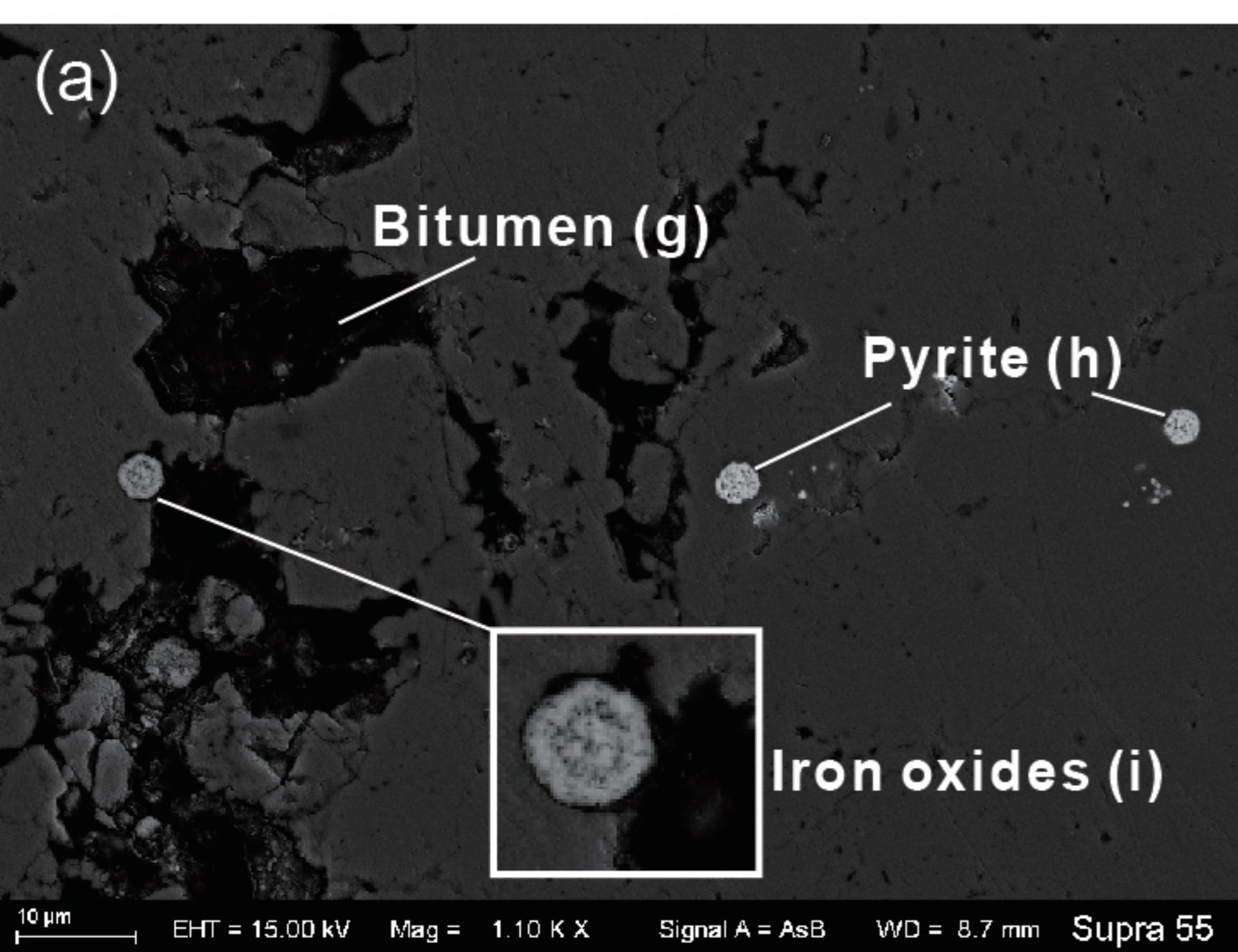


Figure 9.

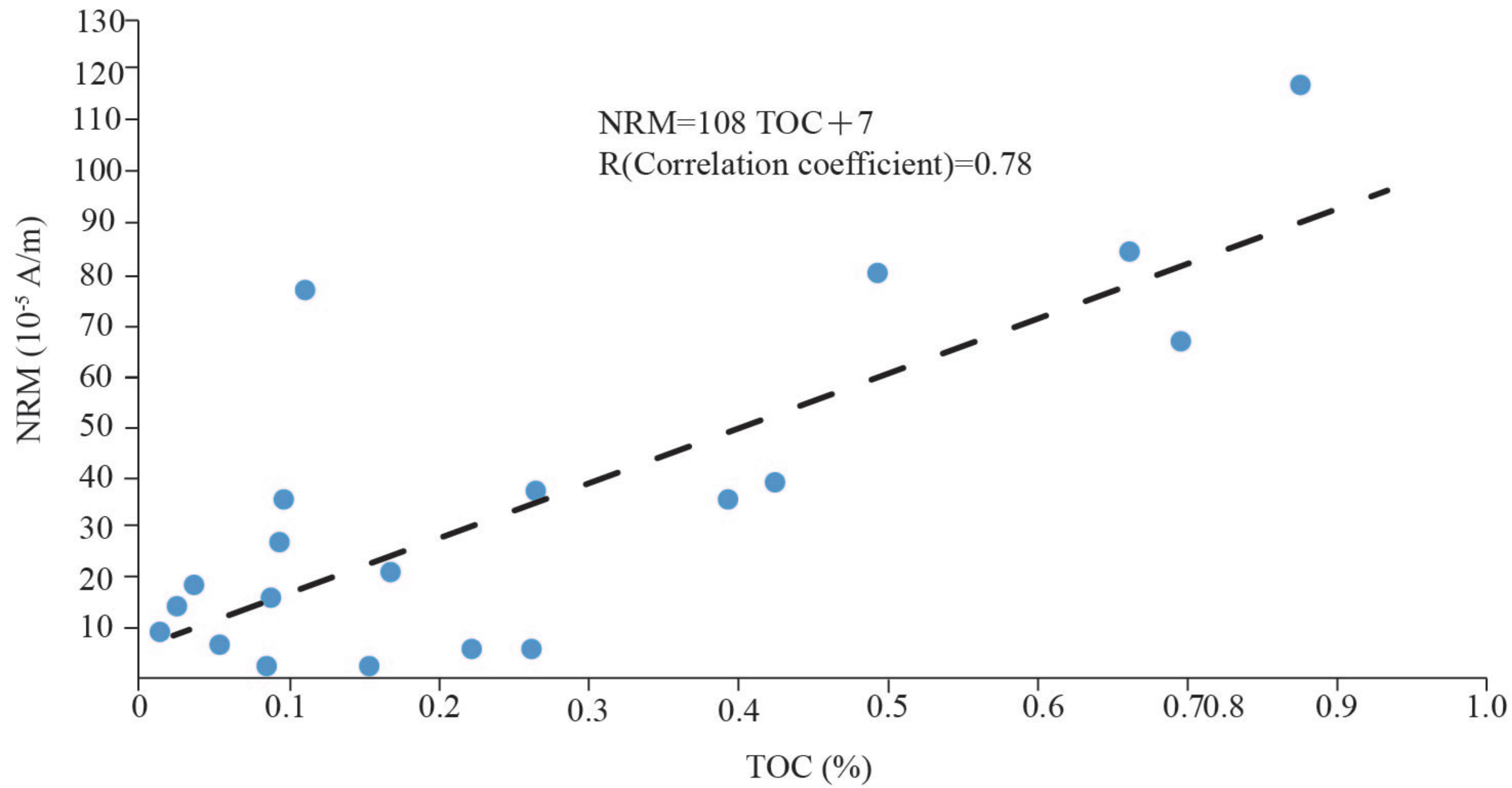


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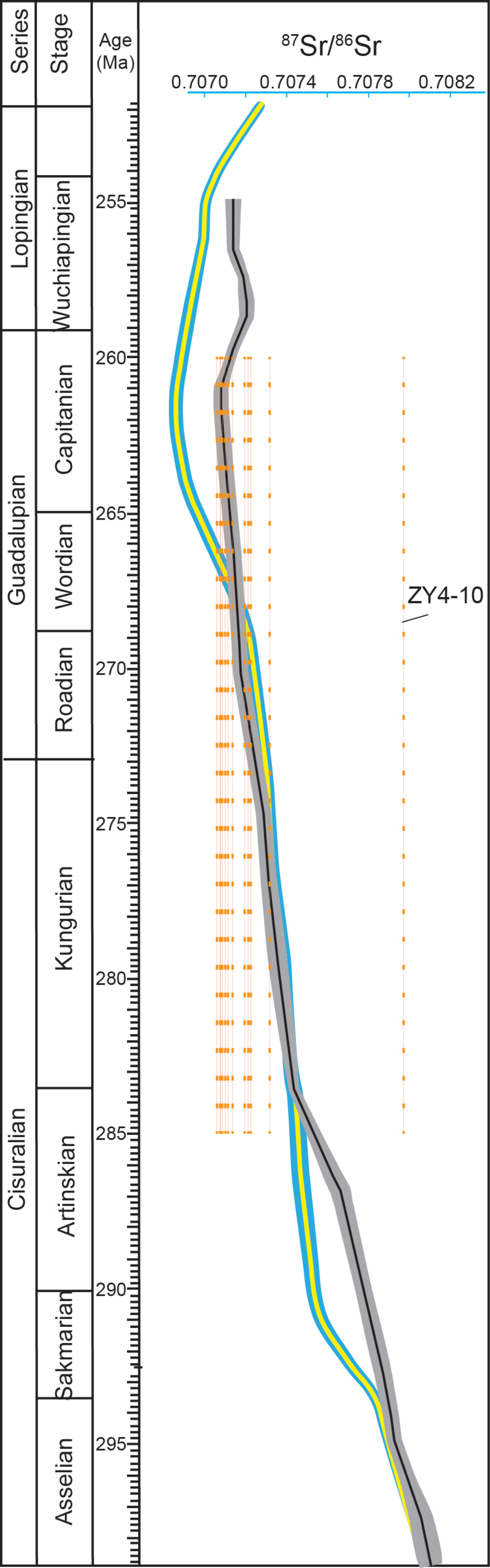


Figure 11.

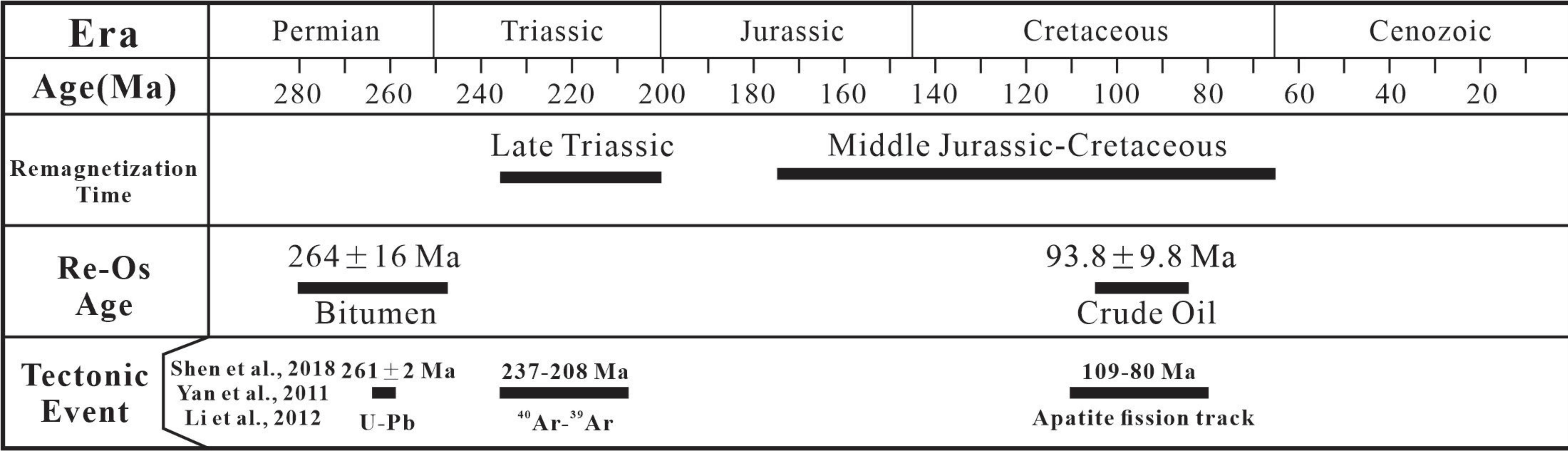


Table 1. Summary of site-mean ChRM directions of Permian shale and carbonate rocks from the northern portion of the Longmen Shan Belt. Strike/dip are the bedding as measured in the field (right hand rule), N is the number of directions used to determine the ChRM, Dg and Ig are the geographic declination and inclination, and Ds and Is the stratigraphic declination and inclination, k the precision parameter and α_{95} the standard confidence error.

Site	Location	Lithology	Strike/dip (°)	ChRM	N	Dg (°)	Ig (°)	Ds (°)	Is (°)	k	α_{95} (°)
<i>Changjianggou Fold</i>											
CJG01	32.321°N, 105.453°E	Limestone	33/33	ChRM-1	7	49	54	79	35	17	15
CJG02	32.324°N, 105.452°E	Limestone	32/40	ChRM-1	7	40	53	73	37	28	12
CJG03	32.297°N, 105.390°E	Limestone	215/36	ChRM-1	6	40	52	0	42	36	11
CJG04	32.288°N, 105.396°E	Limestone	215/36	ChRM-1	4	44	47	8	40	38	15
CJG05	32.290°N, 105.398°E	Limestone	215/42	ChRM-1	7	44	47	3	38	37	10
CJG06	32.293°N, 105.390°E	Limestone	229/82	ChRM-2	7	23	42	3	-13	48	9
<i>Chejiaba Fold</i>											
CJB01	32.534°N, 105.739°E	Limestone	71/66	ChRM-1	7	49	32	95	32	35	10
CJB02	32.534°N, 105.739°E	Limestone	71/66	ChRM-2	6	21	43	111	53	107	7
CJB03	32.534°N, 105.739°E	Limestone	77/57	ChRM-1	6	32	48	115	53	32	12
CJB04	32.534°N, 105.739°E	Limestone	77/57	ChRM-2	7	18	46	115	63	86	7
CJB05	32.534°N, 105.739°E	Dolomite	73/66	ChRM-2	11	16	52	129	52	57	6
CJB06	32.534°N, 105.739°E	Dolomite	73/66	ChRM-1	8	35	51	120	43	29	11
CJB07	32.526°N, 105.741°E	Limestone	82/48	ChRM-1	6	35	44	100	60	62	9
CJB08	32.520°N, 105.750°E	Limestone	215/36	ChRM-2	13	16	56	346	33	50	6
CJB09	32.511°N, 105.754°E	Limestone	235/34	ChRM-1	10	39	42	17	27	51	7
CJB10	32.511°N, 105.754°E	Dolomite	234/26	ChRM-1	11	38	55	9	40	98	5
<i>Zhuyuan Fold</i>											
ZY01	32.221°N, 105.292°E	Limestone	213/49	ChRM-2	11	20	53	344	25	109	4
ZY02	32.221°N, 105.292°E	Limestone	213/49	ChRM-1	8	33	48	353	30	137	5
ZY03	32.220°N, 105.292°E	Limestone	219/46	ChRM-2	8	18	55	346	23	83	6
ZY04	32.218°N, 105.285°E	Limestone	232/54	ChRM-1	9	53	36	23	21	39	8
ZY05	32.205°N, 105.299°E	Limestone	39/64	ChRM-2	7	20	39	71	31	37	10
ZY06	32.204°N, 105.312°E	Limestone	36/64	ChRM-2	8	11	46	75	36	127	5
ZY07	32.204°N, 105.312°E	Limestone	44/64	ChRM-2	8	14	47	85	39	88	6

Table 2. Rhenium–Osmium content and isotopic composition for oil and bitumen samples from Permian reservoir rocks, which paleomagnetic measurements were done. ppb = part per billion, ppt = part per trillion and rho = the associated error correlation.

Batch/Sample	Re (ppb)	±	Os (ppt)	±	¹⁸⁷Re/¹⁸⁸Os	±	¹⁸⁷Os/¹⁸⁸Os	±	rho
Oil1	13.6	0.04	241.5	1.6	319.3	2.6	1.507	0.015	0.704
Oil2	46.8	0.12	492.1	2.6	562.7	3.0	1.869	0.012	0.660
Oil3	21.1	0.06	600.6	3.0	194.8	1.2	1.293	0.009	0.650
Oil4	8.4	0.03	198.0	1.5	238.2	2.7	1.361	0.019	0.722
Bitumen-1	32.3	0.08	196.0	1.9	1752.5	15.1	9.356	0.086	0.861
Bitumen-2	15.2	0.04	97.3	1.4	1532.7	25.2	8.018	0.150	0.860
Bitumen-3	72.4	0.18	354.4	3.5	2903.6	21.0	15.082	0.121	0.794
Bitumen-4	22.1	0.06	144.1	1.6	1541.7	17.1	8.478	0.102	0.872
Bitumen-5	80.7	0.20	659.9	4.5	1000.4	4.8	5.468	0.031	0.616
Bitumen-6	13.6	0.04	443.5	2.8	190.4	1.2	2.322	0.018	0.650
Bitumen-7	12.2	0.03	423.1	2.7	179.1	1.1	2.371	0.019	0.654
Bitumen-8	15.6	0.04	524.7	3.4	189.8	1.2	2.630	0.020	0.650
Bitumen-9	15.6	0.04	459.7	2.9	213.6	1.3	2.460	0.019	0.657
Bitumen-10	18.3	0.05	669.0	4.3	173.9	1.0	2.593	0.020	0.647
Bitumen-11	7.7	0.02	476.5	4.1	102.5	1.0	2.579	0.032	0.676



Citation on deposit: Hu, J., Zhang, Y., Jia, D., Muxworthy, A., Selby, D., Li, Y., ...Li, W. (2023). Combining Paleomagnetic and Re-Os Isotope Data to Date Hydrocarbon Generation and Accumulation Processes. *Journal of Geophysical Research: Solid Earth*, 128(2), Article

e2022JB025955. <https://doi.org/10.1029/2022jb025955>

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