

1 On the evolution of seismogenic faults in the Longmen Shan, eastern Tibet

2 Huiping Zhang<sup>1\*</sup>, Guixi Yi<sup>2</sup>, Peizhen Zhang<sup>1</sup>, Eric Kirby<sup>3</sup>

3 <sup>1</sup> *State Key Laboratory of Earthquake Dynamics, Institute of Geology, China Earthquake Administration,*  
4 *Beijing 100029, China*

5 <sup>2</sup> *Earthquake Administration of Sichuan Province, Chengdu, 610041, China*

6 <sup>3</sup> *College of Earth, Ocean and Atmospheric Sciences, Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon 97331,*  
7 *USA*

8 \* E-mail: huiping@ies.ac.cn (H-p. Zhang)

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10 **Abstract:** A fundamental debate exists regarding the geometry and depth  
11 extent of seismogenic faults in eastern Tibet. Along the Longmen Shan,  
12 geologic and seismic reflection data reveal a belt of low to moderate angle  
13 thrust faults, some of which may have been activated in devastating earthquakes  
14 in 2008 ( $M_w \sim 7.9$ , Wenchuan) and 2013 ( $M_w \sim 6.6$ , Lushan). However,  
15 geologic and geodetic constraints on these ruptures suggest rupture along  
16 relatively high-angle listric reverse faults. Here, we use a combination of focal  
17 mechanisms determined from 276 aftershocks ( $M_s > 4.0$ ) with well-determined  
18 waveforms and aftershock distributions from the 2008 event to determine  
19 subsurface fault geometry. Our results imply that seismogenic slip occurred  
20 along relatively high-angle structures that cross-cut low-angle imbricate faults  
21 imaged in reflection seismic data. Thus, we suggest that current geometric  
22 models of seismogenic faults may not fully represent the distribution of  
23 subsurface seismic hazard along the heavily-populated Sichuan Basin.

24 **Keywords:** Longmen Shan; eastern Tibet; seismogenic fault; seismic hazard

## 25 **1. Introduction**

26 Understanding the distribution of seismic hazard in intracontinental regions is  
27 a first-order problem, since relatively low rates of strain accumulation and  
28 sparse historic seismicity of these regions pose challenges for evaluation based  
29 on both geodetic data and probabilistic approaches (Bilham, 2004). Moreover,  
30 in regions that have been subject to multiple periods of orogeny, complex  
31 distributions of pre-existing crustal weaknesses present difficulties in the  
32 recognition and characterization of active structures. This situation is typically  
33 challenging for assessing seismic hazard in Eurasia, because most of the ~200  
34 active faults are distributed along the pre-existing block boundaries and have  
35 been reactivated during the Cenozoic (Deng et al., 2007). For example, active  
36 thrust faults near the eastern end of the Haiyuan fault in NE Tibet apparently  
37 originated as a normal fault in the Oligocene to early Miocene (Wang et al.,  
38 2013). Although the general case of fault inversion is rather well-known (e.g.,  
39 McClay, 1989), distinguishing reactivated structures from newly formed faults  
40 with low-magnitude displacement may be challenging.

41 In eastern Tibet, faults along the Longmen Shan hosted devastating  
42 earthquakes in 2008 (Wenchuan,  $M_w \sim 7.9$ ) and 2013 (Lushan,  $M_w \sim 6.6$ ). These  
43 events occurred in a region considered to be of only moderate seismic hazard (P  
44 Zhang, 2013) due to slow rates of deformation and strain accumulation (e.g.,  
45 Gan et al., 2007). Among three strands of the Longmen Shan faults, Beichuan  
46 and Pengguan faults ruptured during the 2008  $M_w 7.9$  Wenchun earthquake

47 (Figure 1; Fu et al., 2011; Liu-Zeng et al., 2009; Xu et al., 2009; Zhang et al.,  
48 2010). Geological context for generating this event has been a hotspot in that it  
49 is essential to understand the Cenozoic evolution of the eastern Tibetan Plateau,  
50 and it is also a critical target to test the geodynamical models proposed to  
51 describe the evolution of the region. Because these events occurred along a  
52 fold-and-thrust belt that initially developed in Mesozoic time (Burchfiel et al.,  
53 1995; Chen and Wilson, 1996) and was reactivated in the middle Cenozoic  
54 (Burchfiel et al., 1995; Richardson et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2012), determining  
55 whether these events occurred along pre-existing structures or along newly  
56 developed faults is challenging (c.f., Hubbard and Shaw, 2009; Zhang et al.,  
57 2010). Therefore, the geometry of the seismogenic Longmen Shan faults  
58 responsible for the events is not well constrained and still hotly debated.

59 Geological and numerical modeling observations favor a listric geometry (Feng  
60 et al., 2010; Shen et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2010; Zhu and Zhang, 2010, 2013),  
61 however, almost all the geophysical surveys argued for an overthrusting  
62 imbricated faults (Hubbard and Shaw, 2009; Jia et al., 2010; Y Li et al., 2010),  
63 which are thought obviously responsible for the 2008 *M*<sub>w</sub> 7.9 earthquake.

64 Here we present an analysis of aftershocks following the 2008 Wenchuan  
65 event; their spatial distribution and focal mechanisms are consistent with  
66 rupture along a steep ( $>40^\circ$ ) fault zone. These results support the notion that at  
67 least some seismogenic faults in the Longmen Shan are recently formed and  
68 cross-cut the imbricate fold-and-thrusts observed in reflection seismic data.

## 69 **2. Background: tectonics of the Longmen Shan**

70 The Longmen Shan, a mountain range approximately 500 km long and 30-50  
71 km wide, marks the steep topographic transition from the Sichuan Basin to the  
72 eastern Tibetan Plateau (Figure 1) (Clark and Royden, 2000; Kirby et al., 2003).  
73 The fault system along the Longmen Shan initially developed during Mesozoic  
74 convergence between the North China Block, South China Block and the  
75 Songpan-Garze basin (Burchfiel et al., 1995; Chen et al., 1995; Cook et al.,  
76 2013; Jia et al., 2006). Shortening and fabric development within the Mesozoic  
77 orogen involved emplacement of a series of nappes over foreland strata  
78 (Burchfiel et al., 1995; Chen and Wilson, 1996), whereas ductile deformation  
79 within the hinterland led to fabric development along the sinistral-oblique  
80 Wenchuan-Maowen shear zone (Dirks et al., 1994). Cenozoic deformation was  
81 superimposed upon these early fabrics and structures (Burchfiel et al., 1995,  
82 2008). Consequently, deconvolving the history of slip along them is challenging,  
83 and significant uncertainty still remains regarding the geometry of active  
84 structures and the magnitude of Cenozoic displacement.

85 At the lithospheric scale, the Longmen Shan is an enigmatic mountain range,  
86 with relatively modest shortening (Burchfiel et al., 1995, 2008), but a thick  
87 crustal root (Robert et al., 2010a, 2010b). In conjunction with the absence of a  
88 foreland basin and limited shortening rates observed geodetically (e.g., Gan et  
89 al., 2007; Loveless and Meade, 2011), these observations imply a mode of  
90 mountain building that does not lead to a flexural load of the basin (Burchfiel et

91 al., 2008). It has been suggested that flow of the lower crust provides a means to  
92 explain these observations (Clark and Royden, 2000; Clark et al., 2005; Kirby et  
93 al., 2002; Royden et al., 1997), and this model is consistent with geophysical  
94 observations of high conductivity and elevated temperature which suggest low  
95 viscosity in middle and lower crust (Bai et al., 2010; Zhao et al., 2012). Not all  
96 workers agree, however, as structures observed on seismic reflection profiles  
97 (Hubbard and Shaw, 2009; Jia et al., 2006, 2010; Y Li et al., 2010) have been  
98 interpreted to represent up to ~50% shortening of the upper crust across the  
99 Longmen Shan foothills (Hubbard and Shaw, 2009). An apparent correlation  
100 between structural and topographic relief approaching the Longmen Shan led  
101 these authors to conclude that brittle shortening through low-angle thrust  
102 faulting is closely linked to the production of steep topography.

103     Against this geodynamic backdrop, the geometry of active faults in the  
104 Longmen Shan plays a central role in a current debate over the nature and  
105 distribution of seismic hazard. Active convergent and right-lateral deformation  
106 along the Longmen Shan is accomplished along series of major faults (Burchfiel  
107 et al., 1995, 2008; Densmore et al., 2007; Fu et al., 2011; Kirby et al., 2002),  
108 from northwest to southeast, the Wenchuan-Maoxian, Beichuan, and Pengguan  
109 faults, and blind range front thrusts (Figure 1) that collectively define an  
110 east-vergent imbricate fault system (e.g., Hubbard and Shaw, 2009). Well  
111 constrained studies of active faults indicate that the slip rates (both dip-slip and  
112 strike-slip) averaged over tens of millennia are around 2 mm/a or less

113 (Densmore et al., 2007; Zhang et al., 2011), consistent with decadal GPS  
114 observations (Chen et al., 2000; Gan et al., 2007; Zhang et al., 2004).

115 The southeastern two faults of the Longmen Shan fault system ruptured  
116 during large to moderate-magnitude reverse events in 2008 and 2013 (Xu et al.,  
117 2009, 2013; Zhang et al., 2010; Y Zhang et al., 2013). Along the Beichuan fault,  
118 the 2008 Mw 7.9 Wenchuan earthquake was associated with a 240-km-long  
119 surface rupture while an additional 72-km-long surface rupture occurred along  
120 the Pengguan fault (Figure 1) (Xu et al., 2009). Maximum vertical and  
121 horizontal offsets of ~9.0 m and 4.9 m (Liu-Zeng et al., 2009; Zhang et al.,  
122 2010), respectively, were measured along the Beichuan fault. A maximum  
123 vertical offset of 3.5 m was measured along the Pengguan fault (Liu-Zeng et al.,  
124 2009; Xu et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2010). This earthquake was characterized by  
125 pronounced along-strike variations in the magnitude and direction of co-seismic  
126 slip (Hao et al., 2009; Liu-Zeng et al., 2009; Xu et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2010).  
127 Between the southern terminus of the rupture, near the cities of Yingxiu and  
128 Beichuan, right-lateral slip occurred with a significant component of dip-slip  
129 (Feng et al., 2010; Liu-Zeng et al., 2009; Shen et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2010).  
130 North of Beichuan, however, primarily right-lateral strike slip occurred (Feng et  
131 al., 2010; Hao et al., 2009; Xu et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2010).

132 These variations in co-seismic slip appear to be associated with differences in  
133 geometry of the rupture plane. Surface exposures of the surface rupture along  
134 the Beichuan fault exhibit dips of 70–80° to the northwest (C Li et al., 2010;

135 Liu-Zeng et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2010), in agreement with trench excavations  
136 and with a borehole drilled to a depth of  $\sim 590$  m (H Li et al., 2013). Moreover,  
137 aftershocks are confined to relatively narrow region,  $\sim 15 - 30$  km wide,  
138 northwest of the Beichuan fault (Zhang et al., 2010) (Figure 1). Far-field  
139 coseismic displacements recorded with GPS and InSAR imply that slip occurred  
140 a relatively high-angle fault ( $\sim 45 - 50^\circ$ ) (Feng et al., 2010; Shen et al., 2009).  
141 Collectively, the distribution of aftershocks, inversion of geodetic data, and the  
142 best-fit seismic moment tensor ( $\sim 30^\circ$  fault plane at  $\sim 18$  km, Wang et al., 2008)  
143 all suggest that, near the epicenter area, the coseismic Beichuan fault is a  
144 high-angle listric thrust fault that dips  $\sim 70^\circ$  in the shallow crust, but only  $30^\circ$  to  
145  $40^\circ$  below  $\sim 15$  km depth. The fault presumably roots into a sub-horizontal  
146 brittle-ductile transition zone below  $\sim 20$  km depth (Zhang et al., 2010; Zhu and  
147 Zhang, 2010, 2013). Along the northeastern segments of the rupture, aftershock  
148 locations and observations of fault scarps indicate that the dip of the  
149 near-surface rupture plane is even steeper, approaching  $90^\circ$  (Xu et al., 2009).  
150 Likewise, slip inversions of geodetic data by Shen et al. (2009) and Feng et al.  
151 (2010) both support a steeper fault geometry along these segments of the  
152 Beichuan fault.

153 These observations, however, contrast with the geometry of fault systems as  
154 imaged in the subsurface of the Longmen Shan foreland. Seismic reflection  
155 surveys reveal moderately- to shallowly-oriented imbricated faults that are  
156 organized in a series of east-vergent fold and thrust systems (Hubbard and Shaw,

157 2009; Hubbard et al., 2010; Jia et al., 2006, 2010; Y Li et al., 2010). Some have  
158 argued that the close coincidence of the surface trace of the 2008 Wenchuan  
159 rupture with the mapped trace of the Beichuan and Pengguan faults implies that  
160 rupture utilized these moderately to shallowly west-dipping faults (Figures 2a  
161 and 2b) (Jia et al., 2010). Seismic data are confined to the foreland of the range,  
162 and, thus the geometry of the fault plane is inferred by projection of near  
163 surface structures to the hypocentral depth (Figure 2a) (Hubbard and Shaw,  
164 2009; Jia et al., 2010; Y Li et al., 2010). A similar situation occurs along the  
165 northern segment of the Beichuan fault (Figure 2b). Here, the trace of the 2008  
166 surface rupture is nearly coincident with mapped, west-dipping thrust faults (Jia  
167 et al., 2010; Y Li et al., 2010). These workers suggest that rupture occurred  
168 along a plane that dips  $\sim 30 - 45^\circ$  in the shallow crust, but gradually decreases to  
169  $\sim 15 - 20^\circ$  by  $\sim 7$  km depth (Figure 2b) (Jia et al., 2010).

170 Similar controversy exists for the 2013 Lushan earthquake ( $M$  6.6), which  
171 ruptured the frontal fault system in the southern Longmen Shan (Figures 1 and  
172 2). Although aftershocks of this event are also distributed along the Longmen  
173 Shan faults (Xu et al., 2013), debate persists regarding the exact fault strand that  
174 ruptured (Chen et al., 2013; Li et al., 2014; Xu et al., 2013; Y Zhang et al.,  
175 2013). Relocations of the aftershocks show that seismicity is spread along 35  
176 km of the fault length and across 16 km in width, and most of the focal depths  
177 lie between 10 and 20 km depth (Fang et al., 2013). Focal depth profiles of the  
178 Lushan mainshock and aftershocks show that the coseismic fault planes dip to



179 the northwest, but likely become shallower as a listric thrust fault at depth (Fang  
180 et al., 2013). Since field investigations revealed only limited brittle compressive  
181 fissures in cement-covered pavement, this earthquake is inferred to have  
182 ruptured a blind thrust fault (Xu et al., 2013). Consequently, whether the  
183 Pengguan fault (locally known as Shuangshi-Dachuan fault) was responsible or  
184 whether slip occurred on one of the faults mapped farther east in the foreland is  
185 still difficult to determine (Chen et al., 2013; Li et al., 2014; Xu et al., 2013; Y  
186 Zhang et al., 2013).

### 187 **3. Evidence for cross-cutting fault geometry**

188 In order to evaluate the details of fault geometry along the Beichuan fault, we  
189 analyzed 276  $M_s > 4.0$  aftershocks with high signal-to-noise ratio waveforms to  
190 first obtain focal mechanism solutions (Figure 3), and then resolve the failure  
191 planes of the Wenchuan earthquake (Figure 4; Table S1). We explored an  
192 updated “cut and paste” (CAP) method (Zhu and Helmberger, 1996) on  
193 broadband waveform data of the regional Sichuan Digital Seismic Network (Yi  
194 et al., 2012). The source mechanism is obtained by applying a direct grid search  
195 through all possible solutions to find the global minimum of misfit between the  
196 observations and synthetics, allowing time shifts between portions of  
197 seismograms and synthetics. One of the advantages of this CAP technique is  
198 that it proves insensitive to velocity models and lateral crustal variation, we  
199 refer readers to Zhu and Helmberger (1996) for a more detailed description of  
200 the method. Comparison of the available depth distribution of the aftershocks

201 shows a maximum scatter of  $\sim 2$  km (Yi et al., 2012; Zheng et al., 2009).

202 It was previously suggested that the type of the focal mechanism solution  
203 shows characteristic of spatial segmentation for the aftershocks (Wang et al.,  
204 2009; Yi et al., 2012; Zheng et al., 2009). Three primary segments were  
205 primarily proposed along the main rupture zone from southwest to northeast,  
206 where initially the focal mechanism is of main thrust type, finally of main  
207 right-lateral strike-slip type and between these two areas there is a transition  
208 zone characterized in multiple types of focal mechanisms (Wang et al., 2009; Yi  
209 et al., 2012; see Figure 1 for segmentation boundaries). Analysis of failure  
210 planes derived from focal mechanisms of the aftershocks ( $M_s > 4.0$ ) therefore  
211 allows us to evaluate the orientation of nodal planes with depth for different  
212 segments (Figures 4) (Yi et al., 2012). The focal mechanisms of the aftershocks  
213 suggest, first, the fault planes for all segments have dips more than  $40^\circ$ , mostly  
214 up to  $50\text{--}65^\circ$  (Figure 4), and second, the aftershock sequence is segmented  
215 along the trace of the rupture. Along the southern segment, the dip of aftershock  
216 nodal planes appears to shallow progressively with increasing depth ( $60\text{--}70^\circ$   
217 between  $3\text{--}13$  km, and  $\sim 40^\circ$  at  $\sim 18$  km deep) (Figure 4a), consistent with the  
218 suggestion of a listric structure derived from geodetic observations (Shen et al.,  
219 2009). Along the central fault segment, the average dip appears to range from  
220  $\sim 50\text{--}60^\circ$  in the shallow crust to  $\sim 40^\circ$  between  $10\text{--}20$  km depth (Figure 3b).  
221 But in the north, the sequence is consistent with a planar fault ( $50\text{--}65^\circ$ )  
222 (Figures 4c). For the Beichuan fault, averaged angles of all the failure planes

223 show a very steep,  $\sim 50\text{-}65^\circ$ , fault geometry (Figures 4d), inconsistent with the  
224 reflection seismic observations.

225 In addition, two other lines of evidence lead us to argue that it is unlikely that  
226 the shallowly dipping faults observed in reflection seismic data were the  
227 primary fault responsible for the 2008 Wenchuan rupture. First, the positions of  
228 precisely located aftershocks define a cluster of seismicity concentrated  
229 between 12 – 20 km depth, but located directly below the surface trace of the  
230 rupture (Figure 2). If the rupture passed through the volume of rock exhibiting  
231 the aftershocks, they implicate a high-angle ( $\sim 60^\circ$ ) fault (Figure 2a), which is  
232 consistent with our failure plane estimates (Figure 3a). Such a structure is not  
233 obvious in previous reflection seismic data (Jia et al., 2010; Y Li et al., 2010).  
234 We suspect it may be relatively transparent due to a combination of sparse data  
235 sampling and a high angle of the fault, which generates only weak reflections.  
236 Although seismic images are more complete across the northern portion of the  
237 rupture zone (Figure 2b) (Jia et al., 2010), there is still a large discrepancy  
238 between the position of the aftershock cluster and the position of the shallowly  
239 west-dipping Beichuan fault. Here, the aftershocks sit 8-10 km below the  $\sim 15^\circ$  –  
240  $25^\circ$  dipping Beichuan fault (present at  $\sim 7$  km depth in Figure 2b). Given the  $\sim 2$   
241 km uncertainties of the aftershock locations (Yi et al., 2012; Zheng et al., 2009),  
242 all of the aftershocks are still  $\sim 6$  – 8 km below the mapped Beichuan fault  
243 (Figure 2b). It seems clear that, although the surface trace of 2008 rupture is  
244 nearly coincident with the low-angle Beichuan fault, these are not the same

245 structures at depth. Instead, our failure plane solution of a planar fault ( $50 - 65^\circ$ )  
246 matches the aftershocks below the surface trace (Figures 2b, 4b and 4c).  
247 However, as shown in Figure 2, the distribution of earthquakes beneath the  
248 Longmen Shan forms a broad cloud. Given a maximum scatter of  $\sim 2$  km of the  
249 aftershocks relocation for available different velocity models (Yi et al., 2012),  
250 we interpret this broad distribution of earthquakes to reflect a wide damage zone  
251 associated with deformation in the wall rocks.

252 Second, the detailed trace of the coseismic rupture along the Beichuan fault  
253 obliquely transects previously mapped faults near the northeastern tip  
254 (transparent thick blue dash-line in Figure 1), suggesting a crosscutting  
255 relationship between the steep rupture plane (Zhang et al., 2010) and the  
256 low-angle overthrusts in this region (Hubbard and Shaw, 2009; Hubbard et al.,  
257 2010; Jia et al., 2006, 2010). Near the northeastern terminus of the aftershocks,  
258 one branch of the two aftershock zones deviated northward from the  
259 Pingwu-Qingchuan fault (Figure 1), testifying to a newly-born feature of steeper  
260 fault cross-cutting the previously indentified faults. Interestingly, for the 2013  
261 Lushan earthquake, available relocated aftershocks also appear to show a  
262 cross-cutting relationship between the surface fault trace and depth distribution  
263 of the aftershock sequence, similar to what we observed for the Wenchuan  
264 aftershocks across the Beichuan and Pingwu-Qingchuan faults (Figure 1).

265 In summary, guided by the pattern of the orientation of nodal planes with  
266 depth, we reexamined the aftershock depth distribution relative to structural

267 interpretations of fault geometry based on seismic reflection data (Figures 2a  
268 and 2b) (Jia et al., 2006, 2010; Y Li et al., 2010). Our new interpretations  
269 suggest that the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake occurred along a structure that  
270 transects the upper 20 km of the crust at a relatively high angle (Figure 2). The  
271 inferred geometry requires that this fault system cross-cuts many, if not all, of  
272 the primary imbricate structures that comprise the fold-and-thrust belt along the  
273 Longmen Shan (Jia et al., 2006, 2010; Y Li et al., 2010) (Figure 2).

#### 274 **4. Discussion**

275 Our analysis suggests that, although low-angle thrust faults are clearly  
276 imaged on seismic data (Hubbard and Shaw, 2009; Hubbard et al., 2010; Jia et  
277 al., 2010; Y Li et al., 2010), recently active faults appear to cross-cut these  
278 structures (Zhang et al., 2010; Zhu and Zhang, 2010, 2013) (Figures 2 and 4).  
279 Acquisition of high-resolution seismic profiles appears to confirm that the  
280 Beichuan fault (not Pengguan fault) along the central-northern Longmen Shan  
281 remains relatively high angle ( $>45^\circ$ ) throughout the upper 5-6 km of the crust  
282 (Figure 1, Wu et al. 2014) and cross-cuts the previously imaged imbricate  
283 thrusts (Jia et al., 2006, 2010; Y Li et al., 2010). Along the southern Longmen  
284 Shan, a steep geometry of the Pengguan fault was proposed (Figure 5; Y Zhang  
285 et al., 2013), thus, we suggest that this may be characteristic of many of the  
286 active faults along the Longmen Shan mountain front. The clear difference in  
287 the pattern of aftershocks in the north vs. the south suggests that a new, vertical  
288 strike-slip fault ruptured in the north, while the southern part of the rupture

289 occurred on a slightly gently dipping ( $\sim 50 - 65$  degrees) plane, which indicates  
290 an along-strike variation of the fault geometry (Figure 4), as also evidenced by  
291 the contrasting landscapes along the Longmen Shan (Kirby et al., 2003; Zhang  
292 et al., 2011). It is also clear that the Beichuan fault has accumulated  
293 displacement prior the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake; both deformed fluvial  
294 terraces and trenches (Ran et al., 2010, 2013) indicate sustained fault during the  
295 late Quaternary. Moreover, differences in the cooling history of the hanging  
296 wall block (e.g. Wang et al., 2012) and footwall block (e.g., Arne et al., 1997)  
297 suggest that fault activity may extend back to the late Miocene. Thus, we  
298 hypothesize that the presently active high-angle faults have accumulated  
299 displacement for a significant length of geologic time.

300 Further, our hypothesis that seismogenic faults in the Longmen Shan are  
301 newly formed, high-angle structures has important implications for seismic  
302 hazards along this mountain front. First, the geometry of the fault influences the  
303 rate of strain accumulation during interseismic deformation. Shortening across  
304 the Longmen Shan, prior to the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, was inferred from  
305 geodetic studies to be low, on the order of 1-3 mm/yr (Gan et al., 2007; Zhang  
306 et al., 2010). Trenching and associated dating along the Beichuan fault revealed  
307  $\sim 3,000$  years of recurrence similar to the Wenchuan earthquake, therefore, the  
308  $\sim 5$  m observed average coseismic displacement during the 2008 event requires  
309 an average rate of  $\sim 1.7$  mm/yr deformation (Ran et al., 2010, 2013). More  
310 specifically, at Yingxiu trench site, and  $\sim 7.6$  m cumulative vertical displacement

311 (including  $\sim 2.4$  m coseismic offset) during the last  $\sim 6,000$  year confirms an  
312 average dip-slip rate of  $\sim 0.9$  mm/yr (Ran et al., 2010, 2013). Although the  
313 Holocene slip rate along the Beichuan fault is not well determined, it appears to  
314 be on the order of  $\sim 1$  mm/yr (Densmore et al., 2007). All of these estimates of  
315 vertical motion along the fault system are similar to rates of erosion ( $>0.3 - 0.4$   
316 mm/yr) in the hanging wall block (Kirby and Ouimet, 2011). The close  
317 correspondence between erosion rates in the hanging wall and the throw rate  
318 along the Beichuan fault also argues for a relatively long-lived, high-angle  
319 structure.

320 Second, although the Cenozoic evolution of shortening across the Longmen  
321 Shan foreland has been suggested to reflect a forward-propagating sequence of  
322 deformation within the Sichuan Basin (Figure 1) (Chen et al., 2013; Cook et al.,  
323 2013; Hubbard and Shaw, 2009; Tan et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2013), both the  
324 Wenchuan and Lushan earthquakes occurred in an “out-of-sequence” position  
325 in the hinterland of the range. The absence of a surface rupture during the 2013  
326 Lushan event (Xu et al., 2013; Z Zhang et al., 2013) has led to an active debate  
327 still ongoing over whether slip occurred on the Pengguan fault or on one of the  
328 faults farther east in the foreland (Wang et al., 2014; Xu et al., 2013; Y Zhang et  
329 al., 2013). The close correspondence of the epicentral locations with the  
330 Pengguan fault (Shuangshi-Dachuan fault) suggest that this event was also  
331 possibly hosted along a relatively steep structure (Figures 1 and 5; Y Zhang et  
332 al., 2013). Indeed, available trenches along the fault revealed that the

333 Shuangshi-Dachuan fault has been active in the Holocene, and there were one  
334 or more larger surface-breaking events during the past millennial period (Chen  
335 et al., 2013; Densmore et al., 2007). Those early events, although maybe  
336 slightly bigger than the Lushan earthquake, were mostly resulted from the slip  
337 along the high-angle Pengguan fault, identical to the latest 2013 event (Figure 5;  
338 Y Zhang et al., 2013).

339 Some of the low-angle structures within the Sichuan Basin are indeed active.  
340 A number of small earthquakes have occurred along the trace of the Longquan  
341 anticline (Burchfiel et al., 2008), and deformation of Quaternary deposits in the  
342 Dayi region (Li et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2014) suggest relatively slow  
343 shortening along faults within the basin. It appears that many of these structures  
344 root into a subhorizontal décollement at  $< 10$  km (Z Li et al., 2013; Wang et al.,  
345 2014), and it appears that this structure f at the Longmen Shan range front  
346 remains active during shortening along high-angle faults further into the interior  
347 Longmen Shan range.

348 Despite this, our results highlight that potential exists for additional rupture  
349 along these high-angle faults, such as the Wenchuan-Maoxian fault and along  
350 the  $\sim 60$  km seismic gap between Wenchuan and Lushan earthquakes (Figure 1)  
351 (Chen et al., 2013; Li et al., 2014; Xu et al., 2013). Our analysis of recent  
352 seismic events, including the July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013 Minxian-Zhangxian  $M_w$  6.0  
353 earthquake (Zheng et al., 2013), suggests that significant seismic hazard along  
354 eastern margin of the plateau arises from deep-seated, steeply dipping faults.



355 We suggest that many (but not all) of the low-angle thrust faults imaged on  
356 seismic data may not be the primary active structures, and that the next  
357 generation of seismic hazard evaluations needs consider the role of high-angle  
358 reverse faults in the overall deformation field.

## 359 **5. Conclusion**

360 We obtained failure planes for the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake by analyzing  
361 the focal mechanisms of low-magnitude aftershock events. For all segments  
362 along the Beichuan fault, we observe that the coseismic fault dips greater than  
363  $40^\circ$ , and primarily  $50 - 65^\circ$ . Reinterpreting the aftershock sequence along the  
364 trace of the rupture, along with our synthesis of the aftershock distribution and  
365 subsurface fault geometries, lead us to conclude that present-day fault activity  
366 and aftershocks are concentrated along relatively high-angle structures. These  
367 faults appear to cross-cut primary low-angle faults imaged in reflection seismic  
368 data along the Longmen Shan and in the Sichuan Basin. We suggest that the  
369 crustal scale low-angle thrust faulting model and the high-angle listric reverse  
370 fault are both correct, but that low-angle thrusts are largely antecedent and may  
371 not represent the primary seismic hazard in the region. Seismogenic  
372 deformation along the Longmen Shan is accomplished along high-angle, listric  
373 structures. Thus, our current models of faults responsible for the earthquakes  
374 along the heavily populated Sichuan Basin need to be further explored to  
375 represent the distribution of subsurface seismic hazard.

376

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384

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606

## 607 **Figure captions**

### 608 **Figure 1**

609 Distribution of the seismogenic Longmen Shan faults in eastern Tibet. Black  
610 lines are previously identified faults (Xu et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2010). Red  
611 lines represent two coseismic ruptures along the Beichuan and Penguan faults  
612 (Xu et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2010) during the 2008 *M*<sub>w</sub> 7.9 Wenchuan  
613 earthquake. Color-coded circles are series of the Wenchuan aftershocks (red  
614 and blue) and Lushan aftershocks (yellow-brown) until April, 2013. Southern,  
615 central and northern segments of the Longmen Shan faults are separated by  
616 white lines and aftershocks in red were selected to infer the failure planes for  
617 associated segments (Yi et al., 2012). Three purple lines marked by AA', BB'  
618 and CC' are locations of the seismic reflection profiles by Jia et al. (2010) and

619 Wang et al. (2014). Three shorter yellow lines are much higher resolution  
620 reflection profiles by Wu et al., 2014. Inset map shows the tectonic location of  
621 the Longmen Shan relative to the Tibetan Plateau (gray-shaded region). Cd,  
622 Chengdu; Ax, Anxian; Bc, Beichuan; Bx, Baoxing; Dj, Dujiangyan; Dy, Dayi;  
623 Jy, Jiangyou; Ls, Lushan; Lx, Lixian; Mx, Maoxian; Pw, Pingwu; Qc,  
624 Qingchuan; Sp, Songpan; Wc, Wenchuan; Ya, Yaan

## 625 **Figure 2**

626 Explanation of the coseismic Beichuan and Pengguan faults (red lines) by  
627 seismic reflection data, typically characterized by low-angle imbricated  
628 overthrust geometry (Jia et al., 2006, 2010; Y Li et al., 2010), and our new  
629 interpretations of the high-angle fault geometry (black dashed lines) according  
630 to reflection data and the dip/depth relations for southern and northern Longmen  
631 Shan faults (Wu et al., 2014, Yi et al., 2012).

## 632 **Figures 3**

633 Example of waveform fitting and focal mechanism determination (2011 May 6  
634 *Mw*4.1 aftershock)

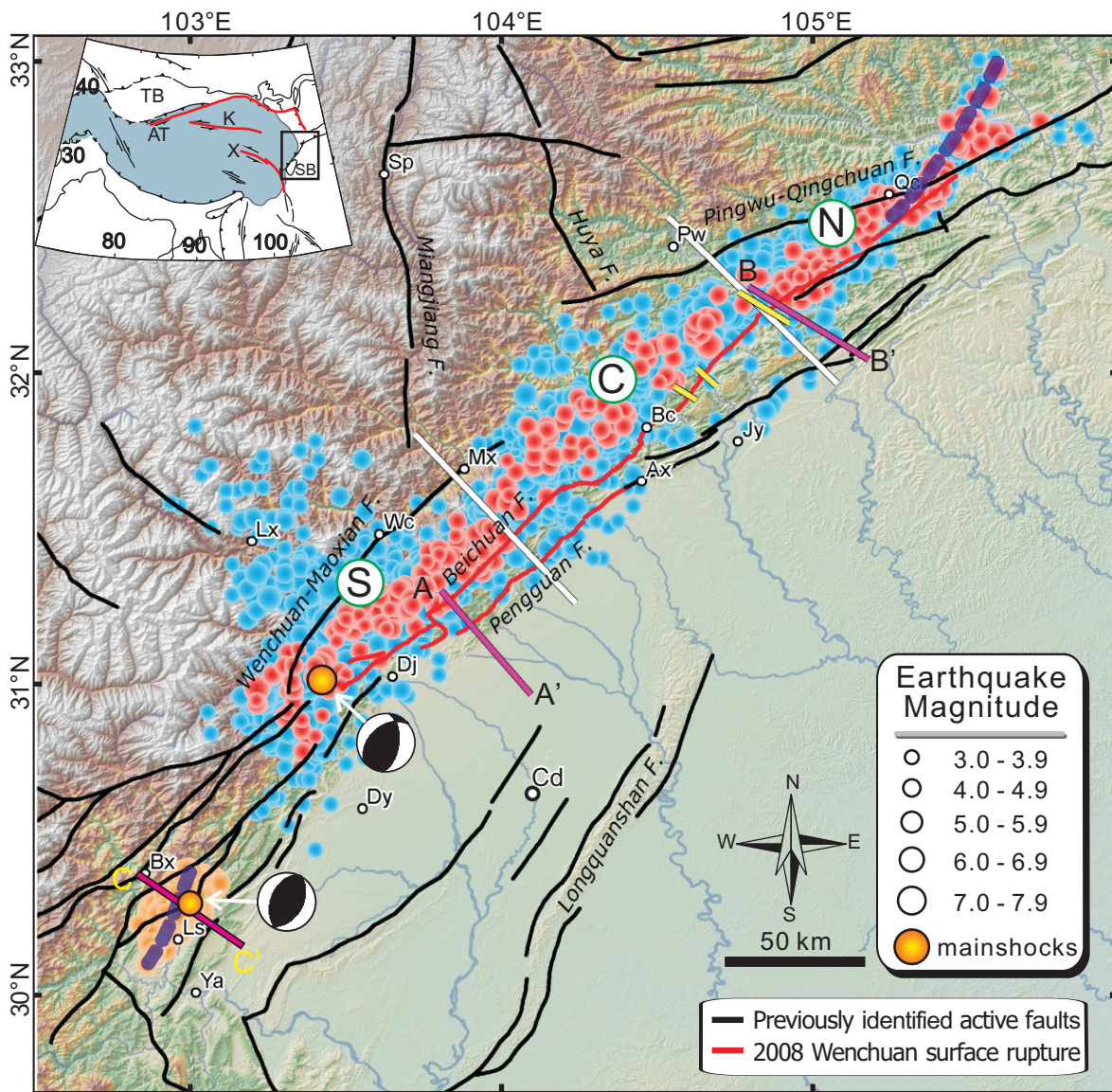
635 (a) Comparison of synthetic waveforms with observations. Red and black lines  
636 are synthetics and observations, respectively. Numbers are time shifts of the  
637 synthetics relative to the observations and the corresponding cross-correlation  
638 coefficients (in percentage); (b) Fitting error as a function of focal depth. Note  
639 the best focal mechanism at 8 km depth with a minimum error.

## 640 **Figure 4**

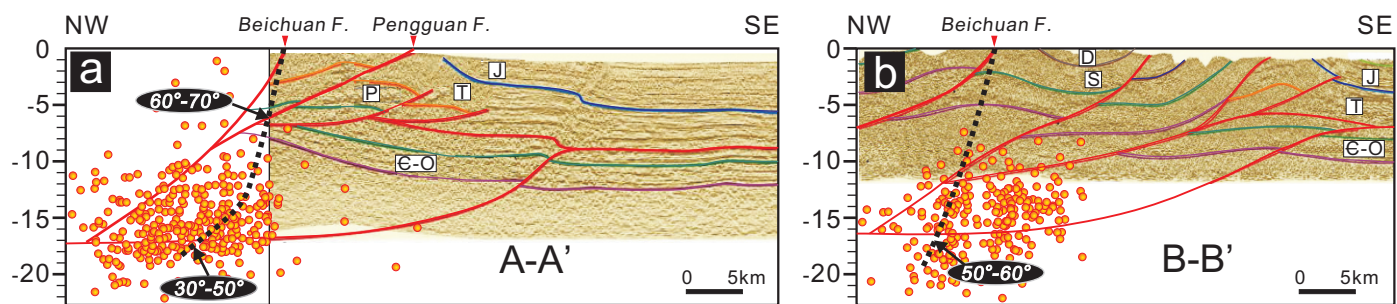
641 Failure planes for different fault segments (a-c) and the Beichuan fault (d)  
642 derived from focal mechanisms of the aftershocks (Yi et al., 2012), S, C, N and  
643 A represents southern (a), central (b), northern (c) segments and all the fault (d).  
644 Red dots are averaged dip angles for two failure planes within 1-km depth, and  
645 gray triangles above error bars are the mean dip angles for each minimum and  
646 maximum values. Aftershocks are  $M_s$  larger than 4.0 and prior to April, 2014,  
647 red color-coded in Figure 1. Note that the fault planes for all segments have dips  
648 more than  $40^\circ$ , mostly up to  $50\text{--}65^\circ$ , in contrast with the fault geometry imaged  
649 by seismic reflection in Figure 2.

650 **Figure 5**

651 Reinterpretation of the high-angle coseismic Shuangshi-Dachuan (Pengguan)  
652 fault (black dashed line) (Y Zhang et al., 2013), crosscutting low-angle  
653 imbricated overthrust faults revealed by seismic reflection data (Wang et al.,  
654 2014).

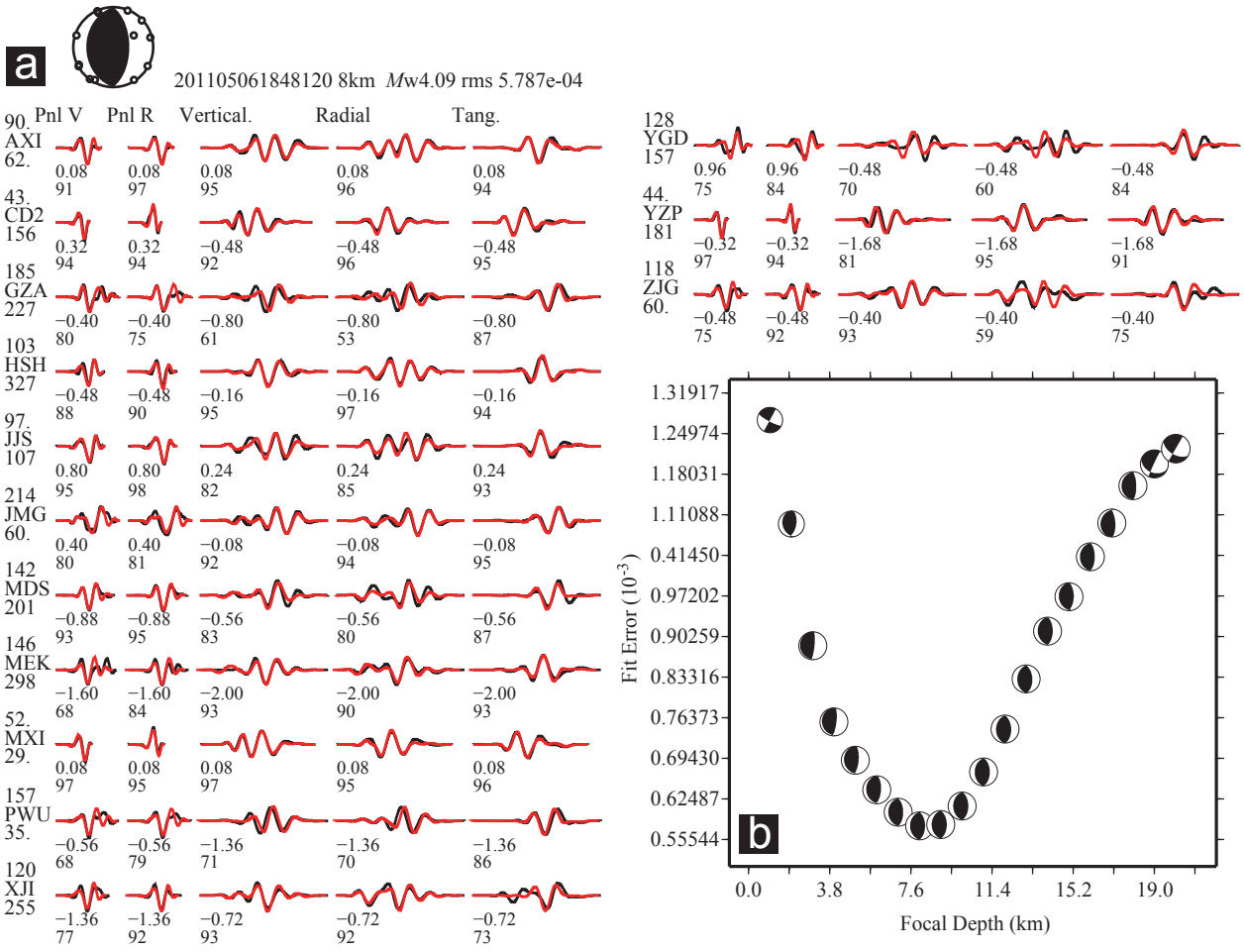


Zhang et al., Figure 1

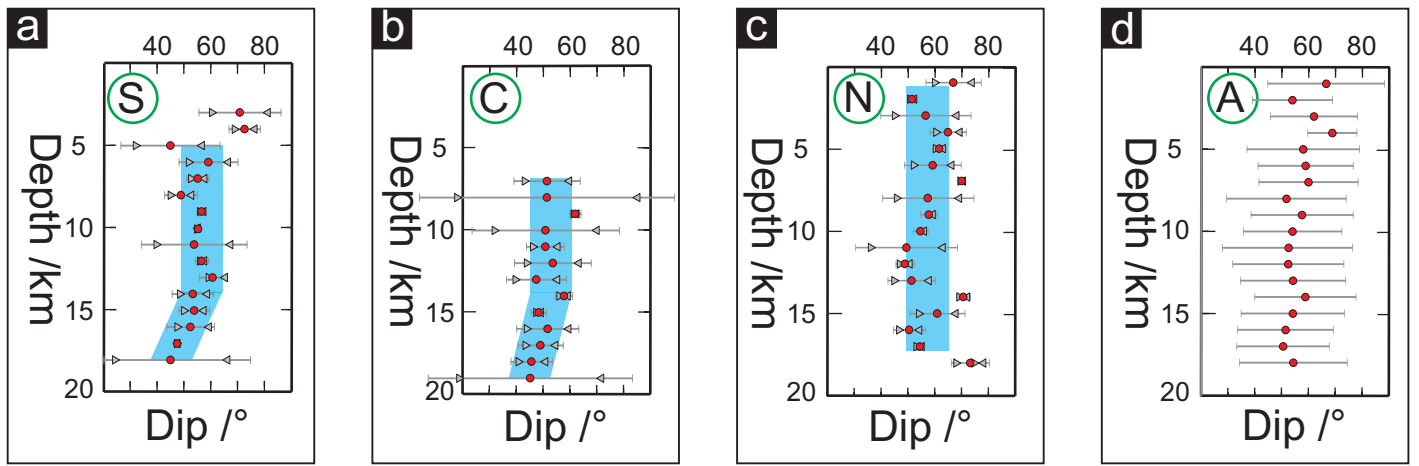


Zhang et al., Figure 2

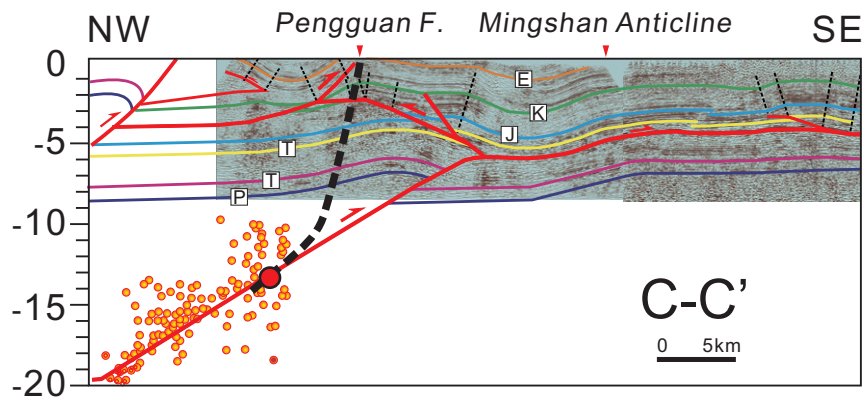




Zhang et al., Figure 3



Zhang et al., Figure 4



Zhang et al., Figure 5

## Supplementary material

Table S1 Aftershocks ( $M_s > 4.0$ ) of the Wenchuan earthquake and dip angles of the failure planes for relevant aftershocks along the Beichuan fault.

Aftershock No.	Longitude /°	Latitude /°	Magnitude	Depth /km	Failure plane dip angles	
					Plane I /°	Plane II /°
1	105.58	32.99	5.5	1	71	35
2	104.89	32.28	4.0	1	84	77
3	105.50	32.83	5.6	2	62	35
4	105.48	32.82	4.5	2	67	41
5	104.81	32.31	4.5	2	64	42
6	105.42	32.82	4.5	2	59	54
7	105.55	32.90	5.1	2	64	39
8	104.76	32.32	4.2	2	75	65
9	105.47	32.80	6.1	2	66	25
10	105.24	32.58	4.2	3	75	35
11	105.27	32.53	4.5	3	67	49
12	103.89	31.48	4.3	3	90	49
13	104.77	32.32	4.0	3	63	50
14	103.61	31.25	4.6	3	73	71
15	103.30	31.05	4.1	4	66	56
16	105.49	32.83	6.0	4	72	56
17	103.47	31.20	4.0	4	81	59
18	105.42	32.67	4.0	4	61	59
19	105.25	32.55	5.4	4	71	61
20	105.16	32.52	4.5	4	76	62
21	103.61	31.23	4.0	4	81	65
22	103.62	31.27	4.2	4	80	68
23	103.49	31.21	4.2	4	87	82
24	105.17	32.48	4.2	5	79	26
25	105.41	32.65	4.0	5	54	37
26	103.69	31.18	4.8	5	58	32
27	104.95	32.34	4.6	5	69	66
28	105.18	32.55	4.7	5	90	71
29	105.39	32.69	4.3	6	72	24
30	103.77	31.41	4.0	6	70	30
31	103.62	31.17	4.4	6	68	31
32	103.77	31.25	5.0	6	47	43
33	104.86	32.26	4.4	6	47	45
34	105.33	32.58	4.3	6	74	50
35	105.52	32.80	4.5	6	62	51

36	103.91	31.42	4.1	6	75	67
37	105.17	32.55	4.1	6	87	69
38	105.37	32.59	4.0	6	71	57
39	103.45	31.03	4.6	6	86	74
40	103.28	30.97	4.9	7	60	30
41	103.41	30.97	4.2	7	63	31
42	105.46	32.73	4.7	7	56	34
43	104.25	31.68	4.0	7	62	39
44	103.30	30.97	4.3	7	46	45
45	104.26	31.74	4.0	7	58	46
46	105.15	32.50	4.0	7	67	47
47	103.47	31.22	4.1	7	87	50
48	103.80	31.26	4.3	7	55	35
49	103.19	30.93	4.8	7	61	32
50	103.67	31.23	4.5	7	65	56
51	105.50	32.83	4.9	7	87	71
52	103.24	31.02	4.9	7	85	81
53	105.48	32.78	4.4	7	86	67
54	105.21	32.54	4.2	7	86	70
55	105.41	32.66	4.1	7	90	77
56	105.35	32.64	4.7	8	82	13
57	103.58	31.27	4.1	8	56	34
58	103.18	30.98	6.1	8	49	41
59	105.38	32.57	5.0	8	50	41
60	103.30	30.93	4.6	8	51	41
61	103.29	31.00	4.2	8	50	46
62	103.36	31.01	4.3	8	64	57
63	104.54	31.98	4.3	8	80	14
64	105.47	32.84	4.7	8	82	76
65	104.30	31.90	4.5	8	90	21
66	103.28	30.88	5.0	9	67	24
67	103.18	30.92	4.3	9	57	34
68	103.52	31.20	4.3	9	58	35
69	104.95	32.27	4.3	9	51	39
70	104.95	32.24	4.5	9	51	40
71	105.37	32.67	4.1	9	71	40
72	103.33	30.87	4.0	9	47	43
73	105.30	32.51	4.3	9	47	45
74	104.90	32.25	6.0	9	49	41
75	104.68	32.26	4.5	9	53	50
76	103.48	31.23	4.3	9	83	51
77	105.09	32.39	4.0	9	74	53
78	105.35	32.62	4.0	9	55	39
79	104.37	31.83	4.3	9	55	45

80	104.99	32.26	4.2	9	59	31
81	103.74	31.42	4.5	9	65	34
82	105.11	32.46	4.5	9	87	67
83	103.33	30.77	4.3	9	75	56
84	105.03	32.37	4.5	9	78	75
85	105.37	32.65	4.6	9	80	10
86	105.10	32.50	4.0	9	82	71
87	103.67	31.22	4.5	9	82	76
88	104.66	32.18	4.2	9	85	83
89	103.46	31.18	5.1	9	90	41
90	105.17	32.49	4.8	9	90	73
91	104.64	32.09	6.1	10	79	16
92	103.57	31.30	4.1	10	79	24
93	103.18	30.94	4.0	10	62	28
94	104.20	31.74	4.1	10	59	31
95	105.01	32.31	4.2	10	55	35
96	104.64	32.16	4.1	10	63	36
97	103.91	31.35	4.6	10	52	38
98	103.34	30.82	4.7	10	50	40
99	103.37	30.82	4.0	10	50	40
100	103.44	31.16	4.3	10	51	40
101	105.00	32.35	4.4	10	80	41
102	104.25	31.88	4.8	10	80	42
103	105.45	32.74	4.3	10	53	38
104	103.55	31.25	4.7	10	54	36
105	105.48	32.81	4.8	10	59	46
106	104.88	32.30	4.8	10	60	30
107	105.03	32.33	4.4	10	60	42
108	105.02	32.28	4.5	10	60	60
109	103.95	31.39	4.3	10	68	40
110	103.63	31.24	4.6	10	70	27
111	103.77	31.32	4.5	10	70	43
112	103.37	31.05	4.1	10	86	75
113	103.73	31.27	4.0	10	79	60
114	103.45	30.99	4.0	10	86	82
115	105.12	32.47	4.5	10	84	70
116	103.69	31.25	4.1	11	88	3
117	103.46	31.18	4.6	11	80	19
118	103.94	31.48	4.9	11	70	20
119	103.33	30.84	4.3	11	76	20
120	104.38	31.86	4.9	11	80	20
121	104.30	31.82	4.2	11	84	20
122	103.28	30.90	4.0	11	85	20
123	103.90	31.37	4.6	11	83	25

124	103.98	31.47	4.3	11	73	29
125	103.62	31.21	5.0	11	75	30
126	104.34	31.87	4.2	11	82	32
127	103.87	31.37	4.8	11	82	33
128	104.48	31.97	4.0	11	50	48
129	104.32	31.79	5.2	11	51	40
130	105.16	32.43	4.4	11	54	36
131	104.51	31.99	4.2	11	57	54
132	103.30	30.98	4.9	11	58	32
133	104.95	32.32	4.9	11	65	46
134	103.99	31.72	4.0	11	67	23
135	105.13	32.52	4.4	11	69	26
136	103.51	31.21	4.0	11	70	20
137	103.62	31.27	4.3	11	71	70
138	104.17	31.84	4.6	11	71	31
139	103.28	31.05	4.6	11	76	41
140	103.27	31.05	4.1	11	86	71
141	104.52	31.98	4.2	12	87	9
142	104.34	31.84	4.3	12	79	14
143	103.72	31.31	4.2	12	67	23
144	103.45	31.18	4.3	12	66	35
145	104.88	32.30	4.8	12	56	36
146	104.38	31.87	4.3	12	87	40
147	103.98	31.45	5.0	12	57	45
148	104.59	32.15	4.4	12	50	40
149	105.03	32.37	4.8	12	50	41
150	105.29	32.52	4.5	12	51	40
151	105.03	32.42	4.7	12	51	41
152	104.26	31.90	4.0	12	77	55
153	104.61	32.17	4.2	12	64	46
154	105.30	32.58	4.5	12	68	54
155	103.53	31.25	4.1	12	69	36
156	103.44	31.17	5.0	12	70	20
157	104.29	31.97	4.6	12	71	29
158	103.52	31.10	4.2	12	90	79
159	103.68	31.27	4.1	13	87	5
160	103.92	31.50	4.1	13	74	40
161	105.25	32.57	4.4	13	49	41
162	104.44	32.07	4.1	13	48	42
163	104.45	32.05	4.5	13	49	47
164	104.53	32.05	4.9	13	50	47
165	104.03	31.55	4.5	13	51	39
166	105.23	32.52	4.0	13	51	41
167	103.94	31.50	4.0	13	86	57

168	103.85	31.35	4.5	13	59	31
169	103.57	31.30	4.2	13	85	60
170	103.87	31.39	4.1	13	61	37
171	104.37	31.88	4.3	13	63	27
172	105.18	32.52	4.5	13	65	25
173	103.73	31.31	4.1	13	72	67
174	104.00	31.58	5.0	13	69	33
175	105.53	32.75	4.4	13	73	65
176	103.44	31.13	4.0	13	90	35
177	103.58	31.07	4.2	13	90	55
178	103.47	31.02	4.0	14	71	21
179	103.59	31.19	4.7	14	75	30
180	103.39	31.06	5.0	14	85	30
181	103.95	31.45	5.6	14	61	31
182	104.13	31.72	5.0	14	62	37
183	103.99	31.64	4.2	14	90	38
184	105.13	32.52	4.0	14	53	39
185	104.13	31.70	4.1	14	49	41
186	104.52	32.10	4.1	14	53	41
187	105.19	32.59	4.8	14	61	46
188	104.25	31.88	4.3	14	47	46
189	104.42	32.02	4.1	14	50	46
190	104.40	32.12	4.0	14	50	47
191	103.88	31.40	4.8	14	55	35
192	104.50	32.10	4.8	14	55	47
193	104.14	31.73	4.1	14	55	52
194	103.84	31.40	4.8	14	56	34
195	103.78	31.37	4.8	14	56	54
196	104.24	31.90	4.0	14	59	34
197	103.75	31.38	4.3	14	61	47
198	105.17	32.50	4.4	14	81	64
199	103.23	31.02	4.8	14	66	37
200	103.65	31.30	4.2	14	86	75
201	105.57	32.78	5.4	14	87	75
202	104.47	32.09	4.4	14	79	77
203	104.64	32.18	5.1	14	90	80
204	105.50	32.73	5.1	14	81	53
205	104.24	31.77	4.2	14	82	80
206	105.72	32.82	4.3	14	85	81
207	105.33	32.55	6.4	14	90	90
208	103.39	30.89	4.0	15	82	9
209	103.40	31.08	5.1	15	84	9
210	104.92	32.32	4.6	15	74	19
211	104.18	31.87	4.3	15	58	34



212	105.37	32.59	4.3	15	55	35
213	105.13	32.47	4.3	15	56	40
214	103.90	31.38	4.5	15	50	41
215	104.60	32.13	5.0	15	47	43
216	103.82	31.47	4.0	15	83	43
217	103.92	31.40	4.3	15	50	42
218	104.51	32.09	4.2	15	50	48
219	105.18	32.52	4.7	15	57	50
220	104.00	31.60	4.0	15	52	38
221	104.12	31.78	4.6	15	52	41
222	103.80	31.40	4.1	15	56	36
223	104.13	31.80	4.3	15	59	32
224	103.86	31.39	4.5	15	63	28
225	104.12	31.60	4.5	15	64	62
226	103.72	31.35	4.5	15	65	42
227	103.52	31.25	4.7	15	90	65
228	105.60	32.78	5.7	15	76	69
229	103.77	31.43	4.2	15	71	40
230	105.40	32.60	4.5	15	76	72
231	103.83	31.52	4.1	15	74	61
232	105.60	32.75	4.6	15	90	82
233	103.53	31.18	4.0	16	77	16
234	105.18	32.53	4.1	16	83	24
235	104.94	32.31	4.0	16	67	25
236	104.08	31.78	4.1	16	66	26
237	103.83	31.45	4.8	16	62	29
238	104.06	31.83	4.5	16	67	37
239	103.73	31.39	4.0	16	52	41
240	105.03	32.40	4.0	16	47	43
241	103.66	31.31	4.3	16	46	44
242	103.49	31.17	5.0	16	46	44
243	104.02	31.68	4.1	16	45	45
244	104.76	32.23	4.6	16	61	45
245	104.20	31.78	4.0	16	90	47
246	104.12	31.83	4.3	16	48	43
247	104.18	31.87	4.9	16	55	46
248	105.00	32.37	5.0	16	59	31
249	103.28	31.09	4.1	16	75	52
250	105.08	32.40	4.7	16	80	45
251	103.77	31.38	4.5	16	81	69
252	103.95	31.59	5.0	17	81	10
253	103.72	31.35	5.0	17	66	26
254	105.22	32.58	4.7	17	77	26
255	104.22	31.92	4.7	17	68	29

256	103.32	31.10	4.0	17	53	37
257	103.84	31.45	5.7	17	52	38
258	104.08	31.70	5.1	17	51	39
259	104.40	32.10	4.2	17	47	43
260	103.59	31.29	4.2	17	46	44
261	103.64	31.30	4.1	17	46	45
262	103.92	31.43	5.1	17	47	46
263	104.98	32.37	4.7	17	47	46
264	105.07	32.42	4.1	17	48	42
265	105.23	32.55	5.4	17	48	43
266	105.27	32.55	4.0	17	73	54
267	104.12	31.82	4.2	17	55	38
268	103.82	31.41	4.2	17	72	67
269	104.98	32.31	4.6	17	68	27
270	103.57	31.23	4.7	17	74	27
271	105.50	32.90	4.0	17	79	79
272	104.62	32.13	4.7	17	81	44
273	103.50	31.20	4.7	18	66	24
274	104.08	31.73	4.3	18	51	40
275	104.92	32.40	4.2	18	78	68
276	104.00	31.63	4.5	19	72	18

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