SPECIAL COLLECTION: APATITE: A COMMON MINERAL, UNCOMMONLY VERSATILE

In situ elemental and isotopic analysis of fluorapatite from the Taocun magnetite-apatite deposit, Eastern China: Constraints on fluid metasomatism

LI-PING ZENG¹, XIN-FU ZHAO¹,* XIAO-CHUN LI², HAO HU¹, and CHRISTOPHER MCFARLANE³

¹State Key Laboratory of Geological Processes and Mineral Resources, and Faculty of Earth Resources, China University of Geosciences, Wuhan 430074, China
²Department of Earth Sciences, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR, China
³Department of Earth Sciences, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, NB E3B 5A3, Canada

ABSTRACT

Metasomatic alteration of fluorapatite has been reported in several iron-oxide apatite (IOA) deposits, but its effect on elemental and isotopic variations has not been well understood. In this study, we present integrated elemental, U-Pb, Sr, and O isotopic microanalytical data on fresh and altered domains in fluorapatite from the Taocun IOA deposit, Eastern China, to evaluate the timing and nature of the metasomatism and its effects on the ore-forming event. Orebodies of the Taocun deposit are spatially associated with a subvolcanic, intermediate intrusion, which displays zonal alteration patterns with albite in the center and increasing actinolite, chlorite, epidote, and carbonate toward the margin. Both disseminated and vein-type ores are present in the Taocun deposit, and fluorapatite commonly occurs with magnetite and actinolite in most ores.

Fluorapatite grains from both types of ores have been variably metasomatized through a coupled dissolution-reprecipitation mechanism. Many trace elements, including Na, Cl, S, Si, Mg, Sr, U, Th, and (REEs+Y), were variably leached from the fluorapatite grains during this process and the Sr and O isotopic signatures of the grains were also modified. The altered fluorapatite grains/domains have in situ 87Sr/86Sr ratios (0.70829–0.70971) slightly higher than those of the fresh fluorapatite (0.70777–0.70868), and δ18O values (–3.0 to +3.4‰) variably lower than the primary domains (+5.3 to +7.5‰). The Sr and O isotopes of the primary fluorapatite are consistent with or slightly higher than those of the ore-hosting intrusion, implying that the early-stage, ore-forming fluids were magmatic in origin but underwent weak interaction with the country rocks.

U-Pb dating of the fresh and altered domains of the fluorapatite yielded indistinguishable ages of ~131 Ma, which are the same as the age of the ore-hosting intrusion. In combination with fluid inclusion data, we propose that the metasomatism of fluorapatite was induced by hydrothermal fluids at a late stage of the ore-forming event. The shifts to higher 87Sr/86Sr ratios and lower δ18O values in the altered fluorapatite indicate that the alteration was induced by fluids with more radioactive Sr and lighter O isotope signatures. The metasomatic fluids were likely dominated by meteoric waters that were mixed with the earlier magmatic fluids and interacted with sedimentary rocks. Our study highlights that elemental and isotopic compositions of fluorapatite can be significantly modified by hydrothermal fluids during ore-forming events. Thus, instead of traditional bulk-rock analysis, in situ microanalysis is important to provide accurate constraints on the magmatic and/or hydrothermal evolution of complex ore-forming systems.

Keywords: Fluorapatite, microanalysis, fluid metasomatism, SIMS oxygen isotope, IOA deposit

INTRODUCTION

Apatite is a common mineral in various hydrothermal deposits, including iron-oxide copper gold, skarn, and porphyry Cu-Au deposits (e.g., Belousova et al. 2002; Pan and Fleet 2002; Zhao et al. 2015), and is a major constituent of iron-oxide apatite (IOA) deposits (e.g., Frietsch and Perdahl 1995). It normally contains various trace elements [e.g., halogens, S, Fe, Mn, Sr, and rare earth elements (REEs)], which can be used to document the mineralizing conditions. In addition, Sr and O isotopes of apatite can be effectively employed to trace the source and evolution of the ore-forming fluids (e.g., Li and Zhou 2015; Zhao et al. 2015). Furthermore, apatite is a good host for fluid inclusions, which can directly reflect the nature of ore-forming fluids (e.g., Jami et al. 2007; Nabatian and Ghaderi 2013; Li et al. 2015). Thus, apatite is an ideal phase for the study of ore genesis and the evolution of hydrothermal deposits.

However, it has been documented that apatite can be partially or completely metasomatically altered by hydrothermal fluids (e.g., Harlov et al. 2002, 2005; Harlov and Förster 2003; Chen and Zhou 2015; Li and Zhou 2015; Harlov 2015), which raises questions about the interpretation of elemental and isotopic compositions. Fluid metasomatism usually leads to significant