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2019

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Implications for atmospheric CO₂ reconstruction**

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**Variations of stomatal frequency in
Taxodium and *Metasequoia* populations at
the mid-Miocene Clarkia Lake deposits:
Implications for atmospheric CO₂
reconstruction**

MENG-XIAO WU^{1,2}, QIN LENG¹, HONG YANG¹,
DAIANNE F. HOFIG³, YI-GE ZHANG³

¹ Laboratory for Terrestrial Environments, Bryant University,
Smithfield, Rhode Island 02917, U.S.A.

² Key Laboratory of Tropical Forest Ecology, Xishuangbanna
Tropical Botanical Garden, Chinese Academy of
Sciences, Menglun, Mengla, Yunnan 666303, China

³ Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843, USA

Stomatal frequency (such as stomatal index-SI and stomatal density-SD) has been widely used to reconstruct atmospheric CO₂ levels in geological history as it is one of the most reliable proxies of paleo-CO₂ that predate the oldest ice-core records. However, living plants show large variations on stomatal frequency within the same species, potentially generating large error margins for estimated paleo-CO₂ levels using limited fossil specimen(s). The extraordinarily well-preserved and abundant fossil leaves from the mid-Miocene (~15Ma) Clarkia Lake deposits in northern Idaho, the USA, allow us to test variations within a population of a fossil species and to compare that cross different contemporary species. Our preliminary results from the SD of 15 cuticular membranes of *Taxodium* revealed a range of variation leading to CO₂ levels of 345-445 parts per million (ppm). The SI of eight cuticular membranes of *Metasequoia* from the same fossiliferous layers reconstructed CO₂ levels of 290-345 ppm. These wide and discrepant ranges imply that randomly selected fossil leaves with limited sample numbers may give a large range of CO₂ reconstructions and different methods (such as SD or SI) and different plant taxa (such as *Taxodium* and *Metasequoia*) may result in different CO₂ results. A better understanding of stomatal frequency variations within populations and consistent sampling method will reduce errors in paleo-CO₂ reconstruction.