Surface creep along the Longitudinal Valley fault, Taiwan from InSAR measurements

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[1] We use interferometric synthetic aperture radar (InSAR) analysis in eastern Taiwan to study reverse creep on the Longitudinal Valley fault (LVF). A stack of the three highest-quality image pairs spanning 1997–2000 shows sharp range change offsets along the eastern side of the Longitudinal Valley, suggesting 11–35 mm/yr of surface creep between 23 and 23.4°N. No shallow slip was observed along the northern or southern ends of the valley, nor on mapped fault traces on the western edge of the valley. The width of the zone of deformation varied, suggesting distributed shear in shallow sediments above the creeping fault in some places. The InSAR results support the view that although surface creep is rapid in certain locations, significant portions of the LVF are locked and thus represent a substantial seismic hazard. Citation: Hsu, L., and R. Bürgmann (2006), Surface creep along the Longitudinal Valley fault, Taiwan from InSAR measurements, Geophys. Res. Lett., 33, L06312, doi:10.1029/2005GL024624.

1. Introduction

[2] Some of the most rapid tectonic uplift rates in the world occur in Taiwan, where the Eastern Coastal Range is being thrust up along the east-dipping Longitudinal Valley fault (LVF). The LVF accounts for ~30 mm/yr of present-day shortening [Yu and Kuo, 2001], or 30% of the total plate convergence [Angelier et al., 2000]. The fault zone displays both creeping and locked segments and has produced moderate to large earthquakes [e.g., Cheng et al., 1996; Kuochen et al., 2004]. Active shallow creep has been monitored by creepmeters [Lee et al., 2003, 2005], GPS [Yu and Kuo, 2001; Chen et al., 2004a], leveling [e.g., Yu and Liu, 1989], and repeat surveying of manmade structures [Angelier et al., 2000]. This study presents interferometric synthetic aperture radar (InSAR) results from the Longitudinal Valley, which complement existing measurements, providing greater spatial coverage of the surface deformation along the LVF. We focus on establishing the distribution and magnitude of near-fault deformation associated with shallow localized fault creep.

2. Geometry and Kinematics of the Longitudinal Valley Fault

[3] Relocated seismicity south of 23.5°N suggests a 45–60° east-dipping fault near the surface whose dip shallows with depth and connects with a décollement at ~20–40 km depth [Kuochen et al., 2004; Rau et al., 2005]. The seismicity indicates that the fault geometry in the northern half of the LVF is more complicated, with no obvious fault plane extending to the surface [Kuochen et al., 2004]. A left-lateral strike-slip component is inferred along the fault zone that may be partitioned between sub-parallel thrust and strike-slip fault segments along portions of the fault [Angelier et al., 2000; Hu et al., 2001]. There is still debate about how much regional deformation is accommodated by the LVF, a possible Central Valley fault to the west, and offshore faults to the east [e.g., Bos et al., 2003; Shyu et al., 2005].

[4] Along-strike, the existing deformation measurements suggest highest creep rates near Chihshang and decreasing rates toward the northern and southern tips (Figure 1). Shallow creep rates inferred from GPS velocities vary longitudinally [Chen et al., 2004a] and may reach up to 40 mm/yr in the southern section [Hsu et al., 2003]. The local creep rate of the fault near Chihshang as derived from near-fault data is ~26–28 mm/yr in a N40°W direction [Angelier et al., 2000; Chen et al., 2004a]. However, uncertainties remain regarding the spatial extent and degree of localization of along-strike and cross-strike surface deformation.

[5] Creep rates along the LVF appear to be variable in time, at both seasonal and decadal scales. Lee et al. [2003, 2005] found creep rates two to three times higher during the wet period (Apr.-Oct.) than during the dry season (Nov. to Mar.). Decadal trends in repeat ground-surveying of manmade structures suggest a 25% decrease in rate from the 1980s to the 1990s [Angelier et al., 2000], possibly continuing up to the Mw = 6.8 Chengkung earthquake of 10 December 2003 [Lee et al., 2005]. Millennial uplift rates derived from Holocene river incision into terraces suggest a 20 mm/yr uplift rate (J. B. H. Shyu, manuscript in preparation, 2006). Some geodetically determined slip rates appear to exceed the sparse geologic estimates and active slip is generally variable in time. Creep rate estimates determined from the 1997–2000 InSAR data should thus only be directly compared to other measurements obtained during that time period.

3. InSAR Processing and Results

[6] We use synthetic aperture radar data obtained by the European Space Agency’s ERS-1 and 2 satellites. Along descending track 461, we selected 11 scenes covering the southern Longitudinal Valley and 6 scenes covering the northern valley, acquired between 23 June 1993 and 11 May 2002 (Table S1). We processed the data with the Repeat
Orbit Interferometry Package (ROI-PAC) developed at JPL, supplemented with the SNAPHU unwrapper [Chen and Zebker, 2001]. Twelve interferometric pairs were generated, all with orbital baseline differences less than 100 meters (Figure S1). Topographic effects were removed with a 40-m DEM. During processing, orbital baselines were re-estimated to minimize the phase gradient across the scene. However, this process also may remove a real regional gradient due to interseismic deformation. For example, near Chihshang, 3D velocities of a row of GPS stations from the coast (station S057) to the Central Range (S080) correspond to a predicted range-change rate of 38 ± 5 mm/yr over 40 km. About 34 mm/yr of the offset occurs within the valley, the other 4 mm/yr occurs in the Coastal and Central Ranges. Nonetheless, the removal of a regional range-change gradient will have a negligible effect on surface deformation measured on short (1–2 km) profiles across the fault. We do not attempt to infer deformation at depth from far-field interferometry.

Obtaining coherent and reliable InSAR measurements in this area is challenging, due to the nature of the landcover, atmospheric errors, and other possible confounding signals such as groundwater-related movement. The land cover in the valley is mostly agricultural or urban with some river beds and the surrounding ranges are heavily vegetated. Accordingly, the coherence of the interferometric pairs is greatest in the valley and degrades quickly as elevation and vegetation density increases. Since the fault usually borders topography, large coherent patches on both sides of the mapped fault are intermittent. To create an interferogram with reduced atmospheric error and a longer time span, we formed a stack from the three pairs with the largest coherent areas, covering a total duration of 1260 days (Figure 1b). The stacking process averages the phase gradient while eliminating data pixels without coherence in all three pairs (Figure S2).

4. Surface Deformation and Creep

The data were analyzed by examining 400-m-wide swath profiles of range change rates across selected areas of the mapped fault trace (Figures 1a and S4). We chose 14 profile locations based on coherence of the InSAR data and relationship to the mapped fault trace. Because the satellite track (S13°W) is sub-parallel to the trace of the fault (S20°W), vertical and fault-perpendicular slip components dominantly map into the range-change measurement. We projected the range change detected by the satellite into the fault-perpendicular dip-slip direction, assuming a near-surface fault dip angle of 45° and a satellite look angle of 23° from vertical (Figure S3 and Table S2).

At each location, we evaluate the magnitude of the range change rate and the width of the zone of range change (Table 1). Because of possible errors from atmospheric interference and other InSAR uncertainties, no single interferogram is taken as proof of a deformation pattern. Thus, in addition to considering the stacked interferogram, we examine profiles across the 11 individual interferograms. Only if four or more pairs show a consistent range-change offset, do we consider the creep estimate as robust. We find that where we observe offsets in the fault-crossing profiles, the offset is found in all pairs that span less than 385 days, and most pairs that span 525 days. Visual inspection of the wrapped interferograms confirms that temporal decorrela-
Table 1. Dip-Parallel Slip on the LVF

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Range Change, mm/yr</th>
<th>Dip-Slip, mm/yr</th>
<th>Offset Width, m</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hualien</td>
<td>0 ± 2</td>
<td>0 ± 2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Fuyuan</td>
<td>0 ± 2</td>
<td>0 ± 2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Juisui</td>
<td>4 ± 2</td>
<td>11 ± 6</td>
<td>300 – 400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yuli</td>
<td>12 ± 3</td>
<td>32 ± 7</td>
<td>200 – 400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fuli</td>
<td>13 ± 1</td>
<td>35 ± 2</td>
<td>1000 – 1400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Chihshang</td>
<td>9 ± 2</td>
<td>24 ± 5</td>
<td>100 – 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Wanan North</td>
<td>7 ± 1</td>
<td>19 ± 6</td>
<td>400 – 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Wanan South</td>
<td>7 ± 1</td>
<td>19 ± 2</td>
<td>250 – 400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Taitung</td>
<td>0 ± 2</td>
<td>0 ± 1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Wuhu Tableland</td>
<td>0 ± 3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>W Yuli</td>
<td>0 ± 3</td>
<td>0 ± 3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Tuyeh</td>
<td>0 ± 1</td>
<td>0 ± 3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>W Taitung</td>
<td>0 ± 1</td>
<td>0 ± 1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>W Taitung 2</td>
<td>0 ± 1</td>
<td>0 ± 3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Dip-parallel slip is calculated for a 45° east-dipping fault with thrust vergence in the N70°W direction, the uncertainty of the slip rate is estimated from the RMS scatter of the data surrounding the deformation zone. The width of deformation is the distance over which the InSAR offset occurs.*

| Value derived from pairs 970517–980502 and 970726–980815 only. |
| Value derived from pairs 970726–980815 and 970801–980815 only. |

Discussion and Conclusion

Figure 1c (data in Table S2) summarizes the InSAR results together with previous field measurements. InSAR suggests that the steady creeping section terminates shortly north of Juisui and south of Wanan. Whereas GPS indicates creep continuing south between Wanan and Taitung, the InSAR data covering the fault may have been too sparse to detect this. Also, motion in the strike-slip direction is not detected by the ERS descending satellite orientation, so areas with dominantly strike-slip motion would appear inactive. Confounding signals from atmospheric vapor and groundwater-related subsidence and rebound could be reduced with additional data that allow for more detailed investigation of seasonal effects.

There have been several historical earthquakes of magnitude >6.0 on the creeping Chihshang segment, including the two 1951 Taitung (Mw = 6.2 and 7.0) and 2003 Chengkung (Mw = 6.8) earthquakes (Figure 1b). Cheng et al. [1996] note that meter-scale scarpus were produced at the surface by the 1951 event between about 23.05 and 23.6°N, overlapping with the present-day area of highest creep rates. For the 2003 event located near Chihshang, Chen et al. [2004b] found coseismic vertical GPS offsets measuring over 20 cm and an additional 5 cm postseismic uplift over four months. This shows that even segments creeping at a high rate can have large strain-releasing events. Possibly, the pre-2003 creep rates measured on the Chihshang segment were postseismic transients from the 1951 events.

Seismicity maps of eastern Taiwan indicate a conspicuous region with fewer earthquakes between 23.3 and 23.5°N [e.g., Kuochen et al., 2004]. Directly south of this region is the well-imaged and rapidly creeping Chihshang segment. North of this region, the fault geometry is more complicated than a simple east-dipping thrust, and creep rates are not detectable. The seismically quiet region itself has lower creep rates. In analogous creeping fault zones (e.g., the San Andreas in California) creeping fault segments are usually very microseismically active, and seismicity collapses into well defined planar features. Creeping faults...
Figure 3. Profiles of range-change rate across the LVF for individual pairs and the composite stack. Swaths are 400 m wide with each point representing a 40 m by 40 m pixel. The dates are in YYMMD format.

also tend to have repeating events among the on-fault seismicity. So, while not conclusive, the lack of seismicity, lack of well-defined planar features, and low creep rates between 23.3 and 23.5°N may suggest a more fully-locked section of the LVF. Continued monitoring of shallow slip along the LVF using InSAR will provide valuable information about the spatial and temporal evolution of aseismic slip and elastic strain accumulation along the fault. Such a monitoring effort will benefit from improved coherence of future L-band SAR systems and from a higher frequency of acquisitions.

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