ISOTOPES AS TRACERS OF SOURCES OF LEAD AND STRONTIUM
IN AEROSOLS (TSP & PM$_{2.5}$) IN BEIJING

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Submitted to Atmospheric Environment
**ABSTRACT**

Even after its being phased out in gasoline in the late 90’s, lead (Pb) is still present at relatively high levels in the atmosphere of Beijing, China (0.10-0.18 μg.m⁻³). Its origin is subject to debate as several distinct sources may contribute to the observed pollution levels. This study proposes to constrain the origin(s) of Pb and strontium (Sr) in aerosols, by coupling both Pb and Sr isotope systematics. The characterisation of the main pollution sources (road traffic, smelters, metal refining plants, coal combustion, cement factories, and soil erosion) shows that they can unambiguously be discriminated by the multi-isotope approach (²⁰⁶Pb/²⁰⁴Pb and ⁸⁷Sr/⁸⁶Sr). The study of total suspended particulates (TSP) and fine particles (PM₂.₅) from Beijing and its vicinity indicates that both size fractions are controlled by the same sources. Lead isotopes indicate that metal refining plants are the major source of atmospheric lead, followed by thermal power stations and other coal combustion processes. The role of this latter source is confirmed by the study of strontium isotopes. Occasionally, emissions from cement plants and/or input from soil alteration are isotopically detectable.

**Keywords**: Air pollution, Lead isotopes, Strontium isotopes, Aerosol sources

**INTRODUCTION**

High concentrations of fine particles are found in the air of big cities, which can be up to 300 μg.m⁻³ for PM₁₀ particles (Particulate Matter with a diameter <10 μm; Seinfeld and Pandis, 1997). As fine atmospheric particles (e.g. PM₂.₅) have a damaging effect on public health (e.g. Kappos et al., 2004), they have recently become a cause of major concern. Isotope compositions have proved to be reliable tracers of the origin of aerosols in the atmosphere, including urban air (e.g. Sturges et Barrie, 1989; Monna et al., 1997). Natural variations of selected isotope compositions (e.g. carbon (δ¹³C), nitrogen (δ¹⁵N)) and isotope ratios (e.g. ²⁰⁶Pb/²⁰⁴Pb, ²⁰⁷Pb/²⁰⁶Pb, ⁸⁷Sr/⁸⁶Sr) can provide clearer evidence for anthropogenic input compared to concentrations data alone, as the different anthropogenic sources, whether point-source or of regional scale, commonly show distinct characteristic isotope compositions compared to those found in natural sediments (e.g., Hamelin et al., 1990; Monna et al., 1997). The signatures of “heavy” isotope may ultimately be related to the isotope geochemistry of the ore deposit from which the industrial element was produced (Sangster et al., 2000). In the case of Pb air pollution, impact studies were supported, since the 1980s (e.g. Mukai et al., 1993), by the well defined isotopic composition of automobile emissions, the major source of lead in the ambient air (Nriagu, 1990). However, since 1975 in the US, the mid-1980s in Europe and 2000 in China, legislative measures have passed to reduce and eventually eliminate Pb in gasoline. As a consequence of the phasing-out of Pb, the abundance of Pb in troposphere has decreased world-wide, but Pb remains essentially anthropogenic in atmospheric aerosols (e.g. Widory, 2006). Mukai et al. (2001) coupled sulphur and Pb isotopes to characterise the atmosphere of several Chinese urban sites. Lead isotope ratios suggested that coal combustion considerably contributed to atmospheric Pb in some cities in China. At the same time, influences by the emission of Chinese lead ores were also observed in northern Chinese
cities. Seasonal variations of Pb isotope ratios indicated the existence of a certain amount of industrial sources other than coal combustion (Mukai et al., 2001).

Studies of atmospheric aerosols using Sr isotopes have mainly been carried out for the soluble components of aerosols in rainwater (Herut et al., 1993; Nakano and Tanaka, 1997). However, Sr is a soil constituent element, and water-soluble Sr is only a part of the total Sr content of an aerosol. Kanayama et al. (2002) studied $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ ratios coupled with both major and trace elements chemistry to track the contribution of long-range-transported Asian dust (Kosa) on the overall atmosphere of Japan. Recently, Xu and Han (2009) monitored the monthly $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ ratios of rainwater in Beijing over a period of one year to estimate the inputs of sea salt ($^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}=0.70917$; Dia et al., 1992) and terrestrial elements, as well as anthropogenic emissions.

The city of Beijing in general, and particularly during the preparation for the 2008 Olympics, has been trying hard to improve its air quality. Leaded gasoline in the city has been phased-out since 1998, but even if a slight decrease in its atmospheric concentrations has been observed, the levels remain critically high (0.10-0.18 $\mu$g.m$^{-3}$ in 2005-2006). Industrial emissions, particularly from the non-ferrous industry as well as coal-combustion are the usual suspected vectors of pollution (Xiao et al., 2008; Li et al., 2008), but so far the classical chemical methods for assessing Pb levels have proven limited in their ability to determine the respective sources’ contributions.

The present study assesses the use of coupling both lead ($^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$) and strontium ($^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$) isotope systematics to help determine the origin of aerosols (TSP and PM$_{2.5}$) in the atmosphere of Beijing (China). Potential sources of pollution in the atmosphere of Beijing, such as cement factories, coal combustion and Pb refining, were first chemically and isotopically characterized. Then, through the isotope characterisation of ambient aerosols, the major sources of pollution were identified and, when possible, their respective contributions to particulate-matter contents appraised.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The major sources of aerosol pollution in the atmosphere of Beijing, analysed during this study, include: coal combustion (4 samples), cement factories (3 samples) and smelters (1 sample). Chemical and isotope characteristics from road traffic were taken from the literature (Chen et al., 2005; Widory et al., 2007b). Wind transport of aerosols from surrounding deserts and non-polluted rural areas were also taken into account (2 standardised loess and 3 soils from different locations in China were sampled and analysed). A total of 63 samples of ambient PM$_{2.5}$ were collected at the Sino-Japan Friendship Centre for Environmental Protection in Beijing, BMCEM, located on the North 4th ring (Figure 1), every 6 days, from September 2005 to September 2006. In parallel, 23 samples of ambient TSP were collected, from September 2005 to September 2006, at various locations around Beijing (Figure 1): 1) Changping (50 km north of Beijing, at the foot of the Jundu Mountains), 2) Downtown Beijing and 3) Liangxiang (31 km southwest of Beijing). These 23 TSP samples were part of a larger 166 sample set, described elsewhere (see Li et al., 2008 and Xiao et al., 2008), and claimed to represent the influence of either heavy pollution or Asian dust events. At the different sites, collection
of particles was made on quartz filters (QMA). PM$_{2.5}$ were sampled during runs of 24 hours at a constant flow of 1 m$^3$ h$^{-1}$, using a low volume sampler, while TSP samples were collected using a high volume sampler (runs of 24 hours).

In the laboratory (in a class-10 000 clean room with class-100 laminar flow hood), samples (filters in the case of PM$_{2.5}$ and TSP, and solids and particles in the case of the different inputs end-members) were leached with Supra-pure hydrobromic acid (HBr). The efficiency of Pb (& Sr) complexation by HBr is generally better than 90 %, confirming that the major part of these elements is contained in the labile fraction (e.g. Widory, 2004b and 2006). Pb & Sr concentrations were measured with an Inductively Coupled Plasma Mass Spectrometer (ICP-MS; precision 5%). Blank measurements made on quartz sampling filters yielded relatively low Pb and Sr contents (3.9±0.7 and 0.7±0.05 ng, respectively), compared to those obtained from ambient air samples and pollution sources (lower by at least a factor 15).

Pb-isotope measurements were measured on a Neptune Multiple Collector Inductively Coupled Plasma Mass Spectrometer (MC-ICP-MS; Thermo-Finnigan). The procedure, described in White et al. (2000), was slightly modified in order to certify some key features of the instrument’s double-focusing system (Motellica-Heno et al., 2003). Due to the physical principles of this machine, a rather high mass fractionation is observed (~0.7%/amu). Use of thallium (Tl), an element of similar mass, as an internal standard (Longrich et al., 1987) provides an opportunity for correction of mass dependency of the instrumental bias. Despite the fact that the fractionation coefficients are not strictly identical for Tl and Pb, the ratio of these coefficients remains constant for a given analytical session (White et al., 2000). Furthermore, Tl normalisation seems to reduce a potential matrix effect. In addition, sample-standard bracketing was applied to control potential random instability of the instrument as a whole, resulting in the following sequence: Blank – NIST 981 – Cleaning solution HNO$_3$, 3% – Blank – Sample – Cleaning solution HNO$_3$, 3% – Blank – etc. The blank level obtained is very low (<1 mV on 208Pb) and is subtracted from the next sample in the sequence. For this environmental study, samples were diluted to 50 to 100 ppb of Pb in solution, and 20 to 30 ng of Tl were added to 1 ml of solution. Baselines were measured at mass 100 at the beginning and end of each analysing sequence. A correction for 204Hg used a 206Hg measurement, applying a 202Hg/204Hg ratio of 4.35. For routine analyses following this procedure, avoiding any chemical lead purification, the uncertainty level was 0.01% for 208Pb/206Pb and 207Pb/206Pb, and 0.1% for 206Pb/204Pb, 207Pb/204Pb and 208Pb/204Pb.

Chemical purification of Sr (~3 µg) was performed, on the HBr leachate, using an ion-exchange column (Sr-spec) before mass analysis according to a method adapted from Pin and Bassin (1992), with a total blank of less than 1 ng for the entire chemical procedure. After chemical separation, around 150 ng of Sr was loaded onto a tungsten filament with tantalum activator and analysed on a MAT 262 Thermo-Ionisation Mass Spectrometer (TIMS; Finnigan). The 87Sr/86Sr ratios were normalised to a 87Sr/86Sr ratio of 0.1194. An average internal precision of ±10 ppm (2σ) was obtained and the reproducibility of the 87Sr/86Sr measurements was tested through repeated analyses of the
NBS987 international standard, for which a mean value of 0.710243±0.000022 (2σ; n=13) was obtained during the period of analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characterization of potential end-members

Both Pb and Sr concentrations from pollution sources display large fluctuations (Table 1), among which several trends appear. The highest Pb concentrations are measured in the samples from the Pb refining plants (95±4 %), while the lowest correspond to emissions from the cement factories (21±8 ppm). Emissions from smelters (3.83 %; n=1; this value is similar to concentrations obtained by Banic et al., 2006), and to a lesser extent from coal combustion (109±7 ppm; similar to the values reported by Block and Dams, 1975, on samples from thermal power stations) present intermediate Pb concentrations. Strontium, on the other hand, was found to be under the detection limit (i.e. 10⁻¹ ppm) in samples from the lead refining plants, in low concentrations in the smelters (5 ppm; n=1), and yield comparable concentrations in both the emissions from coal combustion (517±15 ppm) and from the cement factories (513±15 ppm). Their corresponding isotope ratios show that while aerosols from coal combustion and cement factories have similar ranges of ²⁰⁶Pb/²⁰⁴Pb, 17.873-18.326 (average of 18.09±0.25) and 17.729-18.365 (average of 18.05±0.32), respectively, the smelter yields aerosols with a significantly lower ratio (²⁰⁶Pb/²⁰⁴Pb=16.380; n=1). The Sr isotopes display a large range of variations, allowing a clear discrimination of the different emitters. Coal combustion yields the aerosols with the lowest ⁸⁷Sr/⁸⁶Sr (0.70924±0.00028), and the smelters the most radiogenic value (0.712064±0.00028). The cement factories produce particles with intermediate ⁸⁷Sr/⁸⁶Sr (0.71029±0.00029). The isotope characteristics of emissions from road traffic were taken from the literature. The phasing-out of leaded gasoline started in 1997 in China (Chen et al., 2005). The use of leaded gasoline was first banned in Beijing in 1997, and then in Shanghai, Guangzhou, Tianjin and other big cities (Sun et al., 2006). Chen et al. (2005) report Pb concentrations (77 to 399 ppm) and ²⁰⁷Pb/²⁰⁶Pb (0.862 to 0.879) in unleaded vehicle exhausts. However, the authors were not able to measure the ²⁰⁴Pb content, using their particular ICP-MS technique.

The “natural” sources of aerosols measured in this study include loess and soils collected at various locations in China (Table 1). Slight variations are observed in both their Pb and Sr concentrations, from 24 to 41 ppm (average of 32±7 ppm) and 242 to 333 ppm (average of 286±36 ppm), respectively. No clear chemical discrimination is apparent between the loess and the soils. Their corresponding ²⁰⁶Pb/²⁰⁴Pb ratios form a somehow compact range, from 18.312 to 18.693, with an average of 18.459±0.17. This is consistent with the values of 18.671±0.006 reported for soils by Jones et al. (2000). ⁸⁷Sr/⁸⁶Sr, in loess and soils, range from 0.7118 to 0.7148 (average of 0.7136±0.0012), similar to previous studies. Zhang et al. (1995) reported ⁸⁷Sr/⁸⁶Sr ratios of 0.7111–0.7154 from rivers around the Taklimakan Desert in northwest China, similar to those measured at both the Huanghe river
Characterisation of ambient air samples

While certainly not representative of its overall budget in Beijing, data for TSP concentrations in the air (Figure 2), measured at the three sampling sites (Changping, Downtown Beijing and Liangxiang), mostly exceed the 24-hours average range guidelines of 150-230 µg.m\(^{-3}\), proposed by the World Health Organisation (WHO). These guidelines are for combined exposure to both sulphur dioxide and TSP. At the selected sites, the concentrations also exceed the Class 2 China air quality standards (300 µg.m\(^{-3}\)), and occasionally also the class 3 standards (500 µg.m\(^{-3}\)). The concentrations exceeding this latest threshold correspond to the spring Asian dust events. The PM\(_{2.5}\) concentrations in the air measured at the downtown Beijing site exceeds the 24-hour mean recommended value (WHO, 2005) of 25 µg.m\(^{-3}\), which also corresponds to the European target for 2015 (2008/50/CE). The highest concentrations of PM\(_{2.5}\) (as high as 636 µg.m\(^{-3}\)) were measured in May 2006, at about the same period as the highest TSP concentrations, which would be consistent with the influence of the regional Asian dust events. Still, it clearly demonstrates the need for continued efforts for a better air quality management (including identification of the corresponding pollution sources).

Lead contents (Figure 3A) vary between 70 and 2940 ppm (average of 1364±620 ppm) in PM\(_{2.5}\), and between 32 and 2188 ppm (average of 920±638 ppm) in TSP. These values are significantly greater than those reported in some other megacities around the world, such as Paris (e.g. Widory et al., 2004a; Widory, 2006). Except for samples taken on the 3\(^{rd}\) of January (both PM\(_{2.5}\) and TSP), the \(^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}\) ratios (Figure 3B) do not show any significant variations with time, with an average value of 18.0±0.1 (17.98±0.09 for PM\(_{2.5}\) and 17.99±0.1 for TSP). This could be indicative of either i) a sole source of contamination through the year, or more likely ii) a constant mixing of different sources. If we compare the Pb isotope ratios with those reported in Table 1, they fall into the range of emissions from coal combustion, lead refining plants and cement factories. The PM\(_{2.5}\) and TSP samples taken on the 3\(^{rd}\) of January yield \(^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}\) ratios that are closer to those measured in the emissions from the smelter. Strontium, on the other hand, is in significantly greater abundance in the coarser mode (Figure 4A), with an average concentration of 215±196 ppm (variations from 90 to 958 ppm). In PM\(_{2.5}\), the Sr concentrations fluctuate from 11 to 185 ppm, with an average of 90±49 ppm. This pattern is similar to what has been previously observed in other cities (e.g. Widory et al., 2007b). The corresponding \(^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}\) ratios (Figure 4B) vary from 0.7086 to 0.7107 (average of 0.7097±0.0005) in the TSP, and from 0.7092 to 0.7101 (average of 0.7097±0.0003) in the PM\(_{2.5}\). This overlap between the ranges found in both size fractions may argue for similar sources, but the isotope disparity clearly indicates at least two distinct sources. The comparison with results from Table 1 shows that emissions from both coal combustion and cement factories have similar \(^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}\) ratios compared to those measured in the aerosols. Still, for the lowest Sr isotope ratios measured (close to 0.7086), the input from another
unidentified source is required (see below). Variations of Sr and Pb concentrations in both TSP and PM$_{2.5}$ seem to be roughly linear (with opposite slopes for PM$_{2.5}$ and TSP, negative and positive, respectively; Figure 5). While at low Pb concentrations the trends for TSP and PM$_{2.5}$ merge, perhaps indicating a single origin for both size fractions in the atmosphere, at high Pb concentrations, at least two distinct sources seem to be required. At high Pb concentrations, the source of PM$_{2.5}$ is characterised by a high Pb content coupled with a relatively low Sr content (<100 ppm), while the source of TSP is characterised by high Pb and Sr concentrations. This conclusion is in agreement with the fact that PM$_{2.5}$ samples are expected to be mainly influenced by activities such as lead refining, while the coarser TSP fraction incorporates inputs from activities such as coal combustion or emissions from cement plants (Zhang et al., 2007). Two TSP samples taken on the 28$^{th}$ of January 2006 plot outside these trends (one is from downtown Beijing, while the other is from Changping, suburb of Beijing). They coincide with the Chinese New Year’s Eve festivities, which would explain the high Sr concentrations measured (>600 ppm), as Sr is commonly used as a colouring compound in fireworks. Even though Pb has been phased-out in Beijing since 1997, it is still present (in low quantities) in the unleaded gasoline burnt today in the city, and thus may represent a potential source of contamination (Wang et al., 2003). Figure 6A compares the $^{207}$Pb/$^{206}$Pb measured in both TSP and PM$_{2.5}$ with those characterising the different sources of particles in the air (including ranges of road traffic emissions measured by Chen et al., 2005). For the majority of samples, results confirm that, road traffic is no longer a major source of atmospheric Pb, which was expected following its phasing-out in gasoline. Only two samples, taken consecutively, one TSP sample taken in Changping (01/05/2006) and one PM$_{2.5}$ sample (01/04/2006) show isotope characteristics compatible with the input of aerosols from either road traffic or smelters. The dual isotope approach ($^{208}$Pb/$^{204}$Pb vs. $^{206}$Pb/$^{204}$Pb; Figure 6B) shows that all Pb isotope ratios measured in the ambient air samples (both TSP and PM$_{2.5}$) plot within the ranges obtained on aerosols from the main pollution sources noted above (Table 1), indicating that no other pollution source is required for explaining our aerosols sample set. Still, the use of the sole Pb isotopes is not sufficient for precisely tracing the origin of these elements in the aerosols (both TSP and PM$_{2.5}$). Figure 6C plots the more discriminating $^{206}$Pb/$^{204}$Pb ratio versus the reciprocal of Pb concentrations in the samples. Two distinct emitters appear to play a major role in the observed Pb pollution levels: i) Pb refining plants (to which most of the aerosols samples are closely associated), and to a lesser extent ii) the Jingneng coal-fired power station, located southeast of Beijing. Two samples taken on the 28$^{th}$ of January 2006, both TSP (downtown Beijing and Changping sites) and PM$_{2.5}$ (Beijing site) display the most radiogenic $^{206}$Pb/$^{204}$Pb ratios (Figure 6C). Their date of sampling and Sr contents (>600 ppm) may corroborate the influence of fireworks residues, used during the New Year’s Eve festivities. This is consistent with conclusions drawn from Figure 5, but this has yet to be confirmed by measurements, as to our knowledge no studies have ever reported Pb-isotope ratios for lead nitrate (Pb(NO$_3$)$_2$), used in fireworks and other pyrotechnics. As discussed above, samples taken on the 4$^{th}$ (PM$_{2.5}$) and 5$^{th}$ (TSP Changping) of January may indicate an input from road traffic (Figure 6A), or more probably, the influence of smelter emissions due to their relatively high Pb concentrations (1145 and 621 ppm, respectively). Finally, one TSP sample taken in Changping (22$^{nd}$ of April) suggests that emissions from cement plants are the corresponding source of
pollution. Figure 7 shows that most samples in both size fractions plot within the range of $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ from the analysed end-members (Table 1), and are consistent with a mixing between 1) a major end-member, emissions from coal combustion, and 2) “secondary” contributors, such as cement plants and smelters. Four PM$_{2.5}$ samples (4th of March, 21st of June, 1st and 19th of September), as well as two TSP samples from the Changping and downtown Beijing sites (both taken on the 28th of January) plot on a binary mixing line ($r^2=0.97$; Figure 7) that yields a $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ ratio of 0.7086 and a Sr concentration of at least 103 ppm for its corresponding source. This Sr isotope ratio is significantly lower than the range measured on potential end-members (Table 1), and could correspond to i) emissions from coal combustion, assuming that the samples measured during this study do not reflect the total $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ natural variability of coal combustion, or ii) an input from carbonaceous alteration, brought by wind from outside the city, which is consistent with the $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ variations of marine carbonates from 0.7080 to 0.7090, reported by Derry et al., 1994, during the early Cambrian stage, or, 3) residues from fireworks, as deduced from Figures 5 and 6B. This latter source would explain the TSP samples, but hardly fits with the PM$_{2.5}$ samples that were taken at different periods in the year (May, June and September).

The equation of mixing for a $k$ component system for isotope ratios $I$ can be expressed in the following way (Douglas and Schilling, 2000):

$$I = \sum_{i=1}^{k} z_i I_i / \sum_{i=1}^{k} z_i$$

With $\sum_{i=1}^{k} z_i = 1$ and $0 \leq z_i \leq 1$, and where $I$ is the isotope ratio in the mixture, $I_i$ the isotope ratio in each end-member component, $z_i$ the mass fraction of component 1, 2, 3…., and $n_i$ the relative enrichment of element $I$ in component 1, 2, 3…., relative to component $k$ (i.e. $n_i = c_i/c_k$; where $c$ is the concentration of element $I$). From our data set, and considering the average concentrations and isotope ratios for each major pollution source (refining plants, coal burning and smelter; from Table 1), it is possible to estimate their respective contributions for each ambient air samples. Results indicate that for most of the aerosols, the Pb contribution from the smelter is negligible ($<2\%$), while coal burning usually represents less than 20%. Results show that most of the atmospheric Pb, both TSP and PM$_{2.5}$, in Beijing comes from refining plants. Nevertheless, as discussed above, 2 distinct samples seem to identify a non negligible contribution from the smelter. The calculation for the TSP sample taken on the 5th of January gives an amount of about 10% of its Pb from the smelter. In the case of the PM$_{2.5}$ sample taken on the 4th of January, the contribution of the smelter is around 4%. From most of the samples plotting on the mixing line between the refining plants and the Jingneng coal-fired power station (Figure 6C), the contribution of this latter source is, of at least $\sim 70\%$. Calculation with the Sr isotopes confirms that this element is mainly dominated, in the atmosphere of Beijing, by coal combustion. Results give a contribution of the smelter $<\approx 10\%$. 

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hal-00549066, version 1 - 21 Dec 2010
Combining the two isotope systematics ($^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$ and $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$) yields even more constraints on the source of atmospheric particles in the atmosphere of Beijing. Results (Figure 8) confirm the great impact of emissions from coal combustion, as well as from the cement plants. The sample plotting outside this trend, taken on the 5th of January, has a significantly lower $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$ coupled with a relatively low $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$, which could indicate the potential influence of road traffic.

**CONCLUSIONS**

China, and particularly its megacities such as Shanghai or Beijing, is working towards improving air quality, especially regarding airborne particulate matter. Measures have already been taken, including the phasing-out of Pb in gasoline (the major vector of atmospheric lead until the end of the 90’s). However, critically high concentrations of this toxic element are observed. We studied here the possibility of using Pb isotope systematics coupled with Sr isotopes systematics, to help decipher the origin of these elements (and ultimately the origin(s) of both PM$_{2.5}$ and TSP) in the atmosphere of Beijing and its vicinity. Results lead to the following conclusions:

1. Pb and Sr concentrations in the different size fractions are relatively high (up to 2500 and 1000 ppm, respectively). When compared, Pb and Sr concentrations show that while at low Pb concentrations a common source, or a constant mixing of aerosols from multiple sources, seems possible, at higher Pb concentrations at least two distinct sources, one for the PM$_{2.5}$ and another for the TSP, are implicated. We cannot uniquely identify these sources at this point. For two particular samples taken during the festivities of the Chinese New Year’s Eve, residues from fireworks appear to have impacted the levels of TSP and PM$_{2.5}$ observed.

2. Lead isotopes ($^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$) identify emissions from metal, lead-related, refining plants as the major emitter of this element in Beijing’s atmosphere, followed by coal-fired power stations (such as the Jingneng station). As expected after the phasing-out of Pb in gasoline, the influence of road traffic has drastically decreased, but still the data indicate that it may contribute to the concentrations measured for (only) two samples (one TSP and one PM$_{2.5}$) out of the total set. It is more likely that these two samples reflect the input of smelter emissions. The samples yielding the highest $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$ ratios may present the characteristics of fireworks, a suggestion that is reinforced by both the date of sampling and the relatively high Sr contents of these samples. Cement plants are occasionally isotopically identified, while erosion of soils seems to have a slight influence in the overall Pb atmospheric budget.

3. Strontium isotopes ($^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$) indicate that this element in the atmosphere of Beijing is mainly controlled by coal combustion and to a lesser extent by cement plants and/or smelters. For a few number of samples (both TSP and PM$_{2.5}$), either road traffic, or carbonaceous particles brought into the city by windy mid- to long-range transport, or fireworks may explain the observed $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ ratios.
4. Coupling the Pb and Sr isotope systematics gives deeper insight into the sources responsible for the levels of those elements in the aerosols measured. Results confirm the major role played by coal combustion and, to a lesser extent, cement plants.

While the study of Pb and Sr concentrations may have hinted at a correlation between the source(s) involved and the size fraction of the aerosols (i.e. each size fraction being influenced by a specific pollution source), the use of the multi-isotope approach shows that TSP and PM$_{2.5}$ are both derived from the same source of contamination.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was funded by both the Sino-French Advanced Research Program (PRA-E05-05) and the National Science Foundation of China (NSFC; project 20477042).
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Table 1. Characteristics of the sources of aerosols in the atmosphere of Beijing.

| Sample     | Remarks                                      | Pb (ppm) | 207Pb/206Pb | 206Pb/204Pb | Sr   | 87Sr/86Sr |
|------------|----------------------------------------------|----------|-------------|-------------|------|----------|
| S-CJ-1     | Chinese loess                                | 29       | 0.8340      | 18.693      | 295  | 0.714524 |
| S-CJ-2     | Simulated Chinese loess                      | 40       | 0.8389      | 18.390      | 242  | 0.714797 |
| S-ELHT     | Soil collected at Erlianhoat                  | 41       | 0.8466      | 18.300      | 261  | 0.711784 |
| S-SZWQ     | Soil collected at Siziwangi                   | 24       | 0.8526      | 18.321      | 300  | 0.713303 |
| S-BYZE     | Soil collected at Bayinhuoer                   | 28       | 0.8774      | 18.578      | 333  | 0.713653 |
| CC-JN-A    | Beijing Jingneng thermal power Co. Ltd (Shijingshan) | 112     | 0.8662      | 17.873      | 530  | 0.709470 |
| CC-JN-B    | Beijing Jingneng thermal power Co. Ltd (Shijingshan) | 103     | 0.8658      | 17.879      | 510  | 0.709492 |
| CC-JG      | Jiangong thermal power station                | 118      | 0.8501      | 18.326      | 500  | 0.709033 |
| CC-BY      | Beiyuan thermal power station (Shandong Sheng) | 104      | 0.8510      | 18.290      | 530  | 0.708970 |
| M1 - HNXW  | Sludge from a Pb smelting factory in Xiuwu county | 38  300  | 0.9425      | 16.380      | 5    | 0.712064 |
| Diamond    | Hebei Yanxin Construction Material Co. Ltd    | 14       | 0.8479      | 18.365      | 530  | 0.710380 |
| Lafaji     | Beijing Shunfa Co. Ltd                       | 20       | 0.8611      | 18.064      | 510  | 0.709963 |
| Tangshan   | Tangshan Yutian County Cement Factory         | 30       | 0.8757      | 17.729      | 500  | 0.710528 |
| P1 - SFDJ  | End-product, high purity, production of Pb batteries | 997  700 | 0.8647      | 18.040      | udl  | -        |
| P2 - SFHJ  | End-product, high purity, production of Pb batteries | 940  600 | 0.8682      | 17.970      | udl  | -        |
| P3 - HDDJ  | End-product, high purity, production of Pb batteries | 994  300 | 0.8672      | 17.989      | udl  | -        |
| M2 - NKR   | Raw material, high purity, from North Korea   | 900  700 | 0.8651      | 18.039      | udl  | -        |
| M3 - TJBD  | Raw material, high purity, from Tianjin (Baodi county) | 921  100 | 0.8676      | 17.982      | udl  | -        |
| M4 - HBBD  | Raw material, high purity, from Baoding (Hebei) | 771  400 | 0.8682      | 17.969      | udl  | -        |

*udl: under detection limit (10^-1 ppm).*
FIGURE CAPTIONS

Figure 1: Location map of the different sampling sites in Beijing and its vicinity: TSP (A: Changping; B: Downton Beijing; C: Liangxiang) and PM$_{2.5}$ (D: BMCEM on the North 4$^{th}$ ring).

Figure 2: Atmospheric TSP and PM$_{2.5}$ concentrations. European, WHO’s recommendations and China air quality standards are reported.

Figure 3: Lead characteristics of TSP and PM$_{2.5}$ during the period of sampling. A) Variations of Pb concentrations in the particles. B) Variations of the $^{206}$Pb/$^{204}$Pb ratio.

Figure 4: Strontium characteristics of TSP and PM$_{2.5}$ during the period of sampling. A) Variations of Sr concentrations in the particles. B) Variations of the $^{87}$Sr/$^{86}$Sr ratio.

Figure 5: Pb & Sr concentrations in the TSP and PM$_{2.5}$.

Figure 6: Isotope tracking of sources of atmospheric Pb (TSP and PM$_{2.5}$) in the atmosphere of Beijing and its vicinity. A) $^{207}$Pb/$^{206}$Pb ratios, used to provide consistency with previous studies, vs. 1/Pb. B) $^{208}$Pb/$^{204}$Pb vs. $^{206}$Pb/$^{204}$Pb ratios. C) $^{206}$Pb/$^{204}$Pb ratios vs. 1/Pb. Binary mixing relationships are modelled. In a Pb isotope ratio versus 1/Pb diagram, binary mixing is described by a straight line.

Figure 7: Isotope tracking of sources of atmospheric strontium (TSP and PM$_{2.5}$) in the atmosphere of Beijing and its vicinity. A) $^{87}$Sr/$^{86}$Sr vs. Sr concentrations. B) Binary mixing relationships are modelled. In a $^{87}$Sr/$^{86}$Sr ratios versus 1/Sr diagram, binary mixing is described by a straight line. Characteristics of road traffic emissions of particles are also reported (adapted from Widory et al., 2007b). Note that the X-axis is under a logarithmic scale.

Figure 8: The multi-isotope approach. Coupling both $^{206}$Pb/$^{204}$Pb and $^{87}$Sr/$^{86}$Sr ratios brings more constrains on the origin of TSP and PM$_{2.5}$ in the atmosphere of Beijing and its vicinity. Isotope characteristics of samples from Geagea et al. (2008) are also reported.
FIGURE 2

**PM$_{2.5}$ concentration in the air (µg m$^{-3}$)**

- **European target for 2015 (2005/39/EC)**
- **WHO's 24-hour average guideline (2001)**
- **TSP concentration in the air (µg m$^{-3}$)**

- **China air quality standard Class 1**
- **China air quality standard Class 2**
- **China air quality standard Class 3**

Legend:
- Open circles represent data points for each category.
FIGURE 3

A) 

B)
