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**MECHANISMS OF PLATINUM-GROUP ELEMENT  
FRACTIONATION IN ULTRAMAFIC MELTS AND  
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EXPLORATION FOR  
MAGMATIC NICKEL SULPHIDE DEPOSITS**

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This thesis is presented for fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. May 2010



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# ABSTRACT

Platinum-group elements (PGE) are important as petrogenetic tracers, but owing to their low abundances and complex behaviour they are among the least understood elements in geochemistry. This study investigates the mechanisms of PGE fractionation in ultramafic systems (komatiites, komatiitic basalts, ferro-picrites) and focuses on the role of chromite. Samples from a range of occurrences have been analysed to assess potential controls on PGE behaviour, such as geochemical affinities (Munro-type and Karasjok-type), age (2.0 and 2.7 Ga), emplacement styles, metamorphic grade and nickel-sulphide mineralisation endowment and style.

Data obtained by in-situ laser ablation ICP-MS analysis provide the first direct evidence that Ru can exist in solid solution in chromite with concentrations up to several hundred ppb. The data show that the behaviour of Ru is dominantly controlled by the sulphide-saturation state. In systems that did not equilibrate with a sulphide liquid, chromites have distinctly higher Ru concentrations than chromites from systems that interacted with a sulphur-source during crystallisation. Carius tube digestion isotope dilution ICP-MS analyses of chromite separates confirm the accuracy of the in-situ study and also show that Ir is weakly compatible in chromite. Anomalously high Pt and Pd concentrations in chromite separates reflect the presence of platinum-group minerals (PGM) and suggest that PGM are common accessory phases in komatiites. A study of the PGE-mineralogy shows that PGM in komatiites can be of magmatic and post-magmatic origin and that they often remain undetected due to grain sizes less than 5  $\mu\text{m}$ . As a consequence, the presence of PGE minerals has to be taken into account when whole-rock PGE signatures are interpreted.

The association of Ru-poor chromites with Ni mineralisation and Ru-rich chromites with barren systems provides a new tool for the exploration for nickel-sulphide deposits. This model applies to all magma types and is independent of the age, the geochemical affinity, and other sample characteristics.





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis results from the collaboration between Macquarie University / GEMOC and the Centre for Exploration Targeting at the University of Western Australia. This study used instrumentation funded by ARC LIEF and DEST Systematic Infrastructure and Macquarie University. It was supported by an IMURS scholarship and a PGRF travel fund (Higher Degree Research Unit, Macquarie University), by the AMIRA Project P710a, and by the MERIWA grant M388

I want to thank all the people who have been implicated in my work during this PhD project and particularly my official supervisors Norman Pearson, Suzanne O'Reilly, and Marco Fiorentini. I would like to express my special thanks to Steve Barnes who was a great help along the way. I thank my office mates Alan Kobussen, Cara Donnelly, and June Chevet for sharing their knowledge and experience. I also thank all my co-workers at GEMOC who helped me on more than one occasion to solve problems outside my areas of expertise: Kelsie Dadd, Peter Wieland, Mei-Fei Chu, Will Powell, Kevin Grant, Dick Flood, Bill Griffin, Carol McMahon, Sally-Ann Hodgekiss, Michael Engelbretsen, and Nigel Wilson. Also, I thank Belinda Godel, Steve Beresford, and Steve Barnes (yes, again!) for their help during the past years.

Finally, I acknowledge the support and companionship from my friends and family , and particularly my toki Christina.

