

# Global Patterns of Carbon Dioxide Variability from Satellite Observations

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## Keywords

CO<sub>2</sub> annual cycle, CO<sub>2</sub> semiannual cycle, intraseasonal variability, monsoon, El Niño–Southern Oscillation, Northern Annular Mode, drought, wildfire

## Abstract

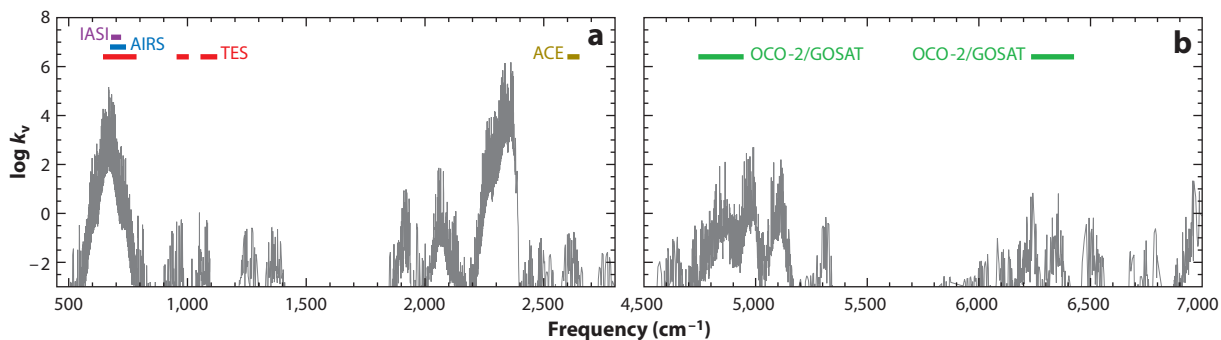
Advanced satellite technology has been providing unique observations of global carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) concentrations. These observations have revealed important CO<sub>2</sub> variability at different timescales and over regional and planetary scales. Satellite CO<sub>2</sub> retrievals have revealed that stratospheric sudden warming and the Madden-Julian Oscillation can modulate atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations in the mid-troposphere. Atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> also demonstrates variability at interannual timescales. In the tropical region, the El Niño–Southern Oscillation and the Tropospheric Biennial Oscillation can change atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations. At high latitudes, mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations can be influenced by the Northern Hemispheric annular mode. In addition to modulations by the large-scale circulations, sporadic events such as wildfires, volcanic eruptions, and droughts, which change CO<sub>2</sub> surface emissions, can cause atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations to increase significantly. The natural variability of CO<sub>2</sub> summarized in this review can help us better understand its sources and sinks and its redistribution by atmospheric motion.

- Global satellite CO<sub>2</sub> data offer a unique opportunity to explore CO<sub>2</sub> variability in different regions.

- Atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentration demonstrates variations at intraseasonal, seasonal, and interannual timescales.
- Both large-scale circulations and variations of surface emissions can modulate CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations in the atmosphere.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) is an important greenhouse gas and has a big impact on the radiative budget (e.g., Goody & Yung 1989, IPCC 2013). As shown in **Figure 1**, the major absorption bands of CO<sub>2</sub> are at 540–800 cm<sup>-1</sup>, 850–1,250 cm<sup>-1</sup>, and 2,100–2,400 cm<sup>-1</sup> (Goody & Yung 1989), where they trap infrared radiation emitted from the Earth and warm the atmosphere and surface. The concentration of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> is increasing with a positive trend of ~2 ppm/year (e.g., Keeling et al. 1995, Sarmiento & Wofsy 1999, Tans & Keeling 2014), which has a significant influence on global warming (e.g., Dickinson & Cicerone 1986, IPCC 2013). To understand its variations, researchers have used different data sets to monitor atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentration. Surface, aircraft, and satellite CO<sub>2</sub> data are summarized in **Table 1**. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Earth System Research Laboratory (NOAA ESRL) network has ~155 CO<sub>2</sub> measurement stations monitoring atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> at the surface (Tans et al. 1998, GLOBALVIEW-CO2 2010). The Total Carbon Column Observing Network (TCCON) has ~20 surface stations that use a ground-based Fourier transform spectrometer to measure column CO<sub>2</sub> (Washenfelder et al. 2006, Wunch et al. 2011). In addition to the surface measurements, there are also aircraft CO<sub>2</sub> data, such as those from NOAA ESRL (GLOBALVIEW-CO2 2010), Comprehensive Observation Network for TRace gases by AirLiner (CONTRAIL) (Matsueda et al. 2002), Intercontinental Chemical Transport Experiment-North America (INTEX-NA) (Singh et al. 2002, Choi et al. 2008), HIAPER Pole-to-Pole (HIPPO) (Wofsy 2011), In-service Aircraft



**Figure 1**

CO<sub>2</sub> absorption coefficients derived from the high-resolution transmission molecular absorption database. The lines shown indicate channels used to retrieve CO<sub>2</sub> from the OCO-2 and GOSAT (green), TES (red), AIRS (blue), IASI (purple), and ACE (dark yellow). Abbreviations: ACE, Atmospheric Chemistry Experiment; AIRS, Atmospheric Infrared Sounder; CO<sub>2</sub>, carbon dioxide; GOSAT, Greenhouse gases Observing SATellite; IASI, Infrared Atmospheric Sounding Interferometer; OCO-2, Orbiting Carbon Observatory 2; TES, Tropospheric Emission Spectrometer.

**Table 1 Summary of surface, aircraft, and satellite CO<sub>2</sub> data sets**

Type	Data	CO <sub>2</sub> channels (cm <sup>-1</sup> )
Surface CO <sub>2</sub>	NOAA ESRL surface CO <sub>2</sub>	NA
	TCCON column CO <sub>2</sub>	NA
Aircraft CO <sub>2</sub>	NOAA ESRL aircraft CO <sub>2</sub>	NA
	CONTRAIL aircraft CO <sub>2</sub>	NA
	INTEX-NA aircraft CO <sub>2</sub>	NA
	HIPPO aircraft CO <sub>2</sub>	NA
	IAGOS aircraft CO <sub>2</sub>	NA
	CARVE aircraft CO <sub>2</sub>	NA
Satellite CO <sub>2</sub>	OCO-2 column CO <sub>2</sub> ( $\bar{X}_{CO_2}$ )	6,250–6,410, 4,760–4,930
	GOSAT column CO <sub>2</sub> ( $\bar{X}_{CO_2}$ )	6,250–6,410, 4,760–4,930
	TES mid-tropospheric CO <sub>2</sub>	660–770, 970–990, 1,070–1,110
	AIRS mid-tropospheric CO <sub>2</sub>	690–725
	IASI mid-tropospheric CO <sub>2</sub>	694–705
	ACE mid-tropospheric CO <sub>2</sub>	2,615–2,635

CO<sub>2</sub> channels used to retrieve satellite CO<sub>2</sub> are also listed. Abbreviations: ACE, Atmospheric Chemistry Experiment; AIRS, Atmospheric Infrared Sounder; CARVE, Carbon in Arctic Reservoirs Vulnerability Experiment; CO<sub>2</sub>, carbon dioxide; CONTRAIL, Comprehensive Observation Network for Trace gases by AirLiner; HIPPO, HIAPER Pole-to-Pole; GOSAT, Greenhouse gases Observing SATellite; IAGOS, In-service Aircraft for a Global Observing System; IASI, Infrared Atmospheric Sounding Interferometer; INTEX-NA, Intercontinental Chemical Transport Experiment-North America; NA, not applicable; NOAA ESRL, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Earth System Research Laboratory; OCO-2, Orbiting Carbon Observatory 2; TCCON, Total Carbon Column Observing Network; TES, Tropospheric Emission Spectrometer.

for a Global Observing System (IAGOS) (Petzold et al. 2015), and Carbon in Arctic Reservoirs Vulnerability Experiment (CARVE) (Dupont et al. 2012, Fisher et al. 2014).

Previous in situ CO<sub>2</sub> measurements at the surface or from aircraft are limited in spatial extent, so it is difficult to explore CO<sub>2</sub> variability over the global domain. In recent years, satellite missions have provided global measurements of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentration (e.g., Barkley et al. 2006; Chahine et al. 2008; Strow & Hannon 2008; Crevoisier et al. 2009; Yokota et al. 2009; Kulawik et al. 2010; Rinsland et al. 2010; Boesch et al. 2011; Foucher et al. 2011; Crisp et al. 2012, 2017; Nguyen et al. 2014; Eldering et al. 2017). Absorption bands for retrieving CO<sub>2</sub> concentration from different satellites are shown in **Figure 1**. The weak CO<sub>2</sub> absorption band at 6,250–6,410 cm<sup>-1</sup> (1.58 μm) is combined with the absorption band at 4,760–4,930 cm<sup>-1</sup> (2.06 μm) to retrieve CO<sub>2</sub> abundances from the Orbiting Carbon Observatory 2 (OCO-2) satellite (Kuang et al. 2002) and Greenhouse gases Observing SATellite (GOSAT) (Shiomi et al. 2008, Watanabe et al. 2008, Kuze et al. 2009). CO<sub>2</sub> channels at 660–770 cm<sup>-1</sup>, 970–990 cm<sup>-1</sup>, and 1,070–1,110 cm<sup>-1</sup> are used to retrieve mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> from the Tropospheric Emission Spectrometer (TES) (Kulawik et al. 2010). Absorption bands at 690–725 cm<sup>-1</sup>, 694–705 cm<sup>-1</sup>, and 2,615–2,635 cm<sup>-1</sup> are used to derive mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> from the Atmospheric Infrared Sounder (AIRS) (Chahine et al. 2008), Infrared Atmospheric Sounding Interferometer (IASI) (Crevoisier et al. 2009), and Atmospheric Chemistry Experiment (ACE) (Rinsland et al. 2010), respectively. These globally distributed CO<sub>2</sub> retrievals from satellites offer a unique opportunity to explore atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> variability over the planetary scale.

Surface, aircraft, and satellite data provide CO<sub>2</sub> information at different altitudes. For example, data from NOAA ESRL provide CO<sub>2</sub> measurements at the surface. However, they are limited in

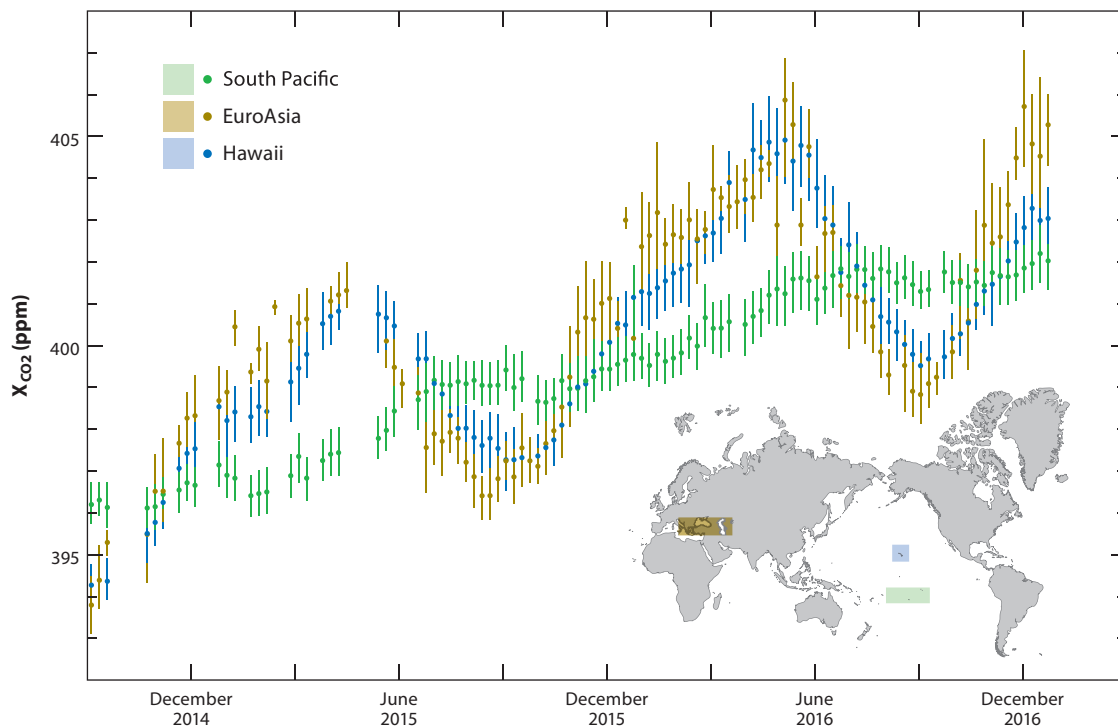
spatial extent and do not contain CO<sub>2</sub> vertical profiles. Aircraft CO<sub>2</sub> data (e.g., NOAA ESRL, CONTRAIL, INTEX-NA, HIPPO, IAGOS, CARVE) provide additional information on CO<sub>2</sub> vertical structure, but they are limited in spatial extent and are not continuous. Recent satellite CO<sub>2</sub> retrievals provide continuous global maps of column CO<sub>2</sub> (e.g., OCO-2 and GOSAT) and mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> (e.g., ACE, AIRS, IASI, and TES). In this article, we discuss the variability of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations, especially new results emerging from satellite data.

## 2. IMPACTS OF BIOSPHERE AND LARGE-SCALE ATMOSPHERIC CIRCULATION ON CO<sub>2</sub> CONCENTRATIONS

### 2.1. Annual and Semiannual Cycles of CO<sub>2</sub>

Atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentration demonstrates an annual cycle. Using in situ CO<sub>2</sub> measurements, previous studies (Pearman & Hyson 1980, 1981; Cleveland et al. 1983; Bacastow et al. 1985; Keeling et al. 1996; Shia et al. 2006; Buermann et al. 2007) explored the CO<sub>2</sub> annual cycle over different locations and revealed that it is related to the interaction between the biosphere and the atmosphere. Recent satellite retrievals provide CO<sub>2</sub> data over the global domain and offer a unique opportunity to explore the CO<sub>2</sub> annual cycle over different regions (e.g., Chahine et al. 2005, Crevoisier et al. 2009, Kulawik et al. 2010, Rinsland et al. 2010, Lindqvist et al. 2015, Jiang et al. 2016, Eldering et al. 2017). Using CO<sub>2</sub> retrievals from the IASI, Crevoisier et al. (2009) revealed a larger CO<sub>2</sub> annual cycle in the Northern Hemisphere than in the Southern Hemisphere for the upper tropospheric (11–15 km). Chahine et al. (2005) compared mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> from AIRS with CONTRAIL CO<sub>2</sub> aircraft data and found that the satellite-derived AIRS mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> captures the correct CO<sub>2</sub> annual cycle in both hemispheres. Kulawik et al. (2010) compared mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> from TES to CO<sub>2</sub> data from Mauna Loa, CarbonTracker, and CONTRAIL data and found a consistent CO<sub>2</sub> annual cycle among different data sets. Rinsland et al. (2010) analyzed satellite-derived ACE mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> retrievals and found a CO<sub>2</sub> annual cycle similar to the GLOBALVIEW aircraft CO<sub>2</sub> data. The GOSAT column CO<sub>2</sub> measurements were compared to the ground-based TCCON data and were found to have similar CO<sub>2</sub> annual cycles (Lindqvist et al. 2015). Eldering et al. (2017) calculated weekly averaged OCO-2 column CO<sub>2</sub> data from Hawaii, EuroAsia, and the South Pacific. As shown in **Figure 2**, OCO-2 column CO<sub>2</sub> annual cycle amplitudes are larger in Hawaii and EuroAsia than in the South Pacific because there is less CO<sub>2</sub> surface emission and uptake in the South Pacific (Eldering et al. 2017). In addition to the annual cycle, atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> also demonstrates a semiannual cycle, which is related to the biosphere-atmosphere exchange (Jiang et al. 2012).

Using a multiple regression method, Jiang et al. (2016) studied CO<sub>2</sub> annual cycle and semiannual cycle amplitudes from different satellite CO<sub>2</sub> retrievals (e.g., GOSAT, AIRS, TES), NOAA ESRL surface CO<sub>2</sub>, and TCCON column CO<sub>2</sub>. As shown in **Figure 3**, of all these data sets, NOAA ESRL surface CO<sub>2</sub> has the largest annual cycle and semiannual cycle amplitudes; AIRS mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> has the smallest annual cycle and semiannual cycle amplitudes. Annual cycle and semiannual cycle amplitudes derived from GOSAT X<sub>CO<sub>2</sub></sub> (column-averaged CO<sub>2</sub> dry air mole fraction) are consistent with those from TCCON X<sub>CO<sub>2</sub></sub> but smaller than those in the NOAA ESRL surface data. All CO<sub>2</sub> data correctly demonstrate the latitudinal gradient for CO<sub>2</sub> annual cycle amplitudes, with larger amplitudes in the Northern Hemisphere than the Southern Hemisphere. **Figure 3** also demonstrates that the amplitudes of CO<sub>2</sub> annual and semiannual cycles decrease with altitude (Jiang et al. 2016) because the sources of cycles are located at the surface and the signals decay with the altitude. The Model for Ozone And Related chemical Tracers-2 (MOZART-2) and CarbonTracker models were used to explore the CO<sub>2</sub> annual cycle. The CO<sub>2</sub>



**Figure 2**

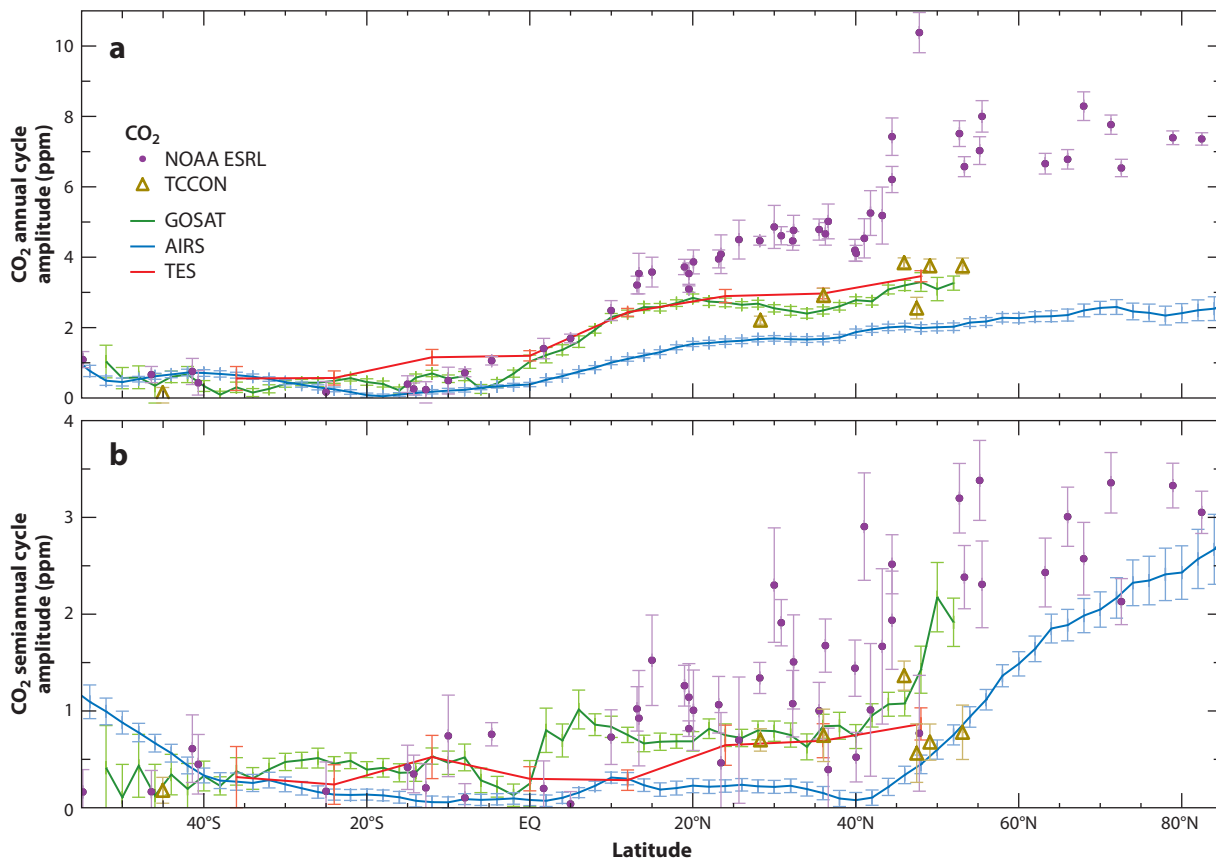
OCO-2 CO<sub>2</sub> data from Hawaii (*blue*), EuroAsia (*dark yellow*), and the South Pacific (*green*). X<sub>CO<sub>2</sub></sub> is the CO<sub>2</sub> dry air mole fraction in units of parts per million. Abbreviations: CO<sub>2</sub>, carbon dioxide; OCO-2, Orbiting Carbon Observatory 2. Figure adapted from Eldering et al. (2017) with permission from AAAS.

annual cycle results from these models are similar to those from the satellite CO<sub>2</sub> retrievals in most regions except the Northern Hemisphere mid-latitudes, which might be related to the weak convective mass flux (Jiang et al. 2008) and underestimation of net ecosystem exchange in the models (Yang et al. 2007). These results can help us to better understand the vertical distribution of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> and identify possible deficiencies in the models.

## 2.2. Intraseasonal Variability of CO<sub>2</sub>

In addition to the annual cycle and semiannual cycle, atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> also demonstrates intraseasonal variability.

**2.2.1. Influence of the Madden-Julian Oscillation.** Intraseasonal variability, such as the Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO), can modulate mid-troposphere CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations in the tropics and polar region (Li et al. 2010, Li 2018). MJO is an important intraseasonal feature with a period of about 30–90 days (Madden & Julian 1971). It can influence convection, rainfall, winds, and chemical tracers (Knutson & Weickmann 1987, Tian et al. 2007, Jiang et al. 2009). **Figure 4** demonstrates the MJO-related mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> anomalies and the Tropical Rainfall Measuring Mission rainfall anomalies for eight phases of the MJO. The eight MJO phases are defined by the All-season Real-time Multivariate MJO index and represent different phases of the MJO cycle in a temporal sequence, as MJO propagates from the Indian Ocean to the eastern Pacific. The



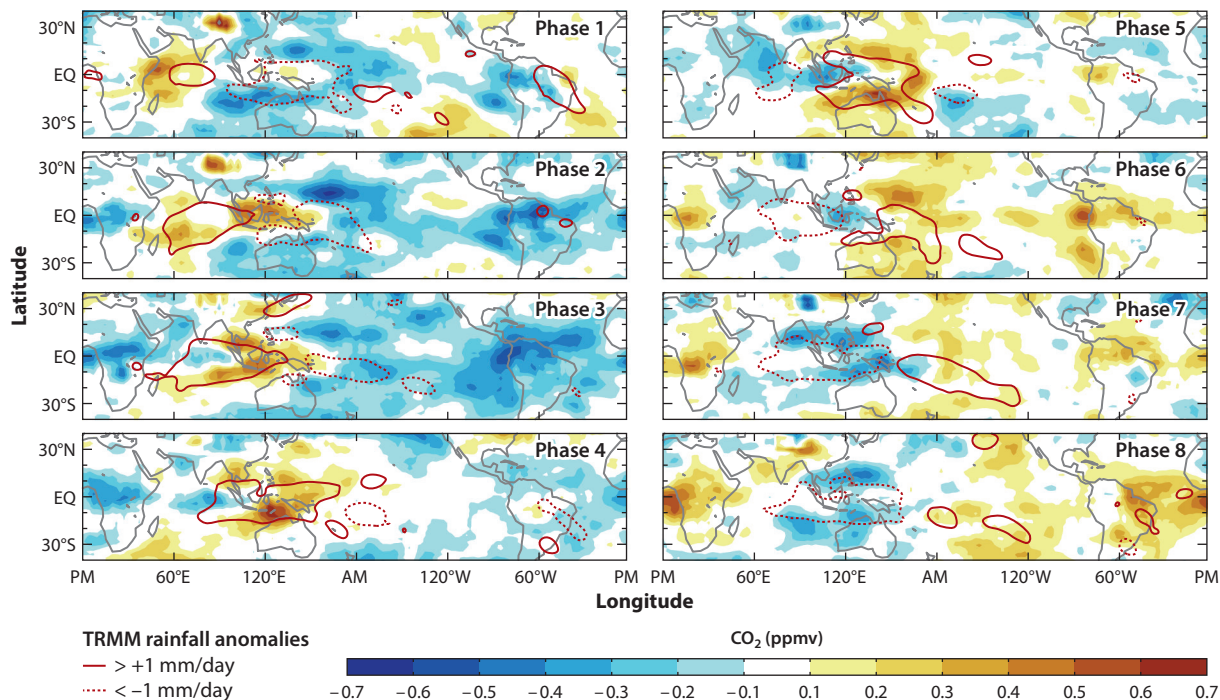
**Figure 3**

Latitudinal distributions of (a) CO<sub>2</sub> annual cycle amplitudes and (b) CO<sub>2</sub> semiannual cycle amplitudes. Shown are results from AIRS mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> (blue lines), GOSAT X<sub>CO<sub>2</sub></sub> (green lines), TES mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> (red lines), NOAA ESRL surface CO<sub>2</sub> (purple dots), and TCCON X<sub>CO<sub>2</sub></sub> (dark yellow triangles). Abbreviations: AIRS, Atmospheric Infrared Sounder; CO<sub>2</sub>, carbon dioxide; GOSAT, Greenhouse gases Observing SATellite; NOAA ESRL, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Earth System Research Laboratory; TCCON, Total Carbon Column Observing Network; TES, Tropospheric Emission Spectrometer. Figure adapted with permission from Jiang et al. (2016).

duration of each phase is 6 days. The positive rainfall anomalies are associated with enhanced rising air, which will bring more CO<sub>2</sub> from the surface to the mid-troposphere, as shown in **Figure 4**. The sinking air can bring low concentrations of CO<sub>2</sub> from high altitudes to the mid-troposphere, contributing to negative CO<sub>2</sub> anomalies. These MJO-related CO<sub>2</sub> anomalies propagate from west to east as shown in phases 1–8 in **Figure 4**. The peak-to-peak CO<sub>2</sub> amplitude of the composite MJO modulation is about 1 ppm.

MJO can also modulate CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations in the high latitudes. Li (2018) explored AIRS mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> over the Arctic region. MJO was separated into four different phases (phase 8 + 1, phase 2 + 3, phase 4 + 5, and phase 6 + 7). As shown in **Figure 5**, Arctic CO<sub>2</sub> anomalies are negative during phase 8 + 1 and positive during phase 4 + 5. The amplitude of MJO-related Arctic CO<sub>2</sub> anomalies is about 1.2 ppm. The Arctic MJO-related CO<sub>2</sub> anomalies represent a teleconnection between MJO and the polar atmosphere (Li 2018). The mechanism by which MJO influences CO<sub>2</sub> in the Arctic needs to be investigated in the future (Li 2018).





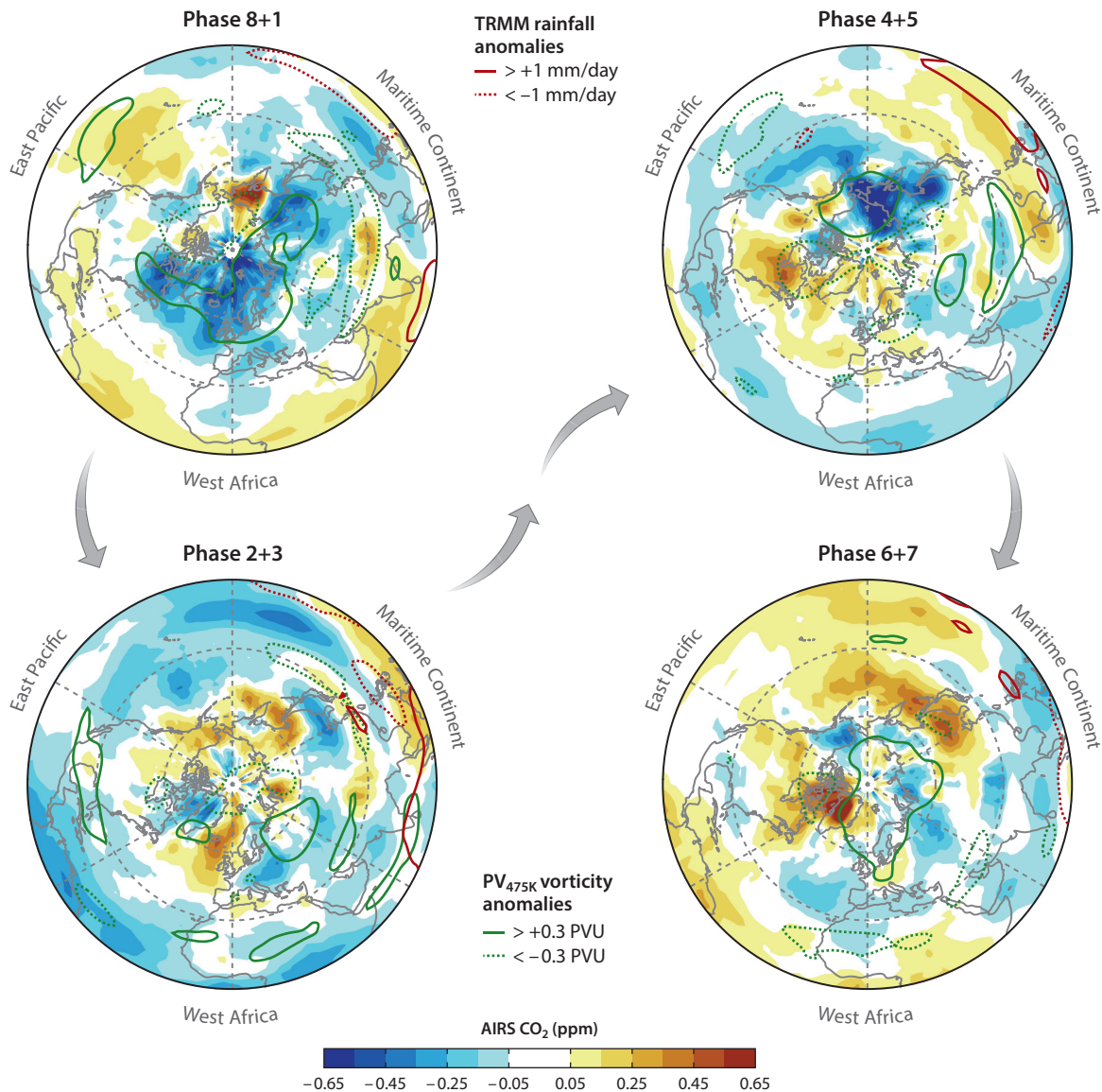
**Figure 4**

MJO-related AIRS CO<sub>2</sub> anomalies (*color*) and MJO-related rainfall anomalies (*contours*) for eight MJO phases. Abbreviations: AIRS, Atmospheric Infrared Sounder; CO<sub>2</sub>, carbon dioxide; MJO, Madden-Julian Oscillation; TRMM, Tropical Rainfall Measuring Mission. Figure adapted with permission from Li et al. (2010).

**2.2.2. Influence of stratospheric sudden warming.** In addition to the MJO signal in mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub>, stratospheric sudden warming (SSW) can also modulate CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations. SSW is an important source of variability in the polar stratosphere. During SSW, the polar stratospheric temperature increases and the circumpolar wind reverses direction in a few days (Jiang et al. 2013b). The stratospheric polar vortex weakens, the positive temperature anomalies propagate downward, and there is less sinking air in the polar region during SSW (Limpasuvan et al. 2004). SSW can influence tracer concentrations (e.g., Manney et al. 2009, Sofieva et al. 2012, Jiang et al. 2013b). Jiang et al. (2013b) investigated the influence of SSW on the mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> retrievals from AIRS. AIRS mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations were explored before (Figure 6a,c) and after (Figure 6b,d) SSW events. It was found that mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations increased by 2–3 ppm within a few days after SSW events. After the SSW, the polar vortex areas shrank. In the horizontal direction, strong northward winds can bring mid-latitude, high-concentration CO<sub>2</sub> into the polar region (Figure 6b,d). In the vertical direction, the reduced sinking air leads to less stratosphere-troposphere exchange, which can contribute to the CO<sub>2</sub> increase after the SSW (Jiang et al. 2013b). It is still a challenge to simulate the influence of SSW on model CO<sub>2</sub> (Jiang et al. 2013b).

### 2.3. Interannual Variability of CO<sub>2</sub>

In addition to the annual cycle, semiannual cycle, and intraseasonal variability, atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> also demonstrates interannual variability.

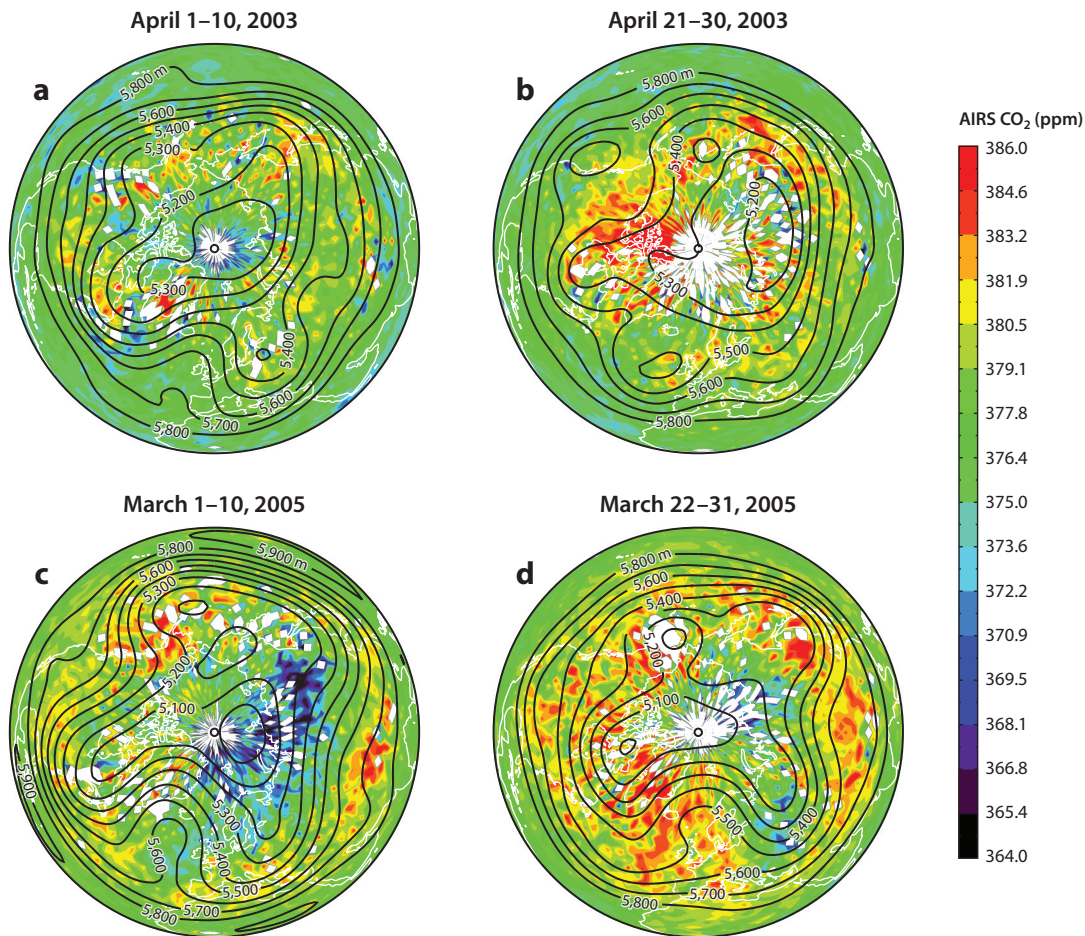


**Figure 5**

MJO-related AIRS CO<sub>2</sub> anomalies (color), MJO-related rainfall anomalies (dark red contours), and isentropic potential vorticity anomalies (dark green contours). Abbreviations: AIRS, Atmospheric Infrared Sounder; CO<sub>2</sub>, carbon dioxide; MJO, Madden-Julian Oscillation; PVU, potential vorticity unit, TRMM, Tropical Rainfall Measuring Mission. Figure adapted with permission from Li (2018).

**2.3.1. Influence of the El Niño-Southern Oscillation.** In the tropical region, the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) is the most important source of interannual variability. During ENSO events, sea surface temperature is high over the central and eastern Pacific, and convection and rain form over the central Pacific (Gage & Reid 1987). Previous studies (Bacastow 1976, Bacastow et al. 1980) suggested that the surface CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations could be modulated by ENSO. It was also noticed that the rate of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> rise increases at the surface



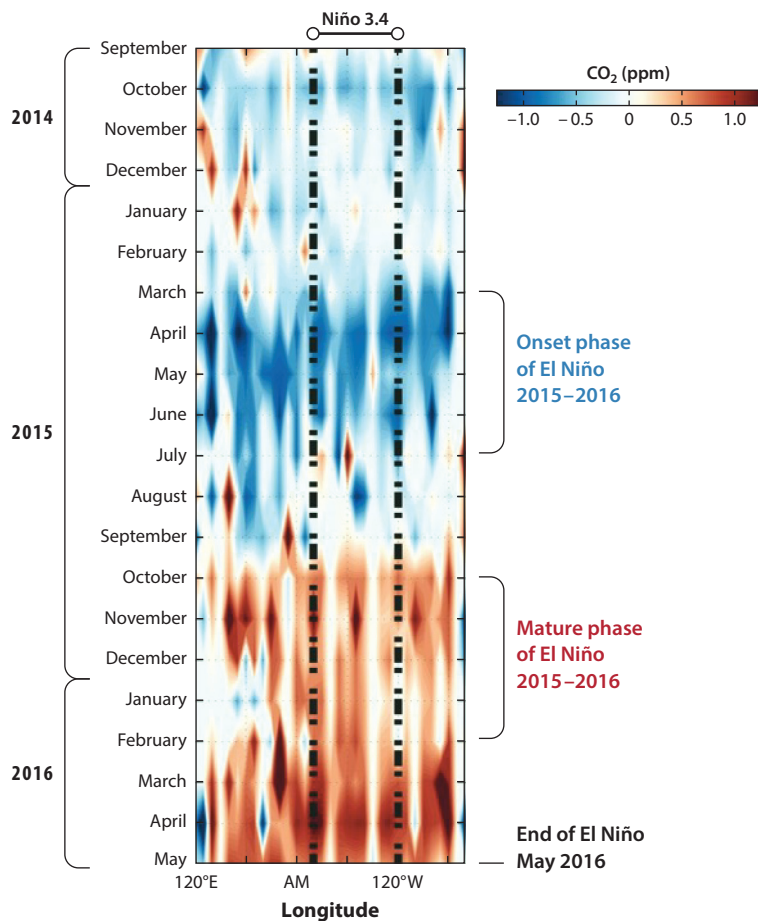


**Figure 6**

AIRS CO<sub>2</sub> data averaged in (a) April 1–10, 2003, and (c) March 1–10, 2005 (before SSW events), and (b) April 21–30, 2003, and (d) March 22–31, 2005 (after SSW events). Units for AIRS CO<sub>2</sub> are in parts per million. Black contours are NCEP2 500-hPa geopotential height data averaged over the same time periods as AIRS CO<sub>2</sub>. Abbreviations: AIRS, Atmospheric Infrared Sounder; CO<sub>2</sub>, carbon dioxide; NCEP2, National Centers for Environmental Prediction 2; SSW, stratospheric sudden warming. Figure adapted from Jiang et al. (2013b); copyright the American Meteorological Society.

during ENSO events (Keeling et al. 1995, Jones et al. 2001). During ENSO events, the upwelling of ocean water ceases at the South American coast, which decreases the CO<sub>2</sub> concentration in surface water (Feely 1987; Inoue & Sugimura 1992; Wong et al. 1993; Feely et al. 1997, 2006). However, the terrestrial biosphere becomes a larger source of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> due to the increase of respiration during ENSO events (Francey et al. 1995, Keeling et al. 1995, Jones et al. 2001). The net effect from land and ocean is that the surface CO<sub>2</sub> growth rate increases during ENSO events. These previous studies mainly focus on a few surface stations.

Satellite CO<sub>2</sub> retrievals confirm that ENSO can modulate mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentration. During ENSO, air rises over the central Pacific, which will bring high-concentration surface CO<sub>2</sub> to the mid-troposphere. Air sinks over the western Pacific, which will bring low-concentration CO<sub>2</sub> from high altitudes to the mid-troposphere. As a result, there is more AIRS mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> over the central Pacific (where air is ascending) and less AIRS



**Figure 7**

Time evolution of OCO-2 detrended  $X_{CO_2}$  anomalies averaged over 5°S to 5°N. Abbreviation: CO<sub>2</sub>, carbon dioxide; OCO-2, Orbiting Carbon Observatory 2. Figure adapted from Chatterjee et al. (2017) with permission from AAAS.

mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> over the western Pacific (where air is descending) during ENSO events (Jiang et al. 2010, Jiang et al. 2013a). Similar results are also seen in MOZART-2 mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> data; however, the ENSO signal is weaker in the model than in those from AIRS mid-tropospheric observations (Jiang et al. 2013a). Using OCO-2 column CO<sub>2</sub>, Chatterjee et al. (2017) found a strong correlation between atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> and ENSO. As shown in **Figure 7**, there is a negative  $X_{CO_2}$  anomaly during the onset phase of ENSO, which is related to the decreased upwelling in the tropical Pacific Ocean (Chatterjee et al. 2017). Positive  $X_{CO_2}$  anomalies are seen during the mature and end phase of ENSO, which is due to the terrestrial component of the carbon cycle, especially the enhanced fire emissions (Chatterjee et al. 2017). It was also found that the biosphere released more CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere during the 2015–2016 ENSO compared to normal years (Liu et al. 2017).

**2.3.2. Influence of the Tropospheric Biennial Oscillation.** The Tropospheric Biennial Oscillation (TBO) is another important source of interannual variability in the tropical region. TBO

is defined as an oscillation in the strength of the Asian monsoon. The Asian monsoon may be strong in one year and weak in another year within a period of two years (Mooley & Parthasarathy 1984). During a strong monsoon year, the strong western Walker circulation is associated with strong rising air over the Indo-Pacific (Chang & Li 2000), which can bring more CO<sub>2</sub> from the surface to the mid-troposphere (Wang et al. 2011). AIRS mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> data averaged over strong and weak monsoon years are shown in **Figure 8a,b**, respectively. The difference and corresponding significance level are shown in **Figure 8c,d**, respectively. Mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations are higher over the Indo-Pacific Ocean during strong monsoon years, which are associated with strong rising air (Wang et al. 2011). The time series of AIRS mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> data averaged over the Indo-Pacific Ocean has a periodicity of around two years and correlates well with the TBO index. A similar TBO signal is also seen in model CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations from MOZART-2, although the magnitude of the TBO CO<sub>2</sub> signal in this model is weaker compared with those from AIRS mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> data (Wang et al. 2011).

**2.3.3. Influence of annular modes.** In high latitudes, annular modes are the most important source of interannual variability (Thompson & Wallace 1998). There are two annular modes: the Northern Annular Mode (NAM) and the Southern Annular Mode. The annular modes explain ~20–30% of the total variability of the geopotential height in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres and are characterized by opposite geopotential height anomalies in the polar region and mid-latitudes (Thompson & Wallace 2000). Jiang et al. (2010) found that the NAM can influence CO<sub>2</sub> concentration. Using mid-tropospheric data from AIRS, they explored the influence of the NAM on CO<sub>2</sub>. As shown in **Figure 9a**, the detrended polar CO<sub>2</sub> concentration correlates well with the detrended and inverted NAM index with a correlation coefficient of 0.7. AIRS mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> data averaged over strong polar vortex years (2005 and 2007) and weak polar vortex years (2006 and 2008) are shown in **Figure 9b,c**, respectively. Overall, in high latitudes, there is less mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> in the polar region during strong polar vortex years than weak ones. When the polar vortex is strong, there is a strong jet stream, making it hard for CO<sub>2</sub> in mid-latitudes to penetrate into the polar region. During the strong polar vortex years, there is also increased photosynthetic uptake of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> in spring, which also contributes to negative CO<sub>2</sub> anomalies in the polar region (Russell & Wallace 2004, Schaefer et al. 2005, Jiang et al. 2010). The absolute amplitude of the CO<sub>2</sub> difference between the strong and weak polar vortex years is about 2–3 ppm, as shown in **Figure 9d**. Similar results are expected for CO<sub>2</sub> over the Southern Hemisphere high latitudes when the data become available in the future.

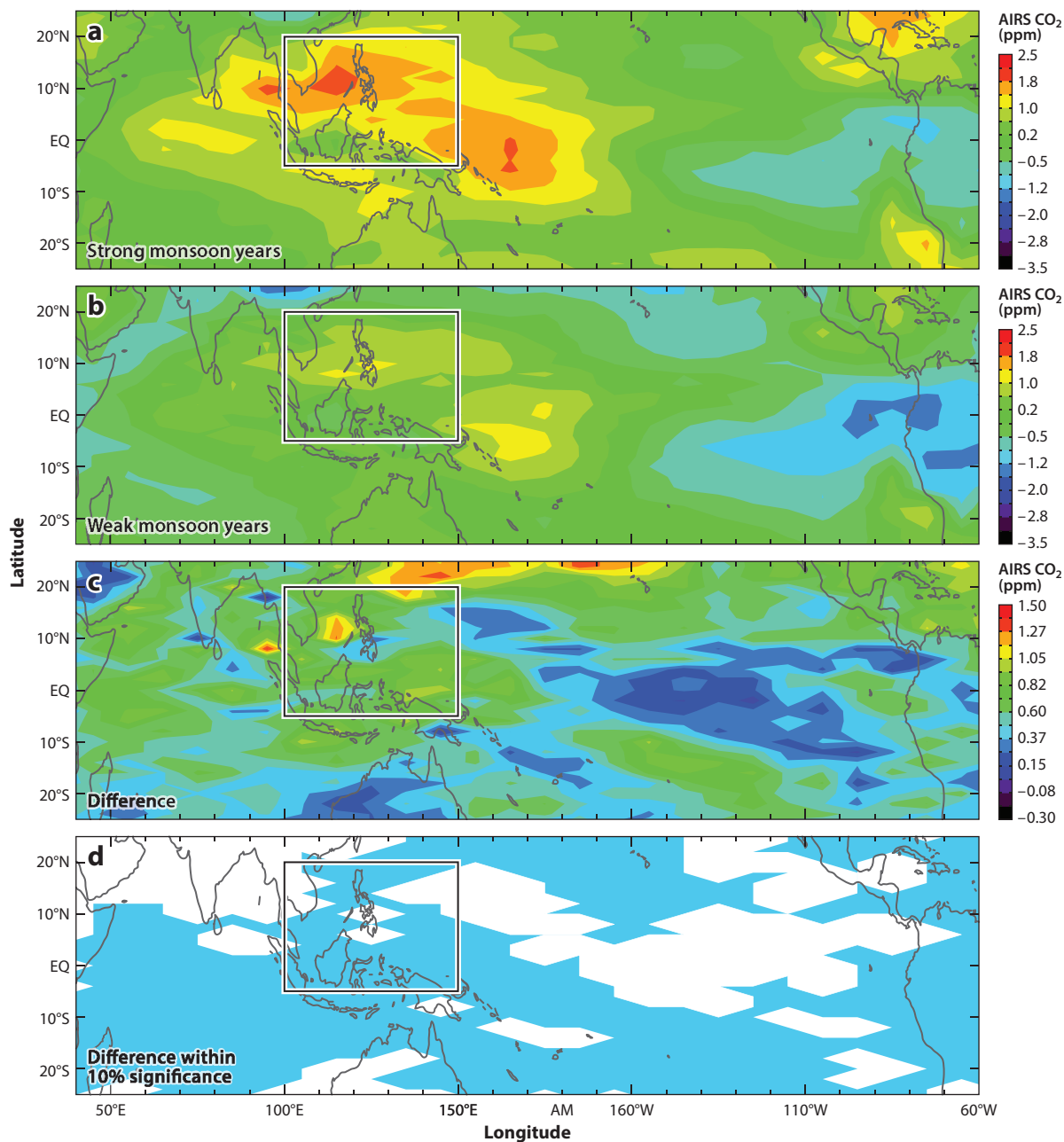
### 3. OTHER SOURCES OF CO<sub>2</sub> VARIABILITY

#### 3.1. Influence of Fire

Biomass burning is a major source for CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere. Utilizing the latest X<sub>CO<sub>2</sub></sub> retrievals from OCO-2, Heymann et al. (2017) found that there was more atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> during the fire season in 2015 at Indonesia than during normal seasons. OCO-2 X<sub>CO<sub>2</sub></sub>, background X<sub>CO<sub>2</sub></sub>, and X<sub>CO<sub>2</sub></sub> enhancements are shown in **Figure 10a,b,c**, respectively. As shown in **Figure 10c**, there was more atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> during the fire event (about 2 ppm) (Heymann et al. 2017).

#### 3.2. Influence of Volcanic Eruption

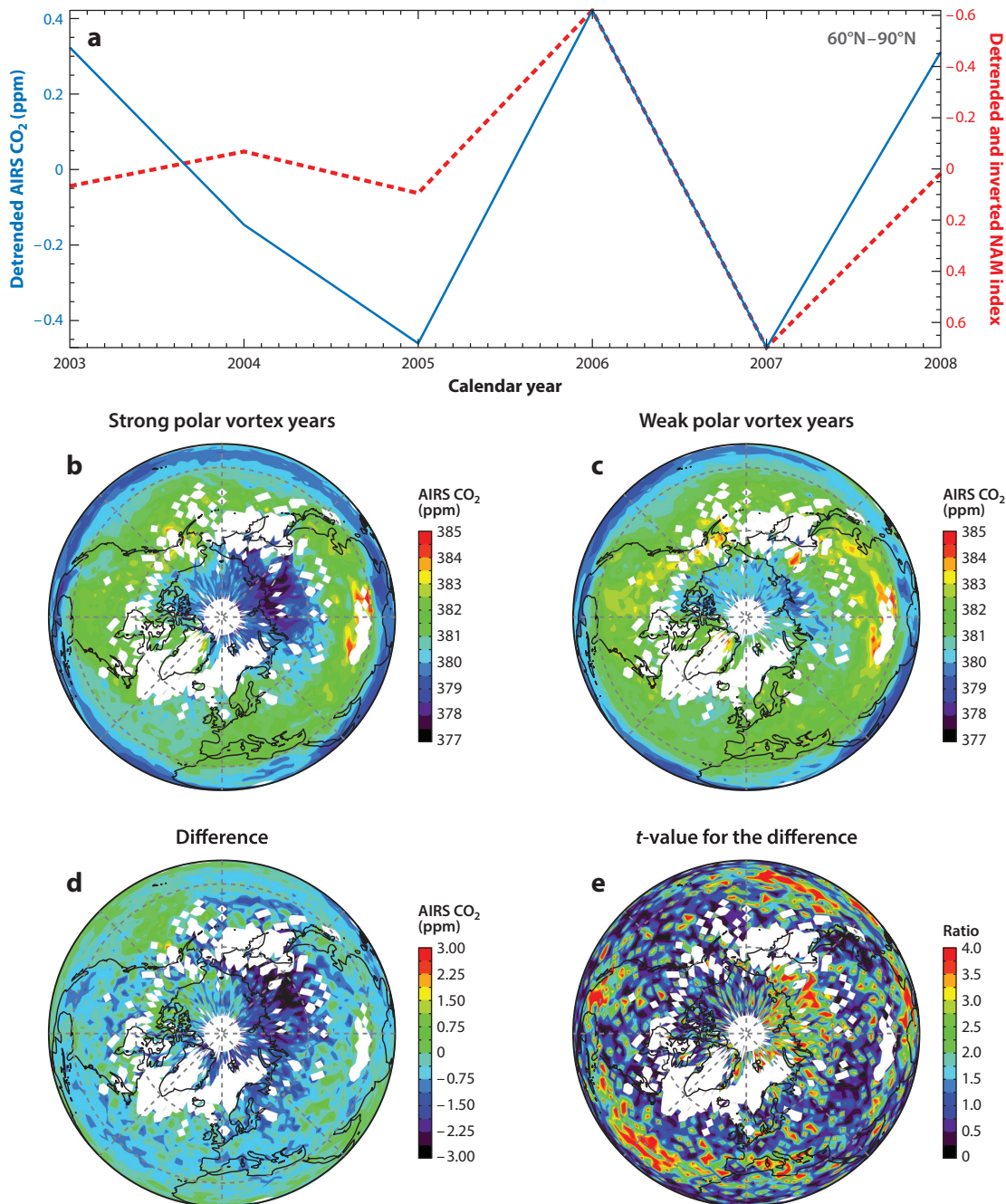
Volcanic eruptions also release CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere. Schwandner (2017) explored a CO<sub>2</sub> release event from the Yasur volcano on Tanna Island, Vanuatu (19°S, 169°E), on May 30, 2015.



**Figure 8**

AIRS detrended mid-tropospheric CO<sub>2</sub> averaged over (a) strong monsoon years (JJAS of 2003, 2005, 2007, and 2010) and (b) weak monsoon years (JJAS of 2004, 2006, and 2008). (c) CO<sub>2</sub> differences between panels a and b. (d) CO<sub>2</sub> differences within 10% significance level (blue). The black rectangle highlights the Indo-Pacific region. Abbreviations: AIRS, Atmospheric Infrared Sounder; CO<sub>2</sub>, carbon dioxide; JJAS, June, July, August, and September. Figure adapted with permission from Wang et al. (2011).

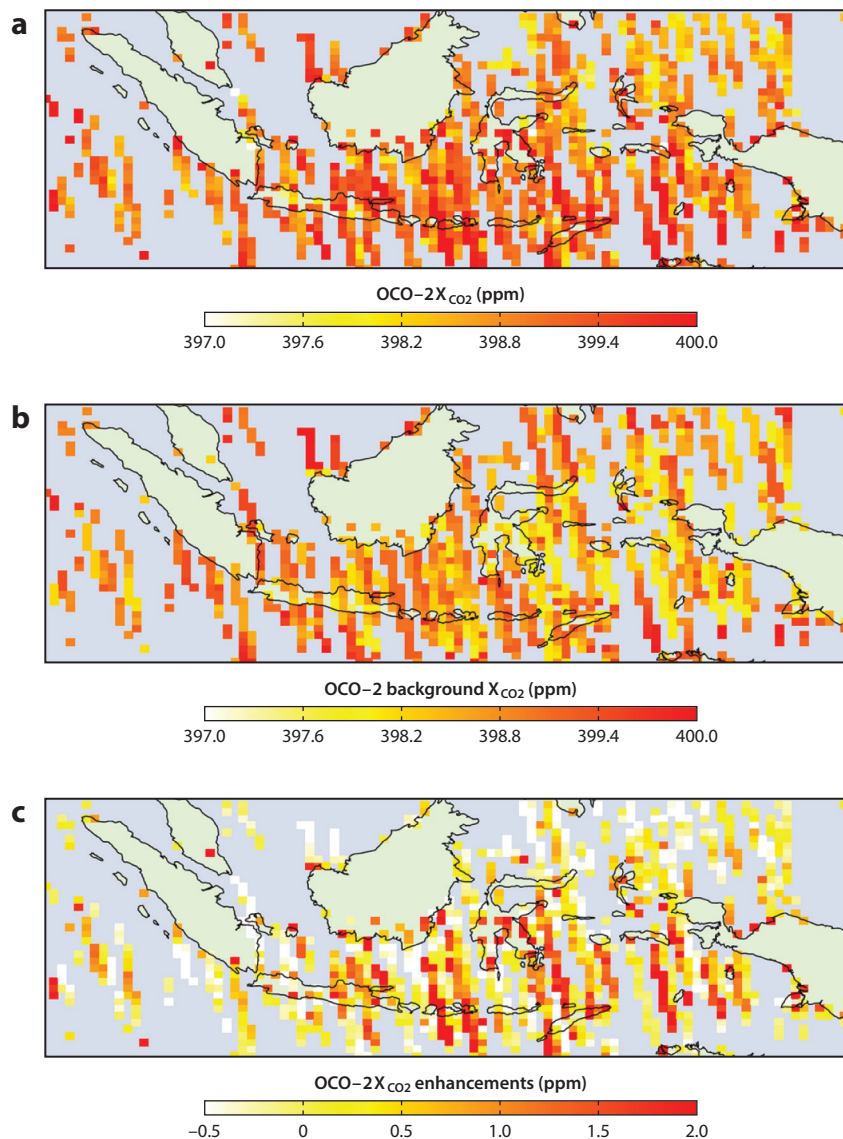




**Figure 9**

(a) AIRS detrended polar CO<sub>2</sub> (blue solid line) and detrended NAM index (red dashed line, inverted), (b) AIRS detrended CO<sub>2</sub> during strong polar vortex years (2005 and 2007), (c) AIRS detrended CO<sub>2</sub> during weak polar vortex years (2006 and 2008), (d) difference of AIRS CO<sub>2</sub> between strong and weak polar vortex years, and (e) *t*-value for the CO<sub>2</sub> difference. All CO<sub>2</sub> data are averaged from November to April. Abbreviations: AIRS, Atmospheric Infrared Sounder; CO<sub>2</sub>, carbon dioxide; NAM, Northern Annular Mode. Figure adapted with permission from Jiang et al. (2010).

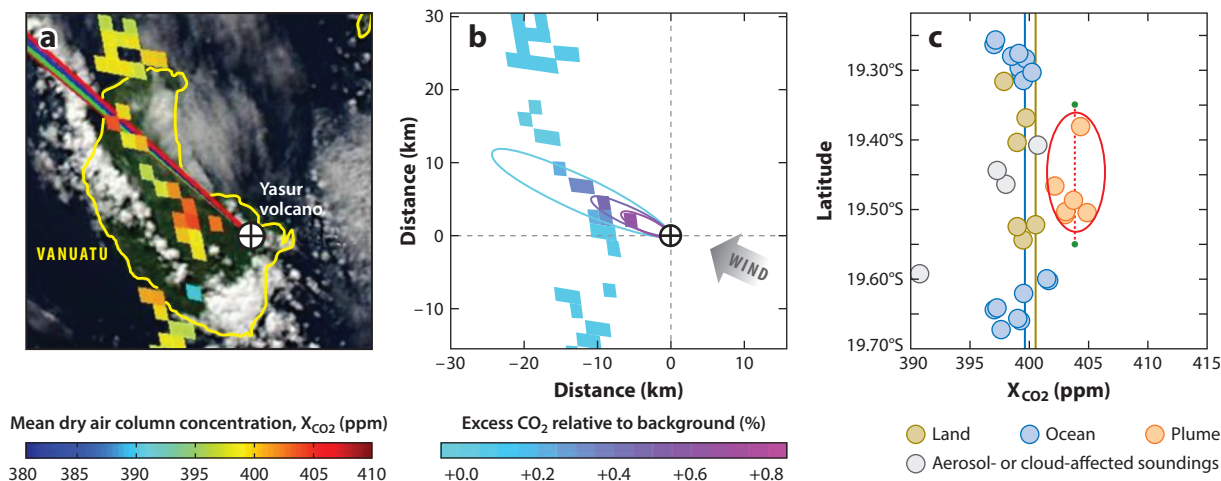




**Figure 10**

(*a*) OCO-2 X<sub>CO2</sub> in July–November 2015, (*b*) background X<sub>CO2</sub> in July–November 2015, and (*c*) X<sub>CO2</sub> enhancements for the Indonesian region. Abbreviation: OCO-2, Orbiting Carbon Observatory 2. Figure adapted with permission from Heymann et al. (2017).

As shown in **Figure 11**, OCO-2 detected a high CO<sub>2</sub> plume from the volcano, and several high X<sub>CO2</sub> footprints were found within 15 km downwind. A Gaussian plume model was used to simulate the enhancement of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> due to the eruption, and the model results were consistent with the X<sub>CO2</sub> signal from OCO-2 (Schwandner 2017). The magnitude of the CO<sub>2</sub> enhancement due to the volcanic eruption was about 3.4 ppm near the crater vent (Schwandner 2017).



**Figure 11**

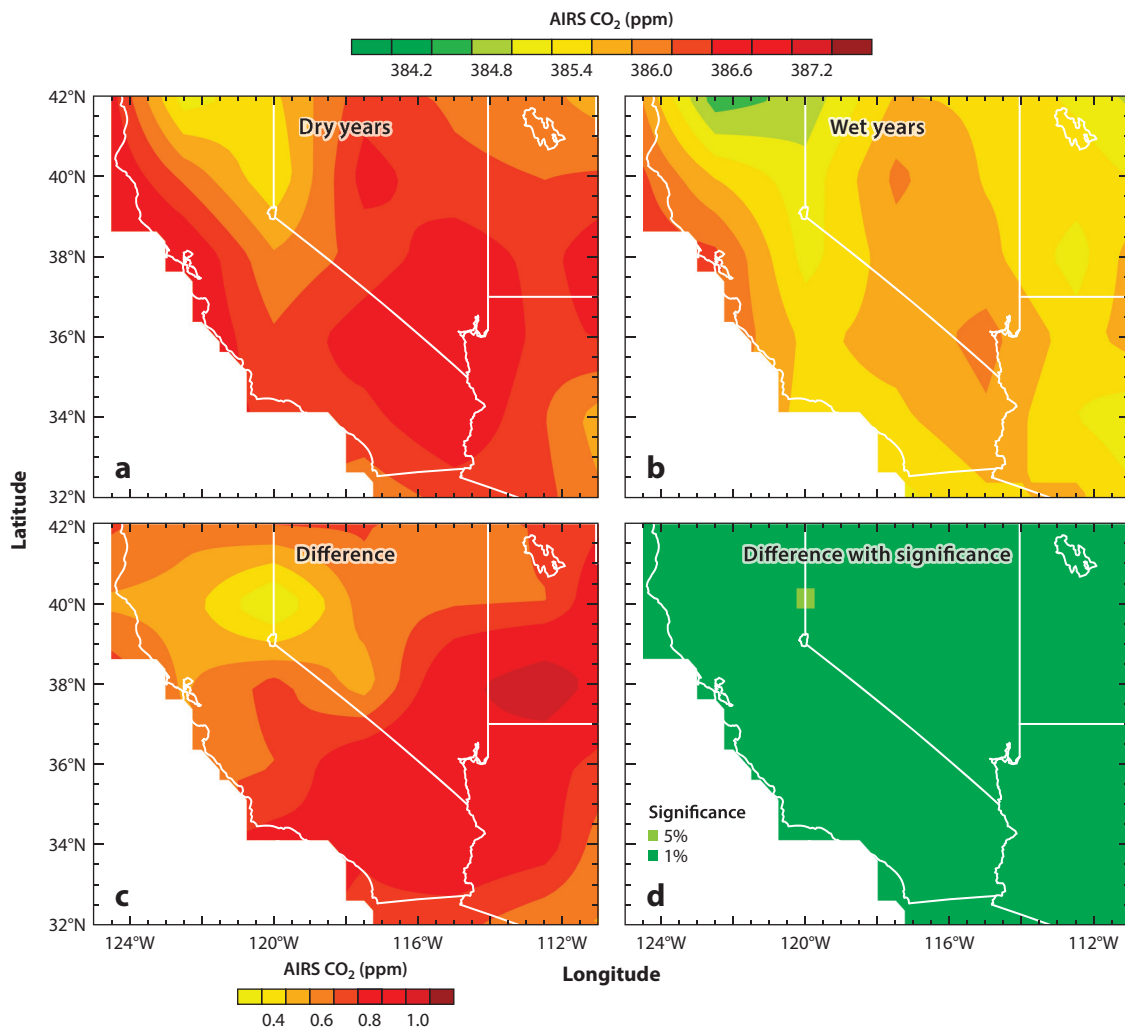
$\text{CO}_2$  plume emitted from the Yasur volcano in Vanuatu (white circle with a black outline and cross) on May 30, 2015. (a) OCO-2  $X_{\text{CO}_2}$  over MODIS composite imagery. (b) The order of magnitude of the  $X_{\text{CO}_2}$  enhancement and the extent of the plume corresponding to a model  $\text{CO}_2$  source of 41.6 kt/day at the time of overpass. (c) The magnitude of the excess shows  $X_{\text{CO}_2}$  over ocean (blue circles), land (brown circles), and plume (orange circles). The red oval highlights the volcanic plume data (orange circles), and the red dashed line is the plume mean with the green end nodes representing the extent of the detectable plume. Abbreviations:  $\text{CO}_2$ , carbon dioxide; MODIS, Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectrometer; OCO-2, Orbiting Carbon Observatory 2. Figure adapted from Schwandner (2017) with permission from AAAS.

### 3.3. Influence of Drought

Atmospheric  $\text{CO}_2$  concentrations can also be influenced by droughts, as demonstrated by Buermann et al. (2007) for the Mauna Loa record. Using satellite retrievals, Jiang et al. (2017) analyzed the impact of droughts on mid-tropospheric  $\text{CO}_2$  over the southwestern United States. Mid-tropospheric  $\text{CO}_2$  averaged over dry months [June, July, August, and September (JJAS) of 2003, 2007, and 2010] and wet months (JJAS of 2006, 2008, 2011, and 2012) are shown in **Figure 12a,b**, respectively, and the difference between dry years and wet years and corresponding significance are shown in **Figure 12c,d**, respectively. In this region, mid-tropospheric  $\text{CO}_2$  concentrations in dry years are  $\sim 1$  ppm higher than concentrations in wet years. Surface temperature is higher during droughts, which leads to an unstable environment and enhanced rising air. The increasing vertical motion can bring more  $\text{CO}_2$  from the surface to upper levels. In addition, there is less  $\text{CO}_2$  uptake from the biosphere due to reduced plant photosynthesis and greater soil respiration during droughts, which can contribute to the positive  $\text{CO}_2$  anomaly during dry years (Jiang et al. 2017).

## 4. CONCLUSION

Recent satellite  $\text{CO}_2$  data provide global distributions of  $\text{CO}_2$ , which offer a unique opportunity to explore  $\text{CO}_2$  variability at different timescales (e.g., trend, intraseasonal, semiannual, annual, and interannual variability). Different satellite  $\text{CO}_2$  retrievals (e.g., AIRS, ACE, IASI, GOSAT, OCO-2, and TES) capture the correct  $\text{CO}_2$  seasonal cycle when compared with in situ  $\text{CO}_2$  measurements. The  $\text{CO}_2$  annual cycle has the largest amplitude at the surface, which decays with altitude. In addition to the annual cycle, atmospheric  $\text{CO}_2$  concentration also demonstrates a semiannual cycle, which is related to the interaction between biosphere and atmosphere. Satellite



**Figure 12**

AIRS CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations averaged in (a) dry years (JJAS of 2003, 2007, and 2010) and (b) wet years (JJAS of 2006, 2008, 2011, and 2012), (c) CO<sub>2</sub> differences between panels a and b, and (d) CO<sub>2</sub> differences within 5% significance level (*light green*) and 1% significance level (*dark green*). Abbreviations: AIRS, Atmospheric Infrared Sounder; CO<sub>2</sub>, carbon dioxide; JJAS, June, July, August, and September. Figure adapted with permission from Jiang et al. (2017).

CO<sub>2</sub> measurements can also be used to explore the intraseasonal variability of CO<sub>2</sub>. The 30- to 90-day MJO oscillation can influence atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations with a magnitude of 1 ppm at tropics and high latitudes. During an SSW event, CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations increase by 2–3 ppm within a few days. In addition to the semiannual cycle, annual cycle, and intraseasonal variability, atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> also demonstrates variability at interannual timescales. ENSO, an important, large-scale component of interannual climate variability in the tropics, can modulate CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations with a magnitude of 1–2 ppm. TBO is related to the strengths of monsoon and western Walker circulation; it can modulate CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations over the Indo-Pacific region. At high latitudes, CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations can be influenced by the NAM. There is less CO<sub>2</sub> in the

polar region during the positive NAM years because of weak horizontal mixing and increased plant uptake of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> in spring. In addition to the intraseasonal and interannual variability, atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations can also be modulated by fire, volcanic eruptions, and droughts. These results will help us better understand the natural variability of CO<sub>2</sub> and the interactions of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> with biosphere, biomass burning, and atmospheric circulation, which are critical for investigating the carbon budget.

Nearly half a century ago, a seminal paper by Lovelock (1971) argued for the usefulness of chlorofluorocarbons as indicators of atmospheric movements. Results summarized in this paper suggest that CO<sub>2</sub> has largely fulfilled Lovelock's vision for tracking atmospheric movement and circulation. It remains a challenge for atmospheric models to simulate the global patterns of variability of CO<sub>2</sub> summarized here. For example, preliminary modeling suggested that deep convection, which lofts CO<sub>2</sub> from the planetary boundary layer to the mid-troposphere, is underestimated in transport models (Jiang et al. 2008). Results from the variability of CO<sub>2</sub> can help us to identify possible deficiencies in the models and improve the models in the future.

## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors are not aware of any affiliations, memberships, funding, or financial holdings that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this review.

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## Errata

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