

Sources and Sinks of Carbon Dioxide in Populous Asia

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HIGHLIGHTS

- CO₂ sources and sinks are estimated for East, South and Southeast Asia by inverse modelling and terrestrial ecosystem models.
- These Asian regions are either a carbon sink or source neutral but the uncertainties are significant between methods particularly for East Asia.
- High quality observations and model synthesis is recommended for monitoring and verification.

ABSTRACT The recently concluded 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) agreed to limit the increase in global temperature to less than 2°C above pre-industrial levels, with a more aspirational target of 1.5°C. Achieving these policy goals will require extraordinary input from the scientific community to define anthropogenic emission targets that account for natural biosphere sources and sinks of carbon dioxide (CO₂), consistent with the climate targets. Asian countries, being densely populated and emerging global economic powers, are key players in defining future emission trajectories. The average fossil emissions from the three regions are estimated to be 2.4, 0.5 and 0.3 petagrammes of carbon per year (PgC yr⁻¹) for East, South and Southeast Asia, respectively, and have increased by 67, 58 and 33 percent over the period 2003–2012. Here, we estimate land biosphere CO₂ fluxes using: 1) simulations of terrestrial ecosystem models driven with global and regional atmospheric and climate observations and 2) atmospheric CO₂ inverse models. Based on observations of atmospheric CO₂ and inverse models, we show that on average over the period 2003–2012, the land biosphere (excluding fossil fuel emissions) in the three Asian regions in our study is either a CO₂ sink (0.35 PgC yr⁻¹ in East Asia) or source neutral (South and Southeast Asia). Consistently, our terrestrial ecosystem modelling suggests that the land biosphere of South and Southeast Asia were nearly neutral, but disagrees for East Asia.

KEYWORDS Asian CO₂ sources and sinks; atmospheric inversion; terrestrial ecosystem model

1. Introduction

Tropical and temperate Asia is home to 3.72 billion people and is undergoing rapid social changes and economic growth. We define the three Asian regions for this study as: East Asia comprising China, Japan, the Koreas and Mongolia; South Asia comprising India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bhutan; and Southeast Asia comprising Myanmar, Lao PDR, Viet Nam, Cambodia, Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Singapore, Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea (Figure 1).

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the Asia-Pacific Network for Global Change Research (APN) and the Global Carbon Project (GCP). It fully relies on the participants' voluntary contribution. The ensemble of inverse and ecosystem modelling fluxes and uncertainties have been synthesised in the REgional Carbon Cycle Assessment and Processes (RECCAP) project (Patra et al., 2013; Piao et al., 2012; Canadell et al., unpublished). These results suggest large uncertainties in the estimated CO₂ fluxes by different methods and inconsistencies in the carbon flow accounted by the two modelling approaches.

This report aims to update the CO₂ source and sink budgets using recent model simulations as more atmospheric measurements have become available for inverse modelling, and by the terrestrial ecosystem model fluxes following inclusion due to land use and land cover change (LULCC).

2. Methodology

There are two main flux components in the terrestrial carbon balance: anthropogenic emissions (from fossil fuel consumption, cement production and deforestation) and ecosystem flux (balance between gross primary production and autotrophic respiration + heterotrophic respiration + disturbances such as fire and insect damage). Two principal approaches are used to estimate terrestrial CO₂ fluxes: top-down and bottom-up approaches. The top-down approach estimates the terrestrial CO₂ flux that is optimally consistent with atmospheric CO₂ concentration. The bottom-up approach estimates the ecosystem carbon cycle by considering the internal biochemical mechanisms of carbon flows.

The bottom-up CO₂ fluxes are estimated as net biome production (NBP) using five dynamic global vegetation models (DGVMs), namely, the Community Land Model version 4.5 (CLM4), Joint UK Land Environment Simulator ver. 3.234 (JULES), Lund-Potsdam-Jena DGVM wsl (LPJwsl), LPJ GUESS, Orchidee-CN (O-CN), and the Vegetation Integrative Simulator for Trace gases (VISIT). The DGVMs are run using climate data-set from the Climate Research Unit (CRU) TS3.2 and prescribed annual LULCC dataset from the Histroy Database of the global Environment (HYDE) (ref. Kondo et al., 2016, and references therein). The models compute the land use fluxes by adjusting carbon pools over time for defined transitions, e.g., forest to pasture. Fire emissions associated with land use change are accounted by all models but only a few are able to estimate emissions from wildfires.

The top-down fluxes of CO₂ sources/sinks are estimated by using seven atmospheric transport models, observed CO₂ concentrations and inverse modelling/data assimilation. In this study, seven inverse models were used, namely, GELCA: 64-region inversion system using Lagrangian-Eulerian coupled transport, MACC: 4-dimensional variational data assimilation system, WU: CarbonTracker Europe, ACTM: 84-region matrix inversion system, CSIRO: 130-region matrix inversion system,

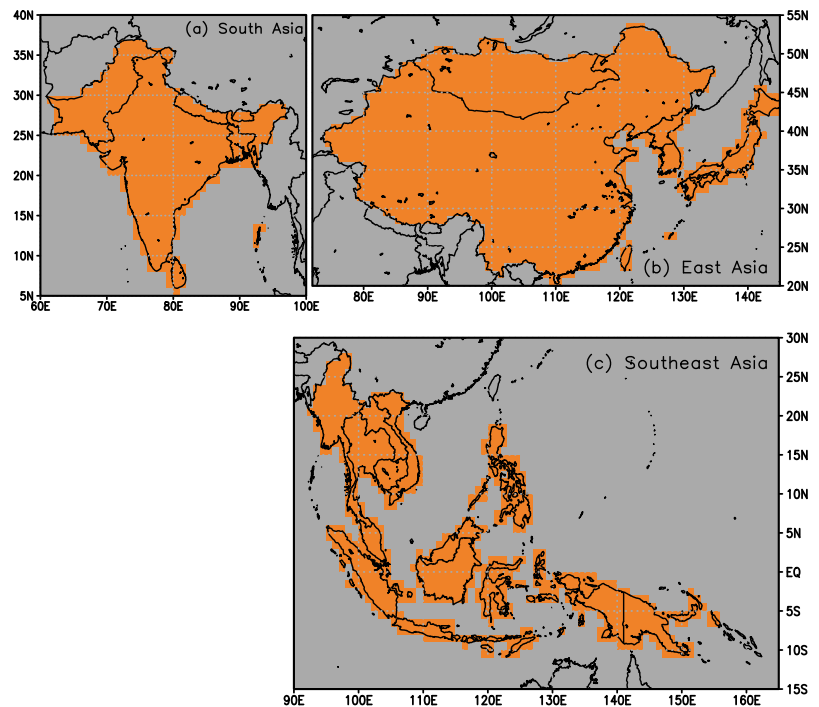


FIGURE 1. The three focus regions of our study - South Asia (top-left), East Asia (top-right) and Southeast Asia (bottom).

JMA: 22-region matrix inversion system, and CAO: inversion system using empirical orthogonal functions (as described in Thompson et al., 2016). The inverse models were driven using different prior flux information, atmospheric transport models, and CO₂ observation datasets. In this way, the ensemble range resulting from the use of all inversions represents the uncertainties of these various components.

The top-down and bottom-up results are combined and compared to produce a mean average and uncertainty estimates for CO₂ fluxes for three Asian regions as defined in this study (Figure 1).

We additionally investigated trends in the normalised difference vegetation index (NDVI), precipitation (PCP) and temperature (T) for understanding the role of climate variations on the carbon assimilation capacity of the temperate (East Asia), tropical (Southeast Asia) and mixed (South Asia) ecosystems. Detailed results are not presented here for the sake of brevity.

3. Results and Discussions

Figure 2 shows the time-series of mean CO₂ fluxes estimated by top-down and bottom-up approaches and emissions due to Fossil Fuel consumption and Cement production (FFC) for the three Asian regions. Detailed statistics of uncertainties for model-to-model differences are given in Table 1 along with long-term mean normalised difference vegetation index (NDVI), precipitation (PCP) and temperature (T). The uncertainties in CO₂ fluxes are based on 1- σ standard deviation for model differences. The mean values and uncertainties in FFC emissions are

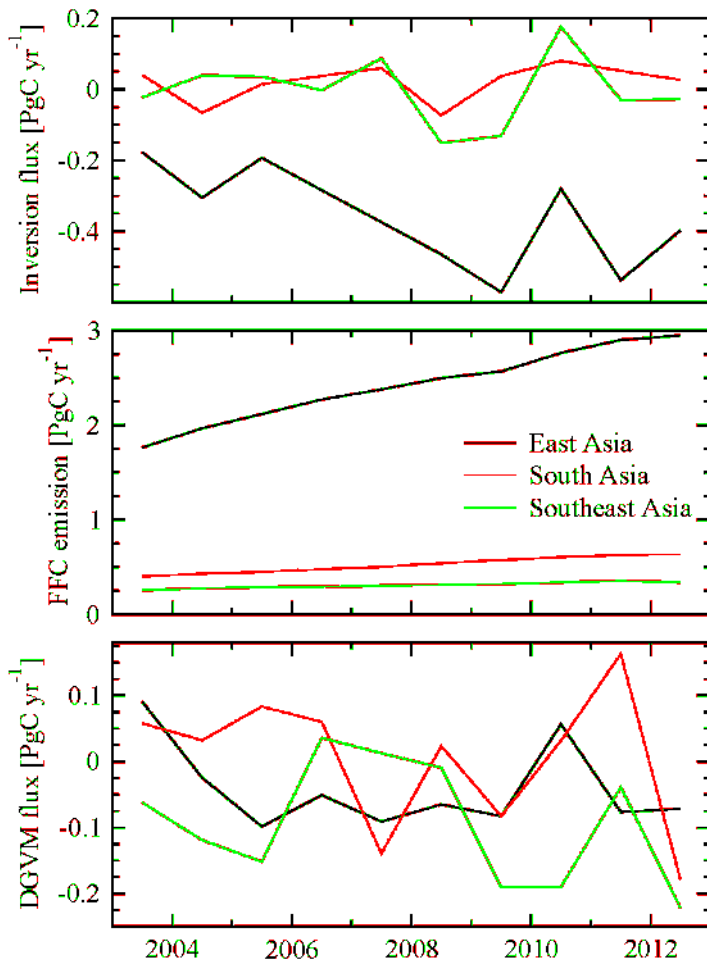


FIGURE 2. Time-series of multi-model mean CO₂ fluxes (top row: top-down method, bottom row: bottom-up method) and FFC emissions (middle row). Uncertainties for model-to-model differences are given in Table 1.

rates are constrained by atmospheric data, the distribution of the uptake between regions is only weakly constrained and may be reflected as weak or no increase in uptake over South and Southeast Asia. The latter two regions are also largely void of atmospheric CO₂ measurements, while the East Asian fluxes are fairly well constrained by measurements in Japan, South Korea and China. A further possibility for the weak to no increase in uptake over South and Southeast Asia may be an underestimate of the

estimated from the values used by 7 inverse modelling systems.

In Figure 2, one can see that the FFC emissions increased rapidly for the East Asia region (118 TgC yr⁻²), from 1.76±0.15 PgC yr⁻¹ in 2003 to 2.95±0.58 PgC yr⁻¹ in 2012. During the same period of time (2003–2012), the top-down models estimated an increase in the uptake of CO₂ by the terrestrial ecosystem at the mean rate of 22 TgC yr⁻² (see also Thompson et al., 2016). The mean CO₂ uptake increase simulated by the bottom-up models is 16 TgC yr⁻². However, the net CO₂ flux estimated for 2012 is much greater with the top-down models (-0.40±0.29 PgC yr⁻¹) compared to the bottom-up models (-0.07±0.06 PgC yr⁻¹) for East Asia. The 2012 mean CO₂ fluxes for South and Southeast Asia are estimated to be 0.03±0.08 and -0.03±0.16 PgC yr⁻¹, respectively, with the top-down models, and -0.18±0.14 and -0.22±0.10 PgC yr⁻¹, respectively, with the bottom-up models. Although the net fluxes show reasonably good agreements for the South and Southeast Asia regions, the rates of uptake change are distinctly different for top-down (1 TgC yr⁻² and 0.5 TgC yr⁻², respectively) and bottom-up (24 TgC yr⁻² and 16 TgC yr⁻², respectively) models.

The DGVM simulated increase rates of uptake are quite similar for all three regions, while for the inverse models we find a large increase in uptake for East Asia but almost no trends for South and Southeast Asia. This could be due to overestimation of CO₂ fertilisation by the DGVMs given that most models do not include nitrogen-limitation on gross primary production (GPP) and/or the LULCC database prescribed lower trends in deforestation. The differences in the rate of regional CO₂ uptake increase could also arise from an overestimation of the uptake increase over East Asia and an underestimation over South and Southeast Asia. This may be possible because although the global uptake

	CO ₂ flux (model mean ± 1-σ difference) units: PgC yr ⁻¹			Biosphere and meteorology (mean ± 1-σ inter-annual variation)		
	TOP-DOWN	BOTTOM-UP	FFC	NDVI	PCP (MM D ⁻¹)	T (°C)
East Asia	-0.36 ± 0.28	-0.04 ± 0.08	2.40 ± 0.33	0.33 ± 0.005	51.39 ± 2.90	6.81 ± 0.38
South Asia	-0.02 ± 0.17	0.005 ± 0.14	0.52 ± 0.11	0.39 ± 0.007	79.88 ± 5.32	22.3 ± 0.24
Southeast Asia	0.00 ± 0.19	-0.09 ± 0.15	0.31 ± 0.06	0.45 ± 0.002	170.7 ± 9.13	20.2 ± 0.11

TABLE 1. Mean values (± 1-σ difference/variation) of top-down and bottom-up CO₂ fluxes (1 Pg = 1015 g; 1 Tg = 1012 g) and the climate drivers for the period 2003–2012. The model-to-model differences (1-σ standard deviations) are always greater than those estimated for interannual variations for the top-down and bottom-up fluxes.

increase in FFC emissions in these regions, which is assumed a posteriori and is subtracted from the total optimised CO₂ flux (see Thompson et al., 2016).

4. Conclusions

One of the biggest challenges in implementing mitigation policies is the capacity to monitor, report and verify (MRV) as required by the UNFCCC. The new Paris Agreement further emphasises the need for robust and transparent reporting of greenhouse gas fluxes in order to enable successful implementation. Here, we have estimated CO₂ fluxes using two complementary approaches (top-down and bottom-up) for the three regions of the populous Asia. Use of multiple models enable us to show more robust model ensemble means of CO₂ fluxes that suggest the Asian land biosphere is generally source-neutral, albeit there are large uncertainties associated with the ensemble mean values. Differences between top-down and bottom-up approaches also suggest both lack of higher density data to drive the models and possibly missing processes.

At the large regional scales such as those reported in this study, there will always be the need to employ a diverse array of models that capture enough variability and flux components. In order to further improve the models and ultimately the quantification of the Asian greenhouse gases budget, we require a higher density of atmospheric observations, biospheric flux measurements such as eddy-covariance, and increased spatial resolution of land use and land cover changes. We have initiated measurements of CO₂, CH₄, N₂O, SF₆, CO and H₂ from Comilla, Bangladesh since 2012. This site is strategically located for sampling the air mass from the South Asia region during most seasons of the year. Noting the importance, continuation of this measurement programme is now supported by the Ministry of Environment, Japan. We have also begun to work closely with inventory and space agencies, whose data provides new insights into the rapid land use and land cover changes in the region; this undoubtedly will reduce uncertainties of the resulting fluxes.

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