STAR FORMATION ACTIVITY IN THE LONG, FILAMENTARY INFRARED DARK CLOUD G53.2

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ABSTRACT

We present star formation activity in the infrared dark cloud (IRDC) G53.2, a remarkable IRDC located at Galactic coordinates \((l, b) \sim (53^\circ2, 0^\circ0)\) based on the census of young stellar object (YSO) candidates. IRDC G53.2 was previously identified as several IRDCs in mid-IR images, but it is in fact a long \((\geq 45\text{ pc})\) cloud, well consistent with a CO cloud at \(v \sim 23\text{ km s}^{-1}\) (or \(d \sim 1.7\text{ kpc}\)). We present a point-source catalog of IRDC G53.2 that contains \(\sim 370\) sources from our photometry of the Spitzer MIPS 24 \(\mu\text{m}\) data and Galactic Legacy Infrared Mid-Plane Survey Extraordinaire Catalog. The classification of the identified sources based on their spectral index and control field analysis to remove field star contamination reveals that IRDC G53.2 is an active star-forming region with \(\sim 300\) YSO candidates. We compare the YSO classification based on spectral index, mid-IR colors, and the wavelength range used, which results in consistent classification, except for flat-spectrum objects, with some ambiguity between Class I and II. Comparison of the YSO population in IRDC G53.2 with those of other nearby star-forming clusters indicates that they are similar in age; on the other hand, stronger association with mid-IR stellar sources in IRDC G53.2 compared with other IRDCs indicates that IRDC G53.2 is at a later evolutionary stage among IRDCs. Spatial distribution of the YSO candidates in IRDC G53.2 shows a good correlation with \(^{13}\text{CO}\) column density and far-IR emission, and earlier-class objects tend to be more clustered in the regions with higher density.

Key words: infrared: stars – ISM: clouds – stars: formation – stars: pre-main sequence

Supporting material: machine-readable table

1. INTRODUCTION

Massive stars \((M \gtrsim 8M_\odot)\) have a great influence in the interstellar medium and the galactic environment by providing ionizing photons and kinetic energy, enriching heavy elements, and so on. Nonetheless, compared with low-mass stars, the formation process of massive stars still remains unclear because direct observations of high-mass protostars are challenging owing to their rarity, long distances, and short lifetimes. Infrared dark clouds (IRDCs), which are identified as silhouettes against the bright Galactic background in mid-IR, are cold \((< 20\text{ K})\) and very dense \((> 10^5 \text{ cm}^{-3})\) clouds with high column densities \((\sim 10^{21} – 10^{22} \text{ cm}^{-2})\); Carey et al. 1998, 2000; Egan et al. 1998; Pillai et al. 2006; Peretto & Fuller 2010; Ragan et al. 2011. Thus, IRDCs are believed to be the precursors to massive stars and star clusters. Millimeter/far-IR clumps/cores found in IRDCs with masses from a few tens to thousands of solar masses support this (e.g., Rathborne et al. 2006; Henning et al. 2010), while the investigation of star formation in the IRDC at Galactic coordinates \((l, b) \sim (48^\circ66, -0^\circ30)\) using Spitzer data (van der Wiel & Shipman 2008) showed a diverse distribution in the mass of young stellar objects (YSOs), with no massive \((> 8M_\odot)\) ones, although their sample size was small \((< 20)\).

Since IRDCs were cataloged from the Midcourse Space Experiment (MSX) 8 \(\mu\text{m}\) data (MSXDC catalog; Simon et al. 2006a) and more recently from the Spitzer Galactic Legacy Infrared Mid-Plane Survey Extraordinaire (GLIMPSE; Benjamin et al. 2003) \(^3\) 8 \(\mu\text{m}\) data (Peretto & Fuller 2009), several studies on physical properties and star formation characteristics of IRDCs via multiwavebands from mid- and far-IR to radio have been published (e.g., Rathborne et al. 2006; Simon et al. 2006b; Chambers et al. 2009; Battersby et al. 2010; Jackson et al. 2010). Most studies have mainly focused on statistical properties of IRDCs (or near IRDCs) themselves or star formation activities on clump or core scales rather than on a stellar scale represented by mid-IR detection. The IRDCs in the previous studies are composed of several clumps in a diverse mass range (Ragan et al. 2009; Henning et al. 2010), and as IRDC clumps evolve, they tend to be more associated with star formation tracers, including mid-IR (24 \(\mu\text{m}\)) stellar sources (Chambers et al. 2009; Battersby et al. 2010). However, only a small fraction of IRDC clumps that have thus far been investigated are associated with 24 \(\mu\text{m}\) emission features (Ragan et al. 2009). The number of 24 \(\mu\text{m}\) stellar sources in IRDCs is usually very limited (van der Wiel & Shipman 2008; Henning et al. 2010), too few for a proper statistical analysis of star formation in individual IRDCs after the clumps (i.e., the precursors to massive stars and clusters) further fragment. Therefore, an investigation on IRDCs with many young stars (i.e., large number of stellar sources detected in mid-IR) such as the one presented in this study and comparison with star formation activities in other well-studied star-forming regions are crucial to understanding the statistical properties of star formation (e.g., YSO population, star formation rate, or initial mass function) in IRDCs.

In this paper, we present star formation activity in an IRDC located at Galactic coordinates \((l, b) \sim (53^\circ2, 0^\circ0)\). This IRDC (IRDC G53.2, hereafter) is long and filamentary, extending \(\gtrsim 1\text{ kpc}\) in the mid-IR images as seen in Figure 1, and it shows a number of bright mid-IR stellar sources distributed along its filamentary structure. IRDC G53.2 was previously identified as three separate IRDCs in the MSXDC catalog (MSXDC G053.11+00.05, MSXDC G053.25+00.04, MSXDC

\(^3\) http://www.astro.wisc.edu/glimpse/glimpsedata.html
Figure 1. Three-color image of IRDC G53.2 produced from Spitzer IRAC 5.8 μm (B), IRAC 8.0 μm (G), and MIPS 24 μm (R) images. The magenta contours are from the GRS $^{13}$CO $J = 1-0$ integrated intensity map at $v = 15-30$ km s$^{-1}$ (see Section 2 and Figure 2). The outermost contour level, which defines the boundary of IRDC G53.2, is $T_{\text{mb}} dv = 6.3$ K km s$^{-1}$ or the mean antenna temperature $T_h = 0.48 T_{\text{mb}} = 0.2$ K. The Bolocam Galactic Plane Survey (Aguirre et al. 2011) 1.2 mm contours are also overlaid in white. The previously identified three IRDCs in the MSXDC catalog (Simon et al. 2006a) are marked.

Figure 2. Left: $^{13}$CO $J = 1-0$ integrated intensity map of IRDC G53.2 region. The velocity range is from $v_{\text{LSR}} = +15$ to $+30$ km s$^{-1}$. The scale bar shows the integrated intensity scale, and the contour levels are drawn at $T_{\text{mb}} dv = 3.1, 6.3, 7.9, 11.0, 15.7$ K km s$^{-1}$ (or the mean antenna temperature $T_h = 0.48 T_{\text{mb}} = 0.1, 0.2, 0.25, 0.35,$ and $0.5$ K). The inset shows the average spectrum of the cloud, and the square box marks the area of Figure 1. Right: Mean velocity of the $^{13}$CO gas in IRDC G53.2. The velocity scale (km s$^{-1}$) is given by the scale bar at the bottom. The contour levels of the integrated intensity are overlaid.

G053.31+00.00; Simon et al. 2006a) as presented in Figure 1, and as 56 IRDCs in the Spitzer IRDC catalog (Peretto & Fuller 2009); however, we have found that these individual IRDCs in the previous two catalogs lying between $l \sim 53^\circ$ and $54^\circ$ are well consistent with a CO cloud at $v \sim 23$ km s$^{-1}$. Therefore, in this study, we consider these separate IRDCs in the mid-IR image to be associated, and we investigate the overall star formation activity in IRDC G53.2 using a catalog of YSO candidates constructed from Spitzer data. This paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we define IRDC G53.2 based on the associated molecular cloud and present its physical parameters. In Section 3, we describe the point-source catalog (PSC) of IRDC G53.2, followed by selection and classification of YSO candidates in Section 4 and accounting...
for contaminations in Section 5. We then discuss different schemes of YSO classification, the characteristics of star formation in IRDC G53.2 in terms of the stellar population, and spatial distribution of the YSO candidates in Section 6. In Section 7, we give our summary and conclusions.

2. MOLECULAR CLOUD ASSOCIATED WITH IRDC G53.2

IRDC G53.2, seen as several separate filamentary clouds in the mid-IR images (Figure 1), coincides with a CO cloud at \( v \sim 23 \text{ km s}^{-1} \). We use the \(^{13}\text{CO}\) integrated intensity data from the Boston University–Five College Radio Astronomy Observatory Galactic Ring Survey (GRS; Jackson et al. 2006) to determine the distance and the mass of IRDC G53.2. Figure 2 shows the integrated intensity and the mean velocity distributions of the \(^{13}\text{CO}\) emission in the area of IRDC G53.2. We integrate the GRS cube data from 15 to 30 km s\(^{-1}\), which covers essentially all of the CO emission associated with the cloud (see the average spectrum of the cloud in the inset of Figure 2). In Figure 2, the cloud is elongated over \( \sim 1'5 \) in the Galactic plane (for the cloud size determination, see below), but we note that the CO cloud at low brightness level extends as far as \( \gtrsim 2'4 \). The mean velocity of the cloud varies from 22 to 24 km s\(^{-1}\) from the western to the eastern part of the cloud (Figure 2), and the mean velocity of the entire cloud is \( +22.9 \text{ km s}^{-1} \). Assuming a flat rotation curve with \( R_0 = 8.5 \text{ kpc} \) and \( \Theta_0 = 220 \text{ km s}^{-1} \), the kinematic distance to the cloud is 1.7 kpc. In this paper, we adopt 1.7 kpc as the distance to IRDC G53.2.

In order to obtain the mass of IRDC G53.2, we first derive the \(^{13}\text{CO}\) column density \( (N(\text{^{13}CO})) \) map. In principle, the integrated intensity map in Figure 2 can be converted to an \( N(\text{^{13}CO}) \) map if the excitation temperature \( (T_{ex}) \) is known under the LTE assumption (e.g., Rohlfs & Wilson 2000). One may assume that \( T_{ex} \) is equal to the observed brightness temperature of the \(^{12}\text{CO}\) J = 1–0 emission, which is usually optically thick, but there are uncertainties associated with this method such as unknown beam-filling factors or pointing/calibration errors from different observations. In addition, the available \(^{13}\text{CO}\) J = 1–0 data from the Massachusetts–Stony Brook (UMSB) Galactic Plane Survey (Clemens et al. 1986; Sanders et al. 1986) are rather poorly sampled. We therefore instead adopt \( T_{ex} = 10 \text{ K} \), which is a typical excitation temperature of IRDCs determined from CO observations (Heyer et al. 2009; Roman-Duval et al. 2010; Liu et al. 2014). (The median \( T_{ex} \) from these works might be somewhat below 10 K, e.g., 8–9 K.) We note that, however, \( T_{ex} = 10 \text{ K} \) may be too low for some regions in IRDC G53.2. The beam-main brightness temperature \( (T_{mb}) \) of the \(^{13}\text{CO}\) J = 1–0 line is given as \( T_{mb} = (J_{13}(T_{ex}) - J_{13}(T_{bg})) \) \( 1 - \exp \left( \frac{-1}{T_{13}} \right) \), where \( J_{13}(T) = 5.29/(\exp(5.29/T) - 1) \), \( T_{bg} = 2.73 \text{ K} \), and \( T_{13} \) is the optical depth of \(^{13}\text{CO}\) J = 1–0 emission (e.g., Rohlfs & Wilson 2000). Assuming \( T_{ex} = 10 \text{ K} \) and \( T_{13} = 3 \), which is a typical optical depth for most IRDCs (Liu et al. 2014), the maximum allowed \( T_{mb} \) of \(^{13}\text{CO}\) J = 1–0 line is 6.4 K, whereas toward the cloud cores (e.g., areas around 1.2 mm contours in Figure 1) \( T_{mb} \) is higher than this, in some regions as high as 20 K. The excitation temperature in these areas also must be high, and the \(^{13}\text{CO}\) emission might be optically thick, which is not unusual for IRDCs (e.g., Liu et al. 2014). We indeed confirmed that the \(^{13}\text{CO}\) line intensities are comparable to the \(^{12}\text{CO}\) line intensities in these areas from the UMSB data. Therefore, we derive the \( N(\text{^{13}CO}) \) map of IRDC G53.2 by applying different assumptions for inner and outer areas of the cloud. For the outer areas with \( T_{mb} \leq 6.4 \text{ K} \), we assume \( T_{ex} = 10 \text{ K} \), while for the inner areas with \( T_{mb} > 6.4 \text{ K} \), instead of assuming \( T_{ex} \), we assume a constant optical depth of \( T_{13} = 3 \). This is an ad hoc method but will provide a smooth and reasonable \( N(\text{^{13}CO}) \) map until a more accurate map is obtained from detailed molecular line studies. (The resulting \( N(\text{^{13}CO}) \) map is found in Figure 9.)

The \( N(\text{^{13}CO}) \) map is then converted to a mass density map assuming \(^{13}\text{C}^{12}\text{C} = 60 \) (Milam et al. 2005, their Equation (3)) and \( n(\text{^{13}CO})/n(\text{H}_2) = 1.1 \times 10^{-4} \) (Pineda et al. 2010). The total mass of the cloud depends on how we fix its outer boundary. For the analysis of the star formation activity in this study, we define the boundary of IRDC G53.2 by the \(^{13}\text{CO}\) integrated intensity contour at \( T_{mb}\int dv = 6.3 \text{ K km s}^{-1} \) (Figure 1), which corresponds to \( N(\text{^{13}CO}) \sim 1 \times 10^{16} \text{ cm}^{-2} \). This boundary is chosen such that the IRDC includes the dark filamentary features seen in mid-IR (24 \( \mu \text{m} \)) but excludes bright emission nebulosities at 8 and 24 \( \mu \text{m} \), which are likely foreground regions, to avoid contamination from unrelated mid-IR sources as much as possible.

Adopting the boundary at \( N(\text{^{13}CO}) = 1 \times 10^{16} \text{ cm}^{-2} \), the cloud mass is \( 6.2 \times 10^4 M_\odot \), with a mean mass surface density of \( 0.076 \text{ g cm}^{-2} \). The cloud, however, has a low-density envelope (Figure 2), and we account for this by adopting \( N(\text{^{13}CO}) = 3 \times 10^{15} \text{ cm}^{-2} \) (the \(^{13}\text{CO}\) integrated intensity contour at \( T_{mb}\int dv = 2.1 \text{ K km s}^{-1} \)) or \( A_V = 1 \text{ mag} \) as the cloud boundary, which is slightly beyond the outermost contour in Figure 2. This yields an entire cloud mass of \( 1.0 \times 10^5 M_\odot \) and a mean surface density of \( 0.033 \text{ g cm}^{-2} \). The derived parameters of IRDC G53.2 are listed in Table 1.

| Table 1 | Parameters of IRDC G53.2 |
|---------|--------------------------|
| Parameter | IRDC G53.2 |
| Center (l, b) | \( \sim (53^{\circ} 21', -0^\circ 08') \) |
| Angular Size | \( \sim 1'5 \times 0'7 \) |
| Linear Size | \( 45 \text{ pc} \times 21 \text{ pc} \) |
| \( V_{\text{center}} \) | \( +22.9 \pm 1.0 \text{ (km s}^{-1} \) |
| \( \Delta V_{\text{peak}} \) | \( 1.7 \pm 0.5 \text{ (km s}^{-1} \) |
| Kinematic distance | 1.7 (kpc) |
| Mass | \( 6.2 \times 10^4 M_\odot \times 10^9 (M_\odot) \) |
| Surface density | 0.076, 0.033 (g cm\(^{-2}\)) |

Notes.

a The boundary of IRDC G53.2 for the analysis of the star formation activity in mid-IR (the \(^{13}\text{CO}\) integrated intensity contour \( T_{mb}\int dv = 6.3 \text{ K km s}^{-1} \)).

b The cloud boundary accounting for its low-density envelope (at \( T_{mb}\int dv = 2.1 \text{ K km s}^{-1} \)). See Section 2.

For comparison, Ragan et al. (2014) identified the same molecular cloud in their study of filamentary molecular clouds (F54.0–52.0 in their Table 1) and assigned a kinematic distance of 2.0 kpc using the Galactic rotation model of Reid et al. (2009), which is based on high-mass star-forming regions.

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4 Ragan et al. (2014) obtained \( 6.8 \times 10^4 M_\odot \) as the mass of the molecular cloud.

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3. PSC OF IRDC G53.2

We make a PSC of IRDC G53.2 region to search for YSO candidates. We use two Spitzer inner Galactic plane surveys as a major data set in this study: GLIMPSE and MIPS GALactic plane survey (MIPSGAL; Carey et al. 2009). These Spitzer legacy programs cover the inner Galactic plane at the four IRAC bands of 3.6, 4.5, 5.8, and 8.0 μm (GLIMPSE) and the two MIPS bands of 24 and 70 μm (MIPSGAL). Other published catalogs such as the Two Micron All Sky Survey (2MASS) PSC (Skrutskie et al. 2006) and MSX PSC (Egan et al. 2003) are also used as complements.

3.1. Point-source Photometry of MIPS 24 μm Mosaics

We perform point-source photometry of MIPSGAL 24 μm data to extract point sources in IRDC G53.2 since our first criterion to build a PSC of IRDC G53.2 area is the presence of 24 μm emission. We start with four 24 μm mosaics centered at (l, b) = (53°00′, 0°5′), (53°00′, −0°5′), (54°00′, 0°5′), and (54°00′, −0°5′), which are distributed by MIPSGAL v3.0 Data Delivery. The size of each mosaic is 1°1 × 1°1, and the pixel size is 125. We use the Astronomical Point source EXtractor (APEX) software in the MOsaicking and Point-source EXtraction (MOPEX) package developed at the Spitzer Science Center to extract point sources and compute photometry by the point response function (PRF) fitting method based on Recipe 24 of the Spitzer Data Analysis Cookbook. We first extract bright sources in the background-subtracted mosaics generated by taking a median filter of the images with an 11 pixel by 11 pixel filter and remove the Airy rings around the bright sources so that the Airy rings are not detected as faint objects; subsequently, we extract faint sources from the above images. We measure the flux of the extracted sources and scale them, following the Cookbook, by a factor of 1.46 to correct lost fluxes due to a small background filter size. The magnitude zero point we use to convert the estimated fluxes to magnitudes is 7.14 Jy as reported in the MIPS Data Handbook v3.2.1.

The number of sources within the boundary of IRDC G53.2 presented in Figure 1 from the above procedure is 844. Here we exclude the sources within the GRS 13CO contour at (l, b) ∼ (53°2′, 0°2′) in Figure 1. Although the contour level is the same in the integrated intensity map, its lower (≤20 km s−1) velocity compared to the other region of the IRDC (see Figure 2) and bright emission in 24 μm mosaics indicate that the sources in this region are unlikely associated with IRDC G53.2. Among the 844 sources in the IRDC, the faintest source is 8.41 mag, and the magnitude from which the number of sources drops is ~7.8 mag. Since the background emission around the IRDC region is bright and complicated, we do not extract fainter sources for reliability.

3.2. Merging with the GLIMPSE Catalog

The 24 μm sources from the PRF photometry are then matched to the GLIMPSEI v2.0 Catalog and Archive with a matching radius of 2″ to make a PSC of IRDC G53.2 area. As mentioned above, the 24 μm mosaics have complicated background emissions, so residual emissions in the background-subtracted mosaics are sometimes detected as a source during the point-source extraction process. After matching the sources, we remove the false ones by visual inspection comparing the original and background-subtracted mosaics. Finally, 369 sources out of 844 are matched with the GLIMPSEI Catalog or Archive. Table 2 presents the coordinates and IR magnitudes of the 369 matched sources. The number of sources whose IRAC magnitudes are from the GLIMPSEI Archive is 51, and we put a superscript “a” to their classes in column 13 (see Section 4 for the source classification). From the PRF photometry by APEX, we only get uncertainties from the fitting, whereas there is an absolute uncertainty (4% for 24 μm) from the pipeline calibration according to MIPS Instrument Handbook v3.11 Therefore, we add both in quadrature and present in Table 2. Note that the 24 μm errors in Table 2 are underestimated because they do not account for uncertainties from other components such as background variations. Since we choose completeness rather than reliability, we do not make any criteria for using the GLIMPSEI Catalog/Archive. The median uncertainty of the IRAC-band magnitudes of the sources in Table 2 is 0.053 mag, and ≤9% of the sources have any one of the IRAC-band magnitudes with its error ≥0.2 mag.

Because of strong and complicated background emission, many of the unmatched sources are probably false detections arising from the residuals after removing the Airy rings or from extended emission. There may be genuine sources as well that are very deeply embedded, e.g., Class 0 YSos. Those not detected in the IRAC bands, however, are beyond the scope of this study, so we do not further examine the unmatched sources here. We note that one of the unmatched sources at (R.A., decl.) = (19:29:16.18, +17:56:10.32) is very bright at 24 μm, with its magnitude of 1.04 mag, but not detected in any IRAC bands. Our new recent observation in near-IR using adaptive optics reveals that this source is, in fact, composed of two stars separated by ∼0.75″ (H.-J. Kim et al., in preparation).

We measure its IRAC band fluxes from aperture photometry, but extended features, particularly remarkable at 5.8 and 8.0 μm, make the measured fluxes less reliable; therefore, we exclude this source from our catalog.

3.3. Final Point-source Catalog

From the MIPS 24 μm mosaics and GLIMPSE Catalog/Archive, 369 sources in total are identified in IRDC G53.2 and listed in Table 2. Among them, 302 sources are also identified in 2MASS PSC, so we include their 2MASS magnitudes in Table 2 (columns 4–6).

There are four saturated sources in the MIPS 24 μm mosaics that are not extracted by APEX. For these sources, we use MSX PSC as a complement to their IRAC 8 μm and MIPS 24 μm magnitudes. The 2MASS and IR magnitudes of these four sources with their coordinates from the 2MASS PSC are presented in Table 3. Note that No. 2 is so close to No. 1 that it is not resolved in the data from MSX, which has a larger beam size than Spitzer.

http://irsa.ipac.caltech.edu/data/SPITZER/docs/mips/mipsinstrumenthandbook
Table 2
Point-source Catalog of IRDC G53.2

| No. | R.A. (J2000) | Decl. (J2000) | J  | H  | Ks | [3.6] | [4.5] | [5.8] | [8.0] | [24] | α*      | Class† |
|-----|--------------|---------------|----|----|----|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|---------|--------|
| 1   | 19:30:19.59  | 18:18:17.21   | 11.84 ± 0.022 | 11.11 ± 0.022 | 10.72 ± 0.021 | 10.57 ± 0.156 | 10.26 ± 0.181 | ...   | ...   | 3.27 ± 0.044 | ...    |
| 2   | 19:30:22.95  | 18:20:27.92   | ... | ... | 13.83 ± 0.076 | 10.01 ± 0.214 | 7.39 ± 0.159 | 5.69 ± 0.026 | 4.94 ± 0.025 | 0.82 ± 0.061 | 1.77 ± 0.57|
| 3   | 19:30:22.14  | 18:20:46.43   | 14.83 ± 0.049 | 12.71 ± 0.034 | 11.46 ± 0.031 | 9.67 ± 0.061 | 8.84 ± 0.063 | 8.23 ± 0.060 | 7.80 ± 0.183 | 5.62 ± 0.046 | −0.74 ± 0.19|
| 4   | 19:30:14.05  | 18:18:22.50   | 12.91 ± 0.025 | 11.33 ± 0.022 | 10.27 ± 0.018 | 9.09 ± 0.039 | 8.65 ± 0.047 | 8.15 ± 0.036 | 7.30 ± 0.029 | 4.16 ± 0.045 | −0.55 ± 0.05|
| 5   | 19:30:17.10  | 18:19:43.00   | 11.97 ± 0.025 | ... | 6.44 ± 0.063 | ... | 5.64 ± 0.036 | 5.21 ± 0.025 | 3.44 ± 0.045 | −1.30 ± 0.08 |

Notes.
* Defined as $\alpha = d \log (\lambda F_\lambda)/d \log (\lambda)$ (Lada 1987) between 2 and 24 $\mu$m.
† * = IRAC magnitudes are from the GLIMPSEI Archive; † = a deeply embedded protostar.
(This table is available in its entirety in machine-readable form.)
Table 3
Saturated Sources in 24 μm

| No. | R.A. (J2000) | Decl. (J2000) | J  | H  | Ks | [3.6] | [4.5] | [5.8] | 8.0/MSX A | MSX E | α   | Class |
|-----|--------------|---------------|----|----|----|-------|-------|-------|-----------|-------|------|-------|
| 1   | 19:29:17.50  | 17:56:22.81   | ...| ...| 11.92 ± 0.073 | 7.03 ± 0.106 | 4.42 ± 0.110 | 3.54 ± 0.050 | 2.36 ± 0.045 | −1.39 ± 0.065 | 1.88 ± 0.62 | I    |
| 2   | 19:29:17.29  | 17:56:17.59   | 14.85 ± 0.181 | 11.97 ± 0.091 | 8.88 ± 0.204 | 7.49 ± 0.162 | 6.19 ± 0.046 | 4.97 ± 0.044 | ... | 2.21 ± 0.13 | I    |
| 3   | 19:29:41.28  | 18:06:39.38   | 8.19 ± 0.027 | 5.83 ± 0.023 | 4.63 ± 0.020 | ... | 2.85 ± 0.165 | 2.55 ± 0.035 | 1.78 ± 0.045 | 0.17 ± 0.066 | −1.11 ± 0.09 | II   |
| 4   | 19:30:01.68  | 18:19:14.23   | 8.73 ± 0.032 | 6.23 ± 0.020 | 4.81 ± 0.021 | 4.45 ± 0.160 | ... | ... | 1.46 ± 0.045 | −0.51 ± 0.065 | −0.59 ± 0.20 | II   |

Note. Only No. 2 is detected in GLIMPSE catalog/archive at 8 μm. Others use MSX A magnitudes.
4. SELECTION AND CLASSIFICATION OF YSO CANDIDATES

We select and classify YSO candidates in our PSC (Table 2) based on the IR spectral index defined as \( \alpha = d \log (\lambda F_\lambda)/d \log (\lambda) \) (Lada 1987). Spectral index can be used to quantify the slope of spectral energy distributions (SEDs) of YSOs in the IR and to divide YSOs into several classes. We compute the spectral index of each object in Table 2 by least-squares linear fitting between 2 and 24 \( \mu \)m. Among 369 sources, we only fit 347 sources that are detected in more than three IRAC bands to make enough data points and classify them as follows (Greene et al. 1994; Billot et al. 2010): 0.3 \( \leq \alpha \) as Class I, the youngest evolutionary class whose SED is rising toward mid-IR, which indicates the presence of a dusty envelope infalling onto a central protostar; \(-1.6 \leq \alpha < -0.3\) as Class II, which are pre-main-sequence stars with warm optically thick dusty disks; \(-2.56 \leq \alpha < -1.6\) as Class III, objects whose SED is mostly photopsheric emission in near-IR but which show some excess emission at longer (>20 \( \mu \)m) wavelengths; and \( \alpha < -2.56\) as photopsheric-emission-only (photospheric, hereafter) sources. We also include flat-spectrum (\(-0.3 \leq \alpha < 0.3\), whose evolutionary status is likely between Class I and II, although flat-spectrum sources could be considered as Class I (e.g., Calvet et al. 1994). The computed spectral indices \( \alpha \) with 1\( \sigma \) errors and the results of classification are presented in Table 2 (columns 12 and 13). We also compute the spectral indices of the MIPS-saturated sources using available data and present their \( \alpha \) and classes in Table 3 (columns 12 and 13).

As a next step, we examine the sources that are excluded from the fitting owing to insufficient data. If a source is bright in 24 \( \mu \)m but not detected in shorter wavebands, it is possible that the source is deeply embedded. In the investigation of the young, embedded cluster NGC 1333, Gutermuth et al. (2008) suggested that any source that lacks detections in some IRAC bands but which show some excess emission at longer bands could be considered as Class I, whose evolutionary status is likely between Class I and II, although flat-spectrum sources could be considered as Class I (e.g., Calvet et al. 1994). The computed spectral indices \( \alpha \) with 1\( \sigma \) errors and the results of classification are presented in Table 2 (columns 12 and 13). We also compute the spectral indices of the MIPS-saturated sources using available data and present their \( \alpha \) and classes in Table 3 (columns 12 and 13).

5. CONTAMINATIONS

5.1. Extragalactic Contamination

MIPS sources generally contain extragalactic backgrounds as well as Galactic sources, but we expect most sources in IRDC G53.2 to be Galactic since the IRDC is in the Galactic plane (\( b \sim 0^\circ \)). Although both galaxies and YSOs show IR-excess emission, they can be distinguished in a [3.6] versus [3.6]–[24] plot (Rebull et al. 2011). In the [3.6] versus [3.6]–[24] plot, Rebull et al. (2011) compared the extragalactic sources from the Spitzer Wide-area Infrared Extragalactic Survey (SWIRE; Lonsdale et al. 2003) European Large Area ISO Survey (ELAIS) N-1 extragalactic field with the YSO candidates in North American and Pelican Nebulae (NAN) and Serpens (see their Figure 10), and they found that the YSO candidates occupy a different region from the SWIRE-type contaminants, which include galaxies and diskless stars. We also compare IRDC G53.2 sources (Tables 2 and 3) with the SWIRE ELAIS N-1 samples in Figure 3. In the figure, the distribution of the IRDC 53.2 sources (colored circles) is distinctively separated from the SWIRE-field samples (gray dots) except for the ones with mostly stellar photopsheric emission (i.e., Class III and photospheric sources), which have [3.6]–[24] \( \sim 0\). The location of the YSO candidates in IRDC G53.2 in the [3.6] versus [3.6]–[24] plot is similar to those of the YSO candidates in NAN and Serpens as well (Figure 10 of Rebull et al. 2011). In addition, we searched the SIMBAD database and found no counterpart for each of our 373 sources among known extragalactic sources within a 5'' radius. We therefore conclude that essentially all of our sources are likely of Galactic origin, and there is very little contamination from extragalactic sources.

5.2. Field Star Contamination

While we do not expect extragalactic contamination toward the Galactic plane, there is nonetheless contamination by foreground/background stars. In order to account for the amount of contamination from these field stars, we analyze control fields and compare the population of point sources between the control fields and IRDC G53.2. We select seven control fields around IRDC G53.2 where there are no CO clouds in the GRS CO J = 1–0 data. The control fields in the GRS integrated intensity map are presented in Figure 4 by white ellipses and circles with their numbers. In the figure, the integration of the GRS cube data has been done over the entire velocity range of the GRS survey, i.e., \( v_{LSR} = -5 \) to +85 km s\(^{-1}\), and the scale bar indicates the integrated intensity scale. The boundary of IRDC G53.2 is shown by a black contour as well.

We identify point sources in the control fields from the MIPS 24 \( \mu \)m mosaic, match them to the GLIMPSEI Catalog/Archive, and perform the same spectral index analysis as we did for the sources in IRDC G53.2. In the seven control fields, 218 sources are classified in total. Table 4 presents the results of the control field analysis and the comparison to IRDC G53.2. Among the sources in the control fields (column 2), about 90% are Class III or photospheric sources with little excess emission in IR. The others classified as Class I, flat-spectrum, or Class II show 12 SWIRE ELAIS N1 Region 24 \( \mu \)m Spring '05 Spitzer Catalog from IPAC Infrared Science Archive (http://irsa.ipac.caltech.edu/applications/Gator). 13 http://simbad.u-strasbg.fr/simbad/
similar IR excess to the YSO candidates. These IR-excess sources are, however, not likely YSOs but sources with similar colors to YSOs such as AGB stars or planetary nebulae because they are mostly isolated and placed where there are no molecular clouds. Since the area of the IRDC is \( \lesssim 0.5 \) times of the total area of the control fields, we scale the number of sources in the control fields to IRDC G53.2 area to compute the expected numbers of each class (column 3) and compare them with the numbers of the sources in the IRDC (column 4).

The comparison between the control fields and IRDC G53.2 implies that there is a negligible contamination from field stars in earlier classes of YSO candidates (i.e., Class I, flat-spectrum, and Class II), while about 50% of field star contamination exists among Class III objects. In addition, all photospheric sources identified in IRDC G53.2 area are not likely the genuine members of the IRDC but foreground/background stars. We note that we detect fewer (\( \lesssim 50\% \)) photospheric sources in IRDC G53.2 than expected from the control field analysis. Photospheric sources without strong IR excess are mostly faint in 24 μm; for example, the median 24 μm magnitudes of each class in IRDC G53.2 are 4.5, 6.2, 6.8, 7.1, and 7.7 for Class I, flat-spectrum, Class II, Class III, and photospheric objects, respectively. Since the extinction toward IRDC G53.2 is higher than the control fields without molecular clouds, we probably have failed to detect a large number of photospheric sources owing to extinction, which results in a smaller number of the photospheric sources in the IRDC compared to the scaled number from the control fields. Here, we only compare the sources with the MIPS 24 μm photometry (Table 2) because there are no saturated sources in the MIPS 24 μm mosaic in the control regions. However, even if we include the MIPS-saturated sources that are presented in parentheses in column 4 of Table 4, its small number does not affect the results.

Based on the comparison with the control fields, we expect that our PSC of IRDC G53.2 is contaminated with 1 Class I, 3 flat-spectrum, 6 Class II, and 29 Class III objects. All of the photospheric sources in our catalog are likely to be contaminants. If we removed this field star contamination, we would be left with 308 sources in total (including four MIPS-saturated sources), and the final census of YSO candidates would be 77 Class I (25%), 63 flat-spectrum (21%), 129 Class II (42%), 33 Class III (11%), and 6 No Class (1%) sources.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1. Classification Schemes of YSOs

6.1.1. Based on Spectral Index, ε

In classification of YSOs, an empirical scheme based on the slope of SEDs was first constructed by Lada & Wilking (1984) and more quantitatively developed by Lada (1987) adopting the definition of spectral index ε. Since then, Greene et al. (1994), introducing flat-spectrum (see Section 3.1), has developed the classification system in the study of the ρ Oph YSO population. Whereas the original definition of ε used wavelengths between 2 and 20 μm (Lada & Wilking 1984), several recent studies have used only the four IRAC bands to compute ε (e.g., Lada et al. 2006; Billot et al. 2010). Regarding differences in the choice of wavelength range, Greene et al. (1994) claimed no deviation between ε computed using 2.2–20 μm and 2.2–10 μm, but Evans et al. (2009) classified YSOs in five nearby molecular clouds in the c2d project (Evans et al. 2003, hereafter the c2d clouds) using both 2–24 μm and the IRAC bands and showed that using only the IRAC bands moves sources from earlier to later classes, resulting in 10%–15% difference in inferred lifetimes for the earlier SED phases.

In Section 4, we classified the point sources in IRDC G53.2 by least-squares linear fitting between 2 and 24 μm. In order to examine the difference in classification depending on the use of wavelength range, we classify the sources again using only the IRAC bands and compare the results to the one we have from 2–24 μm in Figure 5. In Figure 5, the histogram of spectral index from only using the IRAC bands, drawn in red, shows a relatively lower number of flat-spectrum and higher number of Class III than the histogram of spectral index from 2–24 μm, drawn in black. When using only the IRAC bands, we get fewer Class I (by \( \sim 7\% \)), fewer flat-spectrum (by \( \sim 40\% \)), comparable Class II, and more Class III (by \( \sim 43\% \)). Since a direct comparison in numbers of each class does not account for uncertainties from fitting in the computation of spectral index, we show a spectral index from 2–24 μm

![Figure 3](image-url) **Figure 3.** [3.6] vs. [3.6]–[24] plot for objects in IRDC G53.2 region and SWIRE (Lonsdale et al. 2003) ELAIS N-1. Red, green, blue, yellow, and purple circles indicate Class I, flat-spectrum, Class II, Class III, and photospheric sources, respectively. Gray dots are SWIRE ELAIS N-1 samples. The dotted line divides the regions occupied mostly by SWIRE-type contaminants (galaxies and diskless stars) and YSOs (Rebull et al. 2011).

![Figure 4](image-url) **Figure 4.** Same as the left panel of Figure 2, but the integration has been done over the entire velocity range of the GRS survey, i.e., \( \nu_{LSR} = -5 \) to +85 km s\(^{-1}\). Seven white ellipses and circles with numbers are control fields, and the black contour shows the boundary of IRDC G53.2. The scale bar indicates the integrated intensity scale.
Table 4
Comparison of Classified Sources in IRDC G53.2 and Control Fields

| Class          | Number in Control Fields | Number Scaled to Area of IRDC G53.2 | Number Identified in IRDC G53.2 | Contamination Fraction |
|----------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| I              | 2                        | 0.9                                  | 76(2)                          | 1.2%                   |
| Flat-spectrum  | 6                        | 2.8                                  | 66                             | 4.2%                   |
| II             | 13                       | 6.1                                  | 133(2)                         | 4.6%                   |
| III            | 61                       | 28.5                                 | 62                             | 45.9%                  |
| Photospheric   | 136                      | 63.5                                 | 26                             | ~100%                  |

Note. The sources of IRDC G53.2 (column 4) only account for the sources in Table 2, and the numbers of the MIPS-saturated sources (Table 3) are presented in parentheses for reference. Note that including the MIPS-saturated sources does not affect the fraction of field star contamination (column 5).

YSOs are often classified based on mid-IR colors. For example, Gutermuth et al. (2008, 2009) established a mid-IR color-based method that can robustly distinguish YSOs and mitigate the effects of contamination and reddening. Their mid-IR color-based method primarily uses the IRAC magnitudes and additionally uses 24 μm detection for further classifying “Transition Disk” Class II sources, deeply embedded protostars, and highly reddened Class II sources. The color-based classification of YSOs in principle relies on the mid-IR excess emission, as the spectral-index-based classification does, but different criteria between the two may give different classification. In order to check this possibility, we apply the classification scheme described in Gutermuth et al. (2009) to the sources in IRDC G53.2 and compare the results between the color-based and the α_{2-24 μm}-based classification. Among 369 sources in Table 2 (excluding the saturated sources in 24 μm), 70 and 189 sources are classified as Class I and Class II, respectively, based on mid-IR colors, where Class I includes 16 deeply embedded protostars and Class II includes 52 transition disk sources and 7 highly reddened Class II sources. The others are the sources with photospheric colors or the sources that lack the IRAC magnitude. Comparing the number of objects in each class, we find that most Class I (>80%), Class II (>90%), and Class III/photospheric sources (~100%) from the α_{2-24 μm}-based classification are well consistent with the color-based classes.

A possible reason for this discrepancy is an ambiguity of flat-spectrum. Since flat-spectrum is an evolutionary stage between Class I and Class II, separating flat-spectrum sources from either class will be highly uncertain. The wavelength range used in classification can be a reason as well. Although the color-based classification is made from IRAC to MIPS 24 μm wavelengths, classes are mainly determined by IRAC colors because the 24 μm magnitudes are only additionally used to classify anomalies such as transition disk or highly reddened Class II. Therefore, a source with an SED slope in the IRAC wavelengths close to the boundary between flat-
spectrum and Class II but bright in 24 μm may be classified as Class II by the color-based scheme, whereas it would be classified as flat-spectrum (i.e., Class I) by the $\alpha_{2–24\mu m}$-based scheme. This trend is also seen in the comparison between the $\alpha_{2–24\mu m}$-based and $\alpha_{\text{IRAC}}$-based classification discussed above (Section 6.1.1). We note that extinction may be an another factor that moves flat-spectrum to Class II, and it will be discussed below in detail. In summary, the mid-IR color-based classification of YSOs is consistent with the $\alpha_{2–24\mu m}$-based classification scheme in general, except when classifying flat-spectrum sources. In such objects, there is some ambiguity between Class I and Class II sources, which is likely dependent on the wavelength ranges used. The difference between the two classifications will affect the number ratio of Class II to Class I objects by a factor of two or three (Section 6.2.1).

6.1.3. Based on Physical Properties of SEDs

On the other hand, Robitaille et al. (2006) adopted a “Stage” classification. Stage is based on the physical properties of SEDs, thus referring to the actual evolutionary stage rather than Class, which is only based on the slope of SEDs. Although Stage 0/I/II/III is analogous to Class 0/I/II/III, it is not a one-to-one correspondence because of the inclination effect. For example, pre-main-sequence stars with an “edge-on” disk can be classified as flat-spectrum or Class I by their SED slopes, and Crapsi et al. (2008), in their study on the nature of embedded YSOs using radiative transfer modeling, claimed that 34% of the Stage II sources could be misclassified as flat-spectrum. Despite the possible misclassification, however, the classes of the YSO candidates in IRDC G53.2 classified based on spectral index $\alpha_{2–24\mu m}$ agree fairly well with the stages in a color–color diagram as presented in Figure 7. In Figure 7, Class I, II, and III objects mostly fall into the areas of Stage I, II, and III (Robitaille et al. 2006), respectively. Flat-spectrum sources again show an ambiguity between Stages I and II, but ~65% are located in the Stage I area. The others placed in the Stage II area may represent the ones with large inclination angle. Comparison of “Class” and “Stage” classification from the [3.6]–[5.8] versus [8.0]–[24] color–color diagram indicates a general agreement between the two, although there are some exceptions. Detailed investigation on the physical properties of the YSO candidates in IRDC G53.2 based on the analysis of the individual SEDs will be addressed in our forthcoming paper.

6.1.4. Effects from Extinction on Classification

Embedded star-forming regions in a dense molecular cloud suffer high extinction from dust and reddening. High column density, and thus high extinction, toward IRDC G53.2 may affect the classification of YSOs based on SED shapes, but it may not be significant because of much smaller extinction in mid-IR than in optical. Previous studies using Spitzer data also show that the effects from extinction on the overall YSO classification are small. Evans et al. (2009) compared spectral index of YSOs in the c2d clouds before and after extinction correction and found that the effect from extinction was small (10%–20%), probably smaller than other sources of uncertainty. Billot et al. (2010) also found that the YSO census in the Vulpecula OB association (hereafter Vul OB1) based on the mid-IR color method showed only a marginal difference after they corrected for extinction. This indicates that classification schemes based on mid-IR excess are only moderately affected by extinction. However, it is also possible that extinction effects in our analysis of IRDC G53.2 YSO population, which is much further away and embedded in a denser molecular cloud, may not be as negligible as in the above studies, and we will briefly discuss expected effects from extinction on the YSO census in IRDC G53.2 below.

The local extinction in star-forming regions may be derived using the near-IR colors of stars observed in each region and comparing these with their intrinsic colors (e.g., Evans et al. 2009; Gutermuth et al. 2009). However, since this method is limited to nearby regions, we cannot apply it to IRDC G53.2. Extinction in IRDC G53.2 is also not uniform; it is larger in the central parts of the molecular cloud, where the 12CO integrated intensity map peaks in Figure 2 (left). To investigate the effects of extinction on our YSO census, we therefore consider the extreme case of one of the clumps in IRDC G53.2 (from Butler & Tan 2012) and examine how it could possibly affect the YSO classes. Butler & Tan (2012) estimated physical properties of starless and early-stage cores and clumps in 10 IRDCs, including the one in IRDC G53.2 (MSX G053.11+00.05 in Figure 1; core J1 in Butler & Tan 2012) based on the mid-IR extinction mapping technique. Their estimation, using the IRAC 8 μm images, gave a mean mass surface density of ~0.15 g cm$^{-2}$ or $\tau_{8\mu m}$ ~ 1.1 (according to their Equation (1)) for a clump in the MSX G053.11+00.05. From the mid-IR extinction law derived by Spitzer data (Flaherty et al. 2007; Chapman et al. 2009), we estimate the extinction at each IRAC and MIPS 24 μm band as follows, although extinction at 24 μm is highly uncertain owing to a small sample size in Flaherty et al. (2007) and Chapman et al. (2009): $A_{[3.6]}$ = 1.6–1.7 mag, $A_{[4.5]}$ = 1.3–1.4 mag, $A_{[5.8]}$ = 1.2 mag, $A_{[8.0]}$ = 1.2 mag, and $A_{[24]}$ = 1 mag. If we apply extinction correction to these values in Figure 7, about half of the flat-spectrum sources in the Stage I area move to the Stage II area, whereas Class I and Class II sources show only small changes. However, we note that this extinction will be close to the upper limit in IRDC G53.2. The clump in the MSX G053.11+00.05 is located where the 12CO emission is strong, corresponding to the innermost contour in Figure 2, and extinction of most of the area in the IRDC should be much.
lower. For example, the mass surface density (or extinction) of the outer part of the clump in the MSX G053.11+00.05 is ~10% of the mean value (Figure 12 of Butler & Tan 2012), which does not make any remarkable changes in Figure 7. Therefore, extinction in IRDC G53.2 may affect the YSO classification in a way to decrease the number of flat-spectrum objects and increase the number of Class II objects, but the effect on the overall classification is likely insignificant.

6.2. Comparison of the YSO Population in IRDC G53.2 to Other Regions

While IRDCs are believed to be a probable site of massive star formation, many of them do not show a signature of active star formation in mid-IR represented by 24 μm point sources (Chambers et al. 2009), and the clumps in IRDCs are typically not associated with 24 μm sources (Ragan et al. 2009). In this aspect, IRDC G53.2, with a few hundreds of YSO candidates, is a unique place where we can statistically investigate the stellar population formed in IRDCs. The YSO population in IRDC G53.2 is also able to provide the star formation activity occurring in the whole associated molecular cloud in which IRDCs are embedded. Below, we discuss the stellar population in IRDC G53.2 by comparing with that of other well-studied star-forming regions in different environments (Section 6.2.1). We also compare with other IRDCs, some of which are associated with 24 μm sources and some of which are not (Section 6.2.2), mainly focusing on the evolutionary stage of the IRDC. Finally, we estimate the age of IRDC G53.2 using an analytic model (Myers 2012) based on the YSO census and compare it with other nearby star-forming clusters (Section 6.2.3).

6.2.1. Comparison with Other Star-forming Regions: Number Ratio of Class II to Class I

We first compare the census of YSO candidates in IRDC G53.2 and other star-forming regions because the number of YSOs in each class can provide an estimation of the relative age of a star-forming region, assuming a constant birthrate (Gutermuth et al. 2009). For example, the number ratio of Class II to Class III objects, which can be a diagnostic of a fraction of YSOs with disks (i.e., disk fraction), gives the age of a star-forming region since disk fraction exponentially decreases with the age of a star-forming region (Mamajek 2009; Ybarra et al. 2013). The use of the ratio of Class II to Class III, however, would be inappropriate in the case of IRDC G53.2. In IRDC G53.2, the fraction of Class I and flat-spectrum sources that may not even form accretion disks is rather high (∼50%), and the census of Class III objects and photospheric sources is likely to be incomplete because of their weak IR-excess emission and faintness at 24 μm (see Section 5.2). Instead, we use the number ratio of Class II to Class I objects \(N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}\), hereafter to compare the relative age of IRDC G53.2 with other star-forming regions. As mentioned in Section 4, the evolutionary status of flat-spectrum is rather uncertain, and the objects with SEDs of flat-spectrum are often included in Class I if they are not separately classified (e.g., Gutermuth et al. 2009). Following this, we include flat-spectrum in Class I in the discussion below.

Figure 8(a) presents \(N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}\) of IRDC G53.2 and other star-forming regions from the literature. In the figure, \(N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}\) of IRDC G53.2, which is 0.9 after removing field star contamination, is marked with a filled red star, and the ratios of other star-forming regions from different literature are marked with different filled symbols. Filled gray circles are from a systematic Spitzer survey on 36 young, nearby, star-forming clusters within 1 kpc by Gutermuth et al. (2009), and a gray dashed line indicates the median value of \(N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}\) (3.7) for these clusters. \(N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}\) of the c2d clouds (Evans et al. 2009) and Vul OB1 (Billot et al. 2010) are also presented by a filled blue square and filled purple downward-pointing triangle, respectively. Filled green triangles are \(N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}\) of YSOs that are spatially associated with dark filamentary structures in the inner Galactic region of \(10° < l < 15° \) and \(-1° < b < 1° \) using GLIMPSE data (Bhavya et al. 2013). While nearby, low-mass star-forming regions (Evans et al. 2009; Gutermuth et al. 2009) and Vul OB1 (Billot et al. 2010) show higher \(N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}\) than that of IRDC G53.2, YSOs likely related to IRDCs (Bhavya et al. 2013) show similar or lower \(N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}\) compared to IRDC G53.2. Direct comparison of the number ratios from different studies, however, is not appropriate because (1) different classification schemes affect the fraction of each class, as discussed in Section 6.1, and (2) different distances affect the detection limit so that the number of faint sources at...
24 μm (i.e., later-class YSOs) decreases as the distance to the star-forming region increases.

To make an appropriate comparison, we first compute $\alpha_{2-24 \mu m}$ of YSOs in the star-forming clusters from Gutermuth et al. (2009) and Vul OB1 (Billot et al. 2010) using their flux catalogs and reclassify them. Gutermuth et al. (2009) classified YSOs using their mid-IR colors. Since the color-based classification results in fewer Class I and more Class II sources than the $\alpha_{2-24 \mu m}$-based classification (Section 6.1.2), $N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}$ will become higher if one uses the color-based classification scheme. After reclassification of their sources based on $\alpha_{2-24 \mu m}$, the median of $N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}$ for all the clusters becomes smaller, as expected, from 3.7 to 2.0. New $N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}$ distribution and the median value are presented in Figure 8(b) with filled gray circles and a gray dashed line, respectively. Billot et al. (2010) classified the YSOs in Vul OB1 using $\alpha_{\text{IRAC}}$, so they also have fewer flat-spectrum and more Class II sources and thus higher $N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}$ (Section 6.1.1 and Figure 5). Our $\alpha_{2-24 \mu m}$-based classification scheme to the sources in Vul OB1 decreases $N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}$ from 1.9 to 1.2, and the new ratio is marked with an open purple downward-pointing triangle in Figure 8(b). For the c2d clouds (Evans et al. 2009), we use their results because they used $\alpha_{2-24 \mu m}$ in classification.

Next, we correct for distance by assuming that the nearby regions from Evans et al. (2009) and Gutermuth et al. (2009) are at the same distance as IRDC G53.2 (at 1.7 kpc). To do this, we scale the fluxes of the YSOs and extract the sources brighter than a threshold at 24 μm. For the threshold, we use 8.41 mag, the faintest 24 μm magnitude in IRDC G53.2. Larger distance may affect the classification itself as well owing to higher extinction, but such an effect will be negligible in the overall statistics (Section 6.1.4). We mark distance-corrected $N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}$ in Figure 8(b) using open orange circles for the clusters in Gutermuth et al. (2009) with their median value of 0.8 (orange dashed line) and an open blue square for the c2d clouds. For the clusters in Gutermuth et al. (2009), we only consider the clusters with total number of YSOs > 10. In the c2d clouds, ~50% of Class I sources including flat-spectrum remain after distance correction, whereas only ~26% of Class II sources remain. This indicates that in a region at larger distance, the YSO census is likely biased to an earlier class so that $N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}$ becomes lower. We do not correct distance for Vul OB1 since it is at a similar distance (2.3 kpc) to IRDC G53.2. We summarize the newly computed $N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}$ for each region after correcting classification and distance in Table 5. Number ratio of Class II to Class I in a star-forming region is sensitive to both classification scheme and distance, and each factor changes the ratio by a factor of two. We do not make any correction for the IRDC-associated YSOs from Bhavya et al. (2013) because their catalog is not available. The IRDCs in their samples are mostly farther away (3–6 kpc) than IRDC G53.2, so $N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}$ will become higher by a factor of two if assuming the distance of 1.7 kpc. On the other hand, they classified the sources based on $\alpha_{\text{IRAC}}$, so the use of $\alpha_{2-24 \mu m}$ will make $N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}$ lower by a factor of two. Therefore, their corrected $N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}$ may not be very different from the uncorrected ones.

Under the same classification criteria and assuming the same distance, all of the compared regions and IRDC G53.2 show similar $N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}$, which indicates that they are similar in age or at a similar evolutionary stage. We note that there may be more Class I objects in IRDC G53.2 that are too deeply embedded to be detected even in 24 μm because of high column density of the central part of the IRDC. Such sources are, however, beyond the scope of this study, and further investigation including longer wavebands will be helpful to search for them.

### 6.2.2. Comparison with Other IRDCs

Star formation activity in IRDCs has mostly been studied on core (10$^{-3}$–10$^{-4}$ pc) or clump (10$^{-1}$–10$^{0}$ pc) scales, so a direct comparison of the stellar population in different IRDCs, as in Section 6.2.1, is difficult. Some studies, however, address the issues on protostars detected at 24 μm in the vicinity of IRDCs and their association. The 24 μm point-source detection is one of the signs to trace star formation activity in IRDC clumps and related to their evolutionary phase. IRDC clumps are suggested to evolve from a quiescent clump to an active/red clump with an intermediate clump in between. As clumps evolve, they become warmer and show tracers of star formation such as embedded 24 μm point sources or H$_2$O/CH$_3$OH maser emission (Chambers et al. 2009; Battersby et al. 2010). A large number of YSO candidates detected in 24 μm in IRDC G53.2, with the associated “green fuzzies” (extended 4.5 μm enhancement)” and H$_2$O/CH$_3$OH masers previously found (e.g., Chambers et al. 2009), indicates that stars are actively forming in IRDC G53.2 and IRDC G53.2 is likely at a later evolutionary stage among IRDCs.

Ragan et al. (2009) investigated stellar content around 11 IRDCs at 2.4–4.9 kpc using Spitzer data. They found many Class II and a few Class I objects, but only ~10% of

### Table 5

Comparison of Number Ratio of Class II to Class I Objects ($N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}$) between IRDC G53.2 and Other Star-forming Regions

| Region            | Distance (kpc) | Without Correction | $\alpha_{2-24 \mu m}$-based Class | At 1.7 kpc$^c$ |
|-------------------|----------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| IRDC G53.2$^a$   | 1.7            | 0.9                 | 0.9                               | 0.9           |
| Gutermuth et al. (2009) | <1         | 3.7                 | 2.0                               | 0.8           |
| c2d clouds$^b$   | 2.3            | 0.3                 | 2.1                               | 1.1           |
| Vul OB1$^c$      |                | 2.3                 | 1.9                               | ~1.2$^d$     |

Notes.

$^a$ Classification is based on $\alpha_{2-24 \mu m}$.

$^b$ The numbers are after removing field star contamination.

$^c$ Evans et al. (2009).

$^d$ Billot et al. (2010).

$^e$ Since Vul OB1 is at a similar distance to IRDC G53.2, we use $N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}$ without correction.
them were associated with the IRDC clumps identified by the absorption in 8 μm. From the clump mass function, which is shallower than the Salpeter mass function, and a lack of association between the clumps and mid-IR sources, the authors suggested that IRDCs are the precursors to stellar clusters in an early phase of fragmentation. In the IRDC G011.11-0.12, Henning et al. (2010) found ~20 embedded cores in a diverse mass range (1–240 M☉), half of which were associated with the 24 μm detection. From large spacings between the cores, well in excess of the Jeans length in the IRDC (see Section 6.3.2 below), the authors also concluded that IRDC cores are at an early stage in protostar formation with a capability of forming massive stars and clusters. These IRDC clumps in the early phase of fragmentation (Henning et al. 2010; Ragan et al. 2009) are very weakly associated with 24 μm point sources with lower surface density of sources in mid-IR compared to IRDC G53.2. This again implies a more evolved status for IRDC G53.2. The cores in the IRDC G011.11-0.12 or in the IRDCs in Ragan et al. (2009) may represent an earlier stage than that seen in IRDC G53.2, before active star formation has turned on. Future studies on stellar mass function in IRDC G53.2 or on physical properties of the clumps harboring bright 24 μm sources will be helpful for further comparison between IRDC G53.2 and other IRDCs at various evolutionary stages.

6.2.3. Age Estimation Using the Analytic Model

Myers (2012) developed an analytic model of protostar mass and luminosity evolution in clusters that provides estimates of cluster age, protostar birthrate, accretion rate, and mean accretion time, under the assumptions of constant protostar birthrate, core-clump accretion, and equally likely accretion stopping. Based on the model, the age of a star-forming cluster can be described as $t \approx \frac{a}{\nu} \left( 1 + \frac{\nu^2}{2} (1 - \nu) \right)$ (Equation (38) of Myers 2012), where $a$ is the accretion timescale and $\nu$ is the fraction of protostars among total YSOs in the cluster. From this, Myers (2012) estimated the ages and birthrates of 31 nearby clusters and complexes using the observed numbers of protostars and Class II YSOs assuming the accretion timescale of 0.17 Myr and equal numbers of Class II and Class III sources (see Section 5 of Myers 2012 for details). In the above equation, the term $\nu^2/[2(1 - \nu)]$ becomes negligible as $\nu$ decreases, so that the equation can be approximated by $N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}$ and the age of a star-forming cluster as $t \approx 2a(N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}} + 1/2)$. We apply this relation to IRDC G53.2, assuming the same accretion timescale of 0.17 Myr, and the estimated age of IRDC G53.2 is ~0.5 Myr. This age may be highly uncertain because of several assumptions used in the model, particularly the accretion timescale, which varies from 0.12 to 0.4–0.5 Myr (Myers 2012 and references therein). The age of the nearby star-forming clusters in Gutermuth et al. (2009) using $N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}$ after correcting for classification and distance (Section 6.2.1) ranges from 0.2 to 1.1 Myr, with a median of 0.5 Myr. This is comparable to the estimated age of IRDC G53.2.

6.3. Spatial Distribution of the YSO Candidates

6.3.1. Distribution of the YSO Candidates in the Molecular Cloud and Far-IR Emission

As Figure 1 shows, bright mid-IR sources in IRDC G53.2 are located along dark filaments in 24 μm. Based on the classification in Section 4, we examine the spatial distribution of the YSO candidates in IRDC G53.2 in relation to the associated CO molecular cloud and far-IR emission. Figure 9 shows the distribution of the YSO candidates in each class on a 13CO column density map we construct from the GRS 13CO $J = 1–0$ image integrated at $v = 15–30$ km s$^{-1}$ (Section 2). Overall, the YSO candidates are dispersed within the boundary of IRDC G53.2 as drawn by the magenta contour, though they are also more concentrated where the 13CO column density is higher.

Column density of the molecular cloud shows a good correlation with far-IR continuum emission as well. For comparison, intensity contours from the Herschel14 SPIRE (Griffin et al. 2010) 500 μm image15 with levels of 3, 5, and

14 Herschel is an ESA space observatory with science instruments provided by European-led Principal Investigator consortia and with important participation from NASA.

15 Level 2 image was retrieved from Herschel Science Archive (http://www.cosmos.esa.int/web/herschel/science-archive).
8 Jy beam$^{-1}$ are presented in white on the column density map in Figure 9, and three peak positions (one in the eastern and two in the western part of the IRDC) in both column density and 500 μm intensity are spatially coincident. We note that there is far-IR emission outside of IRDC G53.2 boundary to the north and west of the IRDC. This emission is probably not related to IRDC G53.2 but, rather, to foreground emission from CO clouds at another velocity observed along the same line of sight (see Figure 2).

In Figure 9, Class I objects are clustered within the 500 μm contours, particularly higher intensity levels, whereas Class II or III objects are rather randomly distributed. We examine the degree of clustering by comparing the numbers of objects in each class within the 500 μm contours. Table 6 presents the numbers of the YSO candidates in each class within the 500 μm contours of 8, 5, 3, and 2 Jy beam$^{-1}$. If we compare Class I and II objects, >40% of the Class I objects are distributed within 5 Jy beam$^{-1}$, where only ∼22% of the Class II objects are placed. This indicates that Class I objects or YSOs in earlier classes are more concentrated where the 500 μm intensity is higher, although flat-spectrum objects are more widely distributed. Clustering of Class I YSOs at high-extinction regions or the regions with high column density is often shown in other star-forming regions as well (e.g., Gutermuth et al. 2009; Myers 2012 and references therein; Chavarría et al. 2014).

We also compare $N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}$ in each level of the 500 μm contours. Flat-spectrum objects are again included with the Class I objects. If Class I objects are concentrated in a denser region surrounded by more evolved YSOs, $N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}$ will increase as larger regions are considered, from the densest region to the outer region, and there will be a gradient in the ratios. (Myers 2012), using the protostar fraction, investigated age structures in well-studied star-forming regions, Serpens north/south clusters and the CrA cluster, and found that there are local age variations from 0.3 to 0.9 Myr. In Table 6 we present $N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}$ in the 500 μm contours of each level in IRDC G53.2. The central region with higher (>8 Jy beam$^{-1}$) 500 μm intensity or higher $^{13}$CO column density shows smaller $N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}$ of 0.6, compared to 0.9 for the whole IRDC. The difference is small, and a local gradient among the intensity levels is hardly seen, likely owing to a small sample size. Compared to the area of the IRDC, the number of YSO candidates is rather small, which makes a statistical comparison of the number of sources in each contour zone difficult. However, we still see that Class I objects are likely concentrated along the denser filament in IRDC G53.2. If we apply the relation between $N_{\text{Class II}}/N_{\text{Class I}}$ and age we derive in Section 6.2.3 from Myers (2012), it gives ∼0.2 Myr of age variation in IRDC G53.2.

On the other hand, several recent studies have shown clustering of Class I YSOs along filamentary structures or pre- and protostellar core formation along IRDCs, many of which are likely massive (Teixeira et al. 2006; Henning et al. 2010; Jackson et al. 2010; Bhayya et al. 2013). Therefore, spatial concentration of earlier-class objects along the bright emission in the Herschel image supports star formation in very early phases occurring in IRDC G53.2 and gives a possibility that a fraction of the early-phase YSOs are massive. Detailed modeling of the objects using a full SED including longer wavebands in the future will be necessary to investigate physical characteristics of YSOs forming in IRDC G53.2.

### 6.3.2. Spacings of the YSO Candidates

In analysis of the spatial distribution of YSOs in star-forming regions, an average spacing between sources is often used to investigate the fragmentation processes in relation with the Jeans fragmentation and the subsequent dynamical evolution of the stars since YSOs are expected to move away from their birth sites as they evolve (Teixeira et al. 2006; Kumar et al. 2007; Winston et al. 2007; Gutermuth et al. 2009). One indicator to examine spacings between YSOs is a nearest-neighbor distance, which is the projected distance to the nearest YSO, often noted as NN2 distance (Gutermuth et al. 2009). In the study of the “Spokes” cluster in the young cluster NGC 2264, Teixeira et al. (2006) found a clear peak in their histogram of NN2 distances and suggested that the peak indicates the Jeans fragmentation of dense, dusty filaments. A peak at small spacings with a relatively long tail of large spacings in NN2 distance histograms is shown in young, nearby, star-forming clusters as well, and when the histograms show a pronounced peak and tail, the cumulative distributions have a steep inner slope and a shallow outer slope (e.g., Figure 2 of Gutermuth et al. 2009).

The histogram of the NN2 distances of the YSO candidates in IRDC G53.2 also shows a well-defined peak, as presented in Figure 10(a), with a median value of 0.2 pc. The dashed line in the figure marks the 5σ (or 0.04 pc at 1.7 kpc) boundary below which the source confusion becomes significant (Gutermuth et al. 2009), which means that the most frequent spacing (∼0.2 pc) is not an effect of resolution. As Gutermuth

### Table 6

Number of Young Stellar Object Candidates in IRDC G53.2 in the Herschel 500 μm Contours

| Class  | 8 Jy beam$^{-1}$ | 5 Jy beam$^{-1}$ | 3 Jy beam$^{-1}$ | 2 Jy beam$^{-1}$ | All IRDC$^{a}$ |
|--------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| I      | 15 (19%)        | 33 (42%)        | 56 (72%)        | 74 (95%)        | 78 (100%)       |
| Flat-spectrum | 4 (6%)        | 18 (27%)        | 36 (55%)        | 53 (80%)        | 66 (100%)       |
| II     | 11 (8%)         | 30 (22%)        | 54 (40%)        | 84 (62%)        | 135 (100%)      |
| III    | 0 (0%)          | 0 (0%)          | 2 (3%)          | 15 (24%)        | 62 (100%)       |

$^{a}$ The numbers without removing field star contamination.

$^{b}$ Flat-spectrum is included in Class I.
et al. (2009) pointed out, the cumulative distribution of the NN2 distance has a steep slope at small spacings and a shallow slope at large spacings. In Figure 10(b), we compare the NN2 distances of each YSO class. We include flat-spectrum objects in Class I, and they still show a clear peak at ~0.2 pc. The NN2 distances of Class II objects also have a peak, but not as sharp as that of Class I, and the NN2 distances of Class III are rather broadly distributed at larger spacings. We present the median of the NN2 distances of each class in Table 7. The NN2 distance histograms of each class indicate that Class I objects are more highly clustered with smaller spacings (0.2 pc in median) than later classes (0.4 and 0.7 pc in median for Class II and Class III, respectively), and their normalized cumulative distributions presented in Figure 10(c) more clearly show this. In Figure 10(c), the cumulative distribution of Class I has much steeper slope at small spacings than the other two classes. The NN2 distances that contain 70% of the sources in each class are 0.3, 0.5, and 0.7 pc for Class I, II, and III, respectively (see Table 7).

We perform a Kolmogorov–Smirnov (K-S) test to examine the probability that the parent distributions of each class are the same. Table 8 presents the K-S probabilities of the normalized cumulative distributions of the NN2 distances between each class. The results show <1% chance of similarity between any two classes, implying that Class I objects are typically closer to their nearest neighbors than Class II or III objects. Such a tendency was more obviously shown in a study on the Serpens cloud core, where the median NN2 distances of Class I, flat-spectrum, Class II, and Class III are 0.024, 0.079, 0.097, and 0.132 pc, respectively (Winston et al. 2007). An increase in the median distance between YSOs for more evolved sources/classes supports the idea that stars are born in a dense region and dispersed away from the birth site as they evolve, and the smaller spacing of Class I objects in IRDC G53.2 indicates that such a process is occurring in IRDC G53.2 as well.

On the other hand, the median NN2 distance of IRDC G53.2 is about a factor of two larger than that of nearby star-forming clusters. For comparison, the mean value of the median NN2 distances of 36 nearby, young clusters in Gutermuth et al. (2009) is 0.07 pc. The relatively larger spacing of the sources in IRDC G53.2 is likely due to its larger distance. As discussed in Section 6.2.1, there is a selection effect in the sources in IRDC G53.2 from distance so that the NN2 distances of the sources in the IRDC can be biased to higher values by the smaller number of the sources compared to the whole area (and hence a lower surface density of sources). Although the mean of the median NN2 distances of the clusters in Gutermuth et al. (2009) is 0.07 pc, the median NN2 distances of the individual clusters are spread up to ~0.4 pc, and they in general show a good correlation with the distance to the clusters as we present in Figure 11. In this plot, although there are a few outliers that are not easily explained, the NN2 distance of the sources in IRDC G53.2, lying on the tendency of the relation between distance and NN2 distance, is not particularly large when one takes into account its distance.

In the Spokes cluster at a distance of 800 pc, Teixeira et al. (2006) found a typical separation of ~0.1 pc for protostars distributed along its dusty filaments. This length scale is in very good agreement with the Jeans length in the cluster, so they suggested thermal fragmentation of the dense filamentary material. The NN2 distance of the Spokes cluster is also smaller than that of IRDC G53.2. The assumption that the Spokes cluster is at the same distance as IRDC G53.2 does not change the result because Teixeira et al. (2006) only used the bright
24 μm sources that are detectable at 1.7 kpc. However, the surface density of sources in the Spokes cluster is higher owing to its smaller area than IRDC G53.2, and we need to analyze the NN2 distance in a subregion with high source surface density in IRDC G53.2 to make a suitable comparison. There are three subregions where the YSO candidates are concentrated in Figure 9 that are consistent with the 3 Jy beam⁻¹ of the 500 μm contour, as well as dark filaments in 24 μm. We derive the NN2 distances of one of the subregions marked with an arrow “A” in Figure 9, where the YSO candidates are located along the dark filament in 24 μm. The number of the YSO candidates in region A is 41, and the median NN2 distance is ~0.1 pc, resulting in a similar length scale to that of the Spokes cluster.

The NN2 distance in region A is also comparable with the Jeans length, given as \( \lambda_J = (\pi c T/G\rho_0)^{1/2} = 0.21 \text{ pc} (T/10^4 \text{K})^{1/2} \times (n_H/10^4 \text{cm}^{-3})^{-1/2} \) (McKee & Ostriker 2007; Winston et al. 2007) for initial temperature ~20 K and density \( \sim 10^4 \text{ cm}^{-3} \), which are typical values in IRDCs (Pillai et al. 2006; Rathborne et al. 2006; Ragan et al. 2011). Comparing with the mean core separation of ~0.9 pc in the IRDC G011.11-0.12 (Henning et al. 2010), this indicates that IRDC G53.2, in which Jeans fragmentation is likely dominant, is more evolved than the IRDC G011.11-0.12. More detailed investigation on this subregion using far-IR data and/or molecular line maps such as HNC (1–0) (e.g., Jackson et al. 2010) will be useful to explore the fragmentation and star formation processes occurring in dense filamentary IRDCs.

### 7. Summary and Conclusions

We present star formation activity in IRDC G53.2, which is a long, filamentary IRDC at Galactic coordinates \((l, b) \sim (53°2, 0°0)\) using \textit{Spitzer} mid-IR data. We summarize our results and give conclusions below.

1. We found that IRDC G53.2 previously identified as several separate IRDCs in the mid-IR images coincides precisely with a CO cloud at \( v \sim 23 \text{ km s}^{-1} \). This gives a kinematic distance of 1.7 kpc to IRDC G53.2, and the cloud mass determined from CO emission is \( \sim 10^5 M_\odot \).

2. We made a PSC of IRDC G53.2 based on the photometry of \textit{Spitzer} MIPSGAL 24 μm data. The finalized catalog after merging with the GLIMPSE Catalog contains 373 sources in total, including four sources saturated in the MIPS 24 μm image but listed in the MSX PSC.

3. Based on the spectral index defined in the range 2–24 μm, we classified the sources in the catalog. Since IRDC G53.2 is located in the Galactic plane, there is negligible extragalactic contamination but substantial field star contamination, so that we accounted for the field star contamination by control field analysis. The census of the YSO candidates in the IRDC, if we remove the expected field star contamination, is determined as follows: 77 Class I (25%), 63 flat-spectrum (21%), 129 Class II (42%), 33 Class III (11%), and 6 No Class (~1%) without enough data points to determine spectral index.

4. We compared the classification of YSO candidates based on different classification schemes such as spectral index, mid-IR colors, and the wavelength range used. Different classifications using different criteria generally agree well, but flat-spectrum sources show high uncertainty with an ambiguity between Class I and Class II. High extinction toward IRDC G53.2 may also affect classification of flat-spectrum sources, but the effect on the overall statistics is not likely significant.

5. We compared the census of the YSO candidates in IRDC G53.2 with those of other well-studied star-forming regions. A similar fraction of Class I objects in IRDC G53.2 and other regions indicates that IRDC G53.2 is similar in age or at a similar evolutionary stage to the nearby star-forming regions. On the other hand, the comparison of stellar population to other IRDCs shows that IRDC G53.2, with strong association with mid-IR stellar sources, is at a later evolutionary status among IRDCs.

6. Spatial distribution of the YSO candidates in IRDC G53.2 shows a good correlation with \(^1{}^{3}\)CO column density and far-IR emission, and earlier-class objects tend to be more clustered where \(^1{}^{3}\)CO column density is higher. Overall, the median distance between the YSO candidates and their nearest neighbors is 0.2 pc, and earlier-class objects have smaller spacing, which indicates that YSOs disperse away from their birth sites as they evolve. In a small, denser region with high surface density of sources, the median nearest-neighbor distance is ~0.1 pc, which is comparable to the Jeans length scale.

Characterizing star formation activity in IRDC G53.2, based on the census of YSO candidates presented in this study provides an insight on the star-forming process occurring in IRDCs, particularly in an aspect of an associated molecular cloud rather than in an individual IRDC. We found YSOs in various evolutionary phases, and our results suggest that IRDC G53.2 is an active star-forming region where Jeans fragmentation is likely dominant. Spatial distribution of the YSO candidates, which has a correlation with far-IR emission and the objects only detected in the 24 μm but not in the IRAC bands, may imply the existence of much younger YSOs embedded in the IRDC. Further studies on full SEDs of YSO candidates including longer wavebands to derive mass and luminosity distribution of YSOs in IRDC G53.2 will help to investigate in more detail the nature and star formation properties of IRDCs.

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