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To cite this article: Yuanhai FU & Dong GUO (2020) Projected changes in the western North Pacific subtropical high under six global warming targets, Atmospheric and Oceanic Science Letters, 13:1, 26-33, DOI: 10.1080/16742834.2020.1696649

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/16742834.2020.1696649
Projected changes in the western North Pacific subtropical high under six global warming targets

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ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 14 May 2019
Revised 11 July 2019
Accepted 24 July 2019

KEYWORDS
Global warming target; western North Pacific subtropical high; climate change

1. Introduction

The western North Pacific subtropical high (WNPSH) is a dominant component of the East Asian summer (June–July–August) monsoon and anchors the subtropical rain belt on its northwestern flank. Its intensity, shape, and location consequently have a large influence on the East Asian summer precipitation (Lu 2002; Ren, Yang, and Sun 2013). An anomalous WNPSH causes widespread disasters over East Asia, such as floods, drought and heat waves (Lu, Li, and Ryu 2008; Wang, Xiang, and Lee 2013). Thus, the future behavior of the summer WNPSH under global warming is of great concern.

There are some uncertainties in the projected changes in the WNPSH under global warming. The CMIP3 future warming scenarios agreed on the strengthening of the WNPSH, which is depicted by the streamfunction at 925 hPa (Li et al. 2012). Liu et al. (2014) investigated the location of the 5880-gpm contour line and found the WNPSH is projected to enlarge in all the pathways in CMIP5. However, the lower-troposphere circulation indicates that the projected WNPSH experiences weak changes in the future (He and Zhou 2015). He et al. (2015) claimed that the WNPSH tends to weaken and retreat eastward in the mid-troposphere by analyzing the eddy geopotential height and eddy streamfunction field at 500 hPa. Huang, Li, and Wang (2016) suggested that the WNPSH, as depicted by the eddy geopotential height at 850 hPa, will be relatively weak during the mid-21st century. It appears that different variables lead to different results.

Moreover, the possible responses of the WNPSH to different warming targets have received less attention. The Paris Agreement aims to maintain the rise in global temperature well below 2.0°C above the preindustrial level and to pursue efforts to limit this even further to 1.5°C. It is expected that warming targets of even 4.0°C–5.0°C will be reached by the end of the 21st century under a high emission scenario (Xu et al. 2017; Fu, Lu,
and Guo 2018; Wang, Jiang, and Lang 2018). Therefore, the projected changes in the WNPSH under six global warming targets (1.5°C, 2.0°C, 2.5°C, 3.0°C, 3.5°C, and 4.0°C) are investigated in this study.

2. Data and methods

We analyzed the results of 29 CMIP5 models for their historical climate simulation (HIST, 1850–2005) and future climate projection under Representative Concentration Pathway 8.5 (RCP8.5, 2006–2100) (Riahi et al. 2011). Only one realization of the ensembles is selected for each model. All simulations have been interpolated onto a common 2.5° × 2.5° grid to enable the multi-model ensemble (MME) and median analyses. Table 1 lists some key information about the models.

Following the 1.5°C Special Report (IPCC 2018), 51-year (1850–1900) global mean surface temperature (GMST) is used as the quasi-preindustrial baseline, and the 20-year (1986–2005) NCEP reanalysis data and simulations of HIST are used to depict the observed and simulated present climate, respectively. The warming is defined as the GMST anomaly relative to the average of the preindustrial baseline. An 11-year moving mean of the anomalous GMST is used to identify the time when the global warming reaches the target. When the time is determined for a model, the 11-year (five years before and after) mean is referred to as the climatic state under the warming target. Under a warming target, the MME result is obtained by simply averaging the climatic state in the individual models with equivalent weight. The projected change is calculated by the difference of variables under the warming target and in the present climate.

The eddy geopotential height is used instead of the traditional geopotential height to measure the WNPSH (Huang and Li 2015; He et al. 2015, 2018), which is because the traditional geopotential height systematically increases with increasing temperature (Lu, Li, and Ryu 2008) and more than 80% of its increase is attributable to zonally uniform warming (He et al. 2018). The eddy geopotential height at 500 hPa referred to as $H^{500}$ hereafter is calculated by subtracting the zonal belt mean height between 0° and 40°N from the geopotential height (He et al. 2018). The WNPSH is also depicted by the eddy geopotential height at 850 hPa (referred to as $H^{850}$ hereafter) is calculated by subtracting the zonal mean height from the geopotential height (Huang, Li, and Wang 2016).

Several WNPSH indices (WNPSHIs) are defined to facilitate the estimation of the changes in the WNPSH. Similar to the indices defined by the China Meteorological Administration, in the region of (0°–60°N, 90°–180°E), the number of grid points with $H^{500}$ ($H^{850}$) ≥ 0.0 is defined as the area index; the accumulated value of the $H^{500}$ and $H^{850}$ at each grid point within the 0-gpm contour line is defined as the intensity index; and the minimum longitude of the 0-gpm contour line is defined as the west

| Model          | Affiliation and country | Resolution | 1.5°C | 2.0°C | 2.5°C | 3.0°C | 3.5°C | 4.0°C |
|----------------|-------------------------|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| BCC-CSM1-1     | BCC, China              | 128 × 64   | 2018  | 2035  | 2050  | 2060  | 2070  | 2084  |
| BCC-CSM1-1-M   | BCC, China              | 128 × 64   | 2010  | 2028  | 2048  | 2059  | 2068  | 2084  |
| BNU-ESM        | GCSS, China             | 128 × 64   | 2009  | 2023  | 2035  | 2047  | 2055  | 2065  |
| CESM1-CAM5     | NCAR, USA               | 288 × 192  | 2028  | 2041  | 2047  | 2057  | 2067  | 2078  |
| CCSM4          | NCAR, USA               | 288 × 192  | 2015  | 2030  | 2045  | 2058  | 2068  | 2077  |
| CanESM2        | CCCMA, Canada           | 128 × 64   | 2015  | 2028  | 2040  | 2049  | 2059  | 2069  |
| CNRM-CM5       | CNRM-CERFACS, France    | 256 × 128  | 2029  | 2044  | 2055  | 2066  | 2077  | 2088  |
| CSIRO-Mk3-6-0  | CSIRO-QCCCE, Australia  | 192 × 96   | 2035  | 2044  | 2055  | 2065  | 2076  | 2082  |
| FG0ALS-g2      | IAP, China              | 128 × 60   | 2031  | 2045  | 2061  | 2075  | 2089  | –      |
| FG0ALS-s2      | IAP, China              | 128 × 60   | 1997  | 2011  | 2025  | 2036  | 2048  | 2054  |
| FIO-ESM        | FIO, China              | 128 × 64   | 2028  | 2045  | 2055  | 2068  | 2078  | 2086  |
| GFDL-CM3       | NOAA GFDL, USA          | 144 × 90   | 2025  | 2036  | 2048  | 2055  | 2064  | 2071  |
| GFDL-ESM2G     | NOAA GFDL, USA          | 144 × 90   | 2037  | 2055  | 2068  | 2078  | 2092  | –      |
| GFDL-ESM2M     | NOAA GFDL, USA          | 144 × 90   | 2036  | 2051  | 2067  | 2078  | 2094  | –      |
| GISS-E2-H      | NASA GISS, USA          | 144 × 90   | 2019  | 2036  | 2051  | 2066  | 2080  | –      |
| GISS-E2-R      | NASA GISS, USA          | 144 × 90   | 2032  | 2053  | 2072  | 2086  | –      | –      |
| HadGEM2-AO     | MOHC, UK                | 192 × 145  | 2037  | 2046  | 2054  | 2062  | 2072  | 2078  |
| HadGEM2-CC     | MOHC, UK                | 192 × 145  | 2029  | 2041  | 2051  | 2058  | 2063  | 2073  |
| HadGEM2-ES     | MOHC, UK                | 192 × 145  | 2022  | 2035  | 2048  | 2056  | 2065  | 2073  |
| IPSL-CM5A-LR   | IPSL, France            | 96 × 96    | 2014  | 2028  | 2040  | 2047  | 2057  | 2066  |
| IPSL-CM5A-MR   | IPSL, France            | 144 × 143  | 2015  | 2031  | 2043  | 2051  | 2058  | 2068  |
| MIROC-ESM-CHEM | MIROC, Japan            | 128 × 64   | 2019  | 2042  | 2049  | 2058  | 2058  | 2068  |
| MIROC-ESM      | MIROC, Japan            | 128 × 64   | 2020  | 2031  | 2041  | 2052  | 2062  | 2071  |
| MIROCS         | MIROC, Japan            | 256 × 128  | 2033  | 2051  | 2059  | 2072  | 2082  | –      |
| MPI-ESM-LR     | MPI-M, Germany          | 192 × 96   | 2014  | 2038  | 2050  | 2061  | 2072  | 2083  |
| MPI-ESM-MR     | MPI-M, Germany          | 192 × 96   | 2021  | 2040  | 2051  | 2060  | 2071  | 2085  |
| MRI-CGCM3      | MRI, Japan              | 320 × 160  | 2041  | 2054  | 2063  | 2078  | 2087  | –      |
| NorESM1-ME     | NCC, Norway             | 144 × 96   | 2033  | 2048  | 2058  | 2070  | 2081  | 2092  |
| NorESM1-M      | NCC, Norway             | 144 × 96   | 2033  | 2049  | 2051  | 2062  | 2072  | 2086  | 2095  |
point index. Additionally, the area-averaged eddy stream-function over (10°–30°N, 120°–180°E) at 500 hPa is defined as the ESF500 index, following He et al. (2015). At 850 hPa, the summer mean relative vorticity anomalies averaged over (15°–27.5°N, 125°–150°E) is defined as RV850, following Lu, Li, and Ryu (2008); the difference in the zonal wind between (25°–35°N, 120°–150°E) and (10°–20°N, 130°–150°E) is defined as Ua850, following He et al. (2015).

3. Results

3.1 Model evaluation

Agreement between the model-simulated and observed \( H'500 \) and \( H'850 \) over the western North Pacific (WNP; 0°–40°N, 90°–180°E) is evaluated using Taylor diagrams (Taylor 2001) (Figure 1). Many models can reproduce the spatial pattern of \( H'500 \) in the observations, and some models are unable to sufficiently simulate the spatial pattern (Figure 1a). Almost all models have spatial correlation coefficients with observations larger than 0.90. Nearly all models (except FGOALS-g2 and GISS-E2-R) have normalized standard deviations (NSDs) between 0.50 and 1.50. The root-mean-square errors (RMSEs) exceed 0.50 in six models (CSIRO-Mk3-6-0, FGOALS-g2, FGOALS-s2, GISS-E2-H, GISS-E2-R, and MRI-CGCM3). Additionally, the \( H'500 \) is very weak over the WNP in BCC-CSM1-1 and BCC-CSM1-1-M compared to the observations (figure not shown for brevity). As evident from our findings, the models simulate the \( H'850 \) better than the \( H'500 \) (Figure 1b). Except for CanESM2, nearly all models have correlation coefficients larger than 0.90, NSDs between 0.75 and 1.25, and RMSEs lower than 0.50, which clearly suggest that these model-simulated \( H'850 \) results strongly resemble the observations.

In the meantime, the warming exceeds 4.0°C in more than two-thirds of the models from 2066 (IPSL-CM5A-LR) to 2095 (NorESM1-M) (Table 1), which is consistent with the results in Wang, Jiang, and Lang (2018). Global warming of 4.0°C does not occur in seven models (FGOALS-g2, GFDL-ESM2G, GFDL-ESM2M, GISS-E2-H, GISS-E2-R, MIROC5, and MRI-CGCM3), which are therefore not applied in the following investigations. Three models (BCC-CSM1-1-M, BNU-ESM, and FGOALS-s2), which project the 1.5°C target before the year 2010, are also excluded.

Therefore, the outputs of 16 models (CESM1-CAM5, CCSM4, CNRM-CMS, FIO-ESM, GFDL-CM3, HadGEM2-AO, HadGEM2-CC, HadGEM2-ES, IPSL-CM5A-LR, IPSL-CM5A-MR, MIROC-ESM-CHEM, MIROC-ESM, MPI-ESM-LR, MPI-ESM-MR, NorESM1-ME, and NorESM1-M) are used in the following analyses.

3.2 Projected changes in the WNPSH at 500 hPa

The WNPSH is projected to clearly weaken and retreat eastward at 500 hPa under the six global warming targets (Figure 2a,b). Under the 1.5°C warming target, the shift of the MME 0-gpm contour line is relatively weak (Figure 2a). It retreats quickly from the 1.5°C to 2.0°C warming target by approximately 2.5° in longitude. The WNPSH also experiences a rapid decrease from the 2.5°C to 3.0°C warming target. Under the 4.0°C warming target, the MME 0-gpm contour line shifts eastward evidently by approximately 6.0° in longitude. Generally, the multi-model median changes show the same tendency as that in the MME (Figure 2b).

![Figure 1](image-url). Taylor diagrams of (a) \( H'500 \) and (b) \( H'850 \) over the WNP (0°–40°N, 90°–180°E) between the NCEP reanalysis data and CMIP5 model outputs of HIST during the period of 1986–2005.
The changes in the spatial pattern of $H'500$ show that the projected WNPSH weakens slightly at its southern flank and intensifies slightly at its northern flank under the 1.5°C warming target (Figure 3(a)). Under the 2.0°C target, the $H'500$ over the WNP decreases evidently and the increase in $H'500$ mainly occurs north of 40°N (Figure 3(b)), indicating a more remarkable weakened WNPSH. With warming greater than 2.5°C, a clear decrease in $H'500$ occurs at the western and northern flanks of the WNPSH, which intensifies with the rise in the warming targets. There is also a slight increase in the core region of the WNPSH (Figure 3(c–f)). Additionally, all the evident changes agree in more than two-thirds of the models.

The weakened trend of the WNPSH in the mid-troposphere can be further certified by the changes in the WNPSHIs defined by different variables (Figure 4(a–d)). The area is projected to decrease (Figure 4(a)), the intensity is projected to decay (Figure 4(b)), the western point is projected to retreat eastward (Figure 4(c)), and the circulation is projected to decelerate (Figure 4(d)). The decrease shows an approximately linear trend with the rise in the warming target. The weakened WNPSH is projected in more than approximately three-quarters of the models.

3.3 Projected changes in the WNPSH at 850 hPa

In the lower troposphere, the WNPSH tends to intensify and extend westward (Figure 2(c)), showing an opposite tendency in comparison with that in the mid-troposphere. The MME 0-gpm contour line experiences a clear westward shift from present to the 1.5°C global warming target. However, the extension is very weak from the 1.5°C to 3.5°C global warming target. The WNPSH is projected to extend westward by approximately 2.0° in longitude from present to the 4.0°C warming target, showing a weaker change amplitude in comparison with that at 500 hPa. The strengthened WNPSH can also be found in the multi-model median changes (Figure 2(d)). The reverse change in the WNPSH in the mid- and lower troposphere bears high similarity to the results of He et al. (2015), who reported that the WNPSH would weaken in the mid-troposphere but remain unchanged in the lower troposphere.

The spatial pattern of the projected changes in $H'850$ clearly shows that the WNPSH tends to intensify in more than two-thirds of the models (Figure 3(g–l)). Under the 1.5°C global warming target, the $H'850$ intensifies clearly over East Asia and the WNP and decays.
over northeastern Asia north of approximately 40°N (Figure 3(g)). Under the 2.0°C warming target, the increase of $H'850$ mainly occurs over the core region of the WNPSH east of 150°E, and the decrease appears over the North Pacific (Figure 3(h)). It is found that similar changes in $H'850$ also appear under warmer targets and their amplitudes increase with the rising of the warming targets (Figure 3(i–l)).

The changes in various WNPSHIs further show that, in the lower troposphere, the area of the WNPSH is...
projected to increase (Figure 4(e)), the intensity is projected to intensify (Figure 4(f)), the west point is projected to extend westward (Figure 4(g)), and the circulation is projected to strengthen (Figure 4(h,i)). However, the changes are less evident compared with the changes at 500 hPa. Most of the projected changes...
agree only in more than half but less than three-quarters of the models, indicating a relatively large inter-model uncertainty in comparison with that in the mid-troposphere.

4. Summary and discussion

The projected changes in the WNPSH under six global warming targets (1.5°C, 2.0°C, 2.5°C, 3.0°C, 3.5°C, and 4.0°C) in both the mid- and lower troposphere are investigated using the outputs of 29 CMIP5 models in HIST and under RCP8.5. We first select 16 models that have global warming reaching 4.0°C by the end of 21st century and have the highest skills in reproducing the present-day $H'_{500}$ and $H'_{850}$.

It is found that the projected WNPSH varies oppositely in the mid- and lower troposphere. Generally, in the mid-troposphere, the projected WNPSH changes little under the 1.5°C warming target but retreats rapidly under the 2.0°C target. With warming greater than 2.5°C, the WNPSH is projected to weaken and retreat eastward evidently. The area of the WNPSH tends to decrease, the intensity tends to decay, the west point tends to retreat eastward, and the circulation tends to decelerate. These results are consistent in more than approximately three-quarters of the models.

Meanwhile, the WNPSH intensifies and extends westward clearly under the 1.5°C warming target in the lower troposphere, but changes little from the 1.5°C to 2.0°C target. Generally, the projected area is likely to increase, the intensity is projected to intensify, and the circulation is projected to be strengthened under higher warming targets. These changes agree in more than half but less than three-quarters of the models, indicating a relatively large inter-model uncertainty.

The meridional temperature gradient has been reported to be the dominant factor for the WNPSH in the mid-troposphere (He et al. 2015). Following that study, we also investigate the changes in the temperature gradient under different global warming targets. The results show that a strong meridional temperature gradient exists at the northern flank of the WNPSH, but almost consistent warming exists at the same level at the southern flank (Figure 5(a)). This pattern would result in decreased westerly winds in the mid-troposphere (Figure 5(b)), which contribute to the weakened WNPSH.

Previous studies have also suggested that the stronger warming over the tropical Indian Ocean (10°S–10°N, 50°–100°E) and weaker warming over the tropical western Pacific (10°S–10°N, 150°–180°E) favor an enhanced WNPSH at 850 hPa (He and Zhou 2015; Huang, Li, and Wang 2016). The SST gradient between them dominates the projected WNPSH intensity (He and Zhou 2015). However, Figure 5(c) shows that the multi-model median changes in the gradient are less than 0.1°C in most of the models under the six warming targets. This result
means that there may still be other factors responsible for the changes in the WNPSH. Therefore, a more detailed analysis is needed in future work.

This study shows that the WNPSH approximately linearly weakens at 500 hPa and intensifies at 850 hPa with a rise in the warming target. However, the WNPSH varies naturally on decadal time scales. The projected WNPSH might experience an interdecadal variation in the 21st century (Huang, Li, and Wang 2016). Therefore, a more detailed analysis is needed on the influences of the natural variability and global warming on the WNPSH.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

**Funding**

This research was supported by the National Key R&D Program of China [grant number 2017YFA0603802], the Strategic Priority Research Program of the Chinese Academy of Sciences [grant number XDA2006040102], and the National Natural Science Foundation of China [grant number 41675084].

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