



Atmospheric Controls on Climate Variability of Surface Incident Solar Radiation

Kaicun Wang (1,2), Robert Dickinson (2), Martin Wild (4), and Shunlin Liang (3)

(1) College of Global Change and Earth System Science, Beijing Normal University, Beijing, 100875, China (kcwang@jsg.utexas.edu), (2) The University of Texas at Austin, Department of Geological Science, Austin, United States (kcwang@jsg.utexas.edu), (3) College of Global Change and Earth System Science, Beijing Normal University, Beijing, 100875, China, (4) Institute for Atmospheric and Climate Science, ETH Zürich, 8092 Zürich, Switzerland

The Earth's climate system is driven by surface incident solar radiation (R_s). Direct measurements have shown that R_s has undergone significant decadal variations. However, large areas are not covered by these observations. Satellite-derived R_s that has global coverage is of low accuracy in its depictions of decadal variability. This paper shows that daily to decadal variations of terrestrial R_s , from both aerosols and cloud properties, can be accurately estimated using globally available measurements of Sunshine Duration (SunDu). We find that cloud cover variation controls R_s at a monthly scale but aerosols contribute most of the variability of R_s at a decadal time scale. In particular, since the late 1980's it has brightened over Europe due to decreases in aerosols and dimmed over China due to increases in aerosols. Because of its global availability and long-term history, SunDu provides an accurate and continuous proxy record of R_s that fills in the blank areas not covered by direct measurements. By merging direct measurements of R_s with those derived from SunDu, we obtain a good coverage over the Northern Hemisphere. The average increase from 1982 to 2008 is estimated to be 0.87 Wm^{-2} per decade.