

1    **Applicability of machine learning-based downscaling method to climate change**  
2    **prediction**

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## Abstract

The precipitation characteristics that cause water-related disasters strongly depend on local factors such as topography. Therefore, high-resolution climate change projection data is needed to accurately assess regional flood disaster risk. Climate models generally have low resolution and are insufficient to reproduce observed precipitation distributions. Downscaling techniques are usually applied to estimate detailed precipitation distributions. In recent years, machine learning techniques have been widely adopted for downscaling to improve accuracy. However, data-driven machine learning methods have been criticized for issues such as an inability to make appropriate extrapolations when predicting climate change, and there are currently very few examples of their application in this context. In this study, a machine learning–based downscaling bias correction method that recognizes hourly weather patterns in past and future climates was applied and its validity was examined. This method enables temporal and spatial downscaling and bias correction of multiple variables related to hydrological processes, while adequately reproducing climate change characteristics in climate models that are difficult to achieve using conventional methods. Although each variable was estimated independently, the temporal changes were highly correlated with reanalysis values, indicating that the variables were interrelated. Therefore, this simple method of

recognizing temporal and spatial distribution patterns can also be applied to hydrologically relevant climate model output variables, allowing downscaling and bias correction while accurately reflecting the climate change characteristics predicted by global climate models.

## Introduction

Regional climatic characteristics are highly dependent on local topographic features. Therefore, high-resolution data are required to predict regional water resources and water-related disaster risks in detail [1, 2]. However, global climate models are computationally intensive. Therefore, global climate simulations usually need to be performed at coarse spatial resolutions [3]. Dynamic and statistical downscaling techniques have been used to obtain high-resolution climate prediction data [4, 5]. Dynamic downscaling typically uses high-resolution regional climate models, which require significant computational resources for long-term climate simulations. Errors in climate models are likely to be preserved or amplified by high-resolution regional climate models [6]. Climate change projections show substantial differences in climate change characteristics between global and regional climate models [7–9]. Statistical downscaling does not require large computational resources but cannot accurately

reflect the effects of local topography; in some cases, the resulting characteristics may differ significantly from observations [10]. In recent years, many downscaling methods using machine learning have been developed to improve accuracy [11–14]. However, there are few cases in which machine learning techniques have been applied to climate change projections. Machine learning models are data-driven and may not accurately extrapolate beyond the range of the training data [15, 16]. To address this issue, a method was developed that incorporates physical constraints into machine learning models to improve predictive accuracy [17]. The methodology employed climate-invariant mapping to improve data efficiency, performance, and reproducibility across different climates. However, not all variables are necessarily applicable, and it is necessary to find a “feature transformation” that result in climate invariance and to verify its performance [17]. Another approach that has been applied to climate change projections is a machine learning–based downscaling method using hourly spatial distribution data, which exploits the strong relationship between the spatial distribution characteristics of precipitation over large areas and local precipitation characteristics [18]. This method estimates the characteristics of climate change by utilizing various weather patterns that emerge as a result of natural climate variability. Here, it is assumed that weather patterns will not change considerably from the past to the future.

For example, cold (warm) weather patterns observed during the training period are expected to appear more frequently in cold (warm) climates. If this assumption is incorrect, there will be a large discrepancy between the simulation results of the climate model and the climate change characteristics estimated using machine learning. This method can apply the trained patterns to various climate models by imposing a constraint requiring reproducibility of the physical model, that is, the ability to reproduce phenomena at fivefold or higher resolution. In this study, this method was further developed and downscaling experiments were conducted for past and future climates. Eight variables (precipitation, temperature, specific humidity, surface pressure, surface wind, and downward short- and longwave radiation) were used as inputs to land surface models for water-related risk assessment to verify whether extrapolation could be performed appropriately.

## Materials and Methods

### Overview of the machine learning method

A downscaling and bias correction method using machine learning [18] (hereafter referred to as YY2023) was developed to enable the application of climate model outputs, such as those from the World Climate Research Programme (WCRP) Coupled

90 Model Intercomparison Project Phase 6 (CMIP6). Numerical models can generally  
 91 reproduce meteorological phenomena at a resolution approximately five times the grid  
 92 size [19, 20]. Therefore, weather forecasts can reproduce weather events such as warm  
 93 and cold fronts associated with low-pressure systems, as well as the time-varying  
 94 characteristics of weather patterns within a domain. However, model biases owing to  
 95 imperfections in numerical models, such as insufficient resolution, are inevitable [10,  
 96 21, 22]. Machine learning methods are expected to capture a close relationship between  
 97 the simulated spatial distribution and observed values located at the center of the domain  
 98 through weather patterns. It is assumed that climate models with similar resolutions  
 99 reproduce weather systems with similar characteristics. Therefore, pattern recognition  
 100 of the relationship between the spatial distribution of various factors simulated by  
 101 weather forecast models and observational data is applicable to other models. In this  
 102 study, the effectiveness of this method was demonstrated by applying pattern  
 103 recognition to 20th Century Reanalysis Data (20CR) [23] and outputs from CMIP6  
 104 MIROC (MIROC) simulations [24]. This approach is expected to improve the accuracy  
 105 of estimating the water-related disaster risks and water resources associated with climate  
 106 change. In this study, the machine learning downscaling bias correction method was  
 107 applied to estimate precipitation, temperature at 2 m, near-surface wind at 10 m, specific

108 humidity, surface pressure, and downward short- and longwave radiation over land areas  
109 worldwide, excluding regions north of 84°N and south of 60°S (Fig 1), and the  
110 applicability of the method was demonstrated to climate models. We set  $7 \times 7$  grid points  
111 as the explanatory variables ( $1.5^\circ$  grid spacing) and divided the center grid of the  
112 explanatory variables into a  $3 \times 3$  grid to define the objective variables ( $1.5^\circ$  grid  
113 spacing) (Figs. 1b and 2). In this method, temporal downscaling was simultaneously  
114 performed from 3-h values to 1-h values (Figs. 2 and 3 and Table 1). Machine learning  
115 effectively corrects the spatial distribution of each variable. The estimated values of each  
116 variable reproduce the time-varying characteristics well but tend to be slightly  
117 underestimated. Therefore, after machine learning, the quantile mapping (QM) method  
118 was applied to the estimated values to perform quantitative correction [18], except for  
119 downward shortwave radiation (Fig. 4). Regarding shortwave radiation, no significant  
120 need for quantitative correction is determined because the range of values is not  
121 expected to change in the future climate. Quantitative bias in global climate model  
122 simulations is small, and sufficient accuracy can be achieved through downscaling and  
123 bias correction using the machine learning method alone. In addition, an experiment was  
124 performed in which only the QM method was applied to evaluate differences relative to  
125 this method. In the training process, data upscaled to  $0.5^\circ$  and  $1.5^\circ$  using ECMWF

Reanalysis v5 (ERA5) [25] were used as objective and explanatory variables, respectively. The learning period was 11 years, from 2008 to 2018, and a classifier was created for each month (Table 1). For downscaling from 3-h values to 1-h values, data from 3 h before and after the target period were used as explanatory variables, and an hourly classifier was created for each period (Fig 3). For inference, the 20CR and MIROC data were upscaled to  $1.5^{\circ}$  and applied to the classifier created during the learning process. Finally, the 20CR data and MIROC output values were downscaled to a spatial resolution of  $0.5^{\circ}$  and a temporal resolution of 1 h (Table 1).

**Fig 1. Calculation domain and the domains of explanatory variables and objective variables used in machine learning.** (A) The calculation domain (gray area) is the land area from  $60^{\circ}\text{S}$  to  $84^{\circ}\text{N}$ . B) The thick frame defines the explanatory variables ( $1.5^{\circ}$  grid spacing) on a  $7 \times 7$  grid, and the thin inner frame is divided into a  $3 \times 3$  grid to define the objective variables ( $0.5^{\circ}$  grid spacing).

**Fig 2. Schematic view of the training and inference processes.** The numbers of explanatory and response variables (dimensions) were 147 and 1, respectively. A  $7 \times 7$  grid was selected as the explanatory variable, including data from 3 h before (“-3h”)



and 3 h after (“+3h”) the target time (1.5° grid spacing). The central grid of the explanatory variables was divided into  $3 \times 3$  grid points, which were selected as the objective variables (0.5° grid spacing). Twenty-seven classifiers were created for each grid with a coarse mesh (spatial downscaling) and for temporal downscaling from three-hourly to hourly resolution. For variables other than precipitation and downward short- and longwave radiation, “0 h,” “+1 h,” and “+2 h” represent the initial time, 1 h later, and 2 h later, respectively. Precipitation and solar radiation corresponded to averages over 0–1 h, 1–2 h, and 2–3 h.

**Fig 3. Schematic view of temporal downscaling.** The explanatory variables used are data from three hours before and after the “target time.” Precipitation and downward short- and longwave radiation were estimated using 3-h averages, whereas the other variables were estimated using snapshot values. At the target time, the objective variable is set for each hour. “Initial time,” “1st time,” “2nd time,” and “3rd time” represent 0 h, 1 h, 2 h, and 3 h after the initial time in the target time period. “Initial time,” “1st time,” and “2nd time” are used for variables other than precipitation and downward short- and longwave radiation and correspond to “0h,” “+1h,” and “+2h” in

Fig. 2. Precipitation and downward short- and longwave radiation correspond to three-hourly integrated or average values for 0–1 h, 1–2 h, and 2–3 h.

**Table 1. Experimental conditions.**

Experiment	MLDS_20CR	MLDS_MIROC
Explanatory variable	ERA5 reanalysis data (upscaled 1.5degree) 7 by 7 grids	Same as MLDS_20CR
Objective variable	ERA5 reanalysis data (upscaled 0.5 degree)	Same as MLDS_20CR
Training term	Every month from 2008 to 2018	Same as MLDS_20CR
Target mode output	NOAA-CIRES-DOE 20th Century Reanalysis V3	Atmosphere and Ocean Research Institute; Centre for Climate System Research - National Institute for Environmental Studies: WCRP CMIP6: the MIROC team MIROC6 model output.
Downscaling term	Past: Every month from 1955 to 1984	Historical: Every month from 1985 to 2014
	Present: Every month from 1985 to 2014	SSP126: Every month from 2071 to 2100

**Fig 4. Flowchart of the method.** DSWR denotes downward shortwave radiation.

## Bias correction and downscaling methods using machine learning.

A support vector machine regression (SVM–SVR) [26], constructed in a previous study [18], was used. An SVM is a supervised learning technique that uses a subset of the data to derive predictions from support vectors. An SVM seeks to obtain optimal results by finding a maximum-margin hyperplane determined by maximizing the distance

175 between support vectors. Compared with other machine learning techniques, such as  
176 neural networks and random forests, SVM has several advantages [27–29]. For example,  
177 SVR has been shown to perform well, even with small sample sizes [26]. SVMs have  
178 been employed in various fields, including meteorology, hydrology, disaster prevention  
179 management, and water resources management, and have proven effective in recognizing  
180 rare precipitation events [30–32]. In this study, the SVM library was used in the Intel®  
181 Extension for Scikit-learn (ver. 2023.1.1) [33] and the Epsilon-Support Vector  
182 Regression (SVR) implementation in Scikit-learn (ver. 1.2.2) [34]. The SVR method  
183 requires the hyperparameters gamma, C, and epsilon to be specified. Gamma is a kernel  
184 parameter that specifies the width of the Gaussian radial basis function (RBF) kernel, C  
185 is the penalty constraint error, and epsilon is the width of the dead zone [35]. Determining  
186 these hyperparameters is crucial for improving the generalizability of precipitation  
187 estimates. However, determining the optimal parameters requires substantial  
188 computational resources [34, 35]. Therefore, it is necessary to efficiently obtain optimal  
189 hyperparameters. Although hyperparameters can be specified at each time point in this  
190 method, this approach is highly inefficient because determining the optimal values over  
191 the entire domain requires substantial computational resources. Therefore, the same set  
192 hyperparameter values were applied to all the grid cells in the domain, following the same

methodology used in previous studies involving YY2023 (S1 Table) [18, 36].

## SVR method.

The SVR method requires the hyperparameters gamma, C, and epsilon to be set.

Gamma is the kernel function parameter that specifies the width of the Gaussian radial basis function kernel, C is the penalty constraint error, and epsilon is the width of the dead zone [35].

In the SVM method, the vector  $x = (x_1, x_2, x_3, \dots, x_p)^T$  consisting of  $p$  explanatory variables is the input, and a classifier is trained to correctly output the objective variable  $f(x_i)$ . By introducing the intercept  $b$  and the coefficient vector  $w = (w_1, w_1, w_1, \dots, w_p)^T$ , the linear regression function was defined as follows:

$$f(x_i) = w^T x_i + b \quad (1)$$

In this function,  $b$  and  $w$  are estimated to satisfy this relationship. In SVR, the non-negative parameter  $\varepsilon$  is set in advance, and only large residuals of  $e_i$  that exceed the range of  $-\varepsilon \leq e_i \leq \varepsilon$  are recorded as penalties of  $\xi_i$ . The parameters are estimated to minimize the following equation:

$$\psi_\varepsilon(w, \xi) = \frac{1}{2} \|w\|_2^2 + C \sum_{i=1}^n \xi_i \quad (2)$$

$$\|w\|_2 = \sqrt{w_1^2 + w_1^2 + \dots + w_p^2} \quad (3)$$

However, the following restrictions apply.

$$-\varepsilon - \xi_i \leq f(x_i) - (w^T x_i + b) \leq \varepsilon + \xi_i \quad (4)$$

In the above equations,  $C$  is the penalizing constraint error and,  $\varepsilon$  (epsilon) is the width of the insensitive zone. To determine the nonlinear regression equation, a feature map  $\phi(x)$  that represents the vector of the nonlinear terms (features) of the explanatory variables was introduced. The regression function using the feature map is as follows:

$$f(x) = w^T \phi(x) + b \quad (5)$$

To avoid increased computational cost owing to increasing dimensionality of the feature space, kernel functions that can express the inner products in the feature space were introduced.

$$k(x_1, x_2) = \phi(x_1)^T \phi(x_2) \quad (6)$$

The inner product of two vectors is maximized when they have the same direction. Therefore, the kernel function can be interpreted as the similarity between two vectors in the feature space. However, when the dimensions of the feature space are large, calculating the inner product (6) is difficult. Therefore, the kernel method uses the following function, which is the inner product in a high-dimensional space:

$$k(x_1, x_2) = \exp(-\gamma \|x_1 - x_2\|^2) \quad (7)$$

This function is called the Gaussian radial basis function kernel and,  $\gamma$  (gamma) is the kernel function parameter [37,38]. The hyper-parameters and scale factors for each variable are shown in S1 Table.

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## 232 **Training and test data.**

233 The fifth-generation ECMWF reanalysis for global climate and weather (ERA5)  
234 hourly data were used as the training data for 11 years, from 2008 to 2018. As test data,  
235 the 20th century reanalysis data (20CR) for 60 years, from 1955 to 2014, and climate  
236 model data (MIROC) for historical data from 1985 to 2014 and future projections for the  
237 SSP126 scenario from 2071 to 2100 were used. The resolution of the 20CR and MIROC  
238 data was adjusted to 1.5° for consistency with the recognition patterns produced by the  
239 ERA5 reanalysis data. The variables were estimated at a resolution of 0.5° by  
240 downscaling them to a fine grid (3 × 3) using the same hyperparameters and feature  
241 ranges (7 × 7 grid points) used in the recognition pattern of the weather forecast model  
242 (Figs 1, 2, and 3; Table 1).

243

## Quantile mapping method

To perform quantitative corrections, the CDF transformation method [39] was applied to the machine learning downscaling estimates, except for downward shortwave radiation. In machine learning methods, the accuracy is highly dependent on the number of samples. Heavy rainfall results in a small number of samples, which makes it difficult to accurately estimate rainfall. Techniques such as undersampling and oversampling are available to correct for unbalanced sampling [40]. In this study, the quantile mapping method (CDFt in the R package) [41] was used instead of undersampling or oversampling, considering the complexity of the adjustment. “CDF-t” assumes that there exists a transformation  $T$  that can convert the CDFs of GCM variables (e.g., temperature, precipitation, wind speed) into CDFs representing long-term variables at a local scale. To estimate the quantitative correction for future outputs of machine learning estimates, the transformation  $T$  is:

$$T(F_{Gh}(x)) = F_{Oh}(x) \quad (8)$$

$$T(F_{Gf}(x)) = F_{Of}(x) \quad (9)$$

where  $F_{Oh}$  is the CDF of observation data over current period, and  $F_{Gh}$  is the CDF of the bilinearly interpolated simulation data over current period.  $F_{Of}$  and  $F_{Gf}$  are the equivalent CDFs of  $F_{Oh}$  and  $F_{Gh}$ , respectively, for future (or simply different) periods. To model  $T$ ,

262  $x$  in  $Gh$  in Equation (1) with  $F(u)$ , where  $u$  is  $[0,1]$  and the following relationship is  
 263 obtained:

$$264 \quad T(u) = F_{Oh} \circ F_{Gh}^{-1}(u) \quad (10)$$

265 Hence, assuming that the relationship (4) remains valid, the CDF is provided by

$$266 \quad F_{Of}(x) = T(F_{Gf}(x)) = F_{Oh} \circ F_{Gh}^{-1}(u) \circ F_{Gf}(x) \quad (11)$$

267 In the CDFt package, Eq. (1) reconstructs  $F_{Of}$  from  $F_{Oh}$ ,  $F_{Gh}$ , and  $F_{Gf}$ , and Eq. (8) performs  
 268 quantile mapping from  $F_{Of}$  and  $F_{Gf}$  to correct  $Gf$ . In practice,  $F_{Oh}$ ,  $F_{Gh}$ , and  $F_{Gf}$  were  
 269 estimated using the empirical cumulative distribution function. However, the CDFt  
 270 method only works correctly when the observed values of  $Oh$  and  $Gh$  have similar ranges.  
 271 In this study, we used ERA5 data with  $0.5^\circ$  resolution from 2008 to 2018 and 20CR and  
 272 MIROC data over the current period from 1985 to 2014 instead of  $Oh$  and  $Gh$ . Instead of  
 273  $Gf$ , the machine learning estimates use 20CR for past period from 1955 to 1984 and  
 274 MIROC for future projection from 2071 to 2100 (Fig 5).

275

276 **Fig 5. Schematic view of quantile mapping method.**  $F_{Oh}$  is observation (ERA5  
 277 reanalysis data) at  $0.5^\circ$ .  $F_{Gh}$  and  $F_{Gf}$  are present and future/past climate model outputs  
 278 (20CR and MIROC, respectively).  $F_{Of}$  is quantitatively corrected value (final product).



## Results

### Validation of the downscaling bias correction method

July is the month with an active Asian monsoon that brings large amounts of rainfall. This not only causes frequent flooding and other water disasters but also has a major impact on water resources; therefore, estimating the amount of rainfall during this period is extremely important. Figs 6 and 7 show the precipitation and temperature distributions for July over the global and Asian monsoon regions for the 30-year average values of 20CR, MLDS\_20CR, and ERA5 from 1955 to 1984. Downscaling the 20CR data using this method confirmed that the distribution of precipitation and temperature were almost identical to that of ERA5. The precipitation characteristics corresponding to the topography were reproduced, indicating that the downscaling and bias correction methods were effective. The detailed spatial distribution characteristics of the temperature distribution corresponding to the topography were also estimated. Correction of the temperature distribution in alpine zones has a large effect on snow accumulation and snowmelt; therefore, it is also important for estimating water resources. The correlation coefficients and RMSEs of the spatial distributions of the eight variables in the 30-year average values of MLDS\_20CR, 20CR, and ERA5

showed that, relative to ERA5, the bias of 20CR bias was significantly improved in MLDS\_20CR for all variables (Fig 8). In particular, the overestimation of 20CR in the low-temperature range was improved by MLDS\_20CR, indicating that the bias was corrected and the performance was improved by this method. The spatial distribution characteristics of spatial distributions were accurately well estimated using by this method (S1, S2, and S3 Figs).

**Fig 6. Precipitation distribution characteristics in July.** Thirty-year average of precipitation in July from 1955 to 1984 in the global and Asian monsoon area of 20CR, MLDS\_20CR, and ERA5, respectively. (A) Global area of 20CR. (B) Global area of MLDS-20CR. (C) Global area of ERA5. (D) Asian monsoon area of 20CR. (E) Asian monsoon area of MLDS-20CR. (F) Asian monsoon area of ERA5.

**Fig 7. The same figure as Fig 6 except for temperatures.**

**Fig 8. Bias correction effect using this method.** Scatter diagrams of the 30-year average of annual mean values of MLDS\_20CR for 20CR and ERA5 for the first 30 years, from 1955 to 1984. (A) 20CR in temperature (TEMP2M). (B) 20CR for

315 downward long-wave radiation (DLWR). (C) 20CR at specific humidity (SHUM). (D)  
 316 20CR for downward short-wave radiation (DSWR). (E) ERA5 as a function of  
 317 temperature (TEMP2M). (F) ERA5 under downward long-wave radiation (DLWR). (G)  
 318 ERA5 at specific humidity (SHUM). (H) ERA5 under downward short-wave radiation  
 319 (DSWR). (I) 20CR surface pressure (SP). (J) 20CR in the near surface winds (zonal) at  
 320 10m (U10M). (K) 20CR under near-surface winds (meridional) at 10m (V10M). (L)  
 321 20CR during precipitation (PREC). (M) ERA5 surface pressure (SP). (N) ERA5 under  
 322 near-surface winds (zonal) at 10m (U10M). (O) ERA5 under near-surface winds  
 323 (meridional) at 10m (V10M). (P) ERA5 during precipitation (PREC). MLDS\_20CR and  
 324 ERA5 were upscaled to match the resolution of 20CR. The correlation coefficients (R)  
 325 and RMSEs of the spatial distributions are shown in each diagram.

326

327 The 99th percentile values of the hourly data except for precipitation and  
 328 temperature in the first 30 years, and the climatic different values between the first and  
 329 last 30 years in ERA5 and MLDS\_20CR are shown in S4 and S5 Figs. The spatial  
 330 distribution characteristics of extreme values in MLDS\_20CR corresponded well with  
 331 those in ERA5, with a high correlation of  $>0.97$ . The values of precipitation and  
 332 temperature data are described in detail in the following subsections.

## Validation for past climate change

The spatial distribution of the annual mean climate change for the eight variables of 20CR, MLDS\_20CR, and ERA5 over the first 30 years (1955–1985) versus the second 30 years (1985–2014) is shown in Fig 9 and S6 and S7 Figs. The shaded areas indicate areas with a significant change at the 95% significance level with respect to interannual variation. For the seven variables, including temperature (TEMP2M), except for precipitation (PREC), the climate change distribution of MLDS\_20CR was almost the same as that of 20CR, and the change characteristics were consistent with ERA5. The DSWR of MLDS\_20CR also closely reproduced the change characteristics of the 20CR, even though no quantitative correction was performed (Figs 9G and 9H). The areas showing significant changes corresponded well. Regarding precipitation, the amount of climate change was small, and the spatial distribution characteristics of the amount of change were different. The correlation coefficients and RMSEs of MLDS\_20CR and 20CR for the annual mean climate change of the eight variables also showed that, except for precipitation, the correlation coefficients were over 0.93, and the quantitative correspondence was almost the same. However, for precipitation, the correlation was weak, and the quantitative correspondence was not consistent (Fig 10).

351 However, the spatial distribution of climate change trends in ERA5 corresponded well  
352 with those in MLDS-20CR and 20CR, but the amount of change at each grid point did  
353 not correspond well (S8 Fig). This indicates that the climate change at each grid point is  
354 small and that the climate differences between different reanalysis data do not match  
355 well. The frequency and extreme values of precipitation and temperature are important  
356 for assessing flood disaster risk in a region. The performance of the temporal  
357 downscaling from three-hourly to hourly was confirmed by examining the frequency of  
358 hourly precipitation. Fig 11 shows the annual frequency of hourly precipitation events  
359 with precipitation of 1 mm or more in the first 30 years, and the climate difference  
360 values between the first and second 30 years in ERA5 and MLDS\_20CR. Regarding the  
361 spatial distribution of frequency over the first 30 years, MLDS\_20CR estimated the  
362 same regional distribution characteristics as ERA5, and although there was a tendency  
363 for it to be slightly underestimated in the tropical regions of Africa, it showed a high  
364 correlation of 0.98. However, the correlation coefficient for climate change with ERA5  
365 was 0.30, which is a small correlation, and the amount of change by region did not  
366 match. The 99th percentile values of 1-hour precipitation (shaded areas indicate areas  
367 where the change in interannual variability is significant at the 95% confidence interval)  
368 are shown in Fig 12. In the spatial distribution of the first 30 years, the distribution

characteristics of heavy rainfall were well estimated, and the correlation with ERA5 (0.92) was also high. In contrast, the correlation coefficient of climate change with ERA5 was 0.03, indicating there was almost no correlation, and the amount of change did not match. The frequency of temperatures below 0 °C has a substantial impact on water resources through snow accumulation and melting. Fig 13 shows the spatial distribution of the frequency of hourly temperatures below 0 °C (throughout the year). For the spatial distribution of the frequency over the first 30 years, MLDS\_20CR estimated nearly the same regional distribution characteristics as ERA5 and showed a high correlation (0.99) with ERA5. However, its correlation with climate change was relatively low (0.73). The extent of climate change varies greatly in some regions, particularly in the coastal areas of the Arctic and alpine regions. Fig 14 shows the 99th percentile values of the hourly temperatures in the first 30 years, and the climate differences between the first and last 30 years in ERA5 and MLDS\_20CR. MLDS\_20CR estimated nearly the same regional distribution characteristics as ERA5 and showed a high correlation (0.99) with ERA5. In contrast, climate change has a low correlation with ERA5 (correlation coefficient = 0.36).

**Fig 9. Estimation of climate change characteristics using 20CR.** Annual mean climate difference between the first 30 years (past) and the last 30 years (present). (A) 20CR in precipitation (PREC). (B) MLDS-20CR in precipitation (PREC). (C) ERA5 in precipitation (PREC). (D) 20CR in temperature (TEMP2M). (E) MLDS-20CR at temperature (TEMP2M). (F) ERA5 at temperature (TEMP2M). (G) 20CR for downward short-wave radiation (DSWR). (H) MLDS-20CR for downward short-wave radiation (DSWR). (I) ERA5 for downward short-wave radiation (DSWR). Shaded areas indicate significant increases with 95% confidence intervals using Welch's t-test.

**Fig 10. Relationship between climate change simulated by the climate model and the values estimated by this method.** Scatter diagrams of annual mean climate difference values between the first 30 years (past) and the last 30 years (present) of MLDS\_20CR for 20CR. (A) Temperature (TEMP2M). (B) Downward long-wave radiation (DLWR). (C) Specific humidity (SHUM). (D) Downward short-wave radiation (DSWR). (E) Surface pressure (SP). (F) Near-surface winds (zonal) at 10 m (U10M). (G) Near-surface winds (meridional) at 10 m (V10M). (H) Precipitation (PREC). MLDS\_20CR was upscaled to match the resolution of 20CR.

**Fig 11. Annual frequency of hourly precipitation events with precipitation of 1 mm or more in the first 30 years, and the climate difference values between the first and last 30 years in ERA5 and MLDS\_20CR.** (A) The frequency in ERA5. (B) The frequency of MLDS\_20CR. (C) Frequency scatter diagram for ERA5 and MLDS\_20CR. (D) The climate difference values in ERA5. (E) Climate difference values in MLDS\_20CR. (F) The scatter diagram of climate different values in ERA5 and MLDS\_20CR.

**Fig 12. The 99th percentile values of hourly precipitation in the first 30 years, and the climate difference values between the first and last 30 years in ERA5 and MLDS\_20CR.** (A) The 99th percentile values in ERA5. (B) The 99th percentile values in MLDS\_20CR. (C) Scatter diagram of the 99th percentile values of ERA5 and MLDS\_20CR. (D) The climate difference values in ERA5. (E) Climate difference values in MLDS\_20CR. (F) Scatter diagram of the climate difference values in ERA5 and MLDS\_20CR. Shaded areas indicate areas where the change in interannual variability was significant at the 95% confidence interval.



**Fig 13. The spatial distribution of the annual frequency of hourly temperatures below 0 °C in the first 30 years, and the climate difference values between the first and last 30 years in ERA5 and MLDS\_20CR.** (A) The frequency in ERA5. (B) The frequency of MLDS\_20CR. (C) Frequency scatter diagram for ERA5 and MLDS\_20CR. (D) The climate difference values in ERA5. (E) The climate difference values in MLDS\_20CR. (F) Scatter diagram of the climate difference values in ERA5 and MLDS\_20CR. Shaded areas indicate areas where the change in interannual variability is significant at the 95% confidence interval.

**Fig 14. The 99th percentile values of hourly temperatures in the first 30 years, and the climate difference values between the first and last 30 years in ERA5 and MLDS\_20CR.** (A) The 99th percentile values in ERA5. (B) The 99th percentile values in MLDS\_20CR. (C) Scatter diagram of the 99th percentile values of ERA5 and MLDS\_20CR. (D) The climate difference values in ERA5. (E) Climate difference values in MLDS\_20CR. (F) Scatter diagram of climate different values in ERA5 and MLDS\_20CR. Shaded areas indicate areas where the change in interannual variability is significant at the 95% confidence interval.

## **Applicability to future climate change predictions**

SSP126 is one of the most optimistic global warmings scenarios and predicts that the rise in temperature from pre-industrial levels will be limited to approximately 1.5-1.7 °C. Without the ability to properly extrapolate future projections, even for scenarios with small temperature increases, it would be to apply this method to future climate change scenarios. In this study, a scenario with a relatively gradual increase in temperature was selected and verified whether it was applicable to future projections. The characteristics of the spatial distributions of the 30-year mean from 1985 to 2014 in the MLDS\_MIROC historical data corresponded well with ERA5 and corrected the biases in the MIROC historical data (S9, S10, and S11 Figs). The spatial distributions of climate change for the eight variables in MIROC and MLDS\_MIROC historical (1985–2014) and SSP126 (2071–2100) are shown in Fig 15 and S12 and S13 Figs. Except for precipitation, MLDS\_MIROC quantitatively corresponded well with the changes in MIROC, with correlation coefficients greater than 0.89. For precipitation, the correlation coefficient was somewhat high at 0.58; however, the amount of change was generally small, and the areas where significant changes occurred were sparse.

**Fig 15. Relationship between climate change predicted by the climate model and the values estimated by this method.** Annual mean climate difference between the present 30 y (historical scenario) from 1985 to 2014 and the future 30 y (SSP126 scenario) from 2071 to 2100. (A) MIROC for precipitation (PREC). (B) MLDS\_MIROC for PREC. (C) Scatter diagram of PREC in MIROC and MLDS\_MIROC, (D) MIROC for temperature (TEMP2M). (E) MLDS\_MIROC for TEMP2M. (F) Scatter diagram of TEMP2M in MIROC and MLDS\_MIROC, (G) MIROC for downward shortwave radiation (DSWR). (H) MLDS\_MIROC for DSWR. (I) Scatter diagram of DSWR in MIROC and MLDS\_MIROC. Shaded areas indicate significant increases with 95% confidence intervals using Welch's t-test. MLDS\_MIROC was upscaled to match the resolution of MIROC.

## **Correspondence of estimated values of each variable to weather events**

In this method, each variable is estimated using different explanatory and objective variables. Therefore, it was necessary to investigate whether a relationship exists between these variables over time. Fig. 16 shows the time series of the eight variables in 20CR, MLDS\_20CR, and ERA5 for a specific location in July 1985. In

Japan, July is the month when the rainy season changes to a dry period, and changes in the climatic characteristics of the eight variables are also noticeable. For time changes other than precipitation, a high correlation ( $> 0.74$ ) is shown with ERA5. Each element changed in response to the difference between the rainy and dry periods and was consistent with the weather patterns. In 20CR, the effects of terrain (altitude) due to low resolution can be observed (especially in pressure); however, this is corrected by this downscaling method, and the data become closer to ERA5. The correlation between precipitation and ERA5 is low (0.37). Slight differences in the location and timing of the disturbance passage were observed between ERA5 and 20CR, causing large local differences in the temporal variation of precipitation.

**Fig 16. Temporal variations at a specific point (136E, 36N) in July 1985. (A)** Precipitation (PREC). (B) Temperature (TEMP2M). (C) Specific humidity (SHUM). (D) Near-surface wind at 10 m (zonal) (U10M). (E) Surface pressure (SP). (F) Near-surface wind at 10 m (meridional) (V10M). (G) Downward longwave radiation (DLWR). (H) Downward shortwave radiation (DSWR). R is the correlation coefficient between MLDS\_20CR and ERA5.

## Comparison with quantile mapping method

Quantile mapping is a commonly used downscaling technique. In general, this strongly depends on the characteristics of the model output data. Therefore, if the meteorological characteristics at the downscaled grid points differ significantly between the observations and the model output, the QM estimates may differ significantly from the observations. Applying QM alone does not adequately correct bias in the spatial distribution of precipitation [38]. S14 Fig shows the temporal variation in temperature in July 1985 for QM only, ERA5, 20CR, and MLDS\_20CR at a specific grid point. While MLDS\_20CR had almost the same temporal variation characteristics as ERA5, the reproducibility of diurnal variation decreased in QM, and the variation characteristics were closer to those of 20CR than to ERA5. MLDS\_20CR is an hourly estimate, whereas QM is a three-hourly estimate, therefore, the reproducibility of daily changes is inevitably low. Furthermore, if the proportion of the ocean area is large at the model grid point, the diurnal variation in the QM estimate may be smaller owing to its influence. In contrast, MLDS\_20CR can estimate variation characteristics that reflect local influences, such as diurnal variation.

## Discussion

510 To investigate the applicability of this method to climate change, downscaling  
511 and bias correction of eight climate model variables (precipitation, temperature, surface  
512 pressure, surface wind, specific humidity, downward shortwave radiation, and longwave  
513 radiation) used as inputs to a hydrological model was performed. The estimates had  
514 almost the same spatial distribution characteristics as the ERA5 reanalysis. This  
515 indicates that the weather pattern characteristics of each variable simulated by the  
516 climate model are consistent with the ERA5 reanalysis and that the classifier trained  
517 using the ERA5 reanalysis can be applied to climate model output. If the climate model  
518 has a bias in large-scale circulation (e.g., a large north–south shift in the storm track), it  
519 may cause a large error in precipitation frequency in the region, which may have a  
520 considerable impact on the precipitation amount. These biases in climate models also  
521 affect precipitation characteristics estimated using this method, leading to large  
522 discrepancies between estimates and observations. Therefore, this method is applicable  
523 only if the large-scale circulation characteristics reproduced by climate models do not  
524 deviate significantly from observations. This method reproduced the hourly frequency  
525 and extreme value distribution of precipitation, indicating that precipitation events were  
526 effectively downscaled in space and time. This method can also reproduce the spatial  
527 distribution of the frequency of temperatures below 0°C, except in special cases,

528 making it useful for evaluating water resources such as snow accumulation and  
529 snowmelt. To reproduce past climate changes, the method reproduced the same climate  
530 change patterns as the reanalysis values and climate models, except for precipitation.  
531 This indicates that various hourly spatial patterns during the current cold and warm  
532 seasons also apply to past weather patterns. Compared to ERA5, the climate change  
533 characteristics were well reproduced over a wide area, but the amount of climate change  
534 at each grid point was not as consistent as expected (S6 Fig). This is likely because the  
535 extent of climate change was small, and the difference in the characteristics of the  
536 reanalysis data between 20CR and ERA5 was greater than the extent of climate change.  
537 The characteristics of the change in precipitation were unclear, and there were few areas  
538 where the change was statistically significant. This suggests that the natural variability  
539 of precipitation is greater than the influence of global warming and that the differences  
540 in the characteristics of the reanalysis data used for downscaling (20CR and ERA5),  
541 such as slight differences in storm tracks, significantly affect the distribution pattern of  
542 downscaled local precipitation. Climate change in some coastal and alpine regions of  
543 the Arctic has underestimated the frequency of subfreezing temperatures and the 99th  
544 percentile values. This was assumed to be due to changes in the local environment, such  
545 as the disappearance of glaciers. If the local environment changes significantly, it may

be difficult to respond in certain cases. In the future, it will be necessary to incorporate the effects of glacier loss into our estimates. By linking machine learning estimates with hydrological models, it may be possible to adjust temperature to reflect the effects of glacier loss.

Projections of future climate estimated patterns of climate change are almost identical to those reproduced in the climate model, with the exception of precipitation. Precipitation was relatively more strongly correlated with future climate change than with past climate change. This may be due to clearer sensitivity to global warming. Regarding the so-called extrapolation issue, it is assumed that the extrapolation of this method works properly unless climatic characteristics change significantly, such as glacial disappearance. The correlation between the time variation of each variable and ERA5 was relatively high at 0.71 or more, except for precipitation, and the time variation characteristics corresponded well. On the other hand, with regard to precipitation, even small differences in storm tracks between ERA5 and 20CR can lead to large differences in the local temporal variability of precipitation due to the influence of topography. Therefore, it is necessary to estimate the impacts of natural variability and sensitivity to global warming on precipitation using ensemble experiments. In general, the meteorological variables reproduced by climate models are related through



synoptic-scale weather patterns, and by applying this method to estimate the relationship between large-scale and local fields, the relationship between each variable was confirmed, even in downscaling estimations.

Several studies have applied machine learning methods to climate change projections [12, 15]. In addition to the extrapolation problem, it may be difficult to apply the patterns learned using weather forecast model outputs and reanalysis data to climate models. This method uses the characteristics of a numerical model that can reproduce phenomena five times or more the grid spacing as explanatory variables, making it relatively versatile and likely to be flexibly applied to any numerical forecast model or climate model. The fact that explanatory variables can be estimated with high accuracy, despite their simplicity, suggests a close relationship between explanatory and objective variables. The advantage of applying deep learning models instead of traditional machine learning models, such as support vector regression (SVR), may be very small because the method is strongly constrained by the simple relationship between the objective and explanatory variables.

Climate change downscaling experiments using regional models can sometimes reveal future climate change patterns that are quite different from those predicted by global climate models, making interpretation difficult [7–9]. This could be because

high-resolution regional models can reproduce phenomena that are difficult to reproduce using low-resolution global climate models. However, it is also possible that the errors are simply amplified by regional climate models [6]. In contrast, this method can accurately reflect the climate change characteristics of global climate models and does not require consideration of the uncertainties that arise when applying regional models. Therefore, applying this method to highly developed global climate model simulations with greatly improved climate reproducibility will enable local future predictions with reduced model uncertainties and is expected to significantly improve the accuracy of water disaster predictions.

## Conclusions

To investigate the extrapolation problem when applying machine learning to climate change projections, downscaling and bias correction was performed using 20th century reanalysis data and CMIP6 model data. This method has been demonstrated to enable highly accurate downscaling of atmospheric variables, except for precipitation, to regional details, while retaining the characteristics of climate change in global climate models. The climate change characteristics of precipitation differed from those of the climate model. This is presumably because the influence of natural variability is

far greater than that of climate change, making it difficult to accurately reproduce the quantitative characteristics. Although each variable was estimated independently, it was highly correlated with the corresponding reanalysis values, indicating that the variables were interrelated through weather patterns. Therefore, this simple method can also be applied to hydrologically relevant climate model output variables, allowing downscaling and bias correction while accurately reflecting the climate change characteristics predicted by global climate models. On the other hand, the frequency of temperatures below 0 °C and the 99th percentile of temperature values were confirmed to be underestimated, indicating that this method alone has difficulty dealing with cases where temperature fluctuations become large due to extreme changes in regional characteristics, such as the disappearance of glaciers. In the future, this method is planned to be coupled with a hydrological model, improving its adaptability to extreme local characteristics.

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objectively analyzed four-dimensional weather maps and their uncertainty from the early 19th century to the 21st century. (20CR Project).

## Author Contributions

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Methodology: Takao Yoshikane.

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Supervision: Kei Yoshimura.

Visualization: Takao Yoshikane.

Writing the original draft: Takao Yoshikane.

Writing, review and editing: Takao Yoshikane and Kei Yoshimura.

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## Supporting information captions

**S1 Fig. Annual mean climate values in the first 30 years of temperature**

**(TEMP2M), downward longwave radiation (DLWR), and specific humidity**

**(SHUM) in 20CR.** The first 30 years range from 1955 to 1984. 20CR, MLDS\_20CR,

and ERA5 are 20th century reanalysis data, values estimated using 20CR data, and

ERA5 reanalysis data, respectively.

**S2 Fig. The same figure as S1 Fig. except for downward shortwave radiation**

**(DSWR), surface pressure (SP), near-surface wind at 10 m (zonal) (U10M),**

**respectively.**

**S3 Fig. The same figure as S1 Fig. except for near-surface wind at 10 m**

**(meridional) (V10M) and precipitation (PREC), respectively.**

**S4 Fig. The 99th percentile values of hourly downward longwave radiation (DLWR), specific humidity (SHUM), and downward shortwave radiation (DSWR) in the first 30 years, and the climate different values between the first and last 30 years in ERA5 and MLDS\_20CR.** The left, center, and right figures show the 99th percentile values in ERA5, the 99th percentile values in MLDS\_20CR, and a scatter diagram of the 99th percentile values in ERA5 and MLDS\_20CR, with correlation coefficient values (R) and RMSEs.

**S5 Fig. The same figure as S4 Fig. except for surface pressure (SP) and wind at 10 m (zonal and meridional) (U10M and V10M), respectively.**

**S6 Fig. Estimation of climate change characteristics using this method.** Annual mean climate difference values between the first 30 years (past) and the last 30 years (present) of downward longwave radiation (DLWR), specific humidity (SHUM), and surface pressure (SP) in 20CR, MLDS\_20CR, and ERA5, respectively. Shaded areas indicate significant increases with 95% confidence intervals using Welch's t-test.

772

773 **S7 Fig. The same figure as S6 Fig. except for wind at 10 m (zonal and meridional)**  
 774 **(U10M and V10M), respectively.**

775

776 **S8 Fig. Relationship between climate change simulated by the climate model and**  
 777 **the values estimated by this method.** Scatter diagrams of annual mean climate  
 778 difference values between the first 30 years (past) and the last 30 years (present) of  
 779 MLDS\_20CR for ERA5. Temperature (TEMP2M), downward longwave radiation  
 780 (DLWR), specific humidity (SHUM), downward shortwave radiation (DSWR), surface  
 781 pressure (SP), near-surface winds (zonal) at 10 m (U10M), near-surface winds  
 782 (meridional) at 10 m (V10M), and precipitation (PREC). The ERA5 and MLDS\_20CR  
 783 were upscaled to match the resolution of 20CR. The redder the color, the higher the  
 784 distribution density.

785

786 **S9 Fig. Annual mean climate values in the 30 years of temperature (TEMP2M),**  
 787 **downward longwave radiation (DLWR), and specific humidity (SHUM) in**  
 788 **MIROC from 1985 to 2014.**

789

790 **S10 Fig. The same figure as S9 Fig. except for downward shortwave radiation**  
 791 **(DSWR), surface pressure (SP), and near-surface wind at 10 m (zonal) (U10M),**  
 792 **respectively.**

793

794 **S11 Fig. The same figure as S9 Fig. except for near-surface wind at 10 m**  
 795 **(meridional) (V10M) and precipitation (PREC), respectively.**

796

797 **S12 Fig. Estimation of future climate change characteristics using CMIP6-MIROC**  
 798 **data.** Annual mean climate difference between the present 30 years (historical; 1985 to  
 799 2014) and future 30 years (SSP126; 2071–2100) of downward longwave radiation  
 800 (DLWR), specific humidity (SHUM), and surface pressure (SP) in MIROC and  
 801 MLDS\_MIROC. Shaded areas indicate significant increases with 95% confidence

intervals using Welch's t-test. Scatter diagrams of MIROC and MLDS\_MIROC with

correlation coefficient values (R) and RMSEs are shown on the right side of the figure.

**S13 Fig. The same figure as S12 Fig. except for wind at 10 m (zonal and meridional) (U10M and V10M), respectively.**

**S14 Fig. Comparison with quantile mapping method.** Time series of each variable at a specific grid point (130°E, 33°N) in July 1985. The blue, gray, orange, and red lines represent MLDS\_20CR, ERA5, 20CR, and quantile mapping (QM), respectively.

**S1 Table. Hyperparameters used in SVR (gamma, C, epsilon) and scale factors for each variable.**

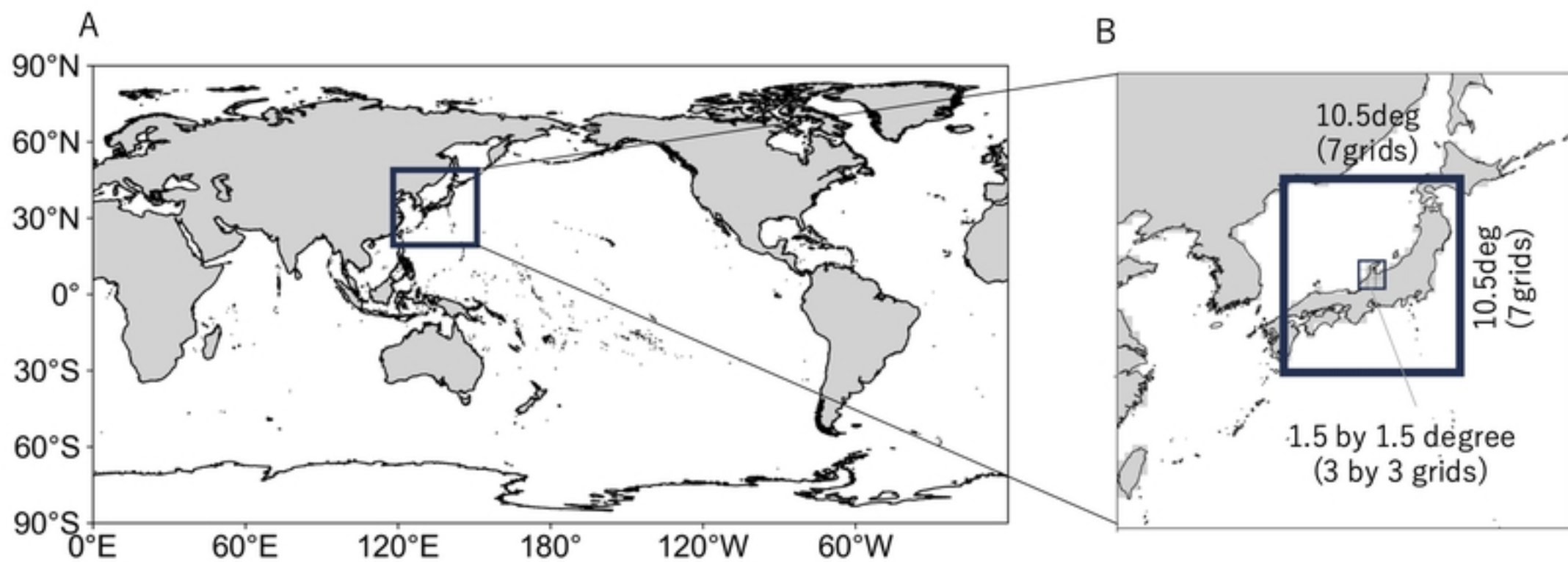
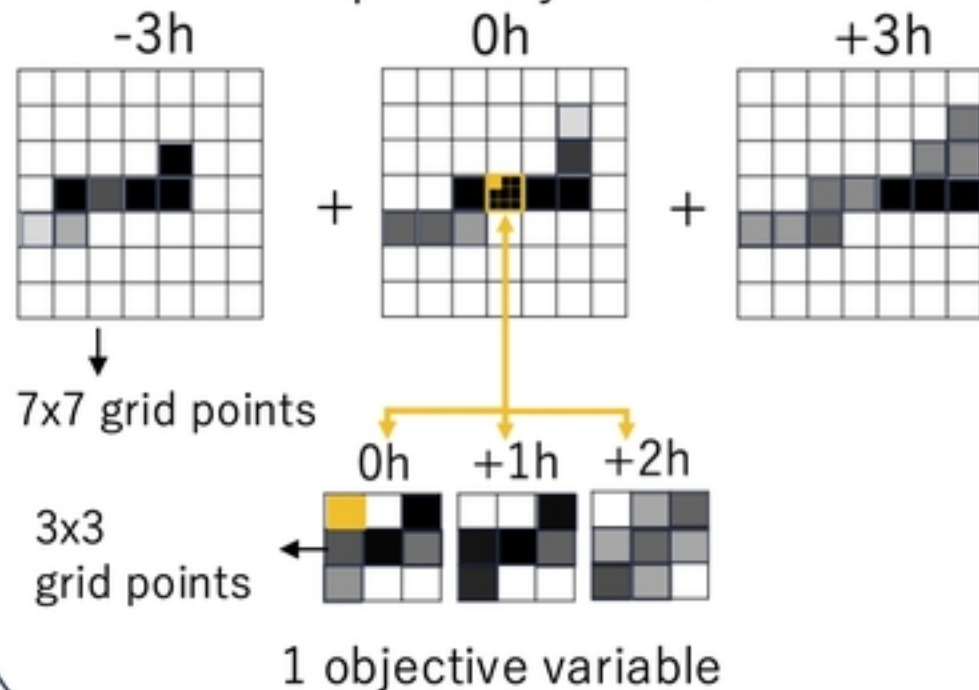


Fig1



## Training process

147 explanatory variables



## Classifiers

Created 27 classifiers  
for each grid with the coarse mesh  
and the temporal downscaling

## inference process

Input data (Climate model)

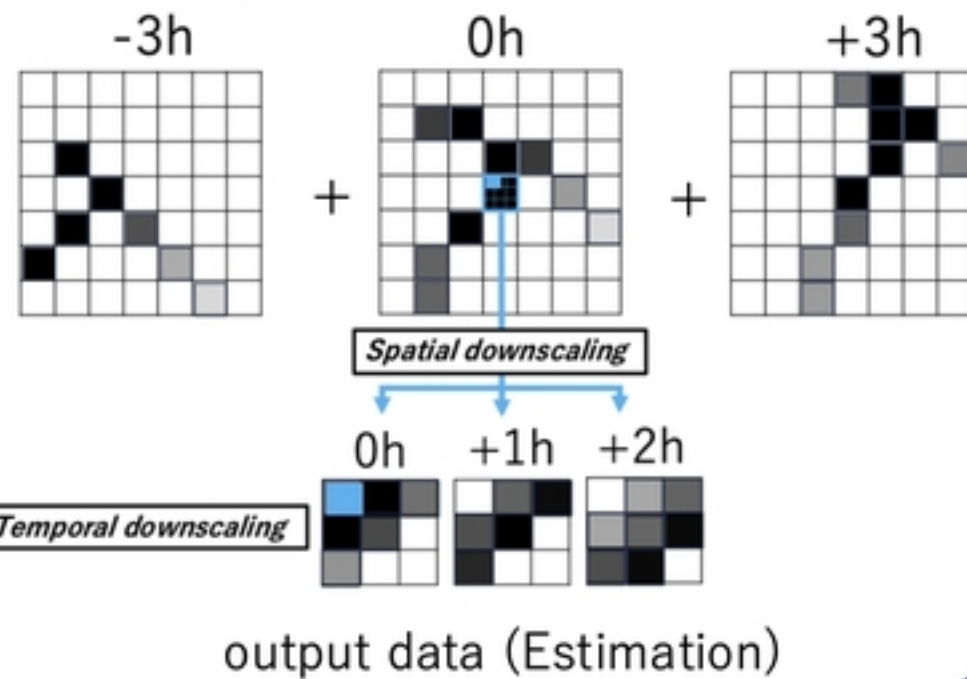


Fig2

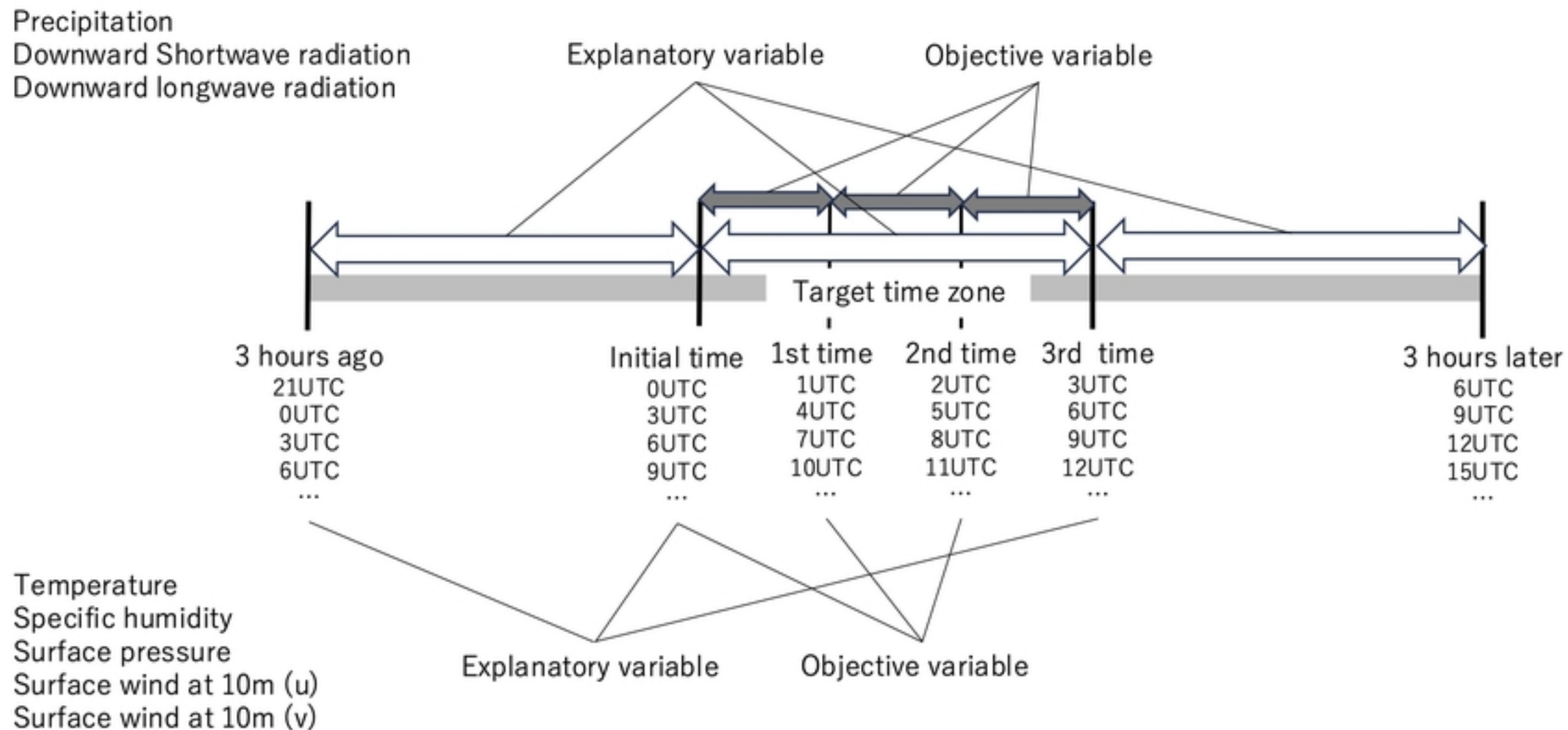


Fig3

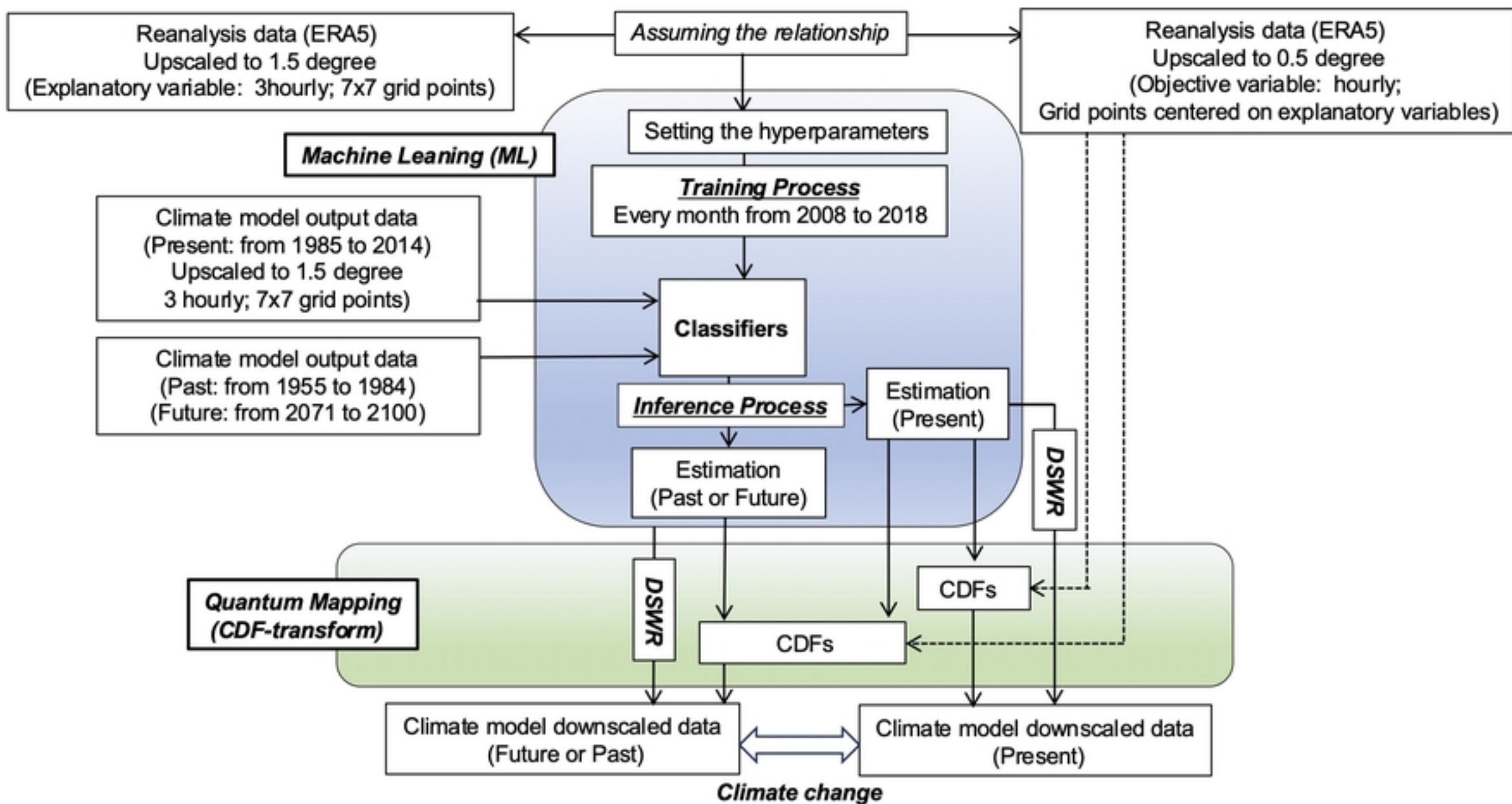


Fig4

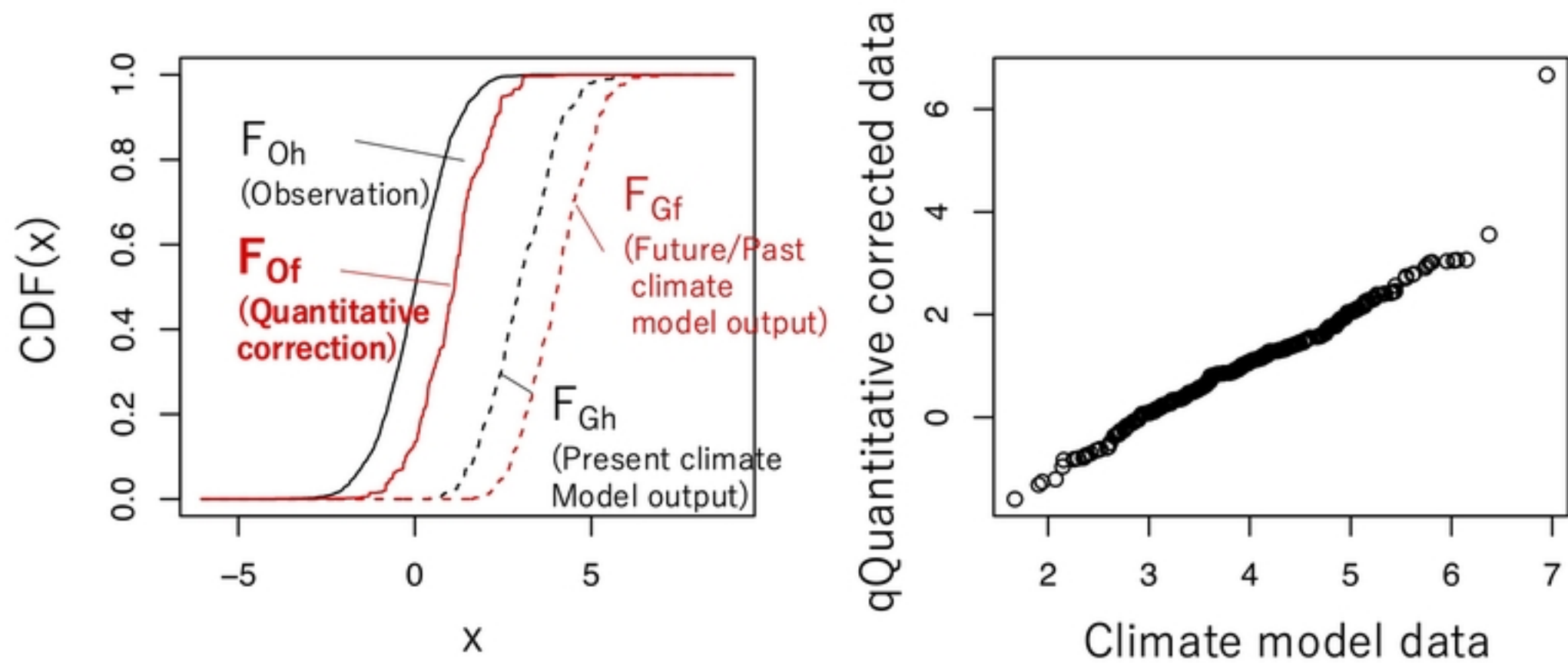


Fig5

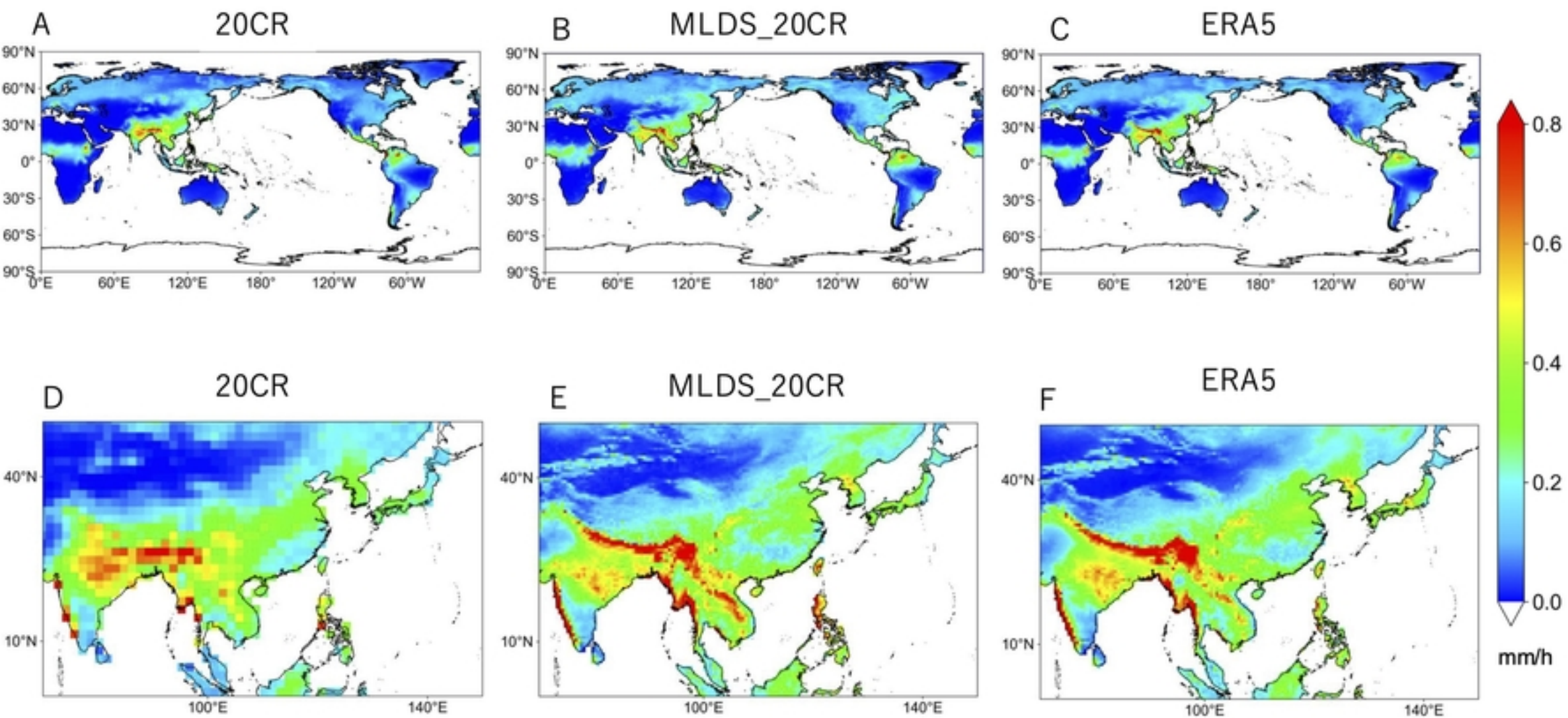


Fig6



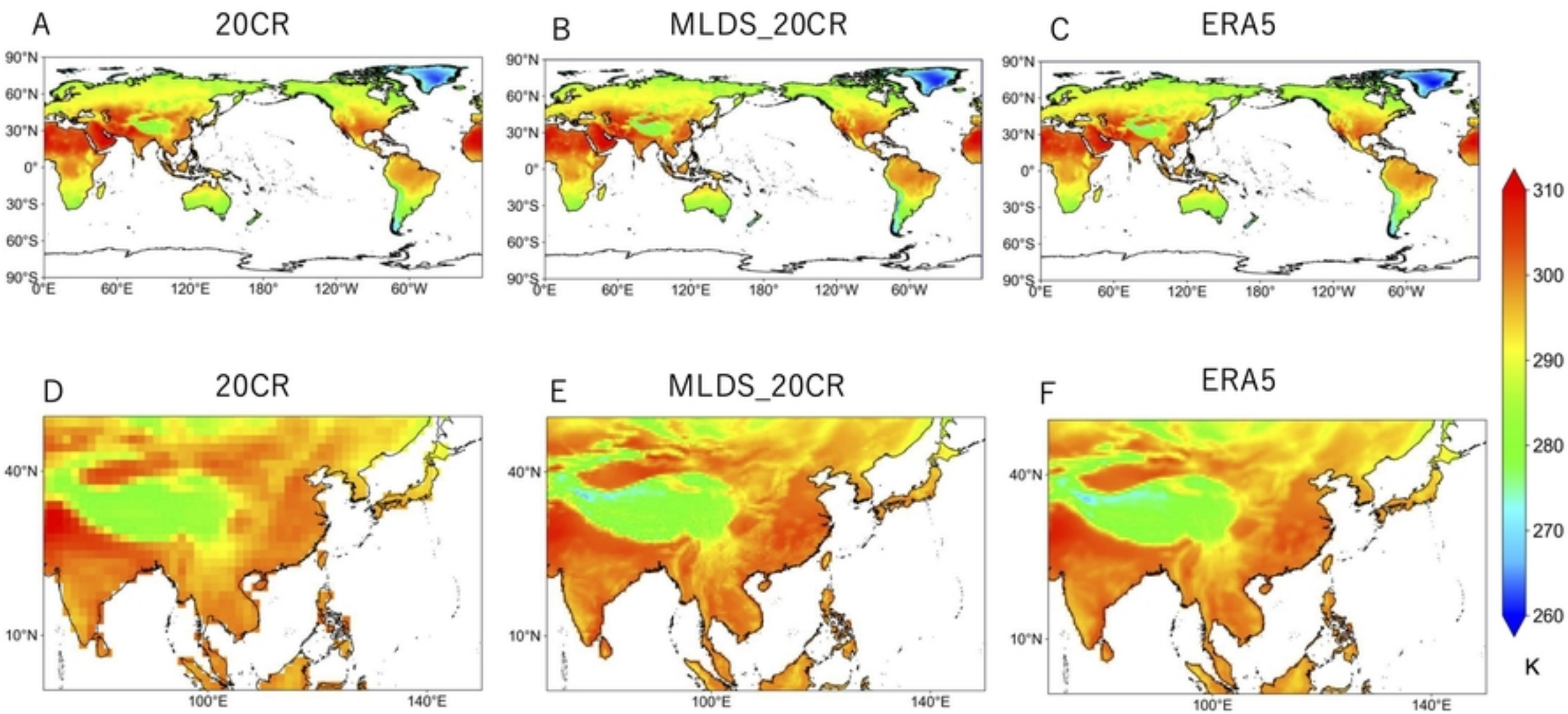


Fig7

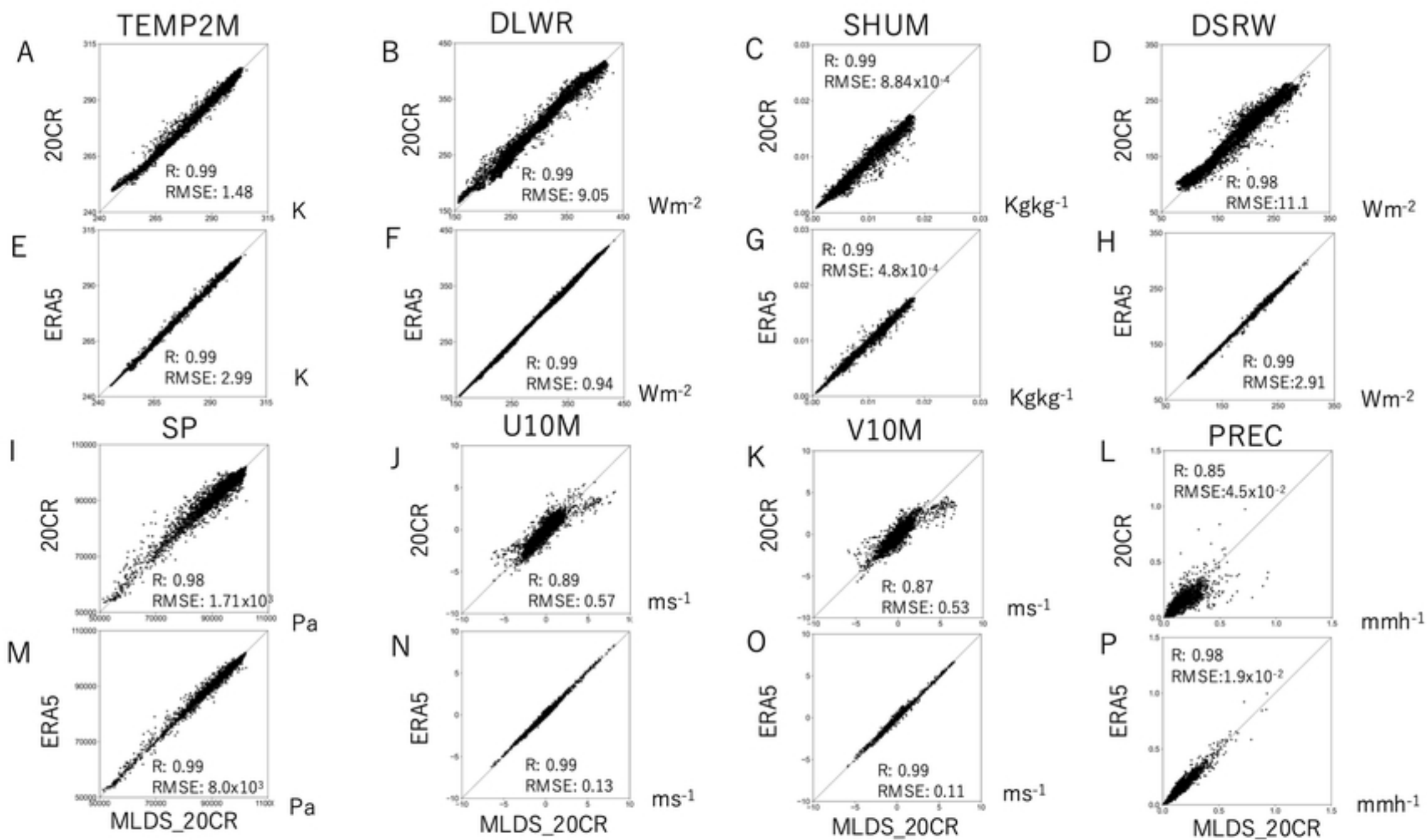


Fig8

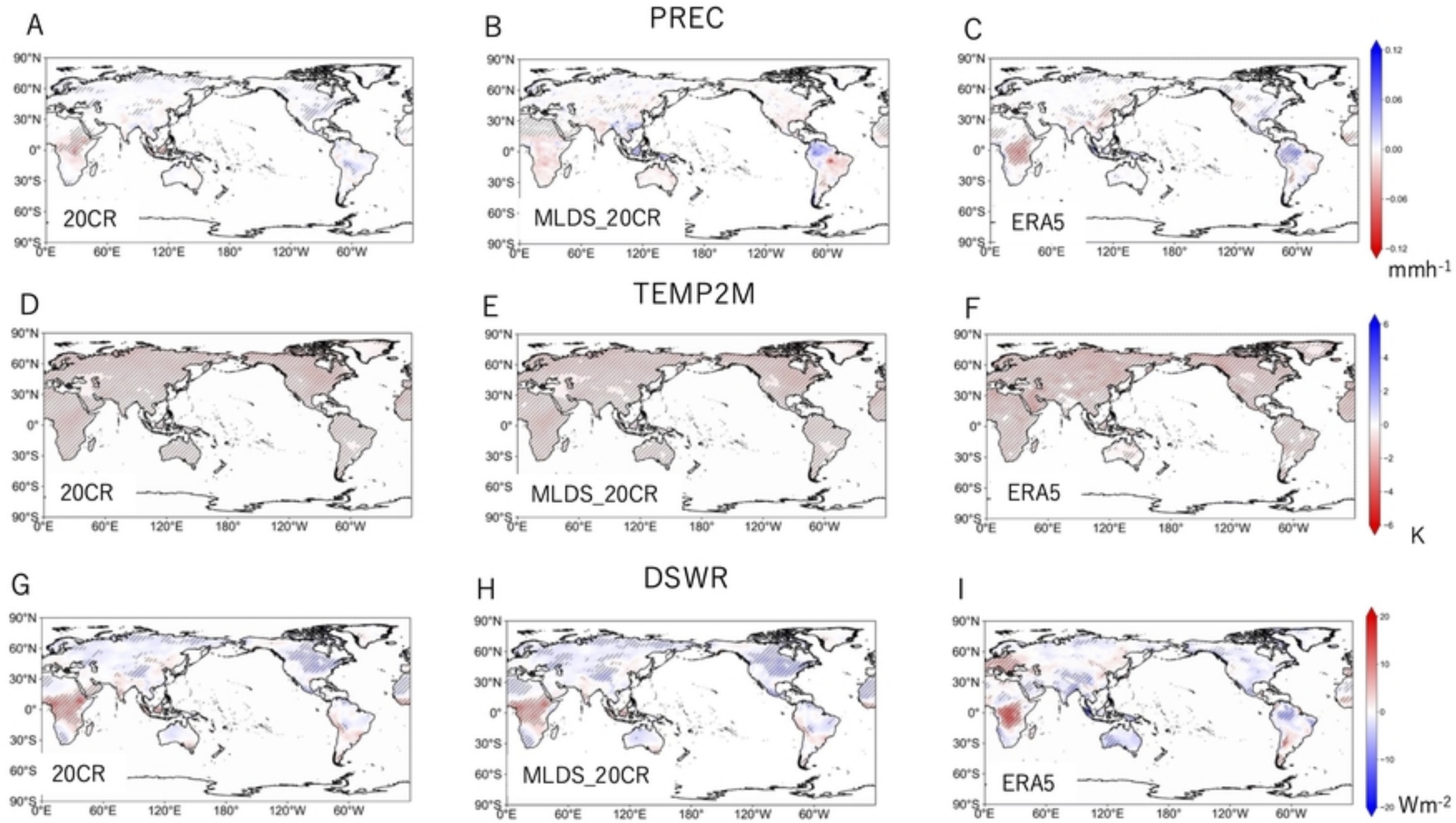


Fig9



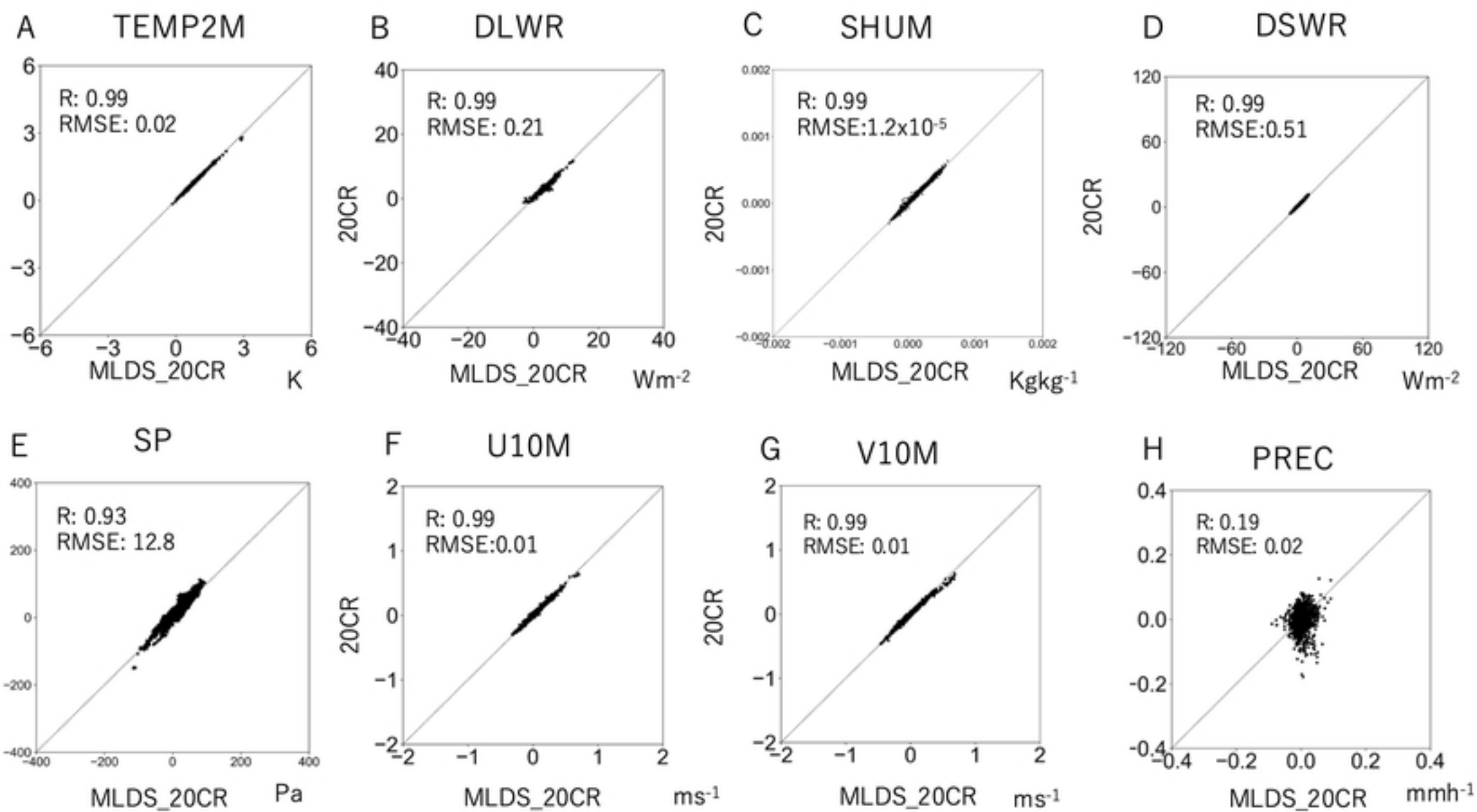


Fig10

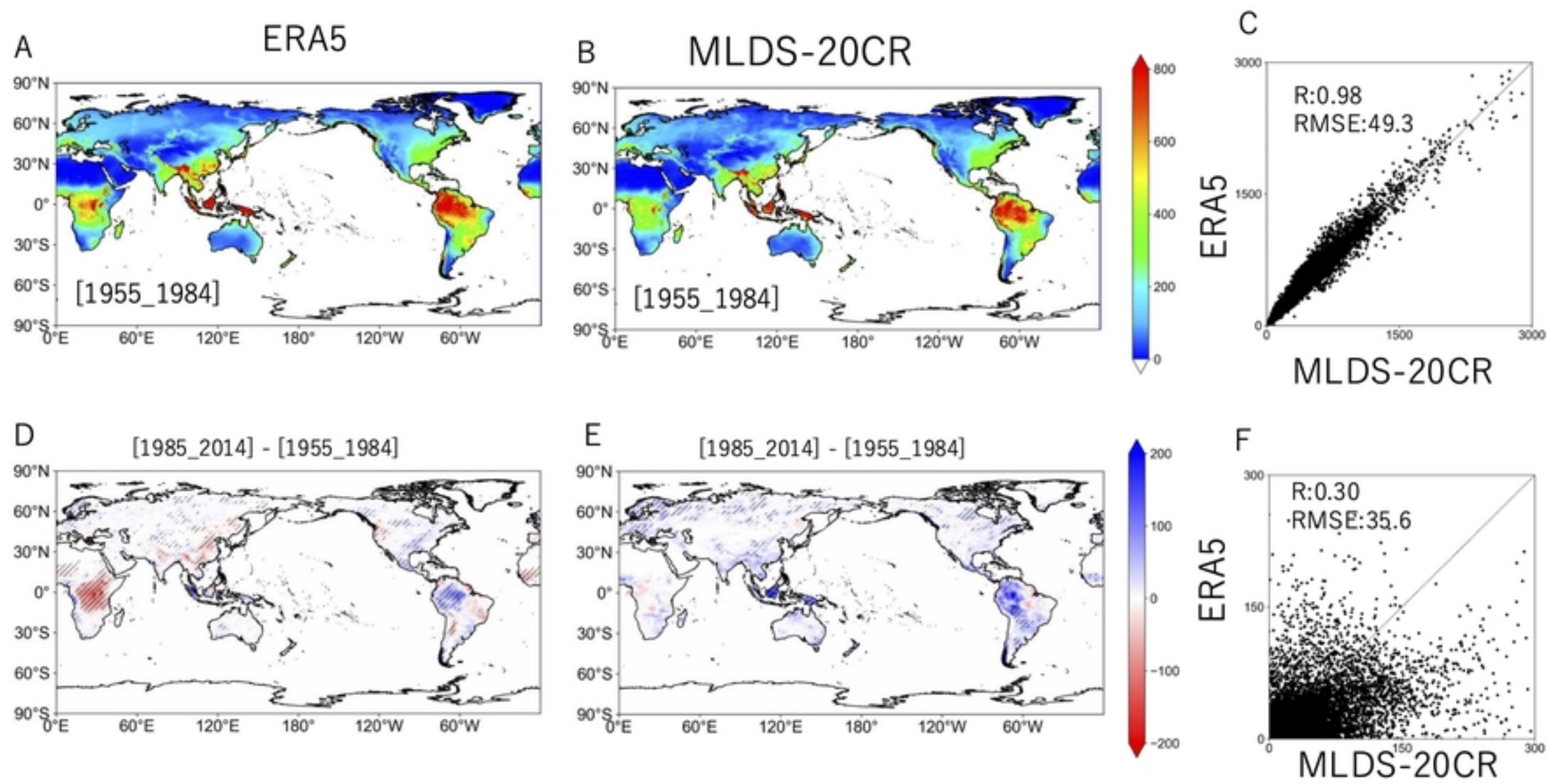


Fig11

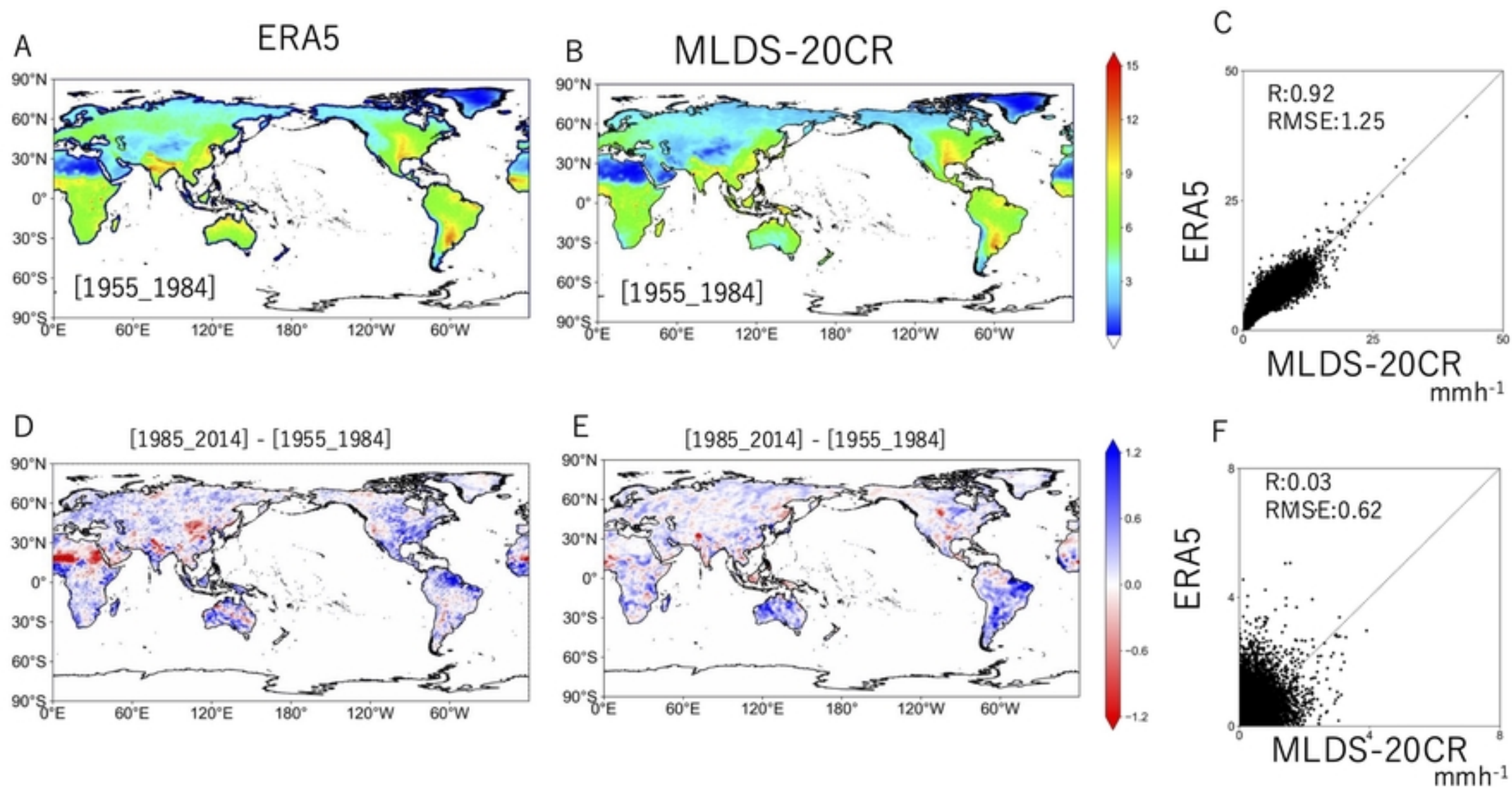


Fig12



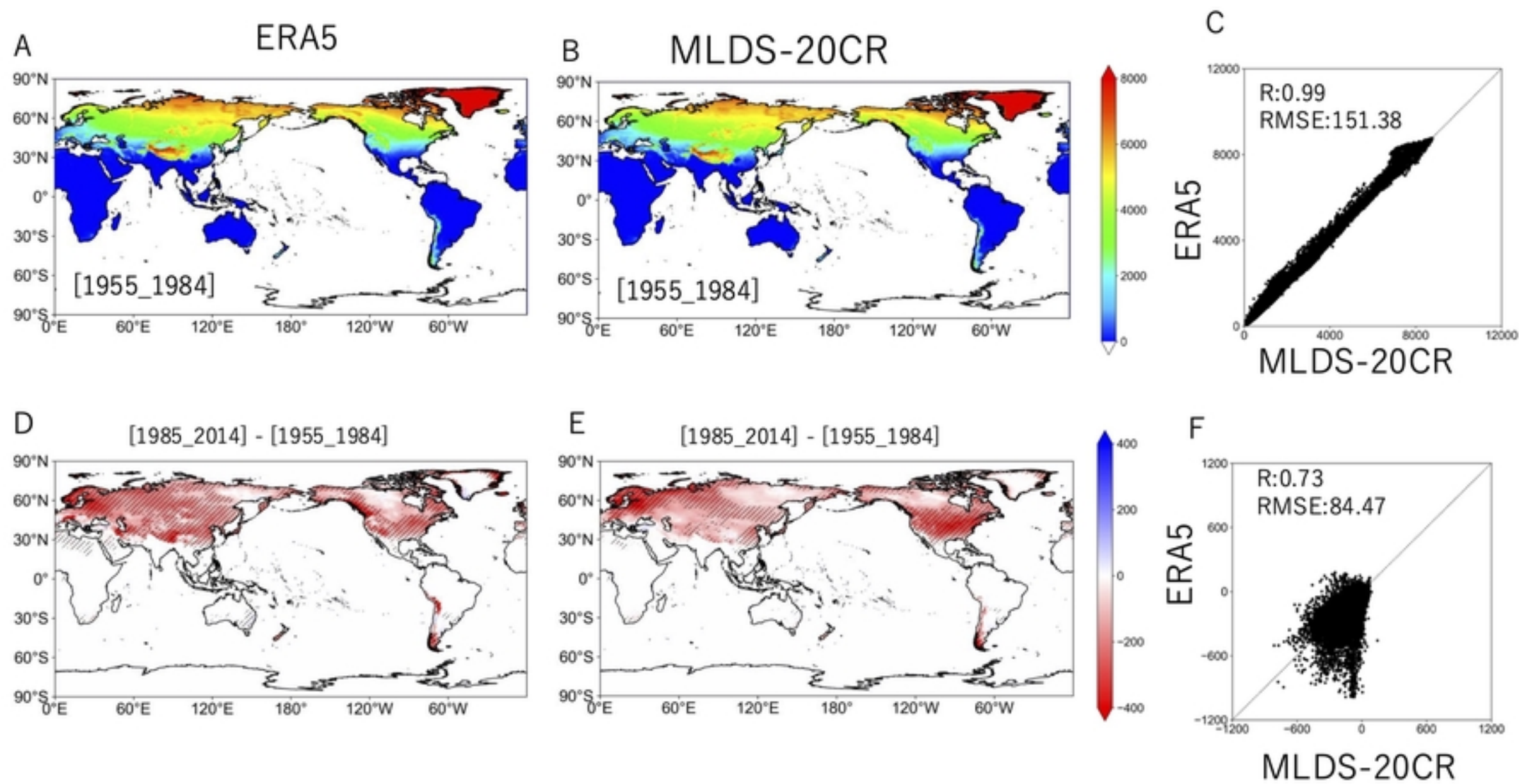


Fig13

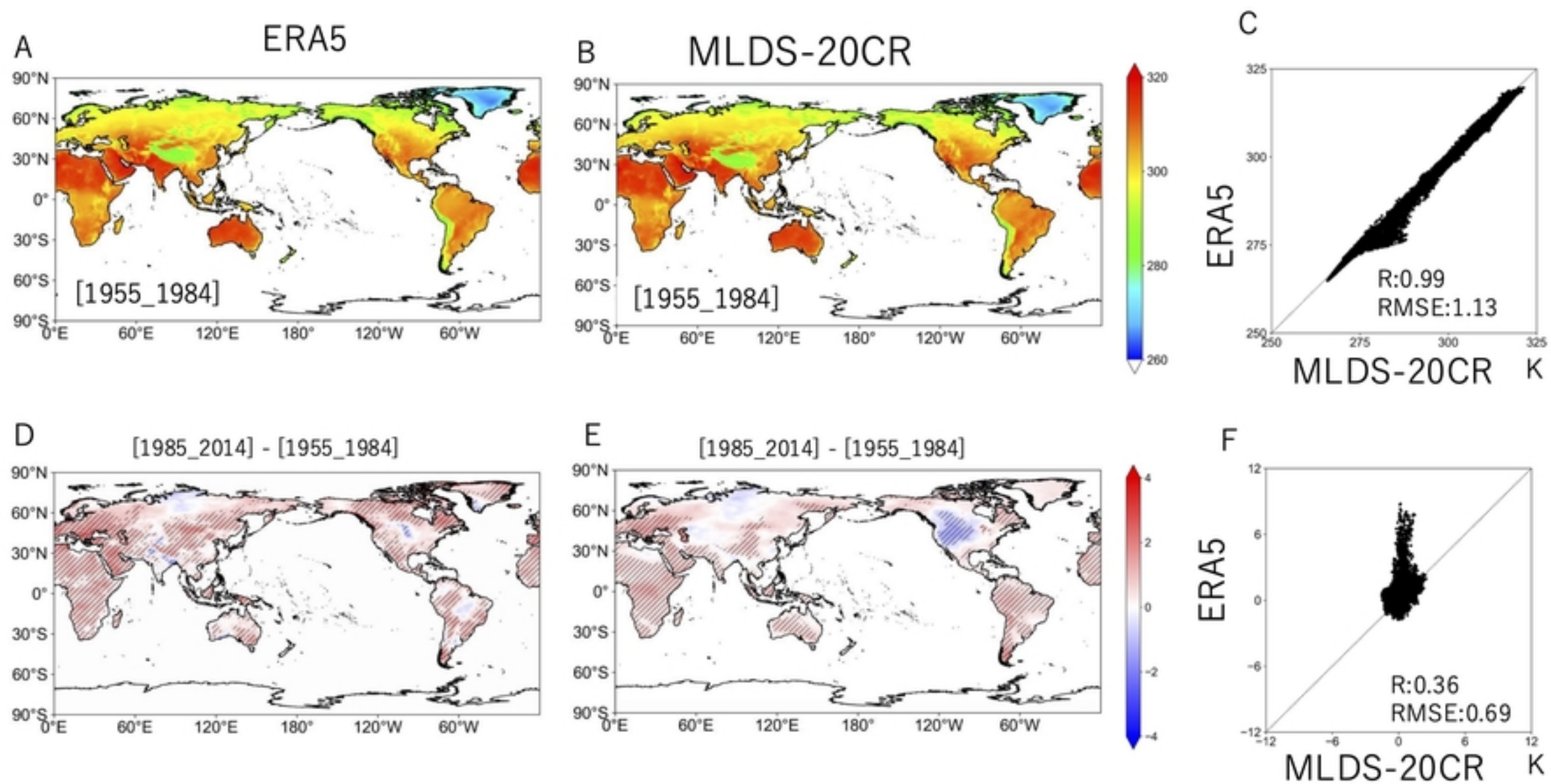


Fig14

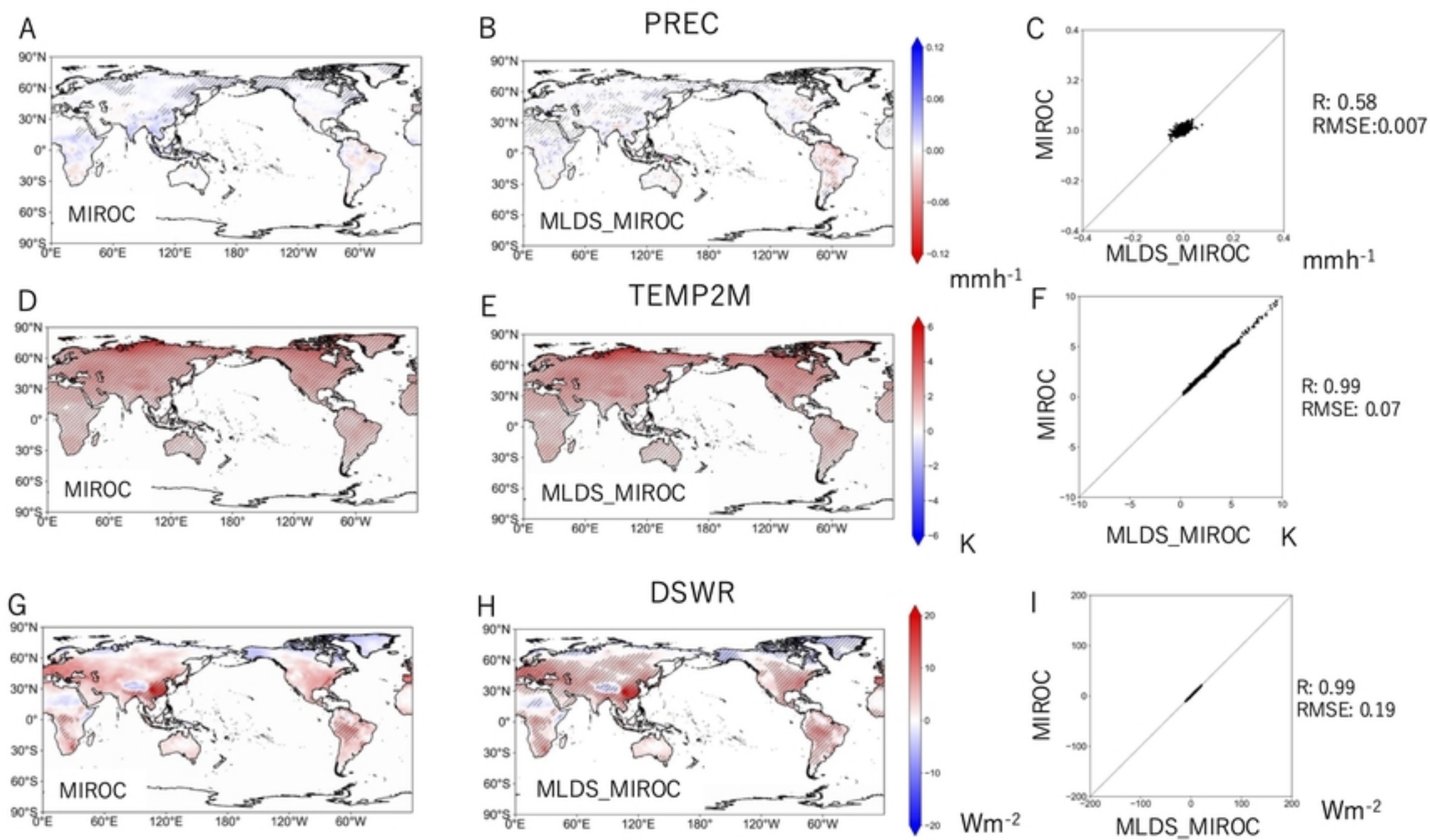


Fig15



— 20CR  
— MLDS\_20CR  
— ERA5

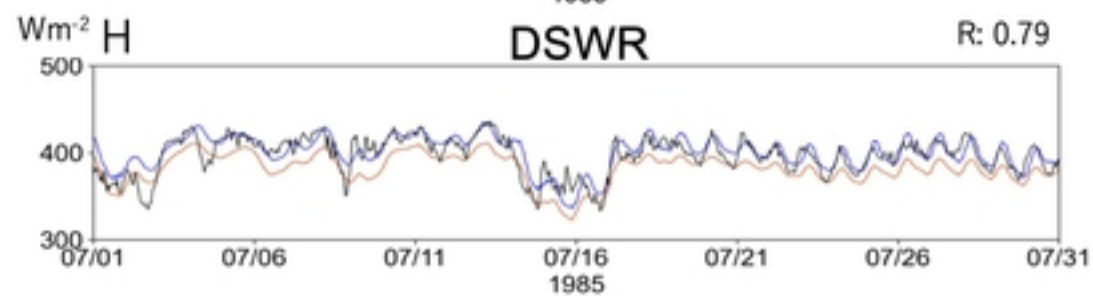
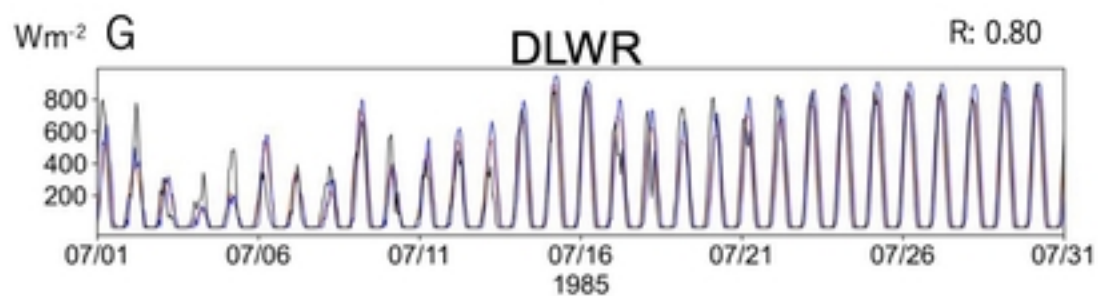
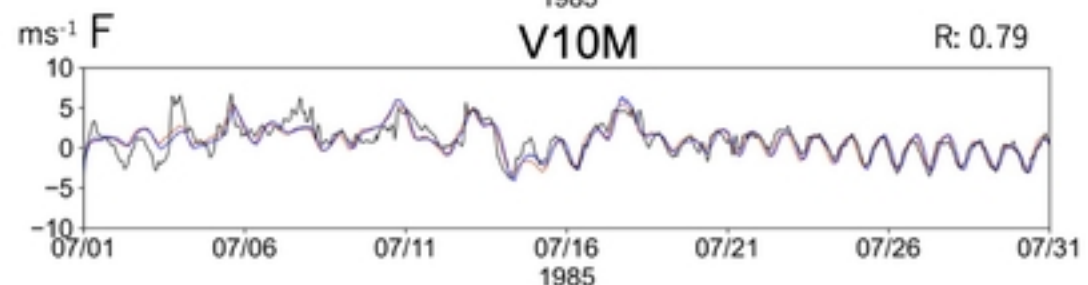
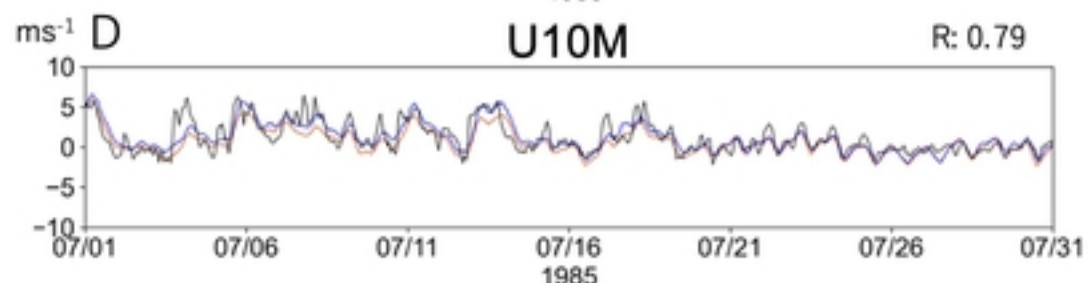
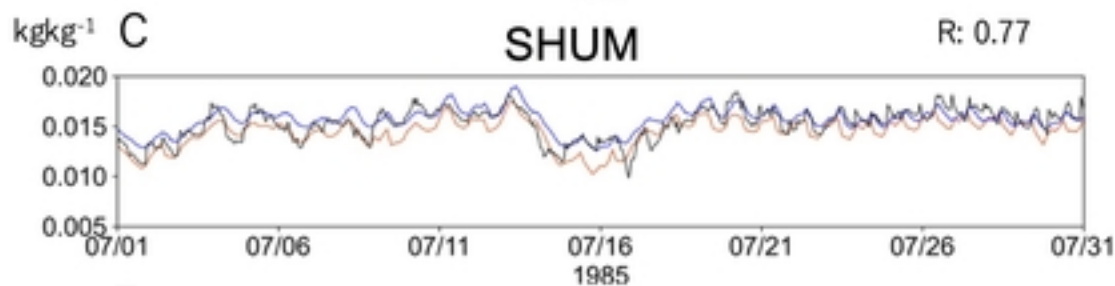
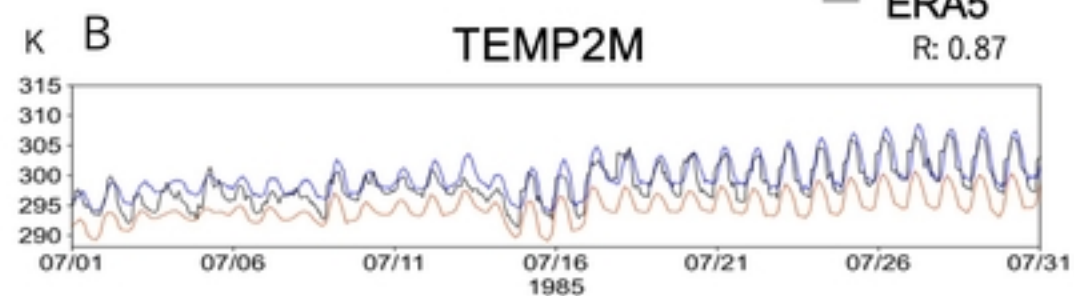
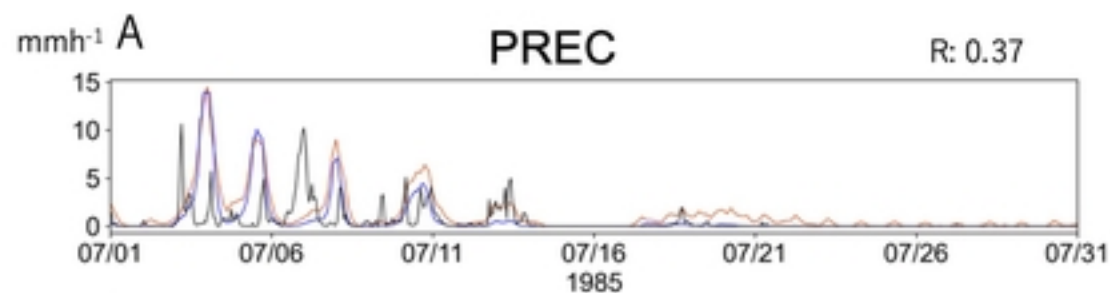


Fig16