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AOD distributions and trends of major aerosol species over a selection of the world's most populated cities based on the 1st version of NASA's MERRA Aerosol Reanalysis

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ABSTRACT

NASA recently extended the Modern-Era Retrospective Analysis for Research and Application (MERRA) with an atmospheric aerosol reanalysis which includes five particulate species: sulfate, organic matter, black carbon, mineral dust and sea salt. The MERRA Aerosol Reanalysis (MERRAero) is an innovative tool to study air quality issues around the world for its global and constant coverage and its distinction of aerosol speciation expressed in the form of aerosol optical depth (AOD). The purpose of this manuscript is to apply MERRAero to the study of urban air pollution at the global scale by analyzing the AOD over a period of 13 years (2003–2015) and over a selection of 200 of the world's most populated cities in order to assess the impacts of urbanization, industrialization, air quality regulations and regional transport which affect urban aerosol load. Environmental regulations and the recent global economic recession helped to decrease the AOD and sulfate aerosols in most cities of North America, Europe and Japan. Rapid industrialization in China over the last two decades resulted in Chinese cities having the highest AOD values in the world. China has nevertheless recently implemented emission control measures, which are showing early signs of success in many cities of Southern China, where AOD decreased substantially over the last 13 years. The AOD over South American cities, dominated by carbonaceous aerosols, also decreased over the last decade due to an increase in commodity prices which slowed deforestation activities in the Amazon rainforest. At the opposite, recent urbanization and industrialization in India and Bangladesh resulted in

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a strong increase of AOD, sulfate and carbonaceous aerosols in most cities of these two countries. The AOD over most cities in Northern Africa and Western Asia changed little over the last decade. Emissions of natural aerosols, which cities in these two regions tend to be mostly impacted by, don't tend to fluctuate significantly on an annual basis.

1. Introduction

Microscopic airborne aerosols have long been a prominent topic of study in the field of environmental science, predominantly in the atmospheric sciences. A considerable amount of literature has emerged in order to better understand the nature of these particles, but more specifically, to assess their impacts on various spheres of life and the environment. Aerosols are found in highly variable space and time distribution, size and chemical composition, and they originate from many sources, both natural and anthropogenic (Pöschl, 2005).

Aerosols considerably affect the environment and its living organisms. It is well documented that aerosols are a serious health hazard to humans, fauna and flora. They are linked to cardiovascular, respiratory and allergic diseases, as well as enhanced mortality (Pöschl, 2005; Tager, 2013). Aerosols also affect weather and climate. Acting as cloud condensation nuclei, aerosols are an essential element of cloud formation. As such, they play an indirect role in increasing the clouds' and the Earth's albedo as a whole (Haywood and Boucher, 2000; Lohmann and Feichter, 2005). They also affect the Earth's radiation budget as absorbers of radiation, contributing to a warming of the atmosphere, and as reflectors of radiation, in which case they act as a cooling agent (Haywood and Boucher, 2000). Finally, in high enough concentrations, they can significantly reduce visibility (Charlson, 1969; Cheng and Tsai, 2000). This is often associated with episodes of haze, smog and dust storms.

The seriousness of the impacts listed in the previous paragraph is dependent on the aerosols' concentration and size, but particularly on their chemical composition. It is therefore relevant to distinguish between different aerosol species commonly found in the air:

- Sulfate (SO_4) aerosols originate from sulfur dioxide (SO_2) that has been neutralized by ammonium (NH_4) to form ammonium sulfate ($(SO_4)_2NH_4$, Forster et al., 2007, sect. 2.4.4.1). SO_2 emissions emerge from fossil fuel and, to a much smaller extent, biomass burning, and therefore are vastly considered as anthropogenic. However, small natural contributions originate from volcanoes and the oceans (Haywood and Boucher, 2000);
- Nitrate (NO_3) aerosols originate from nitrogen oxides (NO_x) that have been neutralized by NH_4 to form ammonium nitrate (NO_3NH_4, Forster et al., 2007, sect. 2.4.4.5). NO_3 emissions emanate from a variety of sources such as fossil fuel and biomass burning, bacteria and lightning. Delmas et al. (1997) estimated that 83% of NO_3 emissions are anthropogenic in nature;
- Particulate organic matter (POM), composed largely of organic carbon (OC), is the result of fossil fuel and biomass burning. The former is an anthropogenic source while the latter is either a natural or an anthropogenic source. As a whole, sources of POM are widely considered to be anthropogenic (Haywood and Boucher, 2000; Forster et al., 2007, sect. 2.4.4.3);
- Black carbon (BC) particles are the result of incomplete combustion and originate from the same sources as POM (Haywood and Boucher, 2000; Forster et al., 2007, sect. 2.4.4.2);
- Mineral dust (DS) is the product of wind erosion predominantly in arid environments. Sources are therefore considered natural. However, deforestation, agricultural and industrial practices are responsible for a portion of anthropogenic dust aerosols in the atmosphere (Haywood and Boucher, 2000; Forster et al., 2007, sect. 2.4.4.6; Denman et al., 2007, sect. 7.5.1.1);
- Sea salt (SS) aerosols originate from the oceans. The release of salt particles in the air depends on meteorological factors such as surface wind speed and sea surface temperature (Denman et al., 2007, sect. 7.5.1.2).

There is scientific interest in studying aerosol pollution in cities because associated industries and road traffic are major sources of particulate matter and gaseous pollutants capable of forming aerosols through various chemical reactions and physical processes. Cities offer a wide variety of opportunities such as

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employment, education, health care, entertainment and other services which stimulate an ongoing and accelerating urbanization movement around the world (Moore et al., 2003). The United Nations (2014) estimated that 30% of the world's population lived in an urban area in 1950. This proportion grew to 47% in 2000 and is expected to reach 66% in 2050 (United Nations, 2014). Particularly in developing countries, where the rate of urbanization is the greatest (Subbotina, 2004, chap. 10), cities are lacking the means to adjust fast enough to fulfill the demand of their rapidly growing population and economic development. In this respect, urbanization comes with its fair share of environmental consequences (Sharma and Joshi, 2016). The phenomenon known has *global dimming,* which consists of a significant decrease in solar radiation flux around the world since the 1950s, is actually spatially inconsistent and much more pronounced over densely populated urban areas (Alpert et al., 2005; Alpert and Kishcha, 2008). Indeed, atmospheric aerosol concentrations are significantly higher in populated cities as opposed to rural or remote areas (Cheng and Tsai, 2000), and the cities' population growth in developing countries tends to correlate with an increase of aerosol concentration (Kishcha et al., 2011). Rapid urbanization and development in India and China resulted in a sharp increase of air pollutant emissions during the last decade (Lu et al., 2011) and frequently recurring episodes of air pollution and haziness. On the other hand, urbanization in developed countries, albeit occurring at a slower rate, hasn't had such a negative impact. Developed countries did indeed struggle with severe air pollution issues in the past, but their economic and democratic situation provides them with the means to enforce clean air regulations and develop green technologies. As a result, air quality has significantly improved over the last decades in the United States (Hand et al., 2012), Europe (Vestreng et al., 2007; Tørseth et al., 2012) and Japan (Wakamatsu et al., 2013), even though their population and economy kept on growing.

Several years ago, NASA's Global Modeling and Assimilation Office (GMAO) introduced the Modern-Era Retrospective Analysis for Research and Application (MERRA, Rienecker et al., 2011), a reanalysis tool incorporating satellite and model data to reproduce spatially consistent observations of many environmental variables. While the original MERRA included only meteorological parameters (wind, temperature, humidity, etc.), it has recently been extended to include assimilation of biased-corrected aerosol optical depth (AOD) from the Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometers sensors (MODIS, Remer et al., 2005) on board the Aqua and Terra satellites, which led to its rebranding as MERRAero. Although only total AOD is constrained by MODIS observations, the data assimilation algorithm in MERRAero provides speciated hourly data, with the relative contributions from five of the major aerosol species listed previously. Version 1 of MERRAero doesn't assimilate NO_3 particles. Nevertheless, MERRAero provides an innovative tool to the scientific community to study aerosol pollution issues around the world, especially in regions where reliable surface-based monitoring is scarce or unavailable. Examples of MERRAero's applicability can be found in Kessner et al. (2013), Colarco et al. (2014), Kishcha et al. (2014, 2015) and Yi et al. (2015).

In this study, AOD data from MERRAero is used to assess the state of air quality over a large selection of major metropolitan areas around the world (hereafter simply referred to as “cities”) over the last thirteen years (2003–2015). Speciation data is used to determine which aerosol species contribute most to AOD over each city and a trend analysis is performed to evaluate how local and regional factors, as well as natural and anthropogenic factors, affect aerosol pollution in urban environments. Alpert et al. (2012) previously and similarly analyzed AOD trends over a selection of major cities around the world based on MODIS data. The advantage of using MERRAero as opposed to just MODIS data is its ability to distinguish between aerosol species which provides substantially more information for analysis.

2. Methodology and data

2.1. MERRA Aerosol Reanalysis

NASA's Version 1 of MERRAero incorporates the latest version of the Goddard Earth Observing System (GEOS-5). It contains components for atmospheric circulation and composition (including atmospheric data assimilation), ocean circulation and biogeochemistry, and land surface processes. GEOS-5 also includes an atmospheric particulate matter (PM) module (Colarco et al., 2010, and references therein). This module is based on a version of the Goddard Chemistry, Aerosol, Radiation and Transport (GOCART) model (Chin et al., 2002). GOCART treats the sources, sinks and chemistry of SO_4, OC, BC, DS and SS particles. DS and SS emissions are a function of surface properties and wind speed at the surface. Sources of other species are simulated from emission inventories, including their precursors. SO_2 anthropogenic emissions are input from the Emission

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Database for Global Atmospheric Research (EDGAR) version 4.1 inventory from 2005 and biomass burning emissions (primarily OC and BC) are input from the NASA Quick Fire Emission Dataset (QFED) version 2.1 (Buchard et al., 2015). PM species are treated as external mixtures and do not interact with each other. MERRAero also assimilates bias-corrected AOD observations from the MODIS sensors on both Terra and Aqua. MERRAero reproduces the concentrations of all five particulate species modeled by GOCART and their relative AOD contributions all over the world every hour with a resolution of 0.5° latitude by 0.625° longitude from mid-2002 to 2015.

A number of MERRAero components have been evaluated in different regions of the world. Its assimilation of AOD has been validated over Africa, South America, and Central and Eastern Asia using many remote sensing instruments by Buchard et al. (2015); Nowottnick et al. (2015) evaluated its aerosol speciation and vertical structure specific to Saharan dust transport using the Cloud-Aerosol Lidar with Orthogonal Polarization (CALIOP); in the United States, the surface concentrations of SO_2, fine PM and its chemical speciation has been thoroughly evaluated by Buchard et al. (2014, 2016); in Europe, an evaluation of the surface concentrations of PM, fine PM and some of their chemical speciation has been performed by Provençal et al. (2017a); and finally, the surface concentration of fine PM in Israel and Taiwan was carried out by Provençal et al. (2017b).

2.2. Method

A selection of 200 of the world's most populated cities were chosen, inspired by Brinkhoff's major agglomerations list (City Population, http://www.citypopulation.de). All the selected cities have a population of at least 2 million inhabitants. Over each one of them, hourly AOD data from MERRAero were extracted for a period of 13 years, from 2003 to 2015, for total and every one of the five aerosol species. It is worth mentioning that MERRAero's resolution is too coarse to capture the urban core of cities. Urban aerosol load is obviously considered in the simulation, but urban grid points are broadly representative of the metropolitan areas, including the urban core and the surrounding suburbs.

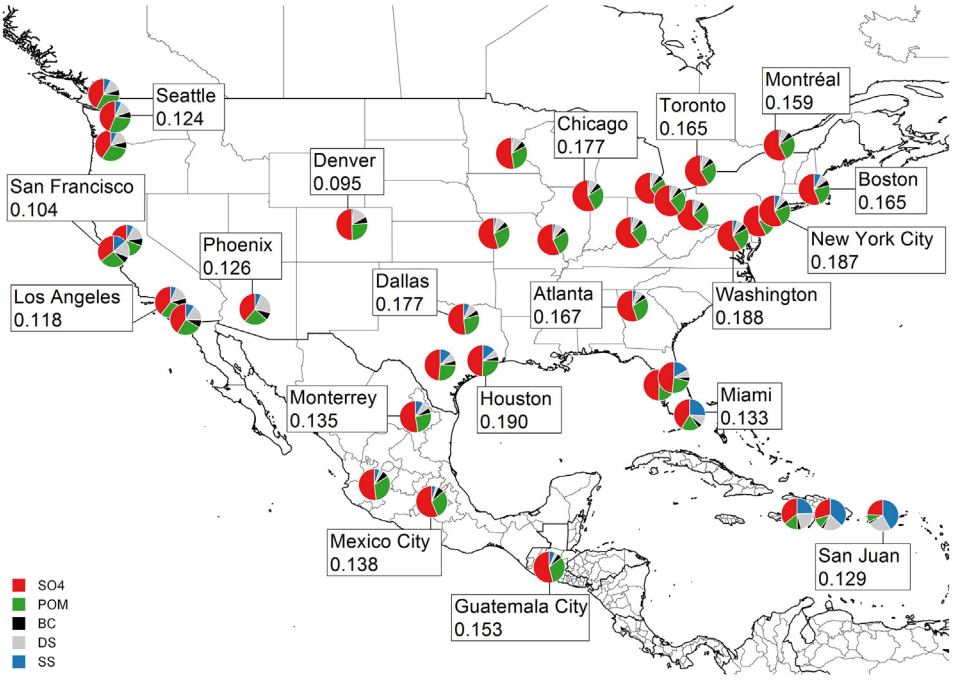

Fig. 1. Proportion of aerosol speciation for a selection of cities in North and Central America. Mean AOD is provided for a few cities. The reader is referred to the supplementary material for such information for all the cities.

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A first analysis is performed by averaging the data over the 13-year period over each city and regrouping the cities by geographic region to determine their aerosol signature. A second analysis is performed by averaging the data by year over each city, calculating a regression trend over the 13 years and performing a Student's *t*-test to evaluate the trend's significance at the 90% confidence level. This quantifies the consequences of rapid urbanization with respect to air quality as well as ascertains the effectiveness of air pollution control over the last decade. The results are presented in map form. All the numerical data used to produce these maps are included in the supplementary material.

3. AOD distributions of aerosol speciation (2003–2015)

3.1. North and Central America

The proportions of aerosol species to total AOD for a selection of major cities in North and Central America are shown in Fig. 1. The reader is referred to the supplementary material for AOD values in all cities. The highest urban AOD values are observed in Central and Eastern United States and Canada, ranging from 0.133 in Miami to 0.190 in Houston. Denver is an exception with the lowest mean AOD in the whole region (0.095). The Northeastern United States is highly populated and industrialized, which explains the higher AOD values in Philadelphia (0.190), Cincinnati (0.189), Washington (0.188), New York City (0.187), Pittsburgh (0.184), Cleveland (0.181) and St. Louis (0.180). SO_4 aerosols account for a majority (>50%) of total AOD in most North American cities. This is in line with Hand et al. (2012) who mentioned that the Eastern U.S. states emit substantially more SO_2, a precursor of SO_4 aerosols, compared to the other states. Overall, anthropogenic aerosols (SO_4, POM and BC) represent at least 85% of total AOD in all the northeastern cities. Nevertheless, overall, the mean AOD remains relatively low (< 0.2) in all cities. This is the result of effective air quality regulation in the U.S. known as the Clean Air Act, first adopted in 1970 and significantly amended in 1990. The success of this regulation has been highlighted by many (e.g., Granier et al., 2011; de Meij et al., 2012; Hand et al., 2012; Xing et al., 2013; de Gouw et al., 2014) by documenting a substantial reduction of SO_2 emissions and/or concentration, among other air pollutants, across the U.S. during the last decades. SO_2 emissions and SO_4 concentrations are generally well correlated (Hand et al., 2012; Xing et al., 2013).

Mean AOD values in Orlando (0.157), Tampa (0.152) and Miami (0.133) are among the lowest in the Eastern U.S. with a significantly stronger contribution from SS aerosols to total AOD (from 16% in Tampa to 26% in Miami) given their proximity to the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. However, Buchard et al. (2016) and Provençal et al. (2017a) documented a substantial overestimation of SS concentrations by MERRAero in coastal areas. Therefore these SS proportions are likely overestimated as well.

The mean AOD in cities of the west coast is lower, ranging from 0.107 in San Diego to 0.124 in Seattle, but the proportions of POM, BC and DS aerosols are higher. These cities are substantially affected by carbon emissions from wildfires occurring periodically in California. Indeed, Spracklen et al. (2007), who modeled OC emissions from summer wildfires in the Western U.S. between 1980 and 2004, concluded that the variability of OC concentrations in the Western U.S. is largely due to the variability of wildfire emissions. Furthermore, AOD values from MERRAero averaged by month, shown in Fig. 2(a) for Los Angeles, also suggest this to be the case. Aside from an increase caused by DS in spring, POM is largely responsible for the fluctuation of total AOD, particularly during the wildfire season between July and October. The wintertime rainy season is also responsible, to a lesser extent, for the seasonal fluctuation. By contrast, the fluctuation of SO_4 AOD is barely perceivable. For the sake of comparison, the same graph is shown for New York City (Fig. 2(b)). The fluctuations of SO_4 and POM AOD are much more correlated which suggests that carbonaceous aerosols originate largely from energy consumption in that city. The higher DS proportion in Western U.S. cities is caused by advection of dust originating from the nearby deserts in the Southwestern U.S. and Northwestern Mexico.

The mean AOD in Mexican cities is relatively low (below 0.140) while its speciation signature is similar to Northeastern U.S. cities, dominated by SO_4 and POM aerosols. The Mexican government also implemented successful management programs and incentives to improve urban air quality during the last decades (Molina and Molina, 2004; Parrish et al., 2011). Finally, AOD in Caribbean cities is also low (below 0.140) but much less impacted by anthropogenic aerosols. DS and SS compose over 50% of total AOD in Santo Domingo and San Juan. The Caribbean does indeed receive a large amount of DS originating from the Sahara desert (Prospero and Mayol-Bracero, 2013).

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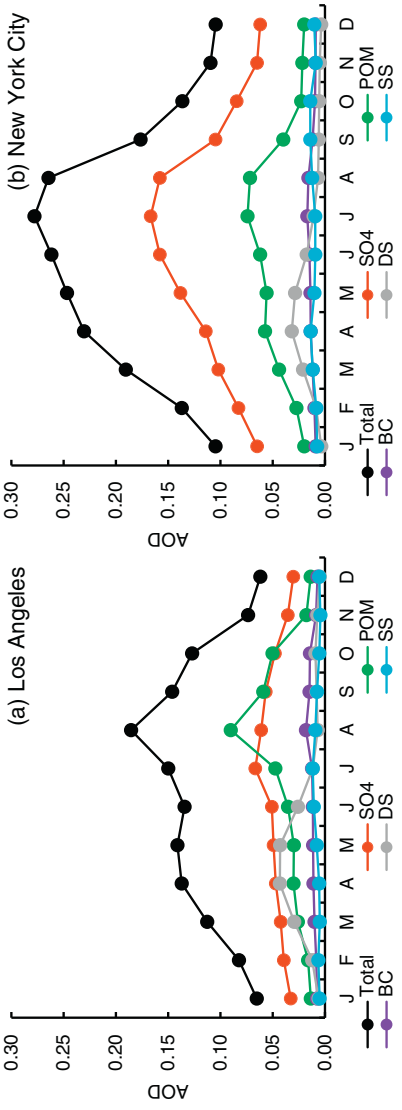

Fig. 2. AOD of total and aerosol species averaged by month in (a) Los Angeles and (b) New York City.

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3.2. South America

The AOD distribution of aerosol speciation for cities located in South America is shown in Fig. 3. The mean AOD for cities in this region is somewhat lower compared to most cities in North America. Lima and Asunción are the only cities whose mean AOD is above 0.160. The speciation distribution is, however, quite different. The mean AOD in Buenos Aires and in cities of Southern Brazil is dominated by SO_4 and POM aerosols in more or less similar proportions. POM accounts for over half of total AOD in Goiânia, Brasília and Asunción. Deforestation and biomass burning for agricultural purposes in the Amazon rainforest are responsible for such a substantial presence of carbonaceous aerosols in the air (Sena et al., 2013). Indeed, van der Werf et al. (2010) estimated that 14.5% of global carbon emissions from wildfires between 1997 and 2009 originate from South America. A synoptic circulation study published by Freitas et al. (2005) suggested that smoke plumes from wildfires in the Amazon are generally blown to the south, which explains why POM contributes much less to total AOD in cities on the east coast of Brazil.

Fig. 4 compares the monthly averaged AOD between a city strongly impacted from wildfire emissions (Brasilia) and another one west of the Andes that is much less influenced by such emissions (Santiago). Brasilia is clearly affected by biomass burning emissions as shown by a sharp increase of POM, SO_4 and BC AOD during the wildfire season in the fall. Santiago, on the other hand, is slightly impacted by POM in the fall, but its AOD distribution is overall dominated by SO_4 aerosols throughout the year. The impact of the summertime rainy season on the aerosol load over the west coast of South America is also clearly illustrated in Fig. 4(b).

3.3. Africa

Fig. 5 displays the distribution of AOD speciation for cities located in Africa. The standout feature of Africa is obviously the Sahara desert, which covers most of the northern part of the continent. DS emissions from the desert contribute to high AOD values observed in cities in vicinity of the desert, such as Kano (0.472), Dakar (0.402) and Khartoum (0.389). DS contributes over 70% to total AOD in these three cities, while it contributes

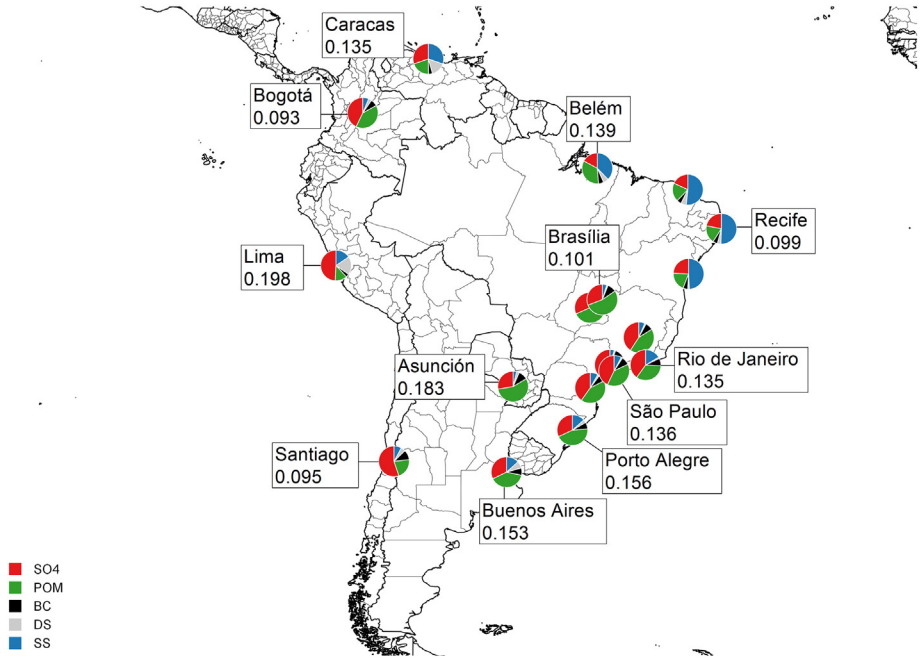

Fig. 3. Proportion of aerosol speciation for a selection of cities in South America.

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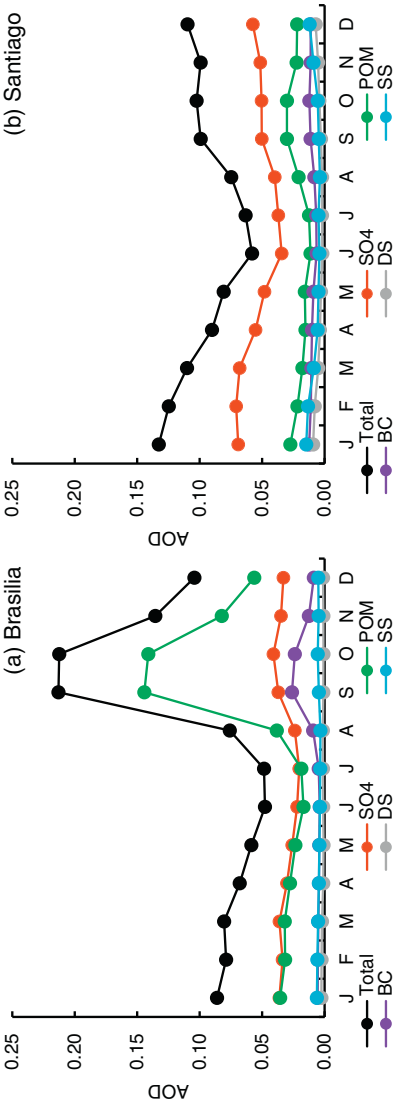

Fig. 4. AOD of total and aerosol species averaged by month in (a) Brasilia and (b) Santiago.

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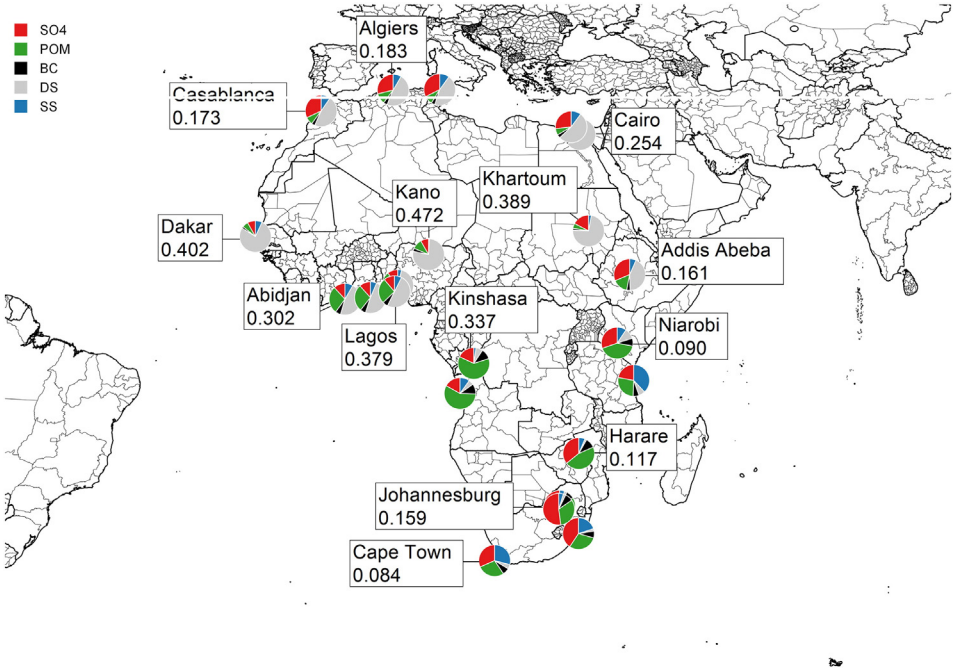

Fig. 5. Proportion of aerosol speciation for a selection of cities in Africa.

~50% in all other cities of Northern Africa. It is important to mention that MERRAero doesn't assimilate AOD data over bright surfaces such as deserts. Therefore, over the source region, the data is constrained primarily by parameterized emissions determined by wind speed. However, the darker surface of cities might have been sufficient to provide assimilated data in and around them.

The region of tropical Africa, south of the Sahara, is characterized by the savannah and rainforest where human-induced wildfire for agricultural purposes is a recurring practice and is an important source of aerosols (Archibald et al., 2009; Eck et al., 2003). Forest preservation initiatives have been implemented in Africa but Mercier (2012) essentially called them a failure. Over 50% of the world's carbon emissions from biomass burning does indeed originate from Africa (van der Werf et al., 2010). Therefore, POM and BC aerosols together contribute over 73% to total AOD in Kinshasa, 68% in Luanda and 56% in Harare. The influence of biomass burning aerosols diminishes toward South Africa, where urban mean AOD is relatively low, ranging from 0.084 in Cape Town to 0.180 in Durban. The aerosol signature in South African cities resembles most that of North American cities.

3.4. Europe, including Russia and Turkey

The AOD proportions for cities located in Europe are shown in Fig. 6. The situation in European cities is, in many respects, similar to that of North American cities: mean AOD is relatively low while SO_4 aerosols contribute ~50% or more in most cities. Europe is indeed a heavily industrialized continent but effective air quality regulations have also been implemented in Europe, which has resulted in a consistent emission and concentration decrease of various air pollutants, notably PM and SO_2, over the last decades (Vestreng et al., 2007; Granier et al., 2011; Colette et al., 2011; de Meij et al., 2012; Tørseth et al., 2012). Europe is, however, significantly impacted by the advection of DS originating for the Sahara desert, which represents over 10% of total AOD in all European cities in Fig. 6. Cities closer to the Mediterranean Sea are the most impacted, in line with Barkan et al. (2005), Querol et al. (2009) and Pey et al. (2013) who analyzed Saharan dust transport over the Mediterranean and into Europe. Indeed, DS contributes over 30% of total AOD in Izmir, Athens, Ankara and Naples, and to higher AOD values observed in cities such as Istanbul (0.206). Monthly averaged AOD values in

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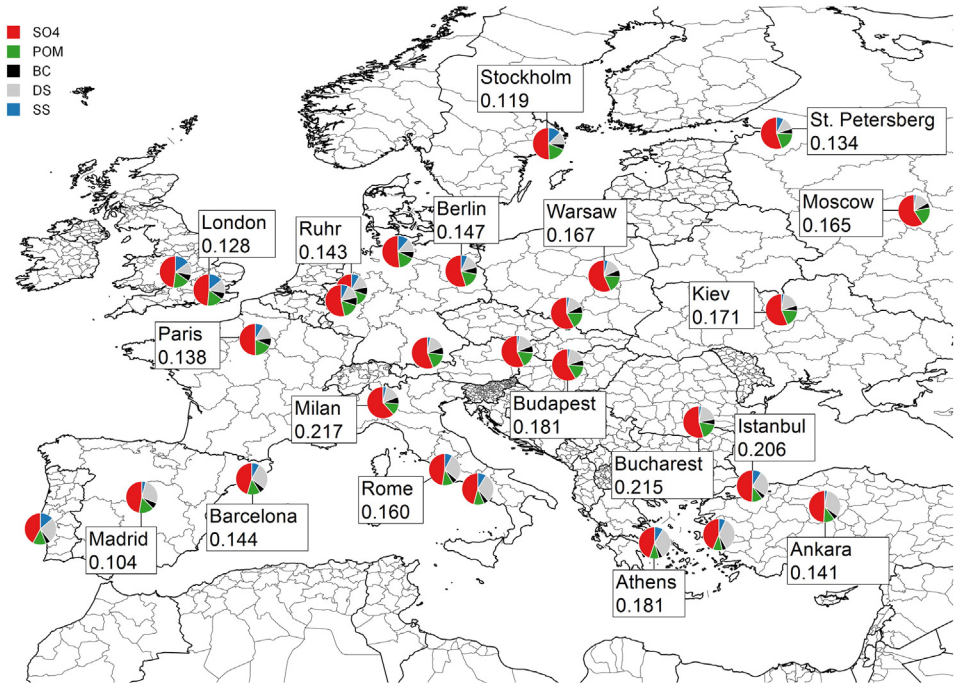

Fig. 6. Proportion of aerosol speciation for a selection of cities in Europe.

Naples are offered as an example in Fig. 7 to show how much DS affects the AOD, especially in the spring when DS contributes almost as much as SO_4 to the total.

The mean AOD in cities of the northern and western parts of Europe tends to be lower, for instance in Madrid (0.104), Stockholm (0.119), Birmingham (0.122) and Lisbon (0.126). Even in the megacities of London and Paris, the total AOD is fairly low (0.128 and 0.138, respectively), due to relatively low levels of SO_4 and to a substantial reduction of SO_2 concentrations in these two cities since the 1990s, but also in other European cities (Henschel et al., 2013; Bigi and Harrison, 2010).

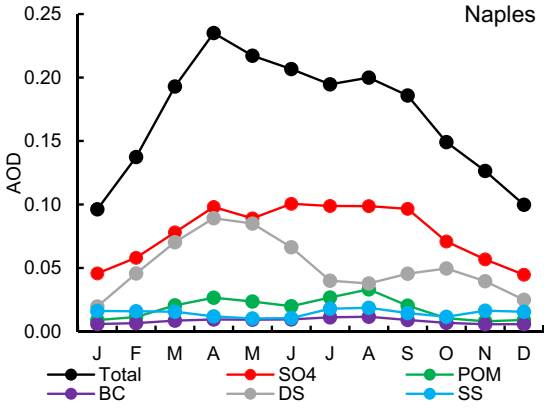

Fig. 7. AOD of total and aerosol species averaged by month in Naples.

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3.5. Western and Central Asia

This region includes a selection of cities west of China and Myanmar, shown in Fig. 8. Cities close to the Mediterranean Sea enjoy a relatively low aerosol load compared to other cities in this region, from an AOD of 0.163 in Damascus to 0.219 in Tel Aviv. The AOD tends to increase toward Pakistan; the mean AOD in all Pakistani cities is above 0.4, except in Rawalpindi where it lies at 0.370. All cities in Western Asia are characterized by the prominent presence of DS particles due to their location in the Middle Eastern deserts. DS accounts for over 40% of total AOD in all cities of Western Asia and close to 70% in Riyadh and Baghdad. The large presence of DS in Pakistani cities is compounded by the significant presence of SO_4 aerosols, which explains their large overall AOD. The mean AOD from SO_4 aerosols is indeed the highest in the Pakistani cities. Even if SO_4 AOD is lower in the other cities of Western Asia, SO_4 aerosols still provide an important contribution to total AOD in Tehran (41%), Aleppo (38%) and Tashkent (36%).

India is the world's second-most populated country. Fig. 8 includes 15 cities in India with a population over 2 million inhabitants. Its recent population and industrialization growth has resulted in a constant increase of fuel consumption and emissions of SO_2, OC and BC since the 1990s (Lu et al., 2011; Klimont et al., 2013). This resulted in high AOD values in most Indian cities; mean AOD is above 0.5 in Patna, Delhi, Kanpur and Lucknow. Indian cities are also highly affected by the advection of DS from nearby sources, especially in the northern part of India. DS aerosols contribute 40% to total AOD in Jaipur, 38% in Ahmedabad and in Delhi.

3.6. Eastern Asia

This region includes a selection of cities in China, Taiwan, North Korea, South Korea and Japan, shown in Fig. 9. China is the most populated country in the world and has recently been surging economically at the cost of deteriorating air quality. Chinese cities record some of the highest speciated AOD averages in the world. Out of the 35 Chinese cities shown in Fig. 9, only three (Kunming, Ürümqi and Lanzhou) have a mean AOD value below 0.3. The highest mean AOD is observed in Chengdu (0.800), Wuhan (0.709) and Changsha (0.706). China is the world's largest anthropogenic aerosol emitter. Its energy consumption has

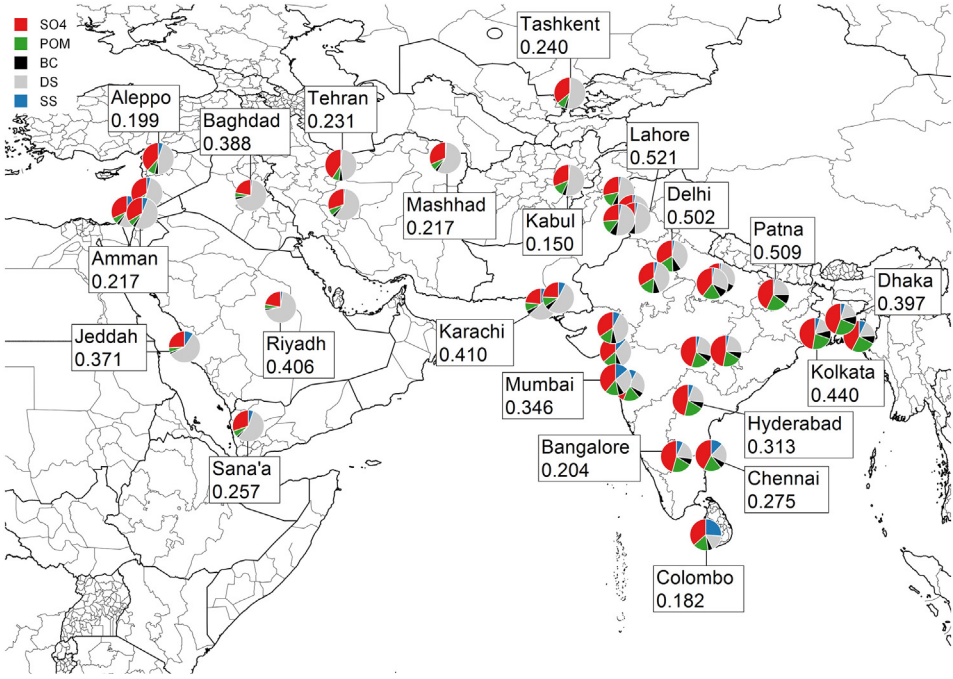

Fig. 8. Proportion of aerosol speciation for a selection of cities in Western and Central Asia.

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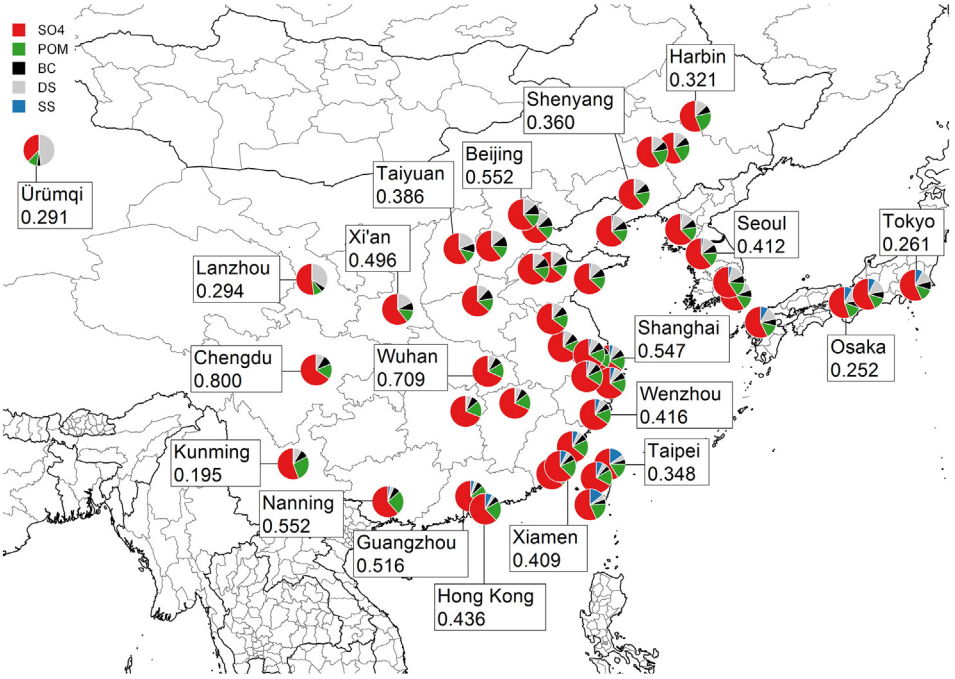

Fig. 9. Proportion of aerosol speciation for a selection of cities in Eastern Asia.

increased drastically since 2000 as well as its emissions of SO_2, OC and BC (Lu et al., 2011; Wang and Hao, 2012; Klimont et al., 2013). SO_4 aerosols account for the majority (> 50%) of mean AOD in all Chinese cities except for Ürümqi located in the northwest, away from the densely populated eastern coast. The contribution of carbonaceous aerosols is also quite significant. Residential activities account for ~70% of OC and ~55% of BC emissions in China (Lu et al., 2011). This results in a strong seasonal AOD fluctuation in many Chinese cities. The megacity of Guangzhou is presented as an example in Fig. 10 to highlight how fossil fuel and biomass burning, combined with frequent stagnating weather conditions, create very high levels of pollution in winter and early spring (Zhang and Cao, 2015). Additionally, springtime advection of DS from the Gobi desert in

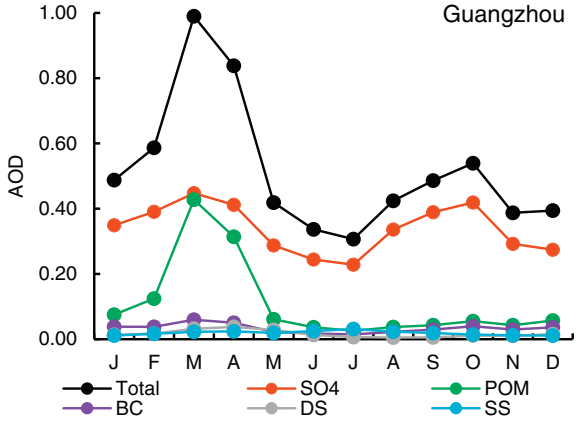

Fig. 10. AOD of total and aerosol species averaged by month in Guangzhou.

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northern China and the Taklimakan desert in Western China (Sullivan et al., 2007) is reflected in the higher DS proportions found in cities of Northern China.

Cities in Taiwan, North Korea, South Korea and Japan are not as polluted as Chinese cities. They are nonetheless influenced by emissions and advection of pollutants from China. Lu et al. (2010) estimated that a 1% increase of SO_2 emissions in China leads to 1.15% and 0.71% increases in background SO_2 concentrations in South Korea and Japan respectively. The mean AOD is indeed fairly high in Pyongyang (0.436), Seoul (0.412) and Taipei (0.348). The fact that Japan is farther away from China is reflected in its cities' lower AOD values, ranging from 0.250 in Nagoya to 0.295 in Fukuoka. Air quality policies have also been in place since the 1960s in Japan. SO_2 emissions and concentrations have decreased substantially since the 1970s (Kanada et al., 2013; Wakamatsu et al., 2013).

3.7. Southeastern Asia and Oceania

Fig. 11 maps the AOD distribution for cities located in Southeastern Asia and Australia. The highest mean AOD values in this part of the world are found in Bangkok (0.280), Jakarta (0.266) and Yangon (0.235). Cities in Indonesia (Jakarta, Bandung and Surabaya) are mostly impacted by SO_4 aerosols (ranging from 58% to 66% of total AOD). Yangon, Bangkok, Saigon, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore are affected by SO_4 and POM aerosols in more or less similar proportions. Deforestation in tropical Asia emits a substantial amount of carbonaceous particles in the air through biomass burning (Chang and Song, 2010). van der Werf et al. (2010) estimated that 9.5% of the world carbon emissions from wildfires originate from equatorial Asia. Manila and Cebu City in the Philippines are less impacted by POM and more affected by SS aerosols.

The mean AOD in the three Australian cities is fairly low: 0.093 in Melbourne, 0.095 in Brisbane and 0.113 in Sydney. Like other industrialized countries, Australia maintains air quality guidelines, more stringent than those in the U.S. and Europe, which are generally well respected (Broome et al., 2015).

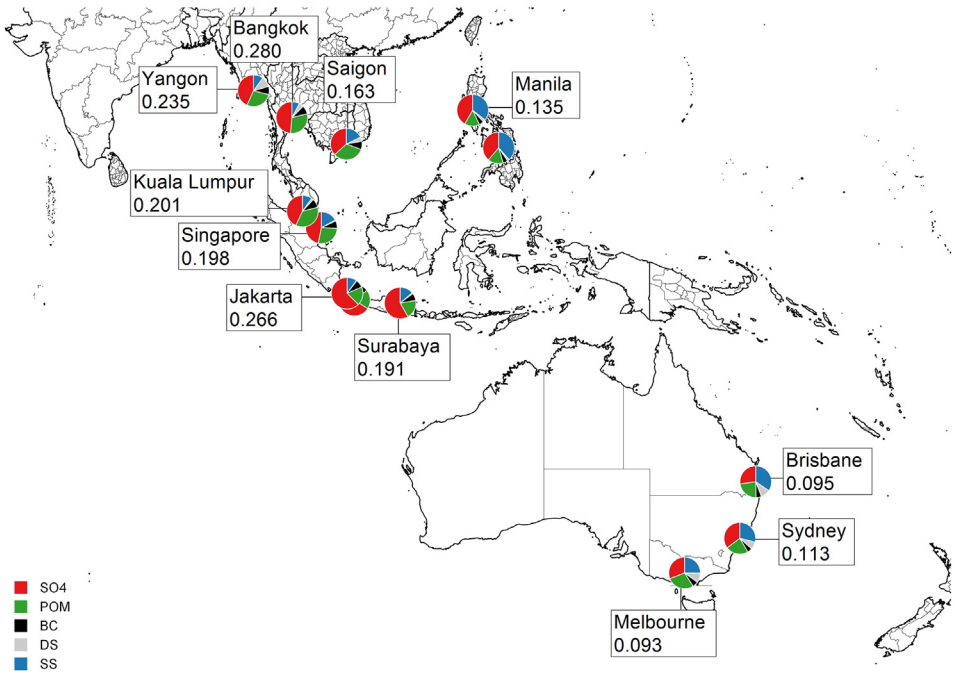

Fig. 11. Proportion of aerosol speciation for a selection of cities in Southeastern Asia and Oceania.

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4. AOD trends of aerosol speciation (2003–2015)

4.1. Total AOD

The linear trend between 2003 and 2015 for total AOD and for all the cities is mapped in Fig. 12. The color grading is indicative of the level of change with lighter colors indicating an insignificant change. Globally, the AOD is decreasing in a wide majority of cities. The trends are negative in every single city of the Americas, except in Sacramento and Santiago where they are positive but insignificant. The decreases are significant in cities of Eastern Canada and U.S., and the southeastern part of South America. The strongest decreases are observed in Washington and Asunción. Cities where the trend is insignificant tend to be those least affected by SO_4 aerosols, notably on the western coast of Canada and the U.S., in the Caribbean and in Eastern Brazil. Similarly, the trends are significantly negative in every European city, except in Stockholm, Kiev, Moscow and St. Petersburg where they are negative but insignificant.

Trends in cities of Africa and Western Asia are generally insignificant, either positively or negatively. They are, however, significant and negatively strong (> 0.004 decrease per year) in the cities of Algiers, Accra, Abidjan, Ibadan, Lagos and Tunis. The situation in India and Bangladesh is quite different, where all cities exhibit a positive trend, many of which are significant and strong (> 0.004 increase per year).

The AOD is decreasing in most of the 38 cities of China and Taiwan, albeit at an insignificant rate. The trend is nonetheless significant in a few cities and strongly decreasing in three cities of Southern China (Guangzhou, Xiamen and Hong Kong). Guangzhou, one of China's most populated cities, is in fact the city where the AOD trend is the strongest in the world (decrease of 0.0072 per year). The trends are also strongly negative in all Japanese cities and in the North Korean capital of Pyongyang. In Southeastern Asia, the trends tend to be insignificant, with the exception of Manila and Cebu City in the Philippines, and Bangkok in Thailand, which exhibit a significant AOD decrease. Finally, the three cities in Australia display an insignificant AOD decrease.

A similar analysis is performed in the following subsections for the trends of AOD speciation which will provide explanations for the AOD trends observed in Fig. 12. The reader is referred to the supplementary material for the trend values in all the cities and for all species.

4.2. AOD from SO_4 aerosols

SO_4 AOD trends are shown in Fig. 13. The trends are decreasing significantly in most cities of North America, especially in Eastern Canada and U.S., coinciding with the total AOD decrease observed in Fig.12 and in line with the goals of the Clean Air Act referenced in Section 3.1. Over the years 2000–2010, SO_4 concentrations decreased in all regions of the U.S. but even more so over the Eastern U.S. (Hand et al., 2012, 2013). Cities in Central and South America experienced insignificant changes in their SO_4 aerosol load, except in Santo Domingo where it significantly decreased and in Santiago where it significantly increased.

In European cities, SO_4 AOD trends are generally decreasing significantly in Western Europe and insignificantly in Eastern Europe. They are increasing in only two cities, Vienna and Ankara, albeit at insignificant rates. This again is the result of effective air quality regulations implemented in Europe where SO_2 emissions and, by extension, SO_4 concentrations have decreased over the years 2001–2010 (de Meij et al., 2012).

The decrease in North American and European cities was aided by the recent global economic recession. A few authors have dealt with the issue of economic slowdown and air quality, notably Vrekoussis et al. (2013) who documented a sharp decrease of various gaseous pollutants over Greece since 2008, Russell et al. (2012) who noticed a stronger-than-normal decrease of the NO_2 column over many U.S. cities during the recession, and Castellanos and Boersma (2012) who arrived at the same conclusion for the whole of Europe. Our data suggest that SO_4 aerosols were impacted in a similar fashion, as shown in Fig. 14 for a selection of four megacities in the industrialized world. In New York City, the AOD of SO_4 aerosols started to decline in 2007 and took a sharp drop in 2010 before rebounding the following year; SO_4 AOD also suffered a sharp decline in 2010 in London; the AOD decreased in Moscow between 2007 and 2010; and the same variable has been steadily decreasing in Tokyo since 2006 but more steadily since 2008.

SO_4 AOD trends have changed insignificantly in most cities of Africa and Western Asia, where SO_4 aerosols generally contribute little to total AOD. There are some exceptions, for instance, Tunis, Algiers, Abidjan, Accra, Lagos and Ibadan where SO_4 AOD trends have significantly decreased, Kinshasa where it strongly decreased and Cairo where it significantly increased. Although the trends are weak in cities in the north of India and

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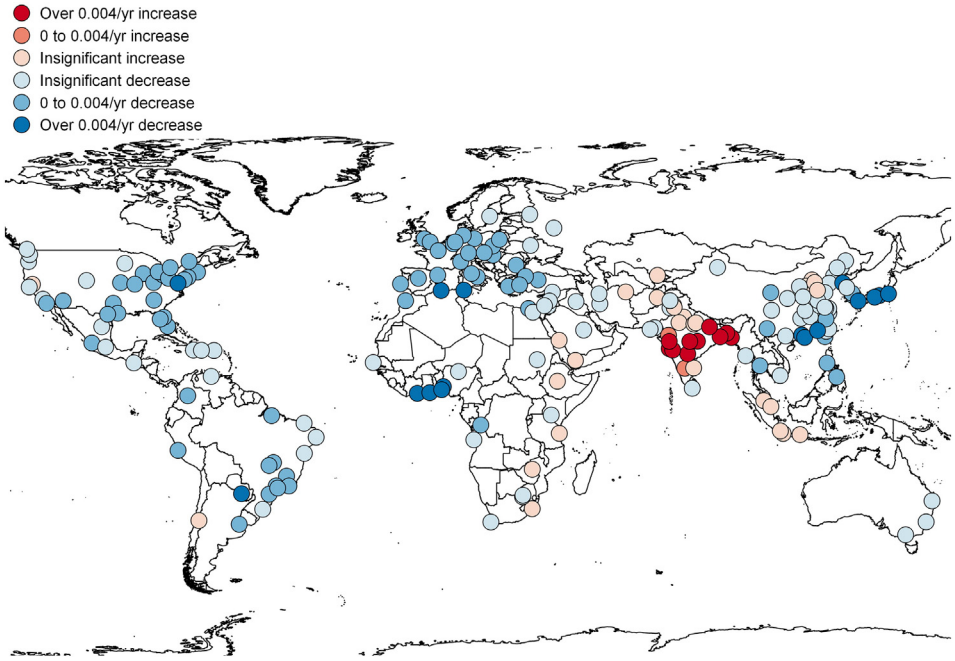

Fig. 12. Linear trend for total AOD in all cities between 2003 and 2015.

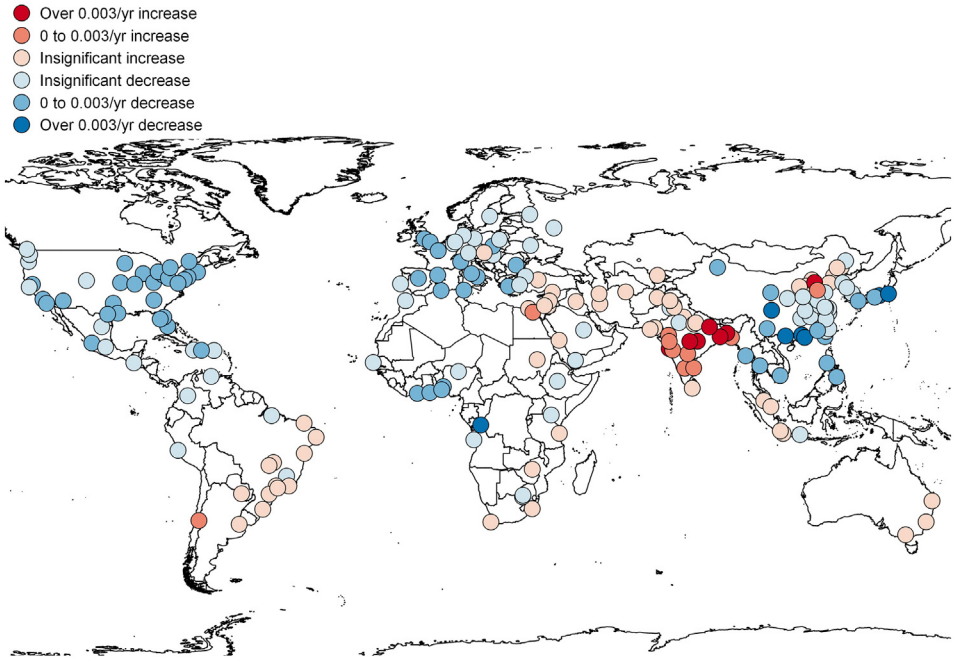

Fig. 13. Linear trend for AOD from SO_4 aerosols in all cities between 2003 and 2015.

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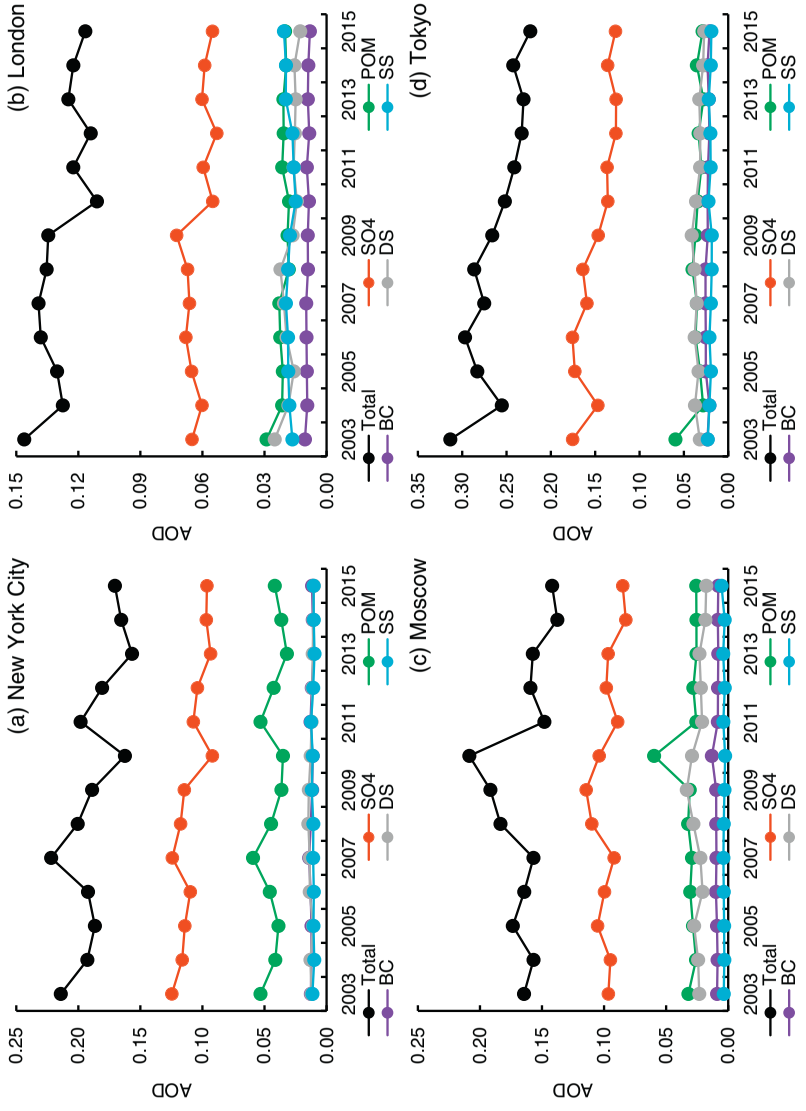

Fig. 14. AOD of total and aerosol species averaged by year in (a) New York City, (b) London, (c) Moscow and (d) Tokyo.

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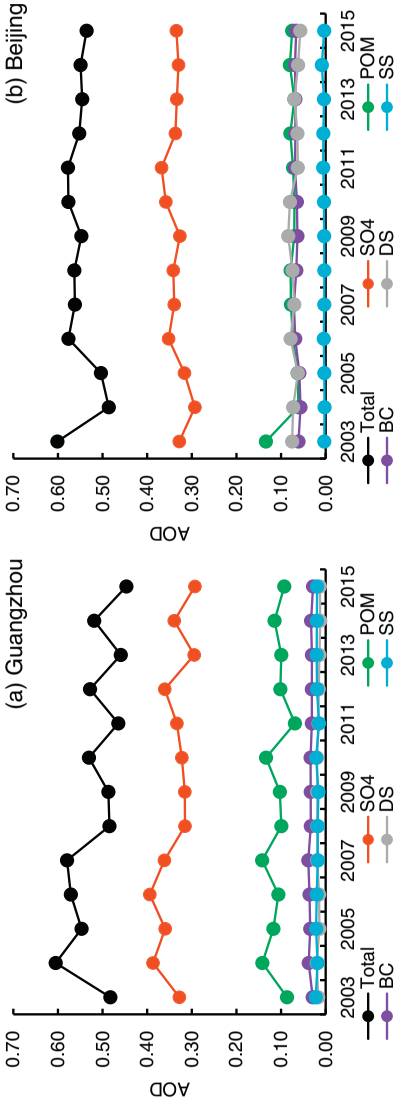

Fig. 15. AOD of total and aerosol species averaged by year in (a) Guangzhou and (b) Beijing.

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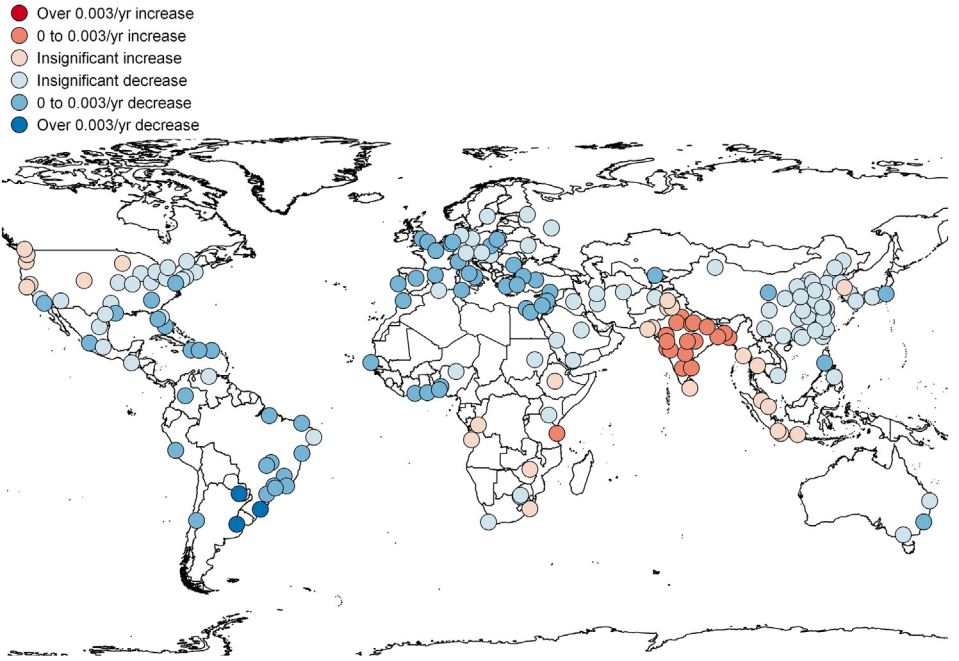

Fig. 16. Linear trend for AOD from POM aerosols in all cities between 2003 and 2015.

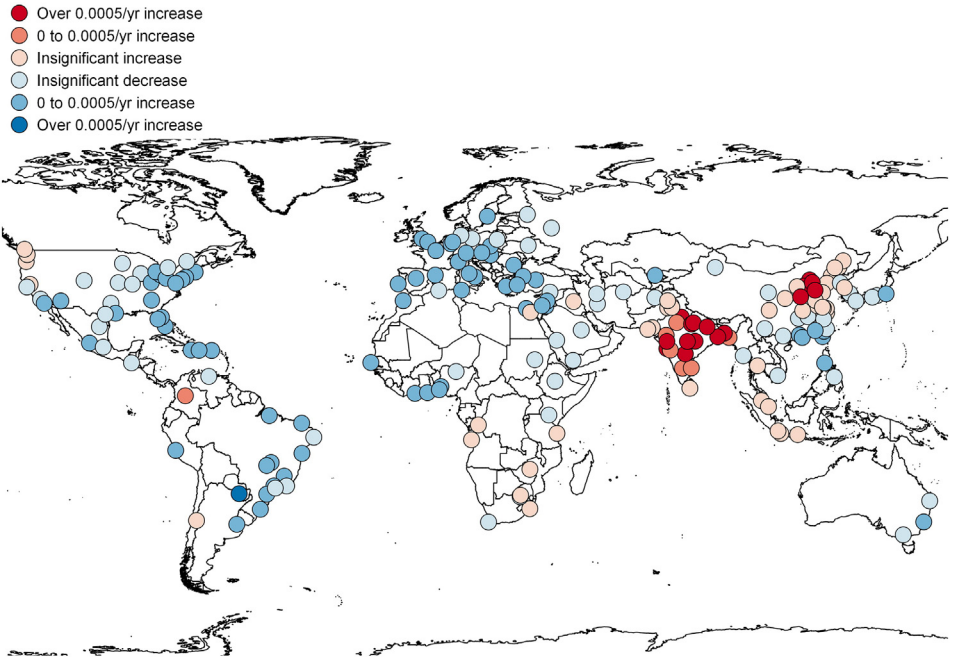

Fig. 17. Linear trend for AOD from BC aerosols in all cities between 2003 and 2015.

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in Bangladesh, Indian cities are rather unique in the global landscape in the sense that India is the only country where cities experienced a strong increasing SO_4 AOD trend. Tianjin in China is the only other city in the world with such a trend. In fact, the trend is increasing in all but one city in India (Jaipur), albeit insignificantly in three cities, including the megacity of Delhi. This is the likely result of recent industrial development and population growth in India. Lu et al. (2011) estimated that SO_2 emissions increased by 35% between 2004 and 2010 in India.

The trend is insignificant in most Chinese cities, positively in the northern part and negatively in the central part. Cities in Southern China experienced a significant decrease, quite strong in some cases (Guangzhou, Chengdu, Hong Kong and Nanning). Like India, China has also been experiencing rapid urbanization and industrialization over the last decade. A look at Fig. 13 is deceiving since only a small number of cities reveal an increasing trend, and an insignificant one in most of those cities for that matter. This is most likely due to emission patterns observed in China. Lu et al.'s (2011) estimates of Chinese SO_2 emissions showed little change between 2004 and 2010. However, this is the result of an 11% increase from 2004 to 2006 (peak year) and a slow decrease since then (9% decrease between 2006 and 2010). Other estimates vary by numbers but all agree with peak emissions in 2006 and a slow decrease since then (Lu et al., 2010; Wang and Hao, 2012; Zhang et al., 2012; Klimont et al., 2013). Implementation of national comprehensive policies by the Chinese government in 2005 has been successful in this respect. The government also took advantage of international events such as the 2008 Beijing Olympics to temporarily and regionally push stricter air quality guidelines (Lin et al., 2013). However, SO_2 emissions and their trends are very disproportionate throughout China (Zhao et al., 2013a; Zhao et al., 2013b). Guangzhou and Beijing are offered as examples in Fig. 15. Guangzhou follows closely the national trend: peak SO_4 AOD in 2006 and a slow decrease since then, although not continuous. The SO_4 AOD trend in Beijing is fairly stable throughout the period, with slight fluctuations.

The significant and occasionally strong SO_4 AOD decrease in all of Japan's cities is due to its air quality policies and to the recession, as mentioned previously, but also due to its position downwind from China. Since peak SO_4 AOD is observed in 2006 in Tokyo (Fig.14(d)) and in other Japanese cities, coinciding with China's peak SO_4 emissions, it appears that Japan has also benefited from the air quality regulations implemented by the Chinese government. Trends are significantly decreasing in Yangon, Bangkok, Saigon and both Philipino cities of Cebu City and Manila, while it is insignificant in Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, the three cities in Indonesia and the three cities in Australia.

4.3. AOD from POM and BC aerosols

Since POM and BC particles originate from the same sources, their trends are similar across the cities (Figs. 16 and 17). Carbonaceous aerosols are also the by-product of fossil fuel burning. It is therefore intuitive to observe a decreasing AOD trend in cities where the SO_4 AOD is also decreasing, and vice versa. This is the case for

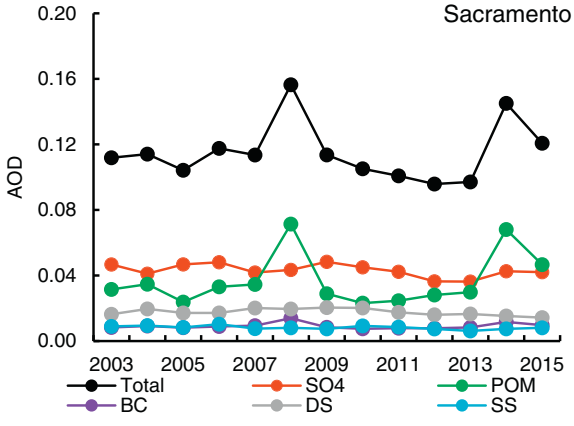

Fig. 18. AOD of total and aerosol species averaged by year in Sacramento.

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cities in the Eastern U.S., European, Indian and Japanese cities. However, trends for carbonaceous particles and SO_4 don't always parallel since carbon also originate from natural sources such as wildfires, whose contribution can explain the discrepancy between the two. For instance, the variability and recurrence of wildfires in the Western U.S. are largely responsible for the variability of OC concentrations in the same region (Spracklen et al., 2007). Sacramento in California is offered as an example in Fig. 18. POM AOD fluctuated frequently according to the intensity of wildfires, as opposed to SO_4 AOD, which barely changed from one year to another. POM AOD has been steadily increasing since 2010, in conjunction with intensifying wildfire activities experienced in California in recent years. The trend was, however, deemed insignificant by the statistical test. A single episodic series of strong wildfires can also leave a profound impact on a city's aerosol signature. Western Russia was affected by an intense wildfire season during the summer of 2010 (Konovalov et al., 2011), which explains the POM AOD peak in Moscow in 2010 (Fig. 14(c)). This peak is, however, probably underestimated since the smoke from the wildfires was so thick that MODIS occasionally and incorrectly identified it as clouds (van Donkelaar et al., 2011). Mean AOD from the Aerosol Robotic Network (AERONET) observations in Moscow during July and August 2010 were above 1 for many days and reached a daily average peak of 3.6 on August 7 (Huijnen et al., 2012). MERRAero's average of 1.5 for the same day pales in comparison. Without this wildfire episode, the POM AOD decrease in Moscow would have been significant.

As mentioned previously, wildfires in the Amazon rainforest are also an important source of carbonaceous aerosols in South America (Sena et al., 2013). POM AOD is decreasing significantly in all both two South American cities, and quite strongly in three cities (Asunción, Porto Alegre and Buenos Aires). In accordance, deforestation in the Amazon has sharply decreased since 2004, which appears to have been caused by conservation policies and economic factors (Malingreau et al., 2012) that resulted in a decrease of carbon emissions (van der Werf et al., 2010). Biomass burning also contributes a large amount of carbon aerosols in Equatorial Africa (Eck et al., 2003); the POM and BC trends are however mostly insignificant in cities of that continent except right below the Sahara where the trends have decreased significantly. Carbon emission estimates also suggest a decrease during the first half of our study period in Northern Hemisphere Africa (Lehsten et al., 2009; van der Werf et al., 2010).

The BC trends in five cities of Northern China (Zibo, Zhengzhou, Tianjin, Shijiazhuang and Beijing) have increased strongly, which doesn't coincide with the POM trends. In Southeastern Asia and Australian cities, the trends for carbonaceous particles are insignificant in all cities, except in Manila and Sydney where they have decreased significantly.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The MERRA Aerosol Reanalysis was used to study urban air pollution issues around the world by using its assimilation of AOD observations and modeled concentrations of particulate matter over a 13-year period (2003–2015). MERRAero's differentiation of particle speciation makes it a unique and innovative tool capable of estimating the AOD of individual aerosol species with a global and constant coverage, unlike remote sensing instruments. This is particularly useful for studying urban air pollution since cities tend to exhibit a heterogeneous composition of aerosols.

The mean AOD was high (>0.3) in most cities of China, India, the Middle East, Northern and tropical Africa. In contrast, it was relatively low (<0.2) in most cities of North America, South America, Europe, Australia and South Africa. The high AOD values observed in Northern African and Western Asian cities are caused mostly by their proximity to large and sandy deserts. Advection of DS also affects cities in India and Bangladesh but the high AOD averages in cities of these two countries is mostly the result of anthropogenic activities. Fossil fuel burning is responsible, for the most part, for the high AOD values observed in Chinese cities. However, advection of dust affects to some extent the AOD in cities of Northern China as well. High AOD averages in cities of tropical Africa are caused by deforestation and biomass burning activities.

Cities in North America, Europe, Japan, Southeastern Asia and Oceania tend to have a relatively low AOD on average, while SO_4 and POM aerosols contribute to it most. Even though fossil fuel consumption is a major source of pollution in those parts of the world, effective air quality regulations have been successful at keeping emissions and, as a consequence, AOD values low over the last decade. Cities in South America and on the west coast of the U.S. are affected by fossil fuel burning but carbon emissions from wildfires contribute a significant proportion to their mean AOD during the summer. European cities are also affected by DS transport from the Sahara.

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Overall, SO_4 aerosols represented at least 10% of the mean AOD in all but two of the 200 cities presented in the various maps of this manuscript, those of Dakar in Senegal and Kano in Nigeria, for the only reason that their AOD is overwhelmed by DS particles due to their location close to the Sahara. POM aerosols represented at least 10% of the average in all but 24 cities, mostly located in Northern Africa or Western Asia. The presence of SS aerosols is significant in coastal cities but usually contributes little to the mean AOD.

The AOD decreased significantly between 2003 and 2015 in most cities of Eastern Canada and U.S., Europe and Japan, accompanied by an AOD decrease from SO_4, POM and BC aerosols, a result of effective air quality regulations and the recent economic recession. Cities in South America, most of which have also experienced a significant AOD decrease, owe this decrease to a declining AOD from POM aerosols due to a slowdown of deforestation activities in the Amazon rainforest. In contrast, all cities in India and Bangladesh experienced an increase of AOD from SO_4, POM and BC aerosols, which was quite strong in some cities due to recent and rapid urbanization and industrialization.

China has also been experiencing a strong urbanization and industrialization movement over the last few decades, which caused a strong increase in emissions of atmospheric pollutants. China nevertheless implemented air quality guidelines during our study period, resulting in insignificant AOD trends in most Chinese cities. The regulations are, however, showing early signs of success, with some cities in Southern China experiencing significant and strong decreases of AOD from SO_4 aerosols. The AOD values over Chinese cities remain, however, among the largest in the world.

Many cities in Africa and all cities of Western Asia have seen little change in their aerosol load. Cities in these parts of the world are mostly affected by aerosols originating from natural sources, which don't tend to fluctuate significantly on timescales of a year or more. Maps for AOD trends from DS and SS aerosols were not shown or discussed for the simple reason that the trends were relatively weak and/or insignificant in most cities.

As demonstrated in this paper, MERRAero is an innovative tool that provides to the scientific community with the means to study a broad range of aerosol pollution issues around the world. Some limitations pertaining to MERRAero are nevertheless worth raising. As mentioned previously, only MODIS AOD over oceans and dark land surfaces are assimilated. Furthermore, no vertically resolved aerosol information is available. NASA's Version 2 of MERRAero, MERRA-2, incorporates other remote sensing instruments, such as the Multi-angle Imaging Spectroradiometer (MISR) and the Aerosol Robotic Network (AERONET), into its reanalysis to mitigate this shortcoming. MERRA-2 is currently being analyzed and results will be reported in forthcoming publications.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.uclim.2017.04.001.

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