

# CO<sub>2</sub> efflux from different forest soils and impact factors in Dinghu Mountain, China

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**Abstract** CO<sub>2</sub> fluxes from soils and related environmental factors were measured in three forest ecosystems of Dinghu Mountain using static chamber-gas chromatograph technique for one year. The seasonal pattern of CO<sub>2</sub> flux, contribution of litter on total CO<sub>2</sub> flux and the correlations of CO<sub>2</sub> flux with soil temperature and soil water content were examined for each type of forest. The results were given as followings: (1) The seasonal patterns of CO<sub>2</sub> flux from soil of the three types of forest were similar, with a higher CO<sub>2</sub> flux in rainy season than in dry season. The comparative relations of mean annual CO<sub>2</sub> fluxes between the three sites were expressed as: monsoon forest > mixed forest > pine forest. (2) CO<sub>2</sub> fluxes from litter decomposition in monsoon forest, mixed forest and pine forest accounted for 24.43%, 41.75% and 29.23% of the corresponding total CO<sub>2</sub> fluxes from forest floor, respectively. (3) Significant relationships were found between CO<sub>2</sub> fluxes and soil temperatures at 5 cm depth for the three types of forest, which could be best described by exponential equations. The calculated  $Q_{10}$  values based on soil temperature at 5 cm depth ranged from 1.86 to 3.24. More significant relationships were found between CO<sub>2</sub> fluxes and soil water content when the annual variation coefficients of soil moisture were higher.

**Keywords:** CO<sub>2</sub> flux, litter decomposition,  $Q_{10}$ , soil moisture.

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CO<sub>2</sub> emission from forest floor, as a major carbon output of forest C pool, is a crucial component of carbon cycle of forest ecosystem, thus long-term and continuous measurement of CO<sub>2</sub> efflux from soil and the determination of the relationship between CO<sub>2</sub> flux and environmental factors are of great importance in understanding the C balance of the whole forest ecosystem. The area of subtropical evergreen broad-leaved forest accounts for 45.56% of the total forest area in China and the soil C pool of which accounts for 39.24% of the total soil C pool in Chinese forest. As small change in CO<sub>2</sub> flux from forest floor in re-

sponse to global climate change may exacerbate the increase of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> level, it is of great significance to study CO<sub>2</sub> flux from soil in this area in identifying the role of forest in the future as C source or sink. Since the 1970s more and more research projects on CO<sub>2</sub> fluxes from soil surface in terrestrial ecosystem have been carried out worldwide, but mostly in temperate grassland and forest ecosystems<sup>[1]</sup>. In China, the corresponding work started relatively late and most of which focused on northern and middle China<sup>[2-4]</sup>, while CO<sub>2</sub> flux from lower subtropical forest soil has been reported little, which prevented us

from understanding the contribution of CO<sub>2</sub> emission from soil in this region to global C budget. In this study, CO<sub>2</sub> effluxes from soils of three main types of forest in the Dinghu Mountain and related environmental factors were measured once a week for one year in order to expound the seasonal patterns of soil CO<sub>2</sub> effluxes and find out key factors affecting CO<sub>2</sub> fluxes, which will provide evidence for the study of C cycle in this area.

## 1 Site description

The measurement sites were located in Dinghushan biosphere reserve (112°30'39"—112°33'41"E, 23°09'21"—23°11'30"N), which is the first natural reserve of China. It has an area of 1145 hm<sup>2</sup> with subtropical monsoon climate, mean annual precipitation 1956 mm, 76% of which occurred from April to September; annual mean air temperature is 20.9°C and annual mean relative humidity is 80.8%. The highest and lowest monthly temperature are 28.0°C and 12.0°C, respectively. In the reserve, three types of forest at different stages of succession were selected to measure their CO<sub>2</sub> emission fluxes from soil and related environmental factors. The three types of forest communities are monsoon evergreen broad-leaved forest, coniferous and broad-leaved mixed forest and *Pinus massoniana* forest.

Monsoon evergreen broad-leaved forest, dominated by *Cryptocarya concinna* and *Castanopsis chinensis*, has a complex community structure, its aboveground profile could be divided into six layers including four arbor layers, one shrub layers and one grass layer. Besides, it has many kinds of interlayer plant (liana and epiphytes). The soil under this community is hydration lateritic soil which is of 30–90 cm thickness and developed from sandy shale, with a pH of 4.06–4.34<sup>[5]</sup>. The coniferous and broad-leaved mixed forest, which was originated from artificial or natural *Pinus massoniana* forest after invasion by broad-leaved trees, is the representative forest type at the mid-successional stage. Its aboveground vertical structure can be divided into four layers: two arbor layers, one shrub layers and one grass layers. The soil

under this community is lateritic soil which is of 30–60 cm thickness and developed from sandy shale, with a pH of 3.86. *Pinus massoniana* forest, about 60 years old, mainly consists of *Pinus massoniana* and occasionally some lower subtropical sun plants. Its aboveground vertical structure can be divided into an arbor layer with open canopy and well-developed shrub and a grass layer<sup>[6]</sup>. The undergrowth in it was dominated by *Rhodomyrtus tomentosa*, *Dicranopteris linearis*. It has lateritic soil, which is no more than 30 cm of thickness and developed from sandy shale, with a pH of 3.99–4.07.

## 2 Experimental methods

CO<sub>2</sub> efflux was measured using static chamber-gas chromatograph technique. Each sampling chamber was made of stainless steel consisting of two parts: chamber pedestal and top chamber. The specifications were: Length (*L*) × Width (*W*) × Height (*H*) × Thickness of steel plate (*T*) = 500 mm × 500 mm × 100 mm × 2.5 mm for pedestal and *L* × *W* × *H* × *T* = 500 mm × 500 mm × 500 mm × 1.5 mm for top chamber, respectively. Chamber pedestals were inserted into the soil in advance and adhesive tapes were stuck into the grooves on pedestals to prevent gas exchange between the chamber and atmosphere. Inside each chamber two small fans were used to improve the air circulation. Gas samples were collected using 100 mL nylon syringe for 30 min at 10 min intervals. Then the samples were analyzed using HP 4890 gas chromatogram (GC) equipped with flame ionization detector (FID) within 12 h. CO<sub>2</sub> was separated with 2 m column with inner diameter of 2 mm 60–80 mesh Porapak Q column, and 200°C work temperature, also ultra-pure nitrogen carrier gas, with a flow rate of 30 mL/min.

There were two treatments in each experimental plot: (1) bare soil surface (litter was removed previously); and (2) litter+soil. At the time of gas sampling, soil moisture, ambient air temperature, soil temperature at surface and at the depth of 5 cm were recorded simultaneously using digital thermometer and TDR soil water detector.

The gas flux was computed from the concentration change over the measurement period. The positive value denotes the gas emission into the atmosphere from soil and the negative value represents the gas flow from air to soil or soil absorption of this gas from the atmosphere. It is expressed as following:

$$F = \frac{\Delta m}{\Delta t} \cdot D \frac{V}{A} = hD \frac{\Delta m}{\Delta t},$$

where  $F$  refers to gas flux ( $\text{mg} \cdot \text{m}^{-2} \cdot \text{h}^{-1}$ ),  $\frac{\Delta m}{\Delta t}$  denotes linear slope of concentration change with time over measurement period.  $D$  is the gas density of the chamber ( $D = n/v = P/RT$ ,  $\text{mol}/\text{m}^3$ ,  $P$  the air pressure,  $T$  the temperature inside of the chamber and  $R$  the air constant),  $h$  represents the height of the chamber.

### 3 Results and discussions

#### 3.1 Comparison of $\text{CO}_2$ fluxes among the three forest types

The seasonal patterns of  $\text{CO}_2$  flux from soil surface (with and without litter) in three forests are shown in fig. 1. For all three forests,  $\text{CO}_2$  fluxes were relatively high during the rainy season and declined during the dry season. Variance analysis indicated that  $\text{CO}_2$  flux from soil surface (whether with or without litter) differed significantly ( $P < 0.01$ ) among all three forests. The contrast relations of mean annual  $\text{CO}_2$  flux of three sites can be described as: monsoon forest > mixed forest > pine forest.

$\text{CO}_2$  emitted from forest soil surface mainly came from heterotrophic respiration of soil microbes and soil animals, autotrophic respiration of plant root. According to long-term observation data of Dinghushan natural reserve, soil microbial biomass, root biomass, soil organic carbon content and litter decomposition rate in all three forests showed the same pattern:

monsoon forest > mixed forest > pine forest (see table 1), which was consistent with the contrast relations of  $\text{CO}_2$  flux mentioned above. Besides, the microclimate in the monsoon forest, which was warm and damp, was in favor of metabolic activity of soil microbes and root system, thus the  $\text{CO}_2$  flux in monsoon forest was biggest among all three forests.

Based on the annual mean value of  $\text{CO}_2$  flux, we estimated the annual  $\text{CO}_2$  emissions from soil surface (with litter) in the monsoon forest, mixed forest and pine forest in this study. They were  $4169 \pm 309$ ,  $3509 \pm 255$ ,  $2210 \pm 274 \text{ g} \cdot \text{m}^{-2} \cdot \text{a}^{-1}$ , respectively. The annual  $\text{CO}_2$  flux from soil of temperate *Betula platyphylla* forest, *Quercus liaotungensis* forest and *Pinus tabulaeformis* forest in China were 1132, 1431, 866  $\text{g} \cdot \text{m}^{-2} \cdot \text{a}^{-1}$ , respectively<sup>[3]</sup>. The annual  $\text{CO}_2$  flux from soil of evergreen broad-leaved forest, *Phyllostachys pubescens* plantation and *Camellia sinensis* garden in mid-subtropical zone of China were 2412, 3077, 2855  $\text{g} \cdot \text{m}^{-2} \cdot \text{a}^{-1}$ , respectively<sup>[4]</sup>. Apparently, these values were lower than those of subtropical forest in this study. The annual  $\text{CO}_2$  flux from tropical forest soil of Jianfengling, Hainan China was 3316  $\text{g} \cdot \text{m}^{-2} \cdot \text{a}^{-1}$ <sup>[7]</sup>, which was near to the results of this study. By converting all  $\text{CO}_2$  flux values to common units from original source, we compared our results with those in other locations in the world as shown in table 2.

Table 2 shows that the  $\text{CO}_2$  fluxes from forest soils in the Dinghu Mountain fell into the range of those in tropical and subtropical zones, such as India, Hawaii, etc., but were higher than those in temperate and frigid zones.  $\text{CO}_2$  flux from temperate pine forest soil in Ontario was higher than that from subtropical pine forest soil in the Dinghu Mountain. One of the reasons might be that  $\text{CO}_2$  flux was measured during growing season in Ontario, when the soil temperature

Table 1 Comparison of factors affecting  $\text{CO}_2$  flux from soil surface among three types of forest

	Soil microbial biomass / $\text{mgC}_{\text{mic}} \cdot 100 \text{ g}^{-1}$ dry soil	Root biomass / $\text{t} \cdot \text{hm}^{-2}$	Density of soil organic C / $\text{g} \cdot \text{m}^{-2}$	Annual decomposition rate of litter (%)	Relative air humidity (%)
B. <sup>a)</sup>	82.20	96	16410	49.65	86.8
M.	58.62	88	11129	40.39	81.8
P.	52.99	81	10518	36.40	80.5

a) B. refers to monsoon evergreen broad-leaved forest; M. refers to coniferous and broad-leaved mixed forest; P. refers to *Pinus massoniana* forest.

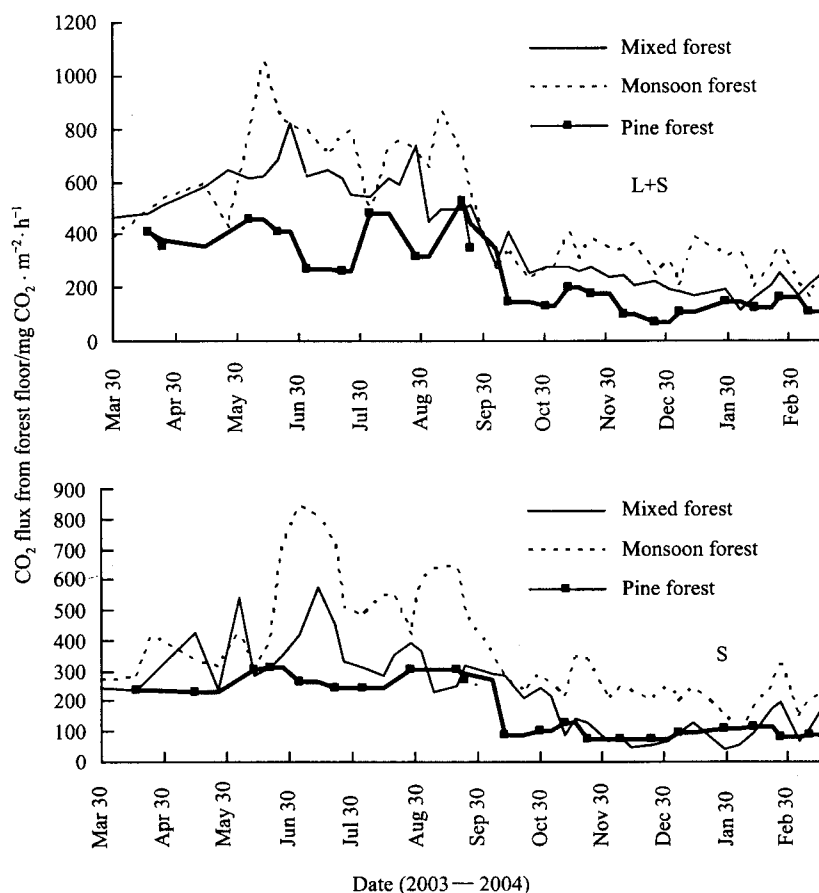


Fig. 1. Seasonal variations of CO<sub>2</sub> fluxes in three forests. L+S: with litter on soil surface, S: litter removed previously.

Table 2 Comparison of CO<sub>2</sub> flux from forest floor at different locations in the world

Location	Vegetation	Period	CO <sub>2</sub> flux/g · m <sup>-2</sup> · d <sup>-1</sup>	Reference
Dinghushan	Monsoon forest	Annual	11.42	This paper
Dinghushan	Mixed forest	Annual	9.61	This paper
Dinghushan	Pine forest	Annual	6.01	This paper
Ontario	Pine forest	Growing season	7.96	[8]
India	Pine forest	Annual	5.21	[9]
Brazil	Evergreen forest	Annual	13.65	[10]
Malaysia	Rubber plantation	Several days	5.03	[11]
Hawaii	Evergreen forest	Annual	7.23	[12]
New York	Red pine	Annual	1.50	[13]
Alaska	White spruce	139 d	3.12	[14]

and soil moisture were in favor of soil microbial activity.

### 3.2 Contribution of litter to total CO<sub>2</sub> flux from forest floor

In order to study the influence of litter on the CO<sub>2</sub>

flux from forest floor, two treatments were applied to the experimental plots: (1) bare soil surface (litters were previously removed); and (2) litter and mineral soil (intact forest floor). T-test illustrated that the difference between CO<sub>2</sub> fluxes of the two treatments were significant ( $P < 0.01$ ) in all three forests. The

CO<sub>2</sub> flux from litter decomposition accounted for 24.43%, 41.75% and 29.23% of the total CO<sub>2</sub> flux from intact floor of monsoon forest, mixed forest and pine forest, respectively. This indicated that CO<sub>2</sub> from litter decomposition was an important part of total CO<sub>2</sub> emission from forest floor in lower subtropical forest ecosystem. The ratio of CO<sub>2</sub> from litter to total CO<sub>2</sub> emission for monsoon forest was lowest among the three forests, which might be attributed to the following two facts: (1) soil respiration rate in monsoon forest was biggest among three forests, the mean annual CO<sub>2</sub> flux from soil surface (without litter) in monsoon forest, mixed forest and pine forest were  $359.72 \pm 28.05$ ,  $233.33 \pm 20.62$  and  $178.56 \pm 20.78$   $\text{mg} \cdot \text{m}^{-2} \cdot \text{h}^{-1}$ , respectively; and (2) the input of litter in monsoon forest has been decreasing in recent years while the input of litter in pine forest are still increasing these years<sup>[15]</sup>, which resulted in the lowest standing litter biomass in monsoon forest. According to the survey in 2002, the standing litter biomass in monsoon forest, mixed forest and pine forest were  $328 \pm 71$ ,  $497 \pm 103$  and  $436 \pm 146$   $\text{g} \cdot \text{m}^{-2}$ , respectively.

CO<sub>2</sub> fluxes from litter decomposition both in rainy season and in dry season in the three forests are shown in fig. 2. CO<sub>2</sub> fluxes in rainy season were apparently higher than those in dry season for all three forests probably due to higher temperature and humidity in rainy season. Although the ratio of CO<sub>2</sub> flux from litter to total CO<sub>2</sub> flux from forest floor was the lowest in monsoon forest, the CO<sub>2</sub> flux from litter in

this forest was higher than that in pine forest whether in rainy season or in dry season (fig. 2). The litter in pine forest mainly consisted of needle leaves, which were hard to decompose, so the CO<sub>2</sub> flux from litter decomposition in pine forest was lowest among the three forests. The mean annual CO<sub>2</sub> flux from litter decomposition of monsoon forest, mixed forest and pine forest were  $116.28 \pm 23.62$ ,  $167.27 \pm 16.40$  and  $73.76 \pm 15.48$   $\text{mg} \cdot \text{m}^{-2} \cdot \text{h}^{-1}$ , respectively, which was consistent with the standing litter biomass of the three forests mentioned above.

### 3.3 Effect of temperature on CO<sub>2</sub> flux

Forest floor CO<sub>2</sub> flux was generally well described by an exponential function of soil temperature at 5 cm depth<sup>[16–18]</sup>. In this study, significant relationships were also found between CO<sub>2</sub> flux from forest floor and soil temperature at 5 cm depth for all three forests as shown in fig. 3 ( $R^2 = 0.49\text{--}0.81$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ).

The  $Q_{10}$  coefficient, which is the relative increase in soil respiration rate for a 10°C change in temperature, serves as an index for the sensitivity of soil respiration rate to temperature. Based on soil temperatures at 5 cm depth, the calculated  $Q_{10}$  values of monsoon forest, mixed forest and pine forest for treatment 1 (L+S) in this study were 1.86, 2.31 and 2.72, respectively; and the  $Q_{10}$  values of the three forests for treatment 2(S) were 2.24, 3.24 and 2.47, respectively. The results demonstrated that the soil respiration of monsoon evergreen broad-leaved forest had the lowest

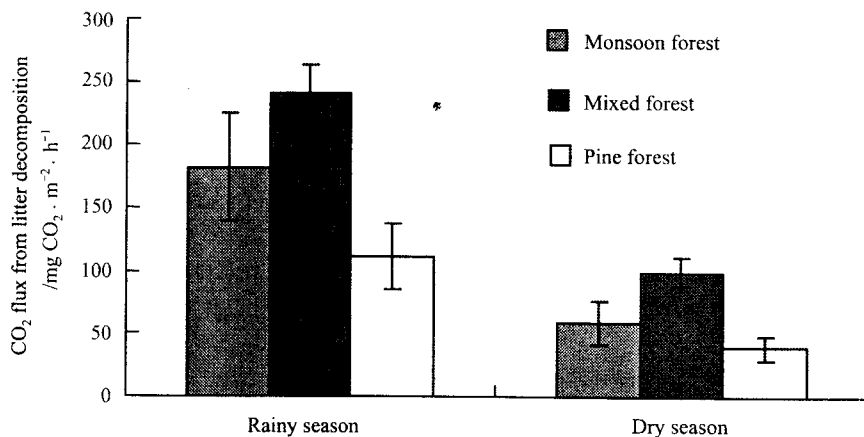


Fig. 2. CO<sub>2</sub> fluxes from litter decomposition for three forests both in rainy season and in dry season.

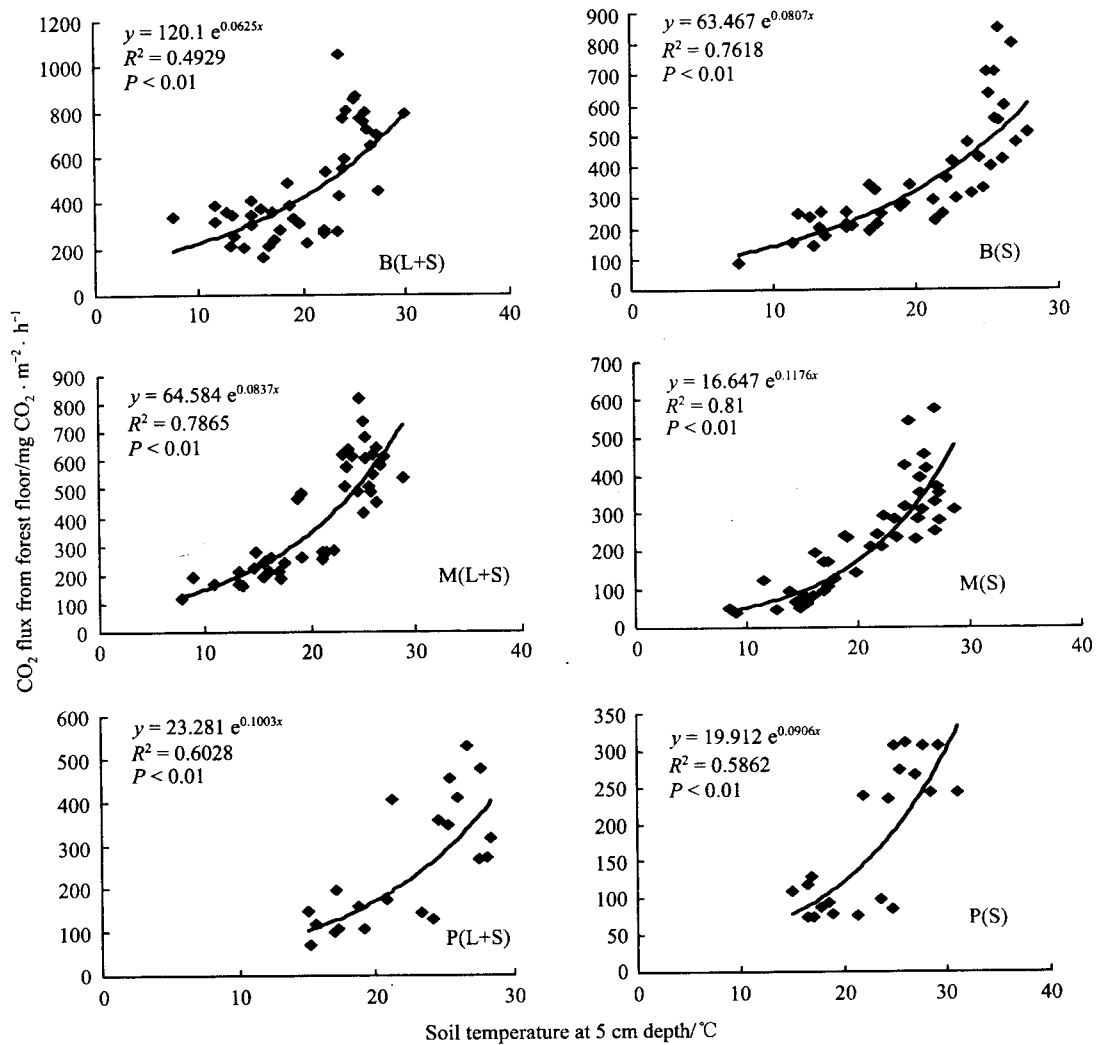


Fig. 3. Relationships between CO<sub>2</sub> evolution rate and soil temperature at 5cm depth for all three forests. B, Monsoon evergreen broad-leaved forest; M, coniferous broad-leaved mixed forest; P, pine forest; L+S, treatment where litter was maintained; S, treatment where litter was removed previously.

sensitivity to temperature change among the three forests, which suggested that the sensitivity of soil respiration to temperature change declined as forest was developing toward climax stage of succession. As far as a certain type of forest was concerned, difference of  $Q_{10}$  values existed between two treatments (with or without litter).  $Q_{10}$  values of the treatment with litter were lower than those of the treatment without litter for monsoon forest and mixed forest, while the  $Q_{10}$  value of the treatment with litter was higher than that of the treatment without litter for pine forest, the reasons were not clear.

Figure 3 shows that the relationship between CO<sub>2</sub> flux and soil temperature was of higher fitness at lower temperature than at higher temperature for the forest type with a higher correlation coefficient ( $R^2 > 0.75$ ) between CO<sub>2</sub> flux and temperature. In other words, the influence of temperature on CO<sub>2</sub> flux was more conspicuous at lower temperature than at higher temperature. The result mentioned above was consistent with those reported in other studies, which demonstrated that the  $Q_{10}$  value decreased with the increase of temperature, described as so-called acclimation of soil respiration to warming<sup>[18,19]</sup>. For the pine

forest with a lower correlation coefficient, such an acclimation was not found because its soil moisture was so low (the mean soil moisture of pine forest in dry season was only 6.61% with a minimum of 2.22%) in dry season that the metabolic activity of soil microbes and plant roots was restricted<sup>[20]</sup>, thus the response of soil respiration to temperature was interrupted.

Comparing the  $Q_{10}$  values in this area with those reported in other climatic zones, we found that  $Q_{10}$  values of the main types of forest in the Dinghu Mountain were apparently lower than those of the hardwood mixed forest ( $Q_{10} = 3.4\text{--}5.6$ ) and beech

forest ( $Q_{10} = 4.2$ ) distributed in temperate zone<sup>[17,21]</sup>, but near to those of forests ( $Q_{10} = 1.75\text{--}2.55$ ) in middle subtropics of China<sup>[4]</sup>. This indicated that the sensitivity of  $\text{CO}_2$  flux to temperature decreased from temperate zone to subtropical zone.

### 3.4 Effect of soil moisture on $\text{CO}_2$ flux

Besides temperature, soil water content is another major factor controlling  $\text{CO}_2$  flux from forest floor. Fig. 4 shows that there existed a significant linear relationship between  $\text{CO}_2$  flux and soil moisture in all three forests ( $R^2 = 0.29\text{--}0.68$ ).

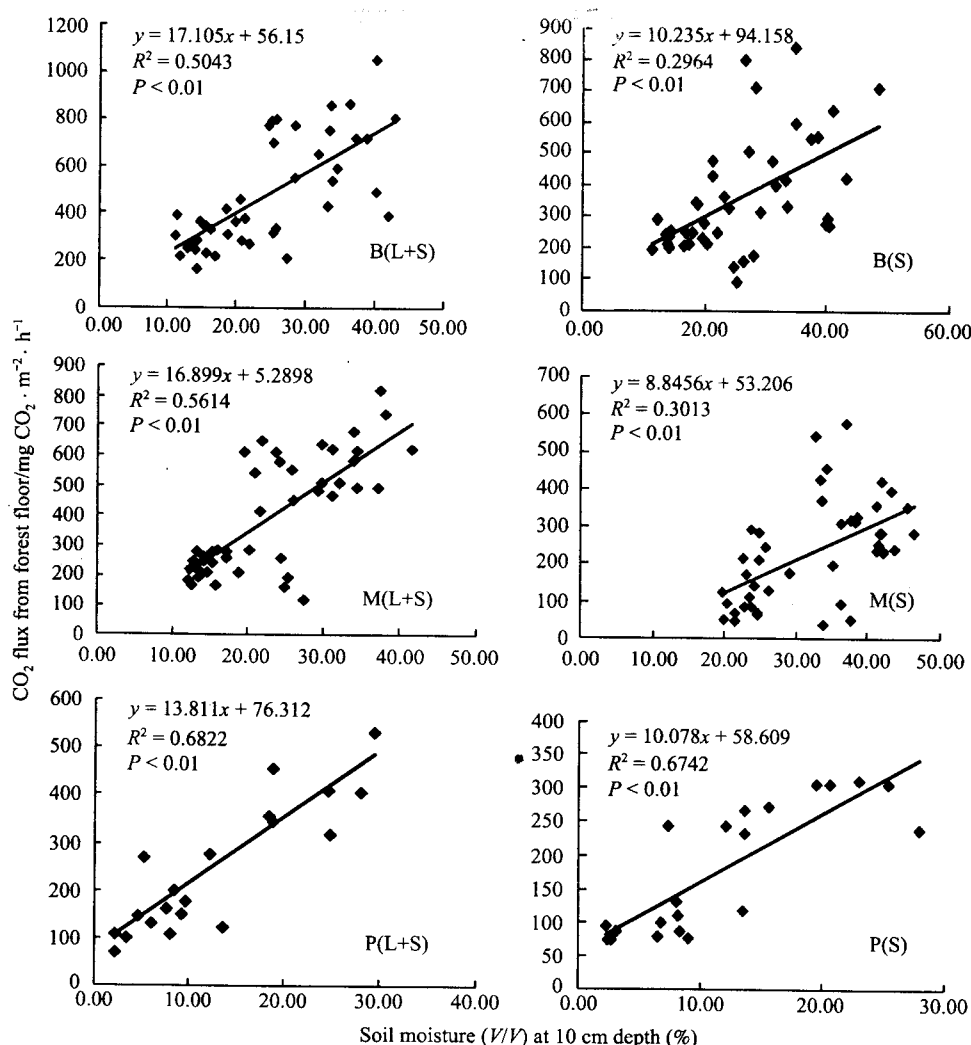


Fig. 4. Relationship between  $\text{CO}_2$  flux and soil moisture at 10 cm depth for the three types of forest. The meanings of letters in this figure are the same as in fig. 3.

Table 3 Comparison of soil water regime under different forest types

Forest type (treatment)	Variation (%)	Annual average (%)	Average in rain season (%)	Average in dry season (%)	Variation coefficient
B(l+s) <sup>a)</sup>	11.07—43.09	24.55	32.90	17.07	0.39
B(s)	11.40—48.57	25.95	34.14	18.62	0.33
M(l+s)	12.02—41.68	23.39	30.31	16.71	0.37
M(s)	19.78—45.49	32.39	39.75	25.80	0.26
P(l+s)	2.22—29.48	12.74	19.29	6.80	0.67
P(s)	2.30—28.04	11.90	17.94	6.42	0.65

a) The meanings of letters in this column are the same as in fig. 3.

It is noticed that the relationship between CO<sub>2</sub> flux and soil moisture was most significant in pine forest among three forests, which might be due to the special soil water regime in pine forest. The sandy soil of pine forest, with poor water holding capacity, was severely short of water during the dry season (see table 3), so the water became the limiting factor for soil respiration. The soil water regimes were much better in monsoon forest and in mixed forest than in pine forest, with a lower annual variation coefficient of soil moisture, in this case, the water might not be the limiting factor for soil microbes and plant roots. The relationship between soil moisture and CO<sub>2</sub> flux from bare soil surface in monsoon forest and mixed forest was least significant, which could be attributed to their lower annual variation coefficients of soil moisture, especially for the site without litter in mixed forest. Compared with other sites in this study, soil moisture in this site kept relatively high for the whole year due to its special micro-environment (a bottomland in the slope that easy to keep rain water), with minimum soil moisture 19.78%, even a little bit higher than the mean soil moisture in rainy season of pine forest (see table 3). It had been reported by Kucera and Kirkham<sup>[20]</sup> that only when soil water regime was in case of extremity (very dry or beyond field capability), the CO<sub>2</sub> production could be greatly restrained, otherwise the influence of soil moisture on CO<sub>2</sub> flux could hardly be detected. The least significant relationship between soil moisture and CO<sub>2</sub> flux from bare soil surface in mixed forest was just a case to the point.

On all accounts, the relationship between soil moisture and CO<sub>2</sub> flux were largely dependent on soil

water regime as affected by forest type, soil property, micro-environment, etc. Higher annual variation coefficient of soil moisture and very low soil water content in dry season resulted in a more significant relationship between soil moisture and CO<sub>2</sub> flux. Soil moisture was not a limiting factor for soil CO<sub>2</sub> flux if the annual range of soil moisture was narrow enough in the Dinghu Mountain.

#### 4 Conclusions

(1) The seasonal patterns of CO<sub>2</sub> flux from forest floor in three main types of vegetation of Dinghu Mountain—monsoon evergreen broad-leaved forest, coniferous and broad-leaved mixed forest and *Pinus massoniana* forest—were similar, and CO<sub>2</sub> flux was higher in rainy season than in dry season due to a higher soil temperature and soil moisture in rainy season. The relations of CO<sub>2</sub> emission of the three forests appeared as: monsoon forest > mixed forest > pine forest.

(2) The contribution of litter decomposition on total CO<sub>2</sub> flux from forest floor was remarkable for all three forests. CO<sub>2</sub> fluxes from the litter decomposition in monsoon forest, mixed forest and pine forest accounted for 24.43%, 41.75% and 29.23% of the corresponding total CO<sub>2</sub> fluxes from forest floor, respectively. The highest ratio for mixed forest was attributed to its largest standing litter biomass among the three forest types. The seasonal patterns of CO<sub>2</sub> fluxes from litter decomposition were consistent with those of total CO<sub>2</sub> flux for all three forests.

(3) Significant exponential correlation was found between CO<sub>2</sub> flux and soil temperature at 5 cm depth



for all three forests and the calculated  $Q_{10}$  based on soil temperature at 5 cm depth ranged from 1.86 to 3.24. The  $Q_{10}$  for monsoon forest was the lowest among the three forests, indicating that the sensitivity of  $CO_2$  flux on temperature decreased with the succession of forest towards climax.

(4) Regression analysis showed that the correlation between soil water content and  $CO_2$  flux was largely dependent on soil water regime as affected by forest type and micro-environment. In general, the relationship between soil water content and  $CO_2$  flux was more significant when the variation coefficient of soil water content was higher.

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