



Reversibility of
cellular convection
transitions

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On the reversibility of transitions between closed and open cellular convection

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Abstract

The two-way transition between closed and open cellular convection is addressed in an idealized cloud resolving modeling framework. A series of cloud resolving simulations shows that the transition between closed and open cellular states is asymmetrical, and characterized by a rapid (“runaway”) transition from the closed- to the open-cell state, but slower recovery to the closed-cell state. Given that precipitation initiates the closed-open cell transition, and that the recovery requires a suppression of the precipitation, we apply an ad hoc time-varying drop concentration to initiate and suppress precipitation. We show that the asymmetry in the two-way transition occurs even for very rapid drop concentration replenishment. The primary barrier to recovery is the loss in turbulence kinetic energy (TKE) associated with the loss in cloud water (and associated radiative cooling), and the stabilization of the boundary layer during the open-cell period. In transitioning from the open to the closed state, the system faces the Sisyphean task of replenishing cloud water fast enough to counter precipitation losses, such that it can generate radiative cooling and TKE. Recovery to the closed cell state is slower when radiative cooling is inefficient such as in the presence of free tropospheric clouds, or after sunrise, when it is hampered by the absorption of shortwave radiation. Tests suggest that a faster return to the closed-cell state requires that the drop concentration recovery be accompanied by significant dynamical forcing, e.g., via an increase in surface latent and sensible heat fluxes. This is supported by simulations with a simple predator-prey dynamical system analogue. It is suggested that the observed closing of open cells by ship effluent likely occurs when aerosol intrusions are large, when contact comes prior to the heaviest drizzle in the early morning hours, and when the free troposphere is cloud-free.

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1 Introduction

Satellite imagery of cloud fields over the eastern edges of the oceanic basins exhibits both closed and open cellular cloud patterns that have captured the imagination of the atmospheric scientist and the layperson alike. Interest in these cellular cloud modes has been spurred by both the desire to understand these states, and to evaluate their consequences for shallow cloud reflectance and climate forcing. The closed cellular state is a mostly cloudy state characterized by broad, weak updrafts in the opaque cloudy cell center and stronger, narrower downdrafts around the cell edges. The open cell state is the “polar opposite” or “negative” in which narrow, strong, cloudy updrafts surround broad, weak downdrafts in the optically thin cell center. These states have been studied through observation (Sharon et al., 2006; Stevens et al., 2005; Wood et al., 2011) and modeling (Savic-Jovcic and Stevens 2008; Xue et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2009a, b; Kazil et al., 2011, 2014; Yamaguchi and Feingold, 2015), with most efforts addressing the closed to open cell transition. These studies have shown that rain is the likely initiator of the closed-to-open cell transition, pointing to the importance of deepening of the cloud (Mechem et al., 2012) and/or reduction in the cloud condensation nucleus (CCN) concentration. An interesting aspect of the precipitating open cellular system is that strongly buoyant cloudy cells produce rain, which imposes local negative buoyancy perturbations. The cloud-rain cycles thus creates a dynamic open-cell state that constantly rearranges itself as clouds move through positive buoyancy (non precipitating) and negative buoyancy (precipitating) cycles (Feingold et al., 2010; Koren and Feingold, 2013). The closed-cell state has, in contrast, a more rigid structure that maintains itself over many hours (Koren and Feingold, 2013).

A relatively under-studied aspect of the system is the two-way transition from closed-to-open-to-closed cells, and will be the focus of the current work. The results pertain to what have been termed Pockets of Open Cells (POCs; Stevens et al., 2005) or Rifts (Sharon et al., 2005) in which open cells periodically appear within a meteorological setting that promotes closed cellular convection. This work does not address

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the broader question of closed to open cell transitions due to a warming sea surface temperature as one moves westward from the stratocumulus-capped continental coastlines. While some modeling work has addressed the two-way transition between states (Wang and Feingold, 2009b; Berner et al., 2013) and there exists ample visual evidence of ship tracks “filling in” cloudiness in open cell fields (e.g. Goren and Rosenfeld, 2012), there remain open questions regarding the relative ease of the two transitions and the extent to which aerosol intrusions control this transition. For example, Wang and Feingold (2009b) perturbed a cloud resolving simulation of the open cell state with a very large aerosol perturbation, and while a thin layer of cloud did fill the open cells, the aerosol was unable to convert the system to a closed state, presumably because the cloud was too thin to generate sufficient radiative cooling. The juxtaposition of these simulations and the observations suggest that differences in meteorological conditions, aerosol perturbations, and the timing within the diurnal cycle might matter (Wang et al., 2011). The latter study explored other important factors such as the amount and distribution of the aerosol perturbation (in the form of shiptracks).

To address this problem, we use a cloud resolving atmospheric model that uses a simple microphysical scheme with an ad hoc control over the drop concentration and therefore, all else equal, the rain production. This is in contrast to our earlier work (Kazil et al., 2011) where the aerosol lifecycle was simulated from new particle formation through wet scavenging, and to more recent two-dimensional, multi day simulations of closed and open cell systems (Berner et al., 2013). The choice of a simple control over drop concentration allows a more direct assessment of the importance of the rates of aerosol removal and replenishment. Supporting simulations are also performed using a dynamical systems analogue to the aerosol-cloud-precipitation system in the form of modified predator-prey coupled equations (Koren and Feingold, 2011; Feingold and Koren, 2013; Jiang and Wang, 2014), which provides insight to the essence of the system, at minimal computational cost.

2 Model description

2.1 Cloud System Resolving Model (CRM)

We use the System for Atmospheric Modeling (SAM) as described in Khairoutdinov and Randall (2003) with a 2nd order centered scheme for momentum advection and a monotonic 5th order scheme for scalar advection (Yamaguchi et al., 2011). SAM is an anelastic system, which solves the Navier–Stokes equations on an Eulerian spatial grid. Prognostic equations are solved for liquid water static energy, mixing ratios of water vapor, cloud water, and rain water, and subgrid scale turbulence kinetic energy. While our earlier work used bin, or bin- emulating microphysics in LES and CRM (e.g., Feingold et al., 1996; Wang and Feingold, 2009a, b), the Khairoutdinov and Kogan (2000) microphysics is chosen here for expediency, and because its level of complexity is commensurate with the ad hoc specification of dN/dt .

The initial and boundary conditions follow the Second Dynamics and Chemistry of Marine Stratocumulus (DYCOMS-II RF02; Ackerman et al., 2009) but also include a number of perturbations. The domain is 40 km × 40 km wide and 1.6 km deep with a grid size of 200 m in the horizontal and 10 m in the vertical. Tests with smaller horizontal grids (100 and 75 m) show that the key results are remarkably robust to the model grid specification (Appendix A). The lateral boundary conditions are doubly periodic and the timestep is 1 s. Our base case is the standard Global Energy and Water Cycle Experiment (GEWEX) Cloud System Study (GCSS) DYCOMS-II RF02 case with horizontal winds ($u; v = 7.3; -3.5 \text{ ms}^{-1}$ at 1000 m; see Ackerman et al., 2009) and an interactive surface model based on similarity theory; the large-scale subsidence is computed based on the large-scale horizontal wind divergence of $3.75 \times 10^{-6} \text{ s}^{-1}$; longwave radiative flux divergence is calculated based either on a simple liquid water path-dependent method (Ackerman et al., 2009) or the coupled Rapid Radiative Transfer Model (RRTM; Mlawer et al., 1997). Because of the shallow depth of the domain, a free tropospheric sounding is patched above the domain top for the RRTM radiation calculations. For the above-domain temperature sounding, we follow Cavallo

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et al. (2010). The domain top value of water vapor mixing ratio is used as the above-domain water vapor profile. Different domain-top values of water vapor mixing ratio will be considered in Sect. 4.2.

Simulations are on the order of 18 h so that some include significant periods of short-wave radiation. Perturbations to these initial and boundary conditions are shown in Sect. 3.1.4.

The second model is an adaptation of the the predator-prey model applied to a cloud system (Koren and Feingold, 2011). The model comprises three equations for cloud depth H , drop concentration N and rainrate R :

$$\frac{dH}{dt} = \frac{H_0 - H}{\tau_1} - \frac{\alpha H^2(t - T)}{c_1 N(t - T)}, \quad (1)$$

$$\frac{dN}{dt} = \frac{N_0 - N}{\tau_2} - c_2 N(t - T)R \quad (2)$$

and

$$R(t) = \frac{\alpha H^3(t - T)}{N(t - T)}, \quad (3)$$

where c_1 is a temperature-dependent constant, and c_2 and α are constants based on theory. H_0 is the cloud depth that would be reached within a few timescales τ_1 in the absence of rain-related losses. Thus H_0 represents “meteorological forcing”, or in population dynamics nomenclature, the “carrying-capacity” of the system. Similarly, N_0 is the drop (or aerosol) concentration “carrying-capacity” that the system would reach in a few τ_2 in the absence of rain. The N loss term on the right hand side of Eq. (2) captures a physically-based rate of removal. The delay T , represents the time required for cloud water to be converted to rainwater by collision and coalescence between drops ($T \sim 15\text{--}20$ min) and introduces significant complexity and nuanced response in the system of equations (Feingold and Koren, 2013). Here we substitute Eq. (2) with

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a simple time varying N similar to that imposed in the CRM simulations. Rainrate is diagnosed from the prognostic variables H and N , again with delay T (Eq. 3). While the system of Eqs. (1)–(3) is represented by five primary parameters, H_0 , N_0 , τ_1 , τ_2 and T , the use of a prescribed $N(t)$ instead of Eq. (2) reduces the free parameters to H_0 , τ_1 and T . In the current work, we will select values of these parameters that are physically plausible, and/or that help illustrate the key points.

3 Results

3.1 Cloud resolving modeling

3.1.1 Time variation in N

A series of simulations with a prescribed evolution of drop concentration N is applied to all simulations (Fig. 1). The time series starts with a steady $N = 90 \text{ mg}^{-1}$ (equivalent to 90 cm^{-3} at an air density of 1 kg m^{-3}), which for the current case generates closed cell conditions with minimal precipitation. It then mimics the rapid drop in N associated with the runaway reduction in N in a developing open cell over the course of 2 h (e.g., Feingold et al., 1996; Wang and Feingold, 2009a); a 4 h period of steady, low N ; and then an equally rapid (2 h) rise in N back to pre-open cell conditions. Four different values of low N are applied: 5, 15, 25, and 35 mg^{-1} . The rapid rise back to 90 mg^{-1} is unrealistic given earlier work that estimated a recovery time of ~ 10 h (Berner et al., 2013), but as will be shown, it provides a (near) upper bound on replenishment of the drop concentration, and anything less rapid serves to strengthen the arguments to be presented. The time series of N , specifically the recovery to $N = 90 \text{ mg}^{-1}$, will be varied in a number of sensitivity tests.

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3.1.2 Control simulations

The control simulations use the GCSS specifications as described above, the simple longwave radiation scheme (no shortwave radiation) and surface latent and sensible heat fluxes that respond to the local surface horizontal winds. A series of snapshots of the cloud liquid water path (LWP) calculated from the modeled cloud and rain water mixing ratios (Fig. 2) shows an initial closed cellular state transitioning to an open cell state (distorted by the mean northwesterly flow), a filling in of cloud associated with the increase in N , which gradually provides colloidal and dynamical stability to the cloud, and finally, a more complete closed cellular cloud cover.

Figure 3 shows time series of the domain mean LWP, rain water path (RWP), and mean surface rain rate R . After the “spin up” of turbulence, by $t = 3$ h the LWP is approximately steady at 110 g m^{-2} (although decreasing slowly). The reduction in N after 3 h results in rapid reduction in domain average LWP as rain ensues and cloud cover decreases, a period of relatively steady LWP – particularly for the low minimum N – and then a slow recovery after the increase in N at $t = 9$ h. In spite of the symmetry in the ramping down and up of N , there exists an asymmetry in $\text{LWP}(t)$ commensurate with the reduction in N . Asymmetry also exists in $\text{RWP}(t)$; initially strong RWP during the onset of drizzle ($t \approx 5$ h) is followed by a more steady but lower RWP ($t = 6\text{--}9$ h), and relatively steady R . This period is characterized by a balance between dynamical forcing that replenishes cloud liquid water, and by drizzle losses. Note that the start of the increase in N at 9 h does not put an immediate stop to rain, as evidenced by the long tail of low RWP and surface rain rate R that persists even after $N = 90 \text{ mg}^{-1}$ ($t = 11$ h). This is because cloud formation is CCN-limited in these very clean conditions and initially the increase in N helps to boost LWP, which further boosts rain. (Recall that $R \propto \text{LWP}^{1.5} N^{-0.5}$; e.g., Pawlowska and Brenguier 2003.)

The mean cloud fraction f_c , surface latent heat (LH) and sensible heat (SH) fluxes, inversion height z_i , and cloud base/top height (z_b/z_t) are shown in Fig. 4. Cloud fraction recovery is approximately symmetrical for high minimum N but becomes increasingly

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more asymmetrical as the minimum N approaches 5 mg^{-1} . Surface latent heat fluxes decrease, while sensible heat fluxes increase during the open cell period, consistent with the cooler and moister surface outflows (see e.g. Kazil et al., 2014 for more detailed analysis of the surface flux responses). The pre-open cell rise in cloud base and top height is suppressed during the raining period. Cloud bases for the different N perturbations all tend to converge after full recovery of N , while cloud tops for the stronger perturbations are up to $\sim 50 \text{ m}$ lower.

3.1.3 No aerosol perturbation

It is of interest to compare these perturbed simulations to one in which there is no perturbation to N , i.e., $N = 90 \text{ mg}^{-1}$ for the entire simulation. Figure 5 shows profiles of total liquid water, total water mixing ratio q_t , and liquid water potential temperature θ_l for the control case and a simulation without any N perturbation. In the absence of a perturbation to N , the cloud does not produce substantial drizzle; even though the boundary layer deepens steadily, it does not produce enough liquid water to generate precipitation at $N = 90 \text{ mg}^{-1}$, and it remains reasonably well-mixed. In contrast, the control simulation with a strong perturbation to N (5 mg^{-1}) exhibits significant drizzle-related reduction in cloud water and significant perturbation to the well-mixed state (Fig. 5, left panel). Notably, and in agreement with earlier studies (e.g., Stevens et al., 2005) the cloud layer dries and warms during the precipitating period while the surface cools and moistens. By the end of the simulation vertical mixing has increased; θ_l is approximately constant with height but a moister near-surface layer up to a depth of 100 m persists, even though surface drizzle is $< 0.01 \text{ mm day}^{-1}$ (Fig. 3c). Overall, however, the morphological structure of the cloud field, its flow structure (not shown) and the thermodynamic profiles at the end of the simulation, are consistent with a closed cellular system.

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3.1.4 Sensitivity tests

A number of sensitivity tests and perturbations to the initial and boundary conditions were performed to gauge robustness in the response to the $N(t)$ perturbation. These include (i) fixed surface fluxes ($SH = 15 \text{ W m}^{-2}$ and $LH = 93 \text{ W m}^{-2}$), (ii) simulation of both shortwave and longwave radiation using RRTM, (iii) changing start times in the diurnal cycle; and (iv) varying free tropospheric humidity and largescale subsidence. This is just a subset of the various tests that could be performed. Figure 6 shows time series plots of LWP for these various tests. In all cases the asymmetry in $LWP(t)$ in response to $N(t)$ is clear. Of interest is that RRTM tends to generate stronger long-wave radiative cooling and therefore even in the presence of shortwave radiation, LWP recovery after the open-cell period is much more effective (cf. Figs. 3a and 6b; see further discussions in Sect. 4.2). Delays in the start time of the simulation slow the LWP recovery (progressively weaker slopes with increasing delay in Fig. 6c) because of shortwave absorption, but once N has returned to 90 mg^{-1} the simulations converge. Other significant changes to the simulations are in response to changes in subsidence and free tropospheric humidity (Fig. 6d). A drier free troposphere (see figure caption for details) reduces LWP during the first 4 h of simulation, before the onset of drizzle. This reduction in LWP is magnified in the case of stronger subsidence but in the case of weaker subsidence, the loss in LWP is countered by the ability of the boundary layer to generate a deeper cloud. As might be expected, recovery to the closed cell state is slowest in the case of a dry free troposphere in combination with strong subsidence. Thus the meteorological conditions that control cloudiness itself set the stage for the rate of recovery after the drizzling period.

3.2 Relationship between recovery, turbulence kinetic energy and convective available potential energy

In stratocumulus, cloud water provides a source of radiative cooling and generation of turbulence. Surface precipitation removes liquid water from the system, cools the sur-

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face and warms the cloud layer, resulting in a more stable environment (e.g., Stevens et al., 1998). We therefore expect rain processes to manifest in TKE and Convective Available Potential Energy (CAPE). We analyze an illustrative case that includes a diurnal cycle (start time 21:00 LT) and a cycle of N from 90-to-5-to-90 mg^{-1} (Fig. 6b solid line). TKE is the grid-resolved component, averaged over the boundary layer depth. Sunrise is at approximately 06:00 LT, i.e., about the time of the beginning of N recovery. A time series of LWP, TKE, and CAPE reveals that during the initial closed cell phase (prior to $t = 24$ h), LWP drives production of TKE (Fig. 7ab). The prescribed drop in N results in precipitation and a loss of LWP. TKE also drops, but with a delay of approximately 1 h. TKE continues to decrease during the open-cell, drizzling phase, and only begins to rebound approximately 1 h after the introduction of N , and the LWP recovery. Later, LWP and TKE increase in unison and eventually peak simultaneously at maximum cloud recovery. During the last 4 h of the simulation, absorption of short-wave radiation results in a decrease in LWP. There is a steady decrease in CAPE over the course of the simulation (Fig. 7b), which is also indicative of the inability of the system to rebound. The asymmetry of the closed-open-close transition cycle is nicely demonstrated as a limit cycle in LWP, TKE phase space. During the delay in TKE recovery upon reintroduction of N ($t = 30$ – 31 h), turbulence does not reinforce the LWP increase. Thus LWP recovery following the introduction of N is hampered by the inability of the system to generate turbulence via radiative cooling – itself a function of LWP.

3.2.1 Influence of rate of N replenishment on recovery

Given the simplicity of the N representation, it is useful to consider whether recovery is limited by the rate of recovery of N at the end of the open-cell phase. Two variations on the control simulations (Figs. 1 and 3) are repeated. The first ramps N up from 5 to 90 mg^{-1} within 5 min (as opposed to 2 h); the second ramps N up to 300 mg^{-1} , also within 5 min (Fig. 8); both are highly unrealistic, considering the aerosol replenishment rates via new particle formation, mechanical surface production, and entrainment (Kazil

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et al., 2011). It is clear that even these unrealistically high N recharge rates make little difference in terms of the rate of increase in LWP and TKE. Small enhancements in recovery in f_c and deepening of the boundary layer are, however, evident. A more realistic N recovery rate of $t = 10$ h further delays recovery. Thus while the rate of replenishment in N is clearly an important controlling factor for recovery, even immediate replenishment in N does not erase the asymmetry in the LWP and TKE recovery.

3.2.2 Influence of meteorological forcing on recovery

Given the close relationship between LWP and TKE – albeit with delay – we hypothesize that a strong influx of energy and water into the system should help with recovery. The control simulation is repeated, but this time the interactively calculated values of SH and LH are both increased by a factor of 2, coincident with the beginning of the ramp up of N at 9 h. As shown in Fig. 9, recovery is significantly stronger. Meteorological forcing of some kind, e.g., in the form of a propensity to generate thicker cloud, or an influx of boundary layer moisture, appear to be important for increasing the rate of LWP and TKE recovery, and transition back to the open cell state. Note that although higher SH and LH are typically as drivers of open-cell formation, here the boundary layer has the propensity to generate closed cells, so that the stronger fluxes translate to stronger dynamical forcing. More detailed analysis of the relationship between surface fluxes and cell state can be found in Kazil et al. (2014).

4 Discussion

4.1 The Predator-Prey Model

Based on the results presented above, we apply the predator-prey analogue to the closed-open cell system, driven by a similar $N(t)$ as in the CRM simulations, i.e., we replace Eq. (2) with a time series much like that in Fig. 1 with high and low N values of 90 and 10 mg^{-1} , respectively. Thus in keeping with the CRM simulations, we prescribe

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the N replenishment time τ_2 as well as two “carrying capacity” values $N_0 = 90 \text{ mg}^{-1}$ or 10 mg^{-1} . Other system parameters are $H_0 = 650 \text{ m}$, and $T = 20 \text{ min}$. Two predator-prey results, differing only in the meteorological forcing timescale τ_1 (in Eq. 1) associated with “recharge” of liquid water (or cloud depth H) to the system, are shown in Fig. 10. One is a slow recharge time, $\tau_1 = 3 \text{ h}$ and the other is a very short $\tau_1 = 0.5 \text{ h}$. For $\tau_1 = 3 \text{ h}$, the broad features of the LWP time series are similar to those produced by the CRM. This large τ_1 also exhibits slow LWP recovery following the low N , low LWP period. The short τ_1 is akin to a strong meteorological forcing much like in Fig. 9 but can also be achieved by increasing H_0 simultaneous with the N recovery (results not shown). Decreasing τ_1 to 0.5 h significantly increases the rate of recovery of LWP, in agreement with Fig. 9. As with the CRM, solution to the predator-prey equations with very rapid replenishment in N , either through very short τ_2 or large N_0 as in Fig. 8, also fails to produce rapid LWP recovery (not shown).

4.2 Influence of radiation

A comparison between results based on the simple radiation scheme (Stevens, 2005) as opposed to RRTM shows a much stronger recovery in the RRTM simulation (cf. Figs. 3a and 6b). As noted earlier, RRTM generates stronger radiative cooling than the simple calculation, which serves to support the contention that the slow recovery is related to the delay in TKE production by cloud radiative cooling. Both the simple calculation and RRTM are based on plane-parallel radiative transfer. The simple calculation has been validated for overcast liquid phase clouds (Larson et al., 2007) but it is unclear how well it performs in broken open-cell scenes, such as during the initial hours of recovery, and if any biases exist between these two calculations in broken clouds. It is however clear that the recovery is sensitive to the method chosen for simulating radiative cooling. Whether 3-dimensional radiative transfer might also have an influence is speculative.

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To explore the influence of radiation further, we consider the representation in RRTM of the effective free tropospheric air above the domain top. In the RRTM simulations thus far (Fig. 6b, c), the upper tropospheric humidity is maintained constant at the value at the domain top ($\approx 2 \text{ g kg}^{-1}$). An additional experiment in which the effective free tropospheric humidity is reduced to 0.01 g kg^{-1} is repeated. This would indicate a more efficient cooling of the system, e.g., in the absence of free tropospheric clouds. Note that this value only pertains to the effective radiative layer *above the model top* and does not directly affect the thermodynamics within the model domain. (Simulations with varying modeled free tropospheric air are shown in Fig. 6d.) As shown in Fig. 11, the more efficient cooling associated with this drier effective free troposphere generates significantly stronger turbulence and a more rapid recovery to the closed cell state. Towards the end of the simulation this recovery of LWP is modulated to some extent by the stronger entrainment associated with the higher TKE – compounded by the solar absorption – so that LWP increases are small.

For perspective, Fig. 11 also includes comparison with the control simulation (simple longwave radiation and standard N replenishment timescale of 2 h, with the time axis shifted so that the perturbations to N coincide) and the standard RRTM simulation but with a replenishment timescale of 10 h. We note that the rate of recovery of N is clearly an important factor in recovery of the LWP and the closed cell state. Also of interest is that z_i is larger and rebounds more rapidly in the Control case (simple longwave radiation) than in the RRTM-based simulations. Closer inspection shows that for the same N perturbation, the Control simulation generates less surface precipitation than does the RRTM simulation (Fig. 12). The weaker thermodynamic stabilization in the Control simulation allows for a deepening boundary layer. Nevertheless, the deeper boundary layer by itself is not able to sustain a deeper cloud during the recovery because the weaker radiative cooling limits the regeneration of condensate. The RRTM simulation is characterized by significantly more positive vertical velocity skewness, and stronger liquid water flux. Thus while the boundary layer is on average poorly mixed, the stronger

updrafts supply moisture to the top of the boundary layer that helps maintain a higher f_c , LWP, and TKE.

The influence of absorption of solar radiation on cloud recovery (Figs. 6c and 11) is clearly manifested in both the initial stages after introduction of particles and towards the end of the simulations when LWP decreases markedly. The timing of the reintroduction of particles to the system relative to the diurnal cycle must therefore be considered to be a fundamental aspect of recovery. This point has also been raised in other modeling studies (Wang and Feingold, 2009b; Wang et al., 2011) and observations (Burleyson and Yuter, 2014).

4.3 Influence of boundary layer depth

The DYCOMS-II RF02 boundary layer has a tendency to deepen steadily over the course of the simulation (Fig. 5). We now consider possible influence of the boundary layer depth on open-closed cell recovery. To address this, we simulate the system described in Fig. 3, but delay the application of the perturbation in $N(t)$ until 11 h, i.e., 8 h later than the standard simulation, when the boundary layer is deeper. In all other respects the perturbation is the same. This result is shown as the dotted curve in Fig. 13, shifted by $t - 8$ h. Clearly, recovery to the closed cell state is very similar to that for the shallower boundary layer. However, this result cannot be generalized since boundary layer depth is one of many factors determining cloud amount. The delayed N perturbation simulation generates a higher z_i throughout the simulation commensurate with the higher TKE. However, curiously LWP is lower prior to the precipitation and very close to the Control simulation thereafter so that radiative cooling is similar during the recovery stage. We have argued that recovery is closely related to the ability of the system to regenerate cloud water and radiative cooling. Why is recovery in the delayed perturbation case so similar to the Control case when the same LWP has to drive circulations over a deeper boundary layer? Analysis shows that the delayed perturbation simulation produces less surface rain R (both in rate and areal cover),

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and less thermodynamic stabilization, thus allowing the system to recover more readily (figures not shown).

4.4 Mean vs. standard deviation of LWP phase diagrams

While the asymmetry in the closed-open-closed cell transitions shows up clearly in the LWP and TKE time series, the system also displays asymmetry in other temporal evolution aspects. Considering parameterization applications, Yamaguchi and Feingold (2015) examined the domain mean LWP (μ (LWP)) vs. domain standard deviation of LWP (σ (LWP)) and showed that for the same case (and model) described here, the closed to open cell system follows a fairly predictable path from high μ (LWP), low σ (LWP) in the closed-cell state, towards lower μ (LWP), high σ (LWP) in the open-cell state. Similar analysis is repeated here for the closed-open-closed transition for a number of different simulations, with and without a diurnal solar cycle and with variations in the subsidence and free tropospheric humidity. One illustrative example associated with Fig. 7 is shown in Fig. 14 but all exhibit similar features. First, the simulations all show similar phase paths as in Yamaguchi and Feingold (2015) for the closed-open transition. Of note is that for a given μ (LWP) the open-closed transition is characterized in all cases by higher σ (LWP) than for the closed-open transition. The higher σ (LWP) on the open-closed path is an expression of the slow recovery; i.e., the low cloudiness (high variance) state attempting to achieve a more cloudy (lower variance) state (see also Fig. 2).

5 Summary

This work is motivated by the radiative impacts of the large increase in the amount of solar radiation absorbed at the Earth's surface in open vs. closed cellular convection, and a desire to (i) understand the propensity of cellular systems to transition back and forth between states, and (ii) elucidate key processes controlling the transitions.

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Satellite imagery often shows ship track effluent closing open cells and yet cloud resolving models that include different levels of complexity in the representation of the aerosol lifecycle produce more ambiguous results regarding the ability of aerosol perturbations to fill in open cells (Wang and Feingold, 2009b; Wang et al., 2011; Berner et al., 2013). Rather than include detailed representation of aerosol processes as in Kazil et al. (2014), we have elected to prescribe a simple symmetrical time series of the drop concentration evolution $N(t)$. Even this symmetrical $N(t)$ does not produce a symmetrical LWP(t) suggesting that some underlying system behavior is responsible for the relatively slow recovery. The key results of this study can be encapsulated as follows.

1. In stratocumulus clouds driven by cloud-top radiative cooling, changes in LWP precede changes in TKE. Once in the open cell state, the recovery of the system depends on regeneration of LWP and attendant radiative cooling; thus the lag in TKE build up represents a barrier to recovery. Although injection of aerosol into the system helps suppress precipitation and generate LWP, until N is large enough, the increasing LWP also helps generate precipitation, representing further barrier to recovery. Thus while a recharge of N is a necessary condition for recovery from the open cell state, it cannot explain the basic asymmetry in the recovery.
2. The relatively slow open-closed transition is related to the stabilization caused by the rain during the low N open-cell state and the relatively long time it takes for a build up in the TKE after the reintroduction of N . The recovery is slower when longwave cooling is countered by shortwave absorption (Fig. 6c), for large imposed reductions in N (Figs. 3, 4 and 6), and when the rate of reintroduction of N is slow (Fig. 11) or the amount too small (Wang et al., 2011). Cloud layers within the free troposphere would also reduce the effectiveness of longwave cooling and delay recovery (Fig. 11). Recovery would be more rapid if stronger surface fluxes were coincident with the replenishment of N (Fig. 9).

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3. In the predator-prey model, asymmetry is a fundamental property of the equations. It is shown that the degree of the asymmetry is controlled by the timescale for replenishment of H , i.e., τ_1 (or alternatively H_0 ; Eq. 1) after recovery from the open cell state. Simple tests with either small τ_1 or large H_0 , i.e., strong meteorological forcing accompanying the injection of aerosol, result in much more symmetric transitions.

These results shed light on why the transition from open to closed cellular state can be significantly more difficult than the reverse, and point to the need to understand the meteorological, radiative, and surface flux environment in which these transitions occur. Transitions from the open to the closed cellular state are expected to be slower during the daytime, when the free troposphere is cloudier (Fig. 11), and when aerosol perturbation/replenishment is slow (Fig. 11). Aspects of this hypothesis can be tested with satellite observations and reanalysis.

Appendix: Sensitivity to grid size

15 The standard simulations are all performed on a relatively coarse grid of $\Delta x \times \Delta y \times \Delta z = 200 \text{ m} \times 200 \text{ m} \times 10 \text{ m}$ (aspect ratio of 20 : 1). Before embarking on the more extensive simulations presented here, system response was explored for finer grids and smaller aspect ratios: $\Delta x \times \Delta y \times \Delta z = 100 \text{ m} \times 100 \text{ m} \times 10 \text{ m}$ (aspect ratio of 10 : 1); and $75 \text{ m} \times 75 \text{ m} \times 10 \text{ m}$ (aspect ratio of 7.5 : 1). Figure A1 compares the LWP, TKE, f_c and z_i time series for these three configurations and shows that the characteristic behavior of these simulations is similar. The finer grid simulations tend to generate more vigorous and deeper boundary layers. Rates of recovery of LWP and f_c are similar. While it would be desirable perhaps to perform all simulations at higher resolution and smaller aspect ratios, Fig. A1 suggests that the key aspects of the system response are robust to grid size.

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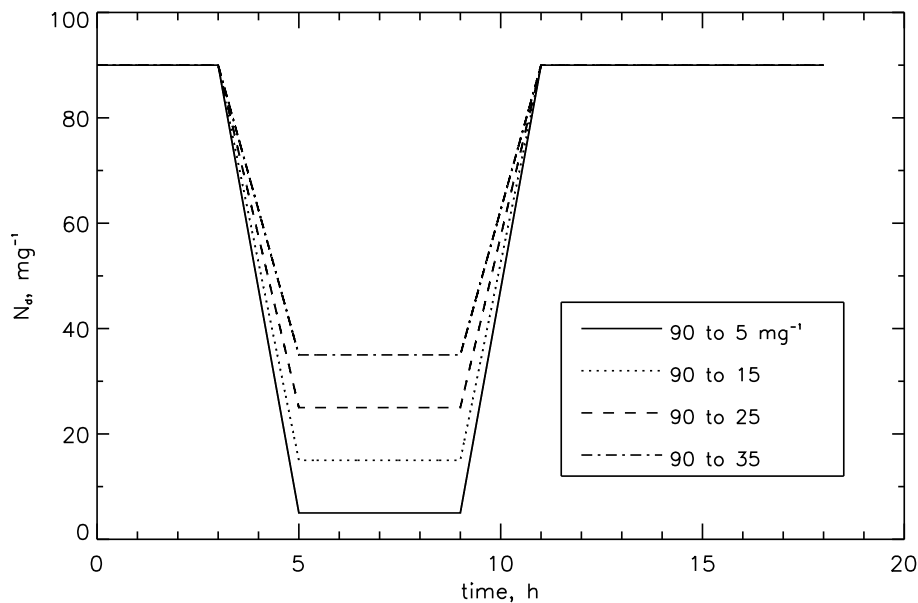


Figure 1. Time series of imposed time series of drop concentration N . The minimum N is varied between 5 and 35 mg^{-1} .

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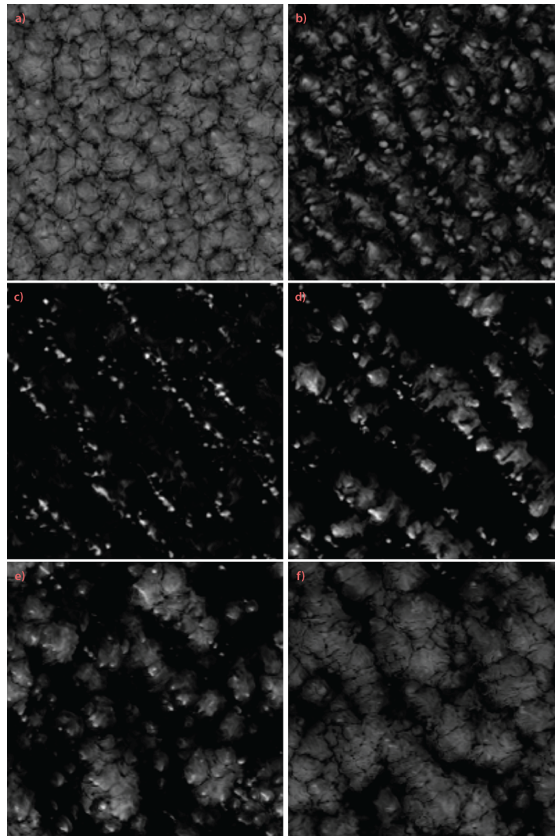


Figure 2. LWP at $t =$ (a) 3 h (closed cell), (b) 5 h (closed transitioning to open), (c) 7 h (open cell), (d) 11 h (open transitioning to closed), (e) 13 h (further recovery to closed), (f) 18 h (closed cell). Control simulation with minimum $N = 5 \text{ m g}^{-1}$. The grey scale ranges from 0 to 450 g m^{-2} .

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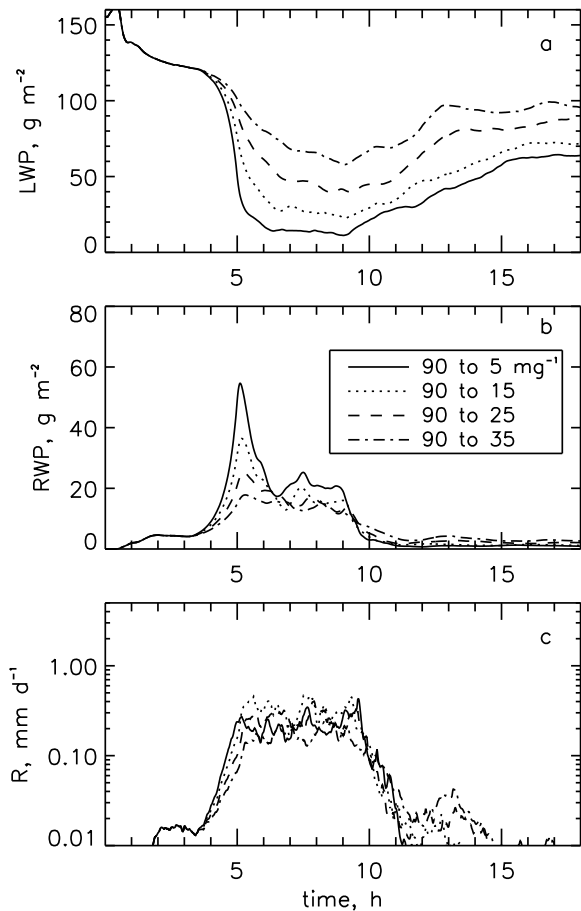


Figure 3. Time series of (a) LWP, (b) Rain Water Path (RWP), and (c) mean surface rain rate R for the control case and the various minimum N as in Fig. 1. Recovery becomes progressively more difficult with decreasing minimum N .

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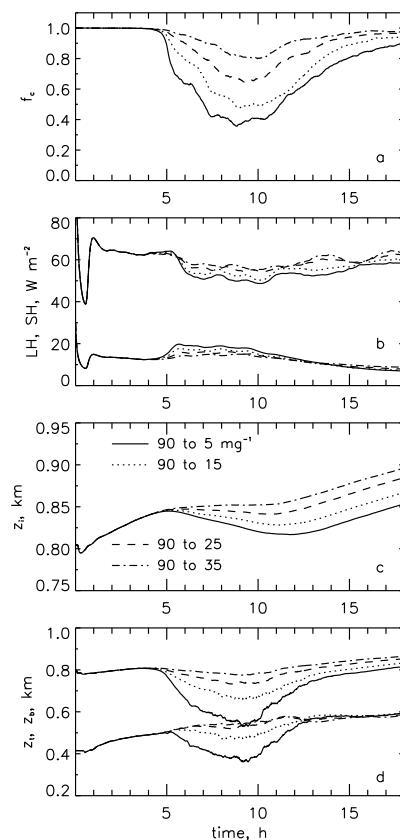


Figure 4. Time series of **(a)** cloud fraction f_c , **(b)** surface Latent and Sensible Heat fluxes (LH and SH, respectively; LH > SH), **(c)** inversion height z_i , and **(d)** cloud top z_t and cloud base z_b for the control case and the various minimum N as in Fig. 1. Note the suppression of the deepening of the boundary layer associated with drizzle.

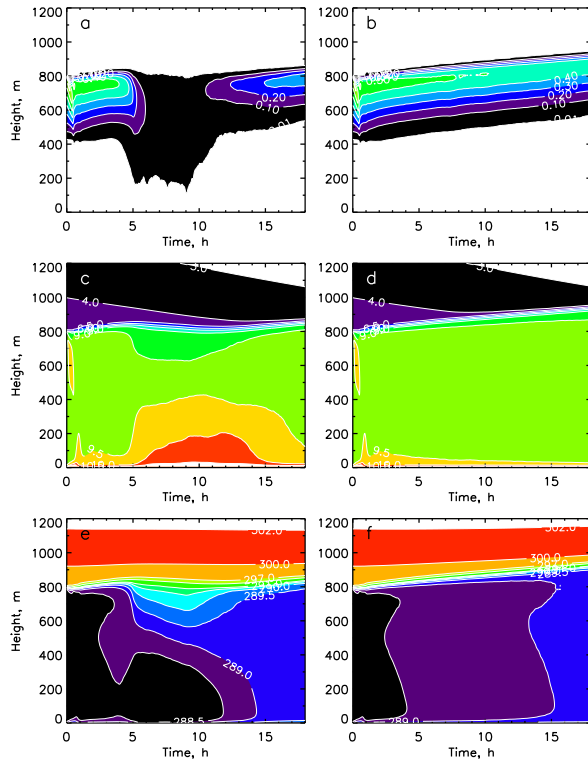


Figure 5. Domain average profiles of **(a)** and **(b)** liquid water content q_c , **(c)** and **(d)** total water mixing ratio q_t , and **(e)** and **(f)** liquid water potential temperature θ_l . Left column: control case with minimum $N = 5 \text{ mg}^{-1}$; Right column: $N = 90 \text{ mg}^{-1}$ throughout the simulation. Drizzle results in a drying of the cloud layer and a moistening of the surface **(c)**. The drizzling period is characterized by poor domain average vertical mixing. The drizzling system eventually recovers to a well-mixed state, although surface moisture persists.

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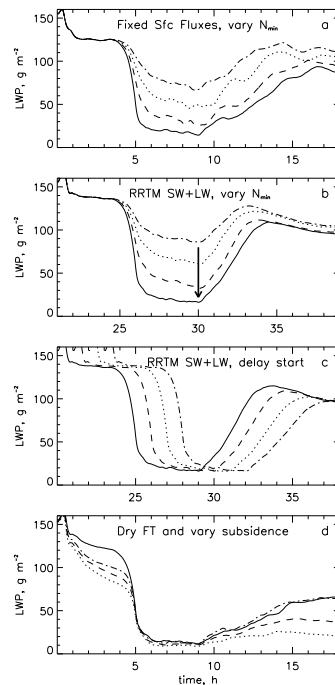


Figure 6. Tests of robustness of LWP recovery. **(a)** Control case but with fixed surface fluxes and no winds. Line types as in Fig. 1; **(b)** RRTM (shortwave and longwave) and start time of 21:00 LT. Line types as in Fig. 1. The arrow points to sunrise at 06:00 LT ($t = 30$ h); **(c)** as in **(b)** but with start times staggered by 1 h between 20:00 LT and 23:00 LT; **(d)** control case (solid line), dry air aloft (dashed line), dry air aloft and divergence increased to $5 \times 10^{-6} \text{ s}^{-1}$ (dotted line), and dry air aloft but divergence decreased to $1 \times 10^{-6} \text{ s}^{-1}$ (dash-dotted line). The drier air aloft is calculated according to $q_v = q_{v,0} - 3[1 - \exp((795 - z)/500)]$ with $q_{v,0} = 3 \text{ g kg}^{-1}$ rather than $q_{v,0} = 5 \text{ g kg}^{-1}$ in the control case. In **(c)** and **(d)** the minimum $N = 5 \text{ mg}^{-1}$.

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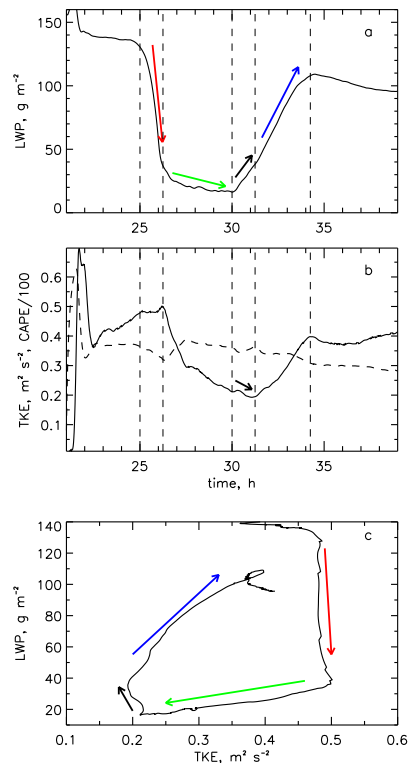


Figure 7. Analysis of RRTM simulation and minimum $N = 5 \text{ mg}^{-1}$ (solid line, Fig. 6b). Time series of **(a)** domain mean LWP and **(b)** domain and boundary-layer average TKE (solid line) and CAPE (dashed line); **(c)** a phase diagram of **(a)** vs. **(b)**. Colored arrows indicate stages of evolution of the system. Vertical dashed lines are included to focus on temporal phase lags between LWP and TKE. Red arrow: LWP falls rapidly while TKE continues to increase; green arrow: both LWP and TKE decrease; black arrow: LWP begins to recover while TKE still decreases; blue arrow: LWP and TKE increase in unison as the closed cell state recovers.

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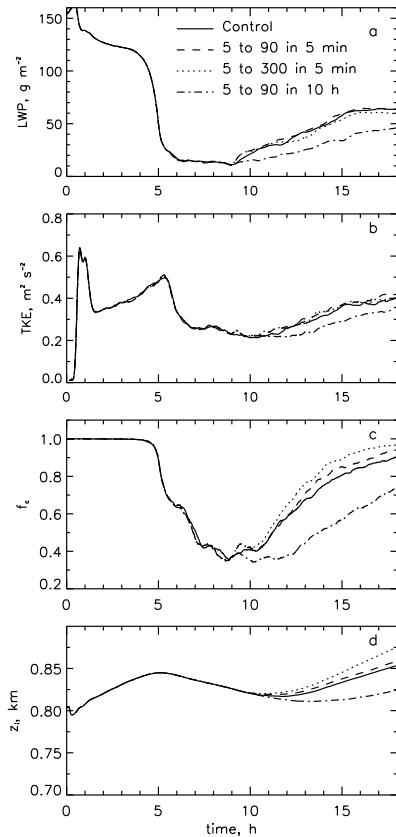


Figure 8. Simulations testing the importance of N for recovery of the closed cell state for Control case set up with variations. Simulations prior to $t = 9$ h are the same (slight differences are due to different machine compilers and processors). After $t = 9$ h, N increases to 90 mg^{-1} within 2 h as in Fig. 1 (solid line, Control); N recovers to 90 mg^{-1} within 5 min (dashed line); N recovers to 300 mg^{-1} within 5 min (dotted line); and N recovers to 90 mg^{-1} within 10 h (dash-dotted line).

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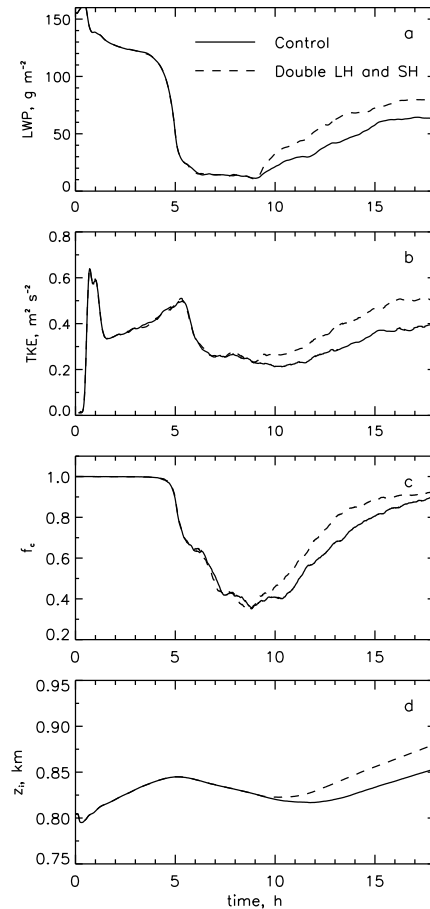


Figure 9. Simulations considering the influence of surface forcing on recovery. Solid line: control simulation; dashed line: latent and sensible heat fluxes are double their interactively calculated values after $t = 9$ h, i.e., concurrent with the increase in N .

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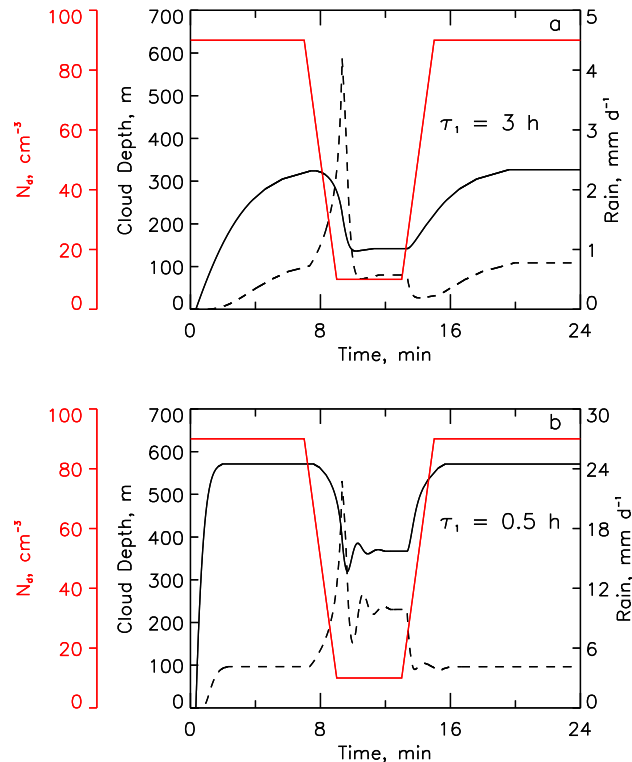


Figure 10. Predator-Prey analog to the cloud system (Eqs. 1 and 3 and with $N(t)$ as in the figure). Model parameters are $H_0 = 650 \text{ m}$, $T = 20 \text{ min}$. **(a)** Meteorological carrying capacity or H recovery time $\tau_1 = 3 \text{ h}$; and **(b)** H recovery time $\tau_1 = 0.5 \text{ h}$. Solid line represents H and dashed line represents R . In both cases the concurrence of rapid increase in R during the rapid reduction in LWP is simulated as in Fig. 3a and b. Smaller values of τ_1 exhibit rapid cloud depth or “meteorological” recovery and quicker transition to the closed cell state. By analogy, cf. simulations with Control radiative forcing (Fig. 3a) and stronger (RRTM) radiative forcing (Fig. 6b).

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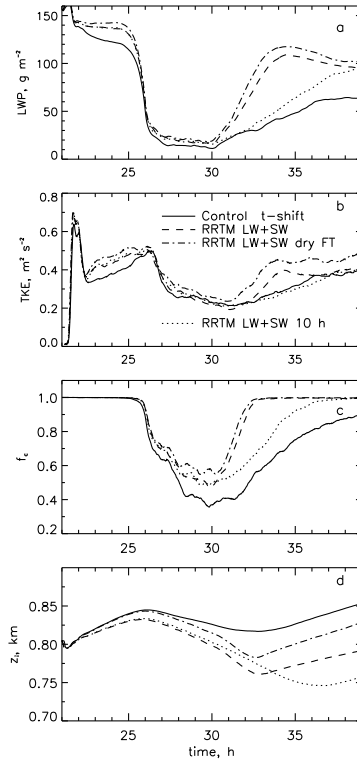



Figure 11. Perspective of different parameters controlling recovery. Solid line: Control simulation with time shift such that $N(t)$ time series coincide; dashed line: RRTM simulation as in Fig. 6b; dotted line: same as dashed line but with N recovering to 90 mg^{-1} over 10 h; dash-dotted line: RRTM simulation as in Fig. 6b but with drier free troposphere imposed above model domain top. Minimum $N = 5 \text{ mg}^{-1}$ in all cases. Slow replenishment of N retards cloud recovery while stronger radiative forcing enhances recovery.

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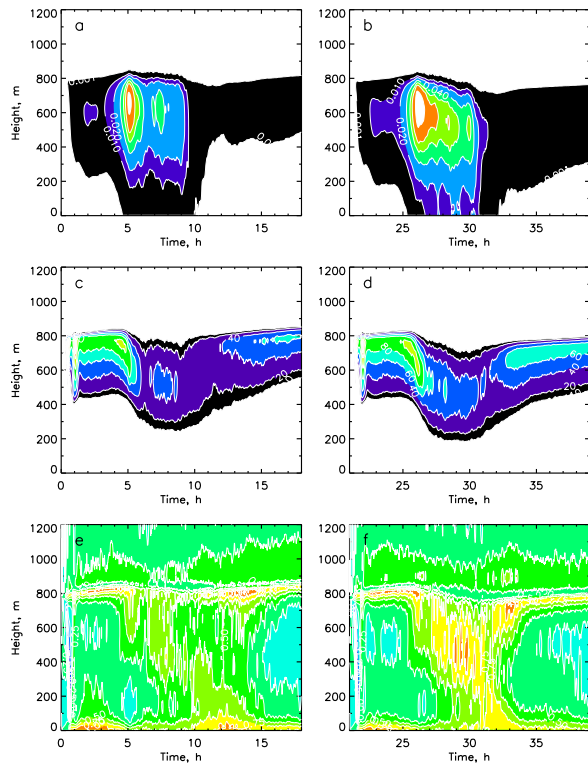


Figure 12. Domain average profiles of **(a)** and **(b)** rain water content q_r , **(c)** and **(d)** liquid water flux, and **(e)** and **(f)** vertical velocity skewness. Left column: control case with minimum $N = 5 \text{ mg}^{-1}$; right column: RRTM simulation (dashed line in Fig. 11). Stronger drizzle in the RRTM simulation generates stronger positive skewness and higher liquid water flux, which help maintain higher f_c , LWP, and TKE (Fig. 11). Contour intervals: for rain water content 0.01 to 0.12 g kg^{-1} in increments of 0.01; for liquid water flux: 20 to 140 W m^{-2} in increments of 20; skewness: -1.5 to 1.5 in increments of 0.25. Color scales are identical for left and right columns.

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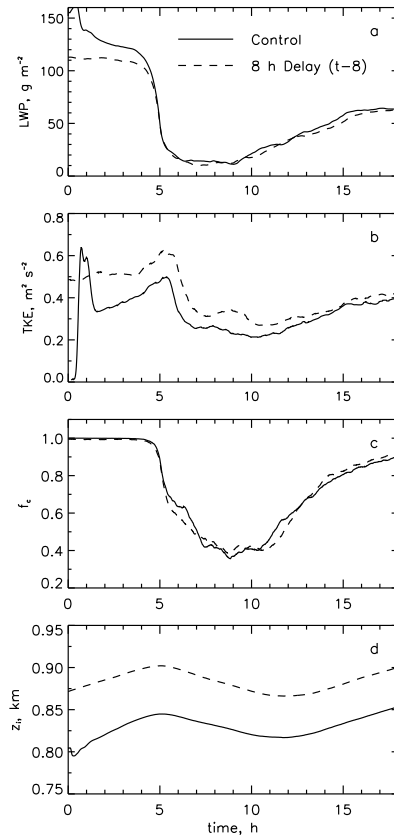


Figure 13. Investigation of importance of timing of N perturbation. Solid line: Control case; dashed line: Control case but with N perturbation delayed by 8 h during which time the boundary layer has deepened (time axis shifted so N perturbation coincides). In both cases LWP and f_c recovery are similar.

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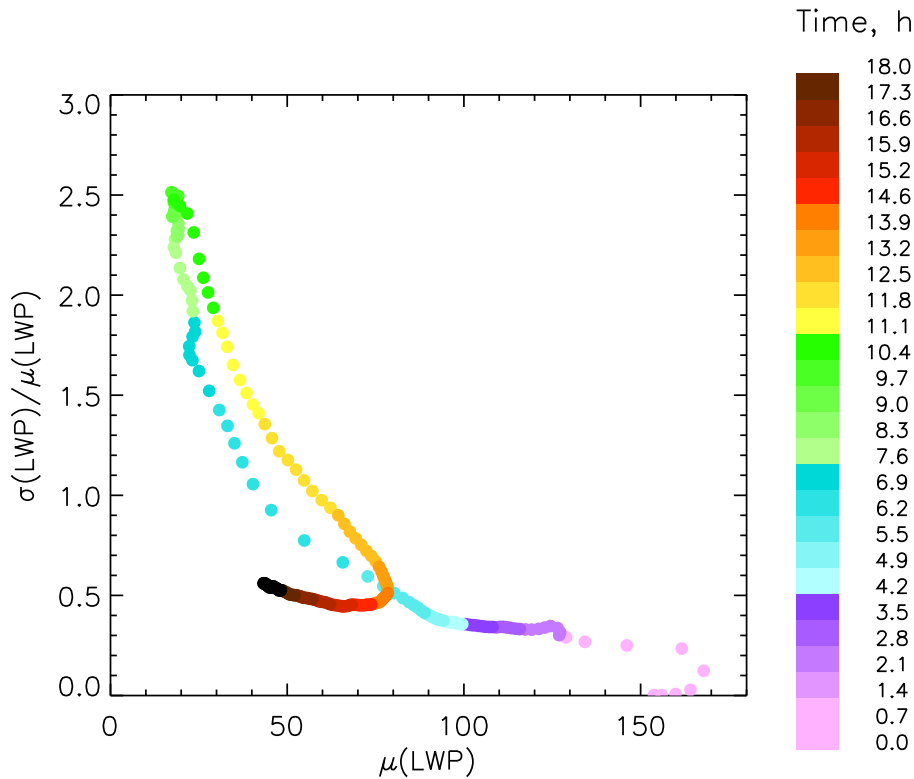


Figure 14. Phase diagram for the relative dispersion of LWP ($\sigma(\text{LWP})/\mu(\text{LWP})$) vs. the mean LWP ($\mu(\text{LWP})$) for the simulation in Fig. 7. Note that the recovery from open to closed cell state is characterized by higher σ/μ .

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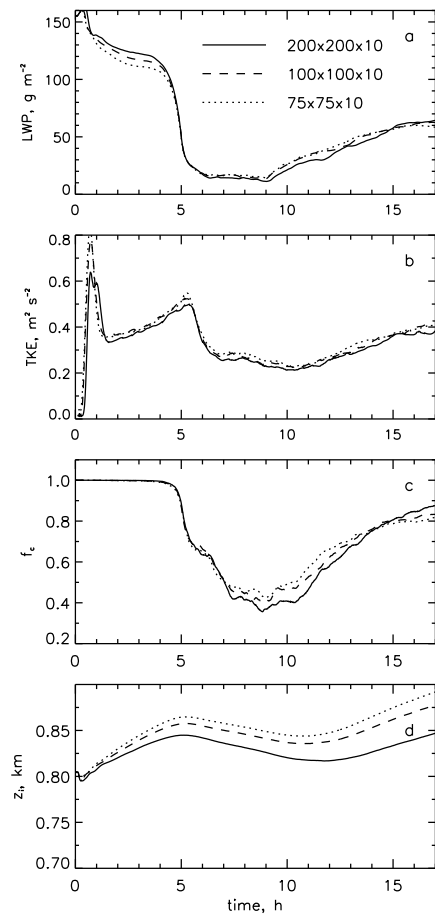


Figure A1. Sensitivity of results to grid size.

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