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A proxy for atmospheric daytime gaseous sulfuric acid concentration in urban Beijing

Yiqun Lu[1], Chao Yan[2], Yueyun Fu[3], Yan Chen[4], Yiliang Liu[1], Gan Yang[1], Yuwei Wang[1], Federico Bianchi[2], Biwu Chu[2], Ying Zhou[5], Rujing Yin[3], Rima Baalbaki[2], Olga Garmash[2], Chenjuan Deng[3], Weigang Wang[4], Yongchun Liu[5], Tuukka Petäjä[2,5,6], Veli-Matti Kerminen[2], Jingkun Jiang[3], Markku Kulmala[2,5], Lin Wang[1,7,8*]

[1] Shanghai Key Laboratory of Atmospheric Particle Pollution and Prevention (LAP[3]), Department of Environmental Science & Engineering, Jiangwan Campus, Fudan University, Shanghai 200438, China

[2] Institute for Atmospheric and Earth System Research / Physics, Faculty of Science, University of Helsinki, 00014 Helsinki, Finland

[3] State Key Joint Laboratory of Environment Simulation and Pollution Control, School of Environment, Tsinghua University, Beijing 100084, China

[4] Institute of Chemistry, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing 100190, China

[5] Aerosol and Haze Laboratory, Advanced Innovation Center for Soft Matter Science and Engineering, Beijing University of Chemical Technology, Beijing 100029, China

[6] Joint International Research Laboratory of Atmospheric and Earth System Sciences (JirLATEST), School of Atmospheric Sciences, Nanjing University, Nanjing 210023, China

[7] Institute of Atmospheric Sciences, Jiangwan Campus, Fudan University, Shanghai 200438, China

[8] Shanghai Institute of Pollution Control and Ecological Security, Shanghai 200092, China

* *Corresponding Author: L.W., email, lin_wang@fudan.edu.cn; phone, +86-21-31243568.*

Abstract. Gaseous sulfuric acid is known as one of the key precursors for atmospheric new particle formation processes, but its measurement remains a major challenge. A proxy method that is able to derive gaseous sulfuric acid concentrations from parameters that can be measured relatively easily and accurately is therefore highly desirable among the atmospheric chemistry community. Although such methods are available for clean atmospheric environments, a proxy that works well in a polluted atmosphere, such as those in Chinese megacities, is yet to be developed. In this study, the gaseous sulfuric acid concentration was measured in February-March, 2018, in urban Beijing by a nitrate based - Long Time-of-Flight Chemical Ionization Mass Spectrometer (LToF-CIMS). A number of atmospheric parameters were recorded concurrently including the ultraviolet radiation B (UVB) intensity, concentrations of O_3, NO_x, SO_2 and HONO, and aerosol particle number size distributions. A proxy for atmospheric daytime gaseous sulfuric acid concentration was derived using a statistical

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Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics Discussions

analysis method by using the UVB intensity, [SO_2], condensation sink (CS), [O_3], and [HONO] (or [NO_x]) as the predictor variables. In this proxy method, we considered the formation of gaseous sulfuric acid from reactions of SO_2 and OH radicals during the daytime, and loss of gaseous sulfuric acid due to its condensation onto the pre-existing particles. In addition, we explored formation of OH radicals from the conventional gas-phase photochemistry using ozone as a proxy and from the photolysis of heterogeneously-formed HONO using HONO (and subsequently NO_x) as a proxy. Our results showed that the UVB intensity and [SO_2] are dominant factors for the production of gaseous sulfuric acid, and that the simplest proxy could be constructed with the UVB intensity and [SO_2] alone, resulting in up to 29% relative deviations when sulfuric acid concentrations were larger than 2.0×10^6 molecules cm^{-3}. When the OH radical production from both homogenously- and heterogeneously-formed precursors were considered, the relative deviations were lower than 24%.

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Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics Discussions

1 Introduction

Gaseous sulfuric acid (H_2SO_4) is a key precursor for atmospheric new particle formation (NPF) processes (Kerminen, 2018; Kirkby et al., 2011; Kuang et al., 2008; Kulmala and Kerminen, 2008; Sipilä et al., 2010). A number of atmospheric nucleation mechanisms including H_2SO_4-H_2O binary nucleation (Benson et al., 2008; Duplissy et al., 2016; Kirkby et al., 2011), H_2SO_4-NH_3-H_2O ternary nucleation (Kirkby et al., 2011; Korhonen et al., 1999; Kürten et al., 2015), and H_2SO_4-DMA-H_2O ternary nucleation (Almeida et al., 2013; Petäjä et al., 2011; Yao et al., 2018) demand the participation of gaseous sulfuric acid molecules. In addition, the condensation of gaseous sulfuric acid onto newly-formed particles contributes to their initial growth (Kulmala et al., 2013). Quantitative assessments of the contribution of gaseous sulfuric acid to both the new particle formation rates and the particle growth rates require real-time measurements of gaseous sulfuric acid concentrations during the NPF events (Nieminen et al., 2010; Paasonen et al., 2010).

Measurements of gaseous sulfuric acid in the lower troposphere are challenging because its ambient concentration is typically quite low (10^6-10^7 molecule cm^{-3}) (Kerminen et al., 2010; Mikkonen et al., 2011). Reported real-time measurements of gaseous sulfuric acid are currently based on Chemical Ionization Mass Spectrometry with NO_3^- as reagent ions (nitrate CIMS) because CIMS has a low detection limit for the atmospheric concentration range of gaseous sulfuric acid (Jokinen et al., 2012), and a constant fraction of sulfuric acid present in the air sample will be ionized by excessive nitrate ions in CIMS under constant instrumental conditions (Kürten et al., 2012; Zheng et al., 2010), which makes the quantification of gaseous sulfuric acid feasible.

Arnold and Fabian (1980) measured the negative ions in the stratosphere using a passive CIMS and derived the concentration of stratospheric gaseous sulfuric acid from the fractional abundances of a series of stratospheric negative ions as well as the associated equilibrium or rate constants. Later, real-time measurement of sulfuric acid in the lower troposphere was performed using nitrate CIMS (Eisele and Tanner, 1993), with laboratory calibrations by production of known concentrations of OH radicals that will be titrated into gaseous sulfuric acid. Thereafter, measurements of sulfuric acid using CIMS have been performed around the world (e.g., Berresheim et al., 2000; Bianchi et al., 2016; Jokinen et al., 2012; Kuang et al., 2008; Kürten et al., 2014; Kurtén et al., 2011; Petäjä et al., 2009; Weber et al., 1997; Zheng et al., 2011), and CIMS has been proved to be a robust tool for gaseous sulfuric acid detection. However, sulfuric

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Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics Discussions

acid measurements are still rather sparse because of the high cost of the CIMS instrument and the extensive demand of specialized expertise on the instrument calibration, maintenance, and data processing, etc. Therefore, a proxy for gaseous sulfuric acid concentration is highly desirable.

Proxies for the estimation of atmospheric gaseous sulfuric acid concentrations were previously developed to approximate measurement results of sulfuric acid in Hyytiälä, Southern Finland (Petäjä et al., 2009), supposing that gaseous sulfuric acid is formed from reactions between SO_2 and OH radicals, and lost due to its condensation onto pre-existing particles. The derived simplest proxy can be written as Eq. (1) below, and the authors recognized that the proxies might be site-specific and should be verified prior to utilization in other environments.

$$[\boldsymbol{H_2SO_4}] = \boldsymbol{k} \cdot \frac{[\boldsymbol{SO_2}] \cdot (\boldsymbol{UVB\ or\ Global\ radiation})}{\boldsymbol{CS}} \qquad (\mathbf{1})$$

Mikkonen et al. (2011) later developed a couple of statistical proxies based on measurements of sulfuric acid in six European and North American sites, including urban, rural and forest areas. Their results showed that the radiation intensity and $[SO_2]$ are the most important factors to determine the concentration of sulfuric acid, and that the impact of condensation sink (CS), a proxy for condensational sink for gaseous sulfuric acid, is generally negligible. In several proxies developed by Mikkonen et al. (2011), the correlation between the gaseous sulfuric acid concentration and CS is positive, which is against what one would expect. In addition, the performance of a proxy equation is site-specific because of varying atmospheric conditions from one site to another, which implies that the proxy suggested by Mikkonen et al. (2011) might not work well in locations that characterized with an atmospheric environment different from those in the six sites of that study.

Beijing is a location with typical values of CS being 10-100 times higher (Herrmann et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2007; Xiao et al., 2015; Yue et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2011) and typical SO_2 concentrations being 1-10 times higher (Wang et al., 2011a; Wu et al., 2017) than those in Europe and North America (Mikkonen et al., 2011), yet measured gaseous sulfuric acid concentrations are relatively similar between these environments (Wang et al., 2011b; Zheng et al., 2011). Whether previous proxies developed for European and North American sites work in Beijing remains to be tested.

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Furthermore, in addition to the gas phase reaction between $O(^1D)$ and water molecules (Crutzen and Zimmermann, 1991; Logan et al., 1981), photolysis of HONO could be a potentially important source of OH radical in the atmosphere not only in the early morning (Alicke et al., 2002, 2003; Elshorbany et al., 2009; Li et al., 2012) but also during the daytime (Acker et al., 2005; Aumont et al., 2003; Kleffmann, 2007). An experimental study measuring HONO near the surface layer estimated that HONO was a main contributor to OH production in Beijing, with HONO's contribution being larger than 70% at around 12:00-13:00, except for summer when the contribution of O_3 dominated (Hendrick et al., 2014). Given the distinct characteristics of these two OH radical formation pathways, they both should be included and evaluated separately when a proxy for atmospheric gaseous sulfuric acid concentration is being built. The reactions between SO_2 and criegee intermediates formed from the ozonolysis of atmospheric alkenes could be a potential source of sulfuric acid only in the absence of solar radiation (Boy et al., 2013; Mauldin et al., 2012), so these reactions are expected to provide a minor contribution to the formation of gaseous sulfuric acid during the daytime in urban Beijing.

In this study, gaseous sulfuric acid concentration was measured by a Long Time-of-Flight Chemical Ionization Mass Spectrometer (LToF-CIMS) in February - March, 2018, in urban Beijing. A number of atmospheric parameters were recorded concurrently, including the ultraviolet radiation B (UVB) intensity, concentrations of O_3, NO_x, SO_2 and HONO, and particle number size distributions. The objective of this study is to develop a robust daytime gaseous sulfuric acid concentration proxy for Beijing, a representative Chinese megacity with urban atmospheric environments.

2 Ambient measurements

An intensive campaign was carried out from 9 February to 14 March, 2018 on the fifth floor of a teaching building in the west campus of Beijing University of Chemical Technology ($39^\circ 94' N, 116^\circ 30' E$). This monitoring site is 2 km to the west of the West 3rd Ring Road and surrounded by commercial properties and residential dwellings. Hence, this station can be regarded as a representative urban site.

The sulfuric acid concentration was measured by a LToF-CIMS (Aerodyne Research, Inc.) equipped with a nitrate chemical ionization source. Ambient air was drawn into the ionization source through a stainless-steel tube with a length of 1.6 m and a diameter of 3/4 inch. A mixture of a 3 standard cubic centimeter per minute (sccm)

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Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics Discussions

ultrahigh purity nitrogen flow containing nitric acid and a 20 standard liter per minute (slpm) pure air flow supplied by a zero-air generator (Aadco 737, USA), together as a sheath flow, was guided through a PhotoIonizer (Model L9491, Hamamatsu, Japan) to produce nitrate reagent ions. This sheath flow was then introduced into a co-axial laminar flow reactor concentric to the sample flow. Nitrate ions were pushed to the middle of sample flow under an electric field and subsequently charged sample molecules. During the campaign, the sample flow rate was kept at 8.4 slpm, since mass flow controllers fixed the sheath flow rate and the excess flow rate and the flow into the mass spectrometer (around 0.4 slpm) was fixed by the size of a pinhole between the ionization source and the mass spectrometer. The CIMS was calibrated twice during the campaign following the protocols in previous literatures (Kürten et al., 2012; Zheng et al., 2015). Here we use 1.1×10^{10} molecule cm^{-3} as the calibration coefficient, after taking into account diffusion losses in the stainless-steel tube and the nitrate chemical ionization source. The obtained mass spectra were analyzed with a tofTools package based on the MATLAB software (Junninen et al., 2010).

Ambient particle number size distributions down to about 1 nm were measured using a combination of a scanning mobility particle sizer spectrometer (SMPS) equipped with a diethylene glycol-based condensation particle counter (DEG-CPC, ~1-10 nm) and a conventional particle size distribution system (PSD, ~3-700 nm) consisting of a pair of aerosol mobility spectrometers developed by Tsinghua University (Cai et al., 2017; Jiang et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2016). The values of CS were calculated following Eq. (2) (Dal Maso et al., 2002):

$$\boldsymbol{CS = 2\pi D \int_0^{\infty} D_p \beta_m(D_p) n(D_p) dD_p = 2\pi D \sum_i \beta_i D_{pi} N_i} \quad \textbf{(2)}$$

where D_{pi} is the geometric mean diameter of particles in the size bin i and N_i is the particle number concentration in the corresponding size bin. D is the diffusion coefficient of gaseous sulfuric acid, and β_m represents a transition-regime correction factor that could be defined as a function of the Knudsen number (Fuchs and Sutugin, 1971).

SO_2, O_3 and NO_x concentrations were measured using a SO_2 analyzer (Model 43i, Thermo, USA), a O_3 analyzer (Model 49i, Thermo, USA) and a NO_x analyzer (Model 42i, Thermo, USA) with the detection limits of 0.1 ppbv, 0.5 ppbv and 0.4 ppbv, respectively. The above instruments were pre-calibrated before the campaign. The UVB (280 - 315 nm) intensity (UV-S-B-T, KIPP&ZONEN, The Netherlands) was measured

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on the rooftop of the building. Atmospheric HONO concentrations were measured by a home-made HONO analyzer with a detection limit of 0.01 ppbv (Tong et al., 2016).

Particle number size distributions and concentrations of gaseous sulfuric acid, SO_2, O_3, NO_2 and HONO were recorded with a time resolution of 5 min, and the UVB intensity with time resolution of 1 min. A linear interpolation method was used for deriving the variables with the same time intervals, *i.e.*, 5 min. Only data between local sunrise and sunset were used in the subsequent analysis.

3 Development of a proxy for atmospheric gaseous sulfuric acid

We derived the gaseous sulfuric acid concentration proxy on the basis of currently accepted formation pathways of sulfuric acid in the atmosphere (R1-R3) (Finlayson-Pitts and Pitts, 2000; Stockwell and Calvert, 1983):

$$OH + SO_2 \rightarrow HSO_3 \qquad (R1)$$

$$HSO_3 + O_2 \rightarrow SO_3 + HO_2 \qquad (R2)$$

$$SO_3 + 2H_2O \rightarrow H_2SO_4 + H_2O \qquad (R3)$$

The reaction (R1) is the rate-limiting step of this formation pathway (Finlayson-Pitts and Pitts, 2000), so our proxy will consider the two major processes that determine the abundance of gaseous sulfuric acid: the formation of gaseous sulfuric acid from reactions between SO_2 and OH radicals, and the loss of gaseous sulfuric acid due to its condensation onto pre-existing particles (Dal Maso et al., 2002; Kulmala et al., 2012; Pirjola et al., 1999).

The rate of change of sulfuric acid concentration can be written as Eq. (3) (Mikkonen et al., 2011):

$$d[H_2SO_4]/dt = k \cdot [OH] \cdot [SO_2] - [H_2SO_4] \cdot CS \qquad (3)$$

where k is a temperature-dependent reaction constant (DeMore et al., 1997). To simplify the calculation, the production and loss of sulfuric acid can be assumed to be at pseudo steady-state (Mikkonen et al., 2011; Petäjä et al., 2009). Then the sulfuric acid concentration can be written as Eq. (4).

$$[H_2SO_4] = k \cdot [OH] \cdot [SO_2] \cdot CS^{-1} \qquad (4)$$

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Atmospheric OH radical measurements represent a major challenge as well. Since previous studies suggest that the OH radical concentration is strongly correlated with the intensity of UVB, [OH] could be replaced with UVB intensity in the proxy equation (Petäjä et al., 2009; Rohrer and Berresheim, 2006). Although photolysis of O_3 ($\lambda < 320\ nm$) and subsequent reactions with H_2O are considered to be the dominant source of OH radicals in the atmosphere (Logan et al., 1981), recent studies argue that photolysis of HONO ($\lambda < 400$ nm) is a potentially important OH radical formation pathway (Hendrick et al., 2014; Kleffmann, 2007; Su et al., 2011; Villena et al., 2011). Thus, we attempt to introduce both O_3 and HONO into the proxy equation and evaluate their effects on the concentration of OH radicals.

In practice, the values of the exponential factors in nonlinear fitting procedures are rarely equal to 1 (Mikkonen et al., 2011), so we replaced the factors x_i with $x_i^{w_i}$ in the proxy, where x_i can be an atmospheric variable and w_i defines x_i' weight in the proxy. Since k is a temperature-dependent reaction constant and varies within a 10 % range (in the atmosphere temperature range of 267.6 - 292.6 K), we further replaced k with a scaling factor k_0 that is also used in the proxy methods built in Hyytiälä, Southern Finland (Petäjä et al., 2009). As a result, the general proxy equation can be written as Eq. (5), with the UVB intensity, $[SO_2]$, condensation sink (CS), $[O_3]$, and [HONO] (or $[NO_x]$) as predictor variables:

$$[\boldsymbol{H_2SO_4}] = \boldsymbol{f}\left(\boldsymbol{k_0}, \boldsymbol{x_i^{\omega_i}}\right), \quad \boldsymbol{x_i} = \boldsymbol{UVB}, [\boldsymbol{SO_2}], \boldsymbol{CS}, [\boldsymbol{O_3}], [\boldsymbol{HONO}] \ldots \quad (5)$$

The nonlinear curve-fitting procedures using iterative least square estimation for the proxies of gaseous sulfuric acid concentration based on Eq. (4) were performed by a MATLAB software.

4 Results and discussion

4.1 General Characteristics of daytime sulfuric acid and atmospheric parameters

Table 1 summarizes the mean, median and 5-95 % percentiles of gaseous sulfuric acid concentrations and other variables measured during the daytime of the campaign. The 5-95 % percentile ranges of the UVB intensity, $[SO_2]$, $[NO_2]$ and $[O_3]$ were 0-0.45 W m^{-2}, 0.9-11.4 ppbv, 3.3-61.4 ppbv and 3.5-23.3 ppbv, respectively. Compared with the sites in the study by Mikkonen et al. (2011), Beijing was characterized with a factor of 1.4-13.1 higher mean $[SO_2]$ but a factor of 3.4-5.4 lower mean $[O_3]$. The 5-95 %

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Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics Discussions

252 percentile range of CS in Beijing was 0.01-0.24 s^{-1}, which is about 1-2 orders of
253 magnitude larger than corresponding value ranges in Europe and North America. The
254 concentration of gaseous sulfuric acid during this campaign was $(2.2 - 10.0) \times 10^6$
255 molecule cm^{-3} was in a 5-95 % percentile range of, relatively similar to observed
256 elsewhere around the world. A diurnal mean concentration of 0.74 ppbv for HONO was
257 observed in this campaign, consistent with previous long-term HONO measurements
258 of about 0.48-1.8 ppbv (averaged values) in winter in Beijing (Hendrick et al., 2014;
259 Spataro et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2017), which is a factor of 4-10 higher than HONO
260 concentrations measured in Europe (Alicke et al., 2002, 2003). In addition, Beijing is
261 dry in winter with an ambient relative humidity generally lower than 60%.
262
263 **4.2 Correlations between [H_2SO_4] and atmospheric variables**
264 Table 2 summarizes the correlation coefficients between [H_2SO_4] and atmospheric
265 variables using a Spearman-type correlation analysis. Note that only correlations with
266 p-values smaller than 0.01 were included to ensure a statistical significance. Clearly,
267 the UVB intensity is an isolated variable that is independent of all the other variables
268 but that imposes a positive influence on O_3 because of photochemical formation of
269 ozone, and a negative influence on HONO because of HONO's photochemical
270 degradation. The sulfuric acid concentration shows positive correlations with all the
271 other variables. The correlation coefficients between [H_2SO_4] and [SO_2] and between
272 [H_2SO_4] and UVB intensity are 0.74 and 0.46, respectively, consistent with the accepted
273 formation pathway of gaseous sulfuric acid from the reaction between SO_2 and OH
274 radicals. Accordingly, [O_3] and [HONO] show positive correlations with [H_2SO_4]
275 because both O_3 and HONO could be precursors of OH radicals. Surprisingly, a high
276 positive correlation coefficient (0.6) was found between [H_2SO_4] and CS, which is in
277 contrast to the conventional thought that CS describes the loss of gaseous sulfuric acid
278 molecules onto pre-existing particles and thus should show a negative correlation. CS
279 correlates well with [SO_2] (r = 0.83) and [NO_2] (r = 0.77): a high CS value, as an
280 indicator of an atmospheric particle pollution, is thus usually accompanied with a high
281 concentration of both SO_2 and NO_2 in urban China, indicating co-emissions. A strong
282 correlation between [HONO] and [NO_2] (r = 0.88) in our measurement is supported by
283 the fact that HONO can be heterogeneously formed by reactions of NO_2 on various
284 surfaces (Calvert et al., 1994).
285 Since the UVB intensity and [SO_2] have been reported as the dominating factors

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for the formation of sulfuric acid (Mikkonen et al., 2011; Petäjä et al., 2009), we further explored the relationship of the measured sulfuric acid concentrations with the UVB intensity and [SO_2] using the nonlinear curve-fitting method with a single variable. Figure 1a presents a scatter plot of [H_2SO_4] against the UVB intensity, color-coded by [SO_2]. A good correlation with a clear lamination by [SO_2] is evident, indicating that the UVB intensity and [SO_2] together play an important role in the formation of sulfuric acid. A similar scatter plot (Figure 1b) of [H_2SO_4] against [SO_2], color-coded by the UVB intensity, leads to a similar conclusion.

4.3 Proxy construction

Similar to the non-linear proxies suggested by Mikkonen et al. (2011), we tested a number of proxies for gaseous sulfuric acid, listed in Table 3 with their respective fitting parameters and performance summarized in Table 4. The scatter plots of observed [H_2SO_4] *versus* predicted values given by proxies are presented in Fig. S1. In these proxies, the concentration of a gaseous species is in the unit of molecule cm^{-3}, the unit of the UVB intensity is W m^{-2}, the unit of CS is s^{-1}, and k_0 is a scaling factor.

The proxy N1 was built by using the UVB intensity and [SO_2] as the source terms and CS as the sink term, which follows the conventional idea of the H_2SO_4 formation and loss in the atmosphere. CS was then removed from this proxy to examine the performance of the proxy N2 that have the UVB intensity and [SO_2] as the only predictor variables. Since the formation of OH radicals in the atmosphere depends on precursors in addition to UVB, we further attempted to introduce the OH precursor term into the H_2SO_4 proxy. The proxies N3 and N4 were built by introducing O_3 as the only OH precursor to evaluate its influence on the formation of sulfuric acid. Furthermore, we added HONO as another potential precursor for OH radicals, resulting in the proxies N5 and N6. Lastly, the proxy N7 was built by replacing [HONO] with [NO_2] because firstly, HONO is not regularly measured, and secondly, a good linear correlation between [HONO] and [NO_2] was generally observed in the daytime during this campaign, although higher [HONO]/[NO_2] ratios were observed in the morning due to the accumulation of HONO during the night (Figure 2). RH was not considered in the current study because the introduction of RH into the proxy did not yield significantly better results in the Mikkonen et al. study (2011). In addition to the correlation coefficient (R), Mean absolute error (MAE) was used to evaluate the performance of proxies in the statistical analysis.

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Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics Discussions

As shown in Table 4, the correlation coefficients are in the range of 0.83-0.86 and MAEs are in the range of $(0.94-1.03)\times10^6$ molecule cm^{-3}. The exponents for the UVB intensity range from 0.13 to 0.16, and those for [SO_2] generally range from 0.38 to 0.41, except in case of the proxy N6 (b=0.33). The obtained exponent b for [SO_2] is significantly smaller than 1 unlike assumed in Eq. (3), mainly because [SO_2] is also an indicator of air pollution that usually influences the sinks of both OH radicals and sulfuric acid. The exponent for [SO_2] ranged from 0.5 to 1.04 in the previous proxy study for European and North American sites (Mikkonen et al., 2011), including values from 0.48 to 0.69 in Atlanta, GA, USA, which was probably quite a polluted site because the measurements were conducted only 9 km away from a coal-fired power plant. The obtained value range of the exponent b for [SO_2] in our study is probably related to the urban nature of Beijing. The value of exponent c for CS in the proxy N1 is as low as 0.03, which either might be due to the covariance of CS and certain H_2SO_4 sources that cancels the dependence on CS, or it might indicate that CS is actually insufficient in regulating the H_2SO_4 concentration, as recently suggested by Kulmala et al. (2017). By comparing the proxies N1 and N2, we can see that CS plays a minor role because the exponents of [SO_2] and UVB, the overall correlation coefficient and the MAE are almost identical with and without CS. We can see the negligible role of CS also when comparing the results of the proxies N3 and N4 where O_3 is considered. However, the role of CS becomes evident between the proxies N5 and N6 when HONO is introduced: the exponents of [SO_2], [O_3], and [HONO] significantly increased when taking into account the CS, suggesting that the covariance between HONO and CS can explain, at least partially, the close-to-zero exponent of CS in the proxies N1-N4. In addition, when [O_3] is introduced as the only precursor for OH radicals, minor improvements in the correlation coefficient and MAE were obtained, as suggested by comparing the proxies N3 and N1. When both [O_3] and [HONO] were introduced as OH precursors in the proxies N5-N7, MAE and correlation coefficient significantly improved. Altogether, these observations suggest that it is crucial to introduce HONO into the proxy, both in our study and also likely for the previous work where the exponent of CS is close-to-zero (Mikkonen et al., 2011).

Although so far the proxy N5 had the best fitting quality, it is impractical to explicitly include [HONO] because HONO measurements are very challenging. As shown in Fig. 2, [HONO] and [NO_2] are tended to correlate linearly with each other in the daytime during this campaign, with a linearly fitted [HONO]/[NO_2] ratio of around

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0.03 and a mean absolute error (MAE) of 0.3 ppbv. Similar, strong linearity was observed in a previous study by Hao et al. (2006) who attributed this observation to the heterogeneous conversion of NO_2 to HONO. Only occasionally slightly higher [HONO]/[NO_2] ratios in the morning could be seen, which might be due to the deviation from the steady state. Bernard et al. (2016) reported that [NO_2] has a similar diurnal behavior to that of [HONO] and hence the ratio of [HONO]/[NO_2] varies slightly during the diurnal cycle. Therefore, due to the good correlation, the proxy N7 replaces [HONO] by [NO_2], a more easily measured variable, and performs equally well with the proxy N5.

Clearly, the proxy N2 provides the simplest parameterization, but the proxies N5 and N7 result in the best fitting quality because of the introduction of [HONO]. Figure 3a and 3b present the averaged and relative deviation of calculated sulfuric acid concentrations according to the proxies N2 and N7, respectively, as a function of linear bins of measured sulfuric acid concentrations. The averaged and relative deviation are defined by Eq. (6) and Eq. (7), respectively, assuming that there are a number of j data points, both measured and calculated, in the i^{th} bin.

$$\boldsymbol{Averaged\ deviation} = \frac{\mathbf{1}}{\boldsymbol{n}} \cdot \sum_{\boldsymbol{j=1}}^{\boldsymbol{n}} ([\boldsymbol{H_2SO_4}]_{\boldsymbol{proxy,ij}} - [\boldsymbol{H_2SO_4}]_{\boldsymbol{meas.,ij}}) \quad \mathbf{(6)}$$

$$\boldsymbol{Relative\ deviation} = \frac{\mathbf{1}}{\boldsymbol{n}} \cdot \sum_{\boldsymbol{j=1}}^{\boldsymbol{n}} \frac{([\boldsymbol{H_2SO_4}]_{\boldsymbol{proxy,ij}} - [\boldsymbol{H_2SO_4}]_{\boldsymbol{meas.,ij}})}{[\boldsymbol{H_2SO_4}]_{\boldsymbol{meas.,ij}}} \quad \mathbf{(7)}$$

The performance of the proxy N7 is considerably better than that of the proxy N2 in the sulfuric acid concentration range of $(2.0 - 15) \times 10^6$ molecule cm^{-3}, which covers most measured concentrations of sulfuric acid. The relative deviation is less than 24% for all the bins in case of the proxy N7, rising up to 29% in case of the proxy N2. For the first bin in a range of $(1.0 - 2.0) \times 10^6$ molecules cm^{-3}, both proxy N2 and N7 show small averaged deviations but the biggest relative deviations, which is due to the smallest denominators. Since we want to make it clear in which bins the predicted values are overestimated or underestimated in Fig. 3a and 3b, the calculation method from Eq. (6) and Eq. (7) would make the positive derivations and negative derivations counteracted to some extent, which is obvious in the middle bins.

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4.4 Comparison of measured and predicted [H_2SO_4]

A comparison between measured and predicted [H_2SO_4] was performed. Figure 4 includes calculated results from the proxies N2 and N7 as well as from a proxy constructed according to measurement in a boreal forest site, Finland, *i.e.*, Eq (1) (Petäjä et al., 2009). The measured daytime [H_2SO_4] on 10 March, 2018, was above 4×10^6 molecules cm^{-3} with a time resolution of 5 min. The predicted [H_2SO_4] using the proxies N2 and N7 both track the measured [H_2SO_4] pretty well, even when an unexpected dip in the sulfuric acid concentration was observed at around 10:00-11:00. The performance of the proxy N7 is better than that of proxy N2 during the entire day, consistent with our results in Fig. 3. The proxy by Petäjä et al. (2009) underestimated the concentrations of sulfuric acid by a factor of 20 or so, which can be attributed to the very different values of CS between Beijing and the boreal forest. The fact that $[H_2SO_4]_{\text{Petäjä } et\ al.}$ does not track the measured [H_2SO_4] even after including a scaling factor indicates that proxies are site-specific and do not necessarily work well in locations other than where they have originally been developed for. In addition, the direct performance comparison between the proxy N2 and the proxy by Petäjä et al. (2009) indicates the importance of assigning exponential weights to variables in the nonlinear fitting procedures, which is consistent with results by Mikkonen et al. (2011).

5 Summary and conclusions

Sulfuric acid is a key precursor for atmospheric new particle formation. In this study, we constructed a number of proxies for gaseous sulfuric acid concentration according to our measurements in urban Beijing during the winter. According to the obtained proxies and their performance, the UVB intensity and [SO_2] were the dominant influencing factors. Hence, the simplest proxy (Proxy N2) only involves UVB intensity and [SO_2] as shown by Eq. (8).

$$[\boldsymbol{H_2SO_4}] = \mathbf{280.05} \cdot \boldsymbol{UVB}^{\mathbf{0.14}} \cdot [\boldsymbol{SO_2}]^{\mathbf{0.40}} \qquad (\mathbf{8})$$

This proxy resulted in a relative deviation of up to 29 %.

For the best proxy accuracy, [O_3] and [HONO] as well as CS should be included (Proxy N5), as shown by Eq. (9):

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Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics Discussions

$$[H_2SO_4] = 0.0072 \cdot UVB^{0.15} \cdot [SO_2]^{0.41} \cdot CS^{-0.17} \cdot ([O_3]^{0.36} + [HONO]^{0.38}) \quad (9)$$

Since HONO measurements are not a regular practice, we can further replace [HONO] with [NO_2], shown in Eq. (10), which can be justified by the strong linear correlation between [HONO] and [NO_2] observed in this study:

$$[H_2SO_4] = 0.0013 \cdot UVB^{0.13} \cdot [SO_2]^{0.40} \cdot CS^{-0.17} \cdot ([O_3]^{0.44} + [NO_2]^{0.41}) \quad (10)$$

We consider this last proxy more reasonable than the others due to the following reasons: first, it makes the equation physically meaningful as the CS starts to be involved as a sink term, and second, the absolute and relative fitting error were reduced considerably compared with the other proxies. Overall, this suggests that the photolysis of O_3 and HONO are both important OH sources in urban Beijing.

As a summary, we recommend using the simplest proxy (proxy N2) and a more accurate proxy (Proxy N7) for calculating daytime gaseous sulfuric acid concentrations in the urban Beijing atmosphere. It is clear that the current proxies are based on only a month-long campaign of sulfuric acid measurements in urban Beijing during winter. Given the dramatic reduction in the concentration of SO_2 in recent years (Wang et al., 2018) and the strong dependence of calculated [H_2SO_4] on [SO_2], the performance of the proxies in the past and future years remain to be evaluated. Nevertheless, our work here shows the importance of heterogeneous chemistry as a potential source of OH radicals in an urban air; however, the proxies might be site-specific and should be further tested before their application to other Chinese megacities.

Author contributions

LW designed this study. YL (Yiqun Lu), CY, YF, YC, YL (Yiliang Liu), GY, YW, YZ, RY, RB and CD conducted the field campaign. YL (Yiqun Lu) analyzed data with contributions from LW and all the other co-authors. YL (Yiqun Lu) and LW wrote the manuscript with contributions from all the other co-authors.

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Manuscript under review for journal Atmos. Chem. Phys.
Discussion started: 29 November 2018
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Table 1 Mean, median, 5-95 % percentiles of key atmospheric variables and $[H_2SO_4]$ in the daytime.

	UVB ($W\ m^{-2}$)	$[SO_2]$ (ppbv)	CS (s^{-1})	$[O_3]$ (ppbv)	[HONO] (ppbv)	$[NO_2]$ (ppbv)	$[H_2SO_4]$ ($\times 10^6$ molecule cm^{-3})	RH (%)
mean	0.17	4.6	0.11	10.5	0.74	25.3	5.4	28
median	0.14	3.7	0.11	9.0	0.51	23.0	4.9	26
5-95% pencentiles	0.00-0.45	0.9-11.4	0.01-0.24	3.5-23.3	0.09-2.65	3.3-61.4	2.2-10.0	9-59

Atmos. Chem. Phys. Discuss., https://doi.org/10.5194/acp-2018-1132
Manuscript under review for journal Atmos. Chem. Phys.
Discussion started: 29 November 2018
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Table 2 Correlation coefficients (Spearman type) between [H_2SO_4] and atmospheric variables in the daytime. Only correlation coefficients with p-values less than 0.01 are included to ensure a statistical significance.

	UVB	[SO_2]	CS	[O_3]	[HONO]	[NO_2]	[H_2SO_4]
UVB	1	/	/	0.14	-0.23	/	0.46
[SO_2]		1	0.83	0.25	0.64	0.70	0.74
CS			1	0.36	0.75	0.77	0.60
[O_3]				1	/	/	0.29
[HONO]					1	0.88	0.39
[NO_2]						1	0.53
[H_2SO_4]							1

Atmos. Chem. Phys. Discuss., https://doi.org/10.5194/acp-2018-1132
Manuscript under review for journal Atmos. Chem. Phys.
Discussion started: 29 November 2018
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Table 3 Proxy functions for the nonlinear fitting procedure.

Proxy	Equation[#]
N1	$k_0 \cdot UVB^a \cdot [SO_2]^b \cdot CS^c$
N2	$k_0 \cdot UVB^a \cdot [SO_2]^b$
N3	$k_0 \cdot UVB^a \cdot [SO_2]^b \cdot CS^c \cdot [O_3]^d$
N4	$k_0 \cdot UVB^a \cdot [SO_2]^b \cdot [O_3]^d$
N5	$k_0 \cdot UVB^a \cdot [SO_2]^b \cdot CS^c \cdot ([O_3]^d + [HONO]^e)$
N6	$k_0 \cdot UVB^a \cdot [SO_2]^b \cdot ([O_3]^d + [HONO]^e)$
N7	$k_0 \cdot UVB^a \cdot [SO_2]^b \cdot CS^c \cdot ([O_3]^d + [NO_2]^f)$

[#]UVB is the intensity of ultraviolet radiation b in W cm^{-3}; $[SO_2]$ is the concentration of sulfur dioxide in molecule cm^{-3}; CS is the condensation sink in s^{-1}; $[O_3]$ is the concentration of ozone in molecule cm^{-3}; [HONO] is the concentration of nitrous acid in molecule cm^{-3}; $[NO_2]$ is the concentration of nitrogen dioxide in molecule cm^{-3}; k_0 is a scaling factor.

Atmos. Chem. Phys. Discuss., https://doi.org/10.5194/acp-2018-1132
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Discussion started: 29 November 2018
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Table 4 Results of the nonlinear fitting procedure for different proxy functions, together with correlation coefficient (R, Pearson type) and mean absolute error (*MAE*).

Proxy	k_0	a	b	c	d	e	f	R	MAE ($\times 10^6$ $molecule\ cm^{-3}$)
N1	515.74	0.14	0.38	0.03				0.83	1.03
N2	280.05	0.14	0.40					0.83	1.03
N3	9.95	0.13	0.39	-0.01	0.14			0.85	1.00
N4	14.38	0.13	0.38		0.14			0.85	1.00
N5	0.0072	0.15	0.41	-0.17	0.36	0.38		0.86	0.94
N6	2.38	0.14	0.33		0.24	0.24		0.85	0.98
N7	0.0013	0.13	0.40	-0.17	0.44		0.41	0.86	0.95

Atmos. Chem. Phys. Discuss., https://doi.org/10.5194/acp-2018-1132
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Discussion started: 29 November 2018
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Figure Captions

Figure 1. Correlations (a) between [H_2SO_4] and UVB intensity, and (b) between [H_2SO_4] and [SO_2]. k_m is a constant term.

Figure 2. Correlation between [HONO] and [NO_2]. The black line represents a linear fitting with a zero intercept.

Figure 3. Performance assessments of proxy N2 and proxy N7. The averaged deviation and the relative deviation in the plots are defined by Eq. (6) and Eq. (7) and used to evaluate the performance of proxy N2 and N7, respectively. "Overlap" refers to the smaller values between proxy N2 and proxy N7, and the larger ones are indicated by the color code of proxies N2 and N7.

Figure 4. Comparison of measured [H_2SO_4], $[H_2SO_4]_{N2}$, $[H_2SO_4]_{N7}$ and $[H_2SO_4]_{\text{Petäjä } et\ al.}$ on 10 March, 2018 with a time resolution of 5 min.

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Discussion started: 29 November 2018
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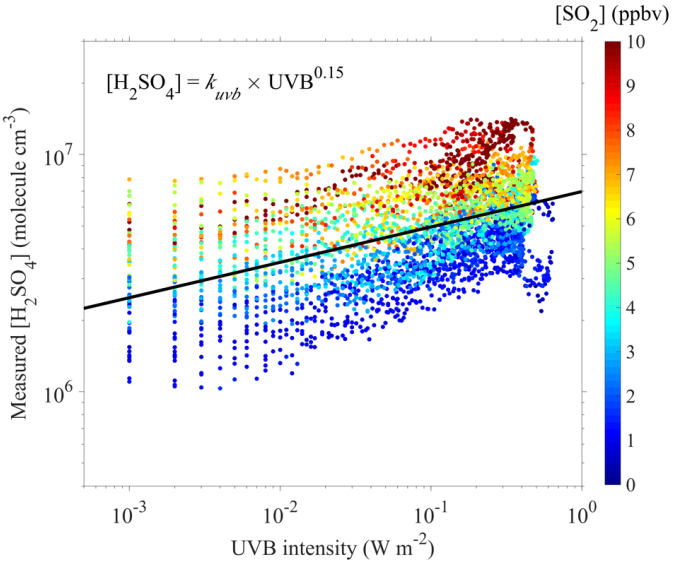

Figure 1a

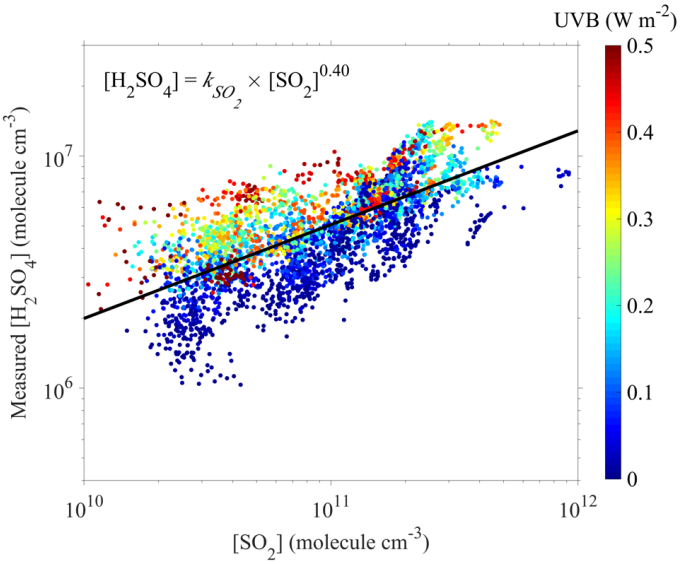

Figure 1b

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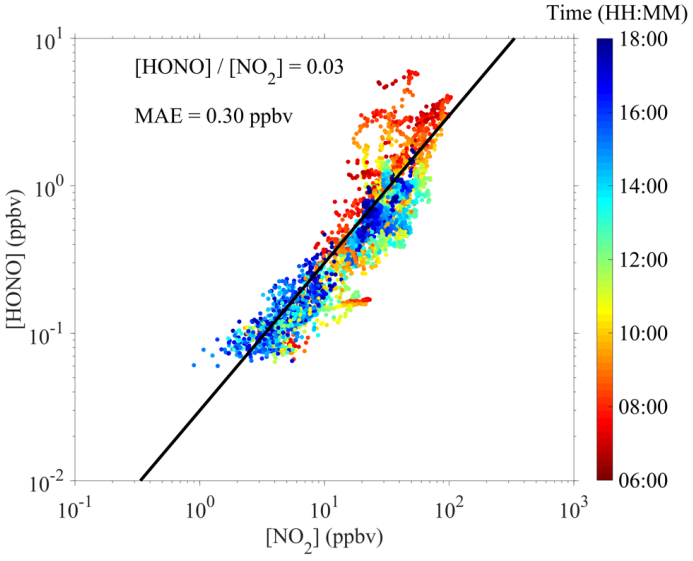

Figure 2

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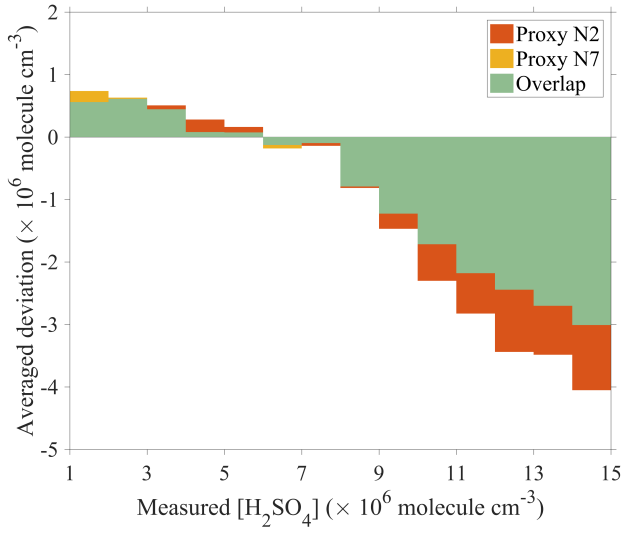

Figure 3a

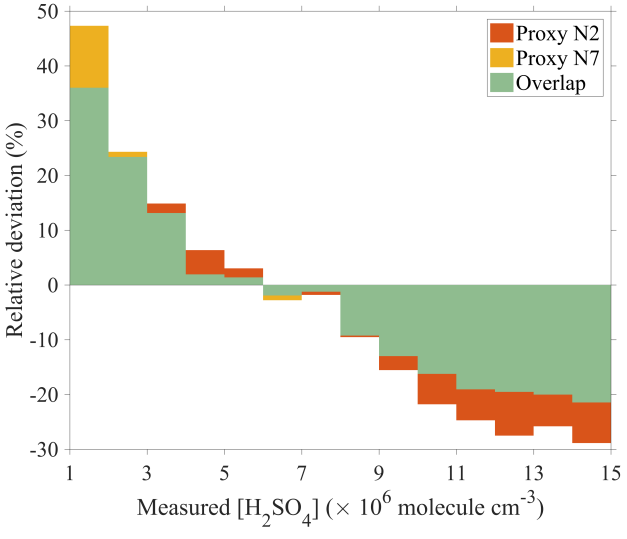

Figure 3b

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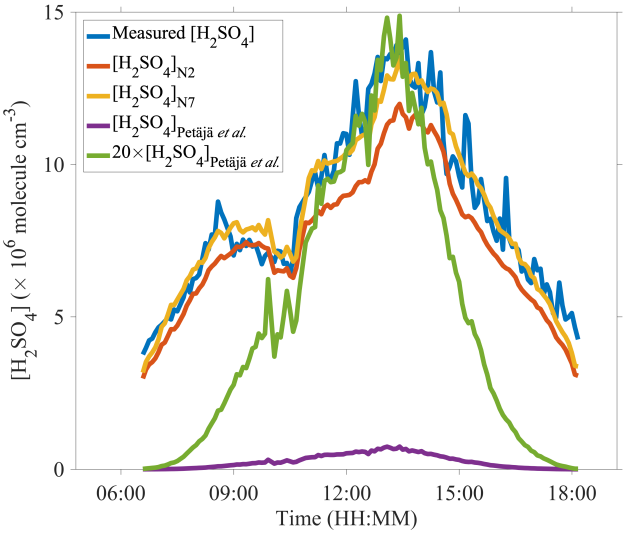

Figure 4