Is Global Warming Leading to More Intense Tropical Cyclones?

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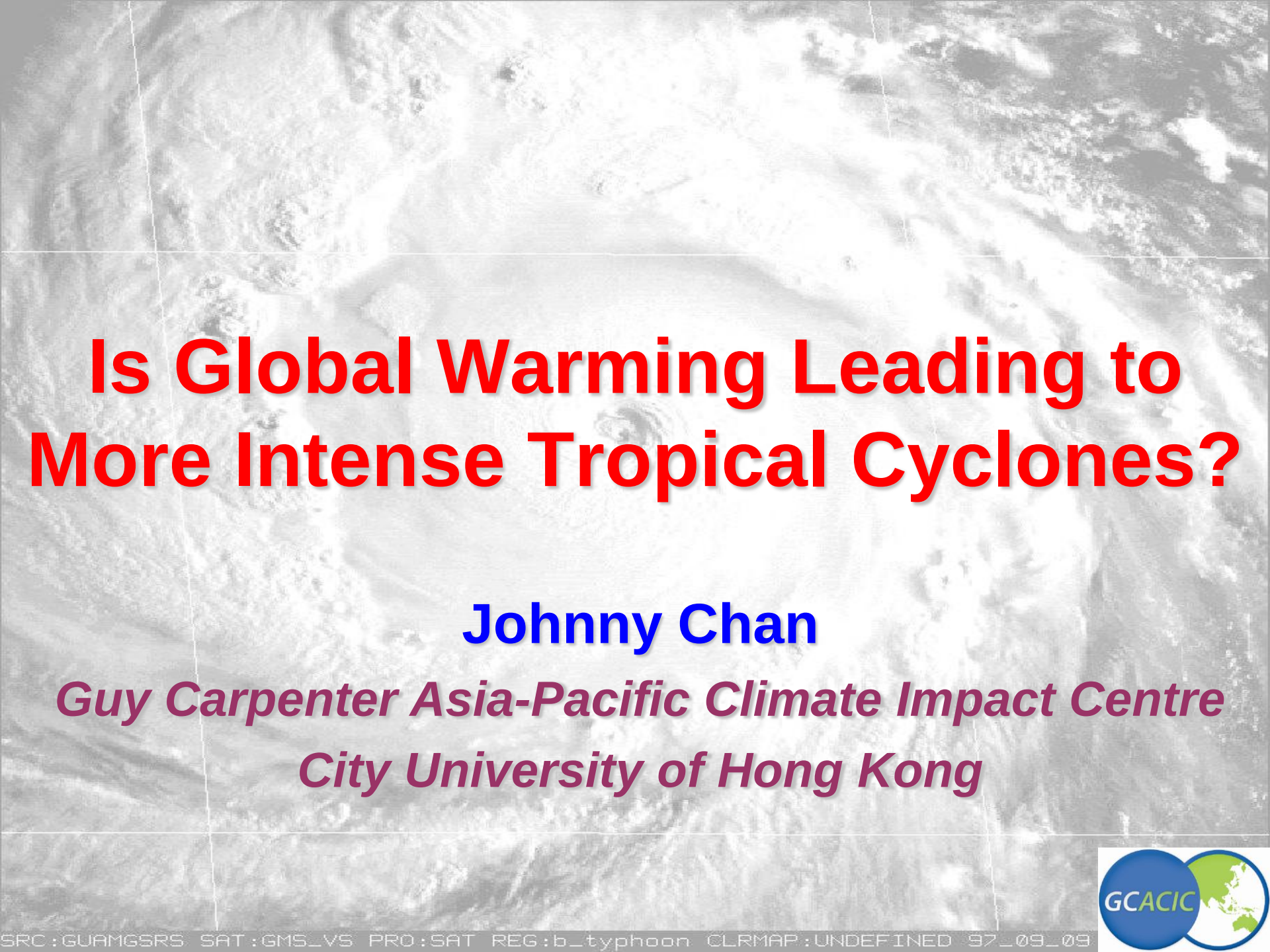


Outline

- Background
- Relationship between global warming and frequency of intense tropical cyclone occurrence
- Summary

Background

- Tropical cyclone formation and development depends on two sets of factors:
  - thermodynamic (heat energy and the "conduciveness" of the atmosphere to the development of strong convection)
  - dynamic (wind flow and degree of rotation)

Background

- **Thermodynamic conditions**
  - **ocean temperature**
  - **energy available for convection**
  - **atmospheric stability – "conduciveness" of atmosphere to the development of strong convection**

Background

- Dynamic conditions
  - extent of “cyclonic” rotation of the wind flow
  - vertical wind shear (wind at 15 km minus that at 1.5 km) – strong shear will tear off the vertical integrity of the cyclone

Background

- Global warming leads to
  - an increase in the temperature near the earth's surface (land and ocean)
  - an increase in the amount of water vapour in the atmosphere due to an increase in ocean temperature
- No study has definitively demonstrated that the dynamic factors are modified by global warming (although some have suggested an increase in vertical wind shear).

Background

- Due to global warming, the thermodynamic factors have become more favourable for tropical cyclone formation and development.
- To determine whether global warming has an impact on the frequency of occurrence of tropical cyclones or of intense cyclones, we need to examine whether the thermodynamic factors are related to the variations on such frequencies.
- A good proxy of the thermodynamic factors is the Maximum Potential Intensity (MPI)

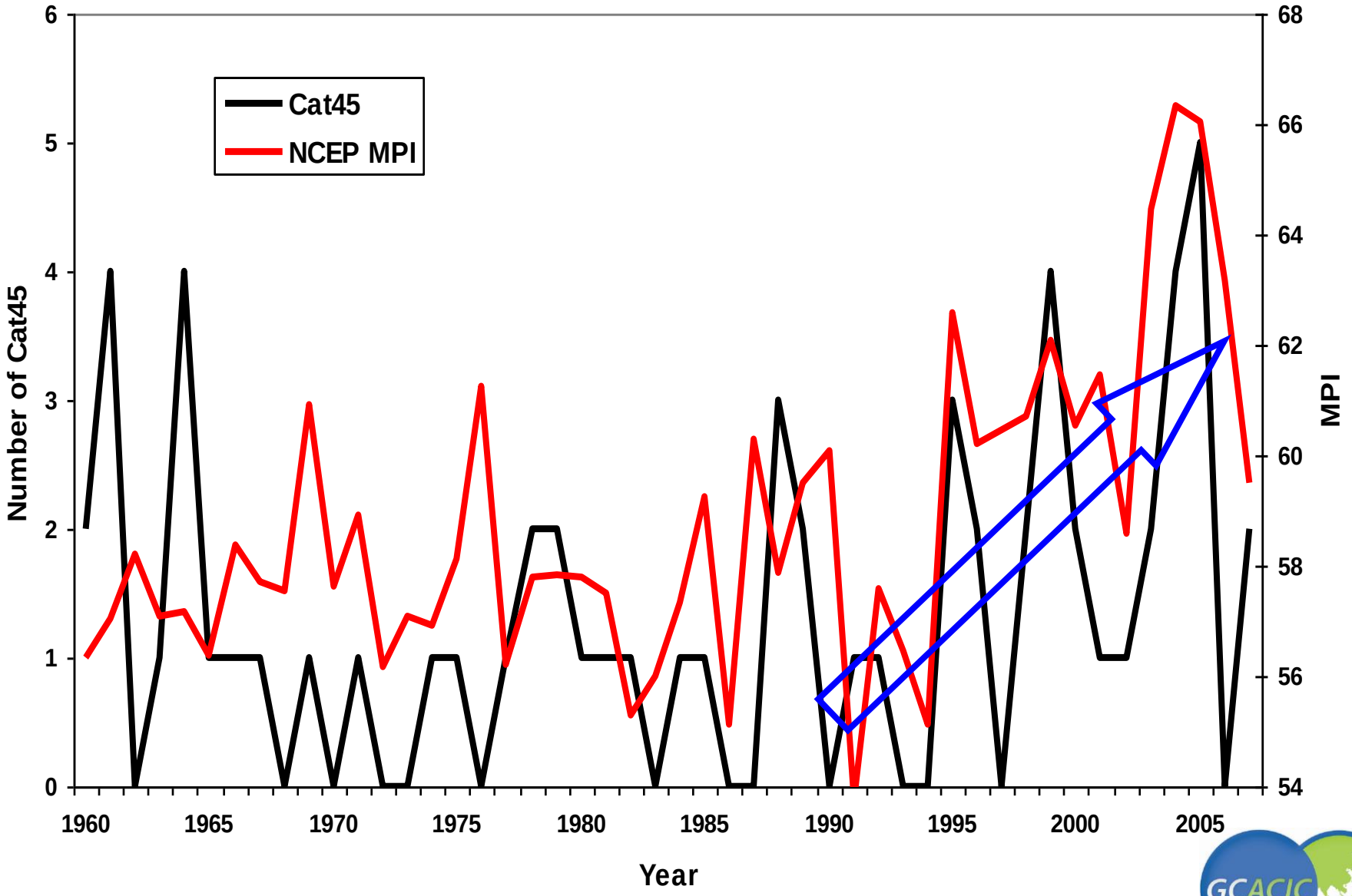
Background

- **MPI = f(ocean temperature, outflow temperature, net amount of energy available for convection)**

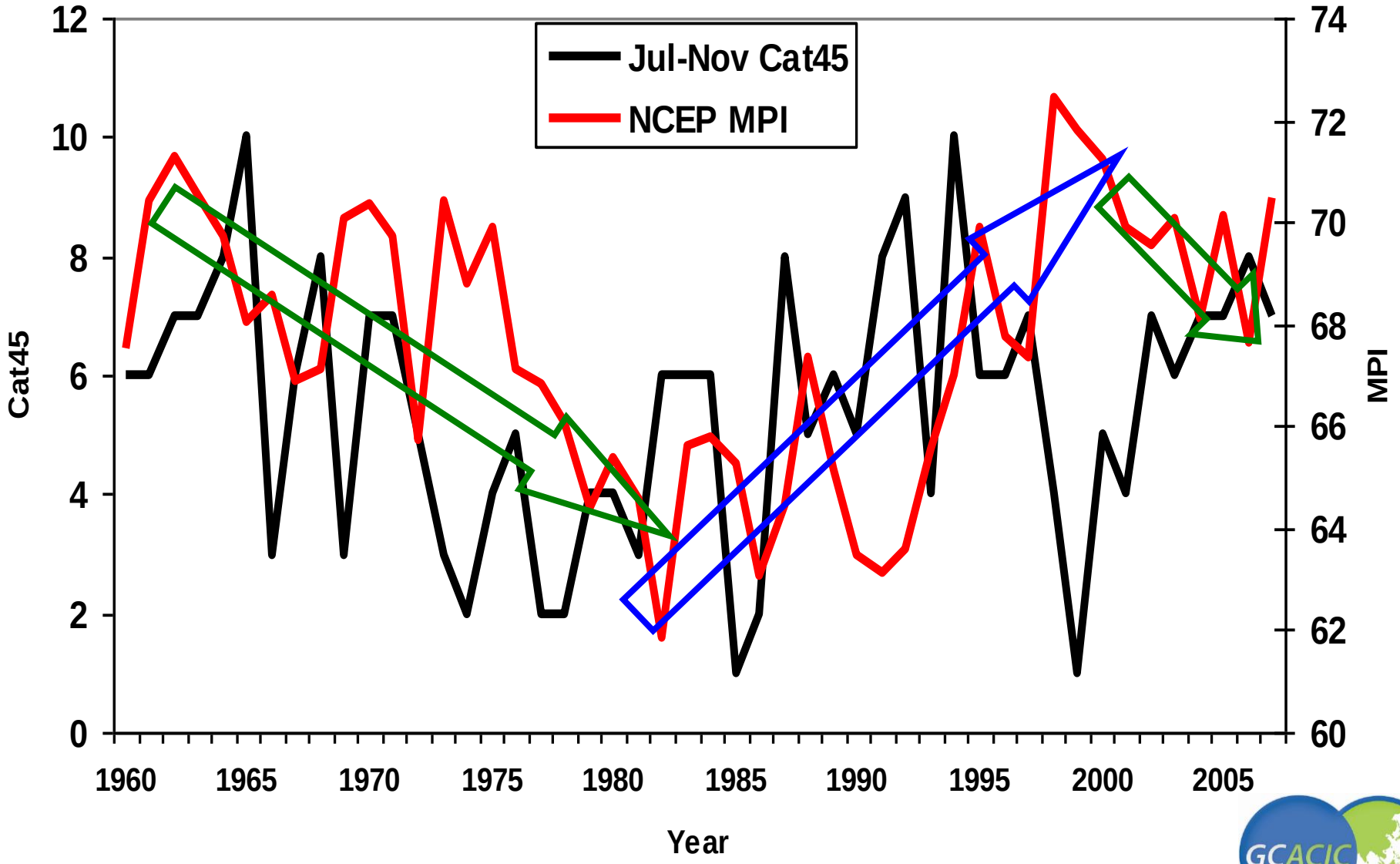
- **Because MPI gives the maximum possible intensity, a higher value of MPI summed over the ocean basin and over a season should imply a more thermodynamically energetic atmosphere, and more TCs could reach higher intensities**

∴ a season with a higher value of MPI should have more intense TCs if the dominant control is thermodynamic

Atlantic


Cat45
NCEP MPI
Number of Cat45
MPI
Year
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
54
56
58
60
62
64
66
68
1960
1965
1970
1975
1980
1985
1990
1995
2000
2005

Western North Pacific

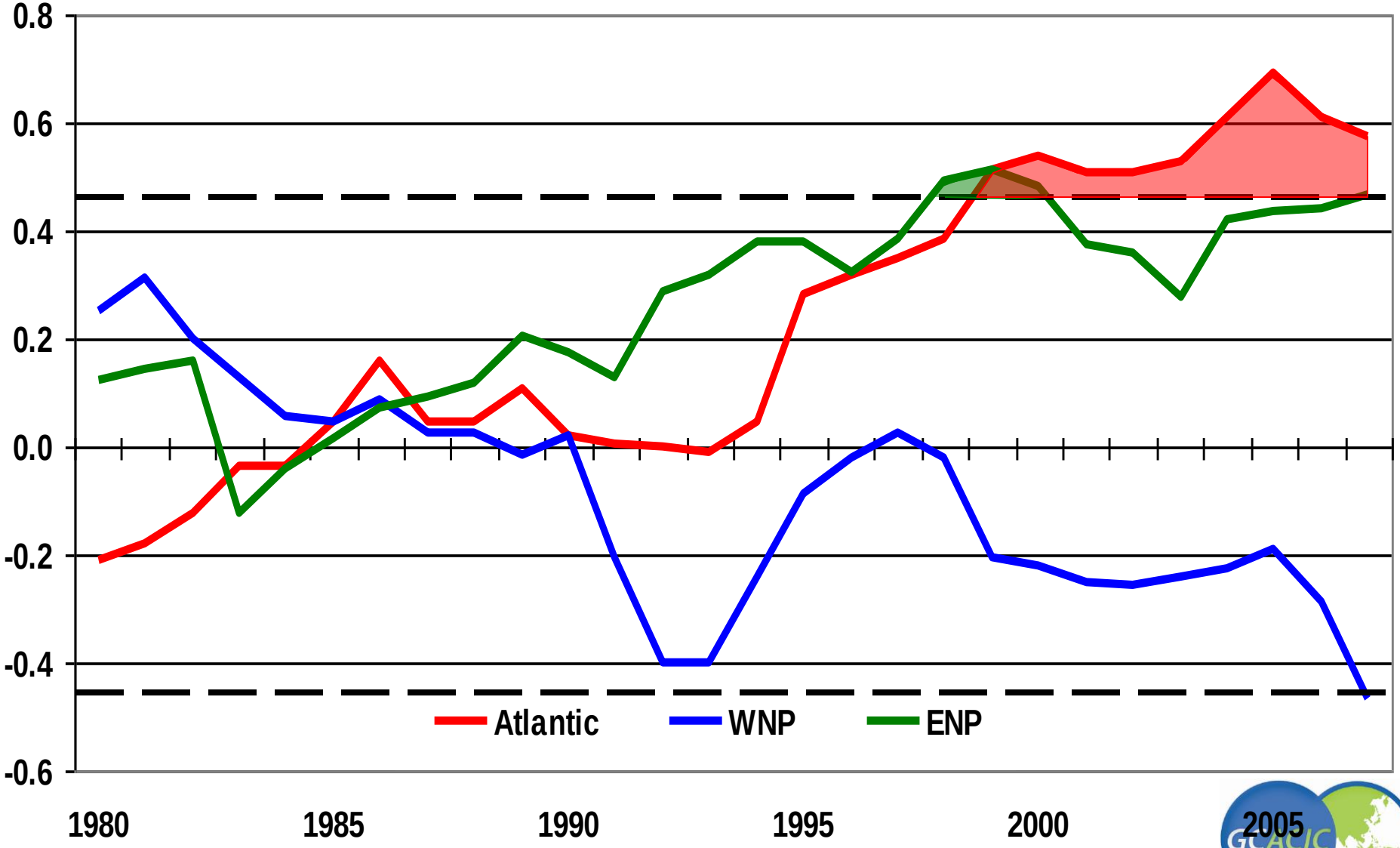


21-year running correlations with NCat45

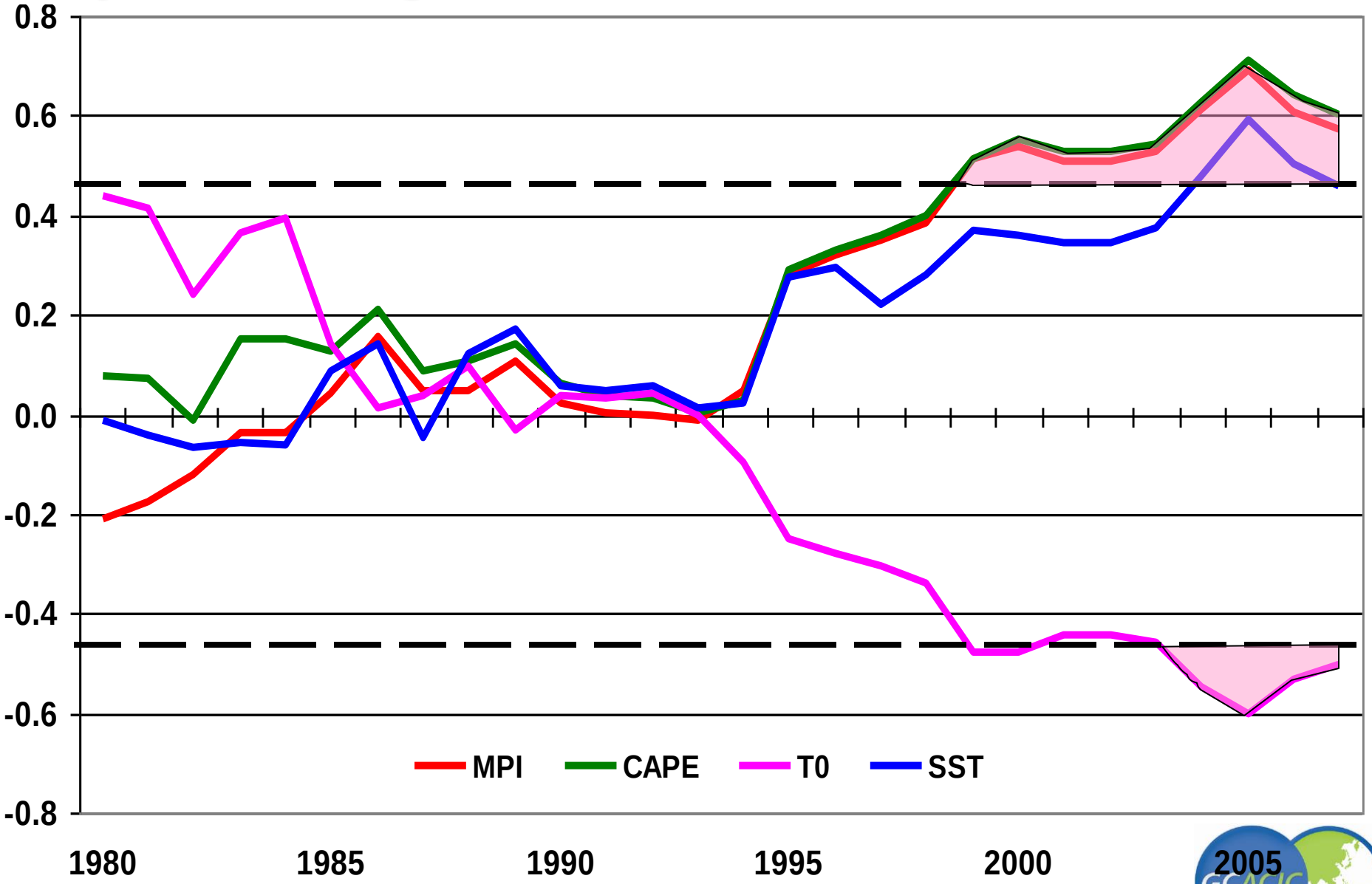
Ocean Basin	Period	Correlation
Atlantic	1960-2007	0.45
	1970-2007	0.59
	1980-2007	0.63
	1979-2006	0.61
Western North Pacific	1960-2007	-0.01
	1970-2007	-0.06
	1980-2007	-0.08
	1981-2006	-0.13
Eastern North Pacific	1960-2007	0.29
	1970-2007	0.35
	1980-2007	0.34
South Indian Ocean	1981-2007	0.35
South Pacific	1981-2007	0.03

GCACIC

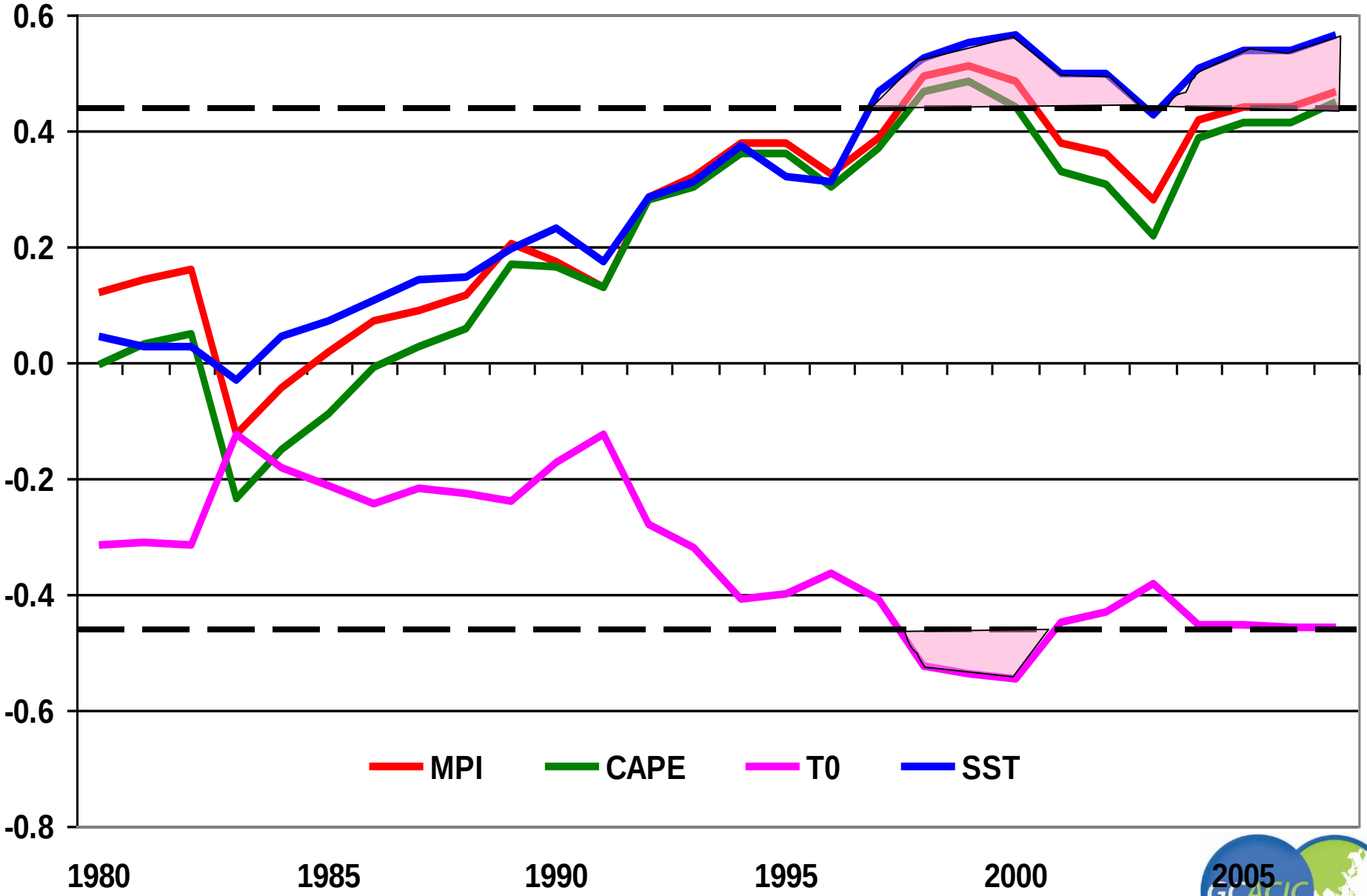
21-year running correlations with NCat45



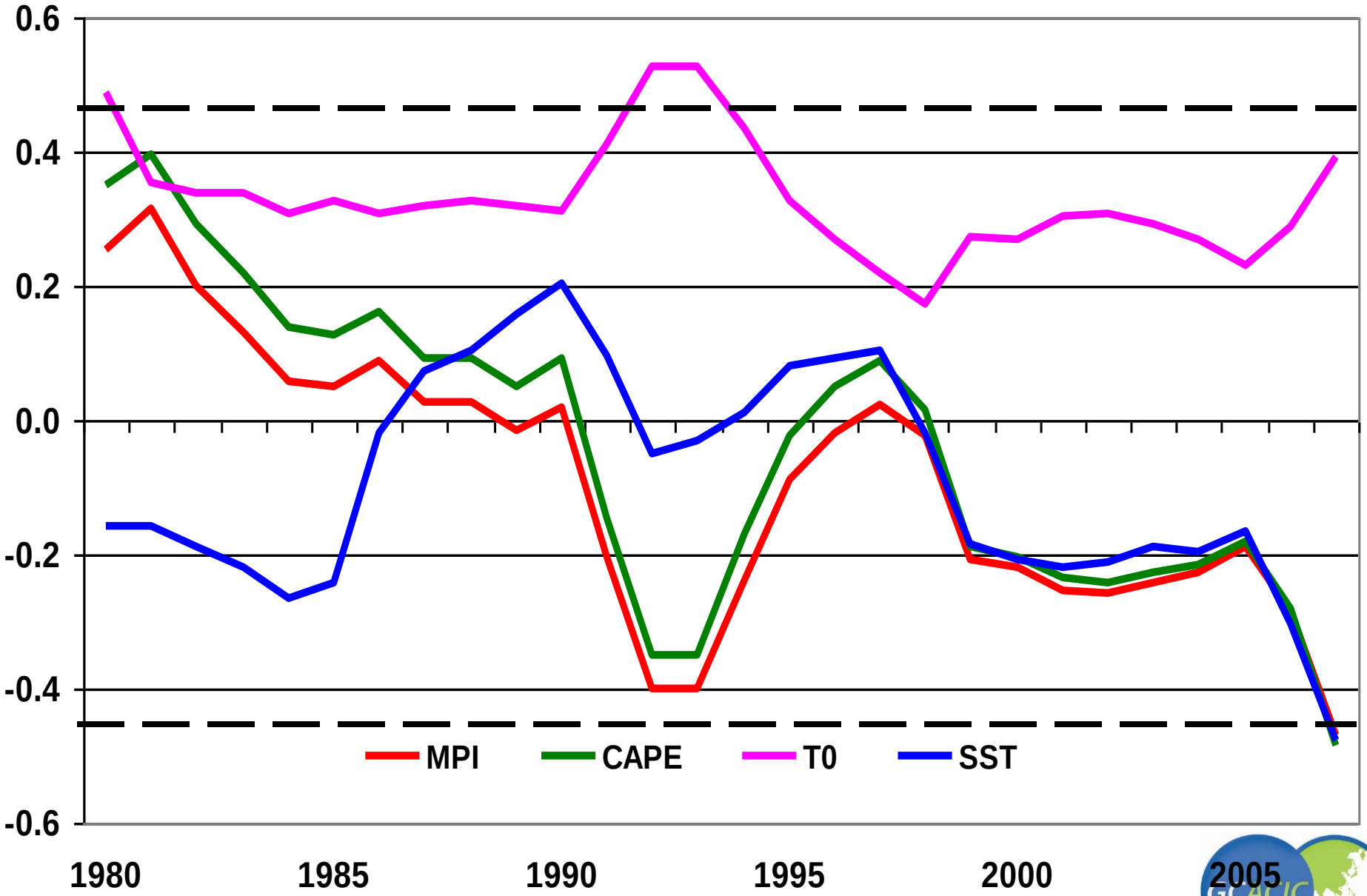
21-year running correlations with NCat45 - Atlantic



21-year running correlations with NCat45 - ENP



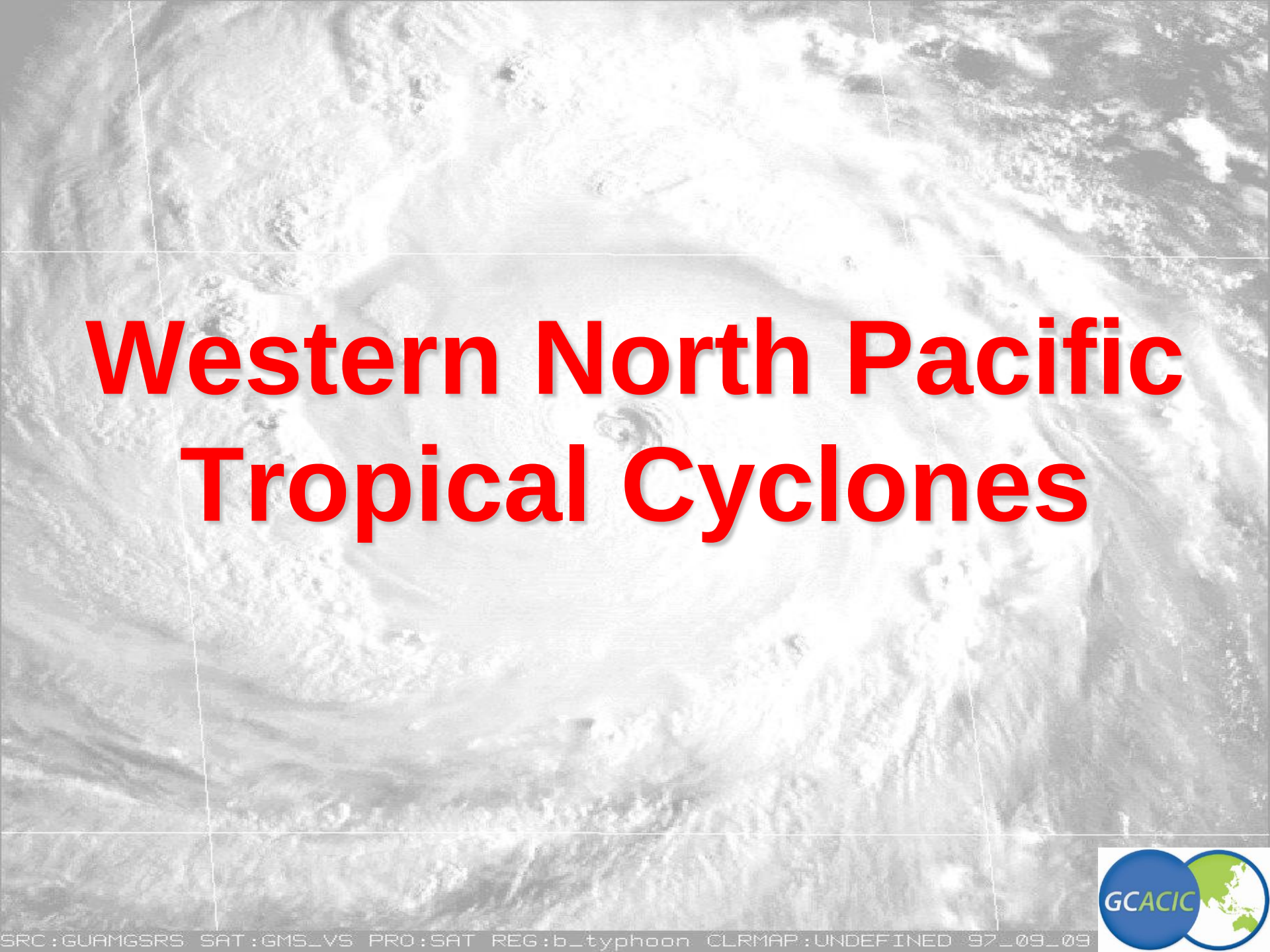
21-year running correlations with NCat45 - WNP



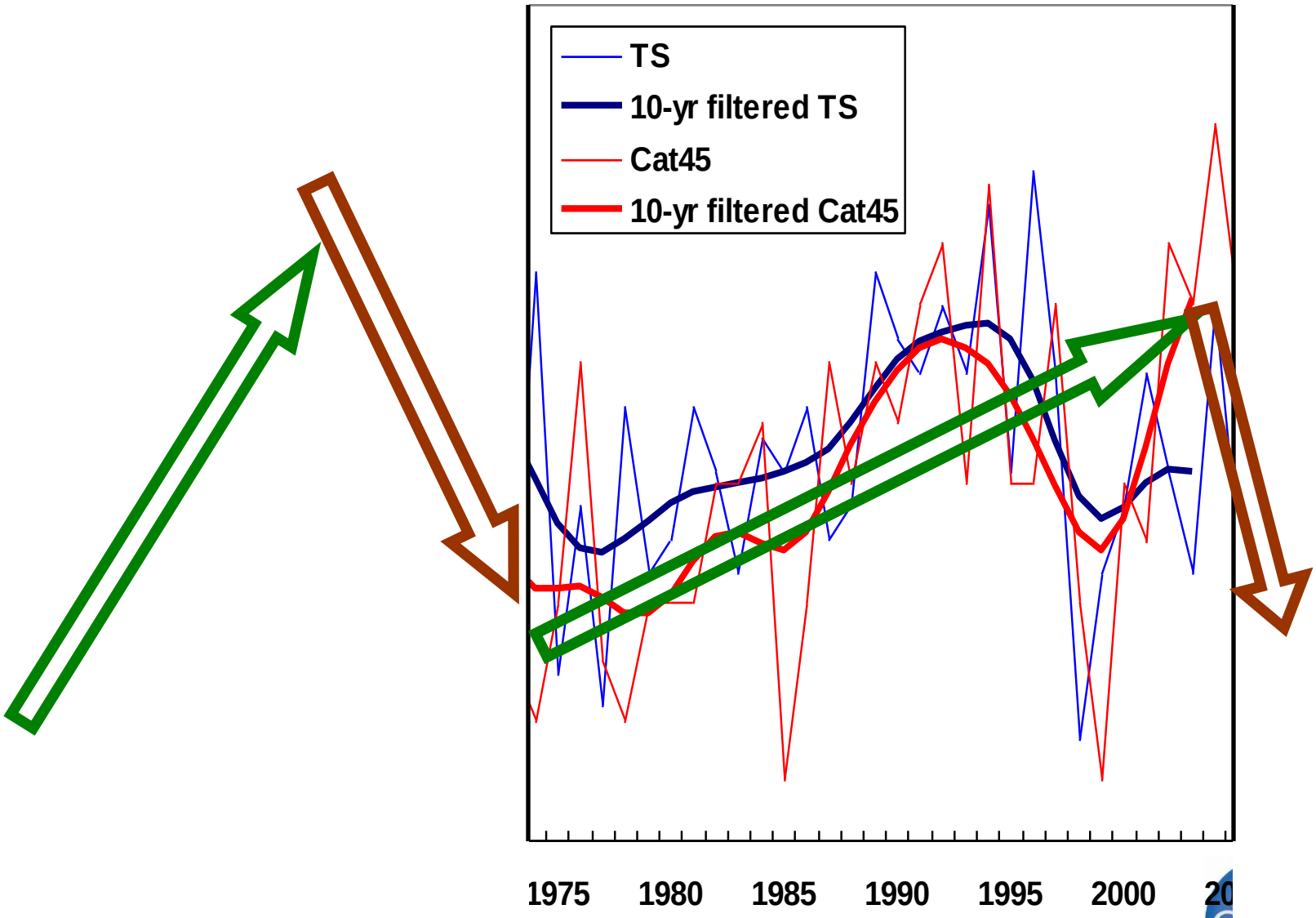
Summary

- **Thermodynamic control on the frequency of intense TCs is important *only* in the Atlantic**
- **Estimating the effect of global warming on the frequency of intense TCs therefore must also assess such an effect on the dynamic processes.**

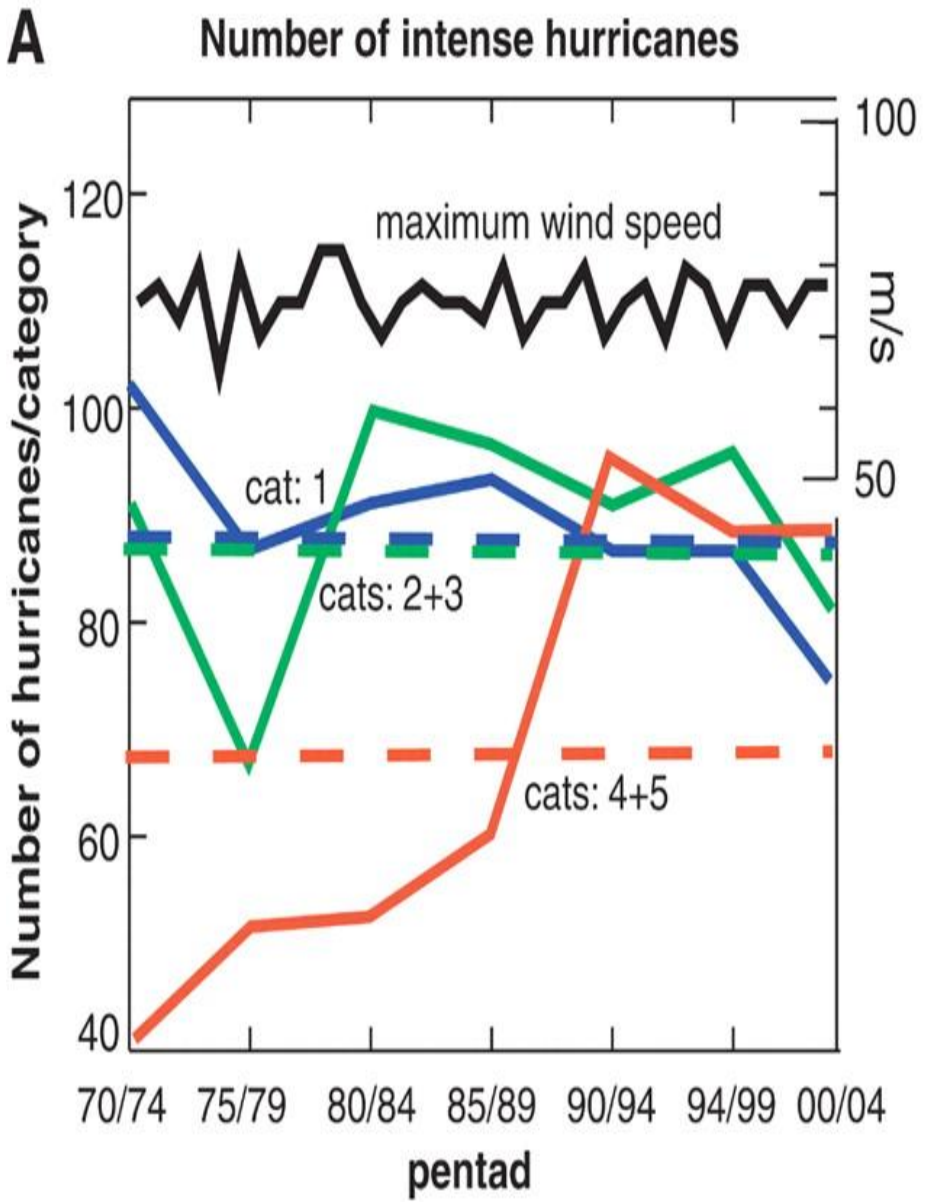
Western North Pacific Tropical Cyclones

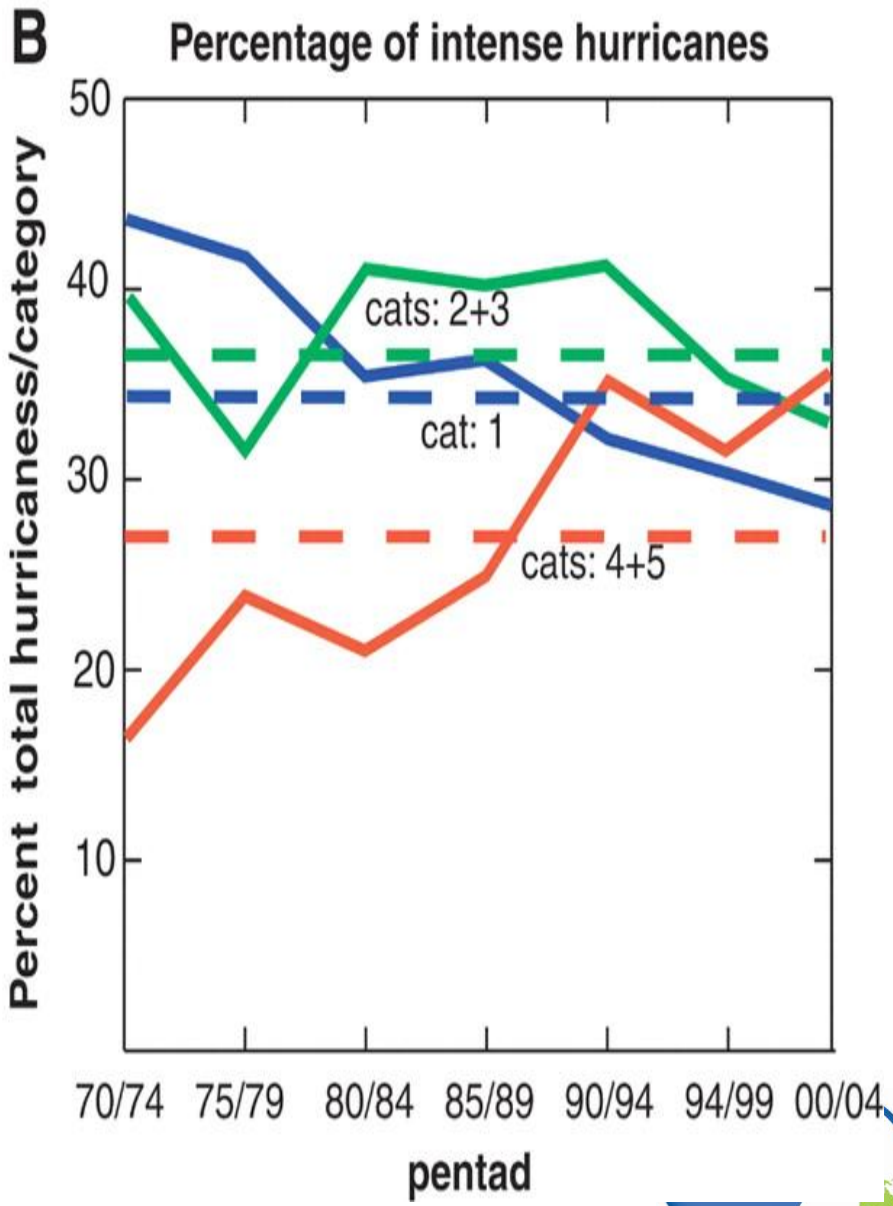


Annual Number of TCs and intense TCs in WNP



Webster et al.'s (2005) *Science* paper





No. of Category 4 and 5 Typhoons

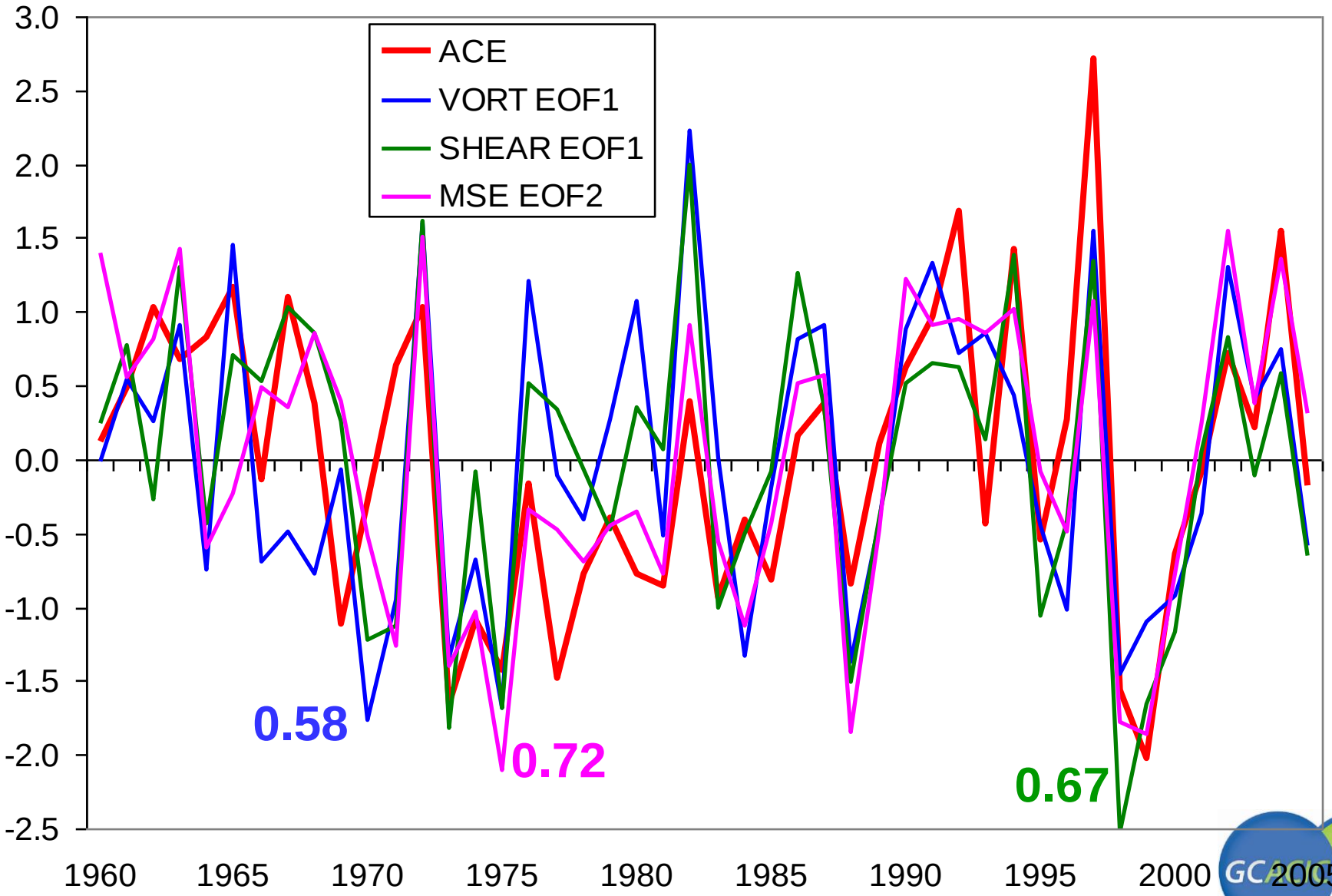
	1975-89	1990-2004
Number	75	115
Percentage	32	42

No. of Category 4 and 5 Typhoons

	1960-74	1975-89	1990-2004
Number	105	75	115
Percentage	37	32	42

ACE vs.. VORT, SHEAR and MSE

Science, 311, 1713b, *Tellus 2007*



Summary

- **No significant trend in any of the TC characteristics (number, intensity, track types, landfall locations) can be identified. In other words, TC activity in the western North Pacific *does not* follow the trend in the global increase in atmospheric or sea-surface temperature.**
- **Instead, all such characteristics go through large interannual and interdecadal variations.**

Summary

- Such variations are very much related and apparently caused by similar variations in the planetary-scale atmospheric and oceanographic features that also ***do not*** have the same trend as the global increase in air temperature
- Unless the temporal variations of such features become linear, these TC characteristics are not expected to vary linearly with time.

Summary

- Even if the observed global warming has an effect, it is probably in the noise level relative to the large interdecadal variations and therefore is not detectable.