

1 **An Alternative Similar Tropical Cyclone Identification Algorithm**
2 **for Statistical TC Rainfall Prediction**

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6 **Key Points:**

- 7 • Statistical tropical cyclone rainfall prediction leverages distance-based algorithms to
8 identify and use similar past events.
- 9 • Proposed in this study is the use of Sinkhorn Distance as a novel measure of TC
10 similarity in rainfall prediction.
- 11 • Incorporating Sinkhorn Distance improves TC rainfall prediction accuracy, offering an
12 alternative similarity measure.
13

14 **Abstract**

15 There is a need to improve the prediction of Tropical Cyclone (TC) rainfall as climate change
16 has led to increased TC rainfall rates. Enhanced reliability in predicting TC tracks has paved the
17 way for statistical methodologies to utilize them in estimating current TC rainfall, achieved by
18 identifying similar past TC tracks and obtaining their corresponding rainfall data. The widely
19 used Fuzzy C Means (FCM) clustering algorithm, though popular, has limitations stemming
20 from its clustering-centric design, hindering its ability to pinpoint the most appropriate similar
21 TCs. Our study introduces the Sinkhorn Distance as a novel measure of TC similarity in rainfall
22 prediction. Our findings indicate that the incorporation of Sinkhorn Distance significantly
23 enhances the accuracy of TC rainfall predictions across WNP. When compared to the
24 conventional approach using FCM, our Sinkhorn Distance-based methodology consistently
25 yields better results, as demonstrated by metrics like RMSE and correlation coefficients.
26 Collectively, the inclusion of Sinkhorn Distance stands as a valuable addition to our toolkit for
27 discerning similar TC tracks, thus elevating the precision of TC rainfall predictions. With
28 ongoing advancements in statistical and AI techniques, we anticipate even more refined
29 approaches to further enhance our predictive capabilities. This study represents a leap forward in
30 meeting the critical need for more accurate TC rainfall forecasts in the WNP Region.

31 **1 Introduction**

32 In recent years, the world has witnessed an alarming increase in the frequency and
33 intensity of extreme weather events (IPCC 2021), and tropical cyclones (TCs) stand out as one of
34 the most devastating natural phenomena affecting coastal regions (Gori et al., 2022; Lee et al.,
35 2019; Wang et al., 2023). The devastating impact of TC rainfall is well-documented, causing
36 severe flooding, property damage, and loss of lives (Tu et al., 2021). Predicting the rainfall
37 associated with these powerful TCs is of utmost importance for enhancing disaster preparedness,
38 risk mitigation, and timely response strategies.

39 Numerical weather prediction (NWP) model-based methods for TC rainfall prediction
40 have made significant progress (Luitel et al., 2018; Ren et al., 2018). However, accurately
41 predicting TC rainfall remains challenging due to the complexity and non-linearity of
42 atmospheric processes (Luitel et al., 2018; Ren et al., 2018). Moreover, these NWP-based
43 methodologies are computationally expensive, demanding substantial resources (Hokson &
44 Kanae, in press-a). To address these issues, statistical-based methodologies have been developed
45 as a complementary measure to conventional methods.

46 Statistical-based methodologies rest on the notion that past weather events have a high
47 likelihood of recurring in the present or future (Bagtasa, 2021). By identifying similar historical
48 TCs, these methods enable the prediction of a TC's rainfall. Leveraging comprehensive historical
49 TC rainfall data, these methodologies provide valuable insights into the fundamental patterns and
50 relationships that govern rainfall behavior during cyclones. A significant advantage of statistical
51 approaches lies in their efficiency, as they often demand fewer computational resources, making
52 them accessible and practical for countries and organizations with limited resources.

53 Recently, there has been a notable enhancement in the precision and reliability of TC
54 track predictions (Li et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2019). This progress has led to the adoption of
55 various statistical methodologies that leverage TC tracks to establish similarity between
56 current/future TCs and past TCs. This approach is grounded in the concept that TCs exhibiting

57 similar tracks tend to generate akin rainfall patterns. This is attributed to the shared influence of
58 factors such as TC intensity, location relative to landmass, as well as temperature and humidity,
59 as noted by Hokson and Kanae (in press-a). Many studies have capitalized on these principles,
60 including works by Ren et al. (2018), Kim et al. (2019), Kim et al. (2020), Bagtasa (2021, 2022),
61 Hokson and Kanae (in press-a, in press-b), as well as Wang et al. (2023).

62 In identifying similar TC tracks, and thus similar TCs, for the statistical prediction of
63 rainfall, researchers employ a distance-based similarity measure. Among the methods utilized in
64 previous studies (Kim et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2020; Hokson & Kanae, in press-a, in press-b;
65 Wang et al., 2023) is the Fuzzy C Means (FCM) clustering algorithm. FCM uses a membership
66 coefficient as a similarity index between a target TC and other TC, allowing it to identify various
67 patterns, even those with irregular shapes. Moreover, FCM exhibits computational efficiency,
68 making it a good choice for those with limited resources. However, certain limitations exist, such
69 as the requirement for equal-length data and the dependence on the number and location of
70 cluster centers. If the cluster centers are not adequately optimized (e.g., centers are close to each
71 other), FCM may fail to identify the most similar TCs. In light of these drawbacks, it becomes
72 crucial to explore alternative distance-based similarity measures to enhance the effectiveness and
73 robustness of TC rainfall predictions.

74 The Sinkhorn Distance (Cuturi, 2013) is one possible distance-based similarity measure
75 we can use in identifying similar TCs for the statistical prediction of TC rainfall. It compares
76 probability distributions and handles large-scale datasets with complexity and uncertainty,
77 making it popular in AI and machine learning research. Unlike FCM, it doesn't need equal-length
78 data and allows direct similarity checks between two TCs without involving other real or
79 arbitrary TCs. In this study, we explore the potential of the Sinkhorn Distance as a similarity
80 measure for identifying similar TCs in the statistical prediction of TC rainfall. To assess its
81 accuracy in rainfall prediction, we employ various statistical measures. We establish the
82 methodology utilizing FCM as the reference approach and compare the results obtained using the
83 Sinkhorn Distance. By doing so, we aim to determine whether the Sinkhorn Distance could serve
84 as a promising alternative to FCM in improving the accuracy of TC rainfall predictions.

85 This study is part of an ongoing effort to enhance our methodologies for the statistical
86 prediction of TC rainfall. In a previous study (Hokson & Kanae, in press-b), we investigated the
87 utilization of additional along-track variables, alongside the TC track, to identify similar TCs.
88 We discovered that these additional variables had minimal impact on TC rainfall prediction
89 accuracies. In another previous study (Hokson & Kanae, in press-a), we proposed a novel
90 constraint involving the TC central pressure at selected locations, which yielded significant
91 improvements in our TC rainfall prediction accuracy. These findings highlight the importance of
92 exploring innovative approaches to optimize our predictions.

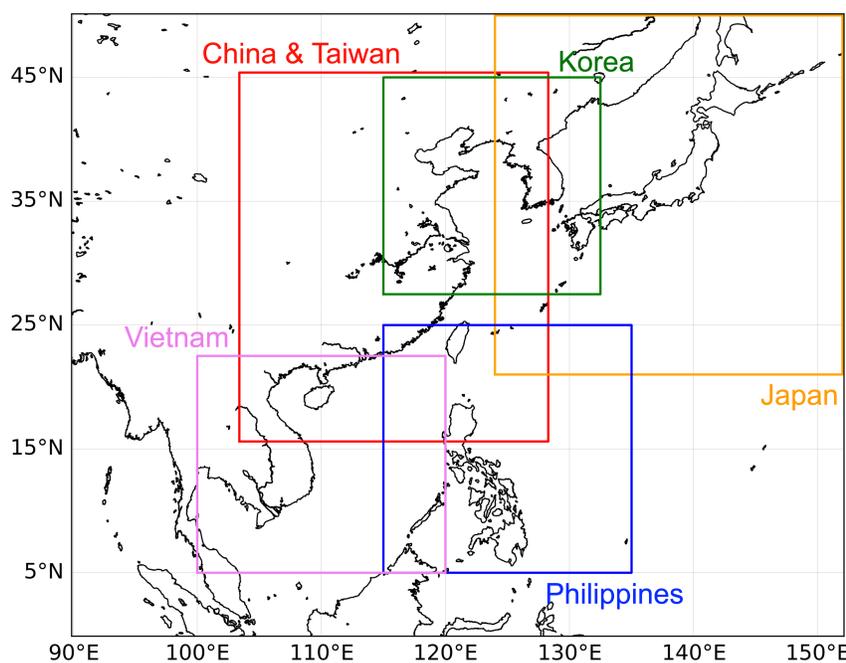
93 This rest of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 describes the data and the study
94 area. Section 3 discusses the methodology, including the proposed use of Sinkhorn Distance
95 Algorithm. Section 4 presents and discusses the result. Section 5 offers a summary and
96 conclusion.

97 2 Data and study area

98 2.1 Data

99 In this study, we utilized two datasets for the statistical prediction of TC rainfall.
 100 The first dataset, RSMC Best Track Dataset (<https://www.jma.go.jp/jma/jma-eng/jma-center/rsmc-hp-pub-eg/trackarchives.html>), provided 6-hourly TC tracks. We
 101 downloaded the second dataset, APHRODITE Monsoon Asia Precipitation data V1101
 102 and V1101EX_R1 (Yatagai et al., 2012), to obtain 0.25° daily rainfall data. These
 103 datasets played a crucial role in our investigation of TC rainfall prediction.
 104

105 2.2 Study area



106

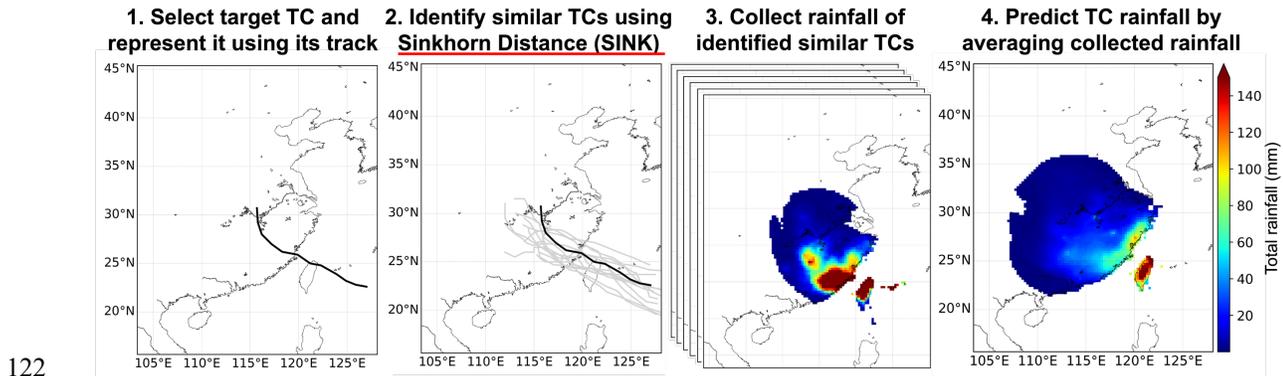
107 **Figure 1.** The five areas of simulations. Adapted – with modifications – from Magee et al.
 108 (2021).

109 The Western North Pacific (WNP) Region is recognized as the world's most
 110 active tropical cyclone basin, witnessing an average of 26 typhoons annually (Lee et al.,
 111 2020). These cyclones impact hundreds of thousands to millions of people every year in
 112 the region, underscoring the critical importance of accurately predicting TC rainfall. In
 113 contrast to regional methods, our study adopts a country-specific approach, focusing on
 114 individual predictions for each country (Figure 1) in WNP. The countries under
 115 examination include China and Taiwan (15.6° - 45.4° N, 128.3° - 103.4° E), Japan (21.0°
 116 - 50.0° N, 124.0° - 152.0° E), Korea (27.5° - 45.0° N, 115.0° - 132.5° E), Philippines
 117 (5.0° - 25.0° N, 115.0° - 135.0° E), and Vietnam (5.0° - 22.5° N, 120.0° - 100.0° E). This

118 decision was driven by the need for more localized and precise forecasts, a crucial aspect
 119 in enhancing disaster preparedness.

120

121 3 Statistical prediction of TC rainfall



122

123 **Figure 2.** Four-step methodology for predicting TC for every TC. Step 2 uses Sinkhorn Distance
 124 instead of the Fuzzy C Means (FCM). The area of simulation for China and Taiwan is used as
 125 example.

126 The prediction of rainfall for each target TC involves a four-step process (Figure 2),
 127 adapted from previous studies (Kim et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2020; Hokson & Kanae, in press-b;
 128 Wang et al., 2023) with a modification in step 2. First, a target TC is selected and represented by
 129 its 6-hourly positions (track) within the area of simulation. Second, similar TCs are identified
 130 using the Sinkhorn Distance (Section 3.1). Third, the rainfall values (Section 3.2) of all identified
 131 similar TCs are collected. Finally, the prediction is obtained by calculating the simple average of
 132 the collected rainfall values.

133 3.1 Identification of similar TCs using Sinkhorn distance

134 To identify similar TCs, we propose the use of Sinkhorn Distance. It is derived
 135 from the optimal transport theory, which studies the most efficient way to transform one
 136 distribution into another. For this study, probability distributions are represented by TC
 137 track positions.

138 The Sinkhorn Distance algorithm for computing distance between two tracks, as
 139 described by Cuturi (2013) is given as follow:

140 1. Define the track data as:

$$141 \mathbf{A} = [(x_1, y_1), (x_2, y_2), \dots, (x_n, y_n)] \text{ with } n \text{ elements}$$

$$142 \mathbf{B} = [(u_1, v_1), (u_2, v_2), \dots, (u_m, v_m)] \text{ with } m \text{ elements}$$

143 where x and u are longitude, and y and v are latitude.

144 2. Define the cost matrix (based on Euclidean distance)

145

$$C_{ij} = \sqrt{(x_i - u_j)^2 + (y_i - v_j)^2}$$

146

where C_{ij} is the pairwise distance between point i in track **A** and point j in track

147

B.

148

3. Initialize the scaling/weighting factors:

149

$\mathbf{g} = [1, 1, \dots, 1]$ with n elements for points in track **A**

150

$\mathbf{h} = [1, 1, \dots, 1]$ with m elements for points in track **B**

151

152

4. Perform Sinkhorn iterations: (repeat until convergence or a maximum number of iterations is achieved)

153

154

- a. Update the scaling factors

155

$$g_i = \frac{1}{\sum_{j=1}^m h_j \frac{c_{ij}}{\varepsilon}} \text{ for } i = 1, 2, \dots, n$$

156

$$h_j = \frac{1}{\sum_{i=1}^n g_i \frac{c_{ij}}{\varepsilon}} \text{ for } j = 1, 2, \dots, m$$

157

where ε is the regularization parameter controlling the trade-off between accuracy and computational stability in Sinkhorn iterations.

158

159

- b. Normalize the scaling factors

160

$$\mathbf{g} = \frac{\mathbf{g}}{\sum_{i=1}^n g_i}$$

161

$$\mathbf{h} = \frac{\mathbf{h}}{\sum_{i=1}^m h_i}$$

162

163

5. Compute the optimal transport plan P_{ij} .

164

$$P_{ij} = g_i \frac{c_{ij}}{\varepsilon} h_j$$

165

where P_{ij} represents the probability of transporting mass from point i in track **A** to point j in track **B**. Values for P_{ij} are within the range 0 – 1.

166

167

6. Calculate the Sinkhorn Distance values.

168

$$sdist = \sum_{i=1}^n \sum_{j=1}^m P_{ij} C_{ij}$$

169

Using the calculated Sinkhorn Distance values of similar TCs per each target TC, the similar TCs are ranked based on similarity.

170

171

To identify the optimal number of similar typhoons, n_{opt} , to be used for TC rainfall prediction, the prediction error values across different numbers of similar TCs are computed. The number of similar typhoons with the least prediction error is considered the optimal number of similar typhoons. All similar TCs that are part of the n_{opt} most similar typhoons are used for rainfall prediction.

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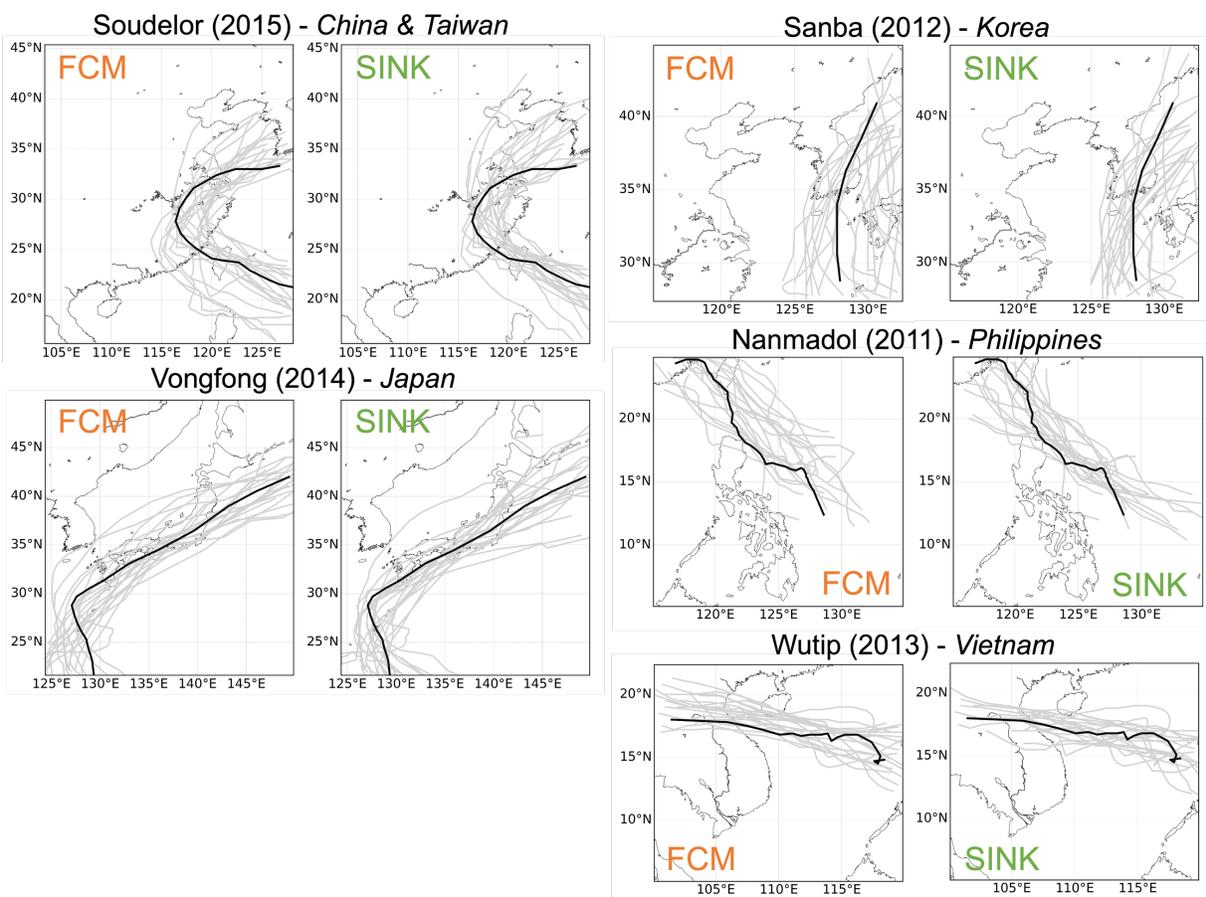
176 3.2 Computation of rainfall values

177 We used the conventional circles of 500 km radius (Guzman and Jiang 2021) to
 178 extract TC rainfall at each of its 6-hourly positions. These extracted values were then
 179 summed up to compute the distributed total rainfall for each TC. Subsequently, the total
 180 rainfall values of all the similar typhoons (i.e., the n_{opt} most similar TCs) were
 181 collected and averaged to obtain the predicted rainfall value of each target TC.

182

183 **4 Results**

184 4.1 Identified similar TCs based on track similarity



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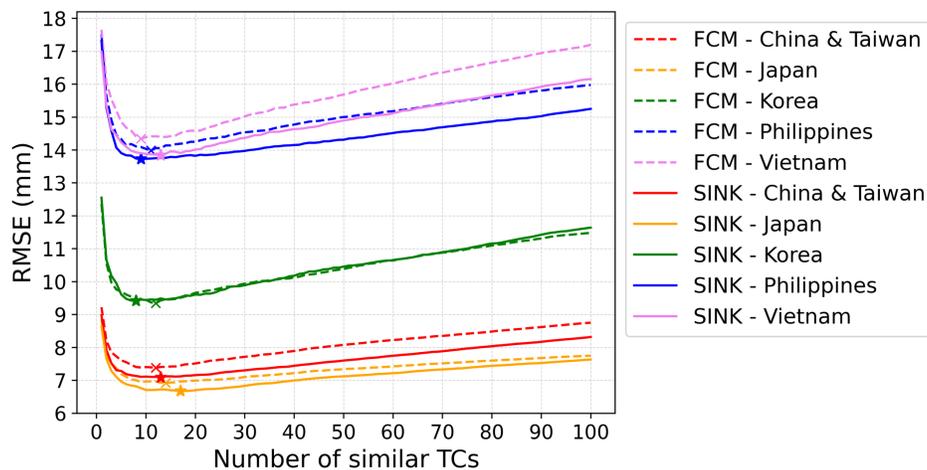
186 **Figure 3.** Top 20 most similar TCs identified through SINK and FCM for the five typhoon cases
 187 in five simulation areas. Black represents the target TC track, and gray represents identified
 188 similar TC tracks.

189 To illustrate the effectiveness of Sinkhorn Distance, hereinafter referred to as
 190 SINK, we conducted an analysis employing five distinct Tropical Cyclones (TCs), each
 191 serving as a representative sample of specific simulation areas. These TCs encompass
 192 Soudelor (2015) for China & Taiwan, Vongfong (2014) for Japan, Sanba (2012) for

193 Korea, Nesat (2011) for the Philippines, and Wutip (2013) for Vietnam. In order to
 194 demonstrate the capacity of SINK in identifying similar TCs, we present the top 20 TCs
 195 that exhibit the highest similarity as identified by the algorithm. Overall, SINK identifies
 196 similar TC tracks wells, as portrayed in Figure 3.

197 In a comparative context against the conventional FCM approach, it becomes
 198 evident that TCs identified as similar by SINK exhibit an enhanced spatial proximity to
 199 the target TCs. Specifically, in the case of China & Taiwan, TCs deemed similar to
 200 Soudelor (2015) demonstrate closer alignment in the southern and eastern sectors, albeit
 201 without the same degree of proximity in the northern trajectory. Similarly, for Japan, TCs
 202 identified as similar to Vongfong (2014) display notable spatial closeness, with the
 203 exception being the northeastern portion of the target TC track. While exploring the
 204 results for Korea, it is noteworthy that SINK identifies analogous TCs primarily closer to
 205 the east of the target, although some tracks exhibit distinctive and unconventional shapes.
 206 Furthermore, when considering the Philippines, TCs identified as similar to Nanmadol
 207 (2011) vividly illustrate the proximity of TC tracks, particularly in the eastern vicinity of
 208 the target TC. Lastly, for Vietnam, SINK identifies a greater number of similar TCs
 209 situated to the south of the target, consequently leading to a more centralized alignment
 210 in comparison to the FCM methodology. These findings highlight the difference in TC
 211 similar identification between the new SINK method and the conventional FCM
 212 approach.

213 4.2 Optimal numbers of similar TCs for TC rainfall prediction and performance of SINK



214

215 **Figure 4.** Average rainfall prediction error of TCs across different number of similar TCs for the
 216 five simulation areas. Only values inside rainfall calculation areas (shown in the Appendix) area
 217 are considered in the prediction error. Values in bold red represent the best values.

218 As in previous studies (Kim et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2020; Hokson & Kanae, in
 219 press-a, in press-b; Wang et al., 2023), we determined the optimal numbers of similar
 220 TCs using TC rainfall prediction error. In such, the numbers of similar TCs with the least

221 RMSE values for the five simulation areas are considered optimal numbers of similar
222 TCs for simple averaging of rainfall for prediction of rainfall.

223 The RMSE values for all simulation areas for any number of similar TCs are
224 between 6 mm to 18 mm for SINK (Figure 4). This same range is applicable to FCM,
225 which is also computed for comparative and in-depth analysis. Notably, these values are
226 markedly lower than those reported by Kim et al. (2019) and Kim et al. (2020), possibly
227 due to the larger dataset of past TCs employed in this study. Moreover, they are also
228 lower than those indicated by Hokson & Kanae (2023a and 2023b), as well as Wang et al.
229 (2023), which may be attributed to the more localized approach adopted in here.
230 Comparing SINK with FCM for all simulation areas except for Korea, RMSE values are
231 lower for SINK than FCM across different number of similar TCs. For Korea, the RMSE
232 values for SINK are almost the same with FCM, sometimes higher sometimes lower.

233 **Table 1.** Minimum RMSE values and corresponding optimal no. of similar TCs based on Figure
234 4 for the five simulation areas.

Simulation Area	No. of target TCs	RMSE [mm]		Optimal no. of similar TCs	
		FCM	SINK	FCM	SINK
China & Taiwan	768	7.38	7.09	12	13
Japan	672	6.92	6.68	14	17
Korea	234	9.34	9.42	12	8
Philippines	759	13.99	13.73	11	9
Vietnam	405	14.34	13.84	9	13

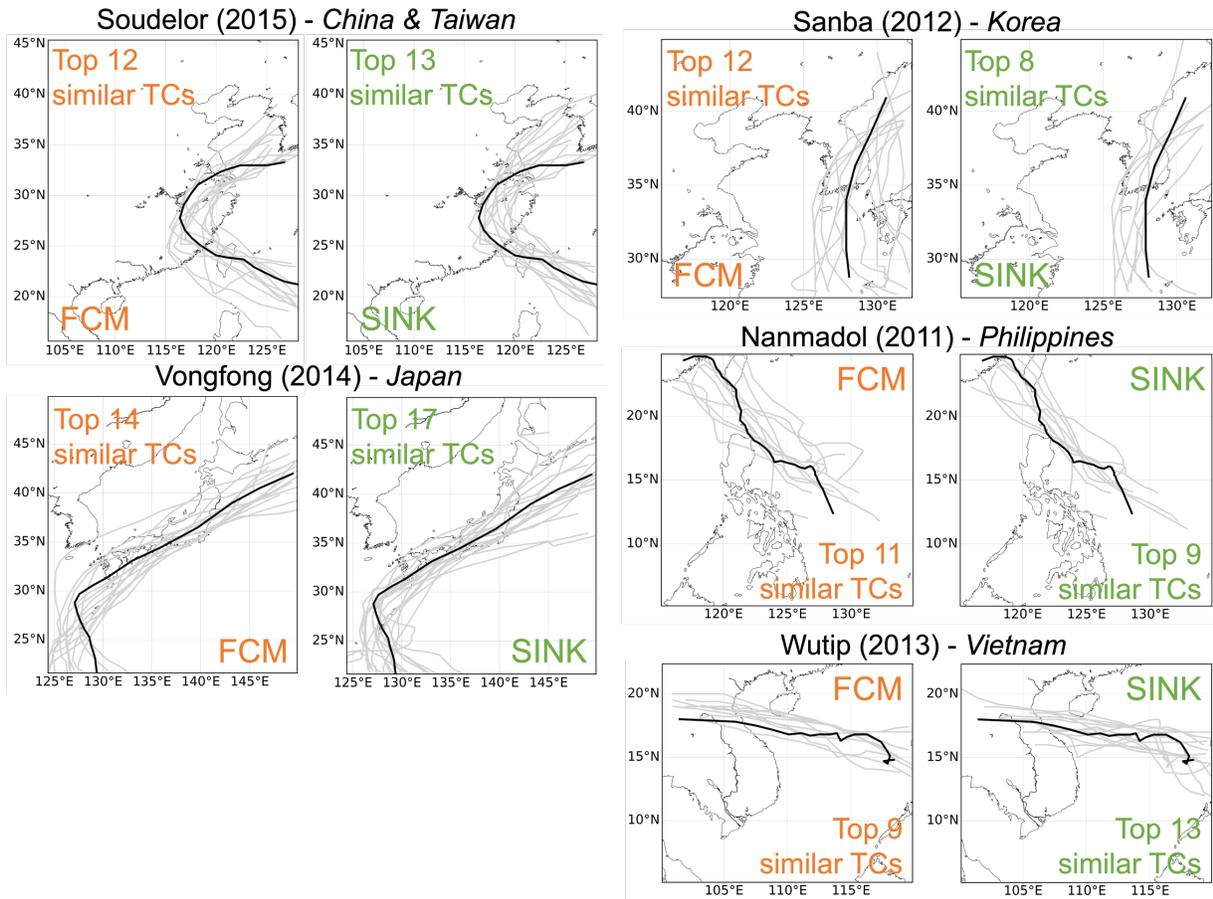
235 The minimum values of RMSE are in between 8 to 17 number of similar TCs and
236 ranges 6 to 15 mm (Figure 4 and Table 1). The optimal numbers of similar TCs for SINK
237 are 13 for China & Taiwan, 17 for Japan, 8 for Korea, 9 for the Philippines, and 13 for
238 Vietnam based on the least RMSE. For FCM, the optimal numbers of similar TCs are 12
239 for China & Taiwan, 14 for Japan, 12 for Korea, 11 for the Philippines, and 9 for
240 Vietnam.

241 4.3 Rainfall prediction

242 Using the optimal number of similar TCs determined in Section 4.2, the TC
243 rainfall are predicted. In this analysis, we continue to utilize the five test TCs introduced
244 in Section 4.1, showcasing the influence of the similar TCs identified through SINK.

245 We replotted the similar TCs shown and discussed in Section 4.1 (Figure 3) to
246 reflect the optimal number of TCs for each simulation area (Figure 5). Generally, SINK
247 identified similar TCs closer to the target than FCM, like those involving top 20 most

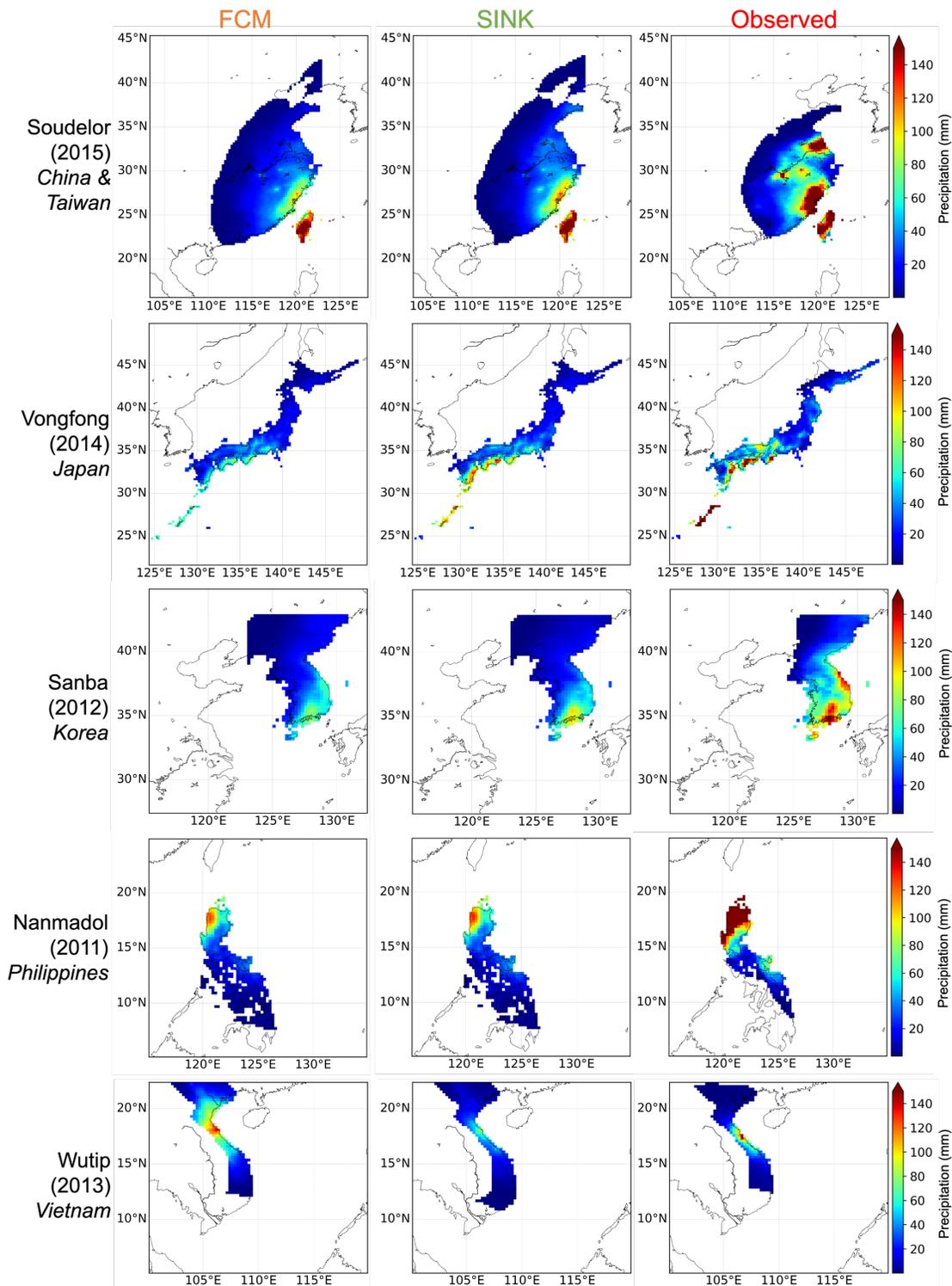
248 similar. Compared to those with top 20 most similar TCs however, the top 8 most similar
 249 TCs for Korea identified through SINK are mostly on the east side of the target TC.



250
 251 **Figure 5.** Similar tracks of optimal number identified through SINK and FCM for five typhoon
 252 cases in five simulation areas.

253 Overall, the identification of similar TCs through Sinkhorn Distance resulted in
 254 comparable predictions of TC rainfall (see Figure 6). Visually, the rainfall prediction
 255 using SINK appears to be superior when compared to predictions made using Fuzzy C-
 256 Means (FCM). In four out of the five typhoon cases – Soudelor (2015), Vongfong (2014),
 257 Sanba (2012), and Nanmadol (2011) – the results from SINK show higher rainfall values
 258 than those from FCM in areas where significant rainfall was observed (highlighted in red
 259 in Figure 6). In contrast, for the remaining typhoon case (Wutip), SINK predicts lower
 260 rainfall values than FCM in areas with high observed rainfall (also in red in Figure 6).

261 These values from SINK generally appear to be closer to the observed values than those
 262 from FCM.



263
 264 **Figure 6.** Spatially distributed rainfall prediction values based on similar TCs identified through
 265 SINK and FCM (Figure 5) for five typhoon cases in five simulation areas.

266 To quantitatively assess the prediction performance illustrated in Figure 6, we
 267 computed the Root Mean Square Error (RMSE) and correlation coefficient values. In
 268 general, the results from SINK exhibit superior RMSE and correlation values. The RMSE
 269 values are consistently better for all five typhoon cases in the results from SINK
 270 compared to those from FCM. The correlation coefficient of the results from SINK
 271 outperforms that of FCM for Soudelor (2015), Vongfong (2014), and Wutip (2013),
 272 remains similar for Nanmadol (2011), but is slightly worse for Sanba (2012). Notably,
 273 Sanba (2012) serves as an illustrative example of the degradation introduced by using
 274 SINK specifically in the context of Korea.

275 **Table 2.** RMSE and correlation coefficient values for the five simulation cases in five simulation
 276 areas. Values in bold red represent the best values. Only values inside rainfall calculation areas
 277 (shown in the Appendix) area are considered in the prediction error.

Simulation area	TC (Year)	No. of similar TCs used		RMSE [mm]		Correlation coefficient	
		FCM	SINK	FCM	SINK	FCM	SINK
China & Taiwan	Soudelor (2015)	12	13	23.48	22.01	0.82	0.84
Japan	Vongfong (2014)	14	17	17.87	14.28	0.85	0.87
Korea	Sanba (2012)	12	8	18.51	17.13	0.97	0.95
Philippines	Nanmadol (2011)	11	9	45.58	44.85	0.96	0.96
Vietnam	Wutip (2013)	9	13	24.95	9.17	0.64	0.88

278

279 5 Summary

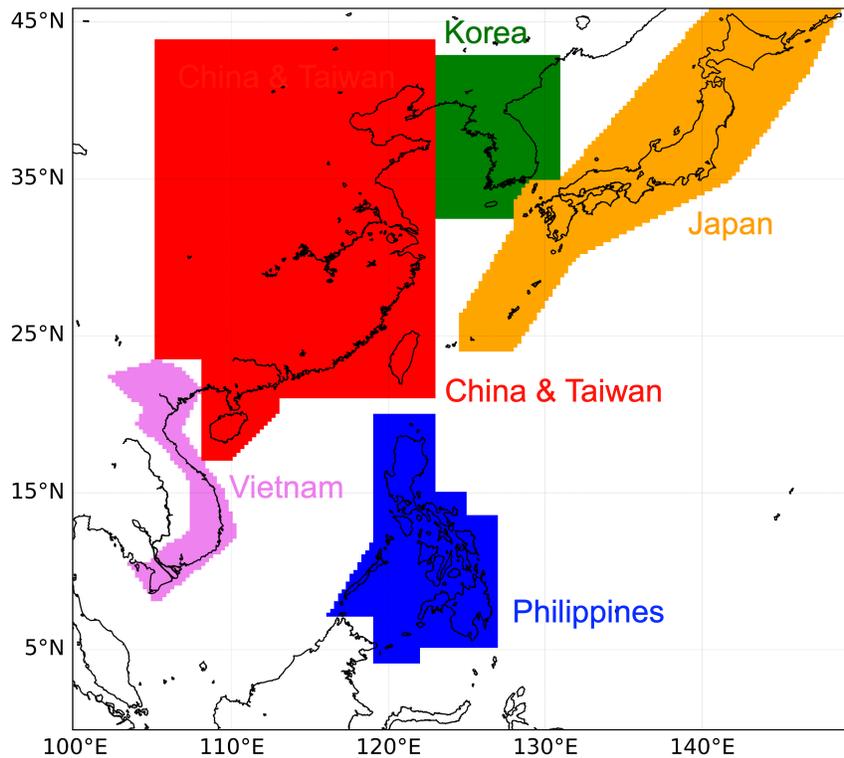
280 Our research introduces the Sinkhorn Distance as a novel TC similarity measure in the
 281 statistical prediction of TC rainfall. By incorporating this metric into an established methodology
 282 (Kim et al., 2019; Hokson & Kanae, in press-b), we have demonstrated its potential
 283 effectiveness. Our investigation revealed that, in general, the utilization of Sinkhorn Distance
 284 leads to accurate predictions of TC rainfall across five simulation areas – namely China &
 285 Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Philippines, and Vietnam.

286 In comparison to the conventional approach employing FCM as a TC similarity measure,
 287 our methodology employing Sinkhorn Distance yielded generally better results for the simulation
 288 areas of China & Taiwan, Japan, Philippines, and Vietnam. However, it exhibited slightly less
 289 favorable outcomes for the simulation area of Korea. These assessments were based on spatially

290 distributed rainfall data, with performance metrics quantified using RMSE and correlation
 291 coefficients.

292 Taken collectively, the inclusion of Sinkhorn Distance in our study presents an additional
 293 valuable tool for discerning similar TC tracks, thereby enhancing the accuracy of TC rainfall
 294 predictions. As statistical and AI techniques continue to advance, we anticipate even more
 295 refined approaches to further enhance our predictive capabilities. This study constitutes a stride
 296 towards a much-needed enhancement in our predictions of TC rainfall.

297 Appendix



298
 299 **Figure A1.** Rainfall calculation areas. Only values on land inside the rainfall calculation areas
 300 are considered in the analysis in the main text.

301 Acknowledgments

302 This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI 21K18744.

303 Data Availability

304 All datasets used in this study are publicly available: RSMC Best Track Dataset is
 305 available at <https://www.jma.go.jp/jma/jma-eng/jma-center/rsmc-hp-pub-eg/trackarchives.html>;
 306 APHRODITE precipitation dataset is available at <http://aphrodite.st.hirosaki-u.ac.jp/>.

307 **Code Availability**

308 All codes are currently in preparation to be uploaded at a GitHub repository. These codes
309 mainly contain code for data handling and implementation of the this paper's methodology,
310 including implementation of Sinkhorn Distance Algorithm and FCM Algorithm.
311

312 **Conflict of interest**

313 The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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