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Title: A Method for Obtaining High Frequency, Global, IR-Based Convective Cloud Tops for Studies of the Tropical Tropopause Layer

Models of varying complexity that simulate water vapor and clouds in the Tropical Tropopause Layer (TTL) show that including convection directly is essential to properly simulating the water vapor and cloud distribution. In boreal winter, for example, simulations without convection yield a water vapor distribution that is too uniform with longitude, as well as cloud incidences that are too low. Two things are important for convective simulations. First, it is important to get the convective cloud top potential temperature correctly, since unrealistically high values (reaching above the cold point tropopause too frequently) will cause excessive hydration of the stratosphere. Second, one must capture the time variation as well, since hydration by convection depends on the local relative humidity (temperature), which has substantial variation on synoptic time scales in the TTL.

This paper describes a method for obtaining high frequency (3-hourly) global convective cloud top distributions which can be used in trajectory models. The method uses rainfall thresholds, standard IR brightness temperatures, meteorological temperature analyses, and physically realistic and documented corrections to IR brightness temperatures to derive cloud top altitudes and potential temperatures. The cloud top altitudes compare well with combined CLOUDSAT and CALIPSO data, both in time-averaged overall vertical and horizontal distributions and in individual cases (correlations of .65-.7).

Results from the method are compared to convective distributions currently used by global models. In general, the method shows that models underestimate convective cloud top altitudes.