

Interactive comment on “The effect of Three Gorges Dam and rainfall on summer flow risk over Yangtze River Basin” by Zhenkuan Su et al.

Zhenkuan Su et al.

zhenkuan.su@gmail.com

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We appreciate the suggestions and comments from the referee. This document discusses, point-by-point in response to the comments. Comment 1: The rainfall measurements across the whole Yangtze River basin were used to develop the regression models for five discharge stations, which is questionable. Since different discharge stations have different controlled upstream areas, it's more reasonable to use these rainfall stations located in the corresponding upstream area of each discharge station for the analysis. For instance, the authors presented in Lines 142-144, “However, the rainfall in Subbasin Xiangjiang located at the downstream of the dam has negative correlation with the streamflow, indicating that different climate events occurred over northwestern and southeastern part of Yangtze River Basin”, I think the negative cor-

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relation is related to the fact that the rainfall in the downstream has not any contribution to the streamflow upstream. Response: The rainfall stations were selected to provide an approximately even spatial distribution to represent each sub-basin. Physically, the rainfall can directly contribute to the streamflow of the downstream stations. But, in this study, we applied the statistical approach to model the streamflow. Although rainfall in the Xiangjian subbasin does not contribute to streamflow upstream, it is indicative of the regional climate. The model does not intend to explicitly model the physical rainfall-runoff relationship, but uses a stochastic approach to incorporate information regarding regional climate relationships, that may be anti-correlated. The CCA process is used to maximize the correlation between the covariates and the target variable, so if one rainfall station is always negatively correlated, it is indicative of a regional climate that is negatively correlated to the basin streamflow of interest and the site is weighted appropriately.

Comment 2: The authors also divide the whole Yangtze River basin into 21 subbasins, while only data from 5 discharge stations are collected, which is far not enough for the analysis. I suggest to collect all the streamflow data from most discharge stations (at least stations represent the 21 subbasins) currently operated in the Yangtze River basin for the analysis. Response: In this study, we choose the 5 important stations along the main stream with a view of demonstrating the method and capturing the changes of summer streamflow that was regulated by the dam. Because the 5 stations are the most important stations in Yangtze River and around big cities, they play an important role in flow monitoring and urban flood control. Cuntan is considered as the demarcation point of upstream and middle stream, and this is also the starting point of Three Gorges reservoir. The following stations are near the major cities or the gauging stations for monitoring the confluence of main stream and key tributaries. Second, because of the high summer flow in the Yangtze River, a small group of hydrological stations and the site's distribution can effectively help to observe the difference among the stations.

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Comment 3: The authors attribute the differences noted between the predicted and the measured streamflow during the post-dam period (e.g. Figure 6) to the dam effect, which is not rigorous. As seen from Figure 3, the correlation coefficients between the rainfall and streamflow are generally less than 0.7, indicating that only the rainfall cannot fully explain the measured streamflow dynamics. Figure 5 also shows that large uncertainties exist in the model performance. As such, simply attributing the difference to the dam effect is not correct without analyzing the impact of model uncertainties. In addition, the authors also note the lake effect, how will this affect the model development and prediction? The time lag between the rainfall and streamflow is also not considered in this study, how will this affect the analysis? Response: The ability to study dam impacts on streamflow in this region is limited by the availability of data regarding dam releases and water withdrawals. Our approach was therefore to assess the relationship between rainfall and streamflow prior to and following the construction of the dam. The analysis is conducted using summer seasonal rainfall and streamflow data. In contrast to the lake effect, climate variability may likely drive the overall streamflow variability (Wang et al., 2017). The conveyance period for streamflow to travel from the upper catchment to the estuary is less than 3 months (about 14 days) (Chu et al., 2006). Given the relatively coarse temporal resolution considered, we did not consider a temporal lag in our model.

Chu, Z., Zhai, S., and Chen, X.: Changjiang River sediment delivering into the sea in response to water storage of Sanxia Rervoir in 2003, *Acta Oceanologica Sinica*, 25, 71-79, 2006. Wang, J., Sheng, Y., and Wada, Y.: Little impact of the Three Gorges Dam on recent decadal lake decline across China's Yangtze Plain, *Water Resources Research*, 53, 1-24, 2017.

Comment 4: It's interesting to see from Figure 8 that the models predict totally different results for all the stations in comparison to the measurements for the year 2008, e.g. measured low flow vs. predicted flood, what's the reason for this? Is it related to the model deficiency? Response: We would like to clarify that the Figure 8 does not the

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predictions versus observations. We ran the model using rainfall during the post-dam period as the model covariates to produce the predictions of un-regulated streamflow, while the observations are the gauged streamflow during this period, which are impacted by the Three Gorges Dam post 2003. The difference between the modelled and the gauged values therefore represents the difference in streamflow as a result of dam operations in addition to model errors.

Comment 5: The authors conclude in the abstract around Lines 28-30, “The comparison of risk type changes between observations and predictions during the post-dam period showed the dam effectively relieved the risk of upstream while not always played a positive role in risk mitigation of downstream”, which sounds strange to me. It’s surprise to see that the dam has minor effect on the downstream but affect the upstream area. What’s the reason for this? Is this conclusion still true if more discharge stations in the upstream area are included for the analysis? Response: The topography of the upstream is given priority to the hilly area with high altitude. The backwater can influence the streamflow of Cuntan, but imposes limited impact on streamflow of stations locating upstream of Cuntan, because Cuntan is the starting point of the forming reservoir by the dam, the backwater cannot flow far away along the channel. However, the downstream is given priority to the plain with many lakes (a total lake area of 15000 km²) (Wang et al., 2017). The water refilling and releasing can directly influence the inflow and water level of the downstream. For Cuntan station on the upstream, we think the difference between observations and predictions is due to the dam operation. While for the downstream, due to the interaction of river-lake, it cannot reflect the result directly impacted by the dam.

Wang, J., Sheng, Y., and Wada, Y.: Little impact of the Three Gorges Dam on recent decadal lake decline across China’s Yangtze Plain, *Water Resources Research*, 53, 1-24, 2017.

For the minor comments, please see the supplement information, including all the response to the comments

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Please also note the supplement to this comment:

<http://www.hydrol-earth-syst-sci-discuss.net/hess-2017-159/hess-2017-159-AC1-supplement.pdf>

Interactive comment on Hydrol. Earth Syst. Sci. Discuss., <https://doi.org/10.5194/hess-2017-159>, 2017.

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