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A modelling-based assessment of suspended sediment transport related to new damming in the Red River basin from 2000 to 2013

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► **To cite this version:**

Xi Wei, Sabine Sauvage, Sylvain Ouillon, Thi Phuong Quynh Le, Didier Orange, et al.. A modelling-based assessment of suspended sediment transport related to new damming in the Red River basin from 2000 to 2013. *CATENA*, 2021, 197, pp.104958. 10.1016/j.catena.2020.104958 . hal-02986914

HAL Id: hal-02986914

<https://hal.inrae.fr/hal-02986914>

Submitted on 25 Oct 2022

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22 **Abstract:**

23 The Red River is an Asian river system strongly affected by global changes.
24 This paper aims to characterize and quantify the suspended sediment flux (SF)
25 over the basin under the influences of short-term climate variability and dam
26 constructions. SF was evaluated at the outlets of main tributaries and along the
27 main course of the Red River from 2000 to 2013 based on daily simulations
28 from a modelling study. A reference scenario (without dams) was carried out to
29 disentangle the impacts of short-term climate variability and damming by
30 comparing to actual conditions. Without dams (reference scenario), the basin
31 would generate 106.9 Mt yr^{-1} of SF to the downstream delta from 2000 to 2013,
32 with a specific sediment yield (SSY) of $778.8 \text{ t km}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1}$. However, under the
33 impacts of short-term climate variability and dams, the mean annual SSY
34 decreased to $84.5 \text{ t km}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1}$. At the outlet of the basin, the annual mean SF of
35 2008-2013 (after new dam constructions) got reduced by 90% (10% related to
36 short-term climate or atmospheric variability and 80% to dam constructions)
37 compared to the reference scenario (without dams) during 2000-2007. The
38 Thao tributary is the most sensitive to short-term climate variability while the
39 Da tributary is mostly affected by the huge-capacity dams. Mean annual
40 retentions of sediment by dams ranged from 7.1 to 111.0 Mt yr^{-1} . Simple rating
41 curves between monthly mean discharge (Q) and SF were established for
42 estimating SF at the outlet of the tributaries and the Red River. High soil
43 erosion (above $2000 \text{ t km}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1}$) occurred in the middle Thao and the lower Da

44 tributaries. Precipitation, slope and agriculture practices are the key influence
45 factors for soil erosion in the basin.

46 **Keywords:** suspended sediment, modelling, the Red River, short-term climate
47 variability, dam, soil erosion.

48 **1. INTRODUCTION**

49 The suspended sediment (SS) transport from continents to oceans by rivers is
50 a crucial process of sediment cycle in the Earth systems: this process drives
51 associated elements to the seas, which is essential for marine biogeochemical
52 cycle and diversity; also, it is a reflection of land and river degradation; besides,
53 this process is of great importance in geomorphology, such as downstream
54 delta formation (Dai et al., 2009; Kunz et al., 2011; Lal et al., 1995). Rivers
55 contribute to 95% of the sediment fluxes (SF) to the oceans (Syvitski et al.,
56 2003), which ranged from 15 to 20 billion t yr⁻¹ (Beusen et al., 2015; Ludwig
57 and Probst, 1996; Milliman and Meade, 1983; Ouillon, 2018; Vörösmarty et al.,
58 2003). In particular, Asian rivers such as the Yellow River and the Mekong
59 River contribute to a large part of sediment delivery to the seas (Cohen et al.,
60 2014; Dang et al., 2018). However, climate variability and anthropogenic
61 activities have altered the SF (Dai et al., 2009; Dang et al., 2018; Jiang et al.,
62 2009).

63 Under anthropogenic disturbances such as intensive agriculture and damming,
64 water ecosystems are facing severe challenges, like the increase of soil
65 erosion, and changes of hydrology regime and SF (Chen et al., 2016; FAO,
66 2011a; IPCC, 2019; Valentin et al., 2008; Zimmerman et al., 2008). Dam

67 construction is the factor with the strongest influence on land-ocean SF
68 (Walling and Fang, 2003). According to the World Commission on Dams
69 (2000), at least 45,000 large dams have been built globally, and nearly half of
70 the world's rivers have one large dam at least. Lehner et al., (2011) found that
71 around 28% of dams are located in Asia. Besides, future hydropower
72 development is primarily concentrated in developing countries and emerging
73 economies of Southeast Asia (Zarfl et al., 2015). Dams cause a significant
74 reduction in SF. Vörösmarty et al. (2003) estimated that the potential sediment
75 trapping by dams in regulated basins was higher than 50%. In some basins,
76 such as the Colorado, Nile and Yellow rivers, sediment is completely trapped
77 due to the large size of reservoirs and to the flow velocity decreases which
78 weakens the sediment transportability (Peng et al., 2010; Vörösmarty et al.,
79 2003; Walling and Fang, 2003). Reduced sediment transport can induce river
80 deltas sinking, therefore affecting estuarine and coastal human communities
81 (Hauer et al., 2018; Syvitski et al., 2005), and increasing their vulnerability
82 (Lehner et al., 2011). Asian rivers constitute good indicators of the strong
83 influence of anthropogenic activities on sediment transport (Arias et al., 2014;
84 Dang et al., 2010; Furuichi et al., 2009).

85 The Red River is a typical Asian river system under the influences of global
86 changes and is the second largest river in Vietnam. It gathers numerous
87 inter-linked rivers, estuaries and coastal waters and plays an important role in
88 agriculture and economy in this basin, which is a major agricultural production
89 region. Understanding and quantifying the water and soil processes and

90 budgets of this river basin will help to manage soil loads and also to study
91 other Asian rivers. Hence, the objective of this paper is to assess the SS
92 regime in a large Asian basin under the influences of global changes,
93 especially under the impacts of dams. Moreover, it would be more precise to
94 calculate SF at a daily time step as discharge (Q) and suspended sediment
95 concentration (SSC) can vary greatly from day to day. However, few studies
96 analyzed fluxes at daily scale in the Red River basin, focusing either on a short
97 period (Le et al., 2007), or only on the outlet of the continental basin (Dang et
98 al., 2010) or on the delta (Luu et al., 2010), or only on Q or SS (Hiep et al.,
99 2018). Assessing SS regime at a daily time step at different stations in the Red
100 River basin will, therefore, contribute to improving our knowledge of the SF
101 across the whole basin.

102 For achieving this objective, a modelling approach, combining remote sensing
103 and in-situ data, was used. The modelling setup and calibration were
104 described in Wei et al. (2019). The specific objective of the present paper is: 1)
105 to quantify SF of the Red River basin based on daily Q and SSC; 2) to
106 disentangle and quantify the impacts of damming and short-term climate or
107 atmospheric variability on SF; 3) to provide rating curves for estimating the SF
108 at the outlets of the main tributaries and of the continental basin; 4) to identify
109 the hot spots of soil erosion.

110 **2. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

111 **2.1. Study area**

112 The study area focuses on the Red River continental basin with a surface of

113 137,200 km² which drains down to Son Tay, the outlet of the continental basin
114 and the entrance of the delta (Figure 1).

115 2.1.1. General characteristics

116 The Red River basin is located in Southeast Asia (Figure 1a), shared by China
117 (49%), while Vietnam (50.1%) and Laos (0.9%).

118 Son Tay is a confluence of three main tributaries: the Lo River (named Panlong
119 Jiang in China) on the left bank, the Thao River (named Yuan Jiang in China)
120 upstream of the main river, and the Da River (named Lixian Jiang in China) on
121 the right bank. They join the Red River 20 km upstream to the Son Tay gauging
122 station.

123 The elevation ranges from 2650 m a.s.l. to 6 m a.s.l. in this basin (Wei et al.,
124 2019). The upstream part of Lao Cai is mainly formed by tectonically active
125 mountainous areas, with steep slopes, usually above 25° (Zhang et al., 2017)
126 which are vulnerable to soil erosion due to the intensive precipitation and land
127 use changes (Bai et al., 2015; Barton et al., 2004; He et al., 2007). The soil
128 types are mainly Acrisols, such as red earth and yellow-brown soil (Bai et al.,
129 2015; Le, 2005). High erosion plus the character of soil types color the water of
130 the Thao River into “red” (Le, 2005). In Vietnam, the same Acrisols dominate
131 on the slopes while grey or alluvial soils dominate in the valleys (Le et al.,
132 2017).

133 In China’s part, the main land cover is forest (62%), followed by grassland
134 (19%) and cultivated land (18%), respectively (Li et al., 2016a). In Vietnam’s

135 part, in the Thao basin, forest is dominating, accounting for 54.2%, followed by
136 rice paddy fields (19%) and industrial crops (13%); the Lo and Da basins are
137 dominated by industrial crops (58%) and forests (74%), respectively (Le et al.,
138 2007).

139

140 Figure 1. (a) The geographical location of the Red River basin in Southeast Asia; (b) locations of the dams
141 (red triangle) and the hydrological gauge stations (blue point) in the Red River basin. Base maps sources
142 were obtained from ArcGIS desktop.

143 2.1.2. Meteorological characteristics

144 The whole Red River basin encompasses two different climate zones: humid
145 subtropical climate in the upper part and humid tropical climate in the lower
146 part, and a strong seasonal variability related to the Southeast Asia monsoon
147 system, which alternates between the cold and dry southwestward winter
148 monsoon from November to April and the hot and humid northeastward
149 summer monsoon from May to October. Rainfall during flood seasons (May to
150 October) contributes to 85-90% of the whole year average (Le et al., 2007; Li
151 et al., 2016b). The general trend of regional precipitation distribution increases
152 from upstream (1000 to 1600 mm yr⁻¹ in China) to downstream (1328 to 2255
153 mm yr⁻¹ in Vietnam) (Le et al., 2007; Li et al., 2008; Xie, 2002). During
154 2000-2013, the mean annual rainfall through the Red River basin was 1494
155 mm yr⁻¹ (Wei et al., 2019).

156 Temperature variations follow a typical orographic pattern, increasing with the
157 decreasing of the elevations, from the northwest (mountainous regions) to the

158 southeast. The mean annual temperature varies from 15 to 21 °C in China (Xie,
159 2002) and 14 to 27 °C in Vietnam (Le, 2005). During the year, the winter
160 temperature ranges from 14-16 °C in winter and 27-29 °C in summer (Le, 2005;
161 Lu et al., 2015).

162 2.1.3. Hydrological characteristics

163 Runoff is mainly recharged by precipitation which leads to big seasonal
164 variations in river flows (FAO, 2011b; Li et al., 2016a; Li et al., 2008). The
165 mean annual discharge during 2000-2013 at Son Tay was 3082 m³ s⁻¹ (Wei et
166 al., 2019). Corresponding to the distribution of rainfall, the runoff is also
167 unevenly distributed. More than 80% of the total annual runoff is produced
168 during rainy seasons (May to October); runoff peaks usually occur in August,
169 and the maximum flood reached 8050 m³ s⁻¹ in 1986 near the border in China
170 (Xie, 2002), and 37,800 m³ s⁻¹ at Son Tay in 1971 (Luu et al., 2010). November
171 to April is the dry season, and the minimum discharge occurs in March. The
172 minimum discharge observed near the boundary in China was 28.7 m³ s⁻¹ in
173 1963 (Ren et al., 2007), and the minimum daily discharge at Son Tay during
174 2000-2013 was 493 m³ s⁻¹ (Wei et al., 2019).

175 2.1.4. Dams implementation

176 In recent years, to meet the water demand according to the rapid increase of
177 population and intensive agriculture activities, dams have been constructed
178 both in China and Vietnam. It is difficult to obtain all the information of all the
179 dams located in the Thao and Lo rivers as most of their information is not
180 accessible to the public, therefore, in this study, we only specifically took into

181 account the dams with big capacity ($>2.2 \text{ km}^3$) and located on the downstream
182 part, i.e. close to the outlets of each tributary.

183 On the Thao River, twelve cascade reservoirs were built or are under
184 construction in China's territory. The impoundment of the first two dams, the
185 Nansha and the Madushan dams, located around 150 km and 100 km
186 upstream of Lao Cai gauge station respectively, started on November 2007
187 and December 2010, respectively, and they are the only two dams impounded
188 on the Thao River during the study period.

189 On the Da River, the biggest dam in Vietnam named Hoa Binh was put into use
190 in 1989. A mass of solid materials has been trapped by this dam, which
191 consequently reduces the dam's efficient capacity and lifetime (Dang et al.,
192 2010). To mitigate the siltation of the Hoa Binh dam and to meet the need for
193 economic growth, the Son La dam was built and put into operation in January
194 2011.

195 On the Lo River, the Thac Ba dam was implemented in 1972 and the Tuyen
196 Quang dam in March 2008 (Table 1 and Figure 1).

197 Table 1 Basic characteristics of the main dams in the Red River basin (Le et al., 2017; Wei et al., 2019)

198

199 **2.2. Data collection**

200 Observed data of daily Q and SSC from 2000 to 2013 was obtained from the
201 Vietnam Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) at Lao Cai,
202 Yen Bai, Vu Quang, Hoa Binh and Son Tay gauge stations (Figure 1). Daily SS

203 sampling campaigns were conducted at different gauge stations. SS was
204 collected vertically from the water surface to the bottom by a collector at each
205 station. Then in the laboratory, a known volume of well-mixed sample was
206 filtered immediately by vacuum filtration through precombusted glass fiber
207 filters. For the measurement of SS, each filter was dried for 2 hours at 105°C
208 and then weighed. Taking into account the filtered volume, the increase in
209 weight of the filter represented the total SS per unit volume (mg L^{-1}).

210 Daily SF, calculated from daily Q and SSC, was used to evaluate the model.
211 Annual mean and seasonal variation of observed Q and SSC for 2000-2013 at
212 these stations are presented in Table 2.

213 Table 2 Annual mean and seasonal variation of observed discharge (Q) and suspended sediment
214 concentration (SSC) for 2000-2013 at 5 gauge stations.

215

216 **2.3. Modelling approach**

217 This study expands the work of Wei et al. (2019) where detailed descriptions of
218 the modelling setup and the calibration and validation processes can be found.
219 Here we only present some essential information about the modelling.

220 In the study of Wei et al. (2019), the daily simulated Q and SSC were
221 presented. In this study, we dug and analyzed the outputs from the model,
222 providing more information within this basin, such as the soil erosion which is
223 an influencing factor for SF; and also we stated how the outputs from the
224 modelling can be beneficial for the stakeholders.

225 2.3.1. The SWAT model

226 The Soil and Water Assessment Tool (SWAT) is a physically-based,
227 semi-distributed hydrological model. It considers soils, land use and
228 management conditions to predict the impact of land management practices
229 on water and sediment within large complex basins where there might be no
230 monitoring data over long periods of time (Neitsch et al., 2009).

231 Both hydrological and sediment dynamics in SWAT are simulated in two
232 components: over the land, and in the channel network. More information
233 about SWAT hydrological can be found in Arnold et al. (1998) and Neitsch et al.
234 (2009).

235 To calculate the sediments from the landscape component, SWAT computes
236 the erosion caused by rainfall with the Modified Universal Soil Loss Equation
237 (MUSLE) for each HRU (Neitsch et al., 2009; Williams, 1975). This equation
238 considers the surface runoff volume, peak runoff rate, soil erodibility, land
239 cover and management, topographic and coarse fragment factor, as follows:

$$sed = 11.8 \cdot (Q_{surf} \cdot q_{peak} \cdot area_{hru})^{0.56} \cdot K_{USLE} \cdot C_{USLE} \cdot P_{USLE} \cdot LS_{USLE} \cdot CFRG \quad (1)$$

240 where *sed* is the sediment yield on a given day (t), Q_{surf} is the surface runoff
241 volume ($\text{mm H}_2\text{O ha}^{-1}$), q_{peak} is the peak runoff rate ($\text{m}^3 \text{s}^{-1}$), $area_{hru}$ is the area
242 of the HRU (ha), K_{USLE} is the USLE soil erodibility factor which is related to the
243 properties of the soil itself ($0.013 \text{ ton m}_2 \text{ hr}/(\text{m}^3 \text{ ton cm})$), C_{USLE} is the USLE land
244 cover and management factor (defined as the ratio of soil loss from land
245 cropped under specified conditions to the corresponding loss from clean-tilled,

246 continuous fallow), P_{USLE} is the USLE support (agricultural) practice factor
 247 (defined as the ratio of soil loss with a specific support practice, such as
 248 contour tillage, strip cropping and terrace systems, to the corresponding loss
 249 with up-and-down slope culture), LS_{USLE} is the USLE topographic factor
 250 calculated according to the slopes of the basin, and CFRG is the coarse
 251 fragment factor.

252 The sediment routing in the channel is a function of two processes: deposition
 253 and degradation, operating simultaneously in the reach. The Simplified
 254 Bagnold equation (1977) is used as a default method for the sediment routing
 255 in stream channels which determines degradation as a function of channel
 256 slope and flow velocity. The maximum amount of sediment that can be
 257 transported is a function of the peak channel velocity, as follows:

$$conc_{sed,ch,mx} = c_{sp} \cdot v_{ch,pk}^{spexp} = c_{sp} \cdot \left(\frac{q_{ch,pk}}{A_{ch}} \right)^{spexp} = c_{sp} \cdot \left(\frac{prf \cdot q_{ch}}{A_{ch}} \right)^{spexp} \quad (2)$$

258 where $conc_{sed,ch,mx}$ is the maximum concentration of sediment that can be
 259 transported by the water ($t \cdot m^{-3}$), c_{sp} is a coefficient defined by the user, $v_{ch,pk}$
 260 the peak channel velocity ($m \cdot s^{-1}$), $spexp$ is an exponent defined by the user,
 261 $q_{ch,pk}$ is the peak flow rate ($m^3 \cdot s^{-1}$), A_{ch} is the cross-sectional area of flow in the
 262 channel (m^2), prf is the peak rate adjustment factor, and q_{ch} is the average rate
 263 of flow ($m^3 \cdot s^{-1}$).

264 2.3.2. SWAT data inputs

265 The topography, land cover and soil maps of the Red River basin for the model

266 are presented here to give a better understanding of the characteristic of the
267 Red River basin (Figure 2, Wei et al., 2019). The climate inputs including daily
268 temperature and precipitation were obtained from remote sensing databases:
269 Climate Forecast System Reanalysis (CFSR) and Tropical Rainfall Measuring
270 Mission (TRMM, product 3B42 V7). The CFSR is a global, high resolution and
271 reanalysis product, coupled atmosphere-ocean-land surface-sea-ice system
272 designed to provide the best estimate of the state of these coupled domains
273 over this period. CFSR, combining with hydrology models, has been proved to
274 result in similar accuracy for computing Q as using surface observation data on
275 large river basins (Dile and Srinivasan, 2014; Lauri et al., 2014). Simons et al.
276 (2016) compared several satellite-based precipitation products to actual
277 evapotranspiration products in the Red River basin and found that TRMM
278 rainfall product could provide reliable values in both space and time at this
279 basin. The resolutions and downloading sources of the above inputs can be
280 found in the supplementary material (Table S-1).

281

282 Figure 2: (a) digital elevation model (gray shades); (b) slope classes: slopes were divided into 5 classes by
283 SWAT based on the (DEM); (c) land use map; (d) soil types. Data sources are presented in the
284 supplementary material (Table S-1), and the legends of land use and soil are detailed in the
285 supplementary material (Tables S-2 and S-3).

286 2.3.3. Model set up

287 The whole basin was divided into 242 sub-basins by model based on 1) the
288 characteristics of the basin according to the input data (DEM, soil property and
289 land use); 2) the gauge stations and sampling sites; 3) dam locations; 4)

290 harmonized size of all the sub-basins.

291 The main large dams in Table 1 were added to the model. In order to
292 disentangle and quantify the impacts of the dams, two scenarios were
293 simulated (Figure 3): (a) actual conditions with the existing dams; (b) reference
294 scenario without dams. The difference between these two scenarios was the
295 dam implementations. New dams mainly started to operate in 2008, therefore,
296 the study period was divided into two sub-periods (pre-new-dams: 2000-2007
297 and post-new-dams: 2008-2013) to evaluate the total impact from old and new
298 dams.

299 The hydrological parameters were kept the same for both periods
300 (pre-new-dams and post-new-dams) for both the actual conditions and the
301 reference scenario. Sediment parameters in Equation (1) and (2) were the
302 same for pre-new-dams and post-new-dams periods except for the parameter
303 c_{sp} which expresses the river bed erodibility. The dam implementations change
304 the particle size distribution downstream, leading to a change in the channel
305 erodibility (Wei et al., 2019). Therefore, c_{sp} was decreased from 0.008 for the
306 pre-new-dams period to 0.002 for the post-new-dams period. For the reference
307 scenario, the sediment parameters were kept the same as the pre-new-dams
308 of the actual conditions. The sediment parameters setting is presented in Table
309 S-4 in the supplementary material.

310 The simulation was carried out and calibrated on a daily scale from 2000 to
311 2013 and analyzed at different temporal scales (daily, monthly and annual).

312

313 Figure 3. Scenarios setting: actual conditions and reference scenario. Gray triangles are the old dams built
314 before 2000 and black triangles are the new dams built after 2007.

315 2.3.4. Model evaluation and validation

316 Based on the daily-scale simulation, simulated monthly and annual SF were
317 extracted to compare with observed data for checking the performance of the
318 model. Following the recommendations by Moriasi et al. (2007), coefficient of
319 determination (R^2), Nash–Sutcliffe Efficiency (NSE), and Percent Bias (PBIAS)
320 were used to evaluate the simulations.

321 Results from the reference scenario were validated by comparing to the results
322 from Lu et al. (2015), Vinh et al. (2014) and Dang et al. (2010).

323 **2.4. Estimating the impacts of short-term climate variability and dams on** 324 **SF**

325 By comparing the mean annual SF of reference scenario between 2000-2007
326 and 2008-2013, the impacts of short-term climate variability can be quantified
327 (Figure 3). By comparing the mean annual SF during 2008-2013 between
328 actual conditions and reference scenarios, the impacts of dams can be
329 quantified. By comparing the mean annual SF of actual conditions between
330 2000-2007 and 2008-2013, the impacts of four new dams and short-term
331 climate variability can be quantified.

332 In this study, we hypothesized that the impact of the land use changes during
333 our study period was not significant. Some researchers used a modelling
334 approach to examine the impacts of land use changes on SF in Vietnam and
335 found that an 11-16% decrease in forest land was likely to increase 3.0-3.9%

336 SF (Khoi and Suetsugi, 2014; Phan et al., 2010). In the Red River basin,
337 between 2000 and 2010, the forest percentage stayed the same, and the
338 farmland increased by 8% from bare land (Le et al., 2018), which might cause
339 less than 2% increase of SF according to Khoi & Suetsugi (2014) and Phan et
340 al. (2010). Therefore, we took into account the impact of land uses on SF but
341 not of its changes during the study period.

342 **2.5. Q-SF simple relationships**

343 Another advantage of this modelling approach is that from the outputs of the
344 modelling, the relationships (rating curves) between Q and SF can be inferred
345 at any point within this basin, which enables people to estimate SF at any point
346 with limited Q data. In this study, we would explore and present the
347 relationships between monthly mean Q and SF for the 5 gauge stations as an
348 example to show the benefits of this modelling. The results are presented in
349 section 3.3. Different temporal scale relationships, such as daily or annual
350 Q-SF relationships, can also be inferred by using the outputs of the modelling.

351 **2.6. Identifying the influencing factors of soil erosion from landscape**

352 The SS in the river can come from both hillslope soil erosion and channel
353 processes. Therefore, having an insight into the land soil erosion can help
354 people understand the source of the SS.

355 Hot spots of land soil erosion were identified according to the model outputs,
356 and the main triggering factors were determined from the correlations between
357 them and SF according to the principal component analysis (PCA) method

358 described below.

359 PCA was used in this study to identify the factors influencing soil erosion in this
360 basin. More detailed explanations of this method can be seen in Basilevsky
361 (1994), Lever et al. (2017), Ringnér (2008) and Wold et al. (1987). Based on
362 the parameters in Equation (1) and (2) and the analysis of parameters in the
363 study of Wei et al. (2019), the following variables of each sub-basin were
364 added into the PCA model to identify the main factor involved in SE in the
365 basing: soil erosion (SE), precipitation (P), water yield (WY), surface runoff
366 (SR), USLE soil erodibility factor (USLE_K), USLE agricultural practice factor
367 (USLE_P), slope, and the percentages of sand (Sand%), silt (Silt%) and clay
368 (Clay%) in soil. The input data to the PCA was the mean annual values of each
369 variable of 242 sub-basins. Results about soil erosion hot spots and triggering
370 factors are presented in section 3.4.

371 **3. RESULTS**

372 **3.1. SF under actual conditions**

373 3.1.1. Monthly variations of actual SF

374 Monthly and annual SF simulations and observations were plotted in Figure 4
375 and Figure 5, and their related statistics evaluations were reported in Table 3.
376 From the general performance ratings at monthly scale recommended by
377 Moriasi et al. (2007), Lao Cai, Yen Bai, Hoa Binh and Son Tay stations gained
378 good performance; Vu Quang station gained satisfactory performance. PBIAS
379 values indicate that the model slightly overestimated SF at most stations, and

380 underestimated SF at Hoa Binh station.

381 Table 3 Evaluation statistics of sediment flux (SF) on different time scales for each station from 2000 to
382 2013

383

384 Thanks to the satisfactory calibration of Q and SSC presented in Wei et al.
385 (2019), simulated SF shows similar trends as observed SF and can be
386 considered as satisfactory results (Figure 4). Base flow of simulated monthly
387 SF fits well with observations at all stations.

388 SF shows great seasonal variations, especially in the Thao River (see stations
389 of Lao Cai and Yen Bai in Figure 4). Maximum flux usually occurs from July to
390 September, and minimum flux generally happens from February and March.
391 87-91% of the annual total SF was produced during the flood season (May to
392 October). The ranges of monthly SF variations and the values of mean monthly
393 SF for flood and dry seasons at each station were summarized in Table 4. The
394 Thao sub-basin has the highest SF and specific sediment yield (SSY)
395 compared to the other two sub-basins and to the whole Red River basin.

396 Table 4 Seasonal variation of sediment fluxes and mean monthly sediment fluxes for flood and dry
397 seasons at five gauge stations

398

399

400 Figure 4. Observed (black dot) and simulated (gray solid line) monthly sediment flux, and simulated
401 sediment flux of reference scenario (without dams, gray dash line) at five stations from 2000 to 2013.

402

403 3.1.2. Annual variations of actual SF

404 The annual SF exhibits different temporal and spatial variations among the 5
405 gauge stations (Figure 5). For the Thao River, the simulated annual SF ranged
406 from 6.8 to 73.6 Mt yr⁻¹ at Lao Cai (with 30.7 Mt yr⁻¹ on average during
407 2000-2013, Table 5), and from 11.7 to 85.9 Mt yr⁻¹ at Yen Bai (39.8 Mt yr⁻¹ on
408 average). The Lo River at Vu Quang is predicted to produce SF ranging from
409 2.0 to 12.5 Mt yr⁻¹ (with 6.6 Mt yr⁻¹ on average). On the Da River at Hoa Binh
410 station, the minimum annual SF was 0.8 Mt yr⁻¹ and the maximum was 7.1 Mt
411 yr⁻¹ (with 3.6 Mt yr⁻¹ on average). Amongst these three tributaries, the Thao
412 River produces the highest SF, followed by the Lo River, and the Da River
413 generates the lowest SF. The Thao River shows higher SF than the other two
414 tributaries due to its high SSC (the annual mean SSC during 2000-2013 at Lao
415 Cai and Yen Bai were 1057 and 1003 mg L⁻¹, respectively, Wei et al., 2019).
416 Even though SSC at Hoa Binh station on the Da River (the annual mean SSC
417 during 2000-2013 was 57 mg L⁻¹, Wei et al., 2019) is much smaller than at Vu
418 Quang on the Lo River (the annual mean SSC during 2000-2013 was 172 mg
419 L⁻¹, Wei et al., 2019), the SF of these two rivers are in the same range. The Da
420 River has a larger runoff (the annual mean Q during 2000-2013 was 1362 m³
421 s⁻¹, Wei et al., 2019) with low SSC induced by dam retention, while the Lo
422 River has a lower runoff (the annual mean Q during 2000-2013 was 729 m³ s⁻¹,
423 Wei et al., 2019) with a higher SSC. As the confluence of these tributaries, the
424 Red River (at Son Tay station) yields an annual SF at the range of 8.0-69.2 Mt
425 yr⁻¹, with an average specific sediment yield (SSY) of 240.3 t km⁻² yr⁻¹ over

426 2000-2013 ($357.6 \text{ t km}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1}$ over 2000-2007 and $84.5 \text{ t km}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1}$ over
427 2008-2013).

428

429 Figure 5. Annual sediment flux (SF) variation from 2000-2013 at 5 gauge stations, and the mean annual
430 SF of pre-new-dams (2000-2007) and post-new-dams (2008-2013). The annual precipitation variation of
431 the whole basin from 2000-2013.

432 The values of mean annual SF during the study period and sub-periods from
433 references are displayed in Table 5. For the whole study period, simulated
434 mean annual SF shows a good match with in-situ data, though slight
435 overestimation at Yen Bai and Son Tay stations. By comparing the mean
436 annual SF of 2008-2013 between reference scenario and actual conditions,
437 the mean annual sediment trapped by the dams during this period ranged from
438 7.1 Mt yr^{-1} (Lo River) to 111.0 Mt yr^{-1} (Da River).

439 Table 5 Simulated sediment flux (Mt yr^{-1}) of reference scenario (without dams) and actual conditions (over the whole study period, 2000-2007 period and 2008-2013 period)
440 compared with other studies and in-situ data; values of trapped sediment (calculated as the difference between average values over 2008-2013 in the reference scenario and
441 actual simulations); impacts of short-term climate variability and dams.

442 AC[†]: Actual Conditions

443 RS[‡]: Reference Scenario (without dams)

444 **3.2. SF of reference scenario (without dams)**

445 3.2.1. Inter-annual variations

446 Like the actual SF (Figure 5), interannual SF of reference scenario (without
447 dams) exhibits high variations. During the study period, results from reference
448 scenario suggest that annual SF at Lao Cai, Yen Bai, Vu Quang and Hoa Binh
449 stations should have been from 21.3 to 73.6 Mt yr⁻¹, 29.6 to 90.7 Mt yr⁻¹, 6.9 to
450 15.8 Mt yr⁻¹, 81.5 to 191.0 Mt yr⁻¹, respectively, thus with a factor of 3 between
451 the highest and the lowest values in the Thao River, and a factor of 2.3 in the
452 Lo and Da rivers. According to the results at the outlet (Son Tay station) the
453 Red River basin should have exported 69.6 to 170.7 Mt yr⁻¹ of sediment, with
454 an average SSY of 778.8 t km⁻² yr⁻¹ over 2000-2013.

455 3.2.2. Mean annual SF

456 Annual SF of reference scenario was compared with observed data from
457 references (Dang et al., 2010; Lu et al., 2015; Vinh et al., 2014, Table 5) which
458 covered periods preceding the dams constructions, i.e. before 1979. Despite
459 different periods, the simulations without dams for most stations (except Hoa
460 Binh station) are close to those in-situ data. At Son Tay, the simulation without
461 dams is slightly lower (~10%) than those reference data. These comparisons
462 show that the model produces an acceptable simulation of SF without dams.

463 **3.3. Simple Q-SF relationship under actual conditions**

464 By using the outputs of the modelling, the simple relationships between Q and
465 SF can be inferred at any point within the Red River and any temporal scales.
466 As monthly mean Q data can be more easily accessed or gained, therefore,
467 here we inferred the monthly mean Q-SF rating curves at the five gauge
468 stations as an example.

469 For both the 2000-2007 and 2008-2013 periods, monthly simulated SF of
470 actual conditions showed a positive power-law relation with monthly simulated
471 Q for the 5 gauge stations as shown by fitted curves in Figure 6, with R^2 above
472 0.96. These 5 stations exported less SF after 2008, which highlights the
473 changes caused by short-term climate variability and by sediment retention of
474 dams. We, therefore, established separately power-law relationships between
475 simulated Q and SF for both periods before and after 2008.

476

477 Figure 6. Correlation and relations between simulated monthly mean discharge (Q) and simulated monthly
478 mean sediment fluxes (SF) at 5 stations in the simulation under actual conditions. Gray solid squares are
479 of the period 2000-2007; gray hollow squares are of the period 2008-2013. Black solid and dash lines are
480 the fitting curves of the period 2000-2007 and 2008-2013, respectively.

481 **3.4. Hot spots of soil erosions**

482 The SWAT model can not only be used to simulate, study and assess the
483 in-stream SF, but also the sediment erosion from the land component. Then,
484 based on these simulated mean annual sediment fluxes and soil erosion, hot
485 spots of erosion were identified and presented in Figure 7c.

486 The model results indicate that the mean annual soil erosion in the whole basin
487 ranged from 0.01 to 43.4 t ha⁻¹ yr⁻¹, with a mean of 5.5 t ha⁻¹ yr⁻¹ (Figure 7c),
488 and the mean annual soil erosion of the Red River basin during 2000-2013
489 was 64.0 Mt yr⁻¹. High erosion areas are identified in the middle part of the
490 Thao River and the downstream of the Da River: with high precipitation (>1500
491 mm yr⁻¹, Figure 7a) and surface runoff (>450 mm yr⁻¹, Figure 7b), Lai Chau
492 (sub-basin 173), Lao Cai (sub-basins 116, 117, 135, 148, 149, 157), Ha Giang
493 (sub-basin 119) and Son La (sub-basins 218, 232, 234, 237, 240, 241)
494 provinces are the most vulnerable to soil erosion, and their mean annual
495 erosion rate during the study period can be above 20 t ha⁻¹.

496 Figure 7d presents the in-stream SF spatial variations. High SF can reach
497 locally above 80 t yr⁻¹, with hot spots of high values identified upstream of the
498 Hoa Binh dam, which corresponds with the annual SF values before Hoa Binh
499 dam construction (Table 5).

500

501 Figure 7. Mean annual value of (a) Precipitation distribution (mm yr⁻¹), (b) Surface Runoff (mm yr⁻¹), (c)
502 Soil Erosion (ton ha⁻¹ yr⁻¹), (d) In-stream Sediment Flux (ton yr⁻¹) within 242 sub-basins, derived from the
503 actual conditions simulation over the period 2000-2013.

504 Principal component analysis (PCA) was applied to identify the factors
505 influencing soil erosion (Table 6). The PCA results based on the correlation
506 matrix analysis with Varimax rotation produce 3 principal components (PCs)
507 with eigenvalues greater than 1.00, corresponding to an overall cumulative
508 variance of 78.3%, moreover, the 2 first PCs represent a cumulated variance of

509 67.5%.

510 Table 6 The principal component (PC) loading

511 †: the simulation from the model

512 ‡: the observation and input data

513 Notes: underlined values correspond to the first three highest factor loadings in the PC.

514

515 **4. DISCUSSION**

516 **4.1. Uncertainties**

517 Differences between simulations and observations are large on some peaks of
518 SF flow: during these peaks, the SF can be underestimated by a factor >2
519 (Figure 4). Uncertainties can come from three factors: uncertainties associated
520 with rainfall satellite input data; errors due to the numerical simulation
521 approximations; uncertainties associated with in-situ measurement errors on Q
522 and SSC.

523 Previous studies indicated that the TRMM (satellite rainfall dataset)
524 underestimated the rainfall when there were intensive or extreme rainfall
525 events (Le et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2015; Simons et al., 2016). The
526 underestimations on rainfall values can cause underestimations in Q
527 simulation which might induce underestimations in channel erosion and
528 re-suspended processes (Wei et al., 2019) and also in soil erosion.

529 Some studies indeed showed that modelling might underestimate SSC during
530 high and intensive rainfall (Oeurng et al., 2011; Xu et al., 2009). Modelling

531 errors can come from the simplification of algorithms. For example, in SWAT,
532 for land erosion SWAT model uses a runoff factor instead of rainfall energy
533 factor (Equation 1); and for the channel processes, SWAT uses a simplified
534 version of Bagnold stream power equation to calculate the maximum amount
535 of sediment that could be transported in a stream segment (Equation 2,
536 Bagnold, 1977; Neitsch et al., 2009). However, this algorithm does not keep
537 track of particle size distribution of elements that pass through the channel,
538 and sediments all are assumed to be of silt size. Besides, the channel erosion
539 is not partitioned between stream bank and bed, and deposition is assumed to
540 occur only in the main channel; flood plain sediment deposition is also not
541 modelled separately (Neitsch et al., 2009). Therefore, this simplification can
542 cause deviations for sediment routing.

543 In-situ measurements and sampling strategy can also cause errors. For
544 example, a high sampling frequency enables to diminish errors in the
545 estimation of annual SF (Dang et al., 2010). Q and SSC measurements during
546 flood events are usually extrapolated by the rating curve. However, the fact
547 that those rating curves may have been established based on non-exceptional
548 conditions might cause deviations on both Q and SSC, and consequently on
549 SF.

550 Besides the above main factors, irrigation diversion and sand excavation can
551 also affect suspended sediment transfer. However, no available data to
552 quantify their impacts on SF of the Red River. Future studies should fill this
553 gap.

554 **4.2. SF variations caused by short-term climate variability**

555 Comparing the annual SF of reference scenario (without dams) between
556 2008-2013 and 2000-2007 shows that short-term climate variability has
557 different impacts on these tributaries, though it induces a decrease at most
558 stations, except at Vu Quang (Table 5 and Figure 5). The biggest impacts are
559 observed at the two stations on the Thao River (Lao Cai and Yen Bai), causing
560 an average 25% decrease of SF, followed by the Da River (Hoa Binh, ~-10%),
561 with a resulting ~10% decrease on the Red River (Son Tay). On the contrary,
562 at Vu Quang station, the mean annual SF very slightly increased by 2%, in
563 accordance with a similar Q change (2%, Wei et al., 2019).

564 In order to figure out the different responses of each tributary to short-term
565 climate variability, we compared the rainfall and water availability (the
566 difference between rainfall and evapotranspiration) variations between
567 2008-2013 and 2000-2007, and the variations are presented in Figure 8. In the
568 upper and middle parts of the Red River basin, both rainfall and water
569 availability decreased while the lower part showed an increasing tendency. At
570 sub-basin scale, the variations of the rainfall were -9% for the Thao basin, +2%
571 for the Lo basin and -2% for the Da basin; for water availability, the Thao and
572 Da basins decreased by 13% and 4%, respectively, while the Lo basin
573 increased by 7%. The impacts of short-term climate variability on SF for each
574 sub-basin are in accordance with the variations of rainfall and
575 evapotranspiration: the Thao river showed the largest reduction while the Lo
576 river showed an increase.

577 Previous studies revealed that climate variability had an effect on both Q and
578 SSC in the Red River basin (Wei et al., 2019), and suggested a decrease of
579 rainfall mean and extremes over the last decades over Southeast Asia
580 (Manton et al., 2001). A 14-year period is not long enough for detecting the
581 climate variability on SF, therefore, this study only aimed at discovering the
582 different responses of each subbasin to the short-term climate variability during
583 the study period, and does not make conclusions for climate changes and the
584 tendency for the future. Longer periods of study are needed to study the
585 climate trends and variability effects on SF. The SF trend of the Red River
586 under the influence of long-term climate variability and hydrology changes will
587 be carried out in future studies based on the methodology proposed by this
588 study.

589

590 Figure 8. The differences in annual rainfall (a) and annual water availability (b) between 2008-2013 and
591 2000-2007.

592 **4.3. Impacts of dams**

593 4.3.1. The reduction caused by dams

594 Among the three tributaries, dams' impact on the outlet of the Da River (Hoa
595 Binh station) is the most severe, followed by the Lo River; and the dams are
596 less affected on the Thao River (Table 5). Two new dams in China caused
597 around a 48% reduction of SF on the Thao River. More cascade dams are
598 under construction in China, so this value can provide a reference for future

599 studies. The dams on the Lo River reduced around 74% of the annual SF. The
600 large dams on the Da River show an enormous impact on SF, and the trap
601 efficiency is 89% compared to 86-91% from other studies which did not
602 estimate the specific impacts of climate variations of different periods and
603 neither the impact of the Son La dam (Dang et al., 2010; Vinh et al., 2014). At
604 the outlet of the Red River basin, the dams upstream caused an 80% decrease
605 of annual SF.

606 The Son La and Hoa Binh dams on the Da River have large capacities and are
607 located quite downstream to the outlet of the river compared to the dams on
608 the other two tributaries, explaining their higher relative impact. The capacities
609 of the Thac Ba and Tuyen Quang dams are also larger than the two dams on
610 the Thao River. The two dams (Nansha and Madushan) on the Thao River are
611 above 100 km upstream of the Yen Bai station, and along the reach between
612 the dams and Yen Bai station, the impacts of dams on sediment transport are
613 mitigated by the degradation and the soil erosion from the land component.
614 Therefore, the dams show larger impact at the outlet of the Lo River than the
615 Thao River.

616 Previous studies (Dang et al., 2010; Lu et al., 2015; Vinh et al., 2014) used
617 long-term observed Q and SSC data to analyse the impact of dams on SF.
618 Dang et al. (2010) analysed the observed Q and SSC from 1960-2008, but
619 only at Son Tay station, did not study the Lo and the Da rivers; Vinh et al. (2014)
620 analysed the observed data from 1960-2010 at four stations (not in Lao Cai)
621 and focused the analysis on the impact of the Hoa Binh dam; Lu et al. (2015)

622 also used the observed data from 1960-2010 to assess the impact of a
623 sequence of dams but without considering the dams upstream in China. This
624 study revisits the impacts of dams by taking into account more dams recently
625 built in the Red River basin. With more dams implemented after 2013 or
626 planned at short/mid-term on these three tributaries, the sediment trap
627 efficiency might still increase and the SF decreases at the outlet of each
628 tributary, consequently at the outlet of the Red River.

629 4.3.2. Impacts on dynamic processes

630 From the seasonal variation of SF (Figure 4), it can be noticed that the flow
631 curve (dynamic processes) with and without dams are similar; the impacts of
632 dams are significant on SF peak flow during flood seasons, and dams have
633 much fewer impacts on the base flow of SF.

634 However, the impacts on the dynamic processes at each station can be
635 different. For example, in 2008, the simulation without dams seems to fit the
636 observations better at Yen Bai and Vu Quang than at other stations. This
637 suggests that, on the same river (Thao), the Nansha dam had weaker impacts
638 at Yen Bai (located more downstream, Figure 1) than at Lao Cai for the first
639 year of dam operation, and it can be related to the sediment degradation
640 processes between Lao Cai and Yen Bai. Also, the Tuyen Quang dam only
641 slightly impacted SF at Vu Quang for the first year of implementation,
642 presumably because the Lo River has much less SS than the other two
643 tributaries and the sediment retention caused by the new dam at the first year

644 can be relatively lighter. Besides, the Tuyen Quang dam is located on one
645 tributary of the Lo River, whereas the other dams are located directly in the
646 main branch of the Thao and Da rivers. Therefore, the Tuyen Quang dam on
647 the Lo River has smaller impacts on sediment transport. In addition, the
648 operation scheme of these new dams can be also a reason that induces
649 different impacts on SS dynamic processes as different discharge releases
650 can carry different amounts of sediment, and discharge release of each dam
651 depends on the main function (flood control or irrigation or power generation)
652 of this dam and its capacity (Wang et al., 2017).

653 **4.4. Soil erosion**

654 The PCA results identified the factor loadings of each component (Table 6):
655 PC1 (consisted of precipitation (P), water yield (WY) and surface runoff (SR))
656 has the highest weighted variable (41.6%), followed by PC2 (25.9%) which is
657 consisted of soil erosion (SE), slope and USLE agricultural practice factor
658 (USLE_P), and PC3 (10.8%, the percentage of sand (Sand%), silt (Silt%) and
659 clay (Clay%) in soil, i.e. the soil texture). Therefore, precipitation (as water
660 yield and surface runoff are fractions of precipitation), slope and USLE
661 agricultural practice factor (USLE_P) are key influence factors for soil erosion
662 in the Red River basin. The soil texture is also a significant factor. Our results
663 are in agreement with He et al. (2007) who indicated that human activities and
664 climate change are the major influences to the sediment change in the
665 mountainous upstream area in China and Ranzi et al. (2012) who highlighted
666 the major role of rainfall in soil erosion in the Lo basin; Yang et al. (2003) found

667 that the hot spots of soil erosion in Southeast Asia were close mountainous
668 areas located in the tectonic zones and dense croplands regions where both
669 natural geomorphology and human activity are major factors for inducing soil
670 erosion. In the middle part of the Ren River basin (especially in the Thao and
671 Da subbasins), agricultural activities are distributed in these mountain areas
672 with steep slopes, and terrace systems and contour farming are popular.
673 Therefore, in these hot spots of soil erosion, agricultural practices on steep
674 mountain areas should be paid attention. With more forests might be
675 converted to farmland in the future, soil erosion might be increased.

676 In the upper Red River basin in China, the soil erosion area accounted for ~44%
677 of the total basin area in China, with a soil modulus of $14.8 \text{ t ha}^{-1} \text{ yr}^{-1}$ (He et al.,
678 2007). Tuan et al. (2014) found annual soil losses from 1.8 to $174 \text{ t ha}^{-1} \text{ yr}^{-1}$
679 from plot-scale experiment near Son La. Podwojewski et al. (2008) found a soil
680 erosion from 0.86 to $13.5 \text{ t ha}^{-1} \text{ yr}^{-1}$ also in Hoa Binh province on steep slopes.
681 Based on a RUSLE model, Nguyen et al. (2012) simulated a continuous
682 increase of the soil erosion from 1970 to the recent decade 2000, from 4.9 to
683 $5.9 \text{ t ha}^{-1} \text{ yr}^{-1}$. Mai et al. (2013) found a 1.63 to $17.22 \text{ t ha}^{-1} \text{ yr}^{-1}$ erosion rate
684 near Son Tay. Our simulation is in the range of these references: from 0.01 to
685 $43.4 \text{ t ha}^{-1} \text{ yr}^{-1}$, with a mean of $5.5 \text{ t ha}^{-1} \text{ yr}^{-1}$ over the whole basin.

686 The soil of the high erosion areas - the middle part of the Thao River and the
687 downstream of the Da River (Figure 7c) - is mainly composed of Orthic Acrisols
688 (Ao90-2-3c-4284, Figure 2c and Table S-3). This type of soil is acid with
689 sandy-loamy surface soil, and prone to slaking, crusting and erosion. Acrisols

690 form the tropical red soils and red earths, and after eluviation they are
691 subjected to erosion (FAO, 2003). This result is in agreement with the above
692 conclusion obtained from PCA.

693 Estimates of annual SF show that Yen Bai produces more SF than Lao Cai
694 (~30% over the whole period, both under reference scenario and actual
695 conditions, Figure 5). This indicates that the soil erosion or/and resuspension
696 likely happens in the part of the basin between Lao Cai and Yen Bai. This can
697 be confirmed by the spatial identification of soil erosion (Figure 7c) which also
698 indicates that Lao Cai province is a hot spot of soil erosion.

699 Before the construction of Hoa Binh dam, sediment input to the Red River
700 mainly originated from the Da River (~120 Mt yr⁻¹ in the reference scenario
701 simulations, i.e. more than twice the values estimated for the other tributaries,
702 Table 5). The high in-stream SF of the Da River results from both land erosion
703 and channel degradation. Complex dam regulation can cause complex
704 hydraulics compared to the natural channel. Comparison of the reference
705 scenario (without dams) and actual conditions simulations over the period
706 2008-2013 suggests a 111 Mt yr⁻¹ value of trapped sediment at the Hoa Binh
707 dam. Such a big quantity of sediment from upstream of Hoa Binh should catch
708 the attention of the management because big sedimentation in the reservoir
709 would reduce the capacity and performance of the dam. As explained in
710 section 2.1.4, this is also a reason why the Son La dam was built.

711 **4.5. Comparison with other basins**

712 To compare our results with SF and specific sediment yield (SSY) without
713 dams obtained for other Asian rivers, the values provided by Milliman and
714 Syvitski (1992) were considered since they were obtained before 1992 and are
715 less impacted by dams than more recent estimates provided by the literature.
716 From our simulation of reference scenario (without dams), the Red River yields
717 an annual SF of 107 Mt yr⁻¹, corresponding to a SSY of 780 t km⁻² yr⁻¹ (Table 5).
718 The Yellow River produced 1100 Mt yr⁻¹ SF with a SSY of 1400 t km⁻² yr⁻¹; the
719 Yangtze River caused 480 Mt yr⁻¹ SF with a SSY of 250 t km⁻² yr⁻¹; the Pearl
720 River generated 69 Mt yr⁻¹ SF with a SSY of 160 t km⁻² yr⁻¹; the Mekong River
721 yielded 160 Mt yr⁻¹ SF with a SSY of 200 t km⁻² yr⁻¹ (Milliman and Syvitski,
722 1992). The Red River basin without dams thus exported less SF than the
723 Yellow River (-90%), the Yangtze River (-78%) and the Mekong River (-33%),
724 and 55% more than the Pearl River. However, its SSY was higher than the
725 Mekong (+290%), Pearl River (+388%), Yangtze (+212%), and nearly half of
726 the Yellow River (-44%). When compared to an equivalent surface watershed
727 such as the upper Danube (132,000 km²), the Red River basin produced
728 almost 3 times higher SSY than that of 265 t km⁻² yr⁻¹ generated by the upper
729 Danube; besides, the upper Danube basin only exported 21.2 t km⁻² yr⁻¹ to the
730 downstream part (Vigiak et al., 2015). These results show that without impacts
731 of dams, the Red River basin, though having a smaller surface than the other
732 basins in the world, would be a very large source of suspended sediments to
733 the sea due to its soil erosion caused by active tectonic movements, steep

734 slopes, deep valleys, high precipitation and intensive agricultural activities
735 along the upstream river (Le et al., 2017, 2007).

736 **4.6. Interpretation of Q-SF simple relations**

737 From Figure 6, we can see that the relation between monthly Q and SF is a
738 power-law relation of the form:

$$739 \qquad \qquad \qquad SF = aQ^b$$

740 (3)

741 where SF is the monthly mean sediment flux ($t \text{ day}^{-1}$), Q is monthly mean water
742 discharge ($m^3 \text{ s}^{-1}$), a and b are regression coefficients.

743 Equation (3) is formally in accordance with a general sediment rating curve
744 (Asselman, 2000; Syvitski et al., 2000):

$$745 \qquad \qquad \qquad SSC = a'Q^{b'}$$

746 (4)

747 where SSC is the suspended sediment concentration ($mg \text{ L}^{-1}$), a' and b' being
748 the regression coefficients. The coefficient a' represents the erodibility of the
749 soil, and is equal to SSC when Q is $1 \text{ m}^3 \text{ s}^{-1}$; a sub-basin with intensively
750 weathered materials which can be eroded and transported easily usually
751 shows a high value of the coefficient a' . The coefficient b' represents the
752 erosive power of the river and the transport capacity; it is also affected by the
753 grain size distribution of the material available for transport: rivers with
754 sand-sized sediments have higher b' values than rivers with silt and clay-sized

755 sediments.

756 As discussed before, among the three sub-basins, the Thao and Da
757 sub-basins present steep slopes and are vulnerable to soil erosion, therefore
758 their a -coefficient should be high. The two stations on the Thao River have the
759 highest a values (Figure 6); however, the Hoa Binh station on the Da River has
760 the lowest a value among these three tributaries because the eroded soil was
761 retained in the Hoa Binh dam. For each station, the a -value decreased
762 between 2000-2007 and 2008-2013 (Figure 6): dams retain the SS from
763 upstream soil erosion which induces a decrease of a value downstream of the
764 dam.

765 The average values of the median diameter D_{50} of surface sediment before
766 new dam constructions are 0.16, 0.35, 0.175 and 0.2 mm in the Thao, Da, Lo
767 rivers and the reach between the confluence of the Da and Thao rivers at Son
768 Tay, respectively (Vinh et al., 2014), and there is a relationship between the
769 parameter b (over the period 2000-2007, before new dams) and the values of
770 the median diameter D_{50} of surface sediment before new dam constructions
771 (Figure 9). The b values during 2000-2007 are similar at Lao Cai and Yen Bai
772 on the Thao river and at Vu Quang on the Lo river (from 1.61 to 1.65, Figure 6),
773 but not during 2008-2013 (1.79 at Lao Cai and Yen Bai vs. 1.59 at Vu Quang).
774 The differences of the b values between 2000-2007 and 2008-2013 can
775 indicate that the dams on the Thao and Lo rivers might change the grain size
776 distributions and transport capacity at these stations: new dam constructions
777 may have induced a higher (with b increasing) median diameter D_{50} of surface

778 sediment in the Thao river while a lower one (with b decreasing) in the Lo river.

779

780 Figure 9. Relationship between the parameter b and the values of the median diameter D50 of surface
781 sediment

782 The coefficients a and b in the simple Q-SF equation are in agreement with the
783 real sub-basin characteristics. The curves of two periods also illustrate the
784 differences of the sediment regimes during these two periods: curves of
785 2008-2013 are gentler than of 2000-2007 (Figure 6), i.e. under the same Q, the
786 SF is lower compared to 2000-2007, which is due to a combined impact of
787 climate and dams. Also, the outputs from the model can be used to infer Q-SF
788 relationship at any other point within this basin. Hence, these simple Q-SF
789 equations can be used by stakeholders to estimate the monthly SF without
790 using the SWAT model.

791 **5. CONCLUSIONS**

792 This study aimed to characterize the suspended sediment flux and the soil
793 erosion of the Red River basin by using the outputs of a numerical model and
794 in-situ data. Suspended sediment flux was quantified based on daily
795 simulations of discharge and suspended sediment concentration during a long
796 period, taking into account the successive implementations of dams and the
797 short-term climate variability during this period. Furthermore, by implementing
798 a reference scenario (without dams in this basin), this study allowed to
799 disentangle the impacts of short-term climate variability and damming at the

800 outlets of each main tributary as well as at the outlet of the continental basin.
801 This provides a reference for future studies on dams' functions and water
802 resource management.

803 Under the main influence of damming, the suspended sediment fluxes showed
804 a drastic decrease during 2008-2013 compared to 2000-2007. These two
805 influencing factors had different effects on each sub-basin. Due to the different
806 climatic characteristics, such as precipitation distribution and variation, the
807 Thao River is more sensitive to short-term climate variability than the other two
808 tributaries. Conversely, the Da River is the most affected by constructions of
809 huge-capacity dams. At the outlet of the Red River basin, the mean annual
810 sediment fluxes decreased by 90% compared to the value estimated from
811 reference scenario (without dams) during 2000-2007, of which 10% was due to
812 short-term climate variability and 80% to the dams. A power-law relation
813 between monthly mean discharge and sediment flux was provided at each
814 outlet of the main tributaries and the Red River for stakeholders and
815 decision-makers to have an easy tool to estimate the sediment flux.

816 The high advantage of the model, once it has been calibrated with data from
817 hydrological stations, is that it can serve to estimate and map each term
818 involved in the sediment transport process – including local erosion, local
819 deposition, in-stream sediment discharge, etc. – and that it can be used to infer
820 local SF-Q rating curves at any virtual station within the basin from the model
821 simulations, even where there is no true station. This point is of major interest
822 both for scientific applications (e.g., studying spatial variations of SF) and for

823 management purposes, with provinces and other stakeholders.

824 Land management (such as agricultural practice) should pay attention on the
825 high soil erosion areas located in the middle part of the Thao sub-basin and the
826 lower part of the Da sub-basin due to the precipitation distribution, topography
827 and soil texture, and river management should notice the sediment retained in
828 the dams on the Da River.

829 Some improvements can be done in future research. This study hypothesized
830 that the impact of the land use changes was not significant during our study
831 period and did not take into account the impacts of land use changes on soil
832 erosion and sediment flux. In the future, more forests might be converted into
833 farmland in this basin, therefore, it would be interesting to evaluate the impacts
834 of land use change on sediment fluxes. A more precise and higher-frequency
835 in-situ dataset would be useful, such as longer and high-frequency
836 hydrological and meteorological data at more stations, and more information
837 about dam management, in order to have a better estimation and
838 understanding of the impacts of climate variability and human interferences.

839 With on-going and future climate change and dam constructions in this basin, it
840 would be necessary to pursue further research about the sediment flux
841 variation and its associated contaminant fluxes as well as carbon transfer in
842 order to better manage this basin and protect the downstream coastal areas. In
843 addition, running numerical simulations under scenarios of global changes,
844 such as land use changes and urbanization, would allow us to estimate the

845 impacts of these changes on hydrology and suspended sediment fluxes.

846

847 **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:**

848 This research was developed in the framework of the
849 Land-Ocean-atMosphere regional coUpled System study center (LOTUS), an
850 international joint Vietnamese/French laboratory (<http://lotus.usth.edu.vn/>)
851 funded by the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD). We thank
852 LOTUS for providing the dataset, and also the research travel funds for Xi Wei
853 to collect data and information in Vietnam. The PhD scholarship of Xi Wei is
854 financially supported by the China Scholarship Council (CSC), grant number
855 201606240088.

856 **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:**

857 The authors declare that no conflict of interest could be perceived as
858 prejudicing the impartiality of the research reported.

859

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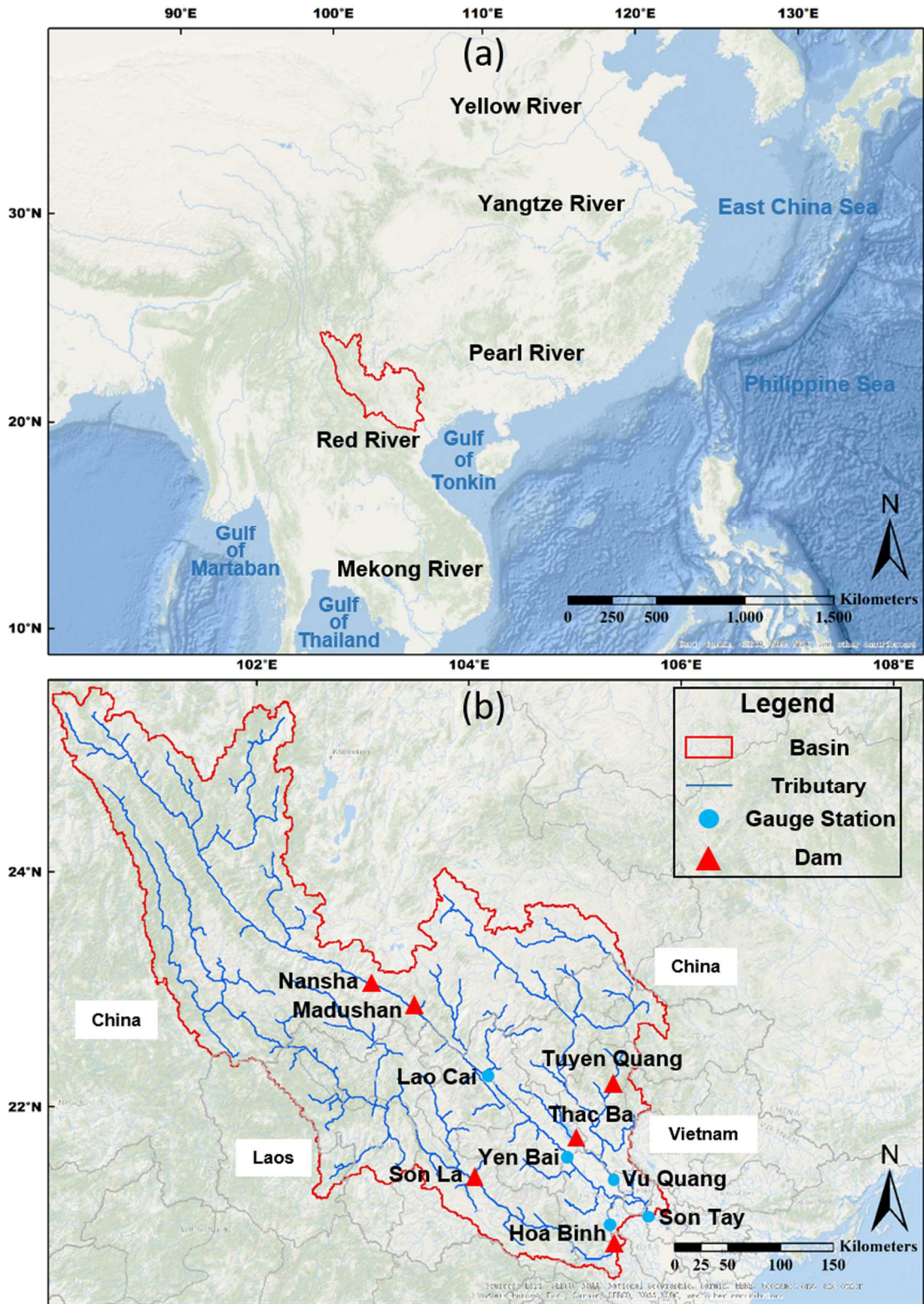
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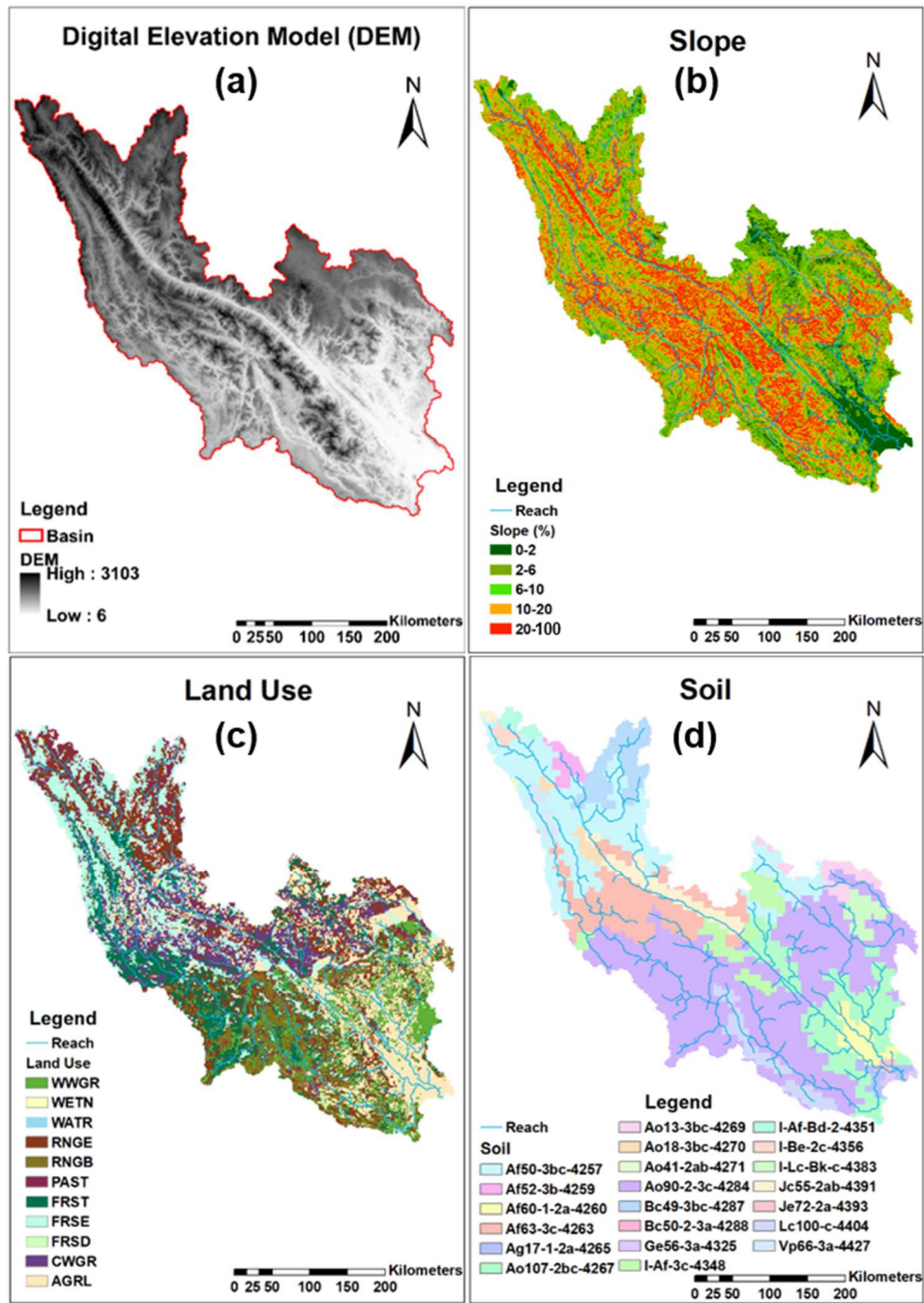
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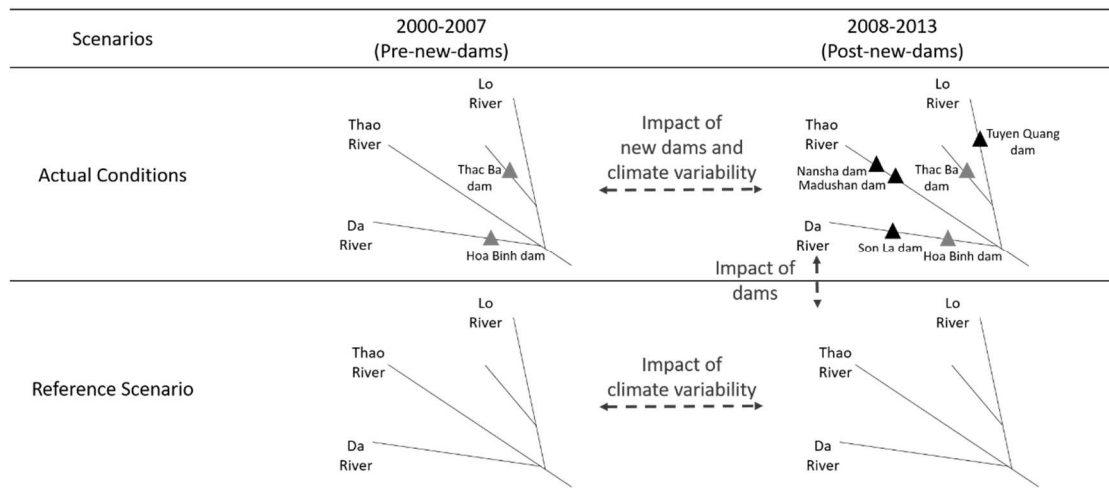
2 Figure 1. (a) The geographical location of the Red River basin in Southeast Asia; (b) locations of the
 3 dams (red triangle) and the hydrological gauge stations (blue point) in the Red River basin. Base maps
 4 sources were obtained from ArcGIS desktop.

5



6

7 Figure 2: (a) digital elevation model (gray shades); (b) slope classes: slopes were divided into 5 classes
 8 by SWAT based on the (DEM); (c) land use map; (d) soil types. Data sources are presented in the
 9 supplementary material (Table S-1), and the legends of land use and soil are detailed in the supplementary
 10 material (Tables S-2 and S-3).

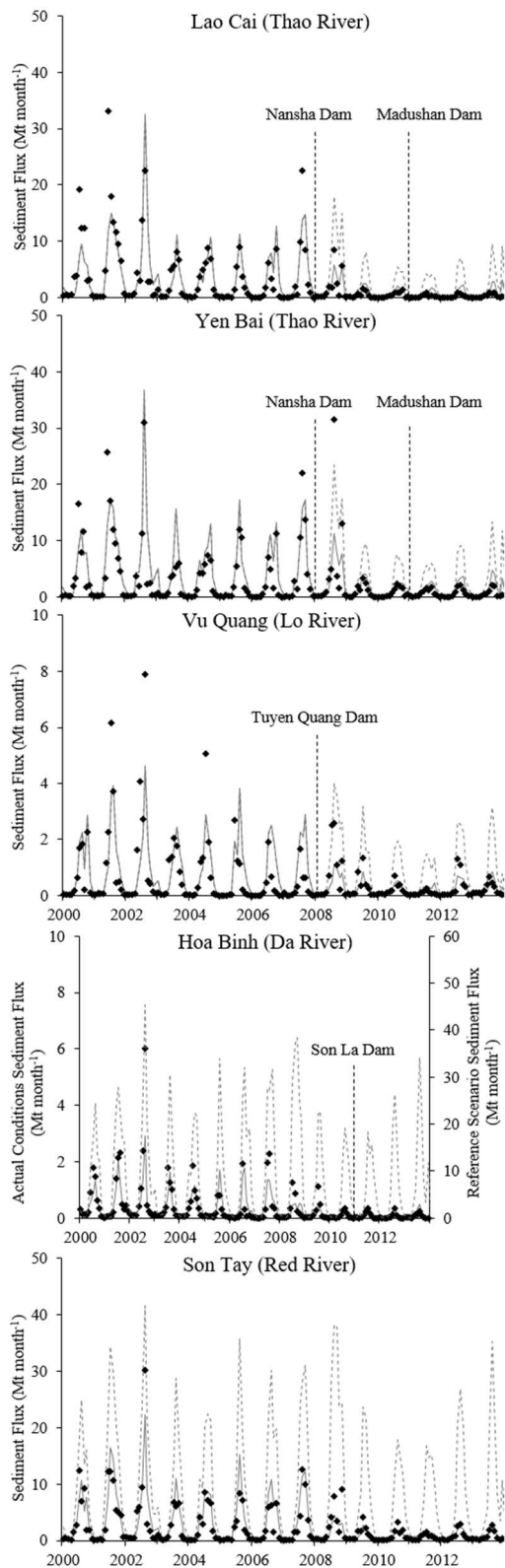


11

12 Figure 3. Scenarios setting: actual conditions and reference scenario. Gray triangles are the old dams

13 built before 2000 and black triangles are the new dams built after 2007.

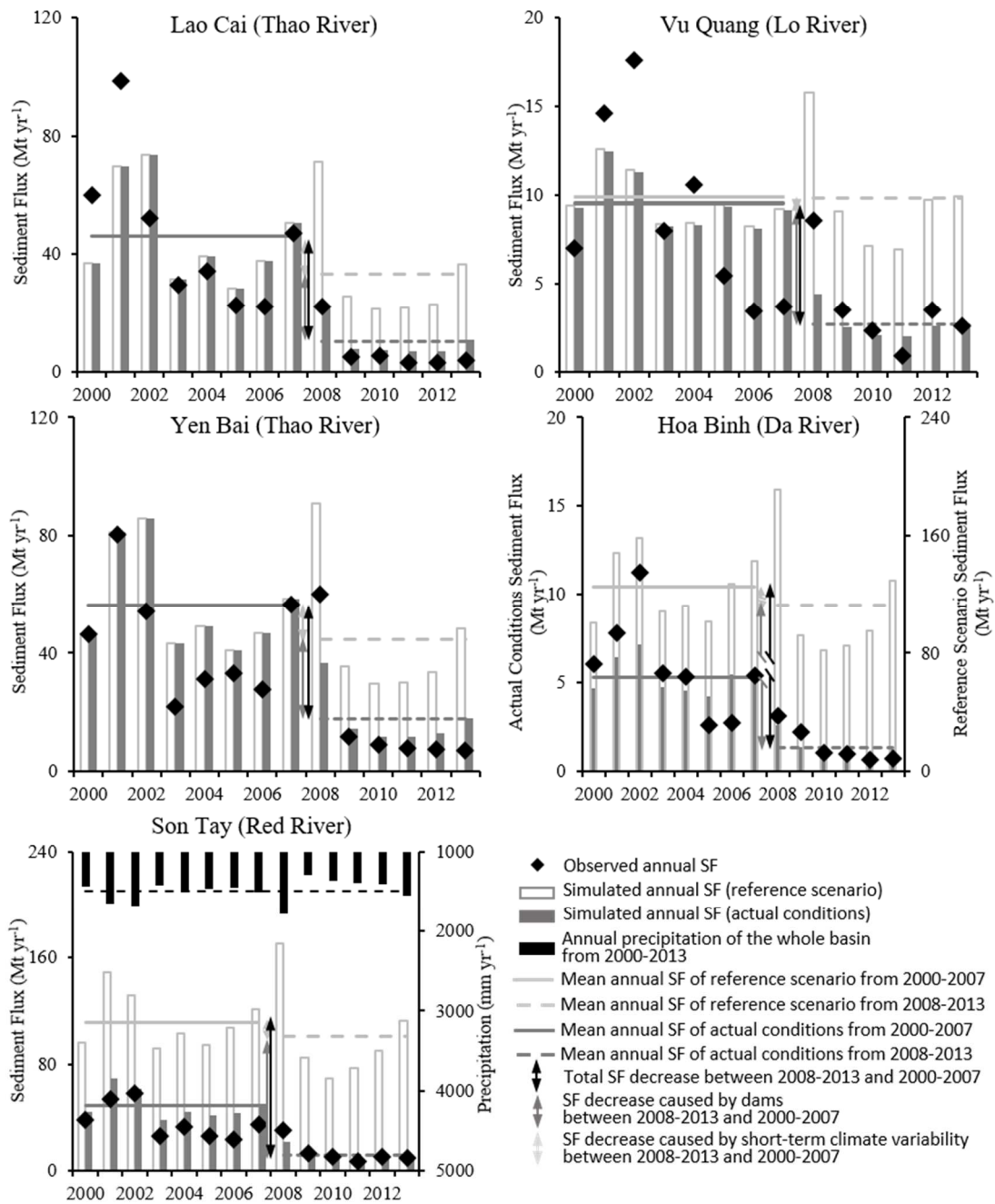
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15

16 Figure 4. Observed (black dot) and simulated (gray solid line) monthly sediment flux, and simulated
 17 sediment flux of reference scenario (without dams, gray dash line) at five stations from 2000 to 2013.

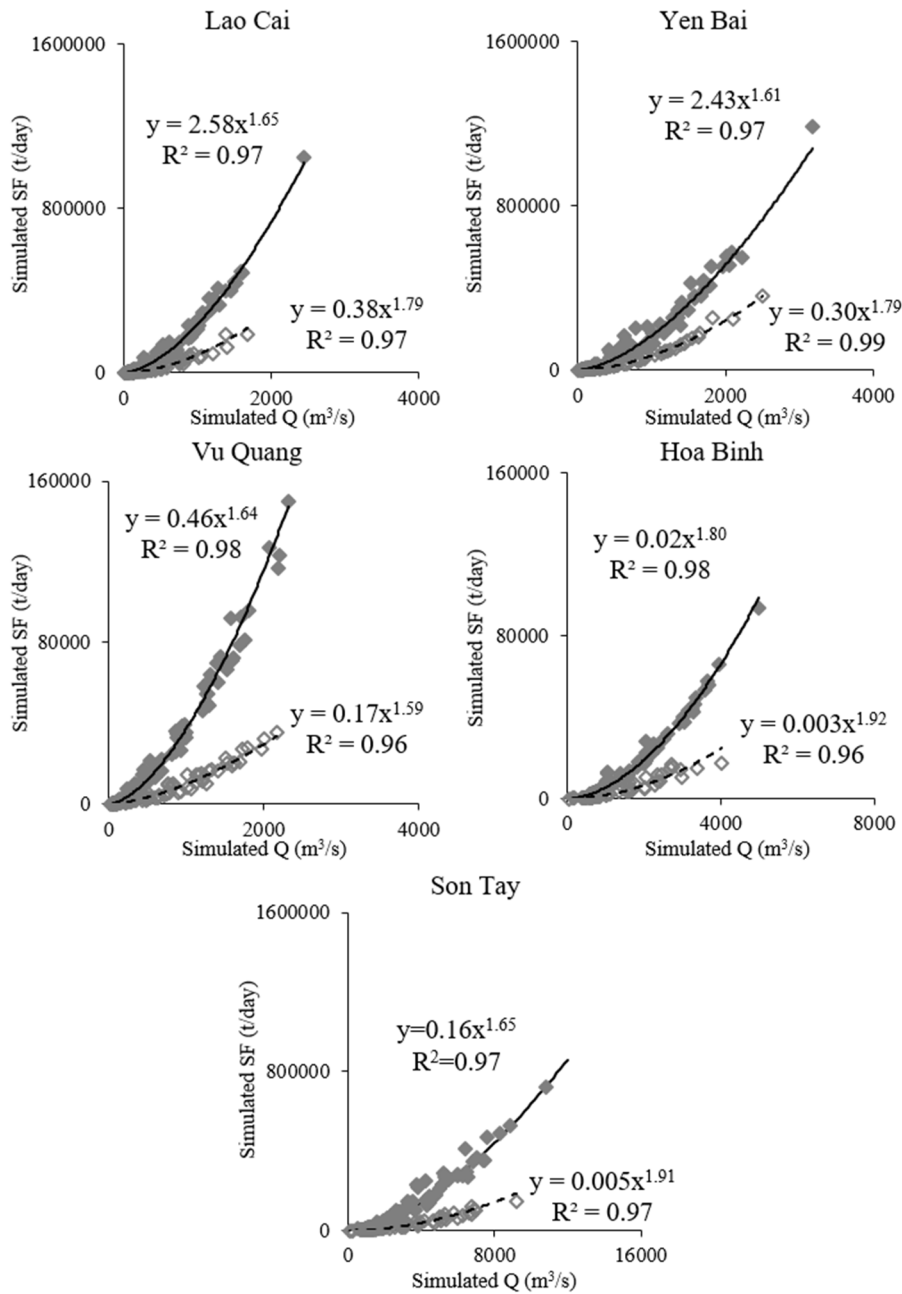
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19

20 Figure 5. Annual sediment flux (SF) variation from 2000-2013 at 5 gauge stations, and the mean annual
 21 SF of pre-new-dams (2000-2007) and post-new-dams (2008-2013). The annual precipitation variation of
 22 the whole basin from 2000-2013.

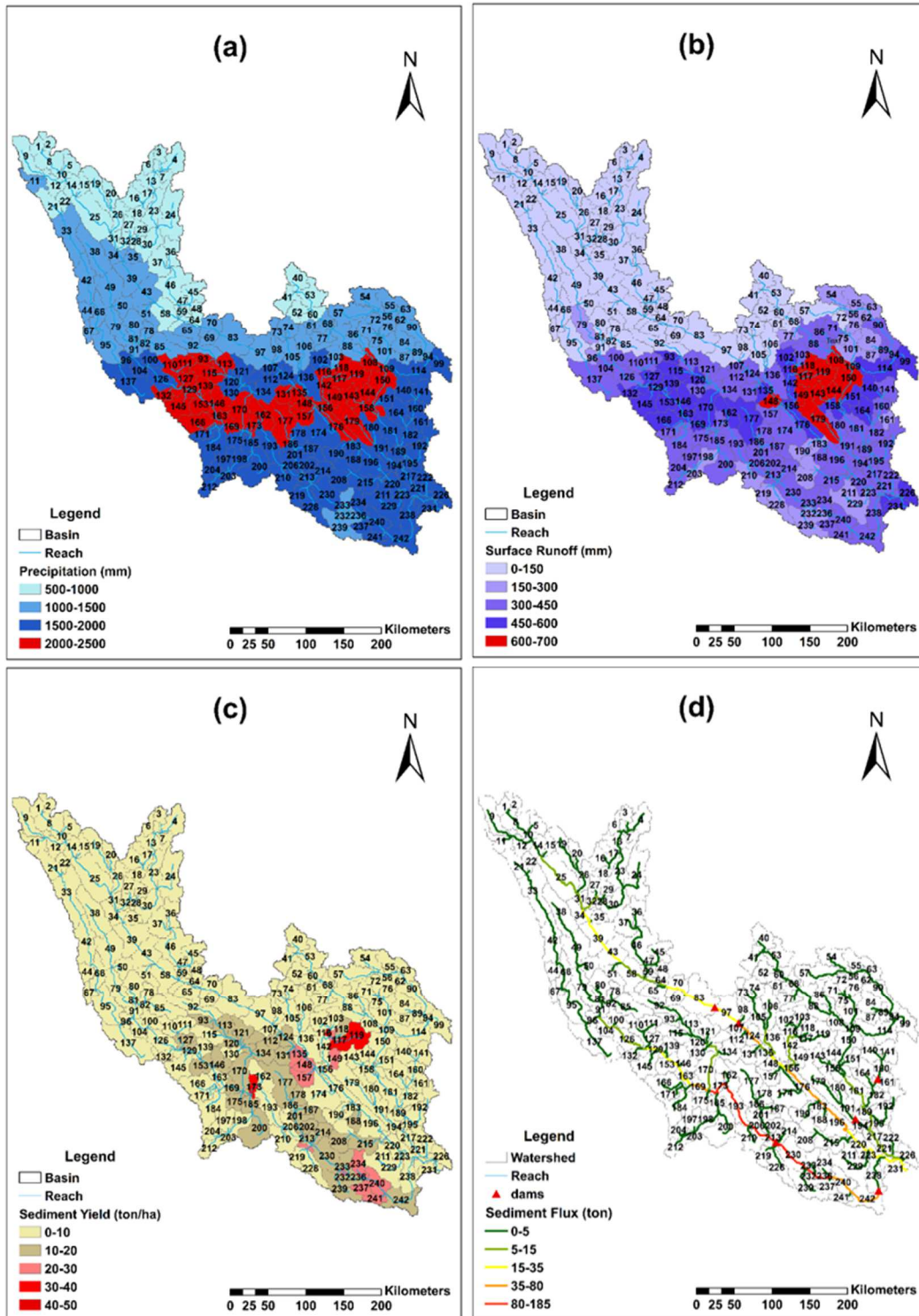
23



24

25 Figure 6. Correlation and relations between simulated monthly mean discharge (Q) and simulated monthly
 26 mean sediment fluxes (SF) at 5 stations in the simulation under actual conditions. Gray solid squares are
 27 of the period 2000-2007; gray hollow squares are of the period 2008-2013. Black solid and dash lines are
 28 the fitting curves of the period 2000-2007 and 2008-2013, respectively.

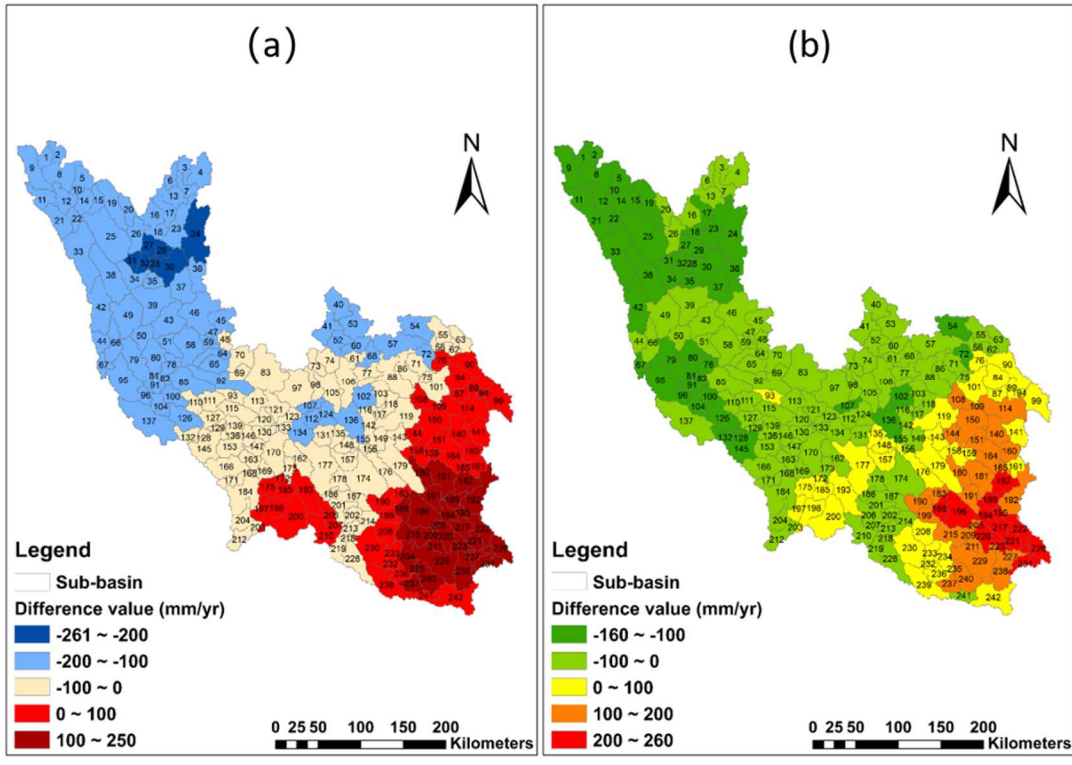
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31 Figure 7. Mean annual value of (a) Precipitation distribution (mm yr⁻¹), (b) Surface Runoff (mm yr⁻¹), (c)
 32 Soil Erosion (ton ha⁻¹ yr⁻¹), (d) In-stream Sediment Flux (ton yr⁻¹) within 242 sub-basins, derived from the
 33 actual conditions simulation over the period 2000-2013.

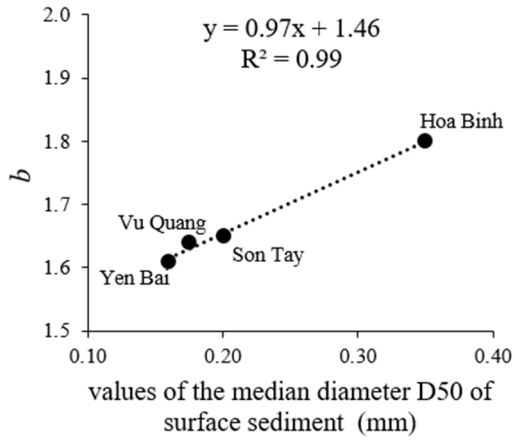
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35

36 Figure 8. The differences in annual rainfall (a) and annual water availability (b) between 2008-2013 and
 37 2000-2007.

38



39

40 Figure 9. Relationship between the parameter *b* and the values of the median diameter D50 of surface
 41 sediment.

42

1 Table 1 Basic characteristics of the main dams in the Red River basin (Le et al., 2017; Wei et al., 2019)

Dam	Basin	Construction began	Impoundment	Capacity (km ³)
Nansha	Thao	Feb-06	Nov-07	0.26
Madushan	Thao	Dec-08	Dec-10	0.55
Thac Ba	Lo	1965	1971	2.90
Tuyen Quang	Lo	Dec-02	Mar-08	2.24
Hoa Binh	Da	1980	1989	9.50
Son La	Da	Dec-05	Dec-10	9.26

2

3 Table 2 Annual mean and seasonal variation of observed discharge (Q) and suspended sediment
4 concentration (SSC) for 2000-2013 at 5 gauge stations.

Gauge Station (Basin)	Drained Area (km ²)	Q (m ³ /s)		SSC (mg/L)	
		Annual Mean	Seasonal Variation	Annual Mean	Seasonal Variation
Lao Cai (Thao)	41600	520	210-1123	800	181-1963
Yen Bai (Thao)	58500	652	218-1577	724	163-1758
Vu Quang (Lo)	30370	891	408-2138	111	22-272
Hoa Binh (Da)	52780	1638	692-3997	42	18-107
Son Tay (Red)	137230	3122	1231-7152	164	55-367

5

6 Table 3 Evaluation statistics of sediment flux (SF) on different time scales for each station from 2000 to
7 2013

Sediment Flux	Statistics	Stations				
		Lao Cai	Yen Bai	Vu Quang	Hoa Binh	Son Tay
Monthly Scale	NSE	0.67	0.66	0.62	0.72	0.71
	R ²	0.68	0.69	0.62	0.75	0.79
	PBIAS	-1.8	-8.7	-0.9	4.6	-24.5
Annual Scale	NSE	0.78	0.60	0.55	0.73	0.54
	R ²	0.78	0.73	0.55	0.77	0.86
	PBIAS	-5.2	-22.6	-0.8	8.6	-24.7

8

9

10 Table 4 Seasonal variation of sediment fluxes and mean monthly sediment fluxes for flood and dry
 11 seasons at five gauge stations

Gauge Stations	Drained Area (km ²)	Seasonal Variations (Mt month ⁻¹)	Flood Season (May-Oct)		Dry Season (Nov-Apr)	
			Flux (Mt month ⁻¹)	Specific Yield (t km ⁻² month ⁻¹)	Flux (Mt month ⁻¹)	Specific Yield (t km ⁻² month ⁻¹)
Lao Cai	41600	0.0005-34.4	4.5	108.2	0.7	16.8
Yen Bai	48500	0.0007-39.6	5.8	119.6	0.8	16.5
Vu Quang	30370	0.0006-4.7	1.1	36.2	0.1	3.3
Hoa Binh	52780	0.0003-3.0	0.5	9.5	0.1	1.9
Son Tay	137230	0.0014-25.2	4.4	32.1	0.5	3.6

12

13

14 Table 5 Simulated sediment flux (Mt yr^{-1}) of reference scenario (without dams) and actual conditions (over the whole study period, 2000-2007 period and 2008-2013 period)
 15 compared with other studies and in-situ data; values of trapped sediment (calculated as the difference between average values over 2008-2013 in the reference scenario and
 16 actual simulations); impacts of short-term climate variability and dams.

Station (River)	1960-1972	1960-1979	1960-1970	2000-2013			2000-2007			2008-2013			Impact			
	(Lu et al., 2015)	(Vinh et al., 2014)	(Dang et al., 2010)	Observed	AC [†]	RS [‡]	Observed	AC [†]	RS [‡]	Observed	AC [†]	RS [‡]	Trapped sediment	Total	Short-term climate variability	Dams
Lao Cai (Thao)	-	-	-	29.2	30.7	40.5	45.7	46.0	46.0	7.1	10.3	33.3	23.0	-78%	-28%	-50%
Yen Bai (Thao)	44.8	43.4	-	32.5	39.8	51.4	43.9	56.5	56.5	17.2	17.6	44.6	27.0	-69%	-21%	-48%
Vu Quang (Lo)	10.1	9.2	-	6.6	6.6	9.7	8.8	9.6	9.5	3.6	2.7	9.8	7.1	-72%	2%	-74%
Hoa Binh (Da)	71.8	65.0	-	4.0	3.6	119.5	5.8	5.3	124.9	1.5	1.3	112.3	111.0	-99%	-10%	-89%
Son Tay (Red)	120.8	119.3	111.6	26.5	33.0	106.9	36.5	49.1	111.6	13.2	11.6	100.6	89.0	-90%	-10%	-80%

17 AC[†]: Actual Conditions

18 RS[‡]: Reference Scenario (without dams)

19

Table 6 The principal component (PC) loading

Factor	Eigenvectors (percentage of variances %)		
	PC1 (41.6%)	PC2 (25.9%)	PC3 (10.8%)
Soil Erosion (SE) [†]	0.177	<u>0.399</u>	0.163
Precipitation (P) [‡]	<u>0.430</u>	0.244	0.101
Water Yield (WY) [‡]	<u>0.416</u>	0.262	0.095
Surface Runoff (SR) [‡]	<u>0.446</u>	0.184	-0.033
Slope [†]	-0.067	<u>0.491</u>	0.125
Clay% [†]	-0.389	0.117	<u>0.277</u>
Silt% [†]	0.019	0.243	<u>-0.877</u>
Sand% [†]	0.346	-0.280	<u>0.256</u>
USLE_P [†]	-0.246	<u>0.414</u>	0.158
USLE_K [†]	-0.275	0.340	0.050

21 †: the simulation from the model

22 ‡: the observation and input data

23 Notes: underlined values correspond to the first three highest factor loadings in the PC.

A modelling-based assessment of suspended sediment transport related to new damming in the Red River basin from 2000-2013

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