

# Glacial forcing of central Indonesian hydroclimate since 60,000 y B.P.

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**The Indo-Pacific warm pool houses the largest zone of deep atmospheric convection on Earth and plays a critical role in global climate variations. Despite the region's importance, changes in Indo-Pacific hydroclimate on orbital timescales remain poorly constrained. Here we present high-resolution geochemical records of surface runoff and vegetation from sediment cores from Lake Towuti, on the island of Sulawesi in central Indonesia, that continuously span the past 60,000 y. We show that wet conditions and rainforest ecosystems on Sulawesi present during marine isotope stage 3 (MIS3) and the Holocene were interrupted by severe drying between ~33,000 and 16,000 y B.P. when Northern Hemisphere ice sheets expanded and global temperatures cooled. Our record reveals little direct influence of precessional orbital forcing on regional climate, and the similarity between MIS3 and Holocene climates observed in Lake Towuti suggests that exposure of the Sunda Shelf has a weaker influence on regional hydroclimate and terrestrial ecosystems than suggested previously. We infer that hydrological variability in this part of Indonesia varies strongly in response to high-latitude climate forcing, likely through reorganizations of the monsoons and the position of the intertropical convergence zone. These findings suggest an important role for the tropical western Pacific in amplifying glacial–interglacial climate variability.**

tropical Pacific | paleoclimate | geochemistry | paleoecology

Three major zones of deep atmospheric convection energize the Earth's moisture and energy budgets: tropical Africa, the Amazon, and the Indo-Pacific. Convection over the Indo-Pacific warm pool (IPWP) is by far the largest of these, and exerts enormous influence on global climate through its role in coupled ocean–atmosphere circulation (1, 2) and its influence on the concentration of atmospheric water vapor, which is the Earth's most important greenhouse gas (3). Despite the region's importance, variations in Indo-Pacific hydroclimate on orbital timescales remain poorly constrained.

Climate models and theory predict that Indo-Pacific hydrology responds strongly to, and interacts with, glacial–interglacial climate variations (4–6). This prediction is partly borne out by terrestrial sedimentary records that suggest widespread drying across the IPWP during the Last Glacial Maximum (LGM; refs. 7, 8) between 19,000 and 26,000 y ago (9). Unfortunately, many of these records are relatively short and discontinuous, limiting their utility to detect the relationship between regional climate change and global forcing. New, long, high-resolution oxygen isotopic ( $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ ) records from speleothems from northern Borneo paint a very different picture of Indo-Pacific paleoclimate, suggesting that orbital-scale changes in regional convection are dominantly controlled by changes in equatorial insolation driven by orbital precession (10). On the other hand, marine sedimentary runoff records from southern Java imply little change in IPWP hydrology at glacial–interglacial timescales (11). Given this disagreement, new records—especially long proxy records that respond strongly to precipitation—are needed to understand

the response of Indo-Pacific climate to glacial–interglacial climate change and forcing.

Indonesia lies at the center of the IPWP and has thousands of lakes, the sediments of which represent a largely untapped archive of the region's hydrologic history. Here we present a 60 thousand y (ky) B.P. record of IPWP hydrology from the sediments of Lake Towuti, located on the island of Sulawesi in central Indonesia (Fig. 1). Lake Towuti is the largest tectonic lake in Indonesia, and at 205 m depth, its sediments preserve perhaps the longest and most continuous terrestrial record of climate available from the region. In 2007–2010, we recovered 13 sediment piston cores from Lake Towuti; here we focus on the most continuous radiocarbon-dated stratigraphy from core TOW10-9B (*Material and Methods* and Fig. S1 and Tables S1 and S2).

## Study Site and Proxy Interpretations

Sulawesi lies at the center of the humid, unstable air mass overlying the IPWP, and its climate responds strongly to large-scale changes in regional atmospheric circulation and sea surface temperature associated with the Australian–Indonesian summer monsoon (AISM). The Lake Towuti basin receives ~2,700 mm of precipitation annually and is surrounded by dense closed-canopy rainforest (12). This region experiences a wet season from December to May when the intertropical convergence zone (ITCZ) migrates southward over Indonesia (13). During this

## Significance

**Climate variability in the tropical western Pacific exerts enormous influence on global climate, yet its history remains poorly constrained. We present the region's first continuous terrestrial sedimentary record of surface hydrology and vegetation spanning the last 60,000 y based upon geochemical data from Lake Towuti, Indonesia. Our data demonstrate that wet conditions and rainforest ecosystems present during the Holocene and during marine isotope stage 3 were interrupted by severe drying between ~33,000 and 16,000 y B.P., when high-latitude ice sheets expanded and global temperatures cooled. These findings indicate an important role for glacial boundary conditions in pacing tropical western Pacific climate change, and highlight the potential for the western Pacific to amplify global climate change during glacial–interglacial cycles.**

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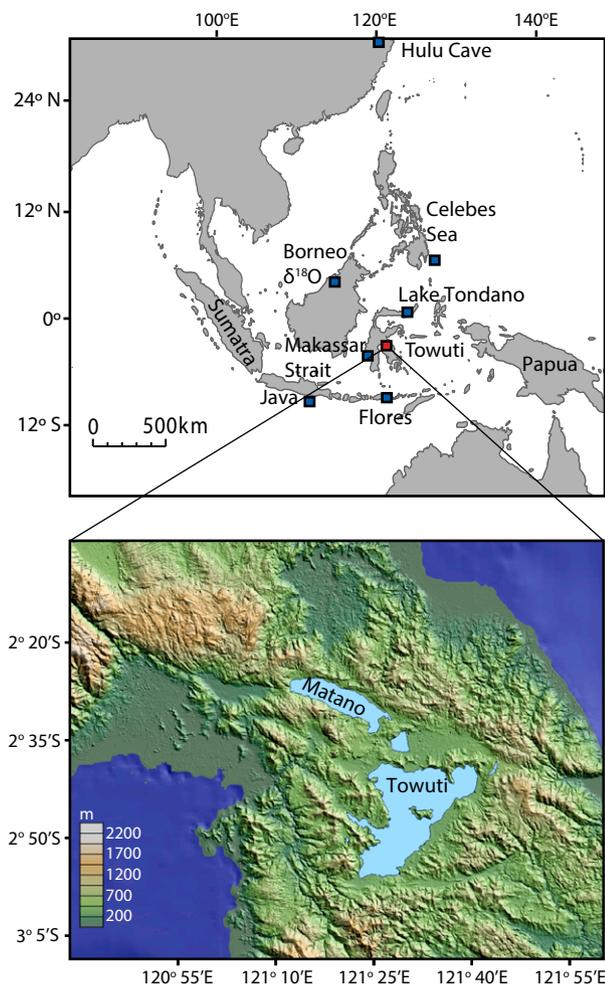
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**Fig. 1.** (Upper) A map of Indonesia showing the location of Lake Towuti and regional records discussed in the text. (Lower) A regional map showing the location of Lake Towuti (2.5°S, 121.5°E) within central Sulawesi.

season strong northerly flow associated with the AISM, warm sea surface temperatures, and strong local convective activity (14) maintain regional precipitation at >250 mm/mo. Precipitation falls below 200 mm/mo from July to October, when much of southern and central Indonesia experiences a dry season (13). During this time, the ITCZ is displaced northward, and cool sea surface temperatures and strong southeasterly flow associated with the east Asian summer monsoon suppress regional convective activity (14).

Our paleoclimate record is based on high-resolution core scanning and organic geochemical analyses to reconstruct changes in surface runoff and terrestrial vegetation (*Materials and Methods*). We performed X-ray fluorescence (XRF) elemental scanning augmented by discrete analyses of elemental concentrations to correct for water content effects to determine sedimentary Ti content (Figs. S2 and S3), which is used to reconstruct climate-driven changes in clastic inputs to sedimentary basins (15). Ti provides a relatively simple and redox-insensitive proxy for the integrated processes of rainfall, erosion, and fluvial discharge from Towuti's ~1,500 km<sup>2</sup> catchment.

We also measured the carbon-isotopic composition of long-chain, even-numbered *n*-alkanoic acids ( $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{wax}}$ ), a main component of plant epicuticular waxes (*SI Materials and Methods* and Fig. S4). The  $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{wax}}$  is primarily used to distinguish between plants using C<sub>3</sub> and C<sub>4</sub> photosynthetic pathways (16) because C<sub>4</sub>

plants use a CO<sub>2</sub>-concentrating mechanism that improves their photorespiration and water-use efficiency relative to C<sub>3</sub> plants (17). The  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  of epicuticular waxes from C<sub>4</sub> plants, which are mainly tropical and warm season grasses, typically range from -14‰ to -26‰, and waxes from C<sub>3</sub> plants range between about -29‰ and -38‰ (18–20). Precipitation is the dominant control on the distribution of C<sub>3</sub> and C<sub>4</sub> plants through much of the tropics, such that  $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{wax}}$  has been widely used to reconstruct past changes in tropical hydroclimate (21, 22).

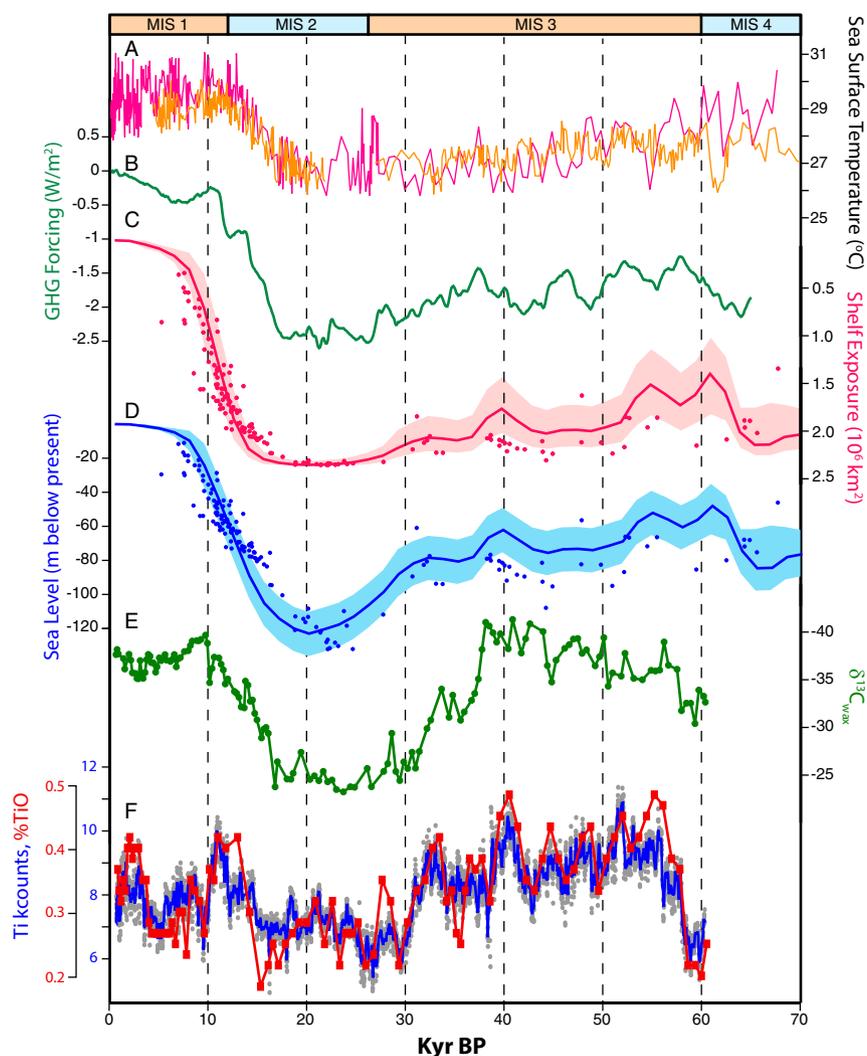
In modern plants,  $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{wax}}$  varies not only due to changes in plants' photosynthetic pathways, but also due to the influence of edaphic factors (water availability, temperature) (23) and plant biome structure (closed-canopy vs. open-canopy forest; ref. 24). Wetter conditions permit more efficient leaf-gas exchange and stronger fractionation against <sup>13</sup>CO<sub>2</sub>, and carbon recycling under closed-canopy forest can cause carbon-isotopic depletion of CO<sub>2</sub> (25). Recent global surveys of the  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  of vegetation indicate these processes can cause ~6‰ depletion in the  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  of leaf matter in tropical rainforests relative to more xeric C<sub>3</sub> ecosystems, and ~4‰ depletion in tropical rainforests relative to drier, tropical deciduous forests (23). Thus, we interpret more depleted  $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{wax}}$  to represent C<sub>3</sub> forests growing in wet conditions; whereas, enriched  $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{wax}}$  reflects a drier climate and increasing C<sub>4</sub> grasses.

Vegetation changes on glacial–interglacial timescales, including changes in C<sub>3</sub> and C<sub>4</sub> plant communities, are controlled not just by precipitation, but also temperature, atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations, soil moisture, and other environmental factors (26). Similarly, sedimentary Ti concentrations are affected by changes in lake levels, soil chemical weathering, and other processes that affect clastic sediment deposition and erosion. Despite these differences, sedimentary Ti concentrations and  $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{wax}}$  in Lake Towuti exhibit coherent orbital-scale variations over much of the past 60 ky B.P. (*SI Materials and Methods* and Fig. S5), demonstrating that the glacial–interglacial variability in these proxies is mostly driven by changing precipitation.

## Results

Ti concentrations and  $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{wax}}$  show strong glacial–interglacial variability over the past 60 ky B.P. (Fig. 2). Low Ti concentrations indicate reduced precipitation at ~60 ky B.P., during late marine isotope stage (MIS) 4, followed by an abrupt rise in Ti at ~58 ky B.P. reflecting a shift toward wetter conditions. At the base of our record,  $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{wax}}$  averages -32.4‰, and exhibits an abrupt ~4‰ depletion at 58 ky B.P., synchronous with the rise in Ti. This <sup>13</sup>C depletion could result either from a **reduction in the abundance of C<sub>4</sub> grasses**, or from an **increase in precipitation that altered the structure of C<sub>3</sub> forests** in Lake Towuti's catchment, confirming an abrupt onset of wet conditions at the MIS 4/3 boundary. Ti concentrations are high and  $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{wax}}$  averages -37.8‰ between ~58 and 39 ky B.P., recording a **wet climate and closed-canopy rainforest in central Sulawesi during much of MIS3** (*SI Materials and Methods*). Ti concentrations fall, and  $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{wax}}$  becomes somewhat more enriched, beginning ~39 ky B.P., followed by an abrupt transition at ~33 ky B.P. to relatively dry conditions. The  $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{wax}}$  averages -25.0‰ between 30 and 18 ky B.P., indicating substantial C<sub>4</sub> grass expansion during the LGM.

Ti concentrations are low during the LGM and reach a minimum at 16 ± 0.4 ky B.P., **coincident with Heinrich event 1 (H1; Fig. 3)** (27), providing additional evidence of the **significance of H1 to tropical hydroclimate** (28). Heinrich events 3 and 4 are also associated with declines in Ti concentrations, and aridity at Lake Towuti ~60 ky B.P. could be correlated to H6, one of the strongest Heinrich events in the North Atlantic (29). However, we see no clear evidence for H2 or H5, nor do we see evidence for the Younger Dryas, which appears to have had a limited impact over much of Indonesia (8). The expression of all six Heinrich events of the past 60 ky B.P. in speleothem  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  from



**Fig. 2.** A comparison of proxy data from Lake Towuti to global and regional climate forcings. (A) Sea surface temperature reconstructions from the tropical western Pacific [Celebes Sea (44) in pink and the Sulu Sea (45) in orange]; (B) radiative forcing from greenhouse gases (46). (C) Areal exposure history of the Sunda Shelf, calculated from sea level reconstructions applied to shelf hypsography using sea-level records from 2D (*SI Materials and Methods*). (D) Global sea level as proxy for ice volume, reconstructed from benthic  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  [blue line (47)] and globally distributed corals [blue dots (48)]. (E) The  $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{wax}}$  from Lake Towuti. (F) Ti in sediments from Lake Towuti measured by scanning XRF (gray dots are individual measurements, blue line is a 10-point running average), and flux-ion chromatography (ICP-AES) (red).

Borneo (11), to the north of our site, coupled with the variable expression of Heinrich events in our record from Sulawesi, could reflect latitudinal gradients in the regional sensitivity of Indo-Pacific hydrology to millennial-scale forcing from the North Atlantic. This is perhaps related to variations in the strength and/or underlying mechanisms of the Heinrich events themselves and their ability to perturb regional rainfall.

Ti concentrations abruptly increase at  $14.8 \pm 0.38$  ky B.P., synchronous with the abrupt onset of wetter conditions recorded in speleothem  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  records from China (30) (Fig. 3A). The  $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{wax}}$  reaches its Holocene average of  $-37.1\text{‰}$  at  $11 \pm 0.28$  ky B.P., recording the development of closed-canopy tropical rainforest that persists today. Ti concentrations are also high in the early Holocene, but fall during the mid-Holocene. The  $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{wax}}$  exhibits a muted but simultaneous mid-Holocene enrichment of  $\sim 1.5\text{‰}$ , indicating that the mid-Holocene reduction in precipitation implied by sedimentary Ti was insufficient to strongly perturb the region's rainforests under Holocene boundary conditions. Both proxies indicate a return to moist conditions in the late Holocene, similar to records from southern Indonesia (11,

29) and likely related to intensification of the austral summer monsoon (11).

## Discussion

Our most significant findings are the existence of a very wet climate during much of MIS3 and the Holocene, interrupted by abrupt transitions to and from a dry LGM. No prior record from Sulawesi contains sediments covering the LGM, let alone the past 60 ky. However, sediment cores from the shoreline of Lake Tondano, North Sulawesi (Fig. 1), suggest a wet climate *ca.* 35 ky B.P., a moist early Holocene, and a discontinuity from  $\sim 31$  to  $\sim 13$  ky B.P. interpreted to reflect low lake levels (31), a history very similar to that of Lake Towuti. Even more discontinuous palynological records from the Wanda peatland, near Lake Towuti, suggest rainforest predominated during late MIS3 and the Holocene and grasslands expanded during the late LGM (12), supporting our interpretation of  $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{wax}}$ . Shorter but high-resolution reconstructions from marine sediments offshore from western Sulawesi suggest a moistening trend from the late glacial into the Holocene (32). Thus, our data appear compatible with





elemental analysis using an ITRAX XRF core scanner equipped with a Cr tube. Selected samples were also prepared for elemental analysis using flux fusion and measured on an inductively coupled plasma atomic emission spectrometer (FF-ICP-AES). Ti counts measured by XRF were corrected for water content variations and other matrix effects and show a strong correlation to Ti concentrations measured by FF-ICP-AES (*SI Materials and Methods*).

We also measured the carbon isotopic composition ( $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ ) of long-chain *n*-alkanoic acids ( $\text{C}_{26}$ ,  $\text{C}_{28}$ , and  $\text{C}_{30}$ ), components of terrestrial leaf waxes. Lipids were extracted by accelerated solvent extraction (Dionex) with  $\text{CH}_2\text{:Cl}_2\text{:MeOH}$  (9:1). Alkanoic acids were purified from the resulting extract, methylated, and the fatty acid methyl esters were analyzed by gas

chromatography–isotope ratio mass spectrometry (*SI Materials and Methods*). All  $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{wax}}$  data are corrected for the isotopic composition of the methyl group added during methylation. The pooled SE of samples measured in triplicate or greater is 0.47‰. See *SI Materials and Methods* for detailed analytical procedures.

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