# Different responses of ecosystem respiration, $CH_4$ uptake, and $N_2O$ emissions to seasonally asymmetric warming in an alpine grassland of the Tianshan Mountains

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**Abstract:**

An experiment was conducted to investigate the effect of seasonally asymmetric warming on ecosystem respiration (*Re*), $CH_4$ uptake, and $N_2O$ emissions in alpine grassland of the Tianshan Mountains of Central Asia, from October 2016 to September 2019. Our results indicated that the annual mean of *Re*, $CH_4$ and $N_2O$ fluxes in growing season were 42.83 mg C m$^{-2}$ h$^{-1}$, −41.57 μg C m$^{-2}$ h$^{-1}$, and 4.98 μg N m$^{-2}$ h$^{-1}$, respectively. Furthermore, warming during the non-growing season increased *Re* and $CH_4$ uptake in both the growing season and non-growing seasons. However, the increase in $N_2O$ emission in the growing season was mainly caused by the warming during the growing season. The *Re*, $CH_4$ uptake, and $N_2O$ emissions were positively correlated with soil temperature. Our results suggested that *Re*, $CH_4$ uptake and $N_2O$ emissions were regulated by soil temperature, rather than soil moisture, in the case of seasonally asymmetric warming. In addition, the response rate was defined

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by the changes in greenhouse gas fluxes driven by warming. In our field experiment, we observed the stimulatory effect of warming during the non-growing season on *Re* and $CH_4$ uptake. In contrast, the response rates of *Re* and $N_2O$ emissions were gradually attenuated by long-term annual warming, and the response rate of *Re* was also weakened by warming over the growing season. These findings highlight the importance of warming in the non-growing season in regulating greenhouse gas fluxes, a finding which is crucial for improving our understanding of C and N cycles under the scenarios of global warming.

**Keywords:** Greenhouse gas flux; Extreme climatic event; Temperature sensitivity; Warming of open-top chambers

## 1. Introduction

Since the industrial revolution, human activities have intensified global warming. The global surface temperature increased by about 0.85°C from 1880 to 2012, and it is expected that the surface temperature will increase by about 1.1–6.4°C by the end of this century (IPCC, 2007, 2013). The rise in atmospheric temperature over the year is not continuous on the temporal scale, but there is asymmetrical warming across the seasons (Xia et al., 2014). The 3rd and 4rd Assessment Report of the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) proposed that, against the backdrop of global warming, the temperature change shows that the warming amplitude in the winter is greater than that in the summer, with the warming amplitude at high latitude being greater than that at low latitude, and confirmed that the warming shows asymmetric trends on a seasonal scale (Easterling et al., 1997;

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Carbon dioxide ($CO_2$), methane ($CH_4$), and nitrous oxide ($N_2O$) are three of the major greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere that directly cause global climate warming, with their contributions to global warming being 60 %, 20 %, and 6 %, respectively (IPCC, 2007, 2013). Experimental warming is known to influence ecosystem respiration (*Re*), $CH_4$ uptake, and $N_2O$ emission (Pärn et al., 2018; Treat et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2019). Information on *Re*, $CH_4$ uptake, and $N_2O$ emission and their sensitivity to warming, will enhance our understanding of ecosystem C and N cycling processes and improve our predictions of the response of ecosystems to global climate change (Li et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2019).

At present, most studies focus on the influence of warming on GHG flux in terrestrial ecosystems during the summer months (Keenan et al., 2014; Li et al., 2011; Yang et al., 2014). Nevertheless, data on the influence of asymmetric warming on the GHG flux on a seasonal scale are scarce. A study of the Alaskan tundra found that summer warming (using open-top chambers to increase air temperatures in the growing season) significantly increased *Re* in the growing season by about 20 % (Natali et al., 2011). Compared with the slight effect of winter warming on the $CO_2$ fluxes in the growing season, warming increased $CO_2$ fluxes during the snow-covered non-growing season by more than 50% (Natali et al., 2011). Studies have shown that the response of soil $CH_4$ uptake rates to temperature increases in alpine meadows of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau are not consistent seasonally, with $CH_4$ uptake in the non-growing season being more sensitive to temperature (increasing by 162 %) than

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**删除了:** periodnongrowing…on-growing season by more the corresponding value in the growing season (Lin et al., 2015). A study by Cantarel et al. (2012) in an alpine grassland ecosystem showed that the response of $N_2O$ emission to warming showed clear seasonal differences, with the $N_2O$ emission in the growing season showing significant differences between the warming treatments, whereas the response of $N_2O$ emission to the warming treatments in November was not obvious. A recent study showed that seasonal variations in carbon flux were more closely related to air temperature in the meadow steppe (Zhao et al., 2019). Another study found that experimental warming enhanced $CH_4$ uptake in the relatively arid alpine steppe, but had no significant effects on $CH_4$ emission in the moist swamp meadow (Li et al., 2020). Furthermore, soil $CH_4$ uptake was not significantly affected by warming in the alpine meadow of the Tibetan Plateau (Wu et al., 2020). In contrast, a global meta-analysis showed that experimental warming stimulates C fluxes in grassland ecosystems, and the response of C fluxes to warming strongly varies across the different grassland types, with greater warming responses in cold than in temperate and semi-arid grasslands (Wang et al., 2019). Across the data set, Li et al. (2020) demonstrated that $N_2O$ emissions were significantly enhanced by whole-year warming treatments. In contrast, no significant effects on soil $N_2O$ emissions were observed by in short-season warming.

In summary, the GHG flux in terrestrial ecosystems shows significant interannual, and seasonal variations, and its response to warming also varies over different temporal scales. After long-term uniform warming, the biotic and abiotic factors have adapted to the temperature increase, and the GHG flux response to increasing

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temperature is smaller than that in the early stages of warming. For example, over longer time periods of warming, accelerated carbon decomposition and increased plant N uptake may decrease soil organic C and N pools (Wu et al., 2012), and the microbial community with variable C use efficiency may reduce the temperature sensitivity of heterotrophic respiration (Zhou et al., 2012). Moreover, climate warming is often unstable, with most of it occurring as extreme events (Jentsch et al., 2007). The heterogeneity of warming may change the adaptability of GHG fluxes to warming, and thus affect the carbon and nitrogen cycles in terrestrial ecosystems. Therefore, we hypothesize that warming in the non-growing season will stimulate GHG flux (especially during the non-growing season) in the alpine steppe. However, continuous warming throughout the year and during the growing season will reduce the sensitivity of GHG flux to warming. This current short communication will help to assess this variation with respect to GHG flux response to increasing temperatures against the backdrop of global climate change, by carrying out seasonally asymmetrical warming studies in alpine grasslands.

## 2. Materials and methods

The experiment was conducted from October 2016 to September 2019 at the Bayinbuluk Grassland Ecosystem Research Station, Chinese Academy of Sciences (42°52.76′ ~ 42°53.17′ N, 83°41.90′ ~ 83°43.12′ E, 2460 m above sea level), which is located in the southern Tianshan mountains of Central Asia, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China. Permafrost is present in the Bayinbuluk alpine grassland, with the average maximum frozen depth (from 2000 to 2011, Zhang et al.,

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2018) being more than 250 cm. The mean annual temperature was −4.8°C per decade, with the lowest monthly temperature in January (−27.4 °C) and the highest in July (11.2 °C), and the mean annual precipitation amounted to 265.7 mm, with 78.1% occurring during the growing season, from June to September (Geng et al., 2019). Variations in soil temperature, soil moisture, air temperature and precipitation are shown in Figure S1, S2, S3 and S4, respectively. Ungrazed since 2005, all the plots were dominated by *Stipa purpurea*, *Festuca ovina*, *Oxytropis glabra*, and *Potentilla multifida*. The soil was sub-alpine steppe soil, the parent material of the soil was Loess, and the average annual soil moisture was 5.9 % (2017-2019).

The open-top chambers (OTCs) were made of 5 mm thick tempered glass. To reduce the impact of precipitation and snow, the OTC was constructed with a hexagonal round table which was 100 cm high, and the diagonals of the bottom and top were 100 cm and 60 cm, respectively. Four treatments were simulated using OTCs: warming throughout the year (AW), warming in the non-growing season (October to May) only (NGW), warming in the growing season (June to September) only (GW) and no warming (NW). Three replicate plots were established for each treatment, each plot measuring 1 m × 1 m, with a 3-m wide buffer zone between adjacent plots, making a total of 12 plots. Soil temperature and soil moisture were measured at 10 cm depth by an outdoor temperature and humidity data recorder (HOBO U23-001; Onset Computer Corporation, Bourne, USA).

*Re*, $CH_4$ and $N_2O$ fluxes were measured using static chambers, made of PVC tubing with diameter 0.25 m and height 0.17 m, with one chamber in each of the 12

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plots. Gas samples were taken 0, 10, 20 and 30 minutes after the lid of the static chamber was sealed in between 12:00 and 14:00 (GMT + 8) every day. The rates of ecosystem respiration, $CH_4$ and $N_2O$ fluxes were calculated based on the change in concentration of $CO_2$, $N_2O$ and $CH_4$ in each chamber over time by a linear or non-linear equation ($P < 0.05$, $r^2 > 0.95$) (the positive flux values represent emission, and the negative flux values represent uptake; Liu et al. 2012; Wang et al. 2013). A total of 232 samples were taken, collecting once or twice a week. Concentrations of individual gases in samples were measured using a gas chromatograph (GC) (Agilent 7890A; Agilent Technologies, Santa Clara, CA, USA).

Effects of seasonally asymmetric warming on *Re*, $CH_4$ uptake, and $N_2O$ emissions were analyzed by two-way repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA). One-way ANOVA was used to compare soil temperature differences. General linear analyses were used to identify significant linear correlations and regressions between soil temperature variation and the responses of *Re*, $CH_4$ uptake, or $N_2O$ emissions. The natural logarithm of the response ratio (RR) was used to reflect the effects of seasonally asymmetric warming on alpine grassland GHG fluxes (Hedges et al., 1999). The RR is the ratio of the mean value of the chosen variable in the warming group ( $\overline{W}_t$ ) to that in the control group (NW; $\overline{W}_c$), and is an index of the effect of seasonally asymmetric warming on the corresponding variable (Eq. 1). All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS (version 20.0) (IBM, Armonk, NY, USA) with the statistically significant difference threshold set at $P < 0.05$.

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## 3. Results

Our study showed that the Bayinbuluk alpine grassland exhibited a low *Re*, was a net $CH_4$ sink, and a negligible $N_2O$ source. The annual mean values of *Re*, $CH_4$ uptake, and $N_2O$ emissions in the growing season were 42.83 mg C $m^{-2}$ $h^{-1}$, 41.57 μg C $m^{-2}$ $h^{-1}$, and 4.98 μg N $m^{-2}$ $h^{-1}$ , respectively, from October 2016 to September 2019 (Figure 1). Compared with the control group (NW), the *Re* was decreased by 7.5% and 4.0% in the growing season and non-growing season, respectively, under AW and decreased by 2.4% and 8.5% under GW in the growing season and non-growing season, respectively. However, compared with the control group, the *Re* under NGW increased by 7.9% and 10.5% in the growing season and non-growing season, respectively, averaged over the three years (Figure 2 a). The AW temperature change induced a 6.4% increase in $CH_4$ uptake in the growing season and a 3.8% decrease in the non-growing season. The GW treatment resulted in 7.1% and 10.2% increases in $CH_4$ uptake in the growing season and non-growing season, respectively. On the contrary, the NGW generated a 10.6% and 9.2 % decrease in $CH_4$ uptake in the growing season and non-growing season, respectively (Figure 2 b). The AW and NGW treatments resulted in 5.8% and 2.2 % decreases, respectively, in $N_2O$ emission in the growing season, and 101.9% and 192.3% increases, respectively, in $N_2O$ emission in the non-growing season. Compared with the control, NW group, the $N_2O$ emission increased by 29.7% and decreased by 24.4% under GW in the growing season and non-growing season, respectively (Figure 2 c). One-way ANOVA results

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The results of two-way repeated measures ANOVA showed significant interannual differences of *Re* in the growing season ($P < 0.05$, Figure 1 a), whereas the $CH_4$ uptake under the warming treatment exhibited significant differences in the growing season ($P < 0.01$; Figure 1 b), and the interannual $N_2O$ emission showed significant differences in both the growing season and non-growing season ($P < 0.05$, Figure 1 c). Therefore, interannual variation was larger than the impact of the warming treatment (for *Re* and $N_2O$ emissions, Figure 1), whereas the warming treatment had a significant impact on $CH_4$ uptake. Under the four warming treatments, *Re* was significantly positively linearly correlated with soil temperature ($P < 0.05$; Figure S5 a). we observed increasing $CH_4$ uptake with increasing soil temperature ($P < 0.05$; Figure S5 b). On the other hand, the $N_2O$ emission showed a significantly positive linear correlation with soil temperature, but only under NGW ($P < 0.05$; Figure S5 c).

## 4. Discussion

Our study found that the response rate of *Re* to temperature significantly decreased with the increase in soil temperature (Δ$ST_{AW}$ and Δ$ST_{GW}$) under AW and GW treatments, respectively (Figure 3 a, c; $P < 0.05$). This finding indicated that the response of *Re* to soil temperature became less and less sensitive to soil tempweature

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Ecosystem $CH_4$ flux is the net result of $CH_4$ production and consumption, occurring simultaneously under the action of methanogenic archaea and methane-oxidizing bacteria (e.g., Mer and Roger, 2001). In addition, our results demonstrated that warming increased $CH_4$ uptake in the growing season, but decreased $CH_4$ uptake in the non-growing season in the alpine grassland, findings similar to those from other grassland ecosystems (Lin et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2015). Our results also demonstrated that seasonally asymmetric warming did not significantly affect the response rate of $CH_4$ uptake (Figure 3 d-f, *P* > 0.05). $CH_4$ flux depended on temperature, pH, and the availability of substrate (e.g., Treat et al., 2015). The $CH_4$ uptake observed during the three growing season and non-growing season implied that the alpine grassland soil could act as an atmospheric $CH_4$ sink, a finding which agrees with the results of many previous studies in similar regions (Wei et al., 2015; Zhao et al., 2017). Hu et al. (2016) suggested that asymmetrical responses of $CH_4$ fluxes to warming and cooling should be taken into account when evaluating the effects of climate change on $CH_4$ uptake in the alpine

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meadow on the Tibetan plateau. Unlike $CH_4$ flux in alpine grasslands, Treat et al. (2018) confirmed that wetland was a small $CH_4$ source in the non-growing season whereas uplands varied from $CH_4$ sinks to $CH_4$ sources. The latest research confirmed that warming in the Arctic had become more apparent in the non-growing season than in the typical growing season (Bao et al., 2020). Hereby, Bao et al. (2020) found that the $CH_4$ emissions during the spring thaw and the autumn freeze contributed approximately one-quarter of the annual total $CH_4$ emissions. That experimental warming is stimulating soil $CH_4$ uptake in the growing season implies that the grasslands of the Bayinbuluk may have the potential to remove more $CH_4$ from the atmosphere under future global warming conditions.

Furthermore, with the increased variation in soil temperature, the response rate of $N_2O$ emission gradually decreased under AW treatment (Figure 3 g, $P < 0.05$). Our results suggested that the response of $N_2O$ emission to temperature increase was limited by the warming that occurred throughout the year. However, our results displayed $N_2O$ emission peaks during the freeze–thaw periods (e.g., May 2017, June 2018 and April 2019). Warming increased $N_2O$ emissions in the thawing period due to disruption of the gas diffusion barrier and greater C and N availability for microbial activity (Nyborg et al., 1997). Wagner-Riddle et al. (2017) also demonstrated that the magnitude of the freeze/thaw-induced $N_2O$ emissions was associated with the number of days with soil temperatures below 0°C. Pärn et al. (2018) found that $N_2O$ emission from organic soils increases with rising soil $NO_3^-$, follows a bell-shaped distribution with soil moisture. Another study has shown that a whole - year warming treatment significantly increased $N_2O$ emissions, but daytime, night-time or short - season

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warming did not have significant effects (Li et al., 2020). In addition, Cantarel et al. (2010) suggested that the $N_2O$ flux from cool and upland grasslands may be driven primarily by response to elevated temperature under projected future climate conditions.

The soil moisture was reduced by warming in the alpine grassland (Figure S2). Therefore, we disentangled the influence of soil temperature and soil moisture on *Re*, $CH_4$ uptake, and $N_2O$ emission by variation-partitioning analysis under the four treatments in the growing season and the non-growing season (Figure 4). Our results showed that, under the NGW treatment, *Re*, $CH_4$ uptake, and $N_2O$ emission in the non-growing season were more influenced by soil temperature than by soil moisture. Under the GW treatment, there was the single effect of soil temperature on $CH_4$ uptake and $N_2O$ emission in the non-growing season. In contrast, there were the joint effects of soil temperature and moisture on *Re* in the non-growing season under the GW treatment. *Re* in the growing season was influenced more by soil moisture than soil temperature under the GW treatment. Annual *Re* under the AW treatment was influenced by the joint effects of soil temperature and moisture.

## 5. Conclusions

In summary, the effect of seasonally asymmetrical warming on *Re* and $N_2O$ emission was obvious, unlike the situation with $CH_4$ uptake. The *Re* and $N_2O$ emission were able to adapt to continuous warming, resulting in a reduced response rates of the *Re* and $N_2O$ emission to temperature increase. Warming in the non-growing season increased the temperature dependence of the *Re*. Thus, we

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**Data availability**

The measured $CO_2$, $CH_4$ and $N_2O$ fluxes and soil temperature and soil water content data are available in Zenodo (http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4244207).

**Author contributions**

GYM, LYY and MA conceive the research question, designed the study approach, led the field survey, ensured data curation and conducted formal analysis. YP and LKH assisted with data collection and analysis. GYM wrote the first draft of the paper, and all co-authors contributed to writing review and editing.

**Competing interests**

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

**Acknowledgments**

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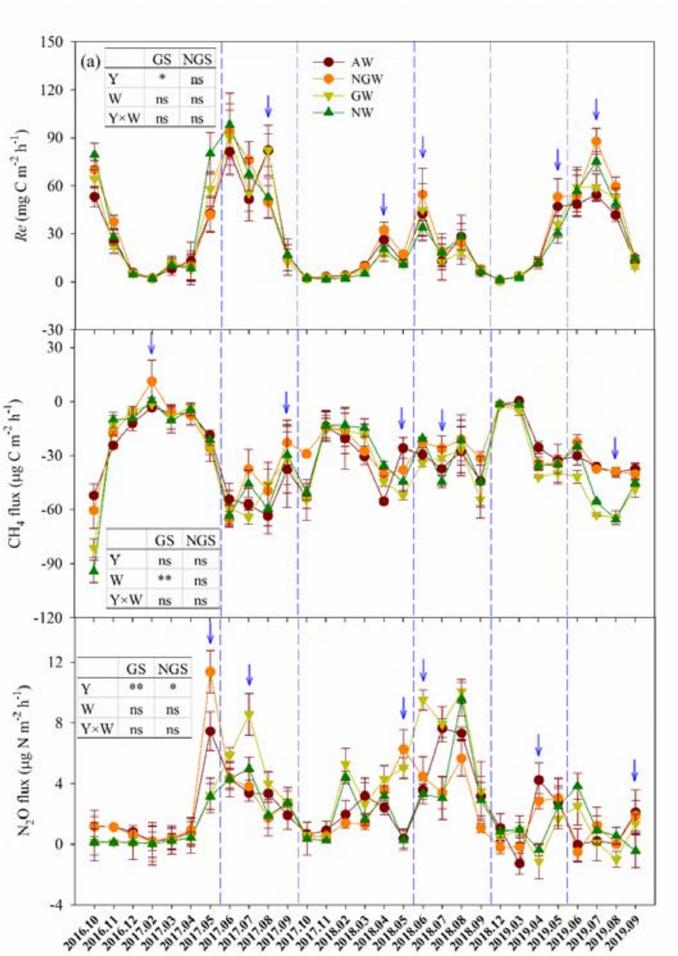


Figure 1 Monthly variation of a). ecosystem respiration (*Re*), b). $CH_4$ uptake and c). $N_2O$ emissions under the four treatments from October 2016 to September 2019. AW, warming throughout the year; NGW, warming in the non-growing season only; GW, warming in the growing season only; NW, non-warming. The blue arrows indicate warming effects. The data points represent mean ± standard error, SE. The tables illustrate the tests of significance for year (Y) and warming (W) on *Re*, $CH_4$ uptake and $N_2O$ emission by two-way repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) in

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the growing season (GS) and the non-growing season (NGS), respectively; $^{*}P < 0.05$; $^{**}P < 0.01$; ns, non-significant.

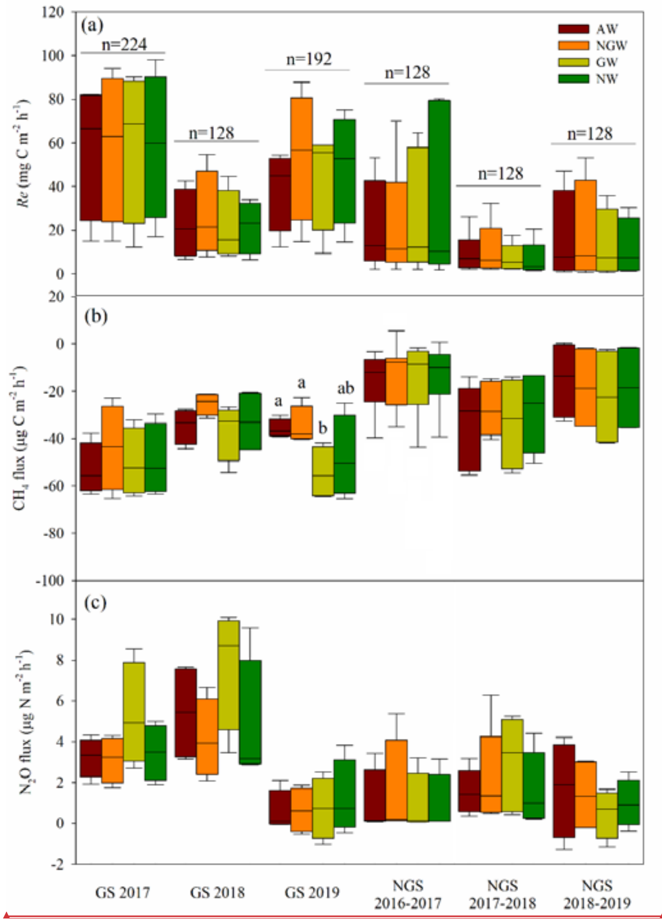


Figure 2 Boxplot presentation of variations in ecosystem respiration (*Re*), $CH_4$ uptake, and $N_2O$ emission under four treatments in the growing season and non-growing season from October 2016 to September 2019. The median is represented by the line in the box. The box (the interquartile range) represents the middle 50% of the data, whereas the whiskers represent the ranges for the bottom 25% and the top 25% of the data values, excluding outliers. GS, growing season; NGS,

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non-growing season; AW, warming throughout the year; NGW, warming in the non-growing season only; GW, warming in the growing season only; NW, non-warming. No significant differences among AW, NGW, GW, and NW were reported from ANOVA; data points are the mean ± standard error. One-way ANOVA results of *Re*, $CH_4$ uptake and $N_2O$ emissions among the four warming treatments were not significant, except that the $CH_4$ uptake in the GS 2019 under the GW treatment was significantly higher than that of AW and NGW treatment ($P < 0.05$).

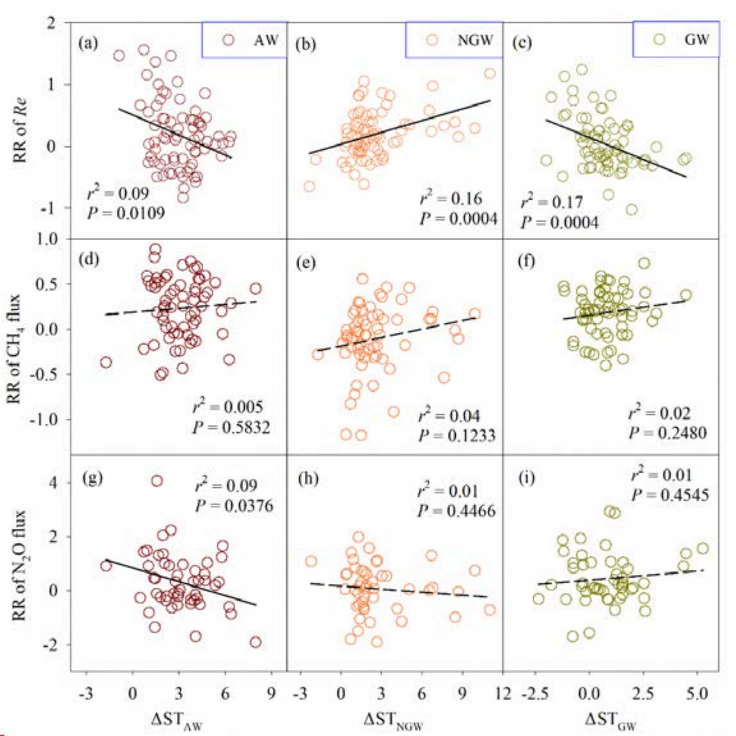


Figure 3 Response (presented by linear regression) of variation in ecosystem respiration (*Re*), $CH_4$ uptake, and $N_2O$ emission to changes in soil temperature under AW, NGW and GW conditions in the alpine grassland, from 2016 to 2019. RR, the

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natural logarithm of the response ratio of the mean value of the chosen variable in the warming group to that in the control (NW) group. $\Delta ST_{AW}$, soil temperature of AW minus that of NW; $\Delta ST_{CW}$, soil temperature of NGW minus that of NW; $\Delta ST_{WW}$, soil temperature of GW minus that of NW; AW, warming throughout the year; NGW, warming in the non-growing season only; GW, warming in the growing season only; NW, non-warming.

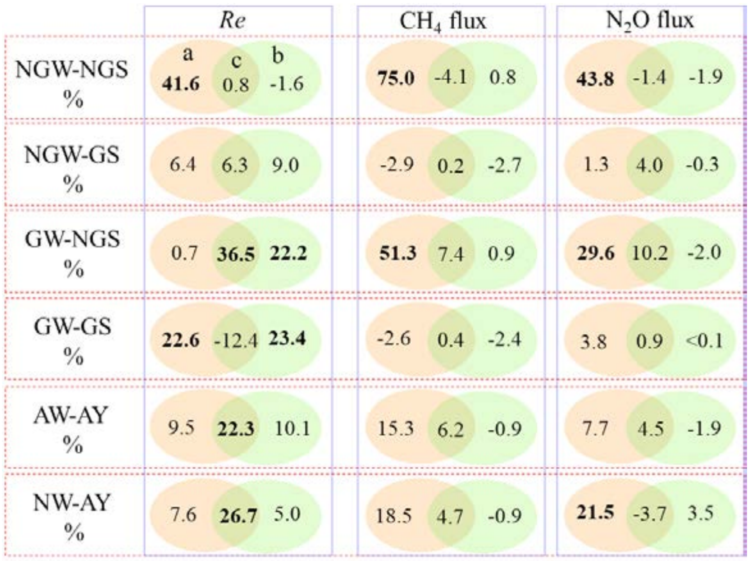


Figure 4 Influence of soil temperature and soil moisture on ecosystem respiration (*Re*), $CH_4$ uptake, and $N_2O$ emission by variation-partitioning analysis under four treatments in the growing season and non-growing season. a, Single effect of soil temperature (%); b, single effect of soil moisture (%); c, joint effects of soil temperature and moisture (%); NGW-NGS, greenhouse gas fluxes in non-growing season under non-growing season warming treatment; NGW-GS, greenhouse gas fluxes in growing season under non-growing season warming treatment; GW-NGS,

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greenhouse gas fluxes in non-growing season under growing season warming treatment; GW-GS, greenhouse gas fluxes in growing season under growing season warming treatment; AW-AY, annual greenhouse gas fluxes under annual warming treatment; NW-AY, annual greenhouse gas fluxes without warming.

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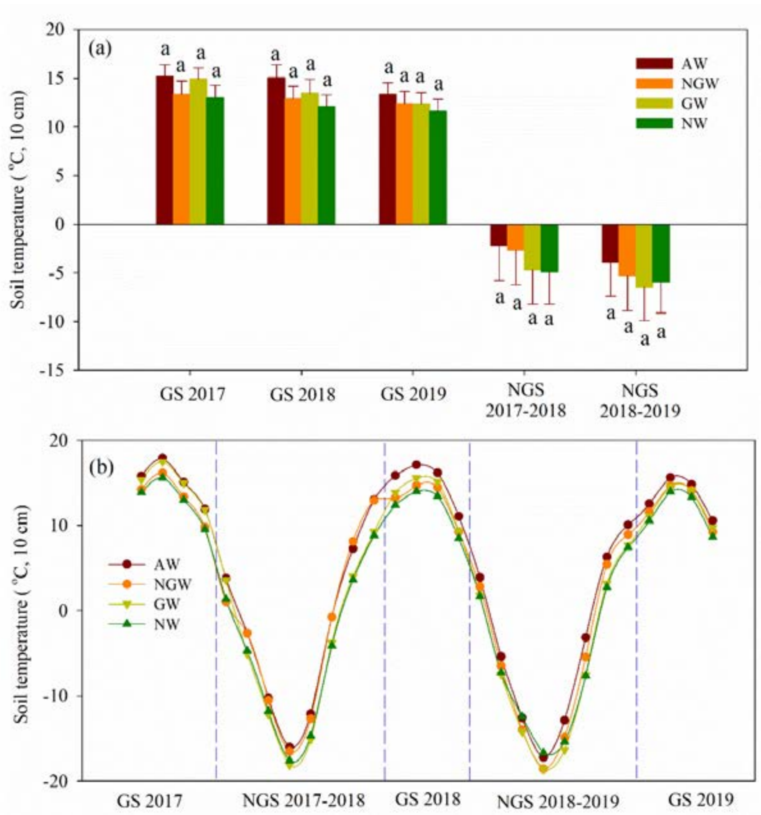


Figure S1 Variation in soil temperature (at 10-cm depth) under four treatments in alpine grassland from June 2017 to September 2019. GS, growing season; NGS, non-growing season; AW, warming throughout the year; NGW, warming in non-growing season only; GW, warming in growing season only; NW, non-warming. Significant differences among AW, NGW, GW, and NW from analysis of variance (ANOVA) are denoted as bars within the same season with different lowercase letters, $P < 0.05$; data points are the mean ± standard error.

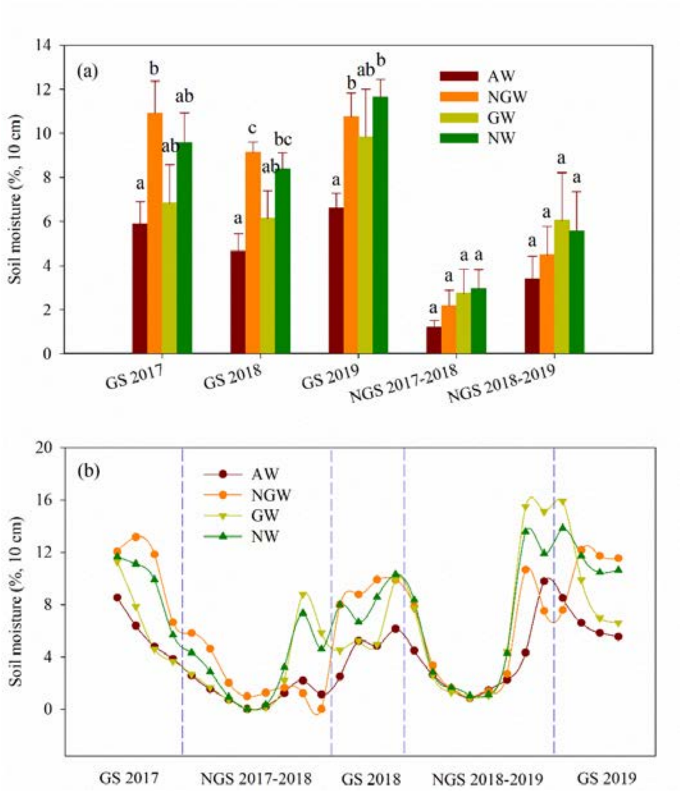


Figure S2 Variation in soil moisture (at 10-cm depth) under four treatments in alpine grassland from June 2017 to September 2019. GS, growing season; NGS, non-growing season; AW, warming throughout the year; NGW, warming in nongrowing season only; GW, warming in growing season only; NW, non-warming. Significant differences among AW, NGW, GW and NW from analysis of variance (ANOVA) are denoted as bars within the same season with different lowercase letters, $P < 0.05$; data points are the mean ± standard error.

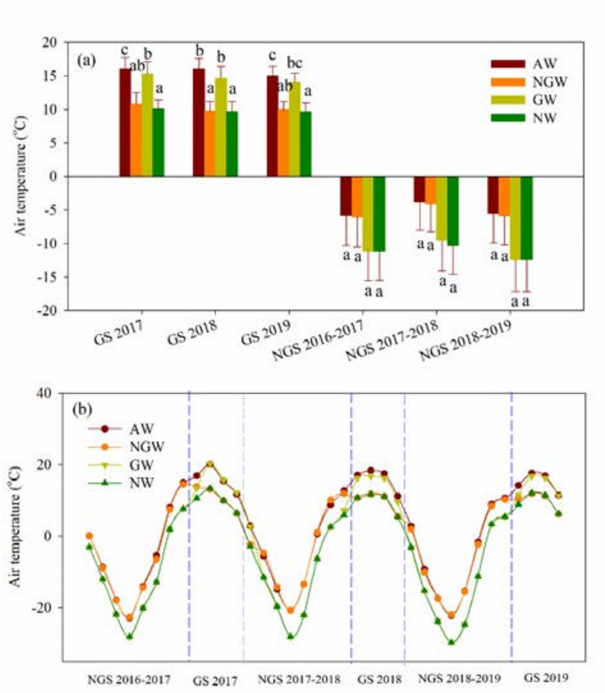


Figure S3 Variation in air temperature (inside the open-topped chamber, OTC, 50 cm above the ground) under four treatments in alpine grassland from October 2016 to September 2019. GS, growing season; NGS, non-growing season; AW, warming throughout the year; NGW, warming in non-growing season only; GW, warming in growing season only; NW, non-warming. No significant differences among AW, NGW, GW and NW from analysis of variance (ANOVA) are denoted as bars within the same season with a common lowercase letter, $P < 0.05$; data points are the mean ± standard error.

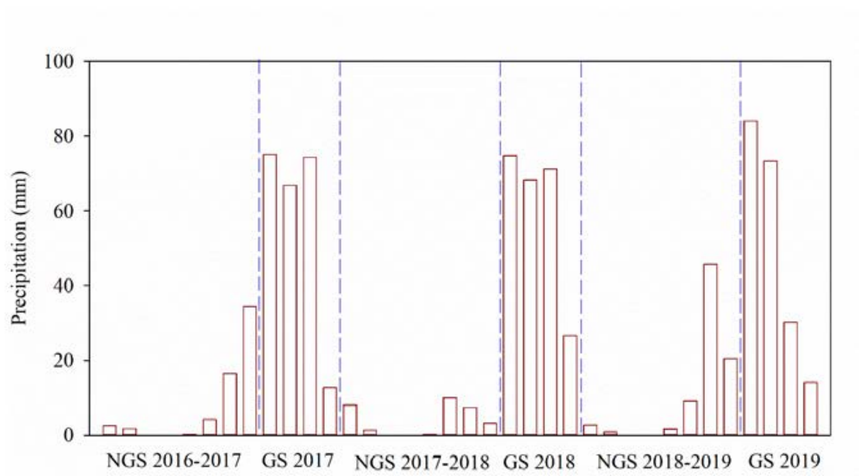


Figure S4 Variation in precipitation in the alpine grassland from October 2016 to September 2019. GS, growing season; NGS, non-growing season.

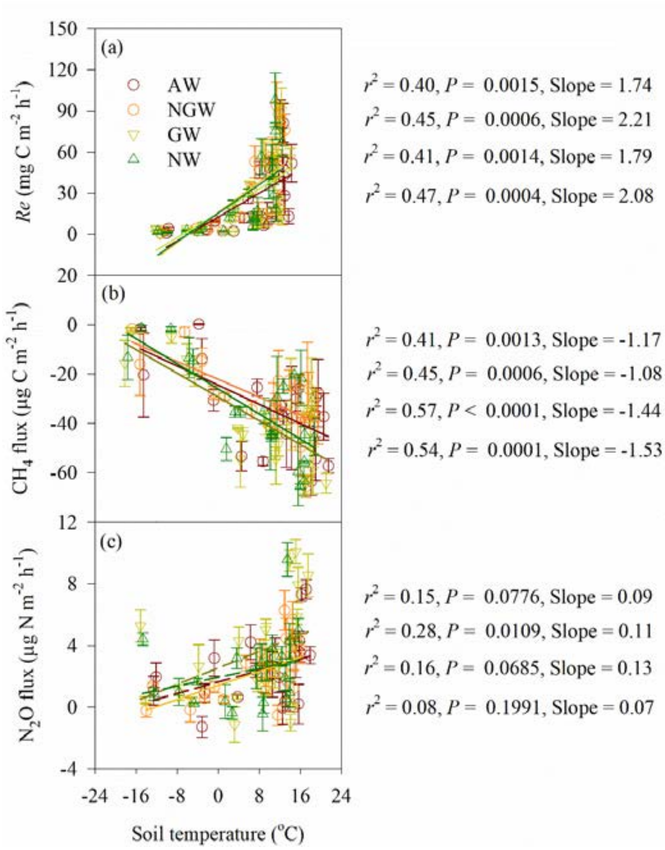


Figure S5 The relationship between ecosystem respiration (*Re*), $CH_4$ uptake and $N_2O$ emissions and soil temperature (at 10-cm depth) from October 2016 to September 2019. AW, warming throughout the year; NGW, warming in the nongrowing season only; GW, warming in the growing season only; NW, non-warming.

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