



# Gated recurrent unit models outperform other Machine learning models in prediction of minimum temperature in greenhouse Based on local weather data

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## ABSTRACT

Obtaining the minimum temperature of greenhouse ( $T_{imin}$ ) in advance can determine the lower limit of crop growth. Some research thought that was feasible to install sensors in the greenhouse so that can obtain the input variables for predicting  $T_{imin}$ . However, lots of expenditures would be spent for intensive greenhouse parks. Local weather data can be easily and economically obtained so that considered it as an input variable for predicting  $T_{imin}$ . First, the Pearson correlation coefficients were used to select the relevant input meteorological variables and eight different input combinations were consequently constructed. Then, three generalized machine learning models (i.e. Random forest, *RF*; Support vector machine, *SVM*; and Multiple linear regression, *MLR*) and two deep learning models (i.e. Long-short term memory, *LSTM*; Gated recurrent unit, *GRU*) were used to predict  $T_{imin}$  based on the eight different input combinations. The results showed that the *RF* and *GRU* model had the best prediction performance among the generalized machine learning and deep learning models, respectively. Deep learning models were not sensitive to the number of input variables. In the absence of sufficient meteorological factors as input variables, the *GRU* model generally had better prediction performance than the other models. The prediction ability of deep learning models was obviously superior to the generalized machine learning models when  $T_{imin} > 28.5^{\circ}\text{C}$  or  $T_{imin} < 13.9^{\circ}\text{C}$ , particularly for the *GRU* model. Most of the differences between predicted and observed value ( $D_i$ ) of deep learning models distributed between  $-1^{\circ}\text{C}$  and  $1^{\circ}\text{C}$ . And most of the predicted  $T_{imin}$  by *RF*, *SVM* and *MLR* models were lower than the actual  $T_{imin}$ , while the deep learning models were relatively stable. Finally, consider the prediction accuracy in terms of lacking input variables and the stability of the model, we recommended deep learning models to predict  $T_{imin}$ , especially the *GRU* model.

## 1. Introduction

A greenhouse is an agricultural building incorporating a large window area, where the windows are made of glass or some other transparent material. Sunlight heats the ground of the greenhouse. Energy is released from the ground in the form of infrared radiation which is blocked by the glass. This increases the temperature inside the greenhouse relative to the outside temperature. Usually, greenhouse provides

protection for crops in unsuitable seasons by creating a suitable micro-environment (Critten and Bailey, 2002). Therefore, the well-growth of greenhouse crops heavily depends on the environmental management of greenhouse. Temperature is one of the most important environmental factors in crop growth (Willits and Peet, 1998). Thus, regulation of temperature is one of the main goals of environmental management of greenhouse.

In greenhouse, most crops were able to fully grow and develop at daytime temperatures of  $20\text{--}30^{\circ}\text{C}$  and night temperatures of  $14\text{--}18^{\circ}\text{C}$

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| Nomenclature |                                      |             |  |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|-------------|--|
| $T_{air}$    | Air temperature (°C)                 | $WD_{ta}$   | Two-minute average wind direction (°)                |
| $T_{omax}$   | Outdoor air maximum temperature (°C) | $T_{ogmax}$ | Outdoor ground maximum temperature (°C)              |
| $T_{omin}$   | Outdoor air minimum temperature (°C) | $T_{ogmin}$ | Outdoor ground minimum temperature (°C)              |
| $Rain$       | Rainfall (mm)                        | $T_{imin}$  | Minimum temperature in greenhouse (°C)               |
| $P_a$        | Air pressure (kPa)                   | $RF$        | Random forest  |
| $VPD$        | Vapor pressure deficits (kPa)        | $SVM$       | Support vector machine                               |
| $T_{dp}$     | Dew point temperature (°C)           | $MLR$       | Multiple linear regression                           |
| $RH$         | Relative humidity (%)                | $LSTM$      | Long-short term memory neural network                |
| $RH_{min}$   | Minimum relative humidity (%)        | $GRU$       | Gated recurrent unit neural network                  |
| $WS_{ta}$    | Two-minute average wind speed (m/s)  | $R^2$       | Decision coefficient                                 |
|              |                                      | $RMSE$      | Root mean square error (°C)                          |
|              |                                      | $D_i$       | Difference between predicted and observed value (°C) |

(Hassanien et al., 2016). Unsuitable temperature will significantly hinder plant growth, yield, and fruit quality of crops (Kläring et al., 2015). Additionally, the lower limit of crop growth is determined by the minimum temperature in greenhouse (or  $T_{imin}$ ). In winter, freeze injury occurs when  $T_{imin}$  is lower than the optimum temperature for crop growth. And heat injury also occurs when  $T_{imin}$  is higher than the optimum temperature in summer (Lamaoui et al., 2018; Zeps et al., 2017). Then, some measures such as heat preservation, heating and cooling need to be taken to make the  $T_{imin}$  reach the threshold value suitable for crop growth (Attar et al., 2013; Attar et al., 2014; Ylidiz et al., 2012). However, the time lag between management and  $T_{imin}$  change usually failed the maximization of heat energy efficiency of intensively managed greenhouses. Thus, timely forecast of  $T_{imin}$  before management measures can help to improve heat energy efficiency and offer optimal temperature for crop growth in greenhouse.

However, temperature change in greenhouse was full of uncertainty and typically transient. Thus, accurate temperature forecasting in greenhouse remains a challenge, which are mainly the following aspects. One the one hand, the change of temperature in greenhouse was shown a non-linear tendency (El Ghoumari et al., 2005). Another issue is that temperature had strong coupling with other factors in greenhouse like soil and crop. This leads to the calculation of unmeasurable parameters such as soil heat flux density, photosynthesis rate and water vapor pressure in predicting greenhouse temperatures (Jung et al., 2020; Pawlowski et al., 2017). Some useful prediction models for greenhouse temperature have been reported in literature (Coelho et al., 2005; Dombayci and Goelcuc, 2009; Du et al., 2012; Yu et al., 2016). Generally, there are three categories of greenhouse temperature prediction models: physical models, empirical models, and artificial intelligence models. Although the physical models could effectively predict greenhouse temperature, they usually required more observation data and computing resources for model calibration (Van Beveren et al., 2015). The empirical models aimed to reveal the linear relationships between prediction variables and input variables, and were widely accepted because of their excellent performance in predicting linear problems (Reikard, 2009; Wang et al., 2019). However, the empirical models could be restricted by the non-linear variations of greenhouse temperature. With the development of big data, artificial intelligence (AI) has been widely applied in data science. As part of AI, generalized machine learning and deep learning algorithms could achieve accurate predictions through elucidating the nonlinear relationships between input and output variables (He et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2016). Deep learning, as an important branch of machine learning, has shown more powerful predictive ability than shallow models (Cao et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2021). However, there were almost no relevant literature about the comparisons between generalized machine learning and deep learning models in terms of  $T_{imin}$  prediction.

Generally, these above prediction models of greenhouse temperature have their own problems though they could achieve relatively reasonable prediction accuracies. First of all, physical and empirical models

were usually complex in structure and required a large number of model parameters. These model parameters usually need to be obtained through field measurements with specific environmental equipment (Chen et al., 2016; Guzman-Cruz et al., 2009). The machine learning models were more efficient in predicting greenhouse temperature. However, environment-monitoring equipment should be installed in greenhouse to obtain the input variables of the models. Therefore, although machine learning models were superior to physical and empirical models in terms of model structure and predictive performance, most previous studies needed specific devices to collect relevant data for greenhouse temperature prediction. Usually, it was expensive for farmers to set up environment monitoring system in greenhouse (Aiello et al., 2018). Hence, it was necessary find a new method to predict greenhouse temperature more conveniently and efficiently.

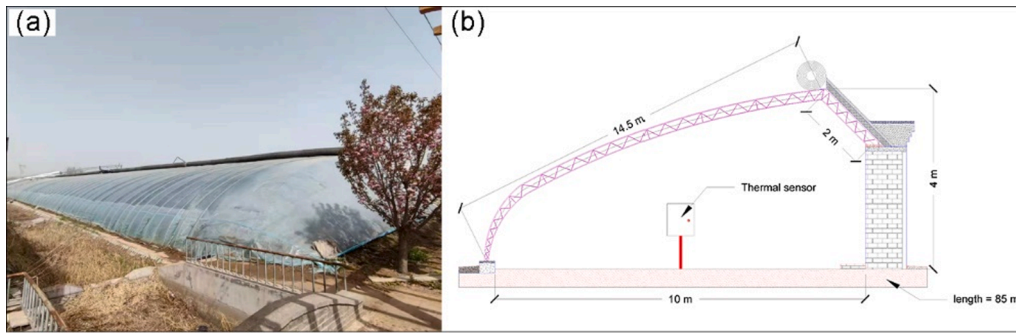
In greenhouse, the variation of temperature was a non-linear dynamic process, and outside environmental factors could inevitably affect the inside temperature. Generally, it was feasible to predict greenhouse temperature based on several measured outside meteorological factors. This was mainly because the dynamics of greenhouse temperature were main determined by the differences in energy and mass contents between inside and outside environments of greenhouse. More importantly, data of external meteorological factors can be easily and economically obtained from local weather stations. However, few studies focused on the influences of different outside meteorological factors on inside temperature of greenhouse. In addition, the number of local meteorological factors that can be obtained was different in different regions, which was caused by the differences in the equipment of the weather stations. Therefore, the selection of optimal combination of input meteorological variables was also a key to  $T_{imin}$  prediction, especially lacking input variables.

In response to the above problems in the prediction of the minimum temperature in greenhouse or  $T_{imin}$ , the objectives of this study were to (1) the feasibility of using local meteorological factors as input variables to predict  $T_{imin}$ ; (2) evaluate the performances of different models and input variable combinations in dynamic  $T_{imin}$  prediction, especially in the case of insufficient input variables; and (3) analyze the stability of different models based on the distributions of differences between predicted and observed  $T_{imin}$  values ( $D_i$ ). The results of this study will prove the reliability of using local meteorological factors as input variables to predict  $T_{imin}$ , especially lacking input variables. Thereby providing an efficient and economical method in intensive greenhouse parks.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. Greenhouse and dataset

All relevant observations were conducted in a typical solar greenhouse located in Changle County (N3641', E11850'), Weifang City, Shandong Province, China (Fig. 1). This type of solar greenhouse was very common in northern China. The experiment area was located in

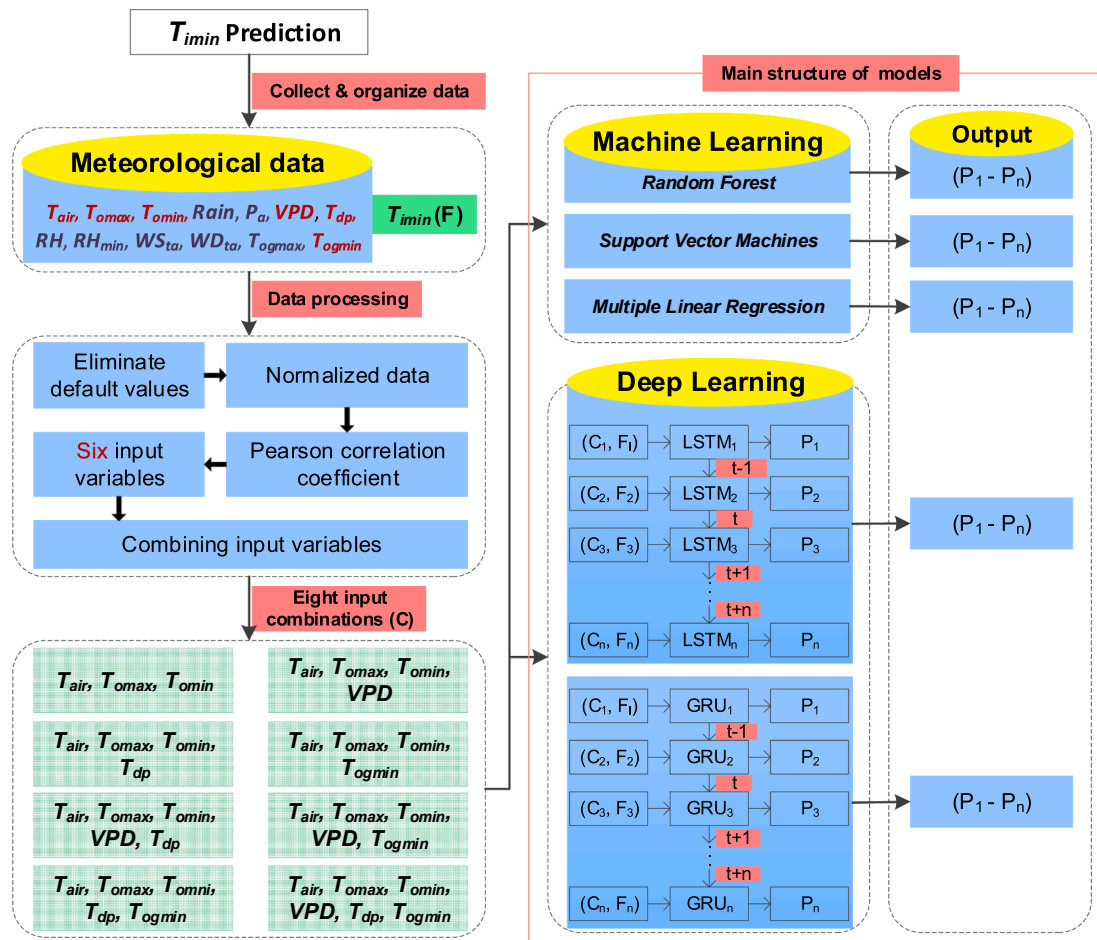


**Fig. 1.** A real photograph (a) and the diagrammatic sketch (b) of the solar greenhouse (length = 85 m; width = 10 m; height of ridge = 4 m; south roof = 14.5 m; north roof = 2 m) investigated in this study.

temperate monsoon zone. The minimum temperature in greenhouse or  $T_{imin}$  was measured by a thermal sensor placed in the center of the greenhouse (Fig. 1b). The sensor recorded  $T_{imin}$  hourly from 01/20/2017 to 12/30/2018. Hourly meteorological data between 01/20/2017 and 12/30/2018 were obtained from the National Meteorological Information Center of China (NMIC), including outdoor air temperature ( $T_{air}$ , °C), outdoor maximum temperature ( $T_{omax}$ , °C), outdoor minimum temperature ( $T_{omin}$ , °C), rainfall ( $Rain$ , mm), air pressure ( $P_a$ , kPa), vapor pressure deficits ( $VPD$ , kPa), dew point temperature ( $T_{dp}$ , °C), relative humidity ( $RH$ , %), minimum relative humidity ( $RH_{min}$ , %), two minute average wind speed ( $WS_{ta}$ , m/s), two minute average wind direction ( $WD_{ta}$ , °), occurrence of ground maximum temperature ( $T_{ogmax}$ , °C), and

outdoor ground minimum temperature ( $T_{ogmin}$ , °C). These meteorological data were also recorded hourly and synchronized with the recording frequency of  $T_{imin}$ .

After obtaining the dataset, appropriate input variables were selected for the generalized machine learning and deep learning models. First, all obtained data should be standardized. It was essential to analyze the correlations between meteorological factors and  $T_{imin}$  to select the relevant input variables effectively. Then, meteorological factors with a correlation coefficient  $>0.5$  were selected as input variables to the models. It was also necessary to investigate the prediction performances of different models under different input combinations of meteorological variables. Finally, 70 % of the available data were used



**Fig. 2.** Framework of  $T_{imin}$  prediction based on generalized machine learning and deep learning models.  $F_1 - F_n$  represent the data series of observed  $T_{imin}$ ;  $C_1 - C_n$  are the data series of input variables; and  $P_1 - P_n$  are the data series of final predicted output values. The meanings of variables are referred to the Nomenclature.

to train the models and the rest 30 % were used to test the models. The training data has passed 10-fold cross-validation, so that the samples of highest training accuracy were obtained to train the model. More details about  $T_{imin}$  prediction with generalized machine learning and deep learning models could be found in Fig. 2.

## 2.2. Models for $T_{imin}$ prediction

### Random forests (RF)

For regression, Random forest (RF) is a combination predictor based on the prediction of decision trees, in which growing trees depend on the value of random vector. The decision tree will get numerical values instead of class labels. Random forest will not overfit because of the Law of Large Numbers. So it is a reasonable and efficient predictor (Breiman, 2001). In this study, the 'Random forest' package in R language (R software, v4.0.3) was used to construct the RF model to predict the  $T_{imin}$ .

### Support vector machine (SVM)

Support vector machine (SVM) is a kind of machine learning predictor based on kernel function. SVM was proposed by Vapnik in 1995 and widely used in classification and regression tasks (Vapnik, 1995). The SVM maps the input vector to a high-dimensional space, which constructs an optimally separated hyperplane. Then a kernel function is constructed in the space to perform secondary classification and regression of the input data. Thus, it has strong predictive performance, but its calculation cost is high. In this study, the 'e1071' package was used to construct the SVM model to predict  $T_{imin}$  in R language.

### Multiple Linear Regression (MLR)

Multiple linear regression (MLR) is mainly used to deal with the influences of multiple factors on dependent variables. In the task of multiple regression prediction, MLR mainly constructs the final predictor by constructing the fitting relationship between the observed multiple independent variables and a dependent variable (Eq. (1)). In this study, MLR was directly constructed in the R language to predict  $T_{imin}$ .

$$y = b_0 + b_1x_1 + b_2x_2 + b_3x_3 + \dots + b_zx_z \quad (1)$$

where  $b_0, b_1, b_2, b_3$  and  $b_z$  are the regression coefficients;  $x_1, x_2, x_3, x_z$  are input variables;  $y$  is predictive variable.

### Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM)

The Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) model was proposed by (Hochreiter and Schmidhuber, 1997) (Fig. 3a) and belonged to recurrent neural network (RNN) model. Usually, RNN had some imperfections about non-stationarity and long-term dependence when processing long-term series data. LSTM changed the basic structure of RNN neural unit by adding a forget gate between the input and output gates, so that it had long-term memory and the ability to prevent gradient vanishing. Therefore, LSTM is more suitable for the task of predicting long-term sequence due to its own network structure (Chen et al., 2019). In this study, we used the Tensorflow v2.3.1 in Python v3.6.10 to build the LSTM network to predict  $T_{imin}$ .

### (5) Gated Recurrent Unit (GRU).

The Gated Recurrent Unit (GRU) model is another variant of RNN (Fig. 3b), which was proposed by (Chung et al., 2014). Like LSTM, the original GRU was also based on long-term dependence but had fewer parameters. GRU can better deal with the prediction problem of long sequence data than RNN. Unlike LSTM, GRU only had two gates (update gate and reset gate) without output gates and separate memory cells, which made all information exposed as information flowed inside the unit. However, the structure of GRU was simpler and easier to converge than LSTM. Thus, it is difficult to compare the performances of two models, except for some specific tasks (Shewalkar et al., 2019). In this study, we also used Tensorflow v2.3.1 in Python, v3.6.10 to build the GRU network to predict  $T_{imin}$ .

## 2.3. Statistical indices

The Pearson correlation coefficient ( $\rho_{A,B}$ ) was used to determine the correlation between  $T_{imin}$  and meteorological variables (Eq. (2)). The performance and accuracy of the five  $T_{imin}$  prediction models were evaluated based on widely used statistics of coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ; Eq. (3)) and root mean square error (RMSE; Eq. (4)). Generally,  $R^2$  is closer to 1, indicating the model has higher goodness of fit. And, RMSE is closer to 0, indicating the model has smaller deviation.

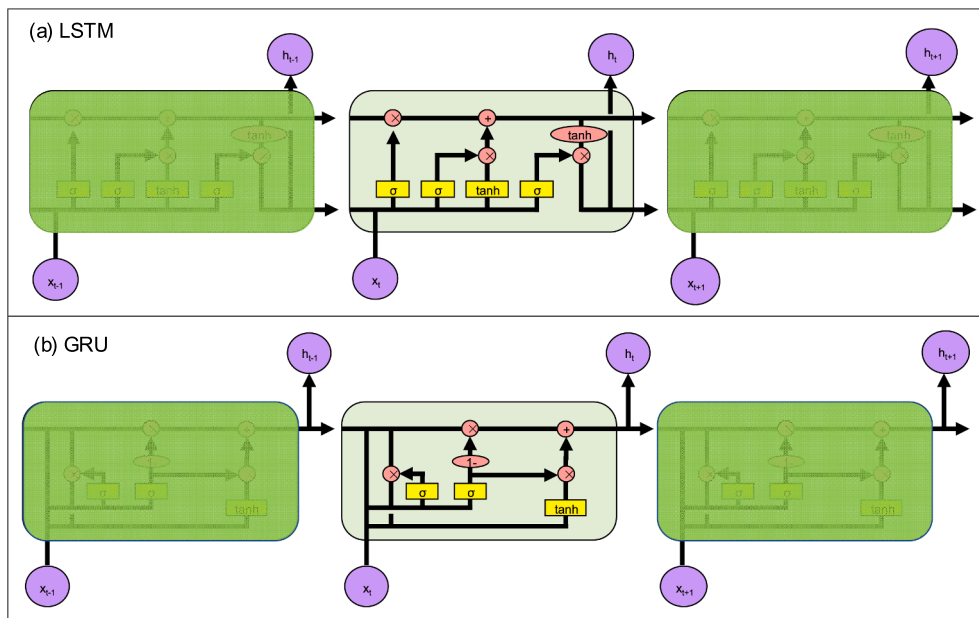


Fig. 3. Details of the LSTM (a) and GRU (b) models.  $h$  is current hidden state;  $x$  is current input;  $\sigma$  are gates. The gates of LSTM from left to right are: input gate, output gate, and forget gate. The gate of GRU from left to right are: update gate and reset gate. The symbol  $\tanh$  is the tanh function.



$$\rho_{A,B} = \frac{n \sum_{j=1}^n A_j B_j - \sum_{j=1}^n A_j \sum_{j=1}^n B_j}{\sqrt{n \sum_{j=1}^n A_j^2 - (\sum_{j=1}^n A_j)^2} \sqrt{n \sum_{j=1}^n B_j^2 - (\sum_{j=1}^n B_j)^2}} \quad (2)$$

where  $\rho_{A,B}$  is the Pearson correlation coefficient;  $A$  and  $B$  are  $T_{imin}$  and meteorological variables;  $n$  is the data sample size.

$$R^2 = \frac{[\sum_{i=1}^n (X_i - \bar{X})(Y_i - \bar{Y})]^2}{\sum_{i=1}^n (X_i - \bar{X})^2 \sum_{i=1}^n (Y_i - \bar{Y})^2} \quad (3)$$

$$RMSE = \sqrt{\frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n (Y_i - X_i)^2} \quad (4)$$

where  $Y_i$  is the model predicted value of  $T_{imin}$  on the  $i$ -th hour;  $X_i$  is the measured value of  $T_{imin}$  on the  $i$ -th hour;  $\bar{Y}$  is the average of  $Y_i$ ;  $\bar{X}$  is the average of  $X_i$ ;  $n$  is the data sample size.

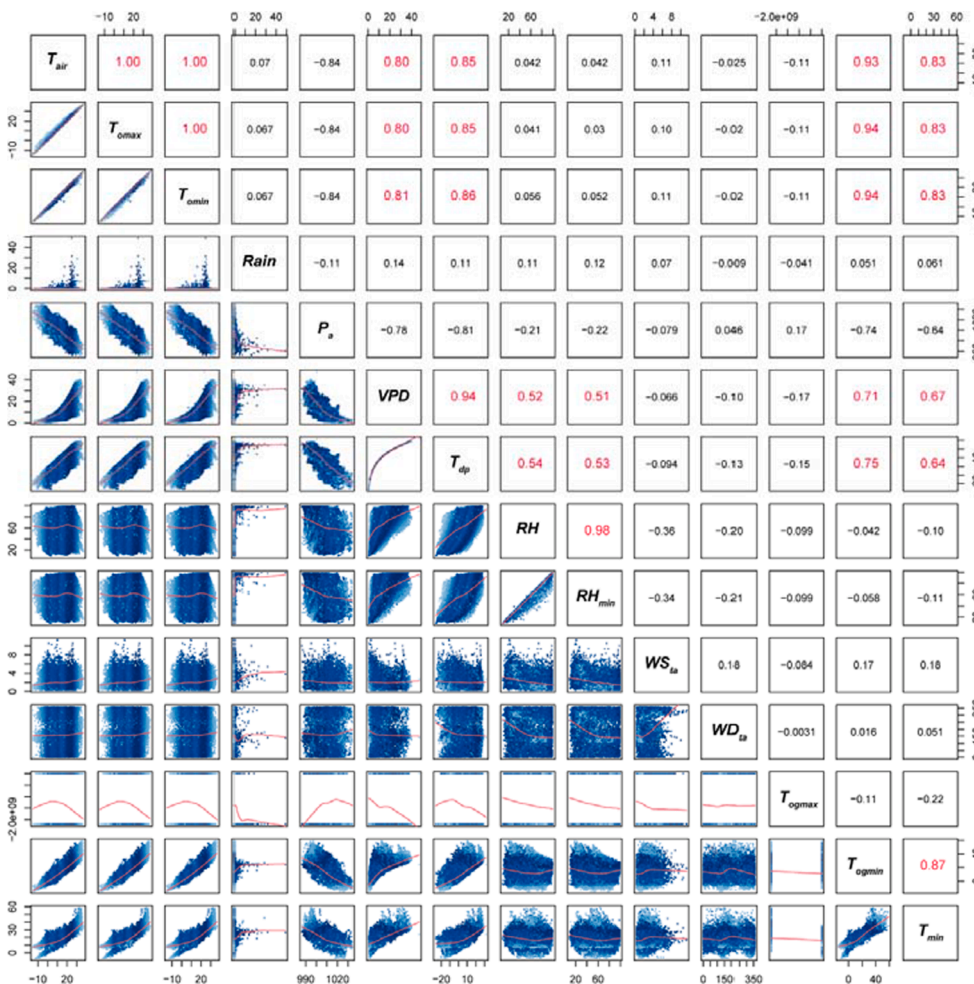
### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Selection of combinations of meteorological variables outside the greenhouse

We comprehensively analyzed the relationships between  $T_{imin}$  and all of the outdoor meteorological variables (Fig. 4). The upper triangular part of the matrix represented the correlation coefficients between the factors and the lower triangular part was the variations of correlations between  $T_{imin}$  and 13 meteorological variables. The larger red font

presented significant correlations. The correlations between  $T_{imin}$  and different meteorological variables were different. The rankings of correlations between  $T_{imin}$  and meteorological variables were:  $T_{ogmin} > T_{air} = T_{omax} = T_{omin} > VPD > T_{dp} > WS_{ta} > Rain > WD_{ta} > RH > RH_{min} > T_{ogmax} > P_a$ . The variables of  $T_{ogmin}$ ,  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ,  $VPD$ ,  $T_{dp}$ ,  $WS_{ta}$ ,  $Rain$ , and  $WD_{ta}$  were all positively correlated with  $T_{imin}$ , while  $RH$ ,  $RH_{min}$ ,  $T_{ogmax}$ , and  $P_a$  were negatively correlated. It was obvious that  $T_{imin}$  had positive correlations with temperature-related variables except for  $T_{ogmax}$  ( $T_{ogmin}$ ,  $r = 0.87$ ;  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ,  $r = 0.83$ ;  $T_{dp}$ ,  $r = 0.64$ ;  $T_{ogmax}$ ,  $r = -0.22$ ). Although  $T_{imin}$  had positive correlations with  $Rain$  (0.061),  $WS_{ta}$  (0.18), and  $WD_{ta}$  (0.051), these relationships were obviously weak (Fig. 4). This was because the purpose of greenhouse was to provide a windproof and rainproof small environment for crop growth, which means that the influences of rainfall and wind on  $T_{imin}$  were relatively limited in greenhouse. The variables of  $P_a$ ,  $RH$ ,  $RH_{min}$ , and  $T_{ogmax}$  were negatively correlated with  $T_{imin}$  (Fig. 4).  $P_a$  obtained the maximum negative correlation coefficient (-0.64). Additionally,  $P_a$  also had significant negative correlations with  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ , and  $T_{omin}$ . This was because the increase of air temperature would make the inside air to expand and lead to decreases in air density and air pressure.

For the generalized machine learning models, when the input variable and output variables had high positive correlations, the training speed and accuracy of the models will be more excellent. Therefore, the meteorological variables that had negative correlations and low correlations ( $r < 0.5$ ) with  $T_{imin}$  were excluded. It was noteworthy that  $T_{imin}$  had similar  $r$  values with  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ , and  $T_{omin}$ , which indicated these variables might have similar temporal variations, but it did not mean these variables were interchangeable. Thus, all of these temperature-



**Fig. 4.** Correlation analysis between the lowest temperature in greenhouse ( $T_{imin}$ ) and outdoor meteorological variables. The lower triangle indicates the correlations between variables and the upper triangle indicates the correlation coefficients ( $r$ ) between different variables. Red numbers represent significantly positive correlations ( $r > 0.5$  and  $p < 0.001$ ). The meanings of variables were referred to the **Nomenclature**. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

related variables were chosen as input variables for the models. We also selected  $VPD$ ,  $T_{dp}$ , and  $T_{ogmin}$  as input variables and combined them with the three basic variables of  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ , and  $T_{omin}$ . Hence, a total of eight different input combinations were obtained: (A)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ; (B)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ,  $VPD$ ; (C)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ,  $T_{dp}$ ; (D)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ,  $T_{ogmin}$ ; (E)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ,  $VPD$ ,  $T_{dp}$ ; (F)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ,  $VPD$ ,  $T_{ogmin}$ ; (G)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ,  $T_{dp}$ ,  $T_{ogmin}$ ; and (H)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ,  $VPD$ ,  $T_{dp}$ ,  $T_{ogmin}$ .

### 3.2. Performances of different models in $T_{imi}$ Prediction

#### 3.2.1. Influences of eight input combinations in $T_{imin}$ prediction

The *RF* (Random forest) model achieved the highest  $R^2$  of 0.87 with the input Combination F ( $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ,  $VPD$ , and  $T_{ogmin}$ ), but the lowest  $RMSE$  of 4.43 °C with the Combination D ( $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ , and  $T_{ogmin}$ ) (Table 1). Generally, the  $R^2$  values of *RF* model increased with the number of input variables. The  $RMSE$  values also showed a downward trend (Fig. 5).

The *SVM* (Support vector machine) model with the Combination D had the optimal prediction performance ( $R^2 = 0.87$  and  $RMSE = 4.52$  °C in Table 1). However, the  $R^2$  value of *SVM* model rose first and then fell with the increased number of input variables. The  $RMSE$  values of *SVM* showed weak increasing tendency (Fig. 6). Thus, it could be seen that addition of excess meteorological variables would affect the final prediction accuracy of the *SVM* model (Table 1).

For the *MLR* (Multiple linear regression) model, it achieved the optimal prediction performance ( $R^2 = 0.86$  and  $RMSE = 4.36$  °C; Table 1) with the Combination H ( $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ,  $VPD$ ,  $T_{dp}$ , and  $T_{ogmin}$ ). Although there were strong correlations among  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ , and  $T_{omin}$ , the relationships between input variables and output variable were weak (Fig. 4). When the number of input variables was large, the final prediction of the *MLR* model was more accurate. Thus, for the *MLR* model, with the increased number of input variables, the prediction of  $T_{imin}$  became more accurate (Fig. 7). The  $R^2$  of the Combination H was 12.3 % higher than that of Combination A and the  $RMSE$  was reduced by 20.0 % compared with Combination A (Table 1).

The *LSTM* (Long short-term memory) model had the highest  $R^2$  of 0.844 and the lowest  $RMSE$  of 3.88 °C with the Combination D. The  $R^2$  of *LSTM* model hardly changed with the increase of input variable number, only increased by 0.48 % from Combination A to H. At the same time, the  $RMSE$  values only reduced by 0.27 % (Fig. 8). For the *GRU* (Gated recurrent unit) model, the optimal input variable was the Combination H ( $R^2 = 0.866$  and  $RMSE = 3.58$  °C in Table 1). Similarly, the accuracy of *GRU* model was quite stable with different numbers of input variables, since  $R^2$  values only increased by 0.81 % and  $RMSE$  decreased by 2.74 % (Fig. 9).

As for the two deep learning models, both *LSTM* and *GRU* models were not sensitive to the number of input variables, or the predictive abilities of the models did not fluctuate greatly under different combinations of input meteorological variables. The average  $R^2$  and  $RMSE$  values of different input combinations were calculated to observe the

overall performances of different models. The largest average  $R^2$  of 0.86 was got with the Combination F ( $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ,  $VPD$ , and  $T_{ogmin}$ ) and the smallest  $RMSE$  of 4.30 °C was obtained with the Combination H ( $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ,  $VPD$ ,  $T_{dp}$ , and  $T_{ogmin}$ ). The average  $R^2$  of the Combination F was only 0.23 % higher than the Combination H (0.85), while the  $RMSE$  was 4.30 % higher than the Combination H (4.48 °C) (Table 1). Generally, the five models all had relatively better prediction accuracies with the Combination H. But the *GRU* model had the highest prediction accuracies when the input variables were the least.

The ranges of linear regression slopes of the five models were: 0.83–0.85 for *RF* model, 0.77–0.81 for *SVM* model, 0.61–0.87 for *MLR* model, 0.79–0.83 for *LSTM* model, and 0.88–0.95 for *GRU* model, respectively (Table 2). In general, the fitting curves of the *RF*, *SVM*, *LSTM*, and *GRU* models were stable under different numbers of input variables except for the *MLR* model. However, the combinations with the maximum slopes were different for various models. The combinations with the maximum slopes were the Combinations F, G, H, C, and E for the *RF*, *SVM*, *MLR*, *LSTM*, and *GRU* models, respectively (Table 2). Although the maximum slope values of the *RF*, *SVM*, *LSTM* and *GRU* models did not occurred under the Combination H, the differences were limited among the eight combinations.

#### 3.2.2. Performances of *RF*, *SVM*, *MLR*, *LSTM* and *GRU* models in $T_{imin}$ prediction

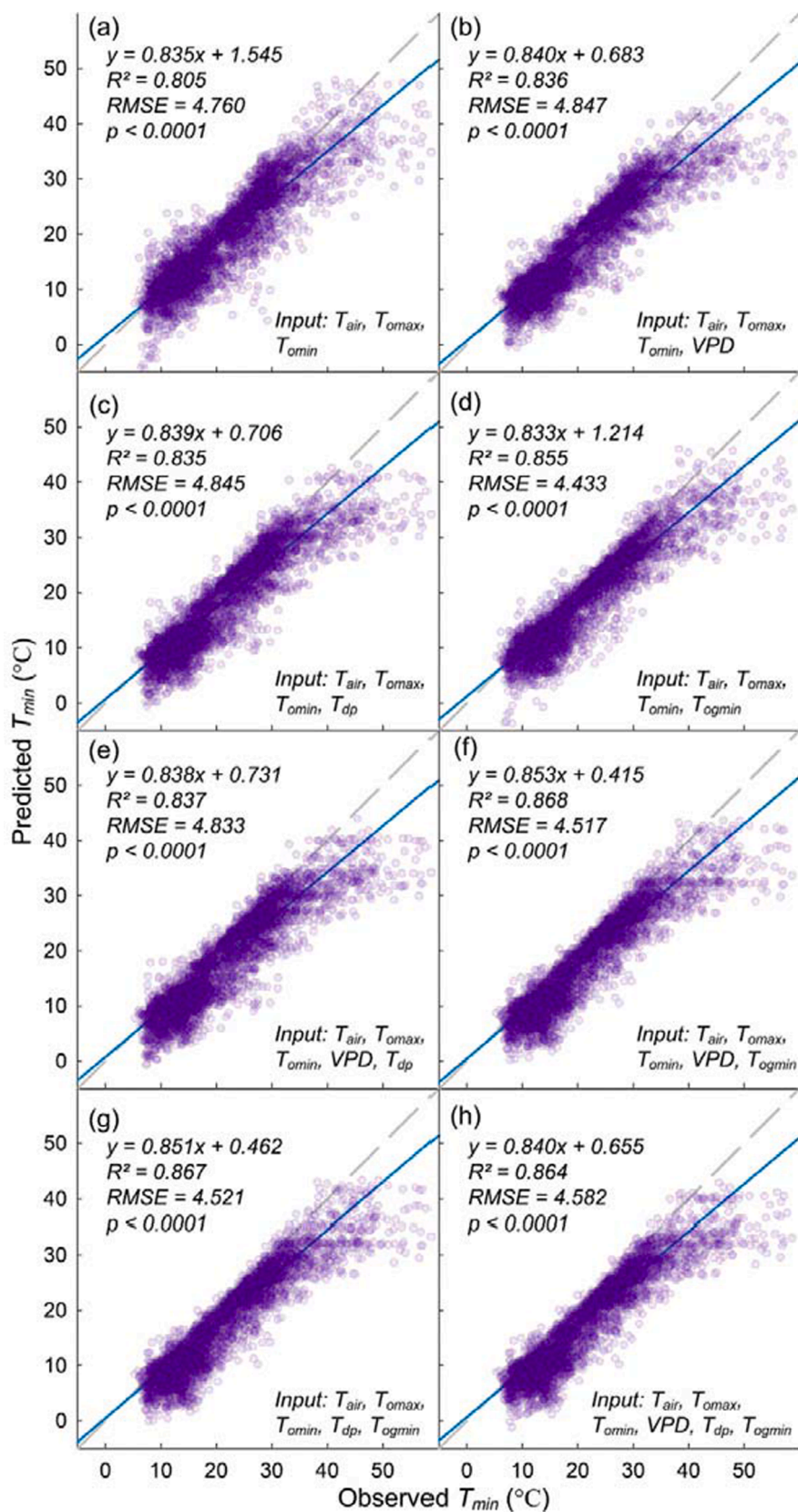
Under the Combination A ( $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$  and  $T_{omin}$ ; Table 1), the performance rank of the five models in  $T_{imin}$  predictions was: *GRU* > *LSTM* > *SVM* > *RF* > *MLR*. So, the *GRU* model could obtain the best prediction accuracy with the fewest input variables ( $R^2 = 0.86$  and  $RMSE = 3.68$  °C). At the same time, the performance of *MLR* was the worst ( $R^2 = 0.76$  and  $RMSE = 5.46$  °C), which means the *MLR* model was not suitable for  $T_{imin}$  prediction when few input meteorological variables were available. When the number of input variables reached the maximum (or Combination H), the *GRU* model also had the best prediction performance compared to other models ( $R^2 = 0.87$  and  $RMSE = 3.58$  °C). At the same time, the performance of the *SVM* model was the worst ( $R^2 = 0.84$  and  $RMSE = 4.96$  °C). Then, the average  $R^2$  and  $RMSE$  values were calculated for different input combinations to assess the overall performances of different models. For generalized machine learning models, *RF* model obtained the best general prediction accuracy ( $R^2 = 0.85$  and  $RMSE = 4.67$  °C), but the *MLR* performed the worst ( $R^2 = 0.82$  and  $RMSE = 5.27$  °C). And for deep learning models, both the largest  $R^2$  and smallest  $RMSE$  were obtained with the *GRU* model ( $R^2 = 0.86$  and  $RMSE = 3.65$  °C). Therefore, considering the least and most input variables, the *RF* model was proved to be the suitable generalized machine learning model and the *GRU* model was the suitable deep learning model for  $T_{imin}$  predictions.

For slopes of linear regressions between the observed and predicted  $T_{imin}$  values based on different models, the largest slopes appeared with the *GRU* model under the Combination E (0.95), and the smallest slope occurred with the *MLR* model under the Combination B (0.61) (Table 2). Furthermore, the slopes of *RF* model were less affected by the number of

**Table 1**

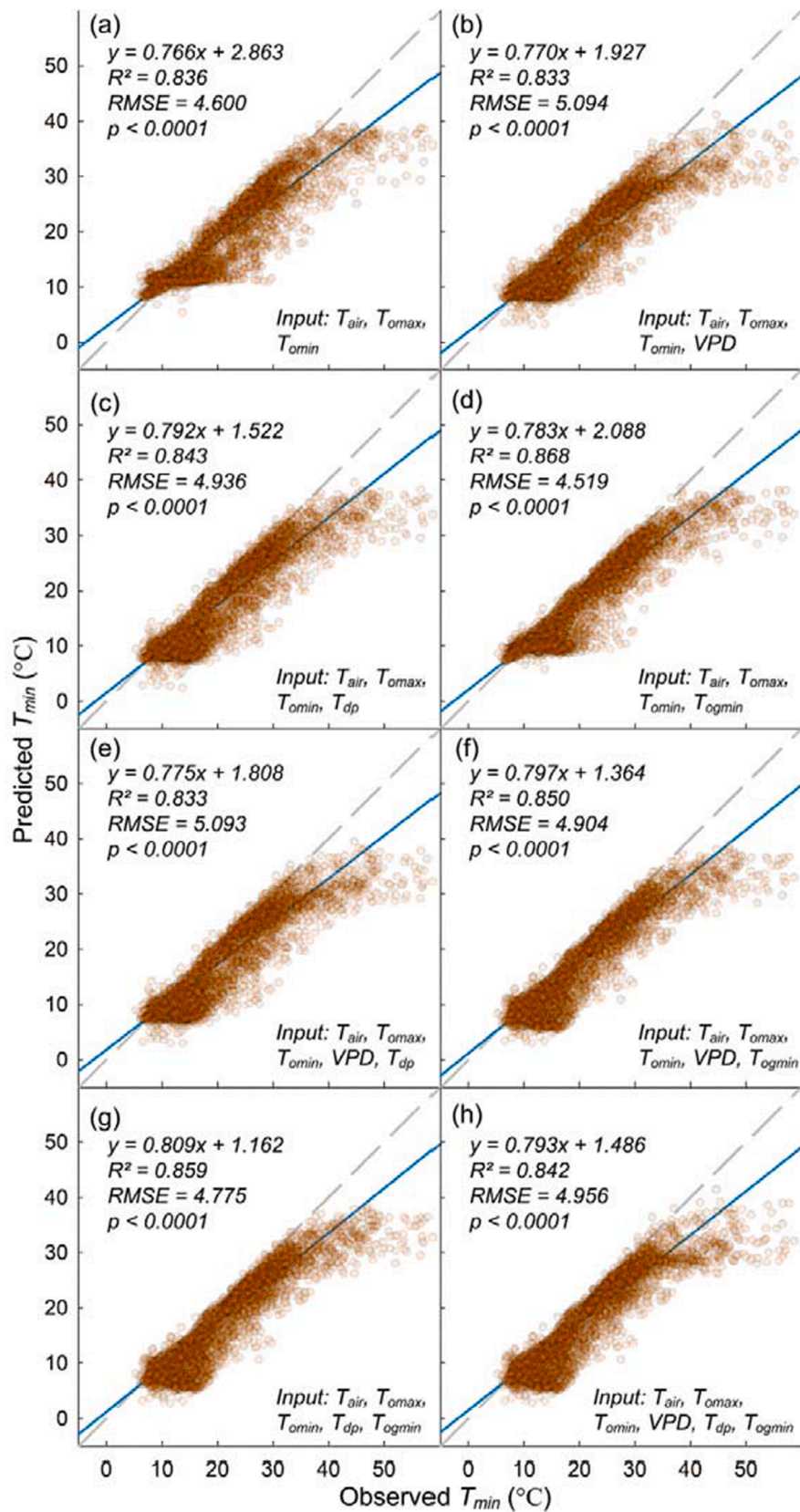
Input combination of meteorological variables used in three generalized machine learning (*RF*, *SVM*, and *MLR*) and two deep learning (*LSTM* and *GRU*) models in the predictions of lowest temperature in greenhouse ( $T_{imin}$ ) in the model test stage.

| Combinations | <i>RF</i> |        | <i>SVM</i> |        | <i>MLR</i> |        | <i>LSTM</i> |        | <i>GRU</i> |        | <i>Means</i> |        |
|--------------|-----------|--------|------------|--------|------------|--------|-------------|--------|------------|--------|--------------|--------|
|              | $R^2$     | $RMSE$ | $R^2$      | $RMSE$ | $R^2$      | $RMSE$ | $R^2$       | $RMSE$ | $R^2$      | $RMSE$ | $R^2$        | $RMSE$ |
| (a)          | 0.805     | 4.760  | 0.836      | 4.600  | 0.764      | 5.455  | 0.837       | 4.007  | 0.859      | 3.684  | 0.820        | 4.501  |
| (b)          | 0.836     | 4.847  | 0.833      | 5.094  | 0.764      | 5.832  | 0.840       | 3.951  | 0.862      | 3.650  | 0.827        | 4.675  |
| (c)          | 0.835     | 4.845  | 0.843      | 4.936  | 0.812      | 5.699  | 0.844       | 3.876  | 0.861      | 3.640  | 0.839        | 4.599  |
| (d)          | 0.855     | 4.433  | 0.868      | 4.519  | 0.834      | 5.330  | 0.836       | 4.082  | 0.859      | 3.675  | 0.850        | 4.408  |
| (e)          | 0.837     | 4.833  | 0.833      | 5.093  | 0.824      | 4.656  | 0.842       | 3.918  | 0.861      | 3.730  | 0.839        | 4.446  |
| (f)          | 0.868     | 4.517  | 0.850      | 4.904  | 0.835      | 5.281  | 0.842       | 3.967  | 0.864      | 3.607  | 0.852        | 4.455  |
| (g)          | 0.867     | 4.521  | 0.859      | 4.775  | 0.849      | 5.547  | 0.843       | 3.919  | 0.862      | 3.635  | 0.856        | 4.479  |
| (h)          | 0.864     | 4.582  | 0.842      | 4.956  | 0.858      | 4.363  | 0.842       | 4.008  | 0.866      | 3.583  | 0.854        | 4.298  |
| <i>Means</i> | 0.846     | 4.667  | 0.846      | 4.860  | 0.818      | 5.270  | 0.841       | 3.966  | 0.862      | 3.651  |              |        |



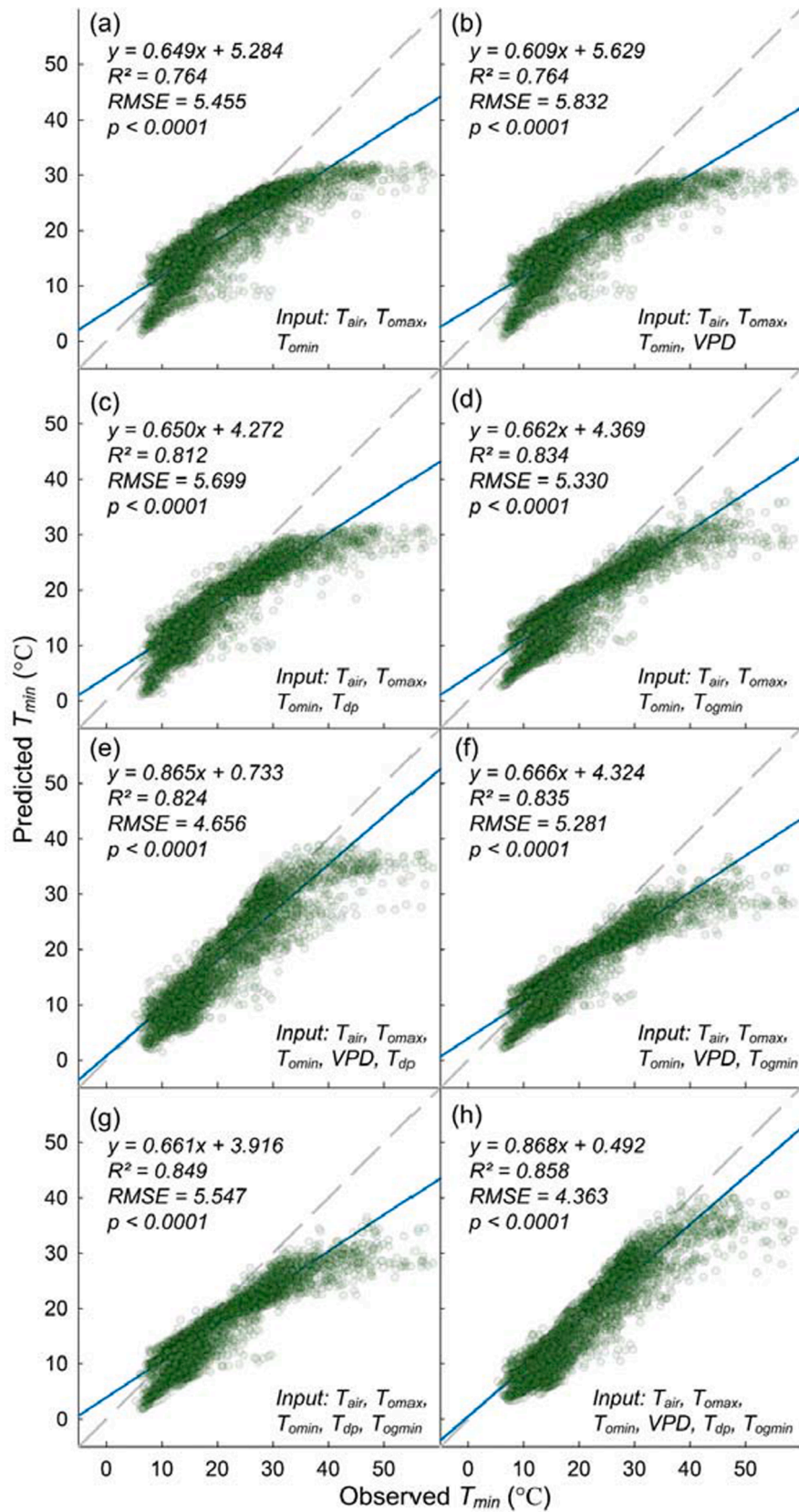
**Fig. 5.** Performance of the random forest (RF) model in  $T_{min}$  predictions at the test stage. Indices (a)-(h) represent the prediction results with different combinations of input meteorological factors of (a)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ; (b)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ , VPD; (c)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ,  $T_{dp}$ ; (d)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ,  $T_{ogmin}$ ; (e)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ , VPD,  $T_{dp}$ ; (f)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ , VPD,  $T_{ogmin}$ ; (g)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ,  $T_{dp}$ ,  $T_{ogmin}$ ; and (h)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ , VPD,  $T_{dp}$ ,  $T_{ogmin}$ . The grey dashed line is the 1:1 line; the blue solid line is the fitted line.  $R^2$  and RMSE are determination coefficient and root mean square error. And the same below. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)



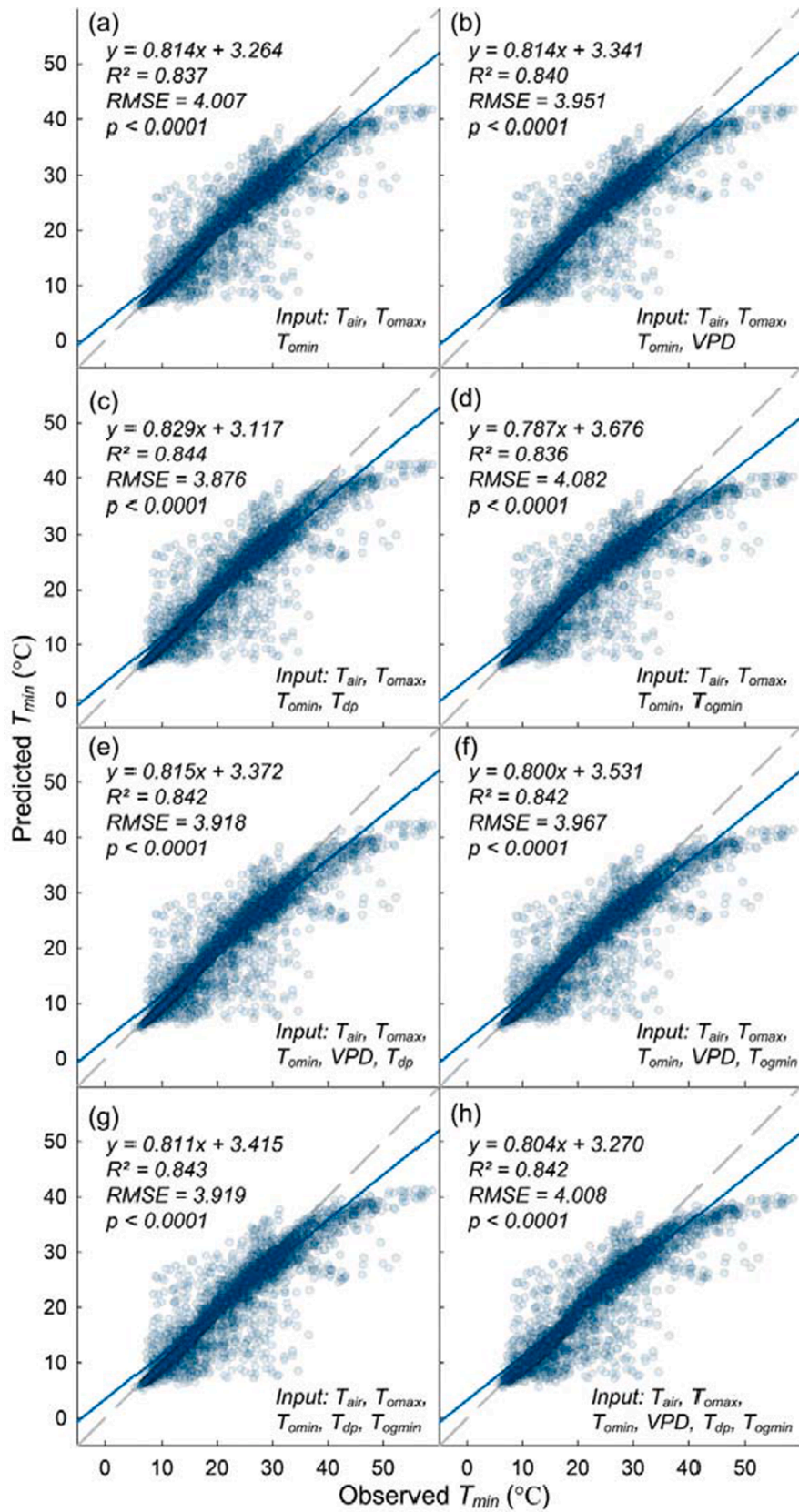


**Fig. 6.** Performance of the support vector machine (SVM) model in  $T_{min}$  predictions at the test stage. Indices (a)-(h) represent the prediction results with different combinations of input meteorological factors, which are consistent with Fig. 4. The grey dashed line is the 1:1 line and the blue solid line is the fitted line. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

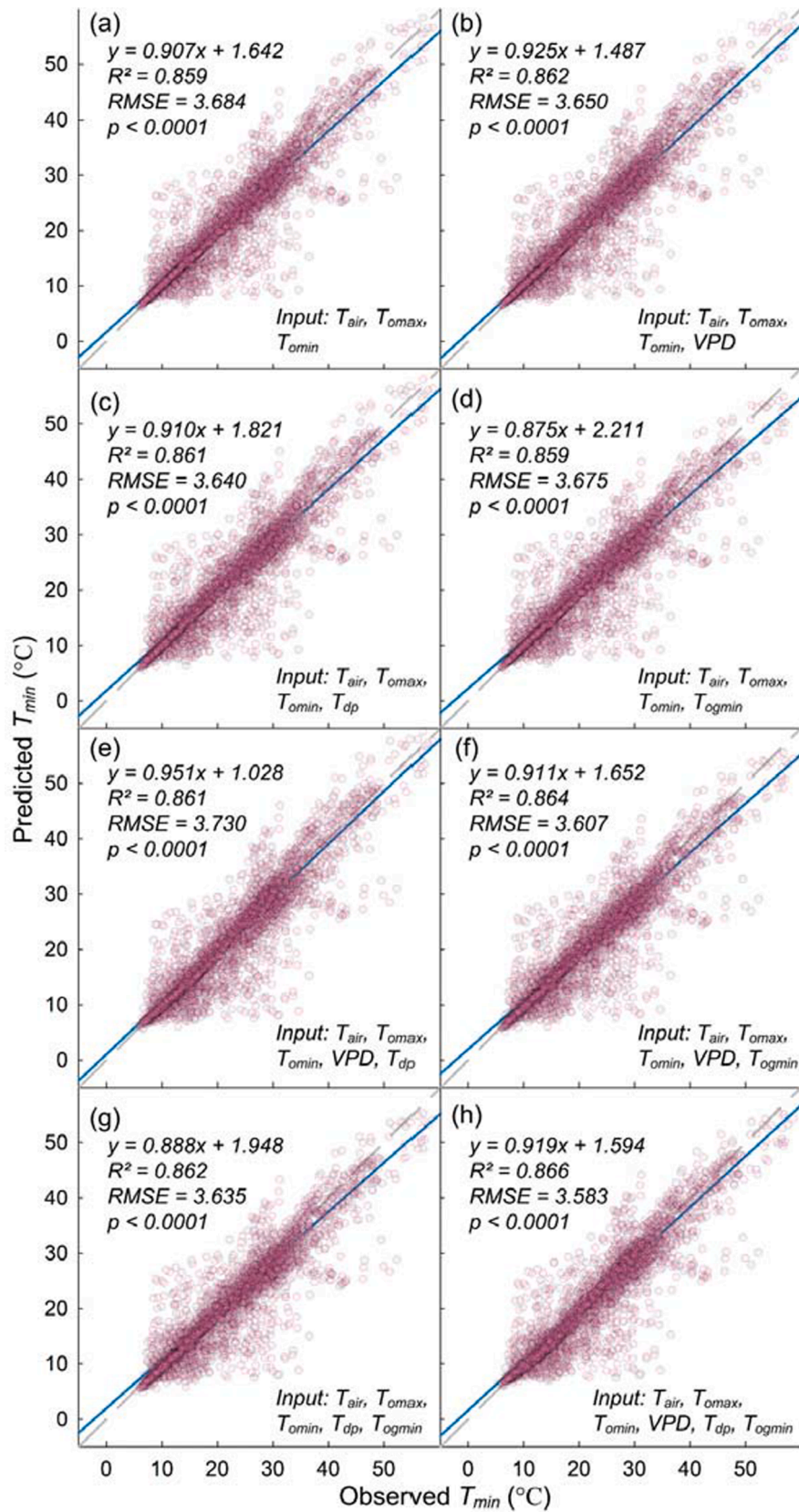




**Fig. 7.** Performance of the multiple linear regression (MLR) model in  $T_{min}$  predictions at the test stage. Indices (a)-(h) represent the prediction results with different combinations of input meteorological factors, which are consistent with Fig. 4. The grey dashed line is the 1:1 line and the blue solid line is the fitted line. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)



**Fig. 8.** Performance of the long-short term memory (LSTM) model in  $T_{min}$  predictions at the test stage. Indices (a)-(h) represent the prediction results with different combinations of input meteorological factors, which are consistent with Fig. 4. The grey dashed line is the 1:1 line and the blue solid line is the fitted line. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)



**Fig. 9.** Performance of the gated recurrent unit (GRU) model in  $T_{min}$  predictions at the test stage. Indices (a)-(h) represent the prediction results with different combinations of input meteorological factors, which are consistent with Fig. 4. The grey dashed line is the 1:1 line and the blue solid line is the fitted line. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)



**Table 2**

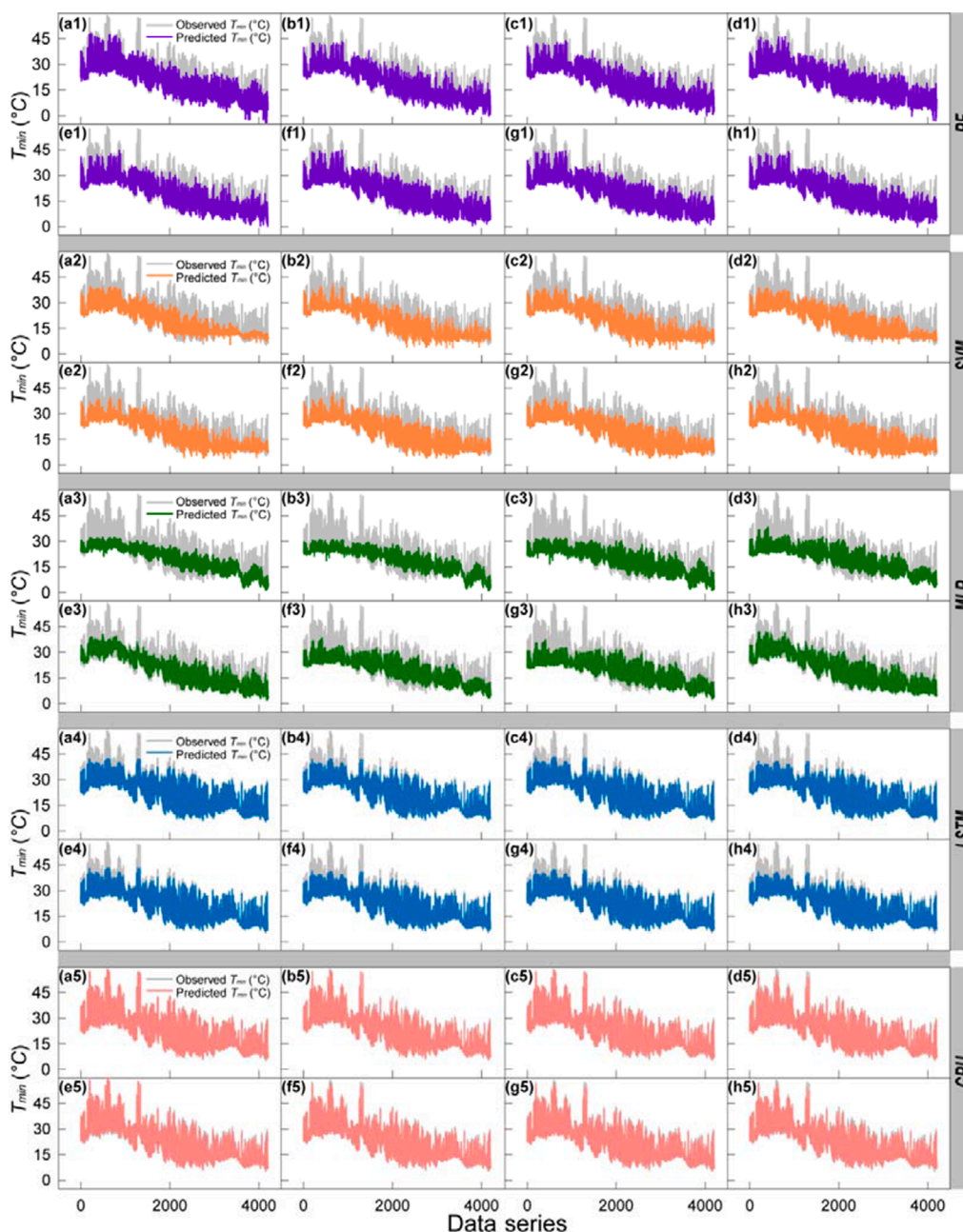
Slopes of linear regressions between observed and predicted lowest temperature in greenhouse ( $T_{imin}$ ) based on three generalized machine learning (RF, SVM, and MLR) and two deep learning (LSTM and GRU) models under eight different input combinations of meteorological variables in the model test stage.

| Combinations | RF   | SVM  | MLR  | LSTM | GRU  | Means |
|--------------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| A            | 0.84 | 0.77 | 0.65 | 0.81 | 0.91 | 0.79  |
| B            | 0.84 | 0.77 | 0.61 | 0.81 | 0.93 | 0.79  |
| C            | 0.84 | 0.79 | 0.65 | 0.83 | 0.91 | 0.80  |
| D            | 0.83 | 0.78 | 0.66 | 0.79 | 0.88 | 0.79  |
| E            | 0.84 | 0.78 | 0.87 | 0.82 | 0.95 | 0.85  |
| F            | 0.85 | 0.80 | 0.67 | 0.80 | 0.91 | 0.81  |
| G            | 0.85 | 0.81 | 0.66 | 0.81 | 0.89 | 0.80  |
| H            | 0.84 | 0.79 | 0.87 | 0.80 | 0.92 | 0.85  |
| Means        | 0.84 | 0.79 | 0.70 | 0.81 | 0.91 |       |

input variables, since the largest change was only 2.4 %. However, the slopes of MLR model were very sensitive to the number of input variables since the largest change of slope was about 42.5 % (Table 2). The average slope of different input combinations of the GRU model was the best among the five models (0.91). Comprehensively considering the RMSE,  $R^2$ , and fitting slope between the observed and predicted  $T_{imin}$  values, the GRU model both showed relatively high prediction accuracy and the lowest prediction error (Fig. 9).

### 3.3. Dynamics of $T_{imin}$ predicted with different models and input combinations

The predicted dynamics of  $T_{imin}$  with different models were inconsistent, especially in the different ranges of  $T_{imin}$  (Fig. 10). It was obvious that the predicted  $T_{imin}$  values with RF, SVM and MLR models were obviously lower than the observed values when  $T_{imin}$  in higher range. The prediction performance of SVM and MLR models in lower range of



**Fig. 10.** Comparisons of observed and predicted  $T_{imin}$  time series based on different models under different input combinations of meteorological variables in the model test stages. Indices (a)-(h) represent the prediction results with different combinations of input meteorological factors of (a)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{max}$ ,  $T_{min}$ ; (b)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{max}$ ,  $T_{min}$ ,  $VPD$ ; (c)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{max}$ ,  $T_{min}$ ,  $T_{dp}$ ; (d)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{max}$ ,  $T_{min}$ ,  $T_{dp}$ ,  $T_{ogmin}$ ; (e)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{max}$ ,  $T_{min}$ ,  $VPD$ ,  $T_{dp}$ ; (f)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{max}$ ,  $T_{min}$ ,  $VPD$ ,  $T_{ogmin}$ ; (g)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{max}$ ,  $T_{min}$ ,  $T_{dp}$ ,  $T_{ogmin}$ ; and (h)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{max}$ ,  $T_{min}$ ,  $VPD$ ,  $T_{dp}$ ,  $T_{ogmin}$ . Indices (a1) - (h1) represent the different input combinations used in the random forest (RF) model; (a2) - (h2) the combinations used in the support vector machine (SVM) model; (a3) - (h3) the combinations used in the multiple linear regression (MLR) model; (a4) - (h4) the combinations used in the long-short term memory (LSTM) model; and (a5) - (h5) the combinations used in the gated recurrent unit (GRU) model, respectively.



$T_{imin}$  was also unsatisfactory (Fig. 10). The LSTM model had better accuracy in  $T_{imin}$  prediction except for the extreme high range (Fig. 10a4–h4). The prediction performance of the GRU model was better than the other models at different  $T_{imin}$  ranges regardless of the input combination of meteorological variables (Fig. 10a5–h5).

To assess the prediction performance of  $T_{imin}$  dynamic with different models in different ranges of  $T_{imin}$ , the observed  $T_{imin}$  values were sorted and divided into three groups (i.e. observed  $T_{imin} > 28.5$  °C, upper quartile;  $13.9$  °C < observed  $T_{imin} < 28.5$  °C, middle; observed  $T_{imin} < 13.9$  °C, lower quartile). Then, the variations of  $R^2$  and RMSE of the five models were analyzed (Fig. 11). When observed  $T_{imin} > 28.5$  °C, the GRU model under Combination G and H obtained the highest  $R^2$  and the lowest RMSE among all models (Fig. 11A). Generally, the prediction performance of the GRU model was obviously better than the other models when observed  $T_{imin} > 28.5$  °C. Therefore, the GRU model was more suitable for high temperature prediction in summer.

When observed  $T_{imin}$  was in the middle region of  $13.9$ – $28.5$  °C, the SVM model under Combination H had the highest  $R^2$ , while the lowest RMSE appeared with the GRU model under Combination A (Fig. 11B). However, the change of  $R^2$  of SVM model (15.95 %) under the eight combinations was higher than that of GRU model (5.1 %). Although the  $R^2$  of SVM model was 10.68 % higher than that of GRU model, the RMSE of GRU model was 20.65 % lower than that of SVM model. Thus, both considering the difference of input variables and the prediction error, the GRU model was the most suitable mode for  $T_{imin}$  prediction in spring and autumn when  $13.9$  °C < observed  $T_{imin} < 28.5$  °C.

When observed  $T_{imin} < 13.9$  °C, the GRU model under Combination G had the highest  $R^2$ , while the smallest RMSE was obtained with the SVM model under Combination A (Fig. 11C). However, the average  $R^2$  and RMSE of GRU model under all of the combinations were higher than those of SVM model. More importantly, the prediction accuracies of the three generalized machine learning models were generally lower than the two deep learning models except for the RMSE of SVM model. Average  $R^2$  and RMSE were 0.15 and  $3.17$  °C for RF model; 0.11 and  $2.38$  °C for SVM model; 0.27 and  $3.04$  °C for MLR model; 0.29 and  $2.65$  °C for LSTM model; and 0.31 and  $2.61$  °C for GRU model, respectively. This indicated that the generalized machine learning models were not very suitable for  $T_{imin}$  predictions in winter (observed  $T_{imin} < 13.9$  °C).

### 3.4. Distributions of the differences in $T_{imin}$ predictions with different models and input combinations

The distributions of the differences between observed and predicted  $T_{imin}$  values ( $D_i$  = predicted  $T_{imin}$  values – observed  $T_{imin}$  values) were explored (Fig. 12). With the least number of input variables (or Combination A), the densities of  $D_i$  between  $-1$  and  $1$  °C of the deep learning models (50.65 % for LSTM model; 51.51 % for GRU model) were obviously higher than the generalized machine learning models (23.53 % for RF model; 29.47 % for SVM model; 18.41 % for MLR model; Fig. 12a). With Combination H, the densities of  $D_i$  between  $-1$  and  $1$  °C of the deep learning models (49.60 % for LSTM model; 48.79 % for GRU model) were also better than the generalized machine learning models (18.70 % for RF model; 26.01 % for SVM model; 25.15 % for MLR model; Fig. 12h). The averaged  $D_i$  values under all input combinations were calculated for each model to analyze the overall  $D_i$  distributions of different models. The distributions of average  $D_i$  between  $-1$  and  $1$  °C of the deep learning models (52.03 % for LSTM model; 52.82 % for GRU model) were significantly better than those of the generalized machine learning models (26.72 % for RF model; 26.03 % for SVM model; 17.08 % for MLR model). This indicated that the predicted  $T_{imin}$  values with LSTM and GRU models were closer to the actually measured values regardless of the number of input variables. And more importantly, the  $D_i$  of deep learning models outperformed generalized machine learning models when the input variables were insufficient (Fig. 12 a, b, c and d).

When the number of input variables was minimal (Combination A),

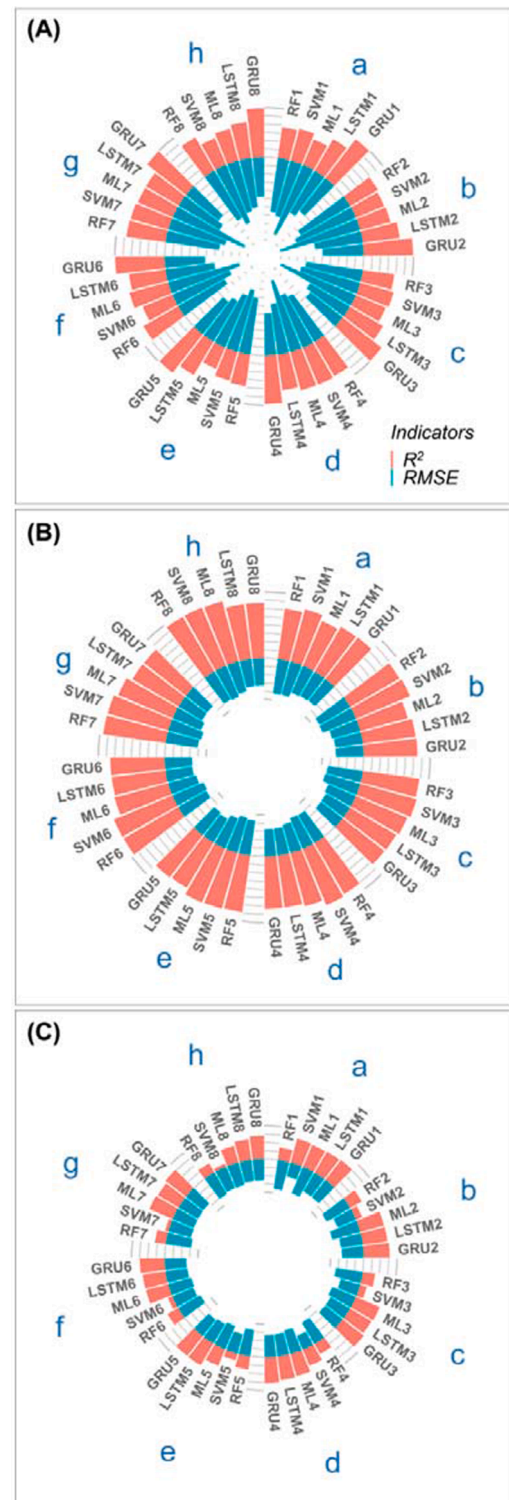
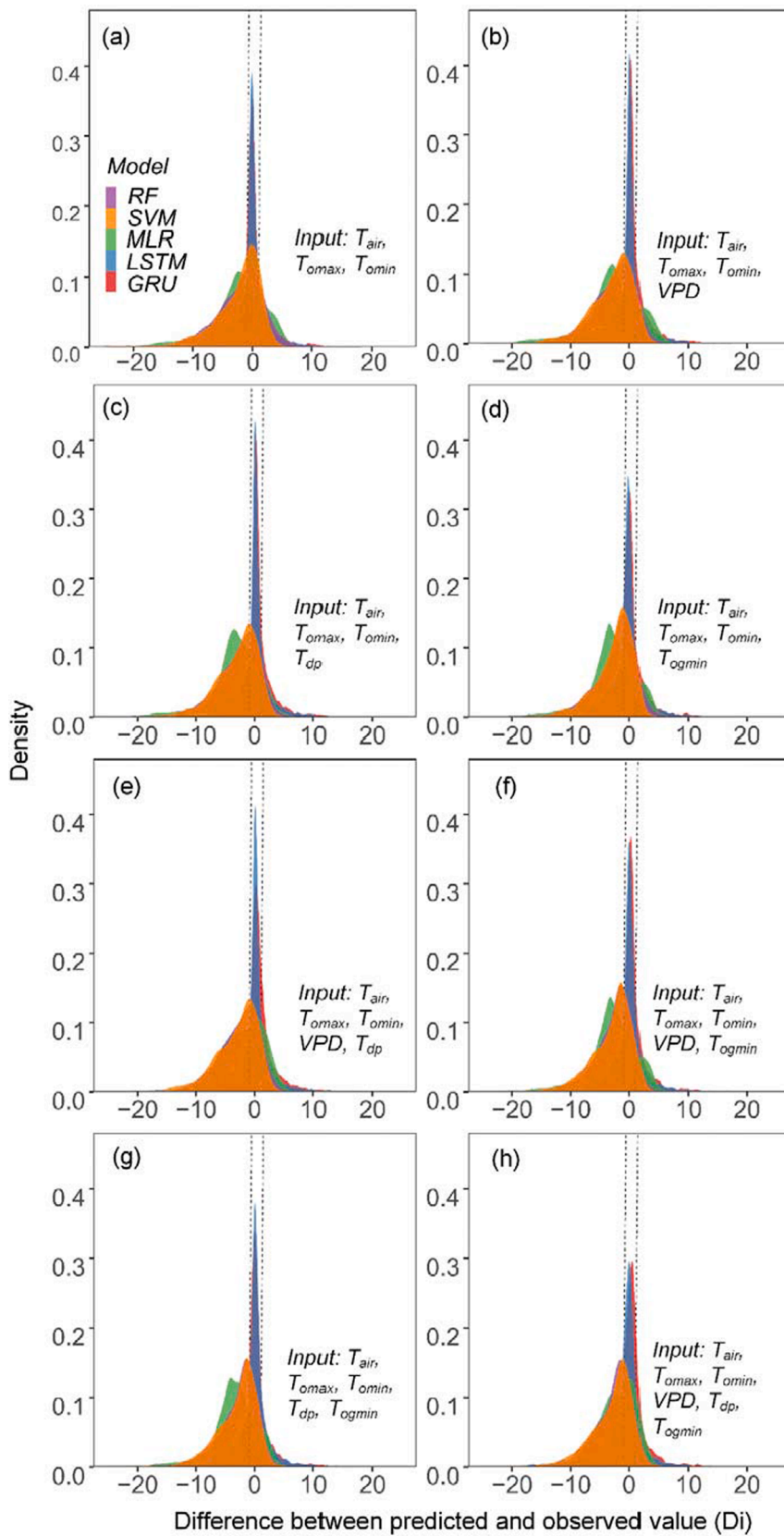


Fig. 11. Performances of the five models in  $T_{imin}$  dynamic predictions at the model test stage. Observed  $T_{imin}$  values were sorted and divided into three ranges: (A) observed  $T_{imin} > 28.5$  °C, upper quartile; (B)  $13.9$  °C < observed  $T_{imin} < 28.5$  °C, middle; and (C) observed  $T_{imin} < 13.9$  °C, lower quartile. Indices of a–h and 1–8 both represented the eight input combinations of (a or 1)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ; (b or 2)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ , VPD; (c or 3)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ,  $T_{dp}$ ; (d or 4)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ,  $T_{ogmin}$ ; (e or 5)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ , VPD,  $T_{dp}$ ; (f or 6)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ , VPD,  $T_{ogmin}$ ; (g or 7)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ,  $T_{dp}$ ,  $T_{ogmin}$ ; and (h or 8)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ , VPD,  $T_{dp}$ ,  $T_{ogmin}$ . The value of scale line of  $R^2$  represented 10 %, and RMSE was 1 °C.



**Fig. 12.** Distributions of the differences between observed and predicted values of  $T_{min}$  based on five different models (RF, SVM, MLR, LSTM, and GRU) under eight different combinations of input meteorological variables. Indices (a)–(h) represent the prediction results with different combinations of input meteorological factors of (a)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ; (b)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ , VPD; (c)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ,  $T_{dp}$ ; (d)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ,  $T_{ogmin}$ ; (e)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ , VPD,  $T_{dp}$ ; (f)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ , VPD,  $T_{ogmin}$ ; (g)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ ,  $T_{dp}$ ,  $T_{ogmin}$ ; and (h)  $T_{air}$ ,  $T_{omax}$ ,  $T_{omin}$ , VPD,  $T_{dp}$ ,  $T_{ogmin}$ . The x-axis represents the differences between predicted and observed values ( $D_i = \text{observe} - \text{predict}$ ) and y-axis the frequency density of different  $D_i$  values. The two vertical dotted lines indicate the  $D_i$  values of  $-1$  and  $1$ . The density of  $D_i$  is between  $0$  and  $1$ .

the  $D_i < 0$  regions of *RF*, *SVM* and *MLR* models accounted for about 66.64 %, 68.26 %, and 69.59 % of total  $D_i$ , which were obviously higher than the *LSTM* (57.60 %) and *GRU* (53.08 %) models. Under Combination H, the  $D_i < 0$  regions of the generalized machine learning models (81.23 % for *RF* model; 81.92 % for *SVM* model; 71.35 % for *MLR* model) were obviously higher than those of the deep learning models (55.37 % for *LSTM* model; 45.52 % for *GRU* model). Generally, most of the  $D_i$  of the generalized machine learning models were  $< 0$ , while the  $D_i$  distributions of deep learning models were relatively stable in  $T_{imin}$  prediction since the ratio of  $D_i < 0$  was closer to the ratio of  $D_i > 0$  (Fig. 12). Thus, the generalized machine learning models could underestimate the  $T_{imin}$  in greenhouse. Since the predicted  $T_{imin}$  was lower than the actual  $T_{imin}$ , more heat had to be invested to maintain proper temperature for crop growth, which resulted in a waste of energy in the temperature management of greenhouse. The deep learning models generally had good predictive performance and relatively smaller  $D_i$  under different input combinations of meteorological variables. Thus, the deep learning model was more suitable for greenhouse  $T_{imin}$  predictions.

#### 4. Discussion

The change of minimum temperature in greenhouse ( $T_{imin}$ ) in a greenhouse was full of uncertainties and was affected by many factors, such as the type and size of greenhouse, the environmental factors and their coupling effects. Therefore, predicting  $T_{imin}$  remains a very challenging task. In this study, we used local weather data as input variables in  $T_{imin}$  prediction instead of inside and exterior environmental data obtained with sensors. It was undoubtedly the most economical method for temperature management in intensive greenhouse production system in developing countries. He et al. (2020) found that adding the input variable of sunshine hours, which was highly correlated with solar radiation ( $r = 0.88$ ), had great impacts on the prediction accuracy of global solar radiation. In addition, Allouhi et al. (2021) chose the input variable of ambient temperature outside greenhouse, which had high correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.95$ ) with the prediction variable of indoor greenhouse temperature and then got the highest prediction accuracy ( $R^2 > 0.90$ ). Therefore, it was necessary to select the input variables that had high correlation coefficients with the prediction variable of  $T_{imin}$ . In this study, the range of correlation coefficients between local weather variables and  $T_{imin}$  ( $r = 0.64\text{--}0.87$ ) was generally lower than other studies, which may affect the prediction accuracy (Fig. 4). However, the  $R^2$  of the optimal model (*GRU*) was close to 0.90 (Fig. 9), which was close to prediction accuracy of some other studies (Allouhi et al., 2021; Castaneda-Miranda and Castano, 2017; Escamilla-Garcia et al., 2020). More importantly, the data acquisition of our methods was more economical. Thus, it was reasonable to use local weather data as input variables.

Generalized machine learning models were commonly used to predict a variety of indicators in greenhouses including temperature (Castaneda-Miranda and Castano, 2017; Chen et al., 2016). In our study, we found that the  $T_{imin}$  predictions with the *RF*, *SVM* and *MLR* models were all affected by the number of input variables (Table 1). Overall, the prediction performance of the *MLR* model was the worst among the three generalized machine learning models (Table 1). The *RF* model had relatively better prediction accuracy of  $T_{imin}$ , compared to the *SVM* and *MLR* models (Figs. 5, 6 and 7). The *RF*, *SVM* and *MLR* models generally had poor predicted performance than deep learning models when observed  $T_{imin}$  was in lower ( $< 13.9^\circ\text{C}$ ) or higher ( $> 28.5^\circ\text{C}$ ) ranges, but the *RF* model was still better than the *SVM* and *MLR* models (Fig. 11). Generally, the *RF* model could capture the non-linear and non-parametric relationships between the predictor (or  $T_{imin}$ ) and the input variables due to the complex model structure, which made the prediction results of *RF* model more accurate and stable (Brokamp et al., 2018). Hence, the *RF* model was recommended as the ideal generalized machine learning models to predict  $T_{imin}$  with local meteorological

variables. Some other studies also found the *RF* model had excellent predictive performance compared to *SVM* and *MLR* (Diniz et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2017). Tyrallis et al. (2021) found that the *RF* model improved the performance of the *MLR* by 12.75 %, followed by the *SVM* model ( $-0.45\%$ ) in daily streamflow forecasting. However, our study found that the prediction accuracy of the *RF* and *SVM* models were improved by 12.92 % and 8.44 % compared to the *MLR* model, respectively, implying that *SVM* was superior to *MLR* for  $T_{imin}$  predictions. This suggested that different application scenarios and datasets could affect the prediction accuracy of different machine learning models.

In this study, the prediction performance of deep learning models was notably higher than generalized machine learning models for  $T_{imin}$  predictions. In particular, the  $R^2$  of *GRU* model averagely was 5.38 % higher than and *RMSE* 44.34 % lower than the *MLR* model (Table 1). The *LSTM* and *GRU* models all had the feature of *DRNN* to call out the state of the nerve cells at the previous time through the feedback connection, so that it allowed them to use the temporal dynamic behavior of the data to build the learning models (Brokamp et al., 2018; Hochreiter and Schmidhuber, 1997). However, the basic structures of the *LSTM* and *GRU* models were different, which made the final prediction results different. We found that the *GRU* models could generally improve  $R^2$  values by 2.50 % over the *LSTM* model, while the *RMSE* value also decreased by 8.63 % for  $T_{imin}$  predictions (Table 1). When  $T_{imin} > 28.5^\circ\text{C}$ , regardless of the input combinations, the prediction accuracy of *GRU* model was all remarkably higher than the *LSTM* model (Fig. 11). When  $T_{imin} < 13.9^\circ\text{C}$ , the prediction accuracy of the *GRU* model was slightly better than the *LSTM* model. On the other hand, when using the fewest input variables (Combination A) to predict  $T_{imin}$ , the optimal predicted performance was obtained by the *GRU* model among the five machine learning models. The corresponding  $R^2$  value was improved by 2.63 % over *LSTM* model and *RMSE* value also decreased by 8.76 % for  $T_{imin}$  predictions (Table 1). Jia et al. (2020) also found similar result in the predictions of coal mine gas concentration, where the *RMSE* value was reduced by 7.9 % compared with *LSTM* model. Nonetheless, Iwendi et al. (2020) suggested that the *LSTM* model (with an average accuracy of 96.50 %) was better than the *GRU* model (with an average accuracy of 95.29 %) for the assisted patient diet recommendation system. In fact, it was difficult to compare the performances of the two models when dealing with different tasks. However, most studies suggested that the prediction performance of the *GRU* model was better than the *LSTM* model, especially in terms of prediction error, rate of convergence, and running time (Gao et al., 2020; Kisvari et al., 2021). This could be explained from the model structures. The *LSTM* model had three gates (forget gate, input gate, and output gate), while the *GRU* model only had two gates (update gate and reset gate). The *LSTM* model had more parameters than the *GRU* model. Therefore, the *LSTM* model needed more data to deal with multi-parameter networks, but with the risks of overfitting. Conversely, the *GRU* model had fewer parameters and was easier to converge, but its performance might be not as good as the *LSTM* model when there were substantial amount of data (Shewalkar et al., 2019).

The difference between predicted and observed value ( $D_i$ ) can determine whether the predicted values underestimated or overestimated  $T_{imin}$  compared to the observed values. However, few studies focused on  $D_i$ . Our study found that most  $D_i$  values of generalized machine learning models were  $< 0$  (the ration of  $D_i < 0$ : 78.37 % for *RF* model; 80.01 % for *SVM* model; 78.85 % for *MLR* model), which indicated the general machine learning models underestimated  $T_{imin}$  values (Fig. 12). Generalized machine learning models had some shortcomings when predicting long time-series data. For example, the *RF*, *SVM* and *MLR* models did not have memory ability for  $T_{imin}$  predictions, resulting in poor prediction accuracy when the data structure of training set and the test set had difference. In addition,  $T_{imin}$  values had different ranges in different months so that some extreme  $T_{imin}$  values may not be trained in the generalized machine learning models. The *RF* model is a



combination of many decision trees by using bootstrapping technique (Breiman, 2001; Lahouar and Slama, 2015). Therefore, when the predicted  $T_{imin}$  was too high and did not exist in the training set, the decision tree would choose a value that was close but lower than the observed  $T_{imin}$  in the training set, causing the real  $T_{imin}$  to be underestimated. In this study, we used support vector regression to predict  $T_{imin}$  (Tay and Cao, 2001), which is a variant of SVM akin to MLR model in structure. When the values of  $T_{imin}$  for the train dataset were generally lower than the test dataset, the slope of the fitting linear curve of the model without higher value was smaller than the slope of the model with higher value, which made the predicted values underestimated. However, the  $D_i$  values of deep learning models were more balanced (Fig. 12). More importantly, the deep learning models were proved to be more suitable and effective for  $T_{imin}$  prediction than the generalized machine learning models. In this study, we found that the prediction performance of deep learning models was generally higher than the generalized machine learning models when dealing with time series tasks, which was consistent with some previous studies (Buturache and Stancu, 2021; Jia et al., 2020). Actually, the differences of  $D_i$  between the GRU and LSTM models were not obvious. Most of the  $D_i$  values were distributed between  $-1$  and  $1$ . However, the prediction performance of GRU model was also higher than the LSTM model despite insufficient input variables. If the local weather station cannot provide the forecasting of enough weather variables, the GRU model should be chosen to more accurately predict  $T_{imin}$ .

## 5. Conclusion

In this study, local weather data were used to predict the minimum temperature in greenhouse ( $T_{imin}$ ). The prediction accuracy was close to some other studies that used inside and exterior environmental data obtained with sensors. In addition, deep learning models had better prediction performance for  $T_{imin}$  predictions, especially the GRU models. When the number of input variables was insufficient, the GRU model had the optimal prediction performance, where the  $R^2$  was 2.63 % higher and RMSE 8.76 % lower than the LSTM model.

Furthermore, we found that generalized machine learning models (i.e., RF, SVM and MLR) could underestimate  $T_{imin}$ . So they should be avoided when dealing with time-series variable simulation tasks. However, the difference between predicted and observed value ( $D_i$ ) values of deep learning models (LSTM and GRU) were relatively stable because the portions of  $D_i < 0$  and  $D_i > 0$  were all closer to 50 %. Therefore, considering the prediction performance and  $D_i$  values, we recommended deep learning models for  $T_{imin}$  prediction, especially the GRU model.

In general, the GRU models developed for  $T_{imin}$  predictions had the advantage of high accuracy and low cost since it only used local weather data as input variables. It is noteworthy that there are many types of greenhouses in the world. The results of this study may be only suitable for  $T_{imin}$  prediction in common solar greenhouses in China. Therefore, specific  $T_{imin}$  prediction models need to be developed for different types of greenhouses in specific countries in the future.

## CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Zhihao He:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Validation, Writing – original draft. **Tengcong Jiang:** Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation. **Yuan Jiang:** Validation, Investigation, Resources. **Qi Luo:** Investigation, Software. **Shang Chen:** Investigation, Resources. **Kaiyuan Gong:** Investigation, Resources. **Liang He:** Resources, Funding acquisition. **Hao Feng:** Supervision, Funding acquisition. **Qiang Yu:** Supervision, Funding acquisition. **Fangying Tan:** Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition. **Jianqiang He:** Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition.

## Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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## Data and code availability

The data and computer codes used in this study can be provided by the corresponding author upon request.

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