

Interactive comment on “Organic and inorganic carbon in the topsoil of the Mongolian and Tibetan grasslands: pattern, control and implications” by Y. Shi et al.

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We thank the anonymous referee for his/her time and effort in reviewing this paper. We have seriously considered his/her constructive comments. The point-to-point responses have been listed in the following context. Revisions will be made accordingly in the revised version.

Comment 1:

For example, authors often used the expression “SOC in soils”. This is wrong. That is to say “soil organic carbon in soils”.

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Response:

We have corrected those redundant expressions in the revised version.

Comment 2:

Another is that authors mixed “organic matter” with “organic materials”. They should replace “matter” on L10 of P1871 and L7 of P1881 with “material”.

Response: Done.

Comment 3:

Special concern is the method for measuring soil pH. Authors measured soil pH using CaCl₂ solution. This is not a good chance for acid soils because exchange Al and others will be extracted by it, resulting in the reduction of soil pH. Thus, authors should not measure soil pH with CaCl₂ solutions (please see the method). I think if they measure using different extraction solution, they will get different results and explanations.

Response:

We have considered the potential impacts of different soil pH measurement methods, and used both CaCl₂ and double distilled water as extracting solutions in the experiment. We found a very strong linear relationship between pH_{CaCl₂} and pH_{water} ($R^2 > 0.9$, please see the figure attached). This suggests that either method will result in the same conclusions and explanations. Since CaCl₂ extractions give better repeatable or consistent measurements (Brady and Weil, 2002), we decided to use pH_{CaCl₂} in the model.

We added following sentences in the “Materials and methods” section:

Soil pH was determined in both 0.01 M CaCl₂ and double distilled water potentiometrically. Results from these two methods showed very strong linear relationship. Since using CaCl₂ solution gives better repeatable results (Brady and Weil, 2002), the pH data from CaCl₂ solution were used in the model.

Comment 4:

I also concern how authors build up the relationship between plant types with SOC (how to transform plant types into figures). Please show it in the part of Materials and methods.

Response:

Thanks for this comment. This may be indeed a little confusing. CART (classification and regression tree) analysis can deal with both categorical and continuous variables simultaneously (Qian, 2009). Hence, we did not need to transform vegetation type to figures.

We revised corresponding sentences in the “Materials and methods” section as follow:

We conducted classification and regression tree (CART) analyses, which can deal with both categorical and continuous variables simultaneously (Qian, 2009), to detect important variables influencing the patterns of SIC, SOC and SIC/STC.

Comment 5

P1882, “This pattern can be explained by two reasons. Firstly, acidification inhibits soil microbial activities and thus the SOC decomposition rate (Francis, 1986). Secondly, N deposition, a major cause of acidification, will lead to a decrease in microbial biomass and oxidase activity (Dalmonech et al., 2010; Fisk and Fahey, 2001; Zak et al., 2008) and to an increase of SOC inputs through increasing vegetation productivity (Neff et al., 2002)”. To my knowledge, N input could also stimulate the growth of microbes and oxidase activity. I think N input mainly stimulate the plant growth and release more organic C into soils thereafter.

Response:

Numerous field and laboratory studies have been conducted to investigate the impact of nitrogen addition to soil organic carbon. Although positive, negative, and neutral

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effects of added N on rates of decomposition are all observed, the majority of studies suggested that N deposition often seems to impede soil carbon decomposition and decrease microbial biomass (Janssens et al., 2010; Treseder, 2008; Knorr et al., 2005). Of course, it is more clear and definite that N deposition could simulate plant growth and litter input. Thus, we revised this part as following:

Secondly, N deposition, a major cause of acidification, will lead to an increase of SOC inputs through increasing vegetation productivity (Neff et al., 2002), and may induce a decrease in microbial biomass and oxidase activity (Dalmonech et al., 2010; Fisk and Fahey, 2001; Zak et al., 2008).

Comment 6

L7 of P1888, please delete “R”.

Response:

This citation is in accordance with <http://www.r-project.org/>. The author is “R Development Core Team”, the title is “R: a language and environment for statistical computing” and the publisher is “R Foundation for Statistical Computing”. Thus we think this citation is OK.

Please also note the supplement to this comment:

<http://www.biogeosciences-discuss.net/9/C861/2012/bgd-9-C861-2012-supplement.pdf>

Interactive comment on Biogeosciences Discuss., 9, 1869, 2012.

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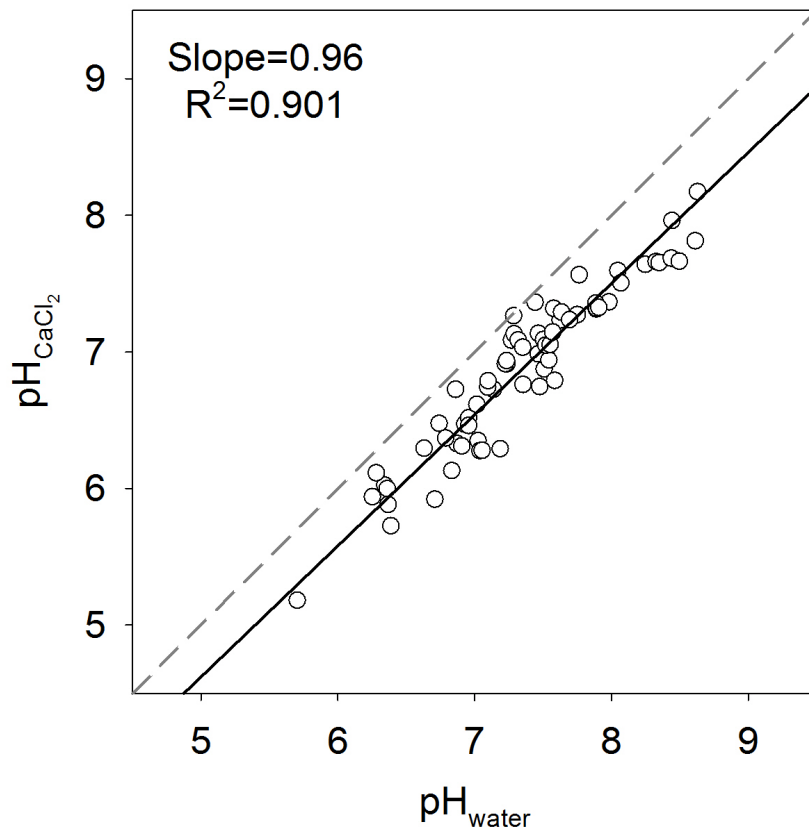


Fig. 1. The linear relationship between pH values measured with two different extracting solutions

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