

The 49th Broadyard Workshop

Symposium on Prevention and Control

of Desertification in Mongolia

October 18, 2021

In early spring 2021, some regions in northern China were hit by sand and dust weather, ranging from blowing sand and floating dust to sandstorms, which not only affected normal production and life, but also harmed people's health. According to China National Environmental Monitoring Centre, southern Mongolia was one of the main sources of the sand and dust events.

On April 7, 2021, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang talked over phone with Mongolian Prime Minister Luvsannamsrai Oyun-Erdene at request, expressing China's willingness to work with Mongolia to meet challenges in environmental protection and desertification prevention and control. On July 27, State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Mongolian Foreign Minister Batmunkh Battsetseg in Tianjin, and shared the vision for long-term cooperation with Mongolia in combating desertification and sandstorms. On September 22, Mongolian President Ukhnaagiin Khurelsukh proposed the National Campaign to Plant One Billion Trees in the general debate of the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, by which

Mongolia aims to plant one billion trees by 2030. During a video conference call with Mongolian Prime Minister Oyun-Erdene on October 12 from Ziguangge, Zhongnanhai, Premier Li Keqiang reiterated his hope that the two countries could further the cooperation on desertification control and create a clean and beautiful ecological environment together.

On October 18, 2021, the Institute of Area Studies, Peking University held a symposium on Desertification Prevention and Control in Mongolia. Prof. Wang Hao from Mongolian Studies Center of Peking University, Prof. Liu Hongyan from College of Urban and Environmental Sciences of Peking University, Prof. Jiang Yong from School of Pharmaceutical Sciences of Peking University and other professors and students attended the symposium.

Wang Hao: Status quo and driving factors of desertification in Mongolia

(I) Status quo of desertification in Mongolia

Mongolia, located on the Mongolian Plateau, is a vast country, ranking the 19th in the world in territory. However, its economic development is not in an equally advantageous position, which is closely related to its resource endowment. First of all, Mongolia has complex geological structure. Half of the country's territory is covered by mountains, and a quarter by the Gobi Desert. As a result, land available for industrial development is both limited in size and confined to only the east.

Second, only 1% of the country's total area is covered by lakes, which mainly concentrate in high-latitude regions in the north and northwest, where it is cold and most places are mountainous, making it impossible to develop agriculture. Although the central and eastern parts of the country are relatively flat, the unfavorable natural conditions, such as lack of water, thick layer of soil and exposed bedrock, make agricultural development quite difficult. Meanwhile, most areas in Mongolia have a temperate steppe climate with long winters of extremely low temperature and short summers with significant temperature difference between day and night, which is not favorable for crop growth.

Moreover, Mongolia is facing severe desertification. According to an assessment report by Mongolia's Ministry of Natural Environment and Tourism in 2015, 24.1%, 29.7%, 17% and 6.1% of its land had been lightly, moderately, severely or extremely severely desertified respectively by 2015, indicating desertification of 76.9% of its total territory, and the situation was aggravating. Since natural resource conditions cannot be easily changed, desertification has become a major roadblock to Mongolia's economic development.

What is desertification? Before 1996, desertification was defined only by natural factors, including land degradation and sandy desertification, among others, but the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, which came into force in

1996, provides a new definition, which emphasizes the joint impacts of both natural and human factors, and by which standard Mongolia has a higher degree of desertification. By the UN definition, desertification in Mongolia mainly concentrates in the central grassland, where human activities are intensive, as the Gobi Desert in the south sees little human intervention and the forests in the north provide adequate vegetation coverage. Therefore, human factors play a major role in the process of desertification in Mongolia.

The criteria for monitoring and assessing desertification vary from country to country. China currently uses satellite data to measure the extent of desertification, while some US scholars suggest that the impact of desertification on people's lives should also be included. Apart from different assessment criteria, statistics of desertification in Mongolia also vary with administrative staff changes. Nonetheless, overall speaking, about 70 percent of Mongolia's total territory has been struck by desertification.

(II) Driving factors of desertification in Mongolia

In recent years, natural factors have also played some roles in desertification in Mongolia. Climate change has taken a toll on Mongolia in that it is a major cause for significant temperature fluctuation in inland areas, which affects the growth of grassland vegetation. Healthy grassland is vital to the survival of livestock. Before 2018 when the climate was drier, graze time drastically

shortened. As a result, herdsmen often overgrazed when growing conditions were most favorable, damaging the grassland before it had fully grown, thus exacerbating desertification. Fortunately, with the climate becoming more humid after 2018, the growth of grassland vegetation has improved and the situation of intensive grazing in a short period of time has also eased, allowing desertification to slow down.

Overall speaking, of the three major industries in Mongolia, agriculture has a small impact on desertification, while animal husbandry and mining are mainly responsible for aggravating desertification. Since Mongolia's agriculture mainly concentrates in low-altitude regions, and only a small proportion of its total territory is arable land, agriculture is not the main cause of desertification.

The mining industry has played an increasingly significant role in aggravating desertification in Mongolia in recent years. At the beginning of the 21st century, driven by the strategy of rejuvenating the country with the mining industry, Mongolia's mining and export of gold, copper, lead and zinc, coal and other mineral products increased year by year, making mineral export one of its important sources of foreign exchange. Excessive mining in a short period of time has brought varying degrees of damage to the country's ecological environment, including drying rivers, falling groundwater level and soil erosion, thus worsened land desertification. However, given its limited overall

mining area, mining is not a main contributing factor to desertification.

Due to its simple industrial structure, Mongolia relies on traditional animal husbandry. It is the second largest cashmere producer in the world after China. As a pillar of Mongolia's economy, the cashmere industry is a source of foreign exchange for the country and a source of income for Mongolian herders with its sales proceeds. The cashmere processing industry also provides tens of thousands of job opportunities. To maintain the sustainable development of the cashmere industry and eliminate the impact of snow disaster and black frost, Mongolia increased its livestock population for nine consecutive years since 2007. Unlike countries that practice large-scale intensive animal farming, Mongolia still retains nomadic production and lifestyle of migrating to wherever water and grass are available. Unrestrained and natural grazing and overgrazing are the main causes of desertification.

In comparison to increasing livestock population, changing livestock species composition is even more destructive to grassland. In its long history of production and life, Mongolia developed a healthy "five species" (horses, cattle, camels, sheep and goats) livestock composition based on their grazing preferences. However, in the past two years, the proportion of large-bodied livestock, such as horses, cattle and camels, has been declining, while that of smaller ones, like sheep and goats,

increasing, to the extent that the proportion of sheep and goats in total livestock population has exceeded 80%. By comparison, horses and cattle are more selective grazers than goats and sheep, but it takes longer for pastures grazed by goats and sheep to recover. Therefore, the increasing number of goats and sheep poses a challenge to the environmental carrying capacity. Consequently, the imbalanced livestock species composition has led to devolution of grassland ecology and aggravated desertification.

(III) Practice and dilemma of desertification prevention and control in Mongolia

Desertification has become a focus of attention for two reasons: First, it may cause negative chain reactions; Second, human intervention can contain the expansion of desertification, reduce desertification area over time, and enhance the ecological functions of deserts. Deeply affected by desertification, Mongolia has launched various combating initiatives since 1996, including the National Desertification Control Plan in 1996, the Green Wall Project in 2005, the establishment of the National Bureau of Soil Protection and Desertification Control under the Ministry of Natural Environment and Tourism in 2012, and the One Billion Trees Project in 2021. However, the initiatives have had little effect on reversing the desertification trend for the following reasons:

First, lack of awareness of desertification, or lack of full

awareness that desertification and land degradation are the most serious ecological threats to Mongolia, which will bring negative impacts on its sustainable social and economic development. Agriculture and animal husbandry will be hardest hit by desertification not only on the quantity but also on the quality of agricultural and livestock production. On one hand, desertification may affect the export of cashmere products, the pillar industry of Mongolia; on the other hand, it may affect food supply in cities, making Mongolia more dependent on food imports, which is not conducive to the country's independent economic development.

Second, lack of attention to and investment in desertification. The government-led initiatives on desertification prevention and control have only been intermittent. The lack of long-term plans and practical measures has resulted in slow progress and repetitive work. As a lower-middle-income economy by GDP, Mongolia is heavily dependent on external factors and lacks the economic strength to make substantial investment in desertification control. Given that the funding for desertification control is mainly from international organizations and supplemented by government investment, funding adequacy has a direct impact on the efforts to control desertification.

Third, lack of comprehensive prevention and control measures. The most important way to combat desertification, reduce land degradation, and make sandstorms less frequent is to

increase vegetation coverage by planting trees and grass, according to officials at Mongolia's Ministry of Natural Environment and Tourism. However, many regions in Mongolia are not suitable for growing trees. In a country where water resource is lacking and natural water resource cannot afford high-coverage desertification control measures, improper tree planting will only accelerate underground water consumption and exacerbate desertification. As tree planting involves various considerations including survival rate, species and location selection, technology and financial investment, as well as a post-planting tracking system of tree maintenance, it is financially and technically demanding and requires a well-coordinated and efficient administrative team, all being challenges for Mongolia. The fundamental reason why prevention and control measures that mainly rely on tree-planting have hardly been effective in Mongolia lies in its economic underdevelopment and political inefficiency.

Fourth, given that desertification prevention and control is a comprehensive work, the Mongolian government needs to shift its mindset on desertification prevention and control. The mindset of "development before control" has had a direct impact on the effectiveness of desertification control in Mongolia, where desertification control has not been a specific part of any policy agendas that the Mongolian government has issued over the past few years. Following this mindset, the Mongolian government

adopted the National Cashmere Program and the Three Pillar Development Policy in 2018 to vigorously promote the two major foreign exchange earning industries --- cashmere and mining. At the same time, mining is playing an increasingly important role in Mongolia's national economy, accounting for 23.1 percent of GDP in 2019, up from 20.1 percent in 2016. Under the impact of socio-economic and policy factors on desertification, the government-led Green Wall Project is a drop in the bucket.

Liu Hongyan: Ecological status, desertification control efforts and experiences around the Gobi Desert

(I) Ecological conditions and mechanisms affecting desertification around the Gobi Desert

Climatic condition is the main reason for the annual variation in vegetation coverage in arid steppe areas. Located at the center of anticyclonic high pressure systems, arid areas have strong and frequent winds, with precipitation much less than evaporation, which results in low moisture in the air; at the same time, due to the geological structure and geomorphic features, arid areas are covered with limited vegetation, mainly shrubs with small leaves. Human activities can easily cause desertification. Due to global warming, the temperature in the Mongolian Plateau has been increasing in recent 30 years. According to the data monitored in Mongolia, the average temperature in the 1990s was 1.13 degree Celsius higher than in the 1960s, rising much faster than the world's average during the same period.

Higher temperature makes the climate drier and warmer in the Mongolian Plateau, where faster and intensified evapotranspiration disrupts the growth and succession of grassland, reduces the vegetation coverage, and leads to lower vegetation productivity and serious grassland degradation. In addition, the warmer climate may lead to the rise of snow line and freeze-thaw desertification, a process in which rocks crack due to thermal expansion and contraction and finally shatter on repeated freeze-thaw action.

Due to environmental constraints, freeze-thaw desertification land has fragile ecosystem and is difficult to control. In addition, case studies in China show that desertification and sandy desertification areas are close to the Loess Plateau where sandy areas meet the Plateau, and loess accumulation and sandy areas push against each other. When the climate is dry and cold and wind strengthens as a geological agent, the dune area expands southward and the northern boundary of loess accumulation retreats southward; when the climate becomes warmer and wetter and wind weakens as a geological agent, the dunes on the southern edge of the desert cease to be active and the boundary of loess accumulation moves northward.

The warming climate not only makes the land drier and sandier, what is worse, it also directly reduces plant viability. Due to global warming, heat waves are occurring more frequently around the Gobi Desert, making the region not suitable for plants

to grow. Studies show that since the 1960s, climatic conditions around the Gobi Desert had been undergoing regular cyclical changes until 1996 when heat waves started to appear in significantly higher frequency, which has led to a significant slowdown in tree growth. In arid and semi-arid regions at high latitudes, the season suitable for vegetation growth is very short. Trees can hardly recover from the impact of high temperature due to the high frequency of high-temperature weather conditions and heat waves, and thus have become more vulnerable to intense drought.

Frequent high temperature and heat waves reduce the water in soil and vegetation, and cause plants to close their stomata defensively, which reduces the ability of plants to absorb carbon dioxide through photosynthesis and slows down their growth. In general, large trees in forests are more resistant to heat than low vegetation on grasslands. Grassland surface vegetation does not have the thermal buffer that forest canopies can provide and is thus more susceptible to changes in soil temperature and humidity. Therefore, while climate change can cause significant forest degradation, and its impact on grassland vegetation can be fatal.

(II) China's experiences in desertification control

As one of the countries that are most seriously affected by desertification in the world, the Chinese government attaches great importance to the prevention and control of desertification. Given Mongolia's economic structure, which is based on the

development of mining and livestock industries, as well as the economic challenges it faces due to the dual impacts of low international prices of mineral products and the COVID-19 pandemic, it would clearly be unrealistic to rely on reducing grazing and mining to combat desertification. In recent years, China has adopted affordable and sustainable ways of desertification control in Inner Mongolia, Gansu and Xinjiang, and has accumulated rich experiences, which can provide reference for Mongolia in desertification control.

First of all, controlling desertification does not mean controlling all deserts, but rather reducing targeted desertification areas using relevant technologies, which not only prevents deserts from spreading, but also improves the effectiveness of control measures in those manageable areas at a lower cost than large-scale desertification control. This way helps fix sand dunes, ensures the sustainable growth of vegetation, reduces water consumption and even helps replenish underground water.

At present, China has established a monitoring system consisting of macro monitoring, annual trend monitoring, positioning monitoring, thematic monitoring, sandstorm disaster monitoring and engineering benefit monitoring, and has formed national and provincial desertification monitoring institutions and teams. The monitoring results provide an important basis for national macro-decision-making, policy and regulation formulation, and sandstorm disaster prevention and evaluation.

China always puts people first and gives priority to measures that help protect people's lives and property, such as those that protect residential buildings against desertification. Along the Baotou-Lanzhou Railway, which runs through the desert area, Chinese professionals invented a "straw checkerboard" technique to fix sand dunes, setting an example of combating desertification according to local conditions.

Second, promote scientific grazing to ensure that livestock population is compatible with the carrying capacity of grasslands and give full play to the self-healing function of the ecosystem with a combination of measures including rotational grazing, grazing prohibition, and rest periods. To be specific, rotational grazing means dividing a pasture into spring and autumn paddocks, which will be grazed in their designated seasons at a frequency that depends on the regrowth rate of grass. Rest periods are usually implemented in spring when pastures resume growth. Some pastures are not grazed in spring or summer, but are only harvested for feed storage in winter.

Stop grazing in accordance with laws for restoration purpose on grassland that has suffered severe degradation, desertification, salinization and rocky desertification, or grassland that is ecologically fragile, or grassland in preservation areas and areas within the ecological red line where production and business activities are prohibited, so that grassland can fully rest and recover during a short period of time (ranging from half a year to

two years) when it is not grazed. Some pastoral areas also explore intensive management with family-run pastures, and allow production factors to be reasonably allocated and reorganized with economic methods in an effort to strike a balance between ecological protection and maximizing family income. Last but not the least, economic development is essential to reducing overgrazing. When the economy develops to a certain level, agricultural mechanization and scientific operation of the livestock sector will also significantly improve, which will not only promote the intensive production in the agricultural and livestock sectors, improve productivity, alleviate the destruction that unscientific ways of production have brought to the already fragile natural environment, but also promote urbanization by freeing up and encouraging some labor force in the agricultural and livestock sectors to migrate to cities. The formation of such a virtuous circle can improve the situation of overgrazing, and will naturally alleviate desertification.

Jiang Yong: *Cistanche deserticola* Y.C. Ma's role in desertification prevention and control

(I) Ecological significance of *Cistanche deserticola* Y.C. Ma's hosts and relevant promotion practice

In recent years, China has adopted a variety of ways to prevent and control desertification. However, it would not be sustainable to rely on government-funded desertification control measures, such as returning farmland to forest, planting grass to

fix sand dunes and promoting afforestation, as reduction or suspension of government funding would bring an end to or weaken the driving force of desertification control projects. It highlights the importance to consider both the environmental performance of desertification control measures and the impact of such measures on economic performance. According to the studies by Prof. Tu Pengfei's research team at the Beijing University School of Pharmaceutical Studies, *Haloxylon ammodendron* and *Tamarix chinensis*, two hosts of *Cistanche deserticola* Y.C. Ma, an endangered medicinal plant, can grow in the Gobi Desert. Planting these two kinds of plants in the desert can solve the problem of short supply of *Cistanche deserticola* Y.C. Ma, generating considerable economic income for farmers and herdsman on the one hand, and working effectively in wind-breaking and sand-binding on the other.

There are mainly four species of *Cistanche deserticola* Y.C. Ma in China --- *C. deserticola*, *C. tubulosa*, *C. salsa* and *C. sinensis*. Among them, *C. salsa* mainly grows in Gansu province with extremely low yield. *C. sinensis* is distinctively different from the other three species, and is generally regarded as counterfeit. *C. deserticola* and *C. tubulosa* are the two main species for medical use, which grow in Alxa, Inner Mongolia and Hotan, Xinjiang respectively. Hotan has favorable climate for intensive growth of *C. deserticola*, and it has attained high yield through artificial cultivation of its hosts. What's more, the

dominant host of *Cistanche deserticola* Y.C. Ma does not rely on atmospheric precipitation, flood or farmland overflow, but regrows and reproduces on its own on the sandy land between moving sand dunes. Growing faster than sand burial, it grows easily in desert areas and plays an important role in binding sand.

In addition, drip irrigation cultivation technology adopted in Xinjiang is of significance to the comprehensive management of Tarim River basin. In Inner Mongolia, planting *Cistanche deserticola* Y. C. Ma proves to be more effective in combating desertification. Artificial planting does not take the yield of *Cistanche deserticola* Y. C. Ma as the first goal, but gives priority to promoting the cultivation of its host *Haloxylon ammodendron*. It mainly grows on fixed dunes, sandy land, sandy desert, gravel desert and desert of mild saline-alkaline soil, and can thrive in places uninhabited by human.

The benefit of promoting the cultivation of medicinal plants is that it can translate into economic benefits. Surveys show that in Xinjiang, a farmer's or herdsman's family can earn 200,000 to 300,000 yuan a year by planting *Cistanche deserticola* Y. C. Ma. Therefore, farmers and herdsmen are highly motivated to respond to the call, effectively solving the typical problem of low motivation in government-funded desertification control projects. Tu Pengfei's team used to promote the planting project in Xinjiang. When the project is completed, the team found through GPS monitoring that the actual planting area was larger than

originally planned, which can be attributed to voluntary planting by farmers and herdsmen.

In addition, planting *Cistanche deserticola* Y. C. Ma is simple. It only needs watering twice a year and no weeding is required. It can be harvested the next year and can be repeatedly harvested. With technological advances, the plant can now be collected and harvested in China with machineries, and it is easy for farmers and herdsmen to learn and operate. Tu Pengfei's team published a planting manual in Chinese and Uyghur. They also held free training sessions and distributed seeds to farmers and herdsmen, contributing to the widespread planting of *Cistanche deserticola* Y. C. Ma and its hosts. Over the past 30 years, Tu Pengfei's team has managed 5.12 million hectares of desert, creating a sustainable desert management model with Chinese characteristics. With a radius of 15 kilometers around Yutian county covered by Tamarisk, one of *Cistanche deserticola* Y. C. Ma's hosts, dust weather days have reduced from 240 to 128 a year.

(II) The prospect of planting *Cistanche deserticola* Y. C. Ma in Mongolia

Cistanche deserticola Y. C. Ma is a traditional Mongolian medicinal plant. It is called "Chagan Gaoyao" in Mongolian, which means "a beautiful white plant." According to Mongolian legend, *Cistanche deserticola* Y. C. Ma contains the blood and essence of a god horse, and Genghis Khan often had his soldiers

eat the plant to boost their physical strength before a battle. Many Mongolians have heard of this medicinal herb. Wild “Chagan Gaoyao” also grows in Mongolia. According to existing information, the *Cistanche* species in Mongolia is similar to the *C. tubulosa* growing in Hotan, Xinjiang in China. If its medicinal value can be verified, it will have the same commercial value as the species in China.

In addition to *Cistanche deserticola* Y. C. Ma itself having medical use, its hosts also have potential use for the livestock industry. Tu Pengfei’s team recently discovered a new host of *Cistanche deserticola* Y. C. Ma --- *Atriplex canescens*. Different from *Haloxylon ammodendron* and *Tamarix chinensis*, *Atriplex canescens* can be used as cattle and sheep feed. If the *Cistanche deserticola* Y. C. Ma living on *Atriplex canescens* passes the safety evaluation, which will soon be conducted, planting the host will bring economic benefits to farmers and herdsmen in its own right, which will further enhance the appeal of planting *Cistanche deserticola* Y. C. Ma among herders.

Repeated sandstorms remind us that preventing and controlling desertification is not a mission which can be accomplished overnight, nor can it be done once and for all. The worsening desertification in Mongolia over recent years is not only caused by ecological and environmental changes such as global warming, but also closely related to human activities such as overgrazing and mining. This is exactly what makes combating

desertification a formidable challenge. Environmental protection measures can barely produce effect in short term and often take a back seat to economic development in resource allocation. In addition, Mongolia's dependence on the livestock and mining sectors for economic development makes it difficult to restrain the human factors that exacerbate desertification through industrial transformation in the short term.

The early initiatives introduced by the Mongolian government to control desertification met difficulties such as insufficient investment, ineffective implementation and conflict with development goals, and produced only limited actual results. Considering Mongolia's practical situation, it can learn from China's experience in desertification control around the Gobi Desert. Mongolia can improve its desertification control measures from the perspectives of precise desertification control, scientific grazing, adopting sustainable development strategy to build a solid economic foundation for desertification control. In particular, China's practice of combining desertification control with improving the living standards of farmers and herdsmen by promoting the cultivation of medical *Cistanche deserticola* Y. C. Ma and its hosts, which has achieved good results, could be a future direction of cooperation between China and Mongolia in combating desertification.

The 51st Broadyard Workshop

Symposium on Extremism in the Middle East

January 4, 2022

Extremism has prevailed in the Middle East in recent years, and extremist groups such as the Islamic State (IS) have been rampant. Meanwhile, many countries have launched deradicalization initiatives. For example, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia publicly pledged to embrace moderate Islam for Saudi Arabia in 2017; the Sisi government of Egypt began to reform Islamic discourse in 2015; Tunisia and other countries in democratic transition are also committed to promoting deradicalization. Deradicalization is not only a pressing issue for the Middle East, but also a crucial task for Muslims in Xinjiang and other regions in Northwest China. Taking extremism in the Middle East as its theme, the workshop invited three scholars to the discussion, who were Bao Chengzhang, associate research fellow of the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University (SISU), Li Lin, associate research fellow of the Islamic Research Office of the Institute of World Religions, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), and Prof. Cui Shoujun at the School of International Relations of Renmin University of China (RUC).

Bao Chengzhang's speech focuses on the current trend of extremism and how to carry out deradicalization work. He points out that international terrorism peaked around 2014, since when it has generally shown a downtrend in terms of the number of incidents and death tolls. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, terrorism has resurged in some countries, but the overall downtrend remains unchanged. At present, the IS, a representative of international terrorism, has changed its strategic goal from previously seeking territorial expansion to building up strength. It is making strategic shift to the peripheral areas and employs asymmetric tactics, such as guerrilla warfare, etc. to maintain to the uttermost its effective strength and global clout. In addition, the IS sometimes attempts to achieve its goals by claiming responsibility for terrorist attacks around the world and stepping up its effort to export its extremist religious ideas and ideas on violence. In particular, the IS gives priority to recruiting and training next generation jihadists, which has become its long-term strategic goal for maintaining and consolidating its extremist ideology.

Between 2014 and 2015 when the IS was at its peak, about 670,000 children were out of school in the IS-controlled area, of which about 1,100 minors were recruited by the IS in 2015 alone to receive military training and extremist ideology indoctrination. Today, most of them are adults, and the "Cubs of the Caliphate" have become "Lions of the Caliphate", who might be the

backbone of the IS 2.0 in the future. Compared with their fathers, these scouts are even more ideologically radical. Judging from its history, an extremist ideology can only be replaced by more extreme ideas in the end, otherwise it will die out, or be compelled to make itself moderate so as to set itself apart from other extremist ideologies. The Taliban, which took power lately in Afghanistan is one example.

Bao Chengzhang believes that radicalization happens in stages, with each stage characterized by different levels of radical and violent thoughts, and follows a path of pre-radical - quasi-radical – radical in its development. Deradicalization is to curb and prevent the progress of radicalization, that is, to provide a non-violent alternative for individuals who have been influenced by extremism and have been radicalized. The way and means of deradicalization determine whether radicalization could reverse or progress. According to China's experience in establishing vocational education and training centers in Xinjiang this year, the skills training programs have achieved remarkable results on those who were subject to extremist influence. After deradicalization, we should pay attention to the possibility of re-radicalization. Firstly, if we take rough measures, deradicalization efforts may provoke backlash from some believers, which may lead to a come-back of extremist ideas. Secondly, if some believers who have been educated and trained are still discriminated against after returning to the society, they may feel

frustrated due to a lack of social acceptance. When they cannot find the meaning of life in reality, they might return to religion for solace. Thirdly, if individuals who return to society reconnect with their original extremist group, they may be re-radicalized.

Li Lin differentiated and analyzed the concept of extremism, and expounded the extremism in the Middle East and the extremism in Xinjiang. Li Lin inclines to use the term “religious” extremism, which denotes a religious manifestation of an extremist core. He believes that the study of religious extremism should not only make itself relevant to the reality, but also highlight its academic nature by keeping certain distance from policy study and focusing on longitudinal analysis. For example, in the early 1990s, the Chinese academia mostly used, instead of “religious extremism”, the term “fundamentalism”, which originates from Christianity, reflecting the evolution of related concepts and a change of discourse, as well as the influence of Western discourse. According to Jin Yijiu, who’s view is relatively mainstream in China at present, religious extremism is closely related to religion in that it is a process of alienation (in the Marxist sense), degeneration (metamorphosis) and polarization (going to extremes) within a religion. Based on Jin Yijiu’s view, Li Lin believes that the essence of religious extremism is extremism, and religion is only its manifestation. Extremism is a political concept, like far left or far right, a concept that is later introduced into other fields from politics. Therefore,

the core of religious extremism is certain extreme political pursuits and behaviors. In Li Lin's view, religion does not have a fixed core that can be polarized or alienated. In short, the mainstream view holds that religious extremism is a shift from religion to extremism, while Li Lin believes it is one from extremism to religion.

Following this view, Li Lin further analyzed the Islamic religious extremism in the Middle East. He believes that Islamic extremism is, in its essence, an extremist movement in response to capitalist globalization in the Islamic world, either far left or far right in its manifestation. Under the pressure of global capitalist expansion, some in the Islamic world advocate Westernization, while others advocate contraction, seeking solutions from the Islamic scriptures. Contemporary religious extremism is a reinterpretation of traditional Islam. For example, jihad was not a mainstream theory in traditional Islam, but now Salafi-Jihadism has gained prominence. Another example is the common dichotomy of Islamic land and non-Islamic land, which in effect reflects a global perspective. In addition, contemporary religious extremism is a rejection of traditional Islam, especially a rejection of the traditional Islamic scripture system and the Ulema. Most religious extremists did not receive long-term systematic religious training, and few have earned degrees from the Al-Azhar University. Religious extremist thinkers are mostly intellectuals with a background in STEM. For example, many of

the Al Qaeda and Muslim Brotherhood leaderships used to be doctors and engineers. They are not part of the traditional Ulema class, nor do they have a place in the traditional scripture system. Their enormous influence can be attributed to the flattening of knowledge today, which is related to the expansion of capitalism and has made a huge impact on the entire Islamic social structure. If the Ulema class had remained strong, there would not have been any space for religious extremist thinkers.

In China, religious extremism is mainly active in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and involves foreign infiltration and domestic acceptance. Xinjiang has its own traditional Ulema, and the inland areas of the country also has its own scripture system. Instead of being a result of the backlash against the expansion of Western capitalism, religious extremism in China is more a product of foreign infiltration. China sent people to study in Islamic countries in the 1980s and 1990s, when the Middle East region just experienced multiple wars, and the nationalist movement was at a low ebb, driving many people to seek solace in religion. When China opened up, the whole world was witnessing Islamic revival. As a strategic contraction, the revival manifested itself as a return to Islamic scriptures. At that time, Mazar worship was popular in Xinjiang, Menhuan in other northwestern regions, and Gedimu or Yihewani (a school of thoughts transformed from Gedimu), a sect of Sufism, in inland China. Sufis considered it right to return to the scriptures, so they

began to learn from overseas experiences. Another reason is that relevant domestic institutions had inadequate understanding of the Islamic revival movement. In the 1990s, Wahhabism emerged in Xinjiang. The local CPC party committee and government, including the local united front work departments, commended Wahhabis as modernists and reformers, and made them CPPCC members, allowing them to reform Sufism and Mazar worship, which had hundreds of years of history in Xinjiang. This move disappointed a considerable number of traditional religious figures. Today, Wahhabism is suppressed in Xinjiang without a recognized status. For inland regions, Wahhabim is known as a sect. Inland Wahhabim, such as that practiced in Gansu Province, was mainly brought back when Ma Lin and others went to Mecca for pilgrimage in the 1930s and 1940s. Therefore, the Wahhabim in inland regions had largely localized and moderated by 1980s and 1990s. Now Wahhabis have no political appeals and will not challenge the current regime.

Finally, Li Lin believes that religious extremism will not go away easily. As long as the US and the West keep pressing on with capitalist globalization, and the Islamic world is still being suppressed, marginalized and weakened, some of the believers will definitely use extremist methods to seek revival. In addition, given the large population, high population growth, and high proportion of youth in population in the Islamic world, religious extremism may have more diverse manifestations in the future.

Based on international de-radicalization experiences, Li Lin believes that we should focus on extremists' political appeals. Normal and reasonable religious appeals should be managed and guided by the policy of freedom of religious belief to promote their Sinicization. As for Xinjiang issues, particular attention should be given to guarding against foreign infiltration to prevent them from becoming political appeals. In practice, too tight or too loose control should both be avoided and policies should be implemented with a long-term vision.

Based on the latest situation in Afghanistan, Prof. Cui Shoujun analyzed whether the Taliban is gradually becoming "moderate". He points out that it has been more than 20 years since the last Taliban regime, and this time they have toned down their rhetoric on women's rights, education and other issues. However, these adjustments are mainly driven by political needs rather than ideological changes. With the massive withdrawal of foreign aid, mainly that from the US, Afghanistan may run out of financial resources. That is why the Taliban is eager to obtain recognition. For example, the Taliban has asked China for help several times, and China has provided 200-million-yuan worth of economic aid. China should attach more importance to its relationship with the Taliban and strictly prevent the infiltration of extremist ideas into the country through movements such as Eastern Turkish Islamic Movement. The present Taliban regime, which is still in transition, is a temporary compromise between

various forces and tribes. Though it still remains to be seen whether the power structure will finally settle down, it does provide us with an access to understand the Taliban's changes.

First of all, the Taliban is not a political party, but a political-military movement that seeks to legitimize its ideology after establishing its regime, rather than gaining legitimacy through ideology in the first place. The Taliban movement has dual characteristics. Vertically, the Taliban has a top-down and centralized command system; horizontally, there is a dialogue and consultation mechanism among the council of Islamic scholars, the military affairs commission, and the political commission. Prof. Cui Shoujun believes that as long as military commanders on the battlefield do not violate the principles of the core leadership, they can take actions at their own discretion to a great extent, which indicates that the Taliban has not steered away from tribal structure in organization.

Second, the Taliban is undergoing changes in dealing issues such as social media and women's rights. On one hand, with well-developed social media platforms in place, the Taliban has begun to use social media for propaganda, and allow people to watch TV and use smartphones. Despite its low per capita income, smartphone penetration is fairly high in Afghanistan. On the other hand, women's rights have received much attention. According to a report released by a human right organization in June 2021, dress codes for women in most Afghan rural areas are still very

strict; meanwhile, the Taliban spokesperson said that in the future, women would be ensured the rights in education and cultural affairs within the framework of Islamic values. The deputy leader of the Taliban once pledged in an article published in the *New York Times* that women's basic rights, including the rights of ownership, inheritance, education, work and even the right to choose their husbands, would be guaranteed. However, as observed, most of these commitments have not been fulfilled. Overall, the Taliban's position on women remains conservative and contradictory.

Third, the Taliban's stance on education. When in power in 1996, the Taliban closed almost all schools in areas under its control, especially girls' schools. Co-education was banned and female teachers were not allowed to teach. The Taliban believed that advocating gender equality or allowing female teachers to teach would provide a chance for the spread of Western values. Now, the Taliban allows some foreign NGOs to open co-educational schools in Afghanistan. For example, a German NGO has opened 13 religious schools in Kabul with about 10,000 students. At the same time, they reached an agreement with the Taliban's Religious Affairs Ministry to launch an affiliated teacher training program. In these coeducational schools, half of the students are girls. In general, the Taliban has expressed views to promote education, and it seems to be more open and inclusive in education.

Fourth, relations with NGOs. Previously, the Taliban publicly opposed NGOs, believing that they were tools of dissidents, and banned their activities in Afghanistan. However, it seems that the Taliban has changed its tactics recently, allowing NGOs that help it and provide it with funding to operate. The Taliban set up a committee to deal with NGOs, and strictly separates NGOs from profit organizations. These all reflect the Taliban's moderation.

Finally, the Taliban's vision for future institutions. In Cui Shoujun's view, the Taliban is clearer about what it opposes than what it supports. In 2019, a Taliban spokesperson published an article in the *New York Times*, stating that the Taliban's goal was to establish an Islamic government, but it still cannot decide what form an Islamic government should take, which will be left for clerics, analysts and Afghan elites to make an appropriate decision. At the same time, the Taliban intends to establish an emirate to return to and share power in a more open manner and establish a more inclusive government. The concepts of caliphate and emirate are mentioned several times in the Taliban's documents, but are not clearly defined. In interviews, different Taliban spokespersons and leaders have voiced ideas about elections, parliaments, pluralism, and cited such models. Some religious scholars also suggested placing the religious academic council above all elected bodies, or following the Iranian model. In addition, till now discussions have largely focused on the

government at central level, and no clear structure has been proposed for arrangements at local level.

Overall speaking, the current Taliban regime is savvier than the 1996 regime. After cutting off economic ties with the US, the Afghan economy faces intractable funding shortage. The Taliban, as a regime builder, can by no means keep funding itself from drug trade, so it has an urgent need to earn recognition from other countries. China is an important neighbor with huge demand for resources and minerals. As Afghanistan has rich rare earth and copper resources, it may provide more opportunities for the Chinese economy to incorporate Afghanistan into the Belt and Road Initiative and promote Chinese companies to seek development in the country (e.g. the Mes Aynak Mine invested by China Minmetals Corporation). However, the fact that the current government is still unstable may subject the large amount of Chinese assets and personnel to high risk and may also create a platform for extremism or fundamentalism to spread to China. Therefore, it is important that we have our own judgment on these issues. In conclusion, the “moderation” of the Afghan Taliban government is mainly tactical and rhetorical, rather than an ideological shift in its central leadership. To win more public support, the Taliban regime first needs to satisfy people’s demands for better economy. If the global economy remains in a slump due to the pandemic, it is uncertain whether Afghanistan will return to what it was in 1996 and become a new hotbed of

extremism or terrorism.

Wang Suolao, deputy director of the Institute of Area Studies, Peking University, considers it necessary to continuously track the Taliban's influence on Middle East countries. The post-war Islamic world centers around countries dominated by Sunnis, such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The Iranian Revolution in 1979 was a great impetus for the revival of Islam around the world. Now that the Taliban is back in power, it remains to be seen whether the Taliban will rekindle the extremism that has been weakened by the declining Islamic State. For the time being, Saudi Arabia and other countries that once supported the Taliban are not actively responding, which may help block the Taliban's ideological spread to the Middle East. However, in this internet age, religious extremists may manifest themselves in different ways, making them more difficult to identify and find. The comeback of the Taliban also presents new topics to the community of Middle East studies. As the topic of religion has regained some attention, it to certain extent benefits the Middle East studies.

After the speeches, the participants discussed the development trend of Islamic extremism.

Bao Chengzhang believes that Islamic terrorism and extremism may experience the following trends in the future. First, increasingly flattening organization structure of extremist groups. Since the IS was dismantled by the international anti-terrorist

forces led by the US, extremist groups will rely more on their branch forces for overseas operations. For the IS, the rise of the Taliban proved for the first time the possibility of an extremist group taking power. Al-Qaeda also has spoken highly of the Taliban's strategic patience.

Second, the study of Islamic extremism must be placed in the dual context of the pandemic and the strategic competition between China and the US. At present, strict border and traffic controls in response to the pandemic have restricted the movement of extremists, who are forced into inactivity. After the Taliban took power, global terrorist groups tend to gather in Afghanistan, which has ranked first in Global Terrorism Index since 2019. The competition among terrorist organizations and extremist groups in Afghanistan, such as Al-Qaeda and the IS, has also intensified. After the Taliban assumed power, its competition with the IS – Khorasan Province (IS-K) has become fiercer. From August to October 2021, the IS-K launched multiple terrorist attacks, sending a signal to the Taliban and its supporters.

Third, the number of suicide attacks launched by Scouts has risen in recent years, so did the number of terrorist attacks by female terrorists. Fourth, in the context of China-US strategic competition, global religious extremist groups and terrorist organizations are inevitably paying more attention to China. In Afghanistan, due to the withdrawal of the US, China has been involved, involuntarily or otherwise, in Afghan affairs. We need

to further collect information and deepen our understanding of Afghanistan and the Taliban.

Fifth, in the age of science and technology, counter-terrorist efforts are facing greater challenges. If terrorists learn AI and other advanced technologies and use them to make videos of attacking China, it will consume more domestic counter-terrorist resources to verify. For other countries, the COVID-19 pandemic may cause the reallocation of resources originally set for counter-terrorism to COVID-19 prevention and control or economic and social recovery, leaving overseas Chinese capital and personnel at greater risk of being attacked.

Regarding the deradicalization initiative, Bao Chengzhang points out that, first, it is important to learn from the experience of pandemic prevention and control. For those who are deeply influenced by extremism, a closed-loop management mechanism should be set up in accordance with the law after their return to the society. Second, different ideas and methods should be adopted for different communities. One situation in favor of deradicalization work in Xinjiang is that many people are not firm believers, which exactly makes them vulnerable to religious extremism, but on the other hand, it is easier to help them break free from extremist ideas. For those young people with strong religious belief, especially those growing up in families with strong religious atmosphere, once they become extremists, it would be extremely difficult to remold their ideology. New ideas

or methods should be adopted for deradicalizing such people. Third, Islamic extremism and mainstream Islam have been competing for orthodoxy. At present, the mainstream Islamic academia is at a disadvantage due to insufficient knowledge supply and lack of theoretical innovation. It is recommended that the Chinese Islamic community promote innovation of the Islamic academic system. Such innovation is not for China to lead the Islamic theoretical discourse system, but to think about how to introduce new ideas to serve deradicalization at home. Fourth, as Li Lin said, deradicalization is essentially a de-politicized transformation of religious extremism to guide it back to religious pursuits. However, at present, deradicalization in China mainly resorts to political means, which makes it necessary to involve more in-depth thinking to find a balance between the two. Fifth, deradicalization experiences in many Islamic countries would provide helpful references. For example, in Lebanon, the principle of youth deradicalization is to help them establish rule consciousness so as to replace the violence consciousness hidden in their minds. Sports activities are helpful, as they emphasize rules. For example, in basketball games, fair charges are allowed, but players cannot beat others to grab the ball. The highlight of Saudi Arabia's deradicalization initiative is art therapy. For example, some Saudi terrorists detained in the Guantanamo Bay detention camp for participation in the 9/11 attack are asked to draw the process of their involvement, which psychologists use

to assess to what extent they are affected by extremist ideas. Deradicalization efforts in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) seek to blur the boundaries between religious world and secular life. For instance, notice boards in mosques in Abu Dhabi often provide secular information as a way to tell those who come to worship that they will return to secular life after the service. Sixth, in the deradicalization work in Xinjiang, we should pay more attention to deradicalization in communities, families, schools and other fields, and should also include anti-discrimination education. Community and family are the first contact after trainees in vocational education and training centers return to society, and a critical aspect to be evaluated for the effectiveness of deradicalization in vocational education. If community workers and law enforcement officials discriminate against trainees or use excessive means in enforcement, it may prevent trainees from further integrating into the society. Community discrimination may make trainees feel frustrated and go radical again. In addition, if training is carried out on family basis in education and training centers, it is necessary to observe the intergenerational transmission of radicalization within the family after graduation. If there is no evident deradicalization, it is possible for trainees to be influenced again after they return home.

Bao Chengzhang believes that China should cooperate with Islamic countries to carry out de-radicalization work, though each may have its own focus. For example, China and Egypt can

strengthen the cooperation on vocational education, which is conducive to stability and development of vocational education and training centers in Xinjiang. China and Saudi Arabia can cooperate on public diplomacy towards international Islamic organizations, through which the moderation concept of the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia could be put to practice. China-UAE cooperation may concentrate on deradicalization discourse. The UAE has been promoting tolerance at home towards other religions. UAE's practice has already been employed in some exemplary centers for anti-violence and de-radicalization in China. China could also explore the prospect for cooperation with Qatar. Although it is difficult to change Al Jazeera's negative stance on Xinjiang-related issues in the short run, China has cooperated with think tanks such as Al Jazeera Center for Studies to discuss deradicalization, from which China has gained more understanding of the experience of various countries.

Regarding the trend of Islamic extremism, Li Lin first emphasized that the so-called religious extremism is violent revolution or armed seizure of power in the Islamic world, which has several targets. First is Western capitalist system, as the collusion between the US and the West and the powerful in the Islamic world has not only put enormous pressure on local people, but also undermined traditional cultures. Second is the privileged class. Even if the ruling class in Saudi Arabia follow Wahhabism, they are also Malik. The ruling class of Saudi Arabia do not

conform to the orthodox faith community, which makes them the target of revolution, therefore Saudi Arabia also needs to fight against religious extremism. Third is the Ulema, or the traditional Islamic intellectuals, as religious extremism seeks to smash the old social structure.

Second, regional powers such as Saudi Arabia have actually adopted an attitude of both prevention and utilization towards religious extremist organizations, and regarded them as tools. Since the pandemic, due to reduction in aids from major countries, religious extremist groups are not as active as before. Amid the intensifying competition between China and the US, we should be vigilant of the possibility that the US and the West interfere in China's affairs by means of religious extremism. Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region are also distancing themselves from religious extremist organizations, as they do not want to be notorious for supporting extremism. However, some countries in South Asia, which are not as powerful as Saudi Arabia, seek to utilize religious extremism, and they are doing so with more direct means and more unscrupulously. The different attitudes of countries may become variables in the fight against religious extremism in the future.

Third, regarding domestic deradicalization work, Li Lin believes that the government must take actions. Religious extremism is in essence political appeal, which takes violence, armed force and power seizure to achieve. Ethnic separatist forces

existed in Xinjiang in history have grown into a certain tradition. Now the government must take actions to crush their political delusions. At the same time, legitimate religious rights and interests should be protected and Sinicized.

If the influence of religious extremism is to be fundamentally removed, it is important to re-establish traditions and the authority of the Ulema. Both Xinjiang and inland regions have their own Islamic traditions. The distorted interpretation of religious extremism should be refuted based on the scriptures and teachings. Islam in inland regions has good traditions and has already established its cultural identity and political identity. Islam in Xinjiang also has its own traditions including many elements of Sufism. We can refer to the practice in inland areas and restore traditions to resist extremism, which is a fundamental solution.

Cui Shoujun believes, first of all, the Taliban's return to power will fundamentally transform the Middle East. Many Israelis view the Taliban occupation of Kabul and the withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan as another landmark event in the global expansion of jihadism after 9/11. In addition, the situation in Afghanistan is greatly influenced by Pakistan. The death of Chinese employees of Gezhouba Group in Pakistan in August 2021 is said to be related to the Taliban in Pakistan. At present, the Taliban mullahs in Afghanistan are less educated, many of whom are illiterate, unlike those in Iran and Egypt, who have been

educated by scribes or learned scriptures. Therefore, it would be hard to bring the mullahs and Afghans at the bottom of the society back to the right track with conventional deradicalization methods after they are radicalized. The lower they are in the social strata, the firmer their cognition is, which will pose many challenges in the future. Secondly, the development of science and technology will have disruptive impact on world politics. With faster and more convenient transnational information flow, the transnational dissemination of extremist ideas, recruitment, training and even financing of extremist organizations will become much easier, making prompt block of cross-border extremism and terrorism a formidable challenge.