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## 1                                    **Irrigation water quality may improve in arid regions of China**

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8    **Abstract:** The stability and safety of water environment are the foundation of agricultural  
9    development. The possibility of salinization and desertification in the oasis agricultural area is  
10    much higher than that in other areas, for the population density, lack of water resources and high  
11    salinity. Therefore, it is necessary to study the water environment of irrigation water in this area,  
12    so as to make a reasonable water resource utilization and protection plan. In the agricultural  
13    irrigation period (from Apr. to Sep.) and non-irrigation period (from Oct. to Mar. of the next year),  
14    there were 9 sampling points set up from the source area to the oasis of the middle and lower  
15    reaches in Shiyang River Basin. Evaluating the irrigation water quality of surface water by ion  
16    concentration, SAR and end-member mixing diagram. The results shown: (1) the dilution effect of  
17    precipitation has a decisive influence on the ion concentration of surface water in the watershed.  
18    Due to the overlapping of irrigation period and rainy season, rainfall dilution makes irrigation  
19    water quality better. (2) There are spatial differences in hydrochemical types. The upstream  
20    hydrochemical type is mainly Ca-HCO<sub>3</sub> type. The hydrochemical type of the middle and lower  
21    reaches is Ca (Na) - HCO<sub>3</sub> mixed type. The upstream surface water is very suitable for agricultural  
22    irrigation, and the middle and downstream oasis area is suitable. (3) Surface rock weathering and  
23    evaporation crystallization are the main factors affecting the hydrochemical characteristics of  
24    surface water. Due to changes in the underlying surface environment in a short time, it is unlikely  
25    that the water quality will deteriorate. (4) In recent years, with the increase in precipitation caused  
26    by climate change and the strict environmental protection policies, the risk of deterioration of  
27    irrigation water quality is greatly reduced, surface water may be more suitable for agricultural  
28    irrigation.

29    **Keywords:** Inland River Basin; Oasis; Shiyang River; Irrigation water quality

## 30 **1 Introduction**

31 The water resource is an important material basis for human survival and development ([Van der](#)  
32 [Hoek et al., 2001](#); [Zhang et al., 2012](#)). As an important part of geochemical cycle in arid area, river  
33 is the connecting channel of material and energy cycle between land and ocean ([Stallard and](#)  
34 [Edmond, 1981](#); [Berner and Berner, 2012](#); [Zhu et al., 2012](#)), and also the main source of water for  
35 Industry and agriculture ([Stigter et al., 2006](#); [Dograceci et al., 2012](#)). Whether the surface water  
36 environment is healthy or not directly determines the sustainability of local social and economic  
37 development. Under the background of global climate change, the hydrochemical characteristics  
38 of surface water are controlled by natural processes such as rock weathering, atmospheric  
39 precipitation, evaporation crystallization and groundwater recharge ([Gibbs, 1970](#); [Meybeck and](#)  
40 [Helmer, 1989](#); [Thomas et al., 2015](#)). The interference of human activities is also accompanied by  
41 the evolution of the surface water environment. The sustainable development of the surface water  
42 environment is a topic of common concern for human society ([Pant et al., 2018](#)).

43 Hydrochemistry studies can reveal the quality of drinking water, agricultural water, and  
44 industrial water ([Burt et al., 1993](#); [Haygarth and Jarvis, 2002](#); [Fučík et al., 2012](#)). Hydrochemical  
45 parameters is base in evaluating water quality suitable for irrigation ([Al-Bassam and Al-](#)  
46 [Rumikhani, 2003](#)). Excessive salt in irrigation water is one of the main constraints for agricultural  
47 development in arid areas ([Wang et al., 2004](#)). Irrigation with poor quality water may bring  
48 excessive harmful elements to the soil and affect its fertility. The quality of irrigation water  
49 restricts the yield of crops through its impact on the soil environment and becomes a key factor  
50 affecting the growth of crops ([Fipps, 2003](#)). Scholars have carried out a lot of research work in the  
51 areas where agricultural activities are concentrated. Based on understanding the hydrochemical  
52 characteristics of irrigation water, it is an urgent problem to explore an effective research method  
53 to evaluate water resources reasonably and guide agricultural production activities. [Giridharan et](#)  
54 [al. \(2008\)](#) found that the groundwater quality was mainly controlled by the dissolution and ion  
55 exchange of carbonate and silicate minerals by analyzing the main ion components of groundwater  
56 in the coom river area of India. The suitability of groundwater for agricultural irrigation in the  
57 study area was analyzed by using single indicators such as sodium adsorption ratio (SAR) and  
58 residual sodium carbonate (RSC). [Varol and Davraz \(2015\)](#) used R-type factor analysis to study

59 the water-rock interaction during the formation of groundwater chemical composition in the  
60 tefenni plain of Turkey. By comparing the change rule of Na% in the wet season and the dry  
61 season, it was found that the groundwater quality in the dry season was more unfavorable to  
62 agricultural irrigation. [Zouahri et al\(2015\)](#) using the USSSL classification method, found that the  
63 risk of soil salt damage caused by groundwater irrigation was higher in western european plain,  
64 while the risk of soil alkali damage was lower. [Pang et al \(2010\)](#) studied the effect of brackish  
65 water irrigation on Soil in northern China. The results showed that brackish water significantly  
66 increase soil salt content in different depths. [Zhang et al \(2012\)](#) believed that in Songnen plain,  
67 surface water and shallow groundwater are suitable for irrigation, but the harm of sodium salt  
68 needs to be controlled. [Zhang et al\(2018\)](#) evaluated the suitability of groundwater irrigation in  
69 Sichuan Basin and found that the water quality of shallow surface groundwater is good and  
70 suitable for irrigation. From shallow to deep, the water quality of groundwater gradually becomes  
71 poor, and the middle and deep groundwater is not suitable for long-term agricultural irrigation.  
72 Besides, Wilcox classification ([Alam and Aslam, 2012](#)), salinity and alkalinity method ([Li et al.,](#)  
73 [2013](#)), and other research methods related to irrigation water quality evaluation. In the early stage,  
74 many research results used a single water quality evaluation index to evaluate the irrigation water  
75 quality respectively ([Al-Bassam and Al-Rumikhani, 2003](#); [Sadashivaiah et al., 2008](#); [Tank and](#)  
76 [Chandel, 2010](#)). The evaluation results lacked integrity and comprehensiveness.

77 The amount of water in the arid area is very limited. The oasis supported by the inland river  
78 concentrates almost all human activities in the arid area and bears huge pressure of population,  
79 resources and environment. Due to the natural background of low precipitation and high  
80 evaporation and the discharge of agricultural and industrial pollutants, many studies have  
81 confirmed that the water quality in the inland river basin take a turn for the worse ([Ji et al., 2006](#);  
82 [Zhang et al., 2010](#)). Still, most of the sampling points in the relevant studies are concentrated in  
83 the cities and towns with dense human activities. Because the hydrological system will continue to  
84 migrate and transform, it has certain self-purification capabilities, only from the perspective of the  
85 whole water cycle can we systematically understand and view the water environment of the basin,  
86 and accurately evaluate whether the surface water can support the agricultural production of the  
87 basin.

88 In this paper, Shiyang River Basin, which has the densest population and the most pressure on  
89 water resources in China, is selected as the research sample. Based on a large number of  
90 hydrochemical data collected in the Shiyang river basin, (1) the hydrochemical characteristics are  
91 analyzed by the surface water in the source area, catchment area and dissipation area of the basin  
92 to determine whether the surface water in different areas are suitable for irrigated. (2) We analyzes  
93 the main control factors of the water environment in the basin. (3) Forecast the development trend  
94 of irrigation water quality in the future. This study can quantitatively reveal the spatiotemporal  
95 characteristics of the hydrochemistry characteristics of the surface water in the inland river in the  
96 arid area, and improve the understanding level of the suitability of the surface water irrigation in  
97 the inland river in the arid area. It can predict the water quality change in the future, which is  
98 beneficial to the development the agricultural development, ecological environment protection,  
99 farmland water conservancy facilities construction and rational utilization of water resources in  
100 Shiyang River Basin.

## 101 2 Study area

102 Shiyang River basin, located in the east of the Qilian Mountains, is one of the three basins  
103 originating from the northern slopes of the Qilian Mountains. In the south is the Qinghai Tibet  
104 Plateau. In the north are the Tengger Desert and Badain Jaran Desert ( $101^{\circ} 41' - 104^{\circ} 16' S$ ,  $36^{\circ}$   
105  $29' - 39^{\circ} 27' N$ ). The basin is located at the junction of the eastern monsoon area and the non-  
106 monsoon area, where the ecological environment is extremely fragile (Fig. 1). The altitude of the  
107 basin is between 1254-5217m, which belongs to the temperate continental climate. The  
108 temperature vary widely, the rainfall is rare, and the surface evaporation is strong. The surface  
109 water of the basin mainly comes from the precipitation in the mountain area and the melting water  
110 of ice and snow. With the change of altitude, there are alpine meadow, subalpine shrub, shrub  
111 grassland, desert vegetation, and other vegetation types from the river source area to the oasis in  
112 the middle and lower reaches. Shiyang River basin covers an area of about  $4.16 * 10^4 \text{ km}^2$ , with a  
113 total cultivated land area of  $4.17 * 10^5$  hectares. At present, the total population of the basin is 2.27  
114 million, and the proportion of multiple planting is 50%. The agricultural water consumption  
115 accounts for 85.7% of the total water consumption, the large agricultural water consumption is the  
116 main reason for the overload of water resources in the Shiyang River Basin. The increase of

117 agricultural irrigation water leads to a series of ecological problems, such as the decline of  
118 groundwater level, vegetation degradation, soil salinization and land desertification , this area is  
119 one of the most serious ecological problems in China (Su et al., 2019).

120 **Fig.1** The Shiyang River Basin, in the east of Qilian Mountains, showing location of oasis  
121 agricultural irrigation area and sampling points

### 122 **3 Data and methods**

123 From June 2015 to October 2017, surface water samples were collected in Shiyang River Basin.  
124 According to the planting type and structure of crops in the study area, the sampling time was  
125 divided into irrigation period (from Apr. to Sep.) and non-irrigation period (from Oct. to Mar. of  
126 the next year). The sampling period is once a month, 323 samples are collected. The location of  
127 the sampling points is shown in Fig. 1. The sample bottle is a 100 ml polyethylene plastic bottle  
128 that has been cleaned by deionized water in advance, then load the sample, and then seal and  
129 freeze it. All samples were transported to the National Key Laboratory of cryosphere, Northwest  
130 Institute of ecological resources and environment, Chinese Academy of Sciences by freezing and  
131 stored in cold storage at -15°C. Two days before the analysis, the sample was taken out and melted  
132 naturally at room temperature (about 23°C). Before the test, filter with 0.45 μm filter membrane,  
133 analyze the concentration of main cations (Ca<sup>2+</sup>, Mg<sup>2+</sup>, Na<sup>+</sup>, K<sup>+</sup>, and NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup>) by Dionex-600 ion  
134 chromatography; analyze the concentration of main anions (Cl<sup>-</sup>, NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>, and SO<sub>4</sub><sup>2-</sup>) by Dionex-2500  
135 ion chromatography, with the accuracy of ng.g<sup>-1</sup> and the test data error of < 5%. DDS-307 water  
136 quality analyzer is used to measure pH, TDS and other indicators of water.

137 The meteorological data (temperature and sunshine duration) involved in this study were  
138 selected from the data of Wuwei meteorological station located in the study area, and the starting  
139 year was 1960. The relevant meteorological data involved in the study are all from China  
140 Meteorological Data Service Center( <http://data.cma.cn/> ).Runoff and precipitation data are from  
141 Shiyang River Basin Water Resources Management Bureau(<http://slt.gansu.gov.cn/syhgjlj/>).In this  
142 paper, the Penman-Monteith model (P-M) recommended by the world food and Agriculture  
143 Organization (FAO) is used as the theoretical basis, and combined with the actual situation in the  
144 region, the potential evaporation in the study area is estimated. The calculation formula is:

145 
$$Eq.1 ET_0 = \frac{0.48 \Delta (R_n - G) + \gamma \frac{900}{T + 273} U_2 (e_s - e_a)}{\Delta + \gamma (1 + 0.34 U_2)}$$

146 Among them,  $ET_0$  is potential evapotranspiration (mm);  $\Delta$  is slope of saturated water vapor  
 147 pressure curve ( $kPa \text{ } ^\circ C^{-1}$ );  $R_n$  is net radiation ( $MJm^{-2}day^{-1}$ );  $G$  is soil heat flux ( $MJm^{-2}day^{-1}$ );  $\gamma$  is dry  
 148 and wet surface constant ( $kPa^\circ C^{-1}$ );  $t$  is average temperature ( $^\circ C$ );  $U_2$  is wind speed at 2m ( $ms^{-1}$ );  $e_s$   
 149 is saturated vapor pressure (kPa);  $e_a$  is actual vapor pressure (kPa).

150 The suitability of irrigation water depends on the type and concentration of dissolved salts, in  
 151 which sodium plays an important role (Subramani et al., 2005). Generally, high sodium content in  
 152 irrigation water will lead to the replacement of  $Ca^{2+}$  and  $Mg^{2+}$  by  $Na^+$ . The migration of  $Ca^{2+}$  and  
 153  $Mg^{2+}$  in the soil reduces the permeability of the soil, thus causing damage to crops such as calcium  
 154 deficiency, skewness, and tilt, and affecting crop yield. Therefore, the irrigation suitability of river  
 155 water can be evaluated by estimating the percentage of sodium ion ( $Na^+\%$ ) and the sodium  
 156 adsorption ratio (SAR).

157 Sodium adsorption ratio (SAR) is an important parameter to indicate the  $Na^+$  content in  
 158 irrigation water or soil solution, and also an important index to measure the degree of soil  
 159 alkalization caused by irrigation water. The higher SAR value is, the stronger  $Na^+$  absorption  
 160 capacity of soil is. High concentration of  $Na^+$  will lead to poor permeability of soil surface, lower  
 161 germination rate of crops, serious diseases and insect pests, and affect the growth and development  
 162 of crops. Irrigation water can be divided into five categories according to  $Na^+\%$  (excellent: < 20%,  
 163 good: 20-40%, suitable for irrigation: 40-60%, suspicious: 60-80%, unsuitable: > 80%) (Richards,  
 164 1954; Thomas et al., 2015). The calculation formula is:

165 
$$Eq.2 SAR = \frac{Na^+}{\sqrt{Ca^{2+} + \frac{Mg^{2+}}{2}}}$$

166 
$$Eq.3 Na^+\% = \frac{Na^+}{Na^+ + K^+ + \frac{Ca^{2+} + Mg^{2+}}{2}} \times 100\%$$

167 the unit of each ion is  $meq L^{-1}$

168 Combined with the analysis and test data, the piper diagram is used to explore the ion  
 169 composition and hydrochemical types of the study area. The contribution proportion of rock  
 170 weathering and the specific impact of human activities on hydrochemistry are explained by the

171 end-member mixing diagram and principal component analysis (PCA).

## 172 **4 Results and analysis**

### 173 *4.1 Hydrochemical characteristics*

174 All the samples in the study area are weakly alkaline, with pH value between 7.86-9.39, the  
175 average value of 8.03 and coefficient of variation of 5%, indicating that the pH value changes  
176 slightly in the water of the study area and is relatively stable, with slight changes between different  
177 sampling points. The total dissolved solids (TDS) in the study area ranged from 180-793 mg L<sup>-1</sup>,  
178 and the coefficient of variation was 53%, which reflected that there were great spatial differences  
179 in the water characteristics of the whole basin. From upstream to middle and downstream, the total  
180 dissolved solids value increases, salinity rises, and ion concentration also rises.

181 The soluble cations in natural water are mainly Ca<sup>2+</sup>, Mg<sup>2+</sup>, Na<sup>+</sup>, K<sup>+</sup>, and the soluble anions are  
182 mainly Cl<sup>-</sup>, SO<sub>4</sub><sup>2-</sup>, HCO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>, and NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>. Under the condition of weak alkalinity, the concentration of CO  
183 <sub>3</sub><sup>2-</sup> is very little, which is less than 5% of the total amount of weak acid ions, so it is ignored.

184 According to the principle of solution neutralization, the anion and cation are balanced, i.e.:

$$185 \quad Eq.4 \quad \sum Z^+ * mc = \sum Z^- * ma$$

$$186 \quad Eq.5 \quad 2c \dot{c}$$

187 according to this, HCO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> ion concentration is calculated.

188 Statistical analysis of the hydrochemical parameters of the water in the study area ([Table 1](#)). It  
189 can be seen that the order of anion concentration in the study area during the irrigation period is:  
190 HCO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> > SO<sub>4</sub><sup>2-</sup> > Cl<sup>-</sup> > NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>, and the average ion concentration is 46.42mg/L, 28.77mg/L, 6.59mg/L  
191 and 3.60mg/L respectively. The order of cation concentration is: Ca<sup>2+</sup> > Na<sup>+</sup> > Mg<sup>2+</sup> > K<sup>+</sup> > NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup>, and the  
192 average ion concentrations were 30.94mg/L, 14.97mg/L, 12.61mg/L, 1.27mg/L and 0.36mg/L,  
193 respectively. In the non-irrigation period, the order of ion concentration from large to small is the  
194 same as that in the irrigation period, but there are differences in numerical value. Among them, the  
195 concentration of NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> is the most obvious, and the ion concentration increases by 72% compared  
196 with the irrigation period. However, there are few NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> in the natural water, most of which are  
197 related to human factors. Therefore, it can be judged that the use of agricultural fertilizer have an  
198 impact on the ion concentration in the study basin.

199 **Table 1** Descriptive statistics of hydrochemistry characteristics of surface water in irrigation

200 and non-irrigation periods in Shiyang River Basin ( $\text{mg L}^{-1}$ )

#### 201 *4.2 Ion composition*

202 Project the sample into the Piper diagram(Piper, 1994), and the results show that the main types  
203 of water in Shiyang River Basin are mainly carbonated water. In the cation diagram(Fig. 2), the  
204 sample mainly falls into the lower-left corner, indicating that the main cation is  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ . From the  
205 source area (M1-M5) to the middle and lower reaches of the agricultural oasis area (O1-O4), the  
206 main cations have a trend from  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  to  $\text{Na}^+$  gradually. This feature is reflected in both irrigation  
207 and non-irrigation periods. In the anion diagram, water samples are concentrated in the lower-left  
208 corner, and  $\text{HCO}_3^-$  is the dominant ion.  $\text{SO}_4^{2-}$  control a small number of samples in the upstream  
209 irrigation period and the middle and downstream non-irrigation period. The area where river water  
210 samples fall in the diamond obviously reflects that the main hydrochemical type in the study area  
211 is  $\text{Ca-HCO}_3$  type, and part of the samples in the middle and lower reaches of non-irrigation period  
212 gradually change to  $\text{Ca(Na)-HCO}_3$  mixed type. In addition, it can be seen from the cation triangle  
213 diagram that the water environment in mountainous area is relatively stable, and the relative  
214 concentration of  $\text{Na}^+$  in irrigation period and non irrigation period is almost the same; however, the  
215 relative content of  $\text{Na}^+$  in the water of oasis area in the lower reaches has obvious difference in  
216 irrigation period and non irrigation period, which shows that  $\text{Na}^+$  is stable and small in irrigation  
217 period, and fluctuates greatly in non irrigation period. On the whole, the water quality in irrigation  
218 period is better and stable.

219 **Fig.2** Piper diagram of ion composition of irrigation water in different regions and periods

#### 220 *4.3 Hydrochemical evaluation of irrigation water*

221 The SAR value of Shiyang River Basin is between 1.28-3.00 in the irrigation period and  
222 between 1.63-3.22 in the non-irrigation period. The average pH value of the basin is 7.98.  
223 According to the range of SAR value, it can be concluded that most of the water in the study  
224 basin can be directly used for agricultural irrigation. SAR values in irrigation period are lower  
225 than that of the non-irrigation period in most sampling points(Fig. 3a), which shows that crops and  
226 coastal vegetation have a certain absorption effect on  $\text{Na}^+$ . In Hongyashan reservoir, SAR values  
227 in irrigation period are higher than that of the non-irrigation period, Hongyashan reservoir is an  
228 artificial reservoir in Shiyang River Basin. During the irrigation season, the Hongyashan Reservoir

229 has a storage capacity of 127 million cubic meters ( 60 million cubic meters of water from the  
230 Yellow River , 30 million cubic meters from the Xiyang river , 23million cubic meters from  
231 Shiyang river ) . The water from the Yellow River and the upper reaches of Shiyang River enters  
232 the Hongyashan Reservoir by the water delivery project, which reduces the SAR values of the  
233 Hongyashan Reservoir, making the water in the Hongyashan Reservoir more suitable for irrigation  
234 (Zhu et al., 2018).

235 The total average value of  $\text{Na}^+\%$  in the study area is 19.86%, which indicates that the quality of  
236 irrigation water is good as a whole. On the spatial scale (Fig. 3b), the percentage of sodium ion in  
237 the water in the upstream mountainous area is all below 20%. After entering the mountain front  
238 oasis, the percentage of sodium ion in the water rises sharply, and the values are all above 20%.  
239 Therefore, the water in the upstream mountainous area is more suitable for agricultural irrigation,  
240 and the irrigation suitability of water from the mountain pass to the oasis area decreases gradually.  
241 In general, the water quality of the mountain reaches of Shiyang River Basin is good, and the  
242 problem of declining irrigation water quality mainly exists in the rivers from Wuwei city to  
243 Hongyashan reservoir(O1-O4). The irrigation suitability of surface water in Qilian mountain area  
244 is very good.

245 **Fig.3** Spatial variation trend of SAR(a) and  $\text{Na}^+\%$ (b) during irrigation and non-irrigation  
246 periods in Shiyang River Basin

## 247 **5 Discussion**

### 248 *5.1 Ion source and main control factors of irrigation water*

249 The end-member mixing diagram is a common method to explore the relationship between the  
250 main ion composition and lithology of river water. It can further explore the contribution of  
251 bedrock weathering and dissolution to the ion composition characteristics and changes of water  
252 and identify the control effect of rock properties on water (Gaillardet et al., 1999; Yang et al.,2018;  
253 Ma et al.,2019). The contribution rate of rock weathering to ion source can be determined by the  
254 ratio of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}/\text{Na}^+$ ,  $\text{Mg}^{2+}/\text{Na}^+$  and  $\text{HCO}_3^-/\text{Na}^+$  normalized by sodium ion equivalent concentration.  
255 When  $\text{HCO}_3^-/\text{Na}^+=2 \pm 1$ , the composition of the rock is mainly affected by silicate rock. The  $\text{HCO}_3^-$   
256  $^3/\text{Na}^+$  ratio of sample points in the study area mainly falls into the range of  $2 \pm 1$ , so it can be

257 concluded that the ions in Shiyang River Basin mainly come from silicate weathering. Also, in the  
258 agricultural oasis area during the irrigation period, some samples are affected by evaporite (Fig.  
259 4). Therefore, the weathering and dissolution of silicate is the main source of surface water in  
260 Shiyang River Basin, and the weathering of carbonate also contributes the water in mountainous  
261 area. The chemical composition of some water in the middle and lower reaches of the irrigation  
262 period is affected by the weathering and dissolution of evaporite.

263 Based on the river water samples in the basin, principal component analysis (PCA) is used to  
264 further determine the source of the main ions in the samples (Table 2). Three principal components  
265 were extracted and 89.6% of the total variance was explained. The three principal components  
266 accounted for 67.338%, 12.168% and 10.076% of the total variance respectively. The first  
267 principal component has a strong positive correlation with  $\text{Na}^+$ ,  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$ ,  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ ,  $\text{HCO}_3^-$ ,  $\text{SO}_4^{2-}$ ,  $\text{K}^+$  and  
268  $\text{Cl}^-$ , and most of these ions come from nature, so it can be concluded that the first principal  
269 component represents the natural environment background of the basin. The second principal  
270 component has a strong positive correlation with  $\text{NH}_4^+$  and  $\text{NO}_3^-$ . However,  $\text{NH}_4^+$  and  $\text{NO}_3^-$  are  
271 mainly influenced by human factors, so it can be considered that the second principal component  
272 represents human activities such as industrial pollution, domestic sewage discharge and the use of  
273 agricultural fertilizer. The third principal component showed a strong positive correlation with  $\text{NH}_4^+$   
274 and a significant negative correlation with  $\text{NO}_3^-$ . It can be considered that the third principal  
275 component shows the different vegetation on both sides of the river, and the utilization and  
276 transformation of nitrogen elements are different. The relative contribution of the three main  
277 components to the total variance decreased gradually, indicating that the natural environment  
278 background of the study area still dominates the hydrochemical characteristics of the basin, and  
279 human activities, land use types and crop planting structure have a certain impact on the surface  
280 water environment in the middle and lower reaches of the Shiyang River Basin.

281 **Fig.4** End-member mixing diagram of Shiyang River Basin in irrigation and non-irrigation  
282 periods normalized by sodium ion equivalent concentration

283 **Table 2** Principal Component Load

## 284 5.2 The possible impact of climate change on irrigation water quality

285 Since the 20th century, global climate change has had a profound impact on the water cycle

286 process and water environment characteristics in different basins (Allan R and Soden B, 2008).  
287 Due to less precipitation and strong evaporation of arid inland river basins, agriculture is highly  
288 dependent on surface and groundwater whose salinity is generally higher than that of humid and  
289 semi-humid regions. Therefore, changes in water quality caused by climate change have a great  
290 impact on agriculture in arid oasis. From 1960-2016, the temperature in the Shiyang River Basin  
291 has been rising at a rate of  $0.45^{\circ}\text{C}/10\text{a}$ (Fig.5), the rainfall increasing rate is  $1.6\text{mm}/10\text{a}$ (Fig.5), the  
292 potential evaporation has dropped by  $2.3\text{mm}/10\text{a}$ (Fig.5). and the runoff has increased significantly  
293 in the Shiyang River Basin. Using the scenario assumptions proposed for carbon emissions in the  
294 fifth assessment report of the IPCC, two greenhouse gas concentration scenarios (RCP4.5 and  
295 RCP8.5) were selected and the assessment concluded that during the period 2020-2099 (Wang,  
296 2017), the annual average The temperature rise rate under the PCR8.5 scenario is  $0.68^{\circ}\text{C}/10\text{a}$ , and  
297 under the RCP4.5 scenario is  $0.23^{\circ}\text{C}/10\text{a}$ . The annual average precipitation rate is  $9.65\text{mm}/10\text{a}$   
298 under the RCP8.5 scenario and  $6.33\text{mm}/10\text{a}$  under the RCP4.5 scenario.

299 An increase in temperature will increase local evaporation and lead to a decrease in water  
300 volume in the basin, and an increase in precipitation will increase the water volume in the basin. If  
301 the concentration caused by the increase in evaporation are stronger than the dilution caused by  
302 the increase in precipitation, there is a risk of a decline in the quality of irrigation water in the  
303 basin, On the contrary, the quality of irrigation water will be further optimized.

304 **Fig.5** Runoff (a), temperature(b), sunshine duration (c), potential evaporation(d) and  
305 precipitation (e) variation diagram of Shiyang River Basin (Wuwei meteorological station) (runoff  
306 data: 1993-2016; precipitation data: 1986-2016; temperature, sunshine duration and potential  
307 evaporation: 1960-2018)

### 308 *5.3 Influence of basin water pollution on irrigation water quality*

309 Since 1999, the discharge of sewage increased first and then decreased in the SRB, and fell  
310 below 0.4 million tons in 2009. In 2015, the proportion of sewage purification treatment in the  
311 basin reached 100%. Since 2009, the chemical oxygen demand has increased first and then  
312 decreased, and fell below 3 million tons in 2017(Table 3). Ammonia nitrogen emissions increased  
313 first and then decreased, and fell below 5,000 tons after 2016. The proportion of polluted river

314 sections dropped from 12.5% in 2011 to 4.3% in 2018. There is no eutrophication in the surface  
315 water bodies in the SRB.

316 In the future, due to (1) a further reduction in urban sewage discharge and a further increase in  
317 the proportion of purification treatment; (2) the government will further control the use of  
318 pesticides and fertilizers. The risk of deterioration of irrigation water quality due to water pollution  
319 is greatly reduced.

320 **Table 3** Changes in water pollution indicators in the Shiyang River Basin

## 321 **6 Conclusion**

322 The ion concentration of surface water in the irrigation period is lower than the non-irrigation  
323 period, which is related to the dilution effect of precipitation in basin, The main hydrochemical  
324 type of the runoff producing area is Ca-HCO<sub>3</sub> type. As Na<sup>+</sup> is gradually enriched along the course,  
325 part of the water types of the middle and lower reaches of the river change to Ca (Na) -HCO<sub>3</sub>  
326 mixed water, this process is mainly affected by evaporation and crystallization. The surface water  
327 is generally of good quality in the Shiyang River Basin, suitable for agricultural irrigation, and the  
328 upstream water quality is better than the middle and lower reaches. Global climate forecasts  
329 indicate that the temperature in arid areas will increase in the future, and the precipitation will  
330 increase, which means that the uncertainty of changes in water quality affected by  
331 evapotranspiration and rainfall dilution in the basin's surface water will increase. In addition, in  
332 recent years, more stringent water pollution prevention and control measures has implemented in  
333 Shiyang River basin , and the irrigation water quality is more likely to be further improved in the  
334 Shiyang River Basin.

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#### 454 **Authors Contributions**

455 Conceptualization, Guofeng Zhu and Huiying Ma conceived the idea of the study, Yu Zhang  
456 analyzed the data, Huiying Ma wrote the paper , Liyuan Sang analyzed samples in laboratory,  
457 Qiaozhuo Wan collected samples in Shiyang River Basin , Zhiyuan Zhang collected samples in  
458 Shiyang River Basin and Yuanxiao Xu and analyzed samples in laboratory. All authors discussed  
459 the results and revised the manuscript.

#### 460 **Additional Information**

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464 to share the data.