GASIFICATION OF SOUTH AUSTRALIAN LIGNITE

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SUMMARY

South Australia has large reserves of low rank coals. Most of these coals contain substantial amounts of moisture and inorganic impurities at Na, Ca, Cl and S. Such impurities will result in fouling and slugging in the pulverized-fuel conventional combustor. Gasification provides an attractive method for the future utilization of these coals.

This study is concerned with obtaining a detailed understanding of kinetics of gasification of South Australian Bowmans coal, which is a typical S.A. lignite. Experimental investigations were carried out in a vertical quartz-tube reactor which can simulate behaviour in fluid-bed gasifier. The major factors which affect reactivity were examined, with emphasis given to the role of inheent inorganic minerals. Experiments consisted of two major parts: steam gasification and carbon-dioxide gasification. To eliminate the influence of external diffusion and intra-particle diffusion, all experiments were conducted in the chemical-reaction-control region. The variables examined were:

- coal treatment (raw, demineralized and catalysed)
- reaction temperature (710, 765, 806, 856 and 892°C);
- coal particle size (0.8–1.6, 1.6–2.4 and 2.4–4.1 mm);
- gas stream (CO2, Steam, N2);
- additives (Na, Ca, K and Ni; acetate, carbonate, chloride, hydroxide and sulphate)
studies conducted were aimed at investigating the kinetics and mechanism of gasification of low-rank coal. Experimentally obtained results were compared with those of other investigators.

The present results show that gasification rate of Bowmans coal is sensitive to temperature and independent (approximately) of coal particle size. Reactivities of Bowmans coal with CO₂ and H₂O were high compared with other coals, the high reactivity being attributed to the high concentrations of inherent alkalis. Acid treatment greatly reduces the reactivity of raw coal, while water leaching only has slight effect. By taking typical data from the literature, the reactivities of Bowmans coal toward H₂O and CO₂ were compared with a wide-range of coals in the world to indicate whether correlations between reactivity and coal properties were suitable for Bowmans coal. Reactivity can generally be correlated by rank; high-rank coal has low reactivity, low-rank coal has a high reactivity but with spread values.

Gasification kinetics were studied by using experimentally obtained data to fit different models. It was found that models with assumption of chemical-reaction-rate control (e.g. Homogeneous model and Shrinking-Core model) reasonably describe CO₂ and H₂O gasification. Obtained kinetic parameters were compared with other results. Reasonable agreement was found between the present results and literature reported values. Gasification mechanism of reaction are discussed. The active site theory which assumes that gasification mainly occurs at active sites and that the reaction rate is determined by the concentration of such active sites seemed provide a satisfactory explanation for gasification behaviour.

Catalysed gasification studies were also conducted by adding various salts to demineralized coal by cation-exchange. A.A.S. was employed to examine the amounts of catalyst adsorbed by coal. Results show that the amount of cation loading is proportional to the concentration of
Impregnation solution. The catalytic activities of alkaline and alkaline-earth metals were examined at different levels. Gasification of Bowmans coal with CO₂ and steam was found to be strongly catalysed by alkaline metals Na, K and Ca. Transition metal Ni is also shown to be catalytically active, although less so than Na, K and Ca. Alkaline salts of weak acids exhibited the strongest catalytic effect. Reactivities increased linearly with the amounts of catalysts added. Metals physically adsorbed on coal show less catalytic effect. The order of catalytic activity was found to be Na₂Ac > Ca(Ac)₂ > Ni(Ac)₂ > CaCl₂ > NaCl > KCl > NiCl₂ for CO₂ gasification and Na₂Ac > Na₂CO₃ > NaOH > Ca(AC)₂ > KAc > Na₂SO₃ > Ni(AC)₂ > NaCl for H₂O gasification.

Thermally treated coal was found to be insensitive to catalyst loading. This indicates that oxygen-containing groups play an important role in catalysis. Further study showed that cations are not active unless they associate with carboxyl groups to form 'active sites'.

The reactivity of Yallourn coal was also examined for comparison with Bowmans coal, results indicating that reactivity of lignite is dominated by the catalytic effect of inorganic impurities. Other properties, such as carbon content, pore structure, concentration of oxygen-containing function groups and total ash content are found to be less important.
# Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 6

STATEMENT 7

LIST OF TABLES 8

LIST OF FIGURES 10

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION 14

1.1 Coal in South Australia 14
1.2 Coal Gasification 16
1.3 Coal Research at Adelaide University 19
1.4 Objectives 21

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW 22

2.1 Introduction 22
2.2 Chemistry of coal gasification 23

2.2.1 Nature and Classification of Coal 23
2.2.2 Devolatilization 24
2.2.3 Heterogeneous and Homogeneous Reaction 25

2.3 Kinetics and Mechanisms of Coal Gasification 27

2.3.1 Concepts of Active Site and Surface Reaction Theory 27
2.3.2 C-CO₂ Reaction 28
2.3.3 C-H₂O Reaction 29

2.4 Factors Influencing the Gasification Rate 31
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.4.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.2</td>
<td>Determination of Active Sites and Index of Reactivity</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.3</td>
<td>Intrinsic Reactivity of Coal</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.4</td>
<td>Effect of Coal Rank</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.5</td>
<td>Effect of Pore Structure</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.6</td>
<td>Role of Minerals</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.7</td>
<td>Role of Oxygen-containing Functional Group</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.8</td>
<td>Effect of Heat Treatment on Reactivity</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Kinetic Models for Coal Gasification</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.2</td>
<td>Models Including Chemical Reaction Control</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.3</td>
<td>Models for Pore Structure</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.4</td>
<td>Models for Intraparticle Heat and Mass Transport</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>The Role of Inherent Inorganics in Gasification</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.2</td>
<td>Nature of Coal Minerals and Inorganics</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.3</td>
<td>Catalytic Effect of Inherent Inorganics</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.4</td>
<td>Effect of Demineralization on Gasification</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.4.1</td>
<td>Effect of Acid Washing</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.4.2</td>
<td>Effect of Water Washing</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.4.3</td>
<td>Influence of Demineralization on Coal Structure</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Catalytic Gasification</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7.1</td>
<td>Effect of Artificially-Added Cations</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7.2</td>
<td>Activities of Alkali and Alkaline Earth Salts</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7.3</td>
<td>Effect of Asions on Catalytic Activities of Cations</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7.4</td>
<td>Activities of Salts of Transition Metals (Fe and Ni)</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7.5</td>
<td>Mechanisms and Kinetics of Catalytic Gasification</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7.6</td>
<td>Models for Catalytic Gasification</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7.7</td>
<td>Factors Influencing Catalytic Gasification</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.8 Conclusion

CHAPTER 3 EXPERIMENTAL

3.1 Introduction
3.2 Materials
  3.2.1 Coal Samples
  3.2.2 Chemicals Used
  3.2.3 Gases
3.3 Experimental System
  3.3.1 Reactor
  3.3.2 Temperature Measurement and Calibration
3.4 Coal Preparation
  3.4.1 Sizing
  3.4.2 Washing and Demineralization
  3.4.3 Thermal Treatment
  3.4.4 Cation Exchange
3.5 Reactor Operation Procedures
  3.5.1 Carbon Dioxide Gasification
  3.5.2 Steam Gasification
  3.5.3 Devolatilization
3.6 Analytical Procedures
  3.6.1 Proximate Analysis
  3.6.2 Atomic Absorption Analysis for Ash

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction
4.2 CO₂ Gasification
4.2.1 Heating Coal Sample in CO₂ and N₂
4.2.2 Gasification Rate and Reactivity
4.2.3 Reactivity of Bowmans Coal Compared with Other Australian Coals
4.2.4 Effect of Temperature
4.2.5 Effect of Particle Size
4.2.6 Mass Transfer
4.2.7 Kinetics of CO₂ Gasification
4.2.7.1 Kinetic Models
4.2.7.2 Correlation of Reactivities
4.2.7.3 Activation Energy
4.2.8 Effect of Demineralization on Gasification Rate
4.2.8.1 Transformation of inorganics During Demineralization
4.2.8.2 Effect of Acid-washing on Reactivity
4.2.8.3 Effect of Water-leaching on Reactivity
4.2.9 Role of Added Catalyst in Gasification
4.2.9.1 Adsorption of Cations
4.2.9.2 Catalytic Effect of Added Cations
4.2.9.3 Catalytic Effect of Nickel
4.2.9.4 Effect of Anion on Catalytic Activity
4.2.9.5 Effect of Thermal Treatment on Activation of Cations
4.2.9.6 Kinetics and Mechanisms of Catalytic Gasification
4.3 Steam Gasification
4.3.1 Kinetics
4.3.1.1 Effect of Temperature
4.3.1.2 Activation Energy
4.3.1.3 Effect of Particle Size
4.3.1.4 Correlation of H₂O Gasification
4.3.2 Effect of Demineralization
4.3.2.1 Acid-Washing
4.3.2.2 Water-Washing
4.3.3 Catalytic H₂O Gasification
  4.3.3.1 Activities of Na and Ca
  4.3.3.2 Comparison of Chloride and Acetate Salts
  4.3.3.3 Dependence of Reaction Rate on Catalyst Loading
  4.3.3.4 Addition of Several Active Elements
4.4 Gasification of Yafourn Coal

CHAPTER 5 EVALUATION OF PRESENT INVESTIGATION

5.1 Reactivity of Bowmans Coal Compared with Other Coals
5.2 Kinetics of Lignite Gasification
5.3 The Characteristics and Beneficiation of Salty Bowmans coal
5.4 The Role of Inherent Minerals
5.5 Catalytic Gasification of Bowmans Coal

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSIONS

NOMENCLATURE

REFERENCES

APPENDICES

(A) Temperature Calibration of Reactor
(B) Conversion Calculations
(C) Experimental Data