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Simulated investigation of chemical looping combustion with coal-derived syngas and CaSO₄ oxygen carrier

WANG Bao-wen^{1,*}, YAN Rong², ZHENG Ying¹, ZHAO Hai-bo¹, ZHENG Chu-guang¹

¹ State Key Laboratory of Coal Combustion, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, Wuhan 430074, China ² Institute of Environmental Science and Engineering, Nanyang Technological University, 637723, Singapore

Abstract: Compared to metal oxides, CaSO4 adopted as oxygen carrier (OC) in chemical looping combustion (CLC) presents several advantages such as low cost, easy availability and superior oxygen transfer capacity, whilst the SO₂ emission and solid sulfur deposit in the process could be a big concern. In this study, thermodynamic simulations were conducted to investigate the sulfur distribution in a CLC system with CaSO₄ as OC and syngas derived from coal as the fuel. Several findings were attained: (i) On the main products and reaction pathways in the fuel reactor (FR), at the low temperature of 100°C-400°C, the main sulfur species and carbon deposit were H₂S and CaCO₃ via the methanation of CO with H₂ coupled with both the shift reaction of CO with H₂O(g) and the ensuing thermochemical sulfate reduction (TSR). Then at 400°C–915°C, CaS and CO₂ were the main products through the reaction of CaSO₄ with H₂ or CO, and both products increased with increasing FR temperature. Furthermore, at the FR temperature higher than 915°C, due to the initiation of the solid side reaction between CaS and CaSO₄, the percentage of CaS declined. In contrary, the percentages of CaO, H₂ and CO increased possibly due to the consumption of part of CaSO₄ in the side reaction and thus not enough lattice oxygen available. In the air reactor (AR), the oxidization of CaS by air into CaSO₄ was always dominant. Besides at Φ_{AR} below 0.8, both the solid side reaction of CaSO₄ with CaS and the oxidization of CaS into CaO were simultaneously in effect. (ii) In the FR, the optimized condition was suggested as at around 915°C, atmospheric condition and carefully controlled Φ_{FR} around unity. (iii) In the AR, sufficient supply of air was important for the oxidization of CaS, and $\Phi_{AR} \ge 1$ would ensure the full oxidization of CaS into CaSO₄ and prevent the emission of SO₂ and formation of CaO as well. Overall, this study provided the most suitable conditions of using CaSO₄ as OC in CLC of syngas with minimal SO2 emissions and CaO formation.

Keywords: chemical looping combustion (CLC); coal-derived syngas; oxygen carriers; CaSO₄; thermodynamic simulation

Control and stabilization of the CO₂ concentration level in the atmosphere is of great necessity. Compared to a variety of CO₂ control technologies with high energy consumption, chemical looping combustion (CLC) has gained great attention across the world for its verified advantages, such as the inherent separation of CO₂ without any energy consumption, the improvement in the thermal efficiency of fuel combustion, and a thorough eradication of the formation of NO_x^[1].

Currently, most researchers are developing various metal oxides OCs, such as those of Ni, Cu, Fe, Mn, Co, etc. However, certain drawbacks are associated with these costly metal OCs^[2]. In contrast, some sulfates, especially CaSO₄, have attracted increasing interest, as sulfates demonstrate more prominently economical advantage over those metal oxides and are easily accessible from desulfurization process. Furthermore, if CaSO₄

is used as OC, its oxygen ratio is 0.47, more than twice of the oxygen ratios for all the metal oxide pairs.

Though the reduction of CaSO₄ in the SO₂ capture process has been widely investigated^[3–7], researches on adopting CaSO₄ as a potential OC in CLC system so far are not sufficient enough. Zheng et al^[8] validated the feasibility of using sulfates (including CaSO₄, BaSO₄ and SrSO₄) as potential OCs via thermodynamic analysis. Shen et al^[9] thermodynamically simulated the reduction of CaSO₄ with coal in an interconnected fluidized beds system. Wang^[10] evaluated the feasibility of integrating a gasifier into CLC system using the ASPEN Plus software-package. Furthermore, the reduction reaction of CaSO₄ with different gases (including CH₄, H₂ or CO) in the FR has also been experimentally studied^[11,12]. However, attention is still not sufficient enough

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^{*} Corresponding author. Tel: 86-27-87542417-8409; Fax: 86-027-87545526; E-mail: david-wn@163.com

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to pay to the evolution of various sulfur species and solid sulfur deposits during the reduction reaction of $CaSO_4$ in the $FR^{[13]}$, the reaction pathways in the FR involving $CaSO_4$ as OC, and the effects of various factors, such as pressure, temperature and oxygen excess numbers on the distribution of various sulfur species. Further investigations are thus needed to understand these aspects.

Coal is much more abundant than other fossil fuels, but more CO₂ is also generated from coal utilization. It would be thus highly advantageous to use coal as fuel for CLC. And there exist two routes for CLC of coal, i.e., the direct route with coal itself as fuel^[14], and the indirect route with the syngas derived from coal gasification as fuel. Considering such great limitations for the direct route as the low rate of coal gasification and the difficult separation of reduced OC from coal ash, the focus of this research is concentrated on the indirect route of coal, i.e., syngas from coal gasification will be considered as the fuel for the CLC simulation. In fact, the gas components in syngas generated from coal gasification varies greatly. Nevertheless, syngas, simply simulated as 50% CO and 50% H₂ in their volumetric fraction, was mostly adopted as the fuel for the CLC simulation and experimental investigations in previous studies. Song et al^[13] further adopted the gas mixtures of H₂,CO and CO₂ to simulate syngas from coal gasification. Jin^[15] ever used H₂, CO, H₂O (g), CO₂ and Ar to represent the syngas in their experimental study. But none of thermodynamic simulations has been conducted on the CLC with a complex syngas composition as the fuel. In addition, the use of a pressurized CLC system would have

several advantages^[16]. Therefore, the effect of pressure on the distribution of various sulfur species in the FR is further investigated.

In this study, syngas containing a mixture of gas components (CO, H₂, H₂O(g), CO₂, H₂S, N₂) was considered as fuel in the CLC. Based on the thermodynamic simulation, the reduction reaction of CaSO₄ with syngas in the FR and the oxidization of the reduced CaS with air in the AR were investigated. Due to the complexity of the redox reaction of CaSO₄ with syngas and air, their reaction products were determined and the apparent conversion of reducing CaSO₄ into CaS in the FR was calculated. Then possible reaction pathways initiated in the FR and AR at different reaction conditions were identified. Finally, the effect of different factors on the distribution of various sulfur species was also investigated and the optimized reaction conditions were proposed.

1 Method and calculation procedure

1.1 Design of reaction system

The representative syngas composition used in this simulation is listed in Table 1, and its relative atomic composition could be represented as $C_{\alpha}H_{\beta}S_{\gamma}O_{\delta}(CO_2)_{\lambda}(H_2O)_{\mu}(N_2)_{\nu}$. After supplying sufficient CaSO₄ and air in the FR and AR, the reduction reaction of CaSO₄ with syngas in the FR and the oxidation of the reduced CaS in the AR could be depicted as follows:

$$C_{\alpha}H_{\beta}S_{\underline{\gamma}}O_{\delta}(CO_{2})_{\lambda}(H_{2}O)_{\mu}(N_{2})_{\nu}(g) + (2\alpha+\beta/2+2\gamma-\delta)CaSO_{4} \rightarrow (2\alpha+\beta/2+2\gamma-\delta)CaS+(\alpha+\lambda)CO_{2}(g)+(\beta/2+\mu)H_{2}O(g)+\gamma SO_{2}(g)+\nu N_{2}(g) (1)$$

$$CaS+2(O_{2}+3.76N_{2}) \rightarrow CaSO_{4}+7.52N_{2}(g) \qquad (2)$$

1.2 Determination of lattice oxygen number of CaSO₄ Φ_{FR} and air excess number Φ_{AR}

The availability of lattice oxygen present in CaSO₄ was one of the most important factors to determine the full conversion of fuel in the FR. The theoretic stoichiometric lattice oxygen needed for the complete conversion of syngas as shown in Eq. (1) was $(2\alpha+\beta/2+2\gamma-\delta)$. Supposing the realistic oxygen contained in CaSO₄ was X(O), then the lattice oxygen excess number of CaSO₄ Φ_{FR} was defined as follows:

$$\Phi_{\rm FR} = x(O)/(2\alpha + \beta/2 + 2\gamma - \delta)$$
(3)

Similarly, in AR, based on Eq. (2), the air excess number Φ_{AR} could be also defined below.

$$\mathcal{D}_{AR} = y(O_2)/2 \tag{4}$$

Overall, Φ_{FR} or $\Phi_{AR} < 1$ denoted that the oxidation of syngas with CaSO₄ in the FR or the oxidization of the reduced CaS in the AR was initiated under oxygen-deficient condition. Φ_{FR} or $\Phi_{AR}>1$ meant the reaction occurred in an oxygen-rich environment; and Φ_{FR} or $\Phi_{AR}=1$ referred to the oxygen supplied theoretically met the complete conversion of the fuel or the reduced CaS.

1.3 Calculation method

The HSC-Chemistry software 4.0 was used based on the minimization of the total Gibbs free energy. The predominant equilibrium compositions in the FR were calculated with focuses on the distribution of various sulfur species at varied pressures $(1\sim30\times10^5 \text{ Pa})$, temperature $(100^\circ\text{C}-1400^\circ\text{C})$ and different oxygen excess number \mathcal{P}_{FR} . Owing to the complexity of the reduction of CaSO₄ with syngas under different reaction conditions^[11], the most possible reaction pathways involved were further identified mainly via comparing the equilibrium constant K_p of different reactions, which was related to the Gibbs free energy Δ Gr and absolute temperatures. Here, only the reactions with positive equilibrium constants can be spontaneously initiated and the bigger equilibrium constant K_p signified the higher affinity of the involved reactants.

| Table 1 Composition of syngas (vol%) | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|----|-----------------|----------------------|--------|---------|
| H ₂ | СО | CO ₂ | H ₂ O (g) | H_2S | N_2 |
| 25 | 35 | 10 | 20 | 3 | Balance |

Finally, based on the equilibrium products obtained from the reduction reaction of CaSO₄ with syngas, the apparent conversions were defined in Eq. (5) as x_i for the oxidization of CO and H₂ into CO₂ and H₂O, and in Eq. (6) as x_{CaSO4} for the reduction of CaSO₄ into CaS, though the evolution of CO and H₂ with the FR temperature was complex and possibly influenced by related side reactions.

$$x_{i} = (N_{i(\text{initial})} - N_{i(\text{final})})/N_{i(\text{initial})}$$
(5)

$$x_{\text{CaSO4}} = N_{\text{CaS(final)}} / N_{\text{CaSO4(initial)}}$$
(6)

where i in Eq. (5) represents H₂ or CO, N in both Eq. (5) and Eq. (6) denotes the mole numbers, and the subscript of "initial" and "final" are the initial input mole numbers and the final equilibrium mole numbers of the involved species.

2 **Results and discussion**

2.1 Equilibrium products distribution of the reduction of CaSO₄ with syngas in the FR

With the minimization of Δ Gr for the reduction of CaSO₄ with syngas at $\Phi_{FR}=1$, FR total pressure of 10⁵ Pa and the FR temperature of 100°C-1400°C, the equilibrium distribution of various calcium-bearing, sulfur-bearing and carbon-bearing species are depicted in Figs. 1(a)-1(c), respectively.

At low FR temperature (100°C–400°C), CaSO₄ was mostly converted to the thermodynamically more stable CaCO₃ with nearly 10% CaSO₄ left. The main sulfur-bearing species were H_2S and $CaSO_4$ with the percentage of H_2S up to ~90%. The main carbon-bearing species were CO₂ and CaCO₃, and CaCO₃ was the sole carbon deposit other than various elemental carbons found for the cases of metal oxides as OCs^[28]. At medium FR temperature (400°C–915°C), the percentage of CaS sharply increased from zero to its peak value. In contrast, the percentages of $CaCO_3$ and H_2S declined

markedly, especially for H₂S, which demonstrated an exponential curve as reported by Shen et al^[9], though the fuels used were differed in the two studies. The percentage of CO₂ firstly increased from ~65% to above 90% at ~500°C, then it diminished with increasing FR temperature. Finally, when the FR temperature was higher than 915°C, the percentage of CaS decreased accompanied by the formation of CaO in Fig. 1(a) and SO_2 , $S_2(g)$ in Fig. 1(b). The percentage of CO_2 further decreased with the presence of CO at FR temperature higher than 1000°C.

Furthermore, using Eqs. (5) and (6), the apparent conversions of CO into CO2, H2 into H2O, and CaSO4 into CaS were calculated as shown in Fig. 2 and denoted as X_{CO-CO2}, X_{H2-H2O} and $X_{CaSO4-CaS}$, respectively. It was found that at the FR temperature of 500°C-1300°C, the apparent conversions of CO, H₂ and CaSO₄ were all above 90%. The conversions of the former two decreased with increasing FR temperature while that of CaSO₄ into CaS firstly increased with an increase in the FR temperature and reached 96% at 915°C, and then it decreased with a further increase in the FR temperature. Furthermore, during 500°C-950°C, the conversion of CO to CO_2 was higher than that of H₂ to H₂O(g), which was however inverse at the FR temperature above 950°C, similar to the observation of Song in their experimental test with CaSO₄ as OC^[7].

2.2 Possible reaction pathways for the reduction of CaSO₄ with syngas

The reduction reaction of CaSO₄ with syngas was very complex, and the analysis of the possible reaction pathways involved would be favorable to understand the redox reaction of CaSO₄ in the CLC system. The equilibrium constant K_p in combination with the distribution of various species from the thermodynamic simulation was adopted as the evaluation index (Fig. 1). And thus the possible reaction pathways at different FR temperatures were supposed as follows.





(i) Low FR temperature (100°C-400°C)

At $\Phi_{FR} = 1$, FR pressure of 1×10^5 Pa and $100^{\circ}C$ -400°C, since CO and H₂ were the main composition in the syngas, both the methanation reaction of CO with H₂ and the shift reaction of CO with H₂O(g) were simultaneously presented as listed in Eqs. (7) and (8), respectively:

$$CO + 3H_2 = CH_4 + H_2O$$
 (7)

$$CO+ H_2O(g)=CO_2+H_2$$
 (8)

Generally, the volume ratio of H_2 to CO in syngas is less than three^[22,24,29], and the amount of H_2 was not enough to completely convert CO to CH₄ only through Eq. (7), so the H_2 produced through Eq. (8) could be also used as the additional H_2 source. Meanwhile, the $H_2O(g)$ produced in Eq. (7) would be conducive to the shift reaction of CO in Eq. (8). And thus, both Eqs. (7) and (8) were simultaneously initiated and complementary to each other. The feasibility of Eqs. (7) and (8) at low temperature has been proved thermodynamically and experimentally.

Following Eqs. (7) and (8), the reduction reaction of $CaSO_4$ with CH_4 , i.e., thermochemical sulfate reduction (TSR) as shown in Eq. (9), was also evidenced in geochemistry, though this process had to experience over a long time at such a low temperature^[18], and thus is not the temperature range of interest for the application of CLC.

$$CaSO_4 + CH_4 = CaCO_3 + H_2S + H_2O(g)$$
(9)

(ii) Medium FR temperature (400°C-915°C)

Due to the sharp decrease of equilibrium constants for Eqs. (7) and Eq.(8) with increasing FR temperature, the reduction reactions of CaSO₄ with CO or H₂ (as shown in Eqs. (10) and (11) below) began to dominate with increasing FR temperature from 400 to 915°C as indicated by the increase of percentages of CaS (Fig. 1(a)) and CO₂ (Fig. 1(c)). On the contrary, the

Eqs. (7) - (9) were weakened, and the percentages of CaCO₃ (Fig. 1(a)) and H₂S(Fig. 1(b)) were declined.

$$CaSO_4 + 4CO = CaS + 4CO_2$$
(10)

$$CaSO_4 + 4H_2 = CaS + H_2O$$
(11)

In addition, from Fig. 1(b), when the FR temperature was higher than ~700°C, SO₂ was produced and its percentage increased with increasing FR temperature. From the equilibrium constants of various potential reactions and the stoichometric relations of the main products predicted from thermodynamic simulation, SO₂ was supposed to most likely come from the oxidization of H₂S with CaSO₄ as shown in Eq. (12):

$$CaSO_4 + 4/3H_2S = CaS + 4/3SO_2 + 4/3H_2O(g)$$
 (12)

(iii) High FR temperature (915°C-1400°C)

When the FR temperature was further increased from 915°C upwards, from Figs. 1(a)–1(c), the percentages of CaS and CO₂ sharply diminished with increasing FR temperature, though they were still the predominant products. Meanwhile, CaO was produced and its percentage increased with increasing FR temperature as well (Fig. 1(a)). Here, though Eqs. (10) –(12) were still the main pathways for the conversion of CaSO₄ with syngas, some other side reactions might become increasingly important as well^[11] and CaO was supposed to generate over 880°C mainly from the solid reaction between CaS and CaSO₄ as shown in Eq. (13)^[6].

$$3CaSO_4 + CaS = 4CaO + 4SO_2$$
 (13)

Considering CaS was the desirable product to be transported to AR, Eq. (13) was the undesirable side reaction of Eqs. (10) and (11). Thus, attention should be paid to inhibit this reaction in the FR of CLC system. Of course, the presence of CaO produced in Eq. (13) could initiate the neutralization of CaO with H_2S (in syngas) as shown in Eq. (14),

$$CaO + H_2S = CaS + H_2O(g)$$
(14)

In addition, above 1200°C (in Fig.1b), the formation of $S_2(g)$ was found instead of COS in the result of Zheng et al^[19], because the fuel used in both researches was different. And $S_2(g)$ formed in this research perhaps was arisen from another solid reaction between CaS and CaSO₄^[7] as shown below:

$$3CaSO_4 + CaS = 4CaO + 2S_2(g) \tag{15}$$

The presence of CO at high FR temperature (in Fig. 1(c)) was supposed to be resulted from the existence of side reaction (Eq. (12)), which was competing with Eqs. (10) and (11), and thus $CaSO_4$ became insufficient to fully oxidize CO and H₂ to CO_2 and H₂O(g).

Overall, the reduction reactions of $CaSO_4$ with syngas were preferred at medium temperature, especially at around 900°C, so that the TSR reaction at the low temperature of the FR and several side reactions of $CaSO_4$ with CaS at high FR temperature could be avoided.



2.3 Effects of various factors on the reduction of CaSO₄ with syngas in the FR

Effects of the FR total pressure and lattice oxygen present in CaSO₄ on the distribution of various sulfur species were further investigated as depicted in Figs. 3 and 4, respectively.

In Fig. 3, \mathcal{P}_{FR} was fixed as 1 and the FR temperature was selected as 915°C, where the highest conversion of CaSO₄ into CaS occurred (as shown in Fig. 2). The mole numbers of formed CaS and SO₂ decreased with increasing total pressure in the FR, which was contrary to the behaviors of H₂S and CaSO₄. Such results were possibly arisen from the existence of certain side reactions to the reduction reactions of CaSO₄ with CO (Eq. (10)) or H₂(Eq. (11)). Owing to both the consumption of part of the H₂ and CO through the methanation reaction (Eq. (7)) and the shift reaction of CO (Eq. (8)) with increasing FR pressure, the amount of CaS produced via Eqs. (10) and (11) was slightly diminished, but the mole numbers of CaCO₃ and

 H_2S were increased via Eq. (9). Overall, in terms of $CaSO_4$ conversion to CaS, pressurized condition was not beneficial at the optimized temperature for CLC application.

Additionally, the effect of Φ_{FR} on the distribution of various sulfur species is presented in Fig. 4. At low Φ_{FR} (such as 0.3 and 0.6), CaS and H₂S were the main sulfur-bearing species, but when Φ_{FR} increased to 0.9, besides CaS and H₂S, SO₂ became one main species possibly due to the solid reaction between CaS and CaSO₄ (Eq. (13)). Furthermore, when Φ_{FR} was larger than unity, no H₂S was existed. The decrease in the percentage of CaS and the increase in the percentage of SO₂ indicated that Eq. (13) was fully initiated. Therefore, in order to maintain the high conversion of CaSO₄ to CaS and avoid the formation of SO₂, a sufficient but not an excess of CaSO₄ was suggested to introduce into the FR.

2.4 Oxidization of the reduced CaS in the AR

Although the oxidization of CaS has also been widely studied in the desulfurization process for coal combustion, both the atmosphere and temperature involved were greatly different from those used in AR of CLC system. In the realistic CLC system, sufficient oxidization of the reduced CaS by air in the AR into CaSO₄ is very important to sustain many cycles of the reaction of CaSO₄ with syngas. During CaS oxidization, the amount of air supply determined the CaS conversion into CaSO₄, and influenced both the SO₂ emission and the formation of CaO greatly^[20]. Therefore, the effect of air supply on both the SO₂ emission at different temperatures and the distribution of various calcium species at 950°C was calculated and presented in Figs. 5(a) and (b), respectively.

From Fig. 5(a), it could be observed that at Φ_{AR} below ~ 0.8, the SO_2 emission was increased with increasing \varPhi_{AR} and temperature. Especially, the higher temperatures, the bigger amount of SO₂ emission, which was in accordance with the experimental results of different authors^[20]. Meanwhile, when Φ_{AR} was higher than 0.8 at all the temperatures studied (900°C-1050°C), the emission of SO₂ sharply declined towards zero with Φ_{AR} increasing to unity. Furthermore, from Fig. 5(b), it could be found that among various calcium species with the increase of Φ_{AR} at 950°C, the percentage of CaS nearly decreased linearly, but the percentage of CaO increased until Φ_{AR} reached 0.9, and then quickly decreased towards zero, while the percentage of CaSO₄ increased to 100% in a sigmoidal mode until Φ_{AR} reached unity. Overall, during CaS oxidization, sufficient supply of air (i.e., $\Phi_{AR} \ge 1$) could ensure the full conversion of CaS into CaSO₄, and simultaneously prevent the emission of SO₂ and formation of CaO.

Finally, based on the various species of CaS oxidization from the thermodynamic simulation, possible reaction pathways could be also deduced. At all the temperature and Φ_{AR} investigated, Eq. (2) was always dominant; but when Φ_{AR} was below 0.8 coupled with Eq. (2), both the reaction as expressed in Eq. (12) and the reaction as shown in Eq. (16) would be in effect.

$$CaS+3/2O_2(g) = CaO + SO_2(g)$$
 (16)

3 Conclusions

In this study, CaSO₄ was adopted as OC for CLC system, and its reduction with syngas in the FR and the oxidization of the reduced CaS in AR was thermodynamically investigated. The following conclusions were reached.

The reduction of $CaSO_4$ with syngas in the FR generated various products at different ranges of temperature. The main reaction pathways involved were proposed. At low FR temperature (100°C–400°C), CaCO₃ and H₂S were mainly produced through the methanation of CO and H₂ and the ensuing TSR reaction. At medium FR temperature (400°C–915°C), the reductions of CaSO₄ with CO or H₂ began

to dominate. Furthermore, at high FR temperature (915°C–1400°C), SO₂ and S₂(g) were mainly produced through the two solid reaction between CaS and CaSO₄.

Pressure, temperature and Φ_{FR} in the FR were demonstrated to show important influences on the distribution of various sulfur species. At 915°C of FR temperature, $\Phi_{FR}=1$ and atmospheric pressure, a satisfactory conversion of H₂ and CO in the reaction with CaSO₄ was attained, but pressurized condition caused not only a decrease of the percentages of CaS, CaSO₄ and H₂S, but also an increase in the percentage of SO₂. Meanwhile, the optimized reaction condition for the reduction of CaSO₄ with syngas in the FR was 915°C, atmospheric pressure and carefully controlled Φ_{FR} around unity.

During CaS oxidization in the AR, the oxidization of CaS by air into CaSO₄ was always dominant, and $\Phi_{AR} \ge 1$ would ensure the full conversion of CaS into CaSO₄ and prevent the emission of SO₂ and formation of CaO as well.

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