Py-GC/MS study of lignin pyrolysis and effect of catalysts on product distribution

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Abstract: Fast pyrolysis is one of the most promising methods to convert lignin into fuels and chemicals. In the present study, pyrolysis-gas chromatography/mass spectrometry (Py-GC/MS) was used to evaluate vapor phase product distribution of lignin fast pyrolysis. During the non-catalytic pyrolysis process, lignin was pyrolyzed at 400°C, 500°C and 600°C respectively, finding that the highest yield of aromatic hydrocarbons was obtained at 600°C. Catalytic pyrolysis experiments were also conducted to investigate the effects of catalyst pore structure and acidity on the product distributions. Five different catalysts (HZSM-5, MCM-41, TiO$_2$, ZrO$_2$ and Mg(Al)O) were applied to lignin catalytic pyrolysis, and the catalytic performance was estimated by analyzing the pyrolytic products. The catalysts were characterized by using X-ray diffraction (XRD), BET, and NH$_3$ (CO$_2$) temperature programmed desorption. Based on these characterizations, discussion was carried out to explain the formation of the product distributions. Among the five catalysts, HZSM-5 exhibited the best performance on the formation of aromatic hydrocarbons.

Keywords: lignin, Py-GC/MS, fast pyrolysis, catalytic upgrading, pore structure, acid-base property

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1 Introduction

Due to the depletion of fossil resources and concerns over carbon emission, lignocellulosic biomass has emerged as a promising renewable feedstock for the production of fuels and chemicals. Pathways for biomass conversions can be categorized as biochemical or thermochemical processes. Fast pyrolysis of biomass and its three major components (i.e. cellulose,
hemicelluloses and lignin) is a relatively simple thermochemical process which is usually conducted at a temperature of 400°C-600°C in the absence of oxygen\cite{1}, and has the advantages of high conversion efficiency and environmentally friendly\cite{2}. One of the primary advantages of fast pyrolysis is that solid biomass can be directly converted to liquid fuels, i.e. pyrolysis oil. However, high oxygen content (20%-40%) of pyrolysis oil leads to undesirable properties such as low energy density, high viscosity and corrosion, thermal and chemical instability. Thus, catalytic upgrading was used to improve the qualities of pyrolysis oil. Catalytic pyrolysis was proved to be an effective way to improve the bio-oil quality. Aho et al.\cite{3} carried out catalytic pyrolysis of pine wood with H\(\beta\), HY, HZSM-5 and Mordenite, finding that acids and alcohols were decreased in the presence of HZSM-5. Zhang et al.\cite{4} studied the effect of HZSM-5 on fast pyrolysis of corncob in a fluidized bed, proposing that the existence of catalyst could decrease 25% oxygen content of pyrolysis oil, while increase the yields of gas, water and coke. On account of the complexities of pyrolysis process and productions, some researchers turned to investigate the catalytic pyrolysis of individual component of lignocellulosic biomass to further understand the pyrolysis mechanisms. Carlson et al.\cite{5} tested several catalysts including ZSM-5, silicalite, \(\beta\), Y-zeolite and silica-alumina on the pyrolysis of cellulose and obtained the highest yield of aromatics in the presence of ZSM-5. Karanjkar et al.\cite{6} obtained a similar aromatic yield of 39.5% C from catalytic pyrolysis of cellulose using ZSM-5 as catalyst. Zhu et al.\cite{7} investigated the effect of HZSM-5 and M/HZSM-5 (M = Fe, Zn) on xylan pyrolysis, revealing that catalytic pyrolysis reduced oxygenates yield and increased hydrocarbons yield. Kim et al.\cite{8} presented that mesoporous Y zeolite with larger quantity and stronger acidity could also reduce the oxygenates content and increase the aromatics to a larger extent from xylan pyrolysis. Guo et al.\cite{9} found that USY catalyst performed the best effect on deoxygenation than HZSM-5 and H\(\beta\) in xylan pyrolysis.

A representative lignin structure showing three primary units is illustrated in Figure 1\cite{10}. The difference with cellulose and hemicellulose, lignin is a cross-linked amorphous biopolymer of three primary units including guaiacol (G), syringyl (S) and \(\rho\)-hydroxyphenol (H) units which are bonded with C-O-C and C-C bonds\cite{11}. Additionally, the content of each unit is varied with plant types. For example, conifer wood (softwood) contains 90%-95% G unit, 0-1% S unit and 0.5%-3.4% H unit\cite{12}. The aromatic rings existed in the primary units are conducive to the immediate conversion of lignin to aromatic products\cite{13}. However, the wide distribution of lignin pyrolysis productions caused by the complex structure\cite{14,15} results in receiving relatively less attention compared to cellulose and hemicellulose. Hence, the understanding of pyrolysis process and the effect of catalyst is essential. Thring et al.\cite{16} investigated the effect of HZSM-5 in the catalytic pyrolysis of lignin in a fixed bed reactor and obtained the highest toluene yield (44 wt.%) at 650°C. The deactivation of zeolite catalyst during lignin pyrolysis was likely caused by simple phenols produced from the deconstruction of the lignin polymer\cite{17}. The role of shape selectivity in lignin pyrolysis was studied by Yu et al.\cite{18}, suggesting that ZSM-5 produced the highest aromatic yield, while \(\beta\) zeolite was suited to convert bulky oxygenates. Adhikari et al.\cite{19} used four zeolite catalysts with different SiO\(_2\)/Al\(_2\)O\(_3\) ratios to catalyze torrefied lignin pyrolysis, and as high as 35 wt.% carbon yield of aromatic hydrocarbons was obtained in the presence of the zeolite with SiO\(_2\)/Al\(_2\)O\(_3\)=30. Extensive researches focused on the zeolite catalysts and the effect of acidic sites on the pyrolysis of lignin. In comparison, less investigation focused on the catalytic pyrolysis over metal oxides with acidic/base property. In the present study, five catalysts with different properties including HZSM-5, MCM-41, TiO\(_2\), ZrO\(_2\) and Mg(Al)O were selected to investigate the influences of pore size, acidic and base properties on lignin pyrolysis. The experiments were conducted by using a Py-GC/MS system and the yield and product distribution were systematically studied to reveal the effects of different catalysts.
2 Experimental materials and layout

2.1 Materials

Lignin used in this study was a Kraft lignin from softwood obtained from Mead Westvaco Co. (USA). Commercial zeolites HZSM-5 (Si/Al=38) and MCM-41 were purchased from Nankai University Catalyst Co., Ltd; ZrO₂ and TiO₂ were purchased from Aladdin; The MgAlO (Mg/Al molar ratio = 2:1) catalyst was prepared in the following manner: solution A was prepared by dissolving 10.0 g Mg(NO₃)₂·6H₂O and 7.76 g Al(NO₃)₃·9H₂O in 50 mL of deionized water; solution B was prepared by dissolving 3.82 g NaOH and 4.38 g Na₂CO₃ in 50 mL of deionized water. Solutions A and B were simultaneously added dropwise to 50 mL of deionized water with constant stirring at 100°C for 12 h. After that, the slurry was filtered, completely rinsed with distilled water and dried at 100°C for 8 h. Finally, the dried product was calcined at 550°C in air for 5 h with a heating rate of 5°C/min. Mg(NO₃)₂·6H₂O, Al(NO₃)₃·9H₂O, NaOH and Na₂CO₃ used here were analytical grade and obtained from Aladdin Reagent Co., Ltd (Shanghai, China). Lignin and catalysts were all dried at 80°C for 12 h before use.

2.2 Characterization

FT-IR spectra were obtained on a Nicolet iS50 FT-IR spectrophotometer (Thermo Scientific, USA). A mercury cadmium telluride (MCT) detector was used and the spectrum was recorded in the range of 4000-500 cm⁻¹. Elemental analysis were performed by a vario EL cube elemental analyzer (Elementary, Germany) which reported the composition of lignin in weight percentage of carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen and sulfur. The content of oxygen was calculated by difference.

The crystallographic properties of the catalysts were characterized on an X-ray diffractometer (X’pert PRO, Panalytical, Netherlands) with a CuKa (λ=0.154 nm) radiation source operated at 40 kV and 100 mA. The 2θ ranged from 5° to 80° with 0.02° step size.

The textural properties of catalysts were determined by N₂ (or Ar for HZSM-5) isothermal adsorption using a QUADRASORB SI analyzer equipped with QuadraWin software system. Prior to analysis, all samples were degassed at 300°C for 8 h. The surface area was analyzed by the Brunauer-Emmett-Teller (BET) method and the pore size distribution was calculated by Density Functional Theory (DFT) method.

The density and strength of acid sites of catalysts were determined by NH₃ temperature-programmed desorption (NH₃-TPD). The sample (200 mg) was firstly pre-treated at 400°C for 60 min in Helium, then cooled to 30°C and exposed to a 10% NH₃/He stream for 60 min. The desorption of NH₃ was carried out by flushing with He by increasing the temperature to 850°C at the heating rate of 10°C/min.

The basic characteristics of the Mg(Al)O catalyst was studied with CO₂-temperature programmed desorption (CO₂-TPD). The sample (200 mg) was pretreated at 400°C for 60 min in He, followed by cooling to 80°C under He flow and subsequent exposed to a 40% CO₂/He stream for 60 min. Flushing with He at 80°C for 3 h was applied to remove the adsorbed CO₂, and TPD analysis was carried out from 80°C to 600°C at a heating rate of 10°C/min.

2.3 Py-GC/MS system

Pyrolysis experiments were conducted using in a micro-furnace single shot pyrolyzer (PY-2020iD, Frontier Laboratories, Japan) equipped with an auto-sampler (AS-1020E, Frontier Laboratories, Japan). For catalytic pyrolysis experiments, about 6 mg of lignin was firstly introduced into a deactivated stainless steel sample cup, over which 6 mg of the catalyst was put. For non-catalytic experiments, only 6 mg of lignin was loaded. Subsequently, a little amount of quartz wool...
was loaded above the sample layer for each experiment to avoid powder spraying caused by carrier gas. The sample cup was then dropped into the pre-heated furnace under a flow of He as carrier gas.

Pyrolysis was performed for 1 min, and the pyrolysis vapor was analyzed by a Thermo Ultra-Trace gas chromatograph (GC) with a Thermo DSQ II Mass spectrometer (MS) connected to the pyrolyzer. Chromatographic separation of the pyrolysis products was done with a (5%-phenyl)-methylpolysiloxane non-polar column (HP-5MS, 60 m×0.25 mm×0.25 μm, Agilent Technologies, USA) with a carrier gas flow of 1.5 mL/min. The injector temperature was 280°C and a split ratio 1:40 were used. The GC oven was held at 40°C for 3 min and then heated to 300°C at 5°C/min with a dwell time of 20 min. The interface temperature between GC and MS was 280°C, and the ion source temperature was 230°C. Mass spectra were recorded under electron ionization (70 eV) at the mass range from 45 m/z to 300 m/z, using a scan rate of 1.0 s/decade.

Identification of the pyrolysis compounds was carried out by comparison of their mass fragment with the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) mass spectral library. Since the chromatographic peak area of a compound is considered linear with its quantity, a semi-quantitative estimation was used in this study that the yield and content of compounds could be revealed by peak area and peak area%, respectively.

3 Results and discussion

3.1 Characterization of lignin

Lignin structure could directly affect pyrolysis product distribution, so that FT-IR was firstly used to investigate the bond structure of lignin. The FT-IR spectrum result is shown in Figure 2 and the corresponding assignments of bonds are given in Table 1 according to previous researches. The broad band around 3415 cm\(^{-1}\) was caused by O-H stretching vibration. The bond at 2930 cm\(^{-1}\) and 1454 cm\(^{-1}\) were assigned respectively to C-H stretching vibration and C-H bending vibration attributable to the methyl and methylene groups. The peak at 1130 cm\(^{-1}\) had lower intensity than that at 1270 cm\(^{-1}\) indicating lower syringyl (S) unit content. Moreover, strong signals at 1515 cm\(^{-1}\) and 1032 cm\(^{-1}\) also indicated a predominance of guaiacol (G) units in this lignin, consisting with the C-H out-of-plane deformation bands at 854 cm\(^{-1}\) and 817 cm\(^{-1}\) typical of G rings. FT-IR results suggested that the lignin used here was mainly composed of G type rings.

![Figure 2](image)

**Table 1** Assignment of FT-IR spectrum of lignin

| Peak/cm\(^{-1}\) | Assignment                  | Miscanthus Lignin\(^{[20]}\)/cm\(^{-1}\) | Flax shives\(^{[21]}\)/cm\(^{-1}\) |
|-----------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 3415            | O-H stretching             | 3435                                   | 3398                             |
| 2930            | C-H stretching -CH\(_3\)  | 2981                                   | 2933, 2848                       |
| 1595            | Aromatic skeletal vibrations (S> G) | 1603                                | 1593                             |
| 1515            | Aromatic skeletal vibrations (G> S) | 1508                                | 1508                             |
| 1454            | C-H bending in -CH\(_3\)   | 1463                                   | 1462                             |
| 1368            | Aliphatic C-H stretching in CH\(_3\), not in OMe | 1366                                | 1369                             |
| 1270            | Guaiacol ring breathing    | 1267                                   | 1265                             |
| 1218            | C-O stretch                | 1230                                   | 1217                             |
| 1130            | Syringyl ring breathing    | 1126                                   | 1122                             |
| 1032            | Aromatic C-H in plane deformation (G> S) | 1034                                | 1030                             |
| 854, 817        | Aromatic C-H out-of-plane deformation (G) | -                                  | 854, 816                         |

Note: Peak assignments from Miscanthus lignin and flax shives are presented for comparison.

3.2 Characterization of catalysts

Since the crystal structure of catalysts played a role on the catalytic pyrolysis process of lignin\(^{[14]}\), XRD patterns of five catalysts used in this study are shown in Figure 3. The crystal structures of these five catalysts were significantly different from each other. The diffraction peaks in HZSM-5 were mainly at 2θ=7.4°-9.3° and 22.5°-24.8°. HZSM-5 had a typical diffraction pattern assigned to the MFI orthorhombic structure which consists of two channels of 10-membered rings and zigzag channels\(^{[22]}\). The pattern of TiO\(_2\) exhibited
strong peaks at $2\theta=24^\circ$ and $48^\circ$ corresponding to the anatase phase with tetragonal system\cite{23}. The peaks were in good agreement with the standard spectrum (JCPDS NO.: 21-1272). The diffraction peaks in ZrO$_2$ pattern were mainly at $2\theta=24.0^\circ$, $28.2^\circ$, $31.5^\circ$, $34.1^\circ$ and $50.0^\circ$ (JCPDS NO.: 37-1484), which exhibited monoclinic phase while no tetragonal phase was observed\cite{24}. The XRD pattern of Mg(Al)O exhibited the typical features of a mixed oxide of Mg(Al)O type. Peaks at $2\theta=42.8^\circ$ and $62.2^\circ$ corresponded to a periclase MgO or rather magnesia-alumina solid solution, while no obvious peaks of Al$_2$O$_3$ phase appeared suggesting Al$^{3+}$ cations were well dispersed in the structure of MgO without formation of spinel species\cite{25}. The XRD pattern of MCM-41 in Figure 3b exhibited a characteristic intense (100) peak at $2\theta=2.25^\circ$ and two higher order (110) and (200) reflections at $2\theta=3.95^\circ$ and $4.60^\circ$, which could be indexed to the $p$6m space group, indicating a hexagonal mesostructure\cite{26,27}.

Figure 4 shows the NH$_3$-TPD results of five catalysts. The peaks appeared at 210$^\circ$C-240$^\circ$C were corresponded to the desorption of ammonia from the weak acid sites and the peaks at 434$^\circ$C-590$^\circ$C were assigned to the strong acid sites in the characterization of HZSM-5 and Mg(Al)O. TiO$_2$ also showed strong acid sites around 382$^\circ$C and 561$^\circ$C, while the peak intensity was weak, indicating the relatively low amounts of acid sites. MCM-41 and ZrO$_2$ showed no obvious peaks of TPD curves, indicating that these catalysts had very weak acid sites. The peak areas representing the amount of acid sites are summarized in Table 2. It is found that the total peak area of HZSM-5 was the largest among the five catalysts, while that of ZrO$_2$ was the smallest one. Mg(Al)O was obtained by the thermal decomposition of hydrotalcites, which showed pairs of acid and basic sites. These pairs of acid and basic sites were obtained by the insertion of Al in the MgO lattice or the presence of Mg in the $\gamma$-Al$_2$O$_3$ lattice\cite{28}. Accordingly, the basicity of Mg(Al)O was measured by CO$_2$-TPD. As shown in Figure 5, three peaks were observed, two of which appeared at 195$^\circ$C-281$^\circ$C assigned to relatively weak basic sites and the other one at about 494$^\circ$C assigned to strong basic sites.

| Catalysts   | BET surface area/cm$^2$/g$^{-1}$ | Total pore volume/cm$^3$/g$^{-1}$ | Total peak area of NH$_3$-TPD |
|-------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| HZSM-5      | 393.514                          | 0.21                              | 3486                          |
| MCM-41      | 1067.66                          | 1.03                              | 524                           |
| TiO$_2$     | 71.83                            | 0.44                              | 1285                          |
| ZrO$_2$     | 5.49                             | 0.03                              | 200                           |
| MgAlO       | 126.74                           | 0.58                              | 1666                          |

Figure 3  XRD patterns of HZSM-5, TiO$_2$, ZrO$_2$, Mg(Al)O and MCM-41

Figure 4  NH$_3$-TPD profile of five catalysts used in this study

Table 2  Physical-chemical properties of the catalysts
The porosity of the five catalysts is illustrated in Figure 6, and the surface area and total pore volume are listed in Table 2. Among the five catalysts, only HZSM-5 showed a dominant peak at 0.43 nm and another peak at 0.58 nm, indicating a microporous structure. MCM-41 showed a pore size distribution mainly centered at 3.04 nm corresponding to mesoporous structure. MCM-41 had the largest BET surface area and total pore volume among the five zeolite catalysts (1067.66 m²/g for surface area and 1.03 m³/g for total pore volume). Both TiO₂ and Mg(Al)O showed a board pore size distribution ranged from 3.5 nm to 32 nm, indicating the existing of irregular mesoporous structure. ZrO₂ presented a non-porous characteristic with a BET surface area of only 5.49 m²/g.

3.3 Effect of temperature on lignin pyrolysis

The products of lignin fast pyrolysis included non-condensable gas, volatile compounds and non-volatile oligomers. In the present py-GC/MS system, only volatile compounds could be analyzed, and the identified compounds were categorized into five categories: aromatic hydrocarbons, phenol-type compounds (phenols), catechol-type compound (catechols), alkoxyl-type compounds (alkoxyls) and polyaromatics. Alkoxyl-type compounds were composed of guaiacol-type compounds and aromatic hydrocarbon alkoxyls. Large molecular weight like sterols and non-indentified compounds were classified as others. In order to know the connection between lignin structure and pyrolysis products, lignin was firstly pyrolyzed at different temperatures without catalyst. The product distribution for non-catalytic pyrolysis of lignin at 400°C, 500°C and 600°C is shown in Table 3 and Figure 7. It is found that the total peak area increased significantly from 3.66×10⁹ at 400°C to 1.68×10¹⁰ at 500°C and then slightly decreased to 1.45×10¹⁰ at 600°C with the increased pyrolysis temperature, indicating that high temperature was beneficial to increasing the yield of volatile liquid. Similar observation was made by Latridis et al. Lignin pyrolysis happened in a wide temperature range which started around 160°C. Linkages between the lignin units like α-O-4 were first cleaved between 200°C and 400°C due to the relatively low bond dissociation energy, which produced the alkoxyls (e.g. guaiacol, 4-methyl-guaiacol, and vanillin) as the major products. With the increase of temperature, the amount of alkoxyls increased obviously from 2.31×10⁹ to 1.02×10¹⁰. Due to the lignin used in this study was softwood lignin, the alkoxyls obtained
were mainly the G types, in accordance with the results of FT-IR. The aromatic hydrocarbons were only detected at 600°C, while its amount (peak area: $2.53 \times 10^7$) was relatively low. Furthermore, pyrolysis products became more complicated at relatively high temperatures due to more complicated depolymerization process and secondary reactions. The amount of 1,2-Benzenediol was found to be increased from 0 to $1.40 \times 10^8$ with the temperature elevated from 400°C to 600°C, while the amount of 3-methyl-1,2-Benzenediol increased from 0 to $9.02 \times 10^7$. It could be attributed to that secondary decomposition occurred at high temperatures resulting in the conversion of guaiacols into catechols[30].

![Figure 7](image)

**Figure 7** Effect of temperatures on the production distributions

| Compounds                      | Structure | 400°C     |          | 500°C     |          | 600°C     |          |
|--------------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|
|                                |           | Absolute peak area | Relative peak area | Absolute peak area | Relative peak area | Absolute peak area | Relative peak area |
| Toluene                        | ![Toluene](image) | 0         | 0        | 0         | 0        | 2.53 $\times 10^7$ | 0.17     |
| Phenol                         | ![Phenol](image)  | 0         | 0        | 5.89 $\times 10^7$ | 0.35    | 5.45 $\times 10^7$ | 0.38     |
| Methylphenol                   | ![Methylphenol](image) | 1.51 $\times 10^7$ | 0.41     | 1.27 $\times 10^8$ | 0.76    | 1.34 $\times 10^8$ | 0.93     |
| Dimethyl-phenol                | ![Dimethyl-phenol](image) | 0         | 0        | 4.77 $\times 10^7$ | 0.28    | 6.84 $\times 10^7$ | 0.47     |
| 1,2-Benzenediol                | ![1,2-Benzenediol](image) | 0         | 0        | 1.33 $\times 10^8$ | 0.79    | 1.40 $\times 10^8$ | 0.97     |
| 3-methyl-1,2-benzenediol       | ![3-methyl-1,2-benzenediol](image) | 0         | 0        | 8.78 $\times 10^7$ | 0.52    | 9.02 $\times 10^7$ | 0.62     |
| Guaiacol                       | ![Guaiacol](image)  | 3.35 $\times 10^8$ | 9.16     | 9.17 $\times 10^8$ | 5.46    | 6.68 $\times 10^8$ | 4.62     |
| 2-methoxy-5-methylphenol       | ![2-methoxy-5-methylphenol](image) | 2.48 $\times 10^8$ | 6.78     | 7.52 $\times 10^8$ | 4.48    | 5.33 $\times 10^8$ | 3.68     |
| 2,4-dimethoxytoluene           | ![2,4-dimethoxytoluene](image) | 1.20 $\times 10^7$ | 0.33     | 3.65 $\times 10^7$ | 0.22    | 0         | 0        |
| Phenol,4-ethyl-2-methoxy-       | ![Phenol,4-ethyl-2-methoxy-](image) | 1.02 $\times 10^8$ | 2.78     | 4.65 $\times 10^8$ | 2.77    | 5.29 $\times 10^8$ | 3.65     |
| 2-Methoxy-4-vinylphenol        | ![2-Methoxy-4-vinylphenol](image) | 2.48 $\times 10^8$ | 6.77     | 6.84 $\times 10^8$ | 4.08    | 5.15 $\times 10^8$ | 3.56     |
| Eugenol                        | ![Eugenol](image)  | 3.72 $\times 10^7$ | 1.02     | 6.75 $\times 10^8$ | 4.02    | 4.62 $\times 10^8$ | 3.19     |

Table 3  Product distribution for non-catalytic pyrolysis of lignin at different temperatures
### Compounds Structure

| Compounds                        | Structure | 400°C | Relative peak area/°C | 500°C | Relative peak area/°C | 600°C | Relative peak area/°C |
|---------------------------------|-----------|-------|-----------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|-----------------------|
|                                 |           | Absolution peak area | Relative peak area 1 | Absolution peak area | Relative peak area 1 | Absolution peak area | Relative peak area 1 |
| Vanilin                         | ![Vanilin Structure](image) | 1.15×10^8 | 3.14 | 4.43×10^8 | 2.64 | 4.28×10^8 | 2.96 |
| Phenol,2-methoxy-4-(1-propenyl)-| ![Phenol,2-methoxy-4-(1-propenyl)- Structure](image) | 1.34×10^7 | 3.67 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Phenol,2-methoxy-4-propyl-      | ![Phenol,2-methoxy-4-propyl- Structure](image) | 2.09×10^7 | 0.57 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2-Propanone,1-(4-hydroxy-3-methoxyphenyl)- | ![2-Propanone,1-(4-hydroxy-3-methoxyphenyl)- Structure](image) | 4.92×10^7 | 1.35 | 2.23×10^8 | 1.33 | 2.36×10^8 | 1.63 |
| Vanillic acid                   | ![Vanillic acid Structure](image) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.68×10^9 | 1.16 |
| Benzene,1,2-dimethoxy-4-propyl- | ![Benzene,1,2-dimethoxy-4-propyl- Structure](image) | 2.64×10^7 | 0.72 | 1.49×10^8 | 0.89 | 1.79×10^9 | 1.23 |
| Benzene propanol,4-hydroxy-3-methoxy- | ![Benzene propanol,4-hydroxy-3-methoxy- Structure](image) | 1.45×10^7 | 3.96 | 7.19×10^8 | 4.29 | 9.60×10^9 | 6.63 |
| Phenol,4-(3-hydroxy-1-propenyl)-2-methoxy- | ![Phenol,4-(3-hydroxy-1-propenyl)-2-methoxy- Structure](image) | 1.79×10^8 | 4.90 | 1.10×10^9 | 6.56 | 1.13×10^9 | 7.80 |
| Polyaromatics                    | ![Polyaromatics Structure](image) | 1.6×10^10 | 44.76 | 8.49×10^9 | 50.62 | 6.12×10^9 | 42.30 |
| Others                          | ![Others Structure](image) | 1.6×10^8 | 4.41 | 1.38×10^8 | 8.23 | 1.70×10^9 | 11.77 |

### 3.4 Production distribution from catalytic pyrolysis of lignin

To investigate the performances of catalysts on the product distribution of lignin pyrolysis, catalytic pyrolysis of lignin with zeolites (HZSM-5, MCM-41) and metal oxides (TiO₂, ZrO₂, Mg(Al)O) were conducted. Since the aromatic hydrocarbons were produced at 600°C, the catalytic pyrolysis was conducted at the same temperature. Table 4 and Figure 8 show the product distribution from catalytic pyrolysis of lignin with HZSM-5 and MCM-41. In the first column of the Table 4, non-catalytic pyrolysis is listed for comparison of the catalysts effect on the product distribution of the volatile liquid fraction. It is found that the total amount was both decreased with the two zeolite catalysts. In the presence of HZSM-5 catalysts, the amount of alkoxyls decreased from 6.13×10⁹ to 5.35×10⁹, and aromatic hydrocarbons significantly increased from 2.53×10⁷ to 2.24×10⁸. Previous studies showed that HZSM-5 zeolite contained Bronsted acid sites that were favorable for the formation of aromatic hydrocarbons.²⁸⁻³⁰ Li et al. [³⁴] also obtained similar results and demonstrated that as the acidity of HZSM-5 increased, the yields of aromatic hydrocarbons increased. In addition to acidity, pore structure could also affect the catalytic process significantly due to shape selectivity.³⁵ However, most oxygenates derived from lignin pyrolysis had a larger dimension than the pore size of HZSM-5, resulting that oxygenates could only be converted at the external surface, in which only existed a small fraction of acid sites.²⁸ This might be the reason for the relatively low yield of aromatic hydrocarbons with HZSM-5 in this study. Comparing with the non-catalytic pyrolysis, the peak area decreased obviously from 1.45×10¹⁰ to 3.65×10⁹, indicating the yield of volatile liquid fraction decreased with the use of MCM-41. Iliopoulou et al. [³⁶] observed polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and heavy compounds were significantly increased with MCM-41 as catalyst, compared to the non-catalytic experiment, due to its high thermal cracking activity. But it could not be able to further convert these heavy compounds to
hydrocarbons due to the lack of acid site. In our study, polyaromatics were not detected resulting in the decrease of volatile liquid yield. This might be attributed to the further polymerization of heavy fraction resulting in the formation of non-volatile oligomers, which could not be detected in our system.

Table 4  Product distribution for pyrolysis of lignin with different zeolites at 600°C

| Compounds            | Non-catalytic | HZSM-5       | MCM-41       |
|----------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|
|                      | Peak area     | Peak area/%  | Peak area    | Peak area/%  |
| Toluene              | 2.53×10^7     | 0.17         | 1.10×10^8    | 0.89         | 4.34×10^7 | 1.19     |
| m-Xylene             | 0             | 0            | 1.13×10^4    | 0.91         | 0         | 0        |
| Ethylbenzene         | 0             | 0            | 0            | 0            | 1.75×10^7 | 0.48     |
| Phenol               | 5.45×10^7     | 0.38         | 1.18×10^6    | 0.94         | 1.06×10^6 | 2.91     |
| Methylphenol         | 1.34×10^4     | 0.93         | 2.00×10^3    | 1.60         | 2.55×10^3 | 6.99     |
| Dimethyl-phenol      | 6.84×10^7     | 0.47         | 1.33×10^4    | 1.07         | 1.24×10^4 | 3.40     |
| Phenol,4-ethyl-      | 0             | 0            | 0            | 0            | 4.07×10^3 | 1.11     |
| 1,2-Benzenediol      | 1.40×10^4     | 0.97         | 0            | 0            | 0         | 0        |
| 3-methyl-1,2-benzenediol | 9.02×10^7 | 0.62         | 1.56×10^3    | 1.25         | 0         | 0        |
| Guaiacol             | 6.68×10^4     | 4.62         | 5.61×10^3    | 4.50         | 7.82×10^4 | 21.40    |
| 3-ethoxy-phenol      | 0             | 0            | 0            | 0            | 2.68×10^7 | 0.73     |
| 2-methoxy-5-methylphenol | 5.33×10^4 | 3.68         | 8.35×10^3    | 6.70         | 5.51×10^4 | 15.09    |
| 2,4-dimethoxytoluene | 0             | 0            | 0            | 0            | 5.06×10^7 | 1.38     |
| Phenol,4-ethyl-2-methoxy- | 5.29×10^4 | 3.65         | 5.55×10^4    | 4.45         | 3.20×10^4 | 8.75     |
| 2-Methoxy-4-vinylphenol | 5.15×10^4 | 3.56         | 6.25×10^3    | 5.01         | 2.50×10^4 | 6.83     |
| Eugenol              | 4.62×10^4     | 3.19         | 6.77×10^3    | 5.43         | 2.78×10^4 | 7.61     |
| Vanilin              | 4.28×10^4     | 2.96         | 4.22×10^3    | 3.38         | 2.12×10^4 | 5.80     |
| Phenol,2-methoxy-4-propyl- | 0         | 0            | 0            | 0            | 5.37×10^4 | 1.47     |
| Ethanone,1-(4-hydroxy-3-methoxyphenyl)- | 3.28×10^4 | 2.27         | 3.82×10^3    | 3.06         | 1.71×10^4 | 4.69     |
| 2-Propanone,1-(4-hydroxy-3-methoxyphenyl)- | 2.36×10^4 | 1.63         | 1.86×10^3    | 1.49         | 4.95×10^4 | 1.35     |
| Vanillic acid        | 1.68×10^4     | 1.16         | 1.30×10^3    | 1.05         | 0         | 0        |
| Benzene,1,2-dimethoxy-4-propyl- | 1.79×10^4 | 1.23         | 1.28×10^3    | 1.03         | 0         | 0        |
| Benzene propane,1-(4-hydroxy-3-methoxy)- | 9.60×10^4 | 6.63         | 5.12×10^3    | 4.11         | 0         | 0        |
| Phenol,4-(3-hydroxy-1-propenyl)-2-methoxy- | 1.13×10^4 | 7.80         | 3.43×10^3    | 2.76         | 0         | 0        |
| Polyaromatics        | 6.12×10^4     | 42.30        | 5.12×10^3    | 41.07        | 0         | 0        |
| Others               | 1.70×10^4     | 11.77        | 1.16×10^3    | 9.31         | 3.22×10^4 | 8.82     |

Figure 8  Effect of the zeolite catalysts on the production distributions

Table 5 and Figure 9 show the product distribution from catalytic pyrolysis of lignin with TiO₂, ZrO₂ and Mg(Al)O. In the presence of TiO₂, the mount of aromatic hydrocarbons increased from 2.53×10^7 to 6.55×10^7 and phenols increased from 2.57×10^8 to 1.24×10^9. The highest amount of phenol-type compounds was achieved with the use of TiO₂. This might be attributed to the complete and incomplete deoxygenation of alkoxyls, since the amount of alkoxyls decreased from 6.13×10^9 to 3.87×10^9. The highest alkoxyls yield was obtained in the presence of ZrO₂, while the aromatic hydrocarbon yield was barely changed. Due to the much lower surface area, ZrO₂ could lead to high yield of oxygenats and be less effective on deoxygenation than TiO₂. This result was similar to Kaewpengkrow et al. who studied the effect of catalyst supporters including Al₂O₃, ZrO₂, TiO₂ (rutile) and TiO₂ (anatase) on upgrading the pyrolysis vapors, and found that the yield of aromatic hydrocarbons of TiO₂ (anatase) was higher than ZrO₂ and TiO₂ (rutile). Pyrolysis with acidic catalysts was prone to form coke via oligomerization, so that catalysts owning basic sites were
expected to reduce coke formation during pyrolysis process. Mg(Al)O catalyst with both acidic and base sites was selected in comparison to acidic catalyst. The amount of aromatic hydrocarbons increased from $2.53 \times 10^7$ to $5.09 \times 10^7$. However, the Mg(Al)O catalyst resulted in an obvious reduction in the yield of volatile liquid fraction. The peak area of alkoxyls sharply decreased from $6.13 \times 10^9$ to $1.34 \times 10^9$, and that of polyaromatics also decreased from $6.12 \times 10^9$ to $9.65 \times 10^8$. Auta et al.\[39\] also obtained the similar results with MgO catalyst that the yields of liquid decreased while the yields of gas and char increased. Wang et al.\[40\] also investigated the catalytic pyrolysis with base catalyst (CaO). The residue yield was much higher than the non-catalytic run at 600°C, which meant to the lower yield of liquid products.

Table 5  Product distribution for pyrolysis of lignin with different metal oxides at 600°C

| Compounds                        | Non-catalytic | TiO2 | ZrO2 | MgAlO |
|----------------------------------|---------------|------|------|-------|
|                                  | Peak area     | Peak area% | Peak area | Peak area% | Peak area | Peak area% | Peak area |
| Benzene                          | 2.19×10^7     | 0.20  | 0     | 0      | 0      | 0          | 0         |
| Toluene                          | 3.54×10^7     | 0.32  | 2.32×10^7 | 0.13  | 3.72×10^7 | 1.05       |
| m-Xylene                         | 8.19×10^6     | 0.07  | 7.80×10^6 | 0.04  | 1.37×10^7 | 0.39       |
| Phenol                           | 2.60×10^6     | 0.00  | 2.32×10^6 | 0.50  | 7.74×10^7 | 2.18       |
| Methylphenol                     | 5.60×10^6     | 0.00  | 5.00×10^6 | 1.03  | 1.95×10^7 | 5.52       |
| Dimethyl-phenol                  | 2.03×10^6     | 0.00  | 1.81×10^6 | 0.43  | 7.70×10^7 | 4.20       |
| Phenol,4-ethyl-                  | 1.65×10^6     | 0.00  | 1.48×10^6 | 0.28  | 5.00×10^7 | 0          |
| Phenol,3-ethyl-5-methyl-         | 5.20×10^6     | 0.00  | 4.04×10^6 | 3.57  | 6.41×10^7 | 1.91       |
| 1,2-Benzenediols                | 9.02×10^6     | 0.00  | 1.25×10^6 | 0.70  | 4.14×10^7 | 0          |
| 4-ethyl-1,3-benzenediols         | 9.02×10^6     | 0.00  | 4.76×10^6 | 0.27  | 4.14×10^7 | 0          |
| Guaiacol                         | 6.84×10^6     | 0.00  | 7.81×10^6 | 4.35  | 2.45×10^7 | 6.91       |
| 2-methoxy-5-methylphenol         | 3.06×10^6     | 0.00  | 8.41×10^6 | 4.69  | 3.22×10^7 | 9.08       |
| 2,4-dimethoxytoluene             | 3.40×10^6     | 0.00  | 3.40×10^6 | 0.19  | 4.10×10^7 | 0          |
| Phenol,4-ethyl-2-methoxy-        | 4.04×10^6     | 0.00  | 3.60×10^6 | 3.57  | 6.41×10^7 | 1.91       |
| 2-Methoxy-4-vinylphenol          | 3.46×10^6     | 0.00  | 3.09×10^6 | 3.75  | 6.72×10^7 | 2.10×10^4 | 5.93 |
| Eugenol                          | 4.66×10^6     | 0.00  | 4.16×10^6 | 3.57  | 6.72×10^7 | 1.82×10^4 | 5.14 |
| Vanillin                         | 3.17×10^6     | 0.00  | 2.83×10^6 | 3.43  | 6.16×10^7 | 8.97×10^7 | 2.53 |
| Ethanone,1-(4-hydroxy-3-methoxyphenyl)- | 2.47×10^6 | 0.00  | 2.20×10^6 | 1.84  | 3.30×10^7 | 3.05×10^4 | 0.86 |
| Vanillic acid                    | 2.27×10^8     | 0.00  | 2.89×10^6 | 2.38  | 4.27×10^7 | 0          |
| Benzene,1,2-dimethoxy-4-propyl-  | 1.63×10^6     | 0.00  | 0      | 0      | 2.09×10^6 | 1.16       |
| Benzenepropano1,4-hydroxy-3-methoxy- | 6.63×10^6 | 0.00  | 7.62×10^6 | 6.80  | 1.18×10^7 | 0.00       |
| Phenol,4-(3-hydroxy-1-propenyl)-2-methoxy- | 7.80×10^6 | 0.00  | 2.86×10^6 | 2.56  | 1.24×10^6 | 6.93       |
| Polyaromatics                    | 2.80×10^6     | 0.00  | 24.97×10^6 | 41.67 | 7.5×10^7  | 9.6×10^3  | 27.23 |
| Others                           | 3.01×10^6     | 0.00  | 26.88×10^6 | 8.99  | 7.6×10^7  | 21.51       |

Figure 9  Effect of the metal oxides on the production distributions

4 Conclusion

Fast pyrolysis of lignin was carried out by py-GC/MS method to investigate the product distribution influenced by both temperature and catalyst. The predominant products of fast pyrolysis of lignin were alkoxyls, resulting from the cleavage of linkages between the lignin units like $\alpha$-O-4. These alkoxyls products were mainly G type, which were in accordance with the lignin structure. For non-catalytic pyrolysis of lignin, the highest amount of volatile fraction was obtained at 500°C, while the highest amount of aromatic hydrocarbons was...
obtained at 600°C. For catalytic pyrolysis of lignin, the amount of total volatile fraction changed in a wide range over catalysts with different structures and acid-base properties. The maximum production of aromatic hydrocarbons was achieved in the presence of HZSM-5, and the highest yield of liquid fraction was obtained in the addition of ZrO₂. The base catalyst, Mg(Al)O, led to the reduction of liquid yield by increasing the yield of oligomers and coke. Generally, the shape selectivity effect is in favor of the formation of aromatic hydrocarbons, but it has limited effect on the catalytic pyrolysis of lignin. Additionally, appropriate acid sites are needed for deoxygenation of oxygenates.

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