Phase Behavior of CO₂ and CH₄ Hydrate in Porous Media

Seong-Pil Kang, Ho-Jung Ryu, and Yongwon Seo

Abstract—Hydrate phase equilibria for the binary CO₂+water and CH₄+water mixtures in silica gel pore of nominal diameters 6, 30, and 100 nm were measured and compared with the calculated results based on van der Waals and Platteeuw model. At a specific temperature, three-phase hydrate-water-vapor (HLV) equilibrium curves for pore hydrates were shifted to the higher-pressure condition depending on pore sizes when compared with those of bulk hydrates. Notably, hydrate phase equilibria for the case of 100 nm pore size were nearly identical with those of bulk hydrates. The activities of water in porous silica gels were modified to account for capillary effect, and nearly identical with those of bulk hydrates. Notably, hydrates were shifted to the higher-pressure condition depending on pore sizes when compared with those of bulk hydrates. Uchida et al. [4], [5] determined the equilibrium pressures of CH₄ and C₃H₈ hydrates. They showed that the equilibrium pressures of the corresponding gas hydrates in silica gel pores were higher than those of the bulk hydrates. Uchida et al. [4], [5] determined the equilibrium pressures of CH₄, C₃H₈, and CO₂ hydrates in porous glasses. In a series of publications, Wilder et al. [6], [7], Seshadri et al. [8], Smith et al. [9], and Zhang et al. [10] used a conceptual model to explain the hydrate equilibria in porous media, adopting a pore size distribution. Some workers [11], [12] have modified the thermodynamic model for bulk hydrate originally developed by van der Waals and Platteeuw (vdWP) to elucidate the effect of pore size on hydrate equilibrium conditions.

Whereas most of works on hydrate equilibrium conditions in porous media have been concentrated on simulating the circumstances of simplified sediments, the authors have an interest in employing gas hydrate in porous media as a gas storage method. Porous media such as silica gels have a large amount of internal volumes to enable to bear waters molecules inside, which can be used for hydrate formation. Seo et al. [13] showed a remarkable result on rapid CO₂ hydrate formation in porous silica gels. Their result showed that the confined water does not hinder gas transport into silica pores, which is the typical phenomenon in bulk hydrates thus gas molecules can easily contact and diffuse into pores through the layer of bound water to participate in the formation of hydrate in pores.

The aim of the present work is to understand the fundamental phase behavior and structure details of pore hydrates for method to store gas molecules in porous media by using gas hydrate formation.

II. EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES

A. Materials

CO₂ gas used for the present study was supplied by World...
Gas (Korea) and had a stated purity of 99.9 mol%. CH₄ gas with a minimum purity of 99.995 mol% was supplied by Matheson Gas Products Co. and deionized water produced by a Millipore purifier was used. As a porous material, spherical silica gels of nominal pore diameter 6 nm, 30 nm, and 100 nm were selected and purchased from Aldrich (6 nm) and Silicycle (30 nm and 100 nm), respectively. All the materials were used without further treatment. The properties of silica gels having 6 and 30 nm pore diameters were measured by nitrogen adsorption/desorption experiments with ASAP 2400 (Micrometrics), and those of 100 nm pore diameter by mercury intrusion, listed in Table I.

### Table I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Name</th>
<th>6 nm SG</th>
<th>30 nm SG</th>
<th>100 nm SG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mean particle diameter (μm)</td>
<td>150 to 250</td>
<td>40 to 75</td>
<td>40 to 75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean pore diameter (nm)</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>94.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specific pore volume (m³/kg)</td>
<td>8.4×10⁻⁴</td>
<td>8.4×10⁻⁴</td>
<td>8.3×10⁻⁴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specific surface area (m²/kg)</td>
<td>586×10⁻¹</td>
<td>94.9×10⁻¹</td>
<td>42.4×10⁻¹</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sorption isotherms of nitrogen at 70 K exhibit a nearly ideal H₁ type hysteresis loop, with almost vertical steps on the ascending and descending curve, which is typical characteristic of a mesoporous medium with a narrow pore size distribution. The pore size distribution was computed using the Barrett-Joyner-Halenda (BJH) method, applied to the desorption branch of the nitrogen isotherm. Their normalized pore size distributions were shown in Fig. 1. The used silica gels were first dried at 373 K for 24 h before water sorption. The dried silica gels were placed in a desiccator containing degassed water, evacuating the desiccator, and allowing more than 3 days in order to establish the solid-vapor equilibrium. The total amount of sorbed water in the silica gel pores was confirmed by measuring the mass of silica gels before and after saturation and was found to be almost identical with the pore volume of each silica gel.

**B. Apparatus and Procedure**

The pressure-temperature dissociation equilibrium curves for CO₂ and CH₄ hydrates formed in silica gel pores were determined using a high-pressure cell with accompanying experimental setup (Fig. 2). The apparatus was specifically constructed to measure accurately the hydrate dissociation pressures and temperatures. The experimental setup consisted of an equilibrium reactor and a buffer cell, both made of stainless steel (maximum working pressure of 15 MPa). The equilibrium reactor had an internal volume of about 350 cm³. The experiment for hydrate phase equilibrium measurements starts with charging the equilibrium cell with about 250 cm³ of silica gels containing pore water. After the cell was pressurized to a desired pressure with CO₂ or CH₄, the whole main system was slowly cooled to 263 K. When pressure depression owing to hydrate formation reached a steady-state condition, the cell temperature was increased at a rate of about 0.1 K/h. The nucleation and dissociation steps were repeated at least two times in order to reduce hysteresis phenomenon. While the experiment was performed, the temperature and pressure of the equilibrium cell was gathered by data acquisition system. The equilibrium pressure and temperature of three phases (HLV) were determined by tracing the P−T profiles from hydrate formation to dissociation. As clearly demonstrated by Anderson et al. [14], a gradual change of slope around the heating curve was shown, due to the pore size distribution. Each measured experimental equilibrium dissociation point was chosen at the point of slope inflection at nominal mean pore diameter.

To identify crystalline structure of formed gas hydrates in silica gel pores and compare them with those of the bulk state hydrate, a Bruker 400 MHz solid-state NMR spectrometer was used in this study. The NMR spectra were recorded at 243 K by placing the hydrate samples within a 4 mm O.D. Zr rotor that was loaded into the variable temperature probe. All ¹³C NMR spectra were recorded at a Larmor frequency of 100.6 MHz with magic angle spinning (MAS) at about 2–4 kHz. The pulse length of 2 μs and pulse repetition delay of 20s under proton decoupling were employed when the radio frequency field strengths of 50 kHz corresponding to 5 μs 90° pulses were used. The down-field carbon resonance peak of adamantine, assigned a chemical shift of 38.3 ppm at 300 K, was used as an external chemical shift reference.

![Fig. 1 Pore size distributions of silica gels used in this study](image1)

![Fig. 2 Schematic illustration of the equilibrium experimental setup](image2)
III. THERMODYNAMIC MODEL

The equilibrium criteria of the hydrate-forming mixture (CO$_2$+water or CH$_4$+water) are based on the equality of fugacities of the specified component $i$ in all phases which coexist simultaneously

$$f_i^H = f_i^L = f_i^V = f_i^I$$

where $H$ stands for the hydrate phase, $L$ for the water-rich liquid phase, $V$ for the vapor phase, and $I$ for the ice phase. The chemical potential difference between the empty hydrate and filled hydrate phases is generally derived from the statistical mechanics in vdWP model

$$\Delta \mu_i^{MT-H} = \mu_i^{MT} - \mu_i^H = -RT \sum w m \ln \left( 1 - \frac{\theta_{mj}}{m \sum j \theta_{mj}} \right)$$

where $w$ denotes water, $v_m$ is the number of cavities of type $m$ per water molecule in the hydrate phase and $\theta_{mj}$ is the fraction of cavities of type $m$ occupied by the molecules of component $j$. This fraction occupancy is determined by a Langmuir-type expression

$$\theta_{mj} = \frac{C_{mj} f_j}{1 + \sum C_{nk} f_k}$$

where $C_{mj}$ is the Langmuir constant of component $j$ on the cavity type $m$ and $f_j$ the fugacity of component $j$ in the vapor phase with which the hydrate phase is in equilibrium. The fugacity was determined using the Soave-Redlich-Kwong (SRK) equation of state and the Langmuir constant, $C_{mj}$, was calculated using

$$C_{mj} = \frac{\Delta \mu_j^0 kT}{\sum m \theta_{mj}}$$

where $k$ is the Boltzmann’s constant, $r$ is the radial distance from the cavity center, and $w(r)$ is the spherical-core potential. The Kihara cell potential with a spherical-core was used for the cavity potential function because it has been reported to give better results than the Lennard-Jones potential for calculating the hydrate dissociation pressures [15].

On the basis of classical thermodynamics, Holder et al. [16] suggested the method to simplify the chemical potential difference of water between hypothetical empty hydrate and that of reference state in liquid state as follows

$$\frac{\Delta \mu_w^{MT-I}}{RT} = \frac{\Delta \mu_w^0}{RT_0} - \int_{T_0}^T \left[ \frac{\Delta h_w^{MT-I} + \Delta h_w^{fus}}{RT^2} dT + \int_{0}^\rho \frac{\Delta v_w^{MT-I} + \Delta v_w^{fus}}{RT} dP - \ln(\gamma_w x_w) \right]$$

where $\Delta \mu_w^0$ is the difference in chemical potential between empty hydrate and water at $T_0$ (the normal melting point of water, 273.15 K) and zero absolute pressure, and $\Delta h_w^{fus}$ and $\Delta v_w^{fus}$ are respectively the molar difference in enthalpy and volume between ice and liquid water.

By combining (1), (2), and (5), the relation between the equilibrium pressure and temperature is written in the form as follows

$$\frac{\Delta \mu_j^0}{RT_0} \int_{T_0}^T \frac{\Delta h_j^{MT-I} + \Delta h_j^{fus}}{RT^2} dT + \int_{0}^\rho \frac{\Delta v_j^{MT-I} + \Delta v_j^{fus}}{RT} dP + \sum w m \ln \left( 1 - \frac{\theta_{mj}}{m \sum j \theta_{mj}} \right) - \ln(\gamma_w x_w) = 0$$

In the present study, it is assumed that the pores of silica gels were completely saturated with water, and thus, in the HLV equilibrium, the pores are completely filled with liquid water and hydrate in equilibrium with bulk gas. The decrease of water activity in porous silica gels mainly due to capillary effect occurring by the presence of geometrical constraints, that a cylindrical pore and solid-phase dissociation (ice melting or hydrate dissociation) are assumed, can be modified, thus the last term of (6) is expressed as [11, 12]

$$\ln a_w = \ln(\gamma_w x_w) - \frac{F_j}{rRT} \cos \theta$$

where $\gamma_e$ is the molar volume of pure water, $\theta$ is the wetting angle between water and hydrate phase, $\sigma_{HW}$ is the interfacial tension between hydrate and water phase, $r$ is the pore radius, and $F$ is the shape factor of the hydrate-water interfacial curvature. Solving (6) and (7) will determine the three-phase HLV equilibrium conditions for pores of radius $r$. The right side of (7) moves the equilibrium conditions to higher pressures and lower temperatures when compared with those of bulk hydrates.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fig. 3 shows a typical $P$–$T$ trace for determining the equilibrium point of gas hydrate formation in porous media. We used the step heating technique to obtain equilibrium data points which is significantly more reliable and repeatable than conventional continuous heating methods. Unlike the case of bulk state hydrates, the heating curve for hydrate dissociation
in a porous medium with pores varying sizes often has a specific shape. This reflects the pore size/volume distribution of the porous medium. Several workers [4], [5] used non-equilibrium continuous heating technique to generate data, and did not properly take into account pore size distribution effects. Furthermore, some authors [6]–[10] misunderstood what the dissociation conditions for specific pore diameters. They presented a heating curve what we have called as hydrate equilibrium data. While obtaining this heating curve, an equilibrium data point should be chosen at a specific pore size diameter.

Three-phase HLV equilibria of CO₂ and CH₄ hydrates in silica gel pores with nominal pore diameters of 6, 30, and 100 nm were measured. Model prediction results were also presented along with the experimental data in Fig. 4 and 5 for CO₂+water and CH₄+water mixture, respectively, and listed in Table II and III. All HLV equilibrium lines of each hydrate in silica gel pores were shifted to the lower temperature and higher pressure region when compared with those of bulk hydrates. This inhibition behavior can appear similarly for melting point depression of ice in small pores. As clearly seen in figures, the measured data showed in a good agreement with those of Anderson et al. [17] previously reported data but largely deviated from those of Smith et al. In case of 30 and 100 nm silica gel pores, the measured equilibrium pressures in this study was generally in agreement with those of Seo et al. [18], and Uchida et al. [5] even though their experimental method is controversial. On the other hand, the difference of the equilibrium dissociation pressures between this study and Seo et al. [18] was significant at smaller silica gel pore of 6 nm nominal pore diameter. It was also shown that the equilibrium pressure shifts were found to be larger as the pore size decreases at constant temperature, and the equilibrium pressure shifts become larger as temperature increases at constant pore size. Although the experimental determinations of the binary CO₂+water mixtures in porous silica gels were restricted to the HLV phase boundary in this study, the adjacent other phase boundaries such as hydrate-ice-vapor (HIV) and hydrate-water-liquid CO₂ (HLL) could be measured and calculated based on our previous works [19], [20].

In silica gel pores, the chemical potential of components had been affected by a consequence of molecular interactions at the hydrophilic pore wall surfaces, and the energy required maintaining capillary equilibrium. Partial ordering and bonding of water molecules with pore surfaces let down water activity, therefore decrease of water activity needs higher pressure at a specific temperature and lower temperature. This phenomenon is also observed in the mixtures containing inhibitors such as salts and alcohols which cause a depression in the freezing point of water thereby reducing its activity.

Even we carefully introduced water to silica gel pores, a significant part of water in the wall of confined spaces would be existed as bound water, which will not participate in gas
Fig. 6 13C NMR spectra of CH4 hydrates in silica gel pores and bulk state hydrates at 200 K

hydrates formation under same temperature and pressure conditions. In this thermodynamic modeling study, we assumed that the pores of silica gels were completely saturated with water, and then reached the HLV equilibrium where the pores were filled with only water and liquid water. For cylindrical pores (assumption in this study) in hydrate dissociation, the shape factor (F) and the contact angle (θ) in (7) is designated as 1 and 0°, respectively. All of the T0 get a solution of predicted gel pores. Fig. 6 shows the 13C MAS NMR spectra of CH4 hydrates confined in silica gel pores. The present study can be applied as valuable key information to develop the method of gas storage.

REFERENCES


Seong-Pil Kang received the B.S. degree in Chemical Engineering from Korea University, Seoul, Korea in 1994, the M.S. and the Ph.D. degrees in Chemical Engineering from Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST), Daejeon in 1996 and 2000, respectively. He had worked in the National Institute for Resources and Environment (NIRE), Japan as a research fellow and KAIST, and in the Petrochemical Research Institute, LG Chem Ltd as a Project Leader. Since 2005, he has been working in Korea Institute of Energy Research (KIER), Daejeon, Korea. His major research areas are the fluid phase equilibrium, kinetics, separation science (distillation, crystallization, absorption), gas hydrate technologies.

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