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Estimation of the Critical Temperature of Thermal Explosion for Energetic Materials Using Non-isothermal Analysis Method

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Abstract: Two methods for estimating the critical temperature (T_b) of thermal explosion for energetic materials (EMs) are derived from the Semenov's thermal explosion theory and two non-isothermal kinetic equations, $d\alpha/dt = A(1 - \alpha)e^{-E_a/RT}$ and $d\alpha/dt = A(1 - \alpha)[1 + E_a/(RT)(1 - T_0/T)]e^{-E_a/RT}$, using reasonable hypotheses. We can easily obtain the values of the autocatalytic reaction activation energies (E_a), the onset temperature (T_e) and the initial temperature (T_0) at which DSC curve deviates from the baseline of the non-isothermal DSC curve of EMs, and then calculate the critical temperature (T_b) of thermal explosion by the two derived formulae. The results obtained with the two methods for nitrocellulose (NC) are in agreement to each other.

Key words: critical temperature; DSC; energetic materials; NC; non-isothermal

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1 Introduction

The critical temperature (T_b) of thermal explosion is a very important parameter for energetic materials (EMs). Much research has been done in this area [1-7]. However, the estimation of the critical temperature (T_b) of thermal explosion of the first order autocatalytic reaction system using non-isothermal analysis method has never been reported so far. The aim of this work is to present two methods for estimating the value of T_b of this system. The data needed for the two methods can be obtained by the non-isothermal DSC measurement alone.

2 Theoretical

The thermal decomposition, as an autocatalytic reaction,

can be described by Eqs. (1) and (2):



where A represents the initial reactant and B represents the thermal decomposition products. The rate expression that corresponds to this scheme is

$$\frac{d\alpha}{dt} = k_1(1 - \alpha) + k_2\alpha(1 - \alpha) \quad (3)$$

The experimental results relating to the thermal decomposition of nitrocellulose [8-12] reveal that the catalyst concentration achieves a stationary state:

$$\alpha_{\text{cat.}} \approx \text{const.} \quad (4)$$

Substitution of Eq. (4) into Eq. (3) gives

$$\frac{d\alpha}{dt} = (k_1 + k_2\alpha)(1 - \alpha) \equiv k(1 - \alpha) \quad (5)$$

Equations (3) ~ (5) explain why such a catalytic thermal decomposition can be described by a first-order reaction. The reaction rate k depends on the temperature

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Biography: HU Rong-zu (1938 -), male, professor, research fields: thermochemistry and thermal analysis; published over 230 papers.

and on the thermodynamic properties of the reaction phase determining the solubility of the volatile catalytic products (α^*):

$$k = k_1 + k_2\alpha \quad (6)$$

The classical Arrhenius equation with two adjustable parameters (E_a and A) is widely accepted as describing the relationship between rate constant and temperature.

Equation (6) may be written in the following form:

$$k \equiv k_1 + k_2\alpha = A_1 e^{-E_{a1}/RT} + a^* A_2 e^{-E_{a2}/RT} \equiv A e^{-E_a/RT} \quad (7)$$

where A_1, A_2 and A are pre-exponential factors, and E_{a1}, E_{a2} and E_a are the activation energies for the first-order, autocatalytic and overall reactions, respectively. The value of E_a depends not only on the kinetics, but also on thermodynamic factors such as the relation between the stability of volatile catalyst (α^*) and temperature.

Combining Eqs. (5) and (7), we obtain

$$\frac{d\alpha}{dt} = A(1 - \alpha) e^{-E_a/RT} \quad (8)$$

The other rate expression commonly adopted is equation (9)

$$\frac{d\alpha}{dt} = A(1 - \alpha) \left[1 + \frac{E_a}{RT} \left(1 - \frac{T_0}{T} \right) \right] e^{-E_a/RT} \quad (9)$$

Equations (8) and (9) are two rate expressions for an autocatalytic overall reaction.

2.1 Method I

The enthalpy (q_1) of thermal decomposition reaction per unit time for EMs can be expressed by the equation

$$q_1 = Q \frac{VDd\alpha}{Mdt} \quad (10)$$

where Q is the enthalpy of the thermal decomposition reaction in $\text{J} \cdot \text{mol}^{-1}$, V is the volume of EMs loaded in cm^3 , d is the loading density in $\text{g} \cdot \text{cm}^{-3}$, M is the mole mass of EMs in $\text{g} \cdot \text{mol}^{-1}$ and $d\alpha/dt$ is the reaction rate. According to previous papers[2, 3], the reaction rate may be expressed as

$$\frac{d\alpha}{dt} = A(1 - \alpha) \left[1 + \frac{E_a}{RT} \left(1 - \frac{T_\infty}{T} \right) \right] e^{-E_a/RT} \quad (11)$$

where α stands for the conversion degree, T for the temperature (K), $(1 - \alpha)$ for the differential mechanism functions, t for the time, R for the gas constant, A for the preexponential factor, and E_a for the activation energy. T_∞ is the initial temperature at which the DSC curve deviates from the baseline when the heating rate tends to zero

in K.

Since the transition from thermal decomposition to combustion starts in the range of low conversion degree, i. e., $f(\alpha) \approx 1$, the enthalpy of decomposition reaction in unit time for one mole EMs may be expressed as

$$q_1 = QA \left[1 + \frac{E_a}{RT} \left(1 - \frac{T_\infty}{T} \right) \right] e^{-E_a/RT} \quad (12)$$

At the same time, the amount of heat (q_2) transferred by the wall of the reactor to surrounding medium in unit time is

$$q_2 = k'(T - T_c)S \quad (13)$$

where S is the external surface of the loaded sample in cm^2 , k' is an overall heat transfer coefficient in $\text{J} \cdot \text{cm}^{-2} \cdot \text{K}^{-1} \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$, T_c is the temperature of the reaction wall and surroundings according to the linear relationship $T_c = T_0 + \beta t$, where β is the heating rate in $\text{K} \cdot \text{min}^{-1}$. When the thermal explosion starts, Eq. (13) becomes

$$q_2 = k'(T_b - T_{eo})S \quad (14)$$

where T_b is the thermal explosion temperature of EMs in K (Fig. 1); T_{eo} is the onset temperature in the DSC curve under linear temperature increase condition when β tends to zero (Fig. 2).

According to Semenov's thermal explosion theory^[13], the sufficient and essential conditions from thermal decomposition to thermal explosion are as follows:

$$(q_1)_{T_b} = (q_2)_{T_b} \quad (15)$$

$$\left(\frac{dq_1}{dT} \right)_{T_b} = \left(\frac{dq_2}{dT} \right)_{T_b} \quad (16)$$

When the thermal explosion starts, Eq. (12) becomes

$$q_1 = QA \left[1 + \frac{E_a}{RT_b} \left(1 - \frac{T_\infty}{T_b} \right) \right] e^{-E_a/RT_b} \quad (17)$$

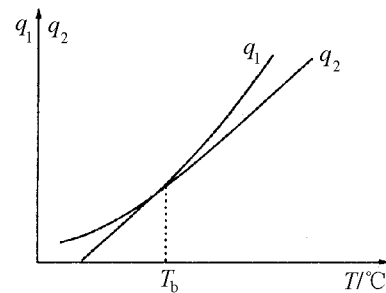


Fig. 1 q_1 - q_2 relation

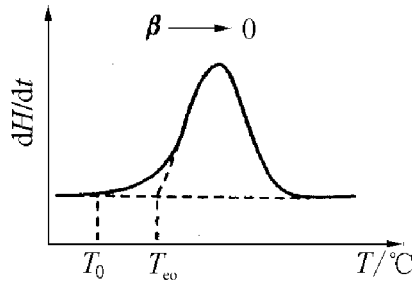


Fig. 2 Schematic diagrams of typical DSC curves of thermal decomposition for EMs

Differentiation of Eq. (12) with respect to t gives

$$\left. \frac{dq_1}{dt} \right|_{T=T_b} = Q A e^{-E_a/RT_b} \frac{E_a}{RT_b^2} \left(\frac{dT}{dt} \right)_b \left[\frac{2T_\infty}{T_b} + \frac{E_a}{RT_b} \left(1 - \frac{T_\infty}{T_b} \right) \right] \quad (18)$$

Differentiation of Eq. (13) with respect to t gives

$$\left. \frac{dq_2}{dt} \right|_{T=T_b} = k' S \left[\left(\frac{dT}{dt} \right)_b - \beta \right] \quad (19)$$

Combining Eqs. (14), (15) and (17), we have

$$Q A \left[1 + \frac{E_a}{RT_b} \left(1 - \frac{T_\infty}{T_b} \right) \right] e^{-E_a/RT_b} = k' S (T_b - T_{eo}) \quad (20)$$

Combining Eqs. (16), (18) and (19), we have

$$k' S \left[\left(\frac{dT}{dt} \right)_b - \beta \right] = Q A e^{-E_a/RT_b} \frac{E_a}{RT_b^2} \left(\frac{dT}{dt} \right)_b \left[\frac{2T_\infty}{T_b} + \frac{E_a}{RT_b} \left(1 - \frac{T_\infty}{T_b} \right) \right] \quad (21)$$

Multiplying both sides of Eq. (21) by $(T_b - T_{eo})$, we obtain

$$k' S \left[\left(\frac{dT}{dt} \right)_b - \beta \right] (T_b - T_{eo}) = Q A e^{-E_a/RT_b} \frac{E_a}{RT_b^2} \left(\frac{dT}{dt} \right)_b \left[\frac{2T_\infty}{T_b} + \frac{E_a}{RT_b} \left(1 - \frac{T_\infty}{T_b} \right) \right] (T_b - T_{eo}) \quad (22)$$

Substituting Eq. (20) into Eq. (22), we obtain

$$\left(\frac{dT}{dt} \right)_b - \beta = \frac{\frac{E_a}{RT_b^2} \left[\frac{2T_\infty}{T_b} + \frac{E_a}{RT_b} \left(1 - \frac{T_\infty}{T_b} \right) \right] (T_b - T_{eo})}{\left(\frac{dT}{dt} \right)_b \left[1 + \frac{E_a}{RT_b} \left(1 - \frac{T_\infty}{T_b} \right) \right]} \quad (23)$$

As the thermal explosion starts, $(dT/dt)_b \gg \beta$, and Eq. (23) may be simplified to the form

$$\frac{E_a (T_b - T_\infty) + 2RT_b T_\infty}{RT_b^2 + E_a (T_b - T_\infty)} \frac{E_a}{RT_b^2} (T_b - T_{eo}) = 1 \quad (24)$$

or

$$R^2 T_b^4 + RE_a T_b^3 - (3RE_a T_\infty + E_a^2) T_b^2 + (E_a^2 T_{eo} + E_a^2 T_\infty + 2RE_a T_{eo} T_\infty) T_b - E_a^2 T_{eo} T_\infty = 0 \quad (25)$$

Equation (25) is the relation formula for estimating the critical temperature of thermal explosion of EMs under linear temperature increase conditions.

Substituting the measured values of T_∞ , T_{eo} and E_a into Eq. (25), the value of T_b is obtained.

2.2 Method II

If the reaction rate of thermal decomposition of EMs is expressed as

$$\frac{d\alpha}{dt} = Af(\alpha) e^{-E_a/RT} \quad (26)$$

Substituting $d\alpha/dt$ in Eq. (10) with Eq. (26), the expression for q_1 becomes

$$q_1 = Q \frac{Vd}{M} Af(\alpha) e^{-E_a/RT} \quad (27)$$

with linear increase in temperature

$$T = T_0 + \beta t \quad (28)$$

where β is the heating rate in $\text{K} \cdot \text{min}^{-1}$, T_0 is the initial temperature of the reaction system in K, t is the heating time in s^{-1} , T is the temperature of the reaction system at time t in K.

Therefore, it is apparent that the enthalpy of thermal decomposition q_1 is proportional to the exponent of the reciprocal of reaction temperature T . At the same time, the heat (q_2) lost from the reaction system in unit time may be expressed

$$q_2 = k' S (T - T_s) \quad (29)$$

where k' is an overall heat transfer coefficient in $\text{J} \cdot \text{cm}^{-2} \cdot \text{K}^{-1} \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$, S is the external surface area of the loaded sample in cm^2 , T is the temperature of the reaction system in K, T_s is the surrounding temperature in K, which is determined by the linear temperature increase in DSC analysis.

With the boundary conditions of thermal explosion, Eq. (27) becomes

$$q_1 |_{T_b} = Q \frac{Vd}{M} Af(\alpha_b) e^{-E_a/RT_b} \quad (30)$$

and Eq. (29) becomes

$$q_2 |_{T_b} = k' S (T_b - T_{sb}) \quad (31)$$

where T_{sb} is the surrounding temperature at the beginning of the thermal explosion in K.

According to Semenov's thermal explosion theory^[13],

the sufficient and essential conditions from thermal decomposition to thermal explosion might be expressed as

$$q_1|_{T_b} = q_2|_{T_b} \quad (32)$$

$$\left. \frac{dq_1}{dT} \right|_{T_b} = \left. \frac{dq_2}{dT} \right|_{T_b} \quad (33)$$

Differentiating Eq. (27) with respect to T , and considering Eq. (28), we obtain

$$\left. \frac{dq_2}{dT} \right|_{T=T_b, \alpha=\alpha_b} = \frac{1}{(dT/dt)_{T_b}} \frac{QVd}{M} Af(\alpha_b) e^{-E_a/RT_b} \left[Af'(\alpha_b) e^{-E_a/RT_b} + \frac{E_a}{RT_b^2} \left(\frac{dT}{dt} \right)_{T_b} \right] \quad (34)$$

Differentiation Eq. (29) with respect to T , and considering Eq. (28), we obtain

$$\left. \frac{dq_2}{dT} \right|_{T=T_b} = \frac{1}{(dT/dt)_{T_b}} k'S \left[\left(\frac{dT}{dt} \right)_{T_b} - \beta \right] \quad (35)$$

Combining Eqs. (30), (31), and (32)

$$\frac{QVd}{M} Af(\alpha_b) e^{-E_a/RT_b} = k'S(T_b - T_{sb}) \quad (36)$$

Combining Eqs. (33), (34) and (35)

$$\frac{QVd}{M} Af(\alpha_b) e^{-E_a/RT_b} \left[Af'(\alpha_b) e^{-E_a/RT_b} + \frac{E_a}{RT_b^2} \left(\frac{dT}{dt} \right)_{T_b} \right] = k'S \left[\left(\frac{dT}{dt} \right)_{T_b} - \beta \right] \quad (37)$$

Combining Eqs. (36) and (37)

$$\left[Af'(\alpha_b) e^{-E_a/RT_b} + \frac{E_a}{RT_b^2} \left(\frac{dT}{dt} \right)_{T_b} \right] (T_b - T_{sb}) = \left(\frac{dT}{dt} \right)_{T_b} - \beta \quad (38)$$

When the transition from thermal decomposition to thermal explosion is triggered, the fraction of the material reacted α is very small, i. e. $f(\alpha) = 1 - \alpha \approx 1$ and $f'(\alpha) = 0$. Equation (38) may therefore be expressed as

$$\frac{E_a}{RT_b^2} (T_b - T_{sb}) = \frac{(dT/dt)_{T_b} - \beta}{(dT/dt)_{T_b}} \quad (39)$$

where $(dT/dt)_{T_b}$ is the increasing rate of temperature in the sample when its thermal decomposition converts into thermal explosion. This is difficult to solve directly from conventional experiments.

When the transition from thermal decomposition to thermal explosion begins, the surrounding temperature is near to the onset temperature T_e of the DSC curve. Substitution T_e of the DSC curves with heating rate β_i for T_{sb} , when β_i tends to zero, we take the limitation of both sides

of Eq. (39)

$$\lim_{\beta \rightarrow 0} \frac{E_a}{RT_b^2} (T_b - T_{sb}) =$$

$$\lim_{\beta \rightarrow 0} \frac{E_a}{RT_b^2} (T_b - T_e) = \frac{E_a}{RT_b^2} (T_b - T_{e0}) \quad (40)$$

$$\lim_{\beta \rightarrow 0} \frac{(dT/dt)_{T_b} - \beta}{(dT/dt)_{T_b}} = 1 \quad (41)$$

Therefore, Eq. (39) can be simplified into the form

$$\frac{E_a}{RT_b^2} (T_b - T_{e0}) = 1 \quad (42)$$

It may also be expressed as

$$T_b = \frac{E_a - \sqrt{E_a^2 - 4E_aRT_{e0}}}{2R} \quad (43)$$

Because the root of Eq. (42) is unreasonable, it is omitted. The value of T_{e0} corresponding to $\beta = 0$ may be obtained by using linear regression of T_{ei} and β_i as described in Eq. (44)

$$T_{ei} = a + b\beta_i + c\beta_i^2 + d\beta_i^3 \quad (44)$$

The value of T_{ei} is easily obtained from the DSC curve with the heating rate β_i , and a unique equation set can be defined using four groups of T_{ei} and β_i . When β_i tends to zero, the value of T_{ei} equals the value of a , and it is designated T_{e0} . The value of the activation energy E_a may be obtained using the same DSC analyses with Kissinger's method^[14] or Ozawa's method^[15].

3 Experimental

3.1 Materials

The nitrocellulose (NC) containing 13.54%, 12.97% and 11.92% of nitrogen used in this work was prepared and purified at Xi'an Modern Chemistry Research Institute.

3.2 Instrument and conditions

In the present experiments, the initial data needed for calculating all the kinetic parameters were obtained from using a CDR-1 differential scanning calorimeter (Shanghai Tianping Instrument Factory, China) with an aluminium cell. The conditions of the DSC analyses were: sample mass, about 0.7 mg; heating rates, 1, 2, 5, 10 and 20 K · min⁻¹, respectively; calorimetric sensitivities, ± 20.92 and ± 41.84 mJ · s⁻¹; atmosphere, static air; reference sample, α -Al₂O₃; the precision of temperature was 0.25 K; the temperature and heat were calibrated using pure indium and tin powders.

Table 1 Calculated values of the critical temperature of thermal explosion for NC

$\beta/\text{K} \cdot \text{min}^{-1}$	T_0/K	T_e/K	$E_{\text{aoe}}/\text{kJ} \cdot \text{mol}^{-1}$	T_{∞}/K	T_{eo}/K	T_b/K	
						Eq. (25)	Eq. (43)
NC (13.54% N)							
1.015	441.65	451.95	180.2	438.38	441.74	448.05	451.13
2.044	443.65	458.90					
5.182	444.40	465.45					
11.68	448.15	472.65					
18.02	455.15	480.95					
NC (12.97% N)							
1.031	440.65	451.95	176.7	440.27	446.45	453.36	456.24
2.146	443.65	458.90					
5.131	444.25	465.45					
10.59	448.15	472.65					
21.59	455.65	481.45					
NC (11.92% N)							
1.047	440.15	450.45	166.5	440.40	446.42	453.71	456.84
2.075	443.15	457.65					
5.378	443.70	465.20					
10.53	449.15	473.65					
19.70	455.40	481.20					

Note: β – heating rate; T_0 – initial temperature at which the DSC curve deviates from the baseline; T_e – onset temperature in the DSC curve; E_{aoe} – apparent activation energy obtained by Ozawa's method^[14].

4 Results and discussion

The measured values of β_i , T_{oi} and T_{ei} ($i = 1, 2, \dots, 5$), the calculated value of E_{aoe} by Ozawa's method and the obtained values of T_{∞} and T_{eo} when β tends to zero, together with the reasonable values of T_b obtained by substituting the above-mentioned values into Eqs. (25) and (43), are shown in Table 1. It can be seen that the calculated values of T_b obtained by the two different methods agree well to each other, clearly demonstrating that Eqs. (25) and (43) are suitable for estimating the values of T_b for NC.

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用非等温分析法估算含能材料的热爆炸临界温度

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摘要: 通过合理的假设, 从谢苗诺夫 (Semenov) 的热爆炸理论和两种非等温动力学方程: $d\alpha/dt = A(1 - \alpha)e^{-E_a/RT}$ 和 $d\alpha/dt = A(1 - \alpha)[1 + E_a/(RT)(1 - T_0/T)]e^{-E_a/RT}$, 导出了估算含能材料 (EMs) 热爆炸临界温度 (T_b) 的两种方法。从 EMs 的非等温 DSC 曲线, 我们很容易得到计算 T_b 值所用的自催化反应活化能 (E_a)、onset 温度 (T_c) 和偏离基线的初始点温度 (T_0)。对硝化棉而言, 两种方法所得的 T_b 值彼此吻合。

关键词: 临界温度; DSC; 含能材料; 非等温

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