

# Design and Evaluation of the Sorption Enhanced Steam Reforming and Solid Oxide Fuel Cell Integrated System with Anode Exhaust Gas Recirculation for Combined Heat and Power Generation

Kunlanan Wiranarongkorn<sup>a</sup>, Karittha Im-orb<sup>a</sup>, Pimporn Ponpesh<sup>a</sup>, Yaneeporn Patcharavorachot<sup>b</sup>, Amornchai Arpornwichanop<sup>\*a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Computational Process Engineering Research Unit, Department of Chemical Engineering, Faculty of Engineering, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok 10330, Thailand

<sup>b</sup>Department of Chemical Engineering, Faculty of Engineering, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang, Bangkok 10520, Thailand  
[amornchai.a@chula.ac.th](mailto:amornchai.a@chula.ac.th)

Solid oxide fuel cell (SOFC) is an electrochemical device for power generation with high efficiency and low environmental impact. Due to a high-temperature operation of SOFC, useful heat can be recovered to enhance its system efficiency. Regarding the environmental concern, bio-oil, the renewable liquid fuel, can be applied to SOFC system. In this study, the SOFC integrated with a steam reforming of bio-oil is considered. A sorption enhanced reforming process is studied for the production of high purity hydrogen for SOFC, and the anode gas recirculation in the SOFC system is proposed for the system improvement. Modeling of such an integrated process is performed using Aspen Plus simulator. As heat and power are generated from the SOFC system, the effect of key design parameters; fuel utilization and recirculation ratio of the anode gas, on a heat-to-power ratio is analyzed. The system performance regarding to the electrical and thermal efficiencies is also evaluated. The results show that increasing the anode recirculation ratio increases the combined heat and power (CHP) performance, but increasing the fuel utilization decreases the thermal efficiency. It is also found that the appropriate range of heat-to-power ratio of the system varies from 0.24 to 0.89.

## 1. Introduction

At present, the development of power generation technologies with high efficiency and low environmental impact is required. Solid oxide fuel cell (SOFC) is a highly efficient energy conversion which directly converts fuel to electricity via electrochemical reactions. Also, it is the quite technology with low CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (Huang and Goodenough, 2009). Due to its high-temperature operation, SOFC is the type of fuel cell that is suitable for combined heat and power and trigeneration applications. Useful thermal energy production can be used in cogeneration purposes, such as steam and domestic hot water production. However, heat and power consumption are unstable, which usually changes in demand. Consequently, a parameter design of the SOFC system to response in variable heat and power ratio is interesting (Chutichai and Arpornwichanop, 2015).

Typically, fossil fuel is usually used as a feedstock to produce hydrogen for SOFC. It is non-renewable fuel and the use of this fuel type causes high CO<sub>2</sub> emission. Using the renewable fuel can mitigate the environmental issues. Bio-oil aqueous fraction is the renewable liquid fuel from a biomass fast pyrolysis process. Because of the low hydrogen to carbon ratio of bio-oil, steam reforming of bio-oil produces low purity hydrogen, reducing the SOFC efficiency (Trane et al., 2012). A sorption enhanced steam reforming process can be applied to the SOFC system to produce high purity hydrogen supplied to the SOFC. However, the sorption enhanced steam reforming process requires a sorbent generator, the endothermic reactor which requires high energy consumption (Wess et al., 2015). As the high-temperature waste heat is generated by SOFC, this useful energy can be supplied to the regenerator. In addition, since bio-oil aqueous fraction is a



Table 1: Bio-oil model compounds (Yao et al., 2014)

Model compounds	wt. (%)
Acetic acid	55.6
Hydroxy acetaldehyde	18.0
Furfural	8.0
Acetaldehyde	4.0
Hydroxy acetone	8.0
Guaiacol	4.0
Dextrose	2.4

Table 2: Design parameter and operating conditions of the CHP system

Parameters	Value
Bio-oil (kmol/h)	1
S/F ratio (-)	6
SESR temperature (°C)	600
Regenerator temperature (°C)	900
SOFC temperature (°C)	800
Fuel utilization	0.85
Cell length (m)	0.4
Cell width (m)	0.1
Number of cell	2500
Anode recirculation ratio (-)	0.4
SOFC thermal losses (%)	2
Afterburner temperature (°C)	1000

CO<sub>2</sub> (CYCLONE2). The operating temperature of the regenerator is fixed at 900 °C. Some useful heat from SOFC and afterburner are supplied to this reactor for an endothermic calcination reaction as an indirect heat. Table 2 presents the operating parameters of the SESR and SOFC integrated system with anode exhaust gas recirculation.

In SOFC section, hydrogen-rich gas from the fuel processing section is fed into the anode side of the SOFC, while air is preheated and fed into the cathode side. At the cathode, oxygen ion is produced from the reduction reaction and transferred to the anode side through the electrolyte. Hydrogen fuel at the anode is reacted with oxygen ion via an oxidation reaction to generate steam and electrons. Steam and unreacted fuel are left from the anode side whereas electrons are transferred to the cathode via an external circuit for the reduction reaction resulting in electrical generation. In the simulation, a separator (CATHODE) is used to simulate the cathode. The certain amount of oxygen determined from the electrochemical reaction and fuel utilization is separated in the CATHODE, and moves to the anode, which is represented by the RGibbs reactor model (ANODE). The oxidation of H<sub>2</sub>, water-gas shift of CO, and steam reforming of CH<sub>4</sub> are occurred at the anode. In this work, air flow rate is varied to keep the SOFC temperature constant at 800 °C. In addition, it is assumed that SOFC has an energy loss of 2 %. The fuel utilization is varied from 0.6 to 0.9 to investigate its effect on the CHP system performance. To calculate the electricity, the electrochemical model equations are employed as follows (Aguilar et al., 2004):

$$E^{ocv} = E^0 - \frac{RT}{2F} \ln \left( \frac{P_{H_2O,f}}{P_{H_2} P_{O_2,a}^{0.5}} \right) \quad (1)$$

$$V = E^{ocv} - (\eta_{ohm} + \eta_{act} + \eta_{conc}) \quad (2)$$

$$\eta_{ohm} = j \times R_{ohm} \quad (3)$$

$$\eta_{act,electrode} = \frac{RT}{F} \sinh^{-1} \left( \frac{j}{j_0} \right) \quad (4)$$

$$\eta_{conc} = \frac{RT}{2F} \ln \left( \frac{\rho_{H_2O,TPB} \rho_{H_2,f}}{\rho_{H_2O,f} \rho_{H_2,TPB}} \right) + \frac{RT}{4F} \ln \left( \frac{\rho_{O_2,a}}{\rho_{O_2,TPB}} \right) \quad (5)$$

Eq(1) is the Nernst equation used to determine the theoretical open-circuit voltage ( $E^{ocv}$ ). However, the actual cell voltage ( $V$ ) is lower than the theoretical open-circuit voltage because of ohmic losses ( $\eta_{ohm}$ ), activation overpotentials ( $\eta_{act}$ ), and concentration overpotentials ( $\eta_{conc}$ ) (Eq(2)). The ohmic losses are loss due to the electrode and electrolyte resistances which can be calculated by Eq(3). The activation overpotentials are caused by the part of the energy used for chemical reaction (Eq(4)). Eq(5) is used to calculate the concentration overpotentials which are the voltage losses due to the mass transfer of the products and reactants.

The anode exhaust gas consisting mainly of steam and unreacted fuel is divided into two streams; ones are fed into an afterburner, and the others are recycled into the fuel processor. The anode recirculation ratio is varied to study its effect on the CHP system. To simulate the afterburner, the RGibbs reactor model (AFTERBUR) is used to represent the combustor which is operated at a temperature of 1000 °C and 1 bar, and the complete combustion is assumed (Table 2).

The model of the SESR and SOFC integrated system was validated with the experimental results. The model prediction and experimental data of the sorption enhanced steam reforming reactor and SOFC are in good agreement (Wiranarongkorn and Arpornwichanop, 2017).

### 3. CHP performance indicator

In order to evaluate the performance of SOFC and the overall process, the following parameters are used to analyze the simulation results.

$$\text{Heat-to-power ratio} = \frac{\text{Useful heat produced}}{\text{Electric produced}} \quad (6)$$

$$\text{Electrical Efficiency (\%)} = \frac{\text{Electric produced}}{\text{Bio-oil flow rate} \times \text{HHV}} \times 100 \quad (7)$$

$$\text{Thermal Efficiency (\%)} = \frac{\text{Useful heat produced}}{\text{Bio-oil flow rate} \times \text{HHV}} \times 100 \quad (8)$$

$$\text{CHP Efficiency (\%)} = \frac{\text{Electric produced} + \text{Useful heat produced}}{\text{Bio-oil flow rate} \times \text{HHV}} \times 100 \quad (9)$$

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1 Fuel utilization

To study the variation of heat-to-power ratio of the SESR and SOFC integrated system with anode exhaust gas recirculation, the fuel utilization with different anode gas recirculation ratio is varied. Figure 2 shows the effect of a variation of fuel utilization on the performance of SESR and SOFC integrated system when the system operates with anode recirculation ratio of 0.4. The results show that increasing the fuel utilization increases the electrical efficiency; on the other hand, it decreases the thermal efficiency. This is because higher hydrogen is reacted to generate electricity and heat. However, air is highly needed to keep the SOFC temperature constant at 800 °C, leading to the need of higher energy for air preheating (Figure 3). Consequently, the CHP efficiency slightly decreases with fuel utilization from 70 to 68 % when the fuel utilization increases from 0.6 to 0.9. Regarding the heat-to-power ratio as shown in Figure 4, the variation of fuel utilization highly impacts the heat-to-power ratio. When the SESR and SOFC integrated system operate with anode recirculation ratio of 0.4, heat-to-power ratio drops from 0.73 to 0.34 because of the electricity production increases, but useful heat decreases at the higher fuel utilization as mentioned above.

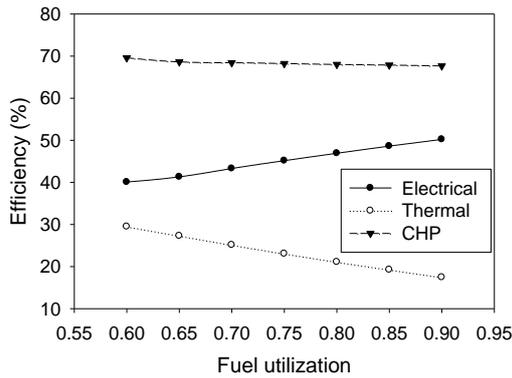


Figure 2: Effect of the variation of fuel utilization on the electrical and thermal efficiencies, and the CHP efficiency

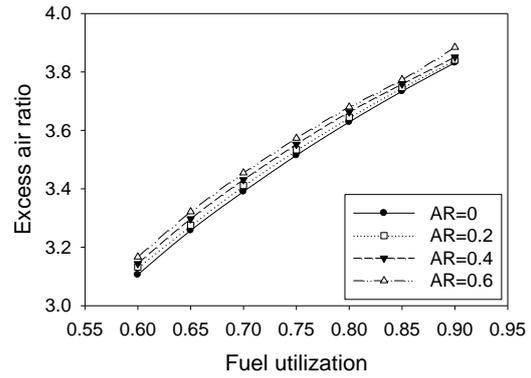


Figure 3: Effect of the variation of fuel utilization in different anode recirculation ratio (AR) on excess air ratio

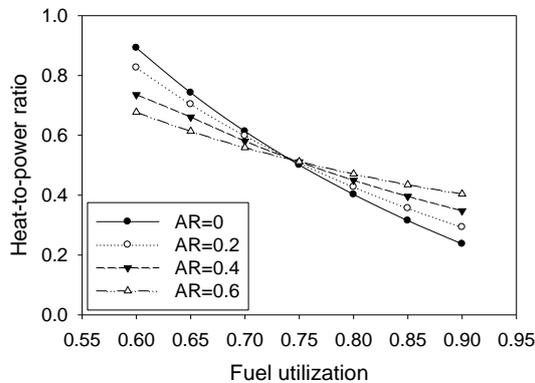


Figure 4: Effect of the variation of fuel utilization in different anode recirculation ratio (AR) on heat-to-power ratio

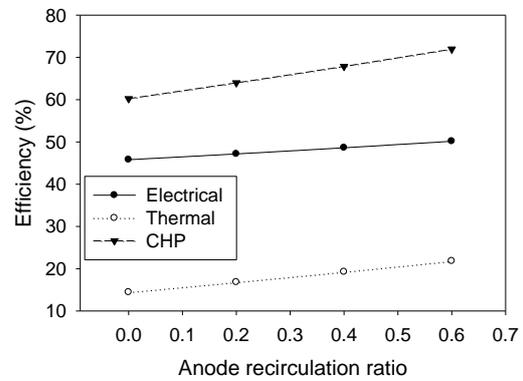


Figure 5: Effect of the variation of anode recirculation ratio on the electrical and thermal efficiencies, and the CHP efficiency

#### 4.2 The variation of anode recirculation ratio

Figure 5 presents the effect of a variation of anode recirculation ratio on the performance of SESR and SOFC integrated system when the system operates at fuel utilization of 0.85. The results indicate that an increase in the anode recirculation ratio slightly increases the electrical efficiency because higher unreacted fuel is recirculated for the electrochemical reaction within the SOFC. When considering the thermal efficiency of the CHP system, it is found that the thermal efficiency sharply increases with anode recirculation ratio. This is because the higher amount of heat and steam is recirculated into fuel processor, so the energy consumption for feed steam preheating dramatically decrease at higher anode recirculation ratio. From the electrical and thermal trend, CHP efficiency sharply increases from 60 % without anode exhaust gas recirculation to 72 % with anode exhaust gas recirculation of 0.6. When regard the effect of a variation of anode recirculation ratio on heat-to-power ratio (Figure 4), the simulation results show that the ratio of heat-to-power steady increases from 0.31 to 0.43 with anode exhaust gas recirculation ratio at fuel utilization of 0.85 because increasing of anode exhaust gas recirculation more beneficially affect heat generation than the electrical production. However, at fuel utilization lower than 0.75, increasing of anode exhaust gas recirculation decreases heat-to-power ratio. At fuel utilization of 0.6, heat-to-power ratio decreases from 0.89 to 0.68. This is because the amount of unreacted fuel in the anode exhaust gas is higher than the amount of hot steam resulting in the higher fuel concentration in the inlet stream of SOFC to produce higher electric production. Consequently, it is concluded that higher anode recirculation ratio increases the CHP efficiency, but to achieve the variable heat-to-power ratio depends on the composition of the anode exhaust gas recycling. In addition, because high energy consumption is required for the regeneration and liquid bio-oil vaporization of the SESR and SOFC integrated system, the range of the variation of heat-to-power ratio of this system is lower than that of the conventional CHP system (De Arespachoga et al., 2015; Liso et al., 2011)

## 5. Conclusions

In this study, a sorption enhanced steam reforming (SESR) and solid oxide fuel cell (SOFC) integrated system with anode exhaust gas recirculation using bio-oil feed stock is investigated. The key operating parameters of the SOFC system such as fuel utilization and anode recirculation ratio, are varied to examine the performance of the combine heat and power (CHP) generation and the variation of heat-to-power ratio. The results reveal that increase of the fuel utilization enhances the electrical efficiency but reduces the thermal efficiency. However, the CHP efficiency slightly decreases with fuel utilization. The anode recirculation ratio affects the system electrical, thermal efficiency as well as the CHP efficiency. When SOFC is run at low fuel utilization, an increase in the anode recirculation reduces the heat-to-power ratio, whereas an opposite trend is observed when it is operated at high fuel utilization. In this study, the heat-to-power ratio of the SESR and SOFC integrated system with anode exhaust gas recirculation is in a range of 0.24 to 0.89.

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