

# Using Agrawal integral equation and thermogravimetric analysis (TGA) to study the pyrolysis kinetics of nanocomposites of polybenzoxazine and exfoliated montmorillonite from a mono-functionalized polyhedral oligomeric silsesquioxane and click chemistry

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**Abstract** In this study, an exfoliated montmorillonite was prepared through click chemistry from a singly azido-functionalized polyhedral oligomeric silsesquioxane derivative and a montmorillonite intercalated with propargyldimethylstearylammonium bromide. This exfoliated montmorillonite was then introduced into a benzoxazine matrix—prepared from paraformaldehyde, aniline, and phenol—to form polymer/exfoliated clay nanocomposites. Thermogravimetric analysis revealed that the pyrolysis kinetics had a close relationship with the structure of montmorillonite, the assembly process, the anchoring effect, the compatibility of the polymer and intercalator, and the char yield. The polymer/exfoliated clay nanocomposites had a same mechanism function, and the kinetic compensation effect equations revealed the pyrolysis essences.

**Keywords** Nanocomposites · Polybenzoxazine · Montmorillonite · POSS · Pyrolysis kinetics

## Introduction

Polybenzoxazines exhibit many unique properties, such as near-zero volume changes upon polymerization with high mechanical integrity, low water absorption

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in water at room temperature, surprisingly high glass transition temperatures, rapid development of their physical and mechanical properties during the polymerization process, very high char yields, low surface energies, etc. [1–7]. Therefore, polybenzoxazines have been studied widely ever since they were first reported [8], and various related applications are also appearing gradually [9–14]. To further improve the physical properties of polybenzoxazines, one of the most important technologies is to manufacture the nanocomposites through blending with other polymers or nanofillers [15–17]. These nanocomposites can impart polybenzoxazines with excellent processability and superb mechanical properties, without forming volatile species. Although many reports describe nanocomposites manufactured through the incorporation of clay into polybenzoxazines, in those cases the clays were merely intercalated and dispersed in the polymeric matrix with a layered or lamellar structure [18–22].

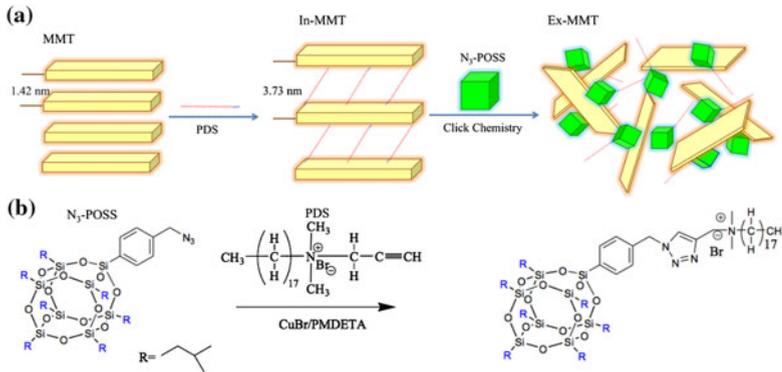
In this study, we used polyhedral oligomeric silsesquioxane (POSS) nanocomposites to improve the exfoliation of clay incorporated in a polybenzoxazine. POSS derivatives, unlike most silicones or fillers, are cage-like molecules presenting organic substituents on their outer surfaces, making them compatible or miscible with most polymers. These functional groups can be designed to be either non-reactive or reactive [23–27]. Therefore, after intercalating propargyl dimethylsterarylammmonium bromide (PDS) between the layers of montmorillonite (MMT) to form intercalated montmorillonite (In-MMT), we introduced a mono-functionalized azide-POSS derivative ( $N_3$ -POSS) to undergo click reactions with the acetylenic intercalator units, resulting in the MMT exfoliated into nanoparticles in the form of single sheets or layers (Scheme 1) [28]. We then incorporated this exfoliated montmorillonite (Ex-MMT) into the Pa-type benzoxazine (3-phenyl-3,4-dihydro-2H-benzoxazine) monomer—derived from paraformaldehyde, aniline, and phenol—to form exfoliated polybenzoxazine nanocomposites [29], the pyrolysis kinetics of which we investigated using Agrawal integral equation and thermogravimetric analysis (TGA).

## Experiments

### Samples

The pristine montmorillonite (MMT) was purchased from Nanocor (USA). The Pa-type benzoxazine (3-phenyl-3,4-dihydro-2H-benzoxazine) monomer, In-MMT, and Ex-MMT were prepared according to previously reported procedures. The Pa-type benzoxazine monomer was prepared from paraformaldehyde, aniline, and phenol [12, 30]. As Scheme 1a shows, In-MMT was prepared from pristine MMT and PDS [28], and Ex-MMT from In-MMT and  $N_3$ -POSS through click chemistry [28, 31–33]. PDS and  $N_3$ -POSS underwent a click reaction with copper (I) bromide (CuBr) and  $N,N,N,N,N$ -pentamethyldiethylenetriamine (PMDETA) as catalysts (Scheme 1b).

The polybenzoxazine/clay nanocomposites were prepared as the following processes [29]: Pa-type benzoxazine monomer was mixed with MMT, In-MMT, or Ex-MMT with vigorously stirring until the sample became homogeneous; the



**Scheme 1** **a** Preparation of In-MMT and Ex-MMT, and **b** click reaction of PDS with mono-functionalized azide POSS

sample was then placed in a natural oven and cured at 140 °C for 3 h, 160 °C for 3 h, and then 200 °C for 4 h under a heating rate of 2 °C·min<sup>-1</sup>; BM was formed from Pa polybenzoxazine and pristine MMT; BIM from Pa polybenzoxazine and In-MMT; and BEM from Pa polybenzoxazine and Ex-MMT (Table 1); the weight ratio of MMT or In-MMT to Pa polybenzoxazine was fixed at 5 %; those of Ex-MMT to Pa polybenzoxazine were 1, 3, 5, 7, 10, 30, and 50 %, named BEM-A, BEM-B, BEM-C, BEM-D, BEM-E, BEM-F, and BEM-G, respectively.

### Characterization

The thermal degradation of the samples was measured using a TA Q-50 thermogravimetric analyzer operated under an atmosphere of pure N<sub>2</sub>. The sample (ca. 7 mg) was placed in a Pt cell and heated at the rate of 20 °C·min<sup>-1</sup> from 30 to 800 °C under a N<sub>2</sub> flow rate of 60 mL·min<sup>-1</sup>.

**Table 1** Compositions of polybenzoxazine/clay nanocomposites

	BM	BIM	BEM-A	BEM-B	BEM-C	BEM-D	BEM-E	BEM-F	BEM-G
Pa	5 g	5 g	5 g	5 g	5 g	5 g	5 g	5 g	5 g
MMT	0.25 g	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
In-MMT	–	0.25 g	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Ex-MMT	–	–	0.05 g	0.15 g	0.25 g	0.35 g	0.50 g	1.50 g	2.50 g

## Results and discussion

There were many reports on the thermal properties of polybenzoxazines and their composites [34–41], but none of them involved the pyrolysis kinetics, and the related influencing factors in this aspect were not investigated, either. Therefore, in this study, the pyrolysis kinetics of nanocomposites of BEM was the point.

In the pyrolysis kinetics, the mechanism function of  $G(a)$  is

$$G(a) = \frac{A}{\beta} \int_{T_0}^T e^{-\frac{E}{RT}} dT$$

The Agrawal approximate equation is [42, 43]

$$\int_{T_0}^T e^{-\frac{E}{RT}} dT = \frac{RT^2}{E} \left[ \frac{1 - \left(\frac{RT}{E}\right)}{1 - 5\left(\frac{RT}{E}\right)^2} \right] e^{-\frac{E}{RT}}$$

Combining the above two equations together, the Agrawal integral equation is

$$\ln \left[ \frac{G(a)}{T^2} \right] = \ln \left\{ \frac{AB}{\beta E} \left[ \frac{1 - \left(\frac{RT}{E}\right)}{1 - 5\left(\frac{RT}{E}\right)^2} \right] \right\} - \frac{E}{RT}$$

For the general reaction temperatures and most of  $E$ , the relationship among  $E$ ,  $R$ , and  $T$  are

$$\frac{E}{RT} > > 1, \quad 1 - \left(\frac{RT}{E}\right) \approx 1, \quad \text{and} \quad 1 - 5\left(\frac{RT}{E}\right)^2 \approx 1.$$

The Agrawal integral equation is simplified as

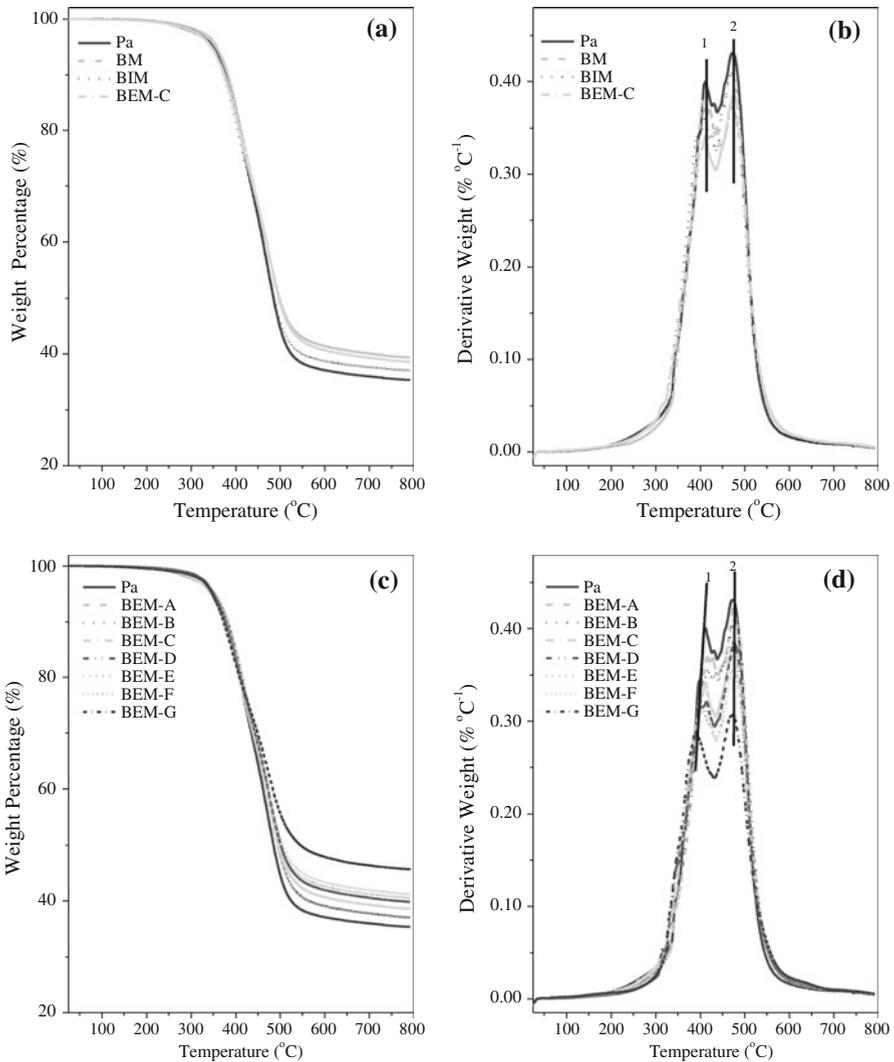
$$\ln \left[ \frac{G(a)}{T^2} \right] = \ln \left( \frac{AR}{\beta E} \right) - \frac{E}{RT}$$

The relationship between  $\ln \left[ \frac{G(a)}{T^2} \right]$  and  $\frac{1}{T}$  will be linear with a suitable  $G(a)$ , and then  $E$  can be calculated from the linear slope and  $A$  from the linear intercept. In the above equations,  $T$  (K) is the temperature,  $R$  is the universal gas constant of  $8.314 \text{ J} \cdot (\text{mol} \cdot \text{K})^{-1}$ ,  $\beta$  is the heating rate,  $E$  ( $\text{kJ} \cdot \text{mol}^{-1}$ ) is the active energy,  $A$  ( $\text{min}^{-1}$ ) is the frequency factor, and  $a$  is the relative weight loss calculated by

$$a = \frac{m_i - m_T}{m_i - m_f}$$

Where  $m_i$  (g) is the initial weight,  $m_f$  (g) is the final weight, and  $m_T$  (g) is the weight at  $T$ .

According to the simplified Agrawal integral equation,  $T$  and  $a$  in the pyrolysis phases of Pa polybenzoxazine, BM, BIM, and BEM (Fig. 1) were linear fit using a trial-and-error method [44–47], as shown in Table S1–S10. On the basis of the linearly dependent coefficient ( $r$ ), the pyrolysis kinetics of Pa polybenzoxazine, BM, BIM, and BEM was obtained, as shown in Table 2.



**Fig. 1** TGA data revealing the (a, c) weight percentages and (b, d) derivative weights of Pa, BM, BIM, BEM-C, and Pa polybenzoxazine samples containing various contents of Ex-MMT (BEM)

In these kinetic parameters,  $G(a)$  is the kinetics mechanism function to illustrate the pyrolysis process. If the  $G(a)$  is different, the linear fit equation,  $r$ ,  $E$ , and  $A$  definitely different also. As Table 2 shows, the  $G(a)$  was the same for Pa polybenzoxazine, BM, BIM, and BEM. All was Zhuralev-Lesokin-Tempelmann equation with a mechanism of three-dimensional diffusion, 3D, which indicated that the pyrolysis kinetics happened mainly on the polymeric matrix of Pa polybenzoxazine, and the pristine MMT, In-MMT, and Ex-MMT did not have any effect on this aspect.

**Table 2** Pyrolysis kinetics of Pa, BM, BIM, and BEM

	$G(a)$	$E$ (kJ·mol <sup>-1</sup> )	$A$ (min <sup>-1</sup> )		$G(a)$	$E$ (kJ·mol <sup>-1</sup> )	$A$ (min <sup>-1</sup> )
Pa	$[(1-a)^{-\frac{1}{3}}-1]^2$	268.57	$4.06 \times 10^{18}$	BEM-C	$[(1-a)^{-\frac{1}{3}}-1]^2$	247.92	$1.14 \times 10^{17}$
BM	$[(1-a)^{-\frac{1}{3}}-1]^2$	267.96	$3.43 \times 10^{18}$	BEM-D	$[(1-a)^{-\frac{1}{3}}-1]^2$	238.24	$2.47 \times 10^{16}$
BIM	$[(1-a)^{-\frac{1}{3}}-1]^2$	257.89	$9.93 \times 10^{17}$	BEM-E	$[(1-a)^{-\frac{1}{3}}-1]^2$	234.77	$1.47 \times 10^{16}$
BEM-A	$[(1-a)^{-\frac{1}{3}}-1]^2$	269.51	$3.70 \times 10^{18}$	BEM-F	$[(1-a)^{-\frac{1}{3}}-1]^2$	234.71	$1.47 \times 10^{16}$
BEM-B	$[(1-a)^{-\frac{1}{3}}-1]^2$	260.15	$6.80 \times 10^{17}$	BEM-G	$[(1-a)^{-\frac{1}{3}}-1]^2$	215.46	$4.76 \times 10^{14}$

$E$  is the required minimum energy of the molecules from a reactant state to an activated state in a chemical reaction. In the pyrolysis, it is the different energy between the onset point and the offset point.  $A$  is a constant determined by the reaction essence and does not have any relationship to the reaction temperature and concentration in the system. The  $E$  and  $A$  always have a same variation trend. Figure 1a shows the TGA traces of Pa polybenzoxazine, BM, BIM, and BEM-C. The char yield of Pa polybenzoxazine was 35.4 wt%. Because of the presence of inorganic MMT, the char yield of BM increased to 39.4 wt%. Although the char yield of BIM at 37.1 wt% was higher than that of Pa polybenzoxazine, it was lower than that of BM because the organic intercalator, propargyldimethylstearylammmonium bromide, had entered into the MMT layers. The char yield of BEM-C (38.62 %) was lower than that of BM, but higher than those of Pa polybenzoxazine and BIM, because of the click reactions that had occurred between the propargyl-containing intercalator and the mono-functionalized azide POSS in the MMT layers [29]. Therefore, the order of their char yields was Pa polybenzoxazine < BIM < BEM-C < BM. However, the  $E$  and  $A$  for Pa polybenzoxazine, BM, BIM, and BEM-C did not show a corresponding variation. Instead, the order of their  $E$  and  $A$  was Pa polybenzoxazine > BM > BIM > BEM-C, which showed the  $E$  and  $A$  had a close relationship not only with their char yields, but also with their structures, especially with regard to the degree of dispersion of pristine MMT, In-MMT, and Ex-MMT in the polymeric matrix. The pristine MMT had a lamellar structure, In-MMT was an intercalated nanocomposite, and Ex-MMT was an exfoliated nanocomposite; therefore, each was dispersed in the polybenzoxazine matrix in a different state [28, 29]. The primary building blocks of the nanodomains of pristine MMT consisted of an assembly of many lamellae (lamella multiples), arranged compactly and densely in a certain direction. In-MMT had a similar, or possibly even the same, layered morphology as that of pristine MMT, but the arrangement was not as compact or dense as that of pristine MMT. Ex-MMT did not have a lamellar structure; the MMT had been exfoliated into nanoparticles, either single sheets or layers, as a result of the click reactions of the cage-like POSS nanoparticles. These single sheets or layers were dispersed randomly and freely in the polymeric matrix and formed different dispersion states, such as so-called

“random dispersion” and “island dispersion”. Moreover, the random and island dispersions always appeared together in the form of the mixed dispersion. The Ex-MMT-based nanocomposites often contained more than one dispersion of the exfoliated single sheets or layers. During the intercalation process leading to the formation of In-MMT, the exfoliation and click reactions leading to Ex-MMT, and the strong stirring in the preparation of BEM, the MMT was exfoliated into nanoparticles in the form of thin solid layers, elementary particles, or aggregates of the two. The Ex-MMT nanoparticles and the polybenzoxazine chains also underwent an assembly process during the strong stirring used in the preparation of BEM. The different charges of the components led to the formation of ionic bonds between them; this assembly process not only had a further exfoliation effect on the Ex-MMT nanoparticles but also anchored these exfoliated single sheets or layers with polybenzoxazine chains through physical crosslinking. In addition, the Ex-MMT nanoparticles interacted also with the polybenzoxazine chains indirectly as a result of the latter’s compatibility with propargyldimethylstearylammmonium bromide. In other words, the structure of MMT, the assembly process, the anchoring effect, the compatibility of the polymer and intercalator, and the char yield all combined so that the BM, BIM, and BEM-C systems possessed different values of  $E$  and  $A$  displayed in Table 2.

Figure 1c mainly shows the TGA traces of BEM, which was composited of Pa polybenzoxazine and Ex-MMT with various contents. BEM had similar, even same structures, so the  $E$  and  $A$  were determined only by the char yield. As Fig. 1c and Table 2 shows, the char yield order was BEM-A < BEM-B < BEM-C < BEM-D < BEM-E < BEM-F < BEM-G, while that of the  $E$  and  $A$  was BEM-A > BEM-B > BEM-C > BEM-D > BEM-E > BEM-F > BEM-G.

The factors described above also influenced the reaction rate constant ( $k$ ) calculated by Arrhenius equation [48–51]:

$$k = Ae^{-\frac{E}{RT}}$$

$k$  is related closely to the reaction temperature, reaction medium (or solvent), catalyst, and so on, even to the shape and characteristics of reactors. Thus, the  $k$  ( $k_1$  and  $k_2$ ) at the temperatures of Peak 1 ( $T_1$ ) and Peak 2 ( $T_2$ ) marked in Fig. 1b and d varied accordingly with the variation of  $E$ ,  $A$ ,  $T_1$ , and  $T_2$ , as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3** Derivative weight data of Pa, BM, BIM, and BEM

	Temperature (°C)		$k$ (min <sup>-1</sup> )			Temperature (°C)		$k$ (min <sup>-1</sup> )	
	$T_1$	$T_2$	$k_1$	$k_2$		$T_1$	$T_2$	$k_1$	$k_2$
Pa	414.5	475.0	$1.61 \times 10^{-2}$	$7.19 \times 10^{-1}$	BEM-C	413.6	475.7	$1.58 \times 10^{-2}$	$5.80 \times 10^{-1}$
BM	406.7	470.5	$8.84 \times 10^{-3}$	$5.16 \times 10^{-1}$	BEM-D	415.2	477.3	$2.06 \times 10^{-2}$	$6.45 \times 10^{-1}$
BIM	411.6	475.4	$2.11 \times 10^{-2}$	1.00	BEM-E	404.1	477.0	$1.15 \times 10^{-2}$	$6.59 \times 10^{-1}$
BEM-A	421.5	474.5	$2.00 \times 10^{-2}$	$5.47 \times 10^{-1}$	BEM-F	403.0	474.4	$1.08 \times 10^{-2}$	$5.84 \times 10^{-1}$
BEM-B	418.4	478.8	$1.52 \times 10^{-2}$	$5.76 \times 10^{-1}$	BEM-G	390.6	476.1	$5.26 \times 10^{-3}$	$4.53 \times 10^{-1}$

Temperature and  $k$  were the values at Peak 1 and Peak 2 marked in Fig. 1b and d

**Table 4** Kinetic compensation effect equations of Pa, BM, BIM, and BEM

	Kinetic compensation effect equation		Kinetic compensation effect equation	
Pa	$\ln A = 0.0002E - 1.8951$	BEM-C	$\ln A = 0.0002E - 2.0574$	
BM	$\ln A = 0.0002E - 1.9003$	BEM-D	$\ln A = 0.0002E - 2.0607$	
BIM	$\ln A = 0.0002E - 1.9728$	BEM-E	$\ln A = 0.0002E - 2.0913$	
BEM-A	$\ln A = 0.0002E - 1.9277$	BEM-F	$\ln A = 0.0002E - 2.1071$	
BEM-B	$\ln A = 0.0002E - 2.0265$	BEM-G	$\ln A = 0.0002E - 2.3789$	

The kinetic compensation effect is often used also in the kinetics. It indicates a linear relationship between  $\ln A$  and  $E$  that  $A$  compensates to the change of  $E$  partly [45, 52–56]:

$$\ln A = KE + Q,$$

where  $K$  and  $Q$  are the kinetic compensation effect parameters calculated from the linear fit between  $E$  and  $A$ .

Table 4 shows the kinetic compensation effect equations of Pa polybenzoxazine, BM, BIM, and BEM. The  $K$  all was the same at 0.0002, which coincided well with the kinetics mechanism function of  $G(a)$  and indicated also that the pyrolysis happened mainly on the polymeric matrix of Pa polybenzoxazine. It can be seen that the order of the  $Q$  was Pa polybenzoxazine > BM > BIM > BEM-C and BEM-A > BEM-B > BEM-C > BEM-D > BEM-E > BEM-F > BEM-G, which was similar to their orders of the  $E$  and  $A$ , showing the  $Q$  also had a close relationship with the structure of MMT, the assembly process, the anchoring effect, the compatibility of the polymer and intercalator, and the char yield. Because the  $K$  and  $Q$  are not affected by experimental factors, the kinetic compensation effect equations can explain the pyrolysis processes and reveal the pyrolysis essences of Pa polybenzoxazine, BM, BIM, and BEM, and also are their theoretical expressions.

## Conclusions

In this study, the pyrolysis kinetics of Pa polybenzoxazine, BM, BIM, and BEM was investigated using Agrawal integral equation, which had a close relationship with the structure of MMT, the assembly process, the anchoring effect, the compatibility of the polymer and intercalator, and the char yield. The Pa polybenzoxazine, BM, BIM, and BEM all had a same  $G(a)$  of Zhuralev-Lesokin-Tempelmann equation and a same kinetic compensation effect parameter of  $K$  at 0.0002, indicating that the pyrolysis happened mainly on the polymeric matrix of Pa polybenzoxazine. The kinetic compensation effect equations revealed the pyrolysis essences of Pa polybenzoxazine, BM, BIM, and BEM.

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