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# The reaction of $CH_2({}^{3}B_1) + N_2O$ studied by time-resolved Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy

Hongmei Su<sup>a</sup>, Jixin Yang<sup>b</sup>, Jinxian Zhong<sup>b</sup>, Fanao Kong<sup>a,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Laboratory of Molecular Reaction Dynamics, Institute of Chemistry, Academia Sinica, Beijing 100080, China <sup>b</sup> Research Center for Eco-Environmental Sciences, Academia Sinica, Beijing 100085, China

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#### Abstract

The reaction dynamics of methylene radical  $CH_2(\tilde{X}^3B_1)$  with  $N_2O$  was investigated by time-resolved Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy. Pure  $CH_2(\tilde{X}^3B_1)$  radical was produced via laser photolysis of ketene at 351 nm. Nascent vibrationally excited products CO, NO and HCN were observed. Five reaction pathways and three possible reaction intermediates are proposed. © 1999 Elsevier Science B.V. All rights reserved.

#### 1. Introduction

Methylene radical plays an important role in combustion process and atmospheric chemistry [1].  $CH_2$  is formed from the pyrolysis of hydrocarbons or in the oxidation of acetylene in combustion flames. As a highly reactive species,  $CH_2$  radical can react with nitrous oxide, which also exists in flame. Therefore, the investigation of  $CH_2 + N_2O$  reaction is of importance for understanding NO<sub>x</sub> emission processes in combustion.

Bell et al. [2] studied the reaction of singlet  $CH_2(\tilde{a}^{1}A_1)$  with  $N_2O$  molecule by gas chromatography and mass spectroscopy. However, they concluded that there is no evidence showing that  $CH_2$  reacted with  $N_2O$ . Using time-resolved IR diode laser absorption spectroscopy, Darwin and Moore [3] recently studied the reaction kinetics of  $CH_2(\tilde{X}^{3}B_1) + N_2O$ . They reported an upper bound of the rate constant of  $1.9 \times 10^{-14}$  cm<sup>3</sup> molecule<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> for the overall reaction. However, no reaction product has been reported.

Actually, the  $CH_2 + N_2O$  reaction has several routines. At least five pathways are energetically allowed. The reaction mechanisms are varied. A detailed study of the product formation and the reaction mechanism is thus invoked. In this work, the reaction dynamics of  $CH_2(\tilde{X}^3B_1)$  with N<sub>2</sub>O studied by time-resolved Fourier transform infrared (TR-FTIR) spectroscopy is reported. According to the Ref. [4], the pure triplet state of methylene  $CH_2(\tilde{X}^3B_1)$  was produced via laser photolysis of ketene at 351 nm. After laser pulse, some nascent vibrationally excited products were observed. The reaction pathways leading to these products are identified. Three possible reaction processes were proposed.

<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author. Fax: +86 10 6256 3167; e-mail: kong@mrdlab.icas.ac.cn

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#### 2. Experimental

The reaction chamber and the TR-FTIR spectrometer has been described in detail elsewhere [5]. Pure triplet state radical  $CH_2(\tilde{X}^3B_1)$  was produced via laser photolysis of ketene at 351 nm (XeF laser, Lambda Physik LPX305i, ~ 170 mJ/pulse). Ketene was synthesized by pyrolysis of acetone and purified by trap-to-trap method [6]. During the experiment, a gas mixture of ketene and N<sub>2</sub>O (99%) flowed into the reaction chamber. The partial pressure of ketene or N<sub>2</sub>O was maintained at 70 and 180 Pa, respectively. The excimer laser beam was slightly focused by a cylinder lens (f = 380 mm) and was led to the chamber. The IR emission from reaction products was collected by a pair of gold-coated spherical mirrors to the FTIR spectrometer (Nicolet 800). An InSb IR detector was used. The spectral resolution was set at 16 cm<sup>-1</sup>. The data acquisition system provided 10 time-sequenced interferrograms. The spacing time between each two adjacent interferrograms is 18  $\mu$ s.

#### 3. Results and discussion

#### 3.1. Nascent products

The CH<sub>2</sub> radical generated from the photolysis of ketene at 351 nm has been ascertained to be the ground electronic state  $\tilde{X}^{3}B_{1}$  [4]. The photolysis reaction is:

$$\operatorname{CH}_{2}\operatorname{CO} \xrightarrow{351\,\mathrm{nm}} \operatorname{CH}_{2}(\tilde{X}^{3}B_{1}) + \operatorname{CO}(X^{1}\Pi)$$

A small amount of available energy (21 kJ/mol) of the above reaction is distributed to translation, rotation and vibration freedom of the products. The products thus are almost not expected to be vibrationally excited. In fact, no IR emission was observed after the photolysis of pure ketene. Therefore, the 351 nm photolysis of ketene at this wavelength provides a neat ground state  $CH_2(\tilde{X}^3B_1)$  source as well as a clean IR emission background.

Due to the absence of absorption at 351 nm [7], the N<sub>2</sub>O molecules are not expected to be photodissociated. Neither was any IR emission observed from the pure N<sub>2</sub>O when it was irradiated by 351 nm laser. Therefore there is no side reaction between CH<sub>2</sub>( $\tilde{X}^{3}B_{1}$ ) radicals and photofragments of N<sub>2</sub>O.

Intense IR emission was recorded when the CH<sub>2</sub>CO/N<sub>2</sub>O mixture was irradiated by 351 nm laser. Fig. 1 shows the IR emission spectra at different delay time after laser firing. The emission between 1950 and 2260 cm<sup>-1</sup> at 5 µs is assigned to the vibrationally excited CO( $v \rightarrow v - 1$ ). The CO(v) emission decreases very fast due to vibrational relaxation. The vibrationally excited state CO(v) are nearly completely deactivated to the ground state after 23 µs. The fast quenching rate can be explained as that a near-resonant V-V transfer to the parent molecules CH<sub>2</sub>CO( $v_2 = 2152$  cm<sup>-1</sup>, C–O stretching mode) takes place. The V-V quenching rate constant of this process is  $3 \times 10^{-12}$  cm<sup>3</sup> molecule<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> [8].

Another spectral band around 2100 cm<sup>-1</sup> overlaps the strong IR emission of CO(v). After CO(v) is almost quenched, the band from 1950 to 2260 cm<sup>-1</sup> appears. It is assigned to the  $\nu_1$  mode of HCN (2089 cm<sup>-1</sup>).

Two other emission bands centered at 1880 and 3270 cm<sup>-1</sup> grew up in the first 40  $\mu$ s. The 1880 cm<sup>-1</sup> band is assigned to NO(v) emission. It is difficult to identify the 3270 cm<sup>-1</sup> band. The emission may be either from N<sub>2</sub>H(v<sub>3</sub>) or from HCN(v<sub>3</sub>).

Questionably, Bell et al. [2] believed that no chemical reaction of  $CH_2(\tilde{a}^1A_1)$  with N<sub>2</sub>O occurred based on the fact that they did not observe the product of N<sub>2</sub> as they expected. However, they disregarded another possible reaction channel with the formation of CO:

$$CH_2(\tilde{a}^1A_1) + N_2O \rightarrow CO + other products.$$



Fig. 1. The IR emission spectra of CH<sub>2</sub>CO/N<sub>2</sub>O system taken at different delay time after laser firing.

In another investigation of  $CH_2(\tilde{a}\,^1A_1) + N_2O$  reaction, we did observe the CO emission. This evidence can explain Bell's observation of the increasing ratio of  $CO/C_2H_4$  with increasing N<sub>2</sub>O pressure. Therefore, their conclusion of no chemical reaction of  $CH_2(\tilde{a}\,^1A_1)$  with N<sub>2</sub>O is doubtful.

# 3.2. Reaction pathways

The thermodynamically allowed pathways of the  $CH_2(\tilde{X}^3B_1) + N_2O$  reaction are as follows:

$\overline{\mathrm{CH}_{2}(\tilde{\mathbf{X}}^{3}\mathbf{B}_{1})+\mathrm{N}_{2}\mathrm{O}}$	$\Delta H (kJ/mol)$			
	$\rightarrow$ CO + e H <sub>2</sub> + N <sub>2</sub>	- 588	(1)	
2 1 2	$\rightarrow$ HCO + N <sub>2</sub> H	-227	(2)	
	$\rightarrow$ H + CO + N <sub>2</sub> H	-113	(3)	
	$\rightarrow$ HCN + HNO	-235	(4)	
	$\rightarrow$ HCN + H + NO	-71	(5)	

As mentioned above, the IR emissions from the nascent vibrationally excited products CO(v), NO(v) and  $HCN(v_1)$  have been explicitly observed by the TR-FTIR spectrometer. The 3270 cm<sup>-1</sup> band may refer to the product N<sub>2</sub>H. Thus, most of the IR active species of the possible products have been observed.

#### 3.3. Reaction mechanism

Due to rich formation enthalpy of  $CH_2$  ( $\Delta H_f \cong 387 \text{ kJ/mol}$  [7]), the reaction of N<sub>2</sub>O with  $CH_2$  is highly exothermic. The reaction mechanism may be described as:



For  $CH_2(\tilde{X}^3B_1)$  radical, the reactive cites refer to the two unpaired p-electrons. These p-electrons of the C-atom may either head-on or side-on attack the linear NNO molecule. The head-on style leads to a highly exothermic reaction (pathway 1) via an intermediate **I**. However, it is more likely to happen a side-on style attack. An addition reaction of the unpaired p-electrons to the  $\pi$ -bond of the NNO molecule results in forming ring-like intermediate **II** or **III**. Following proton transfer and bond-breaking processes, the intermediate **II** would produce HCO and N<sub>2</sub>H (pathway 2), while the intermediate **III** converts to HNO and HCN (pathway 4). Part of the HCO and HNO may further dissociate into H + CO (pathway 3) or H + NO (pathway 5), respectively.

According to the above analysis, the product NO may be formed directly from pathway (5) or indirectly from pathway (4). There are even three possible pathways (1, 2 or 3) to produce CO molecules. Therefore we cannot ascertain the real reaction pathways. Without calculation results about the transition-state energies for the possible reaction channels, it is difficult to elucidate if all these channels are accessible or which one is the most favorable. A further theoretical investigation of the reaction mechanism in combination with ab initio calculation is underway.

# 4. Conclusions

In the present work, we have studied the reaction of  $CH_2(\tilde{X}^3B_1)$  with N<sub>2</sub>O by TR-FTIR spectroscopy. Five possible reaction pathways were investigated. Vibrationally excited products CO, NO,  $HCN(\nu_1)$  and a possible product N<sub>2</sub>H were observed. Three reaction processes with their intermediates were suggested.

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