

Characterization of Methylene Blue Decomposition on Fe-ACF/TiO₂ Photocatalysts Under UV Irradiation with or Without H₂O₂

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Abstract The photocatalysts of Fe-ACF/TiO₂ composites were prepared by the sol-gel method and characterized by BET, XRD, SEM, and EDX. It showed that the BET surface area was related to adsorption capacity for each composite. The SEM results showed that ferric compound and titanium dioxide were distributed on the surfaces of ACF. The XRD results showed that Fe-ACF/TiO₂ composite only contained an anatase structure with a Fe mediated compound. EDX results showed the presence of C, O, and Ti with Fe peaks in Fe-ACF/TiO₂ composites. From the photocatalytic degradation effect, TiO₂ on activated carbon fiber surface modified with Fe (Fe-ACF/TiO₂) could work in the photo-Fenton process. It was revealed that the photo-Fenton reaction gives considerable photocatalytic ability for the decomposition of methylene blue (MB) compared to non-treated ACF/TiO₂, and the photo-Fenton reaction was improved by the addition of H₂O₂. It was proved that the decomposition of MB under UV (365 nm) irradiation in the presence of H₂O₂ predominantly accelerated the oxidation of Fe²⁺ to Fe³⁺ and produced a high concentration of OH· radicals.

Key words activated carbon fiber, TiO₂, Fe, H₂O₂, photo-Fenton.

1. Introduction

Immobilizing TiO₂ onto activated carbon fibers surface were recently developed and studied.¹⁻⁵⁾ It was proved that those photocatalysts could adsorb a large amount of methylene blue (MB) from the aqueous solution due to the porous structure⁶⁻⁷⁾ and had higher photoactivity for decomposition of MB than the pristine TiO₂ under UV irradiation.²⁻³⁾ And some advantages of activated carbon fiber were also found, which attracted more water molecules and/or organic binder on TiO₂ surface and suppression of phase transformation from anatase to rutile during heat treatment at high temperature.

It was also reported that TiO₂ modified with Fe³⁺ could work as photocatalyst for decomposition of organic dye via the photo-Fenton process.⁸⁾ The photo-Fenton process has been studied by many researchers, because it can accelerate the degradation of many organic compounds in water via OH· radicals, which are formed during photo-Fenton reactions.⁹⁻¹²⁾ It was well known that the OH· radicals is a powerful and indiscriminate oxidizing agent

for decomposing a wide range of organic compounds.¹³⁻¹⁵⁾ Therefore, iron is the most commonly metal used as a Fenton reagent in this process.¹⁶⁾ However, the photo-Fenton process is governed by the amount and ratio of Fe²⁺/Fe³⁺, because the oxidation of Fe²⁺ to Fe³⁺ is slow and difficult in acidic solution. In general, the solution of organic dye decomposed with photocatalysts is acidic.¹⁷⁻¹⁸⁾

H₂O₂ could decompose organic dye to highly hydrophilic products in a very short time, complete mineralization proceeded rather slowly.¹⁹⁾ However, it was reported that H₂O₂ can accelerate the oxidation of Fe²⁺ to Fe³⁺.²⁰⁾ When iron exists only in the formation of Fe³⁺ in the catalyst, the Fenton reaction is limited by the reduction of Fe³⁺ to Fe²⁺ due to the presence of H₂O₂, which is considerably slower than the oxidation of Fe²⁺. Thus, in the presence of Fe³⁺ and H₂O₂, a significant acceleration of the decomposition is obtained after reduction of Fe³⁺. The other author reported that the initial presence of Fe²⁺ and H₂O₂ could also accelerate the decomposition of organic dye. Although a complex process of oxidation of Fe²⁺ to Fe³⁺ was appeared, but could not affect oxidation of organic dye through radical process significantly. Because at low dose of Fe²⁺ the consumption of H₂O₂ in the initial reaction period is also low, so that the residual H₂O₂ would play

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an active role in the final oxidation process.²¹⁾ As above pointed out, when the decomposition of organic dye depend on photo-Fenton reaction, addition of H₂O₂ to the solution could reduce Fe³⁺ to Fe²⁺, the rate of decomposition of organic compounds in photo-Fenton process was accelerated by this behavior.

In the present study, photocatalysts of Fe-ACF/TiO₂ composites were prepared by a sol-gel method and were characterized by BET, SEM, XRD and EDX. The photo-activity of Fe-ACF/TiO₂ photocatalysts under UV with or without addition of H₂O₂ towards decomposition of MB was discussed in relation to dyes adsorption on the photocatalyst surface, photocatalytic oxygenation of TiO₂ and reactivity of iron phases in photo-Fenton process.

2. Experimental Procedure

2.1 Materials

Activated Carbon Fiber (ACF) was purchased from EAST ASIS Carbon Fibers Co., Ltd, (Anshan, China), their properties are shown in Table 1. Hydrogen Peroxide (H₂O₂) was purchased from Daejung Chemicals & Metals Co., Ltd, (Korea). Titanium (IV) oxysulfate hydrate (TiOSO₄·xH₂O (TOS), Sigma-Aldrich, Germany) was selected as a titanium source for the preparation of ACF/TiO₂ composites, and Fe(NO₃)₃·9H₂O as the ferric source was purchased from Duksan Pure Chemical Co., Ltd, (Korea). The MB was used as analytical grade which was purchased from Duksan Pure Chemical Co., Ltd, (Korea).

Table 1. The properties of ACFs.

Physical properties	Units
Density	1.23 ~ 1.91 g/mL
Electrical Resistivity	$5.2 \times 10^{-3} \sim 6.8 \times 10^{-3} \Omega \cdot \text{cm}$
Diameter	12 ~ 15 μ
Tensile Strength	$4 \sim 6 \times 10^8 \text{ Pa}$
Tensile Modulus	$3 \times 10^{10} \sim 4 \times 10^{10} \text{ Pa}$
Elemental carbon	$\geq 95 \text{ wt\%}$

Table 2. Nomenclatures of non-treated ACF/TiO₂ and Fe-treated ACF/TiO₂ composites.

Samples	Nomenclatures
ACF + Titanium iso propoxide	AT
ACF + Fe(NO ₃) ₃ (0.1M) + TOS	F _{0.1} AT
ACF + Fe(NO ₃) ₃ (0.25M) + TOS	F _{0.25} AT
ACF + Fe(NO ₃) ₃ (0.5M) + TOS	F _{0.5} AT

2.2 Preparation of samples

In this experimental process, first, 10 g ACF was added into to 50 ml 0.1, 0.15 and 0.5 M Fe(NO₃)₃·9H₂O solution and the mixtures were stirred 24 h using a non-magnetic stirrer at room temperature. After heat treatment at 773 K, we obtained the Fe-ACF. The Fe-ACF was put into the mixture of TOS and ethanol. Then the mixed solution was stirred for 5 h in an air atmosphere. After stirring solution was transformed to gel state, and these gels were heat treated at 923 K for 1 h. And then the Fe-treated ACF/TiO₂ composites were obtained. The nomenclatures of prepared samples are listed in Table 2. At the same time, an original sample of ACF/TiO₂ was quoted from former experiment²²⁾ and compared with that of Fe-ACF/TiO₂ composites obtained in present study.

2.3 Characteristics and investigations of the samples

The BET surface area by N₂ adsorption method was measured at 77 K using a BET analyzer (Monosorb, USA). XRD (Shimadzu XD-D1, Japan) result used to identify the crystallinity by Cu K α radiation. SEM used to observe the surface state and structure of Fe-ACF/TiO₂ composites using an electron microscope (JSM-5200 JOEL, Japan). EDX spectra were also obtained for determining the elemental information of ACF/TiO₂ and Fe-ACF/TiO₂ composites. UV-vis absorption parameters for the MB solution decomposed by ACF/TiO₂ and Fe-ACF/TiO₂ composites under UV lamp irradiation with H₂O₂ and without H₂O₂ were recorded using a Spectronic (USA) spectrometer.

2.4 Photocatalytic activity of Fe-ACF/TiO₂

The photocatalytic decomposition was tested by different Fe-ACF/TiO₂ composites powder and an aqueous solution of MB in a 100 mL glass container and then irradiating the system with 20W UV light at 365 nm with H₂O₂ and without H₂O₂, which was used at the distance of 100 mm from the solution in darkness, respectively. The sample powder of 0.03 g was suspended in the 50 ml of MB solution with a concentration of $1.0 \times 10^{-5} \text{ M}$. Then, the mixed solution was emplaced in the dark for at least 2 h, in order to establish an adsorption-desorption equilibrium, which was hereafter considered as the initial concentration (c₀) after dark adsorption. Then, experiments were carried out under UV only and under UV with addition of $1.5 \times 10^{-3} \text{ mol H}_2\text{O}_2$ to the MB solution (UV and UV + H₂O₂, respectively). Solution was then withdrawn regularly

from the reactor by an order of 30, 60, 90, and 120 min, afterwards, 10 mL of solution was taken out and immediately centrifuged to separate any suspended solids. The clean transparent solution was immediately analyzed by using a UV-vis spectrophotometer in order to decrease continual oxidation of H₂O₂ for MB residue. The intensity at 660 nm for each sample was recorded.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Structure and morphology of Fe-treated ACF/TiO₂

The BET data of pristine ACF, ACF/TiO₂ and Fe-ACF/TiO₂ samples are summarized in Table 3. The specific surface area of the as-received ACF was 1842 m²/g, and almost all BET surface area parameters for the composites have decreased considerably compared with that of pristine ACF. Eventually, it can be evidently seen that there was large change of the micropore size distribution for ACF/TiO₂ and Fe-ACF/TiO₂ composites compared with that of corresponding ACF. This result indicated that the total surface area decreased after formation of TiO₂ particles by Ti precursor treatment. It was considered that the invaded TiO₂ particles can be blocked to pore in ACF. Generally, the BET surface area is thought decrease due to the blocking of the micropores by surface complexes introduced through the formation of the ACF/TiO₂ composites.²³⁾ Especially, for Fe-ACF/TiO₂ composites, the BET surface area was continuously decreased from F_{0.1}AT to F_{0.5}AT. It indicated that

Fe compounds could also be blocked to pore in ACF as TiO₂ particles, hence to decrease specific surface area. The similar phenomena had also been observed in the references.²⁴⁻²⁵⁾

Fig. 1 shows SEM images of the Fe-ACF/TiO₂ and non-treated ACF/TiO₂. From the results, it is observed that TiO₂ particles were immobilized on the surface of ACF, the fixed TiO₂ particles did not form compact

configuration on the ACF surface as shown in Fig. 1. However, the presence of the iron complexes particles could not change this situation due to ionic size. Rather small clusters of TiO₂ crystals spread over the ACF surface with irregular shape, and the interstices among crystalline particles provide an ideal path for the transport and adsorption of organic molecules such as MB which molecular dimension is about 1.70 × 0.76 × 0.325 nm. According to the Fig. 1(e), (f), (g) and (h), it is also observed that the TiO₂ particles were agglomerated on the surface of ACF. In the comparison of different concentrations of Fe in all samples, there was no significant difference. Generally, it is considered that good particle dispersions can produce high photocatalytic activity. In previous studies,²⁶⁻²⁷⁾ ACF/TiO₂ composites treated with nitric acid enhanced the homogenous and uniform distribution of TiO₂ particles. Moreover, shown in Fig. 1(a), (b), (e), (f), (g) and (h), some adjacent fibers were connected to each other by the TiO₂ particles deposited. Thus, the less inner space between neighboring fibers created a 3-D environment that could not enable the transport of chemical species in question and UV irradiation.

Fig. 2 shows the XRD patterns of the Fe-ACF/TiO₂ and non-treated ACF/TiO₂. The peaks of all samples at 25.4, 38.2, 47.9, 54.8 and 62.6° are related to the diffractions of the (101), (112), (200), (211), and (204) planes of anatase. No significant diffraction peaks of rutile-phase TiO₂ were detected in the XRD patterns. According to the former studies,²⁸⁻²⁹⁾ pure anatase nanocrystallites are very efficient photocatalysts due to their superior photocatalytic properties. Moreover, in the patterns of F_{0.1}AT, F_{0.25}AT and F_{0.5}AT, we can clearly find the peaks of Fe,

Table 3. Specific BET surface areas of pristine ACF and Fe-treated ACF/TiO₂ composite samples.

Samples	S _{BET} (m ² /g)
Pristine ACF	1842
AT	1268
F _{0.1} AT	782
F _{0.25} AT	745
F _{0.5} AT	706

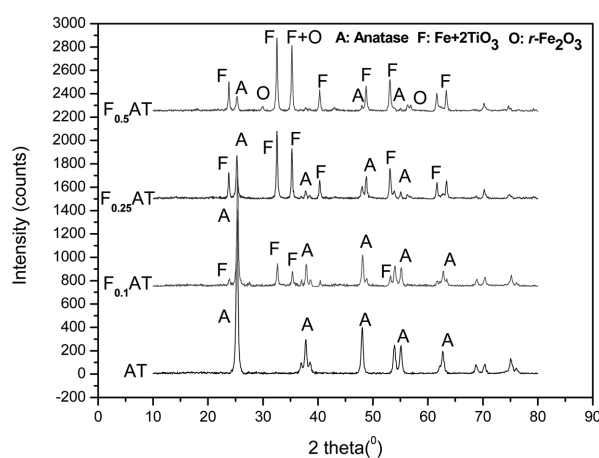


Fig. 2. XRD patterns of powdered ACF/TiO₂ and Fe-ACF/TiO₂ composites.

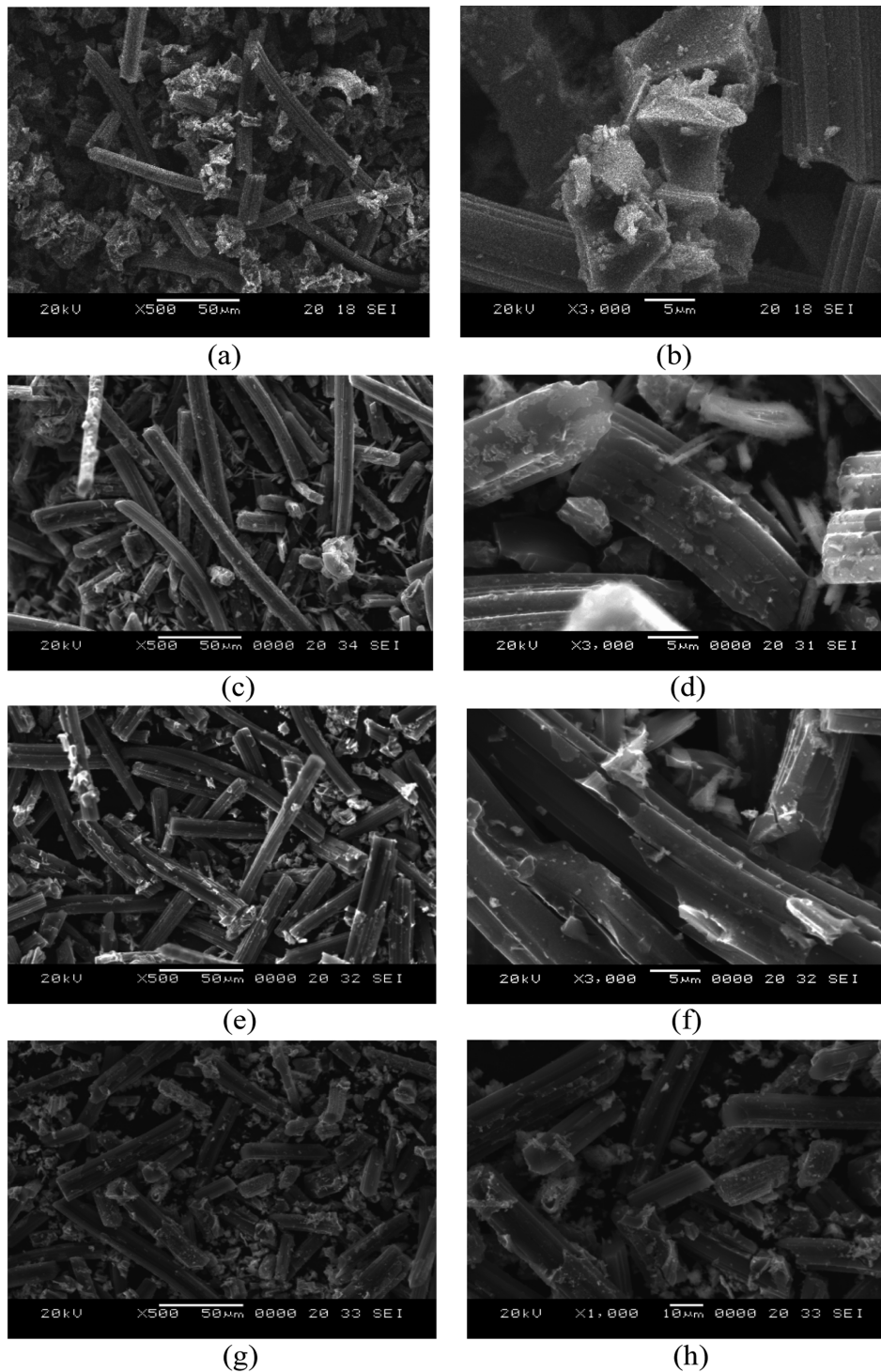


Fig. 1. SEM images of ACF/TiO₂ and Fe-ACF/TiO₂ composites: AT: (a) $\times 500$, (b) $\times 3000$; F_{0.1}AT: (c) $\times 500$, (d) $\times 3000$; F_{0.25}AT: (e) $\times 500$, (f) $\times 3000$ and F_{0.5}AT: (g) $\times 500$, (h) $\times 3000$.

which was further supported by observation of EDX elemental microanalysis of Fe-ACF/TiO₂. Especially, ' γ -Fe₂O₃' diffraction peaks were only found in F3T. The main diffraction peaks have characteristic reflections of (110), (210), and (211).³⁰ These nanocrystallites were produced

by heat treatment temperature at 773-1173 K.³¹⁾

Fig. 3 shows the results of elemental analysis by EDX spectra of Fe-ACF/TiO₂ and non-treated ACF/TiO₂ composites. The spectra show the main presence of C, O and Ti peaks. As expected, the peaks of Fe element were

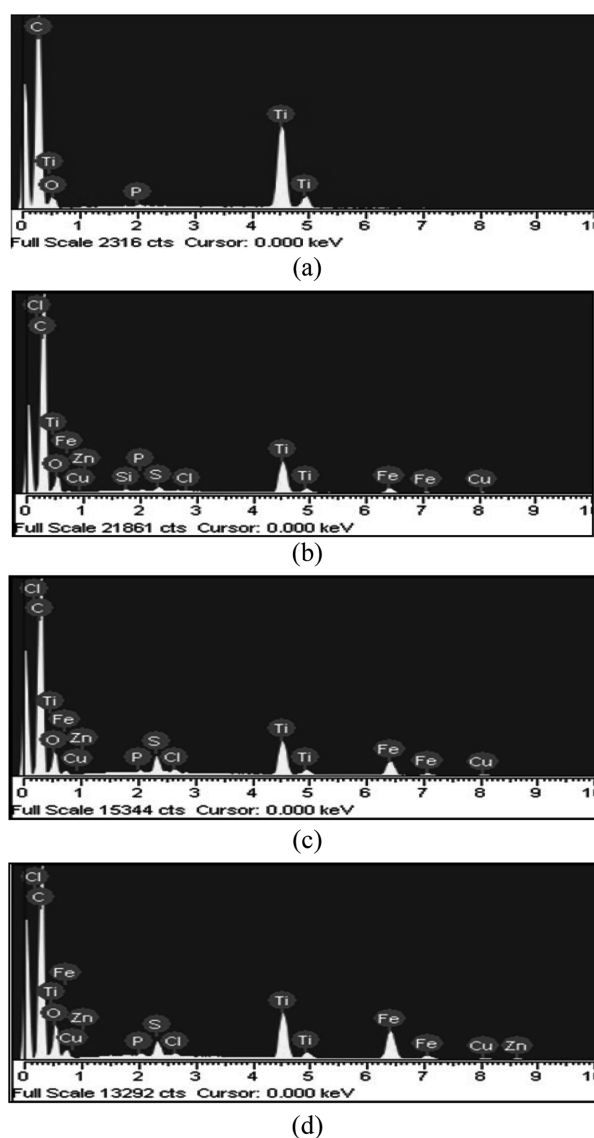


Fig. 3. EDX elemental microanalysis of non-treated ACF/TiO₂ and Fe-treated ACF/TiO₂ composites: (a) AT, (b) F_{0.1}AT (c) F_{0.25}AT and (d) F_{0.5}AT.

Table 4. EDX elemental microanalysis (wt.%) of non-treated ACF/TiO₂ and Fe-treated ACF/TiO₂ composites.

Samples	Elements			
	C	O	Ti	Fe
AT	53.84	21.79	18.90	0
F _{0.1} AT	71.18	16.82	7.8	2.18
F _{0.25} AT	67.41	17.63	6.52	5.18
F _{0.5} AT	60.04	21.07	7.53	8.65

observed after the addition of Fe (NO₃)₃. The EDX elemental microanalysis (wt. %) of all samples is listed in Table 4. For the Fe-ACF/TiO₂ composites, we observed

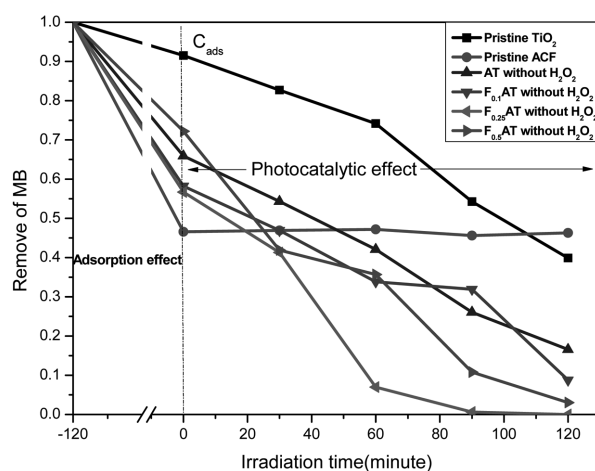


Fig. 4. Removal of MB in the aqueous solution on UV irradiation time without H₂O₂ for the pristine TiO₂, pristine ACF, non-treated ACF/TiO₂ and Fe-ACF/TiO₂ composites.

that stronger peaks of carbon and Ti metal are seen than that of any other elements in most of these spectra.

3.2 Photocatalytic activity

Removal of MB in the aqueous solution on UV irradiation time without H₂O₂ for the non-treated ACF/TiO₂ and Fe-ACF/TiO₂ composites via adsorption and photodecomposition are shown in Fig. 4. ACF was used to probe the adsorption of MB from aqueous solution under dark condition. From Fig. 4, we can know that the adsorption capacity of ACF/TiO₂ and Fe-ACF/TiO₂ was decreasing. To evaluate the actual photocatalytic activities strongly depend on TiO₂ and Fe compounds. According to the Fig. 4, the degradation effect of ACF/TiO₂ is higher than the original TiO₂, it is considered that the ACF can fleetly transfer electron to reduce electronic accumulation on TiO₂ particles, it is quite reasonable to describe the combination effect, which is in agreement with previous study.⁴⁾ And integrating the EDX data of ACF/TiO₂ and Fe-ACF/TiO₂ series, the efficiency of MB decomposition was increased distinctly though content of Ti was highest in non-treated ACF/TiO₂ sample. It is noteworthy that the Fe modified ACF-TiO₂ enhances the photocatalytic activity greatly. This reaction could be attributed to photo-Fenton reaction, which is showed in Eq (1):

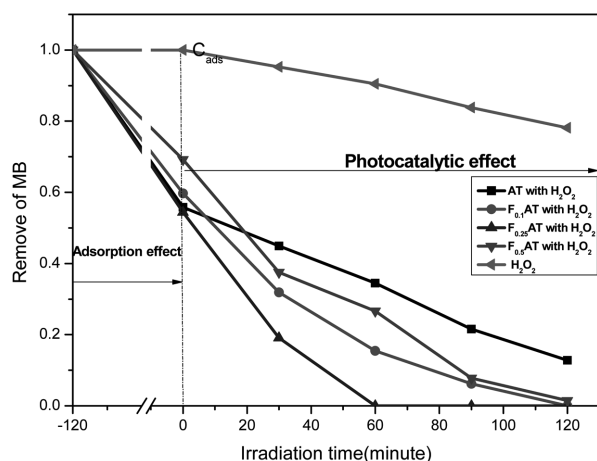


Fig. 5. Removal of MB in the aqueous solution on UV irradiation time without H_2O_2 for the non-treated ACF/ TiO_2 and Fe-ACF/ TiO_2 composites.



However, the photocatalytic activity of $\text{F}_{0.5}\text{AT}$ was lower than that of $\text{F}_{0.25}\text{AT}$. It is attributed to the superfluous irons can act as recombination centers for the electron/hole pairs.³²⁾

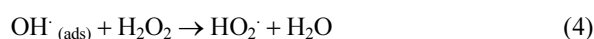
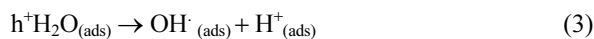
Removal of MB in the aqueous solution on UV irradiation time with H_2O_2 for non-treated ACF/ TiO_2 and Fe-ACF/ TiO_2 composites are presented in Fig. 5. When H_2O_2 (1.5×10^{-3} mol) is only added to the MB solution under UV light. In the previous papers,^{16,19,33)} decomposition of phenol solution using H_2O_2 under UV irradiation without photocatalysts was progressed fast, The higher reaction rates of H_2O_2 can be attributed to the increase in the concentration of hydroxyl radicals. These radicals are generated by Eq. (6):



In this experiment results, however, decomposition of MB is slow. It might be attributed that the formation of $\text{OH} \cdot$ radicals by H_2O_2 was not sufficient to achieve complete decomposition of MB molecules, its production of decomposition still contained ring-retaining intermediates within 120 min under UV irradiation.

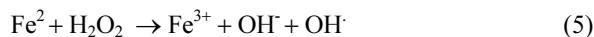
Comparison of Fig. 4 and Fig. 5 results, a quite different behavior of photocatalytic activity was observed on the photocatalysts of non-treated ACF/ TiO_2 and Fe-ACF/ TiO_2 in the presence of H_2O_2 . However, the photocatalytic activity of non-treated ACF/ TiO_2 with and without H_2O_2 is little variation. It can be explained that deposition of ACF on the site of $\text{OH} \cdot$ could cause decreasing the

yield of $\text{OH} \cdot$ radicals which are mainly generated by the reaction of photoinduced holes in TiO_2 with the adsorbed molecular water on its surface. These reactions are showed by Eqs (2)-(4).



$\text{OH} \cdot$ radicals formed on the surface of TiO_2 was suppressed by the scavenging of the free carriers by H_2O_2 . Additionally a part of H_2O_2 was adsorbed on the ACF surface, and the formation of $\text{OH} \cdot$ radicals by photolysis of H_2O_2 was lower.

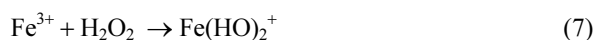
On Fe-ACF/ TiO_2 composites, decomposition of MB was significantly increased. It can be considered that the addition of H_2O_2 into the reaction solutions caused oxidation of Fe^{2+} and more formation of $\text{OH} \cdot$ radicals. The reaction is showed in Eq (5):



As shown in Eq (5), Fe^{3+} can be reduced to Fe^{2+} with an increase of $\text{OH} \cdot$ radical due to addition of H_2O_2 . On the other hand, the photo-Fenton process can be efficiently recycled.

The presence in Fe-ACF/ TiO_2 caused the decomposition of MB is more progressed fast by powerful H_2O_2 assisting photo-Fenton reaction.

In contrast, in case of $\text{F}_{0.1}\text{AT}$, $\text{F}_{0.25}\text{AT}$ and $\text{F}_{0.5}\text{AT}$ for decomposition of MB via addition of H_2O_2 , they indicated various degrees increase of the photocatalytic activity. However, we observed that the active decomposition of $\text{F}_{0.5}\text{AT}$ was slower than that of $\text{F}_{0.1}\text{AT}$ and $\text{F}_{0.25}\text{AT}$. It could be attributed to the different reaction of MB decomposition occurred on $\text{F}_{0.5}\text{AT}$ composite due to $\text{F}_{0.5}\text{AT}$ contained superfluous Fe. The reaction is generated by Eqs. (7)-(8).



The yielding $\text{HO}_2 \cdot$ radicals cannot effectively decompose MB molecules as above mentioned.

4. Conclusion

The Fe-ACF/ TiO_2 composites were prepared by a sol-gel method. From the SEM, the particles of TiO_2 aggregated

into clusters were fixed on the surface of ACF. XRD patterns of the composites showed that TiO₂ exists as a typical single and clear anatase phase. The EDX spectra showed the main peaks of C, O, and Ti, for the Fe-ACF/TiO₂ composites. And, we observed the peaks of the Fe element. Modification of TiO₂ photocatalyst by ACF and Fe could enhance photoactivity for decomposition of MB under the condition of UV via photo-Fenton process. The Fe-ACF/TiO₂ composites seems to be beneficial for decomposition of MB under UV with H₂O₂. It is suggested that the decomposition of MB in Fe-ACF/TiO₂ photocatalyst systems is accelerated by forming more OH[•] radicals.

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