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Mutual separation characteristics for binary oxides Y₂O₃-Ln₂O₃(Ln = Sc, La, Nd, Sm) using stepwise selective chlorination chemical vapor transport reaction mediated by vapor complexes KLnCl₄ [⊕]

SUN Yar-hui(孙艳辉)¹, CHEN Zher-fei(陈振飞)², WANG Zhi-chang(王之昌)³

- (1. Department of Chemistry, South China Normal University, Guangzhou 510631, China;
 - 2. Department of Metallurgy, Hebei Institute of Technology, Tangshan 063009, China;
 - 3. Department of Chemistry, Northeastern University, Shenyang 110006, China)

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1 INTRODUCTION

As we all know, although the vapor rare earth complexes possess the same important role as the solid and liquid state complexes in rare earth chemistry, the study of vapor rare earth complexes is relatively slow. Recently, Boghosian et al^[1] and JIANG et al^[2] reviewed the study panorama of the vapor rare earth The rare earth vapor complexes LnAl_nCl_{3n+3} and ALnCl₄, where A represents alkaline metal and Ln represents rare earth elements, have been used as intermediate materials for the preparation of anhydrous rare earth chlorides in high purity^[3-5], for mutual separation of rare earth elements^[6-14], and for recovery of rare earth metals from rare earth crude ore [15] or scrap of rare earth intermetallic material [16] by using chemical vapor transport (CVT) or stepwise selective chlorination-CVT (SC-CVT) reactions. The CVT separation is found to be more efficient when being mediated by KLnCl₄ and taking KCl as complex former than that when being mediated by $LnAl_nCl_{3n+3}$ and taking $AlCl_3$ as complex former. And it is more efficient through SC-CVT than conventional CVT reaction due to the thermodynamic and kinetic reasons.

WANG et al^[3-5] determined the thermodynamic properties of the gaseous species LnAl_nCl_{3n+3} for all of rare earth elements including Sc and Y, and found that LnAl₃Cl₁₂ is the predominant gaseous complex species for the series lanthanide from La to Lu; while LnAl₂Cl₉ for Sc and Y in the temperature range from 500 K to 900 K. Recently, Adachi et al [6] reported the CVT characteristics of the binary oxide mixtures Sc₂O₃-Y₂O₃, Sc₂O₃-La₂O₃ and Y₂O₃-La₂O₃ mediated by gaseous $LnAl_nCl_{3n+3}$ and $KLnCl_4$. The experiment results indicated that ScCl₃ could be easily separated from YCl₃ and LaCl₃ by the dry CVT process and provided an indirect support for the viewpoint that La³⁺ in fact contains 4f composition due to its electron hybridization assumed by Gschneidner^[17]. Very recently, we reported the mutual separation characteristics for Sc, Y and the rare earth elements such as La, Nd and Sm which usually coexisted in monazite ores from their binary oxide mixtures Y₂O₃-Ln₂O₃(Ln= Sc, La, Nd and Sm) using SC-CVT reaction mediated by $LnAl_nCl_{3n+3}^{[14]}$. The results mainly showed the SC-CVT characteristic difference between the rare earth elements Sc and Y and the lanthanide elements La, Nd and Sm. This was consistent with Adachi's CVT separation results for the binary oxide mixtures $\operatorname{Ln_2O_3\text{-}Ln'}\mathcal{O}_3(\operatorname{Ln} \not= \operatorname{Ln'} = \operatorname{Sc}, Y, \operatorname{La})$ via the vapor complexes $\operatorname{LnAl_nCl_{3n+3}}^{[12]}$. Moreover, the results showed that the SC-CVT separation efficient is higher than that the CVT reaction efficient. But there was no evidence to prove that the SC-CVT characteristics of Sc and Y mediated by KScCl₄ and KYCl₄ were different from other lanthanide elements mediated by KLnCl₄ ($\operatorname{Ln} = \operatorname{lanthanides}$) as remarkably as that Sc and Y mediated by ScAl_nCl_{3n+3} and YAl_nCl_{3n+3} from La, Nd and Sm mediated by $\operatorname{LnAl_nCl_{3n+3}}^{[14]}$.

In this study, we investigate the mutual separation characteristics for Sc, Y, La, Nd and Sm from their binary oxide mixtures Sc_2O_3 - Y_2O_3 , Y_2O_3 - Ia_2O_3 , Y_2O_3 - Ia_2O_3 , Ia_2O_3 - Ia_2O_3 and Ia_2O_3 - Ia_2O_3 using SC-CVT reaction mediated by KLnCl4.

2 EXPERIMENTAL

The chemicals used in this study were analytically pure for KCl and active carbon, and had a purity equal to or more than 99.9% for all rare earth oxides. A raw mixture was formed by mixing active carbon and KCl with a binary oxide mixture of rare earth elements Ln and Ln' with molar ratio of x(C): x(Ln): x(Ln'): x(K) = 6:1:1:1, which contains about 5.0 mmol rare earth elements for Ln and Ln', respectively.

The SC-CVT reaction was carried out in a cylindrical alumina reactor tube, with 25 mm in inner diameter, 32 mm in outer diameter and 1 000 mm in length. A given temperature gradients are shown in Fig. 1. Fifteen pieces of alumina receptor tube with 17 mm in inner diameter, 24 mm in outer diameter and 50 mm in length were placed besides the graphite react boat where the raw materials

were filled. Let T_{max} denoted the highest temperar ture in the tube reactor, where the raw material was placed. The raw material was chlorinated by dry Cl₂ with a flow rate of 20 cm³/min at T_{max} = 800 K for 2 h. The Cl₂ was replaced by a dry Ar+ Cl₂ mixed gas with the flow rates of 30 cm³/min and 10 cm³/min, respectively, within the temperature range of T_{max} = 800 - 1 300 K. Then, the rare earth chlorides reacted with KCl to form the vapor complexes KLnCl4 and the vapor complexes chemically transported along the temperature gradient in the tube reactor at $T_{\text{max}} = 1$ 300 K for 6 h, using a dry Ar+ Cl₂ mixed gas with the flow rates of 30 cm³/min and 10 cm³/min as the carried gas. At the end of each run, the amounts of the rare earth chloride produced were determined from the peak intensity of the characteristic bands: 337. 271 nm for Sc^{3+} , 377. 433 nm for Y^{3+} , 333. 749 nm for La^{3+} , 401. 225 nm for Nd³⁺ and 359. 260 nm for Sm³⁺ on an inductively coupled plasma atomic emission spectrometry (Perkin Elmer, Optima 2000).

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 SC-CVT characteristics

Fig. 2 shows the SC-CVT reaction results of the binary oxide mixtures Sc_2O_3 - Y_2O_3 , Y_2O_3 - La_2O_3 , Y_2O_3 - Nd_2O_3 and Y_2O_3 - Sm_2O_3 , in the form of deposition amount for the rare earth chlorides produced vs the receptor tube numbers, taking KCl as complex former and argon gas as carrying gas for 6 h. It can be seen that in Y-Sc system, there is no ScCl₃ deposited in the receptor tube from No. 1 to 12 and only a very small amounts of ScCl₃ concentrate in the temperature range from 900 K to 600 K. YCl₃ mainly distributes in the temperature range from 1 160 K to 960 K; while LaCl₃, NdCl₃ and SmCl₃ mainly deposit in the temperature range above 1 120 K and YCl₃ mainly in

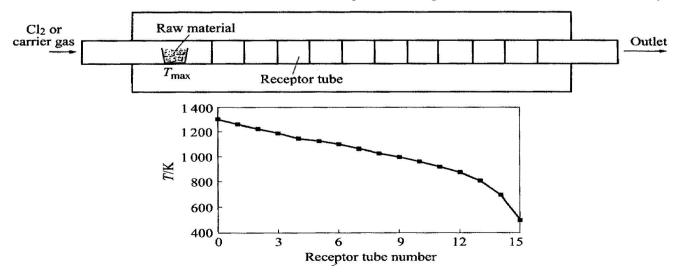


Fig. 1 Schematic representation of reactor and temperature gradients for SC-CVT reaction

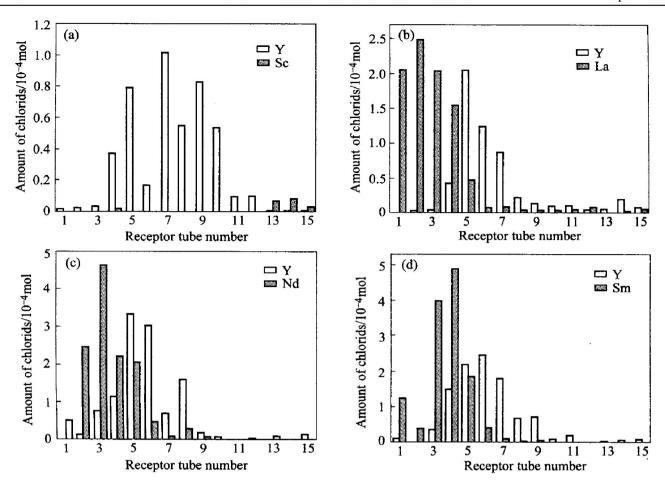


Fig. 2 Distribution of LnCl₃ deposits in SC-CVT reaction formed from their binary oxide mixtures mediated by vapor complexes KLnCl₄
(a) -Y₂O₃-Sc₂O₃; (b) -Y₂O₃-La₂O₃; (c) -Y₂O₃-Nd₂O₃, (d) -Y₂O₃-Sm₂O₃

the temperature range from 1 160 K to 1 050 K in Y-Ln(Ln= La, Nd and Sm) systems. This is as the same as the main deposition range in previous paper^[14] using AlCl₃ as complex former except for Sc Cl₃. And for ScCl₃, YCl₃ and LaCl₃, the results was corresponded to the conventional CVT results observed by Adachi^[6] with KCl as complex former. In the situation of Y-La, Y-Nd and Y-Sm system, the amount of chlorides YCl₃ deposited in the higher temperature is always fewer than those of lanthanide chlorides LaCl₃, NdCl₃ and SmCl₃, and in the lower temperature range the case is reversed. The results indicate that the stability of the vapor complexes KScCl₄ and KYCl₄ is higher than that of KLnCl₄(Ln = La, Nd and Sm), where KScCl₄ is stable in the temperature range from 1 300 K to 900 K, KYCl4 is stable in the temperature range from 1 300 K to 1 160 K, while the early lanthanide complexes are unstable even in the higher temperature 1 300 K, which agrees with that the more the volatile of the chlorides, the more stable the vapor complexes.

3. 2 Separation results

The total transported yields of LnCl₃ produced from their oxides, the total separation factors and the

largest values of the separation factor expressed as the molar ratio for the resulting chlorides are listed in Table 1. The largest separation factor values of 1 100 for Y: Sc, 14. 88 for Y: La, 9. 86 for Y: Nd and 16. 45 for Y: Sm in the temperature range from 1 000 K to 1 120 K, and 157.70 for Lai Y, 51.60 for Ndi Y and 12.46 for Sm: Y in the temperature range from 1 200 K to 1 300 K were observed, respectively. All of them indicate the potential applicability of the SC-CVT reaction for the rare earth separation. The largest separation factor value of 157. 70 for Lai Y in this study indicates that the SC-CVT characteristics for Y and La are very different and this provides a new indirect support for Gschneidner's assumption^[17] that the electronic orbital of La³⁺ in fact contains 4f composition due to its electron hybridization, too. The separation factors are much higher than those for the CVT results of 22. 26 for Y: Sc, 3. 17 for La: Y with KCl as complex former obtained by Adachi^[6], and are higher than those of the SC-CVT results (29. 9 for Y: Sc, 10. 1 for La Y in our previous paper)^[14]. In addition, for Nd-Y and Y-Sm, the separation results in this study are much higher than those of 9.09 for Nd: Y and 3.38 for Y: Nd, 2.46 for Y: Sm and 2. 38 for Sm: Y in Ref. [14]. All are attributed to the difference in chlorination temperatures, 1 300 K in Ref. [12] and 800 K in this study, and to the thermodynamic characteristics of vapor complexes $KLnCl_4$ in this study and $LnAl_nCl_{3n+3}$ in Ref. [14] at different temperatures.

Table 1 Transported yields, largest separation factors and total separation factors of LnCl₃ and Ln'Cl₃(Ln ≠Ln' = Sc, Y, La, Nd and Sm) obtained from their binary oxide mixtures in SC-CVT reaction using KCl as complex former

System	Separation factor	Receptor tube number	Transported yield/%	Total separation factor
Y_2O_3 Sc_2O_3	1100(Y: Sc)	8	Y: 11.48 Sc: 0.087	128. 80 (Y: Sc)
Y ₂ O ₃ -	14. 88 (Y: La)	6	Y: 14. 19	1.62
La ₂ O ₃	157. 70(La; Y)	1	La: 22. 84	(La Y)
Y ₂ O ₃	9. 86 (Y: Nd)	7	Y: 31. 12	1.16
Nd ₂ O ₃	51. 60(Nd Y)	1	Nd: 36. 01	(Nd Y)
Y ₂ O ₃ -	16. 45 (Y: Sm)	7	Y: 25. 22	1.26
Sm ₂ O ₃	12. 46 (Sm: Y)	2	Sm: 31. 92	(Sm: Y)

The SC-CVT reaction mechanism for rare earth binary oxide mixtures would be more complicated than that for individual rare earth oxides and the conventional CVT process for rare earth binary oxide mixtures. It might mainly be a combination of selective carbonthermic reduction chlorination subreaction of the oxides at 800 K:

$$1/2 \text{ Ln}_2O_3(s) + 3/2 \text{ Cl}_2(g) + 3/2 \text{ C}(s) =$$
 $\text{LnCl}_3(s) + 3/2\text{CO}(g)$
(Ln = Sc, Y, La, Nd and Sm) (1)

Exchange subreactions between the remained oxides and the produced chlorides within the temperature range of $800-1\ 300\ K$ are as follows:

$$1/2 \text{ Ln}_2O_3(s) + \text{ Ln'}Cl_3(l \text{ or } s) =$$
 $\text{LnCl}_3(l \text{ or } s) + 1/2 \text{ Ln'}O_3(s)$
 $(\text{Ln} \neq \text{Ln'} = \text{Sc}, \text{ Y}, \text{ La}, \text{ Nd and Sm})$ (2)

Selective complexation subreactions of the produced chlorides at 1 $300~\mathrm{K}$ are as follows:

$$LnCl3(l) + KCl(l) = KLnCl4(g)$$
(Ln = Sc, Y, La, Nd and Sm) (3)

Selective CVT subreactions of the vapor complexes KLnCl₄ along the temperature gradient are:

$$KLnCl_4(g) = LnCl_3(1 \text{ or } s) + KCl (s \text{ or } l)$$

 $(Ln = Sc, Y, La, Nd \text{ and } Sm)$ (4)

The total transported amount of LnCl₃ would mainly be determined by the selective carbonthermic reduction chlorination subreaction of the oxides, exchange subreaction between the remained oxides and the produced chlorides and selective complexation subreaction of rare earth chlorides. While the distribution characteristics of LnCl₃ in the receptor tube would mainly be determined by the selective CVT subreactions along the temperature gradients.

The complexation ability of KLnCl₄ (Ln = Sc, Y, La, Nd and Sm) is determined by the Gibbs free

energy of formation($\Delta_{\!f} \, {\it G}^{\,\ominus}\!)$ of complexes KLnCl4 at different temperatures. Mcphail et al[18] and JIANG et al^[2] reviewed the values of $\triangle G^{\ominus}$ for rare earth vapor complexes KLnCl₄ at 1 000 K being - 103 kJ/ mol for $Sc^{[2]}$, - 121 kJ/mol for $Y^{[18]}$, - 129 kJ/mol for La^[18], - 115 kJ/ mol for Nd^[18], and there are no thermodynamic data for Sm until now. So the vapor ratio ofthe complexes pressure 8.71, $p(KYCl_4)/p(KScCl_4) =$ $p (KLaCl_4) / p$ $(KYCl_4) = 2.62$, and $p(KYCl_4)/p(KNdCl_4) =$ 2.06 at 1 300 K. While the vapor pressure ratios are $p(ScAl_2Cl_9)/p(YAl_2Cl_9) = 3.13, p(YAl_2Cl_9)/$ $p(LaAl_3Cl_{12}) = 1.64$, $p(YAl_2Cl_9)/p(NdAl_3Cl_{12}) =$ 1. 83 and $p(YAl_2Cl_9)/p(SmAl_3Cl_{12}) = 1.09$ at 1 300 K calculated from the thermodynamic data of the complexes $LnAl_nCl_{3n+3}$ obtained by $WANG^{[5]}$. So, the difference of formation ability between the vapor complexes KScCl₄, KYCl₄ and KLnCl₄ is larger than $ScAl_nCl_{3n+3}$, YAl_nCl_{3n+3} between $LnAl_nCl_{3n+3}$, though $ScAl_nCl_{3n+3}$ and YAl_nCl_{3n+3} possess different form from $LnAl_nCl_{3n+3}$ within the same temperature range.

The values of pressure ratios mentioned above indicate that the formation ability of vapor complexes KLnCl₄ is in the order of Y > Sc, Y < La and Y > Nd, which is different from the results in Nd> Y in this study. This is not surprising when considering the selective chlorination in SC-CVT. According to the thermochemical data^[19], the equilibrium constant ratio of the carbonthermic reduction-chlorination subreaction (1), $K_1(S_c)/K_1(Y)$, decreases from 1.4× 10^{-4} at 1 300 K to 2. 1 × 10^{-6} at 800 K, and the equilibrium constant ratio of the carbonthermic reduction chlorination subreaction (1) for Y₂O₃ and Ln_2O_3 , $K_1(Y)/K_1(Ln)$, which is equivalent to the equilibrium constant of the exchange subreaction (2), is equal to 1.8×10^{-10} for Y-La, 2.63×10^{-7} for Y-Nd and 1. 24×10^{-5} for Y-Sm at 800 K and 1. $50 \times$ 10^{-6} for Y-La, 1. 22 × 10^{-3} for Y-Nd and 3. 57 × 10⁻³ for Y-Sm at 1 300 K, respectively. That is, the chlorides amount changes as YCl₃ > ScCl₃, YCl₃ < LaCl₃, YCl₃< NdCl₃ and YCl₃< SmCl₃. Our experiment also shows that the selective chlorination of the raw materials with dry Cl₂ gas at 800 K for 2 h may result in an yield of 80% for YCl₃; while Sc₂O₃ is hardly to chlorinate, and the chloride yield ratios are 1. 73 for Lai Y, 2. 40 for Ndi Y and 1. 59 for Smi Y, respectively. This agrees with the results in this study.

Furthermore, the total transported yield shows that the SC-CVT transport ability is Y> Sc, La> Y, Nd> Y and Sm> Y in this study. But the stability order of these gaseous rare earth complexes is also demonstrated both by the SC-CVT transport yield of their pure oxides, Y> Sc, Y> La, Y> Nd and Y>

Sm by previous paper mediated by KLnCl₄^[20], and Sc> Y> La obtained by Adachi et al^[6] from their bir nary oxide mixtures mediated by KLnCl₄ using CVT reaction. The total transported yield ratios between YCl₃ and lanthanide chlorides in the individual oxides are 1.48 for YCl₃: ScCl₃, 6.25 for YCl₃: LaCl₃, 2.01 for YCl3: NdCl3 and 1.55 for YCl3: SmCl3 mediated KLnCl4^[20]. From the binary oxide mixtures, however, it is 128.80 for YCl₃: ScCl₃, while only 1.62 for LaCl₃: YCl₃, 1. 16 for NdCl₃: YCl₃ and 1. 26 for Sm-Cl₃: YCl₃ in this study. This might be explained by the much lower carbonthermic reduction-chlorination ability of Y₂O₃ than the lanthanide oxides in binary systems, which is very important in the selective reaction. The selective reaction results in different SC-CVT characteristics of the binary oxide mixtures from their individual oxides.

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