Degradation of paraquat from contaminated water using green TiO2 nanoparticles synthesized from Coffea arabica L. in photocatalytic process

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ABSTRACT

The TiO2 nanoparticles synthesized from the extract of Coffea arabica L. (or TiO2/C) were used to remove paraquat from contaminated water in heterogeneous photocatalysis process. In this work, the sol-gel process using Coffea arabica L. as the solvent chemical were performed to obtain the TiO2 nano-catalyst. The value of pHpzc of TiO2/C was 2.9 which caused a highly acidic surface of catalyst. The paraquat is effectively removed in alkaline medium due to the adsorption ability of paraquat on the surface of TiO2/C. The paraquat degradation followed the pseudo-first-order model with the apparent rate constants of $5.84 \times 10^{-2}/C_0$, $4.08 \times 10^{-2}/C_0$, and $2.28 \times 10^{-2}/C_0$ min$^{-1}$ for TiO2/C, TiO2, and without TiO2, respectively, under the presence of ultraviolet (UV) and H2O2. The combined TiO2/C with UV and H2O2 was the most efficient process, exhibiting a maximum 66.3% degradation of 50 mg/L over 90 min at pH 10.

INTRODUCTION

Titanium dioxide (TiO2) has proved to be a highly useful and active photocatalytic material to remove or degrade recalcitrant organic contaminants through the chemical oxidation reaction for water and air purification. Due to its physical and chemical properties, the application of TiO2 with ultraviolet (UV) has been widely used, and it has been considered as one type of advanced oxidation processes (Chen et al. 2016). The organic pollutants can be degraded by photocatalytic oxidation in which photo-induced holes in TiO2 oxidize OH$^-$ or water molecules adsorbed on the surface of the particles to produce HO$^-$ and O2$^-$ which subsequently attack adsorbed organic molecules (Hoffman et al. 1995). Photocatalytic reactions have been applied to degrade several pesticides including atrazine, bentazon, monuron, dichlorvos, propyzamide, dicloran and triadimefon (Pelizzetti et al. 1989; Pelizzetti et al. 1993; Pramuro et al. 1993; Minero et al. 1997).

The emerging of ‘green chemistry’ leads to the new synthesizing method of nanoparticles that can improve the physico-chemical properties of the materials. These green nanoparticles are expected to provide higher efficiency in contaminant removal (Humayun et al. 2017). However, few works reported in detail about the kinetics and degradation efficiency of the pollutant using those green nanomaterials, especially the TiO2. In this area, there has also been increasing interest in identifying environmentally friendly materials that are multifunctional and provide good properties of materials. In this work, coffee extract was chosen to be a solvent for TiO2 formation following the green chemistry synthesis method. Caffeine/polyphenols from coffee extracts can form complexes with metal ions in solution and reduce them to the corresponding metals (Nadagouda et al. 2010). The caffeine/polyphenols contain molecules bearing alcoholic functional groups which can be exploited for reduction, as well as stabilization of the nanoparticles. Thus, these chemicals act as reducing agent and stabilizing agent in TiO2 synthesis. The chemicals from coffee extracts are also the capping agent or dispersing agent of TiO2 that can prevent the agglomeration of the nanoparticles and enhance the photocatalytic efficiency of the nanomaterials (Nadagouda et al. 2010; Varma 2012).

This work aims to synthesize the TiO2 using green methods by applying the green solvent obtained from the extract of Coffea arabica L. (or TiO2/C) and applying it in removal of paraquat from aqueous solution. Paraquat (1,1’-dimethyl-4,4’-bipyridinium dichloride) is a widely used commercial herbicide applied in many agricultural activities. This chemical has a high toxicity to mammals and is
recognized as a potent human poison. The U.S. EPA has classified paraquat as a possible carcinogen and has recommended the maximum concentration of paraquat in drinking water at 200 μg/L (Rossi 1997). The removal of paraquat using TiO2 has been published previously (Zahedi et al. 2015). However, the application of green photocatalytic to remove paraquat is not reported elsewhere.

In this work, the details in kinetics and paraquat degradation efficiency were calculated and reported. The paraquat degradation performance using this new type of TiO2/C in comparison with that using the conventional TiO2 was also discussed. This approach addresses several factors that play an important role in paraquat removal enhancement by this new type of green TiO2 nanomaterial.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Materials**

Titanium tetraisopropoxide (TTiP), paraquat, and glacial acetic acid (CH3COOH) were purchased from Aldrich Chemicals, Thailand. Nitric acid (HNO3), sulphuric acid (H2SO4) and sodium hydroxide (NaOH) were obtained from Merck Chemicals, Thailand. All chemicals were used as received for preparing the nanocatalysts and conducting photocatalytic experiments. The 18 MΩ deionised water (H2O) was used for the preparation of all the solutions. All reagents used were of analytical grade and employed as received.

**TiO2 catalyst synthesis**

All experiments were conducted at the Center of Excellence on Environmental Research and Innovation, Naresuan University. The typical sol–gel synthesis of TiO2-loaded nanoparticles was used in this work. The method is as follows: TTIP (4.83 mL), glacial acetic acid (15.35 mL) and water were used in the molar ratio of 1:10:300.16 TTIP was mixed with glacial acetic acid in an ice bath. When this mixture turned to a sol, it was stirred at room temperature to form a gel before undergoing the drying process. After drying at 100 °C for 90 min, the powder was collected and calcined at 600 °C. The nanoparticles obtained from this process were shortly denoted as ‘TiO2’.

For the green TiO2 nanoparticles synthesized from Coffea arabica L., 1 g of coffee was boiled in 50 mL of water and filtered through a filter paper (Whatman, No. 41). Then 5 mL of coffee extract was added to the mixture solution of TTIP and glacial acetic acid. The drying process was the same procedure as above. The obtained TiO2 nanoparticles were denoted as ‘TiO2/C’.

**Adsorption and photocatalytic of paraquat**

Photocatalysis experiments were performed in a batch reactor. The reactor was cylindrical with a volume of 1.1 L made from quartz glass (ACE Glass Co. 7841-06; Vineland, NJ, USA). The UV light source was a 10 W (Philips) with 254 nm wavelength. The initial concentration of paraquat was in the range of 5–50 mg/L, and the catalyst was 0.6 g/L. In this photocatalytic experiment, the paraquat solution was injected into the reactor and treated in batch operation mode with a steady temperature maintained at 25 ± 2 °C throughout the test in an oxygen atmosphere. The liquid was allowed to equilibrate in the dark for 30 min. The paraquat adsorption data were collected. After reaching equilibrium, the reaction was started by switching on the light at t = 0, and the initial concentration of paraquat was designated as C0. The initial pH of solution was 7. It was adjusted to pH 3 by adding 36.8 N H2SO4 and to pH 10 by adding NaOH before the photoreaction experiment unless otherwise specified. At a chosen interval of irradiation time, aliquots of the reaction mixture were withdrawn and filtered through a membrane filter (0.1 μm). Paraquat concentration was detected by a colorimetric method using UV-Vis spectrophotometer (Model Lambda 650, Perkin Elmer, USA) by reducing paraquat to its blue radical. A solution sample in the test tube was added with 0.1% sodium dithionite in 0.1 M sodium hydroxide. The mixture was gently mixed and measured for light absorbance within 1 min. The detection was done at 600 nm wavelength using a spectrophotometer. The paraquat concentrations in the final solution for each experiment were also confirmed by liquid chromatography–mass spectrometry (Model Single Quadrupole LC/MS, Agilent, USA). Total organic carbon (TOC) analysis was done by TOC carbon analyzers (Model TOC-L, Shimadzu, Japan). The Brunauer–Emmett–Teller (BET) surface area for all nanoparticles were done by BET surface area analyzer (Model SA-9600, Horiba, Japan). Analysis of pH at point of zero charge (pHzpc) for all nanoparticles was measured by Zetasizer (Model ZS90, Malvern, UK).

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Adsorption of paraquat onto TiO2 surface**

Preliminary adsorption experiments revealed that in the absence of TiO2, no noticeable change in paraquat
Adsorption of paraquat using TiO₂/C at different pH was evaluated as shown in Figure 1. The adsorption was rapid in the first few minutes and reached equilibrium within 20 min for all pH conditions. The paraquat adsorption was highest at pH 10 with the maximum adsorption capacity of 20 mg/g. At pH 3 and pH 7, the maximum adsorption capacities were 16.8 and 12.2 mg/g, respectively. Our results are in good agreement with previous work. Florencio et al. (2004) reported that the degradation of diquat and paraquat did not take place in acid medium but was pronounced in an alkaline solution. Less adsorption of paraquat on the surface of TiO₂ resulted in low degradation of the chemicals in acidic and moderate degradation in neutral pH medium (Florencio et al. 2004).

The paraquat adsorption of TiO₂/C was compared with that of TiO₂ from chemical-based process as shown in Figure 2. The BET surface areas of TiO₂/C (75.8 m²/g) was slightly changed when compared with TiO₂ (73.2 m²/g). While the values of pHpzc were 2.9 and 4.6 for TiO₂/C, and TiO₂, respectively. The lower the pHpzc causes the higher affinity for cations to adsorb on the surface of nanoparticles. Thus, using the Coffea Arabic L. for TiO₂ synthesis mainly affected on the surface charge rather than the surface area and, consequently, resulting in higher adsorption ability of TiO₂/C over TiO₂. At pH 10, the surface charges of the catalyst were negative, favouring the adsorption of cations like paraquat. This finding also occurred for other types of catalyst such as TiO₂/SBA-15 and Cu-TiO₂/SBA-15 (Sorolla II et al. 2012).

**Paraquat removal by TiO₂/C photocatalytic reaction**

Paraquat degradation using TiO₂/C with UV in different concentrations of paraquat is shown in Figure 3. The removal percentages of paraquat with initial concentrations of 5, 10, 20, 35, and 50 mg/L were 76.3, 52.1, 31.7, 27.9, and 4.3%, respectively. These results clearly indicate that low concentration paraquat solutions were easily degraded by photocatalytic reactions. However, as the initial concentration of paraquat increased (higher than 35 ppm), the TiO₂/C with UV hardly degraded paraquat within 1 h. It was previously reported that the paraquat removal using TiO₂ was feasible for the concentration lower than 30 mg/L since it is chemically stable in nature (Moctezuma et al. 1999). The paraquat solutions remained stable in the temperature range of 20–40 °C and after standing for 23 days (Florencio et al. 2004).

To enhance the paraquat degradation, H₂O₂ was added to the experiment. Solutions of 50 ppm paraquat were irradiated under four different conditions: H₂O₂/UV, TiO₂/C with UV (without H₂O₂), TiO₂/C with UV + H₂O₂, TiO₂ with UV (without H₂O₂), and TiO₂ with UV + H₂O₂ systems. Figure 4 shows the changes in the degree of degradation of aqueous paraquat versus irradiation time. It is noted that there was no paraquat degradation by the direct photolysis with a 10 W UV lamp during 90 min. As shown previously in Figure 3, the 50 mg/L of paraquat was hardly decreased using TiO₂/C with UV irradiation and the removal efficiency was only 4.3%. The paraquat removal increased up to 36.2%
in the presence of 10 mM of H2O2 under UV irradiation (without TiO2/C). Approximately 66.3% of paraquat was degraded within 90 min when 0.6 g/L TiO2/C was added with UV and 10 mM H2O2.

In comparison, the paraquat degradation using TiO2/C was compared with TiO2 in the presence of H2O2 under UV irradiation as shown in the same figure. The TiO2/C provided the higher photocatalytic efficiency for paraquat degradation than the TiO2. The high efficiency in paraquat removal using TiO2/C partially due to the high adsorption of paraquat onto its surface as explained earlier, enhancing more paraquat to react with OH radicals. The least amount of degradation was observed for chemical based TiO2, which has slightly lower surface area, higher value of pHpzc and the lower adsorption of paraquat on its surface as seen in Figure 2. The overall percentages of degradation for paraquat after 90 min of irradiation were 66.3, 48.7, 36.2, and 4% for TiO2/C with UV and 10 mM H2O2, TiO2/C + UV + H2O2, and TiO2/C + UV + H2O2 reaction can generate OH⁻ (Equation (2)), enhancing the rate of photocatalytic reaction. H2O2 was a better electron acceptor than oxygen in other mechanisms (Equation (5)). Thus, the amount of electron recombination decreased, and the paraquat degradation using this photocatalytic process was enhanced as shown in Figure 4.

To describe the kinetics of this paraquat degradation, the Langmuir–Hinshelwood model (or L–H model) was selected as it demonstrated a good fit in photocatalysis process in many previous works (Rajeshwar et al. 2008). The development of this model to obtain a kinetic equation depends on the limiting step (adsorption, surface reaction, or desorption). The L–H model relates the degradation rate (r) to the concentration of the organic reactant (C), as shown in Equation (8).

\[
 r = \frac{-dC}{dt} = \frac{k_r K_{ad} C}{1 + K_{ad} C} 
\]

where \( k_r \) is the rate constant, and \( K_{ad} \) is the adsorption equilibrium constant. When the adsorption is relatively weak, or the concentration of the reactant is low, Equation (8) can be simplified to be the first-order kinetics with an apparent rate constant \( k_{app} \) (Equation (9)):

\[
 \ln \left( \frac{C}{C_0} \right) = -k_{app} t
\]

Plotting \(-\ln(C/C_0)\) vs. reaction time (t) generates a straight line with a slope equal to \( k_{app} \) (Chiou et al. 2008). The apparent rate constants \( (k_{app}) \), initial degradation rates \( (r) \), and correlation coefficients \( (R^2) \) for paraquat degradation using different types of TiO2 are shown in Table 1.

In the system that contained only TiO2, the electron \((e^-)\) and hole \((h^+)\) on the TiO2 surface were generated upon UV irradiation (Equation (1)). Equations (3), (4), and (7) express that the hydroxyl radicals were formed under light excitation when the positive holes reacted with OH⁻ on the TiO2 surface. When the H2O2 was presented in the system, the UV/H2O2 reaction can generate OH⁻ (Equation (2)), enhancing the rate of photocatalytic reaction. H2O2 was a better electron acceptor than oxygen in other mechanisms (Equation (5)). Thus, the amount of electron recombination decreased, and the paraquat degradation using this photocatalytic process was enhanced as shown in Figure 4.

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### Table 1 | Apparent rate constants \( (k_{app}) \), initial degradation rates \( (r) \), and correlation coefficients \( (R^2) \) for paraquat degradation using different types of TiO2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TiO2</th>
<th>Photocatalytic condition</th>
<th>( k_{app} ) (min⁻¹)</th>
<th>( r ) (mm/min)</th>
<th>( R^2 )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TiO2</td>
<td>UV + 10 mM H2O2</td>
<td>0.0228</td>
<td>0.0044</td>
<td>0.9990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TiO2/C</td>
<td>UV + 10 mM H2O2</td>
<td>0.0408</td>
<td>0.0106</td>
<td>0.8591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TiO2/C</td>
<td>UV only</td>
<td>0.0014</td>
<td>0.0004</td>
<td>0.9080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TiO2/C</td>
<td>UV + 10 mM H2O2</td>
<td>0.0584</td>
<td>0.0130</td>
<td>0.9203</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The values are approximate and may vary depending on experimental conditions.*
The initial reaction rate of the TiO$_2$/C with UV + H$_2$O$_2$ ($5.84 \times 10^{-2} \text{ mM/min}$) in paraquat removal was nearly forty-two fold that of the TiO$_2$/C with UV but without the H$_2$O$_2$ system ($1.4 \times 10^{-3} \text{ mM/min}$). This difference is attributed to the contributions of the hydroxyl radicals produced by H$_2$O$_2$ during the TiO$_2$/C with the UV + H$_2$O$_2$ process.

The degradation percentage of paraquat regarding mineralization of TOC in the presence of UV + H$_2$O$_2$, TiO$_2$ with UV and TiO$_2$ with UV + H$_2$O$_2$ was also investigated. The initial concentration of paraquat was 50 ppm with an initial TOC value of 32.08 ppm. The degradation percentage and mineralization to the TOC of paraquat using different processes are shown in Figure 5. All cases were expressed as mean ± standard deviation. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test the significance of the results with $p < 0.05$ and $F = 4.34$ was statistically significant. From the results, mineralization of paraquat for TiO$_2$/C in the presence of UV with H$_2$O$_2$ showed the highest yield. By contrast, the TiO$_2$ from chemical-based synthesis provided lowest TOC percentage removal.

**CONCLUSIONS**

In this work, a green, low-cost, and reproducible of TiO$_2$ nanoparticles were used to remove paraquat from contaminated water in heterogeneous photocatalysis process. The novel ‘green’ nanoparticles were obtained by the sol-gel process using coffee as the solvent chemical. The paraquat degradation using the TiO$_2$/C was conducted in comparison with the TiO$_2$ from chemical-based synthesis. Both TiO$_2$ with UV and TiO$_2$ with UV/H$_2$O$_2$ have been investigated. From overall experiments, the combined TiO$_2$/C with UV and H$_2$O$_2$ was the most effective photocatalyst, exhibiting a maximum 66.3% degradation of 50 mg/L over 90 min at pH 10. The paraquat removal depended on the pH of the medium. The TiO$_2$/C provided the highest adsorption percentage of paraquat due to its dominated negative charge on the surface. The BET surface areas of TiO$_2$/C (75.8 m$^2$/g) was slightly changed when compared with TiO$_2$ (73.2 m$^2$/g); however, the values of pH$_{pzc}$ of both materials were pronouncedly different. The pH$_{pzc}$ of TiO$_2$ were 2.9, and 4.6 for TiO$_2$/C, and TiO$_2$, respectively. Thus, the surface charge of particles played a major role for the adsorption of positive ions of paraquat in this work. The high adsorption of paraquat on TiO$_2$/C led to high efficiency in paraquat removal. The Langmuir–Hinshelwood model could well describe the photodegradation of paraquat during all three catalytic oxidation processes. The apparent first-order rate constants were $5.84 \times 10^{-2}$, $4.08 \times 10^{-2}$, and $2.28 \times 10^{-2}$ min$^{-1}$ for TiO$_2$/C, TiO$_2$, and UV, respectively, under the presence of UV and H$_2$O$_2$. Results from this work offer the benefit of using the green nanoparticles (such as TiO$_2$/C) in pollutant removal for water and wastewater treatment.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

This research received funding support from National Research Council, Thailand (NRCT) through Naresuan University under grant No. R2562B021 and Thailand Research Fund under grant No. BRG6180009.
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First received 26 August 2018; accepted in revised form 26 November 2018. Available online 6 December 2018