

THERMAL RESPONSE OF HEAT-RESISTANT LAYER WITH PYROLYSIS

by

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A model is developed for analyzing the thermal response of the heat-resistant layer composed of high silica fiber reinforced phenolic matrix composites(SiO_2/P) and aluminum, in which pyrolysis and phase transitions are exsited, such as melt, vaporization and sublimation. Based on this model, the thermal response of the heat-resistant layer with different SiO_2/P thickness is calculated under a heat flux by using FORTRAN codes. As indicated in the results, the slope of temperature gets a sudden decline at the pyrolysis interface, which is due to the latent heat of pyrolysis; the thickness of heat-resistant layer has little influence on the heating-surface temperature, however, the back temperature may increase with the decreasing thickness; and the thermal conductivity of carbonized layer is very important to thermal response.

Keywords: *heat-resistant layer; pyrolysis; phase transition; thermal response.*

1. Introduction

When a spacecraft flies in hypersonic speed, the kinetic energy is transferred into heat in ways of convection and radiation. Although being no more than one percent of the whole kinetic energy, the heat is still large enough to destroy the spacecraft. Generally, there are two approaches for protecting the spacecraft. One way is to optimize the flight trajectory so as to reduce the aerodynamic heating, and the other way is to exhaust the heat flux which is known as the thermal protection scheme [1].

Nowadays, three thermal protection schemes—heat sink, radiation and ablation—can be used in heat design. However, with the increasing demand on the flying speed, a single scheme usually cannot fulfill the design requirements and the three thermal protection schemes should be used synthetically, so the actual thermal protection will be a complex process with thermal conduction, radiation, pyrolysis and phase transition. On studies of the pyrolysis and phase transition, many achievements have been published, such as Dejan [2] studied thermal and aerodynamic performances of supersonic motion; Alhama and Campo [3] analyzed the rapid temperature changes in the composite nozzle wall by experimental methods; Huang and Xu [4-6] presented a combined model for the flow past a

blunt ablator and investigated the nonlinear attributes of ablation and thermal contact resistance; Tong [7] gave a qualitative model for simulating the tile gap heating on space shuttle; Mohammed *et al.* [8] calculated the transient response for different types of erodible surface thermocouples by using the finite element method; Anthony [9] studied the liquid bio-oil product from fast pyrolysis in transportable fuel; Goran *et al.* [10] analyzed the influence of ambience temperature and operational-constructive parameters on landfill gas generation; Zheng [11] studied flow and heat transfer of a power-law fluid over an unsteadily stretched surface by using a modified homotopy perturbation method; Chen and Guo [12] investigated the entransy theory and its application to heat transfer in porous media; Enzo *et al.* [13] studied the olive pits pyrolysis in a rotary kiln plant.

When the spacecraft is suffering high heat flux, pyrolysis and phase transitions result in the pyrolysis and phase transitions surfaces moving continuously, in another word, the ablation process corresponds to different thermal conduction model in different stages which are ignored in the classical ablation model. In this paper, the authors develop the ablation model for analyzing the thermal conduction of the heat-resistant layer, which is composed of aluminum and high silica fiber reinforced by phenolic matrix composites (SiO₂/P) with pyrolysis and phase transitions, such as melt, vaporization and sublimation, then calculate the thermal response of the heat-resistant layer with different SiO₂/P thickness, which may be helpful to the spacecraft design.

2. Model

SiO₂/P is a kind of reinforced composites with excellent attributes in heat insulation and ablation, which can be used as self-sudation material in aerospace field. As the heat flux along normal direction is far larger than that along other directions, the numerical model can be simplified as a 1D model shown in figure1. During the flight, the wall surface ($x=0$) is heated continuously by the air with high compression ratio. The heat flux will be transferred along x axis and the ultimate target of thermal protection scheme is to assure the temperature of back surface ($x=x_3$) varies in a safe interval, so relative instruments can work safely under the cold structure layer; the phenolic resin begins to pyrolyze at 1020[K] and the generated carbonized layer is constituted by carbon skeleton and silica in solid phase. Pyrolysis gas flows through the carbonized layer and takes some heat away. When the temperature increases to 2053[K], the solid silica begins to melt. When the temperature reaches 2500[K], the liquid silica boils and leaves the porous carbonized layer with low strength and may be easily washed away.

Before simulations are carried out, three assumptions are presented as

- (1) The oxidation of carbon is neglected, which means, $x_1=0$
- (2) Thermo-physical attributes of silica can be seen as invariant, that is

$$\rho_{\text{SiO}_2(L)} = \rho_{\text{SiO}_2(S)}, \quad k_{\text{SiO}_2(L)} = k_{\text{SiO}_2(S)}, \quad c_{p,\text{SiO}_2(L)} = c_{p,\text{SiO}_2(S)} \quad (1)$$

- (3) The density and specific heat of carbonized layer are

$$\rho_{\text{SiO}_2/C} = \rho_{\text{SiO}_2} \phi_{\text{SiO}_2} + \rho_C \phi_C \quad (2)$$

$$c_{p,\text{SiO}_2/C} = c_{p,\text{SiO}_2} \phi_{\text{SiO}_2} + c_{p,C} \phi_C \quad (3)$$

In the thermal response model shown in figure 1, there are five possible cases which

are:

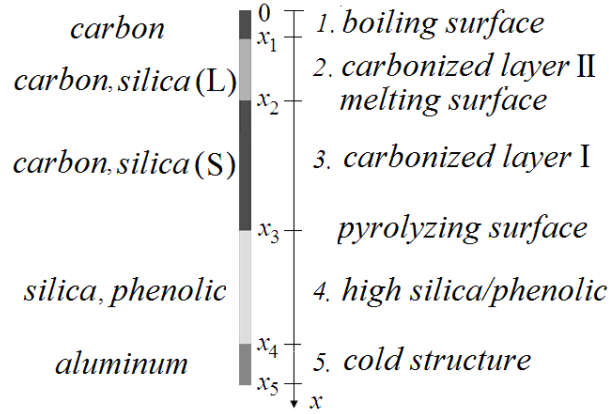


Figure 1. Thermal response of the heat resistant layer.

Case 1: while $T_{\max} \leq 1020[\text{K}]$, the model is constituted by aluminum and SiO_2/P , namely, $x_2 = x_3 = 0$.

The heat conduction equation in the two layers can be written as

$$\rho_{\text{Al}} c_{p,\text{Al}} \frac{\partial T}{\partial t} = k_{\text{Al}} \frac{\partial^2 T}{\partial x^2} \quad (4)$$

and

$$\rho_{\text{SiO}_2/\text{P}} c_{p,\text{SiO}_2/\text{P}} \frac{\partial T}{\partial t} = k_{\text{SiO}_2/\text{P}} \frac{\partial^2 T}{\partial x^2} \quad (5)$$

Case 2: while $1020[\text{K}] < T_{\max} \leq 2053[\text{K}]$ and $T_{\min} \leq 1020[\text{K}]$, the model adopts three layers: aluminum, SiO_2/P and the carbonized layer I, namely, $x_2 = 0$.

The heat conduction equation in the three layers can be

$$\rho_{\text{Al}} c_{p,\text{Al}} \frac{\partial T}{\partial t} = k_{\text{Al}} \frac{\partial^2 T}{\partial x^2} \quad (6)$$

$$\rho_{\text{SiO}_2/\text{P}} c_{p,\text{SiO}_2/\text{P}} \frac{\partial T}{\partial t} = k_{\text{SiO}_2/\text{P}} \frac{\partial^2 T}{\partial x^2} \quad (7)$$

$$\rho_{\text{SiO}_2(\text{S})/\text{C}} c_{p,\text{SiO}_2(\text{S})/\text{C}} \frac{\partial T}{\partial t} = k_{\text{SiO}_2(\text{S})/\text{C}} \frac{\partial^2 T}{\partial x^2} + \dot{m}_p c_{p,g} \frac{\partial T}{\partial x} \quad (8)$$

Case 3: while $2053[\text{K}] < T_{\max} \leq 2500[\text{K}]$ and $T_{\min} \leq 1020[\text{K}]$, the model is constituted by aluminum, SiO_2/P , the carbonized layers I and II, namely,

The heat conduction equation in these four layer are

$$\rho_{\text{Al}} c_{p,\text{Al}} \frac{\partial T}{\partial t} = k_{\text{Al}} \frac{\partial^2 T}{\partial x^2} \quad (9)$$

$$\rho_{\text{SiO}_2/\text{P}} c_{p,\text{SiO}_2/\text{P}} \frac{\partial T}{\partial t} = k_{\text{SiO}_2/\text{P}} \frac{\partial^2 T}{\partial x^2} \quad (10)$$

$$\rho_{\text{SiO}_2(\text{S})/\text{C}} c_{p,\text{SiO}_2(\text{S})/\text{C}} \frac{\partial T}{\partial t} = k_{\text{SiO}_2(\text{S})/\text{C}} \frac{\partial^2 T}{\partial x^2} + \dot{m}_p c_{p,g} \frac{\partial T}{\partial x} \quad (11)$$

$$\rho_{\text{SiO}_2(\text{L})/\text{C}} c_{p,\text{SiO}_2(\text{L})/\text{C}} \frac{\partial T}{\partial t} = k_{\text{SiO}_2(\text{L})/\text{C}} \frac{\partial^2 T}{\partial x^2} + \dot{m}_p c_{p,g} \frac{\partial T}{\partial x} + \dot{m}_r c_{p,\text{SiO}_2(\text{L})} \frac{\partial T}{\partial x} \quad (12)$$

Case 4: while $T_{\max} > 2500[\text{K}]$ and $T_{\min} > 1020[\text{K}]$, the model is make up of aluminum, carbonized layer I and II, namely $x_3 = x_4 = x_5$.

Case 5: while $T_{\min} > 2500[\text{K}]$, the model contains two layers: aluminum and the carbonized layer II, namely $x_2 = x_3 = x_4 = x_5$.

In cases 4 and 5, aluminum must have been molten and the support structure fails, when SiO₂/P is completely pyrolyzed, the calculation makes no sense.

The boundary conditions on wall surface, back surface and the interfaces among layers can be written as

$$-k_{\text{SiO}_2(L)/C} \frac{\partial T(x,t)}{\partial x} = q_w - \varepsilon \sigma T_w^4 \quad (x=0) \quad (13)$$

$$-k_{\text{SiO}_2(S)/C} \frac{\partial T(x,t)}{\partial x} = -k_{\text{SiO}_2(L)/C} \frac{\partial T(x,t)}{\partial x} + \dot{m}_r \Delta H_r \quad (x=x_2) \quad (14)$$

$$-k_{\text{SiO}_2/P} \frac{\partial T(x,t)}{\partial x} = -k_{\text{SiO}_2(S)/C} \frac{\partial T(x,t)}{\partial x} + \dot{m}_p \Delta H_p \quad (x=x_3) \quad (15)$$

$$-k_{\text{SiO}_2/P} \frac{\partial T(x,t)}{\partial x} = -k_{\text{Al}} \frac{\partial T(x,t)}{\partial x} \quad (x=x_4) \quad (16)$$

$$\frac{\partial T(x,t)}{\partial x} = 0 \quad (x=x_5) \quad (17)$$

The heat conduction equations can be solved by using the pursuit method in a difference scheme. Take case 3 for example, the discrete scheme of Eq. (12) can be written as

$$\begin{aligned} \rho_{\text{SiO}_2(L)/C} c_{p,\text{SiO}_2(L)/C} \frac{T_j^{(n)} - T_j^{(n-1)}}{\Delta t} = k_{\text{SiO}_2(L)/C} \frac{T_{j+1}^{(n)} - 2T_j^{(n)} + T_{j-1}^{(n)}}{(\Delta x_2)^2} + \dot{m}_p c_{p,g} \frac{T_j^{(n)} - T_j^{(n-1)}}{\Delta x_2} \\ + \dot{m}_r c_{p,\text{SiO}_2(L)} \frac{T_j^{(n)} - T_j^{(n-1)}}{\Delta x_2} \end{aligned} \quad (18)$$

which is

$$(1 + 2r_2)T_j^{(n)} = (r_2 + z_2)T_{j+1}^{(n)} + (r_2 - z_2)T_{j-1}^{(n)} + T_j^{(n-1)} \quad (19)$$

where $r_2 = \frac{k_{\text{SiO}_2(L)/C} \Delta t}{\rho_{\text{SiO}_2(L)/C} c_{p,\text{SiO}_2(L)/C} (\Delta x_2)^2}$ and $z_2 = \frac{(\dot{m}_p c_{p,g} + \dot{m}_r c_{p,\text{SiO}_2(L)}) \Delta t}{2\rho_{\text{SiO}_2(L)/C} c_{p,\text{SiO}_2(L)/C} \Delta x_2}$.

Denote $A_2 = 1 + 2r_2$, $B_2 = r_2 + z_2$, $C_2 = r_2 - z_2$, $D_2 = T_j^{(n-1)}$, and Eq. (19) becomes

$$A_2 T_j^{(n)} = B_2 T_{j+1}^{(n)} + C_2 T_{j-1}^{(n)} + D_2 \quad (20)$$

Similarly, discrete scheme of other layers can be written as

$$A_i T_j^{(n)} = B_i T_{j+1}^{(n)} + C_i T_{j-1}^{(n)} + D_i \quad (i=2,3,4,5) \quad (21)$$

Eliminate $T_{j+1}^{(n)}$, Eq. (21) becomes

$$T_{j-1}^{(n)} = P_{j-1}^{(n)} T_j^{(n)} + Q_{j-1}^{(n)} \quad (22)$$

where

$$P_j^{(n)} = \frac{B_j^{(n)}}{A_j^{(n)} - C_j^{(n)} P_{j-1}^{(n)}}, \quad Q_j^{(n)} = \frac{D_j^{(n)} + C_j^{(n)} Q_{j-1}^{(n)}}{A_j^{(n)} - C_j^{(n)} P_{j-1}^{(n)}} \quad (23)$$

From the thermal insulation Eq. (17) we know $T_1^{(n)} = T_2^{(n)}$, that is $P_1^{(n)} = 1$ and $Q_1^{(n)} = 0$. Denoting the numbers of elements in each layer are respectively M_2 , M_3 , M_4 and M_5 , and the boundary Eq. (16) becomes

$$-k_{\text{Al}} \frac{T_{M5+1}^n - T_{M5}^n}{\Delta x_5} = -k_{\text{SiO}_2/P} \frac{T_{M5+2}^n - T_{M5+1}^n}{\Delta x_4} \quad (24)$$

Put the equation

$$T_{M_5}^{(n)} = P_{M_5}^{(n)} T_{M_5+1}^{(n)} + Q_{M_5}^{(n)} \quad (25)$$

into Eq. (24), we get

$$T_{M_5+1}^{(n)} = P_{M_5+1}^{(n)} T_{M_5+2}^{(n)} + Q_{M_5+1}^{(n)} \quad (26)$$

$$\text{where } P_{M_5+1}^{(n)} = \frac{1}{\frac{k_{Al} \Delta x_4}{k_{SiO_2/P} \Delta x_5} (1 - P_{M_5}^{(n)}) + 1}, \quad Q_{M_5+1}^{(n)} = \frac{Q_{M_5}^{(n)}}{(1 - P_{M_5}^{(n)}) + \frac{k_{SiO_2/P} \Delta x_5}{k_{Al} \Delta x_4}}.$$

Similarly, we obtain

$$P_{M_5+M_4+1}^{(n)} = \frac{1}{\frac{k_{SiO_2/P} \Delta x_3}{k_{SiO_2(S)/C} \Delta x_4} (1 - P_{M_5+M_4}^{(n)}) + 1}, \quad Q_{M_5+M_4+1}^{(n)} = \frac{Q_{M_5+M_4}^{(n)} - \dot{m}_p \Delta H_p}{(1 - P_{M_5+M_4}^{(n)}) + \frac{k_{SiO_2(S)/C} \Delta x_4}{k_{SiO_2/P} \Delta x_3}},$$

$$P_{M_5+M_4+M_3+1}^{(n)} = \frac{1}{\frac{k_{SiO_2(S)/C} \Delta x_2}{k_{SiO_2(L)/C} \Delta x_3} (1 - P_{M_5+M_4+M_3}^{(n)}) + 1}, \quad Q_{M_5+M_4+M_3+1}^{(n)} = \frac{Q_{M_5+M_4+M_3}^{(n)} - \dot{m}_r \Delta H_r}{(1 - P_{M_5+M_4+M_3}^{(n)}) + \frac{k_{SiO_2(L)/C} \Delta x_3}{k_{SiO_2(S)/C} \Delta x_2}}.$$

From Eq. (13), we have

$$-k_{SiO_2(L)/C} \frac{T_{M_5+M_4+M_3+M_2+1} - T_{M_5+M_4+M_3+M_2}}{\Delta x_2} = q_w - \varepsilon \sigma T_{M_5+M_4+M_3+M_2+1}^4 \quad (27)$$

put $T_{M_5+M_4+M_3+M_2}^{(n)} = P_{M_5+M_4+M_3+M_2}^{(n)} T_{M_5+M_4+M_3+M_2+1}^{(n)} + Q_{M_5+M_4+M_3+M_2}^{(n)}$ into Eq. (27), and we get

$$-k_{SiO_2(L)/C} \frac{(1 - P_{M_5+M_4+M_3+M_2}^{(n)}) T_{M_5+M_4+M_3+M_2+1}^{(n)} - Q_{M_5+M_4+M_3+M_2}^{(n)}}{\Delta x_2} = q_w - \varepsilon \sigma T_{M_5+M_4+M_3+M_2+1}^4 \quad (28)$$

By solving the nonlinear Eq. (28), we can obtain $T_{M_5+M_4+M_3+M_2+1}^{(n)}$, and then the thermal response of the whole heat resistant layer can be calculated by using Thomas method based on Gauss elimination. As is shown in figure 2, the boundary is moving continuously, the grid should be re-divided before a new round of calculation, and the temperature on a new grid node may be calculated from the old grid by interpolation.

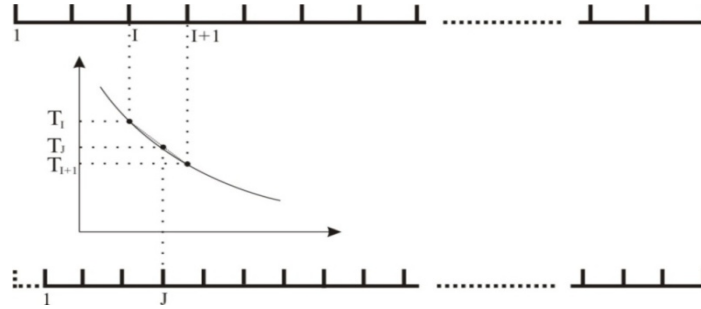


Figure 2. Re-division of ablation grids and interpolation of nodes data.

3. An example

The radiation coefficient takes 0.8 and the initial temperature is 300[K]. The aluminum layer is 4mm thick, $\rho_{Al} = 2643[\text{kgm}^{-3}]$, $k_{Al} = 249.1[\text{Wm}^{-1}\text{K}^{-1}]$, $c_{p,Al} = 1.089[\text{kJkg}^{-1}\text{K}^{-1}]$ and $\alpha_{Al} = 0.865 \times 10^{-6}[\text{m}^2\text{s}^{-1}]$; the thickness of SiO_2/P layer are 21[mm], 23[mm] or 25[mm], respectively; $\rho_{\text{SiO}_2/P} = 1700[\text{kgm}^{-3}]$, $k_{\text{SiO}_2/P} = 0.65[\text{Wm}^{-1}\text{K}^{-1}]$, $c_{p,\text{SiO}_2/P} = 1.20[\text{kJkg}^{-1}\text{K}^{-1}]$ and $\alpha_{\text{SiO}_2/P} = 0.319 \times 10^{-6}[\text{m}^2\text{s}^{-1}]$.

In figure 3, we plot a curve of aerodynamic heat flux exerted on a flying spacecraft for 200[s] according to our flying experiment, which is relevant to some military need in China. From the measured radiation heat flux shown in figure 4, we inverse the development of actual heating-surface temperature and plot it in figure 5. The actual thermal conductivity of carbonized layer is very difficult to obtain, however, it may have a great influence on heating-surface temperature, back temperature, distribution of temperature and heat flux, so we solve the heat conduction equation with different assumed thermal conductivity, and then compare the calculated heating-surface temperature with the experimental data in order to find the most possible thermal conductivity.

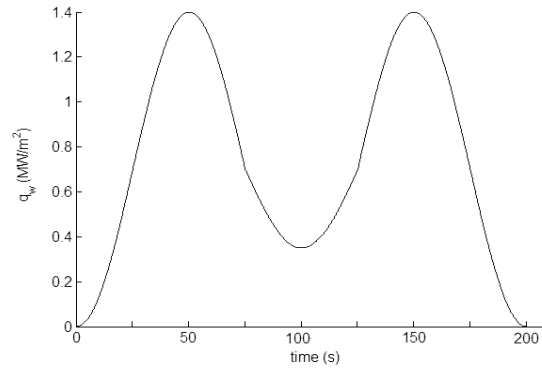


Figure 3. Aerodynamic heat flux on the supersonic spacecraft.

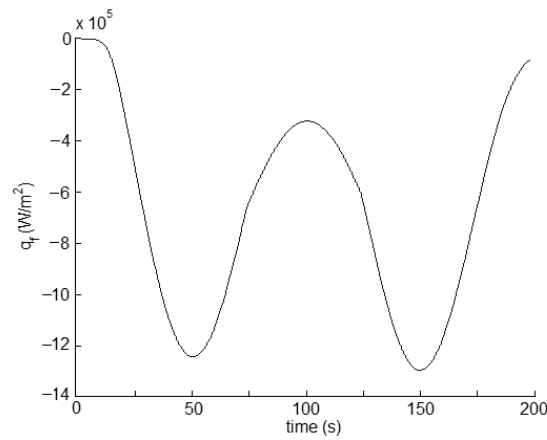


Figure 4. Radiation heat flux on spacecraft surface.

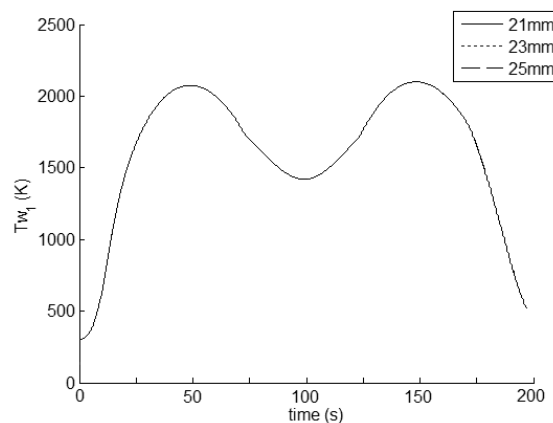


Figure 5. Heating-surface temperature inversed from radiation heat flux.

The temperature calculated under different k_{cl} is shown in figure 6: the larger k_{cl} corresponding to the higher back temperature and the thicker carbonized layer. When the thermal conductivity of SiO₂/P is smaller and k_{cl} is relatively larger, the heat accumulates at the interface between SiO₂/P and carbonized layer so that the pyrolysis surface put forward very fast and the back temperature be much higher; otherwise, when k_{cl} is relatively smaller, the back temperature will be lower and the carbonized layer is thinner. So the thermal conductivity is very important.

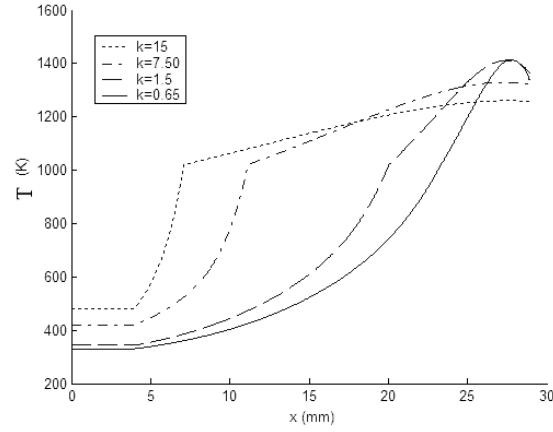


Figure 6. k_{cl} influence on temperature.

The heating-surface temperature and back temperature calculated with different k_{cl} ($0.75[\text{Wm}^{-1}\text{K}^{-1}]$, $3.0[\text{Wm}^{-1}\text{K}^{-1}]$, $4.5[\text{Wm}^{-1}\text{K}^{-1}]$ and $7.5[\text{Wm}^{-1}\text{K}^{-1}]$) are shown in figure 7 and figure 8, respectively. With a comparison between the development of heating-surface temperature and the experimental one shown in figure 5, we known the two curves get the best match at $k_{cl} = 0.75[\text{Wm}^{-1}\text{K}^{-1}]$, which is close to the true data.

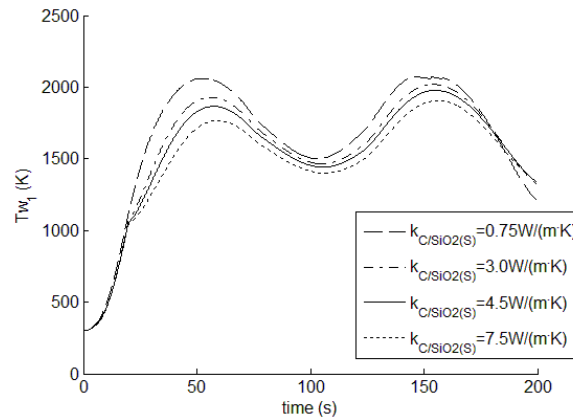


Figure 7. Heating-surface temperature calculated from different k_{cl} ($l_{\text{SiO}_2/\text{P}} = 21[\text{mm}]$).

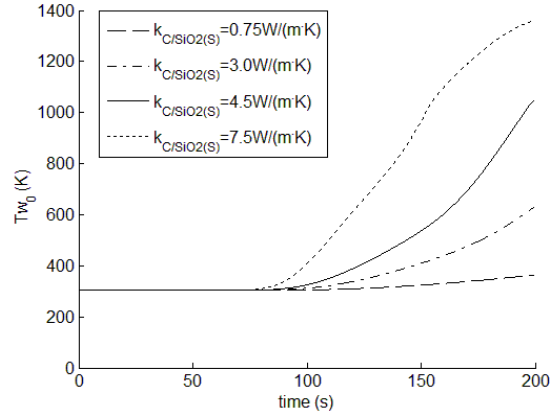


Figure 8. Back temperature calculated from different k_{cl} ($l_{\text{SiO}_2/\text{P}} = 21[\text{mm}]$).

When $k_{cl} = 0.75[\text{Wm}^{-1}\text{K}^{-1}]$ and SiO_2/P layer is $21[\text{mm}]$, $23[\text{mm}]$ or $25[\text{mm}]$ thick, we calculate the development of heating-surface and back temperature. As is shown in figure 9, there is little difference on the heating-surface temperature, which agrees with the experimental case shown in figure 5; As can be seen in figure 10, the maximum back temperature $372[\text{K}]$ corresponds to the least thickness of $l_{\text{SiO}_2/\text{P}}$, whereas the minimum back temperature $323[\text{K}]$ corresponds to the largest $l_{\text{SiO}_2/\text{P}}$.

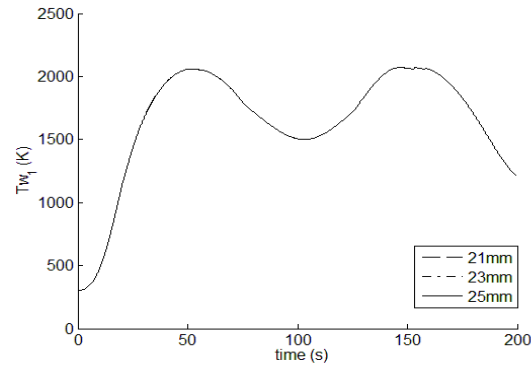


Figure 9. Development of heating-surface temperature with different $l_{\text{SiO}_2/\text{P}}$, ($k_{cl}=0.75$ $[\text{Wm}^{-1}\text{k}^{-1}]$).

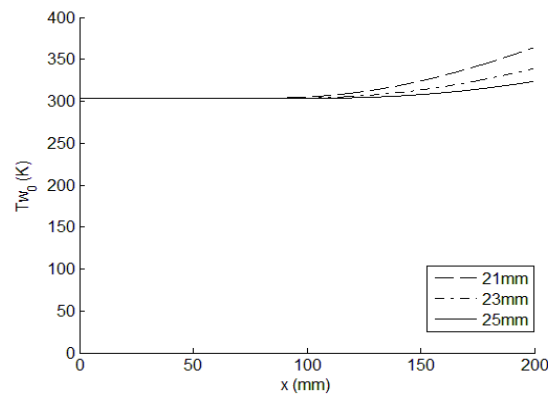


Figure 10. Development of back temperature with different $l_{\text{SiO}_2/\text{P}}$, ($k_{cl}=0.75[\text{Wm}^{-1}\text{k}^{-1}]$).

The distributions of temperature and heat flux at $t = 200[s]$ are shown in figure 11 and figure 12 respectively. The temperature is relatively uniform in the aluminum layer, as the thermal conductivity of aluminum is much larger than SiO_2/P ; the slope of temperature gets a sudden decline at $T = 1020[\text{K}]$, which is due to the heat absorption of pyrolysis, and the maximum heat flux appears at the pyrolytic interface $T = 1020[\text{K}]$ (shown in figure 12).

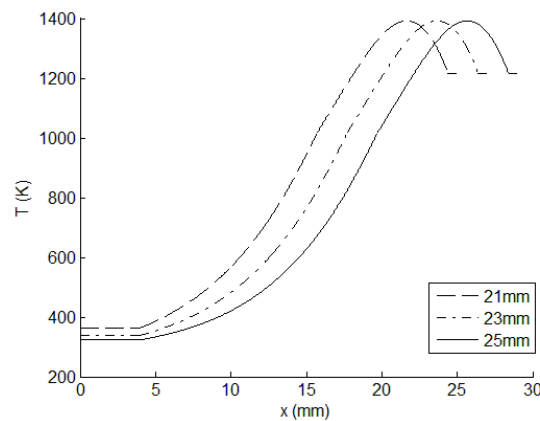


Figure 11. Temperature at $T = 200[s]$ of different $l_{\text{SiO}_2/\text{P}}$ ($k_{cl} = 0.75[\text{Wm}^{-1}\text{K}^{-1}]$).

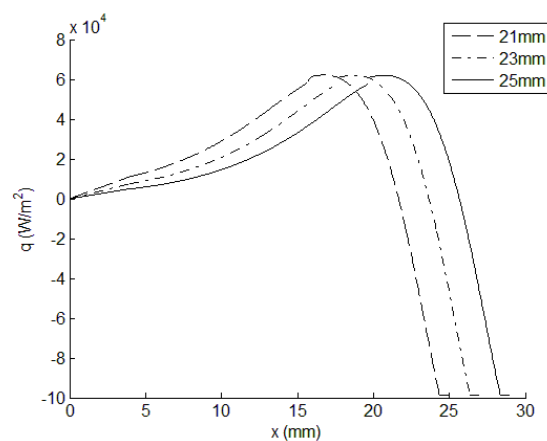


Figure 12. Heat flux at $T = 200[s]$ of different $l_{\text{SiO}_2/\text{P}}$ ($k_{cl} = 0.75[\text{Wm}^{-1}\text{K}^{-1}]$).

4. Conclusions

In this paper, we present a model for studying thermal response of the heat resistant layer which is constituted by aluminum and SiO_2/P . In this model, pyrolysis is considered as well as phase transitions such as melt, vaporization and sublimation. On the basis of this model, we calculate the thermal response of aluminum layer and different thickness of SiO_2/P under an experimental heat flux. The slope of temperature gets a sudden decline at pyrolysis interface, which is due to the latent heat of pyrolysis; the thickness of heat-resistant layer has little influence on heating-surface temperature, however, with the thickness decreasing, the back temperature may increase; the thermal conductivity of carbonized layer has a great influence on thermal response. This study may afford some advice to spacecraft design.

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Nomenclature

ρ : Density, $[\text{kgm}^{-3}]$;	\dot{m}_p : Mass change rate of pyrolysis, $[m / s]$;
k : Thermal conductivity, $[\text{Wm}^{-1}\text{K}^{-1}]$;	\dot{m}_r : Mass change rate of melt, $[m / s]$;
c_p : Specific heat, $[\text{kJkg}^{-1}\text{K}^{-1}]$;	ΔH_p : Latent heat of pyrolysis, $[\text{MJ} \cdot \text{kg}^{-1}]$;
α : Thermal diffusivity, $[m^2 s^{-1}]$;	ΔH_r : Latent heat of melt, $[\text{MJ} \cdot \text{kg}^{-1}]$;
l : Thickness, $[m]$;	ϕ : The volume fraction, $[-]$
k_{cl} : Thermal conductivity of carbonized layer, $[\text{Wm}^{-1}\text{K}^{-1}]$;	

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