RESEARCH ON COMBUSTION VISUALIZATION OF COAL-FIRED BOILERS BASED ON THERMAL IMAGING TECHNOLOGY

by

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Original scientific paper https://doi.org/10.2298/TSCI230627044Z

At present, there's a lack of combustion visualization in the combustion control of heating boilers. To understand the combustion of coal in the furnace, only experienced workers can observe it through visual inspection. Using infrared thermal imaging technology to monitor the combustion can realize combustion visualization. This paper analyzed and solved two problems: the installation position and number of infrared cameras, and the infeasible of using infrared cameras observing the combustion condition in the furnace through heat-resistant glass. Monitored parameters such as oxygen content, furnace temperature and smoke exhaust temperature, and monitored the concentration of PM, NO_x , and SO_2 in the main atmospheric pollutants in the flue gas. After calculation, the air leakage coefficient when the inspection doors are opened for observation is 0.04. This value still includes the sum of air leakage from coal hopper, furnace door, grate side seal, peep holes and other parts. The monitored average emission concentration of PM decreased by 16.28%, from which we can concluded that the use of thermal imaging technology to monitor the combustion in the furnace is conducive to emission reduction. The application of thermal imaging technology implementation of coalfired boiler combustion visualization is feasible.

Key words: thermal imaging technology, coal-fired boiler; emission reduction, combustion visualization, oxygen content, furnace temperature, exhaust gas temperature

Introduction

In addition power plant, coal-fired systems are also widely used in other industrial boilers, and heating boilers are a common one. The combustion in a normal and stable state can make the boiler run efficiently, which is conducive to reducing pollutant emissions and energy consumption [1, 2]. The geometry, color, brightness, flicker, temperature, *etc.* of the flame reflect the state of fuel combustion [3-6], Using digital visualization technology to monitor the characteristics of the flame in the boiler furnace, predict the combustion status of the boiler, and make corresponding adjustments to make the boiler in a good running status is the main direction of boiler combustion control [7-10]. Power plant boilers generally adopt circulating fluidized bed combustion mode with high combustion intensity, while common heating boilers such as chain furnaces and reciprocating furnaces adopt layer combustion mode, and the combustion intensity is relatively low. Therefore, infrared thermal cameras can be used to monitor the combustion in the boiler furnace [11, 12].

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At present, infrared thermal imaging technology has been applied to boilers such as power station boilers [13], and coal and biomass composite combustion boilers [14]. It has been applied to thermal equipment, pressure vessels and pipe-lines [15], and power equipment troubleshooting [16, 17]. Even thermal engineering of building exterior walls Defect and energy-saving detection have applications [18]. Due to the higher furnace temperature of the boiler, expensive cooling cameras are used to prevent lens damage to the power plant boiler, and the troubleshooting of thermal equipment and other faults can be completed by using ordinary infrared thermal cameras. Compared with power plant boilers, the investment in heating boilers is much less, so the investment in its subsidiary facilities is not expected to be much. How to get good results with less investment in the process of combustion visualization is the difficulty of this research.

In the past decade, the use of infrared thermal imaging technology in coal-fired boilers has mainly focused on the visual measurement of the flame temperature and emissivity of utility boilers [19-21]. The two-color pyrometry method for measuring the combustion characteristics of single-particle coal has also been reported [22]. Sun *et al.* [23] proposed a visualization method for quantitatively calculating carbon combustion energy in a packed bed. However, there are few related studies for monitoring the combustion situation of heating boilers and realizing the visualization of combustion. By using infrared thermal imaging technology, the combustion of coal in the furnace is transmitted in the form of thermal images to the computer screen in the control room, allowing management personnel to observe the combustion situation in the furnace at any time and make timely adjustments. It cannot only improve the efficiency of boilers, but also reduce coal consumption. It is also possible to observe the operation of other facilities in the furnace through thermal imaging, which facilitates timely detection of hidden dangers and corresponding countermeasures.

This paper focuses on the design, constructing and verification of the combustion visualization system. The novelty of the research lies in the cost-effectiveness of the system, using ordinary infrared thermal cameras instead of expensive high-speed cameras. Firstly, a hand-held infrared imager is used to photograph the thermal images before, during and after the boiler furnace to determine the installation position and number of infrared thermal cameras. Then according to the number and location determined in the previous step, the infrared thermal cameras are installed and connected with the computer in monitoring room to monitor the combustion in the furnace. Oxygen content, furnace temperature, smoke exhaust temperature and emission concentration of major pollutants such as particulate matter, NO_x , SO_2 are monitored to verify the effect of the experimental system. The goal of the research is to determine whether it is feasible to apply infrared thermal imaging technology implementation of heating boiler combustion visualization, and to make it possible to realize full automation of heating boiler combustion control in the future.

Experimental system construction

At present, the combustion control of heating boilers mainly measures parameters such as furnace temperature, supply and return water temperature and pressure, exhaust gas temperature, furnace pressure, oxygen content, *etc.* Through the measured parameters and experienced workers to observe the flame state, and then manually adjust the drum, air diversion, and fuel filling [24, 25]. The missing link in the boiler combustion control process is to visualize the actual state of the fuel combustion. The furnace temperature of coal-fired boilers for heating is generally above 1000 °C. The contact temperature measuring elements are easily damaged, and can only measure the temperature at a single point, which cannot directly observe

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the combustion of fuel in the furnace. Using infrared thermal imaging technology to monitor the combustion inside the furnace not only can monitor the combustion of fuel in real time, but also the temperature distribution inside the furnace can be observed through thermal imaging. From which can adjust the boiler load, air and fuel supply, so that to solve the important link missing in the visualization of combustion conditions and realize the visualization of boiler combustion control.

Problems that the system needs to solve

The system needs to solve two problems: the installation location and quantity of infrared thermal cameras. It is not feasible to observe the combustion situation inside the furnace through heat-resistant glass.

The installation position and number of infrared thermal cameras

The combustion conditions of the front, middle and back parts of the boiler furnace were observed with a thermal imager. Figure 1 is an infrared thermal image of combustion at the front of the furnace of the boiler. In this imaging, the coal is burning vigorously, the flame is high, and the whole image is very bright. Figure 2 is an infrared thermal image of coal burning on the grate in the middle of the furnace. In which, the combustion is not as intense as the front, and the flame height is also lower, but the fire bed is still bright. Generally, coal burns well in the front and middle of the furnace. Because we are most concerned about whether the coal is completely burned, we also have observed the rear of the furnace, which is the tail of the grate, where we can see clearly whether the coal is completely burnt. Figure 3 is an infrared thermal image of coal burning on the grate at the back of the boiler furnace. The bright part in the figure is the burning coal, and the blue-black part is the burnt coal. From the figure, we can see the combustion condition of the boiler, there is burning coal falling off the grate. The cinders falling from the grate of the completely burned coal are blue-black, and no red flame can be seen. On the contrary, the combustion is incomplete. As a result of the aforementioned analyses, an infrared camera installed at the back of the furnace can effectively monitor whether the coal is burning adequately.



Figure 1. Thermal image of the furnace front

Figure 2. Thermal image of the furnace middle

Figure 3. Thermal image of the furnace rear

Install one or two? Figures 4 and 5 are infrared thermal images taken from both sides of the boiler, respectively. From fig. 4, you can see that the coal near the shooting position has burned out, and the flame opposite the shooting position is bright and the coal is burning. Looking at the opposite side from fig. 5, it is not clear that the coal has burned out. Similarly, the burning situation near the shooting position in fig. 5 is not the same as that seen in fig. 4. If there is coal being burned in the middle of the grate width direction as in fig. 3, the combustion on the opposite side of the grate cannot be seen. It has been concluded from extensive practical

observation that it is necessary to install one on each side of the boiler to give a complete view of the combustion throughout the rear of the furnace.

area

min

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Figure 4. Thermal image taken from the right side of the furnace



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It is not feasible to use an infrared camera to observe fuel combustion in the furnace through heat-resistant glass

If an infrared thermal camera is used to observe the combustion of coal in the furnace through the heat-resistant glass, it will not affect the air volume in the furnace. However, the radiation inside the furnace must pass through the glass and then to the surface. During this process, when the radiation passes through the inner surface of the glass, some of it is bounced back into the boiler furnace, and part of the radiation is absorbed, when it reaches the outer surface of the glass, part of the radiation is also bounced back to the interior, and part of it reaches the glass outer surface and escape, while part of the radiation is reflected again. Although this progressive reflection process gradually weakens, it has a very large impact to observe the combustion in the furnace. Figure 6 is a thermal image of the infrared camera observing the image observed through the glass is very unclear! Therefore, observation through glass cannot be performed. The temperature of the boiler furnace is relatively high, if the infrared thermal camera is directly embedded in the boiler wall for installation, it needs to adopt a cooling type, and in order to prevent lens ash accumulation, it must be equipped with air purge lens com-



Figure 6. Thermal image observed through heat-resistant glass



Figure 7. Thermal image observed by opening the inspection door

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ponents. This equipment is expensive and complicated in operation and maintenance, and is mostly used for large power station boilers [1, 4, 5, 26]. Therefore, the heating boiler can choose an uncooled infrared thermal camera to observe through the inspection door on the boiler to reduce investment and operation and maintenance costs. Figure 7 is a thermal image observed when the inspection door is opened using an infrared camera, and the image is very clear. If the location of the boiler inspection door can be installed at a suitable location.

Experimental system construction

The infrared thermography system consists of five components:

- *Infrared lens*: receives and gathers the infrared radiation emitted by the object to be measured.
- Infrared detector assembly: converts thermal radiation models into electrical signals.
- *Electronic components*: Processes electrical signals.
- Display component: Converts electrical signals into a visible image.
- Software: Processes collected temperature data and converts it into temperature readings and images.

The infrared thermography system, computer and air supply adjustment mechanism constitute a coal-fired boiler combustion control visualization system based on infrared thermal imaging technology. The experimental system installation is shown in fig. 8 [27].

The equipment used in the experiment:

- Testo350 flue gas analyzer measures flue gas concentrations of PM, SO₂, NO_x, and flue gas temperature.
- The FLIR T200 infrared camera, the temperature measurement range is -20-1200 °C, which is used to observe the combustion in the furnace in the early stage of experiment.
- Customized uncooled infrared thermal cameras, maximum measurement temperature of 1600 °C are installed at the tail of the boiler for combustion visualization monitoring.
- Platinum-rhodium thermocouple, measuring temperature range 0-1300 °C, measuring furnace temperature.



Figure 8. Experimental system installation diagram; (a) system schematic and (b) infrared thermal camera in place

Results discussion

The information in the thermal image can guide the adjustment of air distribution and coal supply. As can be seen from fig. 7, most of the grate is bright in color. The combustion situation in the furnace is not good, and most of the coal on the grate is not burned out. At this time, the height of the coal gate can be lowered to reduce the supply of coal. In addition, the

color of the grate near the inspection door is darker, indicating that the air distribution volume here is relatively large and the coal burns faster than other parts. At this time, the opening of the air gate on this side should be reduced from less air distribution.

Because the furnace is under negative pressure when the boiler is working. The observation is carried out when the boiler inspection door is opened, which will inevitably change the air volume in the boiler furnace, and the air volume change will affect the boiler operation. Therefore, it is necessary to study the influence on the operation of the boiler when the inspection door is opened for observation.

The air volume in the boiler can be measured by monitoring the oxygen content in the boiler furnace. The amount of air required for complete combustion of coal without excess oxygen is called the theoretical amount of air. During the operation of the boiler, due to the imperfect combustion equipment of the boiler and the limitation of combustion technical conditions, the amount of air fed in cannot be ideally mixed with the fuel. In order to make the fuel burn as completely as possible, the air-flow into the furnace is always greater than the theoretical amount of air. The portion of the actual air supply that is greater than the theoretical air volume is called excess air. The ratio of the actual air volume delivered to the theoretical air volume is called the excess air factor. The optimum value of the excess air factor is related to the type of fuel, the mode of combustion and the degree of refinement in the construction of the combustion equipment. Grate fired furnaces commonly used in heating boilers generally have an excess air factor between 1.3 and 1.6. It takes some time for the coal to burn completely in the furnace. Taking the chain furnace as an example, the running speed of the grate is generally 2-20 m per hour depending on the coal type and load, and the movement is slow [28-30]. It is therefore, not necessary to observe the combustion in the furnace all times, but it can be monitored by intermittently opening the inspection door and then taking a thermal image by an infrared thermal camera. The size of the inspection door is small compared to the boiler, and the shooting process takes less time. Generally, one shooting can be completed within 2 minutes, so that the amount of air entering the furnace through the inspection door is not much. Since the boiler needs a certain amount of excess air, intermittently opens the inspection door during observation, and closes the inspection door immediately after shooting, so that it will not have too much influence on the air volume of the boiler. Based on the aforementioned analysis, the intermittent observation method can be used to monitor the combustion in the furnace.

As the amount of air fed into the furnace increases, oxygen content in the flue gas will increase, and the furnace temperature will decrease accordingly. Due to the increase in the amount of air, the heat transfer from the heated surface of the tail will decrease, and finally the exhaust gas temperature will increase. Therefore, under different working conditions, the three parameters of boiler oxygen content, furnace temperature and exhaust gas temperature were monitored, respectively to evaluate the impact of the use of infrared thermal cameras on the operation of the boiler when opening the inspection door to observe the combustion.



Figure 9. Comparison of oxygen content

Monitor the change of the oxygen content of the boiler to analyze the influence of the excess air during the operation of the boiler due to the opening of the boiler inspection door to monitor the combustion in furnace. At the rear of the furnace, we monitored the oxygen content of the boiler without opening the inspection door, and opening the inspection door on both sides at the same time. The actual situation is shown in fig. 9. It shows the changes in the oxygen content of the boiler under two conditions within 24 hours: the boiler is in normal operation, and using the infrared thermal camera to intermittently open the inspection doors on both sides to observe the combustion in the furnace. Through the monitored oxygen content data, the air leakage coefficient of the boiler can be calculated:

$$n_f = \frac{O_2' - O_2}{21 - O_2'} \tag{1}$$

where n_f is the air leakage coefficient, O'_2 – the volume percentage of oxygen when opening the inspection door for observation, and O_2 – the volume percentage of oxygen at normal operation. From there, we can determine the effect on boiler operation when opening the inspection door and observing the combustion in the furnace with an infrared thermal camera. As can be seen from the monitoring data, the average oxygen content in the furnace was 10.52% when the inspection door was opened for observation, and the average oxygen content in the boiler during normal operation is 10.05%. The air leakage coefficient calculated from eq. (1) can be obtained when opening the inspection door for observation is 0.04. Which still includes the sum of air leakage in the coal hopper, furnace door, grate side seal, peephole and other parts. It can be seen from the air leakage coefficient, compared with the normal operation of the boiler, the intermittent opening of the inspection door has little effect on the boiler air distribution and can be ignored.

While monitoring the oxygen content, the boiler furnace temperature was also monitored. Figure 10 shows the boiler furnace temperature monitored in 24 hours when the boiler is in normal operation and the inspection doors are intermittently opened by infrared thermal camera to observe the combustion in the furnace. As can be seen from the data in fig. 10 that the temperature curve of boiler furnace is basically consistent with that when the inspection doors



Figure 10. Comparison of furnace temperature

were opened. The average temperature of the furnace during normal operation of the boiler is 1060.76 °C, and the average temperature of the furnace is 1050.18 °C when the inspection doors were opened and the infrared thermal camera is used for observation. The difference between the two is very small. So that intermittent opening of the inspection doors and the use of infrared thermal cameras to monitor the combustion in the furnace have no significant effect on furnace temperature.

At the same time of monitoring the oxygen content, the exhaust temperature of the boiler was also monitored. Figure 11 shows the boiler exhaust temperature monitored in 24 hours when the boiler is in normal operation and the inspection doors are intermittently opened to observe the combustion condition in the furnace. As can be seen from the data in fig. 11 that the temperature curve of boiler furnace is basically consistent with that when the inspection doors were opened. The average smoke exhaust



Figure 11. Comparison of exhaust temperature

temperature during normal operation of the boiler is 178.86 °C, and the average smoke exhaust temperature when the inspection doors were opened and observed by the infrared thermal cameras is 188.13 °C, which is not much different. Therefore, when the inspection doors were opened intermittently and infrared cameras were used to monitor combustion in the furnace it has little effect on the exhaust temperature.

From the previous analysis of the oxygen content, furnace temperature and exhaust gas temperature monitoring data, the method of using infrared thermal cameras to intermittently open the inspection doors on both sides of the boiler tail to observe the coal combustion in the furnace will not adversely affect the normal operation of the boiler.

Along with the aforementioned parameters, the emissions of major air pollutants such as PM, SO_2 and NO_x were monitored to assess the impact of the experimental system on the atmospheric environment. The heating station of the laboratory has two identical boilers, one of which is equipped with the experimental system and the two boilers are running in parallel. In a month's time, the emission of the main air pollution of the two boilers was monitored at the same time, and the specific data are shown in figs. 12-14.



Figure 12. Comparison of PM emissions

From the measured data in fig. 12, it can be concluded that the boiler with this experimental system installed has an average daily emission concentration of 16.30 mg/Nm³, while the boiler without the experimental system has an average daily emission concentration of 19.46 mg/Nm³. The average emission concentration was reduced by 16.28%. Since the boil-

ers installed with this experimental system use infrared thermal cameras to monitor combustion in the furnace during operation, the combustion status is adjusted in a timely manner and the PM emissions are reduced.

From the measured data in fig. 13, it can be concluded that the daily average emission concentration of SO₂ from the boiler installed with this experimental system is 147.20 mg/Nm³, while the daily average emission concentration from the boiler without the experimental system is 146.60 mg/Nm³. The average emission concentration increased by 0.4%, and the change was very small, because the emission concentration of SO₂ is mainly related to coal quality, and the amount of sulfur contained in coal determines the amount of SO₂ emission.

From the measured data in fig. 14, it can be concluded that the boiler NO_x installed with this experimental system has an average daily emission concentration of 266.92 mg/Nm³, while the boiler without the experimental system has an average daily emission concentration of 277.97 mg/Nm³. The average emission concentration is reduced by 4%, and the change is also very small. This is because NO_x in the heating boiler is mainly of thermal type and fuel type [31-33], and the thermal type furnace temperature is related. In this experiment, the fur-



Figure 13. Comparison of SO₂ emissions

Figure 14. Comparison of NO_x emissions

nace temperature changes little, and the fuel type is directly related to the nitrogen content in the coal.

From the monitoring data analysis of PM, SO_2 , NO_x emissions, that this experimental system has a good effect on reducing PM emissions and is conducive to reducing air pollutant emissions.

Conclusion

Visualization of boiler combustion can be achieved by observing the boiler furnace combustion conditions using infrared thermal cameras. Visualizing the combustion process in coal-fired boilers by using infrared thermography not only allows you to visualize the thermal image in the furnace, but also to keep track of the temperature distribution in the furnace. From the analysis of the monitoring data of oxygen content, furnace temperature and exhaust temperature, intermittent opening of the inspection doors to observe the combustion of coal in furnace will not adversely affect the normal operation of the boiler. From the monitoring data analysis of PM, SO₂, NO_x emissions, that this experimental system has a good effect on reducing PM emissions and is conducive to reducing air pollutant emissions. It is feasible to apply infrared thermal imaging technology implementation of heating boiler combustion control in the future.

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