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Nitrate formation from heterogeneous uptake of dinitrogen pentoxide during a severe winter haze in southern China

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Abstract: Nitrate (NO_3^-) has become a major component of fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$) during hazy days in China. However, the role of the heterogeneous reactions of dinitrogen pentoxide (N_2O_5) in nitrate formation is not well constrained. In January 2017, a severe haze event occurred in the Pearl River Delta (PRD) of southern China during which high levels of $PM_{2.5}$ (~400 μg m^{-3}) and O_3 (~160 ppbv) were observed at a semi-rural site (Heshan) in the western PRD. Nitrate concentrations were up to 108 μg m^{-3} (1 h time resolution), and the contribution of nitrate to $PM_{2.5}$ reached nearly 40%. Concurrent increases in NO_3^- and $ClNO_2$ (with a maximum value of 8.3 ppbv in 1 min time resolution) were observed in the first several hours after sunset, indicating an intense N_2O_5 heterogeneous uptake on aerosols. The formation potential of NO_3^- via N_2O_5 heterogeneous reactions was estimated to be 39.7 to 77.3 μg m^{-3} in the early hours (3 to 6 h) after sunset based on the measurement data, which could completely explain the measured increase in the NO_3^- concentration during the same time period. Daytime production of nitric acid from the gas-phase reaction of OH + NO_2 was calculated with a chemical box model built using the Master Chemical Mechanism (MCM v3.3.1) and constrained by the measurement data. The integrated nocturnal nitrate formed via N_2O_5 chemistry was comparable to or even higher than the nitric acid formed during the daytime. This study confirms that N_2O_5 heterogeneous chemistry was a significant source of aerosol nitrate during hazy days in southern China.

Keywords: N_2O_5, $ClNO_2$, nitrate, Pearl River Delta, southern China

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1 Introduction

Severe haze in China has been a major concern of the regulatory and scientific communities in recent years. Nitrate was identified as an important component of $PM_{2.5}$ during hazy days in both summer and winter (e.g., Huang et al., 2014; Li et al., 2018; Pathak et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2015). Moreover, the proportion of nitrate in $PM_{2.5}$ has increased steadily in the last decade due to the lagged control of NO_x emissions compared to SO_2 (Fu et al., 2014; Geng et al., 2017; Qu et al., 2017; Reuter et al., 2014; Wang X et al., 2016). As a result, the concentrations of nitrate in $PM_{2.5}$/$PM_{1.0}$ were even higher than those of sulfate during some haze events (Ge et al., 2017; Li et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2017; Yue et al., 2015).

Nitrate is formed from NO_x in both the daytime and nighttime. During the day, nitric acid (HNO_3) is produced through the gas-phase reaction between OH and NO_2 (R1), and this pathway is insignificant at night due to very low OH concentrations (e.g., Seinfeld and Pandis, 2016). The nitric acid can react with ammonia (NH_3) to form ammonium nitrate (NH_4NO_3), and an equilibrium can be reached for these three compounds between the gas phase and the particle phase (R2-3). In the nighttime, heterogeneous uptake of N_2O_5, which is formed from the reactions involving O_3, NO_2 and NO_3, becomes a source of nitrate and also produces gaseous $ClNO_2$ when chloride-containing aerosol is present (R4-7) (Finlayson-Pitts et al., 1989). This nitrate formation pathway is important only at night due to the fast photolysis of NO_3 during the day. Compared to the relatively well-understood formation of aerosol nitrate via the OH + NO_2 reaction, the contribution from N_2O_5 heterogeneous reactions has been poorly quantified due to the limited knowledge of key factors controlling the heterogeneous processes, such as the N_2O_5 uptake coefficient (γ_{N2O5}) and $ClNO_2$ yield (ϕ_{ClNO2}) (Brown and Stutz, 2012; Chang et al., 2011).

(R1) $OH + NO_2 + M \rightarrow HNO_3 + M$

(R2) $HNO_3\ (g) + NH_3\ (g) \leftrightarrow NH_4NO_3\ (s)$

(R3) $HNO_3\ (g) + NH_3\ (g) \leftrightarrow NH_4^+\ (aq) + NO_3^-\ (aq)$

(R4) $NO_2 + O_3 \rightarrow NO_3$

(R5) $NO_2 + NO_3 + M \leftrightarrow N_2O_5 + M$

(R6) $NO_3 + VOCs \rightarrow products$

(R7) $N_2O_5 + H_2O$ or Cl^- (aq) $\rightarrow$ (2-ϕ) NO_3^- (aq) + ϕ $ClNO_2$ (g)

Model studies initially treated γ_{N2O5} as a constant (0.03 to 0.1) (Dentener and Crutzen, 1993;Makar et al., 1998;Munger et al., 1998;Schaap et al., 2004;Wen et al., 2015;Xue et al., 2014), and later utilized several parameterization schemes of γ_{N2O5} and ϕ_{ClNO2} based on the laboratory investigations of their dependence on aerosol compositions and aerosol water content (Anttila et al., 2006;Bertram and Thornton, 2009;Davis et al., 2008;Evans and Jacob, 2005;Riemer et al., 2009;Riemer et al., 2003;Roberts et al., 2009). However, recent studies found a significant discrepancy between the field-derived and parameterized γ_{N2O5} and ϕ_{ClNO2} (McDuffie et al., 2018; Phillips et al., 2016; Tham et al., 2018; Wang X et al., 2017; Wang Z et al., 2017; Zhou et al., 2018). These findings suggest that N_2O_5 uptake is more complicated than previously thought and a better understanding of the uptake process is needed to improve the prediction of nitrate and haze.

In addition to the modeling approach, field measurements of trace gases and aerosol composition have been used to infer the contribution of N_2O_5 heterogeneous chemistry to nitrate formation. Pathak et al. (2009) postulated the importance of N_2O_5 heterogeneous reactions to the high aerosol nitrate observed in summertime in Beijing and Shanghai by examining the variation of nitrate with the change in relative humidity (RH) and the equilibrium between anions and cations in $PM_{2.5}$. Pathak et al. (2011) further investigated nitrate formation using a coupled aqueous phase radical mechanism (CAPRAM) and a gas-phase chemistry mechanism (RACM, without $ClNO_2$ chemistry). By constraining the uptake coefficient of N_2O_5 in the range of 0.001 to 0.1, they reproduced the observed enhancement of nitrate and suggested that N_2O_5 uptake in aerosols contributed to 50 to 100% of the nighttime increase in nitrate. A similar method was used recently by Wen et al. (2018) to simulate the summertime nitrate formation in the North China Plain (NCP), which demonstrated the dominant contribution of N_2O_5 heterogeneous reactions to nighttime nitrate formation. Based on the observed covariation of nitrate and RH, Wang et al. (2009)

speculated that N_2O_5 reactions dominated the nitrate formation on polluted days with high NO_2 and O_3 in Shanghai. Neither N_2O_5 nor $ClNO_2$ was measured during these early observation-based studies. A recent study (Wang H et al., 2017) inferred γ_{N2O5} from the measured N_2O_5 on four days in urban Beijing and estimated the lower limit of the formation potential of aerosol nitrate assuming a unity ϕ_{ClNO2} because $ClNO_2$ was not measured. Their result showed a comparable contribution to nitrate formation from the N_2O_5 heterogeneous chemistry as from the daytime pathway of the OH + NO_2 reaction.

In the present study, N_2O_5, $ClNO_2$, the related chemical and meteorological parameters were measured at a semi-rural site in the Pearl River Delta of southern China from Jan 2 to Jan 15, 2017. A severe haze event was observed during the field study with $PM_{2.5}$ reaching 400 μg m^{-3} and O_3 up to 160 ppbv. $ClNO_2$, which is only known to be produced from N_2O_5 heterogeneous uptake, reached up to 8.3 ppbv, which is the highest ever reported value and revealed extremely active N_2O_5 chemistry during the episode. The concurrent measurements of N_2O_5, $ClNO_2$ and aerosol nitrate provide better constraints for elucidating nighttime NO_3/N_2O_5 chemistry and aerosol formation. An overview of the measurement data was first presented. The nighttime processes that led to the formation of nitrate (e.g., production of NO_3 and N_2O_5, N_2O_5 uptake coefficient, $ClNO_2$ yield) were analyzed. The nighttime formation potential of nitrate was estimated based on these data and compared to the measured increase in nitrate. The daytime production of nitric acid via the OH + NO_2 reaction was calculated based on a box model using the Master Chemical Mechanism (MCM v3.3.1) and compared to the nighttime formation potential of nitrate.

2 Methods

2.1 Site description

The field observation was conducted at the Guangdong Atmospheric Supersite, a semi-rural site located at Hua Guo Shan (HGS, 22.728°N, 112.929°E) in the southwest of the city of Heshan from Jan 2 to Jan 15, 2017. As shown in Fig. 1, HGS is a hill with a height of 60 m above sea level. All measurement instruments were located on the 4th floor of a four-story building on the top of the hill. The observation site was located in the western PRD where the

economic activity and population density are much less compared to central PRD. There are five main roads near the HGS site, including three national roads (G325, G94 and G15), and two provincial roads (S272 and S270). The hill is covered by subtropical trees and surrounded by similar hills within close range, and a few residents live at the foot of the hill with some farmland in the area.

2.2 Chemical ionization mass spectrometer

N_2O_5 and $ClNO_2$ were simultaneously observed using a quadrupole chemical ionization mass spectrometer (THS Instruments, Atlanta) which converted N_2O_5 and $ClNO_2$ to ion clusters of $I(N_2O_5)^-$ and $I(ClNO_2)$ (Tham et al., 2016; Wang T et al., 2016). Iodide ions (I^-) were produced by exposing a mixture of CH_3I/N_2 (0.3%v/v) to an alpha radioactive source, 210-Po (NRD, P-2031-2000). $I(N_2O_5)^-$ and $I(ClNO_2)^-$ were generated from the reaction between $I^-(H_2O)$ and $N_2O_5/ClNO_2$, and were detected at 235 and 208 m/z, respectively. The time resolution for the measurement was approximately 10 s, and the derived data were later averaged to a time resolution of 1 min for further analysis. Activated carbon packed in a filter before the sampling inlet was used to determine the instrument background. The calibration of N_2O_5 and $ClNO_2$ were carried out every afternoon at the site, and the standard gas of N_2O_5 was added into the ambient air every 3 h to check the changes of sensitivity. A more detailed description of the operation method of the CIMS can refer to Wang T et al. (2016). The detection limits of N_2O_5 and $ClNO_2$ were 7 pptv and 6 pptv (3 σ, 1 min-averaged data), respectively. The uncertainty and the precision of the measurement was ± 25 % and 3%, respectively.

The inlet of the CIMS instrument was set approximately 1.5 m above the roof with 6 m long PFA-Teflon tubing as the sampling line. The total sampling flow was set as 11 standard liters per minute (SLPM). Four SLPM were diverted into the CIMS, O_3 and NO_x analyzer, and the remaining part was evacuated directly from the system. The total residence time was less than 1 s in the sampling system. To reduce the influence of the tubing wall adhered with deposited particles, we replaced the inlet tubing and fittings every day and washed them with an ultrasonic bath.

2.3 Other measurements

Trace gases of CO, SO_2, O_3, NO_x, total reactive nitrogen (NO_y), nitrous acid (HONO), C2 to C10 non-methane hydrocarbons (NMHCs) and oxygenated hydrocarbons (OVOCs) were measured. CO was observed using a gas filter correlation analyzer (Thermo Model 48i). SO_2 was measured using a pulsed fluorescence analyzer (Thermo Model 43i). O_3 was determined using a UV photometric analyzer (Thermo, Model 49i). NO and NO_2 were detected with a special chemiluminescence instrument (Thermo, Model 42i). A photolytic converter only sensitive to NO_2 was equipped in this instrument (Xu et al., 2013). NO_y was determined using a general chemiluminescence analyzer (Thermo, Model 42i-Y) which was equipped with a molybdenum oxide (MoO) catalytic converter. HONO was detected using a long path absorption photometer (QUMA, Model LOPAP-03) (Xu et al., 2015). NMHCs were determined using an online gas chromatograph (GC) coupled with a flame ionization detector (FID) and a mass spectrometer (MS). NMHCs were only measured from Jan 2 to Jan 8, 2017 due to the maintenance of the GCMS after Jan 8. OVOCs (e.g., formaldehyde, acetaldehyde, acetone, methyl ethyl ketone) were sampled with 2,4-dinitrophenylhydrazine cartridges every 3 h and were later analyzed with a high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) system (Cui et al., 2016).

Concentrations of $PM_{2.5}$ were detected with a multi-angle absorption photometer (MAAP, Thermo Model 5012). The ionic compositions of $PM_{2.5}$ were measured with an ion chromatography (GAC-IC) system equipped with a gas and aerosol collector at a time resolution of 30 min (Yue et al., 2015), and the data were also averaged every 1 h to meet the time resolution of other components of $PM_{2.5}$. Organic carbon (OC) and elemental carbon (EC) were measured with an online OC/EC analyzer (RT-4, SUNSET) with a time resolution of 1 h. A scanning mobility particle sizer (SMPS Model 3936L75, TSI) was used to determine the dry-state particle number size distribution, covering the size range from 16.5 to 1000 nm. The ambient (wet) particle number size distributions were estimated based on a size-resolved kappa-Köhler function considering the variation with the relative humidity (Hennig et al., 2005; Liu et al., 2014). Aerosol surface density was then derived using the ambient particle number size distribution (wet) and an assumption of spherical particles (Tham et al., 2016;

Wang Z et al., 2017).

Meteorological parameters were measured with a portable weather station (Model WXT520, Vaisala, Finland), including temperature, relative humidity (RH), wind direction, wind speed, and pressure. A pyranometer (CMP22, Kipp & Zonen B.V., Holland) was used to measure the solar radiation and the data were then utilized to derive the photolysis frequency of NO_2 based on the method of Trebs et al. (2009).

2.4 Chemical box model

To estimate the daytime formation of nitric acid via the reaction of OH + NO_2, an observation-based chemical box model developed with the latest version of the Master Chemical Mechanism v3.3.1 (Jenkin et al., 2003; Jenkin et al., 2015; Saunders et al., 2003) and an updated chlorine (Cl) radical chemistry module (Xue et al., 2015) was utilized to calculate the mixing ratio of OH radicals and the reaction rate of OH + NO_2. The integrated production of nitric acid during the daytime was then calculated based on the simulation results. The box model was constrained with the observation data every 10 min, including the data of N_2O_5, $ClNO_2$, HONO, O_3, NO, NO_2, SO_2, CO, C2 to C10 NMHCs, OVOCs (formaldehyde, acetaldehyde, acetone, and MEK), temperature, aerosol surface density and $J(NO_2)$, which were first averaged or interpolated. Average concentrations of NMHC species during the daytime (7:00 to 17:00) and nighttime (17:00 to 7:00 of the next day) are shown in Table S1. A function considering the variation of the solar zenith angle (Saunders et al., 2003) was used to calculate the photolysis frequencies of HONO, O_3 and other species in clear sky, which were then corrected with the $J(NO_2)$ values in the real environment. The $J(ClNO_2)$ was treated the same as in Tham et al. (2016). The lifetime of unconstrained species respect to the physical loss was set as 8 h in a boundary layer of 1000 m depth (equivalent to 3.47×10^{-5} s^{-1}) in order to avoid their accumulation. The model was run from 0:00 of Jan 3 to 11:00 of Jan 8, 2017. To stabilize the intermediate species, the simulation for the first 24 h was repeated six times.

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3 Results and discussion

3.1 Overview of the observation

Figure 2 shows the time series of N_2O_5, $ClNO_2$, components of $PM_{2.5}$, related trace gases and meteorological parameters from 18:40 of Jan 2 to 11:00 of Jan 15, 2017. The average temperature and RH during the measurement period were 17 ± 4℃ and 86 ± 14%, respectively. A severe pollution episode occurred on Jan 3 to 7 due to stagnant meteorological conditions (Fig. 3 (a)), and the concentrations of most pollutants decreased to very low levels on Jan 9 and Jan 12 to 15, which corresponded to the change in weather conditions. The most polluted days were Jan 5 and 6 with the highest $PM_{2.5}$ of 400 μg m^{-3} and the highest O_3 of 160 ppbv. The $PM_{2.5}$ data from the PRD regional air quality monitoring network revealed that the HGS site was within the most polluted area during this haze event (Fig. 3(b)). This pollution event was characterized by concurrent high levels of $PM_{2.5}$ and O_3 and is in contrast to the winter haze in north China, which experienced high $PM_{2.5}$ but low O_3 (e.g., Sun et al., 2016; Wang H et al., 2018a). The mixing ratios of N_2O_5 and $ClNO_2$ were up to 3358 pptv and 8324 pptv (1 min time resolution), respectively, indicating active N_2O_5 heterogeneous chemistry.

Very high concentrations of aerosol nitrate (up to 108 μg m^{-3}, 1 h time resolution) were also observed during the multi-day episode. Nitrate contributed to 24% of the total $PM_{2.5}$ mass concentration on average, which was comparable to that of organic matters (OM = 1.7*OC, 28%) and much higher than that of sulfate (16%) and ammonium (11%). The contribution of nitrate to the $PM_{2.5}$ increased with an increase in nitrate concentration, and reached nearly 40% at its highest nitrate level, indicating that nitrate was a dominant component of the $PM_{2.5}$ on the most polluted days. The concentration of NO_3^- exhibited a concurrent increase with that of $ClNO_2$ in the early nighttime on Jan 3 to 4, Jan 4 to 5, Jan 5 to 6 and Jan 9 to 10 (see Fig. 4), suggesting that N_2O_5 heterogeneous reactions significantly contributed to the formation of nitrate during the nighttime. The measured increases of the NO_3^- concentration during these four nights were 35.3, 50.9, 43.3 and 32.7 μg m^{-3}, respectively. A similar increase in $ClNO_2$ was observed on Jan 6 to 7, but the composition of the $PM_{2.5}$ was not available due to instrument maintenance. The discussion in the remainder of this manuscript will focus on the detailed analysis of these five nights to investigate the role of N_2O_5 heterogeneous chemistry

in nitrate formation.

3.2 N_2O_5 heterogeneous chemistry on the selected nights

3.2.1 Production of NO_3 and N_2O_5

The first step in the nighttime nitrate formation via N_2O_5 chemistry is the production of NO_3 and N_2O_5. To get insight into the key factors affecting the NO_3/N_2O_5 chemistry, the variation of N_2O_5 and production rate of NO_3 were examined with some relevant gases and meteorological parameters of the five nights. Fig. 5 shows the data of the night of Jan 4 to 5 as an example. Some common features were identified for all five nights. In general, low wind speed (< 2.0 m s^{-1}) at night facilitated the accumulation of air pollutants, and high RH was favorable for N_2O_5 heterogeneous uptake. In addition, high aerosol surface density provided interfaces for N_2O_5 heterogeneous reactions.

In the first couple of hours after sunset (Fig 5, red rectangle), N_2O_5 exhibited a peak and quickly dropped to hundreds of pptv, while nitrate and $ClNO_2$ concurrently increased, which was indicative of the local production and loss of N_2O_5. NO was below the detection limit during this period. The production rates of NO_3 ($P_{NO_3} = k_{NO_2+O_3}[NO_2][O_3]$) were the fastest just after sunset and decreased gradually due to reduced O_3 levels. There was a period later in the night (22:00 to 01:00) when fresh emissions of NO were observed, and the production of NO_3 was suppressed due to the titration of O_3 by NO. In the later nighttime, NO was below the detection limit (Fig. 5, blue rectangle). During this period, NO_3 and N_2O_5 were produced at moderate rates, and the very low N_2O_5 concentrations (below the detection limit) suggested a fast loss of N_2O_5 probably leading to the local production of $ClNO_2$ and nitrate, which was not revealed in the observed variations of $ClNO_2$ and nitrate. The concentrations of $ClNO_2$ and nitrate during this period fluctuated due to the change in the air masses indicated by the change in SO_2 concentrations and wind speeds.

3.2.2 N_2O_5 uptake coefficient and $ClNO_2$ yield

The N_2O_5 uptake coefficient and $ClNO_2$ yield, together with the reactivity of NO_3 with NO and VOCs, determines the loss pathways of NO_3 and N_2O_5. To derive the uptake coefficient of N_2O_5, a method suggested by McLaren et al. (2010) was applied by treating NO_3 and N_2O_5 as

a whole ([NO_3] + [N_2O_5]) without assuming the chemical system was in the steady state. This approach considers that the change of NO_3 and N_2O_5 concentrations is mainly due to NO_3/N_2O_5 chemistry, and thus it requires that the air mass have relatively stable chemical conditions and not be subject to fresh NO emissions. It also requires that $ClNO_2$ is produced from the N_2O_5 chemistry and has an increasing trend to derive the yield of $ClNO_2$. This method is applicable for the early nighttime (red rectangle, section 3.2.1) for these five nights.

The variation rate of [NO_3] + [N_2O_5] can be calculated by deducting the production rate of [NO_3] + [N_2O_5] with its loss rate as Eq. (1).

$$(1)\quad \frac{d([N_2O_5]+[NO_3])}{dt}=P_{NO_3}-L_{N_2O_5+NO_3}$$

The loss of [NO_3] + [N_2O_5] is through the NO_3 reaction with VOCs and N_2O_5 heterogeneous reactions, which can both be expressed as pseudo first order losses as Eq. (2):

$$(2)\quad L_{N_2O_5+NO_3}= L_{NO_3}+ L_{N_2O_5}= k_{NO_3}[NO_3] + k_{N_2O_5}[N_2O_5]$$

where k_{NO3} and k_{N2O5} represent the total first order rate constants for NO_3 and N_2O_5, respectively. The loss rate of N_2O_5 can then be obtained from Eq. (3):

$$(3)\quad L_{N_2O_5} = k_{N_2O_5}[N_2O_5]= k_{NO_2+O_3}[NO_2][O_3]-\frac{d[N_2O_5]}{dt}-\frac{d[NO_3]}{dt}-k_{NO_3}[NO_3]$$

Because NO_3 was not measured, it was calculated by assuming an equilibrium of NO_2-NO_3-N_2O_5 as shown in Eq. (4). High levels of NO would break this equilibrium. Thus, the periods with detected NO were excluded. d[NO_3]/dt and d[N_2O_5]/dt were calculated as the rate of change of NO_3 and N_2O_5 in a time resolution of 10 min. k_{NO3} was derived with the measured concentrations of NMHCs as Eq. (5) by interpolating the data of NMHCs to 10 min time resolution. The NO_3 reactivity with VOCs (k_{NO3}) in the early nighttime ranged from 0.632 to 1.54×10^{-3} s^{-1} (Table 1), which was higher than those derived at Mt. TMS in winter 2013 (0.17 to 1.1×10^{-3} s^{-1}) (Brown et al., 2016), but lower than those in the North China Plain during the summertime ($2\text{-}57\times10^{-3}$ s^{-1}) (Tham et al., 2016; Wang H et al., 2017, 2018b; Wang Z et al., 2017). NMHCs were not measured on Jan 9 to 10, 2017. Therefore, we used the average k_{NO3} in the early nighttime on Jan 3 to 4 as a replacement because these two periods

had similar pollution levels for most pollutants. For the later nighttime (Fig. 5, blue rectangle), low levels of N_2O_5 and moderate levels of P_{NO3} also made Eq. (3) inapplicable even though NO was not detected.

(4) $[NO_3]= \frac{[N_2O_5]}{[NO_2]\times K_{eq}}$

(5) $k_{NO_3} = \sum k_i[VOC_i]$

Finally, the uptake coefficient of N_2O_5 was derived using Eq. (6) for every 10 min and averaged for the whole selected periods. In Eq. (6), C_{N2O5} is the mean molecular speed of N_2O_5, and S_a is the aerosol surface density. The yield of $ClNO_2$ was derived from Eq. (7) by dividing the integrated production of $ClNO_2$ ($[ClNO_2]_{max}$) to the integrated loss of N_2O_5 since sunset.

(6) $k_{N_2O_5} = \frac{L_{N_2O_5}}{[N_2O_5]} = \frac{1}{4} C_{N_2O_5} S_a \gamma_{N_2O_5}$

(7) $\phi = \frac{[ClNO_2]_{max}}{\int L_{N_2O_5} dt}$

The relative importance of NO_3 reactions with VOCs and N_2O_5 heterogeneous reactions can be examined by comparing the values of the loss coefficient of NO_3 reactions ($\frac{k_{NO_3}}{[NO_2]\times K_{eq}}$) and N_2O_5 heterogeneous reactions (k_{N2O5}) (Tham et al., 2016). Based on the calculations, the values of $\frac{k_{NO_3}}{[NO_2]\times K_{eq}}$ were 1.82×10^{-5} to 6.07×10^{-5} s^{-1} (see Table 1), while that of k_{N2O5} were 3.78×10^{-3} to 20.4×10^{-3} s^{-1}, which was two orders of magnitude higher than that of $\frac{k_{NO_3}}{[NO_2]\times K_{eq}}$, suggesting that N_2O_5 heterogeneous reactions were the dominant loss pathway of NO_3 and N_2O_5.

The average γ_{N2O5} and ϕ_{ClNO2} derived for the early night of the five cases are listed in Table 1. The data show that the uptake coefficient ranged from 0.009 to 0.101, which was comparable to the previous values derived at Mt. Tai Mo Shan (TMS) in Hong Kong (0.004 to 0.022) (Brown et al., 2016) and in the North China Plain (0.006 to 0.102) (Tham et al., 2018; Tham et al., 2016; Wang H et al., 2017, 2018b; Wang X et al., 2017; Wang Z et al., 2017; Zhou et al., 2018). The yield in this study varied from 0.20 to 0.36, which was similar to most studies in

China (Tham et al., 2018; Tham et al., 2016; Wang Z et al., 2017; Yun et al., 2018; Zhou et al., 2018).

3.3 Nitrate formation potential (pNO_3^-) through N_2O_5 chemistry

3.3.1 Nighttime $p(NO_3^-)$

The formation potential of NO_3^- through N_2O_5 chemistry is the total amount of NO_3^- accumulated from N_2O_5 heterogeneous loss. It can be calculated by deducting the integrated loss of N_2O_5 with the integrated production of $ClNO_2$ as Eq. (8).

(Eq.8) $p(NO_3^-) = (2-\phi) \int L_{N_2O_5}\, dt = 2 \int L_{N_2O_5}\, dt - [ClNO_2]_{max}$

In the early nighttime, the average loss rate of N_2O_5 (L_{N2O5}) ranged from 1.9 to 3.9 ppbv h^{-1} (Table 1), which was close to the average P_{NO3} due to the dominance of the N_2O_5 heterogeneous reactions in NO_3 and N_2O_5 loss. Based on the derived N_2O_5 loss rate and the maximum $ClNO_2$ concentration, the formation potential of NO_3^- was derived and ranged from 39.7 to 77.3 μg m^{-3} as shown in Fig. 6. The measured increase of the NO_3^- concentration in the early nighttime can be completely explained by the integrated production of NO_3^- via the N_2O_5 heterogeneous reactions during the same period.

In the later nighttime, the method described in section 3.2.2 was not valid for calculating the N_2O_5 heterogeneous loss rate as mentioned above. We attempted to estimate the formation potential of nitrate by assuming that the N_2O_5 heterogeneous reactions continued to dominate the loss of $NO_3 + N_2O_5$ in the later nighttime. The k_{NO3} in the later nighttime were comparable to those in the early nighttime, and the high RH close to 100% in the later nighttime was favorable for the N_2O_5 heterogeneous reactions. We assumed that all NO_3 was quickly consumed by the N_2O_5 heterogeneous reactions, which means that the loss rate of N_2O_5 approximated to the production rate of NO_3 ($L_{N2O5} \approx P_{NO3}$). As listed in Table 2, the N_2O_5 loss rates ranged from 0.82 to 1.26 ppbv h^{-1}, which were significantly lower than those derived in the early nighttime. The derived N_2O_5 loss rate here and the yield of $ClNO_2$ in the early nighttime were used to estimate the formation potential of NO_3^- in the later nighttime. As shown in Fig.6, the nitrate produced during these later periods ranged from 7.3 to 37.7 μg m^{-3},

which was significantly lower than those in the early nighttime, indicating that the nighttime nitrate from N_2O_5 chemistry was mainly produced in the early nighttime.

3.3.2 Comparison with daytime production of HNO_3

During the daytime, the formation of NO_3^- is mainly from the gas-particle partitioning of the gas phase HNO_3 formed through the OH + NO_2 reaction. Hence, the daytime formation potential of HNO_3 (p(HNO_3)) can be treated as the upper limit for the locally-produced daytime aerosol nitrate. To calculate the daytime p(HNO_3), a box model based on MCM v3.3.1 was used to derive the mixing ratio of OH and the rates of OH + NO_2 as described in section 2.4. This model was previously used in our study at Wangdu in North China (Tham et al., 2016). The calculated mixing ratios of OH at Wangdu with this model compared well with those observed by the laser-induced fluorescence (LIF) technique (Tan et al., 2017). In the present study, the average daytime OH (7:00 to 17:00) mixing ratios were 1.71 to 3.82×10^6 cm^{-3} during Jan 3 to 7 as listed in Table 3 with the maximum values reaching 3.24 to 6.71×10^6 cm^{-3}. The detailed results for OH can be found in Fig. S1.

The average production rates of HNO_3 through the OH + NO_2 reaction were 1.40 to 5.21 ppbv h^{-1} from Jan 3 to Jan 7, and the integrated formation potential of HNO_3 during the daytime was 35.7 to 131.8 μg m^{-3}, which was comparable to the nighttime p(NO_3^-) ranging from 77.4 to 102.9 μg m^{-3} (Fig. 7). Nighttime production of nitrate via the heterogeneous uptake of N_2O_5 accounted for 43.8 to 57.7% of the total nitrate (NO_3^- + HNO_3) produced in a 24 h period at the site. These results underscored the important role of N_2O_5 heterogeneous chemistry in nitrate formation in this severe winter haze in southern China.

4 Concluding remarks

With the use of concurrent measurements of nitrate, $ClNO_2$ and related pollutants, this study demonstrates the important contribution of N_2O_5 heterogeneous uptake in nitrate formation. Current chemical transport models have difficulties in simulating this nitrate production pathway. Therefore, more research efforts are needed to improve the representations of γ_{N2O5} and ϕ_{ClNO2} for better prediction of nitrate in the models. The observation-based approach presented here can be applied to investigate nitrate formation in other areas of China.

5 Data availability

The data used in this study are available from the corresponding author upon request (cetwang@polyu.edu.hk & dingliyue@163.com).

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Table 1. Average values of N_2O_5 concentrations, N_2O_5 uptake coefficients, $ClNO_2$ yields and other related parameters and maximum values of $ClNO_2$ concentrations in the early nighttime for five selected nights.

Date	N_2O_5 pptv	Max-$ClNO_2$ pptv	NO_2 ppbv	O_3 ppbv	RH %	Sa $\mu m^2\ cm^{-3}$	P_{NO3} ppbv h^{-1}	k_{NO3} $10^{-3}\ s^{-1}$	L_{N2O5} ppbv h^{-1}	$k_{NO3}/(Keq[NO_2])$ $10^{-5}\ s^{-1}$	k_{N2O5} $10^{-3}\ s^{-1}$	γ_{N2O5}	ϕ_{ClNO2}
Jan.3 17:40-20:50	102	3145	22	68	68	3644	4.0	0.632	3.9	3.26	20.4	0.101	0.36
Jan 4 17:00-22:00	700	4608	24	61	82	6452	3.3	1.54	3.2	6.07	4.16	0.009	0.32
Jan 5 17:00-22:00	338	4828	18	73	81	8399	3.4	0.790	3.3	4.06	9.00	0.015	0.29
Jan 6 17:00-22:40	326	2908	13	82	77	5092	2.8	0.677	2.6	4.95	3.78	0.013	0.20
Jan 9 19:00-00:20	121	2553	19	41	85	5173	1.9	0.632	1.9	1.82	4.28	0.015	0.28

Table 2. Average values of N_2O_5 loss rate and related parameters for selected periods in the later nighttime.

Date		NO_2 ppbv	O_3 ppbv	P_{NO3} ppbv h^{-1}	k_{NO3} $10^{-3}\ s^{-1}$	L_{N2O5} ppbv h^{-1}
Jan 3-4	21:00-05:00	20.8	20.7	1.00	0.684	1.00
Jan 5	01:30-06:50	22.4	19.5	0.96	1.45	0.96
Jan 5-6	23:40-01:10	21.1	25.5	1.26	1.13	1.26
Jan 6-7	23:00-06:00	22.1	14.4	0.82	0.709	0.82
Jan 10	01:50-03:30	24.8	15.6	0.90	/	0.90

Table 3. Average OH mixing ratio and rate of OH + NO_2 during the daytime (7:00 to 17:00 LT) from Jan 3 to Jan 7, 2017.

Date	OH (cm^{-3})	NO_2 (ppbv)	OH + NO_2 (ppbv h^{-1})
Jan 3	2.18×10^6	36.2	3.49
Jan 4	2.47×10^6	23.6	2.60
Jan 5	2.62×10^6	30.8	3.09
Jan 6	3.82×10^6	31.5	5.21
Jan 7	1.71×10^6	18.4	1.40

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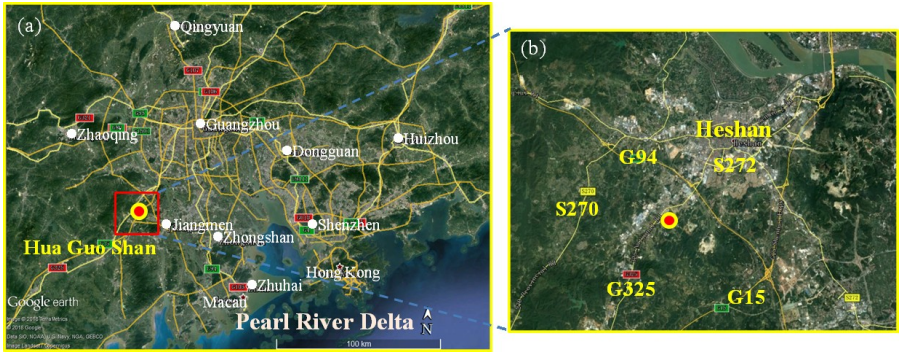

Figure 1. (a) Google map images of the Pearl River Delta in the Guangdong Province and measurement site (Hua Guo Shan). (b) The topography and major roads (shown by number) adjacent to the measurement site.

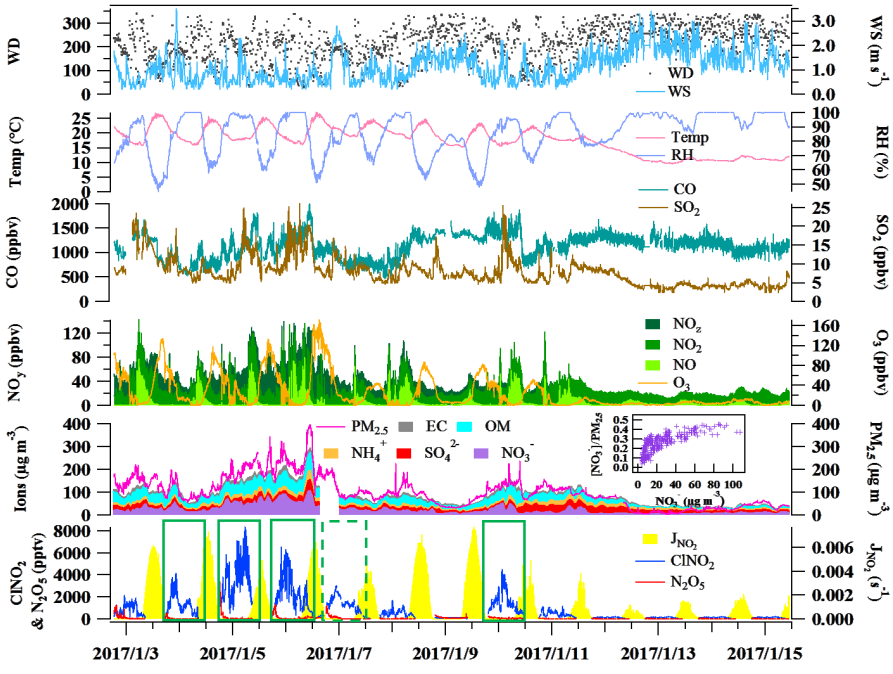

Figure 2. Time series of N_2O_5, $ClNO_2$, components of $PM_{2.5}$, related trace gases and meteorological parameters from 18:40 of Jan 2 to 11:00 of Jan 15, 2017. The inserted figure shows the variation of the ratio of nitrate to $PM_{2.5}$ with increasing nitrate concentration. The green rectangles in the figure indicate the five days used for detailed analysis.

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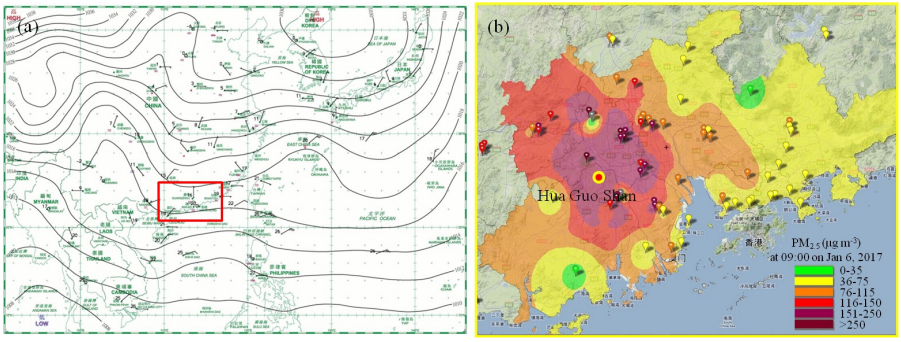

Figure 3. (a) Surface weather chart at 08:00 LT on Jan 6, 2017 downloaded from the website of the Hong Kong Observatory indicating stagnant conditions. (b) The distribution of $PM_{2.5}$ concentrations in the PRD region at 09:00 LT on Jan 6, 2017. This figure was captured from the website. http://113.108.142.147:20031/GDPublish/publish.aspx.

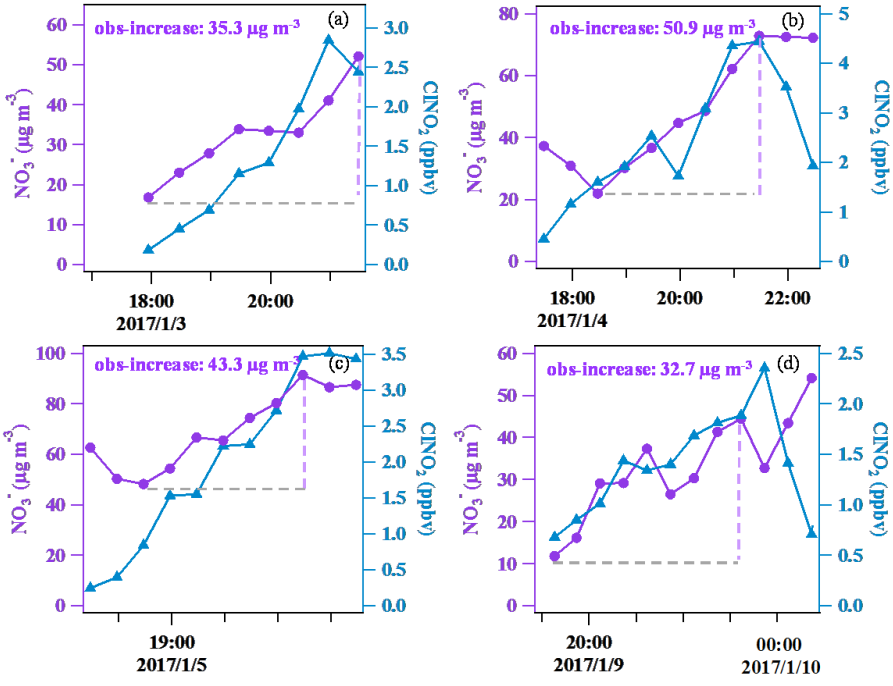

Figure 4. The covariance of aerosol nitrate and $ClNO_2$ in the early nighttime (in 30 min time resolution) for four nights.

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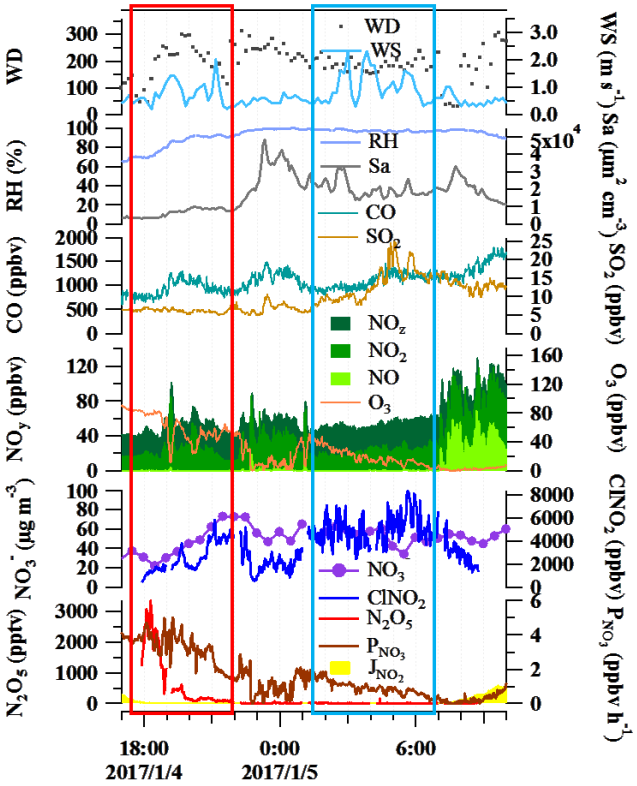

Figure 5. Variation of N_2O_5, $ClNO_2$, NO_3^-, trace gases and meteorological conditions during the nighttime of Jan 4 to 5, 2017 as an example for the five selected nights.

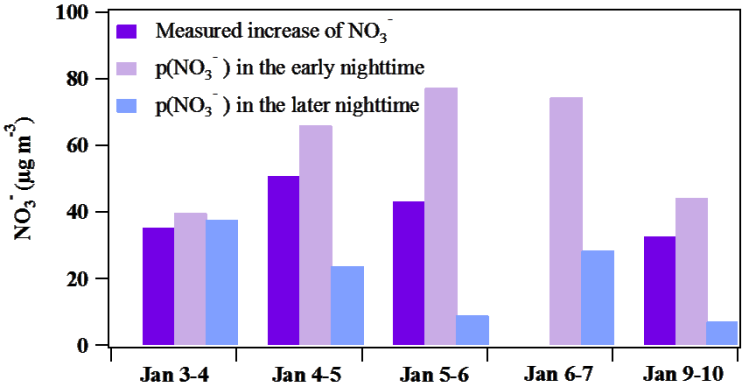

Figure 6. Comparison between the measured NO_3^- increase and the NO_3^- formation potential in the early nighttime (periods in Table 1) and in the later nighttime (periods in Table 2).

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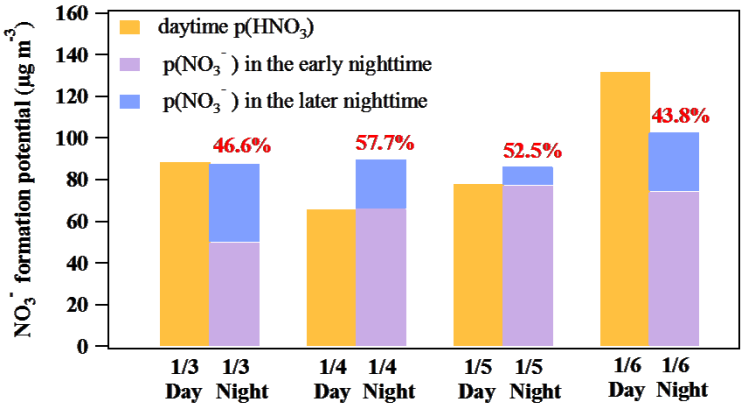

Figure 7. Comparison between the daytime (7:00 to 17:00 LT, assuming all gas phase HNO_3 partitioned into particle phase) and nighttime (17:00 to 7:00 LT of the next day) NO_3^- formation potential.