

Dear Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics Editor:

After reading the comments from the reviewer, we have carefully revised our manuscript. Our responses to the comments are itemized below.

Anything for our paper, please feel free to contact me via [cwu@geo.ecnu.edu.cn](mailto:cwu@geo.ecnu.edu.cn), or [ghwang@geo.ecnu.edu.cn](mailto:ghwang@geo.ecnu.edu.cn).

All the best

Can Wu  
On behalf of Prof. Gehui Wang  
December 25, 2019

Reviewer(s)' Comments to Author:

### **Reviewer 3**

#### **Comments:**

This study characterized brown carbon including extracted mass using methanol and water, and PAHs, Oxy-PAHs etc., composition analysis for size-segregated particles collected during winter and summer period in Xi'an. Brown carbon has significant impacts on radiative forcing and regional climate, and receives growing interests during the past decades. Studies on abundance, temporal variations, possible sources, ect., of BrC is essential for a better understanding on impacts of carbonaceous aerosols in environment on air quality and climate, and vital for air pollution controls.

**Reply:** We thank the reviewer's valuable comments. We have carefully revised our manuscript according to her/his advice. See details below.

#### **Comments:**

1) Line 46, for correlation analysis, use  $r$  instead of  $R^2$ . Please correct and revise throughout the manuscript.

**Reply:** Suggestion taken. We have substituted  $r$  for  $R^2$  in both revised draft and supporting information.

#### **Comments:**

2) Line 56, pay more attention to the significant figures.

**Reply:** Suggestion taken. We revised the format. (Please see line 56)

#### **Comments:**

3) Line 63, "a small fraction"- do you mean the mass fraction? Giving high OC fractions

in carbonaceous aerosols, and probably high abundance of BrC to total OC, its mass fraction might be not “small”, although so far it is still unclear about its mass as there is only an operationally defined term, and mass differs when using different extraction methods.

**Reply:** We do agree with the comments above, and revised the statement. See page 3, line 63-64.

**Comments:**

4) Lines 102-105, better to move this part ahead to the beginning of paragraph.

**Reply:** Suggestion taken. See page 4, line 98-101.

**Comments:**

5) Line 112, “12-hr” – only daytime, or both day and night samples were collected?

**Reply:** The samples were collected on a day/night basis with each for 12-hrs. We have rephrased the descriptions. See page 5, line 112-114.

**Comments:**

6) Line 160, provide methods in quantification mass of WSOC and MSOC.

**Reply:** Suggestion taken. As for the WSOC measurement, we added the related information into the experiment section, see page 6, line 129-132. Because MSOC cannot be measured directly, we use OC to replace it for BrC<sub>methonal</sub> calculation, which is a common way in aerosol community for BrC study. The related explanation was also given in the revised version, see page 7, line 159-163.

**Comments:**

7) Line 172, why not “300-880nm”?

**Reply:** The absorptions for aerosol extracts were almost zero at the wavelengths above 700 nm, hence, the AAE calculation by previous studies usually selected different wavelength ranges, e.g., 300 -500 nm (Liu et al., 2013), 310 -450 nm (Cheng et al., 2016), 330- 400 nm (Kirillova et al., 2014). In fact, we recalculated the AAE values at 300-500 nm for both extractions in winter, but we found that the variance for both wavelength ranges was little (< 10%), and have minor effect for our conclusion. Therefore, we believe the current wavelengths we selected are reasonable.

**Comments:**

8) Line 195, start a new sentence “similar phenomena: : :”

**Reply:** Suggestion taken. See page 9, line 192-193.

**Comments:**

9) Line 198 “mainly”- the relative contribution of primary and secondary sources for OPAHs and nitrophenols is still unclear so far. But my opinion here is that the word “mainly” here might be inappropriate. Also, the authors may provide some past emission studies on OPAHs, nitrophenols, and PAHs here. The cited study here was insufficient to support the statement.

**Reply:** Suggestion taken. We have revised the discussions. See page 9, line 195-200.

**Comments:**

10) Lines 201-203, but the question is that these chemicals comprised only a small mass fraction of BrC or OC, so the light absorption of BrC could be attributed to other components, although currently there is a big gap in this area.

**Reply:** We agree with the reviewer that these compounds comprised only a small fraction of BrC, and the light absorption of BrC could be attributed to other components. As mentioned by the reviewer, currently only a small fraction of BrC can be characterized on a molecular level and there is a big gap in this area. Many studies have found that PAHs, OPAHs and nitrophenols are of strong light-absorbing ability, although their contributions to the total light-absorption are relatively small mainly due to their very low mass fractions. However, their sources especially secondary formation pathways are still not clear. Therefore, studies related to these BrC compounds are warranted.

**Comments:**

11) Line 205, a few past studies indicated that in some area especially in north China, coal burning could be an unignorable source of LG as well.

**Reply:** We agree that coal burning is an unignorable source of levoglucosan in some area of China. However, we found that the ratio of the levoglucosan/mannosan and levoglucosan/galacosan in Xi'an during the campaign are similar to the biomass types (see in Fig. S2). Therefore, we believe that in Xi'an and its surrounding regions levoglucosan is mostly derived from biomass burning and can be taken as the tracer. The related discussion can be found in page 11, line 243-247, and the supporting information (Figure S2).

**Comments:**

12) Line 216, "open biomass burning"

**Reply:** Suggestion taken.

**Comments:**

13) Line 233, is it possible that BrC compositions differed among these sites, resulting different absorption efficient? "BrC pollution is more significant"- is a little hard to understand.

**Reply:** Thank for your valuable advice. We think the higher values of  $abs_{\lambda=365nm}$  values in Xi'an than in Beijing, US and Korea are mainly due to the higher level of light-absorbing compounds in the urban atmosphere. We agree with the reviewer that BrC compositions differed among these sites, resulting different absorption efficiency. As defined in page 7, MAC is  $abs_{\lambda=365nm}$  divided by WSOC or OC, which reflecting the light-absorbing ability of per unit mass of BrC. From Table 2, we can see that MAC in Xi'an during the two seasons are higher than those in US and Korea, suggesting that BrC in Xi'an is comprised of stronger light-absorbing compounds. We added this discussion into the text, see page, line 239-241. We also modified the sentence "BrC pollution is more significant" as suggesting a heavy pollution of light-absorbing aerosols in Xi'an. See page10, line 231.

**Comments:**

14) Line 237, “OC” or “MSOC”?

**Reply:** We assumed that OC could be completely dissolved in methanol solvent and substituted MSOC, so it is WSOC or MSOC here. We changed the OC term into MSOC, to keep consistent. See page 11, line 235.

**Comments:**

15) Line 254- any evidence or past studies to support this?

**Reply:** Phthalates, as important plasticizer, are easily dissolved in methanol, but not in water. It has less absorption at wavelength  $>300$  nm (Du et al., 2014). We analyzed 3 species of phthalates, and found that phthalates/OC ratio was about 10 times higher in summer than in winter (Figure 1). Hence, we think that more amount of non-BrC by methanol extraction lead to smaller  $MAC_{MSOC}$  compared with  $MAC_{WSOC}$  in summer. We added this explanation into the text. See page 12, line255-266.

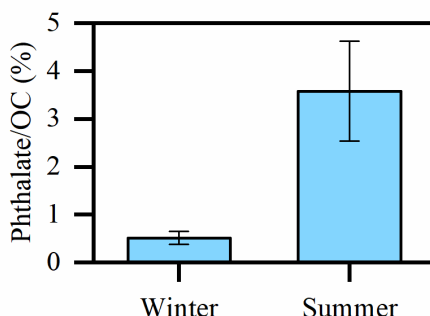


Figure 1 The ratio of phthalates/OC in both seasons.

**Comments:**

16) Lines 293-317, while interpreting these results, I'd like to suggest to paying more attentions to the uncertainties in both Mie theory calculation as well as experimental methods, and difference in difference extraction approaches. The 30% difference may be not a “significant underestimation”.

**Reply:** Thank you for reminding. An orthogonal regression was applied here, which was better than the previous linear fit due to considering the errors with variables x and y. From Figure 2a, the slope has changed compared with previous method (1.3), and the variance of variable x is significant. We noted that one point, as depicted in Figure 2a (red circle), is much far away from the fitting line. Hence, it may be an abnormal datum, and thus lead to this phenomenon. Unfortunately, there are no more filter for measuring this sample again. So, we have to exclude this point, and found that the factor become bigger than that depicted in Figure 2a. While, the variance of variable x (0.04) is only 0.1fold for the previous one. To make the data more representative, we also choose the 5<sup>th</sup> ~ 95<sup>th</sup> percentiles of all data points to further verify the result, which is same as that in Fig. 2b. To sum up, the factor is about 1.5 between abs-Mie and abs-measure rather than 1.3. Therefore, our previous conclusion about underestimation of BrC absorption by solvent extraction methods is reasonable. We recommend a factor of 1.5 to convert the liquid-based data (at least for the water-soluble data) reported by this work for estimating optical properties of atmospheric aerosols in Xi'an and its surrounding regions in order to

better quantify the BrC light-absorption. We added this discussion into the text, See page 15, line 318-321.

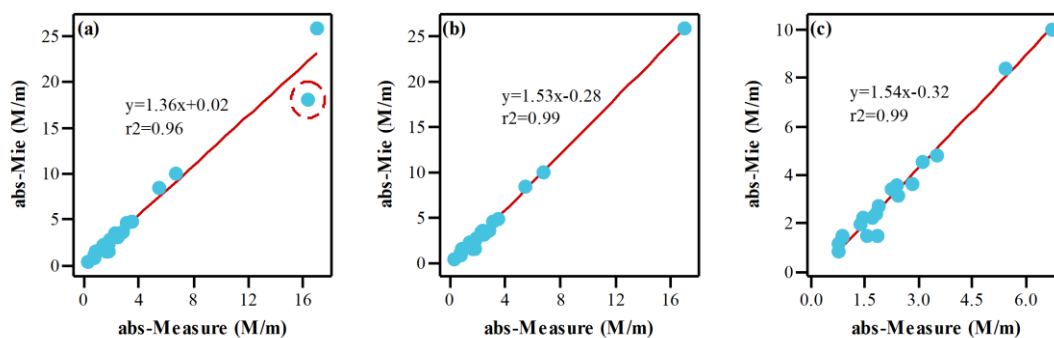


Figure 2 An orthogonal regression for different data. (a) all data points, (b) excepting abnormal point (red circle in Fig. 2(a)), (c) 5<sup>th</sup> ~ 95<sup>th</sup> percentiles of all data points.

### Comments:

17) Line 347, delete “which is also called black carbon”

**Reply:** Suggestion taken.

### Comments:

18) Line 411, did the authors calculate AAE for this fraction(source) separately? Please clarify.

**Reply:** In this study, we have no way to calculate the AAE values for each source, so the value represents the AAE of total BrC. We have clarified this issue in the revised manuscript. See page 19, line 414.

### Comments:

19) Figure 6- suggest to improving quality

**Reply:** Suggestion taken. We have replotted it.

## References

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