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Aerodynamic size-resolved composition and cloud condensation nuclei properties of aerosols in Beijing suburban region

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Abstract The size-resolved physiochemical properties of aerosols determine their atmospheric lifetime, cloud interactions, and the deposition rate on human respiratory system, however most atmospheric composition studies tend to evaluate these properties in bulk. This study investigated size-resolved constituents of aerosols on mass and number basis, and their droplet activation properties, by coupling a suite of online measurements with an aerosol aerodynamic classifier (AAC) based on aerodynamic diameter (D_a) in Pinggu, a suburb of Beijing. While organic matter accounted for a large fraction of mass, a higher contribution of particulate nitrate at larger sizes (D_a > 300 nm) was found under polluted cases. By applying the mixing state of refractory black carbon containing particles (rBCc) and composition-dependent densities, aerosols including rBCc were confirmed nearly spherical at D_a > 300 nm. Importantly, the number fraction of rBCc was found to increase with D_a at all pollution levels. The number fraction of rBC is found to increase from ~3% at ~90 nm to ~15% at ~1000 nm, and this increasing rBC number fraction may be caused by the coagulation during atmospheric aging. The droplet activation diameter at a water supersaturation of 0.2% was 112 ± 6 nm and 193 ± 41 nm for all particles with D_a smaller than 1 μm (PM_1) and rBCc respectively. As high as 52 ± 6% of rBCc and 50 ± 4% of all PM_1 particles in number could be activated under heavy pollution due to enlarged particle size, which could be predicted by applying the volume-mixing of substance hygroscopicity within rBCc. As rBCc contributes to the quantity of aerosols at larger particle size, these thickly coated rBC may contribute to the radiation absorption significantly or act as an important source of cloud condensation nuclei (CCN). This size regime may also exert important health effects due to their higher deposition rate.

1. Introduction

Atmospheric aerosols make a significant contribution in a number of atmospheric chemical and physical processes (Riemer et al., 2019). Aerosols from anthropogenic emissions have negative impact on air quality and human health (West et al., 2016). As a major megacity, the air pollution in Beijing and its surrounding regions has raised much attention in the past years (Shi et al., 2019). The rapid urbanization and the continued increase in vehicle numbers have contributed to a complicated air pollution

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situation in Beijing (Squires et al., 2020). A number of in-situ measurements have characterised the submicron aerosol compositions in urban Beijing (Wang et al., 2020;Hu et al., 2016;Wang et al., 2019). However, few studies have detailed characterised the fine particle compositions or cloud condensation nuclei (CCN) abilities at Beijing rural sites (Chen et al., 2020a). The relocation of industry from the urban Beijing has led the surrounding cities around Beijing to be highly industrialised in recent years (Wang et al., 2018), and the rural sites of Beijing are significantly impacted by the air pollutants transported from the surrounding industrial regions in North China Plain (NCP) (Wu et al., 2011). Furthermore, controls targeting pollution from residential solid fuel use and diesel vehicles do not apply outside of the main metropolitan area of Beijing. Detailed characterisation of fine aerosol physiochemical properties in a variety of different environments is essential to understand the evolution of atmospheric particulate matter.

Fine particulate matter can also cause damage to human respiratory system (Xing et al., 2016;Xu et al., 2016). Aerodynamic size of aerosols crucially determines their deposition to the respiratory system (Sturm, 2010;Vu et al., 2018;Sturm, 2017), e.g. particle with aerodynamic diameter (D_a) below 2.5 μm can reach small air ways of respiratory system and further pass into the blood (Lipworth et al., 2014). The observed toxicity of aerosols is composition dependent (Kwon et al., 2020) and influenced by the complex morphology (Sturm, 2010;Vu et al., 2018), therefore the aerodynamic size-resolved properties of aerosols are important to understand their influences on air quality associated with the human health.

Atmospheric aerosols also play important roles in climate through scattering and absorbing solar radiation directly, or indirectly through altering cloud properties (Liu et al., 2020;Ravishankara et al., 2015). Black carbon (BC) is produced from incomplete combustion and is the dominant optically absorbing component in aerosols (Liu et al., 2020;Bond et al., 2013). By mixing with other compounds, the absorption ability of coated BC can be enhanced through the “lensing effect” (Lack and Cappa, 2010). However, detailed simulation and characterization of optical properties of BC remains

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large uncertain since it is influenced by factors such as shape and mixing state (Cappa et al., 2012;Liu et al., 2017;Fierce et al., 2020), which can be modified through atmospheric processing. Thus, better characterization of light absorbing carbonaceous particles is essential.

Coated BC is also known as an important source of CCN and wet removal is its main atmospheric loss mechanism, so its in-cloud scavenging efficiency and thus lifetime is influenced by its size, mixing state and hygroscopic properties (Taylor et al., 2014), but this is subject to large uncertainties (Myhre and Samset, 2015). Studies have confirmed that hygroscopicity of rBCc is largely impacted by the coating material, and rBCc will transform from hydrophobic to hydrophilic after emission by acquiring more non-BC material and increasing in size (Hu et al., 2020b;Wu et al., 2019;Liu et al., 2013). However, limited studies (Levin et al., 2014;Broekhuizen et al., 2006) have provided both the measured size-resolved CCN ability and aerosol physiochemical properties so far, and the CCN ability of rBCc based on atmospheric data remains poorly constrained. Previously, size-resolved composition has been widely investigated using size-segregated off-line analysis of cascade impactors samples (Marple et al., 1991). This technique offers great advantages in obtaining detailed information about compositions in combination of the advanced offline measurements, however it often requires large amounts of material and may not be able to provide sufficient time resolutions. Information about particle mixing state and CCN activities are also not available through this technique. The aerosol mass spectrometer (AMS) is also capable of delivering size-resolved aerosol compositions, however the poor accuracy of AMS in the size range important for CCN (typically 50 -100 nm) has hampered quantitative work for this application.

A previous study (Yu et al., 2020) has characterized the size-resolved rBCc mixing state in Beijing using a tandem aerosol classifier system. To explore the size-resolved physiochemical properties and CCN ability for bulk aerosol compositions, here we performed a new online measurement method by coupling an aerodynamic aerosol

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classifier (AAC) with different aerosol measurement techniques including a single-particle soot photometer (SP2) and an aerosol mass spectrometer (AMS). Comparing to the previous studies performed with differential mobility analyzer (DMA), the AAC classifies particles without multiple charging artefacts in a wide size range and with better transmission efficiency (Johnson et al., 2018). The simultaneous measurement of size-resolved chemical composition and CCN activation enables a detailed analysis of rBCc hygroscopicity and its size-dependent contribution to the CCN activation in a polluted environment. This information will deliver a better understanding to the BC deposition properties for the climate and air pollution impact on human health studies.

2. Experimental methods

2.1 Experiment location and instruments

The experiment was performed between 5th Jan and 20th Jan 2020 in the Beijing Weather Modification Office field experiment base located in Pinggu (the red pentagram shown in Fig. 4a), a northeastern suburb of Beijing (Shi et al., 2019). With agriculture dominated its local economy, Pinggu is surrounded by small villages and farmlands (Han et al., 2020). Fig. 1 describes the schematic of the instruments used for the size-resolved aerosol measurements. An aerodynamic aerosol classifier (AAC, Cambustion) was placed upstream of the aerosol measurement instruments. The operation and validation of the AAC was described in previous studies (Tavakoli and Olfert, 2013;Tavakoli and Olfert, 2014). Unlike the DMA or Centrifugal Particle Mass Analyzer (CPMA), the AAC selects particles based on aerodynamic sizes according to particle relaxation time without needing charging for electrostatic or mass sizing. A suite of online measurements was introduced downstream of the AAC, including a high-resolution time of flight aerosol mass spectrometer (HR-ToF-AMS, Aerodyne) (DeCarlo et al., 2006) was operated in V-mode to characterize the non-refractory aerosol composition and a single particle soot photometer (SP2, DMT) (Schwarz et al., 2010) for the measurement of rBCc concentrations. The volume properties of non-refractory material within rBCc (hence referred as 'coating thickness') was derived by SP2 leading-edge-only (LEO) method (Liu et al., 2019) and is described as the ratio between the diameter of total rBCc and rBC core (D_p/D_c). A cloud condensation nuclei

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counter (CCNc, DMT) was used to sample the potential CCN activation ability at a constant supersaturation (SS) of 0.2% and a condensation particle counter (CPC, TSI model 3776) was used to measure the condensation nuclei (CN) number concentration. The SP2 incandescence signal was calibrated using nebulised Aquadag black carbon particle standards while the scattering channel was calibrated by 200 nm polystyrene latex spheres before the measurement, and the correction factor of 0.75 for ambient rBC measurement was applied (Laborde et al., 2012). The ionization efficiency of AMS was calibrated using mono-disperse of nebulized ammonium nitrate particles following the standard protocols (Xu et al., 2017), and a constant collection efficiency (CE) of 0.5 is applied (Middlebrook et al., 2012). More details of the calibration and operation of this AMS instrument can be seen in previous field measurement studies (Hu et al., 2021;Liu et al., 2021). The term 'all particles' in this study is referred as the PM_1 compositions including Organic compounds (Org), Sulfate (SO_4), ammonia (NH_4), Nitrate (NO_3), Chloride (Cl) and rBC from AMS and SP2. The AAC was set to classify dry aerosol particles from 90 nm to 1100 nm in aerodynamic diameter (D_a) to cover the detection range of the SP2 and AMS. It took around 15 min to complete one scan using the AAC step scanning mode, and a timed valve was placed at the upstream of the AAC for switching between monodisperse and polydisperse every 30 min. Example for a running cycle is presented in the supplementary.

2.2 Calculation of aerosol morphology parameters

The dynamic shape factor (χ) describes the shape of particles (DeCarlo et al., 2004). $\chi = 1$ denotes a perfectly spherical particle, and $\chi > 1$ means more non-sphericity. Based on the measurement here, χ can be calculated by:

$$\chi = \frac{\rho_p {D_v}^2 C_c(D_v)}{{D_a}^2 C_c(D_a)} \quad (1)$$

where ρ_p is the particle material density, C_c represents the slip correction factor at a given diameter and is calculated following the description in Kim et al. (2005), D_v is the particle volume equivalent diameter, and D_a is the aerodynamic diameter classified by AAC. This calculation is performed for all particles (including rBCc) and rBCc, using their respective parameters (ρ_p and D_v). For all particles, ρ_p is the mean density weighted by the PM_1 results measured by the AMS and SP2. To compute the particle volume results based on the AMS measured ion and Org concentrations, a simplified

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ion pairing scheme presented in Gysel et al. (2007) was applied, and the solutions are described in the supplementary. The ρ_{p} of rBCc is calculated as the weighted density within rBCc including rBC and coatings, where the coating material of rBCc is assumed to constitute of the same volume fractions of ambient non-refractory compositions (Liu et al., 2015;Hu et al., 2021):

$$\rho_{\mathrm{rBCc}} = \frac{M_{\mathrm{rBCc}}}{V_{\mathrm{rBCc}}} = \frac{\rho_{\mathrm{NR}} \cdot \left(\frac{1}{6}\pi D_{\mathrm{p,rBCc}}^3 - \frac{1}{6}\pi D_{\mathrm{c}}^3\right) + M_{\mathrm{rBC}}}{\frac{1}{6}\pi D_{\mathrm{p,rBCc}}^3} \quad (2)$$

where M_{rBCc} and V_{rBCc} are the mass and volume of the rBCc respectively, ρ_{NR} is the particle density of non-refractory compositions. The rBC core diameter (D_{c}) and total rBCc diameter ($D_{\mathrm{p,rBCc}}$) are derived through the SP2 LEO method.

For all particles, mean single particle mass is derived from the total mass (M_{all}) obtained by AMS and SP2 divided by the total number (N_{total}) obtained by the CPC, hereinafter the mean D_{v} of particle is assumed to equal to the mass equivalent diameter (D_{m}) and is obtained by applying the mean ρ_{p} above:

$$D_{v,\mathrm{all}} = D_{m,\mathrm{all}} = \sqrt[3]{\frac{6M_{\mathrm{single,all}}}{\rho_{\mathrm{all}} \cdot \pi}} = \sqrt[3]{\frac{6M_{\mathrm{all}}}{\rho_{\mathrm{all}} \cdot \pi \cdot N_{\mathrm{total}}}} \quad (3)$$

where ρ_{all} is the particle density of all aerosol particles.

2.3 Hygroscopicity parameter calculation

The hygroscopicity parameter (κ) (Petters and Kreidenweis, 2007) of measured aerosols is predicted based on the measured aerosol compositions and invoking the Zdanovskii–Stokes–Robinson (ZSR) mixing rule(Stokes and Robinson, 1966). The κ for all particles (κ_{all}) is calculated as:

$$\kappa_{all} = \sum_i \varepsilon_i \kappa_i \quad (4)$$

where ε_i and κ_i is the volume fraction and hygroscopicity parameter of each chemical composition respectively. The κ based on the AMS measured concentrations were calculated based on the same simplified ion pairing scheme described above. The detailed information for each parameter used for κ calculation is listed in Table S1. For rBCc, the κ_{rBCc} is calculated by:

$$\kappa_{rBCc} = \sum_i \varepsilon_{coating,i} \kappa_{coating,i} + \varepsilon_{rBC} \kappa_{rBC} \quad (5)$$

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Where $\varepsilon_{\mathrm{coating},i}$ and $\varepsilon_{\mathrm{rBC}}$ is the volume fraction coating and rBC respectively; $\kappa_{\mathrm{coating},i}$ represents the hygroscopicity parameter for each rBCc coating composition and is assumed to equal to the κ of ambient non-refractory compositions (Motos et al., 2019;Hu et al., 2021); κ_{rBC} represents the hygroscopicity parameter for rBC and the last term can be ignored since pure rBC is assumed to be hydrophobic.

2.4 CCN ability of all particles and rBCc

The CCN activation fraction is determined as the ratio between CCN number concentration at SS=0.2% and the CN number concentration measured by the CPC. The size-resolved CCN activation fraction (*AF*) is fitted in a sigmoid function:

$$AF = \frac{E}{1+\left(\frac{D_{50}}{D_p}\right)^C} \times 100\% \quad (6)$$

Where E and C are fitting coefficients which represent the asymptote and the slope respectively. D_{p} is the particle dry diameter, and D_{50} represents the critical particle diameter where 50% of particles in number can be activated as CCN (Petters and Kreidenweis, 2007).

The number concentration of rBCc which acts as CCN is derived from the concurrent measurements of rBC number concentration, CCN and CN. The method described by Hu et al. (2021) has been applied to determine the activation of rBCc. Firstly, the un-activated particle number concentration is derived from the difference between CN and CCN, as the red line in Fig. 2(a) shows. For particles with D_{a} > 300nm in the example, the un-activated particles are nil thus all rBCc is also activated. Here particles are considered to be well mixed, and rBCc is less hydrophilic than any other non-refractory particles at the same particle size. Thus, the rBCc is more difficult to be activated as CCN than the other particles. For particles with D_{a} < 300nm, the rBCc is therefore considered to be the first in contributing the un-activated particles and the activated rBCc is the rBCc number concentration higher than the un-activated particle numbers. By this way, the size-dependent activated rBCc number concentration can be obtained (black line in Fig. 2(b)). $D_{50,\,\mathrm{rBCc}}$ can then be derived through Equation (6) based on the rBCc activation fraction curve. The rBCc activation fraction derived through this method is further referred as "measured AF_{rBCc}". There may be some occasions when rBCc could exhibit a higher hygroscopicity, if coated with sufficient hygroscopic

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243 substances, even higher than a particle without containing rBC. This means the scenario
244 here may underestimate some fractions of activated rBCc. The method here may
245 therefore serve as a least estimation of droplet activation of rBCc from this aspect.
246
247 The rBCc activation is also estimated through the calculated size-resolved critical
248 supersaturation (SS_c) (Wu et al., 2019;Hu et al., 2021) for comparsion, which is derived
249 based on the κ_{rBCc} described before from the κ-Köhler theory:

250 $$S(D) = \frac{D^3 - D_{rBCc}^3}{D^3 - D_{rBCc}^3(1-\kappa)} exp\left(\frac{4\sigma_{s/a}M_w}{RT\rho_w D}\right) \quad (7)$$

251 Where D is the diameter of the droplet, D_{rBCc} is the rBCc dry diameter, M_w and ρ_w are
252 the molecular weight and density of water respectively, T is temperature, R is the idea
253 gas constant, and $\sigma_{s/a}$ is the surface tension of the solution/air interface. A decreased
254 SS with increasing D_a can be obtained (Fig. 3), so the $D_{50,\,rBCc}$ at SS_c = 0.2% is the cross
255 point above which diameter only SS<0.2% is required to activate the targeting rBCc.
256 The activated rBCc number concentration is the rBCc concentration with size larger
257 than $D_{50,\,rBCc}$. The activation fraction estimated through this method is further referred
258 as "modelled AF_{rBCc}".
259
260 **2.5 NAME dispersion model**
261 The airmass classification results used to identify potential source regions are generated
262 by the UK Met Office Numerical Atmospheric dispersion Modelling Environment
263 (NAME) dispersion model (Jones et al., 2007). The model presented the 48h backward
264 dispersion results on a $0.25^\circ \times 0.25^\circ$ grid using the three-dimensional gridded
265 meteorological field generated from the UK Met Office's Unified Model (Brown et al.,
266 2012). Beijing and its surrounding areas have been classified into five regions as shown
267 in Fig. 4(a) in order to attribute the airmass histories: The Local Beijing (39-41.5°N,
268 115-117°E), the North (41.5-45°N, 104-121°E), the South (32-39°N, 115-121°E), the
269 West (32-41.5°N, 104-115°E) and the East region (39-41.5°N, 117-121°E).
270

271 ## 3. Results and discussions

272 ### 3.1 Overview for the whole campaign period

273 Fig. 4(c) presents the overview of aerosol total number and mass concentrations during
274 the experimental period. Beijing and its suburban region experience large contrasts in

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pollution conditions depending on the wind direction (Liu et al., 2019;Chen et al., 2020b). To test whether the mixing state varies according to ambient pollution concentrations, the pollution is classified into three levels according to the frequency distribution of PM_1 concentrations during the whole measurement period: heavy pollution ($PM_1 \geq 30\ \mu g/m^3$), moderate pollution ($10\ \mu g/m^3 < PM_1 < 30\ \mu g/m^3$), and light pollution ($PM_1 \leq 10\ \mu g/m^3$). Combining the airmass history results with the aerosol optical depth (AOD) spatial distribution results from the Himawari-8 Level 2 aerosol product (Bessho et al., 2016;Fukuda et al., 2013) (Fig. 4(b)), the heavy and moderate pollution period was mostly attributed to airmasses from the East and West regions. While the contribution from the Local airmass cannot be ignored in some pollution cases, relatively clean northerly airmasses were associated with the light pollution periods.

3.2 Size-resolved aerosol mass compositions and rBCc mixing state

Fig. 5(a-e) presents the size-resolved average mass concentrations for PM_1, rBC, organic compounds (Org), sulfate (SO_4), nitrate (NO_3) respectively under each pollution condition. Though the heavy pollution period has the highest aerosol mass concentrations among three cases, there was no significant difference for total PM_1 and non-refractory compositions mass concentrations below 200 nm in D_a under different pollution levels. Notable contributions to the total PM_1 from non-refractory material was observed for $D_a > 300$ nm especially for the heavy pollution condition. Unlike the more polluted conditions, the non-refractory aerosol mass concentrations during light pollution periods shows limited size-dependent variation. The size distribution of rBC mass concentration reached the peak at 400 nm under heavy pollution, while the peak for the moderate and light pollution was at a bit smaller D_a which was between 300 and 400 nm. The peak diameter of NR-PM_1 observed in Pinggu was at around 700 nm and is higher than the peak diameter of NR-PM_1 reported at the urban site of Beijing which is between 400 nm and 500 nm in winter (Hu et al., 2016). Due to the higher primary organic aerosol (POA) emissions, the results at Beijing urban site has higher contribution of Org at smaller size (< 500 nm) (Zhang et al., 2014). While the higher Org peak diameter (at around 700 nm) shown in our study suggests that the Org was highly oxidised in Beijing suburban (Li et al., 2021). The higher peak diameter of secondary inorganic compound also indicates the well mixture of aerosol components

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in suburban region (Liu et al., 2016). This size-resolved composition result reported in Pinggu is in consistent with the previous measurement in another suburban region in NCP (Li et al., 2021). Comparing the composition mass fractions under three different pollution cases shown in Fig.5(i-k), one of the remarkable differences is that particulate nitrate accounted more mass fraction during the heavy and moderate pollution periods than during the light pollution period. Previous studies shown that this rapid particulate nitrate formation in Beijing area is mainly associated with the heterogeneous hydrolysis of N_2O_5 at night (Li et al., 2018). Particulate nitrate has become one of the major secondary inorganic aerosol pollutants in urban environment recently (Zhang et al., 2015), and NO_3 also contributed to the aerosol hygroscopicity significantly during the haze pollution periods (Sun et al., 2018). Due to the significant reduction of SO_x emissions in China in recent years (Zhang et al., 2012), the mass fractions of SO_4 remained low in pollution cases. The Org contributed to the aerosol mass compositions significantly, and the capping of rBC mass fraction was around 25% among all three cases.

Fig. 5(f) and (g) present the size distribution of rBC core mass median diameter (MMD) and the coating thickness. This indicates larger D_a had selected rBCc with larger rBC core and higher coatings. The MMD of rBC core increased from below 100 nm to around 300 nm with the increasing of particle size. The rBC core for the light pollution condition was a little smaller than the other two periods, indicating a possible coagulation process in more polluted cases with higher rBC concentrations. The coating thickness of rBCc D_p/D_c decreased slightly when D_a increased from 90 to 300 nm. This decreasing trend of rBC coating thickness may be caused by the traffic emissions. Joshi et al. (2021) demonstrated that traffic emissions dominated the rBC fluxes in urban Beijing, and a previous study also showed a similar decreasing trend of rBC coatings for engine emissions within this particle size range (Han et al., 2019). Limited differences were observed for the size-resolved D_p/D_c among the three pollution levels. The average D_p/D_c for all rBCc was 2.1 ± 0.2, 1.6 ± 0.1, and 1.5 ± 0.04 for heavy, moderate and light pollution respectively. There was more heavily coated rBCc showed for heavy pollution condition, and this was consistent with more secondary particle formation than the other periods.

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Fig. 5(h) shows the distribution of hygroscopicity parameter (κ). The lowest κ_{all} between 150 and 300 nm at heavy and moderate pollution condition was mainly caused by the increasing of rBC fractions. Due to the increase of more hydroscopic inorganic compositions for larger particles under heavy and moderate pollution conditions, κ_{all} increased considerably for particles D_a > 200 nm and 300 nm. In contrast to the more polluted cases, κ_{all} under light pollution period varied slightly with the increase of D_a. Caused by the absence of more soluble inorganic compositions, κ_{all} for particles with D_a > 300 nm during light pollution period was lower than the other conditions. For rBCc, κ_{rBCc} was more influenced by the coating volume fractions rather than the coating compositions, as the variation of κ_{rBCc} generally followed the trend of rBCc coating thickness (Fig. 5(g)). κ_{rBCc} for particles with D_a < 300 nm was close under three different pollution levels, and the decreasing trend of κ_{rBCc} between 90 and 300 nm was caused by the reduction of coating material fraction.

3.3 Size-resolved particle morphology

Fig. 6 shows the distribution of particle density, average single particle size and mass, and morphology parameters for all particles (left) and rBCc (right). The average particle density for all particles (ρ_{all}) varied slightly between 1.55 and 1.6 g/cm^3, and the rBCc particle density (ρ_{rBCc}) within the measurement size range was generally higher than the ρ_{all} due to the higher density of rBC. The peak ρ_{rBCc} reached at between 200 and 300 nm in D_a due to the rBCc was least coated within this size range. D_v was larger than D_a and deviated more at smaller size but was close to D_a for all particles and rBCc larger than 200 nm. The dynamic shape factor (χ) of all particles declined from around 1.8 to 1.2, while χ of rBCc declined from around 2 to 1.2. All particles with D_a above 400 nm and rBCc with D_a above 500 nm tended to have lower χ which was around 1.2. Previous study (Lin et al., 2015) in other megacities reported that χ of all particles was around 2 with D_a at around 100 nm which is close to our results. Previous measurements (Zhang et al., 2016) in Beijing also shown the similar decreasing trend of χ for rBC core during the aging process.

This result indicates that smaller particles have more irregular shapes, while particles with larger aerodynamic size are more spherical in ambient atmosphere. Previous experiment shows that the irregular aggregated rBCc from fresh emissions can

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transform to be more spherical-like by acquiring more secondary species(Ahern et al., 2016). Our results confirm that the spherical assumption is suitable for large rBCc in aerodynamic size in a typical anthropogenic polluted environment. This also implies that larger and spherical particles tend to have larger deposition rate, while particles with more irregularity may experience higher drag force in the air, towards decelerating the settlement.

3.4 Size-resolved CN and CCN number concentrations

Fig.7(a) and (b) presents the distribution of rBCc, CN and CCN number concentrations at different polluted conditions. The peak of rBCc number concentration at heavy pollution period was at around 300 nm, while the peak for moderate and light pollution was slightly smaller (at around 200 nm). This agrees with the previous studies in Beijing showing that the average total rBCc particles size was associated with the pollution levels (Yu et al., 2020;Liu et al., 2019). Similar trend was also observed for the CN concentrations, and the peak of CN concentrations shifted to the larger particle size with increased pollution level. Higher levels of secondary production through condensation and also coagulation enlarged particle size. Because of the increasing of average particle size, more fraction of particles can be activated as CCN under heavy pollution period.

By using aerodynamic size-resolved number concentration of rBC and CN, a remarkable increase of rBC number fraction at larger aerodynamic size was found (Fig 7(c)), i.e. with D_a from 100-1000nm, rBC number fraction increased almost linearly from 3% to 15%, and this applied to all pollution levels. This tends to represent a generic phenomenon for a suburban environment with continuous influence of anthropogenic emissions, and the primary emissions had been aged in a time scale of hours. Fine rBC condensed on or coagulated with pre-existing larger particles during the aging process (Riemer et al., 2009). The coagulation process dominated the formation of thickly-coated rBC particles (Reddington et al., 2013), and the coagulation rate of smaller rBC may be fast due to the higher number concentration of fine mode particles (Matsui et al., 2018). The very fresh emissions such as from diesel engine emissions, which mostly contains thinly-coated small rBC (Han et al., 2019), may not show the same rBC number fraction distribution. Previous studies also reported a

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relatively fast aging process for BC also in the order of hours (Peng et al., 2017), if under a polluted environment rich of precursors, the aging could be even faster (Peng et al., 2016). The causality of this increased rBC number fraction at larger particle size is therefore the non-rBC compounds associated with it. The results presented here indicated that the higher contribution from regional pollution to the rBC number at larger aerodynamic size may apply, albeit the various features of primary sources in winter (Wang et al., 2019;Liu et al., 2019).

The rBC associated with larger coatings was more spherical (with χ close to 1, as discussed above), therefore more likely to have a core-shell structure, which would lead to an absorption enhancement from the lensing effect of coatings (Liu et al., 2017). In addition, this size-resolved rBC number fraction results will improve the understanding to the lung deposition of BC in human health studies (Rissler et al., 2017). This means for particles with higher deposition rate tend to contain a higher number fraction of rBC, which may provide some indications for constituents deposited on different parts in human respiratory system (Carvalho et al., 2011;Manigrasso et al., 2020).

3.5 CCN ability and rBCc activation

Presented in Fig. 8(a), the $D_{50,\,\mathrm{All}}$ varied smoothly and was slightly higher than 100 nm for most of the experiment period. The mean $D_{50,\,\mathrm{All}}$ and $D_{50,\,\mathrm{rBCc}}$ was 112 ± 6 nm and 193 ± 41 nm respectively. Shown in Fig. 8(d) most of the $D_{50,\,\mathrm{rBCc}}$ was around 200 nm which illustrates that the number concentrations of rBCc with D_a above 200 nm had significant contribution to the overall AF_{rBCc}.

Fig. 8(b) presents the temporal evolution of the CCN number concentration and activation fraction for all particles and rBCc. Fig. 8(e) showed 50 ± 4% of the measured particles can be activated with SS=0.2% under heavy polluted period, while the AF_{all} for the light pollution period was generally lower than the AF_{all} of the other two periods which was 24 ± 10% on average. The AF_{all} for the moderate pollution period was 39 ± 9% on average. Shown in Fig. 8(e) and (f), both all particles and rBCc showed high activation fraction of around 50% during the heavy pollution periods. While for moderate and light pollution conditions, rBCc exhibited substantially higher activation

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fraction than all particles, especially under light pollution periods where the average activation fraction was 44 ± 18% for rBCc compared to 24 ± 10% for all particles. The maintaining high rBCc activation fraction at all pollution levels resulted from the relatively higher rBC number fractions at larger D_a (Fig. 8(c)) because of the higher associated coatings. The directly measured CCN activity of rBCc showed that particles at larger sizes had contained a larger fraction of rBCc that were CCN active, due to the larger particle size. This in turn implies that the rBCc has the potential to be more efficiently incorporated into cloud droplets. The measured and modelled AF_{rBCc} was close and agreed within 22% (shown in Fig. S3), and the modelled AF_{rBCc} was slightly higher than the measurement results. This underestimation of modelled $D_{50,\,rBCc}$ may result from an overestimation on the κ_{rBCc} as here a consistent κ was applied between rBCc coatings and all non-refractory materials in bulk, though the coatings on rBC may have not contained as much hygroscopic materials as the bulk non-rBC aerosols. Freshly emitted rBC particles contain substantial amounts of organic matter (Peng et al., 2017) while the more hygroscopic secondary inorganic materials require atmospheric aging to be mixed with rBC (Hu et al., 2020a). Our results confirm that while rBCc can be CCN active, and the size of rBCc is crucial to the rBCc CCN ability in polluted suburban environment. This AF_{rBCc} result presented here is generally consistent with previous field measurements: Wu et al. (2019) and Hu et al. (2021) reported 59% and 60% of total rBCc could be activated with SS = 0.2% respectively in other anthropogenic polluted environment.

4. Atmospheric implications

The AAC combination applied in this study introduced a new way to explore the physiochemical properties of aerosols. The comprehensive size-resolved aerosol information presented in this study can contribute to future studies focusing on the BC evolution and lifetime, and improve the particle resolved model simulations (i.e. Riemer et al. (2009)) for the anthropogenic polluted environment. Importantly, our results shown that thickly coated rBCc accounted higher number fraction at larger particle size than the smaller particle size in Beijing suburban. As indicated in Fig. 9, the mass absorption coefficient (MAC) of rBCc at 880nm wavelength is calculated through the core-shell Mie model described in the supplementary. The MAC_{880} was largely enhanced for rBCc with D_a > 500 nm. These larger rBCc with higher absorption

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efficiency importantly contributed to the total absorption. When transported into the top of boundary layer, these highly coated and absorbing rBCc can be efficiently incorporated into clouds (Ding et al., 2019). The absorption effects of these rBCc will be further magnified by mixing with the cloud water droplets (Wu et al., 2016), and the lensing effect may reduce the cloud lifetime (Ramanathan et al., 2001) or the cloud albedo (Chuang et al., 2002). In addition to the strong radiative absorption, these large rBCc may also alter the regional precipitation rate (Johnson et al., 2019).

Conclusions

In this study, a new aerodynamic size selection technique was applied for the direct size-resolved characterisation of aerosol constituents and properties on both mass and number basis in a suburban Beijing in winter. Besides the size selection without relying on particle charging efficiency, this technique allows reliable size-resolved particle properties. Organic compound accounted around 40% of the total PM_1 mass, and we found higher contribution of particulate nitrate at larger sizes under polluted cases in Beijing suburban. In particular, particles with larger aerodynamic diameter (D_a) were found to contain a higher number fraction of refractory black carbon (rBC), which means rBC could be more efficiently mixed with larger particles during atmospheric processes. Mie calculation results show that these thickly coated rBC containing particles (rBCc) as included in large particle may have an up to 2-fold of enhanced absorption. The dynamic shape factors for both refractory and non-refractory particles have also been derived. Particles with D_a larger than 300 nm tended to have a more spherical-like shape, while smaller particles were with more irregular shape in the polluted environment. By applying the method introduced by Hu et al. (2021), as high as 46 ± 15% number fraction of rBCc was observed to be activated under SS=0.2%. Our results suggest that the size of rBCc is key to the cloud condensation nuclei (CCN) activities of rBCc. Though rBC was small and hydrophobic initially, after being mixed with non-refractory compositions and becoming larger, the rBCc can become CCN active. The higher number fraction of rBCc at larger particle size (D_a > 300 nm) emphasizes the importance of the rBCc as a considerable CCN source. In summary, the rBCc from anthropogenic emissions, after short aging in regional scale, may therefore alter the regional radiative forcing directly or indirectly through altering cloud properties and deposit on human respiratory system efficiently.

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Author Contribution

CY and DL deigned the experiments and wrote the paper; DL and JDA provided guidance with the analysis and writing; CY, DL, KH, PT, YW, DZ, WG, MH and DD performed experiments; CY, DL, KH, HW, DH and JDA contributed to the data analysis; QL provided the AAC and guided the operations.

Data availability

Raw data is archived at Zhejiang University and is available on request.

Competing financial interests

The authors declare no competing financial interests.

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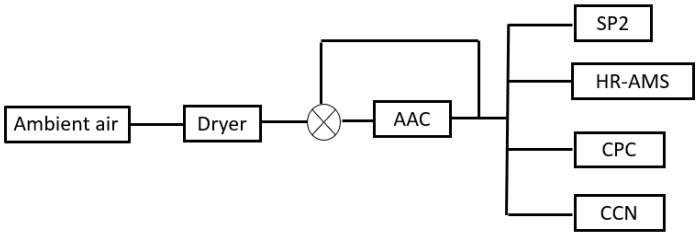

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891 Figure 1. The schematic of the instruments set up. A timed three-way valve was
892 placed at the upstream of the AAC.

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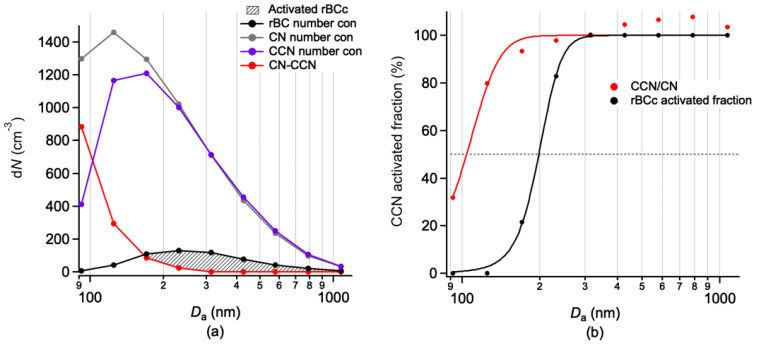

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895 Figure 2 An example of all particles and rBCc activation, the dashed grey line in (b)
896 indicated the 50% of all particles or rBCc activated.

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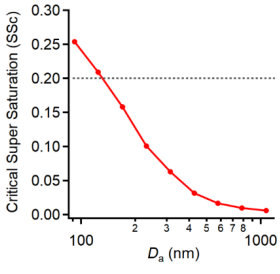

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899 Figure 3 An example of the calculation of the size-resolved critical supersaturation
900 (SSc)

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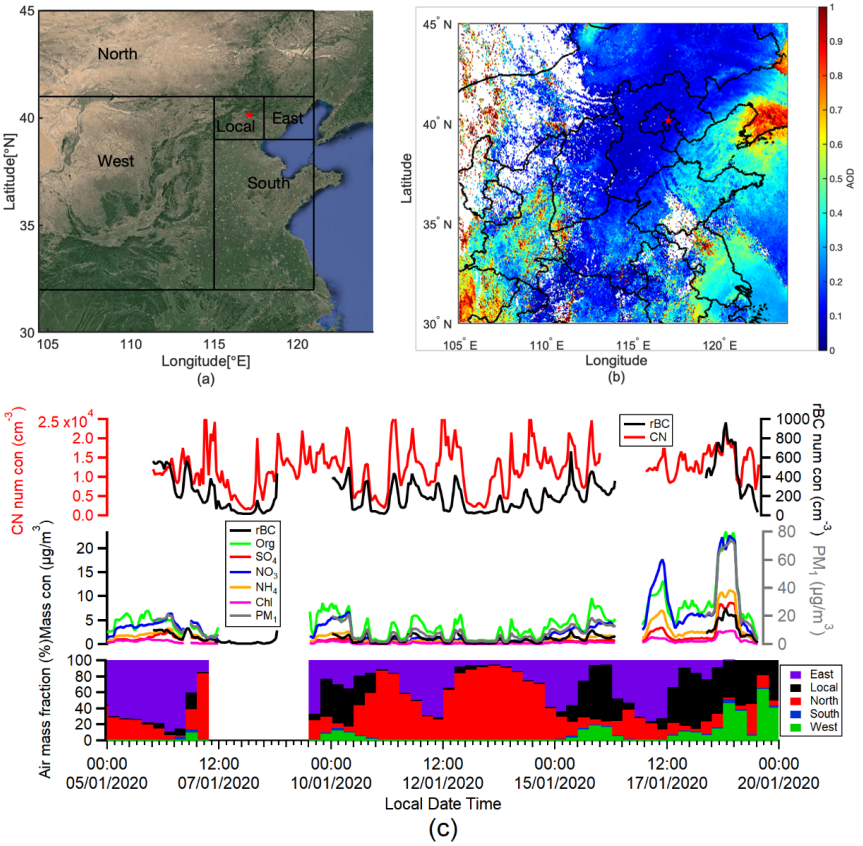

Figure 4. Overview of the experiment. (a) Location of the measurement site (marked in red pentagram) and regions classified for air mass; (b) The mean aerosol optical depth (AOD) distribution during the experiment period; (c) Aerosol mass and number concentrations and classified air mass types.

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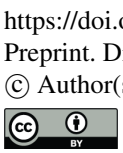

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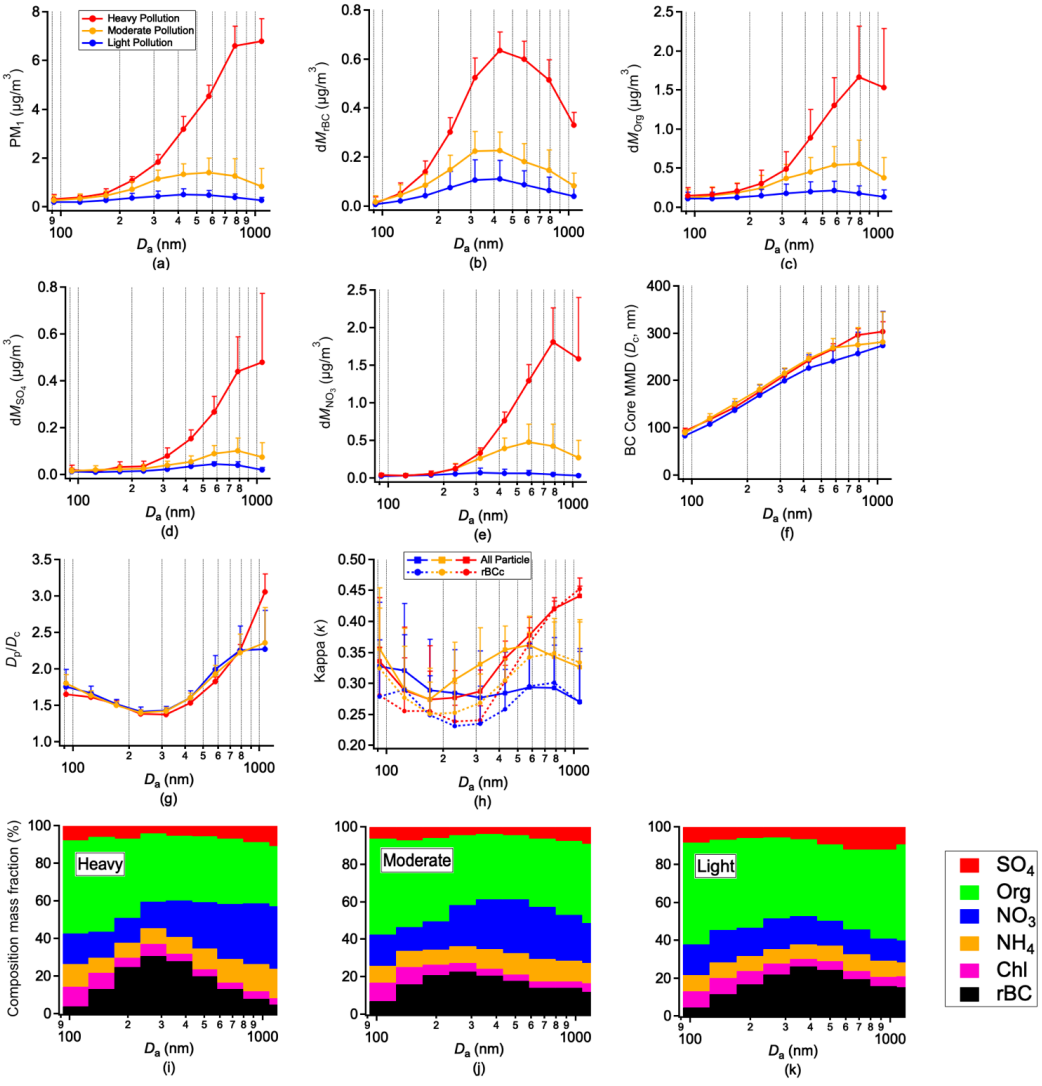

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909 Figure 5 Size-resolved (a) PM_1 (mean ± standard deviation); (b) rBC mass
910 concentration; (c) Org mass concentration; (d) SO_4 mass concentration; (e) NO_3 mass
911 concentration; (f) size-resolved rBC core mass median diameter (MMD); (g) size-
912 resolved coating thickness (D_p/D_c) of rBCc; (h) hygroscopicity parameter (κ); (i, j, k)
913 aerosol composition mass fractions under three different pollution levels.

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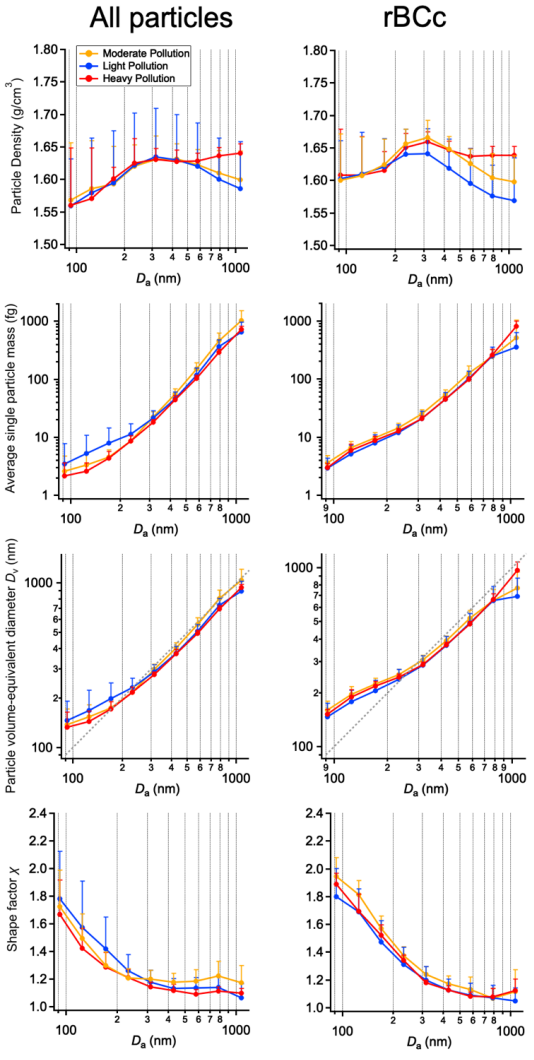

Figure 6 The particle density, average single particle mass, shape factor and volume-equivalent diameter for all particles (All Particles, left) and refractory Black Carbon containing particles (rBCc, right) under different pollution level.

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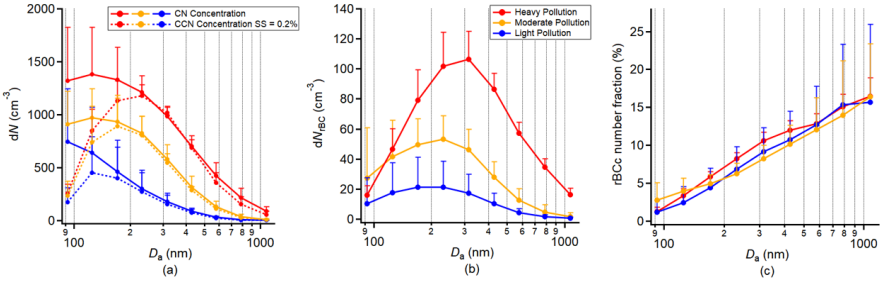

Figure 7 Size-resolved (a) CN and CCN at SS = 0.2% number concentrations; (b) rBC number concentration; (c) rBCc number fraction.

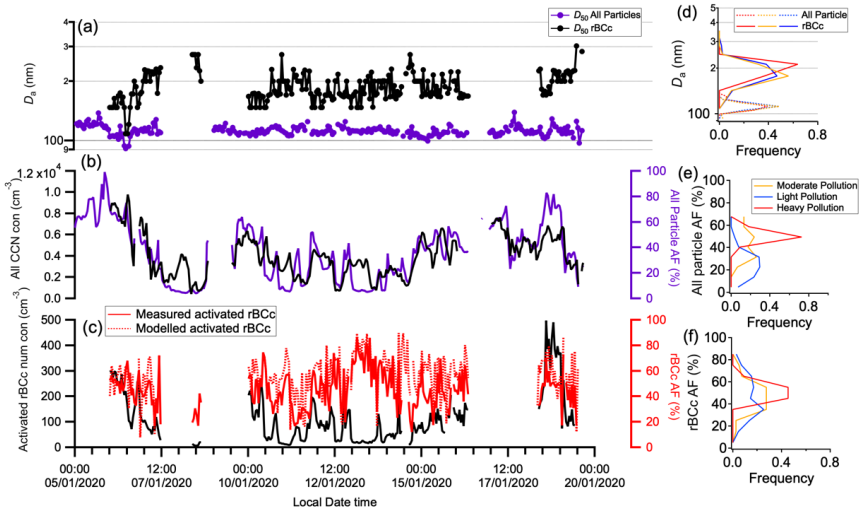

Figure 8 CCN activities of all particles and rBCc. (a) Time series of D_{50} for all particles and rBCc; (b) Time series of all CCN number concentrations and all particles activation fractions; (c) Time series of measured activated rBCc number concentrations, and rBCc activation fractions from two methods; (d) Frequency of D_{50} for all particle and rBCc; (e) Frequency of all particles activation fraction; (f) Frequency of measured rBCc activation fraction.

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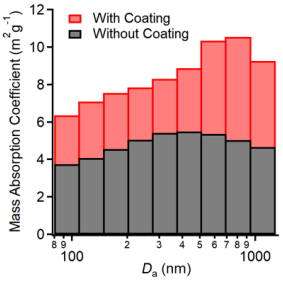

Figure 9 Mass Absorption Coefficient (MAC) at 880 nm wavelength for coated and uncoated rBCc.