Modeling the Crystal Structure and Ion Exchange Mechanisms of Rare Earth Elements in Zorite

J. Caleb Chappell & Aaron J. Celestian*

Department of Geography and Geology, Western Kentucky University

Objectives

- Synthesize pure Na-zorite for the ion exchange process.
- Exchange yttrium for sodium in zorite channels.
- Model the exchange process and site of exchange.

Introduction

Nanoporous inorganic materials, such as zeolites and zeolitic analogues, have long been known to have excellent ion selectivity. These ion selectivity's have been exploited for many industrial applications in areas such as petroleum refinement, agronomy, and water purification. As the need for rare earth elements (REEs) continues to increase, our methods of refinement must also increase in efficiency and ion selectivity. This research is focused on developing a nanoporous material and accompanying technique to accurately and precisely extract different REEs from solution.

Results of Raman Studies

Raman studies indicate that yttrium has at least partially occupied the sodium 2 site. Based on the Raman shifts observed in peaks 545, 520, 870 and 905, it is reasonable to conclude that the change in bond geometry is likely due to the yttrium entering the sodium 2 site. Powder XRD results also suggest a small expansion of the unit cell as a whole, most likely as a consequence of the introduction of the larger yttrium ions. Inductively Coupled Plasma Emission Spectroscopy (ICP-ES) analysis confirms that yttrium is present within the crystal structure at 4.81%.

Discussion

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Methods

The sample was packed into an environmental cell (pictured below) and supported by glass wool and polyimide tubing. Several spectra were taken while deionized water was running over the sample, to obtain a spectra for when the sample was wet. Once this was set, 0.1M YCl3 solution was run over the sample for 90 minutes while in-situ Raman spectra were collected.

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Contact Information

Email: joseph.chappell681@topper.wku.edu
Email: aaron.celestian@gmail.com

*Aaron Celestian is now at the Natural History Museum in Los Angeles.