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Feng, Y., Janssens, T., Vennestrom, P. et al (2024). High-Temperature Reaction Mechanism of NH_3 -SCR over Cu-CHA: One or Two Copper Ions?. *Journal of Physical Chemistry C*, 128(16): 6689-6701. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1021/acs.jpcc.4c00554>

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High-Temperature Reaction Mechanism of NH₃-SCR over Cu-CHA: One or Two Copper Ions?

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Cite This: *J. Phys. Chem. C* 2024, 128, 6689–6701



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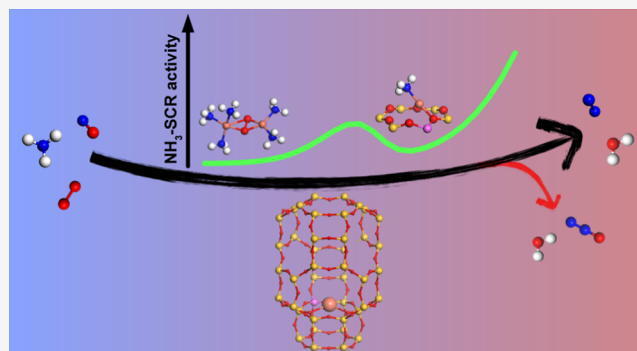


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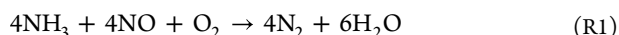
ABSTRACT: Cu-exchanged chabazite (Cu-CHA) shows good performance for selective catalytic reduction of nitrogen oxides using NH₃ as a reducing agent (NH₃-SCR). The temperature dependence of the activity has a characteristic nonmonotonic behavior with a minimum in the range 300–350 °C. The minimum signals that different reaction mechanisms or active sites dominate at low and high temperatures. The low-temperature mechanism is believed to occur over a pair of mobile [Cu(NH₃)₂]⁺ complexes, whereas the high-temperature mechanism should proceed over framework-bound Cu ions. To explore the NH₃-SCR reaction over framework-bound Cu ions, we use first-principles calculations combined with mean-field microkinetic simulations. We find that the reaction proceeds over a single framework-bound Cu ion and that the first step is NO and O₂ coadsorption. The coadsorption competes with NH₃ adsorption, and the NH₃-SCR rate is largely determined by the adsorption energy of NH₃. Combining the high-temperature kinetic model with our previous low-temperature model for NH₃-SCR over pairs of mobile [Cu(NH₃)₂]⁺ complexes makes it possible to describe the nonmonotonic behavior of the reaction rate. The work provides a detailed mechanistic understanding of the role and transformation of different forms of Cu ions during low- and high-temperature standard SCR in Cu-CHA.



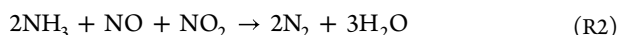
INTRODUCTION

NO_x emission control continues to be a major challenge in lean-burn engine exhaust after treatment due to increasingly stricter legislations.¹ The leading technology for NO_x reduction to N₂ and H₂O in oxygen excess is selective catalytic reduction using ammonia as the reducing agent (NH₃-SCR).² A state-of-the-art catalyst for NH₃-SCR is chabazite zeolite functionalized with Cu (Cu-CHA). Cu-CHA has high activity and selectivity for NH₃-SCR over a wide temperature range and is, moreover, hydrothermally stable at high temperatures.^{2–4}

NO is the main NO_x-component in lean-burn engine exhausts, and NH₃-assisted NO reduction follows the, so-called, standard SCR-reaction, which involves an equal amount of NO and NH₃.²



O₂ is needed to accommodate the hydrogen atoms in NH₃. The presence of NO₂ has been reported to enhance or reduce the activity of Cu-CHA, dependent on reaction conditions and Cu-loading.^{5,6} O₂ is not required for the NH₃-SCR reaction in the presence of NO₂, and the reaction can proceed according to the “fast-SCR” reaction scheme



The conversion of NO_x over Cu-CHA under standard SCR conditions shows a nonmonotonic trend with respect to temperature, with a minimum at about 350 °C.^{7,8} This minimum results in the, so-called, “seagull” profile and indicates that different reaction mechanisms dominate at low and high temperatures.^{7,9–11} An additional indication that the reaction mechanism changes with temperature is different initial exponential increases of the conversion in the low- and high-temperature regimes.

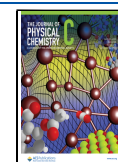
The temperature dependence of the nonselective N₂O formation in the NH₃-SCR is yet another indication that the NH₃-SCR reaction follows different mechanisms at low and high temperatures. N₂O formation is an unwanted side reaction, which should be avoided as N₂O is a potent greenhouse gas.² N₂O formation follows the conversion of NO_x at temperatures below 300 °C,^{7,12} which suggests a mechanism where low-temperature N₂O formation proceeds

Received: January 26, 2024

Revised: March 27, 2024

Accepted: March 28, 2024

Published: April 12, 2024



over Cu ions.^{13,14} The N₂O formation decreases and deviates from the NO_x conversion above 300 °C, which indicates that the reaction mechanism changes with the temperature. The change in the N₂O formation mechanism could be related to a change from a Cu-catalyzed path at low temperatures to the decomposition of ammonium nitrate, which may form under NH₃-SCR conditions. The decomposition of NH₄NO₃ is a highly activated process¹³ that could result in N₂O formation in the range from 250 to 350 °C.

Considerable efforts have been devoted to the understanding of the NH₃-SCR reaction over Cu-CHA at low temperatures.^{7,15–17} X-ray absorption spectroscopy (XAS) and density functional theory (DFT) calculations have shown that Cu at low-temperature reaction conditions is solvated by NH₃ forming [Cu(NH₃)₂]⁺ complexes.^{18–23} The NH₃-SCR reaction is a redox reaction where Cu alternates between Cu⁺ and Cu²⁺. The oxidation from Cu⁺ to Cu²⁺ occurs when O₂ is adsorbed on a pair of [Cu(NH₃)₂]⁺ complexes forming a [Cu₂(NH₃)₄O₂]²⁺ peroxo-complex, whereas the reduction from Cu²⁺ to Cu⁺ occurs during the coupling between NO and NH₃ over [Cu₂(NH₃)₄O₂]²⁺. The activation of O₂ is crucial for the NH₃-SCR reaction, which is strictly sequential; NO adsorbs only on [Cu₂(NH₃)₄O₂]²⁺ and not on [Cu(NH₃)₂]⁺. As O₂ activation at low temperatures requires two Cu ions, the mobility of [Cu(NH₃)₂]⁺ in the zeolite is crucial.^{22,23} The reaction can proceed only when two [Cu(NH₃)₂]⁺ complexes are in the same CHA-cage. NO and NH₃ couple over [Cu₂(NH₃)₄O₂]²⁺, forming the intermediates H₂NNO and HONO, which diffuse to Brønsted acid sites where they decompose into N₂ and H₂O with low barriers.²¹ H₂NNO has been suggested to decompose also over a [Cu₂(NH₃)₄OOH]²⁺ complex, generating N₂O and H₂O.^{13,14} The presence of HONO during NH₃-SCR has recently been inferred from vibrational spectroscopy.²⁴

The “seagull” profile with decreasing NO_x conversion between 300 and 350 °C^{7,9–11} coincides with desorption of NH₃ from the [Cu(NH₃)₂]⁺ complexes as measured in temperature-programmed desorption (TPD) experiments.^{14,25} This indicates that the high-temperature NH₃-SCR reaction proceeds over framework-bound Cu. Additionally, XAS measurements^{12,26,27} and DFT-based phase diagrams^{22,28} suggest that framework-bound Cu dominates the distribution of Cu ions at high temperatures.

The understanding of the reaction path at high temperatures is not as developed as that for low temperatures. Moreover, the underlying reason for the “seagull” profile in the activity is not established, and it is not clear whether the reaction at high temperatures proceeds over one or two Cu ions.²⁹ Gao et al.¹⁶ measured the SCR rate and found it to change from a quadratic dependence on Cu-loading at low temperatures (200 °C) to a linear dependence at high temperatures (380 °C). The change in the dependence of Cu-loading suggests that the reaction proceeds over a pair of Cu ions at low temperatures and isolated single Cu ions at high temperatures. A low-temperature reaction mechanism over single Cu ions was proposed by Janssens et al.³⁰ The reaction cycle in ref 30 included NO and O₂ coadsorption on Z[Cu]⁺ forming Z[Cu(NO₃)]⁺ (where Z represents the anionic Al-site in the zeolite framework). Z[Cu(NO₃)]⁺ was proposed to react with NO forming two NO₂. One NO₂ reacted thereafter with NH₃ forming N₂, H₂O, and Z[CuOH]⁺. NO and NH₃ were in a subsequent step coadsorbing on Z[CuOH]⁺ forming N₂ and two H₂O, which completed the reaction cycle. The main

reaction cycle was paralleled by a cycle following the fast-SCR reaction scheme including one of the formed NO₂. DFT calculations were used in ref 30 to explore the proposed reaction cycle, and barriers were evaluated for the Z[Cu(NO₃)]⁺ formation step and for the formation of two NO₂ from the reaction between Z[Cu(NO₃)]⁺ and NO.

Depending on the preparation and dehydration conditions, the framework-bound Cu may be present in different forms and placed at different locations in zeolite. CHA consists of tetrahedral TO₄ units, where T is either silicon or aluminum arranged in 4-, 6-, and 8-membered rings, forming large and small cages.³¹ High-energy-resolution fluorescence-detected X-ray absorption near-edge structure measurements³² indicate that framework-bound Cu ions mainly are located in the 6- and 8-membered rings, forming Z[CuOH]⁺, ZCu⁺, or Z₂Cu²⁺. The dominating form depends on the reaction conditions as well as the Cu/Al and Si/Al ratios.^{27,32} As the SCR-reaction includes an oxidation step, Z[CuOH]⁺ and ZCu⁺ could, in principle, be parts of the reaction cycle, whereas Z₂Cu²⁺ needs to be converted to Z[CuOH]⁺ and/or ZCu⁺ before it can participate in the reaction cycle. The mechanism for the conversion of Z₂Cu²⁺ to Z[CuOH]⁺ and ZCu⁺ is still an open issue.²²

In the present work, we target the reaction mechanism of high-temperature NH₃-SCR over Cu-CHA using DFT-based mean-field microkinetic modeling and conversion measurements. The NH₃-SCR reaction landscape is explored for framework-bound Cu using either one or two Cu ions. By comparison to experiments, we find that the reaction mainly proceeds over a single Cu⁺ ion and that the reaction is limited by NH₃ self-poisoning. The conversion of Z₂Cu²⁺ and Z[CuOH]⁺ into ZCu⁺ is found to be facile under the reaction conditions. We do not find any obvious path for N₂O formation over framework-bound Cu ions, which is consistent with the measured absence of any correlation between Cu-loading and N₂O formation at high temperatures. By combining the kinetic model for high-temperature NH₃-SCR with our previous model for low-temperature activity,¹⁴ we are able to reproduce the experimentally measured “seagull” profile using the detailed first-principles reaction landscapes. We find that the minimum in activity at intermediate temperatures originates from (i) low reactant coverages in the low-temperature reaction mechanism and (ii) NH₃ poisoning in the high-temperature reaction mechanism. Our work provides additional understanding of the dynamic Cu-CHA catalyst where the active catalytic site changes with reaction conditions.

■ COMPUTATIONAL AND EXPERIMENTAL METHODS

First-Principles Calculations. Spin-polarized DFT calculations are performed with the Vienna Ab-initio simulation package.^{33–36} The valence electrons are described with a plane wave basis set using a cutoff energy of 480 eV, and the interaction between the valence and the core electrons is described with the projector augmented wave method.^{37,38} The number of valence electrons treated in the calculations is Cu(11), Si(4), Al(3), O(6), N(5), and H(1). The *k*-point sampling is restricted to the gamma point.

The gradient-corrected Perdew–Burke–Ernzerhof³⁹ functional, augmented with a Hubbard-U term and van der Waals corrections, is used to describe exchange–correlation effects. Calculations on enzymatic systems with known structures and a similar Cu–OO–Cu core configuration as in the [Cu₂(NH₃)₄O₂]²⁺ complex indicate that a Hubbard-U term

for Cu 3d is needed to properly describe the Cu–O interactions in Cu-CHA catalysts.^{25,40} Here, we use a U-parameter of 6 eV, which has been determined by structural comparison with Cu₂O.⁴¹ In addition, Grimme-D3 corrections are applied to account for the van der Waals interactions of the molecules in the zeolite.^{42,43}

The convergence criterion in the self-consistent field loop is set to 1×10^{-5} eV, and the structures are considered to be relaxed when the force acting on each atom is less than 0.02 eV/Å. Transition state structures and activation energies are calculated using the Climbing Image Nudged Elastic Band method.^{44,45} The transition state structures are confirmed by vibrational analysis using the finite difference method. All reported energies are zero-point energy-corrected.

The periodic chabazite structure is described either with the rhombohedral unit cell, which contains 12 tetrahedral Si-sites, or with the hexagonal unit cell, which contains 36 tetrahedral Si-sites. The experimentally determined lattice parameters ($\alpha = \beta = \gamma = 94.2^\circ$, $a = b = c = 9.42$ Å for the rhombohedral unit cell) are used and fixed during the structural optimizations. To model Cu-exchanged CHA, one or two Si atoms in the 6-membered ring of the zeolite cages are replaced by Al, yielding an Si/Al ratio of 11 or 5 for the rhombohedral unit cell. Replacing two Si atoms in the hexagonal unit cell yields a Si/Al ratio of 17. These ratios are similar to common experimental values^{7,22,46} and, thus, reasonable choices when modeling the Cu-CHA material for NH₃-SCR.

Microkinetic Modeling. Mean-field microkinetic modeling is used to explore the consequences of the first-principles reaction landscapes and facilitate comparison to experiments. The steady-state reaction rates and coverages are in the mean-field approach obtained by numerically solving a set of coupled ordinary differential equations

$$\frac{d\theta_i}{dt} = \sum_j r_j(\vec{\theta})c_{ji} \quad (1)$$

where each intermediate i has a fractional coverage θ_i . r_j is the net rate constant of reaction j , which depends on the fractional coverages of the intermediates ($\vec{\theta}$). c_{ji} reflects the stoichiometric number in reaction j . Each fractional coverage represents one intermediate in the catalytic cycles, and the sum of all possible intermediates is 1. MATLAB with the ode23s solver is used to numerically integrate the set of differential equations, and the equations are integrated until a steady state is reached.

According to the transition state theory (TST), the rate constant (k^{TST}) of each elementary step is related to the change in entropy and enthalpy between the initial and transition states⁴⁷

$$\begin{aligned} k^{\text{TST}} &= \frac{k_B T}{h} e^{-\Delta G^\ddagger/k_B T} \\ &= \frac{k_B T}{h} e^{\Delta S^\ddagger/k_B} e^{-\Delta H^\ddagger/k_B T} \\ &\approx \frac{k_B T}{h} e^{\Delta S^\ddagger/k_B} e^{-\Delta E^\ddagger/k_B T} \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

where k_B is Boltzmann's constant, T is the temperature, and h is Planck's constant. The ΔG^\ddagger is the difference in Gibbs free energy between the initial and transition states. ΔS^\ddagger and ΔH^\ddagger are the corresponding differences in entropy and enthalpy, respectively. Because the volume and pressure do not change

in the reaction, the change in enthalpy (ΔH^\ddagger) is replaced with the change in energy (ΔE^\ddagger). The adsorption steps are considered to be nonactivated and the free energy barriers are, therefore, completely determined by entropy effects. The entropy changes in the reaction are calculated using different methods depending on the state of the reactants. The entropies for the gas phase molecules are calculated from the translational, rotational, and vibrational partition functions. For adsorbed molecules, only the vibrational partition function is used, and the translations and rotations are described as frustrated vibrations. The vibrational modes are evaluated in the harmonic approximation.^{14,48}

With the rate constants from transition state theory, the net rate of each elementary step is given by

$$r_j = k_j^+ \prod_f \theta_f - k_j^- \prod_b \theta_b \quad (3)$$

For the reaction steps, j , f , and b refer to the forward and backward reaction steps, respectively. The turnover frequency (TOF) of NO is obtained by summing the elementary steps that consume NO and is reported per Cu ion and second.

To describe the reaction rate over the entire temperature range, we combine the mechanisms for low and high temperatures using the temperature-dependent equilibrium distribution of the Cu species. Considering mobile $[\text{Cu}(\text{NH}_3)_2]^+$ and framework-bound $\text{Z}[\text{Cu}-\text{NH}_3]^+$, the probability that the reaction proceeds via the low-temperature mechanism $P(\text{LT})$ is given by

$$P(\text{LT}) = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-\Delta G/k_B T}} \quad (4)$$

ΔG is the Gibbs free energy difference at a specified NH₃ pressure between $[\text{Cu}(\text{NH}_3)_2]^+$ and $\text{Z}[\text{Cu}-\text{NH}_3]^+$ with one NH₃ molecule in the gas phase. The probability of the high-temperature mechanism $P(\text{HT})$ is given by $1 - P(\text{LT})$. The kinetics of the high-temperature path is the same for $\text{Z}[\text{Cu}-\text{NH}_3]^+$ and ZCu^+ as both are included in the reaction cycle (see below). The TOF of NH₃-SCR in the entire temperature interval (TOF_{total}) is thus given by

$$\text{TOF}_{\text{total}} = \text{TOF}_{\text{LT}} \times P(\text{LT}) + \text{TOF}_{\text{HT}} \times P(\text{HT}) \quad (5)$$

where TOF_{LT} and TOF_{HT} are the turnover frequencies at low and high temperatures, respectively.

Measurement of NH₃-SCR Activity. A Cu-CHA catalyst is prepared with a Si/Al ratio of 6.7, a Cu/Al ratio of 0.06 (1 wt % CuO), and a sieve fraction of 150–300 μm to measure the NH₃-SCR activity. The Cu exchange is complete as demonstrated by electron paramagnetic resonance measurements.⁴⁹ A 10 mg powder sample is diluted with 150 mg of SiC (40–60 mesh) and placed in a quartz U-tube reactor with an inner diameter of 4 mm. A Gasmet CX4000 FTIR spectrometer is connected to the reactor exit to monitor the concentrations of NO, NO₂, and N₂O in the gas leaving the reactor in real time; the feed concentrations are determined by bypassing the reactor using a four-way valve. Prior to the measurement, the catalyst is degreened by heating to 550 °C for 30 min in 10% O₂. After the pretreatment, the feed gas is admitted to the reactor, and the concentration of the gas exiting the reactor is determined. The catalyst is, thereafter, cooled stepwise to preselected temperatures and kept for 30 min at each temperature to allow for stabilization and measurement of the gas composition. The gas composition is determined as the median of the measured values over the last

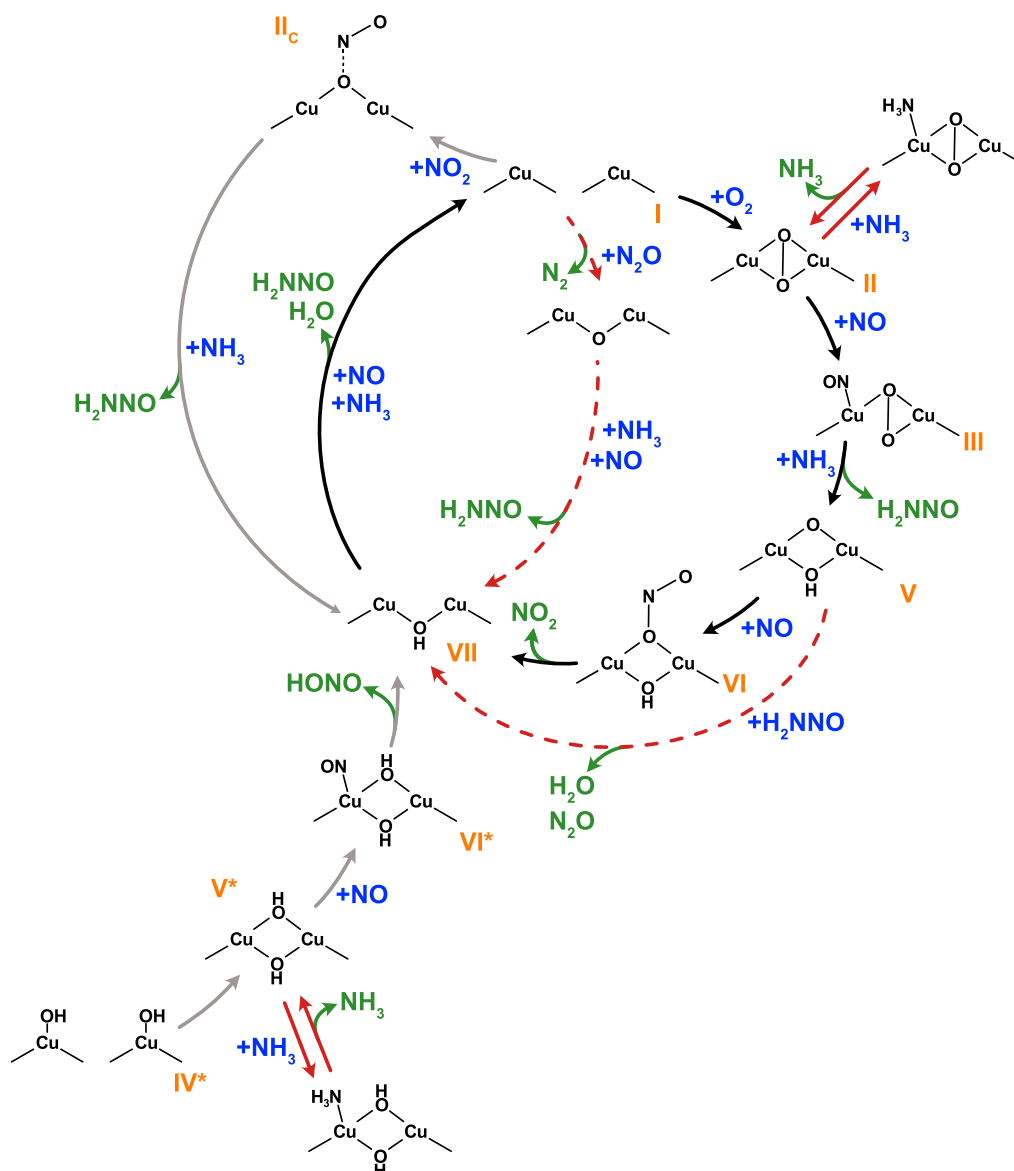


Figure 1. Proposed reaction cycle for high-temperature NH_3 -SCR over two framework-bound Cu ions.

3 min at each step. To determine the TOF, we first evaluate the NH_3 -SCR rate constant ($\text{Cu}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$) from an integral analysis of the reactor data, assuming a plug flow reactor and a first-order reaction in NO.^{14,50} Because the reaction order for NH_3 is close to 0,^{15,50} and O_2 is present in excess, the overall kinetics of the NH_3 -SCR reaction becomes first order in NO. The TOF is, thereafter, obtained by multiplication of the rate constant by the concentration of NO in the feed such that the TOF is obtained for the rate at 0% conversion. The feed gas used in the activity measurement consists of 500 ppm of NO, 600 ppm of NH_3 , 5% H_2O , and 10% O_2 in N_2 , at a flow of 225 N mL/min.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Previous NH_3 -TPD¹⁴ and XAS studies²⁶ show that NH_3 starts to desorb from the $[\text{Cu}(\text{NH}_3)_2]^+$ complex above $\sim 250^\circ\text{C}$, forming framework-bound $\text{Z}[\text{Cu}-\text{NH}_3]^+$ and eventually ZCu^+ at higher temperatures.^{17,27,51,52} The phase diagram for Cu^+ ions in CHA in the presence of NH_3 shows that the dominant Cu species changes from $[\text{Cu}(\text{NH}_3)_2]^+$ to $\text{Z}[\text{Cu}-\text{NH}_3]^+$ at

$\sim 280^\circ\text{C}$ in an NH_3 pressure of 600 ppm (see the [Supporting Information](#)). Here, we investigate reaction mechanisms for the NH_3 -SCR reaction in the high-temperature regime, where Cu ions preferably are bound to the zeolite framework.

The formation of $[\text{Cu}(\text{NH}_3)_2]^+$ pairs is essential in low-temperature NH_3 -SCR, allowing for O_2 activation,^{14,20,28} which is a key step in the sequential reaction mechanism. Assuming that two Cu ions are relevant also in the high-temperature regime, we explore first the reaction path for NH_3 -SCR over two framework-bound Cu ions. We will, thereafter, consider the reaction over one framework-bound Cu ion.

Reaction Cycle over Two Framework-Bound Cu Ions.

NO does not adsorb on Cu^+ ions at low temperatures,²⁸ which makes O_2 adsorption the first step in the reaction cycle. Considering O_2 adsorption on a pair of ZCu^+ ions, the distance between the ions should be long enough to allow for a peroxo-like framework structure. We do not obtain a peroxo-like structure when placing the two ZCu^+ ions in the same 6-membered ring. O_2 can instead adsorb in a peroxo-like $\text{Z}_2[\text{CuOOCu}]^{2+}$ structure when the pair of ZCu^+ ions are

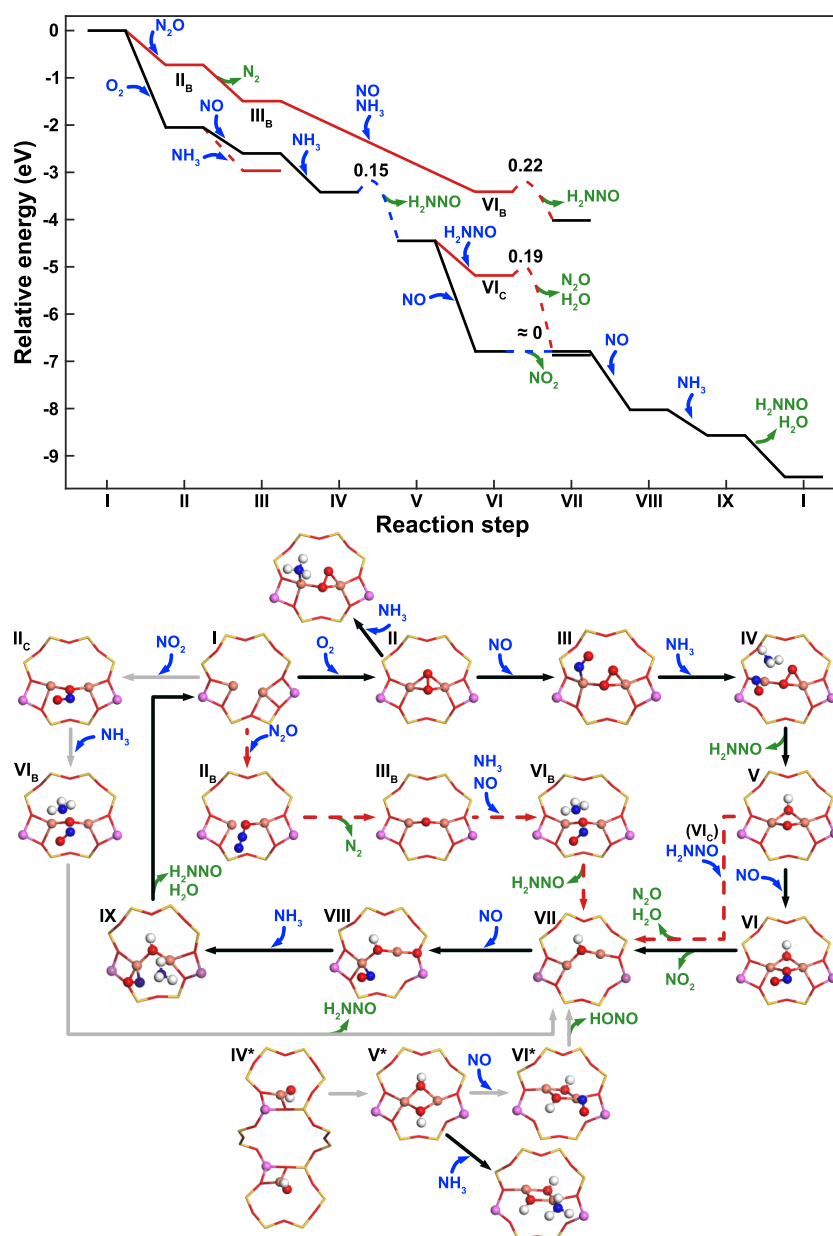


Figure 2. Energy landscape for high-temperature NH_3 -SCR over two framework-bound Cu ions. Structural models of each involved intermediate are shown below the energy landscape. Atomic color code: Cu (bronze), Si (yellow), Al (pink), O (red), N (blue), and H (white).

placed in an 8-membered ring. The reaction cycle and corresponding reaction landscape are shown in Figures 1 and 2, respectively. In the considered configuration, the Al-sites are separated by two (four) Si-atoms. The adsorption energy of O_2 with the Al-sites separated by three Si-atoms is close to the considered structure (within 0.04 eV). NO adsorbs on $\text{Z}_2[\text{CuOOCu}]^{2+}$ with an adsorption energy of 0.54 eV. Adsorption on the Cu^{2+} site is preferred over adsorption on an O-site by 0.1 eV. NH_3 couples with NO over the Cu-site to form H_2NNO , which decomposes over a Brønsted acid site to H_2O and N_2 . NO adsorbs on the O-site of $\text{Z}_2[\text{CuOHCu}]^{2+}$ (V) forming NO_2 and $\text{Z}_2[\text{CuOHCu}]^{2+}$ (VII). NO does not adsorb on the Cu-sites at this stage in the reaction cycle. Adsorption of NO and NH_3 on $\text{Z}_2[\text{CuOHCu}]^{2+}$ results in the formation of H_2O and H_2NNO , which decomposes to N_2 and H_2O over the Brønsted acid sites, concluding the reaction cycle. NO adsorption on intermediate V competes with

H_2NNO adsorption and subsequent N_2O formation, which is associated with a low barrier of 0.19 eV. The barrier for N_2O formation is lower than the barrier for H_2NNO diffusion through an 8-membered ring, which is about 0.3 eV.¹⁴

An alternative possibility in the presence of two ZCu^+ ions and N_2O is the decomposition of N_2O , which is calculated to be barrierless, forming structure III_B . Structure III_B can easily be converted to structure VII via the formation of H_2NNO . With two ZCu^+ ions, it is also possible to adsorb NO_2 , which reacts with NH_3 , forming H_2NNO and structure VII.

The resting state of the catalyst is generally assumed to be $\text{Z}[\text{CuOH}]^+$ or Z_2Cu^{2+} , and here we consider how the reaction cycle can be entered from two $\text{Z}[\text{CuOH}]^+$ (structure IV^*). (The conversion of Z_2Cu^{2+} to $\text{Z}[\text{CuOH}]^+$ is discussed below.) In the initial state, two $\text{Z}[\text{CuOH}]^+$ are located in two 6-membered rings, which are separated by an 8-membered ring. With a small barrier of about 0.4 eV, two $\text{Z}[\text{CuOH}]^+$ combine

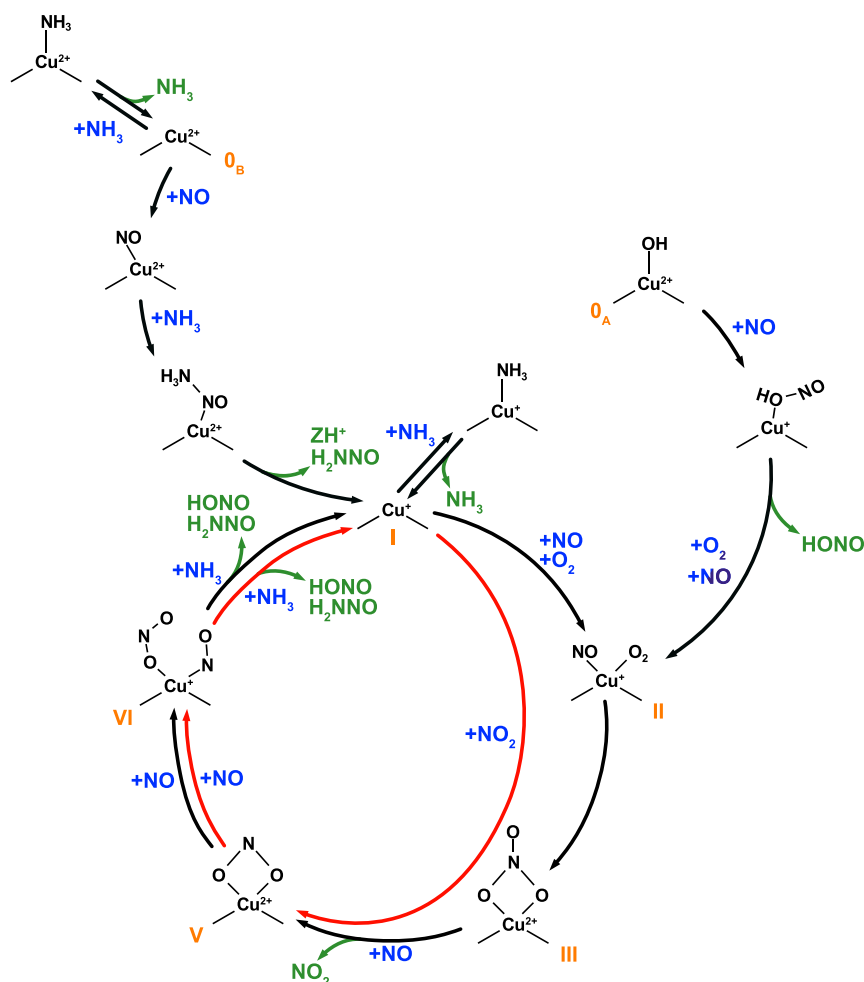


Figure 3. Proposed reaction cycle for high-temperature NH_3 -SCR over one framework-bound Cu ion.

to $\text{Z}_2[\text{CuHOOHCu}]^{2+}$ in the 8-membered ring. NO can react with one OH-group, forming HONO and intermediate VII, which is a part of the main reaction cycle. Thus, the reaction can, in principle, be initialized either from $\text{Z}[\text{CuOH}]^+$ or Z_2Cu^{2+} (see below).

Although the energy landscape over two Cu ions is flat with low barriers, the reaction is not necessarily fast as it requires two ZCu^+ located in the same 8-membered ring. The pairing of two Cu ions in the same 8-membered ring is endothermic by 1.17 eV, with respect to a configuration with the Cu ions located in different 6-membered rings. This suggests that Cu pairing is unlikely, which would slow the activation of O_2 slow. We stress that our results do not contradict previous measurements showing that O_2 can be adsorbed and activated over a pair of framework-bound ZCu^+ ions,⁵³ as these measurements were performed under O_2 exposure only. Under NH_3 -SCR conditions, the adsorption energy of NH_3 on the ZCu^+ ion is higher than that for O_2 , which means that NH_3 instead of O_2 will occupy the ZCu^+ species. Formation of $\text{Z}[\text{Cu}-\text{NH}_3]^+$ is expected to facilitate the migration of the Cu ions to separate 6-membered rings and therefore reduce the probability of Cu-pair formation.

An additional indication that Cu ion pairs are not dominating the SCR reaction at high temperatures is that only a limited amount of N_2O has been measured to form above 350 °C.^{54,55} The cycle in Figure 1 predicts facile N_2O formation unless each formed N_2O is decomposed over the

catalyst. The calculated barrier for N_2O decomposition is negligible, and the reaction is exothermic by -1.49 eV. Thus, the presence of ZCu^+ pairs could be tested by exposing the catalyst to N_2O and measuring the decomposition. We have performed such experiments, where the catalyst was prepared with ZCu^+ and exposed to N_2O , see the [Supporting Information](#). We do not observe any N_2O decomposition, which indicates that pairs of framework-bound ZCu^+ , if present, are minority species and do not affect the reaction. Consequently, as pairs of ZCu^+ in the Cu-CHA catalyst appear to be minority species, the most likely mechanism for NH_3 -SCR at high temperatures involves single Cu ion sites.

Reaction Cycle over a Single Framework-Bound Cu Ion. The inconsistency between the SCR-reaction path over two Cu ions and the experimental data for N_2O decomposition (see the [Supporting Information](#)) motivated us to investigate the SCR-reaction over one framework-bound Cu ion. The starting points for the analysis are $\text{Z}[\text{CuOH}]^+$ and Z_2Cu^{2+} because these configurations generally are assumed to be present in Cu-CHA in the absence of NH_3 .^{27,32,56} The reaction cycle is shown in Figure 3 with the corresponding energy landscape in Figure 4.

Considering $\text{Z}[\text{CuOH}]^+$ at SCR conditions, NO reacts exothermically with OH, forming HONO. The reaction changes the oxidation state of the Cu ion from Cu^{2+} to Cu^+ . The formed HONO on ZCu^+ has a desorption energy of 0.88 eV. The desorption energy is reduced to 0.38 eV by the

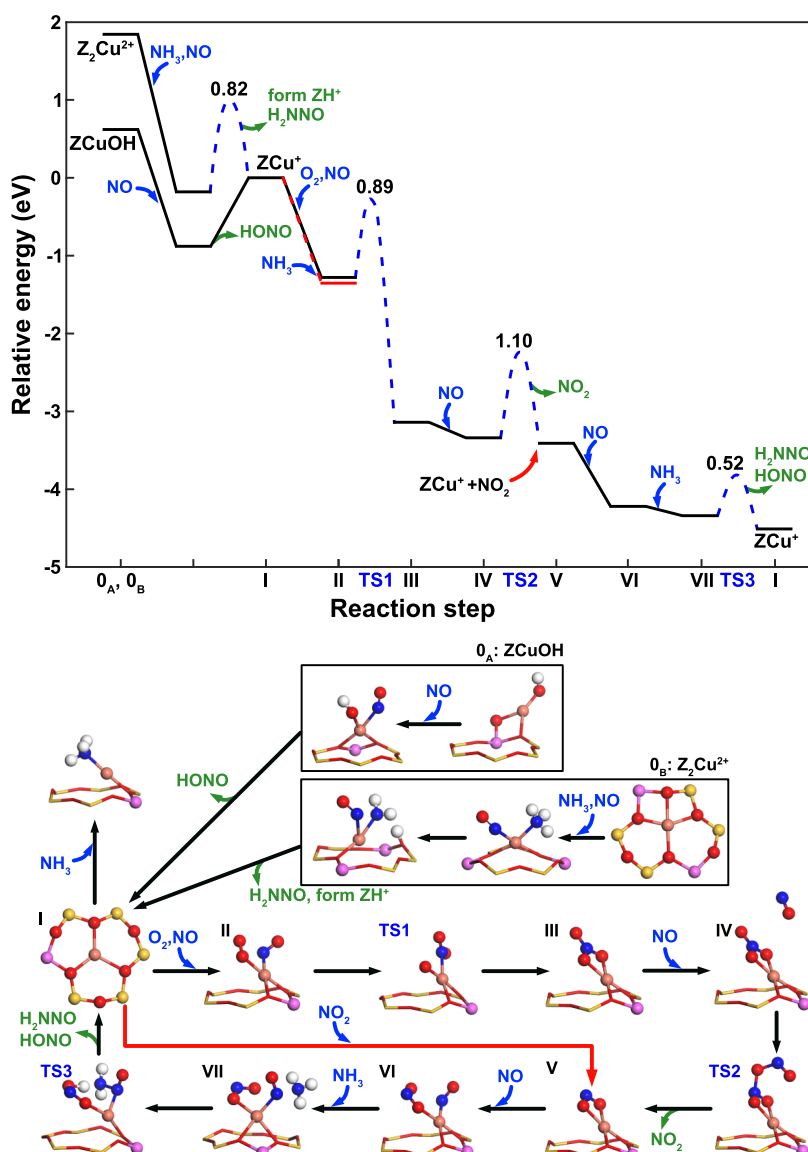


Figure 4. Energy landscape for high-temperature NH₃-SCR over one framework-bound Cu ion. The energies are referred to the ZCu⁺ state. Structural models of each involved intermediate are shown below the energy landscape. Atomic color code as in Figure 1.

adsorption of an additional NO molecule, which results in Z[CuNO]⁺ onto which O₂ adsorbs, following the main reaction cycle. Based on DFT-calculations, Liu et al.⁵⁷ proposed that adsorbed NO₂ facilitates HONO desorption, which is similar to our results with NO. However, as our mechanism focuses on the reaction at high temperatures, HONO desorption will not limit the reaction kinetics; thus, the coadsorb NO intermediate is not included in the present mechanism.

Z₂Cu²⁺ is converted to a framework-bound Cu⁺ ion and a Brønsted acid site by coupling of NO and NH₃ over Z₂Cu²⁺ forming H₂NNO while a proton from NH₃ is transferred to the Al–O–Si site. The reaction changes the oxidation state of the Cu ion from Cu²⁺ to Cu⁺, and Z₂Cu²⁺ is connected in this way to the main reaction cycle. The reaction is endothermic by 0.18 eV and has a barrier of 0.82 eV. It has previously been suggested that Z₂Cu²⁺ can be converted to Z[CuOH]⁺ by H₂O decomposition.²² We find that water splitting over Z₂Cu²⁺ is endothermic by 0.71 eV (in agreement with the calculations by Paolucci et al.²²) and associated with a barrier of 1.24 eV.

Based on DFT calculations, the conversion of Z₂Cu²⁺ to framework-bound Cu⁺ has previously been suggested to occur via mobile [Cu(NH₃)₄]²⁺ species.⁵⁸ As [Cu(NH₃)₄]²⁺ species are estimated to decompose above 230 °C,²² we anticipate that the NH₃-SCR path for Z₂Cu²⁺ conversion to framework-bound Cu⁺ in Figure 3 should dominate at high temperatures.

Knowing that ZCu⁺ can be formed from Z[CuOH]⁺ and Z₂Cu²⁺ during reaction conditions, we investigate the NH₃-SCR reaction over ZCu⁺. The first step in the cycle is adsorption of O₂ and NO. The adsorption energy of O₂ is 0.37 eV, whereas the adsorption energy of NO is 0.90 eV. The combined adsorption energy is close to additive as the adsorption energy of O₂ and NO on the ZCu⁺ is calculated to be 1.27 eV. O₂ reacts with a barrier of 0.89 eV to form Z[Cu(NO₃)]⁺, where the oxidation state of Cu changes from Cu⁺ to Cu²⁺. The formation of adsorbed NO₃[−] is exothermic by 1.86 eV. The formation of Z[Cu(NO₃)]⁺ was calculated in ref 30 to have a barrier of 1.08 eV. NO reacts with the adsorbed NO₃[−] to form Z[Cu(NO₂)]⁺ and nonadsorbed NO₂ with a barrier of 1.10 eV. A similar reaction step has been reported in

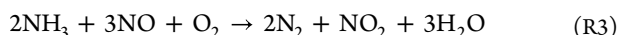
Table 1. Energy (ΔE^\ddagger) and Entropy (ΔS^\ddagger) Contributions to the Reaction Barriers of the Considered Elementary Steps^a

no.	elementary step	ΔE^\ddagger	ΔE^\ddagger_b	ΔS^\ddagger	ΔS^\ddagger_b
r1	$\text{NO} + * \xrightarrow{\text{r1}} \text{NO}^- *$	0.00	0.90	−108.0	0
rb	$\text{NH}_3 + * \xrightarrow{\text{rb}} \text{NH}_3^- *$	0.00	1.35	−108.6	0
r2	$\text{O}_2 + \text{NO}^- * \xrightarrow{\text{r2}} \text{O}_2^- \text{NO}^- *$	0.00	0.37	−111.3	0.0
r3	$\text{O}_2^- \text{NO}^- * \xrightarrow{\text{r3}} \text{NO}_3^- *$	0.89	2.75	−9.16	19.14
r4 _{phys}	$\text{NO} + \text{NO}_3^- * \xrightarrow{\text{r4}_{\text{phys}}} \text{NO} \cdots \text{NO}_3^- *$	0.00	0.12	−88.2	0.0
r4	$\text{NO} \cdots \text{NO}_3^- * \xrightarrow{\text{r4}} \text{NO}_2^- * + \text{NO}_2 \cdots *$	1.10	1.17	−53.1	−66.1
r5	$\text{NO} + \text{NO}_2^- * \xrightarrow{\text{r5}} \text{NO}^- \text{NO}_2^- *$	0.00	0.81	−12.2	0.0
r6 _{phys}	$\text{NH}_3 + \text{NO}^- \text{NO}_2^- * \xrightarrow{\text{r6}_{\text{phys}}} \text{NH}_3 \cdots \text{NO}^- \text{NO}_2^- *$	0.00	0.14	−91.6	0.0
r6	$\text{NH}_3 \cdots \text{NO}^- \text{NO}_2^- * \xrightarrow{\text{r6}} * + \text{H}_2\text{NNO} + \text{HONO} *$	0.52		−59.0	
r7	$\text{NO}_2 \cdots * \xrightarrow{\text{r7}} \text{NO}_2^- *$	0.00	1.35	−128.0	0.0
r8	$\text{HONO} + \text{NH}_3 \xrightarrow{\text{r8}} \text{H}_2\text{NNO} + \text{H}_2\text{O}$	0.38		19.7	
r9	$\text{H}_2\text{NNO} \xrightarrow{\text{r9}} \text{N}_2 + \text{H}_2\text{O}$	0.38		−70.1	

^aEnergy is given in eV and entropy in J/mol·K. The * in the elementary steps represents one ZCu⁺ site.

refs 30 and 57 with a lower barrier (~ 0.66 eV). The difference in the barrier can originate from the choice of exchange–correlation functionals and the spin state considered during the reaction. The barrier was, in our case, calculated with a triplet configuration, which is a stable configuration. The formation of $\text{Z}[\text{Cu}(\text{NO}_2^-)]^+$ is close to thermo-neutral with respect to $\text{Z}[\text{Cu}(\text{NO}_3^-)]^+$. $\text{Z}[\text{Cu}(\text{NO}_2^-)]^+$ reacts with NO and NH₃, forming HONO and H₂NNO with a barrier of 0.52 eV. The formation of HONO and H₂NNO is accompanied by a reduction of the Cu site from Cu²⁺ to Cu⁺. The reaction cycle is completed as HONO and H₂NNO desorb, yielding the ZCu⁺ species.

HONO and H₂NNO will further react and decompose into H₂O and N₂ over Brønsted acid sites with low barriers.²¹ NH₃ in the HONO conversion and H₂NNO decomposition originate either from the feed gas or, in the case of limited NH₃ supply, from NH₃ stored at Lewis acid sites. This picture is consistent with the transient experiments in ref 17. The proposed reaction cycle is similar to the cycle proposed in ref 30 with the overall scheme



NO₂ that is formed in the cycle adsorbs on ZCu⁺, forming again $\text{Z}[\text{Cu}(\text{NO}_2^-)]^+$, and follows the red inner cycle in Figure 3, which, actually, represents the fast SCR reaction scheme (R2). Assuming that NO₂ generated in R3 will adsorb on ZCu⁺ and react, we can add the reactions R3 and R2, which results in the overall reaction equation for the standard SCR reaction (R1). Note that the reaction steps with high barriers are circumvented in the presence of NO₂, which potentially enhances the NH₃-SCR rate by following the fast-SCR reaction scheme, in agreement with the suggestion in ref 30. The effect of NO₂ on the reaction rate and kinetics of NH₃-SCR is discussed further below.

Kinetic Model for High-Temperature NH₃-SCR. To investigate the kinetic behavior of the energy landscape for the cycle with one ZCu⁺, we construct a microkinetic model using the calculated energy landscape. As both $\text{Z}[\text{CuOH}]^+$ and

Z_2Cu^{2+} can be converted to ZCu⁺ during reaction conditions, we focus on a catalytic cycle over ZCu⁺. The considered elementary reaction steps with the corresponding enthalpy and entropy barriers are presented in Table 1. Our previous kinetic study of the low-temperature NH₃-SCR reaction¹⁴ revealed that the decomposition of HONO and H₂NNO over the Brønsted acid sites are facile and can be expected to be fast and irreversible also at high temperatures.

The reaction cycle starts with the adsorption of NO, O₂, and NH₃, which are considered in r1, r2, and rb. We chose to have NO adsorption before the adsorption of O₂. However, in contrast to the low-temperature NH₃-SCR reaction, the order of adsorption is arbitrary because the adsorption of NO and O₂ is barrierless with similar changes in entropies. The adsorbed NO and O₂ react to form $\text{Z}[\text{Cu}(\text{NO}_3^-)]^+$ (r3), which upon additional NO adsorption converts to adsorbed NO₂[−] and NO₂ physisorbed in the zeolite (r4_{phys} and r4). Yet another NO adsorbs on $\text{Z}[\text{Cu}(\text{NO}_2^-)]^+$ in r5. In r6_{phys} NH₃ is physisorbed in the zeolite. H₂NNO and HONO are formed from the reaction where the physisorbed NH₃ reacts with coadsorbed NO and NO₂ (r6). The formed HONO reacts with NH₃ to form H₂NNO and H₂O (r8). Finally, H₂NNO is decomposed to N₂ and water (r9). Physisorbed NO₂ formed in r4 adsorbs on ZCu⁺ in r7. The reason to include the physisorbed states for NO, NO₂, and NH₃ is that this procedure provides a convenient way to evaluate the entropy changes along the reaction. In addition, the physisorbed state of NO₂ is needed to account for NO₂ that is formed (outer cycle in Figure 3) and consumed (inner cycle in Figure 3) during the SCR-reaction.

We study the reaction kinetics under standard NH₃-SCR conditions at a total pressure of 1 atm, with 600 ppm of NH₃, 500 ppm of NO, 10% of O₂, and balance N₂. The TOF and probability of intermediates in the reaction cycle (coverages) are presented in Figure 5a,b. The high-temperature NH₃-SCR reaction has a light-off at about 350 °C and the TOF increases until a plateau is reached at about 500 °C. The light-off temperature is connected to the decomposition of the $\text{Z}[\text{Cu}-$

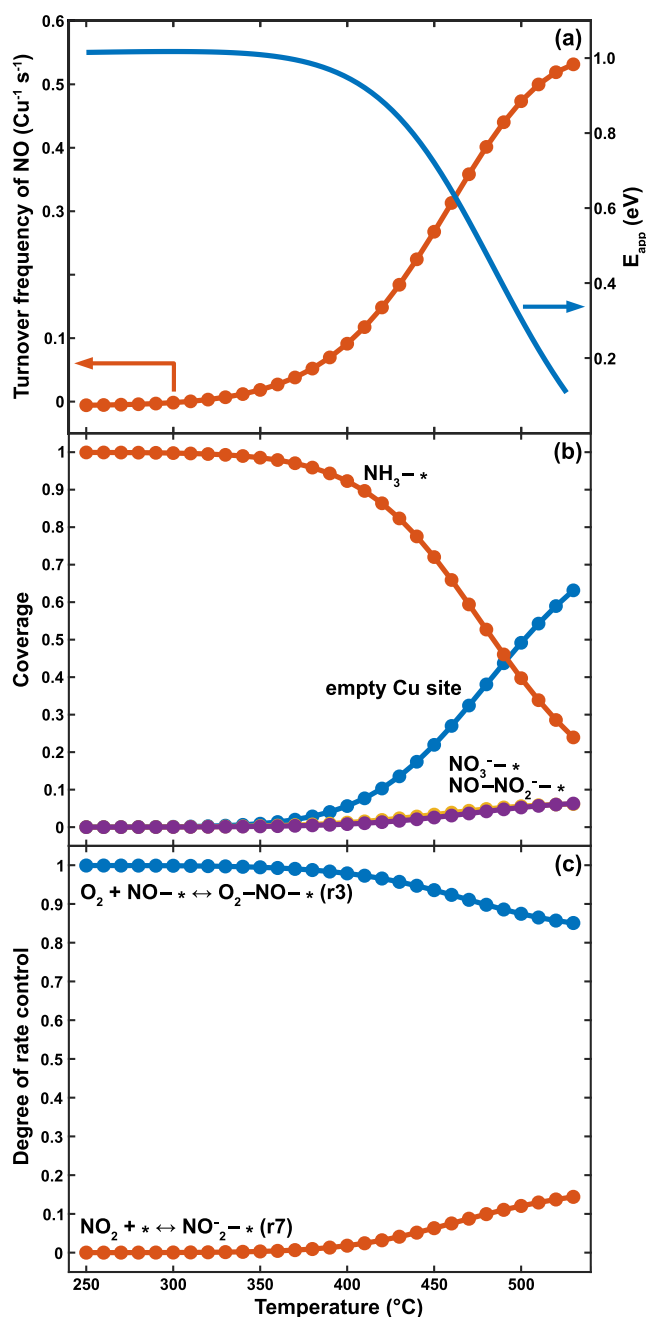


Figure 5. (a) Simulated TOF for NO conversion (orange) and the apparent activation energy (E_{app}) over Cu-CHA as a function of temperature over one framework-bound Cu ion. (b) Coverage of dominating intermediates. (c) Degree of rate control analysis. The simulation is performed with 600 ppm of NH₃, 500 ppm of NO, 10% O₂, and balance N₂.

NH₃)⁺ intermediate. The calculated coverages of the intermediates reveal that almost all Cu is present as Z[Cu-NH₃)⁺ below 350 °C. Because NO or O₂ cannot adsorb on this intermediate, the reaction does not proceed at low temperatures. By increasing the temperature to above 400 °C, Z[Cu-NH₃)⁺ decomposes to ZCu⁺. As ZCu⁺ reacts with O₂ and NO, the rate of the NH₃-SCR reaction increases once this temperature has been reached. The coverage of ZCu⁺ gradually increases as the temperature exceeds 400 °C, whereas the coverages of Z[Cu(NO₃)⁻)⁺ and Z[Cu(NO-NO₂)⁻)⁺ are below 0.06, making experimental detection of these

intermediates challenging. Other intermediates have even lower coverages. The fractions of Cu⁺ and Cu²⁺ were analyzed by counting the number of Cu species with different oxidation states in the considered temperature range (see the [Supporting Information](#)). The analysis shows that Cu⁺ dominates over the entire temperature interval considering only the high-temperature mechanism. Combining the low- and high-temperature mechanisms, we reproduce the experimentally observed presence of Cu²⁺ at low temperatures and the switch-over to Cu⁺ at high temperatures⁸ (see the [Supporting Information](#)).

The TOF is used to calculate the temperature-dependent apparent activation energy. The apparent activation energy is 1.05 eV below 350 °C and decreases to 0.95 eV at 400 °C; see [Figure 5a](#). We deduce an experimental apparent activation energy of 1.3 eV in the temperature range 375–420 °C from our measurements, which is in agreement with previous reports.⁴⁶

A degree of rate control (χ_i) analysis⁵⁹ is performed to understand which elementary steps control the reaction. To calculate χ_i , the value of rate constants for the forward and backward reaction for each elementary step are increased by 1% while keeping the equilibrium constant (K_i) and the rate constants of all other reaction steps fixed

$$\chi_i = \frac{k_i}{\text{TOF}} \left(\frac{\partial \text{TOF}}{\partial k_i} \right)_{K_i} \quad (6)$$

The results of the degree of rate control analysis are shown in [Figure 5c](#). Only the elementary steps that have a substantial degree of rate control are shown, namely, the formation of adsorbed NO and O₂ (r3) and the adsorption of NO₂ (r7). The analysis shows that the NH₃-SCR rate is controlled by r3 over the entire temperature range. The reason for r3 having rate control below 400 °C is that the adsorption of NO and O₂ is hindered by competitive NH₃ adsorption and the high barrier for NO₃⁻ formation. The desorption energy of NH₃ is 1.35 eV, which is the highest barrier in the reaction landscape. Once the coverage of ZCu⁺ increases, NO and O₂ can adsorb, and the reaction proceeds. The dominating degree of rate control for r3 is evident from the reaction energies. At higher temperatures, the NO₂ adsorption has some degree of rate control. The degree of rate control for NO₂ adsorption arises as NO₂ is produced in the outer reaction cycle in [Figure 3](#) and reacts in the inner reaction cycle. The outer reaction cycle has an overall reaction according to [R3](#). As r7 has some degree of rate control, not all of the NO₂ is converted in the reaction cycle. We note that NO₂ is not formed experimentally during standard SCR;⁶⁰ thus, NO₂ is in the experimental situation and converted over Brønsted acid sites⁶¹ or adjacent Cu ions in the zeolite.

As the reaction cycle includes both NO and NO₂, it could also describe the fast SCR mechanism. We study this situation by running the kinetic model with a total pressure of 1 atm, with 600 ppm of NH₃, 250 ppm of NO, 250 ppm of NO₂, 10% of O₂, and balance N₂. In the presence of NO₂, reactions r3 and r4, which have high reaction barriers, can be circumvented, and the TOF of the overall reaction is considerably higher than for the standard SCR conditions. The TOF as a function of the NO₂/(NO + NO₂) ratio is shown in [Figure 6](#). The TOF over the Cu ion site has a clear maximum with equal amounts of NO and NO₂, which agrees with experiments.^{5,62}

Origin of the “Seagull” Profile. In our previous work,¹⁴ we proposed a reaction cycle for the low-temperature NH₃-

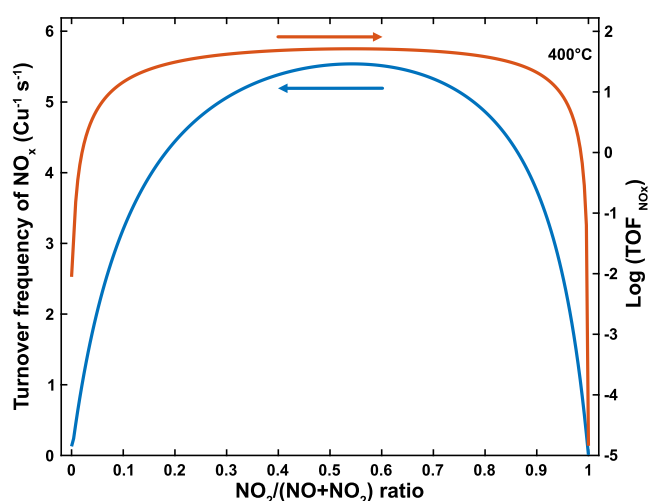


Figure 6. Effect of the $\text{NO}_2/(\text{NO} + \text{NO}_2)$ ratio on NO_x TOF over Cu-CHA from the microkinetic model. The TOF is shown both on a linear and a logarithmic scale.

SCR, which showed good agreement with experimental apparent activation energy and reaction orders in NO , O_2 , and NH_3 . However, the investigated temperatures were below 250°C where the linear $[\text{Cu}(\text{NH}_3)_2]^+$ complexes dominate. The high-temperature kinetic model proposed in this work provides atomistic insight into the reaction at high temperatures and allows us to construct a model that is valid for both low and high temperatures.

To connect the low- and high-temperature models, the probabilities that the Cu ions are in the form of $[\text{Cu}(\text{NH}_3)_2]^+$ or $\text{Z}[\text{Cu}-\text{NH}_3]^+$ are calculated as a function of temperature. The complete TOF is obtained by summing the weighted TOFs for the two regimes (eq 5), as shown by the dashed line in Figure 7. The total TOF has a characteristic local minimum

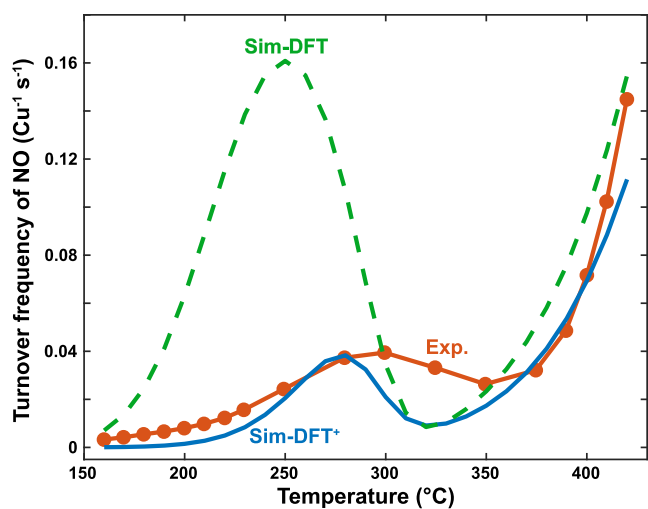


Figure 7. Simulated TOF from simulated low- and high-temperature NH_3 -SCR over Cu-CHA. The dashed line (Sim-DFT) shows the results with kinetic parameters according to Table 1 and ref 14, whereas the solid line (Sim-DFT+) shows the results with slightly adjusted parameters for the rate-controlling steps (see text). The simulated results are compared to experimental NO_x conversion data (Exp.). The simulations and experiments are performed with 600 ppm of NH_3 , 500 ppm of NO , 10% O_2 , and balance N_2 . The experiments are performed over a Cu-CHA (1 wt % CuO) sample.

at intermediate temperatures. The low-temperature behavior is characterized by a reaction onset at about 150°C and a maximum at 250°C . The decrease in TOF above 250°C has two reasons: (i) Decrease in O_2 coverage on paired $[\text{Cu}(\text{NH}_3)_2]^+$ complexes, which is needed for the reaction to proceed along the low-temperature path. (ii) Decomposition of the $[\text{Cu}(\text{NH}_3)_2]^+$ complexes forming $\text{Z}[\text{Cu}-\text{NH}_3]^+$. As the high-temperature mechanism requires ZCu^+ , the TOF according to the high-temperature mechanism is low at intermediate temperatures. It is only when the coverage of ZCu^+ becomes appreciable that the TOF starts to increase again. The minimum of the TOF is in the present calculations at 320°C , which is in the temperature region where the minimum is typically observed experimentally.^{8,31}

The comparison between the experimental and simulated results shows good agreement. The main differences are that (i) the simulated low-temperature maximum is shifted by 50°C to lower temperatures and that (ii) the light-off at high-temperature is at a slightly higher temperature than the experimental TOF and with a weaker temperature dependence. It is clear that the exact shape of the simulated TOF depends sensitively on the calculated kinetic parameters. The accuracy of the calculated kinetic parameters depends on both the inherent accuracy of the applied exchange–correlation functional in the DFT calculations and the atomistic model with chosen Si/Al and Cu/Al ratios. Previous DFT calculations show that the desorption energy of NH_3 from $[\text{Cu}(\text{NH}_3)_x]^+$ ($x = 1-4$) may change ~ 0.3 eV between different functionals²⁵ and that the Al-distribution affects the stability of $[\text{Cu}(\text{NH}_3)_2]^+$ pairs.⁶³

Having access to mechanistic models for the low- and high-temperature regimes and experiments, we can modify the kinetic parameters for the rate-controlling steps in the two models within reasonable margins to study whether the difference between experiments and simulations is related to the accuracy of the model (see the Supporting Information). The rate-controlling step in the low-temperature model is NH_3 desorption from a $[\text{Cu}_2(\text{NH}_3)_5\text{O}_2]^{2+}$ complex,¹⁴ whereas NH_3 desorption from $\text{Z}[\text{Cu}-\text{NH}_3]^+$ is rate-controlling in the high-temperature model. Adjusting ΔE_b^\ddagger by 0.16 eV for the low-temperature mechanism and ΔS_b^\ddagger by -3 J/mol·K for the high-temperature mechanism, we obtain the solid simulated line in Figure 7. These adjustments, which are within the anticipated DFT-accuracy range, bring the simulated results in quantitative agreement with the experimental data. The remaining difference between simulated and measured results in the low-temperature regime is related to Al-distribution and the assumed probability of $[\text{Cu}(\text{NH}_3)_2]^+$ pairing.^{14,20}

CONCLUSIONS

We use first-principles DFT calculations in combination with mean-field microkinetic simulations to explore NH_3 -SCR over Cu-CHA in the high-temperature regime. The reaction is investigated over a pair of ZCu^+ ions as well as a single ZCu^+ ion. The reaction over two ZCu^+ ions has a flat potential energy landscape. However, the pair of Cu^+ ions is not stable with respect to fragmentation into two separated ZCu^+ sites and the envisioned kinetic behavior, such as facile N_2O decomposition, is not consistent with experimental data.

The proposed reaction cycle over one Cu^+ ion is composed of two intertwined catalytic cycles where the first cycle consumes three NO molecules while producing one NO_2 molecule and the second cycle consumes the NO_2 molecule

together with an additional NO molecule. The combined cycles follow the standard SCR reaction (R1) and the second cycle follows the stoichiometry of the fast-SCR reaction (R2). We find that ZCu^+ is easily formed during SCR-reaction conditions from $\text{Z}[\text{CuOH}]^+$ and Z_2Cu^{2+} , which commonly are present in the resting state of the catalyst. The first-principles-based kinetic model for NH_3 -SCR over ZCu^+ shows that the reaction is limited by NH_3 self-poisoning. The reaction path does not include Cu species, where H_2NNO could decompose into N_2O , which indicates that high-temperature N_2O formation is not directly linked to the Cu-sites.

By combining the high-temperature kinetic model with our previous low-temperature model, where the reaction proceeds over a pair of mobile $[\text{Cu}(\text{NH}_3)_2]^+$ complexes, we are able to reproduce the characteristic “seagull” profile of the NH_3 -SCR activity with a local minimum at intermediate ($\sim 300^\circ\text{C}$) temperatures. The minimum activity has two main reasons. (i) The activity of the low-temperature mechanism starts to decrease above 250°C due to a decreasing O_2 coverage on pairs of $[\text{Cu}(\text{NH}_3)_2]^+$ complexes. (ii) $[\text{Cu}(\text{NH}_3)_2]^+$ complexes decompose above 250°C into $\text{Z}[\text{Cu}-\text{NH}_3]^+$, which is a poisoned state in the high-temperature mechanism. The onset of the high-temperature activity requires that NH_3 desorbs, allowing for NO and O_2 adsorption. Interestingly, at low temperatures, the onset of the reaction is also determined by NH_3 desorption where NH_3 desorbs from $[\text{Cu}_2(\text{NH}_3)_5\text{O}_2]^{2+}$, forming $[\text{Cu}_2(\text{NH}_3)_4\text{O}_2]^{2+}$ over which the reaction can proceed.

For the first time, the present work provides a consistent picture of NH_3 -SCR over Cu-CHA over the entire relevant temperature interval. The detailed atomistic understanding stresses the dynamic behavior of the catalyst material where the function of the Cu ions depends sensitively on the reaction conditions and offers a possibility to further improve the catalytic performance of Cu-CHA for NH_3 -SCR.

■ ASSOCIATED CONTENT

SI Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge at <https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.jpcc.4c00554>.

Phase diagram for $[\text{Cu}(\text{NH}_3)_x]^+$ in CHA as a function of temperature and NH_3 pressure, procedure to fit kinetic parameters of rate-controlling steps to experimental data, measurement of N_2O consumption over Cu-CHA, temperature-dependent fractions of Cu^+ and Cu^{2+} , atomic structures from the DFT calculations, and raw data from kinetic simulations and experiments (PDF)

Structural data (ZIP)

Kinetic data (ZIP)

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Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

■ ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We acknowledge financial support from the Swedish Energy Agency (47110-1). The Competence Centre for Catalysis (KCK) is hosted by Chalmers University of Technology and financially supported by the Swedish Energy Agency (52689-1) and the member companies Johnson Matthey, Perstorp, Powercell, Preem, Scania CV, Umicore and Volvo Group. The calculations were performed at PDC (Stockholm) through a NAISS grant.

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