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Abstract

The catastrophic failure of coal under super-critical stresses and mining-induced disturbance is becoming one of major safety risks of underground mining. Research of the failure pattern of coal under impact load is helpful for understanding its burst behavior in order to mitigate the burst risk. To investigate the fragmentation characteristic and burst behavior of coal under impact load, drop weight tests of coal samples were conducted. This paper found that coal samples have high peak stress, pulverized fragmentation, and intensive burst energy under impact load. The fragments induced by the impact load have a relatively consistent distribution mode, which can be characterized by a fractal model. The burst energy accounts for more than 99% of the impact energy input while fragmentation energy only accounts for no more than 1%.

Keywords

Coal burst, Drop weight, Energy dissipation, Fragmentation characteristics, Impact load

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Xiaohan Yang ^{1,*}, Ting Ren ², Lihai Tan ³ and Alex Remennikov ⁴

Abstract

The catastrophic failure of coal under super-critical stresses and mining-induced disturbance is becoming one of major safety risks of underground mining. Research of the failure pattern of coal under impact load is helpful to understand its burst behaviour hence to mitigate the burst risk. To investigate the fragmentation characteristic and burst behaviour of coal under impact load, the drop weight tests of coal samples were conducted. This paper found that coal samples have high peak stress, pulverized fragmentation, and intensive burst energy under impact load. The fragments induced by impact load have a relatively consistent distribution mode, which can be characterised by fractal model. The burst energy accounts for more than 99 % of the impact energy input while fragmentation energy only accounts for no more than 1 %.

Keywords

Fragmentation Characteristics; Coal Burst; Impact Load; Drop Weight; Energy Dissipation

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18 **Introduction**

19 As the fourth largest producer and second largest exporter of coal resource, Australia owns a big
20 underground mining industry which consists of tens underground coalmines and thousands mining
21 workers (Geoscience Australia and ABARE 2010). With the increases of mining depth, the
22 catastrophic failure of coal under super-critical stresses, complicated geological conditions and
23 mining-induced disturbance is becoming one of major safety risks of underground mining. It has been
24 well-documented that the catastrophic failure of coal can cause severe damage to mining workers and
25 equipment (Zhang, Canbulat et al. 2017). However, the failure of brittle or quasi-brittle materials
26 including coal has not been adequately understood at current stage (Grady 2008). Previous research
27 has shown that coal tend to have more violent and instantaneous failure under impact or dynamic load
28 as the strength of coal is positively related with loading rate (Okubo, Fukui et al. 2006, Zhao, Wang et
29 al. 2014). Research of the failure pattern of coal under impact load is helpful to understand its burst
30 behaviour hence to mitigate the associated safety hazards by addressing sufficient mitigative measures
31 and protective equipment.

32 Fragmentation is a common physical and mechanical phenomenon exists in the failure process of geo-
33 materials under static, impact and dynamic loads (Li, Li et al. 2018, Li, Zhang et al. 2018). It has been
34 pointed out by many researchers that the study of fragment size distribution (FSD) is important for the
35 understanding of energy dissipation and failure mechanism of geo-materials. Grady analysed the
36 experimental and theoretical size distribution of solid materials resulting from dynamic fragmentation
37 based on the power-law character (Grady 2008). Liu et al. compared the FSD of sandstone samples
38 subject to impact load and static load and found the crushing degree of fragments generated by impact
39 load is higher, accompanied with blocky characteristics (Liu, Li et al. 2014). Deng et al. conducted
40 dynamic uniaxial compression tests of rock samples with the application of SHPB system and
41 proposed energy consumption model of rock fragmentation based on fractal rock mechanics and
42 fracture mechanics theory (Deng, Chen et al. 2016). Chen et al. found that the energy dissipation of
43 fragments declines linearly with increase in loading rate from 0.5 to 4.0 MPa/s (Chen, Su et al. 2019).
44 It has been well proved by these research that the fragmentation characteristic of rock subject to

45 impact load is obviously different with it subject to quasi-static load. Based on previous research of
46 rock fragmentation, Yang et al. proposed the energy calculation model of coal fragmentation subject
47 to quasi-static load based on Rittingers's theory and fractal model (Yang, Ren et al. 2020). The
48 experimental study conducted by Yang et al. demonstrated that this model can be used to study the
49 fragmentation characteristic and energy dissipation during catastrophic failure of coal. However, the
50 research of coal fragmentation subject to impact load has not been well-developed.

51 Drop weight system has been adopted by many researchers to study the dynamic fragmentation
52 features of different materials including concrete (Rahmani, Kiani et al. 2012), rock (Whittles,
53 Kingman et al. 2006), glass (Sam, Joren et al. 2014) and other materials (Rajput, Burman et al. 2018).
54 Through the drop weight tests of granite, Hogan et al. offered insight into the catastrophic dynamic
55 fragmentation of rock under low-energy impact and provided useful data for the numerical modelling
56 of rock fragmentation (Hogan, Rogers et al. 2012). The drop weight tests done by Reddish et al.
57 indicated that the degree of fragmentation formed a non-linear relation with impact energy (Reddish,
58 Stace et al. 2005). Alex et al. investigated the impact energy absorption capacity of concrete through
59 drop weight tests (Remennikov and Kaewunruen 2007). Hence, drop weight test is a widely used
60 method to apply impact load on materials and to investigate the corresponding dynamic fragmentation
61 characteristic. In a drop weight test system, a hammer with known height and weight will be given
62 impact velocity and energy by gravitational acceleration to impact the samples placed underneath.
63 The impact energy can be calculated based on measuring the dropped weight and calculating the
64 resultant velocity. The FSD generated by drop weight tests can be determined by manual sieving and
65 image processing technique. Then the energy dissipation can be analysed based on impact energy
66 input and fragmentation energy consumption (Yang, Ren et al. 2020).

67 This paper aims to investigate the fragmentation characteristic and energy dissipation of coal under
68 impact load. The impact load tests of coal samples were conducted in laboratory by the application of
69 an innovatively modified drop weight test system. The fragmentations generated by impact load were
70 analysed by a novel combination method of manual sieving and image processing. Six coal samples
71 taken from local coal seam were tested by a 0.72 kN drop weight with 0.5 m height. The test results

72 demonstrated that the FSD of coal generated by impact load can be characterised by Fractal Model.
73 Experimental results are compared with the fragmentation characteristic and energy dissipation of
74 coal samples subject to quasi-static load.

75 **Material and Methods**

76 **Experimental Setup**

77 Coal blocks were taken from local coal seam and delivered to our laboratory. To maintain the original
78 state of the coal, all blocks were fully wrapped with aluminium and polymer membranes during
79 delivery. As shown in Figure 1, coal blocks were processed into 50 mm * 50 mm * 100 mm cuboid
80 samples through the process of cutting and grinding.

81 In this study, steel incident plate was used to distribute impact load to coal sample through
82 transmission bar. The impact load was achieved by a free-fall drop weight that can be dropped from a
83 maximum height of 2.5 m, or equivalent to the maximum drop velocity of 7 m/s. The drop height in
84 this paper was selected as 0.5 m based on a series of pre-test experiments, which can achieve 3 m/s
85 impact velocity. This impact velocity can achieve complete fragmentation and intermediate strain rate
86 of coal samples (Zhu, Niu et al. 2015). The impact load was monitored by a force sensor and then
87 recorded by the connected computer. A transmission bar was placed above the sample to transfer the
88 impact load. Coal sample was placed between the transmission bar and the base. To guide the descent
89 of the transmission bar and maintain the direction of impact load, bolts were installed between
90 transmission bar and base. The apparatus setup is shown in Figure 2.

91 The drop weight adopted has the weight of 73.35 kg, which is equivalent to 0.72 kN. It was found that
92 due to the friction of guiding runner that the incident plate's experimental velocity averagely reduces
93 to 98 % of the theoretical value (Remennikov and Kaewunruen 2007). Therefore, test system
94 efficiency needs to be considered during the impact energy calculation process based on energy
95 conservation theory.

96 **Fragment Size Distribution**

97 FSD is important for the understanding of failure process and fragmentation characteristic of material.
98 As mentioned in introduction part, it has been found by many researchers that the FSD of rock
99 generated by super-critical quasi-static, impact or dynamic loads can be characterised by typical
100 functions. Experiments done by Li et al. found that fractal model is appropriate for FSD of coal
101 samples resulting from uniaxial compression loading. Uniaxial compression tests of coal samples
102 done by our previous research has verified that fractal model can be used to describe the FSD of coal
103 samples under quasi-static load (Yang, Ren et al. 2020). However, the statistical and exponential FSD
104 of coal subject to impact load have not been well understood.

105 In this paper, FSD analysis was carried by a combination of manual sieving method and image
106 processing technique. Coal fragments generated by impact load test were sieved into several regimes
107 and then digital analysed through image processing in MATLAB software (Yang, Ren et al. 2020).
108 The selected meshes have different sizes including $d = 2.5, 5$ and 10 mm. The sieving and image
109 analyse process are shown in Figure 3. The cumulative mass distribution curve of each sample could
110 be plotted based on sieved and image processed data.

111 **Energy Dissipation**

112 During the brittle failure of coal samples subject to quasi-static load, most of the energy will be
113 dissipated in the form of fragmentation energy as shown in Figure 4. The energy conservation of this
114 process can be written as (Yang, Ren et al. 2020):

$$115 \quad E_{dissipation} = E_{burst} + E_{fragmentation} \quad (1)$$

116 where $E_{dissipation}$ is energy stored in coal samples during loading process, $E_{fragmentation}$ is energy
117 consumed by coal fragmentation and E_{burst} is the kinetic energy carried by burst coal.

118 During the impact load test, energy was inputted by impact load and then dissipated in the forms of
119 fragmentation and burst. Refer to equation (1), the energy conservation of this process can be written
120 as (Zhang, Kou et al. 2000, Feng, Wang et al. 2016):

$$121 \quad E_{impact} = E_{burst} + E_{fragmentation} \quad (2)$$

122 where E_{impact} is the energy input resulting from impact load.

123 According to the calculation equation of gravitational potential energy, the impact energy can be
124 acquired as follow:

$$125 \quad E_{impact} = m \times g \times h \times \varphi \quad (3)$$

126 where m is the weight of dropped hammer, g is gravitational acceleration, h is dropping height and φ
127 is the energy efficiency of test system (As mentioned above, $\varphi = 0.98$).

128

129 The fragmentation energy can be calculated based on FSD function and Rittinger's theory (Yang, Ren
130 et al. 2020). Then the burst energy is the difference between impact energy and fragmentation energy.

131 Generally, burst energy only accounts no more than 1 % of the total energy dissipation during brittle
132 failure of coal samples subject to quasi-static load (Su, Jiang et al. 2016). Based on the test results, the
133 energy dissipation of coal samples subject to impact load can be analysed.

134 **Results and Discussions**

135 As shown in Figure 2, a force sensor mounted to incident plate was adopted to record the impact load
136 during the test process. The recorded load wave of each sample is shown in Figure 5. The arrival time
137 of impact load wave for each sample was different as data sampling and weight dropping were
138 triggered by recording button of software and releasing button of test apparatus, respectively. The
139 peak impact load of each sample is marked by red arrow in Figure 5. It can be seen that 2-3 main
140 impact load waves were captured by force sensor for each sample. The lower impact waves 0.2 s after
141 of test initiation are caused by impact between drop weight and transmission bar as coal samples have
142 been completely damaged by high impact load wave. The peak load is contained by the first impact
143 load wave. Although the dropping height is the same, the peak impact load of each sample is different
144 as coal is inhomogeneous. The average peak stress of coal samples subject to impact load is 39.88
145 MPa according to the peak impact load data in Figure 5. According to our previous research (Yang,
146 Ren et al. 2020), the average peak stress of coal sample subject to quasi-static load is 16.82 MPa. It is
147 obvious that impact load increases the peak stress of coal samples.

148 The cumulative FSD of coal samples acquired by manual sieving and image processing is shown in

149 Figure 6. It has been proved by previous research that the cumulative FSD of coal samples subject to
150 uniaxial compression load (quasi-static load) can be characterised by fractal model (Peng, Ju et al.
151 2015, Yang, Ren et al. 2020) :

$$152 \quad F(d) = \left(\frac{d}{d_{max}}\right)^{3-n} \quad (4)$$

153 Where $F(d)$ is the cumulative mass fraction of the fragments smaller than size d , d_{max} is the
154 maximum size of coal fragment and n is the fractal dimension of particle size distribution, which is
155 related to coal properties.

156

157 The maximum fragment size of each sample can be determined based on image processed data. Then
158 the fractal dimension can be determined based on fitting of manual sieving and image processing data.
159 As shown in Figure 6, the fractal model also can be adopted to describe the FSD of coal samples
160 subject to impact load as the fitting curve is highly correlated to manual sieving and image processing
161 data. The FSD of coal samples subject to impact load has a relatively consistent distribution mode as
162 the distribution curves of these 6 samples are pretty similar, which can also be seen from Figure 7.
163 Figure 7 shows the comparison of cumulative FSD of coal samples subject to impact and quasi-static
164 loads. UCS1 and UCS2 are FSD curves of two coal samples tested by uniaxial compression load
165 (quasi-static load). It is obvious that fragmentation of coal under impact load is more pulverized. The
166 maximum fragment size of coal under quasi-static load is over half sample length while it under
167 impact load is only around 1/5 of the sample length. This finding will be important for understanding
168 the driving force of coal burst in underground coal mines according to its FSD data, hence, to adopt
169 proper measures to maintain the stability of underground structure. Generally, the stress concentration
170 induced by quasi-static load can be mitigated by water infusion (Frid 2000), de-stress drilling (Justine
171 and Ian 2016) and de-stress blasting (Dou, Lu et al. 2004). However, the mitigation of coal burst
172 induced by impact needs innovatively designed roadways (Dou, Mu et al. 2014) or specific solving
173 techniques.

174 The dropping height of all impact tests is 0.5 m and the dropping weight is 73.35 kg. Based on
175 equation (3), the energy inputted by impact load is 352.23 J. According to fragmentation energy

176 calculation equation proposed by Yang et al. (Yang, Ren et al. 2020), the energy consumed by
177 fragmentation can be calculated based on fractal FSD function of each samples. Then the burst energy
178 can be calculated based on equation 2. The values of burst and fragmentation energy for each coal
179 sample are shown in Figure 8. It has been proved by uniaxial compression tests of coal samples that
180 only no more than 1% of stored energy is dissipated in the form of burst energy for coal samples
181 subject to quasi-static load (Su, Jiang et al. 2016). However, for coal samples subject to impact load,
182 the burst energy accounts for more than 99 % of the impact energy input while fragmentation energy
183 only accounts for no more than 1 %, which is distinctly different with quasi-static load tests. The burst
184 severity and hazard are positively related to burst energy scale (Rezaei, Hossaini et al. 2015, Yang,
185 Ting et al. 2018). Hence, the burst of coal under impact load will be more severe and instantaneous as
186 more kinetic energy will be carried by burst coal. The dynamic loading tests of coal/rock achieved by
187 Split-Hopkinson Bar (SHPB) System also found that the kinetic energy increases with impact speed
188 of striker bar (Zhang, Kou et al. 2000). However, fragmentation energy still accounts for 87 % of the
189 dissipated energy for gabbro samples when the impact velocity is 20 m/s according to the equation
190 proposed by Zhang et al (Zhang, Kou et al. 2000). This may be caused by the material property as
191 gabbro is denser and can consume more fragmentation energy. However, the percentage of
192 fragmentation energy and kinetic energy of coal samples subject to different impact velocities still
193 need to be further studied by more tests with the application of drop weight and SHPB test systems.

194 **Concluding Remarks**

195 The stability of coal is essential to main the safety and efficiency of underground mining as
196 catastrophic failure of coal can cause personal casualties and economic losses. Coal body in mine site
197 is always under static, impact or dynamic loads induced by mining disturbance and original stress.
198 Research of the coal failure subject to impact load will contribute to understand the fragmentation
199 characteristic and burst behaviour of coal burst caused by impact load. In this paper, the drop weight
200 tests of coal samples were conducted in laboratory to investigate the fragmentation characteristic and
201 energy dissipation of coal under impact load. 6 coal samples taken from local coal seam were tested
202 by a 0.72 kN drop weight with 0.5 m height. The main findings of this paper include:

- 203 1. It is obvious that impact load increases the peak stress of coal samples. The average peak
204 stress of coal samples subject to impact load is 39.88 MPa, which is twice of the average peak
205 stress of coal sample subject to quasi-static load (16.82 MPa).
- 206 2. The FSD of coal samples subject to impact load has a relatively consistent distribution mode,
207 which can be characterised by fractal model. It is obvious that fragmentation of coal under
208 impact load is more pulverized.
- 209 3. For coal samples subject to impact load, the burst energy accounts for more than 99 % of the
210 impact energy input while fragmentation energy only accounts for no more than 1 %, which is
211 distinctly different with quasi-static load tests. That is, the burst of coal under impact load will
212 be more severe and instantaneous as more kinetic energy will be carried by burst coal.

213 **Data Availability**

214 All data, models, or code generated or used during the study are available from the corresponding
215 author by request.

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223 **Declarations**

224 Authors declare no conflict interests.

225 **Authorship Contribution Statement**

226 **Xiaohan Yang:** Methodology; Formal analysis; Writing – original draft. **Ting Ren:** Supervision;
227 Funding acquisition. **Lihai Tan:** Validation; Experimental. **Alex Remennikov:** Supervision; Writing
228 – review & editing.

229 **Reference**

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306 **Figure Captions**

307 **Figure 1 Coal Samples Preparation**

308 **Figure 2 Impact Test Setup**

309 **Figure 3 Image Processing Technique**

310 **Figure 4 Energy Dissipation of Coal Samples under Impact and Static Load**

311 **Figure 5 Impact Load of Coal Samples**

312 **Figure 6 Cumulative FSD of Coal Samples**

313 **Figure 7 Comparison of Cumulative FSD of Coal Samples subject Impact and Quasi-static Load**

314 **Figure 8 Burst and Fragmentation Energy of Coal Samples under Impact Load**

315