

# ***Fluid flows in low-permeability media: Non-Newtonian flow in clays***

**Fuel Cycle Research & Development**

***Prepared for  
U.S. Department of Energy  
Used Fuel Disposition***

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November, 2012***

**FCRD-UFD-2013-000028**



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**FCT Quality Assurance Program Document**

Revision 1 08/19/2011

## Appendix E FCT Document Cover Sheet

Name/Title of Deliverable/Milestone Fluid flows in low-permeability media: Non-Newtonian flow in clays  
Work Package Title and Number FT-13LB080705  
Work Package WBS Number Generic Natural Systems Evaluations - LBNL  
Responsible Work Package Manager 1.02.08.07  
Hui-Hai Liu  
(Name/Signature)

Date Submitted 11/14/2012

Quality Rigor Level for Deliverable/Milestone  QRL-3  QRL-2  QRL-1  N/A\*  
 Nuclear Data

This deliverable was prepared in accordance with Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory  
(Participant/National Laboratory Name)

QA program which meets the requirements of  
 DOE Order 414.1  NQA-1-2000  Other

**This Deliverable was subjected to:**

Technical Review

Peer Review

**Technical Review (TR)**

**Peer Review (PR)**

**Review Documentation Provided**

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**Review Documentation Provided**

- Signed PR Report or,
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## 1. Introduction

Water flow in clay media is an important process for geological disposal of high-level nuclear wastes. Clay/shale formations have been considered as potential host rock for geological disposal of high-level radioactive waste because of their low permeability, low diffusion coefficient, high retention capacity for radionuclide, and capability to self-seal fractures (Tsang et al., 2012). In geologic repositories for radioactive waste disposal, compacted expansive clay soils (bentonites) are also often considered as buffer materials within an engineered barrier system, to be placed in the repository tunnels between the radioactive waste and the host rock. The bentonite is usually compacted at low water content, and then progressively wetted by water from the surrounding host formation. As a result, an unsaturated zone generally develops within the near field of a clay repository. The unsaturated wetting process is accompanied by bentonite swelling which ensures acceptable sealing of open spaces between waste packages and the corresponding host formation. At the same time, heat emanating from the decaying radioactive waste causes thermal gradients and unsaturated flow within the engineered and natural barriers. Accurately modeling unsaturated flow in such clay materials, and how it is related to swelling and heat transfer processes, is critical for assessing the performance of both clay rock and buffer materials for isolating radioactive wastes at a disposal site.

Water flow in porous media is traditionally described by Darcy's law. In 1856, Henry Darcy investigated the flow of water in vertical homogeneous sand filters in connection with the fountains of the city of Dijon in France. From his experiment results, Darcy discovered that water flux is directly proportional to the hydraulic gradient. However, it has been well documented that Darcy's law is not adequate for clay media. For example, Hansbo (1960, 2001) reported that water flux in a low-permeability clay is proportional to a power function of the hydraulic gradient when the gradient is less than a critical value, whereupon the relationship between water flux and gradient becomes linear for large gradient values. He explained this behavior by positing that a certain hydraulic gradient is required to overcome the maximum binding energy of mobile pore water. From their experiment results, Miller and

Low (1963) also found the existence of a hydraulic gradient below which water is essentially immobile. After analyzing several data sets for water flow in clay media, Swartzendruber (1961) proposed a modified Darcy's law in which non-linear behavior of water flux vs. gradient is described by an exponential function. Zou (1996) developed a nonlinear flux-gradient relationship depending on the activation energy of pore liquid. He assumed that the activation energy of pore water in clay is not only variable with the distance from the solid particle surface, but also with the flow velocity of pore water. His model, which includes several empirical parameters, is able to fit a number of data sets that show nonlinear flux-gradient relationships at low hydraulic gradients and linear relationships at high gradients.

The studies mentioned above are all for saturated flow conditions. Laboratory test results seem to show that non-Darcian flow behavior becomes even more significant under unsaturated conditions. Cui et al. (2008) reported non-Darcian behavior for a range of observed hydraulic gradients under unsaturated conditions. Liu et al. (2012) developed a constitutive model for unsaturated flow when water can be considered as a power-law (non-Newtonian) fluid. The model is consistent with the data set of Cui et al. (2008).

While considerable progress has been made for investigating non-Darcian flow in clay media, a general relationship between water flux and hydraulic gradient (that covers the full range of non-Darcian flow behavior under both saturated and unsaturated conditions) is still lacking. We will develop such a model in this paper and also demonstrate an empirical relationship between permeability and threshold hydraulic gradient (that will be defined later and is an important measure of non-Darcian behavior). The latter relationship is practically useful because it can reduce the number of parameters whose values need to be determined from experiment data in order to model non-Darcian behavior.

## **2. Relationships between water flux and hydraulic gradient**

The key requirement for accurately modeling water flow in clay media is an appropriate relationship between water flux and hydraulic gradient. This section reviews the currently available



relationships and develops an improved relationship that can capture a relatively large range of water flow behavior. The well-known flux-gradient relationship is Darcy's law given by

$$q = Ki \quad (1)$$

where  $q$  (m/s) is water flux,  $K$  (m/s) is hydraulic conductivity and  $i$  (-) is hydraulic gradient. The above equation only includes magnitudes of variables for one-dimensional flow and therefore  $q$ ,  $K$ , and  $i$  are all positive. A similar treatment, for convenience, is used for all the other relationships to be discussed in this section.

Darcy's law was initially developed for water flow in saturated porous media. Buckingham (1907) extended Darcy's law to unsaturated conditions, although it is an issue of debate whether he was aware of Darcy's law when developing his relationship. In his extension, Buckingham (1907) used an unsaturated hydraulic conductivity, a function of water saturation, to replace hydraulic conductivity in Darcy's law. An excellent historic review of Edgar Buckingham and his scientific contributions to unsaturated flow in soils was recently published by Nimmo and Landa (2005).

Hansbo (1960, 2001) proposed a relationship between water flux and hydraulic gradient to consider the non-Darcian flow behavior in clay media:

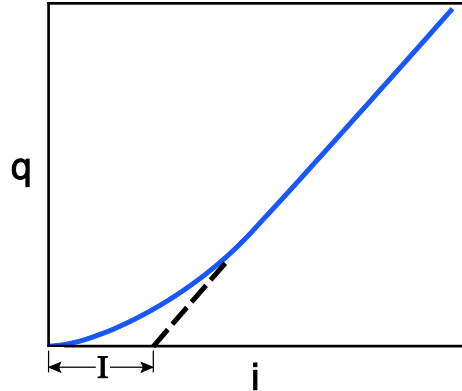
$$q = k^* i^n \quad \text{for } i \leq i_1 \quad (2-1)$$

$$q = k^* n i_1^{n-1} (i - I) \quad \text{for } i \geq i_1 \quad (2-2)$$

$$i_1 = \frac{In}{(n-1)} \quad (2-3)$$

The formulation of Hansbo (1960, 2001) includes three parameters  $k^*$  (m/s),  $n$  (-) and  $I$  (-). Note that  $k^*$  herein is not the hydraulic conductivity and Eq. (2-2) corresponds to a linear function between water flux and hydraulic gradient  $i$ . Parameter  $I$  is called threshold gradient in this study and refers to the intersection between the  $i$  axis and the linear part of the relationship (Figure 1). Hansbo (1960, 2001) demonstrated that Eq. (2) can fit related experimental observations and developed, based on (2), a

theoretical approach to dealing with clay consolidation processes. However, as indicated by Swartzendruber (1961), Eq. (2) consists of two separated mathematical expressions and three related parameters cannot be evaluated unless data are available all the way from  $i=0$  out to and including an appreciable part of the linear portion of the flux-gradient curve.



**Figure 1.** Definition of threshold hydraulic gradient

To overcome the difficulties encountered in applying (2), Swartzendruber (1961) introduced a new version of the modified Darcy's law based on a relation for  $dq/di$ :

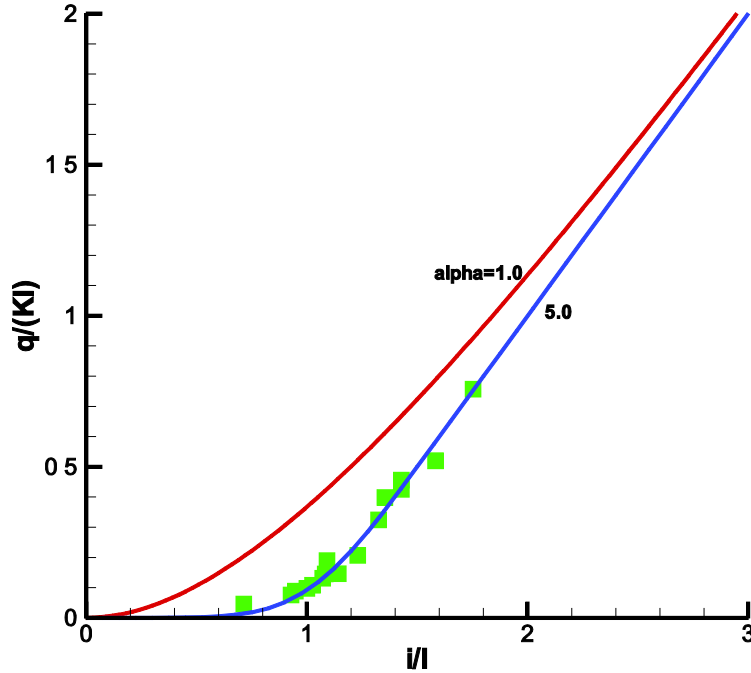
$$\frac{dq}{di} = K(1 - e^{-i/I}) \quad (3)$$

For a large value of hydraulic gradient  $i$ ,  $dq/di$  approaches a constant  $K$  that is hydraulic conductivity. Integrating, and using  $q=0$  at  $i=0$ , leads to

$$q = K[i - I(1 - e^{-i/I})] \quad (4)$$

Eq. (4) involves two parameters  $K$  and  $I$ . In contrast to the commonly used Darcy's law, it contains only one additional parameter ( $I$ ). The equation of Swartzendruber (1961) had been evaluated with a number of data sets collected under saturated flow conditions and satisfactory agreements were generally obtained (Swartzendruber, 1961; Blecker, 1970). However, Figure 2 shows a comparison between results calculated from Eq. (4) and a data set collected by Cui et al. (2008) under unsaturated flow conditions, indicating a deviation between the theoretical and observed results. Note that under unsaturated

conditions, Figure 2 shows data for unsaturated permeability that is defined as permeability multiplied by relative permeability for water flow. Thus, Eq. (4) cannot capture the full range of non-Darcian flow behavior in clay media under different conditions.



**Figure 2.** Comparisons between proposed Eq. (8) with two different  $\alpha$  values and data of Cui et al. (2008). Note that Eq. (8) is reduced to Swartzenruber Equation [Eq. (4)] for  $\alpha = 1$ .

Another commonly used flux-gradient relationship for clay is given as:

$$q = 0 \quad \text{for } i \leq I \quad (5-1)$$

$$q = K(i - I) \quad \text{for } i \geq I \quad (5-2)$$

Similar to Eq. (4), the above equation involves only two parameters ( $K$  and  $I$ ) and is mathematically simpler than other relationships. It is obvious, however, from data available in the literature, that Eq. (5) cannot adequately capture the non-Darcian flow behavior (or non-linear flux-gradient relationship) at low  $i$  values (e.g., Swartzenruber, 1961; Blecker, 1970). Therefore, Eq. (5) should be applied only when  $i$  is large. It is also of interest to note that Eq. (5-2) is a limiting case of Eq. (4) for  $i/I \rightarrow \infty$ .

Assuming that the activation energy of pore water in clay is not only variable with the distance from the solid particle surface, but also with the flow velocity of pore water, Zou (1996) proposed the following flux-gradient relationship:

$$q = \frac{Ki}{1 + b \exp(-ci)} \quad (6)$$

where  $b$  and  $c$  are empirical parameters. One problem with this equation is that it will become exactly the Darcy's law, defined in (1), for  $i \rightarrow \infty$  without considering the threshold gradient that has been often observed from test results, as shown in Figure 2.

From the above discussions, it is clear that a general relationship between water flux and hydraulic gradient (that covers full range of non-Darcian flow behavior under both saturated and unsaturated conditions) is still lacking. As an effort to overcome this problem, we propose to generalize the Swartzendruber's (1961) relationship by using

$$\frac{dq}{di} = K \left( 1 - e^{-\left(\frac{i}{I^*}\right)^\alpha} \right) \quad (7)$$

where  $\alpha$  is a positive constant, and  $I^*$  is a parameter related to  $\alpha$  and  $I$ . For  $\alpha = 1$ , (7) is reduced to (3).

For  $\alpha \rightarrow \infty$ ,  $\frac{dq}{di} \rightarrow 0$  when  $\frac{i}{I^*} < 1$ , and  $\frac{dq}{di} \rightarrow K$  when  $\frac{i}{I^*} > 1$ . In this case, Eq. (7) essentially represents the flux-gradient behavior given in Eq. (5). Thus, with one more parameter ( $\alpha$ ), (7) can capture a relatively large range of non-Darcian flow behavior.

Integrating (7) with the condition of  $q=0$  at  $i=0$  yields

$$q = K \left[ i - \frac{I}{\gamma\left(\frac{1}{\alpha}\right)} \gamma\left(\frac{1}{\alpha}, \left(\frac{i}{I^*}\right)^\alpha\right) \right] \quad (8)$$

where

$$I = \frac{I^*}{\alpha} \gamma\left(\frac{1}{\alpha}\right) \quad (9-1)$$

and  $\gamma$  refers to Gamma functions

$$\gamma(a, x) = \int_0^x t^{a-1} e^{-t} dt \quad (9-2)$$

$$\gamma(a) = \int_0^{\infty} t^{a-1} e^{-t} dt \quad (9-3)$$

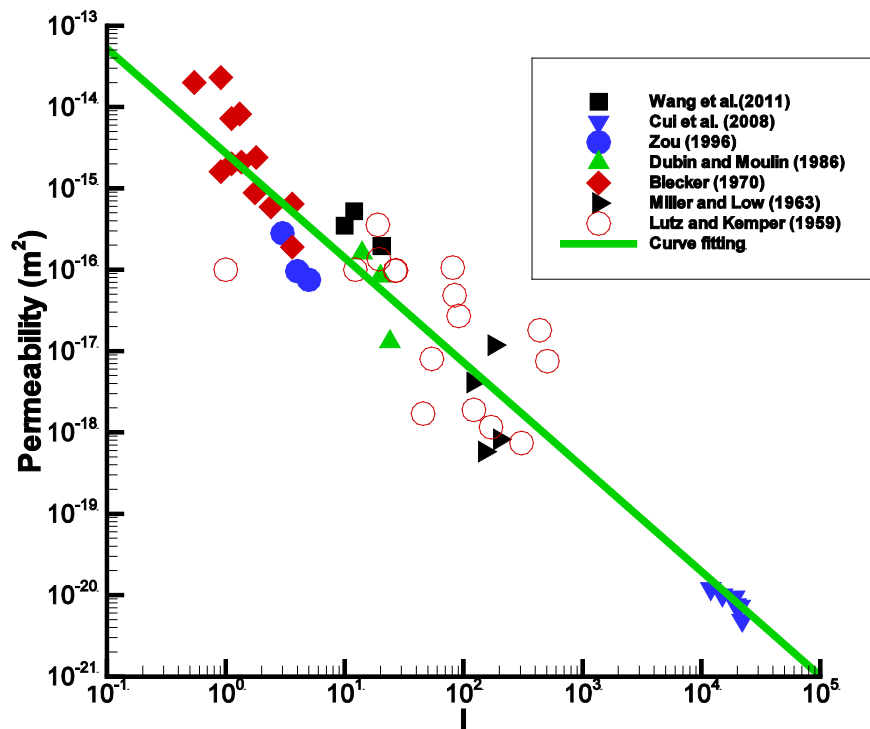
Figure 2 shows a good agreement between Eq. (8) with  $\alpha = 5$  and the data from Cui et al. (2008). Note that Cui et al. (2008) reported flux-gradient data for three capillary pressure values. Each capillary pressure has its own  $I$  value. Different  $I$  values are used in Figure 2 for different capillary pressure when calculating  $i/I$  and dimensionless flux defined as  $q/(KI)$ .

### 3. Correlation between permeability and threshold gradient

Previous studies suggest that non-Darcian flow is a result of strong solid-water interaction in clay materials. Since pore size in clay media is on the order of nanometers, studies of water properties and flow processes in nanotubes are highly relevant to water flow in clay (Wang et al., 2011b). The mechanism of non-Darcian flow behavior was attributed to water-clay interaction by Low (1961). This is further confirmed by a number of studies on nanoscale fluid transport based on molecular dynamics (MD) simulations (e.g., Chen et al., 2008; Ma et al., 2010; Farrow et al., 2011). These studies generally show that water properties and flow processes at that scale could be significantly different from those in less fine-grained materials. For example, the density of water near the solid surface of grain material is generally much higher than its bulk value. It has been widely accepted for porous media that owing to viscous forces, the water velocity can be assumed zero on the solid surface. This non-slippage boundary condition, however, does not apply to nanoscale flow because of the sub-continuum behavior of water molecules. Also, the resistance to water flow at the nanoscale is dominantly from friction between water and solid surfaces, and less so from internal friction between water layers, because of the small pore sizes (Chen et al., 2008). Several MD simulation results show that the flow rate of water through a nanotube is

a nonlinear function of shearing stress (equivalent to hydraulic gradient for steady-state flow) (e.g., Chen et al., 2008; Ma et al., 2010; Farrow et al., 2011), which is consistent with non-Darcian behavior observed from laboratory measurements.

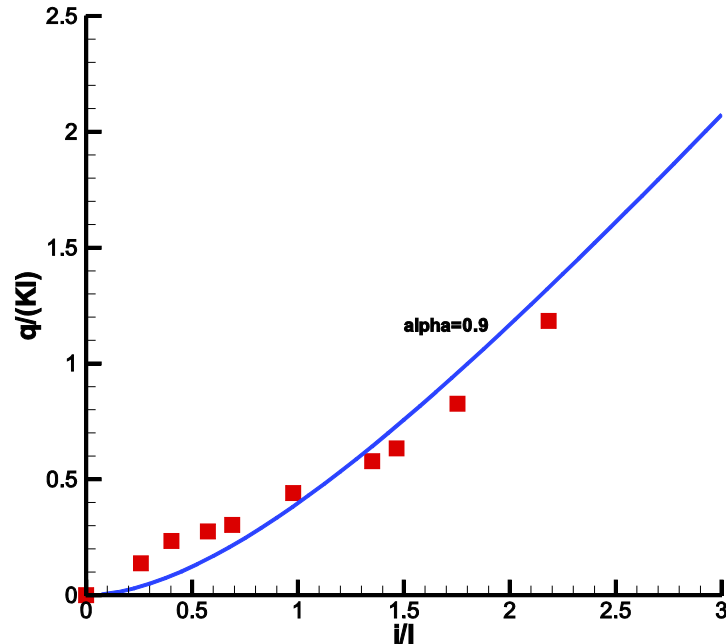
For a clay material, the degree of solid-water interaction and non-Darcian flow behavior can be characterized by permeability ( $K$ ) (or pore size) and threshold gradient ( $I$ ), respectively. Thus, it seems logical to expect a correlation between  $K$  and  $I$ . We will demonstrate such a relationship using a number of typical clay data sets of permeability vs. gradient (Figure 3). This correlation, if it can be demonstrated, would be very important because the number of parameters in Eq. (8) (whose values are required for practical applications) would be reduced. For better transparency, the data sets and procedures to determine parameter  $I$  and permeability are briefly given in the rest of this section, while we refer the readers to the cited references for the details of the data sets.



**Figure 3.** Correlation between permeability and threshold hydraulic gradient.

Miller and Low (1963) presented results of laboratory experiments for Wyoming bentonite. The soil samples have a length of 2.5 cm and diameter of 1 cm. Rates for water flow through soil samples were measured as a function of hydraulic gradient. We estimated permeability values using the slope of the linear part of the flow-rate versus gradient curve. When the data points corresponding to the linear part are limited, we use a straight line through the two data points with the highest gradient values to approximate the linear part. Note that Miller and Low (1963) defined their threshold gradient as the gradient below which water does not flow, while here we use the term threshold gradient  $I$ , as previously indicated, to describe the intersection between the gradient axis and the linear part of the flux-gradient relationship (Figure 1). Figure 4 shows a match of Eq. (8) with data from one of the experiments conducted by Miller and Low (1963). The fitted  $\alpha$  value is 0.9, indicating that the relationship of Swartzendruber (1961), corresponding to  $\alpha = 1$ , should give a similar match.

Blecker (1970) reported test results regarding flux-gradient relationships for clay soils from Brolliar and Springerville soil series of northern Arizona, USA. His experimental setup is similar to the one used by Miller and Low (1963). The soil samples were prepared with different densities for a given soil type. His data show a good agreement with Eq. (4). He also reported values for all the fitting parameters including permeability and  $I$ . However, his reported values for hydraulic head difference across a soil sample are based on heights of mercury column. To be consistent with other data sets in Figure 3, we converted his reported values by representing the head difference with height of water column.



**Figure 4.** Match of Eq. (8) with test data for a Na-clay paste (Miller and Low, 1963).

Consolidation of clays is important for some civil-engineering applications. Investigation of consolidation behavior requires data of clay permeability under different mechanical and hydraulic conditions (Hansbo, 2001). For this purpose, Dubin and Moulin (1986) reported measured flux-gradient curves for Saint Herblain clay (their Figure 7). The corresponding hydraulic conductivity values were converted to permeability values in Figure 3. To evaluate his relationship for water flux and hydraulic gradient, Zou (1996) also presented a data set for several soil types. Figure 3 only shows his data points for clay soil because no significant non-Darcian behavior is observed from other soils in his paper.

Wang et al. (2011a) presented test data from core samples collected from low-permeability Daqing oilfield, China. During their tests, core samples were first saturated with salt water (composition is not available), and then a pressure gradient across them was imposed. After steady-state flow conditions were achieved, the water flux value was recorded. In this way, they were able to generate flow rate data as a function of hydraulic gradient. The non-Darcian flow behavior is represented by the ratio of  $(\frac{q}{i})/K$  (their Figure 2) in terms of variables defined in this paper. The permeability values reported in Wang et al.



(2011a), with appropriate unit conversion, are used in Figure 3. Based on (4), the ratio  $(\frac{q}{i})/K$  can be expressed as

$$\frac{q/i}{K} = 1 - \frac{1 - e^{-\frac{i}{I}}}{i/I} \quad (10)$$

The above equation is used to fit the data sets of Wang et al. (2011a). A comparison between calculated curve and the data is given in Figure 5. The fitted  $I$  values are 20.4, 12.0 and 10.0 for rock samples with permeability values of 0.195 mD, 0.347 mD and 0.524 mD, respectively. The comparison between data and (10) is reasonable, suggesting that Eq. (4) is valid for describing flux-gradient relationships for these rock samples.

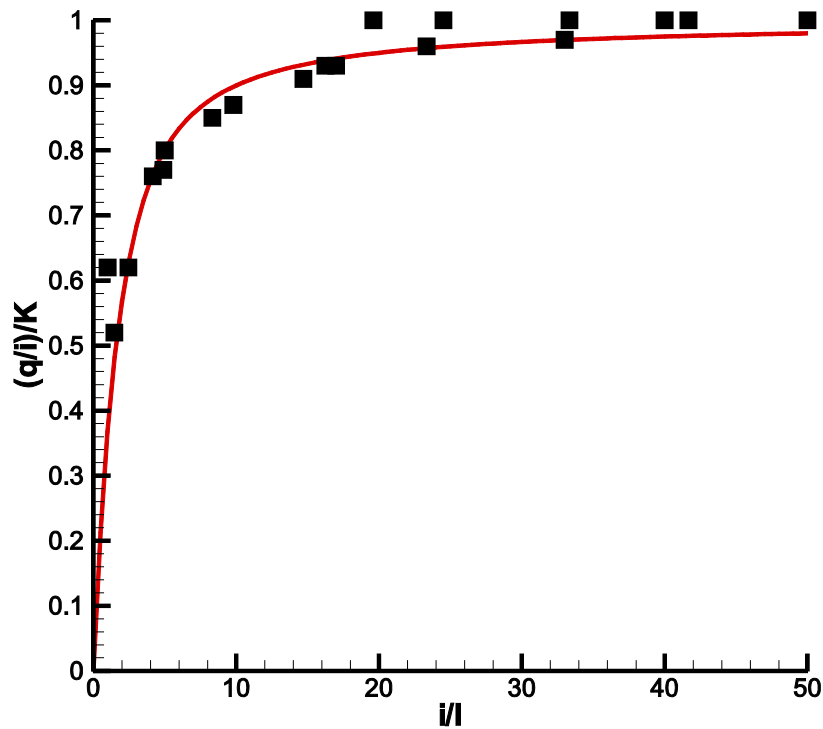


Figure 5. Match of Eq. (10) with test data of Wang et al. (2011a).

Lutz and Kemper (1959) were among the first to report the impact of clay-water interaction on clay hydraulic properties. The types of clay soils used in their tests include Utah bentonite, hallosite, Bladen

clay, and Wyoming bentonite. The tests were conducted under saturated conditions using solutions with different electrolyte concentrations. For the given soil and hydraulic gradient, a low concentration generally corresponds to a low water flow rate, as a result of swelling. During their tests, water flow rate was monitored as a function of the gradient. The threshold values for all these tests were calculated by Swartzendruber (1961) and used in Figure 3. Swartzendruber (1961) also demonstrated that the data are consistent with Eq. (4). A cross-sectional area of soil samples is needed to determine permeability values from the flow rate versus gradient data at large gradients corresponding to Darcy behavior. However, Lutz and Kemper (1959) did not report the value of the area, only the thickness of soil samples. Thus, we determine the area value from the ratio of sample diameter to its thickness value measured from the test-setup figure in Lutz and Kemper (1959). Since this approximation may involve significant uncertainties, the data of Lutz and Kemper (1959) are not used for estimating the relationship between parameter  $I$  and permeability in Figure 3; they have been plotted in Figure 3 to provide corroborative information. Nevertheless, the data seems to be consistent with the general trend in the figure. Also note that impact of soil swelling for this and other data sets to be discussed, to some extent, has been included in permeability values because permeability is a strong function of swelling (or shrinkage).

All the data sets discussed above are for saturated conditions. Cui et al. (2008) reported measurements of unsaturated hydraulic conductivity for a compacted sand-bentonite mixture. To the best of our knowledge, this work provided the first reliable data set of water flux as a function of hydraulic gradient under unsaturated conditions. The tests of Cui et al. (2008) were conducted under two experimental boundary conditions: constant volume and free swelling. In this study, we focus on the data for constant-volume conditions, based on the reasoning that under constant-volume conditions and for a given capillary pressure, hydraulic processes and pore structures are approximately the same at different locations within the soil sample (Cui et al., 2008). Cui et al. (2008) used the instantaneous profile method to determine the unsaturated hydraulic conductivity for infiltration tests of a vertical sand-bentonite column. The sand-bentonite mixture was directly compacted in a metallic cylinder (50 mm in inner diameter, 250 mm high). The bottom of the test cell was connected to a water source, and the upper end to

an air source under atmospheric pressure. Under transient water-flow conditions, vertical distributions of capillary pressure were directly measured as a function of time at several locations along the column. The relationship between water content and capillary pressure was independently measured under constant volume conditions. This relationship enables them to estimate vertical distributions of water content from the capillary-pressure measurements. Based on these vertical distributions at different times, and assuming mass balance at each location within the soil column, they estimated the water flux at that location as a function of capillary pressure and hydraulic gradient (their Figure 12). The details of this instantaneous method can be found in Cui et al. (2008). For this study, linear part of the flux-gradient relationship for a given capillary pressure is approximated by a straight line through the two points with the largest hydraulic gradients. Consequently, the unsaturated permeability (relative permeability for water multiplied by absolute permeability) and the threshold gradient  $I$  can be obtained for each capillary pressure. Figure 3 shows the match between Eq. (8) and the data set.

As shown in Figure 3, the data sets can be reasonably fitted by a relationship between  $I$  and permeability  $k$  ( $\text{m}^2$ )

$$I = Ak^B \quad (11)$$

with  $A = 4.0 \times 10^{12}$  and  $B = -0.78$ . This is very encouraging considering that the data sets were collected for different kinds of clay media and low-permeability materials and by different researchers. This may imply the existence of a universal relationship between  $I$  and permeability, although some degree of fluctuation exists in Figure 3.

Equation (11) (or Figure 3) can be used to evaluate the relative importance of non-Darcian behavior for a given media if its permeability is known. For example, non-Darcian behavior can be safely ignored for permeability values larger than  $10^{-13} \text{ m}^2$  based on Figure 3. Also, when data are not available for estimating site-specific values for  $A$  and  $B$ , Eq. (11) can be directly used for estimating parameter  $I$  based on more easily obtained permeability values. Eq. (11) is also useful in providing a criterion for permeability to be accurately measured. For example, if the hydraulic gradient head used in tests is less

than the value calculated from Eq. (11), the measured permeability will depend on the gradient and does not correspond to the correct value.

It is especially of interest that the data for unsaturated flow follow the same relationship as for saturated flow if permeability is replaced by unsaturated permeability (relative permeability multiplied by permeability) (Figure 3). This is because unsaturated permeability is related to the sizes of pores occupied by water under unsaturated conditions. In practical applications, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to determine the parameter  $I$  for different capillary pressures. Figure 3 seems to indicate that the same  $A$  and  $B$  values can be used for different capillary pressures, although this needs to be further confirmed when more data are available. If this is the case,  $A$  and  $B$  values can be either estimated from data at one capillary pressure or using values from Figure 3 when site-specific data are not available. Then  $I$  values for different capillary pressures (or saturations) can be estimated from Eq. (11) using unsaturated permeability. The relationships between unsaturated permeability and capillary pressures are well established for unsaturated media (van Genuchten, 1980; Brooks and Corey, 1964).

#### 4. Discussion

We developed a new relationship for one-dimensional water flow and hydraulic gradient given in Eq. (8). It can be considered a generalization of two previous formulations (Eqs. (4) and (5)) and is more consistent with laboratory experiments. In many studies, we need to investigate multidimensional water-flow processes. For that purpose, we extend Eq. (8) to three-dimensional, homogeneous and isotropic clay media:

$$\mathbf{q} = -K \left[ i - \frac{I}{\gamma \left( \frac{1}{\alpha} \right)} \gamma \left( \frac{1}{\alpha}, \left( \frac{i}{I^*} \right)^\alpha \right) \right] \mathbf{n}_i \quad (12)$$

where  $q$  (m/s) and  $\mathbf{n}_i$  (-) are water flux vector and unit vector for hydraulic gradient, respectively. The relationship between  $I$  and  $I^*$  is given by (9-1). When the threshold gradient  $I$  approaches zero, Eq. (12) is reduced to the commonly used form of Darcy's law. It should be emphasized that Eq. (12) is an empirical

relationship and developed based on one dimensional test results. It is logical to directly extend Eq. (8) to Eq. (12) for homogeneous and isotropic cases because both equations are consistent with the one-dimensional-test condition that flux and negative hydraulic gradient are along the same direction. That condition is violated for three-dimensional anisotropic porous media. In this case, it is not clear whether Eq. (12) is adequate.

Eq. (12) is applicable to both saturated and unsaturated flow processes. As demonstrated in Figure 2, Eq. (12) can also be used to satisfactorily describe unsaturated flow, although the related flux-gradient data are very limited. For unsaturated flow, both hydraulic conductivity and threshold gradient  $I$  are dependent on capillary pressure or water saturation. In this regard, the developed relationship between permeability and  $I$  (Eq. (11)) is especially useful. As previously indicated, it is practically difficult, if not impossible, to experimentally obtain flux-gradient data under constant capillary pressures (or saturations) to determine the threshold gradient  $I$  for a large range of capillary-pressure values. However, through the relationship given in Eq. (11), we can easily obtain  $I$  from unsaturated permeability whose dependence on saturation and capillary pressure has been well established.

It is not clear how parameter  $\alpha$  is related to other clay parameters, while a single  $\alpha$  value cannot adequately capture all the non-Darcian flow behavior of interest, as demonstrated in Figures 2 and 4. One speculation is that parameter  $\alpha$  may be related to pore-size distribution, because the observed flux-gradient relation is a combination of water flow processes across pores with different sizes that correspond to different degrees of water-solid interaction. Nevertheless, this needs to be further confirmed in future studies.

Finally, parameters in Eq. (12) depend on the electrolyte concentration of solution that flows through clay media and on its temperature. For example, Swartzendruber (1961) analyzed the data of Lutz and Kemper (1959) that were collected for solutions with different electrolyte concentrations and found that the threshold gradient decreases with the concentration. As previously indicated, the impact of the concentration is partially considered herein through the correlation between permeability and  $I$  (Eq. (11)). For example, with increasing solution concentration, permeability will increase because of

shrinkage and thus parameter  $I$  will decrease based on Eq. (11), which is consistent with the analysis results of Swartzendruber (1961). Studies of temperature impact on non-Darcian behavior are rare in the literature. To the best of our knowledge, the only study that is related to temperature impact is Miller and Low (1963). They experimentally found that the critical hydraulic gradient (below which water is immobile) decreases with increasing temperature. They argue that this is because increased temperature may weaken the bounding between water molecules and clay surface. More experimental and theoretical studies are needed to fully establish temperature dependence of related parameters in Eq. (12).

## 5. Summary

Water flow in clay media is an important process for a number of practical applications. Experimental results indicate that the traditional form of Darcy's law is not adequate for describing water flow processes in clay media because the observed relationship between water flux and hydraulic gradient can be highly non-linear. In this paper, to capture this non-Darcian flow behavior, we developed a new relationship between water flux and hydraulic gradient by generalizing the currently existing relationships. The new relationship is shown to be consistent with experimental observations for both saturated and unsaturated conditions. We also developed an empirical relationship between permeability and the threshold hydraulic gradient, an important measure of non-Darcian behavior. The latter relationship is practically useful because it can reduce the number of parameters whose values need to be determined from experiment data in order to model non-Darcian behavior. However, how to incorporate the impacts of temperature and electrolyte concentrations into the proposed relationships requires further research.

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