

Non-precious metal oxygen-reduction catalysts for PEM Fuel Cells based on N-doped ordered porous carbon

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N-doped ordered porous carbon (CN_x) was synthesized via a nano-casting process using polyaniline (PANI) as the carbon and nitrogen precursor and mesoporous silica as a hard template. Transmission electron microscopy (TEM), X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) and electrochemical tests were used to characterize the synthesized CN_x and the derived nonprecious metal oxygen-reduction catalysts. The non-precious metal oxygen-reduction catalysts were prepared by pyrolyzing iron chloride-impregnated CN_x in nitrogen, followed by post-treatments. Optimizations of the iron loading and the pore size were also explored. The catalytic activities of the CN_x products for the oxygen reduction reaction (ORR) were examined by rotating disc electrode (RDE) measurements and single-cell tests. The onset potential for oxygen reduction in 0.5 M H₂SO₄ of the best catalyst was as high as 0.82 V vs. normal hydrogen electrode (NHE). The current density obtained in an H₂/O₂ proton exchange membrane fuel cell (PEMFC) was as high as 0.3 A/cm² at 0.6 V with a cathode catalyst loading of 4 mg/cm².