

Encapsulating Cobalt into N-Doping Hollow Frameworks for Efficient Cascade Catalysis

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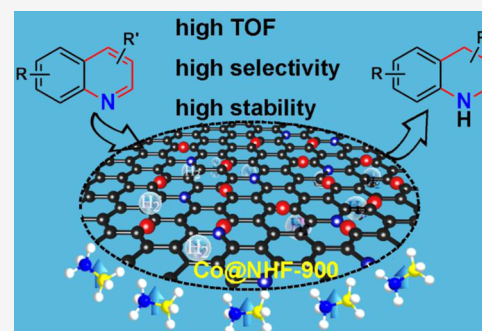
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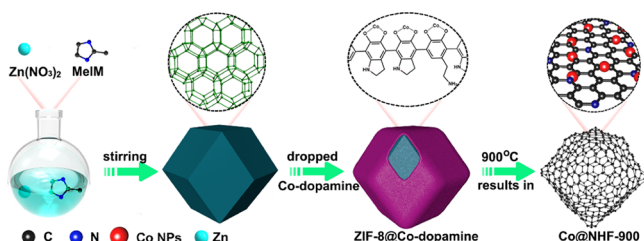
ABSTRACT: The development of nonprecious catalysts for hydrogenation of organic molecules is of great importance in heterogeneous catalysis. Herein, we report a series of N-doped hollow carbon frameworks encompassing cobalt nanoparticles (denoted as Co@NHF-900) constructed as a new kind of reusable catalyst for this purpose by pyrolysis of ZIF-8@Co-dopamine under Ar atmospheres. Notably, the framework of ZIF-8 is essential for efficient catalyst by providing a carbon framework to support Co-dopamine. The experimental results reveal that the ZIF-8 renders a large hollow place within the catalysts, allowing the enrichment of the substrate and windows of the hollow structure and the ease of mass transfer of products during the reaction. All of the virtues made Co@NHF-900 a good candidate for hydrogenation of quinolines with high activity (TOF value of 119 h⁻¹, which is several times than that of akin catalysts) and chemoselectivity.



INTRODUCTION

In view of many byproducts generated during the chemical synthesis process, developing a high-performance catalytic

Scheme 1. Graphical Illustration of the Synthesis of Co@NHF-900



system is of great demand and arouses wide attention.^{1–3} Consequently, there is an urgent need to design and synthesize catalysts with high activity and selectivity.^{4–6} In this regard, the non-noble metal catalysts, such as Fe- and Co-based materials, have attracted enormous interest due to their low cost and high selectivity in comparison to the precious metal-based catalysts.^{7–10} Nowadays, unremitting efforts have been devoted to selective hydrogenation reactions using inexpensive metal-based catalysts.^{11,12} Especially, the selective hydrogenation of azacyclo compounds with heterogeneous cobalt or other metal-based catalysts using H₂ as well as alternative transfer hydrogen resources has been studied. This priority of the heterogeneous catalytic system is because the heterogeneous catalysts can be easily separated from the reaction system, although the structure of the catalysts is ambiguous to precisely recognize at atomic

Table 1. Activity of Hydrogenation of Quinoline with Different Co-Based Catalysts^a

entries	catalysts	conv. (%)	select. (%)
1	Co _{ac} @NHF-900	<65	>99
2	Co@NHF-700	0	>99
3	Co@NHF-800	0	>99
4	Co@NHF-900	>99	>99

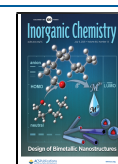
^aReaction conditions: 0.2 mmol quinoline, 1 mmol AB (named ammonia borane), 5 mg of a catalyst, 15 mL of a solvent (EtOH/H₂O; 1:2), 60 °C, 2 h. Conversions are determined by gas chromatography–mass spectrometry (GC-MS) using *n*-hexadecane as the standard.

levels.^{13,14} Well-dispersed non-noble metal nanoparticles supported by nitrogen-doped porous carbon have attracted growing interest due to their well confirmable structure.^{15–17}

As a specifically valuable building unit in synthetic bioactive compounds, 1,2,3,4-tetrahydroquinoline (THQ) has mounts of applications in agrochemicals, drugs, and biomolecules.^{18,19} Moreover, the atom-efficient methodology to obtain THQ often

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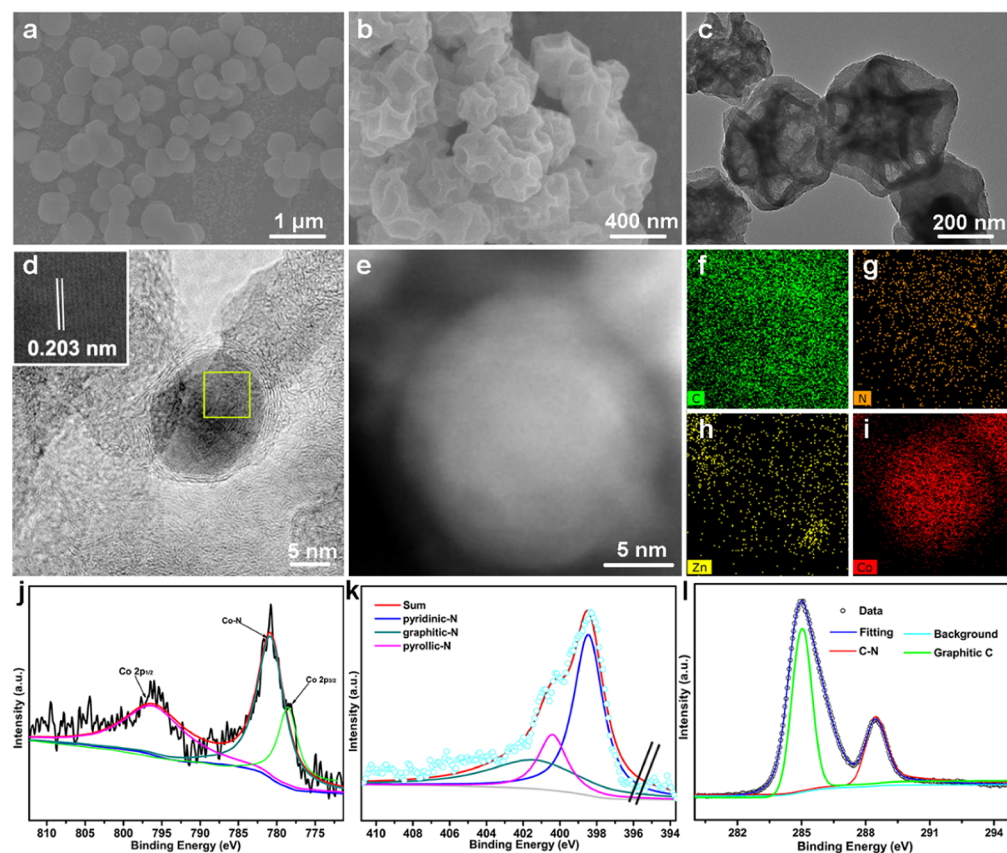


Figure 1. (a and b) SEM images of Co–dapamine@ZIF-8 and Co@NHF-900, respectively; (c and d) TEM and high-resolution TEM images of Co@NHF-900; (e–i) energy-dispersive system (EDS) mapping of Co@NHF-900; and (j–l) XPS spectra of Co, N, and C of Co@NHF-900, respectively.

uses the hydrogenation of quinoline; the reduction process, however, is still challenging due to the catalyst deactivation, which was caused by the easy combination between the metal centers and the nitrogen atoms in the quinoline molecule or its other reduced products.^{20–22} Although various heterogeneous catalysts have been successfully developed, this reduction still depends on the noble metal-based catalysts. Hence, designing nonprecious metal-based catalysts with high activity and selectivity for the hydrogenation of quinolines under milder conditions is essential.













Zeolitic imidazolate frameworks (ZIFs) possess high porosity that can enrich a substrate to increase the collision probability of reactants,^{23–25} which has been selected as the template to synthesize the carbon-supported catalysts and is extremely attractive in recent years.^{26–28} As a typical example, the nanoparticles obtained by pyrolysis of ZIF-8 and ZIF-67 show less catalytic activity toward hydrogenation reactions. Taking the above reasons in account and considering our previous work,^{29–31} here, we synthesized N-doping hollow graphitic carbon-supported Co core–shell nanoparticles (named Co@NHF-900) by encapsulating ZIF-8 in the cobalt–dopamine and subsequent pyrolysis, which is described in Scheme 1. All of the as-synthesized samples were tested for the liquid-phase hydrogenation of quinoline at 60 °C. Catalytic experiments exhibit that Co@NHF-900 possesses the highest activity and selectivity, which allows the overall conversion into the target product, THQ in 99%. Obviously, the pyrolysis temperature and the cobalt salts strongly influence the catalytic performance: the materials have the highest activity at the calcined temperature of 900 °C, and the conversion reduces to 65% with the cobalt

nitrate being replaced by Co(III) acetylacetonate (denoted as Co_{ac}@NHF-900) (Table 1).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To investigate the superb activity and selectivity of Co@NHF-900, the characterization of its structure was carried out by X-ray diffraction (XRD), scanning electron microscopy (SEM), high-

Table 2. Reduction of Quinoline Derivatives by Co@NHF-900^a

Conv./select.				Conv./select.			
Entry	Substrate	Time (h)	(%)	Entry	Substrate	Time (h)	(%)
1		2	>99	2		2	>99
3		2	>99	4		2	>99
5		2	>99	6		3	~95
7		2	>99	8		2	>99
9		2	>99	10		2	>99
11		2	>99	12		2	>99

^aNote: reaction conditions are the same as presented in Table 1.

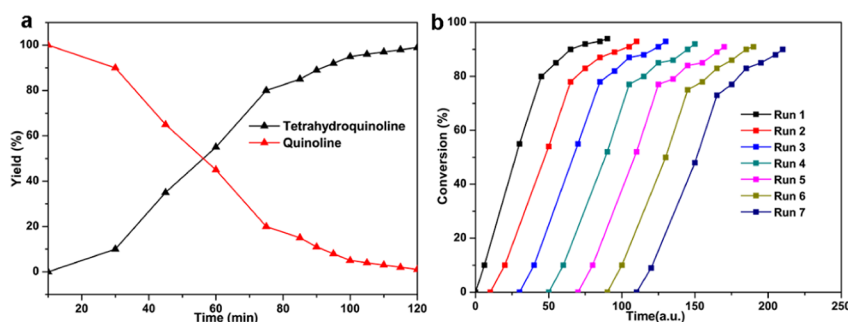


Figure 2. (a) Kinetic curves for hydrogenation of quinoline with Co@NHF-900 (reaction conditions: with 5 mg of catalyst and 0.2 mmol substrate dispersed in 15 mL of solution at 60 °C). (b) Reusability tests of the optimal catalyst.

resolution transmission electron microscopy (HRTEM), Brunauer–Emmett–Teller (BET) techniques, and X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS). The XRD patterns show that Co@NHF-900 exhibits cobalt phase with the PDF card no. 15-0806; however, in the case of Co_{ac}@NHF-900, XRD patterns show the presence of both metallic and oxide cobalt phases (Co and CoO, Figure S2) which may cause the decrease in the activity. Therefore the high activity may be attributed to Co NPs. Compared with the other catalysts, Co@NHF-900 shows larger BET surface areas of 730 m²/g (Figure S4, Co@NHF-700 and Co@NHF-800 show 414 and 467 m²/g, respectively), which causes concentration enrichment of the substrate to enhance the catalysis process. More importantly, the large pore size of the catalyst also exposes more active site to facilitate the catalysis process.

There is a large cave of the carbon framework as a result of the pyrolysis of ZIF-8, as shown in Figure 1a–c, and there are no obviously big particles on the surface of the polyhedral framework. Furthermore, the HRTEM analysis of the catalyst reveals that the particle size of Co@NHF-900 is in the range of *ac.* 8–10 nm; most of the particles were encapsulated in N-doped carbon to form a core–shell structure (Figure 1d,e), and all elements are scattered well (Figure 1f–i). Moreover, XPS analysis was performed to confirm the nature of Co species of the active catalyst (Figure 1j–l). Peaks observed at 778.48, 780.85, and 796.39 eV corresponded to Co⁰ and Co–N species, which illustrates that the metal particles were anchored on the inner surface of the shell through coordinated bonds.^{32,33} In addition, a series of peaks appear at 398.47, 400.40, and 401.57 eV, indicating the presence of pyridinic N and graphitic N in the N-doping graphitic carbon framework.³⁴

Considering the successful catalysis for hydrogenation of quinoline, the catalyst was used for the derivatives of quinoline with different functional groups, which are listed in Table 2. It is noteworthy that the derivatives with both electron-withdrawing and electron-donating groups are hydrogenated to obtain the corresponding products with a high conversion of up to 99% and without alkyl group removal and dehalogenation (entries 1–9). Interestingly, although there are competitive unsaturated groups, the catalyst still shows outstanding activity and excellent selectivity (entries 10 and 12). The extreme results highlight the activity and its eminent virtues compared with those of noble metal catalysts in the process of hydrogenation of quinolines.

A time-dependent experiment of reduction of quinoline with an optimal catalyst and using ammonia borane as the hydrogen resource was used to conduct the reaction kinetic investigation (Figure 2a). The kinetic curve indicates that the conversion is fast within the first hour and without any byproducts. To further

prove the practicability of the optimal catalyst, its stability and recyclability have been tested. As shown in Figure 2b, due to the N-doping carbon shell, the metal core as the active site can be protected from etching and aggregating, leading to Co@NHF-900 having good recyclability, which can be reused at least seven times without any loss in the conversion. More interestingly, the catalyst can be separated easily from the reaction medium by the magnetism of the nature of the catalyst, which solves the problem that catalysts are hard to separate during the catalysis process in the practical industry.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, a hollow N-doping carbon framework supported core–shell catalyst of Co@NHF-900 has been designed and constructed by template synthesis of the Co–dopamine coating on the ZIF-8 and subsequent pyrolysis. It was evidenced that the catalyst shows excellent performance for hydrogenation of quinolines due to the large surface areas of the carbon framework, which facilitates substrate enrichment and transfer, and the well-distributed Co particles, which provide uniform active sites. Meanwhile, the Co-based catalyst can be separated easily by magnetism and reused at least seven times due to the carbon shell that well protects the nanoparticles from leaching in the solvent. This work paves a new path to design hollow structures with uniformly distributed nanoparticles and promotes the performance of heterogeneous catalytic reactions.

ASSOCIATED CONTENT

Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge at <https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.inorgchem.1c01063>.

Experimental section; characterization (Figures S1–S5); and gas chromatography graph (Table S1) (PDF)

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Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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