## A Comprehensive Study of Formic Acid Oxidation on Palladium Nanocrystals with Different Types of Facets and Twin Defects

Sang-II Choi,<sup>[a, b]</sup> Jeffrey A. Herron,<sup>[c]</sup> Jessica Scaranto,<sup>[c]</sup> Hongwen Huang,<sup>[a]</sup> Yi Wang,<sup>[a]</sup> Xiaohu Xia,<sup>[a]</sup> Tian Lv,<sup>[a]</sup> Jinho Park,<sup>[a]</sup> Hsin-Chieh Peng,<sup>[a]</sup> Manos Mavrikakis,<sup>[c]</sup> and Younan Xia<sup>\*[a]</sup>

Palladium has been recognized as the best anodic, monometallic electrocatalyst for the formic acid oxidation (FAO) reaction in a direct formic acid fuel cell. Here we report a systematic study of FAO on a variety of Pd nanocrystals, including cubes, right bipyramids, octahedra, tetrahedra, decahedra, and icosahedra. These nanocrystals were synthesized with approximately the same size, but different types of facets and twin defects on their surfaces. Our measurements indicate that the Pd nanocrystals enclosed by {100} facets have higher specific activities than those enclosed by {111} facets, in agreement with prior observations for Pd single-crystal substrates. If comparing nanocrystals predominantly enclosed by a specific type of facet, {100} or {111}, those with twin defects displayed greatly enhanced FAO activities compared to their single-crystal counterparts. To rationalize these experimental results, we performed periodic, self-consistent DFT calculations on model single-crystal substrates of Pd, representing the active sites present in the nanocrystals used in the experiments. The calculation results suggest that the enhancement of FAO activity on defect regions, represented by Pd(211) sites, compared to the activity of both Pd(100) and Pd(111) surfaces, could be attributed to an increased flux through the HCOO-mediated pathway rather than the COOH-mediated pathway on Pd(211). Since COOH has been identified as a precursor to CO, a sitepoisoning species, a lower coverage of CO at the defect regions will lead to a higher activity for the corresponding nanocrystal catalysts, containing those defect regions.

## Introduction

Direct liquid fuel cells involving electrochemical oxidation of liquid fuels on the anodes have received considerable interest as the next-generation power sources for portable devices such as smartphones and laptops.<sup>[1-3]</sup> For several decades, methanol has been widely explored as a liquid fuel for such devices owing to its high energy density. However, methanol is toxic and its electrooxidation is plagued by problems such as production of CO, and thus poisoning of the catalyst, as well

[a]	Dr. SI. Choi, H. Huang, Y. Wang, Dr. X. Xia, T. Lv, J. Park, HC. Peng,
	Prof. Y. Xia
	The Wallace H. Coulter Department of Biomedical Engineering
	School of Chemistry and Biochemistry
	and School of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering
	Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, Georgia 30332 (USA)
	E-mail: younan.xia@bme.gatech.edu
[b]	Dr. SI. Choi
	Current address: Department of Chemistry
	Kyungpook National University, Daegu, 702-701 (Korea)
[c]	Dr. J. A. Herron, Dr. J. Scaranto, Prof. M. Mavrikakis
	Department of Chemical and Biological Engineering
	University of Wisconsin-Madison
	Madison, Wisconsin 53706 (USA)
	Supporting information for this article is available on the WWW under
	http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/cctc.201500094.
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as crossover flux through the membrane. Ethanol, another promising liquid fuel, also generates CO during its electrooxidation. Most of these issues can be addressed by switching to a liquid fuel based on formic acid. For example, the level of CO produced from formic acid oxidation (FAO) could be lower than that from the oxidation of methanol or ethanol by employing a Pd catalyst (see below).<sup>[4–6]</sup> It is also feasible to use formic acid at a higher concentration than methanol because of its lower toxicity and crossover flux. As a result, FAO on various types of electrocatalysts has received considerable attention in recent years for fuel cell applications.<sup>[4–24]</sup>

It has been established that FAO can proceed through two different pathways.<sup>[4,7]</sup> In the direct oxidation pathway, CO<sub>2</sub> is formed after two steps of proton/electron transfer, and CO<sub>2</sub> can readily desorb from the surface of a catalyst as a result of its weak binding, liberating active sites for further catalytic reactions. In the indirect oxidation pathway, CO is formed after CO–O bond scission in a carboxyl (COOH) intermediate. CO binds strongly to the surface of a catalyst and acts as a poison, which must be oxidized to CO<sub>2</sub> in the following step to be removed from the catalyst. The direct pathway is dominant at low potentials of approximately 0.4 V (vs. reversible hydrogen electrode, RHE) and the indirect pathway occurs at potentials over 0.8 V.<sup>[8]</sup> Typically, it is more efficient to oxidize formic acid through the direct pathway, but the gradual accumulation of



CO at potentials of approximately 0.4 V may still diminish the catalytic activity over time. An ideal catalyst for FAO should work at potentials of approximately 0.4 V, together with an ability to prevent the formation of CO and/or resist the poisoning by CO.

Palladium is considered the most effective catalyst for FAO owing to its high activity in directly oxidizing formic acid to CO<sub>2</sub> at relatively low potentials.<sup>[7]</sup> The high activity can be attributed to the low CO formation flux, thereby mitigating the poisoning effect of CO as compared with Pt, another catalyst that has been explored for FAO.<sup>[9,10]</sup> Although the Pd catalyst can still be deactivated because of the gradual accumulation of CO during operation, the high activity can be replenished



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Figure 1. Pd nanocrystals with different shapes, and the facets exposed on their faces and twin boundries.

by increasing the potential beyond 1.0 V.<sup>[11]</sup> The activity of a Pd catalyst is typically determined by the arrangement of atoms on the surface. For the low-index facets on Pd singlecrystal substrates, their FAO activities increase in the order of Pd(110) < Pd(111) < Pd(100).<sup>[10]</sup> Over the past decade, there has been a strong interest in controlling the shape of Pd nanocrystals to preferentially expose the most active {100} facets. In a previous study, we tested Pd cubes

Shape of Pd nanocrystal	Size of nanocrystal [nm]	Number of twin boundaries	SA <sup>[a]</sup> at 0.4 V [mA cm <sup>-2</sup> ]	Anodic peak potential [V]	SA <sup>[a]</sup> at anodic peak potential [mA cm <sup>-2</sup> ]
cube	15	_	5.9	0.54	10.1
right bipyramid	15	1	9.1	0.56	20.8
octahedron	13	-	5.0	0.47	6.0
tetrahedron	15	-	3.0	0.40	3.0
decahedron	15	5	7.4	0.47	10.0
icosahedron	17	30	8.2	0.46	10.4

and octahedra as two model systems to understand the dependence of FAO activity on crystal facet.<sup>[14]</sup> In good agreement with the results obtained from single-crystal substrates, Pd cubes enclosed by {100} facets were found to be more active than octahedra enclosed by {111} facets. In addition to the type of facet, the twin defect or stacking fault on the surface of a Pd nanocrystal can also affect its performance in catalyzing FAO.<sup>[16-24]</sup> Recently, we demonstrated that the specific activity (*j* in  $mAcm^{-2}$ ) toward FAO on Pd icosahedra was twofold higher than that of Pd octahedra, even though both geometries are predominantly exposing (111) facets.<sup>[16]</sup> This enhancement could be attributed to the presence of twin defects on the surface of Pd icosahedra. We also studied the effect of twin defects on the FAO activity by comparing Pd right bipyramids with single-crystal Pd cubes, and a two-fold enhancement was observed.<sup>[17]</sup> The enhancement in activity could be attributed to the {211} facets exposed on the twin defect of a Pd right bipyramid. The reaction on this high-index facet prefers the HCOO-mediated pathway, helping reduce the formation of CO.

Herein, we report, for the first time, a comprehensive and systematic study of FAO on Pd nanocrystals with different types of facets and twin defects, including cubes, right bipyramids, octahedra, tetrahedra, decahedra, and icosahedra (Figure 1). To minimize the effect of size,<sup>[25]</sup> all the Pd nanocrystals were prepared with a similar size in the range of 13– 17 nm for edge lengths or diameters (Table 1). Their corresponding FAO activities were then measured by using the same setup and under essentially identical conditions to minimize any possible variations or errors.<sup>[7, 10, 12-18]</sup> Both the cubes and right bipyramids are enclosed by {100} facets, whereas the octahedra, tetrahedra, decahedra, and icosahedra are all enclosed by {111} facets. The Pd nanocrystals enclosed by {100} facets showed higher specific activity than those enclosed by {111} facets, in agreement with previous observations on Pd single-crystal substrates.<sup>[10]</sup> For Pd nanocrystals enclosed by the same type of facet but possessing a single-crystal or twin structure, those with twin defects on the surfaces showed higher specific activities. At 0.4 V, a potential responsible for the direct oxidation pathway, both the Pd decahedra and icosahedra exhibited greater specific activities than the octahedra and tetrahedra. In addition, the FAO activity was found to be affected more significantly by the twin defects relative to the difference in low-index facets. In this respect, the decahedra and icosahedra exhibited higher specific activities than the cubes, even though they were enclosed by {111} facets with a lower activity than the {100} facets on cubes. Among all the nanocrystals we have tested, the right bipyramids exhibited the highest specific activity at 0.4 V. To understand the experimental results, we performed periodic selfconsistent DFT calculations (GGA-PW91) on model single-crystal substrates of Pd. Because of the enhancement in flux through the HCOO-mediated pathway on the Pd(211) surface, representing the structure of defect sites on the nanocrystals,<sup>[24]</sup> the level of CO is reduced relative to that on Pd(100) and Pd(111), leaving more catalytic sites on the nanocrystals for the electrooxidation of formic acid to CO<sub>2</sub>.







**-** 20 nm

**Figure 2.** TEM images of various types of Pd nanocrystals used in the present study: A) cubes, B) right bipyramids, C) octahedra, D) tetrahedra, E) decahedra, and F) icosahedra. The nanocrystals had edge lengths of A) 15, B) 15, C) 13, and D) 15 nm, respectively. The diameters of Pd decahedra and icosahedra were 15 and 17 nm, respectively.

## **Results and Discussion**

# Synthesis of Pd nanocrystals with different types of facets and twin defects

The synthesis of Pd cubes was performed in the presence of KBr because of the important role of Br<sup>-</sup> ions in promoting the formation of {100} facets.<sup>[14,26]</sup> In Figure 2A, a TEM image of the as-obtained Pd cubes with an average edge length of 15 nm is shown to demonstrate good uniformity in shape and narrow distribution in size. In Figure 2B, a TEM image of Pd right bipyramids synthesized in the presence of Nal is shown, where I<sup>-</sup> ions can act as an oxidative etchant for the selective removal of multiple-twinned Pd nanoparticles and as a selective capping agent for the {100} facets.<sup>[17]</sup> The Pd nanocrystals with other shapes such as octahedra and tetrahedra (Figure 2, C and D) were prepared by seed-mediated growth with the use of different combinations of seeds and precursors, including Na<sub>2</sub>PdCl<sub>4</sub> and Pd(acac)<sub>2</sub>.<sup>[15]</sup> Specifically, 5 nm Pd cuboctahedra were used as seeds for the syntheses of Pd octahedra and tetra

rahedra with average edge lengths of 13 and 15 nm, respectively, in a mixture of ethylene glycol (EG) and tetraethylene glycol (TTEG). The Pd decahedra (Figure 2E) were prepared with an average diameter of 15 nm by adding Na<sub>2</sub>PdCl<sub>4</sub> into a diethylene glycol (DEG) solution containing poly(vinyl pyrrolidone) (PVP) and Na<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>.<sup>[19]</sup> The Pd icosahedra were synthesized by adding HCl into the polyol synthesis, which could control the pH value of the solution and thus manipulate the reaction kinetics.<sup>[16]</sup> The use of HCl at an optimal concentration could lead to the formation of Pd icosahedra with high purity (> 94%) and uniformity. The sample shown in Figure 2F had an average diameter of 17 nm. All the detailed descriptions for the synthesis of Pd nanocrystals with different shapes are presented in the Experimental Section.

# Comparison of Pd nanocrystals with different types of twin structures

In Scheme 1, simple geometric models of two different types of twin defects that are involved in the Pd nanocrystals evaluated by this work are shown. The first type of twin defect is a mirror symmetry plane that can be introduced into the lattice of a crystal without causing any strain to the lattice. A typical example is the right bipyramid, which is bisected by a symmetry plane along the <111> direction in the middle of the nanocrystal and enclosed by six right-isosceles triangular {100}



**Scheme 1.** Schematic illustrations of different types of twin defects on A) a right bipyramid, B) a decahedron, and C) an icosahedron. A) The right bipyramid has a single twin defect, by which mirror symmetry is introduced into the crystal lattice. B) The decahedron can be considered as an assembly of five single-crystal tetrahedra. There is a gap of 7.35° in the lattice as a result of the unique structure. C) The icosahedron can be viewed as a densely packed array of twenty single-crystal tetrahedra. The icosahedron with a gap of 1.54 steradians (sr) will cause an internal lattice strain and a disordered region at the twin boundaries (similar to the twin zone of a decahedron).

facets, as shown in Scheme 1A. This type of twin defect only leads to the formation of three  $\{211\}$  high-index facets on the nanocrystal, and it does not cause strains to the crystal lattice.<sup>[17]</sup>

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The other type of twin defect corresponds to the boundary region between two tetrahedral units in a decahedron or icosahedron. As shown in Scheme 1B, a decahedral nanocrystal can be considered to form from five tetrahedral units (all covered by {111} facets) by sharing one common edge along the five-fold axis. A total of five twin boundaries are required to generate the decahedral particle because it is impossible to completely fill the space of a particle in five-fold symmetry with a single-crystal lattice only. Specifically, the projection angle of  $70.53^{\circ}$  for each tetrahedral unit brings a gap of  $7.35^{\circ}$ when the five tetrahedral units are assembled together by sharing one common edge, leading to the formation of strained regions at the boundaries. Johnson and co-workers recently demonstrated that the twin boundary of a decahedron is characterized by disclination and graded strains in the crystal lattice.<sup>[21]</sup> From the rigid-body rotation measurement, they found that a gap of  $4.3^{\circ}$  could be filled through atomic disclination but the remaining gap had to be filled through graded shear strains on the lattice.<sup>[21]</sup> An icosahedron consists of twenty tetrahedral units with thirty twin boundaries and twenty {111} facets.<sup>[16,22-24]</sup> As shown in Scheme 1C, the twin defect of a Pd icosahedron corresponds to a gap of 1.54 steradians.<sup>[27]</sup> As every edge on an icosahedron is a result of twin boundaries, the density of twin boundaries on the surface of an icosahedron is higher than that on the decahedron. The facets corresponding to the twin boundaries of a decahedron can be indexed as {211} based on its projection along the [011] zone axis, as shown in Figure S1 in the Supporting Information. As an icosahedron is comprised of twelve interpenetrating decahedra, the twin boundaries of an icosahedron can also be assigned to the {211} facets.

### Electrochemical measurements of the Pd nanocrystals

The surfaces of the as-synthesized Pd nanocrystals were covered by capping agents such as Br<sup>-</sup>, I<sup>-</sup>, and PVP. Therefore, we performed plasma etching for 30 min, followed by holding the electrical potential at -0.05 V (vs. RHE) for 60 s to remove the capping agents prior to electrochemical measurements.<sup>[7,17]</sup> To minimize the effect of particle size on FAO,<sup>[25]</sup> all the Pd nanocrystals were prepared with edge lengths or diameters in the range of 13-17 nm (Figure 2). In Figure S2, typical cyclic voltammograms (CVs) between 0.08 and 0.8 V for the Pd nanocrystals obtained in N2-saturated solutions containing 0.1 м HClO<sub>4</sub> are shown. From the curves, we could easily identify the hydrogen adsorption/desorption peaks. To evaluate the electrocatalytic surface areas (ECSAs), we performed stripping of underpotentially deposited Cu (Cu<sub>UPD</sub>) prepared in a N<sub>2</sub>-saturated solution containing 0.05 M H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub> and 0.05 M CuSO<sub>4</sub>. As shown by the Cu<sub>UPD</sub> curves in Figure S3, the Pd nanocrystals exhibited different behaviors. For the nanocrystals enclosed by {100} facets, a single Cuupp peak appeared at 0.56 V for cubes and at 0.57 V for RBPs, respectively (Figure S3 A).<sup>[28]</sup> The Cu<sub>UPD</sub> peaks for the Pd nanocrystals enclosed by {111} facets all appeared below 0.53 V (Figure S3B).<sup>[28]</sup> The ECSAs of the catalysts were calculated by integrating the stripping charges of Cu<sub>UPD</sub>. Charges of 420 and 490  $\mu C \, cm^{-2}$  were used for the Pd{100} and Pd{111} facets, respectively.<sup>[7, 16, 17]</sup>

We then conducted electrochemical measurements of FAO for the Pd nanocrystals with different shapes using the same setup and under essentially identical conditions (see the Experimental Section) to minimize any possible variations or errors.<sup>[7, 10, 12-18]</sup> We first compared the electrocatalytic activities between the nanocrystals enclosed by {100} and {111} facets, and then compared those with a single-crystal or twinned structure. In Figure 3, the CVs of FAO for the catalysts recorded between 0.08 and 1.1 V in N<sub>2</sub>-saturated solutions containing



**Figure 3.** Anodic cyclic voltammograms for the FAO on Pd nanocrystals enclosed by A) {100} and B) {111} facets obtained in a N<sub>2</sub>-saturated solution containing 0.5  $\,$  M HClO<sub>4</sub> and 0.5  $\,$  M HCOOH. Scanning speed = 50 mV s<sup>-1</sup>. The currents were normalized to the electroactive surface areas of the corresponding Pd nanocrystals derived from the charges for the underpotential deposition of Cu. The different shapes of Pd nanocrystals are indicated.

0.5 M HClO<sub>4</sub> and 0.5 M HCOOH at a scan rate of  $50 \text{ mV s}^{-1}$  are shown. The specific activity was obtained by normalizing to the ECSA of the catalyst derived from the charges of Cu<sub>UPD</sub>. The anodic CVs of FAO for Pd nanocrystals enclosed by {100} facets, such as cubes and right bipyramids, are shown in Figure 3 A. At the anodic peak potential, the specific activity of the right bipyramids was much higher than that of the cubes (Table 1). In Figure 3 B, the anodic CVs of FAO for Pd nanocrys-





**Figure 4.** Comparison of the specific FAO activities on Pd nanocrystals with different shapes and twin structures at 0.4 V. The data were derived from Figure 3 A,B.

tals enclosed by {111} facets are given, including octahedra, tetrahedra, decahedra, and icosahedra. For both the decahedra and icosahedra with twinned structures, they displayed an enhancement in specific activity at the anodic peak potential relative to the single-crystal octahedra and tetrahedra (Table 1). To compare the catalytic activities of these Pd nanocrystals quantitatively, their specific activities at 0.4 V, a potential for the direct oxidation pathway,<sup>[7]</sup> are summarized in Figure 4 and Table 1. The cubes enclosed by {100} facets showed enhancement in specific activity relative to both the octahedra and tetrahedra enclosed by {111} facets, in agreement with the results of previous studies for single-crystal substrates.<sup>[10]</sup> The nanocrystals with twin defects (i.e., right bipyramids, decahedra, and icosahedra) demonstrated enhanced specific activity with respect to their single-crystal counterparts (i.e., right bipyramids were more active than cubes, and the decahedra or icosahedra were more active than octahedra or tetrahedra). Between decahedra and icosahedra, the latter sample exhibited slightly higher activity than the former one. This result could be explained by the larger number of twin boundary regions on the surface of an icosahedron than that on a decahedron (Table 1). In addition, both decahedra and icosahedra showed enhanced specific activity at 0.4 V relative to the cubes even though they were enclosed by {111} facets that are less active than {100}. Taken together, it can be concluded that the FAO activity could be enhanced more significantly by including twin defects rather than by varying the low-index facets from {111} to {100}.

#### DFT calculations for FAO on Pd nanocrystals

To rationalize the experimental observations, we performed periodic self-consistent DFT calculations (GGA-PW91) on model single-crystal surfaces, which would capture the various types of active sites that may be present in the nanocrystals our experiments were performed on. The twin defect on the surface of a right bipyramid, decahedron, or icosahedron was modeled as a Pd(211) surface (Figure S1). The terraces in the defect zone were modeled as Pd(111) and Pd(100) surfaces. We evaluated the potential energy surfaces at 0.4 V for FAO through





Reaction Coordinate

**Figure 5.** DFT-calculated thermochemical potential energy surfaces for formic acid (HCOOH) oxidation at 0.4 V through HCOO-mediated (solid lines) and COOH-mediated (dashed lines) pathways on Pd(211) (red), Pd(111) (yellow), and Pd(100) (green). The reaction stoichiometry is balanced with H<sup>+</sup> and e<sup>-</sup>. For example, the energy level indicated by HCOO\* corresponds to HCOO\* + H<sup>+</sup> + e<sup>-</sup>.

<b>Table 2.</b> Relative stability of HCOO versus COOH on model sites based on Pd(211), Pd(111), and Pd(100) surfaces. <sup>[a]</sup>								
	Relative stability of isomers [eV]							
adsorbate HCOO COOH	Pd(211) 0.00 0.01	Pd(111) 0.11 0.00	Pd(100) 0.22 0.00					
[a] The energy of the more stable isomer on each surface is defined as the zero-energy reference for that surface. More positive entries signify less stable species. HCOO is practically isoenergetic with COOH on Pd(211) whereas COOH is more stable than HCOO on both Pd(111) and Pd(100).								

two reaction pathways (see Figure 5, the binding energies used to construct the potential energy surface are provided in Table S1 in the Supporting Information): carboxyl-mediated and formate-mediated. As shown in Table 2, the carboxyl (COOH) species, which has been identified as a precursor to CO formation, is more stable than formate (HCOO) by 0.22 eV on Pd(100) and more stable by 0.11 eV on Pd(111). In contrast, HCOO and COOH are isoenergetic on Pd(211). The relative stability of HCOO over COOH drives the reaction flux and selectivity toward the HCOO-mediated pathway rather than the COOH-mediated pathway. This result is important because, on all these surfaces, it is thermochemically favorable for COOH to be dissociated into CO and OH. If formed, the CO will compete with HCOO for the surface sites, poisoning the surface and lowering its catalytic activity. We note that in our calculations, the potential energy surface did not include the stabilization effect of water toward adsorbed OH, which has been calculated to be  $\approx$  0.5 eV on Pt(111),<sup>[29]</sup> which, in turn, would make CO oxidation by OH to CO2 more difficult than it appears in Figure 5. Therefore, by enhancing flux through the HCOOmediated pathway on Pd(211), the formation of CO will be reduced relative to those on Pd(100) and Pd(111), leaving rela-



tively more catalytic sites on Pd(211) free of CO (compared to (100) and (111)) for FAO to directly produce  $CO_2$ .

We also investigated the role of surface strain (up to  $\pm 5\%$ ) on the binding properties of Pd(211) surfaces to examine the impact of dislocation and shear gradients resulting from the twin defects on decahedra and icosahedra. There were only very small changes to the binding characteristics (see the Supporting Information, as well as Table S2 and Figure S4). Additionally, the effect of strain on the relative stability of HCOO versus COOH intermediates was probed on Pd(111) with 0-3% tensile strain (see the Supporting Information and Table S3),<sup>[30]</sup> and the effect was again found to be minimal, almost negligible if compared to the magnitude of change between different types of facets. Overall, this simple analysis provides one possible explanation for the observed enhancement in activity on the nanocrystals with twin defects compared to their singlecrystal counterparts. A more detailed mechanistic analysis may be required to evaluate other possible mechanisms responsible for the observed activity enhancement.

## Conclusions

We have systematically investigated the formic acid oxidation (FAO) activities of Pd nanocrystals with different shapes and twin structures, including cubes, right bipyramids, octahedra, tetrahedra, decahedra, and icosahedra. The nanocrystals enclosed by {100} facets were found to show higher specific activities than those enclosed by {111} facets. For nanocrystals enclosed by the same type of facet but with a single-crystal or twin structure, those with twin defects on the surfaces showed higher specific activities. It is interesting to note that both decahedra and icosahedra exhibited higher specific activities than cubes even though the {111} facets are less active than the {100} facets. In these cases, the presence of twin defects imposes a stronger impact on the catalytic activity toward FAO than the type of facet. To understand the correlation between the specific activity and the twin defect on the nanocrystal, DFT calculations were performed on model single-crystal surfaces of Pd. The formation of CO is reduced on Pd(211) if compared to both Pd(100) and Pd(111), retaining a higher fraction of the defect sites free of CO, for FAO.

## **Experimental Section**

### Chemicals and materials

Palladium(II) chloride (PdCl<sub>2</sub>, 99.9%), Na<sub>2</sub>PdCl<sub>4</sub> (99.99%), Pd(acac)<sub>2</sub> (99.0%), PVP (MW  $\approx$  55000), L-ascorbic acid (AA, 99.0%), KBr (99.0%), Nal (99.5%), Na<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub> (99.0%), DEG (99.0%), TTEG (90%), and HCI (37%) were all purchased from Sigma–Aldrich and used as received without further purification. EG (99.0%) was obtained from J. T. Baker. Deionized (DI) water with a resistivity of 18.2 M $\Omega$  cm was used for all experiments.

### Syntheses of Pd cubes and right bipyramids

For the synthesis of Pd cubes with an edge length of 15 nm,<sup>[14]</sup> an 8.0 mL volume of an aqueous solution containing PVP (105 mg),

AA (60 mg), and KBr (500 mg) was placed in a 20 mL vial. The mixture was preheated at 80 °C for 10 min under magnetic stirring. Then, a 3.0 mL volume of an aqueous solution containing  $Na_2PdCl_4$  (57 mg) was rapidly injected into the vial using a pipette. The reaction solution was allowed to proceed at 80 °C for 3 h.

For the synthesis of Pd right bipyramids with an edge length of 15 nm along the <100> direction,  $^{[17]}$  a 5.0 mL volume of EG containing PVP (400 mg) and Nal (150 mg) was added into a 25 mL three-neck, round-bottom flask. The mixture was preheated at 160 °C for 10 min under magnetic stirring. Then, a 1.0 mL volume of EG containing Na\_2PdCl\_4 (15 mg) was rapidly injected into the flask with a pipette. The reaction was allowed to proceed at 160 °C for 2 h.

# Syntheses of Pd octahedra, tetrahedra, decahedra, and icosahedra

For the syntheses of Pd octahedra and tetrahedra (with edge lengths of 13 and 15 nm, respectively),<sup>[15]</sup> a 2.5 mL volume of TTEG containing PVP (10 mg) and a 0.1 mL volume of a suspension of the 5 nm cuboctahedral Pd seeds in EG (1.8 mg mL<sup>-1</sup> in concentration) were placed in a 20 mL vial. The mixture was preheated at 140 °C for 10 min under magnetic stirring. Meanwhile, a 0.5 mL volume of TTEG solution containing Na<sub>2</sub>PdCl<sub>4</sub> (2 mg) or an equal molar amount of Pd(acac)<sub>2</sub> was prepared for the synthesis of Pd octahedra or tetrahedra, respectively. After the precursor had been completely dissolved, the solution was quickly injected into the vial by using a pipette. The reaction solution was allowed to proceed at 140 °C for 1 h.

For the synthesis of Pd decahedra 15 nm in diameter,<sup>[19]</sup> a 2.0 mL volume of DEG containing PVP (80.0 mg) and Na<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub> (40.0 mg) was placed in a 20 mL vial. The mixture was preheated at 105 °C for 20 min under magnetic stirring. Then, a 1.0 mL volume of DEG containing Na<sub>2</sub>PdCl<sub>4</sub> (15.5 mg) was rapidly injected into the vial with a pipette. The reaction was allowed to proceed at 105 °C for 24 h.

For the synthesis of Pd icosahedra 17 nm in size,<sup>[16]</sup> a 2.0 mL volume of EG containing PVP (30 mg) was placed in a 20 mL vial. The mixture was pre-heated at 160 °C for 20 min under magnetic stirring. Meanwhile,  $H_2PdCl_4$  was prepared by dissolving PdCl<sub>2</sub> in a mixture of EG and 37 vol% HCl, in which the molar ratio of HCl to PdCl<sub>2</sub> was set to 4:1 and the concentration of Pd<sup>II</sup> to 50 mM. Then, the  $H_2PdCl_4$  solution (1 mL, 50 mM) was added into the vial in one shot. A specific amount of HCl was also added to achieve a final concentration of 134 mM in the reaction mixture. The reaction was allowed to proceed at 160 °C for 3 h.

All the syntheses were quenched by immersing the vials in an icewater bath and the products were washed with acetone once and DI water five times by centrifugation prior to the electrochemical measurements.

### Characterization

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The TEM images were taken by using a microscope (HT7700, Hitachi) operated at 120 kV by drop-casting the nanoparticle dispersions on carbon-coated copper grids and drying under ambient conditions. The particle concentration of each suspension of Pd nanocrystals was determined by using inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (ICP–MS, NexION 300Q, PerkinElmer).



#### **Electrochemical measurements**

Samples of approximately 0.2 mg of the Pd nanocrystals and commercial Pd black (0.2 mg, Strem Chemicals) were dispersed in a 1.0 mL volume of DI water and treated by ultrasonication for 10 min. To prepare the working electrode, a 10  $\mu$ L volume of an aqueous suspension of the catalyst was dropped onto the precleaned glassy carbon electrode (Bioanalytical Systems Inc.). Upon drying in an oven at 50 °C for 10 min, the electrode was covered with Nafion aqueous solution (5  $\mu$ L, 0.05%) and allowed to dry in an oven set to 50°C for another 10 min. Then, plasma etching (PE-50, Plasma Etch Inc.) was performed for 30 min to remove the PVP on the surfaces of the Pd catalysts. An Ag/AgCl electrode and a Pt mesh  $(1 \times 1 \text{ cm}^2)$  were used as the reference and counter electrodes, respectively. The potentials are presented with reference to RHE. To further remove the capping agents such as PVP, Br<sup>-</sup>, and  $I^-$ , the electrical potential was held at -0.05 V for 60 s.<sup>[7]</sup> CVs were obtained by cycling the potential between 0.08 and 0.8 V for 10 cycles in  $N_2$ -saturated 0.1 M HClO<sub>4</sub> solutions at a scan speed of  $50 \mbox{ mV s}^{-1}.$  The ECSAs were obtained from the charges associated with the stripping of  $\mathsf{Cu}_{\text{\tiny UPD}}$  on the Pd nanocrystals by assuming 420 and 490  $\mu C\,cm^{-2}$  for a full monolayer coverage of Cu on Pd enclosed by {100} and {111} facets, respectively, and 460  $\mu$ C cm<sup>-2</sup> for commercial Pd black.  $^{[7]}$  The  $\text{Cu}_{\text{UPD}}$  was conducted in a  $\text{N}_2\text{-satu-}$ rated solution containing 0.05  $\mbox{ M}$   $\mbox{H}_2\mbox{SO}_4$  and 0.05  $\mbox{ M}$   $\mbox{CuSO}_4.$  To obtain FAO activity, the catalyst was tested between 0.08 and 1.1 V for two cycles in a  $N_2\mbox{-saturated}$  solution containing  $0.5\,\,\mbox{m}$  HClO4 and 0.5 м HCOOH at a scan speed of 50 mV s<sup>-1</sup>. All the electrochemical measurements were conducted with a CHI600E potentiostat (CH Instrument).

#### **Theoretical calculations**

All calculations were performed using DACAPO.<sup>[31,32]</sup> A 3×3 unit cell was used to construct a four layer Pd(100) slab (36 slab atoms in total). A  $1 \times 3$  unit cell was used to construct a ten layer Pd(211) slab (30 slab atoms in total). A 3×3 unit cell was used to construct a three layer Pd(111) slab (27 slab atoms in total). The surface coverage of adsorbates on all three surfaces was set to 1/9 ML, with only one adsorbate per unit cell. Each unit cell was repeated in super cell geometries with successive slabs separated by a vacuum region of at least 10 Å. The optimized bulk lattice constant for Pd was calculated to be 3.99 Å, in good agreement with the experimental value of 3.89 Å.<sup>[33]</sup> Adsorption was only allowed on one of the two exposed surfaces, with the electrostatic potential adjusted accordingly  $^{\scriptscriptstyle [34,35]}$  The top two layers of the Pd(100) slab were relaxed and the top five layers of the Pd(211) slab were relaxed, whereas all layers of the Pd(111) slab were fixed because the effect of relaxation for this surface was negligible.<sup>[36]</sup> The surface Brillouin zone was sampled using a  $4 \times 4 \times 1$  Monkhorst-Pack kpoint mesh  $^{\scriptscriptstyle [37]}$  for Pd(211) and Pd(100), and was sampled using 18 special k-points<sup>[38]</sup> for the Pd(111) surface. The Kohn–Sham oneelectron valence states were expanded in a basis of plane waves with kinetic energies up to 25 Ry, and ionic cores were described by ultrasoft Vanderbilt pseudopotentials.[39] The exchange-correlation potential and energy were described self-consistently using the GGA-PW91 functional.<sup>[40,41]</sup> The electron density was determined by iterative diagonalization of the Kohn-Sham Hamiltonian, Fermi population of the Kohn–Sham states ( $k_{\rm B}T$ =0.1 eV), and Pulay mixing of the resulting electronic density.<sup>[42]</sup> The total energies were then extrapolated to  $k_{\rm B}T = 0$  eV. Convergence with respect to various calculation parameters was tested.

The binding energies ( $E_b$ ) of the FAO intermediates were calculated with respect to the clean (relaxed, if applicable) surfaces ( $E_{substrate}$ ) and the respective free adsorbate in the gas phase ( $E_{gas-phase adsorbate}$ ), i.e.,  $E_b = E_{total} - E_{substrate} - E_{gas-phase adsorbate}$ , where  $E_{total}$  is the energy of the surface with the adsorbate adsorbed on it. The surface intermediates considered were COOH, HCOO, CO, and OH. Their  $E_b$  are presented in Table S1.

The thermochemistry of the elementary steps in the following reaction network was calculated using the binding energy:

$HCOOH(g) + * \rightarrow HCOO^* + H^+ + e^-$	(1	)
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 $HCOO^* \rightarrow CO_2(g) + H^+ + e^- \tag{2}$ 

$$HCOOH(g) + * \rightarrow COOH^* + H^+ + e^-$$
(3)

$$COOH^* \rightarrow CO_2(q) + H^+ + e^-$$
(4)

$$\mathsf{COOH}^* + {}^* \to \mathsf{CO}^* + \mathsf{OH}^* \tag{5}$$

The calculated reaction thermochemistry for proton/electron transfer reactions (elementary steps 1–5) were adjusted to an artificial electrode potential of 0.4 V by using an approach similar to that of Nørskov and co-workers.<sup>[17,43–46]</sup> First, we chose the RHE as a reference. Under standard conditions, hydrogen gas is in equilibrium with protons and electrons, at a defined potential of 0 V. A change in the electrode potential by *U* will shift the free energy of each electron exothermically by *eU*, where *e* is the absolute charge of an electron. For this study, we have neglected the entropic and zero-point energy contributions to the free energy of the reactions because these corrections will not vary significantly between the surfaces.

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