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Atomically Dispersed Co Atoms Stabilized by Nitrogen Species in Carbon Skeleton for Efficient Oxygen Reduction and Zn-air Batteries

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Abstract: Atomically dispersed and nitrogen-coordinated single metal atom implanted into the carbon substrate holds great promise as Pt-liked catalysts for oxygen reduction reaction (ORR). However, the complicated synthetic procedures of single atomic catalysts heavily limit their widespread applications. Herein, the atomically dispersed Co stabilized by nitrogen species in carbon skeleton (Co-SAs/NC) is prepared by a controllable pyrolysis of the nano-confined Co-precursor, and further employed as alkaline ORR catalyst. The atomic configuration and electronic structure of Co-SAs/NC are systematic investigated by a wide range of advanced techniques, such as electron microscopic and X-ray absorption spectroscopy. As expected, Co-SAs/NC exhibits excellent ORR activity with a large onset and half-wave potentials, as well as good selectivity and favorable stability. More importantly, the outstanding ORR performances of Co-SAs/NC enable the assembled Zn-air battery to deliver a large specific capacity of $788.4 \text{ mAh} \cdot \text{g}_{\text{Zn}}^{-1}$, a maximum power density of $233.6 \text{ mW} \cdot \text{cm}^{-2}$, and a long cycle life.

Keywords: Atomically dispersed Co sites; Oxygen evolution reaction; Zn-air battery

1. Introduction

Metal-air batteries are promising renewable energy technologies with the advantages of high energy conversion efficiency, safety, and nontoxicity^[1-3]. However, the energy conversion efficiency of metal-air batteries heavily depends on the

air-cathode performances of electrocatalytic oxygen reduction reaction (ORR)^[4]. The ORR generally undergoes the multiple proton-coupled electron transfer steps with complex reaction intermediates (OO*, OOH*, O*, and OH*), therefore, the catalyst with high activity are required to break down the



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corresponding reaction barrier and improve the ORR activity^[5,6]. Currently, the Pt-based electrocatalysts show the highest ORR activity, and are promising used for commercial applications^[7,8]. However, the high-cost and scarcity of the Pt may severely hinder its large-scale applications. Thus, it is urgent to develop efficient and stable non-noble metal catalysts to replace Pt-based ones. In the past few years, carbon-based materials and transition metal compounds have been developed as efficient ORR electrocatalysts^[9-11]. Among these catalysts, the hybrids of transition metal and nitrogen doped carbon (M-N-C) have been attracted much attention due to their easy availability as well as high ORR activity^[12,13]. Generally, the activity origin of M-N-C catalysts is believed to be the M-N_x species^[14,15]. Therefore, the key to enhance the ORR catalytic ability of M-N-C catalysts is to increase the density of M-N_x sites.

Currently, the transition metal single atoms (SAs) anchored on N-doped carbon substrates (M-N₄) with a porphyrin architecture have attracted much attention in ORR^[16,17]. In comparison with transition metal nanoparticles and/or nanocrystallines, their homogeneous dispersed atomic sites enable the metal single atom catalysts (SACs) with maximum atom utilization efficiency^[18,19]. Among these M-N_x SACs, atomically dispersed and nitrogen-coordinated Co atoms (Co-SACs) have been demonstrated to be the high activity ORR catalysts. Much effort has been done to increase the corresponding ORR activity by tuning the microstructure and/or electronic structure of Co-SACs^[20-23]. For examples, Li group^[21] reported that the Co single atoms were anchored in hierarchically porous N-doped carbon by a dual-template strategy, which is favor for exposure of the active sites and facilitating mass transfer during ORR process. Wang *et al.*^[20] highlighted that the electronic density of Co single site could be regulated by designing of the corresponding atomic configuration, and the as-reported Co₁-N₃PS active moiety displayed excellent ORR activity. Although enormous progress has been made in designing high activity Co-SACs catalysts for ORR, most of the synthetic strategies for Co-SACs suffer from the expensive precursors and complex procedures, which heavily limit the widespread applications of Co-SACs. Therefore, the development of simple and efficient synthesis methods is meaningful for extensive

application of single atomic catalysts.

In this work, we successfully synthesize the novel atomically dispersed and nitrogen-coordinated single-atom Co moieties implanted into the N-doped carbon (Co-SAs/NC), and investigate its ORR performance in alkaline electrolyte. Specifically, the Co-SAs/NC was prepared by a controllable pyrolysis of the Co-precursor, which was assembled by encapsulating the Co(NO₃)₂ • 6H₂O into the frameworks of ZIF-8 *via* a nano-confined strategy. Then, the atomic configuration and electronic structure of Co-SAs/NC were systematic investigated by the advanced techniques, such as electron microscopic and X-ray absorption spectroscopy. As expected, Co-SAs/NC exhibits excellent a large onset and half-wave ORR potentials of 1.01 V and 0.87 V, respectively, as well as good selectivity and favorable stability. And, the outstanding ORR performances of Co-SAs/NC enable the assembled Zn-air battery to deliver a large specific capacity of 788.4 mAh • g_{Zn}⁻¹, a maximum power density of 233.6 mW • cm⁻², and a long cycle life (1000 cycles).

2. Experimental Section

2.1 Preparation of Co-SAs/NC

There are two steps for preparation of Co-SAs/NC. Firstly, Co-ZIF-8 precursors were prepared by following step. Typically, Zn(NO₃)₂ • 6H₂O (3.0 g) and Co(NO₃)₂ • 6H₂O (0.1 g) were dispersed in water solution (50 mL) under intensive stirring. Then, another water solution (50 mL) containing of 2-methylimidazole (11.2 g) was added into above solution and further kept stirring for 48 h. Afterwards, the Co-ZIF-8 precursors were obtained by centrifugation and drying. To prepare the Co-SAs/NC, the above Co-ZIF-8 precursors were annealed at 800 °C for 2 h under N₂ atmosphere.

2.2 Synthesis of NC

The NC was prepared with the same procedure of Co-SAs/NC without using of Co(NO₃)₂ • 6H₂O.

2.3 Characterizations

The details of electron microscope measurements, N₂ adsorption, X-ray diffraction, X-ray spectroscopy, Raman, and X-ray absorption near edge structure (XANES) measurements were presented in Supporting Information.

2.4 Electrochemical Measurements

The details of ORR measurements were provided in

Supporting Information.

3. Results and Discussion

The overall synthetic process of carbonaceous catalysts with atomically dispersed and nitrogen-coordinated single-atom Co sites (Co-SAs/NC) was operated by a two-step method (**Figure 1a**). Briefly, the Co-ZIF-8 precursors were first assembled via a host-guest confined strategy, wherein the Co species as guest components were confined in the host frameworks of ZIF-8. Subsequently, the Co-SAs/NC was formed by pyrolysis of the as-obtained Co-ZIF-8 precursors at 800 °C. During the pyrolysis process, the Zn species were volatilized and simultaneously ZIF-8 frameworks were carbonized into N-doped carbon skeleton, and the confined Co was in-situ stabilized by the N species in N-doped carbon to formation of the atomically dispersed Co-N_x moiety. However, when the amount of Co was increased in precursor, the metallic Co was observed after the final pyrolysis step (**Figure S1**), indicating that the formation of Co-SAs/NC crucially depends on the amount of the confined Co in precursor.

Moreover, the microstructure of Co-SAs/NC was observed in transmission electron microscopy (TEM) images. Co-SAs/NC displayed an irregular block architecture (**Figures 1b and 1c**), and no nanoparticles were observed in high-magnification TEM image (**Figure 1d**), revealing the Co species was atomically dispersed into the carbonaceous skeleton rather than formation of individual metallic Co or Co-based compounds. Moreover, the atomically dispersed Co species into carbon architecture was further investigated by the advanced aberration-corrected high-angle annular dark field scanning TEM (HAADF-STEM). Clearly, numerous bright dots, corresponding to a high density of Co atoms (Co is heavier than that of C and N), were uniformly distributed across/within the carbon skeleton (**Figures 1e and 1f**). Additionally, the energy-dispersive X-ray spectroscopy mapping images further confirm the presence of Co, C, and N elements in Co-SAs/NC, and all of them were homogeneous distributed across the overall architecture (**Figure 1g**). As a contrast, the NC (**Figure S2**) counterpart could be also controllably assembled by employing the ZIF-8 precursors.

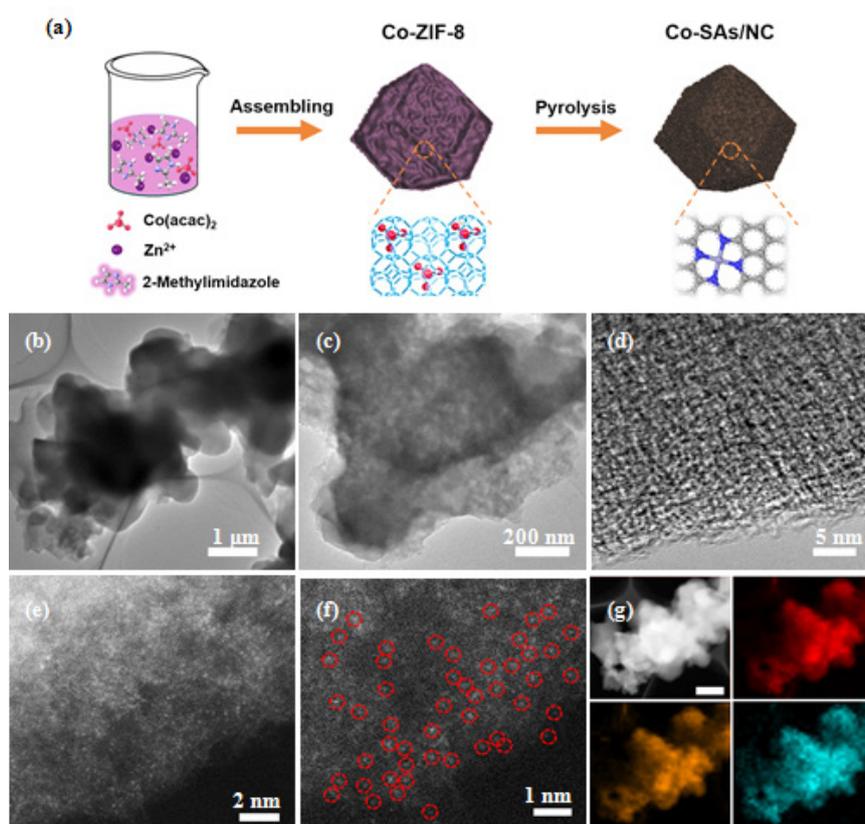


Figure 1. (a) Schematic representation of the synthetic procedure for Co-SAs/NC; (b-d) TEM images; (e,f) aberration-corrected (AC)-HAADF-STEM images of Co-SAs/NC; (g) The corresponding elemental mappings of Co-SAs/NC (scale bar, 1 μm)

Moreover, a fast rise of sorption capacity in the low pressure area and an H4 type hysteresis loop were observed in the nitrogen adsorption isotherms of Co-SAs/NC (**Figure 2a**), which reveals that the Co-SAs/NC hold the hierarchical micro-meso-pores^[24]. Correspondingly, the pore size distribution curve indicated that the sizes of the pores center mainly at below 4 nm (**Figure 2b**), agreeing well with the observed result in TEM image. The novel porous character of Co-SAs/NC enabled it with a large Brunauer-Emmett-Teller surface area of $794.1 \text{ m}^2 \cdot \text{g}^{-1}$. Furthermore, X-ray diffraction (XRD) pattern revealed that there are two peaks at 25° and 43.5° in Co-SAs/NC curve, which can be assigned to the characteristic (002) and (101) planes for graphitic carbon (**Figure 2c**), and no additional diffraction peaks of Co-based compounds can be identified, suggesting that the Co species were atomically dispersed in carbon substrate with a long-range disordered character. Moreover, two typical peaks at $\sim 1347 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ and 1581 cm^{-1} were observed in the Raman patterns (**Figure S3**), which could be assigned to the D and G bands of carbon. And, the D band and G band were related to the structural defects and degree of graphitization, respectively. Clearly, the

Co-SAs/NC displayed a relative strong peak of G-band in comparison with that of NC, revealing the Co species Co-SAs/NC could increase the graphitization degree of its carbonaceous substrate.

The composition and chemical state of Co-SAs/NC were investigated by X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS). In high-resolution Co 2p spectrum of Co-SAs/NC (**Figure 2d**), the four fitted peaks at 780.8/796.5 eV and 785.2/802.3 eV can be assigned to Co-N as well as the corresponding satellite signals, respectively^[25,26]. And, the Co loading in Co-SAs/NC is around 0.89 at.% (determined by XPS) and 1.27 wt% (by inductively coupled plasma optical emission spectrometry, ICP-OES), respectively. And, the N 1s XPS of Co-SAs/NC could be divided into three peaks, which located at 397.9 eV, 399.1 eV, and 400.2 eV for pyridinic N, Co-N species, and pyrrolic N, respectively (**Figure 2e**)^[27,28]. Additionally, the C 1s XPS spectra could be fitted into three peaks at binding energies of 284.6 eV, 286.1 eV, and 288.4 eV (**Figure 2f**), which can be assigned to C-C, C-N, and C-O bonds, respectively^[29]. The above results further revealed that Co atoms in Co-SAs/NC are anchored by N species in carbon matrix to formation of Co-N_x configuration.

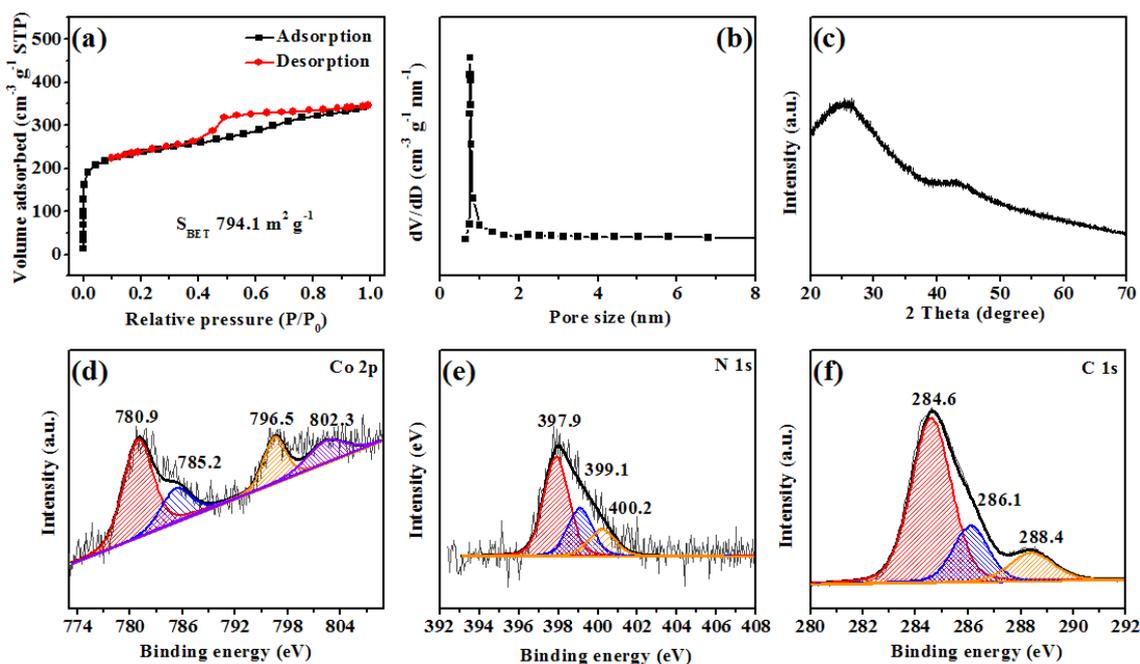


Figure 2. (a) N_2 adsorption-desorption isotherms; (b) corresponded pore-size distribution of Co-SAs/NC; (c) XRD pattern, and high-resolution; (d) Co 2p XPS spectra; (e) N 1s XPS spectra; (f) C 1s XPS spectra of Co-SAs/NC

Moreover, the local atomic coordination of Co species in Co-SAs/NC was further investigated by

X-ray absorption fine-structure (XAFS) measurements, and CoO, Co_3O_4 , and Co foil were employed as

references. Clearly, the Co K-edge X-ray absorption near-edge structure (XANES) spectra (**Figure 3a**) displayed that the absorption edge positions of Co-SAs/NC is located between Co foil and Co_3O_4 , and is amazingly close to that of CoO reference, indicating the Co species in Co-SAs/NC was probably covalently bonded with N to afford a divalent valence state. Furthermore, the corresponding R space (**Figure 3b**) derived from Fe k^3 -weighted Fourier transform (FT) displayed the bond length and atomic coordination of Co species. The curve of Co-SAs/NC displayed a typical peak at $\sim 1.51 \text{ \AA}$, which could be attributed to Co-N bond in the first shell^[30], and no Co-Co signal at

$\sim 2.20 \text{ \AA}$ and Co-O signals were detected, revealing the Co atoms in Co-SAs/NC were atomically dispersed and stabilized by N atoms to formation of the Co-N bond. Additionally, wavelet transform (WT) of Co K-edge EXAFS oscillations was also applied to investigate the backscattering atoms and obtain powerful resolutions in both R-space and k-space^[31]. The WT contour plots of Co species in Co-SAs/NC displayed only one intensity maximum, which was assigned to Co-N (6.0 \AA^{-1}) contribution (**Figure 3c**). Taking all these results together, well-defined architectures of atomically dispersed Co-N_x centers of Co-SAs/NC was successfully constructed.

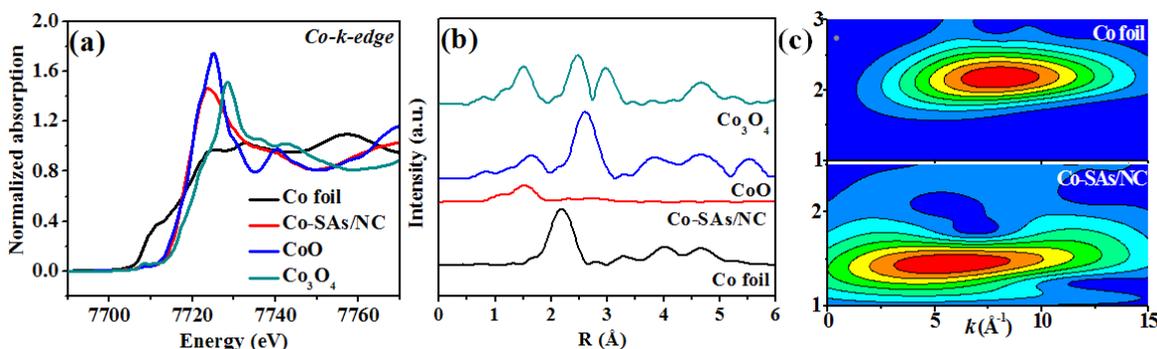


Figure 3. (a) Co K-edge XANES spectra; (b) corresponding Fourier-transformed k^3 -weighted EXAFS spectra of Co-SAs/NC, and references of CoO, Co_3O_4 , and Co foil; (c) Co K-edge WT-EXAFS contour plots for Co foil and Co-SAs/NC

The ORR performance of Co-SAs/NC was first investigated in O_2 -saturated 0.1 M KOH solution, wherein the NC and commercial 20 wt% Pt/C were employed as counterparts for comparison. In the cyclic voltammetry (CV) results, Co-SAs/NC showed a typical reduction peak at the potential of 0.88 V (**Figure 4a**), which is more positive than that of NC (0.80 V) and closed to commercial Pt/C (0.90 V), manifesting the Co single atom anchored by N-doped carbon has a significant impact on the ORR activity. Moreover, the linear sweep voltammograms (LSV) measurement was further employed to evaluate the ORR activity and kinetics. Obviously, the LSV curve of Co-SAs/NC presented the much more positive onset potential (E_{onset}) of 1.01 V than NC (**Figure 4b**), revealing an easier ORR initiation process on Co-SAs/NC. And, Co-SAs/NC also demonstrated an outstanding half-wave potential ($E_{1/2}$, 0.87 V) and a large kinetic current density (J_k , $5.2 \text{ mA} \cdot \text{cm}^{-2}$) (**Figure 4c**), which are amazingly superior to those of commercial Pt/C ($E_{1/2}$, 0.86 V, J_k , $3.1 \text{ mA} \cdot \text{cm}^{-2}$) as well as NC ($E_{1/2}$, 0.79 V,

J_k , $0.5 \text{ mA} \cdot \text{cm}^{-2}$) (**Figure 4c**). Moreover, the half-wave potential of Co-SAs/NC was also superior to some of the currently reported results (**Table S1**). Interestingly, Co-SAs/NC also showed an obvious improved ORR activity in term of an outstanding $E_{1/2}$ and large J_k compared to NC catalyst, indicating that the atomically dispersed Co-N_x centers of Co-SAs/NC can greatly improve its ORR activity in comparison with that of N species in NC counterpart. Generally, the ORR mechanism undergoes the multiple proton-coupled electron transfer steps accompanying with complex reaction intermediates (OO^* , OOH^* , O^* , and OH^*). Therefore, the efficient strategy to improve the ORR activity and kinetics of the catalyst is to break down the corresponding reaction barrier. Compared with the N-doped carbon, the excellent ORR performances of Co-SAs/NC may be benefited from its Co-N_x moiety, wherein the Co electronic structural characteristics (e.g. d-band center, electron spin) could be regulated by N ligands to effectively optimize the reaction barrier and ORR activity/

kinetics^[32,33]. Moreover, Co-SAs/NC also hold a larger electrochemical active surface area (ECSA) than that of bare NC (**Figure S4**), which is also conducive to the improvement of ORR activity.

Apart from the excellent activity and rapid kinetic, the ORR catalytic selectivity and stability of Co-SAs/NC are also the key parameters for its practical application. The rotating disk electrode (RDE) tests at different rotating rates (400 rpm to 2025 rpm) were firstly performed to assess the ORR pathway of series catalysts, the current densities increase with the rotating rates (**Figure 4d**, **Figures S5 and S6**), indicating the corresponding ORR process is an obviously kinetic controlled process^[34]. Moreover, the Koutecky-Levich (K-L) plots derived from LSV curves (**Figure 4e**) further confirmed that the electron transfer number (n) of Co-SAs/NC is 3.96, which indicates a near 4e⁻ reduction of O₂ to H₂O pathway as well as agrees well with reported 4e⁻ mechanism^[21]. The n

values of Co-SAs/NC are slightly larger than that of NC (3.87), revealing Co-SAs/NC possesses a higher ORR selectivity. In addition, the methanol crossover test of Co-SAs/NC was also performed. After injection of methanol into the KOH electrolyte, the current density of Co-SAs/NC had only a slight oscillation, but the current density of Pt/C dropped sharply (**Figure S7**), revealing Co-SAs/NC has an excellent methanol tolerance. More importantly, the long-term durability test and corresponding structural characterizations of Co-SAs/NC were operated to evaluate its ORR lifespan. Clearly, the LSV plots of Co-SAs/NC before and after 8000 continuous cycles were almost overlapped (**Figure 4f**), further revealing the excellent stability of Co-SAs/NC. Meanwhile, the component and structural characters of Fe-DAs/NC after ORR (Fe-DAs/NC-spent) were also fully analyzed, and all the results of XRD and TEM image revealed its robust structural features (**Figures S8 and S9**).

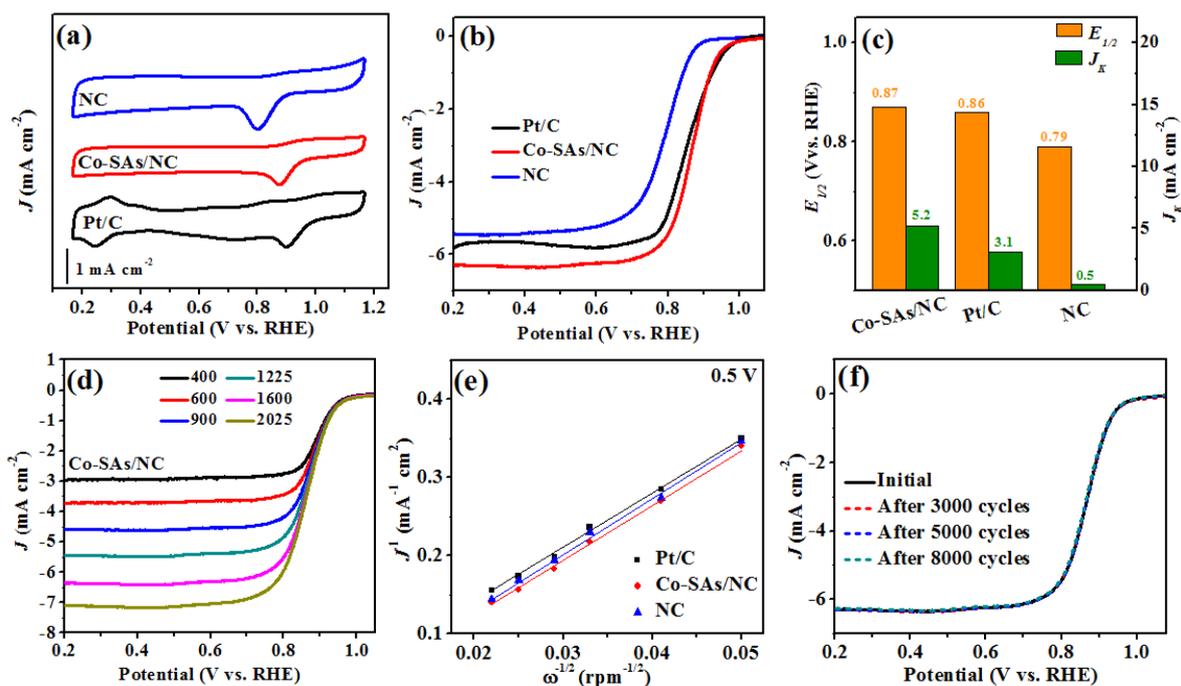


Figure 4. (a) CV curves; (b) LSV curves; (c) summarized half-wave potentials and kinetic current density (at 0.87 V vs. RHE) of Co-SAs/NC, NC, and commercial Pt/C; (d) LSV curves of Co-SAs/NC at various rotating rates; (e) K-L plots of Co-SAs/NC, NC, and commercial Pt/C obtained from the RDE data at 0.5 V; (f) LSV curves of Co-SAs/NC before and after 8,000 potential cycles

As the designed Co-SAs/NC displayed excellent ORR performance, a proof-of-concept rechargeable Zn-air battery (ZAB) with Co-SAs/NC as cathode was assembled to deeply evaluate its potential applications.

Clearly, all of the Co-SAs/NC, NC, and Pt/C-based ZAB devices can smoothly discharge, and deliver appreciable current densities of 151.5 mA · cm⁻², 7.3 mA · cm⁻² and 50.1 mA · cm⁻² at cell voltage of 1.0

V, respectively (**Figure 5a**). Moreover, the maximum power density for Co-SAs/NC-based ZAB device is $233.6 \text{ mW} \cdot \text{cm}^{-2}$ (**Figure 5a**), outperforming $137.3 \text{ mW} \cdot \text{cm}^{-2}$ of Pt/C-based and $80.5 \text{ mW} \cdot \text{cm}^{-2}$ of NC-assembled ZAB. Moreover, ZAB with Co-SAs/NC as air cathode displayed a specific capacity of $788.4 \text{ mAh} \cdot \text{g}_{\text{Zn}}^{-1}$ along with a 95.5% utilization of the theoretical capacity (at $10 \text{ mA} \cdot \text{cm}^{-2}$), superior to the Pt/C-based ZAB ($741.7 \text{ mAh} \cdot \text{g}^{-1}$) and NC-based ZAB ($625.1 \text{ mAh} \cdot \text{g}^{-1}$) (**Figure 5b**)^[35]. In addition, Co-SAs/NC-based ZAB device, operated at $10 \text{ mA} \cdot \text{cm}^{-2}$ with a 10 min per cycle period, also showed an excellent

long-life cycling performance (**Figure 5c**). In the initial cycle, the typical discharge and charge voltages for this ZAB are 1.20 V and 2.28 V, respectively, corresponding to a 1.08 V voltage gap and a high trip efficiency of 52.6%. Amazingly, negligible voltage fading was observed for Co-SAs/NC-based ZAB even within at least 1000 cycles, whereas both of the Pt/C-based ZAB and NC-based ZAB devices showed an obvious enlarged voltage gap with the increasing cycles, respectively, revealing the excellent stability of Co-SAs/NC in practical ZAB device.

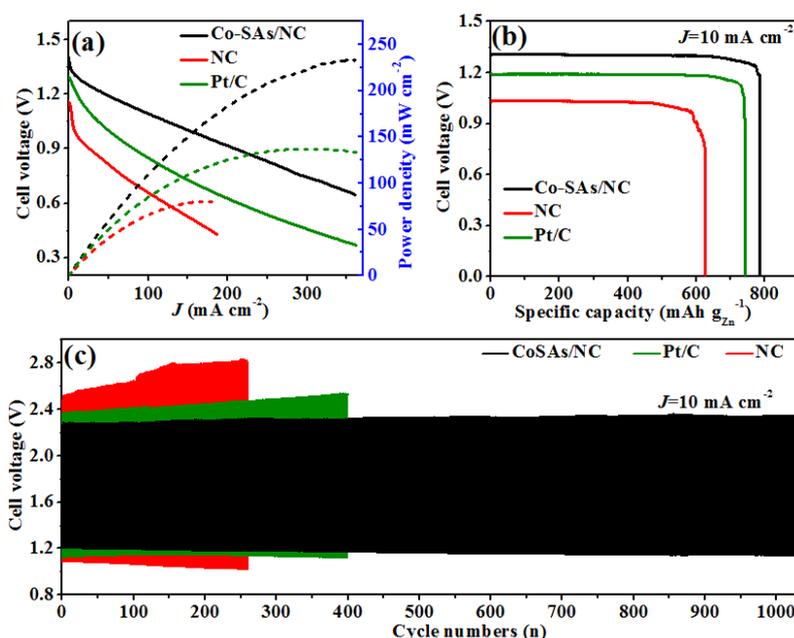


Figure 5. (a) Discharge curves along with corresponding power densities; (b) Voltage-capacity curves; (c) galvanostatic discharge/charge plots of home-made zinc-air battery (ZAB) based on Co-SAs/NC, NC and commercial Pt/C

4. Conclusions

In summary, the Co-SAs/NC was successfully synthesized by pyrolysis of nano-confined Co-precursors. And, the atomic configurations and electronic structures of Co-SAs/NC were investigated by detailed characterizations of HAADF-STEM and XAS techniques. Co-SAs/NC exhibited excellent ORR performance in alkaline electrolyte with a large onset and half-wave potentials of 1.01 V and 0.87 V, respectively, as well as good selectivity and favorable stability. Moreover, Zn-air battery assembled with Co-SAs/NC showed excellent performances in specific capacity, power density, and stability, which indicated that the Co-SAs/NC has promising potential for practical applications.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could influence the work reported in this paper.

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Supplementary Information

1. Experimental

1.1 Characterizations

The microstructures of the as-obtained products was observed on the transmission electron microscopy [TEM, JEOL JEM-2010], and high-angle annular dark field-scanning transmission electron microscopy [HAADF-STEM, JEOL ARM200F], respectively. N₂ adsorption-desorption isotherms were tested using a Belsorp-max sorption analyzer at liquid nitrogen temperature (77 K). The phase was detected by X-ray diffraction (XRD) (Bruker D8, Cu-K α radiation). X-ray spectroscopy (XPS) was performed on an ESCALAB 250 spectrometer (Perkin-Elmer). Raman spectra were collected on an Invia Raman spectrometer with the excitation laser wavelength of 633 nm. X-ray absorption near edge structure (XANES) measurements were undertaken at the Beamlines 1W1B in Beijing Synchrotron Radiation Facility (BSRF).

1.2 ORR

The slurry was prepared by dispersing of 4 mg of catalyst in 1 mL of solvent, which containing of 900 μ L ethylalcohol and 100 μ L 0.5 wt% Nafion aqueous solution. Then, 20 μ L of the as-prepared slurry was dropped on a polished glass carbon electrode (diameter 5 mm) and dried naturally.

The ORR measurement was investigated in O₂-saturated 0.1 M KOH electrolyte with a three-electrode mode, where in the rotating ring disk (RRDE) with catalyst as the working electrode, Ag/AgCl (3 M KCl) as a reference electrode, graphite rod as a counter electrode, respectively. The CV and LSV were obtained at ambient temperature after purging O₂ or N₂ gas for 30 min with a scan rate of 10 mV \cdot s⁻¹. All the measured potentials were normalized to a RHE electrode.

RDE measurements were carried out at rotating rates varying from 400 rpm to 2025 rpm at a scan rate of 10 mV \cdot s⁻¹. The kinetic parameters can be obtained on the basis of Koutecky-Levich equations as follows:

$$1/J = 1/J_k + 1/(B\omega^{1/2}) \quad (1)$$

$$B = 0.2nFC_0D_0^{2/3}\nu^{-1/6} \quad (2)$$

$$J_k = nFkC_0 \quad (3)$$

Where J is the measured current density, J_k is the kinetic current densities, ω is the rotation speed (the constant 0.2 is used when the rotation speed is expressed in rpm), n is the transferred electron number, F is the Faraday constant (96,485 C \cdot mol⁻¹), C_0 is the saturated concentration of O₂ in the electrolyte (1.21 \times 10⁻³ mol \cdot L⁻¹), D_0 is the diffusion coefficient of O₂ in the solution (1.9 \times 10⁻⁵ cm \cdot s⁻¹), ν is the kinetic viscosity of the electrolyte (0.01 cm² \cdot s⁻¹), and k is the electron-transfer rate constant.

1.3 Zn-air battery

The rechargeable Zn-air batteries were tested in home-made electrochemical cells, and the synthesized CoSAs/NC was coated on substrate of carbon paper as the air cathodes, a polished Zn plate was applied as the anode, and a 6 M KOH aqueous solution was utilized as the electrolyte. Battery testing was performed at room temperature on a LAND CT2001A instrument. For the cycling tests, one cycle consisted of one discharging step (10 mA \cdot cm⁻² for 5 min) followed by one charging step of the same current density and duration time.

2. Supplementary Figures

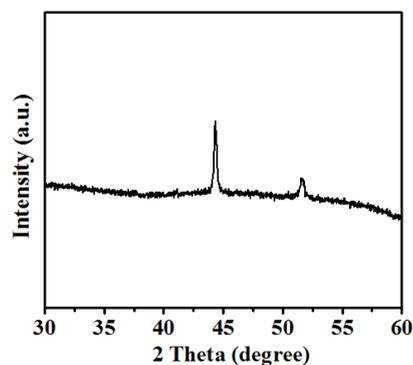


Figure S1. XRD pattern of metallic Co/NC

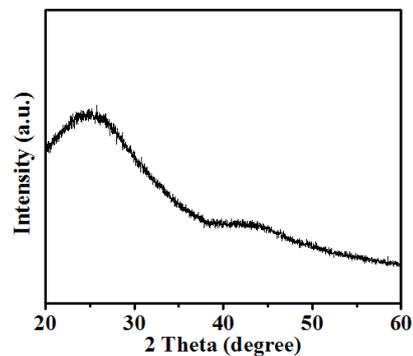


Figure S2. XRD pattern of NC

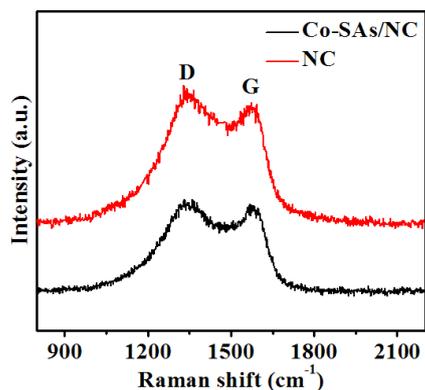


Figure S3. Raman patterns of Co-SAs/NC and NC

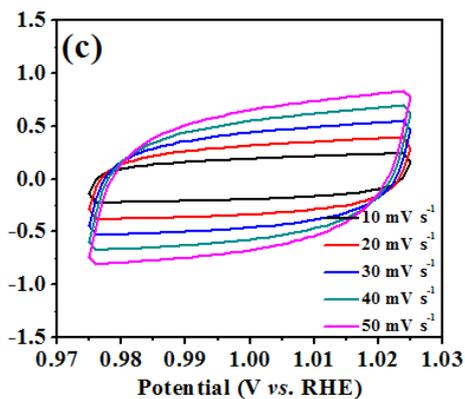
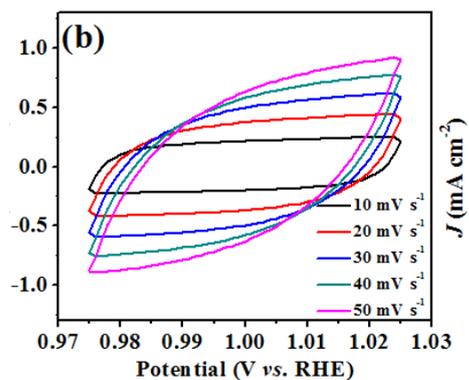
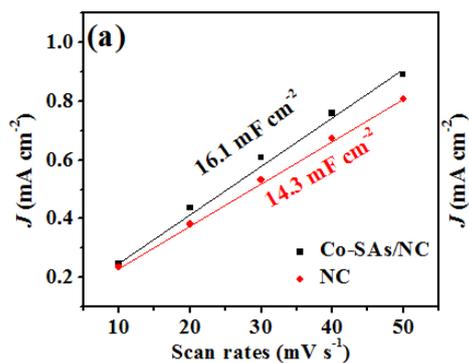


Figure S4. (a) Plots of the current density vs the scan rate for Co-SAs/NC and NC. Cyclic voltammograms (CVs) for (b) Co-SAs/NC and (c) NC

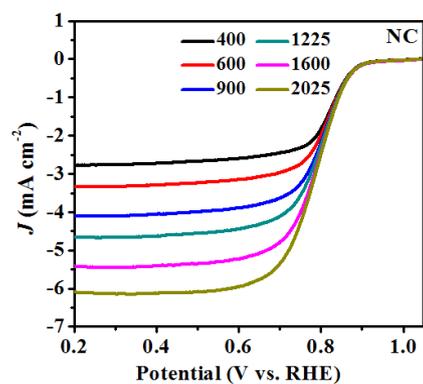


Figure S5. LSV curves of NC at various rotating rates

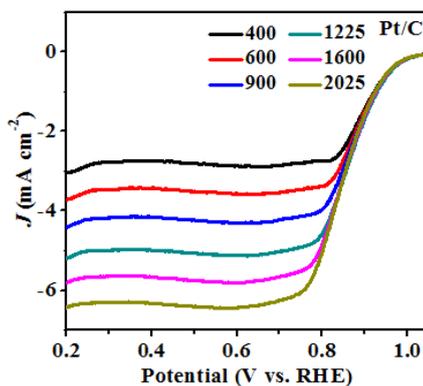


Figure S6. LSV curves of Pt/C at various rotating rates

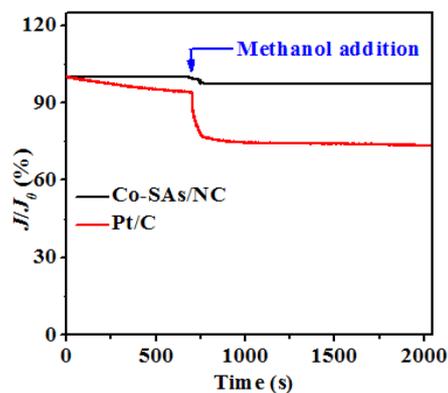


Figure S7. Methanol tolerance tests of Co-SAs/NC and Pt/C

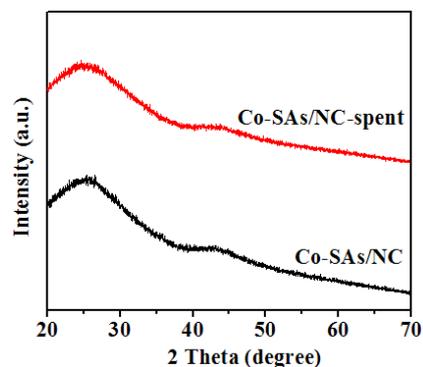


Figure S8. XRD pattern of Co-SAs/NC before and after ORR test

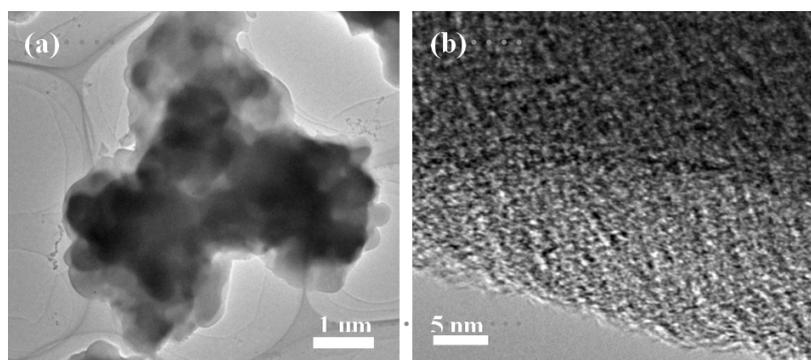


Figure S9. TEM images of Co-SAs/NC before and after ORR test

3. Supplementary Table

Table S1. The ORR activity comparison of Co-SAs/NC with non-noble metal-based catalysts previously reported in 0.1 M KOH solution

Catalyst	Loading ($\text{mg} \cdot \text{cm}^{-2}$)	E_{onset} (V)	$E_{1/2}$ (V)	Supplementary Ref.
Co-SAs/NC	0.2	1.01	0.87	This work
CoNi-SAs/NC	0.4	0.88	0.76	[1]
Co-N,B-CSs	0.1	0.89	0.83	[2]
Fe-ACSA@NC	0.26	1.03	0.9	[3]
Co@MCM	0.51	0.95	0.86	[4]
OLC/Co-N-C	0.2	/	0.855	[5]
Zn/CoN-C	0.255	1.004	0.861	[6]
Fe ₃ C-Co/NC	0.2	0.94	0.885	[7]
CoFe/N-GCT	5.97	0.88	0.76	[8]
CoFe/SNC-25	0.354	/	0.843	[9]
CoNi@NCNT	0.408	0.97	0.87	[10]
Co-Fe/NC-700	0.25	/	0.854	[11]
Fe1Co1-CNF	~0.2	0.99	0.87	[12]
FeAB-O	0.2	/	0.9	[13]

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