Synthesis, Structure and Electrochemical Performance of LiFePO₄/C

YUWEN LIU*, WEI ZHANG and JINGNA JIANG

Hebei Key Lab of Applied Chemistry, Department of Environmental and Chemical Engineering, Yanshan University, Qinhuangdao, Hebei Province, P.R. China

*Corresponding author: Fax: +86 335 8061569; Tel: +86 335 8061569; E-mail: liuyuwen@ysu.edu.cn

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Olivine-type LiFePO₄ and LiFePO₄/C cathode materials were synthesized by hydrothermal method. The crystal structure and morphology and electrochemical performance of the materials were characterized and analyzed by X-ray diffraction, scanning electron microscopy and electrochemical testing. The effects of three different carbon sources, *i.e.* citric acid, poly(vinyl alcohol) and glucose, on the performance of as-synthesized cathode materials were investigated. Then, LiFePO₄/C cathode materials prepared using glucose as the carbon source were modified with polyaniline (PAN) as modifier. The results show that the carbon formed from the carbon resource during hydrothermal process has obviously improved the electrochemical performance of LiFePO₄, while it has no effect on the crystal structure of LiFePO₄. The initial discharge specific capacity of LiFePO₄/C cathode with 5 % glucose as carbon resource achieves 151.2 mAh × g⁻¹ at 0.1 C and 87.3 mAh × g⁻¹ at 2C, respectively. After modified by 10 % PAN the PAN_{0.1}-LiFePO₄/C_{0.9} delivers the capacity of 167.1 mAh × g⁻¹ at 0.1 C and has good reversibility and high capacity retention.

Key Words: LiFePO₄, Carbon resource, Hydrothermal method, Cathode material.

INTRODUCTION

The shortages of fossil fuel and the pollution of human survival environment promote the rapid development of solar, wind, hydropower and other clean sustainable energy. Converting the new energy into electrical energy and using it as driving force of power tools are causing the concern in the field of the world's energy and environment. Lithium-ion batteries for their high specific capacity, long life and less pollution have become new energy storage candidates for power source of electric vehicles. Recently, lithium iron phosphate (LiFePO₄) has been successfully developed as cathode material in lithium-ion battery with high security and long service life. Now, the LiFePO₄ has been prepared by solid-phase method and sol-gel method^{1,2}. LiFePO₄ itself has inherent disadvantages, namely the low electronic conductivity and low Li⁺ diffusion rate. So the modification and morphology control of LiFePO₄ have become the research focus^{3,4}. Hydrothermal method can make the materials to achieve molecular-level mixing in the solution. And the prepared particle size can be controlled. Furthermore, relatively low synthesis temperature and short reaction time can help to reduce particles agglomeration⁵⁻⁸. In this paper, carbon sources were directly introduced into the process of hydrothermal synthesis. The effect of different carbon sources such as citric acid, poly(vinyl alcohol) (PVA) and glucose on the performance of LiFePO₄ was investigated.

With LiFePO₄/C as parent material, polyaniline (PAN) coated PAN_x-LiFePO₄/C_{1-x} particles were *in situ* synthesized.

EXPERIMENTAL

Raw materials such as LiOH·H₂O, FeSO₄·7H₂O and H₃PO₄ were weighed according to n (Li): n (P): n (Fe) = 3:1:1. The aqueous solutions of LiOH and H₃PO₄ were mixed together first and then FeSO₄ solution and a certain amount of citric acid, polyvinyl alcohol or glucose was added subsequently. Finally they were put in an autoclave. The autoclave was sealed and heated at 180 °C for 6 h. When the solution cooled down to room temperature the precipitate was filtered and washed several times with deionized water and ethanol. The filter cake was dried at 90 °C for 3 h in a vacuum oven. The dried sample was treated at 650 °C for 5 h under N₂ atmosphere. The LiFePO₄ without carbon was marked as sample **a**. The sample synthesized with 5 % (by the amount of substance of LiOH) citric acid, PVA or glucose was marked as b, c or d. PAN-LiFePO₄/C composite was prepared using LiFePO₄/C particles as crystal nuclear, sodium dodecylbenzenesulfonate as emulsifier, FeCl₃ as oxidative agent and aniline as monomer in aqueous solution at 0 °C for 6 h. The final product PAN-LiFePO₄/C was successively washed with distilled water and acetone, then dried at 60 °C under vacuum overnight to obtain a homogeneous powder.

Detection method: Crystal structure of LiFePO₄ and LiFePO₄/C and PAN-LiFePO₄/C were identified with X-ray

diffraction with CuK_α radiation. XRD patterns were collected by a step-scanning mode in the range of 10° – 80° with a step time of $0.014^\circ/0.3$ s. The powder morphologies were observed by the field emission scanning electron microscopy (FE-SEM). In the electrochemical test, the composite electrodes were fabricated using as-prepared cathode materials, acetylene black and polyvinylidene fluoride (PVDF) with a weight ratio of 80:10:10 in NMP. The slurry was coated onto Al foil and dried at 120°C for 12 h under vacuum. The resulting electrode plates were pressed with a twin roller and cut into a round shape ($\Phi = 14$ mm). Cells were assembled in argon-filled glove box using lithium as the anode and 1 M $\text{LiPF}_6/\text{EC-DEC}$ (1:1 vol %) as the electrolyte. The charge-discharge cycle performance was examined in galvanostatic charge-discharge unit LAND-CT2001A battery cycler from 2.4 V to 4.2V.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

XRD analysis of LiFePO_4 and LiFePO_4/C and $\text{PAN-LiFePO}_4/\text{C}$: The XRD patterns of LiFePO_4 and LiFePO_4/C and $\text{PAN-LiFePO}_4/\text{C}$ composites are shown in Fig. 1. The diffraction peaks of LiFePO_4/C and $\text{PAN-LiFePO}_4/\text{C}$ are consistent with the standard diffraction peaks, indicating that they are the olivine-type structure. The diffraction peaks of impurities Li_3PO_4 and $\text{Fe}_2(\text{PO}_4)\text{OH}$ appear in the curve of LiFePO_4 and the peak intensity is relatively weak. On the other hand, the peak of carbon is not observed, indicating that the amount of carbon is little or most of which is amorphous carbon. It is well known that the added carbon sources during the hydrothermal synthesis process would conduct some chemical reactions at the temperature of hydrothermal synthesis, which offer a good dispersion and reducibility environment for growth of LiFePO_4 and contribute to well formed crystal LiFePO_4 . The carbon prevents the oxidation of Fe^{2+} to Fe^{3+} and hinders the appearance of impurity during high temperature calcination of LiFePO_4/C composite material. Without carbon in LiFePO_4 , the small amount of Fe^{2+} will be oxidized to Fe^{3+} during the hydrothermal synthesis and subsequent high-temperature roasting process. The formation of non-conductive layer on the surface of LiFePO_4 particles will influence the LiFePO_4 activity in the lithium battery. In addition, no evidence of diffraction peaks for crystalline carbon and polyaniline appear in the diffraction patterns, which indicates that the carbon and polyaniline have no influence on the olivine structure of LiFePO_4 .

SEM analysis of LiFePO_4 and LiFePO_4/C and $\text{PAN-LiFePO}_4/\text{C}$ samples: The morphology of LiFePO_4 and LiFePO_4/C and $\text{PAN-LiFePO}_4/\text{C}$ observed by SEM are shown in Fig. 2. As can be seen from Fig. 2, hydrothermal synthesis environment with different carbon sources has a great effect on the morphology of samples. The agglomeration phenomenon of sample **a** is more serious than others and the particle size is larger and uneven. The particle size of sample **b** is about 600 nm, which is larger than that of sample **c** and **d**, whose are about 300 nm. The dispersion of sample **d** is better than that of sample **c**. It is acknowledged that different carbon sources have different effects on the grain growth and re-growth. The carbon formed in the hydrothermal and subsequent roasting process distributes between the particles or coats on the particle

surfaces to prevent the growth of grain and refine grains. The SEM observation has shown that there is an appropriate amount of carbon resource especially for the glucose in the morphology and shape control of LiFePO_4/C . From Fig. 2 (e) and Fig. 2(f) it can be seen that the $\text{PAN}_{0.1}\text{-LiFePO}_4/\text{C}_{0.9}$ composite looks homogeneous. Fig. 2(f) further demonstrated that polyaniline is well coated on the surface of the LiFePO_4/C particles. Most of the particles congregated each other by the connection of sticky polymers, which could benefit to reduce the particle-to-particle contact resistance and enhance the electrical conductivity of the composites.

Fig. 1. XRD patterns of LiFePO_4 and LiFePO_4/C and $\text{PAN-LiFePO}_4/\text{C}$ samples (a) LiFePO_4 ; (b) LiFePO_4/C with 5 % citric acid as carbon resource; (c) LiFePO_4/C with 5 % poly(vinyl alcohol) as carbon resource; (d) LiFePO_4/C with 5 % glucose as carbon resource; (e) $\text{PAN}_{0.1}\text{-LiFePO}_4/\text{C}_{0.9}$ with 5 % glucose as carbon resource

Fig. 2. SEM patterns of LiFePO_4 and LiFePO_4/C and $\text{PAN-LiFePO}_4/\text{C}$ samples (a) LiFePO_4 ; (b) LiFePO_4/C with 5 % citric acid as carbon resource; (c) LiFePO_4/C with 5 % PVA as carbon resource; (d) LiFePO_4/C with 5 % glucose as carbon resource; (e) (f) $\text{PAN}_{0.1}\text{-LiFePO}_4/\text{C}_{0.9}$ with 5 % glucose as carbon resource

Electrochemical performances of LiFePO_4 and LiFePO_4/C and $\text{PAN-LiFePO}_4/\text{C}$: The initial charge-discharge performances of LiFePO_4 and LiFePO_4/C (sample **a**, **b**, **c** and **d**) at 0.1 C are shown in Fig. 3. It can be seen from Fig. 3 that carbon sources have important effects on the charge-discharge performances of these LiFePO_4/C composites. There is no obvious platform on the charge and discharge curves of sample **a**. For sample **b** there is a short platform. Sample **c** and **d**, however, have stable charge and discharge platform at the 3.5 V and 3.3 V respectively. The sample **d** prepared by glucose as the carbon source has the maximum discharge capacity, which is $151.2 \text{ mAh} \times \text{g}^{-1}$ and sample **c** used poly(vinyl alcohol) as carbon source is the second one, but the discharge capacity of sample **b** used citric acid as carbon source does not increase obviously. The reason may be that irregular LiFePO_4/C particles have been formed in citric acid precursor solution, moreover, the particle size is large. These factors are the disadvantages to Li^+ diffusion in the process of charging and discharging. The poly(vinyl alcohol) and glucose are hydroxyl-rich compounds. They can be used as good dispersants and reducing agents in the precursor solution. Therefore the oxidation of Fe^{2+} into Fe^{3+} can be inhibited and small size particles of LiFePO_4/C have been obtained. Furthermore, the particle size decreases after roasting at high temperature and the grain shape becomes more regular. Small particles help Li^+ to reach the redox center of the cathode and improve the utilization of active materials, thereby enhancing the discharge capacity. But the sample **c** has a little agglomerating phenomenon, which contributes to the lower discharge capacity than that of sample **d**.

Fig. 3. Initial charge-discharge curves of samples at 0.1 C (a) LiFePO_4 ; (b) $\text{LiFePO}_4/5\%$ citric acid; (c) $\text{LiFePO}_4/5\%$ PVA; (d) $\text{LiFePO}_4/5\%$ glucose

Fig. 4 displays initial discharge curves of LiFePO_4/C samples with various contents of glucose at 0.1 C rate. It can be seen from Fig. 4 that initial discharge specific capacity of sample doped with 3 % glucose is $106.3 \text{ mAh} \times \text{g}^{-1}$, while the sample **d** with 5 % glucose has the maximum initial discharge specific capacity. Then as the content of glucose increases the discharge specific capacities of samples decrease. There is an appreciate amount of glucose used as carbon resource. Under the same carbon source conditions, particle morphology and agglomeration level are the main factors to reduce the discharge

specific capacity. In addition, the high carbon content resulting in low effective active substance content may also affect the discharge specific capacity of materials.

Fig. 4. Initial discharge capacity curves at 0.1 C of LiFePO_4/C with various contents of glucose

Fig. 5 shows the initial discharge profiles of the $\text{PAN}_x\text{-LiFePO}_4/\text{C}_{1-x}$ composites. As can be seen, all the composites show similar flat voltage plateaus at around 3.4 V. The electrochemical properties of the $\text{PAN}_x\text{-LiFePO}_4/\text{C}_{1-x}$ composite with different polyaniline contents were compared. Fig.5 shows a capacity of $139.5 \text{ mAh} \times \text{g}^{-1}$, $142.5 \text{ mAh} \times \text{g}^{-1}$, $167.1 \text{ mAh} \times \text{g}^{-1}$, $162.8 \text{ mAh} \times \text{g}^{-1}$, $150.4 \text{ mAh} \times \text{g}^{-1}$ at the 0.1 C rate for $x = 0.03, 0.05, 0.10, 0.15$ and 0.20% respectively. $\text{PAN}_{0.1}\text{-LiFePO}_4/\text{C}_{0.9}$ exhibits a excellent discharge specific capacity of $168.9 \text{ mAh} \times \text{g}^{-1}$. It is evident that modification with proper content of conductive polyaniline in LiFePO_4/C can effectively enhance discharge profiles.

Fig. 5. Initial discharge capacity curves at 0.1 C of $\text{PAN}_x\text{-(LiFePO}_4/\text{C)}_{1-x}$ with 5 % glucose as carbon resource (A $x = 0$; B $x = 0.03$; C $x = 0.05$; D $x = 0.1$; E $x = 0.15$; F $x = 0.2$)

Fig. 6 presents the cycle performances of LiFePO_4/C with 5 % glucose as carbon resource and $\text{PAN}_{0.1}\text{-LiFePO}_4/\text{C}_{0.9}$ at different rates. It can be seen from Fig. 6 that the samples have stable cycle performance and the first initial discharge specific capacities are $103.7 \text{ mAh} \times \text{g}^{-1}$ and $87.3 \text{ mAh} \times \text{g}^{-1}$ at 1 C and 2 C rate respectively for the prior sample. Compared with LiFePO_4/C the composite modified with 10 % polyaniline can significantly improve the high-rate discharge performance.

Fig. 6. Rate capacity of LiFePO₄/C and PAN-LiFePO₄/C (A LiFePO₄/C with 5 % glucose as carbon resource; D polyaniline (10 %)-LiFePO₄/C with 5 glucose as carbon resource)

Fig. 7 presents the cyclic voltammetric (CV) behaviours of the LiFePO₄/C and PAN_{0.1}-LiFePO₄/C_{0.9} composite at a sweep rate of 0.1 mV/s. Curve (A) shows a typical CV for the LiFePO₄/C. The broad oxidation and reduction peaks centered at 3.59 V and 3.259 V, respectively. Curve (D) shows a typical CV for the PAN_{0.1}-LiFePO₄/C_{0.9}. The broad oxidation and reduction peaks centers at 3.589 V and 3.262 V, respectively. The midpoint between the oxidation and reduction peaks which corresponds to the open-circuit voltage (OCV) of the electrode is about 3.4V. In the CV profiles, higher peak current means better electrode reaction kinetics and consequently, better rate performance of the PAN_{0.1}-LiFePO₄/C_{0.9}.

Fig. 7. Cyclic voltammetry curves of LiFePO₄/C and PAN-LiFePO₄/C (A LiFePO₄/C with 5 % glucose as carbon resource; D PAN (10 %)-LiFePO₄/C with 5 glucose as carbon resource)

Conclusion

Olivine-type LiFePO₄ and LiFePO₄/C materials were synthesized by hydrothermal method. Carbon sources, *i.e.* citric acid, polyvinyl alcohol and glucose, were directly introduced in the process of hydrothermal method to provide an appropriate crystal growth environment for LiFePO₄ and LiFePO₄/C. The LiFePO₄/C cathode material synthesized with 5 % glucose as carbon resource has small particle size and even regular shape. The initial discharge specific capacity reaches 151.2 mAh × g⁻¹ and 87.3 mAh × g⁻¹ at 0.1 C and 2 C rate, respectively. LiFePO₄/C grains have been successfully coated with *in situ* polymerized PAN. The PAN_{0.1}-LiFePO₄/C_{0.9} composite exhibits excellent initial discharge capacity, rate capability and cyclability. It delivers a discharge specific capacity of 167.1 mAh × g⁻¹ at 0.1 C.

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