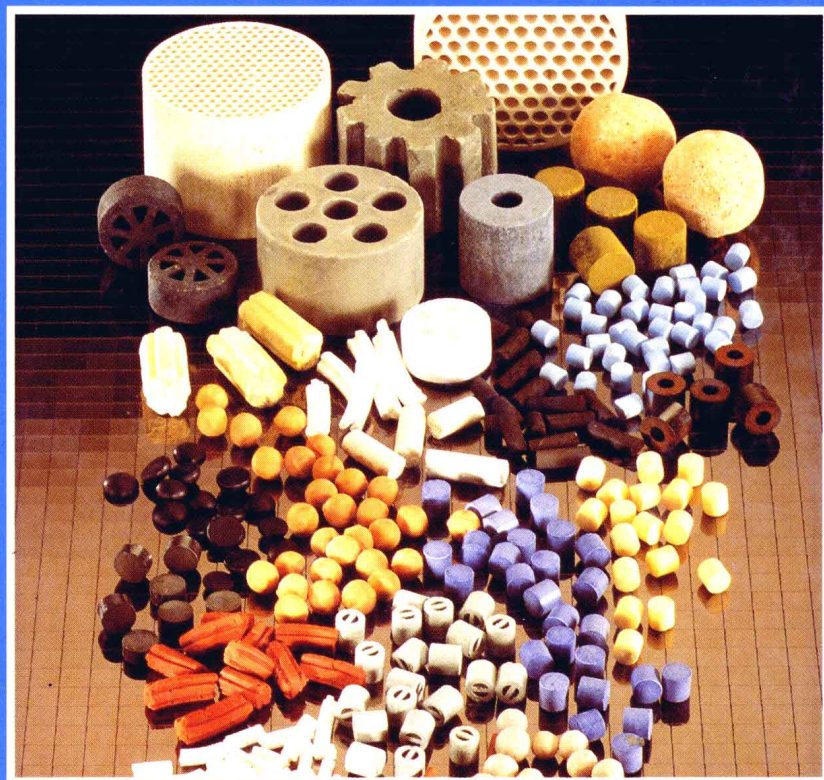


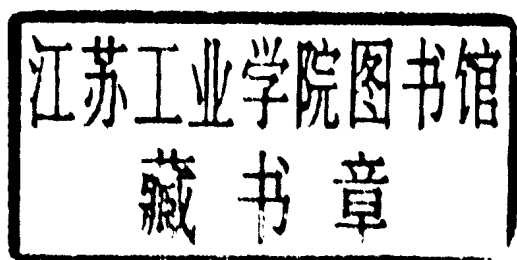
Preparation of Solid Catalysts

Edited by
G. Ertl, H. Knözinger, J. Weitkamp



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Foreword

The Handbook of Heterogeneous Catalysis was published in 1997. This book is part of the Handbook, now published as a monograph. Publisher and Editors felt that the Handbook of Heterogeneous Catalysis, which is only available as a full set of five volumes covering almost all aspects of heterogeneous catalysis, might not always be accessible to individuals interested in narrower areas of this field of chemistry. Therefore, the chapters dealing with aspects of preparation of catalysts were selected and put together in this monograph. Catalysis is a rapidly growing field of both academic and technological interest; this Handbook aims to cover the concepts without an encyclopedic survey of the literature, so – although the chapters chosen could not be updated for the present volume – we believe that it will prove most useful to all readers interested in the chemical and physicochemical basis of the preparation of catalysts.

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Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Developing Industrial Catalysts <i>(J. F. LePage)</i>	3
2.1	Properties and Characteristics of Industrial Catalysts	3
2.1.1	Activity	3
2.1.2	Selectivity	3
2.1.3	Stability	4
2.1.4	Morphology	4
2.1.5	Mechanical Strength	5
2.1.6	Thermal Characteristics	5
2.1.7	Regenerability	5
2.1.8	Reproducibility	5
2.1.9	Originality	6
2.1.10	Cost	6
2.2	The Ideal Catalyst and the Optimum Catalyst	6
2.2.1	Catalyst Development	7
2.2.2	Devising the First Catalytic Formulas	8
2.2.3	Optimization of a Typical Catalytic Formula	10
3	Bulk Catalysts and Supports	11
3.1	Fused Catalysts <i>(R. Schlögl)</i>	11
3.1.1	Introduction	11
3.1.2	Concept of Fused Catalysts	12
3.1.3	Thermodynamic and Kinetic Considerations	17
3.1.4	Sulfuric Acid Catalyst	19

3.1.5	Metallic Glasses	21
3.1.6	Mesostructure of Fused Catalyst Materials	25
3.2	Skeletal Metal Catalysts (<i>M. S. Wainwright</i>)	28
3.2.1	Introduction	28
3.2.2	General Aspects	29
3.2.3	Skeletal Nickel Catalysts	31
3.2.4	Promoted Skeletal Nickel Catalysts	34
3.2.5	Skeletal Cobalt Catalysts	34
3.2.6	Skeletal Copper Catalysts	35
3.2.7	Promoted Skeletal Copper Catalysts	37
3.2.8	Skeletal Copper–Zinc Catalysts	38
3.3	Metallic Glasses (<i>A. Baiker</i>)	43
3.3.1	Introduction	43
3.3.2	Preparation	43
3.3.3	Chemical and Structural Properties	44
3.3.4	Metallic Glasses in Catalysis Research	46
3.3.4.1	Research on Metallic Glasses in As-Quenched State	46
3.3.4.2	Metallic Glasses as Precursors to Catalytically Active Materials	49
3.3.5	Case Studies: CO Oxidation Catalysts Prepared from Metallic Glasses	50
3.3.5.1	Pd/ZrO ₂ Catalysts from Amorphous Pd–Zr Alloys	50
3.3.5.2	Promoted Gold–Zirconia Catalysts from Ternary Gold- Containing Glassy Alloys	52
3.3.6	Factors Influencing Chemical and Structural Properties of Catalytic Materials Derived from Metallic Glasses	53
3.3.6.1	Chemical Composition	53
3.3.6.2	Chemical and Structural Homogeneity	54
3.3.6.3	Thermal Stability and Crystallization Behavior	54
3.3.6.4	Oxidation Behavior	55
3.3.6.5	Dissolution of Gases	56
3.3.6.6	Segregation Phenomena	56
3.3.7	Conclusions and Outlook	56
3.4	Precipitation and Coprecipitation (<i>F. Schüth and K. Unger</i>)	60
3.4.1	Introduction	60
3.4.2	General Principles Governing Precipitation from Solutions ...	61
3.4.3	Influencing the Properties of the Final Product	69
3.4.4	Prototypical Examples of Precipitated Catalysts and Supports	75

3.5	Sol–Gel Process	
	<i>(E. I. Ko)</i>	85
3.5.1	Introduction	85
3.5.2	Important Parameters in Sol–Gel Preparation	85
3.5.3	Advantages of Sol–Gel Preparation.....	91
3.5.4	Catalytic Membranes	96
3.5.5	Other Sol–Gel Materials.....	97
3.5.6	Summary	97
3.6	Flame Hydrolysis	
	<i>(H. Jacobsen and P. Kleinschmit)</i>	99
3.6.1	Manufacture.....	99
3.6.2	Physicochemical Properties of Fumed Oxides	101
3.6.3	Preparation of Formed Supports.....	104
3.6.4	Applications	107
3.7	Solid-State Reactions	
	<i>(P. G. Menon and B. Delmon)</i>	109
3.7.1	Why Solid-State Reactions?.....	109
3.7.2	Description of Preparative Methods	117
3.7.3	Conclusions and Prospects.....	136
3.8	High-Surface Transition Metal Carbides and Nitrides	
	<i>(S. T. Oyama)</i>	139
3.8.1	General Properties of Transition Metal Carbides and Nitrides.....	139
3.8.2	Thermodynamic Considerations in the Preparation of Carbides and Nitrides.....	139
3.8.3	Survey of Preparative Methods	142
3.9	Carbons	
	<i>(R. Schlögl)</i>	150
3.9.1	Introduction	150
3.9.2	Structural Chemistry of Carbon.....	151
3.9.3	Overview	151
3.9.4	Basic Structures.....	153
3.9.5	Loosely Defined Structures	157
3.9.6	Formation of Carbon Materials, General Pathways.....	167
3.9.7	Formation of Carbon Materials, Mechanistic Aspects	169
3.9.8	Catalytic Formation of Carbon from Molecules	171
3.9.9	Carbon on Noble-Metal Catalysts	173
3.9.10	Carbon Formation in Zeolites	175
3.9.11	Graphitization of Carbons.....	178

3.9.12	Reaction of Oxygen with Carbon	180
3.9.13	Surface Chemistry of Carbon	188
3.9.14	Non-Oxygen Heteroelements on Carbon Surfaces.....	191
3.9.15	Surface Oxygen Groups.....	195
3.9.16	Carbon as Catalyst Support.....	216
3.9.17	Carbon as Catalyst	223
3.9.18	Case Studies of Catalytic Applications.....	224
3.9.19	Catalytic Removal of NO by Carbon	225
3.9.20	Removal of Carbon Deposits From Catalyst Materials	227
3.9.21	Activation of Oxygen on Carbon Surfaces	229
3.9.22	Conclusions.....	234
3.10	Heteropoly Compounds (<i>K.-Y. Lee and M. Misono</i>)	240
3.10.1	Structure and Catalytic Properties	240
3.10.2	Heteropolyacids – Acid Forms in Solid State and in Solution .	245
3.10.3	Salts of Heteropolyacids – Cation-Exchanged Forms	247
3.10.4	Mixed-Coordinated Heteropoly Compounds.....	251
3.10.5	Metal-Coordinated Heteropolyanions.....	253
3.10.6	Heteropolyanions Intercalated in Layered Double Hydroxides	256
3.10.7	Supported Heteropoly Compounds	257
3.11	Hydrothermal Zeolite Synthesis (<i>E. J. P. Feijen, J. A. Martens and P. A. Jacobs</i>)	262
3.11.1	Introduction	262
3.11.2	Zeolitization in General.....	262
3.11.3	Synthesis of Industrial Zeolites.....	279
3.12	Pillared Clays (<i>J. J. Fripiat</i>).....	284
3.12.1	Introduction	284
3.12.2	Pillars.....	290
3.12.3	Pillared Clays.....	296
3.12.4	Catalytic Properties.....	308
3.12.5	Conclusions.....	311
4	Supported Catalysts	315
4.1	Deposition of Active Component.....	315
4.1.1	Impregnation and Ion Exchange (<i>M. Che, O. Clause and Ch. Marcilly</i>)	315

4.1.2	Anchoring and Grafting of Coordination Metal Complexes onto Oxide Surfaces (<i>C. Louis and M. Che</i>)	341
4.1.3	Heterogenization of Complexes and Enzymes (<i>W. Keim and B. Driessen-Hölscher</i>)	355
4.2	Supported Metal Cluster Catalysts (<i>B. C. Gates</i>)	371
4.2.1	Introduction	371
4.2.2	Preparation of Supported Metal Clusters	373
4.2.2.1	Synthesis of Supported Metal Carbonyl Clusters	373
4.2.2.2	Decarbonylation of Supported Metal Carbonyl Clusters	374
4.2.2.3	Formation of Metal Clusters in Zeolite Cages by Reduction of Exchange Cations	374
4.2.2.4	Deposition of Size-Selected Gas-Phase Metal Clusters	375
4.2.2.5	Formation of Nearly Uniform Metal Particles on Supports ...	375
4.2.3	Structural Characterization of Supported Metal Clusters	376
4.2.4	Catalysis by Supported Metal Clusters	378
4.2.4.1	Catalysis by Supported Ir ₄ and Ir ₆ Clusters	380
4.2.4.2	Catalysis by Clusters of Pt and of Ir in Zeolite LTL	385
4.2.5	Summary and Assessment	386
4.2.6	Acknowledgment	386
4.3	Metal Clusters in Zeolites (<i>W. M. H. Sachtler</i>)	388
4.3.1	Introduction	388
4.3.2	Metal Clusters Versus Macroscopic Metals	389
4.3.3	Preparation of Mono- or Bimetallic Clusters in Zeolites	390
4.3.4	Interaction of Metal Clusters and Zeolite Protons	393
4.3.5	Effects of Zeolite Geometry on Catalysis	399
4.4	Zeolite-Entrapped Metal Complexes (<i>G. Schulz-Ekloff and S. Ernst</i>)	405
4.4.1	Synthesis of Zeolite-Entrapped Metal Complexes	405
4.4.2	Characterization	411
4.4.3	Catalysis by Zeolite-Entrapped Transition Metal Complexes ..	420
4.5	Supported Catalysts from Chemical Vapor Deposition and Related Techniques (<i>Y. Iwasawa</i>)	427
4.5.1	Chemical Vapor Deposition Process	427
4.5.2	CVD Precursors	428
4.5.3	CVD Application	430

4.5.4	CVD Catalysts.....	430
4.5.4.1	Nickel	430
4.5.4.2	Chromium	432
4.5.4.3	Copper and Calcium.....	433
4.5.4.4	Iron.....	434
4.5.4.5	Molybdenum	434
4.5.4.6	Cobalt	439
4.5.4.7	Vanadium	442
4.5.4.8	Titanium	445
4.5.4.9	Zirconium	445
4.5.4.10	Tin	447
4.5.4.11	Ruthenium	448
4.5.4.12	Palladium Films	448
4.5.4.13	Palladium/Zeolites.....	448
4.5.4.14	Bimetals	449
4.5.4.15	Mixed Metal Oxides	451
4.5.4.16	Silica	453
4.5.5	CVD-Related Techniques.....	455
4.5.6	Conclusions.....	456
4.6	Preparation of Supported Catalysts by Deposition-Precipitation	
	<i>(J. W. Geus and A. J. van Dillen)</i>	460
4.7	Solid Superacids	
	<i>(K. Tanabe and H. Hattori)</i>	487
4.7.1	Sulfate-Treated Metal Oxides, Mixed Oxides, and Those Modified with Platinum.....	488
4.7.1.1	Preparative Methods.....	488
4.7.1.2	Morphology and Surface Properties.....	490
4.7.1.3	Structure of Superacid Sites.....	493
4.7.1.4	Catalytic Properties.....	495
4.7.2	Other Solid Superacids.....	498
4.8	Spreading and Wetting	
	<i>(H. Knözinger and E. Taglauer)</i>	501
4.9	Redox Methods for Preparation of Bimetallic Catalysts	
	<i>(J. Barbier)</i>	526
5	From the Precursor to the Final Catalyst...	541
5.1	Formation of Final Catalysts	
	<i>(B. Delmon)</i>	541

5.1.1	Introduction and Background.....	541
5.1.2	Activation of Supported Catalysts by Calcination.....	553
5.1.3	Activation of Supported Catalysts by Reduction.....	555
5.1.4	Reduction–Sulfidation.....	565
5.1.5	Other Methods of Activation.....	574
5.1.6	Conclusions.....	574
5.2	Catalyst Forming <i>(J. F. Le Page)</i>	579
5.2.1	Forming Microgranules.....	579
5.2.2	Forming Granules.....	583
5.2.2.1	Pelletizing.....	583
5.2.2.2	Extrusion.....	584
5.2.2.3	Pan Granulation.....	586
5.2.2.4	Miscellaneous Forming Operations.....	586
5.2.3	Organizing a Catalyst-Manufacturing Process.....	587
6	Computer-Aided Catalyst Design <i>(M. Baerns and E. Körtling)</i>	591
6.1	Introduction	591
6.2	Heuristics in Catalyst Design	594
6.2.1	Knowledge-Based Systems.....	594
6.2.2	Neural Networks.....	597
6.3	Deterministic Methods in Catalyst Design	599
6.4	Chemical Reaction Engineering Aspects	601
6.5	Conclusions	601
	Index	605

1 Introduction

Nature has developed the most efficient and selective catalysts known today. Workers in academia and industry still have a long way to go to reach nature's sophistication in the synthesis of catalysts. For many decades, catalysts were prepared by an empirical approach based on the experience and knowledge of the particular period. Perhaps the best known success story of the development and preparation of a technical solid catalyst by empirical methodologies is that of the ammonia synthesis catalyst by Alwin Mittasch [1–3]. In February 1909 he wrote in his laboratory journal: (i) the search for a suitable catalyst necessitates carrying out experiments with a certain number of elements together with numerous additives; (ii) the catalytic substances must be tested at high pressures and temperatures just as in the case of Haber's experiments; (iii) a very large number of test series will be required [3]. For the optimization of the actual promoted iron catalyst which is still used today, Mittasch ultimately carried out more than 10,000 tests, the number of catalyst formulations exceeding 4,000 [3].

Catalyst preparation lacked a reliable scientific basis until recently and perhaps still does, although catalytic chemists have slowly moved from alchemy to what is now called the science of catalysis. Even in 1940, Raney stated: "It is in the preparation of catalysts that the chemist is most likely to revert to type and to employ alchemical methods. From all evidence, it seems the work should be approached with humility and supplication, and the production of a good catalyst received with rejoicing and thanksgiving" [4, 5].

The catalyst is often, if not always, the heart of a chemical process, and thus, synthesis strategies for technical catalysts are proprietary knowledge of catalyst producers. Therefore, those strategies are either not accessible or protected by patents. This situation, which unfortunately severely hampers the flow of knowledge and information, was strikingly formulated by Richardson: "Catalyst preparation is the secret of achieving the desired activity, selectivity and life time" [6, 7].

Recently combinatorial methodologies were introduced into catalyst development [8, 9]. In this approach, large libraries of materials are synthesized as potential catalysts and examined by microanalysis techniques, and the results are evaluated statistically. This methodology permits an efficient material screening in the case of multi-parameter problems such as the development of solid catalysts. Combinatorial methodologies may be considered as modern versions of Mittasch's approach toward catalyst development that are faster and more cost-efficient than the tradi-