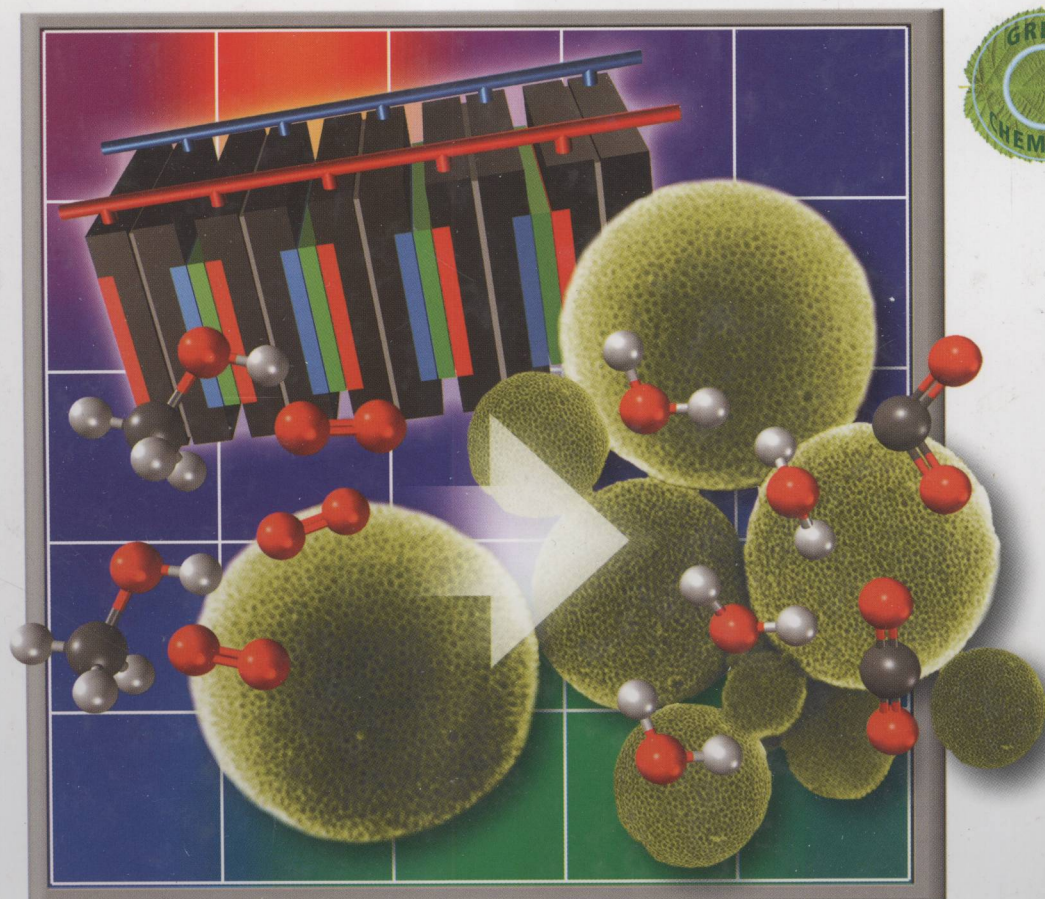


Edited by
Hansan Liu and Jiujun Zhang

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Electrocatalysis of Direct Methanol Fuel Cells

From Fundamentals to Applications



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Preface

In today's world, human energy demands are continually on the rise, and the prospect of an energy shortage, or even crisis, is likely in the near future. Among the various efforts being made to meet global energy needs, the energy carried by hydrogen and liquid biofuels such as methanol and ethanol has become an attractive option in terms of sustainability and low environmental impact. Within this category of energy conversion technologies, the fuel cell is one of the most environmentally friendly and sustainable possibilities. In the past several decades, governments, along with academic communities and industries, have made enormous investments to develop fuel cells, especially proton exchange membrane fuel cells (PEMFCs), into a viable technology for stationary, portable, and transportation applications. As a result, great advances have been achieved in fuel cell technology in recent years. To date, several kinds of fuel cells, including direct methanol fuel cells (DMFCs), have shown great promise for near-term commercialization.

DMFCs, using renewable liquid methanol as fuel, have some advantages over the hydrogen-fuelled PEMFCs, such as easy fuel production, storage, and transportation, simple feed strategy, as well as system simplification. In comparison with other advanced energy devices such as lithium ion batteries, DMFCs show one order of magnitude higher energy density, making them a better choice for meeting the high energy density requirement of traditionally battery-powered devices. In the past two decades, great progress has been made in DMFC technology. For example, a few pre-commercial products based on this technology are currently emerging in the portable device category, including laptop computers and cell phones. However, several challenges still hinder commercialization, such as inadequate performance and high cost. The sluggish electrocatalytic reactions, that is, the anodic methanol oxidation reaction (MOR) and the cathodic oxygen reduction reaction (ORR), are largely responsible for this low performance. Methanol crossover from anode to cathode through the membrane can also cause performance deterioration. In order to overcome these technical difficulties, high-loading and high-cost Pt and Pt alloy catalysts must currently be used in DMFCs to mitigate the negative effects of the sluggish MOR and ORR, as well as the methanol crossover. In the past few years, numerous studies have been devoted to developing DMFC electrocatalysis, in an effort to further understand the reaction mechanisms, develop cost-effective and

high-performance or methanol-tolerant catalysts, and optimize the fabrication of catalyst layers and membrane electrode assemblies membrane electrode assembly (MEA).

This book is designed to draw a clear picture of the current status of DMFC technology, with a particular focus on the technical progress, challenges, and perspectives in the field of DMFC electrocatalysis. A group of top fuel cell scientists and engineers, who have not only excellent academic records but also strong industrial fuel cell expertise, were invited to contribute chapters. These leading researchers from universities, government laboratories, and fuel cell industry companies in North America, Europe, and Asia share in this volume their knowledge, information, and insights on recent advances in the fundamental theories, experimental methodologies, and research achievements in DMFC electrocatalysis.

In the first chapter, Arico and his colleagues provide a comprehensive review of DMFC history, the current status of fundamental studies, and the technical advances that have been made in catalyst preparation, MEA fabrication, as well as stack/system design. They also give a global summary of DMFC prototypes in portable and transportation applications, and discuss the techno-economic challenges still confronting DMFC technology. In Chapter 2, Liu and his co-workers describe various methods of synthesizing nanostructured electrocatalysts for DMFCs, including both conventional carbon-supported, Pt-based catalysts and novel unsupported catalyst nanostructures. In Chapter 3, Sarma and Hwang give an overview of versatile characterization techniques for elucidating nanoscale characteristics and activity validation methodologies for DMFC electrocatalysts. In Chapter 4, Jiang and Chu introduce the principles and modern technologies of combinatorial methods used in the synthesis and high throughput screening of electrocatalyst libraries for DMFCs. In Chapter 5, Lei and his co-workers introduce DMFC catalyst development in industry, particularly focusing on Cabot's spray conversion reaction (SCR) platform for the discovery and manufacturing of high-performance fuel cell electrocatalysts. In Chapter 6, Antolini surveys the progress in preparation methods, activity validation, and stability studies of Pt binary and ternary alloys for DMFC anodes. In Chapter 7, Lamy and his colleagues discuss the thermodynamics and kinetics of the oxygen reduction reaction on DMFC cathodes, and introduce strategies to mitigate the methanol-cross-over effect; they also describe the progress made in developing methanol-tolerant catalysts. In Chapter 8, Chen and his co-authors review recent advances in carbon nanotube (CNT)-supported DMFC catalysts. In Chapter 9, Pak and Chang cover studies of mesoporous carbon-supported DMFC catalysts. In Chapter 10, Kim and Guiver discuss strategies for making proton exchange membranes with high proton conductivity and lower methanol permeability, mainly describing their own work on developing hydrocarbon-based copolymers containing sulfonic acid groups for DMFC membranes. In Chapter 11, Xing and his co-authors review the progress that has been made in the fabrication and optimization of DMFC catalyst layers and membrane electrode assemblies, with an emphasis on the effects of catalyst layer components, structures, and fabrication methods on DMFC performance. In Chapter 12, Kulikovskiy and Wippermann present their experimental and modeling efforts to understand local current distribution during

DMFC operation. In Chapter 13, Scott and Yu provide a detailed description of direct methanol alkaline fuel cells in terms of MOR catalysts, ORR catalysts, and membranes in alkaline circumstances. In Chapter 14, Blair and Law introduce electrocatalysis in other direct liquid fuel cells, mainly focusing on direct ethanol fuel cells and on their own work with direct formic acid fuel cells at Tekion Inc.

It is our hope that this volume will prove to be a good resource for electrochemists, chemical engineers, material scientists, students, and the public, providing up-to-date information on DMFC principles, the current status of DMFC electrocatalysis, and the future prospects for DMFC technology. We anticipate that this book will also be used as a reference by undergraduate and graduate post-secondary students, as well as scientists and engineers who work in the areas of energy, electrochemistry science/technology, fuel cells, and electrocatalysis.

We would like to express our appreciation to Wiley-VCH for inviting us to lead this book project, and we thank Dr. Elke Maase and Dr. Heike Noethe for their guidance and support in smoothing the book preparation process. We also extend our thanks to all our colleagues at the National Research Council of Canada's Institute for Fuel Cell Innovation (IFCI), and especially to the members of the catalysis team, for their support and help. We gratefully acknowledge all the chapter authors for their enthusiastic, collaborative, and reliable contributions. Special thanks go to Prof. Arico, Dr. Lei, Dr. Chang, and Dr. Kulikovsky for providing raw materials for the book's cover design. (Kulikovsky's current distribution picture and IFCI's mesoporous catalysts pictures were incorporated into the cover art.) Finally, our special appreciation goes to our families, for their understanding and their ongoing support of our work.

Vancouver, Canada
February 2009

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Contents

Preface XV

List of Contributors XIX

1	Direct Methanol Fuel Cells: History, Status and Perspectives	1
	<i>Antonino Salvatore Aricò, Vincenzo Baglio, and Vincenzo Antonucci</i>	
1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Concept of Direct Methanol Fuel Cells	2
1.2.1	Principles of Operation	2
1.2.1.1	DMFC Components	2
1.2.1.2	DMFC Operation Mode	3
1.2.1.3	Fuel Cell Process	3
1.2.2	Performance, Efficiency and Energy Density	4
1.2.2.1	Polarization Curves and Performance	4
1.2.2.2	Fuel Utilization	5
1.2.2.3	Cathode Operating Conditions	7
1.2.2.4	Heat Production	8
1.2.2.5	Cell Efficiency	9
1.2.2.6	Energy Density	9
1.3	Historical Aspects of Direct Methanol Fuel Cell Development and State-of-the-Art	10
1.3.1	Historical Development of Methanol Oxidation Catalysts	10
1.3.2	Status of Knowledge of Methanol Oxidation Process and State-of-the-Art Anode Catalysts	14
1.3.2.1	Oxidation Mechanism	14
1.3.2.2	Pt-Ru Catalysts	15
1.3.2.3	Alternative Anode Formulations	19
1.3.2.4	Practical Anode Catalysts	19
1.3.2.5	Anode Catalysts for Alkaline DMFC Systems	20
1.3.3	Technological Advances in Electrolyte Development for DMFCs	21
1.3.4	State-of-the-Art DMFC Electrolytes	24
1.3.4.1	General Aspects of DMFC Electrolyte Development	24

1.3.4.2	Proton Conducting Membranes	24
1.3.4.3	Membranes for High Temperature Applications	26
1.3.4.4	Alkaline Membranes	29
1.3.4.5	Effects of Crossover on DMFC Performance and Efficiency	32
1.3.5	Historical Development of Oxygen Electroreduction in DMFCs	33
1.3.6	Status of Knowledge of Oxygen Reduction Electrocatalysis and State-of-the-Art Cathode Catalysts	33
1.3.6.1	Oxygen Reduction Process	33
1.3.6.2	Pt-Based Catalysts and Non-noble Metal Electrocatalysts	35
1.3.6.3	Alternative Cathode Catalysts	37
1.3.7	DMFC Power Sources in the 'Pre-1990 Era'	39
1.4	Current Status of DMFC Technology for Different Fields of Application	40
1.4.1	Portable Power Sources	40
1.4.2	Transportation	53
1.4.3	Technology Development	60
1.4.3.1	DMFC Technology	60
1.4.3.2	Catalyst Preparation	61
1.4.3.3	Electrode Manufacturing and Membrane Electrode Assemblies Membrane Electrode Assembly (MEAs)	61
1.4.3.4	Stack Hardware and Design	62
1.4.3.5	DMFC Systems	64
1.5	Perspectives of Direct Methanol Fuel Cells and Techno-Economical Challenges	65
	References	70
2	Nanostructured Electrocatalyst Synthesis: Fundamental and Methods	79
	<i>Nitin C. Bagkar, Hao Ming Chen, Harshala Parab, and Ru-Shi Liu</i>	
2.1	Introduction	79
2.2	Fundamental Understanding of the Structure–Activity Relationship	80
2.2.1	Particle Size Effect	81
2.2.2	Crystal Facet Effect	82
2.3	Synthetic Methods of Conventional Carbon-Supported Catalysts	85
2.3.1	Impregnation Method	87
2.3.2	Colloidal Method	88
2.3.2.1	Polyol Synthesis	89
2.3.3	Microemulsion Method	93
2.4	Synthetic Methods of Novel Unsupported Pt Nanostructures	95
2.4.1	Template-Based Synthesis	95
2.4.1.1	Soft Template	96
2.4.1.2	Hard Template	96
2.4.2	Galvanic Replacement Reaction	99
2.4.2.1	Platinum Nanospheres	99
2.4.2.2	Platinum Nanotubes	99

2.4.2.3	Nanoporous Platinum	101
2.4.2.4	Hollow Platinum Nanochannels	102
2.4.2.5	Bimetallic Clusters	103
2.4.3	Electrochemical Synthesis	104
2.4.3.1	Spherical Platinum Clusters	104
2.4.3.2	Nanoporous Platinum	105
2.4.3.3	Tetrahexahedral Platinum Nanostructures	106
2.5	Conclusions	108
	References	110
3	Electrocatalyst Characterization and Activity Validation – Fundamentals and Methods	115
	<i>Loka Subramanyam Sarma, Fadlilatul Taufany, and Bing-Joe Hwang</i>	
3.1	Introduction	115
3.2	Direct Methanol Fuel Cells – Role of Electrocatalysts	117
3.2.1	Role of Anode Electrocatalysts – Methanol Oxidation Reaction (MOR)	118
3.2.2	Role of Cathode Electrocatalysts – Oxygen Reduction Reaction (ORR)	119
3.3	Characterization Techniques for Anode and Cathode Catalysts	121
3.3.1	Fundamental Aspects	121
3.3.2	Evaluation of Catalyst Crystallite Size, Elemental Composition, Morphology, Dispersion	122
3.3.2.1	X-ray Diffraction (XRD)	122
3.3.2.2	Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM)	124
3.3.2.3	Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM)	125
3.3.2.4	Atomic Force Microscopy (AFM)	125
3.3.2.5	Energy Dispersive X-ray Spectroscopy (EDS/EDX)	125
3.3.3	Elucidation of Nanostructural Characteristics of Electrocatalysts – Alloying Extent or Atomic Distribution, Electronic Structural Features, State of Catalyst Species, Surface Composition, Segregation Phenomena	126
3.3.3.1	X-ray Absorption Spectroscopy	126
3.3.3.2	X-ray Photoelectron Spectroscopy (XPS)	132
3.3.3.3	Electrochemical-Nuclear Magnetic Resonance Spectroscopy (EC-NMR)	133
3.3.3.4	Low-Energy Electron Diffraction (LEED)	134
3.3.3.5	Auger Electron Spectroscopy (AES)	134
3.3.3.6	Low-Energy Ion Scattering (LEIS)	135
3.3.3.7	Temperature Programmed Reduction (TPR)	135
3.4	Evaluation of Electrocatalyst Activity, Electrochemical Active Surface Area, Catalyst – Adsorbate Interactions, and Activity Validation Techniques	136
3.4.1	Cyclic Voltammetry (CV)	136
3.4.1.1	Applications	137

3.4.1.2	State of the Pt-Based Catalysts	137
3.4.1.3	Qualitative Indicator for the Activity of Pt-Based Catalysts Towards ORR	139
3.4.1.4	Qualitative Indicator for the Activity of Pt-Based Catalysts Towards MOR	139
3.4.1.5	Reversibility of $H_{ads/des}$ Reaction and Roughness Factor (RF) of Pt-Based Catalysts	140
3.4.1.6	Electrochemical Active Surface Area (ECASA) and Particle Size of Pt-Based Catalysts	140
3.4.2	Adsorptive CO-Stripping Voltammetry (CO_{ads} -SV)	141
3.4.3	Underpotential Deposition (UPD)	143
3.4.3.1	Surface Composition of Pt-Based Catalysts Through the Cu-UPD method	145
3.4.4	Rotating Disk Electrode (RDE)	146
3.4.5	Rotating Ring-Disk Electrode (RRDE) Method	148
3.4.6	Linear Sweep Voltammetry (LSV)	149
3.5	Conclusions and Outlook	155
	References	156
4	Combinatorial and High Throughput Screening of DMFC Electrocatalysts	165
	<i>Rongzhong Jiang and Deryn Chu</i>	
4.1	Introduction	165
4.2	Common Procedures for the Development of DMFC Catalysts	168
4.3	General Methods for Combinatorial and High Throughput Screening	169
4.4	Methods of Combinatorial Synthesis	171
4.4.1	Chemical Synthesis	171
4.4.2	Electrochemical Synthesis	173
4.4.3	Physical Synthesis	174
4.5	Electrode Arrays for High Throughput Screening	175
4.5.1	Direct Electrode Array and Automated Screening Method	175
4.5.2	Material Spot Array on a Single Electrode and Optical Screening Method	177
4.5.3	Indirect Electrode Array on a Single Conductive Substrate and Electrolyte Probe Screening Methods	179
4.6	Other Screening Methods for Catalyst Discovery	182
4.6.1	Infrared (IR) Thermography	183
4.6.2	Scanning Mass Spectrometry	183
4.6.3	Scanning Electrochemical Microscope (SECM)	185
4.7	Combinatorial Methods for DMFC Evaluation and Data Analysis	187
4.7.1	Micro Fuel Cell Array	187
4.7.2	A Method for High Throughput Screening of DMFC Single Cells	189
4.7.3	Data Analysis of Combinatorial Results	190

4.8	Challenge and Perspective	190
	References	193
5	State-of-the-Art Electrocatalysts for Direct Methanol Fuel Cells	197
	<i>Hanwei Lei, Paolina Atanassova, Yipeng Sun, and Berislav Blizanac</i>	
5.1	Introduction	197
5.2	Electrocatalysis and Electrocatalysts for DMFC	198
5.2.1	Electrocatalysis for Methanol Oxidation	198
5.2.2	Electrocatalyst Development	199
5.2.3	Spray Conversion Reaction Platform for Electrocatalyst Manufacturing	202
5.3	DMFC Electrocatalyst Characterization and Evaluation	203
5.3.1	Physical Characterization	204
5.3.2	Electrochemical Evaluation	208
5.3.2.1	Thin Film Rotating Disc Electrode (TFRDE) Catalyst Characterization	208
5.3.2.2	Fuel Cell Evaluation	210
5.3.3	Durability Study	212
5.4	DMFC Performance Advancement via MEA Design	215
5.4.1	Electrocatalyst Layer Design	215
5.4.2	Hydrocarbon Membrane for DMFC Performance Improvement	217
5.4.3	Other Aspects of DMFC Catalyst Development	220
5.5	Prospects for DMFC	222
5.6	Conclusions	222
	References	224
6	Platinum Alloys as Anode Catalysts for Direct Methanol Fuel Cells	227
	<i>Ermete Antolini</i>	
6.1	Introduction	227
6.2	Phase Diagram vs. Activity: New Chances for DMFC Anodes	229
6.2.1	PtRu Catalysts: The Effect of Alloying and Ru Oxide Presence	229
6.2.2	PtSn Catalysts: Activity of PtSn Alloys and Non-Alloyed Pt-SnO _x	233
6.2.3	Pt-Co and Pt-Ni Catalysts: Effect of Alloying and CoO _x and NiO _x Presence	235
6.3	Preparation Methods of Pt Alloys	238
6.3.1	Unsupported Catalysts	238
6.3.2	Supported Catalysts	240
6.4	Activity Evaluation of Pt Alloys	242
6.4.1	Pt-Based Binary Catalysts	243
6.4.1.1	Pt-W	243
6.4.1.2	Pt-Mo	244
6.4.1.3	Pt-Au	245
6.4.2	Ternary Pt-Ru-Based Catalysts	246