

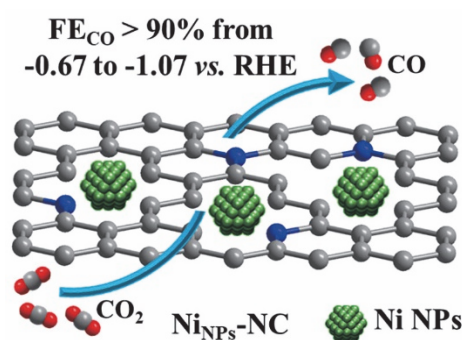
Metal-Organic Framework-Derived Nickel Nanoparticles for Efficient CO₂ Electroreduction in Wide Potential Windows

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Abstract: The electrocatalytic carbon dioxide (CO₂) reduction has gained recognition as an outstanding approach for transforming CO₂ into renewable energy products. To accomplish this reduction reaction, the development of efficient electrocatalysts is required. Nickel-based electrocatalysts have been extensively investigated for CO₂ reduction; however, nickel nanoparticles (NiNPs) have demonstrated limited catalytic performance. In this study, NiNPs implanted in N-doped porous carbon (NiNPs-NC) were prepared by thermal treatment of nickel metal-organic framework, urea, and carbon black under an N₂ atmosphere. The NiNPs-NC exhibited high catalytic performance for the electroreduction of CO₂ to CO in both H-type and flow cells. In the H-type cell, the CO faradaic efficiencies (FEs) of NiNPs-NC exceeded 90% in the potential window from -0.67 to -1.07 V vs. reversible hydrogen electrode (RHE), reaching a maximum CO FE of approximately 100% at -0.87 V vs. RHE. In the flow cell, the CO selectivities of NiNPs-NC exceeded 95% in the potential window from -0.50 to -0.70 V vs. RHE. The fast charge transfer, as demonstrated by electrochemical impedance spectroscopy and Tafel slope, can be attributed to the high catalytic activity of NiNPs-NC. This study provides a simple method to develop highly efficient catalysts for electrocatalytic CO₂ reduction.



Key Words: Nickel nanoparticle; Electrocatalyst; CO₂ reduction; Metal-organic framework; Thermal treatment

金属有机框架衍生镍纳米颗粒在宽电位窗口内高效电催化二氧化碳还原

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摘要: 电催化二氧化碳(CO₂)还原被认为是将CO₂转化为可再生能源产品的一种有前途的方法。开发性能优异的电催化剂高效完成这一重要反应是关键。镍基催化剂广泛应用于电催化CO₂还原研究,但是,镍纳米颗粒经常表现较差的催化性能。在本文中,通过在氮气气氛中高温热解镍基金属有机骨架(MOF)、尿素和炭黑混合物,获得了镍纳米颗粒负载于

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多孔碳氮中的催化材料($\text{Ni}_{\text{NPs}}\text{-NC}$)。有趣的是, $\text{Ni}_{\text{NPs}}\text{-NC}$ 在H型和流动相电池中都表现出优异的 CO_2 电还原性能。在H型电解池和 $-0.67 - -1.07 \text{ V vs. RHE}$ (可逆氢电极)电位窗口内, $\text{Ni}_{\text{NPs}}\text{-NC}$ 催化 CO_2 还原为 CO 的法拉第效率大于90%, 其中, 在 -0.87 V vs. RHE 时, CO 的法拉第效率约为100%。在流动相电解池和 $-0.50 - -0.70 \text{ V vs. RHE}$ 电位窗口内, $\text{Ni}_{\text{NPs}}\text{-NC}$ 催化 CO_2 还原为 CO 的选择性大于95%。电化学阻抗谱图和塔菲尔斜率表征显示, $\text{Ni}_{\text{NPs}}\text{-NC}$ 的高催化活性归因于其在催化过程中的快速电荷转移。本文提供了一种制备高效 CO_2 电还原催化剂的方法。

关键词: 镍纳米颗粒; 电催化剂; 二氧化碳还原; 金属有机框架; 热处理

中图分类号: O643

1 Introduction

The large-scale combustion of fossil fuels has resulted in excessive emission of carbon dioxide (CO_2), which has caused serious environmental problems^{1,2}. In the past decades, some technologies have been developed to alleviate the excessive emission of CO_2 ^{3,4}. Among them, electrocatalytic CO_2 reduction has been considered as a promising method for lowering CO_2 accumulation and converting it into value-added products such as CO , HCOOH , CH_4 and C_2H_4 , *etc.*⁵⁻⁷. However, owing to the high stability of the CO_2 molecule, as well as the competing hydrogen evolution reaction (HER), this CO_2 conversion technology often displays low activity and selectivity⁸⁻¹¹. In consequence, developing efficient electrocatalysts to reduce CO_2 with high performance and selectivity is urgently demanded.

Metal-organic frameworks (MOFs), as the new crystalline porous materials, are fabricated by metal ions/clusters and organic ligands, which not only show great potentials for various applications, but also are promising candidates to produce desired materials for catalysis¹²⁻¹⁸. Recently, MOFs have been demonstrated to be ideal platforms to construct single-atom catalysts (SACs) for electrocatalytic CO_2 reduction¹⁹⁻²⁵. Particularly, the MOF-derived single-atom nickel electrocatalysts usually show high performance for the reduction of CO_2 to CO ²⁶⁻³⁵. Nevertheless, they tend to agglomerate to form nanoparticles (NPs) in the synthetic process because of the high surface energy, which often show lowered catalytic performance over pure SACs^{23,29}. Therefore, the construction of MOF-derived Ni NPs for electrocatalytic CO_2 reduction with high activity and selectivity is highly desired yet remains a grand challenge.

Herein, we prepared Ni NPs implanted in N-doped porous carbon ($\text{Ni}_{\text{NPs}}\text{-NC}$) by the calcination of nickel-based MOF (Ni-MOF), urea and carbon black under N_2 atmosphere for

electrocatalytic CO_2 reduction (Scheme 1). The catalytic results demonstrate that $\text{Ni}_{\text{NPs}}\text{-NC}$ exhibits excellent performance for electrocatalytic CO_2 reduction, with CO faradaic efficiencies (FEs) of exceeded 90% from -0.67 to $-1.07 \text{ V vs. reversible hydrogen electrode (RHE)}$ in the H-type cell. The maximum CO FE is $\sim 100\%$ at -0.87 V vs. RHE . Furthermore, in the flow cell, $\text{Ni}_{\text{NPs}}\text{-NC}$ also shows high CO selectivities of exceeded 95% from -0.50 to -0.70 V vs. RHE . The results of electrochemical impedance spectroscopy and Tafel slope unveil that the high performance of $\text{Ni}_{\text{NPs}}\text{-NC}$ could be attributed to its fast charge-transfer.

2 Experimental section

2.1 Preparation of Ni-MOF

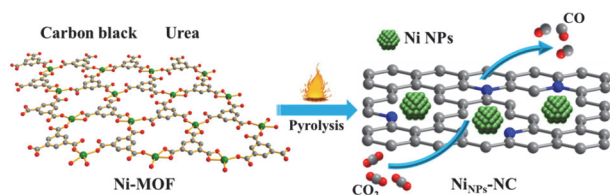
Ni-MOF was prepared based on literature methods³⁶. 145 mg $\text{Ni}(\text{NO}_3)_2 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (99.99%, 0.5 mmol), 105 mg 1,3,5-benzenetricarboxylic acid (H_3BTC , 98%, 0.5 mmol) and 10 mL *N,N*-dimethylformamide (DMF, 99.5%) were added in the Teflon-lined stainless steel reactor, which was heated at 130°C for 3 d. Yellow-green block crystals of Ni-MOF were obtained by filtration and washed with DMF. Yield: 55%.

2.2 Preparation of $\text{Ni}_{\text{NPs}}\text{-NC}$ and NC

A mixture of 40 mg Ni-MOF, 2 g urea (99%) and 20 mg carbon black (99.9%) was ball-milled for 10 h continuously (XQM-0.4A, Changsha Tianchuang Powder Technology Company Limited, China). Then, the mixture was heated in N_2 atmosphere at 520 and 800°C for 1 h, respectively. Black powder of $\text{Ni}_{\text{NPs}}\text{-NC}$ was obtained. The synthetic procedure of NC is similar to that of $\text{Ni}_{\text{NPs}}\text{-NC}$, except for the absence of Ni-MOF.

2.3 Characterization

Powder X-ray diffraction (XRD) measurements were carried out using a smart X-ray diffractometer (SmartLab 9 kW, Rigaku, Japan). N_2 sorption measurements were performed at 77 K using a gas adsorption analyzer (BELSORP-Mas, Microtrac BEL, Japan). The content of Ni was quantified by an inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometer (ICP-MS, iCAP RQ, Germany). The ^1H NMR spectroscopy was conducted on 400 MHz spectrometer (AVANCE III HD, Bruker, Germany). Electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS) measurements were conducted on an electrochemical workstation (CHI660E, Shanghai Chenhua, China). The gas products for CO_2



Scheme 1 Illustration showing the construction of $\text{Ni}_{\text{NPs}}\text{-NC}$ catalyst for electrocatalytic CO_2 reduction to CO .

electroreduction were analyzed by gas chromatography (GC-2014 + ATF, 230C, Shimadzu, Japan). The isotopes of ^{13}C for CO was analyzed using mass spectrometry (7890B/5977B, Agilent, USA).

2.4 Electrochemical measurements

Electrochemical measurements were performed in both H-type and flow cells using an electrochemical station (CHI760E). In the H-type cell, the Nafion 117 membrane (Dupont, USA) was used as proton exchange membrane. Each compartment contains 17 mL $0.5 \text{ mol}\cdot\text{L}^{-1}$ KHCO_3 (99%) electrolyte. Flow cell was fabricated with a CO_2 gas compartment and two liquid compartments with channels. CO_2 and electrolyte (97%, $1.0 \text{ mol}\cdot\text{L}^{-1}$ KOH) were separated by gas diffusion electrodes (GDEs). Ag/AgCl (saturated KCl) and Pt foil were used as reference and counter electrodes, respectively. All potentials were converted to RHE. In the H-type cell, 2.5 mg catalyst was first dispersed in the mixture of $\text{C}_2\text{H}_5\text{OH}$ (99.5%, 360 μL), H_2O (120 mL) and Nafion solution (20 μL) to prepare catalyst ink. Then, the homogeneous ink (100 μL) was loaded onto a carbon cloth ($2 \text{ cm} \times 0.5 \text{ cm}$). In the flow cell, the catalyst ink was prepared by dispersing catalyst (4.0 mg) in the mixture of ethanol (480 μL) and Nafion solution (20 μL). The mixture was then loaded onto a carbon paper ($2 \text{ cm} \times 2 \text{ cm}$). A CO_2 -saturated electrolyte was prepared by purging CO_2 gas into liquid electrolyte for 30 min.

3 Results and discussion

3.1 Characterization

Powder XRD pattern of the synthesized Ni-MOF is basically identical with the simulated one, demonstrating the high purity of Ni-MOF (Fig. S1, Supporting Information). Afterward, the calcination of Ni-MOF, urea and carbon black in N_2 atmosphere was performed to generate nickel nanoparticles implanted in N-doped porous carbon ($\text{Ni}_{\text{NPS}}\text{-NC}$). Powder XRD pattern confirms the formation of Ni NPs, in which the 44.5° , 51.7° and 76.2° peaks are assigned to the (111), (200) and (220) diffractions, respectively (Fig. 1a). N_2 adsorption measurement of $\text{Ni}_{\text{NPS}}\text{-NC}$ at 77 K and 101325 Pa reveals a reversible type II isotherm. The Brunauer-Emmett-Teller (BET) surface area of $\text{Ni}_{\text{NPS}}\text{-NC}$ is $189.8 \text{ m}^2\cdot\text{g}^{-1}$ and the pore size distribution of

$\text{Ni}_{\text{NPS}}\text{-NC}$ is 0.7 to 5.3 nm (Figs. 1b and S2). The result of CO_2 adsorption isotherm demonstrates that the adsorption capacity of $\text{Ni}_{\text{NPS}}\text{-NC}$ is $9.0 \text{ cm}^3\cdot\text{g}^{-1}$ at 298 K and 101325 Pa (Fig. S3). Moreover, the content of Ni in $\text{Ni}_{\text{NPS}}\text{-NC}$ is 13.8% (mass fraction) determined by ICP-MS. In addition, the N-doped porous carbon (NC) was synthesized by the pyrolysis of urea and carbon black in N_2 atmosphere. Powder XRD pattern of NC shows two broad peaks located at 20° – 30° and 40° – 45° respectively, which correspond to the (002) and (101) crystal faces of carbon black (C) (Fig. 1a). N_2 adsorption measurements of NC and C at 77 K and 101325 Pa also unveil reversible type II isotherms with the BET surface areas of 186.2 and $218.5 \text{ m}^2\cdot\text{g}^{-1}$, respectively. Their pore size distributions are 0.6–4.8 nm and 0.5–4.4 nm, respectively (Figs. 1b, S4 and S5). CO_2 adsorption measurements at 101325 Pa and 298 K show that the CO_2 uptakes of NC and C are 9.5 and $11.9 \text{ cm}^3\cdot\text{g}^{-1}$, respectively (Figs. S6 and S7).

3.2 Electrocatalytic CO_2 reduction

Electrocatalytic reduction of CO_2 for C, NC and $\text{Ni}_{\text{NPS}}\text{-NC}$ were carried out in both H-type and flow cells. The linear sweep voltammetry (LSV) measurements show that the current densities of them in CO_2 -saturated electrolyte are higher than those of in Ar atmosphere in the H-type cell, demonstrating their catalytic activities for electrocatalytic CO_2 reduction (Figs. S8–S10). As shown in Fig. 2a, $\text{Ni}_{\text{NPS}}\text{-NC}$ exhibits a higher current density than C and NC in CO_2 atmosphere, manifesting the best performance of $\text{Ni}_{\text{NPS}}\text{-NC}$ for CO_2 electroreduction among all three catalysts. Moreover, the CO FEs of C, NC and $\text{Ni}_{\text{NPS}}\text{-NC}$ for electrocatalytic CO_2 reduction were examined from -0.57 to -1.17 V vs. RHE . Impressively, the $\text{Ni}_{\text{NPS}}\text{-NC}$ shows high CO FEs of exceeded 90% from -0.67 to -1.07 V vs. RHE . At -0.87 V vs. RHE , the CO FE reaches maximum value of about 100% (Fig. 2b). Meanwhile, $\text{Ni}_{\text{NPS}}\text{-NC}$ achieves a large CO partial current density (J_{CO}) of $23.72 \text{ mA}\cdot\text{cm}^{-2}$ at -0.97 V vs. RHE (Fig. 2c). The CO FEs and J_{CO} of $\text{Ni}_{\text{NPS}}\text{-NC}$ are larger than those of C and NC in all tested potentials (Fig. 2c), suggesting that the implantation of Ni NPs in N-doped porous carbon significantly enhances electrocatalytic performance for the reduction of CO_2 to CO. Apart from the excellent activity and selectivity, $\text{Ni}_{\text{NPS}}\text{-NC}$ also

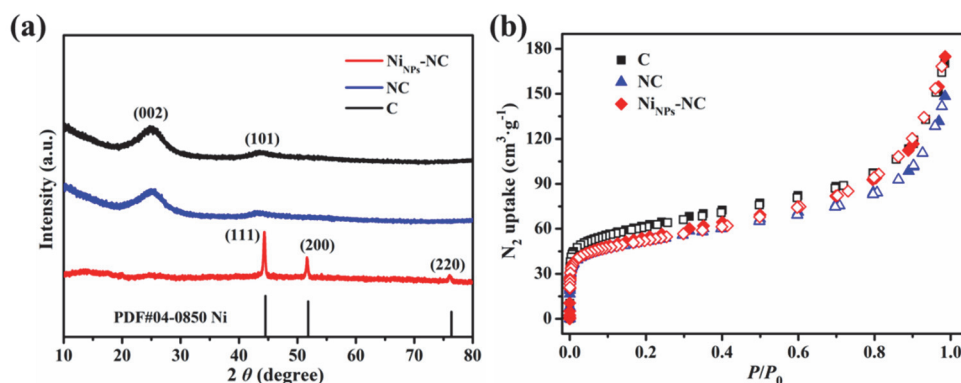


Fig. 1 (a) Powder XRD patterns for $\text{Ni}_{\text{NPS}}\text{-NC}$, NC and C. (b) N_2 adsorption isotherms for $\text{Ni}_{\text{NPS}}\text{-NC}$, NC and C.

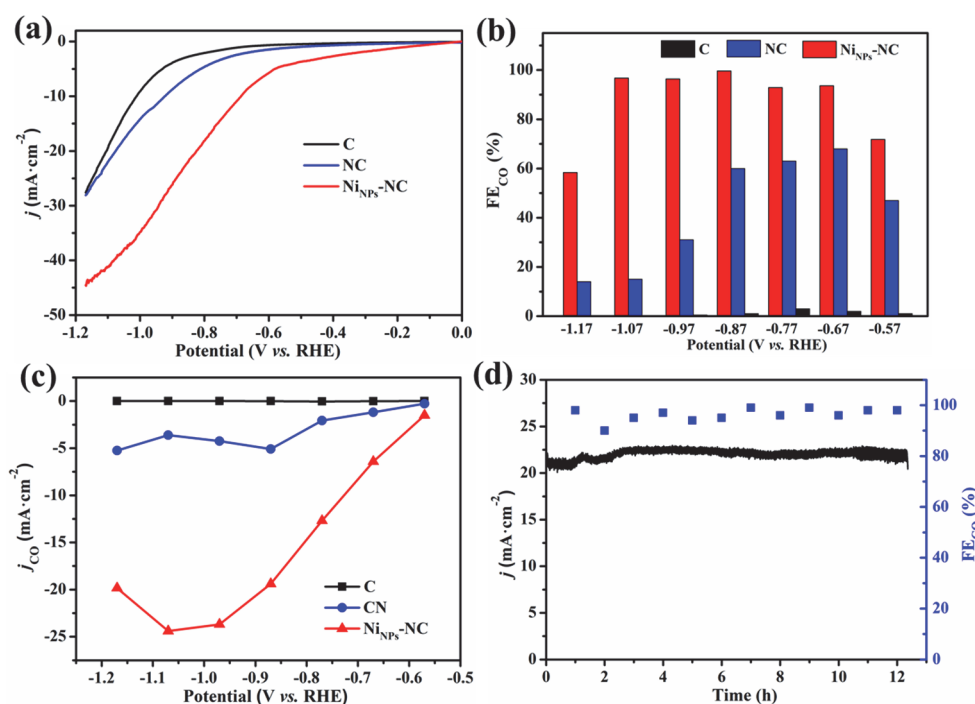


Fig. 2 (a) LSV curves of C, NC and NiNP₅-NC in the CO₂-saturated electrolyte. (b) CO FEs of C, NC and NiNP₅-NC. (c) The J_{CO} of C, NC and NiNP₅-NC. (d) The stability measurement for NiNP₅-NC at -0.87 V vs. RHE.

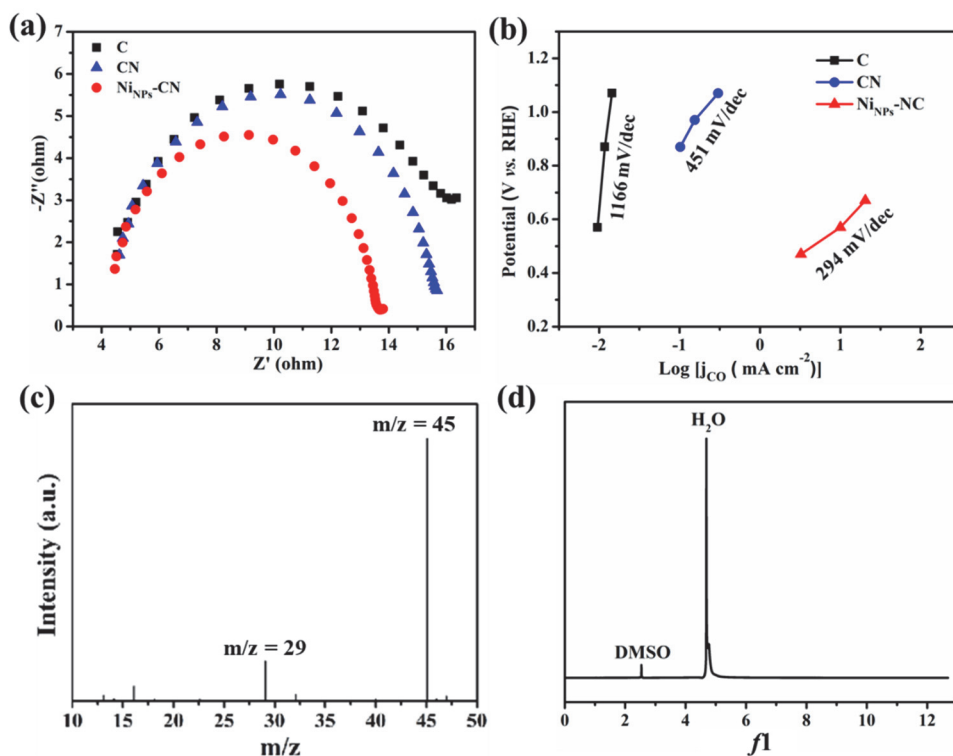


Fig. 3 (a) EIS plots of C, NC and NiNP₅-NC. (b) Tafel plots of C, NC and NiNP₅-NC. (c) MS of the gaseous products for electrocatalytic ¹³CO₂ reduction over NiNP₅-NC. (d) ¹H NMR spectrum of the electrolyte after 30 min electrolysis at -0.87 V vs. RHE over NiNP₅-NC.

exhibits good catalytic stability for CO₂ electroreduction in the H-type cell. The current density and FE for CO production are nearly unchanged after electrolyzation for 12 h at -0.87 V vs. RHE (Fig. 2d).

In order to clarify the higher activity of NiNP₅-NC than C and

NC, EIS and Tafel slopes were conducted. The results of EIS demonstrate that NiNP₅-NC shows the smallest semicircle radius, suggesting the lowest charge-transfer resistance of NiNP₅-NC among the tested electrocatalysts (Fig. 3a). The Tafel slope of NiNP₅-NC is calculated to be 294 mV·dec⁻¹, which is

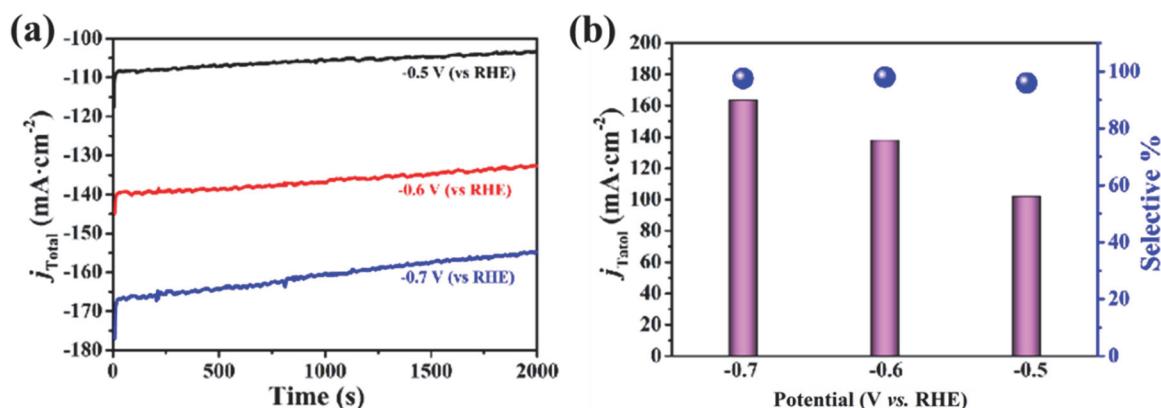


Fig. 4 (a) The current density of NiNP₅-NC during long-time electrolysis at different potentials. (b) The current density and CO selectivities of NiNP₅-NC at different potentials.

smaller than C (1166 $\text{mV}\cdot\text{dec}^{-1}$) and NC (451 $\text{mV}\cdot\text{dec}^{-1}$), implying the favorable kinetics of NiNP₅-NC for the formation of CO (Fig. 3b). These results indicate that NiNP₅-NC exhibits the fastest charge-transfer and thus the highest catalytic performance for the electroreduction of CO₂ to CO among all three catalysts. To confirm the carbon source of CO, the ¹³CO₂ isotope trace experiment of NiNP₅-NC was performed. The result of mass spectrum (MS) exhibits a signal peak at $m/z = 29$, which is attributed to ¹³CO, confirming that the CO indeed comes from CO₂ reduction. Furthermore, no liquid products are detected over NiNP₅-NC by ¹H NMR spectroscopy, further affirming the high selectivity of CO (Fig. 3d).

To further investigate catalytic performance of NiNP₅-NC, the electrocatalytic CO₂ reduction was carried out in the flow cell. LSV measurement shows that NiNP₅-NC exhibits large current density in CO₂-saturated 1.0 mol·L⁻¹ KOH (Fig. S11). At -0.50, -0.60 and -0.70 V vs. RHE, the current densities of NiNP₅-NC are about 163, 138 and 102 $\text{mA}\cdot\text{cm}^{-2}$, respectively, and the CO selectivities of NiNP₅-NC exceed 95% in these potentials (Fig. 4). These results clearly demonstrate exceptionally catalytic performance of MOF-derived Ni NPs for the electroreduction of CO₂ to CO.

4 Conclusions

In summary, Ni NPs implanted in N-doped porous carbon (NiNP₅-NC) has been prepared by the pyrolysis of nickel-based MOF, urea and carbon black. The results of electrocatalytic CO₂ reduction demonstrate that NiNP₅-NC shows high performance for the production of CO in both H-type and flow cells. In the H-type cell, the CO FEs of NiNP₅-NC exceed 90% from -0.67 to -1.07 vs. RHE, with the maximum CO FE of ~100% at -0.87 V vs. RHE. Moreover, the CO selectivities of NiNP₅-NC exceed 95% from -0.50 to -0.70 vs. RHE in the flow cell. The electrochemical impedance spectroscopy and Tafel slope disclose that NiNP₅-NC exhibits fast charge-transfer and thus accounting for its excellent catalytic performance. This work develops efficient metal nanoparticles for electrocatalytic CO₂ reduction.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, Y.G. and D.Z.; Methodology, B.S., H.D., F.C. and J.L.; Formal Analysis, J.M.; Writing-Original Draft Preparation, B.S. and Y.G.; Writing-Review & Editing, D.Z.; Supervision, D.Z. and T.L.; Funding Acquisition, Y.G., D.Z. and T.L.

Supporting Information: Powder XRD pattern, pore diameter distributions, CO₂ adsorption isotherms, LSV curves.

Notes: The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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