



Short communication

Preparation of Pt supported on WO₃-C with enhanced catalytic activity by microwave-pyrolysis method

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ABSTRACT

The WO₃-C hybrid materials are prepared by intermittently microwave-pyrolysis using ammonium tungstate as the precursor, and then Pt nano-particles are deposited by microwave-assisted polyol process on WO₃-C. The TEM images show the dispersion of ~10 nm WO₃ particles size supported on carbon and ~3 nm Pt metal crystallites supported on WO₃-C. XRD results illustrate that WO₃ presented as monoclinic phase and the content of WO₃ in WO₃/C and Pt/WO₃-C catalysts is further characterized by EDAX. Furthermore, XPS characterizations indicate that the interaction between Pt and WO₃ is dramatically enhanced after heat treatment at 200 °C. The activities of Pt/WO₃-C for the electrochemical oxidation of methanol are compared with Pt/C in acid solution by cyclic voltammetry, CO-stripping and chronoamperometry. Pt/WO₃-C catalyst calcined at 200 °C exhibits the highest activity per electrochemical active surface area for methanol oxidation and is 60 mV more negative for CO electro-oxidation than that of Pt/C and Pt/WO₃-C without heat treatment. The great enhancement of electrochemical performance may be due to the improvement of the synergistic effect between Pt and WO₃ in Pt/WO₃-C catalyst after heat treatment.

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1. Introduction

The anode catalysts of direct methanol fuel cell (DMFC) have been explored to solve the low kinetic process of methanol electro-oxidation and CO-poisoned problems for several decades. It is demonstrated that there are great improvements in terms of promotion effect or bi-functional effect when Pt was modified by other metals or metal oxides. The well-known electrocatalysts of Pt-Ru [1–3], Pt-Ru-Os [4], Pt-Ru-W [5], Pt-Ru-Ir [6,7] and Pt-Ru-Sn [8] perform significantly better than Pt alone. Various factors including particle-size, composition, and electronic structure of Pt after modification and structural arrangements in the nanostructure have also been reported. Besides, some studies claimed that the addition of metal oxides (TiO₂ [9], ZrO₂ [10], MoO₃ [11], CeO₂ [12,13], SnO₂ [14], etc.) effectively promote the electro-oxidation of methanol, which is due to the high dispersion of Pt nano-particles, the stabilization of Pt on support and the

formation of OH species under lower potential with the additive promoter. Especially, Pt/WO₃-C electrocatalysts prepared by various synthesis procedures [15–19] are known to greatly enhance the electro-oxidation of methanol. The H-spillover effect from Pt to WO₃ left more free Pt active sites to accelerate kinetics of methanol dehydrogenation [20,21]; meanwhile, the H_xWO₃ is a good conductor, unlike most metal oxides of low conductivity. However, the morphology of WO₃ and the interaction between Pt and WO₃ are still in vague [21,22], which are two key parameters to improve the electro-oxidation of methanol and CO.

In this study, Pt/WO₃-C was prepared by a new method, i.e. WO₃-C hybrid materials were firstly synthesized by intermittently microwave-pyrolysis, and then Pt particles were deposited on it. The results indicated that WO₃ with small particles was well dispersed on carbon, and the catalytic performance of Pt/WO₃-C was improved further after heat treatment at 200 °C. The relationship between the structure of Pt/WO₃-C and performance of methanol oxidation was discussed as well.

2. Experimental

2.1. Sample preparation

Ammonium tungstate was mixed mechanically with carbon (Vulcan XC-72, Cabot Corp.) for 30 min using ethanol as solvent. The

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paste was dried under 60 °C for 20 h and then ground for later usage. The powder was placed in the center of a household microwave oven (2450 MHz, 700 W) and intermittently heated in the form of pulse every 10 s for three times. The hybrid material was denoted as WO₃-C, in which the theoretical weight ratio of WO₃ to C is 10:90.

Microwave-assisted glycol method was chosen to load Pt on C or WO₃-C support in ethylene glycol solution with H₂PtCl₆ as precursor [23]. Moreover, Pt/WO₃-C catalyst was calcined at 200 °C in N₂ atmosphere for 2 h, which was denoted as Pt/WO₃-C-HT. Pt loading was kept as 10 wt% in all samples.

2.2. Physical and electrochemical characterizations

The particle-size distribution and morphology of catalysts were examined by transmission electron microscope (TEM) on a FEI Tecnai20 FEG at 200 kV. The distribution of elemental concentrations was performed using the mapping analysis of SEM (LEO 1530VP) equipped with energy dispersive analysis of X-ray spectrometer (EDAX).

X-ray diffraction (XRD) measurements were carried out with a Rigaku D/MAX-Ultima III X-ray diffractometer using Cu K α radiation ($\lambda = 0.15406$ nm). The 2θ angular ranges between 20° and 80° were explored at a scan rate of 10° min⁻¹. The X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) measurement was performed by ESCALAB 250 apparatus, using monochromated Al K α radiation at 150 W, in the pass energy (PE) mode (PE = 20 eV). All of the spectra were obtained under identical conditions. The pressure of the spectrometer was 5×10^{-10} mbar and 5×10^{-9} mbar during the measurements.

Electrochemical experiments were conducted by an electrochemical workstation (PARSTAT 2273, Princeton Applied Research) equipped with a three-electrode configuration using Pt foil as a counter electrode, and saturated calomel electrode (SCE) as a reference. The working electrodes were fabricated by casting Nafion-impregnated catalyst ink onto 0.196 cm² glass carbon disk electrodes, and the loading of the catalyst was 0.255 mg cm⁻². For CV measurements, the working electrode was immersed in nitrogen saturated 0.5 M CH₃OH in 0.5 M H₂SO₄ solution. In the CO-stripping experiment, the pre-adsorption of CO was achieved by bubbling CO gas into the solution, while the potential of working electrode was kept at -0.15 V versus SCE for 20 min. After that, the solution was purged with N₂ gas for another 20 min to remove the dissolved CO in the solution.

In electro-catalytic investigations, electrochemical active surface area (ECSA) of each electrode was used to normalize the current density. ECSA of the Pt-based working electrodes were determined from CO-stripping voltamograms.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. XRD characterization

The XRD patterns of Pt/C and Pt/WO₃-C catalysts were shown in Fig. 1. The diffraction peaks at 39.6°, 46.3° and 67.4° observed in samples corresponding to the face-centered cubic (fcc) phase of Pt [24], while those at 33°, 40°, 49°, 54°, 61° and 76° observed in Pt/WO₃-C catalysts corresponding to the monoclinic phase of WO₃ [25,26]. The diffraction peaks at 23° in all catalysts were due to the mixture of the (002) reflection of Vulcan XC-72 carbon and (020) reflection of WO₃. In all samples, the diffraction peak intensity of Pt (220) at 67.4° was too weak to calculate the Pt crystallize size. However, each diffraction peak of Pt crystalline plane was obviously broad, meaning Pt nano-particles were small in these catalysts.

It was clear that WO₃ particles with high crystalline monoclinic phase presented in WO₃-C hybrid material as shown in Fig. 1(b) and (c). No other new phases were observed after heat treatment at 200 °C. As reported in literature, the addition of

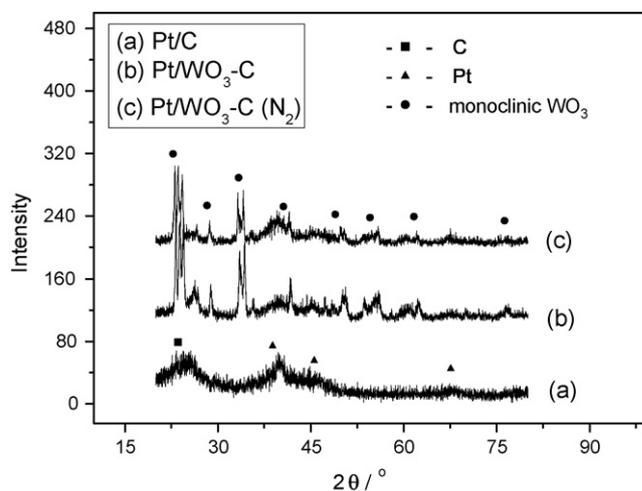


Fig. 1. XRD patterns of (a) Pt/C, (b) Pt/WO₃-C and (c) Pt/WO₃-C-HT samples.

WO₃ in Pt/C by various methods [27,28] can enhance the activity for methanol electro-oxidation due to the formation of hydrogen tungsten bronze. However, the size of WO₃ particles is hardly controlled, which is believed to be important to maximize interfaces of Pt/WO₃. By microwave-pyrolysis method proposed in this paper, WO₃ crystalline formed quickly due to unique microwave-absorption property of carbon material, which can intermediately decompose tungstate precursor to form WO₃-C hybrid material and avoid the following aggregation of WO₃ particles, which happens in the conventional pyrolysis or hydrolysis method.

3.2. TEM characterization

Fig. 2 presented the TEM of Pt/C, WO₃-C, Pt/WO₃-C and Pt/WO₃-C-HT samples. As shown in Fig. 2(a), around 3 nm Pt nano-particles were homogeneously dispersed on carbon in Pt/C catalysts. It was seen from Fig. 2(b) that 6–15 nm WO₃ nano-particles were deposited on carbon. The crystalline plane distance was 0.382 nm, which was in agreement with (010) of monoclinic phase WO₃ as shown in Fig. 2 (pdf#30-1387). The formation of relatively small WO₃ particles tended to be helpful for separating Pt nano-particles and maximizing the interfaces of Pt/WO₃. The Fig. 2(c) gave the TEM results of Pt supporting on WO₃-C hybrid material. Although the microstructure of Pt and WO₃ was hardly to be distinguished, the uniform dispersion of small Pt or WO₃ particles on carbon support was clear. Comparing between Fig. 2(c) and (d), the particles size showed no obvious change after heat treatment in N₂ atmosphere. It was interesting to notice that particle-size and shape were changed when WO₃ existed in Pt/C. It may be due to the co-existence of Pt and WO₃ particles on carbon support. Therefore, the abundant interfaces between Pt and WO₃ were likely to generate, which can enhance the H-spill effect and improve the catalytic activity.

The chemical composition of the obtained WO₃-C, Pt/WO₃-C and Pt/WO₃-C-HT samples was determined by EDAX analysis. Table 1 listed the content of each composite for all samples. The

Table 1
EDAX analysis of all samples.

Samples	Element (wt%)			
	C	W	Pt	O
WO ₃ -C	84.75	9.11	–	6.14
Pt/WO ₃ -C	74.65	9.03	9.46	6.86
Pt/WO ₃ -C-HT	72.28	9.28	9.81	8.63

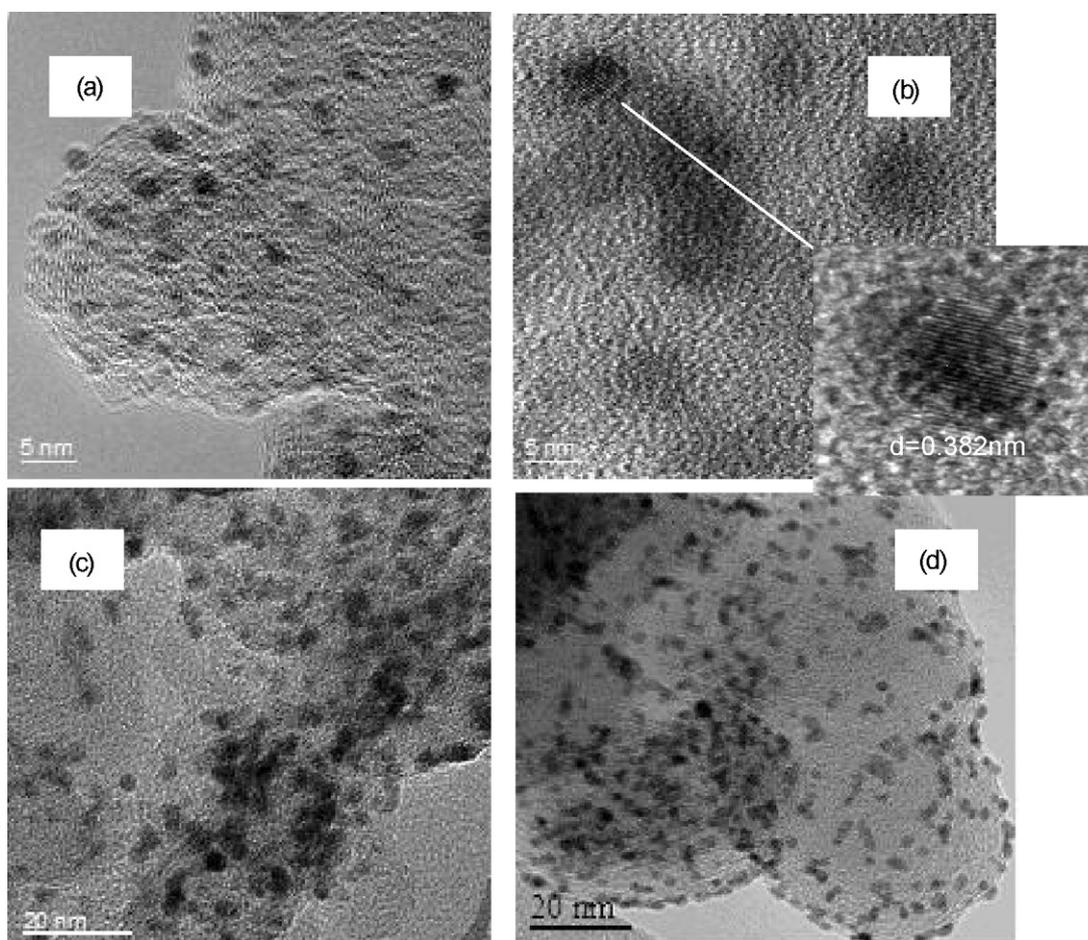


Fig. 2. TEM images of (a) Pt/C, (b) WO₃/C, (c) Pt/WO₃-C and (d) Pt/WO₃-C-HT samples.

element composition and contents were taken in different particular microzones. From the EDAX spectrum, the existence of the WO₃ in all samples was testified. The contents of W in WO₃/C, Pt/WO₃-C and Pt/WO₃-C-HT were 9.11%, 9.03% and 9.28%, separately, which were close to the initial ratio of 10 wt%. It cannot be excluded that a small quantity of tungstate decomposed incompletely, but there was little change of W content in three samples. A slight increase of the ratio of Pt:W in Pt/WO₃-C-HT may be due to the aggregation of Pt nano-particles. Based on the results of TEM and EDAX, WO₃ with nano-particles can be deposited successfully by intermittently microwave-pyrolysis method.

3.3. XPS analysis

Fig. 3 exhibited the XPS results of Pt 4f and W 4f. The binding energies (BE) of all peaks were referenced to a C1s value of 284.6 eV. All samples demonstrated similarly asymmetric peaks, indicating multiple oxidation states for Pt. The principle peaks were assigned to Pt⁰ at 71.4 eV (4f_{7/2}) and 74.7 eV (4f_{5/2}), where double shoulder peaks at 73.0 eV and 75.8 eV were due to PtO or Pt(OH)₂ [29]. For all samples, platinum mostly existed in the form of metal Pt, containing little Pt²⁺. It can be seen that the Pt 4f peaks nearly unchanged in Pt/WO₃-C without heat treatment. The W 4f spectrum of Pt/WO₃-C was also exhibited in Fig. 3. The two major peaks at 36.1 eV and 38.1 eV were assigned to the +6 oxidation state of tungsten for the W 4f_{7/2} and W 4f_{5/2} [30], respectively. It was clear that the tungsten majorly exists in a +6 valence state, but there was also a small fraction of W⁵⁺, centering at 35.0 eV and 36.8 eV [30]. Noticeably, the binding energy of Pt 4f and W 4f peaks shifted after calcination, probably due to various electronic interactions between Pt and

support. The phenomenon was a symbol of strong “metal–support interaction” between Pt and WO₃. This kind of interaction can modify the electronic and catalytic properties of metal nano-particles and lead to the electrochemical activation of both dispersed metal and oxide. Recently, Pd/WO₃-C was reported for oxygen reduction reaction and the researchers found that the uniform dispersion of Pd on WO₃/C and the strong interaction between Pd and WO₃ from XPS greatly improve the catalytic performance [31].

As we know, it was hard to use sol–gel method to disperse noble metal particles on hydrophobic supports in acid solution, such as WO₃ with a low isoelectric point of 0.43 [32]. In this work, there was no change of Pt 4f XPS comparing between Pt/C and fresh Pt/WO₃-C catalysts, indicating the interaction between Pt and WO₃ was quite weak by sol–gel method. After heat treatment, the interaction between Pt and WO₃ was dramatically improved and more interfaces of Pt/WO₃ may emerge.

3.4. CO-stripping voltammograms and methanol electro-oxidation activity

For Pt/WO₃-C catalyst, it was hard to calculate the Pt surface area obtaining from H-UPD measurements, which was due to the intercalation of protons in WO₃ forming tungsten bronzes, which occurs in the same potential region (−0.24 to 0.05 vs SCE) as H-UPD on Pt [33]. Therefore, CO-stripping tests were investigated to calculate the electrochemical surface area (ECSA) in Fig. 4. Assuming CO monolayer adsorption charge of Q⁰ = 420 μC cm^{−2}, the ECSA was calculated by Q/[Pt]Q⁰, where Q was the charge transferred derived from the electro-oxidation of CO on the surface of platinum, and [Pt] represented the Pt loading in the electrode. According to

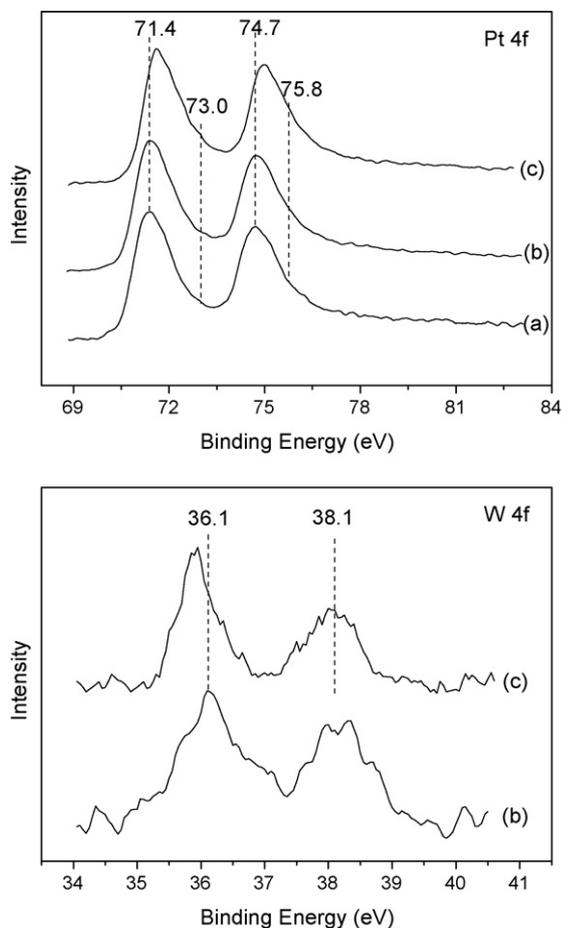


Fig. 3. Pt 4f, W 4f XPS spectra of (a) Pt/C, (b) Pt/WO₃-C and (c) Pt/WO₃-C-HT samples.

Fig. 4, the ECSA increased from 72.1 to 114.8 m² g⁻¹, while after heat treatment the ESA by calculation further increased to 133.1 m² g⁻¹. According to TEM, small particles WO₃ was loaded in carbon support by microwave decompose, in favor of the dispersion of Pt nano-particles on support and the enhancement of ECSA. After heat treatment, the electro-oxidation current of CO_{ads} species further

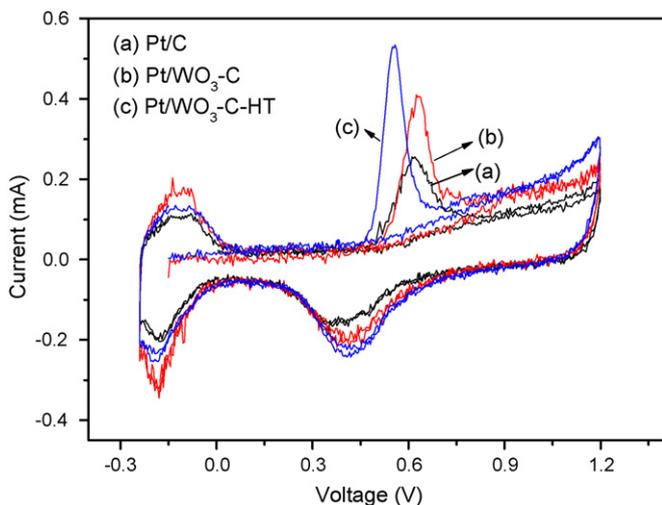


Fig. 4. CO-stripping voltammetry of saturated CO in 0.5 M H₂SO₄ solution for (a) Pt/C, (b) Pt/WO₃-C and (c) Pt/WO₃-C-HT catalysts. Scan rate = 20 mV s⁻¹ at room temperature.

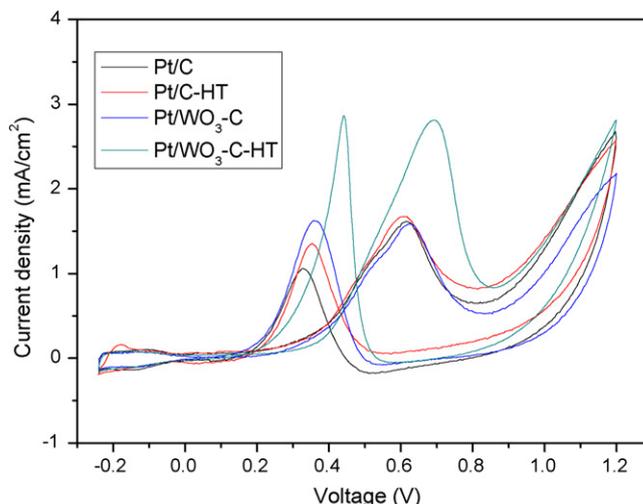


Fig. 5. Cyclic voltammograms for Pt/C and Pt/WO₃-C. Scan rate = 20 mV s⁻¹ at room temperature in 0.5 M H₂SO₄ with 0.5 M CH₃OH. (a) Pt/C, (b) Pt/WO₃-C and (c) Pt/WO₃-C-HT.

increased, which can be due to the maximized interaction between Pt and WO₃. It was reported by Hou [34] that the CO_{ads} on Pt sites can spill on neighbor WO₃ particles adsorbing OH species. The rapid oxidation will form more free Pt sites covered by CO, resulting in the increase of CO electro-oxidation current.

In addition, the onset potential of CO electro-oxidation with Pt/WO₃-C-HT was 0.439 V, which was 60 mV negative than Pt/C and fresh Pt/WO₃-C. It was also proved that WO₃-C catalyst showed no activity for methanol and CO electro-oxidation (not shown in this work). That was to say, the WO₃ connected with active Pt sites, can promote CO oxidation dramatically. The interaction between Pt and WO₃ possibly modified the electron density of Pt sites and weakened the CO absorbing bond on Pt. Therefore, more sites of Pt interacting with WO₃ were helpful for improving the electro-oxidation ability of CO.

Fig. 5 depicted cyclic voltammogram of catalyst samples performed in a solution containing 0.5 M CH₃OH/0.5 M H₂SO₄. Although the peak current increased from 0.584 mA of Pt/C to 0.916 mA of Pt/WO₃-C (not shown in this work), the current density of methanol electro-oxidation on both Pt/C and Pt/WO₃-C catalysts was very close. Interestingly, Pt/WO₃-C-HT catalyst exhibited much higher peak current density of 2.84 mA cm⁻² than 1.62 mA cm⁻² of Pt/C catalyst, demonstrating an intrinsic enhancement of catalytic performance.

To clearly investigate the effect of the interaction between Pt and WO₃ on Pt/WO₃-C-HT catalyst performance, we also performed methanol electro-oxidation on Pt/C-HT catalysts, as seen in Fig. 5. It was obvious that the current density of methanol oxidation per ECSA was nearly unaffected by the heat treatment for Pt/C catalyst. So the strong interaction between Pt and WO₃ may be the dominant factor greatly promoting the catalytic performance. The abundant interfaces of Pt/WO₃ can improve H-spill effect, which can keep Pt sites clear for chemisorption of methanol, thus advance the kinetic of methanol dehydrogenation.

3.5. Chronoamperometric tests

To show the electrochemical stability of the three catalysts for methanol oxidation, chronoamperometric experiments were carried out. The current-time curves for the three catalysts in 0.5 M CH₃OH and 0.5 M H₂SO₄ at 0.4 V and 0.6 V versus SCE were shown in Fig. 6. All catalysts showed gradual decay in the current in test time, which may be due to the poison of CO intermediate species

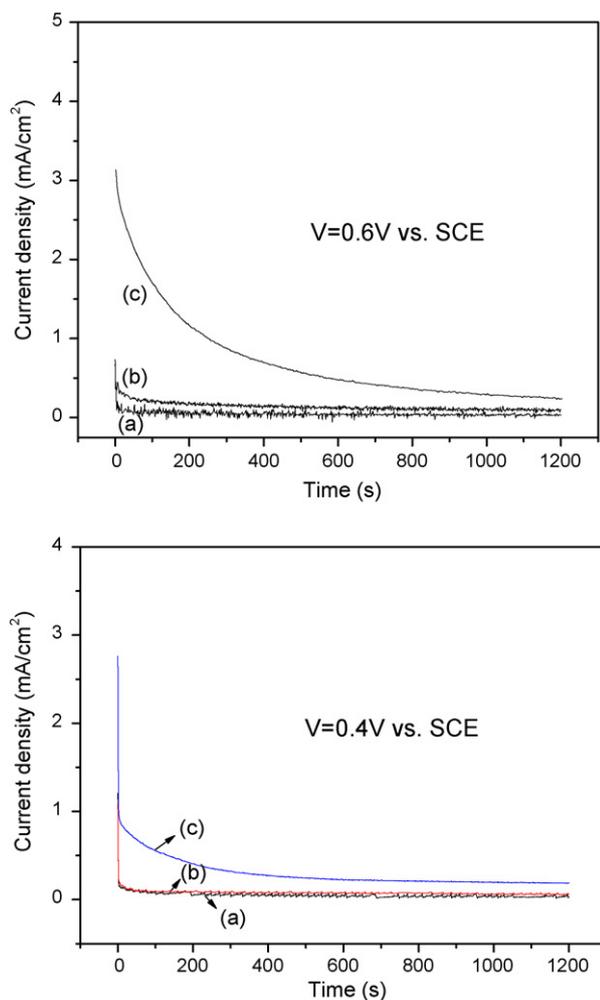


Fig. 6. Chronoamperometric curves for methanol electro-oxidation on (a) Pt/C, (b) Pt/WO₃-C and (c) Pt/WO₃-C-HT catalysts in 0.5 M H₂SO₄ with 0.5 M CH₃OH under different potentials.

on active sites. Compared with Pt/C, Pt/WO₃-C catalyst showed a little higher activity than Pt/C catalyst at 0.6 V. For Pt/WO₃-C-HT catalyst, the current density per ECSA both at 0.6 V and 0.4 V dropped much less seriously than that of the other two catalysts, and showed the best electro-catalytic performance and kept higher than the other catalysts during 20 min. According to the CO-stripping voltammetry, the potential of CO electro-oxidation was lower on Pt/WO₃-C-HT, which may be helpful to keep more Pt active sites to methanol dehydrogenation and the decomposition of water molecular to form -OH species. The intrinsic catalytic activity on Pt/WO₃-C-HT enhanced obviously according to the increase of current density per ECSA, explaining that Pt sites of Pt/WO₃-C-HT were more active for methanol electro-oxidation. Above all, Pt/WO₃-C-HT catalyst gave the best performance and the best stability among three catalysts due to the high ECSA and the strong interaction between Pt and WO₃.

4. Conclusions

WO₃ particles with a size of ~10 nm were deposited on XC-72 carbon by microwave-pyrolysis method. EDAX results further

revealed the existence of tungsten with certain weight ratio in WO₃/C and Pt/WO₃-C catalysts. Pt supported on WO₃-C showed higher activity for methanol electro-oxidation than that of Pt/C catalyst. The TEM and cyclic voltammetry results indicated that the addition of WO₃ in Pt/C catalyst was in favor of improving the distribution of Pt nano-particles and the electrochemical surface area. Furthermore, Pt/WO₃-C after heat treatment at 200 °C exhibited higher intrinsic activity for methanol and CO electrooxidation. The H-spill effect due to strong interaction between Pt and WO₃ plays a critical role on methanol oxidation for Pt/WO₃-C catalyst.

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