



Short communication

# A study on AgCuO<sub>2</sub> as ultra fast charging cathode material for alkaline secondary battery

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## ABSTRACT

AgCuO<sub>2</sub> as ultra fast charging cathode material for alkaline secondary batteries is reported in the present paper. The structural characterization shows that the AgCuO<sub>2</sub> material is composed of many one-dimension linear crystals arranged in a certain sequence. The experimental results show that the AgCuO<sub>2</sub> electrodes have good electrochemical characteristics at ultra fast charging-discharging speed from 5000 mA g<sup>-1</sup> to 50,000 mA g<sup>-1</sup>. The super high speed ability of charge/discharge makes the charge time of the electrode shorter than 29 s. Cyclic voltammetric (CV) and galvanostatic charge-discharge tests reveal that the charge/discharge process is not the single electron transfer for Cu(III) but the fast dual electron transfer for Ag(II) and Cu(III). The characteristics of high cycling capacity and fast charging for AgCuO<sub>2</sub> not only increase the specific capacity of batteries considerably but also make it possible to charge the future electric cars instantaneously as fast as refueling the fuel vehicles.

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## 1. Introduction

With the development of digital products and electric automobiles, people have paid more and more attention to the high speed charge/discharge characteristic of batteries [1–3]. Kang and Ceder reported that the recently developed lithium ion batteries can be charged in less than two minutes for electric cars or 30 s for cell phones [4]. However, the aqueous electrolyte batteries, for example, Ni-metal hydride based ones, have serious drawbacks at high charge/discharge current [5]. Although the AgO cathode makes the charge time shorter than 2 min 53 s, its charge speed still needs to be improved [6].

The Ag–Cu dual metal oxides (AgCuO<sub>2</sub> and Ag<sub>2</sub>CuO<sub>3</sub>) were discovered in 1999, and there were a few reports about their discharge performance and the discharge mechanism in alkaline electrolyte [7–11]. Theoretically, the reduction of AgCuO<sub>2</sub> during discharge process needs as many as 4 electrons since it contains trivalent copper and univalent silver. Consequently, AgCuO<sub>2</sub> might have much higher capacity than MnO<sub>2</sub> and Ni(OH)<sub>2</sub> of single electron discharge [12]. However, the charge for Cu(II) to Cu(III) is considered to be very difficult because of the strong oxidizability of Cu(III), leading to a view point which deems that the realization of charge process for AgCuO<sub>2</sub> consisting of Ag(I) and Cu(III) is also hard.

Therefore, its potential rechargeability and fast charging ability have not been reported until now.

In this paper, we report AgCuO<sub>2</sub> as ultra fast charge material for alkaline secondary batteries. The AgCuO<sub>2</sub> electrode has cycling specific capacity of 352 mAh g<sup>-1</sup> at high charge/discharge rate of 50,000 mA g<sup>-1</sup>. Consequently, the charge time is shortened to 29 s, making it possible to charge the electric cars instantaneously as fast as refueling the fuel vehicles. The electrochemical reaction mechanism of the AgCuO<sub>2</sub> electrode is also explored in the present paper.

## 2. Experimental

### 2.1. The preparation of AgCuO<sub>2</sub> samples

0.02 mol AgCuO<sub>2</sub> and 0.02 mol Cu(NO<sub>3</sub>)<sub>2</sub> were dissolved in 0.1 mol L<sup>-1</sup> HNO<sub>3</sub>, and then the solution was added to 50 mL mixture solution consisting of NaClO (4.6 mol L<sup>-1</sup>) and NaOH (7.5 mol L<sup>-1</sup>) drop by drop with controlling speed at 3.0 mL min<sup>-1</sup>, and then the suspension was aged for 60 min under 800 rpm stirring speed and 10 °C constant temperature before centrifugation. The product was then washed to present neutral by deionized water. After drying under vacuum at 323 K for 3 h, a black powder of AgCuO<sub>2</sub> sample was obtained.

### 2.2. The structural characterization of nano-structured AgCuO<sub>2</sub>

The phase structures of AgCuO<sub>2</sub> samples were characterized by X-ray powder diffraction (XRD) using a Rigaku D/Max 2500

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VB2+/PC diffractometer, with a Cu-K $\alpha$  operating at 200 mA and 40 kV and a scan rate of 10° min<sup>-1</sup>. The samples were analyzed at big angle; the absorbance angle ( $2\theta$ ) was in the range of 10–90°. The sample morphology was examined by using a S4700s scanning electron microscope (FSEM, Hitachi, Japan).

### 2.3. Electrochemical experiments of AgCuO<sub>2</sub> electrode

800 mg AgCuO<sub>2</sub> powder and 200 mg expended graphite were adequately mixed in agate mortar for 20 min and three drops of 40% KOH were added to this mixture followed by stirring equably, then the product was rolled on a rolling machine to form AgCuO<sub>2</sub> foils with a thickness of 80  $\mu$ m. The foils were then moved onto a foam nickel net (1 cm  $\times$  1 cm) current collector and pressed under 10 MPa to manufacture AgCuO<sub>2</sub> electrodes. A Zn(Hg)/ZnO electrode was employed as reference electrode, pure nickel wire as auxiliary electrode and 35% KOH solution as electrolyte. After aging for 12 h, the CV test and charge–discharge test were carried out by using a CS300 electrochemistry workstation and a LAND CT 2001A battery test system (Jinnuo Corp., China) respectively.

## 3. Results and discussion

Fig. 1 is the FSEM photographs of AgCuO<sub>2</sub> at different magnifications. It can be seen that the AgCuO<sub>2</sub> crystals present thorn-balls form of about 30  $\mu$ m in diameter. It is clear that at high magnification, the AgCuO<sub>2</sub> thorn-ball is composed of many one-dimension linear crystals arranged in a certain sequence. Fig. 2 is the XRD pattern of AgCuO<sub>2</sub> sample. Compared with AgCuO<sub>2</sub> standard diffraction pattern, we can conclude that the sample is pure AgCuO<sub>2</sub> [13]. Based on Scatter formula and the XRD result, the calculated size of the AgCuO<sub>2</sub> sample is 26 nm. This result approximately conforms to the FSEM examination.

CV test was firstly carried out to explore the electrochemical property of AgCuO<sub>2</sub> electrode. Fig. 3 is the CV curve of AgCuO<sub>2</sub> sample at a scan speed of 1 mV s<sup>-1</sup>. It can be seen that there occur 5 pairs of redox peaks, namely, A: 1.056 and 0.819 V, B: 1.285 and 1.107 V, C: 1.696 and 1.491 V, D: 1.961 and 1.647 V and E: 2.014 and 1.822 V. The two oxidation peaks at 2.014 V and 1.961 V almost overlap each other, meaning the potentials of the two electrode processes are very close. According to the existing references, the reduction of AgCuO<sub>2</sub> is involved in the reduction processes of Cu(III) and Ag(I), so there must be four corresponding independent redox electric pairs. However, 5 pairs appear as a matter of fact. There occur two questionable points: (1) the references [10] attribute the reduction peaks both at 1.491 V and the succeeding 1.647 V to the discharge process of Ag(I) at 1.647 V, but it is well known that usually Ag(I) in the electrode only has one reduction peak under the same test condition after the first discharge process of AgCuO<sub>2</sub> at 1.822 V. (2) It is deemed that trivalent Cu like NaCuO<sub>2</sub> is very unstable in alkaline aqueous solution, but in our experiment, AgCuO<sub>2</sub> can exist in alkaline solution for months without obvious decomposition. Therefore, it can be seen that AgCuO<sub>2</sub> is quite different from NaCuO<sub>2</sub> in structure and we believe that the above 5 pairs of redox peaks correspond to 5 independent reactions respectively: Pair A and B correspond to the redox reactions peaks of Cu(II) and Cu(I) species respectively. Pair C is attributed to the redox peak of Ag(I). In combination with the reference [6], we have noticed that pair E comes from the reaction of Ag(II). In this case, pair D must be the redox peak of Cu(III), not the peak of impurity Ag(I) which has been affirmed by the existing references [10].

In order to make a quantitative analysis on the base of mathematics and accordingly determine the above electrochemical processes and the electron transfer numbers of the redox processes for the 5 peak pairs more precisely, numerical integration of the

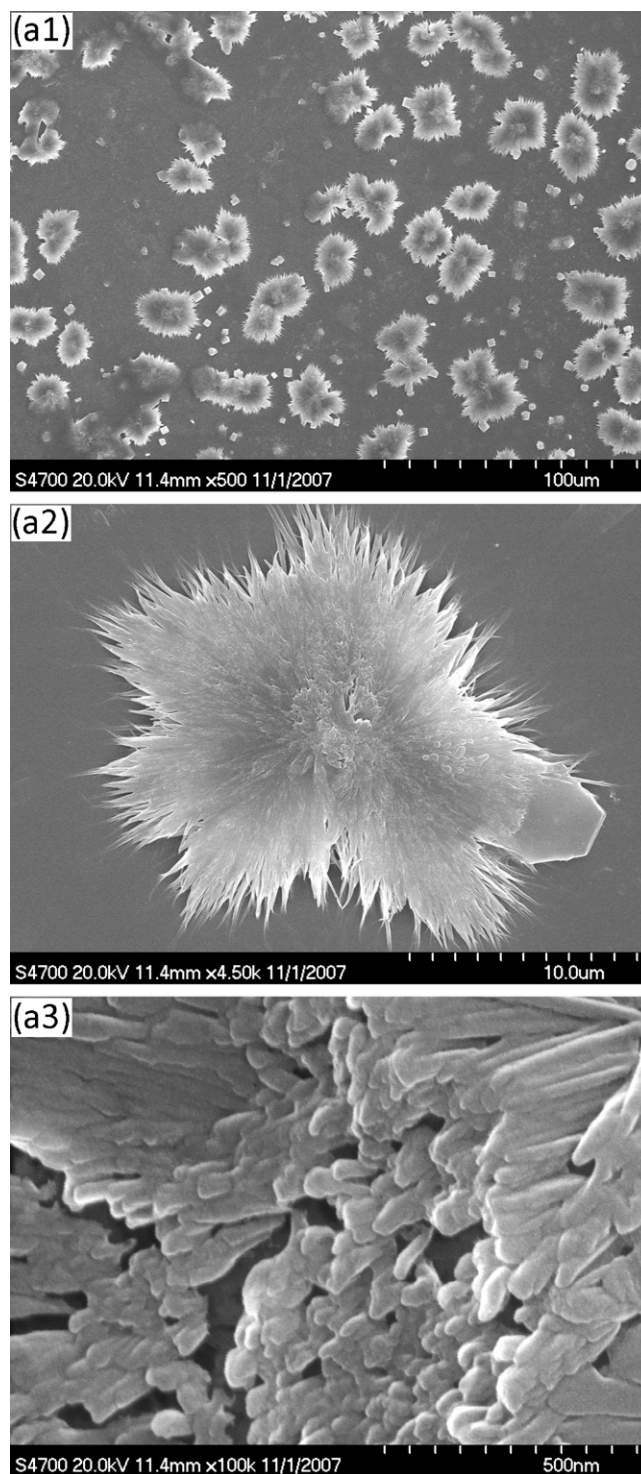


Fig. 1. The FSEM pictures of AgCuO<sub>2</sub>.

CV curves for the third cycle was carried out and electric quantity analysis was performed. The results are shown in Table 1.

It can be seen that the charge capacity and discharge capacity are 25.953 C (AgCuO<sub>2</sub>: 16.5 mg, 436.9 mAh) and 24.459 C (411.8 mAh), respectively. The efficiency of charge/discharge is 94.2%. According to Faraday Law and molecular weight of AgCuO<sub>2</sub>, the theoretical electric quantity for 4 electron reduction for AgCuO<sub>2</sub> is 526.9 mAh, or 131.7 mAh for single electron reduction, meaning that AgCuO<sub>2</sub> offers 78.2% of theoretical capacity in the actual discharge process. The decrease in actual capacity possibly comes from the utilization

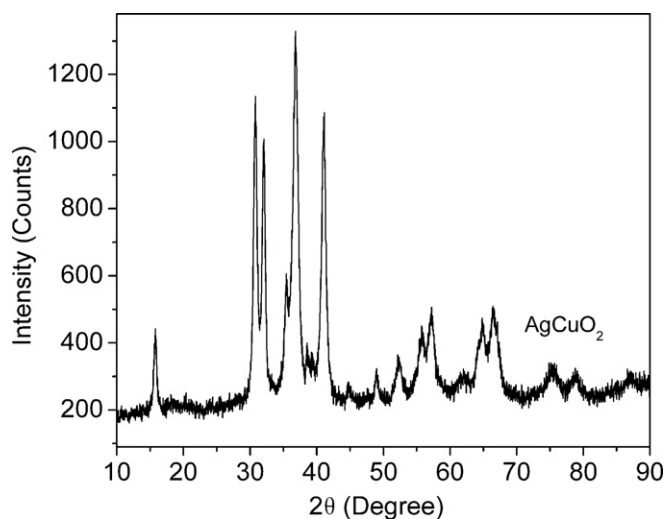


Fig. 2. The XRD pattern of as-prepared AgCuO<sub>2</sub>.

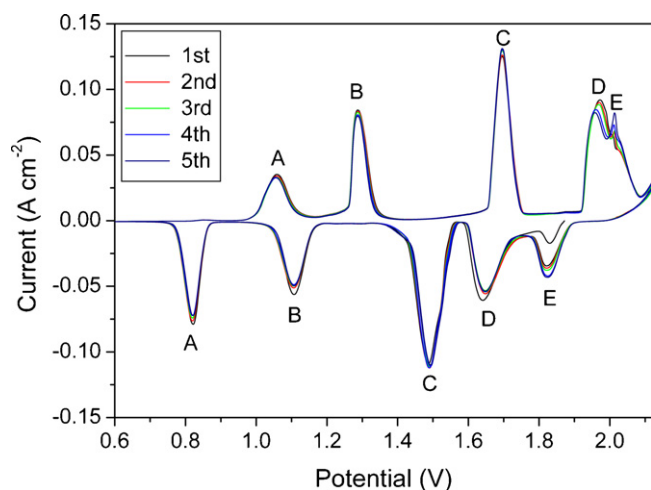


Fig. 3. The CV curves of AgCuO<sub>2</sub> electrode at a scan rate of 1 mV s<sup>-1</sup> (vs. Zn(Hg)/ZnO).

rate and electrochemical activity. It is easy to find through analyzing Table 1 that the total discharge capacity of D (86.2 mAh) and E (43.9 mAh) is 130.1 mAh, very close to 131.7 mAh of theoretical single electron capacity, meaning that the reduction for AgCuO<sub>2</sub> of high valence ion is the process which takes place in the manner of transferring 1/3 of the electron capacity for Ag(II) at 1.822 V followed by transferring 2/3 of the electron capacity for Cu(III) at 1.647 V, not simply transferring from Cu(III) to Cu(II). That is because Ag(I) can be oxidized into Ag(II) reversibly and Ag(I) and Cu(III) can partially transform into Ag(II) and Cu(II) respectively through their self-electron-deviation, thus decreasing the actual potential of Cu(III) compound, and considerably increasing the stability of AgCuO<sub>2</sub>. To summarize the above discussion, it is more reasonable to regard Ag(I)Cu(III)O<sub>2</sub> as Ag<sub>2</sub>(I)Ag(II)Cu(II)Cu<sub>2</sub>(III)O<sub>6</sub>. However, it is hard to carry out the similar electron transfer on Na(I)

Table 1

Electric quantity analysis of AgCuO<sub>2</sub> electrode by the CV results in Fig. 3.

Electric pair	A		B		C		D		E	
	C	mAh	C	mAh	C	mAh	C	mAh	C	mAh
Reduction electric quantity	4.329	72.9	4.313	72.6	8.085	136.1	5.123	86.2	2.609	43.9
Oxidation electric quantity	2.826	47.6	4.801	80.8	7.508	126.4	10.818	182.1		

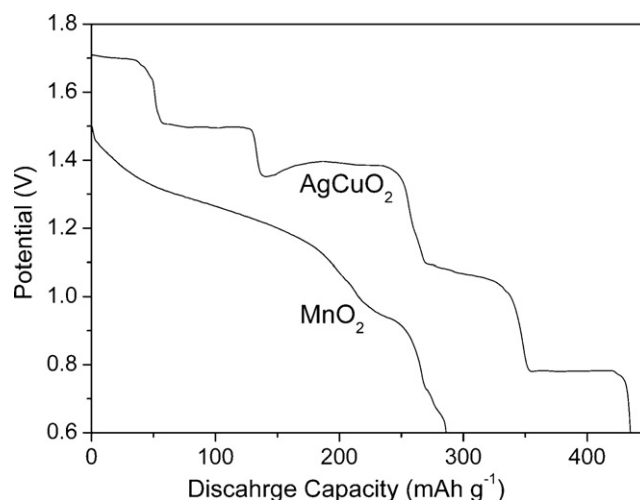


Fig. 4. The discharge curves of AgCuO<sub>2</sub> and MnO<sub>2</sub> electrode under 60 mA g<sup>-1</sup>.

and Cu(III) for the existing NaCuO<sub>2</sub>, thus leading to the bad storage property of NaCuO<sub>2</sub>.

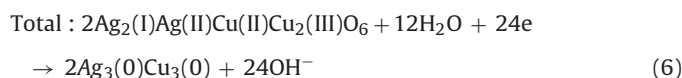
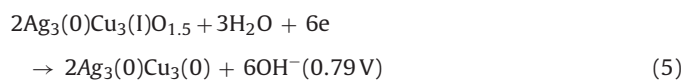
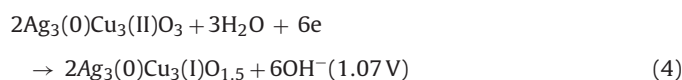
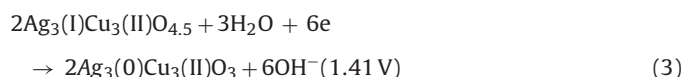
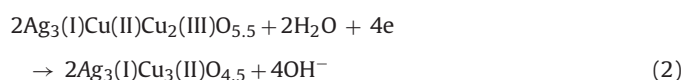
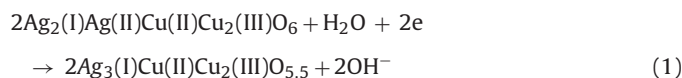
Similarly, at the succeeding potential (1.491 V) for pair C, the discharge capacity is 136.1 mAh, which might approximately be attributed to the single electron discharge capacity of Ag(I). At the lower potential of pair B and A, the discharge capacities are attributed to the processes of Cu(II) → Cu(I) and Cu(I) → Cu(0), respectively. However, they are only 72.9 mAh and 72.6 mAh respectively, showing that Cu(II) and Cu(I) of low valence ions only have a utilization rate as low as 55.4% in addition to low potential. The future study should be focused on changing grain size and creating micro-nano structure to increase the utilization rate of the active material.

In the initial oxidation period of AgCuO<sub>2</sub>, there are only Ag(0) and Cu(0) in the electrode. With increasing reaction time, Cu(I) is earlier formed on partial surface of Cu particles and resistant to the contact between conductive agent and Cu(0) inside Cu particle, leading to the fast oxidation of the new formed Cu(I) into Cu(II), meanwhile, the resultant Cu(II) is able to oxidize the Cu(0) inside particles into Cu(I) coupled with the reduction of Cu(II) itself into Cu(I) gradually through redox process. This process is embodied in the result that the electric quantity of Cu(0) → Cu(I) is far less than that of Cu(I) → Cu(II). The similar phenomenon also happens to the succeeding processes of Ag(0) → Ag(I) and Ag(I) → Ag(II).

In order to fully reflect the discharge capacity of AgCuO<sub>2</sub> in maximum extent, galvanostatic discharge tests of AgCuO<sub>2</sub> and MnO<sub>2</sub> electrodes were performed at low current density. Fig. 4 shows that AgCuO<sub>2</sub> offers 434.2 mAh g<sup>-1</sup>, but still lower than its theoretical capacity of 527 mAh g<sup>-1</sup>, meaning that the inner active material is not fully involved in the electrode reaction. However, the capacity of 434.2 mAh g<sup>-1</sup> for AgCuO<sub>2</sub> is far higher than that of 285.5 mAh g<sup>-1</sup> for MnO<sub>2</sub>, which benefits from the multi-electron reduction of AgCuO<sub>2</sub> itself. As for the super high discharge plateau, it is quite suitable to becoming a new generation of positive electrode material of alkaline batteries.

It can be seen that there occur 5 discharge plateaus at 1.67 V, 1.52 V, 1.41 V, 1.07 V and 0.79 V during discharge process.

The corresponding capacities are  $49.2 \text{ mAh g}^{-1}$ ,  $86.8 \text{ mAh g}^{-1}$ ,  $132.6 \text{ mAh g}^{-1}$ ,  $83.2 \text{ mAh g}^{-1}$  and  $82.4 \text{ mAh g}^{-1}$ , respectively. In combination with the analysis of the CV test, we believe that these discharge plateaus correspond to Ag(II) of 1/3 electron, Cu(III) of 2/3 electron, Ag(I) of 1 electron, Cu(II) of 0.63 electron and Cu(I) of 0.63 electron, respectively. It can be seen that the decrease in actual discharge capacity mainly comes from the low activity of Cu(II) and Cu(I) which are the resultants of  $\text{AgCuO}_2$  reduction and the low utilization rate. To combine the analysis of CV data, we conclude that the following reactions are involved in the discharge of  $\text{Ag}_2(\text{I})\text{Ag}(\text{II})\text{Cu}(\text{II})\text{Cu}_2(\text{III})\text{O}_6$ :



It can be seen in Fig. 4 that in the initial discharge period of Ag(II) of 1/3 electron and Cu(III) of 2/3 electron, the discharge curve presents flat, their discharge products are Ag(I) and Cu(II), respectively. In the succeeding period of  $\text{Ag}(\text{I}) \rightarrow \text{Ag}(\text{I})$ , the increase in discharge voltage is observed because Ag of good conductance is formed, leading to the increase in electrode conductance. In the low voltage stage of  $\text{Cu}(\text{II}) \rightarrow \text{Cu}(\text{I})$ , with consumption of Cu(II), the polarization is gradually increased, thus causing slight decrease in discharge voltage. During the final period of  $\text{Cu}(\text{I}) \rightarrow \text{Cu}(\text{I})$ , slight increase in voltage is presented because Cu is formed, also leading to improvement of conductivity.

In order to fully verify the redox mechanism of the  $\text{AgCuO}_2$ , the XRD analysis results for the charged  $\text{AgCuO}_2$  electrode after each reduction step at  $60 \text{ mA g}^{-1}$  are shown in Fig. 5. It can be seen that the diffraction peak at  $26.54^\circ$  of carbon appears for all curves. That results from the graphite addition for increasing the conductivity of the  $\text{AgCuO}_2$  electrode. Curve (a) is the XRD pattern of the fully charged  $\text{AgCuO}_2$  electrode. The diffraction peaks appear at  $30.91^\circ$ ,  $32.10^\circ$ ,  $37.01^\circ$ ,  $37.15^\circ$  and  $44.12^\circ$  in respect to (200), (002),  $(-111)$ ,  $(-202)$  and (111) crystal lines of  $\text{AgCuO}_2$  (PDF# 01-070-8903), which indicates that the charged product is  $\text{AgCuO}_2$ .

Curve (b) shows the X-ray diffraction pattern for  $\text{AgCuO}_2$  after the first discharging platform (1.67 V). It can be seen that a little amount of  $\text{Ag}(\text{I})_2\text{O}$ , which may come from the reduction of Ag(II), is generated in the sample. That indicates a part of Ag in  $\text{AgCuO}_2$  has expressed the characteristics of Ag(II). In addition, it is also observed that the diffraction peaks at  $33.50^\circ$ ,  $34.77^\circ$

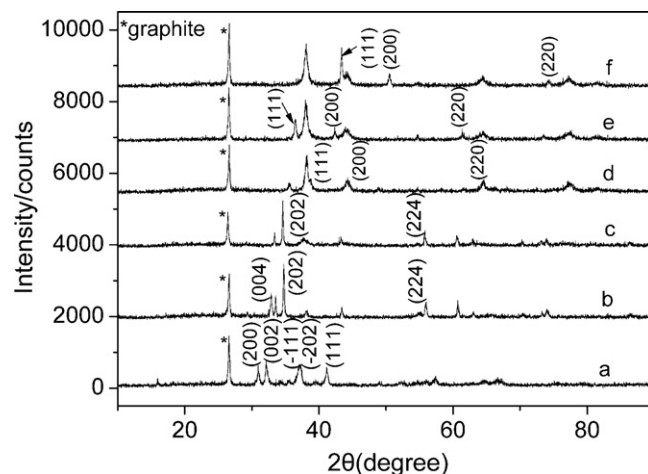


Fig. 5. The XRD patterns for the charged  $\text{AgCuO}_2$  electrode after each reduction step at low current density of  $60 \text{ mA g}^{-1}$ . (a) Fully charged  $\text{AgCuO}_2$  electrode; (b) the reduction product after discharging at 1.67 V; (c) the product after discharging at 1.52 V; (d) after discharging at 1.41 V; (e) after discharging at 1.07 V; (f) after discharging at 0.79 V.

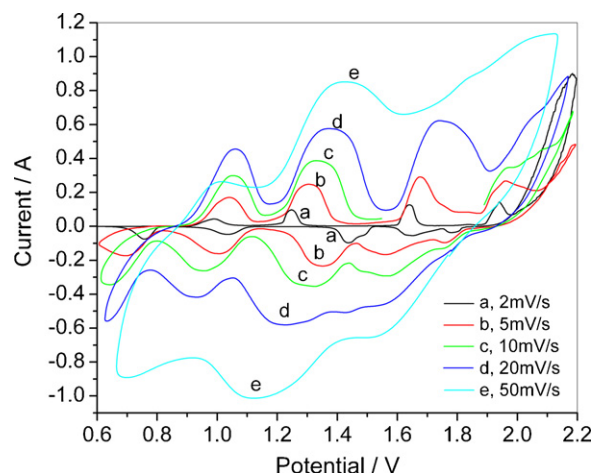


Fig. 6. The CV curves of  $\text{AgCuO}_2$  electrode at different scan rate.

and  $55.90^\circ$  correspond to (004), (202) and (224) crystal lines of  $\text{Ag}_2\text{Cu}_2\text{O}_3$  (PDF#01-073-6753) respectively, indicating that a part of the Cu(III) in  $\text{AgCuO}_2$  is reduced to Cu(II). That demonstrates the reduction process of  $\text{AgCuO}_2$  is a mixed process. Curve (c) is the XRD pattern for  $\text{AgCuO}_2$  after the second discharge platform (1.52 V). It

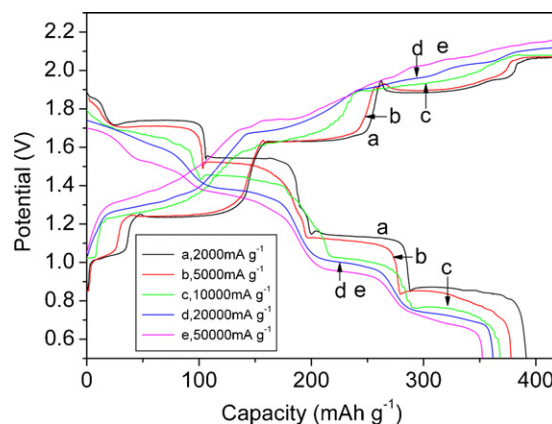


Fig. 7. The charge/discharge property of  $\text{AgCuO}_2$  electrodes.

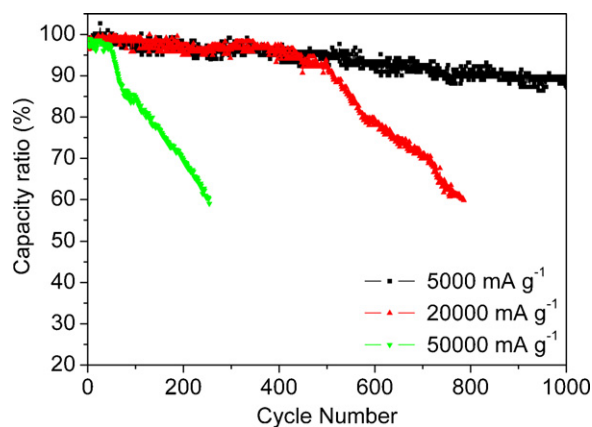


Fig. 8. The cycle property of AgCuO<sub>2</sub> electrodes under different charge/discharge speed.

is observed that the main reduction product is Ag<sub>2</sub>Cu<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>, which indicates the AgCuO<sub>2</sub> electrode continues to form Ag<sub>2</sub>Cu<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> on the discharge platform of 1.52 V. Curve (d) shows the X-ray diffraction pattern for AgCuO<sub>2</sub> after the third discharge platform (1.41 V). The diffraction peaks appear at 38.12°, 44.28° and 64.45°, corresponding to (1 1 1), (2 0 0) and (2 2 0) crystal lines of Ag(0) respectively. And the peaks at 35.54° and 38.75° correspond to Cu(II)O. Thus it is concluded that the corresponding reduction product is Ag(0) and Cu(II) at this stage. Curve (e) is the XRD pattern for the AgCuO<sub>2</sub> electrode after the fourth discharge platform (1.07 V). Compared with curve (d), the new diffraction peaks appear at 36.42°, 42.31° and 61.38°, corresponding to the (1 1 1), (2 0 0) and (2 2 0) crystal lines of Cu<sub>2</sub>O respectively. So the electrochemical reaction on the platform may be involved in Ag(0) + Cu(II)O → Ag(0) + Cu(I)<sub>2</sub>O. Curve (f) is the XRD pattern for the AgCuO<sub>2</sub> electrode after the fifth discharge platform (0.79 V). It can be seen that the new diffraction peaks at 43.34°, 50.48° and 74.17° correspond to the (1 1 1), (2 0 0) and (2 2 0) crystal lines of Cu(0) respectively. Thus the electrochemical reaction at this stage is involved in Ag(0) + Cu(I)<sub>2</sub>O → Ag(0) + Cu(0).

Fig. 6 demonstrates CV curves of AgCuO<sub>2</sub> at various scan rates. With increasing scan rate from 2 mV s<sup>-1</sup> to 50 mV s<sup>-1</sup>, oxidation peak of AgCuO<sub>2</sub> increases. It is found that when scan rate reaches 50 mV s<sup>-1</sup>, the anodic scan is shortened to 32 s, the charge process is finished in such a short time and a capacity of 337.2 mAh g<sup>-1</sup> is offered, showing excellent charge/discharge ability in extra short time. Therefore, a galvanical charge/discharge curve was measured at 2000–50,000 mA g<sup>-1</sup> at super high speed. The result is shown in Fig. 7. It can be seen that with increasing charge/discharge current, the charge/discharge plateau of AgCuO<sub>2</sub> still presents flat and keeps relatively stable although cycling capacity slightly decays from 391 mAh g<sup>-1</sup> (2000 mA g<sup>-1</sup>) to 352 mAh g<sup>-1</sup> (50,000 mA g<sup>-1</sup>). Obviously, the waiting time is considerably shortened, from 12.6 min at 2000 mA g<sup>-1</sup> to 29 s at 50,000 mA g<sup>-1</sup>. We think that the super high speed ability benefits from the duplex ability of transfer electron on the one hand and from its open structure form of layered and nano linear structure on the other hand, which favors the fast exchange and transfer of electrons and ions in charge/discharge process.

We have noticed that although AgCuO<sub>2</sub> has good electrochemical property and charge/discharge ability at 50,000 mA g<sup>-1</sup>, the electrode still undergoes polarization. The polarization and high current (9.55 mg at 477.5 mA) generate obvious heat, thus shortening its cycle life. So cycle life was also measured at 5000–50,000 mA g<sup>-1</sup>. As can be seen in Fig. 8, AgCuO<sub>2</sub> electrode retains 87% cycling capacity at 5000 mA g<sup>-1</sup> after 1000 cycles. When the current density increases from 20,000 mA g<sup>-1</sup> to 50,000 mA g<sup>-1</sup>, the cycle life decreases from 786 to 253 cycles, respectively. We found that the electrolyte temperature rose from 30 °C to 52 °C in the process of charge and discharge, and large amount of oxygen was generated on the positive electrode at the late charging stage simultaneously. The joule heat generated by large current and oxygen releasing caused the volatilization of water in KOH electrolyte and then led to partial drought of the electrode, inhibiting the active substances of this part of electrode from full participation in the electrode reaction, thus decreasing the charge–discharge capacity. The latest mathematic model shows that the life span of the electrode is able to be shortened from the existing 29 s down to 7.3 s, meaning that the charge process of power batteries made of AgCuO<sub>2</sub> can be completed instantaneously.

#### 4. Conclusions

It is demonstrated that AgCuO<sub>2</sub> presents thorn-ball form composed of one-dimension nano-meter linear crystals. CV tests indicate that the charge/discharge process of AgCuO<sub>2</sub> is not the single electron transfer for Cu(III) but the fast dual electron transfer for Ag(II) and Cu(III). The super high speed ability of charge/discharge makes the charge or discharge time of the AgCuO<sub>2</sub> electrode shorter than 29 s, which will make it possible to replenish energy as fast as refilling fuel vehicles in the future.

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