



Short communication

## Oxygen adsorption on the Ag/La<sub>1-x</sub>Sr<sub>x</sub>MnO<sub>3</sub>(001) catalysts surfaces: A first-principles study

Yongjun Zhou<sup>a,b</sup>, Zhe Lü<sup>a,\*</sup>, Bo Wei<sup>a</sup>, Xingbao Zhu<sup>a</sup>, Xiqiang Huang<sup>a</sup>, Wei Jiang<sup>a</sup>, Wenhui Su<sup>a</sup><sup>a</sup> Center for the Condensed Matter Science and Technology, Department of Physics, Harbin Institute of Technology, Harbin 150001, China<sup>b</sup> College of natural sciences, Shenyang Aerospace University, Shenyang 110034, China

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## ABSTRACT

The oxygen adsorption on Ag/LSM(001) catalysts surfaces has been investigated using first-principles density functional theory calculations. The most favorable oxygen adsorption sites are found to be atop surface Mn atoms on the MnO<sub>2</sub>-terminated surface and on the hollow positions of the La(Sr)O-terminated LSM(001) surface. The calculated adsorption energies for Ag atom demonstrate that the Ag adsorption at O site is much more favorable than Mn site. The atomic relaxation results indicate that Ag doping produces a strong local perturbation and a large effect on the surface properties. No significant improvement for oxygen adsorption is found due to Ag doping. However, the O<sub>2</sub> adsorption energy increases from 0.495 eV to 0.937 eV due to the pre-adsorbed Ag. It is pre-adsorbed Ag that facilitates O<sub>2</sub> adsorption on surface. The bond length and bond population of O<sub>2</sub> molecule indicate that Ag atom facilitates O<sub>2</sub> molecule dissociative adsorption. The adsorbed Ag on LSM strengthens its activity as SOFCs cathode by acting as an active center at the surface.

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### 1. Introduction

Solid oxide fuel cells (SOFCs) have attracted considerable attention due to their high energy conversion efficiency and excellent fuel flexibility [1–4]. Sr-doped LaMnO<sub>3</sub> (La<sub>1-x</sub>Sr<sub>x</sub>MnO<sub>3</sub>, hereafter denoted as LSM) is one of the extensively studied perovskite-type cathode materials for SOFCs due to its excellent electrocatalytic activity for the oxygen reduction reaction at high temperatures, good electronic conductivity, and chemical stability at operating conditions [5–7]. Nevertheless, the high operating temperature (800–1000 °C) causes some problems (i.e. high cost; enhanced aging, etc.). Lowering the operating temperature, however, decreases the power density of SOFCs due to decreasing catalytic activity. To make SOFCs economically competitive, the development of optimal cathode materials with high catalytic activity at lower temperatures (i.e. 500–800 °C) has been an active research topic. One way to overcome this limitation may be to increase catalytic activity of the cathode for oxygen reduction and improve the performance of the cathode by adding noble metals (Ag, Pd, Pt) to the cathode. Silver is a potential component for the cathode in SOFCs operated at less than 800 °C due to its good catalytic activity, high electrical conductivity and relatively low cost [8]. According to recent experiments [9–12], Ag/LSM system has

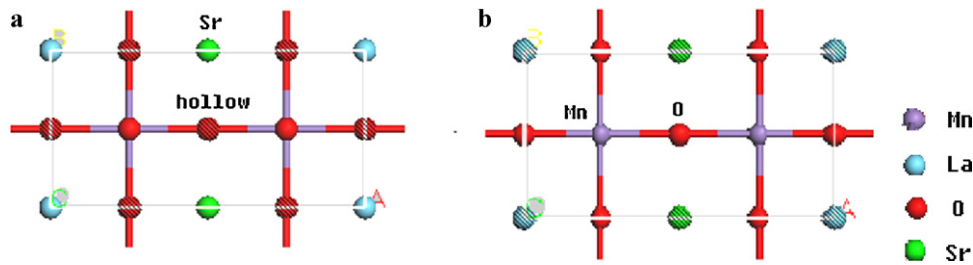
also been reported to be a prominent catalyst for the oxygen reduction reaction in SOFCs applications.

The cathodic reaction comprises the adsorption of oxygen molecule on the surface, followed by surface or bulk diffusion toward the electrolyte, charges transfer and ion incorporation into the electrolyte. Recently, density functional theory (DFT) study method [13–16] has proved to be a powerful tool to elucidate reaction mechanism as the technique can provide electronic structure, geometrical parameters and adsorbed intermediate species. Branda et al. [17] and Tang et al. [18] investigated the properties of Ag adsorbed on the CeO<sub>2</sub>(111) surface by DFT method. Similarly, Wang et al. [19] systematically examined the reduction processes of oxygen molecule adsorbed on the Ag/CeO<sub>2</sub> surface, implying that oxygen molecules prefer being reduced at triple-phase boundary (TPB).

However, the Ag/LSM system is less studied compared with the cases of Ag/CeO<sub>2</sub>. No theoretical investigation so far has been carried out about the oxygen adsorption on Ag/LSM(001) catalysts surfaces in the literature. Elucidating the mechanisms of oxygen reduction on Ag/LSM(001) catalysts surfaces is beneficial for understanding the limitations of the currently used materials in SOFCs technology and aiding the development of higher performance materials.

In the present paper, we report the oxygen adsorption mechanisms on Ag/LSM(001) catalyst surfaces using first-principles calculations based on DFT and pseudopotential method. First, adsorption properties for O<sub>2</sub> molecule on both MnO<sub>2</sub>-LSM(001)

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +86 451 86418420; fax: +86 451 86418420.  
E-mail address: lvzhe@hit.edu.cn (Z. Lü).



**Fig. 1.** Schematic top view of oxygen possible adsorption sites: the La(Sr)O-terminated LSM(001) surface (a) and the MnO<sub>2</sub>-terminated LSM(001) surface (b). Hatched denote atoms in the subsurface plane.

and La(Sr)O-LSM(001) terminal surface are extensively investigated. Second, the electronic properties of interaction between Ag atom and MnO<sub>2</sub>-terminated surface are calculated. Finally, a comparison study of the oxygen adsorption mechanisms for pre-adsorbed and doped Ag on MnO<sub>2</sub>-terminated surface is carried out, which provides a new direction for improving electrocatalysis.

## 2. Computational method

We carry out first-principles calculation using CASTEP code [20], which uses the plane-wave pseudopotential total energy calculation method based on the DFT. The interaction between nuclei and electrons is approximated with Vanderbilt ultrasoft pseudopotential [21] and the Wang and Perdew [19,22] parametrization is taken as the exchange-correlation functional in the generalized-gradient approximation. After test calculation, kinetic energy cutoff at 420 eV and the Brillouin zone sampling  $2 \times 3 \times 1$  Monkhorst–Pack [23] *k*-points for surface is adopted. By further increasing the kinetic energy cutoff and the number of *k*-points the change in the results could be neglected. La, Mn, Sr, O, Ag atoms are described by  $11(5s^25p^65d^16s^2)$ ,  $7(3d^54s^2)$ ,  $10(4s^24p^65s^2)$ ,  $6(2s^22p^4)$ ,  $11(4d^{10}5s^1)$  valence electrons, respectively. A relaxation is performed for the constructed supercell by using Broyden–Fletcher–Goldfarb–Shanno algorithm [24] to minimize the energy with respect to atomic position. In calculations the tolerances for self-consistency are set at  $1.0 \times 10^{-6}$  eV atom<sup>-1</sup> for total energy,  $0.05$  eV Å<sup>-1</sup> for force,  $2.0 \times 10^{-5}$  eV atom<sup>-1</sup> for band energy,  $0.1$  GPa for maximum stress and  $0.002$  Å for the maximum displacement. We chose the spin-polarized method to properly describe the magnetic property of LSM and the triplet ground state of oxygen [25–27]. Under SOFCs operation conditions LaMnO<sub>3</sub>(LMO) is paramagnetic ( $T_N = 140$  K). We perform all calculations for the ferromagnetic (FM) configuration because FM configuration of LSM is more stable than the anti-ferromagnetic (AFM) configuration [14].

According to Hund's rule, the lowest energy corresponds to the maximal spin projection on the Mn<sup>3+</sup> ion ( $S_z = 2$ , four spin-up *d* electrons occupy *t*<sub>2g</sub> and *e*<sub>g</sub> levels). In this study, we consider cubic perovskite structure of pm3m since the LMO-based cathode materials has a cubic structure under SOFCs operating conditions [28,29]. We calculate cubic phase of LSM-based crystals doped with Sr, substituting for La atoms. Fig. 1 shows a schematic top view of possible oxygen adsorption sites on the La(Sr)O-LSM(001) slab with Sr dopant at  $x=0.16$  in the surface plane (a) and on the MnO<sub>2</sub>-LSM(001) slab with Sr dopant in the subsurface plane (b). In SOFCs applications, LMO is usually doped 10–20% of Sr substituting for La [30].

We model the O<sub>2</sub> adsorption on a much less polar LSM(001) surface with respect to LSM(110) surface consisting of alternating MnO<sub>2</sub>/La(Sr)O plane. We find in particular that 6- and 7-plane slabs are thick enough and show main property convergence. The periodically repeated slabs are separated by a large vacuum gap of

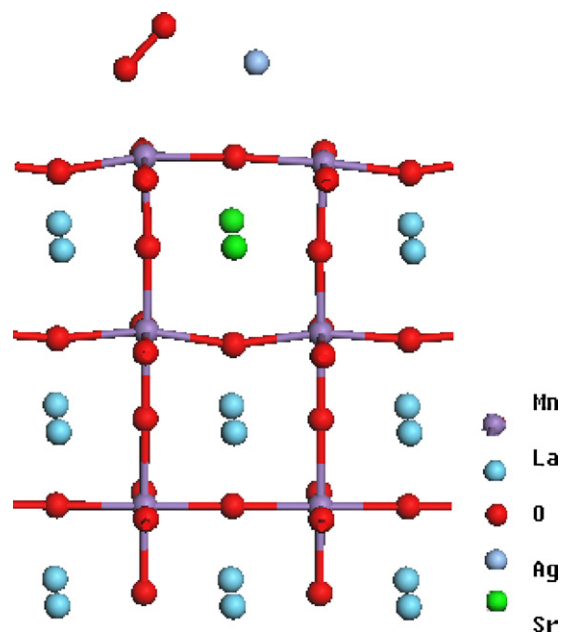
15 Å, in order to prevent an interaction between the two surfaces through the vacuum region. In the geometric optimization, only the top 3 layers are allowed to be relaxed (Fig. 2).

The adsorption energy is calculated according to  $E_{\text{ads}} = E_{[\text{O}_2]} + E_{[\text{surface}]} - E_{[\text{O}_2/\text{surface}]}$ , where  $E_{[\text{O}_2/\text{surface}]}$  and  $E_{[\text{surface}]}$  are the calculated electronic energies of bonded oxygen species on the surface and a clean surface, respectively, and  $E_{[\text{O}_2]}$  denotes the energy for triplet O<sub>2</sub>. The adsorption energy is a criterion to determine the stability of the adsorption.

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1. O<sub>2</sub> molecule adsorbed on the LSM(001) surfaces

The bulk calculations are initially performed and compared with previous calculations [31] and experimental value [32,33] to confirm that the applied parameters give confident results (Table 1). As can be seen from the calculated adsorption properties in Table 2, the O<sub>2</sub> adsorption energies for Mn site on the MnO<sub>2</sub>-terminated surface is 0.495 eV and for hollow site on the La(Sr)O-terminated surface is 0.709 eV. It can be confirmed that the most favorable oxygen adsorption sites are found to be atop surface Mn atoms on the MnO<sub>2</sub>-terminated surface and on the hollow positions of the La(Sr)O-terminated LSM(001) surface. The Mulliken charges of O<sub>2</sub> molecule are  $-0.20$  at Mn site, while it is  $-0.42$  at hollow site. The O<sub>1</sub>–O<sub>2</sub> bond length is largely stretched (O<sub>1</sub>–O<sub>2</sub> distance of 1.302 Å,



**Fig. 2.** The optimized structure of the O<sub>2</sub> adsorption on Ag pre-adsorbed LSM(001) surface.

**Table 1**  
The optimized lattice constant of bulk LaMnO<sub>3</sub> and SrMnO<sub>3</sub>.

	Lattice constant (Å)			
	WIEN-2k [31]	CRYSTAL-03	Experiment	This work
LaMnO <sub>3</sub>	3.921	3.967	3.947 <sup>a</sup>	3.978
SrMnO <sub>3</sub>	3.848	3.840	3.806 <sup>b</sup>	3.894

<sup>a</sup> Experimental data from Ref. [32].

<sup>b</sup> Experimental data from Ref. [33].

compared to the calculated equilibrium gas phase value of 1.238 Å which is slightly larger than experimental value of 1.210 Å [34]) at the hollow position of the La(Sr)O-terminated LSM(001) surface. The adsorbed molecule could be considered as a kind of the superoxo-radical (hydrogen superoxide radical HO<sub>2</sub> 1.33 Å [14]). At the same time, the bond population of O<sub>1</sub>–O<sub>2</sub> decreases to 0.34 at hollow site. Both the bond length and the bond population indicate that the adsorption of O<sub>2</sub> molecule on hollow position of the La(Sr)O-terminated surface is readily dissociated. The bond population of O<sub>1</sub>–M<sub>surf</sub> at O site is –0.01, meaning a non-covalent interaction between O<sub>2</sub> molecule and surface ion. For other adsorption sites, the bond population are positive, which indicates the covalent bonds are formed between O<sub>2</sub> molecule and surface ion.

### 3.2. Main electronic properties for Ag adsorption and doping on LSM(001) surface

The Ag adsorption properties are investigated and the results are listed in Table 3. We consider two different sites on MnO<sub>2</sub>-terminated surface (Fig. 1b): Mn site and O site. Because the surface is attractive for the oxygen incorporation process due to smaller oxygen vacancy formation energy [7]. We find that Ag adsorption at O site is much more favorable ( $E_{ad} = 2.091$  eV) than Mn site ( $E_{ad} = 1.736$  eV), which are similar to the value of Ag adsorbed on CeO<sub>2</sub>(111) surface [17]. The effective charges of the structure are obtained by Mulliken charges analysis. The Mulliken charges of Ag are 0.11 at O site, while this number is reduced to 0.05 at Mn site. Compared to pure surface, the Ag adsorption introduces charge transfer, especially the charges of Mn atom in the topmost plane decrease from 0.86 to 0.64, 0.76, respectively. The bond populations of Ag–Mn<sub>s</sub> and Ag–O<sub>s</sub> reach 0.29 and 0.12, which demonstrate that covalent bonds between Ag and surface ion are formed.

**Table 2**  
Calculated adsorption properties for O<sub>2</sub> molecule on LSM(001) surface.

Ads. site	$E_{ads}$ (eV)	Distance (Å)		Charges		Bond population	
		O <sub>1</sub> –O <sub>2</sub> <sup>a</sup>	O <sub>1</sub> –M <sub>surf</sub> <sup>b</sup>	O <sub>1</sub>	O <sub>2</sub>	O <sub>1</sub> –M <sub>surf</sub>	O <sub>1</sub> –O <sub>2</sub>
MnO <sub>2</sub> -LSM(001)							
O	0.072	1.242	2.982	0.00	–0.04	–0.01	0.40
Mn	0.495	1.270	2.000	–0.12	–0.08	0.11	0.42
La(Sr)O-LSM(001)							
Sr	0.584	1.274	2.443	–0.23	–0.06	0.21	0.37
Hollow	0.709	1.302	2.595	–0.28	–0.14	0.26	0.34

<sup>a</sup> O<sub>1</sub> atom nearest to the surface, O<sub>2</sub> atom far to the surface.

<sup>b</sup> O<sub>1</sub>–M<sub>surf</sub> correspond to the distance between O<sub>1</sub> and the nearest surface atoms.

**Table 3**  
Calculated adsorption properties for Ag atom on LSM(001) surface.

Ads. site	$E_{ads}$ (eV)	Distance (Å)		Charges			Bond population	
		Ag–O <sub>s</sub> <sup>a</sup>	Ag–Mn <sub>s</sub>	Ag	O <sub>s</sub>	Mn <sub>s</sub>	Ag–O <sub>s</sub>	Ag–Mn <sub>s</sub>
Mn	1.736	3.381	2.667	0.05	–0.70	0.64	–	0.29
O	2.091	2.228	2.957	0.11	–0.74	0.76	0.12	0.06

<sup>a</sup> O<sub>s</sub> atom on the surface, Mn<sub>s</sub> atom on the surface.

Due to the very close ionic radii of Ag<sup>+</sup> (0.126 nm), La<sup>3+</sup> (0.106 nm) and Sr<sup>2+</sup> (0.113 nm) [11], a certain amount of the Ag<sup>+</sup> doped onto the LSM(001) surface could partially replace La<sup>3+</sup> and Sr<sup>2+</sup>, and occupy the A-sites in the perovskite lattice, as reported by some experiments [35–37]. We construct doped Ag in the sub-surface plane based on the pure LMO(001) surface model. The introduction of Ag ions substituting for La ions in the second plane produces a strong local perturbation. The dopant Ag atom relaxes toward the surface, forming the vacancy and interstitial Ag. In order to compare the calculated surface structure, the amplitudes of surface rumpling defined as the relative displacement of O atoms with respect to Mn atoms in the surface layer [38]. Analysis of surface relaxation shows a considerable rumpling ( $s = 0.236$ , approximately 5.9% of  $a_0$ ) compared to the pure LMO ( $s = 0.178$  is in agreement with the literature [39], which could be checked by means of LEED experiments) surface structure. O ions of the MnO<sub>2</sub>-terminated surface strongly move outward (0.159 Å), while surface Mn ions move inward (0.077 Å) toward the slab center. On the MnO<sub>2</sub>-terminated surfaces both O and Mn ions become additionally more positive by 0.04 and 0.08, respectively. These indicate that the doping of Ag has very large effect on the surface properties.

### 3.3. The catalytic effect of Ag in the O<sub>2</sub> adsorption of LSM(001) surface

For the doping, the O<sub>2</sub> adsorption energy at Mn site is calculated with respect to Ag substituting for La in the second plane. The value is 0.102 eV, much smaller than the adsorption on pure LMO surface ( $E_{ad} = 0.298$  eV) and LSM surface ( $E_{ad} = 0.495$  eV). The increased O<sub>2</sub> molecule bond population (0.42 vs. 0.40 for LMO) and relatively long distance of O<sub>ads</sub>–Mn<sub>s</sub> (2.094 Å vs. 2.000 Å for LMO) also indicate that no significant improvement for oxygen adsorption is found due to Ag doping.

For pre-adsorbed Ag, the catalytic effect for O<sub>2</sub> adsorption on MnO<sub>2</sub>-terminated surface is investigated. We construct a surface model with O<sub>2</sub> molecule adsorbed Mn site and Ag atom adsorbed O site and simulate three-phase boundary area for oxygen reduction reaction (Fig. 2). The adsorption energy dramatically increases from 0.495 eV to 0.937 eV due to pre-adsorbed Ag. It is pre-adsorbed Ag that facilitates O<sub>2</sub> adsorption.

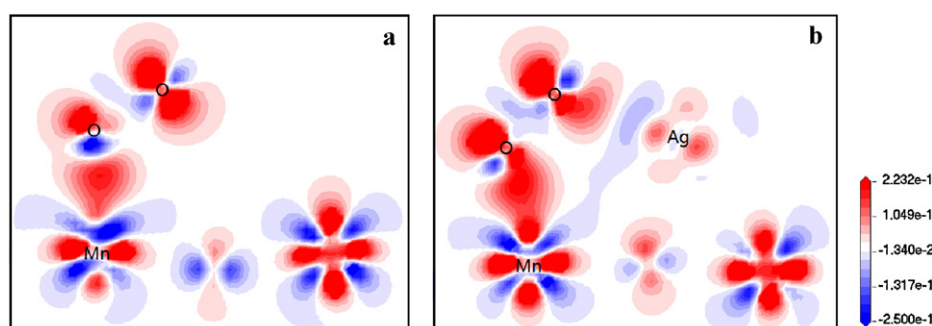
As can be seen from Table 4, an important consequence of adsorption at the interface is that the bond length of O<sub>2</sub> molecule increases from 1.270 Å to 1.370 Å and the bond population of O<sub>1</sub>–O<sub>2</sub>

**Table 4**  
Comparative O<sub>2</sub> adsorption properties on LSM(001) surface with and without Ag pre-adsorbed.

	$E_{\text{ads}}$ (eV)	Distance (Å)		Charges				Bond population	
		O <sub>1</sub> –O <sub>2</sub>	O <sub>1</sub> –Mn <sub>s</sub>	O <sub>1</sub>	O <sub>2</sub>	Mn <sub>s</sub>	Ag	O <sub>1</sub> –O <sub>2</sub>	O <sub>1</sub> –Mn <sub>s</sub>
No Ag pre-adsorbed	0.495	1.270	2.000	–0.12	–0.08	0.92/0.87	–	0.42	0.11
Ag pre-adsorbed	0.937	1.370	2.045	–0.17	–0.24	0.89/0.76	0.51	0.37	0.21

**Table 5**  
Calculated O atom adsorption properties on Ag/MnO<sub>2</sub>-terminated surface.

Ads. site	$E_{\text{ads}}$ (eV)	Distance (Å)		Charges			Bond population	
		O–Mn <sub>s</sub>	O–Ag	O	Mn <sub>s</sub>	Ag	O–Mn <sub>s</sub>	O–Ag
Mn	0.934	1.749	2.193	–0.49	0.82	0.42	0.52	0.26
Hollow	0.475	–	2.006	–0.62	0.81	0.54	–	0.81

**Fig. 3.** Difference electron density maps highlighting the electron charge density redistribution due to the Ag pre-adsorption for the (a) without Ag adsorption and (b) with Ag adsorption. Red and blue colors have been used to represent accumulation and depletion of charge, respectively. (For interpretation of the references to color in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of the article.)

decreases from 0.42 to 0.37, which demonstrate that pre-adsorbed Ag atom facilitates O<sub>2</sub> molecule dissociate to O atoms, thus contributing to the surface oxygen diffusion process. The charges of O<sub>2</sub> molecule increase from 0.20 to 0.41 and the bond population of O<sub>1</sub>–Mn<sub>s</sub> increases from 0.11 to 0.21, implying that ionic bond and covalent bond of adsorption molecule and surface ions become strong apparently. The Mulliken population analysis results are nicely supported by the change of electron density. The different charge density is constructed by subtracting the electronic densities of O<sub>2</sub>/LSM(001) from the densities of an O<sub>2</sub> molecule and a clean LSM(001) for Fig. 3(a) and by subtracting the electronic densities of O<sub>2</sub>/Ag/LSM(001) from the densities of an O<sub>2</sub> molecule and a clean Ag/LSM(001) for Fig. 3(b). In this way, the presentation highlights the charge rearrangement upon bond formation and more obvious electron density accumulation in the O–Mn bonding regions compared to without pre-adsorbed Ag. So the silver is highly active for adsorption and dissociation of oxygen species. This may strengthen LSM substrate activity due to pre-adsorbed Ag and active center is formed in surface, which enhances the electrocatalytic activity of LSM as SOFCs cathode materials at low temperature.

Along with the O<sub>2</sub> molecule adsorption, the adsorption properties for O atom on Ag/LSM(001) surface are calculated. Table 5 shows a strong preference for O atom adsorption over the Ag/LSM(001) surface Mn ion, which is in agreement with the pure LSM(001) surface [15,40]. The bond population indicates that stronger covalent bond is formed between O atom and Ag atom. The electron charges of 0.49 are transferred to the adsorbed O atom from nearest ions, while this number is increased to 0.62 at hollow site.

#### 4. Conclusions

First-principles calculations based on DFT with pseudopotential method have been used to oxygen adsorption on the Ag/LSM(001) catalysts surface. The obtained results are given as follows:

- (1) The most favorable oxygen adsorption sites are found to be atop surface Mn atoms on the MnO<sub>2</sub>-terminated surface and on the hollow positions of the La(Sr)O-terminated LSM(001) surface.
- (2) The calculated electronic properties of interaction between Ag atom and surface demonstrate that the Ag adsorption energies at Mn, O sites are 1.736 and 2.091 eV, respectively. The Ag adsorption at O site is much more favorable than Mn site. The atomic relaxation results indicate that Ag doped in the second plane produces a strong local perturbation and a large effect on the surface properties.
- (3) No significant improvement for oxygen adsorption is found due to Ag doping. However, the O<sub>2</sub> adsorption energy increases from 0.495 eV to 0.937 eV due to pre-adsorbed Ag. It is pre-adsorbed Ag that facilitates O<sub>2</sub> adsorption. The calculated bond length and bond population of O<sub>2</sub> molecule indicate that Ag atom facilitates O<sub>2</sub> molecule dissociate to O atoms. The adsorbed Ag on LSM strengthens its activity as SOFCs cathode by acting as an active center at the surface.

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