Synthesis and Characterization of Mesoscopic Tin Oxide with Crystalline Walls

Limin Qi,* Jiming Ma, Humin Cheng, and Zhenguo Zhao

Department of Chemistry, Peking University, Beijing 100871, China

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Introduction

Shortly after the original synthesis of silica-based mesoporous molecular materials (MCM-41) with uniformly sized pores,1,2 the supramolecular templating approach was extended to the synthesis of non-siliceous mesoporous materials with desired crystalline structurally ordered walls can form in certain cases such as the case of ZrO2. In order to synthesize mesoporous materials with crystalline walls, we report on the synthesis of mesoporous SnO2 with crystalline walls would be of interest. Recently, a mesoporous phase based on SnO2 has been successfully synthesized by using an anionic surfactant aerosol OT (AOT).7 However, the obtained mesoporous SnO2 has not been shown to consist of crystalline walls. Here, we report on the synthesis of mesoporous SnO2 with crystalline walls would be of interest. The resulting solid white product was recovered by centrifugation, washed with water and acetone successively, and dried at 80 °C for 1 day. The obtained mesoporous SnO2 has been successfully synthesized by using an anionic surfactant aerosol OT (AOT).7 However, the obtained mesoporous SnO2 has not been shown to consist of crystalline walls.

Experimental Section

An anionic surfactant sodium dodecyl sulfate (SDS) was employed as a template for the synthesis of mesoporous SnO2 with crystalline walls. In a typical synthesis, SDS (1.36 g, 5 mmol) was dissolved in water (100 mL) at 40 °C and then 5 mL of 1 M aqueous SnCl4 solution was added to the SDS solution with stirring, resulting in a milky white suspension. After 5 min of stirring, the mixture was aged for 24 h at room temperature and the suspension settled slowly. The resulting solid white product was recovered by centrifugation, washed with water and acetone successively, and dried at 80 °C for 1 day. The obtained mesoporous SnO2 has been successfully synthesized by using an anionic surfactant aerosol OT (AOT).7 However, the obtained mesoporous SnO2 has not been shown to consist of crystalline walls.

Results and Discussion

As shown in Figure 1A, the XRD pattern of the SnO2 material obtained in the presence of Na2SO4 shows only a broad shoulder at low angles; however, three broad peaks

at medium angles are apparent and are assignable to the tetragonal cassiterite structure of SnO\textsubscript{2}. According to the Scherrer formula, an average SnO\textsubscript{2} crystallite size of about 1.8 nm in the (110) direction was derived from the half-height breadth of the (110) peak.\textsuperscript{21} It is worth noting that the current synthesis of nanocrystalline SnO\textsubscript{2} from SnCl\textsubscript{4} usually introduces ammonium hydroxide into the acid salt solution to induce condensation producing oxyhydroxide or oxide precipitates,\textsuperscript{21,22} whereas the spontaneous solution–sol–gel transition for pure aqueous SnCl\textsubscript{4} solution is very slow.\textsuperscript{23} In the present case, sulfate ions seem to act as a precipitation reagent to induce condensation, indicating that sulfate ions and the like, such as sulfonate ions as in the case of C\textsubscript{12}S, may have certain inherent interaction with the Sn(IV) cationic species in the acid solution.

The XRD pattern of the as-synthesized solid product obtained using C\textsubscript{12}S instead of Na\textsubscript{2}SO\textsubscript{4} is shown in Figure 1B. An intense peak at a low angle corresponding to a d spacing of 4.1 nm is present, which is relatively broad in view of the wide 2θ range of the figure, and is characteristic of a mesophase with a pore system lacking long-range order. Analogous single peak patterns corresponding to large d spacings have been observed for disordered mesoporous silica,\textsuperscript{24,25} alumina,\textsuperscript{16,17} and zirconia.\textsuperscript{10} In addition to the intense peak at large d spacing, the three broad peaks assignable to cassiterite are still present, and the intensities and breadths of these peaks are almost identical to those of the peaks in Figure 1A. This indicates that the mesostructured SnO\textsubscript{2} consists of crystalline walls, the average thickness of which is close to 1.8 nm. However, the possibility that the product is a phase mixture of cassiterite and mesostructured amorphous tin oxide cannot be excluded from this XRD pattern. The IR spectrum of the as-synthesized mesophase shows the known features of C\textsubscript{12}S, confirming the presence of the surfactant in the pores. A surfactant content of more than 15 wt % is revealed by the corresponding TGA result. After calcination at 400 °C, most organics are removed as proved by the TGA and IR results for the calcined sample. However, collapse of the mesostructure occurs during calcination, which has been suggested by the disappearance of the large d spacing peak in the XRD pattern of the calcined SnO\textsubscript{2}–C\textsubscript{12}S (Figure 1C). It has also been shown that the average crystallite size has grown to about 2.7 nm upon calcination.

A representative TEM micrograph of the SnO\textsubscript{2} synthesized without the surfactant is shown in Figure 2A, which reveals the presence of many irregularly sized nanopores. This irregular pore system may bring about a certain degree of short-range structural order and result in the presence of a broad shoulder at low angles in the XRD pattern shown in Figure 1A. The corresponding electron diffraction pattern shows that the three relatively broad fringe patterns with spacings of 0.33, 0.26, and 0.17 nm are consistent with the cassiterite structure SnO\textsubscript{2} (110), (101), (211) spacings. This result reveals that the random network surrounding the irregularly sized pores consists of SnO\textsubscript{2} nanocrystals.

In contrast to the irregularly sized pores in the SnO\textsubscript{2} synthesized without the surfactant, the SnO\textsubscript{2} synthesized in the presence of C\textsubscript{12}S shows uniformly sized pores (Figure 2B). The wall thickness as well as the pore size is measured to be approximately 2 nm, a value in good agreement with the thickness indicated by the average crystalline size. It can also be seen that the pore structure has no long-range order, which is consistent with the XRD

\textsuperscript{24}Tanev, P. T.; Pinnavaia, T. J. Science \textbf{1995}, \textit{267}, 865.
result. It is noteworthy that a short-range structural order with uniform pore sizes leads to an intense XRD peak at low angles, while a much lower short-range structural order resulting from irregular pore sizes only leads to a broad XRD shoulder at low angles. The electron diffraction pattern corresponding to the SnO$_2$–C$_{12}$S mesophase shown in Figure 2B appears to be almost identical to that corresponding to the SnO$_2$ synthesized without the surfactant. This result proves that the obtained mesostructured SnO$_2$ consists of nanocrystalline cassiterite, which forms crystalline walls, instead of amorphous tin oxide. Although it still cannot be concluded that the walls are completely composed of crystalline SnO$_2$, the possibility of the presence of amorphous SnO$_2$ seems to be rather low since the SnO$_2$ crystal formation under the present condition occurs readily. Furthermore, the fact that the intensities of the corresponding XRD peaks assignable to cassiterite are almost identical to those corresponding to the SnO$_2$ obtained without the template strongly indicates that the formation of the SnO$_2$–C$_{12}$S mesophase has not impeded the crystal formation of SnO$_2$.

As shown in Figure 2C, the calcined SnO$_2$–C$_{12}$S is composed of grains and holes, which are very irregular in size. The grain sizes of about 2–5 nm are considerably larger than the wall thickness of the as-synthesized SnO$_2$–C$_{12}$S, which indicates a crystalline size increase upon calcination, confirming the corresponding XRD result. It has been reported that the crystalline size of nanocrystalline SnO$_2$ readily increases upon calcination even at annealing temperatures lower than 400 °C. This may contribute to the collapse of the SnO$_2$ mesostructure upon surfactant removal during calcination. It appears that although the SnO$_2$ crystal formation at room temperature does not become considerable obstacles in obtaining mesostructured SnO$_2$, the SnO$_2$ crystal growth upon calcination does become remarkable obstacles in obtaining stable mesoporous SnO$_2$. Thus, surfactant removal by methods other than calcination seems more promising, and such efforts are currently in progress.

Further information about the microstructure of the as-synthesized SnO$_2$–C$_{12}$S mesophase is provided by HRTEM investigation. As shown in Figure 3A, many crystals ranging in width from less than 2 to about 3 nm show clear tetragonal SnO$_2$ lattice fringes. These nanocrystals connect each other to form crystalline walls, in which are many pores filled with amorphous material probably corresponding to the surfactant. However, due to the random ordering of the pores and the overlapping of the nanocrystalline walls, it is extremely difficult to see evenly distributed, uniformly sized pores in HRTEM images even though different focus planes are used. Figure 3B presents an enlarged HRTEM image showing a single pore about 2 nm in size, which is indicated by the arrow in Figure 3A. The pore apparently filled with amorphous surfactant is surrounded by a crystalline wall consisting of tetragonal SnO$_2$ nanocrystals. The nanocrystals connected to form the wall are randomly directed with many crystal defects present in the interface between them. The interface between the nanocrystalline wall and the enclosed amorphous area shows also disordered structure. Our HRTEM observations of the SnO$_2$ synthesized in the presence of Na$_2$SO$_4$ have shown that there are many nanocrystals connected to form a random network and the hole sizes are rather irregular, which is reminiscent of the “nanosponge structure” in the dry gel SnO$_2$. This comparison suggests that the major difference in the microstructures between the SnO$_2$ synthesized with and without the surfactant lies in the uniformity of the pore sizes. These results indicate that HRTEM is a useful method for directly examining the microstructure of mesostructured materials with crystalline walls. However, the use of HRTEM to study the wall structures and wall thickness has its limitation considering that the apparent contrast is sensitive to the photographic conditions and the electron beam could induce possible crystal grain growth.

In conclusion, a mesostructured phase based on SnO$_2$, which has randomly ordered pores and crystalline walls consisting of tetragonal SnO$_2$ nanocrystals, can be synthesized by using an anionic surfactant as template. HRTEM has been used to provide direct information about the microstructure of the mesostructured phase with crystalline walls for the first time.

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