Recent developments in nanostructured anode materials for rechargeable lithium-ion batteries

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In this paper, the use of nanostructured anode materials for rechargeable lithium-ion batteries (LIBs) is reviewed. Nanostructured materials such as nano-carbons, alloys, metal oxides, and metal sulfides/nitrides have been used as anodes for next-generation LIBs with high reversible capacity, fast power capability, good safety, and long cycle life. This is due to their relatively short mass and charge pathways, high transport rates of both lithium ions and electrons, and other extremely charming surface activities. In this review paper, the effect of the nanostructure on the electrochemical performance of these anodes is presented. Their synthesis processes, electrochemical properties, and electrode reaction mechanisms are also discussed. The major goals of this review are to give a broad overview of recent scientific researches and developments of anode materials using novel nanoscience and nanotechnology and to highlight new progresses in using these nanostructured materials to develop high-performance LIBs. Suggestions and outlooks on future research directions in this field are also given.

1. Introduction

Rechargeable lithium-ion batteries (LIBs) have been considered as the most promising energy storage system for a wide variety of applications. LIBs have revolutionized portable electronic devices including cell phones, laptops, and digital cameras with the worldwide market now valued at ten billion dollars. They are also important power sources for future electric vehicles, hybrid electric vehicles, and emerging smart grids. Rechargeable LIBs offer energy densities 2-3 times and power densities 5-6 times higher than Ni–MH, Ni–Cd, and Pb acid batteries. Rechargeable LIBs have many other advantages such as long cycle life, low self-discharge, high operating voltage, wide temperature window, and no “memory effect”. Nowadays, rechargeable LIBs are constructed with various shapes (e.g., cylindrical, coin, or prismatic shapes) by employing different electrode materials.

The charge/discharge mechanism of LIBs is based on the rocking-chair concept. A typical LIB consists of a cathode (e.g., LiCoO2) and an anode (e.g., graphite), together with an electrolyte-filled separator that allows lithium (Li) ion transfer but prevents electrodes from direct contact (Fig. 1). When the battery is charging, Li deintercalates from the cathode and intercalates into the anode. Conversely, Li intercalates into the cathode via the electrolyte during discharging. During charge/discharge, Li ions flow between the anode and the cathode, enabling the conversion of chemical energy into electrical energy and the storage of electrochemical energy within the battery. The chemical reactions involved in a typical LIB cell are described as follows:

Broader context

Recent progresses in advanced nanoscience and nanotechnology have presented the opportunity to design a series of novel nanostructured anode materials for next-generation high-performance rechargeable lithium-ion batteries (LIBs). Nanostructure-based anodes offer controllable surface area, short mass and charge diffusion distance, and high freedom for volume change during charge-discharge cycles, and hence they can improve the energy density, life cycle and rate capability of LIBs. The major goals of this review article are to highlight the new progresses in using these nanostructured materials as anode electrodes to develop LIBs with high energy density, high rate capability, and excellent cycling stability, and to give a broad picture of recent scientific research in the developments of anode materials from nanoscience and nanotechnology.
Anode:

\[ 6C + xLi^+ + xe^- \leftrightarrow Li_x C_6 \]  

Cathode:

\[ LiCoO_2 \leftrightarrow Li_{1-x} CoO_2 + xLi^+ + xe^- \]  

The performance of rechargeable LIBs depends on active materials employed for Li storage in the electrodes. The basic requirements for active materials include high reversible capacity, good structural flexibility and stability, fast Li ion diffusion, long cycle life, improved safety, low cost, and environmental benignity.\(^{21-23}\) In commercial LIBs, cathodes are mainly made from Li-ion host materials possessing high positive redox potentials such as LiCoO\(_2\), LiMn\(_2\)O\(_4\), and recently LiFePO\(_4\).\(^{24-26}\) Graphite is the most used commercial anode material for LIBs because of its low and flat working potential, long cycle life, and low cost. However, the most Li-enriched intercalation compound of graphite has a stoichiometry of LiC\(_6\), resulting in a less-than-desirable theoretical charge capacity (372 mAh g\(^{-1}\)) and a small practical energy density.\(^{27,28}\) Furthermore, the Li-ion transport rates of graphite anodes are always less than 10\(^{-6}\) cm\(^2\) s\(^{-1}\), which results in a low power density of the battery since the chemical diffusion coefficient of Li ions is related to the power density of the battery.\(^{29}\)

In order to improve the energy and power densities of LIBs, the use of anode materials with larger capacities and higher Li diffusion rates is required. Different microscale materials such as pyrolytic carbons, alloys, and metal oxides have been developed as anodes for LIBs. However, further advances in current LIBs...
are bottlenecked by limitations associated with these microscale materials such as small surface areas, slow solid-state Li diffusion rates, high electronic resistances, and poor shape flexibilities along with huge morphological and structural changes during charge-discharge processes. As a result, current microscale structured anode materials still suffer from poor cycling stability and unsatisfactory charge/discharge capacities, especially at high current rates. Recent progresses in electrochemistry, nanotechnology, and solid state chemistry have led to the application of nanomaterials for efficient energy storage in high-performance LIBs because of their unique morphologies and structures. Nanomaterials with large surface areas and numerous active sites can be developed to increase the anode capacities and subsequently energy densities of the batteries due to their large spaces and active sites for Li intercalation/deintercalation reactions. In addition, nanomaterial-based electrodes with stable and thin solid electrolyte interface (SEI) films and large electrode/electrolyte contact areas can increase the charge-discharge rates and subsequently power densities because of their effective transfer pathways for both Li ions and electrons. Nanomaterials with flexible structures can also be developed to improve the cycling performance due to sufficient free spaces to relax the large volume changes during continuous charge/discharge reactions. Furthermore, nanostructured composite anode materials containing conductive matrices, such as carbon components, can decrease the interface resistances leading to higher specific capacities at high charge/discharge rates.50–57

There have been many review articles on rechargeable LIBs,18–46 however, there are few comprehensive reviews to cover a large variety of nanostructured anode materials. This review article aims to meet this need by summarizing recent progresses in the synthesis and characterization of nanostructured anode materials for rechargeable LIBs, primarily focusing on nanocarbons, alloys, metal oxides, and metal sulfides/nitrides. For each material, the basic structural and electrochemical properties are described firstly, and then different synthesis approaches and strategies are discussed to indicate how to control the nanostructures and how to improve the electrochemical performance. The electrochemical performance characteristics such as charge/discharge capacity, cycling performance, and rate capability, are discussed for each nanostructured anode material. An overlook on future developments is also presented.

2. Nano-carbons

Carbonaceous materials, especially graphite, are the most used anode materials for rechargeable LIBs. They can avoid the problem of Li dendrite formation by reversible intercalation of Li into carbon host lattice, and this provides good cyclability and safety for LIB anodes. However, graphite has a limited theoretical capacity of 372 mAh g⁻¹ since the most Li-enriched intercalation compound of graphite only has a stoichiometry of LiC₆. To increase the energy and power densities of LIBs, nanostructured carbonaceous anode materials, such as one-dimensional (1D), two-dimensional (2D), and porous carbon-based anodes, have been developed to create more active spaces or sites for Li storage.

2.1. One-dimensional carbon

The development of 1D nanostructured carbon materials, such as nanotubes, nanowires, and nanofibers, for high-performance LIBs is stimulated by their high surface-to-volume ratios and excellent surface activities. Shortly after the discovery of carbon nanotubes (CNTs),57 researchers studied the interactions of Li vapor with CNTs and measured the corresponding electrochemical properties.48 It was found that CNTs can offer Li intercalation between pseudo-graphitic layers and/or inside central tubes. The small diameters of CNTs can impose strain on the planar bonds of the hexagon. This strain causes de-localization of electrons and makes the structure more electropositive than regular graphitic sheets, which in return increases the degree of Li intercalation. Therefore, the reversible capacity of anodes made from CNTs can exceed 460 mAh g⁻¹ and reach up to 1116 mAh g⁻¹ by various post-treatments such as ball milling,49 acid oxidation,50 and metal oxide cutting.51 The relatively high capacity of CNTs represents a dramatic improvement over graphite; however, the Coulombic efficiency of CNTs was found to be low compared with that of graphite due to the introduction of large structure defects52 and high voltage hysteresis.53 Various CNTs have been used as anodes for rechargeable LIBs, such as bamboo-shaped CNTs54 and CNTs with a quadrangular cross section (q-CNTs).55 The Columbic efficiency of these anodes was improved by the high Li intercalation on the CNT walls, fast electron transfer rate, and the large number of electroactive sites.56–59

Carbon nanofibers (CNFs), which were synthesized by many methods such as chemical vapor deposition, arc-discharge, template deposition, laser ablation, and electrospinning, have also been used as anodes for rechargeable LIBs.50–63 Unlike CNTs, which require a long diffusion time for Li intercalation/deintercalation, a large amount of defects in CNFs such as lattice and surface defects along the fiber length are expected to

![Fig. 1 Schematic operating principle of a typical rechargeable LIBs.](Image)
promote fast Li intercalation/deintercalation. More recently, CNF-based anodes were also prepared using the simple and low cost electrospinning technique and subsequent carbonization processes. Electrosprun CNF anode materials can deliver a relatively large reversible capacity of approximately 450 mAh g\(^{-1}\) at 30 mA g\(^{-1}\). Zhang’s group improved the electrochemical performance of CNFs by preparing porous CNFs via the electrospinning/carbonization process combined with chemical treatments. These porous CNFs had much higher specific surface area and larger pore volume than non-porous CNF anodes. The porous structure improved Li ion diffusion at the electrolyte-electrode interface and added freedom for volume change associated with Li intercalation.

### 2.2. Two dimensional carbon

Graphene, a novel 2D aromatic monolayer of honeycomb carbon lattice, has also attracted attention for use as an anode material in rechargeable LIBs because of its fascinating physical, chemical, and mechanical properties, such as ultrahigh surface area, intriguing electronic and thermal conductivities, structural flexibility, unique porous structure, and broad electrochemical window. In addition, graphene has a considerable Li-storage ability, since Li can be bound not only on both sides of graphene sheets, but also on the edges, defects, disorders, and covalent sites of graphene nanoplatelets. Therefore, it is expected by many researchers that graphene and graphene-based nanocomposites can overtake its 3D counterpart (graphite) for enhanced Li storage in rechargeable LIBs. Recently, electrochemical Li intercalation in graphene materials has been explored by several research groups. For example, Song et al. used chemically prepared graphenes as anodes for rechargeable LIBs to evaluate their electrochemical behavior. These 2D carbon anodes delivered first-cycle charge and discharge capacities of 1233 mAh g\(^{-1}\) and 672 mAh g\(^{-1}\), respectively. Although the Coulombic efficiency was low (55%), the reversible capacity still can be preserved at about 502 mAh g\(^{-1}\) after 30 cycles. Several other groups also demonstrated that graphene-based anode materials had large charge/discharge capacities along with low initial Coulombic efficiency and large irreversible capacity. The high irreversible capacity of graphene anodes could be explained by the reaction of Li ions with oxygen-containing functional groups and the formation of SEI in nanocavities/defects derived from the wrinkling/oxidation of the graphene. In addition, the electrolyte intercalation into the graphene layers is high because of the large surface-to-volume ratio, which also contributes to the increased irreversible capacity.

Graphenes anchored with active metal (e.g., Sn, Sn–Sb, and Si) and/or metal oxide (e.g., CoO\(_2\), TiO\(_2\), Fe\(_2\)O\(_4\), MnO\(_2\), CuO\(_2\), and SnO\(_2\)) nanoparticles can be used to reduce the irreversible capacity and enhance the cycle life. For example, Honma et al. obtained SnO\(_2\)-graphene nanocomposites (Fig. 2a) by reassembling graphene nanosheets in ethylene glycol with the presence of SnO\(_2\) nanoparticles. The existence of SnO\(_2\) nanoparticles prevented the reassembly of graphene to graphite platelets during cycling. It was found that these SnO\(_2\)-graphene electrodes exhibited a high reversible capacity of 810 mAh g\(^{-1}\) at 50 mA g\(^{-1}\). After 30 cycles, the capacity was preserved at 570 mAh g\(^{-1}\), indicating a 70% capacity retention (Fig. 2b).

The performance enhancement of graphene by forming nanocomposites with metals or metal oxides can be ascribed to several factors. Firstly, both metal/metal oxide nanoparticles and graphene sheets have large Li-storage abilities. Secondly, graphene components have excellent electrical conductivity which ensures good electrical contact between adjacent active particles. Thirdly, the flexible and electronic conductive graphene nanosheets suppress the large volume expansion/extraction of the electrodes during charge/discharge, alleviating the aggregation and pulverization problems connected with pure metal or metal oxide nanoparticles. Finally, the confining of metal or metal oxide nanoparticles between graphene nanosheets mitigates the restacking of graphene sheets, and consequently keeps their high active surface areas and creates more significant disorder/defects and cavities for Li storage. Therefore, these synergic effects of graphene and metal or metal oxide nanoparticles lead to increased Li storage capacity, improved cycling performance, and good rate capability of the graphene/metal and graphene/metal oxide nanocomposites.

### 2.3. Porous carbon

Porous carbons with different pore sizes ranging from nanometre to micrometre scale are promising anode materials for LIBs due to their high surface areas and open pore structures. The desirable characteristics of these materials are the effective diffusion pathways for Li ions due to the formation of percolation networks from interconnected nanopores, reasonable electrical conductivity provided by the well-interconnected carbon walls, large amount of active sites for Li storage, and minimized mechanical stress for volume expansion/contraction during Li intercalation/deintercalation. Because of these unique merits, porous carbons often show prominently increased capacities in comparison with traditional graphitic carbons.

There are three types of porous carbons, i.e., microporous (pore size < 2 nm), mesoporous (2 nm < pore size < 50 nm), and macroporous (pore size > 50 nm) carbons. Among them, microporous carbons have demonstrated larger capacities than traditional graphitic carbons, although in many cases high irreversibilities are also accompanied. For example, Takeuchi et al. used a template method to prepare high-surface area microporous carbons for use as anodes. The results showed a reversible capacity of 480 mAh g\(^{-1}\) and a large irreversible capacity of 3685 mAh g\(^{-1}\). This high irreversible capacity was caused by the increased surface area of the microporous carbon which led to an increased SEI area. The large irreversible capacity might also be due to the reactions of Li ions with the surface functional groups (\(-\text{C} = \text{O}\) or \(-\text{OH}\)) on carbon. Because of the high surface area of these materials, there are many sites for the formation of these functional groups. In addition, a high capacity fade was observed in the first few cycles, which further hinders the use of these materials as anodes for LIBs.

Mesoporous carbons (2 nm < pore size < 50 nm) have also been used as anode materials for LIBs. Using silica SBA-15 as a template, Zhou et al. synthesized 3D ordered mesoporous carbon materials with uniform pore sizes, high surface areas, and large pore volumes (Fig. 3a). The results (Fig. 3b) showed that at the first cycle the reversible capacity and irreversible capacity were 1100 and 2000 mAh g\(^{-1}\), respectively. After the first cycle,
both the charge and discharge capacities remained unchanged. This could be due to the minimized ion transport resistance and localized graphitic structures around the pores and more importantly, to the ordered porous structure.96,99

Ordered macroporous carbons (pore size > 50 nm) have also been synthesized by template-based methods. Colloidal suspensions of poly(methyl methacrylate) (PMMA) and inverse silica opal were used as templates by Su et al. to prepare ordered macroporous carbons.100 The resultant anodes exhibited a high capacity of 320 mAh g\(^{-1}\) after 60 cycles with a high capacity retention of 98%. Macroporous CNFs with well-interconnected pore and wall structures were prepared by Stein et al. using a PMMA colloidal-crystal template.101 These anodes delivered a capacity of 260 mAh g\(^{-1}\) at a current density of 1000 mA g\(^{-1}\) with a capacity retention of 83% after 30 cycles.

In summary, the electrochemical performance of nano-carbons (1D, 2D, and porous carbons) is largely determined by their structures and morphologies. The 1D nanostructured carbons have high Coulombic efficiency and good cycling stability. However, they often show unsatisfactory rate performance and low volumetric energy density due to the formation of large SEI films and less-compact structure. In comparison, due to the unique 2D aromatic monolayer of honeycomb carbon lattice, 2D graphene typically shows good rate capability, i.e., small capacity fading even at high rates.79,102,103 However, graphene-based anodes have relatively low initial Coulombic efficiency and large irreversible capacity due to the reactions between Li ions with oxygen-containing functional groups and to the formation of SEI films in nanocavities/defects. Similar to graphene, porous carbons have low volumetric energy density and large irreversible capacity although their capacity is typically large. Combining different nano-carbons, such as CNT/CNFs104 or CNF/graphene platelet, could lead to novel carbon nanostructures with improved electrochemical performance. Moreover, hybridising nano-carbons with other high-capacity components (e.g., alloys and/or metal oxides) also offers a promising strategy for achieving excellent overall performance.

### 3. Alloys

Li can be electrochemically alloyed with a number of metallic and semi-metallic elements in groups IV and V, such as Si, Sn, Ge, Pb, P, As, Sb, and Bi, and also some other metal elements, such as Al, Au, In, Ga, Zn, Cd, Ag, and Mg.105–107 The Li alloying could be carried out before or during the preparation of the electrodes, but more often it is realized by the charging process after assembling the LIBs. These alloyed anodes are well-known for high specific capacities, moderate operation potentials vs. Li/Li\(^+\), and good safety. The main challenge for the implementation of these anodes is the large volume change during Li alloying/dealloying processes. The large volume change causes severe cracking and crumbling of the electrodes and subsequent

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**Fig. 2** (a) SEM images, and (b) charge/discharge profile of SnO\(_2\)/graphene nanocomposite. Reproduced with permission.93

**Fig. 3** (a) TEM image of ordered mesoporous carbon perpendicular to the direction of hexagonal pore arrangement, and (b) discharge and charge performance of the ordered mesoporous carbon anode at 100 mA g\(^{-1}\). Reproduced with permission.99
loss of electrical contact between individual particles, which in turn results in large irreversible capacity and severe capacity fading.  

Several strategies have been investigated to overcome the large volume change and preserve the structural integrity. The first approach involves preparing unique nanostructures. Depending on the type of the nanostructures, the resultant anodes could better accommodate the large stress and strain without cracking, reduce the electronic and ionic transport pathways, and provide additional Li-storage sites. The second approach is to introduce a second component to form nanocomposites; for example, metal nanoparticles can be coated with carbon or dispersed in a carbon matrix. In this approach, the carbon matrix acts as a buffer for the volume change and improves the electric conductivity of the electrode. In addition, carbon phase has the advantages of low volume expansion, good ionic conductivity, and excellent tolerance to mechanical stress. The presence of carbon component can also suppress the formation of SEI film and provide additional capacity since carbon is an electrochemical active material and has considerable Li-storage capacity. The third approach is to form an alloy with a second phase, which is an electrochemically active or inactive component. The main role of phase M is to absorb the massive volume change during cycling. This second phase can also enhance the electronic conductivity of the electrode.  

If the second phase M is electrochemically active, an intermetallic, such as electrochemically active-electroplated multiphase, is formed, in which the two different phases can act as mutual buffer to each other to overcome the large volume expansion/extraction. This section focuses on the use of elements in groups IV (Si, Ge and Sn) and V (P and Sb) since these elements provide higher theoretical capacities compared with others and they are relatively cheap and abundant.  

3.1. Group IV elements  

Group IV is also commonly called the carbon group since carbon is one of the most important elements in this group. All group IV elements have four electrons in their outermost shell, and the last orbital of all these elements is the p2 orbital. As discussed before, carbon can be used as the anode material through a Li intercalation/deintercalation mechanism. However, other group IV elements form alloys with Li. Among all non-carbon group IV elements, Si is probably the most studied anode material since it exhibits a low discharge potential of 0.06 V vs. Li/Li+, has the highest theoretical specific capacity of 4200 mAh g⁻¹, which is more than ten times greater than that of graphite. However, the low Coulombic efficiency at the initial cycle and the 400% volume change during charge/discharge hindered the large-scale commercial use of Si anodes in LIBs. Using the three strategies mentioned above, nanostructured Si, Si/carbon nanocomposites, and Si-metal alloys have been prepared to improve the cyclability of Si-based anodes by enhancing the structural stability of Si. For example, Cho et al. prepared mesoporous Si/carbon core/shell nanowires with a diameter of around 6.5 nm using a butyl-capped Si as the precursor, which was impregnated into a silica SBA-15 template for multiple times and annealed at 900 °C under vacuum. The silica template was removed using hydrofluoric acid (HF) (Fig. 4a). The Si/carbon composites formed from the first impregnation showed nanorod structures with 4 nm in diameter and 20 nm in length (Fig. 4b–c). Si/carbon core-shell nanowires with mesopore channels composed of thin amorphous carbon layers and Si walls were formed from the fourth impregnation (Fig. 4d–e). These as-prepared Si/carbon core-shell nanowires exhibited a high charge capacity of 3163 mAh g⁻¹ (based on the total weight of Si and carbon) with a Coulombic efficiency of 86% during the first cycle at 0.2 C. After 80 cycles, the capacity was 2738 mAh g⁻¹, corresponding to a capacity retention of 87% (Fig. 4f). These mesoporous Si/ carbon nanowires also showed good rate capability where the charge capacities at 0.5, 1, and 2 C were 2954, 2757, and 2462 mAh g⁻¹, respectively (Fig. 4g). The excellent electrochemical performance was attributed to the presence of ordered internal pores that were flooded with electrolyte, which ensured a high surface contact area with the electrode and hence a high flux of Li ions across the interface. In addition, the thin Si walls ensured effective diffusion pathways and high transport rates for Li ions and electrons throughout the material. Finally, both Si and carbon in the nanowires are Li-active materials and can contribute to the overall reversible capacities.  

More recently, the preparation of Si/carbon composite nanofibers by embedding Si nanoparticles as an alloying medium in electrospun CNFs was reported by Zhang’s group. Anodes made from these Si/carbon composite nanofibers combined the advantages of both carbon (long cycle life and good Li-storage capacity) and Si (high Li-storage capacity) and exhibited good electrochemical performance in terms of relatively large reversible capacity (e.g., around 800 mAh g⁻¹ at 100 mA g⁻¹) and relatively good capacity retention (e.g., 84.5% after 20 cycles) (Fig. 5). The electrospinning and subsequent carbonization are an effective method to prepare Si/ carbon composite nanofibers due to the simplicity, low cost, and easy scale-up of the process.  

In addition to Si, Ge and Sn are also important group IV elements that have gained attention as promising anode materials. Ge and Sn have relatively high capacities of 1600 and 992 mAh g⁻¹, respectively. Like Si, anodes based on Ge and Sn also suffer from poor cycling performance because of the high volume changes caused by Li alloying/dealloying. The three approaches that are used to improve Si anode performance have also been adopted to improve the cycling performance of Ge and Sn anodes. For example, Cui et al. prepared Ge/carbon composite nanospheres with Ge nanoparticles dispersed in carbon matrix by the solid-state pyrolysis of tetraallylgermane. These Ge/carbon nanospheres had an average diameter of 62 nm and the Ge nanoparticles encapsulated were 5 to 20 nm in size (Fig. 6a and b). These materials exhibited a highly stable and reversible capacity of 900 mAh g⁻¹ after 50 cycles at 150 mA g⁻¹ (Fig. 6c). At a further increase in current density from 150 to 300, 600, and 900 mA g⁻¹, highly-stable reversible capacities of approximately 774, 650, and 613 mA h g⁻¹ were observed (Fig. 6d), indicating an excellent rate performance. The high performance of Li storage was ascribed to the unique nanostructure of Ge/carbon nanocomposites. The small grain size of the Ge phase reduces the Li diffusion length to a few nanometres. Nanosized carbons are Li-active and can also keep a good
electrical contact with the current collector and avoid severe agglomeration of the Ge phase. Further improvement in the electrochemical performance of Ge/carbon nanocomposites was reported by the same group where carbon was replaced by CNTs through a pyrolysis technique.  

Although nanostructured group IV elements and their composites have improved electrochemical performance, several problems need to be addressed, including high production cost, low tap density associated with large surface-to-volume ratio, high surface reactivity, and safety hazard associated with the flammable or explosive tendency of nanopowders.  

3.2. Group V elements

Group V elements are also called nitrogen group elements, and they have five electrons in their outermost shell. Group V element P-based nanocomposites and intermetallics (MPₙ) can be used as anodes for LIBs. The high degree of electron delocalization in MPₙ leads to a low oxidation state of the metal and also to a strong covalent character of M-P bond. As a result, MPₙ shows an overall lower insertion potential compared to the counterpart oxides. Therefore, anodes made from MPₙ with small particle size can deliver large reversible capacity and good high-rate cycling stability.

MPₙ can be categorized into two groups depending on the nature of the transition metal and phosphor bonding stability upon Li insertion/extraction. The first group includes MnP₄, VPₓ (x = 1, 2, or 4), FeP₂, ZnP₂, Zn3P₂, and NiP₂, which realize topotactic Li insertion/extraction without breaking bonds between transition metal and phosphor. The overall reaction can be written as:

\[ x\text{Li}^+ + \text{MP}_n \rightarrow \text{Li}_x\text{MP}_n \]
Fig. 5  (a) SEM and (b) TEM images of Si/carbon composite nanofibers, and (c) Galvanostatic charge-discharge curves and (d) cycling performance of Si/carbon nanofibers. Current density: 100 mA g\textsuperscript{−1}. Reproduced with permission.\textsuperscript{143}

Fig. 6  (a) SEM image and (b) enlarged image of Ge/carbon nanospheres. (c) Galvanostatic charge/discharge curves of Ge/carbon nanospheres at 150 mA g\textsuperscript{−1}. (d) Cycling and rate performance of Ge/carbon nanospheres. Reproduced with permission.\textsuperscript{160}
In the second group, which includes Cu₃P,¹⁷⁵,¹⁷⁶ Co₃P,¹⁷⁷–¹⁷⁹ Sn₃P₄,¹⁸⁰ Ni₅P₃,¹⁷² and GaP,¹⁷² the reaction between Li and MPₙ results in the direct decomposition of metal phosphide into nanosized metallic particles and Li phosphate, indicating a conversion mechanism. The reaction can be written as:¹⁰⁶

\[ 3nLi^+ + MP_n + 3ne^- \leftrightarrow nLi_3P + M \]  

The reversible interconversion of the crystalline phase is effected by the electrochemical redox reactions. In insertion mechanism, during the reduction (insertion) reaction, the P–P bonds in the MPₙ structure are broken and form Li₃MPₙ, which is reoxidated to MPₙ in the reverse process. The formation of Li₃MPₙ by the insertion reaction results in a stable crystalline structure with good electrochemical properties. This insertion reaction mechanism is transformed to conversion reaction during continuous charge/discharge process. The conversion reaction mechanism involves staggering uptakes of Li before the decomposed metal starts precipitating out with small structural stress. The high specific capacities of these transition metal phosphides (e.g., > 1400 mAh g⁻¹ for Mn₄P₈, > 1800 mAh g⁻¹ for Co₃P₃, > 1475 mAh g⁻¹ for Ni₅P₃) make them attractive anode candidates. However, they usually have low electrical conductivity and relatively high reaction potential. The use of these P-based anodes requires further exploration to overcome these disadvantages.¹⁰⁶,¹⁸¹

Except for P, Group V element Sb is an attractive anode material with a high theoretical capacity of about 660 mAh g⁻¹.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, Sb/graphite nanocomposites and Sb-based intermetallics, especially binary compounds with other metals, have been prepared to evaluate their electrochemical performance as anodes in LIBs. Among these materials are Sb/CNT,¹⁸² Sb/graphite,¹⁸³ Sb/polyacrylonitrile (PAN),¹⁸⁴ and others.¹⁸⁵ Similar to MPₙ systems, Sb-based intermetallics and their nanocomposites are based on either insertion or conversion reaction mechanism. The materials based on the insertion reaction mechanism include Cu₃Sb,¹¹⁵ ZnSb,¹¹¹ MnSb,¹⁸⁶ FeSb₂,¹⁸⁷ AlSb,¹⁸⁸ InSb,¹⁸⁹ and Mg₂Sb₁,⁹⁰ while those based on the conversion reaction mechanism are Sn₃Sb,¹⁵⁴ Co₃Sb,¹⁹¹ CrSb,¹⁹² VSb₂,¹°¹ and NiSb₂,¹°⁴ High capacities were achieved for both the insertion (e.g., 600 mAh g⁻¹ for ZnSb/C) and conversion (e.g., 700 mAh g⁻¹ for SnSb/C) reactions of Sb-based nanomaterials.¹⁰⁶ The insertion reaction mechanism shows good initial electrochemical performance; however, it is often followed by a structural collapse during Li insertion, resulting in the transformation to a conversion reaction. The conversion reaction mechanism has reduced structural stress and this leads to a stable crystalline structure during electrochemical cycling.

Although anodes made from group V elements have shown promising properties, they still do not meet the requirements of many practical applications such as hybrid electric vehicles and advanced electrical storage devices. This is because of their expensive production cost and relatively poor capacity retention. In order to meet the requirements of commercial utilizations, a proper production process with the use of relatively cheap materials and suitable electrode designs in term of microstructures and compositions, are necessary to lower the production cost, and improve the structural stability, capacity retention, and rate capability.¹⁰⁶,¹⁸¹

4. Metal oxides

Various metal oxides have been extensively investigated as potential anode materials for rechargeable LIBs because these materials have diverse chemical and physical properties and can deliver high reversible capacities between 500 and 1000 mAh g⁻¹.¹⁰⁶,¹⁸¹,¹⁹⁵–²⁰¹ Metal oxide-based anodes can be classified into three groups depending on their reaction mechanisms: (i) Li-alloy reaction mechanism, (ii) insertion/extraction reaction mechanism that involves the insertion and extraction of Li into and from the lattice of the transition metal oxide, and (iii) conversion reaction mechanism. The materials based on the conversion reaction mechanism have the formation and decomposition of Li oxide (Li₂O), accompanying the reduction and oxidation of metal nanoparticles.¹⁰⁶,¹⁸¹,¹⁹⁵–²⁰¹ The three reaction mechanisms are displayed as follows:

**Li-alloy reaction mechanism:**

\[ M_xO_y + 2yLi^+ + 2ye^- \rightarrow xM + yLi_2O \]  

**Insertion reaction mechanism:**

\[ MO_x + yLi^+ + ye^- \leftrightarrow Li_yMO_x \]  

**Conversion reaction mechanism:**

\[ M_xO_y + 2yLi^+ + 2ye^- \leftrightarrow xM + yLi_2O \]  

4.1. Li-alloy reaction mechanism

SnO₂ is the most important metal oxide in this category. On the first charge, Li bonds to the oxygen in SnO₂ forming Li₂O and Sn, and the latter continues to form alloy with Li with an upper-limit of Li₄Sn, corresponding to a theoretical capacity of 783 mAh g⁻¹.²°²–²°⁵ However, upon continuous cycling, Sn phases produced from the delithiation of the Li-Sn alloy showed a tendency to aggregate with each other and form clusters. This causes fast deterioration in the reversible capacity because of the volume change of Sn and the destruction of Li₂O matrix that hold reduced Sn particles upon Li insertion.¹⁰⁶,²⁰⁶,²⁰⁷ Much attention has been paid to improve the cycling performance of SnO₂ and reduce the irreversible capacity. Porous SnO₂ nanostructure, SnO₂-based nanocomposites,²⁰⁸–²¹⁰ nanostructured SnO₂ thin films²¹¹ and hollow core-shell mesospheres²¹² are representative material systems developed in this direction.

Compared with solid SnO₂ particles, porous SnO₂ nanomaterials can suppress volume changes since the pores act as the structure buffer for the large volume changes during cycling.²¹³ Using silica as template, Cho et al. prepared mesoporous SnO₂-based anodes that delivered a reversible capacity of 800 mAh g⁻¹ at 0.2 C with a capacity retention of 98% after 50 cycles.²¹⁴ Hyeon et al. also synthesized porous SnO₂ microspheres using SnCl₄·5H₂O and resorcinol-formaldehyde gel.²¹⁵ The resultant anodes delivered a discharge capacity of 952 mAh g⁻¹. However, the major drawback of these porous SnO₂ materials is the large irreversible capacities caused by their large surface areas.
SnO2/carbon nanostructured composites, such as SnO2/carbon nanocolloids,216 SnO2/carbon nanoparticles,217 SnO2/CNTs,218 SnO2/carbon hollow nanospheres,219 and porous SnO2 nanotubes with coaxially grown CNT overlayers,220 were also prepared. The results showed most of these materials had high reversible Li storage capacities and improved cycling performance. This stems from the synergistic combination of the good stability of conductive carbon matrices and high Li-storage capacity of SnO2 nanoparticles. For these SnO2/carbon nano-composites, carbon acts as a barrier to prevent the aggregation between SnO2 particles by providing a buffering space where SnO2 particles can experience the volume change without collapsing. Furthermore, carbon itself is an active material for additional Li storage. Recently, Zhang’s group prepared carbon-SnO2 core-sheath composite nanofibers using electrospinning and electroposition strategies.221 The as-prepared core-sheath composite nanofibers were used as binder-free anodes and delivered a discharge capacity of around 800 mAh g\(^{-1}\) at the first cycle at 50 mA g\(^{-1}\), with 69% capacity retention after 100 cycles. These anodes can withstand large volume expansion and contraction during Li insertion/extraction because the carbon fiber cores act as efficient electron transport pathways and stable mechanical support for keeping the structural integrity of the electrodes during cycling.

4.2. Insertion reaction mechanism

Several transitional metal oxides can store Li via the insertion reaction mechanism.106 These materials are attractive anode materials for rechargeable LIBs due to their low cost and non-toxicity. However, the number of materials involved in the insertion reaction is generally less than one per Li because Li can only be accommodated into the vacant sites of the frameworks in these metal oxides. Therefore, insertion reaction-based metal oxide anodes have relatively low specific capacity.222–224 For example, TiO2 has various polymorphs such as anatase, rutile, and TiO2-\(\beta\). Anatase is generally considered the most electro-active Li-insertion host, because anatase TiO2 is not only a low voltage insertion host for Li but also has fast Li insertion/ extraction kinetics.222–224 Guo et al. recently prepared nanostructured mesoporous anatase TiO2 that exhibited high Li-storage capacity and excellent cycling performance.222–224 TiO2 nanowires and nanotubes are also attractive anode materials. Results reported by Zhou et al. on TiO2 nanotubes with mesoporous walls within anodic aluminum oxide membranes showed a Li-storage capacity of 340 mAh cm\(^{-2}\). The nanotube structure of these TiO2 provided effective pathways for both Li ions and electrons which are essential for high-rate rechargeable LIBs.87,225 WO3 is another transitional metal oxide with Li insertion storage mechanism, which demonstrates a low working potential; however, this material usually undergoes severe irreversible decomposition and shows poor cycle performance.226,227

4.3. Conversion reaction mechanism

The conversion reaction mechanism has brought great interest since many important transitional metal oxides (MO\(_x\), where M = Fe, Co, Ni, Cu, Mo, Ni, Gr, Ru, etc.) follow that mechanism during electrode reactions.106,181,209 According to eqn (8), these oxides are converted to a metallic state along with Li2O component at the first lithiation and are reversibly returned to its initial state after delithiation. Anodes made from these metal oxides exhibit high reversible capacities and high energy densities because the oxidation state is utilized fully and more than one electron are involved in the conversion reaction.106,181,187,203,228 However, they often show low Coulombic efficiency at the first cycle, unstable SEI film formation, large potential hysteresis, and poor capacity retention. To solve these problems, nanostructured porous transition metal oxide materials and transition metal oxide/carbon nanocomposites have been prepared.38–46,106,181,207–209 In the following section, we discuss the most widely studied conversion reaction-based transition metal oxide anodes, i.e., iron oxides, cobalt oxides, manganese oxides, molybdenum oxides, and copper oxides, as shown in Table 1. Moreover, other transition metal oxide anodes and their representative nanostructures, i.e., chromium oxides, nickel oxides, and ruthenium oxides, have also been summarized in Table 1.

4.3.1. Iron oxides. Iron oxides, such as hematite (Fe2O3) and magnetite (Fe3O4), are attractive conversion reaction-based anode materials for rechargeable LIBs because of their low cost and non-toxicity.203,228 Li can be reversibly inserted into Fe2O3 in a wide potential range, e.g., 1.5–4.0 V vs. Li/Li\(^+\). When lowering the potential to 0.9 V, additional two moles of Li can be inserted but they cannot be extracted without damaging the crystal structure of the material.229,230 After discharging to 0.005 V, 8.5 moles of Li can be further inserted. This yields a total theoretical capacity of 1007 mAh g\(^{-1}\) by the formation of Fe0 from Fe3+. Studies by Larcher et al.239 and Morales et al.241 on Fe2O3 nanoparticles and by Chen et al.243 on Fe3O4 nanotubes indicated that the morphology of nanosized Fe2O3 structures plays a significant role in the reactivity towards Li, and demonstrated that four moles of Li are cyclable in the potential range of 0.005–3.0 V. However, severe capacity degradation occurred during the long-term cycling. Zhang et al. fabricated fiber-like Fe2O3 macroporous nanomaterials by the in situ synthesis of Fe2O3 in regenerated cellulose fibers, followed by the removal of cellulose matrix via calcination.233 These Fe2O3 nanomaterials presented a large discharge capacity of 2750 mAh g\(^{-1}\) at the first cycle and 732 mAh g\(^{-1}\) after 50 cycles. This large discharge capacity might be due to both the increased surface area of Fe2O3 and the carbon remained after calcination, which contributes to additional Li storage, as well as their special nanostructures.234,235,236

In addition to Fe2O3, Fe3O4 is also a promising high-capacity anode material that can deliver a theoretical capacity up to 926 mAh g\(^{-1}\).237,238 Zhang et al. synthesized carbon-coated Fe3O4 nanospindles by partial reduction of monodispersed Fe3O4 nanospindles with carbon coatings.237 SEM images on the Fe3O4 nanospindles showed that these spindle-like nanostructures were composed of tiny crystals with an average length of 470 nm and a diameter of 106 nm (Fig. 7a-b). After a heat-treatment at 600 °C, Fe2O3-carbon spindles of 428 nm in length and 100 nm in diameter with small void space at the tips were obtained (Fig. 7c). The TEM image in Fig. 7d showed that the carbon layer had a uniform and continuous structure with a thickness of 2–10 nm. At the first cycle, the carbon-coated Fe3O4 nanospindles showed a high reversible capacity of 745 mAh g\(^{-1}\) at C/5. The capacity remained almost unchanged after four subsequent cycles.
Table 1 Summarization of conversion reaction-based nanotructured transitional metal oxide anodes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metal oxides</th>
<th>Theoretical capacities (mAh g⁻¹)</th>
<th>Representative nanostructures</th>
<th>Common problems and possible solutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iron oxides</td>
<td>Fe₂O₃ Fe₃O₄</td>
<td>1007223,230 926231–238</td>
<td>Nanostructures and carbon-based nanocomposites²¹¹–²³⁷</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Common problems: Low Coulombic efficiency at the first cycle, unstable SEI film formation, large potential hysteresis, and poor capacity retention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cobalt oxides</td>
<td>Co₃O₄</td>
<td>890⁴⁴</td>
<td>Nanostructured Co₃O₄ or Co₃O₄/carbon nanocomposites²⁴⁰–²⁴⁶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manganese oxides</td>
<td>MnOx</td>
<td>71.5²³⁹ 700–1000²⁴⁰,²⁴¹</td>
<td>CoO composites²⁴⁵–²⁵⁰</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molybdenum oxides</td>
<td>MoO₂ MoO₃</td>
<td>1111²⁶⁹,²⁷⁰ 830²⁶⁹,²⁷⁰</td>
<td>Doped MoO₂²⁷¹–²⁷⁵</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copper oxides</td>
<td>CuO</td>
<td>674²⁸⁴,²⁸⁵ 37.5²⁹³</td>
<td>Nanostructured CuO²⁷⁸,²⁷⁹,²⁸³–²⁹¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chromium oxides</td>
<td>Cr₂O₃</td>
<td>1058²⁹⁹</td>
<td>Cu₂O/CuO/Carbon composites²⁹⁴–²⁹⁸</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nickel oxides</td>
<td>NiO</td>
<td>718²⁹⁵</td>
<td>Nanostructures, hetero-atom doping, and carbon-based nanocomposites²⁹⁶–³⁰²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruthenium oxides</td>
<td>RuO₂</td>
<td>1130²⁹⁵</td>
<td>NiO/Carbon²⁹⁶</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compared with bare Fe₂O₃ spheres, these carbon-coated Fe₂O₃ nanospindles showed higher Coulombic efficiency and better cycling performance (Fig. 7e–f). Zhang et al. attributed these improvements to the uniform and continuous carbon coating layers, which helped to maintain the integrity of spindles and increased the electronic conductivity of the electrodes.³³⁷ More work is needed to completely understand this performance improvement mechanism.

4.3.2. Cobalt oxides. Cobalt oxides such as Co₃O₄ and CoO have relatively high theoretical capacities of 890 and 715 mAh g⁻¹, respectively.²⁸⁶,²³⁸ Recently, Co₃O₄-based nanomaterials were synthesized to be used as LIB anodes, including mesoporous Co₃O₄,²⁴⁰ porous Co₃O₄ nanosheets,²⁴¹ Co₃O₄ nanowire arrays,²⁴⁰,²⁴² needle-like Co₃O₄ nanotubes,²⁴³ multiwalled CNT/Co₃O₄ nanocomposites,²⁴⁴,²⁴⁵ and Co₃O₄ nanorods.²⁴⁶ Li et al. developed a template-free method for the large-area growth of self-supported Co₃O₄ nanowire arrays.²⁴² The nanowires were 500 nm in diameter and 15 µm in length and they grew almost vertically from the substrate (Fig. 8a–b). The Co₃O₄ nanowire arrays showed superior capacity retention compared to other unsupported nanowires and commercial powders. Results reported on the self-supported Co₃O₄ nanowire arrays showed large charge and discharge capacities of approximately 1124 and 859 mAh g⁻¹, respectively, at the first cycle at 1 C. The nanowire arrays maintained a stable capacity of 700 mAh g⁻¹ after 20 cycles. Under the same conditions, commercial Co₃O₄ powders gave a significantly lower capacity of 80 mAh g⁻¹ and unsupported nanowires only showed a moderate capacity of 350 mAh g⁻¹ after 20 cycles (Fig. 8c). The self-supported Co₃O₄ nanowire arrays also showed high rate capability (Fig. 8d). The large capacity and high rate capability of self-supported nanowire arrays result from their unique hierarchical architecture. CoO nanostructured materials, such as Li₂O–NiO–CoO composites²⁴⁷ and Ni-foam-supported reticular CoO–Li₂O composites,²⁴⁸ have also been studied for use as anodes for LIBs. Xia et al. prepared CoO nanoparticle-loaded hollow carbon spheres by a wet-penetration method.²⁴⁹ The hollow carbon spheres played the role of structural support, which hampered CoO particles from agglomeration as well as acted as a host for Li storage. Zhang
et al. also improved the performance by synthesizing CoO/carbon hybrid microspheres via a solvothermal approach.\\n
**4.3.3. Manganese oxides.** Manganese oxides, such as Mn$_2$O$_3$,\textsuperscript{251,252} Mn$_3$O$_4$,\textsuperscript{253,254} and MnO,\textsuperscript{255–257} can also be used as anodes.\textsuperscript{181,258,259} The theoretical capacities of manganese oxides as anode materials are between 700–1000 mAh g$^{-1}$ depending on their chemical and physical structures.\textsuperscript{260,261} The application of manganese oxide-based anodes in practical LIBs is challenging because of their poor electrical conductivity and large volume change during cycling. A promising method to alleviate these problems is to use nanostructured manganese oxide-based anodes, such as MnO\textsuperscript{x} nanocrystalline, MnO thin films,\textsuperscript{262} Mn$_3$O$_4$ nanofibers,\textsuperscript{263} and interconnected MnO\textsubscript{x} nanowires.\textsuperscript{199,264} The limited substitution of Mn by Co or Zn in Mn$_3$O$_4$ materials can also improve their electrochemical performance.\textsuperscript{254,265} Recently, the synthesis of porous manganese oxide/carbon composite nanofibers by electrospinning PAN/Mn(CH$_3$COO)$_2$ precursor followed by a thermal treatment process was reported by Zhang’s group.\textsuperscript{266,267} As seen in Fig. 8a-b, the SEM and TEM images showed that MnO\textsubscript{x}/carbon nanofibers had uneven convolute and undulated surface morphology with a large variation in fiber diameters. The charge and discharge capacities of these composite fibers were 1155 and 785 mAh g$^{-1}$, respectively, at 50 mA g$^{-1}$ at the first cycle.\textsuperscript{266,267} A highly stable and reversible capacity of 600 mAh g$^{-1}$ was achieved at the 50th cycle, which was 76% of the initial reversible capacity (Fig. 9c). These porous MnO\textsubscript{x}/carbon nanofiber anodes were cycled at higher current densities and showed a relatively good rate capability (Fig. 9d).\textsuperscript{266,267} More recently, the same group also prepared MnO\textsubscript{x}/carbon nanofiber composites through electrodepositing MnO\textsubscript{x} nanoparticles onto electrospun CNFs.\textsuperscript{268} These nanocomposites exhibited a stable reversible capacity of approximately 500 mAh g$^{-1}$ after 50 cycles at 50 mA g$^{-1}$. At high current density of 500 mA g$^{-1}$, a stable reversible capacity of 400 mAh g$^{-1}$ was also obtained.\textsuperscript{268}\\n
**4.3.4. Molybdenum oxides.** MoO$_3$ and MoO$_2$ can also store Li through the conversion reaction and can deliver high theoretical specific capacities of 1111 mAh g$^{-1}$ and 830 mAh g$^{-1}$, respectively.\textsuperscript{269,270} MoO$_3$ is often doped with Na and Sn to improve the capacity retention and rate capability.\textsuperscript{271,272} The electrochemical performance was further improved by using MoO$_2$- and MoO$_3$-based nanostructures,\textsuperscript{273,274} and nanocomposites.\textsuperscript{275} Recently, Shi et al. synthesized a highly-ordered mesoporous crystalline MoO$_2$ via a nanocasting strategy.\textsuperscript{276} This material showed a typical metallic conductivity and exhibited improved charge/discharge capacities and enhanced cycle life, because the material partially lost its crystallinity and transformed to an amorphous-like structure during cycling. The improved Li diffusion kinetics and the reversible formation/decomposition of the SEI film may also play an important role.\textsuperscript{277}\\n
**4.3.5. Copper oxides.** CuO\textsuperscript{203,278,279} and Cu$_2$O\textsuperscript{203,280} are well-known p-type semiconductors and can be attractive anode materials for rechargeable LIBs due to their nontoxic nature and affordable price. Pure CuO and Cu$_2$O anodes also suffer from large volume change during cycling. To reduce the volume change and improve the cycle life of these anodes, nanostructured copper oxides\textsuperscript{2,3,96} and nanocomposites\textsuperscript{281} were prepared. The reversible capacity of CuO is closely related to the product formed during the discharging process. Results reported by
Tarascon et al. showed that CuO was reduced to Cu nanograins during the charge process through an intermediate Cu$_2$O phase. However, the reduced metallic Cu re-oxidized back to Cu$_2$O instead of CuO during discharge. The charge/discharge mechanism was observed and confirmed by several other groups.

Wu et al. prepared hierarchical CuO spheres with radiating nanoplates and a charge capacity of 800 mAh g$^{-1}$ and a discharge capacity of approximately 250 mAh g$^{-1}$ at the first cycle were observed. These values indicated that the reduced metallic Cu can only be re-oxidized to Cu$_2$O. A theoretical capacity of 674 mAh g$^{-1}$ can be obtained if the reduced metallic Cu can be re-oxidized back to Cu$_2$O. CuO nanomaterial anodes, such as CuO nanoribbon arrays, CuO nanowires, CuO nanorods, and nanoflower-like CuO/Ni films, CuO/graphite composites, and CuO/CNT composites were also reported.

Cu$_2$O is nontoxic and abundant in nature. Results from charge-discharge and cyclic voltammetry experiments revealed that the morphology and crystallinity of Cu$_2$O play important roles in determining the electrochemical performance. Cu$_2$O nanostructures, such as Cu$_2$O nanorod arrays, Cu$_2$O nanoparticles, and Cu$_2$O nanofilms, and Cu$_2$O-based nanocomposites, such as Cu$_2$O/graphite, core–shell Cu$_2$O/Cu, Cu$_2$O–Li$_2$O, and porous Cu$_2$O/CuO nanocomposites were synthesized and used as anodes for LIBs.

5. Metal sulfides/nitrides

A variety of transition metal-containing sulfides MS$_2$ (M = Fe, Ti, Co, Ni, and Cu) have been studied as cathode materials. Many other layered metal sulfides MS$_2$ (M = Mo, W, Ga, Nb, and Ta) can be used as anode materials because they act as host lattices when reacting with a variety of guest atoms or molecules to yield intercalation compounds. Layered metal sulfides have a similar structure to graphitic carbon and can form inorganic fullerene-like structures. A key feature of these sulfides is the existence of Van der Waals force across gaps between S–M–S sheets, which provide space for guest reactants. During Li intercalation, a complete charge transfer occurs, which involves not only the reduction of M$^{4+}$ to M$^{3+}$ but also the diffusion of Li ions into the Van der Waals gaps. Anodes made from these layered transition metal sulfides show reasonable capacity and good cycling stability. Wang et al. found that Li could be intercalated into WS$_2$ nanotubes. The results showed a capacity of 350 mAh g$^{-1}$ at a cut-off voltage window of 0.1–1.5 V vs. Li/Li$^+$. In addition, a capacity of 790 mAh g$^{-1}$ in a voltage range of 0.7–3.0 V vs. Li/Li$^+$ was observed on WS$_2$ nanoflakes, and this corresponds to 7.4 mol Li per mole of WS$_2$. The high capacity was attributed to the intercalation of Li into intratubular and intertubular sites of WS$_2$ nanotubes as well as the diffusion into the WS$_2$ structure to form Li$_x$WS$_2$ intercalation compounds. However, since Li can intercalate into small holes/channels, defects in WS$_2$ nanotubes and a relatively large volume change during cycling can result in structural instability and poor cycling performance. Except for the layered transitional metal sulfides, many other metal sulfides such as Co$_9$S$_8$, ZnS, Li$_2$SiS$_3$, and Al$_2$S$_3$ were also reported to react with Li following a conversion reaction mechanism to produce Li$_2$S and metal nanoparticles when used as LIB anodes.

Li transition metal nitrides have also emerged as promising anode candidates for LIBs because their layered morphology can
support fast Li ion conduction and low transition metal oxidation states.\textsuperscript{318} The first metal nitride studied was LiMoN\textsubscript{2},\textsuperscript{319} but the materials capturing current interest are antifluorite-type Li\textsubscript{2}MnN\textsubscript{4} and Li\textsubscript{7.9}MnN\textsubscript{3.2}O\textsubscript{1.6} which showed reversible capacities in excess of 300 mAh g\textsuperscript{-1} with excellent retention, most likely due to the small volume change during charge/discharge.\textsuperscript{320,321} The capacity of Li metal nitrides was improved by the synthesis of Li\textsubscript{2}CO\textsubscript{2}N to between 480 and 760 mAh g\textsuperscript{-1}.\textsuperscript{322} The new compound of Li\textsubscript{2}FeO\textsubscript{1.5}N, with a reversible capacity of 550 mAh g\textsuperscript{-1}, was prepared by Rowsell \textit{et al.} and preliminary results showed good rate capability over cycling.\textsuperscript{323} Other metal nitrides, such as Sb\textsubscript{3}N\textsubscript{4}, Zn\textsubscript{3}N\textsubscript{2}, \textit{Ge\textsubscript{5}N\textsubscript{4}}, SnN\textsubscript{3} and VN\textsubscript{2} were also studied as anodes for LIBs via conversion reactions.\textsuperscript{324}

6. Summary and outlook

As one of the most promising energy storage technologies, LIBs are dominantly powering most of today’s portable electronics. However, they fall short of meeting the demands in powering advanced hybrid electric vehicles and plug-in electric vehicles because of their relatively low energy and power densities, poor durability, and high cost. Advances in nanoscience and nanotechnology have presented the opportunity to design novel energy-storage materials for the next-generation high-performance LIBs with higher capacity and longer cycle life. Due to the high surface area of nanostructured materials, these materials can provide high Li-ion flux across the interface, short diffusion pathways for both Li ions and electrons, abundant active sites for Li storage, and high freedom for volume change during charge/discharge to enhance the structural stability of the electrodes.

In this review article, four categories of LIB anode materials were discussed. The first one is nano-carbons, which can store Li through an intercalation process. The improved storage ability is closely related to their surface area, crystallinity, morphology as well as the orientation of the crystallites. In the second group, alloying materials such as groups IV and V elements were presented. These materials can electrochemically alloy with Li and provide larger specific capacities compared with carbonaceous materials. However, these materials suffer from large volume change upon Li alloying/dealloying which leads to severe capacity fading. Downsizing these bulk materials to the nanoscale, dispersing these elements into active and/or inactive matrices and preparing intermetallic alloy materials have been used to overcome the above-mentioned problems and improve the overall electrochemical performance. The third category is metal oxides which usually react with Li through alloying, insertion or conversion mechanisms. Their large-scale application is also hindered by the rapid capacity decay during charging/discharging because of the enormous volume change. Various types of metal oxide-based nanostructures and nanocomposites have been developed to address this problem. The final category is metal sulfide/nitride nanostructures which have also been demonstrated to be promising anode materials for LIBs since they can support fast Li-ion conduction and low transition metal oxidation states. However, the use of these materials as anodes for LIBs is still far from reality because of their high cost, poor safety, poor rate capability, and low capacity.

To realize wide-spread commercial applications, further work is required to achieve controlled and large-scale synthesis of nanostructures. It is also necessary to understand the mechanisms of Li storage in nanomaterials and the kinetic transport at the electrode/electrolyte interface since reactions in LIBs start at the interface between electrode and electrolyte. Further considerations include the development of predictive theoretical tools for a better fundamental understanding of the relationships between nanostructures and electrochemical characteristics of these novel nanostructured anode materials.\textsuperscript{328–331}

The future directions of nanostructured anode materials for rechargeable LIBs should focus on exploring new types of Li-ion redox couples with different electrode reaction mechanisms and designing novel micro-structures and morphology in order to further increase battery energy/power densities, enhance charge/discharge rate capability, improve service life and safety, and reduce the cost at the same time. As the science of producing high-energy and high-power batteries matures, the preparation of nanostructured anode materials via more sustainable and greener strategies or from renewable resources should also be addressed to limit environment pollution and to secure a bright future for human beings and also for our world as a whole.\textsuperscript{328–331}

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