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**Characterization of vacuum-annealed  $\text{TiNb}_2\text{O}_7$  as high potential anode material  
for lithium-ion battery**

Ryoji Inada\*, Tomoya Mori, Rei Kumasaka, Ryuta Ito, Tomohiro Tojo, and Yoji Sakurai

Department of Electrical and Electronic Information Engineering,  
Toyohashi University of Technology,  
1-1 Hibarigaoka, Tempaku-cho, Toyohashi, Aichi 441-8580, Japan.

\*Corresponding author

Ryoji Inada, Associate Professor

Postal address: Toyohashi University of Technology, 1-1 Tempaku-cho, Toyohashi,  
Aichi 441-8580, Japan

Phone: +81-532-44-6723

Fax: +81-532-44-6757

E-mail address: inada@ee.tut.ac.jp

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-6357-092X

## ABSTRACT

Electrochemical properties of mixed titanium-niobium oxide  $\text{TiNb}_2\text{O}_7$  (TNO) synthesized via vacuum annealing as high potential anode material for lithium-ion batteries were investigated. Crystal structure, size and morphology are nearly independent of the annealing atmosphere for starting materials but the color of vacuum-annealed TNO (TNO-V) is dark blue while white for the air-annealed one (TNO-A). X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy analysis also indicated that  $\text{Ti}^{4+}$  and  $\text{Nb}^{5+}$  in TNO are partially reduced into  $\text{Ti}^{3+}$  and  $\text{Nb}^{4+}$  due to the introduction of oxygen vacancy. Electronic conductivity for TNO-V was around  $10^{-3} \text{ S cm}^{-1}$  at room temperature and much higher than that for TNO-A ( $= 10^{-11} \text{ S cm}^{-1}$ ). In electrochemical testing, both TNO-A and TNO-V electrodes showed reversible capacity of 260–270  $\text{mAh g}^{-1}$  at low current density of  $0.5 \text{ mA cm}^{-2}$ , while at higher current density of  $5.0 \text{ mA cm}^{-2}$ , TNO-V electrode retained higher reversible capacity of 140  $\text{mAh g}^{-1}$  than that for TNO-A electrode ( $= 80 \text{ mAh g}^{-1}$ ). The enhancement of intrinsic electronic conductivity greatly contributes to improve the rate performance of TNO.

**Keywords:**  $\text{TiNb}_2\text{O}_7$ , lithium-ion battery, anode material, oxygen vacancy, electronic conductivity

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Rechargeable lithium-ion batteries (LiB) have been used as power sources for various electronic devices, such as mobile phones and laptop computers. As an anode material for present LiB, graphite has been commonly used because of its low cost, acceptable storage capacity ( $= 372 \text{ mAh g}^{-1}$ ) and stable cycling performance. However, the passivating solid electrolyte interphase (SEI) formed on graphite electrode in the initial charging process via decomposition of organic liquid electrolyte. Moreover, the low  $\text{Li}^+$  storage potential of graphite raises safety issues: when charged at high current rate or overcharged, there is possible lithium plating or formation of lithium dendrites and the short circuit in LiB to fire the flammable electrolyte. Safety concern has become the critical issue for large scale applications of LiB, such as hybrid electric vehicles and energy storage system.<sup>1-3</sup>

In order to overcome this problem, titanium-based oxides have attracted wide attention because of relatively high redox potential between 1.0 and 2.0 V vs.  $\text{Li/Li}^+$ , which avoids the possibility of lithium plating during the charging process.<sup>4-18</sup> Particularly, the zero-strain  $\text{Li}_4\text{Ti}_5\text{O}_{12}$  (LTO) with cubic spinel structure was commercialized as a highly safe anode material for LiBs due to its excellent cycle stability and high rate capability.<sup>4-10</sup> However, theoretical  $\text{Li}^+$  storage capacity of LTO is limited to  $175 \text{ mAh g}^{-1}$ , so that development of anode materials with both high safety and high  $\text{Li}^+$  storage capacity is strongly required to increase energy density of LiB for large scale applications. Niobium-based oxides with the redox potentials from 1.0 to 2.0 V vs.  $\text{Li/Li}^+$  have been also considered as interesting candidates for anode material of LiB with high safety, because it is possible to realize two-electron transfer per niobium by redox couple of  $\text{Nb}^{5+}/\text{Nb}^{4+}$  and  $\text{Nb}^{4+}/\text{Nb}^{3+}$ , resulting into high  $\text{Li}^+$  storage capacity. Moreover, these

oxides are nontoxic and more importantly, their redox potential should avoid possible lithium plating. To date, the electrochemical properties for various niobium-based oxides have been reported.<sup>19–42</sup> Among them, mixed titanium-niobium oxides  $\text{TiNb}_2\text{O}_7$ ,  $\text{Ti}_2\text{Nb}_{10}\text{O}_{29}$  and  $\text{TiNb}_{24}\text{O}_{62}$  have high theoretical capacity around 390–400 mAh g<sup>-1</sup> due to  $\text{Ti}^{4+/3+}$ ,  $\text{Nb}^{5+/4+}$  and  $\text{Nb}^{4+/3+}$  redox couples.<sup>26, 32, 36, 41</sup> They have the monoclinic “shear  $\text{ReO}_3$  structure” with the space group of  $C2/m$ , consisting of  $\text{MO}_6$  (M = Ti, Nb) octahedra sharing edges and corners.<sup>19, 26, 36, 41</sup> At the potential range above 1.0 V vs.  $\text{Li/Li}^+$ , they shows the reversible capacity of 250–300 mAh g<sup>-1</sup> and reasonably good cycle stability.

It has been already reported that the rate capability of  $\text{TiNb}_2\text{O}_7$  was significantly improved by carbon coating,<sup>26, 27</sup> reducing the particle size below 100 nm and controlling the particle morphology.<sup>29–32</sup> The former is effective to increase the extrinsic conductivity of active material while the latter plays a role in  $\text{Li}^+$  insertion/deinsertion kinetics, by increasing the reaction interface between the active materials and liquid electrolyte and facilitating transport owing to shorter or simpler diffusion paths for  $\text{Li}^+$  ions. The reforming the intrinsic properties such as electronic conductivity and  $\text{Li}^+$  diffusion coefficient by substituting with alien metal ions and/or controlling the composition is another effective method to improve the electrochemical properties of active materials. Although the electronic conduction in composite electrode is achieved by the conductive carbon, improvement of intrinsic electronic conductivity of active material is quite effective to enhance the rate performance because both the electrons and  $\text{Li}^+$  ions move in active material during charge and discharge reactions, as shown in the literatures.<sup>9–10</sup>  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$ ,  $\text{Ru}^{4+}$  and  $\text{Mo}^{6+}$  doping is confirmed to be effective to improve electrochemical performance for  $\text{TiNb}_2\text{O}_7$ .<sup>33–35</sup>  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  and  $\text{Nb}^{5+}$  co-doped  $\text{Ti}_2\text{Nb}_{10}\text{O}_{29}$  shows mush superior electrochemical performance to non-doped one.<sup>37</sup> In addition, electrochemical properties

of  $\text{Ti}_2\text{Nb}_{10}\text{O}_{29}$  can be improved greatly by introducing oxygen vacancy in the crystal structure.<sup>38–40</sup> Oxygen vacancy can be easily introduced in  $\text{Ti}_2\text{Nb}_{10}\text{O}_{29}$  crystal by annealing the precursor in vacuum, Ar and  $\text{N}_2$  atmospheres and greatly enhance the electronic conductivity.<sup>38–40</sup> Such improvement in electronic conductivity This method is quite simple, and could be applicable for improving electrochemical performance of other mixed Ti-Nb oxide with different Ti and Nb compositions such as  $\text{TiNb}_2\text{O}_7$  and  $\text{TiNb}_{24}\text{O}_{62}$ . Moreover, in the point of view for material cost, TNO with lower Nb contents is preferable because the cost of Nb source is more expensive than Ti source.

In this paper, we synthesized both  $\text{TiNb}_2\text{O}_7$  and  $\text{TiNb}_2\text{O}_{7-x}$  via simple solid state reaction by annealing the mixture of  $\text{TiO}_2$  and  $\text{Nb}_2\text{O}_5$  in air and vacuum atmosphere, in order to reform the intrinsic properties. The influence of introduction of oxygen vacancy into crystal structure, particle morphology, electronic conductivity and electrochemical performance for  $\text{TiNb}_2\text{O}_7$  as anode material for LiB was investigated.

## 2. EXPERIMENTAL

Samples used in this work were synthesized by a conventional solid state reaction method. Stoichiometric amount of anatase  $\text{TiO}_2$  (Kojundo Chemical Laboratory Co., Ltd., 99%) and  $\text{Nb}_2\text{O}_5$  (Kojundo Chemical Laboratory Co., Ltd., 99.9%) were ground and mixed in ethanol by planetary ball-milling (Nagao System, Planet M2-3F) with zirconia balls for 1 h. The mixture was sealed in a vacuum quartz tube with alumina boat and then annealed at  $1050^\circ\text{C}$  for 24 h under a pressure of 0.8 Pa using a tube furnace. For comparison, the sample was also prepared by annealing the same starting materials at  $1050^\circ\text{C}$  for 24 h in air.

Crystal structure of both TNO annealed in air (TNO-A) and TNO annealed in

vacuum (TNO-V) were evaluated by X-ray diffractometer (MultiFlex, Rigaku) using  $\text{CuK}\alpha$  radiation ( $\lambda = 0.15418 \text{ nm}$ ), with measurement angle range  $2\theta = 5\text{--}90^\circ$  and step interval of  $0.01^\circ$ . For the measurements, small amount of Si powders were mixed with TNO-A or TNO-V as the reference material. Using the X-ray diffraction (XRD) data for both powder samples, lattice parameters were calculated by Rigaku PDXL XRD analysis software. Scanning electron microscope (SEM, VE-8800, KEYENCE) was used to observe the size and the morphology of both TNO-A and TNO-V particles. The chemical states of Ti and Nb for both samples were characterized by using an X-ray photoelectron spectrometer (Quantera SXM, ULVAC-PHI Inc.) with an  $\text{AlK}\alpha$  X-ray source (1486.6 eV). Thermogravimetric (TG) analysis of both TNO-A and TNO-V was carried out by using differential thermal balance analyzer (Thermo plus EVO II TG-DTA TG8120, RIGAKU) at temperature range from room temperature to  $900^\circ\text{C}$  in flowing air with 500 mL/min, to evaluate the introduction of oxygen vacancy in TNO-V.

Electronic conductivity for both TNO-V and TNO-A was evaluated at  $20^\circ\text{C}$  by potentiostatic polarization measurement with an applied DC voltage of 1 V, using a Multi Potentiostat (VSP-300, Bio-Logic). During the conductivity measurement, uni-axial pressure of  $5 \times 10^3 \text{ N}$  was applied to both powder samples put between the pair of SUS316L electrodes with cylindrical shape. For electrochemical characterization of both TNO-A and TNO-V annealed in different atmospheres, two-electrode set-up was used. Firstly, the composite electrodes were fabricated from a 70:25:5 (wt%) mixture of active material (TNO-A or TNO-V), acetylene black (AB) as a conducting additive, and polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE) as a binder. The mixture was rolled into thin pellets with thickness of 0.5 mm and punched into 8 mm-diameter circular disks. The mass loading and compacted density of active material (TNO-A or TNO-V) in composite electrodes

were 0.062–0.065 g cm<sup>-2</sup> and 1.24–1.30 g cm<sup>-3</sup>, respectively. TNO-A or TNO-V pellet is used as working electrode, where as a single lithium foil serve as both counter and reference electrodes. The electrolyte solution was 1 mol LiPF<sub>6</sub> in a mixture of ethylene carbonate (EC) and dimethyl carbonate (DMC) with a volume ratio of 1:1 (Kishida Chemical Co., Ltd.). Together with Celgard 3501 as a separator, these components were assembled in a CR2032 coin type cell. The assembly of the cell was carried out in a dry Ar-filled glove box (UN-650FCH, UNICO). The cell was charged and discharged over a voltage range between 1.0 and 2.5 V versus Li/Li<sup>+</sup> electrode at different fixed current density 0.5–5.0 mA cm<sup>-2</sup> and 25°C using Battery Test System (TOSCAT-3100, Toyo System).

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1(a) shows the comparison of XRD patterns for TNO-A (annealed in air) and TNO-V (annealed in vacuum). It is noted that the diffraction peaks from Si, which was mixed with TNO-A or TNO-V as the reference, are removed from the data. All the peaks for both samples are well indexed with the calculated patterns based on structural data for TiNb<sub>2</sub>O<sub>7</sub> with monoclinic ReO<sub>3</sub> shear structure with the space group of *C2/m*,<sup>26–35</sup> and no other peaks from secondary phases were detected. However, as shown in Figure 1(b), several specific peaks are slightly shifted to smaller angle. It is noted that all diffraction peaks for TNO-V are confirmed to be shifted to smaller angle and the angle shift for each diffraction peak is much larger than the measuring step (= 0.01°), so that the lattice size for TNO-V is expected to be larger than that for TNO-A. The lattice parameters calculated by using XRD data and PDXL software are  $a = 1.191$  nm,  $b = 0.3810$  nm,  $c = 2.041$  nm and  $\beta = 120.20^\circ$  for TNO-A, while  $a = 1.193$  nm,  $b = 0.3813$  nm,  $c = 2.041$  nm and  $\beta =$

120.42° for TNO-V. These are very close to the data as previously reported but the parameters  $a$  and  $b$  for TNO-V are slightly larger than those for TNO-A.<sup>26–35</sup>

Comparison of photos and SEM images of TNO-A and TNO-V are shown in Figure 2. Both the size and morphology of TNO-A and TNO-V particles are nearly identical and the averaged particle size of both samples is confirmed to be around 0.5–2  $\mu\text{m}$ . However, the color is clearly different among the samples. TNO-A annealed in air is white while TNO-V annealed in vacuum is dark blue. Similar color change was reported in  $\text{Li}_4\text{Ti}_5\text{O}_{12}$  with the presence of the mixed  $\text{Ti}^{4+}/\text{Ti}^{3+}$  ions for charge compensation by  $\text{Ta}^{5+}$ ,  $\text{V}^{5+}$ ,  $\text{W}^{6+}$  and  $\text{Mo}^{6+}$  doping into  $\text{Ti}^{4+}$  site.<sup>8–11</sup> It has been also reported that partial reduction from  $\text{Nb}^{5+}$  to  $\text{Nb}^{4+}$  in Nb-based oxide also causes similar color change from white to dark blue.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, in our previous work,  $\text{Ti}_2\text{Nb}_{10}\text{O}_{29}$  also shows similar color change by introduction of oxygen vacancy, which is attributed to the partial reduction from  $\text{Ti}^{4+}$  and  $\text{Nb}^{5+}$  to  $\text{Ti}^{3+}$  and  $\text{Nb}^{4+}$  for charge compensation.<sup>38</sup> In this study, the nominal composition ratios of Ti : Nb of TNO-A and TNO-V are expected to be identical (= 1 : 2). Therefore, if partial reduction from  $\text{Ti}^{4+}$  and/or  $\text{Nb}^{5+}$  to  $\text{Ti}^{3+}$  and/or  $\text{Nb}^{4+}$  was occurred in TNO-V annealed in vacuum, some amount of oxygen vacancy should be introduced in TNO-V.

In order to confirm the introduction of oxygen vacancy in TNO-V, thermogravimetric (TG) analysis of both powder samples was carried out under flowing air. Figure 3 shows the comparison of thermogravimetric (TG) curves for TNO-A and TNO-V. As can be seen, TNO-A shows no weight change in whole measured temperature range, while the weight of TNO-V gradually increase with temperature above 400°C and becomes constant above 700°C. Increase of the weight for TNO-V from the initial state is confirmed to be 0.4% and after the measurement, the color of TNO-V was changed into



white color as well as TNO-A. These results suggest that oxygen vacancy is introduced in TNO-V and increase of the weight for TNO-V in TG analysis is attributed to the vanishing the oxygen vacancy by the oxidation. If Ti and Nb contents in TNO-V were stoichiometric (Ti : Nb = 1 : 2), the oxygen content in TNO-V is estimated to be 6.91. Therefore,  $\text{Ti}^{4+}$  and/or  $\text{Nb}^{5+}$  in TNO-V are expected to be partially reduced into  $\text{Ti}^{3+}$  and/or  $\text{Nb}^{4+}$  by introducing oxygen vacancy. In addition, ionic radii for  $\text{Ti}^{3+}$  and  $\text{Nb}^{4+}$  are 67 pm and 68 pm, larger than those for  $\text{Ti}^{4+}$  (61 pm) and  $\text{Nb}^{5+}$  (64 pm). Slightly larger lattice parameters for TNO-V than those for TNO-A could be attributed to the presence of  $\text{Ti}^{3+}$  and  $\text{Nb}^{4+}$ .

We also carried out X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) analysis for both powder samples to confirm the chemical state of both Ti and Nb in TNO-A and TNO-V. The XPS characterizations obtained for both powder samples are shown in Figure 4. For calibration of measurement data, small amount of AB powders were mixed into both TNO-A and TNO-V in the analysis. As shown in Figure. 4(a), two peaks of Ti  $2\text{P}_{1/2}$  and Ti  $2\text{P}_{3/2}$  spectra in TNO-A are observed at binding energy around 465.3 and 459.7 eV, suggesting that the existence and occupying of  $\text{Ti}^{4+}$  in an octahedral environment.<sup>35, 37, 38</sup> These peaks are confirmed in TNO-V, but Ti  $2\text{P}_{3/2}$  spectrum in TNO-V slightly shifts toward lower binding energy compared to TNO-A, indicating that small amounts of  $\text{Ti}^{4+}$  in TNO-V are reduced to  $\text{Ti}^{3+}$  caused by introduction of oxygen vacancy.<sup>35, 40</sup> In Figure. 4(b) for Nb 3d spectra, two peaks located at 208.1 eV for Nb  $3\text{d}_{5/2}$  and 210.9 eV for Nb  $3\text{d}_{3/2}$  are confirmed in TNO-A indicating the presence of  $\text{Nb}^{5+}$ .<sup>35, 37, 38</sup> These two peaks are also detected in TNO-V, but the peak shift toward lower binding energy due to the presence of  $\text{Nb}^{4+}$  caused by introduction of oxygen vacancy are quite small, so the presence of  $\text{Nb}^{4+}$  in V-TNO could not be characterized enough. For further examination,

the curve fitting for Ti 2P<sub>3/2</sub> spectra for both TNO-A and TNO-V was carried out and the results are shown in Figure 4(c). The peaks for Ti<sup>3+</sup> 2P<sub>3/2</sub> and Ti<sup>4+</sup> 2P<sub>3/2</sub> are located around 458.8 and 459.7 eV.<sup>9</sup> and the contribution of Ti<sup>3+</sup> becomes remarkable in TNO-V compared to TNO-A.

As previously reported, electronic conductivity for Ti<sub>2</sub>Nb<sub>10</sub>O<sub>29-x</sub> with oxygen vacancy is much higher than stoichiometric Ti<sub>2</sub>Nb<sub>10</sub>O<sub>29</sub>, due to the presence of Ti<sup>3+</sup> and/or Nb<sup>4+</sup> in the crystal lattice.<sup>38-40</sup> In order to evaluate the influence of oxygen vacancy on electronic conductivity for TiNb<sub>2</sub>O<sub>7</sub>, potentiostatic polarization measurement at 30°C was carried out for TNO-A and TNO-V. Each powder sample with 0.3 g in weight was put between the pair of SUS316L electrode with cylindrical shape and then uni-axially pressed under applying pressure of  $5 \times 10^3$  N. Applied DC voltage in the measurement was fixed to 1.0 V. Geometrical parameter of both pressed powder samples are 11 mm in diameter and 2 mm in thickness. DC polarization curves in both pressed TNO-A and TNO-V measuring electron conduction are shown in Figure. 5. Steady state current at 10 h after applying DC voltage are  $4.5 \times 10^{-8}$  mA for TNO-A and 5.1 mA for TNO-V, respectively. The electrical resistance  $R_e$  of each sample is calculated using the steady state current, applied DC voltage (= 1 V) and geometrical parameters of each sample. The electronic conductivity  $\sigma_e$  of pressed powder sample can be derived by using  $R_e$  and geometrical parameters as mentioned above. As a result, the electronic conductivity of pressed TNO-V was estimated to be  $1.1 \times 10^{-3}$  S cm<sup>-1</sup>. On the other hand, the conductivity of pressed TNO-A was  $0.95 \times 10^{-11}$  S cm<sup>-1</sup>, which is consistent with the reported value for air-annealed TiNb<sub>2</sub>O<sub>7</sub> in the literatures.<sup>33</sup> This indicates that the electronic conductivity of TNO is increased by eight orders by introduction of oxygen vacancy.

Figure 5 is the comparison of initial charge (Li<sup>+</sup> insertion) and discharge (Li<sup>+</sup>

extraction) profiles for TNO-A and TNO-V electrodes at 20°C and current density of 0.5 mA cm<sup>-2</sup>. As shown in Figure 5, both TNO-A and TNO-V shows narrower voltage plateau around 1.8 V and wider plateau around 1.65 V, which is consistent with the results as previously reported.<sup>26–35</sup> It has been reported that in the potential range from 2.5 to 1.0 vs. Li/Li<sup>+</sup>, Ti<sup>4+</sup> in TNO is continuously reduced into Ti<sup>3+</sup> and Nb<sup>5+</sup> is also reduced into Nb<sup>4+</sup> and sequentially reduced into Nb<sup>3+</sup> from this potential range.<sup>31, 32</sup> Despite of the differences in the reversible capacities, the profiles for both cells are quite similar, indicating that the introduction of oxygen vacancy in TNO do not affect the fundamental electrochemical reaction mechanism. TNO-V with oxygen vacancy has slightly lower capacity than TNO-A. Initial charge and discharge capacities are 270.9 mAh g<sup>-1</sup> and 267.3 mAh g<sup>-1</sup> for TNO-A while 263.5 mAh g<sup>-1</sup> and 259.8 mAh g<sup>-1</sup> for TNO-V, respectively. It is known that all the electrochemical energy in TNO comes from the reversible redox reactions between Ti<sup>3+</sup> and Ti<sup>4+</sup> ions, between Nb<sup>4+</sup> and Nb<sup>5+</sup> ions, and between Nb<sup>3+</sup> and Nb<sup>4+</sup> ions. Since there are some amounts of Ti<sup>3+</sup> and/or Nb<sup>4+</sup> ions in TNO-V with oxygen vacancy, the contents of Ti<sup>4+</sup> and/or Nb<sup>5+</sup> become smaller than TNO-A without oxygen vacancy, leading to the lower reversible capacity at low current density. If the decrease of reversible capacity (= 7.6–7.7 mAh g<sup>-1</sup>) in TNO-V at low current density (= 0.5 mA cm<sup>-2</sup>) was caused by the partial reduction of Ti<sup>4+</sup> and/or Nb<sup>5+</sup> into Ti<sup>3+</sup> and/or Nb<sup>4+</sup>, oxygen content in TNO-V is estimated to be 6.90, which is close to the result (= 6.91) derived from TG measurement in Figure 3.

The charge–discharge curves of both TNO-A and TNO-V electrodes at 20°C and different fixed current densities per unit-electrode area of 1.0–5.0 mA cm<sup>-2</sup> are shown in Figure 7. At current density of 1 mA cm<sup>-2</sup>, both electrodes showed the reversible capacity around 250 mAh g<sup>-1</sup>. The charge and discharge capacities for both electrodes are

decreased monotonically with increasing current densities, but TNO-V shows much smaller polarization and larger capacity than TNO-A under the current density above 2.0 mA cm<sup>-2</sup>. This tendency becomes more significant as the current density is increased. At the highest current density of 5.0 mA cm<sup>-2</sup>, TNO-V maintains the discharge capacity of 140 mAh g<sup>-1</sup> while the capacity of TNO-A is limited to only 80 mAh g<sup>-1</sup>. Such remarkable improvement of rate performance in TNO-V is mainly attributed to the enhancement of intrinsic electronic conductivity by introduction of oxygen vacancy.

Figure 8(a) shows the cycling performance for discharge capacities of TNO-A and TNO-V electrodes at 20°C and current density of 2.0 mA cm<sup>-2</sup>. For direct comparison, the cycling performance for LTO electrode (70:25:5 (wt%) mixture of LTO as an active material, AB as a conducting additive and PTFE as a binder) with a thickness of 0.5 mm and a diameter of 8 mm, measured at same condition. Notably, LTO used in this measurement was prepared by a conventional solid state reaction, and its particle size is in the range from 0.5 to 1 μm (see inset of Figure 8(a)). As can be seen, both TNO-A and TNO-V electrode has higher capacities than LTO. Moreover, TNO-V electrode has higher capacity than TNO-A electrode in the whole cycles, suggesting that higher intrinsic electronic conductivity of the former than the latter is maintained during the cycling. The capacity retentions after 50 cycles for both TNO-A and TNO-V electrodes were around 90% and the coulombic efficiencies of both electrodes are nearly 100% during the whole cycle (Figure 8(b)). The results indicate that introduction of oxygen vacancy in TNO lattice and enhancement of intrinsic electronic conductivity has no notable influence on the cycling performance of TNO, and the cycling performance of active material is influenced by not only the intrinsic conductivity but also the magnitude of volume change during the electrode reaction. However, the cycling stability of both TNO-A and TNO-V

electrodes is inferior to LTO electrode with the capacity retention of 97% after 50 cycles. One of the main reason for lower cycling stability in TNO-A and TNO-V electrodes comparing to LTO electrode is expected to be the difference in volume change during  $\text{Li}^+$  insertion/extraction reaction. It is well known that volume change in LTO during the  $\text{Li}^+$  insertion/extraction reaction is negligibly small ( $< 0.2\%$ ),<sup>5</sup> while it has been confirmed that larger volume change ( $\sim 8\%$ ) occurs in TNO during the  $\text{Li}^+$  insertion/extraction reaction at an electrical potential above 1 V vs.  $\text{Li/Li}^+$ .<sup>31, 32</sup> This would cause the mechanical damages in active material and promote the degradation of electrochemical performance with cycling.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

We investigated the properties for  $\text{TiNb}_2\text{O}_7$  (TNO) annealed in air (TNO-A) or vacuum (TNO-V) as high potential anode material for LiB. Oxygen vacancy is easily introduced in TNO lattice by vacuum annealing for precursor materials for TNO. XPS analysis also indicated that  $\text{Ti}^{4+}$  in TNO-V are partially reduced into  $\text{Ti}^{3+}$  due to the introduction of oxygen vacancy. Room temperature electronic conductivity for uniaxially pressed TNO-V powder is estimated to be around  $10^{-3} \text{ S cm}^{-1}$ , which is eight orders higher than that for pressed TNO-A powder. In electrochemical testing, both TNO-A and TNO-V electrodes showed reversible capacity of 260–270  $\text{mAh g}^{-1}$  at low current density, but at higher current density, TNO-V electrode showed much higher capacity than that for TNO-A. The improvement in rate performance for TNO-V is mainly attributed to the enhancement of intrinsic electronic conductivity.

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## FIGURE CAPTIONS

**FIGURE 1.** (a) Comparison of X-ray diffraction patterns for TNO-A annealed in air and TNO-V annealed in vacuum. An inset is the crystal structure of  $\text{TiNb}_2\text{O}_7$  along  $ac$ -plane. Enlarged several specific diffraction peaks for both samples are shown in (b).

**FIGURE 2.** Photos (left) and SEM images (right) for TNO-A annealed in air (a) and TNO-V annealed in vacuum (b).

**FIGURE 3.** Comparison of thermogravimetric (TG) curves for TNO-A and TNO-V. The measurement was carried out in flowing air with  $500 \text{ mL min}^{-1}$ .

**FIGURE 4.** Comparison for Ti 2p (a) and Nb 3d (b) spectrum for TNO-A and TNO-V measured by X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy. Fitting results (solid lines) for Ti 2p  $2/3$  spectrum for TNO-A and TNO-V are shown in (c).

**FIGURE 5.** DC polarization curves in pressed TNO-A and TNO-V measuring electron conduction at 1 V and  $30^\circ\text{C}$ .

**FIGURE 6.** Comparison of initial charge ( $\text{Li}^+$  insertion) and discharge ( $\text{Li}^+$  extraction) curves at  $20^\circ\text{C}$  and current density of  $0.5 \text{ mA cm}^{-2}$  for TNO-A (dashed line) and TNO-V (solid line) electrodes.

**FIGURE 7.** Charge (solid lines) and discharge (dashed lines) curves at  $20^\circ\text{C}$  and different fixed charge and discharge current densities from  $1.0$  to  $5.0 \text{ mA cm}^{-2}$  for (a) TNO-A and (b) TNO-V electrodes.

**FIGURE 8.** (a) Discharge capacities for TNO-A, TNO-V and LTO electrodes at constant current density of  $2.0 \text{ mA cm}^{-2}$  at  $20^\circ\text{C}$  plotted against cycle numbers. The inset SEM image of LTO particles used in this measurement. Coulombic efficiencies of both TNO-A and TNO-V electrodes are also plotted as a function of cycle numbers in (b).

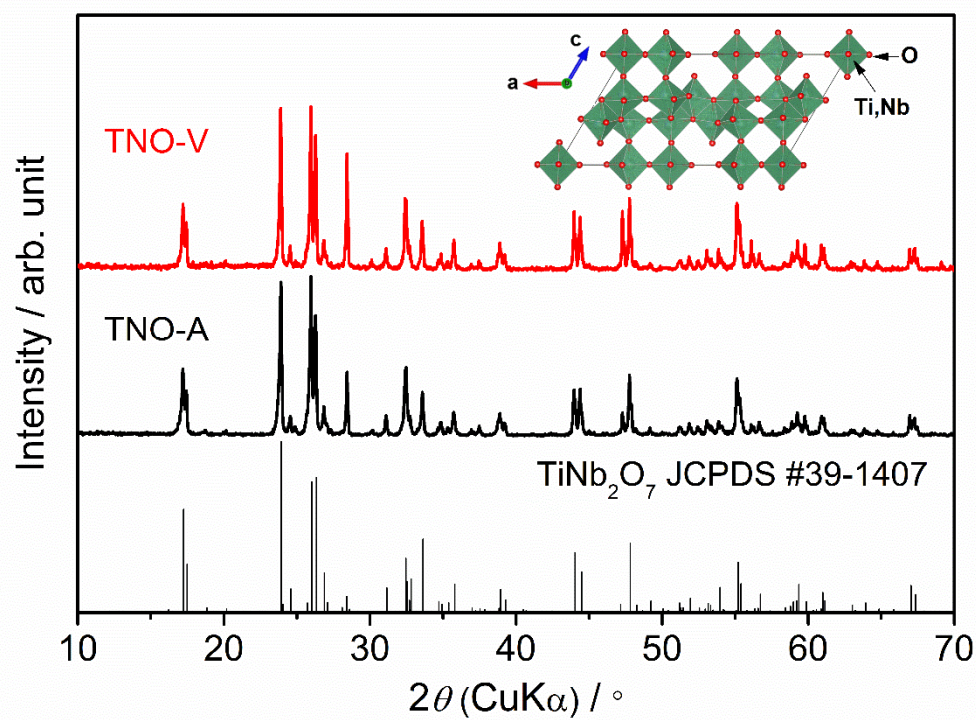


Figure 1(a)

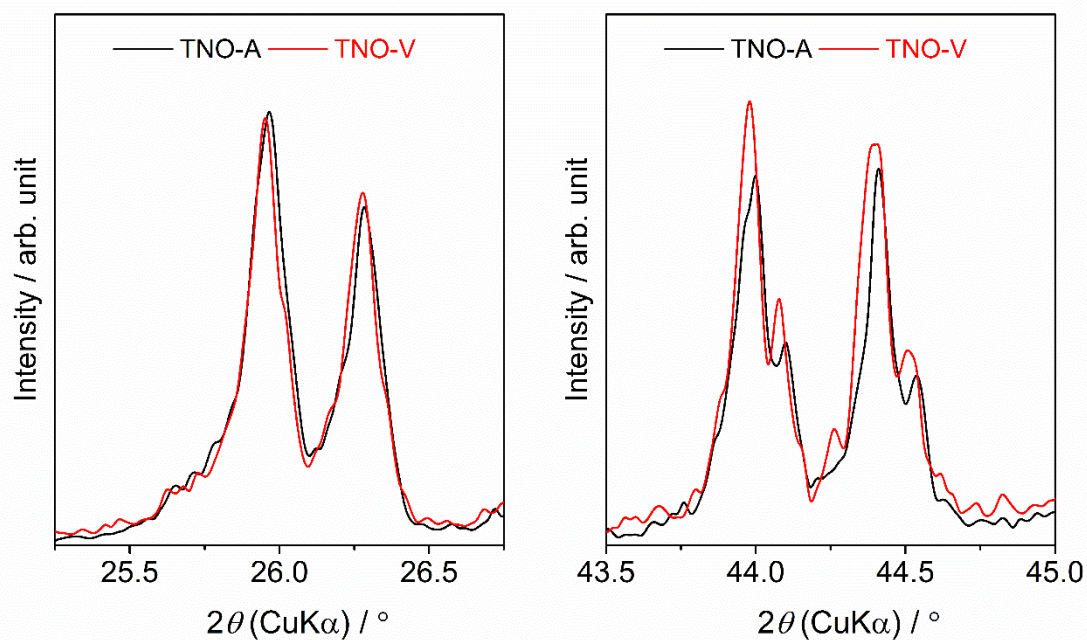


Figure 1(b)

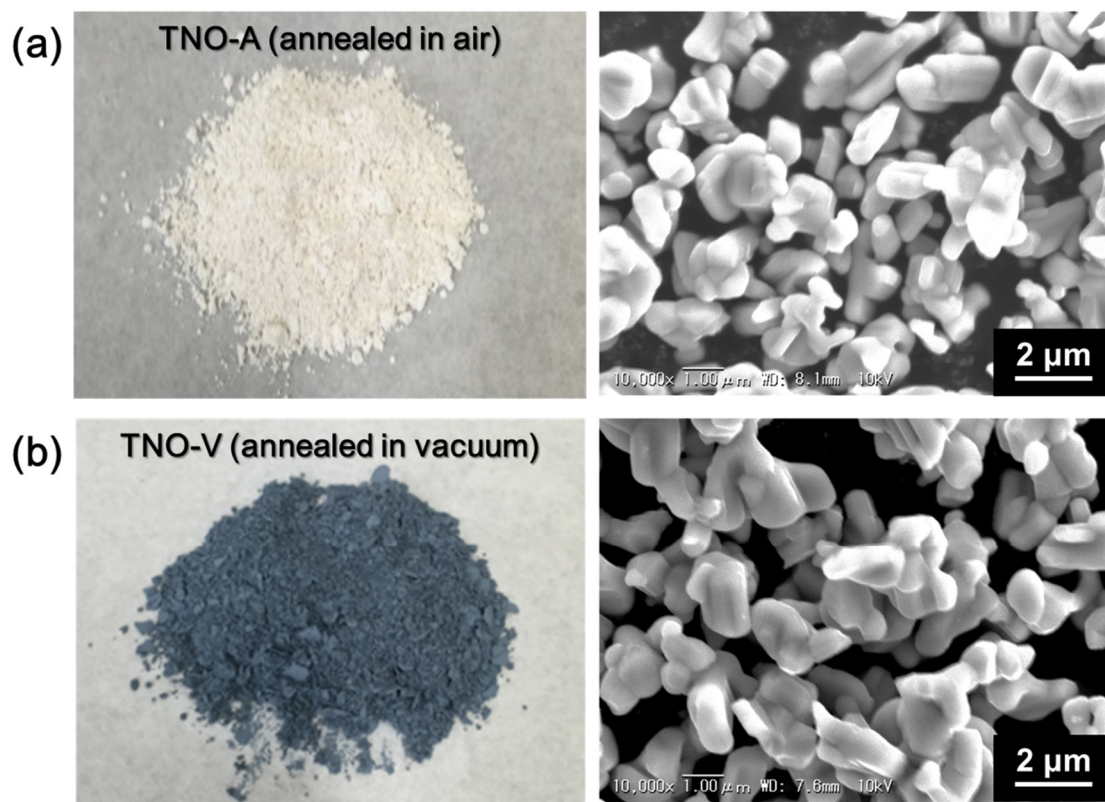


Figure 2

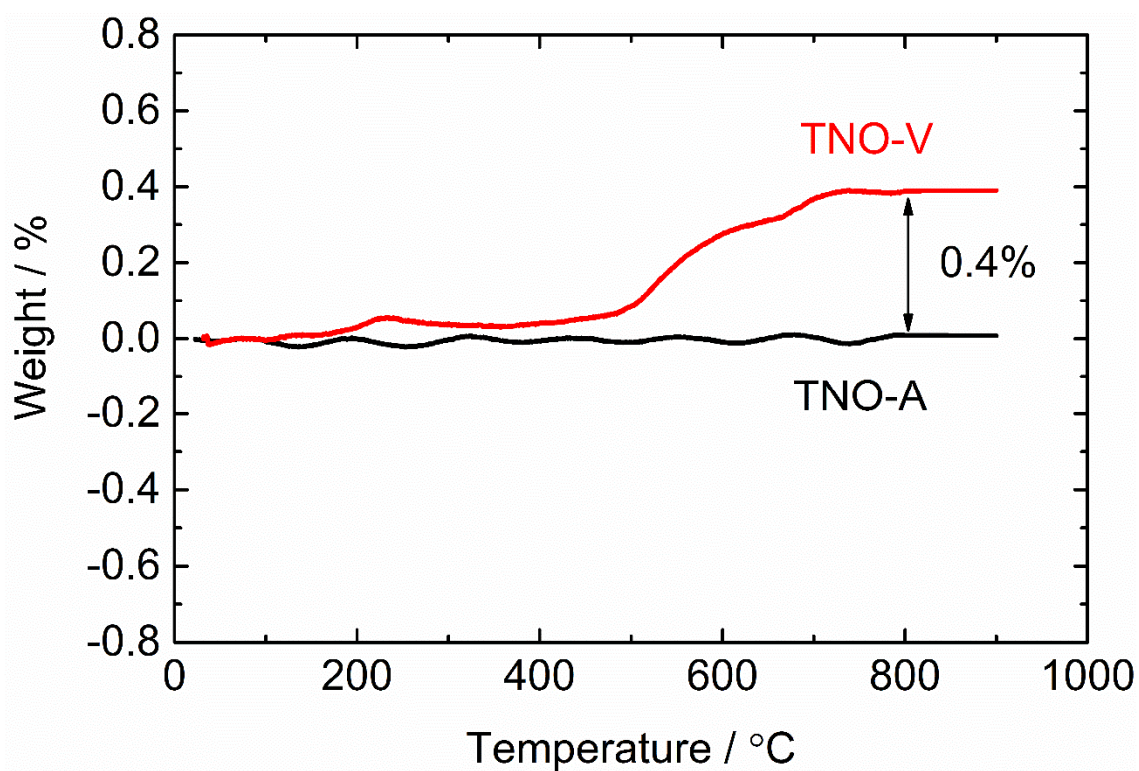


Figure 3



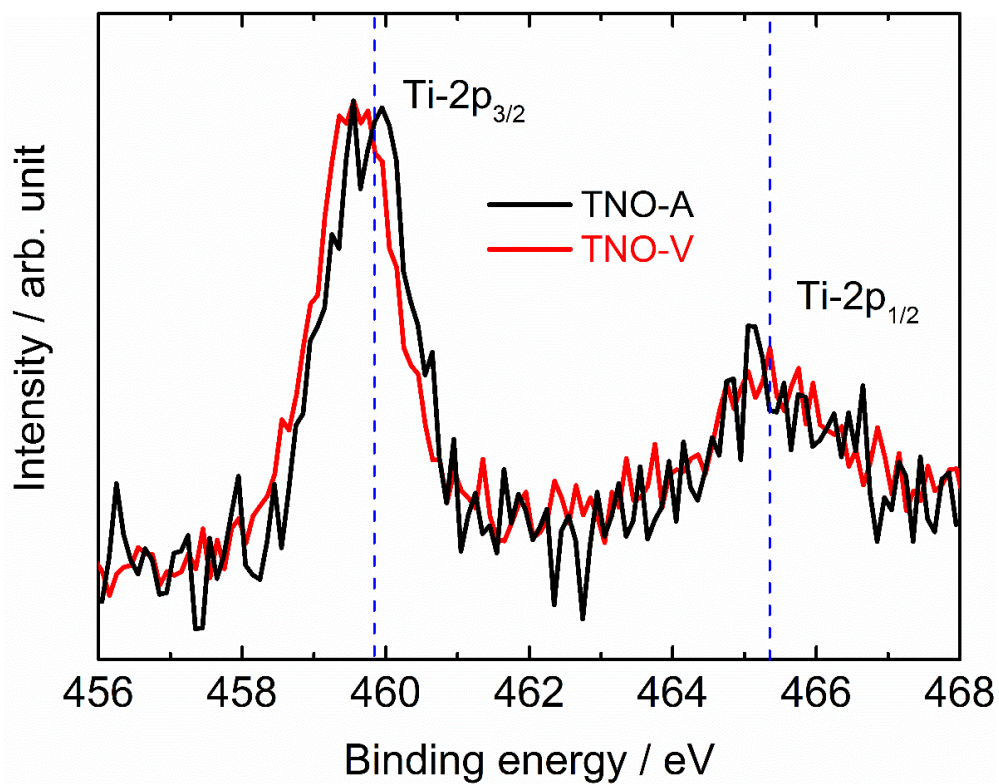


Figure 4(a)

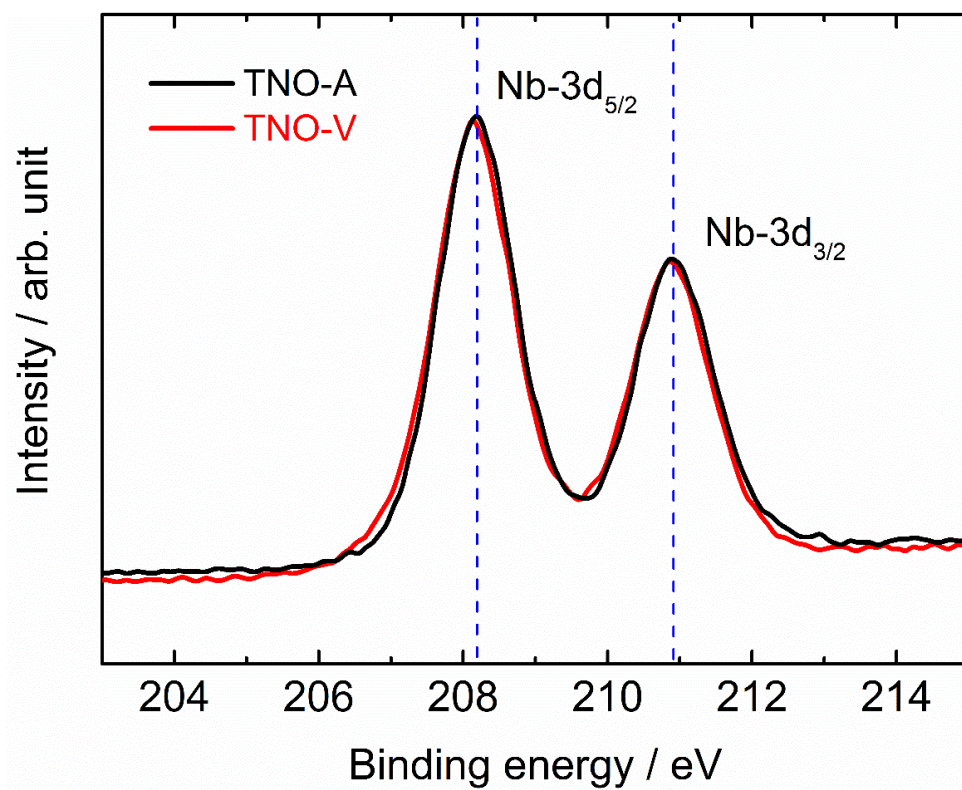


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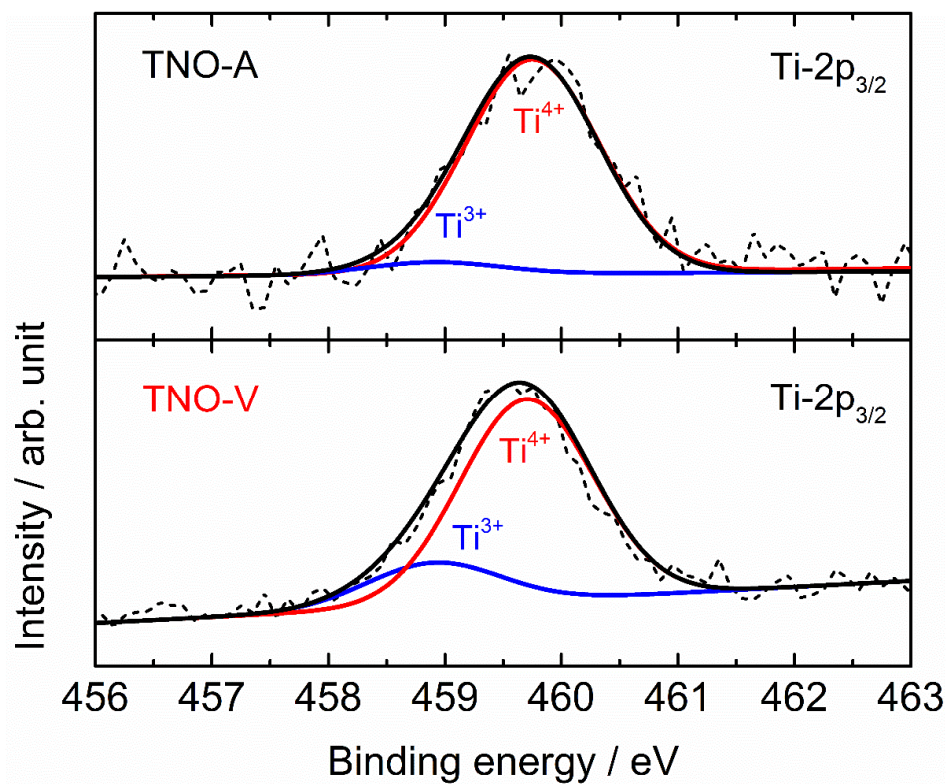


Figure 4(c)

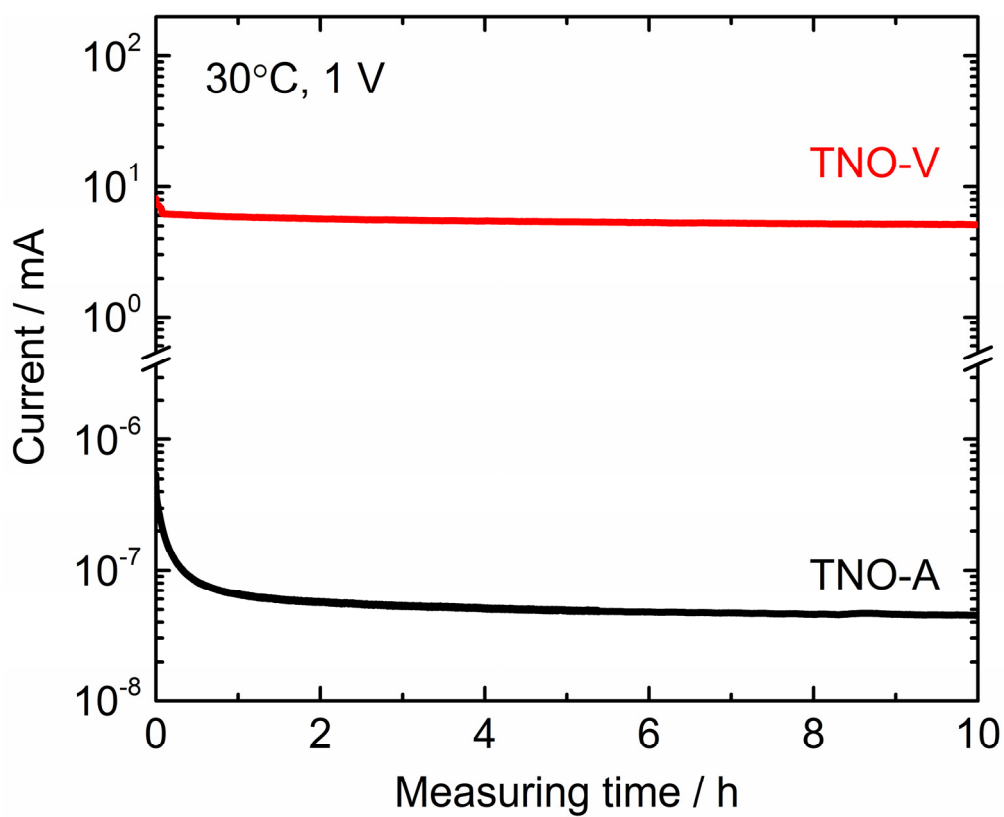


Figure 5

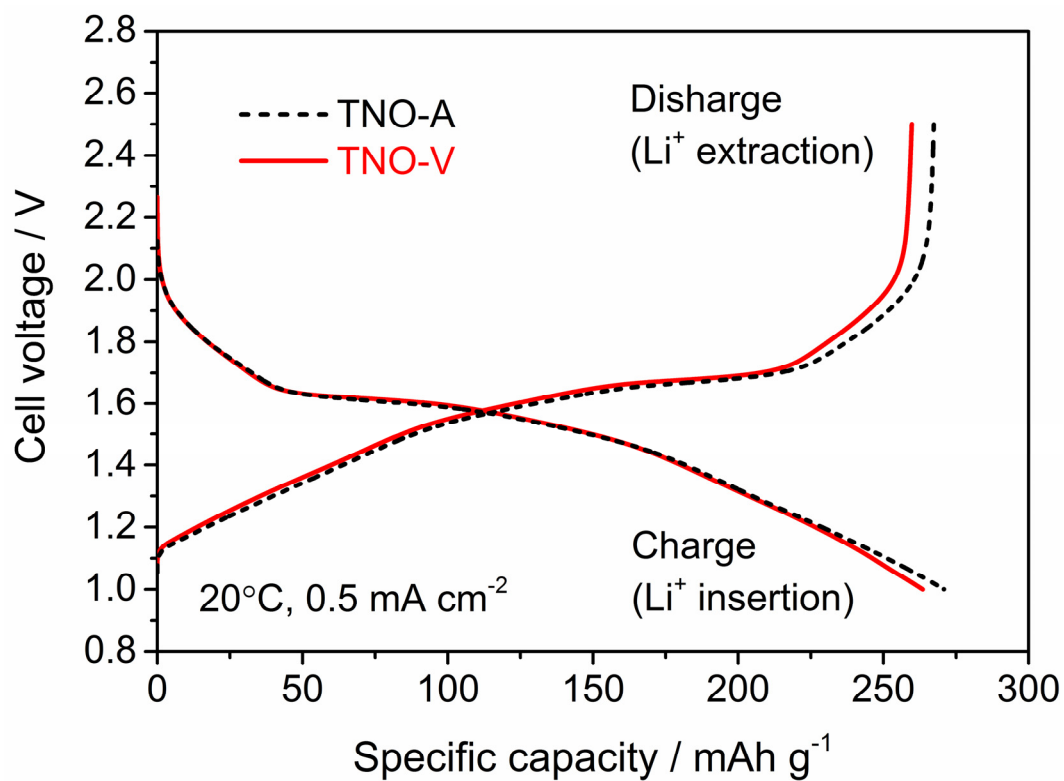


Figure 6

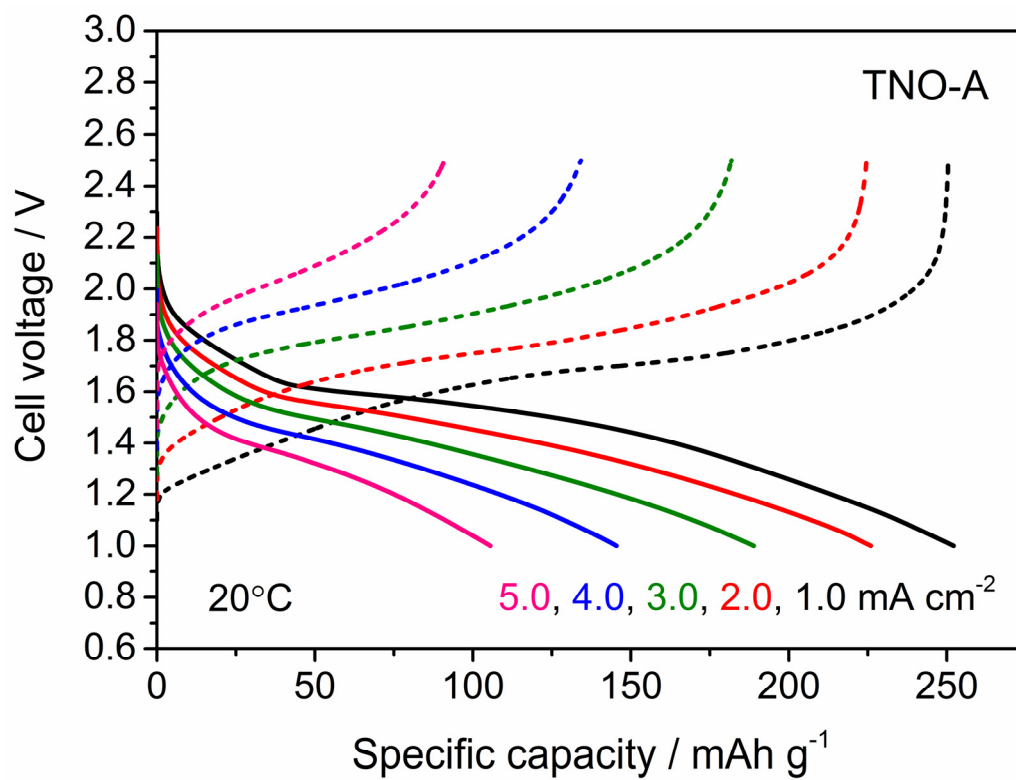


Figure 7(a)



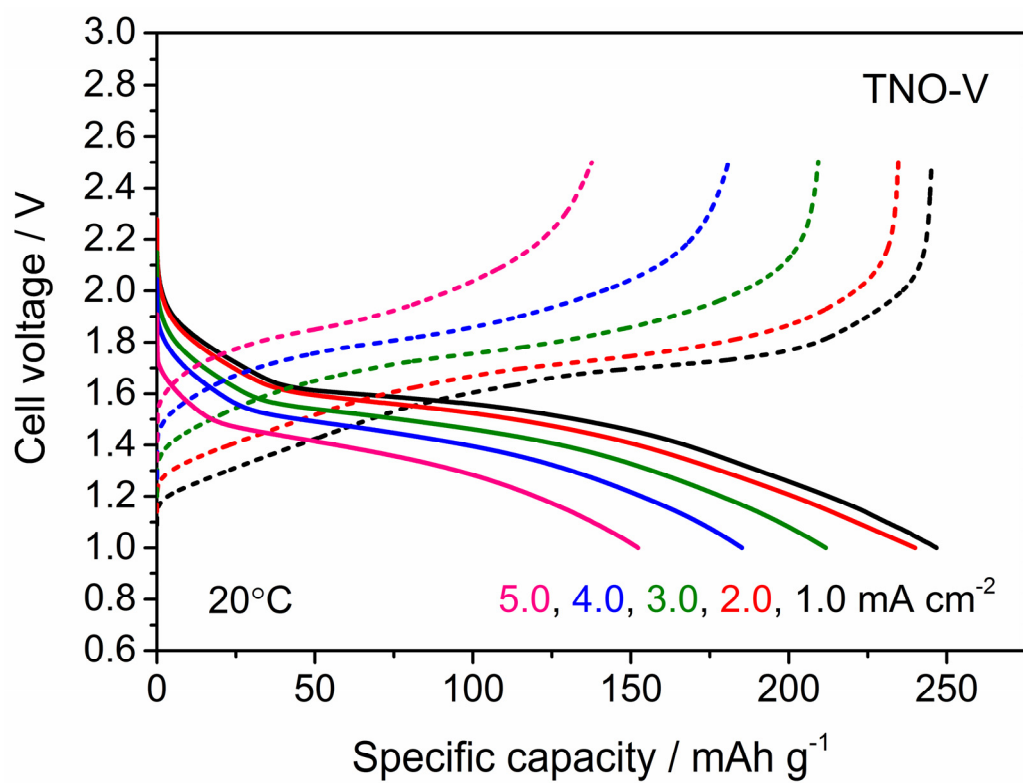


Figure 7(b)

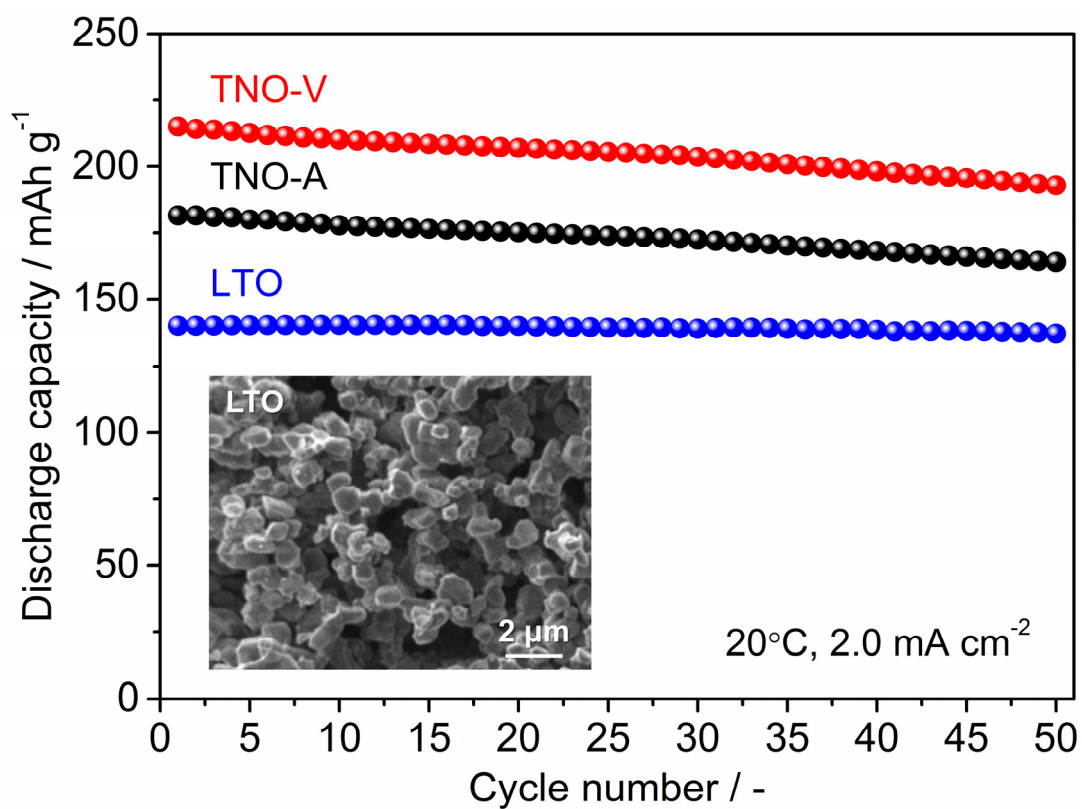


Figure 8(a)

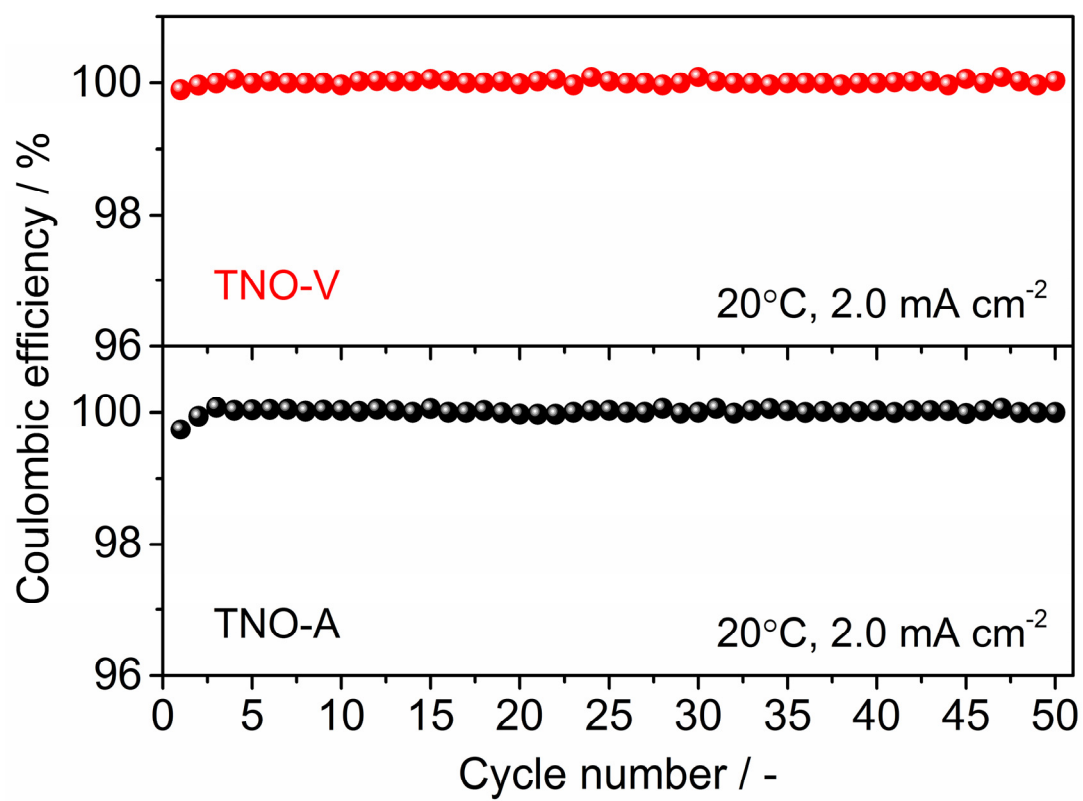


Figure 8(b)