In recent years, lithium-ion battery material in the field of new energy application has received considerable attention [1–4]. LiFePO$_4$, with an olivine structure, is considered to be a promising positive electrode due to its high theoretical capacity, low cost, environment benignity, cycling stability and high safety, all of which has naturally led to a fast development in the application of plug-in hybrid vehicles [5–9]. Meanwhile, LiFePO$_4$ is one of the anode materials in various applications such as electric power; the battery needs better performance of low temperature and the ratio of the corresponding requirement of the lithium iron phosphate material nano-particles [10–12]. Nonetheless, LiFePO$_4$ has some intrinsic shortcomings, including poor electronic conductivity and limited lithium ion diffusion coefficient, which result in less impressive performance at high rates. Many efforts have been made to overcome these limitations, several researchers reported that reducing the particle size and carbon-coating on the LiFePO$_4$ particles were effective in improving its electrochemical reactivity. The crystal orientation of LiFePO$_4$ particles is also an important characteristic, which is strongly related to electrode kinetics.

The most common methods to synthesize LiFePO$_4$ are solid-state reaction, coprecipitation, hydrothermal, solvothermal, sol–gel and microwave reaction, during which hydrothermal is one of the most effective method, which is widely applied and systemically studied. In order to increase the utilization of LiFePO$_4$ for charge and discharge, smaller particles should be prepared under suitable conditions. Many efforts have been made to overcome these limitations. However, the former reaction methods for synthesizing LiFePO$_4$ reported are unproductive because they need 3mol LiOH as Li source [13].

In this paper, we developed a novel routine based on hydrothermal method for synthesizing LiFePO$_4$. We use FeSO$_4$·7H$_2$O and LiH$_2$PO$_4$ as raw materials, and the molar ratio of Li: Fe in the precursor was controlled to be 1:1. The addition of citric acid to the precursor was effective in preventing the undesirable iron compounds during hydrothermal treatment. The particle morphology and the crystal orientation of the prepared LiFePO$_4$ particles were investigated by the XRD and SEM results. The X-ray diffraction pattern of the samples indicated that single-phase LiFePO$_4$ were successfully synthesized by hydrothermal method with a stoichiometric 1:1 ratio of Li :Fe.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, lithium-ion battery material in the field of new energy application has received considerable attention [1–4]. LiFePO$_4$, with an olivine structure, is considered to be a promising positive electrode due to its high theoretical capacity, low cost, environment benignity, cycling stability and high safety, all of which has naturally led to a fast development in the application of plug-in hybrid vehicles [5–9]. Meanwhile, LiFePO$_4$ is one of the anode materials in various applications such as electric power; the battery needs better performance of low temperature and the ratio of the corresponding requirement of the lithium iron phosphate material nano-particles [10–12]. Nonetheless, LiFePO$_4$ has some intrinsic shortcomings, including poor electronic conductivity and limited lithium ion diffusion coefficient, which result in less impressive performance at high rates. Many efforts have been made to overcome these limitations, several researchers reported that reducing the particle size and carbon-coating on the LiFePO$_4$ particles were effective in improving its electrochemical reactivity.

Novel Synthesis of Plate-like LiFePO$_4$ by Hydrothermal Method

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Received: October 01, 2015, Accepted: December 09, 2015, Available online: February 08, 2016

Abstract: Lithium iron phosphate (LiFePO$_4$) was prepared by hydrothermal synthesis method using FeSO$_4$·7H$_2$O and LiH$_2$PO$_4$ as resource of Li and Fe. The ratio of Li: Fe was maintained 1:1. The results suggested that pH value played a crucial role in the synthesis of LiFePO$_4$, especially for the generation of impurities. We found that adding citric acid to the precursor was an effective way for chelating ferrous ions, thereby preventing the undesirable iron compounds during hydrothermal treatment. The particle morphology and the crystal orientation of the prepared LiFePO$_4$ particles were investigated by the XRD and SEM results. The X-ray diffraction pattern of the samples indicated that single-phase LiFePO$_4$ were successfully synthesized by hydrothermal method with a stoichiometric 1:1 ratio of Li :Fe.

Keywords: Hydrothermal synthesis; single phase LiFePO$_4$; citric acid

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LiFePO$_4$ was synthesized via an optimum hydrothermal method. The raw materials, FeSO$_4$·7H$_2$O (99%) were dispersed in 30 ml deionized water by stirring for a period of time in a 100 ml Teflon liner. Then the LiH$_2$PO$_4$ (99.6%) were added into the solution under vigorous stirring. Here, it should be emphasized that the ratio of Fe to Li resource was maintained at 1:1 in our experiments. To evaluate the influence of pH value on crystal structures and crystal morphologies, the pH values, were modified by adding a chemical agent of ammonia into the mixtures mentioned above, and were ranged from 5 to 8. Then the solution was poured into a beaker placed into a sealed Teflon lined steel autoclave and heated at 180 °C for 6 hours. After cooling to room temperature naturally, the products were collected and washed several times using deionized water and air-dried at 80 °C for hours.

According to the impurity content at pH 7 was of the lowest, to obtain a single phase and reduce the impurity content, citric acid were transferred into the solution for pH value of 7. The molar ratio of citric acid and FeSO$_4$·7H$_2$O was controlled to be 1:9.

The X-ray diffraction (XRD) data was measured on an X-ray diffractometer (Model D/Max2500 PC, Rigaku Co., Japan) with CuKα irradiation using a tube voltage and current of 40 kV and 150 mA. The diffraction data were collected in the range between 10° and 70°, with an acquisition step of 0.02°.

The crystal morphologies of the powder were characterized on scanning electron microscopy (SEM; Model JSM-840, JEOL Co., Japan).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fig. 1 shows powder XRD patterns of samples prepared from the precursors with different pH values of the reaction solution. It should be pointed out that the primary crystalline phases were LiFePO$_4$ (space group: Pnma) for all the products. Whereas, the impurity crystalline phases were different. As can be seen from Fig. 1, Fe$_3$(PO$_4$)$_3$H$_2$O and Fe$_5$P$_4$O$_{20}$H$_{10}$ were generated as impurities at lower pH values of 5 and 6, and Fe$_4$(P$_2$O$_7$)$_3$ impurity was formed when the pH value was 8. However, when the pH value was adjust-
ed to 7, the majority of the product was orthorhombic LiFePO$_4$, with a small amount of impurities. Apparently, the XRD results gave the evidence that the pH values of the solution played crucial roles for the composition of the product. As we known that, the variety of pH values means the concentration of H$^+$ or OH$^-$ species in the solutions changes, which can naturally affect the solubility of precursor and dissoluble/depositional ratio of configurational ions. With the increase of pH value, some high energy surfaces remain because the deposition rate of configurational ions is higher than the dissolution rate, and finer particles are obtained because of quick nucleation rate. [14] And with a decreased pH value, there would be more H$^+$ in the starting solution which has higher mobility that may affect the formation activation energy. Therefore, it may be easier to form Li vacancies and also result in Li, Fe inter-site mixing. So orthorhombic LiFePO$_4$ (space group: Pnma) was obtained from the precursor solution at pH 7.

Fig. 2 displays SEM images of the as-synthesized products at different pH values. It can be seen from the figure that the morphologies of the products varied in terms of the pH values of the solutions. The primary particle size of pH 7 was as large as 1mm.

In order to diminish the formation of impurities such as Fe$_3$(PO$_4$)$_2$·H$_2$O, Fe$_2$P$_2$O$_7$·(OH)$_{10}$ and Fe$_4$P$_2$O$_7$·(OH)$_{10}$, we add the citric acid to the precursor to synthesize a single phase of orthorhombic LiFePO$_4$. Fig. 3 shows the XRD patterns for LiFePO$_4$ synthesized at pH 7 after adding the citric acid. It can be seen from Fig.3 that the samples are single phase of LiFePO$_4$ which can be indexed to the orthorhombic olivine type structure (PDF#81-1173). The strong and narrow peaks suggest that the LiFePO$_4$ has high crystallinity. No impurities such as Fe$_3$(PO$_4$)$_2$·H$_2$O, Fe$_2$P$_2$O$_7$·(OH)$_{10}$ and Fe$_4$P$_2$O$_7$·(OH)$_{10}$, were tested. In comparison with Fig. 1, another important feature of the XRD pattern of LiFePO$_4$ is that the intensity of the main peak of LiFePO$_4$ in Fig. 3 is stronger than Fig. 1, suggesting that the existence of citric acid affected the crystalline process of the generation of LiFePO$_4$. We believe that the crystalline of LiFePO$_4$ is herein the location of Li$^+$, Fe$^{2+}$ and PO$_4^{3-}$ onto their crystalline positions. With the citric acid in the system, it will be incorporated with Fe$^{2+}$. The release of Fe$^{2+}$ controlled the reaction process during the forming LiFePO$_4$.

Fig. 4 displays SEM images of the as-synthesized LiFePO$_4$ at pH 7 after adding the citric acid. It is noteworthy that very tiny plate-like crystals were obtained, the resulting microstructure of the sample was homogeneous, the length and width respectively of the sheet structure of 100μm.

Fig. 5 is the X-ray diffraction patterns of the samples LiFePO$_4$ were refined. The XRD pattern of LiFePO$_4$ together with its refinement is shown in Fig.5. The pattern could be indexed using Rietveld refinement with unit cell parameters of a=10.336(35)Å, b=6.004(48)Å and c=4.701(90)Å.

4. CONCLUSIONS

A single orthorhombic LiFePO$_4$ was successfully synthesized by hydrothermal routine with the stoichiometric Li/Fe of 1:1 from the precursor solution of pH 7. The addition of citric acid to the precursor was effective in chelating ferrous ions, control the release rate during the hydrothermal reaction, thereby preventing the undesirable iron compounds during hydrothermal treatment.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was financially supported by the 863 program (Grant No.2009AA11A106) and Special funds for independent innovation and transformation of achievements in Shandong Province (Grant No. 2014CGZH0911).
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