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BOROHYDRIDE REDUCTION: A TECHNIQUE TO SYNTHESIZE NANOSIZE TRANSITION METALS, REDUCED TRANSITION METAL OXIDES AND NANOCOMPOSITES

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Introduction

Sodium borohydride was recognized forty years ago as an effective reducing agent for metal ions in aqueous solutions [1]. The reduction of metal ions M²⁺ with borohydrides can be represented as [2]

\[ \text{BH}_4^- + M^{2+} + 2H_2O = M + \text{BO}_2^- + 2H_3^+ + 3H_2 \]

The advantage of the borohydride reduction technique is to synthesize extremely fine (nanosize to amorphous) material at room temperature. The use of borohydrides to generate magnetic metallic particles such as Co, Fe and Ni has been relatively well studied [3-5]. However, use of the borohydride reduction to synthesize transition-metal oxides and nanocomposites is relatively new. Manthiram's group [6-9] was the first to show that borohydrides can be used to reduce oxo-ions (MOₓ⁻) (M=Mo, W, or V) to obtain reduced transition metal oxides. They also showed [10, 11] that borohydrides can be used to obtain nanocomposites such as Fe-AlₓB₂O₇ at ambient temperatures. This paper summarizes some recent studies of using borohydride reduction to synthesize W, transition metal oxides such as WO₂ and MOO₃, and Fe-AlₓB₂O₇ magnetic nanocomposites.

Transition-Metals Oxides

It is found [6-9] that borohydride-reduction of Na₂WO₄ and Na₂MoO₄ solutions gives at ambient temperature amorphous reduced oxides such as Naₓₐ-WO₄, WO₂, and MoO₂. During the reduction, the valence state is reduced from W⁶⁺ to W²⁺ in Naₐ-WO₄, to W⁴⁺ in WO₂, and Mo⁶⁺ to Mo⁴⁺ in MoO₂. These oxides crystallize around 350-500°C to give nano-crystalline oxides. They also give nanocomposite upon crystallization if several oxide phases are formed during the synthesis process.

The general procedure of borohydride reduction is as follows. The metalates (Na₂W₄, Na₂MoO₄) were dissolved in distilled water to make the desired metalate solution. NaOH or HCl were added to the solution until the desired reaction pH value is reached. Solid NaBH₄ was dissolved in water and its pH value was pre-adjusted to 10 to suppress the evolution of hydrogen. The borohydride solution was added to the metalate solution, which was constantly stirred with a magnetic bar on a stirrer, while adjusting the reaction pH with dilute NaOH or HCl to the desired value. After the reduction, the solid formed was either filtered or centrifuged to remove the unreacted solution. The solid was washed several times with water or dilute NaBH₄ solution and then dried in an air oven at 100 °C. The as-obtained powder was then used for further heat treatment in an evacuated sealed quartz tube to form nanocrystalline material.

Shown in Figs. 1 and 2 are X-ray powder diffraction patterns of WO₂ and W₁₅O₄₀ and MoO₂ obtained using the above procedure. WO₂ and W₁₅O₄₀ was obtained by adding 50 ml of 2.6M NaBH₄ to 50 ml of 0.25M Na₂WO₄ at pH=1, while MoO₂ was obtained by adding 50 ml of 2.6M NaBH₄ to 50 ml of 0.25M Na₂MoO₄ at pH=1.

Fig. 1 X-ray powder diffraction pattern of WO₂+W₁₅O₄₀ (fired in vacuum at 550°C overnight).

Fig. 2 X-ray diffraction pattern of MoO₂: a) as-prepared; b) after heating in DSC up to 470°C at a heating rate of 10 °C/min.
Metallic Tungsten and an Unknown New Phase

Tungsten metal and an unknown new phase have also been obtained at pH=11 using the procedure mentioned in the last section. The x-ray patterns of these phases are shown in Figs. 3a and 3b [6]. The as-prepared samples are all amorphous; after heating at 900 °C in evacuated sealed quartz tubes overnight, they show strong X-ray reflections.

![Fig. 3a: X-ray diffraction pattern of W with some impurity.](image)

![Fig. 3b: X-ray diffraction pattern of a new phase with a cubic structure.](image)

**Fe-Al\textsubscript{2}B\textsubscript{3}O\textsubscript{9} Magnetic Nanocomposite**

Fe-Al\textsubscript{2}B\textsubscript{3}O\textsubscript{9} magnetic nanocomposite has also been synthesized using borohydride reduction [10, 11]. Fifty ml each of 0.1 M FeSO\textsubscript{4}·7H\textsubscript{2}O and 1 M NaBH\textsubscript{4} were prepared in distilled water, and then rapidly added simultaneously to an aluminum tri-sec-butoxide solution diluted with isopropyl alcohol. The black precipitates form in the solution but remain in suspension due to continuous mechanical stirring. The nano-sized precipitates were captured in a filter and rinsed with water and acetone. Shown in Fig. 4 are the X-ray patterns after the precipitate was annealed in H\textsubscript{2} at different temperatures. A weak reflection around 2θ = 45° corresponding to iron from the as-prepared sample indicates that the particle size is very small. Subsequent annealing in H\textsubscript{2} resulted in sharpening of the Fe reflections and a crystallization of aluminum borate at T>800°C.

![Fig. 4: X-ray diffraction patterns of Fe-Al\textsubscript{2}B\textsubscript{3}O\textsubscript{9} magnetic nanocomposite.](image)

**References**

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