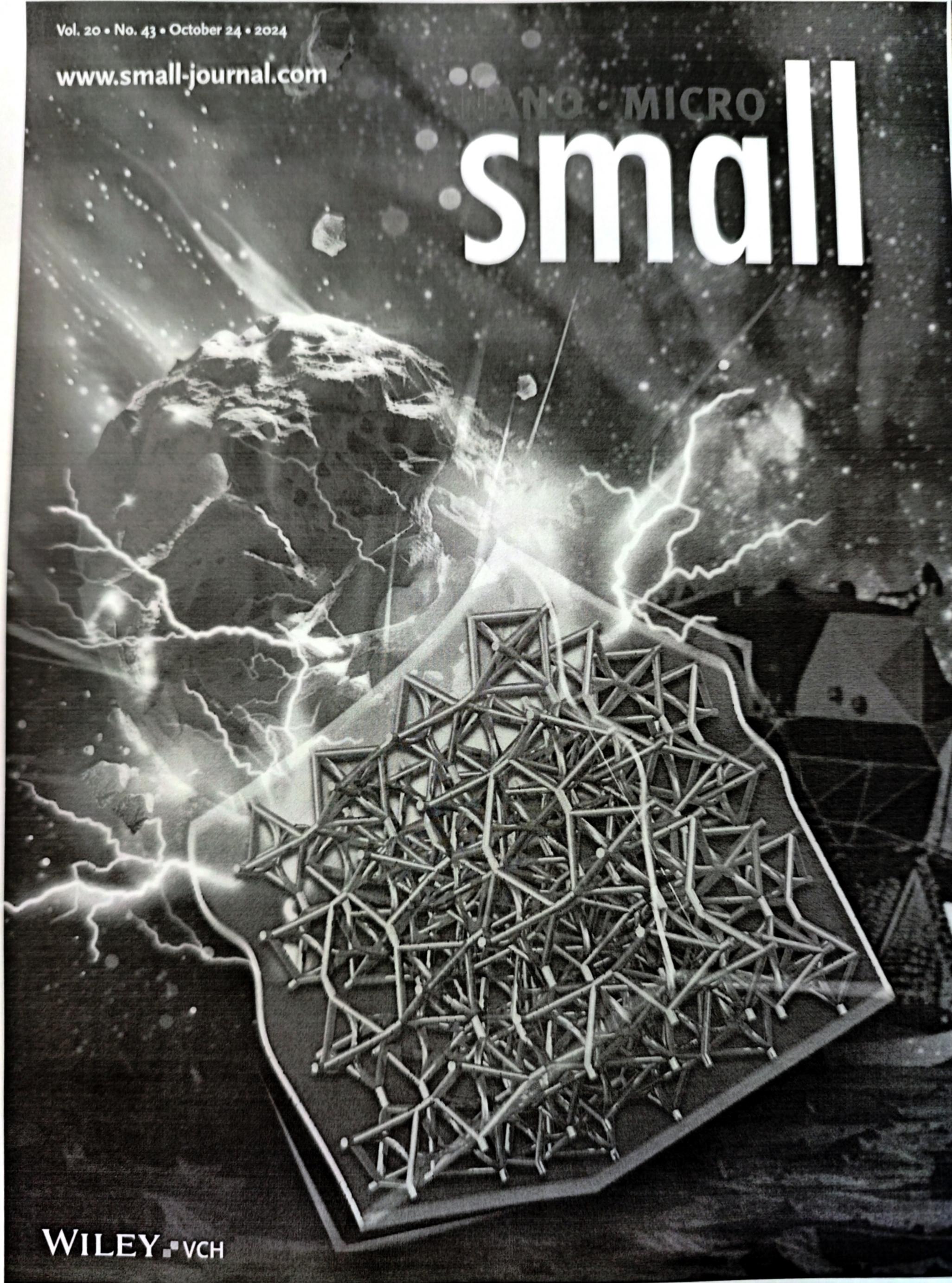


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Enrichment of Active Hydrogen at Amorphous CoO/Cu₂O Heterojunction Interfaces Enhances Electrocatalytic Nitrate Reduction to Ammonia

Jiahao Liu, Yufeng Li, Xiaojie Jia, Jianhua Shen,* Yihua Zhu,* and Chunzhong Li*

The reduction of nitrate into valuable ammonia via electrocatalysis offers a green and sustainable synthetic pathway for ammonia. The electrocatalytic nitrate reduction reaction (NO₃RR) encompasses two crucial reaction steps: nitrate deoxygenation and nitrite hydrogenation. Notably, the nitrite hydrogenation reaction is regarded as the rate-determining step of the process. Herein, the amorphous CoO support introduced for the construction of the a-CoO/Cu₂O tandem catalyst provides sufficient active hydrogen and synergistically catalyzes the NO₃RR. The a-CoO/Cu₂O catalyst showed excellent performance with a maximum NH₃ Faradaic efficiency of 95.72% and a maximum yield rate of 0.96 mmol h⁻¹ mg_{cat}⁻¹ at -0.4 V. In the flow cell, the maximum NH₃ yield rate of 12.14 mmol h⁻¹ mg_{cat}⁻¹ is achieved at -800 mA. The high NO₃RR activity of a-CoO/Cu₂O is attributed to the synergistic cascade effect of amorphous CoO and Cu₂O at the heterojunction interface, where Cu₂O serves as the adsorption site for NO₃⁻, while the accelerated active hydrogen generation of amorphous CoO promotes the nitrite hydrogenation reaction. This work provides a strategy for designing multi-site cascade catalysts centered on amorphous structures to achieve efficient NO₃RR.

emissions.^[2] As a result, there is an urgent need to develop an alternative, low-energy synthesis method to replace the conventional process.^[3] Furthermore, the accumulation of NO₃⁻ pollutants in groundwater and industrial wastewater poses a significant threat to ecological balance and human health.^[4] The technology of synthesizing NH₃ from pollutant NO₃⁻ as a raw material and renewable electrical energy as a driving force has garnered widespread attention.^[5] However, the electrocatalytic nitrate reduction reaction (NO₃RR) process is a complex proton-coupled electron transfer process with slow reaction kinetics and numerous by-products. The NO₃RR process involves two key reaction steps: nitrate deoxygenation and nitrite hydrogenation. Among them, the nitrite hydrogenation reaction is considered to be the rate-limiting step of the process. Therefore, effective catalytic materials need to be developed to promote intermediate hydrogenation to enhance NO₃RR performance.^[6]

1. Introduction

NH₃ is a crucial component in the chemical industry, playing a vital role in global food production and economic growth.^[1] However, the current Haber-Bosch process for industrial NH₃ synthesis is both energy-intensive and produces high levels of carbon

Cu-based catalysts are efficient electrocatalysts for NO₃RR due to their low cost and easy availability, favorable NO₃⁻ adsorption activity, and inhibition of hydrogen. However, pure Cu catalysts suffer from weak hydrogenation ability and strong adsorption of intermediate NO₂⁻, leading to rapid catalyst deactivation and accumulation of NO₂⁻, ultimately resulting in low Faradaic efficiency (FE).^[7] To address the above limitations, the introduction of hetero-elements or heterostructures has been adopted to adjust the electronic structure of Cu, optimize the intermediate adsorption energy, and design active and functional group elements to construct tandem catalysis.^[8] For instance, He et al.^[9] utilized the concept of tandem catalysts by employing Cu-Co binary sulfide as synergistic active sites. In this system, NO₂⁻ intermediates are preferentially formed on the Cu basal phase and subsequently cleaved to the nearby Co basal phase to selectively catalyze the NO₂⁻ reduction to NH₃, realizing a cascade NO₃⁻ to NH₃ conversion. Similarly, Fang et al.^[10] mimicked the bifunctional nature of Cu-type NO₂⁻ reductase and prepared CuCo bimetallic catalysts, which efficiently remove NO₂⁻. In their strategy, Cu promotes NO_x⁻ adsorption and attachment, while Co acts as a proton-giving center to promote NO₃⁻ hydrogenation to NH₃ via adsorbed *H species.

J. Liu, Y. Li, X. Jia, J. Shen, Y. Zhu
Shanghai Engineering Research Center of Hierarchical Nanomaterials
Key Laboratory for Ultrafine Materials of Ministry of Education
Frontiers Science Center for Materiobiology and Dynamic Chemistry
School of Materials Science and Engineering
East China University of Science and Technology
Shanghai 200237, China
E-mail: jianhuashen@ecust.edu.cn; yhzhu@ecust.edu.cn

C. Li
School of Chemical Engineering
East China University of Science and Technology
Shanghai 200237, China
E-mail: czli@ecust.edu.cn

The ORCID identification number(s) for the author(s) of this article can be found under <https://doi.org/10.1002/smll.202408279>

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