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Structure and Electronic Properties of Nanographites – Structural Blocks of Activated Carbon Fibers

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The structure and electronic properties of nanographites - the structural elements (blocks) of activated carbon fibers were investigated by different physical methods (X-ray diffraction, scanning tunnel microscopy, transmission electron microscopy, X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy, ESR and magnetic susceptibility). The considerable enhancements of the intersheet distance and the density of states at the Fermi level were found. The reasons of these peculiarities are discussed.

Introduction

Activated carbons are representative porous materials, which have been widely used in various technologies.¹ Activated carbon fibers (ACFs), which have large specific surface areas ranging about 1000 - 3000 m²g⁻¹, are microporous carbons consisting of a three dimensional disordered network of micrographites, where each micrographite has three to four graphene sheets with an average in-plane size about a few nanometers.^{1,2} This particular structure makes ACFs a good model system of nanographites. There are a few reasons for an intently interest of scientists to nanographites. First, due to their intermediate position between the bulk graphite and aromatic molecules, nanographites are the potential source of new chemical substances with unusual electronic and magnetic properties. Second, while the fullerenes and carbon nanotubes are the close shaped π -electron conjugated systems,³ the electronic properties of which are mainly controlled by the quantum size and surface effects, the nanographites represent the edge-open π -electron conjugated system. The presence of open edges around the peripheral region can result in occurrence of specific features in nanographite systems, which are different from their closed-surface counterparts.^{4,5} Obviously, an arbitrary shaped graphene sheet comprises two kinds of edges: zigzag type and armchair type, while the former has a *trans*-polyacetylene type structure, while the later has a *cis*-polyacetylene type. The calculations for the model of graphite ribbons – one dimensional graphite lattices of finite width, show that ribbons with zigzag edges possess localized edge states with energies close to the Fermi level.^{4,5} These edge states correspond to the nonbonding molecular orbital (nonbonding π levels superimposed on the bonding π and antibonding π^* bands). In contrast, edge states are completely absent for ribbons with armchair edges. However, in a general finite graphene sheet consisting of both types of edges, even a few zigzag sites per sequence are shown to lead to non-negligible edge-state effects, resulting in an enhancement in the electronic density of states around the Fermi energy.⁵ The theoretical investigations of the stacking effects in the zigzag nanographite sheets show that the edge states are sensitive to the type of the graphene layers stacking and to the interlayer interaction.^{6,7} At last, it was shown that the edge states may determine the new magnetic properties in nanographene sheet, because of their relatively large contribution to the density of states at the Fermi energy.⁴ The calculations show a remarkable difference in the

magnetic properties between the different types of graphene layers stacking.⁶⁻⁸

In this paper, we present the results of X-ray diffraction, scanning tunnel microscopy, transmission electron microscopy, X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy, ESR and magnetic susceptibility study of nanographites - the structural elements (blocks) of ACFs, in order to clarify their structure and electronic properties.

Results and discussion

The X-ray diffractograms of the ACFs show very broad peaks at the graphite (002), (100) and (101) positions, where graphite (100) and (101) peaks merge into a single broad peak around 20° (Fig. 1). In order to estimate the sizes of the graphite nanoparticles in ACFs, the intensities of the experimental X-ray diffractograms were corrected by standard procedures (Fig. 1).

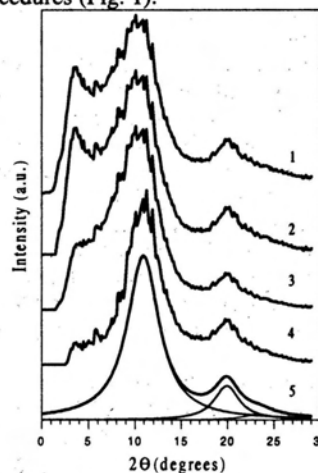


Fig. 1. The X-ray diffraction spectra of ACFs. (1 – experimental; 2 – after constant background subtraction; 3 – after correction with Lorentz-polarization factor, carbon atomic form-factor and absorption factor; 4 – after angle dependant background subtraction; 5 – simulated spectrum with components, corresponding to (002), (100) and (101) peaks).

Using the corrected (002), (100) and (101) peak parameters we estimate the thickness and the in-plane size of the particle grains. From the broad graphite (002) peak, we find a grain thickness of $L_c \approx 1$ nm. We deconvolute the broad feature around 20° - 24° into single (100) and (101) peaks on the assumption that each peak originates mostly from a single component. The obtained contribution to the

(100) peak gives an estimate of the in-plane size of $L_a \approx 1.3$ nm. From the location of centre for the (002) diffraction peak at $2\theta = 11.01^\circ$ the interlayer distance between graphene sheets are estimated at 0.370 nm, which are considerably longer than the interlayer distance of 0.3354 nm for bulk regular graphite. From nanographite sample thickness and interlayer distance between graphene sheets, the number of graphene sheets is estimated at $\sim 3 - 4$.

The CI's spectrum of ACFs consists only of a single peak with the binding energy $284,4 \pm 0,1$ eV. The lineshape parameters of signal considered are near the same for bulk graphite. This fact testifies to absence or negligible amount of functional groups in ACFs.

Up to ~ 100 K, the ESR spectrum of ACFs consists of a single line, which g -factor value is close to the g -factor value for free electron, and with the peak-to-peak width ~ 7 mT. The EPR signal is practically symmetric, that specifies a weak anisotropy of the g -factor. At lowering of the temperature, the ESR signal is narrowed at near the constant values of g -factor and integral intensity. At the temperature range lower 70 K in spectrum the second signal appears with the peak-to-peak width $\sim 0,7$ mT and $g \approx 2,0008 \pm 0.0005$.

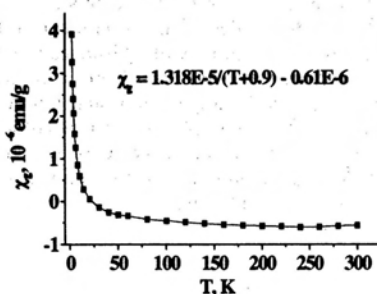


Fig. 2. The magnetic susceptibility as a function of temperature for the activated carbon fibers under a magnetic field of $H_0 = 0.5$ T.

At 300 K the magnetic susceptibility is negative and equal to $(-0,560 \pm 0,001) \times 10^{-6}$ emu/g. At the lowering of temperature up to 240 K it is insignificant ($\sim 0,4 \times 10^{-7}$) decreases, then starts to grow monotonously. At $T \sim 21$ K it is near zero. At temperatures lower ~ 60 K a susceptibility is well described by the Curie-Weiss law with the Curie constant (C) and the Weiss temperature (Θ) equal to $(1,318 \pm 0,003) \times 10^{-5}$ emu-K/g and $-0,90 \pm 0,05$ K, respectively. To this Curie constant the localized spins concentration $N_s = 4 \times 10^3$ spin/(carbon atom) are correspond. Negative value of Weiss temperature specifies that between the localized spins a weak antiferromagnetic interaction present. At the analysis, the full susceptibility was considered as the sum of core diamagnetism, Curie paramagnetism, orbital diamagnetism, and Pauli paramagnetism: $\chi = \chi_{\text{core}} + \chi_{\text{Curie}} + \chi_{\text{orbital}} + \chi_{\text{Pauli}}$, where from Pascal rule $\chi_{\text{core}} = -0,5 \times 10^{-6}$ emu/g.

Taking into consideration that the interlayer distance in nanographites is significantly larger than in regular bulk graphite the former was considered to consist of finite-size non-interacting graphene sheets. To determine the value of orbital diamagnetism in nanographites the McClure⁹ model of orbital diamagnetism for two-dimensional graphite, which was modified by including the Dingle temperature (the Kotosonov¹⁰ method) was used. Thus, it was supposed that π -electrons are scattered mainly around graphene boundaries. Then, by knowing the values of χ_{core} , χ_{Curie} and the calculated value of χ_{orbital} the value of χ_{Pauli} was

determined. The value of χ_{Pauli} determined by such a way and from ESR data are one orders of magnitude larger than the Pauli contribution expected for bulk regular graphite for typical Fermi level energies $E_F < 0.1$ eV.¹¹ This results means that the density of states at the Fermi level considerably large than that in bulk regular graphite. The reasons of this may be the presence of an additional band superimposed upon the ordinary graphene bands around the Fermi level that was proposed theoretically^{4,5}. Another reason of considered phenomenon is the deeper position of Fermi level in nanographite, than that in bulk regular graphite. Such displacement of the Fermi level in nanographites may be as the result of interaction of surface carbon atoms with some adsorbed molecules, such as oxygen. We shall note, that in acceptor graphite intercalation compounds a similar situation are realized and the value of displacement of the Fermi level may be significant.¹¹ Obviously, at the validity of the model considered, the position of the Fermi level in nanographites (as well as the sign and the value of charge on graphene layers) may be controlled by adsorption on their surface of different molecules. In ACFs studied the intersheet distance in nanographites reduced at the adsorption by fibers of water molecules.¹² The one of possible reason for this is the large internal pressure of water molecules adsorbed on nanographite surface, because water in the porosity of ACFs has a solid-phase structure with less density than that in the normal conditions.¹³ It is obviously that the decrease of positive charge of graphene layers as a result of donating of electrons by the adsorbed water molecules may be the another reason for this phenomenon.

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