

1 **Strong Metal-support Interaction (SMSI) Modulates d-**
2 **orbital Centers to Promote Oxygen Reduction**
3 **Reaction**

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2 **Experimental section**

3 **Materials**

4 Urea ($\text{CH}_4\text{N}_2\text{O}$), melamine ($\text{C}_3\text{H}_6\text{N}_6$), Hydrochloric acid (HCl), hydrogen peroxide (H_2O_2),
5 Methanol, L-Histidine, Ammonium oxalate, benzoquinone, was obtained from Mclean
6 Chemistry Co., Ltd., sodium hydroxide (NaOH) and Isopropanol ($\text{C}_3\text{H}_8\text{O}$ analytical reagent)
7 were purchased from Xilong Science Co., Ltd., sodium sulphate (Na_2SO_4), isopropanol
8 ($\text{C}_3\text{H}_8\text{O}$, analytical reagent, $\geq 99.7\%$), and silver nitrate (AgNO_3) were purchased from
9 Sinopharm Chemical Reagent Co. Ltd. (Shanghai, China); and 5-dimethyl-1-pyrrole-N-
10 oxide (DMPO, 99.5%), 2,2,6,6-Tetramethylpiperidine-1-oxyl (TEMPO), Nitrotetrazolium
11 Blue chloride (NBT) and 4,4'-Diamino-3,3', 5,5'-tetramethyl biphenyl (TMB, analytical
12 reagent) were obtained from Mclean Chemistry Co., Ltd. All reagents are analytically pure
13 and can be used without further treatment. Deionized water ($18.2 \text{ M}\Omega\text{-cm}$) was used for all
14 preparations.

15

16 **Preparation of CN and ACN**

17 CN was carried out according to the previous work of our group. Specifically, a certain
18 amount of urea was put into a crucible with a capacity of 50 mg, and a thermal
19 polymerization reaction was carried out in a tube furnace chamber filled with ammonia gas
20 at a heating rate of $5 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}/\text{min}$. The temperature was kept at $550 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ for two hours, then
21 slowly cooled to room temperature. The resulting powder material was labeled CN.

22

23 Preparation of ACN: Ag clusters-CN-based structure (abbreviated as ACN) with
24 intercalated and semi-intercalated structure was synthesized by molecular self-assembly
25 method under argon protection. Specifically, melamine and urea were dissolved and mixed
26 in water, and a small amount of AgNO_3 solution was added to stir uniformly. Finally, the
27 chelated precursor was placed in a quartz dish and sealed. ACN structure was obtained
28 by setting the tube furnace at $550 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$, heating it for 3h, and slowly cooling it to room
29 temperature.

30

1 For comparison, Ag nanoparticle-supported CN structures were synthesized. 100 mg of
2 CN prepared above was ultrasonically dispersed in 100 mL ultrapure water, 1 mM AgNO₃
3 aqueous solution (5, 10, 15, 20, 30, 45 mL) was added to the above solutions respectively,
4 and irradiated under simulated sunlight of 100 mW/m² for 15 min. After the AgNO₃ solution
5 was completely reduced, the solution was centrifuged, and the precipitate was washed,
6 dried, and collected.

7

8 **Characterization**

9 The microstructure and morphology of the samples were observed by Talos F200X G2
10 (SEM) and (TEM). X-ray diffraction (XRD) patterns (Rigaku DX-2700BH), X-ray
11 photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) spectra were to characterize samples' crystal and
12 molecular constitution. Optical performance was evaluated with a UV-Vis-NIR
13 spectrophotometer ((Shimadzu, UV2450) and steady-state photoluminescence spectrum
14 (PL, FLS 880). The ultraviolet-visible (UV-vis) absorption spectra were recorded from 200
15 – 800 nm using a UV-Vis-NIR spectrophotometer (Agilent S3 Cary 5000) with BaSO₄
16 reflectance standards. The electron paramagnetic resonance (EPR) spectra were carried
17 out at 110 K using a JEOL JESFA200 EPR spectrometer. For the free radical test, 5,5-
18 dimethyl-1-pyrroline N-oxide (DMPO) were used as a spin-trapping reagent to detect •OH
19 or •O₂⁻. The EPR spectra were carried out at 300 K using water or methanol mixed with
20 5,5-dimethyl-1-pyrroline N-oxide (DMPO). A 300 W Xe lamp ($\lambda \geq 400$ nm) was used as the
21 light source. The methanol mixtures were purged with N₂ gas before light irradiation.
22 Samples for X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) measurements were collected using
23 an SSI S-Probe XPS spectrometer. AFM images were obtained using an NT-MDT Solver
24 Next atomic force microscope. Atomic Force Microscopy (AFM) images were acquired from
25 a Bruker Dimension Icon using the Peakforce Tapping model, where the catalysts were
26 diluted in ethanol and then dropped onto a mica plate. The LED light model and power is
27 a full white LED lamp with a wavelength range of 400 - 830 nm (220V 13W). XANES and
28 EXAFS spectra of AgK edge at room temperature have been measured using transmission
29 mode at SSRF BL14W1 line station. XPS and UPS data were obtained using a Thermo
30 Fisher ESCALAB Xi+ spectrometer. Nitrogen adsorption-desorption isotherms were

1 conducted using a Surface Area and Porosity Analyzer (ASAP 2020, Micromeritics) at 77K
2 after degassing the samples at 150 °C for 4h. The steady-state PL emission spectra and
3 time-resolved transient PL decay spectra were measured at room temperature using a PTI
4 QM-4 fluorescence spectrophotometer. Piezo electrochemical measurements were
5 operated in a standard three-electrode system (CHI 660E electrochemical station) under
6 ultrasonic irradiation (generated by an ultrasonic cleaner, KQ-300DE, Kunshan). The three-
7 electrode system was composed of the samples as the working electrode, Ag/AgCl
8 (saturated KCl) as the reference electrode and Pt wire as the counter electrode. 0.1 M
9 Na₂SO₄ solution was used as the electrolyte. Conductive adhesive was used to fix the
10 samples on ITO glass tightly. The stable adsorption energy and free energy of various
11 models are first optimized through Forcite module, and the forcefield is the COMPASS II
12 module. Then, the Dmol3 module is used to search the transition state and calculate the
13 stable adsorption energy, electron localization function (ELF), electron density difference
14 (EDD) and primordial cells' tape constitution were evaluated through the Dmol3 module.
15 The generalized gradient estimation (GGA) of Perdew-Burke-Ernzerhof (BP) operational
16 is invoked for correlation and electron exchange. The level wave base's cutoff power is set
17 to 450 eV, and the mutual space's k point is placed to an exceptional standard. All the
18 structures are completely relaxed, and the force tolerance is 1.0 e⁻⁵ eV.

19

20 **Density functional theory (DFT) calculations**

21 The geometries of the different CN materials were reduced to a simple repeating unit.
22 States' density (DOS) and primordial cells' tape constitution were evaluated through the
23 CASTEP module. The generalized gradient estimation (GGA) of Perdew-Burke-Ernzerhof
24 (PBE) operational is invoked for correlation and electron exchange. The level wave base's
25 cutoff power is set to 450.0 eV, and the mutual space's k point is placed to an exceptional
26 standard. The interaction between contiguous pictures in the optimization unit's
27 computation is eradicated at the side of 15 vacuum layers. All the structures are completely
28 relaxed, and the force tolerance is 0.02 eV.

29 These units and adsorption structures of O₂/H⁺ were optimized with dispersion-
30 corrected density functional theory (DFT-D₃) at the PBE₀-D₃/def₂-SVP ^[1] + SDD ^[2] level

1 using the Gaussian 16 program. Vibrational frequency analyses were carried out for these
2 optimized structures using the same calculation method to obtain zero-point and free
3 energy corrections. Finally, the single point energy was added to the free energy correction
4 calculated before to obtain the Gibbs free energy. [3] The adsorption free energy of the
5 complex was calculated from the formular:

$$6 \quad G_{(\text{adsorb})} = G_{(\text{A+B})} - G_{(\text{A})} - G_{(\text{B})}$$

7 where $G(\text{A})$ and $G(\text{B})$ is the Gibbs free energy of isolated molecules, $G(\text{A+B})$ is the total
8 free energy of the complex structure.[4]

9
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11 **Photo-electrochemical measurements**

12 Through CHI 760D electrochemical, the electrochemical impedance and
13 photocurrent reaction of prepared photocatalysts were gauged in a conventional three-
14 electrode system (CH Implements, Inc., China). The three electrodes consisted of catalyst-
15 coated indium-doped can oxide (ITO) glass (2 cm×2 cm) as the functional electrode, Pt
16 wire as the counter electrode, and a strong calomel electrode (SCE) as the mentioned
17 electrode. In the meantime, Na_2SO_4 solution (0.1 M 50 mL) was utilized as an electrolyte
18 solution. The functional electrode was prepared (500 μL) of the prepared dynamic
19 substance on an ITO glass substrate through drop-casting an aliquot. An aliquot was
20 prepared by dispersing the synthesized powdered sample's 1 mg ultrasonically with 5 mL
21 of deionized water and adding 5 μL of Nafion solution (1%) as a binder. The temporary
22 photocurrent (i-t) was deliberately consuming the equivalent 300W Xenon lamp at 0.5 V
23 utilized potentiality. The electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS) research was
24 executed in the frequency scope of 1000 Hz - 8000 Hz with a sinusoidal AC indication of
25 10 mV.

26

27 **Photocatalytic H_2O_2 production.**

28 The photosynthesis of H_2O_2 was performed in a multi-channel photochemical reaction
29 system (Beijing Perfectlight, PCX-50C). Specifically, 20 mg catalyst was dispersed into 80
30 mL deionized water in a quartz glass bottle (maximum diameter, $\phi 60$ mm; capacity 100 ml)

1 with a rubber septum cap sealing the bottle. The catalyst was dispersed under
2 ultrasonication for 15 min and bubbled with O₂ for 30 min. The air experiment was done by
3 bubbling air continuously into the solution for 30 min, and the light was then turned on after
4 30 min of bubbling. Each sample was continued to be continuously bubbled with a syringe
5 after each sampling, and then the light was turned on for the next cycle of light reaction.
6 The LED lamp ($\lambda \geq 400$ nm) was used to irradiate the photocatalyst suspension from the
7 bottom. The bottle was kept at 25 ± 0.5 °C via cooling water, and then a 1 mL aliquot was
8 collected from the suspension at a given time interval (10 min).

9 The concentration of H₂O₂ was determined by the enzyme chromogenic method.
10 2.8756 g of dipotassium hydrogen phosphate (K₂HPO₄ · 3H₂O) and 11.935 g of potassium
11 dihydrogen phosphate (KH₂PO₄) were dissolved in 200 mL water to prepare 1M (pH=7)
12 PBS buffer. 100 mg DPD was dissolved in 10 mL 0.05 M H₂SO₄ solution to prepare DPD
13 solution. 10 mg POD was dissolved in 10 mL ultra-pure water to prepare the POD solution.
14 The sample solution diluted by 2.15 mL was mixed with 0.40 mL PBS buffer. Then 50 μ L
15 DPD solution and 50 μ L POD solution were added successively and stirred for 30 s. The
16 Abs of the mixture at the wavelength from 700 nm to 400 nm was measured by ultraviolet-
17 visible spectrophotometer (UV-Vis) as soon as possible, and the corresponding H₂O₂
18 concentration was calculated by the standard curve. 2.24 mL deionized water, 0.8 mL PBS
19 buffer, 0.1 mL DPD solution and 0.1 mL POD solution were removed by liquid transfer gun
20 and mixed in 10 mL centrifuge tube to get the mixed solution. The H₂O₂ standard solutions
21 (10, 50, 100, 200 and 500 μ M) with 2 mL configuration were added to the mixed solution.
22 After the solution was mixed slowly for 30 seconds, it was transferred to a quartz
23 colorimetric plate, and then the absorbance values of different concentrations of H₂O₂
24 standard solution at 551 nm wavelength were determined by UV-Vis. Finally, the standard
25 curve is drawn by linear quasi-merging with the concentration of H₂O₂ standard solution
26 (C) as Abscissa and absorbance value (A) as ordinate.

27

28 **Rotating ring disk electrode (RRDE) electrode Measurements.** The electron transfer
29 number was obtained using an electrochemical workstation (CHI660E) by a three-
30 electrode cell with Rotating ring Disc Electrode (RRDE) as working electrode, graphite rod

1 as counter electrode, calomel electrode as reference electrode and 0.1 M Na₂SO₄ as
2 electrolyte. Generally, each of sample and carbon powder (6 mg each) were dispersed in
3 isopropanol (600 μL) with 30 min sonication, followed by the addition of Naphthol reagent
4 (10 μL) to the mixture and sonication for 15 min to obtain the ink. The ink (6 μL) was then
5 dropped onto the glass carbon disc of the RRDE. The disk potential and ring potential
6 were set to open circuit potential and 1.2 V vs. SCE, respectively

7

8 The electron transfer number is acquired via the following equation (1):

$$9 \quad n = 4I_d / (I_d + I_r/N) \quad (1)$$

10 Here, n is the number of electron transfers, N is the collection efficiency of the Pt ring, while
11 I_d and I_r indicate the disc and ring currents, respectively.

12

13 **H₂O₂ decomposition study.** The decomposition of H₂O₂ was carried out by mixing the
14 catalyst (20 mg) with H₂O₂ (1 mM) aqueous solution (30 mL) and bubbling with N₂ for 30
15 min. The catalyst was sonically dispersed for 15 minutes and bubbled by N₂ for 30 min.
16 The LED lamp (λ ≥ 400 nm) was used to irradiate the photocatalyst suspension from the
17 bottom. The bottle was kept at 15 ± 0.5 °C via cooling water and then a 2 mL aliquot was
18 collected from the suspension at a given time interval (30 min), filtrated by a syringe filter
19 (0.22 μm) to remove the photocatalyst. Then, the amount of H₂O₂ produced was
20 determined by the iodometric method.

21

22 **Photocatalytic evolution of •O₂⁻:** The concentration of •O₂⁻ was measured by detecting
23 the decay of NBT (nitroblue tetrazolium) using UV-vis spectroscopy. 2.5 mL of liquid was
24 filtrated with a 0.22 μm filter to remove the photocatalysts. The photocatalytic generation
25 of •O₂⁻ was determined by the degradation of NBT, which was detected by the absorbance
26 change at the wavelength of 259 nm. The mole ratio of generated •O₂⁻ and reacted NBT
27 was 4:1.

28

29 **Molecular Oxygen Activation Measurements:** 50 μL of aqueous suspension of the
30 sample (10 g L⁻¹) and 20 μL of 3,3',5,5'-tetramethylbenzidine (TMB) (50 mM

1 aqueous solution) were mixed with 2 mL of HAc/NaAc buffer solution. A 300 W
2 xenon lamp (PLS-SXE300/300UV, Trusttech Co., Ltd., Beijing) equipped with a 420
3 nm cut-off filter was used as the light source. TMB oxidation were evaluated by
4 UV-Vis measurements (the absorbance around 370 nm) at different time intervals. To
5 identify the type of active oxygen species, scavenging experiments were conducted as
6 the above procedure with different amounts of scavengers (mannitol, 50 mM, 100 μ L;
7 carotene, 2 mg; catalase, 4000 units/mL, 100 μ L; SOD, 4000 units/mL, 100 μ L).

8

9 **Determination of apparent quantum yield.** The photocatalytic reaction was conducted
10 on an autoclave with a quartz window in which deionized water (30 mL) and photocatalyst
11 (20 mg) were added, sonicated and bubbled O₂ for 30 min. A 300 W Xenon lamp was used
12 to irradiate the reactor for 1 hour under magnetic stirring with the incident light using band-
13 pass filters at 350 \pm 5 nm, 365 \pm 5 nm, 380 \pm 5 nm, 420 \pm 5, 450 \pm 5 nm and 500 \pm 5 nm,
14 respectively. Illumination intensity was confirmed by a light power meter with an irradiated
15 area of 4.0 cm². The apparent quantum yield (AQY) is available from the following equation
16 (2).

17

$$18 \text{ AQY (\%)} = \frac{H_2O_2_{generated} (mol) \times 2}{N} \times 100 \% \quad (2)$$

19

20 **SCC Efficiency measurements:** The solar-to-chemical energy conversion (SCC)
21 efficiency was determined by using an AM 1.5G solar simulator as the light source (100
22 mW cm⁻²). Catalysts (40 mg) and water (30 mL) were put in a sealed device mainly
23 composed of a quartz tube. During the photocatalytic tests, O₂ was continually bubbled
24 into the bottle. The SCC efficiency was calculated via the following equation (3):

$$25 \text{ SCC} = \frac{\Delta G_{H_2O_2} \times n_{H_2O_2}}{I \times S \times T} \times 100\% = \frac{117 \times 10^3 \times 125 \times 10^{-6}}{100 \times 1 \times 10^{-3} \times 3600} \times 100\% = 1.06 \% \quad (3)$$

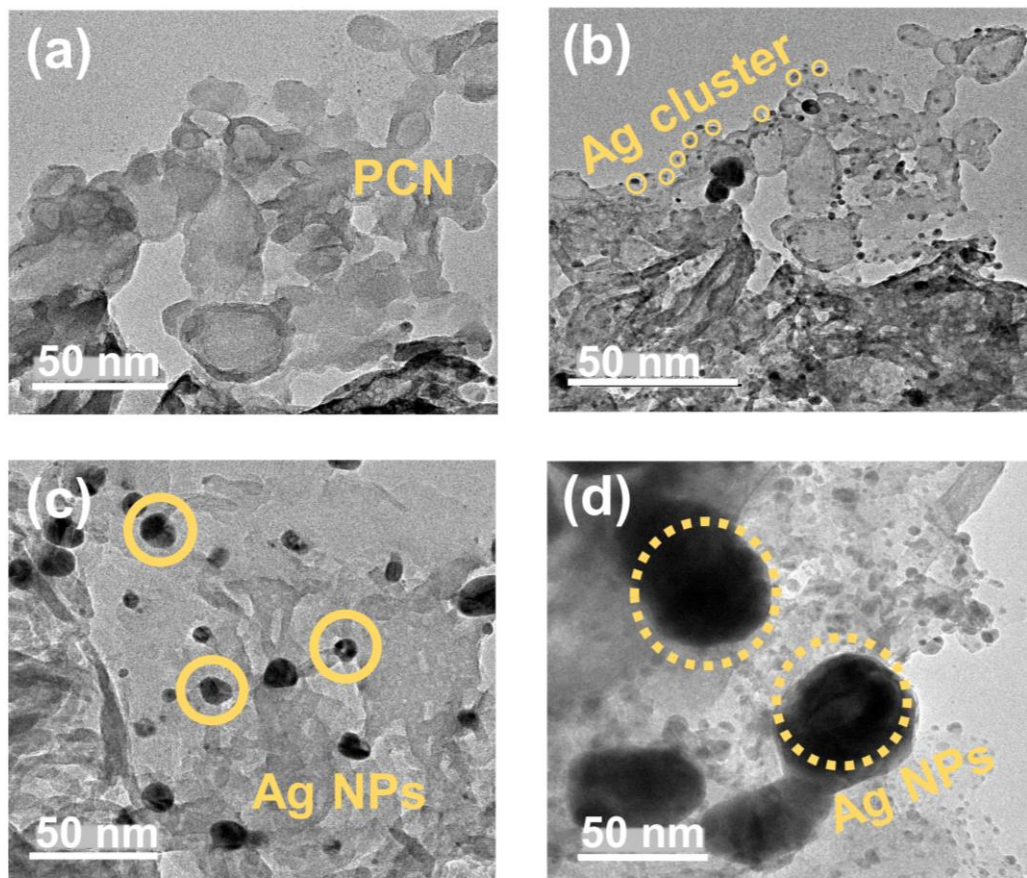
26 Where $\Delta G = 117 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$, the irradiated sample areas are 4.0 cm² during 0.5 h of
27 illumination. During the photocatalytic reaction, 125.14 μ mol H₂O₂ was generated during 1
28 h.

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2 **Results and discussion**

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5 **Figure S1 (a) SEM for CN; (b) SEM for ACN; (c)(d) SEM for Ag NPs@CN**

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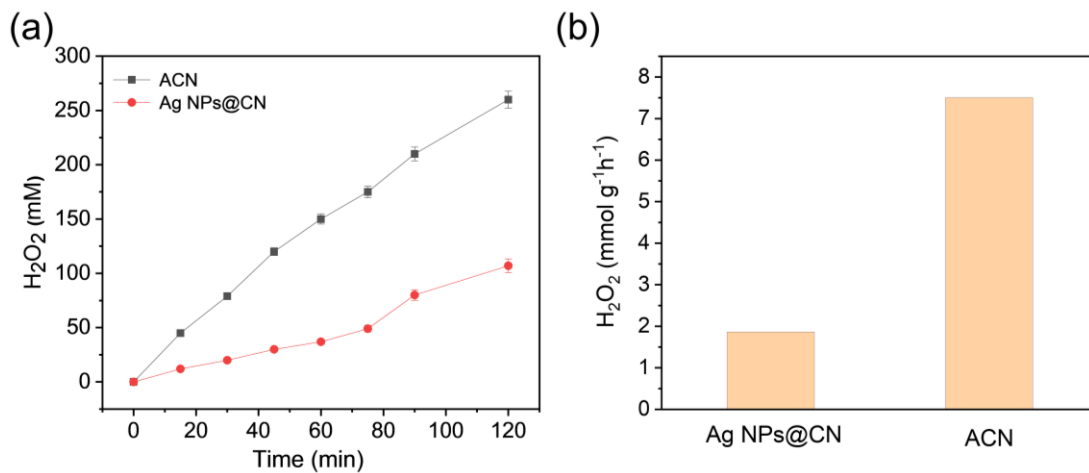
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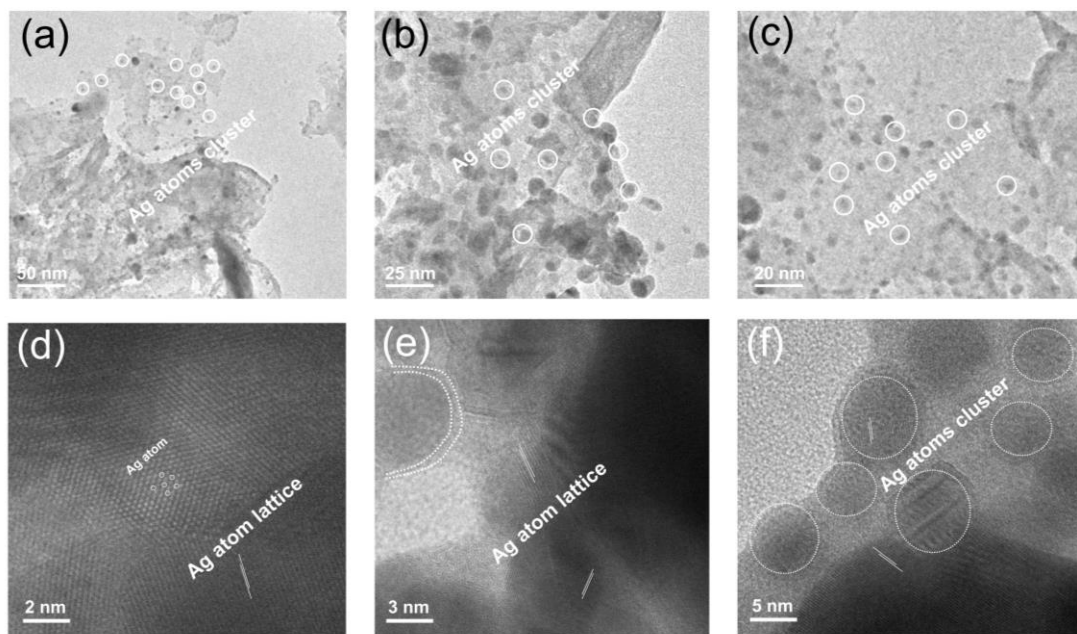
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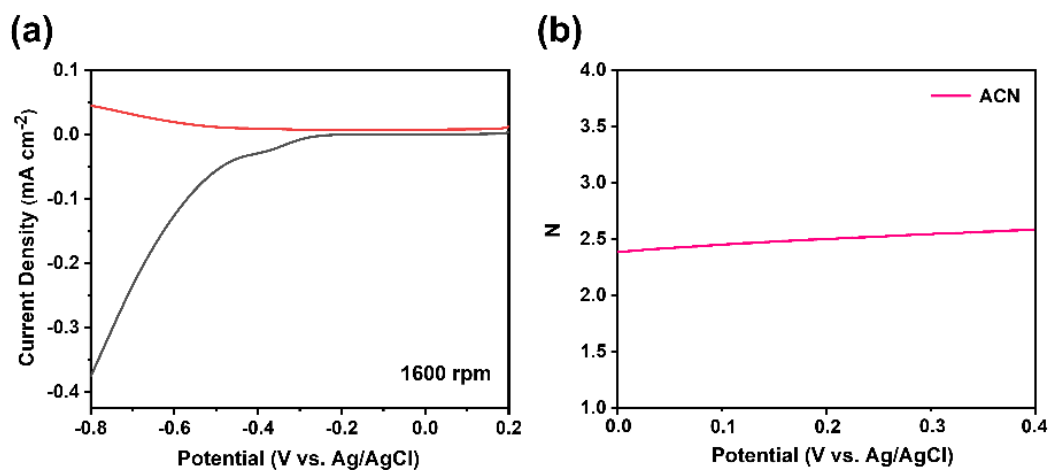
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Figure S2. (a) Hydrogen peroxide yield curves under different conditions for **a-b** ACN and Ag NPs@CN (catalyst: 0.2 g/L; Xe Light: 100 mW/cm²)



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Figure S3. (a) – (f) High-resolution dark-field microscopy images of ACN at different sizes



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3 **Figure S4 (a)** The RRDE polarization curve over ACN-coated electrodes at room
4 temperature at 1600 rpm rotation rates ($\omega = 1600$ rpm). The ring current (top) and disc
5 current (bottom). **(b)** the corresponding number of electro-transfer as a function of the
6 applied potential. The electrochemical measurements were performed in O₂ saturation (0.1
7 M Na₂SO₄) with a 10 mV s⁻¹ scan rate at 1600 rpm.

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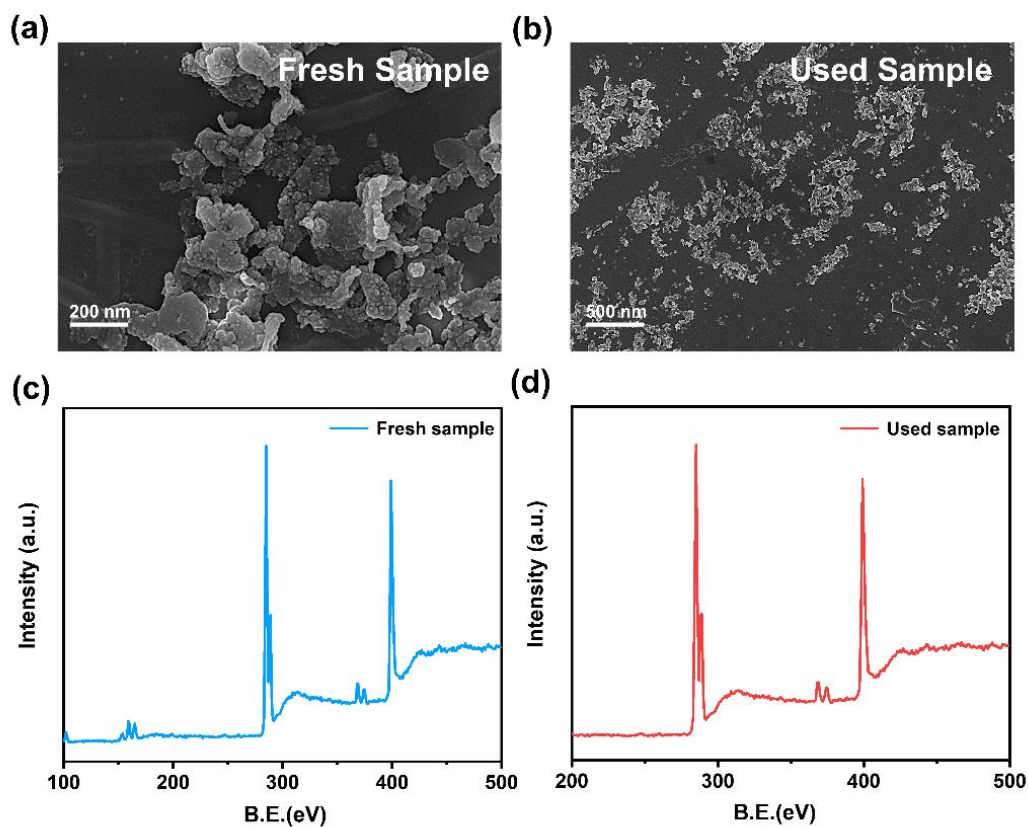
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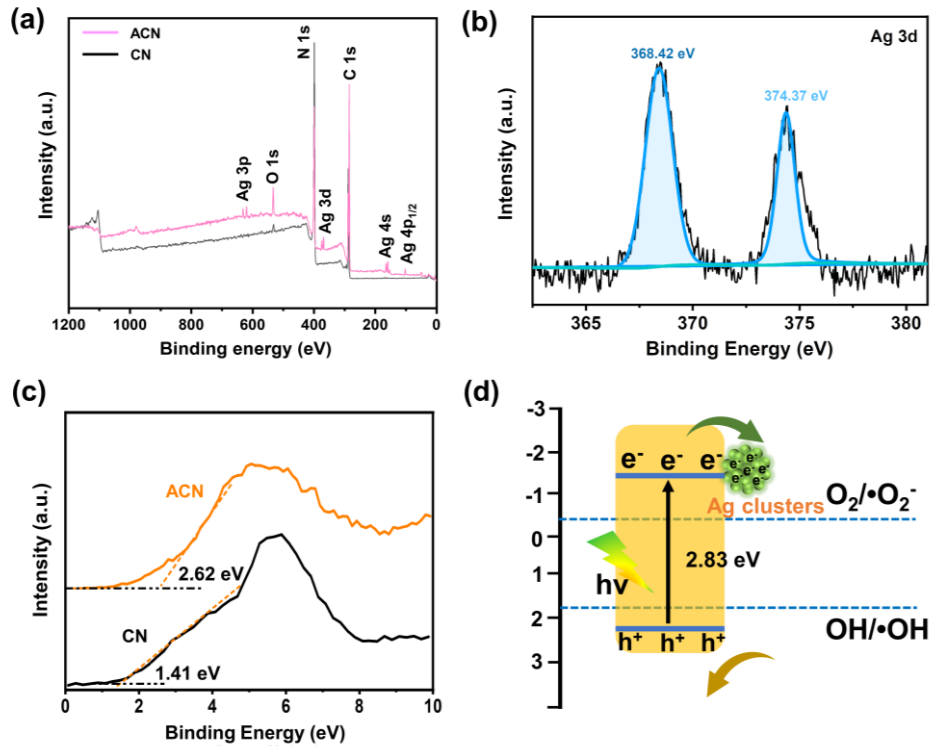
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 2 **Figure S5** Comparison of morphology, structure and surface properties before and after
 3 ACN reaction
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3 **Figure S6 a** Survey spectrum of CN and ACN; **b** Ag 3d spectrum of ACN; **c** VB-XPS of
 4 samples; **d** Redox potential and energy band position diagram

5

6 Most of the valence charge electrons and conduction band electrons of semiconductors
 7 are distributed near the band gap, so when the photon energy approaches the band gap
 8 width, a large number of electrons can transition by absorbing the photon energy, and
 9 the absorption coefficient will increase with the increase of the number of photons. For
 10 semiconductor materials, there is the following relationship between the optical
 11 bandgap and the absorption coefficient:

$$12 (\alpha h\nu)^{1/n} = B (h\nu - E_g) \quad (1)$$

13 Where α is the absorption coefficient, $h\nu$ is the photon energy, h is the Planck
 14 constant ($h \approx 4.13567 \times 10^{-15} \text{ eV} \cdot \text{s}$), ν is the incident ray frequency ($\nu = c/\lambda$,
 15 where c is the speed of light, $c \approx 3 \times 10^8 \text{ m/s}$; λ is the wavelength of the
 16 incident ray), B is the proportionality constant, and E_g is the band gap width of the

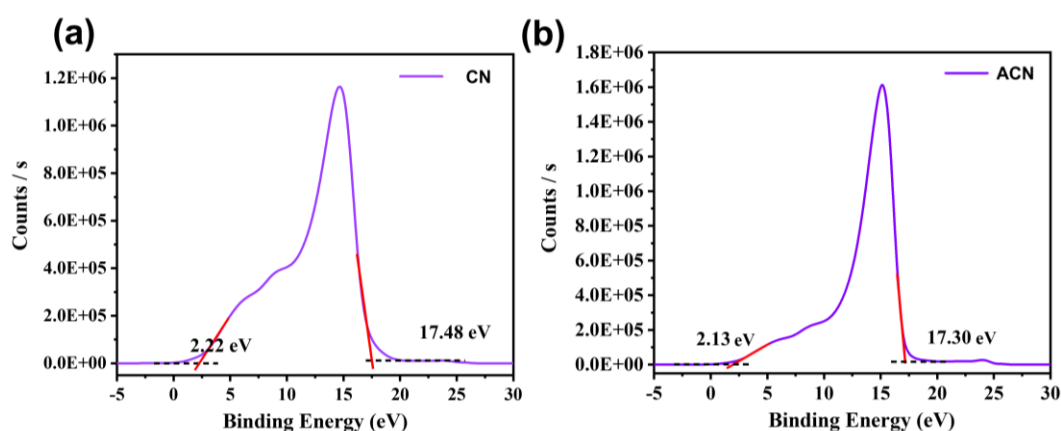
1 semiconductor material.

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3 The value of n depends on the type of semiconductor material. When the semiconductor
4 material has a direct bandgap, $n = 1/2$; when the semiconductor material has an indirect
5 bandgap, $n = 2$.

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Figure S7. UPS spectrum of samples

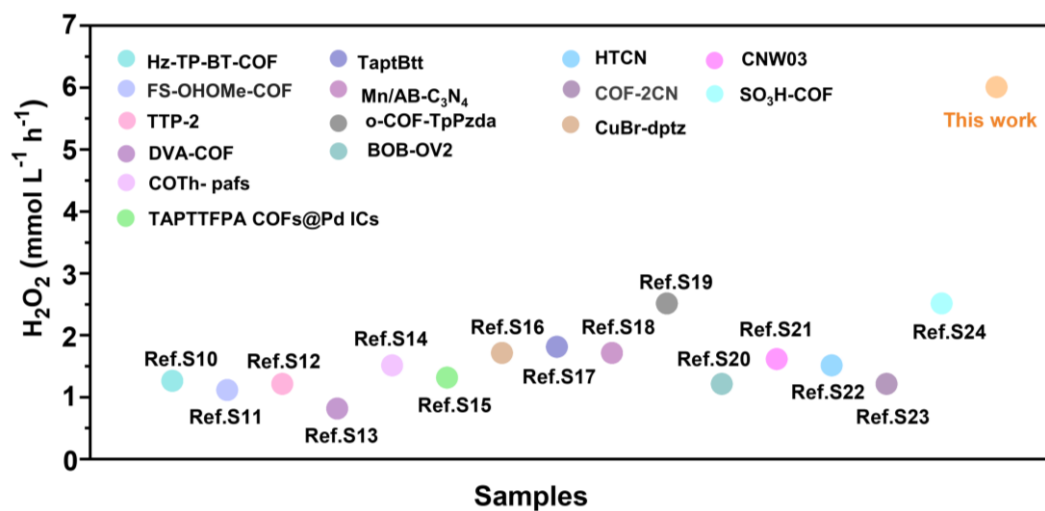
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11 Through the conversion method of the valence band value in the reference literature^[5],
12 UPS was used to determine the ionization potential, which is equivalent to the valence
13 band energy (E_{VB}). According to the linear intersection method, the E_{VB} of ACN was
14 calculated to be -6.05 eV (vs. vacuum) from $h\nu + E_{Fermi} - E_{Cutoff}$ ($h\nu$ of 21.22 eV: the
15 excitation energy of the He I Source Gun). Then the E_{VB} of ACN, vs. RHE, was converted
16 to be 1.61 eV, based on the relationship between the vacuum energy (E_{vacuum}) and the RHE
17 potential (E_{RHE}), $E_{vacuum} = -E_{RHE} - 4.44$ eV. Knowing the VB maximum difference between
18 ACN and CN, determined from VB XPS spectra, we can get E_{VB} of CN and ACN, vs. RHE.
19 Combined with the bandgap values calculated from UV-vis diffuse reflectance spectra, the
20 band positions of ACN, and CN could be then obtained.

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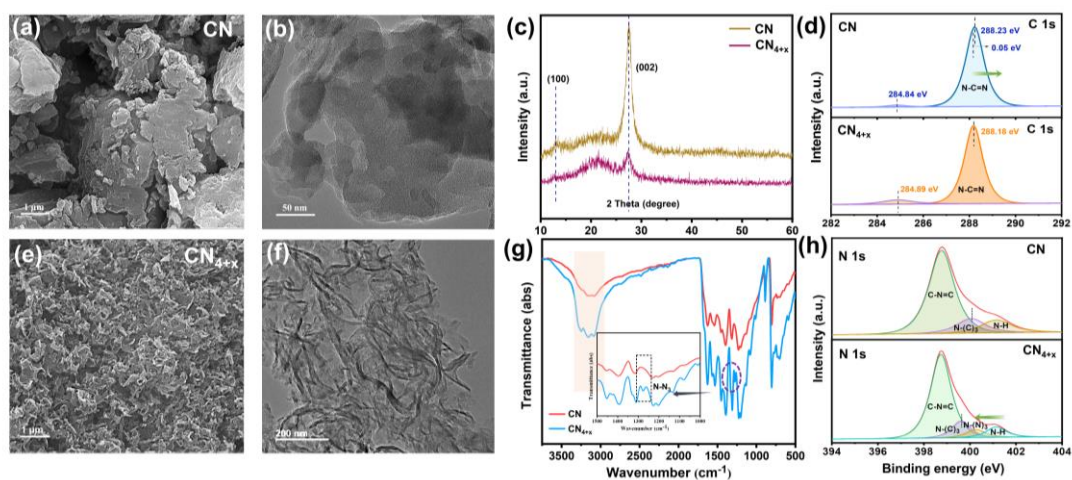
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3 **Figure S8** Comparison of H_2O_2 production efficiency between ACN and other covalent
 4 polymer catalysts (Corresponding literature: [6])

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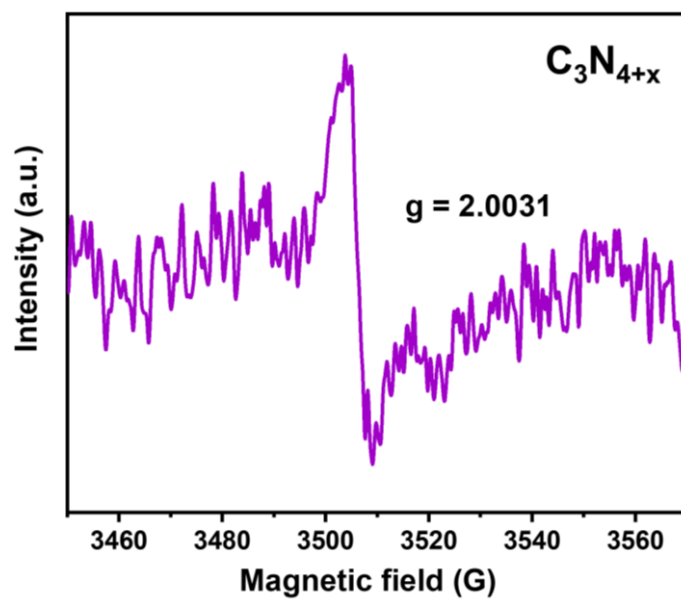
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9 **Fig. S9** (a)(e) SEM image for C_3N_{4+x} and bulk CN with different cooling times; (b)(f) TEM
 10 image for bulk CN and C_3N_{4+x} ; (c) (g) XRD and FT-IR for bulk CN and C_3N_{4+x} ; (d)(h) XPS
 11 spectra for bulk CN and C_3N_{4+x}



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Fig. S10 EPR for C_3N_{4+x}

In addition, as we pointed out in our manuscript, the CN structure prepared contains a defect state structure, which we defined as nitrogen doping and therefore labeled as C_3N_{4+x} . The existence of this defect state may be due to the prolonged cooling and holding time during thermal polymerization.

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