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# Electrospun Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-carbon Composite Nanofibers as Durable Anode Materials for Lithium Ion Batteries

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## Abstract

Combination of metal oxides and carbon has been a favourable practice for their application in high-rate energy storage mesoscopic electrodes. We report quasi 1D Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-carbon composite nanofibers obtained by the electrospinning method, and evaluate them as the anode for Li ion storage. In the half-cell configuration, the anode exhibits a reversible capacity of 820 mA h g<sup>-1</sup> at a current rate of 0.2C up to 100 cycles. At a higher current density of 5C, the cells still exhibit a specific capacity of 262 mAh g<sup>-1</sup>. Compared to pure electrospun Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanofibers, the capacity retention of Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofiber electrode is drastically improved. The good electrochemical performance is associated with the homogenous dispersed Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanocrystals on the carbon nanofiber support. Such structure prevents the aggregation of active materials, maintains the structure integrity and thus enhances the electronic conductivity during lithium insertion and extraction.

**Keywords:** *Electrospinning, Lithium ion battery, Iron oxide, Carbon nanofibers, Energy storage*

## Introduction

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Lithium-ion batteries (LIBs), the commercialized rechargeable batteries, have been under the research focus in the past decade due to their extensive applications in portable electronics, electric vehicles (EVs) and hybrid electric vehicles (HEVs).<sup>1</sup> Commercial LIBs are made of LiCoO<sub>2</sub> positive electrode and graphite/carbon negative electrode. Graphite can form LiC<sub>6</sub> compound during lithiation and has a Li-storage capability of 372 A h kg<sup>-1</sup>, which poses a storage limitation for high-energy applications. Besides the capacity limitation, graphite anode also faces severe safety problems of lithium plating during high current operation. Thus there is an increasing demand for the development of new anode materials with high specific capacity and power density from durable, nontoxic and inexpensive materials.

Transition metal oxides (e.g., MnO<sub>2</sub>, Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>, Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>, Co<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>, etc) have been studied as a candidate for the anode materials, in view of their large theoretical capacity.<sup>2-6</sup> The lithium storage mechanism here is the 'conversion reaction' in which the transition metal oxides react with lithium ions leading to reversible *in situ* formation and decomposition of Li<sub>y</sub>X (where X is O, S, F, or N).<sup>2, 7</sup> High reversible capacities ranging from 400 to 1100 mA h g<sup>-1</sup> between 3.0 V and 0.001 V vs. Li/Li<sup>+</sup> can be generated from the reaction. Among the intensively studied transition metal oxides, Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> is an appealing anode material owing to its high theoretical capacity, high density (5.24 g cm<sup>-3</sup> vs. 2.23 g cm<sup>-3</sup> for graphite), low cost, earth abundance, environmentally friendly and high resistance to corrosion.<sup>8-10</sup> Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> can accommodate up to 6 moles of Li uptake/extraction per formula unit due to its high coordination number, leading to its high capacity of 1007 mA h g<sup>-1</sup>. On the other hand, iron oxide anode materials are limited by a large capacity fading during cycling because of large volume change<sup>11</sup> and unavoidable thick solid electrolyte interphase (SEI) film on the Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> surface,<sup>12-15</sup> which results in pulverization, loss of electrical connection at high current rates and large irreversible capacity (consumption of large amount of Li<sup>+</sup> by SEI film). Furthermore, there is a significant hysteresis between Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> charge and discharge potentials around above 1 V. To overcome these problems, several strategies have been employed including carbon addition and nanoarchitecture control. Bruce and co-workers<sup>16</sup> compared the Li-cycling of nanosize, mesoporous, mm-size α-Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> particles and concluded that nanosize particles with a sufficient amount of added carbon (30 wt%) are essential to ensure high performance. Nanoparticles enhance the Li transport as well as ease the strain of the conversion reaction, and the added carbon improves the electronic transport to and within the nanoparticles.<sup>16</sup> Lou and co-workers<sup>17</sup> showed that addition of carbon, CNT and various coatings could enhance

the Li-storage performance of oxide materials; a very stable capacity of  $800 \text{ mA h g}^{-1}$  for 100 cycles at a current density of  $500 \text{ mA g}^{-1}$  can be obtained on the carbon coated  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  nanohorns on carbon nanotubes. Another issue with carbon- $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  is that the high temperature ( $\geq 600 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ ) treatments can cause reduction of  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  to Fe.<sup>14, 18</sup> In short, while it is rather necessary for iron oxides to form composite with carbon, it still remains a challenge to fabricate nanostructured iron oxide and carbon in a form of uniform composites.

Compared to other synthesis methods such as forced hydrolysis, sol-gel synthesis, template methods, molten salt process, spray pyrolysis, hydrothermal method, co-precipitation technique,<sup>19-26</sup> electrospinning is a versatile, low cost and high-yield fabrication technique to pattern 1D nanofibers<sup>27, 28</sup> for various applications such as dye-sensitized solar cells<sup>29, 30</sup>, photocatalysis<sup>29</sup>, photodetector<sup>31</sup>, supercapacitors<sup>32, 33</sup> and lithium ion batteries.<sup>34-37</sup> Here, we report the synthesis of  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$ -carbon hybrid ultralong nanofibers prepared by the well-established electrospinning technique. After calcination,  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  nanocrystals are formed and dispersed uniformly on the carbon fibers. The electrochemical properties of  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$ -C composite nanofibers are evaluated as the Li-ion battery anode, which indeed shows dramatically enhancement in cyclic stability compared to pure  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  particle fibers without carbon matrix.

## Experimental

### Synthesis of $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$ -C composite nanofibers

Polyacrylonitrile (PAN, Mw = 150,000), iron (III) acetylacetonate ( $\text{Fe}(\text{AcAc})_3$ , > 99.9%), N,N-dimethylformamide (DMF, 99.8%) were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich and used as received.

In a typical process, 0.8 g of PAN was added into 20 mL DMF and stirred at  $60 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  for 8 h. After that, 2.4 g of  $\text{Fe}(\text{AcAc})_3$  was slowly added into the above solution and stirred continuously for 8 h to yield homogeneous solution. The prepared homogeneous solution was then loaded into plastic syringes (10 mL) with a needle of 22G and subsequently placed into a commercial electrospinning setup (Electrospunra, Microtools Pte.Ltd Singapore). A high-voltage power of 20 kV was applied to the needle tip. The flow rate of fluid was set to 1 mL/h. The humidity level inside the electrospinning chamber was  $55 \pm 5\%$ . The nanofibers were collected on aluminum foil wrapped around a flat plate placed 12 cm below the needle tip. The as-electrospun  $\text{Fe}(\text{AcAc})_3$ -PAN composite nanofibers were first stabilized at  $280 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$

for 3 h in Air. The as-stabilized sample was carbonized at 500 °C for 3h in Ar. The heating and cooling rate was set to be 2.5 °C/min. View Article Online  
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Pure Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanofibers were also synthesized by electrospinning for comparison. The precursor solution consisting of Fe(AcAc)<sub>3</sub>, polyvinyl pyrrolidone (PVP, MW= 100 000, Aldrich), and ethanol was loaded into a plastic syringe and a 20 kV DC voltage was applied to the single nozzle spinneret. The flow rate was set to 1 mL/h. The collector was grounded and placed at a distance of 12 cm below the spinneret. The as-spun samples were calcined at 500 °C for 3h in Air with a heating and cooling rate of 2.5 °C/min.

### Characterization

Powder X-ray diffraction measurement was carried out using Bruker AXS D8 Advance X-ray diffractometer equipped with Cu K $\alpha$  radiation between 20° and 80°. The morphological features and chemical composition were examined with a field emission scanning electron microscope (FE-SEM, JEOL-6701F). Particle morphology of the synthesized composites was observed using transmission electron microscopy (TEM, JEOL 3010) with an energy dispersive X-ray spectrometer (EDS) attachment and selected area electron diffraction (SAED). Specimens were prepared by ultrasonically dispersing Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofibers in ethanol followed by dropping the suspension on a carbon-coated copper grid. Raman spectrum was recorded by a Dilor model OMARS 89-Z24 microprobe spectrometer, under excitation of an Ar<sup>+</sup> ion laser of 514.5 nm. The surface area was determined by nitrogen adsorption/desorption using the Brunauer-Emmett-Teller method (BET, Micromeritics Tristar 2000). The sample was degassed under nitrogen gas at 300 °C for 10 h prior to BET measurements (under standard protocols at 77 K). The details of degas process and measurements are given in our previous study.<sup>29,36</sup>

### Electrochemical Measurements

All the electrochemical studies were conducted in two-electrode coin cell (CR 2016) configuration. The composite anode was prepared by mixing of active material (Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofibers), conductive additive (super P) and binder (Polyvinylidene fluoride, PVDF) in the mass ratio 70:15:15. This mixture was coated on an etched Cu foil (thickness 10  $\mu$ m), which serves as current collector, and subsequently dried at 85 °C overnight before conducting cell assembly in an Ar-filled glovebox (MMM Ensaca). The circular electrode area and weight were 2 cm<sup>2</sup> and ~2.5 mg. The coin cells were assembled by lithium metal foil (Kyokuto Metal Co., Japan) as counter electrode, glass microporous fiber filter (Whatman,

Cat. No. 1825-047) as separator and 1 M LiPF<sub>6</sub> in ethylene carbonate (EC)/diethyl carbonate (DEC) (1:1 by volume, DAN VEC) as the electrolyte. Cyclic voltammetric (CV) traces were performed using Arbin automatic battery cycler at scan rate of 0.05 mV s<sup>-1</sup> between 0.005 and 3.0 V. The galvanostatic discharge-charge cycling of the cells were carried out at different current densities between potentials of 0.005 and 3.0V by Arbin automatic battery cycler. Electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS) (Solartran 1260+1287) technique was used to measure impedance in the frequency range from 0.003 Hz–180 KHz with an AC amplitude of 10 mV.

## Results and discussions

The surface morphology of Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofibers was characterized using FESEM. The as-spun Fe(AcAc)<sub>3</sub>-PAN composite nanofibers are randomly oriented, continuous with smooth surfaces as shown in Fig 1 (a). The Fe(AcAc)<sub>3</sub> counterpart in the composite nanofibers is amorphous. The diameter of the as-spun Fe(AcAc)<sub>3</sub>-PAN composite nanofibers is in the range of 450–1200 nm. The inset is the optical image of as-spun Fe(AcAc)<sub>3</sub>-PAN composite nanofibers deposited on aluminum foil. It can be peeled off readily from the aluminum foil as a free-standing nanofiber mat. Fig. 1 (b) shows the stabilized composite nanofibers mat after heating at 280 °C in air. During the stabilization process, the PAN counterpart was converted to an aromatic cyclized ladder type structure by cyclization, dehydrogenation, aromatization and crosslinking, which convert the CH<sub>2</sub> and C≡N groups to infusible C=N and C-H groups.<sup>38</sup> The as-stabilized composite nanofibers mat was further transformed to Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofibers after a further calcination process. During this process, N was removed in the form of N<sub>2</sub>, and the chains joined into graphitic planes. The morphology of Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofibers mat is shown in Fig 1 (c) and more detailed images in Fig. 1 (d)–(f). The average diameter of Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofibers became smaller, in the range of 220–600 nm, as a result of weight loss from the removal of various components during carbonization. Also, the surface of Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofibers became rough (Fig 1 (f)) because of the presence of Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanoparticles crystalized on the nanofiber surface.

The microstructure of Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofibers was further examined by TEM. Figure 2 (a) shows the typical microstructure of a single Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofiber. The Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanoparticles are uniformly distributed along the nanofibers. A close-up view of the

composite fiber in Fig 2 (b) reveals that most of the Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanocrystals are embedded within the carbon fibers, and some remain on the surface. The Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> crystals have a size range of 18 ± 8 nm, measured from the imaging software attached to TEM. The corresponding diffraction rings of (104), (110), (113), (024) and (116) in the selected area electron diffraction (SAED) patterns (Figure 2 (c)) confirm the formation of polycrystalline α-Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> in composite nanofiber. As shown in Figure 2 (d), the high-resolution TEM image reveals the lattice fringes from the α-Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanoparticles with an interplanar spacing of 0.37 nm, corresponding to the (012) plane of hematite phase. The energy dispersive X-ray spectrometry (EDS) mapping analysis of Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofibers is illustrated in Fig 2 (e)-(h). The EDS analysis revealed the molar ratio of Fe and O to be about 2:3 for the composite nanofibers, which is in good agreement with the stoichiometric ratio of Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>. The corresponding EDS mapping images for the elements of C, O and Fe illustrate clearly a homogeneous distribution of Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> crystals and carbon through the composite nanofibers.

More crystal structural and phase characterizations were conducted using XRD and Raman. The XRD pattern of Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofibers is shown in Fig 3 (a). The diffraction peaks match well with the rhombohedral phase of hematite Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> (JCPDS 33-0664). In addition, the diffraction peaks observed at 2θ = 31.7°, 45.6° and 55.6° indicates the presence of maghemite Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> with spinel structure. The amount of γ-Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> was calculated to be 11 %. The intensity of the XRD peaks are strong, indicating a highly crystallinity. The lattice parameters of α-Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> were evaluated from Rietveld refinement using TOPAS 3 software to be a = 5.034 Å and c = 13.74 Å. The average crystallite size was calculated using Scherrer formulas to be 22.9 nm, quite close to the TEM analysis result. The specific surface area of Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofibers was estimated to be 46 m<sup>2</sup> g<sup>-1</sup>, according to the N<sub>2</sub> adsorption and desorption isotherm (data shown in Supporting Information, Fig S5). The Raman spectrum of the Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofibers between 800 and 2000 cm<sup>-1</sup> is shown in Fig 3 (b). The broadened characteristic frequencies at ~1350 and ~1580 cm<sup>-1</sup> correspond to the D band and G bands of carbon matrix, respectively. The D-band (disorder-induced phonon mode) can be attributed to defects and disordered portions of carbon (sp<sup>3</sup>-coordinated), whereas the G-band (graphite band) is indicative of ordered graphitic crystallites of carbon (sp<sup>2</sup>-coordinated).<sup>39</sup> The intensity ratio of D and G bands (I<sub>D</sub>/I<sub>G</sub>) provides useful information about the amount of carbon defects: a higher intensity ratio means a higher concentration of defects in the graphite comprising sp<sup>2</sup> hybridization. The intensity ratio I<sub>D</sub>/I<sub>G</sub> of our Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofibers is found to be 1.09, indicating a



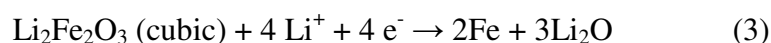
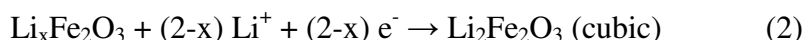
relative high amount of disordered sections and defects.

We now present the results of electrochemical properties. Cyclic voltammetry (CV) was first carried out to investigate the electrochemical reaction process of the electrode made from  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3\text{-C}$  composite nanofibers. Fig. 4 (a) shows the first five cycles of CV trace of the composite nanofibers electrode at room temperature between 0.005 and 3.0 V. In the first cathodic sweep, the well-defined current peak was observed at 0.67 V vs.  $\text{Li}^+/\text{Li}$ , which is ascribed to the complete reduction of Fe (III) to Fe (0), the formation of  $\text{Li}_2\text{O}$  and the irreversible reductive reaction of electrolyte to form solid electrolyte interphase (SEI) film.<sup>20, 40, 41</sup> In the first anodic scan, two broad overlapping current peaks at 1.62 V and 1.85 V corresponds to reversible oxidation of Fe (0) to Fe (II) and Fe (II) to Fe (III). For the second cycles, one cathodic peak appears at 0.98 V with decreased intensity, while two anodic peaks remain unchanged, indicating the irreversible phase transformation with the formation of SEI film in the first cycle and good reversible reaction of Fe (0) to Fe (II) and Fe (II) to Fe (III) respectively.<sup>42</sup> It is noteworthy that the current of the anodic and cathodic peaks remain nearly the same for subsequent cycles, suggesting good reversibility and structure stability during  $\text{Li}^+$  intercalation and extraction processes. The pure  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  nanofibers electrode also exhibits a similar kind of redox reaction (see Fig. 4b), except for the difference in the peak intensity and a shift in the reduction peak from 0.83 V to 0.69 V from 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle to 5<sup>th</sup> cycle. Compared to the CV trace of  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3\text{-C}$  composite nanofibers, the large deviation in the current peaks of  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  nanofibers electrode suggest a larger capacity fading during cycling.

Galvanostatic cycling profiles of  $\text{Li}/\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3\text{-C}$  composite nanofiber half-cells were performed to provide the electrochemical performance of reversibility and cyclability. The typical signature of the charge–discharge curves for first two cycles of  $\text{Li}/\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3\text{-C}$  cells are given in Figure 5 (a). The first discharge curve can be divided into three regions labeled as I, II, III. First, the cell was discharged from open circuit voltage (OCV) 2.8 V to intercalate lithium ions into the  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  matrix (eqn (1)).<sup>22</sup> In region I, a plateau can be observed at 1.1 V with a wide slop, which is attributed to the phase transformation from hexagonal  $\text{Li}_x\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  to cubic  $\text{Li}_2\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  (eqn (2)).<sup>3, 22</sup> In region II, a distinct plateau can be observed at 0.85 V due to the complete reduction of Fe (III) to Fe (0) (eqn (3)).<sup>3, 22</sup> The Fe nanocrystals were dispersed into  $\text{Li}_2\text{O}$  matrix. In the region III, the electrolyte was reduced below 0.8 V and the SEI film was formed, which led to further lithium storage via an interfacial reduction at the metal- $\text{Li}_2\text{O}$  boundary. Thus, the initial specific capacity of  $1214 \text{ mAh g}^{-1}$  exceeds the theoretical capacity of  $1007 \text{ mAh g}^{-1}$  (6 mol of Li per 1 mol of  $\alpha\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$ ), corresponds to an uptake of 7.2 mol Li

per 1 mol of  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite.

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When the cell was charged to 3 V, a smooth voltage profile was observed at 1.5 V, followed by a sloping plateau at 2.5 V and a steep up to 3 V. The first charge capacity was 875 mA h g<sup>-1</sup>, corresponding to an irreversible capacity loss of 28%. During the second cycle, a sloping plateau in the range of 0.8–1.05 V appeared, and the specific capacity decreased to 856 mA h g<sup>-1</sup>, indicating the irreversible nature of amorphous Li<sub>2</sub>O matrix. The galvanostatic cycling profiles of subsequent cycles are nearly the same, indicating good stability during charge and discharge cycling.

The cycling performance of Li/Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofibers and Li/pure Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanofibers cell cycled between 0.005 and 3 V at 0.2 C was presented in Fig 5 (b). The pure Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanofibers were synthesized also by electrospinning. The composite nanofibers cell show a rather stable capacity throughout the cycling process. Furthermore, it is obvious that, after a few initial cycles, the Columbic efficiency was found to be over 96%. The cell displays a discharge capacity of 820 mA h g<sup>-1</sup> even after 100 cycles, which corresponds to a 96% capacity retention. For comparison, the capacity of pure Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanofibers cells fades rapidly to 482 mA h g<sup>-1</sup> after 100 cycles, corresponding to a 50 % capacity retention. The improved cycle stability and reversible specific capacity of Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofibers are attributed to uniform composite fiber structure in which Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanocrystals are well dispersed on the carbon matrix. This structure has the following advantages: The carbon matrix prevents the pulverization and aggregation of the Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanoparticles, accommodates the large volume change of Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> particles during cycling. The carbon improves the electronic conductivity and electrical contact with the active materials (see below). The one dimensional characteristics of the nanocomposite also provides a good mechanical integrity of the electrode.

Rate capability measurement was carried out on the Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofiber cells at various current densities (Figure 5 (c)). The discharge capacities is 973 mA h g<sup>-1</sup> when cycled at a small current density of 0.1 C for 15 cycles. When increasing the current density to 0.2C, 0.5C, 1C, 2C and 5C, the corresponding specific capacity values are 871, 770, 631, 455, and 262 mA h g<sup>-1</sup>, respectively. Importantly, the reversible capacity of 982 mA h g<sup>-1</sup>

was still retained when the current density returned to 0.1 C after 75 cycles. This high rate capability is related to the thickness of SEI film, the interfacial charge transfer and lithium ion diffusion in the nanocomposite materials. The presence of carbon component is beneficial for the high rate performance of the cell for prolonged cycling.

In order to validate the mechanism of the difference in electrochemical performance between Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofibers and pure Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanofibers, an electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS) was conducted. The Nyquist plots are present in Figure 5 (d). The EIS spectra of pure Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> and composite nanofibers have a similar shape, which consists of a semicircle in the high frequency range and an inclined line in the low frequency range. The EIS data were fit by an equivalent circuit as shown in Fig 5 (e). R<sub>e</sub> is the ohmic resistance, which represents the total resistance of the electrolyte, separator and electrical contact. The semicircle in high-frequency region is attributed to the lithium ion migration resistance through a SEI film (R<sub>sf</sub>) and the charge-transfer resistance (R<sub>ct</sub>). CPE<sub>sf</sub> and CPE<sub>dl</sub> is the constant phase element, which represents the charges accumulated on both side of the electrode/electrolyte interface when lithium ion across. The inclined line corresponds to the lithium diffusion kinetics in the solid-state called as Warburg impedance (Wz).<sup>43</sup> The fitting results were summarized in Table S1 (See supporting information). It can be observed that R<sub>sf</sub> and R<sub>ct</sub> of Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofibers was 67 and 159 Ω compared to pure Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanofibers (112 and 192 Ω). The SEI resistance and charge-transfer resistance are reduced by the introduction of carbon into the 1D composite nanofibers. As expected, the carbon component uniformly distributed in 1D nanofibers improves the stability of SEI film, the rate of charge-transfer and the Li<sup>+</sup> kinetics, which results in a higher rate capability and improved cycling performance.

## Conclusion

A new type of Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-carbon composite 1D nanofiber mats have been prepared by a facile and scalable electrospinning route for the application as the LIB anode material. The Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanocrystals are uniformly distributed on the carbon fiber matrix. Such composite nanofiber electrodes demonstrate an improved cycling stability, good reversibility and rate capability compared to pure electrospun Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanofibers. The enhanced electrochemical performance is ascribed to the unique structure of fiber mat with a stable structural integrity and improved electrical conductivity rendered by the carbon fiber network. Given the simple fabrication and outstanding performance, the Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C nanocomposite fiber mats could be a prospective

high-performance anode material for LIBs. In addition, there is no limitation for the electrospinning route to other composite fibers with various metal oxides such as  $\text{Co}_3\text{O}_4$ ,  $\text{MoO}_3$ ,  $\text{MnO}_2$ ,  $\text{NiO}$  for durable and flexible battery electrodes.

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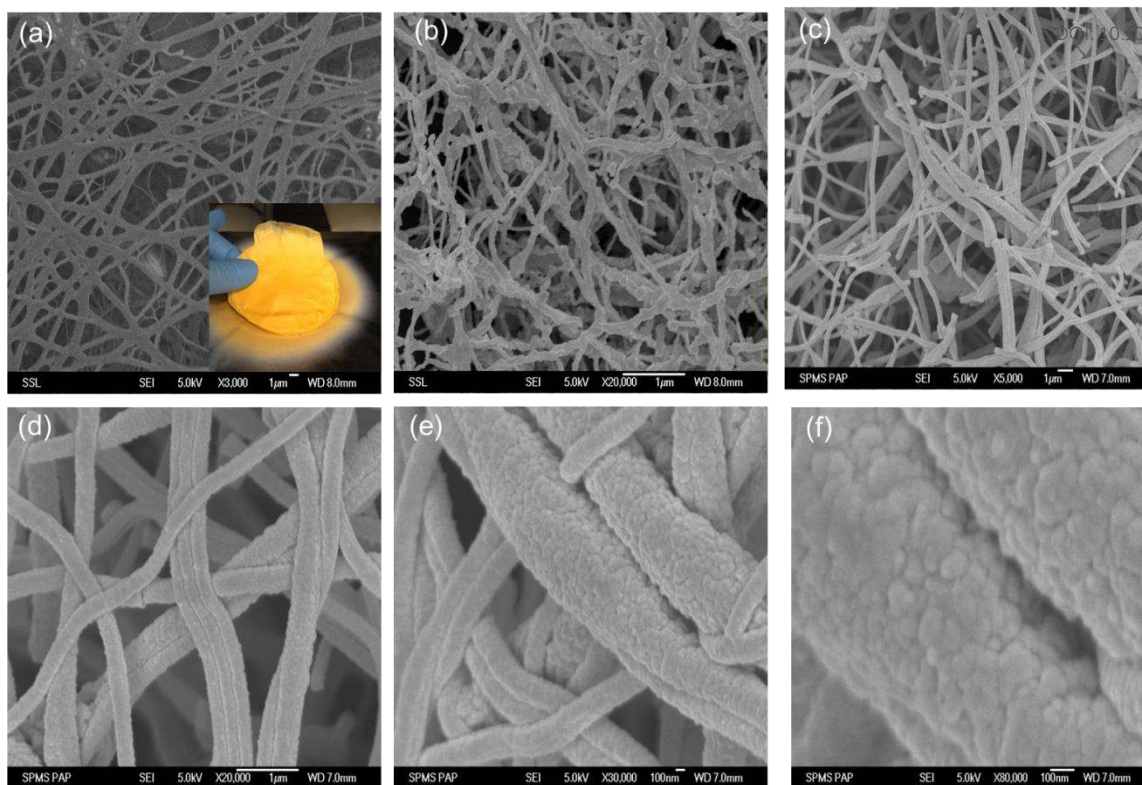


Fig 1 (a) FESEM image of the as-spun nanofiber mat; (b) The nanofiber mat after stabilization by annealing at 280°C in Air; (c) The Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofiber mat after carbonization at 500 °C in argon; (d)-(f) Close-up views of Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofibers after calcination at 500 °C in argon.

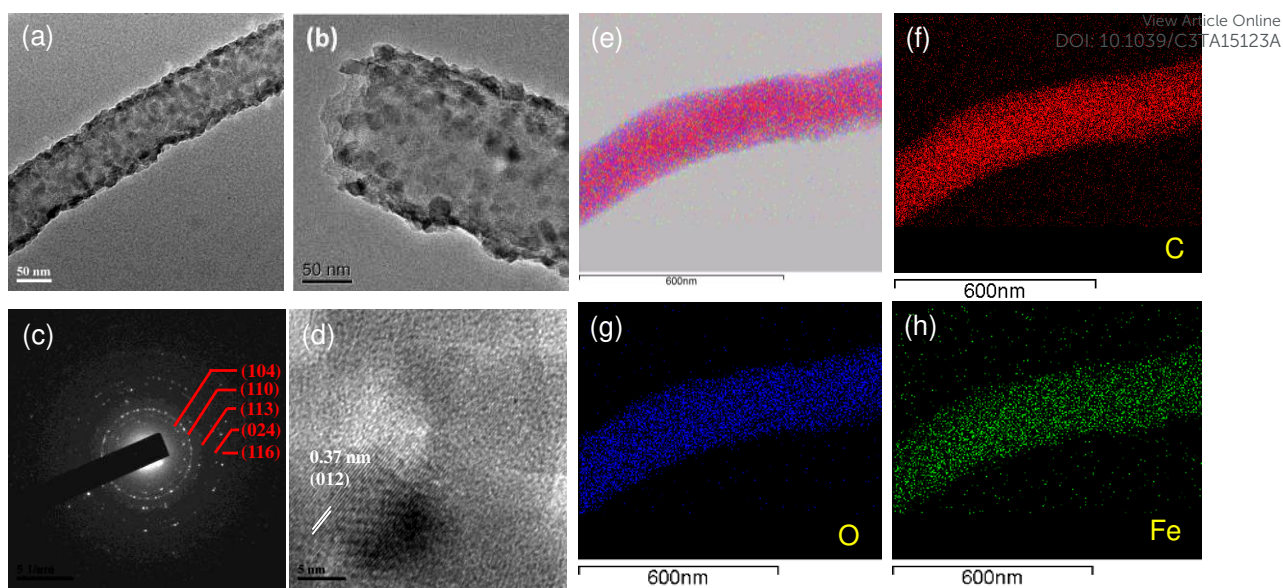


Fig 2. TEM characterization of the  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3\text{-C}$  composite nanofibers. (a) Typical structure of the composite nanofiber; (b) The tip of one composite nanofiber; (c) The corresponding SAED pattern; (d) HRTEM image of the hematite  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  crystals; (e) TEM image of a single  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3\text{-C}$  composite nanofiber with elements mapping; (f)-(h) Element mappings of carbon (red), oxygen (blue), and iron (green), respectively.

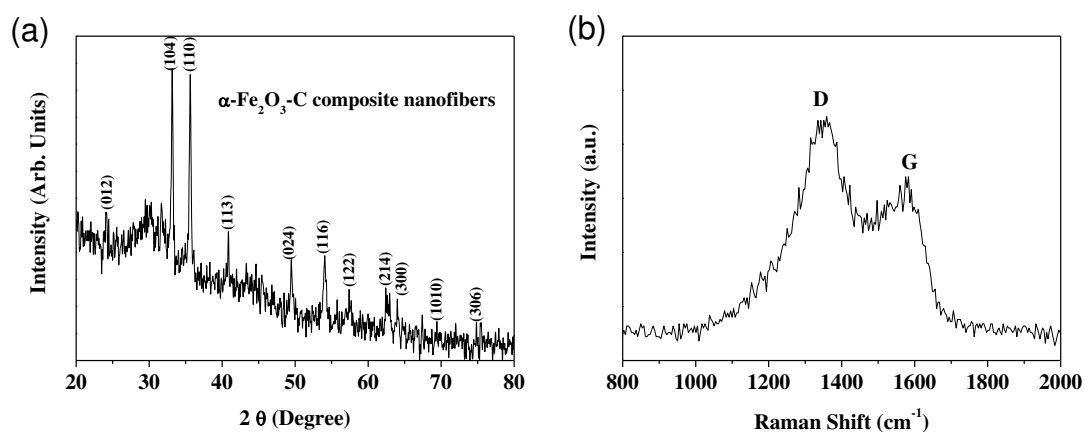


Fig 3 (a) X-ray diffraction patterns and (b) Raman spectrum of the  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3\text{-C}$  composite nanofibers.

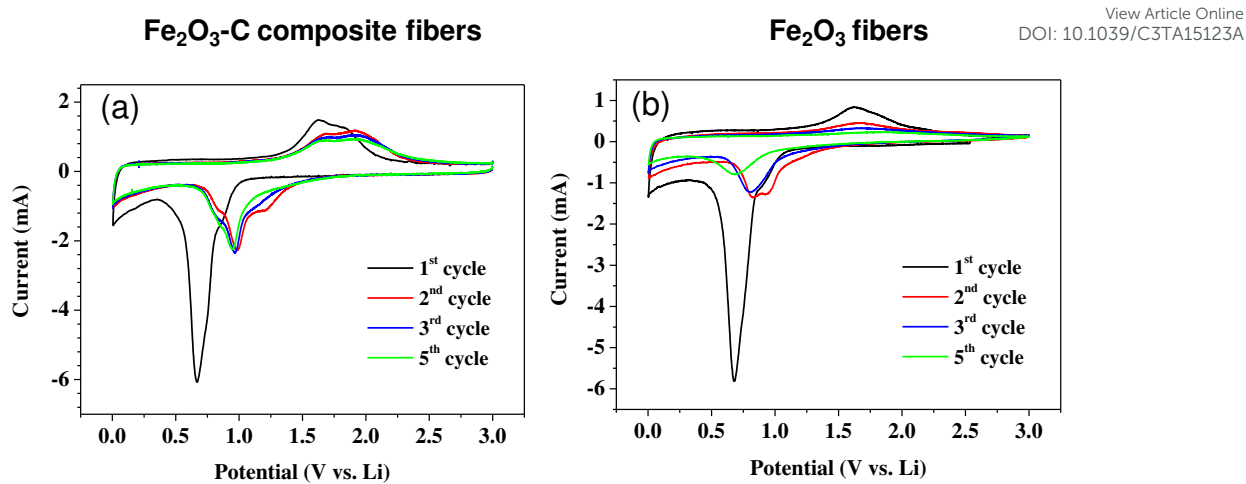


Fig 4 Cyclic voltammogram of (a) Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofiber and (b) pure Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanofiber half-cells cycled between 0.005 and 3 V at a scan rate of 0.05 mV s<sup>-1</sup>, in which metallic lithium serves as both counter and reference electrode.



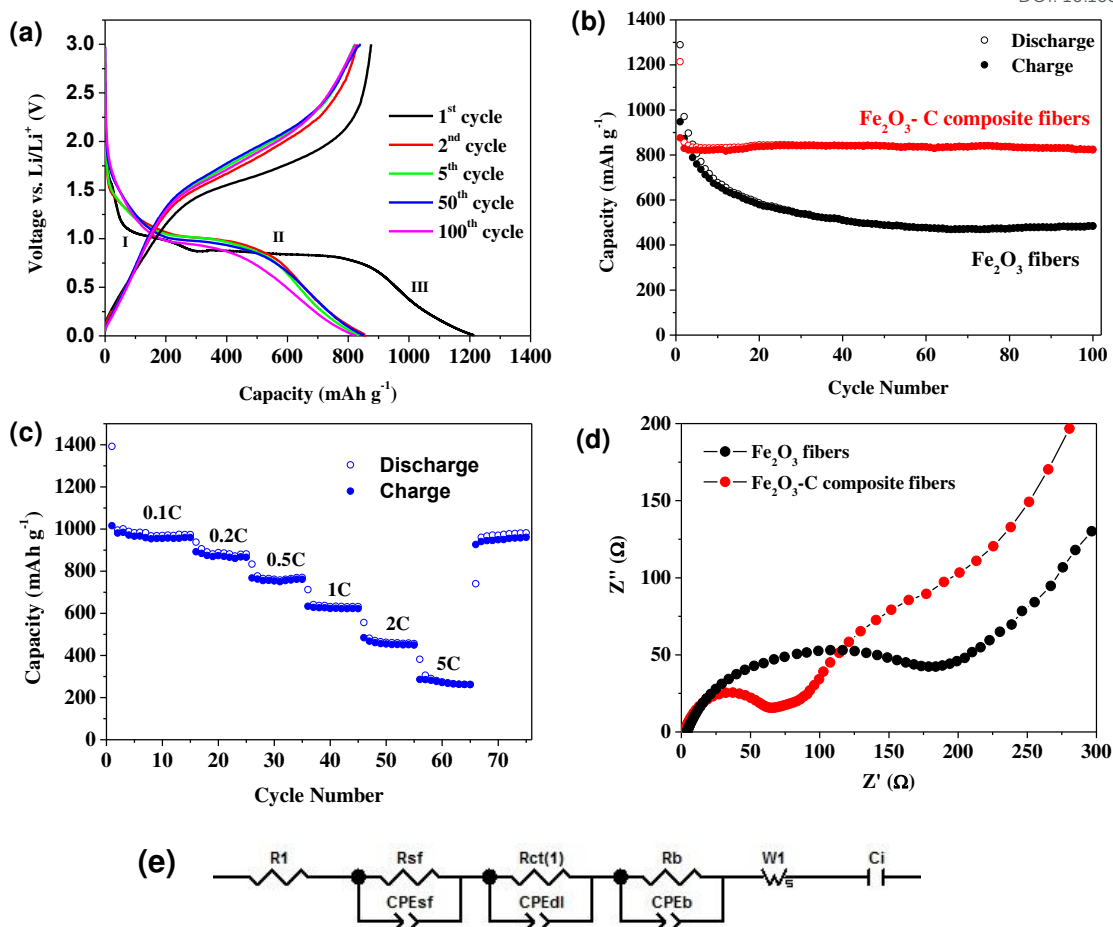


Fig 5 (a) Galvanostatic charge-discharge curves of Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofibers electrode cycled between 0.005 and 3 V (vs. Li/Li<sup>+</sup>) at 0.2 C rate (1 C = 1007 mA g<sup>-1</sup>); (b) Cyclic performance of Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofiber and pure Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanofiber electrodes at 0.2 C rate; (c) Rate capability of Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofiber electrodes at different rates; (d) Nyquist plots of Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-C composite nanofiber and pure Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanofiber electrodes; (e) The equivalent circuit to fit the EIS spectra.

## TOC Figures

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