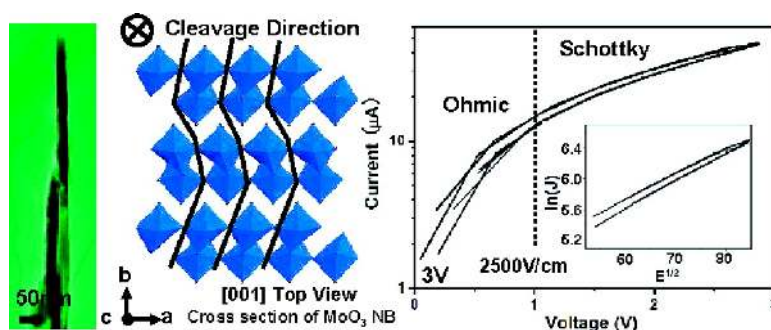


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*ACS Nano*, Article ASAP • DOI: 10.1021/nn800844h

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# From MoO<sub>3</sub> Nanobelts to MoO<sub>2</sub> Nanorods: Structure Transformation and Electrical Transport

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Developed techniques to control the size promote the potential application of molybdenum oxide in recent years.<sup>1–3</sup> Molybdenum oxide materials are particularly attractive among the transition-metal oxides due to their unusual chemistry produced by the multiple valence states. Nanostructured molybdenum oxide with high activity can be used in a wide variety of applications such as cathodes in rechargeable batteries, field-emission devices, solid lubricants, superconductors, thermoelectric materials, and electrochromic devices.<sup>4–11</sup> The molybdenum oxide crystal films may be used as solar cells and heated reflective films because of the favorable electrical properties.<sup>12</sup> The metals can be accessed in these molybdenum-based materials to form the stable coordination environments and have been used widely in the petrochemical industry for selective oxidation and isomerization of hydrocarbons.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the shape of the nanocrystals is a crucial parameter in the determination of their properties.<sup>14–16</sup> The 1D nanostructures are ideal systems for investigating the dependence of electrical transport,<sup>17</sup> optical and mechanical properties on size and dimensionality.

Therefore, how to control the experimental conditions and select the suitable precursor for 1D molybdenum dioxide nanomaterial synthesis has attracted considerable attention. Until now, different methods to synthesize single-crystal MoO<sub>3</sub> NBs have been reported.<sup>3,18–20</sup> Although the MoO<sub>2</sub> NRs could be obtained under the reductive hydrothermal condition by *in situ* reduction based on  $\alpha$ -MoO<sub>3</sub> NBs,<sup>21</sup> synthesis of the low valence state, metastable molybdenum dioxide in solutions is still a challenge. In addition, the strict selection of

**ABSTRACT** The MoO<sub>2</sub> nanorods (NRs) were synthesized by simple hydrogen reduction using the MoO<sub>3</sub> nanobelts (NBs) as the templates. The growth mechanism of one-dimensional (1D) MoO<sub>2</sub> nanostructure can be explained by the cleavage process due to the defects in the MoO<sub>3</sub> NBs. Different *I/V* characteristics of individual MoO<sub>2</sub> NRs were obtained at different bias voltages, which can be explained by Ohmic and Schottky conduction mechanisms, and the resistivity increased at high bias voltage probably because of the oxidation of MoO<sub>2</sub> NRs with large specific surface area.

**KEYWORDS:** MoO<sub>2</sub> · nanorods · structure transformation · reduction · cleavage · electrical · transport · oxidation

reducing agent, the high deficiency density, and amorphous phase of the final product need the improvement necessarily. Recently, we reported the electroactivity of MoO<sub>3</sub> NBs after lithiation that exhibits enhanced performance to nonlithiated MoO<sub>3</sub> NBs.<sup>22</sup> Herein, we introduce a simple and cost-saving method to transform MoO<sub>3</sub> NBs to 1D single-crystal MoO<sub>2</sub> NRs, and the possible growth mechanism is investigated. Furthermore, for application of MoO<sub>2</sub> nanostructures on various electronic devices, such as the printing of electronic device resistors with low temperature coefficients of resistance, we studied the electrical property through an individual MoO<sub>2</sub> NR to understand the electrical transport and interaction with metal contacts.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

X-ray diffraction (XRD) measurement was first used to study the phase change of the sample (Figure 1). The diffraction peaks of the XRD patterns for the sample before and after reduction can be readily indexed to be orthorhombic MoO<sub>3</sub> with preferred orientation (JCPDS No. 05-0508) in Figure 1A and monoclinic MoO<sub>2</sub> in space group *P*2<sub>1</sub>/*c* with the lattice constants of  $a = 5.6 \text{ \AA}$ ,  $b = 4.85 \text{ \AA}$ ,  $c = 5.53 \text{ \AA}$ ,  $\theta = 119.37^\circ$

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Received for review December 8, 2008 and accepted January 16, 2009.

10.1021/nn800844h CCC: \$40.75

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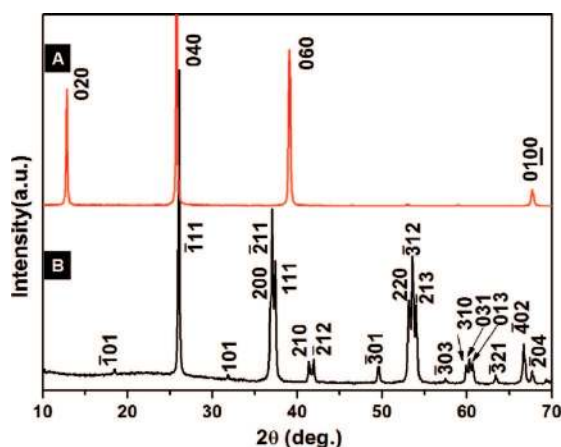


Figure 1. XRD patterns for the sample before (A) and after (B) reduction.

(JCPDS No. 032-0671) in Figure 1B, respectively. No peaks of  $\text{MoO}_3$  or other molybdenum oxides in Figure 1B are observed, indicating that  $\text{MoO}_3$  was completely reduced to single-phase  $\text{MoO}_2$ .

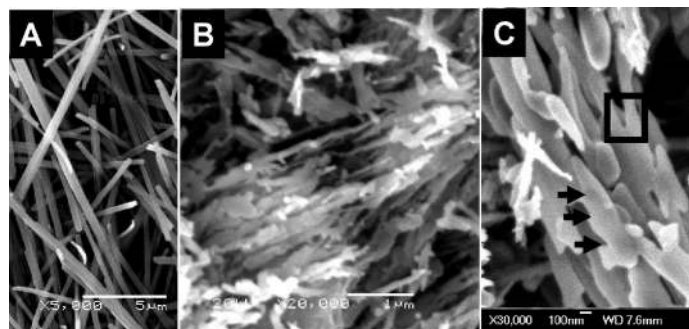


Figure 2. (A) SEM image of  $\text{MoO}_3$  NB templates. (B) Low- and (C) high-magnification images of  $\text{MoO}_2$  NRs.

The morphology of as-synthesized  $\text{MoO}_2$  was characterized by scanning electron microscopy (SEM). Figure 2A gives the image of  $\text{MoO}_3$  NBs, which were used as a template for  $\text{MoO}_2$  NR synthesis. Low-magnification image of  $\text{MoO}_2$  NR is shown in Figure 2B, and the NRs are observed decrease to 1–3  $\mu\text{m}$  in length compared with 10  $\mu\text{m}$  of  $\text{MoO}_3$  NBs. The  $\text{MoO}_2$  NRs are parallel to each other and indeed form bundles of agglomerated smaller filaments with diameters ranging from 100 to

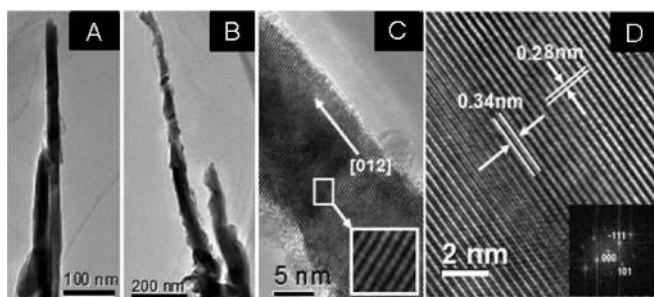


Figure 3. (A,B) TEM images of  $\text{MoO}_2$  NRs with different surface morphology. (C) HRTEM image of  $\text{MoO}_2$  NR growth along the [012] direction; the inset is an enlarged image of a representative portion of  $\text{MoO}_2$  NR. (D) Clear lattice fringes of  $\text{MoO}_2$  NR and the corresponding SAED image (inset).

200 nm, and high-magnification image gives more detail of morphology: the  $\text{MoO}_3$  NB ruptured along the axial direction to form two paralleled  $\text{MoO}_2$  NRs, as marked by the pane where the cleavage process can be seen clearly. Considering the drastic change of cell volume (34.5%) from  $\text{MoO}_3$  (202.99  $\text{\AA}^3$ ) to  $\text{MoO}_2$  (130.52  $\text{\AA}^3$ ), the surface of obtained  $\text{MoO}_2$  NRs appears as saw-like edges as the arrowheads point at, and many short segments with lengths of 200–600 nm can be seen.

To determine the crystal structure of an individual  $\text{MoO}_2$  NR, transmission electron microscopy (TEM) imaging and diffraction analysis were conducted. Figure 3A,B shows the TEM images of  $\text{MoO}_2$  NRs with different surface morphology, and both of them are constituted of two paralleled NRs with different lengths, as shown in the SEM images. High-resolution transmission electron microscopy (HRTEM) images of  $\text{MoO}_2$  NRs in Figure 3C,D show the 2D lattice fringes, and selected area electron diffraction (SAED) patterns further confirm that the NRs obtained by hydrogen reduction are single crystal. In fact, the data reveal that the  $\text{MoO}_2$  NR is structurally uniform with interplanar spacings of approximately 0.34 and 0.28 nm corresponding to the (111) and (101) planes, respectively, and the growth direction is [012]. Unlike the porous structure synthesized by redox etching method in aqueous solutions,<sup>21</sup> the high-temperature reduction environment provided the sufficient thermal energy to remove the high-energy residual interface strain, which was caused by the lattice transformation, and it is thermodynamically favorable to form single-crystal  $\text{MoO}_2$  NRs.

The following possible growth mechanism for the  $\text{MoO}_2$  NRs in hydrogen gas is suggested: The structure of  $\alpha$ - $\text{MoO}_3$  NB is anisotropic, which can be considered as a layered structure parallel to (010). Each layer is composed of two sublayers, each of which is formed by corner-shared octahedra along [001] and [100]; the two sublayers stack together by sharing the edges of the octahedra along [001]. An alternate stack of these layered sheets along [010] will lead to the formation of layered structure, where van der Waals interaction is the major binding between the piled sheets. The special structure features determine the formation of 1D  $\text{MoO}_2$  nanostructure, and the scheme of the cleavage process of  $\text{MoO}_3$  NBs is shown in Figure 4A. Although the  $\text{MoO}_3$  NBs were confirmed as single crystal by XRD and HRTEM, some defects such as oxygen deficiency and dislocation are inevitable on the surface of  $\text{MoO}_3$  NBs. These points with the lower activation energy can react with hydrogen preferentially.<sup>23</sup> Bond breaking along the [001] direction consumes less energy because only one Mo–O bond connects the corner-shared octahedral, while two Mo–O bonds connecting along the [100] direction need more energy to break. It is obvious that the cleavage along the axial direction of the nanobelts is much easier to carry out (Figure 4B), and distortion octahedra determine the appearance of the

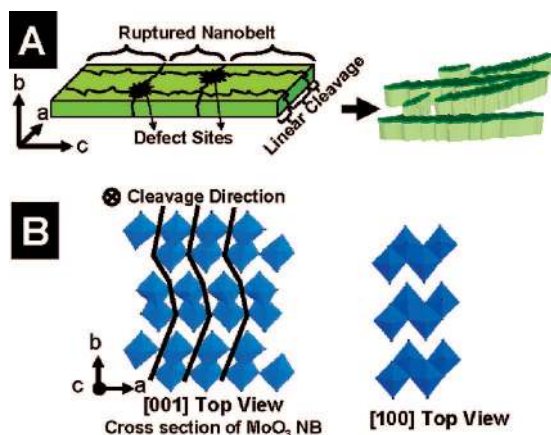


Figure 4. (A) Schematic illustration of the transformation from  $\text{MoO}_3$  NB to  $\text{MoO}_2$  NRs and (B) different top view of  $\text{MoO}_3$  layered structure with the cleavage direction.

rough surface after cleavage, as shown in SEM and TEM images. Since catalytic, electrochromic, and photochromic gas-sensing properties of molybdenum oxides depend significantly on the surface state, the  $\text{MoO}_2$  NRs with rough surface are promising for application of various fields, which is similar to the rough silicon nanowires applied in thermoelectric devices.<sup>24</sup>

Bulk  $\text{MoO}_2$  with good electronic conductivity is a promising anode material in lithium secondary battery.<sup>4</sup> To understand the performance of nanoscaled  $\text{MoO}_2$ , we measured the electrical transport through individual  $\text{MoO}_2$  NRs (Figure 5). The device was prepared by ac electrophoresis, and the contacts were improved through local deposition of Pt at the two ends by focused-ion-beam (FIB) microscopy, and the inset in Figure 5A shows the schematic view of the device.

The  $I/V$  characteristics were measured by sweeping the bias voltage from negative to positive for five times shown in Figure 5A,B,D. The obtained characteristic is symmetrical and behaves linearly dependent of  $I$  versus  $V$  in the low voltage range (Figure 5A), which is in agreement with Ohm's law as  $E = J\rho$  or  $V = IR$ , where  $E$ ,  $J$ ,  $\rho$ , and  $R$  are the electric field, current density, resistivity, and resistance, respectively, and the voltage cycling scan for five times does not change the  $I/V$  curve.

With the effective length and cross section of the sample at approximately  $4\ \mu\text{m}$  and  $100 \times 70\ \text{nm}^2$ , respectively, the contact resistance is around  $33\ \text{k}\Omega$ , and we can deduce the conductivity value as high as  $\sim 190\ \text{S/cm}$ . This value can range from 80 to  $400\ \text{S/cm}$  depending on the different length, width, and thickness of the samples. Notably, the  $I/V$  hysteresis loop obtained in the figures shows weak memory effect, which is probably due to the electron charging effect.<sup>25,26</sup> All the results indicate that the low resistance, stable performance of a metallic  $\text{MoO}_2$  NR is a good candidate material for electrical transport in the low electrical field.

When the bias voltage was up to 3 V, the conductivity of  $\text{MoO}_2$  NR increased dramatically by 3 orders of magnitudes compared with that of  $\text{MoO}_3$  NB (Figure 5B),<sup>22</sup> which is because the monoclinic  $\text{MoO}_2$  is highly anisotropic and deviates only slightly from the rutile structure with strong Mo–Mo bonds, and the electronic properties are dominated by strong hybridization of O 2p and crystal field split Mo 4d states with bands near the Fermi energy originating almost exclusively from Mo 4d  $t_{2g}$  orbitals. Compared with the semiconductor  $\text{MoO}_3$  with the band gap of 3.1 eV, the existence of delocalization electrons in the conduction band of  $\text{MoO}_2$  accounts for the metallic property.

Unlike the feature in Figure 5A, the  $\text{MoO}_2$  NR exhibits an exponential behavior in the current mechanism. The positive part of the  $I/V$  characteristics at the bias

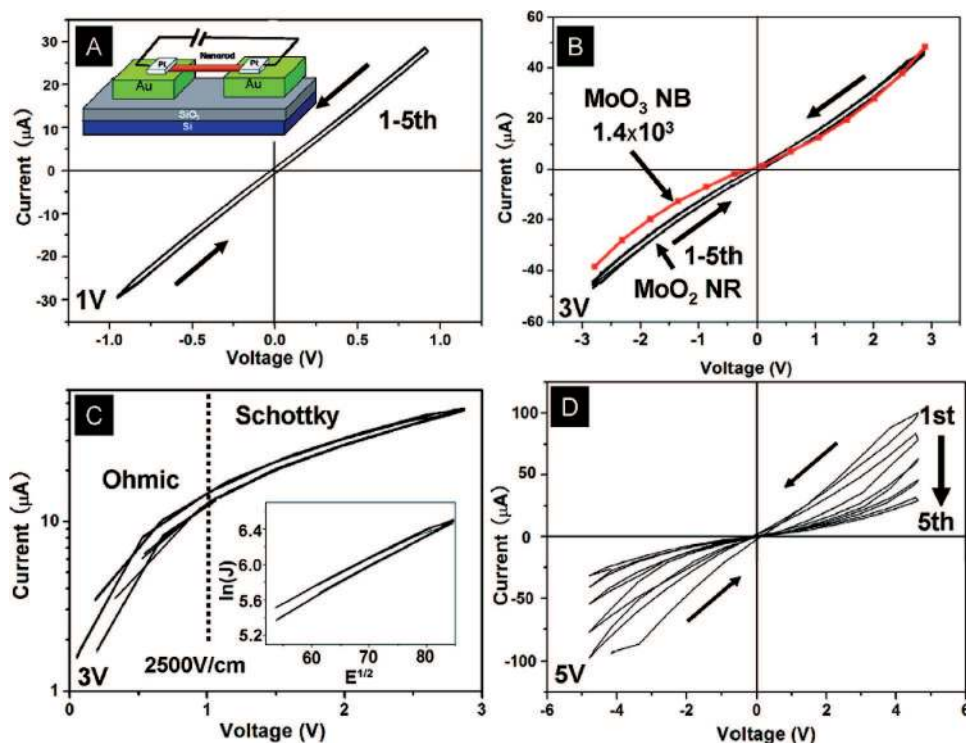


Figure 5. (A)  $I/V$  characteristics of individual  $\text{MoO}_2$  NRs at 1 V. Inset: schematic view of individual nanorod device. (B)  $I/V$  curves of  $\text{MoO}_2$  NRs and  $\text{MoO}_3$  NBs at 3 V. (C) Positive part of the  $I/V$  characteristics of  $\text{MoO}_2$  transversal system in panel B, rebuilt as a function of  $\log(I)$ . Inset: experimental plot of  $\ln(I)$  versus  $E^{1/2}$  at the electric field above 2500 V/cm. (D) Conductivity of  $\text{MoO}_2$  NRs changed with the increase of the sweeping time at 5 V.



voltage of 3 V is shown in Figure 5C, rebuilt as a function of  $\log(I)$ . In order to determine the current mechanism in MoO<sub>2</sub> NR, the logarithm of the current density is plotted against the square root of the electric field [ $\ln(J)$  versus  $E^{1/2}$ ], as shown in the inset in Figure 5C. The linear feature obtained at the electric field above 2500 V/cm implies the Schottky emission, and the Schottky current density is expressed as follows:<sup>17</sup>

$$\ln J = \frac{\beta_{SE}}{kT} \sqrt{E} + \left[ \ln(AT^2) - \frac{q\phi}{kT} \right] \quad (1)$$

where  $A$  is a constant,  $\phi$  is the Schottky barrier height,  $q$  is the electronic charge,  $k$  is Boltzmann's constant, and  $E$  is the electric field.

In general, the device will be heated when the current flows across the nanomaterial and the calorific value is proportional to the current density, and the high working temperature will increase the conductivity of the nanodevice associated with the increased migration rate of carriers.<sup>4,27</sup> However, when the bias voltage further increased to 5 V, the  $I/V$  curve cannot be recovered with the process of sweeping, and the resistance increased slowly as shown in Figure 5D. Furthermore, the research shows that the effect of thermal an-

nealing by the laser can oxidize the MoO<sub>2</sub> nanorods as MoO<sub>x</sub> at threshold powers of 15 mW, and the  $x$  value can be controlled by the power of the laser.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, considering the metastable state of rough MoO<sub>2</sub> NR with high specific surface area, it is probable that the oxidation of MoO<sub>2</sub> to MoO<sub>3</sub> occurred due to the thermal effect by the high current density in the open condition, which decreased the conductivity finally.

## CONCLUSIONS

Using MoO<sub>3</sub> NBs as the template, the MoO<sub>2</sub> NRs were obtained by hydrogen reduction, and the decrease of length and width can be explained by the cleavage mechanism because of the presence of the defects in the MoO<sub>3</sub> NBs. Ohmic characteristics as the dominant conduction mechanism at the electric field below 2500 V/cm is because of the existence of delocalizing electrons in the conduction band, and the conductivity of an individual MoO<sub>2</sub> NR is estimated to be 190 S/cm at room temperature, while the Schottky emission is responsible for the electric field above 2500 V/cm. With the large specific surface area, probably the MoO<sub>2</sub> NR was oxidized to MoO<sub>3</sub> when the device was heated at a higher current density, and the conductivity decreased slowly.

## METHODS

To prepare the  $\alpha$ -MoO<sub>3</sub> NBs, 40 mL of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> (30%) was agitated rapidly, and 4 g of molybdenum powder was added slowly under water-cooling until the clear orange peroxomolybdic acid sol was obtained, then the sol was transferred into a Teflon-lined autoclave and kept at 180 °C for 48 h. The autoclave was left to cool, and the precipitate was filtered out and rinsed with deionized water three times. On the basis of the reduction of MoO<sub>3</sub> NBs with hydrogen gas, the pure MoO<sub>2</sub> NRs can be obtained successfully: 1 g of MoO<sub>3</sub> NB powder was sprinkled on an Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> boat placed in a quartz chamber, and the argon gas was introduced into the chamber until heated to 550 °C at the heating rate of 10 °C · min<sup>-1</sup>, then the hydrogen gas was injected into the chamber and held at 550 °C for half an hour; the powder cooled naturally in atmospheric argon flow, and finally, the blue MoO<sub>3</sub> transformed to black MoO<sub>2</sub> powder.

XRD measurement was performed using a D/MAX-III X-ray diffractometer. SEM images were collected with JSM-5610 and FES-EM LEO 1530. TEM, HRTEM, and SAED were recorded by a JEOL JEM-2010FEF microscope.

**Acknowledgment.** This work was supported by the National Nature Science Foundation of China (50672071, 50672072, 50702039), the Research Fund for the Doctoral Program of Higher Education (20070497012), Program for Changjiang Scholars and Innovative Research Team in University, Ministry of Education, China (PCSIRT, No. IRT0547). Thanks to Professor Z.L. Wang of Georgia Institute of Technology, Dr. C.S. Lao of California Institute of Technology for strong support and helpful discussion.

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