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Modified Borohydrides for Reversible Hydrogen Storage

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Abstract

In attempt to develop lithium borohydrides as the reversible hydrogen storage materials with the high capacity, the feasibility to reduce dehydrogenation temperature of the lithium borohydride and moderate rehydrogenation condition has been explored. The commercial available lithium borohydride has been modified by ball milling with metal oxides and metal chlorides as the additives. The modified lithium borohydrides release 9 wt% hydrogen starting from 473K. The dehydrided modified lithium borohydrides absorb 7-9 wt% hydrogen at 873K and 7 MPa. The additive modification reduces dehydriding temperature from 673K to 473K and moderates rehydrogenation conditions to 923K and 15 MPa. XRD and SEM analysis discovered the formation of the intermediate compound TiB₂ that may plays the key role in change the reaction path resulting the lower dehydriding temperature and reversibility. The reversible hydrogen storage capacity of the oxide modified lithium borohydrides decreases gradually during hydriding-dehydriding cycling due to the lost of the boron during dehydrogenation. But, it can be prevented by selecting the suitable additive, forming intermediate boron compounds and changing the reaction path. The additives reduce dehydriding temperature and improve the reversibility, it also reduces the hydrogen storage capacity. The best compromise can be reached by optimization of the additive loading and introducing new process other than ball milling.

Key Words

Borohydride, Lithium, Hydrogen, Storage,

1. Introduction

Alkali metal borohydrides such as LiBH₄ and NaBH₄ are lightweight materials contain larger amounts of hydrogen. Their gravimetric and volumetric hydrogen storage capacities (18.5wt%, 121 kg/m³ and 10.6wt%, 98.7 kg/m³, respectively) are well above US DOE's bench mark for transportation applications (7.5 wt% and 65 kg/m³ [1]). The lithium borohydride could be superior over other hydrogen storage options if it is reversible in the moderated conditions, see Table 1. The borohydrides are also relatively inexpensive and can be produced from abundant natural borane deposits [3,4]. Unfortunately, these materials are very stable. Heating above 673 K that is above its melting point is required to release the majority of the hydrogen from LiBH₄ [5]. The rehydrogenation conditions

are too harsh for practical application. However, the potential of these materials warrants investigation into possible methods to resolve or alleviate these two major problems.

The majority of borohydride research has focused on "on-demandTM" hydrogen sources, which rely on an irreversible catalyzed hydrolysis reaction. The theoretical hydrogen yield by hydrolysis is only 7.6 wt% and a considerable amount of water will need to be supplied. The novel metal Ru has to be used as the catalyst. Also the safe and cost effective disposal or recycling process for the hydrolysis byproduct such as NaBO₂ has not yet been resolved [13]. A reversible borohydride material capable of releasing and reabsorbing hydrogen at moderated conditions similarly to a standard metal hydride would represent a major breakthrough in hydrogen storage technology.

Technology	Gravimetric	Volumetric	Operating temperature	Recharging
	capacity (wt %)	density	(°C)	pressure
		(kg/m^3)		(bar)
LaNi ₅ [6]	1.7	80	25	10
MgH ₂ [7]	7.7	102	300	30
Glass microspheres [8]	9.4	8	350	680
NaAlH ₄ [9]	7.4	69	125	100
LiNH ₂ [10-12]	6.5	NA	150-250	30
NaBH ₄ hydrolysis [13]	7.6	75	25	NA
LiBH ₄ [5]	18.4	121	400	150

Fig. 1 Solid hydrogen storage materials

Early, Alain Muller reported that 5 gram of LiBH₄ decomposed and released 13.8wt% hydrogen at 723K and 10⁻² mmHg (1.3 Pa) pressure within 24 hours by giving a reaction as LiBH₄ $LiH + B + 3/2 H_2 - 24.8 Kcal$. After dehydrogenation, he was able to put 6.65 liter (11.8wt%) of hydrogen back to the decomposed material at 923K and 15MPa within 48 hours. To improve the dehydrogenation and following rehydrogenation processes, 10wt% aluminum powder was mixed mechanically with LiBH₄. It liberated 12.4wt% of hydrogen at 723K and 1 Pa within 24 hours. After then, 15.2 wt% of hydrogen was recharged back to the decomposed material at 923K and 15MPa within 12 hours [14]. Obviously, the dehydriding and rehydriding temperatures are too high and the reactions are too slow. Recently, Zuttle reported that the LiBH₄ ball milled with 25% SiO₂ librated 9 wt% hydrogen starting from 523K through the reaction LiBH₄ $LiH + B + H_2$. He indicated that the reaction is partially reversible, but with no detail data given in the paper [15]. Orimo studied the Raman spectra of NaBH₄, KBH₄ and LiBH₄ and suggested that the stability of LiBH₄ or LiNH₂ can be reduced by partial cation substitutions using smaller sized and/or higher valenced-cations with higher electronegativities such as Mg [16]. By adding Mg into LiBH4 at Li/Mg=9:1, the dehydriding temperature was reduced from 850K to 820K [17]. Vajo reported that the LiBH₄ was destabilized by adding 0.5 mole of MgH₂ and 0.03 mol\% TiCl₃. The calculation from P-C-T (pressure-compositiontemperature) isotherms shows the rehydrogenation enthalpy of LiBH₄ was reduced by 25 KJ/mol H₂. The kinetics was extreme slow and 100 hours were necessary to reach the equilibrium [18].

Motivated by its high theoretic gravimetric and volumetric capacity, we conducted the systematic investigation to modify the commercial LiBH₄ for reversible hydrogen storage. Many potential additives have been screened and several of them show effective in reduction of thermal decomposition temperatures and improvement of the reversibility at relatively moderate conditions. The materials characterizations discovered the interaction of the borohydride with the additives that helps to understand the dehydriding/rehydriding processes. The detail results are reported in this paper.

2. Experimental

The LiBH₄ powder (99.99% purity) and the additive powder (99.9-99.99% purity) were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich and used directly without any pre-treatment. Two grams of the appropriate LiBH₄ + additive powder mixture was placed in a 25 ml hardened steel grinding bowl with three 11mm diameter tungsten carbide balls. The sealed grinding bowls were taken out of the Argon glove box and put on Frisch-7 planetary ball mill for 600 rpm milling. After milling, the dehydriding temperatures of the new modified borohydrides were first screened on a Perkin-Elmer TG/DTA thermal analyzer. 0.5 grams of selected modified LiBH₄ powders were transferred to the Sieverts apparatus, a volumetric device with 500 Pa (5 mbar) back pressure, for Temperature-Programmed-Desorption (TPD) measurements. The temperature was ramped up from ambient to 973K at rate of 5K/min. The rehydrogenations were conducted at 873K and 7MPa (99.9999% hydrogen) in the same Sieverts apparatus. The selected borohydrides that show promising were investigated by X-ray Diffraction (XRD) in a Philips X'Pert Pro X-ray diffractometer to determine their crystal structure and phase composition in different states. The morphology and additive distribution of the new materials were analyzed by Hitachi S3600N Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) with an Energy Dispersion Spectrometer (EDS). The composition of the dehydriding gas stream was analyzed by Pfeiffer ThermoStar Mass Spectrometer in the ambient environment.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Dehydrogenation of the modified LiBH₄ materials

Fig. 1 is the comparison of the TPDs of the TiO₂ modified and commercial LiBH₄ samples. The commercial LiBH₄ decomposes starting from approximately 598 K at low rate. At about 723K, the decomposition rate appreciably accelerates, resulting in a final release of 9.5 wt% hydrogen at 873K. The dehydriding behavior of the 5-hour milled LiBH4 is same as no-milled. It appears that the ball milling alone does neither reduce the dehydriding temperature nor improve dehydriding rates. The modified materials LiBH₄ 75%+TiO₂ 25% librates same amount of hydrogen, but starting from much low temperature, 473K for 5-10 hour milled samples and 448K for 20 hour milled one. The affect of the TiO₂ in reducing of dehydriding temperature is obvious. It is recognized that that extending milling time does little in reducing dehydriding temperature, but decreases

hydrogen capacity. For example, the 20-hour milled LiBH₄ 75%+TiO₂ 25% releases 6.9 wt% hydrogen at 873K only. The possible reason will be discussed later in this paper.

In our initial investigation, eight oxides and chlorides have been added into LiBH₄ during ball milling. It is found that five additives such as TiO₂, TiCl₃, ZrO₂, V₂O₃ and SnO₂ to be effective for increasing the low temperature desorption rate and reducing the onset temperature for more rapid decomposition. In contrast with commercial LiBH₄, the materials LiBH₄75%+TiO₂ 25% and 75%LiBH₄+V₂O₃ 25% produce ~2-3X the amount of hydrogen at ~200 °C, show earlier onset of rapid decomposition, and release 9.2 wt% and 8.5 wt% hydrogen at 600°C respectively, see Fig.1-2. The onset of noticeable low temperature desorption has also dropped to ~448K. The other three LiBH₄ materials modified by TiCl₃, ZrO₂ and SnO₂ also show the lower decomposition temperature, faster hydrogen desorption and larger dehydriding capacity at same temperatures than the commercial LiBH₄.

It is obvious that the additives play a significant role in enabling lower temperature hydrogen desorption. As well the modified borohydrides release more hydrogen than commercial borohydride at same temperature. Fedneva et al [5] investigated LiBH₄ by DTA. The thermogram of LiBH₄ showed three endothermic effects: at 108-112 °C, 268-286 °C and 483-492 °C. The endothermic effect at 108-112 °C is reversible and corresponds to the LiBH₄ polymorphic transformation. The second peak at 268-286°C corresponds to the LiBH₄ fusion, accompanied by a slight decomposition, which librates approximately 2% of the hydrogen in the compound. The main evolution of gas starts at 380°C and librates 80% in the hydrogen in LiBH₄. However, the cause of the small effect at 483-492°C is uncertain, but it coincides with the liberation of 50% theoretic hydrogen content in LiBH₄. Zuttle [15] reports that about 50% hydrogen (~ 9 wt %) has been liberated from the SiO₂ catalyzed LiBH₄ at 320 °C. In our experiments, the same amount of hydrogen (~9 wt%) was released from the LiBH₄ materials modified by other oxides. but initiating at much lower temperature (~473K). It is proposed that the possible LiBH₄ 2LiH + 2B + 3H₂ because LiH is very stable until dehydriding reaction is 2LiBH₄ 1173K [14,15]. This reaction librates 13.79 wt% of hydrogen from LiBH₄. Due to adding 25 wt% TiO₂, the hydrogen released from our modified material LiBH₄ 75%+TiO₂ 25% will be 10.34 wt% theoretically. Practically, the average dehydriding capacity of our modified LiBH₄ materials that has 25wt% additives is about 9 wt%. It is understandable because some hydrogen was lost during ball milling due to the interaction of LiBH₄ and TiO₂. It will be discussed in the following XRD analysis section.

It is believed that reducing of the load of the additives will increase hydrogen desorption, but increase dehydriding temperature. Fig. 3 shows the dehydriding comparison of the materials LiBH₄ 75%+TiCl₃ 25% with LiBH₄ 90%+TiCl₃ 10%. As expected, the hydrogen desorption increased from 8.2wt% to 9.2wt% at 873K by reducing TiCl₃ load from 25% to 10%. However, the rapid dehydriding temperature increased from 373K to 523K. The reaction kinetics also suffers. The similar conclusion was made from the comparison of the materials LiBH₄ 75%+TiO₂ 25% with LiBH₄ 90%+TiO₂ 10% as Fig. 4 shown. Obviously, there is the trade off issue existed. More work is planned to seek the reasonable compromise.

The isothermal dehydriding properties of the material LiBH₄ 75%+TiO₂ 25% is shown in Fig.5. There are two stages: the fast kinetics in the first short period and very slow kinetics afterward. For example, the material desorbed about 8.0wt% hydrogen within the first 100 minutes at 773K. But, the desorption lasts about 10 hours before the reaction completely by adding 0.5wt% hydrogen in total 8.5wt% desorption. It may attribute to the slow motion of boron after most LiBH₄ decomposed. The nanostructured materials with some effective promoters are being investigated for increase of the kinetics in the second stage. The material desorbs about 4.5wt% and 1.5wt% hydrogen at 573K and 473K respectively. The desorption is the temperature dependable process. The results of the temperature dependence in both stages are determined and plotted in Fig. 6. The Arrhenius plot shows that the desorption kinetics follow thermally activated behavior illustrated by the equation: $dC/dt = k_0 \exp(-O/RT)$.

3.2 Rehydrogenation of the modified LiBH₄ materials

In Muller's work [14], the modified material LiBH₄90wt% +Al 10wt% desorbs 12.4wt% hydrogen at 723K within 12 hours in the first dehydriding, but the dehydrided material was not able to be recharged in its original capacity. The second dehydriding produced 5wt% hydrogen only. The effect of the second rehydrogenation was almost negligible by gaining 0.6 wt% hydrogen only. To verify the dehydriding-rehydriding cycling stability the modified borohydrides, the material LiBH₄ 75%+TiO₂ 25% was selected for repeat hydriding and dehydriding tests. After dehydriding at 873K for one hour, the materials LiBH₄ 75%+ TiO₂25% and LiBH₄ +V₂O₃25% were rehydrogenated at 873K and 10MPa. As Fig.7 shows, the dehydrided materials LiBH₄+ TiO₂25% and LiBH₄ +V₂O₃25% absorb 7.8 wt% and 7.9 wt% hydrogen within 45 minutes. The rehydrogenation capacity was above 8 wt% if absorption time was prolonged to one hour. This proves that the new LiBH₄ materials are reversible. Obviously, the rehydriding temperature and pressure are still high. However, it is believed that the lower conditions are achievable by optimizing compositions and changing the thermodynamic stability of the modified LiBH₄ materials. The Fig. 8 shows the repeated isothermal rehydrogenation of the material LiBH₄ 75%+ TiO₂25% at 873K and 7MPa. It brings our attention that the hydrogen absorption capacity decreases from 8.25wt% to 5.6wt% and 4.2 wt% in the second and the third hydrogenation respectively. To find the possible causes, the XRD and mass spectrum analysis were conducted.

3.3 XRD analysis of the modified and non-modified LiBH₄ materials

To identify the phase composition during dehydrogenation and rehydrogenation, the material LiBH₄ 75%+TiO₂ 25% has been investigated by XRD at three different states: ball-milled, dehydrided, and rehydrided. For reference, the XRD of the raw LiBH₄ (as received) and the 5-hour ball milled LiBH₄ have been performed as well.

3.31 LiBH₄ as received and after ball milling

Fig.9 shows the XRD pattern of as-received commercial LiBH₄. After 5 hours ball milling without any additive, there is no significant structure change rather than the slight broaden peaks caused possibly by the mechanical stress and crystal size reduction, see Fig.10.

3.3.2 LiBH₄ 75%+TiO₂ 25% after ball milling

Fig.11 shows the XRD of the material LiBH₄ 75%+TiO₂ 25% ball milled for 5 hours. It shows the structure change. The TiO₂ is partially changing its crystal structure from anatase to rutile. Beside the expected LiBH₄ and TiO₂, there are traces of TiB₂ and LiB₃O₅ formed through the possible interaction between LiBH₄ and TiO₂ during ball milling. The XRD confirmed the partial LiBH₄ decomposition and combination of Ti with B. It is important to point out that the intermediate compound TiB₂ dispersed within matrix might facilitate the reversible dehydriding - rehydriding reaction. It may play the role as the "bridge" in B-H bond dissociation and recombination process. However, the additive TiO₂ reduces the hydrogen capacity because of the extra "no-hydrogen" weight loading and the hydrogen release during interaction of LiBH₄ and TiO₂. The material LiBH₄ 75% + TiO₂ 25wt% can be expressed as LiBH₄-0.09TiO₂. Based on this molecular ratio, the most LiBH₄ is not able to react with TiO₂ during ball milling. In most case of our measurements, the oxide/chloride-modified LiBH₄ materials desorb 8~9 wt% hydrogen that equals to half of the theoretic capacity of LiBH₄.

After 20 hours of ball milling, the material appears as same as 5 hours milled one that consists of the LiBH₄, TiO_2 , TiB_2 and trace of LiB₃O₅. The reduced intensity and the peak broadening in XRD spectrum may correspond to an average grain size reduction and increase in the short-range disorder, see Fig.12. To understand the reversible reaction path and the role of the additives, the 20 hours ball milled material LiBH₄ $75\%+TiO_2$ 25% is selected for XRD examination in dehydrided and rehydrided states respectively.

3.3.3 LiBH₄ 75%+TiO₂ 25% after dehydriding

The XRD of the dehydrided material LiBH₄+TiO₂ 25% is shown in Fig.13. It appears that the LiBH₄ decomposes to LiH, LiOH, TiB₂ and trace of Ti₇B₆ during hydrogen evolution. The additive TiO₂ disappears. The XRD spectrum does not indicate the visible existence of boron as the reaction 2LiBH₄ 2LiH + 2B + 3H₂ suggested [13]. More likely, LiBH₄ may have certain interaction with TiO₂ resulting in formation of LiH, LiOH and, more meaningfully, the intermediate compounds such as TiB₂. It is possible that the some boron segregates from LiBH₄ as the amorphous clusters without reaction with titanium. The intermediate phases may make the dehydrogenation reversible at relatively moderated conditions. The hypothesis of the reversible reaction is given as 6LiBH₄ + 2TiO₂ 2LiH + 4LiOH + 2TiB₂ + 2B +9H₂. The additive TiO₂ contribution may attribute to form intermediate boron compounds that promote low temperature dehydriding and the reversibility. It is not our intention to prove the mechanism using the limited data in this paper. We don't have reasonable interpretation on possible existence

of compound Ti₇B₆. But, more material characterizations and particularly designed experiments have been planed. We'll report our results later.

3.3.4 LiBH₄ 75%+TiO₂ 25% after rehydriding

The XRD of the rehydrided material LiBH₄+TiO₂ 25% is shown in Fig.14. The intensities of the identifiable peaks are very low that indicates the materials either in short range disorder or in amorphous states. The recombined LiBH₄ is not detectable in our XRD experiments although its existence is evidenced by our rehydriding and following dehydriding measurements (Fig. 5, Fig 7-8). It is believed that the recombined LBH₄ is in amorphous state. The visible peaks are identified as the TiB₂, Li₇B₆ and possible Li₃BO₃. The additive TiO₂ is no identifiable in XRD spectrum of the rehydrided material. However, the intermediate compound TiB₂ persists in both states, dehydrided and rehydrided. It is interested to realized that the TiO₂ partially decomposes during the ball milling and completely decomposes and formed TiB₂ during dehydriding. The intermediate compounds derived from oxide and chloride additives, such as TiB₂ in LiBH₄75%+TiO₂25%, may play the key role in reducing decomposition temperature and provide reversibility for lithium borohydride materials.

3.4 SEM and EDX mapping of the modified material LiBH₄ 75%+TiO₂ 25%

To verify the decomposition of the additive TiO₂, SEM and EDX mapping were carried out. The morphology of the material LiBH₄ 75%+TiO₂ 25% synthesized by 5-hour ball milling is shown in Fig 15. In high magnification, it is estimated that the average particle size is about 2~3 μm with agglomeration. The Ti, B and O element maps indicate that the TiO₂ is mixed with LiBH₄ matrix homogenously with no segregation (see Fig.16). After dehydriding at 873K, the material shows its porous feature with coarsen particles size due to re-crystallization, see Fig.17. The maps show that the titanium segregates with oxygen and may combine with boron as XRD data suggested, see Fig. 18. The rehydrogenation at 873K and 7MPa produces layered material (Fig.19). The disassociation of titanium and oxygen through the decomposition of TiO₂ is observed clearly in the Ti, B and O element maps (Fig.20).

3.5 <u>Mass spectrum analysis of the gas stream from decomposition of the material LiBH</u>₄ 75%+TiO₂ 25%

The mass spectroscope indicates that the gas stream of decomposition of the material LiBH₄ 75%+TiO₂ 25% consists of the hydrogen mainly with the trace of BH₃ and H₂O, see Fig. 21. The H₂O most likely comes from moisture absorption during sample transfer. But, the BH₃ formation, even trace, causes permanent lose of the boron resulting in graduate decrease of the hydrogen storage capacity during dehydriding-rehydriding cycling. Similar conclusion can be applied to NH₃ formation in LiNH₂+LiH system. However, it is believed that the formation of BH₃ can be prevented by change the reaction path using suitable additives.

4. Conclusions

The modified LiBH₄ by additives such as metal oxides and chlorides reduces the hydrogen desorption temperature from 673K to 473K. The modified lithium borohydrides desorb about 9 wt% hydrogen and can be recharged to 7-9 wt% hydrogen capacity at 873K and 7 MPa reversibly. Five effective additives have been identified. The materials characterization shows that the additive reacts with lithium borohydride and produces the intermediate compound that facilitates the reversible reaction at relatively moderate conditions. The reversible hydrogen storage capacity of the oxide modified lithium borohydrides decreases gradually during hydriding-dehydriding cycling. One of the possible reasons is the loose of the boron in forming of BH₃ within the hydrogen stream during dehydrogenation. It is expected that the boron loose can be prevented by select the suitable additive, form intermediate boron compounds and change the reaction path. While the additives reduce dehydriding temperature and improve the reversibility, it also reduces the hydrogen storage capacity. The best compromise can be reached by optimization of the additive loading. The extended ball milling does little in improve dehydriding performance, but reduce the reversible capacity. It is believed that the additives change the thermal stability of the lithium borohydrides in some degree. It is realized that the other modifiers such metals, metal hydrides, other complex hydrides beside the oxides and chlorides may change the B-H binding energy resulting in the reversible dehydriding and rehydriding at reasonable moderate conditions. The research work on destabilizing lithium borohydrides has been conducting. The detail results will be reported later.

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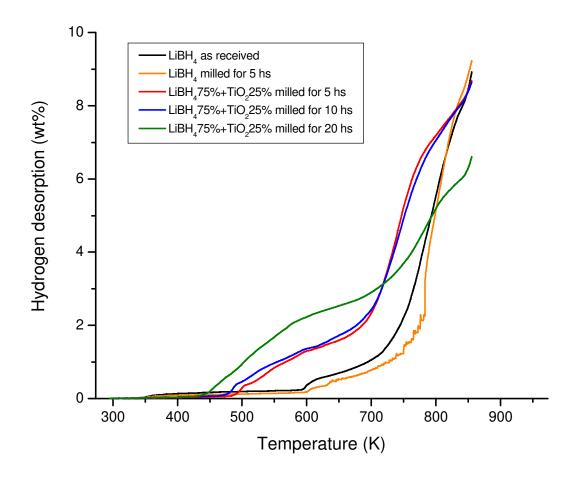


Fig.1. TPD of the commercial LiBH₄

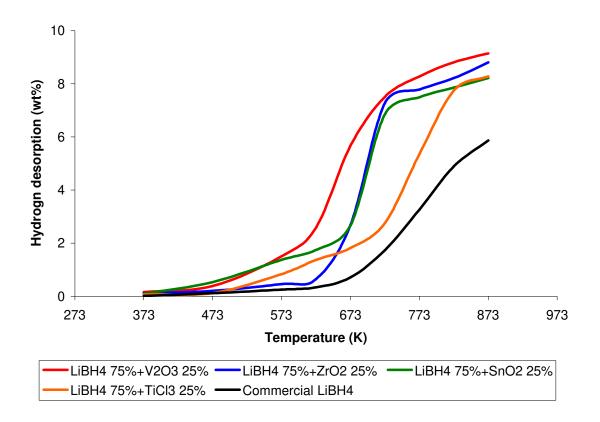


Fig.2 The comparison of other modified LiBH₄ materials with the commercial LiBH₄

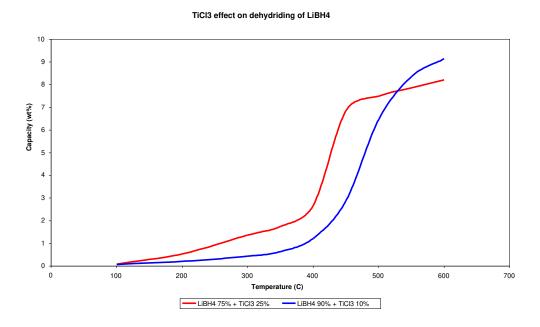


Fig.3 The effect of the additive TiCl₃ on dehydrogenation behavior of LiBH₄

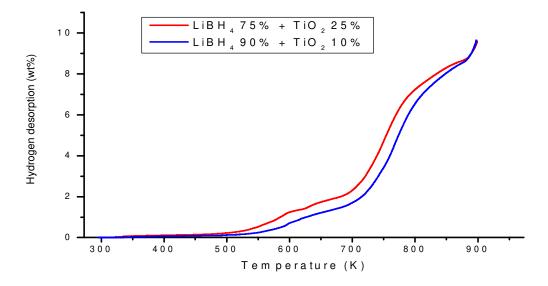


Fig.4 The effect of the additive TiO₂ on dehydrogenation behavior of LiBH₄

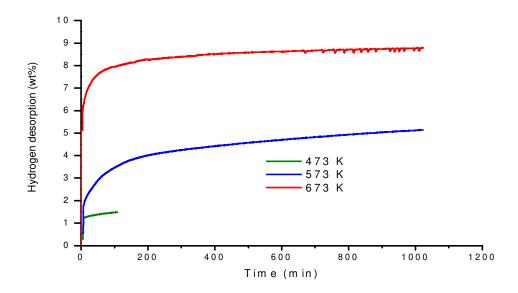


Fig. 5 Dehydrogenation of LiBH₄75%+TiO2 25% at 473K, 573K and 673K

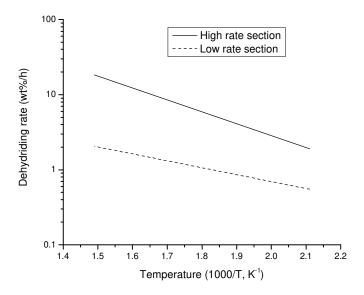


Fig. 6 Arrhenius dehydriding plots of LiBH $_4$ 75%+TiO2 25% for the fast and slow rate stages.

8 Hydrogen absorption (wt%) 6 4 2 0 20 40 0 10 30 50 Time (min) LiBH₄ 75%+TiO₂ 25% LiBH₄ 75%+TiCl₃ 25% Commercial LIBH₄

Rehydriding of LiBH₄ at 873K and 10 MPa

Fig. 7 Hydrogen absorption of the dehydrided materials LiBH₄ 75%+ TiO₂25% and LiBH₄75%+V₂O₃25%

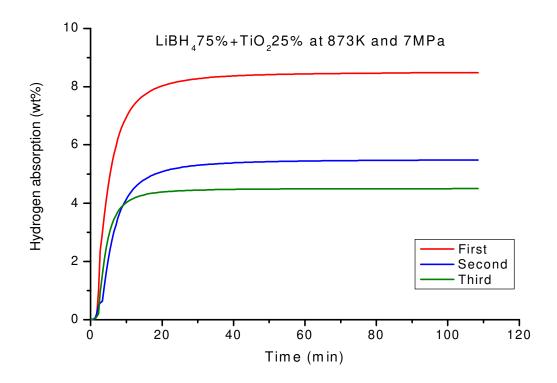


Fig.8 The isothermal hydrogen absorption of the material LiBH₄ 75%+TiO₂ 25%

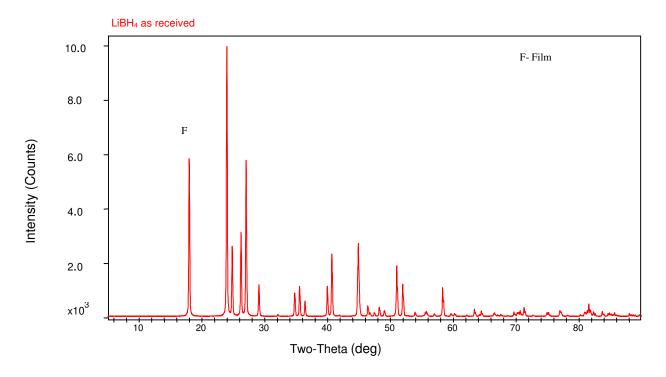


Fig. 9 The XRD of the borohydride LiBH₄ as received

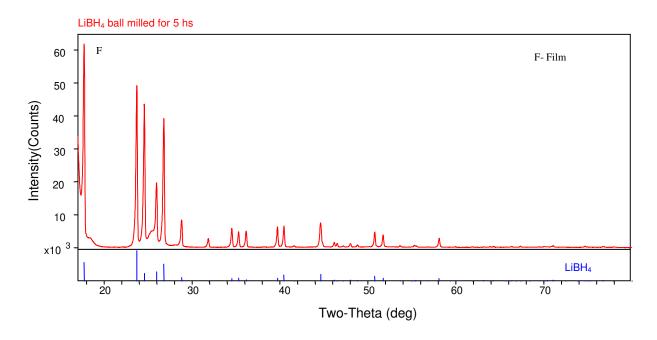


Fig.10 The XRD of commercial LiBH₄ ball milled for 5 hours

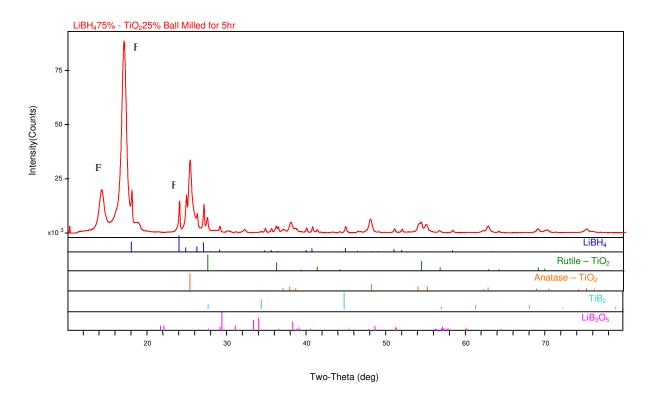
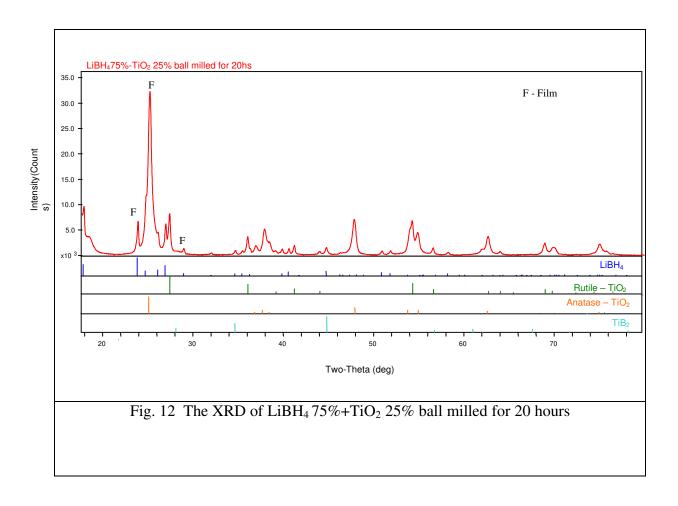


Fig. 11 The XRD of LiBH₄ 75%+TiO₂ 25% ball milled for 5 hours



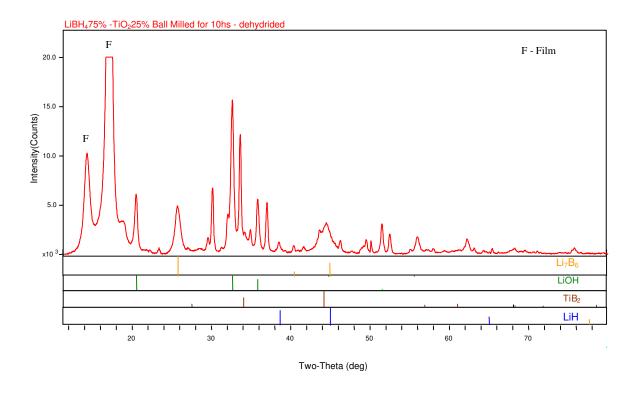
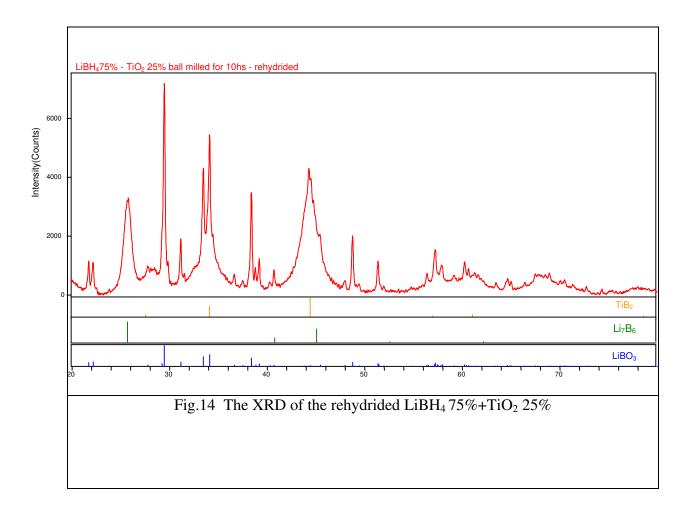


Fig.13 The XRD of the dehydrided LiBH₄ 75%+TiO₂ 25%



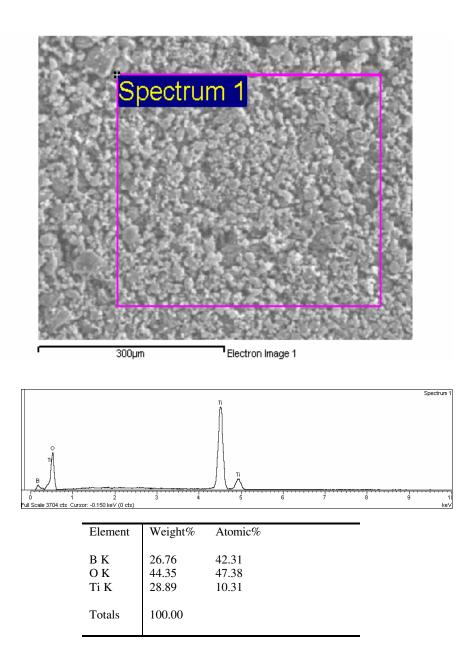


Fig. 15 The SEM morphology and Ti-B-O mapping of LiBH₄ 75%+TiO₂ 25% as synthesized by 5-hour ball milling (X 200)

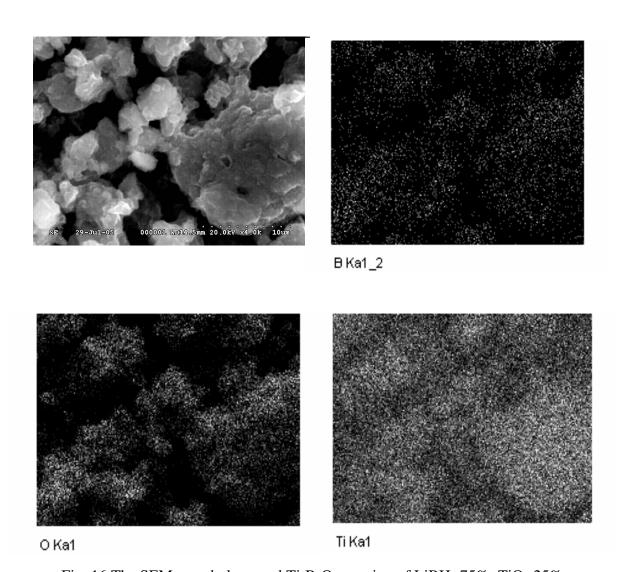


Fig. 16 The SEM morphology and Ti-B-O mapping of LiBH₄ 75%+TiO₂ 25% as synthesized by 5-hour ball milling (X 4000)



Fig. 17 The SEM morphology of the dehydrided LiBH₄ 75%+TiO₂ 25% (X200)

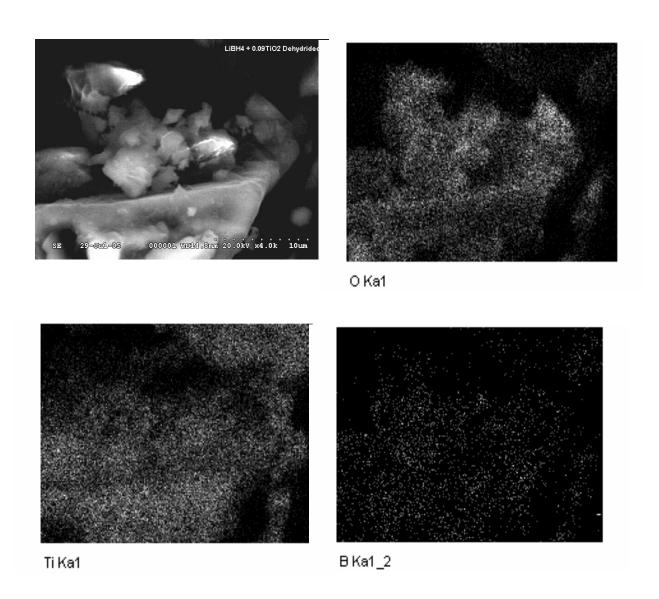


Fig. 18 The SEM morphology and Ti-B-O mapping of the dehydrided LiBH₄ 75%+TiO₂ 25% (X 4000)

LiBH ₄ Pyrolysis Mass Spectra

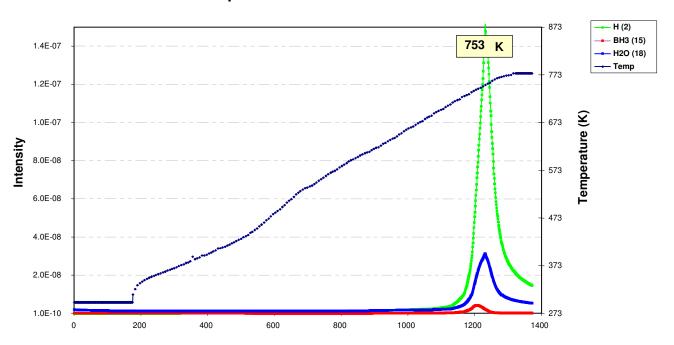


Fig. 21 The mass spectra of thermal decomposition of the material LiBH₄ 75%+TiO₂ 25%