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## Highly effective photocatalytic performance of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO hybrid heterostructures for the reduction of Rh B†

Ya Gao,<sup>a</sup> Yongjie Zheng, <sup>\*a</sup> Jixing Chai,<sup>b</sup> Jingzhi Tian,<sup>a</sup> Tao Jing,<sup>a</sup> Deqing Zhang,<sup>b</sup> Junye Cheng, <sup>\*c</sup> Huiqing Peng,<sup>c</sup> Bin Liu <sup>\*c</sup> and Guangping Zheng<sup>d</sup>

Effective separation and rapid transfer of photogenerated electron–hole pairs are key features of photocatalytic materials with high catalytic activity, which could be achieved in co-catalysts. It is reported that the two-dimensional (2D) MoS<sub>2</sub> is a promising co-catalyst due to its unique semi-conductive properties and graphene-like layered structure. However, the application of MoS<sub>2</sub> as a co-catalyst is limited by its poor electrical conductivity. On the other hand, it is worth noting that TiO<sub>2</sub> possesses reactive crystal facets, which is one of the dominant mechanisms for the separation of photogenerated electron–hole pairs. In this work, we prepared MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO hybrids as co-catalysts which were doped to TiO<sub>2</sub> with highly reactive {001} planes via the hydrothermal method. It was found that the {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO photocatalysts with 7 wt% MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO co-catalyst show the highest photodegradation activity for the degradation of Rh B under visible light irradiation ( $\lambda > 400$  nm), which could result from the synergy of the effective separation of electron–hole pairs by the {001} facets in TiO<sub>2</sub> and the rapid transfer of electron–hole pairs in MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO. The results show that the {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO hybrid is a low-cost and stable photocatalyst for the effective degradation of Rh B under visible light.

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## 1. Introduction

Semiconducting photocatalysts exhibit great prospects in the removal of pollutants from water and air.<sup>1–4</sup> Among the pursued semiconductors, titanium dioxide (TiO<sub>2</sub>) with a band gap of 3.2 eV between the conduction band (CB) and valence band (VB), has attracted attention as a photocatalytic material owing to its nontoxicity, chemical stability, low cost, high chemical inertness.<sup>5–10</sup> The active photocatalytic characteristics of TiO<sub>2</sub> are restricted due to the rapid recombination of photo-generated electron–hole pairs.<sup>11,12</sup>

There are two strategies that have been carried out to enhance the photocatalytic performance of TiO<sub>2</sub>. One of the strategies is based on the design of unique morphology and structure of TiO<sub>2</sub>, such as mesoporous TiO<sub>2</sub> hollow shells,<sup>13,14</sup> TiO<sub>2</sub> nanosheet arrays,<sup>15,16</sup> and three-dimensional network TiO<sub>2</sub>

nanowire films.<sup>17</sup> Another strategy is the loading of co-catalyst, including graphene (GN),<sup>18–20</sup> metallic phases<sup>21,22</sup> and nonmetallic phases<sup>23,24</sup> of materials, as well as polymer-metallic catalysts.<sup>25,26</sup> Zhang *et al.*<sup>20</sup> reported a successful strategy to improve the photocatalytic performance of TiO<sub>2</sub> via introducing the GN without defects to enhance the interfacial contact between GN and TiO<sub>2</sub>; Liu *et al.*<sup>22</sup> prepared Ag/Ag(i)-TiO<sub>2</sub> photocatalyst by a facile impregnated method in combination with a calcination process and the photocatalyst showed a higher visible-light photocatalytic activity; Qu *et al.*<sup>24</sup> synthesized a S,N co-doping GQD/TiO<sub>2</sub> composite though a facile hydrothermal and its photocatalytic performance (degradation of Rh B under visible light) was 10 times higher than that of P25; Jiang *et al.*<sup>26</sup> reported a nanostructured TiO<sub>2</sub> thin film accompanying with the effects of polymer conjugation and Mo-doping, as a result, the methylene blue dye degradation rate reached 90.6%. In the aforementioned methods, heterostructure photocatalysts consisting of two semi-conductive materials with different band gaps and electronic structures have been proved to be effective in photocatalysis.<sup>27–31</sup>

If developed into a co-catalyst material, MoS<sub>2</sub> have some particular advantages due to its graphene-like nanostructures, relatively high activity and unique semiconducting properties.<sup>32–34</sup> And there are numerous reports about MoS<sub>2</sub>-based heterostructure for photocatalytic production of H<sub>2</sub>. However the applications of MoS<sub>2</sub> in the removal of pollutants are limited by its poor electrical conductivity.<sup>35–37</sup> Generally, there

<sup>a</sup>School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering, Qiqihar University, Qiqihar 161006, China. E-mail: [yongjiezhang@163.com](mailto:yongjiezhang@163.com)

<sup>b</sup>School of Materials Science and Engineering, Qiqihar University, Qiqihar 161006, China

<sup>c</sup>Center of Super-Diamond and Advanced Films (COSDAF), Department of Materials Science and Engineering, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong 999077, China. E-mail: [binliu@mail.ipc.ac.cn](mailto:binliu@mail.ipc.ac.cn); [jycheng4-c@my.cityu.edu.hk](mailto:jycheng4-c@my.cityu.edu.hk)

<sup>d</sup>Department of Mechanical Engineering, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong, China

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are two synthesis routes in the fabrication of  $\text{MoS}_2$ -based heterostructure with effective charge transfer processes. First, chemical lithium intercalation could induce a phase change in  $\text{MoS}_2$  from the 2H (showing semiconducting properties) to the 1T (showing metallic properties) phases, resulting in the heterostructure. Bai *et al.*<sup>38</sup> firstly reported that compared with (2H)  $\text{MoS}_2\text{-TiO}_2$ , the (1T)  $\text{MoS}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  exhibits excellent photocatalytic performance. Second, the introduction of conductive materials into  $\text{MoS}_2$  leads to a heterostructure. Peng *et al.*<sup>39</sup> synthesized  $\text{MoS}_2\text{/RGO/CdS}$  as an effective photocatalyst which can reduce and detoxify nitroaromatic compounds. The  $\text{MoS}_2$ -based heterostructures prepared by these two methods have played an important catalytic role, while the latter is more favorable because of its simplicity and efficiency.

Moreover, it is reported that the reactive crystal facets of  $\text{TiO}_2$  are closely related with its photocatalytic efficiency, and the {001} facet-dominated single-crystal anatase  $\text{TiO}_2$  shows higher photocatalytic activity than P25.<sup>40-42</sup> Enlightened by the above-mentioned findings, it is suggested that the {001}- $\text{TiO}_2\text{/MoS}_2\text{/RGO}$  should be an ideal photocatalyst. In this work, we prepared a {001}- $\text{TiO}_2\text{/MoS}_2\text{/RGO}$  hybrid photocatalyst with low cost. The as-prepared {001}- $\text{TiO}_2\text{/MoS}_2\text{/RGO}$  exhibited more outstanding photocatalytic performance for the degradation of Rhodamine B (Rh B) under visible light irradiation ( $\lambda > 400$  nm), compared with the pure {001}- $\text{TiO}_2$  and {001}- $\text{TiO}_2\text{/MoS}_2$ . The enhanced photocatalytic activity could be ascribed to the effective charge separation and transfer due to the band gap of  $\text{MoS}_2$  and high conductivity of graphene.

## 2. Experimental

### 2.1 Materials

All chemicals were in analytical grade and used without further purification. Molybdcic acid ( $\text{H}_2\text{MoO}_4 \geq 85\%$ ) was purchased from Shanghai Aladdin Biochemical Technology Co. Ltd. Thiourea ( $\text{CH}_4\text{N}_2\text{S}$ ) was purchased from Tianjin Fuchen Chemical Reagent Factory. Graphene oxide dispersion were purchased from Nanjing Pioneer Nano Material Technology Co., Ltd. *N*-Butyl titanate (TBOT) was purchased from Tianjin Tianli Chemical Reagent Co. Ltd. Hydrofluoric acid (HF) was purchased from Tianjin Fuyu Chemical Reagent Co. Ltd.

### 2.2 Synthesis of {001}- $\text{TiO}_2$ nanosheets

The {001}- $\text{TiO}_2$  nanosheets were prepared by a simple hydrothermal route. Firstly, 25 ml of *n*-butyl titanate and 3 ml of hydrofluoric acid were added into a 100 ml Teflon-lined autoclave, under magnetic stirring for 2 h. After heating and stirring for 24 h at 180 °C, the solution was naturally cooled to room temperature and washed with deionized water and ethanol for several times until its pH value reached 7 and dried at 60 °C in a vacuum oven to obtain the {001}- $\text{TiO}_2$  nanosheets.

### 2.3 Synthesis of {001}- $\text{TiO}_2\text{/MoS}_2\text{/RGO}$ hybrid

The nanohybrids were also prepared by a hydrothermal method. Firstly, the as-prepared  $\text{MoS}_2\text{/RGO}$  (with 7 wt% RGO) which was prepared by a one-step hydrothermal method

previously reported,<sup>43</sup> was dispersed in 80 ml of DI. Secondly, 0.99 g of the as-prepared {001}- $\text{TiO}_2$  nanosheets were added to the above-mentioned dispersions. After subjected to magnetic stirring for 1 h, the mixture was transfer to a 100 ml Teflon-lined autoclave. After reaction for 3 h at 180 °C, the solution was naturally cooled down to the room temperature. Then the {001}- $\text{TiO}_2\text{/MoS}_2\text{/RGO}$  hybrid was washed with deionized water and ethanol for several times and dried at 60 °C in a vacuum oven. With the same method described above, the {001}- $\text{TiO}_2\text{/MoS}_2\text{/RGO}$  samples with different  $\text{MoS}_2\text{/RGO}$  loadings were prepared. The aforementioned facile synthesis route was summarized in Scheme 1.

### 2.4 Characterization

The morphology of samples was characterized by the field emission scanning electron microscope (SEM, Hitachi S-3400) and transmission electron microscope (TEM, Hitachi H7650). The crystallization properties were measured by X-ray powder diffraction (XRD) patterns (Bruker D8) with a  $\text{Cu-K}\alpha$  radiation. The crystal structure was observed with the high-resolution electron microscopy (HRTEM, Tecnai F30). Element information was characterized by X-ray photoelectron spectrometer (ESCALAB250Xi, Thermo Fisher Co). Raman spectrum was measured by the equipment Lab RAM HA Evolution. Ultraviolet-visible (UV-vis) absorption spectra were performed using a spectrophotometer (Lambda 35, American). The photoluminescence spectra (PL) was examined with a fluorescence spectrophotometer (RF-5301PC, Shimadzu Corporation, Japan). The information on the Brunauer-Emmett-Teller (BET) surface areas of the sample powders was obtained on an automatic gas adsorption analyzer (Conta Instruments, USA).

### 2.5 Evaluation of photocatalytic activity

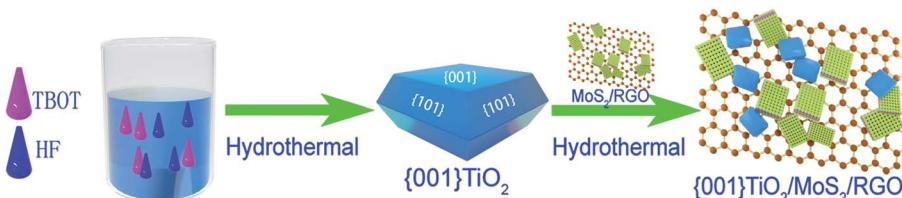
The photocatalytic activities of the catalysts were evaluated through the degradation of Rh B under a light source of 300 W Xe arc lamp equipped with a cut-off filter ( $\lambda > 400$  nm) for visible light. Firstly, 50 mg of photocatalyst was added into 50 ml Rh B solution ( $1 \text{ mg ml}^{-1}$ ). Then, the suspensions were stirred in dark for 30 minutes to reach the adsorption-desorption equilibrium. Third, the suspensions were subjected to the illumination every 10 minutes; in the intervals of illumination 5 ml suspension was withdrawn and centrifuged to remove the photocatalyst particles and then was tested by a UV-vis spectrophotometer to determine the concentration of Rh B through measurements on the 554 nm absorption peak. The Rh B concentration after adsorption equilibrium is regarded as the initial concentration ( $C_0$ ).

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1 Results of characterization

The crystal structures of the prepared samples are characterized determined by XRD, and the XRD patterns of pure {001}- $\text{TiO}_2$ ,  $\text{MoS}_2\text{/RGO}$  and {001}- $\text{TiO}_2\text{/MoS}_2\text{/RGO}$  are shown in Fig. 1a. The diffraction peaks at  $2\theta = 25.28^\circ$ ,  $37.8^\circ$ ,  $48.04^\circ$ ,





Scheme 1 Synthetic routes for the {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub> nanosheets and the {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO composites.

53.89°, 55.06°, 62.68°, 68.76°, 70.30°, 75.02°, 76.01° and 82.65° can be observed in {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub> and {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO samples, which are assigned to (101), (004), (200), (105), (204), (116), (220), (215), (301) and (224) planes of the anatase TiO<sub>2</sub> (PDF 21-1272), respectively. It is also seen that there are only two extremely weak peaks of the co-catalyst in the pattern for {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO (the inset in Fig. 1a). In the patterns for the MoS<sub>2</sub> and MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO samples (Fig. S1a†), there are four peaks at  $2\theta = 14.6^\circ$ , 32.8°, 39.8° and 58.5°, which are assigned to (002), (100), (103), and (110) planes of MoS<sub>2</sub> (JCPDS37-1492), respectively. There are no obvious diffraction peaks for RGO mostly because of very small amount of RGOs in the samples.

To confirm the presence of RGO in the {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO hybrid, Raman measurements were carried out. Fig. 1b shows the Raman spectrum of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO hybrid, it is observed that the weak E<sub>g(1)</sub>, A<sub>1g</sub> and E<sub>g(2)</sub> peaks for TiO<sub>2</sub> are located at 142.97 cm<sup>-1</sup>, 515.22 cm<sup>-1</sup> and 636.34 cm<sup>-1</sup>, respectively. It also can be clearly observed that the E<sub>2g</sub> and A<sub>1g</sub> peaks for MoS<sub>2</sub> are located at 379.74 and 408.88 cm<sup>-1</sup>, respectively. The peaks of the D- and G-band for RGOs are

located at 1348.53 and 1588.53 cm<sup>-1</sup>, respectively, and the  $I_{2D}/I_G$  ratio of RGO is 0.19 ( $0.07 < 0.19 < 0.3$ ), suggesting that the hybrid have triple-layer graphene sheets.<sup>43</sup> The results of Raman spectra thus prove the presence of RGO in the hybrid.

The interactions between the TiO<sub>2</sub> and MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO in the {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO hybrid are studied by XPS spectra. As shown in Fig. 1c, the Mo, S, Ti, O, C and F elements appear in the survey spectrum. The peak at the binding energy of 684.5 eV is assigned to F 1s, which is a typical value for the fluorinated TiO<sub>2</sub> system such as the surficial Ti-F species.<sup>44</sup> Fig. 1d and S2a† shows the high-resolution spectra of Ti 2p for TiO<sub>2</sub> and {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO, respectively. The peaks located at the binding energies of 465.31 and 459.57 eV for TiO<sub>2</sub> could correspond to Ti 2p<sub>1/2</sub> and 4p<sub>3/2</sub>, respectively, which can be assigned to a Ti<sup>4+</sup> oxidation state. Compared with pure TiO<sub>2</sub>, those peaks for {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO shift to 465.11 and 459.48 eV, indicating a strong interaction between MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO and TiO<sub>2</sub>. As shown in the Mo spectrum of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO (Fig. 1e), the bands located at the binding energies of 232.35 and 229.03 eV are assigned to Mo (3d<sub>3/2</sub>) and

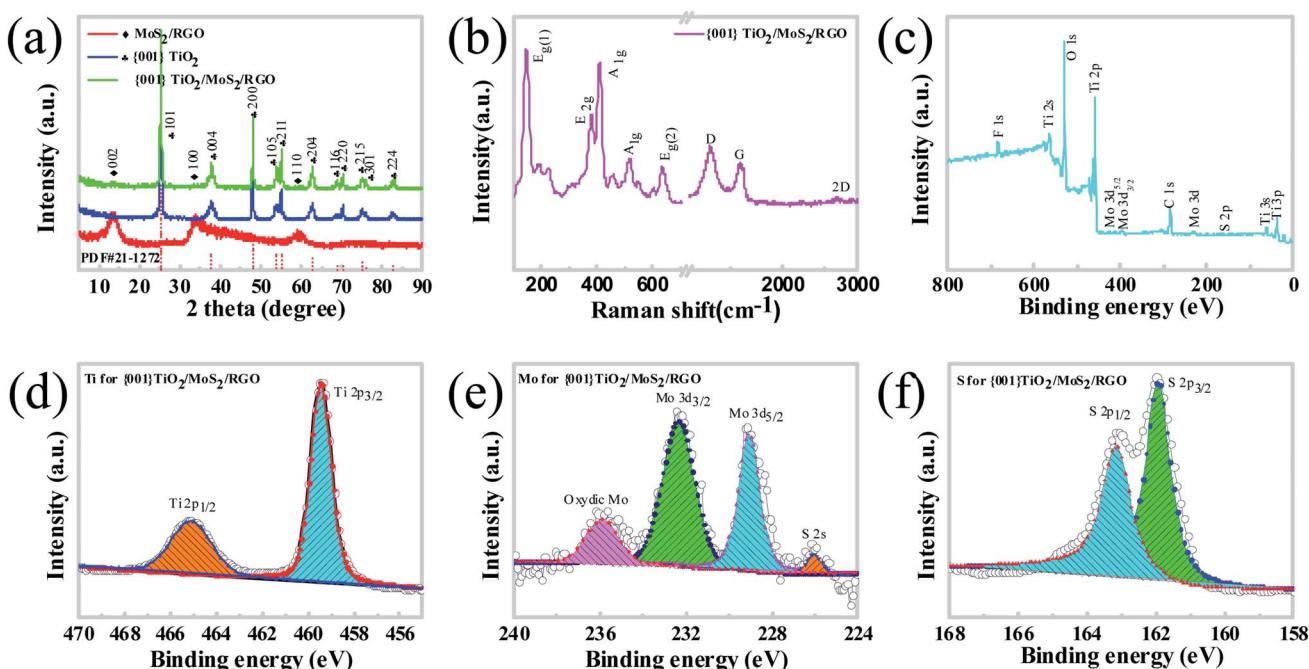


Fig. 1 (a) XRD patterns for MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO, {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub> and {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO, the inset is at  $2\theta = 5\text{--}45^\circ$ ; (b) Raman spectrum for {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO; (c) XPS survey spectrum for {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO; high-resolution spectra of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO (d) Ti 2p; (e) Mo 3d; (f) S 2p.



Mo (3d<sub>5/2</sub>) in the normal chemical state of Mo<sup>4+</sup>, respectively. The S spectra of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO are observed to have two peaks located at 162.82 and 161.71 eV, as shown in Fig. 1f, which are consistent with those of MoS<sub>2</sub>. The C 1s spectrum can be deconvoluted into three peaks located at 288.75, 286.40, and 284.84 eV (Fig. S2b†), which correspond to the C=O, C–O, and C–C functionalities, respectively, and indicate the existence of the carboxy, epoxy, and hydroxyl groups in the graphene. The results indicate that most of the oxygen-containing functional groups are successfully removed. The reduction of GO to graphene will dramatically improve the electrical conductivity of the hybrids, and hence significantly enhancing their photocatalytic activity.<sup>45,46</sup>

Typical morphology and microstructure of the as-prepared catalyst are characterized using scanning electron microscopy (SEM). Fig. 2a shows that a large number of stacked MoS<sub>2</sub> nanosheets with significantly curled edges are observed. Fig. 2b shows the microstructure of MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO, indicating that the small MoS<sub>2</sub> nanosheets are well loaded onto the surfaces of RGOs. Fig. 2c shows the morphology of TiO<sub>2</sub>, which exhibits a rectangular shape with lengths of about 40–60 nm. Fig. 2d show the morphology of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO. No obvious MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO structures can be observed, which maybe caused by the low content of MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO. To determine the composition of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO, the sample is measured by the energy dispersive spectrometer (EDS) as shown in Fig. S3.† Fig. S3† shows that there are a large amount of Ti and O elements, a small amount of Mo and S elements and a few C elements. Moreover, the distribution of Ti and O elements is even and consistent, and the Mo and S elements also show similar features of distribution. Thus, the EDS results demonstrate that the sample shown in Fig. 3d could be {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO.

Detailed microstructure of the samples can be clearly observed in the transmission electron microscopy (TEM) and high-resolution TEM (HRTEM). MoS<sub>2</sub> shows an appearance of thin nanosheets that look like soft and light flowers (Fig. 3b), for MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO hybrid, it can be clearly seen that the flower-like MoS<sub>2</sub> in the dark region is evenly attached to the bright and light RGOs (Fig. 3a and c). The {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub> has a thickness of 11 nm with average dimensions (length × width) of 64 × 38 nm and there is very few small sized {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub> (Fig. 3d). Fig. 3e shows the TEM image of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO. The {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub> nanosheets and MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO can be observed clearly. The HRTEM image of Fig. 3f shows that the lattice spacing of 0.35 nm and 0.62 nm can be assigned to (101) planes of MoS<sub>2</sub> and (101) planes of anatase {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>, respectively.

### 3.2 Photocatalytic study

The photocatalytic activity of all the as-prepared samples was evaluated from measurements on the degradation of Rh B. Before illumination, the suspensions were prepared *via* stirring in dark for 30 minutes, such that they reached the adsorption–desorption equilibrium.

In this study, firstly, we investigate the optimum ratio of MoS<sub>2</sub> and RGO in a co-catalyst, as shown in Fig. 4a. The weight percentage of MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO in the hybrid is kept at 7 wt%, and the {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO hybrid with a MoS<sub>2</sub> : RGO ratio of 97 : 3 wt% shows the highest photodegradation rate. Then we studied the influence of the species and contents of co-catalyst on the photodegradation activity. As shown in Fig. 4c, the color dye without catalyst presents no photodegradation activity under visible light irradiation. It verifies that self-sensitisation couldn't cause the degradation. The pure {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub> exhibits a low photocatalytic activity which could be caused by the rapid recombination of the CB electrons and the VB holes. While by

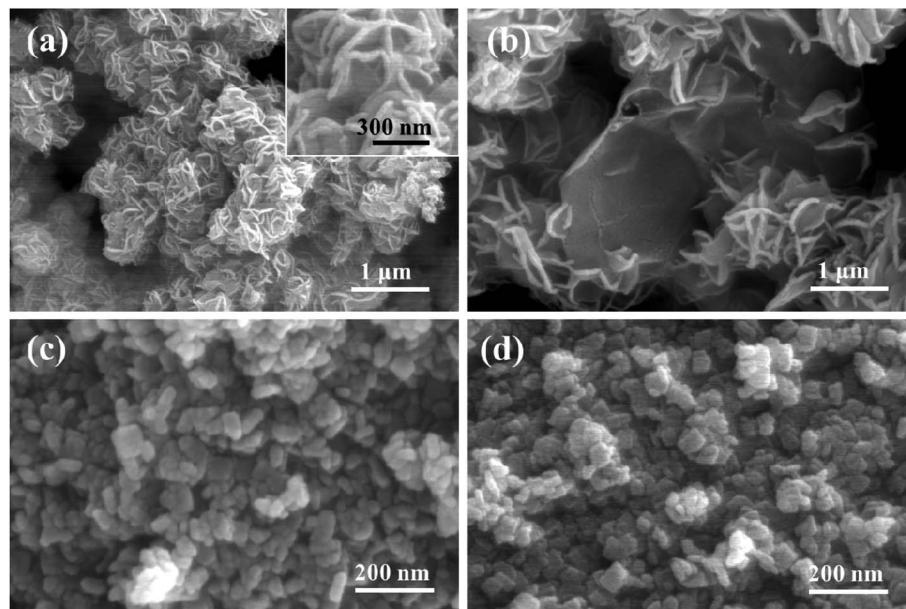


Fig. 2 SEM images of MoS<sub>2</sub> (a), MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO (b), TiO<sub>2</sub> (c) and {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO (d).



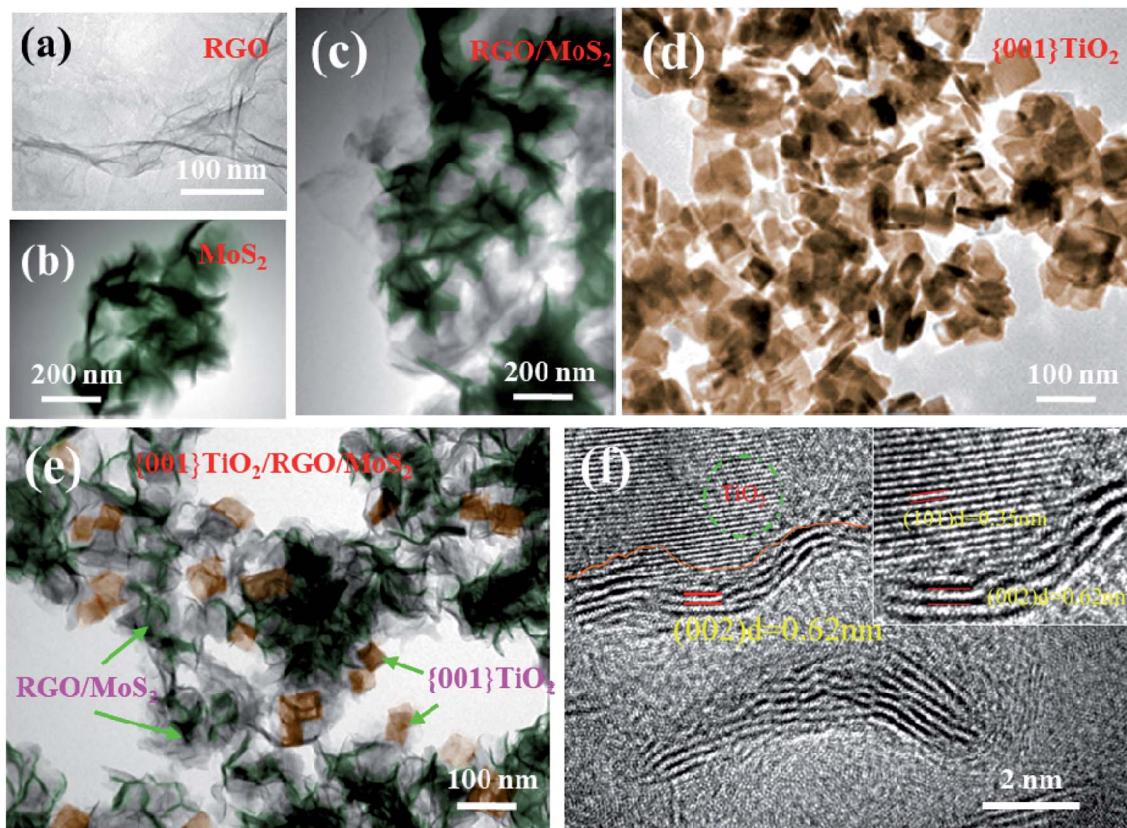


Fig. 3 TEM images of RGO (a), MoS<sub>2</sub> (b), MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO (c), {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub> (d), {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO (e); HRTEM image of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO (f).

the incorporation of MoS<sub>2</sub>, the photocatalytic activity of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub> is enhanced significantly, which is caused by the transfer of electrons from {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub> to MoS<sub>2</sub>.<sup>43</sup> In fact, the {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub> hybrid have exhibited excellent performance for the adsorption of Rh B under dark condition (as shown in Fig. S5c–f†). Through the incorporation of MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO as the co-catalyst for {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>, the photocatalytic activity of the hybrid could be further improved, as demonstrated in Fig. 4b, the {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/0.07(MoS<sub>2</sub>/0.03RGO) hybrids show the best photocatalytic performance. UV-visible investigation shows that after 60 min of visible light ( $\lambda > 400$  nm) irradiation, 92.3% of Rh B has been degraded by {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/0.07(MoS<sub>2</sub>/0.03RGO) (as shown in Fig. 4d). It is suggested that the enhanced separation of photogenerated electrons and holes because of the high electron conductivity of RGO could result in the enhanced photocatalytic performance. In addition, the photocatalytic performance of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/0.07(MoS<sub>2</sub>/0.03RGO) catalyst can also be evaluated by TOC removal. As shown in Fig. S5b†, the {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/0.07(MoS<sub>2</sub>/0.03RGO) hybrid catalyst shows the highest TOC removal rate of Rh B, which basically coincides with the result of the degradation rate, illustrating that the Rh B has been thoroughly mineralized. The color change of Rh B solution also reflects the efficiency of catalyst. We can clearly observe that the Rh B solution under the photocatalytic degradation of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO hybrid is close to white (as shown in Fig. S4†).

The reaction kinetics of Rh B reduction is determined by plotting the value of  $\ln(C_0/C)$  versus illumination time, and the

reaction rate constants ( $K$ ) are calculated by the pseudo-first order model. As shown in Fig. S5a†, the values of  $K$  for {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>, {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/RGO, {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub> and {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO are 0.0084, 0.0201, 0.01285 and 0.03325, respectively. It can be seen that the {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO hybrid photocatalyst exhibits the highest rate (0.03325) of photodegradation.

The stability and reusability of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO were also evaluated. Fig. S1b† shows the XRD patterns of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO before and after photocatalysis, and it is observed that after photocatalysis the crystal structure has not changed. The inset of Fig. S5b† illustrates that the photocatalytic activity of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO displays a slight decrease after running for five successive cycles, indicating that the {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO hybrid is stable and efficient photocatalyst.

### 3.3 Mechanisms of the enhanced photocatalytic activity

It is well known that the photocatalytic activity of semiconductive photocatalysts is intrinsically governed by three processes: (i) photoexcitation of semiconductor to generate electron–hole pairs, (ii) charge separation and diffusion to the surface of the catalysts, and (iii) surface activation for redox reactions.<sup>38</sup> In the sections that follow, the mechanisms of the enhanced photocatalytic performance of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO

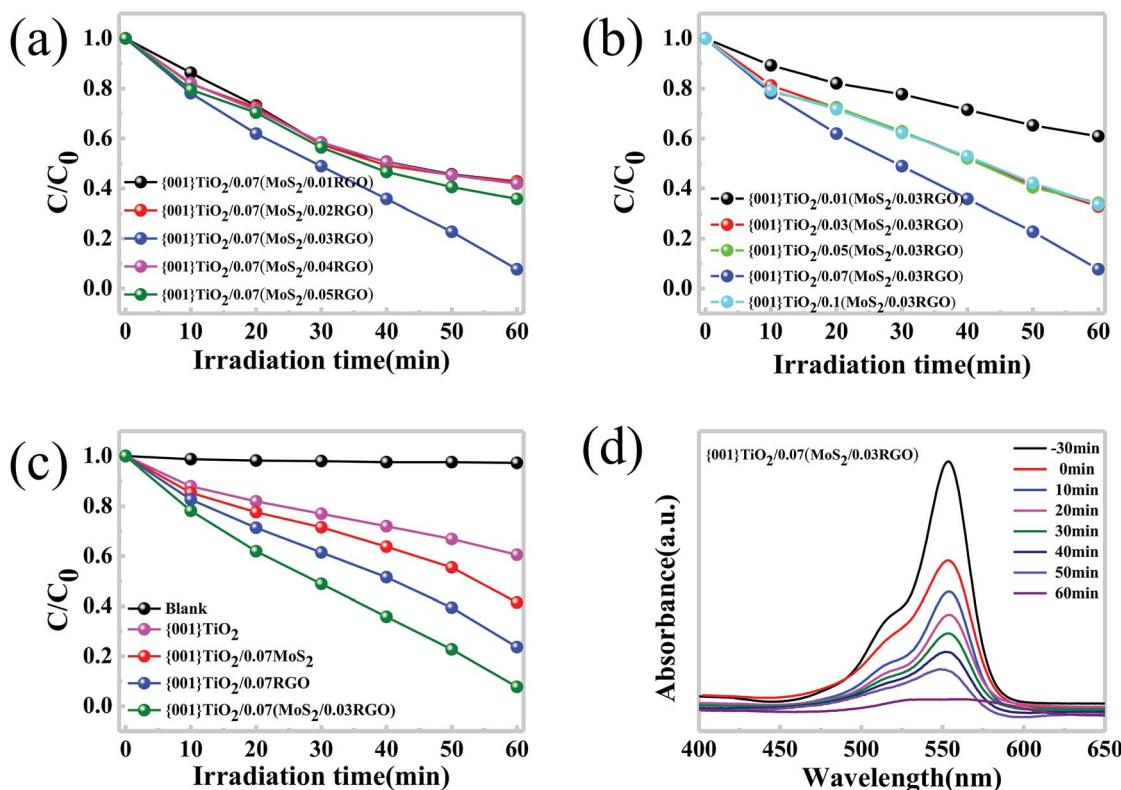


Fig. 4 Photocatalytic degradation of Rh B under visible light irradiation over ( $\lambda > 400$  nm) (a) {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO with different RGO percentages; (b) {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO with different contents of MoS<sub>2</sub>/0.03RGO; (c) blank, {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>, {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/0.07GO, {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/0.07MoS<sub>2</sub> and {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/0.07(MoS<sub>2</sub>/0.03RGO). (d) UV-visible spectra of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO.

are elucidated separately based on the abovementioned processes.

The UV-vis diffuse reflectance spectra of TiO<sub>2</sub> and {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO are shown in Fig. 5a. Compared with pure {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>, the {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO hybrid shows an enhanced visible light absorption. The band gaps of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub> and {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO are determined to be 3.2 and 3.04 eV, respectively, according to the onset of the absorption edge. The {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO hybrid exhibits a narrower band gap and higher absorption intensity, meaning that their redox potentials as well as the recombination of electrons and holes are reduced as compared with those of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>.<sup>47</sup>

Fig. 5b shows the nitrogen adsorption/desorption isotherms of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub> and {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO. The isotherms for pure {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub> reveal a type-IV isotherm with an H3 hysteresis loop, which indicates that the holes are formed by the accumulation of flaky particles. The {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO hybrids display a type-IV isotherm with an H4 hysteresis loop, suggesting the slit-shaped pores are produced by the layered structure. Based on BET calculation, the surface area of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub> is 111.124 m<sup>2</sup> g<sup>-1</sup> and the surface area of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO is 76.123 m<sup>2</sup> g<sup>-1</sup>, revealing the information on their microstructures consistent with those observed in SEM images (Fig. 2c and d).

It is revealed that graphene could improve the photocatalytic property of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO hybrid owing to the fact that

graphene can rapidly transfer electrons to hinder the recombination of photogenerated electron–hole pairs. We can evaluate the probability of recombination of electron–hole pairs by PL spectroscopy, in that the higher fluorescence intensity represents higher probability of recombination. Fig. 5c shows the PL spectra under 400 nm excitation wavelengths for pure {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub> and {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO samples, and a strong emission peak appears at about 602 nm.<sup>48</sup> It is found that the PL intensity of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO sample is lower than that of pure {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>, which indicates that by the incorporation of MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO co-catalyst, the hybrid can inhibit the recombination of excited electrons and holes in the {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO catalysts. The resistance of catalyst is determined by the electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS). Fig. 5d shows the EIS spectrogram of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub> and {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO. Compared with pure {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>, the {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO hybrid presents a smaller frequency semicircle, suggesting the resistance of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO is lower than that of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>. Thus, it can be concluded that the introduction of MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO co-catalysts into {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub> can reduce the recombination of charge carriers, which is consistent with the results of PL spectrum.

The schematic of photocatalytic enhancement and electron transfer of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO is shown in Fig. 5e. Under visible light irradiation, the VB electrons of MoS<sub>2</sub> and {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub> are excited to the CB, leaving holes (h<sup>+</sup>) in the VB.<sup>49,50</sup>



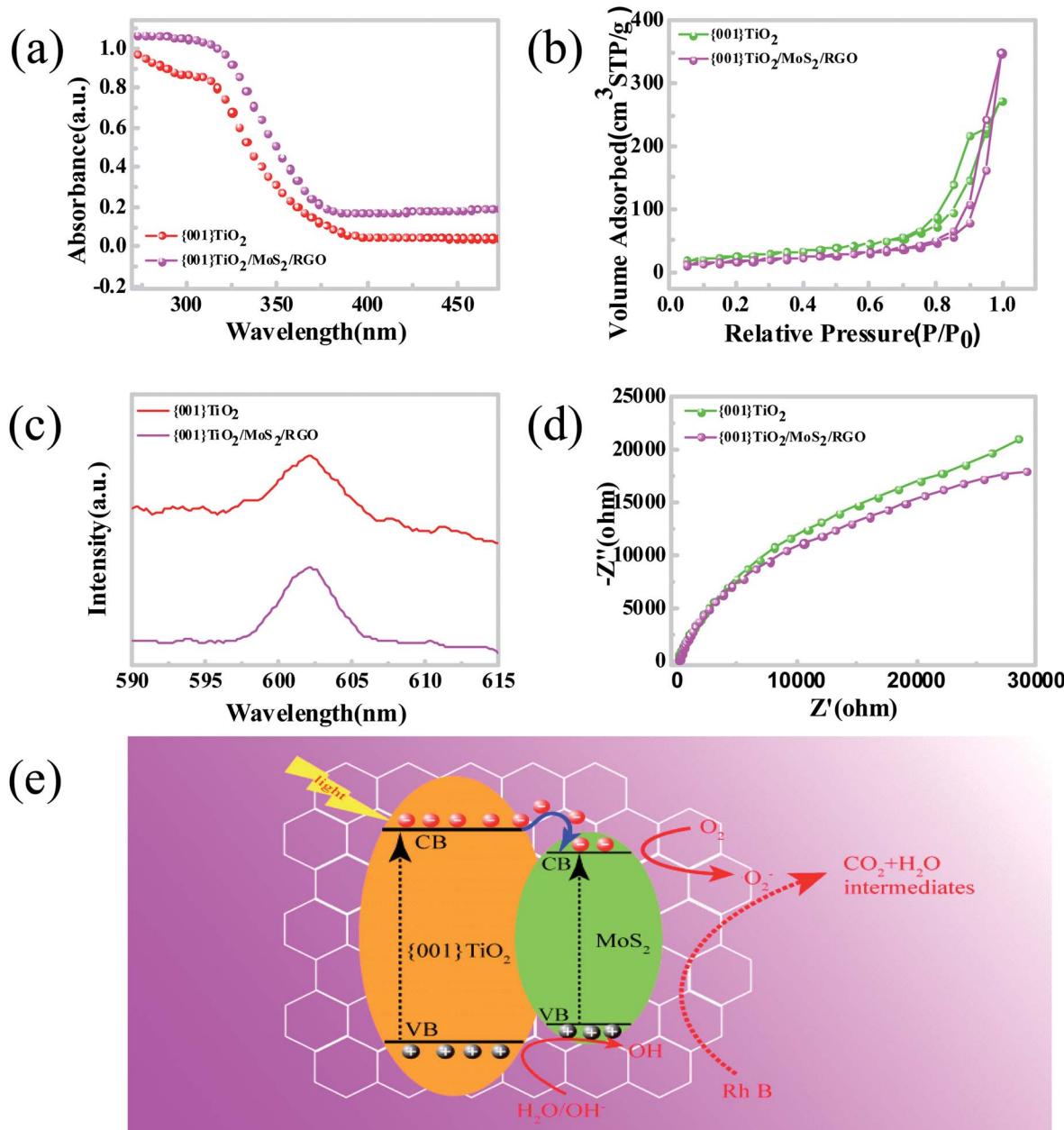


Fig. 5 (a) UV-vis diffusive reflectance spectra of pure {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub> and {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO; the inset is corresponding plot of the transformed Kubelka–Munk function versus the energy of light; (b) N<sub>2</sub> adsorption/desorption isotherms of pure {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub> and {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO; (c) PL spectra of pure {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub> and {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO under 400 nm excitation wavelength; (d) electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS) Nyquist plots of the sample electrodes which are made from the pure {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub> and {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO treated with visible light ( $\lambda > 400$  nm) irradiation; (e) schematic diagram for photocatalytic mechanism of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO.

Meanwhile, the photoinduced electrons of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub> can transfer to MoS<sub>2</sub> *via* the conductive network of RGO. It is worth noting that the separation of photogenerated electron–hole pairs of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO is more rapid than that of conventional TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO owing to the especially reactive {001} facets of anatase TiO<sub>2</sub>. The photogenerated electrons on the CB of samples can react with O<sub>2</sub> to produce superoxide radical anions O<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup>. Meanwhile those photoexcited holes on the VB of samples react with H<sub>2</sub>O and hydroxide ions to

generate ·OH radicals. The powerful oxidizing agents O<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> and ·OH could effectively decompose the Rh B into CO<sub>2</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>O or other intermediates. As listed in Table 1, we have compared {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO with other representative composites reported in literature. It can be found that the {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO exhibits desirable catalytic performance, which is rapid and effective, indicating the promising perspective of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO in the removal of pollutants applications.

Table 1 Catalytic activity of representative composites

Catalyst	Method	Degradation (%)	Degradation target	Times (min)	Ref.
{001}-TiO <sub>2</sub> /MoS <sub>2</sub> /RGO	Hydrothermal	92.3	Rhodamine B	60	This work
BiPO <sub>4</sub> /MoS <sub>2</sub> /RGO	Hydrothermal	92	Rhodamine B	90	51
Bi <sub>2</sub> WO <sub>6</sub> /MoS <sub>2</sub> /RGO	Hydrothermal	92	Rhodamine B	180	48
TiO <sub>2</sub> /RGO	Hydrothermal	94	Rhodamine B	120	52
CeO <sub>2</sub> /SnO <sub>2</sub> /rGO	Hydrothermal	95	Methylene blue	90	53
rRGO-ZnO-MoS <sub>2</sub>	Hydrothermal	90	Methylene blue	75	54
NiWO <sub>4</sub> -ZnO-NRGO	Microwave irradiation method	89	Methylene blue	120	55
{001}-TiO <sub>2</sub> /RGO	Hydrothermal	82	Methylene blue	60	48
TiO <sub>2</sub> /RGO/Ag	Sol-gel process photo-assisted reduction method	93	Methylene blue	120	56
rGO-ZnWO <sub>4</sub> -Fe <sub>3</sub> O <sub>4</sub>	Microwave irradiation method	97	Methylene blue	135	57
TiO <sub>2</sub> /MoS <sub>2</sub> /RGO	Hydrothermal	97	Methylene blue	100	49

## 4. Conclusion

In summary, we have successfully synthesized the {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO hybrids with effective catalytic performance using a facile hydrothermal method. The {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO photocatalysts with 7 wt% MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO co-catalyst show the highest photodegradation activity for the degradation of Rh B under visible light irradiation ( $\lambda > 400$  nm). The {001} facets of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO accelerate the separation of photogenerated electron-hole pairs, and RGO rapidly transfer the photoinduced electrons from {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub> to MoS<sub>2</sub>, which further enhances the charge carrier separation of the {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO hybrid. It is believed that such synergy effect promotes the photocatalytic performance of {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO hybrids. Taking into account their facile synthesis route and excellent photocatalytic performance, the MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO hybrids are promising co-catalyst which can be widely used for co-photocatalysts and {001}-TiO<sub>2</sub>/MoS<sub>2</sub>/RGO hybrids are promising candidates for photocatalytic degradation of Rh B.

## Conflicts of interest

There is no conflict in the statement.

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