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# Selective catalytic reduction of NO<sub>x</sub> by low-temperature NH<sub>3</sub> over Mn<sub>x</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> mixed-oxide catalysts

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Mn<sub>x</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> series catalysts were prepared by a coprecipitation method. The effect of zirconium doping on the NH<sub>3</sub>-SCR performance of the MnO<sub>x</sub> catalyst was studied, and the influence of the calcination temperature on the catalyst activity was explored. The results showed that the Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> catalyst exhibited good NH<sub>3</sub>-SCR activity when calcined at 400 °C. When the reaction temperature was 125–250 °C, the NO<sub>x</sub> conversion rate of Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> catalyst reached more than 90%, and the optimal conversion efficiency reached 97%. In addition, the Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> catalyst showed excellent SO<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>O resistance at the optimum reaction temperature. Meanwhile, the catalysts were characterized. The results showed that the morphology of the MnO<sub>x</sub> catalyst was significantly changed, whereby as the proportion of Mn<sup>4+</sup> and O<sub>x</sub> species increased, the physical properties of the catalyst were improved. In addition, both Lewis acid sites and Brønsted acid sites existed in the Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> catalyst, which reduced the reduction temperature of the catalyst. In summary, zirconium doping successfully improved the NH<sub>3</sub>-SCR performance of MnO<sub>x</sub>.

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## 1. Introduction

With the exploitation of fossil fuels, severe pollution has been caused to the atmosphere, with nitrogen oxide (NO<sub>x</sub>) being one of the most important pollutants. Therefore, NO<sub>x</sub> removal is critical. At present, the most effective way to remove NO<sub>x</sub> is through NH<sub>3</sub> selective catalytic reduction (NH<sub>3</sub>-SCR).<sup>1,2</sup> However, the commercial V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>/TiO<sub>2</sub> catalysts used in this technique have excellent deoxidation activity only at high temperatures and have a narrow operating temperature window (350–450 °C). The activity of the V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>/TiO<sub>2</sub> catalyst is poor at low temperatures and can cause V poisoning and other shortcomings.<sup>3,4</sup> In addition, the presence of abundant SO<sub>2</sub> gas in the flue gas will cause deactivation of the V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>/TiO<sub>2</sub> catalyst.<sup>4,5</sup> To solve this problem, SCR equipment should be installed downstream of the SO<sub>2</sub> removal unit. However, the downstream temperature is about 200 °C, which is unable to achieve the optimal reaction temperature of the V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>/TiO<sub>2</sub> catalyst.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the development of low-temperature, high-activity catalysts is significant.

The most widely studied catalysts are transition metal catalysts, rare earth metal catalysts, and zeolite catalysts. For transition metal catalysts, manganese oxide (MnO<sub>x</sub>) has attracted much attention because of its excellent SCR performance. Jiang *et al.*<sup>7</sup> prepared the Mn-MOF-74 metal-organic framework by a hydrothermal method and formed spherical mesoporous manganese oxide nanoparticles by thermal decomposition. The

catalyst has the characteristics of a large specific surface area and efficient denitration performance. However, when MnO<sub>x</sub> meets water and sulfur, the MnO<sub>x</sub> catalyst is easily deactivated, which seriously affects the denitrification activity. Casapu *et al.*<sup>8</sup> reported that SO<sub>2</sub> poisoning would lead to the irreversible redox capacity of the catalyst. Therefore, it is necessary to enhance the water resistance and sulfur resistance of MnO<sub>x</sub>. Gao *et al.*<sup>9</sup> added Co to MnO<sub>x</sub> by a complexation esterification, and the catalyst showed excellent activity and an enhanced corrosion resistance of MnO<sub>x</sub> to SO<sub>2</sub>. Wang *et al.*<sup>10</sup> showed that the Fe-Mn/Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> catalyst at 150 °C had a NO conversion rate of more than 99%, N<sub>2</sub> selectivity of more than 98%, and strong SO<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>O corrosion resistance. Thus, the addition of one or more transition metals to MnO<sub>x</sub> can make the catalyst have better sulfur resistance and water resistance.

Zirconium has received much attention due to its excellent thermal stability and surface acidity. Gao *et al.*<sup>11</sup> prepared a superacid catalyst by loading cerium oxide on zirconia sulfate, which significantly improved the SCR performance of the catalyst. The zirconium additive can increase the dispersion and activity of the catalyst, and enhance the sulfur resistance of the catalyst.<sup>12</sup> Shi *et al.*<sup>5</sup> improved the high-temperature activity and N<sub>2</sub> selectivity of the catalysts by introducing zirconium into V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>/WO<sub>3</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub>.

Therefore, zirconium was doped in MnO<sub>x</sub> catalyst in this study to prepare a highly efficient SCR catalyst. In addition, the calcination temperature has a significant effect on the activity of the catalyst. Chen *et al.*<sup>13</sup> found that different calcination temperatures have many effects on MnAlO<sub>x</sub> catalysts, with the

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most excellent activity at 400 °C, while the activity of the catalysts calcined at 600 °C decreased sharply. Fang *et al.*<sup>14</sup> also found that the calcination of Fe–Mn–Zr catalysts at different calcination temperatures not only affected the activity of the catalyst, but also changed the surface structure of the catalyst. Furthermore, when the calcination temperature was 800 °C, the catalyst had very poor tolerance to SO<sub>2</sub>, and the NO conversion efficiency was only 20%. Therefore, study of the calcination temperature is critical.

In the present study, a series of new Mn<sub>x</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> catalysts was prepared by a coprecipitation method, and the effects of the Mn/Zr ratio and calcination temperature on the activity and SO<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>O resistance of the catalysts were studied. In addition, the denitration activity was tested in a simulated gas in a fixed-bed reactor. Moreover, the physicochemical properties of the catalysts were studied by a temperature-programmed technique, SEM, FTIR, XRD, BET, XPS, H<sub>2</sub>-TPR, NH<sub>3</sub>-TPD, and other related experiments and characterization.

## 2. Experimental

### 2.1 Materials and reagents

Mn(NO<sub>3</sub>)<sub>2</sub>·4H<sub>2</sub>O (≥99.0%, MACKLIN, Shanghai), Zr(NO<sub>3</sub>)<sub>4</sub>·5H<sub>2</sub>O (≥99.0%, MACKLIN, Shanghai) and related metal nitrates were used as the precursor for the catalyst preparation. NaOH (≥96.0%, MACKLIN, Shanghai) was used to regulate the pH, while (NH<sub>4</sub>)<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub> (≥40.0%, Hongyan, Tianjin) was used as the precipitator. In this study, none of the reagents used needed to be further purified.

### 2.2 Catalyst preparation

A series of Mn<sub>x</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> catalysts was prepared by a coprecipitation method. Taking the Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> catalyst as an example, the preparation method of the catalyst is described in detail. Specifically, a certain amount of Mn(NO<sub>3</sub>)<sub>2</sub>·4H<sub>2</sub>O and Zr(NO<sub>3</sub>)<sub>4</sub>·5H<sub>2</sub>O were added to a 300 mL beaker at room temperature, and then 100 mL distilled water was added, and for the sample where Mn : Zr = 6 : 1 (molar ratio), the prepared catalyst was named Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> according to the molar ratio of elements. The solution beaker was then put into a constant temperature magnetic stirring pot for rapid stirring and dissolution. After 30 min, a certain amount of 0.5 mol L<sup>-1</sup> (NH<sub>4</sub>)<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub> solution was gradually added, and then 0.5 mol L<sup>-1</sup> NaOH solution was gradually dropped in to make pH 9, and the solution was stirred for another 2 h. Then, the solution was aged at room temperature for 24 h, and afterward the supernatant was poured out, the sediment in the cup was collected, and the sediment was washed to neutral with deionized water. The cleaned samples were dried in a vacuum drying oven at 105 °C, and the calcination temperature was set at 400 °C in a muffle furnace, and the calcination temperature was set at the set temperature for 3 h (the heating rate was 5 °C min<sup>-1</sup>). Ultimately, a solid was obtained and collected and sieved using a 40–60 mesh to the obtain Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> catalyst.

Mn<sub>2</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub>, Mn<sub>4</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub>, and Mn<sub>8</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> were prepared in the same way as Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub>, except that the molar ratio of elements was different

when the material precursor was added. The preparation methods for Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub>-300 °C, Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub>-500 °C, Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub>-600 °C, and Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub>-700 °C were the same as for Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub>, but the final calcination temperature was changed.

### 2.3 Catalytic performance test

The activity of the catalyst was evaluated and detected by using temperature-programmed technology, as shown in Fig. 1. Each test catalyst (0.2 g, 40–60 mesh) was placed in a fixed-bed quartz reactor (diameter = 9 mm, length = 60 cm) for the NH<sub>3</sub>-SCR activity evaluation test. The reaction conditions for traditional NH<sub>3</sub>-SCR denitration are as follows: 500 ppm NO, 500 ppm NH<sub>3</sub>, 5 vol% O<sub>2</sub>, 100–200 ppm SO<sub>2</sub> (when used), 5 vol% H<sub>2</sub>O (when used), and N<sub>2</sub> as the balance gas. The total flow rate of the gas was 500 mL min<sup>-1</sup> controlled by mass flow controllers (Beijing Sevenstar Flow Co., Ltd, China). The gas hourly space velocity was set as 30 000 h<sup>-1</sup>. The reaction temperature was 100–300 °C when the catalyst activity was tested. The concentration of NO<sub>x</sub> and NH<sub>3</sub> before and after the reaction was directly measured online by a flue gas analyzer. The remaining unconverted gas was filtered by NaOH solution. Each temperature point was kept for 30 min, and the data were recorded in a stable numerical state. The NO<sub>x</sub> conversion rate formula is as follows:

$$\text{NO}_x \text{ conversion} = \frac{[\text{NO}_x]_{\text{in}} - [\text{NO}_x]_{\text{out}}}{[\text{NO}_x]_{\text{in}}} \times 100\% \quad (1)$$

N<sub>2</sub> selectivity (%)

$$= \left( 1 - \frac{2[\text{N}_2\text{O}]_{\text{out}} + [\text{NO}_2]_{\text{out}} - 2[\text{N}_2\text{O}]_{\text{in}} - [\text{NO}_2]_{\text{in}}}{[\text{NH}_3]_{\text{in}} + [\text{NO}_x]_{\text{in}} - [\text{NH}_3]_{\text{out}} - [\text{NO}_x]_{\text{out}}} \right) \times 100\% \quad (2)$$

The reaction rate of NH<sub>3</sub>-SCR can be truly reflected by the turnover frequency (TOF), and the calculation formula for this is as follows:<sup>15,16</sup>

$$\text{TOF} = \frac{v \times \alpha}{V_m \times n_a} \quad (3)$$

where  $v$  represents the flow rate of NO (m<sup>3</sup> s<sup>-1</sup>),  $\alpha$  is the NO conversion at a specific temperature (%),  $V_m$  is the gas molar constant (m<sup>3</sup> mol<sup>-1</sup>), and  $n_a$  is the mole number of surface acid sites molar amount (mol), which was estimated based on NH<sub>3</sub>-TPD.

The SCR activity of the catalyst can also be quantitatively expressed by a first-order rate constant ( $k$ ), which can be calculated by the formula for NO conversion ( $x$ ) as follows:<sup>16,17</sup>

$$k = -\frac{F_0}{[\text{NO}]_0 W} \ln(1 - x) \quad (4)$$

$$\ln k = -\frac{E_a}{RT} + \ln A \quad (5)$$

where  $F_0$  is the NO feeding rate,  $[\text{NO}]_0$  is the NO concentration at the inlet,  $W$  is the catalyst dosage,  $E_a$  is the apparent activation



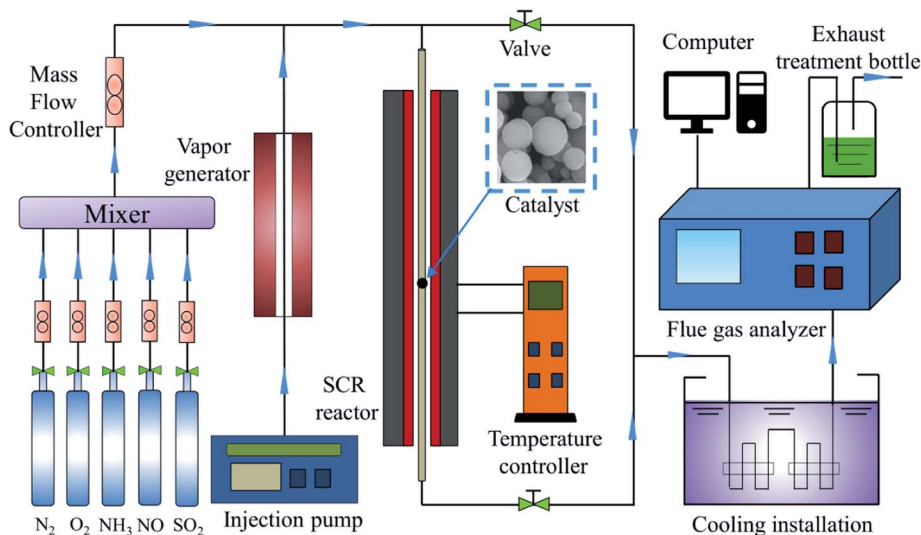


Fig. 1 Catalytic activity evaluation device.

energy,  $T$  is the Kelvin temperature,  $R$  is the gas constant, and  $A$  is the pre-factor.

#### 2.4 Catalyst characterization

Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) was used to determine the species on the catalyst surface in the range of  $400\text{--}4000\text{ cm}^{-1}$  by infrared spectrometry (Nicolet iS5). Scanning electron microscope (SEM; Hitachi Company Japan) was used to analyze the morphology of the catalysts. Before the test, the sample was evenly smeared on the surface of the conductive adhesive, and then sprayed with gold. The  $\text{N}_2$  adsorption-desorption isotherms of the catalysts were determined on a Quantachrome Instrument (Quadrachrome EVO) with high-purity  $\text{N}_2$  as the adsorbent. Before each analysis, the catalysts were degassed in a vacuum at  $300\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  for 3 h and the isotherms were measured in a liquid nitrogen  $\text{N}_2$  state ( $-196\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ ). The X-ray diffraction (XRD) test was carried out with  $\text{Cu K}\alpha$  radiation ( $\lambda = 0.15418\text{ nm}$ ) at 40 kV and 40 mA in an X-ray tube by using a Brook D8 Advance system (Germany). The scanning range was  $10\text{--}80^\circ$ . The speed was  $6^\circ\text{ min}^{-1}$ . The XPS tester used the Escalab 250XI spectrometer (Semei, Inc), operating under monochrome  $\text{Al K}\alpha$  radiation (1486.6 eV), 12 kV, and 15 mA ultra-high vacuum, and all the binding energies were calibrated by the C 1s peak at 284.4 eV. Temperature-programmed reduction of  $\text{H}_2$  ( $\text{H}_2\text{-TPR}$ ) and temperature-programmed desorption of  $\text{NH}_3$  ( $\text{NH}_3\text{-TPD}$ ) were performed on a Mac AutoChem II 2920 instrument (USA). The former was pretreated in  $300\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  argon at a flow rate of  $20\text{ mL min}^{-1}$  for 1 h and cooled to room temperature. The gas was converted into a mixture of 5 vol%  $\text{H}_2\text{-N}_2$  at a flow rate of  $30\text{ mL min}^{-1}$ . After a straight baseline, the catalyst was heated from room temperature to  $800\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  at a rate of  $10\text{ }^\circ\text{C min}^{-1}$ . The latter was pretreated in  $300\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  argon at a flow rate of  $20\text{ mL min}^{-1}$  for 1 h and then cooled to room temperature. The samples were then exposed to a mixture of 5 vol%  $\text{NH}_3\text{-N}_2$  for 1 h, and then purified with high-purity He at a flow rate of  $20\text{ mL min}^{-1}$  to remove the physically

adsorbed  $\text{NH}_3$ . After the baseline was stabilized, the sample was heated from room temperature to  $800\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  at a rate of  $10\text{ }^\circ\text{C min}^{-1}$ .

## 3 Results and discussion

### 3.1 Catalytic activity of $\text{Mn}_x\text{Zr}_1$ catalysts

The  $\text{NO}_x$  conversion efficiency of the  $\text{Mn}_x\text{Zr}_1$  series catalyst is shown in Fig. 2a and Table 1. It could be found that with the increase in the manganese element ratio, the catalyst activity increased first and then decreased. First, the  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalyst showed the best activity. The conversion efficiency reached more than 90% at  $125\text{--}250\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ , while the highest conversion efficiency reached 97%. It had a good temperature window and excellent activity. Second, it is worth noting that the  $\text{Mn}_8\text{Zr}_1$  catalyst showed the best activity at  $100\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ , with the conversion efficiency reaching 95%, although the overall conversion efficiency decreased. A reasonable explanation for this is that while an appropriate ratio of manganese to zirconium can significantly improve the activity of the  $\text{MnO}_x$  catalyst, too much manganese will mask the active sites on the surface of the catalyst, thus reducing the activity of the catalyst.

The  $\text{N}_2$  selectivity of the  $\text{Mn}_x\text{Zr}_1$  series catalyst is shown in Fig. 2b. The  $\text{N}_2$  selectivity of the catalysts decreased with increasing temperature. The main reason for this is that the by-products  $\text{NO}_x$  and  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  were produced by  $\text{NH}_3$  oxidation.<sup>18</sup>  $\text{Mn}_2\text{Zr}_1$  had the lowest  $\text{N}_2$  selectivity and  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  had the best  $\text{N}_2$  selectivity. Such results are similar to the  $\text{NO}_x$  conversion efficiency, and also indicated that  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  has a strong redox performance.<sup>19</sup> The selectivity of  $\text{N}_2$  in  $\text{MnO}_x$  was second only to  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$ , but the conversion efficiency of  $\text{NO}_x$  was the lowest, which may be due to the weak redox capacity of  $\text{MnO}_x$ , which produced less  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ .<sup>20</sup>

As is well known, the calcination temperature of a catalyst directly affects its SCR activity. Fig. 2c shows the  $\text{NO}_x$  conversion of the  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalyst at different calcination temperatures



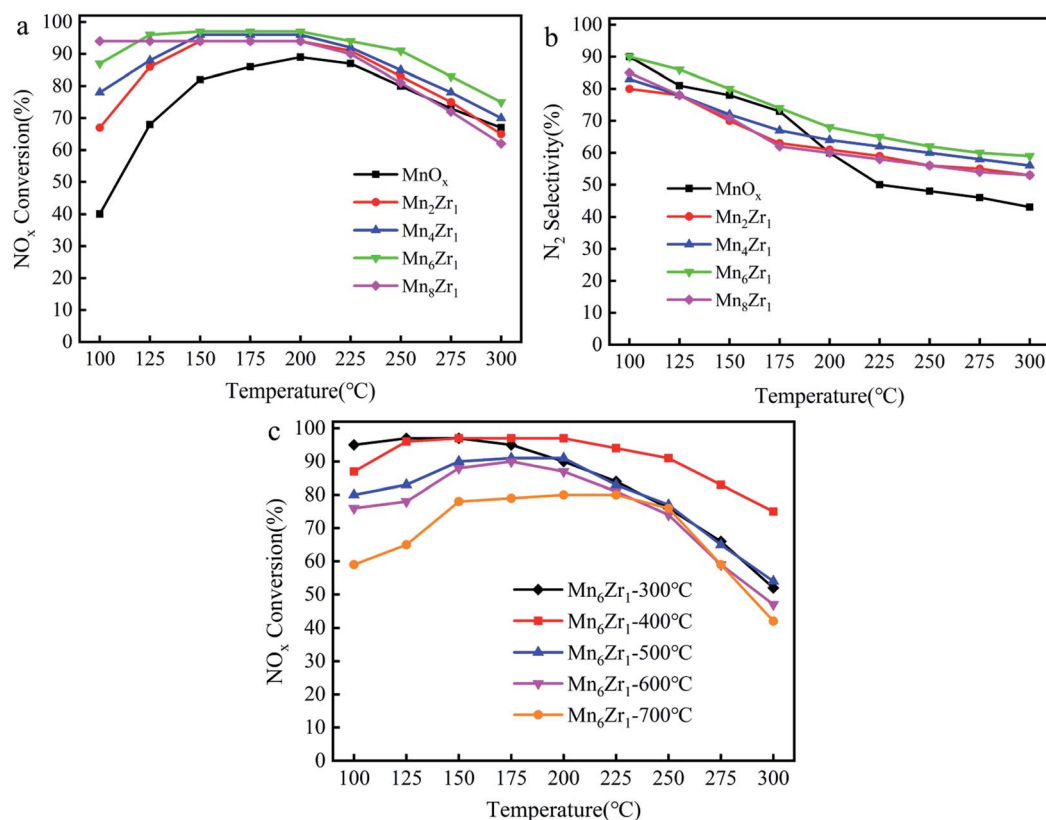


Fig. 2 (a)  $\text{NO}_x$  conversion at different ratios of Mn/Zr, (b)  $\text{N}_2$  selectivity at different ratios of Mn/Zr, and (c) conversion rate of  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  at different calcination temperatures.

Table 1 Catalytic performance of  $\text{MnO}_x$  and  $\text{Mn}_x\text{Zr}_1$  catalysts

Temperature (°C)	$\text{NO}_x$ conversion (%)				
	$\text{MnO}_x$	$\text{Mn}_2\text{Zr}_1$	$\text{Mn}_4\text{Zr}_1$	$\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$	$\text{Mn}_8\text{Zr}_1$
100	40	67	78	87	94
125	68	86	88	96	94
150	82	94	96	97	94
175	86	94	96	97	94
200	89	94	96	97	94
225	87	91	92	94	90
250	80	83	85	91	81
275	73	75	78	83	72
300	67	65	70	75	62

(300–700 °C). The  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$ -300 °C catalyst only showed the best activity at 100–150 °C, which may be because of the calcination temperature and not being able to expose more active sites. When the calcination temperature was 400–700 °C, the  $\text{NO}_x$  conversion decreased gradually. In conclusion, the  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalyst showed the best catalytic activity when the calcination temperature was 400 °C.

The tolerance of the  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalyst to  $\text{SO}_2$  and  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  in a flue gas atmosphere was simulated at 200 °C. The tolerance test results for 100 ppm and 200 ppm  $\text{SO}_2$  on the catalyst are shown in Fig. 3. When 100 ppm  $\text{SO}_2$  was introduced, the catalyst

conversion rate gradually decreased, and finally stabilizes at 90% after 4 h. When introducing 200 ppm  $\text{SO}_2$ , the  $\text{NO}_x$  conversion rate of  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  decreased from 90% at 100 ppm to 82% at 200 ppm. This may be due to the formation of sulfate on the catalyst's surface by  $\text{SO}_2$ , thus covering its active site. When  $\text{SO}_2$  was turned off, the  $\text{NO}_x$  conversion rate recovered to 95%, indicating that the catalyst was reversible. However, the  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalyst did not fully recover to its previous levels, probably because the sulfate formed by the reaction of  $\text{SO}_2$  with  $\text{NH}_3$  or metal oxides was challenging to decompose at low temperatures, thus blocking some of the active or acidic sites of the catalyst, leading to a decrease in catalytic activity.<sup>21</sup> When 5%  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  was added, the catalyst conversion efficiency of the catalyst decreased and stabilized at 92% after 8 h. Compared with the optimal conversion efficiency of 97%, it decreased by 5%. When the water vapor was turned off, the  $\text{NO}_x$  conversion rate recovered to 96%, indicating that the catalyst was reversible, basically going back to the original conversion efficiency. In summary, the  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalyst showed good resistance to sulfur and water.

As can be seen from Fig. 8 and Fig. 3 that  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  had good  $\text{NO}_x$  removal ability, and excellent sulfur resistance and water resistance. Therefore, the anti- $\text{SO}_2$  and anti- $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  properties of the  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalyst were further tested. As shown in Fig. 4, when 100 ppm  $\text{SO}_2$  (stage I) was introduced into the  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalyst, the conversion efficiency reached 92%. Further additions of 5%  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  (stage II) reduced the conversion efficiency to



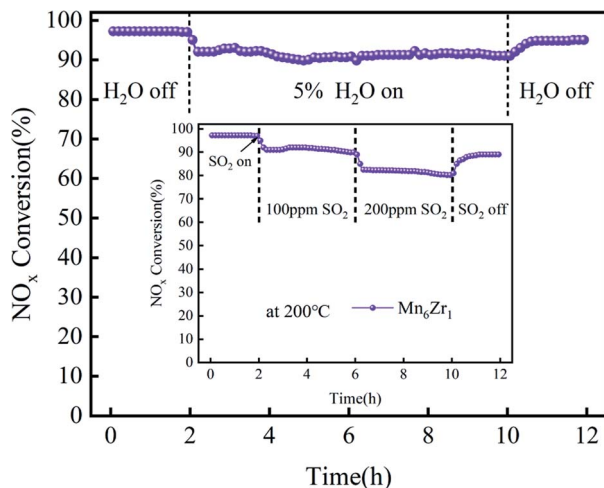


Fig. 3 Resistance of the  $Mn_6Zr_1$  catalyst to  $H_2O$  and  $SO_2$  at 200 °C.

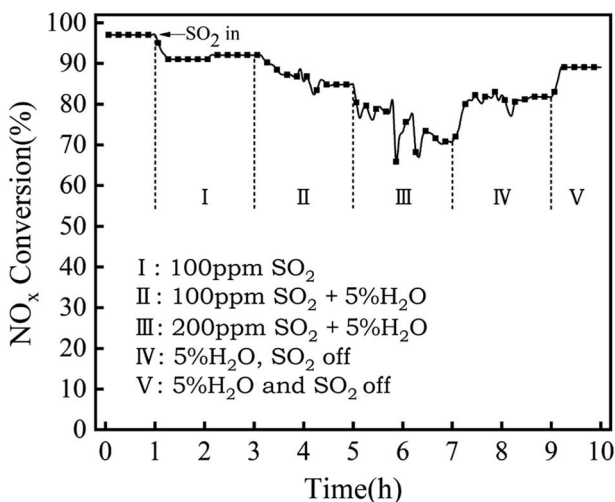


Fig. 4  $NH_3$ -SCR activity of  $Mn_6Zr_1$ -400 °C in the presence of  $SO_2$  and  $H_2O$  at 200 °C.

85%, indicating that  $H_2O$  inhibited the adsorption activity of  $NH_3$ . When 200 ppm  $SO_2$  and 5%  $H_2O$  (stage III) were introduced, the conversion efficiency of  $NO_x$  reached 71% after 2 h of

stability, which may be due to the formation of  $(NH_3)_2SO_4$  and  $(NH_3)_2SO_3$  by-products on the catalyst's surface, resulting in a decrease in catalytic activity.<sup>14</sup> When  $SO_2$  was turned off (stage IV), the conversion efficiency increased gradually and then remained at 82%. This may be because the  $H_2O$  washed away the by-products on the catalyst's surface, releasing some of the active sites. The  $NO_x$  conversion efficiency reached about 90% when  $H_2O$  was turned off (stage V). These results show that the adsorption of  $SO_2$ ,  $H_2O$ , and reaction gas on the surface is competitive and the deactivation is reversible.

### 3.2 Characterization of the $Mn_xZr_1$ catalysts

**3.2.1 XRD.** The  $Mn_xZr_1$  series catalysts,  $MnO_x$ , and  $ZrO_2$  were characterized by XRD, as shown in Fig. 5a. The diffraction peaks of  $ZrO_2$  were not consistent with those of  $Mn/Zr$  catalysts with different proportions, indicating that  $ZrO_2$  formed an amorphous structure or was well dispersed on the catalyst surface. The diffraction peak of pure  $MnO_x$  showed the presence of  $MnO_2$  (PDF#12-0141) and  $Mn_3O_4$  (PDF#04-0732). When the  $Mn/Zr$  ratio increased, the diffraction peak of  $MnO_x$  in the  $Mn_xZr_1$  series of catalysts decreased or disappeared gradually, indicating that  $MnO_x$  was highly dispersed on the catalyst's surface, especially as the diffraction peak of the  $Mn_6Zr_1$  catalyst was the weakest. In addition, the amorphous structure is conducive to enhancing the activity of the catalyst,<sup>22</sup> which also well proved the good catalytic activity of  $Mn_6Zr_1$ .

Fig. 5b shows the diffraction spectrum of the  $Mn_6Zr_1$  catalyst at 300–700 °C. When the calcination temperature of the catalyst increased, the diffraction peak of the catalyst became more apparent, and the diffraction peak of  $ZrO_2$  (PDF#50-1089) appeared. The crystal structure of the catalyst will be formed at a higher calcination temperature, which will inhibit the activity of the catalyst. This is also why the catalyst activity was poor when the calcination temperature was 500 °C or above. When the calcination temperature was 300 °C and 400 °C, the crystallinity of the  $Mn_6Zr_1$  catalyst was poor, which is conducive to enhancing the activity of the catalyst. Besides, when the calcination temperature was 400 °C, the diffraction peak of the  $Mn_6Zr_1$  catalyst was wide and weak in the  $2\theta$  range of 25–35°, and seemed to be a mixed oxide of  $Mn_2O_3$  and  $Mn_3O_4$ .

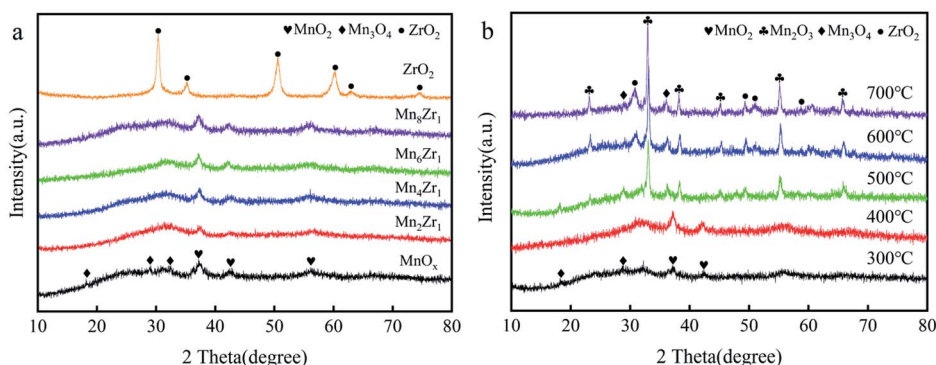


Fig. 5 (a) XRD patterns of  $Mn_xZr_1$  catalysts and (b) XRD patterns of  $Mn_6Zr_1$  catalysts calcined at different temperatures.



Moreover, the vast peak structure contributed to the adsorption/desorption of the catalyst surface and the redox reaction.<sup>23</sup>

**3.2.2 FTIR.** The FTIR spectra of the samples detected within the range of 450–4000  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  are shown in Fig. 6. Two samples had a wide absorption band at 3421  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ , attributed to stretching vibrations of hydroxide and hydroxyl groups in interlayer water molecules.<sup>19</sup> An angular deformation vibration of water molecules was observed in two samples at 1628  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ .<sup>24</sup> The absorption band at 1385  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  in the spectrum could be attributed to the stretching vibration of  $\text{NO}_3^-$ , indicating that there were  $\text{NO}_3^-$  ions in the interlayer of the catalyst to balance the charge of the hydroxyl base.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, a new weak adsorption band was observed near 1099  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ , caused by the antisymmetric stretching vibration of the tetrahedral  $\text{MnO}_4^-$  interlayer  $\nu_3$ .<sup>26</sup> Finally, the vibrations in the range of 500–

800  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  were mainly M–O lattice vibrations ( $\nu_{\text{M-OH}}$ ,  $\nu_{\text{M-O-M}}$ , or  $\nu_{\text{O-M-O}}$ ).<sup>27</sup> Through FTIR spectrum analysis of the sample precursor and the XRD analysis above, the successful synthesis of the catalyst was confirmed.

**3.2.3 SEM.** Fig. 7 shows the surface morphologies of the  $\text{MnO}_x$ ,  $\text{ZrO}_x$ , and  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalysts. As shown in Fig. 7a and b,  $\text{MnO}_x$  had an irregular spherical structure with an uneven surface. Fig. 7c shows the crystal morphology of  $\text{ZrO}_x$ , which had a block structure. As shown from Fig. 7d and e, the  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalyst became a uniform cube structure as a whole, and its surface became very smooth. It seems that  $\text{MnO}_x$  had been modified by zirconium. As can be seen from Fig. 7f, many white spots were formed on the surface of the  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalyst, indicating that the zirconium element was successfully attached to the surface of the catalyst. It was well dispersed on the catalyst surface, which is consistent with the XRD characterization of  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$ . Zirconium can increase the active sites of the catalyst.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, the reaction molecules can be captured better during the SCR denitration process, thus improving the activity of the catalyst.

**3.2.4 BET.** Fig. 8 shows the  $\text{N}_2$  adsorption isotherms and pore-size distribution of the three catalysts at liquid nitrogen temperature. The corresponding physical properties are shown in Table 2. In Fig. 8a, the isotherms of the three catalysts are typical IV-type curves, and all of them have hysteresis loops. When  $P/P_0$  was 0.4, the adsorption capacity of  $\text{N}_2$  increased rapidly, indicating the presence of a microporous structure in the catalyst.<sup>29</sup>

Fig. 8b shows the pore-size distribution of the catalysts. The results showed a peak at about 2 nm for  $\text{MnO}_x$  and  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalysts, and a broad peak at 3–7 nm for all three catalysts, indicating that the samples were dominated by intermediate

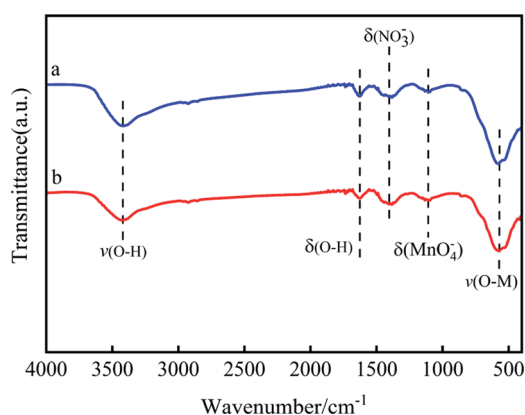


Fig. 6 FTIR spectra of (a)  $\text{MnO}_x$ , (b)  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$ .

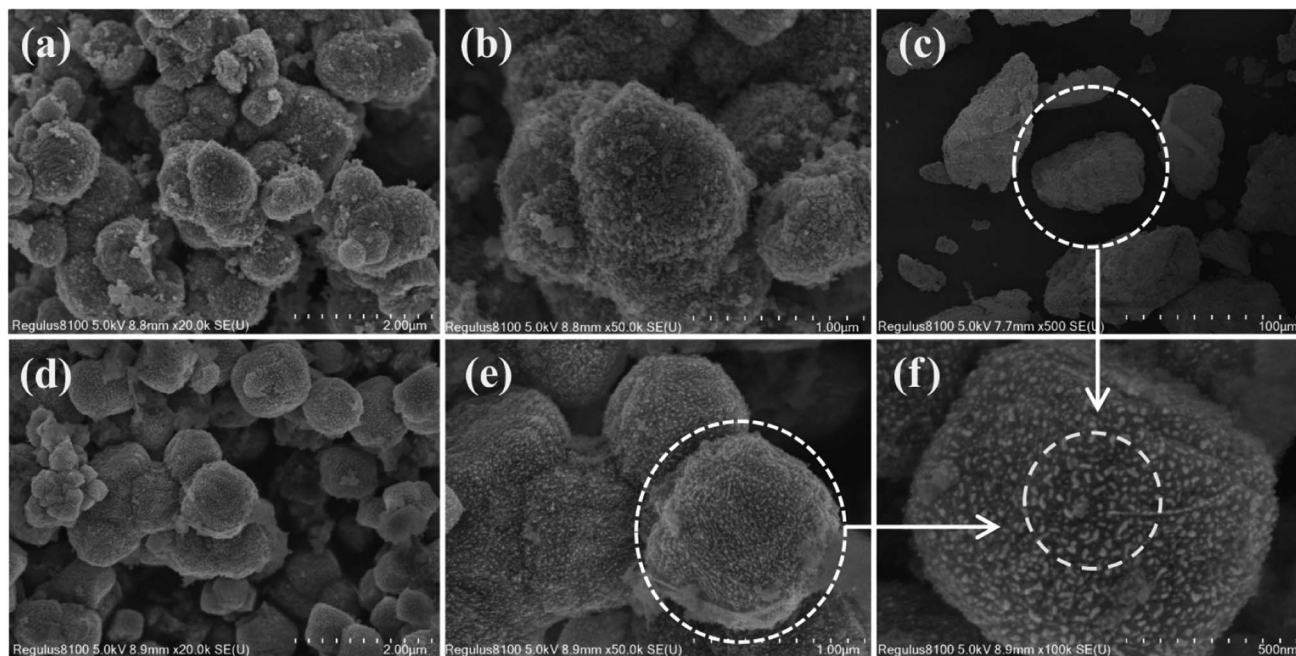


Fig. 7 SEM images of (a and b)  $\text{MnO}_x$ , (c)  $\text{ZrO}_2$ , and (d–f)  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$ .



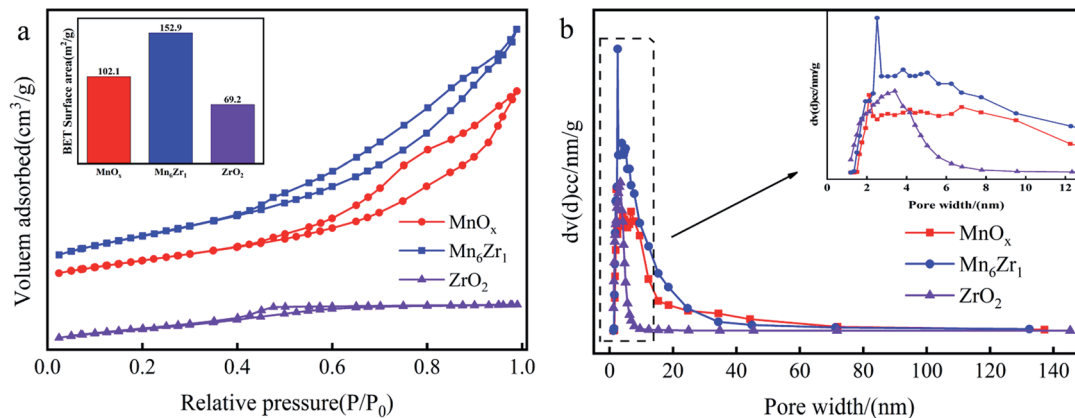


Fig. 8  $N_2$  adsorption isotherms (a) and pore-size distributions (b) of  $MnO_x$ ,  $ZrO_2$ , and  $Mn_6Zr_1$ .

Table 2 BET surface areas, pore volume, and average pore diameter of the samples

Samples	Surface area ( $m^2 g^{-1}$ )	Pore volume ( $cm^3 g^{-1}$ )	Average pore diameter (nm)
$MnO_x$	102	0.22	2.1
$ZrO_2$	69	0.05	3.4
$Mn_6Zr_1$	153	0.28	2.5

pores and supplemented by micropores. There were many intermediate pores in the catalyst, which are conducive to  $NO_x$  removal and thus show good catalytic activity.<sup>30</sup> From Table 1, the specific surface area and pore volume of the manganese-based catalyst were significantly improved by adding zirconium. The specific surface area and pore volume of the  $Mn_6Zr_1$  catalyst were increased to  $153 m^2 g^{-1}$  and  $0.28 cm^3 g^{-1}$ , respectively. The higher specific surface area can better adsorb reactants, hence promoting the activity of the catalyst.

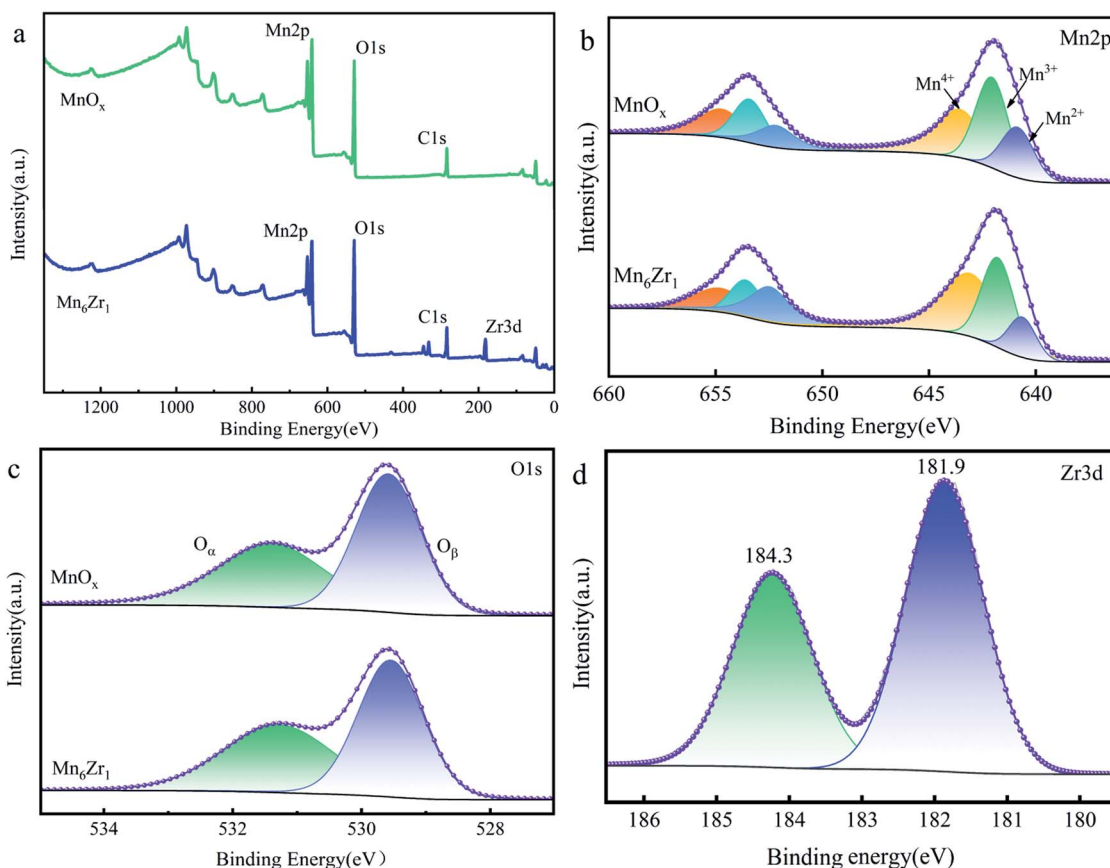


Fig. 9 XPS spectra of (a) the survey, (b) Mn 2p, (c) O 1s, and (d) Zr 3d of the  $MnO_x$  and  $Mn_6Zr_1$ .



Furthermore, the pore size of the  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalyst was increased to 2.5 nm, making it easier for the reaction gas to pass through the catalyst.

**3.2.5 XPS.** The surface elemental states of the  $\text{MnO}_x$  and  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalysts were detected using the XPS technique, and the results are shown in Fig. 9 and Table 3. The full spectrum of Fig. 9a confirmed the existence of Mn, Zr, C, and O elements. Fig. 9b shows the XPS spectra of Mn 2p. Through peak fitting deconvolution for the  $\text{MnO}_x$  catalyst, Mn 2p<sub>3/2</sub> was divided into three characteristic peaks, namely 643.5, 642.1, and 640.9 eV, respectively, which were successively assigned as  $\text{Mn}^{4+}$ ,  $\text{Mn}^{3+}$ , and  $\text{Mn}^{2+}$ .<sup>30,31</sup> The three characteristic peaks of  $\text{Mn}^{4+}$ ,  $\text{Mn}^{3+}$ , and  $\text{Mn}^{2+}$  in Mn 2p<sub>3/2</sub> on the  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalyst were 643.1, 641.7, and 640.6 eV, respectively. In addition, the binding energy of  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  was lower than that of the  $\text{MnO}_x$  catalyst. According to the literature, elements with a lower binding energy have higher activity.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, the  $\text{Mn}^{3+}/\text{Mn}$  ratio of  $\text{MnO}_x$  was 2.57% higher than that of  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$ . However, the  $\text{Mn}^{4+}/\text{Mn}$  ratio of  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  was 46.54%, which was significantly higher than that of  $\text{MnO}_x$  (42.41%), indicating that a large number of  $\text{MnO}_2$  species were added on the surface of  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$ . The results show that the Mn/Zr ratio can affect the valence state of Mn species. According to the literature, the activity sequence of  $\text{MnO}_x$  in low-temperature  $\text{NH}_3$ -SCR is  $\text{MnO}_2 > \text{Mn}_5\text{O}_8 > \text{Mn}_2\text{O}_3 > \text{Mn}_3\text{O}_4 > \text{MnO}$ . Therefore, more  $\text{Mn}^{4+}$  can promote the  $\text{NO}_x$  conversion efficiency, thus improving the catalytic capacity.<sup>33</sup>

The spectrum of O 1s is shown in Fig. 9c. The two fitting peaks of O 1s were at 529.8 and 531.5 eV, respectively. The former was for lattice oxygen  $\text{O}_\beta$ ; while the latter was denoted as adsorbed oxygen  $\text{O}_\alpha$ .<sup>34</sup> Table 2 shows that the  $\text{O}_\alpha/(\text{O}_\alpha + \text{O}_\beta)$  value

of the  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalyst was 47.94%, which was significantly higher than that of the  $\text{MnO}_x$  catalyst. It is well known that  $\text{O}_\alpha$  can promote the oxidation of NO to  $\text{NO}_2$  due to its high mobility and better oxidation capacity, hence speeding up the reaction rate of  $\text{NH}_3$ -SCR.<sup>35</sup>

Fig. 9d presents the XPS spectrum of Zr 3d. The binding energy of the  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalyst at Zr 3d<sub>5/2</sub> was 181.9 eV. However, the binding energy of Zr 3d<sub>5/2</sub> for pure  $\text{ZrO}_2$  was 182.1 eV.<sup>14</sup> The binding energy here is higher than that of the catalyst  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$ , indicating an interaction between manganese and zirconium in the  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalyst. With the increase in the Zr-O coordination bond length, not only is the surface acidity of the catalyst changed, but also the adsorption property of the catalyst surface is affected.<sup>30</sup>

**3.2.6 Temperature programming testing.** In order to better study the surface acidity of the catalyst,  $\text{NH}_3$ -TPD experiments were conducted on the catalyst, and the results are shown in Fig. 10a.  $\text{NH}_3$  adsorbed at the Brønsted acid site is more easily released than at the Lewis acid.<sup>36,37</sup> Therefore, the desorption peak of the Brønsted acid site is in the low-temperature range, and that of the Lewis acid site is in the high-temperature range.<sup>38</sup> The desorption peak of  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalyst at 100–200 °C may be due to the physical adsorption of  $\text{NH}_3$  on the weak acid site, and part of the  $\text{NH}_4^+$  ions were absorbed by the Brønsted acid site.<sup>39</sup> The desorption peaks at 200–400 °C should belong to the chemisorption of  $\text{NH}_3$  at weak acid sites.<sup>40</sup> The peak at 400–500 °C belongs to the desorption peak of a medium-strong acid. In contrast, the desorption peak above 700 °C was attributed to a strong acid, which can be attributed to  $\text{NH}_3$  or  $\text{NH}_4^+$  adsorption on the Lewis acid site. Lewis acid sites have good stability

Table 3 XPS test results and apparent activation energy ( $E_a$ ) of the  $\text{MnO}_x$  and  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalysts

Samples	Atomic concentration (%)				Atomic ratio (%)			$E_a$ (kJ mol <sup>-1</sup> )	ln A
	C	Mn	O	Zr	$\text{Mn}^{3+}/\text{Mn}$	$\text{Mn}^{4+}/\text{Mn}$	$\text{O}_\alpha/(\text{O}_\alpha + \text{O}_\beta)$		
$\text{MnO}_x$	27.96	22.37	49.67	—	36.89	42.41	46.92	38.96	11.78
$\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$	29.95	18.07	49	2.98	34.32	46.54	47.94	19.59	6.92

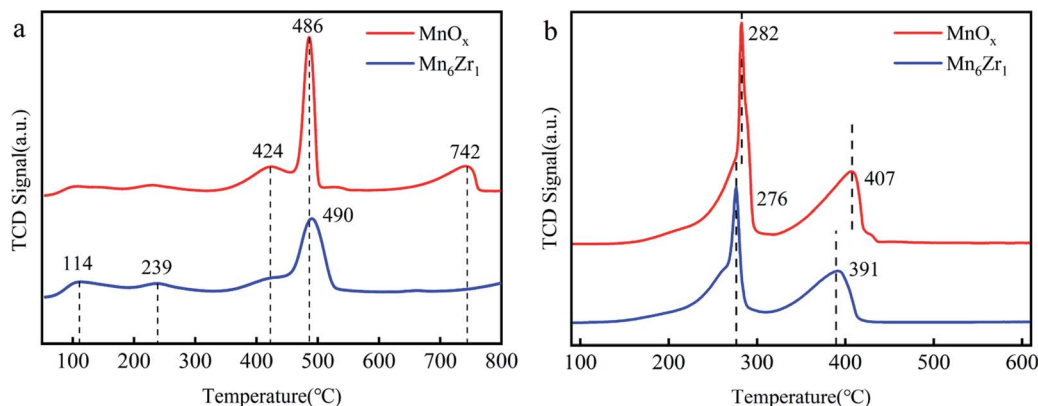


Fig. 10  $\text{NH}_3$ -TPD (a) and  $\text{H}_2$ -TPR (b) of  $\text{MnO}_x$  and  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalysts.



and can work at a wide range of temperatures.<sup>41</sup> In addition, we found that the desorption peak of Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> catalyst was shifted toward the low-temperature region and contained Brønsted acid sites and Lewis acid sites. This indicated that the addition of zirconium changes the properties of MnO<sub>x</sub> acid sites. In conclusion, the Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> catalyst has a wide window and good SCR activity at low-temperature.

H<sub>2</sub>-TPR was used to evaluate the redox performance of each catalyst, as shown in Fig. 10b. Both MnO<sub>x</sub> and Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> catalysts displayed two reduction peaks. The reduction process of manganese-based catalysts usually follows three steps: Mn<sup>4+</sup> → Mn<sup>3+</sup> → Mn<sup>8/3+</sup> → Mn<sup>2+</sup>.<sup>42,43</sup> At 270–300 °C and 390–410 °C, both catalysts showed reduction peaks, attributed to the reduction of MnO<sub>2</sub> to Mn<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> and Mn<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> to Mn<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>,<sup>42,44</sup> respectively. It was found that the addition of zirconium reduced the reduction peak of the Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> catalyst. This indicated that the Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> catalyst had more vital redox capacity.<sup>45</sup> This also explains the reason why the Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> catalyst had an excellent low-temperature denitration activity.

### 3.3 NH<sub>3</sub>-SCR kinetic studies

The turnover frequency (TOF) and the Arrhenius plots of the MnO<sub>x</sub> and Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> catalysts are shown in Fig. 11. As can be seen, the TOF value of the Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> catalyst was much larger than that of the MnO<sub>x</sub> catalyst at various temperature points, especially at 100–120 °C. The TOF value of the Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> catalyst was 2–3 times that of MnO<sub>x</sub>. This result intuitively shows that the Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> catalyst has excellent SCR performance, and is consistent with the excellent N<sub>2</sub> selectivity. In addition, it can be seen from the Arrhenius figure that the MnO<sub>x</sub> catalyst had a high activation energy (38.96 kJ mol<sup>-1</sup>). The activation energy (19.59 kJ mol<sup>-1</sup>) of the Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> catalyst decreased significantly when zirconium was doped in the catalyst, which increased the reaction rate of the catalyst. According to the existing literature, the lower the activation energy of a catalyst, the higher the catalytic SCR activity.<sup>46</sup>

### 3.4 Discussion

The catalyst structure, surface acid–base properties, oxygen mobility, and the interactions between the active components all affect the activity of a catalyst. Zirconium doping into the MnO<sub>x</sub> catalyst can improve the activity of the catalyst, as well as the sulfur resistance and water resistance of the catalyst. In addition, the molar ratio of Mn/Zr also has a great influence on the catalyst. An excessive mole ratio may lead to surface blockage of the catalyst, while too small a molar ratio may lead to too few active sites, which will directly affect the activity of the catalyst. The calcination temperature also has a significant influence on the activity of the Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> catalyst: too high a calcination temperature tends to shrink the pore size and affect the gas entering the catalyst, thus inhibiting the absorption of the catalyst's active site.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the catalyst cannot perform SCR reaction better. The Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> catalyst exhibited a sizable specific surface area, pore volume, and pore size at 400 °C. These factors all affect the conversion efficiency of the catalyst. The larger specific surface area will increase the adsorption sites on the catalyst surface, such as Brønsted and Lewis acid sites. The wider aperture provides convenience for gas diffusion, abundant mesopores can provide the main channel for gas to enter the catalyst, and improve the contact between gas and the inner surface, and thus promote the denitrification activity of the catalyst. From the crystal image, the diffraction peak of the Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> catalyst was weak, indicating that MnO<sub>x</sub> and ZrO<sub>2</sub> formed an amorphous structure or were well dispersed on the catalyst surface. This is also one of the essential reasons for the excellent denitration performance of the Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> catalyst. The interaction between ZrO<sub>2</sub> and the active carrier will accelerate the oxidation rate of the catalyst and make the high-valence Mn easier to be reduced.<sup>30</sup> This is also a reasonable explanation for why catalyst reduction shifts to the low-temperature region.

The addition of zirconium increased the proportion of Mn<sup>4+</sup> and decreased the proportion of Mn<sup>3+</sup> in the Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> catalyst. The former mainly adsorbs NH<sub>3</sub>, while the latter tends to adsorb NO.<sup>47</sup> When the sulfur resistance of the catalyst is measured at the optimal temperature, SO<sub>2</sub> will be oxidized by MnO<sub>x</sub> to form

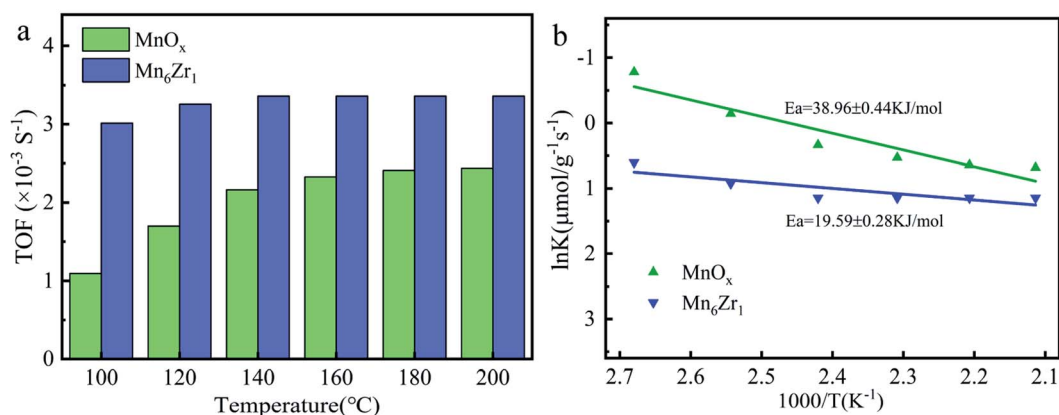


Fig. 11 (a) TOF and (b) Arrhenius plots of MnO<sub>x</sub> and Mn<sub>6</sub>Zr<sub>1</sub> catalysts at different temperatures.

sulfate, and  $\text{Mn}^{4+}$  will lose oxygen and convert to  $\text{Mn}^{3+}$ .<sup>21</sup> At this point, the relative content of  $\text{Mn}^{4+}$  will gradually decrease, and the adsorption of  $\text{NH}_3$  will also gradually decrease. This will inhibit the formation of  $\text{NH}_4\text{NO}_3$  and hinder the cyclic reaction of low-temperature SCR. On the contrary, the unadsorbed  $\text{NH}_3$  will react with  $\text{SO}_2$  to form  $(\text{NH}_4)_2\text{SO}_4$ , and the sulfate will precipitate on the surface of the catalyst, blocking the pores of the catalyst or covering the active sites on the catalyst surface, resulting in a decrease in the activity of the catalyst. More  $\text{Mn}^{4+}$  species will adsorb large amounts of  $\text{NH}_3$ , which will inhibit sulfate formation. This also explains the excellent sulfur resistance of the  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalyst with a high proportion of  $\text{Mn}^{4+}$  species. In addition, the surface of the  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalyst contained a large amount of adsorbed oxygen  $\text{O}_x$ . The adsorbed oxygen  $\text{O}_x$  has better mobility and activity in the  $\text{NH}_3$ -SCR denitration reaction.

$\text{Mn}^{4+}$ ,  $\text{Mn}^{3+}$ , and  $\text{Mn}^{2+}$  species exist simultaneously in the  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalyst. Lattice oxygen  $\text{O}_\beta$  is first used in the process of NO removal by  $\text{NH}_3$ -SCR. At this time,  $\text{Mn}^{4+}$  species in the  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalyst will lose oxygen and generate low-price  $\text{Mn}^{3+}$  and  $\text{Mn}^{2+}$ . The  $\text{Mn}^{2+}$  species, on the other hand, tend to adsorb oxygen and convert it to lattice oxygen, thus forming an oxygen cycle:  $\text{O}_2(\text{g}) \leftrightarrow \text{O}_2(\text{a}) \leftrightarrow \text{O}_2^-(\text{a}) \leftrightarrow 2\text{O}^-(\text{a}) \leftrightarrow 2\text{O}^{2-}(\text{lattice})$ . The oxidation of NO is further promoted by the reversible adsorption/desorption cycle of lattice oxygen. Furthermore, the elimination of NO consists of two steps: (1)  $\text{NO} + \text{O}_2 = \text{N}_x\text{O}_y$ , (2)  $\text{N}_x\text{O}_y + \text{NH}_3 = \text{N}_2 + \text{H}_2\text{O}$ . NO is mainly bound to active oxides, including adsorbed oxygen  $\text{O}_x$  and lattice oxygen  $\text{O}_\beta$ . The intermediate  $\text{N}_x\text{O}_y$  is cleaved to the N-H bond in adsorbed  $\text{NH}_3$ , and H or  $\text{NH}_3$  is bound to the hydroxyl group on the surface to form  $\text{NH}_4^+$ . The number of acid centers on the catalyst surface and the types of Lewis and Brønsted acid centers also affect the adsorption of  $\text{NH}_3$ . The zirconium-doped  $\text{MnO}_x$  catalyst has an increased Brønsted acid level on its surface, thus enhancing the adsorption capacity for  $\text{NH}_3$  and promoting the activity of low-temperature SCR. For the  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalyst, amorphous  $\text{ZrO}_2$  and  $\text{MnO}_2$  are formed when the calcination temperature is  $400^\circ\text{C}$ . Both oxides can promote the formation of nitrate and nitrite, and then react with adsorbed  $\text{NH}_3$  to generate  $\text{NH}_4\text{NO}_2$

and  $\text{NH}_4\text{NO}_3$ , which can finally decompose into  $\text{N}_2$  and  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  (L-H mechanism).<sup>37,48</sup> When one of the H atoms in  $\text{NH}_3$  is used, the resulting intermediate  $\text{NH}_2$  reacts with NO to form  $\text{NH}_2\text{NO}$ , decomposing to form  $\text{N}_2$  and  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  (E-R mechanism).<sup>49,50</sup> Based on the above analysis, a possible reaction mechanism of the  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalyst is summarized in Fig. 12.  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  had the highest desorption capacity for  $\text{NH}_3$ , and its surface had the most vital adsorption capacity for  $\text{NH}_3$ . This contributes to the dehydrogenation and activation of  $\text{NH}_3$ , promotes the process of E-R and L-H, and improves its catalytic performance.

## 4. Conclusions

In this work,  $\text{Mn}_x\text{Zr}_1$  series catalysts were prepared by a coprecipitation method, and the influence of zirconium-doped  $\text{MnO}_x$  catalysts on their SCR activity was studied. The results show that the  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalyst had the best catalytic activity when the molar ratio of Mn/Zr was 6 : 1, and the calcination temperature was  $400^\circ\text{C}$ . Under the condition of  $125\text{--}250^\circ\text{C}$ , the  $\text{NO}_x$  conversion rate could reach more than 90%, and the optimal conversion efficiency could reach 97%. Its resistance to  $\text{SO}_2$  and  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  was measured at optimum temperature, and it showed good resistance to sulfur and water. Meanwhile, the doping of zirconium into the  $\text{MnO}_x$  catalyst enhanced its physical properties, such as increasing the specific surface area, pore size, and pore volume of the catalyst. Moreover, the contents of  $\text{MnO}_2$  species and  $\text{O}_x$  on the catalyst surface increased. The results of  $\text{NH}_3$ -TPD and  $\text{H}_2$ -TPR showed that zirconium doping also changed the acid properties of the catalyst and enhanced the redox performance of the catalyst, which is the main reason for the excellent activity of the catalyst. In summary, zirconium was successfully doped into the  $\text{MnO}_x$  catalyst, and the catalytic performance of the catalyst was significantly improved.

## Conflicts of interest

All authors declare they have no conflict of interest to disclose in the context of this study.

## Acknowledgements

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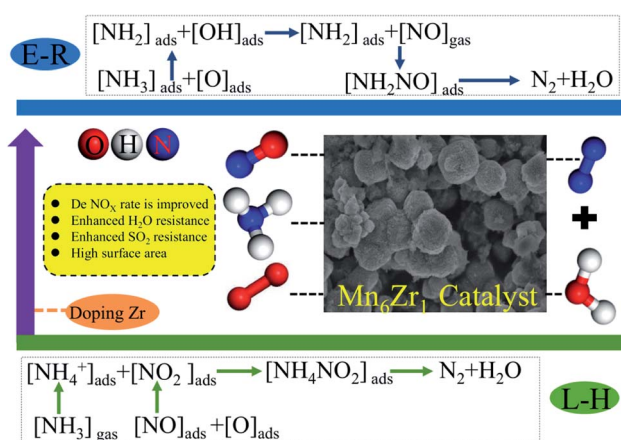


Fig. 12  $\text{NH}_3$ -SCR reaction mechanism of the  $\text{Mn}_6\text{Zr}_1$  catalyst.



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