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# CdO decorated CdS nanorod for enhanced photocatalytic reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> to CO†

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Solar-driven CO<sub>2</sub> reduction into fuels and sustainable energy has attracted increasing attention around the world. However, the photoreduction efficiency remains low due to the low efficiency of separation of electron–hole pairs and high thermal stability of CO<sub>2</sub>. In this work, we prepared a CdO decorated CdS nanorod for visible light driven CO<sub>2</sub> reduction. The introduction of CdO facilitates the photoinduced charge carrier separation and transfer and acts as an active site for adsorption and activation of CO<sub>2</sub> molecules. Compared with pristine CdS, CdO/CdS exhibits a nearly 5-fold higher CO generation rate (1.26 mmol g<sup>-1</sup> h<sup>-1</sup>). *In situ* FT-IR experiments indicated that CO<sub>2</sub> reduction on CdO/CdS may follow a COOH\* pathway. This study reports the pivotal effect of CdO on photogenerated carrier transfer in photocatalysis and on CO<sub>2</sub> adsorption, which provides a facile way to enhance photocatalytic efficiency.

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## Introduction

Photocatalytic reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> by sunlight is a sustainable energy economy because this process is promising to store solar energy in the chemical bonds and produce useful chemicals and fuels such as CO.<sup>1–4</sup> Though a great amount of work has been done during the past several decades, the photoreduction efficiency remains low due to the low efficiency of separation of electron–hole pairs and the high thermal stability of CO<sub>2</sub>.<sup>5–9</sup> Multifarious strategies have been developed to promote charge-separation, such as the construction of heterojunctions,<sup>10–13</sup> heteroatom doping,<sup>14–16</sup> and band-structure engineering.<sup>17–24</sup>

Moreover, water is the most preferred and widely used reductant for CO<sub>2</sub> reduction, and the photo splitting of water to generate H<sub>2</sub> occurs in the photoreduction of CO<sub>2</sub>. CO<sub>2</sub> is one of the most stable and chemically inert molecules. The free energy change of the conversion of CO<sub>2</sub> to CO is 257 kJ mol<sup>-1</sup>, which is higher than that of H<sub>2</sub>O to H<sub>2</sub> (237 kJ mol<sup>-1</sup>).<sup>25,26</sup> The competitive consumption of the photoinduced electrons to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> or protons limits the CO<sub>2</sub> reduction efficiency.<sup>27–30</sup> Many reported works for CO<sub>2</sub> reduction generate more H<sub>2</sub> than CO<sub>2</sub> reduction products. Efforts have been made to prevent the hydrogen generation and promote CO production.<sup>31–33</sup> To

ameliorate the efficiency of photocatalytic reduction of CO<sub>2</sub>, efforts should be made to explore catalysts that could simultaneously efficiently separate hole–electron pairs, selectively activate CO<sub>2</sub>, and prohibit the hydrogen generation.

Recently, CdS has been frequently reported in various photocatalytic systems. However, its photocatalytic activity is poor due to its high recombination rate of photogenerated electron–hole pairs. To enhance its photoactivity, efforts have been put to modify the composition and structure of CdS, such as N-doped graphene grown on CdS hollow spheres,<sup>16</sup> anchoring of a molecular Ni catalyst on CdS,<sup>34</sup> coating CdS with ZIF-8 to form a core–shell structure,<sup>17</sup> decorating CdS with Pt nanoparticle,<sup>35</sup> Co complex assembled by CdS.<sup>36</sup>

In this work, CdS nanorod is used as the visible light responsive photocatalyst. CdO was grown on CdS *via* plasma treatment. The as-prepared CdO/CdS is effective for the photocatalytic reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> under visible light irradiation at room temperature. Compared with pristine CdS, this CdO/CdS catalyst exhibits higher reaction rate, nearly 5-fold higher CO generation (1.26 mmol g<sup>-1</sup> h<sup>-1</sup>) and suppresses H<sub>2</sub> generation rate (0.24 mmol g<sup>-1</sup> h<sup>-1</sup>). This study reveals the promoting effect of CdO on suppressing recombination of photogenerated carriers and on CO<sub>2</sub> adsorption, which provides a novel method to enhance photocatalytic efficiency.

## Results and discussion

Pristine CdS nanorod was prepared according to the literature.<sup>37,38</sup> The characterization of the XRD patterns of CdS could be well indexed to hexagonal wurtzite structure with good crystallinity (JCPDS no. 41-1049).<sup>39</sup> The CdO/CdS catalyst was prepared as Scheme S1† by H<sub>2</sub> plasma treatment, and then

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treated by air oxidation at ambient temperature. After H<sub>2</sub> plasma treatment, sulfur atoms are first removed, and then a small amount of CdO was formed followed by air oxidation as shown by the appearance of CdO (200) peak at 38.3° (JCPDS no. 65-2908), as confirmed by transition electron microscopy (TEM) (Fig. 1a and b). TEM images of CdO/CdS show that the surfaces of CdS nanorods are rough compared to the pristine CdS, and many round particles emerged at the surface. These particles were then investigated by HRTEM images (Fig. 1b). As presented, the three kinds of lattice fringes with fringe spacing of 0.271, 0.23, and 0.166 nm are consistent with the (111), (200), and (220) lattice plane of CdO, respectively. And the lattice fringe spacing of 0.336, and 0.36 nm are attributed to the (002), and (100) lattice plane of CdS, respectively. These results clearly indicate that CdO particles have been constructed on the surface of CdS after plasma treatment. The Cd 3d peaks of CdO/CdS red shift 1 eV compared to that of CdS samples, resulting from CdO environments on the CdS surface.<sup>40,41</sup> Raman is useful for the characterization of CdO species. Raman measurements further provided evidence for the formation of CdO on the surface of CdS (Fig. 1c). Vibrational bands at 305 cm<sup>-1</sup> and 595 cm<sup>-1</sup> are assigned to scattering and double scattering on the longitudinal optical phonon of CdS (LO and 2LO), respectively.<sup>40–42</sup> The broad and intense structure

spanning from 300 to 390 cm<sup>-1</sup> could be attributed to CdO by comparison to a reference spectrum of CdO.<sup>43</sup>

The presence of CdO at the CdS surface changes the energy band structure. The VB potentials of pristine CdS and CdO/CdS are analyzed. As shown in Fig. 1e, the VB potentials of CdO/CdS shifts positive to 1.49 eV, which means the oxidizing power of CdO/CdS is higher than CdS. The band gap of CdO/CdS was nearly the same as pristine CdS (Fig. S1 and S2†). In this case, the electrons can be more easily photoexcited from VB to the conduction band.

The separation and transfer of charge carriers were further examined through photoluminescence (PL) emission spectra, electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS), and transient photocurrent responses. As shown in Fig. 2, the PL emission spectra exhibit a strong peak at about 510 nm, which is attributed to the essential excitonic emission of CdS,<sup>44</sup> in agreement with its band gap energy, which was confirmed by the UV-vis diffuse reflectance adsorption spectra. CdO/CdS retains the light adsorption consistent with CdS, and the spectrum is slightly broadened, with a bandgap of ca. 2.40 eV (Fig. S2†). CdO/CdS shows a decreased PL intensity in comparison with CdS, demonstrating that CdO/CdS inhibits the photogenerated carrier recombination. The lifetime of the two samples were then calculated *via* a photoelectron experiment in Fig. S3,†

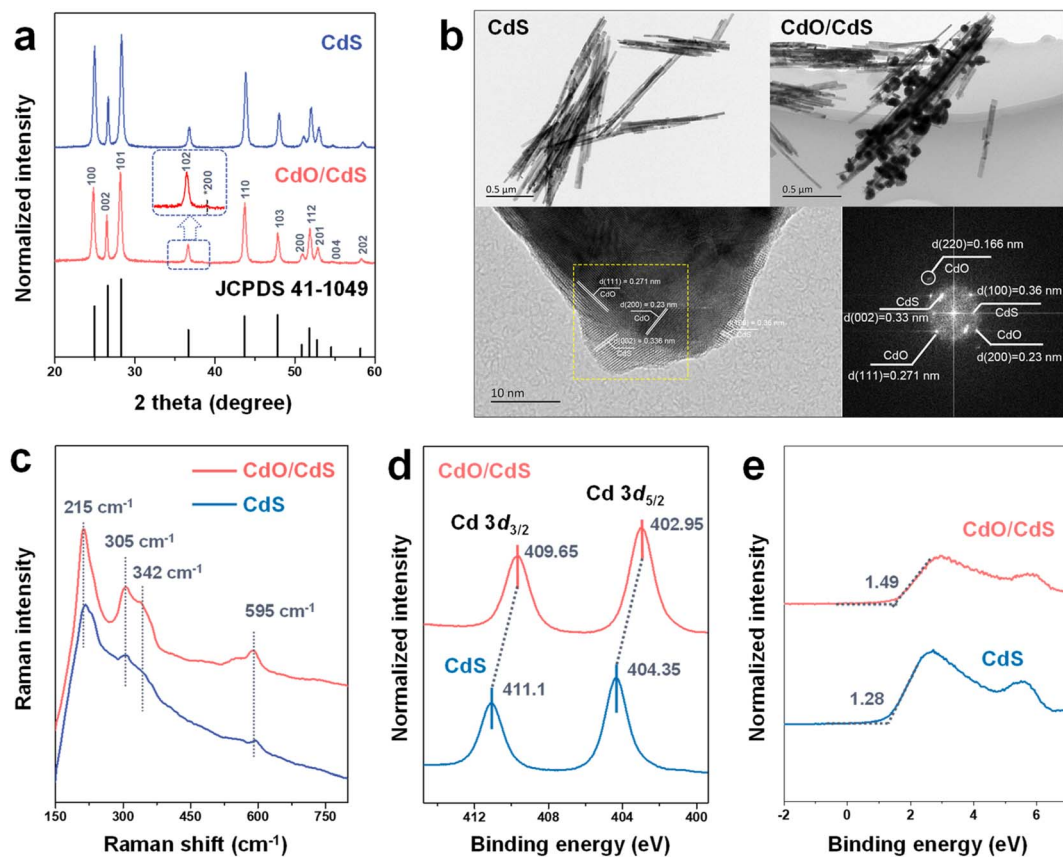


Fig. 1 Characterizations of CdS samples. (a) XRD patterns of CdS and CdO/CdS. (b) TEM and HRTEM images of CdS and CdO/CdS. (c) Raman spectra of CdS and CdO/CdS at an excitation wavelength of 785 nm. (d) XPS analysis of the Cd (3d) region of CdS and CdO/CdS. (e) Valence band spectra of CdS and CdO/CdS.



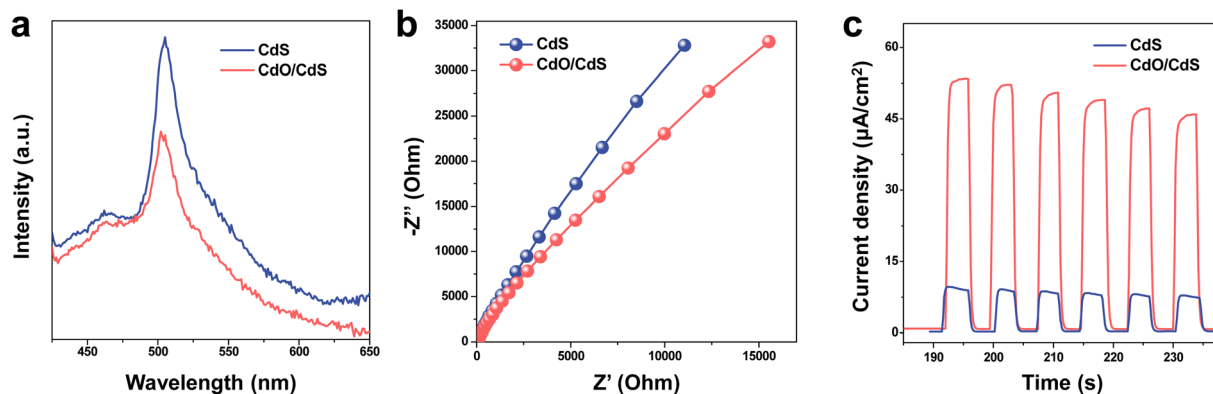


Fig. 2 Photoelectrical properties of catalysts. (a) Photoluminescence emission spectra, (b) EIS Nyquist plots, and (c) transient photocurrent responses of CdS and CdO/CdS.

which demonstrate that the lifetime of photogenerated electrons of CdO/CdS is longer than that of CdS in accordance with the PL spectra. On the other hand, the current density *vs.* time curves consist of six similar trapezoids, and the start and end of each curve edge demonstrate that the photocurrent was fast generated with light irradiation and was rapidly vanished when light was stopped. The photocurrent density of CdO/CdS is notably higher than that of CdS with several on-off cycles of light irradiation (Fig. 2b), which means a better photoinduced carrier separation. Electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS) was then carried out for further investigation. The Nyquist plot of CdO/CdS presents a reduction in the radius of the semi cycle arc compared to CdS, indicating a more efficient interfacial charge migration. These results illustrate that the photoexcited electrons and holes of CdO/CdS were separated and transmitted quickly and their recombination was inhibited.

We then investigated the catalytic performance of CdO/CdS in the CO<sub>2</sub> photocatalytic reduction under visible light (455 nm LEDs) irradiation. Gas chromatography (GC) was employed to identify and quantify the gas product, where CO

was detected as the solo reduction product and no other detectable reduction liquid products by high performance liquid chromatography (HPLC). A series of semiconductor photocatalysts were screened in CO<sub>2</sub> photocatalytic reduction to CO in MeCN-water (9 : 1) solution (Fig. S4†). Most of the widely used catalysts, such as Nb<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>, Bi<sub>2</sub>WO<sub>6</sub>, P25, Bi<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>, CeO<sub>2</sub> were inactive for this reaction. CdS was active and generated 3.4 mmol g<sub>cat.</sub><sup>-1</sup> of CO and 9.1 mmol g<sub>cat.</sub><sup>-1</sup> of H<sub>2</sub>. After plasma treatment of CdS, the activity was greatly improved. CdO/CdS produced 15.1 mmol g<sub>cat.</sub><sup>-1</sup> of CO, nearly 5 times over CdS. To exclude that CO comes from MeCN solvent, we performed the photoreaction in the absence of CO<sub>2</sub>. When CO<sub>2</sub> was replaced with argon, CO was undetected. Then we performed the time profile of photocatalytic conversion from CO<sub>2</sub> to CO over CdS and CdO/CdS. As the reaction proceeds, the yield of CO over CdO/CdS increases, which is 6 times that over pristine CdS after 6 h (Fig. 3a). And the H<sub>2</sub> productivity over CdO/CdS is lower than that over pristine CdS, which is 0.26 times of the latter (Fig. 3b). CO<sub>2</sub> reduction and H<sub>2</sub> generation are competitive reactions, and they both need photo-generated electrons. These results

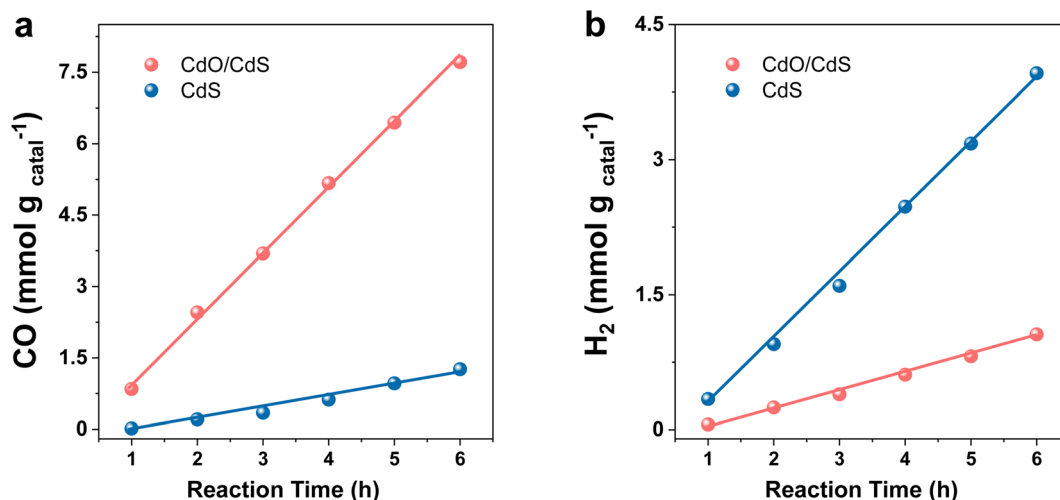


Fig. 3 Time profile of photocatalytic reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> to CO over CdS and CdO/CdS catalysts under standard reaction conditions. (a) CO productivity; (b) H<sub>2</sub> productivity.



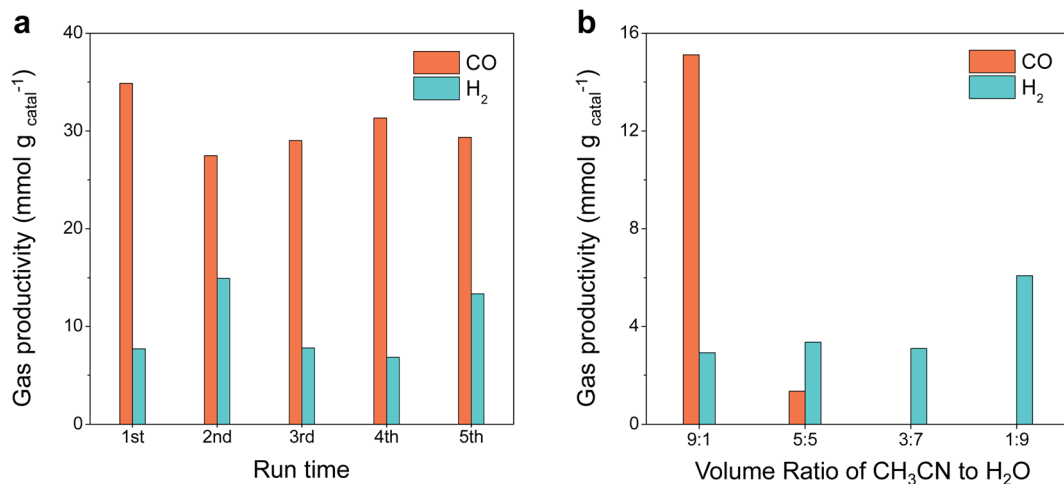


Fig. 4 The photocatalytic performance of CdO/CdS catalyst. (a) Catalyst reusability under standard reaction conditions in 24 h. (b) Solvent effect under standard reaction conditions.

showed that CdO/CdS tended to the selective reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> reduction over hydrogen evolution. The amount of CO and H<sub>2</sub> was nearly linearly increased. The catalyst is stable and could be reused for at least 5 times with no apparent loss of activity (Fig. 4a). We also investigated the solvent effect on the reaction, and when MeCN/H<sub>2</sub>O ratio was 9:1, CO generated most (Fig. 4b).

To further elucidate the reason why CdO/CdS favors CO<sub>2</sub> reduction, we then investigate the adsorption ability of the

catalysts towards CO<sub>2</sub>. After photoirradiation with 450 nm laser in the presence of CO<sub>2</sub>, no apparent peaks were observed, indicating the interaction on the catalyst surface is very weak for pristine CdS. On the contrary, CdO/CdS behaved better CO<sub>2</sub> adsorption ability. Several peaks could be observed (Fig. 5a). The peaks at 1688 and 1383 cm<sup>-1</sup> could be assigned to the bidentate bicarbonate (b-HCO<sub>3</sub><sup>2-</sup>) and bidentate carbonate (b-CO<sub>3</sub><sup>2-</sup>), respectively.<sup>45</sup> And the peaks at 1586 and 1262 cm<sup>-1</sup> could be assigned to the formate (COO<sup>-</sup>), suggesting that CO<sub>2</sub>

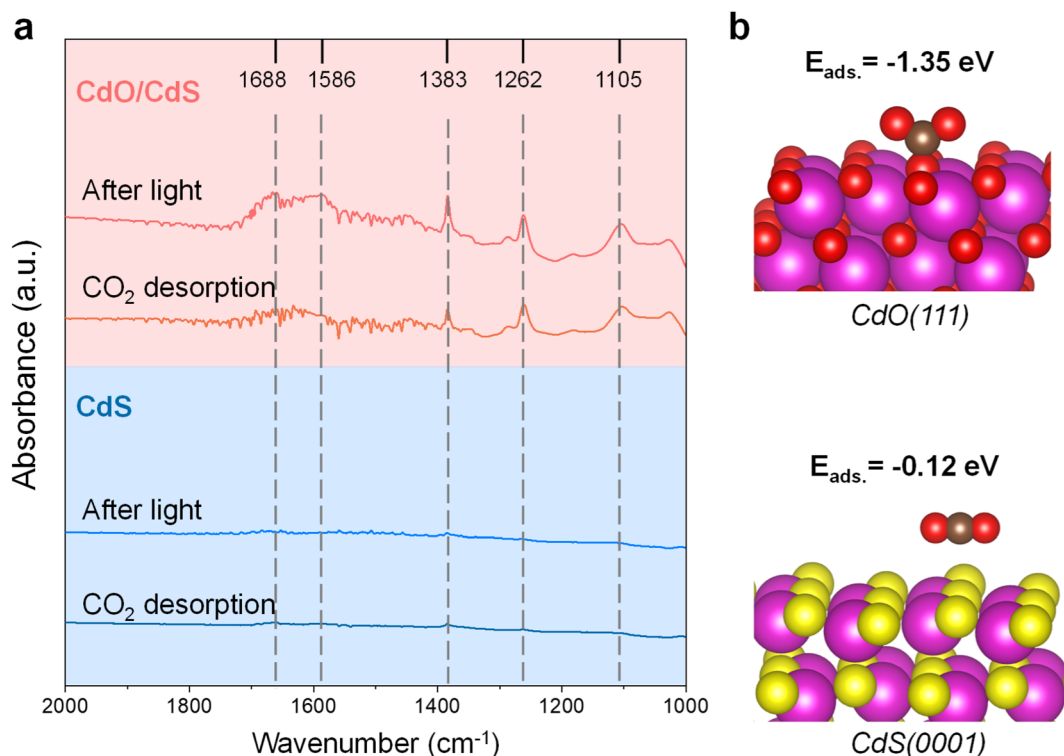


Fig. 5 CO<sub>2</sub> adsorption to CdS samples. (a) FTIR absorbance spectra of CO<sub>2</sub> adsorption to CdO/CdS and CdS. (b) CO<sub>2</sub> adsorption energy to CdO (111) and CdS (0001).



reduction could follow a COOH\* pathway.<sup>46</sup> After evacuation, these peaks still exist though some of which slightly weakened, while no apparent change happened over pristine CdS. These results demonstrate that CdO/CdS had better CO<sub>2</sub> adsorption ability. We also calculate the adsorption energy of CO<sub>2</sub> to CdO (111) and CdS (0001). The adsorption energy of CO<sub>2</sub> to CdO is higher than to CdS, which showed that the introduction of CdO facilitate the activation of CO<sub>2</sub> (Fig. 5b).

## Conclusion

In summary, we developed a method to generate CdO on CdS *via* H<sub>2</sub> plasma treatment then air oxidation. Compared with pristine CdS, CdO/CdS exhibits nearly 5-fold higher CO generation rate (1.26 mmol g<sup>-1</sup> h<sup>-1</sup>) and 0.32-fold lower H<sub>2</sub> generation (0.24 mmol g<sup>-1</sup> h<sup>-1</sup>) in CO<sub>2</sub> photocatalytic reduction. The CdO/CdS is stable and could be used for at least five times without apparent loss of activity. Detailed studies demonstrate that CdO could facilitate separation of electron-hole pairs and could promote CO<sub>2</sub> adsorption. The present work reports the pivotal effect of CdO on CO<sub>2</sub> photocatalytic reduction, which provides a novel and facile method for increasing photocatalytic efficiency.

## Experimental section

### Materials

Cd(NO<sub>3</sub>)<sub>2</sub>·4H<sub>2</sub>O (99%) was purchased from Shanghai Macklin Biochemical Co., Ltd. Thiourea (99%) and (±)1-phenylethanol (98%) were purchased from Shanghai Aladdin Bio-Chem Technology Co., Ltd. Ethylenediamine (99%) and acetonitrile (99%) were purchased from Damao Chemical Reagent Factory. All the reagents were used as received without further purification.

### Preparation of catalysts

CdS nanorods were synthesized by a modified solvothermal method according to the literature. In a typical procedure, 4.62 g of cadmium nitrate and 4.62 g of thiourea were placed in a Teflon-lined steel chamber and filled with ethylenediamine, followed by 160 °C treatment for 24 hours. After cooling to room temperature, the resulting solid products were collected by systematic centrifugation, washed with deionized water. The products were then dried at 60 °C overnight. CdS nanorods were obtained finally as a yellow powder. The as-prepared CdS nanorods were then treated by radio-frequency excited plasma at room temperature for 20 minutes to afford CdO/CdS when the vacuum was kept around 0.2 mbar with a flow of H<sub>2</sub> at 10 mL min<sup>-1</sup>, and the power was kept as 200 W. Then the samples were then kept with a flow of air to normal pressure and room temperature to finally afford CdO/CdS.

### Characterizations

Crystalline information was measured by powder X-ray diffraction (XRD) patterns, conducted on a PANalytical X-Pert PRO diffractometer by using Cu K $\alpha$  radiation at 40 kV and 20 mA.

Continuous scans were in the 2 $\theta$  range from 10°–80°. The surface structure of obtained catalysts was identified by X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) analyses, performed at Thermo Fischer, ESCALAB Xi+. The binding energy was referenced to the C 1s peak at 284.80 eV. The catalyst morphology characteristics were observed by STEM images using a Titan G2 60-300. UV-vis DRS were recorded on a UV-vis spectrophotometer (UV-2600) at room temperature in the range of 300–900 nm with BaSO<sub>4</sub> as the background. Raman spectra were obtained at ExR610-PT7 at an excitation of 785 nm. Photoluminescence (PL) experiments were conducted on a Photon Technology International QM 400 Fluorescence Spectrophotometer. The excitation wavelength was 400 nm obtained by using a xenon lamp as the excitation source at room temperature. The electrochemical tests were conducted on an electrochemical workstation (Corrtest CS2350H). A three-electrode system with a platinum-plate electrode as the counter electrode and a saturated calomel electrode (SCE) as the reference electrode was used for measurements. Na<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub> (0.5 M) was used as the electrolyte solution.

### Reaction procedure and product analysis

The reaction was carried out in homemade LED photoreactors. Typically, 5 mg of catalyst and 0.1 mL of triethylamine were added into 1 mL of solvent in a 6.5 mL of quartz tube reactor, then the system was completely replaced with CO<sub>2</sub> before sealed with a cap. For the standard reaction conditions, 0.9 mL of CH<sub>3</sub>CN, 0.1 mL of H<sub>2</sub>O were used as solvent and reacted for 12 h. This quartz tube reactor could stand up 0.5 MPa pressure. The quartz tube was then irradiated with 455 nm LED light (18 W, 155 mW cm<sup>-2</sup>) *via* side irradiation. The reaction temperature was kept between 25 and 35 °C. After the reaction, gas-phase products were analyzed by gas chromatography (GC) equipped with a TCD detector and TDX-01 column.

### Adsorption FTIR

The CO<sub>2</sub> adsorption FTIR spectra were recorded using Thermo Scientific Nicolet iS10 IR spectrometer. The spectra of the adsorbed CO<sub>2</sub> molecules have subtracted the spectra of the samples before the adsorption. CO<sub>2</sub>-adsorption FTIR spectra were conducted as follows: the CdS samples were placed in a homemade IR cell and evacuated ( $P < 10^{-3}$  Pa) at 423 K for 0.5 h. Then, CO<sub>2</sub> was introduced into the cell at 303 K and left for 0.5 h. The cell was then evacuated for 0.5 h ( $P < 10^{-2}$  Pa) to remove the physically adsorbed CO<sub>2</sub>. Then CO<sub>2</sub> vapor was again introduced into the cell at 303 K and left for 0.5 h upon photoirradiation with 450 nm laser (300 mW cm<sup>-2</sup>). The cell was then evacuated for 0.5 h ( $P < 10^{-2}$  Pa) to remove the physically adsorbed CO<sub>2</sub>.

### DFT calculation settings

All of the first-principles electronic structure calculations were carried out using the Vienna *Ab initio* Simulation Package (VASP),<sup>47</sup> one density functional theory implementation. The exchange–correlation potential was described by the Perdew–Burke–Ernzerhof (PBE)<sup>48</sup> formulation of the generalized



gradient approximation (GGA). The ion–electron interactions were represented by the projector augmented wave (PAW)<sup>49</sup> method. A plane wave basis set with an energy cutoff of 400 eV was used. The *k*-point sampling was performed using the Monkhorst–Pack scheme.<sup>50</sup> The electronic self-consistent minimization was converged to 10<sup>−5</sup> eV, and the geometry optimization was converged to −0.02 eV. The lattice constants of CdS were optimized to be *a* = 4.200 Å, *b* = 4.191 and *c* = 6.817 Å, in good agreement with the experimental constants, *a* = 4.14 Å and *c* = 6.72 Å.<sup>37,44,51</sup> We used them to build a (2 × 2/√3) CdS (001) slab with 10 atomic layers and a vacuum of 15 Å. Atoms in the bottom 6 atomic layers were fixed to their bulk positions, while the rest were allowed to fully relax. A 4 × 2 × 1 *k*-point mesh was used. The lattice constants of CdO were optimized to be *a* = *b* = *c* = 4.695 Å. We used them to build a (1 × 2) CdS (001) slab with 5 atomic layers and a vacuum of 15 Å. Atoms in the bottom 3 atomic layers were fixed to their bulk positions, while the rest were allowed to fully relax. A 4 × 2 × 1 *k*-point mesh was used.

## Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no competing interests.

## Acknowledgements

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