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Influence of Fluorination on CO₂ Adsorption in Materials Derived from Fluorinated Covalent Triazine Framework Precursors

Received 00th January 20xx, Accepted 00th January 20xx Zhenzhen Yang,^{a, b} Song Wang,^c Zihao Zhang,^a Wei Guo,^a Kecheng Jie,^a Mohamed I. Hashim,^d Ognjen Š. Miljanic,^d De-en Jiang,^c Ilja Popovs,^{b, *} and Sheng Dai^{a, b, *}

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Ultra-nanoporous materials derived from fluorinated covalent triazine frameworks (CTFs) have been developed for highly efficient CO_2 capture. CO_2 uptake capacity of 6.58 mmol g⁻¹ at 273 K, 1 bar (2.45 mmol g⁻¹ at 0.15 bar) is achieved. The excellent performance is due to the presence of ultra-micropores (0.6~0.7 nm) that tightly fit CO_2 and strong electrostatic interactions from the residual fluorine atoms within the framework. Both molecular simulation and deep learning study predict that CTFs with F content of ~4.8 wt% and pore size distribution around ~0.7 nm can give rise to the highest CO_2 uptake capacity.

CO₂ capture and sequestration (CCS) represents a critical component of efforts aimed at reducing anthropogenic CO₂ emissions.¹⁻⁸ Aqueous alkylamine solutions are currently used for CO₂ capture in power plants but have severe energy penalties associated with regeneration of the loaded amine solution.⁸⁻¹¹ Physisorption based CO₂ capture using solid-state porous organic polymers (POPs) stands out as a potential alternative to liquid- or solvent-based capture techniques, due to their excellent chemical and thermal stability, tunable porosity and the ability to impart CO2-philic functionalities for increasing the CO₂ capture performance.^{1, 11-20} Nitrogen-rich covalent triazine frameworks (CTFs), a subclass of POPs, are promising candidates for CCS.²¹⁻²⁹ Particularly, fluorinated CTFderived materials, e.g. FCTF-1²⁶ and F-DCBP-CTF,²⁷ are reported to exhibit enhanced CO₂ uptake capacity (5.53 and 5.98 mmol g⁻¹ at 273 K, 1 bar, respectively) compared with the nonfluorinated analogues. Although several reports already discussed the potential for CO₂ capture using CTFs derived from

nitrile monomers, higher CO₂ uptake capacities are still required for practical utilization in CO₂ adsorption/purification from flue gas mixtures.^{23, 30} In addition, a systematic elucidation of the relationship between CO₂ capture capacity and functionality content, as well as pore size distribution, especially the presence of ultra-micropores with the dimensions close to the kinetic diameters of CO₂ (0.330 nm),³¹ has not been explicitly treated, due to a paucity of available nitrile monomers. To achieve this goal, fabrication of novel CTF-derived materials with different textural structures (e.g. surface area, pore size distribution) and fluorine contents is needed and challenging, and this will rely on the rational design of aromatic nitrile monomers.

Herein, we report the synthesis of a series of tailor-made extensively fluorinated CTF derived materials, displaying high surface areas (up to 2085 m² g⁻¹), extensive ultra-micropores (0.5~1.6 nm) and exceptional CO₂ adsorption capacities (up to 6.58 and 4.33 mmol g⁻¹ at 273 K and 298 K, respectively). The relationship between the CO₂ capacities, the residual F contents, and pore size distributions are systematically studied experimentally and by employing molecular simulations. Besides the enhancement of fluorine introduction to CO₂ uptake capacity, in this work it was found that for microporous CTF-derived materials with the same chemical composition, the optimal CO₂ uptake capacity was obtained by that with micropore size distribution around ~0.7 nm. For CTF-derived materials with the same pore size, e.g. 0.7 nm, it was found that fluorine content of ~4.8 wt% within the skeleton led to the highest CO₂ uptake capacity. This innovative approach not only enables achievement of an exceptionally high CO₂ uptake but simultaneously provides guidelines for designing POPs with an excellent performance in gas adsorption and separation.

Firstly, the fluorinated CTF derived material ($F_{12}CTF-3$) is prepared via the ionothermal technique using fluorinated trinitrile monomer ($F_{12}CN-3$) with heating treatment at different temperatures (Figure 1A, for details, see the Electronic Supplementary Information).³²⁻³⁶ The obtained materials are denoted as $F_{12}CTF-3-T$ (T is the heating temperature). For

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Figure 1. (A) Synthetic route and structure of CTF materials (CTF-3 and F12CTF-3). (B) Structures of oxygen and fluorine-bifunctionalized CTFs.

comparison, non-fluorinated CTF-3 is also synthesized from CN-3 with reaction temperature of 600 °C. Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy (FT-IR) reveals the formation of triazine unit in the sample F12CTF-3-350 obtained at low temperature, with peaks located at 1327, 1388 and 1463 cm⁻¹ (Figure S1).³⁷ C=N (1655 cm⁻¹) and its ionic intermediate form C=N $^{\delta+}$ (1709 cm⁻¹) ¹) are also present. Although the heating temperature is low, almost all the cyano groups are involved in the trimerization reaction, with no signal locating around 2251 cm⁻¹, which is obviously shown in the monomer (F₁₂CN-3). The presence of C-F bond in the monomer is evidenced by the peak displaying around 985 cm⁻¹,³⁸ which is also observed in $F_{12}CTF$ -3-350. Decomposition and rearrangement of the polymer skeleton is observed when the heating temperature increased. In the materials of F12CTF-3-450, F12CTF-3-600, F12CTF-3-800 and CTF-3, only weak peaks belonging to C=C and C-N functionalities could be observed. The solid state ¹³C cross-polarization magicangle-spinning (CP/MAS) NMR spectra of the the material F₁₂CTF-3-350 shows peaks centred at 142.5 ppm and 161.1 ppm for the carbon in C-F bond and sp² carbons from the triazine unit, respectively.³⁹ The broad peak from 100~130 ppm is assigned to the signal of carbons in the benzene ring. While for materials obtained by further increasing the heating temperature to 450~800 °C, only one broad peak ranging from 100~170 ppm is present, indicating decomposition and rearrangement of the material structures. X-ray power diffraction (XRD) patterns for $F_{12}CTF\mbox{-}3\mbox{-}T$ and $CTF\mbox{-}3$ show that the whole structures of the materials obtained in this work are amorphous (Figure S3).

 $F_{12}CTF-3-600$ (referred as $F_{12}CTF-3$) is selected for further characterization. Raman spectrum of $F_{12}CTF-3$ shows both peaks for structure defects (ID) and graphitic carbon (IG), with

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the intensity ratio of 1.07 (Figure S4). The chemical state and electronic state of the elements in $F_{12}CTF-3$ are investigated by X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) (Figure S5). The obtained C1s spectrum supports the existence of aromatic C (284.08 eV), C-N bond (285.38 eV) and residual amount of C-F bond (288.68 eV). N1s spectrum indicates the presence of pyridinic (397.87 eV, 26.0%) and pyrrolic nitrogen (400.33 eV, 74.0%). Despite the high temperature used during the synthesis of $F_{12}CTF-3$ (up to 600 °C), the residual fluorine content of up to 3.7 wt% is still present in the material, with the two peaks in its F1s spectrum that correspond to semi-ionic (687.8 eV) and

covalent C-F bonds (689.2 eV).

Nitrogen sorption studies at 77 K (Figure 2A) show a first step at $P/P_0 < 0.05$, corresponding to gas sorption in micropores. F12CTF-3 exhibits a typical type I isotherm, implying a solely microporous structure. For CTF-3, the sorption isotherm (Type IV) of the material shows a further uptake of N_2 in the medium relative pressure region as well as a small hysteresis, reflecting a substantial contribution of additional small mesopores. The Brunauer-Emmett-Teller (BET) surface areas are evaluated to be 1558 and 1454 m² g⁻¹ for F₁₂CTF-3 and CTF-3, respectively (Figure S6). The pore-size of F12CTF-3 calculated by non-linear density functional theory (NLDFT) shows well-defined ultrananopore distributions at 0.6~0.7 nm (Figure 2B). In contrast, CTF-3 has major peaks centred at 1.0 nm and 3.0 nm with a significantly broader distribution. Replacing H atoms with F atoms in the starting material apparently results in the CTFs with a reduced effective pore size. In addition, the total pore volume in F12CTF-3 (1.32 cm³ g⁻¹) is higher than that in CTF-3 (0.98 cm³ g⁻¹).

The CO_2 adsorption performance of $F_{12}CTF-3$ is assessed by CO₂ isotherms at 273 K and 298 K (Figure 2C). Notably, although BET surface area of F₁₂CTF-3 is only marginally higher than that of CTF-3, F₁₂CTF-3 exhibits a significantly higher CO₂ adsorption capacity at 1 bar (6.58 mmol g⁻¹ at 273 K and 4.33 mmol g⁻¹ at 298 K), almost two times higher than that of CTF-3 (2.13 mmol g^{-1} at 273 K and 1.34 mmol g^{-1} at 298 K). Adsorption of CO₂ at ~0.15 bar is more relevant to practical CO₂ capture since flue gas contains ~15% CO₂ at total pressure of ~1 bar.¹ It can be seen that at low CO₂ pressure (0.15 bar) and 273 K, F₁₂CTF-3 adsorbs 2.45 mmol g⁻¹ CO₂, remaining significantly higher than CTF-3 (0.57 mmol g⁻¹). Notably, at 273 K, F₁₂CTF-3 exhibits a higher CO₂ uptake capacity at 0.15 bar (2.45 mmol g⁻¹) compared to CTF-3 at 1 bar (2.13 mmol g⁻¹). The CO₂ uptake of F12CTF-3 at 273 K and 1 bar is among the highest CO2 capacities for all POP-based adsorbents reported so far (Table S1). For example, a porous polymer framework (PPF-1) via imine condensation shows a CO₂ capacity of 6.07 mmol g⁻¹ (273 K, 1 bar).40 Among various CTF materials, bipyridine-CTF synthesized at 600 °C exhibited a CO₂ uptake capacity of 5.58 mmol g⁻¹ (273 K, 1 bar).²² The best CTF-based adsorbent up to now was obtained by our group via an in situ doping strategy. The generated hexaazatriphenylene-based CTF (HAT-CTF-450/600) exhibited high CO₂ uptake capacities (6.3 mmol g⁻¹ at 273, 1 bar).²¹ The performance of $F_{12}CTF-3$ in this study even surpasses the CO₂ uptake capacity of the N-doped hierarchical Journal Name

carbon decorated with ultra-small pores (d < 0.5 nm) (SU-MAC-500), showing an impressive CO_2 uptake of



Figure 2. (A) Nitrogen isotherms, (B) pore size distributions, (C) CO₂ uptake isotherms and (D) CO₂ adsorption capacities at 1 bar and Q_{et} for F₁₂CTF-3 synthesized at different temperatures. (E) CO₂ uptake capacities at 0.15 and 1 bar for oxygen and fluorine bifunctionalized O-CTF-3 and (F) O-CTF-2.

6.03 mmol g⁻¹ (273 K, 1 bar).⁴¹ Very recently, a covalent quinazoline networks (CQNs) was reported showing CO₂ capacity of 7.16 mmol g⁻¹ at 273 K and 1 bar.¹⁸ Notably, $F_{12}CTF$ -**3** also exhibits much higher CO₂ selectivity over N₂ and CH₄ compared to **CTF-3** (Figure S7). The isosteric heats of adsorption (Q_{st}) at low adsorption values are calculated to be 24.5 and 21.0 kJ mol⁻¹ for $F_{12}CTF$ -**3** and **CTF-3**, respectively, indicating a stronger dipole-quadrupole interaction between the polarizable CO₂ molecules and the $F_{12}CTF$ -**3** framework (Figure S8).

It is well-known that ionothermal reaction temperature has a profound effect on the structural properties of the resultant CTFs.^{21, 32, 34, 42} CO₂ Adsorption capacity of the resultant F₁₂CTF-**3-T** (T represents the temperature) is investigated. As shown in Figure 2D and Table S2, although the BET surface areas increase in order: F₁₂CTF-3-350 < F₁₂CTF-3-450 < F₁₂CTF-3-600 < F₁₂CTF-**3-450/600** < F₁₂CTF-3-800, materials obtained at 450~600 °C exhibit similar CO₂ uptake capacities, in the range of 6.43~6.58 mmol g⁻¹ at 273 K and 1 bar. Comparatively, HAT-CTF-450 reported by our group only had CO₂ capacity of 4.4 mmol g⁻¹ at 273 K and 1 bar.²¹ This is probably due to the high reactivity of the fluorinated monomers, which ensure that the trimerization of the nitrile groups is almost complete at 450 °C. In contrast, F12CTF-3-350 only shows a low CO2 capacity of 1.79 mmol g-1, probably owing to its low surface are (842 m² g⁻¹) compared with materials obtained at higher temperature (450~800 °C). Thermogravimetric analysis (TGA) of F12CTF-3-350 indicates that it begins to decompose at ~450 °C (Figure S9). As the reaction temperature increases to 800 °C, although the

resultant F12CTF-3-800 has the highest BET surface area (2085 $m^2 g^{-1}$), its CO₂ capacity is only 4.70 mmol g^{-1} at 273 K and 1 bar. XPS analysis of F12CTF-3-T shows that the residual fluorine content in the materials decreases as the ionothermal temperature increases, from 16.06 wt% in F12CTF-3-350 to 2.74 wt% in $F_{12}CTF\mbox{-}3\mbox{-}800$ (Table S2). The weakening in the CO_2sorbent interactions is evident from the decreased Q_{st}, 24.2~26.8 kJ mol⁻¹ for CTFs obtained at 350~600 °C (Figure S10), while only 18 kJ mol⁻¹ for F₁₂CTF-3-800, indicating the important role of CO₂-philic F atoms present within the framework.⁴³⁻⁴⁵ From the structure characterization viewpoint, it appears that neither the specific surface area nor the total pore volume directly contribute to the CO₂ capacities (Table S2 and Figure S11). Compared with the results obtained for F12CTF-3-600, F12CTF-3-450 shows higher surface area, CO2-philic N and F contents, while it exhibits similar CO₂ uptake capacity with $\ensuremath{\textbf{F_{12}CTF-3-600}}$. This was probably due to the higher composition of ultra-micropores (~0.5 nm) in F₁₂CTF-3-600 (Figure S11). With the increase of the reaction temperature, pore size distributions in the obtained CTFs show that the 0.5 and 1.1 nm peaks decrease in intensity, while the 1.6 and 2.5 nm peaks increase. This suggests that high-temperature leads to further loss of fluorine and creates additional volume of wider pores within the CTF frameworks. Therefore, high adsorption capacity of fluorinated CTF derived material towards CO₂ is due to presence of ultramicropores (<1.1 nm) that tightly fit CO₂ and strong electrostatics from F atoms that line the pore surface.

To further uncover the impact of fluorination on the CO_2 capacities, two other kinds of ether group-linked di- and trinitriles (O-F_nCN-3/2) with different number of fluorine

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substituents on the benzene rings are designed and the corresponding CTF derived materials are obtained through ionothermal method (Figure 1B and Scheme S1, for details, see the Electronic Supplementary Information). As shown in Figure 2E and 2F, from O-CTF-3 to O-F12CTF-3, and O-CTF-2 to O- $F_{16}CTF-2$, the CO₂ adsorption capacities at 273 K and 298 K increase as the number of F atoms on the benzene rings increases (Table S3). Notably, the position of the F-substituted benzene rings only has small effect on the final CO₂ uptake performance, as similar CO₂ capacities for O-F₈CTF-2 and O-F₈CTF-2' are obtained. To gain further insight into the influences of various parameters on CO₂ uptake, elemental (C, H, N and F) analysis of O-CTF-2 with different fluorine content is conducted (Table S4). Notably, the fluorine content in O-F₈CTF-2 and O-F₈CTF-2' is 0.78 wt% and 4.46 wt%, respectively, despite the same fluorine content in their precursor (28.6 wt%), probably owing to the loss of fluorinated benzene ring through ether group cleavage. The nitrogen content in **O-F₈CTF-2** (4.08 wt%) and O-F₈CTF-2' (4.24 wt%) shows no significant difference. Correspondingly, elimination of more fluorine atoms is estimated to give material with higher surface area. Indeed, O-F₈CTF-2 shows higher BET surface area (1878 m² g⁻¹) than that of O-F₈CTF-2' (1403 m² g⁻¹). As shown in Figure 2F, O-F₈CTF-2 and O-F₈CTF-2' exhibit similar CO₂ uptake capacities, which is in opposite trend with the surface area. Therefore, we can conclude that high fluorine content plays important role in the CO₂ uptake enhancement.

Molecular simulations of CO_2 adsorption were performed to further understand the CO_2 sorption behavior. However, as shown

by the structural characterization results, the whole structures of the CTF-derived materials are amorphous, which is difficult to be investigated using molecular simulation. In addition, several parameters are involved and influence the CO₂ uptake capacities of the materials. We need to figure out a way to make variation of only one parameter while keep others under the same conditions. Therefore, in the following work, crystalline skeletons are adopted, trying to gain some tendency about the influence of pore size distributions and fluorine contents on the CO₂ uptake capacities. Dispersion-corrected density functional theory calculations (DTF-D3) were performed with the Vienna ab initio simulation package (VASP) to optimize the cells and structures of CTF-3 and F12CTF-3. The Perdew-Burke-Ernzerhof (PBE) form of the generalizedgradient approximation (GGA) was used for electron exchange and correlation. The projector-augmented-wave (PAW) method was used to describe the electron-core interaction with the cutoff energy of 450 eV for the planewave bases. To simulate the uptake of CO₂, grand canonical Monte Carlo (GCMC) simulations (constant chemical potential μ , volume V and temperature T) were carried out for the porous materials with a slit-pore model based on the experimental pore size distributions. The CO₂ adsorption data were fitted using the virial equation. The pore sizes of 0.6 nm, 0.7 nm and 1.0 nm, 3.0 nm were used for F12CTF-3 and CTF-3, respectively. The universal force field (UFF) parameters were chosen for CTFs and CO2. The partial atomic charges of CTFs were calculated by the Repeating Electrostatic Potential Extracted Atomic charges (REPEAT) method based on DFT-derived electrostatic potential. All GCMC simulations were run for 107 steps to obtain sufficient statistics



Figure 3. The simulated (symbol) and measured CO2 adsorption data (line) of (A) F₁₂CTF-3 and (B) CTF-3 at 273 K (solid line and symbol) and 298 K (dashed line and hollow symbol). (C) Simulated CO₂ uptake by CTF-3 having pore size of 0.7 nm with different F content.

For **F**₁₂**CTF-3**, at 273 K, pores with diameters of 0.6 and 0.7 nm shows similar simulated CO₂ uptake, which fits well with the experimental result (Figure 3A). At 298 K, material with pore size of 0.7 nm shows higher simulated CO₂ sorption performance than that with 0.6 nm, which is closer to the experimental result. This is also in accordance with the previous reports that a cylindrical pore size between 0.7 and 0.8 nm would be most beneficial for CO₂ capture with the maximum potential energy surface (PES) overlap and maximum amount of CO₂ adsorbed.⁴⁶ For **CTF-3**, the simulated CO₂ uptake with material having pore size of 1.0 nm is closer to the experimental results both at 273 K and 298 K, which is obviously higher than that with pore size of 3.0 nm (Figure 3B). The snapshots of CO₂ distribution at 1 bar show that CO_2 molecules mainly locate within the interlayer space of the CTF materials (Figure S12). To study the influence of F content, **CTF-3** materials with different number of fluorine atoms on the backbone are employed, and the simulation results showed that the highest CO_2 uptake capacity (10.88 mmol g⁻¹ at 273 K) is obtained by **F₁CTF-3**, corresponding to F content of 4.8 wt% (Figure 3C, Table S5 and Figure S13). Higher F content leads to decreased CO_2 uptake capacity, mainly due to the higher molecular weight of F compared with H. Enhanced CO_2 uptake by F introduction is also evidenced by the predicted CO_2 uptake using a deep learning method (Table S6).⁴⁷ The result shows that, with the same surface areas, total pore volumes and micropore volumes, CTFs with F content of < 7 wt% obtained in this work exhibit much higher CO_2 capacity compared with carbon materials. However, if the F content in **F**₁₂**CTF-3-350** is too high, e.g. 16 wt%, lower CO_2 capacity will be obtained compared with carbons under otherwise identical conditions.

Conclusions

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In conclusion, a novel fluorinated ultra nanoporous CTF material ($F_{12}CTF-3$) has been developed, exhibiting CO₂ uptake capacity of 6.58 mmol g⁻¹ at 273 K and 1 bar, which is among the highest values of the known POPs. High CO₂ uptake (6.43 mmol g⁻¹ at 273 K, 1 bar) can be maintained with material synthesized at low temperature (450 °C). Molecular simulations and deep learning study provide further rationale of the importance of optimal fluorine content in the residual structure in combination with narrow nanopore distribution on the observed CO₂ capacity and selectivity. Our study underscores the role of fluorine not only as a CO₂-philic group but also as porosity forming group, in turn providing guidelines towards the rational design and development of new nanoporous materials for efficient CO₂ capture.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

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