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# MINIREVIEW

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# Alternatives to water oxidation in the photocatalytic water splitting reaction for solar hydrogen production

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The photocatalytic water splitting process to produce  $H_2$  is an attractive approach to meet energy demands while achieving carbon emission reduction targets. However, none of the current photocatalytic devices meets the criteria for practical sustainable  $H_2$  production due to their insufficient efficiency and the resulting high  $H_2$  cost. Economic viability may be achieved by simultaneously producing more valuable products than  $O_2$  or integrating with reforming processes of real waste streams, such as plastic and food waste. Research over the past decade has begun to investigate the possibility of replacing water oxidation with more kinetically and thermodynamically facile oxidation reactions. We summarize how various alternative photo-oxidation reactions can be combined with proton reduction in photocatalysis to achieve chemical valorization with concurrent  $H_2$  production. By examining the current advantages and challenges of these oxidation reactions, we intend to demonstrate that these technologies would contribute to providing  $H_2$  energy, while also producing high-value chemicals for a sustainable chemical industry and eliminating waste.

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As humanity moves forward into the 21st century, the supplementation of clean and sustainable energy is one of our greatest scientific and technical challenges. The photocatalytic water splitting process using nanoparticulate photocatalysts and solar energy is a leading candidate to achieve low-carbon production of  $H_2$  as a clean and sustainable energy carrier. In this process, water is split into  $H_2$  and  $O_2$  *via* the following redox reactions (eqn (1) and (2); pH 0 in aqueous solution *versus* (normal hydrogen electrode) NHE, 25 °C, 1 atm gas pressure, and 1 M for other solutes):

$$2H^+ + 2e^- \rightarrow H_2 \quad E^{\circ} = 0 \text{ V} \tag{1}$$

$$2H_2O \rightarrow O_2 + 4H^+ + 4e^ E^0 = +1.23 \text{ V}$$
 (2)

Water splitting is a non-spontaneous chemical reaction involving water oxidation to  $O_2$ , which requires four electrons to simultaneously transfer from at least two water molecules. Photocatalysis is a light-driven chemical process that involves oxidation and reduction reactions by the photogenerated electrons and holes. To achieve the photocatalytic water splitting reaction, the conduction band minimum must be more nega-

tive than the H<sup>+</sup> to H<sub>2</sub> reduction potential, while the valence band maximum must be more positive than the H<sub>2</sub>O to O<sub>2</sub> oxidation potential. Consequently, the minimum theoretical energy required to initiate the water-splitting reaction is 1.23 eV. However, O2 evolution from water leads to sluggish kinetics and high additional kinetic overpotentials, 1,2 making photocatalytic H<sub>2</sub> evolution need the use of sacrificial reagents to provide an electron source.3-5 Specifically, the overpotential losses of the oxygen evolution reaction (OER) can reach up to 30%, resulting in a significant amount of wasted energy. 6 In addition, the lack of effective methods to separate the produced O2 and H2 gases is a key problem for the practical application of photocatalytic water splitting.7 As a result of these challenges, increasing attention is being focused on emerging replacements for the OER that may support an expanding H2 economy globally.

In this minireview, we highlight a variety of key reactions that are well suited as potential replacements for the OER, focusing on the recent developments in the study of photoreforming and photochemical oxidation reactions to produce value-added organic and inorganic products that have received considerable attention in the literature, such as formic acid (~1.1 \$ per kg) production from waste PET ( $\leq$ 0 \$ per kg) and H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> (~0.7 \$ per kg) formation by water (~2.9 × 10<sup>-4</sup> \$ per kg) oxidation. <sup>8,9</sup> These reactions are appealing because they would enable (1) the production of more valuable chemicals than O<sub>2</sub> (~0.1 \$ per kg) alongside the production of H<sub>2</sub>; (2) the elimin-

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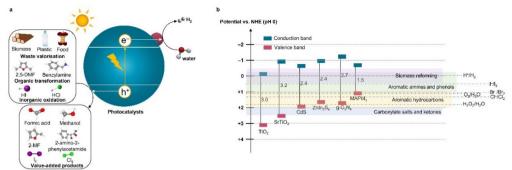


Fig. 1 (a) Diagram of the photooxidation reactions rather than water-to-O<sub>2</sub> oxidation combing with solar H<sub>2</sub> production. (b) Band structures of representative photocatalysts and standard redox potentials for some common oxidation reactions. Data were obtained from ref. 6.

ation of the need for a H2 and O2 mixture separation unit, thereby lowering the cost, improving the safety, and simplifying the design of photocatalytic processes; and (3) reduced overpotential due to the simper 1 or 2 electron net oxidation mechanisms, which would result in an increased conversion efficiency and reaction rate.6 Under light irradiation, an inorganic or organic substrate is oxidized by the photoexcited holes at the valence band, which subsequently generated valuable chemicals or CO<sub>2</sub> or intermediate products and protons (Fig. 1a). The protons are reduced by electrons at the conduction band to produce H<sub>2</sub>. While the direct oxidation of alternative substrates combined with the production of clean H2 can be feasibly carried out using various technologies including photoelectrochemical and photocatalytic systems, 6,7,10 we have targeted cases that have been demonstrated using nanoparticulate photocatalysts due to their potential for large-scale operations.



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### Photoreforming

Photocatalytic reforming that harnesses solar energy to convert sustainable or waste feedstocks for H2 generation has become one of the most rapidly evolving applications in the field due to its ability to valorize a range of feedstocks especially biomass, food and plastics (≤0 \$ per kg) to both energy and value-added products (such as formic acid (~1.1 \$ per kg), methanol ( $\sim 0.6$  \$ per kg), acetaldehyde ( $\sim 2$  \$ per kg) and lactic acid (~3 \$ per kg)), as listed in Table 1.9 Research trends highlight the shift from the early work which focused on simple model substrates such as ethanol, glycerol, and cellulose to more recent work that utilizes real waste, making the process more complex but more economically and environmentally sustainable.11 The energetics of coupling the oxidation of a variety of common organic waste substrates with H<sub>2</sub> evolution are nearly neutral (Fig. 1b), for example, glucose oxidation (eqn (3)), making it more favorable than water splitting, although these oxidation reactions involve multiple electron transfer steps. 12 Theoretically, coupling photoreforming with H2 production would no longer restrict the use of semiconductors with deep valence bands, allowing the application of those with a smaller bandgap. The photocatalytic reforming could therefore be driven by a large portion of incident sunlight including visible and IR parts.

$$C_6H_{12}O_6 + 6H_2O \rightarrow 6CO_2 + 24H^+ + 24e^-$$
  
 $E^\circ = -0.001 \text{ V vs. NHE}$  (3)

$$C_x H_y O_z + (2x - z) H_2 O \xrightarrow{hv} x CO_2 + \left(2x - z + \frac{y}{2}\right) H_2$$
 (4)

Initially, photocatalytic reforming research centered on the production of H2 from a variety of lignocellulose biomassderived feedstocks, the most abundant and non-edible biomass resource, including monosaccharides, such as pentoses (ribose and arabinose) and hexoses (glucose, fructose, galactose, and mannose), alcohols (methanol, propanol, ethanol, and butanol) and organic acids (formic acid and acetic acid). 12-19 Theoretically, in the proposed biomass photoreforming process, photoexcited holes lead to the oxidation of biomass components and derivatives (denoted as  $C_xH_yO_z$ ),

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 Table 1
 Performance metrics for some recent representative solar fuel production systems using alternative photooxidation reactions to the OER

Substrates	Photocatalysts	Reaction conditions	Products	Efficiency	Reaction time	Ref.
Glucose	$Pt/C_3N_4 \left(\sim 1 \ \mu m\right)$	40 W blue LED ( $\lambda = 427 \text{ nm}$ )	H <sub>2</sub> : 3.39 mmol g <sup>-1</sup> h <sup>-1</sup>	Glucose conversion: 100%	16 hours	28
Microcrystalline	Pt/TiO <sub>2</sub>	10 M KOH 16 W UV-A lamp ( $\lambda = 365 \text{ nm}$ )	Lactic acto ${ m H}_2$ : 13.3 ${ m \mu mol}{ m h}^{-1}$	Selectivity (lactic acid.): 80% QE: 42.8% at 365 nm	5 hours	25
cellulose Cellulose	Pt/S- and N-doped graphene oxide	Simulated sunlight (AM 1.5G,	$ m H_2$ : 100 $\mu mol \ h^{-1}$	QE: 23.3% at 420 nm	6 days	108
Glucose	TiO <sub>2</sub> /Co(terpyridine) <sub>2</sub> (~20 nm)	100 mw cm ) pH 12.5 Simulated sunlight (AM 1.5G,	Acetaldehyde, methanol, formate, etc. $H_2$ : ~0.43 mmol per $g_{\rm catalyst}$ per 24 h	Glucose conversion efficiency: 20%	24 hours	48
		100 mW cm ") Aqueous sodium acetate and MeCN purged with CO <sub>2</sub>	CO: $\sim$ 0.43 mmol per g <sub>catalyst</sub> per 24 h	QE: 0.22–0.41% at 360 nm for CO; 1.05–1.45% at 360 nm for formate		
Cellobiose	${\rm TiO_2/Co(terpyridine)_2(\sim\!\!20\;nm)}$	Simulated sunlight (AM 1.5G,	Formate: $\sim$ 1.18 mmol per g <sub>catalyst</sub> per 24 h H <sub>2</sub> : $\sim$ 0.72 mmol per g <sub>catalyst</sub> per 24 h	Cellobiose conversion efficiency: 8.6%	24 hours	48
		Aqueous sodium acetate and MeCN	CO: $\sim$ 0.92 mmol per g <sub>cattalyst</sub> per 24 h			
		purgeu wiui CO <sub>2</sub>	Formate: ~1.03 mmol per g <sub>canlyst</sub> per 24 h			
Glycerol	Cu/TiO <sub>2</sub> nanorods	LED irradiation ( $\lambda = 365 \text{ nm}$ )	H <sub>2</sub> : 22 mmol per g <sub>canlyst</sub> per 12 h	QE: 3.4% at 365 nm	12 hours	49
Cellulose	$\mathrm{Pt/^{NGN}CN_x}$	MeCN-water solution Simulated sunlight (AM 1.5G,	Methanol, CJ, and CJ <sub>2</sub> $H_2$ : ~190 mmol g <sub>catalyst</sub> $^{-1}h^{-1}$		24 hours	20
		LiBr and LiOH in $0.1 \mathrm{M} \mathrm{H}_2\mathrm{SO}_4$	Formic acid, lactic acid, arabinose, erythrose, etc.			
Cellulose	NiP/carbon dots (<10 nm)	Simulated sunlight (AM 1.5G,	H <sub>2</sub> : ~5 µmol per 24 h		24 hours	26
Glucose	NiP/carbon dots (<10 nm)	Simulated sunlight (AM 1.5G,	$C_6H_{12}U_6$ and $C_6H_{10}U_5$ compounds $H_2: \sim 6 \mu mO_1 \text{ per } 24 \text{ h}$		24 hours	26
Cellulose	$Pt/P25 TiO_2 (20-30 nm)$	100 mw cm <sup>-</sup> ) UV-vis light (250 W iron doped	$C_6H_{12}U_6$ and $C_6H_{10}U_5$ compounds $H_2$ : ~170 µmol per 10 h		10 hours	35
α-Cellulose	CdS/CdO <sub>x</sub> quantum dots (diameter	nature lamp) 0.6 M $H_2SO_4$ solution 403 K; 3.0 bar Simulated sunlight (AM 1.5G,	HMF, erythrose, and arabinose $H_2 \colon \sim 2.57  mmol  g_{catalyst}^{-1}  h^{-1}$		6 days	24
Fructose	~5 nm) CdS/CdO <sub>x</sub> quantum dots	100 mW cm 7) 10 M KOH Simulated sunlight (AM 1.5G,	Formate, carboxylic acid, $\mathrm{CO}_2$ , etc. $\mathrm{H}_2$ : $\sim$ 1070 mmol per $\mathrm{gsubstrate}$ per 20 h	QE: 2.73% at 430 nm	20 hours	45
Starch	CdS/CdO <sub>x</sub> quantum dots	100 mW cm <sup>-2</sup> ) 10 M KOH Simulated sunlight (AM 1.5G,	Formate, <i>etc.</i> H <sub>2</sub> : ~462 mmol per g <sub>substrate</sub> per 20 h		20 hours	45
Apple	CdS/CdO <sub>x</sub> quantum dots	100 MKOH Simulated sunlight (AM 1.5G, 100 WW.cm <sup>-2</sup> )	Formate, etc. $H_2$ : ~6070 mmol $g_{caniyst}^{-1} h^{-1}$		20 hours	45
Cheese	CdS/CdO <sub>x</sub> quantum dots	10 M KOH Simulated sunlight (AM 1.5G, 100 mW cm <sup>-2</sup> )	$H_2 \colon {\sim} 9350 \text{ mmol } g_{catalyst}^{-1}  h^{-1}$		20 hours	45
Artificial mixed waste	CdS/CdO <sub>x</sub> quantum dots	10 M KOH Simulated sunlight (AM 1.5G, $100 \text{ mW cm}^{-2}$ )	$H_2 \colon {\sim} 9900 \text{ mmol } g_{\mathrm{catalyst}}^{-1} \text{ h}^{-1}$		20 hours	45
Municipal waste	CdS/CdO <sub>x</sub> quantum dots	10 M KOH Simulated sunlight (AM 1.5G, 100 mW cm <sup>-2</sup> )	$H_2 \hspace{-0.5mm}: \sim \hspace{-0.5mm} 5920 \hspace{0.5mm} mmol \hspace{0.5mm} g_{catalyst}^{-1} \hspace{0.5mm} h^{-1}$		20 hours	45
Wooden branch	CdS/CdO <sub>x</sub> quantum dots (diameter ~5 nm)	10 M KOH Simulated sunlight (AM 1.5G, 100 mW cm $^{-2}$ )	$H_2;{\sim}5.59~mmol~g_{catalyst}^{-1}~h^{-1}$		24 hours	24
Municipal solid	$CN_x/Ni_2P$	10 M KOH Simulated sunlight (100 mW cm <sup>-2</sup> )	Formate, carbonate, etc. $H_2$ : 130 mmol $h^{-1} m^{-2}$		20 hours	39
wasie PLA	CdS/CdO <sub>x</sub> quantum dots (diameter ~5 nm)	Simulated sunlight (AM 1.5G, $100 \text{ mW cm}^{-2}$ )	$H_2 \colon \! \sim \! 64.3 \ mmol \ g_{\mathrm{caulyst}}^{-1} \ h^{-1}$	QE: 15.0% at 430 nm	4 hours	37
		10 M NaOH	Pyruvate, etc.			

Table 1 (Contd.)

Substrates	Photocatalysts	Reaction conditions	Products	Efficiency	Reaction time	Ref.
PET	CdS/CdO <sub>x</sub> quantum dots (diameter $\sim 5$ nm)	Simulated sunlight (AM 1.5G,	$H_2; \sim \!\! 3.42 \; mmol \; g_{\rm catalyst}^{-1} \; h^{-1}$	QE: 3.74% at 430 nm	4 hours	37
PUR	CdS/CdO <sub>x</sub> quantum dots (diameter $\sim 5 \text{ nm}$ )	10 M NaOH Simulated sunlight (AM 1.5G, 100 mW cm <sup>-2</sup> )	Formate, glycolate, ethanol, acetate, and lactate $H_2$ : ~0.85 mmol $g_{\rm catalyst}^{-1} h^{-1}$	QE: 0.14% at 430 nm	4 hours	37
PET water bottle	CdS/CdO <sub>x</sub> quantum dots(diameter $\sim 5 \text{ nm}$ )	10 M NaOH Simulated sunlight (AM 1.5G, 100 mW cm <sup>-2</sup> )	Formate, acetate, pyruvate, and lactate $H_2$ : ~4.13 mmol $g_{\rm catalyst}^{-1} h^{-1}$	QE: 2.17% at 430 nm	24 hours	37
	(mm c.	10 M NaOH	Formate, glycolate, ethanol, acetate, lactate, glyoxylate, methylglyoxal, and methanol	Conversion: 5.15%		
Methanol	CoP/Zn <sub>2</sub> In <sub>2</sub> S <sub>5</sub> nanosheets	Simulated sunlight (AM 1.5G)	$H_2$ : ~21 mmol $g_{catalyst}^{-1}h^{-1}$ Ethylene glycol: 18.9 mmol $g_{catalyst}^{-1}h^{-1}$ HCHO: ~4 mmol $g$ . —1 $h^{-1}$		12 hours	29
Ethanol	CoP/Zn <sub>2</sub> In <sub>2</sub> S <sub>5</sub> nanosheets	300 W Xe lamp ( $\lambda = 400-780 \text{ nm}$ )	Ly: ~8.5 mmol genalyst n H2: ~8.5 mmol genalyst h - 2,3-8btanediol: 3.2 mmol genalyst h h - CH CHO. ~5.5 mmol m - 1 h - 1		12 hours	29
Benzyl alcohol	$Zn_{0.2}ln_{2}S_{3.2}$	6 W LED $(\lambda = 365 \pm 5 \text{ nm})$	Criston Common general H <sub>2</sub> yields: 172% Benzoin yield: 61% Deoxybenzoin yield: 30% Benzoin pield: 00,000		12 hours	28
Furfural alcohol	${\rm Ti_3C_2T_x/CdS}$ nanosheets (~60 nm)	$300 \text{ W Xe lamp } (\lambda \ge 420 \text{ nm})$	H2: 773 mmol per gentalyst per 4 h		4 hours	54
Cetophenone	Pd/TiO <sub>2</sub>	6 W LED $(\lambda = 365 \pm 5 \text{ nm})$ Ethanol	rurintata: //, phino per Senabar pet 4 in Phenethanol: ~0.55 mmol per 3 h Ethylberzene: ~0.05 mmol pre 3 h Aceraldebude: ~0.05 mmol pre 3 h		3 hours	109
DMF	Ni/CdS nanosheets	$300 \text{ W Xe lamp } (\lambda \ge 420 \text{ nm})$	Hz:~! monol per 3 h  V.Benrylidenebenydamine: ~? mmol per 5 h	QE: ∼44% at 420 nm	3 hours	69
Benzyl alcohol	Zn <sub>3</sub> In <sub>2</sub> S <sub>6</sub> (1-3 μm)	300 W Xe lamp (2 > 380 nm)	H <sub>2</sub> : 708.8 µmol per 4 h Benzaldehyde: 732 µmol per 4 h	QE: 6.48% at 380 nm 5.46% at 400 nm 4.02% at 420 nm 1.03% at 450 nm	4 hours	64
DMA	$Pt/CN_x$	14.4 W blue LED ( $\lambda_{\text{max}} = 470 \text{ nm}$ )	$H_2$ : ~12 µmol per 10 h Minisci oxidation products: ~15 µmol per 10 h		10 hours	29
THF	Pt/CN <sub>x</sub>	14.4 W blue LED ( $\lambda_{\text{max}} = 470 \text{ nm}$ )	$H_2$ : $\sim 9 \mu$ mol per 10 h Minisci oxidation products: $\sim 9.5 \mu$ mol per 10 h		10 hours	29
2,5-DMF 2-MF HMF	Ru–Zn $\ln_2 S_4$ (0.6–1.6 $\mu m$ ) Ru–Zn $\ln_2 S_4$ (0.6–1.6 $\mu m$ ) Pt/porous carbon nitride	9 W blue LED ( $\lambda$ = 455 nm) 9 W blue LED ( $\lambda$ = 455 nm) Simulated sunlight ( $\lambda$ > 400 nm,	H <sub>2</sub> : ~6.0 mmol genuys: $1 h^{-1}$ DFPs: ~1.04 genuys: $1 h^{-1}$ H <sub>2</sub> : ~6.0 mmol genuys: $1 h^{-1}$ DFPs: ~0.1 g genuys: $1 h^{-1}$ H <sub>2</sub> : 12 µmol $1 h^{-2}$ $1 h^{-1}$ DFPs: ~0.1 g genuys: $1 h^{-1}$ H <sub>2</sub> : 12 µmol $1 h^{-2}$ $1 h^{-1}$	QE: 15.2% at 452 nm QE: 1.9% at 452 nm DFF yield: 13.8% after 6 h Selectivity 500%.	6 hours 12 hours 6 hours	68 53
Benzylamine	Ni/CdS nanoparticles	1.85 W Xe lamp ( $\lambda > 420 \text{ nm}$ )	H <sub>2</sub> : 21.4 mmol g <sub>catalyst</sub> <sup>-1</sup> h <sup>-1</sup> Imine	Conversion: 99% Selectivity for imine: 97% OE: 11.2% at 450 nm	45 minutes	09
Benzyl mercaptane	PtS/ZnIn <sub>2</sub> S <sub>4</sub> nanocomposites	5 W LED $(\lambda = 450 \text{ nm})$	H <sub>2</sub> yield: 100% Dibenzyl disulfide	Conversion: ~100% after 6 h Selectivity of dibenzyl disulfide: ~100% OE: 24,96% at 420 nm	6 hours	61
Methanol	MoS <sub>2</sub> foam/CdS nanorods	300 W Xe lamp ( $\lambda = 420$ –780 nm)	$ m H_2$ :12 mmol $ m g_{catalyst}^{-1}h^{-1}$ Ethylene ølvrol etc		12 hours	99
MBA	RuCat/Pt-g-C <sub>3</sub> N <sub>4</sub>	300 W Xe lamp ( $\lambda > 400 \text{ nm}$ )	H <sub>2</sub> : 56 µmol per 10 h MBAd	QE: 0.28% at 400 nm	10 hours	65
Furfural alcohol	Ni/CdS nanosheets (thickness ~1 nm)	8 W blue LED ( $\lambda = 450 \text{ nm}$ )	H:5 mL per 8 h Furfitral		8 hours	52
HMF	Ni/CdS nanosheets (thickness ~1 nm)	8 W blue LED ( $\lambda = 450 \text{ nm}$ )	H <sub>2</sub> : ~0.5 mL per 8 h DFF		8 hours	52
4-MBA	$NiP/^{NGM}CN_x$	Simulated sunlight (AM 1.5G,	H <sub>2</sub> : ~21.3 μmol per 24 h 4-MRAd: ~19 8 μmol per 24 h	QE: 15% at 360 nm	24 hours	57
$H_2O$	CdS-ZnIn <sub>2</sub> S <sub>4</sub> nanosheets	300 W Xe lamp $(\lambda > 400 \text{ nm})$	$H_2:\sim 0.5 \text{ mool } gasups^{-1} h^{-1}$ $H_2:\sim 0.5 \text{ mool } gasups^{-1} h^{-1}$	QE: 1.63% at 400 nm	12 hours	98
HI	MoS <sub>2</sub> /MAPbI <sub>3</sub>	280 W Xe lamp ( $\lambda \ge 420 \text{ nm}$ )	$H_2$ : ~29.4 mmol generalist $H_3$ :	QE: 13–22% in the range of 420–850 nm STH: 7.35%	90 hours	102

accompanied by hydrogen generation through the reduction of protons by electrons (eqn (4)). The irreversible reaction of  $C_xH_yO_z$  with photogenerated holes results in the concomitant suppression of electron–hole recombination and back reactions involving the produced  $H_2$ , thereby increasing the quantum efficiency and the rate of  $H_2$  evolution.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, lignocellulose refining is costly and inefficient, typically necessitating acid hydrolysis, enzymatic hydrolysis, or pyrolysis to produce more manageable substrates.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, viable H<sub>2</sub> production systems should directly reform lignocellulose. The main components of lignocellulosic biomass are cellulose (35-50%), hemicellulose (25-30%), and lignin (15-30%).<sup>21,22</sup> Cellulose, <sup>23-28</sup> hemicellulose<sup>24,29,30</sup> and lignin<sup>24,26,31,32</sup> have been reported to produce H<sub>2</sub> using various photocatalysts such as TiO2, CdS/CdOx quantum dots, carbon dots, carbon nitride, and CdS (Table 1). Metallic nanoparticulate cocatalysts (e.g., Pt, Au, and Pd) and non-precious cocatalysts (e.g., NiP and NiS) are frequently loaded on photosensitizers by wet impregnation and photodeposition methods, with Pt the most commonly studied.<sup>33</sup> As an example, CdS/CdO<sub>x</sub> quantum dots loaded Co species as cocatalysts were reported to perform photoreforming of cellulose, hemicellulose and lignin to H<sub>2</sub> in alkaline solution under simulated sunlight irradiation (H2 evolution rates for cellulose, hemicellulose, and lignin were 2.57, 2.32, and 0.53 mmol g<sub>catalyst</sub><sup>-1</sup> h<sup>-1</sup>, respectively).24

Reports on using raw biomass as the substrate for photore-forming are limited. Although direct  $H_2$  production from unprocessed biomass has the advantage of lower production costs, it is limited by low substrate solubility. Additionally, light is scattered and absorbed by insoluble biomass and colored components, lowing the light absorption efficiency. The recalcitrance of raw biomass may lead to a large overpotential for biomass oxidation.  $^{12}$  TiO<sub>2</sub> is frequently used as a photocatalyst for raw biomass reforming, despite its large bandgap (around 3.2 eV) and limited sunlight utilization ability. The  $H_2$  evolution rates of TiO<sub>2</sub> for the photoreforming

of raw biomass, such as poplar wood chips,  $^{27}$  rice husk,  $^{34}$  paper pulp,  $^{35}$  chlorella algae,  $^{36}$  and turf,  $^{36}$  are in the range of 0.01–0.1 mmol  $g_{catalyst}^{-1}$  h<sup>-1</sup>, which are typically lower than those obtained using carbon nitride and CdS with narrower bandgaps (carbon nitride:  $\sim$ 2.7 eV; CdS:  $\sim$ 2.4 eV) (Table 1).  $^{24,29}$  For instance, a rate of over 5 mmol  $H_2$   $g_{catalyst}^{-1}$  h<sup>-1</sup> was reported through photoreforming a wooden branch on Co/CdS/CdO $_x$ , as shown in Fig. 2. The system was stable for more than 6 days and was capable of reforming unprocessed lignocellulose, demonstrating a cost-effective approach to produce  $H_2$  from waste biomass. The high  $H_2$  evolution rate may also be attributed to the alkaline conditions that not only provide an *in situ* pretreatment of lignocellulose by dissolving hemicellulose, lignin, cellulose, and other saccharides but also facilitate CdO $_x$  deposition on CdS, thereby producing a photocatalyst that is active and resistant to corrosion.  $^{24}$ 

The ideal feedstock for photoreforming comes from waste streams that cannot be recycled or reused in any other way. 11 To this end, the photooxidation of food waste and nonrecycled plastics has recently become an emerging topic in the field. 11,37-44 The chemical composition of food waste varies greatly. Due to their hydrophobicity and typically chemically inert hydrocarbon chain, photoreforming fats in an aqueous solution is more difficult than photoreforming proteins composed of long chains of amino acid residues (Table 1). 11 Under simulated solar irradiation, simultaneous production of H2 and the oxidation of a variety of carbohydrates, proteins and fats as well as real-world waste (apples, bread, and cheese) to generate formate and CO2 or carbonate was observed over CdS/ CdO<sub>x</sub> quantum dots and Ni<sub>2</sub>P/CN<sub>x</sub>. 45 The carbon footprints of these processes were estimated to be 44 600-68 800 g<sub>CO2</sub> per kWh H<sub>2</sub> with a conversion efficiency of 1.9-22% after 3 days, which were still high due to the need for alkaline solutions as well as energy for stirring, and pre-treatment (accounts for more than 90% of the values). 45 The carbon footprint can be reduced to a negative value of -3200 g<sub>CO2</sub> per kWh H<sub>2</sub> if the waste in the water is 100% converted to H2 and formate.

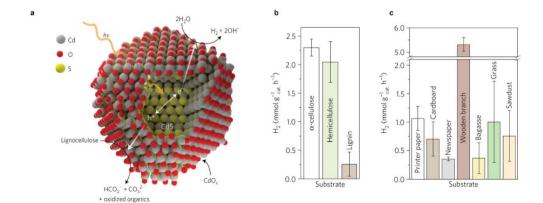


Fig. 2 (a) Diagram of the photoreforming of lignocellulose to  $H_2$  on CdS/CdO<sub>x</sub>. (b and c) Photocatalytic production rates of  $H_2$  from α-cellulose, hemicellulose and lignin (b), and raw and waste biomass substrates (c) using Co/CdS/CdO<sub>x</sub> quantum dots in 10 M KOH aqueous solution under simulated solar light (AM 1.5G, 100 mW cm<sup>-2</sup>). Reproduced with permission from ref. 24. Copyright 2017 Macmillan Publishers Limited, part of Springer Nature.

Therefore, improvements in the conversion efficiency and photooxidation process selectivity are required.

In comparison with the photodegradation of plastics that converts plastics into CO2 and H2O, photorefoming can not only reduce plastic pollution but also produce fuels and products with added value, including pyruvate (~190 \$ per kg), glycolate (~450 \$ per kg), formic acid (~1.1 \$ per kg), ethanol  $(\sim 1.2 \text{ } \text{per kg})$  and acetic acid  $(\sim 1.2 \text{ } \text{per kg})$  (Table 1), allowing for a substantial economic advantage and a higher atom economy. While hydrocarbon chains such as polyethylene (PE), polystyrene (PS), and polypropylene (PP) in plastics are currently difficult to reform due to their highly stable C-C bonds, the oxygen-containing esters including polyethylene terephthalate (PET) (egn (5) and (6)), polylactic acid (PLA) (egn (7) and (8)) and polyurethane (PUR) (eqn (9) and (10)) can facilitate photoreforming after proper hydrolysis treatment.<sup>37</sup>

$$PET: C_{10}H_8O_4 + 2H_2O \xrightarrow{NaOH} C_8H_6O_4 + C_2H_6O_2$$
 (5

$$C_2H_6O_2 + 2H_2O \xrightarrow{hv} 2CO_2 + 5H_2$$
 (6)

$$PLA: C_3H_4O_2 + H_2O \xrightarrow{NaOH} C_3H_6O_3$$
 (7)

$$C_3H_6O_3+3H_2O \xrightarrow{h\nu} 3CO_2+6H_2$$
 (8)

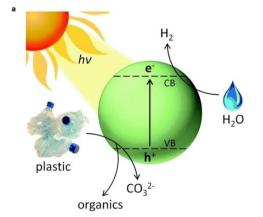
$$\begin{array}{c} PUR: \ C_{12}H_{14}N_2O_4 + 2H_2O \stackrel{NaOH}{\longrightarrow} C_7H_{10}N_2 \\ + C_3H_8O_2 + 2CO_2 \end{array} \tag{9}$$

$$C_3H_8O_2+4H_2O \xrightarrow{hv} 3CO_2+8H_2$$
 (10)

The reforming of plastics conjugating with proton reduction to H<sub>2</sub> is also nearly energy neutral.<sup>40</sup> For instance, the Gibbs free energy changes for the reforming of ethylene glycol (a monomer of PET) and lactic acid (a monomer of PLA) are +9.2 kJ mol<sup>-1</sup> and +27 kJ mol<sup>-1</sup>, respectively. A variety of plastics including PLA, PET, PUR, and a PET water bottle were

oxidized by photogenerated holes in CdS/CdO<sub>x</sub> quantum dots into a range of substrate-dependent organic products (e.g., formate, glycolate, ethanol, acetate, and pyruvate) in 10 M NaOH aqueous solution, while the photogenerated electrons reduced protons to produce H2 with a rate of 3-65 mmol  $g_{catalyst}^{-1} h^{-1}$  (Table 1, and Fig. 3). A  $Ni_2P/CN_x$  photocatalyst which is inexpensive and nontoxic has also shown promising activities for visible-light-driven PET and PLA reforming to produce H2 fuel and a variety of organic chemicals under alkaline aqueous conditions.<sup>46</sup> The challenge in plastic photoreforming is the competition with plastic dehydrogenation to H<sub>2</sub> and selective oxidation to a single product rather than CO<sub>2</sub>. 47 The reported conversion of plastics was up to 30%-40%, which requires further improvement. Furthermore, these studies imply that photoreactions can cleave C-C, C-N, and C-O bonds in the aliphatic chains of plastics as effectively as hydrolysis.

It is suggested that a theoretical maximum of 310-650 Mt of H<sub>2</sub> could be produced each year (the equivalent of ~6-13% of annual global energy consumption) if the above biomass, food and plastic components were all utilized for photoreforming. 11 The preliminary techno-economic and life cycle assessment of photoreforming has shown that it has a lower carbon footprint than or is comparable to existing methods for producing H<sub>2</sub>, converting waste to fuel, and managing waste, but the improvement in production costs and energy balance is still required before industrial applications can be envisaged. Although the product of the oxidation reaction in photoreforming is typically CO2, it is preferred that valuable organic chemicals can be produced instead of CO<sub>2</sub> to improve the sustainability and overall process value of the system. 26,28,37,46,48-50 For example, Cu dispersed on titanium oxide nanorods was reported to be effective for the conversion of polyols and sugars into syngas and methanol under UV light irradiation and ambient conditions. 49 Decreased water content inhibited the formation of CO2, whereas the copper loading amount controlled the decomposition way of the formic acid intermediate. Controlling the oxidation half-reaction is essential to produce



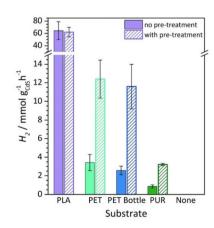


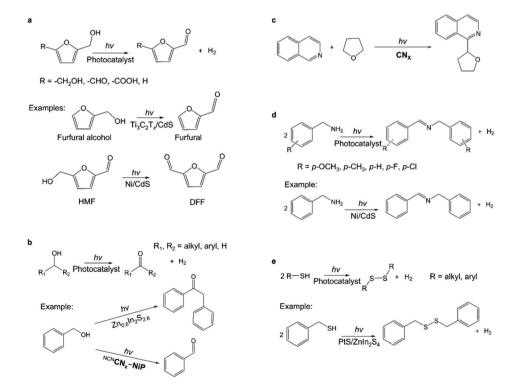
Fig. 3 (a) Diagram of the photoreforming of plastic waste using a CdS/CdO<sub>x</sub> quantum dot photocatalyst. (b) Photoreforming of polymers to H<sub>2</sub> using CdS/CdO<sub>x</sub> quantum dots under simulated solar light (AM 1.5G, 100 mW cm<sup>-2</sup>). Reproduced with permission from ref. 37. Copyright 2018 The Royal Society of Chemistry.

high-value organic products instead of CO<sub>2</sub>. <sup>21,41</sup> In addition, pre-treatment, including physical pre-treatment (such as crushing, shredding, and grinding) and chemical pre-treatment (such as hydrolysis and solubilization under highly alkaline or acidic conditions), is one of the most critical barriers to the practical application of the current photocatalytic reforming systems, adding significant cost and time to the overall process. Recently, it was demonstrated that metal salt hydrate solutions allowed for the complete solubilization of biomass and could be used as a reaction medium for the photocatalytic reforming of lignocellulose to produce H<sub>2</sub> and organic products under more benign conditions than the typically required extremely alkaline aqueous solutions, though the photocatalysts suffered from partial deactivation due to metal salt hydrate adsorption, necessitating future development. <sup>50</sup>

## Organic transformation

Since the pioneering work of Kolbe that reported the electrochemical oxidation of organic molecules with the goal of developing new methods for synthesizing organic small molecules, <sup>51</sup> a larger body of research has grown around this topic in the ensuing decades. Over the past decade, photocatalytic processes that use light as the energy input have emerged as a new alternative approach in the repertoire of the organic synthesis toolbox. In particular, interest has been aroused in waste biomass valorization in order to produce high-value commodity chemicals instead of CO<sub>2</sub>. Researchers have succeeded in converting biomass-derived small molecules such as 5-hydroxymethylfurfural (HMF) and furfural alcohol into higher-value materials (*e.g.*, aldehydes and acids) (Fig. 4a). <sup>52–54</sup> For example, photocatalytic H<sub>2</sub> evolution coupled with HMF (7110 \$ per kg) oxidation to 2,5-diformylfuran (DFF) (198 000 \$ per kg) sing porous carbon nitride was reported to reach a DFF yield of 13.8% with >99% selectivity after 6 h under visible light. <sup>53</sup>

Recent research has revealed a wide range of photocatalysts for oxidizing alcohols in conjunction with H<sub>2</sub> production. <sup>57,58,62-65</sup> Alcohols such as methanol have been widely used as sacrificial reagents for photocatalytic H2 generation from water due to the lower thermodynamic requirements, and alcohols are oxidized to CO2.3-5 We will not discuss these examples because the focus of this work is on the co-production of high-value chemicals with H2. For instance, under visible light irradiation, the coupling of H<sub>2</sub> generation with the oxidation of benzyl alcohol (273 \$ per kg) yielded deoxybenzoin (57 200 \$ per kg) over ZnIn sulfides,<sup>55,58</sup> and 4-methylbenzyl alcohol (2110 \$ per kg) was converted into an aldehyde (4-methylbenzaldehyde; 3440 \$ per kg) over a cyanamide surface functionalized with melon-type carbon nitride. 55,57 Multi-carbon alcohols and polyalcohols have been reported to be photocatalytically produced by selectively activating the inert sp<sup>3</sup>  $\alpha$ -C-H bonds of alcohols and directly forming C-C bonds with the



**Fig. 4** (a) Photocatalytic oxidation of biomass-derived intermediate compounds. <sup>52,54,56</sup> HMF: 5-hydroxymethylfurfural; DFF: 2,5-diformylfuran. (b) Photocatalytic oxidation of alcohols. <sup>57,58</sup> (c) Photocatalytic Minisci coupling. <sup>59</sup> (d) Photocatalytic C–N coupling reactions. <sup>56,60</sup> (e) Photocatalytic S–S coupling reactions. <sup>56,61</sup>

coupling partners (Fig. 4b).62 For instance, Zn<sub>2</sub>In<sub>2</sub>S<sub>5</sub> and CdS were reported as visible-light-responsive photocatalysts for the selective activation of the α-C-H bond of methanol to generate ethylene glycol with a selectivity of as high as 90%. 66,67 The CdS-based photocatalytic system was beneficial for the activation of the C-H bond in methanol without affecting the O-H group, forming ethylene glycol via a 'CH2OH radical intermediate with a yield of 16% and a quantum efficiency (QE) of above 5.0% at wavelengths ≤450 nm.66 The high ethylene glycol selectivity (90%) was maintained throughout the 100-hour reaction, with a yield of 16% after 100 hours, demonstrating an alternative nonpetroleum strategy for ethylene glycol synthesis. The CoP/Zn2In2S5 photocatalyst also was

demonstrated to be the first example of the visible-light-driven dehydrogenative coupling of ethanol to 2,3-butanediol with a selectivity of 53%. <sup>67</sup> The α-C–H bond of ethanol was selectively activated to form 'CH(OH)CH3 radicals for subsequent coupling to 2,3-butanediol, presenting that the α-C-H bond can be preferentially activated in the presence of the O-H group under mild conditions.

Aside from alcohols, the C-H bonds in furanics can also be activated for C-C coupling reactions through photocatalysis. The production of diesel fuel precursors from 2,5-dimethylfuran (2,5-DMF) and 2-methylfuran (2-MF), with concurrent H<sub>2</sub> production, over a Ru-ZnIn<sub>2</sub>S<sub>4</sub> photocatalyst was demonstrated under visible light irradiation (Fig. 5).68 Dehydrocoupling of

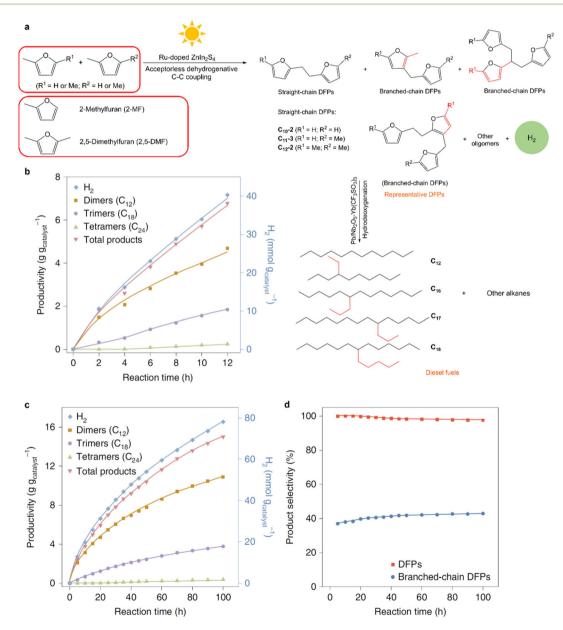


Fig. 5 (a) Schematic representation of the photocatalytic transformation of 2,5-DMF/2-MF into diesel fuel. (b-d) Photocatalytic dehydrocoupling of 2,5-DMF as a substrate: standard experiment (b), catalyst lifetime evaluation (c), and selectivity to oxygenated DFPs and branched-chain DFPs (d). Reproduced with permission from ref. 68. Copyright 2019 Springer Nature Limited.

2,5-DMF and 2-MF yielded mainly H2, dimers and trimers as products with a small number of tetramers produced in 12 h. Photogenerated holes oxidized the furfuryl C-H bond of 2,5-DMF/2-MF, delivering protons and furfuryl radicals that, through C-C coupling, form the desired DFPs. Over Ru-ZnIn<sub>2</sub>S<sub>4</sub>, the QE for the dehydrocoupling of 2,5-DMF was 15.2% at 452 nm, which was approximately double that of ZnIn<sub>2</sub>S<sub>4</sub> because Ru dopants substituted for indium ions in the ZnIn<sub>2</sub>S<sub>4</sub> matrix facilitated charge separation efficiency and thus accelerated C-H activation. Diesel fuel precursors were produced with selectivities of more than 96% in conjunction with H<sub>2</sub> generation and were subsequently transformed into diesel fuels composed of straight- and branched-chain alkanes that were comparable to petroleum diesel in terms of alkane constituents. Future work should focus on improving the yields of C-C coupling products and the QE by the use of more efficient catalysts.

Lately, it has been demonstrated that H2 production could be coupled with more complex organic synthesis. The Minisci reaction is a known strategy for the direct functionalization of C-H bonds in heteroarenes, involving the radical coupling of electron-deficient heteroarenes with oxidatively-generated nucleophilic radicals.<sup>59</sup> A visible light-mediated Minisci coupling of N-heteroarenes with ethers, alcohols, and amides in the presence of aerobic oxygen as an oxidant was reported to conjugate with proton reduction to H2 using a cyanamide functionalized carbon nitride photocatalyst (Fig. 4c).<sup>59</sup>

Photocatalytic C-N coupling of amines for the efficient synthesis of imines may have important applications in pharmaceutical and agricultural chemistry research (Fig. 4d).<sup>56</sup> Ni/CdS was reported to photocatalyze the non-oxygen coupling of amines to yield their corresponding imines under visible light irradiation, concurrent with H<sub>2</sub> generation. 60,69 In particular, the photocatalyst showed a high conversion of benzylamine (99%) with 97% selectivity for imines, associated with a QE of 11.2% at 450 nm for simultaneous H<sub>2</sub> evolution.<sup>60</sup> By constructing in situ photoimmobilized Ni clusters on two-dimensional ultrathin CdS nanosheets, the generation of imines was dramatically improved with a QE of ~44% at 420 nm for the conversion of 4-methoxybenzylamine.<sup>69</sup> It was proposed that photogenerated holes initiated the oxidation of amines via the deprotonation process with the creation of C-centered  $\alpha$ -amine radicals to form aldimine intermediates and release protons. The protons were reduced by the photogenerated electrons and produced H2 with the assistance of a Ni cocatalyst. Additionally, the photocatalytic system converted a wide range of primary and secondary amines (i.e., heterocyclic, aliphatic, and N-heterocycles) to form their corresponding imines with high yields ( $\geq$ 84%) and selectivity ( $\geq$ 95%), thereby offering a promising and versatile pathway for organic chemical synthesis.

The photocatalytic synthesis of disulfides through the coupling of thiols is also of interest because disulfides function as protecting groups in synthetic applications and as vulcanizing agents for rubber (Fig. 4e). One of the examples is the visiblelight irradiation of CdSe quantum dots to result in virtually quantitative coupling of a variety of thiols, exemplified by 3-mercaptopropionic acid (MPA), to produce disulfides and H<sub>2</sub> in aqueous solution. 70 The conversion of MPA reached 99% in 1.5 hours and the yield of 3,3'-dithiodipropanoic acid was near 100%. Likewise, PtS/ZnIn<sub>2</sub>S<sub>4</sub> completely transformed benzyl mercaptan to produce dibenzyl disulfide in 6 h with a selectivity of ~100% under optimal conditions. 61 These examples demonstrated an attractive alternative to existing procedures for synthesizing disulfides from thiols.

Controlling the selectivity of products is the most important issue of organic synthesis, as well as the existence of various potential reactive oxygen species in photocatalysis, including superoxide radicals ('O2"), hydrogen peroxide (H2O2), hydroxyl radicals (OH) and singlet oxygen (O2).71 For selective oxidation, the reactive oxygen species and adsorption-desorption behavior must be carefully controlled.

## Inorganic oxidation

Photocatalytic H<sub>2</sub> production along with more valuable inorganic products rather than O2 via a two-electron oxidation pathway represents an alternatively appealing way. For instance, hydrogen peroxide (H2O2) production from water via the two-electron oxidation process is kinetically more favorable than the water-splitting reaction, which requires four electrons to produce  $O_2$ , despite the  $O_2$  generation (1.23 eV vs. NHE) showing a thermodynamic advantage over the H2O2 production (1.78 eV vs. NHE). The photocatalytic reaction to simultaneously produce H<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> from water (eqn (11)) has attracted increasing attention in recent years because it obtains clean H2 energy by utilizing abundant water resources and inexhaustible sunlight, 72,73 as well as being environmentally friendly for producing the value-added H2O2 (~0.7 \$ per kg),9 which was widely utilized in the chemical industry, and disinfection, energy, and environmental fields.74-77 In addition, this reaction not only realizes the automatic separation of the oxidation product with gaseous H<sub>2</sub> but also effectively avoids the reverse reaction of generated H<sub>2</sub> and O<sub>2</sub> existing in the thoroughly overall water splitting reaction.78,79

$$2H_2O \to H_2 + H_2O_2$$
 (11)

Recent efforts, including optimizing reaction conditions, doping, heterojunctions, cocatalyst loading, and using biological hybrids, have been made to enhance the carrier utilization efficiency of the photocatalyst and increase the selectivity for H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> production, thereby advancing this technology. Graphitic carbon nitride (g-C<sub>3</sub>N<sub>4</sub>), for example, as a notable photocatalyst with advantageous features of low cost and tunable optical and electronic properties was widely employed in this field. A sulfur doping treatment was performed on thin g-C<sub>3</sub>N<sub>4</sub> nanosheets to compensate for the light absorption loss caused by the exfoliation process while improving the charge transfer efficiency. 80 Moreover, Co<sub>x</sub>Ni<sub>v</sub>P nanoclusters were loaded onto

a P-doped g-C<sub>3</sub>N<sub>4</sub> photocatalyst, and the doping and cocatalyst effects enhanced the photocatalytic water reduction and oxidation with a H<sub>2</sub> evolution rate of 239.3 µmol g<sub>catalyst</sub><sup>-1</sup> h<sup>-1</sup> and stoichiometric H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> production.<sup>81</sup> It is also reported that the living Chlorella vulgaris could accelerate the photocatalytic activity of g-C<sub>3</sub>N<sub>4</sub> to produce H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>2</sub> from water, giving a QE of 0.86% at 420 nm.82 The defect control is also a proposed way applicable to increase H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> production. Although defects are typically regarded as charge recombination sites, it has been demonstrated that if properly controlled, they can also contribute to photocatalytic reactions.<sup>83</sup> Defects can introduce mid-gap states in the forbidden band of semiconductor photocatalysts to harness more visible light, serve as active sites for reactants, and offer more trapping sites to hamper the recombination of carriers.<sup>84</sup> For example, the introduced carbon vacancies in C<sub>3</sub>N<sub>4</sub> can not only extend the light absorption range and improve carrier separation efficiency but also alter the H2O2 production pathway from a two-step indirect reaction to a one-step direct reaction, thereby enhancing the H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> production.<sup>85</sup> Construction of heterojunctions appears to be an effective strategy for inorganic semiconductor photocatalysts to generate H2 and H2O2 simultaneously. For instance, a system consisting of CdS and ZnIn<sub>2</sub>S<sub>4</sub> hollow cubes was employed for the stoichiometric generation of H2 and H2O2 from pure water, achieving a QE of 1.63% at 400 nm.86 Noble metal deposition remains a common but effective way to promote photocatalytic reactions. Production of H2 and H2O2 with rates of 9.8 µmol mg<sub>catalyst</sub><sup>-1</sup> h<sup>-1</sup> and 8.2 µmol mg<sub>catalyst</sub><sup>-1</sup> h<sup>-1</sup>, respectively, from pure water (pH ~ 7) was realized using Pt/porous brookite TiO2 nanoflutes as a photocatalyst, and the QE reached 43.4% at 365 nm.87 The simulation and experimental results revealed that a two-electron reaction is kinetically favorable on the surface of brookite TiO2 due to the unique surficial chemistry micro-circumstance, promoting the adsorption of activated hydroxyl groups and the subsequent step of hydrogen peroxide generation.

Though some promising progress has been made, photocatalytic H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> production is still far from the market requirement for practical applications, and the industrial production of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> still mainly relies on the anthraquinone oxidation process (accounting for over 95% of production).88 Facing the same problems with other semiconductor photocatalysis, photocatalytic H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> production also suffers from the drawbacks of low light utilization ability and the high recombination of photogenerated carriers. Another tricky problem is the rapid decomposition of the generated H2O2 occurs at the surface of the photocatalyst/cocatalyst, which can be caused by UV irradiation. More efforts should be devoted to the surface modification and fine control of the photocatalyst/cocatalyst and new cocatalyst development to promote H2O2 evolution and inhibit its decomposition process. For example, the combination of common inorganic semiconductor photocatalysts with bacteria, biomaterials, and organic semiconductors may have some positive effects. Additionally, a deeper understanding of the photocatalytic mechanism and H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> evolution

process is significant and will contribute to the optimization and design of highly active photocatalysts.

$$2HX \rightarrow H_2 + X_2 \tag{12}$$

$$2Cl^{-} \rightarrow Cl_{2} + 2e^{-}$$
  $E^{\circ} = +1.36 \text{ V}$  (13)

$$2Br^- \to Br_2 + 2e^- \quad E^\circ = +1.09 \text{ V}$$
 (14)

$$2I^- \rightarrow I_2 + 2e^- \quad E^\circ = +0.54 \text{ V}$$
 (15)

Photocatalytic hydrohalic acid (HX, X = Cl<sup>-</sup>, Br<sup>-</sup>, I<sup>-</sup>) splitting (eqn (12)) is another attractive approach for producing H<sub>2</sub> with a valuable byproduct X2, which has numerous applications in the energy and hygiene industries. 89-91 Halide ion (Br<sup>-</sup>, I<sup>-</sup>) oxidation (eqn (13)-(15)) is thermodynamically much easier than H<sub>2</sub>O oxidation, and more importantly, these photocatalytic reactions are conducted under the conditions of a relatively high H<sup>+</sup>/X<sup>-</sup> concentration, allowing for a faster reaction rate in dynamics. In addition, the oxidation of halide ions does not involve a net proton transfer, distinct from the H-O breakage and proton loss during O2 formation in H2O splitting, and thus are kinetically favorable. As an example, chloride oxidation catalyzed by silver ions in concentrated Cl solution has been reported, and the chloride complex-assisted catalysis mechanism has been proposed. 92 The research on chloride oxidation could promote the development of photocatalytic seawater splitting, which is still in its infancy due to its low product yield and a plausible catalytic mechanism involving the effect of inorganic ions, yet having been studied for years. 93,94

Photocatalytic HBr and HI splitting to produce H2 based on halide perovskites has aroused a new research upsurge in recent years since the first report about the hydrogen generation from hydriodic acid using MAPbI<sub>3</sub> as a photocatalyst in 2016 (Fig. 6a–c).<sup>95</sup> Subsequently, material compositing and heterojunction construction were extensively employed to boost hydrohalic acid splitting. Reduced graphene oxide (rGO) was first used to composite with MAPbI3 perovskites for the photocatalytic hydrogen evolution reaction, resulting in a hydrogen evolution rate (93.9 µmol h<sup>-1</sup> under visible-light irradiation) 67 times higher than that of pure MAPbI<sub>3</sub>.96 Afterwards, various materials such as TiO2, Ni3C, carbon dots, black phosphorus, MoS2, and CoP were used as cocatalysts or heterojunction counterparts to promote carrier separation. 97-103 In particular, a MoS<sub>2</sub>/MAPbI<sub>3</sub> composite exhibited a remarkable photocatalytic hydrogen evolution activity of 29.4  $\mu$ mol  $g_{catalyst}^{-1}$  h<sup>-1</sup> under visible light and an  $H_2$  production of 103 mL day<sup>-1</sup> under outdoor natural sunlight irradiation. 103 In addition to the heterostructures, composition regulation is also a feasible way. For instance, a graded and gradient halide ion distribution was realized in both organometal and all-inorganic mixed halide perovskites, 104,105 and a resulting bandgap funneling was constructed for efficient carrier transfer, causing an enhanced photocatalytic activity and a solar-to-H2 conversion efficiency (STH) of 1.05% for  $MAPbBr_{3-x}I_x/Pt.^{104}$  In addition, single-atom decoration is also an effective strategy to improve the perovskite photocatalytic HI splitting efficiency, 106,107 an excellent photocatalytic H<sub>2</sub>

Nanoscale

d

Perovskite

Add
H,PtCl<sub>6</sub>-6H<sub>2</sub>O

Add
H,PtCl<sub>6</sub>-6H<sub>2</sub>O

Fig. 6 (a) Schematic band diagram of MAPbI<sub>3</sub> powder for the HI splitting photocatalytic reaction. (b) Quantitative comparison between the evolved  $H_2$  and  $I_3^-$ . (c) Stable photocatalytic  $H_2$  evolution produced by MAPbI<sub>3</sub> powder in the saturated solution for 160 h ( $H_3$ PO<sub>2</sub> was added to the HI solution). Reproduced with permission from ref. 95. Copyright 2016 Springer Nature Limited. (d) Mechanism illustration of the synthesis process of Pt/FAPbBr<sub>3-x</sub>I<sub>x</sub>. (e) Photocatalytic  $H_2$  evolution activities of ω-FPBI (FAPbBr<sub>3-x</sub>I<sub>x</sub> loaded  $\omega$ % Pt in mass percentage). Reproduced with permission from ref. 107. Copyright 2022 The Royal Society of Chemistry.

Reduction & Anchor

Adsorption & Anchor

evolution rate of 682.6 mmol h<sup>-1</sup> under simulated sunlight irradiation (area of  $\pi$  cm) and a corresponding STH of 4.5% were recorded using Pt/FAPbBr<sub>3-x</sub>I<sub>x</sub> (Fig. 6d and e).<sup>107</sup>

Halide perovskites possess several excellent material properties, such as a wide light absorption range, a high absorption coefficient, and a long carrier diffusion length, allowing them to be ideal photocatalysts. However, satisfactory performance of this kind of material for photocatalytic H<sub>2</sub> production has not been achieved. More efforts should be devoted to the investigation of the mechanism and fundamental principles of the physical/chemical process during photocatalysis for this special system, where exists a dynamic equilibrium of dissolution-crystallization between the catalyst and the corresponding saturated solution.

#### Conclusions and outlook

Although the research in this field is at too early a stage to be towards industry-level operation and deployment, exciting work in combining  $H_2$  fuel generation with value-added chemical production or waste valorization is already showing to have a wide impact on large-scale challenges in global energy (Table 1). When looking at both inorganic and organic chemistries, the water-to- $O_2$  conversion can be replaced by a variety of photoreactions that can occur in an aqueous solution.

In any proton-to-H<sub>2</sub> generation, the availability of substrates at the scale required for the process is a key consideration. Biomass, food, and plastic wastes are abundant, inexpensive, and carbon- and hydrogen-rich feedstocks. Photocatalytic methods offer upcycling routes that yield higher-value products, as opposed to conventional mechanical strategies that typically downcycle to lower-quality products.<sup>11,40</sup> In recent

years, much effort has been devoted to the study of the simultaneous production of  $\rm H_2$  and chemicals with added value through reduction and oxidation, respectively. A preliminary techno-economic assessment demonstrates that photoreforming of waste can become economically competitive with existing technologies if the efficiency and lifetime can be substantially improved. For large-scale applications to be economically and environmentally viable,  $\rm H_2$  evolution rates must increase by a factor of at least 50 (rates of >0.004 mol  $\rm H_2$   $\rm g_{\rm substrate}^{-1}$   $\rm h^{-1}$ , conversions of >50% per day, and QEs of >50%). It will be imperative to develop more effective and durable photocatalytic systems. In addition, the current pretreatments commonly reported for photoreforming to improve the solubilization of the feedstock are unlikely to be economically viable on a large scale.

The photocatalytic oxidation of organic compounds, including alcohols, hydrocarbons, aromatics, and amines, differs from conventional methods conducted at high temperatures and pressures in that it is environmentally friendly, operates under mild conditions, and is sustainable. However, selective photocatalytic oxidations present huge challenges. Ideally, the oxidation process would selectively produce a single high-value product. Controlling reactive oxidation species and adsorption–desorption behavior is the primary challenge in selective oxidation. Therefore, it may be necessary to observe the reaction mechanism *in situ* for a better understanding of the reaction kinetics.<sup>71</sup> To yield a single higher-value product in both organic transformation and waste valorization processes, selective oxidation cocatalysts may be required.

For inorganic reactions, the  $\rm H_2O$ -to- $\rm H_2O_2$  conversion and halide oxidation present themselves as an attractive alternative to  $\rm O_2$  evolution due to the higher value of the products and the simpler mechanism resulting from the lower electron demand.

Minireview

Table 2 Summary of the developed alternative photooxidation reactions to the OER

Oxidation reaction	Substrates	Main products	Challenges
Reforming	Lignocellulose biomass-derived feedstocks (pentoses, hexoses, alcohols, and organic acids)	CO <sub>2</sub>	Costly and inefficient lignocellulose refining processes required     Low-value products
	Cellulose, hemicellulose, and lignin	$\mathrm{CO}_2$	Low value products     Low-value products     Low-value products
	Raw biomass	$\mathrm{CO}_2$	Low substrate solubility     Costly and environmentally unfriendly pretreatment processes required     Low-value products
	Waste streams (biomass, food, and plastic)	$\mathrm{CO}_2$ , formate	<ul> <li>Low substrate solubility</li> <li>Costly and environmentally unfriendly pretreatment processes required</li> <li>Competition with water reduction and plastic dehydrogenation to H<sub>2</sub></li> </ul>
Organics	Alcohols		Low selectivity
	Furans	Dimers and trimers	• Low selectivity
	Amines	Imine	
	Thiols	Disulfides	
Inorganics	Water	$H_2O_2$	
-	$HX (X = Cl^-, Br^-, I^-)$	$X_2$	

Nonetheless, the reaction efficiency of these reactions must be enhanced.

The H<sub>2</sub> production cost for a waste photoreforming pilot plant (400 m<sup>2</sup>, 200 kg<sub>waste</sub> per day, 14.4 kg<sub>H<sub>2</sub></sub> per day) was estimated to be £11.80 per kg, which is more than H2 sale targets of £3-5 per kg and predictions for H2 produced by photocatalytic water splitting (£1-3 per kg). 1,111 It can, however, be reduced by increasing the plant scale and photoreforming efficiency. If the plant scale is enlarged 30 times, the cost of producing H2 can be decreased to £3 per kg. Furthermore, economic gains can be realized by producing high-value compounds such as pharmaceutical components at the same time. As an example, oxidizing biomass to 3-hydroxybutyrolactone (3-HBL), a precursor for chiral drugs, could cut H<sub>2</sub> production costs to £3 per kg even if the photoreforming conversion efficiency is as low as 0.2% per day. However, although 3-HBL and its hydrolyzed form 3,4-dihydroxybutyric acid (3,4-DHBA) have been reported to be produced from biomass (glucose, glycolic acid, and xylose) via biological synthesis using bacteria (Escherichia coli), enzymes and yeast, its production via a photocatalytic process has not yet been realized. 110-112 Future efforts would combine photocatalysts with microbes to create abiotic-biotic hybrids capable of producing photocatalytic H<sub>2</sub> while oxidizing biomass to 3-HBL. Likewise, the  $H_2$  production costs can be reduced by photocatalytic transformations to produce value-added organic and inorganic chemicals. For instance, a recent techno-economic analysis suggested that by oxidizing water to produce H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> instead of O<sub>2</sub> using the photoelectrochemical technique, a levelized cost of hydrogen of \$6.19 per kg can be obtained with an STH of 10.1% and an H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> price of \$0.85 per kg, which is a significant improvement over the values found in an analogy of the photoelectrochemical water splitting system. 113 Aside from producing costeffective H<sub>2</sub>, the procedures would also reduce the cost of organic and inorganic products. A minimal selling price of glucaric acid was predicted to be \$6.94 per kg under a base case scenario employing a potential photo-biorefinery approach for sunlight-driven electro-oxidation of glucose, which was 70% lower than the current market price. 114

In spite of the obstacles listed in Table 2, significant progress has been made in the study of coupling H<sub>2</sub> production with diverse oxidation chemistry and will continue. With continued material and technological advancements, these technologies have the potential to produce fuels and chemicals with added value, while also reducing waste.

#### Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

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