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Performance of CdS/CdSe/ZnS quantum dot-sensitized TiO$_2$ mesopores for solar cells

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We prepare CdS/CdSe/ZnS thin films by successive ionic layer adsorption and reaction method. Results show a wider photoresponse range of TiO$_2$ mesopores from the ultraviolet region to the visible light region. Sequentially assembled CdS/CdSe/ZnS quantum dots exhibit significantly improved light-harvesting ability and photocurrent efficiency. A high efficiency of 0.59354% is obtained.

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Numerous techniques can be used to synthesize semiconductor quantum dots (QDs), such as reverse micelle$^1$, epitaxial, colloidal, and hydrothermal methods$^{2,3}$, depending on the application. QDs have potential applications in thin film light-emitting devices, nonlinear optical devices, fluorescent labels for biological applications$^{4,5}$, solar cells, displays, sensors or biosensors, and lasers. Numerous high-quality QDs, such as CdS$^{[6,7]}$, CdSe$^{[8,9]}$, and CdTe, have been successfully synthesized.

In this letter, CdSe QDs and TiO$_2$/CdSe thin films are prepared by colloidal method and dipping technology using mercaptoethanol (thioglycol) as capping agent. We then investigate the optical characteristics of CdSe QDs and TiO$_2$/CdSe thin films for application in solar cell devices. Dye-sensitized solar cells based on wide-band gap semiconductors have lower production cost and versatility compared with conventional solid-state cells. We have also prepared CdS/CdSe/ZnS thin films by chemical bath deposition. Results show that TiO$_2$ mesopores have a wider photoresponse range from the ultraviolet region to the visible light region. To study the effects of co-modification with CdS, CdSe, and ZnS QDs on the photocatalytic response of TiO$_2$ mesopore-based QD-sensitized solar cell (QDSSC), highly ordered TiO$_2$ mesopores are fabricated by electrochemical anodization$^{[10]}$

The TiO$_2$ mesopores are treated by sequential chemical bath deposition (CBD) of CdS, CdSe, and ZnS QDs and used as photoanodes in QDSSC. We demonstrate that the co-modified TiO$_2$ mesopores possess superior photocatalytic response compared with single QD-sensitized devices$^{[11]}$. The TiO$_2$/CdS/CdSe/ZnS photoanode obtained is a high-efficiency QDSSC.

Cd(CH$_3$COO)$_2$·H$_2$O (99%), dimethyl formamide (C$_3$H$_7$NO, 99%), mercaptoethanol (thioglycol, HOCH$_2$CH$_2$SH, 99%), sodium selenite pentahydrate (Na$_2$SeO$_3$·5H$_2$O, 98%), acetone, and TiO$_2$ paste were obtained from Merck. The TiO$_2$ thin films were fabricated by silk-screen printing with commercial TiO$_2$ paste. Their sizes ranged from 10 to 20 nm. One layer of film with thickness of 2 μm was printed (measured by Alpha step unit device). Then, the TiO$_2$ film was heated at 325 °C for 5 min, 375 °C for 5 min, 400 °C for 15 min, and 500 °C for 15 min. Afterward, the film was dipped in 40-nmol TiCl$_4$ solution for 30 min at 70 °C and heated at 500 °C for 30 min.

To prepare TiO$_2$/CdSe films, the TiO$_2$ film was dipped in CdSe solution under different time periods to change the thickness of the film. Then, the film was washed three times with acetone. Finally, the film was heated in a vacuum environment at different temperatures to prevent oxidation.

To prepare TiO$_2$/CdS/CdSe/ZnS films, the highly ordered TiO$_2$ films were sequentially sensitized with CdS and CdSe QDs by CBD method. First, the TiO$_2$ film was dipped into 0.5 mol/L Cd(CH$_3$COO)$_2$ solution for 5 min, rinsed with ethanol, dipped for 5 min in 0.5 mol/L Na$_2$S–methanol solution, and then rinsed with methanol. The two-step dipping procedure corresponded to one CBD cycle, and the incorporated amount of CdS QDs was increased by repeating the assembly cycles for a total of three cycles. For the subsequent CBD process of CdSe QDs, aqueous Se solution was prepared by mixing Se powder and Na$_2$SO$_4$ in 50 mL of pure water after adding 1 mol/L NaOH at 70 °C for 7 h. The TiO$_2$/CdS samples were dipped in 0.5 mol/L Cd(CH$_3$COO)$_2$–ethanol solution for 5 min at room temperature, rinsed with ethanol, dipped in the Se aqueous solution for 5 min at 50 °C, and rinsed with pure water.

The two-step dipping procedure corresponds to one CBD cycle. Repeating the CBD cycle increases the amount of CdS QDs (a total of four cycles). The CBD method was also used to deposit the ZnS passivation layer. The TiO$_2$/CdS/CdSe samples were coated with ZnS by alternately dipping the samples in 0.1 mol/L Zn(NO$_3$)$_2$ and 0.1 mol/L Na$_2$S solutions twice for 5 min/dip and rinsing with pure water between dips (a total of two cycles). Finally, the samples were heated in a vacuum environment at different temperatures to prevent oxidation (see Fig. 1).

Figure 2 shows the absorption spectra of the CdSe QDs at different $M$ values ($M$ = Cd$^{2+}$/thioglycol). All samples show very strong quantum effects. The peak of the
Fig. 1. Preparation of TiO$_2$/CdS/CdSe/ZnS anode films.

Fig. 2. (Color online) (a) Absorption and (b) photoluminescence spectra of CdSe QDs ($M$ = 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14).

Table 1. Describes the Change of the Particle Size on the Concentrate of $M$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$\lambda$ (nm)</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$E_g$ (eV)</td>
<td>2.384</td>
<td>2.426</td>
<td>2.540</td>
<td>2.540</td>
<td>2.605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R$ (nm)</td>
<td>2.471</td>
<td>2.393</td>
<td>2.211</td>
<td>2.211</td>
<td>2.126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$\lambda$ (nm)</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$E_g$ (eV)</td>
<td>2.660</td>
<td>2.780</td>
<td>2.818</td>
<td>3.246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R$ (nm)</td>
<td>2.060</td>
<td>1.936</td>
<td>1.901</td>
<td>1.605</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

absorption spectrum increases from 382 to 520 nm. Thus, the size particle increases from 1.6 to 2.5 nm (Table 1, which is smaller than the radius of Borh ($a_B$ = 5 nm for the CdSe bulk material) as calculated by the approximate equation$^{[12]}$. This result is related to the shift from light yellow to dark red. Therefore, the CdSe QDs exhibit a strong confinement quantum effect ($R < a_B$)$^{[13]}$. The -thiol- group, an organic molecule, limits the interaction among CdSe QDs, thereby reducing the link among QDs. The stability of the QDs is due to the movement of the electric charge from the QDs to the ligand field. During this process, thioglycol envelops the newly formed CdSe QDs. When the $M$ value increases, fewer thioglycol groups envelop the QDs. Thus, particle size increases, corresponding to a shift in the peak absorption of light toward the red. The peak of the absorption spectra of the samples is attributed to the shift between two basic excitrons (1S$_{3/2}$–1S$_{1/2}$)$^{[12]}$. The energy shift from 0.6 to 1.2 eV corresponds to the change in the effective radius from 1.6 to 2.5 nm (see Fig. 3), which results from the presence of surface states in the CdSe QDs. The state is the main surface defect inside the QDs, resulting in recombination with electrons. After the electrons are excited from the valence to the conductor band, they immediately return and recombine with the state surface inside the energy gap of the CdSe QDs.

In the Raman spectrum (see Fig. 4), three peaks are observed at 201, 402, and 601 cm$^{-1}$. These peaks correspond to the phonons of the longitudinal optical vibration in CdSe. The first peak is at 201 cm$^{-1}$ (longitudinal optical, LO). The second peak at 402 cm$^{-1}$ is the second harmonic of the first peak (2LO). The third peak at 601 cm$^{-1}$ is the third harmonic of the first peak. The origin of branch LO and the interactions between the phonons and the surfaces of CdSe QDs depend on the size of the electron-hole pair interaction. Each peak is asymmetrical and tends to stretch toward the low frequency, which is attributed to surface vibration. The LO (201 cm$^{-1}$) and 2LO (402 cm$^{-1}$) of the CdSe powder exhibit blueshifting compared with the peaks at 210 and 418 cm$^{-1}$ of the CdSe bulk. Redshifting indicates that CdSe QDs with high area-to-volume ratio are formed in the sample. The Raman spectra of TiO$_2$/CdSe thin films at different temperatures show the anatase of TiO$_2$ and the zinc blende of the CdSe structure.

Figure 5(a) is the field emission scanning electron microscopy of the CdSe/TiO$_2$ anode films that it was conducted at approximately pH 10, and deposition was performed for 24 h at room temperature. With the growth of CdSe, the white TiO$_2$ film electrode becomes red. After annealing at 300 °C, the film is homogeneous and strongly adherent to the substrate.
Table 2 Parameters of Solar Cells with TiO2/CdSe/CdSe (SILAR)/ZnS (SILAR) and TiO2/CdS (SILAR)/CdSe/CdSe (SILAR)/ZnS (SILAR) Anodes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STT</th>
<th>Solar Cell</th>
<th>JSC (mA/cm2)</th>
<th>VOC (V)</th>
<th>Fill Factor (FF)</th>
<th>Efficiency ((\eta), %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>TiO2/CdSe/CdSe (SILAR)/ZnS (SILAR)</td>
<td>3.688082</td>
<td>0.387615</td>
<td>0.421880</td>
<td>0.603101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>TiO2/CdS (SILAR)/CdSe/CdSe (SILAR)/ZnS (SILAR)</td>
<td>7.93295</td>
<td>0.31839</td>
<td>0.419418</td>
<td>1.059354</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5. (Color online) (a) Field emission scanning electron microscopy image and (b) absorption spectrum of the TiO2/CdSe anode.

Fig. 6. (a) Relative energy levels of TiO2, CdS, CdSe, and ZnS in bulk phase; (b) the proposed energy band structure of the TiO2/CdS/CdSe/ZnS nanostructure interface. All energy levels are based on the normal hydrogen electrode scale. CB and VB are the conduction band and the valence band, respectively.

Fig. 7. J-V curves of the solar cell samples with TiO2/CdSe/CdSe (SILAR)/ZnS (SILAR) and TiO2/CdS (SILAR)/CdSe/CdSe (SILAR)/ZnS (SILAR) anodes.

Figure 5(a) shows that the surface morphology of the porous TiO2/CdSe film is smooth and uniform with equally distributed nanometer-sized grains. The absorption spectrum (Fig. 5(b)) of the self-grown CdSe porous TiO2 film shows a considerable redshift compared with that of the porous TiO2, confirming the invasion of CdSe self-grown nanoparticles. As annealing temperature is increased to 300 °C, the CdSe nanocrystals increase in size. The size distribution also increases.

The relative energy level of the different components is shown in Fig. 6(a). According to the data reported in the literature\(^{[14,15]}\), the band gap of TiO2(3.2 eV) limits its absorption range approximately below 400 nm. CdS has a higher conduction band (CB) edge than TiO2, which is favorable for electron injection. However, with a band gap of 2.25 eV, the absorption of bulk CdS is also limited approximately below 550 nm. Bulk CdSe has a band gap of 1.7 eV, which can extend the absorption to the entire visible region. The CB of CdSe is slightly lower than that of CdS. Lee et al. reported that when CdS and CdSe are brought in contact as a cascade structure, the electrons flow from CdS to CdSe\(^{[16]}\). The redistribution of the electrons results in a stepwise band structure. The insertion of a CdS layer between TiO2 and CdSe elevates the CB of CdSe, generating a higher driving force for electron transportation. In addition, the quantum confinement effect renders the energy level of the CB more negative with decreasing particle size\(^{[17]}\). Thus, a higher efficiency of approximately 0.6031% is obtained with the TiO2/CdS/CdSe electrode (see Table 2). To improve the photoresponse significantly, two layers of ZnS QDs are coated onto the material. The absorption edge of ZnS is at approximately 345 nm. A higher absorption is also obtained, resulting in 1.059354% efficiency (see Fig. 7).

In conclusion, we successfully fabricate a TiO2 photoanode, which is sequentially modified with CdS, CdSe, and ZnS QDs. The co-sensitized electrode exhibits a significantly improved photoresponse, including wider spectral response range and enhanced efficiency in performance compared with the single-type QD-sensitized electrode. This improvement is mainly attributed to the overlap of the absorption spectra of the different materials and the formation of an ideal stepwise band structure.
which promotes the transport of excited electrons and holes across the composite electrode. The synthesized TiO$_2$/CdS/CdSe/ZnS photoanode exhibits a maximum efficiency value of 1.059354%.

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References