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**Rapid Communication** 

## Influence of aggregated morphology on carbon dioxide uptake of polythiophene conjugated organic networks



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#### ABSTRACT

Two novel thiophene-based conjugated networks CMPs-TTT and CMPs-DTBT were designed and prepared with different steric configuration building blocks by FeCl<sub>3</sub> oxidative coupling polymerization. UV–vis spectra, FE-SEM and TEM images showed CMPs-TTT and CMPs-DTBT having the different aggregated morphologies. After porous analysis and gas adsorption test, the result showed CO<sub>2</sub> uptake capacity of CMPs-DTBT with amorphous aggregation model is 2.88 times and 2.66 times greater than that of CMPs-TTT with large lamellar structure model at 273 K and 298 K (1.0 bar), respectively. As a result, this communication proved that change the topological structure of the polymer can influence the CO<sub>2</sub> adsorption capacity significantly.

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#### 1. Introduction

Rapid consumption of hydrocarbon fuels had caused  $CO_2$  concentration increased quickly in the atmosphere. It is well known that  $CO_2$  is probably the main contributor to the global-warming and climate change. Most countries had drawn much manpower and financial resources in this problem last few decades [1]. In a long-term, the best strategy to lower  $CO_2$  emissions is to adopt new energy solutions which do not produce  $CO_2$  as a byproduct, however, this envisaging is not practical nowadays, because there is no any new energy reserves combining with technology can substitute the low-price fossil fuel (coal, petroleum and natural gas).  $CO_2$  capture and storage provides humanity a potential resolution to the fossil energy used continually without  $CO_2$  release in the short-term until green energy technologies mature [2,3]. A wide range of  $CO_2$  adsorbents have been reported including zeolites [4,5], carbons [6,7], metal organic frameworks (MOFs) [8,9] and microporous organic polymers (MOPs) [10,11].

Organic porous polymers skeleton comprised of light, non-metallic elements with high chemical and thermal stability had exhibited potential application in  $CO_2$  uptakes. Various organic reactions have been exploited to synthesize microporous polymers such as hypercross-linked polymers (HCPs) [12,13], polymers of intrinsic microporosity (PIMs) [14,15], covalent organic frameworks (COFs) [16]. Conjugated microporous polymers (CMPs) [17–19] is a new class

of pore materials which are prepared by transition metal coupling chemistry, such as palladium-catalyzed Stilling, Suzuki, Sonogashira-Hagihara coupling condensation reaction and other oxide coupling reaction. The unique feature of CMPs is that they combine the stiff pore structure and conjugated electron system in one bulk material which show good performance in gas storage and separation. Weber and Thomas [20], Yuan et al. [21], and Chen et al. [22] reported a series of polyfluorene microporous polymers with Brunauer-Emmett-Teller (BET) areas from 450 m<sup>2</sup> g<sup>-1</sup> to 1043 m<sup>2</sup> g<sup>-1</sup> and the highest  $CO_2$  uptake reached to 12 wt% at 1.0 bar, 273 K. Schmidt et al. [23], reported the polythiophene microporous conjugated polymers with BET area up to 1056  $m^2 g^{-1}$ , however, no  $CO_2$  adsorption data was given. Recently, Chen et al. [24] reported the microporous polycarbazole CMPs with BET area up to 2220  $m^2 g^{-1}$  and the CO<sub>2</sub> uptake capacity as high as 21.2 wt% at 273 K, 1.0 bar. Kanatzidis [25-27] reported a series of new conjugated polymers for gas capture which CO<sub>2</sub> uptake can be up to 18 wt% near atmospheric pressure at 273 K. However, the relationship of steric structure of monomer with gas adsorption got little attention.

In this communication, we focused on the relationship between configuration of the building blocks (or starting monomers) with  $CO_2$  adsorption capacity on the networks which has different aggregation morphology caused by the steric configuration of the building block. Two thiophene based networks CMPs-TTT and CMPs-DTBT have been prepared and with different aggregation morphology caused the  $CO_2$  isosteric enthalpies has much discrepancy although the two networks with identical chemical component and similar BET areas and pore structure.

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#### 2. Results and discussion

Efficient CO<sub>2</sub> adsorption depends on the surface area, pore structure, and chemical functionality of the material [28]. The building blocks show great influence on the above three parameters, thus, design and/or selection of specific monomer is very important. In this work we chose thiophene as the chemical unit to structure the following reasons, (1) the electron-rich thiophene conjugated aromatic system (Lewis-base) may have the strong interaction with CO<sub>2</sub> molecules (electron-poorer, Lewis-acid), (2) the lone pair electrons of heterocyclic sulfur atom on the pore surface can provide dipole-quadrupole interactions sites with CO<sub>2</sub> [29]. The two core building blocks TTT (nonplanar propeller-like) and DTBT (right-angle) are made up of thiophene rings and show different steric configuration (Scheme 1). The single crystals structures show that each thiophene ring in the TTT unit is chiral due to a twist through the center thiophene plane, the three  $\alpha\text{-conjugated}$  rings are quasi-coplanar (torsional angles=21° and  $15^{\circ}$ ), the other two thiophene rings in the  $\beta$ -positions of the central unit are nearly perpendicular to the average plane of the more conjugated sequence (93° and 80°) [30]. The crystallographic structure of DTBT represents a pseudo-tetrahedral 3D conjugated architecture, the two thiophene rings attached at the 3- and 3'-positions of bithiophene produce a dihedral angle close to 90° between the two thiophene rings that form the 2,2'-bithiophene [31]. The two thiophene-based networks CMPs-TTT, CMPs-DTBT were straightforward synthesized by FeCl<sub>3</sub> oxidative coupling polymerization at room temperature shown in Scheme 1. This method gave high yield and the single building block used in polymerization process can avoid the effect of other structure on the morphology. The crude polymers were washed with methanol and concentrated hydrochloric acid, then, Soxhlet extraction with methanol and tetrahydrofuran for 24 h gave vield more than 90% (CMPs-TTT, dark red solid; CMPs-DTBT, brownish solid). The insoluble solid was characterized by FT-IR (Fig. 1a) and <sup>13</sup>C CP-MAS NMR (Fig. 1b). One can observe that the signal at 1663-1669 cm<sup>-1</sup> was assigned to the C=C stretching vibration in the thiophene ring and 1220 cm<sup>-1</sup>, 1090 cm<sup>-1</sup> was the stretching vibration of C–S–C. The <sup>13</sup>C CP-MAS NMR signals of carbon chemical shift in the range of 115-150 ppm are related to the thiophene carbon atoms of building block.

The porosity structural parameters of CMPs-TTT and CMPs-DTBT were measured by adsorption analysis using nitrogen as the probe molecule at 77 K. Fig. 2 shows the N<sub>2</sub> adsorption–desorption isotherms for the two polymers and they give similar BET surface area with 57.72 m<sup>2</sup> g<sup>-1</sup> and 62.97 m<sup>2</sup> g<sup>-1</sup>, respectively. The building blocks of CMPs-TTT and polycarbazole network CPOP-1 have the similar propeller-like configuration, however, the BET surface area of CPOP-1 is up to  $2220 \text{ m}^2 \text{ g}^{-1}$ , the much lower BET for CMPs-TTT



**Fig. 1.** (a) FT-IR spectra and (b) <sup>13</sup>C CP-MAS NMR spectra of the two networks CMPs-TTT and CMPs-DTBT. (For interpretation of the references to color in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)



Scheme 1. Synthetic pathway toward the polythiophene networks CMPs-TTT and CMPs-DTBT.

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