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Alkali-Assisted Mild Aqueous Exfoliation for Single-layered and Structure-preserved Graphitic Carbon Nitride Nanosheets

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Abstract: Single-layered g-C₃N₄ nanosheets have been fabricated by delaminating directly its bulk counterpart in an alkaline solution. According to the theoretical modeling, the interaction of OH⁻ with terminal –NH₂ or bridged –NH– group of the triazine units within bulk g-C₃N₄ crystal structure could result in decreased bonding energy between layers and promote the total delamination. The resulting g-C₃N₄ nanosheets colloid has a relatively high concentration (12 g/L) compared with the traditional ultrasonic assistant exfoliation method. The delaminated nanosheets are revealed by atomic force microscopy to show a lateral size of a hundred nanometers and a thickness of about 0.4 nm, which provides a direct evidence for the total exfoliation of g-C₃N₄ crystals into their single sheets. More importantly, the X-ray diffraction measurement confirms that the g-C₃N₄ nanosheets could be reassembled with well-preserved original crystal structure. The exfoliation mechanism was also confirmed by the DFT calculation.

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