

## SURFACE CHEMISTRY

# Polymeric vanadyl species determine the low-temperature activity of V-based catalysts for the SCR of NO<sub>x</sub> with NH<sub>3</sub>

Guangzhi He<sup>1\*</sup>, Zhihua Lian<sup>2\*</sup>, Yunbo Yu<sup>1,2,3</sup>, Yang Yang<sup>1</sup>, Kuo Liu<sup>1,4</sup>, Xiaoyan Shi<sup>1,3</sup>, Zidi Yan<sup>1,3</sup>, Wenpo Shan<sup>2</sup>, Hong He<sup>1,2,3†</sup>

The structure of dispersed vanadyl species plays a crucial role in the selective catalytic reduction (SCR) of NO with NH<sub>3</sub> over vanadia-based catalysts. Here, we demonstrate that the polymeric vanadyl species have a markedly higher NH<sub>3</sub>-SCR activity than the monomeric vanadyl species. The coupling effect of the polymeric structure not only shortens the reaction pathway for the regeneration of redox sites but also substantially reduces the overall reaction barrier of the catalytic cycle. Therefore, it is the polymeric vanadyl species, rather than the monomeric vanadyl species, that determine the NH<sub>3</sub>-SCR activity of vanadia-based catalysts, especially under low-temperature conditions. The polymeric vanadia-based SCR mechanism reported here advances the understanding of the working principle of vanadia-based catalysts and paves the way toward the development of low vanadium-loading SCR catalysts with excellent low-temperature activity.

## INTRODUCTION

Nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>), as key precursor pollutants inducing the formation of acid rain, photochemical smog, and haze, are mainly emitted from power plants and mobile diesel vehicles. Selective catalytic reduction of NO<sub>x</sub> with NH<sub>3</sub> (i.e., NH<sub>3</sub>-SCR) over vanadia-based catalysts is one of the most widely adopted techniques for the removal of NO<sub>x</sub> from stationary and mobile sources (1–4). The lower exhaust temperature of advanced combustion engines requires that catalysts be active at lower temperatures (5, 6). Therefore, it is highly desirable to develop vanadia-based SCR catalysts with excellent low-temperature activity to meet future emission regulations, which requires an in-depth understanding of the active center and the reaction mechanism (2, 7, 8).

For the commercial vanadia-based catalysts, previous studies revealed that dispersed vanadyl species, serving as the active moieties for NO<sub>x</sub> reduction, are mainly present as isolated monomeric and polymeric vanadyl species (9–12), the distributions of which are closely related to the content of V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub> (13, 14). As for V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>/TiO<sub>2</sub> catalysts, in situ laser Raman analysis performed by Went *et al.* (12) confirmed that monomeric species predominated at low vanadia loading of 1.3 weight % (wt %) V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>, at 80% of vanadyl species. With increasing vanadia loading from 1.3 to 3.0 wt %, the fraction of monomeric species decreased monotonically, while the percentage of polymeric species increased from 20 to 33%. Vanadia-based catalysts with 2 to 3 wt % V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub> are commonly used in industrial applications for mobile source emission control (15). Moreover, for commercial V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>/TiO<sub>2</sub> catalysts, sulfate species are commonly present in the anatase TiO<sub>2</sub> used. As revealed by Nam's group (16), sulfate

can enhance the transformation of isolated vanadyl species to polymeric vanadyl species. Therefore, the polymeric vanadyl species may play an important role in the removal of NO<sub>x</sub> from mobile sources. However, currently proposed NH<sub>3</sub>-SCR schemes over vanadia-based catalysts mainly focus on the reaction process occurring on isolated monomeric vanadyl species (1, 7, 8, 17), without considering the polymerization of reactive sites and their coupling effects. The working principle of polymeric vanadyl species remains unclear.

Here, using a TiO<sub>2</sub> support pretreated with sulfate species, we successfully obtained V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>/TiO<sub>2</sub> catalysts with varying proportions of polymeric and monomeric vanadyl species, which exhibited marked differences in NH<sub>3</sub>-SCR activity. By combining the results of experimental measurements with density functional theory (DFT) calculations, we found a polymeric vanadyl-based NH<sub>3</sub>-SCR mechanism, which is energetically more favorable than the reaction schemes based on monomeric vanadyl species. Therefore, it is the polymeric vanadyl species, rather than monomeric vanadyl species, that determine the activity of vanadia-based catalysts, especially under low-temperature conditions. This finding shows that the surface structure of dispersed vanadia plays a critical role in the NH<sub>3</sub>-SCR reaction. In addition, the experimental approach used here provides an efficient way to develop high-performance low vanadium-loading SCR catalysts.

## RESULTS

### Catalytic activity

It is well known that vanadia-based catalysts are widely applied because of their excellent sulfur resistance. We pretreated TiO<sub>2</sub> with (NH<sub>4</sub>)<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub> to regulate the amount of sulfur on the surface, and we obtained a series of V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>/TiO<sub>2</sub> catalysts with different amounts of sulfur, denoted as 1V/xSTi (*x* wt % represents the sulfate content). For comparison with these sulfur-containing samples, we also prepared samples without sulfur by treating the TiO<sub>2</sub> support with NH<sub>3</sub> [i.e., Ti-NH<sub>3</sub> and 1V/(Ti-NH<sub>3</sub>) samples]. Because of the reduction of sulfate by NH<sub>3</sub>, x-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) results showed that there was no sulfur in the Ti-NH<sub>3</sub> sample (table S1),

Copyright © 2018  
The Authors, some  
rights reserved;  
exclusive licensee  
American Association  
for the Advancement  
of Science. No claim to  
original U.S. Government  
Works. Distributed  
under a Creative  
Commons Attribution  
NonCommercial  
License 4.0 (CC BY-NC).

<sup>1</sup>State Key Joint Laboratory of Environment Simulation and Pollution Control, Research Center for Eco-Environmental Sciences, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing 100085, China. <sup>2</sup>Center for Excellence in Regional Atmospheric Environment and Key Laboratory of Urban Pollutant Conversion, Institute of Urban Environment, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Xiamen 361021, China. <sup>3</sup>University of Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing 100049, China. <sup>4</sup>Editorial Office of Journal of Environmental Sciences, Research Center for Eco-Environmental Sciences, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing 100085, China.

\*These authors contributed equally to this work.

†Corresponding author. Email: honghe@rcees.ac.cn

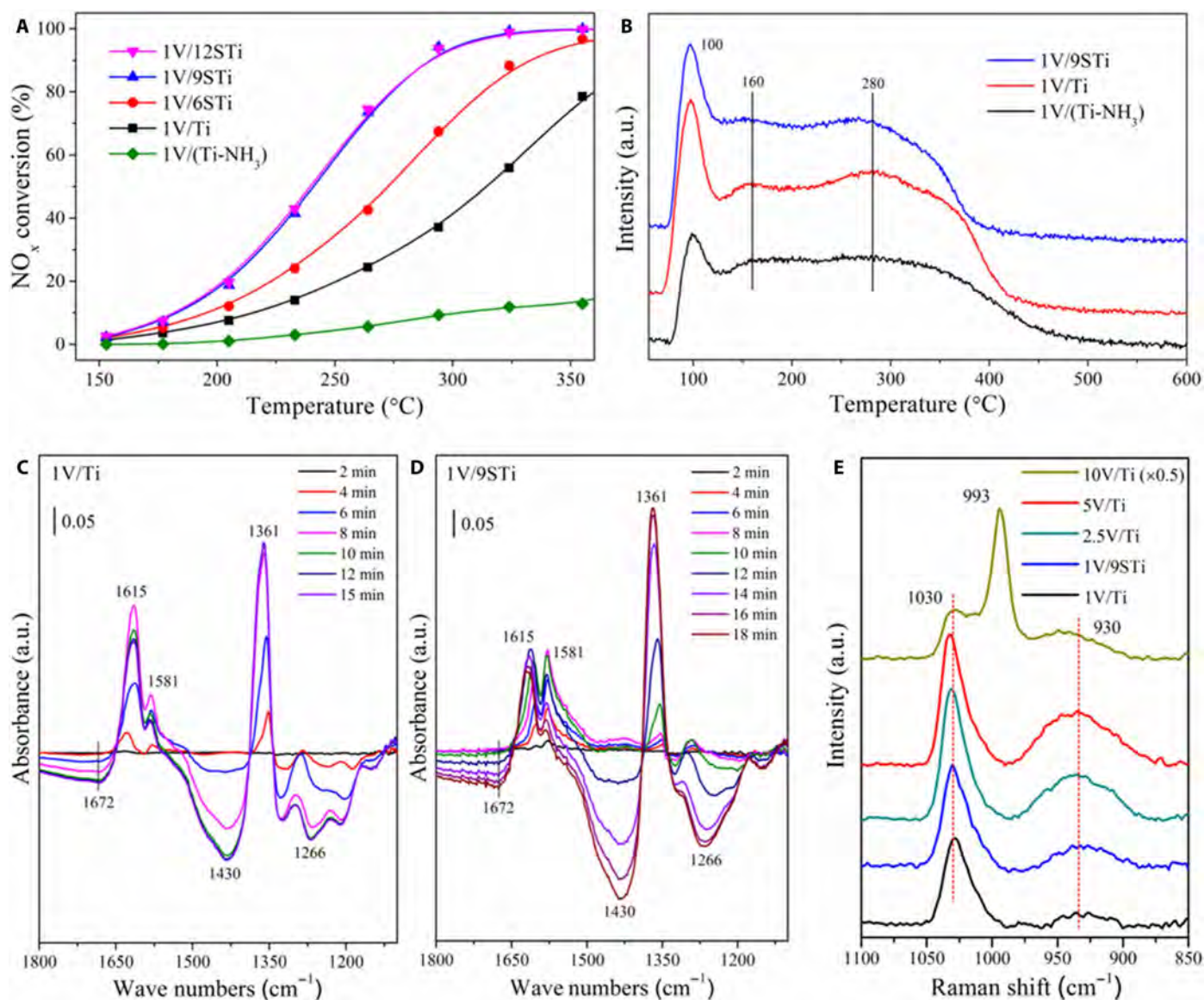
while a small quantity of sulfur was detected in the 1V/(Ti-NH<sub>3</sub>) sample owing to the existence of traces of sulfur in the vanadia precursor (NH<sub>4</sub>VO<sub>3</sub>). With increasing sulfur content, the specific surface area decreased slightly (table S2). There was no change in the crystalline structure, and all these samples crystallized in the anatase structure (fig. S1).

As shown in Fig. 1A, the catalytic activity of the V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>/TiO<sub>2</sub> catalysts in the SCR of NO with NH<sub>3</sub> increased with increasing sulfur content. The highest NH<sub>3</sub>-SCR activity was obtained over 1V/9STi and 1V/12STi samples, which yielded 90% NO<sub>x</sub> conversion at 300°C under a high gas hourly space velocity (GHSV) of 200,000 hour<sup>-1</sup>. The purpose of this study is to elucidate the fundamental NH<sub>3</sub>-SCR principles of vanadia-based catalysts; thus, we used a simplified V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>/TiO<sub>2</sub> catalytic system without introducing any promoter com-

ponents. A comparison of the activity with that of previously reported catalysts (18, 19) shows that the activity of our 1V/9STi catalyst, expressed in terms of reaction rate and turnover frequency (TOF), is comparable to that of many commercial V/WTi catalysts (table S3). The selectivity toward N<sub>2</sub> was maintained at about 98% over the whole temperature range (fig. S2). Moreover, the 1V/9STi sample exhibited excellent resistance to SO<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>O (fig. S3). To confirm the effect of sulfur content on SCR activity, we treated the support with NH<sub>3</sub> to remove the sulfur, and the obtained 1V/(Ti-NH<sub>3</sub>) sample showed the lowest catalytic activity.

### Reactivity of surface acid sites

It has been well established that the occurrence of NH<sub>3</sub>-SCR requires both acid and redox sites on the vanadia-based catalysts working



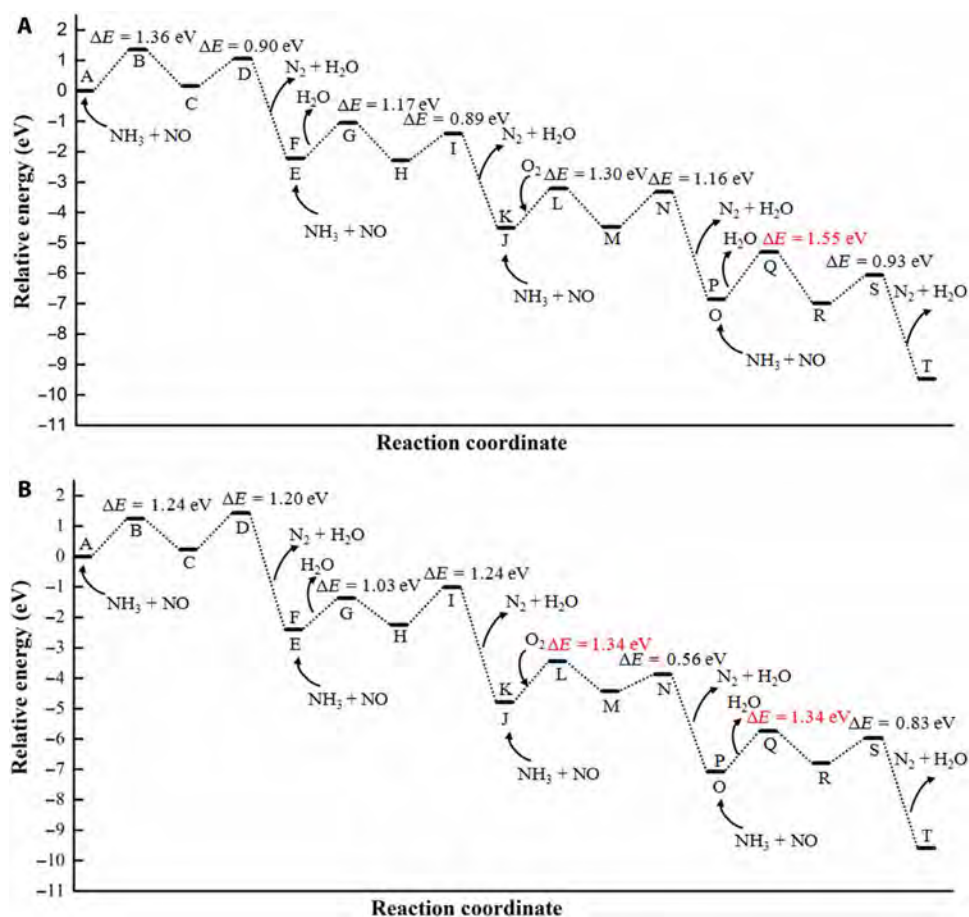
**Fig. 1. Catalytic activity and catalyst characterization.** (A) NO<sub>x</sub> conversion as a function of temperature in the feed gas of 500 parts per million (ppm) NO/500 ppm NH<sub>3</sub>/5.0 vol % O<sub>2</sub>/N<sub>2</sub> (200,000 hour<sup>-1</sup>). (B) NH<sub>3</sub>-TPD of vanadia-based catalysts after 1% NH<sub>3</sub>/N<sub>2</sub> adsorption at 50°C for 1 hour, followed by Ar purging. a.u., arbitrary units. (C and D) In situ DRIFTS of NO + O<sub>2</sub> adsorption on 1V/Ti and 1V/9STi catalysts pretreated with NH<sub>3</sub> at 150°C with the NH<sub>3</sub>-adsorbed samples as background. (E) Raman results of vanadia-based catalysts under an oxygen flow at 400°C.

together (1, 20, 21). Therefore, there are basically two possibilities, i.e., a change in the acid sites or the redox sites, to explain the enhancement of catalytic performance induced by sulfur introduction. To elucidate whether such enhancement derives from a change in the acid sites on the catalyst, we conducted temperature-programmed desorption of  $\text{NH}_3$  ( $\text{NH}_3$ -TPD) (Fig. 1B) and diffuse reflectance infrared Fourier transform spectroscopy (DRIFTS) (Fig. 1, C and D) studies. The adsorption of  $\text{NH}_3$  on Brønsted acid sites would result in the formation of  $\text{NH}_4^+$ , which is generally less thermally stable than  $\text{NH}_3$  bound to Lewis acid sites (22–24). Therefore, the low-, middle-, and high-temperature peaks of the  $\text{NH}_3$ -TPD curves are attributed to the desorption of physisorbed  $\text{NH}_3$ ,  $\text{NH}_3$  bound to weak Brønsted acid sites, and  $\text{NH}_3$  bound to strong Brønsted and Lewis acid sites, respectively. The  $\text{NH}_3$ -TPD result (Fig. 1B) shows that a high sulfur content on the catalysts increases the amount of Brønsted acid sites, whereas it decreases the amount of Lewis acid sites, in accordance with our DRIFTS data on  $\text{NH}_3$  adsorption (fig. S4A) and previous literature (25).

We investigated the reactivity of adsorbed  $\text{NH}_3$  toward  $\text{NO} + \text{O}_2$  using in situ DRIFTS (Fig. 1, C and D). The samples were exposed to  $\text{NH}_3$  until adsorption saturation and then flushed with  $\text{N}_2$  for collection of the background spectrum. After  $\text{NO} + \text{O}_2$  was introduced to the samples, the DRIFTS data were collected. The occurrence of negative infrared (IR) peaks indicates the consumption of adsorbed  $\text{NH}_3$  species. The  $\text{NH}_3$  adsorbed on Lewis acid sites and ad- $\text{NO}_x$  exhibit

characteristic IR peaks in the same regions (1200 to 1300  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  and 1500 to 1650  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ ); hence, it is difficult to differentiate these species. For the 1V/ $\text{TiO}_2$  sample (Fig. 1C), the negative peaks at 1430 and 1672  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  due to  $\text{NH}_4^+$  on Brønsted acid sites appeared after the flow of  $\text{NO} + \text{O}_2$  for 5 min at 150°C and became more negative over time. This result indicates that during the first 5 min, the  $\text{NH}_3$  coordinated to Lewis acid sites participated in the  $\text{NH}_3$ -SCR reaction, and then the  $\text{NH}_4^+$  on Brønsted acid sites were consumed. The low reactivity of  $\text{NH}_4^+$  bound on Brønsted acid sites was also observed for the 1V/9STi sample (Fig. 1D). The occurrence of the asymmetric O=S=O stretching vibration peaks of sulfate species at 1361  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  (26, 27) denotes the consumption of  $\text{NH}_3$  species adsorbed on sulfate sites. Similar results were also obtained at 250°C (fig. S4, B and C). Ferri and co-workers (7) have also reported that  $\text{NO}$  reacts predominantly with  $\text{NH}_3$  coordinated to Lewis acid sites during  $\text{NH}_3$ -SCR on the  $\text{V}_2\text{O}_5$ - $\text{WO}_3$ - $\text{TiO}_2$  catalyst, while Brønsted acid sites are not involved in the catalytic cycle and mainly serve as an  $\text{NH}_3$  pool to replenish the Lewis acid sites, which is consistent with our experimental results.

As revealed above, sulfuration increases the amount of Brønsted acid sites, whereas it decreases the amount of Lewis acid sites. Moreover, the  $\text{NH}_3$  coordinated to Lewis acid sites preferentially participates in the  $\text{NH}_3$ -SCR reaction (7). Therefore, this result suggests that the introduction of sulfate changes not only the acid sites but also other active centers (i.e., the redox sites), and the enhancement of  $\text{NH}_3$ -SCR reactivity may result mainly from changes to the redox sites.



**Fig. 2. Energy profile of the entire  $\text{NH}_3$ -SCR process.** (A) Pathways over monomeric vanadia/ $\text{TiO}_2$  surfaces. (B) Pathways over dimeric vanadia/ $\text{TiO}_2$  surfaces. The letters at each state correspond to the structures in Figs. 3 and 4. The barrier in the rate-determining step is marked in red font.

### Structure of surface redox sites

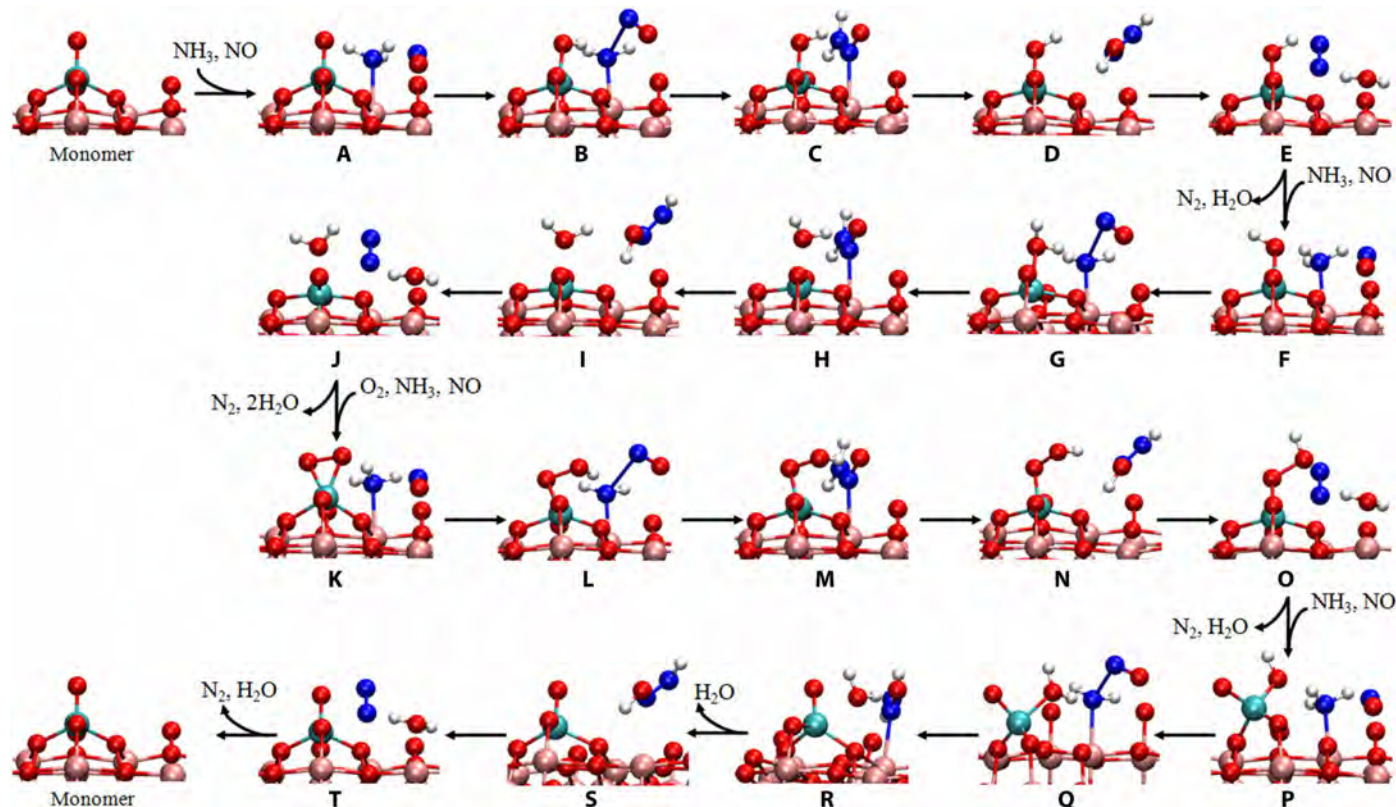
We used Raman spectroscopy to determine the structure of dispersed surface vanadyl species. According to the literature (16, 28, 29), the experimentally observed bands at 1030, 993, and 930  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  are characteristic of monomeric vanadyl species, crystalline  $\text{V}_2\text{O}_5$ , and polymeric vanadyl species, respectively. Therefore, the evident enhancement of the band at 930  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  from the 1V/Ti sample to the 1V/9STi sample indicates that the introduction of sulfate causes the polymerization of monomeric vanadyl species under low vanadium loading (Fig. 1E). To confirm the Raman spectroscopy result, we conducted nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) measurements. In general, the effect of  $^{51}\text{V}$  electronic shielding increases with the decrease of its isotropic chemical shift. The  $^{51}\text{V}$  NMR spectra (fig. S5) show that, with increasing sulfur content, the intensity of the central-band peak at lower chemical shifts (i.e.,  $-655$  ppm) was significantly increased, suggesting that the polymerization of vanadyl species was enhanced with sulfate introduction (30). The transformation of monomeric vanadyl to polymeric vanadyl species caused by sulfate introduction may be due to the surface sites of  $\text{TiO}_2$  being partially occupied by sulfate, which enables the vanadyl species to be close to each other (16). The XPS results (table S4 and fig. S6) show that the surface sulfate species do not have a significant effect on the valence state of the V ions; rather, they simply change the structure of dispersed vanadyl species.

### $\text{NH}_3$ -SCR reaction pathways

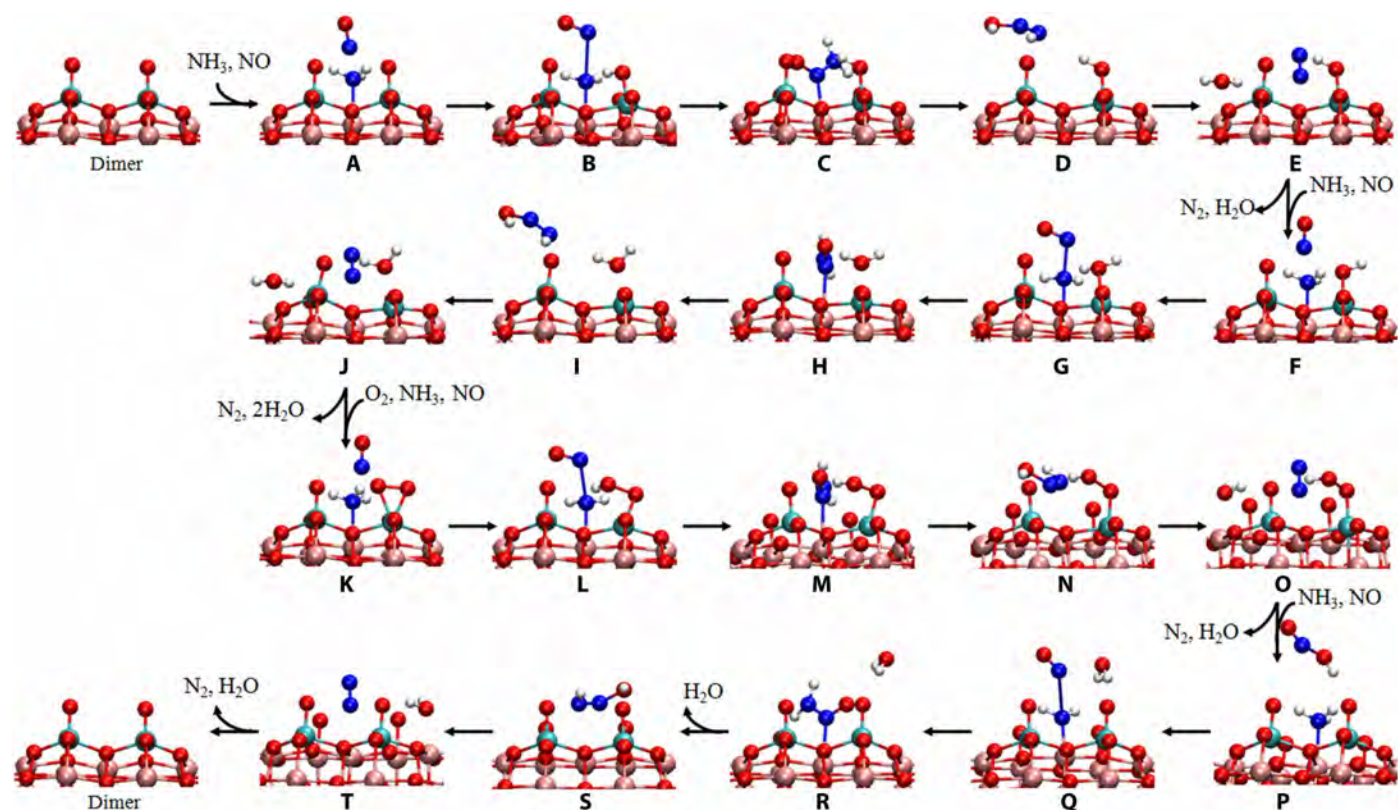
To elucidate the mechanism underlying the activity difference between monomeric and polymeric vanadyl species at the atomic scale, we carried out DFT calculations (see Figs. 2 to 4). According to the

computational results, the  $\text{NH}_3$ -SCR de- $\text{NO}_x$  reaction over vanadia/ $\text{TiO}_2$  catalysts proceeds via the Eley-Rideal mechanism, and both the redox sites and the acid sites are involved in the SCR process. The results of DRIFT spectra (fig. S4A) and DFT calculations (fig. S7, A and B) show that  $\text{NH}_3$  is preferentially adsorbed on surface Ti sites (31). The adsorbed  $\text{NH}_3$  is activated by the transfer of an H atom to the vanadyl species and subsequently reacts with NO in the gas phase, resulting in the formation of an intermediate nitrosamide ( $\text{NH}_2\text{NO}$ ), denoted by the IR signals at 1505  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  in fig. S4D) (7) and a V-OH or V-OH<sub>2</sub> group (A→C, F→H, K→M, and P→R). Then, the  $\text{NH}_2\text{NO}$  intermediate is decomposed into  $\text{N}_2$  and  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  (C→E, H→J, M→O, and R→T). Gas-phase  $\text{O}_2$  replenishes the consumed surface oxygen on the vanadyl species (J→K) (8). When the V=O groups are regenerated, a catalytic cycle is completed. The overall reaction barrier on the dimeric vanadyl species is predicted to be 1.34 eV, 0.21 eV lower than that on the monomeric vanadyl species (Fig. 2). According to transition state theory (32), at 493.15 K (220°C), this reduction of barriers would induce an increase in reaction rate of up to two orders of magnitude (table S5). This result indicates that the dimeric vanadyl species, rather than the monomeric vanadyl species, determine the  $\text{NH}_3$ -SCR activity of vanadia-based catalysts, which is consistent with our experimental results (Fig. 1, A and E).

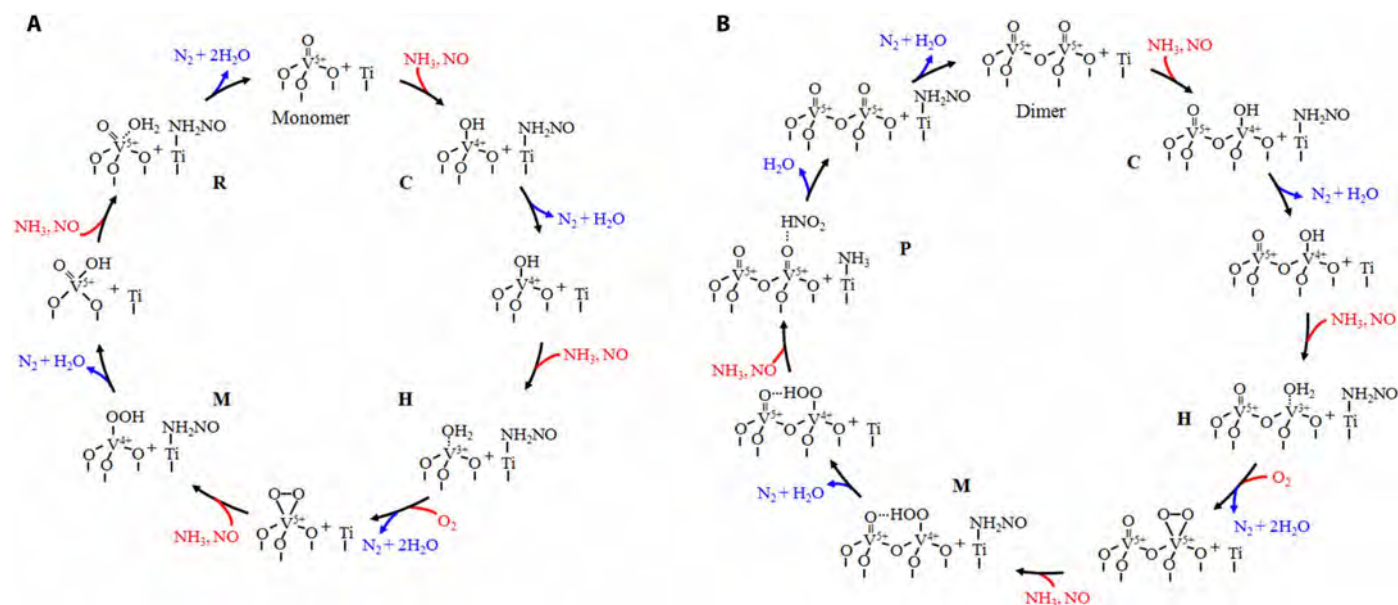
It is noteworthy that a VOOH intermediate would be formed when an H atom transfers from the adsorbed  $\text{NH}_3$  to the adsorbed  $\text{O}_2$  on the vanadyl species (K→O). The VOOH intermediate is converted into the O=V-OH structure instantaneously for the monomeric vanadyl species (O→P in Fig. 3). However, the existence of an adjacent vanadyl enhances the thermal stability and lifetime of the



**Fig. 3. Optimized geometries of the reactant, transition states, intermediate, and product for all elementary steps in the  $\text{NH}_3$ -SCR mechanism over the monomeric vanadia/ $\text{TiO}_2$  surfaces.** Red, pink, cyan, blue, and white circles denote O, Ti, V, N, and H atoms, respectively.



**Fig. 4. Optimized geometries of the reactant, transition states, intermediate, and product for all elementary steps in the  $\text{NH}_3$ -SCR mechanism over the dimeric vanadia/ $\text{TiO}_2$  surfaces.** All legends are the same as those in Fig. 3.



**Fig. 5. Mechanism of the standard  $\text{NH}_3$ -SCR reaction.** (A) Reactions over monomeric vanadia/ $\text{TiO}_2$  surfaces. (B) Reactions over dimeric vanadia/ $\text{TiO}_2$  surfaces. Reactants are marked in red, and products are marked in blue. The letters at each state correspond to the structures in Figs. 3 and 4.

VOOH intermediate due to the formation of a hydrogen bond between the VOOH group and the adjacent  $\text{V}=\text{O}$  group (fig. S7C), which allows a barrierless reaction between the VOOH intermediate and NO to occur on the polymeric vanadyl species. The regeneration of

redox sites, as well as the formation of a nitrous acid molecule ( $\text{HNO}_2$ ), is achieved at this step (O $\rightarrow$ P in Fig. 4). Yet on the monomeric vanadyl species, the regeneration of redox sites does not occur until the P $\rightarrow$ R process (Fig. 3). In the following process, the reaction of

adsorbed  $\text{NH}_3$  with  $\text{HNO}_2$  is energetically more favorable than the reaction of adsorbed  $\text{NH}_3$  with  $\text{NO}$  ( $\text{P} \rightarrow \text{T}$  in Fig. 2). Therefore, the coupling effect of the polymeric vanadyl species not only shortens the reaction pathway for the regeneration of redox sites but also substantially reduces the overall reaction barrier of the catalytic cycle, which therefore greatly accelerates the  $\text{NH}_3$ -SCR reaction. On the basis of the DFT calculations and experimental evidence, the entire  $\text{NH}_3$ -SCR mechanism over the monomeric and dimeric vanadia/ $\text{TiO}_2$  surfaces was deduced and is summarized in Fig. 5.

## DISCUSSION

Our study indicates that the surface structure of dispersed vanadia significantly affects the  $\text{NH}_3$ -SCR activity of vanadia-based catalysts. Owing to the difference in elementary reaction steps, the polymeric vanadyl species exhibit markedly higher activity than the monomeric vanadyl species. The polymeric vanadia-based SCR mechanism reported here advances the understanding of the working principle of vanadia-based catalysts. In the removal of  $\text{NO}_x$  from mobile sources, catalysts with high vanadium loading have been prepared to enhance the low-temperature activity. However, the high vanadium loading would result in a decrease of the thermal stability and an enhancement of  $\text{SO}_2$  oxidation. Here, we successfully obtained low vanadium-loading catalysts with excellent low-temperature SCR activity, which paves the way toward solving this problem.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Catalyst synthesis and activity test

The  $\text{SO}_4^{2-}$ -pretreated  $\text{TiO}_2$  supports were prepared by the wet impregnation method. The  $(\text{NH}_4)_2\text{SO}_4$  was dissolved in distilled water before  $\text{TiO}_2$  was added to the solution. The mixture was agitated for 1 hour, and then the moisture was evaporated at  $60^\circ\text{C}$  using a rotary vacuum evaporator before drying overnight at  $100^\circ\text{C}$ . The mixture was calcined in air for 3 hours at  $300^\circ\text{C}$ . The resulting samples were labeled as  $x\text{STi}$ , where  $x$  is the loading amount of  $\text{SO}_4^{2-}$ .  $1\text{V}/x\text{STi}$  catalysts were prepared by the wet impregnation method using ammonium metavanadate (1.0 wt % vanadium pentoxide) and calcined  $x\text{STi}$  and were finally calcined in air for 3 hours at  $500^\circ\text{C}$ .

Before the  $\text{NH}_3$ -SCR activity tests, the catalysts were pressed, crushed, and sieved to 40 to 60 mesh. The activity tests were carried out in a fixed-bed quartz flow reactor at atmospheric pressure. The reaction conditions were controlled as follows: 500 ppm  $\text{NO}$ , 500 ppm  $\text{NH}_3$ , 5 volume percent (vol %)  $\text{O}_2$ , 100 ppm  $\text{SO}_2$  (when used), 10 vol %  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  (when used), and  $\text{N}_2$  balance. Under ambient conditions, the total flow rate was 500 ml/min, and the GHSV was  $200,000 \text{ hour}^{-1}$ . The effluent gas, including  $\text{NO}$ ,  $\text{NH}_3$ ,  $\text{NO}_2$ , and  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ , was continuously analyzed by a Thermo Antaris IGS FTIR gas analyzer equipped with a heated, low-volume, multiple-path gas cell (2 m).

### Catalyst characterization

The surface area and pore characteristics of the catalysts were obtained from  $\text{N}_2$  adsorption/desorption analysis at  $-196^\circ\text{C}$  using a Quantachrome Quadrasorb SI-MP. Before the  $\text{N}_2$  physisorption, the catalysts were degassed at  $300^\circ\text{C}$  for 5 hours. The surface area was determined by the Brunauer-Emmett-Teller equation in the 0.05 to 0.35 partial pressure range. The pore volume and average pore diameter were determined by the Barrett-Joyner-Halenda method from the desorption branches of the isotherms.

XPS spectra of the catalysts were recorded on a scanning X-ray microprobe (Axis Ultra, Kratos Analytical Ltd.) using  $\text{Al K}\alpha$  radiation (1486.7 eV). All the binding energies were calibrated using the  $\text{C 1s}$  peak (binding energy = 284.8 eV) as standard.

$\text{NH}_3$ -TPD experiments were performed using a quadrupole mass spectrometer (HPR-20, Hiden Analytical Ltd.) to record the signal of  $\text{NH}_3$  [mass/charge ( $m/z$ ) ratio = 15 for  $\text{NH}$ ]. Before TPD experiments, the samples (150 mg) were pretreated at  $400^\circ\text{C}$  in a flow of 20 vol %  $\text{O}_2/\text{N}_2$  ( $50 \text{ ml min}^{-1}$ ) for 0.5 hours and cooled down to room temperature. The samples were then exposed to a flow of 1%  $\text{NH}_3/\text{N}_2$  ( $50 \text{ ml min}^{-1}$ ) at  $50^\circ\text{C}$  for 1 hour, followed by Ar purging for 1 hour. Last, the temperature was raised to  $600^\circ\text{C}$  in Ar flow at a rate of  $10^\circ\text{C min}^{-1}$ .

Raman spectra were measured on a LabRAM HR 800 Raman spectrometer using a 532-nm laser as the excitation source. The spectrometer was equipped with an in situ reaction cell (PIKE Technologies), in which samples can be heated to  $500^\circ\text{C}$  in a gas flow. In our experiments, all catalysts were heated from room temperature to  $400^\circ\text{C}$  under an oxygen flow and then the Raman spectra were acquired.

The  $^{51}\text{V}$  solid-state NMR experiments were performed at 11.7 T on a Bruker Avance III 500 spectrometer with a resonance frequency of 131.6 MHz, using a 1.9-mm HX double-resonance probe at a spinning rate of 40 kHz. The NMR spectra of  $^{51}\text{V}$  were acquired using a Hahn-echo pulse sequence with a  $\pi/2$  pulse width of 1.5  $\mu\text{s}$ . For our samples with 1 wt %  $\text{V}_2\text{O}_5$  loading, 60,000 scans with a 0.3-s recycle delay were used. The  $^{51}\text{V}$  chemical shift was referenced to  $\text{V}_2\text{O}_5$  at  $-610 \text{ ppm}$ .

### In situ DRIFTS measurements

In situ DRIFTS experiments were performed on a Fourier transform infrared (FTIR) spectrometer (Nicolet Nexus 670) equipped with a Smart Collector and an MCT/A detector cooled by liquid nitrogen. The reaction temperature was controlled precisely by an Omega programmable temperature controller. Before each experiment, the sample was pretreated at  $300^\circ\text{C}$  for 0.5 hours in a flow of 20 vol %  $\text{O}_2/\text{N}_2$  and then cooled down to 150 or  $250^\circ\text{C}$ . The background spectra were collected in flowing  $\text{N}_2$  and automatically subtracted from the sample spectrum. The reaction conditions were controlled as follows: total flow rate ( $300 \text{ ml min}^{-1}$ ), 500 ppm  $\text{NH}_3$  and/or 500 ppm  $\text{NO}$ , 5 vol %  $\text{O}_2$ , and  $\text{N}_2$  balance. All spectra were recorded by accumulating 100 scans with a resolution of  $4 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ .

### Computational details

Geometries and energies were calculated using the Perdew-Burke-Ernzerhof functional (33) with van der Waals correction proposed by Grimme (i.e., DFT-D2 method) (34), as implemented in the Vienna ab initio simulation package (VASP 5.4.1) (35). The projector augmented wave method was used to describe the interaction between the ions and the electrons (36). The energy cutoff of the plane wave was set to 400 eV. A ( $2 \times 4$ ) supercell of the anatase (101) surface with two stoichiometric  $\text{TiO}_2$  layers (about  $11 \text{ \AA} \times 15 \text{ \AA} \times 6 \text{ \AA}$ ; see fig. S7, D and E) was used as the substrate. A vacuum gap of 12  $\text{\AA}$  was used to avoid the periodic image interaction normal to the surface. During the geometrical optimization, the bottom  $\text{TiO}_2$  layer was fixed at its bulk position, while all other atoms were allowed to relax, until the forces on each atom were smaller than  $0.02 \text{ eV \AA}^{-1}$ . Only the  $\Gamma$  point of the Brillouin zone was sampled. The Gaussian smearing method with a smearing width of 0.2 eV was used to accelerate the convergence of integration at the Brillouin zone. The reaction

pathways and transition states were traced by the climbing image nudged elastic band method with a spring constant of  $5.0 \text{ eV } \text{Å}^{-2}$  (37, 38). No obvious differences in the structural properties ( $<0.002 \text{ Å}$ ) and energy barriers ( $<0.002 \text{ eV}$ ) were observed when  $k$  points were increased from the  $\Gamma$  point only to a  $2 \times 1 \times 1$   $k$ -point mesh and the energy cutoff from 400 to 600 eV (table S6), indicating that the calculations had converged, and the computational settings used here were reliable for describing the studied reactions. The coupling effect between two adjacent vanadyl species was generally applicable in dimeric and higher-order polymeric vanadia structures. During the  $\text{NH}_3$ -SCR of NO over the polymeric vanadyl species, the coupling effect between the two adjacent vanadyl species (i.e., within a dimer unit of vanadia) at the reaction site accelerated the whole catalytic cycle, and hence, it could be expected that dimeric and higher-order polymeric vanadia would have similar effects on the SCR reaction. The dimeric vanadyl species is the basic structural unit of various polymeric vanadia structures and can reasonably represent the coupling effect in polymeric vanadia structures; hence, it was used as the model in our DFT calculations.

## SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Supplementary material for this article is available at <http://advances.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/full/4/11/eaau4637/DC1>

Fig. S1. XRD patterns of vanadia/TiO<sub>2</sub> samples.

Fig. S2. N<sub>2</sub> selectivity as a function of temperature in the feed gas of 500 ppm NO/500 ppm NH<sub>3</sub>/5.0 vol % O<sub>2</sub>/N<sub>2</sub> (200,000 hour<sup>-1</sup>).

Fig. S3. Effect of H<sub>2</sub>O and SO<sub>2</sub> on NO<sub>x</sub> conversion over the 1V/95Ti catalyst at 350°C in the feed gas of 500 ppm NO/500 ppm NH<sub>3</sub>/5.0 vol % O<sub>2</sub>/N<sub>2</sub> (200,000 hour<sup>-1</sup>).

Fig. S4. DRIFT spectra of NH<sub>3</sub> and NO + O<sub>2</sub> adsorption on the vanadia/TiO<sub>2</sub> catalysts.

Fig. S5. NMR spectra of vanadia/TiO<sub>2</sub> samples.

Fig. S6. V 2p XPS spectra of vanadia/TiO<sub>2</sub> samples.

Fig. S7. Models used in DFT calculations.

Table S1. Relative surface atomic concentrations of vanadia/TiO<sub>2</sub> samples obtained from XPS.

Table S2. N<sub>2</sub> physisorption results of vanadia/TiO<sub>2</sub> samples.

Table S3. A comparison of reaction rates and TOFs between our catalyst and reported commercial catalysts for the SCR of NO with NH<sub>3</sub> at 200°C.

Table S4. Vanadium valence distribution in vanadia/TiO<sub>2</sub> samples obtained from XPS.

Table S5. NH<sub>3</sub>-SCR de-NO<sub>x</sub> reaction rate constants ( $k$ ) at 493.15 K (220°C) over the monomeric and dimeric vanadia/TiO<sub>2</sub> surfaces.

Table S6. DFT-calculated structural parameters and energy barriers ( $\Delta E$ ) for the formation of the first NH<sub>2</sub>NO intermediate over the monomeric vanadia/TiO<sub>2</sub> surfaces (i.e., the A→C process in Figs. 2A and 3) with different computational settings.

References (39–41)

## REFERENCES AND NOTES

- N. Y. Topsøe, Mechanism of the selective catalytic reduction of nitric oxide by ammonia elucidated by in situ online Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy. *Science* **265**, 1217–1219 (1994).
- M. Zhu, J. K. Lai, U. Tumuluri, Z. Wu, I. E. Wachs, Nature of active sites and surface intermediates during SCR of NO with NH<sub>3</sub> by supported V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>-WO<sub>3</sub>/TiO<sub>2</sub> catalysts. *J. Am. Chem. Soc.* **139**, 15624–15627 (2017).
- G. Busca, L. Lietti, G. Ramis, F. Berti, Chemical and mechanistic aspects of the selective catalytic reduction of NO<sub>x</sub> by ammonia over oxide catalysts: A review. *Appl. Catal. B* **18**, 1–36 (1998).
- J. Li, H. Chang, L. Ma, J. Hao, R. T. Yang, Low-temperature selective catalytic reduction of NO<sub>x</sub> with NH<sub>3</sub> over metal oxide and zeolite catalysts—A review. *Catal. Today* **175**, 147–156 (2011).
- C. Paolucci, I. Khurana, A. A. Parekh, S. Li, A. J. Shih, H. Li, J. R. Di Iorio, J. D. Albarracin-Caballero, A. Yezerets, J. T. Miller, W. N. Delgass, F. H. Ribeiro, W. F. Schneider, R. Gounder, Dynamic multinuclear sites formed by mobilized copper ions in NO<sub>x</sub> selective catalytic reduction. *Science* **357**, 898–903 (2017).
- L. Nie, D. Mei, H. Xiong, B. Peng, Z. Ken, X. I. P. Hernandez, A. DeLariva, M. Wang, M. H. Engelhard, L. Kovarik, A. K. Datye, Y. Wang, Activation of surface lattice oxygen in single-atom Pt/CeO<sub>2</sub> for low-temperature CO oxidation. *Science* **358**, 1419–1423 (2017).
- A. Marberger, D. Ferri, M. Elsener, O. Kröcher, The significance of Lewis acid sites for the selective catalytic reduction of nitric oxide on vanadium-based catalysts. *Angew. Chem. Int. Ed.* **55**, 11989–11994 (2016).
- M. Zhu, J.-K. Lai, U. Tumuluri, M. E. Ford, Z. Wu, I. E. Wachs, Reaction pathways and kinetics for selective catalytic reduction (SCR) of acidic NO<sub>x</sub> emissions from power plants with NH<sub>3</sub>. *ACS Catal.* **7**, 8358–8361 (2017).
- D. W. Kwon, K. H. Park, S. C. Hong, Influence of VO<sub>x</sub> surface density and vanadyl species on the selective catalytic reduction of NO by NH<sub>3</sub> over VO<sub>x</sub>/TiO<sub>2</sub> for superior catalytic activity. *Appl. Catal. A* **499**, 1–12 (2015).
- S. Youn, S. Jeong, D. H. Kim, Effect of oxidation states of vanadium precursor solution in V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>/TiO<sub>2</sub> catalysts for low temperature NH<sub>3</sub> selective catalytic reduction. *Catal. Today* **232**, 185–191 (2014).
- D. Yun, J. E. Herrera, A novel methodology for in situ redox active site titration of TiO<sub>2</sub>-supported vanadia during ethanol partial oxidation catalysis. *J. Catal.* **350**, 72–85 (2017).
- G. T. Went, L.-j. Leu, A. T. Bell, Quantitative structural analysis of dispersed vanadia species in TiO<sub>2</sub> (anatase)-supported V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>. *J. Catal.* **134**, 479–491 (1992).
- C. Li, Identifying the isolated transition metal ions/oxides in molecular sieves and on oxide supports by UV resonance Raman spectroscopy. *J. Catal.* **216**, 203–212 (2003).
- G. T. Went, S. T. Oyama, A. T. Bell, Laser Raman spectroscopy of supported vanadium oxide catalysts. *J. Phys. Chem.* **94**, 4240–4246 (1990).
- A. Marberger, M. Elsener, D. Ferri, O. Kröcher, VO<sub>x</sub> surface coverage optimization of V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>/WO<sub>3</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> SCR catalysts by variation of the V loading and by aging. *Catalysts* **5**, 1704–1720 (2015).
- S. T. Choo, Y. G. Lee, I.-S. Nam, S.-W. Ham, J.-B. Lee, Characteristics of V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub> supported on sulfated TiO<sub>2</sub> for selective catalytic reduction of NO by NH<sub>3</sub>. *Appl. Catal. A* **200**, 177–188 (2000).
- L. Arnarson, H. Falsig, S. B. Rasmussen, J. V. Lauritsen, P. G. Moses, A complete reaction mechanism for standard and fast selective catalytic reduction of nitrogen oxides on low coverage VO<sub>x</sub>/TiO<sub>2</sub>(001) catalysts. *J. Catal.* **346**, 188–197 (2017).
- W. S. Hu, X. Gao, Y. W. Deng, R. Qu, C. H. Zheng, X. B. Zhu, K. F. Cen, Deactivation mechanism of arsenic and resistance effect of SO<sub>4</sub><sup>2-</sup> on commercial catalysts for selective catalytic reduction of NO<sub>x</sub> with NH<sub>3</sub>. *Chem. Eng. J.* **293**, 118–128 (2016).
- M. H. Kim, S.-W. Ham, Determination of N<sub>2</sub>O emissions levels in the selective reduction of NO<sub>x</sub> by NH<sub>3</sub> over an on-site-used commercial V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>-WO<sub>3</sub>/TiO<sub>2</sub> catalyst using a modified gas cell. *Top. Catal.* **53**, 597–607 (2010).
- N. Y. Topsøe, J. A. Dumesic, H. Topsoe, Vanadia/titania catalysts for selective catalytic reduction of nitric oxide by ammonia: II studies of active sites and formulation of catalytic cycles. *J. Catal.* **151**, 241–252 (1995).
- C. Wang, S. Yang, H. Chang, Y. Peng, J. Li, Dispersion of tungsten oxide on SCR performance of V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>-WO<sub>3</sub>/TiO<sub>2</sub>: Acidity, surface species and catalytic activity. *Chem. Eng. J.* **225**, 520–527 (2013).
- Z. Lian, F. Liu, H. He, K. Liu, Nb-doped VO<sub>x</sub>/CeO<sub>2</sub> catalyst for NH<sub>3</sub>-SCR of NO<sub>x</sub> at low temperatures. *RSC Adv.* **5**, 37675–37681 (2015).
- S. Roy, B. Viswanath, M. S. Hegde, G. Madras, Low-temperature selective catalytic reduction of NO with NH<sub>3</sub> over Ti<sub>0.9</sub>M<sub>0.1</sub>O<sub>2-x</sub> (M = Cr, Mn, Fe, Co, Cu). *J. Phys. Chem. C* **112**, 6002–6012 (2008).
- R. Jin, Y. Liu, Z. Wu, H. Wang, T. Gu, Low-temperature selective catalytic reduction of NO with NH<sub>3</sub> over MnCe oxides supported on TiO<sub>2</sub> and Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>: A comparative study. *Chemosphere* **78**, 1160–1166 (2010).
- H. Zhao, S. Bennici, J. Shen, A. Auroux, Nature of surface sites of V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub>/SO<sub>4</sub><sup>2-</sup> catalysts and reactivity in selective oxidation of methanol to dimethoxymethane. *J. Catal.* **272**, 176–189 (2010).
- R. Q. Long, R. T. Yang, Selective catalytic reduction of nitrogen oxides by ammonia over Fe<sup>3+</sup>-exchanged TiO<sub>2</sub>-pillared clay catalysts. *J. Catal.* **186**, 254–268 (1999).
- F. Liu, K. Asakura, H. He, W. Shan, X. Shi, C. Zhang, Influence of sulfation on iron titanate catalyst for the selective catalytic reduction of NO<sub>x</sub> with NH<sub>3</sub>. *Appl. Catal. B* **103**, 369–377 (2011).
- S. Besselmann, E. Löffler, M. Muhler, On the role of monomeric vanadyl species in toluene adsorption and oxidation on V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>/TiO<sub>2</sub> catalysts: A Raman and in situ DRIFTS study. *J. Mol. Catal. A Chem.* **162**, 401–411 (2000).
- A. Christodoulakis, M. Machli, A. A. Lemonidou, S. Boghosian, Molecular structure and reactivity of vanadia-based catalysts for propane oxidative dehydrogenation studied by in situ Raman spectroscopy and catalytic activity measurements. *J. Catal.* **222**, 293–306 (2004).
- J. Z. Hu, S. Xu, W.-Z. Li, M. Y. Hu, X. Deng, D. A. Dixon, M. Vasiliu, R. Craciun, Y. Wang, X. Bao, C. H. F. Peden, Investigation of the structure and active sites of TiO<sub>2</sub> nanorod supported VO<sub>x</sub> catalysts by high-field and fast-spinning <sup>51</sup>V MAS NMR. *ACS Catal.* **5**, 3945–3952 (2015).
- F. Giraud, C. Geantet, N. Guilhaume, S. Gros, L. Porcheron, M. Kanneche, D. Bianchi, Experimental microkinetic approach of de-NO<sub>x</sub> by NH<sub>3</sub> on V<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>/WO<sub>3</sub>/TiO<sub>2</sub> catalysts. 1. Individual heats of adsorption of adsorbed NH<sub>3</sub> species on a sulfate-free TiO<sub>2</sub> support using adsorption isobars. *J. Phys. Chem. C* **118**, 15664–15676 (2014).

32. S. Canneaux, F. Bohr, E. Henon, KiSThEP: A program to predict thermodynamic properties and rate constants from quantum chemistry results. *J. Comput. Chem.* **35**, 82–93 (2014).
33. J. P. Perdew, K. Burke, M. Ernzerhof, Generalized gradient approximation made simple. *Phys. Rev. Lett.* **77**, 3865–3868 (1996).
34. S. Grimme, Semiempirical GGA-type density functional constructed with a long-range dispersion correction. *J. Comput. Chem.* **27**, 1787–1799 (2006).
35. G. Kresse, J. Furthmüller, Efficient iterative schemes for ab initio total-energy calculations using a plane-wave basis set. *Phys. Rev. B* **54**, 11169–11186 (1996).
36. G. Kresse, D. Joubert, From ultrasoft pseudopotentials to the projector augmented-wave method. *Phys. Rev. B* **59**, 1758–1775 (1999).
37. G. Henkelman, B. P. Uberuaga, H. Jónsson, A climbing image nudged elastic band method for finding saddle points and minimum energy paths. *J. Chem. Phys.* **113**, 9901–9904 (2000).
38. G. He, J. Ma, H. He, Role of carbonaceous aerosols in catalyzing sulfate formation. *ACS Catal.* **8**, 3825–3832 (2018).
39. E. R. Johnson, S. Keinan, P. Mori-Sánchez, J. Contreras-García, A. J. Cohen, W. Yang, Revealing noncovalent interactions. *J. Am. Chem. Soc.* **132**, 6498–6506 (2010).
40. T. Lu, F. Chen, Multiwfn: A multifunctional wavefunction analyzer. *J. Comput. Chem.* **33**, 580–592 (2012).
41. M. J. Frisch, G. W. Trucks, H. B. Schlegel, G. E. Scuseria, M. A. Robb, J. R. Cheeseman, G. Scalmani, V. Barone, B. Mennucci, G. A. Petersson, H. Nakatsuji, M. Caricato, X. Li, H. P. Hratchian, A. F. Izmaylov, J. Bloino, G. Zheng, J. L. Sonnenberg, M. Hada, M. Ehara, K. Toyota, F. Fukuda, J. Hasegawa, M. Ishida, T. Nakajima, Y. Honda, O. Kitao, H. Nakai, T. Vreven, J. A. Montgomery Jr., J. E. Peralta, F. Ogliaro, M. Bearpark, J. J. Heyd, E. Brothers, K. N. Kudin, V. N. Staroverov, R. Kobayashi, J. Normand, K. Raghavachari, A. Rendell, J. C. Burant, S. S. Iyengar, J. Tomasi, M. Cossi, N. Rega, N. J. Millam, M. Klene, J. E. Knox, J. B. Cross, V. Bakken, C. Adamo, J. Jaramillo, R. Gomperts, R. E. Stratmann, O. Yazyev, A. J. Austin, R. Cammi, C. Pomelli, J. W. Ochterski, R. L. Martin, K. Morokuma, V. G. Zakrzewski, G. A. Voth, P. Salvador, J. J. Dannenberg, S. Dapprich, A. D. Daniels, O. Farkas, J. B. Foresman, J. V. Ortiz, J. Cioslowski, D. J. Fox, *Gaussian 09, Revision D.01* (Gaussian Inc., 2013).

**Acknowledgments:** We thank F. Deng, J. Xu, Q. Wang, and X. Zhao for help in NMR measurement and data analysis. The NMR experiment was performed at the Wuhan Institute of Physics and Mathematics, CAS. **Funding:** This work was supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of China (21637005 and 21607149), the National Key R&D Program of China (2016YFC0205301), and the K. C. Wong Education Foundation. **Author contributions:** H.H. conceived and supervised the project. G.H. conducted DFT calculations. Z.L., Y. Yang, K.L., X.S., Z.Y., and W.S. performed the experiments. G.H., Z.L., and Y. Yu wrote the manuscript. All the authors discussed the results and commented on the manuscript.

**Competing interests:** The authors declare that they have no competing interests. **Data and materials availability:** All data needed to evaluate the conclusions in the paper are present in the paper and/or the Supplementary Materials. Additional data related to this paper may be requested from the authors.

Submitted 13 June 2018

Accepted 29 October 2018

Published 30 November 2018

10.1126/sciadv.aau4637

**Citation:** G. He, Z. Lian, Y. Yu, Y. Yang, K. Liu, X. Shi, Z. Yan, W. Shan, H. He, Polymeric vanadyl species determine the low-temperature activity of V-based catalysts for the SCR of NO<sub>x</sub> with NH<sub>3</sub>. *Sci. Adv.* **4**, eaau4637 (2018).



## Polymeric vanadyl species determine the low-temperature activity of V-based catalysts for the SCR of NO<sub>x</sub> with NH<sub>3</sub>

Guangzhi He, Zhihua Lian, Yunbo Yu, Yang Yang, Kuo Liu, Xiaoyan Shi, Zidi Yan, Wenpo Shan and Hong He

*Sci Adv* 4 (11), eaau4637.  
DOI: 10.1126/sciadv.aau4637

ARTICLE TOOLS	<a href="http://advances.sciencemag.org/content/4/11/eaau4637">http://advances.sciencemag.org/content/4/11/eaau4637</a>
SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS	<a href="http://advances.sciencemag.org/content/suppl/2018/11/26/4.11.eaau4637.DC1">http://advances.sciencemag.org/content/suppl/2018/11/26/4.11.eaau4637.DC1</a>
REFERENCES	This article cites 40 articles, 3 of which you can access for free <a href="http://advances.sciencemag.org/content/4/11/eaau4637#BIBL">http://advances.sciencemag.org/content/4/11/eaau4637#BIBL</a>
PERMISSIONS	<a href="http://www.sciencemag.org/help/reprints-and-permissions">http://www.sciencemag.org/help/reprints-and-permissions</a>

Use of this article is subject to the [Terms of Service](#)

---

*Science Advances* (ISSN 2375-2548) is published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1200 New York Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20005. 2017 © The Authors, some rights reserved; exclusive licensee American Association for the Advancement of Science. No claim to original U.S. Government Works. The title *Science Advances* is a registered trademark of AAAS.