Simulating the Calcination Process for Boron and Nitrogen Co-Doped Carbon in Lithium-Ion Battery Cathode Materials $LiFePO_4$

(Project CSCI 596)

Ning Nie

1. Introduction

Lithium-ion batteries (LIBs) as a cornerstone technology in modern energy storage systems, powering everything from portable electronics to electric vehicles (EVs) and renewable energy storage solutions. The heart of these batteries lies in their cathode materials, which play a pivotal role in defining the battery's overall performance, energy density, and longevity. However, the efficiency and performance of LIBs are significantly constrained by the electrochemical properties of traditional cathode materials. These materials often exhibit low electronic conductivity and poor lithium-ion (Li^+) diffusion, which are major bottlenecks in achieving high-performance batteries. This limitation is particularly pronounced in the case of lithium iron phosphate ($LiFePO_4$), a widely used cathode material known for its stability and safety but criticized for its intrinsic low electronic conductivity.

In recent years, significant advancements have been made in enhancing the properties of $LiFePO_4$ cathodes. Researchers have explored various strategies, such as nano structuring, surface coating, and doping with foreign atoms, to improve its electrical and ionic conductivity. Among these, doping has shown considerable promise. Doping $LiFePO_4$ with elements like carbon, nitrogen, and sulfur has resulted in improved electronic conductivity and battery performance.

There is a growing recognition of the need for computational simulations in this field. Simulations can play a crucial role in understanding the fundamental mechanisms at the atomic and molecular levels, which often remain elusive in experimental studies. Moreover, computational simulations offer a cost-effective and time-efficient alternative to experimental trial-and-error. They can predict the outcomes of doping, suggest optimal compositions, and even explore new material systems that have not yet been synthesized. This approach is particularly valuable in the context of co-doping strategies, where the

interplay between different dopants can lead to a wide range of possible outcomes.

Here in this project, we will focus on bridging the gap: understanding how the nitrogen and boron atoms perform and how their state change during the high temperature calcination process in this doping strategy, the initial research is about the material preparation towards improving the electrochemical performance on the cathode material $LiFePO_4$. See the previous publications on ACS website: (https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acsami.5b05398). Given the complexity of the doping process, especially in the context of high-temperature calcination and the insertion of dopants like nitrogen and boron into the carbon layers, there is a critical need for detailed simulations. These simulations can provide insights into how these dopants integrate into the $LiFePO_4$ structure and influence its electrochemical properties.