

Electronic Supplementary Information

Integration of Yolk–Shell Units into Robust and Highly Reactive Nanoreactor: A Platform for Cascade Reactions

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Experiment

Materials:

Tetraethoxysilane (TEOS, 99.5%), hydrofluoric acid (HF, 48 wt%), and concentrated sulfuric acid (H₂SO₄, 98 wt%) were purchased from Tianjin Fuchen Chemical Reagent Company. Trimethylsilyl iodide (Me₃SiI, 97%), nitromethane (98.5%, GC), benzaldehyde dimethyl acetal (BDA, 98%), 4-nitrobenzaldehyde, 1,2-phenylenediamine, ethyl cyanoacetate, palladium chloride, and di-*tert*-butyl dicarbonate ((Boc)₂O, 98%) were purchased from Aladdin Industrial Corporation. *p*-aminostyrene (St-NH₂, 96%) was received from J&K Chemical Company. Styrene (St) and divinylbenzene (DVB, containing 80% divinylbenzene isomers) were obtained from Tianjin Guangfujingxi Chemical Company. St and DVB monomers were purified by distillation under reduced pressure and stored nitrogen atmosphere before their polymerization. The Boc-*p*-aminostyrene (St-NHBoc) monomer, which was synthesized by the chemical reaction between St-NH₂ monomer and (Boc)₂O according to Covolan et al.¹ All other reagents were used as received.

Preparation of CLPS@SiO₂ CS-CCTs

First, the synthesis of monodisperse CLPS microspheres with controlled diameter about 238 nm (PDI=0.019) was carried out by emulsion polymerization method reported previously.² Then 1.0 g the CLPS microspheres were immersed in large quantity of concentrated sulfuric acid (40 mL) at 25 °C for 3 h and then heated to 40 °C for 12 h under slow stirring to

derive sulfonated CLPS microspheres. The obtained CLPS-SO₃H microspheres were washed with ultrapure water until neutral. The freeze-dried CLPS-SO₃H microspheres (0.5 g) were dispersed into excessive TEOS/ethanol (10 mL/50 mL) mixture for 2 h at 25 °C under mechanical stirring. Then ultrapure water (10 mL) was added to the mixture at 25 °C for 24 h to form silica partially covered CLPS-SO₃H microspheres via first sol-gel process. Then the resulting CLPS-SO₃H@SiO₂ microspheres were centrifuged and washed three times with ethanol, and dispersed in ethanol (250 mL) under sonication. TEOS (5 mL) and ammonia solution (15 mL) were sequentially added into the reaction mixture. The reaction occurred at 25 °C for 12 h under slow stirring via the second sol-gel process. The purpose of two-step reaction is to form a thicker silica shell on the CLPS-SO₃H surface. Then the thickened CLPS-SO₃H@SiO₂ core-shell microspheres were centrifuged and washed three times with ethanol. The CLPS-SO₃H@SiO₂ colloidal dispersions were ultrasonicated to form a uniform emulsion and then centrifuged at 1000 rpm for 12 h. The obtained precipitations were then dried at room temperature for 5 days to obtain the final monolithic CLPS-SO₃H@SiO₂ CS-CCTs.

Fabrication of IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂

The copolymerization solution containing St-NHBoc (9.0 g), AIBN (0.05 g) and DVB (1.0 g) was infiltrated into the voids inside the CLPS-SO₃H@SiO₂ CS-CCTs. Then polymerization reaction was carried out at 85 °C for 24 h. The as-synthesized IY-SO₃H@SiO₂/S-NHBoc composites were completely immersed into aqueous HF (5 wt%) to selectively etch the middle silica layer. After being washed with ultrapure water until neutral, the samples were ambiently dried. The as-prepared IY-SO₃H@S-NHBoc composites (1 equiv. of amine determined by elemental analysis) were treated with 1 equiv. of Me₃SiI in dry acetonitrile solution at 40 °C for 12 h under magnetic stirring. When the reaction was complete 3 equiv. of methanol was added. The deprotected samples were collected by filtration, washed with dry acetonitrile, and dried under vacuum. Thus, the IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂ was prepared.

Preparation of IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂/Pd

Pd NPs were loaded into the obtained IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂ via an in-situ reduction method. Typically, 100 mg of IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂ was immersed in 20 mL of deionized water via magnetic stirring. After stirring for 30 min at 30 °C, 12.0 mL of fresh PdCl₂ aqueous solution with a concentration of 1.0 mg/mL was dropwise slowly and then kept at 30 °C with stirring for 10 h. Then 2.0 mL of 0.1 M freshly prepared NaBH₄ aqueous solution was added dropwise, and the mixture was aged for 24 h. The creamy white color transformed into gray black. The mixture was filtered and the black powder product was washed with deionized water and ethanol several times. After drying in an oven at 60 °C overnight, the palladium-loaded products IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂/Pd was obtained.

Synthesis of 3DOM CLPS-NH₂

For comparison, various multifunctional nanoreactors with comparable acid sites and/or basic sites concentration, that is, IY-SO₃H@S-NHBoc (-SO₃H groups in the yolk and -NHBoc groups in the interconnected shell), CLPS-SO₃H microspheres (the microspheres with -SO₃H groups), 3DOM CLPS-NH₂ (the -NH₂ groups on the pore wall of 3DOM CLPS), IY-SO₃H@S (only the -SO₃H groups in the yolk), IY@S-NH₂ (only the -NH₂ groups in the interconnected shell), and 3D-IYS (without functionalities), were also prepared. SiO₂ CCTs with an average diameter of ca. 300 nm was synthesized adopting the procedures described in the literature.³ The synthesis of 3DOM CLPS-NH₂ was almost the same as that of IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂ described above except with a change of the CCTs. For 3DOM CLPS-NH₂, the SiO₂ CCTs was used in place of the CLPS-SO₃H@SiO₂ CS-CCTs in the infiltration process.

Synthesis of IY-SO₃H@S

The synthesis of IY-SO₃H@S was almost the same as that of IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂ described above except with a change of the copolymerization solution. For IY-SO₃H@S, the monomer (St) was used in place of the monomer (St-NHBoc) in the copolymerization process.

IY@S-NH₂ and IY@S

The monodisperse CLPS-PVP@SiO₂ core-shell microspheres were prepared by emulsion polymerization and subsequent sol-gel process that was slightly modified from previously reported methods.⁴ CLPS-PVP@SiO₂ core-shell microspheres were centrifuged at 1000 rpm for 13 h to form the CLPS-PVP@SiO₂ CS-CCTs, then allowed to air-dry. The synthesis of IY@S-NH₂ and IY@S both used these CS-CCTs. The St-NHBoc and St were used as the monomers in the copolymerization process, respectively.

The concentrations of the sulfonic acid and amine group determination by the acid-base back-titrations method.^{5,6}

In order to quantify the alkalinity, 50 mg of IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂ was impregnated in an HCl solution (10 mL, 0.02 M). After 2 h of stirring at room temperature, the mixture was filtrated and washed with deionized water (3x10 mL). The obtained filtrate was titrated by a NaOH solution (0.01 M), using phenolphthalein as the indicator. In order to quantify the acidity, 50 mg of IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂ was impregnated in a KCl solution (8 mL, 0.01 M solution). After 2 h of stirring at room temperature, the mixture was filtrated and washed with deionized water (3x10 mL). The obtained filtrate was titrated by a NaOH solution (0.01 M), using phenolphthalein as the indicator. The amount of sulfonic acid and amine groups were calculated with the following formula.

$$C_{-NH_2} = \frac{C(HCl) \times V(HCl) - C(NaOH) \times V(\text{consume, NaOH})}{m(\text{solid})}$$

$$C_{-SO_3H} = \frac{C(NaOH) \times V(\text{consume, NaOH})}{m(\text{solid})}$$

One-pot deacetalization-Henry reaction catalyzed by IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂

For one-pot deacetalization-Henry reaction, a mixture of IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂ (1.8 mg, 0.0045 mmol of amine), nitromethane (3 mL), BDA (37.5 μL, 0.25 mmol) and water (0.2 mL) were vigorously stirred at 90 °C for 12 h under N₂ in a sealed glass vessel. To make the reaction time profiles, 100 μL of the mixture was removed with a filter syringe at different time intervals. Then the obtained products were thoroughly evaluated by GC-MS to determine the yield of benzaldehyde and β-nitrostyrene. For the recycling test, the catalyst was collected by filtration after the reaction and washed with CH₃NO₂ several times.

One-pot deacetalization-Knoevenagel reaction catalyzed by IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂

For one-pot deacetalization-Knoevenagel condensation reaction, a mixture of IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂ (0.032 mmol of amine), anhydrous toluene (5 mL), BDA (0.5 mmol), ethyl cyanoacetate (0.6 mmol), and water (50 μL) were vigorously stirred at 80 °C for 1.5 h, and the reaction was stopped by cooling to room temperature. The catalyst was separated via filtration and the reaction filtrate was analyzed by GC-MS.

Synthesis of the 2-(4-aminophenyl)-1*H*-benzimidazole using IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂/Pd

60 mg of IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂/Pd was dispersed in 5 mL of methanol, followed by the addition of 0.5 mmol of 4-nitrobenzaldehyde and 0.6 mmol of 1,2-phenylenediamine. The resulting mixture was stirred at 80 °C under air atmosphere for 5 h and then transferred into a Teflon-lined pressure vessel without any separation or extraction. The vessel was then pressurized with H₂ to 2 bar reacting for 8 h. After the reaction, the IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂/Pd was separated by filtration, thoroughly washed with methanol, and then reutilized as the catalyst in subsequent runs under identical reaction conditions. The yield of the product was analyzed by GC-MS.

Characterization

Fourier transform infrared (FT-IR) spectra were recorded between 4000 and 400 cm⁻¹ on a Bruker VECTOR-22 spectrometer with potassium bromide (KBr) pellets. C, H, S, and N elemental analyses were performed on a Flash EA 1112 apparatus. UV-Raman spectra were recorded on a Renishaw inVia Reflex UV Raman spectrometer. The ¹H NMR spectra were registered in CDCl₃ by using a Bruker 400 spectrometer. X-Ray

photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) measurements were conducted by using a Thermo Scientific ESCALab250Xi spectrometer with monochromatic Al K α radiation (1486.6 eV) and spot size 650 μ m. The binding energies were calibrated using the C 1s peak at 284.6 eV. Scanning electron microscopy (SEM) images were obtained on FEI Nova Nano-SEM450 with a concentric backscattered retractable (CBS) detector field-emission scanning electron microscope at different accelerating voltages. Transmission electron microscopy (TEM) was carried out on a JEM-2100F electron microscope running at 200 kV. Hydrodynamic diameter was acquired from Nano-ZS90 (Malvern Zetasizer). The inorganic content of the CLPS-SO₃H@SiO₂ core-shell microspheres was derived by Thermogravimetric analysis (TA, SDT-Q600). The sample was heated from ambient temperature to about 800 °C, with a heating rate of 10 °C/min, in dry flowing air. The obtained liquid solution after cascade reaction was analyzed by GC-MS using nitrobenzene as internal standard (GC-2010 Plus gas chromatograph equipped with a flame ionization detector working at 220 °C and a 30 m BPX 5 column). The injected samples were heated from 40 to 280 °C at a heating rate of 10 °C /min. The Pd contents in the IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂/Pd samples were measured with an Optima 5300DV inductively coupled plasma atomic emission spectroscopy (ICP-AES) (Perkin-Elmer). Three-dimensional morphology was investigated by atomic force microscopy (AFM) with a dimension 2 μ m instrument (MultiMode 8, Bruker). Images were acquired under ambient conditions in ScanAsyst mode.

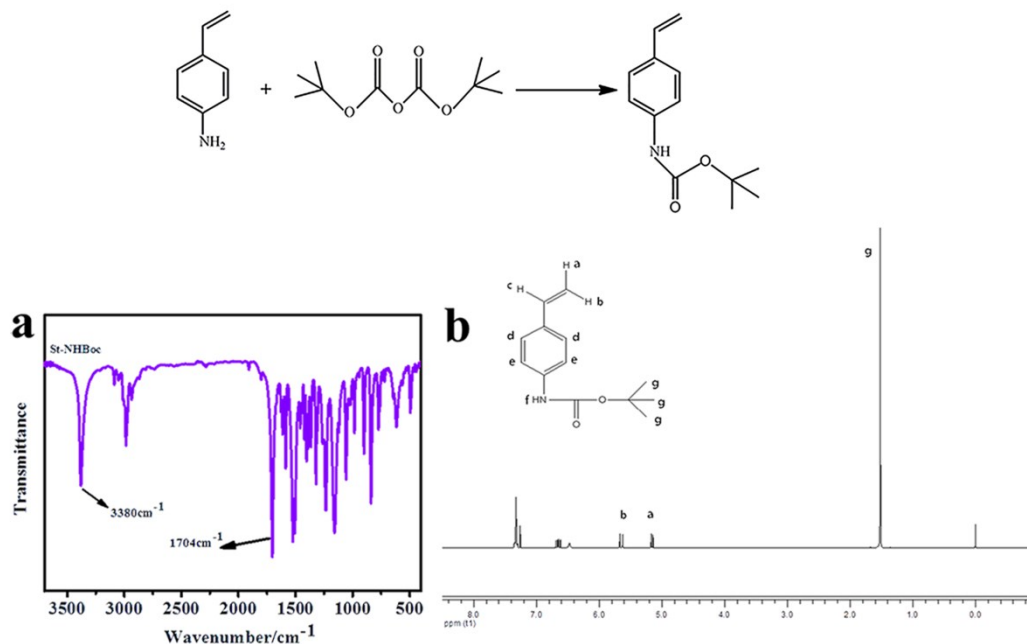


Fig. S1 (a) FT-IR spectrum of St-NHBoc. (b) ¹H NMR (400 MHz, δ , ppm, CDCl₃) spectrum of St-NHBoc: 1.5 (s, 9H, -CH₃), 5.1 (dd, 1H, =CH₂), 5.6 (dd, 1H, =CH₂), 6.6 (dd, 1H, =CH-), 6.7 (s, 1H, NH), 7.3 (s, 4H, H_{ar}). The FT-IR spectrum of the St-NHBoc monomer contained typical absorption bands of protected amino group *N*-carbo-*tert*-butoxy at 1704⁻¹ cm and the very sharp N-H stretching band at 3380⁻¹ cm.

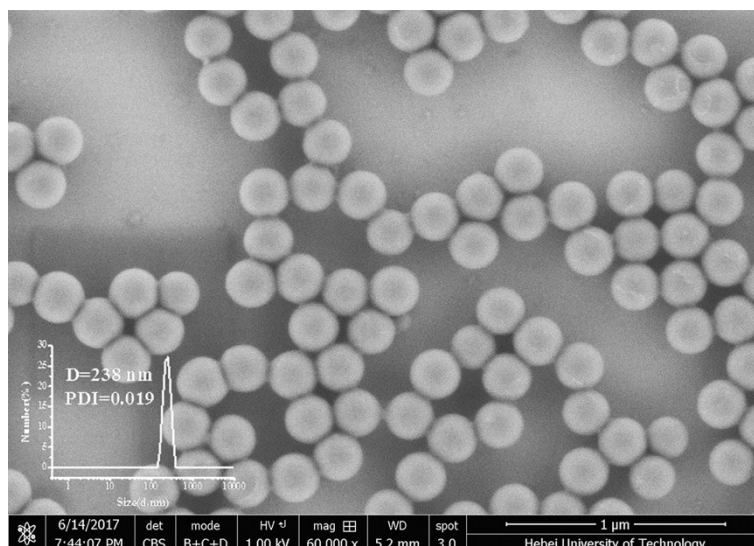


Fig. S2 SEM image of CLPS-SO₃H microspheres and average size distribution (inset).

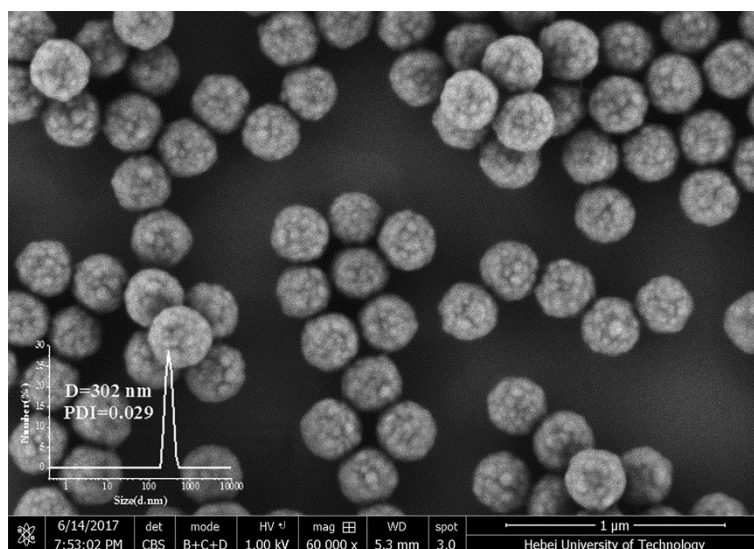


Fig. S3 SEM image of CLPS-SO₃H@SiO₂ core-shell microspheres and average size distribution (inset).

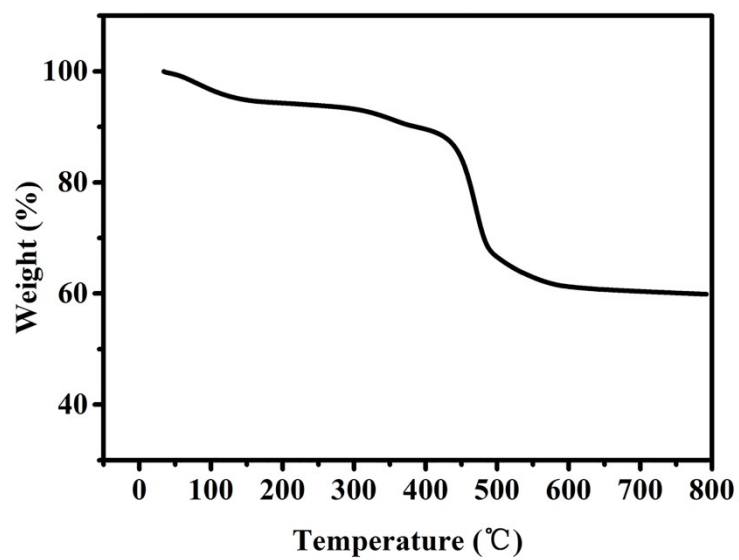


Fig. S4 The TG analysis of CLPS-SO₃H@SiO₂ core-shell composite microspheres.

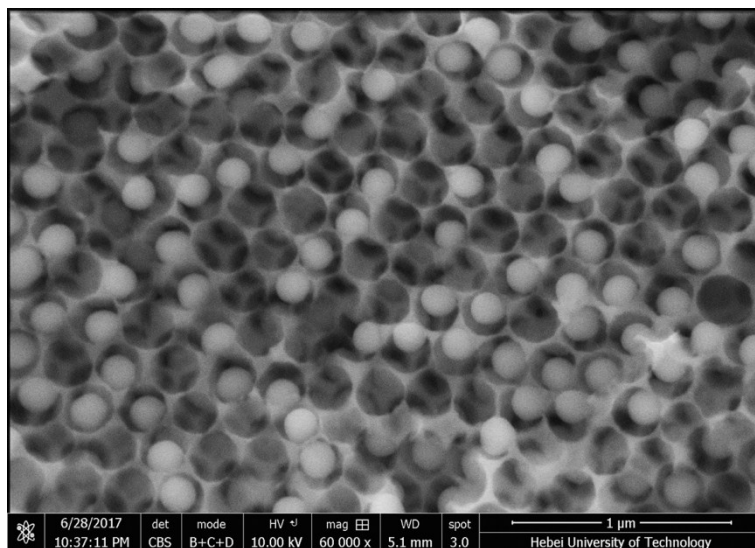


Fig. S5 SEM image of IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂ (CBS detector at 10kV).

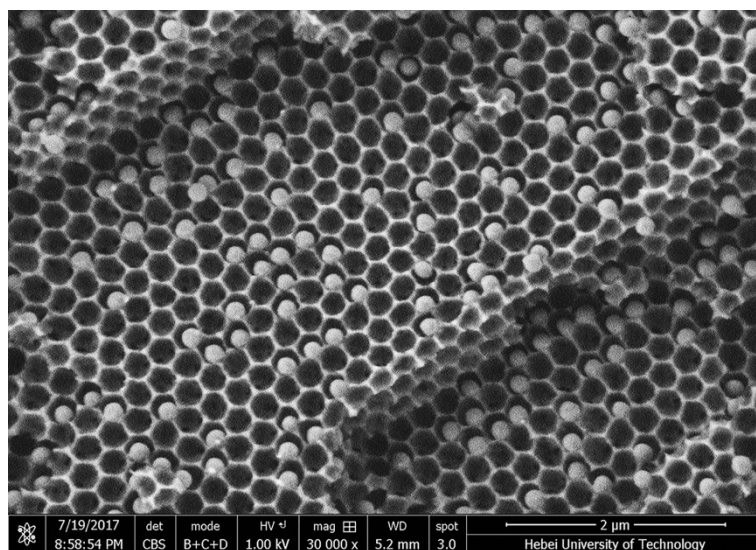


Fig. S6 SEM image of IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂ (CBS detector at 1kV).

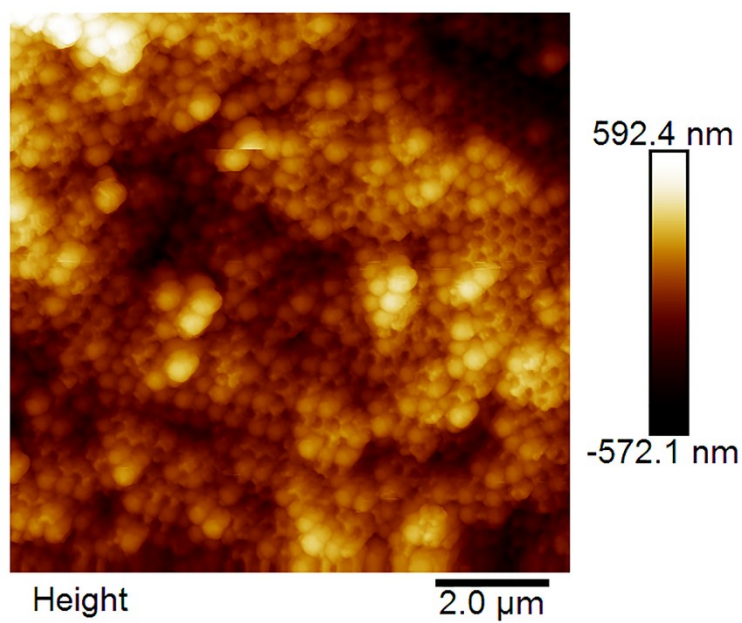


Fig. S7 AFM topography image of IY-SO₃H@SiO₂/S-NHBoc.

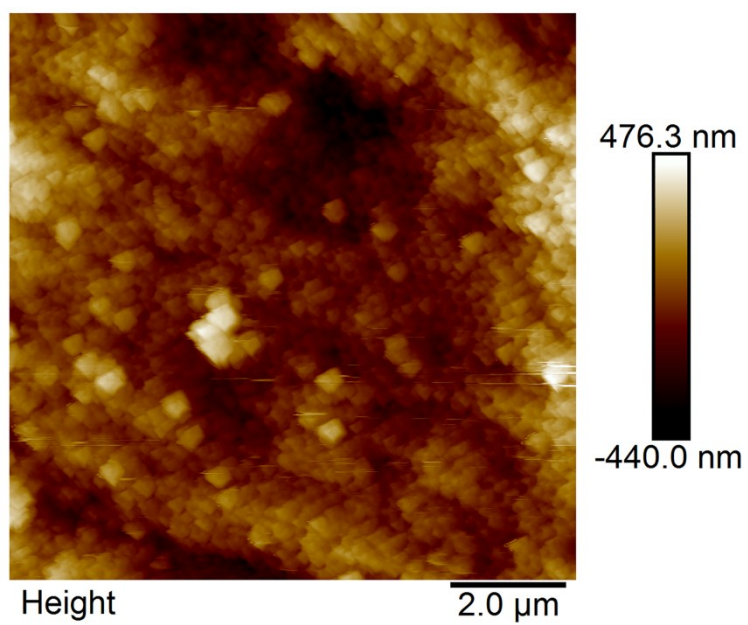


Fig. S8 AFM topography image of IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂.

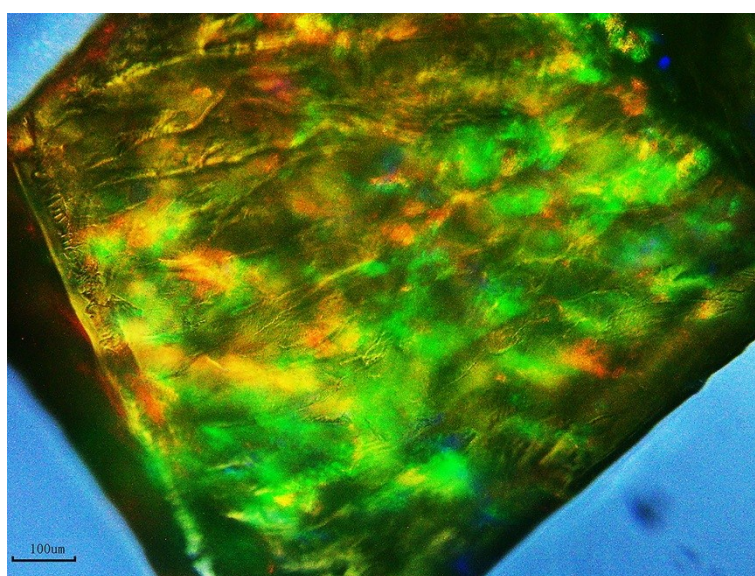


Fig. S9 Microscope image of IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂.

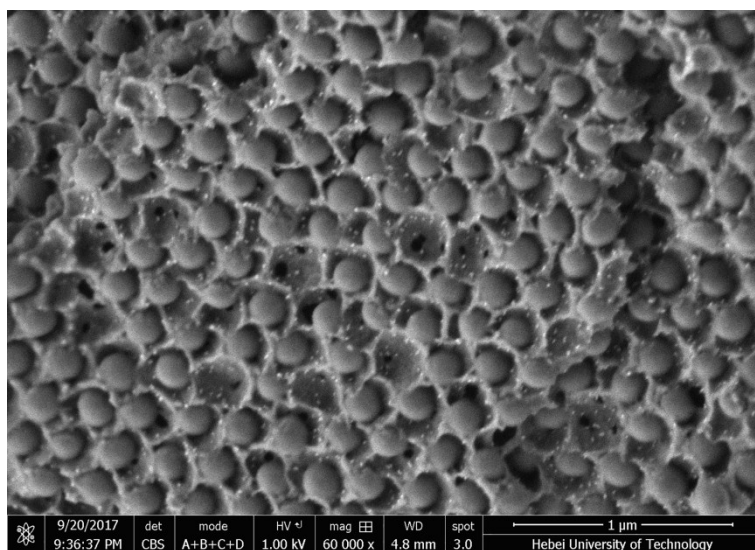


Fig. S10 SEM image of IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂/Pd.

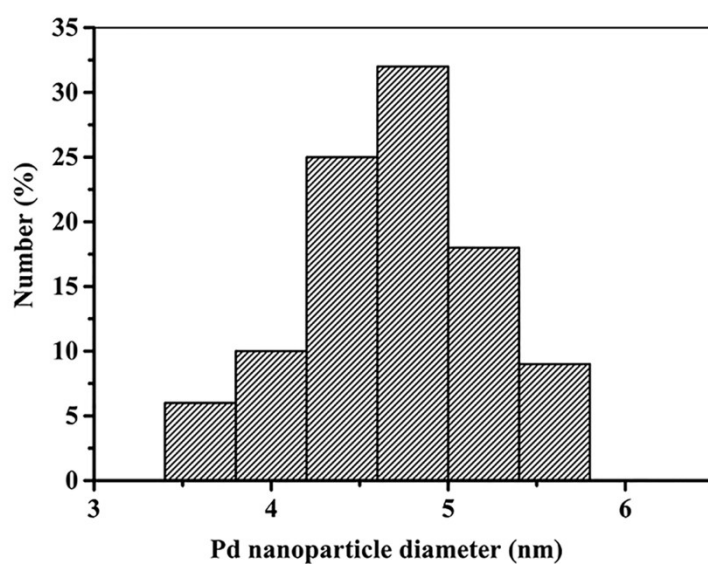


Fig. S11 The size distribution of Pd NPs on IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂ surface estimated from the TEM image via NanoMeasurer.

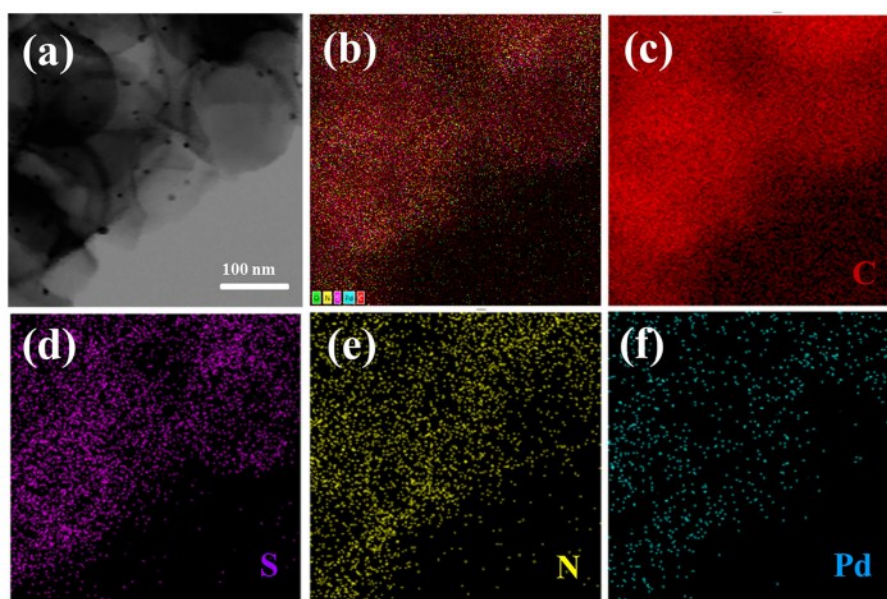


Fig. S12 (a) STEM image of IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂/Pd. EDS elemental mapping of overall (b), C (c), S (d), N (e), and Pd (f) elements in IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂/Pd.

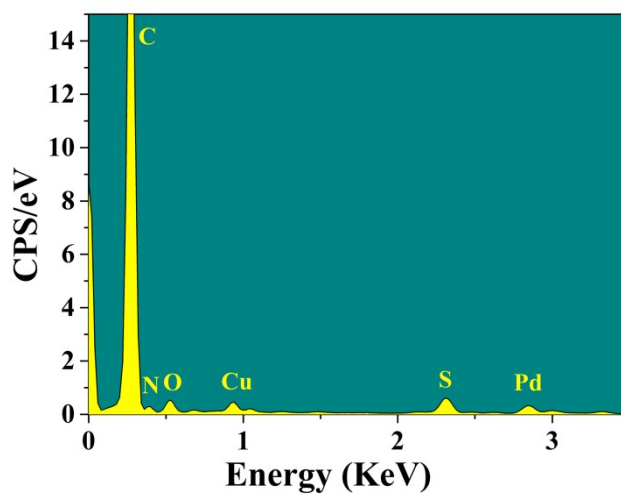


Fig. S13 EDS elemental spectrum of IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂/Pd. (Cuprum element is derived from copper mesh for sample preparation)

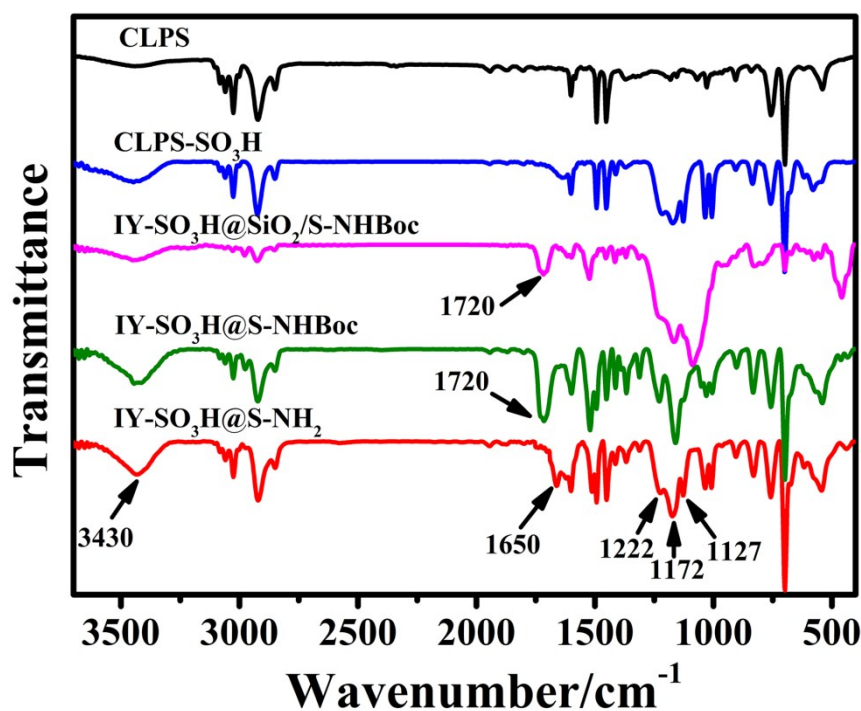


Fig. S14 FT-IR spectra of CLPS, CLPS-SO₃H, IY-SO₃H@SiO₂/S-NHBoc, IY-SO₃H@S-NHBoc, and IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂.

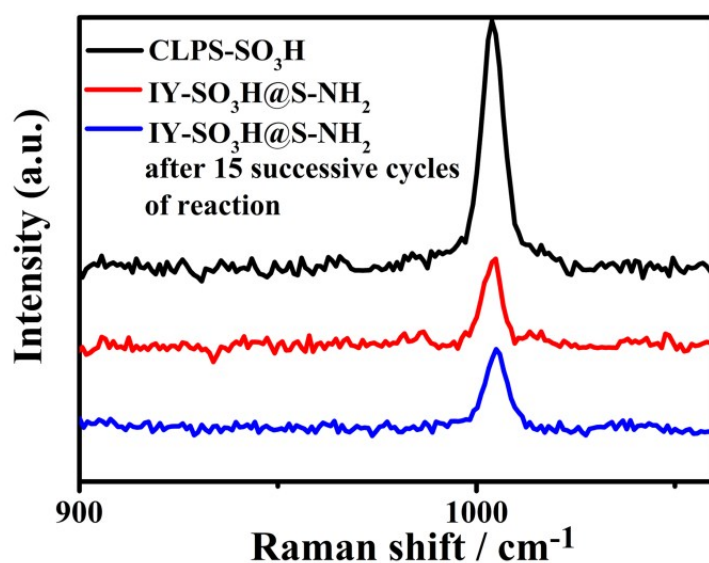


Fig. S15 UV-Raman spectra of the CLPS-SO₃H, IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂, and IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂ after 15 successive cycles of reaction.

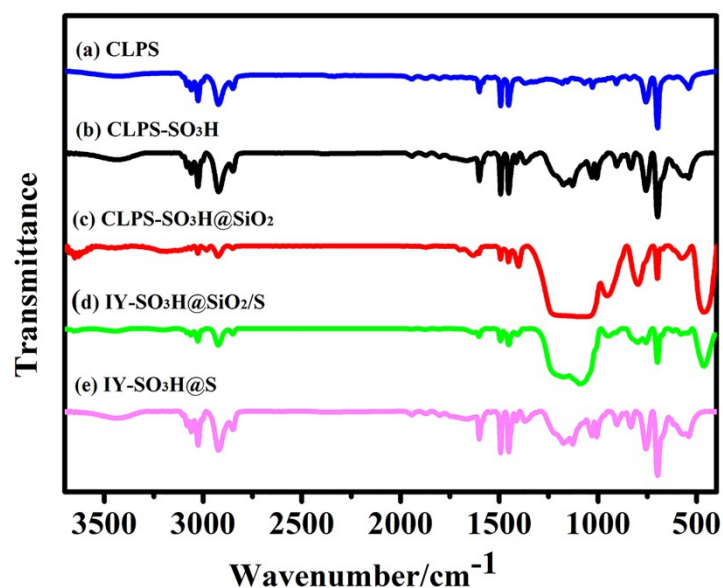


Fig. S16 FT-IR spectra of preparation process corresponding materials of IY-SO₃H@S.

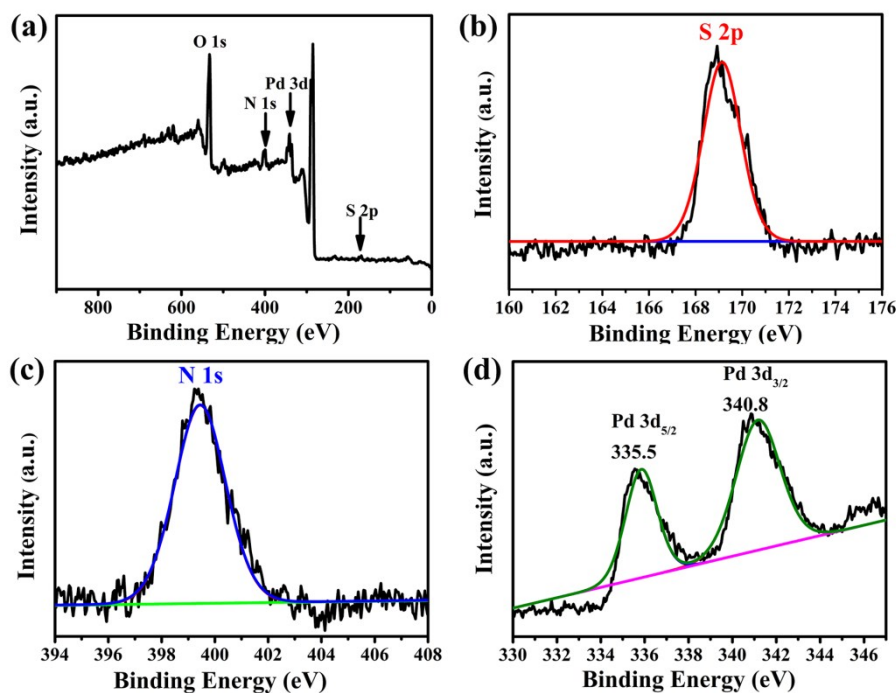


Fig. S17 (a) XPS wide-scan of the IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂/Pd, (b) S 2p core-level spectrum of the IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂, (c) N 1s core-level spectrum of the IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂, and (d) Pd 3d core-level spectrum of the IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂/Pd.

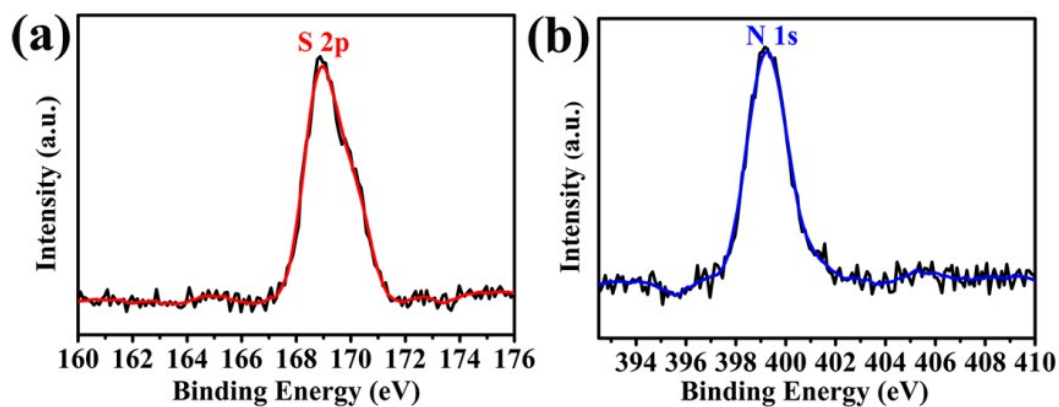


Fig. S18 S 2p (a) and N 1s (b) core-level spectrum of the IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂/Pd.

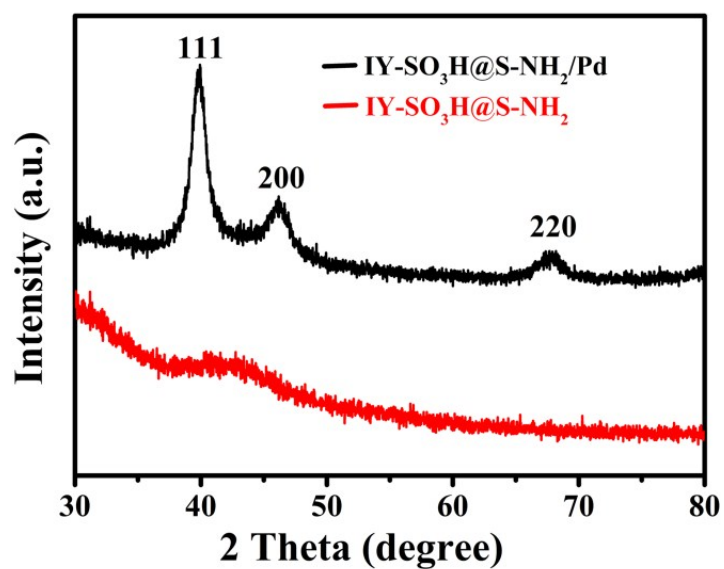


Fig. S19 XRD patterns of IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂ and IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂/Pd.

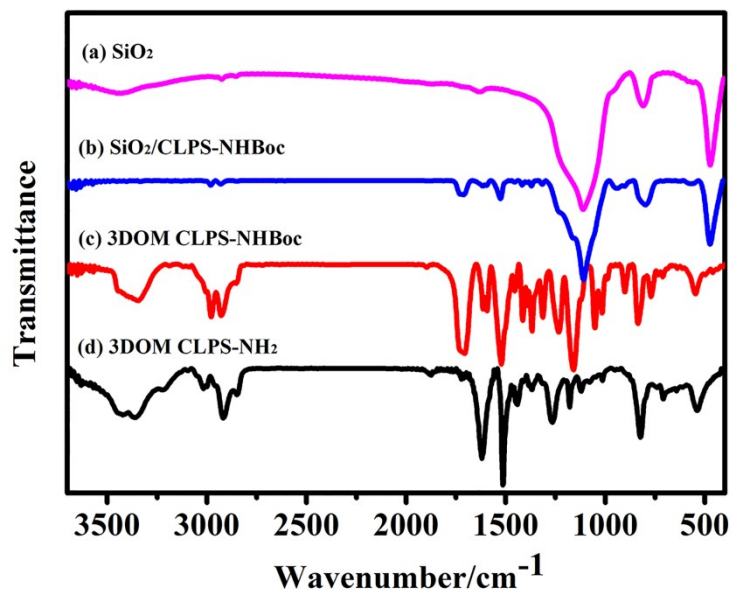


Fig. S20 FT-IR spectra of preparation process corresponding materials of 3DOM CLPS- NH_2 .

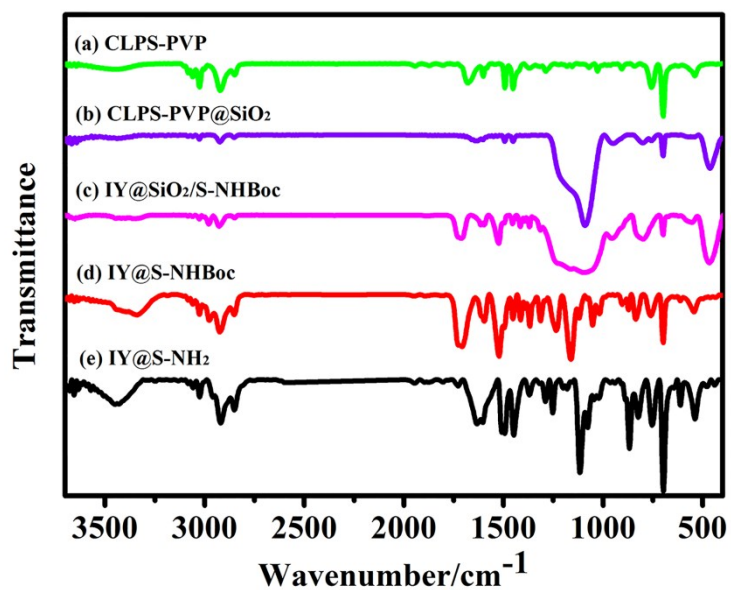


Fig. S21 FT-IR spectra of preparation process corresponding materials of IY@S- NH_2 .

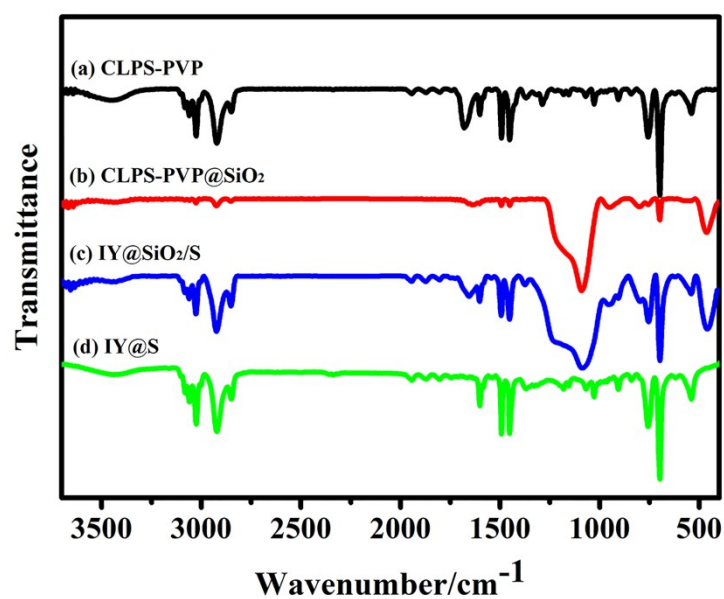


Fig. S22 FT-IR spectra of preparation process corresponding materials of IY@S.

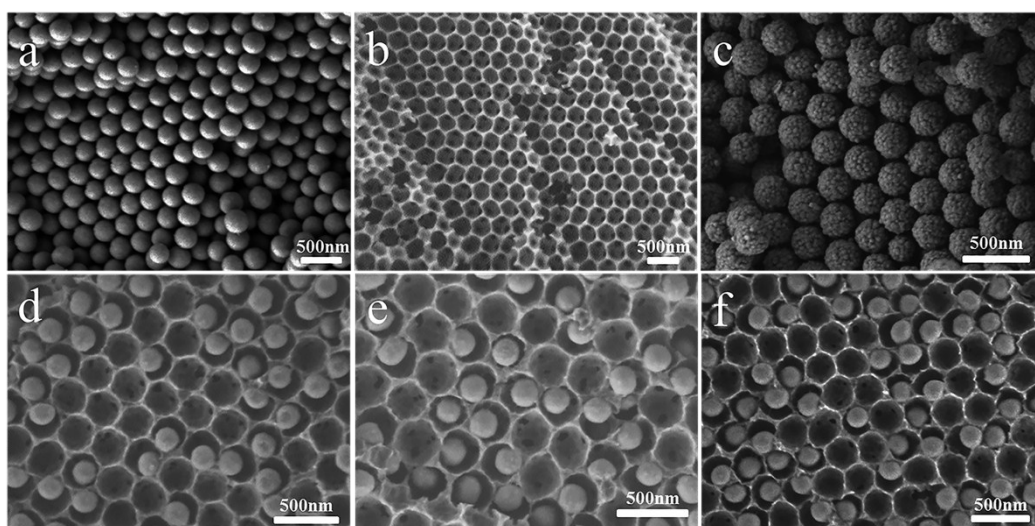


Fig. S23 SEM images of (a) SiO₂ CCTs; (b) 3DOM CLPS-NH₂; (c) CLPS-PVP@SiO₂ CCTs; (d) IY@S-NH₂; (e) IY@S; (f) IY-SO₃H@S.

Table S1. The acidic and basic parameters of various solid catalysts

Entry	Catalyst	S content (mmol/g) ^a	Acid sites (mmol/g) ^b	N content (mmol/g) ^a	Base sites (mmol/g) ^b
1	CLPS-SO ₃ H	1.82	1.79	0	0
2	3DOM CLPS-NH ₂	0	0	7.52	7.48
3	IY@S-NH ₂	0	0	2.43	2.40
4	IY@S	0	0	0	0
5	IY-SO ₃ H@S	1.04	0.93	0	0
6	IY- SO ₃ H@S-NHBoc	1.03	0.92	2.51	0
7	IY- SO ₃ H@S-NH ₂	1.05	0.95	2.49	2.18

^a Measured by elemental analysis. ^b Measured by acid-base titration.

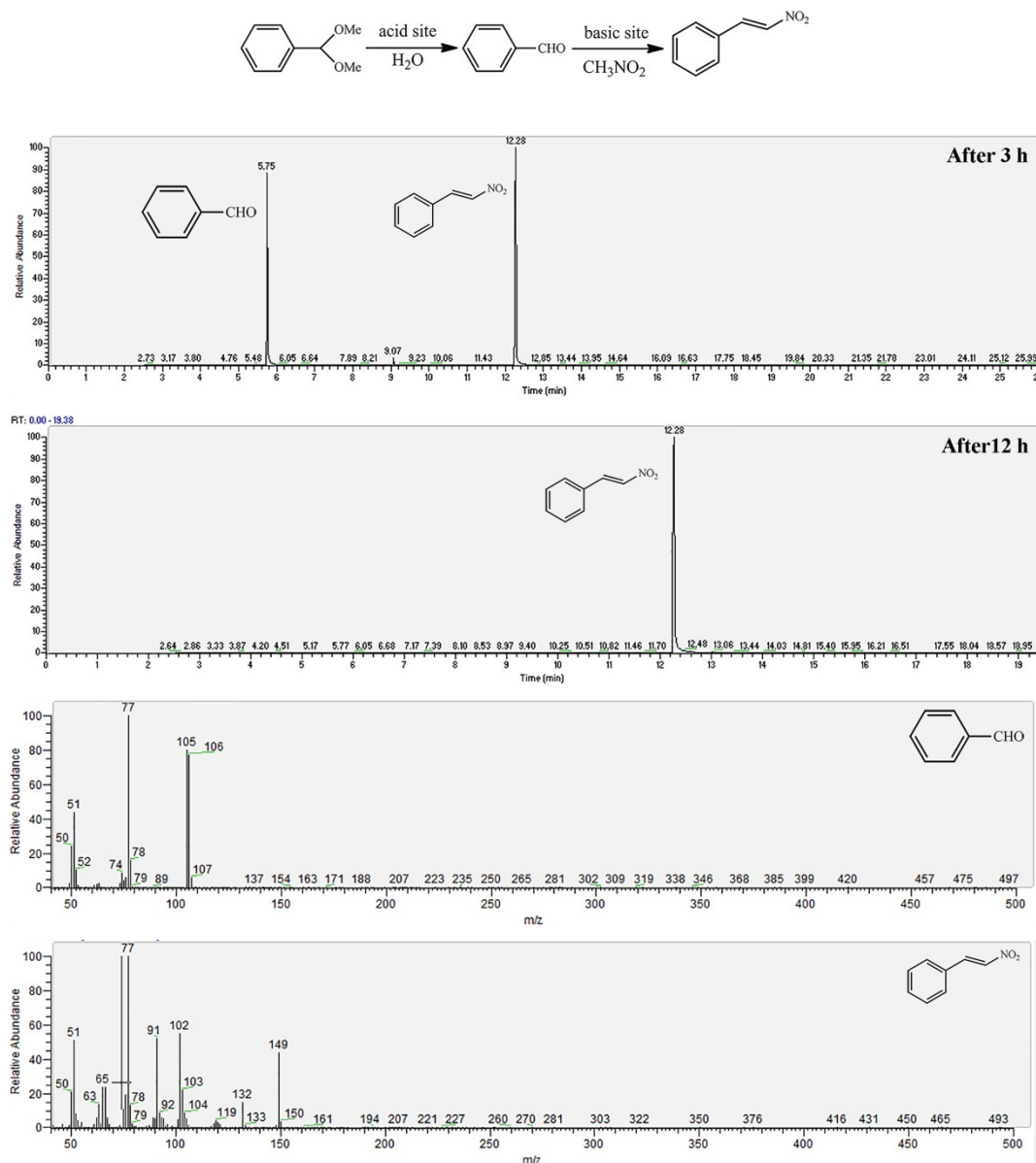


Fig. S24 GC-MS results of deacetalization-Henry reaction after 3 h and 12 h (IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂). It is seen that the bifunctional IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂ nanoreactor can catalyze the cascade reactions completely after 12 h.

Meanwhile, we also designed a deactivation experiment to further investigate the stability of the IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂. The solid 3D integrated nanoreactor was removed after 3 h was conducted, and then the mother liquor was allowed to react for another 9 h under identical reaction condition. No significant change in either the conversion of benzaldehyde or the yield of β -nitrostyrene was observed, demonstrating the absence of leaching and a homogeneous reaction.

The catalytic deacetalization-Henry cascade reaction process occurring in the IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂ is illustrated in Fig. 2b. The reagents (nitromethane and benzaldehyde dimethyl acetal) must diffuse through the encapsulated yolks,

and its conversion into the intermediate species (benzaldehyde) is catalyzed by $-\text{SO}_3\text{H}$ groups on the encapsulated yolks. Subsequently, the intermediate species will pass the hollow chamber that offers a confined environment. Ultimately, they reach the interconnected shell and their conversion into the final product (β -nitrostyrene) is catalyzed by $-\text{NH}_2$ groups on the interconnected shell. The appropriate location of both the acidic and basic functional groups in a 3D-IYS nanoreactor can shorten the reaction pathway and enhance the synergistic effects. Meanwhile, the integrated yolk-shell unit that interconnected with each other provides a longer cycling time for reaction species.

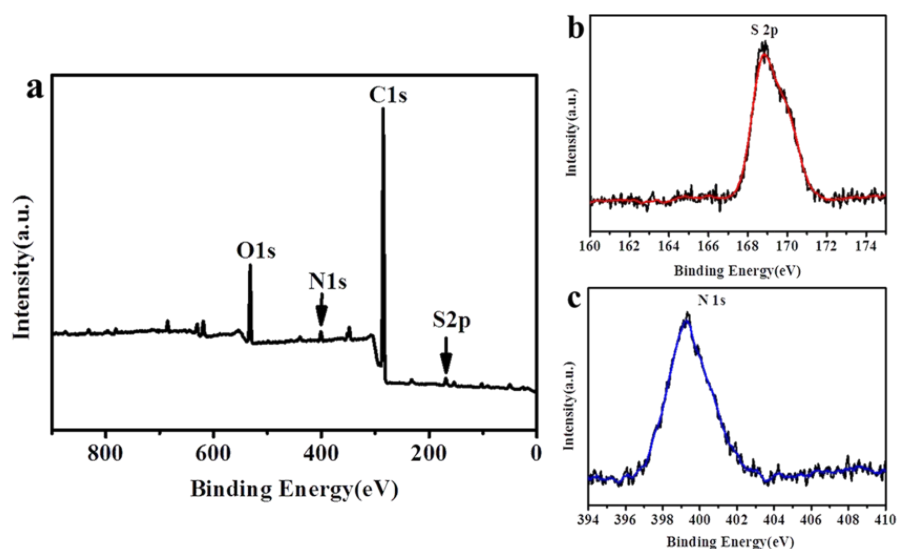


Fig. S25 (a) XPS wide-scan, (b) S 2p and (c) N 1s core-level spectra of the IY- $\text{SO}_3\text{H}@\text{S}-\text{NH}_2$ after 15 successive cycles.

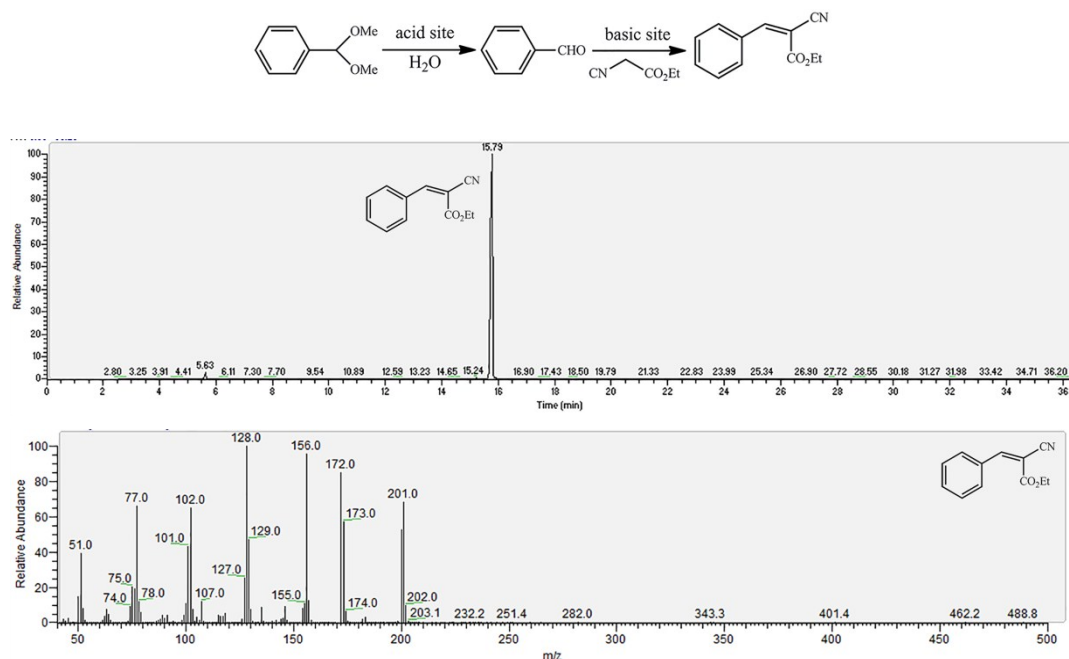


Fig. S26 GC-MS results of deacetalization-Knoevenagel condensation reaction.

Similarly, the bifunctional IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂ was used in the acid-base catalyzed one-pot cascade deacetalization-Knoevenagel reaction and showed excellent catalytic activity. This reaction sequence is composed of two separate steps: the conversion of benzaldehyde dimethyl acetal into benzaldehyde by the acid sites and benzaldehyde condensation with ethyl cyanoacetate to give the final product by the base sites. The results show that the bifunctional IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂ nanoreactor can catalyze the cascade reactions completely with >99% conversion for the starting reactants and 98% yield for the target products. Such an excellent catalytic performance is mainly attributed to the spatially separated active sites, continuously interconnected windows, 3D integrated effect and the movable encapsulated yolks of the multifunctional nanocatalyst system. These results confirm that such a 3D-IYS nanostructure is excellent as a versatile acid-base bifunctional nanoreactor for heterogeneous catalytic reactions.

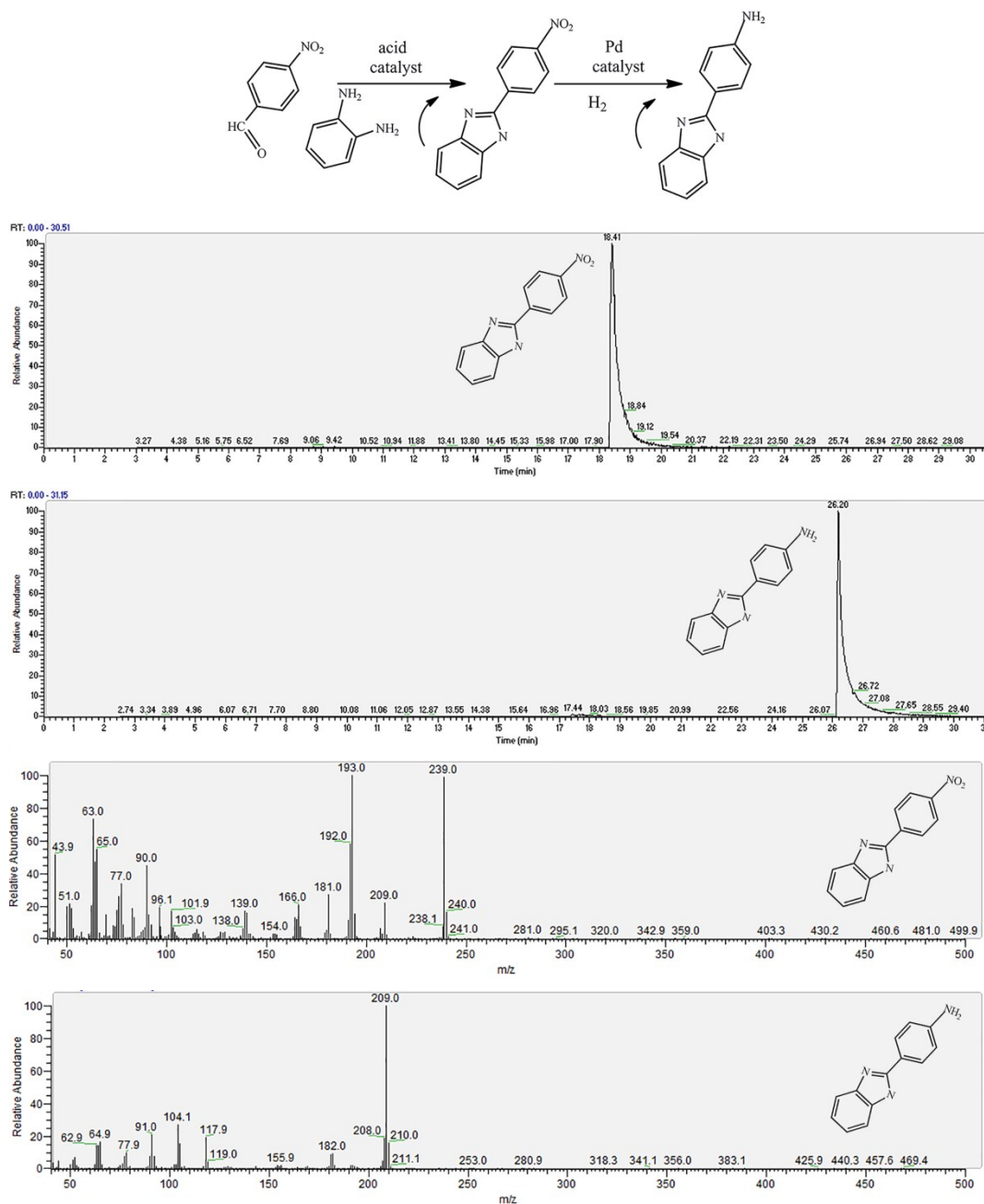


Figure S27. GC-MS results of synthesis of the 2-(4-aminophenyl)-1H-benzimidazole. It is seen that both the acidic catalysis and hydrogenation reaction is carried out completely.

The as-synthesized IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂/Pd can be used as nanoreactors for cascade reactions, the synthesis of 2-(4-aminophenyl)-1H-benzimidazole from 4-nitrobenzaldehyde and 1,2-phenylenediamine. This reaction sequence is composed of acidic catalysis and catalytic hydrogenation. 2-(4-aminophenyl)-1H-benzimidazole is a key intermediate in the syntheses of benzimidazole derivatives which have antiviral, antiulcer, and anticancer properties. As expected, after both the acidic catalysis and hydrogenation steps, >99%

conversion of the reactant 4-nitrobenzaldehyde and 97% yield of the desired product 2-(4-aminophenyl)-1*H*-benzimidazole were obtained.

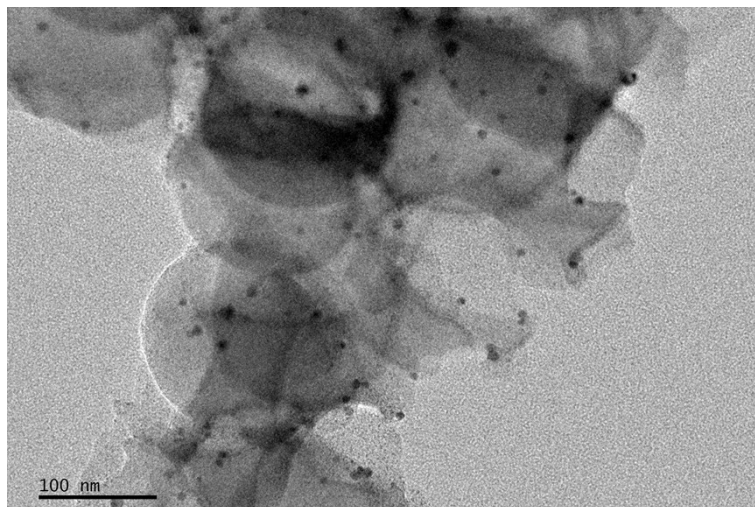


Fig. S28 TEM image of Y-SO₃H@S-NH₂/Pd after 5 successive cycles.

The TEM image of IY-SO₃H@S-NH₂/Pd after 5 repeating catalytic cycles reveals that no obvious aggregation of Pd NPs is visible. The catalytic results were determined by GC-MS. Hence, the versatility of this synthesis strategy towards the fabrication of 3D-IYS with the sufficiency of a multiscale range of active sites, controllable compositions, and interconnected windows structures has been successfully demonstrated.

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Table S2. Comparing the catalysis efficiency of different reported acid-base bifunctional catalysts in the cascade reactions

Catalyst	Catalyst Structure and composition	-NH ₂ content	-SO ₃ H or -COOH content	TOF _{-NH₂}	Conversion (%)	Yield of 3 (%)	Reusable (run) and Yield of 3 (%)	Ref.
HSO ₃ -(NH ₂ -SBA-15)	mesoporous SBA-15	0.18 mmol/g	0.09 mmol/g	TOF 17 h ⁻¹	100.0	99.5	3-(92.1%)	1
YS-NH ₂ @SO ₃ H	yolk-shell mesoporous silica nanospheres	240 μmol/g	80 μmol/g	TOF 13 h ⁻¹	100	>99	3-(72%)	2
COOH-TREN	cross-linked Micelle	---	---	---	99	86	---	3
HCP-A-B	hollow hyper-cross-linked nanospheres	1.19 wt%	1.02 wt%	---	100	96	18-(94%)	4
MS-SO ₃ H @MS@MS-NH ₂	core-shell-shell structured mesoporous silica	0.80 mmol/g	0.50 mmol/g	---	100	≈ 100	5-(≈88%)	5
PPAF-SO ₃ H-NH ₂	porous polymeric aromatic framework	5.12 mmol/g	0.8 mmol/g	TOF 0.57 min ⁻¹	100	100	8-(≈90%)	6
COOHAHN	hollow silica nanospheres	0.1 mmol/g	---	TOF 2.7 h ⁻¹	>99	95	---	7
MIL-101-SO ₃ H-NH ₂	metal-organic frameworks	---	---	---	100	97	---	8
NH ₂ -GO-2	GO sheets	0.714 mmol/g	1.66 mmol/g	---	96	70	6-(91%)	9
MS-A@MS-B	core-shell structured mesoporous silica	0.71 mmol/g	0.35 mmol/g	---	100	≈ 100	4-(91.0%)	10
PAF-1-NHCH ₂ CH ₂ NH ₂ -	porous aromatic frameworks	---	---	---	100	97.2	3-(≈93%)	11

SO ₃ H								
30-MLHM-NH ₂ -SO ₃ H	monolayered hybrid catalyst	3.2 wt%	4.2 wt%	TOF 0.7 h ⁻¹	97.0	91.9	5-(87%)	12
MFI-BTEB-NH ₂	organic pillared MFI zeolite	---	---	---	≈ 100	≈ 80	---	13
MMAB	mesoporous silica	1.744 wt%	2.256 wt%	---	≈ 100	95	5-(91%)	14
PMO-SO ₃ H-NH ₂	periodic mesoporous organosilicas	1.79 mmol/g	1.10 mmol/g	---	100	97.5	---	15
SAMSN-AP	mesoporous silica nanoparticles	0.35 mmol/g	0.35 mmol/g	TOF 3.26 h ⁻¹	100	97.7	5-(96.8)	16
IY-SO ₃ H@S-NH ₂	three-dimensional integrated yolk-shell	2.49 mmol/g	1.05 mmol/g	TOF 14.4 h ⁻¹	100	>99	15-(83%)	This work

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