

Supporting Information

Constructing Fe-N-doped porous carbon nanofiber for pH-universal ORR and switchable superior Zn-air batteries

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Experimental Section

Chemical reagents and raw materials: Bacterial cellulose (BC) dispersion was kindly provided by Hainan Yeguo Foods Co., Ltd., Hainan, China. $\text{FeCl}_3 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$, $\text{Zn}(\text{NO}_3)_2 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$, 2-methylimidazole (2-MIM) and tert-butyl alcohol (TBA) were purchased from Aladdin and directly used without further purification. The commercial Pt/C catalyst (20 wt%), 0.1 M phosphate buffered saline (PBS, pH 7.4) and Nafion solution (5 wt%) were acquired from Sigma-Aldrich. All the water used in the present study was deionized water.

Preparation of Fe(Zn)-N-C: Bacterial cellulose nanofibers were chemical treatments via an improved 2,2,6,6-tetramethylpiperidine-1-oxyl radical (TEMPO) method according to our previous work¹. The TEMPO-mediated cellulose nanofibers were named as TOBC. The $\text{Zn}(\text{NO}_3)_2 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (86 mg) was mixed with a suspension of ion-exchanged TOBC (25 mL BC) immediately. Then mixtures were washed by deionized water five times. The product was poured into 25 mL of 5:1 (v:v) water/TBA mixture, followed by stirring at room temperature (R.T.) for 2 h. The aqueous suspension was added into $\text{FeCl}_3 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (50 mg), $\text{Zn}(\text{NO}_3)_2 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (255.8 mg) and 2-MIM (2824.6 mg) together and followed by stirring for 15 minutes, then through centrifugation, repetitive rinsing by deionized water and freeze-drying for 48 h. Finally, the mixture was pyrolyzed in Ar atmosphere separately at 900 °C for 2 h. The corresponding carbon aerogels were denoted as Fe(Zn)-N-C.

Synthesis of control samples: (1) Mesoporous carbon (CF) was synthesized in parallel by the same method as that for Fe(Zn)-N-C, except for no using $\text{FeCl}_3 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$, $\text{Zn}(\text{NO}_3)_2 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$ and 2-MIM. (2) Fe-N-C was obtained in parallel by the same synthesis route as that for Fe(Zn)-N-C, except for no addition of $\text{Zn}(\text{NO}_3)_2 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$. (3) (Zn)-N-C was prepared in parallel by the same way as that Fe(Zn)-N-C, except for no applying for $\text{FeCl}_3 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$. (4) Fe(Zn)-N-C-x (x=1, 2, 3), where x indicates the different amount of $\text{FeCl}_3 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (35, 50 and 65 mg). Unless otherwise specified, Fe(Zn)-N-C refers to the sample prepared at x=2 ($\text{FeCl}_3 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$, 50 mg).

Microstructural Characterization: The as-prepared samples were examined by transmission electron microscopy (TEM, JEM-2100F, JEOL, Japan) to character the morphologies and the microstructures. X-ray powder diffraction (XRD, D8 Advance, Bruker, Germany) with Cu-K α radiation ($\lambda=1.5406 \text{ \AA}$) and Raman spectroscopy (Renishaw inVia, UK Raman spectrometer system) with a laser wavelength of 532 nm investigated to obtain the crystal structure of all samples. The chemical compositions of samples were studied by X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS, ES-CALAB 250Xi, Thermo Fisher Scientific, America). N_2 sorption isotherms were determined by the Tristar II (Micrometrics, ASAP 2020 HD88) at 77 K. The specific surface area (SSA) was calculated using Brunauer-Emmett-Teller (BET) model. Pore size distribution was analyzed by Barrett-Joyner-Halenda (BJH) model based on the adsorption data.

Electrochemical performance characterization: The ORR electrochemical tests were carried out by using electrochemical workstation (CHI 760E, CH Instruments Inc., Shanghai, China) with a rotating disk electrode (RDE) and rotating ring-disk electrode (RRDE) with a Pt ring in a standard three-electrode cell at room temperature. A graphite rod was employed for counter electrode, glassy carbon (RDE or RRDE) coated with catalytic material as the working electrode and reference electrode of Hg/HgO for tests in 0.1 M KOH and 0.1 M PBS buffer (pH 7.4), reference electrode of Ag/AgCl in 0.5 M H_2SO_4 . All recorded potentials are given relative to a reversible hydrogen electrode (RHE) by experimental calibrations: Pt foil was used as both the working electrode and counter electrode, and the electrolyte was saturated with H_2 provided by hydrogen generator. Our result shows that the $E(\text{Ag}/\text{AgCl})$ is lower than $E(\text{RHE})$ by 0.222 V in 0.5 M H_2SO_4 , $E(\text{Hg}/\text{HgO})$ by 0.882 V in 0.1 M KOH and 0.557 V in 0.1 M PBS.

The working electrode was prepared as follows: 4 mg of as-fabricated catalysts was first dispersed in the mixture of deionized water, ethanol and 5% Nafion (6:3:1) by sonication for 30 min in an ice-water bath. Then 5 μl of the ink was dropped on the polished glassy carbon electrode (RDE) to obtain catalysts loading of 0.28 mg cm^{-2} (8.9 μl of the ink for the RRDE)

and dried 1 hour in the air. For comparison, commercial Pt/C (20 wt%) catalyst was also measured with loading of 25 $\mu\text{gpt cm}^{-2}$.

Before each ORR testing, the system was saturated with O_2 to remove the surface contamination of the catalysts in 0.1 M KOH, 0.5 M H_2SO_4 and 0.1 M PBS solutions, respectively. Cyclic voltammetry (CV) curves were recorded at a scan rate of 20 mV s^{-1} in N_2 - or O_2 -saturated electrolytes. Linear sweep voltammetry (LSV) was collected at a scan rate of 10 mV s^{-1} at a different rotation speed of 400-2025 rpm. Rotating ring-disk electrode (RRDE) measurements were performed at a rotating speed of 1600 rpm with a scan rate of 10 mV s^{-1} and the ring potential was fixed at 1.4 V versus RHE.

The kinetics parameters were evaluated using the Koutecky-Levich (K-L) equation as follows:

$$\frac{1}{j} = \frac{1}{j_L} + \frac{1}{j_K} = \frac{1}{B\omega^{1/2}} + \frac{1}{j_K} \quad (1)$$

$$B = 0.62 nFC_0(D_0)^{2/3}v^{-1/6} \quad (2)$$

where j , j_L and j_K are the measured, diffusion-limiting and kinetic current densities, respectively. ω is the electrode rotation rate in rpm; F is the Faraday constant ($F = 96485 \text{ C mol}^{-1}$); C_0 is the bulk concentration of O_2 ($1.2 \times 10^{-6} \text{ mol cm}^{-3}$); D_0 is the diffusion coefficient of O_2 ($1.9 \times 10^{-5} \text{ cm}^2 \text{ s}^{-1}$); v represents the kinematic viscosity of the electrolyte ($0.01 \text{ cm}^2 \text{ s}^{-1}$).

In order to plot the Tafel curves, the kinetic current was calculated from the mass-transport correction of the RDE using:

$$j_K = \frac{j \times j_L}{j_L - j} \quad (3)$$

For RRDEs, the peroxide (H_2O_2) content and the transferred electron number (n) relative to the total products was determined based on the following equations:

$$n = 4 \times \frac{I_D}{\frac{I_R}{N} + I_D} \quad (4)$$

$$\text{H}_2\text{O}_2(\%) = 200 \times \frac{I_R/N}{\frac{I_R}{N} + I_D} \quad (5)$$

where I_D and I_R represent the disk current and the value of ring current, respectively, and $N=0.37$ is the current collection efficiency of the Pt ring.

The double layer capacitances were carried out by CV in a potential range from 1.092 V to 1.192 V vs. RHE in 0.1 M KOH solution. The scan rates were measured from 10 mV s⁻¹ to 100 mV s⁻¹. The C_{dl} can be determined by calculating the half of the slope by plotting the Δj ($j_a - j_c$) at 1.142 V vs. RHE against the scan rates. Furthermore, electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS) was performed in the frequency range of 0.01 Hz to 1 M Hz in O₂-saturated 0.1 M KOH, 0.5 M H₂SO₄ and 0.1 M PBS solutions, respectively, while perturbation amplitude was set to 5 mV. The durability measurement of the as-prepared catalysts was performed by applying a constant potential at a rotating rate of 1600 rpm.

Liquid Zn-air battery assembly: Zn-air batteries were tested on home-made alkaline/neutral electrochemical cells, where Zn foil as active anode, 6 M KOH was used as the alkaline electrolyte and 4 M NH₄Cl+2 M KCl as the neutral electrolyte. For Pt/C and Fe(Zn)-N-C samples, 5 mg catalyst was ultrasonically dispersed in 1 mL ethanol with 100 μL 5% Nafion to form a homogenous ink. The catalyst ink was then dropped on a cleaned carbon cloth (1.0 mg cm⁻²), which could be explored as air cathode (without the addition of conductive carbon black). All measurements were carried out on the as-fabricated cell with a CHI760E workstation and LAND multi-channel battery testing system (CT2001A, Wuhan, China) at room temperature.

The specific capacity (C , mAh g⁻¹) was calculated according to the following equation:

$$C = \frac{I \Delta t}{m_{Zn}} \quad (6)$$

where I (mA) represents the current, Δt (h) is the service time and m_{Zn} (g)

is the weight of the consumed Zn anode.

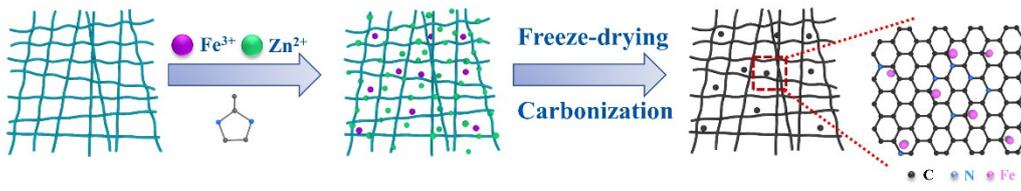


Fig. S1. Schematic illustration for the synthesis of sample Fe(Zn)-N-C.

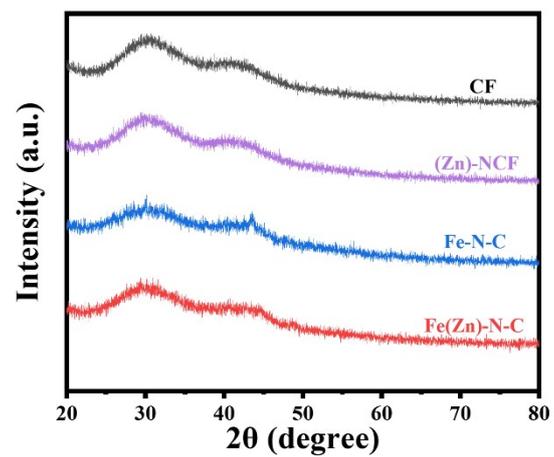


Fig. S2. XRD patterns of samples CF, Fe-N-C, (Zn)-N-C and Fe(Zn)-N-C.

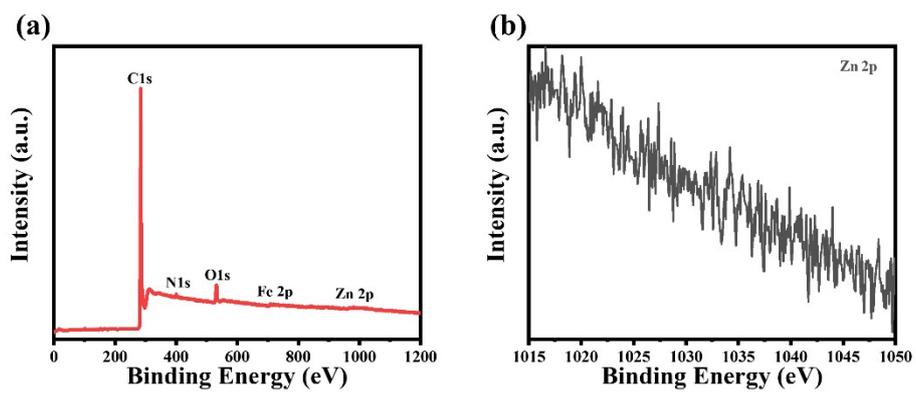


Fig. S3. (a) XPS survey and (b) Zn 2p spectra of Fe(Zn)-N-C catalyst.

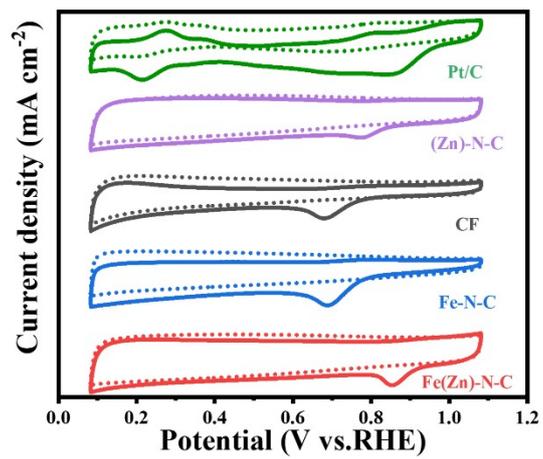


Fig. S4. CV curves of as-prepared catalysts in O₂/N₂-saturated 0.1 M KOH.

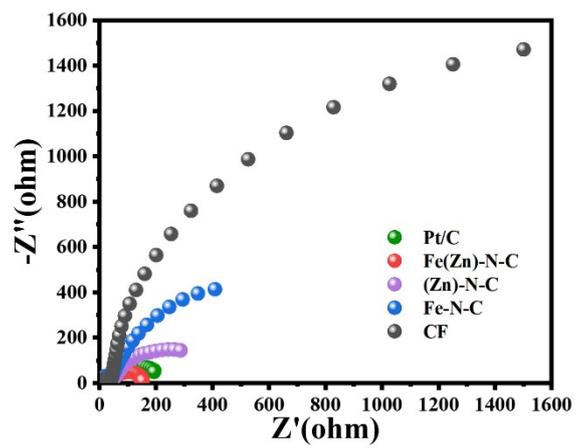


Fig. S5. Nyquist plots of Fe(Zn)-N-C and control samples in O_2 saturated 0.1 M KOH solution.

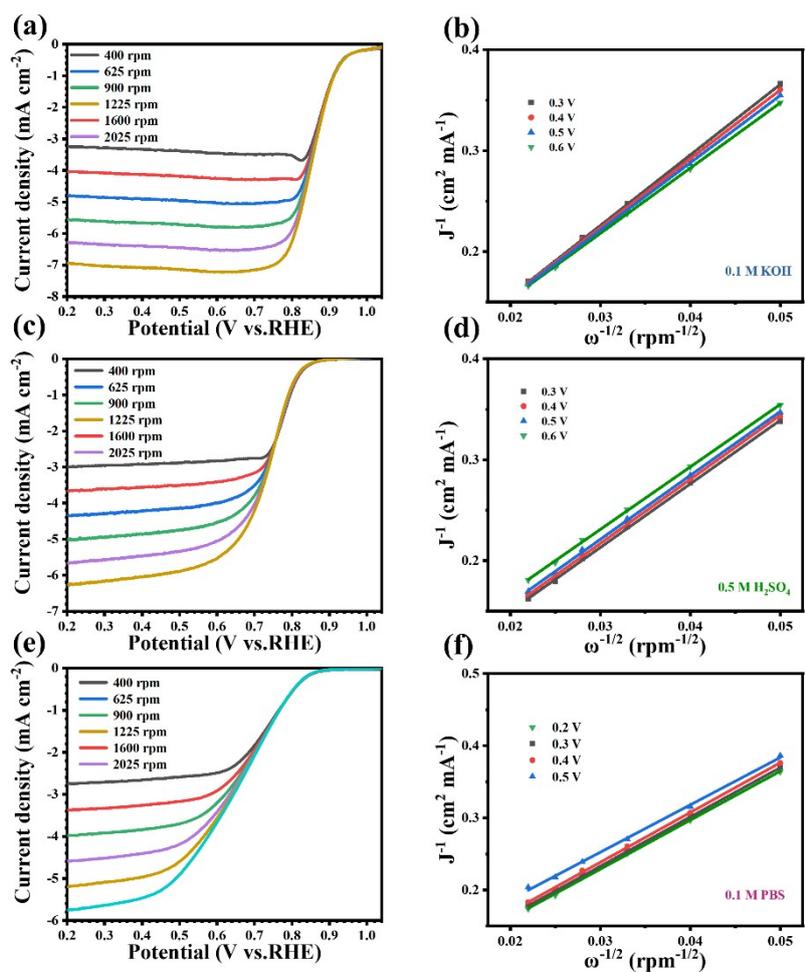


Fig. S6. (a, c, e) LSV curves at different rotating rates and (b, d, e) Koutecky-Levich (K-L) plots of the Fe(Zn)-N-C catalyst in O₂ saturated 0.1 M KOH, 0.5 H₂SO₄ and 0.1 M PBS solutions, respectively.

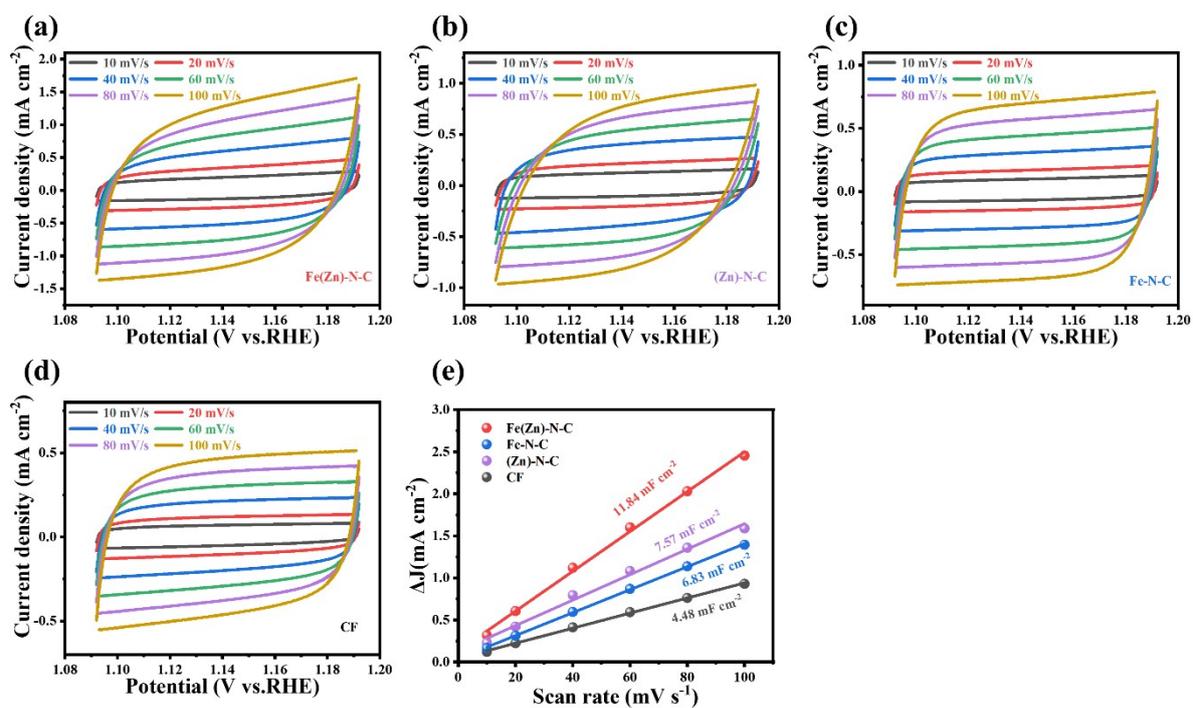


Fig. S7. CV curves of (a) Fe(Zn)-N-C, (b) (Zn)-N-C, (c) Fe-N-C, (d) CF at different scan rate; (e) Current density differences plotted against scan rates of various catalysts.

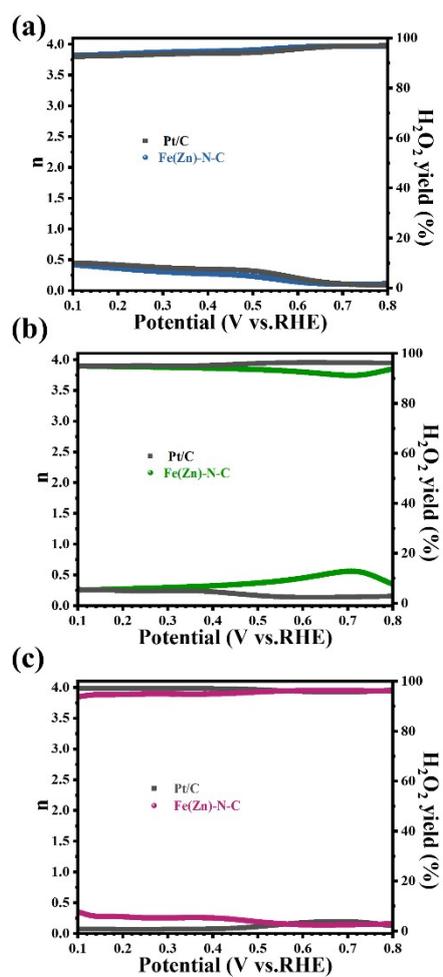


Fig. S8. Electron transfer number and peroxide yield derived from RRDE of the Fe(Zn)-N-C and Pt/C catalysts in O_2 saturated 0.1 M KOH, 0.5 M H_2SO_4 and 0.1 M PBS solutions, respectively.

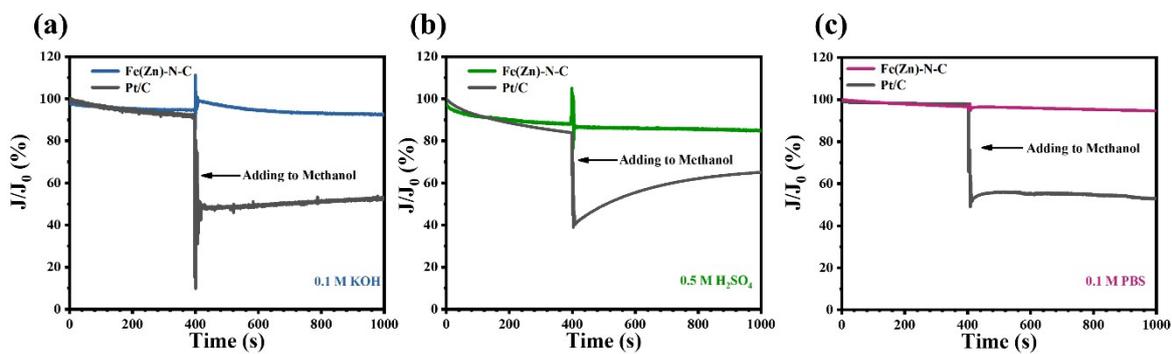


Fig. S9. Chronoamperometric response curves of Fe(Zn)-N-C and Pt/C catalysts before and after the addition of 3 mL methano about 400 s in O₂ saturated 0.1 M KOH, 0.5 M H₂SO₄ and 0.1 M PBS solutions, respectively.

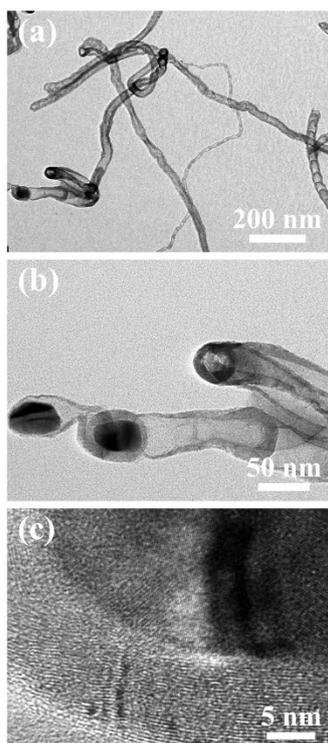


Fig. S10. TEM images of the Fe(Zn)-N-C catalyst after ORR stability test in 0.1 M KOH solution.

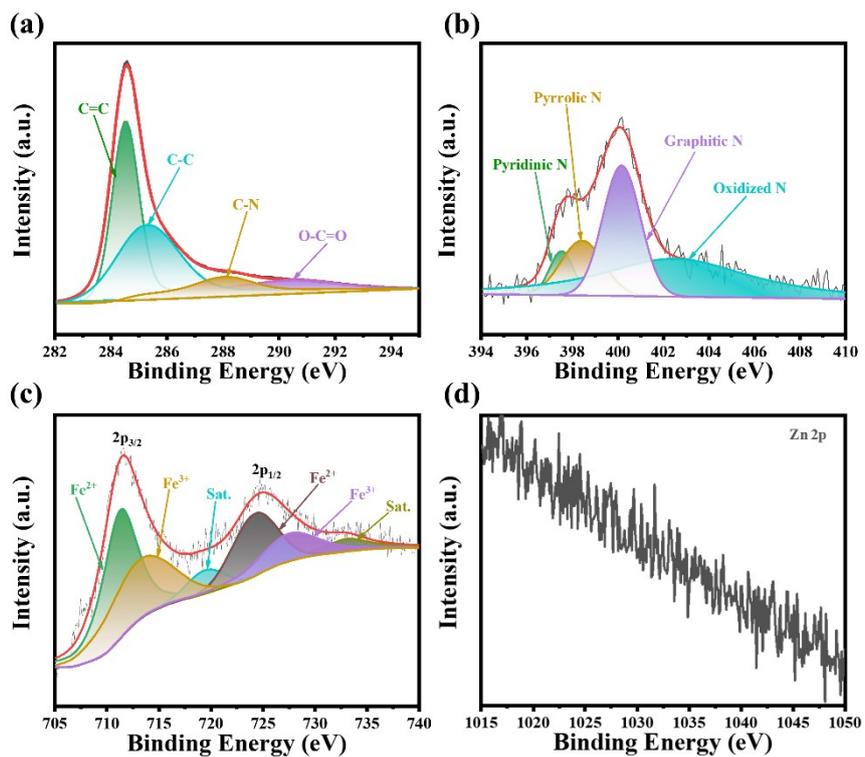


Fig. S11. High-resolution XPS spectra of (a) C 1s, (b) N 1s, (c) Fe 2p and (d) Zn 2p for Fe(Zn)-N-C catalyst after ORR stability test in 0.1 M KOH solution.

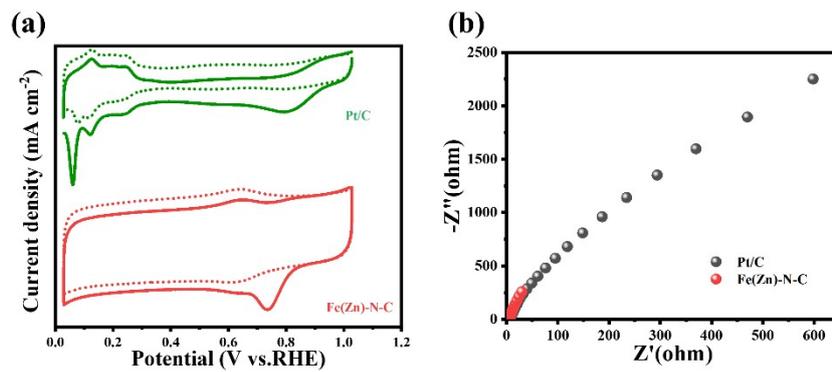


Fig. S12. (a) CV curves, (b) Nyquist plots of Fe(Zn)-N-C and Pt/C catalysts in 0.5 M H₂SO₄ solution.

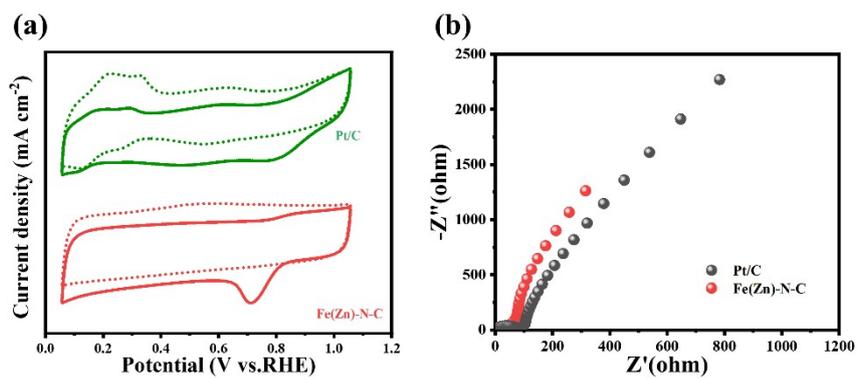


Fig. S13. (a) CV curves, (b) Nyquist plots of Fe(Zn)-N-C and Pt/C catalysts in 0.1 M PBS solution.

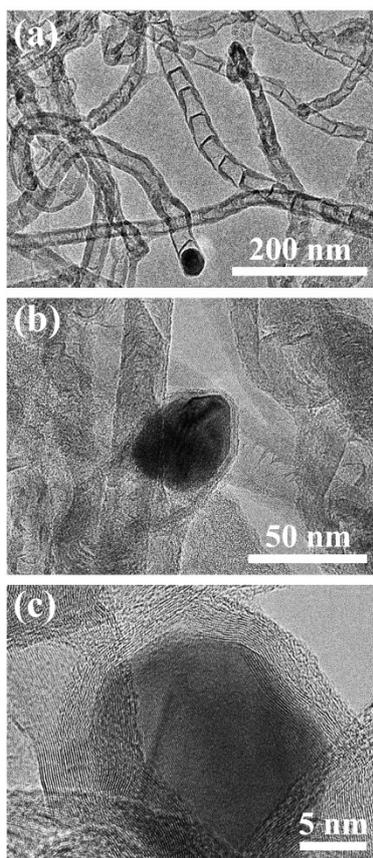


Fig. S14. TEM images of the Fe(Zn)-N-C catalyst after ORR stability test in 0.5 M H₂SO₄ solution.

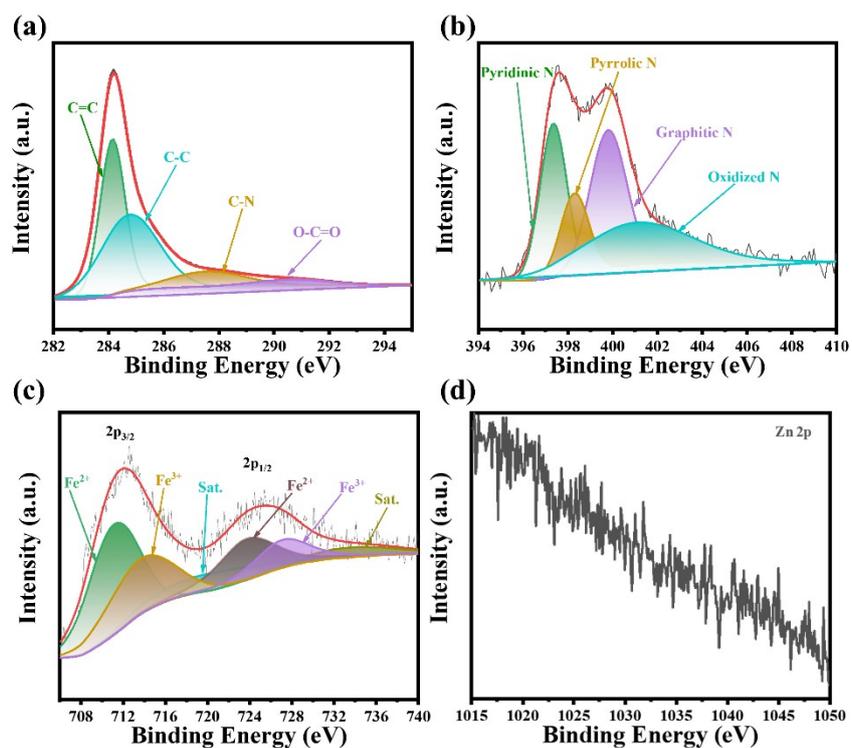


Fig. S15. High-resolution XPS spectra of (a) C 1s, (b) N 1s, (c) Fe 2p and (d) Zn 2p for Fe(Zn)-N-C catalyst after ORR stability test in 0.5 M H₂SO₄ solution.

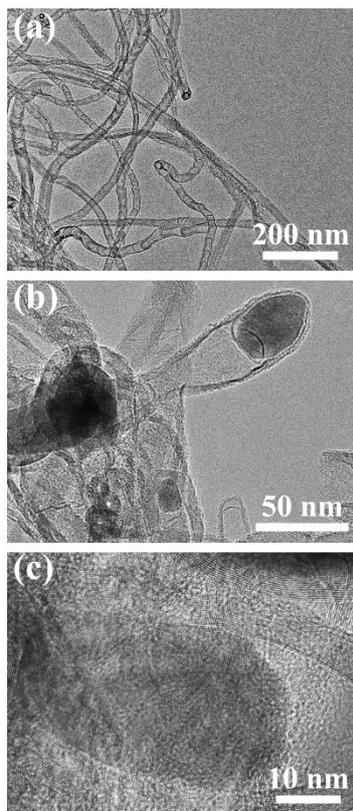


Fig. S16. TEM images of the Fe(Zn)-N-C catalyst after ORR stability test in 0.1 M PBS solution.

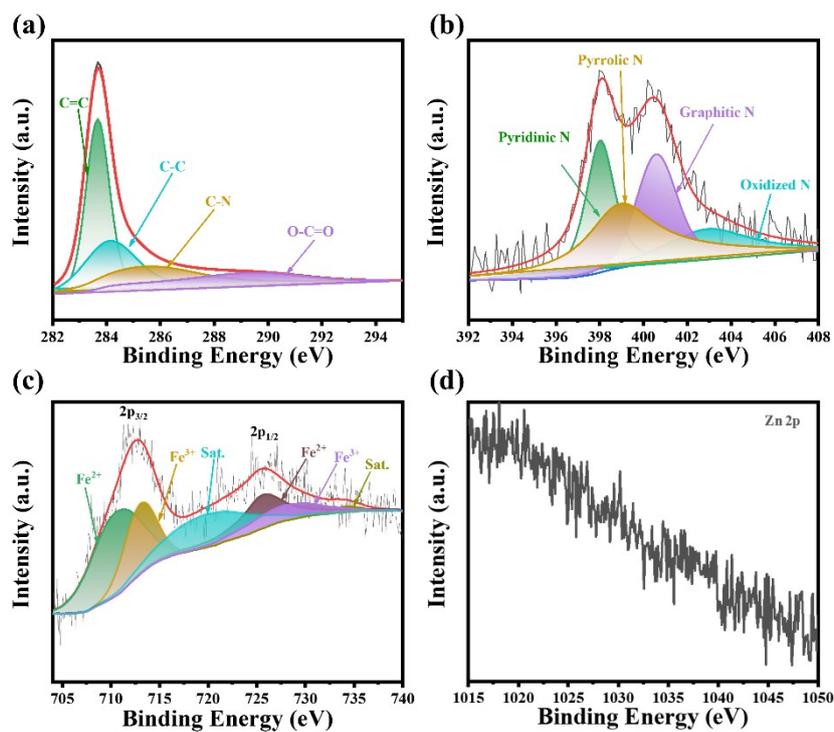


Fig. S17. High-resolution XPS spectra of (a) C 1s, (b) N 1s, (c) Fe 2p and (d) Zn 2p for Fe(Zn)-N-C catalyst after ORR stability test in 0.1 M PBS solution.

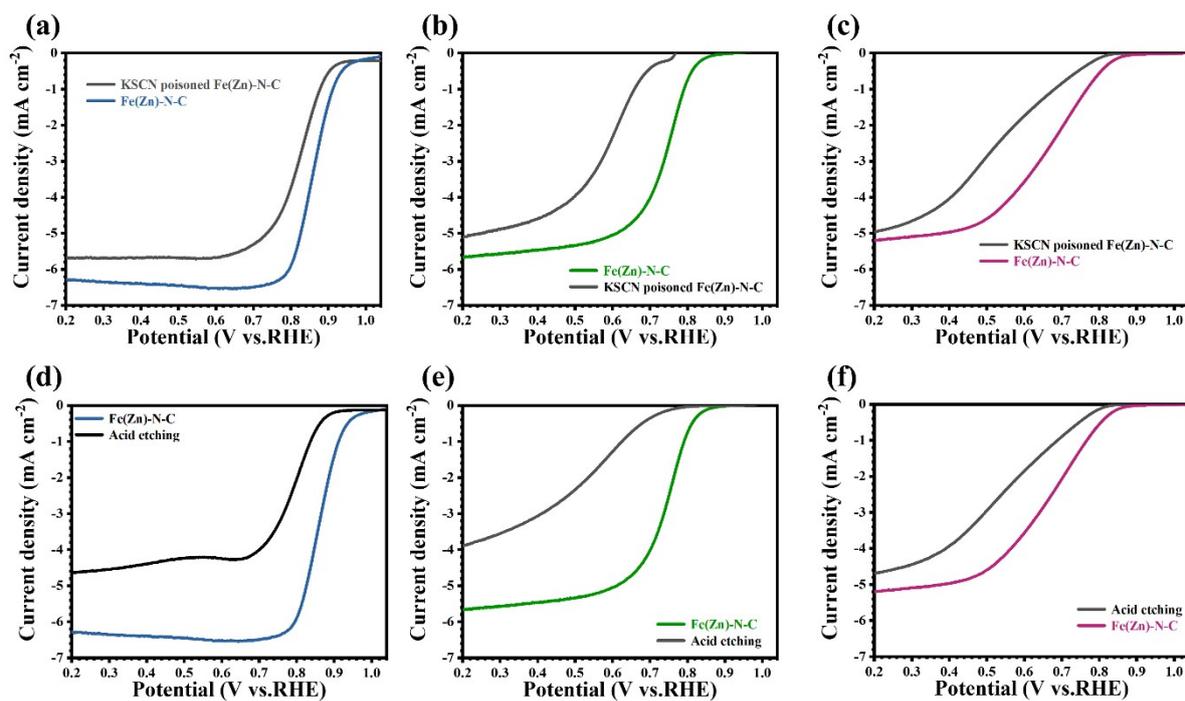


Fig. S18. (a-c) ORR polarization curves of Fe(Zn)-N-C and Pt/C catalysts with or without 10 mM KSCN, (d-f) before and after hot acid etching in O₂-saturated 0.1 M KOH, 0.5 M H₂SO₄ and 0.1 M PBS solutions, respectively.

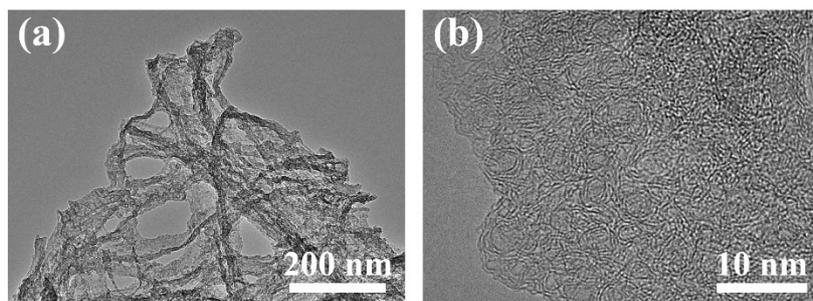


Fig. S19. TEM images of Fe(Zn)-N-C treated by hot acid etching.

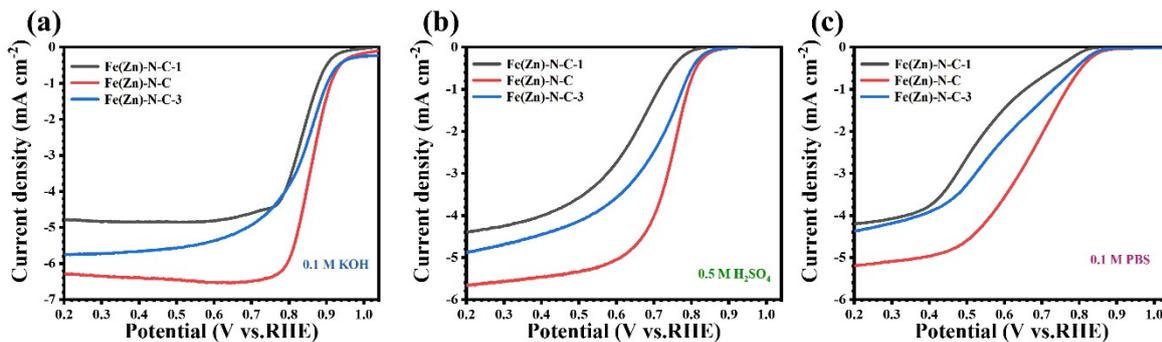


Fig. S20. LSV curves of ORR for the Fe catalysts pyrolyzed from the precursors of different Fe concentrations ($\text{FeCl}_3 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$ concentration: 35, 50 and 65 mg) at a rotating rate of 1600 rpm in O_2 -saturated 0.1 M KOH, 0.5 M H_2SO_4 and 0.1 M PBS solutions, respectively.

Table S1. The ORR performance of CF, (Zn)-N-C, Fe-N-C, Fe(Zn)-N-C and Pt/C catalysts in O₂-saturated 0.1 M KOH, 0.5 M H₂SO₄ and 0.1 M PBS solutions.

Catalysts	$E_{1/2}$ (V vs. RHE)	Limiting current density (mA cm ⁻²)	Tafel slop (mV dec ⁻¹)	Current retention after 86400 s chronoampero metric test (%)	Electrolyte
CF	0.62	3.02	100	-	0.1 M KOH
(Zn)-N-C	0.76	4.51	80	-	
Fe-N-C	0.65	4.21	94	-	
Fe(Zn)-N-C	0.86	6.16	66	85	
Pt/C	0.82	5.68	75	63	
Fe(Zn)-N-C	0.74	5.81	61	80	0.5 M H ₂ SO ₄
Pt/C	0.78	4.74	91	48	
Fe(Zn)-N-C	0.67	5.26	76	82	0.1 M PBS
Pt/C	0.61	4.65	131	56	

Table S2. Comparison of ORR performance of Fe(Zn)-N-C catalyst with non-precious electrocatalysts in 0.1 M KOH.

Catalysts	$E_{1/2}$ (V vs. RHE)	Tafel slop (mV dec ⁻¹)	Stability	Ref.
Fe/Fe ₃ C@C	0.831	87	94% retention after 20,000s	2
Fe-N-C/Fe ₃ C-op	0.911	83.4	95% retention after 43,200s	3
SA-Ir/NC	0.84	65.1	$E_{1/2}$ of 10 mV shift after 20,000 cycles	4
NC@Co-HPNC	0.83	87.63	$E_{1/2}$ of 5 mV shift after 2,000 cycles	5
FeNPC	0.904	84	92.2% retention after 36,000s	6
Fe _H -N-C	0.91	58	$E_{1/2}$ of 29 mV shift after 100,000 cycles	7
CuCo-NC/NPs	0.87	64.3	93% retention after 72,000s	8
Fe SA/NCZ	0.87	70	$E_{1/2}$ of 10 mV shift after 10,000 cycles	9
Fe _{0.5} Co@HOMNCP	0.903	82	96.4% retention after 36,000s	10
Fe(Zn)-N-C	0.86	66	85% retention after 86,400s	This work

Table S3. Comparison of ORR performance of Fe(Zn)-N-C catalyst with non-precious electrocatalysts in acidic media.

Catalysts	Electrolyte	$E_{1/2}$ (V vs. RHE)	Tafel slop (mV dec ⁻¹)	Stability	Ref.
Fe-pyridinic N-C	0.1 M HClO ₄	0.825	63.8	83.4% retention after 28,800s	11
PNC-30	0.1 M HClO ₄	0.76	65	93.2% retention after 20,000s	12
H-S-Fe-NC	0.1 M HClO ₄	0.782	-	91.8% retention after 36,000s	13
Co _x Fe _y @N-C	0.5 M H ₂ SO ₄	0.83	97	$E_{1/2}$ of 18 mV shift after 5,000 cycles	14
Fe/Ni-N-PCS	0.1 M HClO ₄	0.71	126	-	15
Fe@MNC-OAc	0.1 M HClO ₄	0.838	70.4	96.27% retention after 15,000s	16
Fe ₁ NGF	0.1 M HClO ₄	0.813	74	Slight shift of $E_{1/2}$ after 5,000 cycles	17
Mn-Fe@NCNTs	0.1 M HClO ₄	0.76	78.5	90.1% retention after 29,000s	18
D-MN4-CNF-IL- A	0.5 M H ₂ SO ₄	0.71	61	~86% retention after 43,200s	19
Fe(Zn)-N-C	0.5 M H₂SO₄	0.74	61	80% retention after 86,400s	This work

Table S4. Comparison of ORR performance of Fe(Zn)-N-C catalyst with non-precious electrocatalysts in neutral media.

Catalysts	$E_{1/2}$ (V vs. RHE)	Tafel slop (mV dec ⁻¹)	Stability	Ref.
NiFe ₂ O ₄ /FeNi ₂ S ₄ HNSs	0.507	-	almost no decay after 5,000 cycles	20
Fe-N-C/800- HT2	0.743	91	89.4% retention after 28,800s	21
G/C-Fe-2	-	-	78.7% retention after 10,000s	22
FePc@CTS	0.057V vs. Ag/AgCl	51.3	-	23
eFe-N ₃ /PCF	0.72	-	89.9% retention after 10,000s	24
Fe _x N/NC-7	0.80	-	-	25
Fe SAs/NC	0.75	67.4	-	26
5%Fe-N/C	0.64	-	-	27
Fe(Zn)-N-C	0.61	76	82% retention after 86,400s	This work

Table S5. Comparison of $E_{1/2}$ of Fe(Zn)-N-C catalyst with pH-universal non-precious electrocatalysts in alkaline, acidic and neutral media.

Catalysts	Alkaline $E_{1/2}$ (V vs. RHE)	Acidic $E_{1/2}$ (V vs. RHE)	Neutral $E_{1/2}$ (V vs. RHE)	Ref.
CeNCs	0.9	0.83	0.78	28
γ -Fe ₂ O ₃ @CNFs-12	0.905	0.693	0.58	29
FeSA/PNC	0.92	0.84	0.83	30
Fe/Fe ₃ C/NHCS	0.84	0.67	0.71	31
MFS-Fe-0.7	0.83	0.64	0.76	32
Fe-N/C	0.823	0.661	positive than Pt/C catalyst	33
Fe/NC-3	0.90 (1 M KOH)	0.71	0.69	34
Fe-Zn-SA/NC	0.85	0.78	0.72	35
Fe-NX@NSCST-ZL	0.94	0.77	0.74	36
Fe(Zn)-N-C	0.86	0.74	0.61	This work

Table S6. Comparison of reported alkaline/neutral liquid Zn-air batteries based on well-developed non-precious oxygen catalysts .

Catalysts	Electrolyte	Power Density (mW cm ⁻²)	Specific capacity@10 mA cm ⁻² (mAh g ⁻¹)	Ref.
Fe ₁ /d-CN	6 M KOH +0.2 M Zn(Ac) ₂	144	770	37
	4 M NH ₄ Cl+2 M KCl	34	653	
Fc@Fe-NHCS	6 M KOH	196	769@100 mA cm ⁻²	38
	4 M NH ₄ Cl+1 M KCl	58	-	
Fe-NBrGo	6 M KOH+0.15 M ZnO	107	-	39
	4 M NH ₄ Cl+2 M KCl	34	-	
NHCS@B ₁ P ₂	6 M KOH	158.5	-	40
	4 M NH ₄ Cl+1 M KCl	104.6	-	
Fe-NC@NHCS-600	6 M KOH	278.97	-	41
	4 M NH ₄ Cl+1 M KCl	114.96	-	
FeCo SAs@Co/N-GC	6 M KOH	207	741@5 mA cm ⁻²	42
	3 M Zn(TFSI) ₂	162	813@2 mA cm ⁻²	
SA-Ir/NC	0.1 M PBS+ 0.02 M Zn(CH ₃ COO) ₂	76	776.8 @20 mA cm ⁻²	4
Fe(Zn)-N-C	6 M KOH	193	800	This work
	4 M NH₄Cl+2 M KCl	48	688	

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