



# Two-dimensional van der Waals materials and their mixed low-dimensional hybrids for electrochemical energy applications

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Compared with their three-dimensional counterparts, two-dimensional (2D) van der Waals (vdW) materials exhibit quantum confinement where charge carriers are spatially confined at the physical boundaries. Particularly, when mixing 2D materials with other low-dimensional (LD) materials, they exhibit enormous potential in electrochemical energy applications due to the reduced dimensionality and, more importantly, material integration synergy, resulting in controllability over mixture composition, layer stacking and arrangement, and interlayer coupling. In this article, the latest advancements in 2D vdW heterostructure and their mixed low-dimensional hybrids (MLDHs) are reviewed with an emphasis on innovations covering hybrid structure construction and electrochemical applications. Recent developments leveraging the 2D vdW platform to promote a mechanistic understanding of charge-transport dynamics at the electrified interface were highlighted. Fundamental insight into the synergistic effect of MLDH integration for advancing the development of electrochemical energy applications was discussed. The knowledge gained on how mixed-dimensional physics and chemistry influence the performance of metal ion batteries and electrocatalytic hydrogen evolution reaction will shed light on the design principle of the electrode materials and deepen the understanding of the process–structural–property–performance relationship of the vdW-based MLDHs.

## Introduction

The growing global energy demands along with concerns about materials scarcity and environmental impact have intensified the need for exploring new materials for energy technology development. Two-dimensional (2D) van der Waals (vdW) layered materials, a class of materials composed of atomically thin layers held together by weak vdW interactions, have emerged as highly promising candidates for driving innovation in electrochemical energy applications owing to their rich material chemistry, versatile structure engineering possibility, and tunable surface chemistries.<sup>1–4</sup> Since the rise of graphene,

various 2D vdW materials such as transition-metal dichalcogenides (TMDs),<sup>1,5–10</sup> black phosphorus (BP),<sup>11</sup> hexagonal boron nitride (*h*-BN),<sup>5,12</sup> and transition-metal carbides/nitrides/carbonitrides (i.e., MXenes)<sup>13</sup> have been discovered. Unique properties and phenomena have been explored in 2D vdW with decreased layer numbers such as enhanced quantum confinement, active edge site effects, and structural phase transformation,<sup>14–18</sup> enabling a deeper understanding of the fundamental physics and practical applications of 2D vdW layered materials.

Despite extensive research efforts in advancing the electrochemical performance of 2D vdW materials, inherent

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material property challenges need to be addressed when employed as MIBs electrodes and HER catalysts. First, 2D layers tend to reassemble or restack during synthesis, especially in solvent processes, due to the existence of vdW interactions and the tendency of surface energy minimization, leading to reduced interlayer distance and limited use of surface area and active sites.<sup>19</sup> Second, despite the well-acknowledged presence of active edge sites, strategies to activate the inert basal planes and increase the total number of active sites in 2D vdW layers need to be introduced. Third, many 2D materials such as the TMD family exhibit low electrical conductivity, especially along the out-of-plane direction, which hinders efficient electron transport, and therefore, overall reaction kinetics.<sup>20</sup> Finally, 2D vdW materials could suffer from property degradation via structural changes, oxidation, or dissolution under harsh electrochemical conditions, adversely affecting the long-term stability of electrochemical devices.<sup>21</sup>

Fortunately, hybrid structures can be created by combining different 2D vdW layers or integrating them with zero-/one-dimensional (0D/1D) materials. These mixed low-dimensional hybrids (MLDHs) not only harness the unique properties of each component, but also overcome the limitations of individual low-dimensional (LD) materials. Mixing materials with different dimensionalities offers the ability to tailor and engineer the properties of 2D vdW layers by precisely controlling their composition, layer stacking and arrangement, and interlayer coupling, resulting in structural synergy for improved electrochemical performance. Furthermore, the investigation of MLDHs will also deepen our fundamental understanding of 2D-vdW-based physics. For instance, creating Moiré superlattice (MS) in twist-angle 2D vdW layers has resulted in boosted electrochemical catalytic activity, opening up avenues for designing vdW materials for improved device performance.

In this article, representative integration techniques for building 2D/2D vdW heterostructures and their mixed dimensional 1D/2D, 0D/2D hybrids will be introduced. Electrochemical energy applications of the previously mentioned nanocomposites used as electrode materials in MIBs and as electrocatalysts for hydrogen evolution reaction (HER) will be reviewed. Recent developments leveraging the 2D vdW layers in conjunction with a microreactor platform to promote a mechanistic understanding of charge-transport dynamics at the electrified interface will be discussed. In the end, discussions on challenges and future perspectives will be provided.

## Integration techniques of 2D vdW heterostructures and their MLDHs

Material property optimization through rational structural design requires a diverse range of dimensional mixing. Integration techniques of mixed dimensional hybrids with control over composition, morphology, and structure are essential. Various synthetic strategies, including solid-state reaction,<sup>22–24</sup>

electrospinning,<sup>25–27</sup> chemical vapor deposition (CVD),<sup>28–32</sup> sol–gel method,<sup>33,34</sup> self-assembly,<sup>35,36</sup> and hydrothermal/solvothermal techniques<sup>32,37,38</sup> have been widely employed for constructing hybrid nanocomposites. Extensive literature reviews have documented the success of the LD mixing techniques, and interested readers are referred to References 22, 32, 37, 39–41. In this section, we aim to highlight the representative synthesis methods and review the recent innovative examples in the preparation of vdW heterostructures and their MLDHs.

### Single-step techniques

#### Chemical vapor deposition

In the chemical vapor deposition (CVD) process, precursors decompose or react with the substrate at a specific temperature within a hot-environment chamber. This technique has the potential to precisely control the growth of materials at the nanoscale and it has been widely used to prepare LD materials such as 1D carbon nanotubes (CNTs),<sup>42–44</sup> 2D layered graphene,<sup>45–48</sup> TMDs,<sup>49–51</sup> and MXenes.<sup>13,52–54</sup> Lately, significant research progress has been made in constructing vdW heterostructures and their MLDHs using CVD.

#### 2D/2D vdW heterojunctions

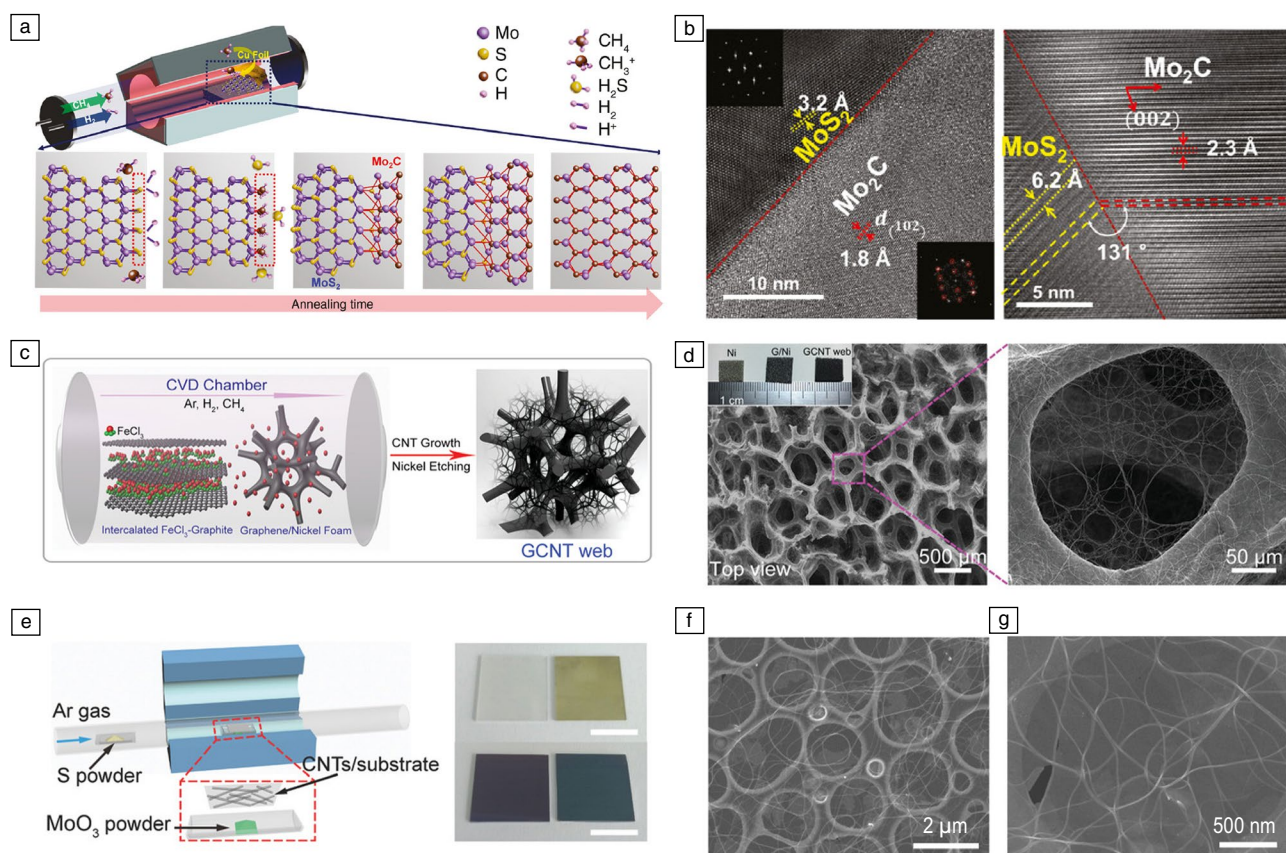
CVD has been employed as a powerful tool to assemble ultrathin 2D/2D vdW heterostructures. Strategies to engineer the interlayer coupling by controlling the stacking sequence and stacking arrangement (vertical or in-plane) of TMD/TMD heterobilayers during the CVD process have been developed and widely reviewed.<sup>22,40,41,49,51,55</sup> It is worth mentioning that vertical stacked 2D/2D homojunctions (such as graphene/graphene and TMD/TMD) with small twist angles have been achieved recently using CVD as well,<sup>51,56</sup> providing new opportunities to tune the interlayer electronic coupling and thus influencing charge-transfer kinetics in the electrochemical process (more discussion can be found in the section “[Mechanics understanding of electrochemical processes based on vdW-based MLDHs](#)”).<sup>57–60</sup> Benefiting from the recent advancements in CVD MXene growth, 2D/2D graphene/MXene and TMD/MXene heterostructures have also been produced.<sup>29,30,61,62</sup> For instance, Xu et al. successfully demonstrated direct CVD growth of high-quality graphene/ $\alpha$ -Mo<sub>2</sub>C vertical heterostructures with uniformly well-aligned lattice orientation and strong interface coupling. In the heterostructure, both graphene and  $\alpha$ -Mo<sub>2</sub>C crystal showed no defect, and the graphene is strongly compressed.<sup>31</sup> Jeon et al. conducted a study on the chemical conversion of MoS<sub>2</sub> to Mo<sub>2</sub>C to form a lateral junction with thermal annealing, as shown in **Figure 1a**. The result revealed that the thermal annealing duration can be adjusted to achieve a partially converted semiconducting material or a fully converted metallic Mo<sub>2</sub>C. The resultant Mo<sub>2</sub>C/MoS<sub>2</sub> hybrid junction exhibits a metallic/semiconducting junction nature with an atomically sharp interface (**Figure 1b**) and low contact resistance.<sup>30</sup>

### Two-dimensional vdW-based MLDHs

Numerous 2D vdW-based MLDHs have been successfully achieved using CVD. In the case of all-carbon-based architecture, parallel and vertical 1D/2D CNT/graphene integrated structures where nanotubes are sandwiched between graphene layers in the forms of randomly aligned networks or vertical pillars, respectively, have been realized using CVD.<sup>63–65</sup> Especially, in the vertical CNT/graphene architecture, seamless contact between the 1D and 2D graphitic layers has been achieved and the poor out-of-plane electron transport originating from the weak vdW interaction in the transverse direction can be improved, resulting in largely reduced contact resistance along with high surface area and meso-/microporosity.<sup>66</sup> Recently, Xiao et al. synthesized a hierarchical 1D/2D carbonaceous structure consisting of CNTs and graphene by employing Fe nanoparticles confined to the interlamination of graphite as a catalyst and porous nickel foam as a scaffold substrate in the *in situ* template-directed CVD process, as shown in Figure 1c. The obtained structure exhibited a fully 3D interconnected CNT web through the pores of graphene

foam (GCNT web) (Figure 1d) with completely geometric, mechanical, and electrical interconnectivity.<sup>67</sup>

In the case of beyond-carbon 2D vdW-based MLDHs, 1D/2D and 0D/2D architectures, especially those that contain carbon species, have been reported using the CVD synthesis technique.<sup>37,67–69</sup> For instance, Li et al. synthesized 1D/2D CNT/TMD hybrids on CNT-coated dielectric substrates in a low-pressure CVD system, as shown in Figure 1e. In this structure, nanotubes serve as favorable heterogeneous nucleation sites for TMDs. Taking  $\text{MoS}_2$  as an example, the  $\text{MoS}_2$  grains grow on the substrate while bridging the subnanometer gaps beneath the CNTs, as displayed in Figure 1f and g, resulting in the creation of a continuous  $\text{MoS}_2$ /CNT hybrid film with high conductivity and mechanical stability.<sup>69</sup> Li et al. reported a 1D/2D CNT/MXene structure synthesized by *in situ* grown CNT on delaminated  $\text{Ti}_3\text{C}_2\text{T}_x$  nanosheets. The resulting MXene nanosheets were found to be covered and interconnected by the densely packed CNT network.<sup>70</sup> As for the 0D/2D hybrids, we noticed that CVD was not used as often as other solution-based methods such as hydrothermal/solvothermal, sonochemical



**Figure 1.** (a) Schematic illustration of chemical vapor deposition (CVD) setup for the synthesis of 2D  $\text{Mo}_2\text{C}$  and 2D/2D  $\text{Mo}_2\text{C}/\text{MoS}_2$  lateral heterostructure. (b) Top and cross-sectional view high-resolution transmission electron microscopy images of  $\text{Mo}_2\text{C}/\text{MoS}_2$  lateral heterostructure. Reprinted with permission from Reference 30. © 2018 American Chemical Society. (c) Schematic illustration of *in situ* growth of 1D/3D carbon nanotube (CNT)/graphene foam (GF) scaffold. (d) Scanning electron microscopy (SEM) images of the graphene carbon nanotube (GCNT) web. Reprinted with permission from Reference 67. © 2018 Wiley. (e) Schematic illustration of CVD setup for 1D/2D CNT/ $\text{MoS}_2$  hybrid films and corresponding optical images of different CNT-coated substrates after  $\text{MoS}_2$  hybridization. Scale bars, 1 cm; SEM (f) and magnified SEM (g) images of the 1D/2D CNT/ $\text{MoS}_2$  hybrid film supported on a copper grid. Scale bars, 2 μm in (f) and 500 nm in (g). Reprinted with permission from Reference 69. © 2018 Wiley.



reaction, or chemical oxidation/exfoliation methods.<sup>71–74</sup> However, it has the potential to produce quantum dots (QDs) in a large area with better controllability.<sup>75–78</sup> For instance, Ding reported the direct synthesis of graphene QDs on insulating hexagonal BN (*h*-BN) substrate by atmospheric pressure CVD without any metal catalyzer. The thickness of the graphene QDs can be controlled by tuning the gas mixing ratio. The *h*-BN substrate induces the formation of high-quality and high-surface-density dots with an ordered arrangement over a large area.<sup>79</sup>

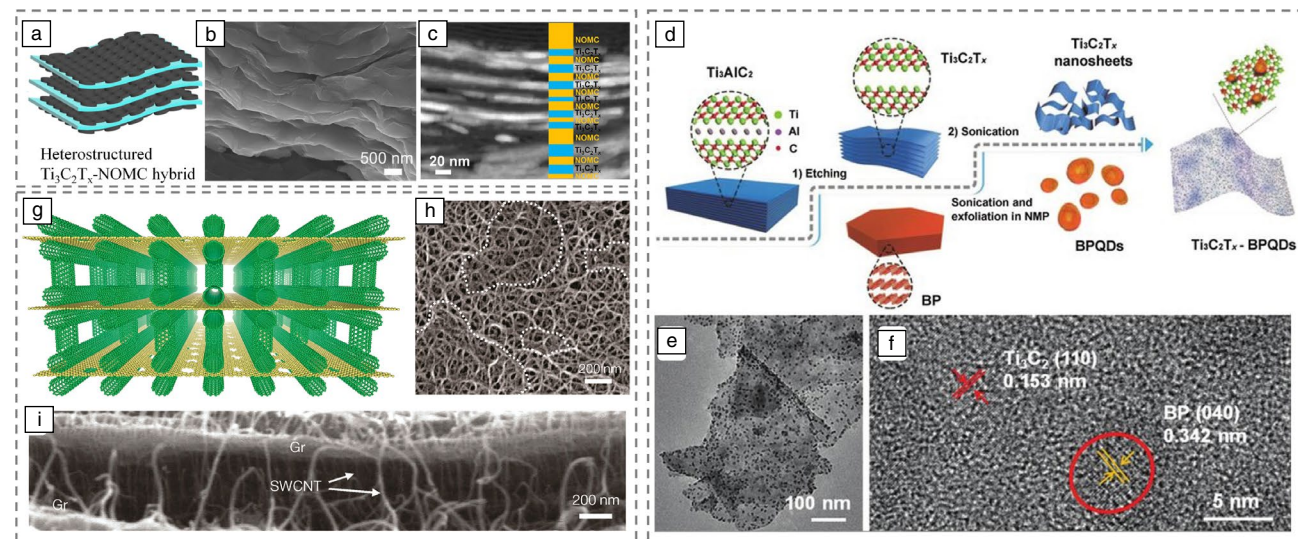
### Self-assembly

Self-assembly (SA) organizes material building blocks with different dimensionalities into complex superstructures through noncovalent interactions, such as hydrogen bonding, vdW interactions, electrostatic attraction, hydrophobic–hydrophilic interactions, and  $\pi$ – $\pi$  interactions.<sup>36,80</sup> Two-dimensional vdW structures, especially chemically modified carbonaceous materials (such as graphene oxide, reduced graphene oxide, etc.) and MXenes are enriched with multiple functional groups, endowing them as desirable materials to assemble with themselves or to form hybrid structures.<sup>36,81–83</sup>

### Two-dimensional/2D vdW heterojunctions

The SA method has the universal applicability to create a range of 2D/2D vdW heterostructures and can be effectively extended to produce 2D/2D hybrids in lateral and vertical arrangement fashions.<sup>84–87</sup> For instance, to construct nitrogen-doped graphene (NDG)/MoS<sub>2</sub> heterostructure, dopamine (DOPA) monomers were attached to Li-intercalated MoS<sub>2</sub> layers via an electrostatic-attraction-assisted SA process, followed by in situ conversion of DOPA to NDG. The heterojunctions showed high conductivity, rich active sites, and expanded interlayer spacing. Yun et al. reported 2D/2D MoS<sub>2</sub>/WS<sub>2</sub> and MoS<sub>2</sub>/NbSe<sub>2</sub> heterostructures via fast interfacial SA of chemically exfoliated TMDs from dilute dispersions simultaneously or sequentially, leading to the formation of lateral and vertical vdW heterostructures, respectively.<sup>87</sup>

One challenge in assembling a 2D/2D heterostructure by SA is how to create electron conductive bridges across nanosheets with regular pore distribution. Recently, Wang et al. intercalated amphiphilic triblock copolymer F127 (PEO-PPO-PEO) and resols into Ti<sub>3</sub>C<sub>2</sub>T<sub>x</sub> MXene where F127 unimers self-assembled into micelles with hydrophobic PPO block and hydrophilic PEO block (with -OH terminal groups) as the cores and shells, respectively, and interacted with the resol molecules through hydrogen bonding. The resulting Ti<sub>3</sub>C<sub>2</sub>T<sub>x</sub>-micelle@resol composites were then thermally treated, followed by metal etching and chlorination procedures, leading to the formation of all-carbon-based MLDHs composed of ordered mesoporous carbon (OMC) with MXene-derived-carbon (MDC) nanosheets.<sup>88</sup> Allah et al. reported a Ti<sub>3</sub>C<sub>2</sub>T<sub>x</sub> MXene/nitrogen-doped ordered mesoporous carbon (NOMC) heterostructure (Figure 2a) through SA of melamine resol-P123 micelles with exfoliated Ti<sub>3</sub>C<sub>2</sub>T<sub>x</sub> nanosheets. The NOMC is well aligned with the Ti<sub>3</sub>C<sub>2</sub>T<sub>x</sub> nanosheet (Figure 2b–c) and advantageous for preventing MXene sheets from restacking with ordered porous structure.<sup>89</sup>



**Figure 2.** (a) Schematic illustration of the 2D/2D Ti<sub>3</sub>C<sub>2</sub>T<sub>x</sub>/nitrogen-doped ordered mesoporous carbon (NOMC) hybrid material. (b, c) Cross-sectional scanning transmission electron microscopy images of Ti<sub>3</sub>C<sub>2</sub>T<sub>x</sub>/NOMC hybrid material. Reprinted with permission from Reference 89. © 2019 Elsevier. (d) Schematic illustration of the formation process of the 0D/2D black phosphorus quantum dot (BPQD)/TNS composite. (e) TEM image of the BPQD/Ti<sub>3</sub>C<sub>2</sub> nanosheet (TNS) composite. (f) High-resolution transmission electron microscopy image revealing BPQDs anchored on the surface of TNS. Reprinted with permission from Reference 96. © 2018 Wiley. (g) Schematic of the 3D single-walled carbon nanotube (SWCNT)-bridged graphene block. (h) Scanning electron microscopy (SEM) image showing the porous SWCNT network and graphene flakes (dotted lines). (i) Magnified cross-sectional SEM image of the hybrid structure that clearly shows vertical SWCNTs between the graphene layers in the inner part. Reprinted with permission from Reference 97. © 2015 American Chemical Society.

### Two-dimensional vdW-based MLDHs

Zero-dimensional (nanoparticles/nanospheres) as well as 1D nanotubes have been successfully integrated with 2D layered structures using SA.<sup>90–95</sup> For instance, Meng et al. reported a synthesis of 0D/2D nanocomposites consisting of black phosphorus quantum dots (BPQDs) and  $\text{Ti}_3\text{C}_2$  MXene nanosheets (TNSs). The BPQDs and well-dispersed TNSs were first prepared separately, followed by an interfacial assembly of BPQDs on TNSs (Figure 2d). The BPQDs with a size of 0.34 nm were anchored on the nanosheets, as shown in Figure 2e–f. The author found strong covalent interactions (P–O–Ti bonds) at interfaces between BPQDs and TNSs, which enhanced the pseudocapacitive charge storage.<sup>96</sup> Pham et al. assembled a 1D/2D CNT/graphene porous structure based on Coulombic interaction achieved by grafting positively charged CNTs with cationic surfactants onto negatively charged graphene oxide sheets, as shown in Figure 2g. In the structure, vertically aligned CNTs were observed in addition to planar CNT network. Benefiting from the CNT pillared structure with rich porosity induced by KOH activation (Figure 2h–i), the freestanding, flexible, 3D hierarchical structure showed high electrical conductivity and significantly improved accessible surface area, facilitating fast electron and ion transport.<sup>97</sup>

### Multistep synthesis

Compared with the single-step method, the multistep synthesis method integrates different synthesis techniques such as electrospinning,<sup>25–27</sup> CVD,<sup>28–32</sup> sol–gel method,<sup>33,34</sup> self-assembly,<sup>35,36</sup> microwave-assisted method,<sup>73,98</sup> and hydrothermal/solvothermal techniques<sup>32,37,38</sup> to produce MLDHs. The multistep synthesis allows for more complex reactions to produce multicomponent hybrids with a high order of structural complexity. As such, MLDHs can be produced with rich chemistry combinations, versatile morphologies, numerous charge-transport channels, and abundant active sites, beneficial for electrochemical applications. In addition, each step can be optimized individually, allowing for fine-tuning the properties of each component and improving overall structural synergy. Numerous MLDHs have been produced using the multistep methods and we recommend a few review papers for interested readers.<sup>22,39,91,92,99</sup> A few recent examples of novel MLDH structures constructed by multistep methods are highlighted next.

He et al. synthesized a freestanding 3D hierarchical structure consisting of few-layered graphene nanosheets sandwiched by 1 T  $\text{MoS}_2$  nanosheets by integrating a one-pot hydrothermal process with a freeze-dry method. In addition to the facile electron transfer originating from the high electronic conductivities of graphene and metallic 1 T-phase  $\text{MoS}_2$ , the porous 3D structure can also advance the ion transfer due to the hydrophilic nature of  $\text{MoS}_2$ .<sup>38</sup> Chen et al. produced porous hierarchical  $\text{MoS}_2$  tubular structures aligned with CNTs using combined electrospinning and hydrothermal processes. Their approach introduces carboxylic groups onto multiwalled CNTs to improve the dispersion of CNT on polyacrylonitrile (PAN) nanofibers during electrospinning (Figure 3a). Ultrathin  $\text{MoS}_2$  nanosheets were then

integrated into the CNT/PAN hybrid structure using the hydrothermal method, followed by porosity creation at the expense of Co nanoparticles. A schematic illustration of the unique CNT-wired porous hierarchical  $\text{MoS}_2$  nanotubes is shown in Figure 3b.<sup>26</sup> Cui et al. synthesized a 1D/2D hybrid material by integrating  $\text{MoS}_2$  and carbon fiber (CF), namely  $(\text{MoS}_2/\text{CF})@ \text{MoS}_2@ \text{C}$  (Figure 3c–h), via combined electrospinning, hydrothermal, and postannealing approach. The resultant multicomponent MLDH exhibited remarkable sodium storage capacity, which can be attributed to its highly conductive, cross-linked 3D framework as well as the protective function of the outermost carbon layer.<sup>27</sup> Ren et al. reported a method for creating a 0D/2D/2D hybrid foam composed of CNTs, graphene, and  $\text{MoS}_2$  nanoparticles. The graphene foam (GF) was produced on nickel foam using the CVD method. CNT was then dispersed in alcohol and applied to the GF, creating GF@CNT. Ammonium thiomolybdate powders were added to the GF@CNT hybrid followed by a hydrothermal process, resulting in ternary GF@CNT@ $\text{MoS}_2$  MLDHs.<sup>100</sup>

### Two-dimensional vdW heterostructures and their MLDHs for electrochemical energy applications

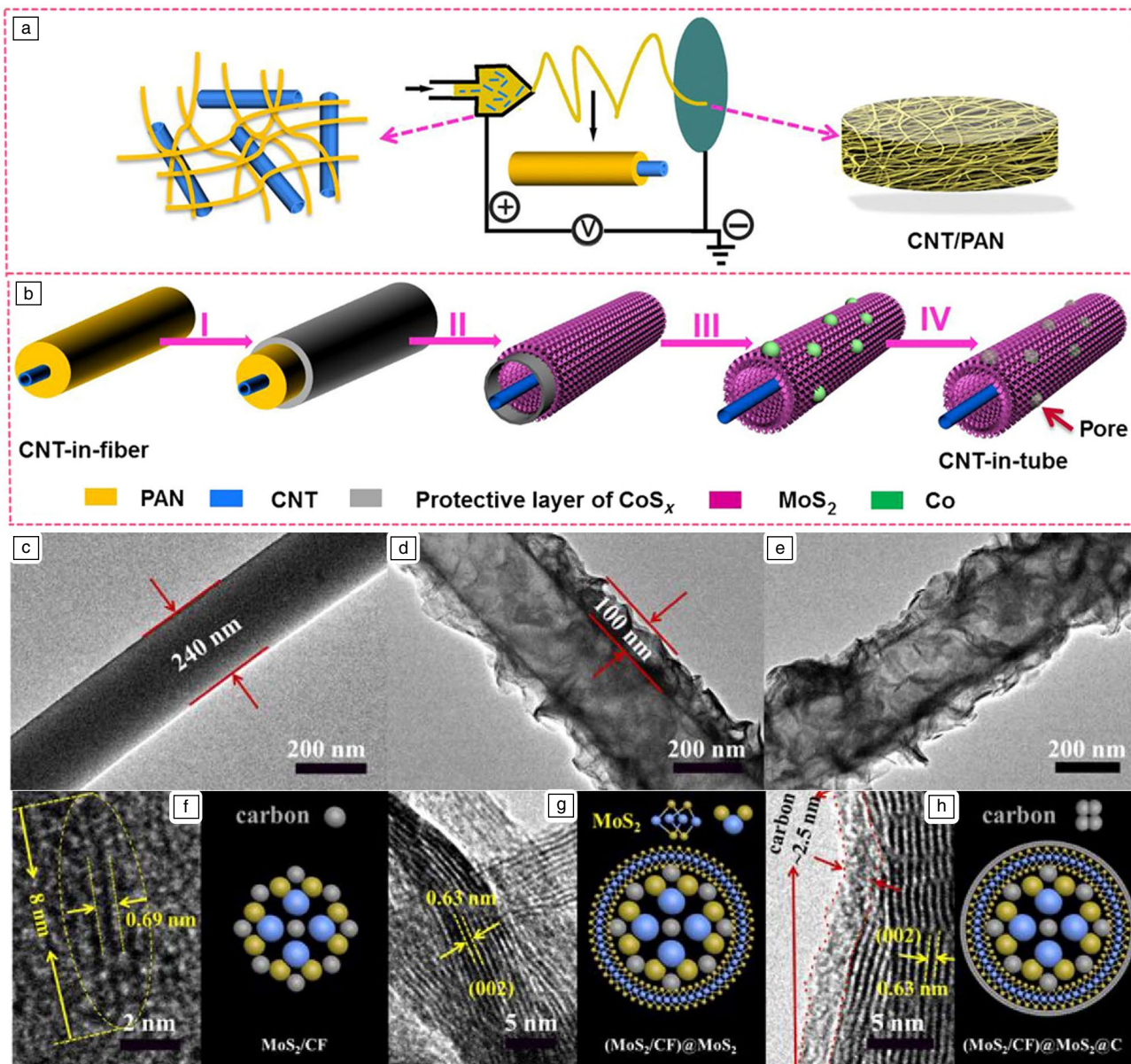
LD materials have emerged as promising candidates for electrochemical energy applications. These materials exhibit unique physicochemical properties due to the quantum confinement effect arising from the reduced dimensionality. Furthermore, enhanced properties and expanded applications can be expected by forming MLDHs via material hybridization or composite design, allowing for the optimization of various material characteristics for specific applications.<sup>93,99,101–106</sup> In the following section, we will highlight the recent achievement of MLDHs in the application of MIBs and HER.

#### Two-dimensional/2D vdW heterostructures

Two-dimensional/2D heterostructures such as  $\text{MoS}_2$ /carbon nanosheets,<sup>107</sup>  $\text{MoS}_2$ /graphene,<sup>108–119</sup>  $\text{MoSe}_2$ /graphene,<sup>120–126</sup>  $\text{WS}_2$ /graphene,<sup>127,128</sup>  $\text{Ti}_3\text{C}_2\text{T}_x$ /graphene,<sup>129–133</sup>  $\text{MoS}_2$ / $\text{Ti}_3\text{C}_2\text{T}_x$ ,<sup>134–140</sup>  $\text{MoS}_2/\text{Mo}_2\text{CT}_x$ ,<sup>141</sup>  $\text{MoSe}_2/\text{Ti}_3\text{C}_2\text{T}_x$ ,<sup>134,142,143</sup> have been investigated in electrochemical applications. The 2D hybrids exhibit structural synergy in terms of enlarged surface area, increased electrical conductivity, enhanced structural integrity, and restacking/oxidation prevention, resulting in improved electrochemical performance along with desired structural stability and mechanical flexibility.

As an example, Yuan et al. synthesized a 2D/2D  $\text{BN}/\text{Ti}_3\text{C}_2\text{T}_x$  hybrid through a solvent-free ball-milling method. Leveraging from the enlarged interlayer spacing, reduced nanosheet size, and better structural integrity, the hybrid structure delivered a capacity of  $345 \text{ mA h g}^{-1}$  at  $1 \text{ A g}^{-1}$  with long-cycle stability as a Na-ion battery (SIB) anode.<sup>144</sup> Zhou et al. constructed a super light and bendable MXene/graphene aerogel (MGA) as the Zn host in Zn-ion batteries (ZIBs) via hydrothermal method. Due to the solid zincophilic traits and the presence of micropores within MGA, densely encapsulated



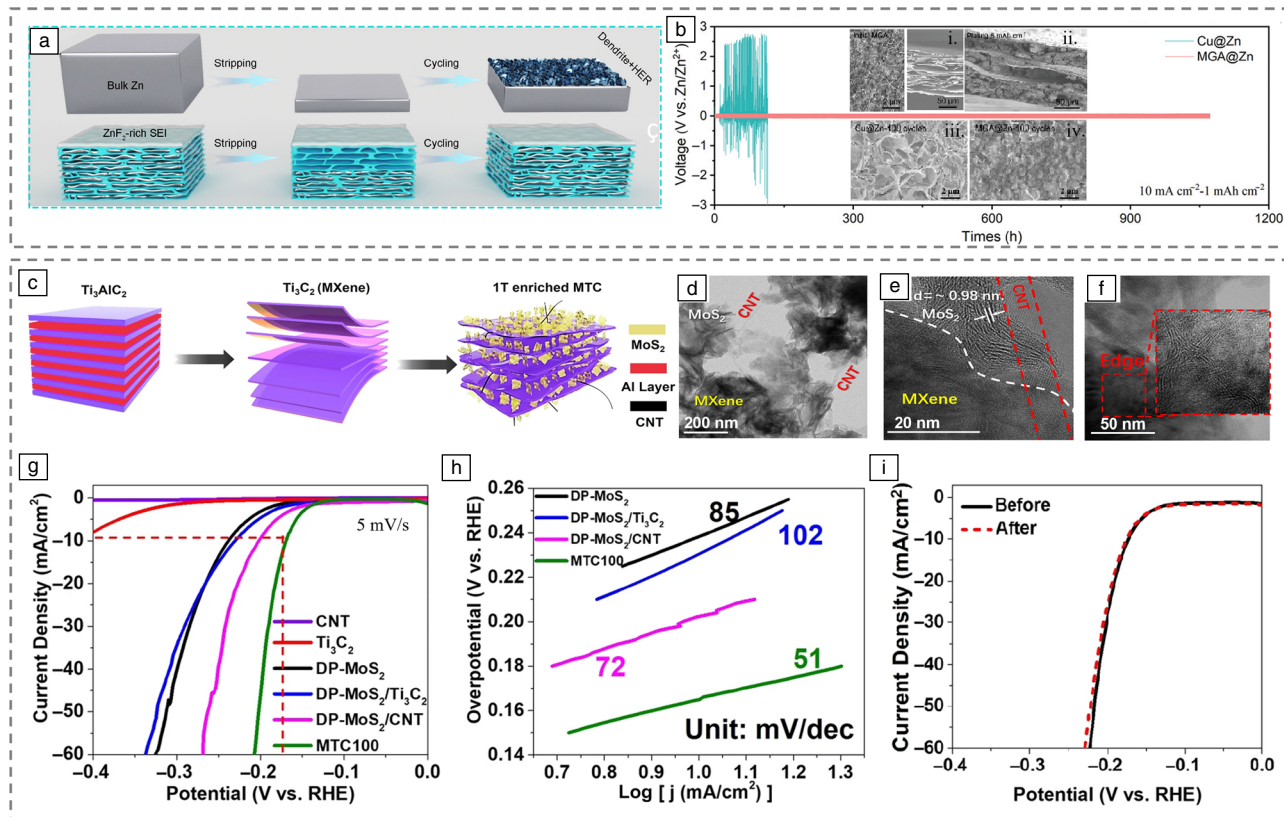


**Figure 3.** (a) Illustration of the synthesis process of the carbon nanotube (CNT)/PAN tube-in-fiber structure by electrospinning. (b) Schematic of the fabrication process for the CNT-in-tube structure. (I) Growth of a protective layer of  $\text{CoS}_x$  on the CNT-in-fiber composite. (II) Formation of  $\text{MoS}_2$  nanosheets on the composite accompanied by the removal of PAN, yielding a tubular structure. (III) Heating treatment of the hybrid to reduce the  $\text{CoS}_x$  to Co nanoparticles. (IV) Acid treatment to remove Co particles to obtain a CNT/ $\text{MoS}_2$  tubular structure. Reprinted with permission from Reference 26. © 2016 The Authors. Transmission electron microscopy images of (c) 2D/1D  $\text{MoS}_2/\text{CF}$ , (d)  $(\text{MoS}_2/\text{CF})@ \text{MoS}_2$ , and (e)  $(\text{MoS}_2/\text{CF})@ \text{MoS}_2@ \text{C}$ . High-resolution TEM images and schematic representation of (f)  $\text{MoS}_2/\text{CF}$ , (g)  $(\text{MoS}_2/\text{CF})@ \text{MoS}_2$ , and (h)  $(\text{MoS}_2/\text{CF})@ \text{MoS}_2@ \text{C}$ . Reprinted with permission from Reference 27. © 2018 Elsevier.

Zn can be electrodeposited inside the host structure (Figure 4b[i–ii]). Moreover, the MGA maintained a flat top surface without visible pores after Zn deposition, leading to a substantial reduction in the contact area with the electrolyte and thus the suppression of side reactions (Figure 4a). Moreover, this 2D/2D hybrid induces the *in situ* formation of the solid electrolyte interface (SEI) containing zinc fluoride due to the presence of inherent  $-\text{F}$  terminations on MXene. The zinc fluoride-based SEI effectively inhibits the growth of dendritic structures, enhancing the stability and safety of the battery.

Consequently, the MGA@Zn anode demonstrated a stable cycling profile for more than 1000 h at a current density of  $10 \text{ mA cm}^{-2}$  with a fixed capacity of  $1 \text{ mAh cm}^{-2}$  (Figure 4b). In addition, a smoother and dendrite-free surface was observed when compared with the Cu@Zn anode (Figure 4b[iii–iv]).<sup>131</sup>

As demonstrated by Fan et al., 2D/2D  $\text{MoS}_2$ /graphene nano-hybrids can be employed as a cathode in hybrid-ion ( $\text{Mg}^{2+}/\text{Li}^{+}$ ) batteries. In their process,  $\text{MoS}_2$  nanosheets were synthesized on CVD-grown graphene via the hydrothermal method. Due to the highly conductive nature of graphene and the expanded



**Figure 4.** (a) Schematic illustration of Zn plating and cycling on bulk Zn foil and MGA@Zn electrodes. (b) Long-term cycling performance of Cu@Zn and MGA@Zn symmetric cells. The insets are scanning electron microscopy images of initial MGA (i), MGA after plating (ii), Cu@Zn (iii), and MGA@Zn (iv) after 100 cycles. Reprinted with permission from Reference 131. © 2021 Wiley. (c) Schematic illustrations of the preparation process of MoS<sub>2</sub>/MXene/carbon nanotube (CNT) (MTC) composite. The transmission electron microscopy image (TEM) (d) and high-resolution TEM images (e, f) of the MTC composite. (g) Polarization curves and (h) Tafel plots for selected samples. (i) The polarization curves of MTC before and after 1000 cycles of CV scans.<sup>146</sup> HER, hydrogen evolution reaction; DP, dual phase; RHE, reversible hydrogen electrode; CV, cyclic voltammetry.

interlayer distance of MoS<sub>2</sub> originating from the glucose-assisted synthesis process, the heterostructure showed efficient intercalation of Li<sup>+</sup> and Mg<sup>2+</sup> simultaneously. Moreover, undesired side reactions and the growth of dendrites were prohibited due to the excellent chemical and structural stability of graphene, leading to a stable charging/discharging process of 500 cycles.<sup>111</sup>

As for HER, we recently synthesized a 2D/2D MoS<sub>2</sub>/Ti<sub>3</sub>C<sub>2</sub> MXene nanohybrid using a facile bisolvent solvothermal method (Figure 4c). Due to the NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> intercalation, MoS<sub>2</sub> layers exhibited expanded interlayer spacing along with partial 2H to 1T phase transition. The dual-phase MoS<sub>2</sub> (DP-MoS<sub>2</sub>) nanosheets with enriched edge sites (Figure 4f) were found in the interlayers as well as the surface of MXene. Sandwiching the DP-MoS<sub>2</sub> with Ti<sub>3</sub>C<sub>2</sub> MXene not only prevented the 2D layers from restacking, but also protected the MXene from oxidation.<sup>145</sup> The importance of mixing materials with different dimensionalities was noticed when introducing 1D CNTs into the 2D/2D hybrids. We found that the presence of CNT largely improved the HER performance despite its low density. This can be attributed to the cross-linking function of 1D tubes, which bridged the 2D islands to form a highly

conductive network (Figure 4d–e). The MTC configuration outperformed the other binary counterparts in HER with the lowest overpotential of 169 mV and the smallest Tafel slope of 51 mV dec<sup>−1</sup> (Figure 4g–h). The ternary structure retained a high HER performance after 1000 cycles of CV scans, indicating the promising structural stability of the hybrid (Figure 4i).<sup>146</sup> In addition, the property of the 2D/2D hybrids can be further tailored by introducing prelithiation treatment. We recently employed an n-Buli-based prelithiation process to the hybrid 2D/2D structure and demonstrated that deep phase transition of MoS<sub>2</sub> can be triggered along with the removal of F-containing functional groups in MXene, beneficial for the overall conductivity and ion diffusion kinetics of the composite.<sup>146</sup>

### Zero-dimensional/2D MLDHs

Integrating 0D materials with 2D structures can avoid the self-aggregation of 0D QDs and introduce defects on the 2D substrates with favorable properties. The controllable coupling between the two components allows for the design of specific interfaces that promote efficient electron transfer and facilitate energy-storage and catalytic reactions. Various 0D/2D MLDHs



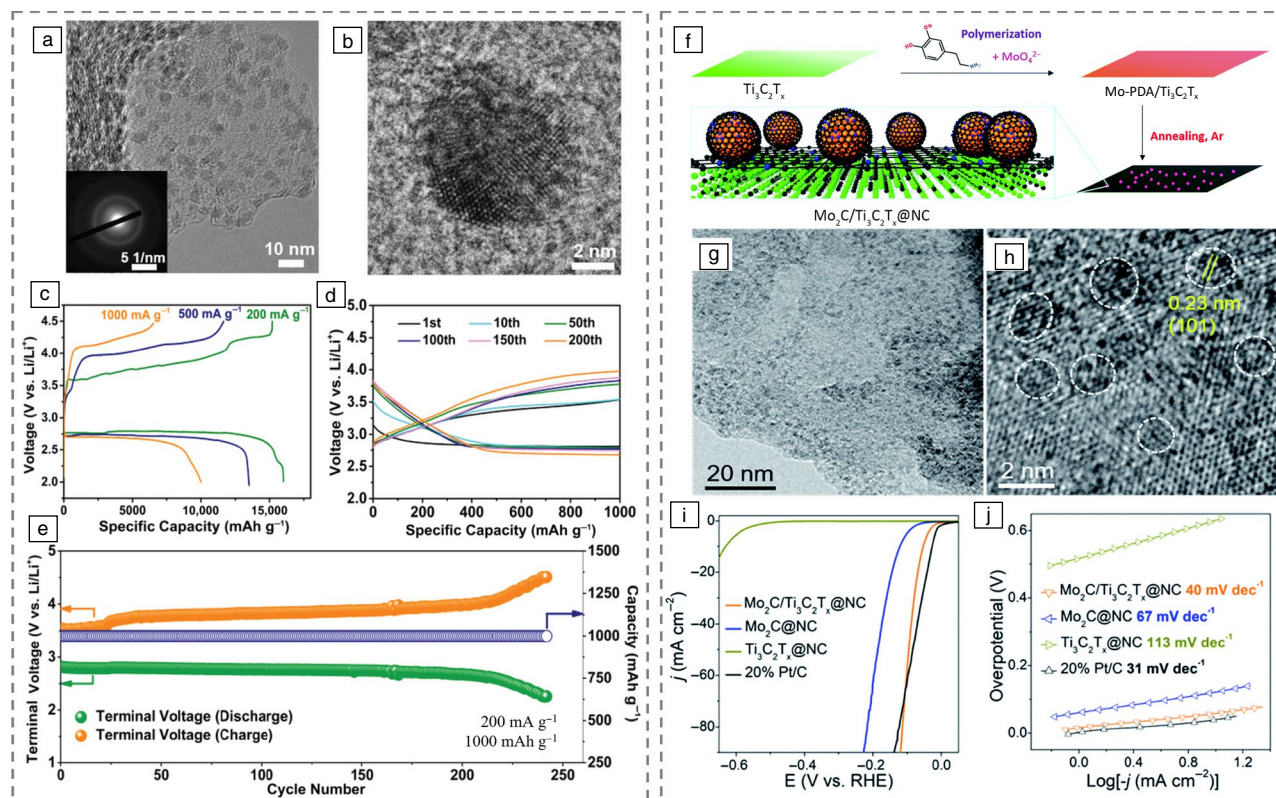
such as carbon QDs/graphene,<sup>147,148</sup> graphene QDs/MoS<sub>2</sub>,<sup>149,150</sup> MoS<sub>2</sub> nanoparticles/graphene,<sup>151,152</sup> Ti<sub>3</sub>C<sub>2</sub>T<sub>x</sub> QDs/carbon nanosheets,<sup>153</sup> and Mo<sub>2</sub>C/Ti<sub>3</sub>C<sub>2</sub>T<sub>x</sub><sup>154</sup> have been reported.

For instance, the 0D/2D BPQD/TNS composite shown in Figure 2d–f was adopted as the anode material in both LIBs and SIBs. Anchoring the BPQDs on TNS not only enhanced the conductivity of BPQDs, but also relieved the stress generated during cycling. Additionally, the presence of P–O–Ti interfacial bonds between the two components induces atomic charge polarization, resulting in additional pseudocapacitance in TNS. Benefiting from the improved charge adsorption and efficient interfacial electron transfer originated from the mixed dimensionality, high capacity (910 mAh g<sup>-1</sup> at 100 mA g<sup>-1</sup>) and long cycling stability (2400 cycles with capacity retention over 100%) were achieved in the LIB system. Moreover, the MLDHs also delivered a high initial capacity of 723 mAh g<sup>-1</sup> at 50 mA g<sup>-1</sup> in the SIB system.<sup>96</sup>

Wang et al. anchored Ti<sub>3</sub>C<sub>2</sub> MXene quantum dots clusters (QDCs) on N-doped carbon nanosheets for Li–O<sub>2</sub> batteries using the hydrothermal method. The MXene QDC with crystal defects embracing grain boundaries and edge defects were evenly distributed on the 2D carbon nanosheets (Figure 5a–b).

The defect-rich MXene QDC acted as active centers, contributing to an optimized electronic structure for high catalytic activity. Importantly, the presence of multiscale defects altered the coordination states surrounding the Ti atoms, leading to charge delocalization and *d*-orbit electronic environment optimization at active sites, resulting in enhanced electrocatalytic performance. As the cathode catalyst, the hybrids delivered a high capacity and good cycling stability, as shown in Figure 5c–e.<sup>153</sup>

For HER, Wang et al. built N-doped carbon encapsulated Mo<sub>2</sub>C nanodots on Ti<sub>3</sub>C<sub>2</sub>T<sub>x</sub> MXene (Mo<sub>2</sub>C/Ti<sub>3</sub>C<sub>2</sub>T<sub>x</sub>@NC) using a dopamine-assisted thermal decomposition method (Figure 5f). The N-doped carbon layer was formed from self-polymerized dopamine on the surface of Ti<sub>3</sub>C<sub>2</sub>T<sub>x</sub> and protected the MXene from oxidation during the synthesis. The surface of Ti<sub>3</sub>C<sub>2</sub>T<sub>x</sub> flakes was uniformly decorated with high-density ultrasmall Mo<sub>2</sub>C nanodots with an average diameter of 1.1 nm (Figure 5g and h) after the annealing process. The MLDHs demonstrated a comparable overpotential with the Pt/C electrode (Figure 5i) and a Tafel slope of 40 mV dec<sup>-1</sup> (Figure 5j), which can be attributed to the synergetic effects of hybrid structure in terms of abundant active sites originated from the highly dispersed ultrasmall Mo<sub>2</sub>C nanodots and a



**Figure 5.** (a, b) High-resolution transmission electron microscopy images of Ti<sub>3</sub>C<sub>2</sub> quantum dot clusters/nitrogen-doped carbon nanosheet (QDCs/N-C). The deep discharge–charge curves of the Ti<sub>3</sub>C<sub>2</sub> QDC/N-C electrode in Li–O<sub>2</sub> batteries at different current densities (c) and different cycles (d). (e) Cycling stability and terminal discharge–charge voltages of the Ti<sub>3</sub>C<sub>2</sub> QDC/N-C electrode. Reprinted with permission from Reference 153. © 2021 Wiley. (f) Schematic illustrations of the Mo<sub>2</sub>C/Ti<sub>3</sub>C<sub>2</sub>T<sub>x</sub>@NC. (g) TEM image and (h) high-angle annular dark field–scanning TEM image of Mo<sub>2</sub>C/Ti<sub>3</sub>C<sub>2</sub>T<sub>x</sub>@NC. Polarization curves (i) and Tafel plots (j) for selected samples. Reprinted with permission from Reference 154. © 2020 Royal Society of Chemistry. RHE, reversible hydrogen electrode.



low-resistance electron pathway associated with the coupling of  $\text{Mo}_2\text{C}$  and  $\text{Ti}_3\text{C}_2\text{T}_x$  MXene.<sup>154</sup>

### One-dimensional/2D MLDHs

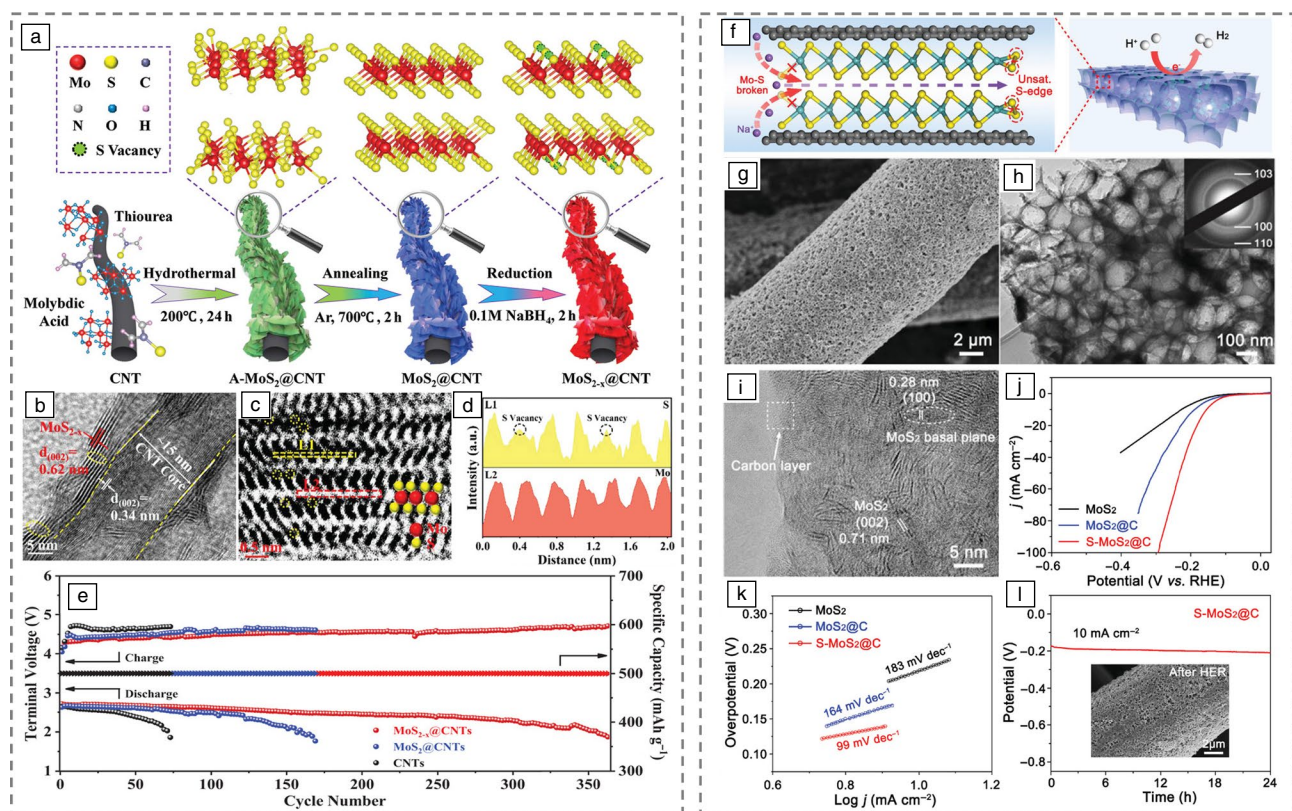
A variety of 1D/2D MLDHs, including CNT/ $\text{MoS}_2$ ,<sup>155–158</sup> CNT/ $\text{MoSe}_2$ ,<sup>159</sup> CNT/ $\text{WSe}_2$ ,<sup>160</sup> CNT/ $\text{Ti}_3\text{C}_2\text{T}_x$ ,<sup>161–163</sup> CNT/graphene,<sup>164</sup> carbon nanofiber/ $\text{MoS}_2$ ,<sup>165–168</sup> graphene nanocable/ $\text{MoS}_2$ ,<sup>169</sup> and  $\text{WS}_2$  nanotube/graphene<sup>170</sup> have been synthesized and investigated for energy storage. For instance, leveraging the structure synergy mentioned previously in Figure 3, the  $(\text{MoS}_2/\text{CF})@\text{MoS}_2@\text{C}$  composite demonstrated a high reversible  $\text{Na}^+$  storage capacity of  $575.3 \text{ mAh g}^{-1}$  at  $0.1 \text{ A g}^{-1}$ .<sup>27</sup> Another example, Li et al. synthesized a core-shell  $\text{MoS}_{2-x}@\text{CNTs}$  composite as a cathode catalyst in  $\text{Li-O}_2$  batteries via a hydrothermal method followed by  $\text{NaBH}_4$  reduction processing (Figure 6a). The  $\text{MoS}_2$  nanoflakes were found to be uniformly coated on the CNT network (Figure 6b) with randomly distributed sulfur vacancies (Figure 6c–d) induced by the reduction process. The hybrid 1D/2D structure showed high charge/discharge capacities and stable cycle life lasting for 355 cycles at  $200 \text{ mA g}^{-1}$  with a fixed specific capacity of  $500 \text{ mAh g}^{-1}$  (Figure 6e). The excellent performance can be ascribed to the synergetic

effect of the 1D/2D structure hybridization associated with the suppression of side reactions originating from reduced CNT exposure and enhanced participation of active sites such as S vacancies for the catalytic reaction.<sup>158</sup>

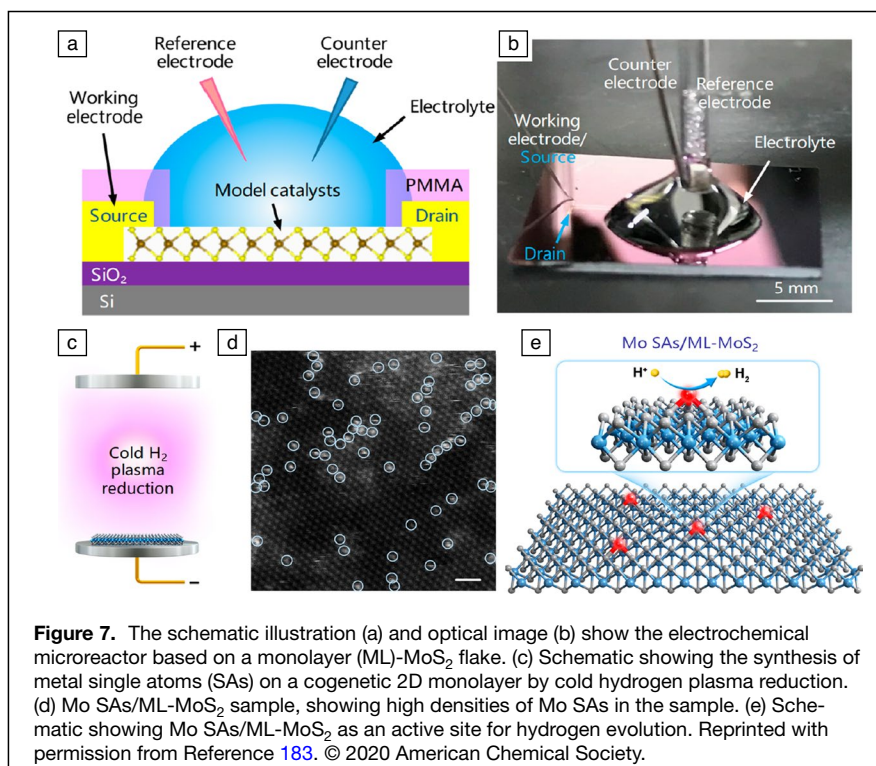
Xu et al. prepared unsaturated S edge-enriched  $\text{MoS}_2$  nanosheets on carbon fibers ( $\text{S-MoS}_2@\text{C}$ ) via a thermal decomposition method. The uniform distribution of  $\text{MoS}_2$  on the carbon layers was confirmed with an ordered, porous 1D/2D structure (Figure 6g–i). Importantly, unsaturated sulfur edges created via ion pre-intercalation treatment (Figure 6f) and the formation of the C–S bonds ensured the existence of plausible active sites and strong interaction between 2D  $\text{MoS}_2$  nanosheets and 1D carbon fibers, respectively, resulting in promising HER performance. The hybrid MLDHs exhibit a low overpotential of  $136 \text{ mV}$ , a Tafel slope of  $99 \text{ mV dec}^{-1}$ , and a stable catalytic profile over 24 h at a current density of  $10 \text{ mA cm}^{-2}$  with no obvious morphology change (Figure 6j–l).<sup>168</sup>

### Mechanics understanding of electrochemical processes based on vdW-based MLDHs

Two-dimensional vdW heterostructures and MLDHs present unique opportunities for elucidating the governing principles of ion diffusion mechanism and charge-transfer kinetics



**Figure 6.** (a) Schematic illustration of the synthesis process for  $\text{MoS}_{2-x}@\text{CNTs}$ . High-resolution transmission electron microscopy (HRTEM) image (b), scanning TEM image (c), and the corresponding intensity profile for  $\text{MoS}_{2-x}@\text{CNTs}$  (d). (e) Cycling performance of different cathodes. Reprinted with permission from Reference 158. © 2021 Wiley. (f) Schematic of the  $\text{S-MoS}_2@\text{C}$  microstructure; (g) SEM, (h) TEM, and (i) HRTEM images of  $\text{S-MoS}_2@\text{C}$ . (j) Polarization curves, (k) Tafel plots, and (l) stability tests for the  $\text{S-MoS}_2@\text{C}$  electrocatalyst. Reprinted with permission from Reference 168. © 2018 Wiley. HER, hydrogen evolution reaction. RHE, reversible hydrogen electrode.



at electrified interfaces. By leveraging the reduced dimensionality along with novel material assembly/isolation techniques, these materials can be integrated into microreactor platforms.<sup>21,171,172</sup> A typical microreactor device is shown in **Figure 7a** where metal contact is placed on a Si/SiO<sub>2</sub> substrate and acts as a working electrode when put in contact with the material of interest. The exposure area of the active material is well-defined on a micrometer scale with the assistance of e-beam lithography. Electrochemical measurements can be conducted by placing a droplet of electrolyte over the exposed area (**Figure 7b**).

Combining with ultraflat 2D vdW layers, the microreactor not only enables real-time analysis of electrochemical processes with precise geometrical and environmental control, but also allows one to decouple the impacts of different contributing factors, advancing the fundamental understanding of the energy storage and conversion process at the mechanistic level. For instance, insights on lithium diffusion kinetics and the heterointerface impact on intercalation mechanisms in various 2D vdW layers and their heterostructures were revealed, promoting the rational design of future battery electrodes.<sup>173,174</sup> In addition, impacts of charge injection from the substrate to catalysts, interlayer/intralayer electron transport, stain, and vacancies on HER kinetics were also elucidated based on the microreactor platform.<sup>171,175–182</sup> For instance, Luo et al. synthesized a hybrid 0D/2D structure where isolated Mo single atoms (SAs) were anchored on structurally well-defined 2D monolayer MoS<sub>2</sub> using the cold hydrogen plasma reduction method (**Figure 7c–d**). A typical two-terminal microreactor

with a well-defined exposure area of Mo SAs/MoS<sub>2</sub> was fabricated. Due to the precisely defined catalyst area with a ratio of interfacial surface area to the surface area of electrode close to 1, quantitative analysis of HER kinetics was obtained. In conjunction with DFT calculation, the author concluded that Mo SAs on MoS<sub>2</sub> are efficient sites (**Figure 7e**) for HER with ultrafast hydrogen adsorption/desorption kinetics, originating from a strong hybridization between the single Mo atoms and hydrogen atoms.<sup>183</sup>

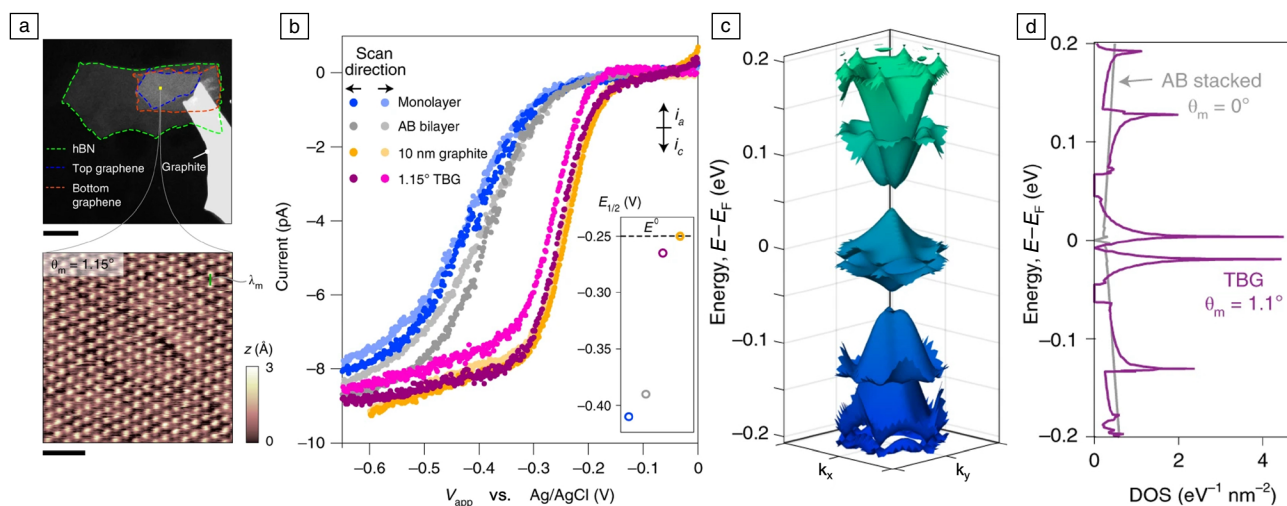
In addition, Yu et al. fabricated a microreactor based on twisted bilayer graphene (**Figure 8a**) and observed a strong twist-angle dependence of heterogeneous charge-transfer kinetics with the greatest electrochemical activity enhancement observed near the “magic angle” (1.1°), as shown in **Figure 8b**. The activity enhancement was attributed to the MS-derived flat band formation (**Figure 8c and d**), where strong electron–electron interactions with localized electronic states can be induced,<sup>56,184,185</sup> advancing electron transfer kinetics across the 2D layers. This pioneering work suggests that the twist-angle-derived MS in 2D vdW materials offers an extra degree of freedom for improving the charge-transfer kinetics across 2D vdW layers with the potential to activate the MS as active sites (i.e., topological defects) on 2D basal planes, providing an effective strategy to further advance the performance of a broad range of electrochemical processes based on 2D vdW layers and their MLDHs.<sup>58</sup>

## Conclusion and outlook

In this article, we introduced representative techniques for constructing vdW-based heterostructures and MLDHs and discussed their applications in electrochemical energy storage and conversion. Recent advancements in elucidating charge-transport dynamics based on vdW-microreactors were also reviewed. In the end, we will summarize potential strategies to overcome inherent material issues in 2d vdW layers to assist future device performance boosting.

First, to maintain the large reaction area and efficient electron/ion-transport pathways, it is important to prevent 2D vdW layers from restacking and form a universal conductive network in the MLDHs. As we demonstrated previously, introducing 1D interlayer spacers such as CNT to the 2D framework is a promising strategy.<sup>147</sup> However, it is worth noting that uniform distribution of nanotubes in the hybrids is the key to performance improvement. Proper treatment to functionalize the CNT surface will not only debundle the nanotubes, but also improve their interfacial interaction with vdW layers





**Figure 8.** Twisted bilayer graphene (TBG) Moiré superlattices and their electrochemical response. (a) Microscope image (scale bar = 10  $\mu\text{m}$ ) of a TBG (twist angle = 1.15°) connected with a graphite contact, and the corresponding scanning transmission microscopy image showing the Moiré patterns. (b) Comparison of steady-state voltammograms using 1.15° bilayer with references using 2 mM  $\text{Ru}(\text{NH}_3)_6^{3+}$  in 0.1 M KCL solution. (c, d) Calculated Moiré band and corresponding density of states (DOS), where  $E_F$  is the Fermi energy,  $k_x$  and  $k_y$  are the reciprocal space vectors. Reprinted with permission from Reference 58. © 2011 Wiley.

without sacrificing the electrical conductivity of the nanotubes. In addition, the contact geometry between the 1D/2D component also determines the overall conductivity of the network. Therefore, attention needs to be paid to engineering the heterostructure contact for structure optimization. Second, it is critical to activate the inert basal planes and increase the total number of active sites in 2D vdW layers and their MLDHs. Recent microreactor-based studies suggested that basal planes can be activated if the charge injection from the substrate to the active material can be improved by reducing the contact resistance between them.<sup>176</sup> Moreover, inducing MS in the twisted bilayer vdW structures can be another important method to improve out-of-plane charge-transfer kinetics as well as forming topological defects to add additional active sites.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, the implementation of these fundamental findings into practical electrochemical devices requires extensive experimental efforts on materials synthesis control and cell design optimization. Third, the long-term stability of electrochemical devices using 2D vdW structures has been a longstanding issue. The cause of performance degradation can be a result of material oxidation as well as the intercalant-rich solvent environment. As such, careful study of the dynamics and mechanisms of the degradation process is necessary to evaluate the potential of the vdW-based heterostructure/MLDHs in energy technology and boost their performance in practical applications.

In conclusion, 2D vdW heterostructures and their MLDHs not only provide an excellent material platform for fundamental science exploration, but also present great potential for electrochemical energy applications. Nevertheless, the previously mentioned challenges will need to be well addressed in

the future to unlock the complete capabilities of vdW layered structures and their MLDHs for practical industrial adoption. With more time and effort invested in this area, further advancements can be expected and will undoubtedly lead to significant breakthroughs and innovations in the field of electrochemical energy.

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### Data availability

Not applicable.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declare no competing interests.

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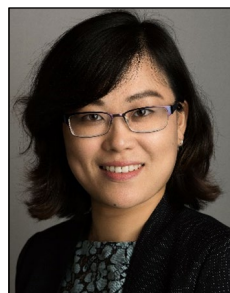


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