Hierarchical MoS$_2$ Nanosheet@TiO$_2$ Nanotube Array Composites with Enhanced Photocatalytic and Photocurrent Performances

Lingxia Zheng, Sancan Han, Hui Liu, Pingping Yu, and Xiaosheng Fang*

A novel type of hierarchical nanocomposites consisted of MoS$_2$ nanosheet coating on the self-ordered TiO$_2$ nanotube arrays is successfully prepared by a facile combination of anodization and hydrothermal methods. The MoS$_2$ nanosheets are uniformly decorated on the tube top surface and the intertubular voids with film appearance changing from brown to black color. Anatase TiO$_2$ nanotube arrays (NTAs) with clean top surfaces and the appropriate amount of MoS$_2$ precursors are key to the growth of perfect compositing TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ hybrids with significantly enhanced photocatalytic activity and photocurrent response. These results reveal that the strategy provides a flexible and straightforward route for design and preparation nanocomposites based on functional semiconducting nanostructures with 1D self-ordered TiO$_2$ NTAs, promising for new opportunities in energy/environment applications, including photocatalysts and other photovoltaic devices.

1. Introduction

Since the pioneering work on water splitting by Fujishima and Honda,[1] titanium dioxide (TiO$_2$) has been extensively investigated and remained as one of the most promising candidates for photocatalysts and photoelectrodes due to its high chemical stability, favorable band edge positions, strong optical absorption, eco-friendliness, and abundant availability.[2–5] Among different crystal structures and morphologies of TiO$_2$, vertically oriented anatase 1D TiO$_2$ nanotube arrays (TiO$_2$ NTAs) grown by a simple electrochemical anodization method show the highest activity for solar energy conversion in the viewpoint of high surface-to-volume ratio and excellent electron transport property.[6–8] More importantly, the structural characteristics (tube diameters, length, tube packing densities, etc.) of TiO$_2$ NTAs can be facilely controlled by fine design of anodization process (such as anodization time, potential/current, electrolyte, and temperature).[4,9,10] However, as an n-type wide band gap semiconductor, TiO$_2$ can solely absorb the UV light, which accounts for less than 5% over the full solar resource, thus significantly limiting its widespread applications. In addition, the rapid recombination rate of photogenerated electron-hole pairs of TiO$_2$ leads to a low quantum efficiency and poor photocatalytic activity. In order to address these obstacles, a plethora of strategies have been explored to improve the photoresponse of 1D TiO$_2$ NTAs. For example, metal/nonmetal impurity doping was shown to introduce mid-gap energy levels, which were expected to control the band gap response of the TiO$_2$ NTAs and enhance their visible spectrum properties.[11–15] In particular, the growth of TiO$_2$-based composites (core-shell geometry or nanoparticle decoration) is considered to be one of the most promising routes due to the improvement of charge carrier separation.[16–19] It is of paramount importance to design efficient semiconductor-based composites with desirable architectural structure/morphology enabling synergistic impacts on the overall performance of photocatalytic and photoelectrochemical applications.

Molybdenum disulfide (MoS$_2$), a member of the layered transition metal dichalcogenides family, has been a focus of study for wide applications due to its high activity, excellent morphologies, good electronic and optical properties, such
as supercapacitors, hydrogen storage, catalysis, microelectronics, and optoelectronics.\cite{20-27} With an analog structure to graphene, each layer of MoS$_2$ consists of molybdenum atoms sandwiched between two layers of hexagonally close-packed sulfur atoms and the sandwiched adjacent layers are held together by the weak van der Waals forces. To date, the MoS$_2$-based semiconductor heterostructures, such as CdS/MoS$_2$,\cite{26} MoO$_3$/MoS$_2$,\cite{29} SnO$_2$/MoS$_2$,\cite{30} with good photocatalytic or photoelectrochemical properties have been successfully synthesized, since the efficient charge separation can be obtained by coupling two semiconductor structures with the matched energy levels. In particular, MoS$_2$/TiO$_2$ nanocomposites are one of the best candidates for contributing to superior energy and environment performances given their great crystal-modification potential for conductance, aspect ratio, and ultrathin edges. There are a few existing studies of MoS$_2$/TiO$_2$ nanocomposites with remarkable photocatalytic or photoelectrochemical properties.

To the best of our knowledge, a few studies have reported a 3D hierarchical heterostructures constructed by nanotube TiO$_2$ composites with remarkable photocatalytic activity or lithium storage performances.\cite{27,31-38} For example, Zhang et al.\cite{27} reported a 3D hierarchical heterostructures constructed by few-layer MoS$_2$ nanosheet coating on the TiO$_2$ nanobelts with enhanced photocatalytic efficiency. Xu et al.\cite{39} demonstrated that the MoS$_2$ nanosheet@TiO$_2$ nanotube hybrids prepared via a template-assisted hydrothermal method exhibited high reversible lithium storage capacity and superior rate capability. However, the reported MoS$_2$/TiO$_2$ nanocomposites were classical powder assemblies, difficult for recycling use or requiring additives/binders to prepare the electrodes. It is strongly desirable to easily fabricate TiO$_2$-film-based nanocomposites with highly defined 1D geometries owing to their advantageous directional charge transfer, improved ion diffusion, and increased active facet exposure. Moreover, the introduction of foreign species with undesirable morphologies is preferentially occurred only at top surface of the TiO$_2$ NTAs and usually results in the blocking of the tube openings.\cite{40} To the best of our knowledge, a few studies have been reported on the synthesis of MoS$_2$ nanosheets coating on an array of self-ordered TiO$_2$ nanotubes nanocomposites.

Herein, a modified two-step anodization approach is proposed to grow highly ordered TiO$_2$ NTAs with clean top surface, providing easy access for the uniform loading of MoS$_2$ nanostructures via a facile hydrothermal method. Note that the as-anodized TiO$_2$ NTAs sample was amorphous and intentionally annealed to anatase in order to increase conductivity before composing with MoS$_2$. The oxide film color was found to change from brown to black after the decoration of MoS$_2$ species. The MoS$_2$ nanosheets are evenly distributed over the tube top surface and the intertubular voids rather than filling in the tubes, thus allowing these nanotubular channels open to the environment, which are beneficial to efficient transport of ions and electrons. More importantly, these novel TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ nanocomposites exhibit enhanced photocatalytic activity and improved photocurrent response due to the higher light absorption at visible light range and faster charge separation with lower recombination chance comparing to the pristine TiO$_2$ NTAs. The straightforward and low cost method presented here provides the flexibility of hybridizing 1D self-ordered TiO$_2$ NTAs with a wide scope of functional semiconducting nanostructures, promising for new opportunities in energy/environment applications, including photocatalysts and other photovoltaic devices.

### 2. Results and Discussion

The X-ray diffraction (XRD) patterns of the three as-prepared samples: the pristine TiO$_2$ NTAs, pure MoS$_2$ sample, and the TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites are shown in Figure 1. The diffraction patterns for the pristine TiO$_2$ NTAs match the standard peaks of anatase TiO$_2$ phase (JCPDS card No. 21-1272) with the lattice parameters of $a = b = 0.316$ nm, $c = 1.230$ nm. A major peak centered at 25.3° can be assigned to (101) facet of anatase TiO$_2$.\cite{16} As for pure MoS$_2$, the detected peaks located at 14.2° and 33° can be indexed to (002), (100) planes in the hexagonal phase MoS$_2$ (JCPDS card No. 37-1492).\cite{27} All diffraction peaks of anatase TiO$_2$ are still present in the XRD patterns of the TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites, suggesting that the intrinsic structure of TiO$_2$ NTAs are well retained during the hydrothermal reaction. Interestingly, the peak assigned to (002) plane of the MoS$_2$ (14.2°) is absent. This diffraction peak is corresponding to the $c$-plane of MoS$_2$, and can be used to study the structure of MoS$_2$, which is consisted of Mo atoms coordinated with S atoms to form the S–Mo–S sandwiched layer. The absence indicates that the MoS$_2$ nanosheets decorated on the TiO$_2$ NTAs may contain only a few layers, too thin to be detected by XRD, indicating that the growth of MoS$_2$ along the (002) facet might be suppressed by the pure TiO$_2$ NTAs during the hydrothermal process.\cite{27,41}

Figure 2 depicts the scanning electron microscopy (SEM) images of the structural morphologies of the pure TiO$_2$ NTAs prepared by a modified two-step anodization method\cite{42,43} from both top surface and cross-sectional views. The anodic TiO$_2$ NTAs generated by the first anodization exhibits vertically oriented tubular array with an average diameter of $\approx 60$ nm and a film length of $\approx 9$ µm as shown in Figure 2a,b.
The disordered tube-top structures can be clearly observed, mainly due to the chemical etching upon exposure to fluoride-containing electrolyte which corrodes the upper part of the nanotubes. These undesirable features are detrimental to many applications and also easily lead to the random growth of MoS$_2$. Only a small portion of the MoS$_2$ nanosheets stack and gather around the tube mouth and randomly decorated on the outer tube walls (Figure S1, Supporting Information). In light of this, a second-anodization process was performed under similar conditions to grow highly ordered TiO$_2$ NTAs with a clean top surface as shown in Figure 2c,d with a common brown appearance (inset in Figure 2c). A thin layer of continuous nanoporous structure is formed on the top surface of NTAs with pore diameters ranging from 50 to 170 nm. Noteworthy, these top-porous networks can prevent nanotubes bundling and allow a high tube packing density beneficial to the specific surface area. The average outer tube diameters are estimated to be 140 nm and the overall film thickness is $\approx 4 \mu$m. It is noted that the clean top surface of the NTAs plays a significant role in providing an easy access for the uniform loading of MoS$_2$, which will be discussed later.

Typical SEM images of the synthesized TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites are illustrated in Figures 3a–d and 4. Distinctly different color (from brown to black, inset in Figure 3a) is readily observed after the decoration of MoS$_2$ onto TiO$_2$ NTAs. It is found that with an appropriate loading amount of the MoS$_2$ precursors, thin MoS$_2$ nanosheets, interconnected with each other, are evenly distributed on both the tube top surface and the intertubular voids while leaving the tube inside unfilled without obvious morphological change of the TiO$_2$ NTAs backbones. Additional cross-sectional SEM images were taken from different locations of the TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composite sample as shown in Figure 4. The results further confirmed the existence of MoS$_2$ nanosheets decorating in-between the tube gaps. The amount of MoS$_2$ precursors is critical as they are very likely to aggregate together by forming nanospheres, randomly sitting on top surface of the nanotubes (Figure S2, Supporting Information). As reported, the introduction of foreign species to the anodic TiO$_2$ NTAs generally occurs at the top surface and usually blocks the tube openings. In this study, the few-layer MoS$_2$ nanosheets perfectly decorated around the tube mouths and the intertubular gaps, allowing large portion of tube surface accessible to the environment. The reason can be possibly due to higher conductivity of the anatase TiO$_2$ after thermal annealing treatment.
confirmed by SEM images in Figure S3 (Supporting Information), due to the semiconductive nature of TiO$_2$, both MoS$_2$ nanoparticles and a few nanosheets are formed on the thin continuous porous layer on top of the self-ordered nanotubular array when coupling the MoS$_2$ with amorphous TiO$_2$ NTAs. Thus, clean top surface and crystalline of the anodic TiO$_2$ NTAs together with the appropriate amount of MoS$_2$ precursors play a vital role in generating the novel TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites. As for pure MoS$_2$ sample, self-assembly nanospheres (MoS$_2$ NSs) are formed with diameters ranging from 150 to 500 nm by using the same hydrothermal method without the presence of anodic TiO$_2$ NTAs (Figure 3e,f). The morphologies of pristine TiO$_2$ NTAs and TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites were further confirmed by transmission electron microscopy (TEM) and high-resolution TEM (HRTEM) observations (Figure 5). As shown in Figure 5a–c, the anodic TiO$_2$ NTAs are packing closely with diameters ranging from 60 to 160 nm, consistent with the SEM results in Figure 2. The selected area electron diffraction pattern (SAED) (inset of Figure 3c) displays clear anatase diffraction rings consisting of clean diffraction dots, indicating the highly crystalline nature of the pristine TiO$_2$ NTAs. The well-resolved lattice fringes of 0.35 nm corresponding to the (101) plane of TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites. The high-resolution XPS spectra of Mo, S for pure MoS$_2$ NSs and TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites are indicated in Figure 6b,c. The binding energies of Mo 3d$_{5/2}$ and Mo 3d$_{3/2}$ for pure MoS$_2$ nanospheres are $\approx$232.2 and $\approx$229.2 eV, respectively, indicating the presence of Mo$^{4+}$. The separation energy close to 3.0 eV can be ascribed to the typical characteristics of Mo species, which is also existed in the TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites with corresponding binding energies of $\approx$234.2 and $\approx$229.2 eV, respectively. The high-resolution spectra of S 2p indicate two major peaks at 162.3 eV and 161.1 eV, corresponding to S 2p$_{1/2}$ and S 2p$_{3/2}$ spin orbits, respectively (Figure 6c). The intensity ratio is $\approx$1:2 and their separation energy is $\approx$1.2 eV, in good agreement with previously reported data.[32,48] For the TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites, the fitted peaks are shifted to more negative binding energies of $\approx$1.0 eV, suggesting the electronic interaction between MoS$_2$ and TiO$_2$.[32] A comparison of the observed spin-energy separation of $\approx$5.8 eV between Ti 2p$_{1/2}$ and Ti 2p$_{3/2}$ peaks indicates a normal chemical state of Ti$^{4+}$ in both pure TiO$_2$ NTAs and TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites (Figure 6d). Similarly, the binding energies of Ti 2p for TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites shifted to negative higher energies due to the existence of Ti$^{3+}$ states. As reported,[41] the Ti$^{3+}$ states exhibit higher reactivity by trapping electrons and resulting in the formation of radicals.
Figure 5. TEM images of a–c) pristine TiO\textsubscript{2} NTAs and d–f) TiO\textsubscript{2}@MoS\textsubscript{2} composites. High-resolution TEM (HRTEM) images of g) pristine TiO\textsubscript{2} NTAs and h,i) the designated square parts in (e,f) of TiO\textsubscript{2}@MoS\textsubscript{2} composites. Insets in (c,f) show the corresponding SAED patterns.

Figure 6. XPS spectra of pristine TiO\textsubscript{2} NTAs, pure MoS\textsubscript{2} NSs, and TiO\textsubscript{2}@MoS\textsubscript{2} composites: a) the survey scan, b) Mo 3d, c) S 2p, and d) Ti 2p XPS spectrum.
covalently linked to the surface of TiO$_2$. And these shallow defects can release trapped charge carriers to the nearby conduction or valence bands (VBs) by thermal excitation, beneficial to photocatalytic and photocurrent performances.

Figure 7 shows a comparison of Raman spectra of pristine TiO$_2$ NTAs, pure MoS$_2$ NSs, and TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites. For TiO$_2$ NTAs sample, a very intense Raman band with $E_{1g} \approx 145$ cm$^{-1}$ can be observed, corresponding to the main $E_g$ anatase vibration mode. Three strong vibrational peaks located at 392 (B$_{1g}$), 513 (A$_{1g}$), and 634 cm$^{-1}$ ($E_g$) also verify the presence of anatase TiO$_2$. In the spectrum of pure MoS$_2$ NSs, a broad peak centred at 403 cm$^{-1}$ is fitted into two dominant scattering peaks (inset in Figure 7) and can be assigned to $E_{2g}$ and $A_{1g}$ modes of MoS$_2$, respectively. These features can also be found in the Raman spectrum of the TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites, suggesting the successful introduction of MoS$_2$ species into the TiO$_2$ NTAs system. There is a small blue shift observed in the mode of $E_{1g}$, $A_{1g}$, and $E_g$ in the TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites compared with those of pure TiO$_2$, which is possibly due to the surface strain induced by the decorated MoS$_2$ nanosheets on the surface of TiO$_2$ NTAs.$^{38,49}$

The photocatalytic activity of the unique TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composite was evaluated by measuring its efficiency in the photodegradation of Rhodamine B (RhB) under UV light (Figure 8). RhB is a nonbiodegradable dye commonly used in textile and paper industrials. Before light irradiation, an adsorption–desorption equilibrium would be established between the photocatalysts and RhB in the dark. Interestingly, the TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites were found to exhibit stronger adsorption ability toward RhB than both the pristine TiO$_2$ and pure MoS$_2$, which was reported to be highly
favorable to the photocatalytic activity. Control experiment (in the absence of any photocatalysts, denoted as “blank” in Figure 8) reveals that the dye degradation under UV illumination is almost negligible. It is evident that the photodegradation efficiency of the TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites is significantly higher than that of pristine TiO$_2$ NTAs and pure MoS$_2$ NSs, suggesting the beneficial photocatalytic activity in the composite nanostructures. Notably, comparing to commercially available P25 powder, the efficiency of the TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites still proves to be better. To be specific, the concentrations of RhB are reduced by 74.5%, 65.8%, and 53.9% after 120 min of irradiation, respectively, when using the pristine TiO$_2$ NTAs, P25, and the pure MoS$_2$ NSs as the photocatalysts. However, the concentration of RhB can be reduced by 85.3% by using the TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites. The decomposition of RhB pollutant follows the pseudo-first-order reaction kinetic and can be expressed as: ln($C_t/C_0$) = $kt$, where $C_t$ is the initial RhB concentration after adsorption equilibrium, $C$ is the concentration after a certain reaction time, $k$ is the rate constant, and $t$ is the reaction time. In Figure 8b, the $k$ values of pristine TiO$_2$ NTAs, P25, pure MoS$_2$ NSs, and TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites are calculated to be 0.0113, 0.00925, and 0.00624 min$^{-1}$, respectively. Evidently, the $k$ value of TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites is apparently the highest (0.01646 min$^{-1}$), which is almost 1.5, 1.8, and 2.6 times higher than that of pure TiO$_2$ NTAs, P25, and pure MoS$_2$ NSs, respectively, indicating that the introduction of MoS$_2$ into TiO$_2$ can highly promote the enhancement of photocatalytic activity. The photocatalytic activity of semiconductor oxides is known to be mainly governed by light absorption, the recombination rate of photogenerated charge carriers, etc. Therefore, these factors are discussed as follows.

The optical properties of TiO$_2$ NTAs and the TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites are determined by UV–vis diffuse reflectance spectra (DRS). Comparing with TiO$_2$ NTAs, the obtained TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites exhibit a higher absorption (lower reflectance as shown in Figure 8c) in the visible range (400–600 nm), contributing largely to the enhancement of photocatalytic activity. The energy band gap ($E_g$) can be estimated by the conventional Tauc equation:

$$\alpha h\nu = A (h\nu - E_g)^n$$  \hspace{1cm} (1)

where $h\nu$ is the photon energy, $\alpha$ is the absorption coefficient, $A$ is the constant, $n = 2$ for an indirectly allowed transition, and $n = 1/2$ for a directly allowed transition. The corresponding Kubelka–Munk transformed reflectance spectra are shown in Figure 8d, where the slopes of the tangents on horizontal axis are band gap energies. The calculated $E_g$ is estimated to be 3.20 eV for pure TiO$_2$ NTAs (corresponding to the absorption edge of 387 nm) and 1.65 eV for TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites (corresponding to the absorption edge of 750 nm), indicating that the presence of MoS$_2$ enhances the optical absorption properties, which has a positive effect on the photocatalytic activity.

The efficiency of charge trapping and recombination of photoinduced electron-hole pairs in the semiconductor can be verified by the photoluminescence (PL) emission spectrum. As shown in Figure 9, the emission spectra of TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites appear to be similar with pure TiO$_2$ NTAs, which means that the loading of MoS$_2$ nanosheets has not induced new PL. There are three main emission peaks located at 392 nm ($\approx$3.16 eV), 468 nm ($\approx$2.65 eV), and 523 nm ($\approx$2.37 eV). The first peak can be assigned to electronic transition from the bottom of conduction band (CB) to the top of VB, and the other two peaks are likely attributed to the defect levels formed by oxygen vacancies. Furthermore, the PL intensity of TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites is strongly weakened from 380 to 550 nm than that of the bare TiO$_2$ NTAs under excitation at 320 nm, suggesting that the recombination of photogenerated electrons and holes is suppressed effectively. Therefore, the TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composite can effectively retard the recombination of photogenerated charge carriers and prolong the lifetime of electron-hole pairs, resulting in the superior photocatalytic activity.

The heterojunction created between MoS$_2$ and TiO$_2$ also exerts great influence on the photocurrent response, as comparatively studied in Figure 10. The maximum photocurrent density of TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites is $\approx$7.72 mA cm$^{-2}$, which is twice higher than that of pristine TiO$_2$ NTAs ($\approx$3.38 mA cm$^{-2}$) (Figure 10a), meaning stronger ability of producing charge carriers and more separated electrons in TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites. In addition, the onset potential of TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites is negatively shifted with respect to pristine TiO$_2$ NTAs, indicating that more electrons liberated and accumulated in the heterojunction and thus leading to more electron negativity of the anode potential. Figure 10b illustrates the current–time ($I$–$t$) characteristics in three different electrodes of pristine TiO$_2$ NTAs, pure MoS$_2$ NSs, and TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites upon several light ON/OFF cycles. It can be seen that TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites display good photoswitching performance with fast response time and stable photostability. The photocurrent density is found to be 3.2 mA cm$^{-2}$, much higher than that of pristine TiO$_2$ NTAs ($\approx$2.1 mA cm$^{-2}$). The photosresponse activity of pure MoS$_2$ NSs is very low and can be negligible, which is possibly due to the low conductivity of MoS$_2$ that limits the electron

![Figure 9. Room temperature PL emission spectra of pristine TiO$_2$ NTAs and TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites with an excitation wavelength of 320 nm.](image-url)
The remarkably increased photocurrent density in TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites could be ascribed to faster electron transport from VB to CB and a high separation efficiency of the photogenerated electron-hole pairs due to the introduction of MoS$_2$.

The Schematic diagram (Scheme 1) illustrates the energy band structure and the principle of the separation of charge carriers in TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites. In general, anatase TiO$_2$ has a wide band gap (~3.2 eV) with a work function of 4.5 eV, while MoS$_2$ is a narrow band gap (~1.8 eV) semiconductor with a work function of 4.52 eV.$^{[4,28,57]}$ Upon light illumination, electrons are promptly excited from VB of MoS$_2$ to CB, leaving behind holes in the VB. Since the CB of TiO$_2$ is situated lower than that of MoS$_2$, the TiO$_2$ can be used as a photoelectronic receiver, and the photo-induced electrons in the CB of MoS$_2$ could be rapidly transferred to the CB of TiO$_2$ NTAs.$^{[27,38]}$ The photogenerated electrons can be trapped by oxygen molecules in the aqueous solution to form superoxide radical anions (O$_2$ + e$^-$ → O$_2^-•$), the activated superoxide radical anion O$_2$• could remove organic pollutants or further produces oxygen species via a series of reactions with H$^+$, such as oxidative H$_2$O$_2$, hydroxyl radicals OH•, meanwhile, the holes move in the opposite direction and oxidize water into hydroxyl radicals (H$_2$O + h$^+$ → OH•), which are highly oxidative and can react with organic species to produce mainly carbon dioxide and water. This high interfacial charge transfer and separation ability suppressed the recombination of electron-hole pairs, which explained the enhanced photoactivity and improved photocurrent response in TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites.$^{[5,53]}$

3. Conclusions

A novel type of hierarchical TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites by decorating thin layer MoS$_2$ nanosheets onto 1D anodic self-ordered TiO$_2$ NTAs is successfully prepared by a facile hydrothermal method. The MoS$_2$ nanosheets are uniformly coated on the tube top surface and the intertubular voids with appearance changing from brown to black color. Anatase TiO$_2$ NTAs with clean top surface and the appropriate amount of MoS$_2$ precursors are the keys to grow perfect TiO$_2$@MoS$_2$ composites with significantly enhanced photoactivity and improved photocurrent response due to the higher light absorption at visible range and faster charge separation with lower recombination chance comparing to the pristine TiO$_2$ NTAs. This facile and low-cost method provides the flexibility of hybridizing the self-ordered TiO$_2$ NTAs with a wide scope of functional semiconducting nanostructures at high throughput rate, and thus would greatly enable the investigation and optimization of the dual-semiconductor material system and accelerating the translation into applications in photocatalysts, and other photovoltaic devices.

4. Experimental Section

Preparation of Anodic TiO$_2$ NTAs: The titanium foils (0.25 mm thick, 99.7% purity, Sigma-Aldrich) were ultrasonically cleaned in acetone, ethanol, and deionized water successively, and then dried in a nitrogen stream before anodization. Anodic TiO$_2$ films were generated in a two-electrode electrochemical cell, with a Pt gauze as the counter electrode and a Ti foil as the working
The Ti working anode was pressed together with an Al foil against an O-ring, defining a working area of 1.766 cm² (diameter of 1.5 cm). An anhydrous ethylene glycol (99.8%, Sigma-Aldrich) solution of 0.27 wt% NH₄F (98%+, Sigma-Aldrich) and 5 vol% H₂O was used as the electrolyte. In order to effectively reduce the defects on the surface and help grow well-aligned nanotubular array, the Ti foils were preanodized in the electrolyte at 60 V for 2 h, and then the oxide films were peeled off by ultrasonication in acetone. Then they were anodized for the second time using fresh electrolyte with the same conditions at 60 V for 20 min to grow the self-ordered NTAs with clean top surface. All the anodization experiments were performed at room temperature. After anodization, the sample was washed with ethanol and then dried in a nitrogen stream. The annealed anatase TiO₂ NTAs (denoted as pristine TiO₂ NTAs), the as-anodized samples were thermally treated at 450 °C in air for 3 h.

**Synthesis of TiO₂@MoS₂ Nanocomposites:** Coupling TiO₂ NTAs with MoS₂ nanosheets was achieved by a facile hydrothermal reaction. In a typical process, sodium molybdate dihydrate (Na₃MoO₄⋅2H₂O, 10 mg) and thiourea (C₂H₄NS, 20 mg) were dissolved in DI water (20 mL), stirred for 30 min and then transferred into a 100 mL stainless steel Teflon lined autoclave. The annealed anatase TiO₂ NTAs film was placed at the bottom of the autoclave. The autoclave was put into an electric oven and heated at 200 °C for 24 h, and then cooled to room temperature naturally. The hybrid material was washed several times with distilled water and ethanol, respectively. Finally, the TiO₂@MoS₂ composites were dried in a nitrogen stream. The sample was annealed in an N₂ atmosphere at 450 °C for 2 h to improve the crystallinity of MoS₂. For comparison, pure MoS₂ NSs were synthesized via the similar hydrothermal process using Ti foil as the substrate without the presence of anodic TiO₂ NTAs, and then annealed in N₂ atmosphere at 450 °C for 2 h.

**Analysis Instruments:** Sample morphologies were characterized using a field emission scanning electron microscopy (FESEM, Model JSM-6701F) and a TEM (Model, Tecnai G² S-TWIN). X-ray diffraction patterns were collected on a Bruker D8-A25 diffractometer using Cu Ka radiation (λ = 1.5405 Å). The XPS spectra of the samples were recorded by a Perkin Elmer PHI 5000 C ESCA system equipped with a hemispherical electron energy analyzer, and the Mg Ka (1253.6 eV) anode was operated at 14 kV and 20 mA. The Raman spectroscopy (Speex 403 Raman microscope with 532 nm argon ion laser) was employed to verify chemical bonding characteristics. The optical properties were investigated by optical DRS using a UV–vis spectrophotometer (Hitachi U-4100) with an integrating sphere attachment. PL emission spectra were recorded under ambient conditions (Horiba, Fluoromax-4) with an excitation light at 320 nm induced from an He–Cd laser source.

**Photocatalytic Degradation Test:** The efficiency of the fabricated films to degrade RhB was measured and used as an indicator of the photocatalytic ability. The tested sample was immersed in an aqueous solution of RhB (5 mL, 10 mg L⁻¹) under UV light (230 W long-wave mercury lamp with main wavelength 365 nm) irradiation at room temperature. The working area of the anodic TiO₂ film was fixed to be 1.766 cm² (diameter of 1.5 cm). The mass of the TiO₂ NTAs samples was found to be ~1 mg by measuring five anatase TiO₂ NTA samples. The control experiments were carried out in absence of any photocatalyst (denoted as “blank”). For comparison, 1 mg P25 powder (Degussa, Germany) was dispersed in 3 mL ethanol, deposited on Ti foil of the same area (1.33 cm × 1.33 cm), followed by a heat treatment at 450 °C for 2 h. The distance between the lamp and the solution was 12 cm. All the tested samples were stirred in the dark for 40 min to achieve the adsorption–desorption equilibrium between RhB and the photocatalysts. The concentration of RhB was monitored as a function of reaction time using a UV–vis spectrometer (Hitachi U-4100). The concentration of RhB was calculated from the absorption maxima located at 554 nm.

**Photoelectrochemical Measurements:** Photocurrent measurements were performed on an electrochemical workstation (CHI 660E, Chenhua, Shanghai) in a standard three-electrode configuration with three different photoelectrodes: pristine TiO₂ NTAs, pure MoS₂ NSs, and TiO₂@MoS₂ composites, as the working electrodes. All the samples can be used directly as electrodes under front illumination with back sides of the substrates covering with tape. The counter electrode and the reference electrode were Pt sheet and Ag/AgCl electrode, respectively. Time-dependent photocurrent response tests were carried out by measuring the photocurrent under chopped light irradiation (light/dark cycles of 15 s) at a fixed bias of 0.6 V versus Ag/AgCl. A 0.1 M Na₂SO₄ aqueous solution was used as the electrolyte. The working area used was fixed at 1.766 cm² (diameter of 1.5 cm). The working electrode was irradiated by Xe lamp during the measurements. The distance between the working electrode and the light source was 20 cm and the focused incident light intensity on the working electrode was ~80 mW cm⁻².

**Supporting Information**

Supporting Information is available from the Wiley Online Library or from the author.

**Acknowledgements**

This work was supported by the Science and Technology Commission of Shanghai Municipality (15520720700 and 13NM1400300), the National Natural Science Foundation of China (Grant No. 51471051), the Shanghai Shu Guang Project (12SG01), and the Programs for Professor of Special Appointment (Eastern Scholar) at Shanghai Institutions of Higher Learning. Part of the experimental work was carried out in Fudan Nanofabrication Laboratory.


C. C. Mercado, F. J. Knorr, J. L. McHale, ACS Nano 2012, 6, 7270.


