

***In situ* Observation of Cu₂O Island Shrinking on Cu(100) Facet under Methanol Using Environmental Transmission Electron Microscopy**

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In situ Environmental Transmission Electron Microscopy (ETEM) has progressed dramatically in recent years, currently allowing for temperature, time, and pressure resolved imaging of oxidation at the atomic scale [1]. Recent *in situ* studies have provided a significant understanding of atomic scale Cu oxidation, especially during early stage oxidation [2, 3]. In contrast, the reduction of metal oxides, such as Cu₂O, has been studied much less extensively. However, such reductions play an important role in many technologies such as catalytic reaction design, environmental stability, and electrochemistry [4]. In this work, we investigate the structural dynamics of Cu₂O islands on Cu(100) under MeOH in ETEM, using oriented Cu thin film produced by *e*-beam evaporation. Cu₂O nano-islands on Cu facets were created *via* controlled *in situ* oxidation of copper films, followed by reduction in MeOH vapor.

Cu(100) thin films with a thickness of 600 Å were produced by *e*-beam evaporation of 99.999% pure Cu pellets on NaCl(100) substrates. The films were grown in a ultrahigh vacuum evaporator system with a base pressure of 1×10^{-9} Torr. The growth parameters for Cu films include a deposition rate of 1.2 Å/s and a substrate temperature of 300 °C. We used an ETEM (Hitachi H9500) equipped with a differential pumping system, as well as a specially designed double-tilt heating holder and gas injection system [5]. ETEM images and videos were evaluated using Fiji-imageJ software (NIH).[6]

Native oxides (Cu₂O) on Cu films were removed by injection of H₂ on those films at a H₂ partial pressure (p_{H_2}) of 7.6×10^{-6} Torr and a temperature of 550 °C. Annealing at elevated temperature facilitates the formation of faceted holes on Cu films (figure 1a). In order to form Cu₂O nano-islands along Cu(100) facets, we performed controlled *in situ* oxidation of Cu films ($p_{\text{O}_2} = 1.5 \times 10^{-4}$ Torr, 350 °C) after cleaning the native oxides inside the ETEM. During this process, Cu₂O islands are formed with the epitaxial relation Cu₂O(200)//Cu(200) (figure 1b). These islands were then reduced in MeOH (7.6×10^{-6} Torr, 250 °C) and the process was imaged and recorded to evaluate Cu₂O nano-island shrinking dynamics. Figure 2 shows the shrinking of a Cu₂O island during reduction with MeOH. The Cu₂O nano-island sitting on the Cu(100) facet initially has a height of 2 nm and radius (i.e. half of the width) of 5.5 nm. During the first 15 s of reduction, the Cu₂O island shrinks anisotropically, i.e. the island radius decreases strongly from 5.5 to 2 nm while its height only decreases slightly to ~1.7 nm. Interestingly, once the island radius roughly matches its height (at $t \sim 17$ s), the shrinking switches from anisotropic to isotropic as both island height and radius simultaneously shrink until the whole island is removed at around 25 s. This shrinking behavior was observed uniformly for all other Cu₂O islands studied on Cu(100) (a total of 8 islands), i.e. it appears to be representative of the shrinking dynamics of Cu₂O islands on Cu(100) in an MeOH atmosphere. We propose that this behavior is caused by a preferential reaction between MeOH and stepped surfaces on the sides of the Cu₂O islands (e.g. Cu(110) with atomic steps) which show substantially higher reactivity than the island top terrace (Cu(100)). We are currently collecting additional, atomically resolved data for Cu₂O reduction on Cu(100) to further support our hypothesis. In parallel, we are calculating MeOH adsorption

energies for Cu(110) and Cu(100) surfaces using DFT to further corroborate this hypothesis and explain the difference in reactivity between these surfaces. The combination of *in situ* observations and theoretical calculations in this work will hence serve to reveal insights into methanol reactivity on different crystallographic facets of Cu₂O surfaces. More broadly, this work aims to contribute to the understanding and manipulation of supported metal oxide systems including those that are widely used in heterogeneous catalysis [7].

References:

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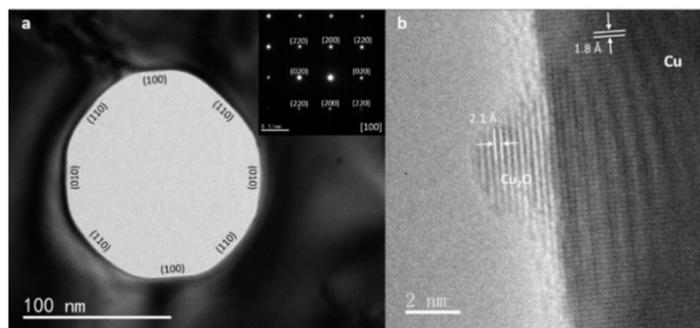


Figure 1. **a.** Representative TEM image and matching selected area electron diffraction pattern of a Cu film. *In situ* faceted hole formation and removal of the native copper oxide occurs at 550 °C and 7.6×10^{-4} Torr H₂. **b.** High-resolution ETEM image of a Cu₂O nano-island formed on a Cu(100) facet at $p_{O_2} = 1.5 \times 10^{-4}$ Torr and 350 °C.

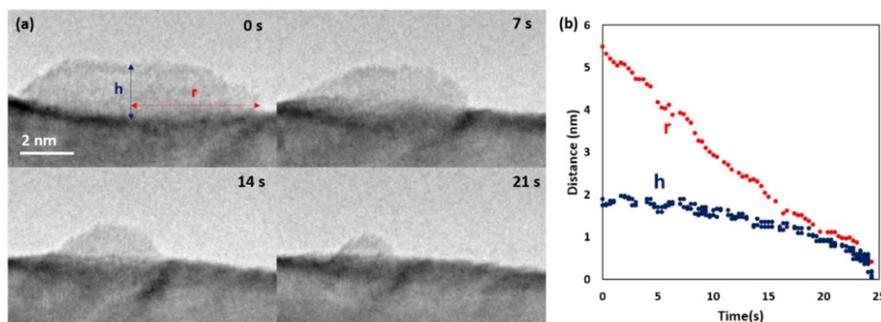


Figure 2. Morphological changes of Cu₂O nano-islands on Cu(100) facets under 7.6×10^{-6} Torr MeOH vapor and at 250 °C. **a.** BF ETEM images depicting Cu₂O nano-island shrinking over time. **b.** Dimensions of the Cu₂O nano-island measured by Fiji-imageJ.