



## Fabricating macroporous RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes using polystyrene templates for high chlorine evolution efficiencies

Tran Le Luu<sup>a</sup>, Choonsoo Kim<sup>b</sup>, Seonghwan Kim<sup>b</sup>, Jiye Kim<sup>b</sup>, Jeyong Yoon<sup>b,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Mechatronics and Sensor Systems Technology, Vietnamese German University, Le Lai Street, Hoa Phu Ward, Thu Dau Mot City, Binh Duong Province, Vietnam

<sup>b</sup>School of Chemical and Biological Engineering, Institute of Chemical Process (ICP), Asian Institute for Energy, Environment & Sustainability (AIEES), Seoul National University, Gwanakgu, Daehak-dong, Seoul 151-742, Korea, Tel. +82-2-880-8941; Fax: +82-2-876-8911; email: jeyong@snu.ac.kr (J. Yoon)

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### ABSTRACT

In dimensionally stable anodes, RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> has emerged as one of the fundamental anode materials in terms of practical application because of its high stability and catalytic performance toward chlorine evolution. Nevertheless, high chlorine evolution efficiency is still required for an effective chlorine production process. In this study, high chlorine electrocatalytic active RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes were fabricated using several ranges of polystyrene microsphere templates (0.1, 0.46 and 1.1 μm) resulting in novel three-dimensional ordered macroporous structures. Higher chlorine evolution efficiency was observed in the macroporous RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes than that in the nontemplated electrode at the same Ru loadings. In particular, a macroporous electrode fabricated with a specific polystyrene size (0.46 μm) exhibited the highest chlorine evolution efficiency in this study indicating the existence of an optimal macropore size for RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes in the chlorine evolution reaction. This chlorine evolution efficiency could be attributed to the well-developed outer active surface area formed by the optimal pore structure which contributes to the easy mass transfer of chloride ions and removal of produced chlorine gas bubbles. This novel idea strategically provides a new method for preparing inexpensive RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrocatalysts with a high electrochemically active surface area, especially the outer active surface area for chlorine evolution.

*Keywords:* DSA; RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub>; Macroporous; Chlorine evolution; Outer surface area

### 1. Introduction

Chlorine, which is generally produced by the chlor-alkali process, is one of the most important chemical species in the chemical, the pharmaceutical industry and for wastewater treatment [1]. In the chlor-alkali process, dimensionally stable anodes (DSA<sup>®</sup>) have been employed with great success as the electrocatalysts in chlorine evolution in technical electrochemistry [2,3]. These types of anodes usually consist of a Ti support coated by noble metal oxides including RuO<sub>2</sub>, IrO<sub>2</sub> or their mixture with valve metal oxide [4–10]. Among these anodes,

the RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> binary anode has notably gained interest in the practical application of DSA<sup>®</sup> due to its high stability and catalytic performance toward chlorine evolution [11,12]. Although the electrochemical chlorine production is a well-established industrial process, it is still necessary to improve the chlorine evolution efficiency of the RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrode further and reduce the electrical energy consumption as well [4].

The chlorine evolution efficiency of RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes depends on several important parameters such as their surface area, composition, annealing temperature, etc. [11–13]. In particular, the surface and pore structure lead to an increased surface area and fast mass transfer is thought to be a key parameter affecting the chlorine evolution efficiency [14,15].

\* Corresponding author.

For example, various pathways have been investigated to enhance the surface area of RuO<sub>2</sub> with hollow aerogels [16], vertical nanorods [17–20], nanosheets [21] and nanotubes [22–24]. In particular, the use of a porous framework by virtue of its tiny crystallite dimensions has dramatically emerged as the fundamental method to enhance the surface area of RuO<sub>2</sub> electrodes [25–27]. The porous framework is known to contribute to the high chlorine evolution efficiency of the anode. The pore surface provides improved diffusional access for the electrolyte to reach the electrode surface, and faster transport of the evolving gas from the reactive pore surface due to the enhanced pore connectivity and the formation of gas channels inside [27,28].

In particular, the porous framework can be simply prepared by employing templates with a narrow size distribution as the pore-directing agent, which has been extensively investigated in the synthesis of various nanostructures and exhibit significant promise [29–32]. This process is easy, reliable, versatile, low cost and applicable to a wide variety of electrodes. A previous study showed successful improvement in the oxygen evolution on an IrO<sub>2</sub> macroporous electrode fabricated with an SiO<sub>2</sub> template [33]. The macroporous structure decreases the mass transport resistance compared with porous materials by enabling easy access to the active surface sites for the electrolyte [31–33]. However, a RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrode with the macroporous framework that intends to have a controlled pore size without collapse of the wall structure has not been fully investigated for chlorine evolution.

In this study, we report a highly electrocatalytically active RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrode for chlorine evolution fabricated by polystyrene (PS) microsphere templates (0.1, 0.46 and 1.1 μm) resulting in novel three-dimensional ordered macroporous structures. The microstructures of the as-prepared electrodes were characterized with scanning electron microscope-energy-dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (SEM-EDS), transmission electron microscopy (TEM) and X-ray diffraction (XRD). The electrochemical properties were examined using the cyclic voltammetry (CV), linear sweep voltammetry (LSV) and total chlorine concentration methods.

## 2. Experimental setup

### 2.1. Electrode preparation

The titanium-coated macroporous RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes were prepared using the thermal decomposition method with several sizes of PS microspheres (0.1, 0.46 and 1.1 μm in diameter) to examine their effect on the macroporous structure including the pore size. Titanium foils (dimensional 30 mm × 20 mm × 0.25 mm, purity 99.7%, Sigma-Aldrich, USA) were utilized as the substrate materials, for which the contaminants were removed by emery paper, degreased in acetone and subsequently etched in boiling concentrated HCl acid at 86°C for 1 h to produce a gray surface with uniform roughness. RuCl<sub>3</sub> 42 mg, TiCl<sub>3</sub> 72.5 mg (proportion of Ru:Ti was 30:70, % mol/mol), 0.1 mL of hydrogen peroxide solution (30 wt%) and 0.1 g of PS microspheres were dissolved in a solution of 3 mL of ethanol. As a reference, coating without templated macroporosity (nontemplated) was prepared by dissolving Ru:Ti

(30:70) as above but without PS microspheres presence. The precursor solution was sonicated for 30 min before it was spread onto the titanium substrates. Next, the electrodes were sintered at 450°C for 1 h to allow for hydrous removal and formation of the metal oxides [34]. To examine the effect of calcination temperature to the PS template, the 0.46-μm PS electrode was also calcinated at 250°C and 350°C for 1 h. The amount of RuO<sub>2</sub> loading in each electrode is approximately 3 mg/cm<sup>2</sup>.

### 2.2. Microstructure characterization

The microstructures, thickness and chemical compositions of the electrode surfaces were characterized using a field emission scanning electron microscope coupled with an EDS system (FE-SEM-EDS, JSM-6701F, JEOL Co., Japan). The SEM-EDS measurements were taken at a working distance of 7 mm and an accelerating voltage of 10 kV. The samples were positioned horizontally [35].

The crystal images were examined using a TEM (JEOL 2000EXII, JEOL Co., Japan). The TEM samples were prepared by scraping off the coating using a sharp knife and then dispersing the powders in isopropyl alcohol. A few drops of this solution were deposited onto carbon-film-coated Cu grids and then analyzed using a microscope. The accelerating voltage, vacuum and tilting angles were 110 kV, 10 Pa, and ±25°C, respectively.

To study the crystallinity of the RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes, a high-resolution XRD pattern was obtained with the grazing incidence technique on a D8 Discover (Bruker-AXS, Germany) diffractometer (Cu Kα, λ = 1.5406 Å). A scintillation counter detector scanned between 25° and 100° in 2θ with an angle of incidence of 0.5°. The working distance and the accelerating voltage were 12 mm and 25 kV, respectively [36].

N<sub>2</sub> gas adsorption/desorption experiments were performed using a Micromeritics ASAP 2010 analyzer (Micromeritics Instrument Corporation, USA) at 77 K. The BET surface areas and pore size distributions were calculated using the Barrett-Joyner-Halenda (BJH) model on the desorption branch [37,38].

The stability of prepared RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes was examined using the accelerated stability test (AST) [39,40], with a current density considerably higher than those typically applied in industrial electrochemical conditions (1 A/cm<sup>2</sup>, 5 M NaCl, pH = 2, 25°C) to ensure that the desired characteristics of the electrode lifetime via the electrode potential-time dependence was obtained.

### 2.3. Chlorine evolution and electrochemical measurements

Chlorine was evolved by electrolysis in a two undivided electrodes system under the following conditions (0.1 M NaCl, pH = 2, 16.7 mA/cm<sup>2</sup> and 5 M NaCl, pH = 2, 400 mA/cm<sup>2</sup>, t = 10 min). The aqueous active chlorine concentration was determined by the *N,N*-diethyl-*p*-phenylenediamine colorimetric method [41]. The experiments were replicated three times, and then the average value with standard deviation was reported. The chlorine current efficiencies and energy consumption were calculated based on Faraday's law and chlorine concentration [42,43]:

$$CF(\%) = \frac{V \times C \times n \times F}{I \times t} \quad (1)$$

where CF is the current efficiency (%),  $V$  is the volume of electrolyte (L),  $C$  is the chlorine concentration in the solution (mol/L),  $n$  is the number of electron exchanged,  $F$  is the Faraday constant (96,485 C/mol),  $I$  is the applied current (A) and  $t$  is the electrolysis time (s) [42].

In addition:

$$EC = \frac{756.1 \times E}{CF} \quad (2)$$

where EC is the energy consumption (kWh/ton  $\text{Cl}_2$ ),  $E$  is the cell voltage and CF is the current efficiency [43].

Electrochemical characterizations of the  $\text{RuO}_2$  electrodes with CV and LSV measurements were performed in a conventional single compartment cell with three electrodes using a computer-controlled potentiostat (PARSTAT 2273A, Princeton Applied Research, USA) [44,45]. To determine the Tafel slopes, LSV (anodic polarization curves) were corrected with compensation of the ohmic drop according to the method assuming that the observed overpotential ( $V$ ) at any current can be calculated by the uncompensated resistance of the system [46,47]. The volume of the electrolyte solutions in the cell was 150 mL.  $\text{RuO}_2/\text{Ti}$ , Pt (Samsung Chemicals, Korea) and Ag/AgCl (in saturated KCl) were used as the working electrode (anode), the counter electrode (cathode) and the reference electrode, respectively. The CV curves were measured in a solution of 0.5 M  $\text{H}_2\text{SO}_4$  as the electrolyte with the potential ranging between 0 and 1 V and the scan rate varying from 5 to 320 mV/s. LSV was performed under an acidic condition (pH = 2, 5 M NaCl) in which the chlorine evolution is favored over oxygen evolution [48,49]. The outer surface area was estimated by measuring the voltammetric charge ( $q$ ) indicating the active accessible Ru sites proposed in previous studies [50,51]. The voltammetric charge recorded in the potential range in the cyclic voltammograms can be described by a pseudo-capacitive reaction ( $\text{RuO}_x(\text{OH})_y + z\text{H}^+ + ze^- \rightarrow \text{RuO}_{x-z}(\text{OH})_{y+z}$ ) which consists of coupled redox transitions involving proton exchange at a broad reversible peak of approximately 0.6 V vs. Ag/AgCl. To observe the stability with pseudo-capacitance, CV and voltammetric charges of the electrodes were also recorded at the scan rate 20 mV/s after the 1st, 500th and 1,000th cycles.

### 3. Results and discussion

#### 3.1. Surface analysis

Fig. 1 shows the SEM (a) and TEM (b) images of the  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrodes fabricated for several different sizes of the PS microspheres (diameters of 0.1, 0.46 and 1.1  $\mu\text{m}$ ) compared with the nontemplated electrode. As shown in Fig. 1(a), the  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrodes (PS 0.1, 0.46 and 1.1  $\mu\text{m}$ ) clearly exhibited three-dimensional uniform macroporous structures. In addition, the macropores on the  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrodes appeared to be smaller than the PS microspheres. In other words, the 0.1, 0.46 and 1.1  $\mu\text{m}$  diameters of the PS microspheres led to pore sizes of ca. 0.05, 0.2 and 0.6  $\mu\text{m}$ ,

respectively. This observation can be explained by the contraction of the microspheres during the sintering process [26–28]. Furthermore, the distinct surface morphology of the macroporous electrodes (PS 0.1, 0.46 and 1.1  $\mu\text{m}$ ) and the nontemplated electrode with its irregularly shaped aggregates (11–20 nm) and no macroporous structure was also clearly observed in the TEM images (Fig. 1(b)). This observation is in accord with the results of the SEM images in Fig. 1(a). The results in Fig. 1 suggest that PS microspheres as templates play a fundamental role in the synthesis of macroporous  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrodes. However, the thicknesses of the coating layers measured by cross-sectional SEM were approximately 7  $\mu\text{m}$  (Fig. S1 in supplementary information), excluding the effect on the electrocatalyst resulting from the different thicknesses of the oxide layer. In addition, the compositions of Ru of all the macroporous and nontemplated  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrodes measured using EDS also appeared to be similar, excluding the effect on the electrocatalyst resulting from the different Ru quantities in the oxide layer. Note that the percentage of Ru on PS 0.1, 0.46, 1.1  $\mu\text{m}$  and the

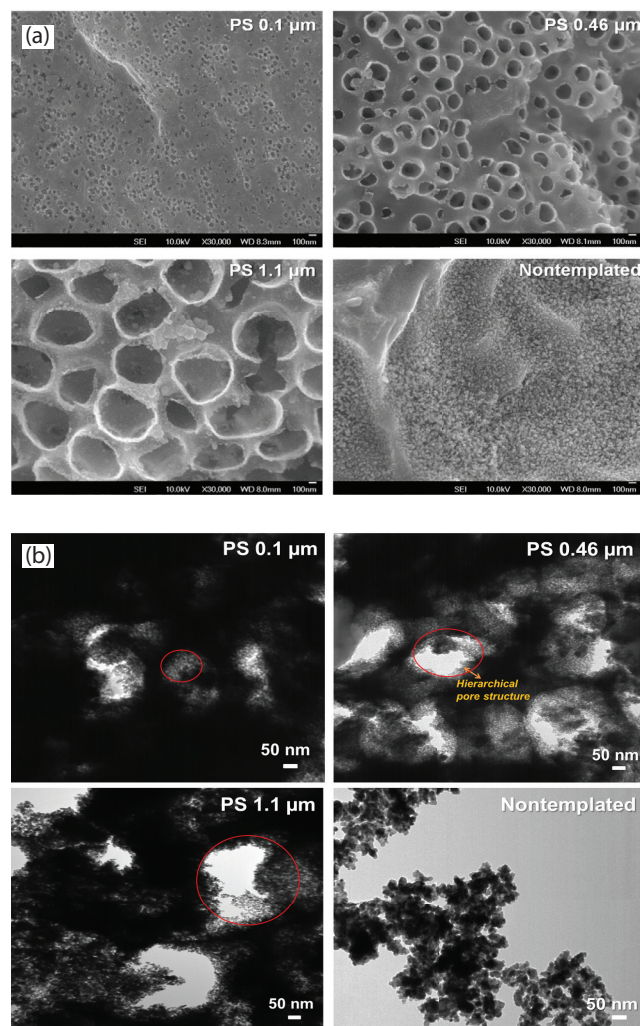


Fig. 1. SEM (a) and TEM (b) images of the macroporous  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrodes fabricated with several ranges of the PS sizes (diameter of 0.1, 0.46 and 1.1  $\mu\text{m}$ ) in comparison with that of the nontemplated  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrode.



nontemplated electrodes were: 8.7%, 8.6%, 8.1% and 8.4%, respectively.

The effect of the heat treatment step on polystyrene microsphere (as expressed by C%) was examined by EDS measurement at several calcination temperatures (250°C, 350°C and 450°C). Table 1 presents the C% remaining on the macroporous RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes at several calcination temperatures. As presented in Table 1, the C% decreases with the increase of calcination temperature, falling from 27.2% at 250°C to <1% at 450°C, for all of the prepared macroporous electrodes, indicating that the PS is well removed at 450°C. This observation is consistent with the results of the previous studies [52–54]. The results in Table 1 were clearly supported by the SEM images (Fig. S2 in supplementary information).

Fig. 2 shows the XRD spectra of the macroporous and nontemplated RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes. As shown in Fig. 2, the (110) rutile peak was observed at approximately 27.8° which exists between the reference peak of the pure rutile TiO<sub>2</sub> (110) (27.4°) and the peak of the rutile RuO<sub>2</sub> (110) phase (28.05°), indicating that the solid solution of RuO<sub>2</sub> and TiO<sub>2</sub> was formed. The formation of a solid solution is presumed to contribute to the stability of electrode [55,56]. Alternatively, the formation of isolated rutile-type RuO<sub>2</sub> and TiO<sub>2</sub> is explained by the effect of water in H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> solution (30%). For example, water induces the hydrolysis of TiCl<sub>3</sub> to form Ti(OH)<sub>x</sub> at room temperature, while crystalline RuO<sub>2</sub>·xH<sub>2</sub>O is formed at higher

decomposition temperature [57]. This process is further supported by the report that the deviations from stoichiometry are accommodated in TiO<sub>2</sub> by the formation of crystallographic shear planes, whereas there is no evidence for similar defects in nonstoichiometric RuO<sub>2</sub> [56,58]. Because X-rays can penetrate through the coating layers, the absorption peaks of Ti metal substrates were also observed. No evidence of an Ru metallic peak was observed, which means that the electrodes are high-purity phase structures. Their average crystallite sizes calculated by the Scherrer equation [36] for the peaks of (110) were approximately 15 nm. This result indicates that both the macroporous and nontemplated RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes possessed similar crystallite structure and sizes despite significantly different surface morphologies.

### 3.2. Chlorine evolution on the ordered macroporous RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes

Fig. 3 shows measurements via LSV for the macroporous and nontemplated RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes. There are two important observations in Fig. 3. First, all of the macroporous RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes showed a higher current density as a result of the charge transfer reaction in chlorine evolution compared with the nontemplated electrode. Second, among the macroporous electrodes, PS 0.46 μm, but not PS 0.1 and 1.1 μm, exhibited the highest current density, indicating the existence of an optimal macropore size for RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes. Under this condition for the LSV measurement, oxygen evolution is suppressed, thereby increasing the oxygen overpotential and selectivity for chlorine evolution [48,49].

The polarization curves of the RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes were presented in Fig. 4, and a representative LSV curve of PS 0.1 μm electrode before and after IR correction was provided in the inset. As seen in Fig. 4, the Tafel slope of the PS 0.1, 0.46 and 1.1 μm electrodes of 31 mV/dec, 30 mV/dec and 34 mV/dec, respectively, were lower than that of the nontemplated electrode (40 mV/dec). This result is consistent with the previous studies, in which the Tafel slope of normal or commercial electrode was reported as typically 40–60 mV/dec for

Table 1

C% contamination on the macroporous RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes fabricated at several calcination temperatures (250°C, 350° and 450°C) for different PS sizes (diameter of 0.1, 0.46 and 1.1 μm) in comparison with that of the nontemplated RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrode

Sample	C (%)
250°C (PS 0.46 μm)	27.2
350°C (PS 0.46 μm)	9.8
450°C (PS 0.46 μm)	0.8
450°C (PS 0.1 μm)	0.6
450°C (PS 1.1 μm)	0.9
450°C (nontemplated)	0.4

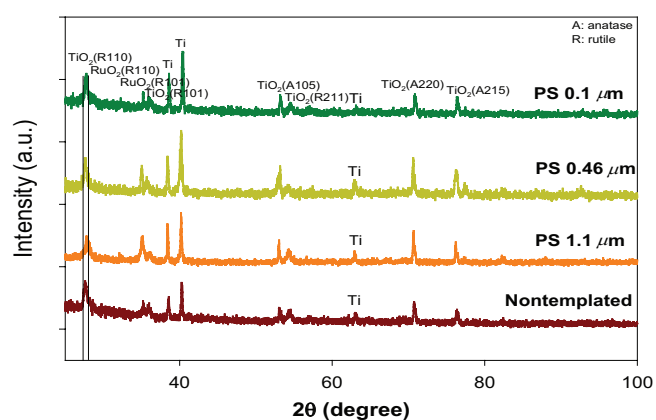


Fig. 2. XRD patterns of the macroporous RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes fabricated with several ranges of the PS sizes (diameter of 0.1, 0.46 and 1.1 μm) in comparison with that of the nontemplated RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrode.

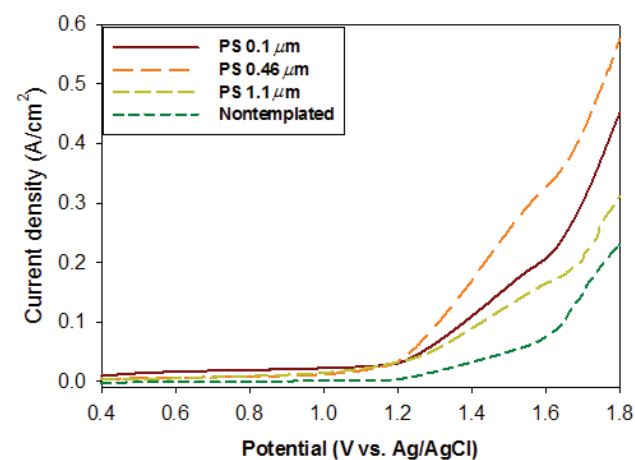


Fig. 3. Linear sweep voltammetry (5 M NaCl, pH = 2) of the macroporous RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes fabricated with several ranges of the PS sizes (diameter of 0.1, 0.46 and 1.1 μm) in comparison with that of the nontemplated RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrode.

an RuO<sub>2</sub>-based electrode [43,51]. The lower Tafel slopes of the macroporous RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes indicate higher electrocatalytic with chlorine evolution than that of the nontemplated electrode. This result can be explained by the facilitated diffusion or the mass transport of the reactive species and products through the macroporous frameworks.

Table 2 presents the chlorine current efficiencies and energy consumption of the macroporous RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes fabricated for several ranges of the PS sizes (diameter of 0.1, 0.46 and 1.1 μm) and without the PS template (nontemplated) or commercial electrode at two different electrolysis conditions. As seen in Table 2, the current efficiencies at a high concentration (5 M NaCl) and high current density (400 mA/cm<sup>2</sup>) are much higher than those at a low concentration (0.1 M NaCl) and low current density (16.7 mA/cm<sup>2</sup>). For example, the current efficiencies at a high concentration (5 M NaCl) and high current density (400 mA/cm<sup>2</sup>) were approximately 90%–98%, while the current efficiencies at low concentration (0.1 M NaCl) and low current density (16.7 mA/cm<sup>2</sup>) were approximately 49%–75%. These results agree with the previous studies, which reported current efficiencies for chlorine evolution reaction in dilute chloride solutions of 8%–45% depending upon the experimental conditions, while at higher brine concentration and current density, the

reported current efficiencies were approximately 90%–92% at a commercial electrode [59–61]. The macroporous RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes increase the chlorine current efficiency compared with the nontemplated electrode in the chlor-alkali industry. In addition, the macroporous of RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes also reduce the energy consumption (~200 kWh/ton Cl<sub>2</sub> in case of PS 0.46 μm) in the chlor-alkali industry. The energy consumption of a normal electrode at chlor-alkali condition was reported in the literature to be in the range of 2,300–2,600 (kWh/ton Cl<sub>2</sub>) [4,43]. The lower current efficiency and higher energy consumption at the condition of lower brine concentration and current density reveal that the interference of oxygen evolution.

### 3.3. Surface area of the ordered macroporous RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes

Fig. 5 shows the voltammetric charge obtained from the cyclic voltammograms with the scan rate (5–320 mV/s) within a potential range of 0.0–1.0 V in 0.5 M H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub> (Fig. S3 in supplementary information) to estimate the total and outer surface areas of the RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes [50,51]. The total voltammetric charge including both the inner and outer active surfaces can be measured at a low scan rate. Alternatively,

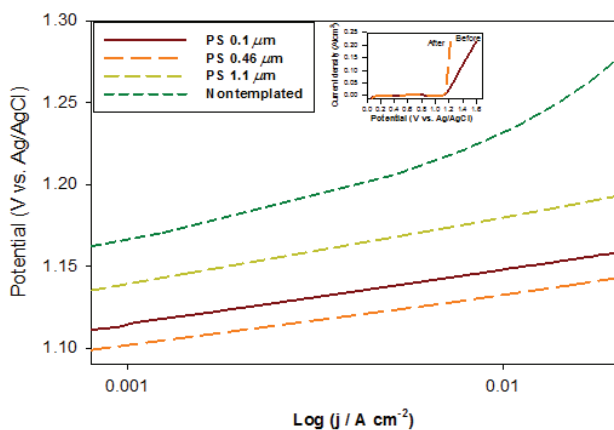


Fig. 4. The polarization curves of the macroporous RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes fabricated with several ranges of the PS sizes (diameter of 0.1, 0.46 and 1.1 μm) in comparison with that of the nontemplated RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrode under chlor-alkali condition of 5 M NaCl, pH = 2 (inset: the representative LSV curve of PS 0.1 μm electrode before and after IR correction).

Table 2

Chlorine current efficiencies and energy consumption of the macroporous RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes fabricated with several ranges of the PS sizes (diameter of 0.1, 0.46 and 1.1 μm) in comparison with that of the nontemplated RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrode at different electrolysis conditions

Electrode	Current efficiency (%)		Energy consumption (kWh/ton Cl <sub>2</sub> )	
	5 M NaCl, pH = 2, 400 mA/cm <sup>2</sup>	0.1 M NaCl, pH = 2, 16.7 mA/cm <sup>2</sup>	5 M NaCl, pH = 2, 400 mA/cm <sup>2</sup>	0.1 M NaCl, pH = 2, 16.7 mA/cm <sup>2</sup>
PS 0.1 μm	97	70	2,251	2,925
PS 0.46 μm	98	75	2,229	2,721
PS 1.1 μm	94	62	2,317	3,274
Nontemplated	90	49	2,415	4,140

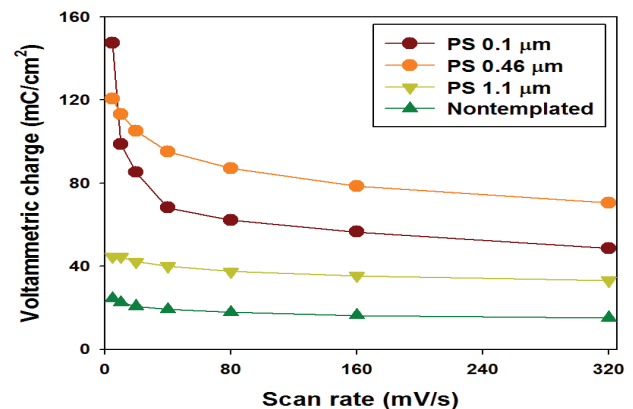


Fig. 5. Voltammetric charges of the macroporous RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes fabricated with several ranges of the PS sizes (diameter of 0.1, 0.46 and 1.1 μm) in comparison with that of the nontemplated RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrode.

the outer voltammetric charge can be obtained at a high scan rate [50]. Note that, in Fig. 5, the order of the total surface area for the electrodes was different from that of the outer surface area. That is, the total surface area was in decreasing order of PS 0.1, 0.46, 1.1  $\mu\text{m}$  and the nontemplated electrode, while the outer surface areas was in decreasing order of PS 0.46, 0.1, 1.1  $\mu\text{m}$  and the nontemplated electrode. More details of the electrochemically active surface area are provided in Table S1 in supplementary information. Thus, the outer surface area was in good agreement with the results of the chlorine evolution efficiency for the macroporous  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrodes, indicating that the outer surface area plays a more critical role in enhancing the chlorine evolution efficiency than that of the total surface area, and the pore size can affect the optimal development of the outer surface area. As mentioned earlier, the reason for this behavior could be because of the increased mass transfer or the easy removal of chlorine gas bubbles based on the well-developed outer structure of the macroporous electrodes because the chlorine evolution reaction rate is notably fast and thermodynamically reversible [11,62–64]. Furthermore, under intensive gas evolution, the inner surface was found to be blocked by adherent gas bubbles and becomes partially inactive for chlorine evolution [65–67].

Table 3 shows a summary of the average pore size, pore volume and surface area of the prepared electrodes. As presented in Table 3, the average pore diameters of macroporous  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrodes fabricated with PS 0.1, 0.46 and 1.1  $\mu\text{m}$ , are similar, regardless of the PS template sizes: 25, 26 and 27 nm, respectively. These diameters of the macroporous  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrodes were larger than that of the nontemplated  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrode ( $\sim 18$  nm). The BET surface areas and pore volumes of the  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  macroporous electrodes greatly decrease with the increase of the PS template sizes from 0.1 to 1.1  $\mu\text{m}$ . For example, the specific surface areas of the  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  macroporous electrodes fabricated with PS sizes of 0.1, 0.46 and 1.1  $\mu\text{m}$  were 233, 178 and 88  $\text{m}^2/\text{g}$ , while the surface area of the nontemplated electrode was much lower, 41  $\text{m}^2/\text{g}$ . These results are consistent with the previous studies indicating that  $\text{RuO}_2$ -based electrodes ranged from 42 to 263  $\text{m}^2/\text{g}$ , depending on the calcination temperature and the fabrication condition [25,68–70]. It is important to recognize that the largest surface area may not ensure for the highest chlorine evolution efficiency.

Table 3  
BET surface areas of the macroporous  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrodes fabricated with several ranges of the PS sizes (diameter of 0.1, 0.46 and 1.1  $\mu\text{m}$ ) in comparison with that of the nontemplated  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrode

Sample	Average BJH pore size (nm)	Pore volume (cc/g)	BET surface area ( $\text{m}^2/\text{g}$ )
PS 0.1 $\mu\text{m}$	25	0.78	233
PS 0.46 $\mu\text{m}$	26	0.56	178
PS 1.1 $\mu\text{m}$	27	0.33	88
Nontemplated	18	0.09	41

### 3.4. The stability of the ordered macroporous $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$ electrodes

As mentioned in the previous section, the solid solution of  $\text{RuO}_2$  and  $\text{TiO}_2$ , which contribute to the stability of electrodes against chlorine evolution, was formed in all of the prepared electrodes. To examine this phenomenon further, the stability test was conducted in terms of chlorine evolution and pseudo-capacitive reaction. ASTs performed for long hours at high current density (1  $\text{A}/\text{cm}^2$ ) were applied for all the prepared electrodes and their results are presented in Fig. 6. As shown in Fig. 6, the highest stability was observed in nontemplated macroporous  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrodes (maximum lifetime 14 h) among all the prepared electrodes. This level of stability is consistent with the previous studies on the  $\text{RuO}_2$ -based electrodes [71–75]. However, note that the stability of the macroporous electrodes decrease a little bit with the increase of pore sizes under the same electrolysis condition, but still keep the high stability compared with the nontemplated electrode. For example, the lifetime of the electrode with PS sizes of 0.1, 0.46 and 1.1  $\mu\text{m}$  were 13.5, 13 and 11 h, respectively. This observation can be explained by the insulating  $\text{TiO}_2$  grains being formed on the interface via oxidation of the Ti substrate as the electrolyte penetrates through open pores toward the substrate. In addition, as the pore sizes increase, the connectivity between  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  nanoparticles becomes looser and the erosion of the catalyst coating is induced [35,39,40]. In addition, as the pore structure of the nontemplated electrode is more compact and the penetration of the electrolyte toward the titanium substrate is limited. Thus, the structure allows for reduced nonconductive intermediate  $\text{TiO}_2$  layer formation as compared with the macroporous  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrodes [35,40]. The research to increase the lifetime of macroporous  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrodes during the real electrolysis is now under processing.

Next, the stability in terms of the pseudo-capacitive property on the electrodes was tested over 1,000 cycles in  $\text{H}_2\text{SO}_4$

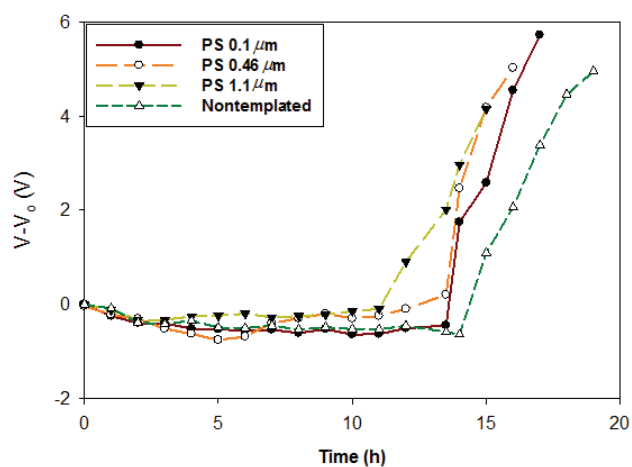


Fig. 6. The AST of the macroporous  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrodes fabricated with several ranges of the PS sizes (diameter of 0.1, 0.46 and 1.1  $\mu\text{m}$ ) in comparison with that of the nontemplated  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrode. Experimental conditions: 5 M NaCl,  $\text{pH} = 2$ ,  $25^\circ\text{C}$ , 1  $\text{A}/\text{cm}^2$ .

0.5 M at 0–1.0 V vs. Ag/AgCl KCl (saturated) at 20 mV/s and the results at the 1st, 500th and 1,000th cycles are presented in Figs. 7(a) and (b). As seen in Figs. 7(a) and (b), the pseudo-capacitive property was retained during 1,000 cycles of operation. Less than 10% of the decrease of voltammetric charges was observed in all the electrodes. Note that, the pseudo-capacitive property of PS 0.1, 0.46, 1.1  $\mu\text{m}$  and nontemplated  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrodes decreased by approximately 3.3%, 4.6%, 9.5% and 1.4%, respectively. This result indicates that the proton absorption/desorption reaction ( $\text{RuO}_x(\text{OH})_y + z\text{H}^+ + ze^- \rightarrow \text{RuO}_{x-z}(\text{OH})_{y+z}$ ) did not affect the stability of the  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrodes.

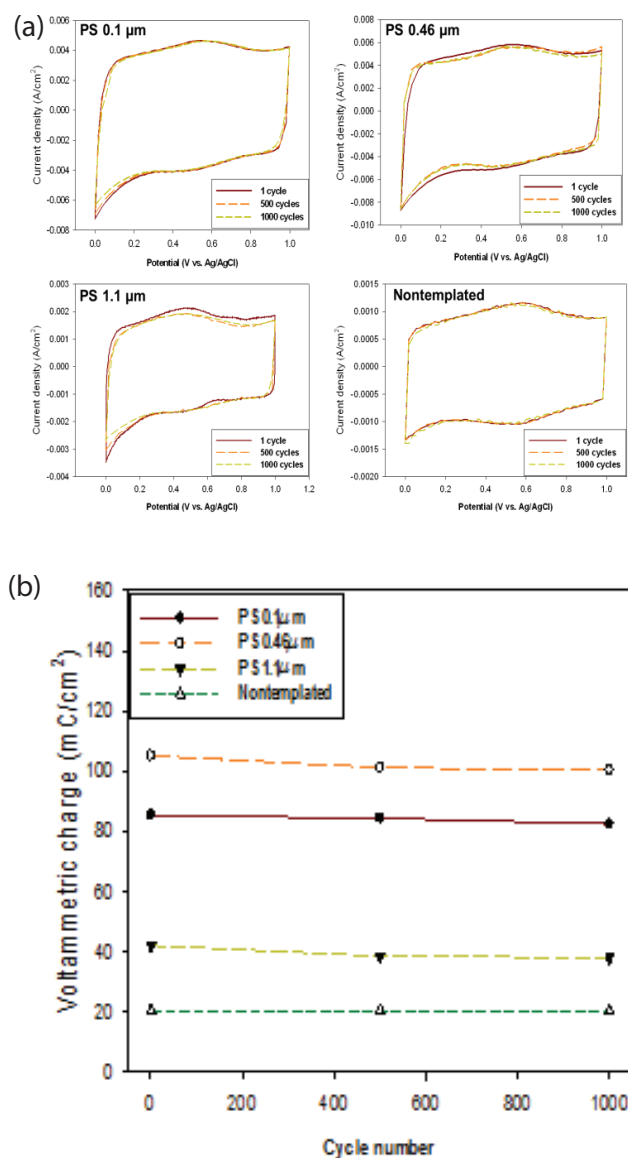


Fig. 7. The CVs (a) and voltammetric charges (b) of the macroporous  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrodes fabricated with several ranges of the PS sizes (diameter of 0.1, 0.46 and 1.1  $\mu\text{m}$ ) in comparison with that of the nontemplated  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrode (0.5 M  $\text{H}_2\text{SO}_4$ , 20 mV/s).

#### 4. Conclusions

In this study, we fabricated highly electrocatalytically active  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrodes for chlorine evolution based on a structural ordered macroporous framework using PS microsphere templates (0.1–1.1  $\mu\text{m}$ ). A significant higher chlorine evolution efficiency was observed in the macroporous  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrodes than that in the nontemplated electrode at the same Ru loadings. Interestingly, in the macroporous  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrode with the specific templated pore size of PS 0.46  $\mu\text{m}$ , and not those of PS 1.1 or 0.1  $\mu\text{m}$ , the outer surface area was the most well-developed, and led to the highest chlorine evolution efficiency in this study, indicating the existence of an optimal macropore size for an effective chlorine evolution reaction. This result could be attributed to the structural properties of the macroporous electrodes, which provide easy mass transfer and removal of chlorine gas bubbles and good control over the pore size and pore walls connectivity. The macroporous  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrodes can be considered as promising anode materials with high chlorine evolution efficiency in the future chlor-alkali industry.

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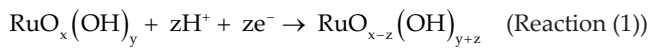
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## Supplementary information

Fig. S3 shows the representative cyclic voltammograms of the macroporous  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrodes (PS diameter of 0.1, 0.46, and 1.1  $\mu\text{m}$ ) and nontemplated electrode at two selected scan rates (5 mV/s (a) and 320 mV/s (b)) as cyclic voltammograms with various scan rate (5, 10, 20, 40, 80, 160, and 320 mV/s) were measured to estimate voltammetric charge. As can be seen from Figs. S3(a) and (b), all CV curves show nearly rectangular shape indicating the good reversibility (redox reaction (1)) of the system resulting from the insignificant  $iR$  (ohmic drop) loss. The voltammetric charge ( $q$ ) recorded over a potential range in the cyclic voltammogram can be described as a pseudo-capacitive reaction (reaction (1)) which consists of coupled redox transitions involving proton exchange at a broad reversible peak around 0.6 V vs. Ag/AgCl [50,51].



Total or outer voltammetric charge can be obtained by varying the scan rate of the applied potential. The total voltammetric charge including both the inner and outer active surfaces can be measured at a low scan rate. On the other hand, the outer voltammetric charge can be obtained at a

high scan rate [50,51]. This is explained as follows: at a low scan rate, the total active surface including both the inner and outer active surfaces can exchange protons with the solution, while at a high scan rate, the inner active surface fails to participate in this reaction. Thus, the total or outer active surface area can be estimated by plotting and extrapolating the voltammetric charge according to an infinitely low (0) and high ( $\infty$ ) scan rate with the following equations (Eqs. (1)–(3)) [51]:

$$q_{\text{total}} = q_{\text{inner}} + q_{\text{outer}} \quad (1)$$

$$q(v) = q_{\text{outer}} + A(1/\sqrt{v}) \quad (2)$$

$$1/q(v) = 1/q_{\text{total}} + B\sqrt{v} \quad (3)$$

where  $v$  is the scan rate;  $q(v)$  is the voltammetric charge at the scan rate  $v$ ;  $q_{\text{total}}$  is the voltammetric charge obtained at an infinitely low (0) scan rate;  $q_{\text{outer}}$  is the voltammetric charge obtained at a high ( $\infty$ ) scan rate;  $q_{\text{inner}}$  is related to the voltammetric charge of the inner surfaces; and  $A$  and  $B$  are constants.

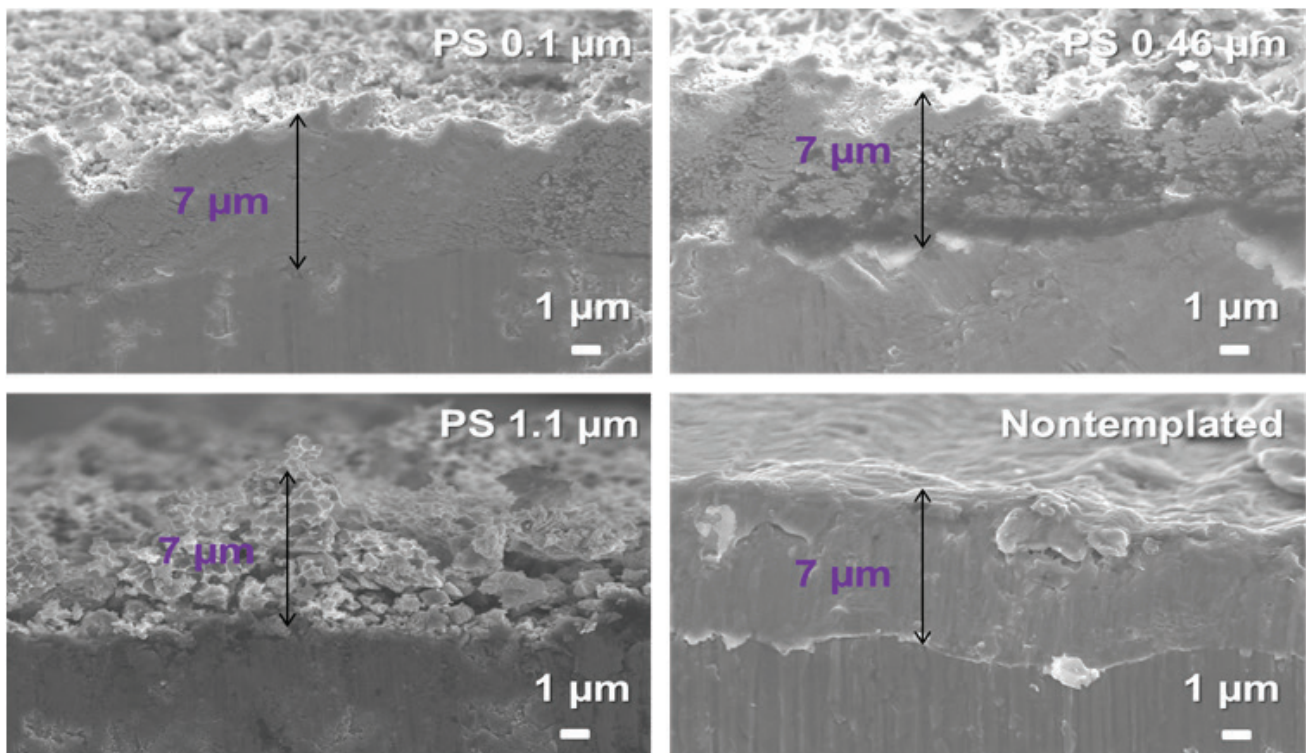


Fig. S1. Cross-sectional SEM images of the macroporous  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrodes fabricated with several ranges of the PS sizes (diameter of 0.1, 0.46 and 1.1  $\mu\text{m}$ ) in comparison with that of the nontemplated  $\text{RuO}_2\text{-TiO}_2$  electrode.

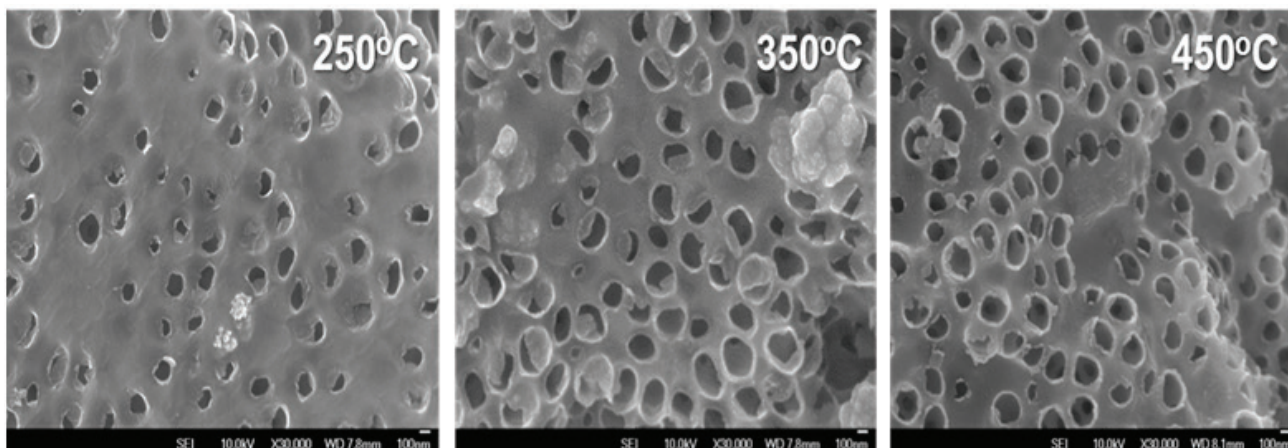


Fig. S2. SEM images of the macroporous RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes (PS 0.46 μm template) fabricated at several calcination temperatures (250°C, 350°C, and 450°C).

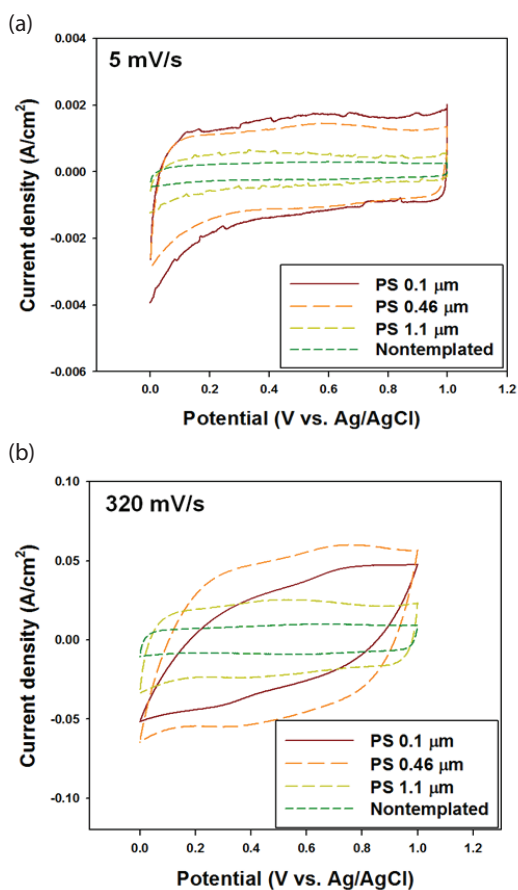


Fig. S3. Cyclic voltammograms of the macroporous RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes fabricated with several ranges of the PS sizes (diameter of 0.1, 0.46 and 1.1 μm) and the nontemplated electrode at two selected scan rates (5 mV/s (a) and 320 mV/s (b)).

Table S1

Total and outer surface area of the macroporous RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrodes fabricated with several ranges of the PS sizes (diameter of 0.1, 0.46 and 1.1 μm) in comparison with that of the nontemplated RuO<sub>2</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> electrode

Electrode	Total voltammetric charge (mC/cm <sup>2</sup> )	Outer voltammetric charge (mC/cm <sup>2</sup> )
PS 0.1 μm	159	47
PS 0.46 μm	126	69
PS 1.1 μm	48	33
Nontemplated	27	16