**Coaxial Fiber Supercapacitor Using All-Carbon Material Electrodes**

Viet Thong Le,‡ Heetae Kim,§ Arunabha Ghosh,‡ Jaesu Kim,†‡ Jian Chang,†‡ Quoc An Vu,†‡ Duy Tho Pham,†‡ Ju-Hyuck Lee,§ Sang-Woo Kim,†‡ and Young Hee Lee†‡,*

"IBS Center for Integrated Nanostructure Physics, Institute for Basic Science (IBS), Daegon 305-701, Republic of Korea, ‡Department of Energy Science, Department of Physics, Sungkyunkwan University, Suwon 440-746, Republic of Korea, and §Sungkyunkwan Advanced Institute of Nanotechnology, School of Advanced Materials Science and Engineering, Sungkyunkwan University, Suwon 440-746, Republic of Korea"

**ABSTRACT** We report a coaxial fiber supercapacitor, which consists of carbon microfiber bundles coated with multiwalled carbon nanotubes as a core electrode and carbon nanofiber paper as an outer electrode. The ratio of electrode volumes was determined by a half-cell test of each electrode. The capacitance reached 6.3 mF cm\(^{-1}\) (86.8 mF cm\(^{-2}\)) at a core electrode diameter of 230 μm and the measured energy density was 0.7 μWh cm\(^{-1}\) (9.8 μWh cm\(^{-2}\)) at a power density of 13.7 μW cm\(^{-1}\) (189.4 μW cm\(^{-2}\)), which were much higher than the previous reports. The change in the cyclic voltammetry characteristics was negligible at 180° bending, with excellent cycling performance. The high capacitance, high energy density, and power density of the coaxial fiber supercapacitor are attributed to not only high effective surface area due to its coaxial structure and bundle of the core electrode, but also all-carbon materials electrodes which have high conductivity. Our coaxial fiber supercapacitor can promote the development of textile electronics in near future.

**KEYWORDS:** supercapacitors · textile electronics · carbon nanotubes · carbon fibers

Fiber electronics, electronic capabilities on textile fibers, is a primary component for wearable technology particularly for future portable and wearable electronics, and is a growing industry. Producing electronics components such as transistors, displays, and energy storage and harvesting devices such as solar cells, thermoelectric generators, and capacitors on fiber electronics is a prerequisite for self-sustaining and self-powered integrated systems. Textile electronics require conducting and/or semiconducting materials to construct electronic capabilities on textile fibers. Metallic fibers have been traditionally used as a core material to load organic transistors and energy converters. Although metal fibers have advantages as a core electrode due to their high conductivity and availability, their tendency to oxidize under ambient conditions, poor bendability, and heavy weight limit their uses in wearable electronics.

Not only are carbon microfibers (CMFs) well-known for their high mechanical strength, but they are also light, highly conductive, bendable, and inert under ambient conditions, can be woven to form wearable cloths, and are thus attractive as electrode materials for various energy storage devices. Most flexible supercapacitors developed thus far have been two-dimensional films using carbon clothes or carbon papers which can be later attached to wearable clothes. Even though a supercapacitor is composed of two parallel carbon microfibers, it can be classified as a film type supercapacitor because carbon fibers are placed onto substrate. Recently, cylindrically shaped-fiber supercapacitors have been intensively studied because of their structural advantage for direct use as threads/fabrics in textile electronics.

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two parallel plastic fibers coated with gold and graphite nanoparticles were used to make a flexible fiber supercapacitor by installing spacer wire to prevent contact. However, this supercapacitor still had low capacitance due to its parallel wire structure, limited number of fibers and low conductivity of plastic wires.

In order to increase surface area, carbon nanotube fibers and graphene fibers have been used to make fiber supercapacitors. In addition to disadvantages of the twisted structures, the above-mentioned capacitors also suffered from poor quality of fibers, which had lower tensile strength and lower conductivity compared to CMFs. The choice of electrode materials and structure is a key factor in determining the energy and power density of fiber supercapacitor.

Our aim is using CMFs to design a highly flexible coaxial fiber supercapacitor with high energy density and power density which can ultimately be woven into self-powered wearable electronics. In this report, a coaxial fiber supercapacitor was fabricated using all carbon materials. The structure of the developed supercapacitor consisted of a CMF bundle coated with multiwalled carbon nanotubes (MWCNTs) as a core electrode in the center of coaxial supercapacitor and a carbon nanofiber (CNF) film prepared by electrospinning as an outer electrode. The fabricated coaxial-cable-type supercapacitor provides an efficient, flexible, wearable energy storage device which shows high capacitance, high energy and power density, and good bendability.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Design of Coaxial Fiber Supercapacitor.** The fabrication process of a coaxial-cable-type supercapacitor is shown in Figure 1. A commercially available CMF bundle with an individual fiber diameter of ~7 μm was used as a core electrode due to its high mechanical strength (tensile strength ~2 GPa, Figure S1) and high conductivity (~10^5 S/cm). The specific capacitance of CMF is low (0.25 F g~1 at a scan rate of 5 mV s~1) due to its low external surface area. To increase the specific capacitance, MWCNTs were coated onto CMF bundle. MWCNTs were dispersed in a sodium dodecylbenzenesulfonate (NaDDBs) solution. A spray method was adopted to deposit MWCNTs on CMF because dipping method yielded nonhomogeneous deposition and poor mechanical adhesion with limitation of massive loading (Supporting Information Figure S2). To coat CMFs with MWCNTs uniformly, the CMF bundle was first spread out on the paper. This was done easily in solution of DI water and isopropyl alcohol by tweezers. The paper was slowly taken out of the solution to prevent CMF aggregation. The prepared planar CMFs were then heated using a hot plate during spray of MWCNTs. The MWCNT droplets were evaporated to leave MWCNTs only on the CMF surface before the next droplets arrived. This enhanced condensation of MWCNTs on the CMF surface and prevented MWCNT aggregation. After coating with MWCNTs, the MWCNTs/CMF was dipped in HNO_3 to remove NaDDBs and then washed with DI water several times. Up to ~90% of the CMF in the bundle was uniformly coated with MWCNTs, as shown in Figure 1d–f. Electrospun CNF film made of polyacrylonitrile (PAN) polymer was used as an outer electrode. PAN nanofiber film with a typical diameter of 200 nm was stabilized in air and further carbonized under argon, which was different from typical activation under CO_2 ambient. This was necessary to maintain the flexibility of the film even though the surface area of the nanofibers is presumably lower. Figure 1g shows FESEM images of the film, and individual CNFs are
shown in the inset. The bendability of the film is illustrated in the image in the left bottom inset, where the film is shown being bent using tweezers. The core and outer electrode were soaked with polymer electrolyte, and then a separator and the outer electrode were wrapped in series around the core electrode. The final coaxial-cable-type supercapacitor is shown in Figure 1i. Diameter of the final supercapacitor was around 0.8 mm.

**Electrochemical Properties of the Core and Outer Electrodes.** Figure 2 shows half-cell test with three electrodes of the core electrode with different volumes of MWCNT solution loading. The current was enhanced as the loading content of MWCNTs increased, as shown in Figure 2a. The oxidation peak current reached 0.32 mA at 6 mL, 40 times larger than the 0.0079 mA of pristine CMF. The clear redox peaks are related to electron transfer during redox reaction of hydroxyl and alkoxy groups, as described previously.41,42 It is intriguing to note that the equivalent series resistance (ESR) was not altered much with the change in MWCNT content, as shown in Figure 2b. The diffusion resistance did not change up to 4 mL MWCNT content, whereas a significant increase in the diffusion resistance was observed at 6 mL MWCNT content. This diffusion resistance originates from the thick MWCNTs accumulated on the CMF surface.

Length capacitance of the core electrode increased as the MWCNT loading was higher, as described in Figure 3a. The diameter of the CMF bundle coated with MWCNTs reached 250 μm at 6 mL from 170 μm of pristine CMF. The length capacitance increased as the MWCNT loading increased due to increased surface area of the MWCNTs/CMF. At larger-diameter MWCNTs/CMF, the capacitance decreased more rapidly as the scan rate increased due to the limited diffusion of ions through the thick MWCNT network. Gravimetric capacitance of MWCNT only or MWCNTs/CMF was shown in Figure 3b. As the MWCNT content increased from 2 to 6 mL, the specific capacitance of MWCNTs decreased from 80 to 42 F g⁻¹ due to the limited accessibility of ions in electrolyte, in consistent with the impedance measurements shown in Figure 2b. On the other hand, the specific capacitance of MWCNTs/CMF increased from 3.6 to 11.1 F g⁻¹. The total charge increased as the MWCNT content increased, while the majority of the weight of the sample is due to the CMFs. The decrease in the specific capacitance of the MWCNTs only as the MWCNT loading increased appears similar to the dependence of areal capacitance on SWCNT thickness, as previously reported.43 For wearable electronics, the fiber diameter is required to be reasonably small, but the fibers must have high capacitance. Hence, we chose 4 mL MWCNT loading, which corresponds to a diameter of 230 μm, to fabricate full-cell coaxial fiber supercapacitors, since the sample with 6 mL loading not only had a large diffusion resistance, leading to poor cycling performance and low power density, but also became rigid and thus had poor flexibility.

**Figure 2.** Different volumes of MWCNT solution (2, 4, and 6 mL) loading onto CMF. (a) CV curves at a scan rate of 5 mV s⁻¹. (b) Electrochemical impedance spectroscopy.

**Figure 3.** (a) Length capacitance of core electrodes as a function of scan rate with different MWCNT loadings. (b) Gravimetric capacitance of the core electrode calculated for MWCNTs only and for MWCNTs/CMF.
The electrochemical properties of CNF film as an outer electrode were evaluated and further compared to those of the core electrode as shown in Figure 4. Figure 4a shows cyclic voltammetry (CV) curves measured at a scan rate of 5 mV s⁻¹. The volumetric capacitance of the CMFs without a coating of MWCNTs was 0.7 F cm⁻³. The volumetric capacitance with MWCNT coating of 4 mL was increased to 14.1 F cm⁻³, which was 20 times higher than that of CMF only. The high capacitance originates both from pseudocapacitance due to chemical reactions associated with defects and functional groups remaining on the MWCNT surface and from electric double layer capacitance (EDLC).⁴¹,⁴²

The capacitance of the CNFs was 13.8 F cm⁻³, similar to that of MWCNTs/CMF. The capacitance of the CNFs was mostly attributed to the EDLC. The gravimetric capacitance of the CNF film was 129.8 F g⁻¹ at a scan rate of 5 mV s⁻¹, which was 500 times higher than that of CMF and 15 times higher than that of MWCNTs/CMF (Figure S3b). The corresponding electrochemical impedance data is provided in Figure 4b. The ESRs of CMF and MWCNTs/CMF were 1.6 and 1.4 Ω/cm, and revealed that MWCNTs improved the conductivity of the CMF bundle, whereas the ESR of CMF film was 6.8 Ω/cm, much higher than that of MWCNTs/CMF. The slope (tan θ) represents the diffusion of ions in the electrode. Both MWCNTs/CMF and CNF had similar steep slopes, which is different from the tilt slope of the CMF only. Since CMF has a diameter of 7 μm, ultramicropores may be present in the inner area so that ions have difficulty to access which can affect the slope. For the case of MWCNTs/CMF, the CMF surfaces were fully covered by CNTs which block ion diffusion through CMFs. Therefore, ion diffusion through CMFs is prohibited in CMFs and ion diffusion is only limited by the entangled CNTs, which can easily facilitate ion diffusion. On the other hand, the diameter of CNFs is ~200 nm, and micropores are unlikely to be formed during Ar annealing. Therefore, ions can be adsorbed only on the surface, leaving the steep slope, as shown in Figure 4b.

The scan rate dependence on the capacitance was more distinct. While the capacitance of MWCNTs/CMF initially decayed rapidly as the scan rate increased and was saturated at around 50 mV s⁻¹, the capacitance of the CNF decayed over the entire range of scan rate (Figure 4c). Thus, to ensure that our coaxial fiber supercapacitor has good power performance at a high scan rate (or a high current density), we chose a volume ratio between the core and outer electrode by following the ratio of volumetric capacitance \( \frac{C_{\text{CNF}}}{C_{\text{MWCNTs/CMF}}} = 3:10.6 \) at scan rate of 200 mV s⁻¹. We fixed the diameter of the MWCNTs/CMF bundle at 230 μm and the length at 5 cm. The volume of the CNF was then controlled by the thickness of the film, which can be adjusted by the volume of PAN precursor used during electrospinning. The thickness of the CNF film at a size of 3.6 cm × 0.4 cm was 40 μm, meaning that the CNF volume was 5.76 mm³ and the MWCNTs/CMF volume was 1.49 mm³. Thus, the total capacity balance was \( C_{\text{CNF}}/C_{\text{MWCNTs/CMF}} = 17.3:15.8 \), where the ratio is nearly one.

Electrochemical Performance of Coaxial Fiber Supercapacitors. A coaxial fiber supercapacitor consists of a core and an outer electrode was fabricated following the above ratio. Figure 5a shows the CV curves of the coaxial fiber supercapacitor at various scan rates. The large CV area resembles the EDLC of the outer electrode, whereas a broad oxidation peak was still observed but was slightly upshifted, which resembles the pseudocapacitance of the core electrode. It is worth noting that the redox peaks were retained at high scan rates. This can be attributed to the fact that ion diffusion can be easily facilitated in core electrode with MWCNTs/CMF bundle, because the space between CMFs is quite large (~few micrometers) (Figure 1e), and also high conductivity of CMF promotes electron transfer, in good contrast with film type supercapacitors where the redox peaks are reduced at high scan rates.⁴⁴ The ESR of the coaxial fiber supercapacitor was 4.2 Ω/cm (Figure 5b).

As the scan rate varies from 2 to 200 mV s⁻¹, the length capacitance decreased from 6.3 to 2.9 mF cm⁻¹, corresponding to an areal capacitance from 86.8 to 40.4 mF cm⁻². The measured capacitance as a function of scan rate is shown in Figure 5c. The capacitance initially dropped, and is saturated at around 50 mV s⁻¹. The theoretical estimated capacitance is shown as a

**Figure 4.** Electrochemical characterizations of a half-cell of CMF, MWCNTs/CMF and CNF. (a) CV curves at a scan rate of 5 mV s⁻¹. (b) Electrochemical impedance spectroscopy. (c) Volumetric capacitance as a function of scan rate.
demonstrate the bending angle of the coaxial fibers, which are highly flexible. This result implies that our coaxial fiber supercapacitor can be applied for textile electronic devices.

Figure 6a shows typical V-shaped charge–discharge V–t curves at different current densities. The IR drop was small (0.0052 V at 27.5 μA cm⁻¹) benefiting from low ESR. The curves were almost linear, revealing the dominant EDLC contribution. The extracted length capacitance of core and outer electrode, which were determined from the half-cell test, is shown in Figure 5d. Volumetric capacitance of coaxial fiber capacitor was also calculated by considering the total volume (including volume of two electrodes, electrolyte, and separator), and was supplied in the Supporting Information Figure S5 in order to evaluate its volumetric capacity. Figure 5d shows the CV measurements at a scan rate of 5 mV s⁻¹ at different bending angles. The CV shapes were not changed much up to 180° bending, reflecting that the CMF, MWCNTs, and CNF soaked with polymer gel electrolyte are highly flexible. This result implies that our coaxial fiber supercapacitor can be applied for textile flexible electronic devices.

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of the device should be smaller compared to that of parallel structure. Hence, in practice, coaxial structure is preferable. Cycling performance of the coaxial fiber supercapacitor and coin cell supercapacitor at a current density of 275 μA/cm were shown in Figure 6d. Eighty-eight percent of the capacitance of coaxial fiber supercapacitor was retained after 1000 charge–discharge cycles while the coin cell supercapacitor retained 94% capacity of the initial value. The difference in the discharge retention was caused by inefficient sealing in the fiber structure. Finally, to test the feasibility of our coaxial fiber supercapacitor, the four fabricated supercapacitors connected in series with each having a length of 3.6 cm was connected to a green light emitting diode. The inset of Figure 6d shows the green light emitting diode being lit by our coaxial fiber supercapacitor.

Our all-carbon electrodes, CMFs, CNF, and MWCNTs are not only light, but also highly conductive and fully flexible. This is advantageous in comparison to metal wires, which are not flexible upon severe bending, and Kevlar polymer wires which are not conductive. Therefore, our all-carbon materials and coaxial-cable-type supercapacitor is considered to be feasible for use in self-sustainable textile electronics.

CONCLUSION

We have fabricated coaxial fiber supercapacitor using all carbon material electrodes. Our supercapacitor showed good capacitance, high energy density and power density with excellent flexibility. Length capacitance, energy density, and power density are 5.1 mF/cm, 0.7 μWh/cm, and 13.7 μW/cm, respectively. The obtained high capacitance, energy and power density are attributed to high effective surface area of coaxial structure and high conductivity of carbon material, particularly MWCNTs/CMF. Our approach of coaxial fiber supercapacitor will promote the development of textile electronics and self-powered systems in the near future.

METHODS

Preparation of Carbon Nanofiber Film and Carbon Nanotubes Solution. A commercial CMF bundle with an individual fiber diameter of ~7 μm (Jeonju Institute of Machinery and Carbon Composites, Korea) was treated with 12 M HNO₃ for several days. This process is required for the CMFs to be hydrophilic. A CNF film with a fiber diameter of about 200 nm was fabricated using the electrospinning method with PAN diluted in dimethylformamide (DMF) as described previously.⁴⁰ The PAN nanofiber film was stabilized in air at 280 °C for 1 h and was carbonized at 800 °C under argon for 1 h.

For preparing the carbon nanotubes solution, MWCNTs with an outer diameter of 10–15 nm (CM 95, Hanwha, Korea) were refluxed in 5 M HNO₃ for 12 h at 120 °C to remove catalysts and then annealed at 500 °C for 2 h to remove amorphous carbon. NaDDBs (purity ~80%, Fluka) of 300 mg was diluted in 100 mL of DI water using a bath sonicator, and 300 mg of the prepared MWCNTs was then added into the NaDDBs solution for dispersion. A high-intensity ultrasonic probe (Ulusso Hitech Co., Korea, Ti-Horn, 19.87 kHz, 700 W) with a power of 60% maximum was used to disperse the CNTs in solution for 60 min. The MWCNT solution was further centrifuged (Hanil Science Industrial Co., Ltd., Mega 17R) at 10000 rpm for 30 min to remove large bundles and residual catalyst. For preparing gel electrolyte, 10 g of PVA (molecular weight 89 000–98 000, 99–% hydrolyzed,
The flattened CMFs coated with MWCNTs were dipped in 5 M HNO₃ for 4 h to remove the surfactant. This again functionalized MWCNTs. The MWCNTs-coated CMF were lightly twisted to form a round bundle for use as the core electrode in a coaxial fiber supercapacitor. The weight of the MWCNTs was measured by the weight difference of the CMF bundle before and after MWCNT deposition. CNF film with a thickness of 40 μm was cut into 3.6 cm × 0.4 cm pieces. The core electrode and cut CNF film were dipped into gel electrolyte and then transferred into a low vacuum chamber for 0.5 h so that the electrolyte could soak into the pores of the electrodes. After removing from the oven and letting sit for about 20 min, a separator (Celgard 3501, Celgard USA) was rolled around the core electrode and the cut CNF film was rolled on the outside. In this case, the polymer gel electrolyte acted as a glue to attach the outer electrode well.

**Characterization.** The morphology of the two electrodes was observed by field emission scanning electron microscopy (FESEM, JEOL JSM7000F, Japan), and the capacitive performance of samples was characterized using CV measurement system (Biologic VMP3, France). The electrochemical impedance spectroscopy was measured with a frequency range of 10 kHz to 10 mHz. For the half-cell test, a gold wire was used to connect the core electrode, a custom Teflon cell was used for reference electrode, and a MWCNTs-coated CMF bundle or CNF film as the working electrode. For the coaxial fiber supercapacitor test, the two electrodes of the CV system were connected directly to the core and outer electrode of coaxial fiber supercapacitor. To demonstrate the feasibility of the coaxial fiber supercapacitor, a commercial green light emitting diode was used.

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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**Supporting Information Available:** Calculation method; preparation of coin cell; stress—strain curve of CNF; MWCNT loading onto CNF by dipping method; gravimetric capacitance of core and outer electrodes; capacitance as a function of length; volumetric capacitance of coaxial fiber supercapacitor. This material is available free of charge via the Internet at http://pubs.acs.org.

**REFERENCES AND NOTES**


