Thermal stability of high voltage spinel with disordered and ordered phase
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Introduction
High voltage spinel LiNi$_x$Mn$_{2-x}$O$_4$ (x is around 0.5 and will be referred to as LNMO) has been heavily investigated recently due to its advantage of high operating voltage at ~4.7V versus Li$^+$/Li. Its electrochemical performance has been shown to depend on many factors, including synthesis route, stoichiometry, heat treatment, morphology and particle size. In order to improve the electrochemical performance of this cathode material, the studies of structural stability are important. The delithiated form of its parental material, LiMn$_2$O$_4$, has been investigated by Dahn and his research group extensively. They showed that chemically delithiated LiMn$_2$O$_4$ transforms from $\lambda$-MnO$_2$ to $\beta$-MnO$_2$ at 270°C and further decomposes to $\alpha$-Mn$_2$O$_3$ at 550°C. This is in good agreement with the theoretical calculation reported later. Since there is no oxygen release until above 500°C, LiMn$_2$O$_4$ is generally regarded as a relatively safe cathode material compared with layer structured materials. However, when one quarter of total Mn is replaced by Ni as in LNMO, it was found in this study that the thermodynamics of LNMO and its structural stability are quite different from those of regular spinel LiMn$_2$O$_4$.

DSC measurement of delithiated LNMO has been examined by Patoux and Chen. They both observed exothermic peaks around 250°C. Bhaskar et al investigated substituted spinel Li$_{1-\Delta}$M$_\Delta$Mn$_2$O$_4$ (M = Fe, Co, Ni) and compared thermal stabilities of these materials with different substituted transition metals. To our best knowledge so far, the reaction mechanism of delithiated LNMO at elevated temperature has not been systematically studied.

In this work, we applied synchrotron-based in situ tools to monitor changes in both crystal- and electronic-structure to study the reaction mechanism of delithiated LNMO during heating. By making comparison between ordered and disordered LNMO, we have studied the origin of difference in their thermal and structural stabilities from thermo dynamical perspectives.

Acknowledgement
This work was supported by the U.S. Department of Energy, the Assistant Secretary for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, Office of Vehicle Technologies under Contract No. DE-AC02-98CH10886. The authors acknowledge technical supports by the NSLS’S beamline scientists at X7B, Dr. Sanjaya Senanayake. Use of the National Synchrotron Light Source was supported by the U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Science, Office of Basic Energy Sciences, under Contract No. DE-AC02-98CH10886.

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