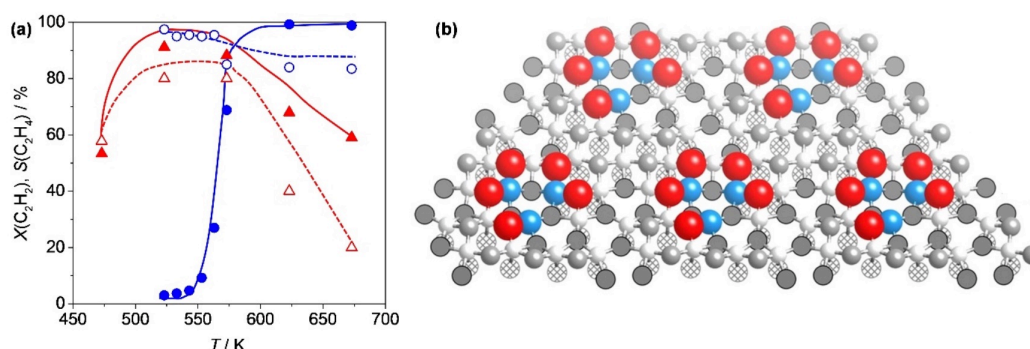


## Single ensemble catalysis: acetylene semi-hydrogenation on indium oxide

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Despite increasing resource scarcity and environmental awareness, industrial hydrogenation catalysts still heavily rely on expensive noble metals such as palladium or platinum modified with toxic selectivity enhancers.<sup>1</sup> Among intensive efforts to address this, one approach involves the untapped potential of metal oxides. In this regard, cerium oxide emerged as an efficient catalyst for the semi-hydrogenation of acetylene,<sup>2</sup> an important reaction for the purification of olefin streams for downstream polymerization processes. To date, no other metal oxide has been identified that selectively catalyzes this reaction, leaving ample room for a more extensive investigation on the abilities of oxides in hydrogenation catalysis. Here, we have explored the potential of indium oxide to hydrogenate acetylene, uncovering a remarkable 85% selectivity to ethylene at full conversion in continuous-flow tests at ambient pressure (Figure 1a). Detailed analyses by temperature-programmed reduction with H<sub>2</sub>, *in situ* diffuse reflectance infrared Fourier transform and Raman spectroscopy, transmission electron microscopy, and density functional theory link the excellent hydrogenation performance with a surface reconstruction during the reaction leading to the creation of well-defined In<sub>3</sub>O<sub>5</sub> sites, consisting of an oxygen vacancy, an In trimer and adjacent oxygen atoms, where C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>2</sub> can co-adsorb and react (Figure 1b). This unusual configuration, which we have named 'single ensemble', comprises a new type of active site in hydrogenation catalysis.



**Figure 1** (a) Acetylene conversion (solid symbols) and selectivity to ethylene (open symbols) versus temperature over  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  (blue) and  $\text{CeO}_2$  (red). Conditions:  $\text{H}_2:\text{C}_2\text{H}_2 = 30$ ,  $t = 1$  s,  $P = 1$  bar. (b) Oxygen vacancy formation on  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3(111)$  under reaction conditions leads to the development of  $\text{In}_3\text{O}_5$  single ensembles. In and O atoms of the ensemble are colored in blue and red, respectively.

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[2] G. Vilé, B. Bridier, J. Wichert, J. Pérez-Ramírez, *Angew. Chem. Int. Ed.* **2012**, 51, 8620.