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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Ligand Design for Energy Conversion and Storage Applications

by

Joshua Heidebrecht

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN CHEMISTRY

CALGARY, ALBERTA

DECEMBER, 2019

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Preface

The negative impact of global warming on climate resulted in an overall ambient temperature increase of roughly 0.9 °C since the mid-nineteenth century, with an additional 0.2 °C expected for every incoming decade if the current trends persist.^[1] As subtle as it may seem, this increase in temperature has major environmental implications through melting icecaps, raising ocean levels, ocean acidification, diminished agricultural production, increasing frequency of natural disasters, and reduction in biodiversity.^[2–4] As carbon dioxide, CO₂, is the most significant component of the greenhouse gases of anthropogenic origin (82% in the US), there has been a substantial effort in bringing society closer to "carbon neutrality" through the use of renewable energy sources and the reduction of coal-generated electricity. The target recommended by the Paris Agreement aims to limit global warming to less than 2 °C since the pre-industrial era.^[1] However, even if all largescale energy production was sourced through renewable technology, petroleum-based CO₂ emissions would persist through applications such as air transportation, which require high energy density fuels that novel battery technologies cannot compete with. To adhere to a closed carbon cycle, advancements in CO_2 sequestration and conversion to fuels is important, in addition to the implementation of renewable energy. This thesis will focus on advancing two areas of research aimed at mitigating the rise in atmospheric CO₂ concentration. Chapters 1 and 2 will outline progresses in grid energy storage using redox flow batteries (RFBs), aimed at enabling an increased proportion of renewable (mainly solar and wind) energy to be connected to the grid. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 will describe attempts at the electrocatalytic reduction of CO_2 to carbon monoxide (CO), which can be reconverted to fuels and create a carbon-neutral fuel cycle.

Abstract

The contents of this thesis are divided into two topics that fall under the umbrella of energy conversion and storage. The first section focuses on tuning the standard reduction potential of the $Fe^{3+/2+}$ redox couple with the aid of nitrogen-based ligands, in pursuit of an all-iron, water-based redox-flow battery. Also included is the synthesis and characterization of iron coordination complexes with redox-active ligands featuring quinone/hydroquinone functional groups. This study aims to exploit the potential of this system incorporating $Fe^{3+/2+}$ and a redox non-innocent ligand for application in single-component redox-flow batteries.

The second portion of the thesis targets homogeneous single-site catalysts for the electrochemical reduction of CO_2 . The ability of nickel and iron complexes incorporating a redox non-innocent bis(triazapentadienyl) ligand to promote this transformation was investigated. The nickel complex was identified as more promising and infrared spectroelectrochemistry was used to determine the fate of the metal during controlled potential electrolysis, as well as to identify the extent to which a large excess of ligand-based redox behavior impacts electrocatalytic CO_2 reduction. The synthesis and characterization of other ligand scaffolds based on tetradentate bis(carbene) macrocycles and porphyrinoids is discussed, with alterations to the parent framework aimed at increasing solubility and stability during metal complexation. Also reported are efforts tailored towards the synthesis of ligands based on a bipyridine central donor with flanking phosphine chalcogenides. The phosphine oxide generated iron, nickel and rhenium complexes while the phosphine sulfide analog proved to be a surprisingly incompetent ligand.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful towards Professor Roland Roesler, who has guided me throughout both my BSc honors and graduate degree. He has promoted a curiosity and passion for science that has become an integral part of my daily life and his mentorship over the last few years is invaluable. I would also like to thank Prof. Warren Piers for instilling a genuine interest towards olefin polymerization and providing feedback and direction during synthetic meetings alongside Prof. Gregory Welch. Likewise, I would like to thank Prof. Todd Sutherland and Prof. Jeffrey Van Humbeck for their feedback and commitments towards my annual meetings and as a late addition to my committee, in addition to Prof. Michele Dolgos as my internal/external examiner.

I want to thank the Roesler group members during my tenure as a grad student, Dr. Chris Gendy, Braulio Puerta Lombardi, Alexander Harrison, Yanmin Jiang and Devon Louwe, as well as Zachary Dubrawski and Dr. Janina Wilkommen for an amazing working environment and friendships that I count on lasting for many years to come.

To my best friend and love of my life, I want to thank my wife Kristina Heidebrecht for her constant support. I can honestly say that I wouldn't be half the man I am today without her amazing personality by my side. I also wouldn't be here without the loving support of my parents, in which words cannot express the gratitude I have towards my family

Most of all, I give praise to God, for nothing would be possible if not for his grace.

Table of Contents					

	11
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Figures	vii
List of Tables	X
List of Schemes	xi
List of Symbols, Abbreviations and Nomenclature	xii
CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION TO REDOX FLOW BATTERIES	1
1.1 Intermittency of Renewable Energy	1
1.2 Redox Flow Batteries	2
1.3 Organic-based Electrolytes and Redox-active Ligands	8
1.4 Original work	12
CHAPTER 2 – IRON-BASED REDOX-FLOW BATTERIES	14
2.1 Introduction	14
2.2 All-iron, all-soluble aqueous RFB	15
2.3 Redox Active Ligands for Application in Symmetric RFBs	18
2.4 Conclusion	27
2.5 Experimental	27
CUAPTER 2 INTRODUCTION TO THE ELECTROCHEMICAL DEDUCT	ION
CHAPTER 3 – INTRODUCTION TO THE ELECTROCHEMICAL REDUCT	ION
	24
OF CARBON DIOXIDE	
OF CARBON DIOXIDE	34
OF CARBON DIOXIDE	34 34 36
 OF CARBON DIOXIDE	
 OF CARBON DIOXIDE	34 34 36 38 41
OF CARBON DIOXIDE	34 34 36 38 41
 OF CARBON DIOXIDE	34 34 36 38 41 ION
 OF CARBON DIOXIDE	34 36 38 41 ION 43
 OF CARBON DIOXIDE	34 36 38 41 ION 43 43
 OF CARBON DIOXIDE	34 36 38 41 ION 43 43 43
 OF CARBON DIOXIDE	34 36 36 38 41 ION 43 43 43 43 45
 OF CARBON DIOXIDE	34 36 38 41 ION 43 43 43 43 43 45 48
 OF CARBON DIOXIDE	34 34 36 38 41 ION 43 43 43 43 43 45 48 55
 OF CARBON DIOXIDE	
 OF CARBON DIOXIDE 3.1 Background Information 3.2 Homogeneous Catalysis for the Electrochemical Reduction of CO₂. 3.3 Mechanistic Insight and Ligand Design Considerations 3.4 Conclusion CHAPTER 4 – LIGAND-CENTERED ELECTROCHEMICAL CO₂ REDUCT WITH A NICKEL BIS(TRIAZAPENTADIENYL) COMPLEX^[144] 4.1 Author Contributions 4.2 Background Information 4.3 Synthesis and Electrochemical Analysis of Ni(TAPPy)₂. 4.4 Infrared Spectroelectrochemistry (IR-SEC) 4.5 Ligand Modification and Reaction with CO₂ 4.6 Iron-based TAPPy complexes 4.7 Experimental 	34 34 36 38 41 ION 43 43 43 43 43 43 43 51 55 61
 OF CARBON DIOXIDE	
 OF CARBON DIOXIDE	
 OF CARBON DIOXIDE	34 34 38 38 41 ION 43 43 43 43 43 43 43 43 51 55 61 AND 66 66
 OF CARBON DIOXIDE	34 34 36 38 41 ION 43 43 43 43 43 43 43 45 51 55 61 AND 66 68

5.3 Unsaturated Carbene-porphyrinoids	72
5.4 Experimental	75
CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSIONS AND FINAL THOUGHTS	81
CHAPTER 7 – FUTURE DIRECTIONS	84
7.1 Background Information	
7.2 Bipyridine-Based Phosphine Chalcogenides with Iron and Nickel	85
7.3 Bimetallic Rhenium Complexes	
7.4 Experimental	91
References	96
Permissions	

List of Figures

Figure 1-1 Wind energy supplied during daily peak demand in Germany over a year, as a percentage proportion of the total energy consumption at that time. Reproduced with permission from reference 61
Figure 1-2 Energy storage applications based on power output and amount of energy stored (Abbreviations: Supercharged magnetic energy storage (SMES) and compressed air energy storage (CAES)). Reproduced with permission from reference 10
Figure 1-3 Schematic of an all-soluble RFB (top) and a mixed RFB (bottom). Reproduced from reference 15
Figure 1-4 Distribution of costs for a 4 MWh all-vanadium RFB ^[14,42] 7
Figure 1-5 Selected organic materials and their corresponding reduction potentials in reference to Ag/AgCl
Figure 1-6 Cyclic voltammogram of 0.4M [Fe(TEOA)OH] ^{-/2-} and 0.4M Fe(CN) ₆ ^{3-/4-} in a 3M sodium hydroxide solution. Reproduced with permission from reference 31.
Figure 2-1 Solid-state structures of pseudo-octahedral complexes 2.2 (left) and 2.3 (right). The thermal ellipsoids are drawn at 50% probability. Selected bond lengths (Å) and angles (deg) for complex 2.3 : Co1–N3 = 1.861(2), Co1– N1 = 1.936(2), Co1–N5 = 1.937(2), N3–C7 = 1.330(4), N3–C11 = 1.343(4), N1–C6 = 1.312(4), N2–C6 = 1.331(4), N5–C12 = 1.311(4), N4–C12 = 1.330(4); N1–Co1– N5 = 163.68(9), N3–Co1–N30 = 178.96(15)
Figure 2-2 CVs of 1mmol solutions of complex 2.2 (left) and Fe(bpy) ₃ SO ₄ (right) at 0.1V s ⁻¹ under argon. Conditions: 0.1 M Na ₂ SO ₄ , H ₂ O, glassy carbon disk working electrode, Pt wire counter electrode, saturated Ag/AgCl reference electrode17
Figure 2-3 Solid state structure of the cationic complex [2.4] ²⁺ at 50% probability ellipsoids
Figure 2-4 CV of a 1mmol solution of complex 2.4 at 0.1V s ⁻¹ under argon. Conditions: 0.1 M TBAPF ₆ , acetonitrile, glassy carbon disk working electrode, Pt wire counter-electrode, Ag/AgCl pseudo-reference electrode and internally referenced to ferrocene
Figure 2-5 CV of a 1mmol solution of complex [2.4]SO ₄ at 0.1V s ⁻¹ under argon. Conditions: 0.01 M HCl, water, glassy carbon disk working electrode, Pt wire counter electrode, saturated Ag/AgCl reference electrode

Figure 2-6 CV of a 1mmol solution of complex 2.6 at 0.1V s ⁻¹ under argon. Conditions: 0.1 M TBAPF ₆ , acetonitrile, glassy carbon disk working electrode, Pt wire counter electrode, Ag/AgCl pseudo-reference electrode and internally referenced to ferrocene.
Figure 2-7 Solid-state structure of pseudo-octahedral complex 2.7 in a combination of thermal ellipsoids at 50% probability and wireframe
Figure 3-1 Tafel plots of selected catalysts for the electrochemical reduction of CO ₂ to CO. (Abbreviations: iron tetraphenylporphyin (TPPFe), <i>o,o</i> '-phenolic-TPPFe (CAT), bis(<i>o,o</i> '-phenolic)bis(pentaflurophenyl)-TPPFe (FCAT), <i>p</i> -trimethylammonium-TPPFe (WSCAT). Reproduced with permission from reference 118
Figure 3-2 Mechanism of CO ₂ reduction with selected manganese catalysts
Figure 3-3 Selected complexes with common ligand platforms electrocatalytic reduction of CO_2 ^[103,141–143]
Figure 4-1 Structural comparison of Ni(TAPPy) ₂ with nickel complexes A–E capable of catalyzing the electrochemical reduction of CO ₂ . Below each structure are the major products formed during electrochemical reduction
Figure 4-2 Top: CV of Ni(TAPPy) ₂ (0.50 mM) at 0.1 V s ⁻¹ under Ar, with cathodic peak current (i _{pc}) versus the square root of scan rate for the one-electron reduction of Ni(TAPPy) ₂ under Ar (inset). Bottom: CVs of Ni(TAPPy) ₂ (0.50 mM, three consecutive scans) at 0.1 V s ⁻¹ under Ar (black) and CO ₂ (red). Conditions: 0.1 M ⁿ Bu ₄ NPF ₆ , DMF, glassy carbon disk working electrode, Pt wire counter electrode, Ag/AgCl reference electrode. Background scans shown in grey46
Figure 4-3 IR-SEC spectra of Ni(TAPPy) ₂ (0.5 mM). Top: Electrolysis from -2.10 to -2.45 V in 0.05 V increments under CO ₂ . Bottom: Electrolysis of Ni(TAPPy) ₂ at -2.45 V under ¹² CO ₂ (red) and ¹³ CO ₂ (blue). Conditions: 0.2 M ⁿ Bu ₄ NPF ₆ , DMF49
Figure 4-4 IR-SEC spectra of Ni(TAPPy) ₂ (0.5 mM) at -2.45 V with (blue) and without (red) the addition of 2.5 mM [Ni(TMC)] ²⁺ under CO ₂ . The green trace corresponds to the IR-SEC spectra of [Ni(TMC)] ²⁺ at -2.45 V in a CO saturated solution. Conditions: 0.2 M ⁿ Bu ₄ NPF ₆ , DMF
Figure 4-5 ¹ H NMR spectra for KTAPPy in THF-d ⁸ (top) and the reaction mixture between KTAPPy and CO ₂ (bottom)
Figure 4-6 Solid-state structure of TAPPy-Br with 50% probability ellipsoids
Figure 4-7 Solid state structures of Fe(TAPPy) ₃ from reactions using an iron(III) source (left, Monoclinic C) and an iron (II) source (right, Triclinic) shown with 50% probability ellipsoids. ^[175]

Figure 4 ¹ un Con cou	1-8 Cyclic voltammogram of potential $Fe(TAPPy)_2(CO)_2$ (1.0 mM) at 0.1 V s ⁻ nder Ar (black), CO ₂ (Dashed line) and Ar after exposure to CO ₂ (grey) . nditions: 0.1 M ⁿ Bu ₄ NPF ₆ , DMF, glassy carbon disk working electrode, Pt wire inter electrode, Ag/AgCl reference electrode
Figure 4 Cor cou	4-9 Cyclic voltammogram of HTAPPy (1.0 mM) at 0.1 V s ⁻¹ under Ar. nditions: 0.1 M ⁿ Bu ₄ NPF ₆ , DMF, glassy carbon disk working electrode, Pt wire unter electrode, Ag/AgCl reference electrode
Figure 4 (bla disk Bac	4-10 Cyclic voltammogram of Fe(TAPPy) ₃ (1.0 mM) at 0.1 V s ⁻¹ under Ar ack) and CO ₂ (Dashed line). Conditions: 0.1 M ⁿ Bu ₄ NPF ₆ , DMF, glassy carbon c working electrode, Pt wire counter electrode, Ag/AgCl reference electrode.
Figure 5	5-1 Selected carbene-based catalysts for the electrochemical reduction of CO_267
Figure '	7-1 Selected catalysts for electrochemical CO ₂ reduction based on 2,2'- yridine ligand frameworks
Figure 7 prol	7-2 Solid state structures of complex 7.4 (left) and 7.5 (right) drawn at 50% bability elipsoids and wireframe
Figure '	7-3 Solid state structures of homotrimetallic rhenium complex (left) and nplex 7.6 (right) drawn at 50% probability ellipsoids and wireframe
Figure 7 (bla Cor cou	7-4 Cyclic voltammogram of complex 7.6 (1.0 mM) at 0.1 V s ⁻¹ under Ar ack) and CO ₂ (Dashed line) with the background scans shown in grey. additions: 0.1 M $^{n}Bu_{4}NPF_{6}$, DMF, glassy carbon disk working electrode, Pt wire unter electrode, Ag/AgCl reference electrode and internally referenced to cocene

List of Tables

Table 1-1 Half reactions, open cell voltage and electrolyte of selected RFBs				
Table 3-1 Standard Reduction Potentials in aqueous solutions for selected CO2 reduction pathways (Referenced to SHE)	35			
Table 4-1 Controlled potential electrolysis (CPE) data ^a	48			

List of Schemes

Scheme 2-1 Synthesis of ligand 2.1 and the corresponding iron complex 2.21	15
Scheme 2-2 Synthesis of cobalt complex 2.31	6
Scheme 2-3 Synthesis of 1,10-phenanthroline-5,6-dione and its iron complexes	9
Scheme 2-4 Synthesis of the iron coordination homoleptic complex 2.62	23
Scheme 2-5 Synthesis of the homoleptic iron complex 2.7	26
Scheme 4-1 Synthesis of KTAPPy·THF and Ni(TAPPy) ₂ 4	16
Scheme 4-2 Potential reactivity of dissociated ligand with carbon dioxide to form carbonate-containing products	52
Scheme 4-3 Synthesis of TAPPy-Br5	54
Scheme 4-4 Attempted synthesis of Synthesis of Fe ^{II} (TAPPy) ₂ L ₂	56
Scheme 4-5 Synthesis of Fe(TAPPy) ₃ 5	59
Scheme 5-1 Proposed catalyst platforms (right) based on known catalysts incorporating porphyrin and pyridine-based macrocycles (left)	58
Scheme 5-2 Synthetic pathway for proligand 5.17	70
Scheme 5-3 Synthetic pathway for proligand 5.47	71
Scheme 5-4 Selected complexation attempts with proligand 5.47	12
Scheme 5-5 Proposed synthetic pathway for a meso-substituted carbene porphyrinoid.	74
Scheme 7-1 Synthesis of free phosphine 7.18	35
Scheme 7-2 Synthesis of oxidized phosphines 7.2 and 7.3	36
Scheme 7-3 Synthesis of coordination complexes 7.4 and 7.5	37
Scheme 7-4 Potential proligands and ligands based on a pentadentate N5 complex used for electrochemical CO ₂ reduction ^[231]) 1

List of Symbols, Abbreviations and Nomenclature

Symbol Defi	Definition					
Å angs	angstrom (unit), 10 ⁻¹⁰ m					
AI-EES Albe	Alberta Innovates Energy and					
Envi	Environmental Solutions					
Ar aryl	aryl					
atm atm	atmosphere (unit)					
ATR atte	nuated total reflectance					
Bpy 2,2'-	bipyridine					
ⁿ Bu buty	rl (normal)					
^t Bu terti	ary-butyl					
°C degr	ee Celsius (centigrade) (unit)					
CAES com	pressed air energy storage					
CFREF Cana	ada First Research Excellence Fund					
CPE cont	rolled potential electrolysis					
CV cvcli	ic voltammogram					
d _n deut	deuterated isotopologue, where n =					
num	number of deuterium atoms					
DDO 2.3-	2,3-dichloro-5,6-dicyano-1,4-					
benz	benzoquinone					
Dipp 2.6-	2.6-di <i>iso</i> propylphenyl					
DCM dich	dichloromethane					
DFT dens	density functional theory					
DMF N.N-	<i>N.N</i> -dimethylformamide					
DMSO dim	dimethylsulfoxide					
e- elect	electron					
ESI elect	electro-spray ionization					
Fc ferre	ferrocene					
GC gas (gas chromatography					
HRMS high	resolution mass spectrometry					
i _{pc} cath	cathodic peak current					
IR infra	infrared					
KHMDS pota	potassium hexamethyldisilazide					
L ligar	nd					
M mol:	molar (unit)					
M meta	al					
min min ¹	utes					
m/z mas	s to charge ratio					
NASA Nati	onal Aeronautics and Space					
Adm	inistration					
NHC N-he	eterocyclic carbene					
NHE norr	nal hydrogen electrode					
	nuclear magnetic resonance					

OAcacetatepparaPCETproton coupled electron transferppmparts per millionpypyridineRgeneric hydrocarbon groupRFBredox-flow batterySECspectroelectrochemistrySHEstandard hydrogen electrodeSMESsupercharged magnetic energy storageTAPPy1,3,5-triazapentadienyl-2,4-bis(2- pyridyl)TBAPF6tetra-n-butylammonium hexafluorophosphateTEMPO(2,2,6,6-Tetramethylpiperidin-1-yl)oxylterpy2,2':6',6"-terpyridineTMC1,4,8,11-tetramethyl-1,4,8,11- tetraazacyclotetradecaneTOFturnover frequencytoltolueneTEOAtriethanolamineTHFtetrahydrofuran 6δchemical shift in ppm	0	ortho
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toltolueneTEOAtriethanolamineTHFtetrahydrofuranδchemical shift in ppm	TOF	turnover frequency
TEOAtriethanolamineTHFtetrahydrofuran δ chemical shift in ppm	tol	toluene
THFtetrahydrofuran δ chemical shift in ppm	TEOA	triethanolamine
δ chemical shift in ppm	THF	tetrahydrofuran
	δ	chemical shift in ppm

Chapter 1 – Introduction to Redox Flow Batteries

1.1 Intermittency of Renewable Energy

The renewable energy provided by wind and solar radiation provides ideal means to decrease CO₂ emissions, yet it is also notorious for intermittent availability, frequently and reliably leading to situations where there is a mismatch between energy supply and demand.^[5] Increasing the proportion of wind and solar energy in the electricity network further exacerbates these issues, leading to the need for a load-leveling method that needs to be reliable, responsive, inexpensive, and capable of handling huge loads. **Figure 1.1** shows the wind energy supplied during daily peak demand in Germany over a year, as a percentage proportion of the total energy consumption at that time.^[6]



Figure 1-1 Wind energy supplied during daily peak demand in Germany over a year, as a percentage proportion of the total energy consumption at that time. Reproduced with permission from reference 6.

These reliable discrepancies between supply and demand result in the destabilization of electrical grids when over 20% of wind and solar energy is incorporated in the energy generation capacity.^[7,8] However, estimations from Bloomberg New Energy Finance propose that renewables could supply up to 50% of the world's electricity by 2050.^[9] This estimation takes into account an expected decrease in the costs of energy

storage, as energy storage can alleviate these intermittencies at the grid level. Current methods of grid energy storage utilize gravitational or kinetic energy as well as pressure, in form of pumped hydro, flywheels, and compressed air, but such facilities can be geographically or geologically limited and have their intrinsic drawbacks (*vide infra*).^[5,10] Other alternatives include the use of large-scale batteries or storing the excess energy in the form of chemical bonds, *i.e.* fuels





1.2 Redox Flow Batteries

The use of grid energy storage for charging/discharging applications requires installments that are capable of storing large amounts of electricity. Different energy storage methods are ranked in **Figure 1.2** based on power output and the amount of energy

stored.^[10] Moving towards the top right of the graph leads to more promising grid energy storage opportunities by being able to provide a large amount of power for a prolonged period of time.

Currently "pumped hydro" represents over 95% of the global grid storage capacity as it is relatively inexpensive, maintains a long calendar life and can store large amounts of energy with high discharge rates.^[11] Pumped hydro has been used to increase the compatibility between the constant energy output of nuclear power plants and the variable energy demand of the electrical grid. However, geographical restrictions and environmental impact limit the feasibility of this method in numerous circumstances. Compressed air energy storage (CAES) typically utilizes large underground caverns for energy storage, yet this option is restricted by geology.^[11] A promising alternative is the use of large-scale batteries that could be implemented without major geographical restrictions. Globally, 5.5 GW of battery storage has been installed, with decreased prices leading to increased utilization over the last couple of years.^[12] For batteries to be applicable to grid storage of renewable energy, they need to be compatible with a large number of charge/discharge cycles, have quick response rates, as well as reasonable capital costs.^[13] Redox-flow batteries (RFBs) represent a promising alternative to conventional electrochemical systems such as lithium-ion and lead-acid batteries. This is because RFBs store the energy in liquid electrolytes and hence they are not subjected to the intrinsic solidelectrolyte degradation processes that limit the life of conventional batteries.^[14] A representation of a classic, all-soluble (top) and a mixed (bottom) redox flow battery is shown in Figure 1.3.^[15]

An all-soluble RFB stores the active species in external reservoirs and pumps it through the cell, enabling the power (W) and storage capacity (Wh⁻¹) to be modified separately while maintaining capacity for over 20,000 cycles in certain designs. The power of the system is determined by the design of the battery stack, and can be tuned by changing the open cell voltage through electrolyte design, size of the electrodes (current collectors)



Figure 1-3 Schematic of an all-soluble RFB (top) and a mixed RFB (bottom). Reproduced from reference 15.

and the number of cells in a stack. The energy storage capacity can also be modified by simply increasing the volume of the external electrolyte tanks, as well as by changing the concentration of redox-active species in solution.^[7] The development of modern redox flow batteries was pioneered by NASA in the 1970s, with a system featuring the Fe^{3+}/Fe^{2+} redox couple for the anolyte solution and the Cr^{3+}/Cr^{2+} redox couple for the catholyte, as well as a hydrochloric acid – based supporting electrolyte.^[7,16,17] The battery provided an open circuit voltage of 1.2V. This seminal work was followed a decade later by the all-vanadium redox flow battery, which has been extensively investigated since its discovery in 1986 and remains the most successful platform to date.^[18–20]

System	Half Reactions	Cell Voltage	Electrolyte (Anode/Cathode)	
All-Soluble		ronage	(initial) satisfies	
All-Vanadium	Anode: $V^{2+} \xleftarrow{\text{charge discharge }} V^{3+} + e^{-}$ Cathode: $VO_{2^{+}} + e^{-} \xleftarrow{\text{charge discharge }} VO^{2+}$	1.4V	H2SO4 / H2SO4	
Vanadium- Polyhalide	Anode: $V^{2+} \xleftarrow{\text{charge discharge }} V^{3+} + e^{-}$ Cathode: $\frac{1}{2}$ Br ₂ + e ⁻ $\xleftarrow{\text{charge discharge }} Br^{-}$	1.3V	VCl3-HCl / NaBr-HCl	
Bromine- Polysulfide	Anode: $2S_2^{2-} \xleftarrow{\text{charge discharge }} S_4^{2-} + 2e^-$ Cathode: $\frac{1}{2}$ Br ₂ + $e^- \xleftarrow{\text{charge discharge }} Br^-$	1.5V	NaS2/NaBr	
Iron- Chromium	Anode: $Fe^{2+} \xleftarrow{charge}{discharge} Fe^{3+} + e^{-}$ Cathode: $Cr^{3+} + e^{-} \xleftarrow{charge}{discharge} Cr^{2+}$	1.2V	HCl/HCl	
Hybrid				
Zinc-Bromine	Anode: $\operatorname{Zn} \xleftarrow{\operatorname{charge}} \xrightarrow{\operatorname{discharge}} \operatorname{Zn}^{2+} + 2e^{-}$ Cathode: $\operatorname{Br}_2 + 2e^{-} \xleftarrow{\operatorname{charge}} \xrightarrow{\operatorname{discharge}} 2\operatorname{Br}^{-}$	1.8V	ZnBr ₂ /ZnBr ₂	
Zinc-Cerium	Anode: $Zn \xleftarrow{charge}{\longrightarrow} Zn^{2+} + 2e^{-}$ Cathode: $2Ce^{4+} + 2e^{-} \xleftarrow{charge}{\longrightarrow} 2Ce^{3+}$	2.4V	CH3SO3H/CH3SO3H	

Table 1-1 Ha	ulf reactions,	open cell	voltage and	l electro	lyte of	selected	l RFBs
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Both the Fe/Cr and all-vanadium RFBs have been tested in commercial applications, along with other systems such as bromine/polysulfide, vanadium/bromine

and hybrid zinc/bromide RFBs involving zinc deposition.^[15,21,22] In addition to commercial applications, a multitude of metal-based systems have been explored, including Zn/Ce,^[23] Zn/Ni,^[24] Ru/Organic,^[25,26] uranium diketonates,^[27] Mn/V,^[28] all-Cu,^[29], all-Fe,^[30,31] soluble lead-acid,^[32] Ti/Fe,^[33] Cu/PbO₂,^[34] and Li/nonmetal^[35,36]. The representative half reactions, cell potentials and electrolytes of a few of the aforementioned RFBs are shown in **Table 1.1**. Intrinsic to different redox couples are the standard reduction potentials of the two active species, which determine the open circuit voltage, and the solubility, which impacts the energy density. Also essential are the redox kinetics, which can limit the current density at the electrode, and the long-term stability of the redox-active species. The electrolyte determines the conductivity of the solution, directly influencing the ohmic losses and hence the efficiency of a given RFB, and also impacts the solubility and stability of the active species. Electrolytes based on acidic solutions are generally preferred, as the inherent conductivity of the solution is much higher in water/acid (6M HCl: 0.84 ohm⁻¹cm⁻¹, 1M HCl: 0.33 ohm⁻¹cm⁻¹) compared to common organic solvents such as acetonitrile (1M TBAPF₆: 0.031 ohm⁻¹cm⁻¹), dimethylformamide (1M TBAPF₆: 0.0145 ohm⁻¹cm⁻¹) or tetrahydrofuran (1M TBAPF₆: 0.0027 ohm⁻¹cm⁻¹).^[37] However, aqueous solutions constrain the maximum open circuit voltage of the battery within the electrochemical solvent window of water, which is determined by the potentials for oxygen and hydrogen evolution at the anode and cathode, respectively. By comparison, organic solvents enable a larger open circuit voltage as the potential window is much larger (H₂O/glassy carbon: ~2V; acetonitrile/TBAPF₆: ~5.5V).^[38] The relatively narrow electrochemical solvent window of water can be expanded using electrodes that inhibit the development of hydrogen and oxygen (increase the overpotential).

Some of the weaknesses associated with RFBs include low energy density, high cost of the membrane and electrolyte active species, as well as the possibility for crossover contamination. Crossover contamination is the permeation of the active species through the membrane and can lead to efficiency losses, capacity decay and deleterious side reactions, well illustrated in the case of the Fe/Cr battery.^[7,39] The use of the same metal in both compartments (single-component RFB) can alleviate some of these issues. The vanadium species that crosses through the membrane in an all-vanadium RFB can be converted into the active material through reduction/oxidation and only leads to a decrease in current efficiency but not a loss in capacity.^[39,40] Further improvements to the initial all-vanadium battery have been implemented, including the use of a mixed-acid electrolyte for increasing conductivity, stability and solubility of the vanadium species, as well as advancements in membrane design.^[41] The all-vanadium RFB continues to have the widest utilization in grid energy storage, however, it features a substantial capital contribution



Figure 1-4 Distribution of costs for a 4 MWh all-vanadium RFB^[14,42]

from the metal source: A representative 4 MWh facility would have approximately 48% of the capital costs resulting from vanadium oxide alone with the second largest contributor being the membrane/separator.^[8] The distribution of costs is shown in **Figure 1.4**.^[14,42] The two main objectives for improving the economic feasibility of RFBs target reducing the cost of active species in solution through using inexpensive metals or organic-based active species, and eliminating the need for a membrane in single-electrolyte systems and hybrid RFBs.

1.3 Organic-based Electrolytes and Redox-active Ligands

Although transition metal based RFBs have featured substantial improvement since their discovery in the 1970s, organic (hydrocarbon-based) active species offer more flexibility for tuning both reduction potentials and solubility, while potentially lowering the cost of the active species. The use of organic redox-active species in RFBs emerged in 2009, when chloroanil was used in the catholyte solution, coupled with a cadmium anode in a mixed RFB.^[43] The first asymmetric all-organic battery quickly followed in 2011, incorporating (2,2,6,6-tetramethylpiperidin-1-yl)oxyl (TEMPO) Nand methylphthalimide.^[44] Systems utilizing organic components continue to be developed, with common frameworks based on quinones/anthraquinones, alkoxybenzenes, viologens and TEMPO, as shown in Figure 1.5 together with their representative reduction potentials. Polymeric organic compounds have also been used to circumvent the diffusion through the membrane while maintaining activity as a charge carrier.^[43,45–52]



Figure 1-5 Selected organic materials and their corresponding reduction potentials in reference to Ag/AgCl

However, even with the development of organic-based active species and continued research into inorganic RFBs, no economically viable RFB for large-scale energy storage is currently available. New electrolytes are needed in order to compete with conventional electrochemical batteries (mostly lithium-ion) and other large-scale storage options. Ligand design can play an important role in the future for RFBs: the reduction potential, electrode kinetics, solubility and stability of inorganic redox couples can be balanced with appropriate structural motifs. The reduction potential of a M^{n+1}/M^n system can be then modified with the appropriate choice of ligands, where the use of strong σ/π donors increases the electron density at the metal center, resulting in an increased stability of higher oxidation states. In addition, ligands that are able to accept electron density can stabilize lower oxidation states, allowing for tuning towards both cathodic and anodic potentials through ligand design. This has been exemplified in aqueous solutions with inexpensive metals such as iron, where the conventional $Fe^{3+/2+}$ redox couple is at 0.77V as a solvated ion in aqueous solution. Commercially available ligand-precursors can tune the reduction potential of the $Fe^{2+/3+}$ redox couple, exploiting the available solvent window

of water. For example, triethanolamine (TEOA) induces a cathodic shift to -0.859V vs. SHE at pH 13, and tripyridyltriazine leads to an anodic shift to 1.484V vs. SHE at pH 0.^[31] The pH of the electrolyte can also be used to shift the redox window of water in order to best suit the electrochemical demands of a given redox system.

The incorporation of appropriate ligands in redox flow batteries enables the use of inexpensive transition metals that would be ill-suited for such applications in their aquated form, M(OH₂)₆ⁿ/M(OH₂)₆ⁿ⁺¹, because of the poor compatibility of their redox potentials with the redox window of water. Additional parameters towards ligand design need to be considered: minimal reorganization energy between oxidation states is needed to maintain fast response rates; the ligand framework needs to form stable complexes across both oxidation states to prevent demetallation or ligand dissociation/association needs to be addressed.^[53] Additionally, the use of redox-active ligands provides an avenue towards single-active-component redox-flow batteries based on metal complexes. This area is relatively scarcely represented in the academic literature and provides modular access to a wide range of properties.^[54–62]

Because of problems associated with membrane-crossover contamination, using the same electrochemically active component in both the anolyte and catholyte continues to be pursued, with the most notable example being the all-vanadium system. This eliminates capacity loss due to crossover. In addition to the all-vanadium system, there are all-copper,^[29,63,64] all-iron,^[31,65–67] all-lead^[68] and all-chromium RFBs.^[69] However, the majority of new RFBs using only one electrochemically active component involve deposition of a metallic plate. These are mixed systems that store energy in a solid medium and effectively negate many of the advantages of RFBs. They are susceptible to dendrite formation and no longer allow for energy and power to be modified separately.^[70] The alliron mixed redox flow battery is of specific interest due to low cost and reduced toxicity of the redox active species, but due to the Fe^{2+/0} reduction potential at -0.44V vs. SHE, a relatively high amount of hydrogen can be produced while charging.^[70,71] The pH of the system can be increased in order to minimize hydrogen production, yet this can lead to other deleterious effects, such as the precipitation of iron hydroxide. The use of coordination complexes has emerged as a solution in all-iron RFBs, stabilizing iron under basic conditions or tuning the reduction potential of the Fe^{2+/3+} redox couple.^[59,72-76] Only one all-soluble, all-iron redox flow battery has been reported to date, using an iron tetraethanolamine /iron cyanide redox pair.^[31] The corresponding cyclic voltammograms (CV) of the active species with their reduction potentials for this asymmetric system are shown in **Figure 1.6**.



Figure 1-6 Cyclic voltammogram of 0.4M [Fe(TEOA)OH]^{-/2-} and 0.4M Fe(CN)₆^{3-/4-} in a 3M sodium hydroxide solution. Reproduced with permission from reference 31.

Although a voltage difference of 1.34 V was obtained, issues with current efficiency and resistance were observed. The crossover of triethanolamine, which can be oxidized under the utilized potentials, through the membrane was identified as a problem. The use of triethanolamine in the $Fe(CN)_6^{2-/3-}$ solution also led to changes in the electrochemical behavior, suggestive of a potential reaction of TEOA with $Fe(CN)_6^{3-}$. Because of the incompatibility of the active species, new design principles need to be pursued in order to afford a stable all-iron, all-aqueous redox flow battery.

In addition to using the same electrochemically active component, the use of redox active ligands emerged as a desirable solution in symmetric redox flow batteries.^[56–60,62] The design of the ligand has led to enhanced solubility, redox activity and improved stability of the overall system through functionalization, chelation and derivatization. Symmetric redox flow batteries reduce the issues associated with crossover of the active species in solution and eliminate the need for mixed-reactant electrolytes.^[77–79] Only a few symmetric redox flow batteries have been reported, and they use either organic active species,^[79–82] or metal coordination complexes incorporating redox-active ligands.^[57–60,69,83] Other complexes incorporating redox-active ligands have been used for asymmetric redox flow batteries. The majority of these systems use electrolytes based on organic solvents in order to afford a greater open circuit voltage and enhanced solubility of the complexes, leading to increased energy density compared to aqueous solutions, but also higher internal resistance.

1.4 Original work

The original work reported herein was carried out within the framework of an AI-EES (Alberta Innovates – Energy and Environment Solutions) funded project (with Drs. Birss and Roberts) aimed at exploring redox flow systems with high practical applicability potential in grid-storage devices. The project targeted primarily all-vanadium systems and also explored other options, which constituted the work described in the next chapter. The requirements of the targeted systems were:

- 1. Simplicity and low cost for large-scale applicability in grid-storage devices.
- 2. Water-based electrolytes for reduced ohmic losses and decreased environmental impact.
- 3. High concentration of active species (> 1M) for acceptable energy density.
- 4. High stability.
- 5. Fast electrode kinetics for high current density

The identification of a single-component system to be tested in membrane-less systems targeted by the Roberts group would have been a bonus. Considering these factors, the synthesis and characterization of metal-coordination complexes suitable as potential charge carries in RFBs will be described. Following initial testing of manganese, chromium, cobalt and iron systems, only the latter have been pursued.

Chapter 2 – Iron-based Redox-Flow Batteries

2.1 Introduction

Initial work targeted an all-iron, all-soluble aqueous redox flow battery using ligand design to tune the Fe^{2+/3+} redox couple. 2,2'-bipyridine (bpy) complexes continue to be investigated as charge carriers in RFBs as cost effective, electrochemically reversible and stable systems.^[25,57,84,85] With commercial availability and stability under a wide range of conditions, the tris(2,2'-bipyridine)iron complex was identified as a potential charge carrier in the catholyte solution. The tris(2,2'-bipyridine)iron complex has been extensively studied, with 2,2'-bipyridine acting as an efficient π acceptor for shifting the Fe^{2+/3+} redox couple to more anodic potentials.^[86] The resulting Fe^{2+/3+} redox couple appears at 1.04V vs. SHE with reversible electrochemistry, moderate solubility and stability in a variety of solvents.^[85,87] Tris(2,2'-bipyridine)iron sulfate was synthesized by simply mixing hydrated iron sulfate and commercial 2,2'-bipyridine in methanol overnight, leading to near-quantitative yields after removing volatiles in vacuo. The sulfate salt was preferred over halides, which had been shown to be capable of exchange with 2,2'-bipyridine.^[87]

Suitable ligand frameworks for anolyte solution complexes usually involve hard, chelating bases such as EDTA, citrate, TEOA or other amines, in order to increase the electron density at the metal center. Chelation helps stabilizing the complexes, however, the alkoxides require a basic pH for increased stability and would not be compatible with tris(2,2'-bipyridine)iron sulfate in the catholyte. Following the remarkable success of 2,2':6',6''-terpyridine ligands (terpy) in coordination chemistry and catalysis, other symmetric, neutral NNN-pincer ligands with pyridine central moieties and unsaturated nitrogen pendant donors have been pursued. Ligand **2.1** was deemed accessible via one

straightforward synthetic step from commercially available starting materials, and the resultant complexes were expected to be soluble in both water and organic solvents. The presence of nitrogen atoms capable to form hydrogen bonds in the ligand framework of **2.1** was expected to enhance the water solubility of its complexes and to offer the possibility to act as neutral(diiminopyridine), mono- (amidoiminopyridine) or dianionic (diamidopyridine) ligand, potentially stabilizing different oxidation states.

2.2 All-iron, all-soluble aqueous RFB

The synthesis of the NNN-pincer ligand **2.1** was carried out via a simple condensation reaction, following the modification of a procedure reported for an anionic phenylene analog (**Scheme 2.1**).^[88] The product was obtained by refluxing dipicolinic acid and 2,2-dimethylpropane-1,3-diamine in ethylene glycol, with the use of p-toluenesulfonic acid as a catalyst.^[89]



Scheme 2-1 Synthesis of ligand 2.1 and the corresponding iron complex 2.2

The corresponding iron complex 2.2 was synthesized by refluxing a methanol solution containing two equivalents of 2.1 and hydrated iron(II) sulfate overnight. Single crystals of complex 2.2 were grown by slow evaporation from a concentrated solution of 2.2 in acetonitrile; however, they were of low quality, so the resultant solid state structure revealed connectivity but could not be used for determination of bond lengths and angles. Although bond lengths and angles cannot be determined from complex 2.2, the pseudo

octahedral structure is similar to that of the corresponding cobalt (III) complex **2.3**. This was synthesized by refluxing a methanol solution containing two equivalents of **2.1** and cobalt(II) chloride hexahydrate in air overnight (**Scheme 2.2**). Under exclusion of air, the reaction failed to produce the desired compound, confirming that atmospheric oxygen was responsible for the oxidation of Co(II) to Co(III).





Single crystals suitable for X-ray crystallography were obtained by slow evaporation of a concentrated solution of **2.3** in a methanol– toluene mixture. Two of the chloride ions are weakly hydrogen bonded to the cation (Cl1…N2 = 3.177(4) Å) while the third bridges the cations via weak hydrogen bonds, forming a linear supramolecular arrangement (Cl2…N4 = 3.208(4) Å). The N1-C6 and N2-C6 bonds are very similar in length (1.312(4) and 1.331(4) Å, respectively), indicating extensive electron delocalization over the amidine fragment. Additional characterization of the cobalt complex and a visual representation of hydrogen bonding of the amidine fragment with counterions can be found in a recently published article.^[89]



Figure 2-1 Solid-state structures of pseudo-octahedral complexes **2.2** (left) and **2.3** (right). The thermal ellipsoids are drawn at 50% probability. Selected bond lengths (Å) and angles (deg) for complex **2.3**: Co1–N3 = 1.861(2), Co1–N1 = 1.936(2), Co1–N5 = 1.937(2), N3–C7 = 1.330(4), N3–C11 = 1.343(4), N1–C6 = 1.312(4), N2–C6 = 1.331(4), N5–C12 = 1.311(4), N4–C12 = 1.330(4); N1–Co1–N5 = 163.68(9), N3–Co1–N30 = 178.96(15).

The cyclic voltammogram of complex 2.2 in 0.1M Na₂SO₄ solution reveals an

 $Fe^{2+/3+}$ redox couple at 0.12 V vs. SHE. The redox couple is reversible with a 62mV peak



Figure 2-2 CVs of 1mmol solutions of complex **2.2** (left) and Fe(bpy)₃SO₄ (right) at 0.1V s⁻¹ under argon. Conditions: 0.1 M Na₂SO₄, H₂O, glassy carbon disk working electrode, Pt wire counter electrode, saturated Ag/AgCl reference electrode.

separation and doesn't contain any other observable features within the solvent window of water. (Figure 2.2).

The initial targets for an all-iron redox flow battery were achieved with the current system, where the syntheses of both redox pairs are simple, high yielding and stem from commercially available reagents. When complex **2.2** is combined with Fe(bpy)₃SO₄, a potential difference of 0.92V is obtained, in comparison to a 1.12 V for the mixed all-iron RFB that involves deposition of metallic iron (**Figure 2.2**). Complex **2.2** maintains stability in aqueous solution, as the cyclic voltammetry shows no changes after 6 months of storage (1mmol solution of **2.2** in 0.1M Na₂SO₄). Both complex **2.2** and Fe(bpy)₃SO₄ showed reasonable electrode kinetics in the preliminary analysis (based on small peak separation in the voltammogram). The concentration of complex **2.2** in aqueous solutions was low (*ca.* 0.2M), although modification of the ligand backbone to increase solubility remains an option.

The synthesis of complex **2.2** and Fe(bpy)₃SO₄ was scaled up to 25 grams and provided to the Roberts group at the University of Calgary for testing within a small scale RFB. An H-cell can be used for preliminary testing of cycling efficiency and is proposed for future work.

2.3 Redox Active Ligands for Application in Symmetric RFBs

Parallel to the work on the asymmetric all-iron all-aqueous redox flow battery, iron coordination complexes featuring redox active ligands for symmetric RFBs that could be used in a membrane-less RFBs were pursued. Quinone-based organic compounds have shown promising electrochemical behavior for use in organic RFBs, so ligands incorporating quinone or hydroquinone functional groups were identified.

The electrochemical behavior of 1,10-phenanthroline-5,6-dione metal complexes is relatively well understood, with a pH-dependent 2 electron reduction of the quinone to generate the corresponding catecholate.^[90,91] The ligand framework is also capable of delocalizing electron density throughout the π^* orbital, leading to an anodic shift of metal redox potentials for coordinated complexes. The majority of electrochemical characterization of known homoleptic iron complex 2.4 involved the use of organic solvents; ^[92–94] we tested its suitability as electrolyte in a symmetric redox flow battery operating in acidic aqueous conditions. 1,10-phenanthroline-5,6-dione is synthesized from 1,10-phenanthroline by oxidation in a nitric acid/sulfuric acid solution. The ligand can be simply collected by filtration and did not need any additional purification before complexation with iron. The synthesis of iron complex 2.4 proceeds readily by refluxing the corresponding iron salt with the ligand in a methanol solution (Scheme 2.3). Single crystals suitable for X-ray diffraction were grown by layering a concentrated acetonitrile solution of $2.4(BF_4)_2$ in benzene. The resulting homoleptic pseudo-octahedral iron complex crystallizes as a racemic crystal containing both enantiomers; the structure of the righthanded enantiomer can be seen in **Figure 2.3**.



Scheme 2-3 Synthesis of 1,10-phenanthroline-5,6-dione and its iron complexes



Figure 2-3 Solid state structure of the cationic complex $[2.4]^{2+}$ at 50% probability ellipsoids.

The electrochemistry of complex $2.4(BF_4)_2$ in acetonitrile matches literature values with the Fe^{2+/3+} redox couple at 1.36 V vs. SCE and a single wave for the ligand reduction at -0.18 V, resulting into a potential difference of 1.54 V (**Figure 2.4**). The Fe^{2+/3+} redox couple is reversible and well separated from the ligand reduction, although the complex is



Figure 2-4 CV of a 1mmol solution of complex **2.4** at 0.1V s⁻¹ under argon. Conditions: 0.1 M TBAPF₆, acetonitrile, glassy carbon disk working electrode, Pt wire counterelectrode, Ag/AgCl pseudo-reference electrode and internally referenced to ferrocene.

known to adsorb onto glassy carbon surfaces under reducing potentials in organic solvents. This was confirmed in the experimental voltammogram featuring a very narrow, symmetric feature corresponding to the oxidation of the ligand, which is suggestive of a non-diffusion process.

After preliminary characterization of the electrochemical behavior of $2.4(BF_4)_2$ in acetonitrile, the corresponding iron sulfate complex was synthesized, aiming for increased water solubility. With the $Fe^{2+/3+}$ redox couple at a highly anodic potential, the use of an acidic solution was necessary in order to shift the reduction potential of water oxidation to more anodic potentials. Because of the pH dependence of the reduction of 1,10phenathroline-5-6-dione redox couple, the potential for ligand reduction was also shifted to 0.3 V vs. Ag/AgCl, at a potential that would avoid proton reduction while charging. However, at this pH the quinone redox couple had a large peak separation between oxidation and reduction that is consistent with electrochemically irreversible reactions and is detrimental for the kinetics of the system. The electrochemical irreversibility could be due to an equilibrium involving the partial hydrolysis of the dione to afford a geminal diol that is redox-inactive. This type of transformation is known to occur under acidic conditions.^[92] In addition, the $Fe^{2+/3+}$ redox couple was no longer reversible at a pH of 2, with the reduction of generated Fe^{3+} back to Fe^{2+} producing very low current (**Figure 2.5**). Unfortunately, higher pH solutions could not be utilized for increasing the stability of the $Fe^{2+/3+}$ couple because of the aforementioned water oxidation, and so complex 2.4 was deemed unsuitable for further studies in aqueous solutions.



Figure 2-5 CV of a 1mmol solution of complex [**2.4**]SO₄ at $0.1V \text{ s}^{-1}$ under argon. Conditions: 0.01 M HCl, water, glassy carbon disk working electrode, Pt wire counter electrode, saturated Ag/AgCl reference electrode.

Based on the electrochemical results from complex **2.4**, a new ligand platform with greater stability of the Fe^{2+/3+} redox couple and a ligand reduction that would be less prone to side reactivity was targeted. Computational work for screening a wide variety of quinone-based organic charge carriers regarded 9,10-anthraquinone frameworks as the most suitable candidates for the anolyte of an RFB, out of a total of 1710 computed redox couples.^[95] In addition, utilizing a tridentate ligand such as terpyridine instead of a bipyridine backbone should increase the stability of the complex. With this in mind, a framework incorporating a 9,10-anthraquinone with a terpyridine central donor was identified as a potentially suitable ligand for an iron-based symmetric RFB. The parasubstituted terpyridine **2.5** was synthesized, with the synthetic pathway building the central



Scheme 2.4 Synthesis of 9,10-anthroquinone substituted terpyridine 2.5 22
terpyridine framework from acetylpyridine, ammonia and a substituted aldehyde (**Scheme 2.4**).^[96,97]

Multiple pathways for the synthesis of the 9,10-anthraquinone substituted aldehyde were attempted with the pathway that ultimately proved successful outlined in **Scheme 2.4**. A Friedel-Crafts acylation with toluene and phthalic anhydride afforded 2-methylanthraquinone in high yields. This was subsequently brominated, hydrolyzed and oxidized in order to deliver 9,10-dioxo-9,10-dihydroanthracene-2-carbaldehyde as a light brown solid. The aldehyde was then reacted with 2-acetylpyridine and ammonium hydroxide to form the para-substituted terpyridine **2.5**. This was purified using column chromatography prior to complexation, with either iron sulfate or iron tetrafluoroborate affording the respective iron complexes (**Scheme 2.5**). When iron sulfate was used as an iron source, the resulting product was insoluble in water and had a low solubility in organic solvents, leading to the remainder of work focusing on the iron tetrafluoroborate complex **2.6**.



Scheme 2-4 Synthesis of the iron coordination homoleptic complex 2.6.

Layering a concentrated solution of **2.6** in acetonitrile with benzene resulted in what appeared to be a single-domain crystalline material, however, when the sample was sent to

the Canadian Light Source for analysis, it was polysynthetic in nature and only diffracted out to 1.8 Å. Additional crystallization attempts are ongoing in order to determine the solid state structure, although microcrystalline products are reproducibly obtained. ESI-MS confirmed the presence of the dication **2.6** as the most abundant species (ESI HRMS: m/zcalc. for $[C_{58}H_{34}N_6O_4Fe]^{2+}$: 467.0990. Found: 467.1013). Electrochemical analysis by cyclic voltammetry in acetonitrile revealed an Fe^{2+/3+} redox couple at 0.74 V vs. Fc/Fc⁺ with approximately 61mV peak separation, and a ligand reduction at -1.12 V with a 122 mV peak separation (**Figure 2.6**).



Figure 2-6 CV of a 1mmol solution of complex **2.6** at $0.1V \text{ s}^{-1}$ under argon. Conditions: 0.1 M TBAPF₆, acetonitrile, glassy carbon disk working electrode, Pt wire counter electrode, Ag/AgCl pseudo-reference electrode and internally referenced to ferrocene.

A potential difference of 1.86 V is observed, with peak separations maintained across scan rates revealing an electrochemically reversible process. Furthermore, based on current density and peak separation, the ligand undergoes a two electron reduction process, leading to increased energy density for the anolyte solution without voltage losses. With

promising electrochemical features, cycling of the complex with an H-Cell and chronoamperometry is planned for future work but has not been completed to date.

An additional ligand scaffold was prepared parallel to the work on complex 2.6, featuring a tridentate nitrogen based ligand and a hydroquinone/quinone functional group. With bipyridylimino isoindoline complexes showing promising reversibility and cycling anolyte, the corresponding hydroquinone 1,3-bis(2-pyridylimino)-4,7as an dihydroxyisoindole was targeted.^[83] The addition of alcohol functional groups on the parent bipyridylimino isoindoline framework could also tailor the solubility of the complex in polar solvents, in addition to providing a suitable redox couple for cycling efficiency. 1,3-bis(2-pyridylimino)-4,7-dihydroxyisoindole was synthesized by refluxing 2-amino pyridine and dicyanohydroquinone in 1-butanol with CaCl₂ for 20 days.^[98] The synthesis was low yielding (17%) but afforded the ligand in high purity for further complexation with anhydrous FeBr₂ in the presence of a base (Scheme 2.6).^[99] Other attempts at complexation included deprotonation of the ligand precursor with KHMDS and the use of Fe₂Cl₄(THF)₃ or anhydrous FeCl₂, although a crude black product was formed after each attempt. This was extracted with DCM and the solution was layered with pentane. This resulted in the precipitation of relatively large fraction of the material as an amorphous black solid that was filtered off, while a small amount of material crystallized on the walls of the vessel. A single crystal was analyzed by x-ray diffraction, revealing a neutral, homoleptic iron complex with a pseudo-octahedral geometry. The resulting solid-state structure shows hydrogen bonding between the alcohols and imines of the ligand, assisting a planar structure with a conjugated π system (Figure 2.7).



Scheme 2-5 Synthesis of the homoleptic iron complex 2.7



Figure 2-7 Solid-state structure of pseudo-octahedral complex **2.7** in a combination of thermal ellipsoids at 50% probability and wireframe.

Attempts at large scale purification of **2.7** were unsuccessful, in each case yielding the same amorphous black precipitate that was difficult to characterize and did not provide a satisfactory elemental analysis. Cyclic voltammetry of this product **2.7** showed multiple redox features and poor resolution. With a low-yielding ligand synthesis and poor electrochemical results after unsuccessful attempts at purification, investigations of complex **2.7** were halted and efforts were directed towards the aforementioned complex **2.6**.

2.4 Conclusion

The synthesis and characterization of iron coordination complexes for targeted use in redox flow batteries has been discussed. An all-iron, all-soluble system based on $[Fe(bpy)_3]^{2+}$ and complex **2.2** revealed a potential difference of 0.92 V with reversible $Fe^{2+/3+}$ redox couples, all within the solvent window of water. The syntheses of both complexes was scaled up for chronoamperometry testing in an H-Cell. Although the use of some quinone-based ligands resulted in poor electrochemical behavior (**2.4**) or difficulty in purification (**2.7**), an iron coordination complex featuring an anthraquinone-substituted terpyridine **2.6** shows promising redox activity as a single complex for anolyte and catholyte solutions. It should be noted that the solubility of the aforementioned complexes is lower than required for practical applications, but they could be functionalized with solubilizing groups in subsequent studies in order to increase the energy density of the system.

2.5 Experimental

Ligand 2.1

Pyridine-2,6-dicarboxylic acid (14.460g, 86.5mmol), 2,2-dimethylpropane diamine (24.00mL, 200mmol) and p-toluenesulfonic acid monohydrate (1.335g, 7mmol) were placed in a 250 mL round bottom flask equipped with magnetic stirrer and refluxed overnight in 150 mL of ethylene glycol. After cooling the resulting solution in an ice bath, the white solid that precipitated was collected by filtration and suspended in water (20 mL)

in an ultrasonic bath in order to remove residual glycol. The suspension was filtered and washed with slight amounts of acetone to afford compound **2.1** (17.031g, 66% yield) as a white powder. ¹H NMR (400 MHz, methanol- d_4): δ 1.00 (s, 12H), 3.14 (s, 8H), 7.92 (t, 1H), 8.11 (d, 2H,). ¹³C NMR (101 MHz, methanol- d_4) δ 25.3, 27.0, 54.6, 122.8, 138.9, 151.2, 153.7.

Complex 2.2

Compound **2.1** (10.000g, 33.4mmol) and iron (II) sulfate heptahydrate (3.704 grams, 13.3mmol) were placed in a 250 mL round bottom flask equipped with a magnetic stirrer and stirred overnight in 100mL of de-ionized water at room temperature. Afterwards, the water was removed in-vacuo and the resulting solid washed with acetone to remove additional ligand to afford complex **2.2** (10.780g, 86% yield) as a dark purple solid. MS (ESI HRMS): m/z calc. for $[C_{34}H_{50}N_{10}Fe]^{2+}$: 327.1779. Found: 327.1785.

Complex 2.3

Ligand **2.1** (450 mg, 1.51 mmol) and cobalt(II) chloride hexahydrate (180 mg, 0.75 mmol) were refluxed overnight in methanol (15 mL) in a 100mL round bottom flask equipped with a magnetic stir bar under ambient atmosphere. The resulting black precipitate was subsequently filtered off and the filtrate was evaporated to dryness with a rotary evaporator. Complex **3** was isolated as a yellow-green solid. (402 mg, 73% yield). ¹H NMR (400 MHz, D₂O): δ 0.81 (s, 12H), 1.97 (s, 4H), 3.17 (s, 4H), 8.52 (d, 2H), 8.79 (t, 1H). ¹³C NMR (101 MHz, D₂O) δ 24.2, 27.8, 49.9, 54.3, 126.0, 143.8, 153.7, 157.2. HRMS (ESI): m/z calcd for C₃₄H₄₉N₁₀CoCl: 691.3162, found: 691.3138.

Fe(Bpy)₃SO₄

2,2'-bipyridine (7.780g, 50mmol) and iron (II) sulfate heptahydrate (4.615g, 16.6mmol) were placed in a 250 mL round bottom flask equipped with a magnetic stirrer and stirred overnight in 100mL of de-ionized water at room temperature. Afterwards, the water was removed in-vacuo and the resulting iron complex was collected (10.305g, quantitative) MS (ESI HRMS): m/z calc. for $[C_{30}H_{24}N_{6}Fe]^{2+}$: 262.0700. Found: 262.0703.

1,10-phenanthroline-5,6-dione

1,10-phenanthroline (2.000g, 11mmol) and KBr (2.001g, 17mmol) were dissolved in 20mL of H₂SO₄ and 10mL of HNO₃ in a 100mL round bottom flask equipped with a magnetic stir bar and reflux condenser. The resulting solution was heated to reflux for three hours, after which the solution was poured over 500mL of ice. The acidic solution was then neutralized with a 2M NaOH solution until the pH of the resulting solution was between 6 and 7, then the product was extracted out of the aqueous layer with 3 fractions of CHCl₃ (50mL). The resulting organic solution was dehydrated with anhydrous Na₂SO₄ and filtered, then brought to dryness under reduced pressure to afford 1,10-phenanthroline-5,6-dione (1.750g, 75% yield) as a yellow solid. ¹H NMR (400 MHz, Chloroform-*d*) δ 9.09 (dd, 1H), 8.47 (dd, 1H), 7.57 (dd, 1H). ¹³C NMR (101 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 178.62, 156.38, 152.86, 137.29, 128.04, 125.61.

[2.4]SO₄

For testing in aqueous solutions, 1,10-phenanthroline-5,6-dione (1.000g, 4.8mmol) and $FeSO_4(H_2O)_7$ (0.440g, 1.6mmol) were dissolved in 10mL of methanol and heated to reflux over a period of three hours. After cooling, the resulting solution was evaporated to dryness under reduced pressure and washed with slight amounts of acetone to afford [2.4]SO₄ (1.223g, 97% yield) as a dark red solid. For testing in organic solutions, $Fe(BF_4)_2(H_2O)_6$

was used in place of FeSO₄(H₂O)₇, however the procedure remained otherwise the same. MS (ESI HRMS): m/z calc. for [C₃₆H₁₈N₆O₆Fe]²⁺: 343.0313. Found: 343.0301.

Compound 2.5

Phthalic anhydride (10.050g, 67.8mmol) and 40g of toluene were placed in a 250mL 3neck round bottom flask equipped with a magnetic stir bar and connected to a bubbler under inert atmosphere. After cooling the suspension to 0 °C, anhydrous AlCl₃ (20.072g, 151mmol) was added through a side arm with positive argon pressure and immediate HCl gas was formed. After 15 minutes, the solution became dark orange and was heated to 95°C over a period of 30 minutes and maintained at 95 °C for 2.5 hours. After heating, the solution was cooled in an ice bath and ice water was added to quench any residual AlCl₃. After quenching, 20mL of concentrated HCl was added to precipitate out carboxylic acid intermediate (16.840g) as a white powder, which was subsequently washed with cold water. After drying, the carboxylic acid intermediate was dissolved in 50mL of fuming sulfuric acid and heated to 100°C under inert atmosphere for 2 hours. After heating, the resulting solution was cooled in an ice bath and deionized water was added dropwise. The resulting suspension was filtered and washed with plenty of water to yield 2-methyl-9,10-Anthracenedione (12.247g, 81% yield) as a dark brown solid.

2-methyl-9,10-Anthracenedione (9.581g, 43mmol), N-bromosuccinimide (8.554g, 48mmol) and benzoyl peroxide (1.710g, 7mmol) were dissolved in 85mL of carbon tetrachloride in a 250mL round bottom flask equipped with a magnetic stir bar. The resulting solution was heated to reflux over a period of 24 hours, then cooled to room temperature. The resulting suspension was filtered and washed with 100mL of 20% NaOH,

followed by water and slight amount of acetone to yield 2-(bromomethyl)-9,10-Anthracenedione (11.945g, 92% yield) as a yellow solid.

2-(bromomethyl)-9,10-Anthracenedione (11.945g, 40mmol) was suspended in a DMSO/H₂O mixture, (450mL DMSO and 650mL of H₂O), and heated to 100 °C for 24 hours in a 2L three-neck round bottom flask equipped with a magnetic stir bar and reflux condenser. After heating, the solution was filtered while hot, and the filtrate cooled to room temperature precipitating the product from solution. The solid was collected by filtration to yield 2-(hydroxymethyl)-9,10-Anthracenedione as a brown solid (6.250g, 66% yield).

2-(hydroxymethyl)-9,10-Anthracenedione (6.250g, 26mmol) and pyridinium chlorochromate (8.125g, 38mmol) were dissolved in 315mL of dichloromethane in a 1L round bottom flask equipped with a magnetic stir bar. The resulting solution was heated to reflux for 12 hours. After heating, volatiles were removed with a rotary evaporator and the resulting solid was washed with water and acetone to remove residual starting material. After washing, 9,10-dihydro-9,10-dioxo-2-anthracenecarboxaldehyde (5.293g, 86% yield) was obtained as a light brown solid.

9,10-dihydro-9,10-dioxo-2-anthracenecarboxaldehyde (3.000g, 12.7mmol) was dissolved in 1.0L of ethanol, and a separate solution containing 2-acetylpyridine (3.020g, 25mmol), KOH (2.80g, 50mmol) and 100mL of concentrated ammonium hydroxide was added dropwise. The resulting suspension was stirred at room temperature for 24 hours, then heated to reflux for an additional 4 hours. After heating, the suspension was filtered and washed with ethanol to yield 4'-[9,10-Dioxo-9,10-dihydroanthracen-2-yl]-2,2':6',2''terpyridine **5** (2.440g, 44% yield) as a crude light brown solid. This product was then purified by column chromatography using CHCl₃, DCM, and THF as eluents.

Complex 2.6

Complexation attempts with FeSO₄ resulted in insoluble precipitates, so complexes with $Fe(BF_4)_2$ was used instead. Compound **2.5** (15mg, 0.03mmol) and $Fe(BF_4)(H_2O)_6$ (6mg, 0.015mmol) were dissolved in 10mL of acetonitrile in a 50mL round bottom flask equipped with a magnetic stir bar and reflux condenser. The resulting solution turned immediately to a dark purple solution, then was heated to reflux for 24 hours. After heating, the solution was evaporated to dryness in vacuo and the purple powder was subsequently washed with THF and pentane to remove residual impurities. MS (ESI HRMS): m/z calc. for $[C_{58}H_{34}N_6O_4Fe]^{2+}$: 467.0990. Found: 467.1013.

1,3-bis(2-pyridylimino)-4,7-dihydroxyisoindole

Dicyanohydroquinone (1.002g, 6.3mmol), 2-aminopyridine (1.230g, 13.1mmol) and CaCl₂ (0.140g, 1.3mmol) was added to a 100mL round bottom flask equipped with a magnetic stir bar and refluxed in 20mL of n-butanol over a period of 20 days under inert atmosphere. After refluxing, the resulting solution was poured into 500mL of water resulting in the precipitation of a yellow-brown solid. The resulting precipitate was collected by filtration and washed with 20mL of deionized water to remove residual n-butanol. The crude product was then dried in vacuo and subsequently washed with slight amounts of dichloromethane to yield 1,3-bis(2-pyridylimino)-4,7-dihydroxyisoindole (0.350g, 17% yield) as a yellow solid. ¹H NMR (400 MHz, Chloroform-*d*) δ 13.36 (s, 1H), 8.58 (ddd, 2H), 7.76 (td, 2H), 7.36 (dt, 2H), 7.13 (ddd, 2H), 7.01 (s, 2H). ¹³C NMR (101 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 159.29, 154.87, 149.02, 147.98, 138.15, 122.47, 121.43, 120.40, 116.26. **Complex 2.7**

1,3-bis(2-pyridylimino)-4,7-dihydroxyisoindole (350mg, 1mmol) and anhydrous FeBr₂ (112mg, 0.5mmol) was dissolved in 9mL of anhydrous methanol in a 2-neck 100mL round bottom flask attached to a swivel frit apparatus. The resulting solution was brought to reflux and 1mL of trimethylamine was added to the reaction vessel, in which heating was continued for an additional 16 hours. After cooling the solution, the resulting suspension was filtered through the swivel frit apparatus, and the collected solid dried in vacuo resulting in a crude mixture containing iron complex **7** (260mg, 72% yield) as an opaque solid. Single crystals suitable for x-ray diffraction were grown by layering a concentrated DCM solution with pentane over a period of three days. MS (ESI HRMS): m/z calc. for $[C_{36}H_{25}N_{10}O_4Fe]^+$: 717.1410. Found: 717.1413.

Chapter 3 – Introduction to the Electrochemical Reduction of Carbon Dioxide 3.1 Background Information

Another alternative in mitigating the increasing concentrations of atmospheric carbon dioxide is its electrochemical reduction. When the supply of renewable energy exceeds demand, the excess energy can be stored in chemical bonds, converting carbon dioxide into fuels or value added chemicals.^[100] This could enable a carbon-neutral cycle where applications such as aviation/shipping can still utilize hydrocarbon-based fuels without a net-increase in CO_2 emissions.^[101]

The electrochemical reduction of CO_2 is an energetically and kinetically challenging process. The single electron reduction of the CO₂ molecule requires significant reorganizational energy to form an unstable radical anion, leading to a large thermodynamic barrier to reduction.^[102] The use of proton-coupled multielectron reduction can circumvent this problem, but leads to a multitude of different potential products. Table **3.1** summarizes a few of the possible reductive pathways with the corresponding potentials. Because some of the equations involve proton-coupled processes, the reduction of protons to dihydrogen also needs to be considered as a competitive process. Typically, hydrogen production is thermodynamically favored or comparable to the reduction of carbon dioxide and needs to be kinetically controlled or have a relatively high overpotential based on the electrodes/catalysts that are used. As seen in Table 3.1, the use of multiple proton-coupled electron transfers for the reduction of CO_2 is also favored over the two electron, two proton reduction pathways, however, it requires multiple bond breaking and bond forming elemental steps. This renders the electrochemical reduction of carbon dioxide to highly reduced carbon products such as methane and methanol extremely challenging to target

with a homogeneous single-site catalyst or heterogeneous systems.^[102] Reducing carbon dioxide *via* a two electron, two proton process is much more feasible, leading to the majority of reported catalysts for the electrochemical reduction of CO₂ producing carbon monoxide or formic acid.^[103] Carbon monoxide is a highly valuable synthon for well established, large scale industrial process such as the Fisher-Tropsch process for the production of fuels.

Table 3-1 Standard Reduct	tion Potentials in	aqueous solutions	for selected C	O_2 reduction
pathways (Referenced to S	HE)			

Reduction Process	E ⁰ (V)
$CO_2 + e^- \rightarrow CO_2^{\bullet -}$	-1.90
$2CO_2 + 2e^- \rightarrow C_2O_4^{2-}$	-0.59
$CO_2 + 2H^+ + 2e^- \rightarrow HCOOH$	-0.25
$CO_2 + H_2O + 2e^- \rightarrow HCOO^- + OH^-$	-1.08
$CO_2 + 2H^+ + 2e^- \rightarrow CO + H_2O$	-0.11
$CO_2 + H_2O + 2e^- \rightarrow CO + 2OH^-$	-0.93
$\mathrm{CO}_2 + 4\mathrm{H}^+ + 4\mathrm{e}^- \rightarrow \mathrm{CH}_2\mathrm{O} + \mathrm{H}_2\mathrm{O}$	-0.07
$CO_2 + 6H^+ + 6e^- \rightarrow CH_3OH + H_2O$	+0.02
$\mathrm{CO}_2 + 8\mathrm{H}^+ + 8\mathrm{e}^- \rightarrow \mathrm{CH}_4 + 2\mathrm{H}_2\mathrm{O}$	+0.17

The field for electrochemical reduction of CO_2 started with copper and zinc metal cathodes in 1904.^[104] However, heterogeneous catalysts can feature different faces, defects and surface sites for activation, leading to poor selectivity. The selectivity issues are difficult to address, as solid-state catalysts are challenging to modify the chemistry that occurs at the surface and is difficult to investigate.^[105,106] A wide variety of electrodes have been tested for CO_2 reduction, with product selectivity falling under three general categories. In a bicarbonate buffer, late transition metals such as Sn, Pb, Tl, Hg and Cd

produce formate at potentials more negative than -1.5V vs. SHE. Precious metals, including Ag, Au and Pd lead to CO as the major carbon-containing product, at potentials more negative than -1.1V, while copper produces multiple different products, including CH₄, CO, and formate.^[107] It is important to note that the parasitic reduction to dihydrogen generally occurs in appreciable amounts (5-20%) and side reactions leading to other carbon-containing products are common. Although continued development has provided heterogeneous systems such as silver nanoparticles with high levels of activity and faradaic efficiency,^[108,109] the remainder of this work will focus on the use of homogenous single-site catalysts.

3.2 Homogeneous Catalysis for the Electrochemical Reduction of CO₂

The field of homogeneous electrochemical reduction of CO_2 started in the 1970s with metal phthalocyanines and porphyrins.^[110–112] A few other homogeneous catalysts emerged in the following decade including rhenium bipyridine,^[113,114] iron porphyrins/clusters^[115,116] and other complexes utilizing nitrogen-based macrocycles^[117]. Advantages of homogeneous single-site catalysts include the high tunability and comparable ease of study, which has led to a diverse derivatization of the aforementioned catalysts and provided mechanistic insight into CO_2 reduction.

However, although the field of electrochemical reduction of CO_2 is well established, the use of different conditions during electrolysis and the relationship between overpotential and catalytic activity has hindered the comparison between reported catalysts. A recent benchmark in the field involves the use of a "Tafel plot" which provides the relationship between overpotential and turnover frequency with a specific catalyst. When overlaying different catalysts, the Tafel plot allows for a quick, visual comparison, with the highest performers in the top left quadrant of the graph at a low overpotential and high turnover frequency. Selected catalysts are shown in **Figure 3.1** with their corresponding Tafel plot to show the relationship between overpotential and turnover frequency.^[118] Other important metrics include turnover numbers relating to the stability of the catalyst and faradaic efficiency to identify the selectivity of carbon dioxide reduction over dihydrogen production.



Figure 3-1 Tafel plots of selected catalysts for the electrochemical reduction of CO_2 to CO. (Abbreviations: iron tetraphenylporphyin (TPPFe), *o,o*'-phenolic-TPPFe (CAT), bis(*o,o*'-phenolic)bis(pentaflurophenyl)-TPPFe (FCAT), *p*-trimethylammonium-TPPFe (WSCAT). Reproduced with permission from reference 118.

3.3 Mechanistic Insight and Ligand Design Considerations

The proposed reduction pathways on molecular catalysts involve multiple electron transfers and chemical transformations in sequence, with the order of elemental steps under slight variation depending on the catalyst under study. Proton-coupled electron transfers (PCET) are also present under certain conditions, lowering the activation energy in catalytic cycles and increasing the rate of catalysis.^[119–121] For the formation of CO, the reduced active species in solution undergoes nucleophilic attack onto the carbon dioxide molecule, leading to a charge transfer into its π^* orbital and η^1 -binding through carbon. This effectively reduces the CO₂ molecule upon coordination, leading to a bent geometry similar to the singly reduced radical anion.^[103] Two subsequent protonation and reduction (or PCET) steps leads to C-O cleavage and the loss of water, followed by the dissociation of CO and regeneration of the active catalyst in solution. This protonation/reduction



Figure 3-2 Mechanism of CO₂ reduction with selected manganese catalysts

also be further tuned with ligand modification (Figure 3.2). [122,123]

The use of Brønsted or Lewis acids to stabilize the metallocarboxylate and assist in cleaving one the C-O bonds can lead to further rate enhancement; for example, varying levels of alkaline earth metals and have shown pseudo-first order kinetics in combination with iron porphyrins. Pseudo-second order kinetics were observed with the use of alkali metals and weak Brønsted acids with the aforementioned catalyst, leading to CO_3^{2-}/CO and H₂O/CO products respectively by a "push-pull" mechanism.^[124,125] The use of weak Brønsted acids has continued to be utilized throughout the field for CO₂ reduction across a variety of catalysts, although the use of stronger Brønsted acids has been hindered by the propensity for strong acids to assist dihydrogen production under reducing conditions. This has been circumvented through appropriate ligand design, where ligands incorporating phenolic groups, amines and amides in the secondary coordination sphere increases the "local proton concentration" around the activated CO₂ molecule, without the presence of strong acids in solution. Initially shown on the iron-porphyrin system,^[126–128] the use of high local-proton concentration has been tested across ligand platforms including bipyridine^[129,130] and nitrogen-based macrocycles,^[131,132] reducing the overpotential and increasing the turnover frequency compared to that of the parent systems.

Because multiple electrons are needed to reduce CO_2 to value-added products, redox noninnocent frameworks are traditionally used in order to accommodate additional electron density and lead to anodic shifts in the reduction potential. Some of the parent frameworks have been modified with electron-withdrawing groups to shift the reduction to even more anodic potentials. One such example involved the replacement of meso-phenyl groups in an iron-tetraphenylporphyrin complex with 1, 2, 3 or 4 pentafluorophenyl groups, respectively. Electrochemical analysis of the corresponding iron complexes showed a decrease in overpotential alongside an undesired decrease in catalytic activity with additional pentaflurophenyl groups.^[133,134] The decreased rate and overpotential could be explained by additional electron density being delocalized across the porphyrin framework, leading to a less nucleophilic metal center and enabling a more anodic reduction potential. Surprisingly, when the meso-phenyl groups were substituted at the ortho-position with trimethylanilinium groups, the electron withdrawing nature of the ammonium group lowered the overpotential and led to an unprecedented *rise* in catalytic activity. The increase in catalytic activity is due to through-space coulombic interactions with the initial CO₂ adduct, leading to the most active molecular catalyst to date. A maximum turnover frequency (TOF_{max}) of 10^6 s⁻¹ at an overpotential of 220mV was determined for the electrochemical reduction of CO₂ to CO, and no significant catalyst degradation was observed over 3.5 days of electrolysis.^[135]

The highest turnover frequency in a manganese-based catalyst also stemmed from modification of a ligand framework, with incorporation of electron donating substituents in contrast to the use of secondary sphere effects. The secondary sphere effects of methoxy or phenoxy groups have led to increased rates and decreased overpotentials.^[122,136,137] The highest reported TOF_{max} for a manganese based catalyst (320,000 s⁻¹) were achieved by replacing 2,2'-bipyridine for a bidentate N-heterocyclic carbene ligand in Mn(bpy)(CO)₃Br.^[138] The strongly donating carbene ligands imposing nucleophilic character on the manganese center are responsible for the increased activity, however, at the expense of a more cathodic reduction potential.^[138]

Other modifications on group 7 bipyridine catalysts include the functionalization of the 6,6'-positions with bulky tert-butyl or mesityl groups.^[139] Monitoring CO stretching frequencies by infrared spectroelectrochemistry (IR-SEC) has provided insight into dimerization of manganese and rhenium complexes after halide dissociation, which is prevented by the addition of bulky substituents on the bipyridine 6,6'-positions.^[123] In addition to increasing the stability of the complex through ligand modification, the singly reduced manganese monomer reduces at more positive potentials then the corresponding dimer, leading to a reduction in overpotential.

3.4 Conclusion

The aforementioned examples are meant to highlight the importance of ligand design and emphasize that slight modifications can impart substantial rate improvements and shift the reduction of CO_2 to more anodic potentials. There has been significant advancement in ligand design for CO_2 reduction over the last few decades, including the use of local proton concentrations, electron-withdrawing groups, coulombic interactions, redox-noninnocent frameworks and steric protection. These design principles have led to higher turnover numbers and frequencies, greater stability, lower overpotentials and higher faradaic efficiencies for reported catalysts. High overpotentials and lack of selectivity still render large-scale conversion of CO_2 to fuels economically unfeasible at this time.^[140] Most of the development in the field for electrocatalytic reduction of CO_2 has involved the functionalization and derivatization of previously known molecular electrocatalysts, with novel ligand designs less common. **Figure 3.3** shows some of the common ligand platforms that continue to be utilized in catalysts for the electrochemical reduction of CO_2 .



Figure 3-3 Selected complexes with common ligand platforms electrocatalytic reduction of CO_2 ^[103,141–143]

The development of future catalysts needs to incorporate the design principles outlined by previous studies while targeting high affinity for CO₂ and stability across multiple oxidation states. Difficulties associated with the development of new catalysts stem from the harsh catalytic conditions under reducing potentials, the kinetic challenges to reduce the parasitic reduction of dihydrogen, maintaining high levels of activity towards CO₂, and providing a low overpotential for reduction. The contents of original work presented in the following two chapters apply some of the aforementioned design principles in novel ligand platforms, with the aim of identifying new complexes active for CO₂ reduction. Selection criteria for new ligands focuses on the ability to be synthetically accessible in gram quantities and form complexes that are stable under reducing conditions. A redox-active framework and low overpotentials, as well as a high selectivity for CO₂ reduction over dihydrogen production are also desired. The synthesis and characterization redox non-innocent ligands and their complexes is discussed, in addition to mechanistic insights into decomposition pathways for nickel-based complexes.

Chapter 4 – Ligand-Centered Electrochemical CO₂ Reduction with a Nickel bis(triazapentadienyl) Complex^[144]

4.1 Author Contributions

A portion of this chapter is reproduced from reference 144 with permission from the Royal Society of Chemistry, in which multiple authors from the Department of Chemistry contributed to the manuscript. Demyan Prokopchuk, Zachary Dubrawski, Joshua Heidebrecht, Janina Willkomm, Alexander Hyla and Braulio Puerta Lombardi contributed to the preparation of the initial draft, with further edits and proof reading from Chase Radford, Gregory Welch, Roland Roesler and Warren Piers. Zachary Dubrawski and Demyan Prokopchuk carried out the work presented in subsection **4.3**, including cyclic voltammetry, controlled potential electrolysis (CPE), synthesis of Ni(TAPPy)₂ and characterization of the post-CPE isolated solids. All synthetic work and electrochemical analysis within subsections **4.4** to **4.6** was performed solely by Joshua Heidebrecht, with the exception of calculated frequencies for [Ni(TAPPy)(CO)₂]⁻ (Alexander Hyla) and CPE experiments performed in the presence of [Ni(TMC)]²⁺ (Demyan Prokopchuck). For additional electrochemical analysis and synthetic characterization on Ni(TAPPy)₂, the reader is directed to reference 144.

4.2 Background Information

One of the first types of molecular catalysts for electrochemical CO_2 reduction was based on macrocycles of nickel and cobalt.^[117] From the initial study, a nickel complex featuring a redox-inactive cyclam ligand was the most promising in terms of faradaic efficiency, product selectivity and a relatively low overpotential for the electrochemical reduction of CO_2 to carbon monoxide. However, even though seminal work by Eisenberg utilized spectator ligands, the field for molecular electrochemical reduction of CO₂ has largely involved the use of redox-active ligands.^[103,141–143,145] Several Mn,^[146] Fe,^[115,147] Ni,^[148–152] and Cu^[153,154] electrocatalysts incorporating such ligands have been reported, capable of reducing CO₂ to either C₂O₄²⁻ or CO in aprotic organic solvents. Nickel-based electrocatalysts that promote the conversion of CO₂ into CO₃²⁻ or C₂O₄²⁻ are presented in **Fig. 4.1**.

Trimetallic diphosphine-bridged complexes (A) have been studied for electrocatalytic CO₂ reduction to produce CO/CO₃^{2-.[149,155]} The similar potential ($E_{pc} =$ 1.46 to 1.56 V vs. $Fc^{+/0}$, MeCN) to generate the electroactive species for this family of compounds is due to the metal-based LUMO, which has little dependence on the nature of capping ligand L.^[156] The bimetallic isocyanide complex **B** is also a CO/CO_3^{2-} electrocatalyst under aprotic conditions ($E_{pc} = 1.0$ V vs. Fc^{+/0}, MeCN).^[151] According to DFT calculations, the LUMO of \mathbf{B} is delocalized across the metal centers and isocyanide ligands. The complex Ni(bpy)Br₂ (C) is capable of producing CO/CO_3^{2-} (Epc = 2.08 V vs. $Fc^{+/0}$, Nmethylpyrrolidone), with the active catalyst being the in situ formed Ni(bpy)(CO)₂.^[148] Finally, complexes $D^{[152]}$ and $E^{[150]}$ catalyse the electroreduction of CO₂ to C₂O₄²⁻, with the latter being more active (TON up to 55 h⁻¹, up to 98% Faradaic Efficiency (FE)). The redox potentials for singly reduced **D** ($E_{1/2} = 2.53$ V vs. Fc^{+/0}, DMF) and **E** ($E_{1/2} = 2.26$ to 2.62 V vs. Fc^{+/0}, DMF) are significantly more negative in comparison to the reduction potentials for **A** and **B**. For **D** and **E**, an outer-sphere electron transfer was proposed to generate transient CO_2 radicals that rapidly couple in solution to yield oxalate salts. Inspired by structural frameworks **D** and **E**, anionic nitrogen-rich ligands coordinated

to nickel were explored for the electrochemical reduction of CO₂. The bidentate TAPPy ligand (TAPPy = 1,3,5-triazapentadienyl-2,4-bis(2-pyridyl)), as shown for Ni(TAPPy)₂ in **Fig. 4.1**, has a pentadiene core that is structurally comparable to compounds **D** and **E**. Only $Cu(TAPPy)_2$ ^[157] and Pd(TAPPy)₂^[158] derivatives have been reported to date, and the redox behavior of M(TAPPy)₂ complexes remains unknown.



Figure 4-1 Structural comparison of Ni(TAPPy)₂ with nickel complexes A-E capable of catalyzing the electrochemical reduction of CO₂. Below each structure are the major products formed during electrochemical reduction.

4.3 Synthesis and Electrochemical Analysis of Ni(TAPPy)2

Ni(TAPPy)₂ was synthesized in 78% yield by deprotonating 2 equiv. HTAPPy in situ with a strong base, followed by addition of NiBr₂(MeCN)₂ (**Scheme 4.1**). The salt KTAPPy THF was also independently synthesized by reacting HTAPPy with strong bases, including KO^tBu, KHMDS or KH.



Scheme 4-1 Synthesis of KTAPPy THF and Ni(TAPPy)₂.

The cyclic voltammogram (CV) of Ni(TAPPy)₂ under Ar is shown in **Fig. 4.2**. A reversible redox feature appears at $E_{1/2} = -2.25$ V (all potentials referenced vs. Fc^{+/0}), which corresponds to the generation of a Ni(II) ligand radical species. The linear dependence of



Figure 4-2 Top: CV of Ni(TAPPy)₂ (0.50 mM) at 0.1 V s⁻¹ under Ar, with cathodic peak current (i_{pc}) versus the square root of scan rate for the one-electron reduction of Ni(TAPPy)₂ under Ar (inset). Bottom: CVs of Ni(TAPPy)₂ (0.50 mM, three consecutive scans) at 0.1 V s⁻¹ under Ar (black) and CO₂ (red). Conditions: 0.1 M ⁿBu₄NPF₆, DMF, glassy carbon disk working electrode, Pt wire counter electrode, Ag/AgCl reference electrode. Background scans shown in grey.

the peak current (i_{pc}) as a function of the square root of the scan rate for this reduction confirms that Ni(TAPPy)₂ is a freely diffusing species in solution, with a calculated diffusion coefficient (D) of 5.3(4) x 10⁻⁶ cm² s⁻¹ (**Fig. 4.2**, inset). This first redox event is followed by an irreversible reduction at $E_{pc} = -2.52$ V, which becomes quasi-reversible at faster scan rates.

The CVs of Ni(TAPPy)₂ in anhydrous DMF under CO₂ reveal an approximate 4fold current enhancement, reaching a maximum at -2.50 V with no significant current loss after multiple scans (**Fig. 4.2**, bottom), indicating CO₂ reduction activity promoted by Ni(TAPPy)₂. In reported cases where anhydrous CO₂ reduction results in CO₃²⁻ and/or C₂O₄²⁻ production, a single-compartment electrochemical cell containing a sacrificial Mg or Al anode was used to precipitate these salts during controlled potential electrolysis (CPE) experiments.^[148,150,159] We conducted CPE experiments under CO₂ with Ni(TAPPy)₂ at -2.50 V using a Mg rod counter electrode. Similar results are obtained with both Pt mesh and glassy carbon working electrodes: simultaneous decrease in current response and precipitation of an off-white solid over the course of 6 h. The major gaseous products during CPE with Ni(TAPPy)₂ are CO and H₂.

At the end of CPE experiments with Ni(TAPPy)₂, the precipitate was isolated and analyzed by attenuated total reflectance (ATR)-IR spectroscopy, allowing the comparison of the solid products with authentic samples of common CO₂ reduction products such as MgCO₃, Mg(HCOO)₂, and MgC₂O₄. Unfortunately, the observed infrared stretches from 1700–1300 cm⁻¹ in the post-CPE sample were mostly broad and ill-defined, making product distribution assessment unclear. The post-CPE sample could also contain multiple carboxylate (RCOO⁻) and carbamate (R₂NCOO⁻) ligand degradation fragments, contributing even further to the poorly resolved IR spectrum. Acidification of the post-CPE solids with excess $H_3PO_4(aq)$ resulted in immediate effervescence, indicating the release of CO_2 from the electrolysis products. Gas chromatography (GC) analysis of the headspace confirms that CO_2 is released upon acidification. The acidified solutions yield no detectable amounts of oxalic acid ($C_2O_4H_2$) by ${}^{13}C{}^{1}H{}$ NMR spectroscopy, suggesting that $C_2O_4{}^{2-}$ is either absent or only present in trace quantities.

The CPE data is presented in **Table 4.1**. The gaseous headspace of sealed electrolysis vessels was analyzed by GC at the end of each run, after which the precipitate was isolated and acidified in a sealed reaction vessel. Electrolysis at -2.50 V in the presence of Ni(TAPPy)₂ (5.0 mmol) generates H₂ (3.58 ± 1.31 mmol) and one equiv. of CO (5.00 ± 0.02 mmol) relative to Ni. A significantly larger amount of RCOO⁻ / CO₃²⁻ is produced (79 ± 13 mmol, 16 equiv.) upon post CPE acidification, quantified by measuring the amount CO₂ released by GC from the isolated precipitate (entry 1).

	Table 4-1	Controlled	potential	electrolysis	(CPE) data ^a
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Reagent	Amount (µmol)	Charge passed (C)	µmol H ₂	µmol CO	$\mu mol \ RCOO^{-} \\ /CO_{3}^{2-} (as \ CO_{2})$	Faradaic Efficiency (%)
Ni(TAPPy) ₂	5.0	7.6 ± 0.3	3.58 ± 1.31	5.00 ± 0.02	79 ± 13	23 ± 2
HTAPPy	5.0	7.4 ± 0.6	9.28 ± 2.02	0.56 ± 0.12	70 ± 15	27 ± 3
KTAPPy•THF	5.0	2.07 ± 0.08	10.09 ± 1.61	0.23 ± 0.10	35 ± 8	95 ± 10

4.4 Infrared Spectroelectrochemistry (IR-SEC)

To determine the fate of Ni during CPE experiments, IR-SEC experiments were performed. In particular, it was of interest to determine whether CO was being sequestered to produce $Ni(CO)_mL_n$ complexes, since this type of decomposition behavior has been recently observed for Ni-based electrocatalysts.^[148,160–162] By applying an increasingly negative reduction potential (-2.10 to -2.45 V), new features gradually intensified at 1976, 1963, 1901, and 1870 cm⁻¹, which was ascribed to Ni–CO stretches from the stepwise decomposition of Ni(TAPPy)₂ (**Fig. 4.3**, top). To strengthen this claim, IR-SEC electrolysis was repeated at -2.45 V with ¹³CO2. All peaks shifted by 41–49 cm⁻¹, consistent with the



Figure 4-3 IR-SEC spectra of Ni(TAPPy)₂ (0.5 mM). Top: Electrolysis from -2.10 to -2.45 V in 0.05 V increments under CO₂. Bottom: Electrolysis of Ni(TAPPy)₂ at -2.45 V under ${}^{12}CO_2$ (red) and ${}^{13}CO_2$ (blue). Conditions: 0.2 M ⁿBu₄NPF₆, DMF.

expected isotopic shift from the reduced mass calculation (43 cm⁻¹) for a simple harmonic oscillator model (**Fig. 4.3**, bottom).

The vibrational frequencies in the resulting spectra match those reported for $Ni(CO)_2L_2$ complexes, where L is a nitrogen donor.^[163–166] For example, $Ni(CO)_2bpy$ features an asymmetric/symmetric stretch at 1860 and 1950 cm⁻¹ and $Ni(CO)_2(py)_2$ has similar stretches with frequencies at 1903 and 1981 cm⁻¹. Vibrational frequencies at 1897 and 1953 cm⁻¹, calculated for zero-valent nickel compound [Ni(TAPPy)(CO)₂]⁻ that could be one of the compounds that is forming at the electrode surface, match well the experimentally observed absorptions.

Due to the expected formation of Ni(CO)_mL_n under reducing conditions, it was postulated that the addition of a CO scavenger would circumvent the catalyst poisoning, leading to increased turnover numbers. The use of $[Ni(TMC)]^{2+}$ (TMC = 1,4,8,11tetramethyl-1,4,8,11-tetraazacyclotetradecane) has been described in the literature. It is known to be inactive towards CO₂ reduction and only be involved in CO sequestration, leading to increased activity and stability of the parent $[Ni(cyclam)]^{2+}$ system towards catalytic electrochemical reduction of CO₂.^[161,167] As a control, spectroelectrochemistry was performed where $[Ni(TMC)]^{2+}$ was reduced in the presence of carbon monoxide, leading to nickel-carbonyl containing compounds that originated from $[Ni(TMC)]^{2+}$. Features around 1950 and 1978 cm⁻¹ steadily increased in the IR spectra at -2.45V vs. Fc/Fc⁺, without features between 1800-1900 cm⁻¹ that were apparent when Ni(TAPPy)₂ was reduced in the presence of CO₂ (**Figure 4.4**). The addition of a 5-fold excess of $[Ni(TMC)]^{2+}$ in the presence of Ni(TAPPy)₂ at catalytic conditions still appeared to result in decomposition of the parent catalyst, based on the presence of features around 1870 cm⁻ ¹ In the IR spectrum. Controlled potential electrolysis confirmed the inability of $[Ni(TMC)]^{2+}$ to mitigate catalyst decomposition, as there was no statistical difference for product formation compared to electrolysis with Ni(TAPPy)₂ on its own.



Figure 4-4 IR-SEC spectra of Ni(TAPPy)₂ (0.5 mM) at -2.45 V with (blue) and without (red) the addition of 2.5 mM [Ni(TMC)]²⁺ under CO₂. The green trace corresponds to the IR-SEC spectra of [Ni(TMC)]²⁺ at -2.45 V in a CO saturated solution. Conditions: 0.2 M ⁿBu₄NPF₆, DMF.

4.5 Ligand Modification and Reaction with CO₂

Another possibility for the discrepancy between the presence of CO in the headspace and the amount of carbonate-containing precipitate, was the potential reaction of the ligand with carbon dioxide with the formation of carbonate-containing products. Although carbamate formation is difficult under standard conditions, these can be accessible through electrochemical synthesis assisted with tetrabutylammonium.^[168–173] One avenue that was envisioned was the decomposition of the catalyst, followed by reaction of the dissociated ligand with carbon dioxide under reducing conditions (**Scheme 4.2**). To test this hypothesis, KTAPPy was prepared, isolated and then exposed to carbon dioxide in solution.



Scheme 4-2 Potential reactivity of dissociated ligand with carbon dioxide to form carbonate-containing products.

The reaction between KTAPPy and CO₂ was performed under inert atmosphere utilizing Schlenk techniques, however, the resonances in the ¹H and ¹³C NMR of the resulting solution closely matched that of HTAPPy and no new products were observed. The initial reaction proceeded quickly and a small amount of precipitate formed after adding CO₂ into the headspace of the gas-tight NMR tube. The precipitate was isolated and characterized by infrared spectroscopy, leading to a spectrum similar to that of the parent HTAPPy, with no identifiable features corresponding to carbonate-containing compounds. Different solvents, including DMSO-d⁶ and THF-d⁸, were used for the same reaction in an attempt to identify the reactivity and dissolve the precipitate that was formed in acetonitrile, although in all cases the analysis pointed towards HTAPPy formation from the reaction with CO₂. Due to the stability of KTAPPy in DMSO, it is expected that small amounts of adventitious water should not be detrimental, and that the reaction was due to the presence of CO_2 . In addition, the carbon dioxide utilized was of high purity, the solvents were dried over molecular sieves or sodium/benzophenone before distillation so it was difficult to rationalize how protonation occurred. Representative spectra are shown in **Figure 4.5** on the conversion of KTAPPy to HTAPPy in THF-d⁸, where the NH resonances integrate for a total of two before the addition of CO₂, and integrate to three after the addition.





No concrete conclusions could be drawn from the reaction of CO_2 with KTAPPy, however it is expected that the discrepancy between the observed CO in the headspace of the vessel with controlled potential electrolysis could be rationalized by the formation of carbonyl-containing nickel compounds in addition to possible reactivity of the dissociated ligand with CO_2 , causing additional carbonate-containing precipitate under CPE.

Parallel to the work on Ni(TAPPy)₂, ligand modification was targeted in order to lower the overpotential and provide avenues for further functionalization towards secondary sphere effects. The targeted modification of the proligand incorporated a bromide on each pyridine group that could be used in subsequent coupling reactions or impart slight variations on the electronic properties of the the parent Ni(TAPPy)₂. The synthetic procedure was similar to that employed for HTAPPy,^[174] where 5-bromo-2pyridinecarbonitrile was heated under a headspace of ammonia in acetonitrile (**Scheme 4.3**). Single crystals were grown by slow evaporation of a concentrated solution of TAPPy-Br in acetonitrile and the identity of the compound was confirmed by X-Ray crystallography. Hydrogen bonding is present between the imine protons and the pyridyl nitrogens, facilitating a planar framework favorable to π delocalization, similar to that of free HTAPPy and Ni(TAPPy)₂ (**Figure 4.6**).^[144,175] The resonances corresponding to the imine protons in the ¹H NMR spectrum are significantly deshielded (δ 9.51, CD₃CN), indicating that the hydrogen bonding is maintained in solution.



Scheme 4-3 Synthesis of TAPPy-Br



Figure 4-6 Solid-state structure of TAPPy-Br with 50% probability ellipsoids.

In summary, the synthesis of new nickel complexes containing the bidentate TAPPy ligand (TAPPy = 1,3,5-triazapentadienyl-2,4-bis(2-pyridyl)) has been accomplished. The neutral complex Ni(TAPPy)₂ can be reduced by one electron, with the resulting anion being best described as a redox non-innocent Ni(II) complex with a radical delocalized almost exclusively onto the ligand framework. Under Ar, Ni(TAPPy)₂ can be electrochemically reduced by up to two electrons in anhydrous DMF, and current

enhancement is observed when the complex is exposed to CO_2 . The observed current enhancement is not due to the electrocatalytic reduction of CO_2 ; instead, the complex reduces CO_2 into carbonyl-containing nickel complexes and insoluble carboxylated ligand byproducts. Although ligands often serve as electron reservoirs during electrocatalysis, the exclusive ligand-based redox activity of Ni(TAPPy)₂ suggests that the localization of the LUMO/SOMO exclusively on the ligand is generally unfavorable for electrocatalytic CO_2 reduction.

4.6 Iron-based TAPPy complexes

The corresponding iron-TAPPy complex was also pursued as a potential candidate for CO_2 reduction, as iron based CO_2 electrocatalysts are much less likely to decompose into carbonyl containing compounds. The structure of two different iron coordination complexes with TAPPy had been previously published, however, the chemistry of iron complexes with the TAPPy ligand remains unknown.^[175] Initial work targeted an Fe^{II}(TAPPy)₂L₂ framework, in order to provide an open coordination site after L dissociation for nucleophilic attack towards CO₂ under catalytic conditions. This desired framework was based on the stability and activity of the iron porphyrin systems, which are expected to undergo halide dissociation upon reduction and generate a planar iron complex as the active catalyst in solution.^[119,124,125,127] Because the iron(II) complex was expected to be susceptible to oxidation, the targeted non-innocent ligands, L, were capable of accepting electron density through back donation from the metal. This would also enable an initial reduction at a lower overpotential to generate a formally Fe(0) active catalyst. Previously reported iron piano-stool electrocatalysts have utilized carbonyl ligands that dissociate prior to CO_2 activation, and the so $Fe^{II}(TAPPy)_2(CO)_2$ framework was

targeted.^[176–178] Fe(CO)₄Br₂ and Fe(CO)₄I₂ were prepared following literature procedures^[179,180] in order to circumvent the need for a carbon monoxide atmosphere during complexation, and freshly prepared KTAPPy was added to the corresponding Fe^{II} source for the salt metathesis reaction (**Scheme 4.4**).



Scheme 4-4 Attempted synthesis of Synthesis of Fe^{II}(TAPPy)₂L₂

Large scale reactions were handled under air and moisture free conditions utilizing Schlenk techniques with a swivel-frit apparatus, and small scale vial reactions were conducted in an argon atmosphere glovebox with freshly sublimed or commercial iron sources. Single crystals suitable for X-Ray crystallography were only obtained when the crystals were grown by layering concentrated solutions of the complex in DCM with pentane. This succeeded both inside and outside the glovebox, resulting in the precipitation of an orange/red solid. However, even when crystallization attempts were conducted in a glove box, the resultant solid state structure always revealed an octahedral homoleptic Fe(TAPPy)₃ coordination environment, indicative of an iron(III) metal center. Different starting materials were utilized in order to try and obtain the target Fe^{II}(TAPPy)₂L₂ including FeBr₂, Fe₂Cl₄(THF)₃, Fe(OAc)₂, and Fe(HMDS)₂ with isocyanates as capping ligands in addition to the carbonyl compounds. In all instances the Fe^{III}(TAPPy)₃ complex was obtained upon warming the reaction solutions and recrystallizing from a DCM/pentane mixture. It is worth noting that the recrystallization was low yielding, and uncharacterized black precipitate was always observed and filtered off. When anhydrous FeCl₃ was used in lieu of an iron(II) source, the solid state structure featured a lower symmetry space group and a slightly different unit cell, although all of the structural parameters are within error and are indicative of the same complex (**Figure 4.7**).^[175]



Unit Cell Dimentions	Literature Value	Monoclinic C	Triclinic
Length a (Å)	20.3755(7)	20.4049(5)	10.4512(6)
Length b (Å)	17.1148(5)	17.1474(4)	12.6572(9)
Length c (Å)	11.5256(4)	11.5359(3)	16.9668(14)
Angle alpha (°)	90	90	75.369(5)
Angle beta (°)	112.336(2)	112.2950(10)	82.844(5)
Angle gamma (°)	90	90	66.394(3)
Selected Bond Lengths	Literature Value	Monoclinic C	Triclinic
N-Fe (Å)	1.921(2) – 1.927(2)	1.925(2)-1.930(2)	1.915(3) – 1.945(3)
N1-C1 (Å)	1.302(3)	1.305(3)	1.298(6)
C1-N3 (Å)	1.342(3)	1.342(3)	1.355(6)

Figure 4-7 Solid state structures of Fe(TAPPy)₃ from reactions using an iron(III) source (left, Monoclinic C) and an iron (II) source (right, Triclinic) shown with 50% probability ellipsoids.^[175]

When the $\text{Fe}^{II}(\text{TAPPy})_2L_2$ complex, (L = 'BuNC), was synthesized at -78 °C and maintained under 0 °C while volatiles were removed under vacuum, a dark green solid was obtained, in contrast to the orange/red product isolated after crystallization from a DCM/pentane solution. This crude product was NMR silent and did not afford single crystals upon multiple attempts in a glovebox freezer. A preliminary voltammogram obtained under argon (**Figure 4.8**.) should be interpreted with caution due to a lack of clear characterization. Three irreversible reduction waves appear to be present, which could be related to the formal Fe^{III}/Fe^{II} , Fe^{II}/Fe^{I} , and Fe^{I}/Fe^{0} redox couples. When the solution was exposed to carbon dioxide, the electrochemical behavior changed dramatically and was supplemented with a color change of the solution to colorless. The resulting voltammogram lost multiple redox features under a CO_2 atmosphere, and these did not return after placing the solution under an argon atmosphere post CO_2 exposure. The redox couple at 0V in the grey trace is due to a ferrocene internal standard and is not relevant to the complex. The resulting voltammogram is relatively free of other features, and relates closely with that of HTAPPy (**Figure 4.9**).



Figure 4-8 Cyclic voltammogram of potential $Fe(TAPPy)_2(CO)_2$ (1.0 mM) at 0.1 V s⁻¹ under Ar (black), CO₂ (Dashed line) and Ar after exposure to CO₂ (grey). Conditions: 0.1 M ⁿBu₄NPF₆, DMF, glassy carbon disk working electrode, Pt wire counter electrode, Ag/AgCl reference electrode.


Figure 4-9 Cyclic voltammogram of HTAPPy (1.0 mM) at 0.1 V s⁻¹ under Ar. Conditions: 0.1 M $^{n}Bu_4NPF_6$, DMF, glassy carbon disk working electrode, Pt wire counter electrode, Ag/AgCl reference electrode.

Due to the difficulty in isolating the corresponding iron(II) complex and its potential irreversible reaction with CO_2 , the homoleptic $Fe(TAPPy)_3$ was synthesized from FeCl₃ and three equivalents of freshly prepared KTAPPy (**Scheme 4.5**).



Scheme 4-5 Synthesis of Fe(TAPPy)₃

The iron complex was purified by crystallization, through layering pentane on a concentrated solution of $Fe(TAPPy)_3$ in DCM. The magnetic moment of the complex is 2.4 μ_B , in agreement with a low spin iron(III) complex with one unpaired electron.^[181,182] Its cyclic voltammogram (**Figure 4.10**) did not show any current enhancement under an

atmosphere of CO_2 . Subtle reduction waves were observed, with the main electrochemical feature being an irreversible oxidation around 0.5V vs. Fc/Fc⁺. Because of the poor catalytic activity of Ni(TAPPy)₂ and a negative initial screen for Fe(TAPPy)₃ under CO₂, optimization of the reaction conditions was not pursued.



Figure 4-10 Cyclic voltammogram of $Fe(TAPPy)_3$ (1.0 mM) at 0.1 V s⁻¹ under Ar (black) and CO₂ (Dashed line). Conditions: 0.1 M ⁿBu₄NPF₆, DMF, glassy carbon disk working electrode, Pt wire counter electrode, Ag/AgCl reference electrode. Background scan shown in grey.

Overall, the pursuit of an iron-based CO₂ electrocatalyst as an alternative to Ni(TAPPy)₂ was unsuccessful. Initial work targeted the synthesis of an Fe(TAPPy)₂L₂ complex with π -acidic L type ligands. The Fe(TAPPy)₂L₂ complex showed a propensity for the formation of a homoleptic Fe(TAPPy)₃ complex upon crystallization in DCM, as well as electrochemical instability under an atmosphere of carbon dioxide. The homoleptic Fe(TAPPy)₃ complex was then isolated and tested for catalytic activity. A negative screen was obtained under aprotic conditions, and optimization was not undertaken.

4.7 Experimental

Spectroelectrochemistry experiments were conducted using a LabOmak IR-SEC cell fitted with CaF₂ windows, platinum working/counter electrodes and a Ag wire pseudoreference electrode that was referenced to an external sample of $Fc^{+/0}$ (0 V). The optical path length of the cell is 0.2 mm. The cell was filled with DMF solutions (ca. 0.1 mL) containing 0.2 M ⁿBu₄NPF₆, and analyte. The solutions were sparged with Ar in a scintillation vial for ten minutes prior to use, and experiments under CO₂ were then sparged for 10 seconds with CO₂ before injection into the IR cell. Blank DMF solutions with 0.2 M ⁿBu₄NPF₆ were used to obtain baseline corrected spectra at each voltage step.

KTAPPy·**THF**. To a 50mL round-bottom flask, HTAPPy (0.502g, 0.002 mol) and a PTFE-coated stir bar were added. The flask was connected to a swivel-frit apparatus and placed under vacuum. Anhydrous THF (35mL) was vacuum transferred into the flask and the vessel was placed under argon. After all solids were dissolved, the solution was cooled to -78 °C and KH was added in one portion (0.170 g, 0.004 mol). The reaction mixture was stirred cold for 30 min, then slowly warmed up to room temperature. After stirring for an additional 1 h, the mixture was filtered and the volatiles were removed under high vacuum. The filtrate was triturated with pentane (15 mL), isolated on a medium-pore glass frit, and dried under high vacuum to yield KTAPPy·THF as a white solid (0.761 g). KTAPPy·THF gradually loses THF under vacuum or after prolonged periods of time under argon. Crystals suitable for X-ray diffraction were grown from a saturated THF solution of KTAPPy·THF in a glove box freezer at -40 °C overnight. ¹H NMR (500 MHz; CD3CN, 25 °C): δ 8.38–8.71 (4H, m, 2Ar-H), 7.56–7.95 (2H, m, Ar-H), 7.27 (2H, ddd, d, ³J_{HH} = 7.4 Hz, ³J_{HH} = 4.7 Hz, ⁴J_{HH} = 1.4 Hz, Ar-H), 3.64 (2H, m, THF), 1.80 (2H, m, THF). The ligand N–H

resonances could not be located. ¹³C{¹H} NMR (101 MHz; CD3CN, 25 °C): δ 26.28 (THF), 68.32 (THF), 118.3 (Ar-C), 123.0 (Ar-C_{quat}), 123.8 (Ar-C), 137.3 (Ar-C), 149.0 (Ar-C), 169.4 (NCNH). Anal. calcd for C₁₆H₁₈N₅OK: C, 57.29; H, 5.41; N, 20.88. Found: C, 56.00; H, 5.41; N, 20.42.

Ni(TAPPy)₂. In an argon-filled glove box, a 25 mL schlenk flask equipped with a threaded PTFE cap was charged with a PTFE coated stir bar, HTAPPy (200 mg, 0.888mmol), and KO^tBu (100 mg, 0.888 mmol). The solids were dissolved in 8 mL THF and stirred vigorously for 5 minutes, turning pale yellow-brown and generating K(TAPPy) in situ. Freshly prepared NiBr₂(MeCN)₂ (133 mg, 0.44 mmol) was then added to the solution in one portion, followed by an additional 2 mL THF. The solution was sealed, removed from the glove box, and vigorously stirred at 60 °C for 6 h. The resultant orange suspension was cooled to room temperature and worked up under air. The mixture was diluted with THF (250 mL), yielding an opaque orange solution which was filtered through a pad of Celite. The clear orange filtrate was dried under reduced pressure, suspended in 100 mL pentane, and isolated on a medium-pore glass frit. The air and moisture stable product was dried under high vacuum for several hours to yield bright orange Ni(TAPPy)₂ (177 mg, 78%), which is sparingly soluble in THF, CH₂Cl₂, CHCl₃, DMF, DMSO and insoluble in MeCN. Single crystals suitable for X-ray diffraction were grown by slow evaporation of CH₂Cl₂ from a saturated solution of Ni(TAPPy)₂. Anal. calcd for C₂₄H₂₀N₁₀Ni: C, 56.84; H, 3.97; N, 27.62. Found: C, 56.82; H, 4.38; N, 26.14. ¹H NMR (500 MHz; CDCl3; 25 °C): δ 8.70 (2H, m, CHAr), 8.61 (2H, d, ${}^{3}J_{HH} = 7.8$ Hz, CHAr), 7.84 (2H, m, CHAr), 7.78 (2H, br s, NH), 7.40 (2H, m, CHAr). ¹³C{¹H} NMR (126 MHz; CDCl3, 25 °C): 160.89 (C_{quat}), 152.00 (Cquat), 148.64 (CHAr), 137.15 (CHAr), 124.74 (CHAr), 121.50 (CHAr). MS (ESI HRMS):

m/*z* calc. for [C₂₄H₂₁N₁₀Ni]⁺: 507.1304. Found: 507.1294. IR (KBr, cm⁻¹): 3278 (w), 3243 (m), 1550 (m), 1433 (s).

KTAPPy + **CO**₂. 20mg of freshly prepared **KTAPPy·THF** was placed into a gas-tight NMR tube with a PTFE-coated screw cap in an argon filled glovebox. Anhydrous THF-d₈ was added to the sample and sealed. The ¹H and ¹³C NMR spectra were taken under the initial argon atmosphere to ensure sample integrity. After the spectra were obtained, the solution was degassed by freeze-pump-thaw cycling on a Schlenk line. The solution was then warmed to room temperature before addition of an atmosphere of anhydrous CO₂ *via* Schlenk techniques. ¹H NMR (400 MHz, THF-*d*₈) δ 11.60 (s, 1H), 9.78 (s, 2H), 8.65 (dd, 4H), 7.91 (td, 2H), 7.53 – 7.38 (m, 2H). ¹³C NMR (101 MHz, THF-*d*₈) δ 164.72, 152.58, 148.40, 136.70, 124.88 (CO₂), 124.77, 121.67.

TAPPy-Br. To a 100 mL thick-walled round-bottom flask equipped with a PTFE-coated screw cap was added a magnetic stir bar, 5-bromo-2-pyridinecarbonitrile (2.503 g, 13.7mmol) and 25 mL of acetonitrile. The suspension was sparged with ammonia for 10 minutes, then sealed under a headspace of ammonia gas and heated to 110 °C for 72 hours. After the reaction was complete, the reaction vessel remained sealed and was cooled to - 20 °C to precipitate **TAPPy-Br** as a colorless solid. The suspension was filtered on a medium-pore glass frit, washed with 5 mL of pentane and dried in air to afford **TAPPy-Br** (0.520 g, 1.4mmol, 20% yield) as a colorless solid. Single crystals suitable for X-ray diffraction were grown by slow evaporation from a saturated acetonitrile solution of **TAPPy-Br**. ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CD₃CN) δ 11.31 (s, 1H), 9.51 (s, 2H), 8.76 (d, 2H), 8.49 (d, 2H), 8.12 (dd, Hz, 2H). ¹³C NMR (101 MHz, CD₃CN) δ 164.32, 150.57, 149.80, 140.08, 123.53, 122.71.

 $Fe(TAPPy)_2(CO)_2$ A 100 mL two-neck round bottom flask was charged with a magnetic stir bar and freshly prepared KTAPPy THF (100mg, 0.334mmol). The flask was attached to a swivel-frit apparatus and placed under vacuum before transferring 20 mL of anhydrous THF. The solution was placed under argon and cooled to -78 °C, then $Fe(CO)_{4}I_2$ (70mg, 166mmol) was added in one portion through the side arm under a heavy flow of argon. The solution was stirred at -78 °C for 1 hour before warming to room temperature, then stirred at room temperature overnight before filtration through the swivel frit apparatus and evaporation of the filtrate to dryness under reduced pressure. Pentane was condensed onto the resulting solid and the suspension was sonicated before filtering back through the swivel frit to afford $Fe(TAPPy)_2(CO)_2$ as an opaque solid.

Fe(TAPPy)₃. A 100 mL two-neck round bottom flask was charged with a magnetic stir bar and HTAPPy (414mg, 1.8mmol). The flask was attached to a swivel-frit apparatus and placed under vacuum before transferring 20 mL of anhydrous THF. The solution was placed under argon and cooled to -78 °C, then KHMDS (367mg, 1.8mmol) was added in one portion through the side arm under a heavy flow of argon. The solution was stirred at -78 °C for 1 hour before warming to room temperature, then stirred for an additional hour before the addition of anhydrous FeCl₃ (88 mg, 0.55mmol) in one portion through the side arm under a heavy flow of argon. The reaction mixture was stirred at room temperature overnight, then filtered through a glass frit under inert atmosphere. The filtrate was evaporated to dryness under reduced pressure affording an opaque solid. Pentane was condensed onto the resulting solid and the suspension was sonicated before filtering back through a medium pore glass frit to afford **Fe(TAPPy)**₃ as an opaque solid. Single crystals suitable for X-ray diffraction were grown by layering pentane on a concentrated solution of $Fe(TAPPy)_3$ in DCM. Large scale recrystallizations proceeded under similar conditions utilizing scintillation vials to afford $Fe(TAPPy)_3(CH_2Cl_2)$ as a red, crystalline solid. MS (ESI HRMS): m/z calc. for $[C_{36}H_{31}N_{15}Fe]^+$: 729.2231. Found: 729.2232. Magnetic moment: 2.4 µ_B.

Chapter 5 – Bis(N-heterocyclic carbene) macrocycles and porphyrinids

5.1 Background Information

A major class of homogeneous single-site catalysts for the electrochemical reduction of CO₂ is based on porphyrin scaffolds. Initially discovered in 1977, the identified iron and cobalt porphyrin catalysts had relatively low productivity and selectivity but have been substantially improved in the last few decades.^[110,111] Major breakthroughs included the use of Lewis and Bronsted acids,^[124,125] incorporating electron withdrawing groups^[133,134] and exploiting secondary sphere effects through the use of local proton-concentration^[126–128] or coulombic interactions.^[135] The stability of the resulting complexes is impressive, with examples reaching turnover numbers of ~10⁶ with no visible sign of degradation^[126] or negligible degradation over 3.5 days of electrolysis.^[135] In addition to iron-based homogenous systems, porphyrin complexes based on cobalt,^[183–185] copper^[186] and zinc^[187] have been used in heterogenous CO₂ reduction, as molecular catalysts supported on carbon-based electrodes. However, the activity of the produced catalysts still needs to be increased in order to meet industrial requirements.^[188,189]

The use of carbenes as strong sigma donors in ligand frameworks is prevalent for group 7 and 10 molecular catalysts, increasing the electron density at the metal center for nucleophilic attack onto the CO₂ molecule. The use of bidentate,^[138,190] tridentate^[191–193] and tetradentate^[194–196] ligands incorporating carbenes have been used for electrochemical CO₂ reduction, with selected examples shown in **Figure 5.1**. The use of a bidentate biscarbene in complex **A** as a bipyridine derivative led to the highest reported activity on a manganese based catalyst with a TOF_{max} of 3.2×10^5 s⁻¹ due to increased electron density at the metal.^[138] The corresponding palladium pincer complex **D** provided a redox-active

framework in comparison to phosphine based pincers, reducing dimerization after reduction, albeit with relatively low FE for CO₂ reduction (28%).^[193,197] A follow-up study on group 10 CNC complexes for CO₂ reduction screened different derivatives of the framework **B** and concluded that the precious metals (Pt and Pd) were better suited for the tridentate ligand with FE up to 47%, while Ni remained under 5%.^[198] However, tetradentate systems are more common with nickel, and have been used in both electrochemical and photoredox catalysis for CO₂ reduction. Complex **C** is one example that has been used in photoredox catalysis, with the use of N-heterocyclic carbenes and isoquinoline donors to achieve TONs up to 98,000 and a TOF of 3.9 s⁻¹, with no detectable dihydrogen formation.^[195]





Another design consideration is the choice of either an open chain or macrocyclic ligand framework. The electrochemical analysis of **D** and **E** as molecular catalysts for CO_2 reduction enabled a comparison between the rigidity of the complex and selectivity towards reducing CO_2 over dihydrogen production. Complex **D** produced carbon monoxide with 87% faradaic efficiency, compared to **E** that had 5% FE towards CO production and 93% of the remaining FE associated with proton reduction. Both complexes showed no sign of degradation, with the use of carbenes and redox active ligands able to prevent $Ni(CO)_4$ formation.^[196] This result is supported by the wide range of macrocyclic ligands used for CO_2 reduction, with unterhered open chain systems less common with group 8-10 metal centers.^[103,143]

5.2 Unconjugated Macrocyclic Biscarbene ligands

Two separate ligands were envisioned with the aforementioned properties in mind. Tetradentate, macrocyclic, redox active ligands suitable to iron, cobalt and nickel were favored for metal sustainability purposes. Two ligand frameworks were targeted, both showing several similarities with known complexes having recognized catalytic proficiency in the electroreduction of carbon dioxide (**Scheme 4.1**). The two targets only differ by saturation/unsaturation of the methylene groups and utilize the same precursor for synthesis.



Scheme 5-1 Proposed catalyst platforms (right) based on known catalysts incorporating porphyrin and pyridine-based macrocycles (left)

In 2002, the Youngs group published the corresponding carbene proligand **5.1**, which was synthesized from readily available starting materials *via* a straightforward pathway.^[199] No metal coordination complexes have been reported, although analogs having pyridine donors instead of pyrrole are established.^[200–203]

Initial work targeted coordination complexes with proligand 5.1, where the compound was synthesized *via* literature reported procedures (Scheme 5.2).^[199,204] The 2,5-substitution of pyrrole proceeds readily with formaldehyde and dimethylammonium chloride and the colorless, liquid product can be purified by distillation. However, the following alkylation with methyl iodide to form the ammonium salt 5.2 always resulted in an impure compound. Multiple attempts at purification or alterations of reaction conditions did not afford the ammonium salt with higher purity, so the reagent was used in further reactions as a crude mixture. As a consequence, subsequent reactions had a reduced yield, although working in gram quantities and purifying the end products enabled progress. The alkylation of imidazole affords a neutral intermediate 5.3, followed by proligand 5.1 in 26% yield. The ¹H NMR spectrum of intermediate 5.3 shows two separate resonances for the chemically inequivalent positions on the imidazole backbone, as expected for a time averaged C_{2V} symmetry. After macrocycle formation, there is only one resonance in the ¹H NMR spectrum for the imidazole backbone, consistent with a symmetry change to D_{2h} . After the initial synthesis, the reactions were scaled up affording 50 grams of the crude ammonium salt and up to 1g of proligand.

The solubility of **5.1** was rather low, with DMSO remaining one of the few suitable solvents. Nickel, iron, cobalt and palladium acetates/halides with an additional base were used for complexation, all resulting in the formation of insoluble precipitates.



Scheme 5-2 Synthetic pathway for proligand 5.1

Only relatively weak bases were used, including carbonates, acetates and triethylamine, due to limited solvent options. ESI-MS and MALDI-TOF were used to provide preliminary results on the insoluble solids, however, the results were inconclusive.

The use of an alkylated imidazole was identified as a synthetically accessible derivative promising better solubility and the use of 4,5-dimethylimidazole was initially targeted. Dimethylimidazole was synthesized from glyoxal, formaldehyde and ammonium sulfate. The synthesis was low yielding, but extraction with ethyl acetate and a final wash with slight amounts of diethyl ether afforded 4,5-dimethylimidazole in high purity. Attempted alkylation with intermediate **5.2** was problematic under different conditions, leading to an oil that was difficult to purify and expected to contain multiple products based on NMR analysis. Dimethylbenzimidazole was also used as an alternative, leading to the expected products in relatively high yields (**Scheme 5.3**). The resultant NMR spectra of the neutral intermediate **5.5** and the dimethylbenzimidazole macrocycle **5.4** were similar to those of the parent system, with a reduction from 4 to 3 aromatic resonances as expected

for a symmetry change from C_{2V} to a D_{2H} point group. In addition, the solubility of the dimethylbenzimidazole analog was slightly better in organic solvents such as THF and acetonitrile, enabling a wider selection of bases and metal reagents for complexation.





Various methods for complexation were fruitlessly pursued (Scheme 5.4), leading to the formation of insoluble precipitates or the cleavage of the C-N α -pyrrole bond. C-N cleavage at methylene groups on 2,5-substituted pyrroles has been described in literature, with a simple pincer analog either providing no reaction, decomposing, or cleaving the C-N bond in the presence of weak bases such as Ag₂O.^[205] With the addition of Ag₂O in DMSO or a strong base such as KHMDS in THF with proligand 5.4, four aromatic resonances were observed in the spectrum of the resultant mixture, matching the ¹H NMR spectrum for the neutral pincer 5.5, as expected for C-N cleavage. In addition, attempted complexation with zinc using either acetates, triethylamine or carbonates as a base again resulted in a ¹H NMR spectra that matched the open chain, neutral intermediate 5.5. Resonances corresponding to the pyrrole fragment were not observed in the respective spectra. This was postulated to be due to pyrrole polymerization as the reaction always produced insoluble precipitates.^[206] In addition, when paramagnetic metals were for used for complexation, the only product identifiable by high-resolution ESI-MS was a coordination complex of the metal with the neutral intermediate **5.5**.



Scheme 5-4 Selected complexation attempts with proligand 5.4

5.3 Unsaturated Carbene-porphyrinoids

Although the non-conjugated macrocycle was prone to decomposition through C-N cleavage, the unsaturation in the conjugated derivative should increase the relative bond order and lead to greater stability. Porphyrin derivatives can be unsaturated with dihydrogen acceptors, such as 2,3-dichloro-5,6-dicyano-1,4-benzoquinone (DDQ) and chloroanil, so a similar procedure was followed with compound **5.4**.^[207,208] Initial attempts were unsuccessful and led to decomposition, so anion exchange with NH₄PF₆ for increased solubility and to avoid any side reactivity with halides was conducted. The corresponding PF_6 salt was purified and used for subsequent reactions with dihydrogen acceptors but maintained the same decomposition as the diiodide salt.

While dihydrogen acceptors were pursued, the use of hydrogen atom abstractors was also attempted by Zachary Dubrawski without success. One possibility for the observed decomposition of 5.4 with DDQ was the instability of the resulting meso positions, where porphyrins have been susceptible to oxidation/cleavage without appropriate stabilization.^[209,210] The incorporation of phenyl groups in the meso-positions was seen as an alternative to stabilize the macrocycle and could potentially alleviate issues with C-N cleavage. The synthetic scheme towards the meso-substituted ligand is shown in Scheme 5.5, where the tolyl derivative of a benzoxathiolium was used instead of the phenyl for a NMR handle during the synthesis.^[207,208,211–214] To avoid porphyrin formation and the 1,4-substitution of pyrrole with benzaldehyde, a protecting strategy was used. The use of a benzoxathiolium salt selectively substituted pyrrole at the 2 and 5 positions, which could be converted to diacylpyrrole via oxidation with hydrogen peroxide or mercuric oxide. The following reduction of the diacylpyrrole was performed with either NaBH₄ or freshly purified LiAlH₄, leading to the secondary alcohol **5.6**. The ¹H NMR spectra showed this to be the expected mixture of two diastereomers, due to the presence of two newly formed stereocenters, with additional impurities. This was difficult to purify and according to literature reports crude 5.6 is commonly used in subsequent reactions without previous purification. The acid catalyzed condensation reaction with imidazole, or the use of toluenesulfonyl chloride to produce a better leaving group appeared to result in decomposition to a variety of different compounds by ¹H NMR. A few different reaction

conditions were attempted, although progress was hindered by the inability to convert compound **5.6** to the imidazole functionalized product.



Scheme 5-5 Proposed synthetic pathway for a meso-substituted carbene porphyrinoid.

With continued difficulties in synthesis, and decomposition during complexation of the previous proligands, the project had moved away from the initial selection criteria. The targeted complexes were meant to be easily synthesized in gram quantities, stable under reducing conditions, provide a redox active framework to reduce overpotentials and have a high affinity for CO_2 reduction over dihydrogen production. The initial proligands **5.1** and **5.4** were easily synthesized in large quantities, but did not lead to isolable metal complexes under a variety of reaction conditions employing different metals. Upon moving towards a meso-substituted analog, difficulties in synthesis and low yielding synthetic steps continued to reduce the applicability of the system towards large-scale implementation. Although the use of carbenes as neutral nitrogen donor alternatives is reported to lead to increased activity of catalysts for electrochemical CO_2 reduction, the instability and difficulty in synthesis of the aforementioned compounds reduced the attractiveness of pursuing the project further. Efforts towards catalyst development transitioned towards other ligand designs in lieu of pursuing the macrocycles any further. Some of these other ligand designs and preliminary data on alternative catalysts are discussed in chapter 7.

5.4 Experimental

2,5-Bis(dimethylaminomethyl)pyrrole

Dimethylamine hydrochloride (30.023g, 368mmol) was dissolved in 37 wt% aqueous formaldehyde (30 mL, 403mmol) in a 250mL round bottom flask equipped with a magnetic stir bar. The solution was cooled with an ice bath before the addition of pyrrole (12.4mL, 179mmol) under vigorous stirring. The aqueous solution was brought to room temperature over a period of 30 minutes and stirred for an additional twelve hours before neutralization with a 20% NaOH solution to a pH of 6-8. The product was extracted with diethylether (3 x 30mL) and separated from the aqueous fraction before removal of volatiles with a rotary evaporator. The resulting crude oil was distilled at 80 °C and 7 millitorr affording 2,5-Bis(dimethylaminomethyl)pyrrole (19.673g, 61% yield) as a colorless liquid. ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 5.92 (d, 2H), 3.39 (s, 4H), 2.22 (s, 12H).

Compound 5.2

Freshly distilled 2,5-Bis(dimethylaminomethyl)pyrrole (19.673g, 109mmol) was dissolved in 200mL of THF in a 500mL two-neck round bottom flask equipped with a magnetic stir bar. The solution was cooled with an ice bath before the dropwise addition of methyliodide (20.27mL, 326mmol) with vigorous stirring. After addition, the reaction was warmed to room temperature and stirred for an additional four hours, resulting in the precipitation of a white solid. 100mL of acetone was then added to the suspension, and stirred for an additional 30 minutes before collecting the precipitate *via* vacuum filtration on glass frit. The white precipitate was then suspended in 200mL of fresh acetone and stirred overnight before collecting again on a glass frit. The solid was dried in air, affording 2,5-Bis[(trimethylammonio)methyl]pyrrole diiodide **5.2** (44.896g, 89% yield) as a white solid. The crude material contained what was believed to be a side product that could not be removed through recrystallization, the use of dry solvents and inert atmosphere during the reaction or with additional equivalents of methyl iodide, so it was decided to use as a crude material in further reactions. ¹H NMR (400 MHz, D₂O) δ 6.60 (s, 1H), 4.51 (s, 2H), 3.08 (s, 18H).

Compound 5.3

Compound **5.2** (3.573g, 7.68mmol), imidazole (2.133g, 31mmol) and KOH (1.750g, 31mmol) was suspended in 50mL of DCM in a 150mL round bottom flask equipped with a magnetic stir bar. The reaction was stirred overnight at room temperature before removing volatiles on a rotary evaporator. The resulting solid was suspended in 50mL of water and filtered to afford a crude off-white solid. The precipitate was further washed with an additional 10mL of water and slight amounts of acetone before drying in air to obtain 2,5-Bis[(imidazole-1-yl)methyl]pyrrole (**5.3**) (1.454g, 83% yield). ¹H NMR (400 MHz, DMSO) δ 11.10 (s, 2H), 7.61 (s, 4H), 7.10 (s, 4H), 6.86 (s, 2H), 5.98 (d, 4H), 5.05 (s, 8H). **Proligand 5.1**

Compound **5.3** (0.475g, 2.1mmol) and compound **5.2** (0.972g, 2.1mmol) were dissolved in 20mL of nitromethane in a 100mL round bottom flask equipped with a magnetic stir bar.

The resulting suspension was stirred at 55 °C overnight, at which point the solution became homogeneous. The Solution was then cooled to room temperature, precipitating proligand **5.1** as an off-white solid. The solid was collected by filtration, washed with slight amounts of acetone and air dried, affording compound **5.1** (0.316g, 26% yield). ¹H NMR (400 MHz, DMSO) δ 11.20 (s, 2H), 8.57 (s, 2H), 7.84 (s, 4H), 6.26 (d, 4H), 5.34 (s, 8H).

Compound 5.5

A similar synthetic pathway as (5.3) was followed, utilizing compound 5.2 (10.045g, 21.6mmol), dimethylbenzimidazole (9.428g, 64.5mmol) and KOH (3.618g, 64.5mmol) in 100mL of DCM. The resulting solid after removing volatiles was washed with water and dried overnight in air to afford compound 5.5 (5.057g, 61% yield) as an off-white solid. ¹H NMR (400 MHz, DMSO- d_6) δ 11.12 (s, 1H), 8.02 (s, 2H), 7.34 (d, 4H), 6.02 (s, 2H), 5.25 (s, 4H), 2.27 (d, 12H).

Compound 5.4

A similar synthetic pathway as proligand **5.1** was followed, utilizing compound **5.5** (0.750g, 1.9mmol), compound **5.2** (0.910g, 1.9mmol) and refluxed in acetonitrile in place of nitromethane to afford compound **5.4** (0.990g, 69% yield) as an off-white solid. ¹H NMR (400 MHz, DMSO) δ 11.12 (s, 2H), 9.05 (s, 2H), 8.07 (s, 4H), 6.36 (d, 4H), 5.61 (s, 8H), 2.44 (s, 12H).

4,5-Dimethylimidazole

Glyoxal (5.36mL, 117mmol), 37 wt% aqueous formaldehyde (5mL, 67mmol) and ammonium sulfate (16.280g, 123mmol) was dissolved in 30mL of water and stirred overnight at room temperature in a 150mL round bottom flask equipped with a magnetic stir bar. The pH of the resulting solution was increased by the addition of 25g of 20%

aqueous NaOH, then 4,5-dimethylimidazole was extracted with 3x150mL portions of EtOAc. The organic fractions were collected, dried over anhydrous MgSO₄, and evaporated to afford a crude red solid. The solid was sonicated with slight amounts of diethylether and filtered to afford 4,5-dimethylimidazole (4.071g, 63% yield) as a pale pink solid. ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 7.43 (s, 1H), 2.18 (s, 6H).

Benzoxathiolium salt

Anhydrous and degassed p-toluoyl chloride (10mL, 76mmol) was dissolved in tetrafluoroboric acid diethyl ether complex (12.5mL, 92mmol) in a swivel-frit apparatus under an atmosphere of argon. A separate solution of degassed o-mercaptophenol (7.5mL, 75mmol) in tetrafluoroboric acid diethyl ether complex (12.5mL, 92mmol) was added dropwise at 0°C to the solution containing p-toluoyl chloride over a period of 30 minutes. The solution was then stirred at 35 °C for three hours before the addition of 25mL of anhydrous diethylether. The addition resulted in the precipitation of a yellow solid that was filtered under inert atmosphere using Schlenk techniques and dried under reduced pressure to afford the benzoxathiolium salt (19.473g, 83%) as a yellow solid. ¹H NMR (400 MHz, Acetonitrile-*d*₃) δ 8.43 – 8.31 (m, 3H), 8.26 (dt, 1H), 8.02 (ddd, 1H), 7.90 (ddd, 1H), 7.72 – 7.64 (m, 2H), 2.61 (s, 3H).

2,5-bis(benzoxathiolium)pyrrole

The benzoxathiolium salt (19.473g, 62mmol) was placed into a 2-neck 150mL round bottom flask charged with a magnetic stir bar in an argon filled glovebox. 20mL of anhydrous acetonitrile was added to the reaction vessel along with pyrrole (1.82 mL, 26mmol) and pyridine (5.13mL, 64mmol). The resulting suspension was stirred at room temperature for two hours before collecting the precipitate *via* filtration on a glass frit. The precipitate was washed with water to remove pyridinium tetrafluoroborate and recrystallized from hot methanol to afford 2,5-bis(benzoxathiolium)pyrrole (6.349g, 47% yield). ¹H NMR (400 MHz, Chloroform-*d*) δ 9.07 (s, 1H), 7.59 – 7.49 (m, 4H), 7.23 – 6.98 (m, 9H), 7.01 – 6.84 (m, 4H), 5.84 (dd, 2H), 2.36 (s, 6H).

2,5-diacylpyrrole

2,5-bis(benzoxathiolium)pyrrole (6.004g, 11.5mmol) was dissolved in 60mL of glacial acetic acid and 6mL of 30% hydrogen peroxide in a 150mL round bottom flask equipped with a magnetic stir bar and reflux condenser. The solution was heated to 110 °C with stirring for 30 minutes before cooling to room temperature. After the solution had cooled, 120mL of water and 240mL of chloroform were added to the reaction mixture and the organic layer separated was from the aqueous fraction. The aqueous layer was extracted with an additional four 120mL chloroform fractions. The combined organic fractions were washed with 60mL of 5% NaOH solution followed by 120mL of deionized water and then dried over MgSO₄. Volatiles were then removed with a rotary evaporator to afford 2,5-diacylpyrrole (2.896g, 83% yield) as an off-white solid. ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 10.29 (s, 1H), 7.88 (d, 4H), 7.36 (d, 4H), 6.92 (d, 2H), 2.48 (s, 6H).

Compound 5.6

2,5-diacylpyrrole (260mg, 0.86mmol) was dissolved in 5mL of anhydrous THF in a 50mL round bottom flask equipped with a magnetic stir bar and transferred *via* syringe dropwise to a suspension of LiAlH₄ (650mg, 17mmol) in 10mL of anhydrous THF at 0^oC. The resulting solution was stirred at 0 °C for three hours before the addition of 10mL water and 50mL DCM. The suspension was filtered through a glass frit and the organic fraction collected, washed with water and dried with anhydrous MgSO₄ before removing volatiles

with a rotary evaporator. The resulting solid was sonicated in pentane and filtered on a glass frit affording compound **5.6** (120mg, 45% yield) as an off-white solid.

Chapter 6 – **Conclusions and final thoughts**

The first two chapters of this thesis document the development of all-iron redox pair for redox flow battery applications, utilizing chelating nitrogen-based ligands to tune the $Fe^{2/3+}$ redox couple within the solvent window of water. A potential difference of 0.92 V was obtained with commercially available $[Fe(bpy)_3]^{2+}$ and iron complex 2.2. The organic envelopes were shown to provide stable iron complexes over 6 months in aqueous solutions and should help reduce crossover contamination through the membrane, which was deleterious in the only other reported RFB Fe²⁺/Fe²⁺ redox pair. Although the included work is only a proof of concept, it reveals the potential for soluble iron-based redox flow batteries as a promising avenue towards energy storage when geographical or geological limitations prohibit the use of pumped hydro or compressed air. The use of appropriate ligands has led to a reasonable open-circuit voltage and the ability to alleviate parasitic dihydrogen production or iron hydroxide precipitation that is prevalent within current alliron mixed RFBs. Future developments may lead to increased potential differences, solubility and identify cycling ability in order to determine the commercial applicability of all-soluble, all-iron RFBs.

An iron-based single-component active species was also developed based on computational work that predicts 9,10-anthraquinone frameworks as the most suitable organic-based candidates for the anolyte of an RFB. Although the use of quinone-based ligands resulted in poor electrochemical behavior (2.4) or difficulty in purification (2.7), the iron coordination complex featuring an anthraquinone-substituted terpyridine 2.6 shows promising redox activity as a single complex for anolyte and catholyte solutions. An increased open-circuit voltage is obtained through the use of an organic electrolyte at 1.86V

and complex **2.6** maintains electrochemical reversibility across multiple scan rates. A single component system based on iron further reduces issues associated with crossover contamination and can lower costs ascribed to membranes and expensive metal sources. Based on the extensive modification of anthroquinones towards increased solubility and tuning of the reduction potential, the incorporation of functional groups in complex **2.6** might provide appropriate water solubility and pH control to ensure that the reduction potential of the ligand falls within the potential window of water.

The second portion of this thesis is dedicated to the development of ligands for the electrochemical reduction of CO₂ catalyzed by first-row transition metals. A redox-active 1,3,5-triazapentadienyl-2,4-bis(2-pyridyl) ligand (TAPPy) employed as a nickel complex was shown to exclusively host a radical anion within the ligand framework upon reduction, and produce CO under reducing conditions. Mechanistic insight into the decomposition of the aforementioned complex was obtained by the use of spectroelectrochemistry, ATR-IR analysis of the isolated post-CPE precipitate, as well as NMR analysis. This revealed decomposition of the complex during electrolysis to nickel carbonyl containing compounds, and potential carbamate formation. Iron coordination complexes with the same TAPPy ligand reproducibly led to a homoleptic Fe(TAPPy)₃ complex that was electrochemically inactive towards CO₂ reduction.

In order to develop catalysts with increased activity, bis(carbene) macrocycles and porphyrinoids were targeted, with the aim of increasing the electron density at the metal center in comparison to literature reported N4-macrocycles and porphyrins. Increased solubility of the parent system **5.1** was achieved with the use of dimethylbenzimidazole, although the labile α -pyrrole C-N bond in ligand **5.4** continuously cleaved upon the addition of base or complexation attempts. Unsaturation towards the corresponding carbene-porphyrinoid led to decomposition of the ligand framework and additional synthetic attempts at a phenyl-substituted analog for increased stability were low yielding and problematic. Due to harsh conditions during the electrocatalytic reduction of CO_2 , ligands with greater stability and facile synthesis are needed, leading to the criteria for new catalyst designs to be revisited.

Selection criteria for new ligands should involve a facile synthesis and provide a system that is stable under reducing conditions. This criteria in combination with the modification of known catalysts can provide a better understanding of ideal ligand properties and contribute to future catalyst designs. The ubiquitous use of 2,2'-bipyridine in ligand frameworks towards electrocatalytic CO₂ reduction prompted the synthesis of a tetradentate framework with a 2,2'-bipyridine central donor and flanking phosphine chalcogenides. The corresponding phosphine oxide **7.2** forms monometallic and dinuclear complexes with Fe/Ni and Re respectively. Based on recent literature, dinuclear rhenium complexes have a potential for a bimetallic cooperative activation of CO₂, leading to increased rates in comparison to the monometallic systems. Additional characterization and electrochemical analysis is needed to determine the applicability of the dinuclear rhenium complex **7.6**, with additional ligand scaffolds proposed based on the free phosphine **7.2** as pentadentate N5 ligands.

Chapter 7 – Future Directions

7.1 Background Information

The development of fundamentally new ligand platforms for the electrocatalytic reduction of carbon dioxide proved more challenging than expected within the timeframe of a masters degree. As a consequence, improving on known systems appeared to be a suitable starting point in order to gain expertise in the field and provide a better understanding of ideal ligand properties, contributing to future catalyst designs. One of the most common building blocks in ligand design for CO₂ reduction has been 2,2'-bipyridine. The bipyridine subunit is one of the most famous chelating ligands in coordination chemistry, forming complexes with a variety of metals as a redox active ligand that is stable upon reduction.^[215] 2,2'-bipyridine is a strong sigma donor, π -acidic and traditionally redox-non innocent throughout proposed catalytic cycles. The use of 2,2'-bipyridine in homogeneous CO₂ reduction spans across multiple different metals including chromium, iron, cobalt, nickel, molybdenum, ruthenium, palladium, tungsten, osmium and iridium. The majority of work reporting electrocatalytic reduction of carbon dioxide catalyzed by manganese and rhenium complexes is based on bipyridine.^[103,143]

In addition to terpyridine, many other ligands in CO₂ reduction have been based off a 2,2'-bipyridine platform, such as quaterpyridines^[216–218], bipyricorrle^[219], imino bypridyl^[220] phosphine-substituted bipyridines,^[221] and bipyridyl-N-heterocyclic carbene donors (**Figure 7.1**).^[196] The 2,2'-bipyridine subunit remains intact in each example and commonly hosts additional electron density throughout the π framework upon reduction of the corresponding complexes. For example, ligand-based reductions occur on bipyricorrle complex **B** at -1.75V vs. Fc/Fc⁺, complex **C** at -1.08V vs. NHE and compound **D** at -1.3V vs. SHE, with the majority of the electron density located on the bipyridine subunit.



Figure 7-1 Selected catalysts for electrochemical CO₂ reduction based on 2,2'-bipyridine ligand frameworks.

7.2 Bipyridine-Based Phosphine Chalcogenides with Iron and Nickel

Maintaining similar selection criteria as previous examples, ligands based on a bipyridine core that are easily synthesized in gram quantities, redox-active and stable under reducing conditions were targeted with the aim of identifying complexes with high activity and selectivity towards CO_2 reduction. With these criteria, a 6,6'-disubstituted 2,2'-bipyridine was identified as a potential framework suitable for CO_2 reduction on different complexes. A facile synthesis and versatility towards donor modification allows for the generation of several potential ligands, all based on a 2,2'-bipyridine central donor. The initial targets included a phosphine oxide and phosphine sulfide, with future works



Scheme 7-1 Synthesis of free phosphine 7.1

incorporating iminophosphoranes, all stemming from phosphine 7.1 (Scheme 7.1).

6,6'-dibromo-2,2'-bipyridine was synthesized from 2,6-dibromopyridine via oxidative cross-coupling, in the presence of half an equivalent of copper(II) chloride and molecular oxygen. The free phosphine **7.1** can then be synthesized by either the addition of freshly prepared lithium diphenyl phosphide or lithium halogen exchange with ⁿBuLi and subsequent addition of chlorodiphenylphosphine. The use of lithium diphenyl phosphide led to cleaner reactivity, so this method was used in subsequent ligand synthesis.

The free phosphine 7.1 can be oxidized with hydrogen peroxide or elemental sulfur to obtain the corresponding phosphine oxide 7.2 or phosphine sulfide 7.3 (Scheme 7.2). The oxidation is confirmed by ³¹P NMR, with the free phosphine 7.1 producing a resonance at -2.96 ppm, compound 7.2 at 20.062 ppm and compound 7.3 at 38.78 ppm.





Metalation proceeds readily with the phosphine oxide, leading to an immediate color change with the addition of FeCl₂(THF)_{1.5} in methanol (**Scheme 7.3**). Single crystals of the iron complex 7.4 were grown by layering a concentrated solution of 7.4 in methanol on benzene, which were used to confirm the solid state structure by X-Ray crystallography. The iron complex exists as a cation in the solid state, with only one chloride bound covalently and the remaining coordination site occupied by the solvated methanol (**Figure 7.1**). The pseudo-octahedral structure appears slightly strained in the equatorial plane, with

an O-Fe-O bond angle of $128.18(7)^{O}$ in comparison to an unterhered bipyridyl-Nheterocyclic carbene donor used in CO₂ reduction with all donor-metal-donor bond angles between 88.9 and 94.7^[196]



Scheme 7-3 Synthesis of coordination complexes 7.4 and 7.5.

The corresponding nickel complex was also synthesized by stirring NiCl₂(H₂O)₆ and ligand **7.3** in methanol overnight. Slow evaporation of a concentrated solution of **7.5** in methanol produced single crystals suitable for X-Ray diffraction, which revealed a cationic pseudo-octahedral structure remarkably similar to that of complex **7.4** (**Figure 7.2**). Electrochemical analysis of both **7.4** and **7.5** in acetonitrile showed increased resistance over successive scans, with visible decomposition on the glassy carbon electrode



Figure 7-2 Solid state structures of complex 7.4 (left) and 7.5 (right) drawn at 50% probability elipsoids and wireframe.

and no observable current enhancement under an atmosphere of carbon dioxide. With the evident decomposition upon reduction, we decided not to pursue complexes **7.4** and **7.5** under different conditions for optimization towards CO_2 reduction.

7.3 Bimetallic Rhenium Complexes

Although the iron and nickel complexes were ineffective as catalysts, the extensive literature of group 7 bipyridine complexes in CO₂ reduction encouraged us to react ligand **7.2** with freshly prepared Re(CO)₅Br, with the aim of obtaining the monometallic Re(**2**)(CO)Br. The reaction of **7.2** with Re(CO)₅Br proceeds readily at 100 °C in toluene, producing a relatively insoluble yellow crystalline product after heating overnight. Analysis of the crystalline material by X-Ray crystallography revealed a homobimetallic complex with ligand **7.2**, where the bipyridine subunit is twisted out of plane to accommodate two equivalents of Re(CO)₃Br (**Figure 7.3**). The synthesis of the binuclear complex was scaled up using two equivalents of Re(CO)₅Br and purified to afford complex **7.6** as a diamagnetic yellow solid in relatively low yields after purification (15%). The ³¹P NMR spectrum featuring a single phosphine resonance at 60.07 ppm and the ¹H and spectrum matched the identified structure. It is noteworthy that during the initial



Figure 7-3 Solid state structures of homotrimetallic rhenium complex (left) and complex 7.6 (right) drawn at 50% probability ellipsoids and wireframe.

characterization, a homotrimetallic impurity was identified by X-Ray crystallography (**Figure 7.3**). It is believed to be due to a quaterpyridine-based impurity present in the ligand.

Although the binuclear rhenium complex was unexpected, cooperative bimetallic rhenium complexes have been shown in literature to be more active than the monometallic analogs.^[222–225] A modified mechanism in which cooperative activation of CO_2 between the two metal centers leads to an increase in the activity of the complex could be promising for further reducing the overpotential and increasing TOF. In addition, the use of dinuclear ruthenium complexes with a central bipyridine framework has also provided active catalysts for CO_2 reduction.^[226]

Prior to scaling up the reaction and additional recrystallization/purification, preliminary electrochemical analysis of complex **7.6** was obtained in dry DMF. Two reversible reduction waves were observed under an argon atmosphere. The first redox event was subtle at -1.75V vs. Fc/Fc⁺ and was further reduced to baseline upon successive scans (2-3 scans at 100mVs⁻¹). While the first redox couple decreased in intensity, a separate reversible reduction event appeared at -2.25V and was stable over continued sweeps. When the solution was mixed or left to freely diffuse over a couple minutes, the process repeated itself and returned to a voltammogram that featured a single redox couple at -1.75V. In contrast to the first reduction, the second reduction wave showed substantial current enhancement under an atmosphere of CO₂, in which no proton sources were added. The reduction potentials obtained at -1.75V and -2.25V are consistent with the first and second reduction waves of Re(bpy)CO₃Cl, which appear at -1.74V and -2.13V respectively (Fc/Fc⁺ = 0.4V vs. SCE),^[227] where the initial reduction leads to a rhenium-rhenium dimer

formation.^[139] Interestingly, after additional purification, only the first redox event remained in the resulting voltammogram and did not show any current enhancement upon addition of carbon dioxide. Additional work needs to be pursued in order to identify if the homobimetallic complex **7.6** undergoes a chemical transformation under reducing conditions such as dimerization that could lead to an active catalyst. Unfortunately, conditions have not been optimized at this point in time and no concrete conclusions can be drawn. Another alternative is to synthesize the quaterpyridine ligand that was observed in the homotrimetallic rhenium complex (*vide supra*) and identify if the trinuclear complex was the active component in the initial screen of complex **7.6**.



Figure 7-4 Cyclic voltammogram of complex **7.6** (1.0 mM) at 0.1 V s⁻¹ under Ar (black) and CO₂ (Dashed line) with the background scans shown in grey. Conditions: 0.1 M $^{n}Bu_{4}NPF_{6}$, DMF, glassy carbon disk working electrode, Pt wire counter electrode, Ag/AgCl reference electrode and internally referenced to ferrocene.

Surprisingly, when all complexation attempts were replicated with the phosphine sulfide **7.3**, no coordination to the metal center was observed. The phosphine sulfide is traditionally a stronger Lewis base, so it was expected that it would form similar complexes

as the phosphine oxide **7.2**.^[228,229] One rationale for the observed behavior is that geometrical constraints due to an increased phosphine sulfide bond distance inhibited coordination: the P=E bond distance in $Ph_3P=E$ is 1.484(1) Å for O and 1.950(3) Å for S.^[230]

In addition to further investigation into the electrochemical activity of complex **7.6**, other ligand platforms based on the parent phosphine **7.1** can be pursued. The use of iminophosphoranes instead of phosphine chalcogenides can enable a pentadentate, macrocyclic nitrogen based ligand similar to that of reported cobalt and iron complexes that are active for CO₂ reduction.^[231] Potential ligand designs are shown alongside the literature reported complex in **Scheme 7.4**, where the resulting ligands could be synthesized from either the free phosphine **7.1** and a bisazide or the use of a free diamine and R_3PX_2 where X = Cl or Br.



Scheme 7-4 Potential proligands and ligands based on a pentadentate N5 complex used for electrochemical CO₂ reduction^[231]

7.4 Experimental

6,6'-dibromo-2,2'-bipyridine

2,6-dibromopyridine (5.00g, 21.1mmol) was charged into a 150mL 2-neck round bottom flask equipped with a magnetic stir bar and placed under an argon atmosphere *via* Schlenk techniques. 20mL of anhydrous diethyl ether was transferred into the reaction vessel and

the resulting suspension was cooled to -78 °C before the dropwise addition of 1.6M "BuLi (14.5mL, 23.2mmol). The suspension was stirred at -78 °C until a homogeneous solution was obtained, upon which anhydrous CuCl₂ (1.419g, 10.5 mmol) was added in one portion through the side arm under a heavy flow of argon. The resulting suspension was stirred at -78°C under an argon atmosphere for an additional hour before opening to atmospheric conditions and bubbling air through the solution. The air was bubbled through the solution upon warming to room temperature and for an additional hour before the addition of 6M HCl (16.3mL). After the addition of HCl, the suspension was stirred for 10 minutes followed by filtration on a glass frit. The precipitate was subsequently washed with 0.5M HCl, followed by water and slight amounts of acetone to afford 6,6'-dibromo-2,2'-bipyridine (1.855g, 56% yield) as an off-white solid. ¹H NMR (400 MHz, Chloroform-*d*) δ 8.40 (dd, 2H), 7.69 (t, 2H), 7.53 (dd, 2H).

Compound 7.1

6,6'-dibromo-2,2'-bipyridine (500mg, 1.59 mmol) was charged into a 100mL round bottom flask equipped with a magnetic stir bar and attached to a swivel-frit apparatus. 20mL of anhydrous THF was then transferred into the reaction flask and cooled to -78 °C before the dropwise addition of 1.6M ⁿBuLi (2.1mL, 3.36mmol). The reaction was stirred at -78 °C for an additional hour before the dropwise addition of PPh₂Cl (0.615mL, 3.3 mmol), in which the solution was stirred at -78 °C for 1 hour before warming to room temperature. The reaction was stirred at room temperature overnight before filtration through the swivel frit apparatus and evaporation of the filtrate to dryness under reduced pressure. Pentane was condensed onto the resulting solid and the suspension was sonicated before filtering back through the swivel frit to afford compound **7.1** (820mg, 98% yield) as an off-white solid.

Compound 7.1 could also be synthesized *via* a different method, as described herein. A 2neck round bottom flask equipped with a magnetic stir bar was charged with lithium metal (200mg, 28.8 mmol) and connected to a swivel frit apparatus. 20mL of anhydrous THF was transferred into the reaction vessel before the dropwise addition of PPh₂Cl (1.77mL, 9.6 mmol) under vigorous stirring. The reaction was stirred at room temperature overnight before filtration through the swivel frit apparatus and evaporation of the filtrate to dryness under reduced pressure. Pentane was condensed onto the resulting solid and the suspension was sonicated before filtering back through the swivel frit to afford LiPPh₂(THF) (2.580g, 99% yield) as a bright yellow solid. The reagent was stored in the glovebox freezer before use in the subsequent reaction. 6,6'-dibromo-2,2'-bipyridine (500mg, 1.6mmol) and LiPPh₂(THF) (951mg, 3.5 mmol) were added to separate 100mL 2-neck round bottom flasks equipped with magnetic stir bars and dissolved in 10mL of anhydrous THF, where the LiPPh₂ solution was attached to a swivel frit apparatus. The 6,6'-dibromo-2,2'bipyridine solution was then added dropwise to the LiPPh₂ solution at room temperature and subsequently heated to 60 °C for 1.5 hours. Afterwards, volatiles were removed under reduced pressure followed by the addition of 20mL of anhydrous DCM. The resulting suspension was filtered through the swivel frit apparatus and the filtrate evaporated to dryness under reduced pressure. Pentane was condensed onto the resulting solid and the suspension was sonicated before filtering back through the swivel frit to afford compound **7.1** (638mg, 76% yield) as an off-white solid. ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CD_2Cl_2) δ 8.18 (d, 2H), 7.66 (td, 2H), 7.50 – 7.36 (m, 20H), 7.17 (dt, 2H). ³¹P NMR (162 MHz, CD₂Cl₂) δ -2.96.

Compound 7.2

Compound **7.1** (415mg, 0.79 mmol) was placed in a 150mL round bottom flask equipped with a magnetic stir bar and reflux condenser. The solid was dissolved in 40mL of absolute ethanol followed by the addition of 30% H₂O₂ solution (0.41mL, 3.6 mmol) in one portion. The solution was refluxed for 30 minutes before cooling to room temperature and the addition of 100mL of water. The resulting suspension was filtered on a glass frit to afford compound **7.2** (370mg, 84% yield) as a white solid. ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CD₂Cl₂) δ 8.39-8.36 (m, 2H), 8.33-8.29 (m, 2H), 8.05-8.00 (m, 2H), 7.97-7.92 (m, 8H), 7.60-7.48 (m, 12H). ³¹P NMR (162 MHz, CD₂Cl₂) δ 19.66.

Compound 7.3

Compound **7.1** (250mg, 0.47 mmol) and elemental sulfur (100mg, 3.1 mmol) were placed in a 100mL round bottom flask equipped with a magnetic stir bar within an argon filled glovebox. 20mL of anhydrous DCM was condensed into the reaction flask and the resulting solution was stirred at room temperature for one hour. Excess sulfur was filtered off and the filtrate was evaporated to dryness on a rotary evaporator affording compound **7.3** (150mg, 54% yield) as an off white solid. ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CD₂Cl₂) δ 8.56 (ddd, 2H), 8.21 (ddd, 2H), 8.03 – 7.89 (m, 10H), 7.60 – 7.43 (m, 12H). ³¹P NMR (162 MHz, CD₂Cl₂) δ 38.79.

Complexes 7.4 and 7.5

Compound **7.2** (50mg, 0.9mmol) and $\text{FeCl}_2(\text{THF})_{1.5}$ (21mg, 0.9mmol) were added to a 50mL round bottom flask equipped with a magnetic stir bar and reflux condenser. The solids were dissolved in 15mL of methanol and refluxed overnight before removing volatiles with a rotary evaporator. The resulting red solid was washed with slight amounts
of water and acetone to afford complex **7.4** as a dark red solid. For the nickel complex **7.5**, $NiCl_2(H_2O)_6$ was used in place of $FeCl_2(THF)_{1.5}$.

Complex 7.6

Phosphine oxide **7.2** (230mg, 0.645 mmol) and sublimed Re(CO)₅Br (524mg, 1.29 mmol) were added to a 100mL round bottom flask equipped with a magnetic stir bar in an argon filled glovebox. 20mL of anhydrous toluene was distilled into the reaction flask and the resulting solution heated at 100 °C overnight. The resulting yellow suspension was cooled with an ice bath prior to filtration and washed multiple times with fresh acetonitrile to afford complex **7.6** (120mg, 15% yield) as a yellow solid. ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CD₂Cl₂) δ 8.76 (dt, 2H), 8.22 (td, 2H), 8.00 (ddd, 2H), 7.93 – 7.60 (m, 20H). ³¹P NMR (162 MHz, CD₂Cl₂) δ 60.07.

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