

**Dilutedly localized high-concentration ionogel electrolyte enabling high-voltage quasi-solid-state lithium metal batteries**

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## ABSTRACT

Ionogels, which are being considered as quasi-solid electrolytes for energy-storage devices, exhibited technical superiority in terms of nonflammability, negligible vapor pressure, remarkable thermostability, high ionic conductivity, and broad electrochemical stability window. However, their applications in lithium metal batteries (LMBs) have been hindered by several issues: poor compatibility with Li-metal anodes and high-voltage cathodes, high viscosity, and inadequate wettability. Little attention has been paid to ionogel-based low-concentration electrolytes, despite their potential advantages in terms of  $\text{Li}^+$  mobility, viscosity, electrode wettability, and cost. Here we demonstrate the surprising capabilities of localized high-concentration ionogel (LHCI) and dilutedly localized high-concentration ionogel (DLHCI) electrolytes, utilizing the non-solvating fluorinated ether 1,1,2,2-tetrafluoroethyl-2,2,3,3-tetrafluoropropyl ether (TTE), to realize high-voltage quasi-solid-state lithium metal batteries (QSLMBs). Notably, the DLHCI electrolyte delivers not only superior ionic conductivity of  $3.93 \times 10^{-3} \text{ S cm}^{-1}$ , but also provides a high Li plating/stripping Coulombic efficiency (CE) exceeding 99%. Moreover, it significantly enhances anodic stability when paired with 4.4 V  $\text{LiNi}_{0.8}\text{Co}_{0.1}\text{Mn}_{0.1}\text{O}_2$  (NCM811) and 4.8 V  $\text{LiNi}_{0.5}\text{Mn}_{1.5}\text{O}_4$  (LNMO). Consequently, substantial improvement in cycling performance of QSLMBs has been realized with the DLHCI electrolyte.

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The current interest in ionogels, *viz.* ionic liquids (ILs) immobilized within solid scaffolds, is driven by their unique merits, including nonflammability, negligible vapor pressure, excellent thermostability, superior ionic conductivity, and broad electrochemical stability window.<sup>1</sup> These properties make ionogels a promising candidate for use as quasi-solid electrolytes in energy-storage devices. Researchers have investigated a great deal of inorganic and organic solid scaffolds for the confinement of various ILs to produce diverse ionogels with enhanced properties. Nevertheless, the Li plating and stripping in ionogel electrolytes have suffered from low current densities (typically around 0.1 mA cm<sup>-2</sup> and 0.1 mAh cm<sup>-2</sup>).<sup>2-4</sup> Besides the growth of Li dendrites, another problem associated with the Li metal is the limited Li plating/stripping Coulombic efficiencies (CEs). The CEs in ionogel electrolytes, which reflect the loss of Li<sup>+</sup> upon each cycle and serve as an indicator of the cycling stability of Li metal, have been scarcely reported in the literature. The available data shows inferior CEs ranging from 19% to 94% in ILs.<sup>5,6</sup> The diffusion of Li<sup>+</sup> is faster through the bulk IL or the interfaces between scaffolds and IL, but slower through the polymeric/inorganic scaffolds, consequently, the spatial nonuniformity of Li flux leads to the formation of Li dendrites.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, to maintain high ionic conductivities, ionogels generally contain minor proportions of solid scaffolds. However, this can weaken the diffusion of ILs and their anions, leading to the side reactions and an unstable solid electrolyte interphase (SEI) on Li metal.

In addition to the challenges posed by Li-metal anodes, the lithium metal batteries

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(LMBs) with ionogel electrolytes have primarily realized Li plating/stripping in low-energy cathodes such as  $\text{LiFePO}_4$  (LFP).<sup>8-10</sup> This limitation arises from the restricted oxidative stabilization of ionogels and the formation of an unstable cathode electrolyte interphase (CEI) on cathodes. To maximize the specific energy of LMBs, a promising approach is to pair the Li metal with Ni-rich  $\text{LiNi}_x\text{Co}_y\text{Mn}_{1-x-y}\text{O}_2$  (NCM,  $x > 0.6$ ) cathodes, such as  $\text{LiNi}_{0.8}\text{Co}_{0.1}\text{Mn}_{0.1}\text{O}_2$  (NCM811). These cathodes offer high specific capacity, high voltage, and low price with less Co. However, increasing Ni content in the NCM cathodes, while enhancing the specific energy, also exacerbates dramatically the side reactions at electrolyte/cathode interface, leading to severe cycling failure.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, it is of great importance yet remains challenge to regulate the ionogel electrolytes simultaneously stable to the Li metal anodes and high-voltage Ni-rich cathodes.

Recently, we reported on a unique “superconcentrated ionogel-in-ceramic” electrolyte, prepared by enriching a garnet-type conductor with a superconcentrated ionogel (3 M  $\text{LiTFSI}$ – $\text{EmimFSI}$ – $\text{PMMA}$ ). This electrolyte not only delivers superior  $\text{Li}^+$  conduction, but also exhibits impressive stabilization for both Li-metal anode and LFP and NCM523 cathodes.<sup>12</sup> It has been energetically proposed that increasing salt concentration in solvents leads to a reduction in solvent molecules and alters solvation structure, thereby producing distinctive properties such as ion diffusion, interfacial stabilization, and electrochemical reversibility.<sup>13</sup> The concept of high-concentration electrolyte (HCE, typically  $\geq 3$  M for Li salt concentration) is now widely recognized

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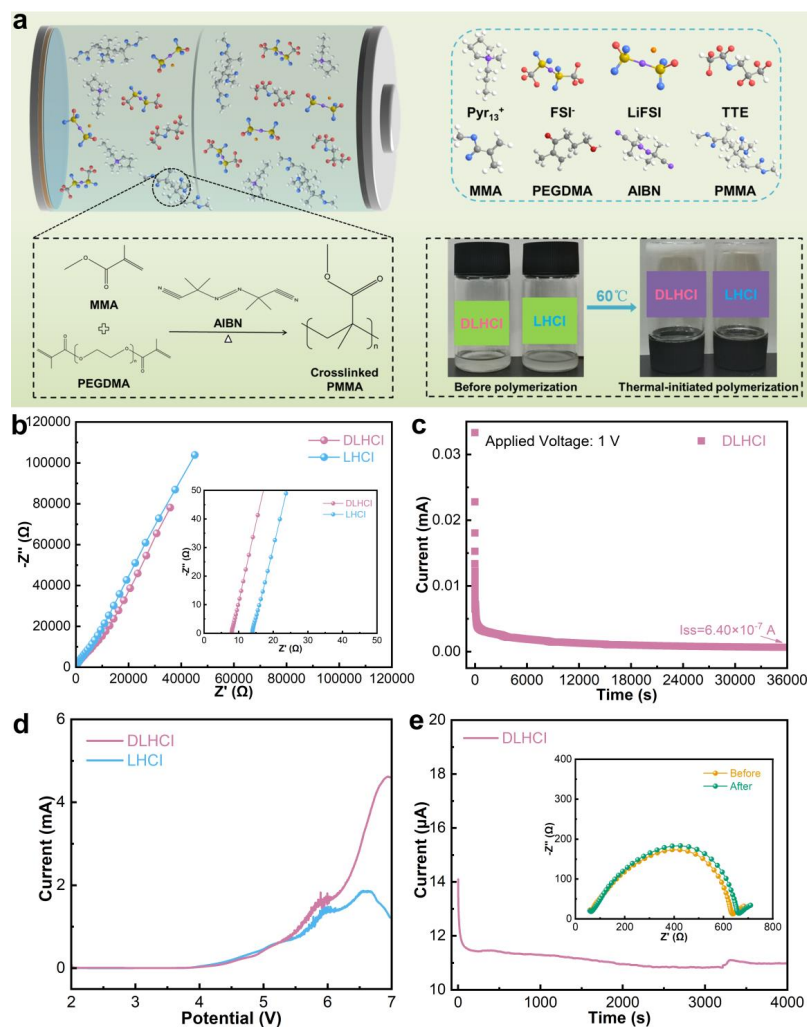
in the field of organic electrolyte.<sup>14</sup> Specifically, several studies have shown salt-concentrated IL electrolytes can form stable interfaces with Li-/Na-metal anodes.<sup>15,16</sup> However, these HCEs generally exhibit high viscosity, low Li<sup>+</sup> mobility, and poor wetting on cathodes, limiting capacity utilization and rate capability. Conversely, the localized high-concentration electrolytes (LHCEs, typically  $\geq 1\sim 1.5$  M for Li salt concentration) demonstrate favorable compatibility with Li-metal anodes, low viscosity, and good wettability.<sup>17</sup> More recently, the low-concentration electrolytes (LCEs, typically  $< 1.0$  M for Li salt concentration) have garnered significant interest due to their notable advantages in terms of cost and viscosity.<sup>18</sup> These electrolyte chemistries have considerably broadened the research scopes of quasi-/solid-state electrolytes and serve as a valuable complement to the conventional liquid electrolytes (1~1.2 M of Li salt concentration). Despite this, the LCEs for high-voltage LMBs remain a significant challenges due to the uncontrollable decomposition of free solvents and the instability of the electrolyte/electrode interphases.<sup>19,20</sup> While ionogel electrolytes provide prominent merits, they have received limited attention, especially in their low-concentration territory, despite the pressing issues surrounding them.

Here we challenge this traditional wisdom and validate the extraordinary capabilities of the localized high-concentration ionogel (LHCl, 1.0 M) and the dilutedly localized high-concentration ionogel (DLHCl, 0.6 M) electrolytes to enable simultaneous stabilization towards Li-metal anode, 4.4 V NCM811 and 4.8 V LiNi<sub>0.5</sub>Mn<sub>1.5</sub>O<sub>4</sub> (LNMO) cathodes, and realize enhanced cycling for high-voltage quasi-

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solid-state lithium metal batteries (QSLMBs).



**FIG. 1.** (a) Schematic of the LHCI and DLHCl preparation. (b) Nyquist curves of LHCI and DLHCl electrolytes. (c) DC polarization curve of DLHCl. (d) Linear sweep voltammetry curves of LHCI and DLHCl. (e) Current-time profile of Li symmetric cell with DLHCl. The inset shows impedance spectra of the cell before and after

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polarization.

Despite a few advancements in IL-/ionogel-based HCEs, the sluggish  $\text{Li}^+$  mobility and large viscosity of the ILs constrain the performance of LMBs. Moreover, the “solidification” in ionogels further compounds these concerns. To tackle these issues, the non-solvating co-solvents, such as hydrofluoroethers or fluorinated aromatic compounds, have recently been used in IL electrolytes,<sup>21</sup> inspired by organic-solvent-based LHCEs. Analogous to the organic-solvent-based LHCEs, the IL-based LHCEs exhibited typical Li salt concentration of 1~1.5 M.<sup>22</sup> The strong electron-withdrawing effect of the fluorinated groups in non-solvating co-solvents reduces the solvating capability of the co-solvents towards  $\text{Li}^+$ , thus produces more inert SEI layers.<sup>23</sup> Intriguingly, while significant research has been devoted to the organic-solvent-based and IL-based LHCEs, ionogel-based LHCEs have received limited attention. In this context, we have developed an ionogel-based LHCE (localized high-concentration ionogel, LHCI, 1.0 M). We have chosen a typical non-solvating fluorinated ether, 1,1,2,2-tetrafluoroethyl-2,2,3,3-tetrafluoropropyl ether (TTE), as it has been found to promote the formation of a stable SEI and enable the operation of high-voltage LMBs.<sup>17</sup> By using the non-solvating TTE, the LHCI is anticipated to not only reduce the viscosity and enhance the  $\text{Li}^+$  mobility of ionogel, but also strike a balance between the stability of electrolyte/electrode interfaces. Furthermore, we have expanded the LHCI concept to the dilutedly localized high-concentration ionogel (DLHCI, 0.6 M) electrolyte concept and demonstrate the superiority of DLHCI over LHCI in various

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electrochemical properties. To prepare the LHCI and DLHCI electrolytes, first lithium bis(fluorosulfonyl)imide (LiFSI) was fully dissolved in N-methyl-N-propylpyrrolidinium bis(fluorosulfonyl)imide (Py<sub>13</sub>FSI), second TTE was used to dilute the solution. Subsequently, methyl methacrylate (MMA) monomer, poly(ethylene glycol) dimethacrylate (PEGDMA) crosslinker, and azobisisobutyronitrile (AIBN) thermal initiator were added to the solution. Transparent and clear electrolytes can be obtained when the PMMA precursors were added. Last solidified electrolytes were received after thermally initiating radical polymerization at 60 °C [Fig. 1(a)]. As revealed by electrochemical impedance spectroscopy [Fig. 1(b)], the LHCI and DLHCI electrolytes showed ionic conductivities of  $2.25 \times 10^{-3}$  and  $3.93 \times 10^{-3}$  S cm<sup>-1</sup> at 25 °C, respectively, which are distinctly superior to those of the inorganic/organic ionogels and concentrated ionogels,<sup>1-4,12</sup> indicating the considerably improved Li<sup>+</sup> mobility. Meanwhile, negligible electronic conductivities of  $1.46 \times 10^{-9}$  and  $2.45 \times 10^{-9}$  S cm<sup>-1</sup> were observed in the LHCI and DLHCI electrolytes [Fig. 1(c) and Fig. S1]. The electrochemical stability of both electrolytes was determined by linear sweep voltammetry at 1 mV s<sup>-1</sup> scan rate between 2 and 7 V. Both the LHCI and DLHCI electrolytes exhibited similar anodic voltage limits of ~5.0 V vs. Li/Li<sup>+</sup> [Fig. 1(d)], indicating the fluorinated ether TTE wouldn't weaken the resistance against oxidation. This wide voltage window provides a possibility of pairing Li-metal anode with high-voltage cathodes. Moreover, the DLHCI electrolyte showed Li<sup>+</sup> transference number of 0.29 [Fig. 1(e)], slightly higher than that of LHCI (0.24) (Fig. S2). The Li<sup>+</sup> transference



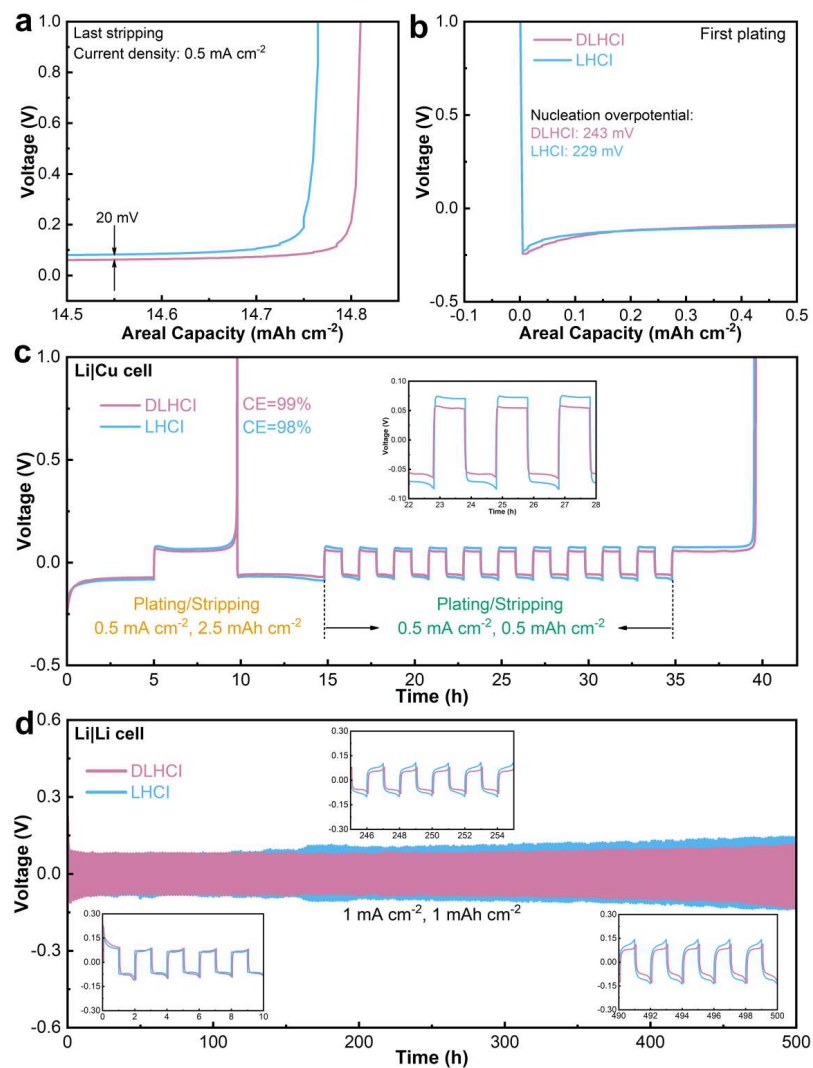
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number values were much higher than those of the IL-based LHCEs,<sup>22,23</sup> which can be ascribed to the solidification of LHCI and DLHCI. Although both the DLHCI and LHCI electrolytes showed comparatively low  $\text{Li}^+$  transference number as compared with the solid polymer electrolytes, the further electrolyte chemistry design and regulation would strengthen the cation migration.

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**FIG. 2.** (a-c) Voltage profiles from Li|Cu cells with LHCl and DLHCl. (d) Li plating/stripping in symmetric Li|Li cells with LHCl and DLHCl.

The Li|Cu cells with LHCl and DLHCl electrolytes were used to study the cycling

stability of Li plating/stripping. The Li plating/stripping CEs were determined according to Aurbach's method.<sup>24</sup> A considerable discrepancy in the voltage profiles of the Li|Cu cells with different electrolytes was presented at 0.5 mA cm<sup>-2</sup> [Fig. 2(a)]. Less Li can be stripped from the Cu electrode in the LHCI Li|Cu cell, implying that a few of plated Li on the Cu reacted with the LHCI electrolyte and cannot be reversible during the stripping process. Whereas the DLHCI Li|Cu cell showed greater stripping capacity, demonstrating better interface stabilization. The Li electrodeposition in the DLHCI and LHCI electrolytes was compared with the nucleation overpotential, indicated by the voltage spike at the onset of Li electrodeposition. A higher nucleation overpotential (0.243 V for DLHCI compared to 0.229 V for LHCI) was observed [Fig. 2(b)]. The higher nucleation overpotential leads to the formation of more quantity of smaller nuclei on the electrode surface, thus generating uniform Li electrodeposition.<sup>25</sup> In consequence, the DLHCI electrolyte provides a prominent Li CE of 99% at 0.5 mA cm<sup>-2</sup> [Fig. 2(c)], in sharp contrast, the LHCI electrolyte shows a moderate Li CE of 98%.

To further study the cycling stability of Li metal, symmetric Li|Li cells with both electrolytes were studied. Fig. 2(d) shows the long-term cycling stability of the Li|Li cells with the LHCI and DLHCI electrolytes. Notably, the symmetric Li|Li cells were cycled for 500 h at a high current density of 1.0 mA cm<sup>-2</sup> and a capacity of 1.0 mAh cm<sup>-2</sup>. The DLHCI electrolyte exhibits stable and flat voltage profiles, accompanied by a stable overpotential. In contrast, the cycling of Li|Li cell with the LHCI electrolyte at

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this current density frequently exhibited increased voltage polarizations. Furthermore, Tafel curves and corresponding current density (Fig. S3) illustrate higher exchange current density ( $0.17 \text{ mA cm}^{-2}$ ) for the DLHCI, indicating better charge transfer capability. These findings validate the exceptional cycling stability of the DLHCI electrolyte, enabling the highly reversible plating/stripping of Li-metal anode even under high current density.

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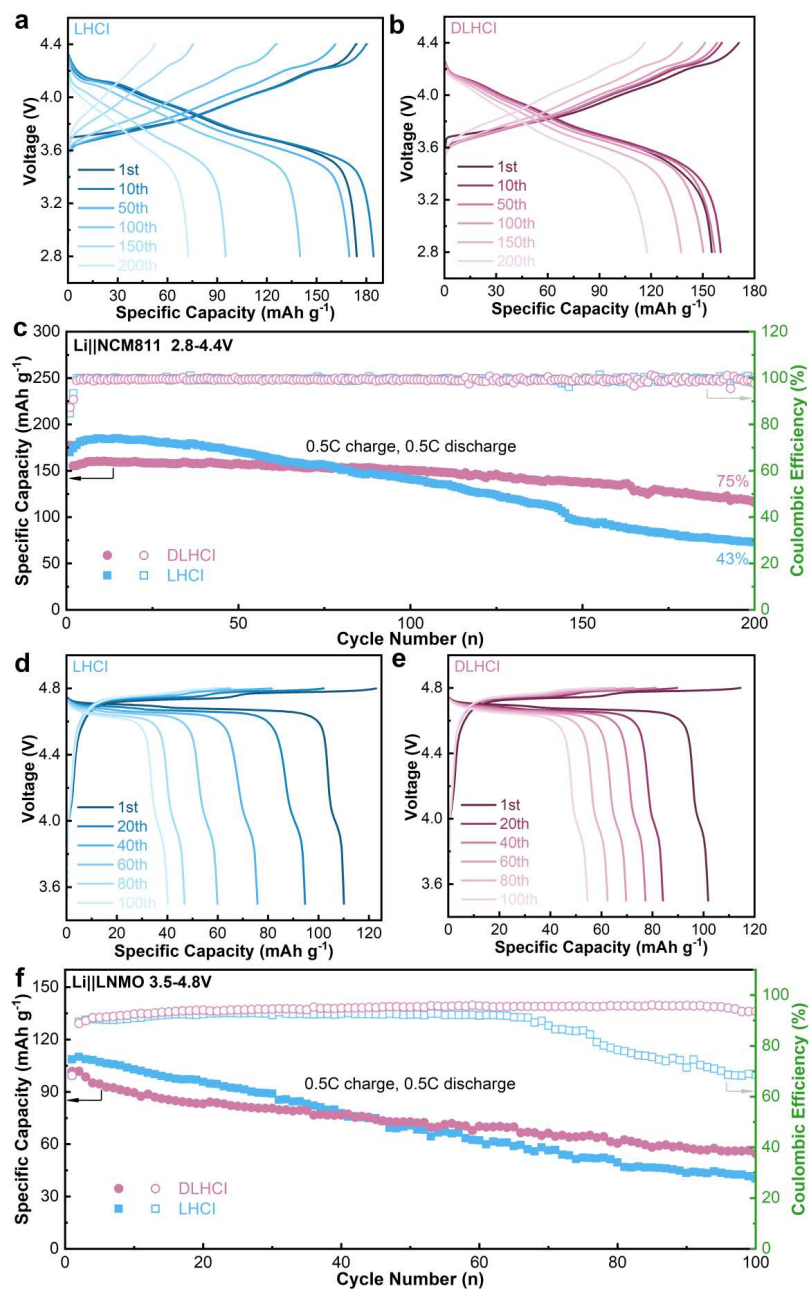


FIG. 3. Voltage-capacity profiles of Li||NCM811 QSLMBs with (a) LHCI and (b)

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DLHCI electrolyte. (c) Cycling performance of Li||NCM811 QSLMBs with LHCI and DLHCI. Voltage–capacity profiles of Li||LNMO QSLMBs with (d) LHCI and (e) DLHCI electrolyte. (f) Cycling performance of Li||LNMO QSLMBs with LHCI and DLHCI.

The use of LCEs for high-voltage LMBs has been hampered by severe decomposition of free solvents and the formation of unstable CEI layer. Consequently, despite their promise of delivering much higher specific energy, the LCEs have rarely been used in the high-voltage cathodes. To evaluate the resistance to anodic oxidation of the LHCI and DLHCI electrolytes, Li||NCM811 QSLMBs were fabricated and subjected to galvanostatic charging to a high cut-off voltage of 4.4 V at 0.5 C. Such condition pushed the electrolytes into a rather harsh oxidative test. The voltage decay was quite suppressed in the DLHCI electrolyte [Fig. 3(a) and 3(b)], indicating the suppression of notorious structural transformation for the NCM811 from the layered to rock-salt or spinel variants.<sup>26</sup> The DLHCI Li||NCM811 QSLMB delivers an initial discharge capacity of 177 mAh g<sup>-1</sup> at 0.1 C [Fig. 3(c)], compared to 170 mAh g<sup>-1</sup> of the LHCI QSLMB indicating the high reversibility of NCM811 cathode with the DLHCI electrolyte. It is noted from Fig. 3(c) that the capacity of LHCI Li||NCM811 QSLMB has slightly sudden drop at about 140 cycles, which was might ascribed to the oxidative decomposition of the LHCI electrolyte by the NCM811 cathode. Notably, the DLHCI Li||NCM811 QSLMB exhibits an acceptable capacity retention of 75% after 200 cycles

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at 0.5 C. In sharp contrast, continuous capacity decays and a moderate capacity retention of 43% were observed for the LHCI Li||NCM811 QSLMB [Fig. 3(c)]. This result reveals a significant improvement in the stability of LCEs towards the aggressive chemistry of both Li-metal anode and high-voltage cathode. To challenge the oxidative stability, we further assembled Li||LNMO QSLMBs with the LHCI and DLHCI electrolytes, and charged to a very high cut-off voltage of 4.8 V at 0.5 C. Both the Li||LNMO QSLMBs showed similar discharge capacity (102 mAh g<sup>-1</sup> for DLHCI compared to 109 mAh g<sup>-1</sup> for LHCI) [Fig. 3(d) and 3(e)]. However, The DLHCI Li||LNMO QSLMB offers a much higher capacity retention than the LHCI Li||LNMO QSLMB (54% compared to 37% after 100 cycles) [Fig. 3(f)]. At elevated 0.5 C rate, the DLHCI Li||NCM811 and Li||LNMO QSLMBs deliver slightly lower initial discharge capacity as compared with the LHCI QSLMBs, which might be attributed to the low Li concentration in DLHCI. Exact mechanism is needed to be revealed in the further investigation. As a result, the DLHCI electrolyte was endowed a desirable capability of enabling high-voltage QSLMBs with underlying high specific energy and enhanced safety.

**Table 1. Ionogel and low-concentration electrolytes comparison**

Study	Li metal		Cathode	Cycling	Ref.
	Coulombic	Symmetric		Performance	
	Efficiency	Cells			

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		(mA cm <sup>-2</sup> , mAh cm <sup>-2</sup> , h)				
Biomimetic ant- nest SiO <sub>2</sub> ionogel	None	0.1, 0.1, 600	LFP, NCM111	60 °C, 0.1C, 10 cycles	27	
Zwitterion- based copolymer ionogel	None	0.1, 0.05, 400	LFP	0.1C, 200 cycles	28	
Dual-layered ceramic-in- ionogel	None	0.1, 0.1, 1000	NCM811	0.1C, 60 cycles	29	
Layer-by-layer assembly ionogel	None	0.1, 0.3, 150	LFP	60 °C, 0.1C, 80 cycles	30	
Layered heterostructure ionogel	<18% and 98% for high-/low- potential ionogel	None	NCM111	0.1C, 4 cycles	31	
Zwitterionic	None	0.1, 0.1, 600	LFP	0.5C, 140	32	



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surfactant–					cycles	
stabilized						
ionogel						
0.05M LiTFSI–	None	None	S	0.2C, 200	33	
0.05M LiPF <sub>6</sub> –				cycles		
0.1M LiNO <sub>3</sub> in						
DME:DIOX						
LCE						
0.3M LiFSI–	99.2%	0.5, 0.5, 150	LFP	0.5/1.0C, 400	34	
0.2M LiTFSI in				cycles		
DX LCE						
0.1M LiDFP–	97.6%	1.0, 1.0, 400	LFP	1.0C, 300	35	
0.4M LBOB in				cycles		
EC:DMC LCE						
0.05M LiTFSI–	95%	1.0, 1.0, ~400	None	None	36	
0.5M LiTFSI–						
0.2M LiNO <sub>3</sub> in						
DME:DOL						
LCE						
DLHCl	99%	1.0, 1.0, 500	NCM811	0.5C, 200	Curr	
				cycles	ent	

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work

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Our DLHCI electrolyte compares very observably against other favorable ionogel electrolytes and LCEs (Table 1). The advanced ionogel electrolytes, which are typically associated with the inorganic nanomaterials and polymer skeletons, have primarily been evaluated in LFP battery structure, due to LFP's low operation voltage and stable structure. A few advanced ionogel electrolytes, such as those with layered heterostructure, have shown enhanced oxidative stability to enable high-voltage NCM battery structure, their cycling performance remains limited. In addition, all these ionogel electrolytes have exhibited moderate Li plating/stripping at relatively low current densities of  $0.1 \text{ mA cm}^{-2}$  in symmetric Li|Li cells. Furthermore, there is a lack of comprehensive evaluations on Li plating/stripping CEs in diverse ionogel electrolytes. A recent study showed that a low CE ( $<18\%$ ) was observed with the high-potential ionogel electrolyte (1 M LiTFSI-EmimTFSI-BN), indicating intense reactions between the deposited lithium and ionogel at low potentials. Alternatively, a high CE (98%) was observed with the low-potential ionogel electrolyte (1 M LiTFSI-EmimFSI-BN).<sup>31</sup> However, the low-potential ionogel electrolyte is unable to support the cycling of NCM111 battery. Overall, the ionogel electrolytes commonly exhibit moderate anodic stability and poor cathodic stability, which can be attributed to the weak efficiency of SEI and CEI stemmed from the ILs. Dai et al.<sup>37</sup> reported that, in comparison to a 5 M high-concentration IL electrolyte, the decomposition of LiFSI and

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the reduction of EmimFSI by Li metal are more significant in the standard 1.0 M IL electrolyte due to less effective SEI passivation. Meanwhile, a uniform CEI layer ( $\approx 5\text{--}10\text{ nm}$ ) was observed on the surface of NCM811 cathode after cycling in the high-concentration IL electrolyte. In contrast, an ultrathin ( $\approx 1\text{ nm}$ ) and uneven CEI layer was formed in the standard 1.0 M IL electrolyte. On the other hand, the emerging LCEs create an opportunity to facilitate the interfacial charge transfer kinetics due to the weak solvation nature, demonstrated with the enhancement of the Li plating/stripping behavior and battery cycling. However, the low-voltage cathodes such as LFP and S, were largely worked with the LCEs, because the preferential organic solvent decomposition in LCEs induces low interface stability. In particular, our DLHCI and LHCI electrolytes exhibit higher Li plating/stripping CEs and current densities. By moving the localized high-concentration ionogel to be more diluted, we overcome the relatively inferior interface stability arising from the IL, thus enable reversible cycling of high-voltage QSLMBs.

In summary, our research has unveiled an unanticipated capability of LHCI and DLHCI electrolytes, leveraging a non-solvating fluorinated ether, TTE, to realize high-voltage QSLMBs. The generation of DLHCI with a low Li-salt concentration of 0.6 M not only delivers desirable properties in regard to  $\text{Li}^+$  mobility, viscosity, electrode wettability, and cost, but importantly also enables high stability against Li-metal anode and high-voltage cathodes simultaneously. Notably, utilizing the DLHCI electrolyte, we achieved a high Li plating/stripping CE exceeding 99% and were able to cycle a

Li|Li cell at a high current density of  $1.0 \text{ mA cm}^{-2}$  over 500 h. Furthermore, the Li||NCM811 QSLMB exhibited an enhanced capacity retention of 75% after 200 cycles at 0.5 C. Additionally, the Li||LNMO QSLMB demonstrated reversible cycling in DLHCI at a high cut-off voltage of 4.8 V. This study highlights the potential of diluted ionogel electrolytes in realizing high-energy and high-safety QSLMBs.

See the supplementary material for the preparation and characterization of the dilutedly localized high-concentration ionogel.

This work is supported by the Key Program for International Science and Technology Cooperation Projects of the Ministry of Science and Technology of China (2021YFE0109700), Chinese National Natural Science Fund (12227801, 32300666), Natural Science Foundation of Chongqing (cstc2021jcyj-msxmX0241, cstb2023nscq-msx0303) Key Technologies and Demonstration Application Research Project for Large-scale Lithium-ion Hybrid Energy Storage Equipment (HC23118), and Hebei Province Military-civilian Integration Science and Technology Innovation Project (SJMYF2022X15).

#### AUTHOR DECLARATIONS

##### Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts to disclose.

##### Author Contributions

**Shufeng Song:** conceptualization, funding acquisition, project administration, writing-original draft, writing-review & editing; **Zongyuan Chen:** investigation, data curation, formal analysis, writing-original draft, writing-review & editing; **Shengxian Wang:** formal analysis, methodology; **Fengkun Wei:** formal analysis, methodology; **Serguei V. Savilov:** formal analysis, methodology; **Anji Reddy Polu:** formal analysis, methodology; **Pramod K. Singh:** formal analysis, methodology; **Zhaoqin Liu:** formal analysis; **Ning Hu:** formal analysis, funding acquisition, project administration, resources.

# DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding authors upon reasonable request.

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