

Ceramics for Environmental and Energy Applications II

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Volume Editor

Hua-Tay Lin

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Coronado, California

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Preface

This Ceramic Transactions volume represents 25 selected papers based on presentations in eight symposia during the 10th Pacific Rim Conference on Ceramic and Glass Technology, June 2–6, 2013 in Coronado, California. The symposia include:

- Solid Oxide Fuel Cells and Hydrogen Technology
- Direct Thermal to Electrical Energy Conversion Materials and Applications
- Photovoltaic Materials and Technologies
- Ceramics for Next Generation Nuclear Energy
- Advances in Photocatalytic Materials for Energy and Environmental Applications
- Ceramics Enabling Environmental Protection: Clean Air and Water
- Advanced Materials and Technologies for Electrochemical Energy Storage Systems
- Glasses and Ceramics for Nuclear and Hazardous Waste Treatment

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Contents

Preface	ix
Recent Research Activities for Future Challenges in Global Energy and Environment in Toyota Central R&D Labs., Inc. (TCRDL) Tomoyoshi Motohiro	1
SOLID OXIDE FUEL CELLS AND HYDROGEN TECHNOLOGY	
Structural and Electrical Characterization of $\text{Pr}_x\text{Ce}_{0.95-x}\text{Gd}_{0.05}\text{O}_{2-\delta}$ ($0.15 \leq x \leq 0.40$) as Cathode Materials for Low Temperature SOFC Rajalekshmi Chockalingam, Suddhasatwa Basu, and Ashok Kumar Ganguli	13
Solid Oxide Metal-Air Batteries for Advanced Energy Storage Xuan Zhao, Yunhui Gong, Xue Li, Nansheng Xu, and Kevin Huang	25
Fabrication of CeO_2/Al Multilayer Thin Films and the Thermal Behavior Shumpei Kurokawa, Takashi Hashizume, Masateru Nose, and Atsushi Saiki	33
DIRECT THERMAL TO ELECTRICAL ENERGY CONVERSION MATERIALS AND APPLICATIONS	
Reduced Strontium Titanate Thermoelectric Materials Lisa A. Moore and Charlene M. Smith	45
PHOTOVOLTAIC MATERIALS AND TECHNOLOGIES	
Densification and Properties of Fluorine Doped Tin Oxide (FTO) Ceramics by Spark Plasma Sintering Meijuan Li, Kun Xiang, Qiang Shen, and Lianmeng Zhang	59
Interfacial Character and Electronic Passivation in Amorphous Thin-Film Alumina for Si Photovoltaics L.R. Hubbard, J.B. Kana-Kana, and B.G. Potter, Jr.	65

CERAMICS FOR NEXT GENERATION NUCLEAR ENERGY

SiC/SiC Fuel Cladding by NITE Process for Innovative LWR Pre-Composite Ribbon Design and Fabrication Yuuki Asakura, Daisuke Hayasaka, Joon-Soo Park, Hirotatsu Kishimoto, and Akira Kohyama	79
SiC/SiC Fuel Cladding by NITE Process for Innovative Light Water Reactor - Compatibility with High Temperature Pressurized Water C. Kanda, Y. Kanda, H. Kishimoto, and A. Kohyama	85
SiC/SiC Fuel Cladding by NITE Process for Innovative LWR-Concept and Process Development of Fuel Pin Assembly Technologies Hirotatsu Kishimoto, Tamaki Shibayama, Yuuki Asakura, Daisuke Hayasaka, Yutaka Kohno, and Akira Kohyama	93
“INSPIRE” Project for R&D of SiC/SiC Fuel Cladding by NITE Method Akira Kohyama	99
SiC/SiC Fuel Cladding by NITE Process for Innovative LWR—Cladding Forming Process Development Naofumi Nakazato, Hirotatsu Kishimoto, Yutaka Kohno, and Akira Kohyama	109

**ADVANCES IN PHOTOCATALYTIC MATERIALS FOR ENERGY
AND ENVIRONMENTAL APPLICATIONS**

Preparation of Brookite-Type Titanium Oxide Nanocrystal by Hydrothermal Synthesis S. Kitahara, T. Hashizume, and A. Saiki	119
Effect of Atmosphere on Crystallisation Kinetics and Phase Relations in Electrospun TiO ₂ Nanofibres H. Albetran, H. Haroosh, Y. Dong, B. H. O'Connor, and I. M. Low	125
Electronic and Optical Properties of Nitrogen-Doped Layered Manganese Oxides Giacomo Giorgi and Koichi Yamashita	135

**CERAMICS ENABLING ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION: CLEAN
AIR AND WATER**

Understanding the Effect of Dynamic Feed Conditions on Water Recovery from IC Engine Exhaust by Capillary Condensation with Inorganic Membranes Melanie Moses DeBusk, Brian Bischoff, James Hunter, James Klett, Eric Nafziger, and Stuart Daw	143
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Reliability of Ceramic Membranes of BSCF for Oxygen Separation in a Pilot Membrane Reactor	153
E. M. Pfaff, M. Oezel, A. Eser, and A. Bezold	

ADVANCED MATERIALS AND TECHNOLOGIES FOR ELECTROCHEMICAL ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEMS

In Situ Experimentation with Batteries using Neutron and Synchrotron X-Ray Diffraction	167
Neeraj Sharma	

Electrochemical Performance of $\text{LiNi}_{1/3}\text{Co}_{1/3}\text{Mn}_{1/3}\text{O}_2$ Lithium Polymer Battery Based on PVDF-HFP/m-SBA15 Composite Polymer Membranes	181
Chun-Chen Yang and Zuo-Yu Lian	

GLASSES AND CERAMICS FOR NUCLEAR AND HAZARDOUS WASTE TREATMENT

Borosilicate Glass Foams from Glass Packaging Residues	205
R. K. Chinnam, Silvia Molinaro, Enrico Bernardo, and Aldo R. Boccaccini	

The Durability of Simulated UK High Level Waste Glass Compositions Based on Recent Vitrification Campaigns	211
Mike T. Harrison and Carl J. Steele	

Scaled Melter Testing of Noble Metals Behavior with Japanese HLW Streams	225
Keith S. Matlack, Hao Gan, Ian L. Pegg, Innocent Joseph, Bradley W. Bowan, Yoshiyuki Miura, Norio Kanehira, Eiji Ochi, Tamotsu Ebisawa, Atsushi Yamazaki, Toshiro Oniki, and Yoshihiro Endo	

Suppression of Yellow Phase Formation during Japanese HLW Vitrification	237
Hao Gan, Keith S. Matlack, Ian L. Pegg, Innocent Joseph, Bradley W. Bowan, Yoshiyuki Miura, Norio Kanehira, Eiji Ochi, Toshiro Oniki, and Yoshihiro Endo	

Cold Crucible Vitrification of Hanford HLW Surrogates in Aluminum-Iron-Phosphate Glass	251
S. V. Stefanovsky, S. Y. Shvetsov, V. V. Gorbunov, A. V. Lekontsev, A. V. Efimov, I. A. Knyazev, O. I. Stefanovsky, M. S. Zen'kovskaya, and J. A. Roach	

Hafnium and Samarium Speciation in Vitrified Radioactive Incinerator Slag	265
G. A. Malinina, S. V. Stefanovsky, A. A. Shiryayev, and Y. V. Zubavichus	

Author Index	273
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RECENT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES FOR FUTURE CHALLENGES IN GLOBAL ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT IN TOYOTA CENTRAL R&D LABS., INC. (TCRDL)

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ABSTRACT

Possible decrease in global supply of conventional oil and greenhouse warming make demands for reduction of oil consumption and diversification of fuels. In association with this, automotive powertrains are also diversifying from conventional internal combustion engine (ICE) into HV, plug-in HV (PHV), EV and fuel-cell HV (FCHV). The main sector is being replaced by HV and PHV, but still stands on ICE. In these hybridized ICE systems, unconventional oils, gaseous-, synthetic- and bio-fuels will be inevitably used more besides conventional fuels. EV as a subsidiary sector for short range use imposes additional demands of electricity from new energy sources. FCHV as another subsidiary sector for route bus and large trucks requests new infrastructures for hydrogen from new energy sources besides industrial by-products. Facing to this situation, it has become important for us to obtain concrete experiences on technologies for future energy sources by conducting R&D by ourselves although the production of energy is out of our business category. R&D for bio-ethanol production from cellulose has been already conducted. This paper describes our other typical recent R&D activities on future energy sources including laser nuclear fusion, solar-pumped lasers, solar cells and artificial photosynthesis, with special attentions to ceramics as key materials.

INTRODUCTION

Possible decrease in global supply of conventional oil and greenhouse warming caused by CO₂ emission make demands for reduction of oil consumption and diversification of fuels. In association with this, automotive powertrains are also diversifying from conventional internal combustion engine (ICE) into hybrid vehicles (HV), plug-in hybrid vehicles (PHV), electric vehicles (EV) and fuel-cell hybrid vehicles (FCHV). The main sector of automobiles is being replaced by HV and PHV, but still stands on ICE. For these hybridized ICE systems, unconventional oils, gaseous fuels, synthetic fuels and bio-fuels will be inevitably used more in addition to the conventional fuels. EV as a subsidiary sector for short range use in imposes

additional demands of electricity which must be supplied from new energy sources as well as conventional power plants. FCHV as an another subsidiary sector for route bus and large trucks requests new infrastructures for hydrogen from new energy sources as well as from industrial by-products.

Facing to this situation, it has become important for us to obtain concrete knowledge and experiences on technologies for future energy sources by conducting R&D by ourselves although the production of energy is out of our business category. R&D for bio-ethanol production from cellulose has been conducted in TCRDL. This paper describes our other typical recent research activities on future energy sources including laser nuclear fusion, solar-pumped lasers, solar cells and artificial photosynthesis, with special attentions to ceramics as key materials.

COMPACT AND HIGH REPETITION(10HZ) LASER NUCLEAR FUSION

It is believed that nuclear fusion can meet the global energy demand with much less burdens on the environment than other energy sources as well as solar energy. However it is still at an immature stage with a lot of technical challenges remaining to be solved. These are being tackled by big science projects such as ITER(International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor) Project for plasma fusion power plants and LIFE(Laser Inertial Fusion Energy) project in National Ignition Facility in US for inertial fusion power plants. Under an idea that we may achieve laser fusion power plants in a different approach using only two counter laser beams with additional one beam for fast-ignition in contrast to the NIF's 192 laser beams from all directions, a compact and high repetition(10Hz) laser nuclear fusion project has been started by The Graduate School for the Creation of New Photonic Industries, Hamamatsu Photonics K.K., TOYOTA Motor Corporation and TCRDL. We have already observed reasonable amount of neutron yield from D-D fusion by implosion of double-deuterated polystyrene foils separated by 100 μ m by counter-illumination succeeded by fast heating¹. Figure 1 shows our present status and future plan displayed as neutron yield versus laser energy. Since it is necessary to develop high- repetition MJ lasers before achieving cost and energy pay- back condition as a power plant beyond the break even condition, some intermediate outputs as neutron sources for analysis, medical and industrial applications are envisaged². At present, Nd- doped phosphate laser glass is a key laser medium whether it is NIF's flashlamp- pumped type or our diode-pumped type³. It is said that the efficiency can be improved by employing diode- pumped Yb-doped fluorapatite crystals. Moreover, the laser medium may be further scaled up for higher

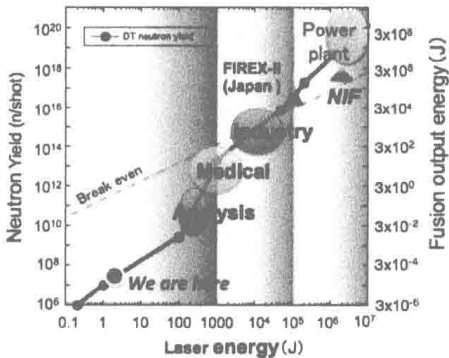


Fig.1. Present status and future plan displayed as neutron yield versus laser energy.

energy output by employing transparent fluorapatite polycrystalline ceramics rather than crystals if micro-domain-control is successful^{4,5}.

COMPACT SOLAR-PUMPED LASER

High-grade Nd-doped YAG ceramics for laser medium accelerated R&D on solar pumped lasers⁶. Solar pumped lasers usually employ Fresnel lenses or concave mirrors of several meters in diameter to concentrate sunlight into a water-cooled Nd-doped YAG rod of typically 10 mm in diameter and 100mm in length⁷. In contrast, employing an off-axis parabolic mirror of 50mm in diameter and a Nd-doped YAG prismatic rod of 1 x 1 x 5mm in size without water-cooling, we have developed a much more compact solar-pumped laser which can stably emit 1064nm laser light tracking the sun on a commercially available equatorial mounting for amateur astronomers as shown in Fig.2⁸. In the same system, Nd-doped ZBLAN (ZrF₄, BaF₂, LaF₃, AlF₃, NaF) fiber was also successful in laser emission in place of the prismatic rod⁹. The 1064nm laser light or its higher harmonics such as of 532nm is expected to be easily transmitted long distance, to be concentrated into a fine spot to attain high temperature for production of hydrogen from water, and to be converted into electricity using photovoltaic cells with its optical band gap just below the photon energy of the laser light so as to minimize thermal loss.

SOLAR CELLS

Dye-sensitized Solar Cells

R&D on dye-sensitized solar cells(DSSC) comprises of sciences and technologies of ceramics for the optical electrodes typically of sintered nano-porous TiO₂ layers in anatase phase, organic and metal-organic chemistry for sensitizers typically of Ru-complexes and photo-electrochemistry. Conventional solar cell manufacturers working typically on Si p/n junction solar cells have been rather not familiar with such versatile fields but automotive manufacturers

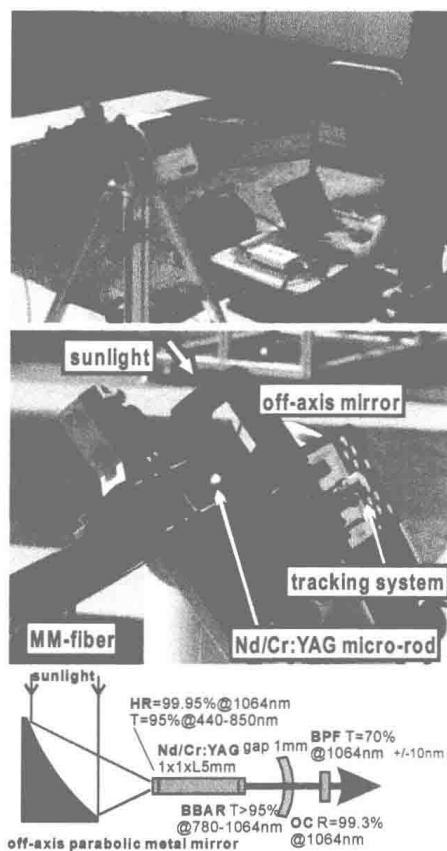


Fig.2 Fabricated compact solar pumped laser mounted on a solar tracker which enables several hours of continuous laser oscillation by tracking the sun.

are. Taking this advantage, we have been working on DSSC for more than 15 years plays with Aisin Seiki Co. Ltd^{10,11}. Figure 3 shows outdoor performance test of battery-operated night-lights charged by dye-sensitized solar cells during daylight near the TOYOTA beam line at the synchrotron orbital radiation site "SPRING-8" in Japan. Although the top efficiency over 12% has been reported but there remain still tough challenges of outdoor durability mainly because of degradation of organic dyes and liquid electrolytes¹²⁻¹⁴. Although more than 15 years durability was confirmed for small cells, large modules still have different challenges to be durable. In 2012, there came up possible game-changing technologies reported from plural research groups^{15,16} in which sensitizers and electrolyte can be replaced by inorganic materials opening the door to all-solid inorganic dye-sensitized solar cells.

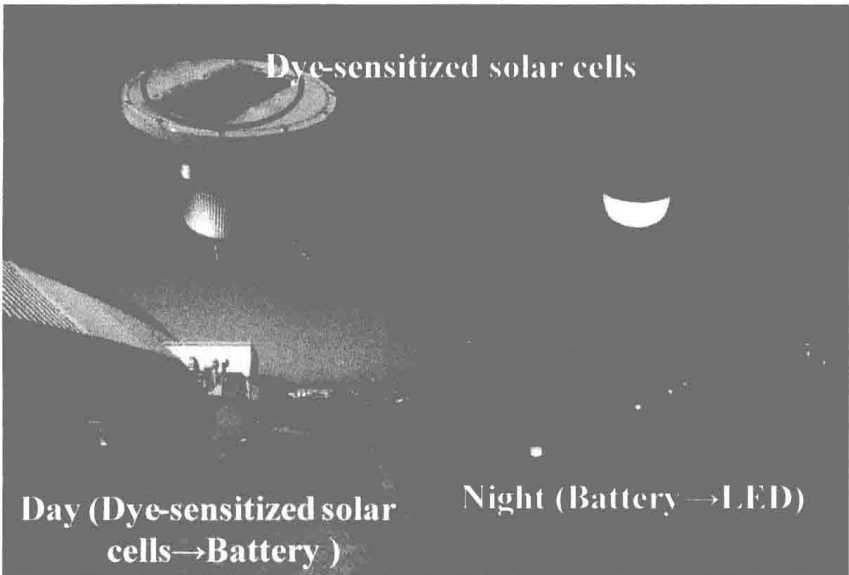


Fig.3 Outdoor performance test of battery-operated LED night-lights charged by monolithic dye-sensitized solar cells in day time (since April, 2009).

Cu₂ZnSnS₄ Thin Film Solar Cells

Inorganic semiconductor solar cells have evolved starting from single-elemental Si, through binary GaAs and CdTe to essentially ternary Cu(In_{1-x}Ga_x)Se₂. We have been working on quaternary Cu₂ZnSnS₄ system of kesterite crystal structure since 2006¹⁷⁻²², because (1) Cu₂ZnSnS₄ is composed of earth-abundant and nontoxic elements, (2) thin-film technologies can reduce both the material cost and the fabrication cost, and (3) the bandgap energy of Cu₂ZnSnS₄ about 1.4eV is optimal for single-junction solar cells leading to the detailed balance limiting efficiency of about 31%²³. In reactive sintering process, a precursor layer formed on a Mo-coated glass substrate changes into a polycrystalline Cu₂ZnSnS₄ thin film where grain

boundaries take important effect on photovoltaic properties. Although this quaternary system can cause difficulties in stable production, the number of R&D reports is increasing rapidly now as shown in Fig.4 since it uses neither rare elements nor environmental pollutants, and since there is an estimation that only this system can make the electricity generation cost lower than that of Si solar cells. More recently, solution-

processed kesterite with an additional element of Se has been successful attaining an energy conversion efficiency beyond 11%^{24,25}. On the other hand, a quaternary system without Zn but with Ge: $\text{Cu}_2\text{Sn}_{0.83}\text{Ge}_{0.17}\text{S}_3$ was found to have a bandgap of 1.0eV and attained energy conversion efficiency of 6%²⁶. This also shows a possibility of higher efficiency constructing a multi-junction type solar cell using this $\text{Cu}_2\text{Sn}_{0.83}\text{Ge}_{0.17}\text{S}_3$ for a bottom cell²⁶.

The Third Generation Solar Cells

The best strategy to decrease thermal loss of photon energy larger than the bandgap and transmission loss of photon energy less than the bandgap in such a widespread solar spectrum is to construct multi-junction solar cells comprising of plural active materials of different optical absorption edges. To compensate the increase in the fabrication cost to form multi-junction structures, concentration of solar-light onto a solar cell of small area is usually employed. However, since more than half of the sky is shadowed by cloud in average and the percentage of direct sunlight which can be concentrated is lower than 80% even in a typical clear day because of moisture in Japan, the area in which the combination of the solar concentrator and the multi-junction solar cells of small area is applied advantageously is quite limited. The third generation solar cells such as (1) hot-carrier type, (2) multi-exciton generation type, and (3) intermediate-band type have been proposed to decrease the loss mentioned above without using solar concentrators. We have also studied these solar cells both theoretically²⁷⁻³² and experimentally^{33,34}. Spontaneous formation and arrangement of quantum dots is a key factor in these solar cells. At the present time of writing, however, we are not successful to get any promising perspective for these third generation solar cells.

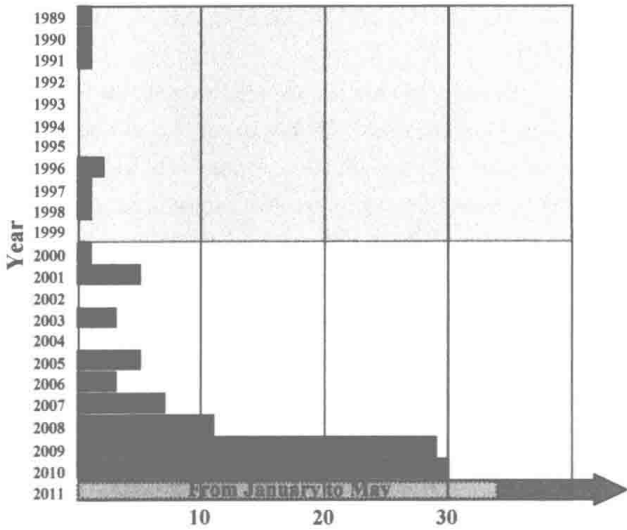


Fig.4 Number of published papers on the topics related to $\text{Cu}_2\text{ZnSnS}_4$

ARTIFICIAL PHOTOSYNTHESIS OF FORMIC ACID FROM CO_2 AND H_2O ONLY USING SUNLIGHT

Hydrogen production by photo-electrochemical water splitting has been extensively studied all over the world. Hydrogen can be also produced from water electrolysis combined with solar cells. In this situation, syntheses of hydrocarbons using solar energy are much more challenging rather than hydrogen. We had an experience of R&D on visible-light photo-catalysis in nitrogen-doped TiO_2 for photolysis of organic contaminants which has been commercialized as a series of environmental catalysts under the name of VCAT³⁵. Based on this experience of photolysis, we have begun R&D on photosynthesis of methanol from CO_2 and H_2O only using sunlight. At present, photo-synthesis of formic acid has been attained^{36,37}. Figure 5 schematically shows the process. Here, H_2O

molecules are oxidized to yield oxygen using holes formed by photo-excitation in the left electrode and residual electrons are transmitted via conducting wire to the right electrode and reduce CO_2 to form formic acid. To increase selectivity of CO_2 reduction in comparison with hydrogen formation, a Ru-complex layer was formed on the surface of the right electrode. By choosing an appropriate materials combination of the two electrodes, solar-energy conversion efficiency of 0.04% was attained which is 20% of solar-energy conversion

efficiency of natural photosynthesis in switchgrass. This was the first achievement of complete artificial photosynthesis from CO_2 and H_2O only using sunlight without applying any bias voltage or additional chemicals in the water. We are continuing effort on further improvement of conversion efficiency and development of electrode materials of lower cost³⁸.

SUMMARY

Typical recent research activities on future energy sources including laser nuclear fusion, solar-pumped lasers, solar cells and artificial photosynthesis in TCRDL are reviewed with special attentions to ceramics as key materials. Although every activity introduced here has

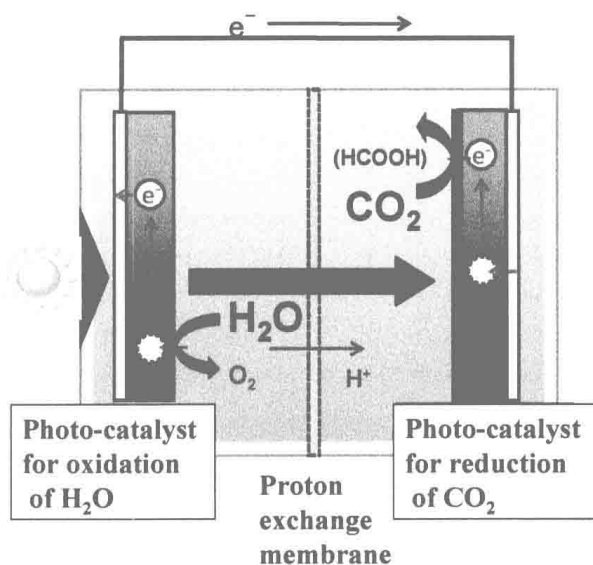


Fig.5 Schematic diagram of artificial photosynthesis of formic acid from CO_2 and H_2O only using sunlight.