

cusing, and clear images were taken with the lens focused to 10 cm and infinity.

The multilayering of the polymer actuator is an essential feature which

enables it to operate at voltages compatible with hand-held electronics. Together with the fact that they can be easily microfabricated in wafer-sized arrays, these

liquid lenses have considerable potential for use in commercial devices, according to the researchers.

Tobias Lockwood

Bi₁₂TiO₂₀ nanocrystals prepared by electrochemical synthesis exhibit excellent photocatalytic ability under visible light

Although titania (TiO₂) is a good photocatalyst, its use is limited to the ultraviolet range and thus cannot be used in the visible solar light range. Bi₁₂TiO₂₀ has emerged in recent years as a promising alternative that may be used in the visible range. However, current methods to synthesize Bi₁₂TiO₂₀ are not well-suited to prepare ultrafine, well-dispersed, crystalline nanoparticles that are desired for photocatalytic applications. Recent work from the China Building Materials Academy in Beijing has resulted in a new electrochemical route to prepare well-dispersed Bi₁₂TiO₂₀ nanocrystals.

Current solid-state synthesis and wet chemical methods used to prepare Bi₁₂TiO₂₀ require high temperature processing or special equipment that yield large-sized aggregated crystals which are at best sub-optimal for photocatalytic applications. Reporting in the May issue of the *Journal of the American Ceramic Society* (DOI: 10.1111/j.1551-2916.2011.04505.x; p. 1336), C. Gao, J. Ma, and co-workers prepared Bi₁₂TiO₂₀ nanoparticles by precipitation in an electrolytic solution using Bi and Ti plates as the anode and cathode, respectively. Adjusting the concentration of H₃PO₄ in the electrolyte caused a change in nanoparticle dispersion.

Electron microscopy revealed that a pure body-centered cubic (bcc) phase was formed in the absence of H₃PO₄ where the nanoparticles agglomerate into 2–3 μm spheres. However, increas-

ing the concentration of H₃PO₄ increased the fraction of the face-centered cubic (fcc) phase with a concomitant weakening of the interparticle adhesion resulting in a well-dispersed Bi₁₂TiO₂₀ nanoparticle mixture of bcc and fcc phases.

UV-vis absorption spectra of the prepared samples revealed absorption onset wavelengths exceeding 500 nm, exhibiting good response in the visible light region. The Bi₁₂TiO₂₀ particles also efficiently degraded an RhB dye under visible light facilitated by the high specific surface area of the well-dispersed nanosized particles. Thus, electrochemical synthesis of Bi₁₂TiO₂₀ nanoparticles offers a promising new route to prepare photocatalysts that are responsive to solar light, according to the researchers.

Kaushik Chatterjee

Numerical simulations predict ultrasmall subwavelength plasmonic cavity

Plasmonic lasers (also called nanolasers), proposed about a decade ago, as well as other high-performance photonic devices, such as single-photon devices, require ultrasmall cavities. In contrast to diffraction-limited dielectric cavities, plasmonic cavities have resonant modes with subwavelength mode volumes. Although plasmonic lasing has been demonstrated, further mode-volume reduction is required for the high density integration of plasmonic devices. Toward this goal, S.-H. Kwon of Chung-Ang University in South Korea along with H.-G. Park and co-researchers at Korea University have proposed a novel plasmonic cavity and used numerical simulations to demonstrate mode vol-

umes an order of magnitude smaller than previously achieved.

As reported in the June 1 issue of *Optics Letters* (DOI:10.1364/OL.36.002011; p. 2011), Kwon, Park, and co-researchers designed a plasmonic cavity consisting of a silver-covered, rectangular (100 nm × 200 nm) nanorod, composed of high- and low-index dielectric materials (refractive indices *n* of 3.4 and 1.5, respectively), atop a transparent sapphire substrate (see Figure 1). The researchers reasoned that surface plasmon polaritons (SPPs) can be efficiently

excited at the nanorod–silver interface by optical pumping through the sapphire

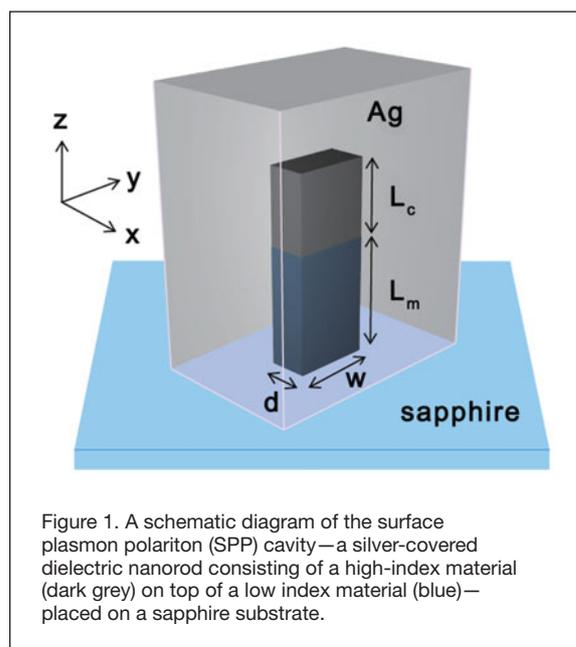


Figure 1. A schematic diagram of the surface plasmon polariton (SPP) cavity—a silver-covered dielectric nanorod consisting of a high-index material (dark grey) on top of a low index material (blue)—placed on a sapphire substrate.