Mg co-doping effects on Ce doped Y₃(Ga,Al)₅O₁₂ scintillator

Kei Kamada¹,², Akihiro Yamaji³, Shunsuke Kurosawa¹, Yuui Yokota¹, Yuji Ohashi³ and Akira Yoshikawa¹,²,³

¹New Industry Creation Hatchery Center, Tohoku University, 6-6-10 Aoba, Sendai 980-8579
²C&A corporation, 6-6-10 Aoba, Aramaki, Aoba-ku, Sendai 980-8579, Japan
³Institute for Material Research, Tohoku University, 2-1-1, Sendai,980-8577 Japan

E-mail: kamada@imr.tohoku.ac.jp

Abstract. Nonstoichiometric Lu₃Al₅₋ₓO₁₂ (x= 0.05, 0.15, 0.35, 0, -0.05, -0.15, -0.35) crystals were grown by the μ-PD method. Luminescence and scintillation properties such as absorption, excitation and emission spectra, light yield and decay time were evaluated. Expected anti-site defect related host emission have been observed in 250-420nm. Emission intensity was increased by increasing the nonstoichiometry. The x=-0.35 sample showed the highest light yield of around 12000 photons/MeV and slowest scintillation decay time of 1.96μs.

Introduction

Scintillators coupled with photodetectors were widely used in radiation imaging applications such as medical imaging, security, high energy physics, astrophysics, oil well logging, etc. Cerium doped garnet single crystals are promising candidates for scintillator applications. For example, Ce-doped Lu₃Al₅₋ₓO₁₂ (Ce:LuAG) , Ce:Gd₃Al₅Ga₃O₁₂ (GAGG) and Ce: Y₃Al₅O₁₂ (YAG) single crystal was reported as a prospective scintillator material [1-4]. Ce:YAG was reported with scintillation properties of a scintillation response of about 91.6 ns, and light yield of about 16,200 phot/MeV[3]. Ce:YAG is also used as a phosphor in white LEDs[5,6]. The function of the Ce:YAG phosphor is to absorb the blue light emitted from the blue LED and converts it to yellow light. In multicomponent garnet of Ce:(Gd,Y)₃(Ga,Al)₅O₁₂ (GAGG), noticeable light yield over 40,000 phot/MeV at around 500nm with ~80ns decay time was reported. Improvement of scintillation performance was reported due to co-doping with alkali earth AE²⁺ ions in Ce activated scintillators such as, Ce:LSO [7,8], Ce:GAGG[9], Ce:LuAG[10] and Ce:YAG[11]. In the case of Ce:YAG, light yield was improved up to 2,1000 phot/MeV and decay time was accelerated to 31 ns in heavily Mg co-doped samples.

In this report, Mg co-doping effect on scintillation properties in multicomponent garnet of Y₃(Ga,Al)₅O₁₂ (YGAG) were investigated. Optical, luminescence and scintillation properties such light yield and decay time were evaluated.

Experimental

1 Kei Kamada, New Industry Creation Hatchery Center, Tohoku University, 6-6-10 Aoba, Sendai 980-8579
1.1. Crystal growth procedure
A stoichiometric mixture of 4N MgCO₃, CeO₂, Y₂O₃, β-Ga₂O₃ and α-Al₂O₃ powders was used as starting material. Nonstoichiometric (Mg₀.₀₀₀₂Ce₀.₀₁₀₇Y₀.₉₈₉₃(GaₓAl₅₋ₓ)O₁₂ (x=1, 2, 3, 4) and Mg non co-doped YGAG single crystals were grown by the micro-pulling-down (μ-PD) method with an RF heating system. The Mg or non co-doped x=1, 2, 3, 4 crystals are named as Mg or non co-doped G1A4, G2A3, G3A2 and G4A1, respectively. A schematic of the μ-PD growth apparatus is given in Refs. [12]. Typical pulling rates were 0.05–0.12 mm/min and the diameter was around 4 mm. Crystals were grown from an Ir crucible under N₂ atmosphere. The seed crystals were <100> oriented YAG crystals. Plates of 4mmϕ x 1mm were cut and polished for the absorption and luminescence spectra measurement.

1.2. Measurements of scintillation properties
Radio-luminescence spectrum at room temperature was measured with the above spectrometer (El FLS920) excited by 5.5MeV alpha rays from an ²⁴¹Am source. To determine the light output, we obtained the pulse height spectrum of this crystal under excitation with 662 keV gamma rays from a ¹³⁷Cs source. The scintillation photons were detected using by a photomultiplier (PMT; Hamamatsu R7600U), and then the signals from the PMT were amplified (ORTEC 113), shaped (ORTEC 572A), and read out with a multi-channel analyzer (AMPTEK 8000A). Additionally, its scintillation decay time excited by the gamma rays (¹³⁷Cs) was measured with the PMT and an oscilloscope (Tektronix TDS 3052B). The scintillation decay time was calculated from exponential approximation.

Results

1.3. Crystal growth procedure
Mg co-doped and non co-doped Ce:YGAG crystals were grown by the μ-PD method. Example photographs were shown in figure 1. The inner part of grown crystals were transparent with yellow color with 3-4 mm in diameter and 10-40 mm in length. The surface roughness was coming from thermal etching during crystal growth.

![Figure 1. Example photographs of the grown Mg co-doped and non co-doped Ce:YGAG crystals](image_url)

1.4. Luminescence and gamma-ray response
The absorption spectra of the sample set are presented in Fig. 2(left). In addition of the 4f-5d₁,₂ absorption bands of Ce³⁺ center at 420 and 350 nm, respectively, the smooth Ce⁴⁺ CT absorption below 350nm is clearly enhanced by Mg co-doping, similarly to the previous report in garnet scintillators [10, 11]. Radioluminescence (RL) spectra of the Mg co-doped and non co-doped G2A3
samples were showed in figure 2(right). There is no energy shift of emission band at 500nm by Mg co-doping.
The typical energy spectra of the Mg co-doped and non co-doped G1A4 samples excited by $^{137}$Cs at room temperature are shown in figure 3(left). The Mg co-doped sample showed 180% higher light yield value compared to that of the non co-doped one. The light yield of the sample was calibrated from the $^{55}$Fe direct irradiation peak to the APD. Such direct irradiation generates 5.9 keV/3.6 eV = 1640 electron-hole pairs. Based on this value, light yield of Mg co-doped sample was calculated to be approximately 36,000 phot/MeV after correcting the QE, which was 80% at 500 nm. Scintillation decay curves of the Mg co-doped and non co-doped G2A3 samples were shown in figure 3(right). The scintillation decay curves were fitted by second exponential. The decay time was accelerated by Mg co-doping. The Mg co-doped and non co-doped G2A3 samples shows decay time of 19.3ns(80%) and 61.0(20%) respectively. Table 1 shows the scintillation properties. Mg co-doping in G2A3 was most effective for improvement of light yield. According to the previous report, band gap increased and the position of $\text{Ce}^{3+}4f5d_1$ level shift to higher energy as decreasing Ga concentration. It is thought that position between conduction band, electron trap coming from anti-site defects, $\text{Ce}^{3+}4f5d_1$, and $\text{Ce}^{4+}$ levels was optimized at G2A3 composition. The $\text{Ce}^{4+}$ center effectively competes with electron traps and contributes to the enhancement of light output and acceleration of decay time.

![Figure 2](image_url)

**Figure 2.** Absorption (left) and radioluminescence spectra (right) of the grown Mg co-doped and non-codoped G2A3 crystals.

![Figure 3](image_url)

**Figure 3.** Energy spectra of the grown Mg co-doped and non-codoped G2A3 crystals (left) and decay curves of the grown G2A3 crystals (right) excited by a 662 keV gamma ray.
Table 1. Scintillation properties of the grown Mg co-doped and non co-doped YGAG crystals

| Mg concentration (mol.ppm) | Emission wavelength (nm) | Light yield (phot/MeV) | 1\textsuperscript{st} decay time (ns)/ratio(%) | 2\textsuperscript{nd} decay time (ns)/ratio(%) |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| G0A5                       | 0                        | 480                    | 16,200                                      | 91.6/77                                     | 464/23                                     |
| G1A4                       | 0                        | 489                    | 12,900                                      | 7.9/57                                      | 15.3/43                                    |
| G2A3                       | 0                        | 501                    | 13,600                                      | 12.7/3                                      | 57.3/97                                    |
| G3A2                       | 0                        | 509                    | 33,400                                      | 25.5/10                                     | 53.9/90                                    |
| G4A1                       | 0                        | 517                    | 22,500                                      | 38.1/26                                     | 79.2/74                                    |
| G0A5                       | 200                      | 480                    | 19,500                                      | 89.3/90                                     | 544/10                                     |
| G1A4                       | 200                      | 492                    | 16,400                                      | 19.8/11                                     | 51.2/89                                    |
| G2A3                       | 200                      | 503                    | 36,000                                      | 19.3/80                                     | 61/20                                      |
| G3A2                       | 200                      | 510                    | 38,800                                      | 11.3/4                                      | 54.4/96                                    |
| G4A1                       | 200                      | 520                    | 29,600                                      | -                                           | 68.5/100                                   |

Conclusion

The Mg co-doped and non co-doped Ce:YGAG single crystals were grown by the μ-PD method and their optical, luminescence and scintillation characteristics were measured. The absorption of the Ce\textsuperscript{4+} CT band below 250 nm was observed at the Mg co-doped samples. The scintillation decays were accelerated by Mg co-doping and dominant decay time decreased down to 19.3 ns. Maximum light yield value of 38,800 phot/MeV was observed at G3A2 sample. The most significant increase of light yield value due to Mg-codoping was obtained for G2A3 sample, the light yield value of which was 36,000 phot/MeV. These results indicate that Mg co-doped G3A2 and G2A3 can be promising scintillator for application which require high light yield and fast timing resolution without self-radiation such as gamma camera and high energy physics applications. In the near future we will report about the bulk crystal growth of Mg co-doped Ce: YGAG by the Cz method. Improvement on scintillation response is expected due to much higher quality of Czochralski-grown crystal samples.

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