Fiber Lasers VI: Technology, Systems, and Applications

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Contents

xiii Conference Committee

xvii 20W CW 4MHz linewidth Raman fiber amplifier with SHG to 589nm (Abstract Only)
Y. Feng, L. Taylor, D. Bonaccini Calia, European Southern Observatory (Germany)

xxi Power scaling of resonantly cladding-pumped Yb-free Er-doped LMA FBG laser (Abstract Only)
M. Dubinskii, J. Zhang, US Army Research Lab. (United States); V. Ter-Mikirtychev, NovaWave Technologies, Inc. (United States)

HIGH-POWER SOURCES I

7195 04 94-W ytterbium-doped single-mode rod-type photonic crystal fiber operating at 977 nm
[7195-03]
J. Boullet, Ctr. Lasers Intenses et Applications, CNRS, Univ. de Bordeaux I, CEA (France); Y. Zaouter, Amplitude Systèmes (France); F. Salin, EOLITE Systems (France); E. Cormier, Ctr. Lasers Intenses et Applications, CNRS, Univ. de Bordeaux I, CEA (France)

7195 05 Simple design for singlemode high power CW fiber laser using multimode high NA fiber
[7195-04]
B. Morasse, S. Chatigny, C. Desrosiers, É. Gagnon, M.-A. Lapointe, J.-P. de Sandro, CorActive High-Tech Inc. (Canada)

7195 06 High-power single-mode tapered double-clad ytterbium fiber laser pumped by diode-laser bar
[7195-05]
V. Filippov, Tampere Univ. of Technology (Finland); Y. Chamorovskii, Institute of Radio and Electronics of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Russian Federation); J. Kerttula, Tampere Univ. of Technology (Finland); A. Kholodkov, Institute of Radio and Electronics of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Russian Federation); O. G. Okhotnikov, Tampere Univ. of Technology (Finland)

HIGH-POWER SOURCES II

7195 07 Joint high power solid state laser program advancements at Northrop Grumman (Invited Paper)
[7195-06]
J. Marmo, H. Injeyan, H. Komine, S. McNaught, J. Machan, J. Sollee, Northrop Grumman Space Technology (United States)
Experimental and theoretical studies on kW class polarized fiber lasers for cw operation
[7195-08]
O. Fitzau, J. Geiger, H.-D. Hoffmann, Fraunhofer Institute for Laser Technology (Germany)

COMPONENTS

Review of fabrication techniques for fused fiber components for fiber lasers (Invited Paper)
[7195-09]
B. Wang, E. Mies, Vytran LLC (United States)

Chiral fiber optical isolator [7195-10]
V. I. Kopp, G. Zhang, S. Zhang, Chiral Photonics, Inc. (United States); A. Z. Genack, Chiral Photonics, Inc. (United States) and Queens College of CUNY (United States); D. Neugroch, Chiral Photonics, Inc. (United States)

Two beam interferometric inscription of UV femtosecond fiber Bragg gratings [7195-12]
E. Lindner, M. Becker, S. Brückner, Y. Wang, M. Rothhardt, H. Bartelt, Institute of Photonic Technology (Germany)

FIBER DESIGNS AND FABRICATION I

Fiber amplifier based UV laser source [7195-14]

Small linewidth CW high power PM Yb-fiber laser around 1150 nm and yellow generation
[7195-15]
M. Jacquemet, E. Goyat, A. Mugnier, D. Pureur, Quantel Lannion (France)

High average power 258nm generation in a nanosecond fiber MOPA system [7195-16]
A. Diening, S. McLean, A. Starodoumov, Coherent, Inc. (United States)
FIBER DESIGNS AND FABRICATION II

7195 ON Large effective mode area optical fibers for high-power lasers (Invited Paper) [7195-22]
L. Dong, J. Li, H. A. McKay, L. Fu, B. K. Thomas, IMRA America, Inc. (United States)

7195 OP In-fiber resonant pumping of a fiber laser [7195-24]
D. G. Lancaster, Defence Science and Technology Organization (Australia); S. D. Jackson, The Univ. of Sydney (Australia)

7195 OQ Comparison of silica-based materials and fibers in side- and end-pumped fiber lasers [7195-25]
A. Langner, G. Schötz, M. Such, Heraeus Quarzglas GmbH & Co. KG (Germany); V. Reichel, S. Grimm, M. Leich, S. Unger, J. Kirchhof, Institut für Photonische Technologien e.V. (Germany); B. Wedel, Highyag Lasertechnologie GmbH (Germany); V. Krause, G. Rehmann, Laserline GmbH (Germany)

MATERIAL PROPERTIES AND PHOTODARKENING

7195 OR Benchmarking and measuring photodarkening in Yb doped fibers (Invited Paper) [7195-26]
J. Koponen, M. Laurila, nLIGHT Corp. (Finland); M. Söderlund, J. J. Montiel i Ponsoda, A. Iho, Helsinki Univ. of Technology (Finland)

7195 OS Yb-doped silica-based laser fibers: correlation of photodarkening kinetics and related optical properties with the glass composition (Invited Paper) [7195-27]
J. Kirchhof, S. Unger, S. Jetschke, A. Schwuchow, M. Leich, V. Reichel, Institute of Photonic Technology e.V. (Germany)

7195 OT The role of charge transfer processes for the induced optical losses in ytterbium doped fiber lasers [7195-28]
M. Engholm, Fiber Optic Valley AB (Sweden); L. Norin, Acreo FiberLab (Sweden)

7195 OU Defect center luminescence spectroscopy in Yb Co-doped silica fibers [7195-29]
G. G. Carlson, K. E. Keister, Univ. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (United States); A. Croteau, Institut National d’Optique (Canada); J. G. Eden, P. D. Dragic, Univ. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (United States)

7195 OV Photo darkening of ytterbium cw fiber lasers [7195-30]
K. E. Mattsson, J. Broeng, Crystal Fibre A/S (Denmark)

MID-IR SOURCES AND FREQUENCY CONVERSION

7195 OW Mid-IR super-continuum generation (Invited Paper) [7195-31]
M. N. Islam, Univ. of Michigan (United States) and Omni Sciences Inc. (United States); C. Xia, Univ. of Michigan (United States); M. J. Freeman, J. Mauricio, A. Zakel, Omni Sciences Inc. (United States); K. Ke, Z. Xu, F. L. Terry, Jr., Univ. of Michigan (United States)

7195 OX Pulsed Tm-doped fiber lasers for mid-IR frequency conversion (Invited Paper) [7195-32]
D. Creeden, P. A. Budni, P. A. Ketteridge, BAE Systems (United States)
600-W single-mode single-frequency thulium fiber laser amplifier [7195-34]
G. D. Goodno, L. D. Book, J. E. Rothenberg, Northrop Grumman Space Technology (United States)

ULTRAFAST SOURCES

Tunable high-energy femtosecond soliton fiber laser based on hollow-core photonic bandgap fiber (Invited Paper) [7195-36]
P. Dupriez, Fianium Ltd. (United Kingdom); F. Gérôme, Univ. de Limoges (France); J. C. Knight, Univ. of Bath (United Kingdom); J. Clowes, Fianium Ltd. (United Kingdom); W. J. Wadsworth, Univ. of Bath (United Kingdom)

Generation of high energy and high quality ultrashort pulses in moderately non-linear fiber chirped pulse amplifier [7195-37]
Y. Zaouter, Ctr. Lasers Intenses et Applications, CNRS, Univ. de Bordeaux 1, CEA (France) and Amplitude Systèmes (France); J. Bouillet, Ctr. Lasers Intenses et Applications, CNRS, Univ. de Bordeaux 1, CEA (France); E. Mottay, Amplitude Systèmes (France); E. Cormier, Ctr. Lasers Intenses et Applications, CNRS, Univ. de Bordeaux 1, CEA (France)

2 GW peak-power 29 fs pulses delivered by 30 kHz fiber chirped pulse amplifier pumped optical parametric amplifier [7195-38]
J. Rothhardt, S. Hädrich, F. Röser, T. Gottschall, J. Limpert, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany); A. Tünnermann, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany) and Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Optics and Precision Engineering (Germany)

Femtosecond fiber CPA system with 325W average power [7195-39]
T. Eidam, F. Röser, E. Seise, T. Gottschall, S. Hädrich, J. Rothhardt, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany); T. Schreiber, Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Optics and Precision Engineering (Germany); J. Limpert, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany); A. Tünnermann, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany) and Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Optics and Precision Engineering (Germany)

Energy scaling of femtosecond and picosecond fiber oscillators beyond the microjoule level [7195-40]
B. Ortaç, M. Baumgartl, O. Schmidt, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany); A. Hideur, Groupe d’Optique et d’Optronique, CNRS, CORIA (France); I. Sagnes, Lab. de Photonique et Nanotechnologie, CNRS (France); A. Garnache, Institut d’Electronique du Sud, CNRS, Univ. Montpellier II (France); J. Limpert, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany); A. Tünnermann, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany) and Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Optics and Precision Engineering (Germany)

All polarization-maintaining fiber chirped-pulse amplification system for microjoule femtosecond pulses [7195-41]
S. Zhou, Cornell Univ. (United States) and Sunx Ltd. (Japan); T. Takamido, R. Bhandari, Sunx Ltd. (Japan); A. Chong, F. Wise, Cornell Univ. (United States)
7195 17 **Modeling of pulsed-fiber sources (Invited Paper)** [7195-42]
A. V. Smith, AS-Photonics, LLC (United States); G. R. Hadley, R. L. Farrow, Sandia National Labs. (United States)

7195 18 **High-peak-power short-pulse fiber laser for materials processing** [7195-43]
A. M. Thomas, D. A. Alterman, M. S. Bowers, Lockheed Martin Aculight (United States)

7195 19 **200W average power 1mJ pulse energy from spectrally combined pulsed sub-5 ns fiber laser source (Best Student Paper Award)** [7195-44]
O. Schmidt, B. Ortac, J. Limpert, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena (Germany); A. Tünnermann, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena (Germany) and Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Optics and Precision Engineering (Germany); T. V. Andersen, Koheras A/S (Denmark)

7195 1D **Enhanced pulsed shaping capabilities and reduction of non-linear effects in all-fiber MOPA pulsed system** [7195-48]
B. Morasse, S. Chatigny, É. Gagnon, J.-P. de Sandro, C. Desrosiers, CorActive High-Tech Inc. (Canada)

7195 1E **Compensation of pulse-shaping due to saturation in fiber amplifiers** [7195-49]
D. N. Schimpf, C. Ruchert, D. Nodop, J. Limpert, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena (Germany); A. Tünnermann, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena (Germany) and Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Optics and Precision Engineering (Germany); F. Salin, EOLITE Systems (France)

7195 1H **High-energy single-mode single-frequency all-fiber laser pulses covering C-band based on highly co-doped phosphate glass fibers** [7195-52]
W. Shi, NP Photonics, Inc. (United States); E. B. Petersen, NP Photonics, Inc. (United States) and Univ. of Arizona (United States); M. Leigh, NP Photonics, Inc. (United States) and College of Optical Sciences, Univ. of Arizona (United States); J. Zong, Z. Yao, A. Chavez-Pirson, NP Photonics, Inc. (United States) and College of Optical Sciences, Univ. of Arizona (United States)

7195 1J **Brillouin gain in optical fibers with inhomogeneous acoustic velocity** [7195-54]
B. G. Ward, J. B. Spring, U.S. Air Force Academy (United States)

7195 1K **Single-frequency fiber laser at 2.05 µm based on Ho-doped germanate glass fiber** [7195-55]
J. Wu, Z. Yao, J. Zong, A. Chavez-Pirson, NP Photonics, Inc. (United States); N. Peyghambarian, College of Optical Sciences, Univ. of Arizona (United States); J. Yu, NASA Langley Research Ctr. (United States)
**BEAM COMBINING I**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paper Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7195 1M</td>
<td>High-power phase locking of a fiber amplifier array</td>
<td>T. M. Shay, Air Force Research Lab. (United States); J. T. Baker, Boeing LTS, Inc. (United States); A. D. Sanchez, C. A. Robin, C. L. Vergien, C. Zeringue, Air Force Research Lab. (United States); D. Gallant, Boeing LTS, Inc. (United States); C. A. Lu, B. Pulford, T. J. Bronder, Air Force Research Lab. (United States); A. Lucero, Boeing LTS Inc. (United States)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7195 1N</td>
<td>Coherent fiber combining by digital holography</td>
<td>C. Bellanger, A. Brignon, J. Collineau, J. P. Huignard, Thales Research and Technology (France)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**BEAM COMBINING II**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paper Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7195 1P</td>
<td>Theoretical analysis of multiplexed volume holograms for spectral beam combining</td>
<td>G. B. Ingersoll, J. R. Leger, Univ. of Minnesota (United States)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7195 1Q</td>
<td>Applications of volume Bragg gratings for spectral control and beam combining of high power fiber lasers</td>
<td>O. Andrusyak, College of Optics and Photonics, Univ. of Central Florida (United States); V. Smirnov, OptiGrate (United States); G. Venus, N. Vorobiev, L. Glebov, College of Optics and Photonics, Univ. of Central Florida (United States)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**APPLICATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paper Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7195 1R</td>
<td>Elucidation of phenomena in high-power fiber laser welding and development of prevention procedures of welding defects (Invited Paper)</td>
<td>S. Katayama, Y. Kawahito, Osaka Univ. (Japan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7195 1S</td>
<td>Material micromachining using a pulsed fiber laser platform with fine temporal nanosecond pulse shaping capability</td>
<td>P. Deladurantaye, D. Gay, A. Cournoyer, V. Roy, B. Labranche, M. Levesque, Y. Taillon, INO (Canada)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7195 1T</td>
<td>Application of a microchip laser-pumped photonic crystal fiber supercontinuum source for high-sensitive cavity ring down optical loss measurements</td>
<td>T. Baselt, T. Hammer, F. Basan, P. Hartmann, West Saxon Univ. of Applied Sciences Zwickau (Germany)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**POSTER SESSION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paper Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7195 1U</td>
<td>Thermal effects in high-power CW fiber lasers</td>
<td>M.-A. Lapointe, S. Chatigny, M. Piché, M. Cain-Skaff, J.-N. Maran, CorActive High-Tech Inc. (Canada)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7195 1W</td>
<td>Fabrication and characterization of Cr:forsterite single crystal fiber</td>
<td>P. S. Yeh, H. Y. Wang, National Taiwan Univ. of Science and Technology (Taiwan); K. Y. Huang, S. L. Huang, K. Y. Hsu, D. Y. Jheng, National Taiwan Univ. (Taiwan)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nanoparticle doping process for improved fibre amplifiers and lasers [7195-69]
A. Pastouret, C. Gonnet, C. Collet, O. Cavani, E. Burov, Draka (France); C. Chaneac, A. Carton, J. P. Jolivet, Univ. Pierre et Marie Curie (France)

Benefits of optimized HNL-PCF for Raman fiber lasers [7195-70]
G. Mélin, S. Richard, A. Fleureau, L. Galkovsky, S. Lempereur, P. Nouchi, Draka (France); G. Beck, L. Bigot, N. Y. Joly, S. Randoux, P. Suret, Lab. de Physique des Lasers, Atomes et Molécules, Univ. des Sciences et Technologies de Lille (France)

Bending behaviors of all-solid silica large mode area Bragg fibers [7195-72]
C. Baskiotis, Univ. des Sciences et Technologies de Lille (France); D. Molin, Draka (France); G. Bouwmans, Univ. des Sciences et Technologies de Lille (France); F. Gooijer, Draka (Netherlands); P. Sillard, Draka (France); Y. Quïquempois, M. Douay, Univ. des Sciences et Technologies de Lille (France)

High core and cladding isolation termination for high-power lasers and amplifiers [7195-73]
A. Wetter, M. Faucher, B. Sévigny, N. Vachon, ITF Labs. (Canada)

LPFG modulator for fiber laser Q switching [7195-74]
F. Luo, T. Yeh, FLT Inc. (United States)

Pump combiner loss as a function of input numerical aperture power distribution [7195-75]
B. Sévigny, P. Poirier, M. Faucher, ITF Labs. (Canada)

Stable, tunable, and single-mode operation of an erbium-doped fibre laser system using a saturable absorber for gas spectroscopy applications [7195-77]
N. Arsad, Univ. of Strathclyde (United Kingdom) and National Univ. of Malaysia (Malaysia); G. Stewart, Univ. of Strathclyde (United Kingdom)

All-fiber coherent arrays combining high-power lasers [7195-79]
B. Wang, E. Mies, Vytran LLC (United States); M. Minden, HRL Labs. LLC (United States); A. Sanchez, Air Force Research Lab. (United States)

Theoretical analysis and quantitative measurements of fiber amplifier coherent combining on a remote surface through turbulence [7195-80]
P. Bourdon, V. Jolivet, B. Bennai, L. Lombard, D. Goular, G. Canat, O. Vasseur, ONERA (France)

Characterization of a coherently coupled 2x2 W fiber amplifier array [7195-81]
R. Nowack, R. Bähnisch, P. Mahnke, J. Speiser, A. Giesen, Deutsches Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt e.V. (Germany)

A frequency doubled gain switched Yb3+-doped fiber laser [7195-82]
Y. Sintov, M. Katz, P. Blau, Y. Glick, E. Lebiush, Y. Nafcha, Soreq Nuclear Research Ctr. (Israel)

Characterization of photodarkening processes in Yb doped fibers [7195-85]
S. Jetschke, U. Röpke, S. Unger, J. Kirchhof, Institute of Photonic Technology (Germany)
Modeling the photodegradation of large mode area Yb-doped fiber power amplifiers
P. Laperle, L. Desbiens, K. Le Foulgoc, M. Drolet, P. Deladurantaye, A. Proulx, Y. Taillon, INO (Canada)

Combined photodarkening and thermal bleaching measurement of an ytterbium-doped fiber
J. J. Montiel i Ponsoda, M. Söderlund, Helsinki Univ. of Technology (Finland); J. Koplow, Sandia National Labs. (United States); J. Koponen, nLIGHT Corp. (Finland); A. Iho, S. Honkanen, Helsinki Univ. of Technology (Finland)

Widely tunable 10GHz synchronized fiber laser in the 1550nm-1750nm wavelength range via dispersion flattened DDF
A. Sysoliatin, A. Senatorov, Fiber Optics Research Ctr. (Russian Federation); A. Konyukhov, L. Melnikov, Saratov State Univ. (Russian Federation); V. Stasyuk, PriTel Inc. (United States)

Optimizing stable mode-locked operation of Yb-doped fiber laser
M. A. Abdel Alim, Y. Logvin, Univ. of Ottawa (Canada); D. A. Khalil, Ain Shams Univ. (Egypt); H. Anis, Univ. of Ottawa (Canada)

Sensitivity of nonlinear fiber CPA-systems to initial spectral amplitude and spectral phase ripples
D. N. Schimpf, E. Seise, J. Limpert, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany); A. Tünnermann, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany) and Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Optics and Precision Engineering (Germany)

Multi-tone approach to SBS mitigation in narrow linewidth high power fiber amplifiers
C. Zeringue, I. Dajani, C. Lu, C. Vergien, C. Robin, Air Force Research Lab. (United States)

Tunable laser with tilted-mirrors interferometer and dynamic wavelength reference
N. Miron, Roctest Ltd. (Canada)

Multiwavelength Brillouin-erbium fiber laser incorporating stimulated Brillouin scattering as mirror
M. Ajiya, M. A. Mahdi, Univ. Putra Malaysia (Malaysia); M. H. Al-Mansoori, Univ. Tenaga Nasional (Malaysia); N. A. M. Ahmad Hamball, Y. G. Shee, Univ. Putra Malaysia (Malaysia)

Low-SBS passive optical fibers for fiber laser pigtails, components, and power delivery
P. D. Dragic, Neolight Technologies LLC (United States)

Reduction of SPM induced spectral broadening in a high peak power narrow linewidth IR fiber laser using phase modulation
M. J. Munroe, M. Y. Hamamoto, D. A. Dutton, Deep Photonics Corp. (United States)

Chirped four-wave mixing in the largely normal dispersion regime from femtosecond pulse-pumped photonic crystal fiber
H. Tu, Z. Jiang, D. L. Marks, S. A. Boppart, Univ. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (United States)
Novel design of a gain-switched diode-pumped fiber laser [7195-100]
M. Giesberts, J. Geiger, M. Traub, H.-D. Hoffmann, Fraunhofer-Institute for Laser Technology (Germany)

Author Index
Conference Committee

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Benjamin G. Ward, U.S. Air Force Academy (United States)
Frank W. Wise, Cornell University (United States)

Session Chairs

1 Fiber Laser Market
   Jay W. Dawson, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (United States)

2 High-Power Sources I
   Benjamin G. Ward, U.S. Air Force Academy (United States)

3 High-Power Sources II
   Almantas Galvanauskas, University of Michigan (United States)

4 Components
   Jean-Philippe Fève, JDSU (United States)

5 Joint Session with Conference 7193: Visible and UV Lasers
   Norman Hodgson, Coherent, Inc. (United States)

6 Fiber Designs and Fabrication I
   Kanishka Tankala, Nufern (United States)

7 Fiber Designs and Fabrication II
   Yoonchan Jeong, University of Southampton (United Kingdom)

8 Material Properties and Photodarkening
   Ji Wang, Corning Inc. (United States)

9 Mid-IR Sources and Frequency Conversion
   L. Brandon Shaw, Naval Research Laboratory (United States)

10 Ultrafast Sources
    Frank W. Wise, Cornell University (United States)

11 Pulsed Sources I
    Andreas Tünnermann, Fraunhofer-Institut für Angewandte Optik und Feinmechanik (Germany)

12 Pulsed Sources II
    Robert G. Waarts, Consultant (United States)
13 Narrow-Linewidth Sources and SBS Suppression
Fabio Di Teodoro, Northrop Grumman Space Technology (United States)

14 Beam Combining I
Eric C. Honea, Lockheed Martin Aculight (United States)

15 Beam Combining II
Oleksiy G. Andrusyak, College of Optics & Photonics, University of Central Florida (United States)

16 Applications
William E. Torruellas, The Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory (United States)

17 Post-Deadline Session
Denis V. Gapontsev, IPG Photonics Corporation (United States)
20W CW, 4MHz linewidth Raman fiber amplifier with SHG to 589nm

Yan Feng, Luke Taylor, and Domenico Bonaccini Calia
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ABSTRACT

Up to 20.7 W CW, 3.5 MHz linewidth, 1178 nm continuous-wave laser has been obtained at ESO laser labs by Raman amplification of a distributed feedback diode laser. To our knowledge it is the highest power obtained at such a narrow linewidth with Raman fiber amplifiers. The 1178nm laser has a linear polarization-extinction-ratio of 25dB. Frequency doubling with an LBO-based SHG commercial cavity has given 83% conversion efficiency and 14.5W CW at 589nm. The source is suitable to produce mesospheric laser guide stars as reference stars for adaptive optics. The presented narrow-band, high power Raman amplification technique might be used for a large number of different wavelength ranges.

Keywords: Lasers, fibers, Raman lasers, laser amplifiers, laser guide stars, Second Harmonic Generation

1. INTRODUCTION

This post-deadline paper, which has to be limited to two pages, reports on the recent breakthroughs of our research activities done in the frame of the ESO R&D programs to generate 589nm CW sources for laser guide stars. In future large telescopes instrumentation, 20-25W CW at 589nm are necessary, with linewidths ideally ≤50 MHz. Toward this goal our Laser Systems Dept is working on the development of high power, narrow band fiber Raman lasers at 1178nm, to be then frequency doubled to 589nm.

Fiber lasers are an asset and probably the best choice in remote and difficult operation sites like astronomical observatories. They are typically compact, maintenance-free, turn-key and ruggedized devices. Moreover their output beam quality is extremely good. The lasers which we are aiming at are part of Laser Guide Star Facilities; the laser beam is projected at 90 km in the Mesosphere, producing laser guide stars by excitation of mesospheric sodium atoms. Our in-house development is done in close touch with industry, with the goal to have the final laser packaged and finally engineered by industry, as a product. We are progressing with the research taking care of course of the IP protection.

2. THE LASER

A MOPA scheme is followed in our 1178nm fiber laser source, in which an 1178nm, ~10s mW DFB fiber coupled laser is used as seed for a Raman fiber amplifier. The pump wavelength is 1120nm. Both seed and pump fiber lasers are commercially available. We have found first a way to obtain narrow-band Raman amplification, with the linewidth limited so far only by the seed linewidth; then recently we have been successful in efficiently suppressing SBS in the Raman amplifier, obtaining up to 20.7 W CW at 1178 nm. The technique will work in many other wavelength ranges.

Although in our experiment still a non-polarization-maintaining fiber is used, the laser can be adjusted to emit linear polarization, with a polarization-extinction-ratio of 25dB, using waveplates in the free space beam before the SHG unit. The observed long-term stability of the output polarization is of the order of few degrees/C, at regime operation. The measured linewidth of our system is about 3.5 MHz, suitable for highly efficient resonant external cavity doubling to 589 nm for laser guide star applications.

The output of the fiber amplifier is optically isolated and then mode matched to a compact, commercially available SHG cavity. The cavity uses a 20mm LBO crystal for the SHG. Thanks to the extremely good optical quality of the input beam, we have reached a very good mode matching with the cavity. Also, the spectral phase noise properties of our high power fiber Raman amplifier are extremely good, since a SHG conversion efficiency up to 83% has been achieved.
3. RESULTS

Figure 1 shows the measured 1178 nm output as a function of the 1120 nm pump power. With the suppressed SBS amplifier we obtain up to 20.7 W at 1178nm with 67 W CW of pump power at 1120nm. This means we have obtained ~10 times increase of SBS threshold in power, with respect to a normal fiber of similar length.

To further increase the output power of the single stage amplifier, we will test in the coming months further SBS suppression schemes as a function of fiber length and pump power. The frequency conversion has produced up to 14.5W CW at 589nm, with 17.2W CW at 1178 in input. This is better than 82% conversion efficiency.

An Ando optical spectrum analyzer is used to check the spectral purity of the 1178nm fiber laser output. The result is shown in Figure 2. We see more than 40 dB contrast of the background noise versus the signal.

The spikes on the emitted spectrum are due to the well known fast frequency jitter of our DFB diode seed. The temporal separation of these spikes depends on jitter frequency, so one can see fewer spikes in the spectrum when scanning faster. The inset figure shows a full free spectral range scanning, indicating that no other frequency exists around the 1178nm line. The 1178nm signal power variation RMS as measured is <1% at full power.
Efficient Highly Ytterbium-Doped Silica Fibers with Low Photo-darkening for High Power Fiber Lasers

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Abstract: Ytterbium-doped phosphosilicate fibers with phosphate-like characteristics, lifetime and doping-levels are demonstrated, offering significantly increased peak powers from shorter fiber amplifiers. Efficient fibers with up to 4700dB/m peak absorption at 976nm, gain of 4.6dB/cm and low photo-darkening are demonstrated. The refractive index of the doped glass can also be tailored to match that of silica, which makes it especially attractive to large core fiber designs.

Fiber lasers are increasingly deployed in many commercial applications. Higher peak powers from fiber lasers are, however, still limited by fiber nonlinearities. Although advanced large core designs offer a raised nonlinear threshold, an increase in rare earth doping level can lead to shorter amplifier length and additional increase in nonlinear threshold. Ease of use can deteriorate for large core fibers, it is, therefore, also highly desirable to further extend peak powers in SM fibers by increasing rare earth concentrations. It is well known that a higher rare earth concentration can lead to clustering which can render fibers inefficient and unreliable by strong non-radiative effects, reduced lifetimes and photo-darkening (PD). It is also well known that aluminosilicate fibers can lower clustering, leading to an increased doping level. Recently, an aluminosilicate fiber with 2450dB/m peak absorption at 976nm was demonstrated with a low PD loss of 17dB/m at 660nm and ~47% inversion [1]. Phosphate glass, on the other hand, is known to be capable of incorporating much higher levels of rare earth ions, ~9000dB/m at 976nm, with negligible PD [1, 2]. Unfortunately, phosphate glass can only be made with crucible techniques which tend to introduce high impurity levels, leading not only to high background loss, but also to lower damage threshold, limiting it to short length and low power applications. In addition, the low transition temperature of ~500°C for phosphate glass comparing to ~1200°C for silica also makes it less reliable host for lasers at high average powers where a much elevated core temperature is expected. A glass host which is capable of having high doping concentrations, low impurity levels, and is compatible to silica fibers to enable the use of technologies developed for telecommunication, is, therefore, highly desirable.

We demonstrate in this work phosphosilicate fibers fabricated with an optimized CVD process for high phosphorus and rare earth doping. Ytterbium-doped fibers are demonstrated to have phosphate-like spectral characteristics and a much longer lifetime of 1.35ms comparing to that in aluminosilicate fibers. Highly efficient and reliable ytterbium doped phosphosilicate fibers with peak absorption of 4700dB/m are demonstrated with saturated PD loss below 3.6dB/m at 1.05µm at ~50% inversion. In fibers with peak ytterbium absorption of 3200dB/m, negligible saturated PD of less than 0.08dB/m is demonstrated. Low background loss of less than 0.05dB/m is regularly obtained in all fibers. Most of these fibers are also doped with a high level of boron. This allows refractive indexes close to that of silica to be achieved even at very high rare earth doping levels, an critical requirement for most large core fiber designs.

Hundreds of fibers have been fabricated for this study. The fabrication process, has been continuously improved for maximum phosphorus incorporation and process control. Many of the fabricated fibers have been used in amplifiers and lasers, including the highly doped fibers in this paper, providing demonstrated efficient and reliable operation over long time period of a few months. Typical normalized absorption and emission cross sections are
shown in Fig.1. These were obtained by curve fitting to the measured data as described in [3]. Both absorption and emission of phosphosilicate fibers are similar to that of phosphate glass, evidence that most ytterbium ions are near phosphorus sites. The absorption of phosphosilicate fibers have three peaks instead of two in aluminosilicate fibers. The emission peaks of phosphosilicate fibers are at shorter wavelengths comparing to that of aluminosilicate fibers, due to a narrower Stark split. Normalized gains at various inversion levels are plotted in Fig.1. The gain peak around 1010-1030nm has relatively higher gain and is significantly broader than that in aluminosilicate fibers, ideal for amplification of ultra short pulses with broad spectral width over a short fiber length. Measured lifetimes for a typical phosphosilicate fiber and a commercial aluminosilicate fiber are 1.35ms and 0.6ms respectively, again showing what is expected from a phosphate-like host.

A large number of fibers with various compositions, fabrication conditions and peak ytterbium absorption ranging from 1500-5500dB/m, were tested for photo-darkening with a 675nm LED with a continuous pumping setup. A short fiber length of ~30mm was typically used. An ytterbium amplifier simulator [3] was used first to calculate 976nm pump power for a saturated inversion of ~50%. Since photo-darkening is very sensitive to inversion levels, sufficient pump power was always used to ensure inversion saturation for good repeatability. The measured absorption spectrum of the fiber with 3200dB/m peak absorption is shown in Fig.2. Loss and gain were measured in or converted to that of a fiber with ~100% overlap between optical mode and the dopant distribution in the fiber. The PD was measured in single mode fibers. The PD usually takes few hours to reach saturation. The Leftmost panel in Fig.2 gives the measured PD for three fibers, two phosphosilicate fibers with 3200dB/m and 4700dB/m peak absorption respectively, and a commercial aluminosilicate fiber with 380dB/m peak absorption. The saturated PD losses are 0.8dB/m, 36dB/m and 0.8dB/m respectively. Despite the phosphosilicate fiber with 3200dB/m peak absorption having near an order of magnitude higher ytterbium concentration, it has a PD loss level similar to that of the commercial 380dB/m aluminosilicate fiber. PD spectra were also measured in the two phosphosilicate fibers and are shown in the middle panel of Fig.2, normalized against the loss at 675nm. The long wavelength loss was not well resolved for the fiber with 3200dB/m peak absorption. The loss ratio at wavelengths of 675nm and 1.05µm is estimated to be ~10 using the data for the fiber with 4700dB/m peak absorption. Saturated PD losses at 1.05µm of 0.8dB/m and 3.6dB/m respectively were estimated for the two phosphosilicate fibers, representing the lowest PD loss at these doping levels ever reported in silica fibers. This saturated PD loss represents the highest possible loss by a 976nm pump. Since PD is a strong function of inversion and inversion in a high power double clad fiber is much lower, a much lower PD loss is expected in high power lasers and amplifiers. PD dynamics for pump on and off was also measured. The PD recovered by ~50% after pump being switched off and increased again at slightly higher rate for the second pumping cycle. Output of fresh 3cm long amplifiers made from the two phosphosilicate fibers, seeded by an ytterbium ASE source peaked at ~1030nm, was monitored for 44 and 136 hours respectively from the first pump on at ~50% inversion (see the right panel in Fig.2), showing high unit gain levles approaching that of ytterbium crystals of 2.2dB/cm and 4.6dB/cm respectively with negligible degradation over the test periods. This type of performance was also confirmed by numerous oscillator and amplifier tests using similar fibers with core diameters ranging from 5µm to 50µm.

![Photo-darkening Loss and Gain](https://www.spiedigitallibrary.org/conference-proceedings-of-spie/)

To summarize, we have demonstrated phosphosilicate fibers with phosphate-like characteristics, doping levels and performance. These fibers will further increase peak power performance of fiber lasers and amplifiers for all fiber designs and provide more robust and reliable alternative to phosphate glass fibers for single frequency lasers.

REFERENCES


Power Scaling of Resonantly Cladding-Pumped Yb-free Er-doped LMA FBG Laser

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Abstract
Reported here is resonantly cladding-pumped (at 1532.5 nm) Yb-free Er-doped fiber laser delivering ~48 W of CW output at 1590 nm with the ~57% optical-to-optical conversion slope efficiency. This diode-pumped laser operates with the ultra-low quantum defect of 3.75%. Obtained efficiency is the highest efficiency reported for the cladding-pumped unidirectionally emitting Er-doped laser. Reported power is believed to be the highest power ever reported from Yb-free, Er-doped fiber laser.

Keywords: fiber laser; eye-safe; Er-doped.

Introduction
Major power scaling results in the eye-safe ~1.5 µm fiber lasers have been reported for the cladding pumped Yb-Er-co-doped fibers pumped into Yb-absorption band [1]. Due to inefficiencies associated with very large (~40%) quantum defect scalability of these devices suffers from and is limited by enormous heat deposition inconsistent with major power scaling toward DEW power levels. So far very few efforts were reported on the resonantly cladding-pumped Yb-free Er-doped fiber lasers, which can actually offer much higher efficiency as well as power scalability [2-4]. In [2, 3] output power of ~1W was achieved based on this concept (in [2] by accounting for the power emitted from the fiber bi-directionally). The [3] was the first effort actually exploiting the most scalable LMA fiber approach. The [4] was the first effort to scale significantly beyond the ~1 W power level achieved in [2, 3]. Single-frequency output power of 9.3 W was obtained in a MOPA configuration from resonantly cladding-pumped Yb-free EDFA with the optical-to-optical conversion slope efficiency of ~46% [4]. Presented here are the results of further major power scaling effort based on resonantly cladding-pumped approach. Characterization results of a resonantly cladding-pumped FBG-laser based on Yb-free Er-doped COTS LMA fiber are discussed. This is the first reported resonantly cladding-pumped FBG-based Er-doped LMA fiber laser. Obtained narrowband output of 47.6 W is believed to be the highest power reported from Yb-free, Er-doped fiber laser. This fully integrated laser also has the optical-to-optical conversion slope efficiency of 56.7%, to the best of our knowledge, the highest efficiency reported for cladding-pumped unidirectionally emitting Er-doped laser.

Experimental details and results
Shown in Fig. 1 is the fully integrated Er fiber laser based on COTS Liekki Er60-20/125 double clad (DC) fiber pumped through the FBG-mirror. The FBG, matching the 20/125 DC fiber format, was manufactured by IPG Photonics Corp. and has the ~93.5% reflectivity centered at 1589.4 nm with the 2.58 nm bandwidth (FWHM). The laser was cladding pumped by fiber-coupled (into a 105/125 µm, NA 0.15 fiber) custom made laser diode modules (centered at 1532.5 nm and spectrally narrowed to 0.5 nm). The pumping was coupled into a ~15 m long Er 60-20/125 DC LMA fiber through a standard matching (6+1)x1 SIFAM pump combiner. The output fiber end has a straight cleave used as an outcoupling mirror. The fiber was coiled in order to achieve nearly single transverse mode regime (see below).

Fig. 2 presents major testing results obtained with the resonantly cladding-pumped Yb-free Er-doped fiber laser shown in Fig. 1. Maximum of 101 W of launched power at 1532.5 nm (after the FBG) resulted in maximum of 84.1 W of power absorbed in the 15-m long fiber. The obtained output versus launched pump power dependence indicates clear linear behavior with no saturation effects, which is indicative of purely pump limited power scaling case. The maximum output power of 47.6 W was obtained with the optical-to-optical efficiency of 56.7%. Er-fiber laser, pumped at 1532.5 nm and emitting at ~1590 nm (see Fig. 3), operates in an
ultra-low quantum defect (QD) mode. QD of ~3.75% regime is very important for further power scaling without the need for special thermal management for powers up to several hundred Watts. In this first FBG-laser experiment spectrally clean 1590 nm output was obtained with the ASE level at about 35 dB below the signal level (see Fig. 3) up to the maximum output power. Indicated in Fig. 3 are: Pump – the leaked unabsorbed pump power at 1532.5 nm; ASE – amplified spontaneous emission; Laser output – the underresolved (on the scale shown in Fig. 3) fiber laser power at ~1590 nm.

Using the optical spectrum analyzer set to a 0.05 nm resolution we found that the overall spectral width of the 1590 nm laser output never exceeds 0.25 nm FWHM. The spectral power distribution within this spectral width is not a steady-state one: there were typically 2-3 not quite fully resolved competing peaks observed in laser output around 1590 nm, but all confined to a 0.25 nm spectral width. With loose coiling laser typically emitted 2-3 lower order modes. Stable nearly diffraction limited operation was achieved, with the penalty in efficiency of ~5%, by partial coiling of the Er60-20/125 DC LMA fiber to a diameter of ~8-10 cm. Far field pattern of the output in this case is shown in Fig. 2 (inset).

Conclusions

Highly scalable, efficient, ultra-low quantum defect (~3.75%) operation of the fully integrated resonantly cladding-pumped Yb-free Er-doped FBG-laser based on COTS LMA fiber has been demonstrated. 47.6 W of spectrally clean narrowband 1590 nm output was obtained with the ~56.7% optical-to-optical conversion slope efficiency. This result presents, to the best of our knowledge, the highest power ever reported from Yb-free Er-doped fiber laser, as well as the highest efficiency ever reported for cladding-pumped unidirectionally emitting Yb-free Er-doped fiber laser. Our laser operated with no indication of power saturation effects, i.e., achieved power is assumed to be strictly pump limited and can be further scaled significantly. Yb-free Er-doped DC fibers for clad pumping are currently grossly underdeveloped. With specialty Er-fibers developed specifically for the application conversion efficiency can be increased to a QD-limited level - just like in Yb-doped fiber lasers.

References


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