Large-Scale Fabrication of Pr$^{3+}$ Doped or Undoped Nanosized ATiO$_3$ (A = Ca, Sr, Ba) with Different Shapes via a Facile Solvothermal Technique

Xianmin Zhang,$^{1,4}$ Jiahua Zhang,*$^{4}$ Ye Jin,$^{1,4}$ Haifeng Zhao,$^{1}$ and Xiao-jun Wang$^{8,7,8}$

Key Laboratory of Excited State Processes, Changchun Institute of Optics, Fine Mechanics and Physics, Chinese Academy of Sciences, 16 Eastern South Lake Road, Changchun 130033, China, Graduate School of Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, 100039, China, Department of Physics, and Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Georgia 30460

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ABSTRACT: CaTiO$_3$ nanoflowers, SrTiO$_3$ nanocubes, and BaTiO$_3$ nanospheres have been prepared by an environmentally friendly solvothermal technique and structurally characterized by X-ray diffraction and field emission scanning electron microscopy. Red fluorescence originating from intra 4f$^1$D$_{2}$-3H$_4$ transition of Pr$^{3+}$ is observed by doping Pr$^{3+}$ ions in CaTiO$_3$ nanoflowers. The energy transfer and red emission processes of Pr$^{3+}$ in CaTiO$_3$:Pr$^{3+}$ nanoflowers are discussed.

Introduction

Low-dimensional nanostructures have attracted extensive interest due to their novel size- and shape-dependent properties and potential applications in numerous areas such as nanoscale electronics and photonics.1–4 Much effort has been directed toward synthesizing carbon nanotubes,1 semiconductors,2 metallic,3 and binary oxide nanowires,5 and nanobelts.5 In recent years, nanoscale ternary transition metal oxides, ATiO$_3$ (A = Ca, Sr, Ba), with a perovskite structure, have received great attention because of their interesting properties and promising application in microwave-tunable devices6 and transducers as well as logic circuitry.7 etc. Thus, considerable efforts have been devoted to fabricate nanosized SrTiO$_3$ and BaTiO$_3$ with different shapes such as nanoparticles,8 nanocubes,9 nanowires,9 nanorods,10 etc. Comparatively little work has been performed on the fabrication of shape-dependent CaTiO$_3$. However, the previous synthesize methods are complicated because of numerous reagents. Moreover, the relatively high reaction temperature increases the cost of the synthesis. Here, we develop an environmentally friendly solvothermal technique to prepare first homogeneous CaTiO$_3$ nanoflowers. On the basis of this method, SrTiO$_3$ nanocubes and BaTiO$_3$ nanospheres have also been successfully prepared.

The synthesis of ATiO$_3$ was carried out according to the overall formal reaction: $\text{A(NO}_3\text{)}_2 + \text{Ti(OC}_4\text{H}_9\text{)}_4 + 2\text{NaOH} + \text{H}_2\text{O} \rightarrow \text{ATiO}_3 + 2\text{NaNO}_3 + 4\text{C}_4\text{H}_6\text{OH}$

In our experimental procedure, 0.02 M alkali metals nitrate (Ca(NO$_3$)$_2$, Sr(NO$_3$)$_2$, or Ba(NO$_3$)$_2$) and 0.3 M NaOH were dissolved in the ethanol and distilled water solution with molar ratio of 1:9. (The production has the highest yield at this ratio.) Under constant magnetic stirring, Ti(OC$_4$H$_9$)$_4$ 0.02 M was added dropwise. To reduce the hydrolytic rate of Ti(OC$_4$H$_9$)$_4$, the solution was kept cold by an ice–water mixture. After the solution was stirred for 15 min, a milky colloid solution was transferred into closed Teflon-lined autoclaves of 50 mL capacity, which were filled ca. 85% of the total volume. The tank was maintained at 180 °C for 10 h (CaTiO$_3$ and BaTiO$_3$) and 200 °C for 4 h (SrTiO$_3$), respectively, and then cooled to room temperature. The heating rate was 5 °C/min. The products were collected by centrifuge, washed several times using distilled water, and dried at 65 °C under vacuum. The products are amorphous if the solvothermal temperature is below 180 °C.

The morphology of the synthesized products was characterized by field emission scanning electron microscopy (FESEM, Hitachi S-4800). The structural characterization was analyzed by X-ray diffraction (XRD; Rigaku D/max-rA) spectroscopy with the Cu K$_\alpha$ line of 1.540 78 Å. Energy dispersive spectroscopy (EDS) was performed on a GENESIS2000XMS 60S (EDAX Inc.). Photoluminescence (PL) and PL excitation (PLE) spectra were measured using Hitachi F-4500 fluorescence spectrophotometer.

Figure 1a shows the FESEM images of CaTiO$_3$ nanoflowers: (a) low-magnification, (b) high-magnification, (c) EDS spectra of CaTiO$_3$ nanoflowers, (d) XRD spectra of CaTiO$_3$ nanoflowers.

Figure 1. FESEM images of CaTiO$_3$ nanoflowers: (a) Low-magnification; (b) high-magnification. (c) EDS spectra of CaTiO$_3$ nanoflowers. (d) XRD spectra of CaTiO$_3$ nanoflowers.
With the same methods, SrTiO₃ nanocubes and BaTiO₃ nanospheres have also been successfully prepared. The uniform SrTiO₃ nanocubes (Figure 2a) and BaTiO₃ nanospheres (Figure 2b) are observed with an average size of 90 and 85 nm. The XRD patterns indicate the formation of cubic SrTiO₃ (JCPDS Card No. 73-0661) and tetragonal BaTiO₃ (JCPDS Card No. 74-1960), as shown in Figure 2, panels c and d, respectively. The EDS spectra of the SrTiO₃ (Figure S1a) and BaTiO₃ (Figure S1b) indicate that these nanocubes and nanospheres are composed of Sr, Ti and O or Ba, Ti and O.

Low-dimensional nanomaterials doped with rare earth ions have received considerable interest due to their potential applications not only in luminescent and displays devices but also as a probe to investigate the microstructure of nanocrystals. In previous work, bulk perovskite-type oxides doped with rare earth ions have been extensively studied. However, few reports have been presented on preparing rare earth doped bulk TiO₂ (A = Ca, Sr, Ba) nanophosphors. Recently, our research group has synthesized CaTiO₃:Pr³⁺ nanocrystals by an improved sol–gel technique. In the present work, we find that Pr³⁺ ions (0.4% PrCl₃ solution was added) can be doped into CaTiO₃ nanoflowers, inducing red emission at 610 nm originating from intra 4f₂⁻1D₂ transition of Pr³⁺.

PL (λₘₐₓ = 323 nm) and PLE (λₘₐₓ = 610 nm) spectra of Pr³⁺ doped CaTiO₃ nanoflowers are presented in Figure 3A. As shown in Figure S2, the FESEM observations indicate that the characteristic, expected morphology of the Pr³⁺ doped CaTiO₃ nanoflowers. The PLE spectra monitoring the red emission mainly consists of three broad bands (a, b, and c) in the ultraviolet region, which are located at 323 nm (a), 265 nm (b), and 375 nm (c), respectively. The position of band a is assigned to the band edge absorption of CaTiO₃ host. Bands b and c are attributed to the absorption of Pr³⁺ 4f5d states and a low-lying Pr-to-metal (Pr³⁺-Ti⁴⁺) intervalence charge transfer state, respectively. Under the 265 nm excitation, there is no 4f5d → 4f⁶ luminescence of Pr³⁺ in CaTiO₃:Pr³⁺ nanoflowers. It is obvious that a nonradiative relaxation from the lowest 4f⁵d level to the 1D₂ state occurs. When an excitation occurs at 323 nm, the spectroscopic behavior of the CaTiO₃:Pr³⁺ nanoflowers can be compared to the behavior of large gap semiconductors such as rare-earth doped ZnS phosphors, since the excitation of the red luminescence is achieved through the conduction band (CB). States of host matrix then transferred to the emitting level of the activator ions. In the case of the CaTiO₃:Pr³⁺ nanoflowers, the UV (323 nm) excitation can generate O(2p) → Ti(3d) and/or Pr³⁺ (4f) → Ti(3d) charge transfers and then produces electron–hole pairs, leading to the formation of bound excitons. As no luminescence from the bound exciton recombination is observed, these excitons, if formed, decay nonradiatively through a resonant or quasiresonant transfer to the 4f shell of Pr³⁺ ions. The excitation band at 375 nm is ascribed to a low-lying Pr³⁺/Ti⁴⁺ → Pr⁴⁺/Ti³⁺ charge transfer state, as the final nonradiative relaxation pathway is to the emitting 1D₂ level in Pr³⁺-doped CaTiO₃. One simple model illustrating the energy transfer to Pr³⁺ and the red emission process of Pr³⁺ is shown in Figure 3B. Although Pr³⁺ ions are also experimentally doped in SrTiO₃ nanocubes and BaTiO₃ nanospheres, the red emission cannot be detected. The fluorescence efficiency is very weak in Pr³⁺ doped bulk SrTiO₃ and BaTiO₃, which is expected to be further reduced due to the presence of numerous nonradiation quenching centers on the surface of nanophosphors. In CaTiO₃:Pr³⁺ nanoflowers, no phosphorescence is observed. This indicates no energy storage traps in nanoflowers.

The present study shows that CaTiO₃ nanoflowers, SrTiO₃ nanocubes, and BaTiO₃ nanospheres can be prepared by an environmentally friendly solvothermal technique. Red fluorescence originating from intra 4f⁵d → 1D₂ transition of Pr³⁺ is observed by doping Pr³⁺ ions in CaTiO₃ nanoflowers. The synthetic strategy presented here may be extended to other perovskite nanostructures with different compositions.

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Supporting Information Available: EDS spectra of SrTiO3 nanocubes (Figure S1a) and BaTiO3 nanospheres (Figure S1b); FESEM image of CaTiO3/Pr3+ (Figure S2). This information is available free of charge via the Internet at http://pubs.acs.org.

References


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