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Author(s)	Suda, Yoshiyuki; Okita, Atsushi; Takayama, Junichi; Oda, Akinori; Sugawara, Hirotake; Sakai, Yosuke; Oke, Shinichiro; Takikawa, Hirofumi
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Carbon-Nanotube Growth in Alcohol-Vapor Plasma

Yoshiyuki Suda, Atsushi Okita, Junichi Takayama, Akinori Oda, Hirotake Sugawara,
Yosuke Sakai, Shinichiro Oke, and Hirofumi Takikawa, *Member, IEEE*

Abstract—We have successfully grown carbon nanotubes (CNTs) by plasma-enhanced chemical vapor deposition (PECVD) using alcohol. When 0.01-wt% ferrocene was added to the alcohol, vertically aligned CNTs grew at 650 °C. By contrast, a few CNTs and mostly carbon nanoparticles were obtained by pure alcohol PECVD even though the Fe catalyst was coated on Si substrates. Comparing this PECVD experiment with thermal alcohol CVD showed that only the PECVD method can be used to grow CNTs under the reported experimental conditions. To understand the plasma properties for CNT growth, particularly plasma species contained in a gas phase of alcohol plasma, the plasma was analyzed using optical-emission spectroscopy (OES) and quadrupole mass spectrometry (QMS). From the OES measurement, emission peaks from the excitation states of C₂, CH, CHO, CH₂O, CO, H, O₂, C⁺, and CO⁺ were identified, while the QMS measurement also showed the existence of H₂, O, and CO. These results indicate that, in alcohol plasma, oxidants and reductants exist together and potentially promote/suppress CNT growth depending on the process conditions. The contribution of C_xH_y ($x \geq 1, y \geq 3$) radicals, which were produced by decomposition reactions in alcohol plasma as a CNT precursor, is discussed.

Index Terms—Carbon nanotube (CNT), ferrocene, mass spectrometry, optical-emission spectroscopy (OES), plasma-enhanced chemical vapor deposition (PECVD).

I. INTRODUCTION

CARBON nanotubes (CNTs) have attracted significant interest due to their unique properties, e.g., high chemical stability, mechanical strength, and current density. Based on these properties, our group has focused on the application of CNTs as nanoscale interconnections in large-scale integrated (LSI) circuits [1], [2]. Plasma-enhanced chemical vapor deposition (PECVD) is superior to other techniques including arc discharge, laser ablation, and CVD for the low-temperature operation of CNT growth (~390 °C). The PECVD approach meets the condition for the LSI fabrication process (≤ 400 °C)

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Y. Suda was with the Graduate School of Information Science and Technology, Hokkaido University, Sapporo 060-0814, Japan. He is now with the Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Toyohashi University of Technology, Toyohashi 441-8580, Japan (e-mail: suda@eee.tut.ac.jp).

A. Okita was with the Graduate School of Information Science and Technology, Hokkaido University, Sapporo 060-0814, Japan. He is now with Hitachi High-Technologies Corporation, Hitachinaka 312-8504, Japan.

J. Takayama, H. Sugawara, and Y. Sakai are with the Graduate School of Information Science and Technology, Hokkaido University, Sapporo 060-0814, Japan.

A. Oda is with the Department of Engineering Physics, Electronics and Mechanics, Graduate School of Engineering, Nagoya Institute of Technology, Nagoya 466-8555, Japan.

S. Oke and H. Takikawa are with the Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Toyohashi University of Technology, Toyohashi 441-8580, Japan.

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[3]. By contrast, recent reports of CVD growth using O₂ gas [4] and water vapor [5] as an additive to CH₄ and C₂H₄, respectively, provide an enormous advantage in long CNT growth with high yields. These oxidants are thought to play a role in activating catalyst particles for long lifetimes and, thereby, allowing the growth of longer CNTs. Alcohol is also well known to grow high-purity CNTs; Maruyama *et al.* [6] discussed the role of decomposed OH radicals from alcohol for the efficient removal of amorphous carbon during CNT growth.

Our group has studied the PECVD of CNTs using CH₄/H₂ gas mixtures and the correlation among reactions in the plasma gas phase, the state of the catalyst nanoparticles, and the CNT growth conditions [7]–[10]. We have developed a CH₄/H₂ simulation code and have paid close attention to the supply of a carbon source as a precursor for CNTs. To simulate the CNT-growth process, surface chemistry including surface activation and chemical sputtering are necessary [11]. By considering the sticking probabilities of ions and radicals, we estimated the total amount of carbon atoms supplied from the plasma onto the catalyst surface. In our analysis, it was concluded that the C₂H₅⁺ ion and neutral species (C_xH_y; $x, y > 2$) are the main precursors for CNT growth [7], [8], [10].

In this paper, we report the use of a new carbon source, alcohol (C₂H₅OH), in PECVD for CNT growth and the analysis of the source's plasma. In this plasma, CNTs can be grown under limited conditions (pressure = 133 Pa, input power = 200 W, temperature = 650 °C, Fe catalysts with Al₂O₃ supports). PECVD of CNTs using C₂H₅OH has been reported [12], [13], but various species, including hydrocarbon radicals, ions, oxidants, and reductants, are present in C₂H₅OH plasma, and the properties of these species remain unclear. Clearly, it is important to understand the characteristics of the plasma species in C₂H₅OH plasma and to investigate the contribution of these species to CNT growth. In this paper, we measured the plasma optical emissions by optical-emission spectroscopy (OES) and investigated the existence of plasma species by quadrupole mass spectrometry (QMS). The C₂H₅OH plasma species monitored by OES and QMS is presented.

II. EXPERIMENTAL SETUP

Fig. 1 shows the experimental setup for alcohol PECVD. The details of the experimental setup and CNT growth procedure are described in earlier reports [7]–[9]. The ribbon heater was equipped to provide a stable alcohol-vapor feed. To compare CNT growth, pure C₂H₅OH and C₂H₅OH containing 0.01-wt% ferrocene (C₁₀H₁₀Fe) were used. We prepared the catalyst/support materials on a Si substrate using the electron-beam (EB)-evaporation approach. The substrates used were Si

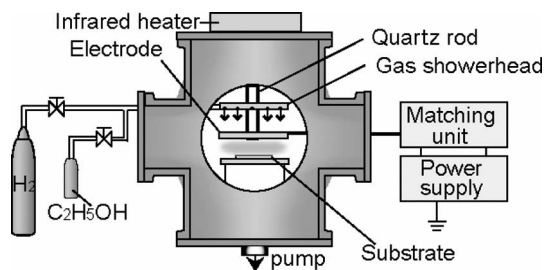


Fig. 1. Experimental apparatus for alcohol plasma-enhanced CVD.

TABLE I
EXPERIMENTAL CONDITIONS

	Pretreatment condition	Process condition
Gas	H ₂ (Gas flow rate = 50 sccm)	C ₂ H ₅ OH vapor (+ 0.01-wt% Ferrocene)
Pressure	666 Pa	133 Pa
Process temperature	550 °C	650 °C
RF input power	50 W	200 W
Process time	4 min	10 min

wafers with a 20-nm-thick SiO₂ layer. In the EB evaporation, the Fe (catalyst) and Al₂O₃ (support) were deposited on the substrates to form sandwichlike structures (Al₂O₃/Fe/Al₂O₃ = 1/1/1 nm), which can then form small nanoparticles [9], [14]. The pretreatment and growth conditions including pressure, power, process temperature, and process time are listed in Table I.

The procedure of CNT growth is briefly described. First, substrates with catalyst and support materials were set on the center of the grounded electrode. The reactor was pumped down to below 10⁻⁴ Pa. Using an infrared heater, the substrates were heated and kept at 550 °C in 666-Pa H₂ plasma for 4 min. The H₂ gas was removed, and C₂H₅OH (water content ≤ 0.2%, with/without 0.01-wt% ferrocene) was introduced. The pressure was maintained at 133 Pa, while the temperature was maintained at 650 °C for 10 min. During CNT growth by PECVD, plasma optical-emission spectra were acquired using a photonic multichannel analyzer (PMA: Hamamatsu Photonics K.K., PMA-11) in the wavelength range of 300–800 nm. A quadrupole mass spectrometer (QMS: ANELVA, M-QA200TS) was used to analyze the plasma species. The QMS tube was connected with the PECVD chamber through a 50-cm-long 1/8-in-diameter stainless-steel pipe and a variable leak valve. Pressure inside the QMS tube was carefully controlled by the valve, and the QMS spectra of CH₄/H₂ gas with/without plasma were evaluated. The CNTs obtained were characterized using a scanning electron microscope (SEM: Hitachi High-Technologies Corporation, S-4800) and a transmission electron microscope (TEM: JEOL, 2000FX).

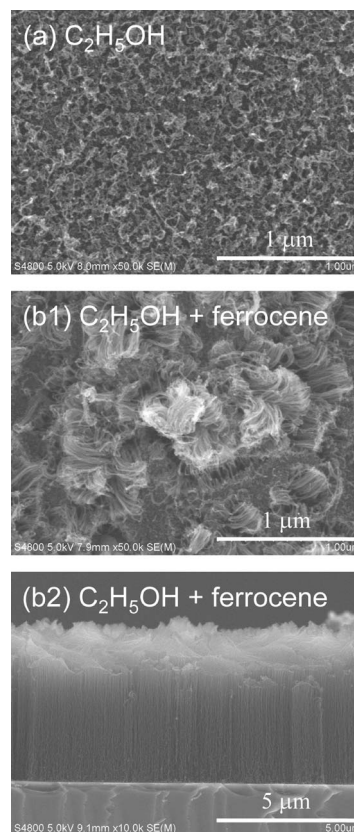


Fig. 2. SEM micrographs of CNTs obtained using a 133-Pa C₂H₅OH plasma. Al₂O₃/Fe/Al₂O₃ [= 1/1/1 nm, (a), and (b)] is used for the catalyst/support materials. Ferrocene is mixed with C₂H₅OH, and the growth results are shown in (b). (b2) is the cross-sectional view of (b1), which confirms the formation of vertically aligned CNTs.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fig. 2 shows the CNT growth results obtained using C₂H₅OH plasma. The substrate with Al₂O₃/Fe/Al₂O₃ showed CNT growth over the whole substrate area, resulting in a high production yield of CNTs. The effect of adding ferrocene can be clearly seen. As shown in Fig. 2(b2), vertically aligned CNTs were obtained when ferrocene was added, although Fig. 2(b1) and (b2) revealed that CNT growth occurred over the whole substrate area. To confirm the effect of the Al₂O₃/Fe/Al₂O₃ catalysts, we observed the CNT deposition on a Si substrate. Without catalyst, no CNTs were obtained on a Si substrate even though ferrocene was supplied with the alcohol. This clearly indicated that a carbon source containing a ferrocene molecule can be activated on the catalyst surface and used to grow CNTs. Eres *et al.* [15] used a substrate that was catalyzed using a Mo/Fe/Al multilayer and found that the introduction of ferrocene into the acetylene-gas stream enhanced the growth of vertically aligned CNTs. In addition, CNT growth has been achieved using ferrocene-containing ethanol solutions in spray pyrolysis [12] and inductively coupled plasma [13] techniques. However, the concentrations of ferrocene in these reports (i.e., 1000 mg/100–800 mL by Su *et al.* [12] and 5 mg/10 mL by Xu *et al.* [13]) are higher than the levels used in our experiment (8 mg/100 mL). TEM analysis showed the effect of the addition of ferrocene (Fig. 3). In the absence of ferrocene, a large

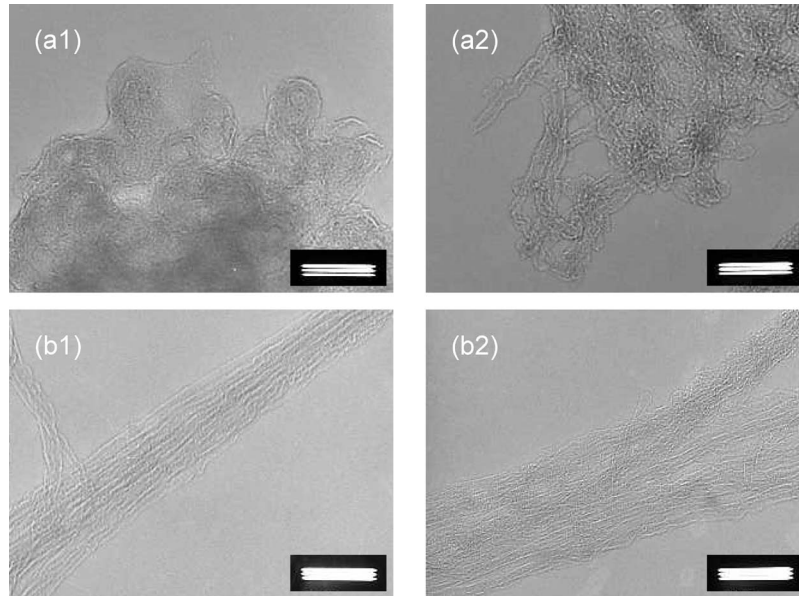


Fig. 3. TEM micrographs of carbon deposits grown from (a) C_2H_5OH only and (b) C_2H_5OH with ferrocene. Scale bar = 50 nm.

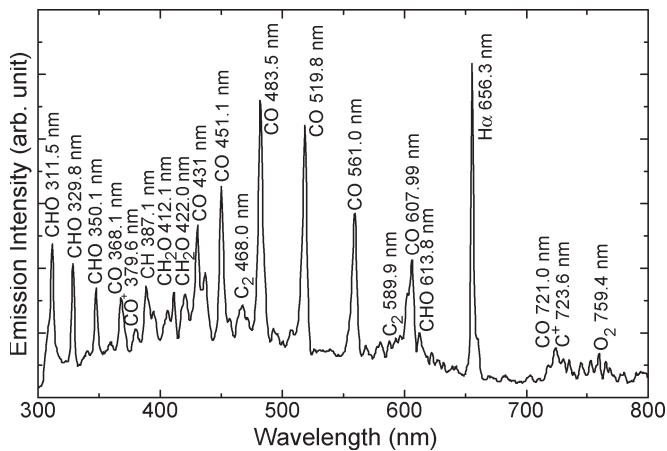


Fig. 4. Optical-emission spectra of C_2H_5OH plasma at 133 Pa.

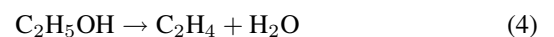
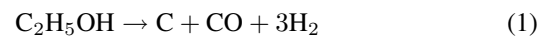
number of carbon nanoparticles and nanocapsules were formed on the $Al_2O_3/Fe/Al_2O_3$ -catalyzed substrate. By contrast, a bundle structure composed of CNTs with a diameter of ~ 5 nm was formed by the ferrocene-assisted reaction.

To ensure the effect of plasma, we confirmed that no CNTs were obtained at a substrate temperature of $650^\circ C$ without plasma. Chiashi *et al.* [16] who performed single-walled CNT (SWCNT) growth in a cold-wall CVD reported that the effective reaction temperature of alcohol CVD was estimated to be slightly higher than $850^\circ C$, whereas a low-temperature reaction caused the generation of amorphous carbon.

Fig. 4 shows the OES spectra obtained using a 133-Pa C_2H_5OH plasma. The measurements were performed at room temperature to avoid the detection of light from the heating system. As a result of this OES measurement, optical peaks from C_2 , CH, CHO, CH_2O , CO, H_α (H atom in the Balmer series), O_2 , C^+ , and CO^+ were identified. Fig. 5(a) shows the QMS result obtained using a 133-Pa C_2H_5OH plasma. From the QMS analysis, peaks corresponding to each molecular weight were

observed: H_2 (between 1 and 3), CH_4 (between 12 and 18), CH_3OH (between 24 and 31), and C_2H_5OH (between 38 and 46). Since the ionization process of particles by electron collision is absolutely necessary for QMS detection, the decomposition of the C_2H_5OH molecule occurs. We measured the QMS peaks obtained in the 133-Pa C_2H_5OH atmosphere [without plasma, Fig. 5(b)]. Fig. 5(c) shows the subtraction of the spectral intensity of plasma-off [Fig. 5(b)] from that of plasma-on [Fig. 5(a)]. The result indicates that the peaks of C_2H_5OH -derived molecules (CH_4 , CH_3OH , and C_2H_5OH) decreased by igniting the plasma. This shows that the decomposition of C_2H_5OH is promoted by generating plasma. By contrast, the species of H_2 , O, CO, and C_2H_4 (atomic/molecular weight = 2, 16, 28, and 28, respectively) increased by the recombination/dissociation processes. These results reflect the observation that plasma processes can promote the production of several species by plasma reactions.

In this paper, we discuss the decomposition/dissociation reactions of C_2H_5OH plasma. Several groups [17]–[21] have reported the chemical-reaction processes of C_2H_5OH plasma.



Reaction (1) is a collision-impact process between electrons and radicals in plasma [17] as well as a typical reaction occurring on a catalyst surface for CNTs growth by nonplasma alcohol CVD. However, the CNT formation in this experiment could not be explained simply by this reaction, since no carbon

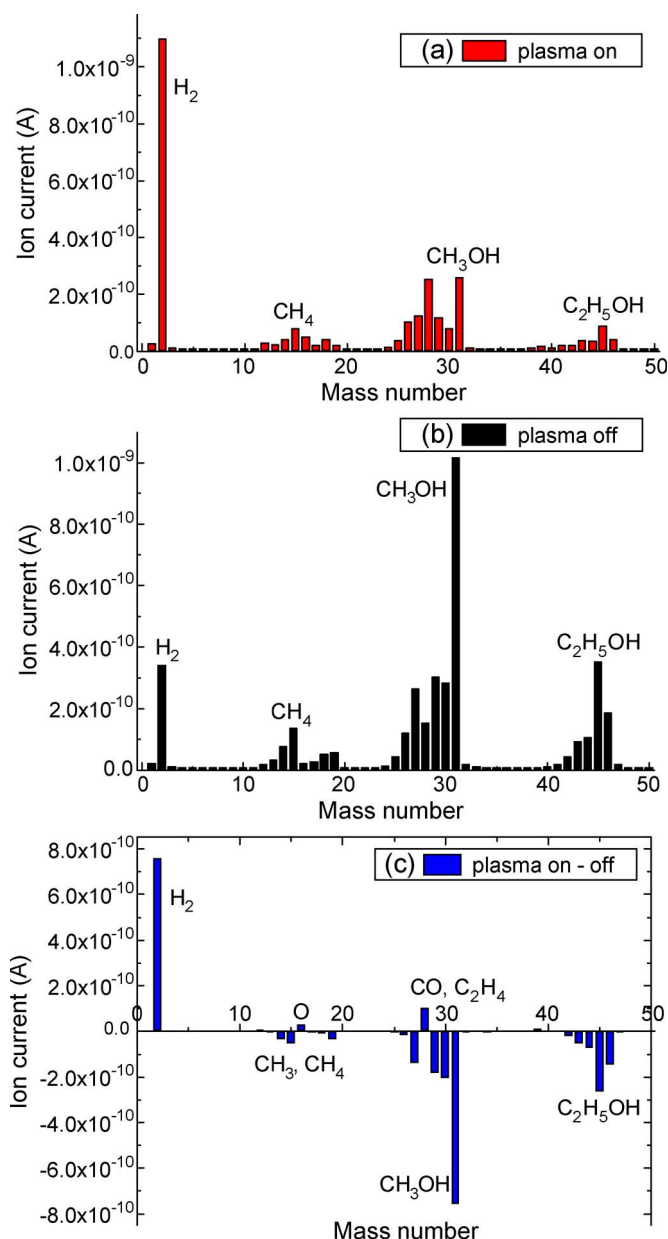


Fig. 5. Mass spectra obtained by (a) C₂H₅OH PECVD and (b) C₂H₅OH vapor (without plasma) at 133 Pa. (c) Subtraction of (b) from (a).

deposit was observed without plasma. Generation of CO, CO₂, and H₂ as proposed by reactions (1)–(5) is consistent with the presented OES and QMS analyses. A small amount of H₂O ($\leq 0.2\%$) was present in the ethanol used, and therefore, reactions (2) and (3) take place. Considering the dissociation energies by electron collision of CO, CO₂, OH, H₂, and H₂O, namely, 11.09, 5.2, 4.39, 8.8, and 7.0 eV, respectively [17], [22]–[25], it was observed that these species were easily dissociated in the plasma and possibly adsorb onto the catalyst surface. This could explain the requirement of ferrocene for CNT growth.

CO₂, H₂O, and OH, which work as oxidants, and CO and H₂, which operate as reductants, are simultaneously produced in the gas phase through reactions (1)–(5). Several papers describe their effects on CNT growth, e.g., supergrowth of SWCNTs by

the addition of a small amount of H₂O (175 ppm) in the carbon source (C₂H₄) [5], the oxidation of the catalyst by existing OH radicals [6], and the optimization of the carbon/hydrogen ratio by O atoms [4]. Among the aforementioned molecules (CO₂, H₂O, OH, CO, and H₂), only CO can be used as a carbon source for CNT by a CO disproportionation reaction below 900 °C [26]. These species produced in the plasma have a strong influence on the catalyst state and CNT growth by varying their concentration in the gas phase.

A recent experiment by Oshima *et al.* [27] showed that C₂H₅OH thermally decomposed at 840 °C without plasma and a metal catalyst, and C₂H₄, C₂H₂, C₂H₄O, CH₄, CO, CO₂, and H₂O were generated through the thermal reactions. This paper suggested that hydrocarbons such as C₂H₄ and C₂H₂ can be used as a CNT precursor. Our previous work using CH₄/H₂ plasma concluded that C₂H₅⁺ and C_xH_y (x, y ≥ 2) are the main precursors [7], [8], [10] and that Al₂O₃/Fe/Al₂O₃ catalyst resulted in high yields of CNTs. According to the present QMS measurement, the radicals derived from the C₂H₅OH molecule are the major species in the plasma. The species observed by QMS are different from those by OES because the emission peaks of hydrocarbon radicals are located in the infrared region and outside the measurement range. Considering these results, we speculate that C₂H₄ and C₂H₅ which were generated by electron impact collision with C₂H₅OH would be CNT precursors in this system. Since the molecular weight of CO and C₂H₄ are equivalent, it is difficult to distinguish between these two species [Fig. 5(c)]. The presence of CO indicates that carbon is provided by the CO disproportionation reaction [26]. By employing plasma, the electron-collision process in the plasma reduces the effective temperature for CNT growth by approximately 200 °C, when compared with the nonplasma CVD process [27].

IV. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we reported multiwalled CNT growth by alcohol PECVD at 650 °C. By adding 0.01-wt% ferrocene in C₂H₅OH, the yield of CNTs increased, and well-aligned CNTs were grown on an Al₂O₃/Fe/Al₂O₃ substrate. Using plasma OES, the spectral peaks from the resulting atoms and molecules (C₂, CH, CHO, CH₂O, CO, H, O₂, C⁺, and CO⁺) were identified. In the QMS measurement, the peaks of H₂, CH₄, CH₃OH, and C₂H₅OH were detected, and a decrease in intensity of CH₄, CH₃OH, and C₂H₅OH by generating plasma was shown. By utilizing the plasma dissociation process for alcohol, oxidants (such as CO₂, H₂O, OH) and reductants (CO, H₂), as well as C_xH_y (x ≥ 1 , y ≥ 3) that are precursors for CNT growth, can be effectively produced at a lower temperature in plasma.

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Yoshiyuki Suda was born in Japan in 1971. He received the M.E. and Ph.D. degrees in electronic information engineering from the Graduate School of Information Science and Technology, Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan, in 1997 and 2006, respectively.

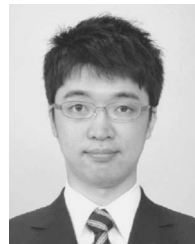
From 2004 to 2007, he was a Research Associate with the Graduate School of Information Science and Technology, Hokkaido University, where he was an Assistant Professor in 2007. He is currently an Associate Professor with the Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Toyohashi University of Technology, Toyohashi, Japan.

Dr. Suda is a member of the IEE of Japan, Japan Society of Applied Physics, and Fullerenes and Nanotubes Research Society.



Atsushi Okita was born in Japan in 1980. He received the B.Eng. degree from Muroran Institute of Technology, Muroran, Japan, in 2003 and the M.Eng. and D.Eng. degrees from the Graduate School of Information Science and Technology, Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan, in 2005 and 2008, respectively.

He was a Research Fellow of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. He is currently with Hitachi High-Technologies Corporation, Hitachinaka, Japan.



Junichi Takayama was born in Japan in 1983. He received the B.Eng. degree from Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan, in 2003 and the M.Eng. degree in 2007, where he is currently working toward the M.S. degree in the Graduate School of Information Science and Technology, Hokkaido University.



Akinori Oda was born in Japan in 1972. He received the M.E. and Ph.D. degrees in engineering from Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan, in 1996 and 2001, respectively.

He is currently an Assistant Professor with the Department of Engineering Physics, Electronics and Mechanics, Graduate School of Engineering, Nagoya Institute of Technology, Nagoya, Japan.

Dr. Oda is a member of the IEE of Japan, Japan Society of Applied Physics, and Institute of Engineers on Electrical Discharge in Japan.



Hirotake Sugawara was born in Japan in 1967. He received the B.E., M.E., and D.E. degrees in electrical engineering from Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan, in 1990, 1992, and 1997, respectively.

From 1992 to 1998, he was a Research Associate with the Department of Electrical Engineering, Hokkaido University, where he was an Associate Professor in 1998. He is currently an Associate Professor with the Division of Electronics for Informatics, Graduate School of Information Science and Technology, Hokkaido University.

Dr. Sugawara is a member of the IEE of Japan and Japan Society of Applied Physics.



Shinichiro Oke was born in Japan in 1978. He received the M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in engineering from Toyohashi University of Technology, Toyohashi, Japan, in 2003 and 2007, respectively.

He is currently an Assistant Professor with the Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Toyohashi University of Technology.

Dr. Oke is a member of the IEE of Japan and Japan Solar Energy Society.



Yosuke Sakai was born in Japan in 1944. He received the M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in engineering from Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan, in 1970 and 1973, respectively.

In March 2008, he retired from an education and research position with Hokkaido University after 35 years. He is an Emeritus Professor with Hokkaido University, where he is currently the Director of the Carrier Center. His research interest includes plasma science and electronic conduction in gaseous and liquid dielectrics.



Hirofumi Takikawa (M'06) was born in Japan in 1962. He received the M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in engineering from Toyohashi University of Technology, Toyohashi, Japan, in 1986 and 1992, respectively.

He is currently a Professor with the Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Toyohashi University of Technology.

Prof. Takikawa is a member of the IEE of Japan and Japan Society of Applied Physics.