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Controlling of luminescence colour through concentration of Dy\(^{3+}\) ions in LiLa\(_{1-x}\)Dy\(_x\)P\(_4\)O\(_{12}\) nanocrystals

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The luminescence and excitation spectra of LiLa\(_{1-x}\)Dy\(_x\)P\(_4\)O\(_{12}\) nanocrystals are reported. In particular, the impact of dopant concentration on luminescence properties of LiLa\(_{1-x}\)Dy\(_x\)P\(_4\)O\(_{12}\) nanocrystals was investigated. It was found that increase of Dy\(^{3+}\) concentration results in strong quenching of luminescence. The mechanism of concentration quenching was discussed in terms of the Yokota-Tanimoto model. It is concluded that, with increasing Dy\(^{3+}\) concentration, the donor-acceptor interaction leads to a significant concentration quenching resulting in nonexponential luminescence decay whereas at the high concentration limit the donor-donor interaction becomes dominant and exponential decay is observed.

Introduction

In recent few decades much effort has been put in finding and developing of new phosphors for solid state lighting applications. A great interest in this field results from a tremendous number of industrial applications where lighting plays important role. One of the most important field in solid-state lighting is related with white light generation. There are several conditions which a new phosphor should fulfill in order to consider its potential application in white light sources: high emission efficiency, color of the emitted light being close to white light (CIE coordinates close to (0.33,0.33)), good color rendering index (CRI), low temperature quenching and, finally, low cost of production. The latter condition can be fulfilled taking advantage of low cost reagents used and low cost method of synthesis of the phosphor as well. On the other hand, high chemical purity necessary for appropriate control of the physical and chemical properties of the obtained phosphor results in increase of its price. Due to relatively high quantum efficiency and well defined physical properties, which facilitate controlling of luminescence properties of the relevant phosphors, lanthanide ions have attracted great attention. One of potential candidates for generating white emission is the dysprosium ion, due to the presence of several emission bands in blue, green, yellow and red ranges of the spectrum. The emission properties of Dy\(^{3+}\) have been reported for different hosts\(^1\)-\(^9\). The efficiency of Dy\(^{3+}\) luminescence is strongly reduced in most of crystals due to significant concentration quenching. Such quenching may be avoided in so called stoichiometric crystals\(^10,11\) characterized by a large distance between optically active lanthanide ions.

In our previous paper, the concentration quenching effect and up-conversion emission were investigated in LiLa\(_{1-x}\)Nd\(_x\)P\(_4\)O\(_{12}\)\(^{12-15}\). In this paper we report the luminescence studies of lithium lanthanum tetraphosphate nanocrystals doped with dysprosium ions (LiLa\(_{1-x}\)Dy\(_x\)P\(_4\)O\(_{12}\)). The mean distance between two neighboring Ln\(^{3+}\) ions in fully concentrated LiLnP\(_4\)O\(_{12}\) crystal is relatively large: 6 Å, and results in lowered concentration quenching of the luminescence. One can expect that the Dy\(^{3+}\) luminescence may be significantly enhanced in such a host even at high concentration. The mechanism of concentration quenching of luminescence is discussed.

Experimental

Nanocrystals of LiLa\(_{1-x}\)Dy\(_x\)P\(_4\)O\(_{12}\) were synthesized taking advantage of a wet chemistry synthesis method described previously\(^12\). High purity lanthanum oxide (La\(_2\)O\(_3\) 99,99% from Stanford Materials Corporation), dysprosium oxide (Dy\(_2\)O\(_3\) 99,995% from Stanford Materials Corporation), lithium
carbonate (Li₂CO₃ 99%, from POCH) and diamonium phosphate ((NH₄)₂HPO₄ from Sigma Aldrich) were used as a reagents. Water solutions of lanthanides nitrates, obtained by dissolving of oxides in diluted HNO₃, were mixed together with water solution of diamonium phosphate and stirred for 2h using a magnetic stirrer in order to obtain homogenous solutions. Then the solution was dried at 90°C for 24 h and this was followed by milling and calcinating at 600°C for 6h.

The emission spectra were measured under 355 nm excitation line (3rd harmonic of YAG:Nd laser) using a Jobin-Yvon HR1000 monochromator provided with a CCD camera. The decay profiles were collected using a LeCroy WaveSurfer 400 oscilloscope.

Excitation spectra measurements were performed at room (298 K) and liquid nitrogen (77 K) temperatures using FL5920 spectrometer from Edinburgh Instruments equipped with a CCD camera. Applied voltage was 200kV. Powder X-ray diffraction data patterns of LiLaP₄O₁₂ were measured at 20°–60° 2θ range for 2h using a Seifert X'Pert Pro diffractometer equipped using Ni filtered Cu Kα radiation (V = 40 kV, I = 30 mA).

### Results and discussion

#### Structure and morphology

Lithium lanthanum orthophosphate (LiLaP₄O₁₂) crystal, which was chosen as a host material for Dy³⁺ ions, crystalizes in the monoclinic crystal system with the space group C12/c 1 (15). In order to analyze in detail the impact of concentration on spectroscopic properties of LiLa₁₋ₓDyₓP₄O₁₂ nanocrystals, eight samples have been synthesized with x=0.001, 0.005, 0.01, 0.1, 0.2, 0.5, 0.8, 1 of Dy³⁺ ions concentration calculated with respect to the La³⁺ ions which were replaced during doping. Powder X-ray diffraction data patterns of LiLa₁₋ₓDyₓP₄O₁₂ nanocrystals are presented in the Fig.1a.

![Fig. 1](image1.png)

**Figure 1.** X-ray diffraction data of LiLa₁₋ₓDyₓP₄O₁₂ nanocrystals: XRD patterns a; and the impact of dopant concentration on cell parameters b, c, d. TEM image of LiDyP₄O₁₂ nanocrystals – e.

No evidence of additional peaks in the spectra proves the samples purity. However, one can notice a significant shifting of the diffraction peaks to higher values of 2θ with increase of Dy³⁺ content. It is a result of reduction of the cell parameters (Fig. 1 b-d) due to the difference in ionic radiuses between host La³⁺ (130 pm for coordination number CN=8) and dopant Dy³⁺ ions (116.7 pm in CN=8) according to Vergard’s rule⁶. Active ions in the host are localized in dodecahedral surrounding. Comparison of LiLaP₄O₁₂ and LiDyP₄O₁₂ matrices is shown in Table I. One can see that, in addition to cell parameters, also Ln³⁺-O²⁻ distances are shorter in LiDyP₄O₁₂ host. Average size of the obtained nanocrystals was estimated from Rietveld analysis and confirmed by TEM images to be around 40 nm (Fig. 1e).

| Table I. The comparison of structure parameters of LiLaP₄O₁₂ (ICSD 416877) and LiDyP₄O₁₂ (ICSD 1627851) |
|---|---|---|
| LiLaP₄O₁₂ | LiDyP₄O₁₂ |
| a[Å] | 16.6230 | 16.2600 |
| b [Å] | 7.1198 | 7.0259 |
| c [Å] | 9.9050 | 9.5783 |
| β [°] | 126.43 | 126.02 |
| Ln³⁺-O²⁻ [pm] | 2.4368 | 2.2928 |
| 2.4368 | 2.2928 |
| 2.4823 | 2.3565 |
| 2.4823 | 2.3565 |
| 2.4368 | 2.4155 |
| 2.4368 | 2.4155 |

The spectra consist of a great number of vibrations localized in the range 100-350 cm⁻¹ associated with external modes. The vibration at 350-500 cm⁻¹ comes from bending and breathing modes of δ(P-O-P) group followed by δO-P-O modes. One of

#### Raman spectra

Room temperature Raman spectra were recorded in the range 100 – 1400 cm⁻¹ (Fig 2a).

![Fig. 2](image2.png)

**Figure 2.** Raman spectra of LiLa₁₋ₓDyₓP₄O₁₂ nanocrystals a; visualization of P-O-P and O-P-O vibration b; and the impact of dopant concentration on energies of P-O-P and O-P-O vibrations – c.
the most intense peaks observed is localized around 690 cm\(^{-1}\) and is a result of \(v_{\text{a}}(P-O-P)\) modes. Above 1000 cm\(^{-1}\) three groups of vibrations can be found: \(v_{\text{a}}(P-O-P)\), \(v_{\text{e}}(O-P-O)\) and \(v_{\text{a}}(O-P-O)\) modes.

With increase of dopant concentration shifting of \(v_{\text{e}}(O-P-O)\) mode energy can be observed while \(v_{\text{a}}(P-O-P)\) is not sensitive to the Dy\(^{3+}\) amount (fig. 2c). As it can be clearly seen in Fig. 2b the \(v_{\text{e}}(O-P-O)\) mode is strongly affected by Ln\(^{3+}\) replacing. With increase of concentration of heavier Dy\(^{3+}\) ions the energy of close neighbour (O-P-O) group increases.

It is worth to mention that one of the most intense peaks in the Raman spectra is localized for relatively large energy \(\sim 1200\) cm\(^{-1}\). Therefore, the probability of nonradiative depopulation of excited states is relatively large in tetraphosphates.

**Spectroscopic characterization**

Luminescence excitation spectra of LiLa\(_{1-x}\)Dy\(_x\)P\(_2\)O\(_{12}\) nanocrystals were measured at 77 K and collected using \(\lambda_{\text{exc}}=575\) nm as a detection line corresponding to the most intense emission line \(4F_{9/2}\rightarrow\text{H}_{15/2}\) (Fig 3a). The sharp \(f-f\) transition bands characteristic for Dy\(^{3+}\) ions originating from the \(\text{H}_{15/2}\) term were observed. The most intense band was attributed to the \(\text{H}_{15/2}\rightarrow\text{M}_{5/2}^{3+}\)\(\text{P}_{7/2}\) transition. Due to this, 355 nm excitation was used for photoluminescence measurements.

To facilitate comparison, all spectra were normalized to the intensity of the most intense \(\text{H}_{15/2}\rightarrow\text{M}_{5/2}^{3+}\)\(\text{P}_{7/2}\) band. Although positions of bands in the excitation spectra do not change with Dy\(^{3+}\) concentration, tremendous differences in relative intensities of particular bands can be noticed. A calculation of participation of particular transitions in excitation processes was performed (Fig. 3b and c) and one can notice a decrease of \(\text{M}_{5/2}^{3+}\)\(\text{P}_{7/2}\) and \(\text{P}_{7/2}\) relative intensities with increase of Dy\(^{3+}\) ions number. Meanwhile, an opposite dependence can be observed in the case of lower lying (in energetic scale) transitions. This process can be explained in term of nonradiative depopulation of higher lying multiplets. The higher concentration the lower is the average Dy\(^{3+}\)–Dy\(^{3+}\) distance. Therefore, the probability of nonradiative energy transfers between ions which can take place is higher.

The emission spectra of LiLa\(_{1-x}\)Dy\(_x\)P\(_2\)O\(_{12}\) nanocrystals were measured at 300 K for different concentrations of Dy\(^{3+}\) ions (see Fig. 4a). One can notice four characteristic transition bands of Dy\(^{3+}\) originating from the \(4F_{9/2}\) state to the lower lying \(\text{H}_{15/2}\), \(\text{H}_{13/2}\), \(\text{H}_{11/2}\) and \(\text{H}_{9/2}\)\(\text{M}_{11/2}\) terms. Two general effects of dopant concentration on emission spectra can be observed. First, the shape of the resonant \(4F_{9/2}\rightarrow\text{H}_{15/2}\) transition located around 480 nm reveals significant sensitivity to dopant concentration. Emission peaks corresponding to transition between excited \(4F_{9/2}\) and the lower Stark components of the ground \(\text{H}_{15/2}\) decrease with increase of Dy\(^{3+}\) ions. The reason of the aforementioned behavior is reabsorption of emitted energy by neighboring Dy\(^{3+}\) ions. Probability of this process escalates with dopant concentration due to reduction of the average Dy\(^{3+}\)–Dy\(^{3+}\) distance and exhibits the highest values for those Stark components for which the population at 77 K is the highest.

The second effect is tremendous extenuation of \(4F_{9/2}\rightarrow\text{H}_{15/2}\) transition intensity, localized in red range of emission spectrum. Explanation of this effect is based on reabsorption process as well and more detailed analysis of it will be presented in further discussion. The same effect was observed at room temperature as well.

Two most intense emission bands correspond to \(4F_{9/2}\rightarrow\text{H}_{11/2}\) and \(4F_{9/2}\rightarrow\text{H}_{13/2}\), however, the intensity of \(4F_{9/2}\rightarrow\text{H}_{11/2}\) located at 575 nm is dominant. Since the \(4F_{9/2}\rightarrow\text{H}_{11/2}\) transition is magnetic dipole moment allowed, its intensity does not depend on crystal field of the host. On the other hand, the intensity of \(4F_{9/2}\rightarrow\text{H}_{13/2}\), an electric dipole moment allowed band, strongly depends on local environment of the active ion and is not allowed in crystal sites of high symmetry. Therefore \(4F_{9/2}\rightarrow\text{H}_{13/2}\) to \(4F_{9/2}\rightarrow\text{H}_{11/2}\) intensity ratio can be used as a local field sensor. The fact that in the case of LiLa\(_{1-x}\)Dy\(_x\)P\(_2\)O\(_{12}\) nanocrystals the intensity of \(4F_{9/2}\rightarrow\text{H}_{13/2}\) is predominant, confirms locations of the active ion in low symmetry environment, without the inversion center. In order to determine the impact of the number of Dy\(^{3+}\) ions on local field symmetry, \(4F_{9/2}\rightarrow\text{H}_{15/2}\) to \(4F_{9/2}\rightarrow\text{H}_{13/2}\) parameters calculations have been performed (fig. 4 b). One can notice that, despite reduction of cell parameters with increase of dopant concentration, the dependence on local crystal field is negligible. It is also important to take into account that, in the case of higher concentration of Dy\(^{3+}\) ions, the values of this parameter are error-laden due to reduction of resonant transition intensity through reabsorption.

**Figure 3.** Excitation spectra analysis of LiLa\(_{1-x}\)Dy\(_x\)P\(_2\)O\(_{12}\) nanocrystals - a; and the impact of concentration on relative intensities of excitation bands - b and c.

**Figure 4.** Luminescence spectra of LiLa\(_{1-x}\)Dy\(_x\)P\(_2\)O\(_{12}\) nanocrystals - a; and the \(4F_{9/2}\rightarrow\text{H}_{15/2}\) to \(4F_{9/2}\rightarrow\text{H}_{13/2}\) intensity ratio as a function of Dy\(^{3+}\) concentration - b; and CIE coordinated obtained for LiLa\(_{1-x}\)Dy\(_x\)P\(_2\)O\(_{12}\) nanocrystals.
The most intense band located at 575 nm is ascribed to the $^{4}F_{9/2} \rightarrow ^{6}H_{13/2}$ hypersensitive transition. It does not change with concentration. An inspection of the emission features presented in the figure shows that only the intensity of $^{4}F_{9/2} \rightarrow ^{6}H_{15/2}^{+}F_{11/2}$ transition decreases significantly with concentration compared to other transitions. That decrease is well fitted by a linear dependence. The resonant $^{4}F_{9/2} \rightarrow ^{6}H_{15/2}$ transition located around 480 nm reveals some insignificant increase of intensity with concentration (see Fig. 4b). The CIE coordinates obtained for these nanocrystals are presented in Fig. 4c. One can see that with increase of dopant concentration colour of emitted light shifts in the white light direction. It is a consequence of nonradiative energy transfers which takes place between Dy$^{3+}$ ions. Therefore it is possible to altering the luminescence colour from yellowish-orange in case of diluted ions in white light direction for stoichiometric phosphors. The highest quantum yield was found for x=0.1 of Dy$^{3+}$ ions.

The energy diagram of electronic terms of Dy$^{3+}$ ions with the observed fluorescence transitions and the scheme of interionic interactions between two Dy$^{3+}$ ions are illustrated in Fig. 5. One can see that there occur two resonant interionic interactions. The first is associated with the donor-donor interaction combined with the $^{4}F_{9/2} \leftrightarrow ^{6}H_{15/2}$ emission and the $^{4}H_{15/2} \leftrightarrow ^{6}F_{5/2}$ absorption. The second is the donor-acceptor interaction combined with the cross relaxation via the $^{4}F_{9/2} \leftrightarrow ^{4}H_{15/2}^{+}F_{11/2}$ and $^{4}H_{15/2} \leftrightarrow ^{4}F_{3/2}$ transitions.

![Figure 5. Energy diagram and scheme of fluorescence transitions, cross relaxation (CR) and energy migration between Dy$^{3+}$ ions.](image)

The kinetics of luminescence decay of the $^{4}F_{3/2}$ state measured at room temperature for different concentrations of Dy$^{3+}$ ions in LiLa$_{0.6}$Dy$_{0.1}$P$_{2}$O$_{12}$ nanocrystals is shown in Fig. 6.

![Figure 6. Luminescence decay profiles of LiLa$_{0.6}$Dy$_{0.1}$P$_{2}$O$_{12}$ nanocrystals a and zooming on profiles of x=0.8 and x=1 of Dy$^{3+}$ concentration b.](image)

One can see that for low concentration (x=0.001, 0.005, 0.01) the luminescence decays were perfectly exponential and the decay time $\tau_0$ was determined to be 1.11 ms. Since we did not observe a significant difference with low temperature measurements, it may be treated as purely radiative lifetime. With increasing concentration (x=0.1, 0.2, 0.3) the decay profiles became nonexponential, but for the higher concentration (x=0.8, 1) they became again exponential (see Fig. 6b). The decay times at high concentration were determined to be 5.15 µs.

Following the energy level diagram of Dy$^{3+}$ ion one can note that apart from the radiative and multiphonon relaxation there may occur also the cooperative donor-acceptor (DA) responsible for cross relaxation and donor-donor (DD) relaxations leading to excitation energy migration. A quantitative analysis of energy transfer phenomena in such a system is well described within the Yokota-Tanimoto theory where the temporal dependence of emission intensity $I(t)$ is expressed as

$$I(t) = I_0 \exp \left[ - \frac{t}{\tau_0} \right] \left[ 1 + 10.8662 \cdot 10^{18} \left( \frac{b}{1 + 8.7492} \right)^{+\alpha/\alpha} \right] + b$$

where

$$\alpha = \frac{4}{3} N_D \left[ 1 - \frac{2}{3} N_D \right] R_0$$

and

$$Z = DC_{DD}^{-1/2}$$

and the donor-acceptor interaction parameter can be determined from the equation

$$C_{DD} = R_0^{-2} \tau_0$$

D, $C_{DD}$ and $\alpha$ is the fitting parameter of decay profile for x=1 with eq. (1) basing on the previously obtained C$_{DA}$ parameter. Hence $C_{DD}$ was found to be 1.03 $10^{-5}$ [m$^2$/s]. The obtained value is much lower than that calculated for LiLa$_{1-x}$Nd$_x$P$_2$O$_{12}$ nanocrystals due to the energy mismatch for cross-relaxation in this host material.

**Conclusions**

Synthesis and optical properties of LiLa$_{1-x}$Dy$_x$P$_2$O$_{12}$ nanocrystals were investigated. The impact of the amount of active ions on structure and morphology was analyzed. Reduction of cell parameters with increase of dopant concentration according to Vegards rule was observed. With increase of the dopant concentration an increase of relative...
intensities corresponding to transitions from lower lying multiplets was observed and explained by multiphonon depopulation of excited states due to higher probability of nonradiative energy transfers for a higher number of Dy$^{3+}$ ions. A significant impact of dopant concentration on luminescence emission spectra was noticed. For higher concentration of Dy$^{3+}$ a reduction of relative intensities of emission bands corresponding to the $^4F_{9/2} \rightarrow ^6H_{9/2} + ^6F_{11/2}$ transition was observed. The decrease of $\beta_{6H9/2+6F11/2}$ luminescence branching ratio results from high reabsorption probability related to lowering of the average distance between Dy$^{3+}$ ions with concentration increase. The CIE coordinates were determined. The shift of the emitted light from yellow (for low Dy$^{3+}$ amount) in yellowish-white direction was observed. This behavior could find application for controlling the emitted light by the doping level. The impact of the dopant amount on luminescence decay profiles was analyzed in term of Yokota-Taniomoto theory.

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Notes and references

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