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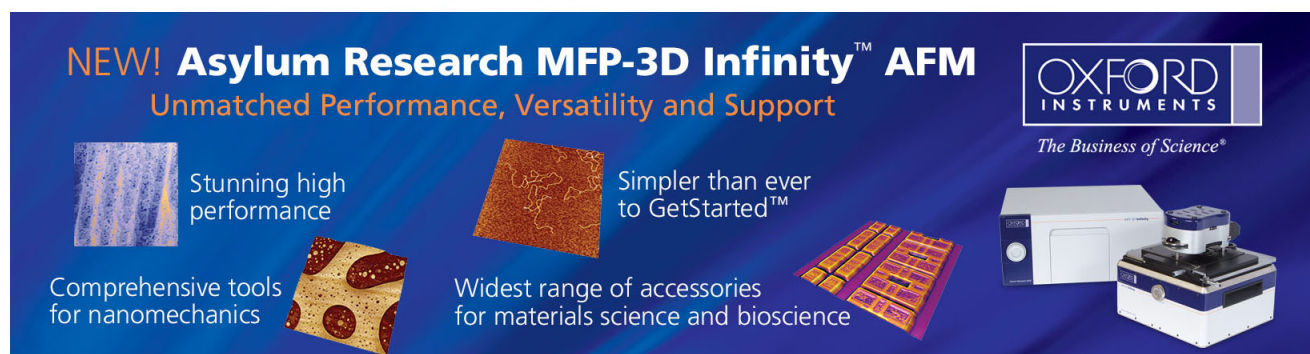
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Laser induced popcornlike conformational transition of nanodiamond as a nanoknife

Chia-Ching Chang,[1,a)] Pei-Hsin Chen,[1] Hsueh-Liang Chu,[1] Tzu-Cheng Lee,[1]
Ching-Chung Chou,[1] Jui-I Chao,[1,b)] Chien-Ying Su,[2] Jyh Shin Chen,[2] Jin-Sheng Tsai,[3]
Chuan-Mei Tsai,[4] Yen-Peng Ho,[5] Kien Wen Sun,[6] Chia-Liang Cheng,[7] and
Fu-Rong Chen[8]

[1]*Department of Biological Science and Technology, National Chiao Tung University, Hsinchu, Taiwan 300, Republic of China*
[2]*Instrument Technology Research Center, National Applied Research Laboratories, Hsinchu, Taiwan 300, Republic of China*
[3]*National Synchrotron Radiation Research Center, Hsinchu, Taiwan 300, Republic of China*
[4]*National Nano Device Laboratories, Hsinchu, Taiwan 300, Republic of China*
[5]*Department of Chemistry, National Dong Hwa University, Hualien, Taiwan 300, Republic of China*
[6]*Department of Applied Chemistry and Institute of Molecular Science, National Chiao Tung University, Hsinchu, Taiwan 300, Republic of China*
[7]*Department of Physics, National Dong Hwa University, Hualien, Taiwan 300, Republic of China*
[8]*Department of Engineering and System, National Tsing Hua University, Hsinchu, Taiwan 300, Republic of China*

Nanodiamond (ND) is surrounded by layers of graphite on its surface. This unique structure feature creates unusual fluorescence spectra, which can be used as an indicator to monitor its surface modification. Meanwhile, the impurity, nitroso ($C-N=O$) inside the ND can be photolyzed by two-photon absorption, releasing NO to facilitate the formation of a sp^3 diamond structure in the core of ND and transforming it into a sp^2 graphite structure. Such a conformational transition enlarges the size of ND from 8 to 90 nm, resulting in a popcornlike structure. This transition reaction may be useful as nanoknives in biomedical application. © *2008 American Institute of Physics*. [DOI: 10.1063/1.2955840]

Nanodiamond (ND) has been shown to be nontoxic and is considered one of the most important biocompatible nanomaterials.[1] Its unique fluorescence properties allow observation of its presence in variant wavelengths.[2,3] The surface of ND can be carboxylated; the nanoparticles so modified exhibit high affinity to proteins,[2,4] rendering conjugation possible with DNA,[3,5] lysozyme,[2] and cytochrome c.[6]

ND (average diameter 4–6 nm, Nanodiamond, TI, Switzerland) has been synthesized from the detonation of the mixture of trinitrotoluene and hexogen,[7] Its conformation and composition remain unclear. In this study, we studied the conformation using ultra high resolution field emission transmission electron microscopy (FE-TEM) (JEM-2010F, JEOL, Ltd. Tokyo, Japan), electron energy loss spectroscopy (EELS), field emission scanning electron microscopy (SEM) (Hitachi S-4300, Hitachi High-Technologies Corporation, Tokyo, Japan) and atomic force microscopy (AFM) (D3100, Veeco Instruments Inc, NY, USA) and Raman spectroscopy.

As shown in Fig. 1, both AFM and TEM images indicate that the size of the ND particles are uniform [Fig. 1(a)]. A magnified view inside red circle is shown as an inset in upper right corner, which indicates that the ND contains a 6 nm diamond core and around 1 nm thick graphite shell. The lattice spacing is about 2 Å which may correspond to {111} plane of diamond structure. The inset in the low right corner is a diffraction pattern from the NDs in the view. It shows a typical electron diffraction ring for diamond. The inset in the low left corner is an AFM image that shows the surface morphology of the ND. Figure 1(b) is a SEM image of ND after laser radiated. The average size of laser radiated ND is about 90 nm. Inset is a TEM image shows the magnified view of ND after laser radiated.

These observations are consistent with the Raman spectral analysis [Figs. 2(a) and 2(b)] and nanobeam EELS spectra analysis [Figs. 2(c)]. As indicated in Fig. 2(a) the ND contains both broaden diamond Raman absorption at 1324 cm^{-1} and a planar graphite (*G* band) spectrum at 1575 cm^{-1}. The broaden 1324 cm^{-1} peak may contain part of the absorption of distortion graphite (*D* band). This core-shell interface structure may create unique surface plasmonic mode and emit the unusual fluorescence spectra in variant wavelengths, as mentioned in previous studies.[2,3]

Elemental data provided by manufacturer showed that there is 9.3% of trace nitrogen inside the structure of the ND. However, previous surface modification study indicated that no nitrogen containing functional group could be observed on the ND surface.[7] We examined the ND with Raman spectroscopy in the range of 500–1100 cm^{-1}, and detected a very weak signal near 604 cm^{-1}. This signal was seen only after long (10 min) accumulation [Fig. 2(b)], and is attributable to nitrogen containing functional group nitroso ($-C-N=O$).[8] By systematic simulation of the nitroso containing molecules from one carbon, $H_3C-N=O$, to 30 carbons, Tri-adamantane-NO ($R-C-N=O$), with Gaussian 03 (B3LYP/6–31G (d) Opt(Raman), with scaling factor 0.89), we noted the Raman shift of the bending mode of
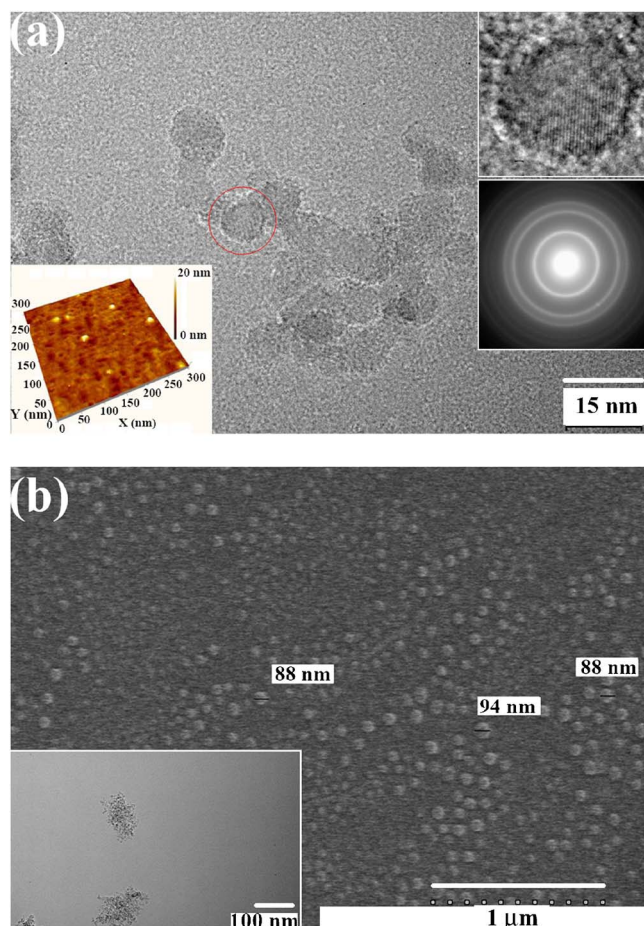
FIG. 1. (Color online) (a) TEM image of ND. A magnified view inside red circle is shown as an inset in upper right corner. The lattice spacing is about 2 Å which may correspond to {111} plane of diamond structure. The inset in the low right corner is a diffraction pattern from the NDs in the view. It shows a typical electron diffraction ring for diamond. The inset in the low left corner is an AFM image that shows the surface morphology of the ND. (b) SEM image of ND after laser radiated. The average size of laser radiated ND is about 90 nm. Inset is a TEM image shows the magnified view of ND after laser radiated.

FIG. 2. (a) Raman spectra of the ND (solid line) and laser irradiated ND (dash line) at the range from 1100 to 1800 cm^{-1}. (b) The Raman range of $500-1100$ cm^{-1}. (c) and (d) are EELS spectra of ND before and after laser radiation, respectively. (c) shows the very weak signal associated with the π^* bond, while (d) shows enhancement of the of π^* signal.

—C—N of nitroso increased from 504 cm^{-1} and plateau near 606 cm^{-1} when the carbon number was larger than ten. On this basis, we surmise that the Raman peak at 604 cm^{-1} is caused by the bending mode of —C—N=O of nitroso of ND.

Nitroso is an active functional group; dissociation of the C—N bond of nitroso (—C—N=O) is in the range of $225-270$ nm of UV light,[8] where nitroso undergoes photolysis and releases nitro monoxide. However, we found that there was no photolysis taking place of the NDs, when irradiated with regular UV light. It is possible that the electronic band gap of ND is around 5.47 eV (or approximately 227.8 nm UV wavelength)[9] and the UV light was absorbed by the diamond structure.

In further test, the possible involvement of photolysis within the ND, we irradiated the ND solution for 30 s with 532 nm; 20 ns, full width at half maximum, Nd:YAG (yttrium aluminum garnet), pulse laser (LS2137U/2, Lotis TII Ltd., Minsk, Belarus); with 140 mW average power; 10 Hz repetition rate; 2 mm beam size. Interestingly, a popcornlike conformational change of ND was observed after the laser irradiation. The size of ND changed from 8 nm [Fig. 1(a)] to approximate 90 nm [Fig. 1(b)]. This observation is consistent
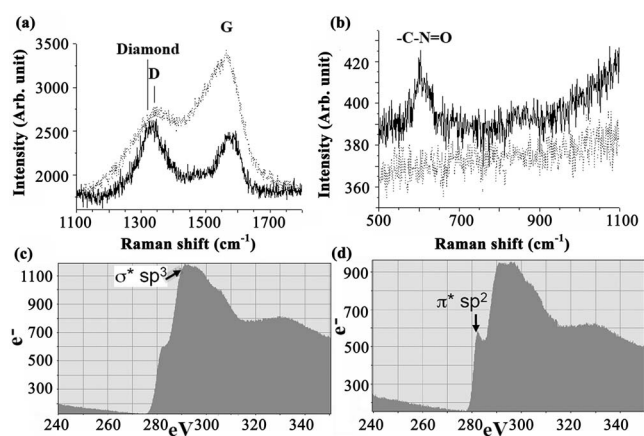
with our previous observation.[10] These laser irradiated particles were fragile and no clear granule image could be observed by FE-TEM [Fig. 1(b)] when they were removed from glass substrate. Raman spectra [Figs. 2(a) and 2(b)] indicated that both peaks of nitroso group and diamond structure disappeared after the laser irradiation; instead, there were *D* (distortion) and *G* bands of graphite.[11] Similar observation was obtained by surface analysis of the FE-TEM. The transformation from diamond to graphite after laser irradiation is also confirmed from the EELS spectra. Fig. 2(c) and 2(d) are EELS spectra taken from ND before and after laser radiation, respectively. Figure 2(c) shows the very weak signal associated with the π^* bond (at 283 eV), while Fig. 2(d) shows enhancement of the π^* signal. That suggests that laser radiation may promote the transformation of sp^3 to sp^2 bonds for NDs

These results suggested that photolysis of nitroso and conformational change of this ND occurred concomitantly. As shown in previous studies,[7] nitroso groups are buried within the structure of ND which is consistent with the assumption of our previous study.[10] Their photolysis into nitro monoxide (NO) molecules may generate large internal pressure triggering conformational changes (explosion) in ND. This can be envisioned as a transformation of sp^3 tetrahedral diamond core [Fig. 1(a)] into a sp^2 planar graphite conformation, expanding its size, approximately 12 fold [Fig. 1(b)]. This is similar to our previous observation.[10]

Although the $225-270$ nm UV light may induce photolysis of CNO group, the ND structure may absorb UV light and protect it. We have observed that ND is stable under both bright light and regular UV nm light irradiation; it does not absorb long wavelength 532 nm light. However, under ultrahigh intensity condition (around 2.2×10^7 W/cm^2), there is a nonlinear two-photon absorption effect which allows the CNO group of ND to absorb two incident photons of 532 nm. As a result, multiple ND photolyses occur simultaneously. We propose the molecular mechanism of diamond graphite transition of ND involves a popcornlike conformation transition which is a physical explosion reaction, with affecting distance is in submicron range (around 90 nm). Such is the case, ND may be used as a nanoknife in biosystems, in addition to other applications.
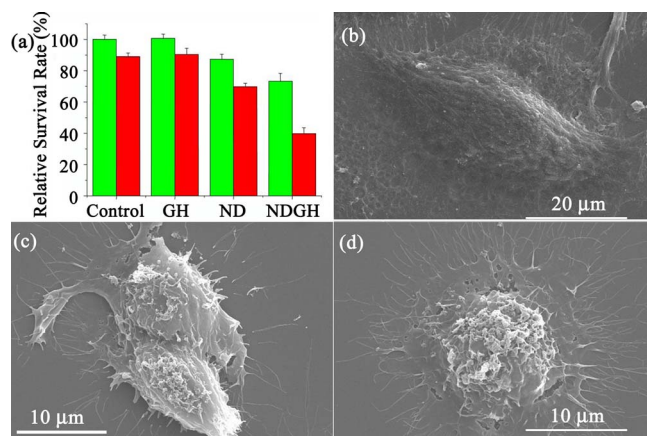
FIG. 3. (Color online) (a) Cell viability assay, (b) SEM images of the A549 cell lines, which were not treated with ND, (c) treated with ND and (d) irradiated with laser following ND treatment. The green bar denotes the cells without laser irradiation and the red bar denotes the cell after laser irradiation and incubation for 24 h.

The feasibility of ND as a nanoknife was indeed tested. We coupled ND to growth hormone (GH), one of the typical growth factors for certain normal tissues and carcinoma. It exerts regulatory functions in controlling metabolism, balanced growth, and differentiated cell expression by acting on specific receptors, GH receptor (GHR), in liver or on cartilage cell surface, triggering a phosphorylation cascade. Thus numerous signaling pathways are modulated and specific gene expression dictated.[12] GH has also been reported to stimulate melanoma cell growth.[12,13] The level of GH receptors is relatively higher in melanocytic tumorous than normal cutaneous cells.[12,13] Similar studies have reported for both mammary epithelial and colorectal cancer cells.[13] GHR is one of the general targets of cancer drug development, as blocking or inhibiting the function of GHR may be a basis for cancer therapy.

The lung cancer cell A549 was used as a model system to be treated with ND linked GH. The graphite surface of ND was first carboxylated by mixing ND with nitrate/sulfate (9:1) at 70 °C and stirred for 24 h. The excess acid was neutralized with $0.1N$ NaOH and washed with ddH$_2$O. The GH was prepared in our laboratory using recombinant techniques as described previously.[14,15] The carboxylated ND molecules were linked by peptide bonding with GH via the zero length cross linkers 1-ethyl-3-[3-dimethylaminopropyl] carbodiimide hydrochloride and *N*-hydroxysuccinimide (Sulfo-NHS) (Pierce Chemical Comp., USA). The reaction was monitored by changes in the fluorescence spectra of the unique fluorescence of ND and autofluorescence of GH. This was followed by examination of MALDI-TOF (matrix-assisted laser desorption ionization-time of flight) mass spectra. Each ND particle was bound with two molecules of GH, forming a NDGH complex (data not shown). The NDGH complex (19 μM) was incubated with the A549 lung cancer cells in culture. After 8 h of incubation, the cells were washed with phosphate buffered saline to remove the non-specific binding complex. The NDGH complex bound to

A549 cell membrane avidly. This was consistent with our previous observation.[16] The cells were then irradiated with the same laser power mentioned above. The results show that approximately 60% of the cells died within 24 h after the irradiation [Fig. 3(a)]. In contrast, less than 10% of the controls cells were found dead under comparable treatment. As shown in Figs. 3(b)–3(d), the cell death can be attributed to the explosion of ND on the cell surface.

In summary, photolysis of nitroso plays a vital role of ND conformational transition. We have developed a NDGH complex, which preferentially kills tumor cells upon high energy pulse laser irradiation. The mechanism may involve the high affinity of NDGH to tumor cell membrane and ND explosion resulted in exposing the high energy locally within hundred nanometers, damaging the membrane leading to cell death. This popcornlike transition reaction of ND is potentially useful as a nanoknife in biomedical application.

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