

PROCEEDINGS OF SPIE

Fiber Lasers IX: Technology, Systems, and Applications

Eric C. Honea
Sami T. Hendow
Editors

23–26 January 2012
San Francisco, California, United States

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Published by
SPIE

Volume 8237

Proceedings of SPIE, 0277-786X, v. 8237

SPIE is an international society advancing an interdisciplinary approach to the science and application of light.

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Please use the following format to cite material from this book:

Author(s), "Title of Paper," in *Fiber Lasers IX: Technology, Systems, and Applications*, edited by Eric C. Honea, Sami T. Hendow, Proceedings of SPIE Vol. 8237 (SPIE, Bellingham, WA, 2012) Article CID Number.

ISSN 0277-786X
ISBN 9780819488800

Published by

SPIE

P.O. Box 10, Bellingham, Washington 98227-0010 USA
Telephone +1 360 676 3290 (Pacific Time) · Fax +1 360 647 1445
SPIE.org

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Contents

xv *Conference Committee*

POST-DEADLINE SESSION

- xix **170W continuous-wave single-frequency single-mode green fiber laser**
A. V. Avdokhin, V. P. Gapontsev, Y. S. Grapov, IPG Photonics Corp. (United States)
- xxx **Temporally resolved build-up and decay of mode instabilities in high power fiber amplifiers**
N. Haarlammert, O. de Vries, A. Liem, Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Optics and Precision Engineering (Germany); A. Kliner, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany); T. Schreiber, R. Eberhardt, Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Optics and Precision Engineering (Germany); A. Tünnermann, Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Optics and Precision Engineering (Germany) and Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany)
- xxiii **A 140W large mode area double clad holmium fiber laser**
A. Hemming, S. Bennetts, N. Simakov, J. Haub, Defence Science and Technology Organisation (Australia); A. Carter, Nufern (United States)

BEAM COMBINING I

- 8237 05 **Multiplexed volume Bragg gratings for spectral beam combining of high power fiber lasers** [8237-04]
I. Divliansky, D. Ott, B. Anderson, D. Drachenberg, V. Rotar, G. Venus, L. Glebov, CREOL, The College of Optics and Photonics, Univ. of Central Florida (United States)

BEAM COMBINING II

- 8237 08 **Coherently combined fiber CPA system delivering 3-mJ femtosecond pulses** [8237-37]
A. Klenke, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany) and Helmholtz-Institute Jena (Germany); E. Seise, S. Demmler, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany); J. Rothhardt, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany) and Helmholtz-Institute Jena (Germany); S. Breitkopf, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany); J. Limpert, A. Tünnermann, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany) and Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Optics and Precision Engineering (Germany) and Helmholtz-Institute Jena (Germany)
- 8237 09 **Passive coherent beam combining of two femtosecond fiber chirped-pulse amplifiers** [8237-38]
L. Daniault, M. Hanna, Lab. Charles Fabry, l'Institut d'Optique, Univ. Paris-Sud (France); D. N. Papadopoulos, CNRS, Institut de la Lumière Extrême, Univ. Paris-Sud (France); Y. Zaouter, E. Mottay, Amplitude Systemes (France); F. Druon, P. Georges, Lab. Charles Fabry, l'Institut d'Optique, Univ. Paris-Sud (France)

HIGH POWER I

- 8237 0B **Thermally induced mode instability in high power fiber amplifiers (Invited Paper)** [8237-40]
A. V. Smith, J. J. Smith, AS-Photonics, LLC (United States)
- 8237 0D **On the thermal origin of mode instabilities in high power fiber lasers** [8237-42]
C. Jauregui, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany); T. Eidam, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany); and Helmholtz-Institute Jena (Germany); H.-J. Otto, F. Stutzki, F. Jansen, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany); J. Limpert, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany) and Helmholtz-Institute Jena (Germany); A. Tünnermann, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany) and Helmholtz-Institute Jena (Germany) and Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Optics and Precision Engineering (Germany)

HIGH-POWER FIBER AND DISK LASERS: JOINT SESSION WITH CONFERENCE 8235

- 8237 0F **Multi-kW single fiber laser based on an extra-large mode area fiber design** [8237-44]
A. Langner, M. Such, G. Schötz, Heraeus Quarzglas GmbH & Co. KG (Germany); F. Just, M. Leich, A. Schwuchow, S. Grimm, Institut für Photonische Technologien e.V. (Germany); H. Zimer, M. Kozak, B. Wedel, HIGHYAG Lasertechnologie GmbH (Germany); G. Rehmann, C. Bachert, V. Krause, Laserline GmbH (Germany)
- 8237 0G **1.2-kW single-mode fiber laser based on 100-W high-brightness pump diodes** [8237-45]
H. Yu, D. A. V. Kliner, K.-H. Liao, J. Segall, M. H. Muendel, J. J. Morehead, J. Shen, M. Kutsuris, J. Luu, J. Franke, K. Nguyen, D. Woods, F. Vance, D. L. Vecht, D. Meng, R. Duesterberg, L. Xu, J. Skidmore, M. Peters, N. Guerin, J. Guo, J. Cheng, J. Du, B. Johnson, D. Yin, A. Hsieh, P. Cheng, A. Demir, J. Cai, R. Gurram, K.-W. Lee, R. Raju, D. Zou, R. Srinivasan, M. Saini, L. Zavala, V. Rossin, E. P. Zucker, JDSU (United States); H. Ishiguro, H. Sako, Amada (Japan)
- 8237 0H **65 W of average power and 6-MW peak power generation from a mode-locked fiber oscillator** [8237-46]
M. Baumgartl, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany) and Helmholtz-Institute Jena (Germany); C. Lecaplain, A. Hideur, Univ. de Rouen (France); J. Limpert, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany) and Helmholtz-Institute Jena (Germany); A. Tünnermann, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany) and Helmholtz-Institute Jena (Germany) and Fraunhofer-Institut für Angewandte Optik und Feinmechanik (Germany)
- 8237 0I **800 W cw nearly diffraction-limited beam delivery through a 100 m long multi-mode fiber** [8237-47]
A. Austerschulte, M. M. Vogel, T. Rataj, J.-P. Negel, A. Voss, M. Abdou Ahmed, T. Graf, Univ. Stuttgart (Germany)

HIGH POWER II

- 8237 0J **Cascaded Raman fiber laser at 1480 nm with output power of 104 W** [8237-48]
V. R. Supradeepa, J. W. Nicholson, C. Headley, Y.-W. Lee, OFS Labs. (United States); B. Palsdottir, D. Jakobsen, OFS Fitel Denmark ApS (Denmark)
- 8237 0K **High-power continuous wave erbium-doped fiber laser pumped by a 1480-nm Raman fiber laser** (8237-49)
J. W. Nicholson, OFS Labs. (United States)

VISIBLE AND UV SOURCES

- 8237 ON **High power picosecond fiber laser emitting 50 W at 343 nm at 80 MHz** [8237-52]
D. Sangla, J. Saby, B. Cocquelin, F. Salin, EOLITE Systems (France)

COMPONENTS

- 8237 OP **Advanced components for multi-kW fiber lasers (Invited Paper)** [8237-54]
D. L. Sipes, Jr., J. D. Tafoya, D. S. Schulz, Optical Engines, Inc. (United States); B. G. Ward, C. G. Carlson, U.S. Air Force Academy (United States)
- 8237 OR **High-spectral-flatness mid-infrared supercontinuum fiber source and its applications for component characterizations** [8237-56]
J. Geng, Q. Wang, S. Jiang, AdValue Photonics, Inc. (United States)

FIBER DESIGNS, MATERIALS AND CHARACTERIZATION I

- 8237 OT **Ultraviolet absorption and excitation spectroscopy of rare-earth-doped glass fibers derived from glassy and crystalline preforms (Invited Paper)** [8237-58]
P. D. Dragic, Y.-S. Liu, T. C. Galvin, J. G. Eden, Univ. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (United States)
- 8237 OW **A comparative study of tapered fiber laser configurations** [8237-61]
J. Kerttula, V. Filippov, Tampere Univ. of Technology (Finland); Yu. Chamorovskii, V. Ustimchik, K. Golant, Institute of Radio Engineering and Electronics (Russian Federation); O. G. Okhotnikov, Tampere Univ. of Technology (Finland)

FIBER DESIGNS, MATERIALS AND CHARACTERIZATION II

- 8237 OX **Polymer optical fibres: conventional and microstructured fibres (Invited Paper)** [8237-62]
A. Argyros, S. G. Leon-Saval, R. Lwin, The Univ. of Sydney (Australia); R. Provo, S. G. Murdoch, J. D. Harvey, J. Anthony, R. Leonhardt, The Univ. of Auckland (New Zealand); A. Tuniz, B. T. Kuhlmeiy, S. C. Fleming, The Univ. of Sydney (Australia)
- 8237 OY **Photonic crystal fiber with large-mode area and low-bending loss for high-power compact lasers and amplifiers** [8237-63]
M. Napierata, Vrije Univ. Brussel (Belgium) and Wroclaw Univ. of Technology (Poland); E. Bereś-Pawlik, Wroclaw Univ. of Technology (Poland); T. Nasilowski, Military Univ. of Technology (Poland); P. Mergo, Marie Curie-Sklodowska Univ. (Poland); F. Berghmans, H. Thienpont, Vrije Univ. Brussel (Belgium)
- 8237 OZ **Mode analysis of LMA fibers using the correlation filter method** [8237-66]
D. Flamm, C. Schulze, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany); O. A. Schmidt, Max Planck Institute for the Science of Light (Germany); S. Schröter, Institut für Photonische Technologien e.V. (Germany); M. Duparré, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany)

- 8237 10 **Highly efficient high power single-mode fiber amplifier utilizing the distributed mode filtering bandgap rod fiber** [8237-65]
M. Laurila, Technical Univ. of Denmark (Denmark); T. T. Alkeskjold, M. M. Jørgensen, S. R. Petersen, J. Broeng, NKT Photonics A/S (Denmark); J. Lægsgaard, Technical Univ. of Denmark (Denmark)
- 8237 11 **Influence of fiber bending and strain on the modal content** [8237-64]
C. Schulze, D. Flamm, M. Duparré, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany); S. Schröter, Institute for Photonic Technologies Jena (Germany)
- 8237 12 **CGH-based real-time analysis of fiber Bragg gratings in few mode LMA fibers** [8237-67]
M. Mundus, J. U. Thomas, C. Voigtländer, R. G. Becker, C. Jauregui, Friedrich-Schiller Univ. Jena (Germany); A. Tünnermann, S. Nolte, Friedrich-Schiller Univ. Jena (Germany) and Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Optics and Precision Engineering (Germany)

FIBER LASER APPLICATIONS

- 8237 13 **Fiber lasers and amplifiers for space-based science and exploration (Invited Paper)** [8237-06]
A. W. Yu, M. A. Krainak, M. A. Stephen, J. R. Chen, B. Coyle, K. Numata, J. Camp, J. B. Abshire, G. R. Allan, S. X. Li, H. Riris, NASA Goddard Space Flight Ctr. (United States)
- 8237 15 **Progress in ultrafast fiber lasers for ultralow-jitter signal sources** [8237-08]
J. Kim, K. Jung, C. Kim, H. Kim, T. Kim, S. Park, Y. Song, H. Yang, KAIST (Korea, Republic of)
- 8237 16 **Application of high-performance OEM fibre lasers in manufacturing (Invited Paper)** [8237-09]
S. Norman, A. Appleyard, P. Harrison, A. Hassey, SPI Lasers (United Kingdom)

FIBER LASER MARKETS

- 8237 17 **Innovations in high power fiber laser applications (Invited Paper)** [8237-10]
E. Beyer, Fraunhofer IWS Dresden (Germany) and Dresden Univ. of Technology (Germany); A. Mahrle, M. Lütke, Dresden Univ. of Technology (Germany); J. Standfuss, F. Brückner, Fraunhofer IWS Dresden (Germany)
- 8237 18 **Fiber laser beam combining and power scaling progress: Air Force Research Laboratory Laser Division (Invited Paper)** [8237-11]
T. J. Wagner, Air Force Research Lab. (United States)

NARROW LINE SOURCES AND FIBER NONLINEARITIES I

- 8237 1A **Distributed light scattering model for the SBS and SRS threshold powers in small and large mode area passive optical fibers** [8237-13]
M. D. Mermelstein, OFS Labs. (United States)

- 8237 1B **Frequency domain analysis of dynamic refractive index changes in fiber amplifiers** [8237-14]
H. Tünnermann, J. Neumann, D. Kracht, P. Weßels, Laser Zentrum Hannover e.V. (Germany) and Ctr. for Quantum-Engineering and Space-Time Research (QUEST) (Germany)
- 8237 1C **All-fiber broad-range self-sweeping Yb-doped fiber laser** [8237-15]
I. A. Lobach, Institute of Automation and Electrometry (Russian Federation); S. A. Kablukov, E. V. Podivilov, S. A. Babin, Institute of Automation and Electrometry (Russian Federation) and Novosibirsk State Univ. (Russian Federation)

NARROW LINE SOURCES AND FIBER NONLINEARITIES II

- 8237 1D **Gain-tailored SBS suppressing photonic crystal fibers for high power applications** [8237-16]
C. Robin, I. Dajani, C. Zeringue, Air Force Research Lab. (United States); B. Ward, U.S. Air Force Academy (United States); A. Lanari, Air Force Research Lab. (USA)
- 8237 1E **YAG-derived fiber for high-power narrow-linewidth fiber lasers** [8237-17]
P. D. Dragic, Y.-S. Liu, Univ. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (United States); J. Ballato, T. Hawkins, P. Foy, COMSET Clemson Univ. (United States)
- 8237 1F **High power single-frequency 780-nm fiber laser source for Rb trapping and cooling applications** [8237-18]
A. Mugnier, M. Jacquemet, E. Le Mercier, R. Lebreff, D. Pureur, Quantel Group (France)
- 8237 1G **Er-doped single-frequency photonic crystal fiber amplifier with 70 W of output power for gravitational wave detection** [8237-19]
V. Kuhn, D. Kracht, J. Neumann, P. Weßels, Laser Zentrum Hannover e.V. (Germany) and Ctr. for Quantum-Engineering and Space-Time Research (Germany)
- 8237 1H **High-power single-frequency photonic bandgap fiber amplifier at 1178 nm** [8237-20]
M. Chen, A. Shirakawa, Y. Yamahara, K. Ueda, The Univ. of Electro-Communications (Japan); C. B. Olausson, J. K. Lyngsø, J. Broeng, NKT Photonics A/S (Denmark)
- 8237 1I **Characterization of a narrowband Raman MOPA with short master oscillator** [8237-21]
A. Siekiera, R. Engelbrecht, A. Nothofer, B. Schmauss, Friedrich-Alexander-Univ. Erlangen-Nürnberg (Germany)

MID IR SOURCES

- 8237 1J **Development of resonantly cladding-pumped holmium-doped fibre lasers (Invited Paper)** [8237-22]
A. Hemming, S. Bennetts, N. Simakov, J. Haub, Defence Science and Technology Organisation (Australia); A. Carter, Nufem (United States)
- 8237 1K **An all-fiber PM MOPA pumped high-power OPO at 3.82 μm based on large aperture PPMgLN** [8237-23]
D. Lin, S. Alam, Univ. of Southampton (United Kingdom); Y. Shen, T. Chen, Zhejiang Univ. (China); D. J. Richardson, Univ. of Southampton (United Kingdom)

- 8237 1M **Integrated 100-W polarized narrow linewidth thulium fiber MOPA system** [8237-25]
L. Shah, R. A. Sims, P. Kadwani, C. C. C. Willis, J. B. Bradford, CREOL, The College of Optics and Photonics, Univ. of Central Florida (United States); Z. Roth, A. Pung, M. Poutous, E. G. Johnson, Clemson Univ. (United States); M. Richardson, CREOL, The College of Optics and Photonics, Univ. of Central Florida (United States)

MODE LOCKED AND ULTRAFAST FIBER SOURCES

- 8237 1N **2 μ m mode-locked fiber lasers (Invited Paper)** [8237-26]
Q. Wang, J. Geng, T. Luo, S. Jiang, AdValue Photonics, Inc. (United States)
- 8237 1O **High peak and average power generation by cascaded nonlinear compression of fiber CPA system** [8237-27]
S. Hädrich, J. Rothhardt, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany) and Helmholtz Institute Jena (Germany); H. Carstens, S. Demmler, T. Gottschall, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany); J. Limpert, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany) and Helmholtz Institute Jena (Germany); A. Tünnermann, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany) and Helmholtz Institute Jena (Germany) and Fraunhofer-Institut für Angewandte Optik und Feinmechanik (Germany)
- 8237 1P **High energy 2 μ m femtosecond fiber laser** [8237-28]
L.-M. Yang, P. Wan, V. Protopopov, J. Liu, PolarOnyx, Inc. (United States)
- 8237 1Q **Stretcher fibers for chirped pulse amplifiers at 1030 nm and 1550 nm** [8237-29]
K. G. Jespersen, D. Jakobsen, P. Kristensen, B. Pálsdóttir, L. Grüner-Nielsen, OFS Fitel Denmark ApS (Denmark)

PULSED FIBER LASER SOURCES

- 8237 1S **26-mJ pulse energy Q-switched large-pitch fiber laser system with excellent beam quality** [8237-31]
F. Jansen, F. Stutzki, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany); A. Liem, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany) and Helmholtz-Institute Jena (Germany); C. Jauregui, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany); J. Limpert, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany) and Helmholtz-Institute Jena (Germany); A. Tünnermann, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany) and Helmholtz-Institute Jena (Germany) and Fraunhofer-Institut für Angewandte Optik und Feinmechanik (Germany)
- 8237 1T **MW+ peak power sub-nsec 10-kHz repetition rate polarization-maintaining fiber-amplifiers using tapered Yb-doped fibers** [8237-32]
Y. Chen, F. Kimpel, J.-L. Fouron, S. Gupta, Fibertek, Inc. (United States)
- 8237 1V **High energy in-band pumped erbium doped pulse fibre laser** [8237-34]
E. L. Lim, S. U. Alam, D. J. Richardson, Optoelectronics Research Ctr., Univ. of Southampton (United Kingdom)
- 8237 1W **Q-switched pulses amplified with short thulium-doped silicate fibers** [8237-35]
Q. Wang, J. Geng, T. Luo, S. Jiang, AdValue Photonics, Inc. (United States)

POSTER SESSION

- 8237 1X **High power all-fiber picosecond laser system for UV light generation** [8237-68]
M. Oku, K. Kieu, N. Peyghambarian, College of Optical Sciences, The Univ. of Arizona (United States)
- 8237 1Z **Sensitivity enhancement of in-line chemical sensing device with C-type fiber and photonic crystal fiber** [8237-70]
S. Hosseinzadeh Kassani, J. Park, M. Park, K. Oh, Yonsei Univ. (Korea, Republic of)
- 8237 21 **Low noise fiber laser based on gain feedback in a rare-earth doped fiber amplifier chain** [8237-72]
H. Wan, Southeast Univ. (China); Y. Gong, X. Li, J. Chen, P. Wu, Wuxi Zhongxing Optoelectronics Technologies Co., Ltd. (China); X. Sun, Southeast Univ. (China)
- 8237 22 **The role of the saturable absorber in a mode-locked fiber laser** [8237-73]
D. Churin, K. Kieu, N. Peyghambarian, College of Optical Sciences, The Univ. of Arizona (United States)
- 8237 23 **Investigation of cavity loss adjustment between two wavelengths required for dual-wavelength laser generation** [8237-74]
R. I. Álvarez-Tamayo, Benemérita Univ. Autónoma de Puebla (Mexico); M. Durán-Sánchez, Univ. Tecnológica de Puebla (Mexico); O. Pottiez, Ctr. de Investigaciones en Óptica, A.C. (Mexico); B. Ibarra-Escamilla, E. A. Kuzin, Instituto Nacional de Astrofísica, Óptica y Electrónica (Mexico)
- 8237 27 **Holmium-doped ZBLAN fiber lasers at 1.2 μm** [8237-78]
X. Zhu, NP Photonics, Inc. (United States) and The Univ. of Arizona (United States); J. Zong, NP Photonics, Inc. (United States); R. A. Norwood, The Univ. of Arizona (United States); A. Chavez-Person, NP Photonics, Inc. (United States); N. Peyghambarian, The Univ. of Arizona (United States); N. Prasad, NASA Langley Research Ctr. (United States)
- 8237 28 **High power single-mode fiber laser and a multi-mode delivery cable** [8237-79]
K. Kashiwagi, T. Kayahara, Y. Emori, A. Fujisaki, The Furukawa Electric Co., Ltd. (Japan)
- 8237 2B **Atomic layer deposition for fabrication of ytterbium doped fibers** [8237-82]
J. J. Montiel i Ponsoda, Aalto Univ. School of Engineering (Finland); L. Norin, Acreo Fiber Lab. (Sweden); M. Bosund, Beneq Oy (Finland); C. Ye, Aalto Univ. School of Engineering (Finland); M. J. Söderlund, Beneq Oy (Finland); A. Tervonen, Aalto Univ. School of Engineering (Finland); S. Honkanen, Aalto Univ. School of Engineering (Finland) and Univ. of Eastern Finland (Finland)
- 8237 2E **Arc power calibration for fusion splicing optical fibers with variety diameters** [8237-85]
W. Zheng, B. Malinsky, AFL (United States)
- 8237 2H **Tailored fiber Bragg gratings inscribed with a phase mask and a deformed wave front by ultrashort pulses** [8237-88]
R. G. Becker, C. Voigtländer, J. Thomas, D. Richter, A. Singh, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany); A. Tünnermann, S. Nolte, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany) and Fraunhofer-Institut für Angewandte Optik und Feinmechanik (Germany)

- 8237 2K **Quantitative modeling of pulse amplification in multimode cladding pumped Er-doped fiber amplifiers** [8237-91]
D. T. Nguyen, W. Shi, A. Pirson-Chavez, NP Photonics, Inc. (United States)
- 8237 2N **All thulium fiber single-mode master oscillator power amplifier delivering 32-nJ picosecond pulses** [8237-94]
W. Renard, G. Canat, P. Bourdon, ONERA (France)
- 8237 2P **Erbium-ytterbium co-doped fiber amplifier with controlled 1060-nm Yb-ASE** [8237-96]
G. Sobon, P. Kaczmarek, A. Antonczak, J. Sotor, A. Waz, G. Dudzik, K. Krzempek, K. M. Abramski, Wroclaw Univ. of Technology (Poland)
- 8237 2R **Three-stage all-in-fiber MOPA source operating at 1550 nm with 20W output power** [8237-98]
G. Sobon, P. Kaczmarek, A. Antonczak, J. Sotor, A. Waz, G. Dudzik, K. Krzempek, K. M. Abramski, Wroclaw Univ. of Technology (Poland)
- 8237 2T **Core-shell nanoparticle erbium-doped fibers for next generation amplifiers** [8237-100]
D. Boivin, A. Pastouret, E. Burov, C. Gonnet, O. Cavani, S. Lempereur, P. Sillard, Draka Comteq France SAS (France); C. Goldmann, E. Saudry, C. Chanéac, Lab. Chimie de la matière condensée de Paris, CNRS, Univ. Paris (France); A. Shlifer, U. Ghera, Red-C Optical Networks Ltd. (Israel)
- 8237 2W **Extreme value statistics in Raman fiber lasers** [8237-103]
D. V. Churkin, Institute of Automation and Electrometry (Russian Federation) and Novosibirsk State Univ. (Russian Federation); O. A. Gorbunov, Institute of Automation and Electrometry (Russian Federation); S. V. Smirnov, Novosibirsk State Univ. (Russian Federation)
- 8237 2Z **Lasing in thulium doped polarizing photonic crystal fibers (PCF)** [8237-107]
P. Kadwani, CREOL, The College of Optics and Photonics, Univ. of Central Florida (United States); N. Madsching, CREOL, The College of Optics and Photonics, Univ. of Central Florida (United States) and West Saxon Univ. of Applied Sciences (Germany); R. A. Sims, CREOL, The College of Optics and Photonics, Univ. of Central Florida (United States); L. Leick, J. Broeng, NKT Photonics A/S (Denmark); L. Shah, M. Richardson, CREOL, The College of Optics and Photonics, Univ. of Central Florida (United States)
- 8237 30 **Fiber laser micromachining of magnesium alloy tubes for biocompatible and biodegradable cardiovascular stents** [8237-108]
A. G. Demir, B. Previtali, D. Colombo, Q. Ge, M. Vedani, L. Petrini, W. Wu, Politecnico di Milano (Italy); C. A. Biffi, CNR-IENI (Italy)
- 8237 31 **Increasing energy in an ytterbium femtosecond fiber laser with a longer gain medium and lower doping** [8237-109]
K. J. Bock, H. E. Kotb, Univ. of Ottawa (Canada); M. A. Abdelalim, Electronics Research Institute (Egypt); H. Anis, Univ. of Ottawa (Canada)
- 8237 32 **Avoided-crossing based modal cut-off analysis of 19-cell double-cladding photonic crystal fibers** [8237-110]
F. Poli, E. Coscelli, Univ. degli Studi di Parma (Italy); T. T. Alkeskjold, NKT Photonics A/S (Denmark); M. Sozzi, A. Cucinotta, S. Selleri, Univ. degli Studi di Parma (Italy); L. Leick, J. Broeng, NKT Photonics A/S (Denmark)

- 8237 33 **All-in-one 1236-nm Yb/Raman fiber laser** [8237-111]
J. W. Nicholson, T. Taunay, E. Monberg, F. DiMarcello, OFS Labs. (United States); Y. Li, J. Ng, OFS (United States)
- 8237 34 **Single-output 3-wavelength multi-watt CW visible fiber laser system** [8237-112]
M. Jacquemet, D. Harnois, Quantel Group (France); A. Rider, T. Durrant, Gooch & Housego, Torquay Ltd. (United Kingdom); A. Jarov, A. Skliar, Raicol Crystals Ltd. (Israel); A. Mugnier, D. Pureur, Quantel Group (France)
- 8237 35 **Mid-infrared strong spectral broadening in microstructured tapered chalcogenide AsSe fiber** [8237-113]
M. Duhant, W. Renard, G. Canat, ONERA (France); J. Trolès, P. Toupin, Sciences Chimiques de Rennes, CNRS, Univ. de Rennes (France); L. Brilland, Plate-forme d'Étude et de Recherche sur les Fibres Optiques Spéciales (France); F. Smektala, Lab. Interdisciplinaire Carnot de Bourgogne, CNRS, Univ. de Bourgogne (France); A. Bétourné, Institut Fresnel, CNRS, Univ. d'Aix-Marseille (France); P. Bourdon, ONERA (France); G. Renversez, Institut Fresnel, CNRS, Univ. d'Aix-Marseille (France)
- 8237 36 **Broadband multi-mode group-velocity dispersion determination in photonic crystal fibers from 0.4 μm to 1.7 μm** [8237-114]
P. Böswetter, T. Baselt, F. Ebert, P. Hartmann, Westsächsische Hochschule Zwickau (Germany)
- 8237 37 **Confined-doped ytterbium fibers for beam quality improvement: fabrication and performance** [8237-115]
C. Ye, nLIGHT Corp., Lohja (Finland) and Aalto Univ. School of Electrical Engineering (Finland); J. Koponen, T. Kokki, nLIGHT Corp., Lohja (Finland); J. Montiel i Ponsoda, A. Tervonen, Aalto Univ. School of Electrical Engineering (Finland); S. Honkanen, Aalto Univ. School of Electrical Engineering (Finland) and Univ. of Eastern Finland (Finland)
- 8237 38 **High-power ultrashort fiber laser for solar cells micromachining** [8237-116]
J.-B. Lecourt, C. Duterte, F. Liegeois, D. Lekime, Y. Hernandez, D. Giannone, Multitel A.S.B.L. (Belgium)
- 8237 3D **Self-similarity of time evolution of photodarkening losses induced in Yb-doped fibers and photodarkening figure of merit** [8237-121]
S. Taccheo, H. Gebavi, Swansea Univ. (United Kingdom); A. Monteville, O. Le Goffic, D. Landais, D. Mechin, D. Tregouat, Plate-forme d'Étude et de Recherche sur les Fibres Optiques Spéciales (France); B. Cadier, T. Robin, iXfiber SAS (France); D. Milanese, Politecnico di Torino (Italy); T. Durrant, Gooch & Housego Plc (United Kingdom)
- 8237 3E **Broadly tunable high-power random fibre laser** [8237-122]
S. A. Babin, Institute of Automation and Electrometry (Russian Federation); A. E. El-Taher, P. Harper, Aston Univ. (United Kingdom); E. V. Podivilov, Institute of Automation and Electrometry (Russian Federation); S. K. Turitsyn, Aston Univ. (United Kingdom)
- 8237 3G **Q switched PM Tm: fiber laser oscillator for mid-IR generation** [8237-124]
P. Kadwani, R. A. Sims, L. Shah, M. C. Richardson, CREOL, The College of Optics and Photonics, Univ. of Central Florida (United States)

- 8237 3I **Gain-switched laser diode seeded Yb-doped fiber amplifier delivering 11-ps pulses at repetition rates up to 40-MHz** [8237-126]
M. Ryser, M. Neff, S. Pilz, Univ. Bern (Switzerland); A. Burn, Bern Univ. of Applied Sciences (Switzerland); V. Romano, Univ. Bern (Switzerland) and Bern Univ. of Applied Sciences (Switzerland)
- 8237 3K **Mid-infrared generation in ZnGeP₂ pumped by a monolithic, power scalable 2- μ m source** [8237-128]
N. Simakov, A. Davidson, A. Hemming, S. Bennetts, M. Hughes, N. Carmody, P. Davies, J. Haub, Defence Science and Technology Organisation (Australia)
- 8237 3L **Anti-symmetric hybrid photonic crystal fibers with enhanced filtering and bending properties** [8237-129]
E. Coscelli, F. Poli, Univ. degli Studi di Parma (Italy); S. Petersen, T. T. Alkeskjold, NKT Photonics A/S (Denmark); A. Cucinotta, S. Selleri, Univ. degli Studi di Parma (Italy); L. Leick, J. Broeng, NKT Photonics A/S (Denmark)
- 8237 3M **True crystalline fibers: double-clad LMA design concept of Tm:YAG-core fiber and its mode simulation** [8237-130]
X. Mu, H. Meissner, H.-C. Lee, Onyx Optics Inc. (United States); M. Dubinskii, U.S. Army Research Lab. (United States)
- 8237 3O **Ytterbium-doped large-mode-area photonic crystal fiber amplifier with gain shaping for use at long wavelengths** [8237-132]
S. R. Petersen, Technical Univ. of Denmark (Denmark) and NKT Photonics A/S (Denmark); T. T. Alkeskjold, NKT Photonics A/S (Denmark); F. Poli, E. Coscelli, Univ. degli Studi di Parma (Italy); M. M. Jørgensen, Technical Univ. of Denmark (Denmark) and NKT Photonics A/S (Denmark); M. Laurila, J. Lægsgaard, Technical Univ. of Denmark (Denmark); J. Broeng, NKT Photonics A/S (Denmark)
- 8237 3P **Design optimization of the distributed modal filtering rod fiber for increasing single mode bandwidth** [8237-133]
M. M. Jørgensen, S. R. Petersen, Technical Univ. of Denmark (Denmark) and NKT Photonics A/S (Denmark); M. Laurila, J. Lægsgaard, Technical Univ. of Denmark (Denmark); T. T. Alkeskjold, NKT Photonics A/S (Denmark)
- 8237 3Q **Fiber based generation of azimuthally polarized light** [8237-134]
C. Jocher, C. Jauregui, C. Voigtländer, F. Stutzki, S. Nolte, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany); J. Limpert, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany) and Helmholtz-Institute Jena (Germany); A. Tünnermann, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany) and Helmholtz-Institute Jena (Germany) and Fraunhofer-Institut für Angewandte Optik und Feinmechanik (Germany)
- 8237 3R **Analytical analysis of coherent combining of ultrashort laser pulses** [8237-135]
A. Klenke, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany) and Helmholtz-Institute Jena (Germany); E. Seise, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany); J. Limpert, A. Tünnermann, Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany) and Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Optics and Precision Engineering (Germany) and Helmholtz-Institute Jena (Germany)

- 8237 3T **Optical frequency comb generation with a flat-top spectrum from a mode-locked Yb fiber laser** [8237-137]
G. H. Jang, T. H. Yoon, Korea Univ. (Korea, Republic of)
- 8237 3V **High pulse energy sub-nanosecond Tm-doped fiber laser** [8237-139]
A. Cserteg, S. Guillemet, Y. Hernandez, D. Giannone, Multitel A.S.B.L. (Belgium)
- 8237 3W **Electronic synchronization of gain-switched laser diode seeded fiber amplifiers** [8237-140]
L. Abrardi, T. Feurer, Univ. Bern (Switzerland)
- 8237 3Y **Characterization of mid-infrared emissions from C₂H₂, CO, CO₂, and HCN-filled hollow fiber lasers** [8237-142]
A. M. Jones, Kansas State Univ. (United States); C. Fourcade-Dutin, Univ. of Bath (United Kingdom); C. Mao, B. Baumgart, A. V. V. Nampoothiri, N. Campbell, The Univ. of New Mexico (United States); Y. Wang, Univ. of Bath (United Kingdom); F. Benabid, Univ. of Bath (United Kingdom) and Xlim Research Institute, CNRS, Univ. de Limoges (France); W. Rudolph, The Univ. of New Mexico (United States); B. R. Washburn, K. L. Corwin, Kansas State Univ. (United States)
- 8237 3Z **New approach to fabrication of a Faraday isolator for high power laser applications** [8237-143]
C. Rothhardt, Fraunhofer-Institut für Angewandte Optik und Feinmechanik (Germany) and Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany); M. Rekas, G. Kalkowski, R. Eberhardt, Fraunhofer-Institut für Angewandte Optik und Feinmechanik (Germany); A. Tünnermann, Fraunhofer-Institut für Angewandte Optik und Feinmechanik (Germany) and Friedrich-Schiller-Univ. Jena (Germany)
- 8237 40 **High-average-power actively mode-locked Tm³⁺ fiber lasers** [8237-144]
M. Eckerle, C. Kieleck, P. Hübner, Institut Franco-Allemand de Recherches de Saint-Louis (France); J. Świdorski, Military Univ. of Technology (Poland); S. D. Jackson, The Univ. of Sydney (Australia); G. Mazé, Le Verre Fluore (France); M. Eichhorn, Institut Franco-Allemand de Recherches de Saint-Louis (France)

Author Index

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- 2 Beam Combining II
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- 3 High Power I
Mikhail N. Zervas, SPI Lasers (United Kingdom)
- 4 High-Power Fiber and Disk Lasers: Joint Session with Conference 8235
Norman Hodgson, Coherent, Inc. (United States)
Dahv A. Kliner, JDSU (United States)
- 5 High Power II
Peter F. Moulton, Q-Peak, Inc. (United States)
- 6 Visible and UV Sources
Daniel B. Soh, Sandia National Laboratory, California (United States)
- 7 Components
John D. Minelly, Coherent, Inc. (United States)
- 8 Fiber Designs, Materials and Characterization I
Siddharth Ramachandran, The Boston University Photonics Center
(United States)
- 9 Fiber Designs, Materials and Characterization II
Adrian L. G. Carter, Nufern (United States)

- 10 Fiber Laser Applications
L. Brandon Shaw, U.S. Naval Research Laboratory (United States)
- 11 Fiber Laser Markets
Sami T. Hendow, Multiwave Photonics (Portugal)
- 12 Narrow Line Sources and Fiber Nonlinearities I
Mark Dubinskii, U.S. Army Research Laboratory (United States)
- 13 Late-Breaking News
Sami T. Hendow, Multiwave Photonics (Portugal)
- 14 Narrow Line Sources and Fiber Nonlinearities II
Clifford Headley III, OFS Laboratory (United States)
- 15 Mid IR Sources
Fabio Di Teodoro, Northrop Grumman Aerospace Systems
(United States)
- 16 Mode Locked and Ultrafast Fiber Sources
Almantas Galvanauskas, University of Michigan (United States)
- 17 Pulsed Fiber Laser Sources
Robert G. Waarts, Robert Waarts Consulting (United States)

170W continuous-wave single-frequency single-mode green fiber laser

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ABSTRACT

170W of continuous-wave single-mode single-frequency low-noise emission at 532nm has been obtained using frequency doubling of linearly-polarized single-frequency ytterbium fiber laser in LBO crystal with SHG conversion efficiency of 76% and overall electrical-to-optical efficiency of 25%.

Keywords: Frequency doubling, fiber laser, CW green laser

1. INTRODUCTION

High-power CW green laser sources are used in a variety of applications, ranging from scientific (pumping of titanium-sapphire and dye lasers, cooling and trapping of atoms), to industrial (material processing, solar cell manufacturing, semiconductor industry, hologram production) to defense and security (LIDAR, dazzling, underwater communications). Many of these applications have traditionally utilized very inefficient and bulky 514-nm argon-ion lasers. As diode-pumped solid-state laser (DPSSL) technology is becoming more affordable, argon-ion lasers are rivaled by far more efficient and compact frequency-doubled DPSSLs. Two frequency-doubling approaches have been used to produce near-diffraction-limited CW green radiation with several tens of Watts of output power. One scheme involves intra-cavity second harmonic generation (SHG) in a diode-pumped solid-state laser. Both bulk and fiber lasers with intra-cavity SHG have been reported, with output powers up to 62 W for bulk [1] and 19 W for fiber [2]. Power scaling of bulk lasers with intra-cavity SHG above several tens of Watts of green output power is challenging due to thermal beam distortion in the laser crystal. Another approach involves using a stand-alone near-IR bulk or fiber laser to pump an external resonant cavity with a nonlinear crystal. Using this scheme, more than 20 W of green output power has been achieved with a fiber laser pump [3] and more than 130 W of green output power has been recently reported, limited by the power of the bulk near-IR laser pump [4]. In our work we utilize an external SHG cavity approach with IPG's single-frequency ytterbium fiber laser as a pump source. This approach brings all the advantages of reliable and affordable fiber laser technology, pioneered by IPG, to the high-power CW green laser market.

2. EXPERIMENTAL PART

We report a fiber laser based source generating 170W of CW single-mode single-frequency green power with a record-high electrical-to-optical efficiency of 25%. To the best of our knowledge, this laser also has the highest output power ever reported from a CW green single-mode solid state laser. A schematic of the setup is shown in Figure 1.

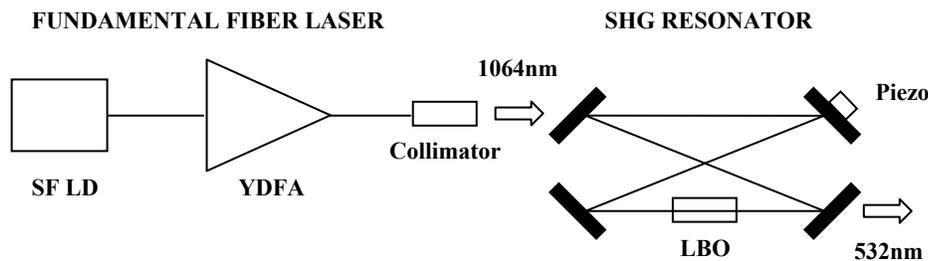


Figure 1. Experimental configuration

The fundamental fiber laser provided up to 230W of linearly polarized single-frequency emission at 1064nm and consisted of a linearly polarized seed laser diode with linewidth of ~140kHz and a single-mode polarization-maintaining multi-stage fiber amplifier. Owing to highly-effective side pumping configuration and fiber-pigtailed assembly of very high-brightness single-emitter pump diodes, the overall electrical-to-optical efficiency of the 1064nm laser was 33%. The output of the laser was then coupled into external bow-tie SHG resonator, which consisted of 4 mirrors and a high-quality IPG-grown LBO crystal. One of the mirrors was installed on piezo actuator in order to actively lock resonance frequency of the resonator to the stabilized frequency of the laser diode seed using Pound-Drever-Hall technique.

The reported laser exhibited very low optical noise - power fluctuation of green output was measured to be <1% peak-to-peak at 170W during 100s interval. Output power, SHG conversion efficiency and overall electrical-to-optical laser efficiency are shown in Figure 2.

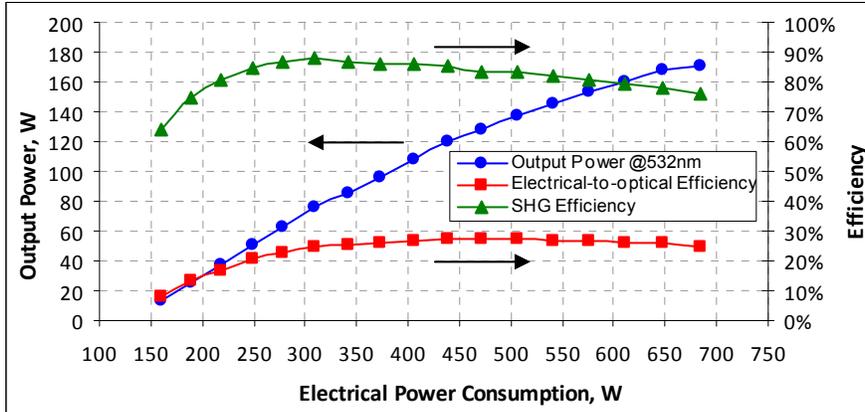


Figure 2. Output power at 532nm (blue circles), electrical-to-optical laser efficiency (red squares), and SHG efficiency (green triangles) as a function of electrical power consumption

SHG resonator used in this experiment was optimized for 75W of green power, at which SHG efficiency of 88% was reached. Further increase of pump power resulted in slow decline of SHG efficiency to 76% at 170W of green power. We expect that cavity optimization for higher output power will result in increase of SHG efficiency up to ~90% and electrical-to-optical efficiency up to ~30%.

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we have demonstrated a compact and efficient high-power CW green fiber laser. With proper cavity optimization, output power is limited by the fundamental fiber laser. As we continue developing more powerful single-frequency ytterbium amplifiers, we intend to further scale CW green power to 500W and higher. We believe that emergence of such low-cost high-power sources will boost the existing applications of green lasers and create new ones.

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Temporally resolved build-up and decay of mode instabilities in high power fiber amplifiers

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Abstract. : State-of-the-art high power Yb-doped large mode area fibers have been developed to a performance level able to reach the so-called mode instability threshold. In this contribution we will discuss the experimental results regarding the temporal evolution (build-up and decay) of this effect to come closer to a comprehensive understanding of its driving mechanisms. With a pulsed pump source emitting pulses in the ms range, we investigated the temporal behavior of the build-up and degradation time for mode instability in a high power fiber amplifier. To the best of our knowledge these are the first systematic, time resolved investigations on that topic.

Introduction

Until a couple of years ago it was of common belief that active fibers can emit diffraction limited beams independent of their output power. But state-of-the-art high power Yb-doped large mode area fibers have been developed to a performance level able to reach the so-called mode instability threshold. At present, the term 'mode instability' stands for a sudden change in mode quality at a certain power level caused by an energy transfer from the fundamental transverse mode to higher order modes [1].

Recently, a debate arose about what physical mechanism(s) can cause the mode instabilities after all. Starting from optically induced long-period gratings via Kerr effect [2] right up to index modulations provoked by population inversion or thermal dynamics [3,4] the underlying force for all potential candidates seems a periodic change in refractive index of any kind whatsoever. But still there are a lot of open questions unsettled, for instance, the tangible influence of operation conditions, center wavelength, and bandwidth. On the experimental side there are some sporadic reports as well as systematic investigations already in existence [1,5], but some aspects still need enlightenment. Here we want to discuss the experimental results regarding the temporal evolution of this effect. With a pulsed pump source emitting pulses in the ms range, we investigated the temporal behavior of the build up and degradation time for mode instability in a high power fiber amplifier. To the best of our knowledge these are the first systematic, time resolved investigations on that topic.

Experimental setup and results

The experimental setup is based on a high power fiber amplifier system comprising an Yb-doped double-clad photonic crystal fiber (core diameter = 42 μm , pump core diameter = 500 μm surrounded by an air cladding). A low-noise cw-signal of ~ 10 W at a center wavelength of 1070 nm was seeded into the laser core, while the 976 nm pump light was injected in counter propagating direction. The amplified signal was separated from the pump light with a dichroitic mirror. For cw pump powers up to around 800 W (resulting in an output power of around 500 W) the amplifier was single-mode but switched to unstable mode operation for higher pump powers. The detected averaged beam profiles for stable and unstable mode operation are illustrated in the insets of Fig. 1b. The beam profile below the instability threshold was near Gaussian.

For the following experiments, the pump source was used in a pulsed regime. This ensures that the laser dynamics in the fiber are shifting in the μs range and are much shorter than the relatively long rise time of the pump source (~ 1 ms) so that the amplifier system directly followed the pump source dynamic. A typical duty cycle, where the pump was periodically switched on for 20 ms and switched off for 80 ms, is shown in Fig. 1a.

In order to analyze the behavior at the mode instability threshold a small fraction ($< 0.01\%$) of the high-power signal was focused and detected with an InGaAs photo diode connected to an oscilloscope. Since the beam was larger than the detector only a spatial fraction was detected resulting in a constant signal for stable mode operation and a strongly modulated signal for unstable mode operation. One example time trace of the detected signal above the mode-instability threshold is shown in Fig. 1b. The example demonstrates that mode instability did not set in instantaneously with switching on the pump power. Temporally the amplifier showed stable fundamental-mode operation, but switched to unstable mode operation with a delay of some ms.

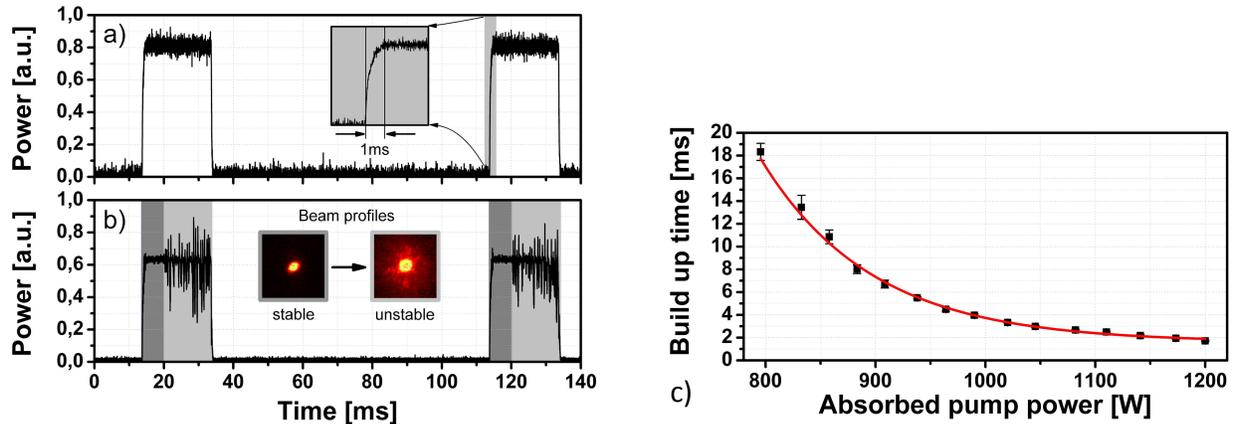


Fig. 1.: Example to illustrate a) the pulsed pump scheme and b) the detected signal above the mode instability threshold. Temporally, the amplifier showed stable fundamental-mode operation (dark gray shaded areas), but switched to unstable mode operation with a delay of some ms (light gray shaded areas).c) Mode instability build up time in dependence on the absorbed pump power.

Both regimes (stable/unstable) showed clear qualitative differences in the presented detection setup. To distinguish carefully the standard deviation of the time signal was used. In this way, we defined and measured the build-up time of the modulation instability.

In Fig. 1c the build-up time is plotted in dependence on the pump peak power (mode instability threshold at ~ 800 W). A duty cycle with 20 ms pulse duration and 120 ms off-time was chosen for this experiment. Each data point in the graph was averaged over 120 pulses and the depicted error bars were calculated from the standard deviation. An exponential decrease of the build-up time in dependence on the absorbed pump power was found and an exponential fit indicated that the build-up time converged to 1.6 ms. Assuming thermal effects as mechanism responsible for mode instability a non-zero minimal build-up time is expected because a thermal gradient inside the fiber will not build up instantaneously. However, the measured build-up time of 1.6 ms was influenced by technical limitations: the pulse rise time of the pump diode was about 1 ms. Thus, the actual build-up time is shorter than the measured one and can be estimated to be < 1 ms.

Another investigations show the temporally resolved decay behaviour and dependence of the build-up time and decay by applying pre- and post-pump power directly before/after the main pump pulse. In this way, the relation to transient thermal effects has been proven by “pre- and post-heating” as well as the mode instability decay is probed and will be discussed during the presentation.

In conclusion we have investigated, for the first time to our knowledge, the time scales for build-up and decay of mode instability in an Yb-doped high power fiber amplifier and its dependence on pump power and duty-cycle. The method of pulsed pumping has been used and reveals important experimental information on the mechanism of mode-instabilities in fiber lasers.

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A 140 W Large Mode Area Double Clad Holmium Fibre Laser

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The 2 μm wavelength band provides advantages in terms of eye-safety, atmospheric transmission, and reduced susceptibility to nonlinear effects. It is of interest for a broad range of applications in fields such as defence, medicine and remote sensing. Thulium fibre lasers operating in this spectral band have been demonstrated at output powers above 1 kW [1], as well as operating with narrow line-width output at powers up to 608 W [2]. However, further power scaling of such devices is limited by thermal constraints and the brightness of pump diodes. Resonantly pumped double clad holmium fibre lasers offer possible solutions to these power scaling issues. The ability of holmium fibre lasers to be pumped by an array of high brightness, efficient, medium power thulium fibre lasers in a tandem pumping architecture with a low quantum defect (pumping at 1950 nm, lasing at 2120 nm), offers a promising route to the further power scaling of 2 μm fibre laser sources.

We have demonstrated a 140 W resonantly pumped double clad holmium fibre laser. The laser uses a large mode area fibre consisting of a 40 μm 0.08 NA core and a 250 μm octagonal inner cladding. A 0.22 NA fluorine-doped glass cladding is used to provide low-loss guidance of the 1.95 μm thulium fibre laser pump power. The slope efficiency of the laser versus coupled power was 55% and the laser operated across a broad wavelength band, 2120-2140 nm, demonstrating the potential operation of these sources beyond 2.1 μm .

This demonstration shows the potential of this fibre laser architecture and demonstrates a path to further power scaling of 2 μm fibre lasers in an all-fibre format, with particular relevance to coherent and spectral beam combination for high power laser applications.

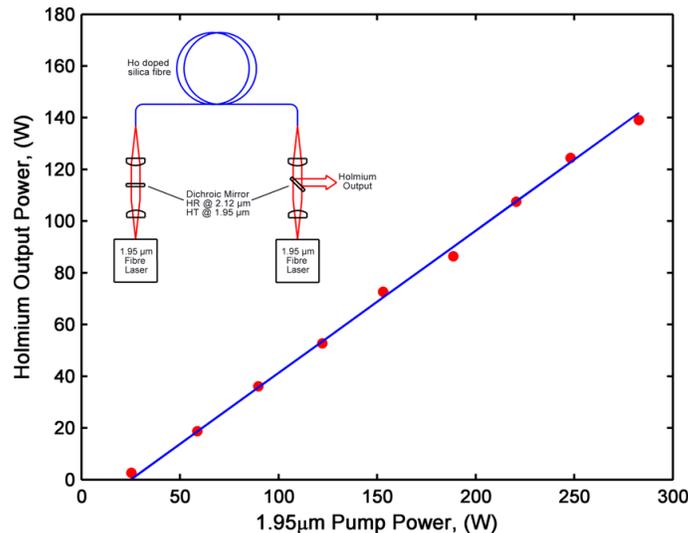


Fig. 1: Output power of holmium fibre laser vs input pump power. Inset: A schematic of the experiment.

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