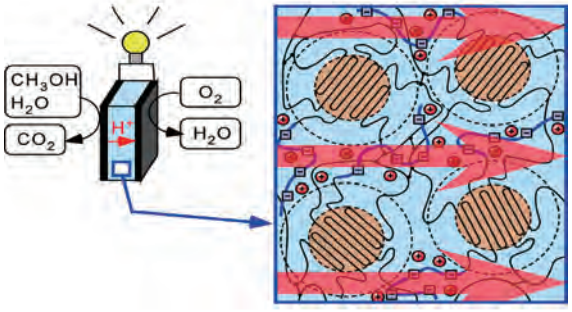
Preparation and Evaluation of Low-Cost Direct Methanol Fuel Cells

Direct methanol fuel cells (DMFCs) using **polymer electrolyte membranes** (PEMs) represent one of the most attractive power sources for various applications, from vehicles to portable devices. DMFCs, which are characterized by a higher level of electrical efficiency than conventional heat engines, stable operation at relatively low temperatures, simple structure, and high energy density compared to lithium ion batteries, use high-concentration methanol solutions as fuel. Use of PEMs, however, suffers from the crossover of methanol through the membrane and from a requirement for large amounts of a precious platinum catalyst to achieve high power density.

Our research topics are (1) **ion exchange polymers** prepared from commodity polymers and (2) preparation and analysis of fuel cell units (membrane electrode assemblies, or MEAs) in order to create a new fuel cell that is characterized by cost-effectiveness, ease of preparation, and high performance.

We expect our findings to drive advances in the area of electrochemical processes, for example electrolysis and electrodialysis.



Schematic image of a direct methanol fuel cell and polymer electrolyte membrane having ion paths by nano-phase separation

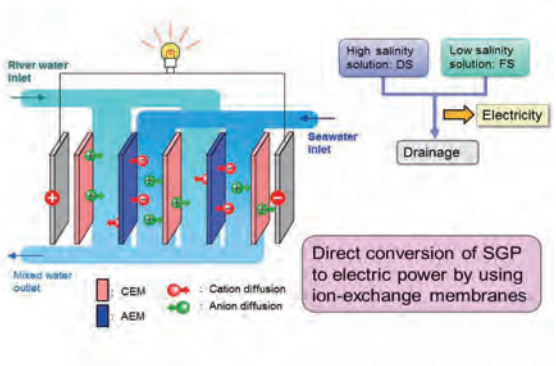
About Researcher

ENDO Nobutaka, Ph.D.

Ph.D., 1999, Yamaguchi University

High-Performance Membranes in Water Treatment and Energy Production

We have prepared many types of high-performance membranes from block copolymers and graft copolymers and proposed novel chemical engineering systems using the membranes in water treatment and energy production. The subjects of our research are as follows: (1) polymer electrolyte membranes for **direct methanol fuel cells**, (2) ion-exchange membranes for electrodialysis (desalination and water treatment) and **reverse electrodialysis** (energy production from salinity gradients), (3) ion-barrier membranes for forward osmosis and **pressure retarded osmosis** processes (water treatment and energy production), (4) charge mosaic membrane with high salt permselectivity (water treatment), and (5) external stimuli-responsive charged membranes for smart sensors and intelligent drug delivery systems.



Reverse electrodialysis system (RED) for energy production

About Researcher

HIGA Mitsuru, Dr.Eng.

Dr.Eng., 1991, Tokyo Institute of Technology

WEB ≫ http://piano.chem.yamaguchi-u.ac.jp/English.html

Evaluation and Control of Environmental Odors

Given the current worldwide realities of increasing human population and industrial activities, odor pollution is becoming a critical issue for most local governments. Odor emissions are considered to be the main cause of disturbances noticed by the citizens living near some facilities. Such emissions affect quality of life, leading to psychological stress and symptoms such as insomnia and loss of appetite.

For appropriate evaluation of **environmental odors**, it is necessary to develop a reliable odor measurement method. Since environmental odors consist of many different odorous compounds, both comprehensive evaluation of odors using the human sense of smell and instrumental analysis of individual chemicals are indispensable. Odor intensity, odor concentration, and odor index are the principal parameters by which odors are characterized, and they serve as remarkably common and important sensory indicators of environmental odors. **Sensory evaluation** of odors reflects people's perception of odors and contributes to effective odor management, including impact assessment and implementation of control measures. Research activities in my laboratory are focused on evaluation and control of environmental odors. Other interests include toxicity assessment of gaseous pollutants and **solid waste management**.

GC/MS olfactometry for odor characterization

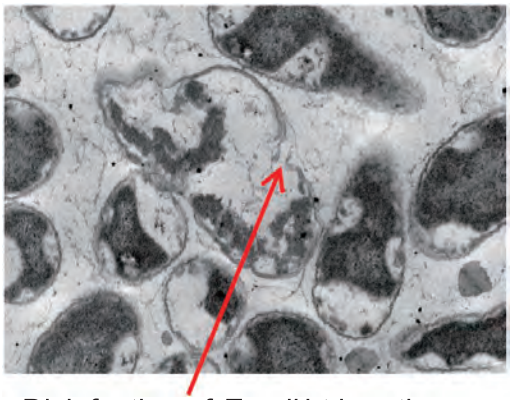
About Researcher

HIGUCHI Takaya, Dr.Eng.

Dr.Eng., 1996, Kyoto University

Water and Wastewater Treatment Technology and Biomass Energy Development

Our research interest is in **environmental technology**, particularly water and **wastewater treatment** for the purpose of conserving the water environment and **energy production from biomass** to help achieve a sustainable society. We believe that environmental technology should be simple and cheap because such technologies are amenable to broad application and adoption in not only developed countries, but also developing countries. Therefore, we focus on the development of these simple and cheap environmental technologies. Research now underway in our laboratory is focused on the following five fields: (1) a novel oxygen supply process based on contact of water film with air, (2) effects of high-dissolved gas (CO_2, N_2, etc.) water on the disinfection of microorganisms, (3) bio-hydrogen production from biomass under extreme thermophilic anaerobic conditions, (4) a novel oil-water separation process based on a combination of microbubbles and normal bubbles, and (5) a novel process for removing CO_2 from various gases (biogas, industrial exhaust gas, etc.) using a high-concentration gas dissolver.



Disinfection of *E-coli* bt bursting

Novel disinfection method using only low-pressure CO_2 (0.2 to 0.3 MPa) as a disinfectant

About Researcher

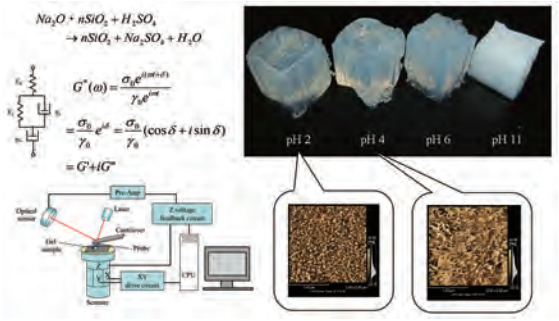
IMAI Tsuyoshi, Ph.D.

Ph.D., 1995, Kyushu University

WEB ≫ http://ds.cc.yamaguchi-u.ac.jp/~imai/index.html

Complex fluids and gelation — Cooperative research with industry through rheology

Have you ever been interested in why a pudding or a jelly gelated? You may have seen a bouncy drink or a paste-like food recently. These are called complex fluids, which are what we consider in our research. For example, we always consider the feel of a sample as smooth or viscous in order to make it more convenient. Besides such human senses, we also evaluate quantitative data with proper devices: rheometers. Engineering to control such flow characteristics is called '**rheology**.'
In addition, in the case of a pudding or jelly, which I introduced in the beginning, the water of the periphery is contained in an additive which has a minute network structure. It is necessary to observe directly to understand why they gelated. Such techniques belong to morphology. We work on various problems using rheology, morphology, surface chemistry, and simple chemical engineering. In order to develop measurement techniques for **approaching human senses** and **improving the convenience of products**, we research flows scientifically.



The silica gels with different appearances show individual internal structures, which can be captured by a scanning probe microscope.

About Researcher

KAIDE Aya, Ph.D.

Ph.D., 2014, Yamaguchi University

Rationalization and Energy Savings for Gas Absorbers, Distillation Columns, and Drying Equipment

Phase equilibrium (**vapor liquid equilibrium, liquid-liquid equilibrium**, etc.) and transport properties (**diffusion coefficients**, etc.) provide essential fundamental data in the design of separation devices such as gas absorbers, distillation columns, and drying equipment, which play an important role in chemical industry. For example, highly precise vapor-liquid equilibrium data for multicomponent mixtures consisting of impurities and ethanol are needed to design bioethanol distilling plants effectively. Obtaining such data in a theoretical manner with a high degree of precision makes it possible to shorten the development timeline, rationalize equipment designs, and facilitate energy-saving operation.
Our research objectives are to measure physical properties such as vapor liquid equilibrium, liquid-liquid equilibrium, and diffusion coefficient data and to develop a new model that can derive them with a high degree of accuracy.

Distillation apparatus (packed column)

About Researcher

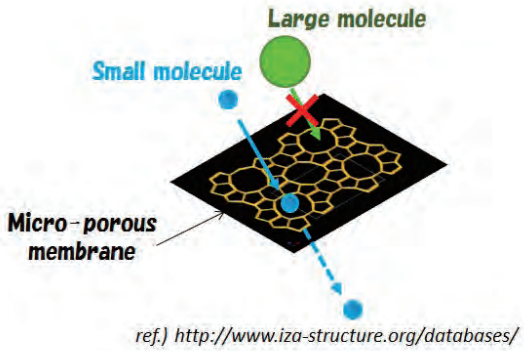
KOBUCHI Shigetoshi, Ph.D.

Ph.D., 1997, Kyushu University

Membranes and Functionalized Nano-Materials for Environmental and Energy Applications

We have been working on **membrane science**, including synthesis, characterization, modeling, and applications in energy and environmental processes. We have been involved in various national and international projects, ranging from fundamental research to more application-oriented research. For example, zeolite membranes, a type of micro-porous inorganic membrane, have been industrialized based on technology that was developed in our laboratory. Since then, the **membrane dehydration process** has gained acceptance as an energy-efficient alternative to azeotropic distillation. There are many other fields where membranes can offer innovative processes. Our laboratory is currently working on the following topics:

- Development of acid-stable inorganic micro-porous membranes for dehydration applications and **catalytic membrane reactor** applications
- Development of inorganic micro-porous membranes and mixed matrix membranes for gas separation, for example carbon dioxide separation and hydrogen purification
- Membrane separation combined with fermentation for efficient bio-fuel production
- Catalytic membrane reactors for water treatment



Molecule sieving by means of a micro-porous membrane

About Researcher

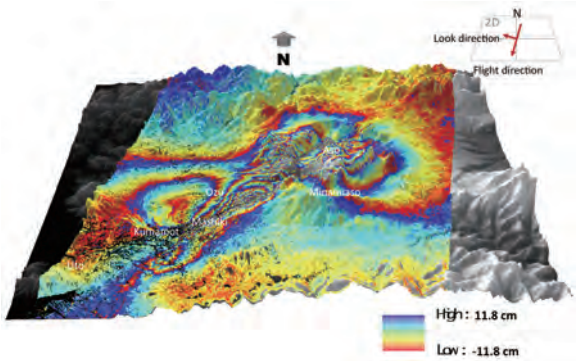
KUMAKIRI Izumi, Ph.D.

Ph.D., 2000, The University of Tokyo

WEB ≫ http://web.cc.yamaguchi-u.ac.jp/~bunshi/

Use of Space-based Infrastructure for Disaster and Environmental Issues

Recently, space-based infrastructures, including Earth observation satellites, positioning satellites and communication satellites, have been developing rapidly. Large amounts of spatial and geographic data collected by space infrastructures are used for environmental monitoring, disaster monitoring and simulations, transportation analyses, natural resource management and smart agriculture. In addition, groundbased infrastructures, such as Global Navigation Satellite System reference stations, sensor networks and cellular phone networks integrated with space-based infrastructures and crosscutting and multi-disciplinary studies have been conducted. For example, environmental issues, such as climate change and global warming, in addition to disaster occurrences such as massive earthquakes, super-typhoons and torrential rain, have become serious problems. Satellite remote sensing data can be analysed in cooperation with space agencies to deliver emergency disaster maps.



SAR interferometry analysis made by ALOS-2 for the Kumamoto earthquake

About Researcher

NAGAI Masahiko, Dr.Eng.

Dr.Eng., 2005, The University of Tokyo

Environmental Cleanup and Resource Recycling Based on Separation Technology

Our group works in the area of environmental system engineering, resource recycling engineering, and separation technology. Progress in science and technology has led to the proliferation of various substances such as artificial chemical substances and heavy metals as contaminants in the environment. Many of these substances are harmful to ecosystems and human beings, making it necessary to develop **environmental cleanup techniques**. We are investigating the development of **innovative and environmentally friendly technologies** for controlling and removing these contaminants from soil and groundwater. Another issue is rapid depletion of natural resources caused by mass production and mass consumption. To maintain the sustainable development of human society and to save natural resources, **resource recycling** and effective utilization of unused resources are important. We are investigating the development of a recycling system for valuable metals, for example rare metals, from secondary resources (obtained from a so-called **urban mine**) such as spent catalysts, spent batteries, and wastewater based on separation and purification operations.

Spent hydrodesulphurization (HDS) catalysts as a treasure trove of rare metals

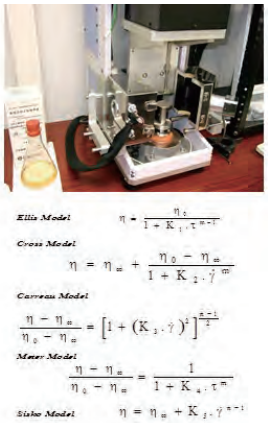
About Researcher

NIINAE Masakazu, Dr.Eng.

Dr.Eng., 1992, Kyoto University

Study of Deformation and Flow of Matter under Applied Stress

Our research interests lie in the area of complex fluids, for example suspensions, polymer solutions, and gels, which show impressive properties intermediate between those of fluids and solids (so-called “soft materials”). Our group has characterized such matter with a combination of rheological and morphological measurements to understand the mechanisms of sol-gel transition, viscoelastity, thixotropy, and so forth. Our research interests have included the suitable design and operation of chemical processes for treating complex fluids. Research now underway in our laboratory is focused on the following four fields: (1) **drag reduction** caused by surfactant solutions, (2) **sol-gel transition** of silica, (3) development of new **organogelators**, and (4) **rheology of foods**.
To date we have investigated rheology primarily at the academic level, but wider dissemination of the technology through cooperation with industry could bring enormous energy-saving benefits and contribute to the goals of green sustainable chemistry.



What is Rheology? Mathematics, physics, and engineering!

About Researcher

SAEKI Takashi, Ph.D.

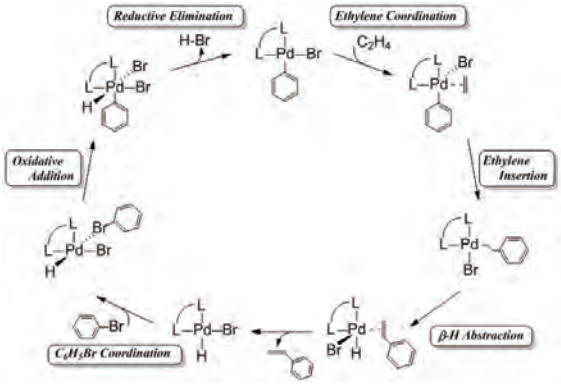
Ph.D., 1995, Yamaguchi University

WEB ≫ http://www.saeki.chem.yamaguchi-u.ac.jp

Theoretical Study of Reaction Mechanisms and Molecular Properties

Our research interest is to investigate reaction mechanisms and molecular properties using **theoretical calculations**. Current research is focused on three fields: (1) theoretical investigation of **metal-catalyzed reaction mechanisms**, (2) theoretical estimation of **molecular properties** with a large π-conjugated aromatic system, and (3) development of a new functional molecule and a route for synthesizing it.

Theoretical investigation of metal-catalyzed reaction mechanisms is a key project. A transition metal complex has been used as a catalyst in various organic synthesis reactions. Those catalyst reactions exhibit various structures as well as bonding and reactivity to which the metal atoms' d orbitals contribute, making them very interesting. Moreover, multiple electronic system catalysts exhibit large molecular sizes, facilitating a flexible electronic state. Consequently, it becomes easy to control structure and reactivity. We are conducting a theoretical investigation into transition metal-catalyzed reactions and searching for transition state structures, rate-determining steps, and active species.



New Heck catalytic cycle with Pd (II) complex

About Researcher

SUMIMOTO Michinori, Ph.D.

Ph.D., 2003, Kumamoto University

WEB ≫ http://rdesign.chem.yamaguchi-u.ac.jp/e_index.html

Soil Remediation and Water Purification

Our research group has research interests in various mechanistic aspects controlling the fate of water/soil pollutants in both engineered treatment processes and natural systems. Current research includes the following topics:

(1) Various **soil/groundwater remediation techniques** such as electrokinetics, permeable reactive barriers, and immobilization. Our research interests also include the interaction of heavy metals with soil components with the final goal of understanding the behavior of heavy metals in soils.

(2) Elucidation of water/pollutant permeation mechanisms through **reverse osmosis and nanofiltration membranes**. Special research effort is currently focused on the enhancement of membrane performance by means of surface treatments.

(3) Development of **point-of-use (POU) water treatment** systems capable of providing an effective barrier for turbidity and waterborne pathogens (e.g., bacteria, viruses, and protozoa). The POU water treatment systems being developed by our group use local materials including *Moringa oleifera* (a plant widely spread throughout the tropics), zero-valent iron, and sunlight.

Seeds of *Moringa Oleifera*, a miracle tree with the potential to save millions of lives

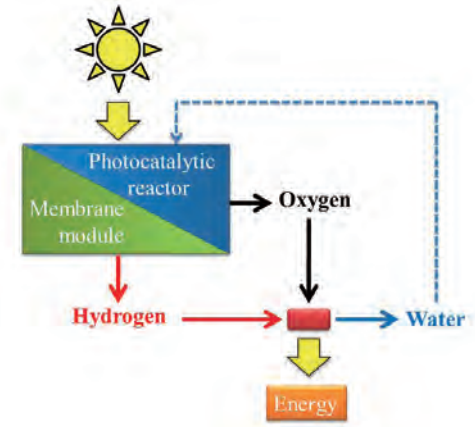
About Researcher

SUZUKI Tasuma, Ph.D.

Ph.D., 2009, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Membrane Separation Processes: Fundamentals and Applications

I have been studying membrane materials and membrane processes for the separation of gas and liquid mixtures. **Membrane separation processes** are energy-efficient, simple in operation, and suitable for smaller-scale operation in comparison to conventional separation processes such as distillation and adsorption. Membrane separation can be used for removal of carbon dioxide from natural gas and purification of ethanol from bioethanol. My research interests include the **fundamental transport phenomena** of molecules permeating membranes, the effects of physical and chemical properties of membrane materials on their permeability and selectivity, methods for fabricating thin membranes without defects, and their application to separation and reaction processes in order to lower energy consumption. Current research topics are the development of membranes for separation of hydrogen and oxygen to be used in a photocatalytic **hydrogen production process**, synthesis of a carbon dioxide selective membrane using a facilitated transport mechanism, and transport phenomena of volatile organic compounds through membranes.



An application of membrane gas separation to photocatalytic hydrogen production

About Researcher

TANAKA Kazuhiro, Ph.D.

Ph.D., 1994, Osaka University

Functional Biomaterials for Tissue Engineering, Cell Therapy, and Drug Delivery

Our research interest is in **functional biomaterials** for tissue engineering, cell therapy, and drug delivery. In particular, we have focused on the development of biocompatible nanoparticles, microcapsules, and emulsions containing protein drugs such as vaccine antigens and antibodies.

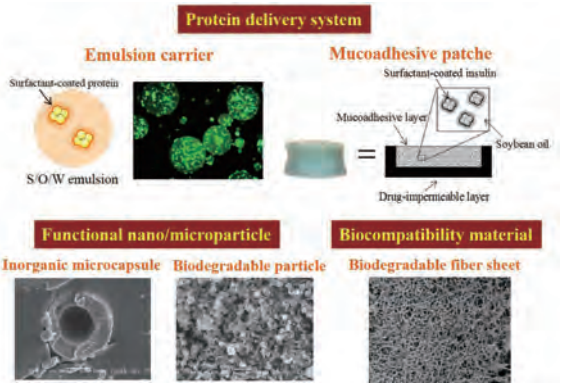
1. Emulsion carriers for **oral protein delivery**

We have developed a solid-in-oil-in-water (S/O/W) emulsion for oral administration of protein drugs using a surfactant-coated protein. It is known that when the S/O/W emulsions containing insulin are administered orally, the emulsion shows hypoglycemic activity for an extended period.

2. Mucoadhesive patches for oral protein delivery

We have proposed an intestinal patch as an efficient carrier for oral protein delivery. These intestinal patches, which have mucoadhesive and drug-impermeable layers, induce sustained unidirectional protein release toward intestinal mucosa while inhibiting protein leakage from the patches.

Recently, we have been interested in an **antigen delivery system** for intranasal vaccines and studied the development of a novel antigen delivery carrier using nanoparticles or emulsions.



Functional biomaterials developed in our research

About Researcher

TOORISAKA Eiichi, Ph.D.

Ph.D., 2003, Kyushu University

Synthetic and Catalytic Chemistry for Sustainable Organic Synthesis

Our research interests lie mainly in the field of organic synthesis. We focus on projects involving the development of novel catalysts and catalytic reactions for highly efficient organic synthesis, the development of those into a powerful synthetic methodology, and its application to the synthesis of functional materials. Our research is supported by a number of chemical companies. Research currently underway in our laboratory is focused on the following four areas: (1) study and discovery of novel chiral catalysts (organocatalysis and transition metal ion catalysis) for **asymmetric bromination** of organic compounds, (2) development of catalytic reactions (Lewis acid catalysis and Brønsted acid catalysis) for highly efficient synthesis of **heterocyclic compounds**, (3) development of novel catalysts and catalytic reactions for the synthesis of functional resin materials, and (4) molecular design of **new functional resin materials**.

Endless possibility in a world so small it cannot be seen with the human eye

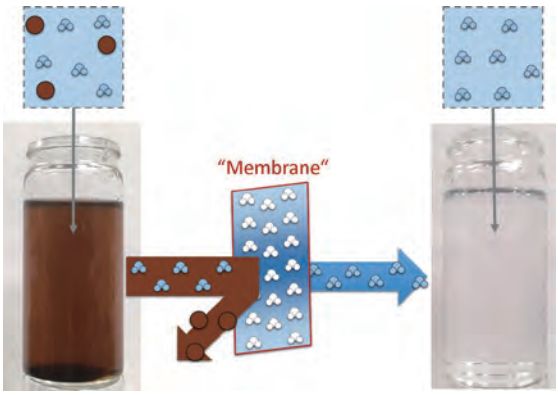
About Researcher

YAMAMOTO Hidetoshi, Ph.D.

Ph.D., 1991, Kyushu University

Membrane Technologies for Sustainable Water and Energy Supplies

The growing global population and increasing human industrial activities will result in serious water and energy shortages throughout the world. To solve such upcoming problems, we research membrane-based technologies including both membrane synthesis and process development. Membranes can enable the selective transport of water and ions and promise to be a useful method for water purification via membrane ltration. Our research interests currently focus on semipermeable membranes (nanofiltration (NF), reverse osmosis (RO) and forward osmosis (FO) membranes) and ion exchange membranes (IEMs) (anion-exchange and cation-exchange membranes (AEMs and CEMs, respectively)) based on functional polymer science and engineering. In addition to water treatment, we study energy conversion systems using the salinity gradient between a low salinity solution such as sewage and a high salinity solution such as seawater. In particular, we focus on both pressure-retarded osmosis (PRO) and reverse electrodialysis (RED) as energy conversion systems. We believe our research will contribute to solving water and energy problems in the future.



A schematic illustration of water puri cation via membrane ltration.

About Researcher

YASUKAWA Masahiro, Dr.Env.

Dr. Env., 2012, Okayama University

WEB ≫ http://piano.chem.yamaguchi-u.ac.jp/English.html