

# Crystal growth and Judd-Ofelt analysis of novel $\text{Tm}^{3+}$ -doped $\text{BaCaBO}_3\text{F}$ crystal

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$\text{Tm}^{3+}$ -doped  $\text{BaCaBO}_3\text{F}$  crystals have been grown by the Czochralski method. The grown crystals have been inclined to crack along the (001) plane due to the layered structure. Polarization absorption spectra have been recorded at room temperature. The peak absorption cross-sections around 800 nm are  $0.84 \times 10^{-20} \text{ cm}^2$  with full width at half maximum (FWHM) of 17.4 nm for  $\pi$ -polarization and  $1.18 \times 10^{-20} \text{ cm}^2$  with FWHM of 16.5 nm for  $\sigma$ -polarization, respectively. The Judd-Ofelt theory, extended to anisotropic system, has been applied to evaluate the spectroscopic parameters relevant for laser applications, such as phenomenological intensity parameters, spontaneous transition probabilities, branching ratios and radiative lifetimes.

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## 1. Introduction

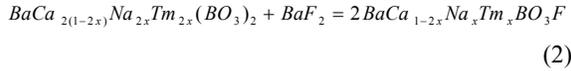
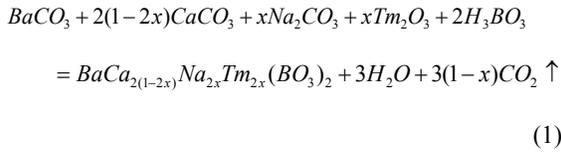
Laser radiation around 2.0  $\mu\text{m}$  has important applications, such as for coherent laser radar, remote sensing and medical equipment [1-3].  $\text{Tm}^{3+}$ -doped crystals are primarily employed as laser sources in this spectral region. Major advantages with  $\text{Tm}^{3+}$ -doped active matrices include the availability of AlGaAs laser diode pumping via the  $^3\text{H}_6 \rightarrow ^3\text{H}_4$  transition at  $\sim 800 \text{ nm}$ , the efficient near infrared laser operation associated with a favorable cross-relaxation process ( $^3\text{H}_4 + ^3\text{H}_6 \rightarrow ^3\text{F}_4 + ^3\text{F}_4$ ), and a tunability near 2.0  $\mu\text{m}$ . Therefore,  $\text{Tm}^{3+}$ -doped crystalline materials have been investigated extensively and deeply [4-11].

$\text{BaCaBO}_3\text{F}$  crystallizes in the hexagonal system with space group  $P\bar{6}2m$  and unit cell parameters:  $a = 9.049 \text{ \AA}$  and  $c = 4.326 \text{ \AA}$  [12]. Its basic structural units are the triangular  $(\text{BO}_3)^{3-}$  groups responsible for the nonlinear optical effect. In 1996,  $\text{Yb}^{3+}:\text{BaCaBO}_3\text{F}$  were assessed as a new laser crystal with potential for self-frequency doubling [13]. The  $\text{Yb}^{3+}:\text{BaCaBO}_3\text{F}$  crystal was characterized by long energy storage time of  $\text{Yb}^{3+}$ , large crystal field splittings for  $\text{Yb}^{3+}$ , and the combined second-harmonic generation and laser features available from the crystal. With a Ti:sapphire pumping source, slope efficiency up to 38% was obtained for the fundamental laser output (1034 nm). Recently,  $\text{BaCaBO}_3\text{F}$  crystals with

large size were grown by the Kyropoulos and Czochralski methods, and the detailed linear and nonlinear optical properties of this material were presented [14-16]. In this work, the growth and polarized absorption spectra of the  $\text{Tm}^{3+}:\text{BaCaBO}_3\text{F}$  crystal are reported. The Judd-Ofelt analysis, which is crucial to understand the relationships between host and  $\text{Tm}^{3+}$  emission properties, has been applied to predict the spectroscopic parameters relevant for laser applications.

## 2. Experimental

$\text{BaCaBO}_3\text{F}$  melts congruently [14, 16]. According, the  $\text{Tm}^{3+}:\text{BaCaBO}_3\text{F}$  crystal was grown by the Czochralski method. The chemicals used were  $\text{Tm}_2\text{O}_3$  with purity of 99.99%, and  $\text{BaCO}_3$ ,  $\text{CaCO}_3$ ,  $\text{Na}_2\text{CO}_3$ ,  $\text{H}_3\text{BO}_3$ ,  $\text{BaF}_2$  with AR grade. Since  $\text{Tm}^{3+}$  replaced the divalent cation  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ ,  $\text{Na}^+$  was codoped as a charge compensator element so as to ensure the lattice electric neutrality and to increase the efficiency of dopant incorporation. In order to avoid the formation of Ba and/or Ca peroxide which attacked the crucible, a two-step process was adopted for preparing a melt from which a crystal could be grown [12], as described by the following reaction:



where  $x = 0.02$ . Crystal pulling was performed in  $\text{N}_2$  atmosphere using a platinum crucible. The detailed crystal growth procedure was described elsewhere [13, 16]. Similar to the  $\text{Yb}^{3+}:\text{BaCaBO}_3\text{F}$  crystal [13], the  $\text{Tm}^{3+}:\text{BaCaBO}_3\text{F}$  crystal cracks easily, which can be related to layered structure. In the structure of  $\text{BaCaBO}_3\text{F}$ ,  $(\text{BO}_3)$  groups and Ca atoms link each other to form layers along (001) plane, and the bond between the layers consists of Ba and F atoms [16], as shown in Fig. 1. Owing to the large distance between layers ( $4.3257 \text{ \AA}$ ), the contact between adjacent layers is weak, so the crystal is apt to fracture along (001) plane.

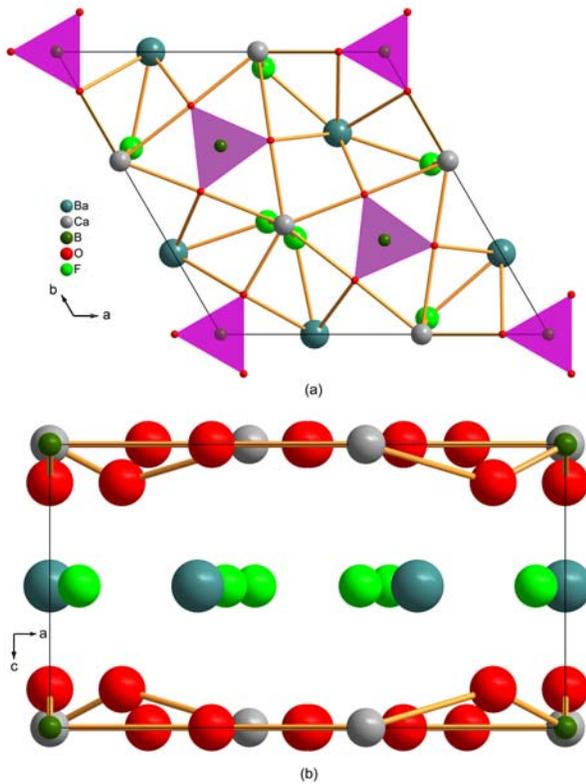


Fig. 1. Crystal structure of  $\text{BaCaBO}_3\text{F}$ .

The concentration of  $\text{Tm}^{3+}$  in the  $\text{BaCaBO}_3\text{F}$  crystal was measured by inductively coupled plasma and atomic emission spectrometry (Ultima2, Jobin–Yvon). A 1.98 mm thick plate sample cut from the as-grown crystal with the  $c$ -axis contained in its main faces was applied to the  $\sigma$  ( $E \perp c$ ,  $k \perp c$ ) and  $\pi$  ( $E \parallel c$ ,  $k \perp c$ ) polarized spectral measurements, where  $E$ ,  $k$ , and  $c$  are the electric field,

wave vector, and optical axis of the uniaxial crystal, respectively. The polarized absorption spectra were recorded by a UV/VIS/NIR Spectrometer (Lambda900, Perkin–Elmer).

### 3. Results and discussions

#### 3.1 Efficient segregation coefficient

The  $\text{Tm}^{3+}$  concentration in the  $\text{Tm}^{3+}:\text{BaCaBO}_3\text{F}$  crystal have been determined to be 3.48 wt.% ( $5.14 \times 10^{20} \text{ cm}^{-3}$ ). The segregation coefficient  $K$  of  $\text{Tm}^{3+}$  in the crystal can be expressed as:

$$K = C_{sol}/C_{liq} \quad (3)$$

where  $C_{sol}$  and  $C_{liq}$  are the concentrations of  $\text{Tm}^{3+}$  in the solid and liquid phases, respectively. Thus, the segregation coefficient  $K$  of  $\text{Tm}^{3+}$  in  $\text{BaCaBO}_3\text{F}$  crystal are 2.63.

#### 3.2 Absorption spectra

Fig. 2 illustrates the polarized absorption spectra of the  $\text{Tm}^{3+}:\text{BaCaBO}_3\text{F}$  crystal at room temperature. The baselines in the spectra, which are caused by the Fresnel reflection of the crystal surface and the defects in the crystal, have been corrected. All the absorption bands are attributed to the transitions of  $\text{Tm}^{3+}$  ions from the ground state  $^3\text{H}_6$  to the excited state  $J'$  manifolds, which are also marked in Fig. 2. As can be seen, the absorption spectra show pronounced polarization dependence due to the anisotropy of the crystal, with  $\sigma$ -polarization giving stronger line. The most interesting feature in the absorption spectra is the strong absorption band around 800 nm corresponding to the  $^3\text{H}_6 \rightarrow ^3\text{H}_4$  transition, which coincides with wavelength of radiation from GaAlAs diode laser. For the  $\sigma$ -polarized spectrum, the peak absorption is situated at 793 nm with an absorption cross-section of  $1.18 \times 10^{-20} \text{ cm}^2$  and full width at half the maximum (FWHM) of 16.5 nm, while for the  $\pi$ -polarized spectrum, the most intense absorption is located at 796 nm with an absorption cross-section of  $0.84 \times 10^{-20} \text{ cm}^2$  and FWHM of 17.4 nm. The maximum value of absorption cross-sections approaches those of  $\text{Tm}^{3+}:\text{YAG}$  ( $0.75 \times 10^{-20} \text{ cm}^2$ ) [17],  $\text{Tm}^{3+}:\text{YVO}_4$  ( $2.50 \times 10^{-20} \text{ cm}^2$  for  $\pi$ -polarization) [18] and  $\text{Tm}^{3+}:\text{GdAl}(\text{BO}_3)_4$  ( $1.75 \times 10^{-20} \text{ cm}^2$  for  $\pi$ -polarization) [11]. The FWHM is much larger than those of  $\text{Tm}^{3+}:\text{YVO}_4$  (5.0 nm) [18] and  $\text{Tm}^{3+}:\text{KYb}(\text{WO}_4)_2$  (3.5 nm) [19] and comparable to those of  $\text{Tm}^{3+}:\text{GdAl}(\text{BO}_3)_4$  (13.0 nm) [11], and  $\text{Tm}^{3+}:\text{LiLuF}_4$  (20.0 nm) [7]. Considering that the wavelength temperature coefficient is about  $0.3 \text{ nm}/^\circ\text{C}$  and the spectral width is about 2.0 nm for commonly commercial diode lasers, such bandwidth is suitable for diode pumping, since it is not crucial to temperature stability of the output wavelengths of diode laser.

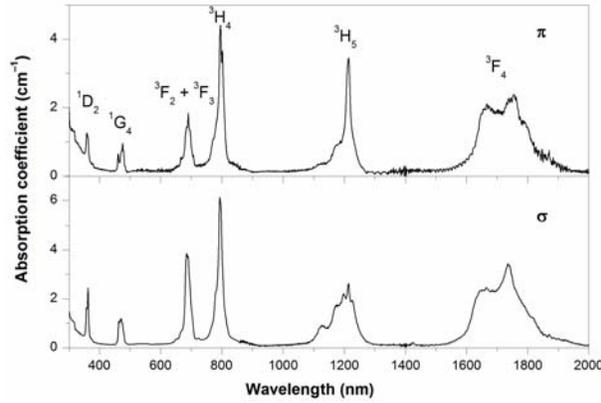


Fig. 2. Polarized absorption spectra of the Tm<sup>3+</sup>:BaCaBO<sub>3</sub>F crystal at room temperature.

### 3.3 Judd-Ofelt analysis

The Judd-Ofelt theory has become standard tool for evaluating the spectroscopic parameters of rare-earth ions in crystals and glasses [20, 21]. The calculation procedure is similar to those of Refs. [22-24], and we will make a brief description giving the equations used in our analysis.

In the framework of the Judd-Ofelt theory, the line strength of the electric-dipole transition between an initial state  $J$  and a final state  $J'$  can be expressed as:

$$S_q^{ed}(J \rightarrow J') = \sum_{t=2,4,6} \Omega_t \left| \langle [L, S]J \| U^{(t)} \| [L', S']J' \rangle \right|^2 \quad (4)$$

where the subscript  $q$  indicates the polarization of the absorption spectra, and the three phenomenological intensity parameters  $\Omega_2$ ,  $\Omega_4$ ,  $\Omega_6$  convey the influence of the host on the transition probabilities, since they incorporate the crystal-field parameters, interconfigurational radial integrals, the interaction between the central ion and the immediate environment [8].  $\langle [L, S]J \| U^{(t)} \| [L', S']J' \rangle$  are the doubly reduced matrix elements of unitary tensor operators, which are almost independent of the ion environment. These matrix elements, calculated in the intermediate coupling scheme, have been tabulated in Refs. [8, 25].

On the other hand, the line strength for the magnetic dipole transition between an initial state  $J$  and a final state  $J'$  is given by:

$$S_q^{md}(J \rightarrow J') = \left( \frac{h}{4\pi mc} \right)^2 \left| \langle [L, S]J \| L + 2S \| [L', S']J' \rangle \right|^2 \quad (5)$$

where  $L+2S$  is the magnetic dipole operator. In view of the selection rules:  $\Delta S = \Delta L = 0$ ,  $\Delta J = 0, \pm 1$  ( $0 \leftrightarrow 0$  forbidden) in the Russel-Saunders limit, the magnetic dipole transitions only contribute to the  ${}^3H_6 \rightarrow {}^3H_5$  absorption band of Tm<sup>3+</sup> here. The values of  $S_{md}$  are usually small and are insensitive to the host, so we have employed the values supplied in Ref. [26].

According to the Judd-Ofelt theory, the line strength of the electric-dipole transition of the  $J \rightarrow J'$  transition ( $J$  represents the ground state  ${}^3H_6$  here) can also be extracted

experimentally from the corresponding room-temperature absorption spectra by the following formula:

$$S_q^{\text{exp}}(J \rightarrow J') = \frac{9n}{(n^2 + 2)^2} \left[ \frac{3hc(2J+1)}{8\pi^3 e^2 \lambda N_0} \int \alpha_q(\lambda) d\lambda - n S_q^{md}(J \rightarrow J') \right] \quad (6)$$

where  $h$  is the Planck constant,  $m$  and  $e$  are the electron mass and charge,  $c$  is the velocity of light,  $N_0$  is the concentration of Tm<sup>3+</sup> in the crystal,  $\alpha_q(\lambda)$  is the absorption coefficient and  $\int \alpha_q(\lambda) d\lambda$  is the integrated absorption coefficient for each absorption band. The refractive indexes  $n$  are obtained from the Sellmeier equations established for BaCaBO<sub>3</sub>F crystal reported in Ref. [16]:

$$n_o^2 = 2.71455 + \frac{0.01871\lambda^2}{\lambda^2 - 0.01730} - 0.00906\lambda^2 \quad (7)$$

$$n_e^2 = 2.55994 + \frac{0.01599\lambda^2}{\lambda^2 - 0.01752} - 0.00528\lambda^2 \quad (8)$$

where  $\lambda$  stands for the wavelength (unit:  $\mu\text{m}$ ). In the subsequent calculation, the values of  $n_o$  and  $n_e$  are used for the  $\sigma$ - and  $\pi$ -polarized spectra, respectively.

Thus, the intensity parameters  $\Omega_t$  ( $t = 2, 4, 6$ ) are estimated by a least-square fitting between equations (4) and (6). Making use of equation (4) and the obtained  $\Omega_t$  value, the calculated line strengths  $S_{cal}$  can be determined. Then, the values of experimental and calculated line strengths are listed in Table 1. To justify the results obtained, the root-mean-square deviation of the experimental and calculation line strengths is introduced, which is defined by:

$$rms \Delta S_q = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^N (S_q^{\text{exp}} - S_q^{\text{cal}})^2}{N_{tr} - N_{par}}} \quad (9)$$

where  $N_{tr}$  is the number of transitions and  $N_{par}$  is the number of parameters. A measurement of the relative error defined as  $rms \text{ error} = rms \Delta S / rms S$  is also carried out. The values of the  $rms \text{ error}$  are 4.4 % and 5.7 % for  $\pi$ - and  $\sigma$ -polarizations, respectively, which are in the typical error range of Judd-Ofelt fitting and indicate good agreement between the calculated and experimental results.

Table 1. Experimental and calculated line strengths of Tm<sup>3+</sup> in the BaCaBO<sub>3</sub>F crystal (in units of  $10^{-20} \text{ cm}^2$ ).

| Transitions           | $\pi$ -polarization |           | $\sigma$ -polarization |           |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------|------------------------|-----------|
|                       | $S_{exp}$           | $S_{cal}$ | $S_{exp}$              | $S_{cal}$ |
| ${}^3H_6 \rightarrow$ |                     |           |                        |           |
| ${}^3F_4$             | 4.05                | 4.05      | 5.34                   | 5.41      |
| ${}^3H_5$             | 1.35                | 1.24      | 2.27                   | 2.13      |
| ${}^3H_4$             | 1.81                | 1.85      | 2.95                   | 2.89      |
| ${}^3F_2+{}^3F_3$     | 0.92                | 0.95      | 2.05                   | 2.16      |
| ${}^1G_4$             | 0.41                | 0.37      | 0.63                   | 0.49      |
| ${}^1D_2$             | 0.33                | 0.37      | 0.67                   | 0.56      |
| $rms \Delta S$        | 0.09                |           | 0.16                   |           |

Table 2. The intensity parameters of  $Tm^{3+}$ -doped crystals (in units of  $10^{-20} cm^2$ ).

| Crystals  | $\Omega_2$          | $\Omega_4$          | $\Omega_6$          | $\Omega_4/\Omega_6$ | Refs.     |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------|
| $Tm^{3+}$ :YAG  | 0.70                | 1.20                | 0.50                | 2.40                | [27]      |
| $Tm^{3+}$ :YVO <sub>4</sub>                                   | 7.81                | 1.03                | 1.14                | 0.90                | [6]       |
| $Tm^{3+}$ :GdAl <sub>3</sub> (BO <sub>3</sub> ) <sub>4</sub>  | 4.54                | 2.55                | 3.39                | 0.75                | [11]      |
| $Tm^{3+}$ :Ca <sub>4</sub> GdO(BO <sub>3</sub> ) <sub>4</sub> | 1.92                | 0.15                | 0.63                | 0.24                | [10]      |
| $Tm^{3+}$ :Sr <sub>3</sub> Y(BO <sub>3</sub> ) <sub>3</sub>   | 2.16                | 0.66                | 2.07                | 0.32                | [28]      |
| $Tm^{3+}$ :BaCaBO <sub>3</sub> F                              | 7.59 <sup>σ</sup>   | 1.31 <sup>σ</sup>   | 1.59 <sup>σ</sup>   | 0.83 <sup>σ</sup>   | This work |
|   | 5.93 <sup>π</sup>   | 1.00 <sup>π</sup>   | 0.58 <sup>π</sup>   | 1.74 <sup>π</sup>   |           |
|   | 7.04 <sup>eff</sup> | 1.21 <sup>eff</sup> | 1.25 <sup>eff</sup> | 0.97 <sup>eff</sup> |           |

The effective intensity parameters, which are defined as  $\Omega_{eff} = (\Omega_\pi + 2\Omega_\sigma)/3$ , are also obtained. In Table 2, the Judd–Ofelt parameters that result from the above mentioned analysis are compared with the values obtained for several laser crystals containing  $Tm^{3+}$ . It is observed that the effective intensity parameters for the  $Tm^{3+}$ :BaCaBO<sub>3</sub>F crystal is similar to that for the  $Tm^{3+}$ :YVO<sub>4</sub> crystal in which an efficient laser output around 2.0  $\mu m$  has been demonstrated [29]. The spectroscopic quality factor,  $X = \Omega_4/\Omega_6$ , first introduced by Kaminiskii and co-workers [30], is also an important laser characteristic in predicting the stimulated emission in laser active medium. The spectroscopic quality factor for  $Tm^{3+}$  in the BaCaBO<sub>3</sub>F is determined to be 0.97, which fall within the range of 0.24–2.40 for  $Tm^{3+}$ -doped different hosts listed in Table 2.

Once the intensity parameters have been obtained, the spontaneous emission probabilities  $A(J \rightarrow J')$  between the excited state  $J$  and terminating state  $J'$  can be calculated by the following expressions in terms of the  $S_{ed}$  and  $S_{md}$  strengths:

$$A_q(J \rightarrow J') = A_q^{ed}(J \rightarrow J') + A_q^{md}(J \rightarrow J') \quad (10)$$

$$A_q^{ed}(J \rightarrow J') = \frac{64\pi^4 e^2}{3h\bar{\lambda}_{em}^3(2J+1)} \frac{n_q(n_q^2+2)^2}{9} S_q^{ed}(J \rightarrow J') \quad (11)$$

$$A_q^{md}(J \rightarrow J') = \frac{64\pi^4 e^2 n_q^3}{3h\bar{\lambda}_{em}^3(2J+1)} S_q^{md}(J \rightarrow J') \quad (12)$$

where  $\bar{\lambda}_{em}$  is the mean wavelength of emission bands,  $A_{ed}$  and  $A_{md}$  are the spontaneous emission probabilities of the electric dipole ( $ed$ ) and magnetic dipole ( $md$ ) transitions, respectively.

The fluorescence branching ratio from the same excited state  $J$  can be determined from the spontaneous emission probability according to the relations:

$$\beta_q(J \rightarrow J') = \frac{A_q(J \rightarrow J')}{\sum_{J'} A_q(J \rightarrow J')} \quad (13)$$

The radiative lifetime for any specific excited state  $J$  is the reciprocal of the total spontaneous emission probability. For a uniaxial crystal, the total spontaneous emission probability is expressed as:

$$A_{total} = \frac{\sum_{J'} A_\pi(J \rightarrow J') + 2\sum_{J'} A_\sigma(J \rightarrow J')}{3} \quad (14)$$

$$\tau_r = \frac{1}{A_{total}} \quad (15)$$

The calculated electric and magnetic dipole spontaneous emission probabilities, radiative lifetimes, and branching ratios for the main emission transitions of  $Tm^{3+}$  in the BaCaBO<sub>3</sub>F crystal, are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Calculated spontaneous emission probabilities, branching ratios, and radiative lifetimes of  $Tm^{3+}$  in the BaCaBO<sub>3</sub>F crystal.

| Transitions                   | $\lambda_{em}$<br>(nm)      | $\pi$ -polarization            |                                |         | $\sigma$ -polarization         |                                |         | $\tau_{rad}$<br>( $\mu s$ ) |        |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------|-----------------------------|--------|
|                               |                             | $A_{ed}$<br>(s <sup>-1</sup> ) | $A_{md}$<br>(s <sup>-1</sup> ) | $\beta$ | $A_{ed}$<br>(s <sup>-1</sup> ) | $A_{md}$<br>(s <sup>-1</sup> ) | $\beta$ |                             |        |
| <sup>1</sup> G <sub>4</sub> → | <sup>3</sup> H <sub>6</sub> | 470                            | 1107.1                         | 0       | 0.533                          | 1612.0                         | 0       | 0.467                       | 334.2  |
|                               | <sup>3</sup> F <sub>4</sub> | 646                            | 92.4                           | 8.5     | 0.049                          | 207.8                          | 9.3     | 0.063                       |        |
|                               | <sup>3</sup> H <sub>5</sub> | 763                            | 506.2                          | 95.4    | 0.289                          | 1055.0                         | 104.2   | 0.336                       |        |
|                               | <sup>3</sup> H <sub>4</sub> | 1177                           | 209.0                          | 21.7    | 0.111                          | 356.9                          | 23.6    | 0.110                       |        |
|                               | <sup>3</sup> F <sub>3</sub> | 1494                           | 27.0                           | 2.4     | 0.014                          | 62.9                           | 2.6     | 0.019                       |        |
| <sup>3</sup> H <sub>4</sub> → | <sup>3</sup> F <sub>2</sub> | 1634                           | 9.0                            | 0       | 0.004                          | 15.4                           | 0       | 0.004                       | 525.3  |
|                               | <sup>3</sup> H <sub>6</sub> | 784                            | 1163.0                         | 0       | 0.891                          | 1990.6                         | 0       | 0.904                       |        |
|                               | <sup>3</sup> F <sub>4</sub> | 1432                           | 102.5                          | 15.6    | 0.090                          | 163.7                          | 16.9    | 0.082                       |        |
| <sup>3</sup> H <sub>5</sub> → | <sup>3</sup> H <sub>5</sub> | 2166                           | 16.2                           | 7.9     | 0.019                          | 23.4                           | 8.5     | 0.014                       | 3031.1 |
|                               | <sup>3</sup> H <sub>6</sub> | 1225                           | 163.7                          | 58.7    | 0.983                          | 310.2                          | 64.0    | 0.980                       |        |
| <sup>3</sup> F <sub>4</sub> → | <sup>3</sup> F <sub>4</sub> | 4226                           | 3.6                            | 0.1     | 0.017                          | 7.5                            | 0.1     | 0.020                       | 3282.4 |
|                               | <sup>3</sup> H <sub>6</sub> | 1725                           | 233.0                          | 0       | 1.000                          | 340.5                          | 0       | 1.000                       |        |

#### 4. Conclusions

Tm<sup>3+</sup>-doped BaCaBO<sub>3</sub>F crystals have been grown by the Czochralski method. The grown crystals have a tendency to crack along the (001) plane because of the layered structure. The crystal is characterized by a wide absorption bandwidth (~17 nm) at the pumping laser wavelength such that wavelength requirements imposed on laser diodes are relaxed to a great extent. The maximum absorption cross-sections around 800 nm are  $0.84 \times 10^{-20}$  cm<sup>2</sup> for  $\pi$ -polarization and  $1.18 \times 10^{-20}$  cm<sup>2</sup> for  $\sigma$ -polarization, respectively. Based on the analysis of the polarized absorption spectra in the framework of the Judd-Ofelt theory, the main spectroscopic characteristics, such as phenomenological intensity parameters, spontaneous transition probabilities, branching ratios and radiative lifetimes, have been determined.

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