Title: An Embedded Microfluidic Self-Pumping Structure for Micro Direct Methanol Fuel Cells

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Abstract
Micro direct methanol fuel cells (μDMFCs) are considered to be the next-generation power sources for portable electronic devices, such as cell phones, global positioning systems (GPS), digital cameras, and laptop computers. The potential advantages of μDMFCs over conventional batteries include higher energy density, quicker recharging rate, and less pollution. Efficient liquid management in μDMFCs is critical in minimizing the methanol cross-over problem. The traditional active liquid management subsystems not only consume considerable power but also claim a significant portion of volume from the system, thus hindering the future development of high-energy-density μDMFCs. Aiming at replacing the current cumbersome liquid management subsystems and improving μDMFCs’ energy density, we are pioneering an integrated microfluidic approach that automatically regulates liquid and gas reactants with minimal or even no power consumption. This presentation focuses on the key technology of our approach: an embedded self-pumping mechanism that uses CO₂ gas bubbles, which are produced by the fuel cell reactions, to deliver the liquid fuel. Our technology requires no energy-consuming components (e.g., active pumps), self-regulates the pumping rate according to the system’s power consumption, and removes CO₂ bubbles promptly through hydrophobic nanoporous membranes. By eliminating the need for discrete pumps and gas/liquid separators, our design is amenable to the further miniaturization of μDMFCs. It must be emphasized that although our approach has only been tested on μDMFCs, it can be easily extended to many other types of micro fuel cells that involve liquid reactants and gaseous products. The presentation will be concluded with a perspective on future research in microfluidics with applications to energy generation and biomedical engineering.

Biography
Dr. Dennis Desheng Meng received his B.E. (1998) and M.S. (2001) degrees from Tsinghua University, Beijing, China and Ph.D. degree (2005) in Mechanical Engineering from UCLA with an Outstanding Ph.D. Student Award. He is currently a postdoctoral researcher/lecturer in the Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering Department at UCLA and a member of IEEE and ASME. He has been conducting research on μDMFCs in the UCLA Micro and Nano Manufacturing Laboratory directed by Professor C.-J. Kim. He also teaches a graduate-level class on MEMS fabrication at UCLA.

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