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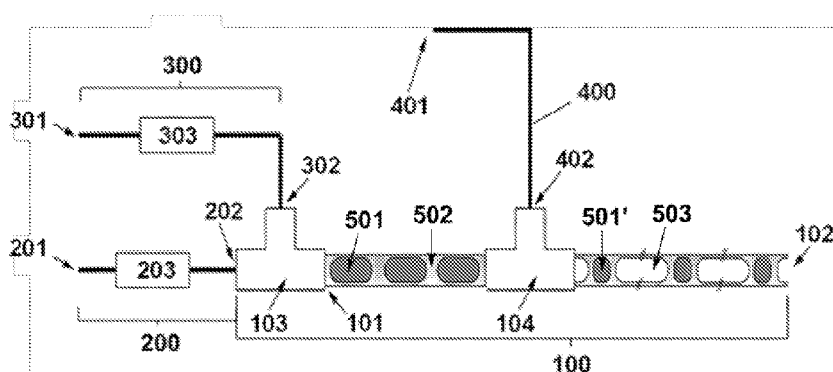


FIG. 1

(57) **Abstract:** Disclosed is a reactor system that contains multiple millireactors, each including a millitube, a first feed line, a second feed line, and a third feed line. Each of the first and second feed lines has a hydraulic damper disposed therein. Also disclosed is a process for conducting in a millitube a triphasic flow reaction that requires a liquid reactant, a gas reactant, and a catalyst.

TRIPHASIC FLOW MILLIREACTORS

BACKGROUND

Gas-liquid multiphase reactions, such as hydrogenation, carbonylation, and hydroformylation, are commonly used in the syntheses of pharmaceuticals and fine chemicals.

Gas-liquid reactions, typically performed in stirred batch reactors with a gaseous reactant pressurized therein, often encounter mass transport limitations due to small specific interfacial areas. Microreactors have been developed for gas-liquid multiphase transformations to enhance mass transport.

Yet, there are several drawbacks to current microreactors for gas-liquid reactions. First, catalyst recovery and recycle remains a challenge, especially where the products, unreacted starting materials, and catalyst co-exist in the same liquid phase. Moreover, catalyst deactivation shortens the shelf life of the reactors. Finally, the rate of mass transport is limited for reactions beyond a biphasic setting, e.g., triphasic reactions.

There is a need to develop a new reactor system that does not have the above-mentioned drawbacks.

SUMMARY

The present invention relates to a reactor system containing multiple millireactors, each of which includes a millitube and three feed lines. Unexpectedly, the reactor system exhibits (i) tremendous mass transport acceleration in catalytic organic syntheses and (ii) facile catalyst recovery and recycle.

In one aspect, this invention is a triphasic flow reactor system that contains multiple millireactors.

Each of the millireactors includes a millitube, a first feed line, a second feed line, and a third feed line.

The millitube has a first end, a second end, a first chamber attached to the first end, and a second chamber disposed between the two ends of the millitube. The first feed line has a first end for receiving a first liquid, a second end connected to the first chamber, and a first hydraulic

damper disposed between the two ends of the first feed line. The second feed line has a first end for receiving a second liquid, a second end connected to the first chamber, and a second hydraulic damper disposed between the two ends of the second feed line. The third feed line has a first end for receiving a gas and a second end connected to the second chamber. As such, the first chamber is capable of receiving both the first and second liquids, and the second chamber is capable of receiving both the gas and a mixture of the first and second liquids.

The reactor system can further include four containers: a first liquid container, a second liquid container, a gas container, and an outflow container. The first container is connected to a first pump and the first end of the first feed line. The second container is connected to a second pump and the first end of the second feed line. The gas container is connected to the first end of the third feed line. The outflow container is connected to the second end of the millitube. In one example, the first and second pumps are each a peristaltic pump.

The term "millitube" herein refers to a tube that has an inner diameter of 0.5-10 mm, e.g., 1-5 mm. Typically, the millitube has a length of 1-50 m, e.g., 2-20 m. It can be made of various materials, such as polytetrafluoro-ethylene, polyether ether ketone, fluorinated ethylene propylene, glass, and metal. During the operation, the tube surface is wetted by an organic phase.

The first and second hydraulic dampers each typically consist of a first tube, a second tube, and a third tube in series. Preferably, the second tube has an inner diameter larger than that of each of the first and third tubes. Also preferably, the first tube has the same length and inner diameter as those of the third tube. In one example, the second tube in the first hydraulic damper is a silicone tube and the second tube in the second hydraulic damper is a viton tube.

In another aspect, this invention is a process for conducting a triphasic flow reaction that requires a liquid reactant, a gas reactant, and a catalyst.

The process includes the following steps: (i) preparing a first liquid containing the catalyst, a second liquid containing the liquid reactant, and a gas containing the gas reactant, the first liquid and the second liquid being immiscible; (ii) mixing the first liquid with the second liquid to form a two-phase mixture; (iii) mixing the gas with the two-phase mixture to form a three-phase mixture; (iv) placing the three-phase mixture in a millitube to form gas bubbles;

- (v) reacting the liquid reactant, the gas reactant, and the catalyst to form a product; and
(vi) collecting the product thus formed.

The catalyst is dispersed or dissolved in a first solvent to form the first liquid. Examples of the first solvent include water, ethanol, and isopropanol. The catalyst can be a regular
5 transitional metal catalyst (e.g., Rh-TPPTS complex, where TPPTS is triphenylphosphine trisulfonate sodium or 3,3',3''-phosphanetriyltris(benzenesulfonic acid) trisodium salt) or a nanoparticle catalyst. Exemplary nanoparticle catalysts each contain rhodium, ruthenium, platinum, palladium, iridium, gold, or a combination thereof.

The second liquid can be formed by dissolving the liquid reactant in a second solvent.
10 Examples of the liquid reactant include an alkene compound, a nitro compound, and an aldehyde. Exemplary second solvents are hydrocarbon solvents, e.g., hexane and heptane.

The gas bubbles, formed in the millitube having an inner diameter of 1-5 mm, each have a length of 30-750 mm. Further, the ratio of the length of each gas bubble to the inner diameter of the millitube is 30-150.

15 The gas can contain a carrier gas, e.g., N₂ or Ar, and a gas reactant, e.g., H₂, CO, O₂, F₂, or Cl₂.

Generally, the flow rate of the gas far exceeds that of liquid phases (e.g., the first liquid and the second liquid), preferably, the former being 20-100 folds (e.g., 30 folds) higher than the latter.

20 The details of the invention are set forth in the description below. Other features, objects, and advantages of the invention will be apparent from the following drawing and detailed description of several embodiments, and also from the appending claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING

25 FIG. 1 is a schematic illustration of the millireactor of a reactor system according to one embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Within this invention is a reactor system containing multiple millireactors for conducting multiphasic flow reactions.

Referring to FIG. 1, each of the millireactors includes a millitube (100) and three feed lines (200, 300, 400). The millitube, 1 mm to 5 mm in inner diameter and 2 m to 20 m in length, has a first end (101), a second end (102), a first chamber (103) attached to the first end (101), and a second chamber (104) disposed between the two ends thereof. The first feed line (200) has a first end (201) for receiving a first liquid, a second end (202) connected to the first chamber (103), and a first hydraulic damper (203) disposed between the two ends of the first feed line (200). The second feed line (300) has a first end (301) for receiving a second liquid, a second end (302) connected to the first chamber (103), and a second hydraulic damper (303) disposed between the two ends of the second feed line (300). The third feed line (400) has a first end (401) for receiving a gas and a second end (402) connected to the second chamber (104).

The reactor system can further include a first liquid container, a second liquid container, a gas container, an outflow container, a first pump, and a second pump, which are not shown in FIG. 1. The first container for holding a first liquid is connected to the first pump and the first end (201) of the first feed line (200). The second container for holding a second liquid is connected to the second pump and the first end (301) of the second feed line (300). The gas container for holding a gas is connected to the first end (401) of the third feed line (400). The outflow container for receiving a liquid mixture containing products is connected to the second end (102) of the millitube (100).

In a typical reactor system, there are multiple parallel millireactors (e.g., eight) for rapid transitional metal-catalyzed gas-liquid reaction (e.g., hydrogenation) and the first and second pumps are each a peristaltic pump.

The two hydraulic dampers (203, 303) in each millireactor serve to damp out pressure fluctuations or flow rate fluctuations resulting from the peristaltic pumps, thereby allowing for formation of a smooth triphasic flow in all millireactors.

An exemplary hydraulic damper consists of three tubes connected in series, namely, a first tube, a second tube, and a third tube. Preferably, the first tube and the third tube have the same length and same inner diameter, and these two tubes have their length and inner diameter

smaller than that of the second tube. For instance, the hydraulic dampers each consist of a first tube of 50 mm in length and 0.1 mm in inner diameter, a second tube of 80 mm in length and 4.8 mm in inner diameter, and a third tube of 50 mm in length and 0.1 mm in inner diameter in series. Each of the three tubes can be a polytetrafluoroethylene tube, a silicone tube, or a viton tube. It is preferred that the second tube is an elastic tube (e.g., a silicone tube or a viton tube).

Also within this invention is a process for conducting a triphasic flow reaction that requires a liquid reactant, a gas reactant, and a catalyst.

Described in detail below is an exemplary process for performing such a flow reaction using a reactor system set forth above.

A first liquid is prepared by dispersing or dissolving a catalyst in a first solvent. The homogeneous solution thus prepared is stored in a first liquid container. A second liquid can be a neat liquid reactant or produced by dissolving a liquid reactant in a second solvent immiscible with the first solvent and stored in a second liquid container. Both the first and second liquids are drawn from the two liquid containers by peristaltic pumps into the first and second feed lines (200, 300) as shown in FIG. 1, respectively. The first and second liquids are mixed in the first chamber (103) to form a two-phase mixture of first liquid spheres (501) and the second liquid (502). See FIG. 1. A gas containing a carrier gas and a gas reactant is transported via the third feed line (400) and mixed with the two-phase mixture in the second chamber (104) to form in the millitube a three-phase mixture, which contains first liquid segments (501'), the second liquid (502), and gas bubbles (503). Also see FIG. 1. The gas bubbles can be elongated by controlling the gas pressure or the gas flow rate, thus enlarging the interacting surface areas between the gas and the second liquid containing the liquid reactant so as to accelerate mass transport of a reaction. The mass transport within the reaction phase is also accelerated by reducing the second liquid (e.g., organic) segments into thin films, with a thickness of the films ranging from 0.01 to 1 mm. The reaction between the liquid reactant and the gas reactant in the presence of the catalyst then takes place to form a product, which is subsequently collected in an outflow container.

The catalyst used in this process is dispersed or dissolved in the first solvent to form a homogeneous solution. Examples of the first solvent include but are not limited to water, methanol, ethanol, isopropanol, tetrahydrofuran, diethyl ether, heptane, isopropyl acetate,

isopropyl amine, acetic acid, and *N,N*-diisopropylethylamine. The second solvent can also be, among others, water, methanol, ethanol, isopropanol, tetrahydrofuran, diethyl ether, heptane, isopropyl acetate, isopropyl amine, acetic acid, or *N,N*-diisopropylethylamine. Importantly, the two solvents are immiscible with each other. The gas can be a pure gas reactant (e.g., O₂) or a mixture of a carrier gas (e.g., Ar) and a gas reactant (e.g., H₂).

To ensure a stable flow in the reactor system, it is important that the flow rate of the gas far exceeds that of the liquid phases. The ratio of the gas flow rate to each of the liquid flow rates is, preferably, 20-100 and, more preferably, 30-100. The process of this invention can tolerate a gas pressure of 10 kPa to 5000 kPa (e.g., 101-103 kPa) and a reaction temperature of -150 °C to 500 °C (e.g., 25 °C).

In an exemplary process of hydrogenation of 1-hexene, the catalyst is rhodium nanoparticles each having a diameter of about 3 nm. Referring back to FIG. 1, the first liquid, prepared by dispersing the rhodium nanoparticles in water, is introduced via the first feed line (200) at 20 μLmin^{-1} into the first chamber (103). Simultaneously, the second liquid, prepared by dissolving 1-hexene in cyclohexane, is introduced via the second feed line (300) at 10 μLmin^{-1} into the first chamber (103) to mix with the first liquid to form a biphasic liquid mixture (501, 502). The hydrogen gas at near atmospheric pressure, e.g., 101-103 kPa, is introduced via the third feed line (400) at a flow speed of about 29 mm/s into the second chamber (104) to mix with the biphasic liquid mixture to form a triphasic mixture containing gas bubbles (503) at room temperature. Hydrogenation of 1-hexene in the presence of the rhodium nanoparticles subsequently takes place to produce the product hexane. Unexpectedly, the hydrogenation of 1-hexene using a millireactor is about 30 folds faster than that using a batch reactor, demonstrating tremendous mass transport acceleration achieved in a reactor system of this invention.

A quick comparison between the reactor system of this invention and commercial microreactors reveals that for the hydrogenation of a double bond (C=C) the millireactor is able to achieve catalyst activity at least 60% higher than that of similar hydrogenation conducted in fixed bed microreactors. Following an exemplary process of this invention, the activity of platinum nanoparticles (PtNPs), a catalyst, for hydrogenation of nitrobenzene, is 110 min⁻¹ (see

Example 2 below), which is twice that achieved by PtNPs immobilized on the walls of a conventional microreactor.

The catalyst used in the triphasic flow reactor system of this invention can be continuously recycled. In one example, a platinum nanoparticle catalyst is unexpectedly recovered and recycled almost to the full extent over the course of 5 hours as evidenced by insignificant loss of its substrate conversion rate.

Without further elaboration, it is believed that one skilled in the art can, based on the above description, utilize the present invention to its fullest extent. The following specific examples are, therefore, to be construed as merely illustrative, and not limitative of the remainder of the disclosure in any way whatsoever. All publications cited herein are incorporated by reference.

EXAMPLE 1: A Comparative Study of Hydrogenation of 1-Hexene between a Millireactor and a Batch Reactor

Rhodium nanoparticles (RhNPs) were synthesized using an ethanol reduction method reported in Mu et al., *Catal. Lett.*, 2004, 97, 151-154. More specifically, a mixture of 5 mM of $\text{RhCl}_3 \cdot x\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (Alfa Aesar, Rh 38.5-45.5 wt%) and 0.555 g of polyvinylpyrrolidone (Alfa Aesar, MW 40k) in 30 mL of ethanol and 20 mL of ultrapure water (Milli-Q, 18.2 M Ω cm at 25 °C) was refluxed at 120 °C for 1 hour. All solvents were then vaporized at 60 °C under reduced pressure to afford a black residue before adding thereto 50 mL of ultrapure water to obtain a 5 mM RhNP stock solution. Following the same protocol, platinum nanoparticles (PtNPs) were prepared using 5 mM of $\text{H}_2\text{PtCl}_6 \cdot x\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (Sigma; $\geq 99.9\%$ trace metal basis), with the addition of 840 μL of 1 M NaOH (Fluka, HPCE) prior to refluxing the solution at 135 °C for 30 minutes. A 5 mM PtNP stock solution was then prepared. The respective 5 mM nanoparticle stock solutions were then diluted to various concentrations (e.g., 0.5 mM) prior to use in both batch and flow experiments.

A batch experiment under atmospheric pressure was performed by attaching to a 50 mL round-bottom flask a balloon with hydrogen gas. 5 mL of 1-hexene and 10 mL of the Rh or Pt nanoparticle solution were introduced into the flask, and the reaction took place at room temperature under a well-stirred condition. The organic phase of the reaction was analyzed using gas chromatography (Shimadzu 2010Plus).

In a flow experiment, a hydrophobic polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE, 1-mm inner diameter) tube was used to prepare a 2-m long millireactor. A liquid-liquid segmented flow was first formed under ambient conditions by infusing into a chamber both an aqueous RhNP catalyst phase at 20 $\mu\text{L}/\text{min}$ and an organic phase containing 800 mM of the substrate 1-hexene (Sigma; $\geq 99\%$), dissolved in cyclohexane (Sigma; $\geq 99.9\%$), at 10 $\mu\text{L}/\text{min}$. Hydrogen gas at near atmospheric pressure (101-103 kPa) was introduced into another chamber, mixed therein with the liquid-liquid segmented flow from the first chamber, to form a triphasic flow. High-speed stereomicroscopic imaging (Basler piA640-210gm) at 100 to 200 frames per second (fps) was used to observe the flow behavior. Samples of the organic phase collected in an outflow container at the end of the 2-m long millireactor were then analyzed using gas chromatography (Shimadzu 2010Plus). The study was conducted at room temperature.

It was found that the hydrogenation of 1-hexene using the millireactor unexpectedly reached an 80% conversion in as short as 1 minute, compared to 30 minutes required by a batch reactor under ambient conditions. The rhodium nanoparticle catalyst used in this reactor system had a catalyst activity of 634 min^{-1} , compared to 21 min^{-1} for the same catalyst used in a batch reactor, in which the catalyst activity was calculated based on the moles of the substrate converted per mole of rhodium atoms per minute.

EXAMPLE 2: A Comparative Study of Hydrogenation of Various Substrates between a Millireactor and a Batch Reactor

Hydrogenation of various substrates was performed following the protocols described in Example 1 to compare the reaction efficiency using a millireactor, compared with that using a batch reactor.

A variety of substrates and two different nanoparticle catalysts (RhNP and PtNP) were used in this comparative study. See Table 1 below.

Table 1. Comparison of hydrogenation of various substrates between the millireactor and the batch reactor^a

Substrate	Millireactor			Batch reactor		
	Residence time (min)	Conversion (%)	Activity ^b (min ⁻¹)	Residence time (min)	Conversion (%)	Activity ^b (min ⁻¹)
1-Hexene ^c	0.9	82	634	30	80	21
Cyclohexene ^d	1.2	30	258	60	14	23
Styrene ^e	4.9	71	126	60	61	9
Styrene ^{e,f}	-	-	-	30	53	16
Nitrobenzene ^g	0.9	98	110	45	97	2
4-Nitrochlorobenzene ^h	0.5	76	229	60	80	2

a) Reactions were performed at room temperature and atmospheric pressure using a 0.5 mM aqueous nanoparticle solution, unless otherwise specified; 2 m and 20 m long millireactors were used for the hydrogenation of 1-hexene and styrene, respectively, whereas a 10 m millireactor was used for the hydrogenation of all other substrates; b) Activity is calculated based on the moles of substrate converted per mole of Rh atoms per minute; c) Cyclohexane, 800 mM 1-hexene, RhNP; d) Neat cyclohexene, RhNP; e) Cyclohexane, 870 mM styrene, RhNP; f) 10 barg; g) Diethyl ether, 100 mM nitrobenzene, PtNP; and h) 50 vol% diethyl ether, 50 vol% dichloromethane, 150 mM nitrochlorobenzene, PtNP.

Referring to Table 1, as a consequence of rapid mass transfer rates, in all cases, the millireactor afforded a higher reaction conversion rate within 10-100 folds lower residence times than the batch reactor under the same reaction conditions. The catalyst activity, defined as the moles of the substrate converted per mole of metal atoms per minute, was 10-50 times higher using the millireactor than using the batch reactor. In particular, selective hydrogenation of styrene to ethylbenzene in the millireactor only took about 5 minutes to achieve a 71% conversion rate under near atmospheric conditions, whereas the same reaction took 60 minutes to reach a 61% conversion rate in the batch reactor under an atmospheric pressure and took 30 minutes to achieve a conversion rate of 53% in the batch reactor under an pressure of 10 barg.

In addition, as shown in Table 1, the hydrogenation of 4-nitrochlorobenzene in the millireactor afforded a selectivity of 89% toward 4-chloroaniline and a 76% conversion rate of the substrate in less than one minute, whereas the batch reactor gave only a selectivity of 20% toward the same product with a similar substrate conversion rate in 60 minutes.

EXAMPLE 3: A Comparative Study of Catalyst Activity in Hydrogenation of Double Bond between a Millireactor and a Batch reactor or a Microreactor

Hydrogenation of 1-hexene was performed following the protocols described in Example 1 to compare catalyst reactivity in the millireactor with that in a batch reactor or a microreactor.

Various catalysts were used in this comparative study. See Table 2 below. For known catalysts: [1] see Boudart, *Appl. Catal.*, 1989, 46, 131; [2] see Cruz, *Appl. Catal.*, 1989, 46, 131; [3] see Künzle et al., *Catal. Today*, 2003, 79–80, 503; and [4] see Lee et al., *Organomet.*, 2001, 20, 794.

Table 2. Comparison of catalyst activity

Catalyst	Reaction phase	Substrate	Solvent	Activity (min^{-1})
RhNP ^a	Liquid	1-Hexene	Cyclohexane	100-650 ^b ; 1550 ^c
Rh- γ -Al ₂ O ₃ [1]	Liquid	Cyclohexene	Cyclohexane	70-80 ^d
Bulk Rh [2]	Gas	Cyclohexene	Nil	1870 ^d
Pt- γ -Al ₂ O ₃ [3]	Liquid	Ethyl pyruvate	Acetic acid	378 ^e
HRu(CO)Cl(PCy ₃)(IMes) [4]	Liquid	1-Hexene	Benzene	400 ^f

a) Reaction was conducted in a millireactor; b) Residence time in a millireactor was between 1 and 3.1 min; c) Residence time in a millireactor was 16 s; d) Reaction was conducted in a batch reactor; e) Reaction was conducted in a continuous fixed-bed reactor at 28 °C and 145 bar; and f) Reaction was conducted in a batch reactor at 100 °C and 4 atm.

Referring to Table 2, in the hydrogenation of dilute cyclohexene catalyzed by a supported Rh catalyst, the activity was in the range of 70-80 min^{-1} , an order of magnitude lower than that achieved in the millireactor, i.e., 100-650 min^{-1} . An unexpectedly high activity of 1550 min^{-1} was achieved in the millireactor for RhNP catalyzed 1-hexene hydrogenation, which is comparable to reported results for the gas phase hydrogenation of cyclohexene by bulk Rh metal.

In addition, as shown in Table 2, the catalyst activity of the hydrogenation of C=C carried out in the millireactor unexpectedly outperformed that of a supported Pt catalyst in a fixed bed reactor (i.e., 378 min^{-1}) and that of reactions catalyzed by a homogeneous ruthenium complex in a batch reactor (i.e., 400 min^{-1}).

EXAMPLE 4: A Study of Catalyst Recovery and Recycle Using a Millireactor

A study was performed to evaluate catalyst recovery and recycle using a millireactor as follows.

A PtNP catalyst used in this study was synthesized following the protocol described in Example 1. 2.775 g of polyvinylpyrrolidone was utilized to prepare 50 mL of a 5 mM nanoparticle stock solution.

Hydrogenation of nitrobenzene in the presence of the PtNP catalyst using the millireactor was performed following the protocol described in Example 1. The reaction mixture was subsequently collected at the outflow container. Forming a layer immiscible with the organic phase, the aqueous catalyst phase was recovered simply by decantation. The recovered catalyst was recycled for use in the same reaction under the same conditions.

Unexpectedly, the substrate conversion rate was maintained at 80-100% across as many as 6 catalytic cycles.

OTHER EMBODIMENTS

All of the features disclosed in this specification may be combined in any combination. Each feature disclosed in this specification may be replaced by an alternative feature serving the same, equivalent, or similar purpose. Thus, unless expressly stated otherwise, each feature disclosed is only an example of a generic series of equivalent or similar features.

Further, from the above description, one skilled in the art can easily ascertain the essential characteristics of the present invention, and without departing from the spirit and scope thereof, can make various changes and modifications of the invention to adapt it to various usages and conditions. Thus, other embodiments are also within the claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A reactor system comprising multiple millireactors, each of which includes:

a millitube having a first end, a second end, a first chamber attached to the first end, and a second chamber disposed between the two ends of the millitube;

5 a first feed line having a first end for receiving a first liquid, a second end connected in fluid communication to the first chamber, and a first hydraulic damper disposed between the two ends of the first feed line;

a second feed line having a first end for receiving a second liquid, a second end connected in fluid communication to the first chamber, and a second hydraulic damper disposed
10 between the two ends of the second feed line; and

a third feed line having a first end for receiving a gas and a second end connected in fluid communication to the second chamber,

whereby the first chamber is capable of receiving both the first and second liquids, and the second chamber is capable of receiving both the gas and a mixture of the first and second liquids.

15 2. The reactor system of claim 1, further comprising:

a first liquid container connected to the first end of the first feed line, the first container connected in fluid communication to a first pump;

a second liquid container connected to the first end of the second feed line, the second
20 container connected in fluid communication to a second pump;

a gas container connected to the first end of the third feed line; and

an outflow container connected to the second end of the millitube.

3. The reactor system of claim 2, wherein the first and second pumps are each a peristaltic
25 pump.

4. The reactor system of claim 1, wherein the millitube is a polytetrafluoroethylene tube.

5. The reactor system of claim 4, wherein the millitube has a length of 2-20 m and an inner
30 diameter of 1-5 mm.

6. The reactor system of claim 4, wherein the first and second hydraulic dampers each consist of a first tube, a second tube, and a third tube in series, the second tube having an inner diameter larger than that of the first tube and that of the third tube.

5 7. The reactor system of claim 6, wherein the first tube has the same length and inner diameter as those of the third tube.

8. The reactor system of claim 6, wherein the second tube in the first hydraulic damper is a silicone tube and the second tube in the second hydraulic damper is a viton tube.

10 9. The reactor system of claim 5, wherein the first and second hydraulic dampers each consist of a first tube, a second tube, and a third tube in series, the second tube in each of the hydraulic dampers having an inner diameter larger than that of the first tube and that of the third tube, the first tube in each of the hydraulic dampers having the same length and inner diameter as
15 those of the third tube, the second tube in the first hydraulic damper being a silicone tube, and the second tube in the second hydraulic damper being a viton tube.

10. The reactor system of claim 2, wherein the millitube is a polytetrafluoro-ethylene tube, a polyether ether ketone tube, a fluorinated ethylene propylene tube, a glass tube, or a metal tube.

20 11. The reactor system of claim 10, wherein the millitube has a length of 2-20 m and an inner diameter of 1-5 mm.

12. The reactor system of claim 10, wherein the first and second hydraulic dampers each
25 consist of a first tube, a second tube, and a third tube in series, the second tube having an inner diameter larger than that of the first tube and that of the third tube.

13. The reactor system of claim 12, wherein the first tube has the same length and inner diameter as those of the third tube.

14. The reactor system of claim 12, wherein the second tube in the first hydraulic damper is a silicone tube and the second tube in the second hydraulic damper is a viton tube.

15. The reactor system of claim 11, wherein the first and second hydraulic dampers each consist of a first tube, a second tube, and a third tube in series, the second tube in each of the hydraulic dampers having an inner diameter larger than that of the first tube and that of the third tube, the first tube in each of the hydraulic dampers having the same length and inner diameter as those of the third tube, the second tube in the first hydraulic damper being a silicone tube, and the second tube in the second hydraulic damper being a viton tube.

16. A process for conducting a triphasic flow reaction that requires a liquid reactant, a gas reactant, and a catalyst, the process comprising:

preparing a first liquid in which the catalyst is dispersed or dissolved, a second liquid containing the liquid reactant, and a gas containing the gas reactant, the first liquid and the

second liquid being immiscible;

mixing the first liquid with the second liquid to form a two-phase mixture;

mixing the gas with the two-phase mixture to form a three-phase mixture;

placing the three-phase mixture in a millitube to form gas bubbles;

reacting the liquid reactant, the gas reactant, and the catalyst to form a product; and

collecting the product thus formed,

wherein the millitube has an inner diameter of 1-5 mm, the gas bubbles each have a length of 30-750 mm, and a ratio of the length of the gas bubbles to the inner diameter of the millitube is 30-150.

17. The process of claim 16, wherein the first liquid is prepared by dispersing or dissolving the catalyst in a first solvent and the second liquid is prepared by dissolving the liquid reactant in a second solvent.

18. The process of claim 16, wherein the gas contains, in addition to the gas reactant, a carrier gas, the gas reactant being H₂, CO, O₂, F₂, or Cl₂, and the carrier gas being N₂ or Ar.

19. The process of claim 18, wherein a flow rate of the gas is 20-100 fold higher than a flow rate of the first liquid or the second liquid.

20. The process of claim 17, wherein the first solvent is water or an alcoholic solvent and the catalyst is a nanoparticle catalyst.

21. The process of claim 20, wherein the nanoparticle catalyst contains rhodium, ruthenium, platinum, palladium, iridium, gold, or a combination thereof.

22. The process of claim 17, wherein the second solvent is a hydrocarbon solvent and the liquid reactant is an alkene compound, a nitro compound, or an aldehyde.

23. The process of claim 22, wherein the gas contains, in addition to the gas reactant, a carrier gas, the gas reactant being H₂, CO, O₂, F₂, or Cl₂, and the carrier gas being N₂ or Ar.

24. The process of claim 23, wherein a flow rate of the gas is 20-100 fold higher than a flow rate of the first liquid or the second liquid.

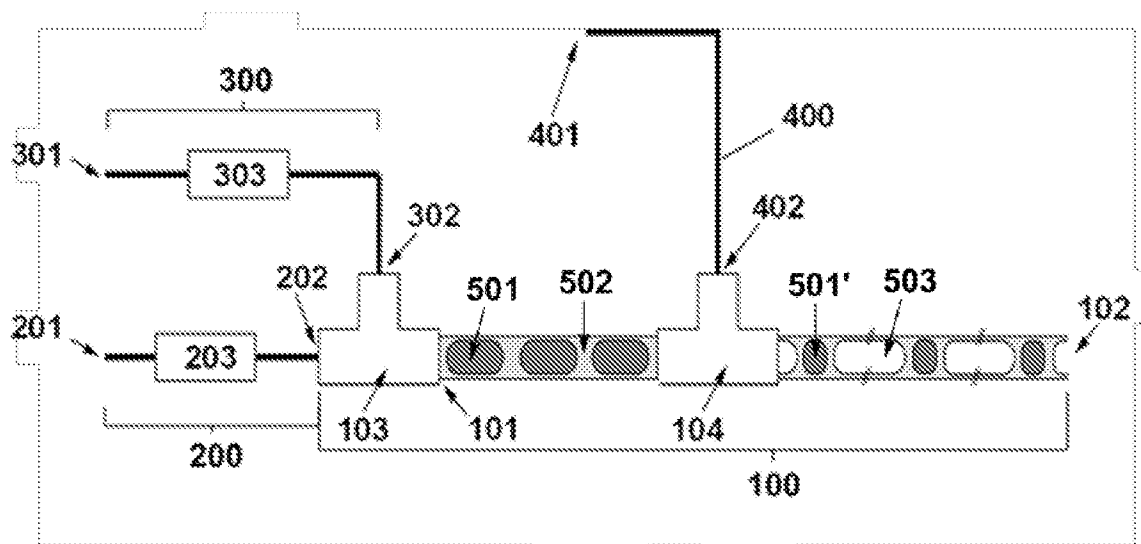


FIG. 1

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/SG2015/050171

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

B01J 8/20 (2006.01) B01J 19/24 (2006.01)

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

Databases: EPODOC, WPI, Google Patents, Google Scholar, Auspat; IPC/CC Marks - B01J2219/00858/LOW, B01J2219/00867, B01J2219/00997, ("B01J8/00": "B01J8/0045"), B01J8/008, ("B01J8/08": "B01J8/085"), ("B01J8/18": "B01J8/1827"), B01J8/1872, B01J8/20/LOW, B01J19/24/LOW; Key words - MILLI+, MICRO+, REACTION, VESSEL?, TANK?, CHAMBER?, LIQUID+, LIQUESCENT, WATER+, GAS+, DAMPER+, FLUCTUAT+, CONTROL+, REGULAT+, SMOOTH+, TRI_PHASE?, TRI_PHASIC+;

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
	Documents are listed in the continuation of Box C	



Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C



See patent family annex

* "A"	Special categories of cited documents: document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"T"	later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
"E"	earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date	"X"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
"L"	document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"Y"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
"O"	document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	"&"	document member of the same patent family
"P"	document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed		
Date of the actual completion of the international search 4 September 2015		Date of mailing of the international search report 04 September 2015	
Name and mailing address of the ISA/AU AUSTRALIAN PATENT OFFICE PO BOX 200, WODEN ACT 2606, AUSTRALIA Email address: pct@ipaustalia.gov.au		Authorised officer Praveen Jain AUSTRALIAN PATENT OFFICE (ISO 9001 Quality Certified Service) Telephone No. 0262223653	

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT		International application No.
C (Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		PCT/SG2015/050171
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	CN 1962035 A (UNIV XI AN JIAOTONG) 16 May 2007 See Abstract, English Abstract retrieved from EPODOC database	
A	WO 2004/091771 A1 (UHDE GMBH and DEGUSSA AG) 28 October 2004 See Abstract	
A	US 6759027 B1 (BILARDELLO et al.) 06 July 2004 See Abstract	
A	MY 118594 A (AGIP PETROLI; INST FRANCAIS DU PETROLE) 31 December 2004 See Abstract, English Abstract retrieved from EPODOC database	
P,X	Swee Kun Yap et al., "Triphasic Segmented Flow Millireactors for Rapid Nanoparticle-Catalyzed Gas-Liquid Reactions — Hydrodynamic Studies and Reactor Modeling", Journal of Flow Chemistry, Volume 4, Number 4/December 2014, Pages 200-205 Published date (web): 10 December 2014 See whole document	1 - 15

Form PCT/ISA/210 (fifth sheet) (July 2009)

Box No. II Observations where certain claims were found unsearchable (Continuation of item 2 of first sheet)

This international search report has not been established in respect of certain claims under Article 17(2)(a) for the following reasons:

1. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they relate to subject matter not required to be searched by this Authority, namely:
the subject matter listed in Rule 39 on which, under Article 17(2)(a)(i), an international search is not required to be carried out, including
2. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they relate to parts of the international application that do not comply with the prescribed requirements to such an extent that no meaningful international search can be carried out, specifically:
3. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they are dependent claims and are not drafted in accordance with the second and third sentences of Rule 6.4(a)

Box No. III Observations where unity of invention is lacking (Continuation of item 3 of first sheet)

This International Searching Authority found multiple inventions in this international application, as follows:

See Supplemental Box for Details

1. ☐ As all required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers all searchable claims.
2. ☐ As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying additional fees, this Authority did not invite payment of additional fees.
3. ☐ As only some of the required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers only those claims for which fees were paid, specifically claims Nos.:
4. ☒ No required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant. Consequently, this international search report is restricted to the invention first mentioned in the claims; it is covered by claims Nos.:
1 - 15

Remark on Protest

- ☐ The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest and, where applicable, the payment of a protest fee.
- ☐ The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest but the applicable protest fee was not paid within the time limit specified in the invitation.
- ☐ No protest accompanied the payment of additional search fees.

Supplemental Box**Continuation of: Box III**

This International Application does not comply with the requirements of unity of invention because it does not relate to one invention or to a group of inventions so linked as to form a single general inventive concept.

This Authority has found that there are different inventions based on the following features that separate the claims into distinct groups:

- Claims 1 - 15 are directed towards a reactor system comprising multiple millireactors.. The feature of The feature of a reactor system comprising multiple millireactors, each of which includes: a millitube having a first end, a second end, a first chamber attached to the first end, and a second chamber disposed between the two ends of the millitube; a first feed line having a first end for receiving a first liquid, a second end connected in fluid communication to the first chamber, and a first hydraulic damper disposed between the two ends of the first feed line; a second feed line having a first end for receiving a second liquid, a second end connected in fluid communication to the first chamber, and a second hydraulic damper disposed between the two ends of the second feed line; and a third feed line having a first end for receiving a gas and a second end connected in fluid communication to the second chamber, whereby the first chamber is capable of receiving both the first and second liquids, and the second chamber is capable of receiving both the gas and a mixture of the first and second liquids is specific to this group of claims, is specific to this group of claims.
- Claims 16 - 24 are directed towards a process for conducting a triphasic flow reaction that requires a liquid reactant, a gas reactant, and a catalyst.. The feature of The feature of a process for conducting a triphasic flow reaction that requires a liquid reactant, a gas reactant, and a catalyst, the process comprising: preparing a first liquid in which the catalyst is dispersed or dissolved, a second liquid containing the liquid reactant, and a gas containing the gas reactant, the first liquid and the second liquid being immiscible; mixing the first liquid with the second liquid to form a two-phase mixture; mixing the gas with the two-phase mixture to form a three-phase mixture; placing the three-phase mixture in a millitube to form gas bubbles; reacting the liquid reactant, the gas reactant, and the catalyst to form a product; and collecting the product thus formed, wherein the millitube has an inner diameter of 1-5 mm, the gas bubbles each have a length of 30-750 mm, and a ratio of the length of the gas bubbles to the inner diameter of the millitube is 30-150 is specific to this group of claims, is specific to this group of claims.

PCT Rule 13.2, first sentence, states that unity of invention is only fulfilled when there is a technical relationship among the claimed inventions involving one or more of the same or corresponding special technical features. PCT Rule 13.2, second sentence, defines a special technical feature as a feature which makes a contribution over the prior art.

When there is no special technical feature common to all the claimed inventions there is no unity of invention.

In the above groups of claims, the identified features may have the potential to make a contribution over the prior art but are not common to all the claimed inventions and therefore cannot provide the required technical relationship. Therefore there is no special technical feature common to all the claimed inventions and the requirements for unity of invention are consequently not satisfied *a priori*.

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT		International application No. PCT/SG2015/050171	
Information on patent family members			
This Annex lists known patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned international search report. The Australian Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information.			
Patent Document/s Cited in Search Report		Patent Family Member/s	
Publication Number	Publication Date	Publication Number	Publication Date
CN 1962035 A	16 May 2007	CN 1962035 A	16 May 2007
WO 2004/091771 A1	28 October 2004	WO 2004091771 A1	28 Oct 2004
		AU 2004229150 A1	28 Oct 2004
		AU 2004229150 B2	08 Oct 2009
		BR PI0409581 A	18 Apr 2006
		CA 2522339 A1	28 Oct 2004
		CN 1791461 A	21 Jun 2006
		DE 10317451 A1	18 Nov 2004
		EA 009346 B1	28 Dec 2007
		EP 1613424 A1	11 Jan 2006
		HK 1093173 A1	03 Jul 2009
		IL 171380 A	31 May 2012
		JP 2006523522 A	19 Oct 2006
		KR 20060012586 A	08 Feb 2006
		KR 101055118 B1	08 Aug 2011
		MX PA05011217 A	30 Mar 2006
		NO 20055394 A	15 Nov 2005
		NZ 542958 A	26 Mar 2010
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		US 7678361 B2	16 Mar 2010
		ZA 200508366 A	28 Feb 2007
US 6759027 B1	06 July 2004	US 6759027 B1	06 Jul 2004
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		EP 1060787 B1	06 May 2004
		FR 2795001 A1	22 Dec 2000
		FR 2795001 B1	17 Aug 2001
		JP 2001046856 A	20 Feb 2001
		JP 4571275 B2	27 Oct 2010
		US 2004219080 A1	04 Nov 2004
		US 7022295 B2	04 Apr 2006
MY 118594 A	31 December 2004	MY 118594 A	31 Dec 2004
		CA 2248067 A1	14 Apr 1999
		CN 1220910 A	30 Jun 1999
		EP 0909581 A1	21 Apr 1999

Due to data integration issues this family listing may not include 10 digit Australian applications filed since May 2001.
Form PCT/ISA/210 (Family Annex)(July 2009)

Due to data integration issues this family listing may not include 10 digit Australian applications filed since May 2001.
Form PCT/ISA/210 (Family Annex)(July 2009)

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT Information on patent family members		International application No. PCT/SG2015/050171	
This Annex lists known patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned international search report. The Australian Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information.			
Patent Document/s Cited in Search Report		Patent Family Member/s	
Publication Number	Publication Date	Publication Number	Publication Date
		EP 0909581 B1	15 May 2002
		ID 22170 A	09 Sep 1999
		IT MI972315 A1	15 Apr 1999
		IT 1295324 B1	04 May 1999
		JP H11192426 A	21 Jul 1999
		JP 3065587 B2	17 Jul 2000
		NO 984774 A	15 Apr 1999
		NO 315934 B1	17 Nov 2003
		US 6132690 A	17 Oct 2000
		ZA 9809392 A	15 Apr 1999
End of Annex			
Due to data integration issues this family listing may not include 10 digit Australian applications filed since May 2001. Form PCT/ISA/210 (Family Annex)(July 2009)			