

ULTRASONIC MACHINING, LAPPING AND POLISHING OF
NEODYMIUM DOPED YTTRIUM ALUMINUM GARNET
LASER CRYSTAL ROD

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*Specially dedicated to my beloved grandfather, parents,
brothers, family and friends...*

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ABSTRACT

Fabrication of perfect laser crystal rod is a very challenging work where high shape accuracy and flawless surface are expected. Besides, most improvements in the processes or understanding of the physical process involved in fabrication of laser crystal rod are closely guarded as proprietary information, and specific details can be hardly found in technical journals and other literatures. The main purposes of the study are to investigate the potential of rotary ultrasonic machining (RUM) process to core drill Neodymium Doped Yttrium Aluminum Garnet (Nd:YAG) laser crystal material, and to study the effect of lapping and polishing parameters on the surface finish of the machined end faces of Nd:YAG laser rods. The effect of RUM machining parameters (spindle speed and feedrate) on surface integrity (surface roughness and opaqueness) and defects (ring marks, edge chipping size and chipping thickness) are studied. The feasible parameters to obtain the best surface roughness, opaqueness, straightness and diameter for Nd:YAG laser rod is 3000 rpm spindle speed and 5.4 mm/min, which is at low spindle speed and high feed rate. Nd:YAG crystal reaches the saturation point at fine surface finish of 0.124 micron at rotational speed of 60 rpm at 11 minutes of lapping time. Whilst for polishing process, Nd:YAG laser crystal reaches the saturation point with mirror-like and flawless surface finish of 5 nm at 23 minutes of polishing time. It is concluded that the RUM process exhibits a great potential method in producing laser crystal rods with better controlled machining condition. Meanwhile, LP50 lapping and polishing machine and its equipment is adequate to produce very fine surface finish of less than 10 nm on hard and brittle materials.

ABSTRAK

Fabrikasi rod kristal laser yang sempurna merupakan kerja penuh cabaran khususnya mencapai kualiti ketepatan bentuk yang tinggi dengan permukaan tanpa kecalaran. Majoriti pemahaman tentang pemprosesan fizikal yang terlibat dalam fabrikasi rod kristal laser dikawal ketat oleh pihak pengilang sebagai harta intelek. Malahan informasi perinciannya juga terhad dalam jurnal teknikal dan bahan bacaan lain. Matlamat utama kajian tersebut adalah untuk mengkaji potensi pemesinan *rotary ultrasonic* (RUM) untuk memproses bahan kristal laser, *Neodymium Doped Yttrium Aluminum Garnet (Nd:YAG)*, serta untuk mengkaji kesan parameter pemelasan dan penggilapan terhadap kekasaran permukaan rod laser Nd:YAG yang dimesinkan. Kesan parameter pemesinan (kelajuan spindal dan kadar uluran) atas kekasaran permukaan dan kadar legapannya, serta kecacatan (tanda cincin dan sumbing bahagian tepi rod) yang terhasil telah dikajiselidik. Kelajuan spindal 3000 putaran per minit (ppm) dengan kadar uluran 5.4 mm seminit merupakan kombinasi parameter bersesuaian untuk menghasilkan rod laser Nd:YAG yang bertahap legapan tinggi, kelurusan rod dan kekasaran permukaan yang memuaskan. Kristal laser Nd:YAG mencapai titik tepu pada kekasaran permukaan 0.124 micron setelah dipelaskan selama 11minit pada kelajuan pemelasan 60 ppm. Sementara itu, kristal laser Nd:YAG menemui titik tepu pada 5 nm setelah digilap 23 minit pada kelajuan spindal 40 ppm dengan permukaan selicin cermin tanpa kecalaran. Kesimpulannya, RUM menunjukkan potensi yang memberangsangkan dalam penghasilan rod kristal laser dengan pengawalan parameter yang optimum. Mesin pemelasan dan penggilapan LP50 sesuai diaplikasi untuk penghasilan permukaan halus yang kurang dari 10 nm pada bahan berkekerasan dan kerapuhan tinggi.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	TITLE	PAGE
	DECLARATION	ii
	DEDICATION	iii
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vii
	ABSTRACT	viii
	ABSTRAK	ix
	TABLE OF CONTENTS	x
	LIST OF TABLES	xvi
	LIST OF FIGURES	xviii
	LIST OF APPENDICES	xxii
 1	 RESEARCH OVERVIEW	 1
	1.1 Introduction	1
	1.2 Research Background	3
	1.3 Problem Statement	4
	1.4 Objective of Study	5
	1.5 Scope of Study	5
	1.6 Significance of the Study	6
	1.7 Organization of the Thesis	7

2	LITERATURE REVIEWS	8
2.1	Introduction	8
2.2	Solid State Lasers	9
2.2.1	Neodymium Doped Yttrium Aluminum Garnet (Nd:YAG) Laser	11
2.2.2	Applications of Nd:YAG Lasers	14
2.2.3	Crystal Growth and Inspection of Nd:YAG Boule (Ingot)	16
2.2.4	Specification of Nd:YAG Crystal Rods	18
2.3	Rotary Ultrasonic Machining (RUM)	19
2.3.1	Operating Principles of Rotary Ultrasonic Machining	20
2.3.2	Material Removal Mechanism of Rotary Ultrasonic Machining	21
2.3.3	Machinability Parameters	23
2.3.3.1	Edge Chipping	23
2.3.3.2	Tool Wear	24
2.3.3.3	Surface Roughness	25
2.3.3.4	Material Removal Rate (MRR)	26
2.3.4	Effects of Control Variables on RUM Drilling Performances	27
2.3.4.1	Effects of Static Pressure	28
2.3.4.2	Effects of Ultrasonic Vibration (Amplitude and Frequency)	29
2.3.4.3	Effects of Abrasive (Diamond Type, Grit Size and Concentration)	30
2.3.4.4	Effects of Coolant	31
2.3.4.5	Effect of Rotational Speed	31

2.3.5	Reviews of Other Researchers' Works on Rotary Ultrasonic Machining	32
2.4	Lapping Process	35
2.4.1	Fundamental of Lapping Process	36
2.4.2	Material-Removal Mechanisms in Lapping Process	38
2.4.3	Effects of Control Variables on Flat Lapping Performances	39
2.4.3.1	Effect of Abrasive Grain Size on Surface Roughness	39
2.4.3.2	Effect of Applied Load and Rotation Speed of Plate on Surface Roughness	40
2.4.3.3	Effect of Lapping Pressure on MRR	40
2.4.3.4	Effect of Lapping Speed on MRR	41
2.4.3.5	Effect of Abrasive Supply on MRR	42
2.4.4	Review of Other Researchers' Works on Flat Lapping	43
2.5	Polishing Process	44
2.5.1	Polishing Mechanism	44
2.5.1.1	Mechanochemical Polishing	46
2.5.1.2	Chemical Mechanical Polishing	47
2.5.2	Requirements for Polishing	48
2.5.3	Effects of Control Variables on Flat Polishing Performances	49
2.5.3.1	Effect of Polishing Pressure on Polishing Rate	49

2.5.3.2	Effect of Polishing Abrasive on Polishing Rate	49
2.5.3.3	Effect of Polishing Speed on Polishing Rate	50
2.5.4	Review on Polishing Techniques	51
2.6	Flatness and Parallelism of Surface	52
2.7	Surface Characterization	53
2.8	Methods of Evaluation on Surface Topography	55
3	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	60
3.1	Introduction	60
3.2	Workpiece Materials	62
3.2.1	BK7 Borosilicate Crown Optical Glass	62
3.2.2	Lithium Niobate	63
3.2.3	Nd:YAG	64
3.3	Experimental Procedures	65
3.3.1	Rotary Ultrasonic Coring	66
3.3.1.1	Backing Materials	68
3.3.2	Lapping Operation	69
3.3.3	Polishing Process	71
3.4	Analytical and Measuring Instruments	72
3.4.1	Opaqueness Measurement	72
3.4.2	Diameter Measurement	73
3.4.3	Surface Roughness Measurement	74
3.4.4	Edge Chipping, Tool Wear, And Surface Morphology Analysis	74

4	RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS	75
4.1	Introduction	75
4.2	Preliminary Study of Rotary Ultrasonic Core Drilling, Lapping and Polishing on BK7 Optical Glass	76
4.2.1	First Trial of Rotary Ultrasonic Core Drilling on BK7 Optical Glass	76
4.2.2	Second Trial of Rotary Ultrasonic Core Drilling on BK7 Optical Glass	80
4.2.3	Trial of Lapping on BK7 Optical Glass Rod	85
4.2.4	Trial of Polishing on BK7 Optical Glass Rod	88
4.3	Study of Ultrasonic Core Drilling on Lithium Niobate and Nd:YAG Laser Crystals	91
4.3.1	Effect of Feedrates and Spindle Speeds on Surface Roughness and Opacity for Lithium Niobate Crystal	91
4.3.2	Effect of Feedrate and Spindle Speed on Surface Integrity for Nd:YAG Laser Crystal	93
4.3.3	Correlation between Surface Roughness and Opacity	95
4.3.4	Geometrical Accuracy Analysis	96
4.3.5	Evaluation on Machinability of Core Drilling on Nd:YAG Crystal Rod	98
4.3.6	Chipping Defects and Ring Marks	99
4.4	Lapping Process	103
4.4.1	Effect of Lapping Table Speeds on Lithium Niobate Crystal Rod	103

4.4.2	Effect of Lapping Table Speeds on Nd:YAG Laser Crystal Rod	106
4.5	Polishing Process	109
4.5.1	Effect of Polishing Plate Speeds on Lithium Niobate Crystal Rod	109
4.5.2	Effect of Polishing Plate Speeds on Nd:YAG Laser Crystal Rod	112
5	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	116
5.1	Introduction	116
5.2	Conclusions	116
5.2.1	Core Drilling	117
5.2.2	Lapping Process	118
5.2.3	Polishing Process	119
5.3	Recommendations for Future Study	120
	REFERENCES	121
	APPENDICES	132

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE NO.	TITLE	PAGE
2.1	Major solid-state lasers and applications	10
2.2	Physical and optical properties of Nd:YAG	12
2.3	Applications of Nd:YAG laser in various industrial fields	14
2.4	Summary of advantages and disadvantages of polishing techniques	51
2.5	Several instrumentation for assessing the surface topography	55
2.6	Theories for light scattering measurement	56
3.1	Some of the physical, chemical, thermal and mechanical properties of BK7 Schott glass	63
3.2	Some of the physical, chemical, thermal and mechanical properties of lithium niobate	64
3.3	Preliminary study and experimental conditions for core drilling	67
3.4	Lapping parameters for preliminary study and experimental works	70
3.5	Polishing parameters for preliminary study and experimental works	72
4.1	Measurement results obtained from commercial Nd:YAG laser rod	76
4.2	Machinability results for first trial of core drilling on BK7 optical glass	77

4.3	Surface roughness and opaqueness of the cored drilled BK7 rods for second trial	81
4.4	Results of diameters of the BK7 glass rods for second trial	82
4.5	Results of straightness of the BK7 glass rods for second trial	83
4.6	Surface roughness of lapped end face of BK7 optical glass rod	85
4.7	Surface roughness of polished end face of BK7 optical glass rod	89
4.8	Surface roughness and opaqueness of the cored drilled lithium niobate crystal rods	92
4.9	Surface roughness and opaqueness of the cored drilled Nd:YAG laser crystal rods	94
4.10	Results of straightness of lithium niobate and Nd:YAG rods	97
4.11	Results of diameters of lithium niobate and Nd:YAG rods	98
4.12	Surface roughness of lapped end face of lithium niobate crystal rod	103
4.13	Surface roughness of lapped end face of Nd:YAG laser crystal rod	106
4.14	Surface roughness of polished end face of lithium niobate crystal rod	110
4.15	Surface roughness of polished end face of Nd:YAG laser crystal rod	112

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE NO.	TITLE	PAGE
1.1	Application spectrum of lasers (Steen, 1991)	2
2.1	Simplified energy-level diagram in 1.06 μm Nd:YAG laser	13
2.2	Generation of second, third and forth harmonics of an Nd:YAG laser	14
2.3	Schematic diagram of Czochralski process and Crystal growth process	17
2.4	Some inspection examples of Nd:YAG boules using crossed polarizers	17
2.5	Illustration of rotary ultrasonic machining	20
2.6	Material removal mechanisms in rotary ultrasonic machining	22
2.7	Edge chipping induced by RUM on advanced ceramic	24
2.8	Effects of static pressure	28
2.9	Effects of vibration amplitude and vibration frequency	29
2.10	Effects of diamond concentration and grit size	30
2.11	Plastic zone, radial, and lateral cracks caused by indentation	39
2.12	Stock removal versus: (a) lapping pressure, and (b) lapping speed	41
2.13	Material removal features: (a) Relationship between lapping time and lapping speed; (b) Relationship between	42

	lapping speed and abrasive size	
2.14	Polishing mechanisms and polishing method	46
2.15	Schematic comparison of chemical and mechanical polishing mechanism	47
2.16	Basic requirements for the wafers to be polished, the relationships between slurries and pads, and influencing factor	48
2.17	Relationship between polishing pressure and polishing rate of various crystals using colloidal silica	49
2.18	The polishing relations among abrasives size, stock removal and surfaces roughness	50
2.19	Relationship between polishing speed and polishing rate	50
2.20	Polished surface evaluating	52
2.21	Surface roughness parameters	53
2.22	Surface roughness parameter: (a) R_a , (b) R_{max} , and (c) R_t	54
2.23	Waviness parameter	54
2.24	Relationship between lightness and R_a indicating correlation coefficient	56
2.25	Spectral sensitivity corresponding to that of the human eye (color-matching functions of the 1931 Standard Observer)	58
2.26	$L^*a^*b^*$ color space (left) and a^* , b^* chromaticity diagram (right)	58
3.1	Schematic diagram summarizing the experimental approach	61
3.2	BK7 optical glass workpiece	63
3.3	As-received cylindrical lithium niobate crystal workpiece	64
3.4	Nd:YAG laser crystal	65
3.5	Setup of rotary ultrasonic core drilling	67

3.6	Backing materials under BK7 glass specimen	68
3.7	(a) LP50 lapping and polishing machine., and (b) cast iron lapping plate and LP50 auto lapping plate flatness control system	70
3.8	Lapping jigs	70
3.9	LP50 with polyurethane pad and setup for: (a) flatness control, and (b) polishing process	71
3.10	(a) Minolta Chroma Meter CR-241. (b) Schematic diagram of light projection in Chroma Meter CR-241.	73
3.11	Mitutoyo digital micrometer	73
4.1	Effect of core drilling feedrate and spindle speed on surface roughness, opaqueness, chipping size and chipping thickness	78
4.2	Surface roughness versus opaqueness for first trial	80
4.3	Effect of feedrate and spindle speed on surface roughness and opaqueness of BK7 optical glass rods for second trial	81
4.4	Surface roughness versus opaqueness for second trial on BK7 glass	82
4.5	Edge chipping occurrence (a) without backing material, (b) backing with BK7 glass, (c) backing with Perspex, and (d) backing with Polyurethane pad and Perspex	84
4.6	Lapping curves showing saturation effect for BK7 glass	86
4.7	Surface morphology of lapped BK7 glass when lapping at different lapping speeds	87
4.8	Changes in surface roughness of polished BK7 optical glass as a function of polishing time at varied polishing table speeds	89
4.9	Surface morphology of BK7 glass at different polishing speeds and time	90

4.10	Effect of feedrate and spindle speed on surface roughness and opaqueness of lithium niobate crystal rods	92
4.11	Effect of feedrate and spindle speed on surface roughness and opaqueness of Nd:YAG laser crystal	94
4.12	Surface roughness versus opaqueness: (a) BK7 optical glass, (b) lithium niobate crystal, and (c) Nd:YAG laser crystal	96
4.13	Effect of various feedrates on chipping size and thickness	99
4.14	Edge chipping on cored drilled Nd:YAG laser rods and hole exits on workpiece with Perspex backing material	100
4.15	Close observation on lateral surface reveals ring marks phenomenon	101
4.16	Lapping curves showing saturation effect	104
4.17	Surface morphology of lapped lithium niobate crystal when lapping at different lapping speeds	105
4.18	Lapping curves showing saturation effect	106
4.19	Surface morphology of Nd:YAG laser crystal when lapping at different lapping speeds	108
4.20	Changes in surface roughness of polished lithium niobate crystal as a function of polishing time	110
4.21	Surface morphology of lithium niobate crystal at different polishing speeds and time	111
4.22	Changes in surface roughness of polished Nd:YAG laser crystal as a function of polishing time	113
4.23	Surface morphology of Nd:YAG laser crystal at different polishing speeds and time	114

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX	TITLE	PAGE
A	CNC program for core drilling	132
B	Inspection on flatness of polishing plate	134
C	Inspection of flatness on polished specimen	135
D	Surface roughness and straightness of commercial Nd:YAG laser rod using Mitutoyo CS-5000 Formtracer	137
E	List of publications from this research	139
F	Abstracts of publications	141

CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

1.1 Introduction

Laser, an acronym for light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation, is certainly one of the greatest innovations of twentieth century. Its persisted growth and development has been an exciting division in the history of science, technology and engineering. Laser is distinguished from other electromagnetic radiation mainly in terms of its coherence, spectral purity and ability to propagate in a straight line. As a versatile source of pure energy in a highly concentrated form, laser has emerged as an attractive tool and research instrument with potential for applications in various fields. Figure 1.1 exemplifies a brief overview to show the diversity of application of laser in different fields.

Rapid progress has taken place in the development of solid-state lasers over the last five decades since the invention of the first ruby laser in 1960. Solid-state lasers exhibit many favorable characteristics such as mechanical durability, and long operational lifetime. Solid-state lasers also provide the most versatile radiation source in terms of output characteristics when compared to other laser systems such as average and peak power, pulse width and repetition rate, and wavelength. These remarkable characteristics have put solid-state laser systems among the most preferred candidates for a wide range of applications in science and technology, military industry, and domestic use. Furthermore, the field of solid-state lasers has found new potential application in

conjunction with development of electro-optics for alternative energy resources. Progress in crystal growth technology is essential for the development of renewable energy sources like laser-fusion energy where large laser and nonlinear-optic crystals of high radiation hardness are required. In short, the field of solid-state lasers remains a dynamic area and that will continuously advance and broaden into many new areas. Therefore, it is essentially for developing nations to explore this arena for better future development.

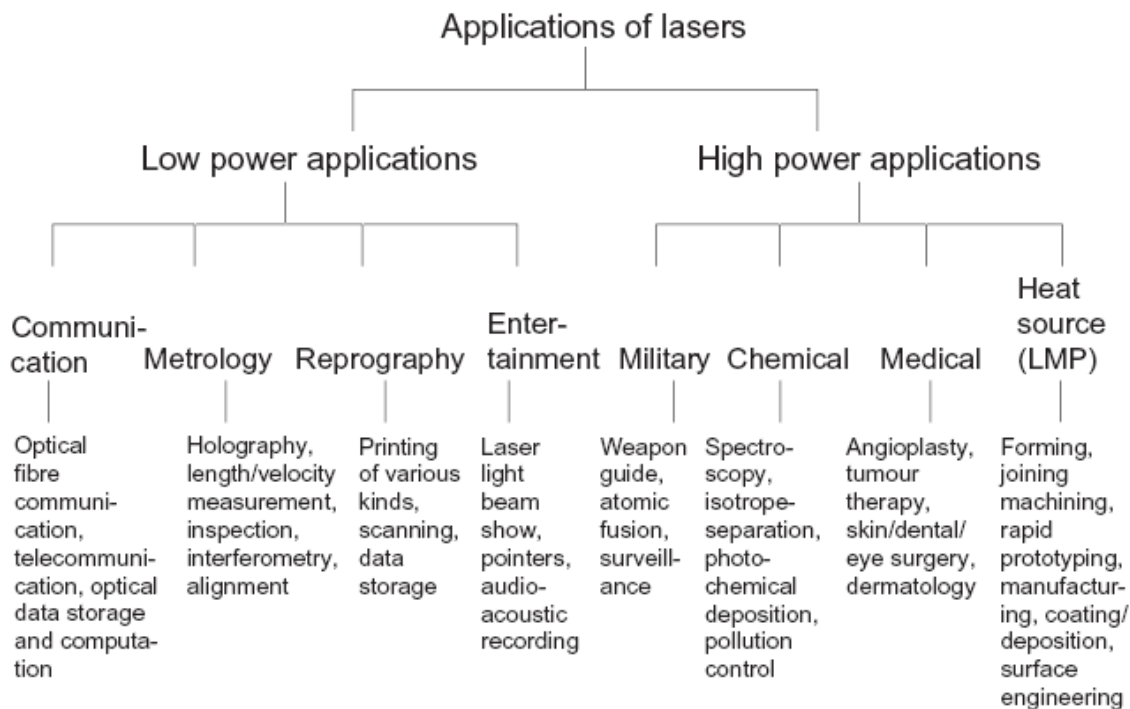


Figure 1.1 Application spectrum of lasers (Steen, 1991)

1.2 Research Background

Electro-optics is a branch of technology involving components, devices and systems which operate by modification of the optical properties of a material by an electric field. It concerns the interaction between the electromagnetic (optical) and the electrical (electronic) states of materials. Solid-state lasers are widely used for high technology electro-optical and laser applications and have found a number of new potential applications. Nowadays hard and brittle oxide materials such as Ruby, Alexandrite (BeAl_2O_4), Yttrium Aluminium Garnet (YAG, $\text{Y}_3\text{Al}_5\text{O}_{12}$), Lithium Niobate (LiNbO_3) and Sapphire (Al_2O_3) have become important host laser materials.

Hard solids are invariably stiff, high strength and wear resistant. On the other hand, hard solids typically exhibit statistically variable brittle fracture and high sensitivity to machining damage. When loaded with tensile stresses, hard solids transform from elastic to fracture behavior and invariably fail by crack extension. Thus, hard solids are usually brittle, i.e., they have small capacity to convert elastic energy into plastic deformation at room temperature (Dieter, 1981). Thus, an optimum technology for industrial fabrication of specific crystals is required in conjunction with the scientific development of crystal growth technology and high demands of various crystals.

In the field of materials processing, the precision machining technologies have been developed for the manufacture of cost-effective and quality-assured precision parts produced by brittle and hard solids. Examples of machining techniques are diamond turning, ion and electron-beam machining, laser-beam machining and abrasive machining processes (Snoyes 1986, Nakazawa 1994). For electro-optic applications, the functional devices built with single crystals frequently show monolithic structures with complex shapes that cannot be achieved during the process of crystal growth. Thus, high precision machining process is required in order to produce these hard and brittle materials into perfect crystal (Anantha Rumu, B.L., et. al, 1989).

1.3 Problem Statement

The science and technology combine the state-of-the-art of crystal growth and fabrication techniques of these oxide materials, however, have only been circulated in the developed nations. In recent years, industrial applications of electro-optical and lasers are growing rapidly. Such a high demand of various crystals for today's wide ranges of applications and purposes, and thus it is extremely crucial for industrial-based developing nations to gain such knowledge and technology. Therefore to gain such technology it is important to gain a paramount understanding the knowledge and have the hands-on experience that art and passion of the crystal growth and fabrication techniques.

Neodymium doped yttrium aluminum garnet (Nd:YAG) crystals have been widely used as solid-state laser materials due to its attractive combination of its physical, chemical, mechanical, thermal and optical properties. The Nd:YAG lasers have found many industrial field applications include material processing in manufacturing fields, medical operations in several medical disciplines and in military field.

Many researchers have reported their studies on designations, generations and characterizations of various Nd:YAG laser systems and their performances in various applications. However, studies related to the machining processes of Nd:YAG were not widely reported. Furthermore, laser crystal, for some unknown reasons, had been given less attention compared to other hard and brittle materials such as advanced ceramics, matrix composites and glasses.

This study is designated to produce Nd:YAG laser crystal rod by core drilling using Rotary Ultrasonic Machining (RUM) and study the influence of machining parameter (feedrate and spindle speed) on core drilling performance. Besides, this study also intended to produce flat end of Nd:YAG laser rod practicing LP50 Lapping and Polishing Machine and investigate the effect of lapping and polishing parameters (rotational speed) on surface finish of flat end of Nd:YAG laser rod.

1.4 Objective of Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To investigate the feasible machining parameters for core drilling laser crystal rod.
2. To evaluate the effect of lapping and polishing table speeds on crystal rod end surface finish.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The research is confined to the following limits:

1. Fabrication on Nd:YAG and lithium niobate laser crystal ingot including the core drilling, lapping and polishing processes. BK7 optical glass was used as preliminary study to simulate and establish machining parameters.
2. Core drilling was carried out on CNC Rotary Ultrasonic Machine. The machining parameters to be varied were limited to feedrate and spindle speed. The interested output parameters are straightness, diameter variation, desired lateral surface roughness and opaqueness for laser crystal rods.
3. Investigation of feasible machining parameter and time for lapping and polishing to obtain excellent mirror-like surface finish on laser crystal rods.

4. Lapping and polishing were carried out on LP50 Lapping and Polishing Machine. The applied load was fixed during lapping and polishing operations. The machined crystal rod end surface finish was interested.
5. The cast iron plate and alumina (Al_2O_3) abrasive slurry with grit size of $9\mu\text{m}$ were used in the lapping operation. The lapping parameter to be varied was limited to table speeds, i.e. 40 – 60 revolutions per minute (rpm).
6. The stainless steel plate with mounted polyurethane pad and SF1 polishing suspension with dissolved alkaline colloidal silica were used in the polishing operation. The polishing parameter to be varied was limited to table speeds, i.e. 20 – 40 revolutions per minute (rpm).

1.6 Significance of the Study

The main emphasize in this study has been given on the great potential of rotary ultrasonic machine (RUM) to produce laser rods with desired matt surface by using metal impregnated diamond abrasive core drilling tool in conjunction with well controlled machining parameters, as well as demonstrates high potential in replacing the conventional method for producing Nd:YAG laser rods. In conventional production, large Nd:YAG ingot single crystal was first cut into near-net shape, and then continuously ground on fine diamond grains to produce Nd:YAG laser rods with desired geometry and surface finish. Such method took lengthy processing time and high dependence on well-trained manpower. Core drilling method is therefore capable to overcome the drawbacks of conventional method to produce laser rods within shorter machining time and low dependence on manpower, and fulfilling the need to industrialize the fabrication for mass productions. Besides, the LP50 lapping and polishing machine shows exciting potentials

to produce flawless flat end of Nd:YAG laser rod with excellent mirror-like surface finishes. The main idea of the study is as an initiatory step to explore and gain the hands-on experience for machining the laser materials, and posterior for the possibility of commercialization.

1.7 Organization of the Thesis

This chapter begins with the background of the research study, followed by the problem statement, objective and scope of the study, significance of the study. Chapter two includes the background of Nd:YAG crystal and standard specifications for Nd:YAG laser rod, overview the principles of ultrasonic core drilling, lapping and polishing processes, and critical reviews of machining performance for these processes. Third Chapter details out methodology and experimental works. Results and discussions are elaborated in the chapter four. Thesis ends with conclusions drawn for this research and recommendations for future work.

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