

OPTIMISATION OF PLATING PARAMETERS AND PERFORMANCE  
ANALYSIS OF BLACK CHROMIUM COATING FOR SOLAR THERMAL  
ENERGY APPLICATIONS

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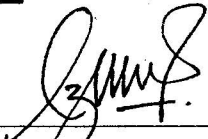
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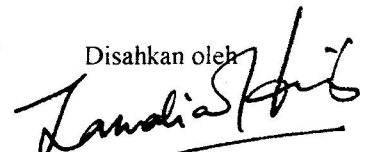
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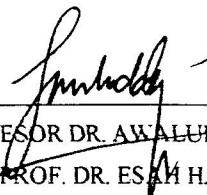
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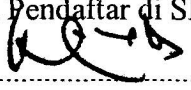
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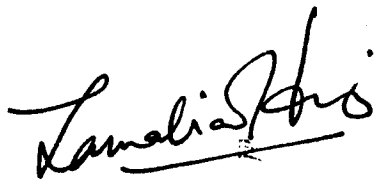
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Sukacita dimaklumkan bahawa tesis yang tersebut di atas yang bertajuk "*The Optimisation of Plating Parameters and Performance Analysis of Black Chromium Coating for Solar Thermal Energy Applications*" memohon dikelaskan sebagai terhad untuk tempoh sepuluh (10) tahun dari tarikh surat ini memandangkan ia adalah sebahagian daripada Projek IRPA dan masih lagi di dalam penyelidikan.

Sekian, terima kasih.

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## DEDICATIONS

*To my beloved father, mother and wife, you are my inspiration*

*and*

*to all my friends for your help and support.*

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## ABSTRACT

Black chromium coating (BCC) is well known to give high performance in absorbing high solar radiation and low emittance in solar spectrum near infrared region. Different composition and plating parameters of the black chromium solution will give various combinations of the coating optical property and performance. The purpose of this study is to determine the optimum plating parameters using the coating solutions, which had been modified by the current work, in order to improve the optical properties and the performance of the coating. The coatings were produced from fluoride and borate baths. Newly improved fluoride baths have better throwing power and have the potential for shorter plating time from 2 to 6 minutes with excellent black coating compared to borate baths which have higher plating time from 4 to 10 minutes which is powdery and dull black in colour. It was also found that the absorptance ( $\alpha$ ) and emittance ( $\epsilon$ ) values of the coating that were determined by scanning infrared spectrophotometer technique were affected by the plating parameters. The plating parameters such as plating time, bath temperature and current density, affect the grain size and distribution of surface morphology which were observed under scanning electron microscope. Coating performance which is determined by using differential thermal analyser, humidity-thermal cycle cracking, sunshine weather-ometer and salt spray tests, shows that improved fluoride black chromium coating is better than borate black chromium coating. The coating gives good thermal stability at temperature around 1300 C, excellent humidity, resistance to weather and corrosion and good coating adhesion. It is found that the coating performance is dependent on the plating parameters for both newly improved baths that should be kept between its parameter limits in order to produce good chromium coating for solar thermal application.



## ABSTRAK

Penyaduran kromium hitam (BCC) terkenal di dalam memberi kecekapan yang tinggi untuk menyerap tenaga suria serta mempunyai kadar pembalikan yang rendah dalam lingkungan spektra infra merah. Komposisi bahan larutan dan parameter saduran yang berlainan didapati memberi pelbagai keputusan dari segi prestasi penyerapan tenaga suria mahupun sifat saduran bahan. Oleh itu, penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk mendapatkan parameter optimum dengan menggunakan bahan larutan baru yang telah diubahsuai oleh penyelidik bagi mempertingkatkan ciri optik dan prestasi saduran. Saduran kromium hitam ini dihasilkan dari larutan florida dan borat. Larutan florida yang telah diubahsuai mempunyai kuasa balingan dan upaya untuk masa lebih pendek iaitu daripada 2 hingga 6 minit dengan menghasilkan saduran hitam yang berkualiti jika dibandingkan dengan larutan borat yang mengambil masa penyaduran yang lebih lama iaitu daripada 4 hingga 10 minit serta menghasilkan saduran yang berserbuk dan bewarna hitam pudar. Kajian turut mendapati bahawa nilai penyerapan ( $\alpha$ ) dan pembalikan ( $\epsilon$ ) bahan saduran kromium hitam yang diuji menggunakan mesin spektrofotometer infra merah imbasan elektron dipengaruhi oleh parameter penyaduran. Faktor masa, suhu larutan dan ketumpatan arus juga turut mempengaruhi struktur permukaan bahan saduran, taburan dan saiz bijian yang mana ia dikaji dengan menggunakan mikroskop imbasa elektron. Prestasi saduran kromium hitam ditentukan dengan menggunakan alat penganalisa perbezaan terma, ujian kelembapan udara, ujian ketahanan cuaca dan ujian percikan air garam menunjukkan bahawa saduran kromium hitam dari larutan florida memberi keputusan prestasi keseluruhan yang lebih baik daripada saduran borat. Saduran ini memberikan kestabilan haba sehingga mencapai  $1300^{\circ}\text{C}$ , kelembapan udara terbaik, ketahanan kepada kakisan dan cuaca, dan kelekatan yang baik. Hasil dari penyelidikan ini juga menunjukkan bahawa parameter saduran memberi kesan kepada prestasi saduran bagi kedua-dua larutan florida dan borat yang telah diubahsuai. Larutan ini perlu digunakan dalam had parameter untuk menghasilkan saduran kromium hitam yang baik untuk penggunaan penyerapan tenaga suria.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER</b>	<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
	<b>DECLARATION</b>	ii
	<b>DEDICATION</b>	iii
	<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	iv
	<b>ABSTRACT</b>	v
	<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	vi
	<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	xi
	<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	xiv
	<b>LIST OF SYMBOLS</b>	xxii
<b>I.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	
	1.1 Prologue	1
	1.2 Research Background	2
	1.3 Brief Introduction of BCC Selective Surface	3
	1.4 Objective and Scope of Study	4
<b>II.</b>	<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	
	2.1 Solar Thermal Performance of a Collector	7
	2.2 Characterisation of Solar Spectrally Selective Surface	8
	2.2.1 Relationship among Absorptance, Emittance, Reflectance and Kirchoff's Law	10
	2.3 Black Chromium Selective Surface	13
	2.3.1 Classification of Black Chromium Plating Baths	14
	2.3.2 Black Chromium Additives	17

2.3.3	Black Chromium Catalysts	17
2.3.4	Properties of BCC	18
2.3.5	Optical Properties of a BCC	19
2.3.6	Coating Properties	21
2.3.7	Thermal Stability upon High Temperature	23
2.3.8	Good Humidity Resistance	23
2.3.9	Formation of Chromium (Cr) and Chromium Trioxide (Cr <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub> )	24
2.3.10	Black Chromium Microstructure	25
2.3.11	Corrosion Protection	27
2.4	Optimisation of Plating Parameters	28
2.4.1	Effect of the Plating Time	28
2.4.2	Effect of the Plating Bath Temperature	31
2.4.3	The Effect of Current Density	32
2.4.4	The Effect of Chromic Acid Concentration	32
2.4.5	The Effect of Anode and Cathode Ratio and Distance	32
2.4.6	The Effect of Surface Microstructure	33
2.5	Black Chromium Coating Process	33
2.5.1	Principles of Electroplating	34
2.5.2	Bath Preparation and Control	36
2.5.3	Surface Preparation	38
2.5.4	Rinsing	39
2.5.5	Drying	40

### **III. EXPERIMENTAL METHOD**

3.1	Optimisation of Electroplating Parameters	42
3.2	Specimens Preparation	43
3.3	Black Chromium Electroplating Process	
3.3.1	Electroplating Process	44
3.3.2	Preliminary Electroplating	46
3.3.3	Actual Electroplating Process	46

3.4	Surface Morphology Observation	47
3.5	Grain Size and Crack Density Measurement	47
3.6	Chemical Analysis Test	48
3.7	Bend Test	49
3.8	Optical Properties of The BCC	
	3.8.1 Introduction	50
	3.8.2 Scanning Electron Spectrophotometer	51
3.9	Performance Test	
	3.9.1 Introduction	53
	3.9.2 Thermal Stability Test	53
	3.9.3 Humidity-Thermal Cycle Cracking Test	54
	3.9.4 Weatherability Test	55
	3.9.5 Corrosion Resistance Test	56

#### **IV. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS**

4.1	Hull Cell Test	58
	4.1.1 Optimisation of Hull Cell Current	62
4.2	Optimisation of Electroplating Parameters	64
	4.2.1 The Effect of Plating Time and Bath Temperature	65
	4.2.2 The Effect of Plating Bath Temperature	71
	4.2.3 The Effect of Current Density	77
4.3	Results of Surface Morphology	
	4.3.1 Surface Micrographs of Various Plating Parameters	83
	4.3.2 The Effect of The Surface Grain Size on the Optical Property	97
	4.3.3 The Effect of Crack Density on Optical Properties for Newly Improved Fluoride Bath	102
4.4	Results of Chemical Analysis	107

4.5	Bending Test Results for The Black Chromium Coating	113
4.5.1	Effect of Plating Time on Crack Rating	118
4.5.2	Effect of Increasing Temperature on Crack Rating	119
4.5.3	Effect of Increasing Current Density on Crack Rating	120
4.6	Performance Test Results	
4.6.1	Results of Coating Thermal Stability	122
4.6.2	Humidity-Thermal Cycle Cracking Test (H-TCCT) Results	126
4.6.3	Weatherability Test Results	133
4.6.4	Salt Spray Test Results	142

## **V. DISCUSSION**

5.1	Effect of Sulphate Compound on BCC Colour and Optical Properties	153
5.2	BCC Optical Properties	
5.2.1	Grain Size and Surface Microstructure	154
5.2.2	Optimisation of Plating Parameters	158
5.3	Coating Composition Results Analysis	165
5.4	Adhesion and Thermal Stability Analysis	166
5.5	Coating Performance Analysis	
5.5.1	Humidity-Thermal Cycle Cracking Results Analysis	167
5.5.2	Weatherability Results Analysis	169
5.5.3	Corrosion Resistance Results Analysis	170

## **VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK**

6.1	Conclusions	173
6.2	Recommendations for Future Work	174

**REFERENCES**

175

**APPENDICES**

Appendix I List of testing equipment and Hull cell test results

Appendix II Reflectance data

Appendix III Image analyser data

Appendix IV Surface topography of specimens after Sunshine  
Weather-Ometer Test

Appendix V Powder diffraction profile data

Appendix VI Conference papers publication (Abstract)

## LIST OF TABLES

NO	TITLE	PAGE
2.1	List of Various Black Chromium Plating Baths	15
2.2	Various Types of Common Catalyst and Its Purpose s	17
2.3	Properties of Chromium	18
2.4	Solar Absorptance and Thermal Emittance of Various type of Black Coating on Various Substrates	20
3.1	Optimisation Parameters of the New Improved BCC	42
3.2	Composition of the New Improved Fluoride and Borate Baths	44
4.1	Hull Cell Test Results for Newly Improved Fluoride Baths	59
4.2	Hull Cell Test Results for Newly Improved Borate Baths	59
4.3	Hull Cell Test Results for Fluoride Baths without addition of BaCO <sub>3</sub>	60
4.4	Hull Cell Test Results for Borate Baths without addition of BaCO <sub>3</sub>	60
4.5	Optimisation of Hull Cell Current Density for Newly Improved Fluoride Baths	62
4.6	Optimisation of Hull Cell Current Density for Newly Improved Borate Baths	62
4.7	Black Chromium Plated Specimens using Newly Improved Fluoride Baths at Varying Plating Time	66
4.8	Black Chromium Plated Specimens using Newly Improved Borate Baths at Varying Plating Time	67
4.9	Black Chromium Plated Specimens using Newly Improved Fluoride Baths at Varying Plating Bath Temperature with constant Plating Time of 4.5 minutes and Current Density of 12 A/dm <sup>2</sup>	72
4.10	Black Chromium Plated Specimens using Newly Improved Borate Baths at Varying Plating Bath Temperature with constant Plating Time of 7.0 minutes and Current Density of 25 A/dm <sup>2</sup>	73

4.11	Black Chromium Plated Specimens using Newly Improved Fluoride Baths at Various Current Density with constant Plating Bath Temperature of 26 <sup>0</sup> C and Plating Time of 4.5 minutes	78
4.12	Black Chromium Plated Specimens using Newly Improved Borate Baths at Varying Current Density with constant Plating Bath Temperature of 28 <sup>0</sup> C and Plating Time of 7.0 minutes	79
4.13	Average Cracks Density of Various Plating Parameters for Newly Improved Fluoride BCC	105
4.14	EDAX Average Weight Percentage of Elements in BCC	107
4.15	XRD Data for Newly Improved Black Chromium Coating for Both Fluoride and Borate BCC	109
4.16	Cracks Rating versus Crack Density/Area of Crack Defects	113
4.17	Results of Cracks Rating after the Bend Test for Newly Improved Fluoride Baths at Various Plating Parameters	114
4.18	Results of Cracks Rating after the Bend Test for Newly Improved Borate Baths at Various Plating Parameters	115
4.19	DTA Peak Results for Specimen M <sub>1</sub> at Plating Time of 2.0 Minutes and Constant Current Density of 12 A/dm <sup>2</sup> from Newly Improved Fluoride BCC	122
4.20	DTA Peak Results for Specimen O <sub>10</sub> at Plating Time of 10.0 Minutes Constant Current Density of 25 A/dm <sup>2</sup> from Newly Improved Borate Baths	122
4.21	Appearance Rating of the BCC After Heat-Thermal Cycle Cracking Test	126
4.22	Solar Absorptance, Emittance and Appearance Results using Newly Improved Fluoride Baths at Various Plating Parameters after Being Exposed to Humidity-Thermal Cycle Cracking Test Chamber for 120 hours	127
4.23	Solar Absorptance, Emittance and Appearance Results using Newly Improved Borate Baths at Various Plating Parameters after Being Exposed to Humidity-Thermal Cycle Cracking Test Chamber for 120 hours	128



4.24	Solar Absorptance, Emittance and Appearance Results using Newly Improved Fluoride BCC at Various Plating Parameters after Being Exposed In the Sunshine Weather-Ometer Chamber for 1200 hours	134
4.25	Solar Absorptance, Emittance and Appearance Results using Newly Improved Borate BCC at Various Plating Parameters after Being Exposed Sunshine Weather-Ometer Test Chamber for 1200 hours	135
4.26	Corrosion Rating vs Area of Corrosion Defects	146
4.27	Corrosion Rating Results using Newly Improved Fluoride BCC at various Plating Parameters after being exposed in the SST for 240 hours	147
4.28	Corrosion Rating Results using Newly Improved Fluoride BCC at various Plating Parameters after being exposed in the SST for 240 hours	148
5.1	Mean Average of Absorptance and Emittance Value for BCC with and without the addition of BaCO <sub>3</sub>	154
5.2	Absorptance Value of Compact and Large Grain Boundaries	156
5.3	Materials Melting Point	167
5.4	Average Loss of Absorptance and Emittance after H-TCC Test	168
5.5	Average Loss of Absorptance and Emittance after SW-O Test	169
5.6	Average Corrosion Rating after Salt Spray Test	171

## LIST OF FIGURES

NO	TITLE	PAGE
2.1	Flat Plate Collector	7
2.2	ASTM Standard Curve of extraterrestrial solar spectral irradiance	8
2.3	Three Diagrams Illustrating the Basic Physics of Selective Surface	12
2.4	Illustration of BCC Structure	26
2.5	Chromium Surface Cracks	27
2.6	Graphs of the Effect of the Plating Parameters	29
2.7	Electroplating Set-Up	35
3.1	Specimen Sizes	43
3.2	Hull/Electroplating Process	45
3.3	Hull Cell	46
3.4	Basic Concept of Grain Size Measurement	47
3.5	The Diffraction X-rays by the (hkl) Planes of a Crystal	49
3.6	Schematic Illustration of the Bend Test	50
3.7	Semi-transparent Sample Measurement Using Opal Glass Method	51
3.8	Semi-transparent Sample Measurement using the Integrating Sphere Method	51
3.9	Specular Reflection and Diffuse Reflection	52
3.10	Opaque Sample Measurement using the Integrating Sphere Method	53
3.11	Humidity-Thermal Cycle Cracking Process Graph	54
3.12	Weatherability Process Graph	56

4.1	Hull Cell Current versus the Hull Cell Bath Temperature for Newly Improved Fluoride and Borate Baths	61
4.2	Absorptance and Emittance vs Current Density for the Hull Cell Optimisation for Newly Improved Fluoride Baths	63
4.3	Absorptance and Emittance vs Current Density for the Hull Cell Optimisation for Newly Improved Borate Baths	63
4.4	Absorptance and Emittance vs Various Plating Time and Coating Thickness at Constant Current Density of 12 A/dm <sup>2</sup> for Newly Improved Fluoride Baths	68
4.5	Coating Thickness and Grain Size vs Various Plating Time at Constant Current Density of 12 A/dm <sup>2</sup> for Newly Improved Fluoride Baths	68
4.6	Absorptance and Emittance vs Various Plating Time and Coating Thickness at Constant Current Density of 25 A/dm <sup>2</sup> for Newly Improved Borate Baths	70
4.7	Coating Thickness and Grains Size vs Various Plating Time at Constant Current Density of 25 A/dm <sup>2</sup> for Newly Improved Borate Baths	70
4.8	Absorptance and Emittance vs Various Bath Temperature and Coating Thickness at Constant Current Density of 12 A/dm <sup>2</sup> and Plating Time of 4.5 minutes for Newly Improved Fluoride Baths	74
4.9	Coating Thickness and Grains Size vs Various Bath Temperature at Constant Current Density of 12 A/dm <sup>2</sup> and Plating Time of 4.5 minutes for Newly Improved Fluoride Baths	74
4.10	Absorptance and Emittance vs Various Bath Temperature and Coating Thickness at Constant Current Density of 25 A/dm <sup>2</sup> and Plating Time of 7 minutes for Newly Improved Borate Baths	76
4.11	Coating Thickness and Grains Size vs Various Bath Temperature at Constant Current Density of 25 A/dm <sup>2</sup> and Plating Time of 7 minutes for Newly Improved Borate Baths	76
4.12	Absorptance and Emittance vs Various Current Density and Coating Thickness at Constant Plating Time of 4.5 minutes and Bath Temperature of 26 <sup>0</sup> C for Newly Improved Fluoride Baths	80

4.13	Coating Thickness and Grains Size vs Various Current Density at Constant Plating Time of 4.5 minutes and Bath Temperature of 26 <sup>0</sup> C for Newly Improved Fluoride Baths	80
4.14	Absorptance and Emittance vs Various Current Density and Coating Thickness at Constant Plating Time of 7 minutes and Bath Temperature of 28 <sup>0</sup> C for Newly Improved Borate Baths	82
4.15	Coating Thickness and Grains Size vs Various Current Density at Constant Plating Time of 7 minutes and Bath Temperature of 28 <sup>0</sup> C for Newly Improved Borate Baths	82
4.16	Surface Microstructure of Black Chromium Coating from Newly Improved Fluoride Baths with Current Density of 12 A/dm <sup>2</sup> at Various Plating Time and Bath Temperature	84
4.17	Surface Microstructure of Black Chromium Coating from Newly Improved Borate Baths with Current Density of 25 A/dm <sup>2</sup> at Various Plating Time and Bath Temperature	87
4.18	Surface Microstructure of Black Chromium Coating from Newly Improved Fluoride Baths with Current Density of 12 A/dm <sup>2</sup> at Constant Plating Time of 4.5 minutes and Various Bath Temperature	89
4.19	Surface Microstructure of Black Chromium Coating from Newly Improved Borate Baths with Current Density of 25 A/dm <sup>2</sup> at Constant Plating Time of 7 minutes and Various Bath Temperature	91
4.20	Surface Microstructure of Black Chromium Coating from Newly Improved Fluoride Baths with Constant Plating Time of 4.5 minutes and Constant Bath Temperature of 26 <sup>0</sup> C at Various Current Density	93
4.21	Surface Microstructure of Black Chromium Coating from Newly Improved Borate Baths at Constant Plating Time of 7 minutes and Bath Temperature of 28 <sup>0</sup> C at Various Current Density	95
4.22	Absorptance and Emittance vs Grains Size at Various Plating Time with Constant Current Density of 12 A/dm <sup>2</sup> for Improved Fluoride Bath	98
4.23	Absorptance and Emittance vs Grains Size at Various Plating Time with Constant Current Density of 25 A/dm <sup>2</sup> for Improved Borate Baths	98

4.24	Absorptance and Emittance vs Grains Size at Various Bath Temperature at Constant Plating Time of 4.5 minutes and Current Density of 12 A/dm <sup>2</sup> for Newly Improved Fluoride Baths	99
4.25	Absorptance and Emittance vs Grains Size at Various Bath Temperature at Constant Plating Time of 7 minutes and Current Density of 25 A/dm <sup>2</sup> for Newly Improved Borate Baths	100
4.26	Absorptance and Emittance vs Grains Size at Various Current Density at Constant Plating Time of 4.5 minutes and Bath Temperature of 26 <sup>0</sup> C for Newly Improved Fluoride Baths	101
4.27	Absorptance and Emittance vs Grains Size at Various Current Density at Constant Plating Time of 7 minutes and Bath Temperature of 28 <sup>0</sup> C for Newly Improved Borate Baths	101
4.28	Crack Density vs Various Plating Time at Constant Current Density of 12 A/dm <sup>2</sup> for Newly Improved Fluoride BCC	102
4.29	Absorptance and Emittance vs Cracks Density at Constant Current Density of 12 A/dm <sup>2</sup> and Various Plating Time for Newly Improved Fluoride BCC	102
4.30	Crack Density vs Various Bath Temperature at Constant Plating Time of 4.5 Minutes and Current Density of 12 A/dm <sup>2</sup> for Newly Improved Fluoride BCC	103
4.31	Absorptance and Emittance vs Cracks Density with Various Bath Temperature at Constant Plating Time of 4.5 Minutes and Current Density of 12 A/dm <sup>2</sup> for Newly Improved Fluoride BCC	103
4.32	Crack Density vs Various Current Density at Constant Plating Time of 4.5 Minutes and Bath Temperature of 26 <sup>0</sup> C for Newly Improved Fluoride BCC	104
4.33	Absorptance and Emittance vs Cracks Density with Various Current Density at Constant Plating Time of 4.5 Minutes and Bath Temperature of 26 <sup>0</sup> C for Newly Improved Fluoride BCC	104
4.34	Cross-section of Newly Improved Fluoride BCC at Plating Time of 5 Minutes, Bath Temperature of 26 <sup>0</sup> with Constant Current Density of 12 A/dm <sup>2</sup>	108

4.35	Cross-section of Newly Improved Borate BCC at Plating Time of 6.5 Minutes, Bath Temperature of 29 <sup>0</sup> with Constant Current Density of 25 A/dm <sup>2</sup>	108
4.36	Energy Dispersive X-ray Profile of Black Chromium Coating from Newly Improved Fluoride Baths	110
4.37	Energy Dispersive X-ray Profile of Black Chromium Coating From Newly Improved Borate Baths	110
4.38	X-ray Diffraction Profile of Black Chromium Coating from Newly Improved Fluoride Baths	111
4.39	X-ray Diffraction Profile of Black Chromium Coating from Newly Improved Borate Baths	112
4.40	Surface micrographs of bent surface for Newly Improved fluoride BCC	116
4.41	Surface micrographs of bent surface for Newly Improved borate BCC	117
4.42	(a) Crack Rating vs Various Plating Time and (b) Coating Thickness for Newly Improved Fluoride Baths	118
4.43	(a) Crack Rating vs Various Plating Time and (b) Coating Thickness for Newly Improved Borate Baths	118
4.44	(a) Crack Rating vs Various Plating Bath Temperature and (b) Coating Thickness for Newly Improved Fluoride Baths	119
4.45	(a) Crack Rating vs Various Plating Bath Temperature and (b) Coating Thickness for Newly Improved Borate Baths	120
4.46	(a) Crack Rating vs Various Current Density and (b) Coating Thickness for Newly Improved Fluoride Baths	120
4.47	(a) Crack Rating vs Various Current Density and (b) Coating Thickness for Newly Improved Borate Baths	121
4.48	DTA Profile of Specimen M <sub>1</sub> at Plating Time of 2.0 Minutes and Constant Current Density of 12 A/dm <sup>2</sup> for Newly Improved Fluoride BCC	123
4.49	DTA Profile for Specimen O <sub>10</sub> at Plating Time of 10.0 Minutes and Constant Current Density of 25 A/dm <sup>2</sup> for Newly Improved Borate BCC	124

4.50	Absorptance and Emittance versus Various Plating Time and Bath Temperature Before and After H-TCCT at Constant Current Density of 12 A/dm <sup>2</sup> for Newly Improved Fluoride BCC	129
4.51	Absorptance and Emittance versus Various Plating Time and Bath Temperature Before and After H-TCCT at Constant Current Density of 25 A/dm <sup>2</sup> for Newly Improved Borate BCC	130
4.52	Absorptance and Emittance versus Various Plating Bath Temperature Before and After H-TCCT at Constant Current Density of 12 A/dm <sup>2</sup> and Plating of 4.5 Minutes for Newly Improved Fluoride BCC	131
4.53	Absorptance and Emittance versus Various Plating Bath Temperature Before and After H-TCCT at Constant Current Density of 25 A/dm <sup>2</sup> and Plating of 7 Minutes for Newly Improved Borate BCC	131
4.54	Absorptance and Emittance versus Various Current Density Before and After H-TCCT at Constant Plating Time of 4.5 Minutes and Bath Temperature of 26 <sup>0</sup> C for Newly Improved Fluoride BCC	132
4.55	Absorptance and Emittance versus Various Current Density Before and After H-TCCT at Constant Plating Time of 7 Minutes and Bath Temperature of 28 <sup>0</sup> C for Newly Improved Borate BCC	133
4.56	Absorptance and Emittance versus Various Plating Time and Baths Temperature Before and After SW-O at Constant Current Density of 12 A/dm <sup>2</sup> for Newly Improved Fluoride BCC	137
4.57	Absorptance and Emittance versus Various Plating Time and Baths Temperature Before and After SW-O at Constant Current Density of 5 A/dm <sup>2</sup> for Newly Improved Borate BCC	138
4.58	Absorptance and Emittance versus Various Plating Baths Temperature Before and After SW-O at Constant Current Density of 12 A/dm <sup>2</sup> and Plating Time of 4.5 Minutes for Newly Improved Fluoride BCC	139
4.59	Absorptance and Emittance versus Various Plating Baths Temperature Before and After SW-O at Constant Current Density of 25 A/dm <sup>2</sup> and Plating Time of 7 Minutes for Newly Improved Borate BCC	139

- 4.60 Absorptance and Emittance versus Various Current Density Before and After SW-O at Constant Plating Time of 4.5 Minutes and Baths Temperature of 26<sup>0</sup>C for Newly Improved Fluoride BCC 140
- 4.61 Absorptance and Emittance versus Various Current Density Before and After SW-O at Constant Plating Time of 7.0 Minutes and Baths Temperature of 28<sup>0</sup>C for Newly Improved Borate BCC 141
- 4.62 Surface Topography of Specimens M of Newly Improved Fluoride BCC with Constant Current Density of 12 A/dm<sup>2</sup> and Various Plating Time and Baths Temperature After SST (100x). (a) M<sub>1</sub>: 2 minutes at 24<sup>0</sup>C; (b) M<sub>7</sub>: 5 minutes at 26<sup>0</sup>C 143
- 4.63 Surface Topography of Specimens O of Newly Improved Borate BCC with Constant Current Density of 25 A/dm<sup>2</sup> at Various Plating Time and Baths Temperature After SST (100x). (a) O<sub>2</sub>: 5 minutes at 28<sup>0</sup>C; (b) O<sub>8</sub>: 8 minutes at 30<sup>0</sup>C 143
- 4.64 Surface Topography of Specimens N of Newly Improved Fluoride BCC with Various Plating Baths Temperature with Constant Plating Time of 4.5 Minutes and Current Density of 12 A/dm<sup>2</sup> After SST (100x). (a) N<sub>3</sub>: 24<sup>0</sup>C; (b) N<sub>5</sub>: 26<sup>0</sup>C 144
- 4.65 Surface Topography of Specimens P of Newly Improved Borate BCC with Various Plating Baths Temperature with Constant Plating Time of 7 Minutes and Current Density of 25 A/dm<sup>2</sup> After SST (100x). (a) P<sub>1</sub>: 16<sup>0</sup>C; (b) P<sub>6</sub>: 28<sup>0</sup>C 144
- 4.66 Surface Topography of Specimens W of Newly Improved Fluoride BCC with Various Current Densities with Constant Plating Time of 4.5 Minutes and Plating Baths Temperature of 26<sup>0</sup>C After SST (100x). (a) W<sub>2</sub>: 11 A/dm<sup>2</sup>; (b) W<sub>7</sub>: 17 A/dm<sup>2</sup> 145
- 4.67 Surface Topography of Specimens Q of Newly Improved Borate BCC with Various Current Densities with Constant Plating Time of 7 Minutes and Plating Baths Temperature of 28<sup>0</sup>C After SST (100x). (a) Q<sub>1</sub>: 16 A/dm<sup>2</sup>; (b) Q<sub>4</sub>: 25 A/dm<sup>2</sup> 145



4.68	Corrosion Rating vs Various Plating Time at Constant Current Densities of 12 and 25 A/dm <sup>2</sup> for Both Newly Improved Fluoride and Borate Baths	149
4.69	Corrosion Rating vs the Coating Thickness at Various Plating Time at Constant Current Densities of 12 and 25 A/dm <sup>2</sup> for Both Newly Improved Fluoride and Borate Baths	149
4.70	Corrosion Rating vs Various Plating Bath Temperature at Constant Plating Time of 4.5 and 7.0 Minutes and Current Densities of 12 and 25 A/dm <sup>2</sup> for Both Newly Improved Fluoride and Borate Baths	150
4.71	Corrosion Rating vs Various Current Density at Constant Plating Time of 4.5 and 7.0 Minutes and Baths Temperature of 26 and 28 <sup>0</sup> C for Both Newly Improved Fluoride and Borate Baths	150
4.72	Corrosion Rating vs the Coating Thickness at Various Current Densities with Constant Plating Time of 4.5 and 7.0 Minutes and Baths Temperature of 26 and 28 <sup>0</sup> C for Both Newly Improved Fluoride and Borate Baths	151
5.1	Colour Variation of Chromate Coatings on Zinc with Cr(VI) : SO <sub>4</sub>	153
5.2	Schematic Representation of Dendritic Grains	155
5.3	Schematic Representation and Surface Structure of a Dendritic and Hillock Surface	155
5.4	Optimisation of Plating Time for Newly Improved Fluoride Baths	160
5.5	Optimisation of Plating Time for Newly Improved Borate Baths	160
5.6	Optimisation of Bath Temperatures for Newly Improved Fluoride Baths	162
5.7	Optimisation of Bath Temperatures for Newly Improved Borate Baths	162
5.8	Optimisation of Current Density for Newly Improved Fluoride Baths	164
5.9	Optimisation of Current Density for Newly Improved Borate Baths	164

**LIST OF SYMBOLS**

$F$	Faraday constant. 96500C
$I$	Current in amperes
$I_{\lambda}$	Solar spectral irradiance
$R_{\lambda}$	Ideal selective surface
$T$	Temperature
$t$	time
$W_{\lambda}$	Blackbody spectral radiant
$w$	Weight of metal deposited
$z$	Valency of metal in the solution

**Greek Symbols**

$\alpha$	Absorptance, solar altitude angle,
$\varepsilon$	Emittance
$\rho$	Reflectance
$\lambda$	Radiation Wavelength
$\rho_{\lambda}$	Monochromatic angular-hemispherical reflectance of a surface

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Prologue

The Harare announcement (Hussein, 1998) in October 1996, has open the eyes of the United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) to utilise the full use of the solar energy and further developing a solar energy programme. The programme highlighted the world usage of the solar energy for the community development and so far Unesco has successfully formed nearly 300 main solar energy project internationally. These programmes were supported by the Prime Minister of Malaysia himself. He had encouraged all researchers and academicians both in the government and private sector to move forward to develop the solar energy programme in Malaysia.

In accordance of the above announcement, this work is aimed at studying the effect of the thermal application of the black chromium coating for a solar panel absorber. This research is a primary study at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia which involves the application of thermal energy. The other research such as solar car and solar cycle are concentrated on the photovoltaic system. The research has been conducted to optimise the plating parameters for the black chromium solar selective surface, in order to develop a solar water heater panel set-up.

The research involves two types of black chromium baths, namely fluoride and borate. The work undertaken was to optimise new plating parameters to investigate the performance of the black chromium coating with respect to the

Malaysia climate, which is hot and humid. The optimisation of the black chromium coating is considered a pioneering effort whereby the black chromium coatings are being investigated for the solar thermal energy application instead of decorative and non-decorative purposes. The optimisation of the plating parameters can improve the existing black chromium coating and it can be a driving force in developing a solar water heater panel, which suits the Malaysian environment.

## 1.2 Research Background

A flat plate collector of a copper substrate electroplated with a thin black chromium solar absorber has been studied for its role and optimisation of the plating parameters such as; plating time, current density, plating bath temperature and the effect of the surface particles overgrowths deposition with respect to the spectral selectivity [absorptance ( $\alpha$ ) and emittance ( $\varepsilon$ )] properties. The design of a flat plate collector system is focused on receiving solar radiation so that the coating capable to absorb the highest absorptance in solar spectrum near infrared region (wavelength 0.3  $\mu\text{m}$  to 2.0  $\mu\text{m}$ ) and low emittance (wavelength  $> 2.0 \mu\text{m}$ ).

Eventhough, a lot of work has been carried out in designing and constructing the selective solar absorbers, only few studies have been recorded regarding the plating parameters of the black chromium coating. It has been reviewed (Inal et. al., 1981) that plating geometry such as plating time, plating bath temperature and current density influences the plating parameters. These factors enhance the effect of the black chromium particle growth, and thus the spectral selectivity of the optical properties. Thus, it is important to study the role of the optimisation of the plating parameters in order to obtain the optimum optical properties.

### 1.3 Brief Introduction of Black Chromium Coating Selective Surface

Solar energy can be utilised both to generate and conserve energy. Various applications of solar energy are such as water heating, crop drying, air heating and solar electric power generation (photovoltaic). Large scale of solar water heater is successfully marketed in Japan, Australia and India (Ong, 1994). As for Malaysia, the development of solar coating materials for solar thermal energy is still at the preliminary stage. A lot of effort has been channelled to improve this area and one of the areas of interest is black chromium coating.

Black finishing applications cover a wide range of area such as for non-reflecting coating, decorative coating and solar selective coating. This work is focused on solar selective coatings where it is used for thermal energy applications, which is targeted for solar water heater. Selective black coatings are used on surfaces of devices meant to collect solar energy for its improvement. The key of an efficient solar absorbing coating is the spectral selectivity. Black chromium selective absorbing solar coatings have made a contribution towards improving the performance of solar energy collectors with high solar absorptance ( $\alpha$ ) and low emittance ( $\varepsilon$ ) in the solar spectrum near the infrared region. It is used for photothermal conversion in solar collector system of low and moderate concentrations. Black chromium selective absorber has been proved to be the most suitable coating for a wide range of temperature applications due to its excellent optical properties and apparent high degree of stability under the operating conditions (Window et. al., 1980).

Black chromium electrodeposition gives satisfactory finishes where the properties can be concentrated easily by the operating conditions such as plating time, plating bath temperature and current density (Inal et. al., 1981; Driver, 1981). The throwing powers of the compositions are related to the bath solutions. Various researchers have formulated black chromium plating solutions (William, 1975; Clive and John, 1980; Magyar and Pojbics, 1988; William Grips et. al., 1989, 1991),

improved and designed new black chromium plating processes (Wilson, 1971; Oleson and Woods, 1973; Kampshchulte and CIE, 1976; Tomoyo and Matsufumi, 1979; Motoaki, 1981; Yasuo, 1982; Itsupei, 1986) and found out that it is a unique black coating where the black coating can be obtained at various bath temperatures and current densities. It is noted that every black chromium solution has its own optimum values with respect to the optical properties. The optical property also depends on the plating process and the plating parameters play an important role in order to achieve the best quality of black chromium coating. It is also reported (William Grips et. al., 1989, 1991) that the black chromium coating has excellent corrosion resistance, high thermal stability and good weather resistance. It can be coated on a copper plate with good adherent film without prior nickel undercoat and this will save a lot of processing time.

For these reasons, a preliminary study on the performance of the black chromium coating is undertaken where it is conducted in the laboratory testing conditions. The study will cover a Hull cell test followed by a simple room temperature electroplating process to produce the black chromium coating, optical test for its spectral selectivity properties, adhesion test, thermal stability test upon high temperature and surface morphology observation.

#### **1.4 Objective and Scope of Study**

The objectives of the investigation are to optimise the plating parameters of the black chromium coating applicable on solar energy absorbing materials and to study the performance and its properties upon the author's new improved solutions on copper substrate as a potential solar panel material.

The main part of this study is to investigate the black chromium coating plating parameters that can be used to absorb the solar radiation and conserve it into heat for heating water. The coating should have good optical and mechanical properties as well as humidity, weatherability and corrosion resistance. This is to make sure that the black chromium coating can withstand the water heating process.

To produce the black chromium coating, the newly improved fluoride and borate baths are chosen as the plating solution. The addition of 10 g/l of barium carbonate ( $\text{BaCO}_3$ ) in the new improved solutions is to precipitate any traces of sulphate which, the results produced an excellent and stable black coating on the copper substrate. These two improved baths act as a comparison study in order to investigate the optimum plating parameters and the performance of the coating. The scope of the research covers:

1. Investigation of the effect of the plating parameters on the coating's optical properties (absorptance  $> 0.9$  and low emittance  $< 0.35$ ). The operating parameters involved are current density, plating time and bath temperature, which have been identified earlier in the preliminary electroplating process. The deciding plating parameters under investigation are:
  - i. 9-17  $\text{A/dm}^2$ , 1-7 minutes and 16-32 $^{\circ}\text{C}$  for fluoride baths, and
  - ii. 16-32  $\text{A/dm}^2$ , 3-11 minutes and 16-36 $^{\circ}\text{C}$  for borate baths.
2. Study of the effect of humidity, weatherability and corrosion on the optical properties of the coating.
3. Determination of the black chromium coating properties such as the coating adhesion, thickness, surface morphology, crack density and thermal stability.