

# Sonophotocatalysis of water in a CO<sub>2</sub>–Ar atmosphere

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## Abstract

A system combining photocatalysis and sonolysis, named a sonophotocatalysis system, was carried out. Sonophotocatalysis means simultaneous irradiation of ultrasound and light with a photocatalyst (TiO<sub>2</sub> powder). As one of possibilities for this system, the resemblance between the reaction of this combined system and photosynthesis was discussed. The overall process of photosynthesis can be divided into two parts: reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> and generation of oxygen from water. In this study, sonophotocatalysis was performed in a CO<sub>2</sub>–Ar atmosphere, resulting in reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> to CO and continuous generation of O<sub>2</sub> from water. Thus, photosynthesis-like reactions can be achieved using this combined system, though incident light energy does not accumulate. Further development of this system in the future is discussed in this paper.

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*Keywords:* Sonophotocatalysis; CO<sub>2</sub> reduction; O<sub>2</sub> production; TiO<sub>2</sub>; Photosynthesis

## 1. Introduction

Much interest has recently been shown in artificial photosynthesis. Photosynthesis is a system for conversion or accumulation of energy. It is also interesting that some reactions occur simultaneously and continuously. Fujishima et al. [1] pointed out that a photocatalytic system resembles the process of photosynthesis in green plants. They described that there are three important parts of the overall process of photosynthesis: (1) oxygen generation by the photolysis of water, (2) photophosphorylation, which accumulates energy, and (3) the Calvin cycle, which takes in and reduces carbon dioxide. We report here that two reactions, reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> and generation of O<sub>2</sub> from water, occur simultaneously and continuously by a sonophotocatalytic reaction.

Generation of O<sub>2</sub> from water is thought to be important. By the combined effects of sonolysis and photocatalysis, water has been decomposed into O<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>2</sub> stoichiometrically and continuously [2]. Namely, overall water splitting, evolution of O<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>, was achieved using a sonophotocatalytic technique in the presence of a TiO<sub>2</sub> photocatalyst under white light illumination of a xenon lamp. Effects of ultrasonic irradiation on heterogeneous photocatalytic reaction systems have been reported by Mason [3], Sawada and Hirano [4], Kado et al. [5], Suzuki et al. [6] and Ragaini et al. [7].

On the other hand, it has been reported that reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> was achieved by the use of sonolysis [8,9]. It was pointed out that in those reports the dissolved gas in the solution was important and that the rate of CO<sub>2</sub> reduction depended on the concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> in the matrix.

Thus, generation of O<sub>2</sub> and reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> are supposed to occur by a combination of photocatalysis and sonolysis. In order to achieve photosynthesis-like reactions, sonophotocatalysis of water was carried out in a CO<sub>2</sub>–Ar atmosphere in the present study.

Before using the combined system, photocatalysis and sonolysis in a CO<sub>2</sub> atmosphere were carried out separately. The photocatalysis was performed under a solid–solid (solvent-free) condition in order to eliminate the influence of the solvent, since it has been reported that the addition of a solvent to a solid–solid system causes changes in product selectivity and reactivity [10,11]. A solvent, however, is necessary for sonochemical effects. Thus, the effects of additional water on the reactivity and product selectivity were important. On the other hand, sonolysis in a CO<sub>2</sub> atmosphere is difficult [8]. A suitable matrix gas is needed.

## 2. Experimental

### 2.1. Photocatalysis

Commercial TiO<sub>2</sub> powders (P-25; anatase-rich, fine particles and specific surface area of 48.7 m<sup>2</sup>/g, Nippon Aerosil;

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rutile-rich and specific surface area of 1.9 m<sup>2</sup>/g, Soekawa Chemicals) were used as photocatalysts. A platinum-loaded titanium oxide (Pt/TiO<sub>2</sub>) was prepared by mixing 5% Pt black (N E Chemcat) in an agate mortar. In the case of a suspension system, a Pyrex glass bulb (250–350 cm<sup>3</sup>) containing the powdered photocatalyst suspended in a reactant solution (90–120 cm<sup>3</sup>) was used as a reactor. In the case of a solid–solid photocatalytic reaction system, on the other hand, the powdered photocatalyst was mixed with powdered reactants in an agate mortar. The Pyrex reactor containing the reactant mixture or solution was irradiated from the bottom with an ultra high pressure Hg lamp (Toshiba, SHL100-UV-Q2, 100 W). Before irradiation, the reactor was filled with gases of atmospheric pressure.

## 2.2. Sonolysis

A Pyrex glass bulb (250–350 cm<sup>3</sup>) containing CO<sub>2</sub> dissolved in distilled water (40–100 cm<sup>3</sup>) was used as a reactor. Distilled water (Wako for HPLC) was purged with argon gas in order to expel air before the addition of CO<sub>2</sub>. After the desired amount of CO<sub>2</sub> had been introduced into the reactor through a needle, ultrasonic irradiation was performed from the bottom of the reactor using a 200 W ultrasonic generator (Kaijo TA-4021-4611, 200 kHz). During sonication, the reactor was placed in a temperature-controlled bath (EYELA NTT-1200 and ECS-0).

## 2.3. Sonophotocatalysis

Simultaneous irradiation was performed from one side of the reactor using a 500 W xenon lamp (Ushio UXL500D-O) and from the bottom of the reactor using a 200 W ultrasonic generator in a CO<sub>2</sub>–Ar atmosphere at 25 °C. The Pyrex reactor (300–1250 cm<sup>3</sup>) was placed in a Pyrex bath with a temperature controller during the reaction. Atmospheric gases were introduced using the above described technique.

## 2.4. Analysis

The amount of evolved gases and remaining CO<sub>2</sub> were determined by gas chromatography (Shimadzu GC8AIT equipped with Molecular Sieve 5A and Porapak Q columns). Hydrogen peroxide in the reaction solution was analyzed by colorimetry (JASCO V-530, 407 nm) using a titanium sulfate solution (Nacalai Tesque).

# 3. Results and discussion

## 3.1. Photocatalytic reactions in a CO<sub>2</sub> atmosphere using a Pt/TiO<sub>2</sub> photocatalyst

Before using the combined system, photocatalysis in a CO<sub>2</sub> atmosphere was carried out. The selection of atmospheric gas is important for photocatalysis. There have been

Table 1  
Solid–solid photocatalytic reaction products from malonic acid (2 h irradiation)

Atmosphere	Product (μmol)		
	CH <sub>4</sub>	CO <sub>2</sub>	H <sub>2</sub>
CO <sub>2</sub>	44	–	4
Ar	24	127	2
O <sub>2</sub>	1	364	–
Air	–	195	–

many reports on photocatalytic reactions but few reports on photocatalytic reactions in a CO<sub>2</sub> atmosphere [12–15]. The influence of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere on the photocatalytic reaction was examined in this section. Photocatalysis of water in a pure CO<sub>2</sub> atmosphere was carried out, but no appreciable products could be obtained.

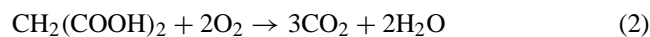
Table 1 shows the effects for the influence of atmospheric gas on photocatalytic reaction products obtained from the reaction mixture. Methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) was produced from malonic acid (CH<sub>2</sub>(COOH)<sub>2</sub>) in a CO<sub>2</sub> atmosphere by a solid–solid photocatalytic reaction:



It has been reported that CH<sub>4</sub> is the characteristic product obtained from malonic acid by a solid–solid photocatalytic reaction in an Ar atmosphere [10,11]. As shown in the above equations, it is presumed that mono-decarboxylation occurs in the first stage and that this is followed by decarboxylation of the product, acetic acid. The observation of an induction period before the production of CH<sub>4</sub> production supports this sequential reaction mechanism. The ratio of CH<sub>4</sub> to CO<sub>2</sub> after 24 h of irradiation was almost 0.5, which is consistent with the reaction stoichiometry [16]. Although the mechanism remains unclear, the yield of CH<sub>4</sub> in a CO<sub>2</sub> atmosphere was greater than that in an Ar atmosphere. It was thought that CO<sub>2</sub> is adsorbed on the surfaces of TiO<sub>2</sub> particles, resulting in modification of their surface properties.

The rate of CH<sub>4</sub> production decreased suddenly when a small amount of water was added to the system. Only a very small amount of CH<sub>4</sub> was detected in a solid–liquid system (suspension).

CO<sub>2</sub> was obtained together with CH<sub>4</sub> in an Ar atmosphere, while it was difficult to determine the amount of evolved CO<sub>2</sub> in a CO<sub>2</sub> atmosphere. In an O<sub>2</sub> atmosphere, only CO<sub>2</sub> was obtained as a major product; production of CH<sub>4</sub> was not observed. As shown in the equation below, oxidation of malonic acid occurred to produce only CO<sub>2</sub>. Similar behavior was observed in air.

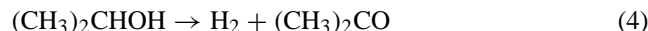


Production of H<sub>2</sub> by photocatalysis in a CO<sub>2</sub> or Ar atmosphere using oxalic acid and 2-propanol as reactants and

Table 2  
H<sub>2</sub> production from oxalic acid and 2-propanol by photocatalysis (2 h irradiation)

Reactant	Atmosphere	Product (μmol)	
		H <sub>2</sub>	CO <sub>2</sub>
(COOH) <sub>2</sub>	CO <sub>2</sub>	154	–
	Ar	129	362
(CH <sub>3</sub> ) <sub>2</sub> CHOH	CO <sub>2</sub>	576	–
	Ar	511	–

Pt/TiO<sub>2</sub> as a photocatalyst was also examined. As shown in Table 2, H<sub>2</sub> was produced by the photocatalytic reaction in not only an Ar atmosphere but also in a CO<sub>2</sub> atmosphere. The photocatalytic reactions proceeded smoothly in a CO<sub>2</sub> atmosphere. No gaseous products other than H<sub>2</sub> and CO<sub>2</sub> were detected. Thus, CO<sub>2</sub> did not react with H<sub>2</sub>



### 3.2. Reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> by sonication

It has been reported that the sonochemical reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> in water was accelerated at an optimal concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> in an Ar matrix [8,9], but in a CO<sub>2</sub> atmosphere, unfortunately, no sonochemical products were detected. This is attributed to restrained cavitation by dissolved CO<sub>2</sub>. Cavitation is the process in which micro-bubbles are formed in a liquid during the rarefaction cycle of an acoustic wave and then undergo violent collapse during the compression cycle of the wave [17]. Henglein [18] reported that chemical effects caused by the collapse of bubbles were generally confirmed only in the presence of a mono- or diatomic gas.

In order to perform the sonolysis of CO<sub>2</sub>, this gas was mixed with a matrix gas (Ar). Then sonolysis was carried out in a CO<sub>2</sub>–Ar atmosphere. Fig. 1 shows sonolytical products obtained from water in a 5% CO<sub>2</sub>–Ar atmosphere. Hydrogen peroxide (111 μmol) and CO (114 μmol) were the major

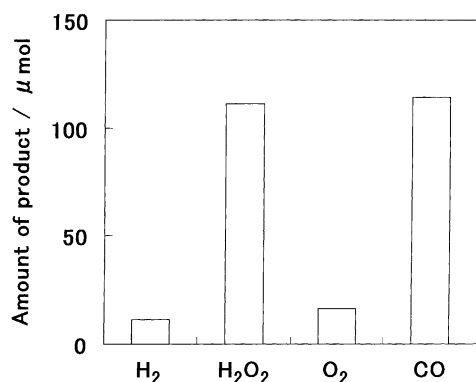


Fig. 1. Sonolytical products from water in a CO<sub>2</sub>–Ar atmosphere; ultrasound, 200 kHz, 200 W; temperature, 25 °C; CO<sub>2</sub> concentration, 5% (440 μmol); H<sub>2</sub>O, 100 cm<sup>3</sup>; reaction time, 2 h.

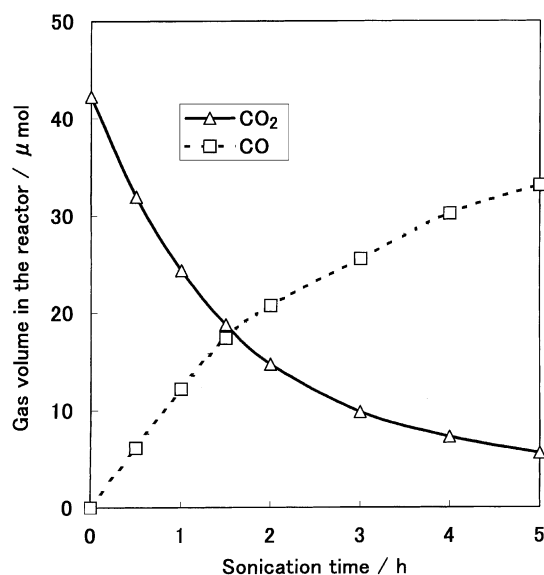
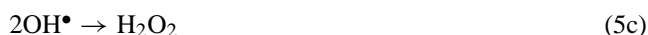


Fig. 2. Consumption of CO<sub>2</sub> and production of CO in a CO<sub>2</sub>–Ar atmosphere under sonication; ultrasound, 200 kHz, 200 W; temperature, 25 °C; CO<sub>2</sub> concentration, 0.4% (44 μmol); H<sub>2</sub>O, 40 cm<sup>3</sup>.

products, and the amount of these two products were similar. Small amounts of hydrogen (11 μmol) and O<sub>2</sub> (16 μmol) were also detected as minor products. In this experiment, 240 μmol of CO<sub>2</sub>, which was almost twice larger than the molar amount of CO produced, disappeared from the gas phase. This difference might be caused by the difference in solubility of CO and that of CO<sub>2</sub> in water; CO<sub>2</sub> is much more soluble than CO. Fig. 2 shows time dependencies of CO<sub>2</sub> reduction. It is clear that CO increased with decrease in CO<sub>2</sub>. Thus, reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> proceeded sonochemically to produce CO along with H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> liberation.

Hydrogen peroxide and H<sub>2</sub> were also obtained from water in an Ar atmosphere by sonication, as shown in the following reaction equations [2,19]. As shown in Fig. 3, the amounts of these two products were similar in the absence of CO<sub>2</sub>.



In the presence of CO<sub>2</sub>, as described above, the H<sub>2</sub> yield was reduced and CO was liberated, while the H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> yield did not decrease. Reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> by H<sub>2</sub> and/or H<sup>•</sup> radicals might occur during the sonolysis, as shown below:



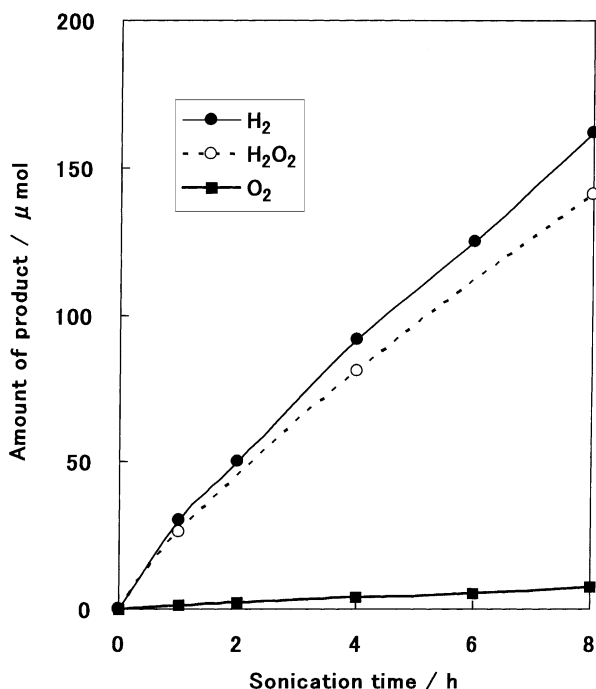


Fig. 3. Sonolytical products from water in an Ar atmosphere; ultrasound, 200 kHz, 200 W; temperature, 25 °C; H<sub>2</sub>O, 100 cm<sup>3</sup>.

To determine whether H<sub>2</sub> participates in the CO<sub>2</sub> reduction (Eq. (6)), sonolysis of CO<sub>2</sub> in the presence of H<sub>2</sub> from the beginning was carried out. Fig. 4 shows the results. A decrease in CO<sub>2</sub> with an increase in CO was observed as

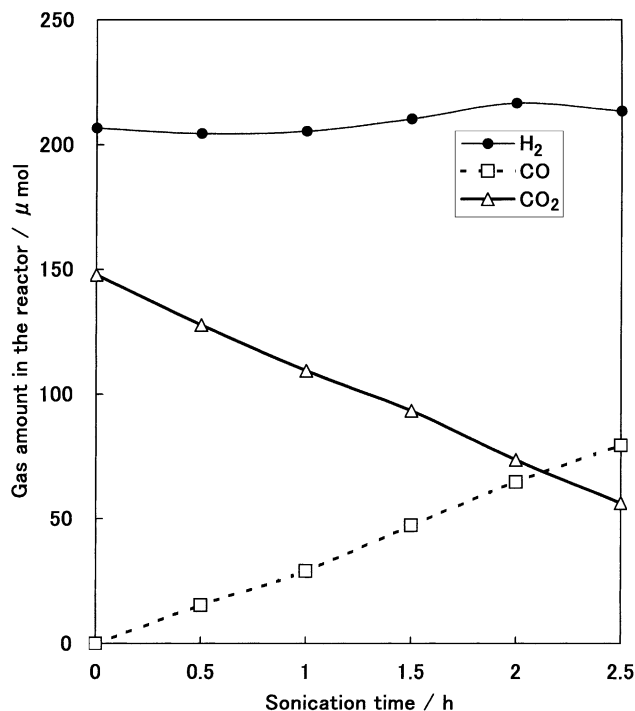
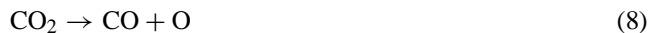


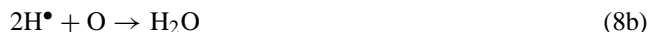
Fig. 4. Effect of H<sub>2</sub> in the reactor on the sonolytical reaction of CO<sub>2</sub>; ultrasound, 200 kHz, 200 W; temperature, 25 °C; H<sub>2</sub>O, 40 cm<sup>3</sup>; atmosphere, H<sub>2</sub>-CO<sub>2</sub>-Ar, CO<sub>2</sub> concentration, 2% (220 μmol) and H<sub>2</sub> concentration, 2% (220 μmol).

observed in the absence of H<sub>2</sub> in the beginning, but negligible H<sub>2</sub> was consumed. Although the solubility of H<sub>2</sub> is low, an appreciable amount of H<sub>2</sub> is dissolved in water from the beginning of the reaction and there seems to be no enhancement of CO production. Therefore, H<sup>•</sup> produced from water by sonication would be used in the process of CO<sub>2</sub> reduction. The effect of H<sub>2</sub> will be discussed again in the following section.

As another possible reaction pathway of CO<sub>2</sub> reduction during sonication, Henglein [9] suggested direct deoxygenation of CO<sub>2</sub> into CO via following the reaction and also suggested that reaction (8b) is the main process



or



(H<sup>•</sup> liberated from H<sub>2</sub>O by sonication). In both reaction pathways (Eqs. (7) and (8)), CO<sub>2</sub> is deoxygenated into CO and the production of H<sub>2</sub> is suppressed. Since, as Fig. 1 shows, only a small amount of O<sub>2</sub> was produced along with the CO<sub>2</sub> reduction, the O<sub>2</sub> evolution reaction, Eq. (8a), seems to be a minor pathway even if reaction (8) proceeds.

The effect of concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere on the rate of sonolysis is shown in Fig. 5. As mentioned above, sonolysis did not proceed in a pure CO<sub>2</sub> atmosphere but did proceed in a CO<sub>2</sub>-Ar atmosphere. It was found that the rate of CO liberation was almost proportional to the CO<sub>2</sub> concentration up to 3%. The yield of H<sub>2</sub> decreased with increase in CO<sub>2</sub> concentration, as reasonably interpreted by the consumption of its precursor, H<sup>•</sup>, by CO<sub>2</sub>. The maximum rate

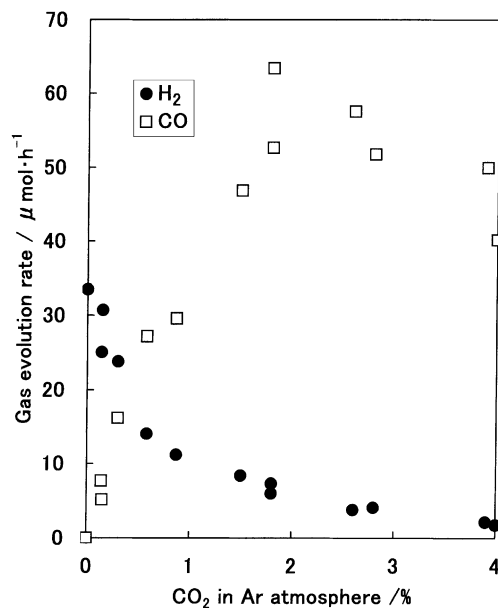
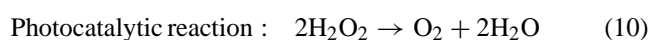
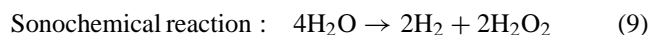


Fig. 5. Effects of CO<sub>2</sub> concentration on the production rates of CO and H<sub>2</sub> in a CO<sub>2</sub>-Ar atmosphere under sonication; ultrasound, 200 kHz, 200 W; temperature, 25 °C; H<sub>2</sub>O, 40 cm<sup>3</sup>.

of CO evolution was obtained in an atmosphere containing 2–3% CO<sub>2</sub> in Ar as was found in our previous study [8].

### 3.3. Combined system for CO<sub>2</sub> reduction and H<sub>2</sub>O oxidation

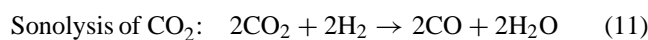
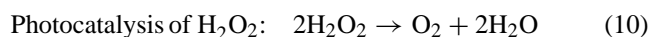
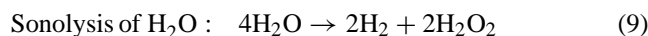
Sonophotocatalysis was carried out to obtain O<sub>2</sub> from water. The combined reaction system was used since overall water splitting could not be achieved by only photocatalysis or sonolysis. This combined system consisted of sonochemical and photocatalytic reactions. In the case of water splitting, sonolysis and photocatalysis proceed simultaneously as shown by the following reaction equations [2]:



Totally, water is decomposed into H<sub>2</sub> and O<sub>2</sub> stoichiometrically and continuously. In other words, overall water splitting was achieved using sonophotocatalysis [2].

According to the conclusion given in Section 3.2, hydrogen is consumed through the CO<sub>2</sub> reduction process when CO<sub>2</sub> is present in the reaction solution. Thus, it is expected that O<sub>2</sub> would remain liberated and that CO<sub>2</sub> would be deoxygenated in the reactor in a CO<sub>2</sub>–Ar atmosphere in the combined sonophotocatalytic reaction system. As mentioned above, 2–3% CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere was found to be the optimal concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> for its reduction. Since an appreciable amount of CO<sub>2</sub> is dissolved in water before and during irradiation, the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in the gas phase was less than the amount of introduced CO<sub>2</sub>. It was confirmed by gas chromatography that the introduction of 3.5% CO<sub>2</sub> gave that there was 2.8% CO<sub>2</sub> in the gas phase of the reactor used in the following experiments.

Fig. 6 shows the products obtained from water in a 3.5% CO<sub>2</sub>–Ar atmosphere under the condition of simultaneous irradiation of sonic waves and light in the presence of a TiO<sub>2</sub> photocatalyst. Carbon monoxide and O<sub>2</sub> were the major products. The reaction of this sonophotocatalysis of water in a CO<sub>2</sub>–Ar atmosphere is formally shown below:



Coincidence of the amounts of liberated CO and consumed CO<sub>2</sub> (ca. 1500 μmol) is consistent with reaction (12). Stoichiometry of reaction (12) also predicts that the amount of O<sub>2</sub> produced is half that of CO. Taking into account the fact that H<sub>2</sub> was detected and that a half molar amount of O<sub>2</sub> is attributed to this side reaction (2H<sub>2</sub>O → 2H<sub>2</sub> + O<sub>2</sub>) ca. 800 μmol of O<sub>2</sub> was expected. However, the actual amount of O<sub>2</sub> detected was ca. 700 μmol, and the reason for this shortage is not known at present.

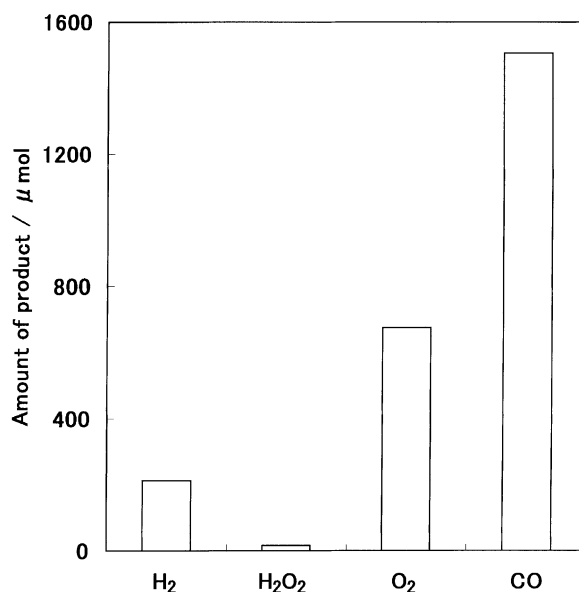


Fig. 6. Sonophotocatalytic products from water in a CO<sub>2</sub>–Ar atmosphere; ultrasound, 200 kHz, 200 W; light illumination, 500 W Xe; photocatalyst, TiO<sub>2</sub> (Soekawa), 200 mg; 500 W Xe; temperature, 25 °C; CO<sub>2</sub> concentration, 3.5% (1780 μmol); H<sub>2</sub>O, 40 cm<sup>3</sup>; reaction time, 20 h.

Table 3 shows the products obtained from sonophotocatalytic reactions at various concentrations of CO<sub>2</sub> in an Ar matrix. In all cases except for 20% of CO<sub>2</sub>, CO<sub>2</sub> was reduced into CO selectively, while, again, the O<sub>2</sub> yields were a little smaller than those expected from reaction (12). The negligible reaction products in 20% CO<sub>2</sub> atmosphere are attributed to the absence of cavitation as described in the previous section. At a low concentration (0.5%) of CO<sub>2</sub> in an Ar matrix, almost all of the CO<sub>2</sub> in the reactor was deoxygenated to CO within 3 h. The ratio of evolved H<sub>2</sub> to O<sub>2</sub>, about 2.0, suggested preferential overall water splitting because of the low CO<sub>2</sub> concentration.

As shown in Fig. 5, ca. 1 and 5% of CO<sub>2</sub> are the middle points of the increasing and decreasing slopes of the CO evolution curve, respectively. Satisfactory results were obtained in those conditions. In the case of 0.9% CO<sub>2</sub>, a better result was obtained for H<sub>2</sub> evolution since, as shown in Table 3, the lower CO<sub>2</sub> concentration gave a higher yield of H<sub>2</sub>. The evolution of H<sub>2</sub> would be important for the next step of the system.

Table 3  
Sonophotocatalytic reaction products from water under various concentration of CO<sub>2</sub>

Atmosphere (% of CO <sub>2</sub> in Ar matrix)	Reaction time (h)	Product (μmol)				Reduced CO <sub>2</sub> (μmol)
		H <sub>2</sub>	H <sub>2</sub> O <sub>2</sub>	O <sub>2</sub>	CO	
20	21	Trace	3	–	–	–
5	17	160	74	216	392	417
0.9	20	623	16	430	437	446
0.5	3	88	10	43	39	44

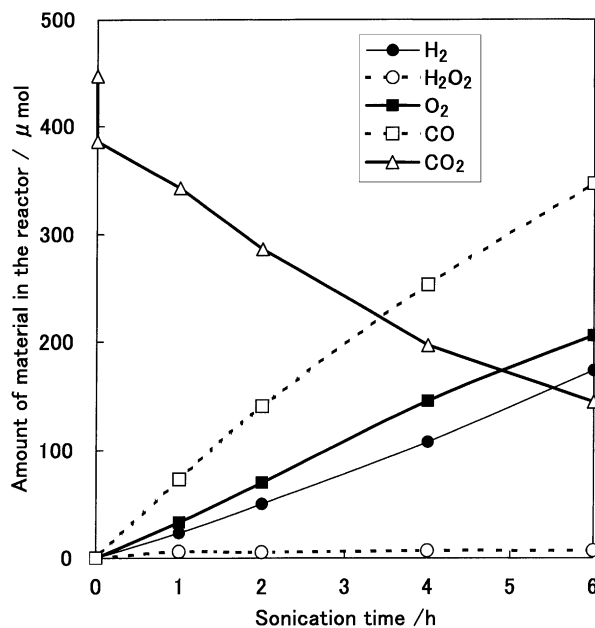


Fig. 7. Sonophotocatalysis of water in a CO<sub>2</sub>-Ar atmosphere; ultrasound, 200 kHz, 200 W; light illumination, 500 W Xe; photocatalyst, TiO<sub>2</sub> (Soekawa), 200 mg; temperature, 25 °C; CO<sub>2</sub> concentration, 0.9% (440 μmol); H<sub>2</sub>O, 100 cm<sup>3</sup>.

The time dependence of the composition of the reactant and products in the reactor during simultaneous irradiation was examined. Fig. 7 shows the results for a 0.9% CO<sub>2</sub>-Ar atmosphere. CO<sub>2</sub> decreased with an almost linear increase in CO, and O<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>2</sub> were observed with the decrease in CO<sub>2</sub>. A small amount of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> was also detected. These facts

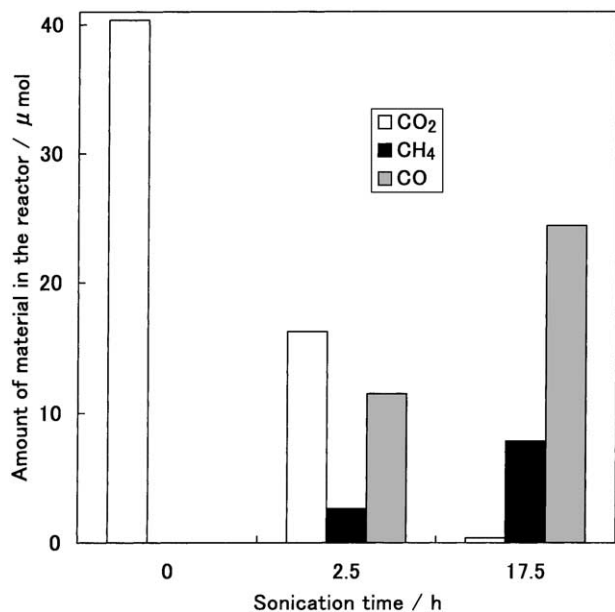


Fig. 8. CH<sub>4</sub> production in a CO<sub>2</sub>-H<sub>2</sub> atmosphere under sonication; ultrasound, 200 kHz, 200 W; temperature, 25 °C; CO<sub>2</sub> concentration, 0.3% (44 μmol); H<sub>2</sub>O, 40 cm<sup>3</sup>.

suggest that the rates of photocatalytic reactions are faster than that of sonolysis, since in the present sonophotocatalytic reaction, photocatalytic reactions proceed with the products, H<sup>•</sup> and H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>, of sonolysis.

As a further extension, production of methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) as well as CO from CO<sub>2</sub> was investigated. As shown in Fig. 8, in an H<sub>2</sub> matrix, CH<sub>4</sub> was produced during the sonolysis of CO<sub>2</sub>, and the yield increased with sonication time. As shown in Fig. 4, CH<sub>4</sub> was negligibly liberated when the concentration of H<sub>2</sub> was lower (2%). A combination of this CH<sub>4</sub> production from CO<sub>2</sub> with photocatalysis to yield O<sub>2</sub>, which resembles photosynthesis, is now being investigated.

#### 4. Conclusions

A solid–solid photocatalytic reaction of malonic acid to give CH<sub>4</sub> was found to be accelerated in a CO<sub>2</sub> atmosphere. Although photocatalysis alone could not split water into H<sub>2</sub> and O<sub>2</sub>, a combined system of photocatalysis and sonolysis could drive water splitting. Similarly, CO<sub>2</sub> was negligibly reduced by photocatalysis, while it was reduced by sonolysis. By a combination of photocatalysis and sonolysis, we could perform the overall CO<sub>2</sub> deoxygenation into CO and O<sub>2</sub>.

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