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HIGH POWER PUMPED MID-IR WAVELENGTH SYSTEMS USING NONLINEAR FREQUENCY MIXING (NFM) DEVICES

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ABSTRACT

Laser diode pumped mid-IR wavelength systems include at least one high power, near-IR wavelength, injection and/or sources wherein one or both of such sources may be tunable providing a pump wave output beam to a quasi-phase matched (QPM) nonlinear frequency mixing (NFM) device. The NFM device may be a difference frequency mixing (DFM) device or an optical parametric oscillation (OPO) device. Wavelength tuning of at least one of the sources advantageously provides the ability for optimizing pump or injection wavelengths to match the QPM properties of the NFM device enabling a broad range of mid-IR wavelength selectivity. Also, pump powers are gain enhanced by the addition of a rare earth amplifier or oscillator, or a Raman/Brillouin amplifier or oscillator between the high power source and the NFM device. Further, polarization conversion using Raman or Brillouin wavelength shifting is provided to optimize frequency conversion efficiency in the NFM device.

30 Claims, 15 Drawing Sheets
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FIG. 1A

FIG. 1B
FIXED OR TUNABLE HIGH POWER SOURCE

MID-IR WAVELENGTH OUTPUT, $\lambda_I$ (\textmu{}m)

PUMP WAVELENGTH INPUT, $\lambda_p$ (nm)

SIGNAL WAVELENGTH, $\lambda_s$ (nm)

FIG. 1C

NONLINEAR FREQUENCY MIXING DEVICE

$\frac{1}{\lambda_1} - \frac{1}{\lambda_2} = \frac{1}{\lambda_3}$

FIG. 1D
\( \lambda_S = 972 \text{ nm} \)
\( P_S = 530 \text{ mW} \)
\( P_p = 250 \text{ mW} \)

**FIG. 3**

![Graph showing power at 3.9 \( \mu \)m vs. pump wavelength (nm).]

\( \lambda_p = 777 \text{ nm} \)
\( \lambda_S = 980 \text{ nm} \)
\( \lambda_I = 3.75 \text{ \( \mu \)m} \)
\( P_p = 180 \text{ mW} \)

**FIG. 4**

\[ P_I = 1.4 \times 10^{-5} P_S \]
**FIG. 5**

![Graph showing PUMP/SIGNAL WAVELENGTH (μm) vs. MID-IR DFM WAVELENGTH (μm)]

- Curve A (λ₂)
- Curve B (λ₁)

**FIG. 6**

![Graph showing PUMP/SIGNAL WAVELENGTH (μm) vs. MID-IR DFM WAVELENGTH (μm)]

- Curve A (λ₂)
- Curve B (λ₁)
FIG. 7

FIG. 8
FIG. 9

LiNbO₃ PUMP SIGNAL IDLER
n = 2.2

Waveguide Region

LiNbO₃
n = 2.2

FIG. 10

51A 51B 51C 51D 51E

52A 52B 52C 52D 52E

SERVO 58 59 54 55 56 57 58A 59 58 59 58A
Er:Yb DOPED, SINGLE MODE FIBER HIGH POWER PUMP SOURCE (FIXED OR TUNABLE)
This invention relates generally to frequency conversion systems and high power sources for such systems, and more particularly to wide-range frequency systems that convert coherent near-infrared radiation to coherent mid-infrared radiation using nonlinear frequency mixing or conversion, such as by difference frequency mixing (DFM) and optical parametric oscillation (OPO).

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

There is a great interest and need for developing compact, reliable high power mid-infrared radiation (mid-IR) sources for many types of applications, such as, spectroscopy, environmental monitoring, gas and chemical sensing and manufacturing process control. The most serious limitations to practical mid-IR sources has been the complexity of the near-IR pump source required and the cost, stability and reliability of nonlinear mixing mediums. However, nonlinear frequency mixing of high power near-IR laser diode sources would be an attractive technique for generating broadly tunable coherent mid-IR frequencies, such as in the range of about 2.0 μm to 5.0 μm.

The use of high power laser diodes for frequency conversion have been contemplated for sum or difference frequency mixing (SFM or DFM) applications, as shown in FIG. 6 of U.S. Pat. No. 5,321,718, which is commonly owned by the assignee of this application and is incorporated herein by reference thereto. Disclosed are a pair of high tunable laser diode sources would be an attractive technique for generating broadband tunable coherent mid-IR frequencies, such as in the range of about 2.0 μm to 5.0 μm.

The use of high power laser diodes for frequency conversion have been contemplated for sum or difference frequency mixing (SFM or DFM) applications, as shown in FIG. 6 of U.S. Pat. No. 5,321,718, which is commonly owned by the assignee of this application and is incorporated herein by reference thereto. Disclosed are a pair of high tunable laser diode sources would be an attractive technique for generating broadband tunable coherent mid-IR frequencies, such as in the range of about 2.0 μm to 5.0 μm.

The advantage of the foregoing systems for achieving mid-IR generation is the lack of room temperature, mid-IR tunability over a large expansive mid-IR range of 2.0 μm to 5.0 μm and lack of a delivery system for mid-IR generation that is compact in size, less costly and not requiring large size solid state and gas lasers operating at elevated temperatures requiring large operating powers.

LiNbO₃ waveguide material is a robust, relatively inexpensive, highly reliable nonlinear material for DFM, and QPM permits the material to be tailored to mix arbitrary laser diode wavelengths through the choice of an appropriate ferroelectric domain reversal period or periodic poling. Recent advances in electric filed poling of LiNbO₃ waveguide material allows QPM to be implemented in bulk interactions and has been employed in demonstrating mid-IR optical parametric oscillation (OPO). See L. E. Myers et al., "Quasi-Phase Matched 1.064 μm-Pumped Optical Parametric Oscillator in Bulk Periodically Poled LiNbO₃," Optics Letters, Vol. 6(2), pp. 252-254 (Feb., 1994). However, mid-IR generation has been demonstrated in quasi-phase matching (QPM) crystals relative to such laser diode sources only for relatively shorter wavelength applications and not reliably extended to more desired...
mid-IR wavelength applications. Moreover, as applied to 
AgGaS₂ and AgGaSe₂ crystals, the full spectral range of 
mid-IR generation cannot be easily derived because the 
input wavelength range required to cover the full 2.0 μm to 
5.0 μm mid-IR range is very broad for noncritical phase 
matching.

What is needed is a mid-IR generating system providing 
for noncritical phase matching over a wide range of near-IR 
input wavelengths at room temperature that can be fre-
quency mixed to selectively provide a desired mid-IR wave- 
length over the entire mid-IR range from about 2.5 μm to 5 
μm.

An object of this invention is the provision for mid-IR 
frequency conversion over a wide frequency range.

Another object of this invention is the provision for high 
power, semiconductor/optical amplifier/laser sources as 
applied to nonlinear frequency mixing devices, e.g., high 
power laser diodes, master oscillator power amplifier 
(MOPA) devices high power fiber amplifier or laser, or 
amplifier devices, Raman or Brillouin amplifiers or lasers, 
and rare earth single mode fiber amplifiers and lasers.

Another object of this invention is the provision of the use 
of near-IR laser diode sources to generate broadly tunable 
coherent mid-IR radiation, such as tunable across the mid-IR 
range of 2 μm to 5 μm.

Another object of this invention is the provision of a 
compact, room temperature, broadly tunable coherent 
source for selectively tuning a desired mid-IR wavelength.

Another object of this invention is the provision of high 
efficiency buried non-linear waveguide structures using 
quasi-phase matching (QPM) to convert developed near-IR 
power from room temperature laser sources to mid-IR power 
for use, for example, in a large spectrum of analysis, sensing 
and monitoring applications.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to the system of this invention, a broadly 
tunable laser diode pumped mid-IR wavelength source com-
prises a pump source comprising combinations of one or 
more different types of high power semiconductor or optical 
amplifier or lasers sources, such as a master oscillator power 
amplifier (MOPA), fiber amplifiers or lasers, tunable laser 
diodes, and Raman or Brillouin amplifiers or lasers, for 
injection and pump wavelength input to a nonlinear fre-
quency mixing (NFM) device, such as a quasi-phase match-
ing difference frequency mixing (QPM DFM) device or a 
quasi-phase matching optical parametric oscillation (QPM 
OPO) device to selectively provide a mid-IR frequency as 
output in the range of 2.0 μm to 5.0 μm. By extending the 
tunability of the pump source wavelengths for QPM fre-
cuency mixing, the range of possible mid-IR wavelengths is 
greatly extended without being significantly affected by the 
asorption limitations of the crystal material employed for 
frequency mixing. Suitable materials in the past, e.g., 
AgGaS₂ and AgGaSe₂, provided tunability for noncritical 
bi-refrangent phase matching required for large input wave-
length tuning ranges such as between 680 nm to 1100 nm to 
possibly achieve the full mid-IR radiation spectrum.

However, by employing QPM nonlinear crystals, such as 
LiNbO₃, input mixing wavelengths can be tunned over 
shorter wavelength ranges to provide for broader tuning 
selectability of mid-IR wavelengths. As an example, QPM 
DFM can be accomplished over the full mid-IR radiation 
spectrum with one fixed signal wavelength input of 1100 nm 
and the other pump wavelength tuned between the narrow 
range of 775 nm to 900 nm or by mixing the output 
wavelengths of two separate tunable laser diodes one tun-
able in the near-IR range of 730 nm to 833 nm and the other 
tunable in the near-IR range of 1000 nm to 1150 nm.

Another aspect of this invention is the provision of 
polarization maintaining fibers to provide linearly polarized 
light output to a nonlinear frequency mixing (NFM) device 
or other polarization input required device. In cases where 
the polarization of light input into the NFM device is 
polarized such that it will not experience efficient frequency 
conversion, an optical polarizing converter system is pro-
vided at the output of the fiber to compensate for this 
condition. Polarization maintaining fiber may function as 
well as an amplifier, particularly in the case of input to QPM 
DFM device and as a laser, particularly in the case of input 
to QPM OPO devices. In these applications, the fiber may be 
userathan doped or co-doped, or operate with Raman gain 
shift or Brillouin gain shift.

Other objects and attainments together with a fuller 
understanding of the invention will become apparent and 
appreciated by referring to the following description and 
claims taken in conjunction with the accompanying draw-
ings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1A is a schematic illustration of a first configura-
tion of a tunable high power, laser diode mid-IR wavelength 
source employing a NFM device and two high power 
injection/pump input sources wherein one of them is tunable 
to achieve a selectively tuned mid-IR wavelength idler 
output. FIG. 1B is a schematic illustration of a second configu-
tion of a tunable high power, laser diode mid-IR wave-
length source employing a NFM device and two high power 
injection/pump input sources wherein both of them are 
tunable to achieve a selectively tuned mid-IR wavelength 
idler output.

FIG. 1C is a graphic illustration of the general relationship 
between pump, injection (signal) and idler wavelength 
selection employing a tunable high power, laser diode 
mid-IR wavelength source.

FIG. 1D is a schematic illustration of a third configura-
tion of a fixed or tunable high power, laser diode mid-IR wave-
length source employing a NFM device and one input laser 
diode pump source wherein either the laser diode and/or 
the non-linear frequency mixing device is tunable to achieve 
a selectively tuned mid-IR wavelength output.

FIG. 2 is a more detailed embodiment based upon the 
embodiment of FIG. 1B employing a QPM waveguide for 
single pass, difference frequency mixing (DFM).

FIG. 3 is a graphic illustration of mid-IR power output in 
μW for a given mid-IR wavelength versus near-IR pumping 
wavelength input in nanometers for a tunable high power, 
laser diode pumped mid-IR wavelength source according 
to FIG. 1B.

FIG. 4 is a graphic illustration of DFM idler or mid-IR 
power versus signal power for fixed pump power for the 
tunable high power, laser diode pumped mid-IR wavelength 
source according to FIG. 1B.

FIG. 5 is a graphic illustration of input pump/signal 
wavelength combinations for wavelength phase matching in 
AgGaS₂ crystal.

FIG. 6 is a graphic illustration of input pump/signal 
wavelength combinations for wavelength quasi-phase 
matching in a periodic poled LiNbO₃ crystal.

FIG. 7 is a graphic illustration of peak output mid-IR 
wavelengths to input signal wavelengths for the tunable high
power, laser diode pumped mid-IR wavelength source according to FIG. 1B using a periodic poled LiNbO₃ crystal as the NFM device.

FIG. 8 is a perspective view of a more detailed embodiment based upon the configuration shown in FIG. 1D employing a QPM waveguide as a multiple pass, optical parametric oscillator (OPO).

FIG. 9 is a schematic side elevation of a buried QPM type waveguide for a NFM crystal device for use with the embodiments of this invention.

FIG. 10 is a more detailed schematic illustration of a embodiment based upon the configuration shown in FIG. 1A employing a NFM device having a progressive poling scheme comprising a laterally stepped poling pattern for varying the poling period relative to the propagating light input.

FIG. 10A is another embodiment of a progressive poling scheme comprising a rotatable NFM device for varying the poling period relative to the propagating light input.

FIG. 10B is still another embodiment of a progressive poling scheme comprising a laterally stepped poling pattern which is laterally shifted for varying the poling period relative to the propagating light input.

FIG. 11 is a schematic illustration of a high power, mid-IR wavelength pump source for a NFM device employing a fiber amplifier as an injection source.

FIG. 12 is an enlarged cross sectional view of the double-clad fiber amplifier of FIG. 11 taken along the line 12—12 of FIG. 11.

FIG. 13 is schematic illustration of a high power, mid-IR wavelength pump source for a NFM device employing a fiber laser source such as semiconductor laser diodes or amplifiers or optical fiber oscillators or amplifiers. These sources can, in turn, be utilized for difference frequency mixing, via an appropriate nonlinear crystal device to produce wavelength, λ₃, in the mid-IR frequency range between about 2 μm to about 5 μm.

With reference to FIG. 1A, a tunable high power injection source 10 provides a first wavelength beam λ₁ (or injection wavelength λ₁), and a second fixed high power pump source 12 provides a second wavelength beam λ₂ (or pump wavelength λ₂). Sources 10, 12 comprise in this configuration, as well as the other configurations to be discussed, a high power diode laser, such as Model No. SDL-8630, available from SDL, Inc., 80 Rose Orchard Way, San Jose, Calif. 95134, a MOPA device, a semiconductor amplifier and laser combination, or a semiconductor pumped fiber laser or amplifier. Tunable high power injection source 10 may comprise a semiconductor amplifier in combination with an external tuning cavity, such as disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 5,392,308 to Welch et al., which is assigned to the assignee herein and is incorporated in this disclosure by reference thereto. High power sources 10, 12 are provided so that λ₁, > λ₂. Also, it should be noted that source 12 may be the tunable source and source 10 may be the fixed source.

Beams λ₁, λ₂ are combined from sources 10, 12 by means of dichroic beam splitter or combiner 14, and the combined beam is provided as input to NFM device 16. Device 16 is a noncritical, single pass, quasi-phase matching (QPM), difference frequency mixing (DFM) device comprising a crystal or waveguide structure made, for example, from such material as LiTaO₃, LiNbO₃, KTP, AgGaS₂, or AgGaSe₂. Device 16 is periodically poled device, as known in the art, which receives the combined beam input, λ₁, λ₂, to be
frequency mixed. The output of NFM device 16 generates a frequency mixed beam having an idler wavelength, \( \lambda_i \), in the near-IR range. The idler wavelength, \( \lambda_i \), is derived by the difference frequency equation,

\[
\lambda_i = \lambda_p - \lambda_s = \lambda_p - \lambda_e
\]

In application, as indicated above, at least one of the high power sources, such as source 10, is tunable, indicated by arrow 10A, and may have, for example, an tunable wavelength between 775 nm to 900 nm or other wavelength, while the other high power source 12 may have a substantially stable frequency, for example, at 1100 nm. Such a stable frequency source may of the type disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 5,485,481 to Ventrudo et al., which is assigned to the assignee herein and is incorporated in this disclosure by reference thereto. It also may be a monolithic master oscillator power amplifier (M-MOPA) laser diode source similar to SDL Model Number 5760-A6, manufactured by SDL, Inc., San Jose, Calif. The combined outputs provided to NFM device 16 produce a longer wavelength having a mid-IR frequency in the range of about 2.5 \( \mu \)m to about 5.0 \( \mu \)m.

As is known in the art, periodic nonlinear coefficient patterning of device 16 may be accomplished by titanium indiffusion in LiNbO\(_3\), by proton exchange and anneal, by heat treatment or by electric field induced poling. Other types of periodic nonlinear coefficient patterning may be employed. Periodic nonlinear coefficient patterning may in general be one of at least two different possible patterns or gratings, for example, (1) a periodic poled pattern of positive and negative nonlinear coefficients or (2) a periodic modulated pattern of either first positive or negative nonlinear coefficients and a second nonlinear coefficient of comparatively low magnitude or of zero magnitude, i.e., no nonlinearity. Electric field induced poling is preferably utilized for NFM device 16 because of its accuracy in forming substantially straight wall domain boundaries in the bulk crystal or waveguide material.

The configuration in FIG. 1B differs from FIG. 1A by the fact that both high power sources 10, 12 are independently tunable sources. Because both sources 10, 12 are tunable, it is possible to extend the tunable mid-IR range from between about 2.0 \( \mu \)m to about 5.0 \( \mu \)m. As an example, tunable source 10 (as indicated by arrow 10A) may be tunable within the frequency range of about 730 nm to about 833 nm, while tunable source 12 (as indicated by arrow 12A) may be tunable within the frequency range of about 1000 nm to about 1150 nm. When these sources are selectively tuned and mixed with their combined output provided to NFM device 16, the full range of selected mid-IR frequencies within the range of about 2.0 \( \mu \)m to 5.0 \( \mu \)m is achievable, within the limits, of course, of the particular absorption edge characteristics of the nonlinear crystal.

FIG. 1C illustrates in graphic form the relative relationship between the pump wavelength, \( \lambda_p \), the signal wavelength, \( \lambda_s \), and the idler wavelength, \( \lambda_i \). For a given tuned pump wavelength, \( \lambda_p \), and tuned signal or injection wavelength, \( \lambda_s \), as such as indicated at “X”, an idler mid-IR frequency, \( \lambda_i \), can be achieved based on a given periodic poled grating of NFM device 16.

The configurations illustrated in FIGS. 1A and 1B can also be additionally wavelength tuned by means of temperature tuning of the NFM device 16. This is accomplished by controlling the application of heat to device 16 through its submount which changes its resultant mixing frequency. Variation in the uniformly applied heat will vary the frequency mixing response of device 16.

The configuration in FIG. 1D is different from the configuration of FIGS. 1A and 1B in that a second source for the second wavelength beam, \( \lambda_s \), is not utilized or necessary. Instead, pumping source 10 having a pumping wavelength, \( \lambda_e \), is coupled to NFM device 16 comprising a noncritical, multiple pass, quasi-phase matching (QPM), optical parametric oscillator (OPO) device which may be a crystal or waveguide structure made, for example, from such material as LiTaO\(_3\), LiNbO\(_3\), KTP, AgGaSe\(_2\), or AgGaSe\(_2\). In the case here, QPM OPO device 16 functions as an oscillator creating within its optical cavity a second shifted wavelength, \( \lambda_i \), which is difference frequency mixed with pumping wavelength, \( \lambda_e \), to produce an idler wavelength, \( \lambda_i \), in the mid-IR frequency range where \( 1/\lambda_i = 1/\lambda_e - 1/\lambda_s \). QPM OPO device 16 may be also independently wavelength tuned by means of temperature tuning. A heater may be provided at the submount for device 16. Variation in the uniformly applied heat will vary the frequency mixing response of device 16.

Reference is made to FIG. 2 illustrating pumped mid-IR wavelength source 20 which is a detail embodiment for the FIG. 1B configuration. Source 20 comprises two tunable high power diode laser sources 21, 22 and one high power, single spatial mode tunable laser diode source, Model No. SDL-8630, available from SDL, Inc., 80 Rose Orchard Way, San Jose, Calif. 95134. The tuned output of these sources, \( \lambda_e \), and \( \lambda_s \), is combined via folding mirror 26 and dichroic beam combiner 27 and provides as input to NFM device 23 which comprises a QPM DFM waveguide device. The output of laser diodes 21, 22 are individually collimated by respective lenses 24 for presentation to half wavelength plates 25 for rotating the polarization axes of the output beams to be aligned when they are combined at beam splitter 27. Lenses 24 may be a lens system to correct for astigmatism in the laser source output depending upon the type of laser source employed. Such lens systems are disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 5,321,718, assigned to the assignee of this application and is incorporated herein by reference thereto. The output of beam splitter 27 is focused to an input face of device or waveguide 23 by means of focusing lens 28. Waveguide 23 is periodic poled crystal of LiNbO\(_3\), having a poled grating period that is adapted to mix the combined wavelengths \( \lambda_e \) and \( \lambda_s \) from beam splitter 27. The idler output 31 comprising idler wavelength, \( \lambda_i \), in the mid-IR frequency range from waveguide 23 is collimated by lens 29, e.g., a CaF\(_2\) lens. Periodic poled LiNbO\(_3\), in both bulk and waveguide form are known in the art, one such example being disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 5,295,218, incorporated herein by reference thereto. Wave length discriminating beam splitter 30 may be a Ge filter employed to absorb any remaining near IR wavelengths from sources 21 and 22 that have not mixed in waveguide 23 or a dichroic beam splitter so that beam 31 is substantially a wavelength selected mid-IR frequency which may be used in an IR application as collimated or focused to a spot as required. Mid-IR source 20 may be optimized by employing optical isolators between each of the lenses 24 and plates 25.

An important aspect of this embodiment is that laser diode sources 21, 22 may be selectively tuned to a wavelength in a near-IR frequency range to provide two closely spaced near-IR wavelengths which are at least 10 nm in wavelength difference so that they can be appropriately mixed in QPM DFM waveguide 23 via an appropriately selected grating period to produce a desired idler wavelength in the mid-IR range. As a specific example, laser diode sources 21, 22 may be respectively tuned to generate a wavelength about 780 nm and about 980 nm to produce a tunable mid-IR wavelength output 31 in the range between about 3.0 \( \mu \)m to 4.5 \( \mu \)m.
LiNbO₃ crystal 23 is periodically poled, preferably employing electric field induced poling, which will be discussed in greater detail later. For example, a grating having a 21 µm period electrode stripes is prepared along the crystal y-direction on the +z face of 0.5 mm thick crystal wafer. With the application of a electric field poling by means of applying electrical pulses, a domain inversion pattern can be created that is 7.8 mm long, having a 40% duty cycle. Thus, with a 21 µm poling period at crystal 23, the signal laser diode wavelength, λₛ, is between about 958 nm and 990 nm, the pump laser diode has optimal phase matching between about 776.7 nm and 781.1 nm, resulting in a mid-IR tuned wavelength in the range between about 3.6 µm and 4.3 µm, as seen from the data results set forth in FIG. 7.

The tuning curve for an output idler power at 3.9 µm for this described arrangement is shown in FIG. 3 for λₛ=972 nm; pump power, Pₚ=250 mW; and signal power, Pₛ=530 mW. As indicated above, the pump wavelength range is relatively small, falling between 776.7 nm and 781.1 nm, with FWHM about 2.2 nm with the signal wavelength tuned at 972 nm. In FIG. 4, the idler power to signal power ratio versus mid-IR DFM wavelength is shown where the pump wavelength, λₚ, is 777 nm, the signal wavelength, λₛ, is 980 nm, the idler output wavelength, λᵣ, is 3.75 µm, and the pumping power is 180 mW. A power of 7.1 µW has been achieved for an idler output wavelength of 3.9 µm. The dependence of the idler power at 3.75 µm on the incident signal power demonstrates a maximum generated mid-IR output power of 6 µW. With 180 mW of pump power, the slope efficiency of the power relative to the signal power is 1.4×10⁻⁶, which corresponds to an overall conversion efficiency of 0.008%/W, which corresponds to a material conversion efficiency of 0.015%/W-cm when AR coating are applied to the input and output surfaces of crystal 23. Higher powers can be generated over a larger range of mid-IR wavelengths by employing a longer LiNbO₃.

These conversion efficiencies are comparable to conversion efficiencies in AgGaS₂ crystals employed as for waveguide 23. However, AgGaS₂ crystals are more limited in the handling wider ranges of pumping wavelengths compared to LiNbO₃ crystals. In this connection, reference is made to FIGS. 5 and 6 which respectively show the non-critical phase matching characteristics for AgGaS₂ crystals and for periodically poled LiNbO₃ crystals relative to the pump/signal wavelengths versus mid-IR DFM wavelength for a 21 µm poled pattern. Curve A in FIGS. 5 and 6 relates to the signal wavelength, λₛ, variation and curve B in FIGS. 5 and 6 relates to pump wavelength, λₚ, variation. It can be seen from these curves that the tunability for LiNbO₃ crystals is superior to that for AgGaS₂ crystals in that comparatively smaller tuning wavelength changes for either or both of the pump or signal wavelength to achieve a fairly broad range of selectable mid-IR wavelengths as previously mentioned. Thus, LiNbO₃ crystals are useful for mid-IR QPM DFM waveguides with efficiencies comparable to AgGaS₂ crystals but provide for a much wider freedom of pumping wavelength and greater versatility in wavelength selectability for mid-IR wavelengths, as illustrated in FIG. 7, particularly extending out to the material absorption edge of LiNbO₃ crystals to mid-IR wavelengths at 4.5 µm to 5.0 µm.

The foregoing discussion relative to FIG. 2 has been related to laser diode sources 21, 22 comprising tunable laser diode sources. Such tunable sources can be of the type that include an external optical cavity with a rotatable reflecting mirror that provides either first order or second order light into an oscillator or amplifier device such as exemplified in U.S. Pat. No. 5,392,308, which is incorporated herein by reference thereto. Alternatively, these two sources may also be distributed Bragg reflector (DBR) laser diode having pump and signal or injection wavelengths that are mixed in waveguide 23 to generate over 100 µW of mid-IR at a chosen mid-IR wavelength in the range between about 2.0 µm to 4.0 µm. Such a system 20 can operate at room temperature and can be produced at a lower cost compared to cryogenic mid-IR laser diode systems and, further, is suitable for packaging on a single substrate.

The tunability of DBR laser diodes 21, 22 may also be accomplished by means of temperature and current tuning, i.e., heating the diodes or varying their current density to cause changes in operating temperature and injection current which in turn causes changes in their wavelength output. This method of wavelength tuning allows for controlled change of the pumping and signal wavelength over several nanometers to produce a mid-IR wavelength at waveguide 23 that is in the range between about 2.0 µm to 4.0 µm. Although the mid-IR range of wavelengths is less than in the case of employing tunable laser diode sources, small range of pump and/or signal tunability provides a comparatively large mid-IR wavelength range of tunability when employing LiNbO₃ crystals, as based upon the data shown in FIGS. 5 and 6.

Reference is now made to FIG. 8 which illustrates a more detailed system of the FIG. 1D configuration comprising a pumped mid-IR wavelength source 32. Here, only one laser diode source, i.e., pumping source 33, at wavelength, λₚ, is required since the mixing signal wavelength is generated in the QPM OPO waveguide 35 which functions as an oscillator via high reflecting (HR) input/output deposited or coated surfaces 36A and 36B, internally generating a second wavelength, λᵣ, while mixing with the pumping wavelength, λₚ, to produce an idler wavelength, λᵢ, at 37. The parametric gain at the second wavelength, λᵣ, must be balanced with the losses due to the necessary output reflectivity and internal losses of the resonator of OPO waveguide 35. The condition for parametric oscillation threshold is given by the equation:

\[ \eta \frac{P_r}{P_i} = \frac{(\alpha + 1)nR}{nR - 1} \]

where \( \eta \) is the normalized conversion efficiency, \( P_r \) is the pump power, \( I \) is the length of the waveguide, \( \alpha \) is the linear loss, \( n \) is the refractive index of LiNbO₃, and \( R \) is the reflectivity of the mirrors 36 at the second wavelength, λᵣ. Typical parameters are L=1 cm, \( \alpha < 0.05 \text{ cm}^{-1} \), \( \eta = 0.015\%/\text{W-cm} \) with reflective coatings 36A and 36B of R=98%, the pumping power required is approximately 1 W. The OPO threshold power can be further reduced by a factor of two by reflecting the pumping power exiting from output 37 of waveguide 35 back into the waveguide with an appropriate external resonator mirror, in lieu of mirror 36B, to reflect the pumping wavelength, λᵣ, back into the device optical cavity. However, such a resonator mirror is transparent to the idler wavelength, λᵢ.

The structure of pump source 33 comprises a monolithic master oscillator power amplifier (M-MOPA) comprising a flared amplifier 33A and a master oscillator 33B with cavity Bragg reflectors 33C. Master oscillator may be slightly tapered away in the direction away from flared amplifier 35A, which concept is disclosed, in part, in U.S. Pat. No. 5,392,308, except that the slight taper in oscillator 33B in the case here extends from rear facet to the inner end of flared amplifier 33A. The slight taper is shown exaggerated in FIG. 8. The purpose of the slight taper, which may be a few degrees, e.g., one to eight degrees, from the axial alignment of the optical cavity, is to provide for good coupling of light.
into flared amplifier 33A and to increase the beam divergence in this region while still providing good waveguiding properties in oscillator 33B.

The structure of waveguide 35 may be identical to the structure of waveguide 23 in FIG. 2 except, as previously indicated, waveguide 35 is provided with reflecting surfaces to function as an oscillator. The QPM LiNbO₃ waveguides are provided with an alternated, poled pattern 38 which is thereafter provided with a waveguide stripe region 39 functioning as a waveguide for propagating radiation provided as input at HR surface 36A, and is formed by an annealed proton exchange resulting in high conversion efficiency for mid-IR wavelengths compared to the use of bulk ferroelectric waveguides. The tight confinement of the interacting modes of the lightwaves increases the intensity as well as the nonlinear conversion efficiency in waveguide 39. Moreover, a further improvement of the conversion efficiency of the waveguide region 39 can be realized by reducing the refractive index asymmetry of this region. The annealed proton exchanged stripe 39 provides for a higher index region for the propagating light compared to the bulk LiNbO₃ cladding material (n=2.2) below the guide and air (n=1) above the guide. The cladding region 39 requires forming a deep buried proton exchange in order to adequately support the generation of mid-IR modes generated by the difference frequency mixing (DFM) and resulting in a waveguide that supports many modes at shorter near-IR wavelengths of the pumping source. This strong guiding support is because of waveguide region 39 providing for a more symmetric refractive index profile and, consequently, a more efficient nonlinear frequency conversion.

For frequency conversion for DFM where there is a large difference between the pump and idler wavelengths, waveguide 35 must be designed so that the longer idler wavelength radiation can be efficiently guided. When this situation is achieved, the waveguide is typically multimode at both the pump and signal wavelengths. For every triplet of modes, there is a unique phase-matching period and conversion efficiency, the latter of which is calculated from the field profiles for each mode. From these calculations, it has been determined that there may typically be over twenty guided modes at the pump wavelength and six guided modes at the signal wavelength. Since only one mode pair phase matches to generate a mid-IR idler wavelength, the conversion efficiency is reduced to roughly 1 over 100 of the theoretical maximum because the power from the input beams from the laser diode source is split into many modes that can be formed in the waveguide region 39 with little discrimination in their coupling.

The combination of this multi-mode generation and the additional reduction in frequency conversion efficiency brought about by poor modal overlap are due to the asymmetrical waveguide having cladding regions with unequal indices. As shown in FIG. 9, a cross section of a LiNbO₃ waveguide 40 is shown which comprises bulk crystal region 41 within which is formed waveguide region 42, and over which is formed LiNbO₃ cladding region 43. As a result, waveguide region 42 for propagating radiation is formed below the surface of the waveguide structure so that it is possible to eliminate the potential cutoff of longer wavelength idler modes while maintaining all three wavelengths (pump, signal and idler) within waveguide 42 nearly single mode, as graphically indicated in FIG. 9 by the mode waveforms, wherein the three modes are substantially symmetrical within waveguide 42. With buried waveguide region 42 being more symmetrical, the waveguide modes will be fewer and more substantially overlap each other yielding a higher normalized conversion efficiency. By utilizing the optimized buried waveguide shown in FIG. 9, normalized conversion efficiencies of at least about 25%/W for a 1 cm crystal can be achieved, which is about two orders of magnitude higher than that attainable with bulk crystal phase matching.

Cladding region 43 in FIG. 9 is fabricating by following the annealed proton exchange process to reverse exchange lithium for hydrogen in the upper portion of formed waveguide region 42 creating a lower index region 43 above waveguide region 42. The process is carried out as follows. First, domain inversion pattern, such as pattern 38 in FIG. 8, is performed by patterning a layer of titanium on a LiNbO₃ wafer surface. Next, the pattern is diffused into the crystal by means of furnace annealing, utilizing a diffusion temperature near the crystal Curie temperature. Next, a deep proton exchange profile is formed by proton exchange in molten benzoic acid followed by annealing. Next, the upper surface region of the formed waveguide is subjected to reverse exchange to bury the proton exchanged LiNbO₃ waveguide. This is accomplished by melting the surface region by means of a melt mixture of KNO₃:NaNO₃:LiNO₃ in the ratio, for example, of about 1:1:0.1 which is applied to the surface of the formed waveguide. The KNO₃:NaNO₃ mixture functions as carrier for the LiNO₃ and the mixture is heated to near its eutectic point of the mixture which is lower than the melting point of the incorporated nitrates per se. In spite of the use of high temperatures, there is no damage to the underlying proton distribution in waveguide 42 below this surface treatment since the restoration of surface cladding region 43 occurs in a short period of time compared to the initial anneal proton exchange process used to form waveguide 42.

An alternative approach to forming buried LiNbO₃ waveguides is overcoating the waveguide surface with a dielectric material index matched to bulk LiNbO₃, e.g., by depositing a dielectric film or by optical contacting of a polished z-cut LiNbO₃ wafer portion to the waveguide surface. Such a dielectric film will need to be fairly thick, such as around 1 µm, and very accurately matched to the refractive index of LiNbO₃ to substantially reduce the number of modes in the waveguide. Optical contacting with another LiNbO₃ wafer portion requires careful surface preparation. As a further alternative, the Li reverse exchange region 43 may be overcoated with a dielectric coating material having a refractive index accurately matched to the refractive index of LiNbO₃.

An alternative approach to forming the periodic poling by means of titanium diffusion is electric field poling to achieve QPM. Electric field poling is accomplished by depositing a periodic pattern of conductive electrodes or the use of planar liquid electrodes on an insulative periodic pattern formed on either the +z axis or –z axis surface of the LiNbO₃ crystal, having a period that matches the QPM period. After the electrode patterns are applied to these surfaces, then high voltage pulses are applied across the electrode sets, domain reversal occurs in regions of the applied high voltage pulses. The range of the applied electric field falls with several kV per cm to several 100 kV per cm. Domain reversal occurs through the entire crystal wafer so that substantially straight, vertical domain boundaries in the z plane are obtained so that the full crystal volume can be employed for nonlinear interaction. The patterned high voltage field is applied at room temperature across the crystal. The processing of E-field poling is disclosed in the articles of Jonas Webjorn et

A DFM rare earth doped, periodically poled nonlinear crystal material functioning as near-infrared pump source may be employed in the waveguide architecture of device 35. In this case, a single laser diode pump source provides wavelength, λᵣ, and device 35 would be a rare earth doped nonlinear material, such as LiNbO₃ or KTP doped with Er³⁺, Nd³⁺, Yb³⁺, Pr³⁺, or Tm³⁺, and is periodically poled, such as by means of annealed proton exchange, titanium diffusion or E-field poling. Rare earth doped oscillator 35 is provided with reflectors 36A and 36B at the input and output surfaces or may have reflectors positioned in an external optical cavity forming an external resonator. The input pump beam is partially converted to a longer wavelength by pumping the rare earth doped oscillator. The unabsorbed pump radiation within the rare earth doped oscillator 35 then difference frequency mixes within the crystal with the internally generated longer radiation wavelength to generate even longer radiation wavelength. The generated longer wavelength is internally reflected within the crystal due to the reflector coatings, which are chosen to provide high reflectance for such longer wavelengths. The periodic poling period is chosen so as to quasi-phase match the DFM interaction. Examples of representative wavelength interactions for mid-IR wavelengths, for example, useful in spectroscopy are shown in Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dopant</th>
<th>Pumping Wavelength, λᵣ, Range</th>
<th>Rare Earth Doped Lithium Niobate Lasing Wavelength</th>
<th>Mid-IR Wavelength Output</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nd³⁺</td>
<td>805 nm–910 nm</td>
<td>1050 nm</td>
<td>3.3 μm–3.4 μm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yb³⁺</td>
<td>910 nm–920 nm</td>
<td>1120 nm–1150 nm</td>
<td>4.3 μm–5.2 μm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tm³⁺</td>
<td>1120 nm–1200 nm</td>
<td>1600 nm</td>
<td>3.7 μm–4.8 μm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Er³⁺</td>
<td>980 nm</td>
<td>1520 nm–1580 nm</td>
<td>2.6 μm–2.8 μm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pr³⁺</td>
<td>1010 nm–1020 nm</td>
<td>1290 nm–1330 nm</td>
<td>4.2 μm–4.4 μm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reference is now made to the embodiment shown in FIG. 10 comprising a pumped mid-IR wavelength source 50, which is an example of the FIG. 1A configuration. Source 50 comprises a cw or modulated signal source 51 with a substantially fixed wavelength output, a tunable pumped source with an adjusted wavelength output, and a NFM device that also provides wavelength tuning. This wavelength tuning may be accomplished by changing the effective poling period of the nonlinear device by means of stage translation of the crystal laterally of the input beam path or by temperature tuning of the NFM device 16 by means of applying heat to the submount of the device. Transverse translation can be accomplished either by means of servo motor control 58, generating mid-IR wavelengths between about 2.6 μm and 4.4 μm, given the adjusted and fixed wavelengths λ₁, λ₂ and possibly limited at the longer wavelength end of the mid-IR range spectrum by material absorption edge. However, by translation of crystal 54 perpendicular to the beam propagation path, i.e., the crystal x direction, by means of servo motor control 58 in combination with the wavelength tuning of the pumping wavelength via only one of the laser sources 51, phase matching can be achieved over a broader range of mid-IR frequencies, i.e., between about 2.6 μm to 5.0 μm. This is an important aspect of this invention in that tuning range requirements in utilizing a near-IR pump laser is greatly narrowed in covering a broad mid-IR range of selectable wavelengths, particularly when compared to noncritical birefringent phase matching where both wavelengths inputs must be tuned together.

Frequency mixing occurs within device 54 so that at its output, via Ge filter 57, is a mid-IR wavelength within the tunable mid-IR range of about 2.6 μm to 5.0 μm based upon the above mentioned pump and signal wavelengths, λ₁, λ₂. Ge filter 57 absorbs any remaining, unmixed near-IR wavelengths and is transparent to the mid-IR wavelengths, λ₂.
As a specific example, a tunable laser pump source $S_1$, such as Model No. SDL-8630, may be utilized having a tunable frequency range of 770 nm to 790 nm at 330 mW output. M-MOPA signal device $S_2$ may have a wavelength of 1013.3 nm with a power output of 625 mW and with source $S_1$ tuned at 779.8 nm with output power at 325 mW, the peak of the tuning curve across the pump wavelength band generates a mid-IR idler wavelength, $\lambda_{id}$, from crystal device $S_4$ of 3.38 nm with FWHM equal to 1.1 nm. Device $S_4$ in the case here has an adjusted 21.1 $\mu$m poling period and is at 23$^\circ$ C. The actual poling interaction length was 11 cm. The frequency conversion efficiency from near-IR to mid-IR wavelength was 0.011%/W, and a peak power of 22 $\mu$W was generated at 3.38 nm. Correcting for Fresnel reflections, the actual frequency conversion efficiency in crystal device $S_4$ was 0.017%/W. By translating device $S_4$ perpendicular to the beam propagation direction, phase matching was obtained at wavelengths between 3.34 nm and 3.57 nm. The poling period varies, via such lateral translation in the $x$ direction, from 21.0 $\mu$m to 21.5 $\mu$m for achieving these mid-IR wavelengths. It should be understood that the upper mid-IR wavelength was limited in this particular example by the tunable capability of laser source $S_1$ so that longer mid-IR wavelengths can be achieved with a source $S_1$ having longer tunable wavelength capability.

As previously indicated, temperature changes to device $S_4$ can be effectively applied to generate different mid-IR wavelengths. The phase matching wavelength for changes in wavelength at source $S_1$ changes with changes in the temperature of device such that the generated mid-IR wavelength for each 0.1 $\mu$m change in the poling period is 0.046 $\mu$m. Continuous tuning by non-critical phase matching over the range and is at 23$^\circ$ C. The actual poled interaction length was 11 cm. The mid-IR wavelength was 0.011%/W, and a peak power of 22 $\mu$W was generated at 3.38 nm. Correcting for Fresnel reflections, the actual frequency conversion efficiency in crystal device $S_4$ was 0.017%/W. By translating device $S_4$ perpendicular to the beam propagation direction, phase matching was obtained at wavelengths between 3.34 nm and 3.57 nm. The poling period varies, via such lateral translation in the $x$ direction, from 21.0 $\mu$m to 21.5 $\mu$m for achieving these mid-IR wavelengths. It should be understood that the upper mid-IR wavelength was limited in this particular example by the tunable capability of laser source $S_1$ so that longer mid-IR wavelengths can be achieved with a source $S_1$ having longer tunable wavelength capability.

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wavelength, $\lambda_p$. As an example, pump laser 65A may be comprised of a high brightness, quasi-cw laser diode bar, and injection laser 66A may be a DMR laser diode having a gain peak near that of near-earth doped fiber 69A. A diode bar for source 65A provides a multiplicity of pump sources, such as 16 or more per bar and the possibility of employing multiple such bars, so that failure of any one or more laser elements in one or more bars does not affect the other operating laser elements or the resulting efficiency of fiber amplifier 69A. As an example, pump source 65A may be a 17 W fiber coupled laser diode bar. Pump source 65A at wavelength, $\lambda_p$, is coupled into the inner cladding 69C of fiber amplifier 69A while injection laser source 66A at wavelength, $\lambda_i$, is coupled into core 69B of fiber amplifier 69A. The injected wavelength is optically coupled, via optical isolator 68, into the core 69B of high power, double-clad rare earth doped fiber amplifier 69A, e.g., a Nd doped double clad fiber.

Pulsed operation of pump source 65A and/or injection source 66A allows a larger pulse energy to be extracted from fiber amplifier 69A in comparison to cw operation. The output of fiber amplifier 69A provides a high power beam at wavelength, $\lambda_i$, in the range with cw output power as high as 30 W peak power (in the case of double-clad Nd$^{3+}$ doped fiber), or pulsed peak powers of 1 kW or more with pulse frequencies from 100 Hz to greater than 1 GHz. Further increases in power are easily achieved by employing multiple pump sources optically coupled into double-clad fiber amplifier 69A by spatial wavelength and/or polarization multiplexing. By using multiple pump sources, output powers of 10's of watts of average power are possible from a single fiber amplifier 69A.

While the foregoing principal embodiment makes preferred use of a high power injection source 61 because of the large power output that it provides for high power applications required for operating NFM devices 64, other high power laser diodes, diode arrays or diode bar arrays may be used in place of injection source 61 if they provide sufficient output power for mid-IR conversion requirements, such as a power output of at least 200 mW.

Reference is now made to other examples for the configurations for high power injection source 61 which are shown in FIGS. 13 and 14. In FIG. 13, high power injection source 61 comprises a double clad rare-earth doped fiber laser 69B having a feedback mechanism in the form of gratings 69G to bring about lasing conditions. Other components of source 61 are similar to FIG. 11 and the description there is equally applicable to the components here comprising multimode pump laser source 65B.

An additional injection laser source 66B, shown in dotted line may possibly be provided, via a beam combiner 67B for example (also shown in dotted line), with its output optically coupled into fiber laser 69B in order to narrow and stabilize the laser wavelength band to improve the nonlinear frequency mixing conversion efficiency.

Reference is made to FIG. 23 relative to mid-IR wavelength source 150 which is a modification of the high power injection source 61 of FIG. 13. FIG. 23 is the same except that fiber laser 69B is wavelength tunable. As shown in FIG. 23, gratings 69G include wavelength tuning devices 69T. In the case here, a tuning device 69T is shown for each grating although it is possible to employ only one such device. Tuning devices 69T change the properties of the gratings 69G so that the wavelength, $\lambda_i$, in oscillator 69B is changed in order to extend the possible range of mid-IR frequencies that can be generated by device 64. Tuning devices 69T may include devices for generating the mid-IR wavelength grating gratings 69G by stretching the fiber grating (U.S. Pat. No. 5,007,705 to Morey et al.); by compression of the fiber grating (U.S. Pat. No. 5,495,520 to Morey et al.); by thermal variation of the gratings (U.S. Pat. No. 5,159,601 to Huber); by employing a piezoelectric transducer (U.S. Pat. No. 5,431,805 to Fritz et al.) by mechanically bending the fiber grating, or rotating the grating relative to the fiber or moving the grating relative to a side-polished region of the fiber (see patents of Sorin et al., such as U.S. Pat. No. 5,058,997); and by opto-electric effect by application of an applied electric field across the grating wherein increasing voltage of the field, such as a negative voltage, causes an increase in the refractive index only in the UV exposed regions forming the grating, shifting the grating reflectivity to longer wavelengths (T. Fujiwara et al. in the paper, entitled, "UV-Excited Poling and Electrically Tunable Bragg Gratings in a Germanosilicate Fiber", Postdeadline Paper, pp. PD6-1 to PD6-5, Optical Fiber Conference '95, (February, 1995). The patents to Morey et al., Huber, Fritz et al., Sorin et al., and the paper of T. Fujiwara et al. are incorporated herein by reference thereto. An additional injection laser source 66B, shown in dotted line may possibly be provided, via a beam combiner 67B for example (also shown in dotted line), with its output optically coupled into fiber laser 69B in order to narrow and stabilize the laser wavelength band to improve the nonlinear frequency mixing conversion efficiency.

In FIG. 14, high power injection source 61 comprises a semiconductor amplifier 69C having a tapered gain section 69F producing, for example, a power output greater than 1 W providing for tens to hundreds of milliwatts of near-IR wavelength radiation for frequency mixing.

Any one of the high power sources 61 shown in FIGS. 11, 13 and 14 may be employed in groups, such as in tandem and all optically coupled into the NFM device to increase the power input and efficiency of operation of the NFM device. Also, different of such sources, shown in these respective figures, particularly having tunable capabilities to maintain the same wavelength, $\lambda_i$, may also be employed in such groups. As grouped, this combined source can be employed with respect to any of the embodiments illustrated herein.

FIG. 15 discloses a mid-IR wavelength source 70 utilizing a high power injection source 61 of any one of FIGS. 11, 13 and 14 in combination with a NDF laser diode comprising a QPM OPO device 74. Mid-IR generation based on OPO is a desirable approach because only a single high power source 61 is required and mid-IR average power outputs greater than one watt with broad tunability over a 2.0 pm to 4.0 pm wavelength range are possible. The beam output of source 61 at a fixed or tuned wavelength, $\lambda_i$, is optically coupled into OPO resonator 74 via lens system 71 which collects and collimates the beam output from source 61 and focuses the beam as input into OPO device 74. OPO device 74 comprises a periodic poled, bulk LiNbO$_3$ crystal 72 for noncritical phase matching any one of tuned wavelengths, $\lambda_i$, provided from source 61. OPM OPO device 74 includes external cavity focusing mirrors 73 and 75 wherein mirror 73 is transparent to wavelength, $\lambda_i$, but highly reflective of
internally developed near-IR wavelengths, $\lambda_2$, created within crystal $72$ due to frequency mixing, while mirror $75$ is transparent to developed mid-IR wavelengths, $\lambda_m$, and highly reflective of internally developed wavelength, $\lambda_2$, created within crystal $72$ due to frequency mixing and partially of wavelength, $\lambda_w$. Frequency mixing results in the development of mid-IR wavelength, $\lambda_{nm}$, radiation from beam $72$ perpendicularly to the pump beam of wavelength, $\lambda_w$, the mid-IR wavelength from OPO device $74$. As a result of QPM DFM device $54$ in FIGS. $10$, $10A$ and $10B$, the poling period can be varied laterally across the width of the crystal in the $y$ direction through proper formation of the poling electrodes, such as by electric field poling. By translating crystal $72$ perpendicularly to the pump beam of wavelength, $\lambda_w$, the mid-IR wavelength from OPO device $74$ can be tuned over a broad range of wavelengths, e.g., $2.5$ $\mu$m to $4.5$ $\mu$m.

Reference is now made to FIG. 16 discloses the application of a rare earth, single mode, polarization maintaining fiber laser $82$ pumped with high power pump source $61$ of any one of FIGS. $11$, $13$ and $14$ or with a lower power single spatial mode diode at $100$ mW to $200$ mW for frequency mixing in mid-IR wavelength source $80$. Fiber laser $82$ may be polarized, maintaining so that both unabsorbed pump radiation and oscillator generated radiation have the same polarization. Polarization maintaining features are provided directly in the fiber $82$. Examples of such features are discussed in greater detail below in connection with FIG. 21.

Laser $82$ includes Bragg gratings or other fiber reflectors $81$ and $83$ provided in each end of the fiber. Reflector $81$ has high reflectivity of generated wavelength, $\lambda_{nm}$ with low reflectivity at pump wavelength, $\lambda_w$. Reflector $83$ has high reflectivity of wavelength, $\lambda_{nm}$ but sufficiently lower than at reflector $81$ to provide for efficient output coupling to NFM device $84$, and has low reflectivity for pump wavelength, $\lambda_w$. NFM device $84$ is periodically poled for QPM and may be bulk or waveguide LiNbO$_3$, KTP or other appropriate nonlinear material. Input pump beam at wavelength, $\lambda_w$, is partially converted to a longer wavelength, $\lambda_{nm}$, in pumping rare earth doped fiber laser $82$. The output from fiber laser $82$ is then mixed in NFM device $84$ to produce the desired mid-IR wavelength, $\lambda_{nm}$. Fairly critical features for efficient DFM in NFM device $84$ are the characteristics in the input beam from fiber laser $82$ to have narrow linewidth and proper linear polarization. The fiber comprising fiber laser $82$ should also be a single spatial mode fiber for both the pump and lasing wavelengths, $\lambda_w$ and $\lambda_{nm}$, so that the two output wavelengths have a similar spatial distribution and can be easily coupled to or focused into NFM device $84$ such as by means of butt coupling or by a lens system.

An example of a system $80$ for generating a mid-IR wavelength, $\lambda_{nm}$ near $4.3$ $\mu$m, which may be used in carbon dioxide sensing, comprises a fiber laser $82$ with single mode silica fiber doped with Yb. The fiber has grating regions $81$ and $83$ to insure lasing near $1155$ $\mu$m and is polarization maintaining and single mode at both of its oscillating wavelength, $\lambda_{nm}$, e.g., $1155$ $\mu$m, as well as at the pump wavelength, $\lambda_w$, of high power pump source $61$, which may have a wavelength near $910$ $\mu$m. The laser output from fiber laser $82$ has a narrow linewidth typically around $1$ GHz, and is in the same polarization state as the unabsorbed pump radiation.

Representative frequency conversion efficiencies of absorbed pump light to output radiation at $1155$ $\mu$m is within the range of about $60$% to $70$%.

For low power mid-IR generation, it is only necessary to convert a small amount, such as a few per cent, of the pump radiation into the longer wavelength, $\lambda_{nm}$, generated by laser $82$ before mixing in device $84$. Several rare earth doped fiber lasers may be employed in tandem or in parallel each with its high power pump source $61$ to provide access for different spectral regions of mid-IR wavelengths thereby covering the entire mid-IR range. The fiber dopants that may be employed in one or more of such parallel coupled fiber lasers $82$ may be Nd$^{3+}$, Yb$^{3+}$, Tm$^{3+}$, Er$^{3+}$, and Pr$^{3+}$. Representative wavelength interactions for mid-IR spectroscopy are shown in Table $1$ above.

As an alternate embodiment, fiber laser $82$ may be co-doped with Er:Yb. The Er:Yb single mode fiber may be pumped with a tunable pump source $61$ at $1.06$ $\mu$m and provide an output $\lambda_{nm}$ of around $1.55$ $\mu$m with a $50$ $\mu$m tuning range. The tuning range can be created by source $61$ having an external tuning device $61$ shown in FIG. $10$ or by using an external tuning device with laser $82$ such as illustrated at $104$ in FIG. $18$. Both the $1.06$ $\mu$m and $1.55$ $\mu$m beams from laser $82$ are employed in device $84$ for mid-IR generation. Device $84$ may also be either a QPM DFM device or a QPM OPO device.

Devices using Raman scattering or Brillouin scattering may be used in combination with high power single laser $61$ for generating the second mixing wavelength, $\lambda_{nm}$, such as the Raman lasers illustrated in FIGS. $17$-$20$. Laser sources based upon Brillouin scattering are very similar to sources based upon Raman scattering except that Brillouin scattering is based on nonlinear interaction with acoustic phonons whereas Raman scattering is based on nonlinear interaction with optical phonons, these different phonons having different wavelength spacing. In the discussion here, reference will be made generally to Raman lasers using Raman wavelength shift to derive the second wavelength. Also, in connection with the embodiments of FIGS. $17$-$20$, multiple outputs from Raman or Brillouin lasers or amplifiers can be utilized as a combined input to a NFM device.

In FIG. $17$, mid-IR wavelength source $90$ employs a Raman laser $92$ having multiple sets of Bragg gratings to provide for sequential Raman phase shift orders via grating pairs $91$, $93$, $95$ to produce wavelength, $\lambda_{nm}$, with a sufficiently different wavelength from wavelength, $\lambda_w$, for mixing together in NFM device $94$. As an example, three to five orders of phase shifting may be employed. Pump light at wavelength, $\lambda_w$, is provided from high power source $61$ as input to Raman laser $92$ to produce a second wavelength, $\lambda_{nm}$, due to Raman wavelength shifting within laser $92$. This wavelength shifting is accomplished in steps wherein the Raman shift may be represented by $\Delta \lambda$. Grating pairs $95$ provide for a first shifting of $\lambda_{nm} + \Delta \lambda$ producing a first intermediate wavelength. Grating pairs $93$ provide for a second shifting of $\lambda_{nm} + 2\Delta \lambda$ producing a second intermediate wavelength. Grating pairs $91$ provide for a third shifting of $\lambda_{nm} + 3\Delta \lambda$ producing a finally shifted wavelength, $\lambda_{nm}$. In this connection, grating $91$, immediately adjacent to NFM device $94$, has low reflectivity at wavelength, $\lambda_{nm}$, as well as wavelength $\lambda_w$, The typical wavelength shift in Raman oscillator $92$ for each wavelength shift order may be in the range of $50$ $\mu$m to $70$ $\mu$m. Also, there may be up to five orders of phase shifting employing five pairs of gratings to achieve sufficiently large difference in wavelengths, $\lambda_{nm}$, to achieve frequency mixing in NFM device $94$. NFM device $94$ may be of the same design as in the case of NFM device $64$ in FIGS. $11$, $13$ and $14$.

Mid-IR wavelength source $100$ shown in FIG. $18$ is identical to the embodiment shown in FIG. $17$ except that source $100$ is wavelength tunable with the inclusion of dichroic beam combiner $102$ in the beam path from high
power source 61 which is transparent to wavelength, \( \lambda_s \), is used to provide a portion of the input power for the Raman or Brillouin wavelength shift. The combined output at wavelengths, \( \lambda_1 \) and \( \lambda_2 \), from Raman fiber oscillator 112 is coupled to a polarization maintaining fiber 113 for Raman wavelength shifting. The configuration is similar to that shown in FIG. 19 illustrating mid-IR wavelength source 110 comprising a high power pump source 61 coupled to a polarization maintaining, single mode fiber 112 for Raman wavelength shifting. The combined outputs at wavelengths, \( \lambda_1 \) and \( \lambda_2 \), from Raman fiber oscillator 112 is provided as input to NFM device 114, e.g., QPM DFWM or QPM OPO devices. Output beam from high power pump source 61 is injected into silica fiber 112 wherein gratings 111 and 113 are used to tune the peak wavelength of the Raman gain. The typical wavelength shifts in Raman oscillators 112 are in the range of about 50 nm to 100 nm. Multiple Raman wavelength shifts have already been described in conjunction with FIGS. 17 and 18. The output from Raman fiber oscillator 112 is coupled into NFM device 114 for mixing of combined wavelengths, \( \lambda_1, \lambda_2 \), i.e., the difference between the Raman shifted beam and the transmitted pump beam from source 61. As an example, high power source 61 utilizing the configuration shown in FIG. 11 (without device 62) may have a tunable wavelength between about 1030 nm to 1090 nm and Raman fiber oscillator 112 will provide an output at about 1.44 \( \mu \)m. The resulting tunable mid-IR wavelength range is between about 3.6 nm and 4.5 nm.

In FIG. 19, polarization maintaining single mode fiber 112 is particularly employed in cases where the high power laser beam from low power pump source 61 is unpolarized or has arbitrary polarization. Such is the case for a beam produced from a high power pump source 61 utilizing a double clad fiber amplifier 69A as illustrated in FIG. 11. For efficient frequency mixing in a NFM device, such as device 114, polarized light is critically critical. In principal, double clad fibers can be polarization maintaining to provide a polarized output, as is the case in both FIGS. 16 and 19. Fabrication of a polarization maintaining fiber typically requires a modification in the fiber cladding to achieve asymmetry in the fiber core so that there is a refractive index difference in orthogonal directions. A known example of achieving such asymmetry is called the "bow-tie" fiber. Another type of configuration would be a core that has an elliptical or other irregular shape via a vis a circular shape. Alternatively, a simple solution for polarizing the output from a double clad fiber is to use a polarizer. The polarizer is placed after the fiber length, \( L_s \), so that the beam output power is at least 50% of the light will be lost in such a polarizer. Moreover, changes in the input polarization will cause power or intensity fluctuations to appear in the polarized output which deteriorates the beam quality as applied to NFM device 114, or other such polarized input beam required application, such as, in a xenographic printer image exposure system or in frequency converters, i.e., frequency doubling or frequency difference mixing or sum generation. Alternative methods may be utilized to efficiently convert an unpolarized beam or an arbitrary polarized beam into an output beam having single, stable linear polarization employing Raman or Brillouin wavelength shifting in a polarization maintaining single mode fiber. Thus, in the case of the embodiment of FIG. 19, high power pump source 61 comprises a pump laser diode source coupled to a double clad fiber amplifier doped with a rare earth such as Yb or Nd, as previously illustrated in connection with the embodiment of FIG. 11. The output beam at wavelength, \( \lambda_p \), is provided as input to polarization maintaining, single mode fiber 112 having Bragg gratings or other reflectors 111 and 113 at the wavelength of the Raman or Brillouin gain of the fiber. Fiber oscillator 112 provides a polarized Raman or Brillouin shifted output beam. Fiber 112 without reflectors 111 and 113 will function as an amplifier and can be provided in the embodiment of FIG. 11 in place of amplifier 69A. The Raman and Brillouin amplifier or oscillator is based on conventional silica fibers and rely on the natural Raman and Brillouin gain in silica fibers. Input reflector 111 has high transmission at the pump wavelength, \( \lambda_p \), and high reflection at the Raman or Brillouin gain wavelength, \( \lambda_2 \). For Raman shifting, the typical difference between pump source wavelength and Raman gain is approximately 70 nm. For Brillouin gain the wavelength shift is in the tens of GHz or sub-Angstrom range. By introducing a small amount of loss in the polarization maintaining, single mode fiber 112 for one of the directional polarizations, the fiber gain will operate in a single polarized mode providing a polarized output beam. This polarization dependent loss in fiber 112 can be introduced in a number of different ways, such as, by bending the fiber in one direction, reducing one side of the fiber close to the fiber core, or introducing into the body of the fiber or into the reflectors 111 and/or 113 polarization dependent loss mechanisms. As indicated above, fiber 112 can also be operated as a Raman or Brillouin amplifier by injecting a signal source into an end of fiber 112, as in case of amplifier 69A. Brillouin gain is effective only in one direction, i.e., it is effective only on counter propagating beams in fiber 112 so that the signal from source 66A must be injected into the reflector 113 end of fiber 112. Raman gain is effective in both fiber directions, and the input signal may be injected into either end of fiber 112. However, the Brillouin gain in fiber 112 is much higher than the Raman gain, at least two orders of magnitude higher. Therefore, the Brillouin amplifier will operate under low signal injection powers, such as several 100 mW. To be most effective, the Raman amplifier should be operated with high peak powers. Polarization maintaining silica fiber 112 can be replaced by a polarization maintaining rare earth fiber, such as disclosed and discussed in connection with FIG. 16. In summary, Raman or Brillouin gain in a fiber may be used to provide either an amplifier or an oscillator. In the case of the amplifier, the input beam, for example, at a wavelength of 1.06 \( \mu \)m, will overlap with the polarization direction of the fiber gain and provide a polarized output having wavelengths. Such a linearly polarized output would be suitable for use with a QPM DFWM nonlinear device such as device 54 in FIG. 10. However, with the use of reflectors 111 and 113, a Raman or Brillouin oscillator is formed providing a fixed polarization output at a shifted wavelength. Such a linearly polarized output of single wavelength would be suitable for use with a QPM OPO nonlinear device such as shown in FIGS. 8 and 15. In using Raman or Brillouin gain in fiber 112 for providing a linearly polarized output beam to a nonlinear frequency mixing device, there may develop the problem of providing no or little gain if the input pump beam is polarized relative to one of the orthogonal polarization axis of the polarization maintaining fiber 112 whereas the Raman or Brillouin oscillation and amplification was designed.
along the other orthogonal polarization axis, since Raman and Brillouin gain is polarization dependent. If the input beam has a orthogonal polarization 90° of the polarization of the Raman or Brillouin gain in the fiber, the polarization relationship will be maintained in the fiber and the input beam will not overlap with the Raman or Brillouin gain so that no gain will be experienced by the input beam. This problem is circumvented by employing polarization converter 120 shown in FIG. 20. Pump beam at wavelength, λ₁, is provided to fiber 112 which has reflective gratings 111 and 113 at each end of the fiber with reflectivity at the Raman wavelength of the fiber. Fiber 112 can also be employed as an amplifier without gratings 111 and 113. The produced dual wavelength output from fiber 112 is collimated by lens 125 and passed through a first wave plate 126 which changes the angle of polarization by a prescribed small amount prior to the reflection of the pump beam wavelength, λ₁, back into fiber 112 via mirror 124. Mirror 124 has reflectivity for the wavelength, λ₁, of the pump beam but has low reflectivity for the wavelength, λ₂, of the linearly polarized Raman amplified beam which is transmitted through mirror 124 to a polarization sensitive application requiring a polarized beam input for optimum performance, such as NFM device 128.

The polarization vector of the reflected pump beam λ₁, is rotated again by wave plate 126 and reenters fiber 112 at a angular polarization direction different from the original polarization direction which, in the case of originally matching orthogonal beam polarization, will now no longer be present. The returning beam will now be subjected to the overlapping Raman or Brillouin gain of the fiber. As a result, the returning pump beam λ₁ becomes scrambled along fiber 112 providing uniform gain for any propagating polarized Raman beam within fiber 112.

Wave plate 127 provides for return of the polarization direction of the Raman beam at wavelength, λ₂, transmitted through mirror 124 to be converted to the proper polarization axis for the particular polarization sensitive application. As an example, wave plates 126 and 127 together must be equal to a π/2 shift to shift the polarization by 90° so that wave plate 126 may, for example, be π/2 while wave plate 127 is π/2 or π/2 λ₁. FIG. 21 is another polarization converter 130 operative in a manner similar to polarization converter 120 of FIG. 20 except that wave plates 126, 127 are replaced with two short sections of polarization maintaining fibers 132, 134 having the same functionality as wave plates 126, 127. Fibers 132, 134 are spiced or otherwise optically coupled to each other at 139 and to fiber 112 at 138 to provide for efficient beam coupling and a more compact configuration. Fiber 112 has a polarization maintenance feature or mechanism such as the bow-tie configuration shown at FIGS. 21A–21C. The angular orientation of the feature is indicated by dotted line 136A which corresponds to the polarization direction of the fiber gain.

Short coupled fiber 132 has a reflective device 133 formed at its forward end which may be a Bragg reflector or other fiber reflector. Reflective device 133 is reflective of the pump wavelength, λ₁, of the pumping beam but transmits the Raman or Brillouin gain wavelength, λ₂. However, the orientation 136A of bow-tie configuration 135 for fiber 132 is different, as shown in FIG. 21B, so that any polarization axis of the pump beam that is substantially orthogonal with the polarization axis of fiber 112 will be slightly rotated by the difference in angular orientation between orientations 135A and 136B shown in FIGS. 21A and 21B. As a result, such polarized input light will be subject to the gain of fiber 112. Fiber 134 functions similar to wave plate 127 in that the Raman or Brillouin output beam is changed to the original polarization orientation 136C, shown in FIG. 21C, designed for the particular application to which the beam is to be applied. In other words, the orthogonal relationship of proper polarization direction is maintained for the output beam, λ₂. As an example, fiber 132 may have a π/2 shift so that fiber 134 must provide a π/2 shift to place the output beam with a proper orthogonal polarization orientation 137A.

It will be understood by those skilled in the art that any asymmetry providing strain in the fiber in a transverse orthogonal direction of the fiber optical axis is sufficient to control beam polarization including the above mentioned bow-tie configuration. Such asymmetry causes losses to the pump beam but in the case of rare-earth doped fiber laser, the fiber core can be Er:Yb co-doped to increase amplification efficiency, or, in the case of a Raman laser, the core may be doped with Ge in high concentration to increase amplification efficiency.

Mid-IR source 140 shown in FIG. 22 is a derivation of any one of FIGS. 11, 13 or 14 and is a description related to FIG. 11 of like components with the same numerical identification is equally applicable to source 140. However, source 140, in addition, includes an Er:Yb doped, single mode fiber amplifier 142 for receiving the pump beam from high power pump source 61. Co-doped fiber amplifier 142 provides for an increase in the pumping bandwidth of the propagating beams formed in fiber 142 of wavelengths, λ₁, and λ₂, by employing co-dopants so that the overall mid-IR bandwidth of tunable frequencies, via tuning signal source 62, is correspondingly increased. As an example, if λ₁ is 1.06 μm, the output amplifier will be at wavelengths 1.06 μm and λ₂ equal to 1.55 μm±30 nm. Thus, the wavelength difference of approximately 40 nm to 50 nm between λ₁ and λ₂, is sufficient for mixing in NFM device 64, which in the case here is preferably a QPM DFM device. Tunable laser diode 62 can adjust the range of wavelength difference thereby further broadening the range of achievable mid-IR wavelengths that can be obtained from NFM device 64.

An alternative modification for source 140 is the use of Bragg reflectors 144 and 145 at the ends of fiber amplifier 142 to provide an oscillator and provide a single modified output wavelength, λ₀, for NFM device 64, which in this case is preferably a QPM OPO device. Tunable laser diode 62 would, therefore, not be used in this alternative modification. As an example, if the wavelength, λ₀, of output beam from source 61 is 1.06 μm, the output beam from oscillator 142 would have a wavelength, λ₀, of about 1.55 μm. A further modification of this alternative is to employ a frequency tuning mirror, such as shown at 104 in FIG. 18, in the location of tunable laser diode 62 so that the oscillator cavity for fiber oscillator 142 would include beam combiner 63 and the additional frequency tuning mirror. In this manner, the output wavelength, λ₀, could be varied so that the range of possible mid-IR wavelengths from device 64 can be extended. In the case where source 61 is pulsed, a 30 watt peak power is possible where optical fiber 142 is Nd doped.

Relative to the alternative form for source 140 discussed in the previous paragraph, it should be understood that that oscillator 142 with gratings 144, 145 may also be tunable for producing the second wavelength, λ₂, of desired frequency so that the mid-IR range of the NFM device can be extended. This is illustrated in FIG. 24. Mid-IR wavelength source comprises a rare-earth doped fiber oscillator or a Raman or Brillouin oscillator 161 having Bragg gratings 162C formed
at the fiber ends to form an oscillator cavity. Oscillator 161 is pumped by high power source 61 and the period of gratings 162G are designed to produce a shifted wavelength, $\lambda_x$, for presentation with the pump wavelength, $\lambda_p$, to NFM device. Pump source 61 may be a fixed or tunable wavelength and oscillator 161 is tunable by means of tuning devices 162T. Tuning devices 162T may wavelength tune gratings 162G by stretching the fiber grating (U.S. Pat. No. 5,007,705 to Morey et al.); by compression of the fiber grating (U.S. Pat. No. 5,469,520 to Morey et al.), by thermal variation of the grating (U.S. Pat. No. 5,159,601 to Huber); by employing a piezoelectric transducer (U.S. Pat. No. 5,446,809 to Fritz et al.); by mechanically bending the grating fiber, or rotating the grating relative to the fiber or moving the grating relative to a side-polished region of the fiber (see patents of Sorin et al., such as U.S. Pat. No. 5,058,997); and by opto-electric effect by application of an applied electric field across the grating wherein increasing voltage of the field, such as a negative voltage, causes an increase in the refractive index only in the UV exposed regions forming the grating, shifting the grating reflectivity to longer wavelengths (T. Fujwara et al. in the paper entitled, “UV-Excited Poling and Electrically Tunable Bragg Gratings in a Germanosilicate Fiber”, Postdeadline Paper, pp. PD6-1 to PD6-5, Optical Fiber Conference '95, February, 1995). The resulting effect is that the wavelength, $\lambda_x$, can be adjusted to extend the range of possible mid-IR wavelengths generated by NFM device 164.

In the foregoing embodiments, it should be clear that two factors are of importance in providing for efficient mid-IR frequency conversion. The first factor is that the pump and/or injection mid-IR wavelengths must be of high power in order to take advantage of the efficiency of operation of the NFM device. Otherwise, without sufficient input power provided to the NFM device, the frequency conversion will not be effectively carried out. The second factor is that of tunability of the input power is important in order to extend the possible range of mid-IR frequency conversion. Such tunable sources can be situated in various pumps, injection, amplifying, or wave shifting devices employed to provide the input for the NFM device.

Although the invention has been described in conjunction with one or more preferred embodiments, it will be apparent to those skilled in the art that other alternatives, variations and modifications will be apparent in light of the foregoing description as being within the spirit and scope of the invention. Thus, the invention described herein is intended to embrace all such alternatives, variations and modifications that are within the spirit and scope of the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A mid-IR tunable frequency system comprising:
a first semiconductor gain source having a first tunable near-IR frequency range of about 780 nm to about 980 nm for providing a first near-IR frequency output within the first tunable range;
means to tune said first semiconductor gain source to a first near-IR frequency;
a second semiconductor gain source having a second tunable near-IR frequency range of about 1,000 nm to about 1,550 nm for providing a second near-IR frequency output within the second tunable range;
means to tune said second semiconductor gain source to a second near-IR frequency;
means for optically combining said first and second near-IR frequency outputs; and

2. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 1 further comprising means for extending the range of possible mid-IR frequency conversion.

3. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 1 wherein said semiconductor gain sources comprise laser diode sources.

4. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 1 wherein said semiconductor gain sources comprise laser diode sources having their output beams coupled to a respective gain medium, said gain medium providing a beam comprising a plurality of selectable periodic pattern variations, and means to select a periodic pattern to extend the tunable extent of said mid-IR frequency range.

5. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 1 wherein said semiconductor gain sources comprise laser diode sources having their output beams coupled to a respective gain medium, said gain medium providing a beam comprising said first near-IR wavelength.

6. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 1 wherein said semiconductor gain sources comprise laser diode sources having their output beams coupled to a respective gain medium, said gain medium providing a beam comprising said first near-IR wavelength.

7. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 1 wherein said semiconductor gain sources comprise laser diode sources having their output beams coupled to a respective gain medium, said gain medium providing a beam comprising said first near-IR wavelength.

8. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 1 wherein said semiconductor gain sources comprise laser diode sources having their output beams coupled to a respective gain medium, said gain medium providing a beam comprising said first near-IR wavelength.

9. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 1 wherein said semiconductor gain sources comprise laser diode sources having their output beams coupled to a respective gain medium, said gain medium providing a beam comprising said first near-IR wavelength.

10. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 1 wherein said semiconductor gain sources comprise laser diode sources having their output beams coupled to a respective gain medium, said gain medium providing a beam comprising said first near-IR wavelength.

11. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 1 wherein said semiconductor gain sources comprise laser diode sources having their output beams coupled to a respective gain medium, said gain medium providing a beam comprising said first near-IR wavelength.

12. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 1 wherein said semiconductor gain sources comprise laser diode sources having their output beams coupled to a respective gain medium, said gain medium providing a beam comprising said first near-IR wavelength.

13. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 1 wherein said semiconductor gain sources comprise laser diode sources having their output beams coupled to a respective gain medium, said gain medium providing a beam comprising said first near-IR wavelength.

14. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 1 wherein said semiconductor gain sources comprise laser diode sources having their output beams coupled to a respective gain medium.
15. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 12 wherein in said fiber gain medium is wavelength tunable.

16. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 15 wherein said fiber gain medium includes a fiber grating, said tunable wavelength achieved by stretching, compressing, bending, heating or applied electric field to said fiber grating.

17. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 1 wherein in said gain medium is optically coupled between said first semiconductor gain source and said nonlinear frequency mixing device to provide additional power to said input outputs.

18. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 17 wherein in said gain medium comprises a rare-earth doped fiber amplifier, a rare-earth doped fiber laser, a Raman or Brillouin fiber amplifier, a Raman or Brillouin fiber laser, or a semiconductor amplifier.

19. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 17 wherein in said gain medium comprises a fiber gain medium.

20. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 19 wherein in said gain medium is a single mode, polarization maintaining fiber amplifier.

21. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 19 wherein in said gain medium is a single mode, polarization maintaining fiber laser.

22. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 19 wherein the output of said gain medium is coupled to at least one polarization maintaining fiber for polarization reorientation of said first and second outputs.

23. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 19 wherein said fiber gain medium is wavelength tunable.

24. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 23 wherein said gain medium includes a fiber grating, said tunable wavelength achieved by stretching, compressing, bending, heating or applied electric field to said fiber grating.

25. A mid-IR tunable frequency system comprising:
   a first semiconductor gain source for providing a first near-IR frequency output;
   a second semiconductor gain source for providing a second near-IR frequency output;
   means to tune at least one of said semiconductor gain sources to a near-IR frequency within a range of tunable near-IR frequencies;
   means for optically combining said first and second near-IR frequency outputs; and
   a nonlinear frequency mixing device comprising a QPM nonlinear crystal coupled to receive said first and second combined outputs as an input, said nonlinear frequency mixing device further comprising a plurality of selectable quasi-phase matching periods; and
   means to select one of said quasi-phase matching periods in combination with frequency output selection via said at least one semiconductor gain source to produce an output frequency selectable within a mid-IR frequency range extending from about 2 \( \mu \text{m} \) to about 5 \( \mu \text{m} \).

26. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 25 wherein said first semiconductor gain source is tunable within a range of about 776 nm to about 900 nm and said second semiconductor gain source is tunable within a range of about 1,000 nm to 1,100 nm.

27. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 25 wherein said selection means comprises a pattern of quasi-phase matching periods formed in a fan-shaped configuration in said nonlinear frequency mixing device and means to laterally translate said nonlinear frequency mixing device relative to said combined input to select one of said quasi-phase matching periods.

28. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 25 wherein said selection means comprises a plurality of different quasi-phase matching periods formed in adjacent rows in said nonlinear frequency mixing device in an axial direction of said combined input and means to laterally translate said nonlinear frequency mixing device relative to said combined input to select one of said quasi-phase matching periods.

29. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 25 wherein said selection means comprises a quasi-phase matching period formed in said nonlinear frequency mixing device and means to rotate said nonlinear frequency mixing device relative to said combined input to change the quasi-phase matching period to select one of plurality of said quasi-phase matching periods achievable through its rotation.

30. The mid-IR tunable frequency system of claim 25 wherein at least one of said near-IR semiconductor gain sources comprises a tapered gain amplifier with an externally tuned cavity forming an oscillator and the other of said near-IR semiconductor gain sources comprises a DBR master oscillator coupled to a tapered gain amplifier.

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