



(19) **United States**

(12) **Patent Application Publication**
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(10) **Pub. No.: US 2016/0236176 A1**

(43) **Pub. Date: Aug. 18, 2016**

(54) **METHOD OF MAKING HIGHLY POROUS,
STABLE ALUMINUM OXIDES DOPED WITH
SILICON**

C04B 38/06 (2006.01)

B01J 20/30 (2006.01)

C04B 35/10 (2006.01)

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B01J 37/04 (2006.01)

B01J 20/16 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC *B01J 21/12* (2013.01); *B01J 37/04* (2013.01);

B01J 37/082 (2013.01); *B01J 20/16* (2013.01);

B01J 20/3078 (2013.01); *C04B 35/10*

(2013.01); *C04B 38/06* (2013.01)

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(57)

ABSTRACT

The present invention relates to a method for making high surface area and large pore volume thermally stable silica-doped alumina (aluminum oxide) catalyst support and ceramic materials. The ability of the silica-alumina to withstand high temperatures in presence or absence of water and prevent sintering allows it to maintain good activity over a long period of time in catalytic reactions. The method of preparing such materials includes adding organic silicon reagents to an organic aluminum salt such as an alkoxide in a controlled quantity as a doping agent in a solid state, solvent deficient reaction followed by calcination. Alternatively, the organic silicon compound may be added after calcination of the alumina, followed by another calcination step. This method is inexpensive and simple. The alumina catalyst support material prepared by the subject method maintains high pore volumes, pore diameters and surface areas at very high temperatures and in the presence of steam.

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(21) Appl. No.: **15/056,461**

(22) Filed: **Feb. 29, 2016**

Related U.S. Application Data

(62) Division of application No. 14/201,538, filed on Mar. 7, 2014, now Pat. No. 9,289,750.

(60) Provisional application No. 61/851,506, filed on Mar. 9, 2013.

Publication Classification

(51) **Int. Cl.**

B01J 21/12 (2006.01)

B01J 37/08 (2006.01)

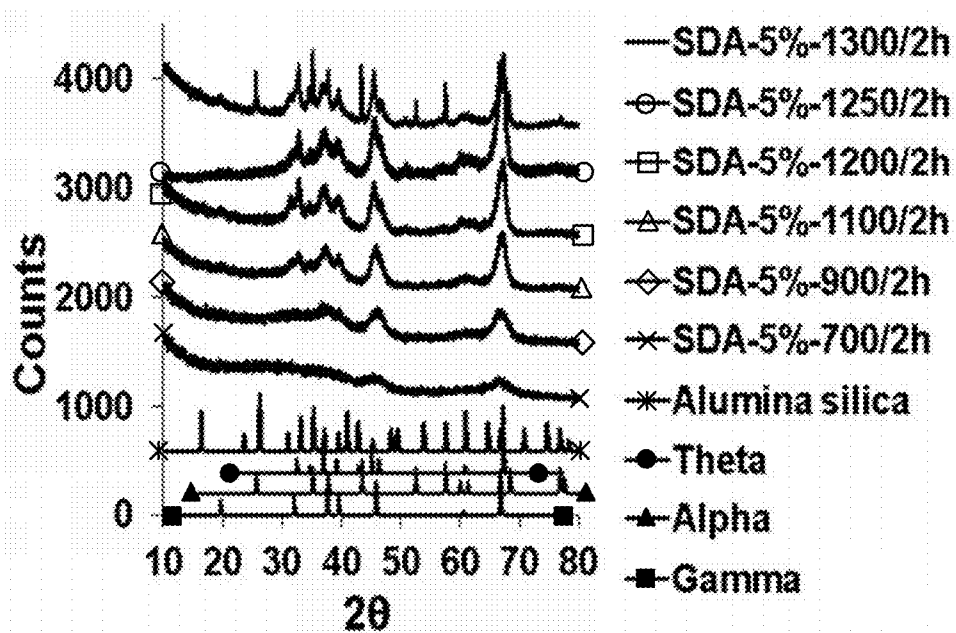


FIG. 1A

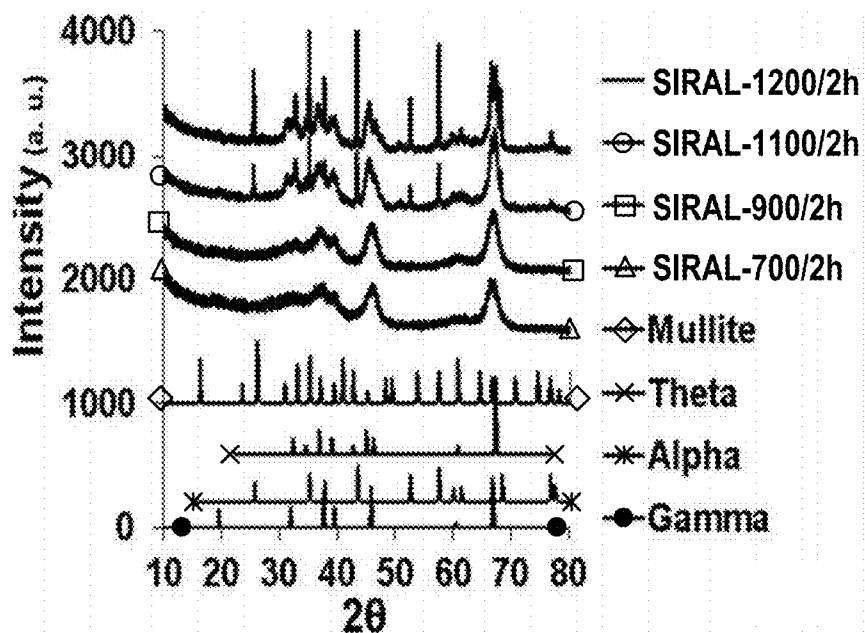


FIG. 1B

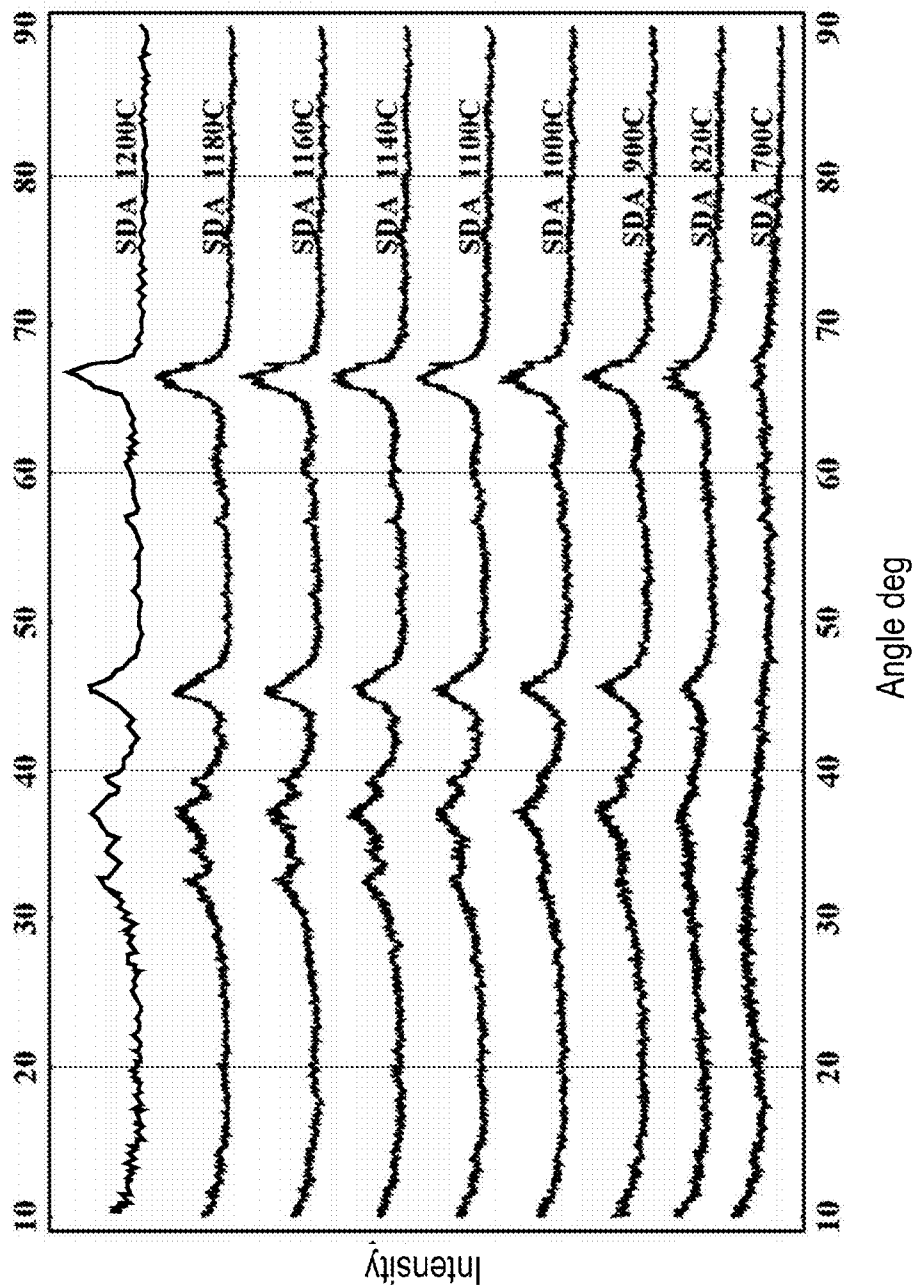


FIG. 2

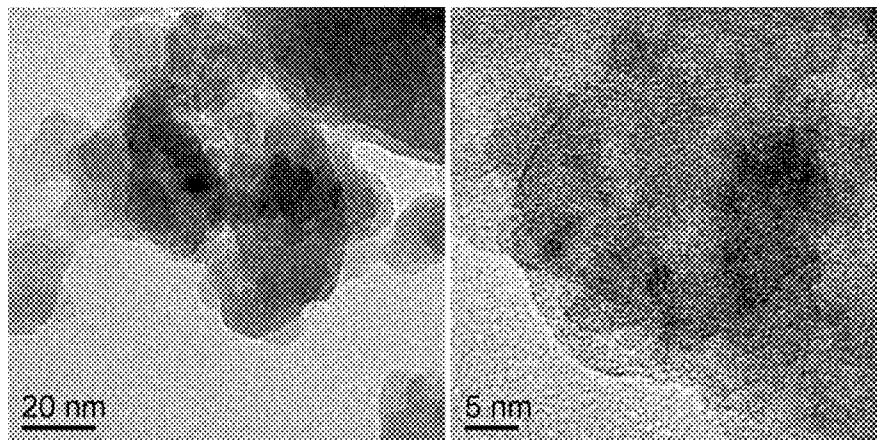


FIG. 3A

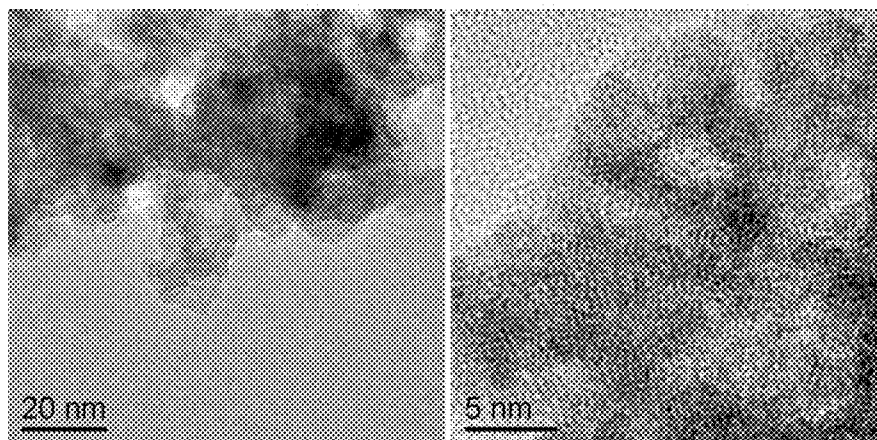


FIG. 3B

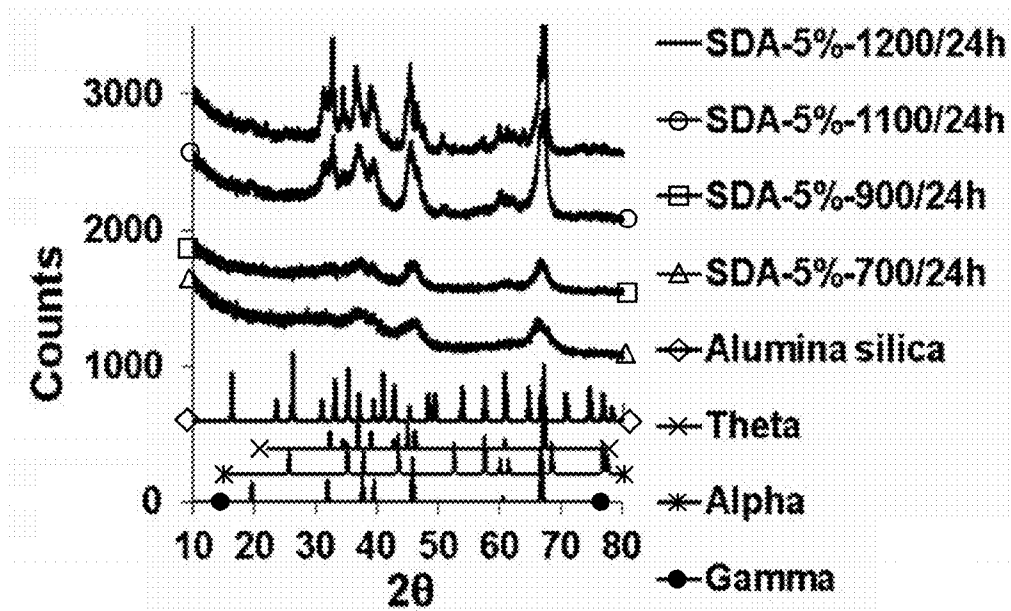


FIG. 4A

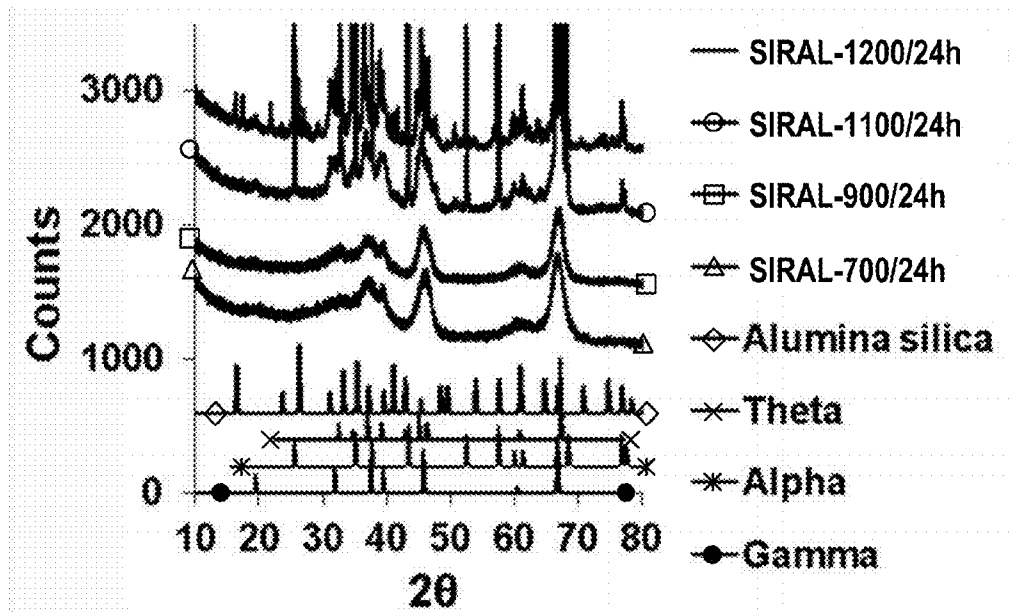


FIG. 4B

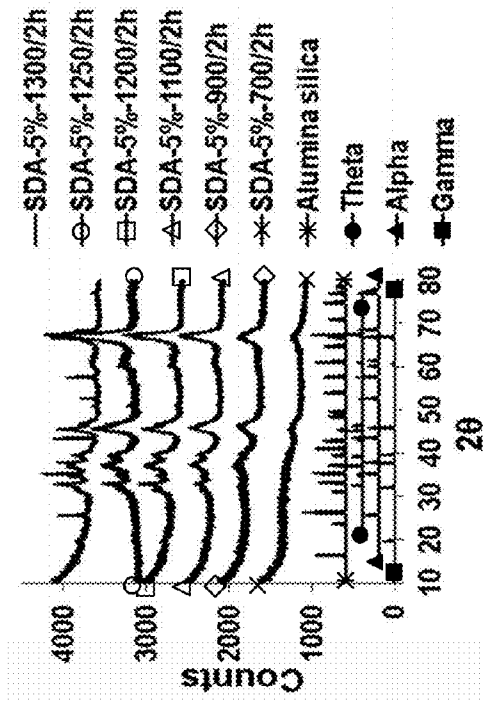


FIG. 5A

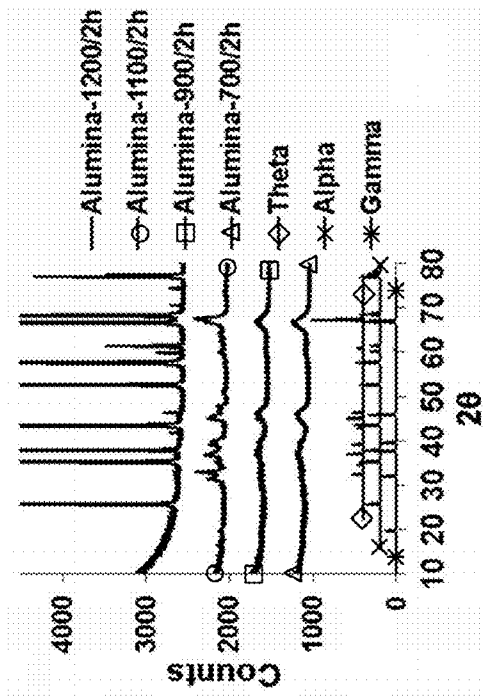


FIG. 5B

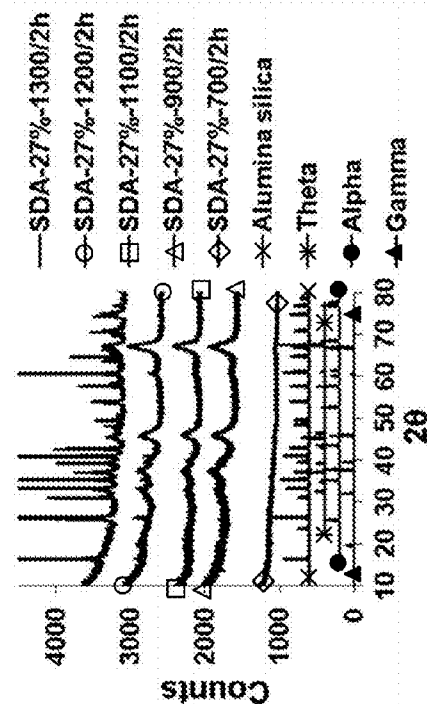


FIG. 5C

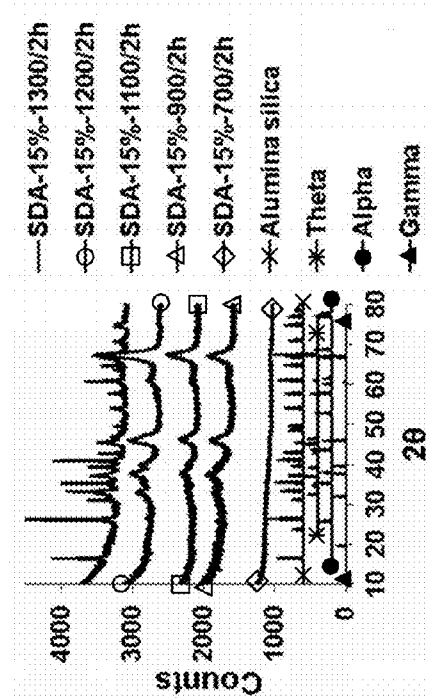


FIG. 5D

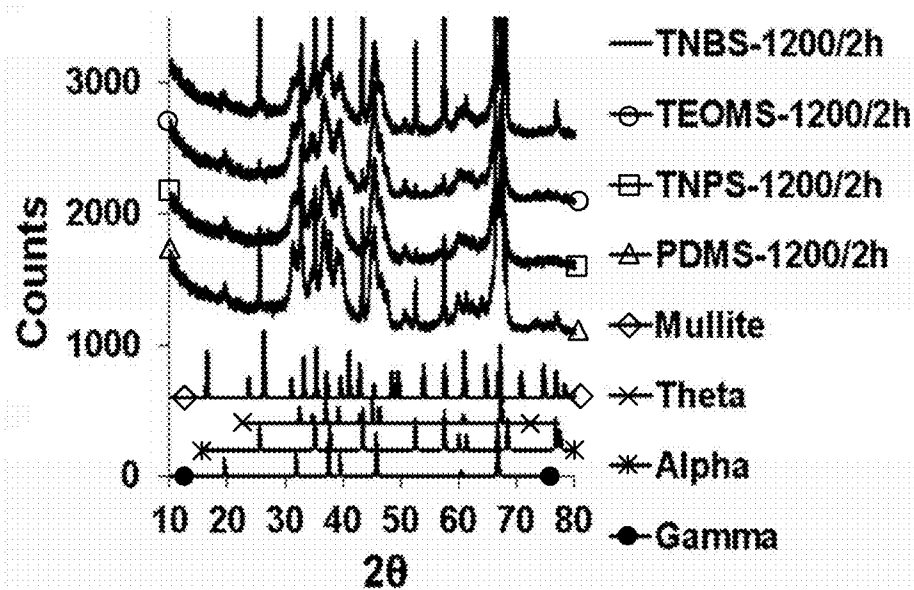


FIG. 6

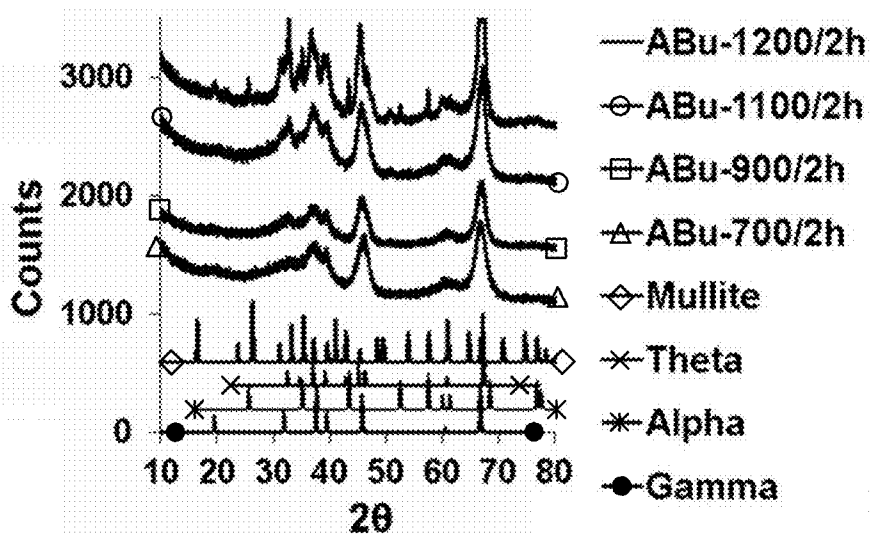


FIG. 7A

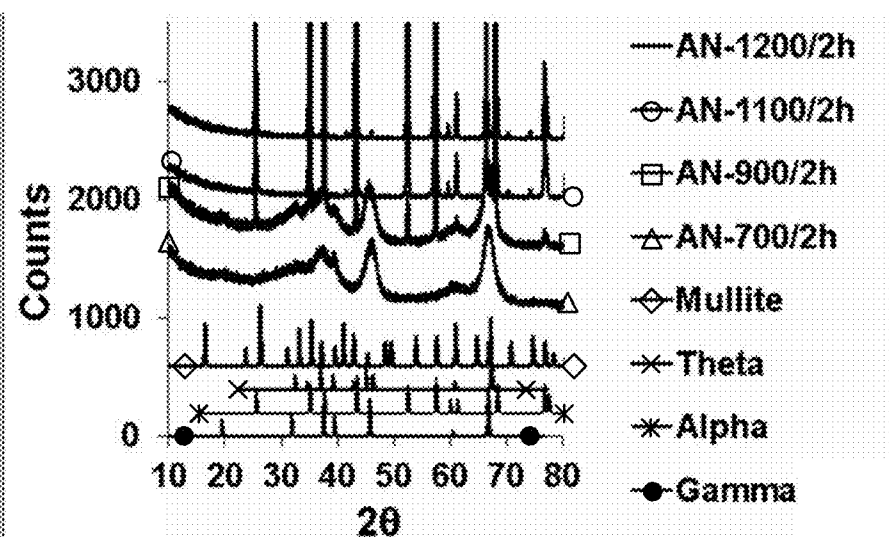


FIG. 7B

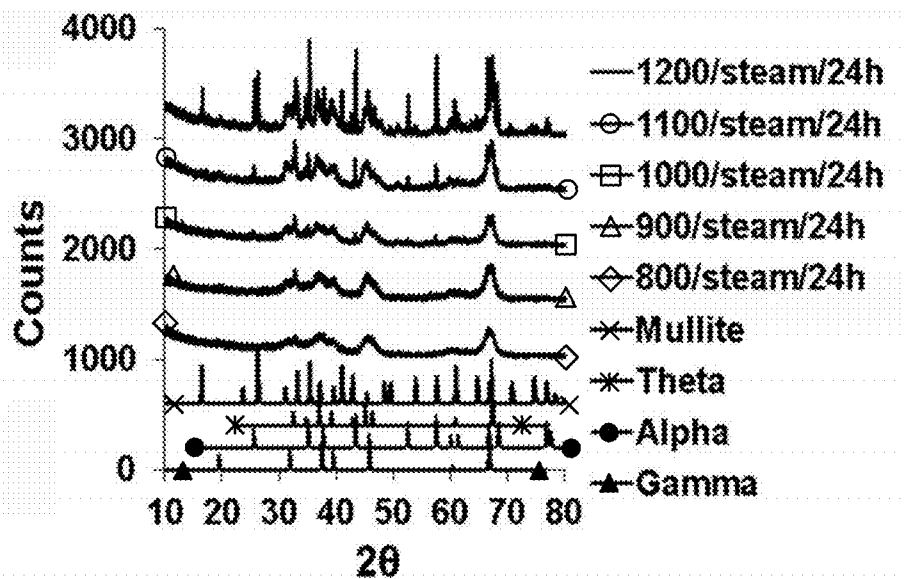


FIG. 8

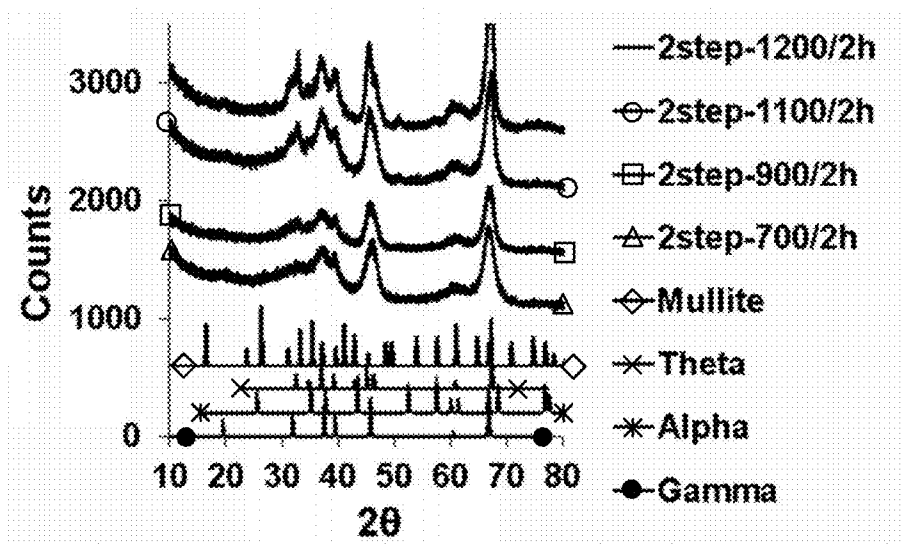


FIG. 9

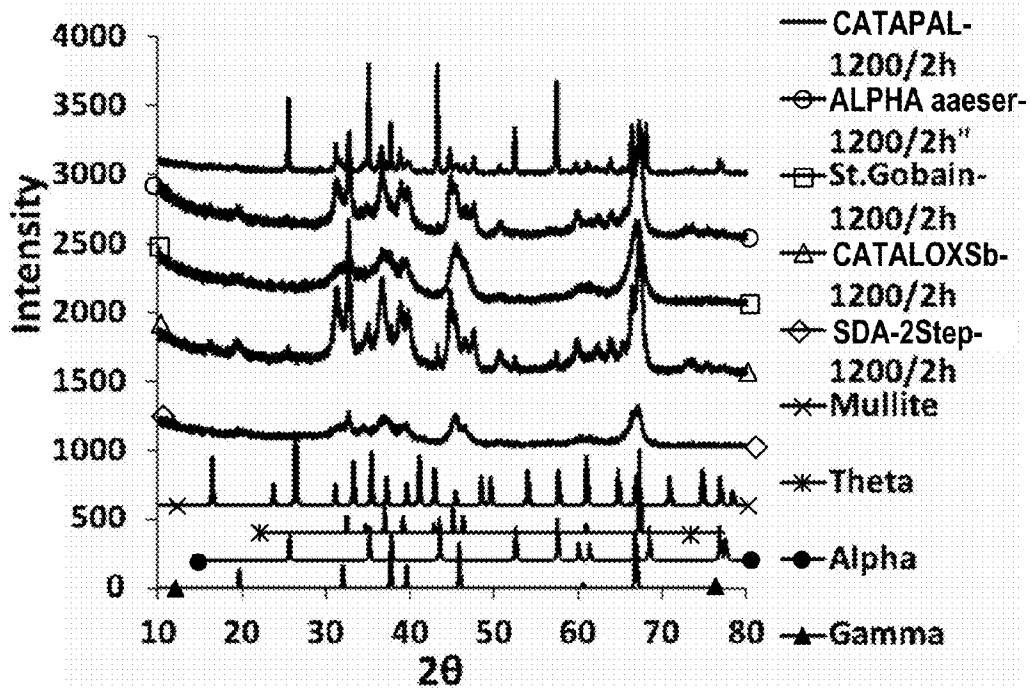


FIG. 10

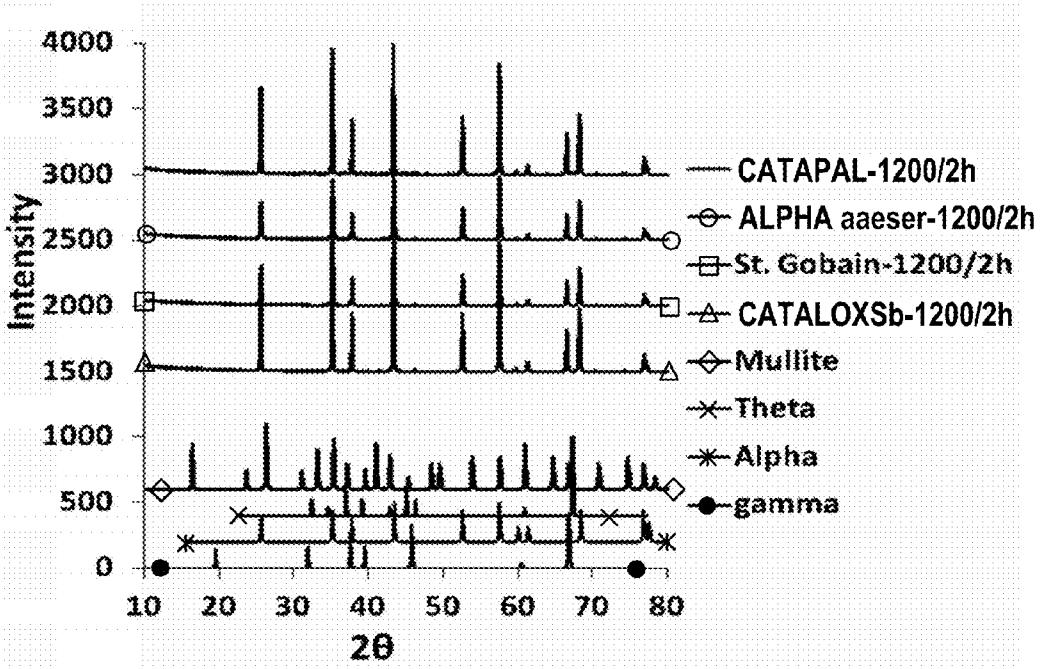


FIG. 11

METHOD OF MAKING HIGHLY POROUS, STABLE ALUMINUM OXIDES DOPED WITH SILICON

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a divisional of, and claims priority to and the benefit of, U.S. Non-Provisional patent application Ser. No. 14/201,538 filed on Mar. 7, 2014 and entitled "METHOD OF MAKING HIGHLY POROUS, STABLE ALUMINUM OXIDES DOPED WITH SILICON," which claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application Ser. No. 61/851,506 filed on Mar. 9, 2013 and entitled "A METHOD OF PRODUCING THERMALLY STABLE AND HIGH SURFACE AREA Al_2O_3 CATALYST SUPPORTS," which applications are hereby expressly incorporated herein in their entirety by this reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The Field of the Invention

[0002] Alumina is the most common catalyst support used in industry and it has numerous applications as a ceramic material. Gamma alumina ($\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$) is preferred for many catalyst systems including Pt, Pd, and Ni for hydrogenation reactions, for Pt, Rh and Pd catalysts for internal combustion engine emissions control (CO, NO_x), for Co(Ni)—Mo(W) sulfide catalysts for fuel hydrodesulfurization, and for Co and Fe catalysts for Fischer-Tropsch synthesis (FTS). Alumina is prepared inexpensively with a wide range of surface areas and porosities, and is more thermally stable than other metal oxide supports. There are three important properties in selecting an appropriate catalyst support. First, high surface area supports increase catalyst dispersion and catalytic reaction sites, which leads to decreased reaction times and catalyst usage. Second, optimal pore size is important in support materials since various catalytic systems require unique pore sizes for better diffusion and selectivity. Third, thermal stability is important since many catalytic reactions take place at elevated temperatures over long periods of time. However, at high temperatures and pressures, $\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$ is deactivated by sintering and a crystalline lattice phase transformation from γ to $\alpha\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$ which causes a sharp decrease in surface area and pore size. And, the metal catalysts on such a support become occluded in the shrunken material, resulting in a loss of exposed catalyst surface area, or they are expelled from the support, resulting in a significant deactivation of the catalyst.

[0003] In order to prevent sintering and suppress catalyst deactivation, methods to stabilize $\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$ supports against thermal deactivation have been developed by adding a dopant which may affect the porous structure and surface properties of the materials and improve their thermal stability. Thermal stability of alumina increases with silica, zirconia, rare earth elements such as lanthanum and chelating agents (ethyl acetoacetate). Several methods for synthesis of stable silica doped alumina have been reported, e.g., impregnation; precipitation/washing; and gel, areogel, and cryogel methods employing various solvents and/or surfactants and templates. These methods are costly and time consuming. Moreover, these supports, with few exceptions, do not maintain high surface areas and pore volumes at higher temperatures. Such materials are described in, e.g., J. W. Curley, M. J. Dreehan, O. E. Finlayson, *Catalysis Today*, 10 (1991) 401-404, in J. van de

Loosdrecht, S. Barradas, E. A. Caricato, P. J. van Berge, and J. L. Visagie, *Studies in Surface Science and Catalysis*, 143 (2002) 587; in A. A. Shutilov, G. A. Zenkovets, S. v. Tsybulya, V. Y. Gavrilove, *Kinetics and Catalysis*, 53, (2012) 125-136; in A. W. Espie, J. C. Vickerman, *Journal of the Chemical Society, Faraday Transactions 1: Physical Chemistry in Condensed Phases*, 80(1984) 1903-1913, and in T. Fukui, M. Hori, *Journal of Materials Science*, 31 (1996) 3245-3248; in Beguin et al., *Journal of Catalysis*, 127 (1991) 595.

[0004] WO 2007/009680 discloses treatment of alumina with an organic siloxide, i.e. $\text{Si}(\text{OR})_{4-n}\text{R}'_n$ including TEOS. U.S. Pat. No. 6,977,273 discloses impregnating Sasol Puralox gamma-alumina with TEOS. (3) US 2003/0162849, WO 03/012008, and US Patent 2005/0245623 discloses addition of TEOS/ethanol or other organic silicon compounds in ethanol to an alumina support to improve mechanical and thermal/hydrothermal stabilities and resistance to sintering.

[0005] U.S. Pat. No. 4,392,988 discloses that soaking alumina in polydimethyl-siloxane increases thermal stability of alumina. EPO 2,392,548 describes a method for the preparation of an amorphous silica-alumina with acid properties like zeolites, using silica to alumina weight ratio of 2. The method includes: co-precipitation of alumina and silica by adding a base precipitating agent to an aqueous solution of sodium silicate and aluminum sulfate in presence of a gelification initiator (bohemite) followed by filtration and drying. After calcination at 550° C. the surface area and a pore volume are 400 m²/g and 1.2 cm³/g, respectively. But, the silica content in such silica-alumina is high which make it less stable at higher temperatures. The acidity of this support is also high which make it undesirable for some catalytic reactions such as Fischer-Tropsch.

[0006] EPO Patent 1,701,787 discloses a silica-modified-alumina with 2-10% silica using a cogel method. After calcination at 648° C., the material has a surface area and pore volume of 318 m²/g and 0.46 cm³/g, respectively. There is no data available at higher temperatures. EPO Patent 0190883 discloses a stabilized 5.5% silica-alumina support produced by impregnating alumina with polyorgano silane. After calcination at 1100° C. and 1200° C., the surface area is 158.2 m²/g and 93 m²/g, respectively. No data are available for pore volume.

[0007] Huang et al. (U.S. provisional Patent application 61/340,762 corresponding to application Ser. No. 13/069,317 filed Mar. 22, 2011 previously disclosed a simple method of preparing $\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$ supports which have high surface areas (>350 m²/g) and pore volumes (>1.7 cm³/g); and in which the pore diameters can be controlled over a large range (3 to 55 nm) made by an inexpensive, solvent deficient method without the use of templates or surfactants. However, pore volume and surface area decrease sharply to about 60 m²/g at approximately 1000° C. due to the γ to $\alpha\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$ transition. Doping with 3% La increases the thermal stability somewhat to achieve a surface area of 139 m²/g and pore volume of 0.22 cm³/g at 1100° C. Moreover, these supports tend to collapse in the presence of water or steam.

[0008] Thus, the need is clear for development of methods for synthesizing alumina catalyst supports with improved stability at high temperatures (e.g., above 1100° C.) in the presence of water/steam, i.e., materials which maintain high surface area, large pore volume medium to large mesopore diameter, under these demanding conditions. Such catalyst supports can be used to facilitate higher catalyst loading and dispersion with attendant increases in catalytic activity, selec-

tivity, productivity, and lifetime at these operating temperatures. It is also desirable to produce such materials using simple manufacturing methods with associated low costs of manufacturing.

[0009] Table 1 shows surface areas, pore diameters, and pore volumes for different Al_2O_3 , and Si— Al_2O_3 supports available commercially and reported in the literature.

Sample ID	BET surface area (m^2/g)			Mesopore volume (cm^3/g)			Pore Diameter (nm)			Alumina phase	
	700	1100	1200	700	1100	1200	700	1100	1200	1100	1200
5% Si/ Al_2O_3 (SIRAL 5- Sasol)a	288	128	73	0.61	0.4	0.23	7.7	11.2	11.4	Gamma & Alpha	Gamma & Alpha
5% Si/ Al_2O_3 [1]b	—	120	110	—	1.28	0.9	—	10.8	18.6	Theta	Theta
10% Si/ Al_2O_3 [1]b	—	100	47	—	0.2	0.1	—	3.5	3.5	Gamma	Gamma
10% Si/ Al_2O_3 [2]c	—	—	150	—	—	0.65	—	—	—	—	Alpha & Gamma
a)5% Si/ Al_2O_3 [3]a	187	68	—	0.57	0.35	—	7.4	15.0	—	Alpha & Theta	—
Si/ Al_2O_3 [4]d	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Calcined for:

a) 2 h,

b) 1 h,

c) 5 h,

d) 4 h

[1]T. Horiuchi, T. Osaki, T. Sugiyama, H. Masuda, M. Horio, K. Suzuki, T. Mori, T. Sago, *Journal of the Chemical Society, Faraday Transactions*, 90 (1994) 2573-2578

[2]Osaki, T.; Nagashima, K.; Watari, K.; Tajiri, K., *Journal of Non-Crystalline Solids* 2007, 353, (24-25), 2436-2442.

[3]J. B. Miller, E. I. Ko, *Catalysis Today*, 43 (1998) 51-67

[4]A. A. Shutilov, G. A. Zenkovets, S. V. Tsybulya, V. Y. Gavrilov, *Kinetics and Catalysis*, 53 125-136.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0010] This invention comprises a method for preparation of a silica doped alumina which maintains high surface areas, large pore volumes and large pore diameters at elevated temperatures, such as about 1200° C. in the presence or absence of water (or steam). The method produces silica-stabilized alumina nanoparticles highly resistant to sintering or fusing with consequent grain growth and conversion of the γ to the α crystalline lattice structure, thus maintaining optimal surface area and pore structure. The silica-doped alumina is produced by a unique solid-state, solvent-deficient synthesis method combined with a novel method of doping with an organic silicon reagent to produce products of superior thermal and hydrothermal stability and pore characteristics.

[0011] The invention may be practiced by either of two alternative methods as a “One Step” or “Two Step” method:

[0012] One Step: An organic silicon compound such as tetraethyl orthosilicate (TEOS) is mixed with an organic aluminum salt such as aluminum isopropoxide and a small amount of water in a solvent deficient environment to produce doped alumina precursor nanoparticles. The organic silicon compound used may vary in concentration to yield from about 1% to about 30% by weight of silica in the final product. The aluminum alkoxide and the organic silicon compound form a precursor in the form of a solid suspension or slurry. Upon further stirring, the slurry may thicken to a slightly-wet solid. The precursor (with or without drying to remove the water and by-product volatile alcohols) is dried at 25-200° C. and calcined by heating to 500-800° C. (e.g., to 700° C. for 2 hrs., ramp rate, 5 hrs.) to form a stable silica-doped aluminum oxide (“SDA” herein) with evaporation of all byproducts.

[0013] Two Step:

a) An organic aluminum salt such as aluminum isopropoxide and a small amount of water are mixed in a solvent deficient environment to produce an alumina nanoparticle precursor in the form of a slurry. The alumina precursor (with or without drying to remove the water and by-product volatile alcohol) is calcined (e.g., at 700° C. for 2 hrs., ramp rate, 5 hrs.) to form aluminum oxide with evaporation of all byproducts.

b) An organic silicon compound such as TEOS is mixed with the alumina produced in step a) and with a small amount of water sufficient to hydrolyze the TEOS. The organic silicon compound may vary in concentration to yield from about 1% to about 30% by weight of silica in the final product. The mixture is calcined (e.g., at 700° C. for 2 hrs., ramp rate, 5 hrs.) to form the stable silica doped aluminum oxide (SDA) with evaporation of all byproducts.

[0014] Examples of appropriate organic aluminum salts include, but are not limited to aluminum isopropoxide, aluminum phenoxide, aluminum sec-butoxide, aluminum tert-butoxide, aluminum ethoxide, and aluminum hexoxide. Examples of organic silicon compounds include, but are not limited to: tetraethyl ortho silicate, tetra-n-butoxysilane, tetra n-propoxy silane, polydimethyl siloxane, and triethoxy methyl silane.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0015] FIG. 1A shows XRD patterns of 5% silica doped alumina (SDA) from Example 1 (FIG. 1A) calcined at different temperatures for 2 hrs.

[0016] FIG. 1B shows a commercially available alumina, Sasol 5% silica doped alumina, “SIRAL-5” (from Example 4) calcined at different temperatures.

[0017] FIGS. 1A and 1B also show XRD patterns for standard alumina phases including “Mullite” (3:1 weight % alumina/silica, also designated as “Alumina silica” in FIG. 1A and other Examples) as well as alpha, theta, and gamma phases. XRD standard patterns described in this and other Examples to follow were compared to an XRD standard

pattern for alpha, gamma, theta and mullite phases in the International Centre for Diffraction Data (ICDD) database software.

[0018] FIG. 2 shows XRD patterns of a 5% doped alumina from Example 2 calcined at different temperatures from 700-1200° C. and stability of the sample over this range.

[0019] FIGS. 3A and 3B show TEM micrographs of 5% silica doped alumina calcined at 700° C. (FIG. 3A), and 5% silica doped alumina calcined at 1100° C. (FIG. 3B). The SDA's were prepared as described in Example 3.

[0020] FIG. 4A shows XRD patterns of an SDA (Example 5) 5% doped alumina calcined at different temperatures for 24 hrs.

[0021] FIG. 4B shows XRD patterns for "Sasol" 5% doped alumina (Example 6, "SIRAL-5") calcined at different temperatures for 24 h. The standards for various alumina phases as described in Example 1 are also shown.

[0022] FIGS. 5A-5D show XRD patterns of different aluminas calcined at different temperatures for 2 hr. (FIG. 5A, Example 7, 0% silica), (FIG. 5B, 5% doped alumina, Example 1), FIG. 5C, 15% doped alumina, Example 8, and FIG. 5D, 27% doped alumina, Example 9. The standards for various alumina phases as described in Example 1 are also shown.

[0023] FIG. 6 shows XRD patterns of silica doped alumina (Examples 10-13) from different organic silicons after calcining at 1200° for 2 hrs. The standards for various alumina phases as described in Example 1 are shown.

[0024] FIGS. 7A and 7B show XRD patterns of silica doped aluminas from Examples 16 (FIG. 7A) and Example 18 (FIG. 7B.) Standards for alumina phases as described in Example 1 are shown.

[0025] FIG. 8 shows XRD patterns of 5% silica doped alumina (Example 19) hydrothermally treated with water for 24 hours at different temperatures. Standards for alumina phases as described in Example 1 are shown.

[0026] FIG. 9 shows XRD patterns of 5% silica doped alumina (Example 20) calcined using the Two Step method at different temperatures for 2 hrs. Standards for alumina phases as described in Example 1 are shown.

[0027] FIG. 10 shows XRD patterns of commercial aluminas (Examples 30-33) after adding TEOS and calcining at different temperatures for 2 hrs and one sample prepared by the two step method of Example 20 ("SDA".) Standards for alumina phases as described in Example 1 are shown.

[0028] FIG. 11 shows XRD patterns of commercial aluminas with no dopant (Example 34) after calcining at 1200° C. for 2 hrs. Standards for alumina phases as described in Example 1 are shown.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0029] The following descriptions and examples illustrate the preferred embodiments of the present invention in detail. Those of skill in the art will recognize that there are numerous variations and modifications of this invention that are encompassed by its scope. Accordingly, the description of the preferred embodiments should not be deemed to limit the scope of the present invention.

[0030] It is an object of some embodiments of the present invention to provide a method for preparing nanoscale aluminum oxides stable at high temperatures in the presence or absence of water and/or steam and having high-surface area,

large pore volume, and medium to large mesopores high mesoporosity-suitable as catalysts supports, ceramic materials and adsorbents.

[0031] The present invention employs the use of a solvent deficient method of making small nanoparticles with tight size distributions to enable the production of high quality aluminum oxide materials stable at high temperatures in the presence or absence of water and/or steam and with high surface area and large mesopore volume. The invention also provides a means of manipulating the secondary structure or aggregation of the nanoparticles to systematically control the surface properties and pore structure of said materials as determined by the BET surface area, pore volume, and pore size from N₂ adsorption. Pore size of the aluminum oxide products can vary from small to large mesopores.

[0032] In one embodiment (referred to herein as the "One Step" method, the basic method of making alumina materials includes mixing a dry powdered (but can be hydrated) organic aluminum salt, preferably an alkoxide or phenoxide (or a mixture of such), an organic silicon compound (hereinafter described) and a small amount of water (in the event a non-hydrated salt is used) to form what is opined to be a complex metal hydroxide/metal-oxide hydroxide precursor material and a byproduct salt. The organic silicon compound may be added in an amount to provide up to about 1% to about 30 weight % of silica in the final product. The reaction is solvent deficient and the reaction mixture consists of a solid suspension or slurry. This condition is characterized as "solvent deficient" or "no solvent added" in that the small amount of water is sufficient to react with (hydrolyze) the aluminum alkoxide and the organic silicon compound, but not sufficient to solubilize the reactants. Typically, water may be provided in an amount to provide a molar ratio to aluminum of at least 3:1 and to silicon of at least 2:1. Larger amounts may be employed but not in sufficient quantities to solubilize the reactants. Upon further stirring, the slurry may thicken to a slightly-wet solid depending upon the reagents used. The entire mixing method to produce the precursor can be carried out at room temperature within 10-30 minutes to bring the reaction to completion. Reaction temperatures from 25 to 90° C. may be used. The intermediate so produced is opined to contain an aluminum hydroxide and/or aluminum oxide hydroxide. The precursor thus formed may optionally be air dried at room temperature or heated to a temperature sufficient to dehydrate the precursor. In one embodiment drying is carried out prior to calcination by heating at a temperature greater than 50° C., 80° C., or 100° C., less than 200° C., or 120° C., or a range constructed from any of the foregoing temperatures.

[0033] Subsequently, the precursor is calcined. Calcination produces thermally, stable silica doped aluminas. The calcination can be carried out at a temperature equal to or greater than 300° C., 350° C., or 400° C., and equal to or less than 1200° C., 800° C., 600° C., 400° C., or a range constructed from any of the foregoing temperatures. Calcination at 500-1200° C. is preferred. The calcination can be carried out for a period of time greater than 10 minutes, 30 minutes, 1 hour, 2 hours, or 5 hours and various ramp rates may be used such as 0.5-10° C./min. Ramp rates of 0.5 to 3° C. are preferred. Calcination at preferred conditions produces highly thermally stable silica-doped aluminas in mostly the gamma phase.

[0034] The drying and calcination can be carried out as separate discrete steps in the same or different heating vessels

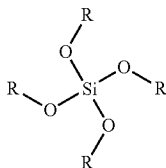
or as a single step (i.e., the drying step may be a single step that transitions to calcination).

[0035] The method may also be modified by washing the precursor material prior to calcination, or the alumina may be washed after calcination.

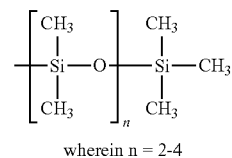
[0036] In another embodiment referred to herein as the "Two Step" method, in the first step an organic aluminum salt, typically an aluminum alkoxide or phenoxide or mixtures thereof, is mixed with a small amount of water to provide sufficient water for the reaction as described above to produce a nanoparticle precursor opined to contain aluminum hydroxide and/or aluminum oxide hydroxide which form a slurry. This precursor (with or without the drying step as described above) is calcined to form aluminum oxide nanoparticles. As above, the calcination can be carried out at a temperature greater than 300° C., 350° C., or 400° C., and less than 1200° C., 800° C., 600° C., 400° C., or a range constructed from any of the foregoing temperatures. The calcination can be carried out for a period of time greater than 10 minutes 30 minutes, 1 hour, 2 hours, or 5 hours and various ramp rates may be used such as 0.5-10° C./min. In the second step, the aluminum oxide so formed is then mixed with an organic silicon compound (described hereafter) and a small amount of water sufficient to hydrolyze the organic silicon compound. The silicon added may vary in concentration, but is typically employed in an amount to provide from about 1% to about 30% by weight of silica in the final product. The mixture of the organic silicon compound and aluminum oxide is then calcined under the conditions, temperatures, times, and heating rates as the calcination described above for Step 1. Calcination under preferred conditions produces highly thermally stable silica doped aluminas. Additional details regarding methods for making a solvent deficient precursor mixture and the reagents that can be used to make solvent deficient precursor mixtures are disclosed in the co-pending U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 61/340,762 corresponding to application Ser. No. 13/069,317, filed Mar. 22, 2011 which is hereby incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

[0037] Suitable organic aluminum starting reagents used in this invention are generally aluminum organic salts such as alkoxides and phenoxides. Examples are aluminum isopropoxide (ATP), aluminum sec butoxide (Abu), aluminum tert butoxide (ATB), aluminum ethoxide (AET), aluminum propoxide (ApO), aluminum pentoxide, and aluminum phenoxide (Aph). They may generally be represented by the formula $Al(O-R)_3$ where R is C₁-C₁₂ alkyl, C₅-C₁₂ cycloalkyl, aryl or combinations thereof.

[0038] The organic silicon compounds used as reagents in this invention are a broad class of compositions generally characterized as silicon oxides. They may also be characterized as silanes (silane derivatives) and silicates. They may be generally represented by the following formula:



Wherein R is alkyl or aryl and can be about C₁-C₁₂ alkyl, C₅-C₁₂ cycloalkyl, phenyl, naphthyl and the like. R may also be a polyalkyl siloxane radical represented by the following structure:



Representative compounds are tetraethyl orthosilicate (TEOS), tetra-n-butoxysilane, (TNBS), tetra n-propoxy silane (TNPS), polydimethyl siloxane (PDMS), and triethoxy methyl silane (TEOMS). TEOS is a preferred compound. The organic silicon compound is typically employed in an amount to provide from about 1% to about 30%, and preferably about 5-10% by weight of silica in the final product in both One Step and Two Step Methods including any amount within these ranges.

[0039] The pore structure of the aluminas can also be controlled by dilution of the starting materials with a liquid. The addition of small amounts of liquids to the solvent deficient slurry will result in substantial changes in the porous characteristics of the product. The diluent may be water, an alcohol, ketone, ether, or other liquids that are generally useful as solvents when dissolving metal salts. However, when used in the present invention, the diluent is added in concentrations that do not dissolve the aluminum salts in the precursor mixture. The diluent may be included in the precursor mixture in molar ratios of diluent to aluminum alkoxide or phenoxide in a range from 1:0.5 to 1:10 or any number or range between. For example, with aluminas prepared from aluminum sec-butoxide, the pore diameter can be varied by three fold and the pore volume by four fold with the addition of small amounts of water (but still maintaining the ∞ solvent deficient environment.) The pore structure can also be controlled by rinsing the precursor material prior to calcination with various solvents. For example, in the case of aluminas prepared from aluminum isopropoxide, the pore diameter can be varied by almost seven fold by rinsing the precursor with various organic solvents.

[0040] The aluminas produced by this invention are highly thermally stable and can have higher surface areas, larger pore volumes, and generally have larger mesopores following treatment at elevated temperatures than aluminas reported in the prior art, with only a few exceptions, in which case the thermal stability and pore volume are generally comparable. The methods of the present invention are also relatively simple, scalable, and designed to be commercially economical compared to methods reported in prior art processes. For example, after calcination temperatures of 1200° C. the silica-doped alumina maintains surface areas of >100 m²/g, pore volumes >0.5 cm³/g, and pore diameters >20 nm. Ceramic silica-alumina porous membranes prepared from the silica-aluminas of this invention can also be used in aggressive media, steam, or high temperature applications. They are preferred over polymeric membranes due to their long life, ecological benefits, and their chemical and thermal stability. They also can be used in gas separation and purification and in numerous filtration applications. Importantly, the silica-aluminas of this invention remain in the gamma phase at high

temperature. γ -Aluminas produced by methods in the current art often exhibit substantial grain growth and loss of surface area as they are exposed to higher temperatures, and all reported examples transition to the θ or α -phases at temperatures from 1100° C. to 1200° C. The α -phase is characterized by excessive grain growth and collapse of the porous structure. The silica doped aluminas of the present invention may also be subject to grain growth and loss of surface area, but to a lesser extent, and they remain in the γ -phase with conserved pore structure up to 1200° C. to 1250° C. Thus, the silica-doped aluminas of this invention have significant benefits in the properties mentioned over similar materials reported in the prior art.

[0041] The following examples are presented to more completely describe the present invention, and comparison examples are also included to demonstrate the benefits of the invention. The examples are provided for illustrative purposes only. Various modifications or changes in light thereof will be obvious to persons skilled in the art and are to be included within the spirit and purview of this application. The invention can take other specific forms without departing from the spirit or essential attributes thereof. In all examples, BET surface area and mesopore volume were determined by N_2 adsorption at 77 K and pore diameter was calculated from the hysteresis region of each isotherm using the improved slit pore geometry (SPG) model for large pore size using the desorption branch.

Example 1

[0042] In a preferred embodiment, water is added to aluminum isopropoxide (AIP) in a 1:5 mole ratio, immediately followed by adding the equivalent of 5 wt. % silica in the form of TEOS. The reagents are mixed for 30 minutes by a Bosch kitchen mixer to form the precursor and the precursor is calcined at 700° C. for 2 hrs (ramp rate 2° C./min) to produce the thermally stable silica doped alumina (SDA). Table 2 includes BET data for 5 wt. % SDA thermally treated at 700° C., 900° C., 1100° C. and 1200° C. for 2 hrs (ramp rate 2° C./min). Following calcination at 1100° C. a surface area of 160 m²/g, a pore volume of 0.99 cm³/g, and a bimodal pore size distribution with peaks at 23 and 52 nm are observed. FIGS. 1A and 5B show that the principal phase of the SDA treated at 1250° C. is γ -Al₂O₃. Peaks attributed to α -Al₂O₃ are not observed until the sample is calcined at 1300° C.

Example 2

[0043] A sample from Example 1 which had been previously air-calcined at 700° C. was loaded in an in situ XRD cell, ramped to 700° C. in air, and held for 30 minutes; the XRD spectrum was scanned and the temperature was ramped to 800° C. and held for 30 minutes, then scanned, etc. up through 1200° C. FIG. 2 shows in situ high-temperature XRD patterns in air. It is evident that the γ -Al₂O₃ phase in 5% SDA is stable to 1200° C. without transforming to either theta (θ) or α -alumina.

Example 3

[0044] A sample from Example 1 calcined at 700° C. was studied by TEM. TEM images (FIG. 3A) show that primary particles of 5% SDA are plate-like, having an average length of 20 nm, an average width of 15 nm; and a thickness of about 5 nm based on XRD calculations using the Scherrer formula. At higher temperatures, i.e. 1100° C., (FIG. 3B), the shape

and size of the 5% SDA primary particle remains relatively small, no significant grain growth due to sintering from gamma to alpha phase transition is observed.

Example 4

[0045] In comparative experiments, a sample of commercial silica-doped alumina ("SIRAL") from Sasol Inc. was calcined at 700° C., 900° C., 1100° C. and 1200° C. for 2 hrs. (ramp rate 5 hrs.). FIG. 1B shows the XRD patterns where the SIRAL transitioned from the γ to α phase at 1100° C., while the 5% silica doped alumina of this invention remains in γ phase to 1200° C. as shown in FIG. 1A).

TABLE 2

BET results of 0, 5, 15, 27% silica doped aluminas (SDAs) after heating at different temperatures for 2 hours					
Silica %	Calcination T (° C./2 hrs)	BET surface area (m ² /g) ^a	Mesopore volume (cm ³ /g) ^a	Pore diameter (nm) ^b	Standard deviation (nm)
0%	700° C.	291	1.56	19.8	1.1
	900° C.	208	1.12	25.5	1.2
	1100° C.	119	0.77	26.7	1.6
	1200° C.	15	0.05	0.00	—
5%	700° C.	378	1.83	14.7 and 35.0	1.8
	900° C.	300	1.60	19.8 and 51.8	1.8
	1100° C.	160	0.99	22.5 and 52.0	1.8
	1200° C.	111	0.59	29.4	1.6
15%	700° C.	222	1.40	43.1	1.8
	900° C.	180	1.10	39.2	1.8
	1100° C.	146	0.96	33.6	1.6
	1200° C.	100	0.66	31.1	1.6
27%	700° C.	195	1.0	51.6	1.5
	900° C.	143	0.89	51.3	1.4
	1100° C.	100	0.57	45.4	1.8
	1200° C.	65	0.33	48.6	1.9

^aDetermined by N_2 adsorption at 77K.

^bDetermined by an improved slit pore geometry (SPG) model for large mesopore aluminas using the desorption branch.

Example 5

[0046] Aliquots of SDA produced in Example 1, were thermally treated at 700° C., 900° C., 1100° C. and 1200° C. for 24 hrs (ramp rate 5 hrs). Table 3 includes BET data and FIG. 4A shows XRD patterns which indicate that γ phase and trace of θ phase are seen at 1200° C.

Example 6

[0047] For comparative experiments, commercial silica doped alumina ("SIRAL") from Sasol Inc. was calcined at 700° C., 900° C., 1100° C. and 1200° C. for 24 hrs (ramp rate 5 hrs). Table 2 includes surface area and porosity data and FIG. 4B shows the XRD patterns where the SIRAL transitions from the γ to α phase at 1100° C. while the 5% silica doped alumina of this invention remains in γ phase to 1200° C. as shown in FIG. 1A.

TABLE 3

BET results of 5% silica doped aluminas (SDAs) and "SIRAL" 5 calcined at different temperature for 24 h												
Sample	BET surface area (m ² /g)				Mesopore volume (cm ³ /g)				Pore Diameter (nm)			
	700° C.	900° C.	1100° C.	1200° C.	700° C.	900° C.	1100° C.	1200° C.	700° C.	900° C.	1100° C.	1200° C.
5% SDA	349	270	131	61	1.06	1.11	0.84	0.24	16.5	18.7	23.7	20.0
Siral-5	262	203	90	28	0.61	0.56	0.33	0.13	8.8	10.5	12.4	18.6

5% SDA: 5% silica doped alumina.

Siral-5: Sasol 5% silica doped alumina.

Example 7

[0048] For comparative purposes, Example 1 was repeated except no dopant was used. It was thermally treated for 2 hrs (ramp rate 5 hrs) at the same temperatures. Table 2 includes surface area and porosity data for the 0 wt. % silica batch which show significant deterioration of the surface area and pore structure with increasing temperatures as it transitioned to the alpha crystalline phase (FIG. 5A).

Example 8

[0049] Example 1 was repeated except 15 wt. % silica based on alumina in the final product was used. It was thermally treated for 2 hrs (ramp rate 5 hrs) at the same temperatures. Table 2 includes surface area and porosity data for the 15 wt. % silica batch. FIG. 5C shows XRD patterns of the 15% silica batch which remains in γ -Al₂O₃ phase at 1200° C.

Example 9

[0050] Example 1 was repeated except 27 wt. % silica based on the weight of alumina in the final sample was used. It was thermally treated for 2 hrs (ramp rate 5 hrs) at the same temperatures. Table 2 includes surface area and porosity data. Alpha peaks are observed at 1100° C. (FIG. 5d). Table 2 shows that 5 wt. % has the highest surface area and largest porosity at higher temperatures compared to others, but all of the TEOS doped samples were significantly better thermally stabilized than the control.

Example 10

[0051] A sample was made according to Example 1 except 5 wt % tetra-n-butoxysilane (TNBS) was substituted for the 5 wt % TEOS. Surface area and porosity remained high after calcination at 1200° C. for 2 hours (Table 4). XRD shows (FIG. 6) alpha and gamma at 1200° C.

Example 11

[0052] A sample was made according to Example 1 except 5 wt % tetra n-propoxy silane (TNPS) was substituted for the

5 wt % TEOS. The surface area, pore volume, and pore diameter were still adequately high after calcination at 1200° C. for 2 hours (Table 4). XRD shows (FIG. 6) that the SDA is stable with theta and gamma phases at 1200° C.

Example 12

[0053] A sample was made according to Example 1 except 5 wt % polydimethyl siloxane (PDMS) was substituted for the 5 wt % TEOS. The surface area, pore volume, and pore diameter were still adequately high after calcination at 1200° C. for 2 hours (Table 4). XRD shows (FIG. 6) that the sample contained some alpha with the gamma phase at 1200° C.

Example 13

[0054] A sample was made according to Example 1 except 5 wt % triethoxy methyl silane (TEOMS) was substituted for the 5 wt % TEOS. Surface area, pore volume, and pore diameter were still adequately high after calcination at 1200° C. for 2 hours (Table 4). XRD shows (FIG. 6) that the SDA is stable with theta and gamma phases at 1200° C.

Example 14

[0055] For comparative purposes a sample was made according to Example 1 except 5 wt % Lanthanum nitrate (LaN) was substituted for 5 wt % TEOS. Substantial decreases in surface area and porosity (Table 4) show that the sample was not stabilized and XRD shows that it is in the alpha phase at 1200° C.

Example 15

[0056] For comparative purposes, a sample was made according to Example 1 except 5 wt % silicic acid (SA) was substituted for the 5 wt % TEOS. Substantial decreases in surface area and porosity (Table 4) show that the sample was not stabilized and XRD shows that it is in the alpha phase at 1200° C.

TABLE 4

BET results of silica doped alumina (SDA) using different silica sources after heating at different temperatures for 2 hours						
5% different silica sources	CalcinationT (° C./2 hrs)	BET surface area (m ² /g) ^a	Mesopore volume (cm ³ /g) ^a	Pore diameter (nm) ^b	Standard deviation (nm)	XRD phase
PDMS*	700° C.	358	1.58	11.8, 52.8	2.1, 1.7	
	900° C.	272	1.54	16.2, 51.3	1.4, 1.7	
	1100° C.	145	0.84	40.88	2.6	
	1200° C.	80.5	0.44	42.24	2.2	Alpha + gamma
TEOMS*	700° C.	291	1.54	18.5, 46.2	1.6, 1.7	
	900° C.	252	1.31	24.4	1.5	
	1100° C.	152	0.88	22.45	1.5	
	1200° C.	84.8	0.46	20.9	1.5	Theta + gamma
TNBS*	700° C.	305	1.76	18.3, 46.8	1.4, 1.7	
	900° C.	233	1.41	11.4, 54.7	6.9, 1.0	
	1100° C.	145	0.93	39.9	2	
	1200° C.	76.2	0.46	39.7	1.9	Alpha + gamma
TNPS*	700° C.	320	1.88	19.8, 50.8	1.7, 1.6	
	900° C.	280	1.89	19.3, 49.0	1.9, 1.6	
	1100° C.	169	1.15	30.6	1.6	
	1200° C.	99.6	0.64	27.2	1.6	Theta + gamma
SA*	1200° C.		No stability			Alpha
LaN*	1200° C.		No stability			Alpha

PDMS*: polydimethyl siloxane
 TEOMS*: Triethoxymethyl silane
 TNBS*: Tetra-n-butoxysilane
 TNPS*: Tetra n-proxy silane
 SA*: silicic acid
 LaN*: Lanthanum nitrate

Example 16

[0057] A sample was made according to Example 1 except aluminum sec butoxide (ABu) was substituted for the aluminum isopropoxide. Surface area, pore volume, and pore diameter listed in Table 5 differ from those for the SDA derived from aluminum isopropoxide, but it is also thermally stabilized. The XRD spectra indicate that aluminum sec-butoxide derived SDA is mostly gamma at 1200° C. (FIG. 7A).

Example 17

[0058] A sample was made according to Example 1 except aluminum tert butoxide (ATB) was substituted for the alumi-

num isopropoxide. Table 5 shows that the SDA is mostly gamma at 1200° C.

Example 18

[0059] For comparative purposes, a sample was made according to Example 1 except aluminum nitrate (AN) was substituted for the aluminum isopropoxide. Relatively low values of surface area, pore volume, and pore diameter listed in Table 5 indicate that this inorganic aluminum source does not produce a thermally stabilized product. The XRD spectra indicate that the SDA is not stable and it is in the alpha phase at 1200° C. and (FIG. 7B).

TABLE 5

BET results of silica doped alumina (SDA) using different aluminum sources after heating at different temperatures for 2 hours						
Aluminum source	CalcinationT (° C./2 hrs)	BET surface area (m ² /g) ^a	Mesopore Volume (cm ³ /g) ^a	Pore Diameter (nm) ^b	Standard deviation (nm)	XRD phase
ABu*	700° C.	392	1.13	17.1	1.44	
	900° C.	299	1.32	18.3	1.1	
	1100° C.	182	0.86	22.8	1.65	
	1200° C.	110	0.59	23.6	1.35	Theta + trace alpha
AN*	700° C.	252	0.31	3.5	2.24	
	900° C.	192	0.198	3.6	2.19	
	1100° C.	5	0.11	0.1	—	
	1200° C.	8	0.06	0	—	Alpha
ATB*	1200° C.	70	0.42	19.5	1.2	Gamma + alpha

ABu*: Aluminum sec-butoxide
 AN*: Aluminum nitrate
 ATB*: Aluminum tert-butoxide

Example 19

[0060] Sample from example 1 was thermally treated in presence of water (0.16 ml/min) for 24 hr at temperatures from 800° C. to 1200° C. Table 6 shows that surface area and porosity are also stable up to 1200° C. in the presence of steam, and FIG. 8A shows that the alumina of this Example is mostly in gamma phase at 1100° C.

TABLE 6

BET of 5% silica doped alumina (SDA) hydrothermally treated with water for 24 hours at different temperatures.														
BET surface area (m ² /g) ^a					Mesopore volume (cm ³ /g) ^a					Pore Diameter (nm) ^b				
700	900	1000	1100	1200	700	900	1000	1100	1200	700	900	1000	1100	1200
199	166	124	105	48	1.16	1.20	0.92	0.81	0.40	34.8	37.4	39.0	41.8	46.28

Example 20

[0061] Two-Step: Water and aluminum isopropoxide are mixed in a 1:5 mole ratio for 15 min and calcined to 700° C. for 2 hrs (ramp rate 5 hrs) to produce pure alumina. TEOS was added to the alumina to give a final concentration of 5% wt/wt silica/alumina and mixed for 30 minutes in Bosch kitchen mixer, then calcined at 700° C., 900° C., 1100° C. and 1200° C. for 2 hrs (ramp rate 5 hrs). Surface area and porosity data indicate that this two-step method also produces a thermally stable alumina product (Table 7). The XRD spectrum indicates it is γ -alumina with a trace of θ at 1200° C. (FIGS. 9 and 10, "SDA in FIG. 10).

TABLE 7

BET results of 5% silica doped alumina (SDA) using 2-step method after heating at different temperatures for 2 hours				
Temperature	BET surface area (m ² /g) ^a	Mesopore volume (cm ³ /g) ^a	Pore diameter (nm) ^b	Standard deviation (nm)
700	296.4	1.37	14.04	1.30
900	262.4	1.31	15.55	1.29
1100	180.5	0.87	14.48	1.22
1200	119.7	0.53	13.69	1.23

Example 21

[0062] A sample was made according to Example 20 except 5 wt % tetra-n-butoxysilane (TNBS) was substituted for the 5 wt % TEOS. XRD shows (Table 8) that the TNBS product transformed to alpha and gamma at 1200° C.

Example 22

[0063] A sample was made according to Example 20 except 5 wt % tetra n-propoxy silane (TNPS) was substituted for the 5 wt % TEOS. XRD shows (Table 8) that the TNPS product theta and gamma phases at 1200° C., indicating significant stability.

Example 23

[0064] A sample was made according to Example 20 except 5 wt % polydimethyl siloxane (PDMS) was substituted for the

5 wt % TEOS. XRD shows (Table 8) that the PDMS sample transformed to alpha at 1200° C.

Example 24

[0065] A sample was made according to Example 20 except 5 wt % triethoxy methyl silane (TEOMS) was substituted for

the 5 wt % TEOS. XRD shows (Table 8) that the TEOMS product contains theta and gamma phases at 1200° C., indicating significant stability.

Example 25

[0066] For comparison purposes, a sample was made according to Example 21 except 5 wt % silicic acid (SA) was substituted for the 5 wt % TEOS. XRD shows (Table 8) that this sample transformed to alpha and gamma at 1200° C.

TABLE 8

XRD phase results of silica doped alumina (SDA) using different silica sources after heating at 1200° C. for 2 hours.	
Silica sources 5%	XRD phase at 1200° C.
SA*	$\alpha + \gamma$
TEOMS*	$\ominus + \gamma$
PDMS*	α
TNPS*	$\ominus + \gamma$
TNBS*	$\alpha + \gamma$

SA*: silicic acid
 TEOMS*: Triethoxymethyl silane
 PDMS*: polydimethyl siloxane
 TNPS*: Tetra n-propoxy silane
 TNBS*: Tetra-n-butoxysilane

Example 26

[0067] A sample was made according to Example 20 except aluminum sec butoxide (ABu) was substituted for the aluminum isopropoxide. Table 9 shows that SDA is thermally stable and mostly gamma at 1200° C.

Example 27

[0068] A sample was made according to Example 20 except aluminum tert butoxide (ATB) was substituted for the aluminum isopropoxide. Table 9 shows that SDA is thermally stable and mostly gamma at 1200° C.

Example 28

[0069] A sample was made according to Example 20 except aluminum phenoxide (APh) was substituted for the alumi-

num isopropoxide. Table 9 shows that SDA is thermally stable and mostly gamma at 1200° C.

Example 29

[0070] A sample was made according to Example 20 except aluminum ethoxide (AEt) was substituted for the aluminum isopropoxide. Table 9 shows that SDA is thermally stable and mostly gamma at 1200° C.

TABLE 9

XRD phase results of silica doped alumina (SDA) using different aluminum sources after heating at 1200° C. for 2 hours.	
Silica sources 5%	XRD phase at 1200° C.
A-Bu*	Mostly gamma
ATB*	Mostly gamma
APh*	Mostly gamma
AEt*	Mostly gamma

A-Bu*: Aluminum butoxide
 ATB*: Aluminum tert-Butoxide
 APh*: Aluminum phenoxide
 AEt*: Aluminum ethoxide

Example 30

[0071] For comparative purposes, "CATAPAL", a commercial pure alumina material obtained from Sasol, Inc. was purchased. 5% TEOS was added to the alumina followed by mixing. Following calcination at 1200° C. for 2 hrs (ramp rate 5 hrs) the XRD pattern (FIG. 10) indicates that CATAPAL transitions to α -alumina by 1200° C.

Example 31

[0072] For comparative purposes, "CATALOX"-SBa-90 a commercial gamma alumina obtained from Sasol, Inc. as calcined at 700° C. for 2 hrs (ramp rate 5 hrs) to produce γ -alumina. 5% TEOS was added to the calcined alumina followed by mixing. Following calcination at 1200° C. for 2 hrs (ramp rate 5 hrs) the XRD pattern (FIG. 10) indicates that it is not stable at 1200° C. and transforms to α -alumina.

Example 32

[0073] For comparative purposes, a "St.GOBAIN" moderately high pore volume gamma alumina as calcined at 700° C. for 2 hrs (ramp rate 5 hrs) to produce γ -alumina. 5% TEOS was added to the calcined alumina followed by mixing. Following calcination at 1200° C. for 2 hrs (ramp rate 5 hrs) the XRD pattern (FIG. 10) indicates that St. GOBAIN remains in gamma phase at 1200° C.

Example 33

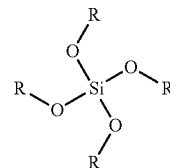
[0074] For comparative purposes ALPHA-Aesar 99.9% gamma alumina (stock#: 43832, lot#: E08T034) as calcined at 700° C. for 2 hrs (ramp rate 5 hrs) to produce γ -alumina. 5% TEOS was added to the calcined alumina followed by mixing. Following calcination at 1200° C. for 2 hrs (ramp time 5 hrs) the XRD pattern (FIG. 10) indicates that ALPHA-Aesar is not stable at 1200° C. and transforms to α -alumina.

Example 34

[0075] For comparative purposes, FIG. 11 shows that several commercial aluminas are transformed to alpha alumina at 1200° C. without addition of an organic silicon compound.

1. A method for preparing a silicon-doped alumina comprising:

- Bringing together as reactants at least one aluminum salt from the group consisting of an aluminum alkoxide, aluminum phenoxide and combinations thereof and water in an amount sufficient to hydrolyze without dissolving the reactants to produce an alumina nanoparticle precursor;
- calcining the precursor of step a) at a temperature of from about 300-1200° C. to produce an aluminum oxide;
- mixing the aluminum oxide of step b) with water and at least one of polydimethylsiloxane or an organic silicon compound of the structure



wherein R is selected from the group consisting of C_1 - C_{12} alkyl, C_5 - C_{12} cycloalkyl, aryl, a polyalkyl siloxane radical and combinations thereof, said water being present in an amount sufficient to hydrolyze without dissolving the reactants, and

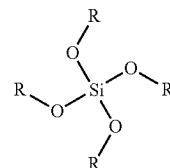
d) calcining the product of step c) at a temperature of from about 300-1200° C.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein the aluminum salt is represented by the formula $\text{Al}(\text{O}-\text{R})_3$ wherein R is C_1 - C_{12} alkyl, C_5 - C_{12} cycloalkyl, aryl and combinations thereof.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein the aluminum salt is selected from the group consisting of aluminum isopropoxide, aluminum sec-butoxide, aluminum phenoxide, aluminum ethoxide, aluminum tert-butoxide, and aluminum hexoxide.

4. The method of claim 1 wherein the aluminum salt is aluminum isopropoxide.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein the organic silicon compound is at least one compound having the following structure:



wherein R is selected from the group consisting of C_1 - C_{12} alkyl, C_5 - C_{12} cycloalkyl, aryl and a polyalkyl siloxane radical and combinations thereof.

6. The method of claim 5 wherein R is C_1 - C_{12} alkyl.

7. The method of claim 6 wherein the organic silicon compound is selected from the group consisting of tetraethyl

ortho silicate, tetra-n-butyloxysilane, tetra n-propoxy silane, polydimethyl siloxane and triethoxy methyl silane and combinations thereof.

8. The method of claim **1** wherein the organic silicon compound is employed in a proportion to provide about 1%-30% silica by weight of the final product.

9. The method of claim **1** wherein the reaction of step a) is carried out in the presence of a diluent selected from the group consisting of an alcohol, a ketone, an ether or a combination thereof to adjust the pore characteristics of the final product.

10. An organic silicon-doped alumina composition having the following properties:

BET surface area at 1000° C. of >100 m²/g;

a mesopore volume at 1000° C. of at least 0.3 cm³/g; and

wherein said composition contains about 1-30 weight % silica and is substantially in the gamma form at a temperature of 1200°.

* * * * *