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TUTORIAL

GaAs nanowires and related prismatic heterostructures

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Abstract

The growth of GaAs nanowires by the gallium-assisted method with molecular beam epitaxy (MBE) is presented in this review article. The structure of the grown nanowires was investigated by means of scanning and transmission electron microscopy as well as Raman spectroscopy. Their optical properties were revealed by performing photoluminescence measurements at the single nanowire level. Furthermore, by tuning the MBE conditions to planar growth, quantum heterostructures on the side facets of the nanowires were achieved. High-resolution transmission electron microscopy proved that the grown heterostructures have epitaxial precision, while photoluminescence measurements showed that they possess excellent optical quality. These quantum heterostructures constitute templates for developing novel nanowire based devices, such as a high electron mobility one-dimensional transistor or third generation solar cells.

(Some figures in this article are in colour only in the electronic version)

1. Introduction

Semiconductor nanowires are interesting nanoscale objects. Their study constitutes a research field that has expanded very fast in the last decade. Semiconductor nanowires offer numerous possibilities for studying a variety of physical phenomena arising from their peculiar geometry: carrier confinement, variations in the band structure, coherence of charge carriers, crystal phase changes due in part to the large surface to volume ratio. It is believed that they will play an important role in scaling down the dimensions of future optoelectronic devices, such as lasers and light emitting diodes. Thanks to their high surface to volume ratio, they are excellent systems for building the future generation of biological and chemical sensors. Nanoscale lasers, light emitting diodes and sensors have been demonstrated in the past which proves that the added functionality of semiconductor nanowires is a real fact and not just a dream [1–7].

A further interesting aspect of nanowires is that they enable the integration of lattice-mismatched materials, which has been an experimental issue in the last decades [8, 9]. Due to the small diameter the strain can be released efficiently, without the formation of dislocations and/or stacking faults, which is the case in thin films. This point has already been theoretically considered by several authors [10–13]. This freedom in the design of nanowire heterostructures further increases their functionality and possible fields of applications.

Nanowires are regularly grown by using the vapor–liquid–solid (VLS) growth method. The method was applied for the first time more than four decades ago by Wagner and Ellis [14]. Since then, it is the most used method for the fabrication of whiskers and nanowires. The central point of this method is the use of a liquid metal droplet acting as a catalyst where preferential decomposition of growth precursors in the gas phase occurs. As soon as the droplet becomes supersaturated the material starts to precipitate at the interface between the liquid droplet and the solid substrate. The continuous
27. Heterostructures are discussed. Concluded in the third section, where some future applications presented to prove the precision of this nanoepitaxy. The heterostructures. High-resolution TEM micrographs are the nanowires, leading to formation of prismatic quantum heterostructures will also be shown. These add further functionality to the nanowires.

The obtained nanowires exhibit excellent optical quality, as will be shown. Epitaxy directly on the side facets of the nanowires, resulting in a formation of so-called prismatic quantum heterostructures will also be shown. These add further functionality to the nanowires.

The paper is structured in the following manner: the first part is devoted to GaAs nanowires. Details of the growth method are presented, followed by the results from the structural characterization of the nanowires. Two main characterization tools are considered: transmission electron microscopy (TEM) and Raman spectroscopy. The optical properties of the grown GaAs nanowires are also discussed. The second part deals with the epitaxy on the side walls of the nanowires, leading to formation of prismatic quantum heterostructures. High-resolution TEM micrographs are presented to prove the precision of this nanoepitaxy. The optical properties are discussed at the end. The paper is concluded in the third section, where some future applications of the bare GaAs nanowires, as well as the prismatic heterostructures are discussed.

2. GaAs nanowires

2.1. Growth principles of GaAs nanowires

In order to find the conditions leading to catalyst-free gallium-assisted growth of nanowires by MBE, the phase diagram of the Ga–As system has to be considered. This enables us to deduce the conditions (temperature, As pressure) under which a liquid Ga droplet will exist in equilibrium with a stoichiometric GaAs surface. The $p$–$x$ projection of the phase diagram of the Ga–As system is shown in figure 1. Here, $x$ corresponds to the composition of the compound, being $x = 0.5$ the stoichiometric for GaAs.

At low temperatures the vapor pressures of As and Ga coincide for stoichiometric GaAs ($x = 0.5$). For compositions below and above $x = 0.5$, the vapor pressures do not coincide in a way that Ga or As are selectively evaporated until stoichiometry is reached. At high temperatures, the vapor pressure of As increases with respect to Ga, leading to preferential evaporation of As in the surface. In these conditions, the surface becomes Ga rich and Ga droplets are formed. The transition temperature from the low to the high temperature regime is called the congruent temperature. The Ga droplets can remind of the gold droplets used in the VLS method for the nucleation and growth of the nanowires. Indeed, the droplets are in equilibrium with the GaAs surface and serve as a sink for precipitation of As atoms, which are alloyed with Ga, thereby forming stoichiometric GaAs.

This means that temperatures higher than the congruent and low As pressures may be essential point for nucleation of nanowires.

The growth was realized in a Gen II MBE system using 2' GaAs wafers as substrates. Prior to growth the substrates were heated up to 650 °C to desorb any remnant molecules from the surface. Afterward the temperature was lowered to the growth temperature of 630 °C. An As$_4$ beam equivalent pressure (BEP) of $3.5 \times 10^{-6}$ mbar and a Ga deposition rate of 0.025 nm s$^{-1}$ were used.

As discussed here above, the temperature and arsenic beam flux conditions leading to the formation of gallium droplets are known. However, for the formation of nanowires the wetting properties need to be considered too. Indeed, if bare GaAs is used as a substrate, the droplets will spread on the GaAs surface and the growth will not proceed outward of the substrate surface. This growth method is based on the well-studied droplet epitaxy growth technique for formation of island of III–V materials as well as ring structures.

In our experiments, formation of a mesoscale structure is observed, where besides ring formation a vertical growth in the center with a height of only several tens of nanometers also occurs as shown in figure 2(a). This can be overcome by using a gallium non-wetting substrate that at the same time enhances the diffusion of the Ga ad-atoms. Previous experiments of deposition of GaAs on SiO$_2$-coated GaAs substrates showed...
that for temperatures above the congruent point the sticking coefficient of Ga on the oxide is negligible and the diffusion length is several micrometers long [34]. For this reason, we have used GaAs substrates covered with approximately 35 nm of sputtered SiO2. The cleanliness of the substrates is a crucial issue. Prior to growth the substrates are cleaned by a short etching in buffered oxide, blown dry with nitrogen and immediately transferred into the growth chamber. Covering the GaAs substrate with SiO2 resulted in growth of nanowires as can be seen in figures 2(a) and (b). The enhanced diffusion length of the Ga atoms on the SiO2 surface as well as the non-wetting properties lead to formation of Ga droplets. On this high temperature the As4 molecules impinging on the oxide surface are desorbed back in the vacuum, while the one impinging of the liquid Ga droplets decompose into As atoms which diffuse through the droplet following the As gradient where they alloy with Ga atoms and form GaAs. The Ga droplets are constantly enriched by other Ga atoms that are diffusing through the oxide and along the nanowire walls.

2.2. Structural characterization

The structure of the grown nanowires was first investigated by TEM. This is a powerful tool for material characterization, which can give a valuable information about the growth direction, the crystal orientation of the side facets as well as the structural quality of the material. TEM characterization requires suitable sample preparation. It is important that a majority of electrons are transmitted through the whole sample. For crystalline samples, this is achieved if the thickness is not thicker than about 100 nm. Additionally, it is required that the whole sample lies on the same plane, so that the microscope can focus equally through the whole sample. For this reason, the nanowires were removed from the original substrate by mechanically breaking them off with a sharp blade and mixing them with a volatile liquid such as hexane. A drop of solution was deposited on a copper TEM grid with a holey carbon membrane, which after evaporation resulted in nanowires lying on the grid. Only nanowires lying on the holes can be measured. A schematic representation of a solution of nanowires deposited on the grid is shown in figure 5.
Figure 3. (a) Dependence of the growth rate from the As BEP. The points represent the experimental data, while the dashed curve is a linear fit. A clear linear dependence is observed. (b) Time dependence of the length of the nanowires for different Ga deposition rates. The inset shows a tapered wire. The tapering occurs only for high Ga deposition rates.

Figure 4. Schematic of the growth process: (a) Ga atoms are able to diffuse on the SiO₂ surface and collect into droplets. For better clarity of the schematic figure the above discussed pin holes formed in the SiO₂ layers are not drawn. (b) These droplets act as sinks, where As atoms coming from the vapor precipitate and diffuse toward the solid–liquid interface. As a consequence a nanowire growth occurs. The Ga droplet at the tip is constantly enriched with Ga atoms diffusing at the SiO₂ surface and the wall of the nanowire.

Figure 5. Schematic representation of a sample prepared for TEM characterization. Nanowire solution prepared in hexane is deposited on a TEM grid with a holey carbon membrane.

In figure 6(a), a typical bright field (BF) TEM micrograph of a single nanowire is presented. For a BF imaging mode an aperture is placed in the back focal plane of the objective lens. This allows only direct electrons to pass which create the image. In contrast, when the direct electrons are blocked with an aperture, while the diffracted are allowed to pass, the corresponding TEM image is dark field image [37]. As can be seen the nanowire has several dark stripes perpendicular to the growth direction, with different spacing. A high-resolution TEM (HRTEM) was further performed to determine the growth direction. It was found that the nanowires have the zinc-blende structure and grow in the (1\n\n-11) growth direction. To characterize the dark and the bright stripes we further did a HRTEM on these regions. A typical HRTEM micrograph is presented in figure 6(b) where the inset shows a magnified view of the selected region. The Fourier transform (power spectrum) of the HRTEM micrograph was calculated numerically on both sides of the contrast stripe. The results are presented in figure 6(c). As can be seen the two sides of the interface correspond to growth along the (1\n\n-11) growth direction. On each side of the interface the adjacent facets correspond to [1 1 0] and [0 1 1] surfaces. These kind of defects are referred to as a twin defect which corresponds to a 60° rotation of the zinc-blende structure along the growth axis. Twin defects are commonly found in the structure of III–V nanowires, and it has already been shown that they have a tremendous effect on their optical properties [38].

2.2.2. Raman spectroscopy characterization. Raman spectroscopy as a non destructive characterization tool is extensively applied for characterization of low-dimensional systems, such as nanowires and nanocrystals. It provides valuable information about their structural quality [41, 42]. Nanowires are particularly interesting systems for Raman
spectral resolution of (1.5–2) cm
measurements, a DILORXY spectrometer was used with an effective way the reference line of the incident laser. For the Raman scattered light. It is for this reason that the use of a well as the frequency difference between the elastically and in general, the intensity of the scattered light is very weak as and further analyzed with a Si CCD. In Raman experiments of mirrors was guided into the entrance slit of a spectrometer objective lens collected the scattered light, which with the help only 10–20 wires can be focused in the laser spot. The same in a spot of several micrometers in a size. We estimate that observed in bulk GaAs \[39\].

For the measurements the nanowires were removed from the original substrate and transferred to a Si substrate. This was done by applying a mechanical friction between the two substrates which resulted in a partial orientation of the nanowires. Depending on the strength of the friction, the density of the transferred nanowires can be varied, e.g. for a stronger friction, a higher density is obtained. This can be seen in figure 7(a) where a SEM micrograph of the transferred wires is shown. The measurements were performed at room temperature using the 488 nm line from an Ar+ laser. A microscope objective (50×) focused the laser on the sample in a spot of several micrometers in a size. We estimate that only 10–20 wires can be focused in the laser spot. The same objective lens collected the scattered light, which with the help of mirrors was guided into the entrance slit of a spectrometer and further analyzed with a Si CCD. In Raman experiments in general, the intensity of the scattered light is very weak as well as the frequency difference between the elastically and Raman scattered light. It is for this reason that the use of a triple spectrometer is very important, in order to filter in an effective way the reference line of the incident laser. For the measurements, a DILORXY spectrometer was used with a spectral resolution of (1.5–2) cm⁻¹. A schematic drawing of the experimental setup is shown in figure 7(c). The scattering geometry is shown in figure 7(b). The wires are probed in the backscattering geometry. From TEM measurements we know that the side facets belong to the {1 1 0} crystal family. In the backscattering geometry the longitudinal optical phonon (LO) is forbidden according to Raman selection rules, while the transversal optical phonon (TO) is allowed \[40\]. Since the top facets contribute most to the signal, the spectra should present rather strong TO signal and much weaker LO signal.

Typical Raman spectrum from nanowires with average diameter of 89 nm is shown in figure 8(a) upper panel. For a comparison on the lower panel the Raman spectrum from (1 1 1)B GaAs is also plotted. On the Raman spectrum from the nanowires two peaks position at 268 cm⁻¹ and 292 cm⁻¹ are clearly observable. According to the reference GaAs sample these peaks are identified as the TO and LO phonon, respectively. They have a full width at half-maximum (FWHM) of approximately 4 cm⁻¹ and their position corresponds very well to the position of the TO and LO in bulk GaAs. This leads to the conclusion that the nanowires exhibit good structural quality and are free from stress and defects.

A third peak is also observable at the low frequency side from the LO phonon. A detailed analysis on this peak which will be presented in the following allowed its attribution as scattering from surface optical phonon (SO). Mathematical expression for the dispersion relation in the case of an infinitely long cylinder is given with \[43–45\],

\[
\omega_{SO}^2 = \omega_{TO}^2 + \frac{\omega_p^2}{\epsilon_\infty - \epsilon_m f(qr)},
\]

where

\[
f(qr) = (l_0(qr)K_1(qr))/(l_1(qr)K_0(qr)),
\]

with \(\omega_p\) being the screened ion plasma frequency given by

\[
\omega_p^2 = \omega_{TO}^2 + \omega_p^2/\epsilon_\infty
\]
Figure 8. (a) The Raman spectrum from GaAs nanowires are shown on the upper panel, while the Raman spectrum from a reference bulk (111) GaAs substrate is shown on the lower panel. The spectrum is fitted using a multiple Lorentzian fit. (b) Raman spectrum from nanowires in air is plotted on the upper panel. On the lower panel the Raman spectrum from nanowires embedded in PMMA is shown. The (red) dashed line is a guide to the eye. Downshift is clearly visible. (c) Representative Raman spectra from nanowires with different diameters. (d) Dependence of the SO position from the diameter. The black line corresponds to theoretical calculations according to [43].

where $I_j(qr)$, $K_j(qr)$ are the modified Bessel functions, $q$ is the phonon wave vector, $\epsilon_\infty$ is the high-frequency dielectric constant of the material and $\epsilon_m$ is the dielectric constant of the surrounding material. The frequency of the SO phonon depends on the dielectric constant of the material surrounding the nanowires as well as on the diameter of the nanowires. In order to investigate the dependence on the dielectric constant the nanowires were covered with a layer of PMMA (polymethyl metacrylat) that has a dielectric constant of 2.8. In figure 8(b), in the upper panel we have plotted again the Raman spectrum from the nanowires in the air, while in the lower panel we have plotted the corresponding spectrum in a PMMA environment. The red dashed line is a guide to the eye. Indeed covering the nanowires by a layer of PMMA caused downshift of the position of the SO phonon of 1.8 cm$^{-1}$. In order to test whether the change in the diameter of the nanowires will also cause a shift in the position of the SO phonon, samples with nanowire diameters ranging from 50 nm up to 160 nm were grown. This was done simply by varying the growth time, but keeping all other growth conditions the same. Each sample was characterized with diameter distribution between 10% and 20%. Representative Raman spectra from samples with average diameters of 160 nm, 69 nm and 49 nm are shown in figure 8(c). As is shown the position of the TO and the LO phonon does not depend from the diameter, while the SO phonon downshifts. Furthermore in the sample with the thickest diameter the SO phonon appears only as a small shoulder, but on the samples with smaller diameter, meaning larger surface-to-volume ratio, is clearly pronounced.

In the sample with the smallest diameter another peak appears on the left side from the TO phonon. This could come due to the presence of the twin defects as seen from the TEM measurements. Since the wires with small diameter also have smaller length the twin defect consist significant percent from the nanowire length. Further investigation in this direction is currently ongoing.

In figure 8(d), the dependence of the SO phonon from the diameter is plotted. The black line corresponds to theoretical calculations considering cylindrical nanowires according to [43]. The shift in the position of the SO phonon is not very strong, but this can also be attributed to the diameter distribution in the samples. According to the theoretical calculations there should be a larger shift, especially for the nanowires with larger diameters. This can also depend from the cross section of the nanowires: the wires in this case have hexagonal cross section, while the theoretical calculations are performed for cylindrical nanowires. Recently, it was shown that the cross section of the nanowires also plays a significant role when calculating the dispersion relation of the SO phonon [46].

2.3. Optical properties

The optical properties of single nanowires were assessed by means of photoluminescence spectroscopy (PL). For the measurements a confocal microscope experimental setup was used. A schematic drawing of the experimental setup is shown in figure 9.

The 633 nm line of a HeNe laser was used as an excitation laser. The laser light is coupled into a single-mode optical fiber...
that guides the light to the top of the microscope, where the light is decoupled from the fiber and with the help of a lens a parallel beam of light is produced. The parallel beam falls onto a beam splitter (splitting ratio of 50%) and one part of it is directed toward the lower part of the microscope. The lower part of the microscope is immersed in liquid He, with a temperature of 4.2 K. There with the help of a lens (numerical aperture of 0.65) the laser is focused on the sample as a spot with a diameter of less than 1 μm. The same lens collects the reflected laser light as well as the emitted photoluminescence from the sample which travels toward the upper part of the microscope. After going through two beam splitters the signal is coupled into a multi-mode detection fiber. The core of the fiber has the role of a blocking pin hole, rejecting the out of focus light. The light that is coupled out from this fiber is focused either on a Si photodiode for measuring the intensity of the reflected light or on the entrance slit of a spectrometer equipped with Si CCD for spectral analysis. The sample is mounted on a top of a four piezo positioners as seen in the inset of the bottom of figure 9. Three of the positioners provide movement in the z-, x- and y-directions, while the top positioner can move in the x-y-plane with a range of 30 × 30 μm.

For the measurements the nanowires were removed from the growth substrate and transferred on small Si pieces. As previously presented in the section dedicated to Raman spectroscopy, this was done by applying small mechanical contact between the substrates and resulted in single nanowires lying separately from each other on the Si piece. Optical microscope image from the sample prepared for measurements is shown in figure 10(a). In order to isolate single nanowire first scanning reflectivity measurements were realized. For this, the sample is scanned below the fixed laser spot in a field with dimensions of 30 × 30 μm. The intensity change of the reflected light from the sample is detected with the Si photo diode and the surface of the sample is reconstructed as shown in figure 10(b) where single nanowires can be clearly distinguished.

After isolating single nanowire the laser spot is focused on it and the emitted PL is detected and analyzed with the Si CCD equipped spectrometer. A typical PL spectra from a single nanowire are shown in figure 11(a). As can be seen the spectra have one single emission line centered at 1.51 eV with a full width at half-maximum of 6 meV which corresponds well to the free exciton emission from bulk undoped GaAs. It should be stressed that these data are exceptional among the nanowires and it should also be taken into the account that the surface of the nanowires was not passivated and surface states might be present. The nanowires were also characterized with spatially resolved PL, when the laser spot was moved along the nanowire in steps of 250 nm and each time the emission was recorded and analyzed. A typical spatially resolved scan is shown in figure 11(b) where the emitted light with respect to the length of the nanowire is plotted. It can be clearly seen that the nanowire emits along its entire length which further corroborates the use of MBE for growth of high-purity nanowires [47].

3. Prismatic heterostructures

The MBE technique offers versatility of growth modes from one to two dimensional. This can be utilized to add complexity to the nanowire structures. As we have shown recently with carefully engineering of the growth conditions the side facets of the nanowires can be overgrown with successive layers of GaAs and AlGaAs [48, 49]. In this case, when a thin GaAs layer is sandwiched between two AlGaAs layer prismatic quantum wells (p-QWs) will be formed. As we will show this adds further functionality of the nanowires and these structures can present a basis for formation of more complex quantum wire-quantum dot-based heterostructures.

3.1. Growth of prismatic heterostructures

As was shown previously, the grown nanowires have hexagonal geometry and their side facets belong to the
Photoluminescence (a.u.)

Energy (eV)

6 meV

Figure 11. (a) Typical PL spectra from single GaAs nanowire recorded at 4.2 K. The full width at half-maximum is 6 meV. (b) Spatially resolved PL emission from the nanowire. PL emission from the entire length of the nanowire was observed.

Figure 12. (a) Schematic of the growth process of the p-QWs. For perpendicular nanowires six quantum wells with equal thickness should be formed, while for angled nanowires quantum wells with different thicknesses will form. SEM micrographs from overgrown GaAs nanowires. In the inset a magnified view of a single nanowire is shown. As can be seen the Ga droplets are fully crystallized.

{110} crystal family. This means that the growth of the p-QWs is done on the {110} surfaces which are non-polar. Previous research on (110)-oriented GaAs substrates has shown that it is more difficult to obtain smooth morphology on these surfaces due to the lack of surface reconstruction [50]. The nanowires were overgrown immediately after they reached a certain length by changing the growth conditions corresponding to planar MBE growth mode. This required the As BEP to be increased up to $4 \times 10^{-5}$ mbar.

The overgrowth was done both on nanowires that stand perpendicular on the growth substrate and nanowires that are angled corresponding to the substrate. Due to the directionality of the molecular beams, deposition occurs only on the exposed surfaces. In the case of the perpendicular nanowires and additional rotation of the substrate during growth, each side faces will receive the same material flux resulting in six quantum wells having the same thickness arranged in a prismatic geometry. In contrast, on the angled nanowires different facets will receive different amount of material flux, and quantum wells with different thicknesses will be formed. Schematic of the growth process with the corresponding structures is shown in figure 12(a), while SEM image of overgrown nanowires is shown in figure 12(b). As can be seen on the inset the droplet is completely crystallized due to the high As flux required for the growth of the p-QWs.

3.2. Structural characterization

With a purpose of detailed investigations of the quality of the growth on the side facets of the nanowires we performed high-resolution TEM characterization on the cross section of the obtained heterostructures. Here, it should be noted that for TEM characterization instead of AlGaAs, pure AlAs was deposited providing better contrast for the measurements. These measurements require a special sample preparation as explained in the following: the nanowires were removed mechanically from the growth substrate as all ready described above, and transferred on Si pieces, with a special care of obtaining high-density parallel oriented nanowires. Afterward they were embedded in 100 nm thick SiO$_2$ deposited by a sputtering method. In order to obtain the required cross section thin slices of the sample were prepared by means of traditional thin film cross section preparation with the use of a focused ion beam machine. Cross section TEM analysis was performed on both vertically and angled grown nanowires in order to prove that two different kinds of heterostructures will be formed. Furthermore, with a purpose to define a relation between the nominal thickness of material and the material that actually deposited on the side facets, measurements were performed on samples where layers with different thicknesses were grown.
3.2.1. Growth on vertical nanowires. On the side facets of the nanowires we have deposited several layers of GaAs and AlAs with different thicknesses. First, we started with deposition of alternating GaAs and AlAs with nominal thickness of few nanometers. Each layer was repeated 6 times, and this region of the sample is labeled as MQWs A—MQWs B. The resulting heterostructure is important that the thickness of the grown material on the SiO2 surface. PL measurements showed that very small number of nanowires present emission at energies above the band gap of GaAs (1.51 eV) that should result from carrier confinement in the formed quantum wells on the side facets. One representative measurement is shown in figure 15(a) where the PL emission is plotted for several excitation powers. As can be seen the emission is centered around 1.60 eV, but is much weaker than the emission of the core (centered at 1.51 eV, as discussed above) which is anticipated by its tail seen on the lower energy side of the spectrum.

3.2.2. Growth on angled wires. A series of different thicknesses of GaAs and AlAs layers, ranging from 8 nm to 30 nm, was also grown on the side facets of angled nanowires. As schematized in figure 12(a) (lower panel) due to the directionality of the molecular beam the top facets should receive most of the flux, resulting in thickest layers. In contrast, the growth on the side facets should result in lower thickness, while on the facets facing the substrate almost no growth should take place. This is verified by the cross sectional TEM of one of these structures shown in figure 14(a). Again, the bright stripes correspond to AlAs layers, while the dark stripes correspond to GaAs layers.

We have correlated again the TEM measured thickness of the layers with the nominal deposited thickness. The resulting data are plotted in figure 14(b) for the top facet as well as for the side facets, both for GaAs and AlAs. As can be seen the different materials follow the same dependence. As discussed above, this proves that the growth is a result of atoms impinging directly on the surface of the nanowires, while the diffusion on the substrate plays a minor role.

3.3. Optical properties of p-QWs

The optical properties of the prismatic heterostructures were investigated with the same confocal microscope setup, described above. With a purpose to have functional prismatic heterostructures it is important that the thickness of the grown layers is uniform along the length of the nanowire. Therefore, we have performed growths on several temperatures in the range from 650 °C to 465 °C for finding the optimal growth conditions. In contrast to the samples used for TEM measurements, here we have grown Al0.35Ga0.65As. The photoluminescence was recorded at 4.2 K and sample preparation is already described previously.

Initially, the growth was performed on a substrate temperature of 650 °C. The objective was to avoid deposition of material on the SiO2 surface. PL measurements showed that very small number of nanowires present emission at energies above the band gap of GaAs (1.51 eV) that should result from carrier confinement in the formed quantum wells on the side facets. One representative measurement is shown in figure 15(a) where the PL emission is plotted for several excitation powers. As can be seen the emission is centered around 1.60 eV, but is much weaker than the emission of the core (centered at 1.51 eV, as discussed above) which is anticipated by its tail seen on the lower energy side of the spectrum.
Figure 14. (a) Cross sectional TEM from a single heterostructure. Due to the directionality of the molecular beam the thickness of the grown layers is different for different side facets. (b) Correlation between the TEM measured thickness of the layers and the nominally deposited thickness for both GaAs and AlAs for the top and side facet of the nanowire. The different layers follow the same dependence.

Subsequently the temperature was lowered to 600 °C. A PL spectrum of a p-QWs grown on 600 °C recorded at different excitation powers is shown in figure 15(b). Again, we have observed that these emissions are much weaker than the emission of the core of the nanowire (not shown here). The spectrum is characterized with one or more sharp lines at low power, which eventually evolve in broad emission peak at high excitation power. This shows that the formed QW has non-uniform thickness along the nanowire resulting in different energy levels of the localized electrons and holes. In the inset of the figure, a spatially resolved PL is shown. We can see that the emission originating from the p-QW is present only on one small part of the nanowire. These findings point out that for these growth conditions, the layer thickness as well as the material quality are non-uniform along the nanowire.

PL measurements performed on growth temperature of 550 °C also showed that this temperature as well, is not suitable for high quality growth of the p-QWs. The best PL characteristics we obtained from growth realized at 465 °C. A spatially resolved PL measurement from a single nanowire is shown in figure 16(a). The emission of the p-QWs is characterized with a single narrow line centered at 1.55 eV. More important, this emission is much stronger than the emission of the core of the nanowire and extends along its entire length indicating a formation of a p-QW with a homogeneous thickness. This proves that the best conformity of the p-QWs is obtained at this growth temperature. A spectrum recorded at one point of the nanowires is plotted in figure 16(b). The FWHM is 5 meV and lies in the range of results obtained for QWs grown on planar (1 1 0) GaAs substrates [51, 52]. This acknowledges the fact that very high quality growth with MBE can be achieved as well on non-planar substrates.

By applying these optimal growth conditions, we have changed the nominal deposited thickness for the formation of the quantum well. The corresponding PL spectra are plotted in figure 17(a). Indeed, with a decrease of the deposited thickness the emission energy shifts toward larger energies, due to the higher confinement in thinner quantum wells. It should be noted that these emission energies correspond to emissions from thinner quantum wells than the actual deposited values. As was discussed above, and confirmed with
the high-resolution TEM measurements, due to the geometry of the nanowires, the grown thickness of materials is smaller than the actual deposited thickness. Nevertheless, we show that we are able to control the emission energy of the p-QWs by changing their thickness. Another point to be noted is the change of the FWHM with respect to the change in the thickness of the quantum well. As the well is thicker, the emission line width is narrower. In the case of thin quantum well (red spectra in figure 17(a)) many sharp peaks are also observable. They are observable at low excitation powers and originate from local confinement of electrons and holes due to small fluctuations in the quantum well width.

At last, we have compared the optical properties of the p-QWs with different thicknesses grown on different growth temperatures. In figure 17(b), the dependence of the transition energy from the deposited thickness for different temperatures is plotted. Here, transition energy refers to the energy position of the p-QWs emission. It should also be noted that with a purpose to estimate the standard deviation of the transition energies, several nanowires for each temperature were probed. For high-temperature growth the standard deviation of the transition energy is significantly increased. As has been shown, these were far from the optimal growth conditions. At temperature of 465 °C the standard deviation decreases dramatically, in agreement with a peak emission with a small FWHM and a small dispersion between nanowires. This confirms again that this temperature results in the best quality of the p-QWs.

4. Outlook

GaAs nanowires were grown by using the Ga-assisted growth method with molecular beam epitaxy. We have found out that it is actually the As who is governing the growth and the role of the Ga is to act as a reservoir for collecting the As atoms. The grown nanowires possess excellent quality as proved by photoluminescence measurements. By using the versatility of growth modes offered by the MBE technique we have add additional functionality to the nanowires by forming the p-QWs. We have shown that their geometry can be changed with varying the orientation of the nanowires with respect to the GaAs substrate. The epitaxy on the side facets of the
nanowires is extremely precise, as proved with high-resolution TEM measurements. Furthermore, these p-QWs presented excellent optical quality and we are able to tune their emission energy by changing their thickness in a controlled way.

This growth technique offers possibilities for in situ doping of the nanowires. It has been shown recently that doped GaAs nanowires can be used as polarization-dependent photodetectors [53]. When the doping is applied to the prismatic heterostructures a variety of functional nanostructures can be obtained. The simplest radial or prismatic structures that one can think of are radial p–n or p–i–n junctions as shown schematically in figure 18(a). Such structures are promising candidates for an enhanced solar energy collection. Indeed, the advantage of these radial devices consists in the fact that the generated electron–hole pairs can be separated in a very short distance, thereby reducing the recombination probability [54–56]. A much more refined structure is the fabrication of a two-dimensional electron gas arranged in a prismatic geometry around the nanowire [57, 58]. This can be achieved when during the overgrowth of the side facets of the nanowires with AlGaAs a Si layer is added. Si atoms will act as donors giving electrons. As in the conventional planar modulation doped heterostructures, the electrons will accumulate at the interface of the nanowire core and the AlGaAs grown on the side facets. Thus, prismatically oriented two-dimensional electron gas will be formed, as schematically shown in figure 18(b). For sure this will lead toward novel application of these systems especially in the area of high-mobility devices based on GaAs nanowires.

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