InGaN nanostructures of a branched morphology on silicon substrate: MBE synthesis and properties

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Abstract. A possibility of InGaN nanostructures of a branched morphology MBE growth on Si substrate has been demonstrated. The results of morphological studies have shown that InGaN synthesis occurs in several stages. InGaN nanostructures turned out to be optically active at room temperature and have a wide radiation visible range.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, semiconductor compounds of III-Nitrides are of great interest for modern optoelectronics due to its unique properties [1]. In particular, InGaN ternary compounds are promising for building devices for emitting in the visible range [2]. Interest in obtaining such structures is due, inter alia, to the prospects for integrating III-N semiconductors and silicon electronics, the possibility of using substrates of large (up to 150-200 mm) dimensions, their low cost, good electrical conductivity, as well as obtaining 'template' structures. However, the synthesis of high-quality direct-gap InGaN two-dimensional layers on silicon substrates leads to the appearance of a high density of defects in the InGaN layer due to the significant difference in the lattices constants and thermal expansion coefficients. Significant efforts are being made to successfully tackle these problems. In particular, to suppress the process of misfit dislocations occurrence and reduce the number of defects, barrier intermediate layers are formed in the epitaxial semiconductor nitride layer \{SiC/Si\{111\}, AlNGaN/SiC/Si\{111\} n GaN/AlN-GaN/SiC/Si\{111\}\} [3,4]. This approach contributes to a decrease in the efficiency or in general impossibility of creating devices based on InGaN. At the same time, an alternative way to overcome the problem — the synthesis of nonplanar InGaN nanostructures of complex shape on the surface of a silicon substrate — is very promising. Due to the complex morphology, the mechanical stresses in semiconductor nanostructures relax and the number of defects decreases significantly [5]. However, it was possible to synthesize structures based on InGaN nanostructures of complex shape on silicon only using pre-growth surface preparation procedures [6].
This paper presents the results of experimental studies on the synthesis by molecular beam epitaxy (MBE) and studies of morphological and optical properties of InGaN nanostructures of branched morphology directly on the unprepared silicon surface.

2. Experimental procedures
Nanowires were grown by MBE using Riber Compact 12 setup equipped with Ga and In effusion sources and nitrogen plasma source. First, Si(111) substrate was transferred into the growth chamber and the substrate temperature was set to 950°C for thermal treatment. Then the substrate temperature was lowered to the actual growth temperature of 700°C. The nitrogen plasma source is ignited and the N flux is set at 0.4 scam and 400 W. Finally, the gallium (Ga) and indium (In) sources were opened. Ga and In partial pressures were equal and set to $10^{-7}$ Pa as pre-specified by the Bayard-Alpert detector. The total growth time for a InGaN nanostructures was about 20 hours.

The surface morphology and optical properties were studied by scanning electron microscopy (SEM) and room-temperature photoluminescence (RT PL) techniques.

3. Results
Typical scanning electron microscopy image of InGaN nanostructures grown on Si(111) substrate are shown in Figure 1. It is seen that synthesized InGaN nanostructures have a complex morphology. The average height of the grown structures was 5 μm. It should be noted that, based on the figure, the synthesis of InGaN nanostructures occurred in several stages: first, nanocolumns were formed, then a transition layer, and, finally, nanostructures with more complex morphology. Probably, different stages of growth correspond effectively to different (despite the constancy of its maintenance by thermocouple measurements) temperature on the surface, which decreases with increasing height of the nanostructure. This may be due to a change in the thermal absorption coefficient of the growing structure due to the formation of complex surface [7, 8].

![Figure 1. SEM image of InGaN nanostructures grown on Si(111) substrate](image)

Figure 2 shows the photoluminescence spectrum at room temperature of the grown sample. The measurement results showed that the InGaN nanostructures are optically active up to room temperature. This fact indicates the high optical quality of the grown structures. It can be seen from the figure that InGaN nanostructures emit in a wide range of wavelengths - from 400 to 900 nm. We assume that this is due to a change in the percentage ratio of In and Ga in a solid solution, which may be caused, inter alia, by an effective change in surface temperature during growth. Such nanostructures are promising for creating white LEDs based on a single material.
Figure 2. RT PL spectra K of InGaN nanostructures grown on Si(111) substrate.

4. Conclusions

In summary, we have demonstrated the possibility of synthesizing InGaN nanostructures by the method of molecular beam epitaxy on the unprepared surface of the silicon substrate. The developed growth technology makes it possible to synthesize InGaN nanostructures of branched morphology without the use of pre-growth surface preparation procedures, which contributes to a significant reduction in the price and time to create such nanostructures. The results of morphological studies have shown that growth occurs in several stages. The grown structures turned out to be optically active in a wide range of wavelengths at room temperature. All these facts indicate the promise of such structures for optical applications.

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