New Phases of Germanene

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Germanene, a graphene-like single layer structure of Ge, has been shown to be stable and recently grown on Pt and Au substrates. We show that a Ge adatom adsorbed to germanene pushes down the host Ge atom underneath and forms a dumbbell structure. This exothermic process occurs spontaneously. The attractive dumbbell-dumbbell interaction favors high coverage of dumbbells. This letter heralds stable new phases of germanene, which are constructed from periodically repeating coverage of dumbbell structures and display diversity of electronic and magnetic properties.

Three dimensional (3D) layered bulk phases, such as graphite,[1] BN,[2] and MoS2,[3] have led to the synthesis of single layer, honeycomb structures of those materials, which were initially conjectured to be unstable.[4–7] The existence of single layer, graphene-like structures of other Group IV elements, like Si and Ge, have been ruled out since these elements do not have layered allotropes like graphite that would allow the synthesis of their single layer structures. Surprisingly, based on state of the art first-principles calculations, silicene,[8, 9] germanene,[10, 11] most of III-V and II-VI compounds,[9, 11] and several transition metal dichalcogenides and oxides[12] have been shown to form stable, single layer honeycomb structures. Moreover, it has been also shown that silicene and germanene share several of the exceptional properties of graphene, such as π- and π*-bands linearly crossing at the Fermi level and hence forming Dirac cones, the ambipolar effect and the family behavior observed in nanoribbons.[10, 13] Advances in growth techniques have enabled the synthesis of some of these predicted single layer structures, in particular the growth of single and multilayer silicene on Ag(111) substrates[14–16] and the growth of germanene on Pt and Au substrates[17–19] were recently succeeded.

In this letter, we find that a single Ge adatom adsorbed to germanene constructs a dumbbell (DB) structure. Even more remarkable is that new phases can be constructed by the periodic coverage of germanene with DBs. Depending on the coverage of DBs, these stable phases can be metal or narrow band gap semiconductor in magnetic or nonmagnetic states and hence they attribute diverse functionalities to germanene. We believe that the intriguing stacking of these phases can pave the way to the layered phase of bulk germanium, i.e. germanite.

Our predictions are obtained from the state of the art first-principles pseudopotential calculations based on the spin-polarized Density Functional Theory (DFT) within generalized gradient approximation (GGA) including van der Waals corrections.[20] We used projector-augmented wave potentials (PAW)[21] and the exchange-correlation potential is approximated with Perdew-Burke-Ernzerhof (PBE) functional.[22] The Brillouin zone (BZ) was sampled in the Monkhorst-Pack scheme, where the convergence in energy as a function of the number of k-points was tested. The k-point sampling of (21×21×1) was found to be suitable for the BZ corresponding to the primitive unit cell of germanene. For larger supercells this sampling has been scaled accordingly. The number of k-points were further increased to (48×48×1) in the density of states calculation. Atomic positions were optimized using the conjugate gradient method, where the total energy and atomic forces were minimized. The energy convergence value between two consecutive steps was chosen as 10−5 eV. A maximum force of 0.002 eV/Å was allowed on each atom. Numerical calculations were carried out using the VASP software.[23] Since the band gaps are underestimated by DFT, we also carried out calculations using the HSE06 hybrid functional,[24] which is constructed by mixing 25% of the Fock exchange with 75% of the PBE exchange and 100% of the PBE correlation energy. The phonon dispersion curves were calculated using small displacement method.[25]

It is known that the splitting of threefold valence band
at the center of the Brillouin zone due to spin-orbit coupling is significant (290 meV) for Ge crystal in cubic diamond (cdGe) structure. The extend of spin-orbit splitting in germanene is crucial as a starting point of the present study. Despite 1 meV spin-orbit splitting in germanene is expected to remain stable. It is noted that DB has been found to be the second most energetic defect structure of carbon adatom on graphene. Later, it has been found to be the most energetic defect structure of Si adatom on silicene, and has been demonstrated that it can form spontaneously without an energy barrier as long as a Si adatom on silicene is available. In the present paper, we demonstrated that Ge DB can form new phases (or derivatives) of germanene with novel electronic and magnetic properties.

Since the construction of a single DB is an exothermic process and hence does not involve any energy barrier, the formation of DB structure is unavoidable as long as an external Ge adatom is present at the close proximity of the surface. We define the associated binding energy as 

$$E_b = E_{\text{germanene}+\text{DB}} - E_{\text{germanene}} - E_{\text{DB}}$$

in terms of the total energies of germanene+DB, pristine germanene and free Ge adatom. The binding energies are calculated for a single DB in the $(n \times n)$ hexagonal supercells with varying values of $n$. Accordingly, $E_b$ is the energy gained from the construction of a single DB through the adsorption of a single Ge adatom to germanene and $E_b > 0$ indicates an exothermic process. For an isolated DB calculated in a large supercell with $n=8$, $E_b \sim 3.4$ eV; but it increases with decreasing $n$ or decreasing DB-DB distance due to the attractive interaction among DBs as discussed in the next paragraph. In (b) and (c), the atomic configurations of a single DB and its relevant structural parameters together with isosurfaces of charge density of Ge-Ge bonds around DB are shown. The charge density counter plots calculated on various planes are presented in (d). The bonding of the DB atoms ($D_1$ and $D_2$) with the nearest Ge atoms of germanene are clearly seen. Notably, there is no bonding between $D_1$ and $D_2$.

The DB-DB interaction on the surface of germanene is crucial for the growth of germanene phases. While an...
attractive interaction between two DBs can lead to the domain structure, a repulsive interaction at small DB-DB distance $d$ is expected to favor phases with uniform coverage of DB. Therefore, we next investigate what happens if a Ge adatom is introduced in addition to an existing DB. Our calculations show that rather than bonding to $D_1$ or $D_2$ dumbbell atoms and forming a short Ge-Ge chain on top of them, Ge adatom migrates on germanene substrate and forms another DB. Hence, each Ge adatom introduced to the surface of germanene favors the construction of a new DB, as long as a proper position is available. The DB-DB coupling is calculated by placing two DBs in an $(8 \times 8)$ supercell; one at a fixed corner, and the second one placed at different sites on the supercell as described in $3$. For each lateral position of the second DB, the coordinates of rest of the atoms including the height of the second DB are fully optimized. Apparently, an attractive interaction is set even for the large DB-DB distance. The DBs tend to be close to each other and hence to form domains. However, as long as germanene continues to be fed by Ge adatoms, domains join to form full coverage. Here one distinguishes two classes of sites for the second DB: One class of sites is the high buckled sites of germanene, the other class is the low buckled sites. It should be noted that low and high buckled sites are equivalent if there is only one DB due to the upside and downside symmetry. The site-specific variation of the total energy is shown in $3$ where the interaction energy versus $d$ curve follow different paths. Accordingly, the formation of two DBs on sites with opposite bucklings appears to be more favorable energetically, by $\sim 0.2-0.3$ eV, since the gain of energy through the buckling of bare germanene is preserved. However, this difference of energy diminish as $d \to \infty$. Notably, it is not possible to create two DBs on the nearest neighbor sites of the lattice. This situation results in the constrained structure optimization in $3$ (shown by the dashed line) as a sudden fall of the attractive interaction energy when the Ge adatom is placed at the first nearest neighbor of the existing DB. The second DB tends to move to the second nearest neighbor position when the constraints are lifted. If the second DB is situated at the second nearest neighbor distance from the first DB (where both DBs are situated on the sites of same buckling), Ge atoms of germanene at the first nearest neighbor distance to these two DBs become five fold coordinated.

In the case of uniform and periodic coverage, DBs form a mesh or periodically repeating supercells on germanene. The properties of the resulting germanene+DB phases depend on the size and geometry of supercells constructed from $(n \times n)$ hexagonal primitive unit cells or $(m \times n)$ rectangular unit cells of germanene, as well as the number of DBs in each supercell or the DB-DB distance, $d$. In $3$, the energetics and the relevant data of the selected phases having 2D hexagonal or rectangular lattice structures are presented. The cohesive energy $(E_C = E_T[Ge] - E_T[germanene + DB])/N,$ $26$ which is the difference between the energy of one free Ge atom and the energy of germanene+DB phase per atom or simply the energy gained per atom by constructing a particular germanene+DB phase), and cohesive energy per unit area (i.e. $E_2^s = N E_C / A$) are relevant measures for energetics of the phases. In particular, $E_2^s$ is a prime criterion which decides the phase that will grow on bare germanene. Here $N$ is the total number of Ge atoms in the supercell of a given phase and $A$ is the area of the supercell. Since each DB constructed on germanene lowers the energy, FDP (Full Dumbbell Phase) which corresponds to full coverage, attains the highest $E_C$, $E_2^s$ and $\Delta E_C$ among other phases listed in $3$. However, one Ge atom in each cell of FDP is forced to be six fold coordinated, and hence FDP is prone to structural instability. In fact, our ab-initio phonon calculations of this phase have branches with imaginary frequencies, which indicate structural instability as shown in the supplement. Another structure, RDP (Rectangular Dumbbell Phase) in $3$ is also found to be unstable based on ab-initio phonon calculations. DHP (Double Hexagonal Phase), where the hexagons of germanene are nested by large DB hexagons has the highest $E_b$ and $E_C$ among the other stable phases listed in $3$. Additionally, two other phases, TDP (Trigonal Dumbbell Phase) and HDP (Hexagonal Dumbbell Phase) which have $(\sqrt{3} \times \sqrt{3})$ unitcells are of particular interest, since silicene grown on Ag(111) substrate

![FIG. 3: The interaction energy versus the distance between two DBs, $d$, on the $(8 \times 8)$ supercell of germanene. The blue and red curves represent the variation of interaction energies for DBs formed on sites with the same and opposite bucklings, respectively. The interaction energy between two DBs situated at the same buckling is set to zero for large $d$. Negative energy indicates attractive interaction. One DB is permanently present on the yellow site and the second DB is placed on various positions shown by the blue and red marks in the inset. The attractive interaction energy falls suddenly when the second DB following the red path is situated at the nearest neighbor distance to the first DB.](image-url)
The shortest distance between two DBs; $d$.

The germanene+DB phases acquire permanent magnetic moments when $d > ∼ 15$ Å, where the DB-DB coupling recedes and the DB behaves as a local defect on the germanene substrate with a total magnetic moment $\mu_B$. The magnetic order of the system. To this extend, four DB structures were created on an (8 × 8) supercell and the ferromagnetic, antiferromagnetic and paramagnetic states were investigated. For the ferromagnetic case, all DB atoms were given an initial spin in the same direction; for the anti-ferromagnetic case opposite spins were assigned to the adjacent dumbbells. Our results showed that the ferromagnetic ordering has the lowest total energy indicating that it is the most favorable configuration.

The energy difference between the ferromagnetic state and the antiferromagnetic state is 0.63 eV per supercell. Notably, upon the relaxation of magnetic states, the final magnetic state of the structure is found to be always ferromagnetic no matter what the initial direction of spins were. The energetics of various germanene+DB phases display interesting trends: In general, the cohesive energy increases with increasing DB coverage, which confirms the situation in [3]. The binding energies, $E_b$, also show the same trend except for DHP. The energy values presented in [4] imply that the higher the DB coverage of a phase is, the higher its total energy gets.

Dumbbells also modify the physical properties of germanane. In particular, the electronic and magnetic properties of pristine germanene show dramatic changes depending on the coverage (see also [4]). Firstly, the spin-orbit coupling gives rise to significant splitting in the bands of germanene+DB phases. For example, the degenerate bands at the top of the valance band of (4 × 4) mesh split by 12 meV. Normally, germamene+DB phases maintain their metallic state at high coverage, but they transform into semiconductor as the size of their cell($n$) or the DB-DB distance($d$) increases; with the exception of HDP. In [4] we present the energy band structures of four different germanene+DB phases having hexagonal lattice. These are (i) TDP; (ii) HDP; (iii) DHP and (iv) triangular structure, where DBs form $(4 \times 4)$ mesh on germanene. The band structures calculated using hybrid functionals (HSE06) are also presented as Supplement. It should be noted that the band gaps of the semiconductor phases are almost doubled after the HSE corrections. The dramatic effects of DB coverage is clearly seen in these band structures. While TDP is a magnetic metal, HDP is a nonmagnetic semiconductor with an indirect band gap of 0.53 eV. DHP, which is a metal according to GGA, becomes a narrow band gap semiconductor after HSE06 correction. The $(4 \times 4)$ mesh of DBs is a magnetic, narrow band gap semiconductor. DB gives rise to localized states at $\sim -2$ eV and $-7$ eV below the Fermi level.
FIG. 4: Electronic band structures of different phases of germanene. (a) TDP. (b) HDP. (c) DHP. (d) The triangular structure with DBs forming hexagonal (4 × 4) supercells, where the total density of states are also shown. The spin up and spin down bands are shown in blue and green lines, respectively. The density of states projected to the DB atoms shown in red and are augmented three times for a better view. Atomic structures of TDP, HDP and DHP are described in the text as well as in Supplement.

Incidently, further to Ge DB on germanene, Si adatoms on germanene can also construct asymmetric DB structures, as such that D₁ = Si, but D₂ = Ge. The formation of this asymmetric DB is also exothermic and occurs spontaneously as long as a Si adatom on germanene is available. These asymmetric DB, as well as their periodic structures on germanene exhibit properties different from host DBs and multiply the functionality of DB based new phases of germanene. For example, the Si-Ge asymmetric dumbbell structure having hexagonal lattice over the (4 × 4) supercell of germanene is a nonmagnetic metal with a binding energy, $E_b=3.86$ eV per DB. In contrast, the symmetric germanene-DB having the same lattice is a magnetic semiconductor, and $E_b=3.44$ eV as shown in [4]. We note that like the Si-Ge asymmetric dimer on germanene, also Ge-Si asymmetric dimer can be constructed on silicene spontaneously.

In conclusion, we showed that a Ge adatom constructs DB structure on germanene through an exothermic and spontaneous process. Moreover, through periodically repeating decoration of DBs new phases can grow on germanene. These stable DB based phases exhibit diverse electronic and magnetic structures, which show remarkable changes with the coverage of DBs. In particular, HDP which has two DBs in each ($\sqrt{3} \times \sqrt{3}$) periodic supercell of germanene with a nearest neighbor distance of 3.85 Å attains highest cohesive energy per unit area and forms relatively larger honeycomb pattern over the buckled honeycomb pattern of germanene. It is an indirect band gap semiconductor and appears to be favorable energetically as compared to other phases. The dumbbell based phases of germanene and their multilayer structures bring about new class of single layer materials and can be precursors of 3D layered Ge.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The electronic band structure of the different phases of germanene calculated with hybrid functionals, atomic structures of the various phases of germanene + DB, and phonon dispersion curves for H/FDP and R/RDP structures are available free of charge via the Internet at http://pubs.acs.org

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