



On a Common Buffer Platform for Monolithic Integration of InGaN/GaN Light-Emitting Diodes and AlGaIn/GaN High-Electron-Mobility Transistors

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For the development of a metal-interconnection-free integration scheme for monolithic integration of InGaN/GaN light-emitting diodes (LEDs) and AlGaIn/GaN high-electron-mobility transistors (HEMTs), a common buffer to achieve high brightness, low leakage current, and high breakdown in the integrated HEMT LED device is essential. Different buffer structures have been investigated, and their impacts upon both the LED and HEMT parts of the HEMT LED device have been analyzed. Results indicated that a GaN/AlN buffer structure is the most ideal to serve as a common buffer platform, offering both the excellent crystalline quality and superior buffer resistivity required by the HEMT LED device. Growth of the AlN layer was particularly crucial for engineering the dislocation density, surface morphology, as well as resistivity of the buffer layer. Using the optimized GaN/AlN buffer structure, the LED part of the HEMT LED device was improved, showing greatly enhanced light output power and suppressed reverse leakage current, while the breakdown characteristics of the HEMT part were also improved.

Key words: Metalorganic chemical vapor deposition, light-emitting diodes, high-electron-mobility transistors, HEMT LED integration

INTRODUCTION

Integration of InGaN/GaN light-emitting diodes (LEDs) and AlGaIn/GaN high-electron-mobility transistors (HEMTs) on a common material platform is attracting interest due to its advantages in reducing device footprint, enhancing system reliability, and minimizing interconnect-related parasitics.¹ To accomplish a monolithically integrated HEMT LED device, a few different schemes have been reported, including selective epitaxial removal (SER), selective epitaxial growth (SEG), and wafer bonding techniques.^{2–8} Recently, we demonstrated a metal-interconnection-free scheme for HEMT LED integration by combining SER and SEG procedures. A schematic of the monolithically integrated HEMT LED structure is shown in Fig. 1. Key to this method

is obtaining intimate and seamless contact between the GaN channel of the HEMT and the *n*-type layer of the LED. Effective modulation of the LED brightness by gate control of the driving current injected through the HEMT has been demonstrated.⁹ However, due to the difference in material requirements for the LED and HEMT, it is not trivial to achieve high brightness in the LED part and high breakdown in the HEMT part simultaneously. A common buffer platform with both high crystalline quality and high resistivity for the monolithically integrated HEMT LED device that can lead to this goal is therefore highly desirable.

In early studies, a two-step growth procedure using low-temperature GaN (LT-GaN) as nucleation layer was typically used to promote two-dimensional (2D) GaN growth on sapphire.¹⁰ Afterwards, several groups demonstrated that an intentionally prolonged three-dimensional (3D) growth mode in the early stage of GaN growth could effectively reduce the

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threading dislocation density and improve the crystalline quality,^{11,12} boosting the performance of GaN-based light-emitting diodes. However, it has recently found that the 3D growth mode as accompanied by enhanced unintentional doping that introduces a buried conductive channel and degrades the barrier breakdown,^{13,14} being the most undesirable characteristics for transistors. Although acceptor-like impurities (e.g., Fe, Mg) can be introduced to compensate the background donor states and enhance the resistivity of the GaN barrier layer,^{15–18} Mg and Fe are known to have serious memory effects,^{16,17} potentially redistributing towards the channel region and degrading device performance. A high-resistivity barrier without compensating dopants that also eliminates the conductive channel induced by the 3D growth mode¹⁹ would be most ideal. The alternative of GaN barriers on sapphire using AlN as nucleation layer would not introduce leak channels and could potentially provide high crystalline quality and high barrier resistivity simultaneously.^{20–26} However, growth of this kind of GaN barriers occurs in a narrow growth window. The best crystalline quality and surface morphology can only be achieved when neither Al nor N atoms dominate at the surface.^{25,26}

To optimize the integrated HEMT LED performance, we have developed a GaN/AlN barrier platform featuring high barrier resistivity and excellent crystalline quality simultaneously. The influence of the growth temperature and the V/III ratio of the AlN layer on the crystalline quality and surface morphology of the upper AlGaIn/GaN heterostructure has been investigated. Under optimal AlN growth conditions, the dislocation density in the GaN barrier can be reduced to $3.2 \times 10^8 \text{ cm}^{-2}$ with high resistivity. To verify the advantages of the GaN/AlN barrier structure, we studied the effect of different barrier structures on the performance of the HEMT and LED parts of the HEMT LED device. Based on the high-quality GaN/AlN barrier, improved light output power and suppressed reverse leakage current were achieved in the LED

part. Meanwhile, low barrier leakage was achieved. Therefore, the GaN/AlN barrier structure developed in this work is promising to serve as a common platform for HEMT LED integration.

EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES

This study was carried out using a pre-qualified proven scheme for the integrated device.⁹ The AlGaIn/GaN HEMT structure described in this work were grown on 2-inch sapphire substrates in an Aixtron 2400HT metalorganic chemical vapor deposition (MOCVD) system. Trimethyl gallium (TMGa), trimethyl aluminum (TMAI), and ammonia (NH₃) were used as Ga, Al, and N sources, respectively. Nitrogen and hydrogen were used as carrier gas. Three barrier structures were used for AlGaIn/GaN HEMT growth in this work, as shown in Fig. 2. With different temperature ramping rates and parameters for the initial high-temperature GaN growth, high-quality (HQ) and high-resistivity (HR) GaN barriers on sapphire can be achieved, respectively, as shown in Fig. 2a and b. The HQ GaN barrier as grown using the method ideally adopted for growing LEDs on sapphire. A 25-nm GaN nucleation layer was deposited at 550°C, followed by temperature ramping to 1150°C in 7 min and *in situ* annealing for 2 min. During the annealing, small grains start to decompose, leading to a low density of large grains. This was followed by high-temperature GaN barrier growth at 200 mbar. Three-dimensional (3D) grain growth first occurs on the island-like grains of the nucleation layer prior to the two-dimensional (2D) coalesced growth. The 3D-to-2D transition growth mode was accompanied with epitaxial lateral overgrowth (ELOG), which can effectively reduce the threading dislocation density. Meanwhile, for HR GaN barrier growth, the reactor temperature was ramped up to 1050°C in 3 min after low-temperature GaN nucleation, followed by immediate growth of high-temperature GaN at 50 mbar. The increased temperature ramping rate without annealing helped to maintain a quasi-2D morphology for the low-temperature GaN nucleation layer. Moreover, the lower reactor pressure can ensure direct 2D growth for the high-temperature GaN. As a result, unintentional doping during the 3D growth can be avoided and the leakage channel at the sapphire GaN interface eliminated.

Alternatively, AlGaIn/GaN HEMTs using GaN/AlN barrier were also investigated, as shown in Fig. 2c. To optimize the GaN/AlN barrier for HEMT applications, a series of growth experiments were carried out. With the thickness of the AlN nucleation layer kept at 150 nm, the growth conditions of the AlN layer for five samples were varied as listed in Table I. The reactor pressure was fixed at 0.0037 (p3

the V/III ratio during AlN growth. Atomic force microscopy (AFM) and high-resolution ω -ray diffraction (HRXRD) were used to characterize the surface morphology and crystalline quality of the as-grown AlGaIn/GaN HEMT epilayers. Mercury capacitance-voltage ($C-V$) probe measurements were implemented to determine the background carrier concentration and monitor the leakage channel in the buffer layer. The electron transport properties of the AlGaIn/GaN HEMT epilayers were investigated by van der Pauw Hall measurements, single ohmic contacts formed by alloyed indium dots on the AlGaIn barrier. Afterwards, the AlGaIn/GaN stack was selectively removed by inductively coupled plasma (ICP) etching, exposing the GaN buffer underneath for subsequent LED overgrowth. The overgrown LED structure consisted of 1.5- μm n -type GaN, five periods of $\text{In}_{0.1}\text{Ga}_{0.9}\text{N}/\text{GaN}$ multiple quantum wells (MQWs) with 3-nm-thick wells and 12-nm-thick barriers, followed by a 15-nm p -type $\text{Al}_{0.15}\text{Ga}_{0.85}\text{N}$ and a 170-nm p -type GaN layer. After the growth, both discrete LEDs and integrated HEMT LEDs were fabricated. Details of the fabrication process can be found in Ref. 9. Electrical properties were measured by on-wafer probing, and luminescence properties were collected using a calibrated integrating sphere at room temperature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 3a, b, and c show the surface morphologies of the AlGaIn/GaN HEMTs grown on GaN/AlN

buffers with AlN deposited at 950°C, 1050°C, and 1150°C, respectively (labeled sample A, B, and C, respectively). Fragmented surface morphology with large and deep pits can be observed for sample A. This is due to incomplete coalescence of the initial 3D AlN islands at low temperature. When the AlN temperature was increased to 1050°C in sample B, step-flow morphology can be observed on the final AlGaIn/GaN surface, with root-mean-square (RMS) roughness decreased from 4.5 nm to 0.8 nm. The associated large density of surface pits lowers the effective barrier height and increases the reverse gate leakage current of the fabricated HEMT devices.²⁷ When the AlN temperature was further increased to 1150°C, sample C showed a pit-free surface with RMS roughness of 0.3 nm, which can be attributed to the enhanced Al atom mobility at higher temperature.

In addition to the AlN growth temperature, the V/III ratio of the AlN layer also plays an important role in the surface morphologies of the upper AlGaIn/GaN HEMTs. It is well known that inversion domains can form during AlN growth if there is prereaction between NH_3 and Al_2O_3 , causing mixed domains and thus rough surface.

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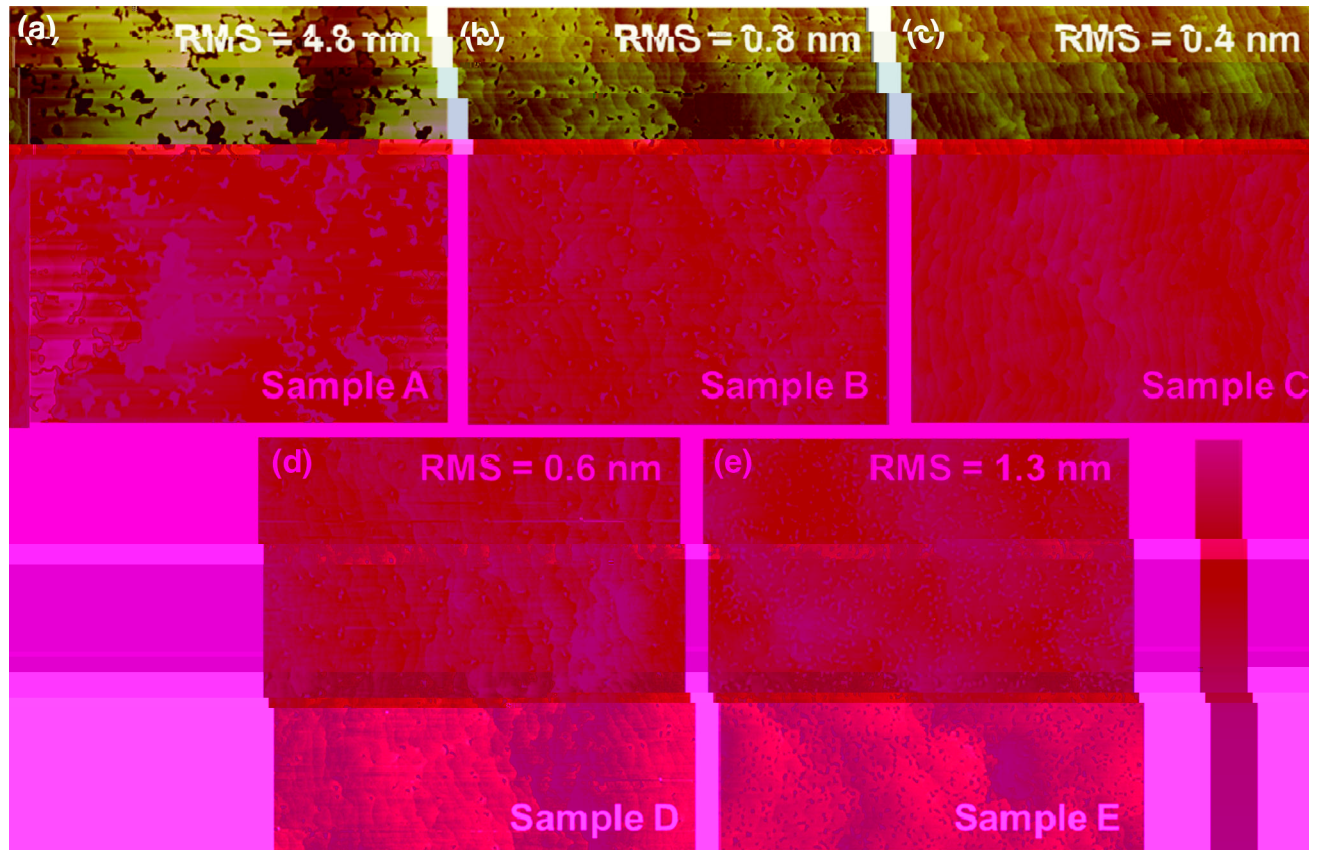


Fig. 3. Surface morphology of AlGaIn/GaN HEMT samples grown on different buffer structures. (a) Sample A, RMS = 4.8 nm; (b) Sample B, RMS = 0.8 nm; (c) Sample C, RMS = 0.4 nm; (d) Sample D, RMS = 0.6 nm; (e) Sample E, RMS = 1.3 nm. Scale bar = 5 μm .

previously, as described, to optimize the ammonia flow at high temperature as found to be effective. Figure 3c depicts the dependence of the surface morphology on the V/III ratio of the AlN layer at fixed growth temperature of 1150°C and reactor pressure of 50 mbar. The lowest density of surface pits on the AlGaIn/GaN HEMT surface was obtained with a V/III ratio of 550 (sample C). The pinholes may be either attributed to inversion domains or due to threading dislocations that terminate at the sample surface.³⁰

The dependence of the crystalline quality and surface roughness of the AlGaIn/GaN/AlN heterostructures on the growth temperature and V/III ratio of the AlN layer is plotted in Fig. 4. The FWHM value of the GaN/AlN buffer decreased monotonically with increased AlN growth temperature, hereby enhanced Al atom mobility can lead to reduced misorientations and nucleation density in the AlN layer. As a result, fewer threading dislocations can penetrate into the upper GaN buffer, and improved crystalline quality can be achieved. This phenomenon agrees with the results reported by Li et al.³¹ The V/III ratio of the AlN layer growth also affects the crystalline quality of the upper GaN buffer, with a minimal FWHM value at V/III ratio of 500. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the

surface roughness and XRD line width exhibited similar trends with growth temperature. This coincidence indicates that, with reduced misorientations and nucleation densities of the initial AlN nucleation layer, under the optimal AlN growth condition, reduced surface roughness and improved crystalline quality can be achieved simultaneously.

Using the optimized AlN growth condition described above, an AlGaIn/GaN HEMT structure was grown using the GaN/AlN buffer structure, to be compared with the other HEMT samples grown using conventional HQ GaN buffer and HR GaN buffer, respectively. The surface morphologies of the as-grown AlGaIn/GaN HEMT epi on different buffer structures were compared by AFM (Fig. 5). Well-aligned step flow could be observed for the HEMT on the HQ GaN buffer, with an RMS value of 0.4 nm. The RMS value of the AlGaIn/GaN surface with HR GaN buffer increased to 0.6 nm, accompanied by disordered step flow, due to increased misorientations and nucleation density of the GaN nucleation layer by eliminating the 3D-to-2D transition growth mode. The AlGaIn/GaN heterostructure on the GaN/AlN buffer also exhibited a well-aligned surface with an RMS value as small as 0.3 nm. The surface morphology is one of the critical factors influencing the transport properties of the

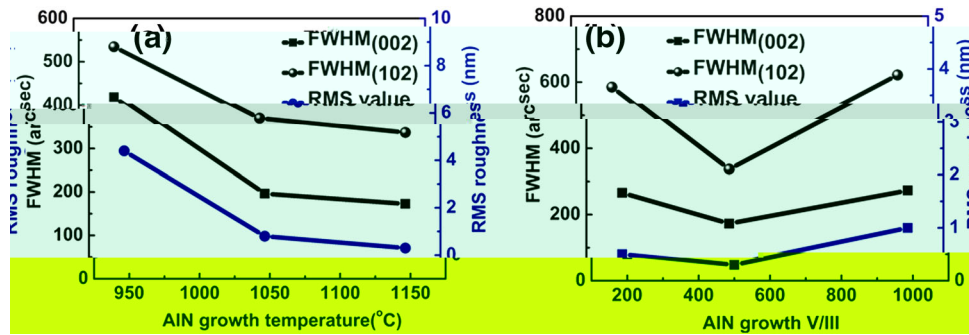


Fig. 4. Dependence of FWHM and RMS values on AIN growth temperature (a) and V/III ratio (b). (a) FWHM (002) (black squares), FWHM (102) (black circles), and RMS value (blue triangles) versus AIN growth temperature (°C). (b) FWHM (002) (black squares), FWHM (102) (black circles), and RMS value (blue triangles) versus AIN growth V/III ratio.

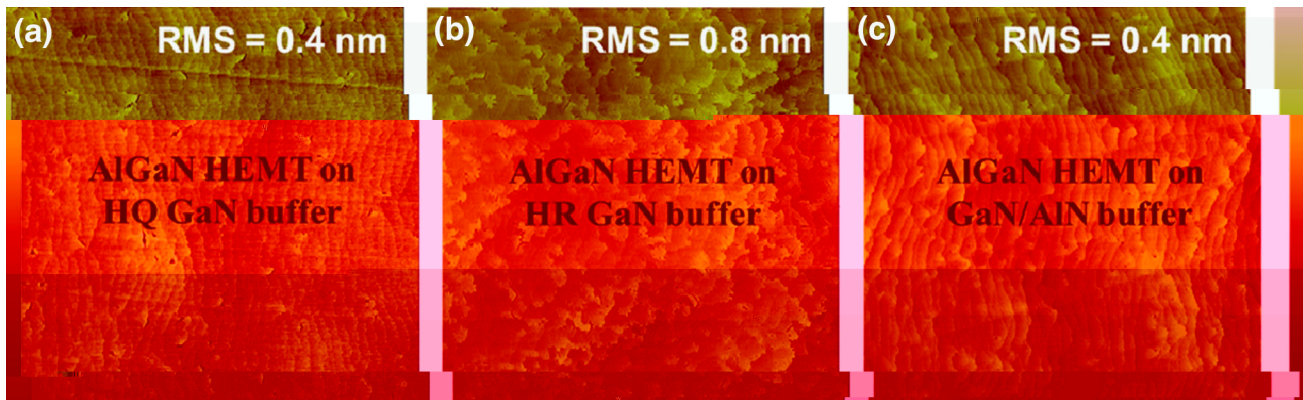


Fig. 5. Surface morphology of AlGaIn HEMT on different buffers: (a) HQ GaN buffer, (b) HR GaN buffer, and (c) GaN/AlN buffer. The scale bar is 5 μm $\times$ 5 μm . The color scale is from 0 to 10 nm.

two-dimensional electron gas (2DEG). Hall-effect measurements showed a sheet carrier concentration of $1.2 \times 10^{13} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ with Hall mobility of 1730 cm^2/Vs , 1530 cm^2/Vs , and 1820 cm^2/Vs for AlGaIn/GaN HEMTs grown on HQ GaN, HR GaN, and GaN/AlN buffers, respectively. The higher electron mobilities for the HEMTs on the HQ GaN and GaN/AlN buffers can in part be attributed to reduced fluctuation at the AlGaIn/GaN interface, as indicated by the reduced RMS roughness, and in part due to decreased defect density, as revealed by the narrowed XRD line width.

In addition to the channel resistivity, the breakdown characteristics are also of great importance for GaN-based transistors to take full advantage of their high current and power driving capabilities. To compare the breakdown characteristics of the different buffer structures on sapphire, the AlGaIn barrier and AlN spacer layers were removed using Cl_2 -based ICP etching. Ti/Al/Ni/Au (20 nm/150 nm/50 nm/80 nm) electrodes separated by 100 μm were deposited by e-beam evaporation and annealed at 850°C in N_2 ambient. The buffer leakage current as measured versus applied voltage and is plotted in Fig. 6a. The two-terminal buffer breakdown voltage (V_{BV}) is defined as the measured voltage when the buffer leakage current reached 1 μA . It

can be seen that the HQ GaN exhibited a poor V_{BV} of 11.5 V, while the HR GaN featured an enhanced V_{BV} exceeding 1000 V. These significantly improved breakdown characteristics are mainly attributed to the different growth mode shown in Fig. 6b. In the HQ GaN buffer growth, a 3D-to-2D transition growth mode was adopted to improve the crystalline quality, while unintentional doping occurred during the prolonged 3D growth, introducing a leakage channel at the GaN/sapphire interface.^{13,14} With the 3D growth mode eliminated for the HR GaN buffer, significantly enhanced V_{BV} exceeding 1000 V could be achieved. The GaN/AlN buffer also showed high V_{BV} over 1000 V, with leakage current level comparable to that of the HR GaN buffer.

To investigate this phenomenon, mercury $C-V$ measurements were carried out on the AlGaIn/GaN heterostructure as illustrated in Fig. 7a, showing a sharp decrease of capacitance for all three samples with varied bias, indicating effective confinement of the carriers in the 2DEG channel. The minimum depletion capacitance (C_{min}) at high reverse bias of the AlGaIn/GaN HEMTs, using the HQ GaN buffer, was about one order of magnitude higher than for the HR GaN or GaN/AlN buffer, which translates to an increased background concentration in the buffer layer (Fig. 7b). The HR buffer and GaN/AlN buffer

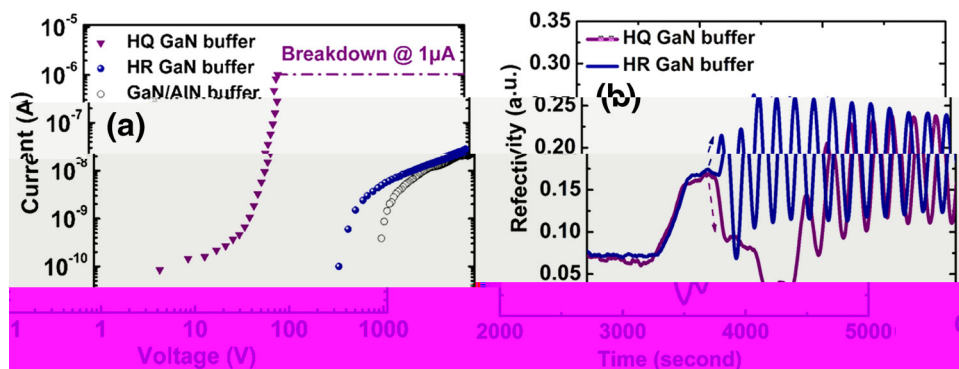


Fig. 6. (a) Leakage current density (J_{leak}) vs. voltage (V_{BV}) at a defined area ($1 \mu m^2$) for the GaN/AlN buffer, HR GaN buffer, and HQ GaN buffer. (b) *In situ* reflectance spectroscopy of the GaN/AlN buffer, HR GaN buffer, and HQ GaN buffer.

both feature low background concentration with a low leakage channel underneath.

The crystalline quality of the as-grown HEMT samples was examined using a HRXRD system operating at voltage of 40 kV and current of 40 mA with $Cu K_{\alpha 1}$ radiation. The HRXRD omega rocking curves for (002) and (102) planes of the HEMT buffers are shown in Fig. 8a and b, respectively. The FWHM values from the HQ GaN buffer were 297 arcsec and 330 arcsec for (002) and (102) planes, respectively. Obvious broadening of the rocking curves can be seen for the HR GaN buffer, with FWHM values of 313 arcsec and 688 arcsec for (002) and (102) planes, respectively. This indicates an increased dislocation density of the HR GaN buffer, due to inefficient 3D island growth before quasi-2D growth. The GaN/AlN buffer exhibited FWHM values of 238 arcsec and 321 arcsec for (002) and (102) planes, respectively. The FWHM values can be related to the dislocation density through the following equations^{32,33}:

$$D_{scre} = \beta_{(002)}^2 / 9b_{scre}^2, \quad D_{edge} = \beta_{(102)}^2 / 9b_{edge}^2,$$

$$D_{dislocation} = D_{scre} + D_{edge}, \quad (1)$$

where D_{scre} is the screw dislocation density and D_{edge} is the edge dislocation density. $\beta_{(002)}$ and $\beta_{(102)}$ are the FWHM values in radians for the (002) and (102) omega rocking curves, respectively. The Burgers vector lengths b_{scre} and b_{edge} are 0.5189 nm and 0.3189 nm, respectively. The estimated dislocation density is $3.6 \times 10^8 \text{ cm}^{-2}$, $1.3 \times 10^9 \text{ cm}^{-2}$, and $3.2 \times 10^8 \text{ cm}^{-2}$ for the HQ GaN buffer, HR GaN buffer, and GaN/AlN buffer, respectively, similar to that reported in Ref. 34. It is noted that the dislocation density calculated from x-ray diffraction is at best a rough estimate; a more accurate dislocation density needs to be measured by transmission electron microscopy.³⁵ The superior crystalline quality of the GaN/AlN buffer can be attributed to the improved AlN under the optimal growth condition.

Afterwards, LED overgrowth was carried out on the exposed GaN buffers to verify the advantages of the GaN/AlN buffer for the LED part of the integrated HEMT LED device. Nomarski optical micrographs of the LED epitaxial growth on different buffers are shown in Fig. 9. All LED surfaces showed similar morphology with large density of dots, resulting from intentional surface roughening due to the lower growth temperature of the p -type layer. However, cracks were observed for the LED on the HR GaN buffer, while the LEDs grown on HQ GaN and GaN/AlN buffers were both crack free. This indicates that the LED epitaxial growth on the HR GaN buffer might be under tensile stress, inducing cracks. Furthermore, some semipolar facets can be observed in the vicinity of the cracks. It seems that the cracks occurred during the high-temperature GaN growth and were subsequently covered by additional material. The locally generated stress and the facets posed by the cracks will induce a different growth mode, forming semipolar facets. The overall stress in an epitaxial GaN film on sapphire is a combined effect of the compressive strain induced by its thermal expansion mismatch compared with sapphire and the intrinsic tensile stress developed during 3D island coalescence.³⁶ Generally, the HQ GaN buffer growth on sapphire substrate is under thermal compressive stress after cooling down to room temperature. To achieve an HR GaN buffer on sapphire, the quasi-2D growth was carried out immediately after the low-temperature nucleation layer without annealing to diminish the 3D island density before coalescence. As a result, the increased island boundary not only degrades the crystalline quality but also leads to increased tensile stress during coalescence.³⁷ Tensile stress was further accumulated during subsequent n -type GaN growth of the LEDs.³⁸ As a result, the built-up tensile stress exceeded the thermal-mismatch-induced compressive stress and resulted in cracks during the LED epitaxial growth. For the GaN/AlN buffer, the smaller lattice constant of the AlN layer will induce extra compressive strain in the

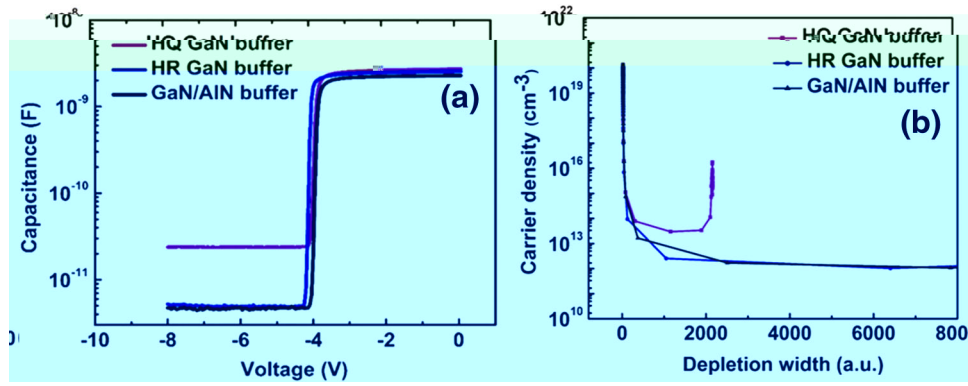


Fig. 7. (a) C-V characteristics and (b) carrier density profiles of InGaN/GaN LEDs on different buffers. (Color figure online)

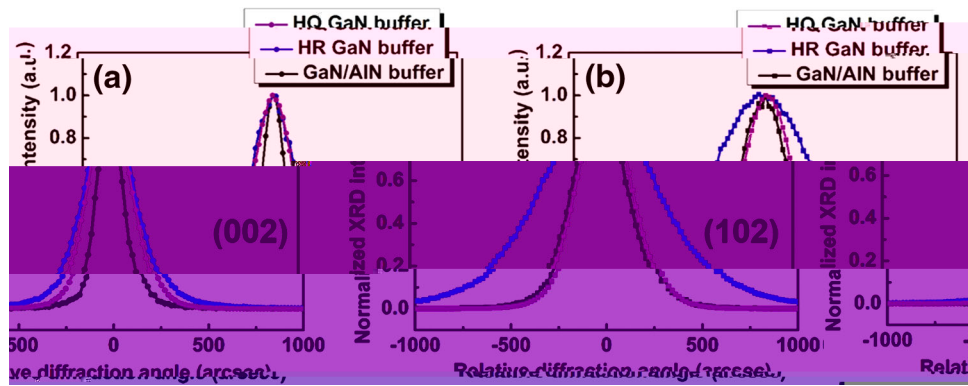


Fig. 8. (a) HRXRD (002) and (b) HRXRD (102) patterns of InGaN/GaN LEDs on different buffers. (Color figure online)



Fig. 9. Surface morphology of InGaN/GaN LEDs on different buffers. (Color figure online)

upper GaN epi, which could compensate the tensile stress induced by SiH_4 doping and result in a crack-free LED.

Micro-Raman scattering spectroscopy was carried out at room temperature to further confirm the strain behaviors in the samples, as shown in Fig. 10a. Both GaN E_2 (TO) and A_1 (LO) phonon modes can be observed. The E_2 (TO) phonon is generally used to represent the residual stress state

in epitaxial layers. The residual in-plane biaxial stress σ_{xx} can be estimated by

$$\sigma_{xx} = \Delta\omega/\kappa, \quad (2)$$

where $\Delta\omega$ is the strain-induced shift of the E_2 (TO) peak, while the Raman stress coefficient κ is $4.3 \text{ cm}^{-1}/\text{GPa}$ for the E_2 (TO) mode of GaN.³⁹ Compared with the stress-free GaN E_2 (TO) peak

at 567.4 cm^{-1} ,⁴⁰ the LED grown on the HQ GaN buffer was nearly stress free, which is a combined result of the compressive strain due to thermal mismatch and tensile lattice stress from island coalescence. However, the E_2 (TO) peak for the LED on the HR GaN peak was blue-shifted to 565.8 cm^{-1} after cooling down to room temperature, corresponding to a tensile stress value of 0.372 GPa. Considering the large compressive stress introduced during cooling down (1.5 GPa),⁴¹ the GaN epilayer was under much higher tensile stress (exceeding 1.872 GPa) at the end of the high-temperature n-type GaN growth. This can explain the cracks formed during the high-temperature LED epilayer growth on the HR GaN buffer. The GaN/AlN buffer on sapphire showed a compressive strain value of 0.529 GPa, which is a combined effect of the smaller lattice of the AlN layer and the thermal mismatch between GaN and sapphire.

Room-temperature photoluminescence (PL) measurements were performed on the samples to explore the effect of the different buffers on the optical performance of the organogrown LEDs; the results are presented in Fig. 10b. It can be seen that the LEDs on the HQ GaN buffer and GaN/AlN buffer exhibited similar peak intensity, while the peak intensity of the LED on the HR GaN buffer was degraded by 53%, which can be attributed to either compromised crystalline quality or different light extraction efficiency. The FWHM values of the PL spectra were 19.9 nm, 20.6 nm, and 25.8 nm for the LEDs grown on the HQ GaN buffer, GaN/AlN buffer, and HR GaN buffer, respectively. The broadened linewidth of the PL spectrum is related to the degraded quality of the MQWs, which are impacted by the buffer layers beneath. Furthermore, due to the tensile stress from the thick GaN buffer, the peak wavelength was red-shifted to 429 nm, com-

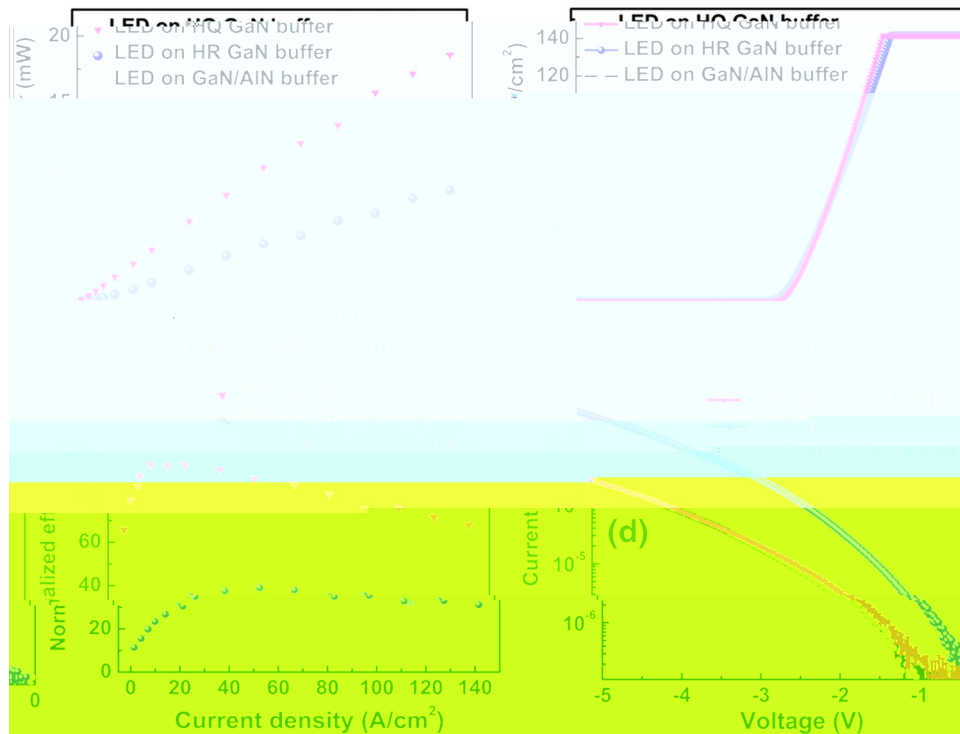


Fig. 11. (a) L/I_c vs. I_c , (b) I_c/V_c vs. V_c , (c) external efficiency vs. I_c , and (d) I_c vs. V_c for the LED devices on different buffer layers.

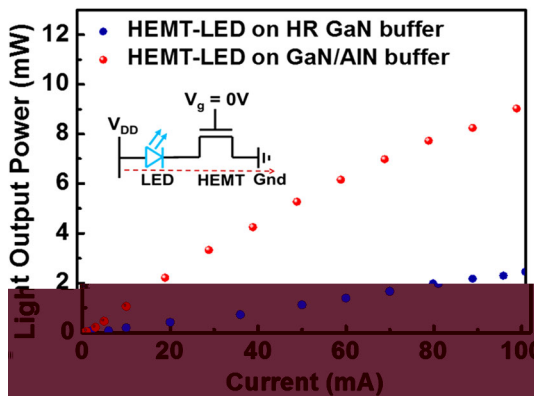


Fig. 12. L/I_c vs. I_c for the HEMT-LED device on the HR GaN buffer and GaN/AlN buffer (C: Fig. 11e).

can emit light with integrated optical power exceeding 9 mW, which is a dramatic increase compared with the integrated LED on the HR GaN buffer (~2.5 mW at injection current of 100 mA). The enhanced brightness of the integrated LED can be attributed to the superior crystalline quality of the GaN/AlN buffer, compared with the HR GaN buffer used in the previous report.⁹

CONCLUSIONS

The influence of different buffer structures on the performance of the HEMT and LED parts of monolithically integrated HEMT LED devices has been

thoroughly investigated. A GaN/AlN buffer was developed, offering both high crystalline quality and superior breakdown characteristics. With the optimal GaN/AlN buffer, the integrated HEMT LED device can emit an integrated light optical power exceeding 9 mW at injection current of 100 mA, a significant improvement compared with the HEMT LED fabricated on the HR GaN buffer. As a result, this GaN/AlN buffer structure can serve as a universal buffer for both the electrical and optical devices.

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