



Letter

Growth and structural characterization of molecular superlattice of quaterrylene and *N,N'*-dioctyl-3,4,9,10-perylenedicarboximide

Nobuya Hiroshiba^{a,b}, Ryoma Hayakawa^a, Matthieu Petit^a, Toyohiro Chikyow^a, Kiyoto Matsuishi^b, Yutaka Wakayama^{a,*}

^aAdvanced Electronic Materials Center, National Institute for Materials Science, 1-1 Namiki, Tsukuba 305-0044, Japan

^bGraduate School of Pure and Applied Sciences, University of Tsukuba, 1-1-1 Tennoudai, Tsukuba 305-8573, Japan

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ABSTRACT

A molecular superlattice consisting of alternate layers of *N,N'*-dioctyl-3,4,9,10-perylenedicarboximide (PTCDI-C₈) and quaterrylene was prepared by using an ultra-slow deposition technique. Film growth under equilibrium conditions with precise optimization of the substrate temperature enabled the layer-by-layer stacking of hetero-molecules at a single-layer level. The morphology of the films and the orientation of the molecules in each layer were analyzed by atomic force microscopy (AFM) and an X-ray reflection (XRR) technique.

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The main purpose of this study is to establish a fine process for growing a molecular superlattice, where hetero-molecular layers are deposited alternately in monolayer level. Organic thin-film devices have recently been used in commercial applications, such as organic field-effect transistors, organic light emitting diodes and organic solar cells [1]. In addition to these conventional devices, organic devices based on new concepts have been reported, e.g., spin injection devices [2], magnetoresistance devices [3] and thyristors [4]. These unique characteristics require delicate arrangements of multiple molecules. A typical example can be seen in a strongly correlated system of organic materi-

als. Non-linear conduction and/or superconductivity are induced by a charge transfer between molecules that are aligned in a low-dimensional superlattice [4,5]. In this respect, a molecular superlattice has great potential for providing innovative functionalities. This makes it essential to establish a fine process for growing a molecular superlattice at a monolayer level.

In this work, we studied the growth and structural characterization of a molecular superlattice of PTCDI-C₈ and quaterrylene. The molecules, which function respectively as *n*-type and *p*-type organic semiconductors, were deposited alternately by an ultra-slow deposition process called the hot-wall technique. This technique is described in detail elsewhere [6–8]. An advantage of our technique is that the molecular layers are grown under near thermal

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +81 29 860 4403; fax: +81 29 860 4916.
E-mail address: Wakayama.yutaka@nims.go.jp (Y. Wakayama).

equilibrium conditions, and so, in contrast to previous studies, precise thin film growth is possible at a monolayer level [9–14]. As a result, *p*–*n* junctions can be formed on a single molecular scale and charge transfer between adjacent molecules can be expected.

Molecular superlattices were fabricated on Si substrates with thermally oxidized surface layers (SiO₂) in a high vacuum ($\sim 10^{-6}$ Pa). The deposition rates were less than 0.03 molecular layers (MLs) per min. Atomic force microscopy (AFM) images (SII SPI-4000, dynamic force mode) and X-ray reflection (XRR) spectra (Bruker AXS, D8 Discover, Cu K α ; $\lambda = 0.154$ nm) [15,16] were obtained from various films grown at different substrate temperatures with a view to optimizing the growth conditions and examining the morphology, thickness and molecular orientation. By using XRR fitting, the layer densities were estimated to be in the 1.3–1.5 g/cm³ range, which is comparable to the values reported in previous studies [17,18].

First, we verified the growth of the first PTCDI-C₈ monolayer on the SiO₂ surface. The molecular structure is shown in Fig. 1a. Fig. 1b shows the XRR spectrum of the PTCDI-C₈ monolayer grown at an optimized substrate temperature of 140 °C [8]. The measurement was carried out immediately after the deposition. The thickness was estimated to be 2.7 nm (± 0.1 nm) from the fitting curve, indicating that the long axis of the molecule (2.97 nm) was oriented vertically to the surface normal with a small tilting angle [8,17,18]. A schematic illustration is shown in the inset of Fig. 1b. Fig. 1c is an AFM image of PTCDI-C₈ (0.6 ML), which clearly shows two-dimensional growth with flat terraces. The surface profile of the AFM images (a typical profile is shown in the inset) revealed that the terraces had an average height of 2.2 nm, which is smaller than that estimated with XRR, and involved a certain fluctuation of about ± 0.2 nm. We found that the thickness (height) had a tendency to decrease with time. For example, the reduction in thickness to approximately 1.8 nm (± 0.2 nm) was confirmed by XRR and AFM 2 months after the deposition (not shown here). These results imply that the PTCDI-C₈ monolayer on the SiO₂ is unstable and the molecular orientation inclines gradually.

Next, we examined the surface morphologies, thickness and molecular orientation of quaterrylene/PTCDI-C₈ double layers (see Fig. 2a). The AFM images in Fig. 2b–d shows the surface morphologies of the quaterrylene layers deposited on the underlying PTCDI-C₈ monolayer. A clear dependence on the substrate temperature was observed. Quaterrylene layers tended to grow in a three-dimensional manner below 150 °C. Meanwhile, the substrate temperature at 160 °C produced 2D layers at the monolayer level. As a result, a well-defined quaterrylene/PTCDI-C₈ bilayer was formed. The surface profile shown in the inset proves that the quaterrylene molecules have an upright orientation, i.e., the long axis of the molecule (1.8 nm) is perpendicular to the SiO₂ surface normal.

To examine the total thickness of the quaterrylene/PTCDI-C₈ bilayer, the XRR spectrum was measured as shown in Fig. 3a. It should be noted that the total thickness estimated with the XRR measurement was only 3.0 nm, which was less than the sum for the two molecules (2.8 + 1.8 nm). We speculate that the reduction in the total thickness can be attributed to the instability of the PTCDI-C₈ layer as already mentioned. The orientation of the PTCDI-C₈ layer changed during the quaterrylene deposition presumably as a result of heating the substrate. To confirm this presumption, we investigated the effect of temperature on the PTCDI-C₈ orientation by thermally treating a PTCDI-C₈ single layer on SiO₂ at 160 °C for 3 h after the deposition. The XRR spectrum in Fig. 3b reveals that the thickness was reduced to 1.2 nm. This result means that the thermal treatment caused the molecules to lie flat as shown in the inset. Based on these analyses, we concluded that the quaterrylene/PTCDI-C₈ bilayer consisted of a vertically orientated quaterrylene layer (1.8 nm) on a prostrate PTCDI-C₈ layer (1.2 nm), which yielded a total thickness of 3.0 nm.

Subsequent layers were deposited and the molecular orientations of each layer were examined. The substrate temperatures were optimized to 160 °C for all the upper layers (2nd–4th layers), in a similar way to that shown in Fig. 2. AFM images were obtained to confirm the surface flatness as shown on the right in Fig. 4a. The XRR spectra

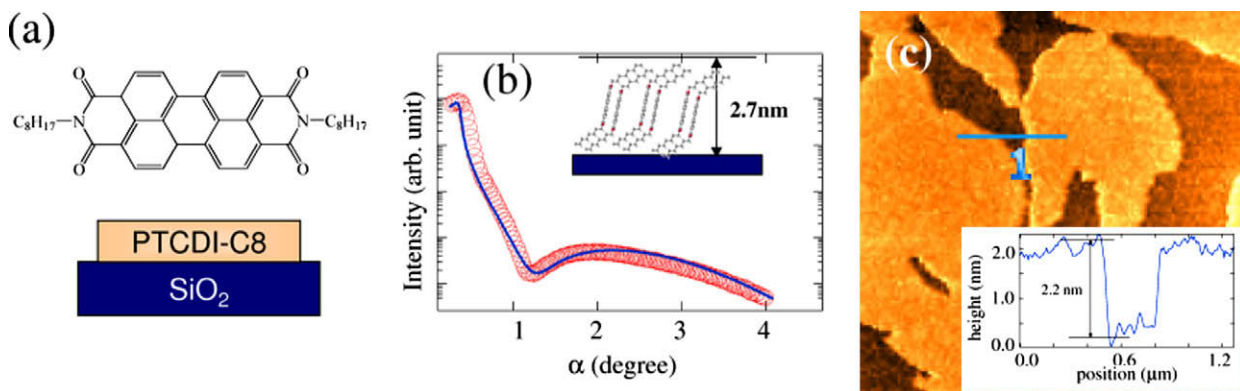


Fig. 1. (a) Chemical structure of PTCDI-C₈ molecule. (b) XRR spectrum of PTCDI-C₈ monolayer. The experimental result (red circles) and fitted line (blue line) revealed a layer thickness of 2.8 nm. The molecular orientation is shown in the inset. (c) $5 \times 5 \mu\text{m}^2$ AFM image of 0.6 ML PTCDI-C₈. The surface profile shows the PTCDI-C₈ layer is 2.2 nm thick, suggesting the layer undergoes a gradual change in orientation. (For interpretation of the references to color in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

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