

Growth behavior of Al-doped zinc oxide microrods with times



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 29 June 2015

Accepted 1 July 2015

Available online 2 July 2015

Keywords:

ZnO

Microrods

Growth

Morphology

Time

pH

ABSTRACT

We investigated the growth behavior of Al-doped zinc oxide (ZnO) microrods grown on ZnO seed layers at various growth times. During the initial 3 h (region I), the randomly oriented microrods grew on the surface of the substrate because of the weak acidity of the initial solution (pH \sim 5.5). Between 3 h and 6 h (region II), when the pH was close to neutrality, a dominant growth of Al-doped ZnO (AZO) microrods with tapered shape occurred. After that the vertical growth of the microrods reached a certain equilibrium, a selective etching of the side nonpolar plane, rather than the top polar plane, dominantly occurred between 6 h and 12 h (region III), thus leading to the formation of the microrods of cylindrical shape. From 12 h to 24 h (region IV), the pH value was saturated, and the morphology of the microrods did not significantly change. As a result, owing to the change of the pH value, the growth behavior of the AZO microrods appeared significantly different when increasing the time.

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1. Introduction

One dimensional (1D) zinc oxide (ZnO) nano and microrods have been considered as one of the most promising material for the fabrication of novel nano and microscale electronic and optoelectronic devices [1–5]. The characteristics of nano and microrods are strongly related to the growth conditions (temperature [6,7], time [7–9], doping [8,10–12], pH [4,7,13,14], etc.). Sun et al. reported that nano and micro morphological changes occurred in ZnO by controlling the thickness of the seed layer [15]. Zheng et al. found that the morphologies of ZnO grown on Pt-coated Si substrates changed from nanorods to microrods with and without Al [16].

In our previous study, we investigated the structural and optical properties of ZnO nanorods doped with Cu, Ag, and Al [11]. Compared with the undoped ZnO nanorods, the Cu-doped ZnO (CZO) nanorods exhibited increased length and improved crystallinity. On the other hand, Ag dopant led to a considerably opposite behavior. Interestingly, the incorporation of Al dopant in the ZnO led to a marked morphological variation with randomly oriented microrods, instead of nanorods, on the surface of the substrate. This morphological change of the ZnO nanorods with the addition of the Al dopant has been rarely reported. On the other hand, Kim et al. showed that, compared with the undoped ZnO nanorods, the length and diameter of Al-doped ZnO (AZO) nanorods decreased and increased, respectively [10]. However, Fang and Kang reported an increased length and decreased diameter of the nanorods upon incorporation of Al [17]. The characteristics of ZnO nanorods doped with Al are still controversial and not fully understood. In this study, we investigated the growth behavior of the AZO microrods at various growth times.

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2. Experimental

ZnO seed layers were prepared on the fluorine doped tin oxide (FTO) coated glass substrate by sol-gel spin-coating method using zinc acetate dihydrate ($\text{Zn}(\text{CH}_3\text{CO})_2 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$, 0.25 M) dissolved in 2-methoxyethanol (ME) ($\text{C}_3\text{H}_8\text{O}_2$), ethanol ($\text{C}_2\text{H}_6\text{O}$), and Milli-Q. A detailed description of the synthesis process has been previously reported elsewhere [12].

The AZO microrods were fabricated by chemical solution deposition with an aqueous solution of zinc nitrate hexahydrate ($\text{Zn}(\text{NO}_3)_2 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$, 0.01 M), hexamethylenetetramine (HMT) ($\text{C}_6\text{H}_{12}\text{N}_4$, 0.01 M), and aluminum nitrate nanohydrate ($\text{Al}(\text{NO}_3)_3 \cdot 9\text{H}_2\text{O}$, 1 mM) as dopant. The ZnO seed layers prepared on the FTO coated glass substrate were vertically immersed in the solution at 90 °C for 3–24 h. The samples were washed with deionized water and then dried at 120 °C for 10 min.

The surface morphologies were examined using field emission scanning electron microscopy (FESEM, JSM-6701F), while the crystal structures and orientations were analyzed using X-ray diffraction (XRD, Bruker, D8ADVANCE) with $\text{Cu K}\alpha$ radiation.

3. Results and discussions

Fig. 1 shows the cross-sectional FESEM images of the AZO microrods grown on the FTO coated glass substrates for (a) 3 h, (b) 6 h, (c–e) 12 h, and (f) 24 h. The variation of the length and of the bottom and top diameters of the microrods with the growth time are shown in Fig. 2. During the initial 3 h (Fig. 1(a)), the rods are randomly inclined to the surface of the substrate but rod with a diameter of several nanometer cannot be observed on the surface of the FTO substrate, in contrast to the undoped ZnO nanorods shown in Fig. S1 of the Supporting Information [18]. The length and the bottom and top diameters of the rods are ~ 2.0 μm , ~ 0.8 μm , and ~ 0.5 μm , respectively. The microrods are slightly wider at the bottom and tapered at the top. By increasing the growth time to 6 h (Fig. 1(b)), the shape of the microrods remains similar to that of the rods observed in the 3 h sample; however, the length of the microrods dramatically increases to ~ 8.5 μm . The bottom and top diameters are ~ 1.8 μm and ~ 0.7 μm , respectively. From XRD pattern in Fig. S2, the diffraction peaks observed for the (100), (002), (101), and (110) planes match the pattern of the hexagonal wurzite ZnO structure (JCPDS card 36-1451). By further increasing the growth time to 12 h (Fig. 1(c)), the length of the microrods reaches ~ 8.8 μm . Notably, the growth dominantly occurred between 3 h and 6 h, while the length of the microrods did not show significant change when the time increased from 6 h to 12 h. The bottom and top diameters are ~ 1.2 μm and ~ 1.1 μm , respectively. It is worthy to note that the bottom diameter decreases, compared with that of the microrods observed in the 6 h sample, thus leading to the formation of cylindrically shaped microrods with equivalent top and bottom diameters. Fig. 1(d) and (e) shows high-magnification images of the areas marked with dotted squares at the top and bottom of the microrod in Fig. 1(c), respectively. The microrod clearly shows a hexagonal cross-section, as seen in Fig. 1(d). Even though, in the bottom area, the etching of the microrod, rather than the growth, prevalently occurred, the surface appears quite smooth, as shown in Fig. 1(e). By further increasing the time to 24 h (Fig. 1(f)), the morphology of the microrods did not exhibit significant changes, compared with that of the 12 h sample.

The pH value of the AZO solution was measured to explain the growth evolution of the microrods with time. Fig. 3 shows (a) the pH value and (b) a schematic illustration of the growth and etching processes of the microrod with increasing the time. As shown in Fig. 3(a), the pH value of the initial AZO solution is ~ 5.5 . During the initial 3 h (region I), the ZnO seed

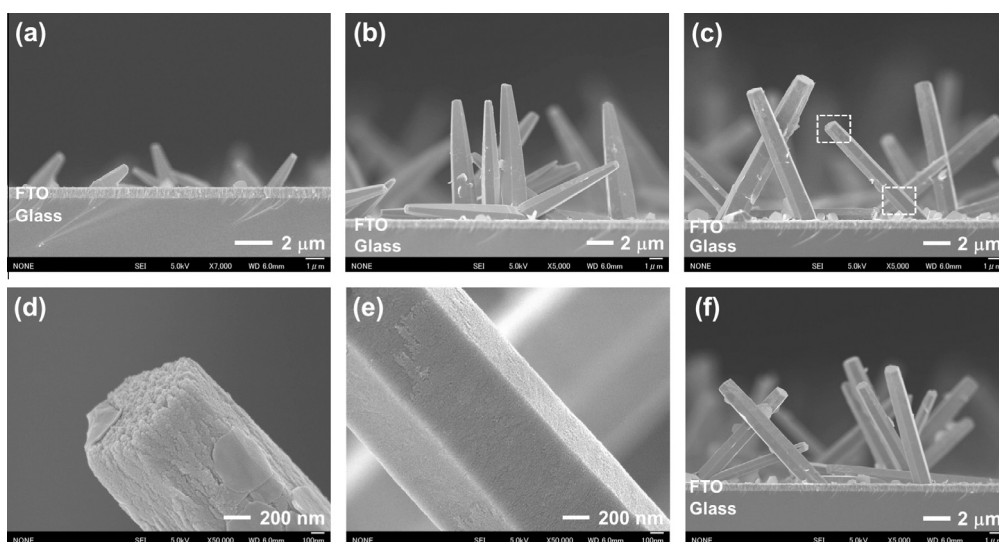


Fig. 1. Cross-sectional FESEM images of AZO microrods with growth time of (a) 3 h, (b) 6 h, (c–e) 12 h, and (f) 24 h; (d and e) high-magnification images of the areas marked with dotted squares at the top and bottom regions in (c).

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