



The effects of Ni–Na codoping on structure and properties of ZnO films by pulsed laser deposition

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ABSTRACT

The Ni-doped and Ni–Na codoped ZnO thin films have been prepared on quartz substrates by pulsed laser deposition. The effect of Na on the magnetic and electrical properties of Ni-doped ZnO has been investigated. The dopant Na⁺ was identified by XPS measurement. The Hall measurement showed weak p-type property in the Ni–Na codoped ZnO thin film. The room-temperature ferromagnetism in the Ni–Na codoped ZnO thin film was obviously enhanced due to the strengthening of the ferromagnetic exchange interaction by the p-type dopant Na⁺. The possible fabrication of ZnO-based p-type diluted magnetic semiconductors should be of interest for spintronic applications.

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1. Introduction

ZnO is a compound semiconductor with a wide direct band gap of 3.37 eV and a large exciton binding energy of 60 meV at room temperature, which is an attractive candidate for a variety of device applications [1,2]. Recently, ZnO-based diluted magnetic semiconductors (DMSS) doped with transition metal (TM) have been extensively investigated both in theory [3,4] and experiments [5,6] for their potential applications in spin electronics through the utilization of both electron charge and spin degree of freedom [7]. Initially Dietl et al. [4] predicted theoretically that room-temperature ferromagnetism can be achieved in p-type doped ZnO. Also, series of theoretical analysis indicated that the room-temperature ferromagnetism could strongly be promoted by p-type doping in ZnO [8]. Since the presence of additional carriers plays an important role in stabilizing or enhancing the magnetic couplings by the codoping ions, the mechanism of room-temperature ferromagnetism is still in debate. Sluiter et al. [9] and Gu et al. [10] experimentally showed that the Li or Na codoping in the Co-doped ZnO as p-type carriers amplifies the magnetic couplings. Wang et al. [11] studied N-codoped ZnO:Mn thin films and predicted that N codoping generally enhances the stability of a ferromagnetism state over an antiferromagnetic state. Wan [12] experimentally reported that p-type conduction is necessary for the observation of ferromagnetism in Mn–P codoped ZnO films at

room temperature. However, Sato and Katayama-Yoshida [13] predicted that room-temperature ferromagnetism in Co-doped ZnO could be due to n-type carriers by using the first-principles calculations. When compared with the Co or Mn doped ZnO thin films, relatively few studies [14,15] have been reported in the Ni-doped ZnO system since its preparation is particularly challenging due to the large driving force for phase segregation into NiO and ZnO [16]. In this paper, PLD was used to deposit Ni-doped ZnO films, so as to enhance Ni solid solubility in ZnO films without second phases. In particular, we hardly find any experimental report on the room-temperature ferromagnetism studies in Ni–Na codoped ZnO thin films. Theoretically, group-I impurities, such as Li and Na, have a relative shallower acceptor level in ZnO [17]. In previous research, our group has demonstrated that Na could be an effective dopant for realizing p-type conductivity in ZnO [18]. As Na locates in group-I and without its own 3d electrons to interfere with magnetic ordering, we can study the influence of the carriers or Na⁺ ions on the room-temperature ferromagnetism. Hence, in this work, we have prepared the p-type Ni–Na codoped ZnO thin film by PLD and made effort to carry out electrical and magnetic studies to understand the origin of ferromagnetism, if any, in ZnO.

2. Experimental details

Ni-doped, Ni–Na codoped ZnO thin films (ZnNiO, Zn(Ni,Na)O) were deposited on quartz substrates by pulsed laser deposition (PLD). The ceramic targets were prepared by mixing ZnO (99.99%), Ni (99.99%) and Na₂CO₃ (99.99%) powders. The Ni content is 3 at.% in the ZnNiO target, and the Ni and Na content are 3 at.% and 1 at.% in the Zn(Ni,Na)O target, respectively. The working pressure in the chamber was 10 Pa with O₂ as the ambient gas. A KrF excimer laser (Compex102, 248 nm,

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25 ns) was used as the ablation source. The substrates were held at 500 °C during the film deposition.

The crystallographic structure of the samples was investigated by the Bede D1 X-ray diffraction (XRD) system with Cu K α radiation ($\lambda = 0.15406$ nm). The chemical states of the elements present in the samples and the element contents were identified by the X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS). The electrical properties were measured by using a four-point probe van der Pauw configuration (HL5500PC) at room temperature. Ni K-edge X-ray absorption near-edge structure (XANES) was used to determine the valence state and local geometry of the Ni dopant in the ZnO lattice. The magnetic properties were measured by a superconducting quantum interference device (SQUID) magnetometer.

3. Results and discussion

Fig. 1 shows the XRD pattern of Zn(Ni,Na)O thin film and that of ZnNiO film for comparison. Only (002) peaks around 34° were observed in both samples, demonstrating that a high *c*-axis preferential orientation and single-phase wurtzite of the deposited films. There were no other phases such as nickel oxide or metal nickel up to the instrument's detection limit. It is also noted that the intensity of the (002) peak in the Zn(Ni,Na)O film reduces, indicating degraded crystallinity caused by Na doping. The inset of Fig. 1 shows the particular position of peaks. Theoretically, since the ion radius of Ni²⁺ (0.72 Å) is close to and smaller than that of Zn²⁺ (0.74 Å), with the assumption that all the dopant Ni would substitute for Zn, the (002) peak of ZnNiO film should move to larger angle slightly or stay at the same angle when compared to that of a pure ZnO film ($2\theta = 34.43^\circ$) obtained at the same condition. From the inset of Fig. 1, we see that our experimental results are in accord with the theory, confirming the doping behavior of Ni. We can also find that the peak of the Zn(Ni,Na)O film shift to lower angle when compared to that of the ZnNiO film. Noting that the ion radius of Na⁺ is 1.02 Å, which is larger than that of Zn²⁺ (0.74 Å); substituting Na for Zn will induce the expansion of the ZnO lattice and cause the lower angle shifting of the (002) peak [18]. The grain size is calculated by Scherrer expressions: $D = 0.89\lambda/\beta \cos \theta$, where D denotes the diameter along *c*-axis, λ is the wavelength of X-ray ($\lambda = 0.15406$ nm), β is the full width at half maximum (FWHM) and θ is the half diffraction angle. By calculation we get the results that the ZnNiO and Zn(Ni,Na)O films have the grain size of 31.56 nm and 31.77 nm, respectively. The presence of grain boundaries and grain boundary segregation increases the overall solubility of dopants without appearance of a second phase [19,20].

The chemical states of the elements present are discussed according to the XPS measurements. The substitution of Ni ions was confirmed by Ni 2p XPS spectrum shown in Fig. 2(b). The Ni 2p_{3/2} peaks occur at 855.87 eV and 855.64 eV, while Ni 2p_{1/2} peaks locate at 873.48 eV and 873.21 eV, respectively for the ZnNiO and

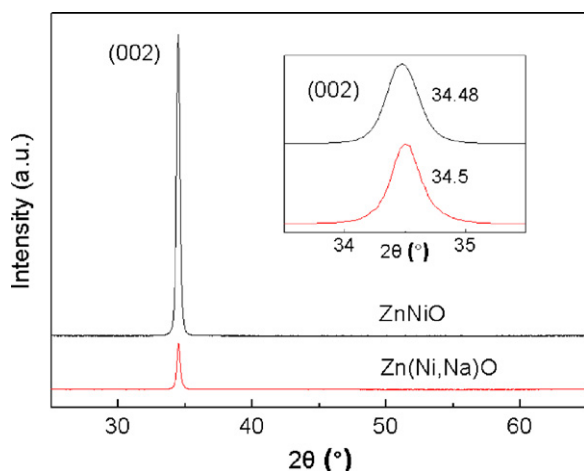


Fig. 1. XRD patterns of ZnNiO and Zn(Ni,Na)O films.

Zn(Ni,Na)O films. The Ni 2p_{3/2} peak position was close to the value of NiO, while quite different from that of Ni and Ni₂O₃, indicating Ni²⁺ in the ZnNiO and Zn(Ni,Na)O films [21,22]. We did not find any double peak structures in the 2p_{3/2} peak of our samples, suggesting the absence of NiO [23]. Besides, the energy difference between the Ni 2p_{3/2} and 2p_{1/2} peaks is about 17.6 eV, which is strikingly different from that of NiO (18.4 eV) [24]. The above results strongly suggest that Ni atoms were successfully incorporated into ZnO without forming any other phases. We employed Ni K-edge XANES to confirm the valence state and local geometry of the Ni dopant further.

In order to confirm the environment of Ni and Na, the Zn 2p and O 1s core level spectra were given in Fig. 2(a) and 2(c), respectively. It is noted that the Zn 2p_{3/2} peak of the Zn(Ni,Na)O film moved to lower energy compared to that of the ZnNiO film. Since the same phenomenon was found in the O 1s peaks, it was not accidental. We believe that the dopant Na substituted for the Zn site of the lattice forming Na⁺–O^{2–}–Zn²⁺ and the binding energy of the Zn 2p and O 1s decrease owing to the lower electronegativity of Na. The absorption peaks of O 1s can be divided into two nearly Gaussian peaks, which centered at 530.3 eV and 531.6 eV for the ZnNiO film and centered at 530.13 eV and 531.17 eV for the Zn(Ni,Na)O film. According to the data on the spectra of other related studies, the peaks on the low binding energy side at 530.3 eV and 530.13 eV could be attributed to O^{2–} ions on the wurtzite structure of the hexagonal Zn²⁺ ion array, surrounded by Zn (or substitution Ni and Na) atoms [25,26]. While the high binding-energy peaks at 531.6 eV and 531.17 eV were associated with O^{2–} ions that were in oxygen-deficient regions within the matrix of ZnO [27]. Fig. 2(d) shows the Na 1s peak centered at 1071.13 eV, which could attributed to Na⁺ according to the handbook of the X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy.

We employed Ni K-edge XANES spectra in Fig. 3 to confirm the valence state and local geometry of the Ni dopant further. In the Ni K-edge XANES spectrum, the feature Ni metal observed at 8333 eV (approximately) is associated with Ni⁰ and can be used to determine the presence of Ni metal. Therefore, it is clear that the plateau near threshold (E_0) associated with Ni⁰ is absent in spectra for ZnNiO and Zn(Ni,Na)O as well as in the spectrum of NiO. Thus there is no detectable Ni⁰ in the ZnNiO and Zn(Ni,Na)O films. Similarly, the obvious difference between the spectra of NiO and ZnNiO (or Zn(Ni,Na)O) indicates that Ni substituted for the Zn site of the lattice instead of the formation of NiO. The XANES spectra of Ni in the ZnNiO and Zn(Ni,Na)O thin films show similar features, referred to, as A (the pre-edge), B (the main edge), C (a multiple scattering resonance). These observed peaks are exactly the replication of the calculated spectrum of Zn_{0.97}Ni_{0.03}O film by using ab initio self-consistent FEFF 8.2 code on Ni K edge referred to Ref. [28]. It also can be found that the dopant Na could not change the Ni state in the ZnNiO film.

Fig. 4 shows the magnetization hysteresis loops of the ZnNiO and Zn(Ni,Na)O films at room temperature. The magnetic field was applied parallel to the film plane, and the background hysteresis loops were subtracted. Both S-shaped magnetization hysteresis loops indicate room-temperature ferromagnetism. The coercivity (H_c) of the ZnNiO film was around 15 Oe at room temperature, and the saturation magnetization (M_s) was ~ 0.12 emu/g ($\sim 0.06 \mu_B/\text{at.}$). When Na was doped into ZnNiO film, the coercivity increased remarkably to 100 Oe with the saturation magnetization of 0.16 emu/g ($\sim 0.08 \mu_B/\text{at.}$) in the Zn(Ni,Na)O film.

The ferromagnetic behavior might be influenced by the grain boundaries [29,30] and texture [31]. However, this factor could not explain the difference between the two samples as both are the same grain sizes and texture. The unambiguous enhancement of the room-temperature ferromagnetism in the Zn(Ni,Na)O film can only be attributed to Na ion rather than any other Ni

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