

## The Effect of Partial Pressure of Oxygen on Self-Diffusion of Si in SiO<sub>2</sub>

Shigeto FUKATSU, Tomonori TAKAHASHI, Kohei M. ITOH\*, Masashi UEMATSU<sup>1</sup>,  
Akira FUJIWARA<sup>1</sup>, Hiroyuki KAGESHIMA<sup>1</sup>, Yasuo TAKAHASHI<sup>1</sup> and Kenji SHIRAIISHI<sup>2</sup>

Department of Applied Physics and Physico-Informatics and CREST-JST, Keio University, 3-14-1 Hiyoshi, Kohoku-ku, Yokohama 223-8522, Japan

<sup>1</sup>NTT Basic Research Laboratories, NTT Corporation, 3-1 Wakamiya, Morinosato, Atsugi 243-0198, Japan

<sup>2</sup>Institute of Physics, University of Tsukuba, 1-1-1 Tennodai, Tsukuba 305-8577, Japan

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The self-diffusion coefficient of Si in thermal oxides (SiO<sub>2</sub>) formed on semiconductor silicon wafers has been determined with isotope heterostructures, <sup>nat</sup>SiO<sub>2</sub>/<sup>28</sup>SiO<sub>2</sub>, as a function of the partial pressure of oxygen mixed into argon annealing ambient. The <sup>nat</sup>SiO<sub>2</sub> layers contain 3.1% of <sup>30</sup>Si stable isotopes while the <sup>28</sup>SiO<sub>2</sub> layers are depleted of <sup>30</sup>Si stable isotopes down to 0.003%, and the diffusion depth profiles of <sup>30</sup>Si isotopes from the <sup>nat</sup>SiO<sub>2</sub> to <sup>28</sup>SiO<sub>2</sub> layers after thermal annealing have been determined by secondary ion mass spectrometry (SIMS). The Si self-diffusivity is found not to depend on the partial pressure of oxygen within our experimental error of about ±33%. [DOI: 10.1143/JJAP.42.L1492]

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Si self-diffusion in SiO<sub>2</sub> has been investigated extensively in the past decades,<sup>1–8)</sup> because SiO<sub>2</sub> formed thermally on semiconductor Si wafers has been the most important gate material in the field of microelectronics. However, even among the most recent and reliable diffusion experiments using isotope heterostructures, the reported values of diffusivity are different by a couple orders of magnitude.<sup>6,7)</sup> The present group reported on the silicon self-diffusivity  $D_{\text{Si}}^{\text{SD}} = 0.8 \exp(-5.2 \text{ eV}/kT) \text{ cm}^2 \cdot \text{s}^{-16}$ ) in contrast to Mathiot *et al.*'s values  $33.2 \exp(-5.34 \text{ eV}/kT) \text{ cm}^2 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$ .<sup>7)</sup> More recently, we have shown very convincingly that  $D_{\text{Si}}^{\text{SD}}$  in thermally grown SiO<sub>2</sub> depends strongly on the distance between the Si diffusers and Si/SiO<sub>2</sub> interface.<sup>8)</sup> When such distance dependence is taken into account, Mathiot *et al.*'s  $D_{\text{Si}}^{\text{SD}}$  (ref. 7) agrees very well with ours (ref. 6).<sup>8)</sup> However, one question raised by Mathiot *et al.* remains. They suggested that our values of  $D_{\text{Si}}^{\text{SD}} = 0.8 \exp(-5.2 \text{ eV}/kT)$  obtained in argon with 1% oxygen annealing atmosphere represented  $D_{\text{Si}}^{\text{SD}}$  in an “oxidation ambient” and, therefore, were different from their  $D_{\text{Si}}^{\text{SD}}$  obtained in the Si<sub>3</sub>N<sub>4</sub> capped, “inert condition.” While our recent experiment has shown  $D_{\text{Si}}^{\text{SD}} = 0.8 \exp(-5.2 \text{ eV}/kT)$  even for the Si<sub>3</sub>N<sub>4</sub> capped SiO<sub>2</sub> film with the Si diffusers far enough from the Si/SiO<sub>2</sub> interface (Mathiot *et al.*'s  $D_{\text{Si}}^{\text{SD}}$  obtained with thin SiO<sub>2</sub> was affected by the SiO defects arriving from the Si/SiO<sub>2</sub>, i.e., it represented the non-intrinsic case), it is still important to determine whether Si self-diffusivity in SiO<sub>2</sub> depends on the oxygen partial pressure in the annealing ambient of argon gas.

Samples employed in this study were prepared as follows. Isotopically enriched <sup>28</sup>Si single crystal epi-layers of 0.8 μm thickness grown by chemical vapor deposition (CVD) on 4-inch highly resistive Si wafers were provided by Isonics Corp., Colorado, USA. The isotope composition of the <sup>28</sup>Si epi-layer measured by secondary ion mass spectrometry (SIMS) was <sup>28</sup>Si (99.924%), <sup>29</sup>Si (0.073%), and <sup>30</sup>Si (0.003%). The <sup>28</sup>Si surface of the epi-layer was thermally oxidized in dry O<sub>2</sub> at 1100°C for 20 hours to form 650 nm thick <sup>28</sup>SiO<sub>2</sub>. Subsequently, about 50 nm thick <sup>nat</sup>SiO<sub>2</sub> was deposited on top of the <sup>28</sup>SiO<sub>2</sub> film by low-pressure chemical vapor deposition (LPCVD) using tetraethoxysilane (TEOS) at 700°C. The isotopic composition of naturally available

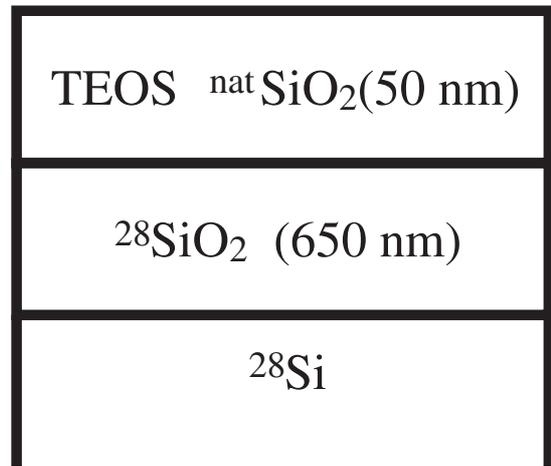


Fig. 1. Schematic of the samples employed in this study.

silicon (<sup>nat</sup>Si) is <sup>28</sup>Si (92.2%), <sup>29</sup>Si(4.7%), and <sup>30</sup>Si(3.1%). The completed structures are shown in Fig. 1. These structures were cut into 5×5 mm<sup>2</sup> samples. An each piece was diffusion annealed in a resistively heated furnace. Semiconductors processing grade quartz tubes and gas sources (argon and oxygen premixed in the 49 liter gas cylinders) were employed for maintaining the sample as clean as possible. Diffusion annealings were conducted under flowing argon with 1, 10, 20, 50, and 100% oxygen fractions at temperatures 1200 and 1250°C. At least 1% of oxygen mixed into argon was necessary in order to prevent SiO<sub>2</sub> from decomposition, which tended to occur at higher temperatures and for lower oxygen partial pressures. This 1% was just enough to slowly oxidize the structure to counterbalance the decomposition, i.e., the total thickness of the oxide (<sup>nat</sup>SiO<sub>2</sub> and <sup>28</sup>SiO<sub>2</sub>) changed very little (<10%) before and after the diffusion annealing. SIMS using O<sub>2</sub><sup>+</sup> for a primary ion beam with the acceleration energy 5 keV was used to determine the depth profile of <sup>30</sup>Si. An electron beam was irradiated during the measurement in order to prevent samples from charging up.

Figure 2 shows one of the <sup>30</sup>Si profiles of the heterostructures before and after annealing in 1–100% oxygen ambient. The SIMS profile of the as-grown, abrupt <sup>nat</sup>SiO<sub>2</sub>/<sup>28</sup>SiO<sub>2</sub> interface is broaden, though it should have ideally

\*E-mail address: kitoh@appi.keio.ac.jp

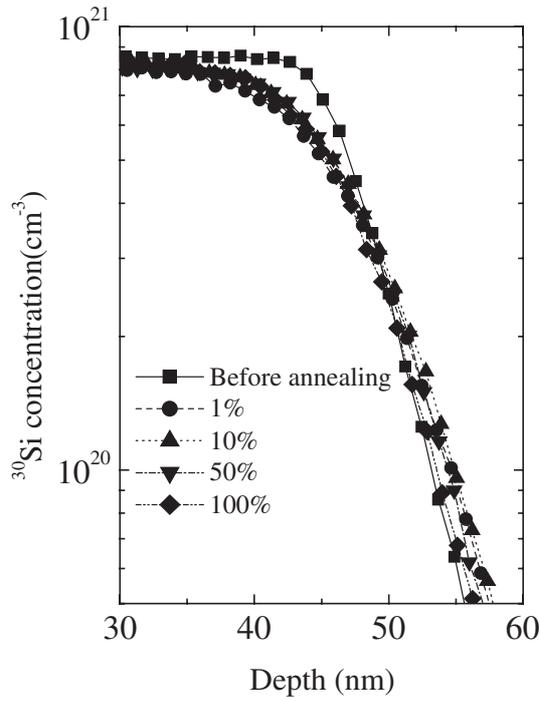


Fig. 2. Comparison of the diffusion profiles of  $^{30}\text{Si}$  from the  $^{\text{nat}}\text{SiO}_2$  to  $^{28}\text{SiO}_2$  layers before and after 48 h diffusion annealings at  $1200^\circ\text{C}$  with oxygen fractions 1, 10, 50, and 100% in the argon ambient.

exhibited a step profile. Unavoidable atomic mixing due to collisional cascades and the surface roughening due to statistical sputter emission processes that are inherent of the SIMS measurements cause this so-called ‘‘SIMS broadening.’’ In the first step of our analysis, the effect of SIMS broadening has been subtracted based on the method developed by Hoffman.<sup>9)</sup> Then the diffusion profiles of  $^{30}\text{Si}$  are fitted by the following equation;

$$C(x) = C_{28} + \frac{C_{\text{nat}} - C_{28}}{2} \times \left[ \text{erf}\left(\frac{x+h}{2\sqrt{D_{\text{SD}}t}}\right) - \text{erf}\left(\frac{x-h}{2\sqrt{D_{\text{SD}}t}}\right) \right] \quad (1)$$

where  $x = 0$  is taken at the surface of samples.  $C_{\text{nat}}$  and  $C_{28}$  are the initial concentrations of  $^{30}\text{Si}$  in  $^{\text{nat}}\text{SiO}_2$  and  $^{28}\text{SiO}_2$ , respectively. The constant  $h$  is the thickness of the  $^{\text{nat}}\text{SiO}_2$  layer,  $D_{\text{SD}}$  is the Si self-diffusion coefficient, and  $t$  is the annealing time. The thickness of the  $^{28}\text{SiO}_2$  layer is regarded as infinite because no  $^{30}\text{Si}$  reaches the interface  $^{28}\text{SiO}_2/^{28}\text{Si}$  by the present annealing process. The only fitting parameter  $D_{\text{SD}}$  in eq. (1) is the silicon self-diffusion coefficient. The diffusion coefficients determined with the SIMS broadening corrections are 10–20% smaller than those obtained without the correction.

$D_{\text{SD}}$  for various oxygen concentrations in the ambient is shown in Fig. 3. Our earlier data<sup>6)</sup> that correspond to the values for 1% oxygen are also shown for the comparison.  $D_{\text{SD}}$  depends very little on the oxygen concentration in the ambient and agrees nicely with our earlier data with 1% oxygen. The error in the broadening correction procedure is estimated to be about  $\pm 2\%$ . This error is much smaller than about  $\pm 30\%$  error arising from the SIMS mass separation and depth measurements. Also fitting with eq. (1) leads to an error of a couple percent. By adding these three major

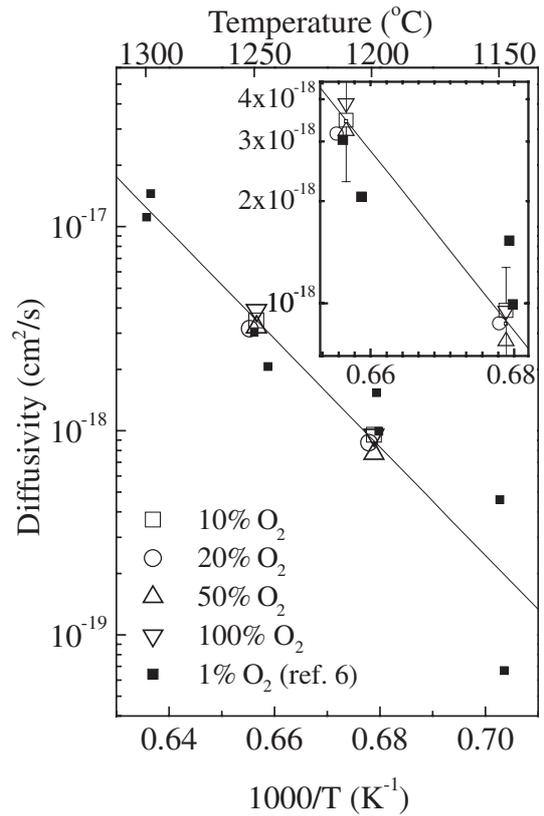


Fig. 3. Temperature dependence of the Si self-diffusion coefficient in  $\text{SiO}_2$  with the oxygen fraction 1, 10, 20, 50, and 100% in the argon atmosphere. Solid line corresponds to the values for 1% oxygen in argon reported in our earlier study.<sup>6)</sup> An inset shows the zoom-up of the temperature range  $1200\text{--}1250^\circ\text{C}$ .

sources of errors, we arrive at our total error bar of about  $\pm 33\%$ . It is clear in Fig. 3 that  $D_{\text{SD}}$  does not depend on the oxygen concentration within our experimental error of  $\pm 33\%$ .

Let us discuss why the oxygen partial pressure in the annealing ambient does not influence the Si self-diffusion in  $\text{SiO}_2$  significantly. The diffusion coefficient of oxygen in  $\text{SiO}_2$  is at least four orders of magnitude larger than the self-diffusion coefficient of Si for the temperatures 1200 and  $1250^\circ\text{C}$ .<sup>10,11)</sup> Therefore, a fraction of oxygen atoms in the annealing ambient enters  $\text{SiO}_2$  from the front surface and diffuse across the thickness of the  $\text{SiO}_2$  film to reach the Si/ $\text{SiO}_2$  interface and forms additional  $\text{SiO}_2$  bonds by reacting with the Si substrate.<sup>12)</sup> There are some Si species going up from the Si/ $\text{SiO}_2$  interface to  $\text{SiO}_2$  as was confirmed in ref. 8. However,  $^{30}\text{Si}$  diffusers (the  $^{\text{nat}}\text{SiO}_2/^{28}\text{SiO}_2$  interface) in our experiment situate so far away (650 nm) from the Si/ $\text{SiO}_2$  interface that practically no Si species emitted from the Si/ $\text{SiO}_2$  interface reaches the region where  $^{30}\text{Si}$  diffusion is taking place. Consequently, we need to focus on the effect of oxygen species going through in the direction from the top surface to the Si/ $\text{SiO}_2$  interface on the diffusion of  $^{30}\text{Si}$ . Theory predicts that the majority of oxygen in  $\text{SiO}_2$  diffuses in the form of  $\text{O}_2$  molecules and the minority in the form of atomic oxygen.<sup>13–16)</sup> None of these theories of oxygen diffusion in  $\text{SiO}_2$  predicts strong interaction of diffusing oxygen with silicon atoms forming the  $\text{SiO}_2$  network. The average flux of oxygen in  $\text{SiO}_2$  during our diffusion

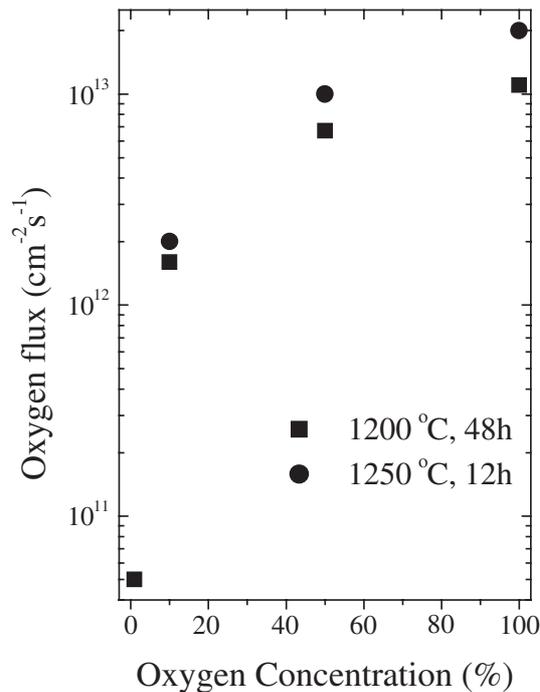


Fig. 4. Average oxygen flux in SiO<sub>2</sub> as a function of the oxygen concentration in the annealing ambient.

annealings can be estimated simply from the total annealing time and the change of the oxide thickness before and after the annealing. The thickness change was measured accurately using an optical interferometer. As shown in Fig. 4, the average flux of oxygen going through the SiO<sub>2</sub> changes by an order of magnitude between 1 and 100% oxygen fractions in Ar. However, the oxygen flux as large as 10<sup>13</sup> cm<sup>-2</sup>·s<sup>-1</sup> for 100% oxygen annealing was not significant enough to change  $D_{SD}$  by the amount larger than our experimental error of 33%. This observation is in accordance with the above-mentioned theories which predict little interaction between the diffusing oxygen and silicon forming the network. It should be also pointed out that our recent experiment<sup>8)</sup> has indicated that SiO molecules diffuse much faster than substitutional Si atoms in SiO<sub>2</sub>, because SiO molecules diffuse predominantly through interstitial sites with frequent atomic exchange interactions with the substitutional Si atoms as implied by the recent first-principle calculation of boron diffusion in SiO<sub>2</sub>.<sup>17)</sup> Our numerical

simulation of Si self-diffusion via SiO kick-out mechanism estimates that it requires formation of at least 10<sup>19</sup> cm<sup>-3</sup> SiO molecules in order to observe the enhancement of the Si self-diffusion larger than our experimental error of 33%. Because of the small interaction between diffusing oxygen and silicon forming the network, such a number of SiO was not formed to enhance the Si self-diffusion in the present experiment.

In summary, the effect of oxygen annealing ambient on Si self-diffusion in SiO<sub>2</sub> has been investigated. The Si self-diffusivity in SiO<sub>2</sub> does not depend on the partial pressure of oxygen within our experimental error of ±33%. Such observation is consistent with the picture that diffusing oxygen in SiO<sub>2</sub> interact little with substitutional Si atoms forming the oxide network.

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