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Spectroscopic Studies on Electroless Deposition of Copper on a Hydrogen-Terminated Si(111) Surface in Fluoride Solutions

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Spectroscopic Studies on Electroless Deposition of Copper on a Hydrogen-Terminated Si(111) Surface in Fluoride Solutions

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The cementation or electroless deposition of copper on a hydrogen-terminated (H)-Si(111) surface in concentrated ammonium fluoride (NH₄F) and dilute hydrofluoric acid (HF) solutions containing copper ion (Cu²⁺) was investigated using attenuated total reflectance-Fourier transform infrared (ATR-FTIR) spectroscopy and X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS). When the H-Si(111) sample was immersed in a 40% NH₄F solution containing 10 μM Cu²⁺, the ATR-FTIR showed a decrease in the monohydride (SiH), and XPS revealed the copper deposition and Si oxide formation as well as the existence of a small amount of fluorinated Si species on the H-Si(111) surface. After the surface was rinsed with ultrapure water, the amounts of SiH and Si oxide decreased and increased, respectively, while the fluorinated Si species disappeared. Copper and Si oxide were observed on the Si surface even after being etched in a Cu²⁺-free NH₄F solution, indicating that the Si oxide grew underneath the copper layer. When the H-Si(111) sample was immersed in a 0.5% HF solution containing 10 μM Cu²⁺, the amounts of SiH decreased while those of the dihydride and trihydride significantly increased, reflecting the increase in the densities of the steps and kinks on the Si(111) surface. The amount of copper deposited on the H-Si(111) surface in the dilute HF solution containing Cu²⁺ was much less than that in the NH₄F solution containing the same amount of Cu²⁺. The oxide was not observed on the H-Si(111) surface after being immersed in the dilute HF solution containing 10 μM Cu²⁺.

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It is well known that a trace amount of metallic impurities on an Si wafer surface can drastically degrade the electronic performance of semiconductor devices.¹³ Many studies on Cu impurity have been carried out because Cu is easily deposited on an Si surface in hydrofluoric acid (HF)-based etching solutions.¹² Therefore, Cu is now attracting much attention because of its possible application as a conductor, 50-500 nm wide Cu wires were preferentially formed at the intersections of the step edges at a potential of ~0.70 V vs. normal hydrogen electrode (NHE).¹⁷ Homma et al. investigated the morphology of an n-type Cu deposition on an H-Si(111) surface during the initial nucleation process of Cu deposition in an NH₄F solution containing Cu²⁺ by ex situ scanning tunneling microscopy (STM) and found that Cu selectively nucleated along the step edges.¹⁸ However, the AFM and STM measurements provide only morphological information about the Si surface. Information on the chemical species on the Si surface during the copper deposition, which is essential to a quantitative understanding of the mechanism of copper deposition on the Si surface, is not now available.

In this study, attenuated total reflectance-Fourier transform infrared (ATR-FTIR) spectroscopy and X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) were employed to investigate the electroless Cu deposition processes on a well-defined H-Si(111) surface in two typical etching solutions, 40% NH₄F solution and 0.5% HF solution containing Cu²⁺, to obtain detailed information about the chemical nature of the Si surface.

Experimental

The parallelogram ATR prisms (26 × 20 × 0.38 mm, 45° bevel angle) were prepared from n-type Si(111) wafers (Shin-Etsu Semiconductor, 50-500 μm), which were polished on both sides for the ATR-FTIR measurements in a multiple internal reflection geometry. The internal reflection number within the ATR prism was 70. The parallelbeam XPS measurements were obtained from the same Si wafer with a dimension of ca. 10 × 10 mm. The 40% NH₄F solution (EL grade) was purchased from Merck Chemicals. All the other chemicals were Suprapure reagents from Wako Pure Chemicals and were used without further purification. The solutions and Milli-Q water used for rinsing treatment were purified by a Milli-Q water system.

An H-Si(111) surface was obtained by etching the Si sample in 40% NH₄F solution for 5 min.¹⁶ The electroless deposition of copper was carried out by immersing the H-Si(111) sample in a 40% NH₄F solution or a 0.5% HF solution containing 10 μM CuSO₄ for various times. After the sample was dried by blowing purified nitrogen, the ex situ ATR-FTIR and XPS measurements were performed.

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A detailed description of the ATR-FTIR system has been given elsewhere.10 Immediately after the preparation process, the sample was mounted on an ATR accessory, and the ATR-FTIR spectra were recorded in a dried air environment in p-polarization with respect to the spectrum of an oxidized Si(111) surface. All spectra were obtained by integrating 128 interferograms with a resolution of 0.5 cm⁻¹.

The XPS measurements were performed with a Rigaku XPS-7000 spectrometer using an AlKα target (1486.6 eV) with an X-ray excitation of 300 W. The binding energies shown in this study were corrected by the C1s peak at 284.8 eV. The electrical contact between the Si sample and XPS sample stage was secured using an In-Ga alloy.

Results and Discussion

Electroless deposition of copper in 40% NH₄F solution.—Figure 1 shows the ex situ ATR-FTIR spectra in the region of 2300-1900 cm⁻¹ of the H-Si(111) surface measured immediately after immersion in a 40% NH₄F solution (a) without and (b) with 10 μM Cu²⁺ for (i) 0 min, (ii) 5 min, (iii) 20 min, and (iv) rinsed by Milli-Q water to investigate the surface adsorbed species after treatment (iii).

A very sharp peak was observed at 2084 cm⁻¹ on the freshly prepared H-Si(111) surface (i of Fig. 1a). This peak can be assigned to the stretching vibration of the monohydride (SiH). The very narrow bandwidth [full width at half-maximum (fwhm) ca. 1 cm⁻¹] reflects the fact that an atomically flat Si(111) surface terminated by hydrogen with an extremely homogeneous state was obtained.15,16 Almost no change was observed in the spectra even after a 20 min immersion in the Cu²⁺-free 40% NH₄F solution (iii of Fig. 1a). The intensity of the SiH peak of the H-Si(111) sample immersed in the Cu²⁺-free NH₄F solution was not significantly affected by the Milli-Q water rinse (iv of Fig. 1a).

However, the immersion in the NH₄F solution containing Cu²⁺ caused a significant change in the spectra, as shown in Fig. 1b. The immersion time dependence of the intensities of the SiH band in the NH₄F solutions without and with Cu²⁺ are summarized in Fig. 2. In the NH₄F solution containing Cu²⁺, the intensity of the SiH stretching vibration band decreased with immersion time and became 63% of its original value after the 20 min immersion, although no change was observed in the peak position and peak width of the SiH band. The intensity of the SiH peak of the H-Si(111) sample immersed in the NH₄F solution containing Cu²⁺ decreased to ca. 70% of its original intensity after the Milli-Q water rinse (iv of Fig. 1b).

No peaks attributed to the dihydride (SiH₂, ~2100 cm⁻¹) and trihydride (SiH₃, ~2130 cm⁻¹) were observed on the Si(111) surface (Fig. 1a and b), suggesting no increase in the step and kink densities, i.e., no roughening, after a 20 min immersion in the NH₄F solution even with Cu²⁺. This is in contrast to the results reported for the Si(100) surface where a significant roughness increase was observed after the immersion in a buffered HF solution containing Cu²⁺.12 The different behaviors observed on the Si(111) and Si(100) surfaces should be caused by the difference in the etching rate between the Si(111) and Si(100) surfaces in the NH₄F solution, in which the etching rate for the {111} orientation was much lower than that for the {100} orientation.19

At the same time, two new small broad peaks appeared at 2260 and 2000 cm⁻¹ after the immersion in the NH₄F solution containing Cu²⁺. The intensities of these two bands slightly increased with immersion time (ii and iii of Fig. 1b). These two peaks completely disappeared after the Si(111) surface was rinsed with Milli-Q water (iv of Fig. 1b).

The peak at 2000 cm⁻¹ can be assigned to the combination mode (νₛ + νₛ) of the NH₄²⁺ deformation (νₛ, 1484 cm⁻¹) and NH₄⁺ torsional oscillation (νₜ, 523 cm⁻¹) of NH₄F,20 which remained on the Si surface after the etching in NH₄F solution containing Cu²⁺. The band at 2260 cm⁻¹ cannot be assigned to the surface Si-O species such as O₃SiH, O₂SiH₃, or SiH(OH)₂,21,22 since these species should remain on the surface after the rinsing treatment. Niwano et al. observed a broad band around 2230 cm⁻¹ on both the Si(100) and Si(111) surfaces after immersion in a dilute HF solution, in situ ATR-FTIR measurement. They found that this peak disappeared after immersion in flowing ultrapure water. Following their arguments, we assign the peak at 2260 cm⁻¹ observed in the present study to the fluorinated Si hydride species such as SiH(SiF₂)
and SiH$_2$(SiF)$_2$. NH$_4$F and the fluorinated Si hydride species adsorbed on the Si(111) surface after etching in the NH$_4$F solution containing Cu$^{2+}$ were not observed after immersion in the Cu$^{2+}$-free NH$_4$F solution. Thus, the existence of these species should be related to the changes in the surface properties of the H-Si(111) surface after etching in the NH$_4$F solution containing Cu$^{2+}$. The Si surface became slightly hydrophilic after the immersion in the NH$_4$F solution containing Cu$^{2+}$. The NH$_4$F species seems to be easier to adsorb on the hydrophilic surface sites. However, it is difficult to observe Si-O stretching of Si oxide by an ATR-FTIR measurement because IR is strongly absorbed by Si bulk in the frequency region lower than 1250 cm$^{-1}$. Further discussions on formation of the fluorinated Si species and surface oxide are given later in conjunction with the XPS measurement results.

Figure 3 shows the XPS spectra in the region of (a) Si 2p and (b) Cu 2p$_{3/2}$ for the sample that was (i) freshly prepared, (ii) immersed for 5 min in the NH$_4$F solution containing Cu$^{2+}$, and (iii) rinsed by Milli-Q water after treatment (ii). The XPS spectra of the freshly prepared sample showed only one peak at 99.4 eV, which is attributed to the elemental Si (ii of Fig. 3a) and no peak in the Cu 2p$_{3/2}$ region (i of Fig. 3b) as expected, confirming that the H-Si(111) surface was free from oxide and the contamination of copper after the etching process.

The chemical composition of the Si surface drastically changed after the H-Si(111) sample was immersed in the NH$_4$F solution containing Cu$^{2+}$ (ii of Fig. 3a). In addition to the elemental Si peak at 99.4 eV, a small broad peak was observed at 103.7 eV in the Si 2p region (ii of Fig. 3a), suggesting that the H-Si(111) surface was partly oxidized. The chemical shift of this peak relative to the elemental Si was approximately 4.3 eV, which is higher than that corresponding to Si dioxide (≈3.8 eV) because fluorine, which has the highest electronegativity, can induce a larger chemical shift in Si. This peak may be related to the partly fluorinated Si species on the Si(111) surface. The oxidized Si species corresponds to the peak at 2260 cm$^{-1}$ in the ATR-FTIR spectra after immersion in the NH$_4$F solution containing Cu$^{2+}$, which was attributed to the fluorinated Si hydride (hydroxide) species above (ii and iii of Fig. 1b).

A strong peak was observed in the Cu 2p$_{3/2}$ region at 932.8 eV (ii of Fig. 3b), which can be attributed to Cu species formed on the Si surface after immersion in the NH$_4$F solution containing Cu$^{2+}$. After the ionization cross section correction, the ratio of oxidized Si species and deposited Cu on the Si(111) surface after the treatment was estimated to be approximately 18:1.

Oxide formation and copper deposition seemed to simultaneously take place on the H-Si(111) surface during immersion in the
NH4F solution containing Cu2+. The oxide formation and copper deposition on the H-Si(111) surface should correspond to the decrease in the SiH band in the ATR-FTIR spectra after immersion in the NH4F solution containing Cu2+, as described above (Fig. 1b).

Rinsing the sample with Milli-Q water resulted in a shift of the Si 2p peak from 103.7 to 103.2 eV and an increase in the peak intensity by ca. 60% (iii of Fig. 3a). The peak at 103.2 eV can be attributed to SiO2 on the Si surface.25,26 These results imply that rinsing with Milli-Q water accelerates the surface oxide formation on the Cu-deposited Si wafer surface, as reported previously.25,26 At the same time, the partially fluorinated Si species formed during the immersion in the NH4F solution containing Cu2+ are converted to SiO2 by a Milli-Q water rinse.

No change was observed in the Cu 2p3/2 peak after the rinsing treatment (iii of Fig. 3b).

In summary, when the H-Si(111) sample was immered in an NH4F solution containing Cu2+, a decrease in the Si-H species and the formation of copper and Si oxide with a small amount of fluorinated Si species and NH4F were observed on the Si surface. The two adsorbed species can be removed from the Si surface by a Milli-Q water rinse.

Electroless deposition of copper in 0.5% HF solution.—Figure 4 shows the ex situ ATR-FTIR spectra in the region of 2300-1900 cm⁻¹ after the H-Si(111) sample was immersed in the 0.5% HF solution (a) without and (b) with 10 µM Cu2+ for (i) 0 min, (ii) 5 min, and (iii) 20 min.

After the 5 min immersion in the dilute HF solution without Cu2+, the intensity of the monohydride (SiH) band at 2084 cm⁻¹ became weaker, while a number of small broad components attributed to the dihydride (SiH2) and trihydride (SiH3) species were observed in the region between 2100 and 2150 cm⁻¹ (ii of Fig. 4a). The intensity of the SiH band decreased, while the intensities of the SiH2 and SiH3 bands increased with immersion time. The total intensity of the bands corresponding to these Si hydride species increased after immersion in dilute HF solution for 20 min (Fig. 4a and 5). The increases in the bands corresponding to SiH2 and SiH3 reflect the fact that the densities of the step and kink increased after immersion in the dilute HF solution. Such changes are not observed after immersion in the NH4F solution (Fig. 1) and should be caused by the isotropic etching of the Si surface in dilute HF solution.15

When the H-Si(111) sample was immersed in the dilute HF solution containing Cu2+, the broad peaks due to SiH2 and SiH3 were clearly observed after the 5 min immersion (Fig. 4b). These peaks were very broad, and the total intensity of the peaks due to these Si hydride species became about 2.5 times that of the Si hydride on the freshly prepared sample immersed in dilute HF without Cu2+ for 20 min (ii of Fig. 4b and Fig. 5). This result demonstrates that the etching in the dilute HF containing Cu2+ generates more surface defects on the Si(111) surface than that in dilute HF without Cu2+ and NH4F solution with or without Cu2+. The increases of surface roughness of the Si(100) surface after immersion in HF solutions containing Cu2+ have been reported by other groups.5,7

Figure 6 shows the XPS spectra of the H-Si(111) surface in the region of (a) Si 2p and Cu 2p3/2 for (i) the freshly prepared sample, (ii) after 5 min immersion in the 0.5% HF solution containing 10 µM Cu2+, and (iii) rinsed with Milli-Q water after (ii). The oxidized Si species with a higher chemical shift than that observed in NH4F solution containing Cu2+ was not observed, and only one peak at 99.4 eV, which is attributed to the elemental Si, was observed for all the cases (Fig. 6a). Only a very small peak was observed in the Cu 2p3/2 region (Fig. 6b) after the immersion in dilute HF solution containing Cu2+. The intensity of the Cu 2p3/2 peak was ca. one-tenth of that observed in NH4F solution with Cu2+, indicating that much less copper was deposited on the Si surface in dilute HF containing Cu2+ than that in NH4F solution containing Cu2+.

Discussion on the different behaviors of electroless copper deposition in 40% NH4F and 0.5% HF solutions containing Cu2+.—Two oxidation reactions on the Si surface can be considered under the present conditions.
The equilibrium potentials of Reaction 1 in 40% NH₄F (~pH 8) and 0.5% HF (~pH 2) are -1.38 and -1.03 V (vs. NHE), respectively, while that of Reaction 2 is independent of the pH and was reported as -1.20 V (vs. NHE). These potentials are much more negative than those of hydrogen evolution (~0.48 V in 40% NH₄F and ~0.12 V in 0.5% HF) and copper deposition (~0.19 V in both solutions when the concentration of Cu²⁺ is 10 μM).

Thus, thermodynamically it is expected that Si is oxidized and H⁺ and Cu²⁺ are reduced when the H-Si surface is immersed in these solutions. Since the equilibrium potential of the H⁺/H₂ couple in 40% NH₄F is more negative than that in 0.5% HF by 0.35 V, while the equilibrium potential of Cu²⁺/Cu couple is the same in both solutions (0.19 V), the current efficiency of the copper deposition on the Si surface is expected to be higher in the 40% NH₄F solution than that in the 0.5% HF solution for the same open-circuit potential. This should be one of the reasons why more copper deposition was observed in 40% NH₄F than in 0.5% HF containing Cu²⁺.

The dissolution rate of Si at the open-circuit potential seemed to significantly affect the behaviors of the copper deposition in both solutions. Allongue et al. reported that the etching rate of the H-Si(111) surface increased with the pH of the NH₄F solution, and the etching rate at pH 8 was ca. four times greater than that at pH 2.28 The etching rate of Si at the open-circuit potential increases with the increase in the pH, a higher deposition rate of copper is expected with the increasing pH, and therefore, more copper is expected to be deposited on the Si surface in 40% NH₄F than in 0.5% HF containing the same amount of Cu²⁺.

The ratio between the amounts of oxidized Si species and deposited Cu on the Si(111) surface in the NH₄F solution containing Cu²⁺ was approximately 18:1. This ratio is very large if one assumes that two Cu²⁺ ions are reduced when one Si atom is oxidized (4e⁻ reaction). Furthermore, the ratio should be even larger if one considers that the Si species are dis-
solved during the etching process (such as SiF$_6^{2-}$, Reaction 2). Thus, the fact that much less copper was deposited on the Si surface than the amount of oxidized/dissolved Si indicates that the hydrogen evolution reaction is the dominant cathodic reaction at open-circuit potential in the NH$_4$F solution. Li et al. reported that the current efficiency for the copper deposition on the Si(100) surface in a buffered HF solution containing 100 ppb Cu$^{2+}$ was less than 1%.$^{12}$ This is in qualitative agreement with the present results. The origin of the high current efficiency of the hydrogen evolution reaction is considered to be the catalytic enhancement of the hydrogen evolution reaction on the copper deposited on the Si surface, due to the lower overpotential of hydrogen evolution on copper than on Si.$^{10,12}$ Even when a small amount of copper is deposited on the Si surface, the reaction rate of the hydrogen evolution is significantly accelerated.

SiO$_2$ can be dissolved by HF and NH$_4$F solutions. Figures 3 and 5 show that oxide remained on the Si(111) surface after immersion in the NH$_4$F solution containing Cu$^{2+}$, while no oxide was formed after immersion in the dilute HF solution containing Cu$^{2+}$. After an additional 5 min etching in a Cu$^{2+}$-free NH$_4$F solution for the Cu-deposited Si(111) sample after the rinsing treatment (iv of Fig. 1b), and ATR-FTIR measurement showed that the intensity of the SiH increased to 80% of its original intensity, but no effect was observed with further immersion. This result demonstrates that part of the SiO$_2$ is stable on the Cu-deposited Si(111) surface and suggests that SiO$_2$ grows underneath the copper nuclei, which protects the oxide etching by NH$_4$F. A much lower etching rate of the SiO$_2$ film and higher etching rate of the Si(111) surface in the concentrated NH$_4$F solution than those in the dilute HF solution$^{28,30}$ should contribute to the higher stability of the SiO$_2$ film in the NH$_4$F solution containing Cu$^{2+}$.

**Conclusion**

When the H-Si(111) sample was immersed in the NH$_4$F solution containing 10 $\mu$M Cu$^{2+}$, a decrease in the SiH and deposition of the copper and the Si oxide with a small amount of fluorinated Si species were observed on the H-Si(111) surface. After the sample was rinsed with Milli-Q water, the amount of SiH and Si oxide decreased and increased, respectively, while the fluorinated Si species disappeared. Cu and Si oxide still existed on the Si surface even after etching the sample in Cu$^{2+}$-free NH$_4$F solution, indicating that part of the Si oxide grew underneath the Cu layer and was stable against NH$_4$F etching. A wide atomically flat Si(111) domain still existed on the Si surface after the copper deposition.

When the H-Si(111) sample was immersed in the 0.5% HF solution containing 10 $\mu$M Cu$^{2+}$, the amount of SiH species decreased, while those of the SiH$_2$ and SiH$_3$ species largely increased, reflecting that more steps and kinks were formed on the Si(111) surface. The amount of copper deposited was much less than in the NH$_4$F solution containing the same amount of Cu$^{2+}$, and no oxide was observed on the H-Si(111) surface. The origin for the difference is discussed by considering the competition between the copper deposition and hydrogen evolution, and the pH-dependent anodic etching rate of Si and Si oxide. The lower current efficiency of the copper deposition on the Si surface is attributed to the catalytic enhancement of the hydrogen evolution reaction on copper deposited on the Si surface.

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