# GeSn/SiGeSn Multiple-Quantum-Well Electroabsorption Modulator with Taper Coupler for Mid-Infrared Ge-on-Si platform

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***Abstract*— We propose taper coupler electroabsorption modulator (EAM) composed of GeSn/SiGeSn multiple-quantum-well (MQW) on Ge-on-Si platform for mid-infrared (2 μm) integrated optical active devices. The epitaxial design is performed by calculating the absorption spectra of GeSn/SiGeSn MQW using many-body theory to investigate the extinction characteristics of GeSn MQW waveguides. Two types of taper couplers are considered for connecting Ge-rib waveguide and GeSn-MQW-highmesa waveguide efficiently. One is an adiabatic taper coupler type EAM (ATC type EAM) and it is useful for thin Ge-buffer structure in terms of the extinction ratio. Another is a resonant taper coupler type EAM (RTC type EAM) and it is superior to ATC type EAM for thick Ge-buffer. It is confirmed that RTC type EAM can obtain the high extinction characteristics with low-loss and shorter device length (6.87 dB, -3.97 dB, and 215 μm) compared with conventional ATC type EAM for thick Ge-buffer (5.67 dB, -4.9 dB, and 340 μm).**

***Index Terms*— Mid-infrared photonics, GeSn quantum wells**

## I. Introduction

MID-INFRARED (mid-IR) band (1.8 ~ 5.0 μm) is now attracting considerable attention for sensing and optical communication applications [1]. In particular, 1.95 μm is the minimum attenuation wavelength of the hollow-core photonic bandgap fiber [2], which is expected as a new wavelength band to increase the transmission capacity. For the mid-IR devices, Ge-on-Si platform is suitable due to its wider low-loss spectrum spanning from 1.8 to 14 μm and its CMOS compatibility for mid-IR photonic integration [1], [3]. A variety of active and passive devices have been developed for this platform.

For active components, the active region (either bulk or quantum well) is grown on Ge-buffer layer. For example, strong electroabsorption (EA) based on quantum-confined Stark effect (QCSE) in the Ge/SiGe multiple quantum well (MQW) was observed in [4] around 1.45 μm. The wavelength range can be extended to mid-IR region by incorporating small amount of Sn to Ge [5]. Recently, GeSn lasers emitting 2-μm wavelength range light have been experimentally realized [6-10]. In future, the monolithic integration of various components will be required for increasing the functionality of the chip. Other important active component is an electroabrsorption (EA) device. EA devices can be used for various optical signal processing, such as switching, and one of the most important application is an EA modulator (EAM) due to its high-speed characteristics. EAMs and lasers can be (in principle) monolithically integrated, and therefore, an on-chip optical communication may be possible by integrating all the components (lasers, modulators, and detectors) on the same Si chip by using mid-IR wavelengths. However, there are few reports of EAM based on group IV material for 2-μm wavelength range.

Usually, active layers are grown on Ge-buffer layer with the typical thickness of several microns [6]. The thickness of the buffer layer depends on various factors: desired crystal quality of active regions, the limitation of growth technologies, etc. For passive components, Ge-rib waveguides are useful and various passive components have been fabricated [11]. Therefore, in the integrated chip, optical signal should be routed by the passive Ge-rib waveguide and access to the highmesa active waveguide, on demand. One approach is to use taper coupler [12-14] for efficient coupling between the GeSn active device and passive waveguides. The taper coupler is an important approach to achieve efficient vertical coupling between layers. There are two types of taper coupler: an adiabatic taper coupler and a resonant taper coupler. The adiabatic taper coupler is a structure that avoids the power transfer from the fundamental mode to higher-order and radiation modes. One problem in adiabatic taper coupler type electroabsorption modulator (ATC type EAM) is that the confinement factor of the fundamental mode ($E_{11}$) in the MQW active region becomes very small if thick Ge-buffer layer is used, because the majority of the power lies in Ge-rib region in highmesa waveguide, leading to poor performance of active devices. To overcome this limitation, we reported the resonant taper coupler type EAM (RTC type EAM) in the preliminary conference proceedings [15]. The advantage of the RTC type EAM is to use vertical multimode interference between $E_{11}$ and $E_{12}$ modes. As shown later, since $E_{12}$ mode has larger field overlap with MQW active region, extinction

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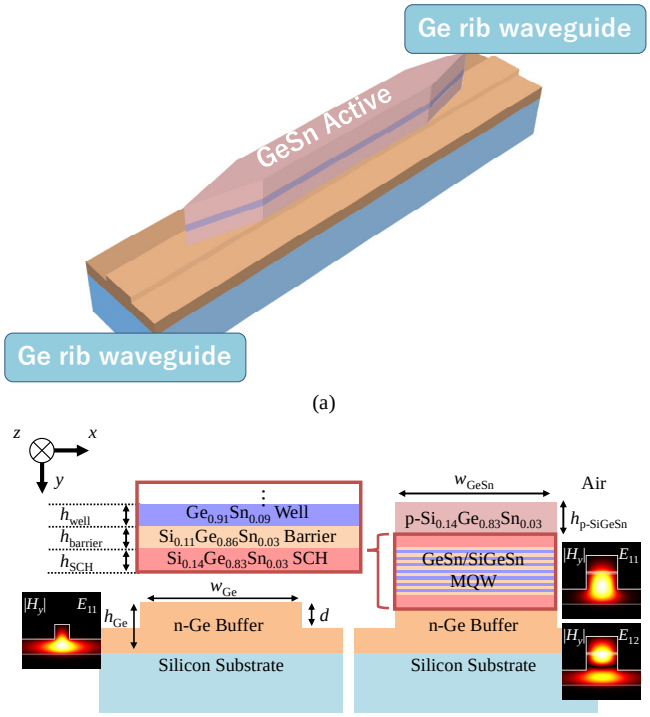


Fig. 1. (a) The schematic of proposed EAM with a taper coupler and (b) cross sections of Ge-rib (left) and GeSn MQW highmesa waveguides (right).

TABLE I
MATERIAL REFRACTIVE INDEX FOR 1.95 μm

| Material | Refractive index |
|---|---|
| Air | 1.000 |
| Si | 3.455 |
| Ge | 4.110 |
| p-$Si_{0.14}Ge_{0.83}Sn_{0.03}$ | 4.055 |
| $Si_{0.14}Ge_{0.83}Sn_{0.03}$ SCH | 4.055 |
| $Si_{0.11}Ge_{0.86}Sn_{0.03}$ barrier | 4.046 |
| $Ge_{0.91}Sn_{0.09}$ well | 4.193 |

characteristics are improved. However, ATC type EAM will be superior for thin Ge-buffer because the confinement factor of $E_{11}$ mode in MQW region will be large. As written above, since the thickness of the buffer layer depends on various conditions, optimum device structures for active-passive integration will be changed depending on the buffer thickness.

In this paper, we propose taper coupler EAM composed of GeSn/SiGeSn MQW on Ge-on-Si platform for mid-infrared (2 μm) integrated optical active devices. GeSn/SiGeSn QW design for 2-μm band QCSE is done for the first time and the epitaxial design is performed by calculating the absorption spectra of GeSn/SiGeSn MQW using many-body theory developed for group IV materials [16,17] to investigate the extinction characteristics of GeSn MQW waveguides. Two types of taper couplers are considered for connecting Ge-rib waveguide and GeSn-MQW-highmesa waveguide efficiently and comprehensive comparison of two structures, ATC type EAM

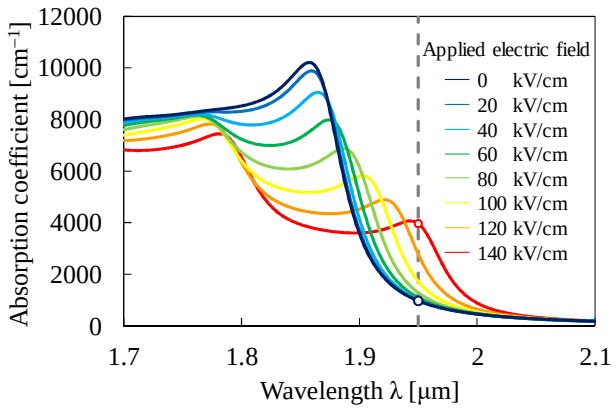


Fig. 2. Absorption spectra of the GeSn/SiGeSn QW calculated by MBT (TE polarization).

and RTC type EAM, is done. It is confirmed that RTC type EAM can obtain the high extinction characteristics with shorter device length compared with conventional ATC type EAM for thick Ge-buffer.

## II. QW STRUCTURE AND MQW WAVEGUIDE

### A. Absorption Spectra of GeSn/SiGeSn MQW

Figure 1 (a) shows the three-dimensional structure of proposed EAM with taper coupler. It consists of Ge-rib input/output waveguide and GeSn MQW highmesa waveguide. These two waveguides are connected via taper coupler as shown in the Figure. This type of two-step waveguide structure was recently fabricated [14]. Figure 1 (b) shows the cross sections of Ge-rib and GeSn/SiGeSn MQW highmesa waveguides, considered here. The insets show the field distributions of $E_{11}$ and $E_{12}$ modes. The waveguide parameters shown in Fig. 1 are given as follows: $h_{p\text{-}SiGeSn}$ = 1.0 μm, $h_{well}$ = 0.01 μm, $h_{barrier}$ = 0.01 μm, $h_{SCH}$ = 0.045 μm, where $h_{p\text{-}SiGeSn}$, $h_{well}$, $h_{barrier}$, and $h_{SCH}$ denote the height of p-SiGeSn layer, well layer, barrier layer, and separate-confinement heterostructures (SCH) layer, respectively. $10^{18}$ and $10^{17}$ cm$^{-3}$ doping concentrations are assumed for n- and p-cladding layers [18]. We assume the loss originating from free-carrier absorption and other effects in these layers in beam propagation simulation. The loss values are extracted from [19] and they are 3 and 10 cm$^{-1}$ for n- and p-cladding layers at 1.95 μm. Although p-cladding is SiGeSn, we used the loss value for Ge. This is because that the loss of Si [20] is smaller than Ge.

The refractive indexes of each layer are summarized in Table I. The GeSn/SiGeSn MQW is grown on the Ge-buffer consists of 10 layers of the $Ge_{0.91}Sn_{0.09}$ well and the $Si_{0.11}Ge_{0.86}Sn_{0.03}$ barrier. The QWs are sandwiched by two $Si_{0.14}Ge_{0.83}Sn_{0.03}$ SCH and grown on the doped n-Ge buffer on Si substrate. The composition of the barrier and SCH layers are lattice matched to the Ge-buffer and have bandgap wavelength of 1.2 and 1.15 μm. Here, we consider 2-μm band communication application. The operating wavelength of EAM is set to 1.95 μm, which is the lowest loss wavelength of photonic bandgap fiber [2]. The well is $Ge_{0.91}Sn_{0.09}$ with 1.3% compressive strain, whose bandgap

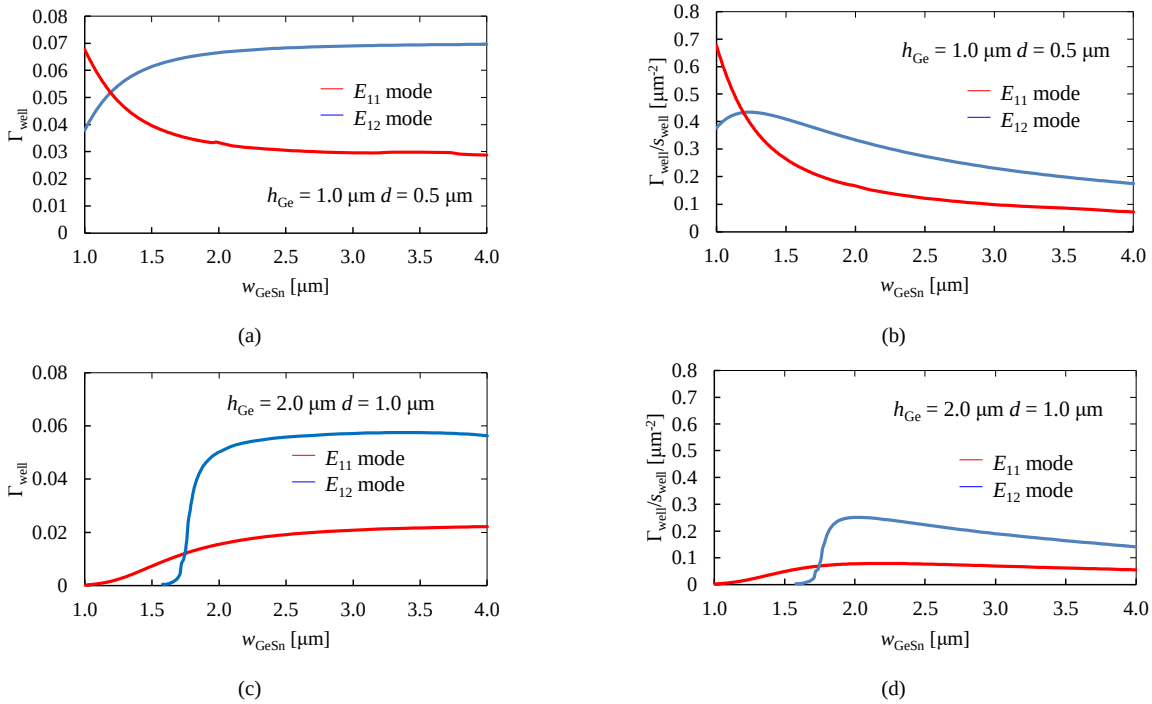


Fig. 3. (a) $\Gamma_{well}$ and (b) $\Gamma_{well}$ / $s_{well}$ with $h_{Ge}$ = 1.0 μm, (c) $\Gamma_{well}$ and (d) $\Gamma_{well}$ / $s_{well}$ with $h_{Ge}$ = 2.0 μm as a function of $w_{GeSn}$ for $E_{11}$ and $E_{12}$ modes calculated by VFEM.

wavelength is 1.85 μm without bias. Therefore, the detuning is 100 nm. The composition of the barrier and SCH layers are determined to maximize the depth of the well in conduction band with the condition of zero strain to Ge-buffer. Deep well leads to stronger electron confinement and steep extinction characteristics [17]. The material parameters, such as lattice constant and bandgap, used in this paper are the same as [16] and [17]. Figure 2 shows the calculated absorption spectra (TE polarization) of the GeSn/SiGeSn QW by MBT for various values of applied electric fields. Red shift of spectra due to QCSE can be seen. For calculating these spectra, inhomogeneous broadening with the broadening energy of $\gamma$ = 7.5 meV is taken into account [17]. In [17], it was shown that calculated absorption spectra of Ge/SiGe QWs are in very good agreement with the measurement [4], showing the validity of the method for quantifying the absorption spectra of group IV QWs. The absorption spectra shown in Fig. 2 is used for the EAM analysis. Since the thickness of the insulating layer is 300 nm, the voltage corresponding to 140 kV/cm is 4.2 V. It should be noted that QCSE in 2-μm wavelength range was experimentally confirmed for InP-based material [21]. Also, it is possible to extend the operating wavelength to longer wavelength region by using GeSn buffer layer.

### *B. Confinement Factor in QW Region*

In order to obtain high ER and to reduce the device size, it is necessary to increase confinement factor in the QW region ($\Gamma_{well}$). We investigate $\Gamma_{well}$ when waveguide width and height are changed for different thickness of Ge-buffer ($h_{Ge}$). Figures 3(a)-(d) show $\Gamma_{well}$ and $\Gamma_{well}$ / $s_{well}$ of $E_{11}$ and $E_{12}$ modes as a function of $w_{GeSn}$ for $h_{Ge}$ = 1.0 and 2.0 μm, where $s_{well}$ is the area of all well layers. $\Gamma_{well}$ is calculated by vectorial finite element method (VFEM) [22]. We can see that $E_{12}$ mode has larger field overlap with the MQW active region for $h_{Ge}$ = 2.0 μm. In contrast, $\Gamma_{well}$ of fundamental mode ($E_{11}$) is larger than that of $E_{12}$ modes for $h_{Ge}$ = 1.0 μm. $\Gamma_{well}$ of the fundamental mode ($E_{11}$) in the active region is very small for thick Ge-buffer layer since the majority of the power lies in Ge-rib region in GeSn MQW highmesa waveguide. Accordingly, if $h_{Ge}$ is 1 μm, ATC type EAM can reduce size and obtain high ER, but if $h_{Ge}$ is 2.0 μm, the performance of ATC type EAM deteriorates because $\Gamma_{well}$ of $E_{11}$ mode becomes small. For $h_{Ge}$ = 2.0 μm, it is better to use RTC type EAM as shown in the next section.

For the electrical connection, heavy-doped p-contacting layer and metal film on the p-cladding are necessary. However, if there is a 100-nm p-contacting layer on the 1-μm p-cladding layer, the confinement factor of $E_{12}$ mode is below 0.5%. Therefore, they are neglected in this paper.

## III. Efficient Connecting Structure and The Extinction Characteristics

Here, we discuss two types of taper couplers. Operating wavelength is 1.95 μm and imaginary part of refractive index is deduced from the absorption coefficient $\alpha$ shown in Fig. 2 by following equation:

$$n_{im} = -\frac{\alpha\lambda}{4\pi}. \quad (1)$$

Long and gentle taper is required (> 40 μm) for the adiabatic taper coupler because the power transfer from fundamental

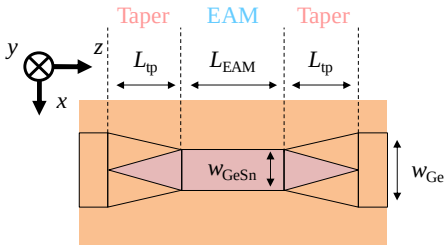


Fig. 4. Top view of ATC type EAM.

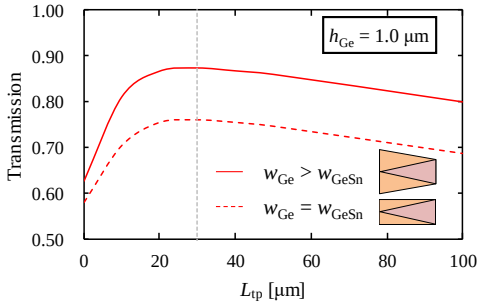


Fig. 5. Transmission in taper region as a function of $L_{tp1}$ for $h_{Ge}$ = 1.0 μm.

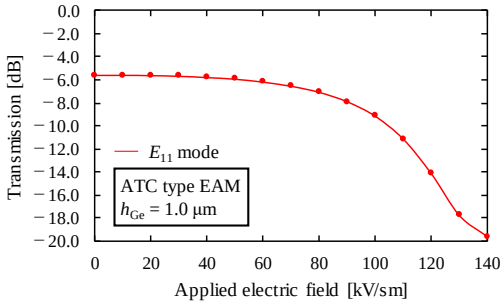


Fig. 6. ER as a function of applied electric field of ATC type EAM with $h_{Ge}$ = 1.0 μm.

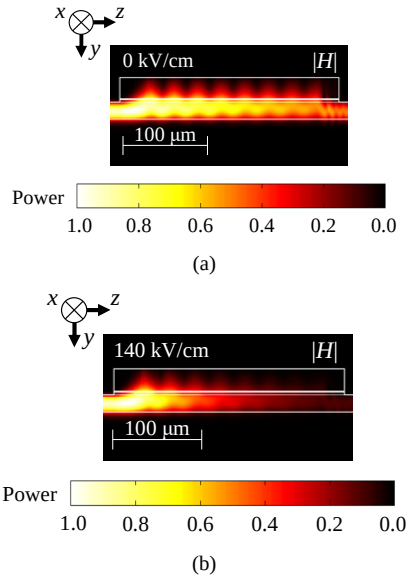


Fig. 7. |*H*| distribution (*yz*-plane) of ATC type EAM with $h_{Ge}$ = 1.0 μm (a) at applied electric field of 0 kV/cm and (b) at applied electric field of 140 kV/cm.

mode to higher-order and radiation modes should be avoided. On the contrary, for the resonant taper coupler, very short taper

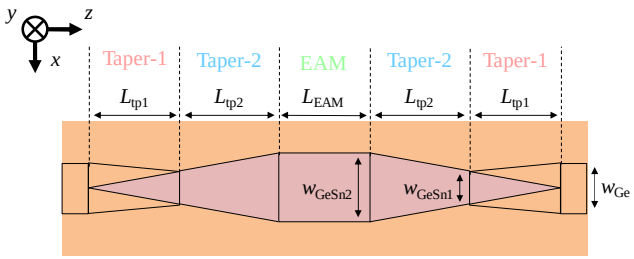


Fig. 8. Top view of ATC type EAM for $h_{Ge}$ = 2.0 μm.

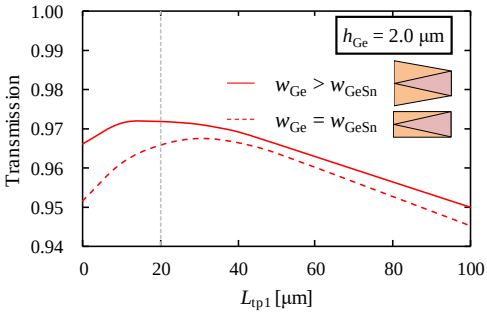


Fig. 9. Transmission in taper-1 region as a function of $L_{tp1}$ for $h_{Ge}$ = 2.0 μm

length (< 10 μm) is used to excite both fundamental and higher-order modes. Properly adjusting waveguide length corresponding to the beat length of multimode interference, $E_{11}$ mode can be extracted from the output. In following section, we investigate the transmission and extinction ratio (ER) characteristics of ATC type EAM and RTC type EAM. Both analyses are performed by vectorial finite element beam propagation method (VFE-BPM) [23,24].

### *A. ATC Type EAM*

Here, we consider ATC type EAM for smoothly connecting Ge-rib and GeSn highmesa waveguides. First, we describe the case of $h_{Ge}$ = 1.0 μm (thin Ge-buffer). Figure 4 shows the top-view of ATC type EAM. It consists of two sections: Ge-rib and highmesa taper (taper) and EAM. From Fig. 3(b), we select $w_{GeSn}$ = 1.2 μm because maximum value of $\Gamma_{well}/s_{well}$ is obtained at $w_{GeSn}$ = 1.2 μm. In the taper, the Ge-rib waveguide is adiabatically connected to the GeSn highmesa waveguide for avoiding the power transfer from fundamental mode to higher order and radiation modes. Figure 5 shows transmission of taper section as a function of $L_{tp}$ at $h_{Ge}$ = 1.0 μm. Solid line is the transmission for $w_{Ge}$ = 1.97 μm > $w_{GeSn}$. For these widths, the effective indexes of $E_{11}$ mode in Ge-rib and $E_{11}$ mode in highmesa waveguides are matched. Dashed line shows the transmission for $w_{Ge}$ = $w_{GeSn}$. For the calculation, the absorption coefficient at 1.95 μm and 0 kV/cm (no bias) is assumed in the QW region. Since the effective refractive index of GeSn MQW waveguide is different from that of the Ge-rib waveguide, the connection of the waveguide with the same width raises the coupling loss. Accordingly, the transmission is slightly improved by adjusting effective refractive index of the GeSn MQW waveguide to that of the Ge-rib waveguide. If the taper length is too short, the transmission decreases due to radiation

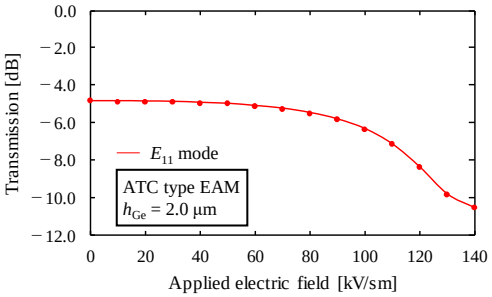


Fig. 10. ER as a function of applied electric field of ATC type EAM with $h_{Ge}$ = 2.0 μm.

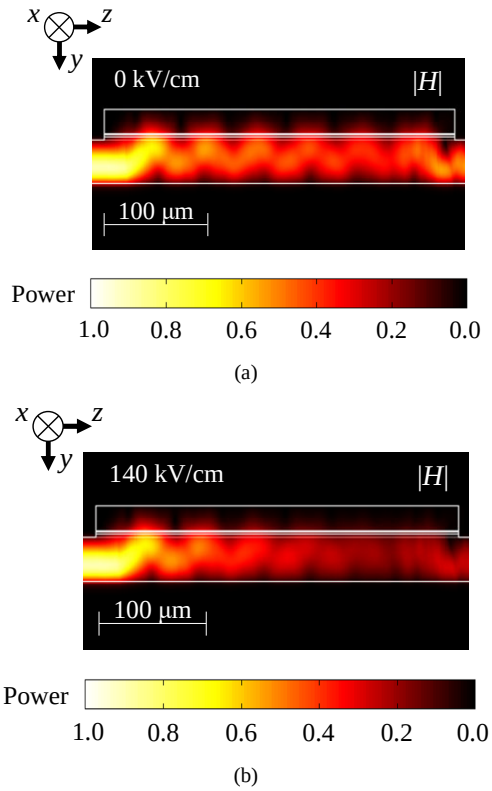


Fig. 11. |*H*| distribution (*yz*-plane) of ATC type EAM with $h_{Ge}$ = 2.0 μm (a) at applied electric field of 0 kV/cm and (b) at applied electric field of 140 kV/cm.

loss and coupling to higher-order mode. Even if the taper length is long, loss due to the QW absorption at the taper section increases. The maximum transmission is obtained at $L_{tp}$ = 30 μm. Figure 6 shows the ER as a function of applied electric field and Figs. 7(a) and (b) show |*H*|-field distribution in *yz*-plane at the center of the waveguide of ATC type EAM with $h_{Ge}$ = 1.0 μm at applied electric field of 0kV/cm and 140 kV/cm. We assumed that the electric field is applied to only EAM section in Fig. 4. The electric field can be selectively applied to the EAM region by removing the p-contacting layer on the p-cladding in the taper region. $L_{EAM}$ is set to 200 μm. ATC type EAM with $h_{Ge}$ = 1.0 μm has ER of 14.0 dB between 0 kV/cm and 140 kV/cm and the insertion loss at 0 kV/cm is −5.56 dB. The total length including taper is 260 μm.

Next, we describe the case of $h_{Ge}$ = 2.0 μm. Figure 8 shows

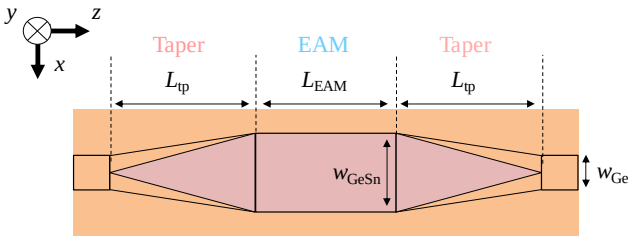


Fig. 12. Top view of RTC type EAM.

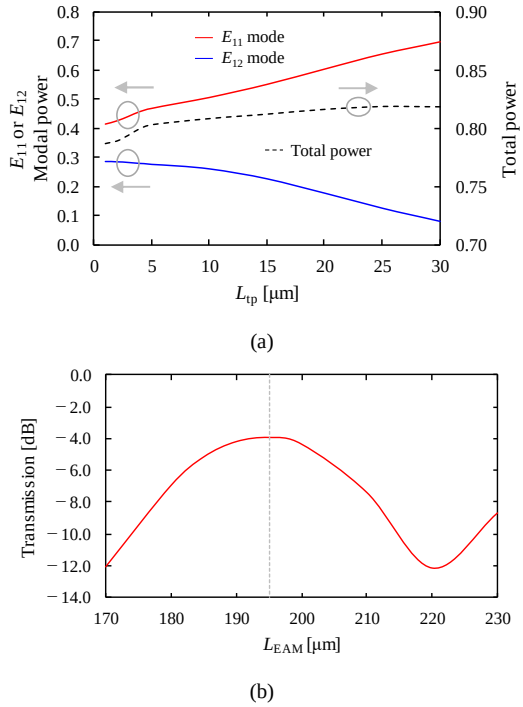


Fig. 13. (a) $E_{11}$ and $E_{12}$ mode power as a function of the taper length $L_{tp1}$ and (b) output power of $E_{11}$ mode of Ge-rib waveguide of proposed EAM for $L_{tp1}$ = 10 μm as a function of $L_{EAM}$.

the structure of ATC type EAM with $h_{Ge}$ = 2.0 μm. It consists of three sections: Ge-rib and highmesa taper (taper-1), highmesa taper (taper-2), and EAM. Figure 9 shows transmission of taper-1 as a function of $L_{tp1}$ at $h_{Ge}$ = 2.0 μm, where $w_{Ge}$ = 1.4 μm, $d$ = 1.0 μm. As in Fig. 9, the solid line is the transmission for $w_{Ge}$ > $w_{GeSn1}$ = 1.34 μm. For these widths, the effective indexes of $E_{11}$ mode in Ge-rib and $E_{11}$ mode in highmesa waveguides are matched. The dashed line shows the transmission for $w_{Ge}$ = $w_{GeSn1}$. Similar to the structure of $h_{Ge}$ = 1.0 μm, the transmission is improved by adjusting effective refractive index of the GeSn MQW waveguide to that of the Ge-rib waveguide. Maximum transmission is obtained around $L_{tp1}$ = 20 μm. According to Fig. 3 (c), since the confinement factor of $E_{11}$ mode is below 1% for $w_{GeSn1}$ = 1.34 μm, the waveguide width is further tapered to $w_{GeSn2}$ to increase the confinement factor. From Fig. 3(c), we select $w_{GeSn2}$ = 4.0 μm, where $\Gamma_{well}$ of $E_{11}$ is saturated to $w_{GeSn}$ and the value is 2.2%. From above discussion, taper parameters are determined as follows: $w_{Ge}$ = 1.4 μm, $d$ = 1.0 μm, $w_{GeSn1}$ = 1.34 μm, $w_{GeSn2}$ = 4.0 μm, $L_{tp1}$ = 20 μm. $L_{tp2}$ is set 50 μm, at which the transmission of $E_{11}$ mode is maximized. $L_{EAM}$ is set to

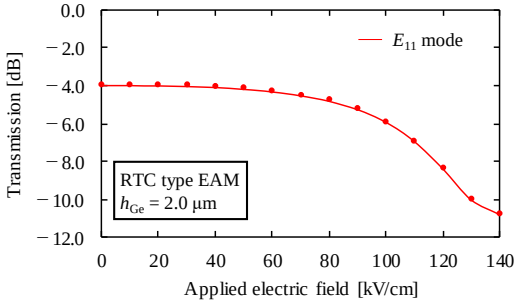


Fig. 14. ER as a function of applied electric field of the EAM using the RTC type EAM with $h_{Ge}$ = 2.0 μm.

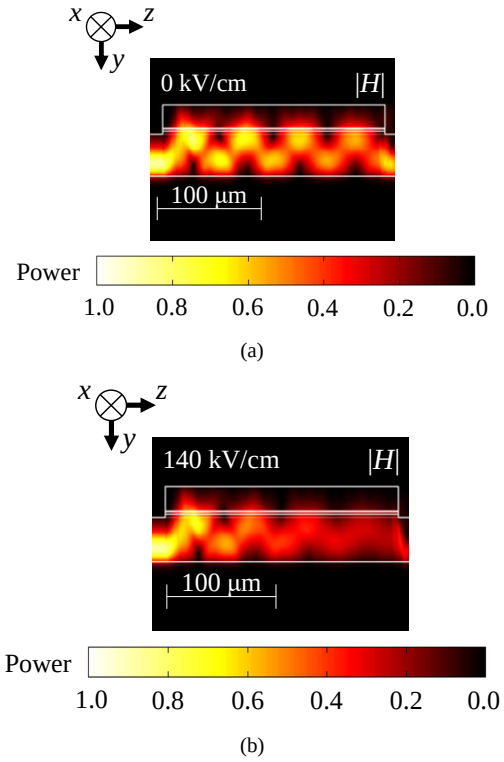


Fig. 15. |*H*| distribution (*yz*-plane) of RTC type EAM with $h_{Ge}$ = 2 μm (a) at applied electric field of 0 kV/cm and (b) at applied electric field of 140 kV/cm.

200 μm. Figure 10 shows the ER as a function of applied electric field and Figs. 11 (a) and (b) show |*H*|-field distributions of ATC type EAM with $h_{Ge}$ = 2.0 μm at applied electric field of 0kV/cm and 140 kV/cm. We assumed that the electric field is applied to only EAM section in Fig. 8. ATC type EAM with $h_{Ge}$ = 2.0 μm has ER of 5.67 dB between 0 kV/cm and 140 kV/cm and the insertion loss at 0 kV/cm is –4.9 dB. Total length including taper is 340 μm.

### *B. RTC Type EAM*

In ATC type EAM with $h_{Ge}$ = 2.0 μm, the device size and insertion loss at 0 kV/cm are increased compared with the ATC type EAM with $h_{Ge}$ = 1.0 μm due to low $\Gamma_{well}$ and the absorption in long taper section. For thick Ge-buffer, since the higher-order mode ($E_{12}$) has larger confinement factor in QW region, RTC type EAM will be superior to ATC type EAM.

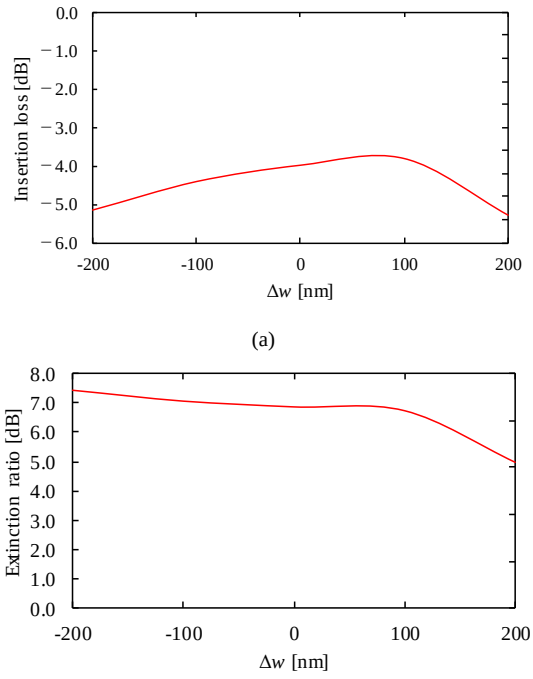


Fig. 16. (a) Insertion loss and (b) extinction ratio of RTC-type EAM as a function of Δ*w*.

Figure 12 shows the top-view of RTC type EAM. It consists of two sections: Ge-rib and highmesa taper (taper) and EAM. We set $w_{Ge}$ = 1.0 μm, $d$ = 1.0 μm, and $w_{GeSn}$ = 2.32 μm to match the effective indexes of $E_{11}$ mode in Ge-rib and $E_{12}$ mode in highmesa waveguides. The confinement factor of $E_{11}$ and $E_{12}$ modes in the QW region of highmesa waveguide are 1.8 and 5.6%. Figure 13 (a) shows the modal power of $E_{11}$, $E_{12}$ modes and total power as a function of the taper length $L_{tp}$. Both $E_{11}$ and $E_{12}$ modes are excited in the taper and we set $L_{tp}$ = 10 μm. Figure 13 (b) shows the output power of $E_{11}$ mode of Ge-rib waveguide of proposed EAM for $L_{tp}$ = 10 μm as a function of $L_{EAM}$ (Output power of whole device including input and output tapers and EAM section). Since in the EAM section, $E_{11}$ and $E_{12}$ modes excited by taper section are propagated with beating, there is an optimum EAM length for maximizing the transmission of $E_{11}$ mode of Ge-rib waveguide. As shown in Fig. 13 (b), for $L_{EAM}$ = 195 μm, the output power is maximized. Figure 14 shows the ER as a function of applied electric field of RTC type EAM with $L_{tp}$ = 10 μm, and $L_{EAM}$ = 195 μm (the total length is 215 μm) and Figs. 15 (a) and (b) show |*H*|-field distributions of RTC type EAM with $h_{Ge}$ = 2.0 μm at applied electric field of 0kV/cm and 140 kV/cm. RTC type EAM has ER of 6.87 dB between 0 kV/cm and 140 kV/cm and the insertion loss at 0 kV/cm is –3.97 dB. The increased ER compared with ATC type EAM with thick Ge-buffer comes from the use of $E_{12}$ mode having large confinement factor, and low-loss and short device length come from the short taper length at $h_{Ge}$ = 2 μm. Furthermore, the width and length of EAM section are 2.32 and 195 μm (half of ATC type EAM with $h_{Ge}$ = 2 μm), which are typical waveguide width and length of

state-of-the-art high-speed EAM for telecommunication band [25]. 3-dB bandwidth ($f_{3dB}$) of the RTC-type EAM is estimated based on simple calculation method described in [26]. The capacitance of the active region is 0.232 pF if we assume the dielectric constant of the active region as $4.193^2$ (the refractive index of well material). If we assume 50 Ω termination register, $f_{3dB}$ is about 27 GHz, comparable to high-speed EAM in telecommunication band [25].

Figures 16 (a) and (b) show the insertion loss and extinction ratio of RTC type EAM as a function of $\Delta w$. Here $\Delta w$ is a deviation from $w_{GeSn}$ = 2.32 μm. Other parameters are the same with the RTC-type EAM shown in Fig. 14. From the results, 200-nm deviation in the waveguide width does not affect much to the device performance.

## IV. Conclusion

We proposed tapered coupler EAM composed of GeSn/SiGeSn multiple-quantum-well (MQW) on Ge-on-Si platform for mid-infrared (2 μm) integrated optical active devices. We calculated the absorption spectra of GeSn/SiGeSn MQW around 2 μm by MBT, and investigated the extinction characteristics of GeSn MQW waveguides. ATC and RTC type EAMs are proposed and comprehensive comparison of these two structures are done in terms of Ge-buffer thickness. Due to the different confinement factor of the fundamental mode in QW region, ATC type EAM is useful for thin buffer and RTC type EAM is useful for thick buffer layer.

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