

Photoinduced effects in amorphous Ge-Se films

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With light illumination from an Ar ion laser, the photoinduced changes in vacuum evaporated amorphous GeSe₂ films were investigated with the X-ray diffraction (XRD), infrared absorption (IR), scanning electron microscope (SEM), transmitting electron microscope (TEM) and transmittance spectra analysis. It was observed that the optical transmittance edges of films shifted to shorter wavelength according to annealing and light illumination and the shift in well-annealed films could be recovered by annealing at 200 °C for 1 h in Ar air. The magnitude of shift increased with the increase of the intensity of illumination light and the illumination time. By sides, photoinduced crystallization was also observed in the exposed regions of GeSe₂ films and more of it was observed with stronger intensity of illumination light.

(Received January 18, 2006; accepted September 13, 2006)

Keywords: Amorphous GeSe₂ films, Photobleaching, Photoinduced crystallization

1. Introduction

It is well known that amorphous chalcogenides exhibit a wide variety of photoinduced phenomena, which are connected with photoinduced structural transformations, defects creation and diffusion of metallic atoms in the films [1-5]. These photoinduced effects in amorphous chalcogenides have been extensively studied, partly as an interesting subject for fundamental research in the field of disordered materials and partly due to potential application of these effects in optoelectronics (photoresists, optical memories, optoelectronic circuits, etc.) [6-8]. The illumination by band gap light of many amorphous chalcogenides changes their internal and/or surface structure and the optical absorption edge will have a red or blue shift [9]. Another interesting photoinduced phenomenon is the photocrystallization, which was first observed by Dresner and Stringfellow in amorphous Se films [10]. The microscopic origin of these photoinduced phenomena, despite extensive studies for more than twenty years [11-14], are not clear up to now. To get a detailed insight into the photoinduced changes process in amorphous GeSe₂ films, in the present paper, we have studied extensively the photoinduced shift of optical transmittance edge as well as the photoinduced crystallization.

2. Experimental

The bulk GeSe₂ glasses were prepared by standard thermal synthesis from 5N purity (99.999%) Ge and Se elements, heated in an evacuated quartz ampoules (10⁻³ Pa), at

a temperature of ~1000 °C, for about 48 h. After the synthesis the melt was water-quenched, resulting in a bulk glass of the desired chemical composition. The GeSe₂ thin films with the thickness of ~500 nm were prepared from bulk GeSe₂ glass powder by the conventional vacuum evaporation technique using a double-covered tantalum boat onto K₉ substrates at a rate of 15 Å/s in a 1×10⁻³ Pa vacuum. The thermal evaporation process was carried out in a coating system, at a pressure of ~10⁻³ pa. The films were annealed at 200 °C for 1 h in Ar air. The X-ray diffraction, using Cu/40 kV/300 mA K_α radiation (Rigaku D/max-2550 V), was used to examine the amorphous or crystalline nature of GeSe₂ films. The IR spectra were measured by the method of KBr in the Perkin Elmer Landa-1600 IR absorption spectrophotometer, the measure range was 400~4000 cm⁻¹. The films were illuminated in Ar air by light from an argon ion laser at 514.5 nm and the beam size was about Ø5 mm. The transmittance spectra of freshly evaporated, illuminated and annealed films were performed in Perkin Elmer Landa 900UV/VIS/NIR spectrophotometer, the measure range was 400 ~ 900 nm. The SEM pictures were obtained from the SEM (Rigaku EPMA-8705QH2) and the film samples were aurum-plated in the vacuum before measurements. The GeSe₂ films were deposited into copper nets and were measured in the TEM (Hitachi, H-800).

3. Results and discussion

It is shown from Fig. 1 that GeSe₂ bulk obtained by water-quenched method and film prepared from bulk GeSe₂ glass powder by the conventional vacuum

evaporation technique are amorphous. No diffraction peaks occur except two wide diffraction peaks occur in the X-ray diffraction spectrum of GeSe₂ film due to the effect of K₉ glass substrate.

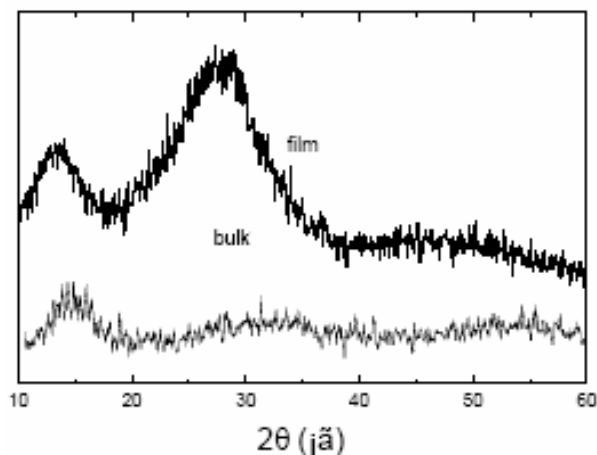


Fig.1. The XRD spectrum of GeSe₂ bulk and film.

Fig. 2 is the IR spectra of GeSe₂ bulk and film by the method of KBr. It is seen from Fig.2 that few absorption bands occur in the IR spectra due to highly pure Ge and Se elements in our experiments, which means that the impurities in the GeSe₂ bulk and film are few. -OH (3454.1 cm⁻¹ and the wavelength is 2.895 μm) and H-O-H (1636.3 cm⁻¹ and the wavelength is 6.111 μm) are observed in the IR spectra according to the water-absorption of KBr. Another absorption band in 1384.1 cm⁻¹ (the wavelength is 7.225 μm) is As₄O₆ impurity[15]. It is also seen from Fig.2 that the IR spectra of GeSe₂ bulk and film are similar except there is little different in the transmittance of them. So the composition of the GeSe₂ film is the same as the GeSe₂ bulk.

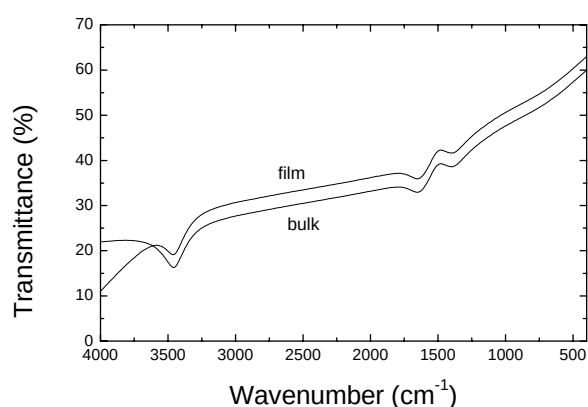


Fig. 2. The IR curves of a-GeSe₂ bulk and film.

The transmittance spectra of GeSe₂ films are shown in Fig. 3. With band gap light illumination from an argon ion laser at room temperature and annealing at 200 °C, we can see from Fig. 3 that the optical transmittance edges of GeSe₂ films shift to shorter wavelength. This photoinduced effect is the so-called photobleaching [9], which has been studied by many researchers in the past twenty years, but the mechanism of it is still unknown. As is shown from Fig. 3, with band gap light illumination, the as-deposited state (a) shifts to the illuminated state (b), but it will shift to the annealed state (c) if the as-deposited films are thermally annealed at 200 °C in Ar air. The annealed state (c) will shift to the state (d) if the films are illuminated, but the illuminated state (d) will restore to the annealed state (c) if the films are annealed again. The shifts between the illuminated state (d) and the annealed state (c) can be repeated by annealing and illuminating, but the shift from the as-deposited state (a) to the annealed state (c) or to the illuminated state (b) is irreversible. So the shift of optical transmittance edges from (a) to (c) or (a) to (b) and between (c) and (d) are denoted as the irreversible and reversible photobleaching process, respectively. With band gap light illumination, photobleaching is observed in a-GeSe₂ films. The occurrence of photobleaching is strongly related to the intensity of illumination light and the illumination time. The dependence of the shift $\Delta\lambda$ of photobleaching on the intensity of illumination light and the illumination time are shown in Fig. 4. Trends are seen from Fig. 4 that the magnitude of shift $\Delta\lambda$ increases with the increase of the intensity of illumination light and the illumination time. With further intensity of illumination light and illumination time, the magnitude of shift $\Delta\lambda$ will be saturated finally.

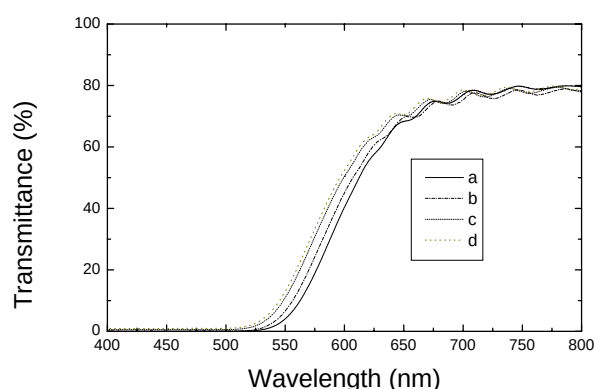


Fig. 3. The transmittance spectra of a-GeSe₂ film. The intensity of illumination light was 100mW and the illumination time was 5 min. (a) as-deposited film, (b) illuminated film, (c) annealed film, (d) illuminated after annealing.

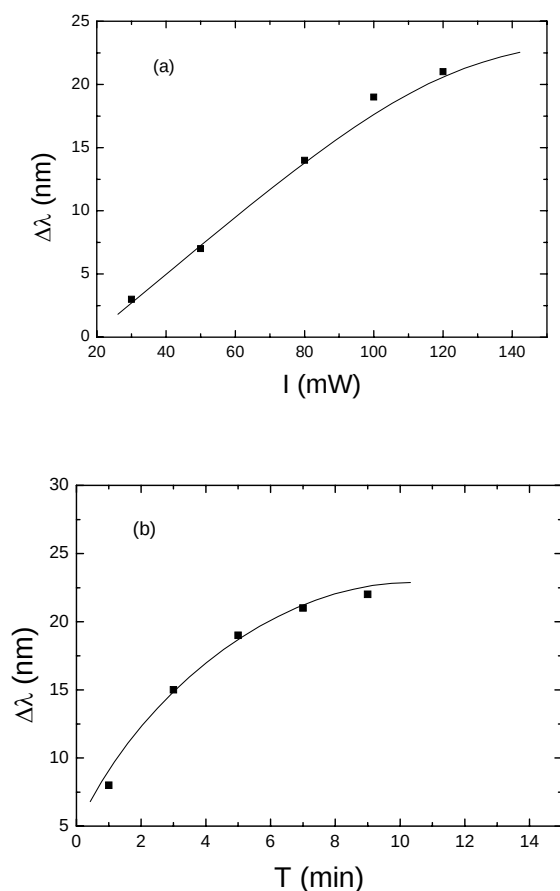


Fig. 4. The magnitude of photobleaching $\Delta\lambda$ versus a the intensity of illumination light and (the illumination time is 5 min), b the illumination time the intensity of illumination light was 100 mW in the a-GeSe₂ films.

The optical transmittance edge of a-GeSe₂ films shifts to lower energy by the band gap light illumination. This photoinduced phenomenon (i.e. photobleaching) is interesting and has been studied many years, but the mechanism of it is still obscure. Researchers only posed different viewpoints according to different system and different structure, which are limited to qualitative explanation and are far from quantitative explanation. Because a-GeSe₂ films are structural flexibility, they are susceptible to light-induced changes [16]. In a-GeSe₂ films, the Se atoms are only two-fold coordinated and possess a lone pair of electrons which are normally non-bonding but which can undergo light-induced reactions to produce structural defects of threefold or singly coordinated Se atoms. The states associated with the non-bonding electrons lie at the top of the valence band and hence are preferentially excited by illumination. It is known that the valence band is formed by the interaction of the lone pair orbits in chalcogenide glasses and the conduction band is formed by the anti-bonding orbits. Therefore, the lone pair electrons play an important role in the photobleaching induced by band gap light illumination. In the case of band

gap illumination, it is believed that the photobleaching is caused by changes of atomic configurations and positions resulting from exciting lone pair electrons. In the case of band gap light illumination, inner core electrons can be excited, i.e. generation of inner core holes. The inner core holes can be immediately filled by outer electrons with auger processes which could induce more holes in upper states (bonding and lone-pair states), since one auger process creates two holes (vacancy cascade process). In this situation, bond-breaking or ionization of atoms is easy to occur, leading to a change in local structural order in the amorphous network and a blue shift of optical transmittance edge.

Amorphous GeSe₂ films, prepared by rapid depositing from the vapor phase, usually have a more or less disordered network, containing a substantial density of wrong chemical bonds. So the amorphous GeSe₂ films are metastable and could be changed easily by the band gap light illumination or annealing. Upon thermal annealing or illumination with band gap light, bonds rearrangements can take place and the film can relaxationally restore to its stable state, leading to irreversible changes in many physical properties, e.g. optical transmittance edge blue shift. So we can see the irreversible shifts between the (a) to (b) and (a) to (c) in Fig. 3. However, some bonds would be transformed if the well-annealed a-GeSe₂ films were illuminated according to the interaction between the photons and some atoms in the network of a-GeSe₂ films, such as Se-Se to Ge-Se, which induces the photoinduced structural changes and a further blue shift of optical transmittance edge. But it would relaxationally restore to the well-annealed state when the films were annealed again, i.e. the process between (c) and (d) is reversible. Reversibility of photobleaching in a-GeSe₂ films can be applied in optical memories.

The occurrence of photobleaching in a-GeSe₂ films is due to photoinduced structural change. The SEM pictures of a-GeSe₂ films illuminated by the intensity of 0 mW, 20 mW and 100 mW light (the illumination time is 3 min) are shown in Fig. 5. The surface of a-GeSe₂ film with no illumination is smooth and no crystallization occurs. But it occurs upon illumination of 20 mW light. With higher intensity of 100 mW light illumination, more crystallization appears. For a-GeSe₂ chalcogenide semiconductors, with band gap light illumination, electronic excitation by photon absorption is assumed to be capable of achieving bonds switching and rearrangement in order, such as Se-Se, Ge-Ge to Ge-Se, which is the origin of the photoinduced structural changes. The same kind of bonds switching and rearrangement mechanism should also be involved in the photoinduced crystallization process. On the other hand, a spatially wide-spread excitation should also be required to produce a long-range order, which induces photoinduced crystallization. The crystal-to-amorphous will take place when GeSe₂ film with crystallization is melt by illumination of high intensity or shorter pulse light and cooled quickly, which is the origin of the phase-change

optical storage materials. Fig.6 shows the TEM pictures of GeSe₂ film with illumination of 50 mW(3 min). The diffraction patterns of (a) as-deposited amorphous region and (b) crystallized region are indicated that the amorphous-to-crystal can be realized by illumination of band gap light.

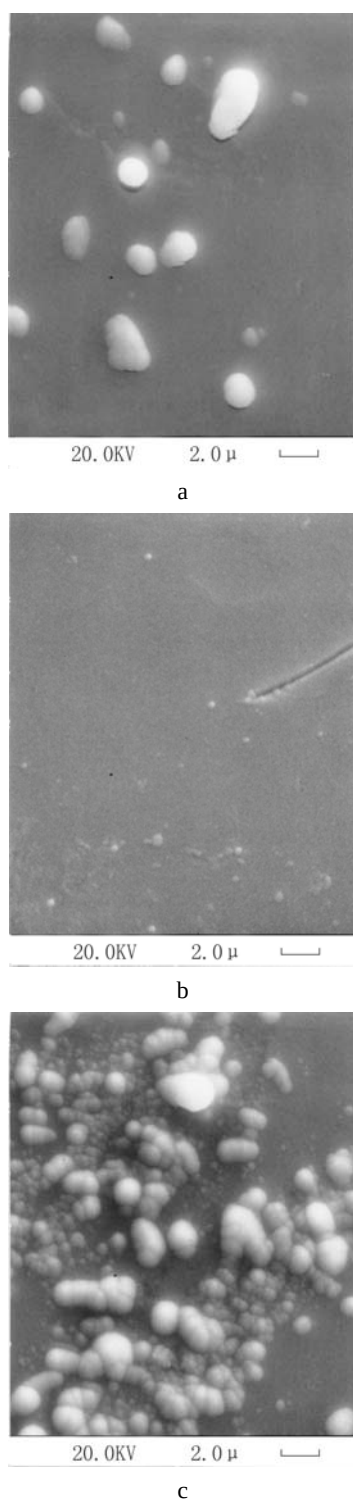


Fig. 5. The SEM pictures of a-GeSe₂ films. a) 0 mW b) 20 mW, 5 min c) 100 mW, 5 min.

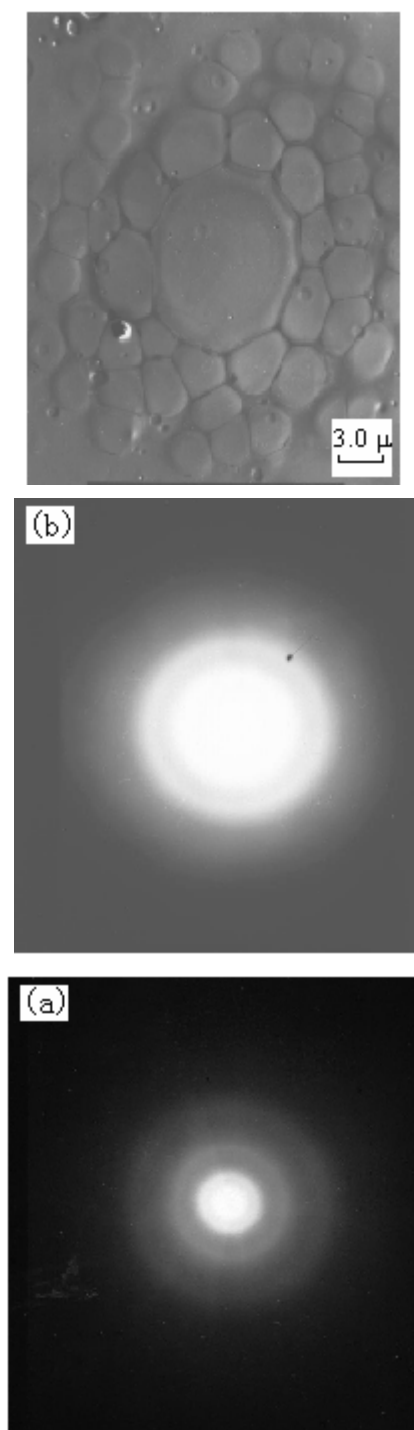


Fig. 6. The TEM pictures of a-GeSe₂ films. The intensity of illumination light was 100 mW and the illumination time was 5 min. (a) the crystallized region and (b) as-deposited amorphous region.

4. Conclusion

The changes of properties and structure in GeSe₂ amorphous semiconductor films by light illumination from

Ar ion laser were studied with the XRD, IR, SEM, TEM and transmission spectra analysis. It was indicated that the optical transmittance edges of films shifted to shorter wavelength according to annealing and light illumination and the shift in well-annealed films was reversible. The magnitude of shift increased with the increase of the intensity of illumination light and the illumination time. Photoinduced crystallization was also observed in the exposed films by SEM and TEM images. By sides, more crystalline was occurred with higher intensity of illumination light.

Acknowledgements

This research work was supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of Hubei Province under Grant No.2006ABB029, the Nippon Sheet Glass Foundation for Materials Science and Engineering and the (2006) and the Program for Changjiang Scholars and Innovative Research Team in University (PCSIRT No. IRT0547), Ministry of Education, China.

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