Characterizations of ZnS/CuInS₂ Film Fabricated by Electrochemical Deposition Process for Solar Cell Devices

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Abstract: In this study, CuInS₂ (CIS) films were fabricated by a two-step, non-vacuum process. Electrochemical deposition (ECD) was first used to prepare Cu-In precursors on Mo substrate under constant current. Then, CuInS₂ films were prepared by sulfurization of the Cu-In precursors in sulfur atmosphere. The surface morphologies, compositions, and transmittance of the CuInS₂ and ZnS films were characterized by X-ray diffraction (XRD), scanning electron microscope (SEM), energy dispersive spectroscopy (EDS), and UV-VIS, respectively. The results show that a high-quality CIS thin film solar cells by low-cost, non-vacuum process could be obtained.

Keywords: ZnS/CuInS₂ layer, electrochemical deposition, chemical bath deposition, CIS thin film solar cells

1. INTRODUCTION

CuInS₂ (CIS) is a kind of direct-band-gap semiconductor material. Because of its low cost, long life, and high absorption rate of light can reach up to 10⁵ cm⁻¹, it can function as the absorption layer of solar cells [1]. After 1970s, researchers started to incorporate the CuInS₂ film as the solar cells, its electro-optical efficiency can reach to 13% in the laboratory [2-3]. Nowadays, preparation of CuInS₂ film has been conducted in various methods such as sputtering [4], evaporation[5-9], spray pyrolysis [10-13], sulfurization after Cu-In deposition[14], chemical bath deposition [15]. Among these fabrication techniques, the electro-deposition with sulfurization has advantages of fast, low cost, and large area production [16]. In addition, the technique can effectively manipulates the thickness, the amount of apertures, and optimize the performance by adjusting the fabrication condition [17].

In this research, we fabricated the CuInS₂ film with electrodeposited sulfurization. The Cu-In precursor film was grown on the Mo glass, followed by sulfurization to form CuInS₂ thin film. During sulfurization, ambient temperature was an important factor related to crystallization and the change of phase. Therefore, a suitable sulfurization temperature could improve the crystallization and enhance the uniformity of the film. The transformation of phases from Cu-In binary compounds to ternary compounds of Cu-In-S was strongly dependent on a proper sulfurization temperature. Furthermore, a ZnS buffer layer was grown on top of the CuInS₂ film. To explore the fabrication condition, the surface morphologies, compositions, and transmittance of the CuInS₂ and ZnS films were characterized by X-ray diffraction (XRD), scanning electron microscope (SEM), energy dispersive spectroscopy (EDS), and UV-VIS, respectively. The results show that a high-quality CIS thin film solar cells by low-cost, non-vacuum process could be fabricated.

2. EXPERIMENTAL

The electrodeposition system consisted of Pt as the counter electrode and the conductive Mo glass as the working electrode. The composition of electrolyte in the plating solution and electrodeposition conditions are shown in table 1. After the Cu-In alloy film was deposited on the Mo glass, the Cu-In alloy was sulfurized with sulfur powder in a vacuum tube to form a high-quality CuInS₂ film. Then, a 70 nm ZnS layer was grown on top of the CuInS₂ film by chemical bath deposition (CBD). The solution of the CBD process was ZnSO₄ (0.15M), SC(NH₂)₂ (0.15M), NH₄OH (25%), and (NH₄)₂SO₄ (0.25M), and (NH₄)₂SO₄ (0.25M). The ZnS/ CuInS₂/Mo film was analyzed by various material and optical measurements. The flowchart of our experiment is shown in Fig. 1.
3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To investigate the Cu-In precursor film, the XRD analysis of the film is shown in Fig. 2. In the XRD spectrum, the highest Cu-In phase (200) peak with a diffraction peak at 34.5° can be clearly observed, indicative of formation of a good crystalline phase. The Cu$_{16}$In$_9$ of intermetallic phase was relatively small compared to the preferable binary compound of the Cu-In film on the Mo glass owing to the proper deposition condition [18]. The surface morphology of the precursor film is shown in Fig. 3. Consistent with the XRD analysis, well-crystallized Cu-In grains can be seen in the SEM image. Sulfurizing the Cu-In film with heating was used with two-step “low temperature - high temperature” heat treatment after electrodeposition [19]. At the beginning, we kept the sulfurization temperature at 150°C for 10 mins. Then, we raised the temperature a final temperatures of 450, 500, and 550°C in a short time. Keep the sample sulfurized in different final temperatures for 120 mins. Figure 4 shows the XRD analysis of CuInS$_2$ film that after sulfurization. According to JCPDS for

| Table 1. Compositions of the plating solution and the deposition conditions |
|-------------------------|----------------|
| Cu-In plating solutions  |                |
| CuCl$_2$                | 0.008M         |
| InCl$_3$                | 0.02M          |
| H$_3$Cit                | 1.142M         |
| TEA                     | 0.4M           |
| pH                      | 2.0            |
| Current densities       | 1.0~2.0 mA·cm$^{-2}$ |
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diffraction peak (No.27-0159), strong CuInS₂ structures can be observed in the XRD spectra. In addition, when the temperature is over 500°C, the diffraction peak of CuS disappeared. According to a previous research [18], an intermediate state of CuS during surfuization might be present near 400°C. A high sulfurization temperature above 500°C can enhance the formation of Cu-In-S₂. In accordance with EDS analysis as shown in Fig. 5, the composition ratio of Cu, In, and S was close to the ideal ratio of CuInS₂ (1:1:2). The EDS results further confirm the removal of CuS impurity and the formation of well-crystallized CuInS₂. Therefore, the sulfurization temperature of 550°C could fabricate high-quality CuInS₂ film on top of the Mo glass.

Since electron-hole pairs induced by sunlight in the absorption layer would rapidly recombine again, a ZnS layer was required as a buffer layer of the CIS film solar cells to decrease probability of carrier recombination. Based on previous research [20] [21], a ZnS
buffer layer with high performance can be fabricated by CBD. Because the buffer layers must have high light penetration rate lest blocking the light absorption, we conducted the penetration measurements with UV/VIS spectrophotometer with the wavelength range of scanning from 300nm ~ 800nm. Figure 6 shows that the penetration rate of the ZnS layer fabricated by CBD was about 80% in the visible light range. Also, from the energy bandgap measurements as shown in Fig. 7, we observed that the energy bandgap of ZnS was about 3.6 eV corresponding with wide energy gap requirements of general CIS buffer layers. Therefore, most of light in the solar spectrum could pass the buffer layer. Furthermore, in addition, a SEM image of the high-quality well-crystallized ZnS film is shown in Fig. 8, which is consistent with the good optical properties of the ZnS film.

Finally, we sputtered a 100nm ZnO (n-type) layer and a 450nm AZO (ZnO: Al) layer on top of the ZnS/ CuInS\textsubscript{2}/Mo film \[22\]. Figure 9 shows the top-view SEM image of the solar cell structure, and Fig. 10 shows a SEM image of the cross-section solar cell structure. Well-contacted interfaces and well-grown Cu-InS\textsubscript{2}/ZnS/ZnO/AZO can be seen in the cross-section \[23\]. The film structure was composed of Mo/CuInS\textsubscript{2}/ZnS/ZnO/AZO (from bottom to top) with the thickness of whole components is about 2.5μm.

4. CONCLUSION

In this research we fabricated a ZnS/CuInS\textsubscript{2}/Mo film compatible with the CIS solar cell structure with electro-deposition, sulfurization, and CBD. The composition ratio of three element Cu/In/S close to a standard stoichiometric ratio of 1:1:2 at a temperature of 500°C. Furthermore, a well-crystallized CuInS\textsubscript{2} layer and a high penetration ZnS buffer layer have been fabricated and examined by multiple material and optical analyses. The ZnS/CuInS\textsubscript{2}/Mo shows great promises for future solar cell applications.

REFERENCES