First-principles study of Be doped CuAlS₂ for p-type transparent conductive materials

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CuAlS₂ has attracted much attention recently as a p-type transparent conductive material. In this paper, we investigate the site preference of substitutional Be in CuAlS₂ and the transition level of BeAl using the first-principles calculation. We find that Be would be doped effectively at Al sites in CuAlS₂ as a good p-type dopant. In addition, we speculate that Be–Mg or Be–Zn codoped CuAlS₂ could have a mobility enhancement and thus a good p-type conductivity due to low lattice distortion. © 2011 American Institute of Physics. [doi:10.1063/1.3574662]

I. INTRODUCTION

Transparent conductive materials (TCMs) belong to the class of wideband-gap semiconductors; by doping with shallow levels of impurities they can be made to possess the unique properties of the transparency of glass and the conductivity of metal. TCMs are widely and practically used as transparent electrodes in flat panel displays, solar cells, and touch panels. They usually possess carrier concentrations of at least 10²⁰ cm⁻³, optical band gaps greater than 3 eV, and conductivity greater than 1 × 10⁴ S cm⁻¹. Most of the industry standard TCMs are n-type, for example, Sn doped In₂O₃(ITO), F doped SnO₂(FTO), and Al doped ZnO (AZO). Even so, the application of n-type TCMs is rather restricted without p-type TCMs because the active functions of most optoelectronic elements are based on p–n junctions. There is, however, still a lack of good p-type TCMs. The development of functional p–n junctions solely using TCMs is a vital goal for material scientists, because it is expected to open up an era of “transparent electronics.”

The first reports of p-type TCMs date back to 1997, when Kawazoe et al. reported CuAlO₂ thin films. They reported that CuAlO₂ film possessed a conductivity of 1.0 S cm⁻¹ at room temperature. After that, almost all copper-oxide-based delafossite structure semiconductors have been reported to be of p-type conductivity, such as CuBO₂, CuGaO₂, CuInO₂, and CuCrO₂, but their conductivities are 10³ to 10⁴ times lower than those of well-established n-type TCMs for the hole localization of oxides. Nie et al. revealed that this delafossite family did not exhibit direct bandgap by first-principles study. This may impede the application of delafossite CuMₓO₂ because TCMs with a direct bandgap are preferred for the p–n junctions.

Recently, a series of nonstoichiometric and Zn/Mg doped CuAlS₂ (Refs. 14–19) with chalcopyrite structures and direct bandgaps have been reported with significant promotions of high p-type conductivity at room temperature by experiment. For example, CuAl₀.₉Zn₀.₁S₂ (Ref. 18) has shown a conductivity of up to 63.5 S cm⁻¹, and the average transmittance in the visible region is above 80%. Yang et al. have successfully prepared transparent p–n junctions with CuAl₁₋ₓZnₓS₂. From a theoretical point of view, we have studied the intrinsic defect and extrinsic Mg/Zn dopant in CuAlS₂, indicating that ZnAl could have a lower formation energy under favorable conditions. We calculated transition level of ZnAl is 0.14 eV, in accordance with good p-type conductivity found by experiment. We also find that the increased hole concentration in Cu₁₋ₓAlₓS₂ is impeded mainly by the antisite defect AlCu. Even with a high hole concentration, it is found that the hole mobility of CuAlS₂ is hindered by the carrier’s low mean free time, in association with lattice distortion in general.

In this paper, using the first-principles calculation, we calculate the defect formation energy and transition level of BeAl in Be doped CuAlS₂. In the most favorable chemical potential condition, the defect formation energy is about 0.55 eV for p-type samples in which Be is substituted for Al (i.e., the Fermi level is close to the valence-band maximum [VBM]). The transition level of BeAl is 0.17 eV, indicating that Be should be a good dopant in CuAlS₂ for p-type conductive doping. In particular, we infer that Be–Zn or Be–Mg codoping would enhance mobility because Be–Zn or Be–Mg codoping decreases lattice distortion effectively.

II. COMPUTATIONAL DETAILS

Our first-principles calculations have been carried out using density functional theory (DFT) as implemented in the Vienna ab initio simulation package (VASP). The Perdew-Burke-Ernzerhof gradient corrected function is used with corrections for on-site Coulomb interactions for strongly correlated systems. Generalized gradients approximation (GGA) typically underbinds localized orbitals of 3d transitions.
transition metals, and the \( +U \) modification provides an approximate correction for this shortcoming. The value of \( U_{\text{eff}} \) employed for the Cu \( d \) states is 5.2 eV, which is consistent with values determined by previous studies.\(^{24,25}\) To describe the interactions between the valence electrons and the core, the projector augmented wave implementation\(^{26}\) was used. For the CuAlS\(_2\) unit cell, an energy cutoff of 700 eV and special K-point sampling over an \( 8 \times 8 \times 4 \) Monkhorst-Pack mesh\(^{27}\) were used. This ensured that the enthalpy differences converged to less than 0.03 meV/atom.

CuAlS\(_2\) has a chalcopyrite structure (space group number: 122), which is analogous to a zinc-blende structure with its cations substituted by two types of cations alternatively along the \( \langle 001 \rangle \) direction. Our calculated lattice parameters and the anion displacement parameter of CuAlS\(_2\) are \( a = b = 5.366 \) Å, \( c = 10.497 \) Å, and \( u = 0.259 \), which are in good agreement with the experimental measurements \( a = b = 5.334 \) Å, \( c = 10.444 \) Å,\(^{28}\) and \( u = 0.268.\(^{29}\) For the formation energy calculation, \( 2 \times 2 \times 1 \) supercells containing 64 atoms are used. For the doped supercells, the lattice constants are fixed as the optimized ideal lattice and other internal coordinates are fully relaxed throughout this work. The energy cutoff is set to 700 eV, while a K mesh of \( 4 \times 4 \times 6 \) is employed for the \( 2 \times 2 \times 1 \) supercells.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 shows the bandgap and partial density of states (PDOS) of CuAlS\(_2\). CuAlS\(_2\) is a direct bandgap semiconductor with a VBM and a conduction-band minimum (CBM) at the \( \Gamma \) point in the Brillouin zone. The underestimation of bandgaps is a well-known drawback of standard DFT calculations. Here, our GGA+\( U \) calculated bandgap, 2.29 eV, was still less than the experimental value, 3.49 eV. As shown from the PDOS, the majority of the upper valence band (\(-2\) to \(0\) eV) is dominated by Cu 3d with a noticeable contribution from S 3p. The atomic orbital level of Cu 3d is higher than that of O 2p, which dominates the upper valence band of ZnO, SnO\(_2\), In\(_2\)O\(_3\), etc. This is attributed to the delocalization of the holes, which results in shallower, less localized acceptor levels above the valence band. The lower conduction band consists of Cu 3d, S 4s, S 4p, and S 3d. At the VBM, the calculated hole effective masses are \( m_{100} = m_{010} = 2.519 \) m\(_e\) and \( m_{001} = 0.681 \) m\(_e\) without spin-orbit coupling in the [100], [010], and [001] directions, respectively. When the spin-orbit coupling is considered, the effective masses change to \( m_{100}^{SO} = m_{010}^{SO} = 2.989 \) m\(_e\) and \( m_{001}^{SO} = 0.643 \) m\(_e\), respectively. This indicates that the spin-orbit coupling has no significant influence on the lightest effective mass in the [001] direction, although the values in the other two directions increase remarkably. The hole effective mass in the [001] direction has the same order as that of the good n-type TCMs In\(_2\)O\(_3\), 0.24 m\(_e.\(^{30}\)

Next, we investigate the site preference of Be at Cu or Al sites. The site preference is crucial to the electronic property of the sample because Be defects are expected to be donors at Cu sites but acceptors at Al sites. Their favorable doping site can be determined by their defect formation enthalpies, which depend on the growth conditions.

The formation enthalpies for the Be doping at Cu or Al sites are calculated in a \( 2 \times 2 \times 1 \) CuAlS\(_2\) supercell consisting of 64 atoms according to\(^{31}\)

\[
\Delta H(D,q) = E(D,q) - E(0) + \sum_x n_x (\Delta \mu_x + \mu_x^{\text{solid}}) + q(E_{\text{VBM}} + E_F),
\]

where \( E(D,q) \) and \( E(0) \) are the total energy of the supercells with and without defect, respectively. Here \( (\Delta \mu_x + \mu_x^{\text{solid}}) \) is the absolute value of the chemical potential of atom \( x \). \( \mu_x^{\text{solid}} \) is defined as the chemical potential of the elemental solid. Also, \( n_x \) is the number of atoms for each defect; \( n_x = -1 \) if an atom is added, while \( n_x = 1 \) if an atom is removed. \( E_{\text{VBM}} \) represents the energy of the VBM of the defect-free system, and \( E_F \) is the Fermi energy relative to the \( E_{\text{VBM}} \). For charged systems, a compensating homogeneous jellium background charge is assumed to preserve overall neutrality. Recently, Lany and Zunger\(^{32}\) found that the formation energy of GaAs:V\(_{\text{X}}\)\(_3\) could be well converged in fairly small supercells such as a 64-atom or even 32-atom supercell, as long as the potential alignment and image charge correction are included. Considering the 64-atom supercells adopted in this work, we have carried out the calculations with both the potential alignment and the image charge correction. The potential alignment is considered by adding \( \Delta V \) into the \( (E_{\text{VBM}} + E_F) \) term, where \( \Delta V \) is the electrostatic alignment between the doped host and the pure host. The full third order image charge correction can be accurately approximated by a simple scaling factor \( (2/3) \) for the first order (screened) Madelung term, as suggested by Lany and Zunger.\(^{32}\)

The chemical potentials of each constituent species \( (\Delta \mu_x) \) can be varied to reflect specific equilibrium growth conditions, but their summation is always equal to the calculated formation enthalpy of CuAlS\(_2\) in order to maintain the stability of the host:

\[
\Delta \mu_{\text{Cu}} + \Delta \mu_{\text{Al}} + 2 \Delta \mu_{\text{S}} = \Delta H(\text{CuAlS}_2).
\]

In addition to the host stability condition, the atomic chemical potentials should be smaller than that of the corresponding
elemental solid in order to avoid precipitation of elemental solids:

\[ \Delta \mu_{\text{Cu}} \leq 0, \quad \Delta \mu_{\text{Al}} \leq 0, \quad \Delta \mu_{\text{S}} \leq 0. \]  

The chemical potentials are further restricted by the competing compounds. Referring to our previous works, these crucial constraints are listed as the following:

\[ 2\Delta \mu_{\text{Al}} + 3\Delta \mu_{\text{S}} \leq \Delta H(\text{Al}_2\text{S}_3), \]  
\[ \Delta \mu_{\text{Cu}} + \Delta \mu_{\text{S}} \leq \Delta H(\text{CuS}), \]  
\[ 2\Delta \mu_{\text{Cu}} + \Delta \mu_{\text{S}} \leq \Delta H(\text{Cu}_2\text{S}), \]  
\[ \Delta \mu_{\text{Cu}} + 5\Delta \mu_{\text{Al}} + 8\Delta \mu_{\text{S}} \leq \Delta H(\text{CuAl}_5\text{S}_8). \]

Because \( \Delta H(\text{BeS}) \) is a constant, the maximum allowed chemical potential for Be is directly dependent on \( \Delta \mu_{\text{S}} \). At point \( M \), the maximum allowed value of \( \Delta \mu_{\text{Be}} \) is \(-1.85 \text{ eV} \) (red (dark gray in black/white) line in Fig. 2).

Figure 3 shows the formation enthalpy of Be\( _{\text{Al}} \) and Be\( _{\text{Cu}} \) under maximum values of point \( M \) and \( \Delta \mu_{\text{Be}} \). If the Fermi energy level is at \( 0.15 \text{ eV} \) above the VBM, the formation enthalpy of Be\( _{\text{Al}} \) should be \( 0.55 \text{ eV} \). The transition level of Be\( _{\text{Al}} \) is calculated to be \( 0.17 \text{ eV} \), indicating that Be could be doped at Al sites effectively as a shallow impurity-level dopant and could improve p-type carrier concentration. In reality, the final electrical conductivity \( \sigma (\sigma = \rho_{\text{eff}} q n) \) depends on not only the carrier concentration \( n \), but also the hole mobility \( \mu_p(\mu_p = q \tau_p/m^*) \). Our former study showed that the difference in the effective mass is negligible between the carriers originating from various defects. Recently, Mao et al. found that there was a great mobility enhancement.

Table I lists the enthalpies of all of the related compounds. We found that the GGA+\( U \) calculated enthalpies of CuS and Cu\( _2 \)S were in better agreement with the corresponding experimental values as compared with our previous GGA results. Under the constraints imposed by the competing compounds, the shaded areas in Fig. 2 are the allowed chemical potential ranges for CuAl\( _2 \)S\( _2 \). Assuming a Fermi energy level at \( 0.15 \text{ eV} \) above the VBM, the formation enthalpy of Be\( _{\text{Al}} \) would be smaller/bigger than that of Be\( _{\text{Cu}} \) in the green/yellow (lower/upper gray in black/white) area. If the Fermi energy level moves toward the CBM, Be\( _{\text{Al}} \) preference in the \( (\Delta \mu_{\text{Cu}}, \Delta \mu_{\text{Al}}) \) plane would increase. A balance point for the Fermi level must exist because Be\( _{\text{Al}} \) is an acceptor, which would impede the Fermi energy level’s movement toward the CBM. In order to get p-type TCMs by doping with Be, we intend to dope with Be at Al sites rather than Cu sites as much as possible. Therefore, point \( M \) is chosen as the optimal growth condition. To have the lowest formation enthalpy of Be\( _{\text{Al}} \), we expect that \( \Delta \mu_{\text{Be}} \) could reach the maximum value. When Be is introduced into the CuAl\( _2 \)S\( _2 \) systems, however, the chemical domain of CuAl\( _2 \)S\( _2 \) may be further limited due to the competing phases of BeS, with a constraint of

\[ \Delta \mu_{\text{Be}} + \Delta \mu_{\text{S}} \leq \Delta H(\text{BeS}). \]
because they are both shallow impurities. Enhanced mobility, as well as a better p-type conductivity, CuAlS2:Zn and CuAlS2:Mg. Zn codoping reduces the lattice distortion with respect to the sequence of Ga3+< Sn4+< In3+. In–Ga codoping is expected to decrease SnO2 lattice distortion compared to In doped and Ga doped SnO2. This shows that the lattice distortion has an important effect on the mobility. In our calculation, the bond length of BeAl0−S is 2.15 Å, which is shorter than the bond length of Al–S (2.28 Å). Meanwhile, we investigated the Mg and Zn (GGA+U on Zn 3d with the U value from Ref. 36) doped CuAlS2. The bond lengths of MgAl0−S and ZnAl0−S are 2.41 Å and 2.34 Å, respectively, which are both longer than that of Al–S. Therefore, Be–Mg or Be–Zn doped CuAlS2 would have a weaker lattice distortion than the Be, Mg, or Zn doped CuAlS2. We therefore speculate that Be–Mg or Be–Zn codoped CuAlS2 could have enhanced mobility, as well as a better p-type conductivity, because they are both shallow impurities.

IV. CONCLUSION

In summary, we have calculated the formation energies and transition levels of Be-related defects in CuAlS2 by using the first-principles calculations. We find that the formation energy of BeAl is about 0.55 eV at the most favorable condition in p-type samples, and its transition level is 0.17 eV. Therefore, Be could be doped at Al sites effectively in CuAlS2 as a good p-type dopant. Furthermore, Be–Mg or Be–Zn codoped CuAlS2 is expected to have enhanced mobility and a good p-type conductivity because Be–Mg and Be–Zn codoping reduces the lattice distortion with respect to CuAlS2:Zn and CuAlS2:Mg.

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