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基于掩埋金属掩膜的表面光栅半导体激光器 制备工艺研究

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摘要:提出了一种基于掩埋金属掩膜的表面光栅分布反馈半导体激光器制备工艺,该工艺方案可以减小器件工艺对光栅结构的影响,无需额外增加光栅保护工艺。在半导体外延片表面预先制作Ni-Au金属层,形成光栅的硬掩膜;完成波导和钝化层工艺后,去除波导结构表面的钝化层形成电极注入窗口的同时,露出掩埋的Ni-Au金属掩膜;在掩埋Ni-Au金属掩膜和钝化层的共同阻挡作用下,进行干法刻蚀工艺,在脊波导表面形成光栅结构。采用该工艺方案制备了光栅周期为10 μm的高阶表面光栅DFB半导体激光器件。实验结果表明,与光刻胶作为表面光栅刻蚀掩膜的工艺相比,掩埋金属掩膜工艺方案保证了表面光栅的形貌,使光栅内的折射率具有更好的周期性分布,器件的单纵模半高全宽由0.56 nm降至0.23 nm,且在输入电流为1 A的情况下可以获得242 mW的输出功率。该工艺有效改善光栅的形貌,提升器件的光谱特性。

关键词:表面光栅;掩埋金属;掩膜;窄线宽;光谱;光栅形貌;远场光斑

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0 引言

光栅作为一种重要的光学元件,因其具有波长变换、耦合等功能,已被广泛应用于激光通讯、光信息处理、光电探测和光学精密测量控制^[1-5]等领域。在传统的法布里-珀罗半导体激光器中加入光栅结构作为选模元件,可以有效地改善半导体激光器的光谱特性,从而实现半导体激光器窄线宽、波长可调谐等功能^[6-8]。

为了能够对半导体激光器谐振腔内的光子起到更好的衍射作用,通常完成激光器外延结构中有源区的生长后,将光栅制作在有源区附近的波导层上,然后借助材料二次外延技术完成剩余功能层的生长。2010年,德国费迪南德-伯恩研究所制备了一种分布反馈(Distributed Feedback,DFB)半导体激光器^[9],研究人员在波导层上刻蚀了周期为324 nm的二阶光栅,并采用二次外延技术完成器件外延结构的整体生长。该激光器件实现了1 064 nm波长激射,并在70 mW输出功率下获得了232 kHz的线宽。然而,二次外延技术不仅增加了半导体激光器制作工艺的复杂度,还容易在激光器内引入杂质影响器件性能^[10-11]。

为此,研究人员近年来围绕表面光栅半导体激光器开展了大量研究工作^[12]。2011年,芬兰的Tampere大学制作了一种光栅周期为405 nm的DFB半导体激光器^[13],该激光器最大输出功率为10 mW,实现了20 GHz的小信号调制带宽。为了获得更高的衍射效率,目前报道的表面光栅DFB半导体激光器主要采用低阶光栅,这就对器件的制作工艺提出了较高要求。因此,通过增加光栅阶数简化表面光栅制作工艺逐渐成为了DFB半导体激光器新的探索方向。2018年,德国费迪南德-伯恩研究所提出了基于十阶表面布拉格光栅的侧向耦合DFB半导体激光器^[14],在输出功率约为46 mW的情况下,该半导体激光器在404.6 nm处实现了

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40 pm线宽的单峰发射。同年,中科院长春光机所报道了一种增益耦合型DFB半导体激光器^[15],该激光器通过制作周期为4.5 μm的光栅实现了脊波导表面的周期性电注入,该激光器在48.8 mW的输出功率下获得了971.3 nm的激光波长以及3.2 pm的线宽。2019年,中科院长春光机所的研究团队基于365 nm的i线光源,刻蚀制备了具有锥形放大器结构的器件的光栅^[16],由于具有更短的波长,光刻精度得以进一步提高,最终实现了303 mW的输出功率和1.4 pm的线宽。高阶表面光栅的周期相对较大,使用接触式紫外曝光机即可进行光栅图形的曝光,并借助光刻胶作为掩膜的干法刻蚀工艺完成光栅的制作。然而,随着半导体激光器技术的发展,表面光栅半导体激光器件的结构愈发复杂,往往需要独立的微纳工艺制作表面光栅结构。由于先期制作的脊波导等结构使外延片表面呈现高低起伏的状态,作为光栅掩膜的光刻胶图形边缘易发生形变,从而对光栅结构造成影响。因此,在表面光栅半导体激光器的制作过程中,通常先进行表面光栅的制作。然而,这就需要额外增加光栅的保护工艺,以避免后续器件工艺损坏光栅结构,这将增加器件工艺的制备复杂度。

为此,本文提出了一种基于掩埋金属掩膜的表面光栅DFB半导体激光器制备工艺。该掩埋金属掩膜工艺方案预先在外延片表面制作具有光栅图形的Ni-Au金属掩膜,在完成器件所需制作工艺并去除波导结构表面钝化层后,在露出的掩埋Ni-Au金属掩膜和剩余钝化层的共同阻挡作用下,通过干法刻蚀工艺在脊波导表面制作形成光栅结构。在该掩埋金属掩膜方案中,先进行Ni-Au金属掩膜制作工艺的设计避免了外延片表面高低起伏形貌对光栅掩膜的影响,后期进行表面光栅刻蚀的设计使得该工艺方案无需额外增加光栅保护工艺。

1 器件制备工艺方案

图1给出了基于掩埋金属掩膜的DFB半导体激光器制备工艺方案。首先,在外延片表面旋涂负性光刻胶,经紫外曝光、显影后,得到具有光栅图形的光刻胶掩膜。通过磁控溅射的方法,在外延片的表面依次磁控溅射厚度为20 nm的Ni薄膜层和厚度为80 nm的Au薄膜层,并借助lift-off剥离工艺,在剥离掉光栅图案之外的金属后获得具有光栅图形的Ni-Au金属掩膜,如图1(a)所示。然后,在外延片表面旋涂正性光刻胶,经紫外套刻曝光后,显影形成脊波导图案。在进行坚膜后,以光刻胶为掩膜,使用感应耦合等离子体(Inductively Coupled Plasma, ICP)干法刻蚀外延片,形成如图1(b)所示的脊波导结构。经过去胶处理后,使用离子体增强化学的气相沉积法(Plasma Enhanced Chemical Vapor Deposition, PECVD)在外延片的表面沉积厚度为300 nm的SiO₂钝化层,再次通过旋涂正性光刻胶进行电极窗口的套刻,通过曝光显影形成电极窗口图案后,使用BOE腐蚀液去除脊波导表面的SiO₂钝化层,形成电注入窗口,同时露出被掩埋在钝化层下方的Ni-Au金属掩膜,如图1(c)所示。对外延片进行ICP干法刻蚀,在掩埋Ni-Au金属掩膜和剩余钝化层的共同阻挡作用下,在脊波导表面形成表面光栅,如图1(d)所示。最后,采用磁控溅射在半导体外延片的P面溅射Ti/Pt/Au形成器件的P面电极,经减薄、抛光处理后,在半导体外延片的N面溅射Au/Ge/Ni形成器件的N面电极,并完成热退火等后续器件工艺。

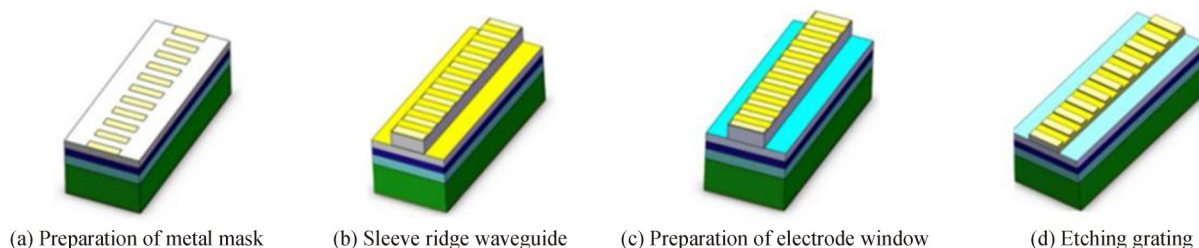


图1 基于掩埋金属掩膜的DFB半导体激光器制备工艺方案

Fig. 1 Preparation process scheme of DFB semiconductor laser based on buried metal mask

采用金属有机化学气相沉积法(Metal-Organic Chemical Vapor Deposition, MOCVD)在GaAs(100)向<011>偏2°的N型掺杂衬底片上生长激光器件的外延结构,其包含厚度为7 nm/14.6 nm的In_{0.26}Ga_{0.74}As/

GaAs_{0.84}P单量子阱结构、厚度均为0.3 μm的Al_{0.3}Ga_{0.7}As N型和P型波导层、厚度分别为1.95 μm和1.4 μm的Al_{0.5}Ga_{0.5}As N型和P型限制层,并在外延片表面生长有一层厚度为0.15 μm的高掺GaAs盖层。分别使用Ni-Au金属薄膜和光刻胶薄膜作为掩膜,经ICP干法刻蚀获得两个脊表面光栅样品,其金相显微镜照片如图2所示。ICP刻蚀过程中,RF功率和ICP功率分别为50 W和400 W,压力和温度分别为0.2 Pa和30 °C,Cl₂、BCl₃和Ar气体流量分别为20 sccm、5 sccm和5 sccm(Standard Cubic Centimeter per Minute)。Ni-Au金属掩膜较为坚固,且在定型之后不会轻易发生形变或边缘塌陷,因此在ICP刻蚀过程中,掩埋Ni-Au金属掩膜具有更好的抗刻蚀效果,保证了光栅的边缘形貌。由图2(a)可以看出,对于掩埋Ni-Au金属掩膜工艺,刻蚀的光栅边缘较为平直,光栅形貌良好。与掩埋Ni-Au金属掩膜相比,光刻胶掩膜的抗刻蚀能力较差,其在ICP刻蚀过程中易出现塌边,导致掩膜边缘产生形变,从而致使刻蚀形成的光栅形貌受损。如图2(b)所示,对于光刻胶掩膜工艺,刻蚀的光栅边缘形变较为明显,光栅形貌相对较差。这在一定程度上削弱了光栅的周期性微扰,将减弱光栅对器件谐振腔内光子的衍射作用。

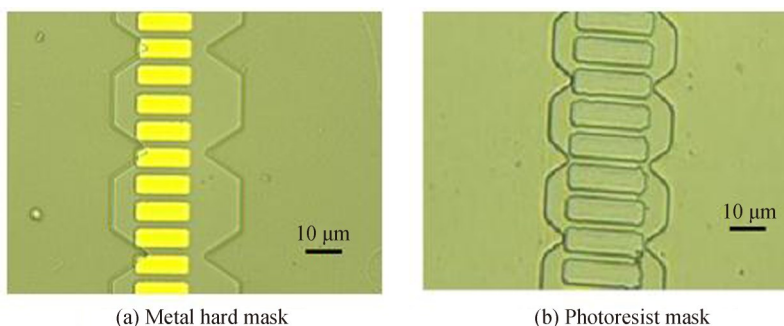


图2 刻蚀后的光栅俯视图
Fig. 2 Top view of etched grating

采用掩埋金属掩膜制备工艺方案制作了表面光栅DFB半导体激光器件(Buried Metal Distributed Feedback, BM-DFB),如图3所示。该激光器件腔长1 mm,脊波导宽度为50 μm,基于理论分析并使用FDTD软件进行模拟,高阶表面光栅也可获得较好的耦合强度,但对于模拟时采用的偶数阶光栅,当占空比为0.5时光栅的反射率为0,综合考虑光栅的特性及制作工艺难度,选用周期为10 μm、占空比为0.6的光栅参数。同时因脊波导两侧刻蚀10 μm宽的微结构,因此将光栅宽度选定为25 μm,在脊波导两侧制作有周期性重复的梯形微结构以抑制激光器件的高阶侧模^[17-18],如图3(a)所示。在完成器件的制作工艺后,将器件解理成单管芯,并将器件P面向上封装在C-mount热沉上以备测试,如图3(b)所示,绿色圆圈内即为解理后的器件,表面连接金丝以注入电流,银色部分是以In为材料制成的焊料。同时为对比分析,采用光刻胶作为表面光栅的刻蚀掩膜,制作了结构相同的DFB半导体激光器件(Photoresist Mask Distributed Feedback, PM-DFB)。

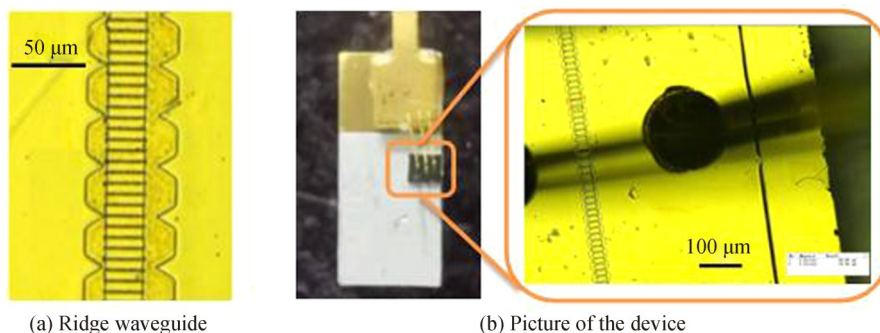


图3 BM-DFB管芯
Fig. 3 View of BM-DFB

2 器件测试分析

器件制作完成后,在温控模块的作用下,使用海洋光学HR4000高分辨率光谱仪对激光器件不同温度时的光谱特性进行了测试。光谱仪探测的光谱范围为700 nm~1 100 nm,探测器为3 648像素线阵探测器。图4给出了两种器件的光谱特性及中心波长对应的半高全宽。测试过程中,器件的驱动电流固定为0.5 A。由图4(a)和图4(b)可以看出,在工作温度稳定在20℃的情况下,BM-DFB在中心波长为1 042 nm处的半高全宽约为0.23 nm,经对光谱数据进行处理,得到其边模抑制比(Side-Mode Suppression Ratio, SMSR)为12 dB;而PM-DFB在1 048 nm的中心波长下半高全宽约为0.56 nm, SMSR为10 dB;而PM-DFB在1 048 nm的中心波长下半高全宽约为0.56 nm, SMSR为10 dB。BM-DFB与PM-DFB相比,光谱的半高全宽降低了59%, SMSR提高了16.7%。因此BM-DFB器件具有更好的单纵模性能。而BM-DFB纵模性能的改善主要得益于BM-DFB的光栅的形貌及折射率具有更好的周期重复性。因此,掩埋金属掩膜制备工艺方案有利于DFB半导体激光器波长稳定性的提升。

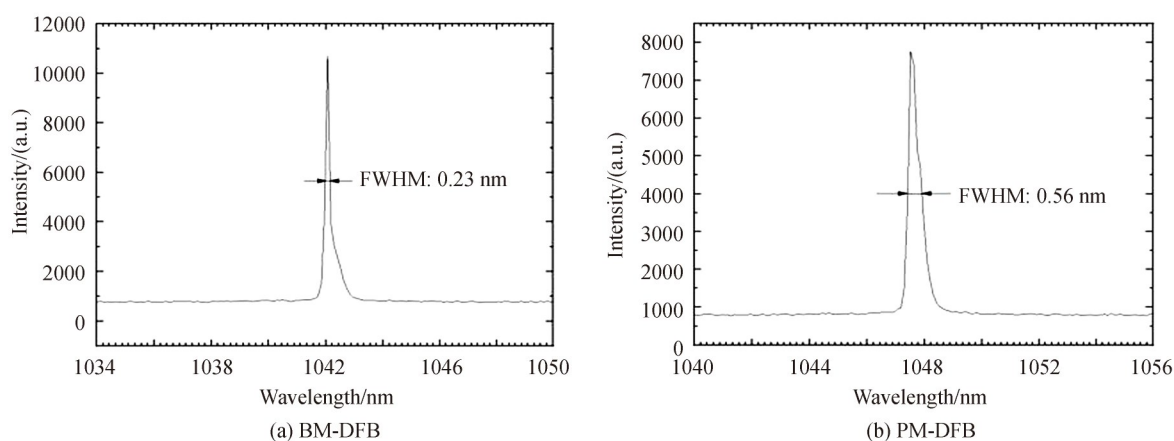


图4 BM-DFB和PM-DFB的光谱
Fig. 4 Spectra of BM-DFB and PM-DFB

图5所示为BM-DFB和PM-DFB的功率-电流-电压($P-I-V$)测试结果。测试过程中,激光器件的工作温度保持在25℃。由图5可知,BM-DFB阈值电流约为200 mA,此后随着输入电流增大,器件的电压及输出功率也逐步上升,在1.1 A的输入电流下达到饱和,获得了245 mW的输出功率。PM-DFB的阈值电流约为100 mA,器件的电压及输出功率也随着输入电流的增大而增加,但在输入电流超过阈值电流后,随电流的增加PM-DFB的电压增加更加显著,经分析认为这是由于正胶工艺中未能将正胶完全清除,从而导致器件的电流注入效率下降。当输入电流达到0.8 A时,PM-DFB的输出功率达到饱和,约为240 mW。

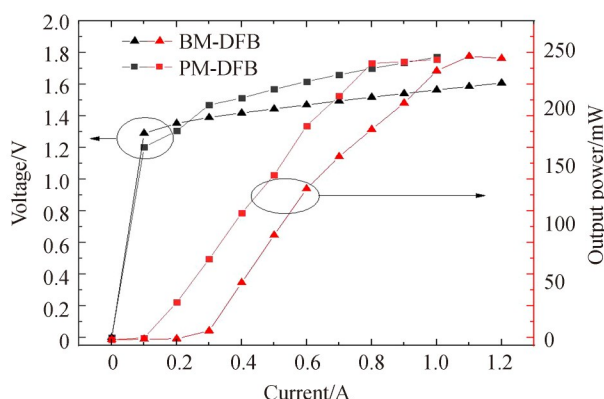


图5 BM-DFB和PM-DFB的 $P-I-V$ 曲线
Fig. 5 $P-I-V$ curves of BM-DFB and PM-DFB

图6为输入电流在0.5 A时BM-DFB与PM-DFB的远场光斑,在50 μm 的脊宽条件下两者均呈“单瓣”,光斑中间并无断处,光场中间的能量更为集中,呈高斯分布。通常对于脊波导宽度超过50 μm 宽的器件,其远场光斑会发生分瓣。通过远场光斑图可知,两种工艺制备的侧向微结构DFB半导体激光器件实现了对高阶横模的抑制,保障了光束质量。这表明脊波导两侧的微结构消除了远场光斑“多瓣”现象,对器件的光斑输出质量起到了良好的提升作用。

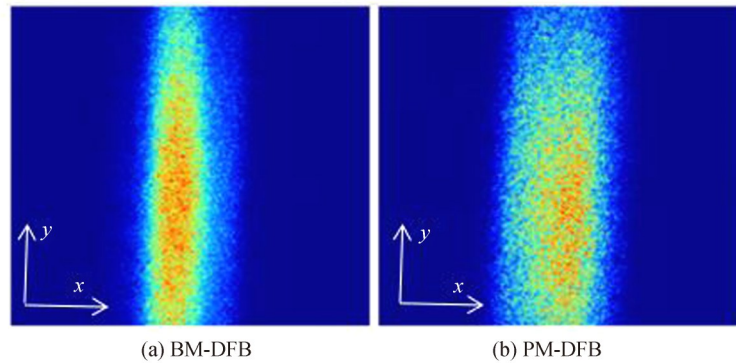


图6 BM-DFB和PM-DFB的远场光斑

Fig. 6 Far field spot pattern of BM-DFB and PM-DFB

3 结论

本文提出了一种基于掩埋金属掩膜的表面光栅DFB半导体激光器制备工艺,通过预先在半导体外延片表面预先制作Ni-Au金属层、制备出光栅的硬掩膜,在随后完成脊波导制作后刻蚀出光栅,成功减小其它器件工艺对光栅结构的影响,从而获得了更好的光栅结构,改善了BM-DFB器件的输出线宽特性。与常规工艺制备的表面光栅DFB半导体激光器相比,其光谱的半高全宽仅为0.23 nm,低于常规工艺的0.56 nm,边模抑制比由10 dB提升至12 dB,单纵模性能更加优良。输入电流为1 A时,器件输出功率均可达240 mW左右。该研究为相关器件结构的光栅设计与提供了新方法。

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Fabrication Technology of Distributed Feedback Semiconductor Laser Based on Buried Metal Mask

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Abstract: With the development of semiconductor laser technology, surface grating semiconductor laser devices' structure is becoming more complex. An independent micro nano process is often required to fabricate surface grating structures. There are some difficulties in the manufacturing process of ridge surface grating. Due to the ridge waveguide and other structures made in advance, the surface of epitaxial wafer presents a state of ups and downs, and the photoresist pattern edge as grating mask is prone to deformation, which destroys the grating morphology and affects the performance of grating. If the process scheme of etching the ridge waveguide first and then grating etching is adopted in the manufacturing process, the first etched ridge waveguide will make the surface of the epitaxial wafer uneven, resulting in uneven photoresist thickness after spin coating and damage the exposure pattern. Moreover, due to the uneven surface of the insulating dielectric layer produced after this process, it is difficult to corrode the insulating layer on the grating when corroding the insulating layer to form the electrode window, which will eventually affect the carrier injection and damage the output power of the semiconductor laser. Therefore, in the fabrication process of surface grating semiconductor laser, the fabrication process of surface grating is usually carried out first. However, this requires additional grating protection to avoid the subsequent device process damaging the grating structure, which will make the device preparation process cumbersome and not conducive to the preparation. In addition, during the subsequent fabrication of ridge waveguide, it is necessary to homogenize the photoresist again to expose the ridge waveguide. During the homogenization, the photoresist on the surface of epitaxial sheet can not be evenly distributed due to the grating structure existing in advance, which will affect the exposure of ridge waveguide and further lead to the residual photoresist in the grating groove during development, which is difficult to remove after subsequent process steps, damage to the quality of the device. In this paper, a fabrication process of surface grating distributed feedback semiconductor laser based on a buried metal mask is proposed. This fabrication process can reduce the influence of device process on the grating structure without additional grating protection process. At the beginning of the process, a Ni-Au metal layer is fabricated on the surface of semiconductor epitaxial wafer to form a hard mask of surface grating. After the process of waveguide and passivation layer, the

passivation layer on the surface of the waveguide is removed to form the electrode injection window and expose the buried Ni-Au metal mask. Under the blocking effect of buried Ni-Au metal mask and passivation layer, a surface grating structure is formed on the surface of waveguide by dry etching process. The high-order surface grating distributed feedback semiconductor laser diode with grating period of 10 μm is fabricated by the fabrication process. By stripping out the metal hard mask on the surface of the epitaxial wafer in advance and making the insulating dielectric layer first, and then etching the grating, the residual problem of SiO_2 insulating layer is avoided. Due to the solid texture of the metal hard mask, the morphology of the grating and wide strip ridge waveguide structure will be more intact than that of the photoresist mask, which expands the manufacturing process of surface grating distributed feedback semiconductor laser and is also conducive to the improvement of device performance. The experimental results show that, compared with the fabrication process using photoresist as surface grating mask, the fabrication process based on buried metal mask ensures the morphology of the surface grating and the periodic distribution of the refractive index in the surface grating. Therefore, the single longitudinal mode half height full width of the device is reduced from 0.56 nm to 0.23 nm, and an output power of 242 mW is obtained at 1 A. At the same time, the far-field spot of the device is intact and the beam quality is good. This fabrication process improve the morphology of the grating and enhance the spectral characteristics of the device effectively. The new device technology ensures the morphology of the fabricated grating and is conducive to the improvement of the performance of laser devices, it provides more flexible and diverse methods for the fabrication of the same type of devices.

Key words: Surface gratings; Buried metal; Mask; Narrow linewidth; Spectrum; Grating morphology; Far field spot

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