

宽范围无跳模外腔可调谐半导体激光器

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摘要: 具有宽调谐范围、无跳模以及高光谱纯净度的半导体激光器在超精细光谱、相干检测和光纤智能感知等领域有着重要的应用。但是受到半导体激光器固有运转特性的制约, 通过传统的单片集成式半导体激光器难以获得高光谱纯净度的宽范围可调谐激光输出。因此文中采用闪耀光栅作为外腔反馈元件, 单角面度半导体增益芯片作为增益介质, 通过 Littman-Metcalf 外腔振荡结构实现了 1480~1580 nm 的宽调谐范围、无模式跳变的线宽小于 98.27 kHz 的激光输出, 在注入电流为 410 mA 的条件下获得了 16.95 dBm 的峰值功率、全范围功率优于 14.96 dBm 和边模抑制比优于 65.54 dB 的输出。相应的实验结果表明: 采用机械刻划闪耀光栅的 Littman-Metcalf 结构用于半导体激光器, 可很大程度的改善半导体激光器的综合性能。该研究有利于推动其在提升光频域反射仪测量精度方向的应用。

关键词: 无跳模; 外腔; 可调谐; 半导体激光光源; 窄线宽

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0 引言

可调谐半导体激光器在光纤三维形状传感、超精细光谱分析、高速光通信相干检测和计量检测等领域获得了广泛的应用^[1-4], 而普通的单片集成可调谐半导体激光器(如分布式反馈激光器、垂直腔面发射半导体激光器等)的光谱纯净度不高, 无法满足需要。利用外腔反馈技术可以改善半导体激光器的工作特性(如降低阈值电流), 提高半导体激光器的光谱纯净度, 并可在几十纳米至上百纳米范围内实现连续波长可调。采用外腔结构实现半导体激光器的波长可调谐、线宽压缩和无跳模输出是一种结构紧凑、成本低的有效方法^[5-7]。

通常, 干涉滤光片、波导滤波器、平面反射镜、法

布里-珀罗(F-P)标准具、闪耀光栅以及这些元件的组合都可用作外腔可调谐半导体激光器的外反馈元件, 其中闪耀光栅腔可以实现宽范围调谐输出, 最为普遍^[8-10]。以闪耀光栅作为外反馈元件的外腔可调谐半导体激光器主要由 Littrow 和 Littman-Metcalf 两种经典结构类型组成。相比而言, Littman-Metcalf 结构的外腔可调谐半导体激光器在运转过程中, 输出光束的方向不会随谐振波长的调谐而改变, 并且由于闪耀光栅的色散作用和往复衍射, Littman-Metcalf 型可调谐半导体激光器的输出光谱纯净度(边模抑制比、光谱线宽)往往优于 Littrow 型外腔可调谐半导体激光器。故基于 Littman-Metcalf 结构的可调谐半导体激光器的应用范围愈来愈广, 成为了当前的一个主流结构设计类型^[11-12]。J. Jin 等采用 803 nm 半导体激光

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器、闪耀光栅与调谐镜构成 Littman-Metcalf 结构的方法,通过精细调整调谐镜的角度,反馈不同波长的反馈信号进入半导体激光器内部(内腔),经过模式选择后,激光器可实现 797.38~807.26 nm 范围内任意波长的调谐输出,最大输出功率为 17.9 mW,边模抑制比优于 20 dB,每个波长的光谱线宽都在 0.06 nm 以下^[13]。K. S. Repasky 等利用电反馈施加微小校正信号来保持激光器调谐过程中腔体谐振状态稳定的方法,将无跳模调谐范围由 1 GHz 提升到 65 GHz^[14]。H. Gong 等通过控制压电陶瓷的补偿速率,保证了本征腔和外腔的同步调谐以及模式匹配,实现了无跳模调谐范围优于 78 GHz 的单纵模可调谐激光输出^[15]。L. W. Sheng 等通过构建外腔调谐源无跳模纵向允许误差范围的数学模型,从转轴点到致动器运动轴线距离、转轴点到闪耀光栅衍射点距离、闪耀光栅安装角度、闪耀光栅刻线密度四个方面对构建的数学模型进行了仿真研究,研究表明,通过合理设计外腔结构参数、优化闪耀光栅性质等,可有效避免外腔可调谐激光器输出光束模式的跳变^[16]。D. Zhang 等对影响 Littman-Metcalf 结构可调谐半导体激光器调谐特性的各种因素进行了分析,依据分析结果设计了一种具有最佳输出性能的外腔可调谐激光器,可实现 1528.77~1568.36 nm 范围内的可调谐输出,每个波长的线宽都在 50 kHz 以下,边模抑制比优于 55 dB,每个波长的输出功率都在 13 dBm 以上^[17]。尽管诸多研究已经被开展,用以实现无跳模调谐输出,但无需外部补偿、更宽调谐范围、更高光谱纯净度的外腔可调谐半导体激光器的研究鲜有报道。

文中报道了一台 1550 nm 波段的基于 Littman-Metcalf 结构的外腔可调谐半导体激光器。利用一端镀有增透膜的单角度面半导体增益芯片作为本征腔种子源,通过合理优化外腔结构参数,在 410 mA 工作电流下,实现了 100 nm 宽度的无跳模波长调谐、优于 16.95 dBm 的峰值输出功率以及优于 65.54 dB 的边模抑制比输出。Littman-Metcalf 结构的外腔可调谐半导体激光器的实验研究有利于推动其在提升光频域反射仪测量精度方向的应用。

1 实验装置

图 1 为实验所用的 Littman-Metcalf 型外腔可调

谐半导体激光器的结构示意图。其中,本征腔(内腔)种子源为 1526.2 nm 中心波长的半蝶形封装半导体激光器(Thorlabs, SAF1550S2),3 dB 带宽为 127.6 nm,注入 300 mA 电流时,输出功率为 0.1 mW,激光器出射端面(单角面度面)镀有反射率低于 0.005% 的增透膜。通过给驱动源控制信号可以对安装在带有热电制冷器的热沉上的单角面度增益芯片进行精确控温,实验过程中使温度恒定在 25 °C。采用数值孔径为 0.55、焦距为 4.51 mm 的模压非球面透镜 L1(LightPath, 355150)对种子源输出的快轴光束进行准直,准直后 90% 的能量集中在 8 mrad 以内。经准直的近似椭圆光束入射到反射式刻划光栅 RG 发生衍射,然后入射到调谐镜 M1 表面,只有与调谐镜垂直的激光光束将原路返回至刻划光栅,该光波再一次被刻划光栅衍射,沿着第一次入射到刻划光栅的路径原路返回进单角面度增益芯片的有源区产生谐振。利用压电陶瓷促动器 P1 实现外腔腔长的调节,从而改变半导体激光器的谐振波长。反射式刻划光栅为美国 Newport 公司生产的闪耀光栅,型号为 33025FL01-155R,刻线密度为 900 grooves/mm。外腔半导体激光器的外腔设计总长度约为 50 mm,对应的纵模间隔约为 3 GHz (24 pm@1550 nm)。半蝶形封装半导体激光器的光纤端用于采集不同谐振激光波长的输出。

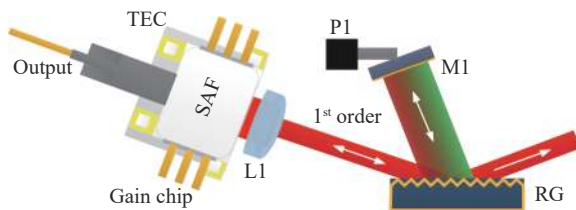


图 1 基于 Littman-Metcalf 结构的外腔可调谐半导体激光器的结构示意图

Fig.1 Structure diagram of the proposed external-cavity tunable semiconductor laser built in the Littman-Metcalf configuration

2 实验结果及分析

首先对采用闪耀光栅作为外反馈元件与半蝶形封装半导体激光器构成外腔前后的光功率-电流(P-I)特性曲线进行测试,结果如图 2 所示。由图 2(a)可见,当半蝶形封装半导体激光器在自由运转条件下,工作电流为 410 mA 时,获得了 0.15 mW 功率的激光

输出,斜率效率为 0.00049 mW/mA。由图 2(b)可见,构成外腔后,在驱动电流为 410 mA 的条件下,外腔可调谐半导体激光器输出功率为 47.50 mW,斜率效率为 0.13542 mW/mA,外腔效率达到 99.68%。当存在外腔反馈时,在阈值电流 (60 mA) 以上,激光器的输出功率与注入电流呈线性关系。相关结果表明,此时所述外腔结构处于强光学反馈和最优光路准直状态。值得注意的是,当注入电流为 330 mA 时,输出光功率存在突变(即存在内外腔模式失配)的情况,因此,为保证全范围无跳模调谐输出应避免这一驱动电流值。

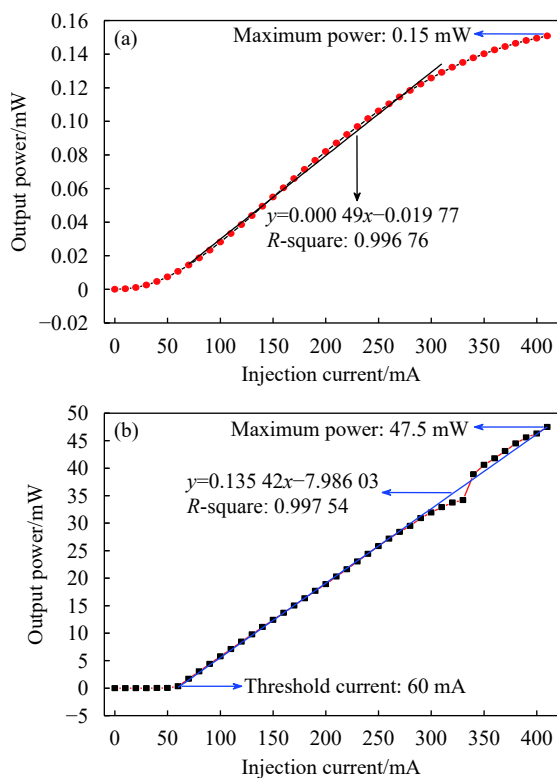


图 2 (a) 自由运行的半蝶形封装 (6 针) 半导体激光器的光功率-电流特性曲线; (b) 闪耀光栅外腔半导体激光器的光功率-电流特性曲线 (输出波长 1580 nm)

Fig.2 (a) P-I characteristic curve of the free-running half-butterfly (6 pin) packaged semiconductor laser; (b) P-I characteristic curve of external-cavity semiconductor laser with blazed grating (Output wavelength is 1580 nm)

图 3(a) 为 Littman-Metcalf 结构可调谐半导体激光器的阈值电流随谐振输出波长的变化情况。图中可见 1480 nm、1570 nm 和 1580 nm 的谐振输出阈值

分别为 144.6 mA、55 mA 和 60 mA。阈值电流的大幅下降说明该外腔可调谐半导体激光器具有较高的外腔耦合效率,阈值电流的最低值处表明耦合效率达到最高。究其原因,外腔可调谐半导体激光器选用了具有较大数值孔径的模压非球面准直透镜和具有较高衍射效率的刻划光栅,且单角度增益芯片的前端面镀有增透膜,这些都有效降低了内腔的有害损耗。这个现象也基本反映了半蝶形封装半导体激光器的增益谱分布特性。输出谐振波长随注入电流变化特性如图 3(b) 所示,驱动电流由 330 mA 增大到 410 mA,输出谐振波长发生红移,从 1570.116 nm 变化至 1570.140 nm,增加了 24 pm。这是由于半导体增益器件有源区的折射率随注入电流增加而增大,从而导致输出谐振波长红移。由插图可见,激光谐振波长虽然发生变化,但外腔可调谐半导体激光器依然保持单模输出,说明闪耀光栅选模作用良好。通过调谐镜的转动,实现了外腔可调谐半导体激光器输出波长的调谐,波长可调谐范围如图 3(c) 所示,可调谐波长输出范围为 1480~1580 nm,覆盖半蝶形封装半导体激光器 3 dB 带宽的 78.37%,且边模抑制比优于 65.54 dB。

图 3(d) 给出了外腔可调谐半导体激光器输出功率随波长的变化特性,当谐振输出波长远离增益中心时,输出功率呈现与阈值电流相反的趋势,离增益谱中心越远,输出功率相对越低,这是由单角度增益芯片自身的增益谱线决定的,即当外腔可调谐半导体激光器的激射阈值电流越低则相应的输出光功率越高。显然,若想使外腔可调谐半导体激光器具有更高输出功率的能力,需要尽可能降低外腔激光器的阈值电流。外腔可调谐半导体激光器注入电流为 410 mA 时,约 1580 nm 处有 16.95 dBm 的最高输出功率,全范围输出功率优于 14.97 dBm。

闪耀光栅外腔可调谐半导体激光器的无跳模调谐特性采用波长差计量法进行测量,即测量电机步数与波长的对应关系,计算波长对电机步数的二阶导数,在整个范围内的二阶导数小于腔体纵模间隔时,则无跳模出现。图 4 给出了电机步数-波长差 (一阶导数) 曲线。由图 4 可知,在整个调谐范围内相邻波长差在 20.06~21.36 pm 之间,二阶导数明显小于腔体纵模间隔 (24 pm),因此可以认为在波长的调谐输出过程中没有模式的突变^[11]。

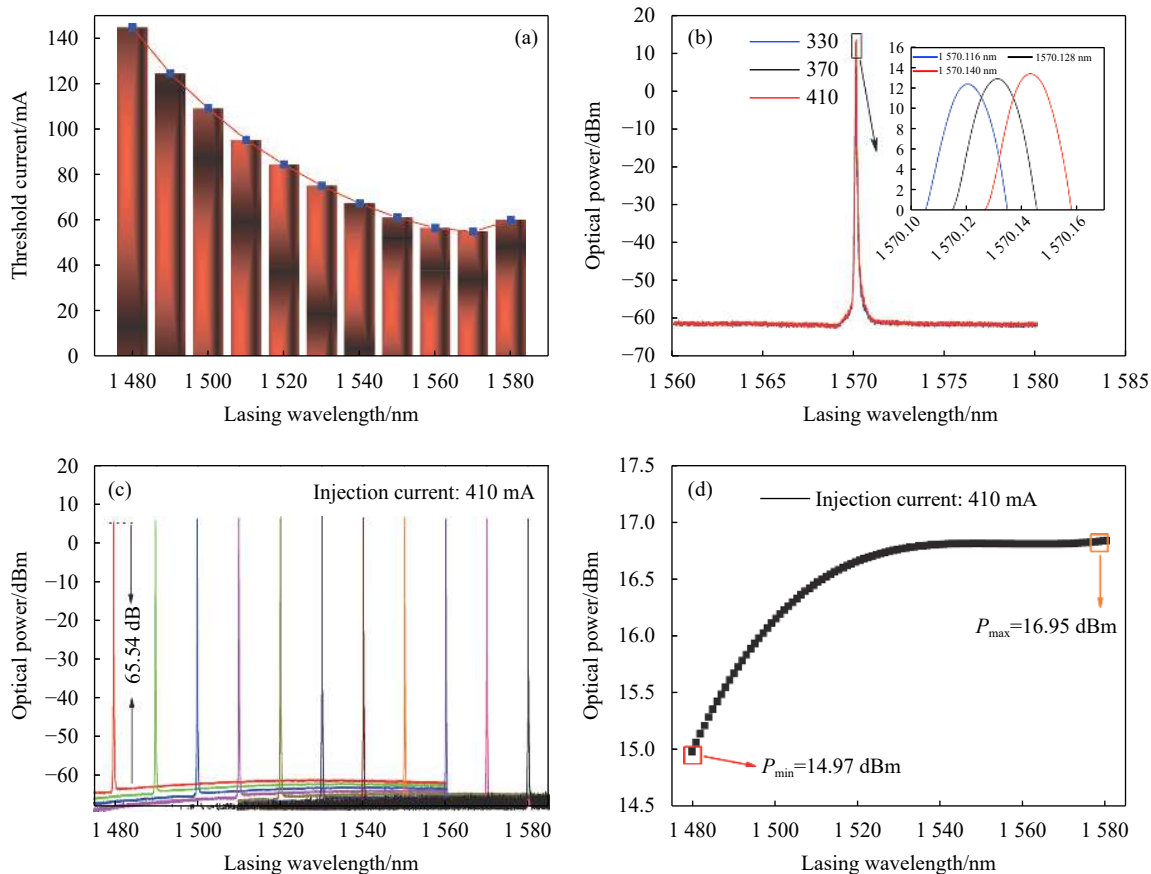


图 3 (a) 阈值电流随谐振输出波长的关系; (b) 输出谐振波长随注入电流的变化关系, 插图: 不同注入电流下的谐振输出波长; (c) 当注入电流为 410 mA 时, 外腔可调谐半导体激光器的波长调谐范围; (d) 外腔可调谐半导体激光器输出功率随波长的变化特性

Fig.3 (a) Relationship between threshold current and lasing wavelength; (b) Output lasing wavelength versus injection current; Inset: lasing wavelength of the proposed external-cavity laser at different injection currents; (c) Tuning range of the proposed external-cavity tunable semiconductor laser with injection current of 410 mA; (d) Output power of the presented external-cavity laser versus lasing wavelength

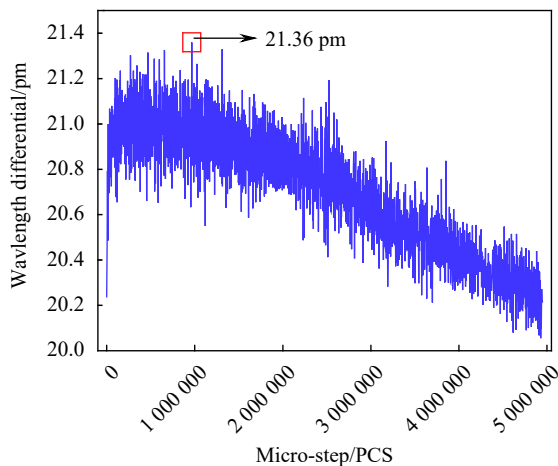


图 4 闪耀光栅外腔半导体激光器的无跳模调谐特性曲线

Fig.4 Mode-hopping free performance curve of external-cavity semiconductor laser with blazed grating

接下来, 采用波长计 (Yokogawa 6151B) 对外腔可调谐半导体激光器的波长稳定性和输出功率稳定性进行了测试。图 5(a) 给出了在采样时间 130 min 内 (监测间隔时间为 5 min)、谐振波长为 1570.0432 nm 时外腔可调谐半导体激光器的输出波长稳定性情况, 可知, 外腔可调谐半导体激光器的输出波长稳定性为 ± 2.5 pm, 表明所设计的外腔激光器具有良好的波长稳定性。由图 5(b) 可知, 外腔可调谐半导体激光器的输出功率稳定性 (± 0.035 dB) 测试结果良好。

最后, 通过采用基于强相干包络的自相干检测方法对外腔可调谐激光光源的线宽进行表征^[18-20], 相应的线宽测试实验结果如图 6 所示。得益于较长的外腔长度和低纹波的直流驱动电源, 从结果可见在整个波长调谐输出范围内, 输出光谱线宽均小于 98.27 kHz,

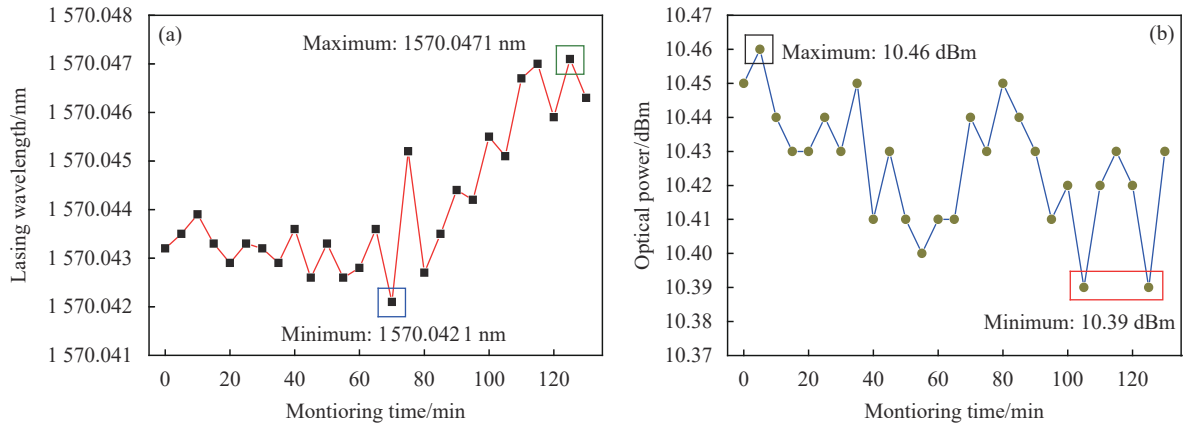


图 5 (a) 外腔可调谐半导体激光器的输出波长稳定性; (b) 外腔可调谐半导体激光器的输出功率稳定性

Fig.5 (a) Lasing wavelength stability of the proposed external-cavity tunable semiconductor laser; (b) Output optical power stability of the proposed external-cavity tunable semiconductor laser

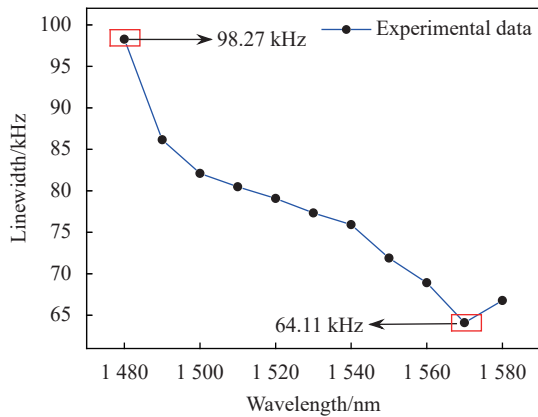


图 6 输出光谱线宽随谐振输出波长的变化关系

Fig.6 Relationship between the output spectral linewidth and the resonant output wavelength

在 1570 nm 附近, 其输出光谱线宽减小至 64.11 kHz, 这是因为在 1570 nm 谐振波长两端的波长衍射角较大, 而调谐镜的镜面尺寸有限, 当调谐镜调谐选择偏离 1570 nm 谐振波长处的波长返回至半蝶形封装增益芯片的有源区时, 谐振腔内的损耗会增大, 从而引起此时输出光谱线宽的增加。

3 结 论

文中采用机械刻划闪耀光栅作为外腔反馈元件, 镀有增透膜的单角面度增益芯片作为增益介质, 设计了一台基于 Littman-Metcalf 结构的宽调谐范围、无模式跳变的窄线宽外腔可调谐半导体激光光源。由实验结果可知, 外腔反馈具有明显压缩半导体激光光源输出光谱线宽的特性, 可将 1480~1580 nm 范围内半

导体增益芯片的光谱线宽由兆赫兹级压缩至 98.27 kHz 以下, 无跳模调谐输出范围达到 100 nm。当注入电流为 410 mA 时, 可以实现 16.95 dBm 的峰值功率、优于 65.54 dB 的边模抑制比、±2.5 pm 的波长长期稳定性以及±0.035 dB 的功率稳定性等输出指标。宽范围无跳模外腔可调谐半导体激光光源的实现为其未来在高精度光纤频域传感等领域的应用奠定了一定的基础, 后续将进一步优化外腔可调谐半导体激光光源性能, 并开展全国产化、可靠性工程化优化设计。

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Wide-range external-cavity tunable semiconductor laser with mode-hopping free

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Abstract:

Objective External-cavity tunable semiconductor laser (ETSL) has been widely studied and acted as a prior selected laser source for its prestigious characteristics such as broad wavelength tuning range, single mode, narrow linewidth, and compactness. However, limited by the intrinsic operation characteristics of currently available semiconductor lasers, it is difficult to obtain a wide-range tunable laser beam output with high spectral purity directly generated by traditional monolithic semiconductor lasers. Particularly, most applications require that the output wavelength of the ETSL can be scanned continuously over time. Consequently, it is critical to

build and maintain an ETSL system with a wide mode-hopping free tuning range. For this purpose, a Littman-Metcalf external-cavity oscillation structure is designed in this paper.

Methods First, according to the principle and characteristics of the Littman-Metcalf external-cavity oscillation structure, a 900 grooves/mm blazed grating is used as the external-cavity feedback element, single-angled facet gain chip is served as the laser gain medium (Fig.1). Then, the threshold current performance of the ETSL system is characterized by measuring the output optical power at different lasing wavelengths to determine a minimum working current (Fig.3(a)). Finally, the linewidth of the ETSL system with a wide mode-hopping free tuning range at different lasing wavelengths are compared (Fig.6).

Results and Discussions The designed total physical lengths of the laser cavity are changed to obtain superimposed optical spectra for different resonance wavelengths. The injection current is fixed at 410 mA and the ambient temperature is adjusted at 25 °C, and the tuning range results are highlighted (Fig.3(c)). The single-mode operation of different lasing wavelength can be clearly identified, and the side mode suppression ratio of the system satisfies the demand of optical frequency reflectometer. Meanwhile, the peak output power of 16.95 dBm, full range power of better than 14.96 dBm are obtained (Fig.3(d)). In the current implementation, the overall physical length of the ETSL cavity is designed to be about 50 mm, namely from the gain chip rear (left) output facet to the tuning mirror front facet, and corresponds to an axial mode spacing of 24 pm operating at 1 550 nm. The mode-hopping performance of external-cavity semiconductor laser with blazed grating is characterized by using the wavelength difference measurement method, no mode-hopping can be observed in the wavelength range of 1 480-1 580 nm (Fig.4). Stability performance of the wavelength and output power are monitored using the commercial wavelength meter (Fig.5), within a 130 mins duration, the designed ETSL has good wavelength stability (± 2.5 pm) and power stability (± 0.035 dB). Based on the short delay self-heterodyne interferometry, the spectral linewidth is measured to be less than 98.27 kHz within the full tuning range, the minimum spectral linewidth is 64.11 kHz around lasing wavelength of 1 570 nm (Fig.6).

Conclusions A wide mode-hopping free and narrow linewidth external-cavity tunable semiconductor laser is designed, which is based on a classical Littman-Metcalf configuration. Meanwhile, the tuning characteristics and spectral linewidth of the ETSL are investigated experimentally. A wide mode-hopping free continuous wavelength tuning range of about 100 nm (namely, 1 480-1 580 nm) with a side mode suppression ratio of more than 65.54 dB and an output power of more than 14.96 dBm over the whole tuning range can be achieved in a long-term free running. The spectral linewidth performance of the designed tunable laser source measured using short delay self-heterodyne interferometry is less than 98.27 kHz. With the help of this designed tunable laser source, it is helpful to promote its application in improving the measurement accuracy of optical frequency reflectometer. Future work shall focus on the optimization of the length of the laser cavity design to further reduce the spectral linewidth.

Key words: mode-hopping free; external-cavity; tunable; semiconductor laser source; narrow linewidth

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