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Process nano scale mechanical properties measurement of thin metal films using a novel paddle cantilever test structure

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Abstract-A new technique was developed for studying the mechanical behavior of nano-scale thin metal films on substrate is presented. The test structure was designed on a novel “paddle” cantilever beam specimens with dimensions as few hundred nanometers to less than 10 nanometers. This beam is in triangle shape in order to provide uniform plane strain distribution. Standard clean room processing was used to prepare the paddle sample. The experiment can be operated by using the electrostatic deflection on the “paddle” uniform distributed stress cantilever beam and then measure the deposited thin metal film materials on top of it. A capacitance technique was used to measurement on the other side of the deflected plate to measure its deflection with respect to the force. The measured strain was converted through the capacitance measurement for the deflection of the cantilever. System performance on the residual stress measurement of thin films are calculated with three different forces on the “paddle” cantilever beam, including the force due to the film, compliance force and electrostatic force.

I. INTRODUCTION

Microelectromechanical systems (MEMS) technologies are developing rapidly with increasing study of the design, fabrication and commercialization of microscale systems and devices. The roadmap for MEMS plans for developing the complexity and packing density of devices into the future allowing ever smaller in the range of nanometer scale and more densely packed structures to be fabricated. Continued growth of Microsystems technologies requires still further miniaturization, with a corresponding need to understand how length scales affect mechanical behavior of all the components. Accurate knowledge on the mechanical behaviors of thin film materials used for MEMS is important for successful design and development of MEMS.

Although many previous studies had performed on the characterization of mechanical behavior on thin films, the results obtained from different measurement techniques were vary widely for nominally identical samples due to the difficulty with the techniques. Example such as the nanoindentation experiment on thin film is stronger correlated its substrate. Therefore, the ISO (International Standard Organization)-14577 had defined the proper measurement range of using Nano Indentation test that the contact depth has to be <200nm & h<10, where t is film thickness. As a result, it limited the ability to do extensive study of thin film.

Here a new technique was developed for studying the mechanical behavior of Nano-scale thin metal films on substrate. The test structure was designed on a novel “paddle” cantilever beam specimens with dimensions as few hundred nanometers to less than 10 nanometers. This beam is in triangle shape in order to provide uniform plane strain distribution. The experiment is designed to be operated by using the electrostatic deflection on the “paddle” uniform distributed stress cantilever beam and then measure the deposited thin metal film materials on top of it. Thus allow us to explore mechanical function mechanisms in thin films and film of the thickness on nanoscale regime.

II. DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT PROCEDURES

In traditional microbeam bending, cantilevered beams of the film of interest are fabricated by micromachining. The end of the beam is deflected using an indentation apparatus which senses vertical displacement. Elastic properties of the thin film material can be determined from the measured load-displacement characteristics [1-3]. If a thin film is deposited on a thicker free-standing cantilever, (e.g. silicon) plastic properties of the thin film can be probed as well [3].

However, the primary drawbacks in common beam bending, due to the non-uniform distribution of stresses, only a small portion of the sample (at the root of the beam) is exposed to the maximum load. One would thus expect to see higher values for yield strength from beam bending experiments compared to techniques which sample larger volumes. In addition, using indentation apparatus providing vertical displacement for the beam will generate localized effects in the vicinity of the loading point due to its destructive force and complicated analysis processes.

The “paddle” cantilever beam approaches here was to design a “constant stress” cantilever beam that eliminate the non-uniform distribution of stresses along the cantilever. In a cantilever beam with a single localized load at the free end, the bending moment varies linearly from zero at the point of load application to a maximum at the built in end. Thus for a parallel sided beam, as in the preceding sketch Fig. 1, the axial stress on the beam surface is proportional to the bending moment; and, is expressed by:
Where: $\sigma(x) = \frac{M(x) \cdot c}{I}$ = bending stress on the beam surface at a distance X from the point of load application, psi (N/m²)
$M(x)$ = bending moment at distance X, in-lbs. (mN)
$c = \frac{t}{2}$ = distance from neutral axis to beam surface, in (m)
$I = \frac{bt^3}{12}$ = Moment of inertia of beam cross-section, in⁴ (m⁴)
$Z = \frac{bt^2}{6}$ = Section modulus of beam, in³ (m³)
$b = \text{beam width}, \text{in (m)}$
$t = \text{beam thickness}, \text{in (m)}$

Thus, through the design of a cantilever section which modulus can be made proportional to X by making the width proportional to X, and holding the thickness constant, thus stress is constant from one end of the beam to the other. This constant-stress “paddle” cantilever beam is shown in Figure 1 and was primarily discussed in various studies in bulk structure [4].

In addition, the electrostatic deflection force on the designated plate to drag “paddle” cantilever beam can be used instead of using indentation apparatus to provide vertical displacement for the beam. Thus can reduce localized effects in the vicinity of the loading point.

**A. Sample design and fabrication**

The single test chip is designed (Figure 2) to fit in an apparatus where one side of the paddle plate is pulled by an electrostatic field. The measured strain was converted through the capacitance measurement for the deflection of the cantilever.

The sample is shown as the structure of a 20mm×20mm chip with paddle as shown above in plane view and cross section. The thin silicon beam (40 um thick) has a triangular shape in plane view to provide uniform strain in a metallic film on its surface when the beam is bent with force on the paddle. Figure 2 shows the front side and backside view of the sample.

The sample fabrication procedure is using standard clean room processing for MEMS structures. We utilize these techniques and develop one of the simplest sample fabrication processes to conduct an experiment that can maintain consistent sample preparation and excellent yield procedures. The sample is fabricated on a standard 4 inches diameter double polished silicon wafer. Each wafer consists of 7 test chips after standard clean room fabrication. Fabrication can be carried out either with crystallographic etching in KOH or deep Si plasma etching. The detail of the fabrication process sequence is outlined:

- **RCA clean**
- **Deposit SiNx**
- **Pattern front SiNx**
- **Pattern back SiNx**
- **Etching Si by KOH**
- **Continue etching Si**
- **Remove SiNx both sides (not essential)**
- **Deposit metal layer**

Figure 3 shows the KOH process schematic.

Tapered sidewalls are naturally produced with KOH etching. The alternative is to use deep RIE. It produces the vertical sidewalls and the processes are clean and easy. Processing with deep Si etching is also a two-mask process. Etching from the front can define the paddle geometry through
the full thickness of the wafer. Etching from the back creates the desired beam thickness. It may be desirable to the process with slightly non-vertical sidewalls to facilitate producing continuously conducting surfaces on both sides of a chip when it is metallized on tested thin film. Figure 4 shows the deep RIE process schematic.

Figure 4: RIE etching process for an example of thin metal sample

B. Testing System

The apparatus is custom design and the system set-up is design to measure beam deflection by capacitance. It consists of the guard-ringed capacitor electrode, the metal spacer, the calibration sample and the deflection electrode. Figure 8 shows the schematic of the measuring system. The sample chip is mounted together with a guard-ringed capacitor electrode as shown below. A spacing of 25 to 125um to the window frame chip surface around the paddle structure is defined by a metallic spacer.

During the experiment, we apply an electrostatic force to the specimen and measure the capacitance change. The deflection of the paddle beam can be measured from the capacitance value which is described by

$$C = \epsilon_0 \frac{A}{d}$$

Where A is the capacitor plate area, d is the spacer thickness and $\epsilon_0$ is dielectric constant. Thus we can have linear correlation between deflection space and the accurate capacitance value.

A second electrode is mounted below the paddle plate. This electrode is used for electrostatic deflection of paddle. The whole chip is at DC ground but driven at 100 kHz with amplitude of a few volts. That provides a displacement current to central electrode of the capacitor plate which is proportional to the capacitance, and hence inversely proportional to the gap. Depending on the spacing selected, the capacitance is between 2 and 4 pF. The measurement of the capacitance can be made to a precision of approximately 0.1 fF so that paddle spacing changes of 50 nm are readily determined. The paddle can be pulled up with a DC voltage on the guard-ringed electrode or pulled down with a DC voltage on the lower electrode. The
Capacitance measurement can be made with a time resolution of ±10 msec.

C. Measurements of specimen bending and strain

For the electronic setup of the capacity measurement, a sine-wave generator at 100 kHz is applied to the film simultaneously measuring capacity of the paddle capacitor while a second generator drives at the same frequency for a test capacitor which has a known capacity. The two units are coupled (one master, one slave) and have a phase shift of 180°. Figure 9 shows the circuits. The 180° out of phase currents from the two generator-capacity pairs are summed at input of change sensitive preamplifier. The amplified sum is measured with lock-in amplifier with the reference signal from one of the frequency generators.

When the current flowing through the two capacitors is approximately equal, the lock-in will show a value close to zero. In this case the ratio of the capacities is inversely-proportional to the ratio of the amplitudes of the driving:

\[ \frac{V_1}{V_2} \cdot \frac{C_2}{C_1} = \frac{Z_1}{Z_2} \]

If now the capacitance of the paddle capacitor is changed by a change in \( y_b \), the 180° out of phase currents are unbalanced and the lock-in amplifier will measure the difference.

III. CALCULATION RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

The mathematical studies of system performance were done to verify the performance of the systems. For all the measurement, the overall performance on the capacitance, electrostatic electrode and the paddle cantilever as shown in Figure 11 is essential.

Whenever the cantilever is bent, the capacitance of the paddle cantilever structure is

\[ C(y_b) = \varepsilon_0 \int_{d}^{d+\text{slope} \cdot x} dx \]

where \( \varepsilon_0 \) is the dielectric constant of vacuum and \( l_p \) is the width of the paddle. \( y_b \) is the distance from the end position of the beam when it is flat to its position when the beam is bent by a force (initial stress or electrostatic force). If the film has no initial stress \( y_b=0 \) and any electrostatic force will make it negative. If the film have initial tensile stress \( y_b \) is positive with no electrostatic force and may be or negative with electrostatic deflection.

In this case \( y(X) = d_c - y_b - \text{slope} \cdot x \) and the slope of the paddle plane is \( 2y_b/l_b \). This yields the linear correlation between the capacitance value and the spacer thickness. Figure 10 shows an example of calculated capacitance value versus 1/d which can be used as the calibration reference line of the system.

![Figure 9: Electronic setup for the capacity measurement](image)

![Figure 10: Calculated Capacitance versus 1/spacer thickness](image)

![Figure 11: Schematic arrangements of capacitance, electrostatic electrode and the paddle cantilever](image)

![Figure 12: Schematic view of electrostatic force deflection](image)
yb and yp have the geometric relation

$$\frac{y_b}{y_p} = 1 + \frac{L_b}{L_p}$$

Thus we can use an example to calculate the sample deflection versus the capacitance. An example of the capacitance vs yp for a $\varepsilon_0$ of 8.85E-12 force/m, a $l_b$ of 3 mm, a $l_p$ of 5 mm, a $d_e$ of 100um. is shown in Figure 13.

The electrostatic force on the paddle is given by

$$F_p = \varepsilon_0 \frac{c(x)}{d} V \frac{d}{dx}$$

The electrostatic force is always downward so that

$$F_p = -\frac{\varepsilon_0 l_p}{4 y_p} \left( \frac{1}{d + y_b + \text{slope} \cdot x} \right)$$

Where $d_e$ is the distance from the paddle bottom plane to the electrode and V is the applied voltage. The electrostatic force divided by $V^2$ is shown in Figure 14 as a function of $y_b$.

For these dimensions the maximum value of $y_p$ is 61.53um because at that point the end of the paddle touches the capacitance plate. The minimum value is -61.53um because the paddle then touches the deflection electrode.

The total force on the paddle is

$$F_p' = F_p' + F_t' - F_e'$$

where the force on the paddle center due to stress in the film

$$F_e' = \frac{dE_x}{dy} E_x V' \frac{dE_x}{dy}$$

and the compliance force of the beam

$$F_t' = -\frac{1}{\text{compliance}} \cdot \frac{y_p}{\text{compliance}} = \frac{y_p}{P} \frac{6L_l(L_l + L_b)}{EI_t}$$

If we neglect electrostatic force on the paddle the total force is

$$F_p' = F_t' + F_p'$$

We can write Eq. in the other word

$$F_p' + F_p' = E_x V' \left( \varepsilon_0 + \varepsilon_0 \right) K \cdot \frac{1}{\text{compliance}} \cdot \frac{y_p}{P}$$

Where $\varepsilon_0$ is the initial strain of the film depends on initial stress and $\varepsilon_0$ is a function of $y_p$. So we can written Eq. like below

$$F_p' + F_p' = E_x V' \left( \varepsilon_0 + \frac{t_b Y_b}{l_b} + \frac{t_s Y_s}{l_s} \right) \frac{6L_l(L_l + L_b)}{EI_t} \frac{y_p}{P}$$

Where $t_b$ is 40um; $l_b$ is 3mm; $l_p$ is 5mm; $K$ is 0.3; E is biaxial young’s modulus. The film and beam force together vs $y_p$ is shown in Figure 15.

As we can observe in this plot when the force is equal to zero imply the system is in its equilibration position with no electrostatic force.

IV. CONCLUSION

A novel “paddle” cantilever beam specimens with dimensions as few hundred nanometers to less than 10 nanometers is designed and fabricated. The experiment can be operated by using the electrostatic deflection on the “paddle” uniform distributed stress cantilever beam and then measure the deposited thin metal film materials on top of it. Capacitance techniques were used to measurement on the other side of the deflected plate to measure its deflection with respect to the force. The measured strain was converted through the capacitance measurement for the deflection of the cantilever. System performance on the residual stress measurement of thin films are calculated with three different forces on the “paddle” cantilever beam, including the force due to the film, compliance force and electrostatic force. The calculation helps to predict system performances including capacity versus bending high, driving voltage versus electrostatic force, maximum deflection and the free end of cantilever beam position in different residual stress. They also provided proof of the testing approach as well as potential use for the design and development of MEMS...
materials.

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