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Pseudo-direct to direct compositional crossover in wurtzite GaP/InxGa1-xP core-shell nanowires

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Pseudo-direct to direct compositional crossover in wurtzite GaP/InxGa1-xP core-shell nanowires

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Thanks to their uniqueness, nanowires allow the realization of novel semiconductor crystal structures with yet unexplored properties, which can be key to overcome current technological limits. Here we develop the growth of wurtzite GaP/InxGa1-xP core-shell nanowires with tunable Indium concentration and optical emission in the visible region from 590nm (2.1eV) to 760nm (1.6eV). We demonstrate a pseudodirect (Г8c-Г9v) to direct (Г7c-Г9v) transition crossover through experimental and theoretical approach. Time resolved and temperature dependent photoluminescence measurements were used, which led to the observation of a steep change in carrier lifetime and temperature dependence by respectively one and three orders of magnitude in the range 0.28±0.04≤x≤0.41±0.04. Our work reveals the electronic properties of wurtzite InxGa1-xP.

KEYWORDS: semiconductor nanowire, indium gallium phosphide, wurtzite, band crossover, heterostructure

A new degree of freedom in band structure engineering has become available in the form of crystal phase tuning in semiconductor nanowires, allowing the control of the material polytype¹⁻⁴. Crystal phase engineering thus unlocks new optical and electronic properties while maintaining compatibility with well-established mainstream semiconductor technology. This provides a promising method to surpass the conventional limits of commonly used semiconductors $5-9$. Various nanowire growth mechanisms^{2,4,10,11} enable the formation of unusual crystal phases which are not accessible in bulk^{2,4,12–16}, such as Wurtzite (WZ) in III-Phosphides, and by exploiting 3D epitaxial overgrowth such crystal phase can be transferred from the core to its surrounding shell¹⁷.

Wurtzite nanowires are very promising candidates for solid state lighting^{4,14-16}, photovoltaics¹⁸ and solar hydrogen conversion^{19,20}. Recently it has also been shown that Wurtzite III-Phosphides enable direct band gap green emitters, opening a promising way to "bridge the green gap"²¹. WZ GaP and WZ InP have been studied, both theoretically^{22–24} and experimentally, and their optical properties are known^{4,15,25,26}. Both materials have a Γ_{9v} highest valence band but, importantly, the first two conduction bands have a different order: the lowest conduction band in WZ GaP has Γ_{8c} symmetry, followed by a Γ_{7c} band at higher energy^{24,27}. In WZ InP this situation is reversed and Γ_{7c} is the lowest band. This has a strong influence on the optical properties of the materials as the Γ_{8C} - Γ_{9V} transition is allowed with a weak oscillator strength, while the Γ_{7C} - Γ_{9V} is instead allowed with a large oscillator strength, as in WZ GaAs and WZ InP²⁸. By tuning the $In_xGa_{1-x}P$ composition a crossover at the Γ point is expected, where the Γ_{8c} (lowest for Ga-rich) will be crossed by the Γ_{7c} band for increasing In concentrations. Such a Γ-crossing has not been observed so far

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for III-V semiconductors through compositional tuning. Moreover, the electronic properties of the WZ $In_xGa_{1-x}P$ alloy are still fully unexplored.

In this work we achieve the growth of WZ $In_xGa_{1-x}P$ alloys through crystal structure transfer¹⁷ in WZ GaP/In_xGa_{1-x}P core-shell nanowires and study their optical properties. We demonstrate emission tunability between 590nm (2.1eV) and 760nm (1.6eV). The decrease by one order of magnitude in the lifetime of the optically generated carriers combined with the strong increase in optical emission for Indium contents higher than x≥0.4 demonstrates the pseudo-direct to direct Γ_{8C} - Γ_{7C} crossover. The large oscillator strength of the Γ_{7C} - Γ_{9V} transition makes WZ In_xGa_{1-x}P suitable for solid-state emitters in the red and infrared range, while still having a relevant application for solar hydrogen conversion due to its wide and tunable band gap.

WZ GaP/In_xGa_{1-x}P core-shell nanowires are grown by a multi-step method, featuring WZ GaP core vapor-liquid-solid (VLS) growth⁴ (schematic layout in Fig. 1a). The Au catalyst droplets for VLS growth were fabricated using nanoimprint lithography on a square matrix with a 500nm pitch or on a hexagonal matrix with 2500nm pitch. The low defectivity \langle stacking fault/ μ m) WZ GaP cores were then grown with Metalorganic Vapor Phase Epitaxy (MOVPE) at 615˚C, using Trimethylgallium (TMGa) and Phosphine (PH₃) as precursors, in combination with Hydrogen Chloride (HCl) to suppress sidewall tapering⁴. The Au catalyst was subsequently removed from the nanowire top to suppress further axial growth with an *ex-situ* wet etching, using King's Water and Iodine solution with optimized concentration and etching times (see Supporting Information S1). The etched cores were then used as a template for the shell growth at 585˚C in the same reactor, using Trimethylindium (TMIn) as Indium

precursor with a very high V/III ratio (>1000 in our case) in order to promote layer growth²⁹.

Hydrogen Chloride (HCl) is also used to control the morphology of the layer growth³⁰ (see Supporting Information S2 for details).. HCl has two important effects on the shell growth^{2,4,31–35}. Firstly, it etches material from the nanowire surfaces, preferentially etching Indium over Gallium³⁶. This effect can also be used as an additional degree of freedom to control the effective Indium incorporation during the layer growth. Secondly, HCl passivates the surface of III-Phosphides, leading to a progressive saturation of the surface by Chlorine, eventually stopping the growth and limiting the maximum thickness of the shell to about 20-40 nm. This surface passivation effect can be avoided by applying a growth process featuring two alternating steps: a 15 minutes long growth step as we described earlier, alternated by a 45s step to remove the passivation layer. The passivation removal step is performed with a lower HCl flow and a higher Gallium flow, providing no Indium. During this step, TMGa reacts with Chlorine at the nanowire sidewalls, producing GaCl₃ and thereby removing the passivation layer¹³. Using this cyclic growth, an arbitrarily thick WZ InGaP shell can be grown.

 The resulting structures have been characterized by Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM). The WZ GaP/In_{0.24}Ga_{0.76}P wires in Fig. 1b are uniform and may bend in random directions with an angle up to 10 degrees. $In_xGa_{1-x}P$ in fact possesses a larger lattice parameter than GaP and we expect the shell to be compressively strained. Bending is due to possible asymmetrical defect density and/or composition in the shell³⁷ and this feature will be investigated more in detail in a forthcoming work.

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The morphology and the crystal quality, *i.e.* the purity of the WZ phase and the absence of defects are analyzed with Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM). For this study the overall structures need to be sufficiently transparent to the electron beam in order to allow high-resolution imaging and therefore a maximum diameter of about 140 nm is used with a 15nm shell thickness. As shown in Fig. 2a, the $\ln_{x}Ga_{1-x}P$ shell shows a WZ crystal structure. Shells with low Indium content (up to x=0.10) are defectfree (as shown in Supporting Figure S2), while the wires with higher Indium content show misfit dislocations (arrow in Fig. 2a). The shell composition is determined by Energy-dispersive X-Ray Spectroscopy (EDS), as shown in Figures 2b-d. We used the EDS data to calibrate the precursor flows to obtain the desired average composition of each shell. The experiment is performed in two different crystallographic orientations: in projection (Fig. 2b) along the $[11\overline{2}0]$ zone axis, and in cross-section (Fig. 2c-e), with the nanowire cut perpendicularly to its main $[0001]$ axis. Cross-sectional analysis is necessary to observe the surface faceting and to observe the inner structure of the shell. From the cross-sectional EDS analysis shown in Fig. 2c-e we obtain an average Indium fraction of x=0.24±0.04 for this sample. Regions with lower Indium concentration are visible along the rods radially extending from the corners of the hexagonal core (see Supporting Information S3), a phenomenon also observed in previous work on core-shell nanowires^{7,38,39}. A 2-5nm thin shell with lower Indium concentration (~5-10%) can also be observed in fig. 2d in between two WZ InGaP shells with higher Indium content, resulting from the layer growth during the chlorine removal step after growing the first $In_xGa_{1-x}P$ shell. The facets of the WZ $In_xGa_{1-x}P$ shells belong to two different families: $\{1100\}$ parallel to the core facets and $\{1120\}$. The number of facets increases with shell thickness as it is possible that the $\{11\overline{2}0\}$ facets

in WZ In_xGa_{1-x}P are low energy facets which appear to minimize the total surface energy. Also, the substitution of the corner between $\{1\overline{1}00\}$ facets with a $\{11\overline{2}0\}$ facet likely helps to minimize the energy.

In order to evaluate the strain magnitude and distribution within the core/shell system, Finite Element Method (FEM) simulations⁴⁰ of hydrostatic strain have been performed for a WZ GaP/In_xGa_{1-x}P core-shell nanowire geometry with a core apothem and shell thickness both of 50nm and for a corresponding planar geometry. The results are displayed in Fig. 2f for x=0.25 and x=0.75 (see Supporting Information S4 for x=0.50, x=1 and for more details). A six-fold symmetry is clearly present, with six pockets at lower strain in the shell caused by the geometric relaxation induced by the six corners, in agreement with previous studies⁴¹. This phenomenon results in a much lower average hydrostatic strain (less than one third) than expected for a corresponding planar $\{1\overline{1}00\}$ heterostructure with identical lattice mismatch as reported in Table 1. This means that the nanowire geometry allows for very efficient strain relaxation, probably delaying the onset of plastic relaxation to shell thickness three times larger than the critical thickness in the planar film (which is not present in the WZ structure) The precise details of the strain relaxation mechanism will be discussed in a future work. For the present report, it is important to mention that these strain effects have been taken into account for the analysis of the photoluminescence results on these structures.

The optical properties of the WZ GaP/In_xGa_{1-x}P core-shell nanowires are investigated by photoluminescence (PL) measurements as a function of the Indium concentration (see Supporting Information S5 for methods). In order to directly correlate the emitted PL wavelength with Indium composition, nanowires are

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transferred onto a TEM grid where first PL experiments and then EDS (in TEM) studies are performed on the same nanowires (see Supporting Information S6). With this method we can avoid difficulties arising from wire-to-wire variations. Overall, the emission wavelength shifts from 590nm to 760nm by increasing x from x=0 to x=0.75 (in In_xGa_{1-x}P) as shown in Fig. 3a. The emission of all WZ In_xGa_{1-x}P shell compositions is polarized perpendicular to the growth c-axis as shown in Fig. 3b (here a WZ GaP/In_{0.63}Ga_{0.37}P nanowire with degree of polarization 55%), reaching up to 80% polarization in some nanowires, confirming that the emission originates from the WZ crystal structure (also see Supporting Information S5). However, as both the Γ_{8C} and Γ_{7C} conduction bands of WZ In_xGa_{1-x}P are expected^{22-24,26} to emit with polarization perpendicular to the nanowire, the polarization selection rules do not allow to discriminate between these two bands.

To identify the bands involved in the emission and to find the Γ_{8C}/Γ_{7C} crossover point as a function of the Indium composition, time-resolved PL (TRPL) measurements are performed at 10K. Two representative TRPL measurements are shown in Fig. 3c from samples with x=0.24±0.04 and x=0.75±0.04 (WZ $In_xGa_{1-x}P$) with lifetimes of 6.2ns and 0.42ns, respectively. Measurements performed over a wide compositional range, averaged on several single nanowires, at 10K show that the emission from WZ In $_{x}Ga_{1-}$ ^xP shells with x≤0.28±0.04 feature lifetimes well above 1ns, while shells with x≥0.45±0.04 feature lifetimes well below 1ns, as reported in Fig. 3d, constituting a significant and reproducible difference in lifetime. Since we expect to observe two different predominant recombination mechanisms, Donor Acceptor Pair (DAP) when $Γ_{8C}$ is the lowest conduction band²⁷, band to band when $Γ_{7C}$ is lowest¹⁵, this difference in lifetime provides a first signature of the Γ_{8c} / Γ_{7c} crossover.

However, such evidence is not conclusive, as the decrease in lifetime could also be attributed to other decay mechanisms, for instance induced by defects in the shell. Temperature-dependent PL measurements were therefore conducted to produce more evidence of the Γ_{8C} / Γ_{7C} crossover. The integrated PL emission intensities as a function of temperature for WZ GaP/In_{0.24}Ga_{0.76}P and WZ GaP/In_{0.63}Ga_{0.37}P are shown in Fig. 4a. The ratio between the integrated emission at 300K (I_{300K}) and 10K (I_{10K}) differs by more than two orders of magnitude between the two samples. We also note that for x≥0.41±0.04 we measured only one single nanowire, while for x≤0.28±0.04 the measurements were performed on an ensemble (5-10) of as-grown wires, since the intensity of the signal at 300K was not sufficient to be detected on single wires: in the inset of Fig. 4a the spectra at 300K of a single WZ GaP/ $In_{0.63}Ga_{0.37}P$ core-shell nanowire and of an ensemble of WZ GaP/In_{0.24}Ga_{0.76}P nanowires show the large difference in absolute intensity (~50 times). The values for the I_{300K}/I_{10K} ratio as a function of the Indium content are shown in Fig 4b. Below $x=0.28\pm0.04$ values of about 10^{-4} are obtained, while above $x=0.41\pm0.04$ the ratio steeply rises by three orders of magnitude, reaching a maximum of 0.18. Since we measure ensembles of wires for x≤0.28±0.04 and single wires for x≥0.41±0.04 we underestimate the variation in I_{300K}/I_{10K} , as the volume of material probed was considerably larger for x≤0.28±0.04. We note therefore that not only the temperature behavior is different, but also the absolute value of I_{300K} is higher by at least two orders of magnitude for x≥0.41±0.04 compared to x≤0.28±0.04, indicating a large difference in oscillator strength.

This steep increase in I_{300K}/I_{10K} ratio in the range 0.28±0.04≤x≤0.41±0.04 is due to the different recombination mechanisms taking place: DAP for x≤0.28±0.04 and band to band for x≥0.41±0.04. This increase is directly correlated with the large

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decrease of the PL lifetime shown in Fig. 3, which cannot be explained by the emergence of non-radiative recombination channels, since such channels would result in a lower I_{300K}/I_{10K} ratio^{42,43}. On the other hand, this increase in I_{300K}/I_{10K} cannot be explained by a possible passivation effect and suppression of surface recombination due to, for instance, a different surface reconstruction, as this would increase the lifetime⁴⁴. As a conclusion, these experimental data establish the Γ_{8C} / Γ_{7C} crossover for WZ In_xGa_{1-x}P in the compositional range $0.28\pm0.04\le x \le 0.41\pm0.04$.

In order to provide a deeper understanding of the observed transitions, we plot the obtained emission wavelengths as a function of the WZ $In_xGa_{1-x}P$ composition in Fig 4c, obtained by correlation of PL measurements and EDS analysis on the same wires (see Supporting Information S6 for details). In addition, we plot the energy values for the Γ_{7C} - Γ_{9V} transition in WZ GaP and Γ_{8C} - Γ_{9V} , Γ_{7C} - Γ_{9V} transitions in WZ InP available in literature (triangles in Fig. $4c)^{23,24,27,45}$. As the emission in WZ GaP is impurity-related²⁷, we report both the emission in this work and the band position from literature. In addition, the band structure of WZ $In_xGa_{1-x}P$ is calculated for different compositions. The calculations have been performed using total-energy calculations in the framework of the density functional theory with the exchangecorrelation functional in local density approximation (LDA) as implemented in the Vienna ab initio simulation package (VASP) (see Supporting Information S7). Quasiparticle corrections to account for the excitation aspect are considered in the framework of the LDA-1/2 method²⁴. The results are shown in Fig. 4c together with the parabolic fit of the optical transition energies (solid and dotted lines), to facilitate the comparison with the experimental data. The band alignment has also been calculated and found to be Type I for all compositions considered (x<0.75, see Supporting

Information S7). Although we note a discrepancy between experimental and calculated data, the results validate our assignment of the PL emission to the Γ_{8C} - Γ_{9V} transition for Indium-poor WZ In_xGa_{1-x}P and to the Γ_{7C} - Γ_{9V} transition for Indium-rich WZ $In_xGa_{1-x}P$. This discrepancy is reasonable, considering the predictive power of the quasiparticle calculations within an accuracy of ±0.1eV. In addition, we should consider alloy disorder and carrier localization effects during the PL measurements, which will result in a lower emission energy, contributing to this discrepancy. From these calculations it is clear that the M minimum cannot be responsible for any observed emission as it is considerably higher in energy.

From the correlation of the PL data with the band structure calculations we can also assess if strain in the shell is a dominant factor. In Fig. 4c we also show (green and red dotted lines) the calculated effect of the average compressive hydrostatic strain on the Γ_{8C} - Γ_{9V} and Γ_{7C} - Γ_{9V} transitions, using the theoretically expected strain without relaxation via defects (Table 1). It can be seen that the band shift compatible with the maximum compressive hydrostatic strain (absence of plastic relaxation) moves the Γ_{8c} - Γ_{7c} crossover towards the WZ InP side. From this it can be concluded therefore that the strain in the nanowires is almost completely relaxed through the previously described geometrical effect and plastic relaxation confirming the structural analysis. The spread obtained in the datapoints in Fig 4c is likely due to a small $(\leq 1\%)$ residual compressive strain in some nanowires, which raises the Γ_{7c} - Γ_{9V} transition to higher energies.

In summary, we demonstrated the growth of WZ GaP/In_xGa_{1-x}P core-shell nanowires with tunable Indium composition of 0≤x≤0.75±0.04, emitting in the visible range between 590nm (2.1eV) and 750nm (1.6eV). We correlated the shortening of

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the emission lifetime by one order of magnitude for 0.28±0.04≤x≤0.41±0.04, with a steep rise in I_{300K}/I_{10K} ratio of three orders of magnitude from 10^{-4} to 0.18 in the same composition range. We assigned this difference to the crossover from (pseudodirect) Γ_{8C} - Γ_{9V} to (direct) Γ_{7C} - Γ_{9V} type of emission as a function of composition and compared these results with theoretical simulations, and find a good qualitative agreement. This work opens the way for the realization of WZ GaP/In_xGa_{1-x}P core-shell nanowire devices, for which we envision applications in solid state lighting, tandem solar cells and solar hydrogen production.

Supporting information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge on the ACS Publications website at XXXXXXXX. Additional information on growth, structure, analysis methods and simulations are provided.

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Captions

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Fig.1 (a) Schematics of the nanowires in this work. Left: WZ GaP (blue) with the gold catalyst droplet (yellow). Right: WZ GaP/In_xGa_{1-x}P core-shell nanowire (In_xGa_{1-x}P in red, notice the absence of the catalyst). (b) SEM image of a representative WZ GaP/In_xGa₁. x^P core-shell sample (in this case WZ GaP/In_{0.24}Ga_{0.76}P). The bending due to asymmetric strain is visible in some nanowires.

Fig. 2 (a) TEM image of a WZ GaP/In_{0.23}Ga_{0.77}P core-shell nanowire, showing a missing crystal plane in the 15nm thick shell (indicated by the arrow). Inset: Fast Fourier Transform of the shown image, showing the $[2\overline{1}10]$ zone as pattern of the wurtzite crystal structure. (b) EDS compositional line profile of the same nanowire in (a), showing the shell composition, with some limited asymmetry. Inset: HAADF image to show the executed line scan (scalebar: 100nm). The length scale of the EDX line profile has been converted to a radial profile. A slight shell thickness dishomogeneity (<10nm) is also visible. (c) 2D EDS mapping (left) and HAADF-STEM image (right) of a WZ $GaP/In_{0.24}Ga_{0.76}P$ core shell nanowire in cross section (blue: Cobalt). The core facets and the 6 shell facets parallel to them belong to the $< 10\overline{10}$ > family. The other 6 shell facets belong to the $< 11\overline{2}0 >$ family. (d-e) Quantified EDS element maps of the same lamella for Indium (d) and Gallium (e). (f) FEM simulations for the shell in WZ GaP/In_{0.25}Ga_{0.75}P (upper panel) and WZ GaP/In_{0.75}Ga_{0.25}P (lower panel) core-shell nanowires.

Fig. 3 (a) Photoluminescence spectra at 10K of various WZ GaP/In_xGa_{1-x}P core shell nanowires, emitting in different spectral regions. Excitation power density: 3kW/cm^2 . (b) Radial plot of PL intensity as a function of signal polarization, superimposed on a

panchromatic image of an emitting WZ GaP/In $_{0.63}$ Ga_{0.37}P nanowire. The perpendicular polarization confirms WZ emission. (c) Time-resolved photoluminescence measurements of two nanowires with different composition, showing an order of magnitude of difference in lifetime. Excitation power density: 0.2 kW/cm². (d) Photoluminescence lifetime as a function of Indium fraction: for x≤0.28±0.04, the emission shows a lifetime well above 1ns, while for x≥0.45±0.04 the lifetime is one order of magnitude shorter. Excitation power density: 0.1 kW/cm^2 . All measurements are performed at 10K on single wires transferred on $SiO₂$.

Fig. 4 (a) Integrated PL intensity as a function of the inverse of temperature for WZ GaP/In_{0.24}Ga_{0.76}P and WZ GaP/In_{0.63}Ga_{0.37}P core-shell nanowires. In WZ In_{0.63}Ga_{0.37}P the increase of the integrated PL intensity above 58K, corresponding to a thermal energy of 4meV, is attributed to carrier detrapping from defects such as impurities and dislocations. Inset: comparison of the spectra at 300K, showing much stronger emission by the WZ GaP/In_{0.63}Ga_{0.37}P nanowire. (b) I_{300K}/I_{10K} ratio as a function of Indium fraction x. All samples with $x \le 0.28 \pm 0.05$ showed a ratio around 10⁻⁴, while for x≥0.41±0.04 the ratio strongly increases, up to 0.18. (c) Experimental and simulated data of the main optical transitions in WZ $In_xGa_{1-x}P$. Blue (dark red) circles: emission attributed to band to band Γ_{7C} -Γ_{9V} (Γ_{8C}-Γ_{9V}-related DAP) transition. Green (bright red) triangles: data from literature for the Γ_{7C} - Γ_{9V} (Γ_{8C} - Γ_{9V}) transition. Lines: calculated energy values of the optical transitions in WZ In_xGa_{1-x}P. Green solid line: Γ_{7C}-Γ_{9V} transition. Red solid line: Γ_{8C} -Γ_{9V} transition. The Γ_{8C} -Γ_{7C} crossover is in this way estimated to lie at x=0.53. Green (red) dotted line: simulated Γ_{7C}-Γ_{9V} (Γ_{8C}-Γ_{9V}) transition

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b

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Fig. 1

Fig. 2

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