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Structural stability and electronic properties of SiC nanocones: First-principles calculations and symmetry considerations

G. Alfieri1,a) and T. Kimoto1,2

1Department of Electronic Science and Engineering, Kyoto University, Kyotodaigaku-katsura, Nishikyo, Kyoto 615-8510, Japan
2Photonics and Electronics Science and Engineering Center, Kyoto University, Kyotodaigaku-katsura, Nishikyo, Kyoto 615-8510, Japan

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The structural and electronic properties of SiC nanocones (SiCNCs), as a function of the disclination angle and electric field intensity and orientation, are investigated by means of ab initio calculations. Phonon analysis revealed that SiCNCs with only three disclination angles are allowed and, among these, the band gap of only one SiCNC is affected by a transverse electric field. An interpretation of these findings, from a group theoretical point of view, is also given. © 2011 American Institute of Physics. [doi:10.1063/1.3567535]

Nanomaterials can find a great number of applications in modern-day technology, ranging from household to on-board satellite electronics, and because of the increasing need for speed and miniaturization of electronic devices, nanotechnology has become a very active field of study. At the same time, due the rapid development silicon carbide (SiC) technology, the existence of SiC nanostructures that can exploit the superior physical-chemical properties of SiC has become a very active field of study. At the same time, due the rapid development silicon carbide (SiC) technology, the existence of SiC nanostructures that can exploit the superior physical-chemical properties of SiC, ranging from household to on-board satellite electronics, and because of the increasing need for speed and miniaturization of electronic devices, nanotechnology has become a very active field of study.

In order to check the structural stability of the SiCNCs of the present study (or, equivalently, that the relaxed geometry is preserved), we analyzed the phonon modes (at the

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<th>Stiochiometry</th>
<th>(d(\text{deg}))</th>
<th>Point group</th>
<th>Tip point group</th>
<th>(E_{\text{Gap}}) (eV)</th>
<th>(D(\text{D}))</th>
<th>(E_{\text{B}}) (eV/atom)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C_{60}Si_{14}H_{30}</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>C_{1}</td>
<td>C_{1}</td>
<td>0.86 (0.87)</td>
<td>2.17 (2.6)</td>
<td>6.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C_{60}Si_{18}H_{30}</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>C_{1}</td>
<td>C_{2v}</td>
<td>0.59 (0.58)</td>
<td>2.35 (2.5)</td>
<td>6.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C_{60}Si_{16}H_{16}</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>C_{2v}</td>
<td>C_{2v}</td>
<td>1.42 (1.38)</td>
<td>3.29 (2.98)</td>
<td>6.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C_{60}Si_{18}H_{15}</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>C_{1}</td>
<td>C_{2v}</td>
<td>0.58 (0.58)</td>
<td>7.7 (7.4)</td>
<td>6.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C_{60}Si_{18}H_{15}</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>C_{1}</td>
<td>C_{2m}</td>
<td>0.50 (0.51)</td>
<td>14.4 (14.0)</td>
<td>6.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C_{60}Si_{18}H_{15}</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>C_{1}</td>
<td>C_{2v}</td>
<td>0.31 (0.30)</td>
<td>16.3 (16.1)</td>
<td>7.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C_{60}Si_{18}H_{15}</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>C_{1}</td>
<td>D_{3h}</td>
<td>0.29 (0.29)</td>
<td>14.1 (6.85)</td>
<td>7.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C_{60}Si_{18}H_{15}</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>C_{1}</td>
<td>D_{3d}</td>
<td>0.08 (0.08)</td>
<td>6.2 (6.4)</td>
<td>6.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a)Electronic mail: giovanni@semicon.kuee.kyoto-u.ac.jp.
This analysis provides a reliable stability test, as the presence of imaginary phonon frequencies suggests that the system is structurally unstable and a structural transformation can occur. Our results indicate the presence of imaginary frequencies in all the investigated SiCNCs, with the exception of the C_{36}Si_{34}H_{20} [d=60°, C_1, Fig. 1(a)], C_{32}Si_{32}H_{16} [d=120°, C_{2v}, Fig. 1(c)], and C_{46}Si_{34}H_{16} [d=300°, C_1, Fig. 1(g)]. We point out that the three stable SiCNCs are either C-rich or possess a ratio of C/Si=1, in agreement with the literature. Yet, this is not sufficient to justify their stability, as the other C-rich or C/Si=1 SiCNCs display imaginary phonon frequencies.

Charlier and Rignanese suggested that the presence of particular topological defects at the tip can contribute to the stability of nanocages. We take advantage of this finding to analyze the tip of our SiCNCs and propose a criterion for determining their stability. As it can be seen in Fig. 1, the tip of studied SiCNCs is pentagonal [d=60°, Figs. 1(a) and 1(b)], rhombohedral [d=120°, Fig. 1(c)], triangular (scalene/isosceles) [d=180°, Figs. 1(d) and 1(e)], linear [d=240°, Figs. 1(f)], and triangular (equilateral/scalene) [d=300°, Figs. 1(g) and 1(h)]. The SiCNCs’ tips point group symmetries are reported in Table I (column 4). A general rule can be deduced, as the point group of unstable SiCNC is different from that of the tip, while for stable SiCNCs the total point group and that of the tip coincide (in the case of C_{36}Si_{34}H_{20}, C_1 is found in the direct product of D_{3h} and C_3 while for C_{38}Si_{28}H_{11} D_{3d}=D_3 \times C_1).

Next, we analyze the effects of $F_\perp$ and $F_\parallel$, the electric field perpendicular and parallel to the cone axis, respectively, on $E_G$ and $E_{GAP}$ for the three stable SiCNCs. No effect of the intensity and orientation of $F$ on $E_B$ could be observed for neither of the three SiCNCs. Analogously, negligible effects on the $E_G$ can be expected for the d=60° SiCNC (C_{36}Si_{34}H_{20}), with a 0.03 and 0.01 eV decrease in $E_{GAP}$ after application of either $F_\perp$ or $F_\parallel$, respectively, of intensities of 0.20 V/Å. The same applies to the 300° SiCNC (C_{46}Si_{34}H_{16}) (0.01 eV and 0.02 eV for $F_\perp$ or $F_\parallel$, respectively. On the contrary a stronger decrease in $E_{GAP}$ is observed for the SiCNC of d=120° (C_{32}Si_{32}H_{16}). Application of $F_\perp$, of intensities 0.05, 0.10, 0.15, and 0.20 V/Å, results in a decrease in $E_{GAP}$ of 1.35, 1.20, 1.05, and 0.89 eV, respectively. By changing the orientation of the electric field, that means by applying $F_\perp$, $E_{GAP}$ becomes less sensitive to the field ($E_{GAP}$ changes as 1.41 eV, 1.41 eV, 1.40 eV, and 1.40 eV for 0.05 V/Å, 0.10 V/Å, 0.15 V/Å, and 0.20 V/Å, respectively).

In Fig. 2, the behavior of the lowest unoccupied and highest occupied molecular orbitals, LUMO (red) and HOMO (yellow), respectively, is shown for the C_{36}Si_{34}H_{20} and C_{32}Si_{32}H_{16} SiCNCs. It can be seen that application of either $F_\perp$ [Fig. 2(b)] or $F_\parallel$ [Fig. 2(c)], with intensities of 0.20 V/Å, on the C_{36}Si_{34}H_{20} cone yields no effect on the molecular orbitals and, in fact, no change is observed on the $E_{GAP}$ values. For the case of C_{32}Si_{32}H_{16}, $F_\parallel=0.20$ V/Å results in a rearrangement of the HOMO (negative charges) and LUMO (positive charges) along the direction of field, at two opposite sides of the SiCNC. This means that two regions are formed, one of low (HOMO) and one of high (LUMO) electrostatic potential that, in terms of energy, contribute to the lowering of the LUMO and the rising of the HOMO, thus shrinking the $E_{GAP}$. When $F_\parallel$ is applied, no rearrangement of either HOMO or LUMO can be noted and $E_{GAP}$ does not change. As the SiCNC with C_{2v} symmetry is more responsive to $F_\perp$ than those with C_{1v} symmetry it is straightforward asking whether or not this can be interpreted by using group theory. To do this, for simplicity, we consider only the HOMO, namely the C-atoms of the C_{36}Si_{34}H_{20} (C_s) and C_{32}Si_{32}H_{16}(C_{2v}) SiCNCs.

By employing the directed valence (DV) bonding, we obtain the following irreducible representations (irrep) $\Gamma^{irrep}_{C_s}=1A'+1A''$ ($C_{36}Si_{34}H_{20}$) and $\Gamma^{irrep}_{C_{2v}}=10A_1+6A_2+8B_1+8B_2$ ($C_{32}Si_{32}H_{16}$). By direct product multiplication, with the representations of the s, p_x, and p_y atomic orbitals of the respective point-symmetry groups ($A', A''$ and $A_1, B_1, B_2$ for $C_s$ and $C_{2v}$, respectively) we obtain...
meaning that the orbitals involved are s, px, and py, corresponding to the sp² hybridization of the single SiC sheet. In order to evaluate the effects of F on the SiCNCs, the \( \Gamma^{DV}_{sp²} \) are multiplied, by direct product multiplication, with the representations of \( F \) and \( F \), respectively. For Cs, \( \Gamma^{DV}_{sp²} \otimes A' \) and \( \Gamma^{DV}_{sp²} \otimes A'' \) still result in \( \Gamma^{DV}_{sp²} \). The same is obtained for \( C_{2v} \) as \( \Gamma^{DV}_{sp²} \otimes A_1 = \Gamma^{DV}_{sp²} \), however,

\[
\Gamma^{DV}_{C_{2v}} = \left( 10A_1 + 6A_2 + 8B_1 + 8B_2 \right)_{sp²} + \left( 10B_1 + 6B_2 + 8A_1 + 8A_2 \right)_{p_z} + \left( 10B_2 + 6B_1 + 8A_2 + 8A_1 \right)_{p_z}.
\]

This suggests that the application of a \( F_\parallel \) to a SiCNC with \( C_{2v} \) symmetry results in the coupling of \( \Gamma^{DV}_{sp²} \) with a final state containing the term \( (10A_2 + 6A_1 + 8B_2 + 8B_1) \) not present in the initial. On the contrary, no change in the initial and final states is observed when either \( F_\perp \) or \( F_\parallel \) is applied to a SiCNC of \( C_s \) symmetry, suggesting that the response to an electric field is different from that of SiCNs with \( C_{2v} \) symmetry (nil or slower response).

In conclusion, phonon analysis revealed that SiCNs with \( d = 60°, 120°, \) and \( 300° \) and C/ Si ≥ 1 are stable and only the \( E_{\text{GAP}} \) of the SiCNC with \( d = 120° \), is affected by a transverse \( F \). These findings were interpreted by means of group theory, by considering the correspondence between the point group symmetry of the cone with that of the shape of the tip and in terms of symmetry change in the irrep of the HOMO, when an electric field is applied.

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