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Vibrational Characterization of the Oxidation Products on Si(111)-(7 × 7)

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The oxidation products on Si(111)-(7 × 7) are investigated at 82 K by means of high-resolution electron energy loss spectroscopy. The isotope-labeled vibrational spectra with 16O2, 18O2, and 16O18O show that, in the initial stage of the oxidation, an O2 molecule dissociates to form a metastable product with an O atom bonding on top of the Si adatom and the other inserted into the backbond. The metastable product is observed as a dark site in the topographic scanning tunneling microscopy (STM) image and can be transformed to a stable product by the STM manipulation. Our results are in good agreement with recent theoretical calculations.

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The oxidation of silicon surfaces is an important subject for the fabrication of microelectronic materials. Over the last three decades, the reaction of O2 gas with Si(111)-(7 × 7) attracted great attention from both experimental and theoretical points of view. Although a great deal of effort was devoted to the molecular-level understanding of the reaction, it is still under debate even whether the initial adsorbed state of O2 is molecular or dissociative.

The presence of a molecular precursor state was proposed by early experimental works [1–7], which were subsequently supported by the theoretical calculations [8–10]. Vibrational electron energy loss spectroscopy (EELS) measurements showed a metastable feature at ~150 meV in the initial stage of the reaction at 100 K, which was assigned to the O-O stretch mode of the precursor [1]. On the other hand, Lee and Kang [11,12] concluded in their density functional calculations that the molecular state is unstable on Si(111)-(7 × 7); an O2 molecule spontaneously dissociates without any barrier. They reassigned the metastable ~150 meV feature as the Si-O stretch mode of the atomic products [12].

Scanning tunneling microscopy (STM) studies of O2 adsorption on Si(111)-(7 × 7) were conducted at 300 K [13–16], 600 K [17], and 30 K [16]. The consensus is that the initial reaction of O2 occurs at the Si adatom site and the main products appear bright in the topographic images above room temperature. However, there remains controversy, in the interpretation of the bright site, whether it is ascribed to the atomic product [11,13,14,16] or molecular O2 [9,10,15,17].

Recent electronic studies with ultraviolet photoelectron spectroscopy at 120 K [18] and 300 K [19] and with near-edge x-ray absorption fine structure at 135 K [20] suggested that the initial reaction is dissociative, and the molecular O2 was observed as a secondary product on the oxidized Si(111) surface. The initial dissociation of O2 on Si(111)-(7 × 7) was also supported by other experimental techniques [21,22].

Our aim in this study is to identify the oxidation products by using vibrational spectroscopy which directly reflects the chemical configurations (atomic or molecular) of the adsorbates. We show that the initial reaction is dissociative with an O atom bonding on top of the Si adatom and the other inserted into the backbond. The on-top O atom migrates into other backbond by thermal activation at 200 K. The metastable species is imaged and manipulated into the stable product with STM.

The experiments were carried out in an ultrahigh vacuum (UHV) chamber equipped with a high-resolution electron energy loss spectrometer (LK-5000, LK Technologies, Inc.) and a four-grid retarding-field analyzer for low-energy electron diffraction (LEED). The base pressure of the chamber is below 1 × 10−10 Torr. For the EELS measurements, the primary electron energy $E_p = 7 \text{ eV}$, incidence angle $\theta_i = 60^\circ$, reflection angle $\theta_r = 60^\circ$, and typical energy resolution of 3.5 meV (the full width at half maximum of the elastic peak) were used. According to the angle-dependent measurements, all the observed loss peaks are dipole excited [23]. The scattering plane is aligned along the [011] direction. The sample was cooled at 82 K. STM was conducted in a separate UHV chamber with the base pressure below 5 × 10−11 Torr [24]. The STM head was cooled at 78 K with liquid nitrogen.

The Si(111) sample was cleaned by the overnight degassing at 900 K, followed by the flashing up to 1400 K. For a clean surface, a sharp (7 × 7) LEED pattern was observed and EELS showed no trace of impurities. We used isotopic gases of 16O2, 18O2, and 16O18O for EELS with the purities of 99.9%, 99%, and 50%, respectively. The 16O18O gas bottle contains 16O2 (25%) and 18O2 (25%). The sample was exposed to O2 gas via a tube doser which was positioned ~1 cm apart from the sample surface. The exposure is given by the background O2 pressure multiplied by time in units of L (1 L = 1 × 10−6 Torr s).

A series of EELS spectra of 16O2/Si(111)-(7 × 7) at 82 K as a function of the exposure is shown in Fig. 1. In the initial stage of oxidation, two peaks are observed at 80 and 146 meV [1(b) and 1(c)]. Spectrum 1(c') is taken for
of the exposure to $^{16}$O$_2$. The loss intensities are normalized to the elastic peak intens. The origin of the $^{16}$O$_2$/Si(111)-(7 x 7) at 82 K as a function of the exposure to $^{16}$O$_2$. The exposures are (a) 0, (b) 0.008, (c) 0.015, (d) 0.03, (e) 0.07, (f) 0.1, (g) 0.2, and (h) 0.3 L. The O-derived losses are marked, and the higher three losses are labeled by $\nu_1$, $\nu_2$, and $\nu_3$. The spectrum (c') is for the 0.015 L exposure followed by annealing at 200 K. $\nu_1$ disappears upon the annealing, indicating the metastability of the initial product. The loss intensities are normalized to the elastic peak intensities.

The origin of the $\sim$150 meV peak, which is resolved as $\nu_1$ and $\nu_2$ in this study, has been under debate: It was argued in the previous EELS study that the losses were most likely due to the superoxy O$_2$ species [1]. However, the SiO species was not completely ruled out since the gas-phase SiO molecule exhibits a vibrational energy at 153 meV [25]. A theory predicted the SiO vibrational energy on Si(111) to be 136–143 meV [12]. Thus, the molecular or atomic nature of the oxidation products cannot be determined from the vibrational energies; we conduct the EELS measurement with the $^{16}$O$^{18}$O isotope.

EELS spectra of Si(111)-(7 × 7) exposed to 0.02 L of (a) $^{16}$O$_2$, (b) $^{16}$O$^{18}$O, and (c) $^{18}$O$_2$ are shown in Fig. 2. Under this condition, $\nu_1$ is mainly observed and $\nu_2$ appears as a shoulder at the higher-energy side of $\nu_1$ for $^{16}$O$_2$ or $^{18}$O$_2$. We can clearly detect the isotope shift between $^{16}$O$_2$ and $^{18}$O$_2$, where $\nu_1$ is observed at 146 and 142 meV, respectively. The 80 meV loss shifts to 78 meV. The spectrum 2(b) taken with $^{16}$O$^{18}$O shows two peaks at 142 and 146 meV, which indicates that $\nu_1$ is attributed to the vibration of atomic oxygen. The 146 meV peak is more intense than the 142 meV peak in 2(b), which is due to the overlap of the higher-energy shoulder of the 142 meV loss ($\nu_2$) with the 146 meV peak. These results conclude straightforwardly that the initial adsorption of O$_2$ on Si(111)-(7 × 7) is dissociative and that $\nu_1$ is assigned as the Si-O stretch mode.

The isotope dependence of $\nu_2$ and $\nu_3$ is shown in the insets of Fig. 2. $\nu_2$ and $\nu_3$ are observed at 150 (146) and 183 (172) meV for $^{16}$O$_2$ ($^{18}$O$_2$), respectively. For $\nu_2$, the spectrum of $^{16}$O$^{18}$O shows two peaks at 146 and 150 meV, indicating that $\nu_2$ is attributed to the vibration of another
SiO species. On the other hand, \( \nu_1 \) is observed at 177 meV in the spectrum of \( ^{16}\text{O}^{18}\text{O} \); \( \nu_3 \) is assigned to the O-O stretch mode of molecular \( \text{O}_2 \) adsorbed on the surface. Thus, our vibrational spectra demonstrate that \( \text{O}_2 \) molecules adsorb dissociatively on Si(111)-(7 \times 7) at 82 K, which gives rise to \( \nu_1 \) and \( \nu_3 \), and the molecularly adsorbed state (labeled as \( \nu_3 \)) exists only after the surface is thoroughly oxidized.

The chemical configurations of the reaction products are determined by comparing our vibrational spectra with those predicted by the recent theoretical calculations [12]. \( \nu_1 \) is assigned to the stretch mode of the SiO with an O atom bonding on top of the Si adatom, and the initial product is identified as the ad-ins structure which is depicted in Fig. 3, where “ad” denotes an O atom bonding on top of the Si adatom and “ins” denotes an O atom inserted into a backbond of the Si adatom. The theory predicted the Si-O(ad) stretch mode at 143 meV and the Si-O(ins)-Si stretch mode at 79 and 103 meV. The Si-O(ins)-Si unit in the ad-ins structure can be represented by the \( C_3 \) point group, and thus, there exist two symmetric modes with respect to the mirror plane. The 103 meV mode mainly involves the motion of O(ins) along the Si-O(ins)-Si bond direction, while the 79 meV mode mainly involves the motion perpendicular to the bond [12]. We assign the observed loss at 80 meV to the latter, whereas the former is not resolved in our spectra, which may be due to the relatively small dynamic dipole moment induced by the excitation.

After annealing the surface to 200 K, \( \nu_1 \) disappears, indicating the reaction of the ad-ins product by thermal activation. The new product exhibits a loss at 80 meV [Fig. 1(c’)], and is identified as the ins-ins species (Fig. 3). The ins-ins structure is also represented by the \( C_3 \) point group, and the two O(ins) atoms are coupled and give three symmetric modes. Among these, the vibrational energy of the motion perpendicular to the Si-O(ins)-Si bond is predicted to be 78 meV [12], to which the observed loss (80 meV) is assigned. The peak shift upon the reaction is so small (1 meV by the theory) that it is not observed. Although there are now twice as many O(ins) atoms, the intensity of the 80 meV peak does not increase; the presence of an O(ad) atom may affect the dynamic dipole moment for the motion of O(ins) atom. The theory showed that the ad-ins structure is thermally metastable and is the sole candidate for the precursor to the stable ins-ins structure [11], which is in agreement with our results.

With increasing exposure, we observe the development of \( \nu_2 \) accompanied with the 129 meV peak. We attribute \( \nu_2 \) to a further oxidized product of the ad-ins species, most probably with the ad-ins \( \times 3 \) structure [12]. The 129 meV peak is attributed to O(ins) of the further oxidized products. At 0.07 L [Fig. 1(e)], mainly two species (ad-ins and tentatively ad-ins \( \times 3 \)) coexist on the surface. Beyond 0.2 L ([1(g) and 1(h)], the \( \nu_1 \) peak is attenuated, indicating that the surface is fully oxidized (note: exposures correspond to the background pressure, not the local pressure at the Si surface). The peak broadenings indicate the inhomogeneity of the oxidized surface with various O(ins) configurations.

The molecular adsorbate is observed after prolonged oxidation of the surface. \( \nu_1 \) is not correlated with the superoxy species observed, e.g., at 128 meV on Pd(111) [26], but with the condensed (physiosorbed) \( \text{O}_2 \) at 195 meV [7]. Thus, the \( \nu_3 \) is ascribed to the nearly neutral \( \text{O}_2 \) species weakly chemisorbed on Si(111). Chemisorbed \( \text{O}_2 \) on Si(111) has attracted considerable attention from many researchers [1–9,14,15,17–20], and it was recently shown that the molecular state is not a precursor in the oxidation process but a secondary product on the oxidized Si(111) [18–20], which is consistent with our results.

An STM image of Si(111)-(7 \times 7) exposed to \( \text{O}_2 \) at 78 K is shown in Fig. 4(a). The image is taken at 0.7 V sample bias and 0.2 nA tunneling current. In the initial stage of the oxidation, the ad-ins product is mainly present on the surface. The STM image shows that the Si adatoms are reacted and observed as dark features compared to the unreacted Si adatoms. This is consistent with the theoretical prediction that the ad-ins species exhibits a dark image [11].

STM-induced reaction of the ad-ins species is demonstrated in Figs. 4(b)–4(d). The ad-ins products (dark features) on the corner adatom sites are shown in Fig. 4(b), imaged at the sample bias of 0.7 V. To induce the reaction, the area is scanned with the sample bias at 1.2 V. After the 1.2 V scanning, the area is imaged with the sample bias at 0.7 V, which is shown in Fig. 4(c). The dark features are found to disappear and look similar to the unreacted Si adatoms, indicating that the ad-ins species have reacted. The same area is imaged at the sample bias 1.2 V.
bias of 1.8 V, which is shown in Fig. 4(d). The reacted sites appear bright when imaged at the sample bias higher than \( \sim 1.8 \) V, and are stable with further scanning. In the room-temperature measurements, we observe that the bright sites are present mainly on the surface, as reported by the previous experiments [13–16]. The EELS shows that the ad-ins species is thermally metastable and transforms into the ins-ins structure above 200 K. Thus, we assign the bright site to the ins-ins species. These results indicate that the high-bias STM induces the reaction of the ad-ins species to the stable ins-ins structure.

In summary, we identify the initial oxidation products on Si(111)-(7 \times 7) at 82 K as the ad-ins species and rule out the molecular adsorption by isotope-labeled vibrational spectroscopy with \(^{16}\text{O}_2\), \(^{18}\text{O}_2\), and \(^{16}\text{O}^{18}\text{O}\). The ad-ins product is thermally metastable and reacted to form the ins-ins structure at 200 K. In the STM topographic images, the ad-ins products appear dark compared to the unreacted Si adatoms. We show that the reaction of the ad-ins product to the stable ins-ins structure can be readily induced by the STM.

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