

Broadband high-extinction-ratio nonvolatile optical switch based on phase change material

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Abstract: In this paper, we present a broadband, high-extinction-ratio, nonvolatile 2×2 Mach-Zehnder interferometer (MZI) optical switch based on the phase change material Sb₂Se₃. The insertion loss (IL) is 0.84 dB and the extinction ratio (ER) reaches 28.8 dB at the wavelength of 1 550 nm. The 3 dB bandwidth is greater than 150 nm. Within the 3 dB bandwidth, the ER is greater than 20.3 dB and 16.3 dB at bar and cross states, respectively. The power consumption for crystallization and amorphization of Sb₂Se₃ is 105.86 nJ and 49 nJ, respectively. The switch holds significant promise for optical interconnects and optical computing applications.

Key words: photonic integration, optical switch, phase change materials

基于相变材料的宽带高消光比非易失性光开关

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摘要: 介绍了一种基于相变材料 Sb₂Se₃ 的宽带、高消光比、非易失的 2×2 马赫-增德尔干涉仪 (MZI) 型光开关。在波长为 1 550 nm 时, 插入损耗 (IL) 为 0.84 dB, 消光比 (ER) 达到 28.8 dB。器件的 3 dB 带宽大于 150 nm。在 3 dB 带宽内, 直通态和交叉态的消光比分别大于 20.3 dB 和 16.3 dB。Sb₂Se₃ 的晶化和非晶化功耗分别为 105.86 nJ 和 49 nJ。该宽带高消光比非易失性光开关在光互连和光计算中有极大的应用潜力。

关 键 词: 光子集成; 光开关; 相变材料

中图分类号: O439

文献标识码: A

Introduction

With the rapid development of artificial intelligence, data traffic is experiencing exponential growth^[1, 2]. The demand for parallelism and data bandwidth is increasing, and reducing power consumption and economic costs is becoming more critical. Optical

data transmission offers advantages over traditional electrical signals in high-speed, high-bandwidth applications^[3]. Optical switches are one of the fundamental components in integrated photonic circuits, functioning to perform physical switching and logical operations on optical signals in transmission lines or integrated photonic circuits. The Mach-Zehnder interferometer (MZI) is a

Received date: 2025-01-02, revised date: 2025-02-12

收稿日期: 2025-01-02, 修回日期: 2025-02-12

Foundation items: Supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of China (62204250), Autonomous deployment project of State Key Laboratory of Materials for Integrated Circuits (SKLJC-Z2024-A05).

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common structure in optical switches. It offers advantages such as wide operational bandwidth, low loss, high fabrication tolerance, and insensitivity to temperature^[4]. Traditional MZI silicon-based optical switches typically achieve switching functionality by altering the effective refractive index of optical modes through the thermo-optic effect or plasma dispersion effect. However, optical modulation based on the plasma dispersion effect or thermo-optical effect is weak (usually $\Delta n < 0.01$)^[5], which results in large footprint or high power consumption. Moreover, silicon-based thermo-optical and electro-optical switches require continuous energy to maintain ON/OFF state, which makes high static power consumption.

Phase change materials (PCMs) have attracted a lot of attention due to its excellent properties, such as high refractive index contrast between crystalline and amorphous states, nonvolatility, reversibility and high repeatability^[6-10]. Ge₂Sb₂Te₅ (GST) is one of the most commonly used PCMs in silicon-based optical switches due to its significant refractive index contrast ($\Delta n \approx 2.8$ at 1 550 nm) between crystalline and amorphous states^[11-15]. However, the imaginary part of the refractive index of GST is large, which is 1.08 and 0.12 at crystalline and amorphous states at 1 550 nm^[9], respectively. This will introduce high loss in the MZI optical switch and limit its applications. Amorphous (Am-) and crystalline (Cr-) Sb₂Se₃ both have low extinction coefficients and exhibit large optical contrast ($\Delta n \approx 0.77$ at 1 550 nm) in the near infrared wavelength range, making it highly promising for applications in optical switches^[16]. In this work, we proposed a broadband high-extinction-ratio 2×2 MZI nonvolatile optical switch based on Sb₂Se₃. The introduction of a $\pi/2$ pre-biased waveguide structure reduces the required length of Sb₂Se₃ to change the ON/OFF state of the switch, which reduces the absorption loss of crystalline Sb₂Se₃ and lowers the power consumption for phase transition of Sb₂Se₃. The loss is 0.84 dB at the wavelength of 1 550 nm for both bar and cross states. The power consumption is 105.86 nJ and 49 nJ for crystallization and amorphization of Sb₂Se₃, respectively. The symmetric integration of Sb₂Se₃ in both phase-shift arms improves the

extinction ratio (ER). The ER reaches 28.8 dB at the wavelength of 1550 nm. The proposed 2×2 MZI nonvolatile optical switch also has a wide bandwidth of greater than 150 nm.

1 Design of device

The designed 2×2 MZI nonvolatile optical switch based on low-loss Sb₂Se₃ consists of two 2×2 multimode interferometers (MMIs) and phase-shift arms, as shown in Fig. 1(a). To reduce the crosstalk at the MMI output, curved waveguides with radius of 10 μm were used to connect MMIs and phase-shift arms. MMI has the advantages of wide bandwidth and large fabrication tolerance. Two 2×2 MMIs are used as power splitter and combiner, respectively. The phase shifters are composed of Si-Sb₂Se₃ hybrid waveguides (Fig. 1(b)). When only one phase-shift arm integrates phase-change material, the large loss difference between the upper and lower phase-shift arms will reduce ER, especially in Cr-Sb₂Se₃. Thus, to improve ER, Sb₂Se₃ is integrated in both the upper and lower phase-shift arms. To shorten the length of Sb₂Se₃, which can reduce the absorption loss especially of crystalline Sb₂Se₃ and lower the power consumption for phase transition of Sb₂Se₃, we introduced a $\pi/2$ pre-biased waveguide structure in the lower phase-shift arm^[17]. In this way, only a $\pi/2$ phase shift needs to be achieved by the phase transition of Sb₂Se₃ to control the ON/OFF state of the switch. Though the $\pi/2$ pre-biased structure has been reported in Ref. [17], it works at the wavelength of 2 μm . We designed and optimized the $\pi/2$ pre-biased structure at the wavelength of 1 550 nm, and firstly introduced it in the Sb₂Se₃ optical switch. The $\pi/2$ pre-biased structure contains two symmetric tapered waveguide whose width transits from $w = 500$ nm to $w_2 = 544$ nm with a total length L of 12 μm (Fig. 1(c)). Then, the Si-Sb₂Se₃ hybrid waveguide was optimized by the finite element method (FEM). Considering compatibility with the complementary metal-oxide-semiconductor (CMOS) fabrication process and single-mode condition, we determined the silicon waveguide dimensions to be 220 nm in thickness and 500 nm in

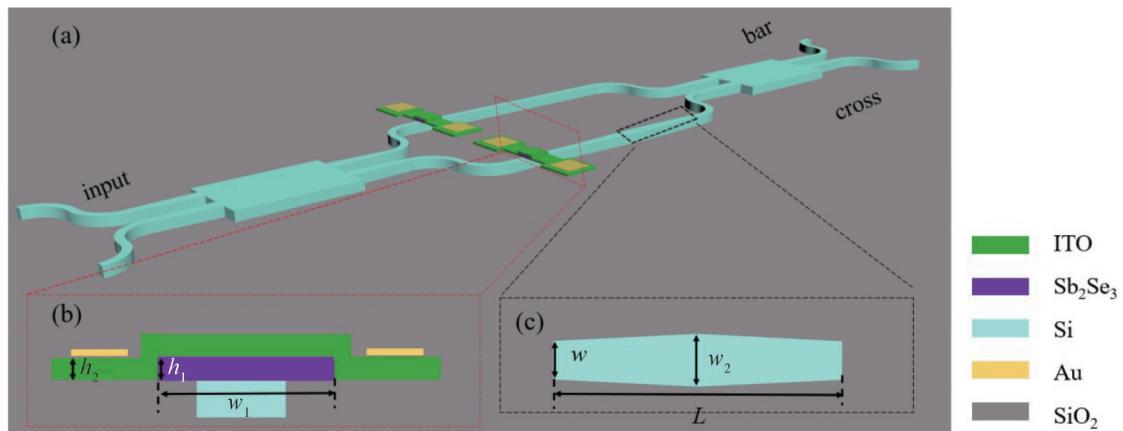


Fig. 1 Device structure diagram: (a) Schematic diagram of the proposed 2×2 MZI nonvolatile optical switch; (b) cross-section of the Si-Sb₂Se₃ hybrid waveguide with the ITO heater; (c) schematic diagram of the $\pi/2$ pre-biased waveguide structure

图1 器件结构图:(a) 2×2 MZI型非易失性光开关结构示意图;(b) 带有ITO加热器的Si-Sb₂Se₃混合波导截面图;(c) $\pi/2$ 预偏置波导结构示意图

width. At the wavelength of 1 550 nm, the refractive index of Si and SiO_2 is $3.476 + i0$, $1.444 + i0$, respectively^[18, 19]. We fabricated layered Sb_2Se_3 and measured its optical constants at amorphous and crystalline states by ellipsometer, as shown in Fig. 2. The measurement results indicate that the refractive index of amorphous and crystalline Sb_2Se_3 is $3.321 + i0$ and $4.024 + i0.008$ at the wavelength of 1 550 nm, respectively. The change of effective refractive index difference (Δn_{eff}) of transverse electric (TE) mode in the Si- Sb_2Se_3 hybrid waveguide at the amorphous and crystalline states with the size of Sb_2Se_3 is shown in Fig. 3 (a). Clearly, Δn_{eff} increases along with the thickness h_1 of Sb_2Se_3 , while firstly increases with the width w_1 of Sb_2Se_3 and then tends to be stable when $w_1 > 1 \mu\text{m}$. According to the phase calculation formula:

$$\Delta\varphi = \frac{2\pi\Delta n_{\text{eff}}}{\lambda} \times L \quad (1)$$

the larger Δn_{eff} , the shorter the required length of Sb_2Se_3 to achieve the desired phase shift. So, we determined the width w_1 of Sb_2Se_3 to be $1 \mu\text{m}$. At the wavelength of 1550 nm, the required length $L_{(\pi/2)}$ of Sb_2Se_3 to achieve $\pi/2$ phase shift at different size of Sb_2Se_3 is shown in Fig. 3 (b). $L_{(\pi/2)}$ reduces as the thickness h_1 of Sb_2Se_3 increases. The absorption loss of the Si- Sb_2Se_3 hybrid waveguide can be calculated by $\alpha_{\text{dB}} L_{(\pi/2)}$, where α_{dB} is the power propagation loss in dB/ μm . α_{dB} can be converted from the propagation loss constant α (μm^{-1}) by the formula $\alpha_{\text{dB}} = 20\alpha / \ln 10$ (dB/ μm)^[20]. According to $\alpha = 2\pi k_{\text{eff}} / \lambda$, so α_{dB} can be calculated by $\alpha_{\text{dB}} = 40\pi k_{\text{eff}} / (\lambda \ln 10)$ (dB/ μm), where k_{eff} is the imaginary part of effective refractive index of the Si- Sb_2Se_3 hybrid waveguide at the crystalline state and is shown in Fig. 3 (c). So, we can derive the absorption loss of the Si- Sb_2Se_3 hybrid waveguide at different thickness h_1 and width w_1 of Sb_2Se_3 , as shown in Fig. 3 (d). The absorption loss increases slightly along with the thickness h_1 of Sb_2Se_3 . However, Δn_{eff} increases along with h_1 , as mentioned above. Considering the thicker the PCM, the more difficult the phase transition and the greater the power consumption, the thickness h_1 of Sb_2Se_3 is chosen to be 50 nm.

The phase transition of Sb_2Se_3 is actuated by indium tin oxide (ITO) heater. ITO is compatible with CMOS

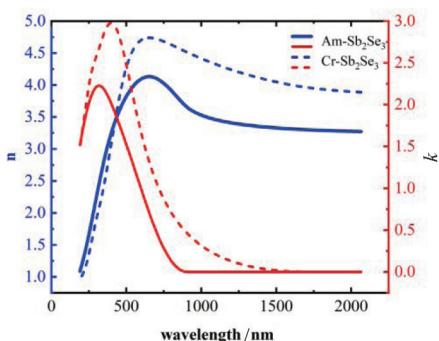


Fig. 2 Optical constants of layered Sb_2Se_3 at crystalline and amorphous states measured using ellipsometry in the experiment.
图2 椭偏仪测量的 Sb_2Se_3 薄膜在晶态和非晶态下的光学常数

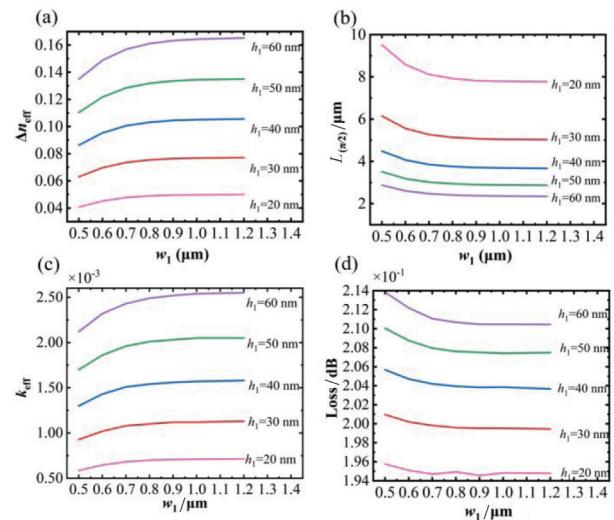


Fig. 3 Structural parameter optimization: (a) effect of the size of Sb_2Se_3 on the difference of effective refractive index (Δn_{eff}) of the Si- Sb_2Se_3 hybrid waveguide at the amorphous and crystalline states; (b) the required length of Sb_2Se_3 to achieve $\pi/2$ phase shift at different thickness and width of Sb_2Se_3 ; effect of the size of Sb_2Se_3 on the (c) imaginary part (k_{eff}) of effective refractive index and (d) absorption loss of the Si- Sb_2Se_3 hybrid waveguide at the crystalline state (The optimization was implemented for TE mode at the wavelength of 1 550 nm)

图3 结构参数优化: (a) Sb_2Se_3 处于非晶态和晶态时 Si- Sb_2Se_3 混合波导有效折射率差 (Δn_{eff}) 与 Sb_2Se_3 的厚度和宽度的变化关系; (b) 实现 $\pi/2$ 相移所需的 Sb_2Se_3 长度与 Sb_2Se_3 的厚度和宽度的变化关系; Sb_2Se_3 处于晶态时, Si- Sb_2Se_3 混合波导的 (c) 有效折射率虚部 (k_{eff}) 和 (d) 吸收损耗随 Sb_2Se_3 厚度和宽度的变化关系(以上结果是在 1 550 nm 波长下基于 TE 模式得到的)

process and its fabrication process is simple, making it more suitable for applications with large-scale integration of optical switches^[21, 22]. The cross-section of the Si- Sb_2Se_3 hybrid waveguide with ITO heater (Si- Sb_2Se_3 -ITO waveguide) is shown in Fig. 1 (b). The introduction of the ITO heater will affect the optical mode, which will further change the required length of Sb_2Se_3 to achieve $\pi/2$ phase shift and absorption loss at the crystalline state. We optimized the thickness h_2 of ITO by FEM. We fabricated the ITO film and measured its optical constant by ellipsometer, as shown in Fig. 4 (a). The complex refractive index of ITO is $2.021 + i 0.0049$ at the wavelength of 1 550 nm. Similar to the optimization of the Si- Sb_2Se_3 hybrid waveguide, we can derive the required length of the Si- Sb_2Se_3 -ITO waveguide ($L'_{(\pi/2)}$) and the absorption loss of the Si- Sb_2Se_3 -ITO waveguide in Cr- Sb_2Se_3 according to the simulated effective complex refractive index and corresponding formulas, as shown in Fig. 4 (b). The required length reduces as h_2 increases, while the absorption loss increases. The shorter the Si- Sb_2Se_3 -ITO waveguide ($L'_{(\pi/2)}$), the lower the power consumption for the phase transition of Sb_2Se_3 and the more beneficial to the miniaturization of the device. To balance the required length and absorption loss, the ITO thickness is chosen to be 30 nm. So only $2.71 \mu\text{m}$ long Sb_2Se_3 at the wavelength of 1 550 nm is needed to realize $\pi/2$ phase shift (Fig. 4 (b)). The simulated cross-section normal-

ized mode profiles of TE mode in the Si-Sb₂Se₃-ITO waveguide in Cr-Sb₂Se₃ and Am-Sb₂Se₃ are shown in Fig. 4(c) and Fig. 4(d), respectively.

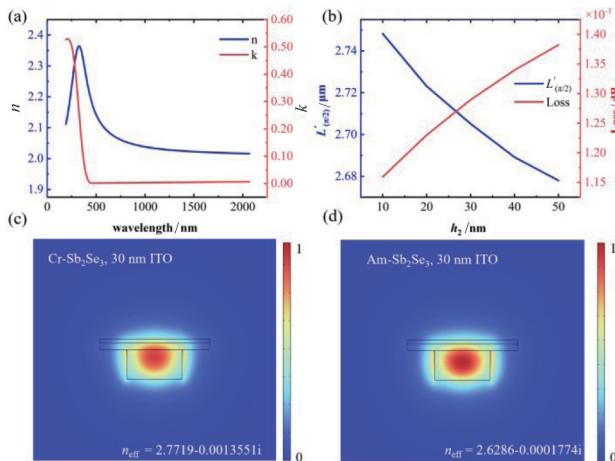


Fig. 4 Effect of ITO on Device Performance: (a) optical constant of the fabricated ITO film measured by ellipsometry in the experiment; (b) effect of ITO thickness on the required length of the Si-Sb₂Se₃-ITO waveguide to achieve $\pi/2$ phase shift and the absorption loss of the Si-Sb₂Se₃-ITO waveguide at the crystalline state of Sb₂Se₃; the cross-section normalized mode profiles of TE mode in the Si-Sb₂Se₃-ITO waveguide in (c) Cr-Sb₂Se₃ and (d) Am-Sb₂Se₃ when $h_1 = 50$ nm, $h_2 = 30$ nm and $w_1 = 1$ μm . (The simulation was implemented for TE mode at the wavelength of 1 550 nm)

图4 ITO对器件性能的影响:(a) 使用椭偏仪测量的ITO薄膜的光学常数;(b) 实现 $\pi/2$ 相移对应的Si-Sb₂Se₃-ITO混合波导长度和Sb₂Se₃处于晶态时Si-Sb₂Se₃-ITO的吸收损耗随ITO厚度的变化关系;当 $h_1 = 50$ nm, $h_2 = 30$ nm 和 $w_1 = 1$ μm 时, Si-Sb₂Se₃-ITO波导中(c) Sb₂Se₃处于晶态和(d) Sb₂Se₃处于非晶态时TE模式的归一化模场分布图(以上结果是在1 550 nm波长下基于TE模式得到的)

2 Results and discussions

2.1 Optical performance

We used the finite-difference time-domain (FDTD) method to study the optical performance of the proposed 2×2 MZI nonvolatile silicon-based optical switch. When Sb₂Se₃ in the lower and upper phase-shift arms are at the crystalline and amorphous states, respectively, the light outputs from the bar port, as shown in Fig. 5(a). The total IL is 0.84 dB and the ER reaches 28.8 dB at the wavelength of 1 550 nm (Fig. 5(b)). Inversely, when Sb₂Se₃ in the lower and upper phase-shift arms are at the amorphous and crystalline states, respectively, the light outputs from the cross port (Fig. 5(c)) with an IL of 0.84 dB and an ER of 19.8 dB at the wavelength of 1 550 nm (Fig. 5(d)). The IL is mainly caused by

two reasons. One is the absorption of crystalline Sb₂Se₃ and ITO, and the other is the mode mismatch between the Si waveguide and the Si-Sb₂Se₃-ITO waveguide. The IL can be further reduced by introducing a coupler structure between the Si waveguide and the Si-Sb₂Se₃-ITO waveguide or by designing micro-nano structured Sb₂Se₃. As shown in Fig. 5(b), the 3 dB bandwidth of the optical switch is greater than 150 nm at bar state and the ER is greater than 20.3 dB in the 3 dB bandwidth. At cross state, the 3 dB bandwidth is also greater than 150 nm and the ER is greater than 16.3 dB in the 3 dB bandwidth (Fig. 5(d)).

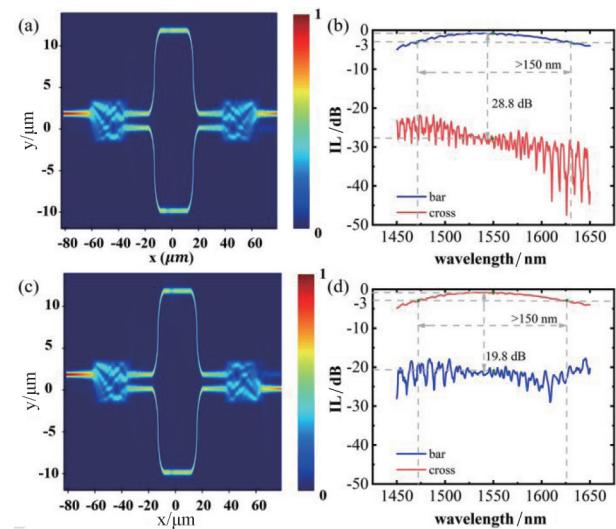


Fig. 5 The simulated electric field distribution diagram of the optical switch at (a) bar state and (c) cross state and the transmission at (b) bar state and (d) cross state

图5 光开关在(a)直通态和(c)交叉态时的电场分布图,以及在(b)直通态和(d)交叉态下的透射谱

2.2 Thermal Simulations

We implemented thermal simulation for the phase transition of Sb₂Se₃. The resistivity of ITO is 1.6×10^{-3} $\Omega \cdot \text{cm}$ ^[24]. The material properties used in the thermal simulation are summarized in Table 1. The metal electrode is Au, as shown in Fig. 1(b). The distance from Au to the middle of the Si-Sb₂Se₃-ITO waveguide is 2.1 μm to prevent metal absorption. For amorphization, Sb₂Se₃ must be rapidly heated to its melting point 893 K and then followed by quick cooling. Therefore, a high and short pulse with 9 V amplitude and 500 ns width is used, as shown by the red line in Fig. 6(a). As the blue line in Fig. 6(a) and Fig. 6(c) show, the temperature of the whole Sb₂Se₃ exceeds 893 K, suggesting Sb₂Se₃ realizes amorphization completely. The corresponding power con-

Table 1 Physical parameters of materials used in the thermal simulation.

表1 在热仿真中所用材料的物理参数

Materials	SiO ₂	Si	Am-Sb ₂ Se ₃	Cr-Sb ₂ Se ₃	ITO
Density [kg/m ³]	2 203	2 329	~6 000	6 500	7 100 ^[23]
Thermal conductivity [W/m·K]	1.38	130	0.2	0.24	~1 340 ^[23]
Heat capacity at constant pressure [J/kg·K]	746	700	150	150	11 ^[23]

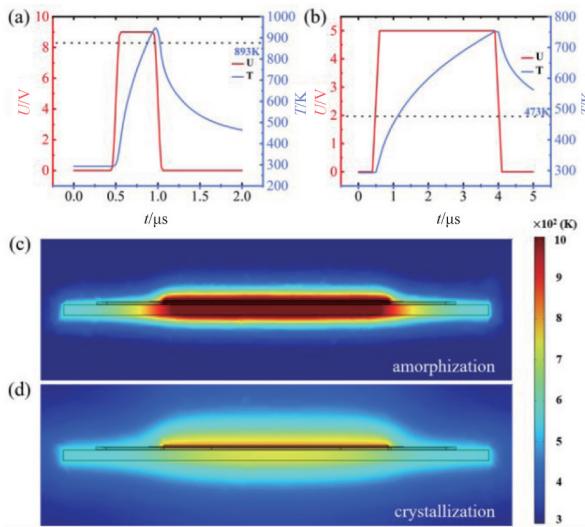


Fig. 6 (a) Thermal simulation of amorphization; (b) thermal simulation of crystallization processes; thermal distribution of the phase-shift arm along longitudinal section at the middle of waveguide for (c) amorphization and (d) crystallization processes

图6 (a) 非晶化过程的热仿真;(b) 结晶过程的热仿真。在波导中部, 相移臂沿纵向截面的热分布:(c) 非晶化过程;(d) 结晶过程

sumption is about 49 nJ. For crystallization, the temperature of Sb_2Se_3 needs to be controlled between the crystal temperature 473 K and the melting point 893 K. A low and long pulse with 5 V amplitude and 3.5 μs width is used, as shown by the red line in Fig. 6(b). Similarly, the whole Sb_2Se_3 realizes crystallization, as shown by the blue line in Fig. 6(b) and Fig. 6(d). The corresponding power consumption is about 105. 86 nJ. The introduc-

tion of the $\pi/2$ pre-bias structure reduces the required length of Sb_2Se_3 , which reduces the power consumption for phase transition of Sb_2Se_3 . Additionally, the ITO heater we designed fully covers and contacts the Sb_2Se_3 , enhancing the heating efficiency and further minimizing the energy loss. Table 2 summarizes a comparison for the performance of the 2×2 nonvolatile optical switches in the literature with our work. Our 2×2 MZI nonvolatile optical switch exhibits outstanding characteristics in terms of PCMs length, bandwidth, ER and IL. Moreover, the IL can be further reduced by introducing a coupler structure between the Si waveguide and the Si- Sb_2Se_3 -ITO waveguide or by designing micro-nano structured Sb_2Se_3 .

3 Conclusions

We demonstrated a broadband high-extinction-ratio 2×2 MZI nonvolatile silicon-based optical switch based on phase change material Sb_2Se_3 . By introducing a $\pi/2$ pre-biased waveguide structure, only 2.71 μm long Sb_2Se_3 is needed to tune the switch state, which reduces the absorption loss of crystalline Sb_2Se_3 and the power consumption for the phase transition of Sb_2Se_3 . When Sb_2Se_3 in the lower and upper phase-shift arms are at crystalline and amorphous states, respectively, light outputs from the bar port. The IL is 0.84 dB and the ER reaches 28.8 dB at the wavelength of 1550 nm. Inversely, light outputs from the cross port with an IL of 0.84 dB and an ER of 19.8 dB at the wavelength of 1550 nm. At both states, the 3 dB bandwidth is greater than 150 nm. The ER is greater than 20.3 dB and 16.3 dB at bar and cross states in the 3 dB bandwidth, respectively. We used a low and long pulse with 5 V amplitude and 3.5 μs width to achieve the crystallization and a high and short pulse (9 V amplitude, 500 ns width) for amorphization. The

Table 2 Comparison of the reported 2×2 nonvolatile optical switches with our work.
表2 此工作与已报道的 2×2 非易失性光开关的比较

Structure	PCM	PCMs Length	IL(@1550 nm)	BW ¹	ER	Phase transition approach	Power	S/E ²
Jiang ^[25]	3W ³ DC ⁴ GSST ⁵	12 μm	Bar: 1.14 dB Cross: 0.38 dB	100 nm	Bar: >12.3 dB Cross: >10.27 dB	/	/	S
Song ^[26]	MSW ⁶ Sb_2S_3	9.4 μm	Bar: 0.073 dB Cross: 0.055 dB	35 nm	Bar: >13.6 dB Cross: >15.3 dB	PIN heater	/	S
Yang ^[27]	MZI Sb_2S_3	9 μm	Bar: 1.69 dB Cross: 2.93 dB @ 1543.85 nm	\approx 10 nm	Bar: >10 dB Cross: >10 dB	RTA ⁷	/	E
Yang ^[28]	MZI Sb_2Se_3	3.88 μm	Bar: 0.6 dB Cross: 0.6 dB	\approx 40 nm	Bar: >20 dB Cross: >20 dB	/	/	S
Li ^[29]	MZI/DC Sb_2Se_3	1.63 μm	Bar: 0.068 dB Cross: 0.034 dB	60 nm	Bar: >20 dB Cross: >20 dB	PIN heater	\approx 1 μJ / \approx 100 nJ	E
Shang ^[30]	MMI Sb_2Se_3	\sim 27 μm	Bar: 1.16 dB Cross: 0.66 dB @1570 nm	35 nm	Bar: >15 dB Cross: >15 dB	/	/	S
This work	MZI Sb_2Se_3	2.71 μm	Bar: 0.84 dB Cross: 0.84 dB	150 nm Bar: >20.3 dB Cross: >16.3 dB	ITO heater	105.86 nJ/49 nJ	S	

¹BW: Bandwidth, ²S/E: Simulation/Experiment, ³3W: 3 Waveguide, ⁴DC: Directional coupler, ⁵GSST: $\text{Ge}_2\text{Sb}_2\text{Se}_4\text{Te}_1$, ⁶MSW: Multimode slot waveguide,

⁷RTA: Rapid thermal annealing.

corresponding power consumption is 105.86 nJ and 49 nJ, respectively. To the best of our knowledge, we have achieved an excellent 2×2 MZI nonvolatile optical switch, which is better than other 2×2 nonvolatile optical switches especially in terms of bandwidth, ER, and IL. Because of the superior characteristics, our optical switch holds considerable potential in the field of optical interconnects and optical computing.

Acknowledgment

The work is supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of China (No. 62204250) and the Autonomous deployment project of State Key Laboratory of Materials for Integrated Circuits (No. SKLJC-Z2024-A05).

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