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Citation: Appl. Phys. Lett. 83, 3180 (2003); doi: 10.1063/1.1616662
View online: http://dx.doi.org/10.1063/1.1616662
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Published by the American Institute of Physics

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Electronic structure of the contact between carbon nanotube and metal electrodes

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(Received 4 June 2003; accepted 12 August 2003)

Our first-principles study of the contact between a semiconducting single-walled carbon nanotube (s-SWNT) and metal electrodes shows that the electronic structure and potential depend strongly on the type of metal. The s-SWNT is weakly side-bonded to the gold surface with minute charge rearrangement and remains semiconducting. A finite potential barrier forms at the contact region. In contrast, the molybdenum surface forms strong bonds, resulting in significant charge transfer and metallicity at the contact. The radial deformation of the tube lowers the potential barrier at the contact and increases the state density at the Fermi level. © 2003 American Institute of Physics. [DOI: 10.1063/1.1616662]

Nanoscience and nanotechnology have opened a new frontier aiming at the ultimate miniaturization of electronic circuits with ultrahigh speed and high-density components presenting new functionalities. The switching of the current in a semiconducting single-walled carbon nanotube (s-SWNT) at room temperature by an external electric field has been utilized to fabricate new field-effect transistors (FET).1–3 The interaction between s-SWNT and metal electrode, and the Schottky barrier, sF, have been proposed as the origin of FET operation. Model calculations have been carried out to provide further understanding of experimental I–V characteristics.4,5 The SWNT–electrode interaction and resulting electronic structure are crucial for the electron transport and hence for all device properties. This letter presents an analysis of the self-consistent-field (SCF) electronic potential and electronic energy structure of a zigzag (8,0) SWNT side-bonded to either gold or molybdenum electrodes.

Calculations are performed using first-principles pseudopotential plane wave method6 within the density functional theory and the generalized gradient approximation.7 A metal electrode is presented by a slab consisting of five atomic planes, except those at the bottom two planes of slab, have been fully relaxed. The lattice parameter of the Au electrode is presented by a slab consisting of five atomic planes. First, the lattice parameters of the SWNT have been determined by using bulk Poisson’s ratio. This letter presents an analysis of the self-consistent-field (SCF) electronic potential and electronic energy structure of a zigzag (8,0) SWNT side-bonded to either gold or molybdenum electrodes.

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The calculated total charge density of SWNT bonded to the metal is similar to that of the carbon atom at the contact region. Calculated total charge density, $\Delta \rho = \rho[\text{SWNT} + E] - \rho[E] = \rho[\text{SWNT}]$, shows minute charge rearrangement. These results indicate that the weak Au-electrode–SWNT interaction does not induce significant changes in the electronic structure. The SCF electronic potential between SWNT and Au electrode, $E(r) = E_{\text{SWNT}}(r) + E_{\text{Au}}(r) + E_{\text{V}}(r)$, is presented on a vertical plane and also on a horizontal plane bisecting $s$ in Figs. 1(a) and 1(b). The shaded area shows that the electronic potential energy at the contact yields a potential barrier $\Phi_c = V_{c} - E_F > 0$. At the contact midway between the SWNT and the Au(100) surface $\Phi_c$ is calculated to be $\sim 3.9$ eV, that is comparable with the calculated work function $\Phi_{\text{Au}} \sim 5$ eV of the Au slab. Figure 1(g) shows the variation of $V_c(z)$ on a line passing through the center of the SWNT and perpendicular to the Au(100) surface. The effective potential barrier $\Phi_{c\text{eff}}$ can be even higher owing to the increased confinement of electrons at the contact region. Therefore, electrons that are transferred from the metal to the semiconducting SWNT has to tunnel a potential barrier $\Phi_{c\text{eff}}(r)$.

By pressing the s-SWNT between two Au slabs, hence by imposing a radial deformation on the tube [see the inset in Fig 1(d)], we examined the electronic structure and the contact potential. Normally, the semiconducting tubes undergo an insulator–metal transition, since the $\pi^*$-singlet states in the conduction band are lowered because of increased $\pi^* - \sigma^*$ hybridization at the high curvature site and eventually overlap with the valence band. In the present case, at a radial deformation, $\epsilon_r = b/a = 0.47$, the state density of SWNT+electrode system near $E_F$ has increased partly due to increased state density of the metallized s-SWNT. The spacing $s$ has decreased to 2.6 Å, and eventually potential barrier has collapsed (i.e., $\epsilon_E < E_F$) at specific sites at the contact [see Figs. 1(e) and 1(f)]. Under these circumstances, the electron from the SWNT can be ballistically transferred to the gold electrodes.

This situation is, however, different in the case of s-SWNT side-bonded to the Mo(110) surface, as shown in Fig. 2(a). Upon relaxation, the tube has rotated slightly so that C atoms tend to approach to Mo atoms. The interaction energy $E_R$ has been calculated to be $\sim 3.5$ eV. The LDOS at the Mo atom interacting with the C atoms of the SWNT is different from that at the clean Mo(110) surface. Moreover, the LDOS at the carbon atom closest to the Mo surface has a finite state density at $E_F$. In particular, the peak near $E_F$ is associated with the C–Mo bond states and hence may be identified as the metal-induced gap states (MIGS). The LDOS of the C atoms farthest from the contact has a band gap near $E_F$. This situation indicates that the site of SWNT forming contact is conducting, while the opposite site farthest from the contact remains semiconducting. Owing to the strong Mo–C bond, the spacing between SWNT and Mo electrode is smaller ($s = 1.96$ Å) than that with the Au electrode. The strong C–Mo bond formation is clarified by the calculated total SCF charge density in Fig. 2(b). The difference charge density $\Delta \rho$ presented on a vertical plane in Fig. 2(c) shows the strong charge transfer to the C–Mo bonds. The electronic potential calculated on the horizontal plane bisecting $s$ and also on a line from the SWNT to the Mo(110) surface through the contact show that $V_c(z) < E_F$ at the contact region. Accordingly, a potential barrier $\Phi_c$ does not form at the extended contact between the SWNT-Mo electrode. The radial deformation on the s-SWNT induced by squeezing it between two Mo(110) electrodes gives rise to the met
alization of the tube and hence to the increase of state density at $E_F$.

It appears that these results distinguish two different types of electronic structure for two different electrodes. A large spacing and sizable potential barrier between the tube and metal electrode, $\Phi_c \sim 3.9$ eV, are characteristics of the contact made with the Au surface. This explains why the devices made from Au electrodes have high contact resistance. Here, weak coupling of electronic states cannot lead to MIGS, and the (8,0) SWNT is identified to be semiconducting even after the contact has been set with the Au surface. Because of weak coupling and hence finite $\Phi_c$, the s-SWNT–Au contact is reminiscent of the metal-oxide–semiconductor junction. A small $\Phi_B$ is estimated for the $p$-type character. Upon radial deformation, $s$ decreases and eventually $\Phi_c$ collapses. Similar features have been observed recently in scanning tunneling microscopy studies using a multiwalled carbon nanotube tip and Au(111) sample. However, $\Phi_c$ has disappeared due to strong coupling between the states of s-SWNT and Mo(110). The height of the Schottky barrier $\Phi_B$ that forms at the SWNT-Mo(110) junction having a finite contact region followed by a free s-SWNT depends on the position where the Fermi level is pinned in the gap of s-SWNT. A crude estimate based on the LDOS suggests that $\Phi_B \sim 0.4$ eV for the $p$-type character. The small cross section of the tube does not allow us to identify a band diagram across the diameter. However, the bands are normally bent along the axis of the s-SWNT and the height of the barrier is monitored by the applied gate voltage. Finally, we note that the electronic properties of present metal–SWNT junctions, in particular the Fermi level pinning exhibits marked differences from those of metal–Si heterostructures, which are known to be insensitive to the type of metal.

This work was partially supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. INT01-15021 and TÜBİTAK under Grant No. TBAG-U/13(101T010). One of the authors (S.C.) acknowledges partial support from Academy of Science of Turkey.