Advancements And Applications of Finfet Technology in Modern Semiconductor Engineering

Runxin Ye *

Institute of Quantum Science and Engineering, Southern University of Science and Technology, Shenzhen, 518055, China

* Corresponding Author Email: 12132864@mail.sustech.edu.cn

Abstract. This comprehensive study presents an in-depth analysis of Fin Field-Effect Transistor (FinFET) technology, a significant innovation in semiconductor technology, focusing on its structural attributes, applications, and future prospects. FinFETs, characterized by their distinctive fin-like channels, are pivotal in overcoming the limitations of traditional MOSFETs, particularly in the context of device miniaturization. The paper begins by exploring the basic theory and structural characteristics of FinFETs, emphasizing their enhanced control over short channel effects and reduced leakage currents in scaled-down devices. Attention is then directed towards the integration of FinFET technology in Static Random-Access Memory (SRAM), detailing how FinFETs contribute to improved stability and efficiency in memory storage. Another crucial application discussed is in the biomedical field, where FinFETs have facilitated the development of advanced instrumentation amplifiers and sensitive sensors, marking a leap in medical electronics. The paper concludes by addressing the challenges encountered by FinFETs as fabrication approaches the 5-7nm scale, including their physical and structural limitations. It also highlights ongoing research in structural modifications and material innovations like Gate-All-Around FETs and alternative materials, underscoring the continued evolution and relevance of FinFET technology in the ever-advancing semiconductor industry.

Keywords: FinFET Technology, Semiconductor Miniaturization, SRAM Performance, Biomedical Electronics Applications.

1. Introduction

This document explores the cutting-edge FinFET (Fin Field-Effect Transistor) technology, a significant evolution in the realm of semiconductor devices. FinFETs have emerged as a pivotal breakthrough, addressing the inherent limitations of traditional MOSFET (Metal-Oxide-Semiconductor Field-Effect Transistor) technologies, particularly in the face of the relentless drive towards miniaturization in semiconductor fabrication [1, 2].

The discussion initiates with a comprehensive examination of the fundamental theory and structural characteristics of FinFETs, emphasizing their role in overcoming the challenges posed by short channel effects and leakage currents in scaled-down devices. Furthermore, the application of FinFET technology in two crucial areas is scrutinized: Static Random-Access Memory (SRAM) and biomedical electronics. This includes an in-depth analysis of the modifications and enhancements in SRAM architecture enabled by FinFETs, alongside an exploration of groundbreaking biomedical applications, underscoring FinFETs' versatility and efficiency. The discussion culminates with an assessment of the challenges and future prospects of FinFET technology, highlighting ongoing structural and material innovations aimed at maintaining the momentum of technological advancement in the semiconductor industry.

2. FinFET Fundamental Theory

2.1. Structural Characteristics

Traditional planar Metal-Oxide-Semiconductor Field-Effect Transistor (MOSFET) technologies have been progressively miniaturized to enhance transistor density, augment device performance, and

minimize power usage. However, this reduction in channel length leads to a diminished control by the gate over the channel due to the quantum tunneling effect [3]. This phenomenon precipitates adverse short channel effects and hampers the effective regulation of leakage currents. A solution to this issue is the adoption of a multi-gate structure. In such a configuration, the leakage current is precisely centered within the channel, facilitating its management.

FinFET, short for Fin Field-Effect Transistor, features a design with multiple upright channels, reminiscent of fish fins, which inspired its name. Its core architecture is built on a base layer, and the gates are strategically placed around two, three, or all four sides of these channels. This configuration results in a dual-gate design, with the source or drain creating a fin-like projection on the silicon surface [4]. The FinFET design includes several distinct areas: the gate-oxide zone, a section of highly doped polysilicon, a silicon fin with light doping, and a heavily doped area connecting the source and drain. Figure 1 illustrates the FinFET structure.

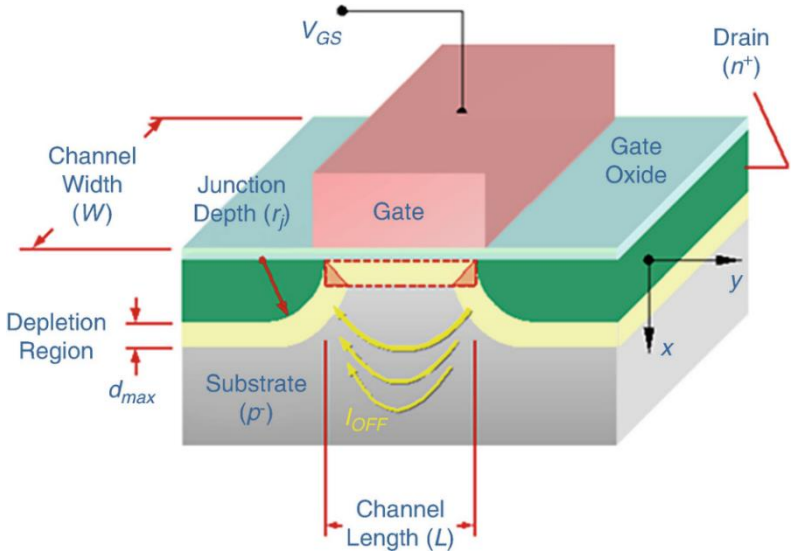

Fig. 1 The structure of FinFET [4]

FinFET transistors are broadly categorized into two modes based on the state of the front and back gates: the tied-gate (TG) mode and the independent-gate (IG) mode. In the TG configuration, the front and back gates are interconnected, receiving analogous control signals. Conversely, in the IG layout, these gates are physically separated and linked to distinct control signals.

2.2. Development History

The history of FinFET technology dates back to 1987 when K. Heida and colleagues pioneered a tri-gate vertical field-effect transistor (FET). This device featured a fully depleted silicon body with grooved isolation on either side, forming sidewall gates. Heida and his team demonstrated that the sidewall gates enhanced gate controllability over the channel, while the fully depleted silicon body, due to the body bias effect, improved the device's switching operations [5].

In 1989, Hisamoto and others invented a tri-gate configuration for a vertical channel ultra-thin body Silicon-On-Insulator (SOI) transistor, known as DELTA. Experimental and simulation data showed that the DELTA structure's gates provided efficient channel control. Its vertical ultra-thin body SOI structure offered exceptional device characteristics, including mitigating short channel effects, nearly ideal subthreshold swing, and high transconductance. The triangular structure of DELTA at this stage already bore similarities to the current FinFET structure [6].

In their 1992 publication, Frank, Laux, and Fischetti presented a detailed study on the potential for scaling down silicon MOSFETs, employing advanced Monte Carlo simulations for more accurate modeling. They focused on a simulated double-gate SOI MOSFET, characterized by a 30 nm gate length, a 3 nm oxide layer, and a silicon film varying from 5 to 20 nm in thickness. Their findings revealed that for gate lengths greater than 70 nm, this device exhibited no short channel effects.

Moreover, it achieved impressive transconductance values, reaching as high as 2300 mS/mm. This research highlighted the significant enhancements in MOSFET device performance achievable through the use of three-dimensional structures [7].

Finally, in 1998, a team led by Hu Zhengming, funded by the U.S. Department of Defense, successfully manufactured the first n-type FinFET with a gate length of 17 nm, a channel width of 20 nm, and a fin height of 50 nm. The following year, they achieved the manufacture of the first p-type FinFET with a gate length of 18 nm, a channel width of 15 nm, and a fin height of 50 nm. This marked the advent of the FinFET era [8].

The history of FinFET technology is shown in figure 2.

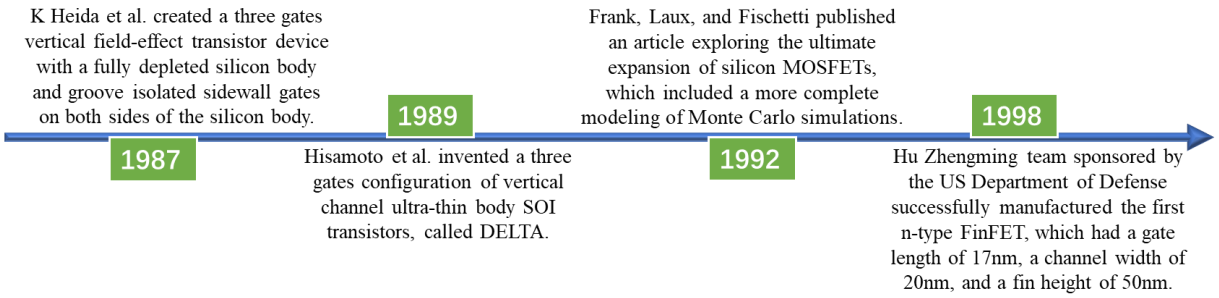

Fig. 2 The history of FinFET technology

3. Application Scenario Analysis

3.1. Integration of FinFET Technology in SRAM Architecture

3.1.1 Enhancing SRAM Performance with FinFETs

Static Random-Access Memory (SRAM) is a pivotal component in digital systems, utilized extensively in CPU caches, workstations, PCs, and as buffers in hard drives. Its fundamental merit is the maintenance of data in a static state, obviating the need for refresh circuits and thereby facilitating rapid data access. Despite these advantages, conventional SRAM, with its planar CMOS structure, confronts limitations such as lower integration density, elevated power consumption, and bulkier dimensions. The miniaturization of SRAM amplifies susceptibility to severe short channel effects, resulting in escalated leakage currents and power consumption, which detrimentally affects performance. FinFET technology, contrastingly, transcends these limitations by offering enhanced channel doping insensitivity, superior Short Channel Effect (SCE) control, elevated gain, reduced cost, compactness, superior drive current capability, efficient density scaling (especially in sub-20 nm regimes), and improved scalability.

3.1.2 Advanced FinFET-based SRAM Cell Designs

To bridge the gap between power efficiency, physical area, durability, frequency performance, and overall quality, FinFET-based structures have emerged as viable alternatives to traditional CMOS devices in SRAM applications. Initial efforts to improve SRAM predominantly targeted the reduction of static power consumption, yet these modifications primarily attenuated leakage current variations. To bolster cell stability and minimize leakage power, an array of FinFET-based SRAM cells, including configurations from 6 to 13 transistors, have been introduced.

6-Transistor (6T) SRAM Cell: Limachia and Kothari's 2020 innovation involved a 6T SRAM cell comprising two cross-coupled inverters and a pair of access FinFET transistors. This cell, known for its compact footprint, stores each bit on four FinFET transistors (XM3, XM4, XM5, and XM6) and utilizes two access FinFETs (XM1, XM2) connected to bitlines BL and BLBar [9].

7-Transistor (7T) SRAM Cell: Asli, Taghipour, Sneha, and their team in 2017 introduced a 7T design, enhancing the 6T structure by adding an additional transistor (XM7), connected to the word line (WL). This design addressed the leakage issues prevalent in the 6T configuration [10].

8-Transistor (8T) SRAM Cell: In 2022, Vemula and colleagues developed the 8T FinFET SRAM cell to surmount the decoupling challenges and low Static Noise Margin (SNM) during read operations in the 6T unit. This cell incorporated two additional FinFETs to separate read and write processes, thus ensuring greater stability at low operating voltages [11].

3.1.3 Performance Metrics and Improvements

SRAM cell performance is primarily gauged through metrics like the Static Noise Margin (SNM) and the Power Delay Product (PDP). The SNM, an index of bit cell stability, depends on the transistor size ratios during read (CR) and write (PR) operations. A higher SNM denotes enhanced stability and data integrity. The PDP, representing the product of gate delay and average power, is an indicator of the energy efficiency of the SRAM cell.

FinFET technology's application has markedly improved the SNM of SRAM cells. Studies by Banu & Shubham in 2017 and Kumar & Chalil in 2019 demonstrated significant increases in the SNM values for FinFET-based SRAM cells compared to those with traditional planar MOSFET technology [12, 13]. This advancement in FinFET technology underscores its potential in enhancing the performance and efficiency of SRAM in modern computing systems.

3.2. FinFET Technology in Biomedical Applications

In recent years, with societal advancements, there has been growing attention to personal health care, sparking interest in the application of semiconductor technology in the biomedical field. The specific requirements for biomedical electronics, such as small size, low power consumption, cost-effectiveness, long-term stability, and biocompatibility, present significant challenges. The advent of FinFET technology, with its advantages over traditional semiconductor techniques, has opened new possibilities for electronic devices in this field. Three representative discoveries are discussed below.

3.2.1 Instrumentation Amplifiers (IN-Amps)

Instrumentation Amplifiers play a crucial role in industrial and medical settings, where they are essential for amplifying very low-power and low-voltage signals amidst significant common-mode voltages and DC potentials. These amplifiers are particularly valued for their ability to extract microvolt signals amidst substantial physiological and environmental interference. Traditional IN-Amps, using passive resistors, required large chip areas, posing challenges such as short channel effects upon miniaturization. Additionally, their reliance on three operational amplifiers led to high power consumption and resistance matching issues, introducing additional DC offset voltages.

A team from Arizona State University, comprising Reena Sonkusare, Omkar Joshi, and S.S. Rathod, proposed a new design for a biomedical application-based SOI FinFET IN-Amp [14]. This design consists of three modules: an Operational Transconductance Amplifier (OTA) based on a 30 nm SOI FinFET, providing additional current input for transconductance control; an instrumentation amplifier based on active FinFET resistors; and a DC offset cancellation circuit based on FinFET. The group's simulations revealed notable performance metrics: a 99.6 dB DC gain, 7.9 MHz unity gain bandwidth, 10.98 KHz 3 dB bandwidth, and 70 degrees phase margin at 0.5 V power supply voltage; a CMRR of 103 dB; an Input Common Mode Range (ICMR) from -0.1V to 0.7V; and PSRRs of 118.18 dB and 143 dB for positive and negative supplies at 0.5 V, respectively. The Total Harmonic Distortion measured at 0.1% for a 10 KHz base frequency output signal at a peak amplitude of 220 mV, indicating effective DC offset cancellation.

3.2.2 Low-Power pH Sensing Microfluidic Chips

Led a group from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne developed the inaugural low-power microfluidic chip for pH sensing, designed for heterogeneous integration [15]. This innovative chip integrates a high k FinFET sensor with a liquid gate, a compact Ag/AgCl quasi-reference electrode, and passive microfluidics, creating a comprehensive, small-scale solution for ion monitoring in biological fluids like sweat pH. The team ingeniously adapted fully depleted n-channel

Fin FETs for use as sensors in liquid mediums by substituting the metal gate electrode with a reference electrode immersed in the fluid.

Subsequent testing of this novel sensor, based on depleted n-channel Fin FETs, demonstrated linear responses to pH variations, with an estimated sensitivity of 6mV/pH and a rapid response time (3.1 seconds for 90% to 10% measurement voltage). The sensor exhibited an 8 mV/pH sensitivity in the output drain voltage, achieving millivolt-level resolution.

3.2.3 Voltage-Controlled Oscillators (VCOs)

VCOs, adjusting current flow through source and drain based on gate voltage, are widely used in biomedical applications for their compact size, speed, and low power consumption. M. Santhosh Rani and colleagues from the Srinivasa Institute of Technology proposed a new VCO design using FinFET technology to reduce leakage power and other short-channel effects in CKTs. FinFETs, with channels above the substrate and gates connected from three sides, allow better voltage control and higher output resolution [16]. Their design, developed in Tanner EDA software, showed significant improvements in transistor count, power delay product, path delay, propagation delay, rise and fall times, and leakage power compared to traditional designs, affirming FinFET's superiority over simple VCOs.

4. Challenges and Prospects in FinFET Technology

4.1. Structural Advancements in FinFETs

Despite FinFETs significantly mitigating the short channel effects (SCE) inherent in traditional MOSFETs and propelling semiconductor technology beyond the 22nm fabrication limit, their efficacy diminishes as fabrication approaches the 5-7nm scale. Challenges such as the proximity of fins leading to leakage resurgence and the physical limits of materials are encountered. To sustain Moore's Law and enhance FinFET performance, two primary technological optimization directions have emerged: structural modification of FinFETs and exploration of novel constituent materials.

Since the advent of FinFET's fin-like structure, continuous improvements have been pursued. Due to etching process limitations, initial FinFET morphologies were not vertical fins but slightly slanted trapezoidal shapes. However, such forms posed potential risks in large-scale integration due to controllability issues and the through effect at the fin's base. Hence, from the 14nm node onwards, FinFET architecture evolved into a taller, rectangular structure. This transition not only increased the device's drive capability per unit area but also reduced the bottom parasitic transistor's impact on off-state leakage current [17].

As chip fabrication continues to scale down, a critical challenge arises with the reduction in the number of fins per FinFET. Moreover, there's a limit to increasing fin height, as maintaining vertical integrity becomes challenging under internal stress, rendering the traditional fin structure inadequate for advanced fabrication processes. In response, researchers proposed the Gate-All-Around Field-Effect Transistor (GAAFET) structure, building on the concept of increasing gate-to-channel contact area for enhanced channel control. GAAFETs, with gates completely enveloping the channel, offer superior SCE control, minimal leakage currents, and improved device drive capability due to quasi-one-dimensional ballistic transport and symmetrical electric field distribution. Additionally, the limited doping concentration in the source/drain extension regions naturally forms a depletion zone at zero gate bias, effectively increasing the electrical gate length and mitigating SCE and substrate bias effects.

4.2. Material Innovations in FinFETs

An alternative approach involves exploring different materials to enhance FinFET performance. In 2018, researchers from the Department of Applied Physics at Delhi Technological University, including Ajay Kumar, Anuj Chhabra, and Rishu Chaujar, experimented with replacing traditional silicon (Si) fins in FinFETs with Gallium Arsenide (GaAs), coupled with metallic gate materials and

silicon nitride (Si3N4) as the gate-source/drain spacer [18]. Comparative measurements revealed that GaAs-FinFETs and traditional Si-FinFETs shared similar on-currents (I_on) around 10^(-5) A, but differed significantly in off-currents (I_off), with GaAs-FinFETs exhibiting around 10^(-15) A, significantly lower than Si-FinFETs at approximately 10^(-8) A. The higher potential barrier and carrier depletion in GaAs-FinFET channels when gate voltage is unapplied result in reduced subthreshold currents, indicating GaAs-FinFETs' potential in designing SRAMs with higher switching speeds and lower leakage currents.

In 2019, the same research team proposed a novel Gallium Nitride on Silicon-on-Insulator (GaN-SOI) FinFET. This design incorporated significant changes from traditional Si-FinFETs, including using silicon oxide (SOI) as substrate to reduce stray capacitance and enhance device frequency, and zirconium dioxide (ZrO2) as gate dielectric to further miniaturize the device [19]. However, the primary innovation was using GaN, with its wider bandgap, higher electron mobility, and high-temperature and voltage tolerance, as a substitute channel material to create an ideal FinFET device. The resultant GaN-SOI FinFET model featured an 8nm fin height, 4nm fin width, 8nm GaN channel length, channel doping of 10^16 cm^ (-3), source/drain doping of 10^21 cm^(-3), gate power of 5eV, and gate length of 8nm. This new model exhibited several distinctive features: a higher transconductance value of 0.9mA/V compared to the traditional Si FinFET's 0.08mA/V; a higher electric field at the source side, impacting electron injection speed and mitigating hot carrier effects; an on-off current ratio (Ion/Ioff) of 5×10^9, significantly higher than Si FinFET's 7×10^5, indicating better current modulation capability; and an 81% reduction in subthreshold swing, indicating faster state transition speeds and reduced SCE. Overall, the GaN-SOI FinFET model demonstrated superior performance in subthreshold swing, transconductance, surface potential, and switching capabilities compared to traditional silicon FinFETs, reducing SCE and enhancing device efficiency, making it a more suitable candidate for low-power, high-performance CMOS circuits.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of FinFET technology has revealed its profound impact on the semiconductor industry, marking a significant step forward in the ongoing quest to uphold Moore's Law. FinFETs have successfully addressed the critical challenges of short channel effects and leakage currents, enabling the continuation of device miniaturization beyond the 22nm node. The analysis of FinFETs in SRAM applications has demonstrated their capability to enhance performance metrics such as Static Noise Margin and Power Delay Product, thereby ensuring higher efficiency and stability in memory devices. In the biomedical sphere, FinFETs have shown promising potential in developing advanced instrumentation amplifiers and sensors, offering improved performance in terms of sensitivity, power consumption, and device miniaturization. Nonetheless, the journey of FinFET technology is not without its challenges. As the industry approaches the 5-7nm fabrication scale, the physical and structural limitations of FinFETs become apparent, necessitating innovations in both design and materials. The emergence of Gate-All-Around Field-Effect Transistors (GAAFETs) and the exploration of alternative materials like Gallium Arsenide and Gallium Nitride present promising avenues for overcoming these barriers. These advancements not only aim to extend the scalability of FinFETs but also signify the relentless pursuit of progress in semiconductor technology, ensuring its vitality and relevance in the ever-evolving landscape of electronics and computing.

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