

# Synergistic Approach to High-Performance Oxide Thin Film Transistors Using a Bilayer Channel Architecture

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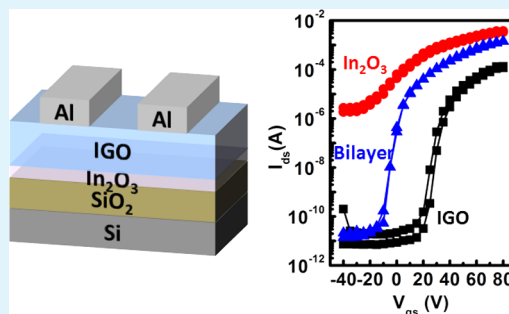
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## S Supporting Information

**ABSTRACT:** We report here a bilayer metal oxide thin film transistor concept (bMO TFT) where the channel has the structure: dielectric/semiconducting indium oxide ( $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$ ) layer/semiconducting indium gallium oxide (IGO) layer. Both semiconducting layers are grown from solution via a low-temperature combustion process. The TFT mobilities of bottom-gate/top-contact bMO TFTs processed at  $T = 250\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  are  $\sim 5$  times larger ( $\sim 2.6\text{ cm}^2/(\text{V s})$ ) than those of single-layer IGO TFTs ( $\sim 0.5\text{ cm}^2/(\text{V s})$ ), reaching values comparable to single-layer combustion-processed  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  TFTs ( $\sim 3.2\text{ cm}^2/(\text{V s})$ ). More importantly, and unlike single-layer  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  TFTs, the threshold voltage of the bMO TFTs is  $\sim 0.0\text{ V}$ , and the current on/off ratio is significantly enhanced to  $\sim 1 \times 10^8$  (vs  $\sim 1 \times 10^4$  for  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$ ). The microstructure and morphology of the  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$ /IGO bilayers are analyzed by X-ray diffraction, atomic force microscopy, X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy, and transmission electron microscopy, revealing the polycrystalline nature of the  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  layer and the amorphous nature of the IGO layer. This work demonstrates that solution-processed metal oxides can be implemented in bilayer TFT architectures with significantly enhanced performance.

**KEYWORDS:** thin film transistor (TFT), indium oxide, indium gallium oxide, bilayer structure



## INTRODUCTION

Thin film transistors based on metal oxide semiconductors (MO TFTs) have attracted considerable attention because of their high carrier mobilities, high optical transparency, and environmental stability.<sup>1–5</sup> Thus, they are being actively investigated as replacements for silicon-based TFTs in the backplanes of next-generation liquid crystal (LC) and active matrix organic light-emitting diode (AMOLED) displays.<sup>6–9</sup> Among metal oxide semiconductors, amorphous oxides are the most promising candidates for large-area TFT applications because of their grain-boundary free thin film properties,<sup>1–5,10–14</sup> with ZTO,<sup>15,16</sup> IZO,<sup>17,18</sup> IGO,<sup>19</sup> and IGZO.<sup>2,20–22</sup> being the most investigated.

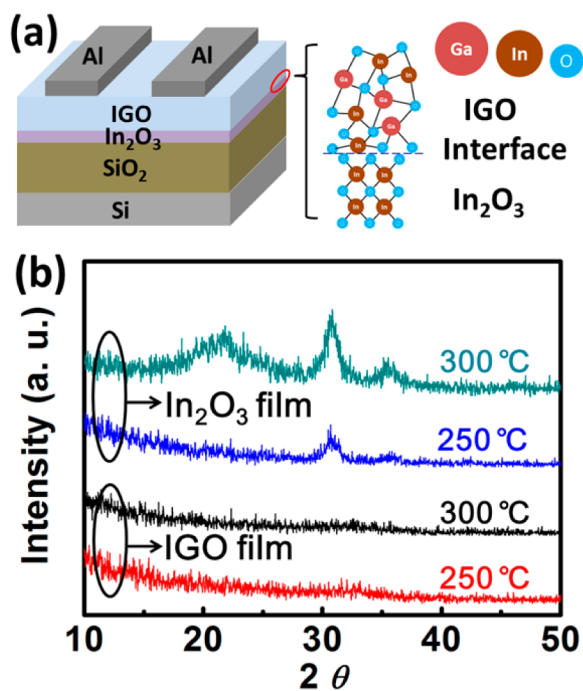
Proper attention to device structure design and materials integration are crucial for optimizing TFT performance. In particular, bilayer metal oxide TFTs (bMO TFTs), where two metal oxide films are used as the channel layer, offer significant performance advantages by combining the properties of two semiconducting materials. Recently, bMO TFTs based on IZO/HIZO<sup>23</sup> and IZO/IGZO<sup>24</sup> as the channel layer have been reported, exhibiting carrier mobilities of 48 and 30  $\text{cm}^2/(\text{V s})$ , respectively, and good on–off ratios ( $1 \times 10^8$  to  $1 \times 10^{10}$ ). Furthermore, when compared to the corresponding IZO single layer devices, these bilayer devices effectively enhance the

photostability<sup>23</sup> and suppress normalized current noise spectral density.<sup>24</sup> To date, the predominant techniques for depositing such bilayer oxide films have been vapor-phase processes. However, solution-based growth processes are attractive because they can be carried out at low temperatures compatible with plastic substrates, offer the possibility of large-scale cost-effective roll-to-roll manufacture, and avoid capital-intensive vacuum equipment.<sup>25</sup> Recently, this laboratory reported a new methodology to fabricate MO TFTs from solution and at low temperature via “combustion synthesis.”<sup>26,27</sup> With this approach, a variety of MO-based TFTs, including  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  devices with mobilities  $\sim 1\text{ cm}^2/(\text{V s})$  can be fabricated on Si/SiO<sub>2</sub> at temperatures as low as 200 °C. However, despite the good  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  mobility ( $\mu$ ), facile crystallization of this material under the combustion synthesis conditions, the yields TFTs exhibit less than optimum current modulation ( $I_{\text{on}}/I_{\text{off}}$ ) and threshold voltage ( $V_T$ ) uniformity over large areas.<sup>27,28</sup> In contrast, amorphous oxides such as IGZO, IZO, and IGO can be prepared via low-temperature combustion techniques<sup>26,27</sup> and

Received: May 29, 2013

Accepted: July 22, 2013

Published: July 22, 2013



**Figure 1.** (a)  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3/\text{IGO}$  bMO TFT device architecture employed in this study and schematic representation of a metal oxide lattice. (b)  $\theta-2\theta$  XRD scans of 15 nm  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  and IGO films deposited on  $\text{SiO}_2$  substrates and annealed at the indicated temperatures.

have more controllable carrier densities with minimal grain boundary effects.<sup>2,18,26,28</sup> However, the electron mobilities for these materials are typically lower than those obtained for combustion-derived  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  ( $5-8 \text{ cm}^2/\text{vs}$ ,  $T = 300 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ ), and therefore the question arises as to whether it is possible to usefully combine the high field-effect mobility of a polycrystalline oxide with the carrier density control and film uniformity of an amorphous oxide, using an all-combustion process.

In this letter, we report novel  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3/\text{IGO}$  bottom-gate top-contact bMO TFTs fabricated at low temperature. After optimizing  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3/\text{IGO}$  film deposition by varying the film thicknesses and combustion processing parameters, the bilayer TFTs achieve greatly enhanced performance for  $250 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  processing temperature ( $\mu \approx 2.56 \text{ cm}^2/(\text{V s})$ ,  $I_{\text{on}}/I_{\text{off}} \approx 1 \times 10^8$ ,  $V_T \approx +6.3 \text{ V}$ ) compared to single-layer  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  ( $\mu \approx 3.22 \text{ cm}^2/(\text{V s})$ ,  $I_{\text{on}}/I_{\text{off}} \approx 1 \times 10^4$ ,  $V_T \approx -10.8 \text{ V}$ ) or IGO ( $\mu \approx 0.52 \text{ cm}^2/(\text{V s})$ ,  $I_{\text{on}}/I_{\text{off}} \approx 1 \times 10^7$ ,  $V_T \approx +30.3 \text{ V}$ ) devices. The morphology and microstructure of the bilayer films are characterized by atomic force microscopy (AFM), X-ray diffraction (XRD), X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS), and transmission electron microscopy (TEM), evidencing a well-defined crystalline/amorphous bilayer microstructure.

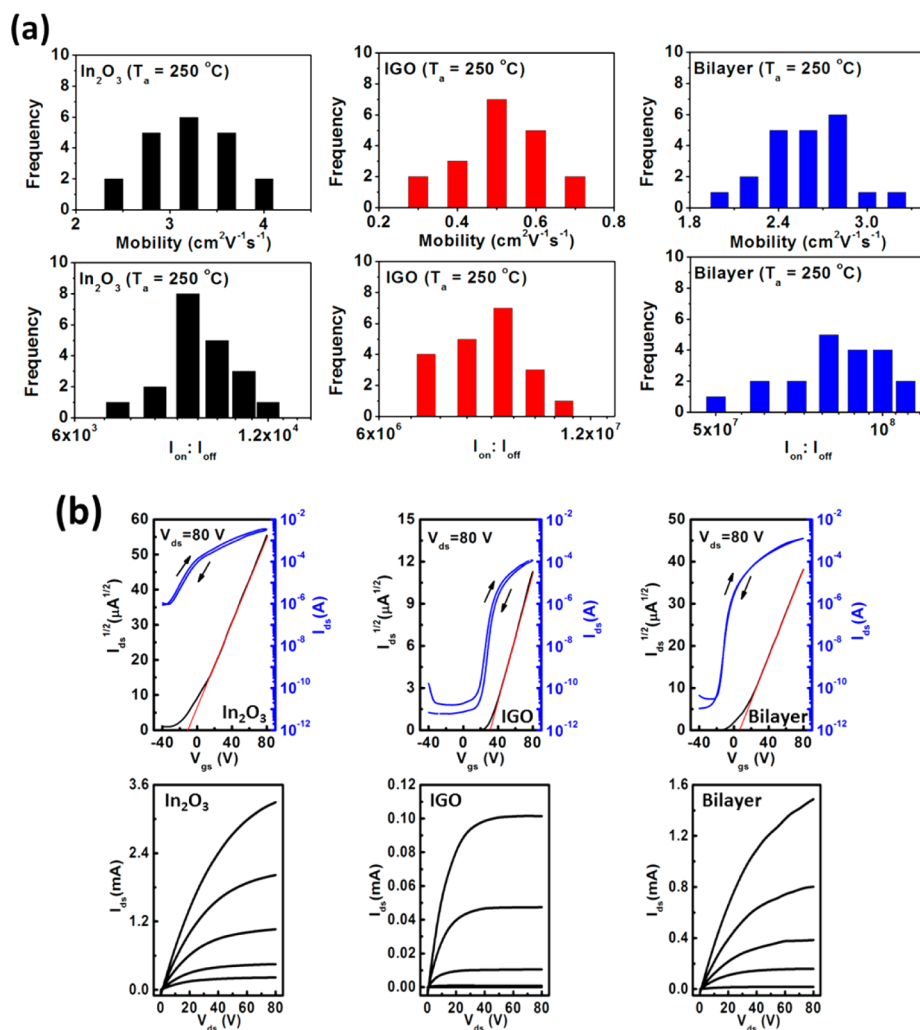
## EXPERIMENTAL SECTION

**Precursor Solutions.** Acetylacetonate fuel-based  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  and  $\text{Ga}_2\text{O}_3$  precursor solutions were prepared with  $\text{In}(\text{NO}_3)_3 \cdot x\text{H}_2\text{O}$  and  $\text{Ga}(\text{NO}_3)_3 \cdot x\text{H}_2\text{O}$  (IGO:0.65:0.35 mol ratio), dissolved in 2-methoxyethanol with acetylacetonate and  $\text{NH}_4\text{OH}$  to yield 0.05 M a solution. All reagents were from Sigma-Aldrich and used as received.  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  precursor solutions were prepared similarly with concentrations ranging from 0.01 to 0.05 M for film thickness variation. Precursor solutions were stirred for more than 3 h at  $25 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  before device fabrication.

**Transistor Fabrication and Electrical Performance.** Doped silicon substrates with a 300 nm thermal  $\text{SiO}_2$  layers were used as the gate electrode and dielectric layer, respectively.  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  precursor solutions were spin-coated onto the  $\text{SiO}_2$  at 3500 rpm for 35 s, and then annealed on a hot plate at temperatures ranging from 200 to  $300 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  for 30 min. Subsequently, the 0.05 M IGO precursor solution was spin-coated onto the  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  channel film and annealed under the same conditions. This procedure was repeated for achieving the desired IGO thickness. Finally, 40 nm Al source and drain electrodes were thermally evaporated onto the IGO film through a shadow mask. The channel length and width for all devices in this study were 50 and  $1000 \mu\text{m}$ , respectively. Similarly, TFTs with single  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  or IGO active layers ( $3\times$  spin-coated layers) were fabricated for comparison.

**Table 1.** Performance Metrics of Single-Layer  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$ , IGO, and Bilayer  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3/\text{IGO}$  TFTs with Different  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  Layer Thicknesses and Processing Temperatures

metal oxide	$T_p$ ( $^\circ\text{C}$ )	mobility ( $\text{cm}^2/(\text{V s})$ )	$V_t$ (V)	$\log(I_{\text{on}}/I_{\text{off}})$
$\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$ (15 nm)	200	$0.63 \pm 0.11$	$4.8 \pm 3.6$	$6.2 \pm 0.2$
	250	$3.22 \pm 0.38$	$-10.8 \pm 5.3$	$3.8 \pm 0.3$
	300	$6.41 \pm 0.71$	$-31.4 \pm 6.5$	$3.0 \pm 0.2$
IGO (15 nm)	200	Inactive	—	—
	250	$0.52 \pm 0.19$	$30.3 \pm 7.1$	$6.8 \pm 0.1$
	300	$2.32 \pm 0.034$	$15.1 \pm 5.6$	$6.1 \pm 0.2$
$\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$ (1 nm)/IGO (10 nm)	200	Inactive ( $\mu \sim 10^{-5}$ )	—	—
	250	$0.78 \pm 0.23$	$25.5 \pm 6.4$	$7.2 \pm 0.3$
	300	$1.63 \pm 0.57$	$17.3 \pm 8.8$	$6.3 \pm 0.3$
$\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$ (2 nm)/IGO (10 nm)	200	$10^{-3}$	$57.4 \pm 9.7$	$4.9 \pm 0.1$
	250	$1.39 \pm 0.27$	$17.9 \pm 3.2$	$7.4 \pm 0.2$
	300	$2.95 \pm 0.37$	$9.9 \pm 6.1$	$6.6 \pm 0.3$
$\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$ (3 nm)/IGO (10 nm)	200	$0.022 \pm 0.0083$	$52.1 \pm 7.5$	$5.4 \pm 0.2$
	250	$2.56 \pm 0.31$	$6.3 \pm 3.7$	$7.9 \pm 0.3$
	300	$3.71 \pm 0.48$	$-3.7 \pm 4.3$	$5.4 \pm 0.1$
$\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$ (4 nm)/IGO (10 nm)	200	$0.27 \pm 0.068$	$15.5 \pm 6.8$	$5.8 \pm 0.3$
	250	$2.87 \pm 0.39$	$2.4 \pm 4.7$	$5.8 \pm 0.4$
	300	$5.21 \pm 0.62$	$-18.6 \pm 5.6$	$3.9 \pm 0.3$
$\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$ (5 nm)/IGO (10 nm)	200	$0.36 \pm 0.83$	$9.5 \pm 7.8$	$6.2 \pm 0.2$
	250	$3.01 \pm 0.44$	$-1.1 \pm 3.9$	$4.6 \pm 0.3$
	300	$5.74 \pm 0.74$	$-26.4 \pm 7.7$	$3.5 \pm 0.2$



**Figure 2.** (a) Saturation TFT mobility and current on/off ratio plots for single layer In<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> TFTs, single layer IGO TFTs, and bilayer In<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> (3 nm)/IGO (10 nm) TFTs, processed at 250 °C. (b) Typical transfer ( $I_{DS}$ - $V_{GS}$ ) and output ( $I_{DS}$ - $V_{DS}$ ) plots of the indicated TFT devices: single-layer In<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> TFT, single-layer IGO TFT, and bilayer In<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> (3 nm)/IGO (10 nm) TFT annealed at  $T = 250$  °C.

TFT characterization was performed under ambient conditions on a custom probe station using a Keithley 2400 sourcemeter and 6430 subfemtometer, operated by a locally written Labview program and GPIB communication. The charge carrier mobility  $\mu$  was evaluated in the saturation region with the conventional MOSFET model in eq 1

$$I_{DS} = (WC_i/2L)\mu(V_{GS} - V_T)^2 \quad (1)$$

where  $C_i$  is the capacitance per unit area of insulator,  $V_T$  is the threshold voltage, and  $V_{GS}$  is gate voltage.  $W$  and  $L$  are channel width and length, respectively.

**Oxide Film Characterization.** Film morphologies were imaged with a Veeco Dimension Icon scanning Probe Microscope in tapping mode. XRD measurements were performed with a Rigaku ATX-G Thin Film Diffraction Workstation using Cu  $\alpha$  radiation coupled to a multilayer mirror. For cross-sectional TEM measurements, samples were prepared using focused ion beam (FIB) techniques (FEI Helios NanoLab 600). A thin Pt/Au layer was locally deposited on the sample to protect it from damage during the FIB processing. The prepared sample was then lifted with an OmniProbe nanomanipulator and transferred to a semispherical Cu TEM grid. TEM imaging was conducted with a JEOL-2100F microscope. XPS (Omicron ESCA Probe) depth profiling was performed on actual devices prepared without the top electrode. Samples were sputtered with an Ar<sup>+</sup> gun at 3000 eV and etched from the air/IGO interface.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The device structure used in this study is shown in Figure 1a. Bottom-gate/top-contact (BGTC) TFTs were fabricated on Si/SiO<sub>2</sub> substrates on which the single- or bilayer metal oxide channel film is deposited via combustion synthesis at three different processing temperatures (200, 250, and 300 °C). Bilayer films with different In<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> film thicknesses ranging from 1 to 5 nm were spin-coated onto the dielectric layer on top of which a 10 nm thick IGO (In:Ga = 65%:35%) layer was subsequently spun as the second layer. The devices were completed by thermally evaporating 40 nm thick Al source and drain electrodes. For comparison, control TFTs were fabricated using 15 nm thick single-layer In<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> or IGO films (details in the Experimental Section).

Figure 1b shows XRD scans of 15 nm thick In<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> and IGO films prepared at two processing temperatures, 250 and 300 °C. The relatively sharp reflections observed for In<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> indicate polycrystalline film formation, irrespective of thickness, as evidenced by TEM energy-filtered nanobeam diffraction (EF-NBD) of the thinner film, whereas the IGO films are amorphous.<sup>26</sup> We have fabricated at least 20 devices for each TFT structure, and the average TFT performance of these separately fabricated single-layer and bilayer TFTs for various



annealing temperatures is summarized in Table 1. The bilayer field-effect mobilities are far greater than those of the single-layer IGO TFTs, and even comparable to that of thick single-layer  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  devices. Furthermore, comparing to  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  TFT, the bilayer TFT  $V_T$  values shift to positive values, bringing  $V_T$  close to zero and providing high  $I_{\text{on}}/I_{\text{off}}$  ratios. The variation of mobility and  $I_{\text{on}}/I_{\text{off}}$  with  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  thickness for different processing temperatures is shown in the Supporting Information, Figure S1.

Films in which the first  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  layer (1–5 nm) is processed below 250 °C exhibit smooth, uniform morphologies with an RMS roughness <0.5 nm (see the Supporting Information, Figure S2). Note that the mobility of bilayer TFTs with an ultrathin (1 nm)  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  layer is lower than that of single-layer IGO devices processed at 300 °C. This result can be partially attributed to the increased conductivity of IGO films formed at higher processing temperatures.<sup>26,30,31</sup> Furthermore, the AFM images (Supporting Information, Figure S2) of  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  layers processed at 300 °C reveal that such ultrathin  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  films (1–2 nm) are uneven and discontinuous, which suggests trap sites, in accord with the low mobilities.<sup>32–35</sup>

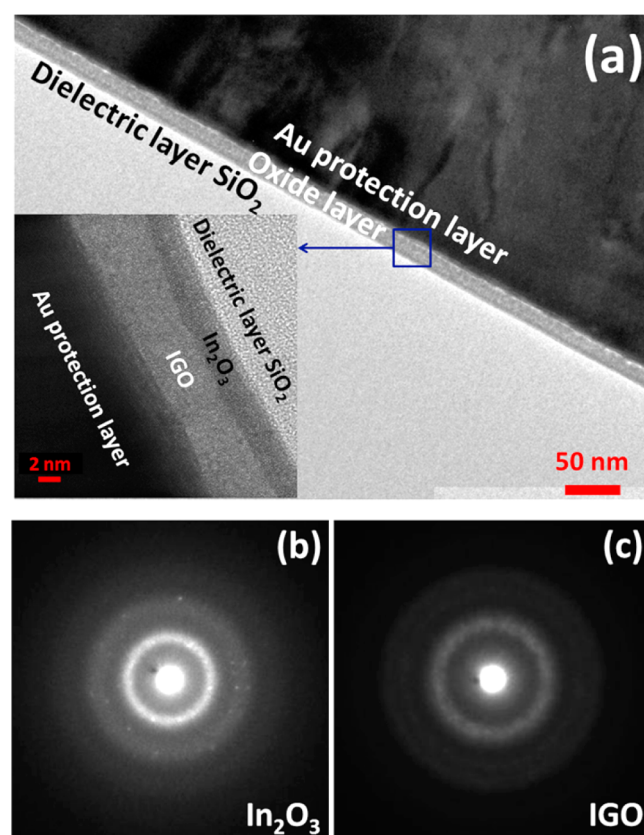
After systematic optimization, bMO TFTs with a 3 nm  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  film and a 10 nm IGO layer exhibit the greatest performance (from Figure S1 in the Supporting Information, Figure 2a, and Table 1). Representative transfer and output plots for these bilayer devices versus those of the corresponding single-layer  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  (15 nm) and IGO (15 nm) devices processed at 250 °C are shown in Figure 2b. These data clearly show that single-layer  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  TFTs exhibit the highest saturation current ( $I_{\text{sat}}$ ) of all devices for  $V_{\text{DS}} = +80$  V and  $V_{\text{GS}} = +80$  V, achieving an average mobility  $\mu \approx 3.22$   $\text{cm}^2/(\text{V s})$ . However, the threshold voltage ( $V_T$ ) is negative, approximately  $-11$  V, because of high carrier concentrations arising from the Fermi level proximity to the conduction band minimum (CBM).<sup>27,28</sup> Thus, it is difficult to deplete the carriers in the  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  films, yielding a negative  $V_T$ , high off-currents ( $I_{\text{off}}$ ), and a low  $I_{\text{on}}/I_{\text{off}}$  ratio of only  $\sim 1 \times 10^4$ . In contrast, single-layer IGO TFTs exhibit a very low  $I_{\text{off}} = \sim 1 \times 10^{-12}$  A and a very large positive  $V_T, \sim +30$  V. This can be explained by the O getter properties of  $\text{Ga}^{3+}$ , which can reduce the carrier concentration and increase empty traps,<sup>29,30</sup> leading to saturation of O gettering sites in IGO films upon completion of “combustion synthesis”. Consequently, a larger gate voltage is required to induce more carriers to prefill the traps, leading to an increase of threshold voltage. Meanwhile, the device  $I_{\text{off}}$  and  $I_{\text{sat}}$  decrease, leading to a large  $I_{\text{on}}/I_{\text{off}}$  of  $\sim 1 \times 10^6$ , but also to a lower  $\mu$  of  $\sim 0.52$   $\text{cm}^2/(\text{V s})$ .

However, by combining the  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  TFT high  $I_{\text{sat}}$  and  $\mu$ , with the IGO TFT high  $V_T$  and  $I_{\text{on}}/I_{\text{off}}$ , the resulting bilayer  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$ /IGO TFTs show a remarkable  $I_{\text{sat}}$  of  $\sim 1.5$  mA (at  $V_{\text{DS}} = V_{\text{GS}} = 80$  V), more than 10x higher than that of a single-layer IGO device ( $I_{\text{sat}} \approx 0.1$  mA), reaching a value only slightly below that of a single  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  active layer TFT ( $I_{\text{sat}} = 3.3$  mA). In addition, the bilayer TFT exhibits a notable  $\mu$  of  $\sim 2.6$   $\text{cm}^2/(\text{V s})$  (average value) and  $V_T$  is close to 0.0 V. The low  $I_{\text{off}}$  is nearly identical to that of single-layer IGO TFTs, affording a high  $I_{\text{on}}/I_{\text{off}}$  of  $\sim 1 \times 10^8$ . This is attributed to the carriers in the  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  channel layer prefilling empty IGO film traps.<sup>28,30</sup> On the opposite, bilayer TFTs with thicker  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  channel layers show negative  $V_T$  and low  $I_{\text{on}}/I_{\text{off}}$ , which is caused by the uncalled free carriers induced by  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  films.

XPS with depth profiling was used to analyze the O1s core levels in the  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  (3 nm)/IGO (10 nm) bilayers. Generally, O1s features at 529.9, 531.4, and 531.7 eV are assigned to oxide

lattices without oxygen vacancies, with oxygen vacancies, and with metal hydroxide species, respectively. The additional peak at 532.3 eV is assignable to adsorbed oxygen species (for example,  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$ ,  $\text{CO}_2$ ).<sup>36–39</sup> In these bilayers, the O1s binding energy shows an abrupt shift to higher energies after the films are ion-gun-bombarded for various times (see the Supporting Information, Figure S3). And the distinct transition from the upper IGO to the lower  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  channel layers is evident from the shift of the In and O binding energies in the  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  film versus those in IGO.<sup>18,22</sup> This conclusion is further supported by XPS depth profile experiments carried out on  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$ /IGO bilayer films on Si/SiO<sub>2</sub> substrates. Composition changes for Ga, In, and Si clearly indicate vertical gradation going from the Ga-containing top layer to the bottom  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  film in contact with the SiO<sub>2</sub> interface (see the Supporting Information, Figure S3).

Additional evidence for a distinct IGO/ $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  interface is evident in the cross-sectional TEM image of a bilayer TFT with a  $\sim 3$  nm  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  layer and a  $\sim 10$  nm IGO layer processed at 250 °C (Figure 3a inset). Clearly distinguishable from the IGO



**Figure 3.** Microstructural characterization of bilayer TFTs. (a) High-resolution cross-sectional TEM image of  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  (3 nm)/IGO (10 nm) bilayer. (b, c) Diffraction patterns of  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  (3 nm) and IGO (10 nm) films. All films were annealed at 250 °C.

layer, the thinner  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  layer appears darker and is located close to the SiO<sub>2</sub> surface. These results suggest that significant diffusion of Ga atoms does not occur in the  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  layer under the exothermic combustion conditions. Interestingly, from the EF-NBD patterns of the  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$ /IGO bilayer shown in panels b and c in Figure 3, it can be seen that the former exhibits the characteristic diffraction pattern of a polycrystalline film (the detector resolution is 2 nm) whereas the upper IGO film

exhibits the typical “halo rings” of an amorphous material. Thus, all data confirm the bilayer nature of the channel region in these bMO FETs.

## CONCLUSIONS

A fully solution-based, low-temperature-processed oxide bilayer TFT architecture has been realized via combustion chemistry, integrating high mobility ultrathin  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  as the lower channel layer and amorphous IGO as the upper layer in the channel. Such bilayer architectures address the low mobility of amorphous IGO TFTs fabricated at low temperature and the unsatisfactory high  $I_{\text{off}}$  and low  $I_{\text{on}}/I_{\text{off}}$  of single-layer  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  TFTs. The mobility and  $I_{\text{on}}/I_{\text{off}}$  ratio of our bilayer devices can reach  $\sim 2.56 \text{ cm}^2/(\text{V s})$  and  $\sim 1 \times 10^8$ , respectively, at a processing temperature of only  $250 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ . The present strategy combining the advantages of ultrathin high mobility layer and an amorphous layer opens new opportunities for large-scale, high-performance, low-temperature solution-processable metal oxide TFTs.

## ASSOCIATED CONTENT

### Supporting Information

Associated content, including (a) AFM morphology, and (b) XPS spectra. This material is available free of charge via the Internet at <http://pubs.acs.org>.

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### Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest. X.Y. and H.L. are on leave from University of Electronic Science and Technology of China

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank ONR (MURI N00014-11-1-0690), the Northwestern University Materials Research Science and Engineering Center (NSF DMR-1121262), and Polyera Corp. for support of this research. Microscopy studies were performed in the NIFTI and KECK II facilities of NUANCE Center at Northwestern University. NUANCE is supported by NSF-NSEC, NSF-MRSEC, Keck Foundation, the State of Illinois, and Northwestern University. X.Y. thanks the graduate student exchange program supported by the University of Electronic Science and Technology of China.

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