

Annealing temperature dependence of effective piezoelectric coefficients for $\text{Bi}_{3.15}\text{Eu}_{0.85}\text{Ti}_3\text{O}_{12}$ thin films

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Abstract The effects of annealing temperatures 600, 650, 700, and 750 °C on microstructure, chemical composition, leakage current, ferroelectric, dielectric, and piezoelectric properties of $\text{Bi}_{3.15}\text{Eu}_{0.85}\text{Ti}_3\text{O}_{12}$ (BET) thin films prepared by metal–organic decomposition were studied in detail. The largest spontaneous polarization $2P_s$ (98.7 $\mu\text{C}/\text{cm}^2$ under 300 kV/cm), remnant polarization $2P_r$ (81.7 $\mu\text{C}/\text{cm}^2$ under 300 kV/cm), dielectric constant ϵ_r (889.4 at 100 kHz), effective piezoelectric coefficient d_{33} (46.7 pm/V under 260 kV/cm), and lowest leakage current (1.3×10^{-6} A/cm² under 125 kV/cm) of BET thin film were obtained with annealing at 700 °C. The mechanisms concerning the dependence of the enhancement d_{33} are discussed according to the phenomenological equation, and the improved piezoelectric performance could make BET thin film a promising candidate for piezoelectric thin film devices.

Introduction

Bismuth (Bi)-layered perovskite lead-free ferroelectric thin films, with the characteristics of larger remnant

polarization $2P_r$, fast switching speed, high fatigue resistance with metal electrodes, and good retention, have attracted much attention due to their potential applications in nonvolatile ferroelectric random access memory devices [1]. In the past years, many studies reveal that Bi^{3+} ions in $\text{Bi}_4\text{Ti}_3\text{O}_{12}$ (BIT) structure can be substituted by trivalent lanthanoid ions, such as Nd^{3+} , La^{3+} , Pr^{3+} , Dy^{3+} , and Sm^{3+} , which improves ferroelectric properties [2–4]. In particular, Eu-substituted BIT lead-free thin films have emerged as new ferroelectric materials due to good fatigue endurance and large polarization [5, 6], and in our previous work the $2P_r$ is 82 C/cm² for $\text{Bi}_{3.15}\text{Eu}_{0.85}\text{Ti}_3\text{O}_{12}$ (BET) lead-free thin film annealed at 700 °C [7]. Recently, more and more efforts have been made to develop nontoxic lead-free piezoelectric materials to apply into piezoelectric microelectromechanical systems (MEMS), and Bi-layered perovskite lead-free ferroelectric thin films are considered to be candidate materials, such as the effective piezoelectric coefficients d_{33} of 30–60 pm/V for $\text{CaBi}_4\text{Ti}_4\text{O}_{15}$ thin films [8, 9], and ~ 38 pm/V for neodymium-doped $\text{Bi}_4\text{Ti}_3\text{O}_{12}$ (BNT) thin film [10]. According to the phenomenological equation regarding the intrinsic piezoelectric coefficient, the high spontaneous polarization P_s is favorable for yielding higher piezoelectric displacement [10]. It is well known that the annealing temperature has an important effect on the microstructure, dielectric, and ferroelectric properties of Bi-layered perovskite ferroelectric thin films. However, few study has involved the piezoelectric properties of BET thin films annealed at different temperatures, therefore it is imperative for us to improve piezoelectric properties of the thin films in order to impetus for integrating Bi-layered perovskite ferroelectric thin films into MEMS piezoelectric devices.

In this paper, BET lead-free ferroelectric thin films were prepared by metal–organic decomposition (MOD), and the

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effects of annealing temperature on microstructure, chemical composition, leakage current, ferroelectric, dielectric, and piezoelectric properties were investigated by field emission scanning electron microscopy (FE-SEM), X-ray diffraction (XRD), Raman spectrometer, energy dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (EDS), semiconductor characterization system, ferroelectric tester, impedance analyzer, and scanning probe microscope (SPM). The ferroelectric, dielectric, leakage current, and piezoelectric behaviors were established from polarization–electric field (P – E) hysteresis loops, dielectric constant–frequency (ϵ_r – f) and dissipation–frequency ($\tan\delta$ – f) curves, current density–electric field (J – E) curves, and displacement–electric field (D – E) “butterfly” curves, respectively. We expect that the research can offer useful guidelines to the design of Bi-layered thin film piezoelectric devices.

Experimental details

Preparation of sample

BET thin films were deposited on Pt(200 nm)/Ti(30 nm)/SiO₂/Si(111) substrate by MOD method [5, 6]. The precursor materials were bismuth (III) acetate {Bi[CH₃CO₂]₃}, europium (III) acetate hydrate {Eu[CH₃CO₂]₃}, and tetrabutyl titanium {Ti[OC₄H₉]₄}, and the solvents were acetic acid {CH₃CO₂H} and acetylacetone {CH₃COCH₂COCH₃}. A 10% excess amount of bismuth acetate was used to compensate Bi-loss during annealing process. At first, the solid-state bismuth acetate and europium acetate were dissolved in the acetic acid, and the solution was mixed to obtain the (Bi, Eu) stock solution followed by stirring for 12 h. Second, the tetrabutyl titanium was dissolved in the mixture of the stock solution and acetylacetone, and it was magnetically stirred in the air atmosphere for 1 h. Finally, the flaxen, transparent and stable BET precursor solution was prepared. The precursor solutions with a mole ratio (Bi:Eu:Ti) of 3.465:0.85:3 were spun on the substrate at 4000 rpm for 30 s. After the spin-coating procedure, the thin films were kept in rapid temperature process at 400 °C for 180 s to remove the organic ingredients. The coating/drying circles were repeated seven times to achieve desired film thickness, and the pre-baked films were, respectively, annealed at 600, 650, 700, and 750 °C in an oxygen atmosphere to promote crystallization.

Characterization methods

Using FE-SEM (1525, LEO, Germany), the surface morphologies of BET thin films were identified with 50 K amplificatory, and the cross-sectional micrograph of BET

thin film annealed at 700 °C was recorded with 20 K amplificatory. The chemical composition analysis was investigated by EDS (INCA, Oxford, England), and the incoming energy of the EDS electron beam was 20 kV. Phase identification, degree of crystallinity, and crystalline orientation of the thin films were investigated by XRD (X’Pert PRO, PANalytical, Netherlands) using the normal scanning method, and they were scanned at 10°/min with Cu radiation (40 kV, 30 mA). The Raman spectroscopy was performed using the Raman spectrometer (Model 3000, Reinshaw, England). The backscattering configuration was employed. The Argon ion laser beam of 514.5 nm wavelength with a power of 0.5 mW was focused on a 1 mm spot on the middle of BET thin films. The circular Au top electrodes with radius of 0.1 mm were deposited on the thin films using a shadow mask by dc magnetron sputtering, and under the electric field 300 kV/cm the P – E hysteresis loops were measured by ferroelectric tester (Precision Workstation, Radiant Technologies, USA). Frequency dependent dielectric constant (ϵ_r) and dissipation factor ($\tan\delta$) were measured by the impedance analyzer (HP4194A, Hewlett Packard, America). The leakage current properties were measured by the semiconductor characterization system (4200-SCS, Keithly, America) at applied voltage of 0–5 V. A commercial available SPM (SPI4000&SPA300HV, Seiko, Japan) was used to characterize piezoelectric properties of the thin films without top electrode. The conductive rhodium coated silicon cantilever is of a spring constant of 1.9 N/m, a resonant frequency of 28 kHz, and an integrated tip of about 10 nm in diameter. The stiff cantilever was used to get a large indentation force ensuring that the measurement was in the so-called strong-indentation regime [11]. The piezoelectric measurement was conducted on 10 points of scanned scope on the sample surface, because the piezoelectric characterization for SPM is a kind of local method [12]. For each sample, keeping the SPM tip fixed above the interesting point the D – E “butterfly” curve was recorded under a dc voltage applied from –9 to 9 V. With considering the unexpected shift of the intersection from the origin of D – E curve, the d_{33} –electric field (d_{33} – E) loops can be calculated according to the modified equation of converse piezoelectric effect [12]

$$d_{33} = \frac{D - D_1}{d(E - E_1)}, \quad (1)$$

where d is the initial film thickness before deformation. On the D – E curve, D_1 and E_1 are the piezoelectric displacement and electric field for the intersection, and D and E are the measured values of piezoelectric displacement and electric field for each point. All of the above measurements were carried out at room temperature.

Results and discussion

Surface and interfacial profiles

The surface micrographs of BET thin films annealed at 600, 650, 700, and 750 °C are given in Fig. 1a–d, and the typical cross-sectional micrograph of the thin film annealed at 700 °C is described as Fig. 1e. In Fig. 1a–d, there are a few pinholes and voids on the film surfaces but crack-free, and the grain sizes of BET thin films annealed at 600, 650, 700, and 750 °C are about 106, 178, 241, and 306 nm, respectively. With the increase of annealing temperature, the pinholes and voids decrease and the grain sizes enlarge, indicating that the high annealing temperature enhances the crystal growth. The crack-free surface seems to be important for ferroelectric thin films because the crack will affect the microstructure, ferroelectric properties, and residual stress [13]. From Fig. 1e, the multiple-layers structure is obviously observed for BET thin film annealed at 700 °C, and the thickness is uniformly 350 nm, which implies a coating/drying cycle about 50 nm. The density is very crucial for MEMS application.

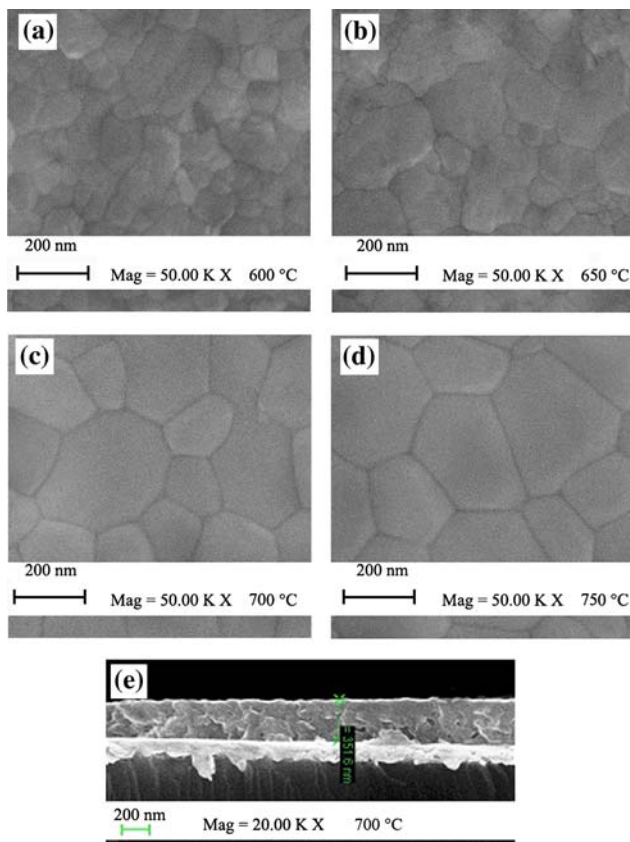


Fig. 1 The surface morphologies of BET thin films annealed at **a** 600, **b** 650, **c** 700, **d** 750 °C, and **e** a cross-sectional micrograph for the thin film annealed at 700 °C

Crystalline structure

A typical EDS spectrum of BET thin film annealed at 700 °C is given in Fig. 2a, and Ti, Bi, O, Eu, Pt, and Si peaks are detected, obviously. Ti, Bi, and O peaks as well as Eu peaks originate from BET thin film, while Pt and Si peaks originate from the substrate. To understand the effect of annealing temperature on Bi³⁺ ions volatile quantity, the collected elemental composition data of BET thin films annealed at 600, 650, 700, and 750 °C are summed up as Fig. 2b. Bi atomic mol ratios are estimated as 15.23, 15.11, 12.28, and 8.77% for BET thin films annealed at 600, 650, 700, and 750 °C, respectively. Bi³⁺ ions volatile quantity increases with the annealing temperature, and it enhances sharply for BET thin film annealed at 750 °C. Eu atomic mol ratios in BET thin films are estimated about 4.43%, and it indicates that the substitution of Eu³⁺ to Bi³⁺ occurs successfully. Figure 3a shows typical Bi-layered perovskite polycrystalline phase without any pyrochlore phase and other phases related to Eu, and it indicates that the substitution of Eu³⁺ to Bi³⁺ occurs successfully [5], and it is consistent with EDS result given in Fig. 2b. At 600 °C, the diffraction peaks are low and broad, indicating poor crystallinity of the sample. With the increase of annealing temperature, the diffraction peaks become sharp and strong, indicating the possible improved crystallinity. According to $(I_{(006)} + I_{(008)} + I_{(0016)}) / \sum I_{hkl} \times 100\%$ (where I_{hkl} is the relative intensity of the corresponding peak) [14], the degrees of *c*-axis orientation are 28.8, 41.9, 45.0, and 47.1% for BET thin films annealed at 600, 650, 700, and 750 °C, respectively. It indicates the degree of *c*-axis orientation of BET thin films increases with annealing temperature. Figure 3b shows Raman spectroscopy of BET thin films annealed at 600, 650, 700, and 750 °C. The peak centered at 261 cm⁻¹ corresponds to the TiO₆ octahedron torsional bending mode, which is representative of the pseudo-perovskite structure in BET thin films, and the peaks centered at 562⁻¹ and 848 cm⁻¹ are related to the TiO₆ stretching mode. The intensity and sharpness of the three peaks increase with the annealing temperature, indicating improvement in crystalline quality of the perovskite structure, and it is consistent with XRD results given in Fig. 3a. The peak centered at 321 cm⁻¹ corresponds to the combination of stretching and bending of the TiO₆ octahedron, and becomes sharper and more distinct with the increase of annealing temperature. The change of TiO₆ mode is most probably due to exaggerations of orthorhombic distortion and octahedral tilting at higher annealing temperature [6, 15].

Dielectric and loss properties

From the ϵ_r -*f* and $\tan\delta$ -*f* curves shown as Fig. 4a, under the applied frequency from 1 kHz to 1 MHz, the ϵ_r values

Fig. 2 **a** The typical EDS spectrum of BET thin film annealed at 700 °C and **b** EDS elemental composition of BET thin films annealed at 600, 650, 700, and 750 °C

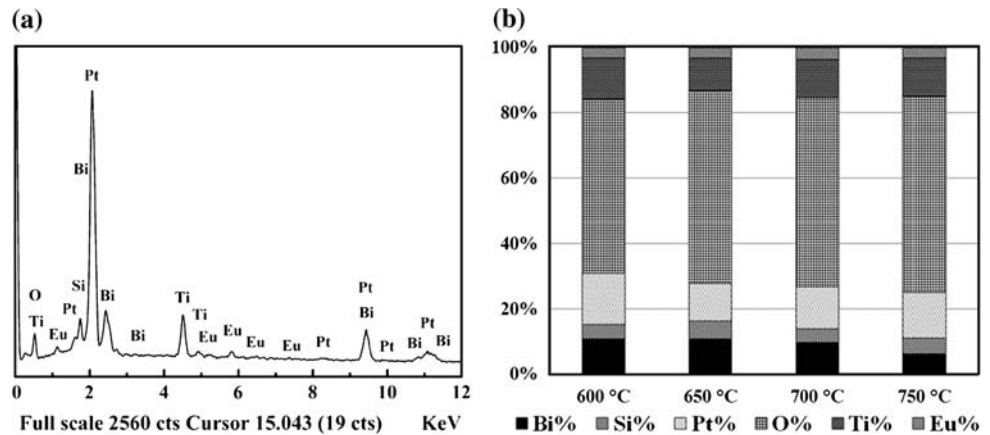


Fig. 3 X-ray diffraction patterns (a) and Raman spectroscopy (b) of BET thin films annealed at 600, 650, 700, and 750 °C, respectively

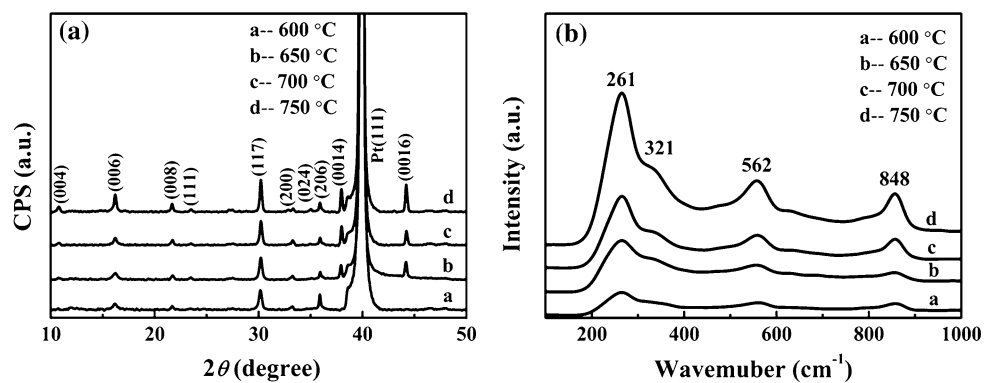
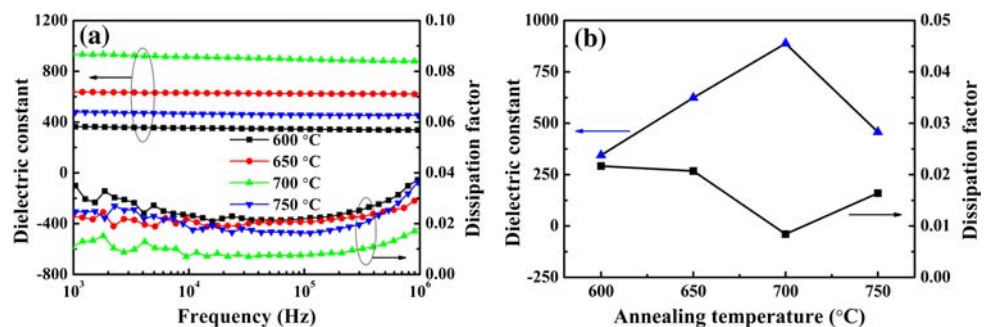


Fig. 4 **a** Frequency dependent ϵ_r and $\tan\delta$ of BET thin films annealed at 600, 650, 700, 750 °C, and **b** at 100 kHz the ϵ_r and $\tan\delta$ as function of annealing temperature



decrease with the increase of frequency, and it is due to an extrinsic resonance behavior resulting from the microstructure deficiency, which may in principle be reduced by optimization of the film growth process [16]. The $\tan\delta$ increases at higher frequencies, and the increasing tendency of $\tan\delta$ is also reported for BNT and $\text{Bi}_{3.25}\text{La}_{0.75}\text{Ti}_3\text{O}_{12}$ (BLT) ferroelectric thin films [17, 18]. There are three possible reasons for the dispersion as follows. One possible cause is the extrinsic resonance behavior which results from the microstructure deficiency [16]. Another one is the resistive losses, because the mobile charges contained in the film cannot follow higher frequency electric fields [19]. The third one is the hypothesis of the influence of the contact resistance between the probe and

the electrode [17]. Figure 4b shows ϵ_r and $\tan\delta$ as function of annealing temperature at 100 kHz, and the values of ϵ_r and $\tan\delta$ were estimated as 344.6, 624.2, 888.3, 457.0, and 0.022, 0.021, 0.008, 0.016 for BET thin films annealed at 600, 650, 700, and 750 °C, respectively. Obviously, the ϵ_r increases with annealing temperature at the range from 600 to 700 °C, while decreases from 700 to 750 °C. The possible reason is the grain size effect on dielectric properties of polycrystalline thin films for the former, and the other is the insufficient Bi supply in Fig. 2b which results in non-stoichiometric structural defects in the thin films for the latter. The $\tan\delta$ decreases with annealing temperature at the range from 600 to 700 °C, while increases from 700 to 750 °C. It is mainly dominated by mobile charges in the

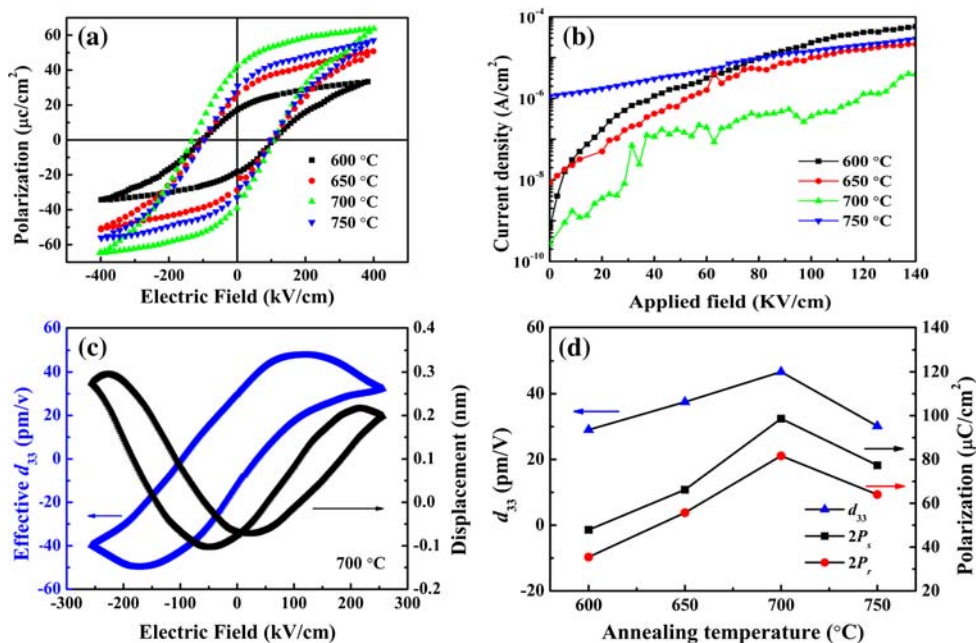
film, such as oxygen vacancy [20, 21], and the annealing temperature may also affect the oxygen vacancies which lead to the decrease in $\tan\delta$ for BET thin films annealed from 600 to 700 °C. At the annealing temperature of 700–750 °C, the $\tan\delta$ value increases due to the insufficient Bi supply as shown as Fig. 2b.

Polarization, piezoelectric response, and leakage current

The P – E loops of BET thin films annealed at 600, 650, 700, and 750 °C are shown in Fig. 5a, the leakage current densities versus the applied electric field of Au/BET/Pt capacitors are exhibited in Fig. 5b, and the typical D – E (black) curve and d_{33} – E (blue) loop are given in Fig. 5c. From Fig. 5a, under the applied field of 300 kV/cm, the values of $2P_s$ and $2P_r$ are 47.9, 66.2, 98.7, 77.4 C/cm² and 35.5, 55.7, 81.7, 64.0 C/cm² for BET thin films annealed at 600, 650, 700, and 750 °C, respectively. With the increase of annealing temperature the values of $2P_r$ and $2P_s$ increase at the range from 600 to 700 °C while decrease from 700 to 750 °C. It is in a good agreement with the previous result that the $2P_r$ of BET thin film annealed at 700 °C is 82 C/cm² [7]. There is more than one contributor causing opening of the hysteresis loops at zero field observed in Fig. 5a, which is a common phenomenon for ferroelectric thin films. It is very likely due to incomplete domain back-switching in association with slow domain wall motion arising from pinning by defects such as oxygen vacancies [22]. The leakage current densities of BET films annealed at different temperatures are shown in Fig. 5b, and they are

4.25, 1.82, 1.30, and 2.23×10^{-5} A/cm² at 125 kV/cm for BET films annealed at 600, 650, 700, and 750 °C, respectively. From 600 to 700 °C, it appears obvious that the change in morphology (see Fig. 1a–c) with increasing temperature is responsible for the decrease in leakage current in Fig. 5b, and it is in agreement with the previous results [23]. The higher the annealing temperature is, the fewer the dislocations and vacancies that result in degradation of conductivity [24]. Therefore, the leakage current density decreases with the increase of annealing temperature. However, from 700 to 750 °C the leakage current density dramatically rises due to the insufficient Bi supply [23] as shown as Fig. 2b. In Fig. 5c, the d_{33} – E loop is almost symmetric and it is in an agreement with the previous symmetries of BiScO₃–PbTiO₃ and Zn_{1-x}V_xO ferroelectric thin films [12, 25]. On the D – E curve, there is no notable horizontal shift, and little vertical shift 0.07 nm can be observed, indicating no obvious imprint effect. The d_{33} – E loop clearly shows that BET thin film is switchable and the piezoelectric is retained [26]. Under a bias field of 260 kV/cm, the typical value of d_{33} is 49.9 pm/V for BET thin film annealed at 700 °C, and the average values of d_{33} are 29.1, 37.5, 46.7, and 30.2 pm/V for the BET thin films annealed at 600, 650, 700, and 750 °C, respectively. The d_{33} 46.7 pm/V is larger than 19 pm/V for BLT thin film and 38 pm/V for BNT thin film [10], and it is comparative with 40–110 pm/V for PbZr_xTi_{1-x}O₃ (PZT) thin films [27, 28]. It is safe to say that the d_{33} value stands in comparison with PZT thin films, therefore BET thin films can be considered as a viable alternative to PZT thin films for selected applications.

Fig. 5 **a** P – E hysteresis loops of BET thin films annealed at 600, 650, 700, 750 °C, and **b** J – E characteristics for BET thin films, **c** representative D – E curve, d_{33} – E loop of BET thin film annealed at 700 °C and **d** $2P_s$, $2P_r$, and d_{33} of BET films as function of annealing temperature



Annealing temperature dependence of piezoelectric responses

The average values of $2P_r$, $2P_s$, and d_{33} as the function of annealing temperature are shown in Fig. 5d. One can read that with increase of annealing temperature all of $2P_r$, $2P_s$, and d_{33} increase at the range from 600 to 700 °C while decrease from 700 to 750 °C. For BET thin films annealed at 600–700 °C, the surface morphologies in Fig. 1a–c, degree of crystallinity and *c*-axis orientation in Fig. 3a are improved, while the leakage current decreases as shown in Fig. 5b with the increase of annealing temperature. Therefore, $2P_r$ and $2P_s$ increase at the range from 600 to 700 °C [29]. For BET thin film annealed at 750 °C, there is excessive volatile of Bi as shown in Fig. 2b, and the leakage current density dramatically rises as shown in Fig. 5b. Therefore, $2P_r$ and $2P_s$ of BET thin film annealed at 750 °C are lower than those annealed at 700 °C. Obviously, the variation of ε_r with annealing temperature is similar with those of $2P_r$ and $2P_s$ as shown as Fig. 4b. The d_{33} can be expressed by the phenomenological equation for most ferroelectric materials [30]

$$d_{33} = 2Q_{\text{eff}}\varepsilon_0\varepsilon_rP_s \quad (2)$$

where Q_{eff} is the effective electrostriction coefficient, ε_0 and ε_r are the permittivity of free space and relative permittivity. Because Q_{eff} is less sensitive to film quality than d_{33} [31], ε_r and P_s can be regarded as the primary factors to relate with d_{33} . The d_{33} variation with annealing temperature should be monotonically corresponding to those of ε_r and P_s , therefore the dependence of d_{33} on annealing temperature should be as same as those of ε_r and P_s in Figs. 4 and 5 for the orientation direction, crystallinity, leakage, and chemical composition of the thin films. Obviously, BET thin film annealed at 700 °C is of the lowest leakage current density and dielectric loss, the highest dielectric constant and effective piezoelectric coefficient, implying that it is suitable for use as ferroelectric capacitors [32].

Conclusions

In conclusion, the average d_{33} of BET thin film annealed at 700 °C is 46.7 pm/V under the bias field 260 kV/cm, and it is larger than that of the others. With the increase of annealing temperature, the $2P_s$, $2P_r$, ε_r and d_{33} values obviously increase at the range from 600 to 700 °C while decrease from 700 to 750 °C. The leakage current density and the dielectric loss decrease with the increase of annealing temperature from 600 to 700 °C, while increase with from annealing temperature 700 to 750 °C. The d_{33} variation may contribute to the annealing temperature dependence of P_s and ε_r for BET thin film. The improved

piezoelectric properties could make Eu-doped BIT a promising candidate for sensors, actuators, and transducers.

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