

NANOSCALE MICROSTRUCTURAL CHARACTERIZATION OF ALUMINUM  
AND COPPER BILAYER THIN FILMS DEPOSITED ON SILICON SUBSTRATE  
USING MAGNETRON SPUTTERING TECHNIQUE

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To my beloved Mum and Dad.

To all my companions who have accompanied me throughout my life's journey.

Thanks for everything.

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## ABSTRACT

Aluminum and copper (Al-Cu) bilayer thin films are commonly used as conductors in electronic applications. Unfortunately, the effect of thermal aging on the interfaces of Al-Cu bilayer thin films have led to the formation of intermetallic compounds (IMCs) which eventually degrades the materials. The study of diffusion-reaction in Al-Cu thin film is very challenging compared to the bulk Al-Cu system. From previous related works, the compilation of data regarding the diffusion kinetics in thin film has led to discrepancies due to the complex relationship between the selected experimental parameters and the formation of the IMCs. Therefore, further study is necessary to fully understand the growth kinetics of IMCs particularly for the Al-Cu system. The present work is an attempt to contribute in the understanding of the phase formation by varying the diffusion parameters. Syntheses of the Al-Cu bilayer thin films (800 nm of total thickness) were physically achieved by magnetron sputtering. The bilayer was then aged at temperatures from 100 °C, 150 °C and 200 °C within the duration of one to six hours. The formation of IMCs of different chemical composition and crystallographic structures were characterized by using High Resolution Transmission Electron Microscope (HRTEM), X-ray diffractometer (XRD) and Energy Dispersive X-ray Spectrometer (EDX). Field Emission Scanning Electron Microscope (FESEM) was utilized to study the morphology and the integrity of the bilayer after subjected to aging. Each layer shows both columnar and non-columnar structures which eventually affects the film integrity. The combination of analytical TEM and X-ray diffraction techniques has revealed the formation of several equilibrium phases which could be identified as tetragonal  $\theta$ -Al<sub>2</sub>Cu (*I4mcm*), monoclinic  $\eta$ -AlCu (*I2/m*), orthorhombic  $\zeta$ -Al<sub>3</sub>Cu<sub>4</sub> (*mmm2*) and cubic crystal structure Al<sub>4</sub>Cu<sub>9</sub> (*P-43m*). Finally, electrical resistivity test on the bilayer indicates increase in resistivity due to the formation of IMC.

## ABSTRAK

Filem nipis dwilapisan aluminium-kuprum (Al-Cu) biasanya digunakan sebagai konduktor dalam aplikasi elektronik. Malangnya, kesan penuaan terma pada bahagian antara muka filem nipis dwilapisan Al-Cu telah membawa kepada pembentukan sebatian antara logam (IMCs) yang akhirnya menurunkan fungsi bahan itu. Kajian tindak balas resapan bagi filem nipis Al-Cu lebih mencabar jika dibandingkan dengan Al-Cu pukal. Daripada penyelidikan sebelumnya, pengumpulan data mengenai kinetik resapan pada filem nipis telah membawa kepada percanggahan kerana hubungan kompleks di antara parameter eksperimen terpilih dengan pembentukan IMCs. Oleh itu, kajian selanjutnya adalah perlu untuk memahami sepenuhnya kinetik pertumbuhan IMCs terutamanya untuk sistem Al-Cu. Kajian ini adalah suatu usaha untuk menyumbang kepada pemahaman pembentukan fasa IMCs dengan mengubah beberapa parameter resapan. Sintesis ke atas dwilapisan Al-Cu (berketebalan akhir 800 nm) telah diperolehi secara fizikal dengan kaedah percikan magnetron. Dwilapisan ini kemudiannya melalui proses penuaan pada suhu 100 °C, 150 °C dan 200 °C dalam tempoh antara satu hingga enam jam. Pembentukan IMCs dari komposisi kimia dan struktur kristalografi yang berbeza telah dianalisis menggunakan Mikroskop Elektron Transmisi Resolusi Tinggi (HRTEM), Pembelauan Sinar-X (XRD) dan Serakkan Tenaga Sinar-X (EDX). Mikroskop Imbasan Elektron (FESEM) telah digunakan untuk mengkaji morfologi dan integriti dwilapisan selepas penuaan. Setiap lapisan menunjukkan struktur turus dan bukan turus yang memberi kesan kepada integriti lapisan. Gabungan analisis TEM dan XRD telah mendedahkan pembentukan beberapa fasa seimbang yang boleh dikenal pasti sebagai tetragonal  $\theta$ -Al<sub>2</sub>Cu (*I4mcm*), monoklinik  $\eta$ -AlCu (*I2/m*), orthorhombic  $\zeta$ -Al<sub>3</sub>Cu<sub>4</sub> (*mmm2*) dan struktur kristal kubik Al<sub>4</sub>Cu<sub>9</sub> (*P-43m*). Akhir sekali, ujian kerintangan elektrik pada dwilapisan menunjukkan peningkatan kerintangan kerana pembentukan IMC.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	TITLE	PAGE
	<b>DECLARATION</b>	ii
	<b>DEDICATION</b>	iii
	<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b>	iv
	<b>ABSTRACT</b>	v
	<b>ABSTRAK</b>	vi
	<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	vii
	<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	xi
	<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	xiii
	<b>LIST OF SYMBOLS</b>	xix
	<b>LIST OF APPENDICES</b>	xxi
<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	
	1.1 Research Background	1
	1.2 Problem Statement	3
	1.3 Objectives of the Research	4
	1.4 Research Scope	4
	1.5 Research Outlines	5
<b>2</b>	<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	
	2.1 Physical vapor deposition: Sputtering	6
	2.1.1 Physical Sputtering Theory	6

2.1.2	Plasma	8
2.1.3	Effect and role of plasma in physical sputtering	10
2.2	Radio Frequency Sputtering	12
2.2.1	Radio frequency sputtering mechanism	13
2.2.2	Sputtering Rate	14
2.2.3	Advantages of RF sputtering techniques	15
2.3	Nucleation and Growth of Thin Films	16
2.4	Growth of single crystal film (Epitaxial)	17
2.5	Growth of polycrystalline film	18
2.6	Influences of sputtering parameters on thin film growth	20
2.6.1	RF power	20
2.6.2	Substrate temperature and argon pressure	20
2.7.1	Aluminum-Copper phase diagram	24
2.7.2	Kinetics and thermodynamics of diffusions	28
2.7.3	Diffusion rate	29
2.7.4	Activation energy	31
2.7.5	Effective heat of formation	33
2.7.6	Effect of intermetallic growth on electrical resistivity	35
2.8	Thin film characterization techniques	37
2.8.1	Grazing incident X-ray powder diffraction	37
2.8.1.1	Bragg's law	38
2.8.1.2	X-ray powder diffraction data analysis	39
2.8.2	Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM)	42
2.8.3	Bright field and dark field images	44
2.8.5	Energy Dispersive X-ray Spectroscopy (EDX)	45

<b>3</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	
3.1	Introduction	49
3.2	Fabrication of Al-Cu Thin Films	50
3.2.1	Sputtering targets	50
3.2.2	Substrate preparations	50
3.3	Deposition of thin films	53
3.3.1	Thermal aging process	54
3.4	Characterization of thin films	55
3.4.1	Grazing incident X-ray diffraction	55
3.4.2	Field Emission Scanning Electron Microscopy	56
3.4.3	Transmission electron microscopy	57
3.4.3.1	Sample preparation for TEM analysis	57
3.4.4	Four-point probe resistivity test	62
<b>4</b>	<b>RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS</b>	
4.1	Morphology of Al/Cu bilayers thin films	63
4.1.1	Thin films before aging	63
4.1.2	Effect of morphology on film's integrity.	66
4.1.3	Effect of thermal aging on crystallinity	75
4.2	Formation of intermetallic phase in heat treated bilayers	77
4.2.1	X-ray diffraction analysis	77
4.3	Influence of temperature on diffusion characterized by XRD texture coefficient	85
4.4	Morphology of heat treated bilayers	88
4.4.1	Chemical mapping by energy dispersive X- ray spectroscopy (EDX)	89
4.4.2	Selected area electron diffraction pattern analysis	91



4.5	HRTEM structural analysis on heat treated bilayers	95
4.5.2	Fast Fourier transformation (FFT)	95
4.5.3	Discussion of HRTEM results	96
4.6	Formation sequence and growth kinetic of intermetallic	110
4.6.1	Formation sequence	110
4.6.2	Growth kinetics of intermetallic phases	113
4.7	Effect of aging on resistance of Al/Cu thin films couple	120
4.8	Summary of results	127
<b>5</b>	<b>CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION</b>	<b>130</b>
5.1	Conclusions	130
5.2	Recommendation for future work	131
	<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>132-136</b>
	<b>APPENDIX A</b>	<b>-</b>
	<b>APPENDIX B</b>	<b>137</b>
	<b>APPENDIX C</b>	<b>138-139</b>
	<b>APPENDIX D</b>	<b>140-144</b>
	<b>APPENDIX E</b>	<b>145-155</b>
	<b>APPENDIX F</b>	<b>-</b>
	<b>APPENDIX G</b>	<b>156-161</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	TITLE	PAGE
2.1	Crystallographic data for compounds and polymorph of the Cu-Al system	25
2.2	Sequence of phase formation and end phases observed at 400 °C for samples with various Cu/Al thickness ratios by Fanta Haidara et.al (2012)	26
2.3	The formation rate of several Al-Cu intermetallic compounds at various temperature ranges H.Xu et.al [1], A. E. Gershinskii et.al [7] and Yajie Guo et.al [8].	30
2.4	Values of activation energy obtained from different experiments.	32
2.5	The composition and corresponding effective heat of formation of the Cu–Al intermetallic phases	34
2.6	Selection rules for common crystal systems	39
3.1	Radio frequency sputtering parameters for Al and Cu deposition process	53
4.1	Comparison between different film-substrate interfaces	74
4.2	Crystallographic data of Intermetallic phases detected by XRD in the Al/Cu thin films after 3 hours aging at 200 °C	82
4.3	Tabulated data of crystal planes of each phases existed in the bilayers	92

4.4	Comparison between XRD and HRTEM result showing the nucleation of the IMC phases after heat treated for 3 hours at 200 °C	109
4.5	Chemical composition (at%) based on EDX point analysis from region 1-3 in Fig. 4.40, 4-6 in Fig. 4.41, 7-9 in Fig. 4.42 and 10-12 in Fig. 4.43	117
4.6	Activation energy (E) and pre-exponential factor $D_0$ for intermetallic growth in Al/Cu thin films	119
4.7	Resistance data before aging (First batch)	120
4.8	Resistance data after 3 hours aging (First batch)	121
4.9	Resistance data after 5 hours aging (First batch)	121
4.10	Resistance data after 6 hours aging (First batch)	121
4.11	Resistance data before aging (Second batch)	122
4.12	Resistance data after 3 hours aging (Second batch)	122
4.13	Resistance data after 5 hours aging (Second batch)	123
4.14	Resistance data after 6 hours aging (Second batch)	123
4.15	Crystallographic data for each intermetallic compounds from Figure 4.47	125

## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	TITLE	PAGE
1.0	Experimental conditions for Al-Cu thin films diffusion study from past authors	3
2.1	Billiard ball model of sputtering	7
2.2.	State of matter change with temperature.	9
2.3	Simple plasma generation by electrical current	9
2.4	Schematic diagram of diode sputtering system	11
2.5	Schematic diagram of RF magnetron sputtering system	12
2.6	Comparison of voltage potential between the target and substrate in RF and DC sputtering.	13
2.7	The use of magnetic field in sputtering system	14
2.8	Coalescence of two clusters on face-centered cubic substrate	17
2.9	Schematic of growth modes for epitaxial thin film	18
2.10	Schematic illustrating fundamental growth processes controlling microstructural evolution	19
2.11	Thornton's structural zone model	21
2.12	Cross-sectional scanning electron image of ZnO thin films deposited at various substrate temperatures and argon pressures using magnetron sputtering	22
2.13	Al-Cu binary phase diagram by Massalski	24
2.14	Phase formations of layered Cu-Al thin film system with various layer thickness ratios [3].	27

2.15	Phase formation study of Cu-Al laminates by Y. Guo et.al [8]	32
2.16	Resistivity of bulk Al-Cu couples of various alloying compositions [14].	36
2.17	Comparison between conventional and grazing incidence XRD for TiO <sub>2</sub> thin film	37
2.18	X-ray diffraction analysis on thin film using low incident angle	38
2.19	Constructive interference of X-ray beam	39
2.20	Williamson-Hall plots on linear fit graph	41
2.21	Main components of typical Transmission electron microscope	42
2.22	Electron signals generated when a high energy beam of electrons interacts with a thin specimen	43
2.23	Example of HREM micrograph showing the interface atomic arrangement of CuAl <sub>2</sub> phase and Alumina substrate.	43
2.24	TEM imaging and diffraction mode	44
2.25	Several kinds of diffraction patterns (dark field) obtained from a range of materials in a conventional 100kV TEM	45
2.26	Brief explanation regarding electron shell and X-ray emission	46
2.27	Schematic of XEDS detector	47
2.28	EDX qualitative analysis on Al-Cu thin film couples deposited on Si substrate.	48
3.0	Research flow chart	49
3.1	Magnetron sputtering system (SNTEK/Korea) used to fabricate Al-Cu thin films couples in this work.	51
3.2	Aluminum and Copper sputtering target.	52
3.3	Steps during cleaving Si wafer	52
3.4	Secondary electron image of Al-Cu thin films on Si substrate	54
3.5	Schematic diagram of the tube furnace used for aging on Al-Cu thin films.	54
3.6	Condition of aging process	55

3.7	Grazing incident X-ray diffraction parameters set up	56
3.8	Schematic of specially designed sample holder for FESEM observation	57
3.9	Dimension of the bilayers thin film slices	58
3.10	Thin films stack and Gatan G1 epoxy	59
3.11	Zinc coated Copper tube and curing of metal tube with stack in it	59
3.12	Cured tube in solid-transparent epoxy	60
3.13	Grinding disc on wet abrasive paper and copper ring used to strengthen thin TEM sample	60
3.14	GATAN 691 Precision Ion Polishing System (PIPS) and TEM cross-sectional sample inside vacuum chamber during ion milling process	61
3.15	Simplified schema of the assembly for resistance measurement	62
4.1	FE-SEM micrograph of Al-Cu thin films	64
4.2	X-ray diffraction pattern of Al-Cu thin films measured at low incident angle ( $\alpha = 0.5^\circ$ )	65
4.3	Al/Cu thin films system on Si substrate. Type 1 and Type 2 interfaces.	67
4.4	Scanning electron image of bilayer (Type 1) aged at 150 °C for 4 hours	68
4.5	Scanning electron image of Type 1 bilayers aged at 200 °C for 4 hours.	69
4.6	Secondary electron image (Type 1) bilayers aged at 200 °C for 2 hours without any peeled off region.	69
4.7	Scanning electron image of finished TEM sample (Type 1) after final ion milling process and EDX cross sectional line scans	70
4.8	FE-SEM image of Cu-Al-Si thin film (type 2) aged at 200 °C for 3 hours.	72
4.9	TEM image of Sample 2. Prior to TEM sample preparation, the sample was heat treated in vacuum at 250 C for 3 hours.	72

4.10	Strain-size analysis of Cu film on Si substrate using modified Williamson-Hall plot as a function of $KC^{1/2}$	73
4.11	Strain-size analysis of Al film on Si substrate using modified Williamson-Hall. Negative slope indicating compressive strain.	73
4.12	AFM 3D surface profile of Al layer before and after heat treatment at different period of time.	76
4.13	XRD diffractogram of Al/Cu bilayer before heat treatment	78
4.14	XRD diffractogram of Al/Cu bilayer after 1 hour heat treatment	78
4.15	XRD diffractogram of Al/Cu bilayer after 2 hours heat treatment	79
4.16	XRD diffractogram of Al/Cu bilayer after 3 hours heat treatment	79
4.17	XRD diffractograms of Al/Cu bilayer thin films before and after heat treatment at 200 °C for 1-3 hours.	81
4.18	Comparison between two XRD profiles. Before and after K-alpha stripped.	81
4.19	Texture coefficient of Al and Cu dominant orientation during heat treatment at 100 °C	85
4.20	Texture coefficient of Al and Cu dominant orientation during heat treatment at 200 °C	86
4.21	Diffusion in Al-Cu bilayers thin films controlled by boundary condition	87
4.22	TEM bright field image and electron diffraction pattern (Inset) of heat treated Al/Cu bilayers sample after 3 hours at 200 °C	88
4.23	EDX study of IMC formation within the Al-Cu bilayer for the aging condition of 200 °C - 180 minutes	90
4.24	Rings “pattern” which constructed based on XRD data where the radius of each ring is relatively equivalent to the value of lattice spacing for each crystal phases existed in the bilayer.	91
4.25	Pattern matching between selected area diffraction patterns with the rings pattern which constructed from the XRD result.	93
4.26	TEM bright field image of Al/Cu bilayer after 3 hours aging at 200 °C. Regions A to G are the selected regions for HRTEM	96

	analysis.	
4.27	High resolution TEM image and fast Fourier transform diffraction pattern of region A	97
4.28	High resolution TEM image and fast Fourier transform diffraction pattern of region B	98
4.29	High resolution TEM image and fast Fourier transform diffraction pattern of region C	99
4.30	High resolution TEM image and fast Fourier transform diffraction pattern of region D	100
4.31	High resolution TEM image and fast Fourier transform diffraction pattern of region E	101
4.32	High resolution TEM image and fast Fourier transform diffraction pattern of region F	102
4.33	HRTEM image of the bilayer's interfacial boundary	103
4.34	High resolution TEM image and fast Fourier transform diffraction pattern of region G	104
4.35	Schematic of the diffusion process between Al/Cu thin films	110
4.36	Schematic of nucleation of the first IMC phase	111
4.37	Schematic of nucleation of 2 <sup>nd</sup> IMC phase	112
4.38	Schematic of formation of $\eta$ -AlCu phase as the 3 <sup>rd</sup> IMC	112
4.39	Schematic of formation of phase $\zeta$ - Al <sub>3</sub> Cu <sub>4</sub> as the last IMC	113
4.40	FESEM micrograph of Al/Cu bilayers after aged at 150 °C for 2 hours.	114
4.41	FE-SEM micrograph of Al/Cu bilayers after aged at 150 °C for 4 hours	115
4.42	FE-SEM micrograph of Al/Cu bilayers after aged at 200 °C for 2 hours	115
4.43	FE-SEM micrograph of Al/Cu bilayers after aged at 200 °C for 4 hours	116
4.44	EDX spectrum profile for region 1-3, 4-6, 7-9, 10-12.	116



4.45	Growth kinetics of IMC layer in Al/Cu bilayers under different aging time and temperatures.	118
4.46	Growth of contact resistance with time during heat treatment at 200°C	124
4.47	XRD pattern of sample after 6 hours aging at 200°C	125
4.48	FESEM micrograph with of the interface region for Al/Cu thin film couple with EDX analysis	126

**LIST OF SYMBOLS**

Y	-	Sputtering yield
$E_T$	-	Maximum energy transferred during sputtering
$\lambda$	-	Mean free path / X-ray wavelength (cm)
K	-	Binding energy of surface atoms (kJ/mol)
M	-	Molar weight (kg/mol)
$N_a$	-	Avogadro number (1/mol)
$j_p$	-	Ion current density ( $A/m^2$ )
$T/T_m$	-	Thornton's model – relative substrate temperature
f.c.c	-	Face centered cubic
b.c.c	-	Base centered cubic
W	-	Intermetallics width (cm)
D	-	Diffusion rate ( $cm^2/s$ )
$E_a$	-	Activation energy (kJ/mol)
R	-	Gas constant (J/molK)
$\Delta H^0$	-	Change in enthalpy (kJ/mol. at)
$C_e$	-	Effective concentration of limiting element
$\theta$ (Bragg's)	-	Bragg's angle

$d$ (Bragg's)	-	Lattice spacings
$h k l$	-	Crystal plane orientation
$a_o$	-	Lattice parameter
$B_{\text{strain}}$	-	Peak broadening contributed by strain (nm)
$\epsilon_{\text{rms}}$	-	Root mean square value of strain (nm)
$K_s$	-	Scherrer's constant
$D_y$	-	Crystallites size (nm)
$C_{\text{hkl}}$	-	Dislocation contrast factors
$Z$	-	Atomic number
$R_a$	-	Average surface roughness (nm)
$D_o$	-	Frequency factor ( $\text{m}^2 \text{s}^{-1}$ )

**LIST OF APPENDICES**

<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
<b>A</b>	Published papers	-
<b>B</b>	Materials Properties of Thin Film System	<b>137</b>
<b>C</b>	Indexing X-Ray diffraction peaks	<b>138</b>
<b>D</b>	Indexing electron diffraction pattern	<b>140</b>
<b>E</b>	Periodic Table of Elements	<b>144</b>
<b>F</b>	Powder Diffraction File (PDF) for Al-Cu alloys.	<b>145-155</b>
<b>G</b>	XRD peak profile after aging at 100 °C and 200 °C	<b>156-162</b>

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Research background

Since 1970's, the focus of attention on advanced materials and new technologies has been shifted from bulk solid materials towards nano-structured materials like thin films and many research papers related to thin films has been published by researchers from various engineering disciplines. Their research which includes the methods of thin film synthesis, thin film materials system, properties studies and characterization methods has led to the development of impressive technology applications and advanced materials that provide alternative solutions to overcome some deficiency issues in bulk materials.

Al-Cu multilayer thin films are common materials systems which have been studied by several researchers and become an important materials system in microelectronics industries [1-15]. This metal system is used as metallization lines in integrated circuits because of their high conductivity and low material cost if compared to gold (Au). In the recent trend of interconnect design, thin metallization lines have shifted into multilevel metallization (MLM) which allows to the miniaturization of electronic devices.

Silicon and Alumina are the most common semiconductors material used for thin film substrate because they offer good lattice structure for epitaxial growth of most metal films. Besides physical evaporation, molecular beam epitaxy (MBE) and

pulse laser deposition technique (PLD), physical sputtering is seen as an effective choice for thin film deposition based on cost and ease of processing, but the quality of the sputtered films is quite uncertain. The thickness of thin films produced by this method can vary from a few nanometers up to micrometer scale in few minutes to a few hours of deposition [16].

However, problem arises when the bimetallic thin films were exposed to heat as it will trigger diffusion between these dissimilar metals. In microelectronic devices, the formation of intermetallics phases within the Al-Cu lines has also meant the degradation of the devices and will eventually lead to device failure. Concern on this issue, had led to effort made by several researchers to the study of diffusion in the Al-Cu binary system [1-15].

The researchers on the binary system have led to discrepancies of results especially on the growth of intermetallics phases. Similar discrepancies were seen on the nucleation kinetics of phases (i.e. diffusion rate and activation energy) and also the formation sequence of the alloying phases. This is due to the complexity of diffusion in thin films which is profoundly differs from diffusion in bulk. Understanding the growth of phase equilibria in bimetallic thin films is crucial for the material design purpose, but it requires a lot of fundamental studies with various experimental parameters.

The present *study* is undertaken *to contribute* to the current understanding of diffusion in Al-Cu thin film system which focus on the bilayers with equal thickness of the individual layers prepared by sputtering deposition. The properties of sputtered thin films and the relations with their substrate are studied using different characterization techniques while the study of diffusion of these bilayers will be focused on low temperature diffusion which is below 300 °C.

## 1.2 Problem statement

The discrepancies of data in terms of growth behavior and kinetics are due to the finite volume and also because of the complexity of nanostructure (e.g. structural defects) of the thin films which completely differs from bulk. Previously, different study conditions and analytical methods have been used to understand the behavior. However from our observation, the two most influential parameters are the bilayer thickness ratio and also the range of the aging temperatures. Collective experimental parameters from previous related studies [2-3, 5-7, 12] are illustrated in Figure 1.0. As in this present work, the selected temperatures range is focus on lower temperature which is in between of 100 to 200°C while the total thickness of the bilayers is around 800 to 900 nanometers thick.

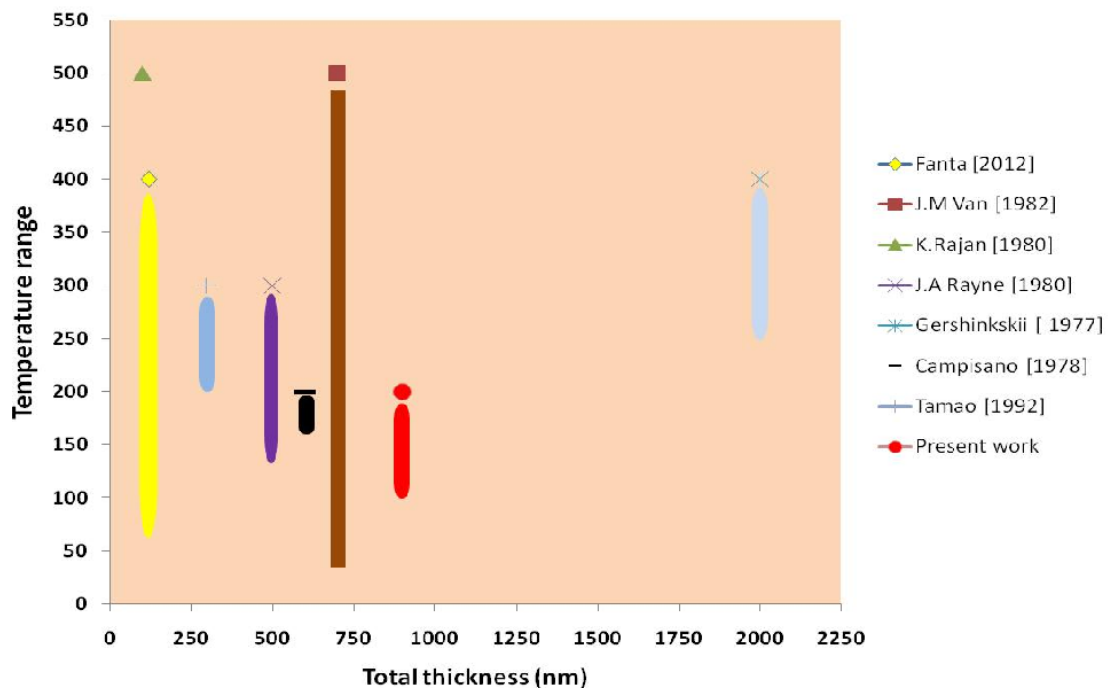


Figure 1.0: Experimental conditions for Al-Cu thin films diffusion study from past authors [2, 3, 5-7, 12].

### 1.3 Objectives of the research

This research embarks on the following objectives:

- 1) To establish optimum deposition parameters of thin Al and Cu layers deposition on Si substrate using radio frequency magnetron sputtering deposition.
- 2) To characterize the properties of bilayers through different thin film characterization techniques including high resolution TEM as a result of different annealing condition.
- 3) To establish diffusion reaction between the bilayers to promote intermetallics growth through the heat treatment process at different temperatures and time and its effects on structural and electrical properties of the bilayers thin films.

### 1.4 Research scope

Annealing temperatures, annealing time, initial layer thickness ratio and the crystal structure of the thin films are important parameters which directly influenced the diffusion kinetics and the growth of intermetallics. These parameters were varied by several authors of previous studies [1-15] in order to study and understand the diffusion in thin films. However, this research is concentrated on the polycrystalline Al-Cu thin films where the diffusion mechanism for this particular crystal structure is different from single crystal thin films.

Different from bulk, the geometries of the thin films couple must be considered because of the finite volume for the diffusion process. The formation sequence and the stable end phase of intermetallics in thin films couple is influenced by the layer thickness ratio of the bilayers system. In this research, diffusion of the bilayers with 1:1 thickness ratio is studied.

Diffusion in thin films might occur at relatively low temperatures because of the poor thermal stability in thin films. In this research, the heat treatment of these



bilayers was focused on low temperature diffusion within the temperatures range of 100 °C, 150 °C and 200 °C. This temperature range is also simulates the working temperature condition for most electronic devices. Based on the fact that diffusion in thin films is much faster than diffusion in bulk, the annealing time for the bilayers is limited only for a few hours, which is from 1 - 6 hours of the isothermal heat treatment process.

## **1.5 Research outline**

The literature review of this thesis starts with the fundamental knowledge of thin film deposition which focused on the properties of thin films deposited using physical sputtering method. Then, the next sub-chapter in the literature review is concentrated on fundamental knowledge of phase equilibria in binary Al-Cu thin film system. Within this sub-chapter, findings from previous works regarding interdiffusion and intermetallics formation in binary Al-Cu thin films have been discussed. The last sub-chapter in the literature review section has discussed in depth about thin film characterization techniques which have been utilized in this study. The techniques include: the microscopy analysis using FE-SEM and TEM, chemical analysis performed by grazing incident XRD and EDX and lastly the crystal structure analysis of thin film by using electron diffraction pattern and fast Fourier transformation method. Next, in the methodology section, all works in this research which start with the fabrication of the thin films until the characterizations of the thin films are discussed thoroughly. All data from these characterization techniques have been discussed in the section of “Result and Discussion”. The growth of intermetallics in the bilayers thin films covers most of the chapter where the chemical properties, crystallographic structure, the kinetics of growth and the effects on the resistivity of the intermetallics phases are discussed in detail. Finally, along with the conclusions, the final chapter describes recommendations for future study on this subject which stressed more on experimental parameters and characterization techniques.

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