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Multi-wavelength semiconductor lasers



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FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention pertains to the field of semiconductor laser fabrication and in particular to a method for manufacturing integrated single output multiple wavelength
5 lasers and related photonic integrated devices to be utilized in wavelength division multiplexing (WDM) optical communication system, optical recording and measurement system.

BACKGROUD OF THE INVENTION

Multi-wavelength laser sources are key elements for a variety of applications such as
10 wavelength division multiplexing (WDM), optical recording, color displays and optical color printing. Several methods have been proposed and patented for the realization of these multi-wavelength laser sources and the integration with modulators, as can be seen in US Pats. No. 4955030 (Menigaux), 4831629 (Paoli), 4993036 (Ikeda), 5384797 (Welch), 5519721 (Takano). They can be realized by the non-uniform current pumping
15 resulting in areas with different band filling, selective area epitaxy or quantum well intermixing. The last two methods can also be used to fabricate the lasers integrated with modulators.

However, many of the multiple wavelength laser sources or arrays fabricated rely on a large spatial separation between different wavelength elements, and therefore complex
20 focusing optics are required to align the individual lasers to the optical fiber. It is desirable that all the laser emissions are combined monolithically together on a wafer so that the alignment restrictions can be eliminated. One method uses serially aligned semiconductor lasers each with a directional coupler [see US Patent 5233187, Japanese Patent 05090715, European Patent 496348, Sakata]. An inevitable drawback of this
25 method is that there cannot be many wavelengths integrated together otherwise the device will be too long and the internal loss will be large. Also the grating must be optimized to act both as a directional coupler and the wavelength selective reflector. Another method is to combine parallel aligned laser arrays into one output port by use of

appropriate waveguide alignment, such as the Y-junction coupler, rib waveguide coupler structures etc [See Japanese Patent 24209, 58175884, IEEE Photon. Technol. Lett. Vol. 7, pp.944-946, 1995]. One problem arising from the combination of different wavelengths together is that the cross talks among these wavelengths are inevitable without additional treatment. The longer wavelength laser element will be optically pumped to lasing even only when the shorter wavelength laser element is electrically biased. The consequence is that each wavelength is not independently addressable. One method is to add an electroabsorption type modulator to each laser element. This method is a little complicated since it needs a lot of additional electrodes to control each modulator.

In this patent we propose a new method, the introduction of an isolator, to provide the needed isolation among different wavelength laser elements. It does not need additional electrodes so it is simple to fabricate and easy to operate. We also provide the method of fabricating the said isolator and other integrated optoelectronic devices.

15 SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The invention has as its objective, to introduce an isolator or isolators monolithically integrated with the semiconductor laser arrays and to provide an easy method of producing integrated multiple wavelength semiconductor lasers that can independently emit each wavelength in one spot.

20 According to one aspect of the invention, there is provided A multi-wavelength semiconductor laser comprising:

a plurality of laser diode sections in parallel arrangement and having different emission wavelengths relative to each other;

25 at least one isolator section, the or each of said isolator sections being integrated with a respective one of said laser diode sections;

a coupler integrated with the laser diode sections and the at least one isolator section to couple the different emission wavelengths into one output port.

The multi-wavelength semiconductor laser comprises three essential components: laser diode sections; at least one isolator section; and a coupler. The cavities of the laser diode sections form a parallel array to provide different emission wavelengths with each wavelength independently addressable. The coupler is used to couple the different wavelengths into one output port. The coupler may be, for example, a Y-junction coupler, a multi-branch waveguide coupler or a waveguide directional coupler such as a rib waveguide directional coupler. The isolator section is used to isolate the cross talks among the different wavelengths so as to ensure that the device can emit either each wavelength singly or their desired combinations.

10 The isolator section may be, for example, either a wavelength selective type or a light absorptive type. For the first type, it can be a distributed Bragg grating type isolator or a photonic bandgap crystal type isolator which is transmissive to one wavelength of the laser diode section but highly reflective to other wavelengths. For a dual wavelength laser source comprising two laser diode sections, an isolator may be integrated with one
15 or each of laser diode sections and tuned to reflect the other wavelength which is not desired. For the second type of isolation, the isolator has a band gap energy transparent to the laser wavelength of the laser diode section but absorbing to all other laser wavelengths. There is no need for an electrical contact for the isolation region thus giving rise to ease of fabrication and operation.

20 In another embodiment, the multi-wavelength semiconductor laser comprises four laser diode sections, at least three of which are integrated with a respective isolator section. In this case, the coupler may include a series of Y-junction couplers coupled by intermediate elements or may include a four-branch coupler.

The integrated multi-wavelength laser source is advantageously fabricated using a
25 quantum well based heterojunction semiconductor laser structure. The semiconductor substrate is preferably made of either GaAs or InP. The quantum well can be made of GaAs, InGaAs, InAlGaAs, or InGaAsP. The device can be made either by selective area metal organic vapor phase epitaxy (MOVPE) or by post growth quantum well intermixing technology. By controlling the area of the semiconductor laser surface

covered by the intermixing inhibiting layer, such as the Ge layer, a one step selective area impurity free quantum well intermixing can be used to fabricate such devices.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1a is a schematic waveguide structure of a dual wavelength laser source with monolithically integrated Y-junction coupler and isolator. Figure 1b is a diagram of the device with ridge waveguide and vertical layer structure shown.

Figures 2a and 2b illustrate the band diagram and the experimental results of the relative photoluminescence spectra for the four different sections in the dual wavelength laser source after a one step selective area intermixing.

Figures 3a and 3b are schematic waveguide drawings for two types of four-wavelength laser sources with monolithically integrated Y-junction couplers and isolators.

Figure 4 is a schematic waveguide drawing for a dual wavelength laser source with monolithically integrated Y-junction coupler and distributed Bragg gratings.

Figures 5a and 5b are schematic diagrams of a Y-junction coupler and a rib waveguide directional coupler.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Referring to Fig. 1a, there is shown a schematic waveguide structure of a dual wavelength laser source monolithically integrated with an isolator and a Y-junction coupler. It contains laser diode sections 1 and 2, an isolator 3 and a Y-junction coupler 4. The structure includes cleaved laser facets 5.

The Y-junction coupler 4 is used to direct the two signals from the laser diode sections, (i.e. gain regions) 1 and 2 into a single output port. The length of the gain region and isolation region are 700 μ m and 300 μ m respectively. The Y-junction coupler 4 is composed of two S-bends with a radius of curvature of 1328 μ m. The central space between the two branches is 34 μ m. The bending loss in the Y-junction waveguide should be kept small in the design. Fig 1b shows the schematic diagram of a ridge waveguide

and vertical layer structure. The ridge waveguide can be formed by either wet chemical etching or plasma dry etching (ICP or RIE). The wafer is a graded index separate confinement heterojunction (GRINSCH) laser structure. The n-type substrate 7 can be either GaAs or InP or other relevant semiconductors. A lower cladding layer 8 is provided with n-type doping to $2 \times 10^{18} \text{ cm}^{-3}$ while an upper cladding layer 12 is provided with p-type doping to $5 \times 10^{18} \text{ cm}^{-3}$. There is also provided lower and upper confinement layers 9 and 10, wherein 10 is the active region with a quantum well structure, and metal contacts 14 and 15 for the electrode.

The gain regions 1 and 2 have different wavelengths λ_1 and λ_2 . The Y-junction coupler region has a bandgap with an equivalent wavelength λ_4 that must be short enough to ensure that it is completely transparent to the laser wavelengths λ_1, λ_2 . The isolator 3 has an equivalent wavelength λ_3 that should be low enough to be transparent to λ_1 but be absorbing to λ_2 so that the laser light from channel 2 will not optically pump channel 1 when only channel 2 is electrically biased. As a result, the two lasers can be operated either simultaneously or separately. Different band gap regions in the wafer can be realized by either selective area MOVPE or by a one step selective area quantum well intermixing.

Fig.2a shows a schematic band diagram illustrating the four different bandgap regions realized by quantum well intermixing. The energy levels in the quantum well are represented as numerals 22, 23, 24 and 25 for laser diode section 1, isolator section 3, laser diode section 2, and Y-junction coupler section 4 respectively. Due to the interdiffusion of the well and barrier elements, the quantum well shape and composition changed thus leading to blueshift of the quantum well energy levels. The p and n type cladding layers are represented as 16 and 21 respectively.

Graded index layers 17 and 20 and separate confinement layers 18 and 19 are provided. Taking the InGaAs/GaAs laser sample with a single 8nm wide $\text{In}_{0.2}\text{Ga}_{0.8}\text{As}$ quantum well confined by two 10nm GaAs barriers as an example, Fig. 2b shows the low temperature photoluminescence spectra of the sample after using the technology of quantum well intermixing with a Ge interlayer controlling band gap tuning. By defining the area of the wafer covered with a Ge layer by varying the spacing between the $1 \mu\text{m}$

wide Ge strip array, different intermixing degree and hence, different emission wavelengths can be achieved. The Ge coverage for the four regions, 1, 2, 3, 4, in this device are 100%, 45%, 25% and 0% respectively. The Ge strip arrays were formed by evaporating Ge onto the photo-resist patterned GaAs surface followed by lift-off. The whole sample surface was then covered by SiO₂ and undergo rapid thermal annealing. The as-grown sample has a peak wavelength at 916nm or 1.353meV. The peak position of the PL signals for Y-junction coupler 4 (0% Ge cover) are 77.8meV and 52.4 meV larger than that of 1 (100% Ge cover) and 2 (45% Ge cover) respectively. The bandgap of isolator (25% Ge cover) is 43meV larger than channel 1 and 18meV larger than channel 2. It is transparent to channel 1 but partly absorbing to channel 2.

Fig. 3a and Fig. 3b show schematic waveguide diagrams of a four-wavelength laser source emitting from one output port. Four different laser diode sections 26₁, 26₂, 26₃, and 26₄ with wavelengths of λ_1 , λ_2 , λ_3 , λ_4 , respectively are provided as are isolator sections 27₁, 27₂, 27₃ and 27₄. It is noted that the isolator that is in the path of the shortest wavelength laser diode section is not necessary. If we assume $\lambda_1 > \lambda_2 > \lambda_3 > \lambda_4$, then isolator 27₄ can be saved and replaced with the material of the same band gap as the Y-coupler.

In Fig. 3a, the four channels 26 are coupled by two Y couplers 28 to a set of two identical intermediate elements 29, which in turn are coupled by Y coupler 30 to the output waveguide 31. In Fig. 3b, the four channels are coupled by one coupler 33 to the output waveguide 35. Some special treatment should advantageously be taken to this four-branch "Y" coupler, such as the employment of flank wings at the outmost two branches to ensure equal power division in the four branches.

As an example, we assume the energy level of the InGaAs/GaAs Quantum well structure sample, that is for 26₁ or λ_1 , is 1.360eV. Then the energy levels for the other three branches of the laser diode sections 26₂ (λ_2), 26₃ (λ_3), and 26₄ (λ_4), with equal spaced wavelength difference of 12meV, could be 1.372eV, 1.384eV, and 1.396eV respectively. The energy level for the isolators 27₁, 27₂, and 27₃ could be 1.39eV, 1.402eV and 1.414eV. The band gap of the Y coupler region could be 1.440eV. So the isolator 27₁(27₂, 27₃) is transparent to laser diode 26₁ (26₂, 26₃) but is absorptive to the

other three laser diodes 26₂, 26₃, and 26₄ (26₁, 26₃, 26₄; 26₁, 26₂, 26₄). The wavelength spacings between the two adjacent gain regions can be changed within a range of 10 to 17meV. These bandgap tuning can be realized by selective area quantum well intermixing carried out on the same wafer, as the method described above, or by selective
 5 area MOVPE.

Another type of isolators 38, 39 are shown in Fig. 4. They are in the form of distributed Bragg gratings, photonic bandgap crystals, or a stack of layers that are designed to be transmissive only to the laser wavelength of their respective gain regions 36 and 37. Here the distributed Bragg grating does not act as a reflector but as a
 10 wavelength filter. The two cleaved facets are still the two mirrors to construct the laser cavity. If the laser diode section 36, 37 are distributed feedback (DFB) laser or distributed Bragg reflecting (DBR) laser, then there will be two different pitch gratings along the light propagation direction. For a dual wavelength integrated laser source, isolators 38 and 39 can be a conventional distributed Bragg grating but be highly
 15 reflective to the laser wavelength of their opposite gain regions 37 and 36, rather than 36 and 37, respectively. Using the grating as the isolator, the wavelength difference between the adjacent gain regions can be made very small because of the very sharp wavelength selection characteristics of the gratings. Such an arrangement has a better performance in isolating the crosstalks among different laser wavelengths than the absorption type
 20 isolator. However it is more complicated in design and fabrication.

The Y-junction coupler is a 3 port device arranged so that optical power fed into one port is divided equally between the other two ports. One physical form that such a coupler can take is that of a single mode waveguide 41 (Fig 5a) which divides at a small angle into two single mode waveguides 42, 43. An alternative form is provided by a
 25 balanced directional coupler configuration in which the first waveguide 44 (Fig.5b) terminates in a region where it is symmetrically flanked on both sides by the start of two other waveguides 46, 47. The overlapping of the waveguides is such that power launched into the Y-junction coupler via waveguide 44 is fully coupled equally into the other two waveguides so that none is reflected at the end 45 of the first waveguide. The lateral
 30 separation of the two ports should be sufficient to provide no mutual evanescence coupling.

In the above explained embodiments, the practice of the invention has been demonstrated in the examples using GaAs type semiconductors. However, it can be effectively applied to all III-V type semiconductors.

5 While the invention has been described in its preferred embodiments, it is to be understood that the words which have been used are words of description rather than limitation and that changes may be made without departing from the true scope and spirit of the invention in its broader aspects.

CLAIMS:

1. A multi-wavelength semiconductor laser comprising:
 - a semiconductor substrate;
 - a plurality of laser diode sections, formed on said semiconductor substrate in parallel arrangement, and having different emission wavelength relative to each other;
 - at least one isolator section, the or each of said isolator sections being integrated with a respective one of said laser diode sections and formed on said substrate;
 - a coupler integrated on said substrate with the laser diode sections and the at least one isolator section to couple the different emission wavelengths into one output port.
2. A multi-wavelength semiconductor laser according to claim 1, wherein said at least one isolator section is a light absorptive type isolator.
3. A multi-wavelength semiconductor laser according to claim 1, wherein said at least one isolator section is a wavelength selective type isolator.
4. A multi-wavelength semiconductor laser according to claim 3, wherein said isolator section is a Bragg grating type isolator or photonic bandgap crystal type isolator which is transmissive to a wavelength which is equivalent to the wavelength of the respective laser diode section.
5. A multi-wavelength semiconductor laser according to claim 1, wherein said coupler is a Y-junction coupler, a multi-branch waveguide coupler or a waveguide directional coupler.
6. A multi-wavelength semiconductor laser according to claim 1, wherein said multi-wavelength semiconductor laser is a dual wavelength semiconductor laser

comprising two laser diode sections and an isolator section integrated with on or each of the two laser diode sections.

7. A multi-wavelength semiconductor laser according to claim 6, wherein said coupler is a Y-junction coupler.
- 5 8. A multi-wavelength semiconductor laser according to claim 1, wherein said multi-wavelength semiconductor laser comprises four laser diode sections, at least three of said laser diode sections being integrated with a respective isolator section.
9. A multi-wavelength semiconductor laser according to claim 8, wherein said coupler includes two Y-junction couplers, each of which is integrated with two of said laser diode sections, a pair of identical intermediate elements each coupled to a respective one of said Y-junction couplers and a further Y-junction coupler coupled to said intermediate elements to provide said outlet port.
- 10 10. A multi-wavelength semiconductor laser according to claim 8, wherein said coupler is a four-branch coupler.
- 15 11. A multi-wavelength semiconductor laser according to claim 1, comprising a quantum well laser structure.
12. A multi-wavelength semiconductor laser according to claim 11, wherein said semiconductor substrate is formed from GaAs and said quantum well is formed from GaAs, InGaAs or InAlGaAs.
- 20 13. A multi-wavelength semiconductor laser according to claim 11, wherein said semiconductor substrate is formed from InP and said quantum well is formed from InGaAsP, InGaAs, or InAlGaAs.
14. A multi-wavelength semiconductor laser according to claim 1, realized by selective area metal organic vapor phase epitaxy (MOVPE) or by selective area quantum well intermixing.
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