

# Negative Photoresponses in MoS<sub>2</sub> Flakes Photogated by p-n Junction Diode

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**Abstract**—Negative photoresponses in photodetectors can find important applications like image AI and image edge detection. In this Letter, we develop a few-layer MoS<sub>2</sub> phototransistor photogated by a silicon-based N<sup>+</sup>P junction. Negative photovoltage will be generated on the open-circuit N<sup>+</sup>P junction by grounding the p-type substrate. The negative photovoltage modulates the conductance of the n-type MoS<sub>2</sub> flake, creating negative photoconductance in the MoS<sub>2</sub> channel. The light-intensity dependent photoresponses are characterized at cryogenic temperatures. The experimental results can be well fitted with the established device theory.

**Index Terms**—MoS<sub>2</sub>, photoresponse, PN junction.

## I. INTRODUCTION

NEGATIVE photoresponses in photodetectors can find important applications in image AI [1], [2], image edge

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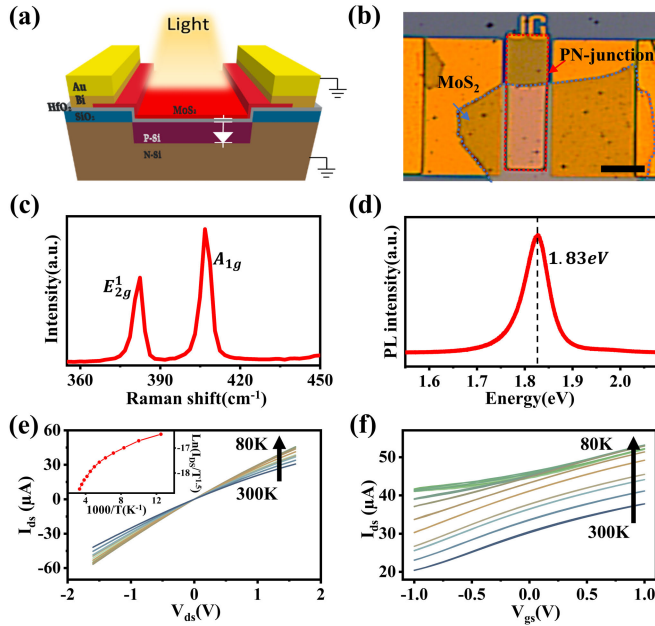
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detection [3], [4], optoelectronic memory [5], optoelectronic detection [6] and low power consume device [7]. The light-induced current suppression enables on-chip differential signal processing, offering inherent contrast enhancement and edge detection capabilities that are unattainable with conventional single-polarity photodetectors. Negative photoresponses have been reported in photodetectors made of either nanowires [8], [9], heterogeneous semiconductor structures [10], [11], 2D materials [12], [13], [14], [15] or graphene [16], [17]. Most of these negative photoresponses arise from the trapping effect of defect states [18], [19] which are disadvantageous in the following two aspects. First, the trapping and emission lifetime of defect states are often at a scale of seconds or even longer. The resultant negative photoresponses are too slow to find practical applications. Second, defect states are difficult to engineer. By contrast, techniques to suppress the defect states have been well developed in commercial semiconductor technologies [20]. As a result, there is little opportunity for these negative photoresponse devices that rely on defect states to find practical applications.

In this Letter, we present a novel approach to realizing negative photoconductivity in MoS<sub>2</sub> phototransistors by integrating a silicon-based NP junction in the substrate as an external photogate. Upon light illumination, the NP junction generates a negative open-circuit photovoltage, which electrostatically modulates the MoS<sub>2</sub> channel conductance, leading to robust and controllable negative photoresponses without relying on defect states. This mechanism enhances device stability and tunability, offering new possibilities for advanced optoelectronic applications. Light-intensity-dependent photoresponses at cryogenic temperatures are also systematically investigated.

## II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fig. 1(a) illustrates the schematic design of our device structure, comprising a silicon-based PN junction diode with a few layers of MoS<sub>2</sub> deposited on the top. A 5 nm thick hafnium oxide (HfO<sub>2</sub>) layer serves as the gate dielectric on the PN junction. Upon illumination, the PN junction diode generates a an open-circuit voltage, which electrically gates the MoS<sub>2</sub> transistor. Fig. 1(b) shows the optical microscopic image of such a typical device in the top view, where the gray area marked with red dashed line denotes the highly doped region of the PN junction, while the blue line indicates the MoS<sub>2</sub> flake.

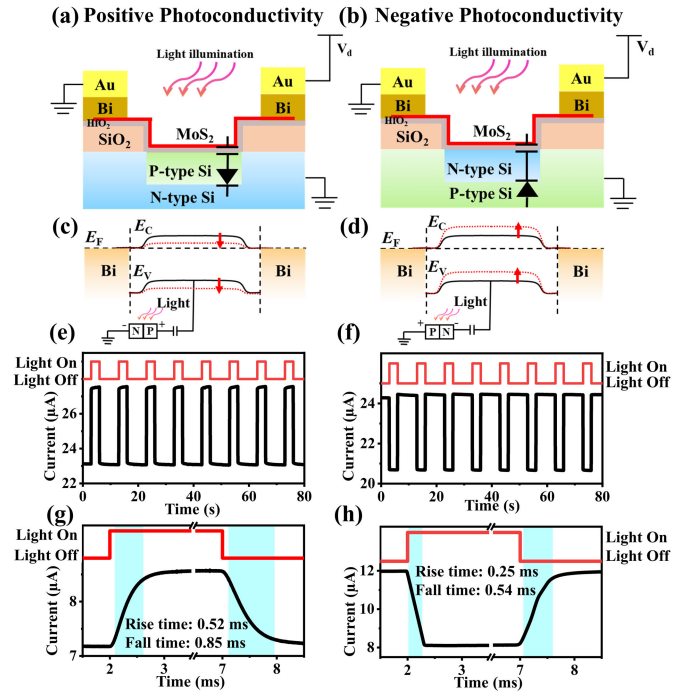


**Fig. 1.** (a) 3D Schematic of the device with a PN junction. (b) Optical microscopy image of a fabricated device. The reference bar is 50 μm. (c) Raman spectroscopy of MoS<sub>2</sub> and (d) Photoluminescence spectrum of MoS<sub>2</sub> under green laser excitation ( $\lambda = 532$  nm). (e) The output characteristic of the device varies at different temperatures with the grounded substrate. Inset: Arrhenius plot of the absolute dark current at a fixed drain-source voltage of  $-1.6$  V. (f) Gate dependent source-drain current at different cryogenic temperature.

The device fabrication process is described in the following. For P<sup>+</sup>N junctions, a p-type region ( $10^{19}\text{cm}^{-3}$ ) is created by ion implantation of boron on an n-type silicon substrate with a phosphorus doping concentration of  $1\text{--}5 \times 10^{15}\text{cm}^{-3}$ . For N<sup>+</sup>P junctions, an n-type region ( $10^{20}\text{cm}^{-3}$ ) is created by ion implantation of phosphorus on a p-type silicon substrate with a boron doping concentration of  $2\text{--}8 \times 10^{15}\text{cm}^{-3}$ . Subsequently, 5 nm thick HfO<sub>2</sub> is deposited on the junction via atomic layer deposition. A few-layer MoS<sub>2</sub> flake is then transferred onto the junction using a gold-assisted transfer technique [21], followed by the thermal evaporation of a 100 nm/20 nm thick Au/Bi electrode to form electrical contacts with the MoS<sub>2</sub> layer.

To evaluate the material quality of the MoS<sub>2</sub> flakes, Raman and photoluminescence (PL) spectroscopy were conducted on the sample. The Raman spectrum in Fig. 1(c) shows two distinct peaks associated with the  $E_{2g}^1$  and  $A_{1g}$  vibrational modes of MoS<sub>2</sub>. The separation between these peaks is measured at  $24.19\text{ cm}^{-1}$ , indicating that the sample is a few-layer MoS<sub>2</sub> flake [22]. The PL spectrum, acquired with green laser excitation ( $\lambda = 532$  nm), is displayed in Fig. 1(d), showing a prominent peak at 1.83 eV, consistent with the fact that the MoS<sub>2</sub> flake has a bandgap of 1.8 eV [23], [24].

Fig. 1(e) presents the current-voltage (IV) characteristics at different temperatures. Due to the fact that the substrate is grounded, the IV curves are slightly nonlinear at positive drain bias, similar to the channel pinch-off phenomenon in the classical metal-oxide-semiconductor field effect transistor (MOSFET). To investigate how the conductance is dependent on temperature, we plot the current at a fixed negative drain

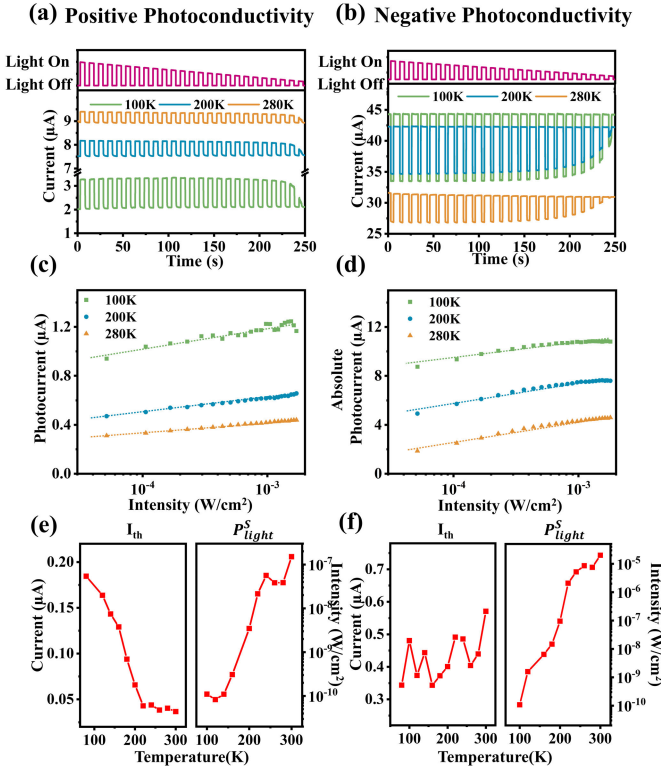


**Fig. 2.** Schematic of the device with a PN junction (a) and the one with a NP junction (b). Band diagram of the device from equilibrium conditions to under light illumination with a PN junction (c) and with a NP junction (d). Current transients (normalized by the channel width-to-length ratio) of the (e) positive and (f) negative photoresponse device at a bias of 1 V, where illumination at  $\lambda = 780$  nm is pulsed ON/OFF periodically. Transient response of the photodetector with a PN junction (g) and with an NP junction (h) at 780 nm. The rise time and fall time is calculated based on 10% and 90% levels of device current.

bias ( $-1.6$  V) at different temperature in the Arrhenius plot shown in the inset of Fig. 1(e). The positive slope observed in the Arrhenius plot confirms the Ohmic contacts between the bismuth electrodes and the few-layer MoS<sub>2</sub> channel [25], [26]. The gate dependent current indicates that the MoS<sub>2</sub> channel is n-type as shown in Fig. 1(f).

Previously, we have systematically investigated the MoS<sub>2</sub> device photogated by a PN junction in the substrate [27]. Such a device shows positive photoresponses. Interestingly, negative photoresponses are expected when the device is photogated by a NP junction in the substrate. Negative photoresponses can find important applications in image AI [1], [2] and image edge detection [3], [4]. Figure 2 presents a side-by-side comparison of the device for positive and negative photoconductivity, with their respective schematics shown in Fig. 2(a) and (b). The devices are illuminated by a 780 nm red LED (30% duty cycle), a wavelength deliberately chosen to exceed the absorption edge of MoS<sub>2</sub> ( $\lambda = 680$  nm), ensuring that light is absorbed primarily by the silicon junction rather than the MoS<sub>2</sub> channel.

In the positive photoconductivity device (Fig. 2(a)), light absorption generates electron-hole pairs, inducing a positive open-circuit photovoltage that gates the MoS<sub>2</sub> channel and enhances its conductance (Fig. 2(c)). Conversely, in the negative photoconductivity device (Fig. 2(b)), the photogenerated carriers produce a negative photovoltage,



**Fig. 3.** (a) Positive and (b) negative photoconductivity device photocurrent at a fixed bias of 1V as illumination intensity decreases. The light wavelength is  $\lambda = 780$  nm and the temperature is lowered from 300 to 80K. Measured photocurrent vs illumination intensity for (c) positive and (d) negative photoresponse device. The parameters extracted from (c) positive and (d) negative photoresponses are presented in (e) and (f) as a function of temperature, respectively.

which depletes electrons in the n-type MoS<sub>2</sub> channel, leading to a reduction in current (Fig. 2(d)).

The opposing photoresponses are further confirmed by transient measurements (Fig. 2(e) (f)), where the PN device exhibits a current increase under illumination, while the NP device shows a clear current suppression. Both configurations achieve sub-millisecond response times (Fig. 2(g) (h)), demonstrating their potential for high-speed, polarity-tunable photodetection.

To investigate how the photoresponses are dependent on the illumination light intensity, we tune the light intensity linearly in each on/off cycle while monitoring the transient response in current. The photocurrent is logarithmically dependent on the light intensity as shown in Fig. 3(c) and (d), which can be well fitted with eq. (1) established in our previous work [27].

$$I_{ph} = I_{th} \ln \left( \frac{P_{light}}{P_{light}^s} + 1 \right), \quad (1)$$

where  $P_{light}^s$  is the critical light intensity, indicating the detection limit of the device. The threshold current  $I_{th}$  is a parameter showing the response in current of the MoS<sub>2</sub> flake to the photogate voltage. The detailed expression of these parameters can be found in our previous publication [27]. From the fittings in Fig. 3(c) and (d), we can extract  $P_{light}^s$  and  $I_{th}$ .

The above experiments and fittings are repeated at different temperature. The extracted  $I_{th}$  and  $P_{light}^s$  for both positive and negative photoconductive devices are presented in Fig. 3(e) and (f) at different temperature, respectively. The observed changes in  $I_{th}$  are notably complicated, arising from the interplay of various factors, including charge trapping at interfaces, the minority carrier recombination lifetime [28], and the intrinsic and free electron concentrations [29]. In contrast,  $P_{light}^s$  exhibits a clear trend of decline as the temperature decreases. This behavior can be attributed to the reduction in the intrinsic carrier concentration  $n_i$  of the semiconductor at lower temperatures because of  $P_{light}^s \sim n_i / \tau_0$  with  $\tau_0$  being the minority carrier recombination lifetime. The observed temperature dependence of  $P_{light}^s$  confirms that the device demonstrates an enhanced sensitivity to lower light intensities at low temperature, consistent with the semiconductor device principle. The difference of  $P_{light}^s$  in PN junction ( $10^{-10} - 10^{-7}$  W/cm<sup>2</sup>) and NP junction ( $10^{-10} - 10^{-5}$  W/cm<sup>2</sup>) arises from the fact that the doping concentrations in the latter case are higher, leading to a stronger temperature dependence of minority recombination lifetime  $\tau_0$  [28].

### III. CONCLUSION

We demonstrate a MoS<sub>2</sub> phototransistor gated by silicon PN and NP junctions, enabling fast, polarity-switchable photoresponses. The negative photoconductivity, achieved without relying on defect states, supports sub-millisecond switching and on-chip differential signal processing. This platform holds strong potential for intelligent vision and AI-assisted optoelectronic systems.

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