Measurement of Single-Event Upsets in 65-nm SRAMs Under Irradiation of Spallation Neutrons at J-PARC MLF

Junya Kuroda, Seiya Manabe, Yukinobu Watanabe, Kojiro Ito, Wang Liao, Masanori Hashimoto, Shin-ichiro Abe, Masahide Harada, Kenichi Oikawa, Yasuhiro Miyake

Abstract — A neutron irradiation test of static random access memories (SRAMs) was performed using a spallation neutron source at Materials and Life Science Experimental Facility (MLF) in the Japan Proton Accelerator Research Complex (J-PARC). The probability of neutron-induced single event upsets (SEUs) was measured for 65-nm Bulk and Silicon on thin buried oxide (SOTB) SRAMs under neutron irradiation at the BL10 experimental facility. The measured SEU data were compared with the previous data of the same SRAMs which were measured at the other irradiation facilities having different neutron spectra. The differences in the operating voltage dependence of the measured SEU probabilities are discussed with particular attention to the impact of irradiation side on SEUs. The Particle and Heavy Ion Transport code System (PHITS) simulation based on the simple sensitive volume model reproduced qualitatively the operating voltage dependence seen in the measured ratio of SEUs for the Bulk SRAM between the resin side and board side irradiations under different neutron fields.

Index Terms — single event upset, neutron, 65-nm Bulk and SOTB SRAMs, irradiation test, J-PARC MLF, PHITS simulation

I. INTRODUCTION

Soft errors induced by terrestrial radiation in semiconductor devices have been of concern from the viewpoint of their reliability[1-3]. The soft error means a temporary malfunction in the devices due to single-event upsets (SEUs) caused by the transient signal induced by energetic ionizing radiation, e.g., resulting in upset of memory information in static random access memories (SRAMs). The SEU appears as a single-bit upset (SBU) or a multi-cell upset (MCU), where SBU and MCU mean the upset of one bit and that of two or more bits which are caused by a hit of a single particle or a photon, respectively. Until recently, the effect of cosmic-ray neutrons has been the main subject of a large number of investigations on radiation-induced soft errors at ground level [4-7]. Secondary ions such as alpha and heavy ions generated by neutron-induced reactions in very large scale integrated (VLSI) chips cause the transient signal that results in

S. Abe is with Research Group for Radiation Transport Analysis, Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA), 765-1 Funaishikawa, Tokai-mura, Naka-gun, Ibaraki 319-1184, Japan (e-mail: abe.shinichiro@jaea.go.jp).

M. Harada, K. Oikawa are with the Materials and Life Science Division, J-PARC Center, Japan Atomic Energy Agency, Tokai-mura, Naka-gun, Ibaraki 319-1195, Japan (e-mail: harada.masahide@jaea.go.jp, oikawa.kenichi@jaea.go.jp).

Y. Miyake is with the Muon Science Laboratory, High Energy Accelerator Research Organization (KEK), Tsukuba 319-1106, Japan, and also with the Materials and Life Science Division, Japan Proton Accelerator Research Complex Center, Muon Section, Shirane Shirakata 319-1195, Japan (e-mail: ymiyake@post.kek.jp).
SEUs. So far, we have conducted much research on cosmic-ray neutron induced soft errors in modern complementary metal oxide semiconductor (CMOS) SRAMs and digital logic circuits, based on measurements and simulations. For instance, irradiation tests [8-10] were performed using a high-energy spallation neutron source at Research Center for Nuclear Physics (RCNP), Osaka University [11] and a quasi-monoenergetic Li(p,n) neutron source at Cyclotron and Radioisotope Center (CYRIC), Tohoku University [12].

Under these backgrounds, we have started a new irradiation experiment with spallation neutron beams at Material and Life Science Facility (MLF) in the Japan Proton Accelerator Research Complex (J-PARC) [13] for the same SRAM devices as used in our previous irradiation tests. The two spallation neutron sources are now available in Japan, namely, RCNP and J-PARC MLF. As shown in Fig. 1, these experimental facilities can provide different neutron spectra. Since the previous data measured at RCNP and CYRIC are available for the same SRAMs, it is of much interest to investigate the sensitivity of neutron energy to SEUs by using the experimental data taken by irradiation with different neutron spectra.

The purpose of the present work is to take SEU data for SRAM devices via irradiation of intensive spallation neutron beam available in the BL10 beam line at J-PARC MLF and to then compare with the results against previous data taken at CYRIC, while paying particular attention to differences in cross sections from irradiating the resin side versus the board side.

II. EXPERIMENT

A. Test Facility

The neutron irradiation test was performed using the BL10 beam line at J-PARC MLF. The facility produces neutrons through spallation reactions between incident 3-GeV protons and a mercury target [13,14]. The pulsed neutrons cooled by a hydrogen moderator located above the target were formed into a square of 10 cm × 10 cm by a collimator and delivered to the BL10 irradiation room where a Device Under Test (DUT) was placed. The energy spectrum of incident neutrons was derived using the simulation result [14] with the number of incident 3-GeV protons that was calculated from the average beam current monitored during each irradiation test. Table 1 presents the fraction of neutrons in three energy groups for BL10, RCNP, and cosmic-ray neutrons on the ground calculated by EXPACS [15]. As shown in Fig.1 and Table 1, the J-PARC BL10 neutron field has a characteristic neutron spectrum having a much higher proportion of low energy neutrons than the other neutron fields. The neutron flux at J-PARC BL10 contains thermal component in a normal operation mode. In the present irradiation test, a 1-cm thick sintered boron carbide (B₄C) plate was installed at 7.1 m position of the beam line to absorb the thermal neutrons.

B. Experimental Setup

The experimental setup is shown in Fig. 2. The two DUTs were placed at 13.4 m and 14 m from the hydrogen moderator, respectively. Both DUTs were connected to an LSI tester to count the number of SEUs via the data acquisition board.

Fig. 3 shows the structure of the DUT. Bulk and Silicon On Thin Box (SOTB) SRAM chips fabricated in a 65-nm CMOS technology with a deep-well option were used in the experiment. Each of chips contains 12 Mbit memory cells of 6T design. In the chips, 64 BL×2 WL cells share the same well [9]. The 16 SRAM chips are mounted on a piece of printed circuit board (PCB) and are covered by epoxy resin. Note that the same DUTs were tested at RCNP and CYRIC in the previous work [9,10].

The neutron beam irradiated each test board from one side at a time. As shown in Fig.3, the one was from the “resin” side and the other from the “board” side to confirm the impact of irradiation side on the occurrence of SEU which was discussed in [10]. Additionally, the operating supply voltage of SRAMs was changed in each irradiation run to investigate the voltage dependence of the SEU rate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Energy domain</th>
<th>BL10 [%]</th>
<th>RCNP [%]</th>
<th>EXPACS [%]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-10MeV</td>
<td>91.7</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-100MeV</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;100MeV</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Operating Voltage Dependence of SEUs

Fig. 4 shows the operating voltage dependence of the SEUs occurrence probability ($P_{SEU}$) measured for the Bulk SRAM at J-PARC BL10 under neutron irradiation from the resin side (RS) and the board side (BS). The probability $P_{SEU}$ was defined by the number of upset bits per incident neutron fluence. Firstly, we found that there is a large difference in $P_{SEU}$ between RS and BS irradiations and the former $P_{SEU}$ is larger than the latter $P_{SEU}$ across the entire operating voltage range. In the case of RS irradiation, $P_{SEU}$ decreases monotonically with an increase in the operating voltage. On the other hand, the $P_{SEU}$ observed under the BS irradiation reaches a minimum value at the operating voltage between 0.5 and 0.6 V, and increases to a saturated value above 0.6 V. As discussed in [9], we expect that this tendency observed in the BS irradiation data appears due to the balance of the following two effects. The critical charge increases as the operating voltage reduces. In this case, $P_{SEU}$ increases with a decrease in the operating voltage. On the other hand, the contribution of parasitic bipolar effect (PBE) to $P_{SEU}$ increases as the operating voltage rises. By balancing the two effects, it can be explained that $P_{SEU}$ has a minimum point.

The experiment at CYRIC was performed under irradiation from both sides (RS and BS) of the DUT in the same way as in the present work. Fig. 5 presents the voltage dependency of $P_{SEU}$ for the Bulk SRAM measured at CYRIC [9]. The same tendency of $P_{SEU}$ as under the BS irradiation (see Fig. 4) is observed. The $P_{SEU}$ under the RS irradiation is larger than that under the BS irradiation at any of three operating voltages of 0.5, 0.9 and 1.2 V. This is the same as in the J-PARC BL10 data.
shown in Fig. 4. From comparison of Figs. 4 and 5, the tendency observed under the RS irradiation at J-PARC BL10 is found to be different from the experimental results of the other irradiation conditions, i.e., monotonic decrease trend with an increase in the operating voltage. The analysis and discussion with attention to hydrogen included in the epoxy resin is presented for understanding of this characteristic tendency in section III C.

Fig. 6 shows the ratio of $P_{\text{SEU}}$ under the RS irradiation to $P_{\text{SEU}}$ under the BS irradiation measured in three different neutron fields. The ratio of $P_{\text{SEU}}$ measured at CYRIC is smaller than that measured at J-PARC BL10, especially at low operating voltage. Finally, we found that $P_{\text{SEU}}$ under the RS irradiation is larger than $P_{\text{SEU}}$ under the BS irradiation, regardless of operating voltage, in either case of neutron irradiations with J-PARC BL10 and CYRIC.

In Fig. 7, the voltage dependence of the measured $P_{\text{SEU}}$ of the SOTB SRAM is compared between the RS and BS irradiations at J-PARC BL10. The probability $P_{\text{SEU}}$ was defined by the number of upset bits per incident neutron fluence. The experimental result shows a similar voltage dependency of the SEU probability, regardless of the irradiation side, which is different from the result of the Bulk SRAM seen in Fig. 4.

Fig. 8 shows the ratio of $P_{\text{SEU}}$ of the Bulk SRAM to that of the SOTB SRAM measured at J-PARC BL10. The ratio increases with operating voltage. This indicates that the SOTB SRAM has higher tolerance characteristics than the Bulk SRAM across the entire range of operating voltage. As will be discussed in the next subsection, the tendency may be due to much smaller occurrence probability of MCUs in the SOTB SRAM than that in the Bulk SRAM.

### B. Operating Voltage Dependence of MCUs

We compare the MCUs measured at J-PARC BL10, CYRIC and RCNP. Fig. 9 shows the ratio of the MCU probability ($P_{\text{MCU}}$) to the SEU probability ($P_{\text{SEU}}$) as a function of operating voltage. For the CYRIC data, only the data with the 70 MeV irradiation is given in Fig. 9, because there is no observable difference between 30 MeV and 70 MeV irradiations. The RCNP data are given for RS irradiation at the two operating voltage of 0.4 V and 1.0 V, which are close to the CYRIC data.

Firstly, the ratio has a minimum at the operating voltage of 0.5 V and increases gradually above 0.5 V, regardless of different neutron fields and irradiation sides. Liao et al. [16] indicated that the Parasitic Bipolar Effect (PBE) is likely to lead to a significant increase in MCUs as the operating voltage rises. From their discussion, the behavior of the ratio in Fig. 9 seems to be caused by the PBE. As shown in Fig. 4, no dip was observed at 0.5 V in the $P_{\text{SEU}}$ measured under the RS irradiation.

Fig. 10 shows the ratio of the SBU and MCU probabilities of the Bulk SRAM between the resin side (RS) and board side (BS) irradiations.
at J-PARC BL10, while the \( P_{\text{MCU}} \) has the minimum value at 0.5V under the same irradiation condition in Fig. 9.

Next, we compare the SBU and MCU observed in the J-PARC BL10 and CYRIC experiments. In Fig. 10, the ratios of the total bit number of SBU and MCU between the RS and BS irradiations are plotted as a function of operating voltage. The ratios for the CYRIC experiment are almost constant regardless of the operating supply voltage. The MCU ratio observed in the J-PARC BL10 experiment shows the same tendency as in the CYRIC experiment. However, one can see that the MCU ratio for the J-PARC BL10 experiment increases remarkably with a decrease in operating voltage and is larger than the other ones in a whole range of the operating voltage. This result suggests that the difference of \( P_{\text{SEU}} \) between the irradiation sides observed in the J-PARC BL10 experiment seen in Fig. 4 arises from the difference in the fraction of SBU in SEUs. As shown in Fig. 1 and Table 1, the J-PARC BL10 neutron spectrum has a large fraction of low-energy neutrons below 10 MeV. We presume that the low energy neutrons caused SBU more frequently than MCU. To understand this, we have performed a simulation based on a simple model and the result will be discussed in the next subsection III C.

Finally, the ratios of \( P_{\text{MCU}} \) to \( P_{\text{SEU}} \) are compared between the Bulk and SOTB SRAMs in Fig. 11. The closed and open symbols represent the irradiations from RS and BS, respectively. From the comparison, it was found that the percentage of MCUs observed in the SOTB SRAM is less a few % and much smaller than that in the Bulk SRAM. We expect that this large difference in MCU occurrence between both SRAM devices leads to high soft error resistance for SOTB devices.

C. Monte Carlo Simulation

A Monte Carlo (MC) simulation with Particle and Heavy Ion Transport code System PHITS [17] was performed for estimating the deposited charge in the Bulk SRAM cell. The SRAM structure and the experimental conditions including the neutron spectrum were considered properly in the PHITS simulation according to our previous work [9]. We defined the sensitive volume (SV) including the depletion region, and calculated the charge deposited in the SV by secondary ions generated via neutron-induced reactions with the constituent material. The number of SEUs per neutron is assumed to be the number of the events in which the charge deposited in SV exceeds a defined critical charge, \( Q_c \).

Fig. 12 shows the calculated ratio of SEUs for RS and BS irradiations under four different neutron fields as a function of critical charge. The error bars represent the statistical uncertainties in the MC calculation. This simulation result can be compared with the experimental result shown in Fig. 6. The low critical charge corresponds to the low operating voltage. The experimental ratio is reproduced by the simulation qualitatively well. In particular, the simulation reproduces satisfactorily the increasing trend in the experimental ratio seen in the low operating voltage domain for the J-PARC BL10 irradiation test. The EXPACS result simulating the terrestrial environmental neutron spectrum shows the small ratio of the SEU probability. As can be seen in Fig. 12, the dependence of irradiation sides on SEUs becomes weak under irradiation in the neutron fields with high-energy components.

The J-PARC BL10 irradiation field has a large amount of low energy neutrons below 10 MeV compared to the 30 and 70 MeV quasi-monoenergetic neutron fields. Abe et al. [10] discussed the impact of irradiation side on the SEUs by the 30 and 70 MeV quasi-monoenergetic neutrons. They revealed that the existence of hydrides in the resin increases the SEUs considerably because of higher production yields of secondary hydrogen (H) ions, namely, protons that are generated via neutron elastic scattering with hydrogen atoms. The neutron-proton (n-p) elastic scattering cross section increases as the incident neutron energy decreases. In addition, the recoiled proton is emitted to only forward angle in the case of the n-p scattering, resulting in high probability for the recoiled proton...
We took the SEU data for 65-nm Bulk and SOTB SRAMs under irradiation of spallation neutrons at the BL10 beam line in J-PARC MLF.

The experimental SEU data of the Bulk SRAM were compared with the previous data of the same SRAMs measured at the other neutron facilities with different neutron spectra, RCNP and CYRIC. One of the differences in the SEUs among them is the operating voltage dependence of SEU probability. We found that the SEU probability under the board side (BS) irradiation for the Bulk SRAM has the monotonic decrease trend with an increase in the operating voltage in the J-PARC BL10 data. The measured SEUs were decomposed into the two components, SBU and MCU, to investigate what causes the difference. The fraction of MCU in the SEUs measured at the J-PARC BL10 neutron field was found to be lower than those measured at RCNP and CYRIC. In addition, we found that the MCU probability has no large difference between the resin side (RS) irradiation and the BS irradiation, while the SBU probability is large in the RS irradiation compared to the BS irradiation.

The experimental SEU data of the SOTB SRAM were compared with those of the Bulk SRAM. The SOTB SRAM showed higher tolerance characteristics than the Bulk SRAM over the entire range of operating voltage. The higher tolerance can be explained by the small MCU probability of the SOTB SRAM than that of the Bulk SRAM, especially at high operating voltage.

The PHITS simulation with the simple sensitive volume model reproduces qualitatively the experimental ratio of SEUs for RS and BS irradiations on the Bulk SRAM in three different neutron fields. From the present simulation and the previous work [4], the large ratio observed in the J-PARC BL10 data at low operating voltage can be explained by the influence of the protons generated by neutron elastic scattering with hydrogen atoms in the resin. In the future, we plan to perform more detailed analysis of experimental results based on PHITS simulation with the multi sensitive volume model used in [4].

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REFERENCES

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