Combining Efficiency and Stability in Mixed Tin–Lead Perovskite Solar Cells by Capping Grains with an Ultrathin 2D Layer

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Metal halide perovskites are attractive photovoltaic materials in view of their excellent optoelectronic properties and ease of fabrication.[1–4] For single-junction perovskite solar cells (PSC), a certified power conversion efficiency of 25.2% has been reported,[3] approaching the performance levels of silicon solar cells. With the goal of further improving power conversion efficiency (PCE), researchers have fabricated all-perovskite tandem solar cells that provide an avenue ultimately to exceed the Shockley–Queisser limit.[6–11] the theoretical upper limit to PCE of single-junction solar cells.

A typical all-perovskite tandem solar cell is comprised of a front cell that utilizes a wide-bandgap ($E_g \approx 1.7–1.8$ eV) lead mixed-halide perovskite; and a back cell based on a narrow-bandgap ($E_g \approx 1.2$ eV) mixed tin–lead (Sn–Pb) iodide perovskite. The best performing two-terminal tandem PSC has been reported to have a PCE of 24.8%.[7]

Achieving the needed performance × stability combination in Sn–Pb PSCs has become the bottleneck to further progress in all-perovskite tandem solar cells. Formamidinium (FA) and methylammonium (MA) mixed-cation Sn–Pb PSCs now exceed 18% PCE, with a highest value of 21.1% reported.[7,10–14] The corresponding Sn–Pb PSCs typically have a limited operating lifetime. In contrast, FA and cesium (Cs) based Sn–Pb PSCs have exhibited excellent thermal and over 500-hour...
operating stability, but their PCE (single junction < 17%) has curtailed tandems based on this approach.[15,16]

Incorporation of layered perovskites to form 2D/3D hybrid structures is a promising approach to resolve this dilemma, as seen in lead-based PSCs.[17–21] Layered perovskites have the chemical formula of $A_2(FA/MA/Cs)_n$-$\text{PbI}_4$-$\text{SnI}_2$-$\text{DMSO}_n$, where $A$ is the bulky organic cation attached to the corner-sharing $[\text{PbI}_6]$ or $[\text{SnI}_6]$ octahedral framework. Compared with 3D perovskites, layered perovskites have increased resistance to both intrinsic and extrinsic degradation.[17,18] For pure-Pb PSCs, active layers comprised of 3D perovskites terminated with a thin layer of perovskite layer on the hole transport layer (HTL) or electron transport layer (ETL) side have enabled stable and efficient devices.[18,20,21]

Until now, the conventional 2D/3D strategy has not been translated into both stable and efficient Sn–Pb PSCs.[19–24] It can increase stability in Sn–Pb devices, but such an excess of bulky organic cation was required that a low fill-factor (FF < 70%) was obtained—presumably arising from blocked out-of-plane carrier transport in layered perovskites.[25,26]

We reasoned that the limited performance and stability of Sn–Pb perovskites could originate from high defect densities (e.g., Sn$_{2+}$ vacancies) on the surface of grains (film surface and grain-boundaries).[7,11,12] We posited that anchoring, onto Sn–Pb perovskite layers, layered perovskites—but avoiding the excess formation of the layered phase which would block the charge carrier transport—could therefore enable simultaneous improvements in device efficiency and stability through passivation of the defects.[27]

Here we employed the bulky organic cation phenethylammonium (PEA) to anchor the Sn–Pb perovskite grains. By introducing the PEA cation directly into the antisolvent, we achieved in situ defect passivation both at the perovskite film surface, and at grain boundaries within the film; yet we also avoided the excess formation of layered perovskite phases. Using this approach, we achieved a 200-fold enhancement in device operating lifetime over the nonpassivated Sn–Pb PSCs under full AM1.5G illumination, and no efficiency drop following 200 h of diurnal device operation under filtered AM1.5G illumination. We preserved a high fill factor of 79%, leading to a lab-measured PCE of 19.4% (certified 18.95%). We then demonstrated efficient two-terminal all-perovskite tandem solar cells that employ the PEA-anchored Sn–Pb PSC as the back subcell. We obtained a stabilized PCE of 23.5% for the tandem cells.

We fabricated triple-cation FA/MA/Cs Sn–Pb perovskites to investigate defect passivation via the introduction of the bulky organic cation. Here the Sn/Pb element ratio was set to 1:1 in the precursor mixture, and the resultant perovskite films have a bandgap of 1.25 eV (Figure S1, Supporting Information).[6,9–12] X-ray diffraction (XRD) reveals a pseudo-cubic structure for the Sn–Pb perovskite films (Figure S2a, Supporting Information), with no additional small-angle XRD peaks (belonging to layered phases) appear (Figure 2c). This absence of scattering below 6 nm$^{-1}$ indicates no detectable layered perovskite domains at the top surface of the surface-passivated film.[30,31] We further investigated the phase distribution of perovskites on the very upper surface via ultrafast transient reflection (TR) spectroscopy. As seen in Figure S6a (Supporting Information), two antisymmetric peaks in the near-infrared region were found for the pristine perovskites, corresponding to the ground-state bleach. Additionally, a negative feature was observed at 550 nm, which arises from the high energy band bleach.[31] For surface-passivated perovskite films (Figure 1d and Figure S6b, Supporting Information), the shape of TR spectra remains similar to that of pristine perovskites, without distinct peaks appearing from a layered perovskite phase (Figure S7a, Supporting Information).[30–32] Combining the GIWAXS and TR studies, we conclude that layered perovskite domains were below the detection limit for the surface-passivated films in these studies.

With the goal of understanding how phenethylammonium iodide (PEAI) interacts with the perovskite surface, we increased the thickness of the PEAI passivation layer until we could reach detectable signals. Upon increasing the PEAI concentration to 1.5 mg mL$^{-1}$, we found a negative feature associated with the $n = 1$ layered perovskite (2D perovskite) in the TR spectra (Figure S7b,c, Supporting Information). The 2D perovskite formation was confirmed by the appearance of related diffraction peaks in the XRD spectra, while no diffraction peaks stemming from the PEAI aggregates were observed (Figure S7d, Supporting Information). This suggests that the PEAI led to 2D perovskites on the film surface. We expect that the diminishing of the 2D perovskite signal for the surface passivated film is a result of an ultrathin passivation layer formed on the surface. This ultrathin passivation layer enables surface defect passivation while maintaining efficient charge extraction.

We then utilized the X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) to study the capacity of 2D perovskite layers to provide passivation. We found that the surface passivation method reduces the oxidation of perovskites. This was evidenced by the reduced
Sn\textsuperscript{4+} signal in the Sn 3d spectra (Figure 1d). The hydrophobic PEA cation suppresses the diffusion of moisture, as indicated by the reduced C=O bond signal in the C 1s spectra for the surface-passivated perovskites (Figure S8, Supporting Information). These results suggest that even a limited amount of formation of the 2D phase on the film surface can contribute to reduced defect densities in Sn–Pb perovskites.

We further employed time-resolved photoluminescence (TR-PL) measurements to study carrier recombination dynamics. An PL decay lifetime of 32 ns was obtained for the pristine perovskites (Figure 1e), indicative of severe nonradiative carrier recombination within the untreated perovskite film. Following PEA cation passivation, the PL lifetime is extended to 210 ns, approaching that of pure-Pb perovskites.\cite{33, 34}

We compared the surface passivation method with the conventional post-treatment method.\cite{18, 27, 28} We found that the conventional isopropanol (IPA) based post-treatment can induce surface degradation (Figure S9a, Supporting Information). As a result, a thin passivation layer (Figure S9b, Supporting Information) is not sufficient to reduce carrier trapping for the IPA-based post-treatment method (Figure S9c, Supporting Information).

For the surface-passivated Sn–Pb perovskite films, a longer PL lifetime was seen only when we probed the PL signal from the front (treated) side of the perovskite film (Figure 2d). When the TR-PL decay was probed from the glass (less treated) side of the perovskite film, the decay rate remained as fast as in the untreated pristine samples. We attribute this short PL lifetime...
probed from the glass side to the limited penetration depth of the PEA cation during the surface treatment (Figure 2a and Figure S4, Supporting Information).

We then turned instead to using PEAI in EA as the anti-solvent for perovskite fabrication: this, we speculated, might enable ligand anchoring occurs on both the film surface and also at grain boundaries within the bulk film. We term these samples in-film passivated (Figure 2a). The films exhibited substantially the same surface morphology and crystalline structure (Figure S10, Supporting Information) of the surface-passivated perovskites. GIWAXS (Figure S11, Supporting Information) and TR studies (Figure S12, Supporting Information) indicate that the layered perovskite phase is too thin to be detected when the in-film passivation method is employed—just as seen in the surface-passivated sample. The thin passivation layer is still sufficient to reduce defect densities (Figure S13, Supporting Information).[35,36]

The spatial distribution of PEA cations within the perovskite films produced using different passivation methods was investigated using ToF-SIMS (Figure 2b). For the in-film passivation method, a significantly higher signal of PEA ligands was detected compared to the case of the surface-passivated sample. The in-film passivation approach enables deeper penetration of PEA cations into the whole film. This in-film passivation approach, we propose, is capable of passivating grain boundaries inside the bulk of the film, in addition to passivating the top surface of the perovskite films.

We then characterized grain boundary passivation with the aid of Kelvin probe force microscopy (KPFM). An average surface potential difference between the grain boundary and the adjacent grain interior of 72 and 75 mV was found for the pristine and surface passivated perovskites, respectively (Figures S14a–b and S15, Supporting Information). This indicates the charge carrier trapping happens at the grain boundaries, consistent with previous reports.[11,12] For the in-film passivated perovskites, this average surface potential difference is significantly reduced to 39 mV (Figure S15, Supporting Information). Since the surface morphology remained similar for all perovskite films (Figure S14d, Supporting Information and Figure 2c), we propose that deep penetration of PEAI within perovskite films can passivate grain boundaries to reduce the charge carrier trapping. This leads to a prolonged PL lifetime probed from each side (top and bottom) of the in-film passivated film (Figure 2d,e). The PL intensity of the in-film
passivated perovskite film is also stronger (Figure S16b,c, Supporting Information) compared with the surface-passivated perovskite film and the pristine perovskite film.

We fabricated Sn–Pb PSCs having the inverted structure: indium-doped tin oxide (ITO)/poly(3,4-ethylenedioxythiophene):polystyrene sulfonate (PEDOT:PSS) (50 nm)/Sn–Pb perovskite (400 nm)/phenyl-C61-butyric acid methyl ester (PCBM) (100 nm)/polyethylenimine ethoxylated (PEIE)/Ag (120 nm) (Figure 3a). The current density–voltage (J–V) curves of the champion cells recorded under reverse voltage scanning using each method are presented in Figure 3b. The PCE under forward (reverse) voltage scan is improved from 14.2% (15.3%) to 15.3% (16.7%) for the surface-passivated devices and to 16.2% (16.3%) for the in-film passivated devices. Figure 3c shows the external quantum efficiency (EQE) spectra of the champion cells. Their integrated J_sc values match well with those obtained from the J–V scans. As seen in Table S1 (Supporting Information), the PCE improvement by the PEA cation passivation comes from an increased open-circuit voltage which we associate with defect passivation; and increased FF that we assign further to the minimal formation of carrier-retarding layered perovskite.[27,37–39] The FF (76%) obtained here is higher than that for the layered perovskite-based Sn–Pb PSCs (below 70%).[19,22]

We found that only in-film passivation significantly reduced hysteresis in the J-V scans (Figure S17a, Supporting Information). Steady-state power outputs were tracked for the three classes of devices (Figure S17b, Supporting Information). In-film passivated PSC achieved a stabilized PCE of 16.3%, and the stabilized power output (SPO) is consistent with the J–V scans.

For the pristine and surface-passivated devices, continuous performance decays were observed; thus, we could not reliably extract the SPOs.

We then carried out transient photovoltage (TPV) decay characterization to study carrier recombination dynamics.[40] The TPV decay lifetimes of the passivated PSCs (35 and 45 µs for the surface-passivation method and the in-film passivation method, respectively) are much longer than those of the non-passivated device (25 µs for the reference cell) (Figure 3d). The prolonged lifetimes indicate that each passivation method suppresses nonradiative carrier recombination, accounting for the improved V_oc in each passivation method. More effective grain-boundary passivation via the in-film method enables the longest TPV decay lifetime and the highest V_oc values among all the devices in this work.

We carried out operational stability measurements of the Sn–Pb PSCs. During maximum power point (MPP) tracking for devices under full AM1.5G illumination (100 mW cm⁻², and without UV-filter), the pristine and surface-passivated devices degraded rapidly. Their PCEs dropped to 90% of their initial PCEs (T90) after 1.8 and 4.3 min, respectively (Figure 3e). In comparison, the in-film passivated PSCs exhibited a T90 of 8.6 h, which represents an over 200-fold enhancement in the operational lifetime compared with the nonpassivated PSCs. To exclude degradation of PEDOT:PSS induced by long-term UV illumination,[41] we then placed the in-film passivated Sn–Pb PSC under a wide-bandgap (E_g = 1.75 eV) perovskite film (similar to the working conditions present within all-perovskite tandem solar cells). A diurnal test was conducted to emulate solar cell working conditions (Figure 3f; performance of initial
devices is shown in Figure S18 in the Supporting Information), and these devices retained their initial value following 200 h of testing. The significantly improved device lifetime, as well as the device efficiency for the in-film passivated Sn–Pb PSCs, indicates that the PEA cation anchoring on the film surface and at grain boundaries is required to ensure performance and stability in the Sn–Pb perovskite solar cells studied herein.

We then combined the in-film passivated mixed Sn–Pb narrow-bandgap perovskite with a wide-bandgap perovskite to construct two-terminal all-perovskite tandem solar cells (Figure 4a and Figure S19, Supporting Information). Here we adopted a thick absorber layer (≈650 nm) in mixed Sn–Pb PSCs to enable sufficient light absorption. We replaced the solution-processed PCBM/PEIE bilayer with a thermally evaporated C60/BCP bilayer as the ETL to ensure conformal surface coverage. PCEs of 19.4% and 19.0% were obtained in the best-performing Sn–Pb single-junction PSCs under reverse and forward scans (Figure 4b), respectively, while the pristine Sn–Pb perovskites achieve a best PCE of 17.9% (Figure S20, Supporting Information) under reverse scan. The in-film passivated Sn–Pb PSCs exhibited minimal performance degradation following 1-month storage in a N2-filled glovebox (Figure S21, Supporting Information). As in the thin devices shown in Figure 3b, the thick in-film passivated Sn–Pb PSCs show substantially improved performance compared with control devices (Figure S22, Supporting Information). The Jsc values obtained from J–V measurements match with the integrated Jsc (≈30.2 mA cm−2) from EQE spectra (Figure 4c). This high Jsc value was achieved here for an active layer thickness below 700 nm, a fact that may be assigned to improved charge transport and carrier extraction thanks to in-film passivation via PEA cations. We also find that this method can be applied using the n-butylammonium cation (Figure S23, Supporting Information). We sent one device to Newport (Montana, USA) for independent characterization, and this device achieved a certified PCE of 18.95% (Figure S24, Supporting Information)—competitive among high-efficiency Sn–Pb PSCs (Tables S2 and S3, Supporting Information). The Jsc values measured at Newport are consistent with in-lab measurements (Table S4, Supporting Information). When we further increased the active layer thickness to 1 µm, the in-film passivation method remained effective (Figure S25, Supporting Information).

We used atomic layer deposited (ALD) SnO2 (20 nm) as the interconnection layer (ICL) for connecting the two subcells (Figure 4a). A thin Au layer (≈1–2 nm) was inserted to ensure charge recombination between subcells. The champion PCE for the tandem PSCs (Figure 4d and Table 1) is 23.7%, with a Jsc of 15.0 mA cm−2, FF of 80.4%, and Voc of 1.967 V under reverse scan. The tandem solar cell exhibits low hysteresis (PCE = 23.2% under forward scan) in J–V scans and has a stabilized PCE of 23.5% (Figure S26, Supporting Information). The EQE spectra (Figure 4e) show integrated Jsc values of 15.1 and 15.0 mA cm−2 for the front and back subcells, respectively, matching well with the Jsc values from J–V measurements. We fabricated 30 tandem solar cells, and the devices showed a narrow PCE distribution (Figure 4f).

We further performed operational stability tests for the tandem PSCs. The devices retained 95% of their initial value.
following 65 h of operation at MPP under AM1.5G illumination (Figure S27, Supporting Information).

In summary, we developed ligand anchored Sn–Pb perovskites to seek simultaneous improvements in device efficiency and stability within narrow-bandgap PSCs. We employed PEA cations as anchoring ligands, and these suppressed nonradiative carrier recombination in Sn–Pb perovskite active layers. We developed a fabrication method that passivates both the perovskite film surface and the grain boundaries, yet avoids the excess formation of layered perovskite phase that would otherwise block carrier transport. This approach enables a 200-fold improvement in the mixed Sn–Pb PSC operating lifetime over the nonpassivated Sn–Pb PSCs and a PCE of 19.4% (certified 18.95%) for the thick Sn–Pb PSCs. We then demonstrated monolithic all-perovskite tandem solar cells using PEA-anchored Sn–Pb PSCs as back cells. We achieved a stabilized PCE of 23.5% for tandem PSCs. The work indicates that passivating defects on film surfaces and at grain boundaries enables efficient and stable Sn–Pb perovskite solar cells.

Supporting Information
Supporting Information is available from the Wiley Online Library or from the author.

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Conflict of Interest
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Table 1. Photovoltaic performance of two-terminal (2T) all-perovskite tandem solar cells and corresponding subcells.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cells</th>
<th>Scan direction</th>
<th>$V_{oc}$ [V]</th>
<th>$J_{sc}$ [mA cm$^{-2}$]</th>
<th>FF [%]</th>
<th>PCE [%]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wide bandgap front subcell</td>
<td>Reverse</td>
<td>1.211</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>76.8</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forward</td>
<td>1.192</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrow bandgap back subcell</td>
<td>Reverse</td>
<td>0.813</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forward</td>
<td>0.811</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2T tandem</td>
<td>Reverse</td>
<td>1.967</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forward</td>
<td>1.937</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>79.4</td>
<td>23.2</td>
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Keywords
layered perovskites, passivation, Sn–Pb perovskite solar cells, tandem perovskite solar cells

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