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Coupling of single quantum dots to photonic crystal cavities investigated by low-temperature scanning near-field optical microscopy

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We report a study of single quantum dots inside photonic crystal cavities with a low-temperature scanning near-field optical microscope. The spatial maps of single excitonic lines from the quantum dot show the clear signature of coupling to the cavity modes for small detunings. We also show that the near-field tip can be used to control the exciton-photon coupling at the nanoscale. A general framework for the interpretation of near-field maps of single emitters in cavities is proposed.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Solid-state cavity quantum electrodynamic (CQED) systems are of major interest for future quantum communication applications. Quantum dots (QDs) in photonic crystal (PhC) cavities have been shown to be a good candidate for the realization of practical implementations of CQED, for example as efficient single-photon sources.

In order to make use of the discretized energy levels of QDs, it is necessary to study them at low temperature. Microphotoluminescence spectroscopy (µPL), with additional time correlated single photon counting or two-photon correlation measurements, is the most popular method for studying the optical properties of single QDs and PhC cavities. However, µPL lacks the spatial resolution needed to study the spatial coupling between QD and PhC cavity, which plays a key role in parameters such as the Rabi frequency and the Purcell factor. Scanning near-field optical microscopy (SNOM) has been used to characterize PhC cavities at room temperature and single QDs at low temperatures. However, near-field studies of the coupling of single QDs to PhC cavity modes have not been reported so far. By performing such a near-field study, we demonstrate here that the interaction between QD, cavity mode and near-field tip leads to surprising observations. The complex interplay between the near-field tip and the cavity mode, together with the coupling of the excitonic QD emission to the cavity mode, leads to distinctly different spatial maps of the QD lines, depending on their spectral alignment to the cavity modes. We give an explanation for the observed results and show that near-field imaging provides an important insight on the QD-cavity coupling.

The sample under investigation contains low density InAs QDs emitting at 1300 nm at low temperature, grown by molecular beam epitaxy. The QDs are grown in the center of a 320-nm thick GaAs membrane on top of a 1.5-μm AlGaAs sacrificial layer. The pattern of the PhC cavity was transferred onto the sample by electron beam lithography and subsequent inductively coupled plasma etching. To form a cavity, one hole of a hexagonal PhC is removed. The first row of holes surrounding the cavity is reduced in size and shifted in position in order to increase the quality factor. Such modified H1 cavity is interesting for SNOM experiments due to the existence of several modes with different spatial pattern. The topography of one of these cavities is shown as inset in Fig. 1.

For the measurements presented here, we have built a tuning fork-based low-temperature SNOM employing the excitation-collection mode. Photoluminescence (PL) is nonresonantly excited through an uncoated fiber tip using a 750-nm pulsed diode laser with a pulse width of 200 ps and a repetition rate of 20 MHz. The PL is collected from the same tip, dispersed by a 0.55-m spectrometer and analyzed by a liquid nitrogen cooled InGaAs charge coupled device (CCD). For scanning and positioning, we use piezos and steppers from attocube systems. The sample, the piezos, and the tuning fork are inside a flowing vapor cryostat from Janis Research in the flow of cold Helium gas at 7 K. We employ uncoated fiber tips since coated tips have too low transmission for single dot spectroscopy. As shown below, the use of uncoated tips and the very low signal levels intrinsically related to single QD spectroscopy limit the spatial resolution in our experiment but do not prevent the observation of the tip-induced perturbation of the QD-cavity interaction, which leads to novel and surprising insights. After approaching the tip to 5–10 nm distance from the sample, it is scanned along the surface. At each point during an image scan, the tip is stopped and a spectrum is acquired. The obtained spectra are then rearranged to show an image for each wavelength.

We first present a case where the QD excitonic lines are far detuned from the cavity modes. Figure 1 shows the spectrum of such a cavity (cavity A) with 14 μW average pump power in the fiber. It shows two distinct sharp lines marked with X and XX, two cavity modes marked with M1 and M2, with quality factors $Q = 860$ and 1290, respectively, and several weaker lines. By taking power-dependent spectra (not shown here), X and XX were identified as the exciton and biexciton emission of the same QD. The PL maps of X and XX are shown in Figs. 2(a) and 2(b), respectively. It is apparent that both lines originate in the same location, confirming our attribution that they originate from the same QD. Additionally, we observe a circular shape, which is not significantly influenced by the PhC cavity. We remark that the QDs are buried 160 nm below the surface in the center of the slab and therefore the QD emission...
FIG. 1. (Color online) SNOM spectrum of cavity A acquired with the tip positioned at the cavity center at 7 K with a pump power of 14 μW. (Inset) Topography acquired during the image scan. The holes of the PhC are drawn as white circles to guide the eye.

results in a relatively large spot of 600-nm full-width at half maximum, much larger than usually observed for QDs close to the surface,17 but similar to previously reported maps of buried QDs.10

Figure 3(a) [Fig. 3(c)] shows the PL intensity maps of the cavity mode M1 (M2) in Fig. 1. These are the quasidegenerate quadrupole modes of the modified H1 cavity as determined by taking μPL spectra prior to the SNOM measurements and comparing with literature.15 The degeneracy is split due to fabrication imperfections. The intensity collected by the tip is expected to map the modulus square of the in-plane electric field at the surface of the membrane.18 Figures 3(b) and 3(d) show the modulus square of the in-plane electric field for modes M1 and M2, respectively, calculated using a 2D finite element software. The observed mode maps are clearly elongated along the two orthogonal axes of the cavity, in agreement with the calculation. However, the fine features of the calculated mode patterns are not resolved, as it was already observed in room-temperature SNOM of PhC cavities with high-density QDs.5 This is a consequence of the limited spatial resolution of the tip. Convolving the calculated mode profile with a Gaussian-shaped instrument response function (IRF) with full width half maximum (FWHM) of 200 nm provides a closer match with the experimental data (not shown). This gives an estimation of the spatial resolution of our SNOM images, as observed in room-temperature experiments.18 However, since a generally accepted model for the IRF is not available, we consider only the calculated mode profile in the following. Additionally, in the present case of low-density QDs, where only one QD is present in the cavity, we expect that in the employed illumination-collection mode the pumping of the QD strongly depends on the tip position, producing substantial changes to the map. Indeed, this explain why the PL map presents a maximum just below the cavity center, corresponding to the position of the QD as observed from the maps in Fig. 2. We note that for this large detuning the modes are pumped by a broad background corresponding to multie excitonic transitions in the QD.19-21 The observed optical maps result from the combined effect of spatial-dependent pumping and collection, as detailed below.

Figure 4 shows the spectrum of another cavity (cavity B), whose topography is shown as inset, taken with the tip positioned at the center of the cavity. When the tip is approached (lower magenta line), it shows a biexcitonic peak XX at 1280.2 nm and a cavity mode M at 1279.15 nm. When the tip is retracted (upper, cyan line), the mode blue shifts by 0.14 nm, while the XX peak remains unaffected.

FIG. 2. (Color online) Maps of the X and XX emissions collected at λ = 1293.2 and 1294.7 nm, respectively, for a pump power of 14 μW.

FIG. 3. (Color online) (a) Intensity PL map of M1, (b) calculated modulus square of the electric field of M1, (c) intensity PL map of M2, and (d) calculated modulus square of the electric field of M2.

FIG. 4. (Color online) Near-field PL spectrum of cavity B with tip approached (lower, magenta line) and tip retracted (upper, cyan line).
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the cavity mode M is blue shifted by 2.4 nm compared to case a. Corresponding spectra in the two cool-down runs show a detuning of 35 nm (green trace). (Inset) The X and XX maps, the $F_{\text{cav}}[\lambda_M(x,y)]$ term has an opposite effect: approaching the tip to a field-maximum redshifts $\lambda_M$, producing an increase of $F_{\text{cav}}[\lambda_M(x,y)]$ for the XX line and a decrease for the X line. This produces the blue imprint of the mode in the X map in Fig. 6(a). The difference in the X and XX maps therefore directly demonstrates the effect of the dielectric tip on the spontaneous emission rate of a QD in a cavity. We note that the X map in Fig. 6(a) presents a lobe in the upper part of the cavity. This is attributed to the influence of the $N_{\text{ex}}(x,y)$ term, which is maximum at the position of the QD. Indeed, imaging the broad background produced by the QD in a spectral region far from these lines,\textsuperscript{25} we have determined that the QD in cavity B is positioned in this region. This also explains the asymmetry in the XX map, which also presents a larger intensity in the upper half.

In order to further support our conclusions, we have performed near-field time-correlated single-photon counting (TCSPC) using a superconducting single-photon detector (SSPD).\textsuperscript{26} To this aim, the PL collected when the tip was positioned at the center of the cavity was spectrally filtered, sent to the SSPD, and the SSPD output signal correlated with a trigger pulse from the pump laser in a correlation card, resulting in a temporal resolution of 250 ps. The combined decay of M and X (not shown) gives two time constants of 280 ps and 1.65 ns, where we attribute the short one to the cavity mode emission (pumped by the multiexcitonic background) and the long one to X decay time. The XX decay shows a dominant decay component with a time constant of 1.2 ns (magenta line in Fig. 7). In another cool-down run, when the cavity mode was blue shifted by 2.4 nm (see inset of Fig. 7), due to the changed environmental conditions, we have repeated the TCSPC in order to evaluate the change of $F_{\text{cav}}$. Now that both X and XX are detuned from M, they show a monoexponential decay with a lifetime of 3.1 and 5.0 ns for X and XX, respectively. Figure 7 shows the XX decay curve in this situation (green curve). The strong increase in the XX lifetime as its detuning from M is increased from 1.05 to 3.35 nm, clearly proves that at smaller detuning the coupling to the cavity mode is dominant and further corroborates our interpretation of the maps in Fig. 6.

In conclusion, we have presented a general framework for the interpretation of low-temperature SNOM of single QDs in PhC cavities. We have shown that the QD emission far-off-resonant with a PhC mode has a circular shape, allowing the identification of the QD position inside the PhC. In contrast, when QD and PhC cavity modes come close to resonance, the mode is strongly affecting the intensity map of QD lines. When the excitonic line is on the long-wavelength side of the mode, its map takes the shape of the mode due to the influence of the tip-induced shift. If the excitonic line is on the short-wavelength side, its map shows signature of suppressed emission due to the tip-induced wavelength shift. Despite the limited resolution in the mapping of single QD lines, near-field PL mapping of QDs in PhC cavities therefore provides detailed information on their spatial and spectral coupling due to local dielectric perturbation produced by the tip. Additionally, these experiments demonstrate the possibility of controlling the spontaneous emission from a QD by nanomanipulation of a near-field tip.

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