

Wafer-Scale Characterization of a Superconductor Integrated Circuit Fabrication Process, Using a Cryogenic Wafer Prober

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Abstract—Using a fully automated cryogenic wafer prober, we measured superconductor fabrication process control monitors and simple integrated circuits on 200-mm wafers at 4.4 K, including SQIF-based magnetic field sensors, SQUID-based circuits for measuring inductors, Nb/Al-AIO_x/Nb Josephson junctions, test structures for measuring critical current of superconducting wires and vias, resistors, etc., to demonstrate the feasibility of using the system for characterizing niobium superconducting devices and integrated circuits on a wafer scale. Data on the wafer-scale distributions of the residual magnetic field, junction tunnel resistance, energy gap, inductance of multiple Nb layers, and critical currents of interlayer vias are presented. A comparison with existing models is made. The wafers were fabricated in the SFQ5ee process, the fully planarized process with eight niobium layers and a layer of kinetic inductors, developed for superconductor electronics at MIT Lincoln Laboratory, Lexington, MA, USA. The cryogenic wafer prober was developed at HPD/FormFactor, Inc., Boulder, CO, USA.

Index Terms—Cryogenic wafer prober, SQUID, superconductor electronics, superconductor integrated circuit, wafer-scale testing.

I. INTRODUCTION

FABRICATION process development of advanced nodes of superconductor electronics has reached stages when very large scale integration (VLSI) is possible and integrated digital circuits with millions of Josephson junctions and other components can be fabricated with high yield [1]–[6]. At the VLSI level, individual testing of digital circuits and circuit components at 4 K for determining fabrication yield, process parameters, parameter statistics and spreads across 200 mm, detecting rare outliers, and studying repeatability from wafer to wafer and from run to run becomes extremely time-consuming and expensive. Full-wafer probing for process control monitoring and circuit

testing similar to the one used in the semiconductor industry is required to further advance superconductor electronics for classical and neuromorphic computing, digital signal processing, quantum optimization, and quantum computing. This requires a fully automated, cryogenic wafer prober operating at about 4 K and having very low levels of ambient magnetic fields and electromagnetic noise.

The interest in probing Josephson devices at cryogenic temperatures is long-standing, starting from the early development on 2-in wafers [7] to more recent work on probing resistance of a relatively large number of junctions on 150-mm wafers using a semiautomated probe station [8], and fully automated probing of junction resistance and critical current on a 1-cm chip scale [9].

The goals of this article are to demonstrate fully automatic testing of 200-mm wafers with superconductor integrated circuits and process control monitors (PCM) containing many tens of thousands of test structures, using a cryogenic wafer prober developed at FormFactor, Inc., Boulder, CO, USA [10], and to evaluate the wafer prober performance. The wafer fabrication was done at MIT Lincoln Laboratory (MIT LL), Lexington, MA, USA. The SFQ 5ee fabrication process used has eight Nb superconducting layers, Nb/Al-AIO_x/Nb Josephson junctions with Josephson critical current density, J_c of 100 $\mu\text{A}/\mu\text{m}^2$, a layer of Mo₂N kinetic inductors, and 2 Ω/sq thin-film molybdenum resistors [11], [12].

Each PCM group comprises sixteen 5 mm \times 5 mm chips printed 49 times on 200-mm wafers, using a 7 \times 7 square grid with 22 mm step size. Each PCM group has about two thousand test structures, which can be tested individually by contacting 100 $\mu\text{m} \times$ 100 μm contact pads with Nb/Pt/Au metallization, on 200- μm pitch. These test structures were designed for four-point measurements to allow for the extraction of all basic process parameters and statistics, e.g., properties of Josephson junctions, inductors, resistors, critical currents of Nb wires, and interlayer vias, most of which cannot be measured at room temperature.

II. WAFER PROBER

A. Design and Operation of the Cryogenic Wafer Prober

The cryogenic wafer prober is designed for testing 150 mm or 200 mm wafers at 4 K. The wafer is loaded using a standard

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Brooks wafer loading system [13] accepting standard 25-wafer cassettes. Wafer cassettes are loaded into the vacuum cassette elevator (VCE) that is evacuated before the wafer is picked up for loading into the cryogenic chamber. Wafers are picked from the VCE, prealigned, and then inserted directly onto the cryogenic chuck, while both the cryogenic chamber and the wafer handler are at high vacuum, better than 10^{-6} Torr. The wafer is held to the chuck surface using a mechanical clamp mechanism. The chuck is actuated with x , y , z , and Θ (rotation about the z -axis) degrees of freedom using ultrahigh precision motion stages that operate within the vacuum space at 300 K.

Electrical contacts to the wafer are made using a replaceable probe card. For the series of tests described here, a dc probe card with 20 flexible tungsten probes (two rows of 10) was used. The pin-to-pin spacing was $200\ \mu\text{m}$ and the two rows were separated by $200\ \mu\text{m}$ (unstaggered) to match the design of the PCM chips. The probe card is mounted on a kinematic holder allowing for the adjustment of tip (θ_x), tilt (θ_y), and z -height such that the probe pins may be planarized to the surface of the wafer. Slotted mounting holes in the probe card allow for rotation (θ_z) to align the probe pins to the axes of motion for the motion stages. The probe card holder is attached to the static cooling stage via flexible thermal links.

The chamber is wired with up to 500 twisted-pair dc wires and 56 RF coaxial lines with bandwidth up to 18 GHz. The cables are wired and heat is sunk from 300 K to 4 K, allowing the operator to configure the probe card with the desired array of I/O signals. RF signals are terminated with SMA connectors at 300 K and SMP connectors at 4 K. DC wires are twisted pairs and terminated in D-Sub 25 connectors at 300 K and micro-D 25 connectors at 4 K.

Suppression of the Earth's magnetic field by more than two orders of magnitude is achieved with two layers of mu-metal shielding. A magnetic field is applied in all three axes using an external set of coils mounted on a cage structure as seen in Fig. 1(a). A passive mu-metal shield is mounted within the 4 K radiation shield for the second stage. The magnetic field within the prober is measured at three points around the perimeter of the wafer, using single-axis fluxgate magnetometers [14].

A camera system with $<3\ \mu\text{m}$ resolution is used for imaging, navigation, automatic alignment routines, and precision die stepping. The camera is mounted on a three-axis positioning system (50-mm range) with a pneumatic lift stage for elevating the system when opening the probe chamber. The camera and positioning system are mounted on an ultrarigid frame that allows the camera arm to be rotated out of the way for easy access to the probe chamber during probe card installation and maintenance.

Cooling of the wafer chuck and the static radiation shields is achieved with liquid cryogenics. The system is pre-cooled with liquid nitrogen before it is purged and switched to liquid helium. A liquid helium system was implemented because it provides a short cooldown time of less than 8 h and wafer exchange time of about 10 min, both significantly shorter than with cryogen-free systems. Continuous liquid helium flow is used to cool the wafer chuck; separate cooling loops are used for the static and motion stages. The wafer on the chuck is in a vacuum; there



(a)



(b)

Fig. 1. (a) View of the full system, including cryogenics handling equipment rack, two load-lock chambers for loading cassettes with 200 mm wafer and 150 mm wafers, and coils for magnetic field canceling. (b) Close view inside the testing chamber during load sequence of a 200-mm wafer. Gray metal is mu-metal shielding.

is no liquid in the testing chamber in Fig. 1. Liquid helium consumption in operation is about 10 L/h. A binary gas analyzer monitors the helium purity of the exhaust gas and, if it meets a preset level, the exhaust may be diverted automatically to a helium reliquefaction plant. It is certainly possible to fabricate a refrigerant-free cryogenic wafer prober. Such wafer prober is in the development stages and results will be reported elsewhere.

To accommodate testing of 150 and 200 mm wafers, the wafer chuck is mounted to the probe chamber with a single fastener locking mechanism that allows the entire wafer chuck to be replaced with one of a different size. The room temperature vacuum wafer handling system is equipped with two VCEs and two aligners (one for each wafer size), so no setup is required when changing wafer sizes.

A wafer z heightmap is created after clamping to the chuck. Actual contact to the wafer is used to determine the contact height and a user-specified overdrive distance is an input to ensure solid electrical contact with the device contact pads. A minimum separation distance is also set to ensure that no lateral motion is allowed unless the prober pins are at a safe distance from the wafer.

The wafer prober software handles all of the automation routines (pump down, cooldown, wafer loading/unloading, alignment, and die-to-die stepping). A wafer map is created showing

the location of all testable dies. When an automated probing sequence is started, the prober moves to the first die and then sends a message to the user's test program that it is ready for measurement. The device is then tested, and a message is sent to the tester with a test/fail message and command to move to the next die or subdie if required. This sequence repeats until the entire wafer is tested. Die-to-die movement is typically less than 1 s. The pass/fail (or other binning criteria) is displayed in real-time on the wafer map to give the user a visual representation of the status of the wafer testing.

III. MEASUREMENTS

A. Data Collection Methodology

Electrical measurements were specified using a user-built MATLAB-based software "Measurement Manager" (MM). The software reads-in an Excel xlsx-formatted file that specifies the location of each test structure on the wafer, the test to perform, and additional test-specific input fields. The MM software was run from a laptop computer, and interfaced with the test equipment through Ethernet and USB-GPIB controller.

All electrical connections were made by automated control of a Keithley 708B switch matrix with low-offset relays. Voltage measurements were made by a Keithley 2182a nanovoltmeter, and Yokogawa GS200 current sources were used to supply all input currents.

Automation of the full testing procedure included switching, motion control, and electrical measurements. Multiple types of tests, including I - V measurements and SQUID- and SQIF modulation measurements were programmed in sequence via an xlsx-formatted specification sheet, and full-wafer testing was performed with minimal need for human intervention.

In conventional chip-scale testing, a wafer is firstly diced into individual $5\text{ mm} \times 5\text{ mm}$ chips, which are then wirebonded, loaded onto a test probe, and immersed in liquid helium for testing. Wafer dicing, cleaning, and chip picking alone account for several hours of overhead time caused by scheduling and execution, estimated at 4 h per wafer. Delays due to wafer queuing for dicing availability can increase this time to several days in practice. Wire-bonding carries similar overheads, on the order of 1 h per chip. Chip testing in a helium dunk probe is typically done in batches of 6 chips per load. Loading and cooldown takes about 15 min per 6 chips, although overheads due to testing in a dry cryostat are considerably higher. After cooldown, measurement time for a typical SQUID test structure is about 1 min.

Overall, conventional testing of 24 SQUID-based test circuits for extracting inductance of Nb layers at 22 different locations across a full wafer would require about 4 h of dicing, plus 22 h of wirebonding, plus 1 h of loading, and about 5 h of actual electrical testing, for a total of 32 h. In practice, the calendar time may extend to a week or more due to queuing.

For comparison, at wafer-scale testing, the loading is done once per wafer, with a cooldown time of about 10 min, the measurement time is identical (performed by the same hardware), and chip-to-chip movement is the only additional contributor, and can be neglected in this example, at approximately 1 s

per typical move. For the same 24 SQUID structures at 22 die locations, the total test time is approximately 5 h, with the bulk of this limited by the actual electrical testing time.

Hence, wafer-scale testing provides a dramatic reduction in the overhead time associated with chip-scale testing. Because of the overhead, the time savings with respect to the chip-level testing linearly increases with the number of chips requiring testing, whereas electric testing time in both methods is approximately the same.

B. Magnetic Field Uniformity on Wafer Scale

A low residual magnetic field, below about 100 nT, is a critical requirement for any system that is going to be used for testing superconductor digital electronics. For cryogenic test equipment intended to test diced chips, typically on the order of $1\text{ cm} \times 1\text{ cm}$, the requirement of low residual field is managed using a multilayer shield of high permeability metal such as cryoperm-10, annealed and assembled in a low ambient field. For larger systems, achieving a sufficient aspect ratio of the shields would greatly increase the overall system size, weight, and cost. Additionally, with locally varying magnetic elements such as the components within a motion stage, static cancellation of external fields is insufficient to manage local perturbations. With these considerations, the cryogenic wafer prober was designed to combine passive magnetic shields, as well as active cancellation from the set of external coils assembled on the cage structure visible in Fig. 1(a).

To evaluate the performance of the shielding system with respect to circuits under test, we measured SQIF magnetometers integrated into the test wafer as a component of the PCM chips. Each chip had 4 different nine-loop SQIFs to cover a wide range of possible magnetic fields. The SQIFs design was similar to the one described in [15]. The typical SQIF measurements (voltage-flux characteristics) are shown in Fig. 2(a), and the obtained wafermap of the z -component of magnetic field is shown in Fig. 2(b). There are easily detectable changes in the local magnetic field at the device under test location, which vary with the position of the wafer chuck. We note that the field was always measured at the same global location with respect to the prober's testing chamber, right below the tips of the probe card, but using SQIFs on different chips brought under the tips by the chuck movements. Hence, the wafermap in Fig. 2(b) does not represent the distribution of the field within the testing chamber (which was not measured) but reflects changes in the field caused by a relative position of the chuck with respect to the chamber walls.

With active compensation, all test sites showed a consistent offset field (between measured by the fluxgate magnetometers and the SQIFs) of about 80 nT. Higher fields were observed at the edge of the wafer when the center of the chuck is closer to walls of the test chamber and mu-metal shields in Fig. 1(b), particularly in the lower-left corner [see Fig. 2(b)]. The reasons for this need further investigation. Overall the measured on-wafer fields correlate with the system-level measurements using fluxgate magnetometers used by the prober's magnetic field cancellation system.

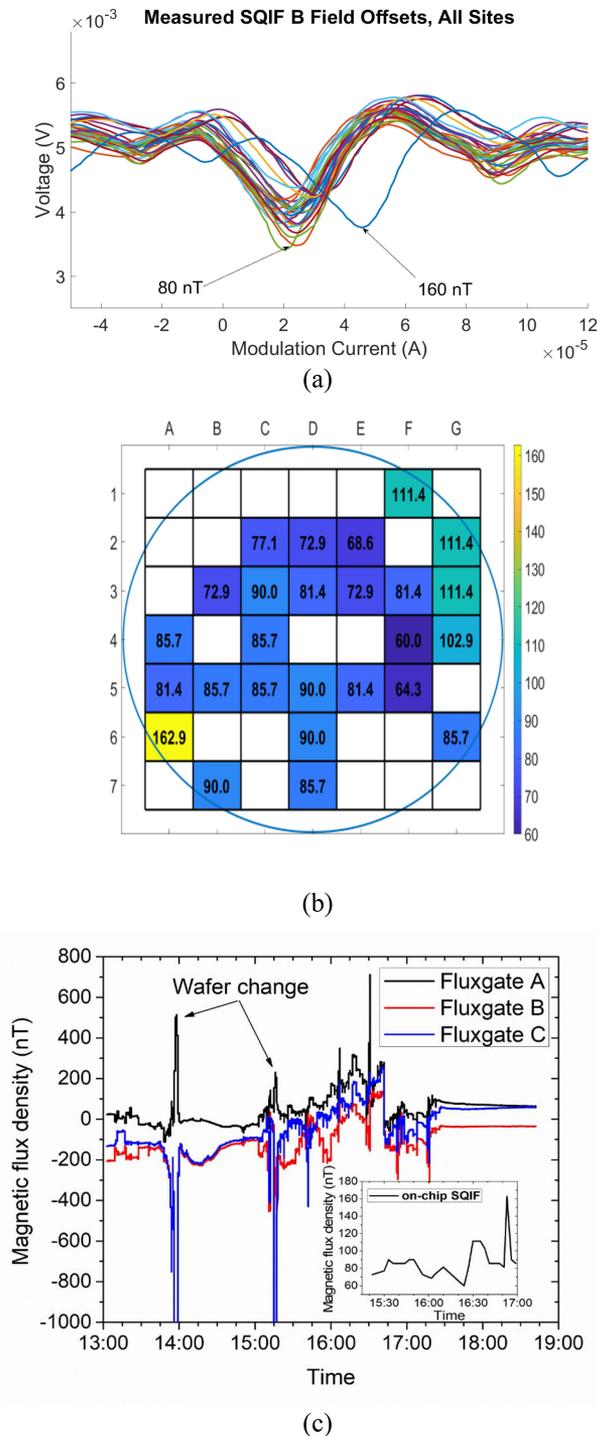


Fig. 2. (a) Flux-voltage characteristics of SQIF magnetometers measured cross-wafer. The majority of sites showed a consistent residual field of about 80 nT. On-chip SQIFs were modulated using modulation coils integrated with each SQIF. An offset of the main voltage minimum from the zero modulation current is the measure of the residual magnetic field at the SQIF location on the wafer. (b) Wafer map of the magnetic field measured by the SQIF magnetometers located on different chips. The field was measured at the same global location (under the probe card tips). Changes in the observed field are caused by changes in the relative position of the wafer chuck and the testing chamber walls. (c) Long-term stability of the magnetic field cancellation system was measured using three fluxgate sensors placed around the perimeter of the chuck and by z -axis SQIF magnetometer (inset). Spikes at 14:00 and 15:15 correspond to changing wafers on the cold chuck of the prober. The SFQ511 wafer with the SQIF sensors was loaded at 15:15.

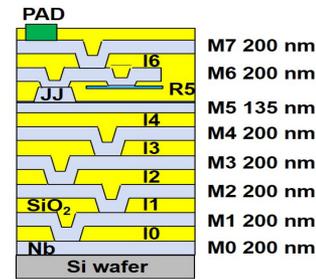


Fig. 3. Simplified cross-section of the SFQ5ee process used for wafer-scale characterization. The nominal thickness of all Nb layers is 200 nm, except the junction base electrode layer M5, which is 135 nm after light anodization of its surface used to encapsulate etched JJs into anodic oxide. The nominal thickness of interlayer dielectrics I0 through I4, and I6 is 200 nm; I5 is 280 nm. Josephson junctions are formed between Nb layer M5 and the counter electrode labeled JJ, using an *in situ* deposition and oxidation of a thin Al layer. After etching the JJs, this Al layer is converted into anodic oxide during the M5 anodization (shown as a black line on the M5 surface). Resistor layer R5 (40 nm thick) is used to form shunt and bias resistors. The cross-section shows a composite via from layer M0 to layer M4, which is referred to as via I0I1I2I3 and presents four staggered individual vias I0, I1, I2, and I3. A 40-nm superconducting layer of high kinetic inductance material Mo₂N below layer M0 is not shown for simplicity because it was not used in the measurements.

The stability of the field cancellation system during a 6-h period was tested and demonstrated in Fig. 2(c). After the cooldown, a one-time measurement of the magnetic field in the system was made by the fluxgate magnetometers to setup currents in the prober's compensation coils and cancel the measured field. These currents then were held for an extended period of time. Fig. 2(c) shows the z -component (perpendicular to the wafer surface) of magnetic field measured by three fluxgate sensors (shown by black, red, and blue curves) located at three points around the perimeter of the chuck at approximately 120° increments. SQIF measurements are shown in the Inset by the black curve. Spikes in the magnetic field at 14:00 and 15:15 correspond to loading wafers on the cold chuck, with the SQIF wafer (wafer # SFQ511) loaded at 15:15. These spikes in the fluxgate sensor output during the wafer load are likely caused by temperature gradients the sensor is experiencing during this time while going from 4 K to ~40 K and back to 4 K in minutes. The system magnetic environment became especially quiet after approximately 17:30, roughly corresponding to the end of the working hours, when all heavy machinery and equipment at the system location were switched OFF. No attempt was made to use the SQIF data to tune the magnetic cancellation system for optimal performance. Also, no active feedback was provided during the measurements. However, this all could be done in the future.

C. Wafer Fabrication and the SFQ5ee Process Details

We used wafers with superconductor circuits and PCMs fabricated in the SFQ5ee process developed for superconductor electronics at MIT Lincoln Laboratory. It is a planarized process with eight Nb layers and Nb/Al-AIO_x/Nb Josephson junctions [12]. A schematic cross-section of the process is shown in Fig. 3. Niobium layers are labeled M0, M1, etc. The Josephson junctions are formed between the layer M5 and the counter

TABLE I
EXPECTED INDUCTANCE VALUES AND DEVIATIONS OF THE MEASURED MEAN
VALUES FROM THE EXPECTED

Inductor	d_1	L_l (pH/ μ m)	$\frac{\Delta L_l}{L_l^{theor}}$	L_l (pH/ μ m)	$\frac{\Delta L_l}{L_l^{theor}}$
	(nm)	$w = 0.5 \mu\text{m}$	(%) ^a	$w = 0.7 \mu\text{m}$	(%)
M5aM4	200	0.478	4.6	0.383	6.0
M5bM7	680	0.645	-0.8	0.549	-2.6
M6aM4	615	0.569	1.0	0.490	1.4
M6bM7	200	0.427	-3.7	0.350	-3.7
M5aM4bM7	200	0.4472	1.5	0.3556	2.1
M6aM4bM7	615	0.3856	n/a	0.3118	n/a

^a $\Delta L_l = \langle L_l^{meas} \rangle - L_l^{theor}$, where $\langle L_l^{meas} \rangle$ is the measured wafer mean value of inductance per unit length, and L_l^{theor} is the expected value from (1) with the nominal process parameters. Penetration depth $\lambda = \lambda_1 = 90$ nm was used in (1) and (2).

electrode labeled JJ in Fig. 3. Resistor layer R5 is used to shunt Josephson junctions and form circuit resistors. A thin layer of high kinetic inductance material Mo₂N placed below Nb layer M0 is not shown and was not used in the measurements. Vias between Nb layers are formed by etching contact holes in the planarized SiO₂ interlayer dielectric and filling them with Nb of the next layer. Planarization of all-dielectric layers I0, I1, etc., is done by chemical mechanical polishing. Vias in dielectric layers are also labeled as I0, I1, etc. The thicknesses of all layers are given in Fig. 3. More process details can be found in [6] and [12] (see also [16], Table 1).

D. Testing Microstrip and Stripline Inductors

With the ambient field in the system well characterized, the system was used for the rapid evaluation of several important process parameters. Inductors are the second most important component, after Josephson junctions, for all superconductor electronic circuits. However, they are one of the very few circuit elements for which room-temperature measurements cannot provide input regarding parameter targeting or variation. There are nine superconducting layers in the SFQ5ee process (eight Nb layers shown in Fig. 3 and a layer of high kinetic inductors, below the layer M0, not shown in Fig. 3), allowing circuit designers to form a few dozen of different types of inductors comprising two superconducting layers (microstrip types) or three layers (striplines). Knowledge and control of linear inductance of multiple combinations of niobium layers and their dependence on the linewidth are essential for the stable fabrication process and circuit design. Therefore, the ability to measure large numbers of inductor structures at 4 K is a critical enabling capability.

To measure inductors, we used integrated circuits which require $N + 2$ contact pads to extract the inductance of N inductors from the periods of voltage-flux characteristics of differential SQUIDs fed by a common modulation current; the SQUID voltage is measured with respect to the common ground [17]. Results of the extensive chip-level measurements using this approach were given in [18] and [19]. A fragment of the typical layout of the inductance test circuit is presented in Fig. 4(a), showing an array of six SQUIDs, the dc bias, and magnetic flux bias rails.

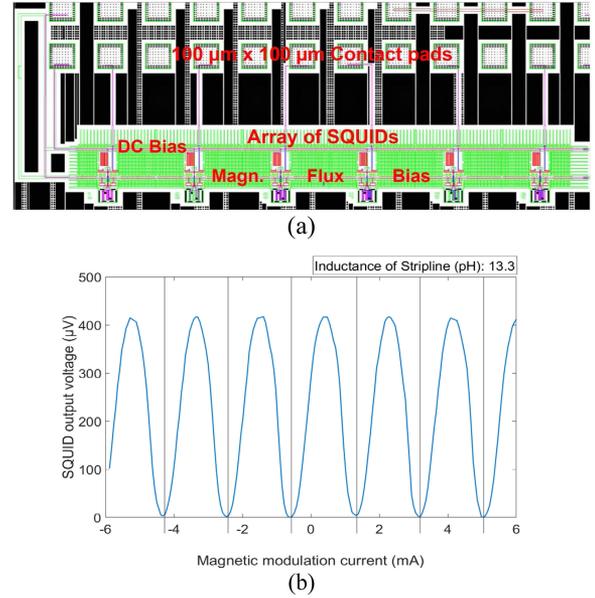


Fig. 4. (a) Layout of a six-SQUID array, a fragment of the integrated circuit used for inductance measurements, requiring $N + 2$ contact pads to measure the inductance of N inductors on PCM chips. Using the wafer probe, these circuits were measured across the wafer. (b) Typical voltage versus magnetic bias current characteristics of one of the SQUIDs (#12) in the integrated circuit, corresponding to a stripline inductor with signal wire formed on Nb layer M6 between two ground plane niobium layers M4 and M7, and stripline M6aM4bM.

The typical voltage-flux (magnetic bias current) characteristic of one of the SQUIDs (#12) in the integrated circuit is shown in Fig. 4(b). The V versus Φ characteristics measured on the prober allowed for accurate extraction of the modulation period and were very similar to those measured in the chip-level test set-up. We were mostly interested in inductors formed on the layers closest to the layer of Josephson junctions: microstrips with signal traces on layers M5 or M6 above M4 ground plane, labeled respectively, M5aM4 and M6aM4; striplines with signal traces on layers M5 or M6 above M4 and below M7 ground planes, respectively, M5aM4bM7 and M6aM4bM7 in the terminology of [18] and [19].

The wafermaps of the extracted inductance of different microstrip inductors with signal traces on the layers M5 and M6 for two linewidths $w = 0.50 \mu\text{m}$ and $0.70 \mu\text{m}$ are shown in Fig. 5. Because these linewidths are relatively large, significantly larger than the practical resolution limit of the process, the variation of inductance on the wafer is not related to the variation of the linewidth across the wafer but rather represents a cumulative result of the variation in the dielectric thickness d_1 (between the signal trace and the ground plane) and in the magnetic field penetration depth, λ . This follows from the expression for microstrip inductance per unit length derived in [19]

$$L_l = \frac{\mu\mu_0}{4\pi} \ln \left[1 + \frac{4(d_1 + \frac{t}{2} + \lambda)^2}{0.2235^2(w + t)^2} \right] + \frac{\mu_0\lambda_1^2}{wt} \quad (1)$$

where the first term is magnetic inductance and the second term is kinetic inductance, t is the signal trace thickness that is 135 nm for the M5 layer and 200 nm for all other layers, and μ and

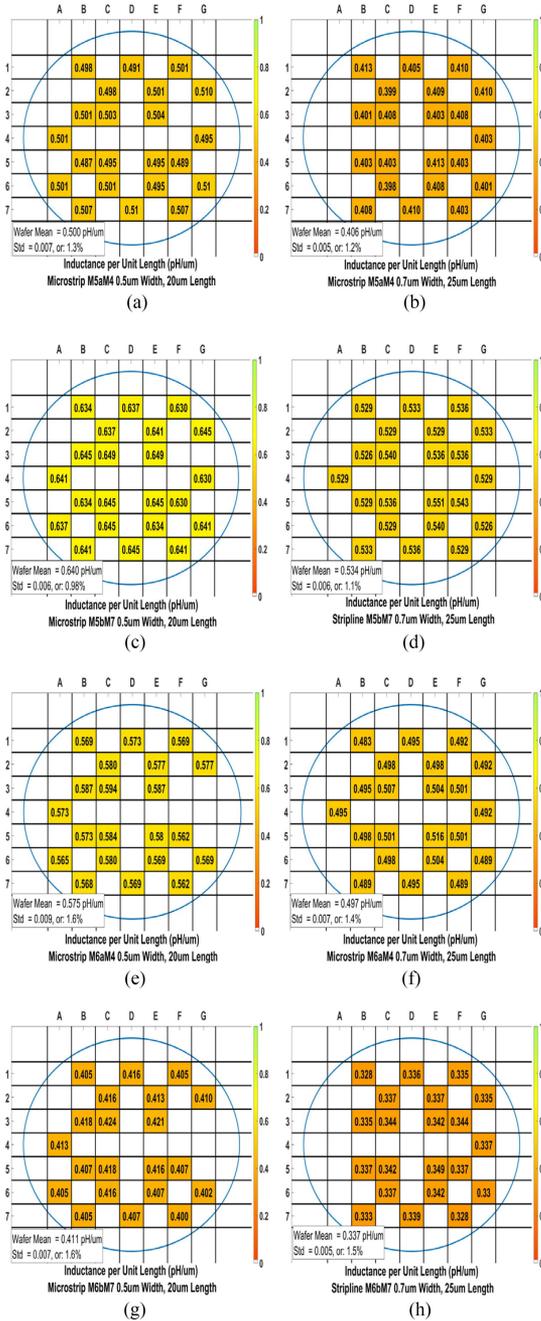


Fig. 5. Wafermaps of inductance per unit length of the microstrips with linewidths of $0.5 \mu\text{m}$ and $0.7 \mu\text{m}$, fabricated on 200-mm wafers in the SFQ5ee fabrication process: (a) and (b) M5aM4. (c) and (d) M5bM7. (e) and (f) M6aM4. (g) and (h) M6bM7. Niobium layers M4 and M7 are the ground planes. The wafer mean value and “standard deviation” (second moment of the distribution) are given. Collecting this amount of information using the chip-level testing would take at least several days as opposed to about 3 h of testing using the wafer prober.

μ_0 are the relative and vacuum permeability. We use the same penetration depth in Nb of the signal traces, λ_1 as in the ground planes, $\lambda = \lambda_1 = 90 \text{ nm}$ to be consistent with the data in [18] and [19].

The expected inductances per unit length L_1 from ([1]) are shown in Table I for the nominal thickness of layers in the

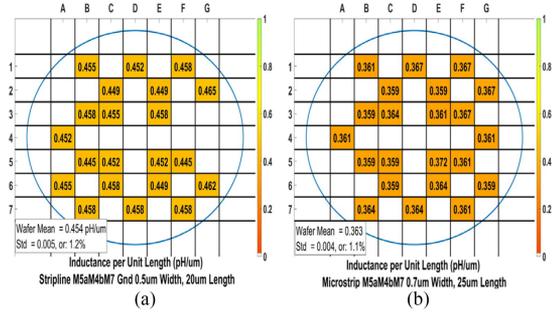


Fig. 6. Wafermaps of inductance per unit length of striplines M5 above M4 and below M7 ground planes (M5aM4bM7): (a) $w = 0.5 \mu\text{m}$; (b) $w = 0.7 \mu\text{m}$. The nominal distance between the ground planes, H is 1015 nm, the thickness of the M5 layer is 135 nm.

SFQ5ee process and $\lambda = 90 \text{ nm}$. The relative difference of the measured wafer-mean values $\langle L_l^{\text{meas}} \rangle$ in Fig. 5 and the theoretical values is also given in Table I for the two linewidths. The percent difference is a factor two smaller for inductors M6aM4 and M5bM7 with the target $d_1 > 600 \text{ nm}$ than for inductors M5aM4 and M6bM7 with $d_1 = 200 \text{ nm}$. This is easy to explain because the thick dielectric between M6 and M4 layers and between M5 and M7 layers is produced as a result of depositing and chemical-mechanical polishing of multiple layers of dielectric, whereas the thin, 200-nm dielectric is deposited and polished as a single layer. As a result of multiple independent depositions and polishing steps, the relative thickness deviation of the composite layers of dielectric from the target thickness is less than of the individual layers comprising them.

To assess the wafer-scale uniformity, we compared the average inductance of the four central dies (C3, C5, E3, E5) and the wafer periphery dies (B1, B7, D1, D7, F1, F7). For signal traces on the M5 layers, there is no statistical difference between the center of the wafer and the periphery. The inductance difference is less than 1%, which is lower than the error of the measurements, estimated as 1.5% in [18], and consistent with the very low standard deviations given in Fig. 5(a)–(d).

On the other hand, for signal traces on the M6 layer, there is a statistically significant difference of about 3.3% between the central dies and the dies at the periphery of the wafer. Regardless of the linewidth, the inductance in the central part of the wafer is higher. This wafer-scale variation of circuit inductors is similar to the one reported in [18] and [19] based on the chip-level measurements. Because of this systematic center-to-edge variation, the distribution of inductance values is not Gaussian and the given “standard deviation” simply represents the second moment of this distribution.

Wafermaps of the inductance per unit length of stripline inductors M5aM4bM7 are shown in Fig. 6. The inductance of the striplines is given in [19] by

$$L_l = \frac{\mu\mu_0}{4\pi} \ln \left(1 + \frac{\sin^2 \frac{\pi(d_1 + 0.5t + \lambda)}{(H + 2\lambda)}}{\sinh^2 \frac{\pi r_{\text{eq}}}{2(H + 2\lambda)}} \right) + \frac{\mu_0}{8\pi} + \frac{\mu_0 \lambda_1^2}{wt} \quad (2)$$

where r_{eq} is the equivalent radius of a cylindrical wire producing the same far-field as the rectangular strip, H is the distance

between the two ground planes (see [19], eq. (23)). In the SFQ5ee process, the nominal distance between M4 and M7 ground planes is 1015 nm [19]. For the M5 strips with $w = 0.5 \mu\text{m}$ and $0.7 \mu\text{m}$, the r_{eq} is, respectively, $0.1807 \mu\text{m}$ and $0.2337 \mu\text{m}$. The first two terms in (2) is magnetic inductance associated with the magnetic field in and around the signal wire and the third term is the kinetic inductance of the supercurrent. We see again a very good agreement between the measured and the expected inductance values in Table I and very uniform distribution of the stripline inductance across the wafer.

E. Superconducting Vias Between Nb Layers

Vias between superconducting layers are the second component for which no information about their critical current in the superconducting state can be obtained based on room-temperature characterization. The critical current of vias between all metal layers was measured on the cryogenic prober. The measurements were done using chains of 1848 vias connected in series. Since voltage is measured across the entire chain, this method measures the smallest critical current of vias in the chain, $I_{c,via}$ but does not characterize the distribution of the critical currents within the chain. This distribution is actually not important because this is a pass/fail test for the critical current which must exceed a certain level, typically 15 mA per square via with a size of 700 nm.

Six 1848-via chains per site were measured for each via type, and the mean critical current was calculated. The typical wafermaps for all types of vias show an asymmetric distribution of the mean critical current: the critical currents are the highest near the center of the wafer and in the bottom left part, decrease towards the edges, being the lowest near the right edge of the wafers (see Fig. 7). This distribution agrees and supplements the limited datasets collected previously by dicing and wire-bonding individual chips.

F. Josephson Junctions

Tunnel barrier resistance of Nb/Al-AIO_x/Nb junctions at room temperatures, R_{300} is directly related to the tunnel barrier resistance at cryogenic temperatures and the critical current of Josephson junctions via an $I_c R_N$ product, a parameter specific for the fabrication process, where I_c is the critical current and R_N is the normal-state resistance (above the critical temperature) of the Josephson junctions. This allows extracting the basic characteristics of JJs, e.g., resistance wafermaps and statistics on a very large number of JJs from room-temperature measurements using a conventional wafer prober (see [6] and [10]).

Measurements of JJs of different sizes on the cryogenic wafer prober allow us to obtain current–voltage (I – V) characteristics of the JJs to

- 1) determine the critical current I_c , normal state resistance R_N , $I_c R_N$ product, the Josephson critical current density J_c , and, also, the gap voltage $V_g = 2\Delta/e$, where Δ is the energy gap in the spectrum of single-particle excitations in superconductors [21] and e is the electron charge;
- 2) check the consistency of the R_{300}/R_N ratio across the wafer;

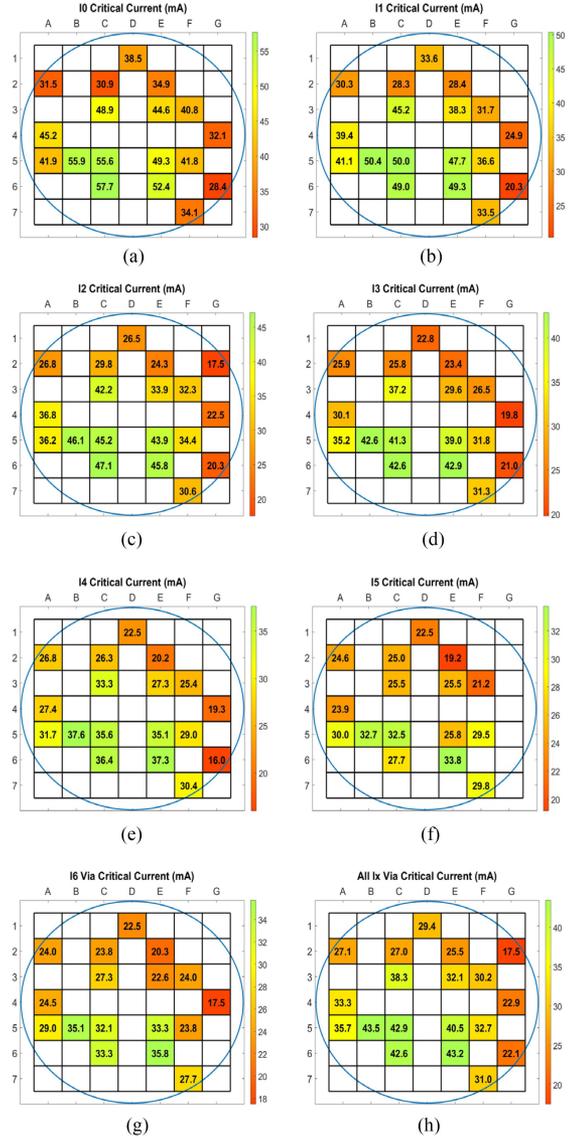


Fig. 7. (a) Wafermaps of the mean critical current of strings of 1848 vias, $0.7 \mu\text{m}$ square between different niobium layers in the SFQ5ee process: (a) between layers M0 and M1, called I0 vias, (b) between Nb layers M1 and M2, called I1, (c) between Nb layers M2 and M3, called I2, (d) between Nb layers M3 and M4, called I3, (e) between Nb layers M4 and M5, called I4, (f) between Nb layers M5 and M6, called I5, (g) between Nb layers M6 and M7, called I6, and (h) composite via from the first Nb layer M0 to the last niobium layer M7, called All Ix Via. 6 strings of 1848 vias of each type were measured at each location to calculate the mean value. Because different types of via chains have different locations on the PCM die, some of the structures on the edge dies on the right side of the wafer, e.g., G2, G4, and G6, fall outside of the fabrication area; they cannot be fabricated and measured.

- 3) measure the subgap resistance in superconducting state R_{sg} , an important characteristic of the tunnel barrier quality, which cannot be measured at 300 K.

In this article, to obtain the wafermaps, we measured six Josephson junctions of each of the four different sizes: 500 nm, 700 nm, 1000 nm, and 1400 nm in diameter. Fig. 8 shows I – V characteristics of JJs with diameters 1000 nm and 1400 nm, measured at 21 locations across the wafer. One can see that

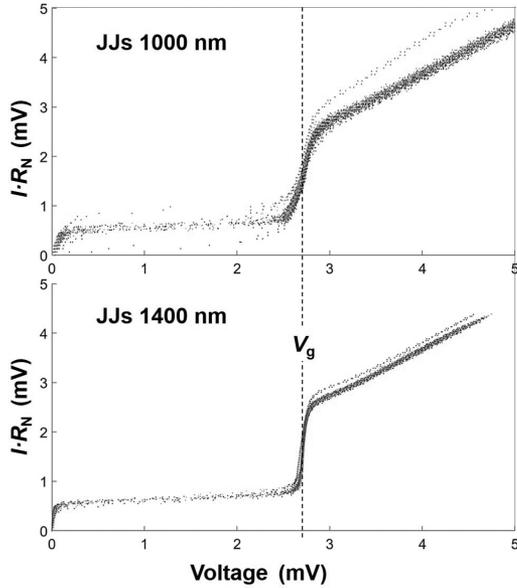


Fig. 8. Superimposed I - V characteristics of Josephson junctions measured at 21 locations across the 200 mm wafer: circular junctions with diameter 1000 nm (top panel) and 1400 nm (bottom panel). Six junctions of each size were measured at each location. Josephson critical current of the individual JJs was suppressed because of insufficient electromagnetic filtering in the test set-up.

the Josephson critical current of the individual junctions was significantly suppressed, apparently because the test set-up did not have sufficient electromagnetic filtering right at the entrance of wiring into the prober. This was not important for testing circuits for inductance extraction (see Fig. 4), which showed full critical currents because those chips include integrated on-chip filters. Hence, adding either cold filters to the wiring of the wafer prober cards or external filters would be advisable.

Wafermaps of the average normal state resistance determined as an average slope of I - V characteristics above 3.5 mV are shown in Fig. 9 for the four sizes of JJs. We can see that, independently of the JJ size, all wafermaps show the same pattern reflecting the wafer-scale properties of Nb/Al-AIO_x/Nb trilayers in the SFQ5ee fabrication process at MIT Lincoln Lab. The R_N of JJs is higher (the Josephson critical current density J_c is lower) in the central part of the wafer and reduces (J_c increases) going towards the edges of the wafer, demonstrating nearly radial symmetry. This trend is especially clearly seen for 1000-nm and 1400-nm JJs due to their small on-chip variation (standard deviation of about 1%), which does not mask the global wafer-scale variation of the trilayer properties. The typical center-to-edge change in R_N and J_c is about 9%. This is fully consistent with the wafermaps obtained in the room-temperature measurements of R_{300} [6], [11], [20].

Similar data for another wafer fabricated in a completely different fabrication process run are presented in Fig. 10 to characterize the run-to-run repeatability of resistance (and critical current density targeting) and reproducibility of the wafer-scale distribution of JJ properties. The process target resistance for the 700-nm diameter junctions is $40 \pm 4 \Omega$. The mean R_N values for the wafers in Figs. 9 and 10 are within $\pm 6\%$ from

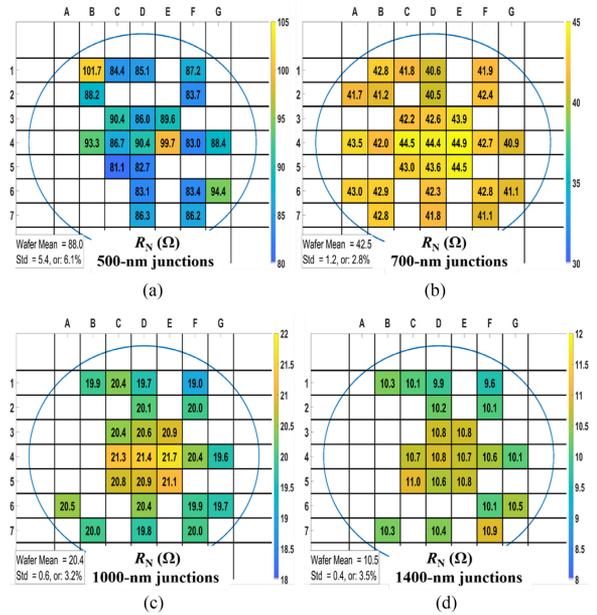


Fig. 9. Wafermaps of the normal-state resistance, R_N of circular Josephson junctions at 4.2 K measured on the 200-mm wafer (the same as in Fig. 8) from the slope of I - V characteristics above the gap voltage for JJs with diameters: (a) 500 nm, (b) 700 nm, (c) 1000 nm, and (d) 1400 nm. The data are the mean resistance of six JJs measured at each location. The shown standard deviations should be viewed simply as a second moment (normalized to the mean) of the wafer-scale (non-Gaussian) distribution of properties of Nb/Al-AIO_x/Nb trilayers on 200-mm wafers in the SFQ5ee fabrication process.

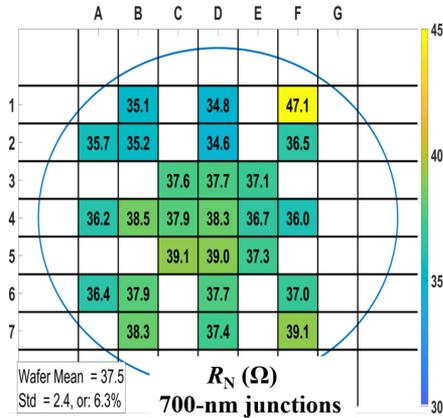


Fig. 10. Wafermap of the normal-state resistance R_N of 700-nm circular Josephson junctions at 4.2 K measured on a different wafer, SFQ511, fabricated in a different fabrication run than the wafer in Fig. 9. The wafermap is quite similar to the one in Fig. 9(b), indicating repeatability of Nb/Al-AIO_x/Nb trilayer properties from run to run of better than $\pm 10\%$. The wafer mean value is -6% from the target value of 40Ω , similar to the wafer in Fig. 9 which is $+6\%$ from the target; see text. The high resistance value at F1 locations is likely a result of poor contact.

the resistance target value and within the process specification for the J_c targeting of $\pm 10\%$ for $J_c = 100 \mu\text{A}/\mu\text{m}^2$.

Another important characteristic of the process uniformity is the gap voltage V_g of the Josephson tunnel junctions, which characterizes local properties of niobium base and counter electrodes of the junctions. Wafermaps of the gap voltage for circular

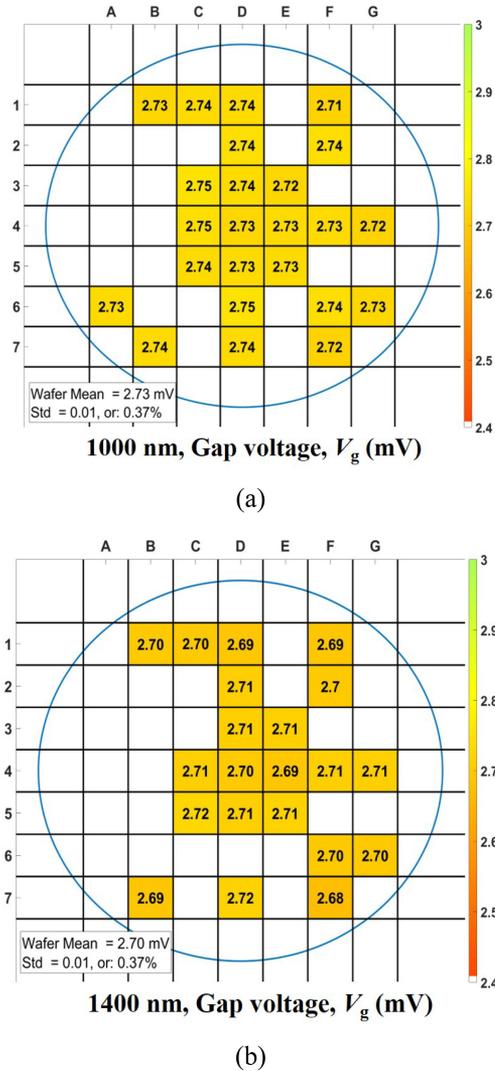


Fig. 11. Wafermaps of the gap voltage $V_g = 2\Delta/e$ in Nb/Al-AIO_x/Nb Josephson junctions with diameters (a) 1000 nm and (b) 1400 nm measured on the same wafer as in Fig. 9. There is an apparent reduction in the gap voltage in the junctions with large sizes with respect to the junctions with small sizes. This is a result of self-heating inside the junctions; see text.

Nb/Al-AIO_x/Nb junctions with diameters 1000 and 1400 nm are shown in Fig. 11 for the junctions on the same wafer as in Fig. 8. The gap voltage was taken as the voltage corresponding to the maximum of the derivative dI/dV of the I - V characteristics. We see a very good uniformity of V_g indicating uniformity of the superconducting gap in Nb electrodes of the junctions.

Not all dies produced test results, as can be seen from the wafermaps in Figs. 9–11 because an issue was discovered during the testing with the chuck control/alignment: the chuck axes would get out of alignment, which needed to get fixed via a firmware/lower-level software fix. In testing, this meant that, if the wafer was initially aligned at the top-left corner, then it would be out of alignment in the bottom-right part and vice-versa. Since we aligned the wafers at the top-right part, some of the 100 μm x 100 μm contact pads of test structures on the bottom left of the wafers got out of alignment during the testing and made poor

contact with the probe card. Once this was realized, we started to repeat testing multiple times to catch the missing die. However, this multiple testing was not done for the JJs. The problem has been later addressed by the wafer prober manufacturer.

IV. DISCUSSION

A. Josephson Junctions

All obtained distributions of the fabrication process parameters have nearly the same wafermaps showing elevated values in the central part of the wafer, decreasing values towards the wafer edge, and nearly radial symmetry. This is certainly caused by the processing equipment used which all have a similar distribution of plasma properties, mainly, a dc magnetron sputtering of niobium and high-density plasma etching of Nb and SiO₂ interlayer dielectric. For instance, the distribution of R_N in Figs. 9 and 10 and inverse to its distribution of J_c , since $J_c = \alpha V_g / (R_N A)$, was attributed in [6] to changes in the work function of niobium caused by the intrinsic stress distribution in Nb films; here A is the junction area, and α is a dimensionless parameter specific for the fabrication process. The film stress is slightly compressive in the central area of the wafers and increases to strongly compressive towards wafer edges due to a specific pattern of a magnetron sputtering gun with rotating magnets in Endura PVD system used for depositing Nb films.

Current–voltage (I - V) characteristics of the junctions fabricated in the SFQ5ee process were studied in [22]. On chips submerged in liquid helium ($T = 4.24$ K), the junctions show a gap voltage of 2.78 mV (see [22], Fig. 3). The smaller values of the V_g in Fig. 11 and the apparent reduction of V_g in larger JJs in Fig. 11(b) with respect to the smaller JJs in Fig. 11(a) are an artifact related to internal Joule heating inside the junctions. When a JJ switches from the superconducting state to the gap voltage, an influx of nonequilibrium quasiparticles with energy 2Δ starts. Their energy is eventually converted into Joule heating. Power dissipation $P = I V_g = \pi d^2 J_c V_g / 4$ increases with the junction diameter as d^2 . At the same time, the heat removal from the junction is proportional mainly to the effective area of Nb wires connecting the junction, i.e., $(d + 2s)l_{\text{spr}}$, because most of the heat conduction occurs along niobium wires due much higher thermal conductivity of Nb than of the surrounding amorphous SiO₂, where $s = 500$ nm is the surround of the JJs by Nb wiring used on this test chip and l_{spr} is the heat spreading length along Nb wires. As a result, the increase in internal temperature of the junctions is proportional to $d^2 / [(d + 2s)l_{\text{spr}}]$.

Because the energy gap decreases with increasing temperature, this self-heating reduces V_g and makes the I - V curves steeper, with a larger slope dI/dV . In the extreme cases of JJs with high current density (or very poor thermal conductivity) this slope may even become negative, i.e., the voltage decreases with increasing the bias current.

Obviously, the heat removal from the junctions is much better when the chip (or the wafer) is submerged in LHe than on the wafer chuck in a vacuum. Even with a perfect thermal contact of the wafer backside with the chuck surface (which can never happen due to wafer bow and surface imperfections), the thermal path from the junction to the chuck through the 750 μm thick

wafer with multiple layers of SiO₂ with a total thickness of about 3 μm is much longer than through the 0.4 μm thin oxide to the front surface to LHe. Hence, heating effects on the wafer prober should be more pronounced.

Junction internal temperature T_J after switching to the gap voltage can be estimated using the temperature dependence of the energy gap $\Delta(T)$ in the BSC theory [21]. The energy gap in Nb is known [23] to follow the strong coupling limit of the BCS theory [24] described by an expression

$$\frac{V_g(T)}{V_g(0)} = \tanh \left[\frac{T_c}{T} \frac{V_g(T)}{V_g(0)} \right]. \quad (3)$$

The measured value of Nb film critical temperature is $T_c = 9.1$ K, the independently determined zero temperature gap voltage in our junctions is $V_g(0) = 2.87$ mV; see also data in [23]. Then, using (3), the gap voltages of 2.73 mV and 2.7 mV in Fig. 11 correspond to the junction internal temperature T_J of, respectively, 4.7 K and 4.9 K at the dissipated power of, respectively, 0.214 μW and 0.420 μW inside 1000-nm and 1400-nm diameter junctions.

Thermal resistance between the junction and the wafer is $R_{th} = \Delta T/P$, where $\Delta T = T_J - T_{wafer}$ and T_{wafer} is the temperature of the wafer clamped to the chuck of the wafer prober. Then, using the above temperatures and heat powers, the wafer temperature during the measurements can be estimated as $T_{wafer} = 4.4$ K. At this temperature, if junction self-heating were negligible, i.e., $T_J = T_{wafer}$, the expected gap voltage from (3) should be 2.76 mV. This value was indeed observed in the smallest junctions used (500 nm in diameter) at dissipated power $P \approx 50$ nW, providing additional credence to our estimate of the wafer temperature on the chuck of the wafer prober.

B. Inductors

Radial distribution of inductance of Nb layer M6 in Fig. 5(e)–(h) was attributed in [18] to a slightly larger magnetic field penetration depth, λ in Nb film of the signal traces in the central part of the wafer than near the wafer edge. A 3% larger inductance would require $\lambda_1 \approx 97$ nm in (1).

The inductance enhancement appears to take place in about the same region where R_N of Josephson junctions is increased, but is less pronounced. In the microscopic theory of superconductivity, the penetration depth in superconductors with short mean free path of electrons is given by [26] and [27] as

$$\lambda(T) = \left(\frac{\hbar \rho}{\mu_0 \pi \Delta \tanh \frac{\Delta}{2k_B T}} \right)^{1/2} \quad (4)$$

where ρ is the normal state resistivity, and \hbar is the reduced Planck's constant. Hence, λ at 4.2 K and inductance of various structures should be larger in those parts of the wafer where resistivity of Nb films is higher than in other parts and/or where the energy gap is smaller.

According to the wafermaps in [6], the sheet resistance of Nb films at room temperature is higher in the central part of the wafer, indicating that the resistivity ρ is also higher because the thickness of the films does not substantially decrease radially.

At the same time, the wafermaps in Fig. 11 show that the energy gap in (4) does not depend on the location. Hence, the presented inductance wafermaps correlate with the sheet resistance wafermaps in [6] and both point to an increased value of the penetration depth in the central part of the wafer. In this respect, it would be interesting to obtain resistivity wafermaps of Nb films at low temperatures, e.g., at 10 K. Taking the measured value of Nb film resistivity at 10 K of about 5 μΩ cm and the mean energy gap from Fig. 11 of $2\Delta/e = 2.73$ mV, we get from (1) a value $\lambda(4.2 \text{ K}) = 80$ nm which reasonably agrees with the value of 90 nm extracted from the inductance measurements in [17]–[19].

C. Vias

The distribution of the critical current of vias in Fig. 7 apparently correlates with the distribution of the etch rate in the high-density plasma etching system used for SiO₂ etching. The lower etch rate of contact holes in SiO₂ near the wafer edge may lead to higher contact resistance between the bottom Nb layer and the next Nb layer deposited over the dielectric into the contact holes to form vias.

V. CONCLUSION

In this article we performed the first 200-mm wafer-scale testing of superconductor electronics wafers on a cryogenic wafer prober. The testing included all fabrication PCMs and small integrated circuits for inductance extraction. Using the gap voltage measurements on junctions with different sizes and different power dissipation, we estimated the wafer top surface temperature during the measurements as 4.4 K. This value is very close to liquid helium temperature and, thus, all the obtained results can be directly compared with chip-level testing done in LHe. The wafer prober testing revealed distributions of the process parameters (wafermaps) which previously were either unknown or known only qualitatively, and gives indispensable information for process engineers and circuit designers in the process. On the other hand, the data obtained on magnetic field and noise levels, alignment, testing speed, etc. should allow the equipment manufacturer to improve the prober characteristics and performance in future models.

The next and more challenging step should be the demonstration of wafer-scale testing of complex integrated circuits. We see the main challenges in removing heat from the circuits with substantial power dissipation, e.g., in bias resistors of the standard RSFQ circuits, as well as in providing sufficient suppression of electromagnetic noise. The heat removal is limited by the wafer-to-chuck (thermal SiO₂ oxide on the back side of the Si wafer to gold-plated copper of the chuck) thermal interface conductance. It can be improved slightly with increased wafer clamping force, reducing wafer bow and warp, gold plating the backside of the wafer, and removing thermal oxide from the backside of the wafer. For large power dissipation, it may be necessary to place the wafer on a carrier and use a thermal interface material.

The results of this article clearly demonstrate the advantages of the wafer-scale testing compared to the conventional chip-scale testing involving wafer dicing, individual chip packaging, and cryogenic testing in liquid helium. There is no doubt that full implementation of cryogenic wafer-scale probing in the superconductor fabs will dramatically help advance superconductor electronics for various applications from traditional sensors and microwave devices to advanced classical computing, to quantum optimization and quantum computing.

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