

1 Article

2 Enhanced Thermoelectric Conversion Efficiency of 3 CVD Graphene with Reduced Grain Sizes

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14 **Abstract:** The grain size of CVD (Chemical Vapor Deposition) graphene was controlled by changing
15 the precursor gas flow rates, operation temperature, and chamber pressure. Graphene of average
16 grain sizes of 4.1 μm , 2.2 μm , and 0.5 μm were synthesized in high quality and full coverage. The
17 possibility to tailor the thermoelectric conversion characteristics of graphene has been exhibited by
18 examining the grain size effect on the three elementary thermal and electrical properties of σ , S , and
19 k . Electrical conductivity (σ) and Seebeck coefficients (S) were measured in a vacuum for supported
20 graphene on SiO₂/Si FET (Field Effect Transistor) substrates so that the charge carrier density could
21 be changed by applying a gate voltage (V_G). Mobility (μ) values of 529~1042, 459~745, and 314~490
22 cm²/V·s for the three grain sizes of 4.1 μm , 2.2 μm , and 0.5 μm , respectively, were obtained from the
23 slopes of the measured σ vs. V_G graphs. The power factor (PF), the electrical portion of the
24 thermoelectric figure of merit (ZT), decreased by about one half as the grain size was decreased,
25 while the thermal conductivity (k) decreased by one quarter for the same grain decrease. Finally, the
26 resulting ZT increased more than two times when the grain size was reduced from 4.1 μm to 0.5
27 μm .

28 **Keywords:** Thermoelectric conversion efficiency; CVD graphene; Grain sizes; FET 4-point
29 measurements; Electrical conductivity; Seebeck coefficient.

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31 1. Introduction

32 The thermoelectric effect enables direct energy conversions between temperature and electric
33 voltage differences. When a temperature gradient is applied, the momentum difference between
34 charge carriers causes them to shift to one side, yielding voltage potential inside the materials. Since
35 it allows for the conversion of wasted heat into electrical energy, having control over the
36 thermoelectric effect would give rise to one of the most promising sources of renewable energy;
37 because the eco-friendly generation of electrical energy only requires a temperature difference to
38 reuse the wasted heat energy.

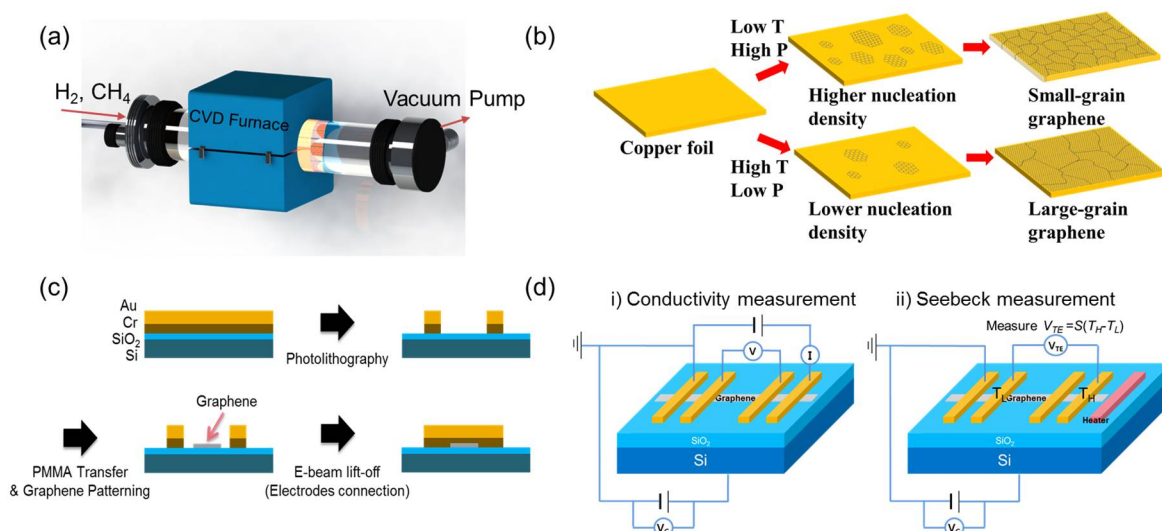
39 Graphene has high potential for becoming a thermoelectric material due to its high electrical
40 properties. Its high thermal conductivity, however, has prevented graphene from being used as a
41 thermoelectric material in reality. In order to enhance graphene's thermoelectric properties, many
42 ideas have been proposed aimed at lowering its thermal conductivity, including defect controlling
43 [1] and management of grain size [2,3]. Among the various proposals, controlling grain size seems to
44 be a highly viable way to handle the carriers' scattering of graphene because it does not add artificial
45 disorder, but only modifies the preexisting grain boundaries of CVD graphene. To the authors'

46 knowledge, thus far no study has attempted to characterize the figure of merit ($ZT = \frac{\sigma S^2 T}{k}$) for
 47 graphene with controlled grain sizes. In our previous study, we have experimentally verified a
 48 decrement of thermal conductivity by controlling the polycrystalline graphene domain sizes [2],
 49 which can lead to the possibility of ZT enhancement of CVD graphene.

50 In this paper, as there is still a need for examining the ZT values, we focus on measuring both
 51 the electrical conductivity (σ) and the Seebeck coefficients (S). Graphene was synthesized on Cu foil
 52 by using the LPCVD (Low Pressure Chemical Vapor Deposition) method, which allows for the
 53 control of the grain sizes, and then subsequently transferred onto a SiO₂/Si (450 nm/525 μ m) FET
 54 substrate. The electrical properties (σ and S) of graphene were measured using the four-point
 55 technique for three different grain sizes of 0.5 μ m, 2.2 μ m, and 4.1 μ m, while the charge carrier density
 56 was controlled by varying the gate voltage levels.

57 2. Materials and Methods

58 Graphene was synthesized from the CVD system by ScienTech Inc. (Figure 1a), where CH₄ was
 59 used as the carbon source and H₂ was used to dissociate H atoms upon their detachment from CH₄
 60 as well as to ensure a single layer by etching away any multiple layers of graphene. The 25 μ m-thick
 61 Cu foil with 99.999% purity (Alfa Aesar Inc.) was used as both a catalyst and substrate. The grain size
 62 of graphene was controlled by comprehensively changing the CH₄ to H₂ ratio, temperature (T), and
 63 pressure (P) of the chamber. Details of the synthesis conditions are shown in Table 1.



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65 **Figure 1.** (a) Schematic of CVD graphene synthesis system (b) Grain size control by synthesis
 66 temperature and pressure variations (c) Fabrication process diagram for the Field Effect Transistor
 67 (FET) substrate with electrode/graphene sample laid down (d) Schematic of the 4-point
 68 measurement layout

69 **Table 1.** CVD graphene synthesis conditions for three different grain sizes

Grain Size [μm]	4.1		2.2		0.5
Temperature [$^{\circ}$C]	1000		900		800
Pressure [Torr]	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	1.09
	0.19	0.30	0.37	1.08	
Gas flow rate ratio CH₄:H₂ [sccm:sccm]	30:5	60:5	80:5	200:100	200:100
Gas flow duration [min]	10	5	20	10	25

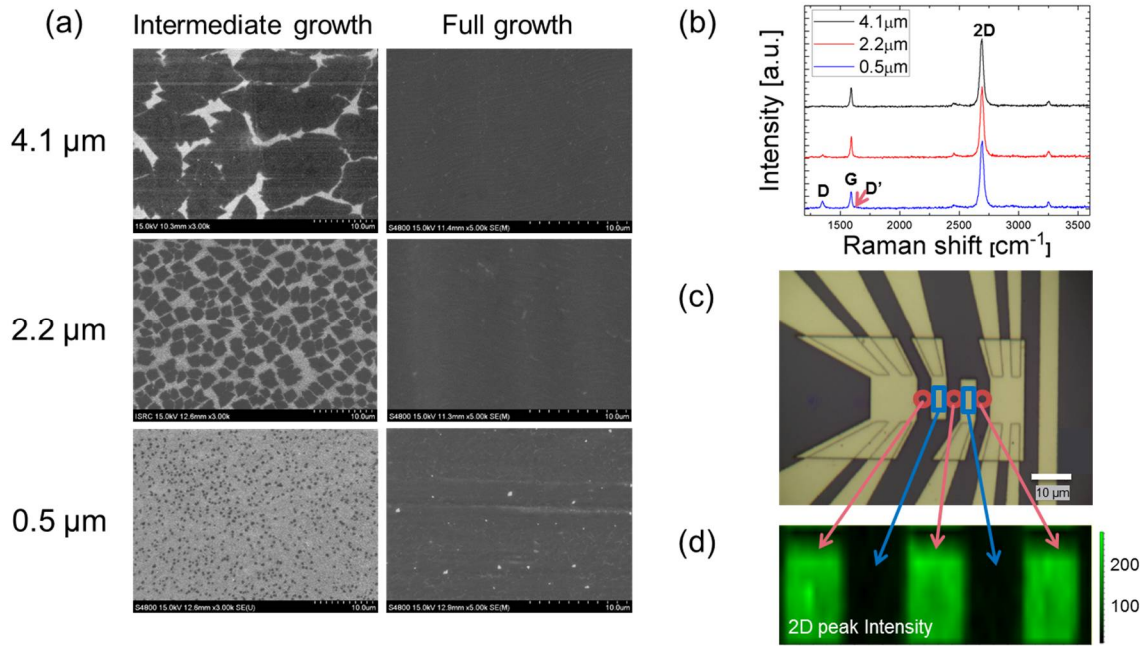
70 CVD graphene with smaller grain sizes was synthesized at low T and under high P to make the
71 nucleation density higher, whereas graphene with larger grain sizes was synthesized at high T and
72 low P to make the nucleation density lower, as depicted in Figure 1b. For both the 4.1 μm and 2.2 μm
73 graphene samples, graphene was synthesized following a two-step process: first, flow rates for CH_4
74 and H_2 were set relatively low so that graphene could grow slowly with enlarged grain sizes; second,
75 the gas flow rates were set high in order to supply enough of a carbon source to ensure the full
76 coverage of graphene. For the 0.5 μm graphene, it was synthesized in a single step with high gas flow
77 rates so that the graphene would grow rapidly while the grain size stayed small. This also enabled
78 full coverage of graphene.

79 The FET substrate was fabricated through lithography, as schematically shown in Figure 1c. It
80 was designed to measure electrical conductivity and Seebeck coefficients in the same substrate by
81 using a micro-heater and electrodes to detect electrical potentials. The micro-heater/electrodes were
82 made of 200 nm thick Au laid on a 20 nm thick Cr contact layer, which were patterned through
83 photolithography on a Si substrate with a thermally oxidized 450-nm thick SiO_2 layer on the top
84 surface. Graphene was patterned between the electrodes via photolithography, and the electrodes
85 were connected above the graphene through e-beam lithography.

86 The 4-point measurement (Figure 1d) is an electrical measuring technique that uses separate
87 pairs of current-carrying and voltage-sensing electrodes to make more accurate measurements, as
88 compared to the conventional two-point sensing. The key advantage of the 4-point method is that the
89 separation of current- and voltage-electrodes eliminates the errors caused by the wiring and contact
90 resistances.

91 After fabricating the FET substrates, graphene was transferred onto it using the well-established
92 PMMA method. CVD graphene is naturally p -doped upon the exposure to the oxygen and hydrogen
93 atoms in air. Since we wanted to observe the Dirac point, we needed to minimize the p -doping effect
94 by means of vacuum annealing. Annealing under excessively high temperature and/or overly long
95 duration is known to attach graphene to the substrate too strongly, so much so that it degrades the
96 quality of graphene [4-6]. Accordingly, we opted to anneal graphene only for 2 hours at 250 $^\circ\text{C}$ so that
97 the p -doping effect would be sufficiently reduced without degrading the graphene sample.

98 The SEM image was taken once during the intermediate growth of grains and again after the full
99 growth on the Cu foil (Figure 2a). The less dense seeding of graphene provides bigger graphene
100 islands that eventually grow into larger grains. Mild dry annealing was used to oxidize Cu foils along
101 the grain boundaries to identify grain sizes of fully grown graphene [2]. We conducted the digital
102 image processing to enhance the contrast of optical images, where the total graphene area was
103 divided by the total number of grains to determine the average grain sizes of the three tested samples:
104 4.1 μm , 2.2 μm , and 0.5 μm . The 2D and G peaks in the Raman spectra (Figure 2b) are located near
105 2700 and 1600 cm^{-1} , respectively, and the 2D/G peak ratio is greater than two for all three samples,
106 indicating that high quality single layer graphene was properly transferred onto the SiO_2/Si substrate
107 [7-11]. For the sample with the smallest grain size, the D peak starts to appear due to the enhanced
108 defects or atomic irregularities associated with the increased grain boundaries. The D/D' peak
109 intensity ratio of about 3.5 also implies that the D peak appearance can be attributed to the boundary
110 defects [12]. In Figure 2c, the microscopic image indicates the well-fabricated FET 4-point electrodes.
111 The 2D peak Raman mapping (Figure 2d) exhibits the uniform 2D peak intensity distribution in the
112 exposed graphene area marked in green (corresponding to the red circles in Figure 2c), whereas the
113 alternative areas marked in black (corresponding to the blue squares) do not show any intense 2D
114 peaks due to the Au electrodes' coverage over the graphene. The uniform 2D peak intensity at the
115 exposed graphene areas between the electrodes confirms the continuous and uniform-quality of the
116 tested graphene.



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Figure 2. (a) SEM images of graphene growth on Cu foil for three different grain sizes. (b) Raman spectra of graphene samples laid on the FET substrate. (c) Optical image of the 4-point electrodes with graphene sample integrated. (d) 2D peak Raman mapping of graphene to distinguish the exposed graphene regions (green) from the electrode-covered regions (black).

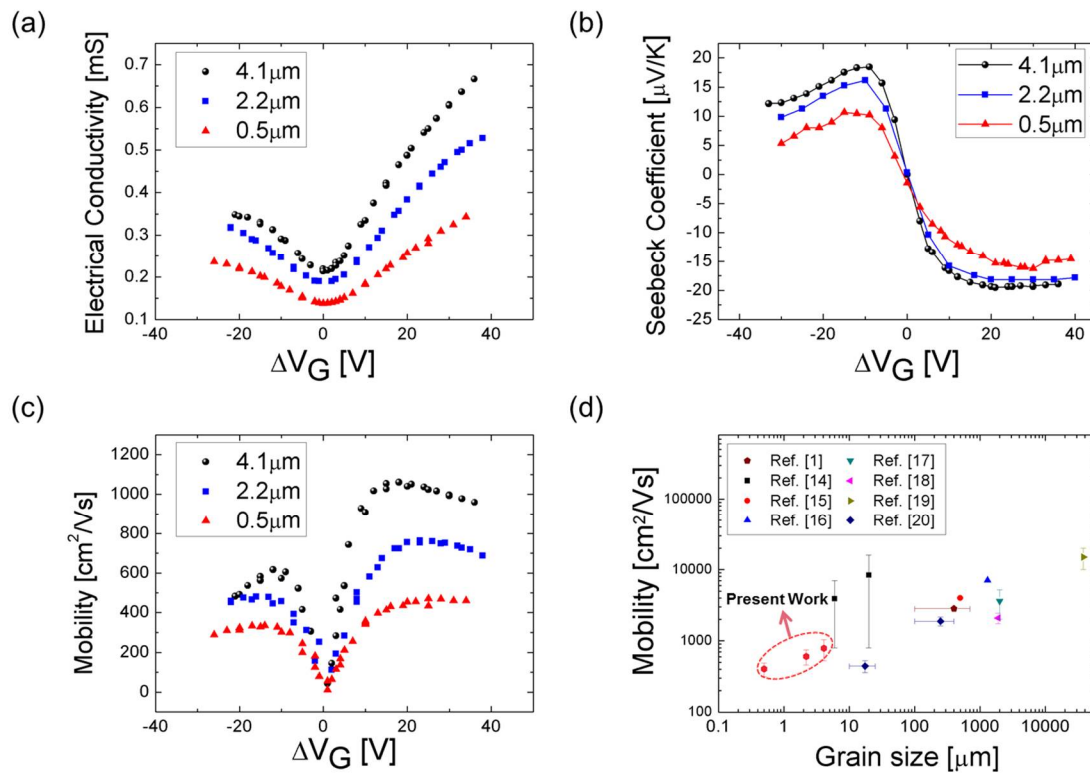
123 3. Results and Discussion

124 The measured electrical conductivities (σ) and Seebeck coefficients (S) are shown in Figures 3a
125 and 3b, respectively. Both graphs are plotted with respect to ΔV_G ($\equiv V_G - V_{G,Dirac}$, where V_G is the
126 gate voltage applied and $V_{G,Dirac}$ is the gate voltage at the Dirac point). The corresponding absolute
127 maximum values of the Seebeck coefficient were about 19.5 $\mu\text{V/K}$, 18.2 $\mu\text{V/K}$, and 16.2 $\mu\text{V/K}$ (Fig 3b),
128 respectively, in a positive ΔV_G range. The electrical mobility (μ) of graphene (Figure 3c) was then
129 determined from the slope of the electrical conductivity, which is given by:

$$\sigma(V_G) = \frac{W}{L} C_{SiO_2} \mu |V_G - V_{G,Dirac}| + \sigma_{Dirac} \quad (1)$$

130 where σ is the electrical conductivity, W and L are the width and the length of graphene, respectively,
131 C_{SiO_2} is the substrate's capacity, and μ is the electrical mobility [13]. Mobility values obtained as
132 functions of gate voltage were used to get the electron MFP (Mean Free Path) in Figure 4c. Effective
133 mobility values of graphene were measured to be 529~1042 $\text{cm}^2/\text{V}\cdot\text{s}$, 459~745 $\text{cm}^2/\text{V}\cdot\text{s}$, and 314~490
134 $\text{cm}^2/\text{V}\cdot\text{s}$ for the grain sizes of 4.1 μm , 2.2 μm , and 0.5 μm , respectively. Measured mobility data for
135 relatively larger grains by other research groups [1,14-20] are also shown in Figure 3d. A gradual
136 increase of the electrical mobility is shown with increasing grain sizes, at the ratio of one order-of-
137 magnitude increase of mobility to nearly four orders-of-magnitude increase of the grain size.

138 Previously published Seebeck coefficient data are summarized in Table 2 [1,21-28]. Although the
139 grain size effect on the Seebeck coefficients were not examined in these studies, the reported data
140 ranges from 10 to 100 $\mu\text{V/K}$, depending on different graphene sample preparations and post-
141 treatments. It is known that the residual carrier density induced by charged impurities has significant
142 effects on Seebeck coefficients near the Dirac point, thus consequently affecting the maximum values
143 of Seebeck coefficients [29]. This also implies that inherent charged impurities induced during the
144 fabrication process can result in variations of measured Seebeck coefficients. Our measured range of
145 Seebeck coefficients of 16~20 $\mu\text{V/K}$ is smaller than the 55 $\mu\text{V/K}$ measured for the case of the 300 μm
146 grain size [1], which uniquely specifies the grain size of their graphene samples.

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149 **Figure 3.** (a) Electrical conductivity for the three grain sizes of 4.1 μm , 2.2 μm , and 0.5 μm as functions
 150 of the gate voltage sweep. (b) Seebeck coefficient for the three grain sizes as functions of the gate
 151 voltage sweep. (c) Mobility for the three grain sizes as functions of the gate voltage. (d) Measured
 152 mobility data compared with published data for varied grain sizes.

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Table 2. Published list of Seebeck coefficients of CVD graphene

(Note: The grain size dependence of Seebeck coefficients is unavailable from any of these studies.)

Reference	Published year	Grain size	Seebeck Coefficient	Descriptions
Ref. [22]	2010	-	$\sim 9 \mu\text{V/K}$ @ 300 K	Linear dependence of S on T for $50 < T < 300\text{K}$
Ref. [23]	2011	-	$\sim 50 \mu\text{V/K}$ @ 500K $\sim 30 \mu\text{V/K}$ @ 300K	Sensitivity of S to the surface charge doping by exposure to the air, N_2O , and NH_3
Ref. [24]	2013	-	$\sim 10 \mu\text{V/K}$ @ 300K	Linear dependence of S and electrical conductivity on T for $75 < T < 300\text{K}$
Ref. [25]	2014	-	$\sim 20 \mu\text{V/K}$ @ 150K	Observation on the large fluctuation of S near the Dirac point associated with the disorder in graphene at high magnetic field & low temperature
Ref. [26]	2015	-	$\sim 100 \mu\text{V/K}$ @ 300K	N-type doping of CVD graphene by H_2 exposure verified by S measurement
Ref. [1]	2017	Average 300 μm (100-700)	$\sim 55 \mu\text{V/K}$ @ RT	ZT enhancement using O_2 plasma irradiation.($ZT/ZT_0 \sim 3$)
Ref. [28]	2018	-	$\sim 30 \mu\text{V/K}$ @ RT	Estimation of electrical conductivity and Seebeck of graphene sheet and graphene nanoribbon by experimental and theoretical approach

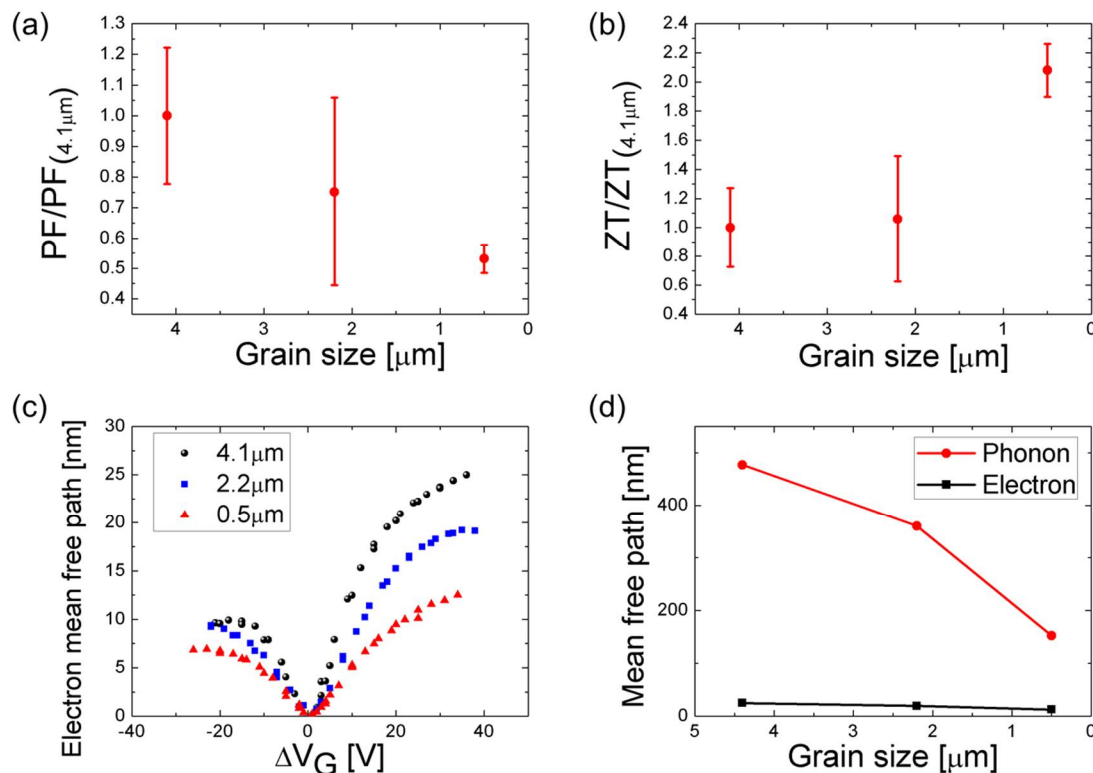
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The thermoelectric figure-of-merit ($ZT = \frac{\sigma S^2 T}{k}$) is determined from the presently measured σ , S , and T , together with the thermal conductivity k data measured for a similar configuration by our

160 group's previous report, as 2660, 1890, and 680 W/m·K for grain sizes 4.1 μm , 2.2 μm , and 0.5 μm ,
 161 respectively [2]. The normalized power factor ($\text{PF} = \sigma S^2 T$, Figure 4a) shows a slower decrease with
 162 decreasing grain size than the corresponding k decrease: the PF decreases to 1/2 while k decreases to
 163 1/4. Consequently, when the grain size is reduced from 4.1 μm to 0.5 μm , the ZT value (Figure 4b)
 164 increases by approximately two times. The corresponding ZT values are 0.55×10^{-4} , 0.58×10^{-4} , and
 165 1.13×10^{-4} at room temperature ($T = 300\text{K}$). The detrimental effect of the grain size on k becomes more
 166 significant when the grain size is comparable to the phonon mean-free-path (MFP) of about 800 nm
 167 [2]. Also, σ shows a predominantly decreasing pattern for grain sizes smaller than 800 nm [3]. In
 168 other words, the grain size effect on ZT is less pronounced when the grain sizes are 4.1 μm or 2.2 μm ,
 169 but shows a dramatic increase for the sub-micron grain size of 0.5 μm . The rms error bars with 95%
 170 confidence intervals account for the 5-10 measurement samples for each grain size.



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173 **Figure 4.** (a) Power Factor dependence on the grain sizes of graphene. (b) Gradually increasing ZT
 174 with decreasing grain sizes. (c) Electron mean free path as a function of gate voltage for the graphene
 175 of grain sizes 4.1 μm , 2.2 μm , and 0.5 μm . (d) Phonon and electron mean free path of graphene of
 176 grain sizes 4.1 μm , 2.2 μm , and 0.5 μm .
 177

178 It is well known that the electron scattering increment at the grain boundaries reduces the
 179 electrical transport and properties [14,20,30]. The electron MFP (Figure 4c) is given by [31,32], $l_{mfp} =$

180 $\left(\frac{h}{2e}\right)\mu\sqrt{\frac{n}{\pi}}$, where h is Planck's constant, e is the elementary charge, μ is the electrical mobility, and n is

181 the charge carrier density. The estimated electron MFPs converge to 24.9 nm, 19.1 nm, and 12.5 nm
 182 for the grain sizes of 4.1 μm , 2.2 μm , and the 0.5, respectively (Figure 4d). The decrements in the 2.2

183 μm and the 0.5 μm samples were 23.3% and 49.8%, respectively, relative to the 4.1 μm sample. The

184 electron MFPs were reported to be in the range from 10 to 100 nm for the charge carrier density range
 185 of $10^{12}\text{--}10^{13}\text{ cm}^{-2}$, which corresponds to the gate voltage range larger than 13 V [33].

186 In contrast, the phonon MFP is given by a Landauer-like approach [34,35], $k(l_G) =$

187 $G_{ball} \left[\frac{1}{l_G} + \frac{2}{\pi\lambda} \right]^{-1}$, where G_{ball} is the ballistic thermal conductance ($\sim 4.2 \times 10^9$ W/m²K at room
 188 temperature), l_G is the grain size, and λ is the phonon MFP. The estimated phonon MFP's are 476.9

189 nm, 360.1 nm, and 152.4 nm for the grain sizes of 4.1 μm , 2.2 μm and 0.5 μm , respectively (Figure 4d).

190 The decrements in the 2.1 μm and 0.5 μm samples were 24.5% and 68.0%, respectively, from the 4.1
191 μm sample. The larger decrements of the phonon MFPs than the electron MFPs shows consistency
192 with the idea that decreasing grain size is more effective for enhancing the scattering rate of phonons
193 than that of electrons. This is the possible reason why graphene of reduced grain sizes shows less
194 decrement for electrical properties than for thermal conductivity, and thus results in an increased ZT.

195 4. Conclusions

196 We investigated the dependence of the thermoelectric figure of merit, ZT, on the grain size of
197 CVD graphene. Electrical conductivity (σ) and Seebeck coefficients (S) were measured for three
198 different grain sizes: 4.1, 2.2, and 0.5 μm using a FET 4-point measurement technique. Since the
199 decrement of the corresponding thermal conductivity (k) was larger than the decrement of the PF,
200 more than two times the original ZT value was observed as the grain size was decreased from 4.1 μm
201 to 0.5 μm . We have shown the possibility that ZT can be tailored by altering the grain size of
202 graphene, which is a crucial factor in CVD graphene synthesis. Furthermore, this enhancement of the
203 thermoelectric properties opens the possibility of graphene to be considered as a more realistic
204 thermoelectric material.

205

206 **Author Contributions:** G.L. and K.D.K. carried out experiments including graphene synthesis, FET fabrication,
207 transfer, and measurements and wrote this paper; H.G.K., W.R.L., and W.M.L. contributed to CVD graphene
208 synthesis, and together with K.P., helped to transfer graphene onto the FET electrodes and developed the
209 electrical properties measurements system; H.G.K. and S.C. conducted work on the theoretical aspects of the
210 manuscript; P.L. and J.M. contributed to fabricate FET substrates; S.K. advised the experimental layouts and had
211 discussions to elaborate the experimental results.

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