

1 Article

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# Enhanced Thermoelectric Conversion Efficiency of

  
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## CVD Graphene with Reduced Grain Sizes

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13

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  $\mu\text{m}$ , 2.2  $\mu\text{m}$ , and 0.5  $\mu\text{m}$  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  $\sigma$ ,  $S$ , and  
19  $k$ . Electrical conductivity ( $\sigma$ ) and Seebeck coefficients ( $S$ ) were measured in a vacuum for supported  
20 graphene on  $\text{SiO}_2/\text{Si}$  FET (Field Effect Transistor) substrates so that the charge carrier density could  
21 be changed by applying a gate voltage ( $V_G$ ). Mobility ( $\mu$ ) values of 529~1042, 459~745, and 314~490  
22  $\text{cm}^2/\text{V}\cdot\text{s}$  for the three grain sizes of 4.1  $\mu\text{m}$ , 2.2  $\mu\text{m}$ , and 0.5  $\mu\text{m}$ , respectively, were obtained from the  
23 slopes of the measured  $\sigma$  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  $\mu\text{m}$  to 0.5  
27  $\mu\text{m}$ .28 **Keywords:** Thermoelectric conversion efficiency; CVD graphene; Grain sizes; FET 4-point  
29 measurements; Electrical conductivity; Seebeck coefficient.

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### 1. Introduction

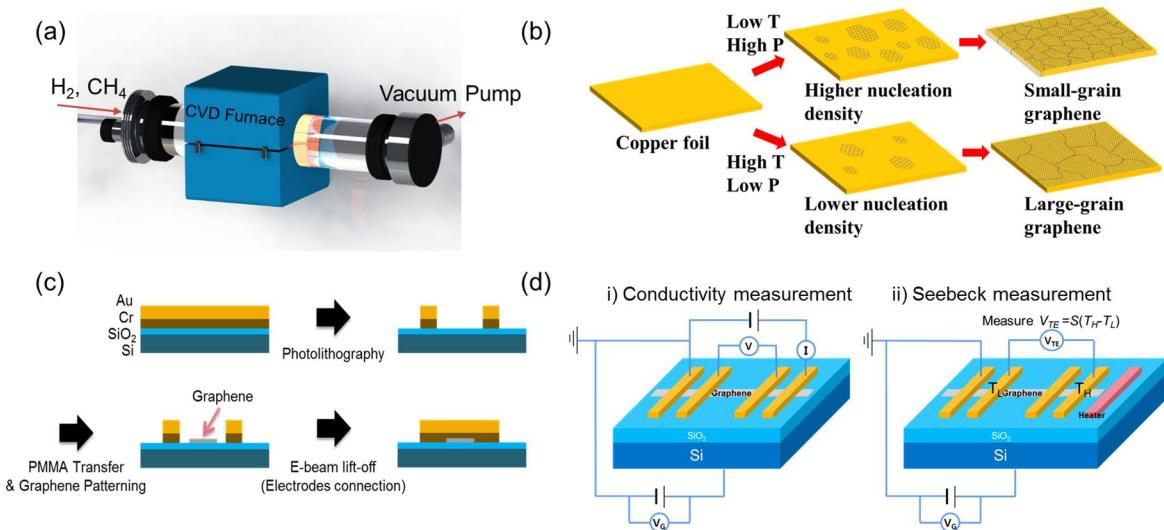
32 The thermoelectric effect enables direct energy conversions between temperature and electric  
33 voltage differences. When a temperature gradient is applied, the momentum difference between  
34 charge carriers causes them to shift to one side, yielding voltage potential inside the materials. Since  
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 ( $\sigma$ ) 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  $\text{SiO}_2/\text{Si}$  (450 nm/525  $\mu\text{m}$ ) FET  
 54 substrate. The electrical properties ( $\sigma$  and  $S$ ) of graphene were measured using the four-point  
 55 technique for three different grain sizes of 0.5  $\mu\text{m}$ , 2.2  $\mu\text{m}$ , and 4.1  $\mu\text{m}$ , 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  $\text{CH}_4$  was  
 59 used as the carbon source and  $\text{H}_2$  was used to dissociate H atoms upon their detachment from  $\text{CH}_4$   
 60 as well as to ensure a single layer by etching away any multiple layers of graphene. The 25  $\mu\text{m}$ -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  $\text{CH}_4$  to  $\text{H}_2$  ratio, temperature ( $T$ ), and  
 63 pressure ( $P$ ) of the chamber. Details of the synthesis conditions are shown in Table 1.



64

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 [ $\mu\text{m}$ ]	4.1		2.2		0.5
Temperature [ $^{\circ}\text{C}$ ]	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 $\text{CH}_4:\text{H}_2$ [sccm:sccm]	30:5	60:5	80:5	200:100	200:100
Gas flow duration [min]	10	5	20	10	25

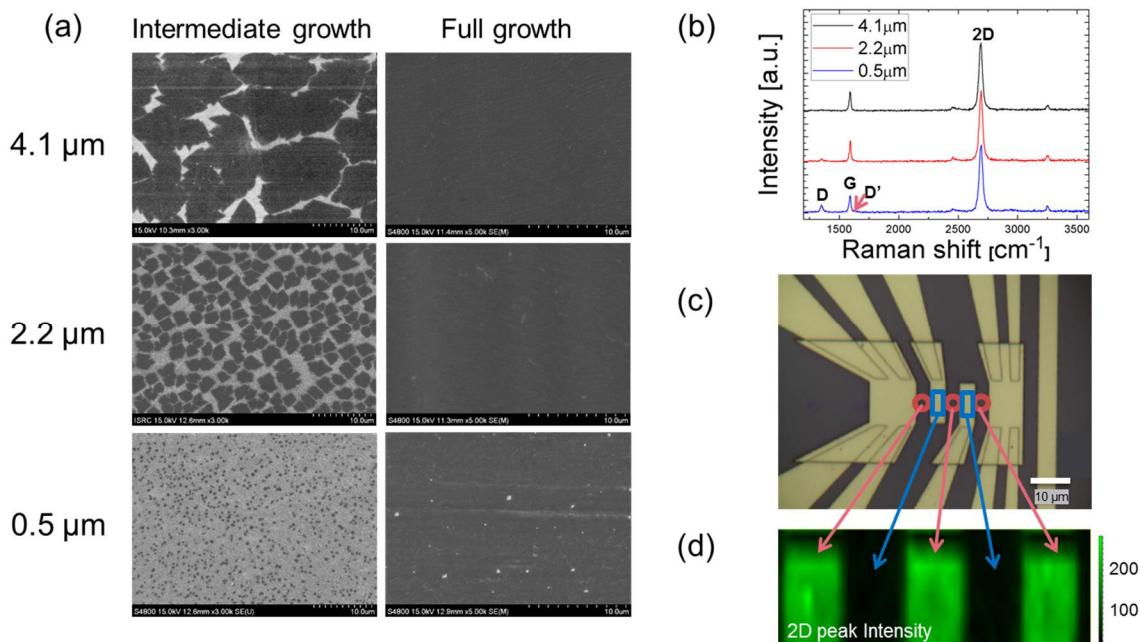
70 CVD graphene with smaller grain sizes was synthesized at low  $T$  and under high  $P$  to make the  
71 nucleation density higher, whereas graphene with larger grain sizes was synthesized at high  $T$  and  
72 low  $P$  to make the nucleation density lower, as depicted in Figure 1b. For both the 4.1  $\mu\text{m}$  and 2.2  $\mu\text{m}$   
73 graphene samples, graphene was synthesized following a two-step process: first, flow rates for  $\text{CH}_4$   
74 and  $\text{H}_2$  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  $\mu\text{m}$  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  $\text{SiO}_2$  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  $\mu\text{m}$ , 2.2  $\mu\text{m}$ , and 0.5  $\mu\text{m}$ . The 2D and G peaks in the Raman spectra (Figure 2b) are located near  
105 2700 and 1600  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ , 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  $\text{SiO}_2/\text{Si}$  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.



117  
 118  
 119 **Figure 2.** (a) SEM images of graphene growth on Cu foil for three different grain sizes. (b) Raman  
 120 spectra of graphene samples laid on the FET substrate. (c) Optical image of the 4-point electrodes  
 121 with graphene sample integrated. (d) 2D peak Raman mapping of graphene to distinguish the  
 122 exposed graphene regions (green) from the electrode-covered regions (black).

123 **3. Results and Discussion**

124 The measured electrical conductivities ( $\sigma$ ) and Seebeck coefficients ( $S$ ) are shown in Figures 3a  
 125 and 3b, respectively. Both graphs are plotted with respect to  $\Delta V_G$  ( $\equiv V_G - V_{G,Dirac}$ , 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  $\Delta V_G$  range. The electrical mobility ( $\mu$ ) 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  $\sigma$  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  $\mu$  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  $\mu\text{m}$ , 2.2  $\mu\text{m}$ , and 0.5  $\mu\text{m}$ , 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  $\mu\text{m}$   
 146 grain size [1], which uniquely specifies the grain size of their graphene samples.

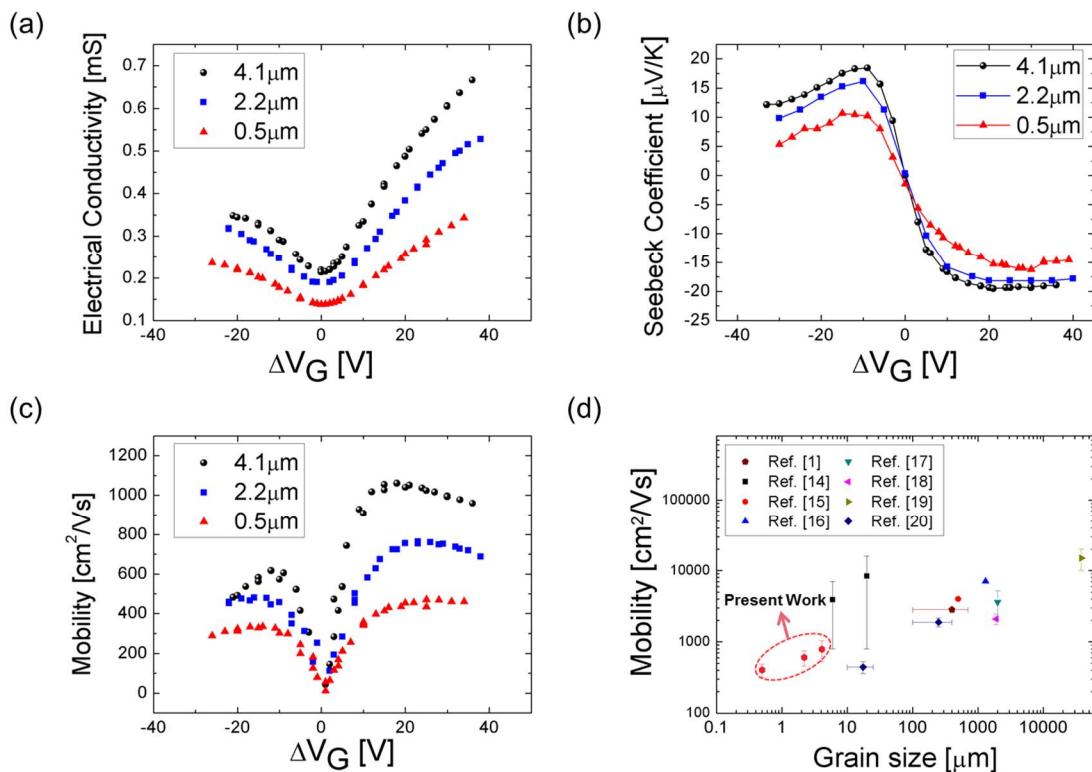


Figure 3. (a) Electrical conductivity for the three grain sizes of  $4.1\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ ,  $2.2\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ , and  $0.5\text{ }\mu\text{m}$  as functions of the gate voltage sweep. (b) Seebeck coefficient for the three grain sizes as functions of the gate voltage sweep. (c) Mobility for the three grain sizes as functions of the gate voltage. (d) Measured mobility data compared with published data for varied grain sizes.

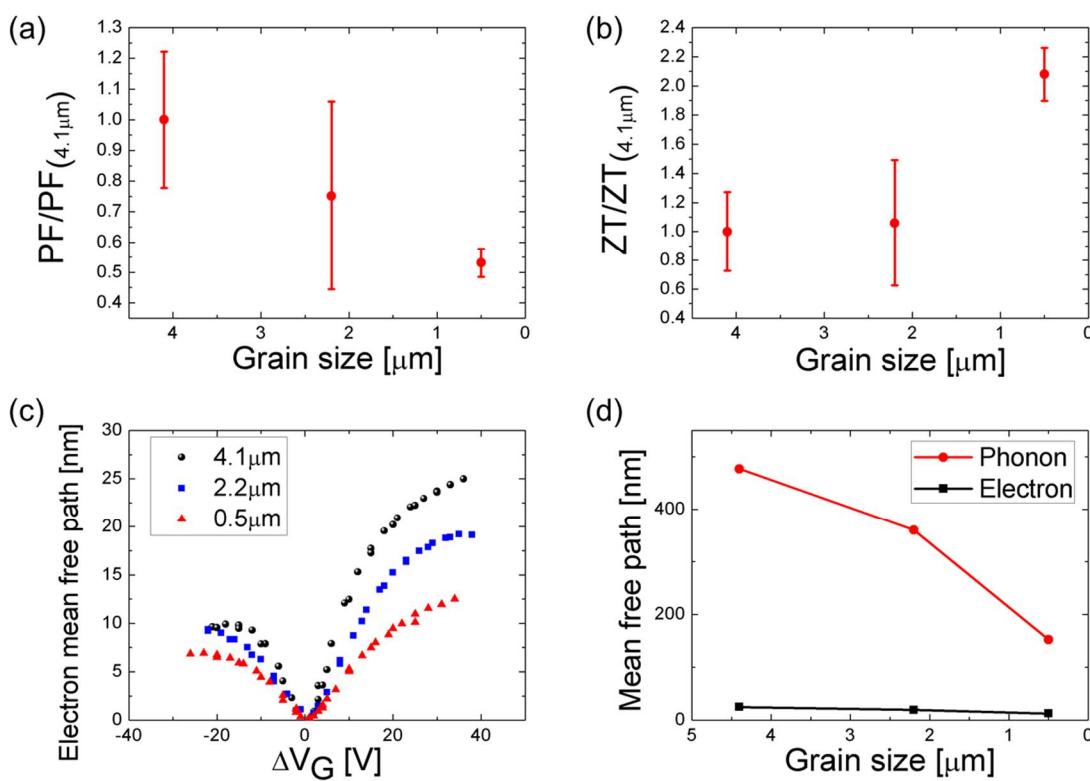
**Table 2.** Published list of Seebeck coefficients of CVD graphene

(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	-	$\sim 9\text{ }\mu\text{V/K}$ @ 300 K	Linear dependence of S on T for $50 < T < 300\text{ K}$
Ref. [23]	2011	-	$\sim 50\text{ }\mu\text{V/K}$ @ 500K $\sim 30\text{ }\mu\text{V/K}$ @ 300K	Sensitivity of S to the surface charge doping by exposure to the air, $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ , and $\text{NH}_3$
Ref. [24]	2013	-	$\sim 10\text{ }\mu\text{V/K}$ @ 300K	Linear dependence of S and electrical conductivity on T for $75 < T < 300\text{ K}$
Ref. [25]	2014	-	$\sim 20\text{ }\mu\text{V/K}$ @ 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	-	$\sim 100\text{ }\mu\text{V/K}$ @ 300K	N-type doping of CVD graphene by $\text{H}_2$ exposure verified by S measurement
Ref. [1]	2017	Average $300\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ (100-700)	$\sim 55\text{ }\mu\text{V/K}$ @ RT	ZT enhancement using $\text{O}_2$ plasma irradiation.( $\text{ZT}/\text{ZT}_0 \sim 3$ )
Ref. [28]	2018	-	$\sim 30\text{ }\mu\text{V/K}$ @ RT	Estimation of electrical conductivity and Seebeck of graphene sheet and graphene nanoribbon by experimental and theoretical approach

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

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



**Figure 4.** (a) Power Factor dependence on the grain sizes of graphene. (b) Gradually increasing ZT with decreasing grain sizes. (c) Electron mean free path as a function of gate voltage for the graphene of grain sizes 4.1  $\mu\text{m}$ , 2.2  $\mu\text{m}$ , and 0.5  $\mu\text{m}$ . (d) Phonon and electron mean free path of graphene of grain sizes 4.1  $\mu\text{m}$ , 2.2  $\mu\text{m}$ , and 0.5  $\mu\text{m}$ .

It is well known that the electron scattering increment at the grain boundaries reduces the electrical transport and properties [14,20,30]. The electron MFP (Figure 4c) is given by [31,32],  $l_{mfp} = \left(\frac{h}{2e}\right)\mu\sqrt{\frac{n}{\pi}}$ , where  $h$  is Planck's constant,  $e$  is the elementary charge,  $\mu$  is the electrical mobility, and  $n$  is the charge carrier density. The estimated electron MFPs converge to 24.9 nm, 19.1 nm, and 12.5 nm for the grain sizes of 4.1  $\mu\text{m}$ , 2.2  $\mu\text{m}$ , and the 0.5, respectively (Figure 4d). The decrements in the 2.2  $\mu\text{m}$  and the 0.5  $\mu\text{m}$  samples were 23.3% and 49.8%, respectively, relative to the 4.1  $\mu\text{m}$  sample. The electron MFPs were reported to be in the range from 10 to 100 nm for the charge carrier density range of  $10^{12}\text{--}10^{13}\text{ cm}^{-2}$ , which corresponds to the gate voltage range larger than 13 V [33].

In contrast, the phonon MFP is given by a Landauer-like approach [34,35],  $k(l_G) = G_{ball} \left[ \frac{1}{l_G} + \frac{2}{\pi\lambda} \right]^{-1}$ , where  $G_{ball}$  is the ballistic thermal conductance ( $\sim 4.2 \times 10^9 \text{ W/m}^2\text{K}$  at room temperature),  $l_G$  is the grain size, and  $\lambda$  is the phonon MFP. The estimated phonon MFP's are 476.9 nm, 360.1 nm, and 152.4 nm for the grain sizes of 4.1  $\mu\text{m}$ , 2.2  $\mu\text{m}$  and 0.5  $\mu\text{m}$ , respectively (Figure 4d).

190 The decrements in the 2.1  $\mu\text{m}$  and 0.5  $\mu\text{m}$  samples were 24.5% and 68.0%, respectively, from the 4.1  
191  $\mu\text{m}$  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 ( $\sigma$ ) and Seebeck coefficients ( $S$ ) were measured for three  
198 different grain sizes: 4.1, 2.2, and 0.5  $\mu\text{m}$  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  $\mu\text{m}$   
201 to 0.5  $\mu\text{m}$ . 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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214 **Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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