

**Thermal stability of a magnetic domain wall in nanowires**S. Fukami,<sup>1,2,\*</sup> J. Ieda,<sup>3</sup> and H. Ohno<sup>1,2,4,5</sup><sup>1</sup>*Center for Spintronics Integrated Systems, Tohoku University, 2-1-1 Katahira, Aoba, Sendai 980-8577, Japan*<sup>2</sup>*Center for Innovative Integrated Electronic Systems, Tohoku University, 468-1 Aramaki Aza Aoba, Aoba, Sendai 980-0845, Japan*<sup>3</sup>*Advanced Science Research Center, Japan Atomic Energy Agency, Tokai, Ibaraki 319-1195, Japan*<sup>4</sup>*Laboratory for Nanoelectronics and Spintronics, Research Institute of Electrical Communication, Tohoku University, 2-1-1 Katahira, Aoba, Sendai 980-8577, Japan*<sup>5</sup>*WPI Advanced Institute for Materials Research, Tohoku University, 2-1-1 Katahira, Aoba, Sendai 980-8577, Japan*

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We study the thermal stability of a magnetic domain wall pinned in nanowires with various widths and thicknesses made of Co/Ni multilayers and analyze the effective volume that governs the thermal stability. We find that, above a critical wire width, the domain wall depinning is initiated by a subvolume excitation and that the critical width is dependent on the wire thickness. The obtained findings are supported by the distribution of critical current density for domain wall depinning and are qualitatively described by an analytical model in which the balance between the Zeeman energy and domain wall elastic energy is considered. We also show a different behavior between the device size dependence of the thermal stability and that of critical current, leading to an enhancement of domain wall motion efficiency with decreasing the device size.

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**I. INTRODUCTION**

Ferromagnets are used for their nonvolatility, i.e., an ability to retain the magnetization direction against external disturbance without a power supply, with which one can design nonvolatile random access memories and logic devices as well as hard disk drives [1,2]. The nonvolatility of a magnetic device is characterized by an energy barrier  $E$  between two stable configurations and is often measured in units of  $k_B T$  as the thermal stability factor  $E/k_B T$ , where  $k_B$  is the Boltzmann constant and  $T$  the absolute temperature; an  $E/k_B T$  of 40 is required to ensure 10 years' retention of one bit and the required value increases to about 70 for large-scale memories [3]. For ferromagnetic elements, the  $E$  is generally proportional to the product of saturation magnetization  $M_S$ , a critical magnetic field  $H_C$ , and a volume  $V$ . Consequently, when one reduces the element dimension in order to enhance the areal density and performances such as operation power and speed, the  $E/k_B T$  degrades because of the decrease in  $V$ . It has also been shown that there is a length scale for nucleation reversal above which exchange stiffness and the thickness of the material governs  $E$ , particularly in the case of perpendicular-easy-axis magnetic tunnel junction (MTJ) devices having a diameter of more than 30–40 nm [4,5]. In this context, it is of great interest, from not only fundamental but also technological points of view, to clarify the factor governing  $E$  and its dependence on the thickness and lateral size down to deep sub-100 nm. The thermal stability of a magnetic domain wall (DW) formed in nanowire is also characterized by the  $E/k_B T$ , which, in this case, represents how stable the DW can stay at a certain position, or how easily the DW is depinned from a pinning site under thermal fluctuation. This is not only a general problem in condensed matter and statistical physics, but it is also an issue of importance for applications to current-induced DW-motion [6] devices, which have been

proposed and have gathered considerable interest [7–9]. The DW depinning induced by electric current [10–15] or thermal fluctuation [16–21] has been studied, and  $E$  for depinning with adiabatic spin-transfer torque generated by the spin-polarized current has been found to be different from that with thermal fluctuation [19,20]. However, physics and the nature of the  $E/k_B T$  involved in the DW motion and its scaling relation with respect to the device size and thickness have not been elucidated. In particular, while a few studies have been carried out to characterize thermally assisted DW depinning using continuous films or micrometer-sized wires [16–18,21–26],  $E/k_B T$  at the nanoscale dimension with various thicknesses along with the current-induced DW-motion properties relevant for nonvolatile devices has not been clarified.

In this study we investigate the thermal stability of a DW formed at an artificially prepared pinning site in nanometer-sized wires with various widths and thicknesses in order to address the physics that governs the  $E/k_B T$ . In addition to thermal stability, we evaluate the width and thickness dependence of the critical current density  $J_C$  to drive the DW and discuss its relation with the  $E/k_B T$ .

**II. EXPERIMENTS**

Co/Ni multilayers with a perpendicular magnetic easy axis are used throughout this work, in which a well-defined DW motion driven by an adiabatic spin-transfer torque has been observed [12,15,19,20]. The films are deposited by dc-magnetron sputtering onto high-resistivity 3-inch Si wafers. The stack structure is, from the substrate side, Ta(3 nm)/Pt(2 nm)/[Co(0.3 nm)/Ni(0.6 nm)]<sub>*N*</sub>/Co(0.3 nm)/Pt(1.5 nm)/Ta(3 nm). The stacking number of the Co/Ni bilayer  $N$  is varied from 2 to 6, corresponding to a magnetic layer thickness  $t_{\text{mag}}$  from 2.1 to 5.7 nm. From measurements of the magnetization hysteresis loop along the out-of-plane and in-plane directions, the  $M_S$  and effective perpendicular anisotropy energy density  $K_{\text{eff}}$  are found to decrease from 0.97 to 0.94 T and from 0.26 to 0.14 MJ/m<sup>3</sup>, respectively, as

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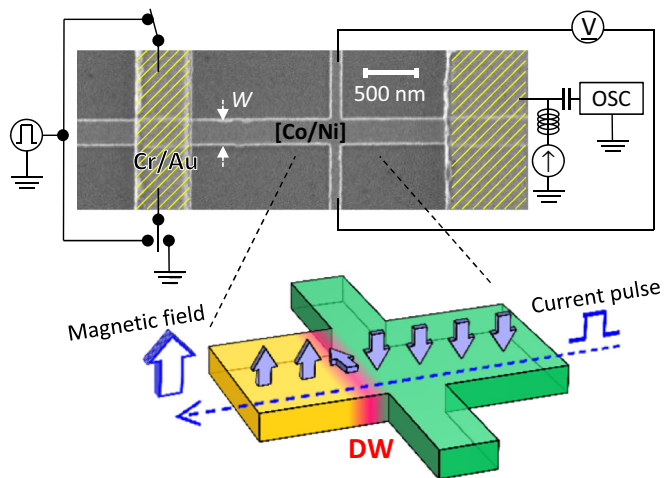


FIG. 1. (Color online) Scanning electron micrograph and schematic illustration of a fabricated device with measurement circuit. DW is prepared at the Hall cross, and current pulses or external fields are applied. The anomalous Hall effect is used to detect whether the DW is moved across the Hall cross.

$N$  increases from 2 to 6. The deposited films are patterned into nanowires with a pair of Hall probes by electron-beam lithography and Ar ion milling, on which Cr/Au electrodes are formed by electron-beam lithography and liftoff. The nominal widths  $W$  of fabricated nanowires in which DW moves are 20, 30, 40, 60, 80, 120, 160, and 240 nm, and those of the Hall probe  $W_H$ , are designed to be 20, 20, 20, 30, 40, 60, 80, and 120 nm, respectively. The resistance of wires shows that the width of fabricated wires is equal to the nominal ones within  $\pm 3.3\%$ . The total number of devices fabricated on a wafer is 960; 120 devices for each  $W$ . In Fig. 1, a scanning electron micrograph of a fabricated device with  $W = 240$  nm is shown together with the measurement circuit. To evaluate  $E/k_B T$  and  $J_C$ , we first prepare a DW at the Hall cross (initialization) and then apply dc magnetic fields or current pulses, as shown in the schematic illustration in Fig. 1 [15]. The anomalous Hall resistance  $R_H$  is measured to examine the DW depinning across the Hall cross with a dc current density of less than  $5 \times 10^{10}$  A/m<sup>2</sup>. Note here that  $R_H$  is found to be independent of  $W$ , indicating that  $M_S$  is independent of  $W$  in the studied range.

### III. RESULTS

#### A. Current-induced DW motion

Before evaluating the thermal stability, we first characterize the properties of the DW motion of fabricated samples induced by current pulses. The measurement sequence is depicted in Fig. 2(a). We apply 20-ns pulsed currents with various amplitudes  $I$  to the nanowires followed by subsequent measurement of  $R_H$ . Prior to every pulse application, the sample is initialized. 80 devices are measured for each  $W$ . Figures 2(b) and 2(c) show examples of measured  $R_H$  versus current density  $J$  for the 80 devices with  $W = 40$  nm and  $N = 3$  and 6, respectively. Here,  $J$  denotes the current density flowing in the Co/Ni multilayer, which is calculated from the

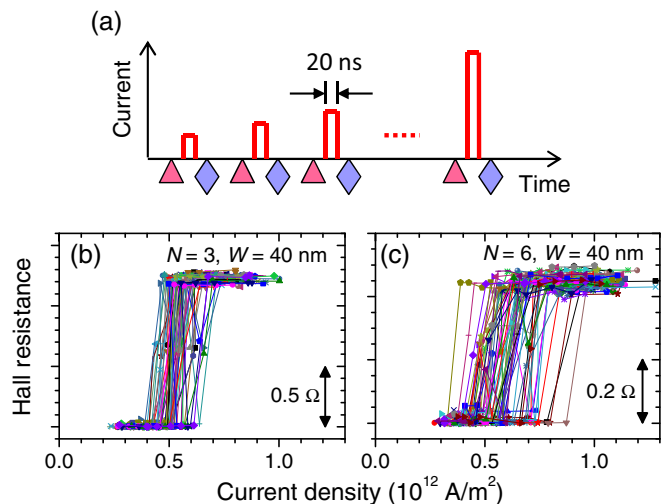


FIG. 2. (Color online) Measurement of current-induced domain wall depinning. (a) Measurement sequence. DW is initialized, and Hall resistance is measured at times indicated by red triangles and blue diamonds, respectively. Hall resistance versus current density of applied pulse for 80 devices with  $W = 40$  nm and (b)  $N = 3$ , and (c)  $N = 6$ .

current flow ratio determined by measuring the sheet resistance of separately prepared films with various stack structures. For all devices,  $R_H$  changes from low to high levels as  $I$  increases as a result of DW motion. The  $J_C$ , defined as the smallest  $J$  by which the  $R_H$  changes to the high level, is around  $5 \times 10^{11}$  A/m<sup>2</sup>, which is consistent with the previous works [12,15,19,20].

Figure 3(a) shows  $J_C$  as a function of  $W$  for  $N = 3, 4$ , and 6. Plots and error bars denote the average (ave) and standard deviation ( $\sigma_{J_C}$ ) of  $J_C$  obtained from the 80 devices. For all  $N$ ,  $J_C$  shows a minimum with respect to  $W$ , as was seen in a previous study [12]. This originates from the dependence of hard-axis anisotropy on  $W$  [27]. It should also be noted that  $W$  giving the minimum  $J_C$  depends on  $N$ , i.e., it is 70 nm for  $N = 3$ , 50 nm for  $N = 4$ , and 30 nm for  $N = 6$ .

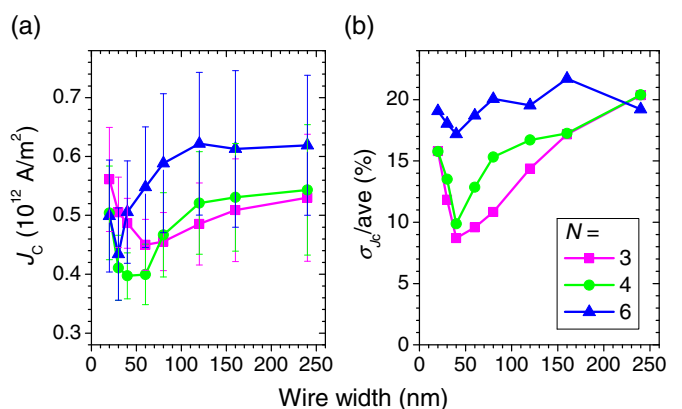


FIG. 3. (Color online) Width and thickness dependence of current-induced domain wall depinning properties. (a) Critical current density  $J_C$  and (b) the ratio of the standard deviation to average  $\sigma_{J_C}/\text{ave}$  as a function of wire width for various stack numbers  $N$ .

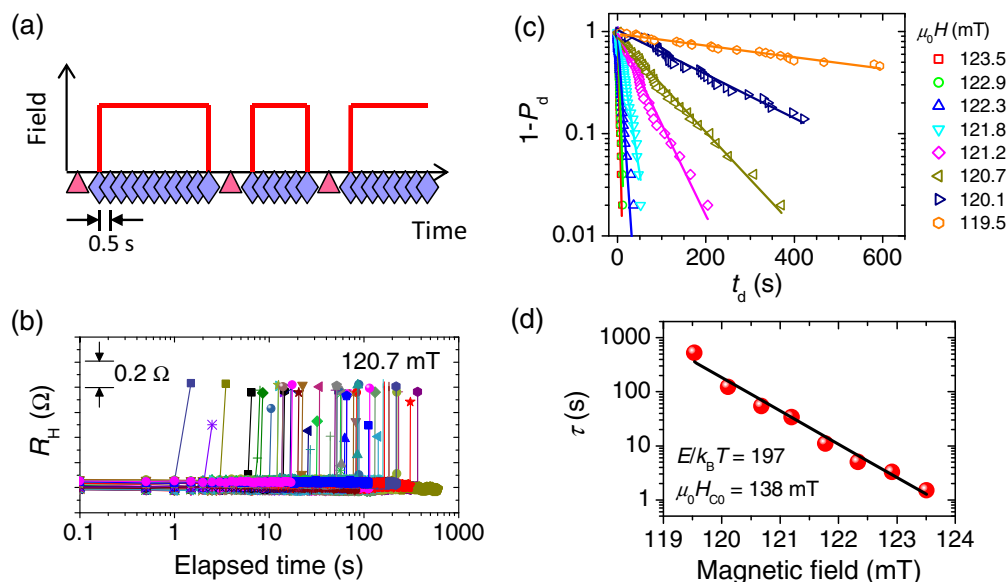


FIG. 4. (Color online) Evaluation of thermal stability factor  $E/k_B T$  and intrinsic critical field  $H_{C0}$ . (a) Measurement sequence. Indications of red triangles and blue diamonds are the same as those in Fig. 2(a). (b) Variation in Hall resistance  $R_H$  with time under an external field of 120.7 mT for a device with  $W = 20$  nm and  $N = 4$ . (c) Cumulative probability of not depinning  $1 - P_d$  versus depinning time  $t_d$  under various magnitudes of magnetic field. (d) Characteristic depinning time  $\tau$  versus magnetic field. Inset shows the values of  $E/k_B T$  and  $\mu_0 H_{C0}$  derived from fitting.

This reflects the width at which a DW changes its magnetic structure between the Bloch and Néel walls and its dependence on  $t_{\text{mag}}$ , as was also shown in the theoretical study [27]. While theoretical studies revealed that in the Bloch wall region  $J_C$  decreases with  $t_{\text{mag}}$  [27,28], our experimental results show that  $J_C$  of  $N = 3$  and 4 are almost the same. We also note that the DW motion was not observed below  $J \sim 1 \times 10^{12}$  A/m<sup>2</sup> in a number of devices with  $N = 2$ . These can be attributed to the low effective spin polarization of thin Co/Ni layers sandwiched by Pt [29] or nonvanishing spin-orbit torques [30]. Figure 3(b) shows the standard deviation of  $J_C$  divided by the average  $\sigma_{J_C}/\text{ave}$ , which represents the bit-to-bit distribution of  $J_C$  as a function of  $W$ . As can be clearly seen in Figs. 2(b) and 2(c), the bit-to-bit distribution of  $J_C$  is much larger for samples with larger  $N$ . The implication of the distribution of  $J_C$  with various  $W$  and  $N$  is discussed later in its relation to thermal stability.

### B. Thermal stability of DW

We now turn to thermal stability. The thermal stability factor  $E/k_B T$  is evaluated by measuring the depinning time  $t_d$  under various magnetic fields  $H$ . The measurement sequence is depicted in Fig. 4(a). After the initialization, a dc magnetic field is applied and  $R_H$  is measured at a constant interval (0.5 s) up to 600 s, until  $R_H$  changes abruptly due to the DW depinning. We repeat this sequence 50 times for each value of  $H$ . Figure 4(b) shows the time variation of  $R_H$  under  $\mu_0 H = 120.7$  mT for a device with  $W = 20$  nm and  $N = 4$ . In this case,  $t_d$  ranges from 1.5 to more than 600 s. The cumulative probability of DWs being not depinned,  $1 - P_d$ , is shown as a function of  $t_d$  for various  $H$  in Fig. 4(c). For the majority of devices (95% of tested ones) on which we focus here,  $1 - P_d$  is well described by the Néel-Brown model and fitted by an exponential function,  $1 - P_d = \exp(-t_d/\tau)$ , indicating

that a single energy barrier governs the depinning with a characteristic depinning time  $\tau$ . Then the obtained  $\tau$  is plotted as a function of  $H$  [Fig. 4(d)]. The value of  $\tau$  is expressed as  $\tau = \tau_0 \exp\{E/k_B T \cdot (1 - H/H_{C0})\}$ , where  $H_{C0}$  is the intrinsic critical field in the absence of thermal activation [20,31]. By fitting this equation to the experimental results,  $E/k_B T$  and  $H_{C0}$  are determined. For the case shown in Fig. 4(d),  $E/k_B T$  and  $\mu_0 H_{C0}$  are  $197 \pm 9$  and  $138 \pm 6$  mT, respectively. In this work, three devices for each  $W$  with  $N = 2, 4,$  and 6 are measured, and their  $E/k_B T$  and  $H_{C0}$  are derived.

The average values of  $E/k_B T$  and  $H_{C0}$  are shown in Figs. 5(a) and 5(b), respectively.  $E/k_B T$  slightly increases as  $W$  and  $N$  decrease.  $H_{C0}$  is independent of  $N$  and proportional to  $1/W$ ; the latter is consistent with the previous reports [25,26]. If we assume that  $V$  is proportional to  $W$  and  $N$ , we expect  $E/k_B T$  to be constant with  $W$  and be proportional to  $N$ , because  $E$  is proportional to the product of  $M_S$ ,  $H_{C0}$ , and  $V$ , with  $H_{C0}$  being proportional to  $1/W$  and independent of  $N$ , the change in  $M_S$  regarding  $N$  and  $W$  being negligible. However, this is not what we see in the present experimental result, particularly when  $W$  is greater than 70 nm.

## IV. DISCUSSION

### A. Effective volume of DW

The slight increase in  $E/k_B T$  with decreasing  $W$  suggests that there is an effective volume governing the  $E/k_B T$  of DW,  $V^*$  hereafter, that does not correspond to the geometric volume. Also, the decrease in  $E/k_B T$  with increasing  $N$  from 2 to 6 suggests that  $V^*$  is smaller for thicker samples. Such a subvolume effect is generally seen in a creep motion of DW. In [17], an effective volume was determined from the size at which the DW dynamics was deviated from the elastic creep motion in two dimensions using micro- and

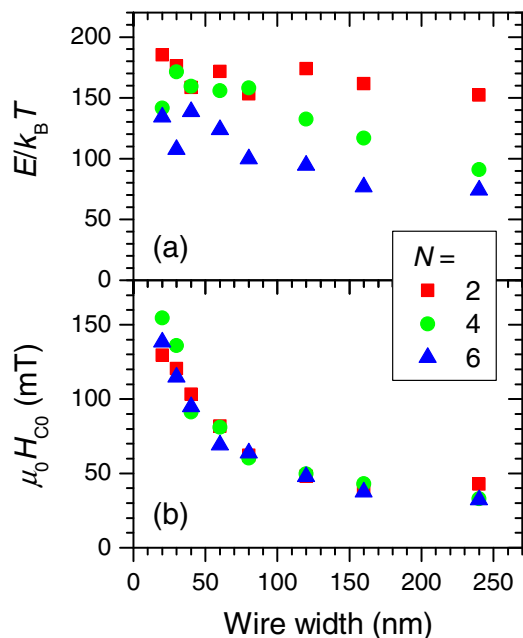


FIG. 5. (Color online) Width and thickness dependence of  $E/k_B T$  and  $\mu_0 H_{C0}$ . (a)  $E/k_B T$  and (b)  $\mu_0 H_{C0}$  versus wire width for various stack numbers  $N$ . Each plot denotes average value obtained from three devices.

submicrometer-sized wires. Let us examine the value of  $V^*$  in the present case. An analytical study on magnetic bubble material showed that  $E$  for DW can be expressed as  $2M_S H_{C0} V^*$  [32], which was confirmed by experimental studies [24,25]. The  $V^*$  can then be derived from the measured  $M_S$ ,  $H_{C0}$ , and  $E/k_B T$  with  $T = 300$  K, which is shown in Fig. 6(a). Interestingly,  $V^*$  initially increases with increasing  $W$  up to a critical width  $W_{crit}$ , above which it is almost constant, as shown by the dotted lines. This means that  $E/k_B T$  is governed by the DW volume defined by the device dimension below  $W_{crit}$  and above which only a portion of DW, i.e., the subvolume, with the length scale of  $W_{crit}$  contributes to  $E/k_B T$ , as illustrated in Figs. 6(b) and 6(c), respectively. This is analogous to the case with the MTJ device, in which  $E/k_B T$  is dominated by a subvolume for device diameters larger than the DW width, below which the geometrically defined volume of MTJ governs the  $E/k_B T$  factor [4,5]. Another notable fact is that  $W_{crit}$  appears to depend on  $N$ , that is,  $W_{crit}$  decreases as  $t_{mag}$  increases. This indicates that an incoherent DW depinning, i.e., depinning triggered by the subvolume as depicted in Fig. 6(c), becomes more likely as the thickness increases. It is also noteworthy that the devices that do not follow the Néel-Brown picture (about 5% of tested ones) are more frequently observed for larger  $W$  and  $N$ . This fact reinforces the above findings, because the deviation from the Néel-Brown picture implies that the DW is more likely to depin through multiple energy paths with stochastic subvolume excitation [16]. We can calculate the effective area  $S^*$  and effective length  $L^*$  of DW governing  $E/k_B T$ , as  $S^* = V^*/t_{mag}$  and  $L^* = S^*/W_H$  [25], leading to several thousands of  $\text{nm}^2$  and several tens of nm, respectively; these are within the expected range from our device geometry. We also note that the obtained value of  $W_{crit}$ , which increases to more than 100 nm as  $t_{mag}$  decreases to 2.1 nm, is roughly

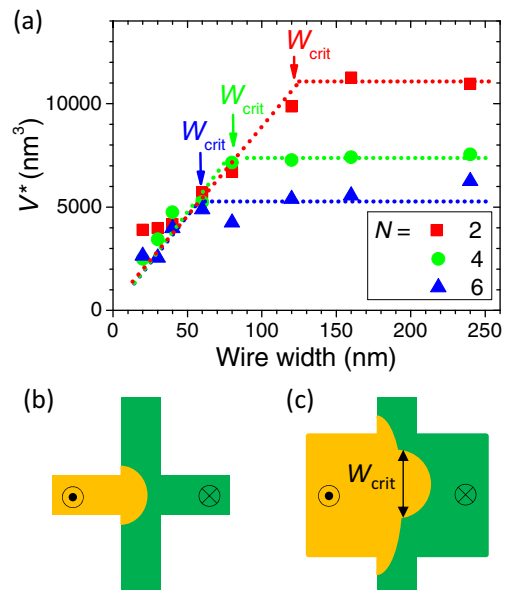


FIG. 6. (Color online) (a) Effective volume  $V^*$  that governs  $E/k_B T$  versus wire width for various stack numbers  $N$ . Schematic illustration of DW depinning in which (b) the whole volume of DW moves coherently and (c) partial volume, subvolume, with the width of  $W_{crit}$  triggers the depinning.

consistent with the previous report [17], where critical width below which the elastic creep nature is missed was determined to be  $\sim 300$  nm in a CoFe wire with  $t_{mag} = 0.3$  nm.

### B. Relation of effective volume with current-induced DW-motion properties

Now we discuss the effect of such a subvolume excitation on the bit-to-bit distribution of  $J_C$ . We previously found that the bit-to-bit distribution of  $J_C$ ,  $\sigma_{J_C}/ave$ , is dominated by the self-distribution within one device, except for a very narrow region less than about 40 nm, where process-induced factors become dominant. The distribution was revealed to originate from the two-dimensional (2D) degree of freedom of the DW configuration [33], i.e., the DW forms a winding shape in 2D space and can contain Bloch lines which cause the bit-to-bit distribution. In this regard,  $\sigma_{J_C}/ave$  should closely link to  $V^*$  because  $V^*$  also relates to the 2D degree of freedom of the DW configuration. Let us look at Fig. 3(b) again and compare it with Fig. 6(a). We see that above 40 nm,  $\sigma_{J_C}/ave$  decreases with decrease of  $W$ , indicating that, as the wire width reduces, the 2D degree of freedom becomes more limited, and the DW is unlikely to form a winding shape during the motion, leading to the suppression of depinning by subvolume excitation. This is consistent with the observation of  $W_{crit}$  in Fig. 6(a). The decrease in  $\sigma_{J_C}/ave$  of the samples with smaller  $N$  starts from a wider region, indicating that the 2D degree of freedom of the DW configuration is reduced and the DW tends to move more coherently, as shown in Fig. 6(b), as the wire thickness decreases. This is also in accordance with the suggestion obtained from the analysis shown in Fig. 6(a), where  $W_{crit}$  increases as  $N$  decreases. Also, for  $N = 6$ ,  $\sigma_{J_C}/ave$  does not decrease with  $W$  in Fig. 3(b), suggesting that the 2D degree



of freedom does not decrease down to around  $W = 40$  nm. This is also consistent with the observed  $W_{\text{crit}}$  for  $N = 6$  in Fig. 6(a) ( $\approx 50$  nm). Overall, the variation in  $\sigma_{J_c}/\text{ave}$  with  $W$  and  $N$  supports our experimental findings that  $W_{\text{crit}}$  exists and it decreases as  $N$ , or  $t_{\text{mag}}$ , increases.

### C. Analytical model

Next we discuss what determines  $W_{\text{crit}}$  and why  $W_{\text{crit}}$  becomes larger for a smaller  $t_{\text{mag}}$  using an analytical model. DW is depinned with a subvolume at  $W > W_{\text{crit}}$  because the energy cost is lower than the coherent process. Previous studies on the depinning process at the Hall cross revealed that the DW could be treated as a soap bubble in 2D space [24,25]. In this case, we should consider the change in the Zeeman energy  $\varepsilon_Z$  and the DW elastic energy  $\varepsilon_{\text{DW}}$ , where the former and latter are proportional to the change in volume  $\delta V$  of the domain and area  $\delta S$  of the DW, respectively, brought about by the external field application. For simplicity, we here assume that a semicircle-shaped DW soap bubble with a diameter  $\hat{W}$  is formed as shown in Fig. 6(c) under a magnetic field  $H$ , and consider the total energy  $\varepsilon_{\text{tot}} (= \varepsilon_Z + \varepsilon_{\text{DW}})$  as a function of  $\hat{W}$ . The gain of  $\varepsilon_Z$  is given by  $\pi M_S H \hat{W}^2 t_{\text{mag}}/4$ , whereas the loss of  $\varepsilon_{\text{DW}}$  is given by  $(\pi - 2)\sigma_{\text{DW}} \hat{W} t_{\text{mag}}/2$ , where  $\sigma_{\text{DW}}$  is the DW energy density per unit area given by  $4\sqrt{AK_{\text{eff}}}$  ( $A$  is the exchange stiffness constant) [34]. The bubble can appear only when  $\partial\varepsilon_{\text{tot}}/\partial\hat{W} < 0$ . [If  $\partial\varepsilon_{\text{tot}}/\partial\hat{W} > 0$ , the DW is depinned coherently as shown in Fig. 6(b).] Thus the critical diameter of the bubble, corresponding to  $W_{\text{crit}}$  in the present model, can be given by  $\partial\varepsilon_{\text{tot}}/\partial\hat{W} = 0$ , and the energy barrier  $E$  for the bubble-triggered depinning can be given by  $\varepsilon_{\text{tot}}$  at  $\hat{W} = W_{\text{crit}}$ , leading to  $W_{\text{crit}} = (\pi - 2)\sigma_{\text{DW}}/\pi M_S H$  and  $E = (\pi - 2)^2 \sigma_{\text{DW}}^2 t_{\text{mag}}/4\pi M_S H$ . Although the expression of  $W_{\text{crit}}$  does not explicitly depend on  $t_{\text{mag}}$ , it contains  $\sigma_{\text{DW}} (\propto \sqrt{K_{\text{eff}}})$ , which is a decreasing function of  $t_{\text{mag}}$  in our samples, as mentioned earlier. When we input experimental values, it leads to the decrease of  $W_{\text{crit}}$  by 26% with increasing  $N$  from 2 to 6, qualitatively consistent with our observation where  $W_{\text{crit}}$  decreases by 50% as  $N$  increases from 2 to 6 [Fig. 6(a)]. As for  $E/k_B T$ , while  $t_{\text{mag}}$  increases 300%, the present model leads to the increase of  $E$  ( $\propto \sigma_{\text{DW}}^2 t_{\text{mag}}$ ) by only 49%; the experimental result shows a slight decrease with increase in  $N$  from 2 to 6 [Fig. 5(a)]. As described here, the present analytical model reasonably explains our experimental results. The residual discrepancy may be attributed to factors like the shape of the excited subvolume (instead of a semicircle, we find better agreement with the experiment, which is shown in Appendix) and/or thickness dependence of  $A$ .

We also note the difference between the present analysis and the one reported recently [21], in which a model that explains Barkhausen jumps of a DW activated by a laser-induced local heating has been put forward. In the model, the DW has been treated as a point particle, whereas it is treated as an elastic object in ours. In the present case, where the DW is under the presence of a magnetic field, a contribution of  $\delta V$  on the total energy has to be considered. This makes it necessary for us to take the effect of subvolume into consideration, eventually resulting in the scaling relation derived above.

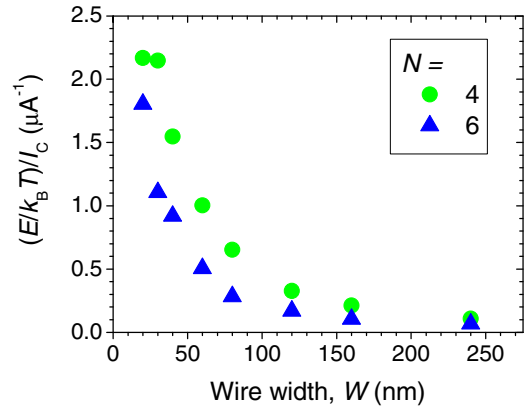


FIG. 7. (Color online) DW-motion efficiency  $((E/k_B T)/I_C)$  versus wire width for  $N = 4$  and 6 calculated from obtained  $E/k_B T$  [Fig. 5(a)] and  $I_C$  [Fig. 3(a)].

### D. DW-motion efficiency

Lastly, we discuss the technological significance of the present study. At dimensions less than  $W_{\text{crit}}$ ,  $I_C$  almost linearly scales with  $W$ , whereas  $E/k_B T$  stays almost constant. Parenthetically,  $J_c$  depends on  $W$  due to the dependence of hard-axis anisotropy on  $W$ ; the variation in  $J_c$  with  $W$  is much less dominant than the decrease in cross-sectional area with  $W$ . Thus the efficiency of DW motion ( $\eta \equiv \{E/k_B T\}/I_C [\mu\text{A}]$ ) increases almost inversely proportional to  $W$ , as shown in Fig. 7. The efficiency becomes more than 2 at  $W \approx 20$  nm, which is greater than the macrospin limit of the spin-transfer torque switching ( $\eta \approx 1$ ) of MTJs [5]. Note that  $I_C$  and  $E/k_B T$  of the MTJ device scale in the same manner with respect to the device size in principle, leading to a size-independent efficiency [4,5], which is in stark contrast to the DW-motion device. Furthermore, the increase in  $H_{C0}$  with the decrease in  $W$  means that robustness to external magnetic fields is enhanced by reducing the device size. In this regard, magnetic nanowire memory devices with current-induced DW motion have a promising characteristic in terms of device size reduction. In addition, no degradation of  $E/k_B T$  with the decrease of  $t_{\text{mag}}$  is a bright prospect for devices that use spin-orbit torques [13,14], because a thin magnetic layer is desirable in these devices.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

The thermal stability of DW in nanowires made of Co/Ni multilayers with various  $W$  and  $N$  is studied. We find that  $E/k_B T$  slightly increases as  $W$  and  $N$  decrease, while  $H_{C0}$  is proportional to  $1/W$  and is independent of  $N$ . By deriving the effective volume  $V^*$  that governs  $E/k_B T$  from them, we find a critical width  $W_{\text{crit}}$  above which the DW depinning is initiated with a subvolume excitation. The value of  $W_{\text{crit}}$  is larger for thinner wires. The findings regarding  $W_{\text{crit}}$  are supported by the variation in bit-to-bit distribution of  $J_c$  with  $W$  and  $N$ , and qualitatively explained by an analytical model where Zeeman and DW elastic energies are considered. The experimental results obtained here show promising potential for nonvolatile DW-motion devices in terms of reducing device

TABLE I. Scaling property of critical width  $W_{\text{crit}}$  derived by the model with  $\zeta = 1$  and  $2/3$  together with the experimental result.

$N$	$t_{\text{mag}}$	$\sigma_{\text{DW}}$	Experiment	$\zeta = 1$ ( $\propto \sigma_{\text{DW}}$ )	$\zeta = 2/3$ ( $\propto \sigma_{\text{DW}}^{5/12} t_{\text{mag}}^{-1/3}$ )
2	1	1	1	1	1
4	1.86	0.80	$\sim 0.7$	0.80	0.74
6	2.71	0.74	$\sim 0.5$	0.74	0.63

size, and the findings extracted from the experiment will allow us to accurately design the nonvolatility of the devices.

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### APPENDIX

In the main body, we derive the scaling relation between the critical width  $W_{\text{crit}}$ , energy barrier  $E$ , and the magnetic layer thickness  $t_{\text{mag}}$  by assuming that a semicircle-shaped subvolume with a diameter of  $\hat{W}$  triggers the depinning under a magnetic field  $H$ . Here we derive the scaling relation by assuming another shape of the subvolume and compare with the experimental results.

According to the theory of creep motion of DW, the displacement  $u$  for a segment of DW  $\hat{W}$  is expressed as

$$u(\hat{W}) \propto \left( \frac{\hat{W}}{W_L} \right)^\zeta, \quad (\text{A1})$$

where  $W_L$  is the Larkin length, given as  $W_L = (\sigma_{\text{DW}}^2 t_{\text{mag}}^2 \xi^2 / \Delta)^{1/3}$ , where  $\xi$  is the characteristic length of

TABLE II. Scaling property of energy barrier  $E$  at  $W = W_{\text{crit}}$  derived by the model with  $\zeta = 1$  and  $2/3$  together with the experimental result.

$N$	$t_{\text{mag}}$	$\sigma_{\text{DW}}$	Experiment	$\zeta = 1$ ( $\propto \sigma_{\text{DW}}^2 t_{\text{mag}}$ )	$\zeta = 2/3$ ( $\propto \sigma_{\text{DW}}^{1/4}$ )
2	1	1	1	1	1
4	1.86	0.80	$\sim 0.9$	1.17	0.94
6	2.71	0.74	$\sim 0.7$	1.49	0.93

the disorder potential and  $\Delta$  is the pinning strength of the disorder.  $\zeta$  is referred to as the roughness exponent. While  $\zeta = 1$  [34,35] leads to the scaling relation described in the main body, here we use  $\zeta = 2/3$ , which is the case for the random bond disorder model of an elastic line interface in a two-dimensional disordered medium [23,36–38]. To simply evaluate the scaling properties, here we neglect numerical factors. In the case that  $\zeta = 2/3$ , the Zeeman energy  $\varepsilon_Z$  and DW elastic energy  $\varepsilon_{\text{DW}}$  are given as

$$\varepsilon_Z = -A \hat{W}^{5/3} \quad \left( A = \frac{M_S H t_{\text{mag}}^{5/9}}{\sigma_{\text{DW}}^{4/9}} \right), \quad (\text{A2})$$

$$\varepsilon_{\text{DW}} = B \hat{W}^{1/3} \quad (B = \sigma_{\text{DW}}^{1/9} t_{\text{mag}}^{1/9}). \quad (\text{A3})$$

The critical condition  $\partial \varepsilon_{\text{tot}} / \partial \hat{W} = 0$  leads to the scaling relation of  $W_{\text{crit}}$  and  $E$  at  $W = W_{\text{crit}}$  as

$$W_{\text{crit}} = \left( \frac{B}{A} \right)^{3/4} = \left( \frac{1}{M_S H} \right)^{3/4} \frac{\sigma_{\text{DW}}^{5/12}}{t_{\text{mag}}^{1/3}}, \quad (\text{A4})$$

$$E = \varepsilon_{\text{tot}}(\hat{W} = W_{\text{crit}}) = \left( \frac{B^5}{A} \right)^{1/4} = \left( \frac{1}{M_S H} \right)^{1/4} \sigma_{\text{DW}}^{1/4}. \quad (\text{A5})$$

Tables I and II, respectively, summarize the scaling relation of  $W_{\text{crit}}$  and  $E$  along with the experimental results. Closer agreement with the experimental results can be seen in the model with  $\zeta = 2/3$  than in the model with  $\zeta = 1$ . Further agreement may be obtained by taking into account the  $t_{\text{mag}}$  dependence of  $\xi$  and  $\Delta$ . If  $\xi$  decreases and  $\Delta$  increases as  $t_{\text{mag}}$  increases, the discrepancy between the analytical model and experiment is found to be more reduced.

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