US 20210184451A1

(19) **United States**

(12) **Patent Application Publication** (10) **Pub. No.: US 2021/0184451 A1**

Ye (43) **Pub. Date: Jun. 17, 2021**

(54) **PROGRAMMABLE OVERCURRENT PROTECTION FOR A SWITCH**

(71) Applicant: **Silanna Asia Pte Ltd**, Singapore (SG)

(72) Inventor: **Guanghua Ye**, Dongguang (CN)

(73) Assignee: **Silanna Asia Pte Ltd**, Singapore (SG)

(21) Appl. No.: **17/249,377**

(22) Filed: **Mar. 1, 2021**

Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 16/148,050, filed on Oct. 1, 2018, now Pat. No. 10,938,199.

(60) Provisional application No. 62/656,700, filed on Apr. 12, 2018.

Publication Classification

(51) **Int. Cl.**

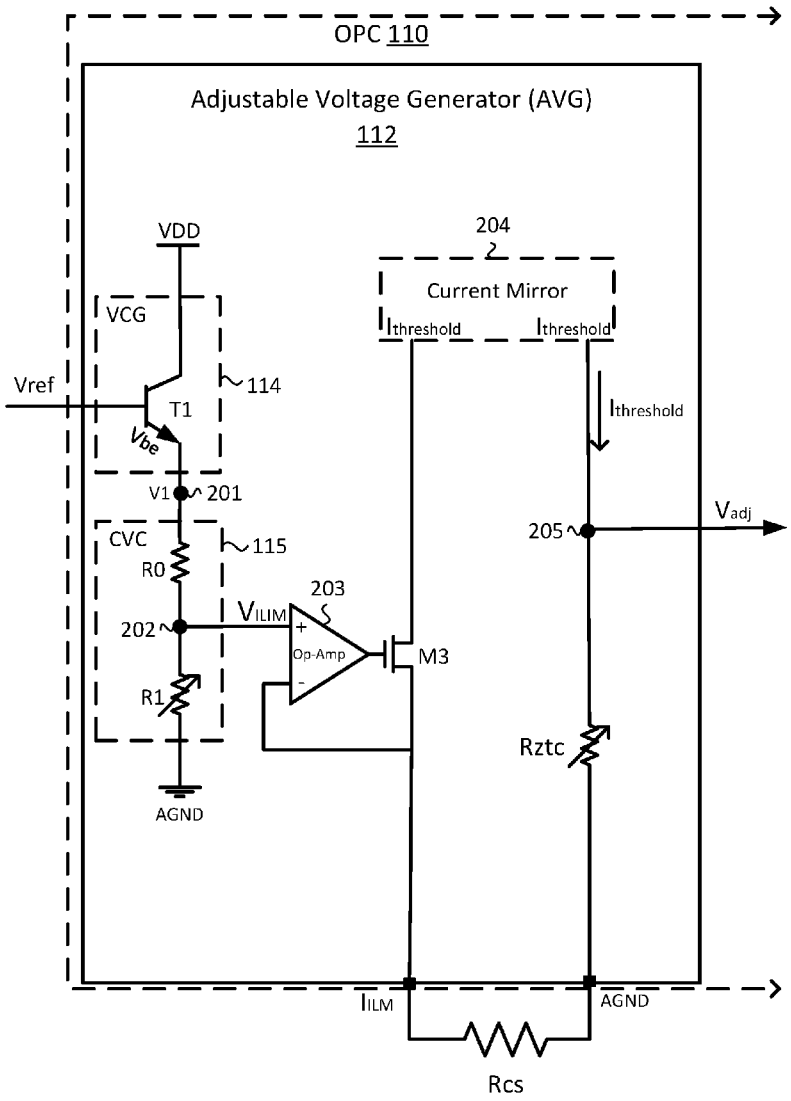
H02H 3/05	(2006.01)
H02H 1/00	(2006.01)
H02H 3/08	(2006.01)
H03K 17/082	(2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC ***H02H 3/05*** (2013.01); ***H02H 1/0007*** (2013.01); *H03F 3/45475* (2013.01); ***H03K 17/0822*** (2013.01); *H03F 2203/45116* (2013.01); ***H02H 3/08*** (2013.01)

(57) **ABSTRACT**

Embodiments of the disclosure include a switch having an on-state resistance that varies based on a temperature coefficient of the switch and an overcurrent protection circuit coupled to the switch and having an adjustable overcurrent threshold level determined based on an adjustable voltage generated by the overcurrent protection circuit, the adjustable voltage generated based on the temperature coefficient of the switch.



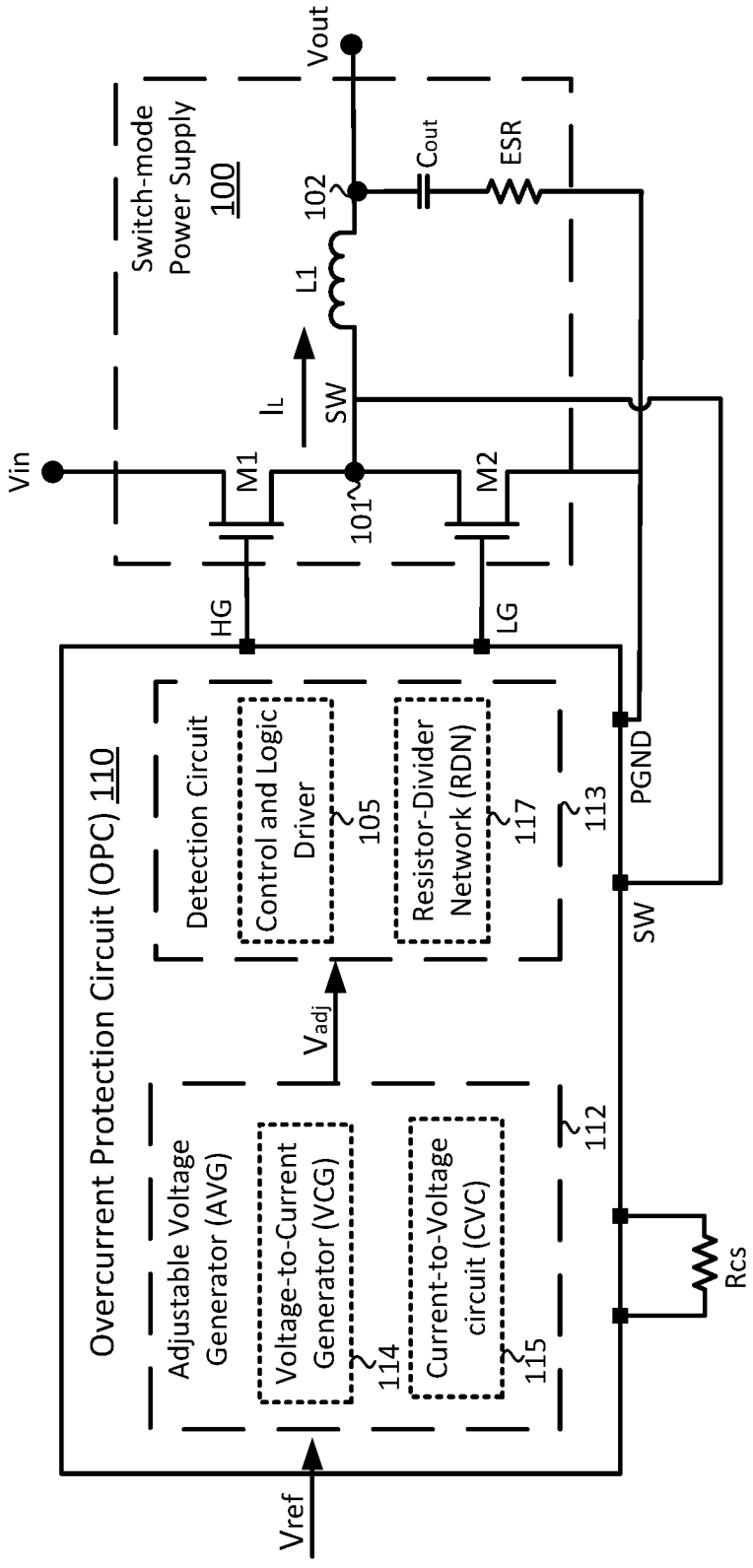

Switch-mode Power Supply 100
Vout
Cout
ESR
102
L1
IL
SW
Vin
M1
M2
101
HG
LG
Overcurrent Protection Circuit (OPC) 110
Detection Circuit
Control and Logic Driver
105
Resistor-Divider Network (RDN)
117
113
PGND
SW
Vadj
Adjustable Voltage Generator (AVG)
Voltage-to-Current Generator (VCG)
114
Current-to-Voltage circuit (CVC)
115
112
Rcs
Vref

FIG. 1

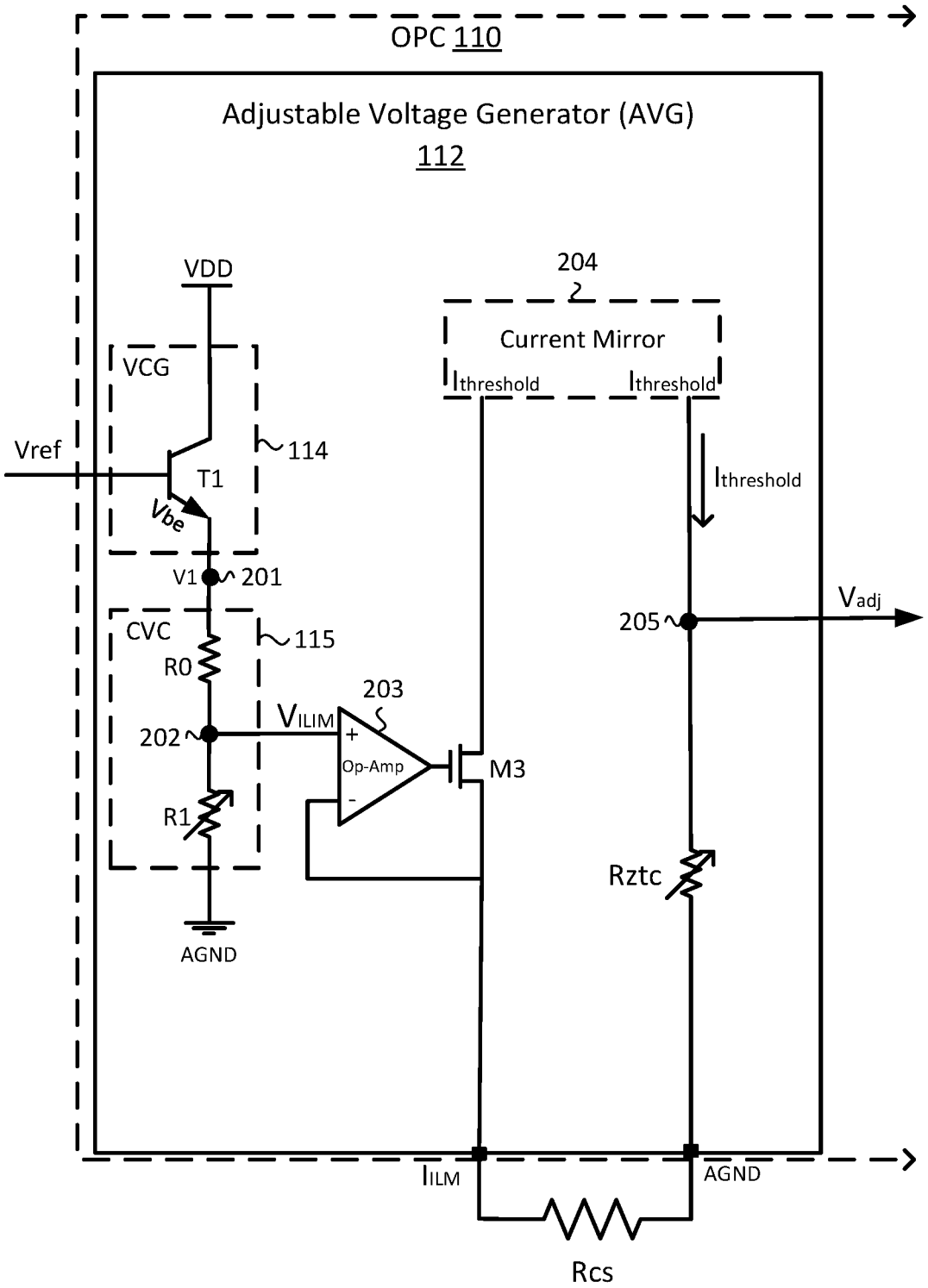

OPC 110
Adjustable Voltage Generator (AVG)
112
VDD
204
Current Mirror
Ithreshold
Ithreshold
VCG
Vref
114
T1
Vbe
Ithreshold
V1
201
Vadj
205
CVC
115
R0
203
VILIM
202
Op-Amp
M3
R1
Rztc
AGND
IILM
AGND
Rcs

FIG. 2

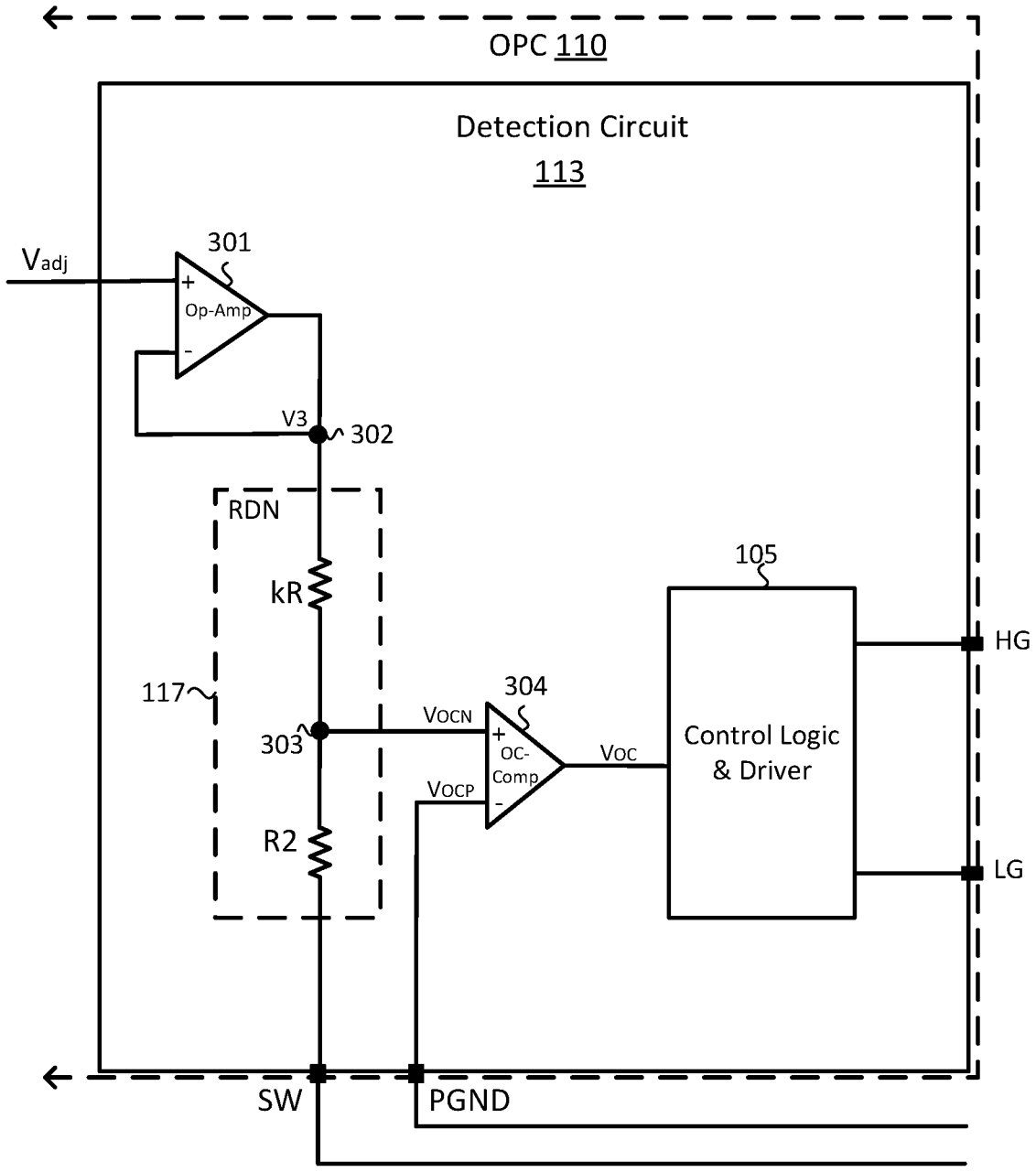

OPC 110
Detection Circuit
113
Vadj
301
Op-Amp
V3
302
RDN
kR
117
303
R2
105
304
VOCN
VOCP
OC-
Comp
VOC
Control Logic
& Driver
HG
LG
SW
PGND

FIG. 3

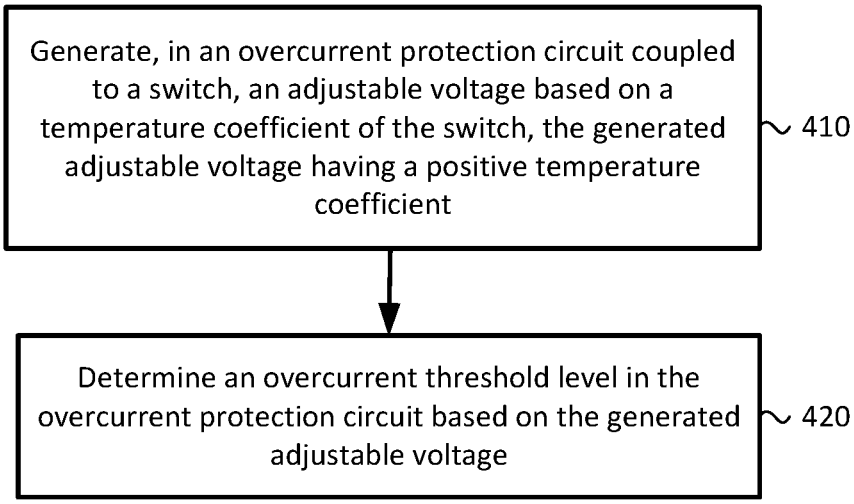

Generate, in an overcurrent protection circuit coupled to a switch, an adjustable voltage based on a temperature coefficient of the switch, the generated adjustable voltage having a positive temperature coefficient
410
Determine an overcurrent threshold level in the overcurrent protection circuit based on the generated adjustable voltage
420

FIG. 4

PROGRAMMABLE OVERCURRENT PROTECTION FOR A SWITCH

RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 16/148,050, filed Oct. 1, 2018, which claims priority to U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 62/656,700, filed Apr. 12, 2018, all of which are hereby incorporated by reference in their entirety.

BACKGROUND

[0002] A synchronous switch mode power supply, such as a buck converter, is an electronic power supply that efficiently converts power from a first power regime to a second power regime. Such converters typically incorporate a high-side switch (e.g., a "control" switch), a low-side switch (e.g., a "synchronous" switch), and an inductor. The inductor couples a common node (e.g., a "phase node") of the switches to a load of the converter. In some applications, the switches are field-effect transistors (FETs). The high-side switch delivers power to the load through the inductor, thereby converting an input voltage at a first level to an output voltage at a second level. In synchronous buck DC-DC applications, when an output short condition occurs, current through the inductor increases to maintain the output voltage level at the inductor. However, this approach may cause the inductor to undesirably saturate, which may damage the FET.

SUMMARY

[0003] In some embodiments, an overcurrent protection circuit is coupled to a switch having an on-state resistance that varies based on a temperature coefficient of the switch. The overcurrent protection circuit has an adjustable overcurrent threshold level determined based on an adjustable voltage generated by the overcurrent protection circuit. The adjustable voltage is generated based on the temperature coefficient of the switch.

[0004] In some embodiments, a method for overcurrent protection involves generating, in an overcurrent protection circuit coupled to a switch, an adjustable voltage based on a temperature coefficient of the switch, the generated adjustable voltage having a positive temperature coefficient. The method further involves determining an overcurrent threshold level in the overcurrent protection circuit based on the generated adjustable voltage.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0005] FIG. **1** is a simplified schematic of an overcurrent protection circuit in accordance with one or more example embodiments.

[0006] FIG. **2** illustrates details of the overcurrent protection circuit of FIG. **1**, in accordance with some embodiments.

[0007] FIG. **3** illustrates further details of the overcurrent protection circuit of FIG. **1**, in accordance with some embodiments.

[0008] FIG. **4** is an example operation of the overcurrent protection circuit of FIG. **1**, in accordance with some embodiments.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0009] Improved methods and circuits are described herein for a programmable overcurrent protection circuit for one or more switches, such as switches used in a switch-mode power supply (SMPS) circuit having an inductor and one or more field-effect transistor (FET) switches, such as a metal-oxide-semiconductor field-effect transistor (MOSFET). When an output short condition occurs at a load of the SMPS circuit, an overcurrent event may occur. An overcurrent event may cause current through the inductor to increase so to maintain the output voltage. Such an overcurrent event may damage one or more of the FETs of the SMPS circuit.

[0010] Some overcurrent protection circuits sense a source-drain current level through a FET of the SMPS circuit and compare the sensed current level to an overcurrent threshold. If the sensed current level surpasses the current threshold, one or more FETs of the SMPS circuit are turned off to stop current flow through that FET switch to the load of the SMPS circuit.

[0011] Current flow through a FET switch is in part related to an on-resistance (Rdson) of a conduction channel formed between a drain region and a source region of that FET. However, the FET on-resistance varies according to a temperature coefficient of resistance (TCR) of the FET as a temperature of the FET varies. As such, at lower temperatures, a sensed source-drain current level through the FET of the SMPS circuit is the same or similar to a current level through the load of the SMPS circuit. However, at higher temperature levels, on-resistance Rdson of the FET varies according to the TCR of the FET. As temperatures vary, a sensed source-drain current level through the FET may diverge from the current level through the load of the SMPS circuit. Thus, a particular overcurrent threshold which is used to accurately determine an overcurrent event at a first temperature of the FET may no longer accurately determine the overcurrent event at another temperature.

[0012] Described herein is a circuit configured for high precision overcurrent protection that advantageously varies an overcurrent threshold level according to an adjustable temperature coefficient of the circuit as temperature of the circuit varies. The adjustable temperature coefficient of the circuit is adjusted to substantially match the temperature coefficient of resistance of a FET of the circuit. As a result, as the on-resistance of the FET varies with temperature, the overcurrent threshold will also vary proportionally. Thus, the circuit advantageously detects an overcurrent condition of the FET across a range of temperatures. Other improvements or advantages will also be described below or become apparent from the following disclosure.

[0013] FIG. **1** is a simplified schematic of an overcurrent protection circuit **110**, in accordance with one or more example embodiments. As shown in FIG. **1**, the overcurrent protection circuit **110** is coupled to a switch M**2**, such as a MOSFET, having an on-resistance Rdson. The on-resistance Rdson varies with temperature based on a temperature coefficient of the switch M**2**. In the example embodiment of FIG. **1**, the switch M**2** is a low-side switch (e.g., a synchronous switch) in a switch-mode power supply (SMPS) circuit **100**, such as a DC-DC buck converter. The switch M**2** is coupled to and controlled by the overcurrent protection circuit **110**. A high-side switch M**1** and the switch M**2** of the SMPS **100** provide a current I_L via inductor L**1** to an output node Vout. A load (not shown) is typically coupled to the

output node Vout. A first terminal of an output capacitor Cout, having a resistance symbolically shown by resistor ESR, is coupled at one end to the inductor L1 and the Vout node at node **102**. A second terminal of the output capacitor Cout is coupled to a voltage ground (PGND). A node **101**, sometimes referred to as a phase node or switch node, is coupled to a port of the overcurrent protection circuit **110** designated as SW. The overcurrent protection circuit **110** is configured to receive, sense, or measure a voltage and/or current from the node **101**.

[0014] As shown in FIG. **1**, the overcurrent protection circuit **110** is coupled to a high gate node (HG) of the switch M1 and to a low gate node (LG) of the switch M2. A control logic and driver circuit **105** of the overcurrent protection circuit **110** controls the turning ON or OFF of the switches M1, M2 by applying driving signal(s) to the gate(s) of one or both of the switches M1, M2. During an overcurrent event, excess amounts of current I_L flows through L1, which can saturate L1 and damage one or both of the switches M1 and/or M2.

[0015] As described below and in greater detail in conjunction with FIGS. **2-4**, to protect the SMPS **100**, and in particular, the switch M2, from an overcurrent condition, a level of a current or voltage which is proportional to the output current I_L is compared to a threshold current level. The threshold current level can be embodied as a voltage or as a current. If the level of the current or voltage which is proportional to the output current I_L exceeds the threshold current level, the overcurrent protection circuit **110** turns one or both of the switches M1, M2 OFF.

[0016] The overcurrent protection circuit **110** is configured to generate an adjustable overcurrent threshold level. As mentioned previously, the overcurrent protection circuit **110** advantageously adjusts the overcurrent threshold level with temperature according to a temperature coefficient which is the same or similar to a TCR of the switch M2. The adjustable overcurrent threshold level is determined based on an adjustable voltage level Vadj which is generated by an adjustable voltage generator circuit **112**. The voltage level Vadj is generated at least in part based on (e.g., matched or proportionally to) the temperature coefficient of the switch M2, and a resistive value of a programmable scaling resistor Rcs coupled to the overcurrent protection circuit **110**, as further described below in conjunction with FIG. **2**.

[0017] As shown in FIG. **1**, the adjustable voltage generator circuit **112** includes a voltage-to-current generator circuit **114**, and a current-to-voltage circuit **115**, amongst other components, which contribute to generating the voltage level Vadj. The generated voltage level Vadj is provided to the detection circuit **113** of the overcurrent protection circuit **110**. As described in greater detail below in conjunction with FIG. **3**, the detection circuit **113**, having a resistor-divider network **117**, uses the received voltage level Vadj to generate the adjustable overcurrent threshold level which is compared to a voltage or current which is proportional or otherwise representative of the current I_L.

[0018] FIG. **2** illustrates details of the adjustable voltage generator circuit **112** of the overcurrent protection circuit **110** shown in FIG. **1**. The adjustable voltage generator circuit **112** is configured to generate the voltage level Vadj based on (e.g., matched or proportionally to) the temperature coefficient of the switch M2. In an example embodiment, the voltage level Vadj has a positive temperature coefficient that is adjusted to substantially match the temperature coefficient of the on-resistance Rdson of the switch M2. As shown in FIG. **2**, the adjustable voltage generator circuit **112** includes the voltage-to-current generator circuit **114**, which includes a switch T1, such as a bipolar junction transistor (BJT) having a base, an emitter and a collector. In some embodiments, the voltage-to-current generator circuit **114** has a negative temperature coefficient (e.g., Vbe of T1 changes at a rate of approximately −2 mV/degC) and is configured to generate an output voltage V1 at node **201** based on a reference voltage Vref received at the base of T1. V1 is substantially equal to Vref minus the voltage Vbe between the base and emitter of T1. In some embodiments, Vref is pre-adjusted to substantially match the temperature coefficient of the on-resistance Rdson of the switch M2. In yet other embodiments, for a different temperature coefficient of the on-resistance Rdson of the switch M2, Vref is trimmed such that the Vref-Vbe matches the temperature coefficient of the Rdson of the switch M2.

[0019] The adjustable voltage generator circuit **112** further includes the current-to-voltage circuit **115** coupled to the voltage-to-current generator circuit **114** to receive the voltage V1 at node **201**. In some embodiments, the current-to-voltage circuit **115** has a net positive temperature coefficient and is configured to generate, based on the voltage V1, an output voltage V_{ILIM}. In other embodiments, the voltage-to-current generator circuit **114** has a positive temperature coefficient and the current-to-voltage circuit **115** has a negative temperature coefficient.

[0020] In the example embodiment of FIG. **2**, the current-to-voltage circuit **115** is implemented using a resistor-divider configuration with a resistor R0 which receives voltage V1 from node **201**, and a variable resistor R1 coupled in series to resistor R0 at a common node **202**. The voltage V_{ILIM} is thus generated based on the following Equation 1:

$$V_{ILIM} = \frac{R1 * (Vref - Vbe)}{(R1 + R0)} \quad \text{(Equation 1)}$$

[0021] The generated voltage V_{ILIM} is output from the common node **202** to a non-inverting (+) input of Op-Amp **203**, which in turn drives a gate of a switch M3, such as a MOSFET. The switch M3 is coupled at a source node to both the inverting (−) input of Op-Amp **203** and to a scaling resistor Rcs. The scaling resistor Rcs is coupled to the adjustable voltage generator circuit **112** between ports I_{ILM} and ground (AGND), as shown in FIG. **2**. In an example embodiment, the scaling resistor Rcs is a programmable overcurrent resistor having a selected (i.e., programmed) value which is used in determining the overcurrent threshold level of the overcurrent protection circuit **110**.

[0022] As also shown in FIG. **2**, the adjustable voltage generator circuit **112** further includes a current mirror **204** circuit configured to output a threshold current threshold based on the voltage V_{ILIM} and a value of the scaling resistor Rcs. The adjustable voltage generator circuit **112** also includes a trim resistor Rztc coupled at a first terminal to the current mirror **204** via node **205**, and to a ground node (AGND) at a second terminal. In an example embodiment, the trim resistor Rztc is a variable resistor having a temperature coefficient substantially equal to zero. The adjustable voltage generator circuit **112** generates the voltage level

Vadj based on the threshold current $I_{threshold}$ and a value of trim resistor Rztc, and outputs the voltage level Vadj from node **205**.

[0023] The voltage level Vadj varies with temperature in accordance with a positive temperature coefficient which substantially matches the temperature coefficient of the on-resistance Rdson of the switch M**2** based on the following Equation 2:

$$Vadj = \frac{V_{ILIM} * RzIc}{Rcs} \quad \text{(Equation 2)}$$

[0024] Substituting V_{ILIM} from Equation 1 into Equation 2 results in the following Equation 3:

$$Vadj = \frac{R1 * (Vref - Vbe) * RzIc}{(R0 + R1) * Rcs} \quad \text{(Equation 3)}$$

[0025] Thus, as shown by Equations 1-3, the voltage level Vadj and its positive temperature coefficient is generated based on (a) a temperature coefficient and base voltage (e.g., Vref) of the switch T**1** (which generates Vref-Vbe), (b) respective values of the resistor R**0** and the variable resistor R**1** (which generate voltage V_{ILIM} from Vref-Vbe), (c) a value of the programable scaling resistor Rcs, and (d) a value of variable trim resistor Rztc.

[0026] FIG. **3** illustrates details of the detection circuit **113** of the overcurrent protection circuit **110** shown in FIG. **1**. As shown in FIG. **3**, the detection circuit **113** is coupled to and configured to receive the voltage level Vadj from the adjustable voltage generator circuit **112**. The detection circuit **113** is also coupled to the SMPS **100** via the high gate node (HG) of the high-side switch M**1** and the low gate node (LG) of the low-side switch M**2**. During an overcurrent event, an overcurrent event detection signal Voc is received at the control logic and driver circuit **105** of the detection circuit **113**. Upon receiving the overcurrent event detection signal Voc, the control logic and driver circuit **105** reacts by turning one or both of the switches M**1**, M**2** off to end the overcurrent event. The overcurrent event detection signal is based on a scaled level of the received voltage level Vadj, a voltage at the phase node **101**, and a reference voltage (e.g., ground).

[0027] As shown in FIG. **3**, the voltage level Vadj generated by the adjustable voltage generator circuit **112**, is received in a non-inverting (+) input of operational amplifier Op-Amp **301** of the detection circuit **113**. Based on the received voltage level Vadj, the Op-Amp **301** is configured to generate a voltage V**3** at node **302**. In an example embodiment, the voltage V**3** is substantially equal to the voltage level Vadj.

[0028] Node **302** is coupled to an input of the resistor-divider network **117**. In an example embodiment, the resistor-divider network **117** includes series-connected resistors kR and R**2** coupled at a common node **303**. The resistor-divider network **117** is configured to receive the generated voltage V**3** at a first terminal and a voltage/current of the phase node **101** at a second terminal. Based on the received voltage V**3** and the voltage/current of the phase node **101**, the resistor-divider network **117** generates a voltage V_{OCN} which is provided to a non-inverting (+) input of Overcurrent (OC) Comparator **304**. The OC Comparator **304** compares the voltage V_{OCN} to a reference voltage (e.g., ground, or another bias voltage) coupled to the inverting (−) input of the OC Comparator **304** and outputs an overcurrent event detection signal Voc. The overcurrent event detection signal Voc is then provided to the control logic and driver circuit **105**. Thus, the adjustment to overcurrent threshold level is advantageously made such that the overcurrent threshold level varies in substantially the same way that Rdson varies across a range of temperatures.

[0029] In some embodiments, a high output state of the OC Comparator **304** indicates an overcurrent event, and a low output state of the OC Comparator **304** indicates the absence of an overcurrent event. In some embodiments, while the output state of the OC Comparator **304** is low, the control logic and driver circuit **105** cycles the switch M**2** between ON and OFF states. At the moment when V_{OCN}=V_{OCP} the output state of the OC Comparator **304** is high. In some embodiments, upon receiving a high output state from the OC Comparator **304**, the control logic and driver circuit **105** turns one or both of the switches M**1**, M**2** OFF. When V_{OCN}=V_{OCP}:

$$Vsw = \frac{V3}{k} \quad \text{(Equation 4)}$$

$$Vsw = Ioc * Rdson. \quad \text{(Equation 5)}$$

where I_{OC} is the overcurrent threshold level of the overcurrent protection circuit **110**.

[0030] As previously stated, V**3** is equal, or substantially equal, to the voltage level Vadj determined in Equation 3 above. Substituting the voltage level Vadj for V**3** in Equation 5 leads to the following Equation 6:

$$Ioc = \frac{Vsw}{Rdson} = \frac{V3}{k * Rdson} = \frac{(Vref - Vbe)}{Rdson} * \frac{R1 * RzIc}{k * R0 * Rcs} \quad \text{(Equation 6)}$$

[0031] The voltage Vref can be trimmed to make Vref-Vbe match the temperature coefficient of the on-resistance Rdson of the switch M**2**. Thus, the overcurrent threshold I_{OC} changes proportionally to a current through M**2** as the temperature changes in the SMPS **100**. A trim resistor Rztc is utilized in some embodiments to trim or otherwise compensate for process variations which may occur during manufacturing of the overcurrent protection circuit **110**. In some embodiments, the trim resistor Rztc is a resistor circuit having a TCR substantially equal to zero. An advantage of the above approach is that the I_{OC} will have little or no temperature dependency and therefore its value can be more accurately determined.

[0032] FIG. **4** illustrates an example operation of the overcurrent protection circuit **110**. The process begins at Block **410** in which an adjustable voltage level Vadj is generated based on a temperature coefficient of the switch M**2**, with the generated voltage level Vadj having a net positive temperature coefficient. Next, at Block **420**, an overcurrent threshold level is determined by the overcurrent protection circuit **110** based on the generated voltage level Vadj. Operations in Blocks **410** and **420** are performed in a manner consistent with those described above in detail in conjunction with FIGS. **1-3**.

[0033] Reference has been made in detail to embodiments of the disclosed invention, one or more examples of which have been illustrated in the accompanying figures. Each example has been provided by way of explanation of the present technology, not as a limitation of the present technology. In fact, while the specification has been described in detail with respect to specific embodiments of the invention, it will be appreciated that those skilled in the art, upon attaining an understanding of the foregoing, may readily conceive of alterations to, variations of, and equivalents to these embodiments. For instance, features illustrated or described as part of one embodiment may be used with another embodiment to yield a still further embodiment. Thus, it is intended that the present subject matter covers all such modifications and variations within the scope of the appended claims and their equivalents. These and other modifications and variations to the present invention may be practiced by those of ordinary skill in the art, without departing from the scope of the present invention, which is more particularly set forth in the appended claims. Furthermore, those of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that the foregoing description is by way of example only and is not intended to limit the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A method comprising:

generating, by an adjustable voltage generator circuit of an overcurrent protection circuit coupled to a switch of a switch-mode power supply circuit, an adjustable voltage based on a temperature coefficient of the switch;

determining an adjustable overcurrent threshold level in the overcurrent protection circuit based on the adjustable voltage; and

adjusting, by a detection circuit of the overcurrent protection circuit, a current supplied to the switch-mode power supply circuit based on (a) the adjustable voltage, and (b) a voltage corresponding to the switch received from the switch-mode power supply circuit.

2. The method of claim **1**, wherein:

the adjustable voltage is generated in accordance with a positive temperature coefficient.

3. The method of claim **1**, wherein:

the switch is coupled to and controlled by the overcurrent protection circuit.

4. The method of claim **3**, further comprising:

adjusting, by the overcurrent protection circuit, the current supplied to the switch-mode power supply circuit independently of temperature changes in the switch-mode power supply circuit.

5. The method of claim **1**, wherein:

the adjustable voltage is generated in accordance with an adjustable temperature coefficient, and the method further comprises:

adjusting, by the overcurrent protection circuit, the adjustable temperature coefficient to substantially match the temperature coefficient of the switch.

6. The method of claim **1**, further comprising:

determining, by the overcurrent protection circuit, a voltage level of the adjustable voltage based on a value of a programmable scaling resistor coupled to the overcurrent protection circuit.

7. The method of claim **1**, further comprising:

generating, by a voltage-to-current generator circuit of the adjustable voltage generator circuit, a first voltage based on a received reference voltage; and

generating, by a current-to-voltage circuit coupled to the voltage-to-current generator circuit, a second voltage based on the first voltage, the second voltage having a net positive temperature coefficient.

8. The method of claim **7**, wherein:

the voltage-to-current generator circuit has a negative temperature coefficient; and

the current-to-voltage circuit has a positive temperature coefficient.

9. The method of claim **7**, wherein:

the voltage-to-current generator circuit includes a bipolar junction transistor (BJT) having a base, an emitter and a collector, and the received reference voltage is received at the base of the BJT.

10. The method of claim **7**, wherein:

the received reference voltage substantially matches the temperature coefficient of the switch.

11. The method of claim **7**, further comprising:

receiving the first voltage at a first resistor of the current-to-voltage circuit and being coupled to the voltage-to-current generator circuit, a variable resistor being coupled in series to the first resistor via a common node; and

outputting the second voltage from the common node.

12. The method of claim **7**, further comprising:

outputting, from a current mirror circuit of the adjustable voltage generator circuit, a threshold current based on (a) the second voltage, and (b) a value of a scaling resistor coupled to the overcurrent protection circuit.

13. The method of claim **12**, further comprising:

generating, by a trim resistor coupled to the current mirror circuit, the adjustable voltage based on the threshold current and the trim resistor.

14. The method of claim **13**, wherein the trim resistor has a temperature coefficient substantially equal to zero.

15. The method of claim **13**, wherein the trim resistor is a variable resistor.

16. The method of claim **1**, further comprising:

generating, by an operational amplifier of the detection circuit, a third voltage based on the adjustable voltage received from the adjustable voltage generator circuit; and

receiving, at a resistor-divider network of the detection circuit, the third voltage and the voltage corresponding to the switch received from the switch-mode power supply circuit;

wherein the adjustable overcurrent threshold level is based on an output voltage of the resistor-divider network.

17. The method of claim **16**, wherein the third voltage is substantially equal to the adjustable voltage.

* * * * *