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Enhancement of connectivity and flux pinning in MgB2 superconducting bulks and wires

Lin Lu

University of Wollongong

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Enhancement of Connectivity and Flux Pinning in
MgB₂ Superconducting Bulks and Wires

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of
the degree of

Master of Engineering by Research

From the

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

By

Lin Lu

Institute for Superconducting and Electronic Materials

2009
DECLARATION

This is to certify that the work presented in this thesis was carried out by the candidate in the laboratories of the Institute for Superconducting and Electronic Materials (ISEM), at the University of Wollongong, NSW, Australia, and has not been submitted for a degree to any other institution for higher education.

Lin Lu

2009
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ABSTRACT

The objective of this work is to improve the connectivity and flux pinning and hence to enhance the critical current density of MgB$_2$ superconductor by the development of following processes and techniques: densification and use of excess Mg addition, substitution and inclusion by doping with nano C, nano-SiC or carbon nanotube (CNT) and BN.

Firstly, a new, direct Mg-diffusion method to synthesize highly dense pure MgB$_2$ bulks has been developed, in which pressed boron bulks are separately packed in sealed iron tubes that have been filled with magnesium powder and then sintered at high temperature over a long period. The influence of the bulk density on the superconducting properties of MgB$_2$ has been investigated through synthesizing bulks with different densities, using a combination of diffusion and the in-situ method. This method is easily applicable to the fabrication of highly dense MgB$_2$ bulks and tape-shaped samples. It was found that the connectivity was significantly improved as the effective area (AF) varied from 0.2 (conventional in-situ) to 0.42 (diffusion), hence the self-field critical current density, $J_c$, is significantly improved compared with conventional porous MgB$_2$ bulks made by the in-situ method. A sample reacted at 850 °C for 10 hrs exhibited $J_c$ of 1.2 MA/cm$^2$ at 20 K in self-field.
Secondly, a novel artificial pinning centre method has been developed by using thermal strain to induce defects in MgB$_2$ superconductors. Strain engineering has been used previously to modify material properties in ferroelectric, superconducting, and ferromagnetic thin films$^8$. The advantage of strain engineering is that it can achieve unexpected enhancement in certain properties, for example, it can increase the ferroelectric critical temperature, $T_c$, by 300 to 500$^\circ$C, with a minimum detrimental effect on the intrinsic properties of the material. Strain engineering has been largely applied to materials in thin film form, where the strain is generated as a result of lattice mismatch between the substrate and component film, or between layers in multilayer structures. The residual thermal stress/strain has been observed in dense SiC-MgB$_2$ superconductor composites prepared by the diffusion method. The thermal strain caused by the different thermal expansion coefficients ($\alpha$) between the MgB$_2$ and SiC phases is responsible for the significant improvement in the critical current, $J_c$, the irreversibility field, $H_{irr}$, and the upper critical field, $H_{c2}$, in the SiC-MgB$_2$ composite. In contrast to the common practice of improving the $J_c$ and $H_{c2}$ of MgB$_2$ through chemical substitution, SiC-MgB$_2$ composite shows only a small drop in $T_c$ and little increase in resistivity but exhibits a significant improvement over the $J_c$ and $H_{c2}$ of conventional MgB$_2$ due to the advantage of residual thermal strains. The present findings open up a new direction for manipulation of material properties through strain engineering in materials in various forms.
Another part of the work in this thesis was on MgB$_2$ bulks and wires that were fabricated by in-situ solid state reaction and the powder-in-tube method, respectively. The effects of excess Mg on the structure and physical properties, such as the lattice parameters, the critical temperature ($T_c$), the critical current ($J_c$), the irreversibility field ($H_{irr}$), and the upper critical field ($H_{c2}$), have been detailed. It was found that $J_c$, $H_{irr}$, and $H_{c2}$ were significantly enhanced for Mg excess samples. All these properties were highly sensitive to the processing temperature for the Mg excess samples, while there was only a weak dependence on processing temperature for normal ones. For the bulks, the $T_c$ variation for the 10% Mg excess sample was 1.6 K (36.3 K to 37.9 K) when the sintering temperature was changed from 650$^\circ$C to 850$^\circ$C, while it only varied by 0.5 K (37.2 K to 37.7 K) for the normal sample. The low field $J_c$ for the 10% Mg excess samples sintered at 750$^\circ$C increased by a factor of 3, compared to that for the normal MgB$_2$ sample, while the $H_{c2}$ for the 10% Mg excess samples sintered at 650$^\circ$C reached 8.7 T at 25 K, compared to 6.6 T for the normal sample. Rietveld refinement x-ray diffraction (XRD) analysis showed that the MgO content was reduced in 10% excess Mg samples, leading to an increase in the effective cross section of the superconductor.

MgB$_2$ / Fe wires with 10 at% excess Mg produced by in-situ powder-in-tube processing were compared with normal stoichiometric MgB$_2$ / Fe wires prepared by the same method. It was found that the critical current ($J_c$) and the irreversibility field ($H_{irr}$) were significantly enhanced for MgB$_2$ / Fe wires with excess Mg. The transport
$J_c$ for 10 at% Mg excess samples sintered at 800°C, measured in fields up to 14 T, increased by a factor of 2 compared to that for the normal MgB$_2$ wires. The best $J_c$ results for a 10 at% Mg excess sample were obtained by heating the sample for 1 h at 600 °C, resulting in $J_c$ for a field of 8 T and a temperature of 10 K that reached $3 \times 10^4$ A/cm$^2$. A detailed analysis of the effects of excess Mg on the microstructures, the $J_c$, and the $H_{irr}$ of MgB$_2$/Fe wires is presented in this thesis.