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Fabrication of *in-situ* MgB₂ thin films on Al₂O₃ substrate using off-axis PLD technique

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

Master of Science
by Research

from

University of Wollongong

by

Yi Sun Wu

at

Institute for Superconducting and Electronic Materials

Faculty of Engineering

August 2007

CANDIDATE'S CERTIFICATION

I hereby declare that the research for this submission was carried out by the candidate at Institute for Superconducting and Electronic Materials, the Faculty of Engineering, the University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless other wise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for any other academic institution.

Yi Sun Wu

31st July, 2007

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Contents

Certificate of Originality.....	I
Acknowledgment.....	II
Contents.....	III
Abstract.....	IX
List of Figures.....	XI
List of Tables.....	XVI
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Introduction to superconductivity and its applications	5
1.1 History of the discovery of superconductors.....	5
1.2 Fundamentals of superconductivity theory.....	5
1.2.1 The superconducting electrons – Cooper pairs.....	6
1.2.2 Coherence length	6
1.2.3 Superconducting state of metals.....	8
1.2.4 The Meissner-Ochsenfeld Effect.....	9
1.2.5 The London penetration depth.....	11
1.2.6 Ginsburg Landau parameter.....	11
1.3 Type-I and Type-II superconductors	12

1.3.1 Destruction of superconductivity by magnetic field and current.....	13
1.3.2 Mixed state in type II superconductors	14
1.4 General applications of superconducting thin films.....	16
1.4.1 Josephson junction.....	16
1.4.2 Application in supercomputers.....	17
References.....	19
 Chapter 2: Literature review of magnesium diboride.....	20
2.1 Discovery of MgB ₂ superconductor	20
2.2 Structure and physical properties of MgB ₂	20
2.2.1 Crystal structure of MgB ₂	21
2.2.2 Transport properties in polycrystalline MgB ₂	22
2.2.3 Anisotropy of MgB ₂	23
2.3 MgB ₂ Preparation	23
2.4 Current Research on MgB ₂	24
2.4.1 Chemical substitution of MgB ₂	24
2.4.2 MgB ₂ Residual Resistivity Ratio	25
2.4.3 Dependence of J_c in MgB ₂ on annealing temperature (T_{ann}) and time (t_{ann}).....	25
2.4.4 Enhanced J_c properties of MgB ₂ films due to elemental doping.....	27
2.5 Some expectation of MgB ₂ applications.....	28

2.5.1 Microwave loss by surface resistance	28
2.5.2 Non-linear response of superconducting films to high- frequency devices.....	28
2.5.3 Superconducting Fault Current Limiter (FCL)	29
2.5.4 Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI).....	29
References.....	31
 Chapter 3: Thin Film Formation Process and Experimental Systems	33
3.1 Methods of MgB ₂ thin film preparation with a pulsed laser deposition (PLD) system	33
3.1.1 Introduction to the PLD system used for thin film preparation.....	33
3.1.2 Advantages of the PLD technique.....	34
3.2 Formation and growth of thin film.....	35
3.2.1 Energy transfer through interaction.....	36
3.2.2 Dynamics of the ablation materials.....	36
3.2.3 Deposition on the substrate surface	36
3.2.4 Nucleation and growth of crystalline film	37
3.3 The PLD set-up in ISEM	39
3.3.1 Schematic layout of the PLD system in ISEM.....	39
3.3.2 The vacuum system.....	41
3.3.3 Preparation for deposition.....	42

3.4 The function of the argon background gas.....	43
3.5 Reviews on methods of high temperature annealing.....	46
3.5.1 The in situ annealing procedure.....	46
3.5.2 The ex situ annealing procedure.....	47
3.5.3 Experimental reviews between in situ & ex situ annealed films by PLD.....	49
3.6 Microstructure characterization.....	49
3.6.1 Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) observations.....	49
3.6.1.1 Microstructure characterization.....	50
3.6.1.2 Surface topography.....	50
3.6.1.3 Energy Dispersive Spectroscopy (EDS).....	51
3.6.2 X-ray diffraction analysis.....	52
3.6.2.1 General X-ray diffraction theory.....	53
3.6.2.2 Bragg's law.....	54
3.6.2.3 Mechanical components (Goniometer).....	55
3.7 Magnetic and transport properties measurements.....	57
3.7.1 Resisitivity measurement by transport current method.....	57
3.7.2 DC-magnetization method.....	58
References.....	61

Chapter 4: Working pressure optimization on off-axis deposition of in situ MgB₂ films.....63

Introduction.....63

Production of thin film by off-axis deposition.....63

Fundamental principles of the off-axis deposition technique.....64

Experiment.....66

Effect of the vacuum condition and deposition pressure.....67

Results and Discussion.....69

Conclusion... ..75

References.....76

Chapter 5: Optimization of off-axis in situ MgB₂ films using different annealing conditions.....77

Introduction.....78

Experiment80

Optimization of annealing condition.....81

Results and Discussion.....82

Conclusions.....101

References.....102

Chapter 6: Investigation of influence on superconducting properties by selective

Si addition.....	104
Introduction	105
Experiment	106
Results and discussion	108
Conclusion.....	128
References.....	129
 Summary.....	 131
 Publication list.....	 134

Abstract

In Chapter 1, I briefly discuss some fundamental theories and the history of superconductivity. A few examples are given for superconductor applications. At Chapter 2, a literature review of MgB_2 is presented, with some discussion on its discovery, as well as the current research on this binary superconductor. In Chapter 3, the experimental system and other types of laboratory measurement and analysis equipment are introduced, such as those used for critical temperature T_c and critical current J_c measurements, microstructural analysis using X-ray Diffraction (XRD), Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM), etc. From Chapter 4 through Chapter 7, various ways of improving the fabrication of MgB_2 thin films are discussed along with the corresponding results.

In Chapter 4, I first report investigations on the vacuum level and background pressure in order to create an optimised environment inside the chamber for the pulsed laser deposition (PLD) of MgB_2 thin films on Al_2O_3 (Sapphire) substrates. I found that a vacuum of 9×10^{-8} Torr inside the deposition chamber was necessary before deposition to generate a stronger plasma of the ablating materials, but that a high purity argon background gas had to be introduced up to a pressure of 120m Torr to fabricate high quality MgB_2 thin films. This result was employed in the experiments in the rest of this report.

In Chapter 5, the effects of changing the annealing parameters, time (τ_{ann}) and temperature (T_{ann}), are reported. The combined results from T_c measurements and

XRD showed that the films with longer dwell times, up to 9 minutes at a moderate sintering temperature, have higher T_c and better crystal growth. We found that for films sintered at 700 °C, critical current densities, J_c , as high as $2 \times 10^{-6} \text{ Acm}^{-2}$ were achieved at 10K and 0.5T. However, J_c drops as the magnetic field increases. It is proposed that the improved J_c in low fields was due to the fine grains and enhanced density of the sample.

In Chapter 6, I discuss the fabrication of MgB_2 thin films with the addition of elemental Si. Silicon is a semiconductor and is very reactive with Magnesium to form Mg_2Si , which can act as a source of pinning centres in our thin films, making it possible to improve the J_c dependence in magnetic field. The drawback of this is higher resistivity and weaker grain connectivity, so a moderate amount of Si addition must be chosen. Also, the Si was added by using a switching target mechanism which will produce thin films of partial multilayer structures. Although the time for the Si deposition was short, the Si layers embedded in between the MgB_2 layers were thin and usually broke during a high temperature sintering process. However, the defects which formed in between these layers generally had a two dimensional structure and their effect on the pinning properties due to this geometry is also discussed. A film with about 5 wt% of Si added was observed to have slightly decreased T_c and weaker field dependence.

List of Figures

Fig.1-1(a) The metal structure considered to be a lattice of cations through which delocalized electrons can flow.

Fig.1-1(b) A concentrated region of positive charge that will propagate along the lattice through interaction with the electron. Both figures cited from [2].

Fig.1-2 Meissner effect exhibits the repulsion of external flux from the core of a perfect diamagnetic superconductor. Note that the Meissner effect does not occur in a perfect diamagnet in the normal state. Figure cited from [6].

Fig.1-3 A Magnet is levitated from the surface of a cooled superconductor due to magnetic field expulsion. Figure cited from [5].

Fig.1-4 Change of magnetization inside type I and type II superconductors under an applied field B_a . Figure cited from [8].

Fig.2-1 MgB_2 crystal structure.

Fig.2-2 Magnetic field dependence of J_c at 5K for various films grown at 700-950°C for 30min and at 900°C for 30-120min. Figure cited from [19].

Fig.2-3 Transport J_c for SiC doped and pure MgB_2 wires. Inset shows T_c for these samples. Figure cited from [4].

Fig.3-1 A schematic diagram of the PLD se-tup used for the common on-axis deposition geometry for MgB_2 in-situ annealed film. The inset figure is a 3-D illustration of the interior of the chamber system. The target-substrate distance is adjustable by changing the height of the heater supporting frame before mounting the part in the chamber.

Fig.3-2 A brief schematic layout of the PLD vacuum system showing all the pumping mechanisms, ISEM, UOW.

Fig.3-3 A photo image of a film sample on the heater during the high temperature annealing.

Fig.3-4 The homemade sealed-in-argon apparatus for the ex situ annealing of MgB_2 film [10].

Fig.3-5 Graphical description of Bragg's theory.

Fig.3-6 Layout of the standard geometry of theta: 2-theta goniometer. Figure cited from [14].

Fig.3-7 An XRD spectrum of the stoichiometric MgB_2 target shows detection of different MgB_2 lattice planes.

Fig.3-8 Illustrations of four-probe set-up for transport measurement in the Physical Properties Measurement System (PPMS). The left is the $B \perp$ /film case and the right $B //$ film. Figure cited from [10].

Fig.3-9 Magnetic Property Measurement System (MPMS) from Quantum Design. Figure cited from [10].

Fig.4-1 Graphical representations of PLD systems. Figure cited from [2].

Fig.4-2 Details of the geometry of the interior deposition chamber.

Fig.4-3 Ablating MgB_2 target in a 120 mTorr argon pressure. Left, the base vacuum was 7×10^{-7} Torr, and right, 9×10^{-8} Torr. The laser energy was 500 mJ/pulse.

Fig.4-4 Laser ablation from Mg and MgB_2 targets at different argon pressures.

Fig.4-5 Magnetic T_c curves of MgB_2 thin films at different Ar deposition pressures.

Fig.4-6 XRD diffraction spectra of MgB₂ thin films at different deposition pressures.

Fig. 5-1 (a) Change of T_c against the annealing time.

Fig. 5-1 (b) Change of T_c against the annealing temperature.

Fig.5-2(a) Normalized magnetic transition curves of samples with different annealing time τ_{ann} .

Fig.5-2(b) Normalized magnetic transition curves of samples with different annealing temperature T_{ann} .

Fig. 5-3 (a) Transition curves of magnetization against temperature for τ_{ann} series.

Fig. 5-3 (b) Transition curves of magnetization against temperature for T_{ann} series.

Fig. 5-4 (a) X-ray diffraction spectra of the samples in the series sintered for different τ_{ann} (Al₂O₃, 0 min, 1 min, 2 mins, 5 mins, 9 mins, 11 mins, 30 mins, 45 mins & 60 mins. from bottom to top).

Fig. 5-4 (b) X-ray diffraction spectra of the samples in the series sintered at different T_{ann} (Al₂O₃, 420 °C, 510 °C, 650 °C, 700 °C, 740 °C, 760 °C & 790 °C. from bottom to top).

Fig.5-5 M - H curves of the off-axis film at different temperatures.

Fig.5-6 Magnetic J_c versus applied field for the off-axis film (t_{ann} = 9 mins, T_{ann} = 700 °C) at different temperatures.

Fig.5-7 TEM images of the #280806u sample: (a) the surface, showing the average grain size of 20-30nm; (b) cross-sectional image showing that the average thickness of the single MgB₂ layer is about 630nm.

Fig.5-8 The temperature (K) dependence of the resistivity ρ in #280806m. The inset figure is an enlargement of the transition near T_c .

Fig. 5-9(a) The field dependence of the R-T curves of the MgB₂ film #280806m in 8.7T, 7T, 5T, 3T, 2T, 1T, 0.5T, 0.1T and 0T from left to right in perpendicular fields.

Fig. 5-9(b) The field dependence of the R-T curves of the MgB₂ film #280806m in 8.7T, 7T, 5T, 3T, 2T, 1T, 0.5T, 0.1T and 0T from left to right in parallel fields.

Fig. 5-10 (a) H_{c2} - T curves derived from T at 90% of the normal state resistivity.

Fig. 5-10 (b) H_{irr} - T curves derived from T at 10% of the normal state resistivity.

Fig.6-1(a) EDS spectrum of 5.7% detected Si content in sample #140906m.

Fig.6-1(b) EDS spectrum of 15.8% detected Si content in sample #150906m.

Fig.6-2 XRD spectra show an increased level of impurities with higher Si addition. The detection of the MgB₂ (001) and (002) peaks at 25.2° and 51.9° are indicated by the dots. The 5.7% Si added sample still shows small peaks induced at these two angles, whereas in the 15.8% Si added sample no detection of these peaks was observed at all.

Fig.6-3(a) EDS surface image (top) and Si mapping (bottom) of the 5.7% Si added MgB₂ film.

Fig.6-3(b) EDS surface image (top) and Si mapping (bottom) of the 15.8% Si added MgB₂ film.

Fig.6-4 DC magnetization curves of films with different level of Si addition in ZFC measurements.

Fig.6-5 TEM cross-sectional image showing grain structures inside the 15.8% Si added MgB₂ film. The middle part is the MgB₂ film and the Al₂O₃ substrate is at the left-hand side.

Fig.6-6 Change of J_c of different levels of Si added films against applied magnetic field at 5K.

Fig.6-7 The resistivity versus temperature curves for (a) un-added, (b) 5.7%, and (c) 15.8% Si-added films in fields parallel to the ab -plane (from right to left 0T, 0.1T, 0.5T, 1T, 2T, 3T, 5T, 7T and 8.7 T).

Fig.6-8 The resistivity versus temperature curves for (a) un-added, (b) 5.7%, and (c) 15.8% Si-added films in fields perpendicular to the ab -plane (from right to left 0T, 0.1T, 0.5T, 1T, 2T, 3T, 5T, 7T and 8.7 T).

Fig.6-9 The irreversibility fields of the pure and Si-added MgB_2 films in both (a) fields parallel to the ab -plane, and (b) fields perpendicular to the ab -plane.

Fig.6-10 The upper critical fields of the pure and Si-added MgB_2 films in fields both (a) parallel and (b) perpendicular to the ab -plane.

List of tables

Table 2-1 Reactivity of MgB_2 with various electronic materials [17].

Table 6-1 Si content and corresponding measured magnetic properties in the MgB_2 films.