

Effects of Nano-TiO₂ Particles Additions on Microstructure Development And Hardness of Sn_{3.5}Ag_{0.5}Cu Composite Solder

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ABSTRACT

The effects of nano-TiO₂ particle additives on the microstructure and microhardness of the Sn_{3.5}Ag_{0.5}Cu composite solder were studied. Results show that alloying with nano-TiO₂ particles dramatically reduced the formation of primary β -Sn phase, the average size of Ag₃Sn phase, and the spacing lamellae in the Sn_{3.5}Ag_{0.5}Cu composite solder. This is attributed to the adsorption of nano-TiO₂ particles with high surface free energy on the grain surface during solidification. Microhardness improved with the addition of nano-TiO₂ particles, which refined Ag Sn IMCs. The refined IMCs acted as a strengthening phase in the solder matrix and enhanced the Vicker's microhardness of the Sn_{3.5}Ag_{0.5}Cu composite solders, which corresponds well with the prediction of the classic dispersion strengthening theory.

Keywords: Nano-TiO₂ particles; Composite solder; Microstructure; Microhardness.

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1. Introduction

Although traditional Sn-Pb solder has been widely used, many alternatives to lead-free solders are being developed because of environmental concerns about lead. Currently, "green" electronic products and systems that do not contain toxic materials such as Pb are required [1]. Among the lead-free solders, Sn-Ag-Cu has been recognized as the most promising candidate to replace eutectic Sn-Pb solder [2-5]. In the development of lead-free solders to be used in the electronic packaging industry, several challenges must be met. The trend towards miniaturization and enhancement of functional density requires much smaller solder joints and fine-pitch interconnections for microelectronic packaging in electronic devices. Hence, ball grid array (BGA) and flip chip (FC) technologies are widely used in these portable devices because of their high density input/output (I/O) connections in a limited space, and the increase in I/O density has lowered the conventional pitches to very fine sizes (20 μ m) [6]. In order to development

new solders with a low melting point, higher strength, better microstructure properties, and high creep resistance are necessary.

In early research to comprehensively improve the properties of solder alloy using composite technology, Lin et al. [7-9] added nano-sized TiO₂ powders into conventional Sn37Pb solder. The micro hardness measurements and microstructure observations revealed that the addition of titanium dioxide nano particles enhanced the strength of the conventional solder. Tsao and Chang added TiO₂ nano particles to Sn3.5Ag0.25Cu lead-free solder alloy [10]. Mechanical property measurements indicated significant increases in micro hardness, 0.2% offset yield strength (0.2% YS), and ultimate tensile strength (UTS). However, the ductility decreased with increasing amounts of TiO₂ nano particles. Tsao et al. [11] added nano-powders of Al₂O₃ to lead-free Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu solder alloys. The refinement of Ag₃Sn IMCs grains improved the micro hardness of composite solder. Recently, Nai et al. [12] have developed a Sn–Ag–Cu composite containing carbon nano-tubes (CNT) that exhibits improved strength.

In this study, small amounts of nano-TiO₂ were added to Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu solder to try to improve the microstructure and mechanical properties of the solder. Specifically, Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu solders were doped with 0, 0.5, or 1 wt.% TiO₂ 20nm nano particles. The microstructure and micro hardness effects of the nano particles on mechanical properties of the solder alloy will be discussed.

2. Experimental

Lead-free solder, Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu eutectic alloy (SAC), was prepared from Sn, Ag, and Cu ingots of 99.99% purity. The Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu lead-free composite solders were prepared by mechanically dispersing 0.5 and 1 wt.% of nano-TiO particles into the lead-free 2 Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu eutectic solder with subsequent remelting in a vacuum furnace at 650°C for 2.5 hours and casting in a mold. The solder was melted in a crucible and chill cast in a copper mold to form square ingots of 8 × 10 × 20 mm. The average size of the nominally spherical nano-TiO₂ particles was 20 nm in diameter (Nanostructured & Amorphous materials, USA).

All seven specimens were etched in a solution of 5 vol.% HNO₃ + 95 vol.% C₂H₅OH for 2 min. The microstructure of the samples was observed with optical microscopy and scanning electron microscopy.

Hardness tests were determined on a Vickers scale using an automatic digital microhardness tester with a 10 gf indenting load and a load dwell time of 15 s. The experiments were carried out at room temperature, 25 °C.

3. Results and discussion

Figure 1a is a SEM image showing the original microstructure of the Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu solder under the as-cast condition. In Fig.1a, the grey regions are representative of dendrite β-Sn grains with an average size of 25.7μm, a needle-like Ag₃Sn, and a eutectic phase. The eutectic phase contained both β-Sn and the needle-like Ag₃Sn phase. The needle-like Ag₃Sn grains were 4.1 μm long and 0.79 μm wide. The Ag₃Sn phase, located between the average spacing (L), was about 1.3 μm. However, no large particles of Ag₃Sn plate were observed in the lead-free Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu solder.

With the addition of 0.5 wt.% nano- TiO₂ particles to the eutectic solder, the size of the dendrite β -Sn grains decreased obviously, as shown in Fig.1b. The average grain size was around 8.6 μm . When the amount of nano-TiO₂ particles was increased to 1 wt.%, the average β -Sn grain size decreased to 10.0 μm , as shown in Fig.1c. According to the XRD analysis, the Sn_{3.5}Ag_{0.5}Cu composite solder with the addition of 1 wt.% nano-TiO₂ particles was found to exhibit a small intensity TiO₂ peak. This indicated that the nano-TiO₂ particles were successfully blended with the Sn_{3.5}Ag_{0.5}Cu solder.

From Fig.1b-1c, it can be seen that the sizes of Ag₃Sn IMCs in the Sn_{3.5}Ag_{0.5}Cu composite solders were influenced by the addition of the nano-TiO₂ particles. In order to precisely determine the influence of nano-structured nano-TiO₂ particles on the morphology of Ag₃Sn IMCs, the size of the Ag₃Sn IMCs and the spacing between the Ag₃Sn IMCs in the fabricated solder specimens were analyzed in 30 randomly chosen locations and the average values calculated based on these data. These data are listed in Table 1. As can be seen in Figure 2, the nano-TiO₂ particles affected both the Ag₃Sn average sizes and the spacing sizes between them in the Sn_{3.5}Ag_{0.5}Cu composite solder. As compared to Sn_{3.5}Ag_{0.5}Cu solder, the average size of Ag₃Sn particles and the spacing between them in the Sn_{3.5}Ag_{0.5}Cu composite solder decreased with the increasing amount of nano-TiO₂ particles [10-11, 14].

When 1 wt. % nano-TiO₂ particles was added, the superfine spherical nano-Ag₃Sn was about 0.25 μm in length and 0.24 μm in diameter, and there were no large block-like Ag₃Sn or Cu₆Sn₅ particles in the structure. This phenomenon has also been found previously in Sn-Ag-RE solder [15]. Wu et al. investigated the microstructural evolution of near equilibrium solidified Sn-Ag solders doped with rare earth elements. They pointed out that the evolution of the microstructure matched the theory of adsorption of surface-active materials, which can be used to explain its effect on the surface energy of Ag₃Sn particles. It is known that greater surface tension is correlated with faster plane growth and greater adsorption amounts of surface-active materials [16, 17]. According to the Gibbs equation [18], the theory of adsorption of surface-active material, an increase in adsorption of the nano-TiO₂ particles surface-active material at the Ag₃Sn grain boundaries decreases its surface energy and therefore will decrease the growth velocity of Ag₃Sn IMCs. For the Sn_{3.5}Ag_{0.5}Cu composite solders, the size of Ag₃Sn IMCs were largest than the size of the nano-TiO₂ particles. It can thus be concluded that the nano-TiO₂ particles refined the Ag₃Sn IMCs sizes via the absorption of nano-TiO₂ surface active particles, and at the same time, the β -Sn grains also become fine.

The influence of nano-TiO₂ particle reinforcement on microhardness is also summarized in Table 2 and shown in Fig. 3. An increase in microhardness with an increase in the weight percent of nanoparticles added into the Sn_{3.5}Ag_{0.5}Cu eutectic solder paste is observed. The microhardness enhancement of these solders was 20.6% to 34.8 % over that of the Sn_{3.5}Ag_{0.5}Cu solder. The observed increase in hardness of the composite solder is attributed to the presence of nano-TiO₂ particles, and the refined compounds of nano-Ag₃Sn can reinforce the microstructure.

According to the dispersion strengthening theory, nano-Ag₃Sn particles can increase the strength of the solder matrix. This can be attributed to (1) pinning of linear dislocations and increased dislocation densities, (2) obstacles to restrict the motion of grain boundaries, and (3) the strengthening mechanism of the matrix, finely dispersed nano-Ag₃Sn phase, and nano-TiO₂ particles [19]. The stress acting on the nanoparticle surfaces can be explained by the piling up of linear dislocations [20] and calculated by the following equation,

$$\tau = n \tau_0 \quad (1)$$

where τ is the stress at particle surface, n is the number of piled-up dislocations, and τ_0 is the yielding stress of the alloy. In addition, the number of piled-up dislocations is calculated as follows:

$$n = \frac{\pi(1-\nu)L\tau_0}{Gb} \quad (2)$$

where ν is the Poisson's ratio; L is the average spacing between the secondary particles (i.e., Ag₃Sn IMCs); b is the Burgers vector; and G is the shear elastic modulus of the substrate. Hence,

$$\tau = \frac{\pi(1-\nu)L\tau_0^2}{Gb} \quad (3)$$

If we assume that τ_0 is the fracture stress of the secondary particles (Ag₃Sn IMCs) and that Poisson's ratio (ν) is constant, the yield stress of the alloy becomes:

$$\tau_0 = \sqrt{\frac{Gb\tau}{\pi(1-\nu)L}} \quad (4)$$

This means that with the reduction of the average spacing of the secondary particles (Ag₃Sn IMCs), the strength of the composite solder increases. Shi et al. [16] proposed that the nano-sized inert reinforcement may be not very effective to enhance the mechanical strength. Thus, the amount of nano-TiO₂ particles is very small and the dispersion strengthening effect is mainly contributed by the nano-Ag₃Sn. In this experiment, the averaging spacing between the Ag₃Sn was 1.3 μm in the Sn_{3.5}Ag_{0.5}Cu solder.

With the addition of 0.5 wt.% nano-TiO₂ particle addition, the Ag₃Sn was obviously refined, with an average spacing of 0.35 μm (*LS2*).

According to Eq. 4, that is $LSAC/LS2 = 3.71$, leading to $\delta S2 / \delta SAC = 1.93$. In the equation, *S2* is the SAC-0.5wt. % nano-TiO₂ composite solder. SAC is the Sn_{3.5}Ag_{0.5}Cu solder. From the experimental results in Fig.3, the ratio of the microhardness between SAC-0.5nano-TiO₂ composite solder and Sn_{3.5}Ag_{0.5}Cu solder is $HS2/HSAC = 17.0/14.1 = 1.20$, which is close to the above theoretical predication of dispersion strengthening theory. These resulted are shown in Table 3 and Figure 4. Hence, the experimental results of microhardness show good correlation with the composite microstructure, and that is close to the theoretical prediction from dispersion strengthening theory.

4. Conclusions

With the addition of nano-TiO₂ particles into the lead-free Sn_{3.5}Ag_{0.5}Cu solder, a novel lead-free Sn_{3.5}Ag_{0.5}Cu composite solder was successfully blended. SEM observation of the microstructure of the Sn_{3.5}Ag_{0.5}Cu composite solders revealed both small β-Sn and superfine nano-Ag₃Sn in the solder matrix as compared to the Sn_{3.5}Ag_{0.5}Cu solder. Since the adsorption of nano-TiO₂ particles with high surface free energy on the grain surface during solidification decreased the size of β-Sn grains, the Ag₃Sn average sizes and the spacing sizes between them in the lead-free Sn_{3.5}Ag_{0.5}Cu composite solder. The enhancement of microhardness shows good correlation with the composite microstructure, approaching the theoretical prediction from dispersion strengthening theory. In summary, the presence of these nano-TiO₂ particles enhanced the mechanical properties of the Sn_{3.5}Ag 0.5Cu composite solder alloy significantly in this research.

Acknowledgements

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Table 1 Phase constituents, average grain size and average spacing of the composite solder.

Sample	Addition (Wt.%)	Ag ₃ Sn (μm)				β-Sn (μm)
		Length	Diameter	Average size	Average spacing	
SAC	Nil	4.1	0.79	2.45	1.3	25.7
1	0.5	0.32	0.29	0.31	0.35	8.6
2	1	0.25	0.24	0.25	0.24	10.0

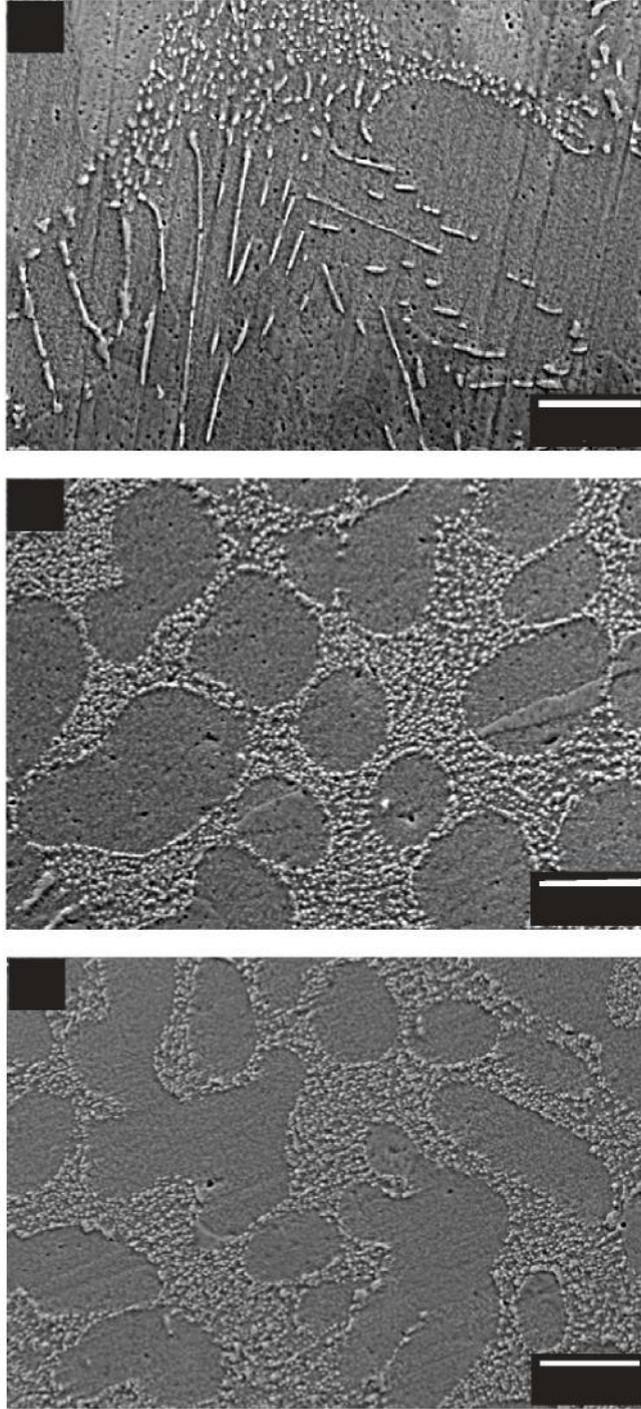


Figure 1 SEM micrographs of as-cast solders: (a) SAC, (b) SAC-0.5TiO₂ and(c) SAC-1TiO₂.

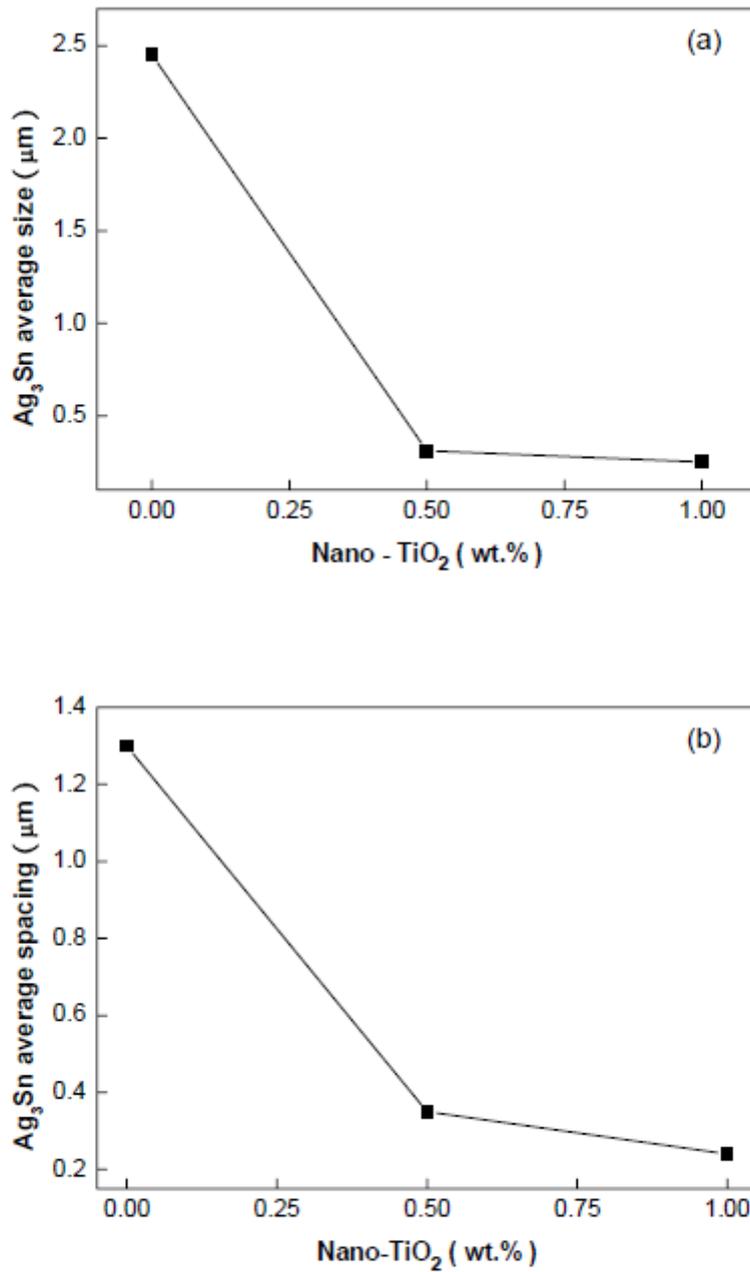


Figure 2 Comparison of Ag₃Sn IMC average sizes (a) and the spacing sizes between Ag₃Sn IMC in the SAC composite solder (b).

Table 2 Microhardness measurements of the Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu composite solders.

Sample #	Addition (Wt.%)	Microhardness indentation results (Hv)					
		Trial 1	Trial 2	Trial 3	Trial 4	Trial 5	Average
SAC	Nil	14.2	14.0	14.7	13.8	14.3	14.1
1	0.5	17.5	17.2	16.7	16.8	16.9	17.0
2	1	18.6	18.7	19.6	19.4	18.7	19.0

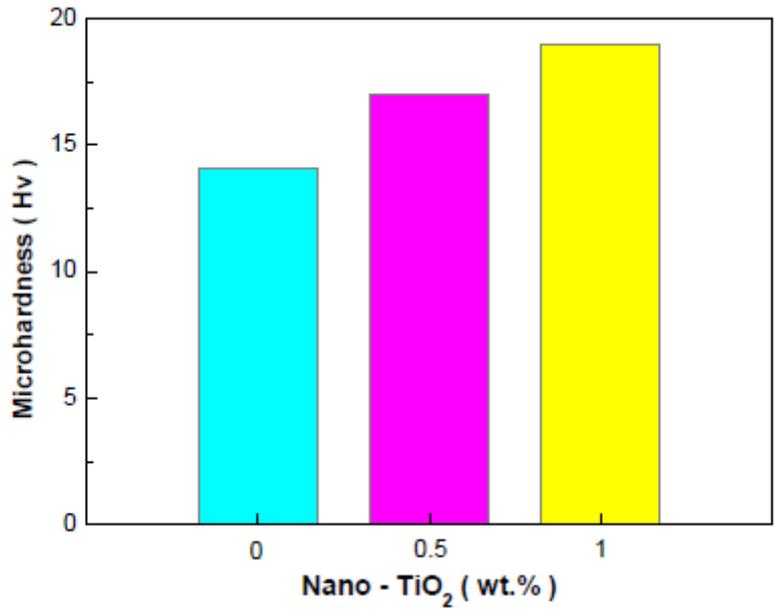


Figure 3 Influence of weight percent of nano-TiO₂ particles on the hardness of the Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu composite solder.

Table 3 The ratio of yield stress and the ratio of microhardness of the Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu composite solders.

No.	Ratio spacing Ag ₃ Sn (L _{SAC} / L _S)	Ratio yield stress (τ _S / τ _{SAC})	Ratio microhardness (H _S / H _{SAC})
1	3.71	1.93	1.20
2	5.41	2.32	1.35

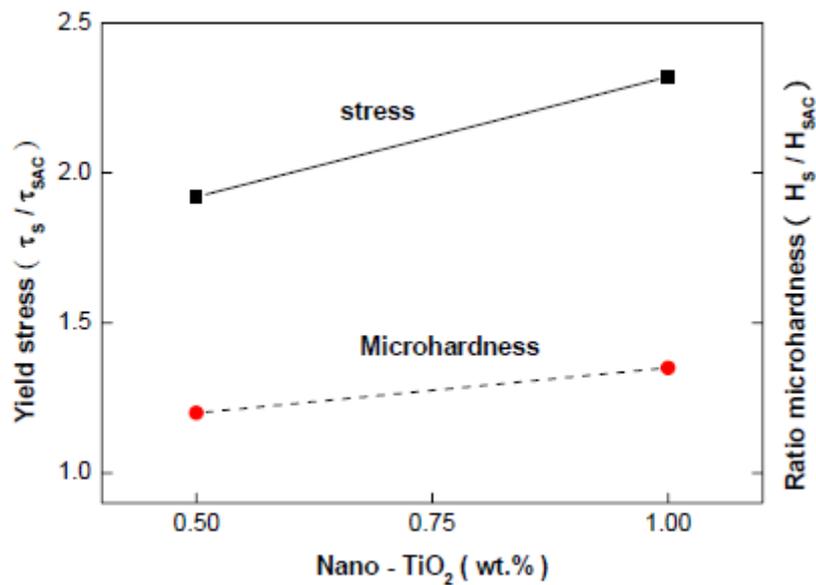


Figure 4 The ratio of yield stress and the ratio of micro-hardness of the Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu composite solder.

Effects of Nano-TiO₂ particles additions on microstructure development and hardness of Sn_{3.5}Ag_{0.5}Cu composite solder

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Context

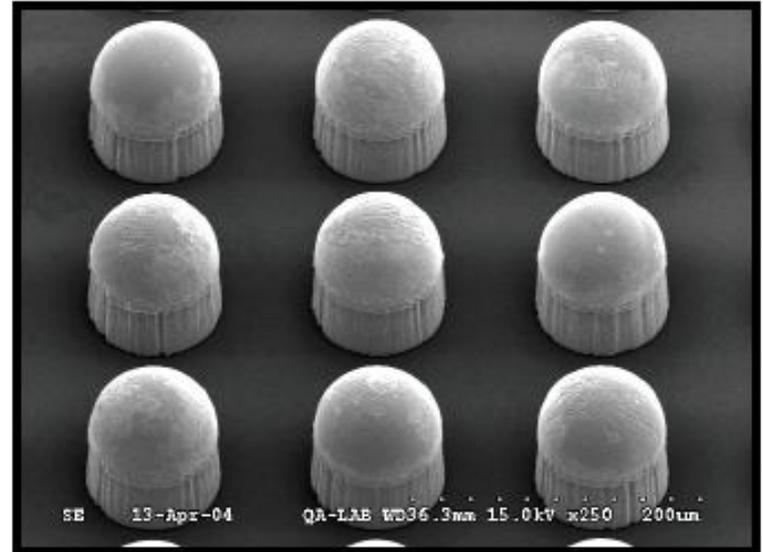
- Introduction
- Experimental
- Results and discussion
- Conclusions

Introduction

- Although traditional Sn-Pb solder has been widely used, many alternatives to lead-free solders are being developed because of environmental concerns about lead. Currently, “green” electronic products and systems that do not contain toxic materials such as Pb are required .
- The Sn-Ag-Cu has been recognized as the most promising candidate to replace eutectic Sn-Pb solder .

Electronic devices

- miniaturization and enhancement of functional density
- smaller solder joints and fine-pitch interconnections for microelectronic packaging
→ Ball grid array (BGA) , Flip chip (FC) , 3D packaging



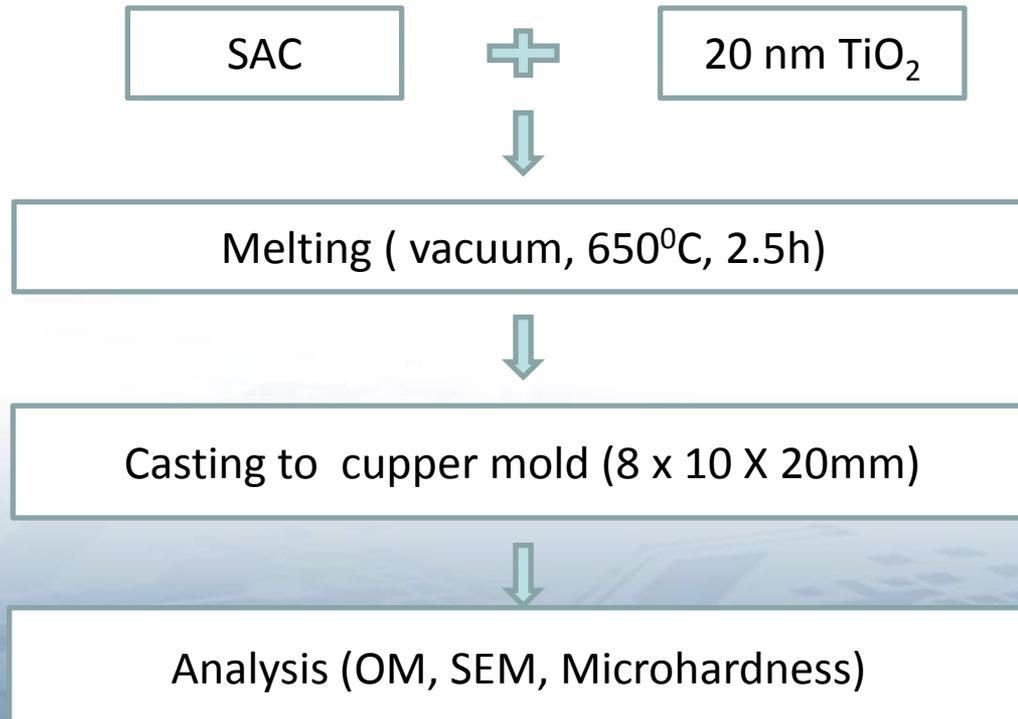
- Development new solders with a low melting point, higher strength, better microstructure properties, and high creep resistance are necessary.
- Add to nano-sized TiO₂, Al₂O₃, containing carbon nanotubes (CNT)
- Significant increases UTS, YS
- Modify microstructure, refine to β -Sn grain and IMC

This study

- small amounts of nano-TiO₂ were added to Sn_{3.5}Ag_{0.5}Cu solder to try to improve the microstructure and mechanical properties of the solder. Specifically, Sn_{3.5}Ag_{0.5}Cu solders were doped with 0, 0.5, or 1 wt.% TiO₂ 20nm nanoparticles.
- The microstructure and microhardness effects of the nanoparticles on mechanical properties of the solder alloy will be discussed.

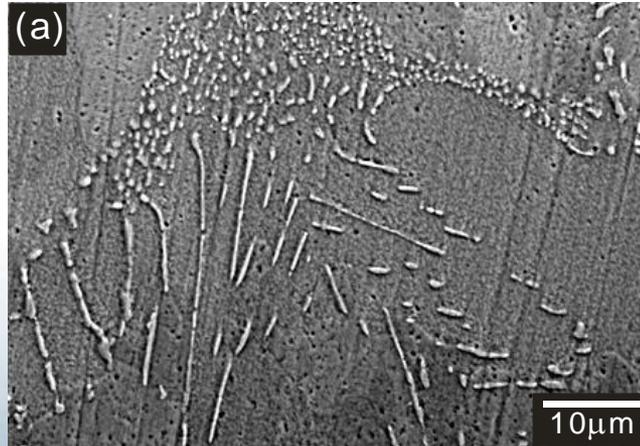
Experimental

Material: intermixing Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu(SAC) solder and 0, 0.5 , 1 wt.% of TiO₂ nanopowder



Results and discussion

- Lead-free Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu solder was composed of dendrite β -Sn grains with an average size of 25.7 μm , a needle-like Ag₃Sn, and a eutectic phase.
- The needle-like Ag₃Sn grains were 4.1 μm long and 0.79 μm wide.
- The Ag₃Sn phase, located between the average spacing (L), was about 1.3 μm .
- no large particles of Ag₃Sn plate were observed in the lead-free Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu solder.

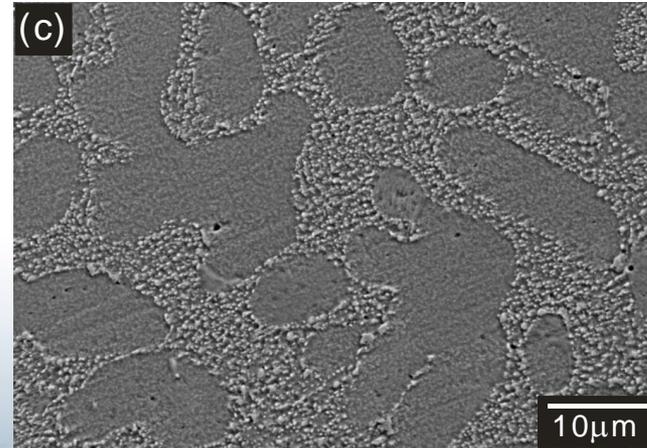
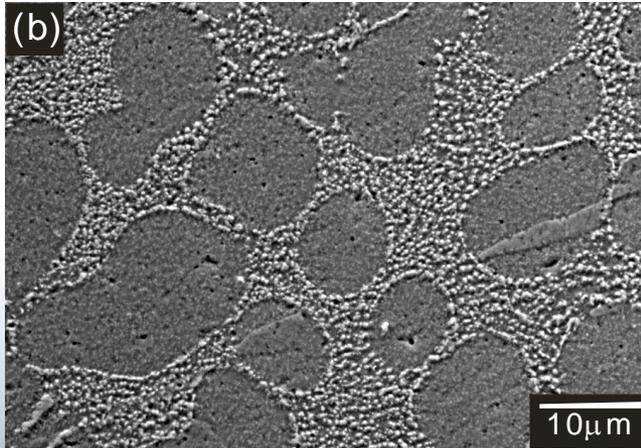


Microstructure of the Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu solder under the as-cast condition

Association Connecting Electronics Industries

Composite solder

- The average β -Sn grain size was around $8.6 \mu\text{m}$ (0.5 wt.%).
- The average grain size decreased to $10.0 \mu\text{m}$. (SAC 25.7 μm)



Microstructure of the Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu solder (b) 0.5 wt.%; (c) 1wt.%

Association Connecting Electronics Industries

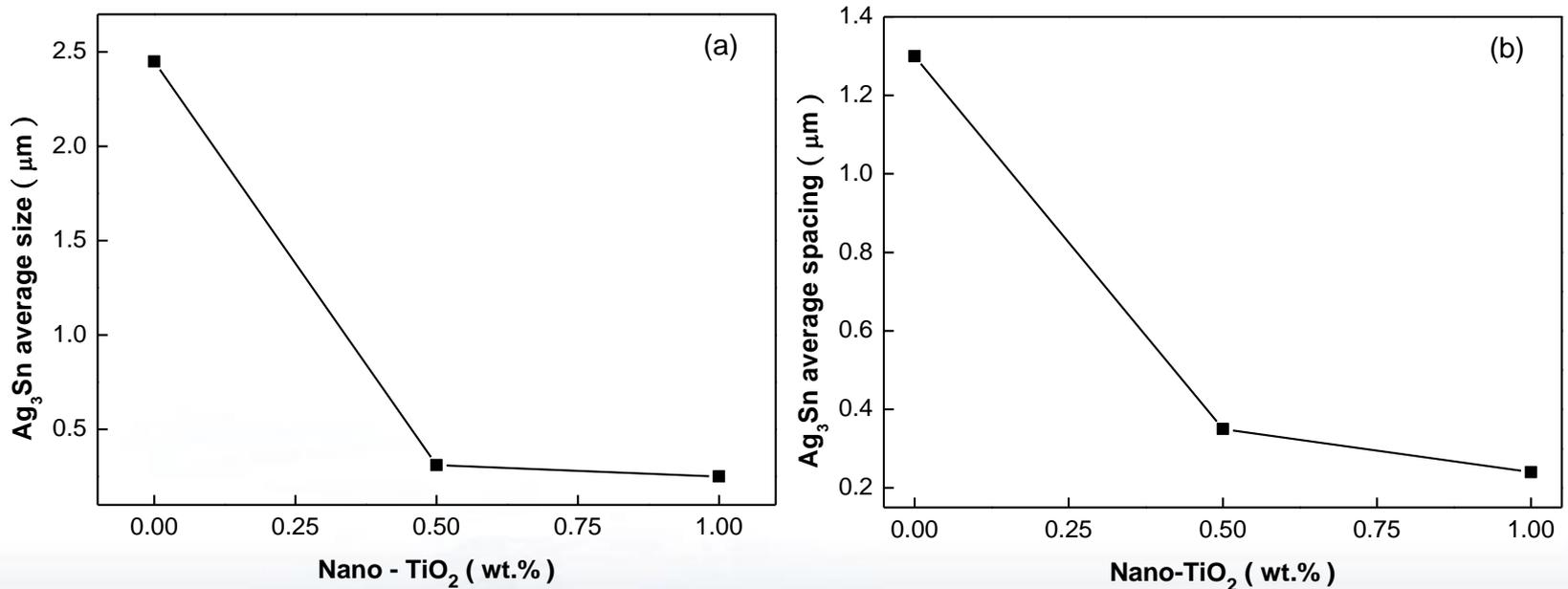
Data analysis

- As compared to Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu solder, the average size of Ag₃Sn particles and the spacing between them in the Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu composite solder decreased with the increasing amount of nano-TiO₂ particles.
- This phenomenon has also been found previously in Sn-Ag-RE solder.

Phase constituents, average grain size and average spacing of the composite solder.

Sample	Addition (Wt.%)	Ag ₃ Sn (μm)				β-Sn (μm)
		Length	Diameter	Average size	Average spacing	
SAC	Nil	4.1	0.79	2.45	1.3	25.7
1	0.5	0.32	0.29	0.31	0.35	8.6
2	1	0.25	0.24	0.25	0.24	10.0

Ag₃Sn IMC data



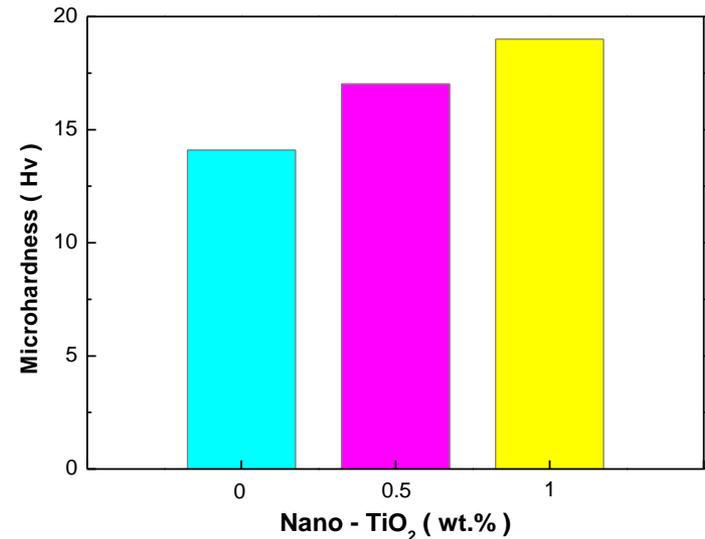
- Comparison of Ag₃Sn IMC average sizes (a) and the spacing sizes between Ag₃Sn IMC in the SAC composite solder (b).

Reason

- The evolution of the microstructure matched the theory of adsorption of surface-active materials, which can be used to explain its effect on the surface energy of Ag₃Sn particles.
- Greater surface tension is correlated with faster plane growth and greater adsorption amounts of surface-active materials .
- The theory of adsorption of surface-active material, an increase in adsorption of the nano-TiO₂ particles surface-active material at the Ag₃Sn grain boundaries decreases its surface energy and therefore will decrease the growth velocity of Ag₃Sn IMCs.
- the nano-TiO₂ particles refined the Ag₃Sn IMCs sizes via the absorption of nano-TiO₂ surface active particles, and at the same time, the β -Sn grains also become fine.

Microhardness

- An increase in microhardness with an increase in the weight percent of nanoparticles added into the Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu eutectic solder paste is observed.
- The microhardness enhancement of these solders was 20.6% to 34.8 % over that of the Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu solder.
- Increase in hardness of the composite solder is attributed to the presence of nano-TiO₂ particles, and the refined compounds of nano-Ag₃Sn can reinforce the microstructure.



- Influence of weight percent of nano-TiO₂ particles on the hardness of the Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu composite solder.

Dispersion strengthening theory

- pinning of linear dislocations and increased dislocation densities
- obstacles to restrict the motion of grain boundaries
- the strengthening mechanism of the matrix, finely dispersed nano-Ag₃Sn phase, and nano-TiO₂ particles .

Dispersion strengthening theory analysis

- Average spacing of the secondary particles & the strength of the composite solder:

$$\tau_0 = \sqrt{\frac{Gb\tau}{\pi(1-\nu)L}}$$

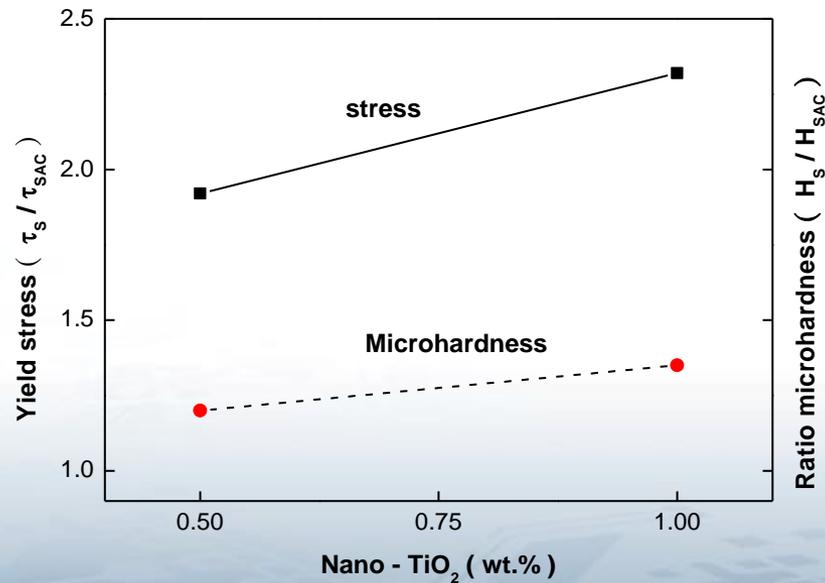
SAC-0.5wt. % nano-TiO₂ composite solder :

$$L_{SAC}/L_{S2} = 3.71, \text{ leading to } \tau_{S2} / \tau_{SAC} = 1.93.$$

the ratio of the microhardness between SAC-0.5nano-TiO₂ composite solder and Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu solder is $HS2/HSAC = 17.0/14.1 = 1.20$

Analysis

The experimental results of microhardness show good correlation with the composite microstructure, and that is close to the theoretical prediction from dispersion strengthening theory.



The ratio of yield stress and the ratio of microhardness of the Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu composite solder.

Conclusions

- The microstructure of the Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu composite solders revealed both small β -Sn and superfine nano-Ag₃Sn in the solder matrix as compared to the Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu solder.
- The adsorption of nano-TiO₂ particles with high surface free energy on the grain surface during solidification decreased the size of β -Sn grains, the Ag₃Sn average sizes and the spacing sizes between them in the lead-free Sn3.5Ag0.5Cu composite solder.
- The enhancement of microhardness shows good correlation with the composite microstructure, approaching the theoretical prediction from dispersion strengthening theory .

Acknowledgements

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Thanks!
Q&A

