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Micro Additive Manufacturing in Tungsten

Manas Singh Baghel[1], Dr .L. Boriwal[2], Dharmesh Barodiya[3], Monil Jain[4], Mohd Altaf Ansari[5]

[1]UG Student Department of Mechanical Engineering (ME), Prestige Institute of Engineering Management and Research, Indore
Email: manassinghbaghel634@gmail.com
[2]Associate Professeor Department of Mechanical Engineering (ME), Prestige Institute of Engineering Management and Research, Indore,
Email: lboriwal@piemr.edu.in.
[3]Assistant Professeor Department of Mechanical Engineering (ME), Prestige Institute of Engineering Management and Research, Indore,
Email: dbarodiya@piemr.edu.in
[4]Assistant Professeor Department of Mechanical Engineering (ME), Prestige Institute of Engineering Management and Research, Indore
Email: moniljain@piemr.edu.in
[5] PG Student Department of Mechanical Engineering (ME), Prestige Institute of Engineering Management and Research, Indore,
Email: aansari@piemr.edu.in.

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ABSTRCT

Tungsten additive manufacturing has been a subject of extensive research to overcome its unique properties. The process involves optimizing parameters like laser power, scanning speed, layer thickness, and build orientation to improve part quality and mechanical properties. Material development involves refining tungsten powder to improve flow, packing density, and sinter ability. Controlling the microstructure of tungsten is crucial for achieving desired mechanical properties. Surface finish improvement involves post-processing techniques like machining, polishing, and coating. Hybrid manufacturing approaches combine additive manufacturing with other methods, offering the advantages of both processes. Modeling and simulation techniques are also used to understand complex thermal behavior and residual stresses.

Keywords: Powder Metallurgy, Metal Injection Molding (MIM), Isostatic Pressing, Summary, References

1. Introduction:

Tungsten micro additive manufacturing has produced material with fine-grain structures that is high-density and devoid of cracks[1][2][3]. High relative density, finely grained, and defect-free tungsten components have been produced through the use of techniques such as powder extrusion printing and electron beam melting[4][5]. The mechanical characteristics of the produced tungsten samples have been further improved by the use of nanopowder precursors and improved debinding-sintering procedures. Improvements in preheating methods and alloying with rare earth oxides have demonstrated promise in lowering microcracking in additively produced tungsten, despite obstacles such as microcrack development owing to residual stresses. All things considered, tungsten micro additive manufacturing shows potential for creating high-performance components with better mechanical qualities and density, opening the door for uses in hot conditions. Numerous research have demonstrated the potential benefits of tungsten micro additive manufacturing. Various approaches, such as directed energy deposition (DED) [7], electron beam melting [8], and selective laser melting (SLM) [6, 7] have been investigated in research to fabricate tungsten components with complex architectures and high density. These techniques have proven to be effective in achieving almost full density, removing fractures, and improving the mechanical characteristics of tungsten composites. Approaches like as preheating and alloying with rare earth oxides have been used to tackle problems like microcracking [9]. The tungsten pieces that are manufactured have enhanced mechanical qualities, superior thermal performance, and high density, which makes them appropriate for use in hostile settings such as fusion reactors and X-ray tubes. All things considered, the use of micro additive manufacturing methods is a viable way to produce intricate tungsten components with improved properties [10]. Recent research has demonstrated potential breakthroughs in the field of micro additive manufacturing of tungsten. To create high-density, flawless tungsten components, a number of methods have been investigated, including wire-based additive manufacturing [13], electron beam melting [12], and powder extrusion printing [11]. These techniques have proven to be effective in producing tungsten components with high relative densities, fine-grain structures, and superior mechanical qualities. Utilising novel techniques like preheating and alloying with rare earth oxides, problems such microcrack development owing to residual stresses and ductile-to-brittle transition temperature features have been addressed [14].

There are now more options for creating high-performance tungsten components thanks to the indirect additive manufacturing process that uses nanopowder precursors [15]. These studies demonstrate, in general, how micro additive manufacturing may be used to improve the characteristics and manufacturingability of tungsten for various high-temperature applications. The problems of Micro Additive Manufacturing in Tungsten include high-density component achievement and cracking. Research has investigated this by creating tungsten composites and pure tungsten components using processes such as Selective Laser Melting (SLM) and Laser Powder Bed Fusion (LPBF). W-Ni-Fe-Co composites treated with SLM showed near full density and enhanced tensile characteristics with higher laser energy density [16]. Because laser scanning techniques alter the customisable microstructure of tungsten, cracking in additively created materials is a prevalent problem [17]. Additionally, methods like Vickers hardness and electron backscatter diffraction (EBSD) have been used to study the microhardness and microstructural characteristics of tungsten under various settings [18]. Furthermore, increased tungsten content and better thermal performance for nuclear fusion equipment can result from optimising DED processing settings[19]. Together, these investigations advance tungsten micro additive manufacturing for a range of applications.[20] Tungsten's high hardness and brittle to ductile transition temperature make micro additive manufacturing difficult[21]. To get around these restrictions, a number of methods have been investigated, including selective electron beam melting and powder extrusion printing, which have produced high- density, fine-grained, defect-free tungsten samples[22][23]. Moreover, pure tungsten has been deposited on steel substrates via directed energy deposition, which has been optimised for high tungsten content and enhanced thermal performance[24]. In spite of efforts to tailor microstructures using laser scanning techniques, cracking is still a major problem in tungsten additive manufacturing, with cracking chains arising because of the intrinsic difficulties in AM[25]. Research on preheating and alloying with rare earth oxides has shown promise in reducing microcracking and mitigating cracking processes in additively produced materials.

2. Powder Metallurgy: Powder metallurgy is a widely used method for tungsten processing. It involves compacting tungsten powder into a desired shape using pressure, followed by sintering at high temperatures. Sintering fuses the powder particles, resulting in a solid and dense tungsten component. Powder metallurgy allows for the production of various tungsten parts, including rods, sheets, plates, and complex-shaped components.

Here are some limitations associated with powder metallurgy in tungsten:

1. High Sintering Temperatures: Tungsten has a high melting point of approximately 3,410 degrees Celsius (6,170 degrees Fahrenheit). Achieving proper bonding between tungsten particles through sintering requires high temperatures, often in the range of 2,200 to 2,500 degrees Celsius (4,000 to 4,500 degrees Fahrenheit). Such high sintering temperatures can lead to challenges in maintaining dimensional stability and avoiding grain growth, which can affect the final properties of the sintered tungsten component.

2. Density and Porosity Control: Achieving high density in tungsten components produced through powder metallurgy can be challenging. Tungsten powders are difficult to compact uniformly, resulting in the presence of residual porosity. Controlling and minimizing porosity is crucial for achieving desired mechanical properties, such as strength and hardness, in the final sintered tungsten product.

3. Size and Shape Limitations: Powder metallurgy techniques for tungsten often result in near-net shape components, which require additional machining or finishing processes to achieve the final dimensions. The complexity of shaping and forming intricate geometries through powder metallurgy alone is limited, and secondary machining may be necessary.

4. Cost and Efficiency: Powder metallurgy processes for tungsten can be time-consuming and energy-intensive due to the high sintering temperatures involved. Additionally, the cost of tungsten powders and the specialized equipment required for sintering at high temperatures can contribute to higher production costs compared to other materials and manufacturing methods.

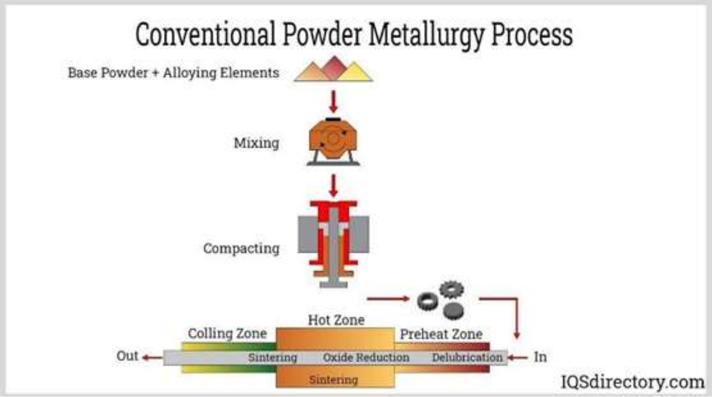

Fig.1 Conventional Powder Metallurgy Process[52]

2. Metal Injection Molding (MIM): Metal injection molding is a process that combines powder metallurgy and plastic injection molding techniques. It involves mixing tungsten powder with a binder material to create a feedstock. Metal Injection Molding (MIM) is a popular manufacturing technique for producing complex metal parts, including tungsten components. However, like any manufacturing method, MIM has its limitations. Here are some limitations of Metal Injection Molding:

2.1 Material Selection: MIM is suitable for a wide range of materials, including various metals and alloys. However, not all materials are suitable for MIM.

Some materials may have challenges in powder form, such as poor flow ability, inconsistent particle size distribution, or high sensitivity to oxidation. Therefore, material selection for MIM is limited to those that can be effectively processed into a suitable feedstock.

2.2 Cost: Metal Injection Molding can be cost-effective for large-scale production due to its ability to produce complex parts with high dimensional accuracy. However, the initial tooling costs for MIM can be relatively high, making it less economical for small production runs or prototyping. The cost of the raw materials, such as metal powders and binders, can also contribute to the overall cost of MIM.

2.3 Part Size and Thickness: MIM is well-suited for small to medium-sized parts with complex geometries. However, there are limitations in terms of the maximum part size that can be effectively produced using MIM. Larger parts may face challenges in achieving uniform shrinkage and maintaining dimensional accuracy.

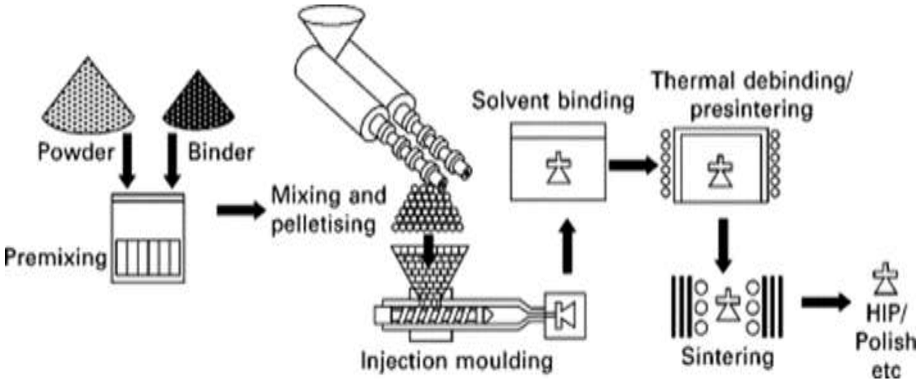

Fig.2 Metal injection moulding flow diagram [53]

3. Isostatic Pressing: Isostatic pressing involves subjecting tungsten powder to high pressures from all directions uniformly. The powder is enclosed in a flexible mold, which is then pressurized using fluids or gases. Isostatic pressing is a technique used to compact powders into dense, uniform shapes. While it offers several advantages, it also has some limitations. Here are some limitations of isostatic pressing:

3.1. Size and Complexity Constraints: Isostatic pressing is most effective for producing relatively simple, geometrically symmetric shapes. It becomes more challenging to achieve uniform compaction and maintain dimensional accuracy for complex or highly intricate parts. As the complexity and size of the part increase, it becomes more difficult to evenly distribute the pressure and achieve consistent densification.

3.2. Material Selection: Isostatic pressing is suitable for a wide range of materials, including metals, ceramics, and composites. However, the suitability of a specific material for isostatic pressing depends on its powder characteristics, including particle size, shape, and flow ability. Materials that do not exhibit good flowability may pose challenges in achieving uniform compaction and may require additional processing steps.

3.3. High Cost: Isostatic pressing equipment can be expensive, particularly for high-pressure applications. The need for specialized equipment and the requirement for high-pressure vessels can significantly increase the cost of implementing isostatic pressing. Additionally, the cost of the necessary support tooling, such as molds and containers, can contribute to the overall expense.

3.4. Limited Complexity in Shape: Isostatic pressing is primarily used for producing simple shapes, such as cylinders, blocks, or discs. It may not be well-suited for intricate designs or components with complex internal structures. Parts with undercuts, fine details, or thin walls may be challenging to produce using isostatic pressing alone.

3.5. Porosity Control: While Isostatic pressing can achieve high-density compacts, controlling porosity can be challenging. Porosity can arise due to the entrapment of air or gases during the pressing process or inadequate consolidation of the powder particles. Achieving high-density, pore-free components may require additional steps such as post-processing treatments, hot isostatic pressing (HIP), or subsequent sintering processes.

3.6. Material Uniformity: Isostatic pressing can encounter difficulties in achieving uniform density and microstructure across large parts or complex shapes. Variations in powder distribution, compaction pressure, and thermal gradients during the process can lead to non-uniform material properties within the component.

4. Cold Working and Forming: Tungsten can undergo cold working processes such as rolling, drawing, or extrusion to shape the material into desired forms. Cold working involves applying force to the tungsten material at room temperature, leading to plastic deformation and changing the shape of the material. While these processes offer several advantages, they also have limitations. Here are the limitations of cold working and forming:

4.1. Material and Alloy Limitations: Cold working and forming may not be suitable for all types of metals and alloys. Some materials, such as brittle or highly ductile metals, may not respond well to cold working and can experience cracking or fracture during deformation. Additionally, certain alloys with specific compositions or properties may have limited formability or require specialized techniques for successful cold working.

4.2. Thickness Limitations: The thickness of the metal being cold worked or formed can impact the success of the process. Thicker materials generally require higher forces and may be more prone to cracking or distortion during deformation. Thinner materials, on the other hand, may be more susceptible to springback or dimensional inaccuracies after forming.

4.3. Complexity of Shapes: Cold working and forming are more suitable for simpler shapes with uniform deformation. Complex shapes with intricate details, sharp corners, or multiple bends may pose challenges in achieving consistent and uniform deformation. Additional operations, such as multiple forming stages or secondary machining, may be necessary to achieve the desired shape.

4.4. Springback: Springback refers to the tendency of a cold-worked or formed metal to return to its original shape after the applied force is removed. It can result in dimensional deviations or inconsistencies in the final product. Controlling and predicting springback can be challenging, especially for complex shapes or materials with high elastic recovery.

4.5. Surface Finish: Cold working and forming can introduce surface imperfections or marks on the metal. The contact between the tooling and the work piece can leave traces, scratches, or other surface defects. Additional post-processing steps, such as polishing or grinding, may be required to achieve the desired surface finish.

4.6. Equipment and Tooling Constraints: Cold working and forming processes often require specialized equipment and tooling, such as presses, dies, or rolls. The availability and cost of such equipment can be a limitation, especially for small-scale or custom production.

5. Problems solved by Additive Manufacturing technique of Tungsten:

Additive manufacturing, or 3D printing, is not commonly used for tungsten due to several limitations associated with the material's properties and the existing technologies. Instead, alternative technologies are employed for manufacturing tungsten components. Here are some limitations of the present technologies used in place of additive manufacturing for tungsten:

5.1. Machining Complexity: Tungsten is a notoriously difficult material to machine due to its high hardness, brittleness, and high melting point. The machining processes used for tungsten, such as milling, turning, or grinding, require specialized equipment, tools, and techniques. The complexity and cost associated with machining tungsten components can be a limitation, especially for intricate or complex geometries.

5.2. Material Loss: Machining processes for tungsten often involve the removal of excess material, resulting in significant material waste. Tungsten is an expensive material, and the loss of material during machining can significantly increase production costs. The limited availability and high cost of tungsten make material efficiency a crucial concern.

5.3. Time-Consuming: Machining tungsten components can be a time-consuming process, particularly for complex shapes or high-precision requirements. The hardness and brittleness of tungsten can lead to slower machining speeds and necessitate frequent tool changes and adjustments. The extended machining time can impact production efficiency and lead to longer lead times.

5.4. Limited Design Flexibility: Conventional machining techniques have limitations in producing complex geometries and intricate designs. Machining is typically limited to subtractive processes, where material is removed to achieve the desired shape. This can restrict the design flexibility and hinder the production of complex tungsten components with internal features or intricate structures.

5.5. Surface Finish Challenges: Achieving a smooth surface finish on tungsten components can be challenging using conventional machining techniques. The hardness and abrasive nature of tungsten can lead to tool wear and surface roughness. Additional post-machining processes, such as grinding or polishing, may be required to achieve the desired surface quality, which adds to the overall manufacturing time and cost.

5.6. Difficulty in Replicating Fine Details: Tungsten's high melting point makes it challenging to replicate fine details or intricate features using traditional manufacturing technologies. The limitations in replicating precise details can impact the functionality and performance of tungsten components, especially in applications that require intricate geometries or precise tolerances.

6. Proposed Solution:

Additive manufacturing, or 3D printing, of tungsten offers several potential solutions and advantages over traditional manufacturing methods. Here are some solutions through additive manufacturing of tungsten:

6.1. Complex Geometries: Additive manufacturing enables the production of highly complex geometries and intricate designs that are difficult or impossible to achieve using conventional machining techniques. Tungsten components with internal channels, lattice structures, or optimized geometries can be easily fabricated using additive manufacturing, allowing for improved performance and functionality.

6.2. Design Flexibility: Additive manufacturing offers greater design freedom, allowing for the creation of customized tungsten components tailored to specific applications. The layer-by-layer building process of additive manufacturing allows for the production of unique shapes, internal features, and lightweight structures that can optimize the performance of tungsten parts.

6.3. Material Efficiency: Additive manufacturing reduces material waste compared to conventional machining methods. It only uses the necessary amount of tungsten powder required for the component, minimizing material loss and reducing production costs. This is especially valuable for tungsten, which is an expensive material.

6.4. Improved Manufacturing Efficiency: Additive manufacturing eliminates the need for multiple machining operations, fixtures, and tool changes associated with traditional manufacturing methods for tungsten. It can streamline the production process, reduce lead times, and increase manufacturing efficiency by directly fabricating the final part from digital designs.

6.5. Enhanced Performance: Additive manufacturing techniques can produce tungsten components with optimized microstructures, such as controlled grain sizes and orientations. This can lead to improved mechanical properties, such as increased strength, toughness, and wear resistance. Additive manufacturing also allows for the inclusion of functional features, such as integrated cooling channels or sensor integration, to enhance the performance of tungsten components.

6.6. Rapid Prototyping and Iteration: Additive manufacturing enables rapid prototyping and iterative design processes. It allows for quick and cost-effective production of tungsten prototypes, enabling designers and engineers to test and refine their designs before committing to large-scale production. This accelerates the development cycle and reduces time-to-market for tungsten-based products.

6.7. Customization and Personalization: Additive manufacturing enables the customization and personalization of tungsten components. It facilitates the production of unique parts with tailored dimensions, shapes, and properties to meet specific customer requirements or individual needs.

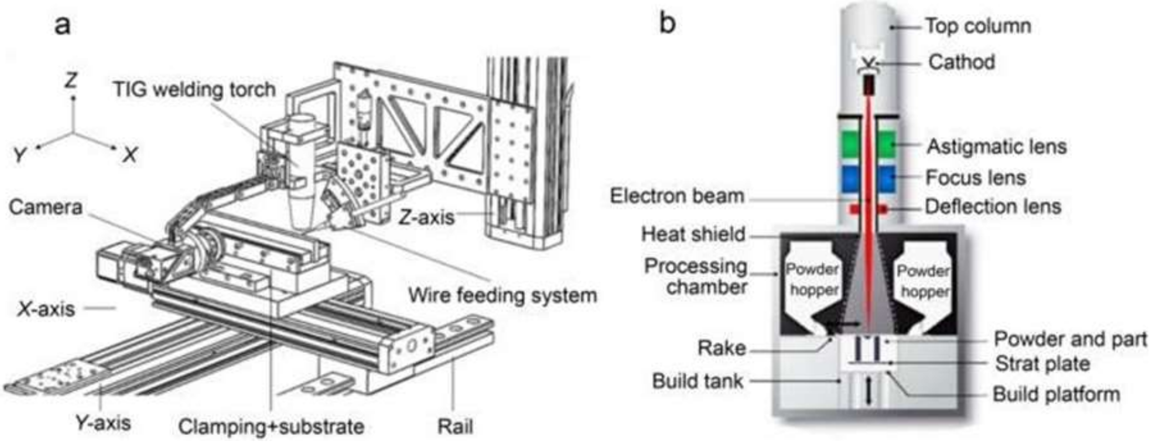

Fig.3 [54]

7. Problems directly addressed by Micro Additive Manufacturing:

7.1. Prototyping and Design Iteration: Traditional prototyping methods can be time-consuming and expensive. 3D printing enables rapid prototyping, allowing designers and engineers to quickly create physical models from digital designs. This facilitates faster iteration and refinement of products, reducing development time and costs.

7.2. Customization and Personalization: 3D printing enables the production of highly customized and personalized products. By leveraging digital design files, individual components or entire products can be easily tailored to meet specific requirements or preferences. This is particularly beneficial in industries such as healthcare, where personalized medical devices and implants can be created.

7.3. Complex Geometries and Lightweight Structures: Conventional manufacturing techniques often have limitations when it comes to producing complex geometries or lightweight structures. 3D printing allows for the creation of intricate shapes, internal structures, and optimized designs that would be difficult or impossible to achieve using traditional methods. This is advantageous in aerospace, automotive, and architectural industries, among others.

7.4. Supply Chain Disruption and On-Demand Manufacturing: 3D printing has the potential to disrupt traditional supply chain models. Instead of relying on centralized manufacturing and extensive inventory, products can be printed on-demand, locally or even on-site. This reduces warehousing, transportation, and inventory costs, and offers the possibility of decentralized manufacturing networks.

7.5. Access to Tools and Spare Parts: 3D printing provides a solution for producing tools and spare parts, especially for older or rare items that may no longer be in production. It reduces dependence on traditional supply chains and allows for localized production, which is particularly valuable in remote areas or during emergencies.

7.6 Education and Research: 3D printing offers educational institutions and researchers the ability to create tangible models and prototypes for experimentation and learning purposes. It enhances hands-on learning experiences, promotes innovation, and enables the exploration of complex concepts in a practical manner.

7.7. Sustainability and Waste Reduction: 3D printing is inherently more sustainable compared to subtractive manufacturing methods, as it only uses the necessary amount of material to build an object. This reduces waste generation and allows for more efficient use of resources. Additionally, 3D printing enables the recycling and reusability of materials, further contributing to sustainability goals.

8. Highlights : Here are some highlights of the research on additive manufacturing in tungsten:

8.1. Process Optimization: Researchers are focused on optimizing the additive manufacturing process parameters for tungsten to achieve improved part quality and mechanical properties. This includes studying the effects of laser power, scanning speed, layer thickness, and build orientation on the density, microstructure, and performance of printed tungsten components.

8.2. Material Development: Innovations in tungsten powder development are being explored to enhance the flow ability, packing density, and sinter ability of the material. Researchers are investigating the impact of particle size distribution, shape, and powder composition on the printability and properties of tungsten components.

8.3. Microstructure Control: Controlling the microstructure of tungsten during additive manufacturing is crucial to achieve the desired properties. Researchers are studying the influence of process parameters on grain size, grain orientation, and porosity in printed tungsten parts to optimize mechanical strength, ductility, and other performance characteristics.

8.4. Surface Finish Improvement: Achieving a smooth surface finish on additive-manufactured tungsten components remains a challenge. Researchers are exploring post-processing techniques, such as machining, polishing, and coating, to improve the surface quality, remove defects, and enhance the functional performance of printed tungsten parts.

8.5. Joining and Hybrid Manufacturing: Researchers are investigating methods to combine additive manufacturing with other manufacturing techniques to overcome the limitations of tungsten's additive manufacturing. Hybrid manufacturing approaches, such as combining additive manufacturing with machining or joining techniques, can offer the advantages of both processes and expand the range of achievable geometries and applications.

8.6. Modelling and Simulation: Computational modelling and simulation techniques are being employed to understand the complex thermal behaviour, phase transformations, and residual stresses during the additive manufacturing of tungsten. This enables better process planning, optimization, and prediction of part quality.

8.7.Application-Specific Research: Research efforts are directed towards exploring the potential applications of additive-manufactured tungsten components in various industries, including aerospace, defence, electronics, and energy. Researchers are investigating the performance of printed tungsten parts in specific environments, such as high-temperature or corrosive conditions, to assess their suitability for critical applications.

These research highlights indicate the ongoing efforts to advance additive manufacturing in tungsten. Through continuous exploration and innovation, researchers aim to improve the process, enhance the properties of printed tungsten components, expand their range of applications, and unlock the full potential of additive manufacturing in the field of tungsten fabrication.

Executive summary

Additive manufacturing, or 3D printing, of tungsten has been the focus of extensive research in recent years, aiming to overcome the challenges associated with this unique material. Tungsten, known for its high melting point, brittleness, and high density, presents difficulties for conventional manufacturing methods, making additive manufacturing an attractive solution. The research on additive manufacturing of tungsten has explored various aspects, including process optimization, material development, microstructure control, surface finish improvement, joining techniques, modelling and simulation, and application-specific investigations.

Process optimization has been a key area of research in additive manufacturing of tungsten. Scientists and engineers have focused on determining the optimal process parameters to achieve improved part quality and mechanical properties. Factors such as laser power, scanning speed, layer thickness, and build orientation have been investigated to understand their influence on the density, microstructure, and performance of printed tungsten components. Through iterative experimentation and process parameter optimization, researchers aim to enhance the printability and overall quality of tungsten parts.

Material development is another crucial aspect of research in additive manufacturing of tungsten. Innovations in tungsten powder, the primary material used in the process, have been explored to improve flow ability, packing density, and sinter ability. Particle size distribution, shape, and powder composition have been studied to understand their impact on printability and the resulting properties of tungsten components. By refining the powder characteristics, researchers aim to enhance the process ability and material properties of additive-manufactured tungsten parts.

Controlling the microstructure of tungsten during additive manufacturing is essential for achieving desired mechanical properties. Researchers have focused on studying the effects of process parameters on grain size, grain orientation, and porosity in printed tungsten parts. Through careful manipulation of these factors, scientists aim to optimize the mechanical strength, ductility, and other performance characteristics of tungsten components. Understanding the relationship between process parameters and micro structural evolution is crucial for tailoring the properties of printed tungsten parts to meet specific application requirements.

Improving the surface finish of additive-manufactured tungsten components has been a significant research area. Achieving a smooth surface is challenging due to the nature of the material and the additive manufacturing process. Researchers have explored various post-processing techniques, such as machining, polishing, and coating, to enhance the surface quality, remove defects, and improve the functional performance of printed tungsten parts. These surface treatment methods aim to refine the printed surfaces, resulting in improved aesthetics and functional properties.

In addition to process optimization and material development, research efforts have been directed towards exploring joining techniques and hybrid manufacturing approaches for tungsten. Combining additive manufacturing with other manufacturing methods, such as machining or joining, can offer the advantages of both processes. Hybrid manufacturing allows for the fabrication of complex geometries and the integration of different materials or functionalities, expanding the range of applications for additive-manufactured tungsten components.

Modelling and simulation techniques have played a significant role in the research on additive manufacturing of tungsten. Computational models have been developed to understand the complex thermal behaviour, phase transformations, and residual stresses that occur during the additive manufacturing process. These models help researchers in process planning, optimization, and prediction of part quality. By simulating the additive manufacturing process, scientists can gain insights into the underlying phenomena and optimize the process parameters for enhanced performance.

Furthermore, research on additive manufacturing of tungsten has focused on application-specific investigations. Scientists have explored the performance of printed tungsten components in specific environments, such as high-temperature or corrosive conditions, to assess their suitability for critical applications. The aerospace, defence, electronics, and energy industries are among the areas where additive-manufactured tungsten components hold promise. Investigating the behaviour and performance of these components in real-world scenarios is essential for validating their potential applications.

In conclusion, research on additive manufacturing of tungsten has been diverse and multidisciplinary. Scientists and engineers have focused on process optimization, material development, microstructure control, surface finish improvement, joining techniques, modelling and simulation, and application-specific investigations. The aim is to overcome the challenges associated with tungsten's unique properties and leverage the advantages of additive manufacturing to produce high-quality tungsten components with tailored properties. Continued research and innovation in this field will unlock the full potential of additive manufacturing for tungsten and open up new opportunities for its application in various industries.

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