




Microwave dielectric properties of Li_2WO_4 -added SrWO_4 ceramics for LTCC applications

Binghong Huang¹, Guohua Chen^{1,2,*} , Tian Xia¹, and Fei Shang^{1,2,*}

¹School of Material Science and Engineering, Guilin University of Electronic Technology, 541004 Guilin, China

²Guangxi Key Laboratory of Information Materials, Guilin University of Electronic Technology, 541004 Guilin, China

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ABSTRACT

The $\text{SrWO}_4 + x \text{ wt.}\% \text{Li}_2\text{WO}_4$ ($0 \leq x \leq 1.5$) ceramics with low dielectric constant and high quality factor ($Q \times f$) were fabricated. The impacts of Li_2WO_4 on sintering, structure, and microwave performance were also investigated. The results exhibit that the appropriate amount of Li_2WO_4 addition can lower sintering temperature and improve the densification of ceramics. All ceramic specimens adopt a tetragonal scheelite structure and can be sintered below 950°C . The relative density and polyhedral deformation of SrO_8 determine the dielectric properties of the sintered ceramics. The 1.0-wt% Li_2WO_4 -added SrWO_4 ceramic sample sintered at 875°C for 2 h reveals satisfactory characteristics with $Q \times f = 88,893 \text{ GHz}$, $\epsilon_r = 8.4$, and $\tau_f = -48.7 \text{ ppm}/^\circ\text{C}$. Moreover, the ceramic material is well compatible with Ag electrodes. These findings demonstrate that the as-prepared SrWO_4 -based materials have great potential for low-temperature co-fired ceramics.

1 Introduction

The development of microelectronics technology makes the device or component tends to miniaturization, high integration, fast transmission rate, and high reliability. The demands of high frequency, fast propagation speed, dense wiring, and low cost are put forward for the performance of packaging materials. It also requires better quality and stability of the packaging process [1, 2]. Electronic devices based on microwave dielectric ceramics (MWDCs) are the key components for 5G base stations. Along these lines, microwave ceramics have been extensively investigated as the preferred dielectric material

for microwave device applications [3, 4]. Low-temperature co-fired ceramic (LTCC) technology is a highly efficient and uncomplicated way of packaging passive electronic devices, which can meet the requirements of miniaturization, high integration, and multi-functionality [5–8]. It also realizes multi-layer stacking of components and is co-fired with an internal electrode with high conductivity. In practical applications, LTCC substrate materials not only have low ϵ_r , favorable quality factor, and near-zero τ_f but also can satisfy the needs of fast signal propagation, excellent high-frequency characteristics, and good temperature stability [9, 10], which are desirable for many industries, including aerospace, military,

Address correspondence to E-mail: cgh1682002@163.com; shangfei1240122@guet.edu.cn

communication, and automotive electronics [11, 12]. Owing to its importance, the development of microwave dielectric ceramics with excellent performance and low sintering temperature (lower than melting point of Ag, 961 °C) have been a subject of intensive research in recent times [13].

In prior research, many microwave dielectric ceramics with excellent performance have been reported. Common low-temperature microwave dielectric ceramic systems mainly include borate, phosphate, tungstate, molybdate, and vanadate, such as $\text{Mg}_3\text{B}_2\text{O}_6$ [14], LiCaBO_3 [15], KSrPO_4 [16], $\text{Li}_{0.16}\text{Cu}_{0.92}\text{MoO}_4$ [17], CaMoO_4 [18], $\text{Ba}_2\text{V}_2\text{O}_7$ [19], and $\text{Ba}_3\text{Mg}(\text{V}_2\text{O}_7)_2$ [20]. Among them, the tungstate system has outstanding performance and is an ideal choice for LTCC materials. For example, the SrWO_4 sintered at 1150 °C has an exceptional performance: $\epsilon_r = 8.1$, $Q \times f = 56,000$ GHz, and $\tau_f = -55$ ppm/°C. Nevertheless, its firing temperature is more than 950 °C, which cannot meet the requirement for LTCC materials. Popularly, three approaches are available to reduce the sintering temperature. The first one is to prepare powder with high surface activity by a chemical process and the second one is to use raw powder with tiny particles. However, the above two methods are costly, complicated, and not conducive to batch production. The most effective and cheapest way is to add sintering additives in ceramics to realize liquid-phase sintering [21] or form a solid solution. Lithium-based compounds are often selected as sintering aids. Xi et al. [8] obtained excellent properties ($Q \times f = 38,093$ GHz, $\epsilon_r = 2.9$, $\tau_f = -2.2$ ppm/°C) by adding 0.3 mol% Li_2O to $\text{CuO-ZnO-B}_2\text{O}_3$ ceramics sintered at 785 °C. Other material systems using Li_2CO_3 as sintering aids were reported as follows: $\text{Ba}_3\text{V}_2\text{O}_8 + 8$ wt% Li_2CO_3 [22] ($Q \times f = 33,000$ GHz, $\epsilon_r = 13.1$, $\tau_f = +13$ ppm/°C), $\text{Mg}_3(\text{VO}_4)_2 - 0.5\text{Ba}_3(\text{VO}_4)_2 + 0.065$ wt% Li_2CO_3 [23] ($Q \times f = 74,000$ GHz, $\epsilon_r = 13$, $\tau_f = -6$ ppm/°C), and $\text{Sr}_2\text{V}_2\text{O}_7 + 3$ mol% Li_2CO_3 [24] ($Q \times f = 73,800$ GHz, $\epsilon_r = 9.9$, $\tau_f = -28.8$ ppm/°C). In addition, LiF is also a common sintering aid, for instance, $\text{LiInO}_2 + 3$ wt% LiF [25] ($Q \times f = 52,500$ GHz, $\epsilon_r = 13.6$, $\tau_f = +18.1$ ppm/°C) and $\text{CaMgSi}_2\text{O}_6 + 2$ wt% LiF [26] ($Q \times f = 64,800$ GHz, $\epsilon_r = 7.5$, $\tau_f = -34$ ppm/°C).

As we know, Li_2WO_4 was chosen because it not only contains the same element (W) as the base material, which can avoid the formation of a second phase in the end but also has excellent properties ($Q \times f = 62,000$ GHz, $\epsilon_r = 5.5$, $\tau_f = -146$ ppm/°C) and

low firing temperature (640 °C) [27], which makes it easy to realize the purpose of this work. Therefore, in this work, Li_2WO_4 was added to SrWO_4 to achieve firing at low temperatures and superior dielectric performance. The effects of Li_2WO_4 on sintering, structure, microstructure, and microwave performance were analyzed carefully. Besides, the chemical compatibility between the ceramics and Ag electrodes was explored.

2 Experimental procedures

Tungstate ceramics were fabricated by the solid-state reaction method. The reagent-grade powders of SrCO_3 ($\geq 99\%$, Xilong Scientific Co., Ltd), WO_3 ($\geq 99.95\%$, Ganzhou Xinzhen New Material Co., Ltd), and Li_2CO_3 ($\geq 98\%$, Xilong Scientific Co., Ltd) were applied as starting materials. WO_3 was placed in a drying dish at room temperature, SrCO_3 and Li_2CO_3 were dried in a 150 °C oven for 24 h, and the raw materials were accurately weighted according to the chemical formula: SrWO_4 and Li_2WO_4 , respectively. Powders were planetary milled for 12 h in a ball mill jar with ZrO_2 balls and alcohol as the grinding medium. After drying at 100 °C, SrWO_4 and Li_2WO_4 powders were pre-sintered at 900 °C and 500 °C for 2 h, respectively. The two powders were mixed based on the design composition $\text{SrWO}_4 + x$ wt.% Li_2WO_4 ($0 \leq x \leq 1.5$) and re-milled for 12 h. After adding 7-wt% PVA for granulation, the powders were pressed into ceramic sheets of 12 mm in diameter and 6 mm in height with a pressure of 100 MPa and sintered at 825–925 °C for 3 h to obtain ceramics.

The crystalline phase identification of the ceramic samples was ascertained by X-ray diffraction (Bruker D8 Advance, Germany) with Cu Ka radiation in the 2θ range of 20–80°. The bulk density was measured by the Archimedes method. A field emission scanning electron microscope (Quanta, FEG450, America) equipped with energy-dispersive spectroscopy (EDS) was used to observe the microscopic morphology of ceramic samples. Raman studies were performed using LabRAM HR Evolution (HORIBA, France) Raman spectroscopy. The dielectric properties were measured by Vector Network Analyzer (N5230C, Agilent Technologies, America) with the TE_{01δ} mode dielectric resonator. The resonant frequency temperature coefficient (τ_f) was tested by the parallel plate method. The value of τ_f is obtained from the change

of resonant frequency at 25 °C and 75 °C based on the following equation:

$$\tau_f = \frac{f_{75^\circ\text{C}} - f_{25^\circ\text{C}}}{f_{25^\circ\text{C}} \times (75 - 25)} \times 10^6 \text{ (ppm/}^\circ\text{C)} \quad (1)$$

3 Results and discussion

Figure 1a–d displays the XRD profile, SEM image, relative density, and microwave dielectric characteristics of SrWO₄ ceramics at various sintering conditions. The prepared ceramic sample is pure-phase SrWO₄ as seen in Fig. 1a. In Fig. 1b, SrWO₄ ceramics sintered at 1000 °C adopt uniform and dense microstructure with an average grain size of 12.6 μm. With the increment of firing temperature, the dielectric permittivity and Q·f value first rise and then reduce, which is following the change of relative density, as depicted in Fig. 1c–d. The best dielectric properties are obtained at a temperature of 1000 °C, and the results are comparable to those reported in

the literature [28]. However, the sintering temperature (>950 °C) is too high to satisfy the requirement for LTCC materials, and the subsequent work is concentrated on reducing the sintering temperature and improving the microwave dielectric performance as well as exploring the co-firing compatibility of ceramics and silver electrodes.

To reduce the sintering temperature, Li₂WO₄ was introduced into the SrWO₄ ceramics, and the relative density of SrWO₄ + x wt% Li₂WO₄ (0 < x ≤ 1.5) after sintering is shown in Fig. 2a. The relative density tends to start increasing and then decreasing with the rise of the firing temperature for all samples. The additions of Li₂WO₄ significantly improve the sintering densification. The specific reasons are as follows: during the sintering process, the solid-phase particles are wetted and compacted by the liquid phase caused by Li₂WO₄ and then slip and rearrange, making the samples dense. The optimal sintering temperature and optimum additive amount of Li₂WO₄ are 875 °C and 1.0 wt%, respectively.

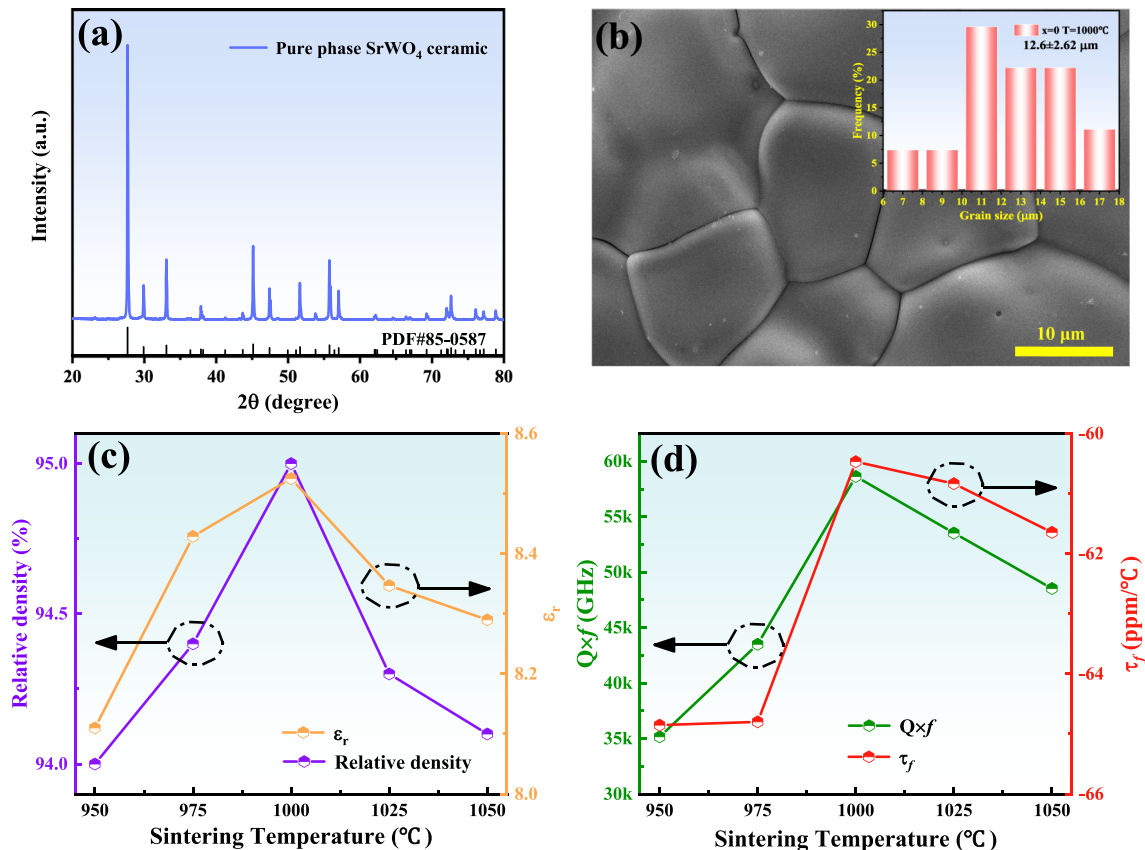


Fig. 1 The XRD profile (a) and SEM micrographs (b) of SrWO₄ ceramics at optimal sintering temperature of 1000 °C, relative density and dielectric constant (c) and Q×f and τ_f (d) as a function of sintering temperature for SrWO₄ ceramics

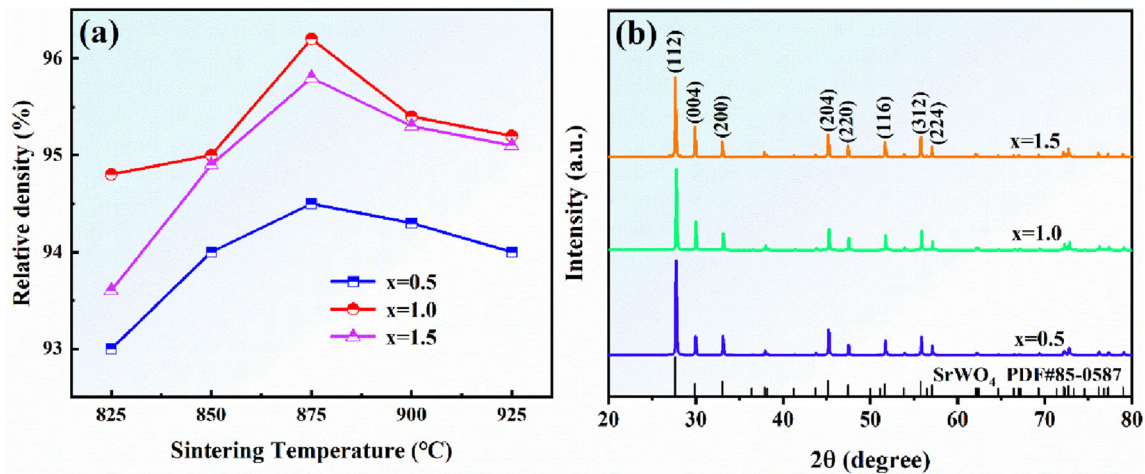


Fig. 2 a The relative density of SrWO₄ + x wt% Li₂WO₄ ($0 < x \leq 1.5$) ceramics at different temperatures; b XRD patterns of SrWO₄ + x wt% Li₂WO₄ ($0 < x \leq 1.5$) ceramics sintered at 875 °C

Figure 2b shows the XRD patterns of SrWO₄ + x wt% Li₂WO₄ ($0 < x \leq 1.5$) ceramics sintered at 875 °C. All diffraction peaks for ceramic samples could be indexed by SrWO₄ (PDF#85–0587) with a tetragonal structure and $I4_1/a$ space group, without heterogeneous phases [29]. This suggests that Li₂WO₄ is not chemically reacted with SrWO₄ and only exists as a liquid phase during the sintering process [30]. The liquid phase promotes powder particles rearrangement, diffusion mass transfer, and densification [31–33].

Figure 3a–g exhibits the SEM image of SrWO₄ + x wt% Li₂WO₄ ($0 < x \leq 1.5$) ceramics. For the fixed sintering temperature of 875 °C, unevenly growing grains and more holes are observed in the sample with $x = 0.5$, indicating that the sample has a lower density. When the content of Li₂WO₄ increases to 1.0 wt%, the grain size decreases, the pores significantly reduce, and a relatively uniform compact microstructure is obtained. With further increasing Li₂WO₄ content to 1.5 wt%, however, the heterogeneous microstructure accompanied by an abnormal grain growth is formed, which is due to the presence of excess liquid phase, deteriorating sintering capability [34]. This is consistent with the change in relative density in Fig. 2a. At $x = 1.0$, the average grain size monotonously grows from 3.2 to 5.5 μm as the firing temperature changes from 825 to 925 °C. The most uniformly compact structure can be achieved at 875 °C seen in Fig. 3b. High temperature is not conducive to sintering and compaction, as shown in Fig. 3f–g. The above changes in microstructure are

consistent with the changes in relative density as shown in Fig. 2a.

Figure 4 displays the dielectric properties of SrWO₄ + x wt% Li₂WO₄ ($0 < x \leq 1.5$) ceramics at various temperatures. In general, the external factors affecting the dielectric properties include densification, grain boundaries, and secondary phase. It is found that all samples sintered at 875 °C have the ultimate dielectric constant, $Q \times f$ value and τ_f absolute value. The best $Q \times f$ value (88,893 GHz, $f = 10.5$ GHz) is obtained when $x = 1.0$. Combining Figs. 2 and 3, the increase in $Q \times f$ value is due to its uniform grain microstructure, high relative density, and high crystallinity because of the same crystal phases. In addition, the ϵ_r increases first and then decreases with increasing temperature, which is similar to the relative density variation. The high densification or lower porosity would result in higher permittivity [35]. The τ_f value changes remarkably with the addition of Li₂WO₄. Generally, τ_f is correlated with the phase composition and the additive content. From Fig. 4a and c, the absolute value of τ_f decreases with the reduction of ϵ_r , which is consistent with the result reported by Chen et al. [36].

The vibrational properties of the ceramics are characterized by Raman spectroscopy, as shown in Fig. 5. All ceramic samples have similar profiles, indicating that the Li₂WO₄ does not change its vibrational modes. Nine distinct vibrations are detected in all specimens. Modes 1 to 4 are the types of motion and the rigid molecular unit of Sr²⁺, which are the translational type of the external mode. Modes 5 to 9 represent the

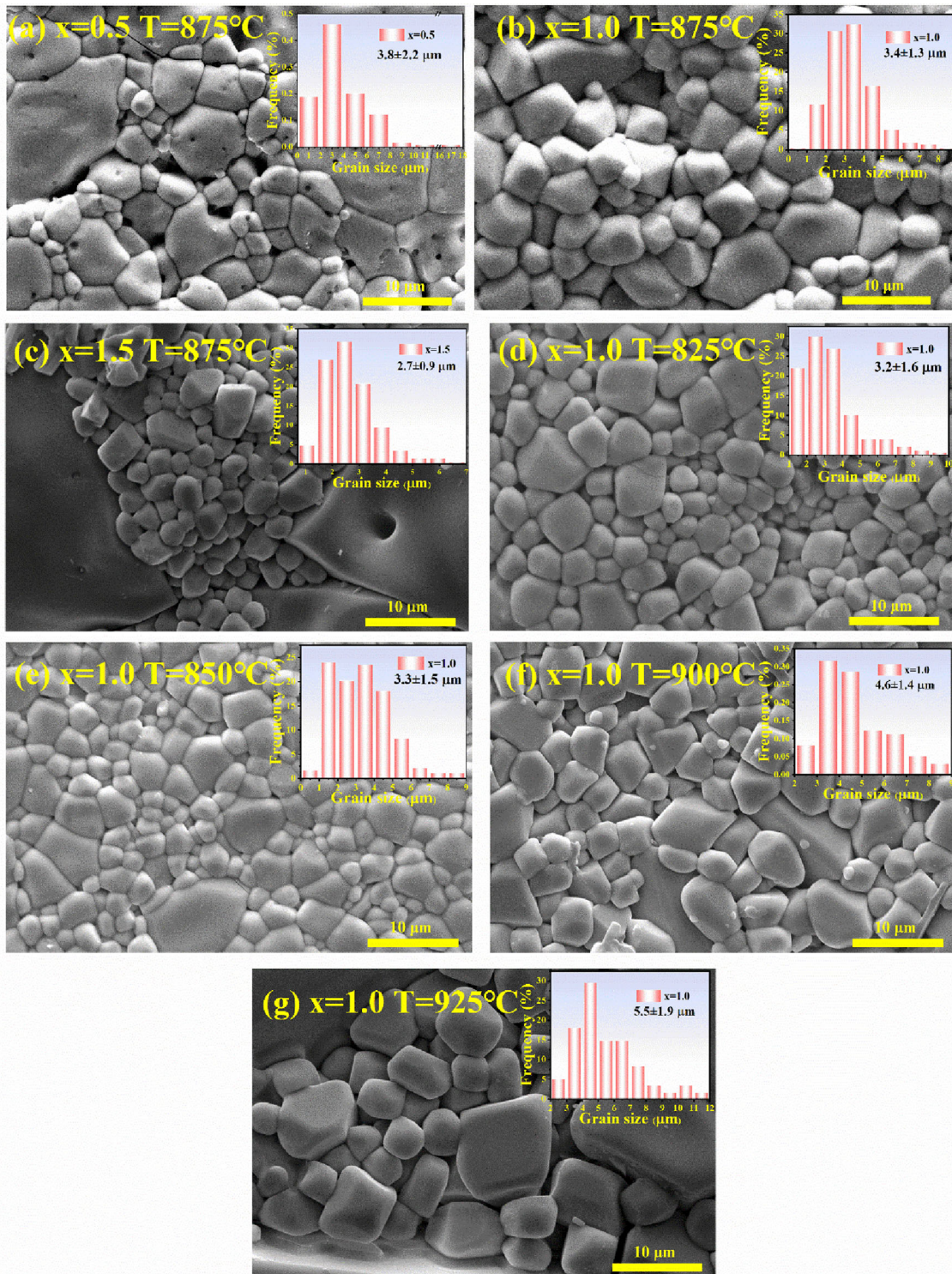


Fig. 3 The SEM micrographs of $\text{SrWO}_4 + x \text{ wt}\% \text{Li}_2\text{WO}_4$ ($0 < x \leq 1.5$) ceramics and the grain size distribution

internal modes, which correspond to the vibration of $[\text{WO}_4]^{2-}$ [29]. The relationships between the FWHM (Full width at half maximum) of mode 1 and the $Q \times f$ values are presented in Fig. 6. The decline of the

FWHM value corresponds to the decrease in the damping coefficient, which leads to the increase of $Q \times f$ value [37, 38].

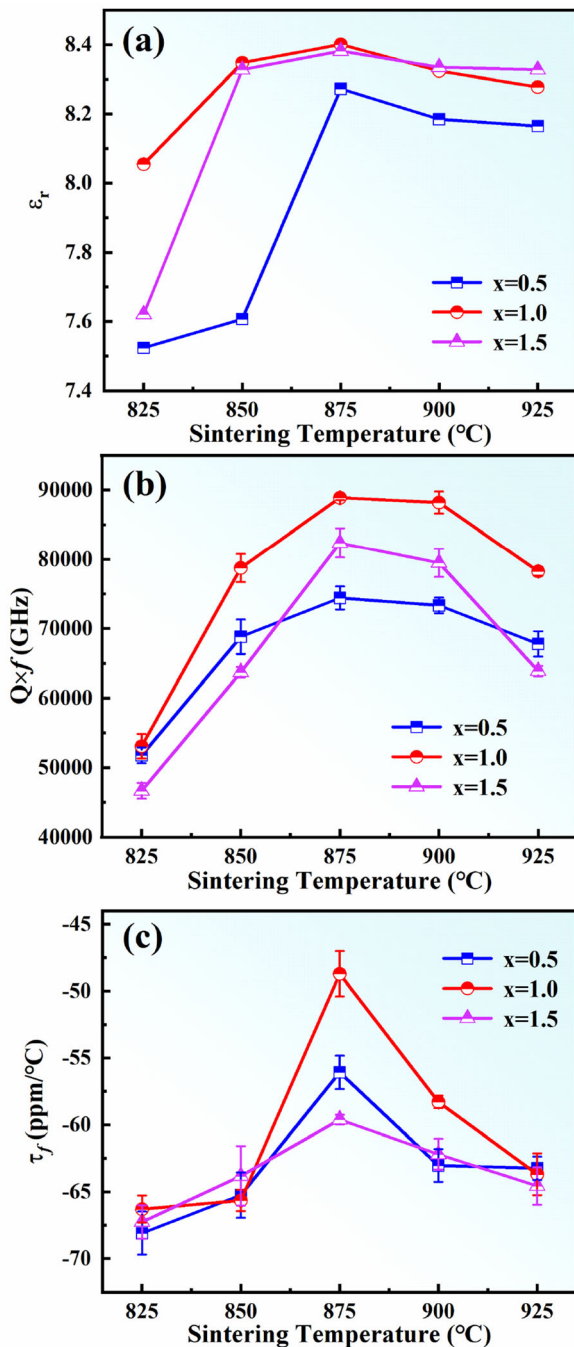


Fig. 4 a The ϵ_r , b $Q \times f$, and c τ_f of $\text{SrWO}_4 + x$ wt% Li_2WO_4 ($0 < x \leq 1.5$) ceramics as function of sintering temperatures

Moreover, the dielectric losses at microwave frequency are influenced by their structural properties and can be evaluated by the packing fraction, which is available from the below equation [39]:

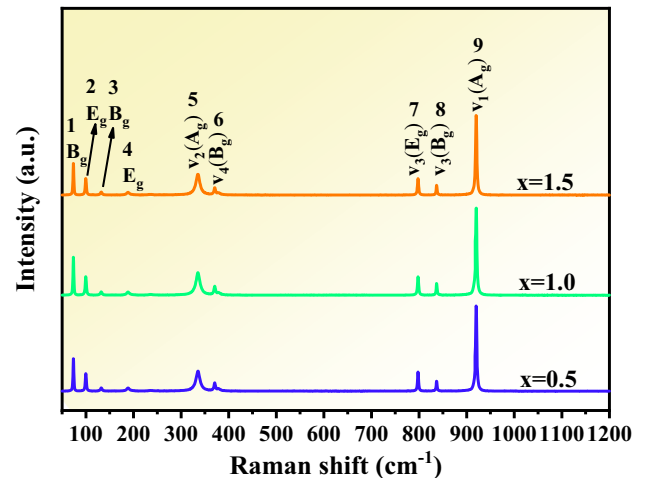


Fig. 5 Raman spectra of the $\text{SrWO}_4 + x$ wt% Li_2WO_4 ($0 < x \leq 1.5$) ceramics sintered at 875°C

$$\text{Packing fraction}(\%) = \frac{\text{volume of packed ions}}{\text{volume of unit cell}} \times Z \quad (2)$$

$$\text{Packing fraction}(\%) = \frac{4\pi/3 \times (r_A^3 + r_B^3 + r_O^3)}{a^2 \times c} \times 4 \quad (3)$$

where Z is the number of formula units per cell and $Z = 4$ for the tetragonal scheelite SrWO_4 . The association between the $Q \times f$ value and the packing fraction is demonstrated in Fig. 6. High packing fractions constrain the space for atoms to move in the lattice by impeding non-harmonic vibrations, resulting in lower intrinsic losses [40]. Therefore, the ceramic doped with 1.0-wt% Li_2WO_4 possesses the largest $Q \times f$, as seen in Fig. 6.

To evaluate whether there is a chemical reaction between SrWO_4 -based ceramics with the silver electrode, the $\text{SrWO}_4 + 1.0$ wt% Li_2WO_4 powders are chosen to be co-fired with 20-wt% Ag powders. The co-firing results are presented in Fig. 7. Only two phases, SrWO_4 and Ag , are identified in the XRD pattern. In the BSE micrograph, the brighter particles are identified as Ag , which is in agreement with the EDS analysis result. These results confirm that $\text{SrWO}_4 + x$ wt% Li_2WO_4 ($0 < x \leq 1.5$) ceramics do not react with Ag electrode.

Compared with other Li_2WO_4 -added systems, as listed in Table 1, the $\text{SrWO}_4 + 0.1$ wt% Li_2WO_4 ceramics have suitable processing temperatures, low permittivity, and great $Q \times f$ value, which are well matched to the requirements of LTCC materials.

Fig. 6 Correlation among $Q \times f$, FWHM of mode 1(B_g), and packing fraction in the $\text{SrWO}_4 + x \text{ wt}\%$ Li_2WO_4 ($0 < x \leq 1.5$) ceramics sintered at 875 °C

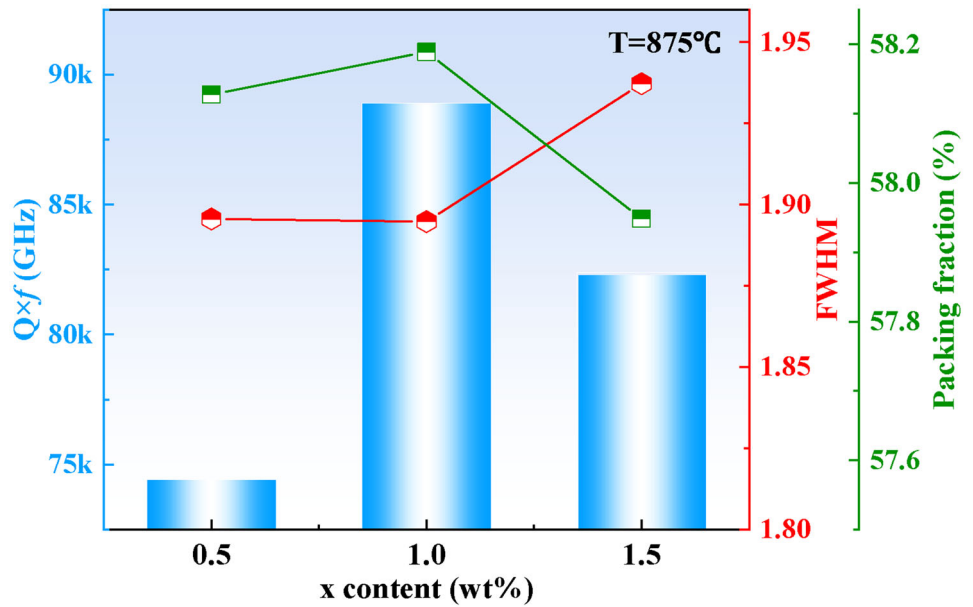
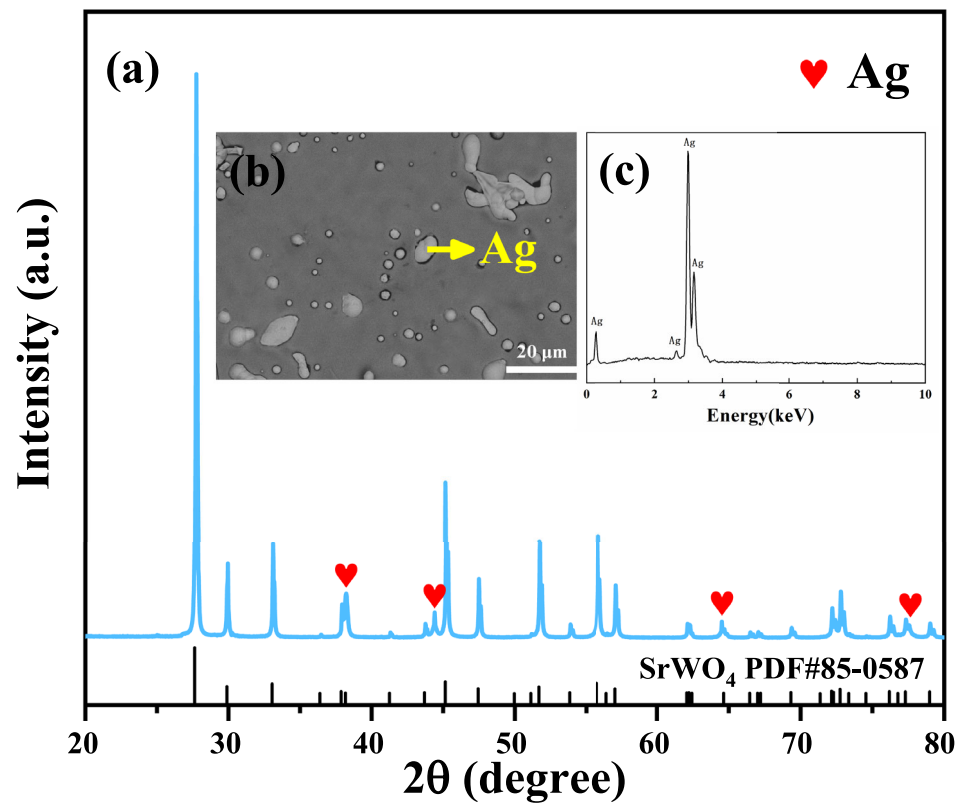


Fig. 7 **a** XRD pattern, **b** BSE image, and **c** EDS analysis of $\text{SrWO}_4 + 1.0 \text{ wt}\%$ Li_2WO_4 ceramic co-fired with 20-wt% Ag at 875 °C for 2 h



4 Conclusion

SrWO_4 ceramics with low dielectric permittivity and favorable $Q \times f$ values are obtained by adding Li_2WO_4 . A suitable amount of Li_2WO_4 could improve the sintering behavior and reduce the temperature of SrWO_4 ceramics from 1000 to 875 °C as well as

enhance the microwave dielectric properties. All ceramic samples do not form a second phase and exhibit a negative τ_f value. The relative densities and polyhedral deformation have a strong influence on the dielectric properties. The $\text{SrWO}_4 + 1.0 \text{ wt}\%$ Li_2WO_4 sample sintered at 875 °C has the optimum performance: $\epsilon_r = 8.4$, $Q \times f = 88,893 \text{ GHz}$, and $\tau_f =$

Table 1 Performance summary of some systems with the addition of Li_2WO_4

Composition	Sintering temperature T_s (°C)	ϵ_r	$Q \times f$ (GHz)	τ_f (ppm/°C)	Ref.
$\text{SrWO}_4 + 0.1 \text{ wt\% Li}_2\text{WO}_4$	875	8.4	88,893	−48.7	This work
$0.85\text{CaWO}_4\text{-}0.15\text{SmNbO}_4 + 1 \text{ wt\% Li}_2\text{WO}_4$	800	12	13,300	−28.6	[30]
$\text{Zn}_2\text{SnO}_4 + 0.75 \text{ wt\% Li}_2\text{WO}_4$	975	5.4	29,500	−76	[36]
$\text{CaWO}_4\text{-}2\text{Li}_2\text{WO}_4$	740	6.1	62,400	−100.1	[41]
$0.85\text{LiTiO}_3\text{-}0.15\text{Li}_2\text{WO}_4$	950	18.1	81,099	2.2	[42]

−48.7 ppm/°C. Furthermore, the ceramic is compatible with the Ag electrode, indicating that the $\text{SrWO}_4 + x \text{ wt\% Li}_2\text{WO}_4$ ($0 < x \leq 1.5$) ceramics with excellent performance are expected to be applied to LTCC substrate materials.

Author contributions

BH contributed to experimental scheme and writing and original draft preparation; TX performed experimental validation and data curation; FS modified the manuscript. GC conceived and designed the conception of the study, provided resources, and revised the manuscript. All the authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Data availability

Our datasets of the paper are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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