



# Low-temperature large magnetocaloric effect in the antiferromagnetic CeSi compound



L.C. Wang<sup>a</sup>, Q.Y. Dong<sup>b</sup>, J. Lu<sup>a</sup>, X.P. Shao<sup>a</sup>, Z.J. Mo<sup>c</sup>, Z.Y. Xu<sup>a</sup>, J.R. Sun<sup>a</sup>, F.X. Hu<sup>a</sup>, B.G. Shen<sup>a,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> State Key Laboratory for Magnetism, Institute of Physics, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing 100190, China

<sup>b</sup> Department of Physics, Capital Normal University, Beijing 100048, China

<sup>c</sup> School of Material Science and Engineering, Hebei University of Technology, Tianjin 300401, China

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## ABSTRACT

Magnetic properties and magnetocaloric effect (MCE) of the CeSi compound are investigated. The compound is determined to be antiferromagnet with the Néel temperature  $T_N = 6.1$  K. A metamagnetic transition from antiferromagnetic (AFM) to ferromagnetic (FM) state occurs at 2 K under an applied magnetic field of 4 kOe. Field variation generates a large MCE and no magnetic hysteresis loss is observed. The maximum values of magnetic entropy change ( $\Delta S$ ) are found to be  $-7.2$  J/kg K and  $-13.7$  J/kg K for the field changes of 0–20 kOe and 0–50 kOe, respectively. The large  $\Delta S$  with no hysteresis loss as well as low price of crude materials make CeSi a competitive candidate for low temperature magnetic refrigerant. In addition, the unusual magnetism in CeSi can be attributed to the appearance of a quartet ground state.

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## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, magnetocaloric effect (MCE) technology plays an important role in the refrigeration area for its high energy-efficiency and eco-friendly characteristics, especially compared with the traditional common gas-compression refrigeration [1–4]. After the discovery of  $\text{Gd}_5\text{Si}_2\text{Ge}_2$  [5], many researchers devoted their energy to seek for materials with excellent performance and  $\text{La}(\text{Fe},\text{Si})_{13}$  [6],  $\text{MnAs}_{1-x}\text{Sb}_x$  [7],  $\text{MnFeP}_{1-x}\text{As}_x$  [8] and NiMn based Heusler alloys [9] have been reported one after the other. The MCE materials working at room temperature can prevent the emission of green house gases. On the other hand, the materials working at low temperature regime is suitable for the gas liquidation and can help the facility to reach millikelvin [10]. Until now, only the paramagnetic salts as  $\text{Gd}_3\text{Gd}_5\text{O}_{12}$ ,  $\text{GdLiF}_4$  or  $\text{GdF}_3$  have been commercially used [11]. Different with the paramagnetic salts that with small MCE, rare earth-transition metal intermetallic compounds with ferromagnetic (FM) to paramagnetic (PM) transition or antiferromagnetic (AFM) to FM metamagnetic transition are thought to possess large MCE, and series of materials have been reported [12,13]. Generally speaking, the magnitude of MCE is characterized by the isothermal magnetic entropy change or the adiabatic temperature change under the variation of the magnetic field [1–9]. In this paper, we pick up CeSi with

AFM order to investigate its magnetic and MCE properties, and a large  $\Delta S$  without hysteresis loss in terms of low transition temperature (6.1 K) make this material a potential refrigerant in low temperature.

## 2. Material and methods

The CeSi ingot was prepared by arc melting method with the stoichiometric starting materials (Ce and Si) on a water-cooled copper crucible under the protection of high-purity argon atmosphere. The purity of all the constituent metals are better than 99.9 wt.%. 2 wt.% excessive Ce was added for the purpose to make up the weight loss during the arc melting. The sample was turned over and remelted for several times to ensure homogeneity. The as-cast ingot was sealed in a quartz tube fulfilled with high-purity argon atmosphere and then annealed at 1223 K for 7 weeks. D2 powder X-ray diffractometer from Bruker Inc. by using  $\text{Cu K}\alpha$  radiation was employed to determine the lattice parameter and phase composition. The DC magnetization as a function of temperature and magnetic field were performed on a small piece of the sample by using a commercial superconducting quantum interference device magnetometer (SQUID, Quantum Design).

## 3. Results and discussion

Fig. 1 shows the standard  $\theta$ – $2\theta$  powder X-ray diffraction patterns for CeSi sample collected at room temperature. The black pattern is the data collected using the Bruker D2 diffractometer and the red line is the standard patterns of CeSi in the PDF data base (PDF#65-1004). It reveals that all the peaks can be indexed and the sample crystallized in a clean phase orthorhombic FeB-type structure (space group:  $pnma$ ; NO. 62) as reported before

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +86 010 82648082.

E-mail address: [shenbg@aphy.iphy.ac.cn](mailto:shenbg@aphy.iphy.ac.cn) (B.G. Shen).

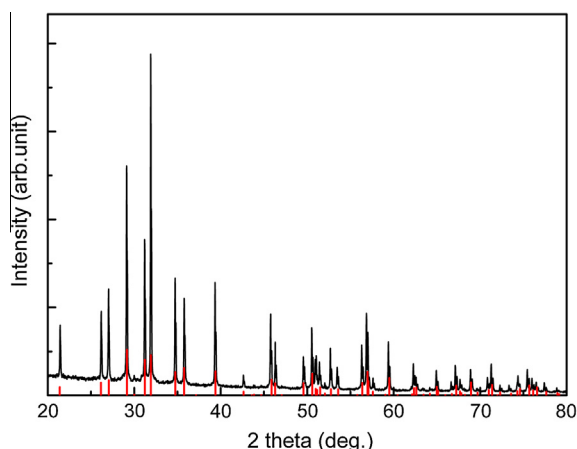


Fig. 1. XRD spectrum for the CeSi alloy.

[14,15]. Within the experimental error, the lattice parameters  $a$ ,  $b$  and  $c$  are determined to be 8.305, 3.966 and 5.963 Å, respectively, consistent well with the results in Refs. [14,15].

Fig. 2 displays the temperature dependence of magnetization ( $M$ - $T$ ) both under zero-field cooling (ZFC) and field-cooling (FC) modes with a magnetic field of 0.1 kOe, for the purpose to determine the transition temperature and the ground state of the sample. It can be found that each of the ZFC and FC curve exhibits a peak around 6.1 K, which is generally thought to be a striking feature of magnetic transition from AFM to PM state. The AFM nature is in accordance with the earlier reports and the Néel temperature  $T_N$  agrees excellently with the results in other published papers [16–19]. This ascertains the sample purity in our experiment indirectly. The reciprocal of susceptibility ( $1/\chi$ ) under ZFC mode as a function of temperature obtained at 0.1 kOe is plotted in the inset of Fig. 2. For obtaining the accurate value of  $\theta_p$ , the data were collected up to 150 K, while the data for  $M$ - $T$  curves in Fig. 2 were just shown up to 50 K for a clearly visible of the transition temperature. It can be seen that the  $1/\chi$  obeys the Curie–Weiss law in the PM region with an effective magnetic moments  $\mu_{\text{eff}} = 2.53 \mu_B$ , which is close to the free ion value of  $\text{Ce}^{3+}$  ( $2.54 \mu_B$ ). On the other hand, the paramagnetic Curie temperature ( $\theta_p$ ) derived from the Curie–Weiss fit in the paramagnetic span is equal to 12 K. Generally speaking, negative values of  $\theta_p$  are always found in samples with

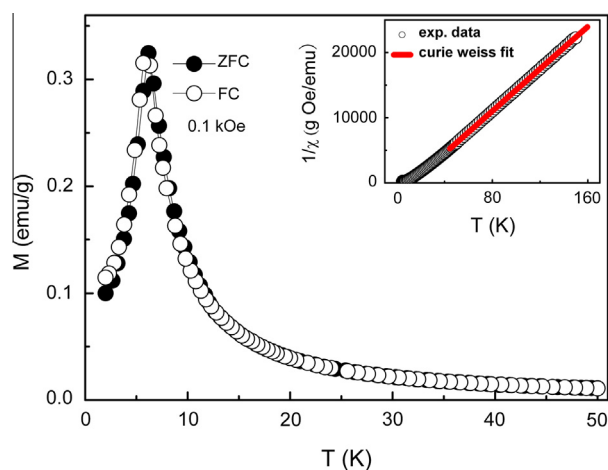


Fig. 2. Temperature dependences of magnetization measured in ZFC and FC modes for CeSi compound. The inset displays the temperature variation of the inverse susceptibility fitted to the Curie–Weiss law.

anti-ferromagnetic ordering. The unusual positive value of  $\theta_p$  comes from the appearance of a quartet ground state in spite of a non-cubic crystal symmetry of this compound [19].

Fig. 3(a) and (b) exhibit the magnetic hysteresis loop at 2 K and initial magnetization curves in a temperature range of 2–7 K, for magnetic fields up to 50 kOe respectively. The magnetic hysteresis loop at 2 K shows a negligible hysteresis effect, which is very favorable for the actual application of magnetic refrigerant. The inset of Fig. 3(a) shows the magnified part of the hysteresis loop under magnetic field up to 15 kOe and a clear change in the slope of the curve can be observed under a field of 4 kOe as the earlier report, [17] which indicates a possible metamagnetic transition from AFM to FM state under this magnetic field. On the other hand, the magnetization shows a trend towards saturation between 12 kOe to 50 kOe. The saturation magnetic moment derived from the law of approach to saturation (LATS) is  $1.46 \mu_B$ , which is closer to  $1.56 \mu_B$  for a  $\Gamma_8$  quartet rather than a value of  $0.71 \mu_B$  for a  $\Gamma_7$  doublet that has been reported in Ref. [19]. Fig. 3(b) exhibits the field dependence of magnetization in a temperature range from 2 to 7 K with an increment of 1 K, in magnetic fields ranging from 0 to 50 kOe. It can be seen from Fig. 3(b) that there exist crossover among the curves after a careful examination, which ensures the existence of AFM ordering in this compound below  $T_N$  [20]. For a general acquaintance of the magnetism of CeSi, a phase diagram is proposed and shown in Fig. 4. It can be seen that the transition field ( $H_{\text{trs}}$ ) for metamagnetic transition decreases with the increasing temperature. The SPM in Fig. 4 indicates a micromagnetic state

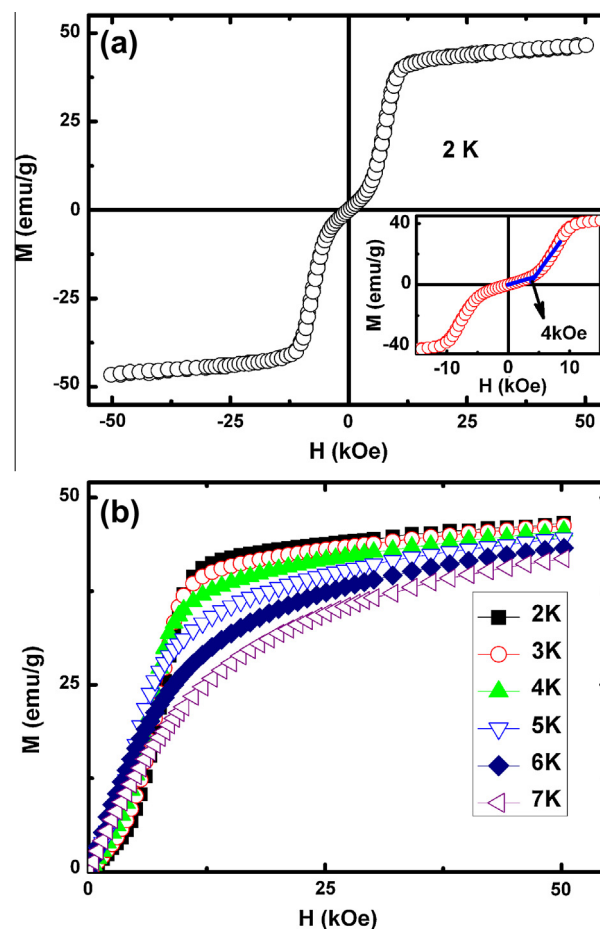


Fig. 3. Magnetic hysteresis loop at 2 K up to 50 kOe, with the inset showing the enlarged part of magnetic hysteresis loop (a) and initial isothermal magnetization curve at typical temperatures (b).

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