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MAGNETIC STIRLING CYCLES--A NEW APPLICATION FOR MAGNETIC MATERIALS

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MAGNETIC STIRLING CYCLES--A NEW APPLICATION FOR MAGNETIC MATERIALS

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Introduction

There is the prospect of a fundamental new application for magnetic materials as the working substance in thermodynamic cycles. Recuperative cycles which use a rare-earth ferromagnetic material near its Curie point in the field of a superconducting magnet appear feasible for applications from below 20K to above room temperature. The elements of the cycle, advanced in an earlier paper, are summarized. The basic advantages include high entropy density in the magnetic material, completely reversible processes, convenient control of the entropy by the applied field, the feature that heat transfer is possible during all processes, and the ability of the ideal cycle to attain Carnot efficiency. The mean field theory is used to predict the entropy of a ferromagnet in an applied field and also the isothermal entropy change and isentropic temperature change are compared with experimental data on Gd.

Basic Advantages

Several advantages of the magnetic cycle should be stressed. The advantages arise from the ease of varying the external parameter (field) and from the fact that heat transfer to or from the FM can be maintained even during changes in field. So, for example, the FM can reject heat isothermally as it is magnetized, whereas it is not practical to compress a gas isothermally. Nonsothermal compression is the most serious cause of inefficiency in conventional refrigerators. The efficiency of the ideal magnetic cycle has not been affected by this conversion between (low grade) thermal and (high grade) mechanical or electrical energies, except near absolute zero.

The mean field theory is used to predict the entropy of a ferromagnet in an applied field and also the isothermal entropy change and isentropic temperature change are compared with experimental data on Gd.

Figure 1. T-S Diagram for the Recuperative Ferromagnetic Cycle.
(with isotherms and perfect recuperation) can approach the Carnot efficiency if the process J → A in Fig. 1 is replaced by the process D → E (drawn parallel to BC). This can be done either by changing the field H appropriately as the FM warms or by using FM mixtures as described below. The possibility of changing H at will during the course of a cycle permits non-isothermal sources and sinks to be efficiently utilized. Furthermore the ideal cycle contains no inherently irreversible processes (such as Joule-Thomson expansion of a gas).

Note that the field may be reversibly raised or lowered incrementally while heat transfer occurs; pressure cannot be so flexibly controlled. The use of a solid working medium offers another advantage—all heat exchange can be between the solid and a liquid (or in some low temperature ranges, a high density gas). Hence the heat transfer coefficients are much higher than for solid-to-gas; enough higher to more than offset the higher viscosity of the liquid and to permit the greater degree of recuperation needed by the solid over the gas.

Possible Applications

A full engineering and economic analysis of specific machine designs is needed to predict in what applications the magnetic cycle can compete economically. However, the basic advantages cited above suggest that it should be evaluated for all refrigeration applications. Obvious applications to be studied are refrigeration for superconducting devices such as magnets, power transmission lines, and rotating machinery; liquefication of gases including He, H2, N2, and natural gas; the separation of air; and numerous special purposes such as cooling of infrared sensors, etc. Near room temperature magnetic refrigerators, heat pumps and air conditioners should be evaluated, as should magnetic heat engines above room temperature. Higher efficiency would be welcome in all these applications. It is expected that the Curie point of a pure rare earth can be decreased to any lower value desired for these applications by a rather modest dilution of the rare earth to reduce the conduction-electron-mediated exchange interaction. Rare earth combinations may also be useful but the hoped-for entropy change may be reduced if crystal fields decrease the effective moment or if complex magnetic structures arise. In any case it appears that materials with Tc optimized for any application can be produced.

Mean-Field Calculation of Entropy

To evaluate the magnetic cycle, one needs to know the entropy as a function of temperature and field. Very little experimental data exists. In this section the Weiss mean field theory is shown to predict moderately well the entropy and temperature changes caused by simple ferromagnets by applied fields. The agreement between theory and experiment is good enough to justify the use of the mean field theory in feasibility studies.

Following the treatment in Ref. 2, we suppose the magnetization M is proportional to the Brillouin function Bj:

\[ M = N g J B_j(x) \]  

(1)

where \( N \) is the number density of dipoles, \( g \) the Landé factor, \( \mu_B \) the Bohr magneton, and

\[ x = N g J (H + K_x)/kT \]  

(2)

where \( K_x \) is Boltzmann's constant and \( K_x \) is the mean-field coupling constant. \( K_x \) can be eliminated in favor of \( T_c \) by noting that above \( T_c \) spontaneous \( M \) exists, so there equations (1) and (2) must have only a trivial solution for \( M \). That condition reduces to

\[ N g^2 \mu_B^2 J (J + 1)K = 3kT_c. \]  

(3)

Equations (1)-(3) can be solved simultaneously for any value of \( H \) by graphical or numerical methods. The magnetic entropy \( S_m \) is given by,

\[ S_m/R = \log \left( \frac{\sinh \left( \frac{2J+1}{2}x \right)}{\sinh \left( \frac{J}{2}x \right)} \right) - N g J x \]  

(4)

where the value of \( x \) is taken from the solution of (1)-(3).

It is convenient to introduce nondimensional variables defined by

\[ t = T/T_c \quad \text{and} \quad h = H/[3kT_c/(J + 1)Ng] \]  

(5)

The magnetic entropy, calculated from (4) is presented in Fig. 2 in terms of \( t \) and \( h \) for \( J = 7/2 \) and \( g = 2 \). Values appropriate for materials based on \( Gd \), conduction electron contributions are not included. The failure of the theory to include short range order is evident at zero field in the abrupt corner and in the attainment of the full magnetic entropy at \( T_c \). The isothermal entropy change \( \Delta S \) caused by a field change \( \Delta h \) follows immediately and is plotted in Fig. 3.

The entropy pumping capacity of any FM based on \( Gd \) with any \( T_c \) in the plot's range can be estimated from Fig. 2 and the definitions (5).

As an example of the isothermal entropy and heat pumping capacity of an FM, the theory predicts for \( Gd \) that at 273K a 10 Tesla change in field gives \( \Delta S = 12 \) J/kg.K which corresponds to a heat of 3.2 kJ/kg.

To compare theoretical and experimental results, the total entropy \( S_{\text{tot}} \) was calculated by \( S_{\text{tot}} = S_{Gd} + S_L \), where \( S_L \) is the lattice entropy based on a Debye model with the Debye temperature taken to be 172K. The isentropic change in temperature caused by applying a field was found numerically and is presented in Fig. 4 along with new experimental data. The data were taken on a cast cylindrical polycrystalline sample 2.29 cm in diameter and 9.33 cm long with hemispherical ends. The new data are more accurate than the first high field data that were reported in Ref. 1. The applied field and effective field are nearly identical in the plot; based on the calculated value of \( M \), the two fields differ by at most 1%. The mean field theory

\[ \text{Fig. 2. Magnetic Entropy in Units of } R \text{ as a Function of the Reduced Temperature } t \text{ and the Reduced Applied Field } h \text{ for } J=7/2, g=2. \]
cannot distinguish between the ferromagnetic Curie point $T_f$ and the paramagnetic Curie point $T_c$; only one quantity, $T_c$, occurs in the equations (3) and (5). It is interesting to compare the results of setting $T_c = T_p$ with those of setting $T_f = T_p$. Hence figure 4 presents three theoretical curves with the experimental data. Curve $F$ results from setting $T_f = 293K$. Curve $P_1$ results from setting $T_c$ equal to an older value of $T_p$ ($302.5K$); curve $P_2$ from a more recent value ($310K$ for polycrystalline samples).

It is interesting that the $P$ curves give better agreement except near $T_f$. Somewhat above $T_p$ the paramagnetic behavior is apparently better because the mean field acts in a basically paramagnetic way on each ion. Thus the appropriate value of the coupling constant is better reflected by $T_p$ in the Curie-Weiss law than by the ordering temperature $T_f$. Near $T_f$ the use of $T_f$ gives the best agreement. Above about $1.1T_f$ the $P_2$ curve is best, and below about $0.9 T_f$ the $P_2$ choice is best. The choice of $T_c$ to use to evaluate a particular FM in a cycle must be made in the context of the intended temperature range and the positions of $T_f$ and $T_p$ in it. For such a simple theory it is surprising that those quantities which depend upon entropy differences are not badly predicted.

**Modifying the T-S Diagram to Improve Efficiency**

As noted under "Advantages" above, the Carnot efficiency is not achieved in the unmodified cycle AICDA in Fig. 1. One aspect of the unmodified cycle is that the average heat capacity of the FM is usually not the same at zero field as at high field, and this would cause a problem in the regenerator. To achieve the "parallel sides" of the cycle in the T-S diagram, which indicate equal heat capacities during warming and cooling and are characteristic of a high efficiency recuperative cycle, is straightforward because the field can be changed during regeneration. As the FM warms in the regenerator, the field is simply increased to cause the state of the FM to follow D→R rather than D→A.

Another way to get the same (or greater) improvement in the T-S diagram is to employ a macroscopic mixture of FM's with different Curie points. The mixture may be formed physically in any manner that preserves the Curie point of each material. The combined entropies at zero field can be made to approach line $PE$ in Fig. 1 as closely as desired. (The high field curve changes, too, but less markedly.) Similarly, the FM mixture technique can be used to reshape the entropy curves for special purposes such as to provide distributed rather than isothermal refrigeration.

**Permanent Magnets and Normal Electromagnets**

The isothermal entropy change is roughly proportional to $\Delta H$, so a permanent magnet ($<1T$) or a normal electromagnet with an iron core ($<2T$) would be less effective than a superconducting coil (up to $17T$). However, it may be desirable for some applications to avoid the cryogenics required for a superconducting magnet, and permanent and/or normal magnets should be considered in cases where the temperature span is small or where several steps can be used.

**Conclusions**

Ferromagnetic materials bring to thermodynamic cycles fundamental advantages which include high entropy density, fully reversible processes, entropy control by an external parameter (field) that can be varied up or down incrementally at will, and a constant shape and density that permits heat transfer at all times. The performance of the FM can be estimated fairly well by the mean field theory. The efficiency of the FM cycle can approach the Carnot value if the field strength is varied appropriately during recuperation or if a suitable mixture is used.

(3) J. S. Smart, Effective Field Theories of Magnetism, Saunders, Philadelphia (1966).
Figure 1. - T-S Diagram for the recuperative ferromagnetic cycle.

Figure 2. - Magnetic entropy in units of R as a function of the reduced temperature \( t \) and the reduced applied field \( h \) for \( j = 7/2, g = 2 \).
Figure 4. - The isentropic temperature change produced by applying a 7T field to Gd.

**Figure 3.** - Isothermal entropy change $\Delta S$ in units of $R$ in terms of reduced temperature $t$ and change in reduced field $\Delta h$. Initial field is zero. ($J = 7/2, g = 2$.)