COATED ARTICLE AND METHOD OF MAKING

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ABSTRACT
An article includes a silicon-containing substrate and a modified mullite coating. The modified mullite coating comprises mullite and a modifier component that reduces cracks in the modified mullite coating. The article can further comprise a thermal barrier coating applied to the modified mullite coating. The modified mullite coating functions as a bond coating between the external environmental/thermal barrier coating and the silicon-containing substrate. In a method of forming an article, a silicon-containing substrate is formed and a modified mullite coating is applied. The modified mullite coating comprises mullite and a modifier component that reduces cracks in the modified mullite coating.

25 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets
**fig. 1**

The graph illustrates the linear expansion, $\Delta L/L$, as a function of temperature (K) for different materials: SiC, Si, and MULLITE.
fig. 2
The present invention is based on the discovery that a modifier component can be added to a mullite coating to reduce cracks in the coating applied to a silicon-containing substrate. The mullite coating with the modifier component is also referred to as a modified mullite coating. The modified mullite coating reduces fracture at the interface of the mullite coating and the silicon-containing substrate.

In one aspect, the invention is an article comprising a silicon-containing substrate and a modified mullite coating. The modified mullite coating comprises mullite and a modifier component that reduces cracks, including through-thickness cracks, in the mullite coating. Preferably, the modifier component comprises a component having a lower thermal expansion than the mullite coating. As a result, the modifier component imparts a lower thermal expansion coefficient to the mullite coating. The article can further comprise an external environmental/thermal barrier coating applied to the modified mullite coating. The modified mullite coating then functions as a bond coat between the external environmental/thermal barrier coating and the silicon-containing substrate.

In another aspect, the invention relates to a method of forming an article with at least a modified mullite coating. In the method, a silicon-containing substrate is formed and a modified mullite coating is applied. The modified mullite coating comprises mullite and a modifier component that reduces cracks in the coating.

**BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

FIG. 1 is a graph illustrating comparative coefficient of thermal expansions for mullite, silicon carbide and silicon.

FIG. 2 is a graph illustrating comparative coefficient of thermal expansions for mullite, cordierite, fused silica and celsian (BaO.Al₂O₃.2SiO₂).

FIG. 3 is a photomicrograph for a mullite that includes through-thickness cracks. By through thickness-cracks are meant cracks that extend substantially through the entire thickness of the mullite coating from near the top surface to near the bottom of the coating or near the silicon-containing substrate. The modifier components can be categorized into one or more of at least three functional groups. (1) The modifier component impacts a phase or phases that reduce the overall elastic modulus of the modified mullite coating to reduce thermal stress in said coating. (2) The modifier component provides a phase or phases that reduce thermal stress in said coating. (3) The modifier component imparts a lower thermal expansion coefficient to the mullite coating. The article can further comprise an external environmental/thermal barrier coating applied to the modified mullite coating. The modified mullite coating then functions as a bond coat between the external environmental/thermal barrier coating and the silicon-containing substrate.
barrier coating applied to the modified mullite coating. A composite can comprise a silicon, carbon, carbide, carbon or mixtures thereof reinforcing fibers, particulate or whiskers and a silicon-based matrix. The fibers, particulate and whiskers generally have at least one outer coating, such as silicon carbide, silicon boride, silicon nitride and the like. The matrix can be processed by melt infiltration (MI), chemical vapor infiltration (CVI) or other technique. Exemplary silicon-containing substrates include a monolithic silicon carbide and silicon nitride substrate, a silicon carbide fiber-reinforced silicon carbide matrix composite, carbon fiber-reinforced silicon carbide matrix composite, and a silicon carbide fiber-reinforced silicon nitride composite. The preferred substrate comprises a silicon carbide fiber-reinforced silicon-silicon carbide matrix composite processed by silicon melt infiltration.

Also suitable as silicon-containing substrates are silicon metal alloys. These alloys include niobium silicon alloys, molybdenum silicon alloys and the like.

The coated article of the invention can comprise a thermal barrier coating applied to the modified mullite coating. Suitable external environmental/thermal barrier coatings include chemically stabilized zirconias, such as yttria-stabilized zirconia, scandia-stabilized zirconia, calcium-stabilized zirconia and magnesium-stabilized zirconia, alumina and alumina silicate. Preferred external environmental/thermal barrier coatings in this invention include yttria-stabilized zirconia (YSZ), barium strontium aluminate silicate (BSAS), calcium aluminosilicate (CAS) and yttrium silicates (YS).

The modified mullite coating of the invention comprises mullite and a modifier component that reduces cracks in the modified mullite coating. Mullite is a stable form of aluminum silicate found naturally or formed by heating other aluminum silicates such as cyanite, sillimanite and andalusite, to high temperature. Mullite is an excellent high temperature material (incongruent melting temperature about 1830°C) with high corrosion resistance, high thermal shock resistance and chemical stability at high temperatures, such as up to about 1700°C. It is the only stable crystalline compound of the aluminum silicate system under normal atmospheric pressure. It has a chemical composition ranging from 3Al2O3·2SiO2 (71.8 wt % Al2O3) (3/2 mullite) to approximately 2Al2O3·SiO2 (77.3 wt % Al2O3) (2/1 mullite). It crystallizes in the orthorhombic system. It has a melting point of 1850°C and a coefficient of thermal expansion of 5.62×10⁻⁶/C. in the 25–1500°C range. In the absence of glassy inclusions, mullite retains greater than 90% of its room temperature strength to 1500°C and displays very high creep and thermal shock resistance.

Examples of suitable modifier components of the modified mullite coating include alkaline earth aluminosilicates, preferably with the formula M·Al2O3·2SiO2, where M is an alkaline earth element. Preferred modifier components of the formula M·Al2O3·2SiO2 include bariumfeldspar (BaO·Al2O3·2SiO2), strontiumfeldspar (SrO·Al2O3·2SiO2), and combinations of bariumfeldspar (BaO·Al2O3·2SiO2) and strontiumfeldspar (SrO·Al2O3·2SiO2). Preferably, the alkaline earth aluminosilicate has a monoclinic celsian crystalline phase. Most preferred aluminosilicates include (BaO)₀·ₓ(SrO)₀·ₓ·Al₂O₃·2SiO₂ referred to as BSAS, CaO·Al₂O₃·2SiO₂ referred to as CAS and BaO·Al₂O₃·2SiO₂ referred to as BSAS. Other preferred modifiers include materials referred to as NZP's such as Na₂Zr₂P₂O₉, B₄Zr₂P₆S₆Si₂O₂₄, Ca₀·₅Sr₀·₅Zr₂(PO₄)₆ and Ca₀·₄Mg₀·₄Sr(PO₄)₆. Other preferred modifier components include yttrium silicates, calcium aluminates including 3CaO·₅Al₂O₃, aluminum titanates including Al₂O₃·TiO₂, cordierite (2MgO·Al₂O₃·SiO₂), fused silica (SiO₂) and silicon (Si). These materials are also chemically compatible with mullite.

The modifier components may be added to the modified mullite coating in a percent volume range between about 5 to about 50. Preferably, the modifier component is present in about 10 to about 30 volume percent of the modified mullite coating and most preferably in about 15 to 25 volume percent.

In the group (1) modifier components, a coefficient of thermal expansion is imparted to the modified mullite coating that is closer to the coefficient of thermal expansion of the silicon-containing substrate. The coefficient of thermal expansion of a polycrystalline composite material is determined by the volume fractions of its constituents. The coefficient of thermal expansion can generally be approximated by using the rule of mixture:

$$\alpha = \alpha_1V_1 + \alpha_2V_2 + \ldots + \alpha_nV_n$$

where $\alpha_1$ is the coefficient of thermal expansion of the composite, and $\alpha_1$, $\alpha_2$, and $\alpha_n$, and $V_1$, $V_2$, and $V_n$ are the coefficients of thermal expansions and volume fractions of phases 1, 2 and i, respectively. Therefore, adding a phase or phases with lower coefficient of thermal expansion to a material will result in a composition that has a lower coefficient of thermal expansion than the starting material. To duplicate the coefficient of thermal expansion of the silicon-containing substrate, the volume fraction of the modifier component in the modified mullite coating should be proportionate to the ratio of the difference between the coefficient of thermal expansion of the silicon-containing substrate and the coefficient of thermal expansion of the mullite to the difference between the coefficient of thermal expansion of the modifier component and the coefficient of thermal expansion of the mullite.

A comparison of coefficient of thermal expansion of mullite with the coefficient of thermal expansions of cordierite, fused silica and celsian (BaO·Al₂O₃·2SiO₂) is illustrated in FIG. 2. According to the invention, co-depositing mullite with a low thermal expansion modifier component such as cordierite, fused silica or celsian (BaO·Al₂O₃·2SiO₂) on silicon or silicon-containing ceramic substrates or ceramic composite substrates imparts an improved thermal expansion match of the modified mullite coating with the silicon-containing substrate than with a monolithic mullite coating.

Cordierite is an incongruently melting compound with mullite formed first when cooling from the liquid phase. Upon quenching form the melt splash during the plasma spray, it may remain as a glassy material or mullite with a glass phase. This may require a post-spray annealing process at appropriate temperatures to convert the material to cordierite. The amount of modifier component addition can be first estimated by the rule of mixture estimate. But because of the complexity of phase composition in the system, a trial and error process may have to be executed before an optimal proportion is reached.

The mullite coating with the modifier component can be applied to the silicon-containing substrate by any suitable method including thermal spray, air plasma spray (APS) and vacuum or low pressure plasma spray (VPS or LPPS), high velocity oxy-fuel (HVOF) spray, vapor deposition, including chemical vapor deposition (CVD), physical vapor deposition (PVD) and solution techniques such as sol-gel, slurry
coating or colloidal suspension coating. A constituent starting powder of the mullite coating and modifier component may be premixed through a vigorous mechanical process, such as ball milling, to provide interlocking of the powders and prevent segregation of phases due to density differences. For the same purpose, a sol-gel or colloidal process may be employed to coat the particles of one constituent with another.

Sarin et al., U.S. Pat. No. 5,763,006 and Lee et al., U.S. Pat. No. 5,496,644 describe exemplary methods of applying mullite coatings. The disclosures of these patents are incorporated herein by reference. Sarin et al. discloses a chemical deposition process comprising steps of establishing a flow of reactants which will yield mullite in a CVD reactor, and depositing a crystalline coating from the reactant flow. Lee et al. discloses a method of plasma spraying mullite coatings onto silicon-based ceramic materials. The method prevents deposition of amorphous mullite by heating the silicon-containing substrate to a very high temperature (greater than 1000°C) during the spraying process.

The following examples are illustrative of the invention.

EXAMPLES

Powders of CaO.Al2O3.4SiO2 (CAS) (20 vol %) and (BaO.2Al2O3.2SiO2) (BSAS) (18 vol %) were added to mullite powder by ball milling, respectively. The composite powders were sprayed using air plasma spray (APS) onto a silicon carbon fiber reinforced silicon carbide-silicon matrix composite substrate processed by melt infiltration. The substrate temperature was kept at 1050 to 1250°C. The plasma torch model was Electro-plasma 03CA, with 45 kW power, argon (14.4 SLM) as primary gas and helium (9.8 SLM) as secondary gas. Plasma torch to substrate distance was 4". A top coat of yttria-stabilized zirconia (YSZ) was applied on top of the composite mullite coating by plasma spray using standard operating procedures for thermal barrier coatings. A baseline sample of monolithic mullite coating on the ceramic composite substrate was also prepared using the thermal spray technique with a yttria-stabilized zirconia topcoat. Samples of silicon-containing ceramic substrates with the modified mullite and thermal barrier coatings and monolithic mullite coatings were subjected to an environmental furnace test with two hour cycles from room temperature to 1300°C, for 500 hours in 90%H2O 10%O2. The results are shown in FIGS. 3-5.

FIG. 3 shows that through-thickness cracks developed in the baseline sample with the monolithic mullite coating. Extensive oxidation of the silicon-based ceramic composite at the mullite/substrate interface resulted in failure of the mullite coating (environmental barrier coating) during the test.

In contrast, the composite modified mullite coatings shown in FIGS. 4 and 5 exhibited no through-thickness cracks in the modified mullite coating and the coatings survived the test with minimal change at the modified mullite coating/substrate interface.

What is claimed:

1. A method of forming an article, comprising: forming a silicon-containing substrate; and applying a modified mullite coating comprising mullite and a modifier component that reduces cracks in the modified mullite coating, wherein said modifier component comprises an alkaline earth aluminosilicate.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising annealing said modified mullite coating to convert a glass phase of said modifier component to a phase compatible with said mullite.

3. The method of claim 1, further comprising applying an external environmental/thermal barrier coating onto said modified mullite coating.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein said modifier component comprises a lower thermal expansion component than mullite that imparts a closer coefficient of thermal expansion match between said modified mullite coating and said silicon-containing substrate.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein said modifier component forms a phase in said modified mullite coating that reduces thermal stress in the modified mullite coating by reducing the elastic modulus of said modified mullite coating.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein said modifier component forms a phase in said modified mullite coating that arrests the propagation of cracks in said modified mullite coating.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein said modifier component comprises barium feldspar (BaO.Al2O3.2SiO2), strontium feldspar (SrO.Al2O3.2SiO2) or a combination of barium feldspar (BaO.Al2O3.2SiO2) and strontium feldspar (SrO.Al2O3.2SiO2).

8. The method of claim 1, wherein said modifier component comprises a monoclinic celsian crystalline phase.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein said modifier component comprises barium strontium aluminosilicate (BSAS), calcium aluminosilicate (CAS), or a combination thereof.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein said modifier component comprises cordierite (2MgO.2Al2O3.5SiO2).

11. The method of claim 1, comprising adding a volume fraction of the modifier component in the modified mullite coating proportionate to a ratio of a difference between a coefficient of thermal expansion of the silicon-containing substrate and the coefficient of thermal expansion of a mullite to a difference between a coefficient of thermal expansion of the modifier component and the coefficient of thermal expansion of the mullite.

12. The method of claim 1, comprising applying said modified mullite coating by thermal spray, high velocity oxy-fuel (HVOF) spray, vapor deposition, physical vapor deposition (PVD) or solution technique.

13. The method of claim 1, comprising applying said modified mullite coating by air plasma spray, vacuum plasma spray or low pressure plasma spray.

14. The method of claim 1, comprising applying said modified mullite coating by chemical vapor deposition.

15. The method of claim 1, comprising applying said modified mullite coating by sol-gel, slurry coating or colloidal suspension coating.

16. The method of claim 1, comprising forming the modified mullite coating by first forming a starting powder of the coating and modifier component by ball milling.

17. The method of claim 1, comprising forming the modified mullite coating by a sol-gel or colloidal process.

18. A method of forming an article, comprising: forming a silicon-containing substrate; and applying a modified mullite coating comprising mullite and a modifier component that reduces cracks in the modified mullite coating, said modifier component comprising a material having a formula of MO.Al2O3.2SiO2, where M is an alkaline earth element.

19. A method of forming an article, comprising: forming a silicon-containing substrate; and applying a modified mullite coating comprising mullite and a modifier component that reduces cracks in the modified mullite coating, said modifier component comprising a material having a formula of MO.Al2O3.2SiO2, where M is an alkaline earth element.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein said modifier component comprises NaxSr0.2P2O7, Ba1.25Zr0.2P2O7, Sr0.5Si0.5O2.8, Ca0.5Sr0.5Zr2(PO4)3 or Ca0.5Sr0.5Zr2(PO4)3.
21. A method of forming an article, comprising: forming a silicon-containing substrate; and applying a modified mullite coating comprising mullite and a modifier component that reduces cracks in the modified mullite coating, said modifier component comprising a calcium aluminate or an aluminum titanate.

22. The method of claim 21, wherein said modifier component comprises 3Ca0.5Al2O5 or Al2O3-TiO2.

23. A method for making a coated article comprising forming a silicon/silicon carbide composite having silicon carbide-containing fibers; applying a modified mullite coating comprising mullite and barium strontium aluminosilicate (BSAS), that reduces cracks in the modified mullite coating.

24. The method of claim 23 further comprising applying a yttria-stabilized zirconia coating to the modified mullite coating.

25. A method of forming an article, comprising: forming a silicon-containing substrate; and applying a modified mullite coating comprising mullite and a modifier component that reduces cracks in the modified mullite coating, said modifier component comprising yttrium silicate.

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