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Design and optimization of a high-efficiency current-biased reverse load modulated power amplifier with impedance and performance constraints

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Abstract: This paper proposes an optimization method based on evolutionary computation for the design of broadband high-efficiency current-biased reverse load-modulation power amplifiers (CB-RLM PAs). First, given the reverse load-modulation characteristics of CB-RLM PAs, a comprehensive objective function is proposed that combines multi-state impedance trajectory constraints with in-band performance deviations. For the saturation and 6 dB power back-off (PBO) states, approximately optimal impedance regions on the Smith chart are derived using impedance constraint circles based on load-pull simulations. These regions are used together with in-band performance deviations (e.g., saturated efficiency, 6 dB PBO efficiency, and saturated output power) for matching network optimization and design. Second, a multi-objective evolutionary algorithm based on decomposition with adaptive weights, neighborhood, and global replacement is integrated with harmonic balance simulations to optimize design parameters and evaluate performance. Finally, to validate the proposed method, a broadband CB-RLM PA operating from 0.6–1.8 GHz was designed and fabricated. Measured results show that the efficiencies at saturation, 6 dB PBO, and 8 dB PBO all exceed 43.6%, with saturated output power maintained at 40.9–41.5 dBm, which confirms the feasibility and effectiveness of the proposed broadband high-efficiency CB-RLM PA optimization and design approach.

Key words: Current-biased reverse load-modulation; Load-modulation; High-efficiency; Power amplifier; Optimization

1 Introduction

With the modern communication systems advance toward higher data rates and broader coverage, the peak-to-average power ratio (PAPR) of modulated signals increases significantly (Iqbal et al., 2025). This trend imposes more stringent requirements on the design of power amplifiers (PAs) with high-efficiency at a larger power back-off (PBO) (Zhou et al., 2022; GiofrèR et al., 2024; Zhang Y et al., 2025a). So, the Doherty power amplifier (DPA) has attracted wide attention because its circuit is relatively simple and it maintains high-efficiency and linearity at PBO. However, conventional DPAs typically rely on a quarter-wavelength ($\lambda/4$) impedance transformer to realize the required load-modulation; the dispersive characteristic of this element severely limits the effective operating bandwidth in broadband operation (Doherty, 1936; Akbarpour et al., 2012).

To extend bandwidth, various improvements have been proposed, such as reactance compensation (Xia et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2019; Xiao et al., 2021), modified load-modulation structures (Pang et al., 2015; Zhou et al., 2017), and reciprocal bias configurations (Gao et al., 2022; Zhang Y et al., 2025b). Although these methods expand the operating band to some extent, they remain fundamentally constrained by the $\lambda/4$ transformer architecture, which makes it difficult to achieve a large fractional bandwidth while ensuring high-efficiency. To address the aforementioned issues, Akbarpour et al. (2017) proposes a novel power amplifier architecture using a constant current source at the drain for DC biasing. By exploiting the reverse load-modulation behavior of current-biased transistors, the operating band at PBO can be effectively expanded without a conventional $\lambda/4$ impedance transformer. Therefore, this architecture is a promising approach to broadband high-efficiency PA design. However, owing to the intrinsic characteristics of transistors and the reverse load-modulation mechanism, it remains difficult to match impedances that meet high-efficiency requirements across different operating states over a wide bandwidth.

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Given its excellent global search capabilities, evolutionary computation has been widely used in RF design and automated optimization (Zhang H et al., 2024; Fan et al., 2025; Hong et al., 2025; Jin et al., 2025; Ni et al., 2025b, 2025c). Chen et al. (2020) uses the multi-objective evolutionary algorithm based on decomposition (MOEA/D) to optimize output power, efficiency, and gain for a high-efficiency DPA at 3.5 GHz. In Kong et al. (2024), MOEA/D is applied to optimize the output matching network (OMN) impedances for different operating states. Although these studies have made progress, the constant current-biased reverse load-modulation power amplifier (CB-RLM PA) has a unique load-modulation mechanism, and how to apply this methodology effectively to CB-RLM PA design remains to be further explored.

Therefore, to address the load-modulation characteristics and efficiency enhancement requirements of the CB-RLM PA under wideband conditions, this paper proposes a design framework that combines multi-state impedance trajectory constraints with performance optimization. First, the OMN impedance trajectory is constrained by matching in two states (saturation and PBO). Next, harmonic balance (HB) simulation is used to evaluate output power and efficiency, and the matching network is optimized to obtain balanced performance across operating states. To validate the approach, MOEA/D with adaptive weights, neighborhood adaptation, and global replacement (MOEA/D-ANGR) is employed for optimization (Ni et al., 2025a). The designed PA achieves a saturated output power (P_{SAT}) above 40.9 dBm over 0.6–1.8 GHz and a drain efficiency (DE) above 43.6% at saturation, 6 dB PBO, and 8 dB PBO. These results demonstrate the effectiveness of the method.

2 Theoretical analysis

2.1 Current-biased reverse load-modulation power amplifier

Conventional PAs typically use constant voltage sources at the gate and drain for DC biasing, as shown in Fig. 1a. Under dynamic load conditions, the output power of a transistor under voltage bias increases as the load impedance decreases, indicating a negative correlation, as shown in Fig. 1b. This load-modulation behavior is contrary to the objective of active load-modulation. Consequently, in a conventional DPA, a $\lambda/4$ transformer is inserted in the carrier path so that the carrier amplifier reaches saturation earlier, thereby improving efficiency at PBO (Moreno Rubio et al., 2018; Zhang ZW et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2023). On the contrary, a high-efficiency PA architecture that biases the transistor with a constant current source was proposed in Akbarpour et al. (2017). The basic structure is demonstrated in Fig. 2a. In this architecture, the drain is biased by a constant current source. Compared with a transistor under voltage bias, a transistor under current source bias exhibits fundamentally different load-modulation behavior. Specifically, its output power increases with increasing load impedance, showing a positive correlation, as illustrated in Fig. 2b. This characteristic is the opposite of the conventional voltage-biased structure. Therefore, if the load-modulation under voltage bias is termed forward load-

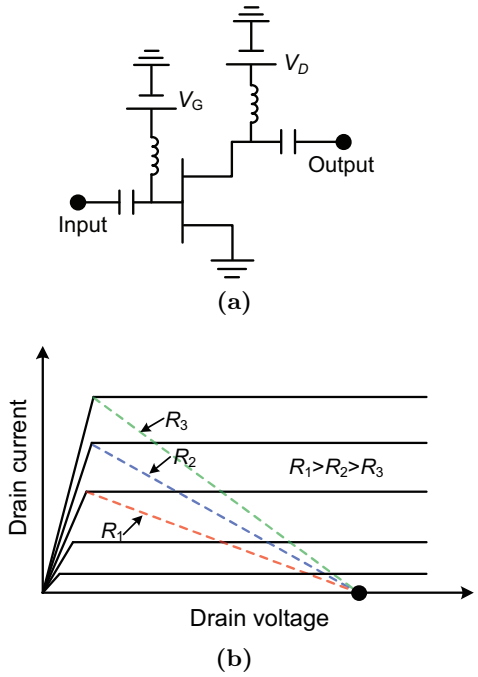

Fig. 1 Transistor biased by voltage: (a) circuit schematic; (b) load line

modulation, the behavior under current source bias can be regarded as reverse load-modulation. Thus, the CB-RLM PA does not rely on a $\lambda/4$ impedance transformer to realize load-modulation in the PBO region. Instead, a lower equivalent load impedance is presented to the carrier branch at PBO so that the carrier PA can enter the high-efficiency operating region at a lower output power. As the peaking branch gradually turns on, the equivalent load impedance of the carrier PA is continuously modulated and can smoothly transition from a normalized value of approximately 0.5 to a normalized value of 1 as shown in Fig. 2c.

Fig. 3 illustrates the basic architecture of the CB-RLM PA. Unlike a conventional DPA, this scheme introduces a constant current source at the drain of the carrier branch, thereby altering the load-modulation behavior and extending the operating bandwidth. The PBO range is defined as the ratio of the output power at saturation to that at power back-off (Zhao et al., 2021). Under a symmetric design (i.e., the saturation power ratio between the peaking and carrier amplifiers is $\alpha = 1$), the PBO range can be derived from the equivalent reflection coefficient Γ based on Fang and Cheng (2014), as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \mathrm{PBO} &= 10\log_{10}\left(\frac{P_{\mathrm{SAT}}}{P_{\mathrm{PBO}}}\right) \\ &= 10\log_{10}\left[(1+\alpha)\frac{1+|\Gamma|}{1-|\Gamma|}\right] \\ &= 10\log_{10}\left(\frac{2(1+|\Gamma|)}{1-|\Gamma|}\right), \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

where P_{SAT} and P_{PBO} denote the output power at saturation and at PBO, respectively. The coefficient Γ is determined by the equivalent output impedances of the carrier branch at these operating states, namely $Z_{\mathrm{C,SAT}}$ and $Z_{\mathrm{C,PBO}}$.

$$|\,\Gamma\,| = \left|\frac{Z_{\mathrm{C,SAT}} - Z_{\mathrm{C,PBO}}}{Z_{\mathrm{C,SAT}} + Z_{\mathrm{C,PBO}}}\right|. \tag{2}$$

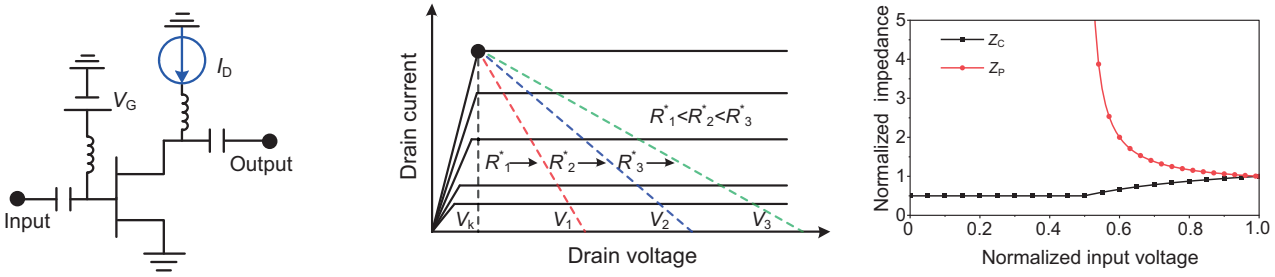

Fig. 2 Transistor biased by current: (a) circuit schematic; (b) load line; (c) load impedance and input voltage

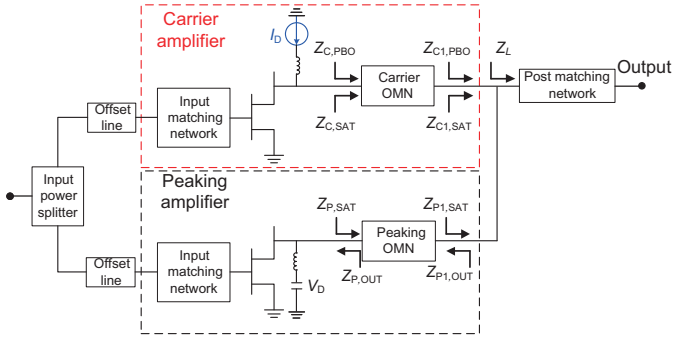

Fig. 3 Schematic of the CB-RLM PA

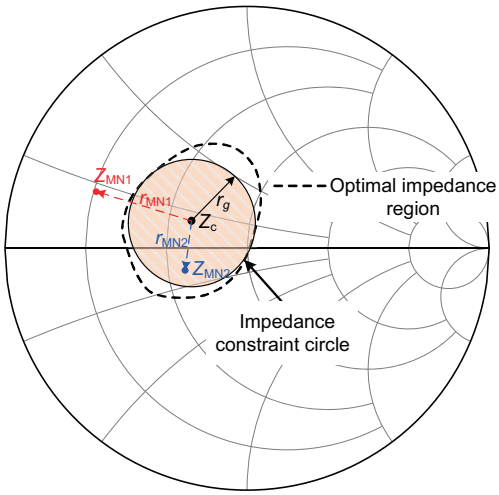

Fig. 4 Impedance constraint circle on the Smith chart

It should be noted that in practical designs, the equivalent output impedance of the carrier branch at PBO, $Z_{\mathrm{C,PBO}}$, is often not purely resistive. It is influenced by the equivalent impedance Z_L of the post-matching network (PMN) and by the peaking branch output impedance $Z_{\mathrm{P,OUT}}$. Previous studies have shown that jointly optimizing Z_L and $Z_{\mathrm{P,OUT}}$ can effectively extend the PBO range (Fang and Cheng, 2014; Li et al., 2020; Xiao et al., 2023). Furthermore, existing designs indicate that this PA architecture involves multiple interdependent factors, and the design process is hindered by numerical difficulties and reliance on designer experience. Therefore, based on the load-modulation mechanism under current source bias, this paper proposes a simple CB–RLM PA design method.

2.2 Proposed objective function

To achieve high-efficiency across operating states, load-modulated PAs must dynamically adjust the load impedance. Therefore, this paper incorporates an impedance constraint into the optimization to ensure that the matching network impedance trajectory remains within a desired impedance region. Because the optimal impedance region obtained from load-pull simulations typically has a complex, irregular shape, it is difficult to describe with analytical expressions. Accordingly, the impedance constraint circle method described in Kong et al. (2024) is adopted. Specifically, as shown in Fig. 4, an impedance constraint circle is constructed on the Smith chart, centered at the target impedance Z_c with radius r_g. This circle defines the allowable deviation for the matching network output impedance.

During optimization, the distance between the impedance obtained by the matching network, Z_{MN}, and the target impedance Z_{center} is defined as follows:

$$y_r = \left| \frac{Z_{\mathrm{MN}} - Z_{\mathrm{center}}}{Z_{\mathrm{MN}} + \mathrm{conj}(Z_{\mathrm{center}})} \right|. \tag{3}$$

The impedance error at different frequencies f is further defined as

$$E_r(f) = \max\left[0, (y_{r,f} - r_{g,f})\right]. \tag{4}$$

Thus, the impedance constraint function F_1 can be obtained.

$$F_1 = \sum_{f \in B} (\max(E_{r,\mathrm{PBO}}(f), E_{r,\mathrm{SAT}}(f))), \tag{5}$$

where B denotes the set of discrete frequencies within the operating band. If $F_1 = 0$, then all design frequencies in the band satisfy the impedance constraints in both the saturation and PBO states.

To simultaneously expand bandwidth and enhance efficiency, the carrier OMN ($\mathrm{OMN_c}$), the peaking OMN ($\mathrm{OMN_p}$), and the PMN in a CB-RLM PA must be designed to provide appropriate impedance matching across operating states. However, accurate analytical solutions are often difficult to obtain for broadband operation. Therefore, to evaluate the performance of the CB-RLM PA, this paper defines in-band normalized performance error functions for efficiency and output power under the two critical and commonly used operating states in load-modulated PA design, namely saturation and PBO. The in-band errors are defined as follows, where the

desired performance targets are $\mathrm{DE}_{\mathrm{PBO}}$, $\mathrm{DE}_{\mathrm{SAT}}$, and P_{SAT}, respectively:

$$E_{\mathrm{DE,PBO}} = \max\left[0, \frac{\mathrm{DE}_{\mathrm{PBO}} - \min_{f\in B}(y_{\mathrm{DE}_{\mathrm{PBO}}})}{\mathrm{DE}_{\mathrm{PBO}}}\right], \quad (6)$$

$$E_{\mathrm{DE,SAT}} = \max\left[0, \frac{\mathrm{DE}_{\mathrm{SAT}} - \min_{f\in B}(y_{\mathrm{DE}_{\mathrm{SAT}}})}{\mathrm{DE}_{\mathrm{SAT}}}\right], \quad (7)$$

$$E_{\mathrm{Pout}} = \max\left[0, \frac{P_{\mathrm{SAT}} - \min_{f\in B}(y_{P_{\mathrm{SAT}}})}{P_{\mathrm{SAT}}}\right], \quad (8)$$

where $y_{\mathrm{DE}_{\mathrm{PBO}}}$, $y_{\mathrm{DE}_{\mathrm{SAT}}}$, and $y_{P_{\mathrm{SAT}}}$ denote the performance of the CB-RLM PA at the corresponding state and frequency.

The above three performance metrics constitute the performance objective F_2. When all the frequencies to be designed in the band meet the specified efficiency and power requirements, $F_2 = 0$.

$$F_2 = E_{\mathrm{DE,PBO}} + E_{\mathrm{DE,SAT}} + E_{\mathrm{Pout}}. \quad (9)$$

2.3 Multi-objective optimization problem

In PA design, it is usually necessary to make trade-offs among multiple objectives such as load impedance and in-band performance. This problem can be formulated as a multi-objective optimization problem:

$$\min_{x\in X} F(x) = \left(F_1(x), F_2(x), \ldots, F_M(x)\right), \quad (10)$$

where x denotes the vector of design variables (e.g., microstrip lengths and widths), X represents the feasible solution space, and $F(x)$ is the vector of M objective functions.

MOEA/D decomposes a multi-objective optimization problem into a set of scalar subproblems and evolves them jointly to approximate the Pareto front (PF). However, the original MOEA/D typically relies on uniform weights and fixed neighborhoods. When the PF has discontinuities or long tails, uniform weights hinder balanced coverage, and fixed neighborhoods cause the search to become overly localized in the later stages of evolution. In addition, traditional methods often select parents within the neighborhood and prioritize their offspring when updating subproblems, which is inefficient when offspring directions misalign with neighborhood weights. To address these issues, Ni et al. (2025a) proposes MOEA/D-ANGR, which adaptively adjusts the density and position of weight vectors during distribution and search to enhance coverage of complex PFs. It also adapts the neighborhood size according to the position of a weight vector on the reference hyperplane and the stage of evolution, enabling a smooth transition from broad exploration early on to local refinement later. Furthermore, it utilizes information from high-quality offspring to update the entire population, which improves global optimization efficiency. Given the high dimensionality and complex constraints of CB-RLM PA optimization, this paper employs MOEA/D-ANGR to optimize the impedance trajectory under multi-states for the matching network and the PA performance within the operating band.

3 Design of broadband high-efficiency reverse load-modulation PA

To validate the proposed design method, a CB-RLM PA was designed using MACOM CGH40006P GaN transistors operating from 0.6–1.8 GHz. The circuit was fabricated on a Taconic TLY-5 substrate with a dielectric constant of 2.2 and a thickness of 20 mil. The carrier amplifier used a constant current source for the drain bias set to 460 mA and a gate bias of −1.6 V. The peaking amplifier used a 28 V drain bias and a gate bias of −6 V.

Fig. 5 shows the schematic of the CB-RLM PA to be optimized. The architecture consists of a power divider, two phase offset lines, a class AB carrier PA biased by a constant current source, a class C peaking PA biased by voltage, and a PMN. To simplify the overall design and optimization, the input matching network (IMN) was designed before the optimization to satisfy the source impedance requirements under two different bias conditions. The proposed CB-RLM PA design process is as follows.

Based on the analysis in Section 2.2, fundamental load-pull simulations were performed for the current-biased carrier amplifier at 0.6, 1.2, and 1.8 GHz under two operating states (saturation and PBO) to ensure effective load-modulation. To obtain a more accurate desired impedance region, the fundamental and harmonic load-pull simulations were carried out iteratively. The extracted harmonic load impedances were

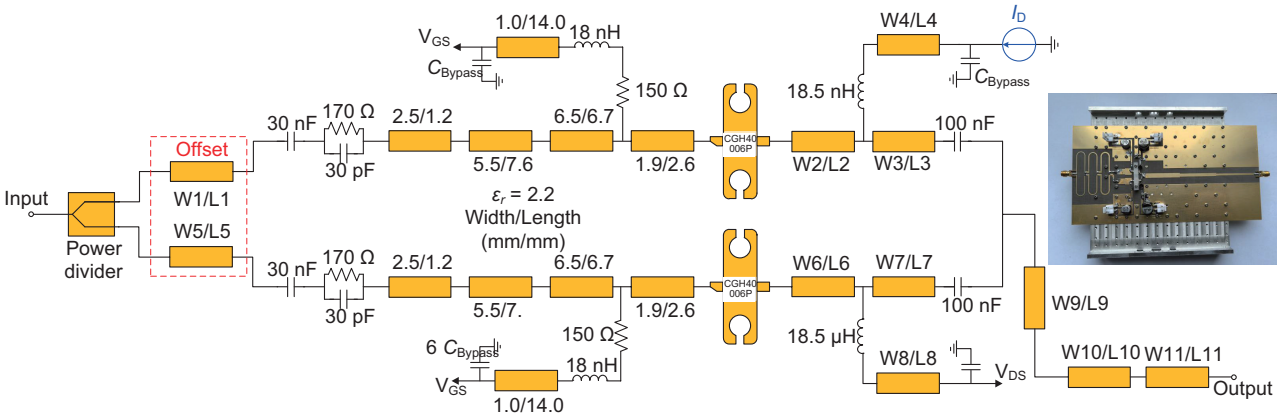

Fig. 5 Schematic of the CB-RLM PA to be optimized

then used as fixed terminations for subsequent fundamental load-pull simulations. The design requires DE $\geq$ 45% at saturation and at PBO. Accordingly, the impedance constraint circle method is used to obtain the desired impedance regions. Fig. 6 details the optimal impedance regions and the corresponding target regions at the design frequencies.

Second, considering that PAs must maintain high-efficiency across different PBO ranges in practical applications, it is required that DE $\geq$ 45% in both the saturation and PBO states, with $P_{\mathrm{SAT}} \geq 40.8$ dBm. The optimization covers seven frequencies from 0.6 to 1.8 GHz (0.6, 0.8, 1.0, 1.2, 1.4, 1.6, and 1.8 GHz). The ranges of the design variables are listed in Table 1. Because W_1 and W_5 are the width parameters of the phase offset line, they are fixed at a 50 Ω microstrip (approximately 1.5 mm).

Next, MOEA/D–ANGR from Ni et al. (2025a) was employed in conjunction with HB simulation for optimization, with a population size of 100 for 50 iterations. The detailed process is shown in Fig. 7. Specifically, the electromagnetic simulation software received the design parameters from the optimization algorithm, automatically constructed the circuit, and performed HB simulation. After each simulation, the load impedances, efficiencies, and output powers for different operating states were returned to the optimization algorithm to compute the objective functions and update the population. The algorithm then iterated until the termination criteria were met.

Fig. 8 shows the convergence curve of the proposed method during the optimization process, i.e., the change in the optimal objective function value (the minimum of the sum of the two objectives) for each generation as a function of iteration count. The figure shows that this value decreases rapidly at the beginning and approaches zero by generation 24, which indicates that the OMN and PMN parameters meet the design requirements. Fig. 9 depicts the impedance trajectories at different iterations. The impedance trajectory of the initial

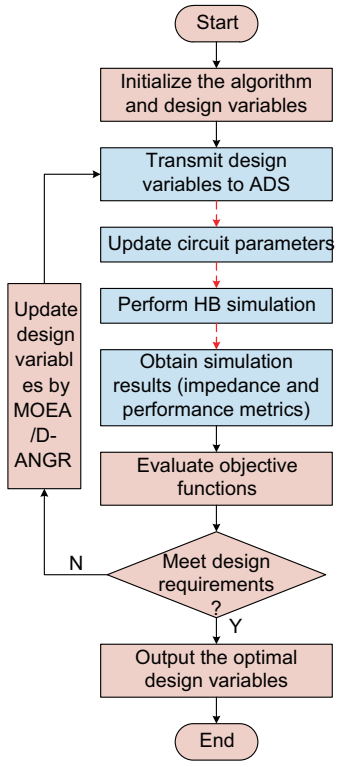

Fig. 7 Flowchart of the proposed method

design is far from the desired regions, while that of the 10$^{\mathrm{th}}$ generation partially enters and adjusts toward the desired direction. The impedance trajectory of the final generation falls within the target impedance region at the three frequencies of 0.6, 1.2, and 1.8 GHz, indicating that the carrier OMN has achieved the required dual state matching. Fig. 10 shows that, as the iterations progress, the performance indicators of the CB–RLM PA, such as efficiency and output power, gradually improve and meet the design requirements. Fig. 11 details the curves of efficiency and gain versus output power for the

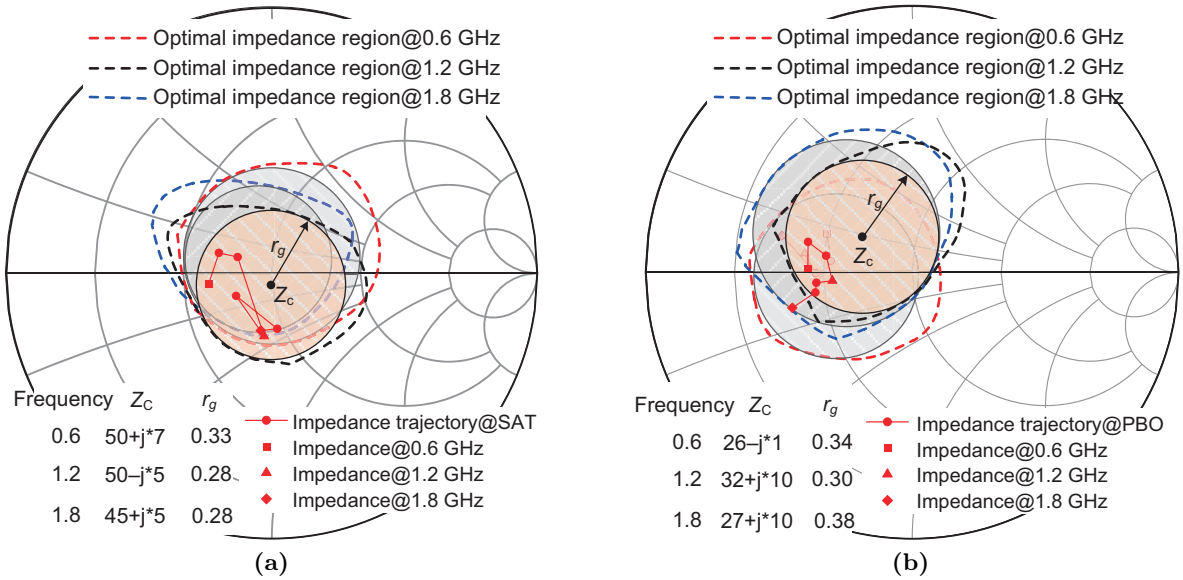

Fig. 6 Desired impedance regions and OMN impedance trajectories for different states: (a) SAT; (b) PBO

Table 1 Design variables and parameters

Variable	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6	W7	W8	W9	W10	W11
LB	1.5	1.4	1.0	1.0	1.5	1.4	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
UB	1.5	5.0	5.0	3.0	1.5	5.0	5.0	3.0	5.0	5.0	5.0
Gen 0	1.5	4.6	2.6	2.1	1.5	1.7	2.4	1.7	3.4	2.2	4.1
Gen 10	1.5	4.9	2.5	1.8	1.5	2.9	2.3	2.0	4.0	3.9	2.1
Gen 50	1.5	2.0	5.0	1.1	1.5	2.9	4.8	1.5	4.3	3.3	2.0
Variable	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7	L8	L9	L10	L11
LB	1.0	0.3	0.3	2.0	1.0	0.3	0.3	2.0	30.0	30.0	30.0
UB	10.0	5.0	5.0	10.0	10.0	5.0	5.0	10.0	50.0	50.0	50.0
Gen 0	7.3	3.1	2.3	9.4	6.4	4.8	3.2	5.0	45.0	34.6	42.5
Gen 10	9.2	3.8	1.5	7.6	3.7	3.9	1.8	2.7	32.2	31.2	32.9
Gen 50	3.0	0.8	0.9	5.5	7.2	2.2	1.0	6.7	39.2	37.3	41.4

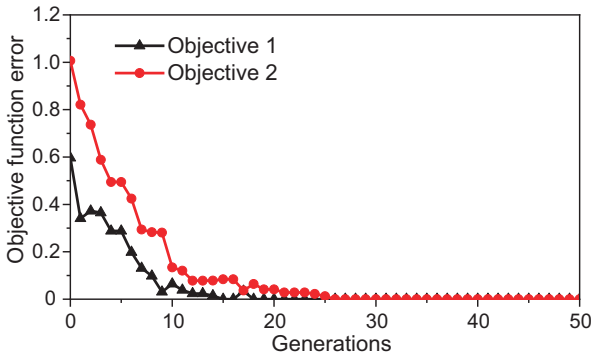

Fig. 8 Objective convergence curve versus generations

designed CB–RLM PA. Within the entire operating band, the saturated output power remains within 41.2–42.0 dBm, and the saturated and 8 dB PBO DEs are maintained at 53.7%–68.6 % and 45.6%–51.5%, respectively. At 6 dB PBO, the DE ranges from 45.6% to 53.8%, which demonstrates excellent broadband performance. Fig. 12 shows the trajectories of the impedances at the package plane for the carrier and peaking PAs versus input power. It can be observed that, by imposing impedance constraints at both saturation and PBO states, the designed PA satisfies the required load-modulation behavior as the input power level varies.

4 Manufacturing and measurement

To validate the proposed design method, a 0.6–1.8 GHz efficiency-broadband CB-RLM PA was fabricated and measured. The prototype is shown in Fig. 5. First, a continuous-wave signal with spacing of 200 MHz was used to analyze the performances of the designed CB-RLM PA across the entire bandwidth. The measurement results are shown in Figs. 13 and 14. It can be seen from the figures the fabricated CB–RLM PA achieves an output power of 40.9–41.5 dBm and a DE of 53.2%–63.9% at saturation. Meanwhile, its 8 dB and 6 dB PBO DEs remain between 43.6%–53.2% and 45.4%–58.7%, respectively. The measurement results are consistent with the simulations, which validate the feasibility of the theoretical analysis and the design methodology.

Second, digital predistortion (DPD) was applied at frequencies of 0.6, 1.2, and 1.8 GHz. Fig. 15 shows the normalized power spectral density (PSD) with and without DPD. With DPD enabled, the in-band adjacent-channel leakage ratio (ACLR) is below −45.5 dBc. Table 2 compares the proposed PA with recently reported broadband load-modulated PAs. The results show that the proposed CB-RLM PA achieves favorable bandwidth and efficiency at 6 dB and 8 dB PBO, further confirming the effectiveness of the method.

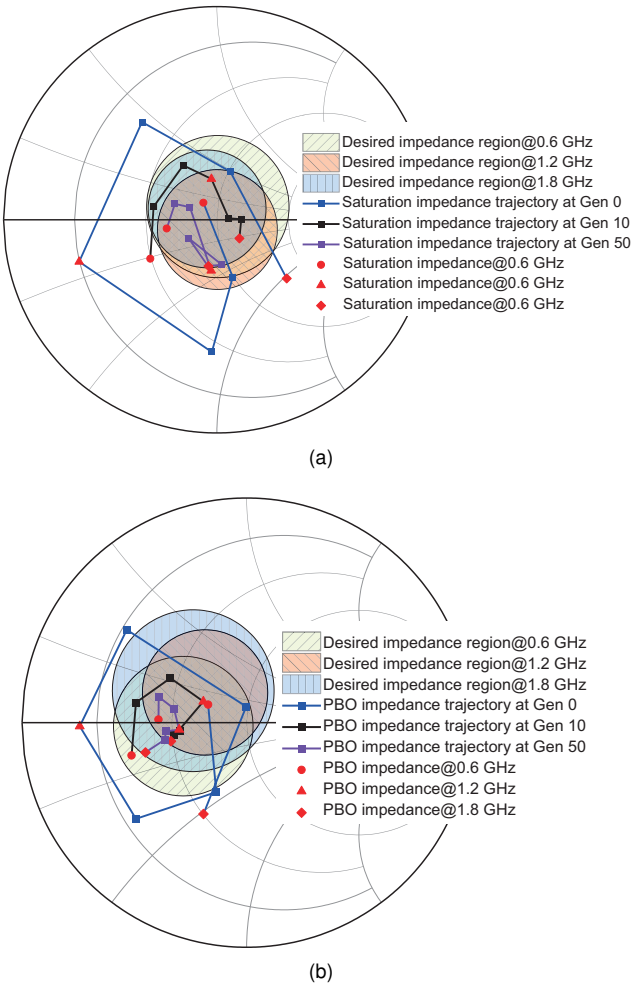

Fig. 9 Carrier OMN impedance trajectories at different generations: (a) SAT; (b) PBO

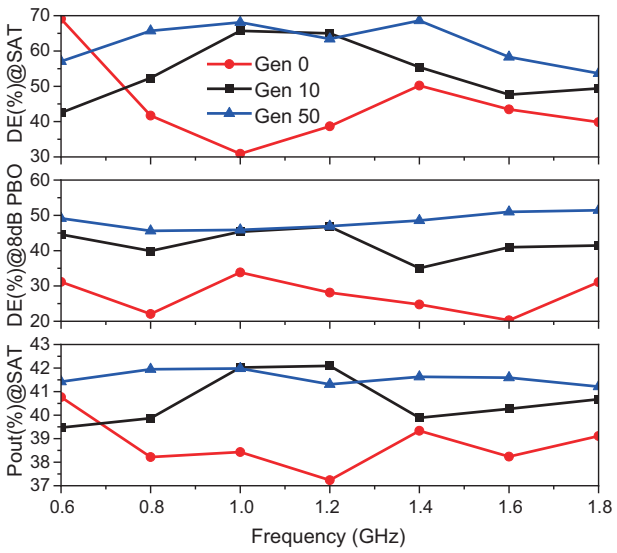

Fig. 10 Performance metrics at different generations

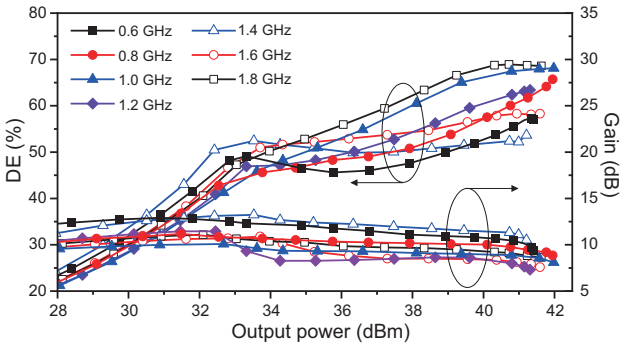

Fig. 11 Simulated efficiency and gain versus output power at various frequencies

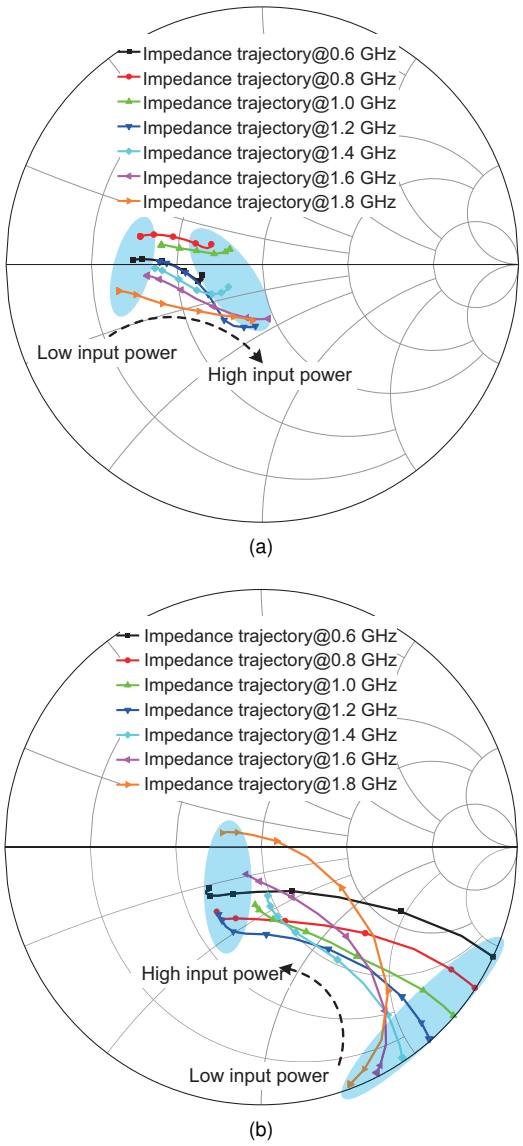

Fig. 12 Load-modulation trajectories: (a) carrier; (b) peaking

5 Conclusions

This paper proposes a CB-RLM PA design method that jointly enforces multi-state impedance trajectory constraints and optimizes in-band performance. The approach considers both impedance modulation behavior and performance metrics and uses MOEA/D–ANGR to optimize the CB-RLM PA across different operating states. Across the entire band, the fabricated PA achieves a saturated output power of 40.9–41.5 dBm. The saturated efficiency and the efficiency at 8 dB PBO are 53.2%–63.9% and 43.6%–53.2%, respectively. At 6 dB PBO, the efficiency remains between 45.4% and 58.7%, demonstrating strong broadband performance and robustness at PBO.

Acknowledgments

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Table 2 Performance comparison with published PAs

Reference	Frequency (GHz)	FBW (%)	P_{sat} (dBm)	Gain (dB)	DE@SAT (%)	DE@6 dB (%)	DE@8 dB (%)
Akbarpour et al. (2017)	0.8–2.2	93.3	39.7–40.7	7.9–8.9*	46.0–64.0	38.0–45.0*	36.9–47.0*
Gan et al. (2020)	1.7–2.6	41.9	43.2–45.2	9.1–11.2	58.4–69.1	46.3–57.7	39.8–53*
Liu et al. (2020)	1.4–2.55	58.2	41.9–42.2	9.1–12.2*	62.0–74.0	48.0–58.0	39.0–61.0*
Fang et al. (2024)	1.0–3.0	100.0	36.5–38.7	6.3–8.8*	47.8–57.7	45.4–51.2	38.8–48.9*
Zhang H et al. (2025)	1.2–2.8	80.0	43.1–44.5	7.1–8.9	54.1–74.2	50.9–56.5	42.5–47.2*
Ju et al. (2025)	2.8–4.2	40.0	42.2–43.1	7.0–8.4	51.0–61.0	43.0–53.8*	43.0–50.8
T.W.	0.6–1.8	100.0	40.9–41.5	7.2–10.5	53.2–63.9	45.4–58.7	43.6–53.2

*denotes values estimated from the corresponding figures (not reported in tables)

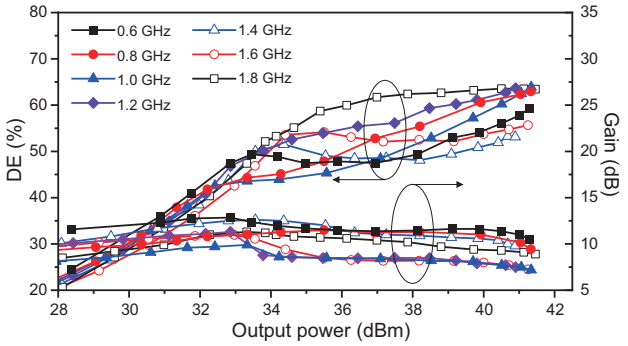

Fig. 13 Measured efficiency and gain versus output power

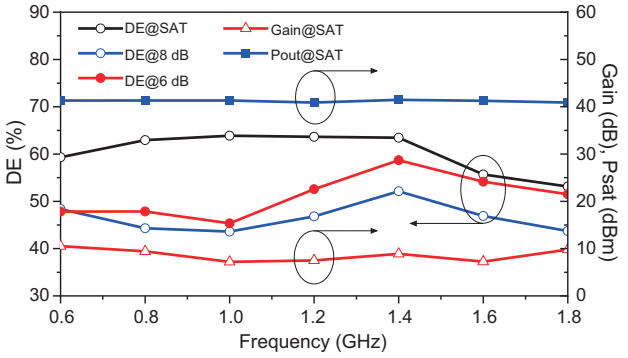

Fig. 14 Measured performance metrics at different frequencies

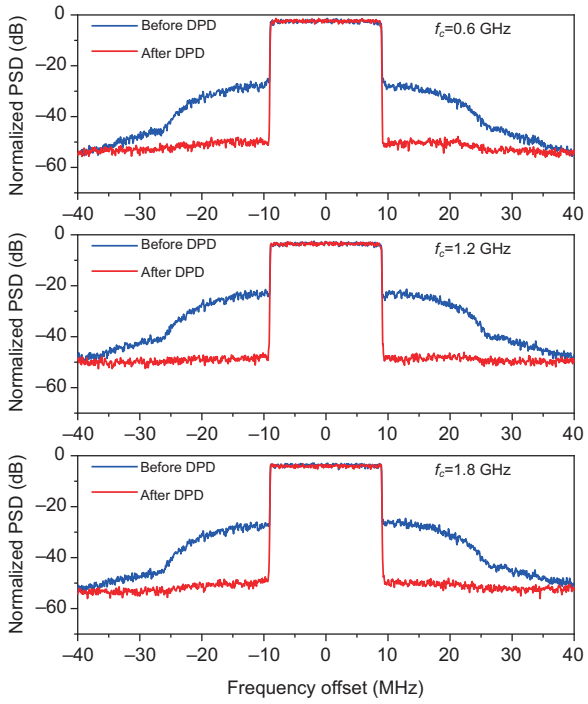

Fig. 15 Measured spectra with and without DPD at three frequencies

Author contributions

Zhongpeng NI designed the research. Heng ZHANG and Jing XIA processed the data. Zhongpeng NI, Wence ZHANG, and Wa KONG drafted the paper. Chao YU and Xiao-Wei ZHU helped organize the paper. Zhongpeng NI and Jing XIA revised and finalized the paper.

Conflict of interest

All the authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration on the use of generative AI tools

During the preparation of this work the authors used Chat-GPT in order to improve language. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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