Physica C 469 (2009) 1940–1944

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Physica C

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/physc

Global and local critical current density in superconducting $SmFeAsO_{1-x}F_x$ measured by two methods

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 11 June 2009
Accepted 29 June 2009
Available online 4 July 2009

PACS:
74.25.Qt
74.25.Sv
74.90.+n

Keywords:
FeAs based superconductor
Critical current density
Global and local J_c
Remnant magnetization
Campbell's method

ABSTRACT

The critical current densities of polycrystalline bulk $SmFeAsO_{1-x}F_x$ prepared by the powder-in-tube (PIT) method and by a conventional solid-state reaction were investigated using the remnant magnetic moment method and Campbell's method. Two types of shielding current, corresponding to global and local critical current densities J_c were observed using both measurement methods. The global and local J_c were on the order of 10^7 A/m^2 and 10^{10} A/m^2 at 5 K, respectively. The local J_c decreased slightly with increasing magnetic field. The global J_c was independent of the preparation method, while the local J_c was larger for samples prepared by PIT than for those prepared by solid-state reaction.

1. Introduction

The recent discovery of superconductivity in Fe-based compounds has attracted considerable attention, since the superconducting mechanism is different from that of Cu oxide superconductors, and Fe-based superconductors are expected to be useful in a wide array of future applications [1]. The critical temperature can reportedly be enhanced over 50 K by incorporating another rare earth element [2–5]. Although this value is still lower than the boiling point of liquid nitrogen (77.3 K), further discovery cannot be denied. In addition, it has been reported that the upper critical field may be higher than 100 T [6,7]. Therefore, Fe-based superconductors may allow applications with higher operating temperatures.

We previously reported the preparation of $SmFeAsO_{1-x}F_x$. Polycrystalline bulk specimens were synthesized by conventional solid-state reaction [8] and by the powder-in-tube (PIT) method [9]. Recently a one-step synthesis was reported instead of the usual two-step synthesis [10].

Since the specimens were polycrystalline, it was expected that two types of shielding currents should be observed in the magnetization measurements [11]. They are known as local and global critical current densities. That is, connection between grains is too week and the difference of shielding current inside grains and through the grains are large as two to three order of magnitude. They are also called intra- and inter-grain shielding currents. However, the loop size of shielding current is not directly corresponding to the size of the grain for the case of very-low quality polycrystalline specimen, since the shielding current may flow several grains or limited area of the grain. Therefore, in the present paper, the local and global critical current densities are used instead of intra- and inter-grain critical current densities.

In our previous works [10], the local and global critical current densities are roughly estimated from the simple magnetization measurement. However, according to this method, the accurate measurement cannot be expected since the measured magnetic moment is a type of average of the local and the global critical current densities [12]. Therefore, an accurate measurement for the local and global critical current densities is required.

In Ref. [11], the two kinds of shielding currents were estimated from the remnant magnetization as a function of maximum applied field, and it was explained that these currents corresponded to the local and global critical current densities. Although this measurement method is simple, the external magnetic field is restricted to zero, so it is impossible to obtain the magnetic field

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doi:10.1016/j.physc.2009.06.013

dependence of the critical current densities. In contrast, the two kinds of critical current density can be measured separately by the use of Campbell's method [12,13]. This method can much more effectively investigate the critical current densities in bulk specimens which have a complicated current path. Moreover, there are few reports on the characteristics of the critical current density of Fe-based superconductors.

In this paper, the two kinds of critical current density were measured using both the remnant magnetization method and Campbell's method, with specimens prepared by two different preparation methods. The difference in values obtained by the two measurements is discussed.

2. Experimental

The sample specifications are listed in Table 1. Specimen #2 was prepared by the PIT method [9], and the other two specimens #3, #4 were prepared by conventional solid-state reaction with different nominal compositions of fluorine [8]. The details of their preparation are described in the references. The critical temperatures of the specimens, measured from the temperature dependence of magnetic moment in field cool and zero field cool, were about 50 K.

The structure of the specimens were examined by scanning electron microscopy (SEM). It was found that the typical grain size was about the same as was reported previously, i.e., in the range of 1–20 μm [8,9]. There exists unreacted particles which size is smaller than the grain size. Although the connection between grains is almost insufficient, strong connected grains are also observed. That is, the size of loop shielding current is widely distributed. Therefore, the size of the loop is assumed as be 10 μm in the present study.

The remnant magnetic moment m_R at zero magnetic field was measured after an excursion up to an external maximum magnetic field H_a. The shield current, which is identified as the critical current density J_c, is related to H_a. Assuming a superconducting slab of thickness w and that the external magnetic field is applied in parallel to the wide surface, the remnant magnetization M_R is given as

$$\begin{aligned} M_R &= \frac{H_a^2}{4H_p}; \quad H_a < H_p \\ &= -\frac{H_a^2}{4H_p} + H_a - \frac{H_p}{2}; \quad H_p < H_a < 2H_p \\ &= \frac{H_p}{2}; \quad H_a > 2H_p \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

where H_p is the penetration depth which is equal to $J_c w/2$ based on Bean's model. Therefore, the derivative of Eq. (1) is given by

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{dM_R}{dH_a} &= \frac{H_a}{2H_p}; \quad H_a < H_p \\ &= -\frac{H_a}{2H_p} + 1; \quad H_p < H_a < 2H_p \\ &= 0; \quad H_a > 2H_p. \end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

Hence dM_R/dH_a shows a peak at $H_a = H_p$, where J_c can be estimated from the measured H_p. In the present study, remnant magnetic moment m_R as a function of maximum magnetic field H_a was measured using a SQUID magnetometer.

Table 1
Sample specifications.

Specimen no.	Specimen	Synthesis	Critical temperature (K)
#2	$SmFeAsO_{0.7}F_{0.3}$	Powder-in-tube (PIT)	50.4
#3	$SmFeAsO_{0.7}F_{0.3}$	Solid-state reaction	48.5
#4	$SmFeAsO_{0.6}F_{0.4}$	Solid-state reaction	51.1

Campbell's method was used to measure the critical current density of the specimens. The DC and superimposed AC magnetic fields were applied to the specimen. The frequency of the AC magnetic field was 97 Hz, and the maximum AC magnetic field was 10 mT. The total magnetic flux Φ penetrating the specimen was calculated from the signals of pick-up and cancel coils as a function of the AC magnetic field amplitude b_{ac}. Then the penetration depth of the AC magnetic field λ' was derived as

$$\lambda' = \frac{1}{2w}\frac{\partial \Phi}{\partial b_{ac}}. \tag{3}$$

The slope of the $\lambda' - b_{ac}$ plot gave $1/\mu_0 J_c$. The value of λ' became saturated to a constant representing the center of the superconductor at a large b_{ac} value. If there were two kinds of magnetic moments in the specimen, two slopes would be observed and two different critical current densities could be evaluated. Temperature of specimen was controlled by cryocooler above 18 K.

3. Results and discussion

Fig. 1a shows the external applied magnetic field dependence of the derivative of the magnetic moment of specimen #2 at various temperatures. Two peaks were clearly observed. The same behavior was observed for specimen #3, which was prepared by solid-state reaction unlike the PIT preparation of #2. The first peak at smaller H_a is related to the global critical current density, since the peak rapidly shifted to a lower magnetic field with increasing temperature, and the estimated value of J_c was much smaller than the local critical current density. It was reported that the global critical current density measured by four probe method reached zero at temperatures higher than 20 K [9]. In contrast, the second peak at larger H_a is related to the local critical current density. It was found that the temperature dependence of the local critical current density was smaller than that of the global critical current density.

On the contrary, only one peak was found for specimen #4, as shown in Fig. 1b. This peak corresponds to the local critical current density. The global critical current density of specimen #4 was too small to be measured under the present conditions.

The global and local J_c evaluated from the peak positions of the derivatives of m_R are shown in Fig. 2. Since only one peak was found for specimen #4, the global J_c was omitted. The value of the global J_c was on the order of 10^7 A/m^2 at 5 K and could not be estimated for temperatures above 20 K, since the peak in the derivative of m_R was too small. This value agrees with that reported by Yamamoto et al. [11] The temperature dependence of global J_c in specimens #2 and #3 were the same. Therefore, the global J_c was too small and was significantly affected by voids and weak links between grains in the polycrystalline bulk specimens, both of which are known to exist in Cu oxide superconductors with poor properties. It is well-known that the temperature and magnetic field dependences of J_c affected by weak links are large.

In contrast, the local J_c at 5 K was over 10^{10} A/m^2, 1000 times larger than the global J_c, which was consistent with the results estimated in Ref. [11]. It was found that the local J_c was quite dependent upon the method of synthesis, as shown in Fig. 2b. Moreover, the temperature dependence of local J_c was also different. That is, the local J_c of specimen #2 prepared by PIT was higher than specimens #3 and #4 prepared by conventional solid-state reaction. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that the characteristics of the critical current density could be improved by further developing the preparation method.