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# Anomalous evolution of corrosion behaviour of warm-rolled type 304 austenitic stainless steel



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## ARTICLE INFO

## Keywords:

- A. Stainless steel B. Polarization
- D. PUI
- C. Pitting corrosion
- C. Intergranular corrosion

#### ABSTRACT

The effect of warm-rolling (at 200 °C) on the corrosion behaviour of type 304 steel in the 3.5% NaCl solution was investigated by electrochemical measurements and microstructural characterization. The pitting corrosion resistance of the specimens decreased with increasing deformation, reached the bottom at 20% deformation, and then improved with further deformation. The increase in low angle and low- $\Sigma$  coincidence site lattice (CSL) grain boundaries improves the corrosion resistance, while the higher dislocation density weakens the corrosion resistance. The corrosion behaviour of warm-rolled austenitic stainless steel is determined by the interplay of the dislocation and grain boundary effects.

## 1. Introduction

Austenitic stainless steels are considered to be an important category of materials due to their suitable electrochemical stability, superior mechanical properties, ease of fabrication, abundance, and relatively low cost. Thus, austenitic stainless steels have been widely applied in such industries as the aerospace, automotive, and electronics industries [1-4]. However, the corrosion behaviour of austenitic stainless steels has been one of the main factors preventing their further applications. Corrosion resistance is one of the most important criteria for evaluating the performance of austenitic stainless steels in corrosive environments. Numerous researchers [5-7] have reported on the corrosion behaviour of austenitic stainless steels in corrosive environments. Despite the intrinsic higher corrosion resistance of austenitic stainless steels, they are extremely susceptible to local corrosion, such as the pitting or intergranular corrosion in severe corrosive environments, such as chloride and alkaline solutions [8-11]. Therefore, for further applications, it is crucial to study the corrosion susceptibility of austenitic stainless steel.

The pre-deformation of stainless steels is unavoidable during the fabrication processes, such as rolling, extrusion, shot peening, ultrasonic peening, and surface mechanical attrition treatment. Rolling, a traditional metallurgical process for improving the mechanical properties of the materials, has been widely used in materials processing.

The plastic deformation induced by rolling or the other afore mentioned methods is likely to not only modify the microstructure but also change the mechanical properties of stainless steels [12,13]. Numerous studies [14-16] have been carried out on the evolution of texture or microstructure in cold-rolling stainless steels. It was reported that mechanical twins, phase transformation and dislocations developed during the rolling process in austenitic stainless steels. The microstructure induced by rolling depends on the material composition, deformation temperature, and degree of deformation. The changes in the microstructure may have a significant effect on the corrosion behaviour of materials. Nam et al. [17] reported that the oriented low-energy grain boundaries induced by the rolling process increased the corrosion resistance of the low alloy steel. Peguet et al. [18] showed that cold-rolling improved the pit propagation rate of type 304 steel and weakened its repassivation ability due to dislocation pile-ups. Xiang [19] also reported that the corrosion resistance of the LA51 alloy sheet improved due to its characteristic textures, texture intensity, and the formation of twins and protective surface films during the rolling process. Similar results have also been reported by Huang [20] and Shakhova [21].

However, in metastable stainless steels, the evolution of microstructure induced by warm-rolling is notably different from that induced by cold-rolling. Warm-rolling at a higher temperature can suppress the strain-induced  $\alpha'$  martensitic transformation in these stainless steels. Additionally, warm-rolling can decrease the rolling resistance

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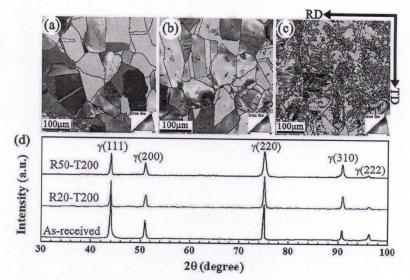


Fig. 1. IPF maps and XRD results of type 304 steel with different deformation percentages: (a) as-received, (b) R20-T200, (c) R50-T200, (d) XRD results. (RD: rolling direction, TD: transverse direction).

force and improve the plasticity of the steel compared with cold-rolling [22]. Such microstructural changes in warm-rolled stainless steels may have a significant impact on the corrosion resistance of the steels. However, the evolution of microstructure induced by warm-rolling has not been thoroughly elucidated to date, and the relationship between the corrosion behaviour and warm-rolling has not been investigated to date in austenitic stainless steels.

In this work, the effects of the rolling temperature of  $200\,^{\circ}$ C ( $0.14\,\mathrm{Tm}$ ,  $T_m$ : the melting temperature of 304 austenitic stainless steel) and rolling deformation percentage ( $10{\text -}50\%$ ) on the corrosion behaviour of type 304 steel in the  $3.5\,\mathrm{wt.\%}$  NaCl solution were investigated by various electrochemical measurements. Anomalous evolution of the corrosion behavior of warm-rolled type 304 steel was observed, and the mechanism for pitting corrosion was discussed based on the microstructural changes induced by warm-rolling.

## 2. Experimental

The base type 304 stainless steel (0.07 wt.% C, 0.33 wt.% Si, 1.13 wt.% Mn, 18.09 wt.% Cr, 8.06 wt.% Ni, 0.022% wt.% S, 0.039 wt.% P) plates were solution-treated at 1050 °C for 1 h and then were water quenched to obtain a homogeneous microstructure. Warm-rolling was conducted under isothermal conditions, where both the roller and specimens were preheated to 200 °C. The plates were multi-step unidirectionally rolled with a reduction of approximately 1% of their initial thickness during each pass, until the desired deformation percentage (10–50%) was achieved after numerous successive passes. Henceforth, the obtained specimens will be referred to as the RXX-T200 specimen. For example, the R20-T200 specimen is the specimen rolled at 200 °C to obtain a 20% reduction of its initial thickness.

The plate specimens for electrochemical measurements were cut parallel to the rolling direction, and then machined into test samples with the dimensions of  $10~\text{mm} \times 10~\text{mm} \times 2~\text{mm}$ . The rear surfaces were connected using an insulated copper wire and sealed with a curing epoxy resin to avoid crevice corrosion. The surfaces of the specimens were successively ground with emery papers up to 2000 grit and polished with a  $0.1~\text{\mu m}$  diamond polishing agent. All of the specimens were rinsed with deionized water and acetone and dried immediately prior to testing. Electrochemical measurements were conducted using an IVIUMSTAT electrochemical workstation equipped with the corrosion software of Ivium Soft. A three-electrode cell was used for the electrochemical measurements, including a platinum sheet (as the

counter electrode), a saturated calomel electrode (SCE, as the reference electrode), and the specimens prepared as described above (as the working electrode). The electrode potentials were measured and are presented in reference to the SCE scale. Electrochemical experiments were conducted in a 3.5 wt.% NaCl solution at 25  $\pm$  1 °C. The specimens were immersed in the solution for 10 min to attain a stable reaction system prior to testing. The open-circuit potential ( $E_{oc}$ ) value was measured in the 3.5 wt.% NaCl solution for 3600 s. Potentiodynamic polarization measurements were conducted at a scanning rate of  $1\,\text{mV/}$ s from  $-0.6 \, V_{SCE}$  to  $+1 \, V_{SCE}$ . For the potentiostatic polarization, the current density was recorded at a constant potential of  $+100\,\text{mV}_{\text{SCE}}$  for 6000 s. Prior to the electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS) tests, the specimens were immersed in the solution with a constant potential of  $+100\,\text{mV}_{SCE}$  (the potential was obtained from the passive region of the polarization curves) for 2 h to form the passive film. EIS measurements were carried out at the open-circuit potential with a signal amplitude perturbation voltage of 10 mV<sub>SCE</sub> over the frequency range of 100 kHz-10 mHz. Each experiment was repeated at least three times under identical conditions to confirm the reproducibility of the tests. Subsequent heat-treatments for the specimens were conducted at 400 °C (0.29 Tm) for 4 h, 500 °C (0.36 Tm) for 4 h, and 950 °C (0.68 Tm) for 1 h, respectively, and the specimens treated at 400  $^{\circ}\text{C}$  and 500  $^{\circ}\text{C}$  were then furnace cooled, while the specimens treated at 950 °C were water cooled. All of the specimens were annealed in vacuum atmosphere. Intergranular corrosion tests [23,24] of the specimens were evaluated by the oxalic acid electrolytic corrosion with a current density of 1 A cm<sup>-2</sup> for 90 s.

The microstructures of the specimens were observed by electron backscatter diffraction (EBSD), X-ray diffraction (XRD) and optical microscope (OM).

## 3. Results

## 3.1. Microstructure characterization

The inverse pole figure (IPF) maps and XRD results for the type 304 stainless steel specimens with different warm-rolling deformation percentages are shown in Fig. 1. The as-received specimen exhibited irregular austenitic grains with some annealing twins after the solution-treatment as shown in Fig. 1(a). The R20-T200 specimen had a polygonal microstructure similar to that of the as-received specimen, as shown in Fig. 1(b). The grain sizes and grain morphologies of the as-

received and R20-T200 specimens were similar, implying that the 20% deformation slightly altered the microstructure. However, the original grain boundaries almost disappeared, and the microstructure changed greatly as the deformation increased to 50%, as shown in Fig. 1(c). These results may be attributed to the dislocation pile-ups around the grain boundaries that constrain the deformation of austenite during the deformation process [25]. In addition, heterogeneous grain clusters were observed in some original grains, and the grains orientation became more disordered with increasing deformation, particularly for the R50-T200 specimen. The original grain boundaries became fairly blurry or even disappeared, resulting in a large amount of incomplete grains in the R50-T200 specimen.

The XRD patterns for the as-received and warm-rolled specimens are shown in Fig. 1(d). The  $\gamma$  (111),  $\gamma$  (200),  $\gamma$  (220),  $\gamma$  (310), and  $\gamma$  (222) diffraction peaks are due to type 304 steel in the austenite phase. The XRD results indicated that warm-rolling did not lead to any phase transitions in type 304 steel. Additionally, the heights of the XRD peaks decreased with increasing deformation, which may be attributed to the greater amount of defects and greater distortion of the crystal structures generated during the deformation process.

## 3.2. Open-circuit potential

The open-circuit potential (Eocp) curves of the as-received and warm-rolled specimens are displayed in Fig. 2. The  $E_{\rm ocp}$  values of all specimens decreased in the first approximately 250 s and then reached a stable level after approximately 1800 s, as shown in Fig. 2. This finding may explain the observation that the specimens should be immersed in the solution for some time prior to the experiments, and with a longer immersion time resulting in a more stable surface. However, significant changes were observed in Eocp stable values for various warm-rolling deformation percentages. It is observed that the warmrolled specimens showed considerably lower Eocp values in the 3.5 wt.% NaCl solution than the as-received specimen. The Eocp value of the R20-T200 specimen (-0.223 V<sub>SCE</sub>) clearly decreased compared with that of the as-received specimen ( $-0.137 \, V_{SCE}$ ). When the deformation was above 20%, the Eocp value increased slightly with further deformation. The Eocp behaviour is closely related to the change in the passivation state of the stainless steel [8]. The lower Eocp value indicates poor passivation state of the stainless steel with the degraded passive film and vice versa. The deteriorated passive film can increase the corrosion rate of the specimen. Thus, the above results indicate that warm-rolling increased the corrosion rate of the type 304 steel in the 3.5 wt.% NaCl solution. The corrosion rate reached the highest value at 20% deformation and then decreased with further deformation.

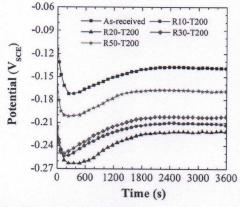


Fig. 2. Open-circuit potential curves of the as-received and warm-rolled specimens.

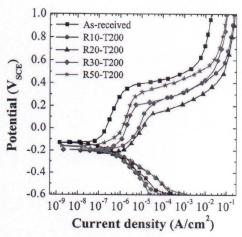


Fig. 3. Potentiodynamic polarization curves of the as-received and warm-rolled specimens.

#### 3.3. Potentiodynamic polarization

Potentiodynamic polarization behaviour of the as-received and warm-rolled specimens are shown in Fig. 3. While all of the curves are similar to each other, a noticeable effect of warm-rolling is observed, indicating that warm-rolling may influence the corrosion process. To reveal the corrosion behaviour of the warm-rolled specimens, several related parameters, such as the corrosion potential ( $E_{corr}$ ), corrosion current density ( $i_{corr}$ ), passive current density ( $i_{pass}$ ), pitting potential ( $E_{pit}$ ), and cathodic Tafel slope ( $\beta_c$ ), were obtained from Fig. 3 or from the Tafel extrapolation method [26], with the obtained values shown in Table 1. The  $i_{pass}$  value was obtained from the polarization curves in the middle of the passive region.

All of the specimens exhibited a cathodic shift in Ecorr, with the Ecorr values of the as-received, R10-T200, R20-T200, R30-T200, and R50-T200 specimens in the 3.5 wt.% NaCl solution reaching -131.4 mV<sub>SCE</sub>,  $-206.8 \, \text{mV}_{\text{SCE}}, -219.3 \, \text{mV}_{\text{SCE}}, -194.5 \, \text{mV}_{\text{SCE}}, \text{ and } -159.4 \, \text{mV}_{\text{SCE}},$ respectively. Ecorr decreased with increasing deformation, reached the lowest value at 20% deformation, and then increased with further deformation. Theoretically, a higher Ecorr indicates a higher chemical inertness and better corrosion resistance for preventing the anodic process [27]. Thus, the general corrosion resistance of all the specimens followed the order of as-received > R50-T200 > R30-T200 > R10-T200 > R20-T200. In addition, type 304 steel presented an obvious passivation in the 3.5 wt.% NaCl solution. The existence of a larger passivation region indicates that a more protective passive film was formed on the specimen surface. The  $i_{\text{pass}}$  of the R20-T200 specimen (7.664 µA cm<sup>-2</sup>) was considerably larger than that of the as-received specimen (0.367 µA cm<sup>-2</sup>). i<sub>pass</sub> reflects the dissolution rate of the passive film during the corrosion process such that a larger ipass indicates a higher dissolution rate [28,29]. The  $E_{\text{pit}}$  value of the R20-T200 specimen was considerably smaller than that of the as-received specimen but increased for the deformation above 20%. Thus, warmrolling could distinctly increase the pitting susceptibility in type 304 steel, particularly for the R20-T200 specimen. With a further increase of warm-rolling deformation, the pitting susceptibility first increased and then decreased.

The surface morphologies of the as-received and warm-rolled specimens after the potentiodynamic polarization are shown in Fig. 4(a)–(e). The density of corrosive pits on the specimen surfaces increased after warm-rolling, particularly for the R20-T200 specimen. An examination of the micrographs also demonstrated that warm-rolling promoted the pitting corrosion of type 304 steel. The corrosive pits became elongated along the rolling direction with an increase in deformation percentage. On the other hand, as shown in

Table 1

Electrochemical parameters of the as-received and warm-rolled specimens.  $E_{corr}$ : corrosion potential,  $i_{corr}$ : corrosion current density,  $i_{pass}$ : passive current density,  $E_{pit}$ : pitting potential,  $B_{corr}$ : corrosion current density,  $E_{pit}$ : cathodic Tafel slope.

Specimens	E <sub>corr</sub> (mV <sub>SCE</sub> )	i <sub>corr</sub> (nA cm <sup>-2</sup> )	i <sub>pass</sub> (μA cm <sup>-2</sup> )	E <sub>pit</sub> (mV <sub>SCE</sub> )	$\beta_c$ (mV decade <sup>-1</sup> )
As-received R10-T200 R20-T200	$-131.4 \pm 3.5$ $-206.8 \pm 4.1$ $-219.3 \pm 3.3$	$1.436 \pm 0.14$ $12.501 \pm 0.51$	$0.367 \pm 0.02$ $7.357 \pm 0.04$ $7.664 \pm 0.03$ $1.547 \pm 0.03$ $1.503 \pm 0.04$	$404.6 \pm 5.2$ $187.5 \pm 5.9$ $131.1 \pm 1.7$ $218.3 \pm 5.2$ $332.4 \pm 6.3$	-285.2 ± 25.9 -370.2 ± 46.5 -376.8 ± 21.1 -361.3 ± 32.5 -339.1 ± 31.8
R30-T200 R50-T200	-194.5 ± 3.7 -159.4 ± 4.5	$69.470 \pm 3.48$ $2.174 \pm 0.05$ $1.807 \pm 0.04$			

Fig. 4(a1)–(e1), tiny corrosive pits were initiated at the grain boundary in all of the specimens at the anodic potentials of  $E_{\rm pib}$  demonstrating that the grain boundary was the preferential initiation site for the corrosive pits. Therefore, grain boundaries may play the primary role in the pitting corrosion of warm-rolling type 304 steel, while a small number of inclusions may have little effect on the pitting corrosion.

Potentiodynamic polarization parameters and surface morphologies indicate the reduction of the corrosion resistance in the warm-rolled 304 specimens. The corrosion resistance decreased with increasing deformation, reached the bottom at 20% deformation, and then increased with further deformation.

## 3.4. Potentiostatic polarization

The potentiostatic polarization curves of the as-received and warm-rolled specimens are shown in Fig. 5. The current densities of the specimens initially decreased and then stabilized at a low positive current density due to the formation of the passive film. During long term-operation, the current densities of the warm-rolled specimens were considerably higher and showed greater fluctuations than the current density of the as-received specimen, particularly for the R20-T200 specimen. As shown in the inset of Fig. 5, some current fluctuation spikes are observed above the baseline current due to the unstable passive films formed on the specimen surfaces. The frequency and height of the current fluctuation spikes of the warm-rolled specimens

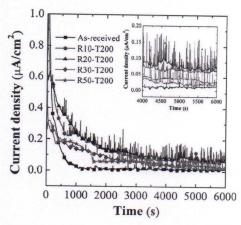


Fig. 5. Potentiostatic polarization curves of the as-received and warm-rolled specimens. The inset shows the magnified view of the curves from 4000 to  $6000 \, \text{s}$ .

increased compared with that of the as-received specimen, particularly for the R20-T200 specimen, but then decreased with further increase in the deformation. Generally, the larger and more fluctuating current density reflects the thinner and porous film structure; such a film increases the opportunity of deleterious ions diffusion to accelerate the

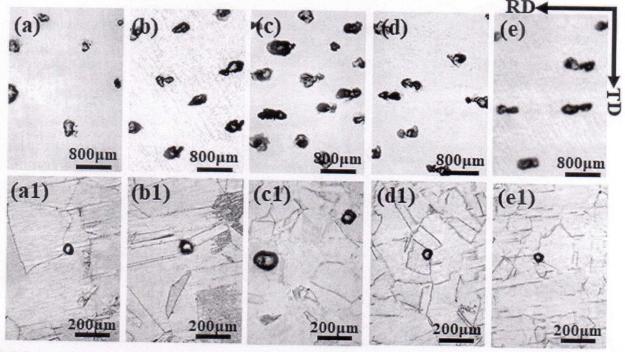


Fig. 4. Surface morphologies of the as-received and warm-rolled specimens after the potentiodynamic polarization measurements (a-e) and beyond the pitting potential (a1-e1). (a,a1): as-received, (b,b1): R10-T200, (c,c1): R20-T200, (d,d1): R30-T200, and (e,e1): R50-T200. (RD: rolling direction, TD: transverse direction).

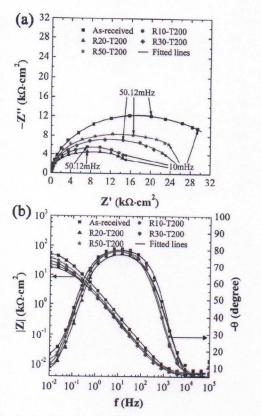


Fig. 6. Nyquist plots (a) and Bode plots (b) of the as-received and warm-rolled specimens.

electrochemical reaction [30]. The deteriorated passive film formed by warm-rolling increased the corrosion rate of the specimens. As a result, the corrosion rate increased with increasing deformation, reached the highest value at 20% deformation, and then decreased with further deformation.

# 3.5. Electrochemical impedance spectroscopy

The Nyquist and Bode plots obtained by EIS for the as-received and warm-rolled specimens are shown in Fig. 6(a) and (b), respectively. All of the specimens presented the specific capacitive semicircles over the entire measurement frequency region in Fig. 6(a), indicating that warm-rolling did not alter the corrosion mechanism of type 304 steel. Theoretically, the diameter of the capacitive semicircle arc provides an indication for the corrosion resistance of the films, and the larger semicircle arc diameter indicates the higher corrosion resistance of the films [31]. Warm-rolled specimens with the smaller semicircle arc diameters reflected the poor corrosion resistance of the passive films. In addition, the corrosion resistance of the passive films significantly decreased at 20% deformation and then increased with further deformation.

A maximum phase angle (approximately  $-80^\circ$ ) was observed over a certain frequency range in Fig. 6(b), representing a non-ideal capacitor of the type 304 steel. The specimen with the higher maximum phase angle will have the greater tendency of capacitive behaviour [32]. The maximum phase angles of the warm-rolled specimens, particularly for the R20-T200 specimen, were lower than that of the as-received specimen, indicating the smaller tendency of the capacitive behaviour of the warm-rolled specimens. On the other hand, the lower frequency region reflects the processes of the passive film stability, Warburg diffusion, and Faradic reactions [32–35]. The decrease in the phase angle observed at lower frequency region is due to the dissolution of the passive film. Generally, the phase angle at 0.01 Hz was compared for an

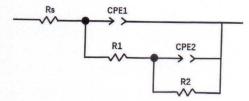


Fig. 7. Equivalent circuit model used to fit the impedance spectroscopy of the as-received and warm-rolled specimens in 3.5 wt.% NaCl solution.

effective analysis of the corrosion protective ability of the specimens. The warm-rolled specimens showed lower phase angle (at 0.01 Hz) compared with that of the as-received specimen, indicating the poor corrosion protective ability of the warm-rolled specimens.

Numerous models have been proposed for interpreting the impedance spectra results for metals [36–39]. The equivalent circuit model in Fig. 7 was used for fitting the EIS from the above data. In this model, the passive films formed on the specimens were considered to have capacitive characteristics. Constant phase element (CPE) was used in the fitting procedure to reflect the frequency dispersion behaviour of the physical phenomena [40–43] and was defined as [37]:

$$Z(\omega) = Z_0 \cdot (i\omega)^{-n} \tag{1}$$

where  $Z_0$  is the proportional factor,  $\omega$  is the angular frequency, and n is the CPE exponent corresponding to the phase shift. In this model, Rs is the electrolyte resistance between the reference and working electrodes. R1 and R2 are the passive film and charge transfer resistances, respectively, and  $CPE_1$  and  $CPE_2$  are their corresponding constant phase elements. In addition,  $C_1$  and  $C_2$  are their corresponding capacitance values calculated by Brug's formula [44,45]. EIS fitting parameters details are plotted in Fig. 6 and are presented in Table 2. Rs remained almost constant, indicating the similar ion conductivity in the 3.5 wt.% NaCl solution and the good reproducibility of the experiments. The warm-rolled specimens showed relatively lower R1 and R2 values compared with those of the as-received specimen, particularly for the R20-T200 specimen, indicating the weaker protective ability of the passive film formed on the surfaces of the warm-rolled specimens. In addition, the CPE1 and CPE2 values of the warm-rolled specimens increased compared with those of the as-received specimen, suggesting the presence of defect in the passive film and the higher reaction rate that were caused by warm-rolling. The lower n value of the warm-rolled specimens also represented the poor capacitive behaviour of the passive film. The laws of the calculated  $C_1$  and  $C_2$  values were in agreement with the fitted results of EIS. Thus, warm-rolling decreased the corrosion resistance of type 304 steel due to the formation of the thinner and porous passive film on the specimen surface. The corrosion resistance of the passive film decreased with increasing deformation, reached the bottom at 20% deformation, and then increased with further deformation. These results are in agreement with the results of the other electrochemical measurements.

## 3.6. Intergranular corrosion

The surface morphologies of as-received and warm-rolled specimens after the intergranular corrosion tests are shown in Fig. 8. Apparently, the degree of the grain boundary corrosion decreased with increasing deformation with or without annealing. As shown in the insets of Fig. 8, the corrosion grooves of the grain boundaries become fairly thin and blurred or even disappeared with increasing deformation. Grain boundaries became disordered, and the connectivity of the grain boundary network was interrupted significantly as the deformation reached 50%. After annealing at 950 °C, the extent of the grain boundary corrosion of the R50-T200 specimen decreased slightly due to the decrease in dislocation density.

Table 2
Fitted electrochemical parameters of the impedance spectra for the as-received and warm-rolled specimens in 3.5 wt.% NaCl solution.

Specimens	$R_s.(\Omega \text{ cm}^2)$	$CPE_1.(\Omega^{-1} cm^{-2} s^n)$	n <sub>1</sub>	$R_1.(\Omega \text{ cm}^2)$	$C_1.(F cm^{-2})$	$CPE_2 (\Omega^{-1} cm^{-2} s^n)$	n <sub>2</sub>	$R_2 (\Omega \text{ cm}^2)$	C <sub>2</sub> (F cm <sup>-2</sup> )	$\Sigma \chi^2$
As-received R10-T200 R20-T200	5.499 5.523 5.346	$5.384 \times 10^{-5}$ $9.306 \times 10^{-5}$ $9.604 \times 10^{-5}$	0.914	$2.512 \times 10^4$ $1.551 \times 10^4$	$1.250 \times 10^{-5}$ $1.632 \times 10^{-4}$	$3.202 \times 10^{-4}$ $1.100 \times 10^{-3}$	0.909 0.787	$9.450 \times 10^3$ $3.936 \times 10^3$	$8.714 \times 10^{-4}$ $1.002 \times 10^{-2}$	$5.631 \times 10^{-4}$ $4.863 \times 10^{-4}$
R30-T200 R50-T200	5.303 5.765	$9.804 \times 10^{-5}$ $9.101 \times 10^{-5}$ $7.178 \times 10^{-5}$	0.870 0.901 0.908	$1.477 \times 10^4$ $1.619 \times 10^4$ $1.676 \times 10^4$	$1.733 \times 10^{-4}$ $2.332 \times 10^{-5}$ $2.046 \times 10^{-5}$	$1.918 \times 10^{-3}$ $3.747 \times 10^{-4}$ $3.950 \times 10^{-4}$	0.771 0.827 0.878	$1.138 \times 10^{3}$ $4.211 \times 10^{3}$ $7.841 \times 10^{3}$	$2.694 \times 10^{-3}$	$4.285 \times 10^{-4}$ $1.813 \times 10^{-3}$ $6.221 \times 10^{-4}$

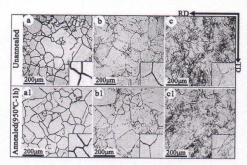


Fig. 8. Surface morphologies of the as-received and warm-rolled specimens unannealed and annealed at 950 °C for 1 h after intergranular corrosion. a: as-received, a1: as-received-950; b: R20-T200, b1: R20-T200-950; c: R50-T200, c1: R50-T200-950. (RD: rolling direction, TD: transverse direction).

## 4. Discussion

The experimental results described above suggested that the corrosion resistance of type 304 steel decreased with increasing warm-rolling deformation, reached the bottom at 20% deformation, and then improved with further deformation. The electrochemical parameters of the specimens obtained by open-circuit potential (Fig. 2), potentiodynamic polarization (Fig. 3), potentiostatic polarization (Fig. 5), and EIS (Fig. 6) experiments and the surface morphologies (Fig. 4) corroborate each other. It is well-known that the corrosion resistance of the materials depends on their composition and microstructure; thus, the microstructural evolution induced by warm-rolling may play an important role in the corrosion behaviour of type 304 steel.

Subsequent heat-treatments were conducted to study the relationship between the microstructure and corrosion behaviour of type 304 steel. To eliminate the residual stress caused by warm-rolling, the specimens were annealed at 400 °C for 4 h, and the corresponding potentiodynamic polarization curves were shown in Fig. 9. The  $E_{\rm corr}$  values of the as-received-400, R20-T200-400, and R50-T200-400

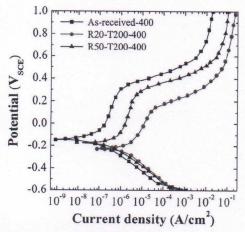


Fig. 9. Potentiodynamic polarization curves of the as-received and warm-rolled specimens after annealing at  $400\,^{\circ}\text{C}$  for 4 h.

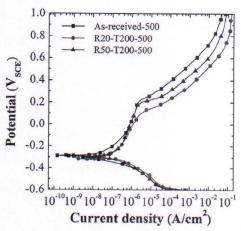


Fig. 10. Potentiodynamic polarization curves of the as-received and warm-rolled specimens after annealing at 500 °C for 4 h.

specimens were  $-148.5\,\text{mV}_{SCE},\,-226.3\,\text{mV}_{SCE}$  and  $-172.7\,\text{mV}_{SCE},\,$  respectively. The  $E_{pit}$  values of the specimens were  $374.6\,\text{mV}_{SCE},\,146.7\,\text{mV}_{SCE}$  and  $284.7\,\text{mV}_{SCE},\,$  respectively. The electrochemical parameters were similar to those of the unannealed specimens, as shown in Figs. 3 and 9. Thus, annealing at 400 °C had little effect on the corrosion resistance of the warm-rolled specimens, indicating that the residual stress was not the main factor affecting the corrosion resistance of the warm-rolled type 304 steel.

As shown in Fig. 10, after annealing at 500 °C, the  $\rm E_{corr}$  values of the as-received-500, R20-T200-500, and R50-T200-500 specimens were  $\rm -286.4~mV_{SCE}$ ,  $\rm -314.7~mV_{SCE}$ , and  $\rm -292.9~mV_{SCE}$ , respectively. The  $\rm E_{pit}$  values of these specimens were 250.5 mV<sub>SCE</sub>, 131.7 mV<sub>SCE</sub>, and 221.7 mV<sub>SCE</sub>, respectively. Thus, the corrosion resistance of the 500 °C annealed specimens was distinctly decreased compared with those of the unannealed or 400 °C annealed specimens. The decrease in the corrosion resistance of the 500 °C annealed specimens may be attributed to the sensitization induced by the heat treatment. Sensitization of austenitic stainless steels has been studied by some researchers [46–49].

Furthermore, the specimens were annealed at 950 °C for 1 h to reduce the dislocations and the corresponding potentiodynamic polarization curves are shown in Fig. 11. The  $E_{\text{corr}}$  values increased from  $-138.7 \text{ mV}_{SCE}$  (as-received-950) to  $-73.6 \text{ mV}_{SCE}$  (R50-T200-950) with further deformation. The ipass of the R50-T200-950 specimen  $(0.098\,\mu A\,cm^{-2})$  was considerably smaller than that of the as-received-950 specimen (0.313  $\mu A$  cm $^{-2}$ ). The  $E_{pit}$  values of the as-received-950, R20-T200-950, and R50-T200-950 specimens reached approximately  $384.5 \, \text{mV}_{SCE}$ ,  $429.6 \, \text{mV}_{SCE}$ , and  $518.9 \, \text{mV}_{SCE}$ , respectively. Thus, the corrosion resistance of the warm-rolled specimens annealed at 950 °C improved distinctly compared with these of the unannealed specimens. Additionally, the extent of the grain boundary corrosion of the specimens decreased after annealing at 950 °C, as shown in Fig. 8(a1)-(c1). Thus, the dislocation pile-ups caused by deformation decreased the corrosion resistance of type 304 steel, as was also confirmed by previous studies [50-52]. The pitting corrosion resistance of the 950 °C annealed specimens followed the order of R50-T200-950 > R20-T200-

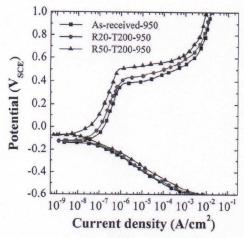


Fig. 11. Potentiodynamic polarization curves of the as-received and warm-rolled specimens after annealing at 950  $^{\circ}\text{C}$  for 1 h.

950 > as-received-950. The pitting corrosion resistance improved with increasing deformation, unlike the trend observed in unannealed or  $400\,^{\circ}\text{C}$  annealed specimens. On the other hand, the pits were preferentially initiated at the grain boundaries, as shown in Fig. 4(a1)–(e1). Therefore, the grain boundaries may play the decisive role in the corrosion susceptibility of the warm-rolled type 304 steel.

How does the grain boundary change by warm-rolling? The grain boundaries with a misorientation of less than approximately 15° were classified as the low angle grain boundaries (green line) and the grain boundaries with a misorientation of above 15° were classified as the high angle grain boundaries (black line), as shown in Fig. 12(a) and (b). The warm-rolled specimens showed a heterogeneous distribution of grain clusters that contained a large number of low angle grain

boundaries. These heterogeneous low angle grain boundaries were distributed around the high angle grain boundaries in the R20-T200 specimen (Fig. 12a), while they covered the entire observation area in the R50-T200 specimen (Fig. 12b). The dissolution of the original high angle grain boundaries and a marked increase in low angle grain boundaries were observed with increasing deformation. On the other hand, the coincidence site lattice (CSL) grain boundaries with  $\Sigma \leq 29$ were classified as the low- $\Sigma$  CSL grain boundaries (red, yellow, green, and blue lines), as shown in Fig. 12(a1) and (b1). The CSL grain boundaries with  $\Sigma$  > 29 were classified as the random grain boundaries (black line) based on the Brandon criterion [53]. Most of the low-Σ CSL grain boundaries belong to the  $\Sigma$  3 grain boundaries (red line) in addition to a small amount of other low- $\Sigma$  CSL grain boundaries. Clearly, the amount of the low- $\Sigma$  CSL grain boundaries increased with increasing deformation. A fraction of the random grain boundaries were replaced by the low- $\Sigma$  CSL grain boundaries, while the others were still preserved. The low- $\Sigma$  CSL grain boundaries replacing the random grain boundaries may interrupt the connectivity of the random grain boundary network [54-56]. The connectivity of the random grain boundary network in the R20-T200 specimen was better, but the random grain boundary network was severely interrupted in the R50-T200 specimen. The low- $\Sigma$  CSL grain boundaries have a high fraction of jointed lattice points, and both the low angle and low- $\Sigma$  CSL grain boundaries have the distinctly lower energy [57,58]; thus they show better corrosion resistance compared with the random grain boundary with these grain boundaries characters. The increase in these grain boundaries may prevent the primary stages of corrosion and improve the corrosion resistance of the material [59-61]. The amount of the original high angle grain boundaries decreased, while the low angle and low-Σ CSL grain boundaries increased, with increasing deformation, resulting in the improvement of the corrosion resistance of grain boundary. Although the grain boundary reactivity may vary greatly due to its crystallography and distributions, all types of grain boundaries are

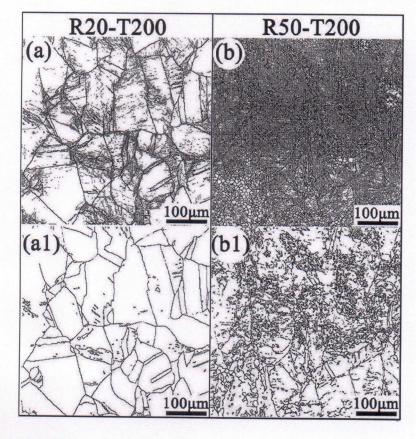


Fig. 12. EBSD maps of the distributions of grain boundaries for warm-rolled specimens: (a,b): the low angle and high angle grain boundaries maps, black lines indicate the high angle grain boundaries and green lines indicate the low angle grain boundaries; (a1,b1): the CSL grain boundaries maps, black lines indicate the random grain boundaries and other lines indicate the low- $\Sigma$  CSL grain boundaries. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

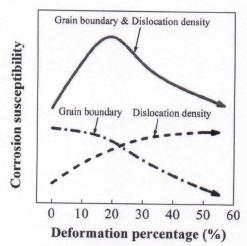


Fig. 13. Scheme of the dependence of corrosion susceptibility on the dislocation density and grain boundaries in the warm-rolled specimens.

more active than the grain bulk. The grain boundary is an important crystallographic defect with a disordered atomic arrangement and it promotes ion adsorption to accelerate the corrosion. Additionally, grain boundaries clearly decrease the electrical conductivity of polycrystalline metals [62,63] and are difficult to be passivated, decreasing the corrosion resistance of the material. The surface morphologies shown in Fig. 4(a1)–(e1) demonstrate the poor corrosion resistance of the grain boundary during corrosion process. Corrosion pits preferentially initiate at the grain boundary and are likely to develop into localized damage. The higher corrosion resistance of the grain boundary obtained by increasing deformation prevents the initiation and development of the corrosion pits and improves the pitting corrosion resistance of type 304 steel.

The changes in the dislocation density and grain boundary due to different warm-rolling deformation percentage significantly influence the initiation and development of corrosion pits. The dependence of corrosion susceptibility on dislocation density and grain boundary in the warm-rolled specimens is described in Fig. 13. The dislocation density, low angle and low-Σ CSL grain boundaries increased with increasing deformation. The increase in low angle and low- $\Sigma$  CSL grain boundaries caused by warm-rolling improves the corrosion resistance, while the increase in dislocation density weakens the corrosion resistance. The corrosion behaviour of the warm-rolled type 304 steel is determined by the interplay of the dislocation and grain boundary effects, which is the main reason for the anomalous evolution of the corrosion behavior of warm-rolled type 304 steel. This work may help to elucidate the relationship between the microstructure and corrosion behaviour and will be valuable for optimizing the production and processing parameters of stainless steels for simultaneous enhancement of mechanical properties and corrosion resistance.

## 5. Conclusions

The effect of warm-rolling on the corrosion behaviour of type 304 steel in the 3.5 wt.% NaCl solution was investigated by electrochemical measurements and microstructural characterization. The main conclusions are as follows:

- (1) The corrosion resistance of the 304 specimens rolled at 200 °C decreased with increasing deformation, reached the bottom at 20% deformation, and then improved with further deformation.
- (2) Dislocation and grain boundary strongly influence the pitting corrosion of the warm-rolled 304 stainless steel, while the residual stress has little effect on it.
- (3) The increase in the low angle and low- $\Sigma$  CSL grain boundaries

caused by warm-rolling improves the corrosion resistance, while the increase in the dislocation density weakens the corrosion resistance. The corrosion behaviour of the warm-rolled type 304 steel is determined by the interplay of the dislocation and grain boundary effects.

## Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the National Key Basic Research Program of China (973 Program, Grant No. 2015CB057601), the National Natural Science Foundation of China (51571181) and the Zhejiang Provincial Natural Science Foundation of China (LY19E010006().

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