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Critical current and nano-structural properties of K-doped BaFe₂As₂ epitaxial thin films by molecular beam epitaxy

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The iron-based superconductor is a promising candidate for applications in polycrystalline forms owing to its high current transport performance under high magnetic fields. Especially, doped-BaFe₂As₂ (Ba122) is particularly interesting in terms of both small anisotropy and small weak-link issues [1]. Epitaxial thin films (ETF) of Ba122-type superconductors have been realized only with Co and P doping by both pulsed laser deposition and molecular beam epitaxy (MBE). Hence, extensive research on enhancing critical current density (J_c) has been carried out via introducing artificial pinning centers [2, 3]. However, the fabrication of K-doped Ba122 ETFs has not been realized due to its high volatility and high vapor pressure. Recently, we have succeeded in growing K-doped Ba122 ETFs on CaF₂ substrate with high crystallinity by MBE [4]. In the present study, we will report J_c characteristics and nanostructure of the K-doped Ba122 ETFs. Surprisingly high J_c over 10 MA/cm² was observed at 4 K by magnetic measurement. Note that our thin films showed superior superconducting properties to the pinning enhanced K-doped single crystals by ion irradiation [5]. TEM analyses revealed that low-angle grain boundaries developed in the K-doped Ba122 ETFs grown on CaF₂ substrates which could act as flux pinning centers and correspond to the record-high J_c .

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