

S12 Plasticity, damage and fracture mechanics

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PHASE-FIELD LENGTH SCALE MEASUREMENT BASED ON THE FRACTOGRAPHY: A CASE STUDY OF CR-AL₂O₃ COMPOSITES

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The phase-field simulation of fracture in heterogeneous materials, such as the metal-ceramic composites, can be conducted in two ways. One way is to distinguish between the constituent phases, and solve the phase-field problem in a heterogeneous domain. While capable of modeling the microscale fracture events, this approach is mostly restricted to small unit cell problems because the simulations need high mesh resolutions for most of the domain since the crack growth path is not known a priori. The second way is to conduct the phase-field model on the homogenized domain with the effective mechanical properties. The approach allows to predict the macroscale fracture properties such as the fracture toughness, but is incapable of capturing microscale fracture mechanisms. A critical issue arises in the determination of the length scale parameter.

To address the issue, we propose to conduct the fractography analysis, define the fracture process zone size, and use that value as the length scale parameter in the phase-field modeling. The technique is tested on Cr-Al₂O₃ composites fabricated by powder metallurgy at different reinforcement volume fractions and particle sizes. Mode I and mixed-mode I/II fracture tests are conducted on single-edge notched beams in four-point bending mode. The fracture surfaces are analyzed in detail by scanning electron microscopy and the fracture process zone lengths are measured. The phase-field model is then applied to simulate the macroscale fracture in the specimens, which are considered as homogeneous domains with effective elastic properties determined by the rule of mixture.

The numerical models adequately approximate the experimentally measured fracture toughness and the fracture loads of the investigated composites. It is shown that the phase-field model prediction of the crack initiation direction in the mixed-mode loading is in agreement with the results of the experiments and the generalized maximum tangential stress criterion. These outcomes justify using the process zone length as the scale parameter in the phase-field modeling of macroscale fracture in chromium-alumina and similar metal-ceramic composites.