

# Effect of Pyrolytic Carbon Interphase on Mechanical Properties of mini T800-C/SiC Composites

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## ABSTRACT

The effect of pyrolytic carbon (PyC) thickness on the tensile property of mini T800-carbon fiber reinforced SiC matrix composites (mini-C/SiC) was studied in this work. PyC interphase was prepared by CVI process, and the PyC thickness was adjusted from 0 to 400 nm. The results showed that the tensile strength of mini-C/SiC first increased and then decreased with the increase of the PyC thickness. When the thickness of PyC was 100 nm, the average strength reached the maximum value of  $393 \pm 70$  MPa. Weibull modulus increased from 2.0 to 8.06 with the increase of PyC thickness, indicating that the increase of PyC thickness is conducive to reducing the dispersion of mechanical properties.

Keywords: C/SiC; T800 carbon fiber; PyC interphase; Tensile strength; Weibull modulus

## 1. Introduction

Continuous carbon fiber reinforced silicon carbide ceramic matrix composite (C/SiC) has been widely used in aviation, aerospace and high-speed braking due to its advantages of low density, high temperature resistance, high specific strength and high specific modulus [1-5]. The United States and Europe have successfully applied C/SiC composites in the fields of thermal protection system [6,7], aerospace propulsion system [8, 9,10] and optical system [11,12,13].

The properties of carbon fiber is important for the mechanical properties of C/SiC. At present, the widely used C/SiC composites are mostly reinforced with T300-carbon fiber [14]. Compared with T300 carbon fiber, the empolyment of high strength carbon fiber like T800-carbon fiber is beneficial to further improve the mehcanial properties

of composites [15-16]. Some research has been carried out for high strength fiber reinforced C/SiC composite materials, such as [16] three dimensional braided T800 C/SiC composite was prepared, and its bending strength is 511.5 MPa. Compared with T300-carbon fiber, T800-carbon fiber has different Young's modulus (300 GPa) and coefficient of thermal expansion ( $-0.56 \times 10^{-6}/K$ ), and thus the modulus and CTE match between T800-carbon fiber and matrix should be re-adjusted by the interphase. Up to now, the research focused on the properties of composites, and it is lack of study on the the interphase optimization of T800-C/SiC.

The interphase is crucial to tailor the modulus and CTE match between fiber and matrix. The interphase plays the role of crack deflection and the load transfer from matrix to fiber, and these two roles are usually balanced to optimize the strength and toughness. As reported, for T300-carbon fiber reinforced C/SiC composites [17, 18, 19], the PyC interphase thickness and crystallization were usually adjusted, and the optimized thickness was around 200 nm. While for the T800-carbon fiber, it has a different microstructure with T300-carbon fiber, leading to the interphase with different required thickness. So, it is essential to carry out the study on the optimization of interphase for T800-C/SiC.

In this work, the mini T800-C/SiC was employed, and the PyC interphase thickness was adjusted by controlling the deposition time. The effect of PyC interphase thickness on the tensile properties of mini T800 -C/SiC composites were characterized.

## 2. Experimental procedures

### 2.1 Materials preparation

T800 carbon fibers (QZ5526, Weihai Tuozhan Fiber Co. LTD, China) were employed, the main performance indicators are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Parameters of T800 carbon fiber

Tow sizes	Tensile Strength (MPa)	Tensile Modulus (GPa)	Failure Strain (%)	Density ( $g/cm^3$ )	Diameter ( $\mu m$ )	Carbon content (%)
6000	5500	300	1.8	1.8	5.2	96

First, the continuous carbon fiber bundle should be wound on the mold with appropriate strength to ensure that the fiber bundle was stretched without being damaged. PyC interphase were prepared on carbon fiber surface by chemical vapor infiltration (CVI) process using  $C_3H_6$ -Ar as gas source and then the PyC interphase was heat-treated by 1800 °C for 1 h under vacuum. The infiltration time of PyC interphase was chosen as 0, 40, 80 and 160 h, to control the interphase thickness. After that, SiC matrix was deposited by CVI using methyltrichlorosilane (MTS) as precursor,  $H_2$  acted as carrier gas of MTS and argon as dilution gas with a MTS/ $H_2$  ratio of 1/10 at 3 kPa. After the infiltration of SiC matrix for 160 h, the mini T800-C/SiC composites with different thickness PyC interphase were obtained. According to the different infiltration time of PyC interphase, the samples were named as samples S0, S1, S2 and S3, respectively.

## **2.2 Characterization**

The tensile strengths of samples were measured by mechanical testing machine (INSTRON-3345, INSTRON CORPORATION, USA) at room temperature, the span and loading rate are 50 mm and 0.2 mm/min. The morphology and fracture surface of samples were observed with scanning electron microscope (SEM, S-4700, Hitachi, Japan).

## **3. Results and discussion**

Fig. 1 presents the SEM images of samples S0, S1, S2 and S3. As shown in Fig. 1 (a), the SiC matrix was directly deposited on the surface of carbon fiber for sample S0. The PyC interphase was prepared between the SiC matrix and carbon fiber, and the interphase thicknesses of samples S1, S2 and S3 were 100, 200 and 400 nm, as shown in Fig. 1 (b-d).

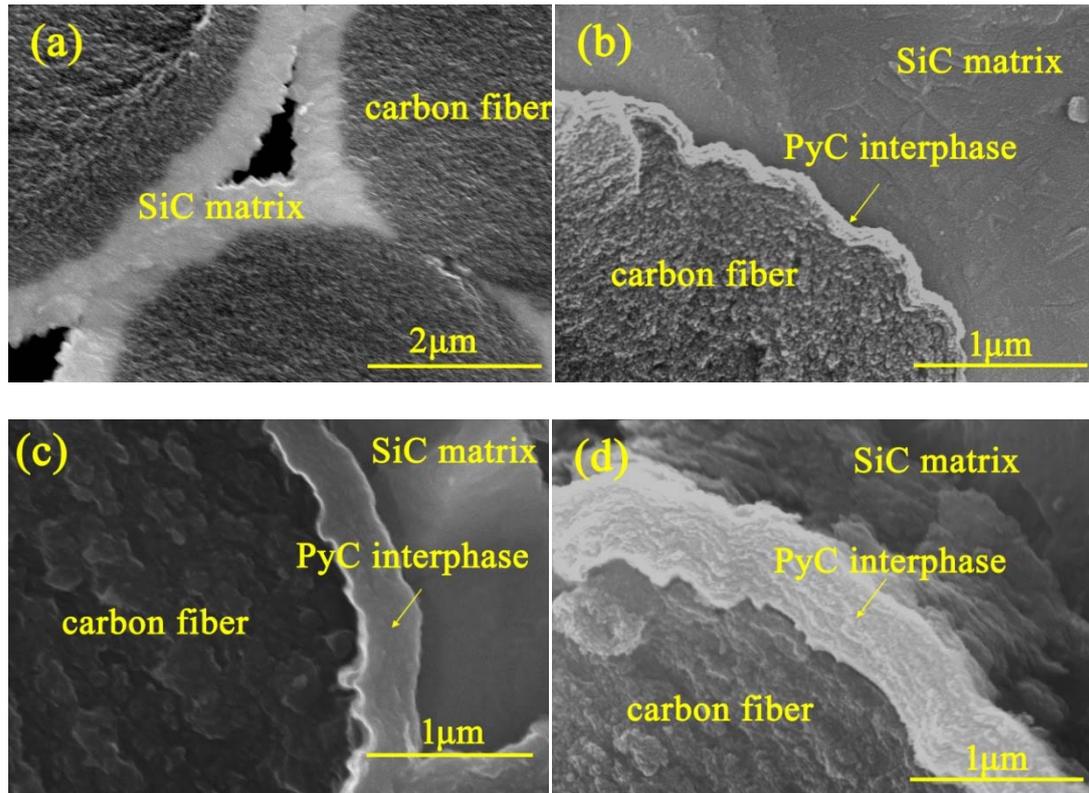


Fig. 1 Microstructure of mini T800-C/SiC composite with different thickness PyC interface:

(a) sample S0, (b) sample S1, (c) Sample S2, (d) sample S3

The tensile properties of mini-C/SiC composite were tested, and the stress-strain curves were shown in Fig. 2. Because there is no interphase to deflect the crack in sample S0, the matrix failed as soon as it cracked because of the penetration of the main crack, and brittle fracture occurred at low stress. The curve of sample S1, S2, S3 is nonlinear, revealing tough rupture. Samples S1, S2, S3 had a certain thickness of interphase, the cracks can be deflected, and interphase debonding and sliding occurred, so the samples showed "pseudo plastic" fracture.

The stress-strain curves of samples S1, S2 and S3 were divided into three stages. The first stage was the linear elastic stage. In this stage, the elastic deformation of the fiber and the matrix occurred simultaneously, and the tangent modulus of the curve remained unchanged. The second stage was nonlinear. There is a critical transition point after the linear elastic stage, where the critical transition point is the matrix cracking stress value. The critical transition points on the stress-strain curves of

samples S1, S2 and S3 were calculated, and the corresponding matrix cracking stress are 212, 183 and 144 MPa, respectively. The results showed that with the increase of the PyC thickness, the matrix cracking stress decreased.

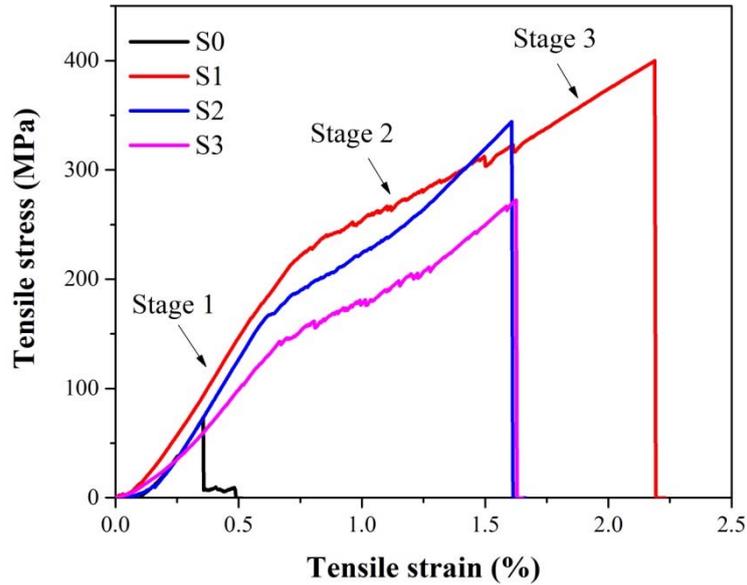


Fig. 2 Stress-strain curve of mini T800-C/SiC composites with different interphase thickness

After the critical transition point, the matrix cracks increased continuously. Because of the existence of weak PyC interphase between matrix and fiber, the cracks deflected and then the interphase debonding and sliding occurred. With the increase of stress, the crack density increased, and gradually reached saturation, and the matrix stress no longer increased with the external load. In this stage, the tangent modulus of the curve decreased gradually due to the proliferation of matrix cracks, showing zigzag shape. In the third stage, the stress-strain curve showed a linear rise again. After the second stage, the applied stress began to be mainly carried by the fibers, and the tangent modulus of the curve increased again and remains unchanged. With the increase of the stress, the fibers began to fracture until the material failed.

### 3.2 Tensile strength distribution analysis

In order to obtain the dispersion and average tensile strength values of mini-C/SiC composite materials, it was firstly assumed that the tensile strength distribution was in line with the Weibull distribution function, and the distribution of tensile strength was

calculated and analyzed using the two-parameter Weibull model [20-23]. Then kolmogorov-smirnov (k-s test) non-parametric test method was used to test the assumed distribution[24-25]. The Weibull distribution of two-parameter is generally expressed as:

$$F(\sigma) = 1 - \exp\left[-\frac{V}{V_0}\left(\frac{\sigma_i}{\sigma_0}\right)^m\right] \quad \text{Eq. (1)}$$

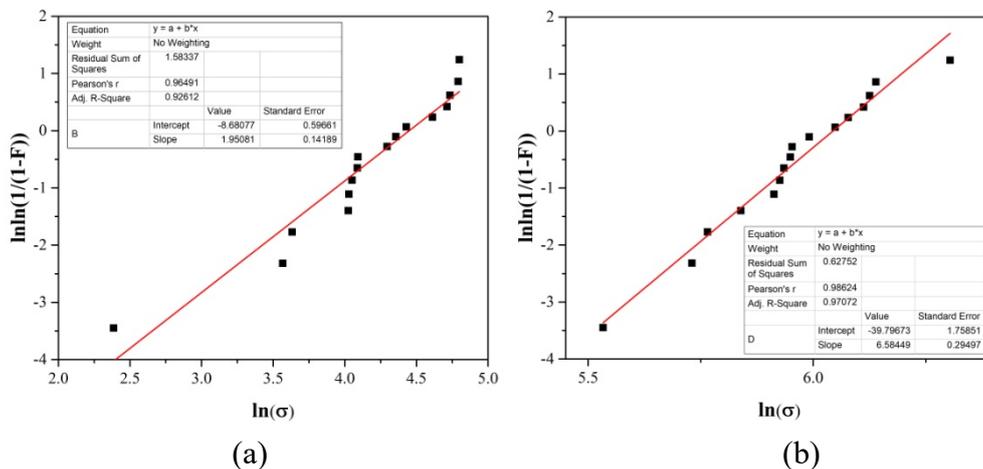
Where  $f(\sigma)$  is the failure probability;  $V$  is the effective test volume of the sample;  $V_0$  is the reference volume;  $\sigma_i$  is the applied stress;  $\sigma_0$  is the size parameter (MPa), which is the characteristic strength;  $m$  is the shape parameter, which is the Weibull modulus, which is used to characterize the dispersion degree of the strength. The larger the Weibull modulus is, the lower the dispersion of the strength is, and the higher the stability of the material is.

The average tensile strength can be expressed by the expected value of Weibull distribution, as shown in formula (2):

$$E(\sigma) = \sigma_0 \Gamma\left(1 + \frac{1}{m}\right) \quad \text{Eq. (2)}$$

where  $\Gamma$  is the gamma function.

According to the above methods, the tensile strength of all the samples was calculated and analyzed. The Weibull modulus  $m$  and the expected value of Weibull distribution  $E(\sigma)$  are obtained. Fig. 3 shows the parameters calculated by the two parameter Weibull distribution graphic method, and the calculation results of all samples are listed in Table 2.



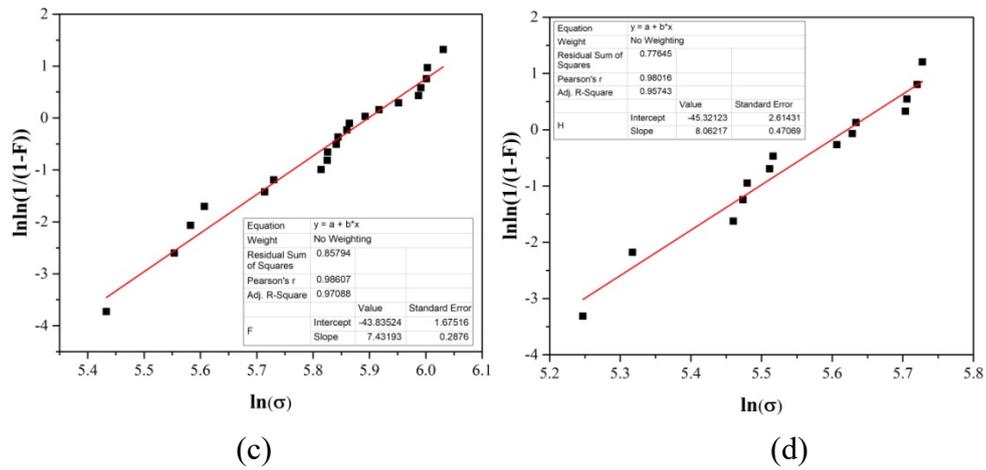


Figure 3 Two parameter Weibull distribution graphic method for parameter calculation:

(a) Sample S0, (b) Sample S1, (c) Sample S2, (d) Sample S3

Table 2 Weibull distribution parameters and average strength of mini T800-C/SiC

Samples	S0	S1	S2	S3
m	2.0	6.6	7.4	8.1
$\sigma_0$ /MPa	86	422	364	276
E( $\sigma$ ) /MPa	76 ± 6a	393±70	342±53	260±37
Normalized tensile strength	80	380	368	304

The fiber volume fraction has a great influence on the mechanical properties of the composite. In order to eliminate the influence of different fiber volume fraction on the tensile strength, it is necessary to normalize the obtained tensile strength value and unify the fiber volume fraction to 20 vol.%. The normalization of the tensile strength for samples were 80 380, 368 and 304 MPa.

It can be seen that the change of the average tensile strength and the normalized average tensile strength were similar. Both tensile strength increased first and then decreased with the increase of the PyC interface phase thickness. As shown in Table 2, the average tensile strength and the normalized average tensile strength of sample S0 was maximum, while the Weibull modulus increased with the increase of the PyC

thickness. When the PyC thickness increased from 0 to 400 nm, the Weibull modulus increased from 2.0 to 8.1, which meant that the dispersion of material strength was getting smaller and smaller, that is to say, increasing the PyC interface phase thickness is conducive to improving the mechanical property stability of mini T800-C/SiC.

The fracture morphology of mini T800-C/SiC composites with different interphase thickness were shown in Fig. 4. The fracture morphology of sample S0 is very even (Fig. 4a), indicating the typical brittle fracture. Although there were many monofilament fibers extending a long distance from the fracture, it was not load pull out. As shown in Fig. 4 (b-d), it can be seen that the fibers show multi-stage pull-out for samples S1, S2 and S3. Moreover, the pull-out length of the fiber increases with the increase of the interphase thickness. According to the shear lag model:

$$\frac{L_c}{d_f} = \frac{\sigma_{fu}}{2\tau} \quad \text{Eq. (3)}$$

Where  $L_c$  is the critical fiber length ( $L_c/2$  is the fiber pull-out length),  $d_f$  is the fiber diameter,  $\sigma_{fu}$  is the fiber breaking strength,  $\tau$  is the interface shear strength. It can be seen that with the increase of the interphase thickness, the interfacial shear strength decreases, the critical fiber length increases, and the fiber pull-out length increases. The results showed that the interfacial shear strength of sample S3 is lower than that of sample S1, which indicated that the too thick interfacial shear strength was too low to transfer the load to the fiber, which made the mechanical properties of mini T800-C/SiC composite decline.

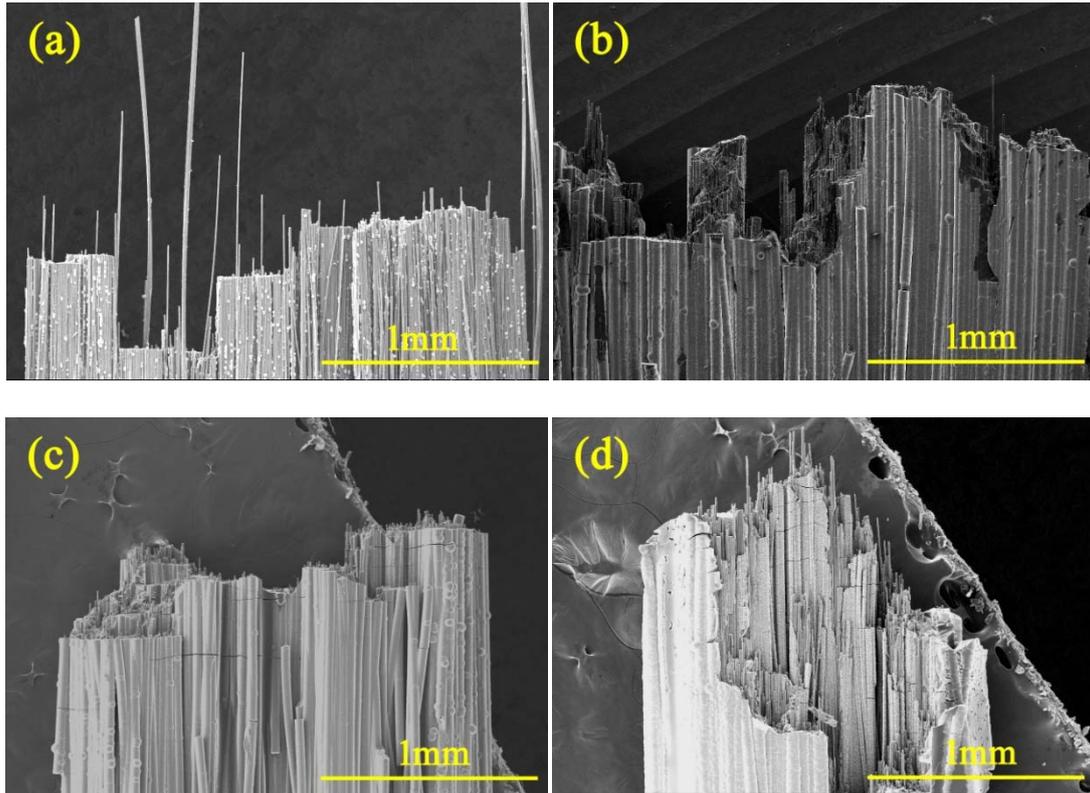


Fig. 4 Fracture morphology of mini T800-C/SiC composite: (a) sample S0, (b) sample S1, (c) Sample S2, (d) sample S3

After the test, the surface morphology of mini T800-C/SiC composite was shown in Figure 5. There were a large number of transverse matrix cracks on the surface of S1, S2 and S3, which were perpendicular to the loading direction. As can be seen from Fig. 5(a), no matrix crack was observed in sample S0 except the main fracture crack. In the tensile process of mini T800-C/SiC, the equidistant crack would be formed on the SiC matrix. From Fig. 5(b-d), the spacing of saturated cracks of samples S1, S2 and S3 were about 94 , 106 and 185  $\mu\text{m}$  respectively. With the increase of the interphase thickness, the interface bonding became weaker, and the saturated crack spacing of the matrix was larger, the tensile strength of mini T800-C/SiC composite was lower.

There is an optimized thickness for the PyC interphase. It plays two roles, the first one is to deflect the cracks, and the second one is to transfer the load from the matrix to fiber. So, the optimization of PyC thickness is a balance between these two

roles. As a summary, for the mini T800-C/SiC, it needs the appropriate PyC thickness to play the strengthening role of fibers. When the PyC thickness reach 100 nm, it can effectively deflect the cracks, and also it has higher interfacial shear strength than that of samples S2 and S3, so it can be more effective to transfer the load, leading to the highest tensile strength in all four samples.

The Weibull modulus is related to the stress distribution in the fiber bundles. The thermal residual stress always existed due to the thermal mismatch between carbon fiber and SiC matrix. There are 6000 filament in one bundle, and with the increase of PyC thickness, it can make the more uniform stress distribution on every filaments. So, the dispersion degree decreased, leading to the increase of Weibull modulus from 2.0 to 8.1.

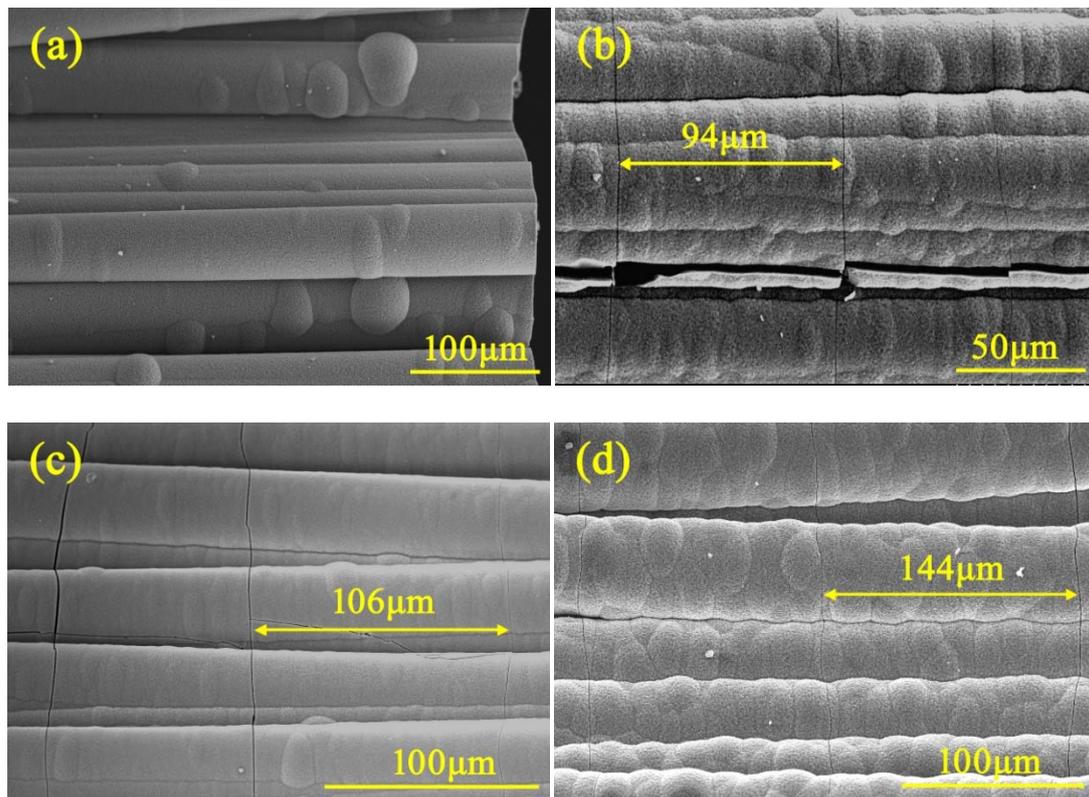


Fig. 5 the surface morphology of mini T800-C/SiC composite: (a) sample S0, (b) sample S1, (c) Sample S2, (d) sample S3

#### 4. Conclusions

In this paper, the mini T800-C/SiC composites with different thickness of PyC interphase were prepared by CVI with T800-carbon fiber as reinforcement. The test results were analyzed by Weibull distribution model. The results showed that with the increase of PyC inter phase thickness, the tensile strength first increased and then decreased; when the thickness of PyC interface was 100 nm, the average strength of the composite reached the maximum, which is 393 MPa. The Weibull modulus increased from 2.0 to 8.06 with the increase of the thickness of the PyC interface layer, which reduced the dispersion degree of the tensile strength of the mini-C/SiC composites. With the increase of the interphase thickness, the interface bonding was weaker, the pull-out length of the fiber was longer and the saturated crack spacing of the matrix was larger, leading to the decrease of the tensile strength.

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