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Coercivity Enhancement and Gamma Phase Avoidance of Alnico Alloys

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Coercivity Enhancement and Gamma Phase Avoidance of Alnico Alloys

by

Li Zhang

A THESIS

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Coercivity Enhancement and Gamma Phase Avoidance of Alnico Alloys

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The promotion of social progress requires greater levels of energy efficiency, quality and productivity. However, these developments usually come at the cost of the environment. Green technologies such as electric vehicles, wind turbine and solar panels are ironically overshadowed by supply limitations and high prices of rare earth elements. Therefore, it is important to find alternative materials to replace those that contain critical elements. Alnico alloys show high magnetization, high Curie temperature (800°C) and good corrosion resistance, making it one of the best candidates to replace neodymium-based magnets used in electric vehicles.

In this thesis, methods controlling shape anisotropy and grain microstructure were used to improve magnetic properties of Alnico. For shape anisotropy, we studied the effects of isothermal heat treatment (IHT), secondary annealing (SA), and alloy composition. The magnetic properties of Alnico were found to be highly sensitive to IHT temperature and time rather than SA temperature and time. Since shape anisotropy is driven by microstructure evolution, it is likely that the evolution has mainly been determined by IHT processing. We found Co increases the spinodal decomposition temperature while it is decreased by Ti. For grain microstructure, we tuned it by controlling wheel speed, and found the optimal magnetic properties were obtained at 20
mps. Textured Alnico was fabricated by setting up a simple casting system. However, a steep temperature gradient was unstable during the casting process due to heat transfer into the atmosphere.

The non-magnetic gamma (γ) phase is known for its deleterious effect on the magnetic properties of Alnico. Here, alloying additions of Sn and Ge were found to decrease amount of γ phase. The role of Sn or Ge could be to suppress γ phase formation or shrink the temperature range over which the γ phase is stable. Furthermore, we studied the effect of magnetic field annealing, and found that its effectiveness depends on IHT temperature and alloy composition. For Alnico 9, the maximum coercivity of 1416 Oe can be obtained after full heat treatment.
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"Carpe diem. Seize the day, boys. Make your lives extraordinary."

- Dead Poets Society, 1989
# Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction .............................................................................................................. 1
  1.1 Permanent Magnets ......................................................................................................... 1
  1.2 Motivation ...................................................................................................................... 5
  1.3 Objective ....................................................................................................................... 7

Chapter 2 Literature Review ................................................................................................. 8
  2.1 History of Alnico Alloys ................................................................................................. 8
  2.2 Magnetic origin of Alnico Alloys .................................................................................... 11
  2.3 Manufacturing Process ................................................................................................. 15
  2.4 Heat Treatment ............................................................................................................. 16
  2.5 Gamma Phase and Alpha Sub Gamma Phase ............................................................... 19
  2.6 Alloy Addition .............................................................................................................. 20
    2.6.1 Coercivity Enhancers ......................................................................................... 21
    2.6.2 Crystallographic Texture Enhancers ................................................................. 26

Chapter 3 Experimental Procedure ..................................................................................... 29
  3.1 Arc Melting .................................................................................................................... 29
  3.2 Melt Spinning .............................................................................................................. 30
  3.3 Hysteresis Loop ........................................................................................................... 31
  3.4 X-ray Powder Diffraction ............................................................................................ 33
  3.5 Metallography ............................................................................................................. 35
  3.6 Scanning Electron Microscopy ...................................................................................... 36

Chapter 4 Effect of Heat Treatment ..................................................................................... 37
  4.1 Isothermal Heat Treatment .......................................................................................... 37
  4.2 Secondary annealing ..................................................................................................... 43

Chapter 5 Effect of Grain Structure ..................................................................................... 47
  5.1 Wheel Speed ................................................................................................................. 47
  5.2 Fabrication of Alnico with crystallographic texture .................................................... 52

Chapter 6 Avoidance of gamma phase by alloying addition ............................................... 57
  6.1 Effect of Sn addition .................................................................................................... 58
  6.2 Effect of Ge addition .................................................................................................... 63

Chapter 7 Effect of Field Annealing .................................................................................... 67

Chapter 8 Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 75

Chapter 9 Reference ............................................................................................................. 77
List of Figures

Figure 1. Modern duplicated Si Nan model................................................................. 2
Figure 2. Diverse applications of permanent magnets[14]. ............................................. 4
Figure 3. The REEs in Toyota Prius[17]. .................................................................... 6
Figure 4. An advertisement from QST amateur radio magazine (April 1945) [24]. ....... 9
Figure 5. Permanent Magnets History in the Aspect of Magnet Energy[33].................... 11
Figure 6. Phase diagram and free energy curve of spinodal decomposition[36] .............. 12
Figure 7. Composition profiles of spinodal decomposition and nuleation & growth [36]. ................................. ................................................................. 13

Figure 8. Magnetic hysteresis loop of three high-energy Alnico grades: Alnico 5 (black), Alnico 8 (red) and Alnico 9 (blue). The higher Br for the Alnico 5 and 9 are consistent with their high grain alignment relative to the applied field direction during processing compared to Alnico 8, which has randomly oriented grains [29]................................................................. 13

Figure 9. HAADF STEM images and schematic of α₁ phase morphology of different Alnico alloys: (a) Alnico 5, transverse; (b) Alnico5, longitudinal; (c) model of α₁ phase in Alnico 5; (d) Alnico 8, transverse; (e) Alnico 8, longitudinal; (f) model of α₁ phase in Alnico 8; (g) Alnico 9, transverse; (h) Alnico 9, longitudinal; (i) model of α₁ phase in Alnico 9[30]........................................................................................................ 15

Figure 10. Relation between coercive force and aging time at 600 °C for the Fe-24Co-14Ni-8Al-3Cu alloy after continuous cooling in magnetic field from 900 °C to 600 °C at various cooling rates. Solution treatment was performed at 1250 °C for 1h[40]. ........................................................................................................... 18

Figure 11. Electron micrographs of Alnico 8 specimens annealed for 10 minutes in a magnetic field at (a) 750 °C, (b) 780 °C, (c) 810 °C and (d) 830 °C, respectively. The upper row corresponds to the specimen surface parallel to the applied field and the lower row corresponds to the surface perpendicular to the field[34]. ................................................................. 19

Figure 12. The effect of α₁ on magnetic properties of Alnico 8[45].............................. 20

Figure 13. TEM of Alnico 8 thin foils perpendicular to the applied magnetic field. (a) bright-field image of 34 wt% Co Alnico; (b) 36 wt% Co Alnico; (c) 40 wt% Co Alnico[47]........................................................................................................... 22

Figure 14. Relation between magnetic properties and Ti content in Alnico 8-type alloys under the optimal isothermal heat treatment[48]. ...................................................... 24

Figure 15. Electron micrographs of Alnico 8-type alloys containing various Ti content, after the optimal isothermal treatment followed by aging[48]........................................ 24

Figure 16. Effect of added Niobium on the magnetic properties of sintered Alnico 5 magnet alloys[51]........................................................................................................... 26

Figure 17. Effect of Ti contents on length of columnar crystals in Alnico magnet alloys[54]. ......................................................................................................................... 28

Figure 18. Schematic diagram of arc melter.................................................................. 30

Figure 19. Schematic diagram of melt spinner......................................................... 31
Figure 20. Schematic representation of a hysteresis loop for a ferromagnetic material portraying the saturation points (a and d), remanence points (b and e), and coercivity points (c and f)[60].

Figure 21. Schematic representation of the magnetic domains with increasing and decreasing magnetizing force[60].

Figure 22. Bragg diffraction. Two beams with identical wavelength and phase approach a crystalline solid and are scattered off two different atoms within it. The lower beam traverses an extra length of $2\sin \theta$. Constructive interference occurs when this length is equal to an integer multiple of the wavelength of the radiation[63].

Figure 23. FEI Helios NanoLab 660.

Figure 24. Schematic diagram for isothermal heat treatment process-temperature.

Figure 25. Effect of isothermal heat treatment temperature on magnetic properties of (a) sample 1, (b) sample 2 and (c) sample 3.

Figure 26. Schematic diagram for isothermal heat treatment process-time.

Figure 27. Effect of isothermal heat treatment time on magnetic properties of (a) sample 1, (b) sample 2 and (c) sample 3.

Figure 28. Schematic diagram for secondary annealing process-temperature.

Figure 29. Effect of draw heat treatment temperature on magnetic properties of (a) sample 1, (b) sample 2 and (c) sample 3.

Figure 30. Schematic diagram for secondary annealing process-time.

Figure 31. Effect of draw heat treatment time on magnetic properties of (a) sample 1, (b) sample 2 and (c) sample 3.

Figure 32. Effect of wheel speed on magnetic properties.

Figure 33. XRD pattern of the as-spun ribbons spun at 10 mps, 20 mps and 30 mps.

Figure 34. Cross-sectional light optical microscope photomicrographs of the as-spun ribbons spun at 10 mps, 15 mps, 20 mps, 30 mps (B: brittle and D: ductile) and 40 mps.

Figure 35. Schematic diagram of casting system.

Figure 36. XRD pattern of textured Alnico 9.

Figure 37. Hysteresis loop of textured Alnico 9.

Figure 38. Phase diagram of Alnico alloys[41].

Figure 39. Schematic diagram of heat treatment 1 and 2.

Figure 40. Effect of Sn on magnetic properties of the Alnico alloys.

Figure 41. Effect of Sn on magnetic properties of $\gamma$ heat treated Alnico alloys.

Figure 42. XRD pattern of $\gamma$ heat treated Alnico alloys.

Figure 43. Cross-sectional SEM images of Sn-containing Alnico ribbons.

Figure 44. Cross-sectional SEM image and EDS spectra of Alnico ribbons with 3 wt% Sn. (a) SEM image, (b) EDS spectra of the area without the impurity phase and (c) with the impurity phase.

Figure 45. The schematic diagrams of heat treatment 1 and 2.

Figure 46. Effect of Ge on magnetic properties of Alnico alloys. (a) full and (c) second
quadrant hysteresis loops of the samples after heat treatment 1, (b) full and (d) second quadrant hysteresis loops of the samples after heat treatment 2. (black square represents control, red dot respresents 1 wt% Ge-containing sample, blue triangle represents the 5 wt% Ge-containing sample).

**Figure 47.** XRD pattern of the Alnico samples after heat treatment 1 and 2. (HT1 indicates heat treatment 1, HT2 indicates heat treatment 2).

**Figure 48.** Field annealing set up.

**Figure 49.** Effect of magnetic field on the intrinsic coercivity of (a) sample 1, (b) sample 2, (c) sample 3, and (d) sample 4.

**Figure 50.** Effect of magnetic field on the remanence of (a) sample 1, (b) sample 2, (c) sample 3, and (d) sample 4.

**Figure 51.** Effect of magnetic field on the energy product of (a) sample 1, (b) sample 2, (c) sample 3, and (d) sample 4.

**Figure 52.** Schematic diagram of field annealing and full heat treatment process.

**Figure 53.** Magnetic properties of sample 3 and sample 4 after field annealing (FA) and full heat treatment (FHT). Coercivity of (a) sample 3 and (b) sample 4 vary with IHT temperature. Remanence of (c) sample 3 and (d) sample 4 vary with IHT temperature. Energy product of (e) sample 3 and (f) sample 4 vary with IHT temperature. (red lines indicate field annealing, blue lines indicate full heat treatment).

**Figure 54.** Hysteresis loop of sample 4 after FHT.
List of Tables

Table 1. Magnetic properties of Alnico 8[46]. ................................................................. 22
Table 2. Composition and magnetic properties of anisotropic, thermomagnetically treated
Alnico 5 and 8 as well as single crystal Alnico 5. ......................................................... 27
Table 3. Compositions of Alnico Samples. ................................................................. 38
Table 4. Composition of the sample. ........................................................................... 47
Table 5. Composition of the sample. ........................................................................... 53
Table 6. Compositions of the samples. ........................................................................ 59
Table 7. Compositions of the area with impurity phase and the area without impurity
phase. .......................................................................................................................... 63
Table 8. Compositions of the samples. ........................................................................ 64
Table 9. Compositions of the samples. ........................................................................ 68
Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Permanent Magnets

Permanent magnets are ferromagnetic materials that keep their magnetism in the absence of magnetic field. The oldest known permanent magnet is lodestone, which is a naturally magnetized mineral magnetite (Fe₃O₄) with inclusions of maghemite (cubic Fe₂O₃)[1]. According to the 5th century BC book of the Guanzi[2] and the 2nd century BC chronicle the LüshiChunqiu[3], people found some magic stones that attract iron. They called these stones Ci Shi, which means love stones. Ancient people regarded the attraction as the love from parents to their children. They thought the stones were parents of iron, and only loving parents can attract their children[4]. The first recorded magnetic device is called Si Nan, which means "pointing to the south"[5][6]. It is a spoon-shaped compass made of lodestone. When "the spoon" stopped rotating, the spoon handle points to the south, while the head of the spoon points to the north. Figure 1 shows modern duplicated Si Nan maded by technology historian Zhenduo Wang[7]. Although there is a doubt about whether Si Nan is a compass made of lodestone[8], it is believed that medieval Chinese navigators were using lodestone compasses by the 12th century[1].
The modern permanent magnets history started in the beginning of twentieth century, while high carbon steels and then tungsten or chromium steels replaced lodestone acting as the best available permanent magnet[9].

In 1940s, Tokushichi Mishima of Japan discovered Alnico alloys[10][11]. A family of Fe-based alloys with primary addition of Al, Ni and Co, and minor addition of Cu and Ti. Alnico has relatively high coercivity (up to 2000 Oe for Alnico 8H) and good thermal stability (around 800 °C), and the best reported energy product exceeding 10 MGOe (79.6 KJ/m³) for Alnico 9[12]. Generally, there are two ways to make Alnico magnets, they can either be cast or sintered[13].

In 1966, the magnetic properties of YCo₅ phase was discovered, followed by SmCo₅. The combination of rear earth elements (REEs) and transition metals (TMs) has great potential for permanent magnets because REEs are known for their high anisotropy and
TMs usually have high magnetization and Curie temperature. The magnetic properties of SmCo-type permanent magnet were improved with the development of Sm$_2$Co$_{17}$ in 1976. Its maximum energy product is over 30 MGOe (240 kJm$^{-3}$)[9].

General Motors in the USA and Sumitomo Special Metals of Japan simultaneously discovered the magnetic properties of Nd$_2$Fe$_{14}$B in 1984[9] by different processing routes. General Motors used melt spinning to make ribbon-like raw materials. After melt spinning, there are three different methods to make commercial products. Ribbons can be blended with resin to make bonded permanent magnets. They can also be hot pressed to improve density, which gives a higher energy product. Furthermore, they can be die upset to make dense anisotropic permanent magnet, and maximum energy products of 50 MGOe (400 kJm$^{-3}$) can be achieved due to crystallographic alignment.

Sumitomo Special Metals invented a powder metallurgy processing route. In their methods, an as-cast ingot is broken into powder by exposing to hydrogen. This process is called hydrogen decrepitation (HD). The size of HD powder is further reduced by a jet milling. When a fine size is achieved, each particle of powder is single crystalline, which can then be aligned well in magnetic field. After alignment, the compact is heated in vacuum to remove hydrogen. Finally, the magnets are quenched and heat treated to get optimal magnetic properties.

Permanent magnets have a big impact on our daily life. Generally speaking, applications of permanent magnets can be divided into four categories as follows[14]:

(1) Using tractive or repelling force of the magnet to do mechanical work, such as
magnetic separators or magnetic holding devices.

(2) Using the energy stored in a ferromagnetic material and the principle of Lenz’s Law to convert mechanical energy into electrical energy, such as in generators or wind turbines.

(3) Using the energy stored in a ferromagnetic material and the principle of Lenz’s Law to convert electrical energy into mechanical energy, such as in motors or loudspeakers.

(4) Using the magnetic field to direct, shape and control electron or ion beams, such as in ion pumps or cyclotrons.

Figure 2. Diverse applications of permanent magnets[14].
1.2 Motivation

At the end of 2015, the leaders from more than 190 nations attended a summit in Paris that was aimed at preventing dangerous climate change[15]. At the meeting, the United States pledged to cut its greenhouse gas emission by 26-28% by 2025. This will require a multitude of changes to meet this goal. According to a new report from energy and environmental groups[16], electrification of 53% of the vehicle, along with more wind and solar power plants, the nation would reduce greenhouse gases of 550 metric tons per year in 35 years. This equals to 100 million gasoline and diesel vehicles taken off the road[16], which will help the nation to achieve the goal.

Electric vehicles and hybrid vehicles rely heavily on REEs. It is said each of the vehicle need 60 pounds of REEs[17]. Figure 3 shows the REES in the Toyota Prius. The vehicle occupies over 50% of the hybrid market in the United States, and has been called the biggest user of rare earths of any object around the world[17]. As we can see, REEs play a vital role in hybrid and electric vehicles. Neodymium magnets are important in electric motor and regenerative braking systems. Terbium and Dysprosium are added in neodymium magnets to improve their thermal stability. All hybrid and electric vehicles on road rely heavily on lanthanum in battery pack[18]. Catalytic converters require cerium for the oxidation of CO and NOx emissions in exhaust gases[19]. Currently, California is dedicated to 1.5 million electric cars on the road by 2025[16]. This transportation evolution will result in a potential demand of over 40 million kilograms of REEs in the
next few years.

![Diagram of Toyota Prius showing REEs](image)

**Figure 3.** The REEs in Toyota Prius[17].

Rare earth elements are also essential for many other applications, such as compact fluorescent lamps, hard disk drives and other technical areas[20]. The versatility of REEs has given them technological, environmental, and economic importance.

However, REEs are naturally abundant in China, which controls about 95% of global rare earth production, and holds half the world's reserves of these metals[21]. Recently, in order to boost its own industry and prevent depletion of natural resources, China reduced its export quota, leading to high prices and supply chain disruptions around the globe[21].

Therefore, it is highly desirable to design and synthesize high energy product permanent magnets without REEs to compete with rare earth magnets and to achieve long term supply and cost outlook. One successful candidate is Alnico, due to its cost
efficiency, relatively good magnetic properties, and high working temperature. This will enable domestic automobile makers to provide a broad range of vehicles with electric drive motors[22].

1.3 Objective

Our study aims to optimize the thermal treatment processing and composition of Alnico alloys. Different solidification rate of melt-spun Alnico ribbons created different grain features compared with cast and sintered Alnico. The investigation of the relationship between grain microstructure and magnetic properties are important for coercivity enhancement, since the methods to improve the coercivity of Alnico is deficient. A non-magnetic (gamma) phase in Alnico is detrimental to its magnetic properties, therefore, it is necessary to develop methods to get rid of it.

Specifically, the objectives of our research are as follows:

(1) To study the effect of heat treatment and composition on magnetic properties of melt-spun Alnico alloys;

(2) To investigate the effect of solidification process on the grain microstructural and magnetic properties of melt-spun and cast Alnico alloys;

(3) To discovery new alloying elements that could be effective to remove gamma phase.
Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 History of Alnico Alloys

Alnico permanent magnets were developed in early 1930s by Japanese scientist Tokushichi Mishima[10][11]. He developed permanent magnet made from nickel, aluminum and iron with better magnetic properties than "magnet steels" available at the time. A few months later, he reported addition of cobalt (Co) could further enhance the magnetic properties of the alloy[23].

In 1935, researcher William E.Ruder of General Electric developed a new Alnico permanent magnet. An Alnico disk of less than a pound can be used to swing a 55-lb.radio cabinet. This suggested that Alnico was ready to replace small electromagnets in motors, transformers, and loudspeakers, which show great potentials in lowering the cost and simplifying the construction[24].

Anisotropic Alnico alloys with columnar grains were developed by Gottfried Bruno Jonas of the Netherlands in late 1930s. Such alloys show 50% to 200% higher maximum energy product than isotropic Alnico[24]. Since that time, Alnico had been developed into a robust permanent magnet. However, commercial exploitation of this material was stopped by the advent of World War II. It was not until 1947 that Alnico speakers was used in guitar amps of Gibson and Fender[24], which indicated the rise of Alnico products. Figure 4 shows an advertisement from QST amateur radio magazine released in
April 1945, exhibiting importance of Alnico.

Since researchers cannot further improve the remanence of Alnico, they switched their attention to coercivity enhancement. Koch et al. found Ti-containing Alnico has better coercivity, followed by the development of Alnico 8[25]. However, Ti introduces grain refinement, which makes it difficult to obtain a columnar structure. At that time, there was considerable doubt in the Alnico industry that any practical results could be achieved[26].

Figure 4. An advertisement from QST amateur radio magazine (April 1945)[24].
In the early of 1960s, Gould discovered that appropriate sulfur (S) addition to Alnico 8 produced columnar crystals without sacrificing large magnetic properties[27][28]. Since then, further work on composition modification to improve coercivity without reducing remanence led to the introduction of Alnico 9 in the U.S. market in 1964[26].

Research on Alnico stopped after 1975, after the emergence of high coercivity rare earth permanent magnets, such as samarium cobalt and neodymium iron boron. There has been no significant progress on magnetic properties of Alnico since 1964, as can be seen in Figure 5. Today, researchers are focusing on understanding coercivity mechanisms[29][30], microstructure[31], and processing[31][32] to improve its magnetic properties.
2.2 Magnetic origin of Alnico Alloys

Magnetic properties of Alnico results from the phase transformation (spinodal decomposition). \( \alpha_1 \) (Fe-Co rich) and \( \alpha_2 \) (Al-Ni rich) phases are developed in Alnico after spinodal decomposition, in which \( \alpha_1 \) phase is strong ferromagnetic, while \( \alpha_2 \) is weakly ferromagnetic. \( \alpha_1 \) phase is aligned as rods in \(<100>\) direction and distributed in \( \alpha_2 \) phase, since \(<100>\) is the energetically favorable direction[34].

Spinodal decomposition is a continuous phase transformation arising from conserved order parameter, which means it cannot change in one location without affecting its neighborhood[35]. As can be seen in Figure 6, an alloy with composition \( X_0 \) is heat treated at \( T_1 \) and then quenched to \( T_2 \). Its composition is homogeneous and initial free energy is \( G_0 \) at the beginning. However, the alloy will be immediately unstable due to small variations in composition, producing A-rich and B-rich phase will reduce the total free energy. Therefore, ‘up-hill’ diffusion occurs until the equilibrium composition \( X_1 \) and \( X_2 \) are achieved[36]. There is no activation energy barrier inside the spinodal area. If the alloy lies outside the spinodal area, small fluctuation of composition results in free energy increase, and the alloy is metastable. In order to reduce the free energy of the system, nucleation and growth will take place. Therefore, ‘down-hill’ diffusion occurs in this situation, as can be seen in Figure 7.
There are three high-energy Alnico alloys, which are Alnico 5, Alnico 8, and Alnico 9. Figure 8 shows magnetic properties of these three Alnico grades. Alnico 5 has the highest remanence compared to other two grades. However, Alnico 8 has the maximum coercivity. Alnico 9 combines characteristics of Alnico 5 and Alnico 8, showing the maximum energy product. The difference of magnetic properties among these Alnico alloys results from various chemical composition, followed by shape anisotropy variation.

Figure 6. Phase diagram and free energy curve of spinodal decomposition[36].
Figure 7. Composition profiles of spinodal decomposition and nucleation & growth [36].

Figure 8. Magnetic hysteresis loop of three high-energy Alnico grades: Alnico 5 (black), Alnico 8 (red) and Alnico 9 (blue). The higher $B_r$ for the Alnico 5 and 9 are consistent with their high grain alignment relative to the applied field direction during processing compared to Alnico 8, which has randomly oriented grains [29].
The coercivity of Alnico is largely determined by shape anisotropy\cite{37,30}. Figure 9 shows high-angle-annular-dark-field (HAADF) scanning transmission electron (STEM) imaging, which clearly differentiates phase morphology in Alnico alloys\cite{30}. The aspect ratio of $\alpha_1$ phase in Alnico 5 is about 5, however, Alnico 8 and Alnico 9 has larger aspect ratio, which is around 10.

$$H_{ci} = (1 - \rho)(N_b - N_a)C^{Fe+Co}M_{s}^{Fe,Co}$$

(1)

where $\rho$ is volume fraction of $\alpha_1$ phase, $N_b$ is demagnetizing factor along the long axis, $N_a$ is demagnetizing factor along the short axis, $C^{Fe+Co}$ is the relative concentration of Fe+Co in the $\alpha_1$ phase, $M_{s}^{Fe,Co}$ is saturation magnetization of the sample.

Equation (1) \cite{30} shows that the intrinsic coercivity of Alnico alloys is proportional to the difference in the demagnetizing factor between the long axis and the short axis. Therefore, a high aspect ratio of $\alpha_1$ phase is beneficial for coercivity improvement. This characteristic is used to design high coercivity Alnico alloys.
2.3 Manufacturing Process

Commercial Alnico alloys are fabricated by casting and sintering. For castAlnico, pure elements are put into a furnace and melted at 1750-1780 °C. The molten Alnico alloy is poured into sand molds with required shape of magnet. The sand mold and casting is cooled rapidly to avoid the formation of gamma phase. Sometimes there are chilled plates at the bottom of the molds to aid cooling. Sand can be exothermic sand,
which gives a different cooling rate. Exothermic sand is combined with chilled plates to produce textured Alnico alloys with higher remanence values. After cooling, the sand mold is broken down and the magnets retrieved. A series of heat treatments are applied to as-casted Alnico. If required, the magnets are ground to finished size and are also magnetized before packing[13].

Sintered Alnico is made by compacting powder. Firstly, the raw elements are ground by milling into particles. Secondly, the powder is pressed in a die under tonnes of pressure. The resulting magnet is then sintered at 1260 °C in a hydrogen atmosphere to melt the powder together. Generally, sintered Alnico magnets are small, weighing less than 30 grams[13].

2.4 Heat Treatment

As-made Alnico alloys are magnetically soft, with the coercivity of a few oersted. Their relatively good magnetic properties are given by heat treatment. Therefore, heat treatment study is very important for improving Alnico alloys' performance. Heat treatment of Alnico alloys depends on their types. Typically, the heat treatment of Alnico includes three steps. For Alnico 5, samples are heat treated at 1350 °C to reach the single phase, and then are fast cooled to 900 °C. This process is called solutionization, which is used to make homogeneous $\alpha$ phase and remove $\gamma$ phase formed in Alnico preparation process. Samples are then cooled to 600 °C under a magnetic field where spinodal decomposition takes place. Following a double tempering for 6 hours at 650 °C and 24
hours at 550 °C to achieve chemical equilibrium between $\alpha_1$ and $\alpha_2$ phases[38]. For Alnico 8 and Alnico 9, firstly, as made Alnico alloys are solutionalized above 1250 °C for half an hour, and then are quenched to room temperature to achieve single phase. Secondly, the quenched samples are annealed for 10 minutes at 800 °C in the presence of a magnetic field for spinodal decomposition development[39]. The magnetic properties of Alnico alloys are mainly determined in this process. Field annealing samples are successively annealed at 650 °C and 550 °C as Alnico5, to sharpen phase separation, followed by magnetic properties improvement.

Kim et al. reported the effect of cooling rate and low temperature solutionalization on the magnetic properties of Alnico 5[40]. They found the magnetic properties of Alnico 5 are highly dependent on the cooling rate from 900 °C to 600 °C. The faster the cooling rate is, the smaller the size and the larger aspect ratio of $\alpha_1$ phase it will have, resulting in better coercivity, as shown in Figure 10.

Iwama et al. studied the effect of isothermal annealing temperature on evolution of phases, as can be seen in Figure 11. The quenched specimens were isothermally annealed at 750, 780, 810, and 830 °C, respectively, with a magnetic field applied along the columnar axis of the specimen. It shows $\alpha_1$ phases aligned along the magnetic field direction, and 810 °C producing the optimal morphology[34].
Figure 10. Relation between coercive force and aging time at 600 °C for the Fe-24Co-14Ni-8Al-3Cu alloy after continuous cooling in magnetic field from 900 °C to 600 °C at various cooling rates. Solution treatment was performed at 1250 °C for 1h[40].
Figure 11. Electron micrographs of Alnico 8 specimens annealed for 10 minutes in a magnetic field at (a) 750 °C, (b) 780 °C, (c) 810 °C and (d) 830 °C, respectively. The upper row corresponds to the specimen surface parallel to the applied field and the lower row corresponds to the surface perpendicular to the field [34].

2.5 Gamma Phase and Alpha Sub Gamma Phase

Gamma (γ) phase is an FCC phase which is notorious for its deleterious effect on the magnetic properties of Alnico alloys. The reason why it kills coercivity is not well understood. It is possible that the γ phase is a non-ferromagnetic phase whose existence destroys saturation magnetization and coercivity of Alnico. γ phase tends to form along grain boundaries [41]. Its stable region depends on alloy composition. The lowest solutionization temperature where γ phase can still be found increases with cobalt and decreases with titanium content [42]. In order to avoid γ phase, Alnico alloys can be heated to 1200°C to 1300 °C, held for 30 minutes or longer, and then quenched to bypass γ phase formation region [43][44][34]. However, when Co concentration is larger than 36 wt%, it is difficult to solutionize Alnico alloys without destroying previous grain microstructure, because the lowest temperature where γ phase formation does not occur nearly coincides with the solidus [42].

While cooling, γ phase diffusionlessly transforms to a BCC alpha sub gamma (αγ) phase. Jullene et al. [45] studied its detrimental effect on magnetic properties of Alnico 8. They found remanence (Br) was reduced markedly with increasing αγ. The intrinsic coercivity is decreased about 18 Oe/% αγ. Energy product ((BH)max) is similar to Br.
although it changes more drastically than $B_r$, as can be seen in Figure 12.

![Figure 12. The effect of $\alpha_\gamma$ on magnetic properties of Alnico 8[45].](image)

### 2.6 Alloy Addition

Alloy additions are an effective way to improve magnetic properties of Alnico alloys by controlling shape anisotropy and microstructures. The alloying elements for Alnico can be separated into two categories: (1) Elements that are used to boost intrinsic coercivity
of Alnico, and (2) elements to help columnar grain growth.

### 2.6.1 Coercivity Enhancers

Most of Co goes to $\alpha_1$ phase after spinodal decomposition, which increases saturation magnetization, resulting in higher $B_r$. Equation 2 shows this also enlarges the magnetization difference between $\alpha_1$ and $\alpha_2$. $H_c$ results from magnetostatic interactions, as can be seen in equation 3[46]. Therefore, the coercivity of Alnico is increased with Co addition. Here $\Delta M$ is the difference in saturation magnetization, $M_{\alpha_1}$ the saturation magnetization of $\alpha_1$ phase, $M_{\alpha_2}$ the saturation magnetization of $\alpha_2$ phase, $N_2$ the demagnetizing factor along the long axis, and $N_1$ the demagnetizing factor along the short axis.

\[
\Delta M = M_{\alpha_1} - M_{\alpha_2} \tag{2}
\]

\[
H_c \propto \Delta M(N_2 - N_1) \tag{3}
\]

Liu et al. investigated Alnico alloys containing 34, 36, 38, and 40 wt% Co[47]. They found that there was more $\alpha_1$ phases with diameter smaller than 10nm when increasing Co and Ti content in the samples, as can be seen in Figure 13. The coercivity largely increases with Co, while the remanence and squareness of the demagnetization curve decrease with Co. They explained that the increasing nonmagnetic Ti content is the reason for saturation magnetization reduction. However, there is no report of Ti content of their specimens. It is possible that particle alignment and perfection deteriorate with Co, following with the reduction in saturation magnetization.
Table 1. Magnetic properties of Alnico 8[47].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alnico 8 (mass%) Co</th>
<th>B_s (T)</th>
<th>H_cj (kA/m)</th>
<th>(BH)_{max} (kJ/m^3)</th>
<th>Hk/Hc_j</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34Co</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>93.5</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36Co</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>104.3</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38Co</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>97.9</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40Co</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>93.4</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 13. TEM of Alnico 8 thin foils perpendicular to the applied magnetic field. (a) bright-field image of 34 wt% Co Alnico; (b) 36 wt% Co Alnico; (c) 40 wt% Co Alnico[47].

Ti is another element that can boost coercivity of Alnico alloys. Alnico 8 and Alnico 9 are well-known due to their relatively high coercivity compared with Alnico 5, especially when an isothermal field treatment is applied[48]. Coercivity enhancement can be explained by the equation 2 and 3. Ti is a paramagnetic element, which primarily segregates to the $\alpha_2$ phase[30]. This can increase the saturation magnetization difference between $\alpha_1$ and $\alpha_2$ phases, enhancing coercivity. Another reason is that Ti improves the shape anisotropy of Alnico alloys. This is proved by comparison of the aspect ratio of
Alnico 5, Alnico 8 and Alnico 9[30]. Alnico 5 usually has an aspect ratio of 5, while Alnico 8 and Alnico 9 have aspect ratios of 10.

Takeuchi et al. performed anisotropy measurements using a combination of magnetic measurements and electron microscopy on monocrystalline Alnico alloys[49]. They found that the shape anisotropy constant increases with Ti content, resulting in coercivity improvement. They also found that the packing fraction of the $\alpha_1$ phase dramatically changes with Ti, leading to the conclusion that one main reason for high coercivity of the high Ti-containing Alnico is the packing fraction. However, this finding does not agree with other work[30], which shows packing fraction has no obvious change among Alnico 5, Alnico 8, and Alnico 9.

Iwama et al. studied the effect of Ti in Alnico 8-type alloys[48]. Figure 14 shows that extrinsic coercivity ($B_H$) significantly increases as Ti content increases. It approaches 1700 Oe at 6 wt% Ti, and then slightly decreases. At the same time, $B_r$ linearly decreases with Ti. The optimal Ti content is 5 wt%, which shows the highest $\left(\text{BH}\right)_{\text{max}}$. The electron microscopy images in Figure 15 reveal the precipitates particles after optimal heat treatment are likely to coarsen in both size and aspect ratio with increasing Ti. This finding seems to contradict the recent characterization study of Alnico 5, Alnico 8, and Alnico 9[30], and the later report about the effect of Ti on shape anisotropy[49]. It is likely that shape anisotropy is mainly determined by the synergy of Co and Ti, rather than by Ti itself, since Ti was increased while Co was deceased. On the contrary, high Ti-containing Alnico alloys usually have high Co content, which leads to improvement in
shape anisotropy and magnetic properties[30][49].

Figure 14. Relation between magnetic properties and Ti content in Alnico 8-type alloys under the optimal isothermal heat treatment[48].

Figure 15. Electron micrographs of Alnico 8-type alloys containing various Ti content, after the optimal isothermal treatment followed by aging[48].
(a) No.3 (3.10 wt% Ti) (b) No.5 (4.36 wt% Ti) (c) No.7 (6.39 wt% Ti) (d) No.8 (7.52 wt% Ti)
Nb is another element that can be used to enhance coercivity. The reason for coercivity enhancement results from shape anisotropy improvement[50]. Although the effect of Nb on the microstructure of Alnico alloys has not be studied, it is suggested that it is similar to Ti addition[50]. Szymura et al. investigated the influence of Nb addition on the magnetic properties of textured Alnico 5 alloy. They found 0.5 wt% Nb addition decrease remanent induction while increasing coercivity and squareness of the hysteresis loop[50]. Sugiyama et al. studied the effect of Nb on the magnetic properties of sintered Alnico 5 alloys[51]. As can be seen in Figure 16, coercivity increases as Nb increases. However, remanence gradually decreases when Nb addition is over 1%. They also reported large amount of Nb addition cause pore aggregation, rapid grain growth, and negative effects on rupture strength. They suggested that 0.35~0.70 wt% of Nb addition is optimal to improve sinterd Alnico 5 alloys.
2.6.2 Crystallographic Texture Enhancers

Grains with preferential orientation create crystallographic texture[52]. Crystallographic texture strongly affects the shape of the hysteresis loop, making it more square, resulting in magnetic properties improvement. As can be seen in Table 2, the magnetic properties of Alnico are significantly improved with grain alignment. Therefore, it is desirable to develop Alnico with crystallographic texture.
Table 2. Composition and magnetic properties of anisotropic, thermomagnetically treated Alnico 5 and 8 as well as single crystal Alnico 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alnico</th>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Composition (wt%) (balance Fe)</th>
<th>Magnetic Properties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ni</td>
<td>Al</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Random grain</td>
<td>12–15</td>
<td>7.8–8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG* 5</td>
<td>Directed grain</td>
<td>13–15</td>
<td>7.8–8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 xtl</td>
<td>Single crystal</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Random grain</td>
<td>14–15</td>
<td>7–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG 8(9)</td>
<td>Directed grain</td>
<td>14–16</td>
<td>7–8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alnico alloys containing Ti are especially attractive due to their high coercivity. However, it is very difficult to cast magnets with a columnar structure with Ti content higher than 0.7 wt%[53][54]. There are two explanations for grain refinement of Ti addition. Thomas et al. concluded that equiaxed grains formed at high Ti addition are caused by the combination of Al and Ti rather than Ti alone[55]. The addition of Al and Ti may widen solidus-liquidus gap, which creates a large concentration gradient in the liquid during solidification, followed by equiaxed grain formation. In contrast, Luteijin et al. suggested that titanium oxide, carbide and nitride after Ti addition act as heterogeneous nucleation sites, leading to grain refinement[56].

In order to obtain textured Alnico alloys when Ti is added, researchers searched for alloying elements that are beneficial for columnar grain formation. It was found that appropriate addition of S[53][57], Si[57], Se[53], Te[53], and C[53], or the combination thereof[54] help columnar grain growth without sacrificing magnetic properties. Makino
et al. reported textured Alnico 8 alloys can be prepared with 0.15 to 1.0 wt% S addition[57]. Columnar grains were easily obtained with increasing S content; however, S can decrease magnetic properties. The optimal S addition is suggested take in the range of 0.15 to 0.3 wt%.

They also studied the duplex effect of S and Te, which is more effective than adding one element alone[54]. As can be seen in Figure 17, columnar grains of Alnico alloys with 8.5 wt% Ti content can be obtained by duplex addition of S and Te.

Si is another texture enhancer. It is reported that by adding up to 1 wt% Si, magnetic properties are equal to or better than Alnico 5 without Si addition[57]. Si lowers freezing temperature, which results in a larger temperature gradient for solidification. This could be beneficial for columnar grain growth.

Figure 17. Effect of Ti contents on length of columnar crystals in Alnico magnet alloys[54].
Chapter 3 Experimental Procedure

3.1 Arc Melting

Arc melting or vacuum arc melting is a traditional method used to prepare solid metal ingots. In our process, pure metals were placed on a water cooled copper plate. The chamber of the arc melter was repeatedly pumped and backfilled with high purity argon gas. The base pressure was around 100 mTorr and the operating temperature was slightly below atmospheric pressure. A large voltage was applied to tungsten electrode to generate the arc. Pure metals were melted by the arc with melting temperature up to 3500 °C and then formed a solid sample. The sample was then flipped and re-melted for four times to ensure chemical homogeneity.
3.2 Melt Spinning

Melt spinning is a method that can control solidification and structure of materials[58]. In our experiment, the base pressure was $2.3 \times 10^{-2}$ Torr. Samples were melted by radio frequency induction heat copper coil, and then ejected by over pressured argon through a small round nozzle (0.72 mm in diameter) onto the rotating copper wheel. Alnico ribbons were collected for characterization.
3.3 Hysteresis Loop

The hysteresis loop is the fingerprint of a ferromagnetic material, the typical shape can be seen in Figure 20, which results from a nonlinear response of ferromagnetic materials to an applied external magnetic field. Any ferromagnetic material is composed of small regions where all magnetic dipole moments align in the same direction, and contiguous domains are separated by domain walls[59]. The hysteresis loop begins at a starting point with zero applied field (H=0), at this state, all the domains are disoriented such that vector sum of the magnetizations is zero. When an external magnetic field is applied, the magnetization increase gradually and then rapidly, finally saturate at point a, which is called saturation magnetization. In this point, the specimen becomes a single
domain that is aligned in the direction of applied field. When H is reversed and reduced to zero, some magnetization remains, which is known as the remanence (B_r). This may be explained by the resistance to movement of domain walls, corresponding to the increase of H in the opposite direction[59]. In order to remove the remanence, a reversed H is required. The field applied to reduce remanence to zero is called coercivity (H_c). Since all the domains have different magnetization direction, there is no magnetic flux (B=0) at point c. With increasing of field in the opposite direction, the same saturation happens as it did before. The cycle is then reversed to get a full hysteresis loop.

Figure 20. Schematic representation of a hysteresis loop for a ferromagnetic material portraying the saturation points (a and d), remanence points (b and e), and coercivity points (c and f)[60].
Figure 21. Schematic representation of the magnetic domains with increasing and decreasing magnetizing force[60].

Figure 21 shows magnetic domains at different stages of magnetization. In the beginning, they are disoriented, and then gradually aligned with increasing magnetic field, finally misaligned again when moments cancel each other and yield zero net magnetic moment.

For hysteresis loop measurement, we used an alternating gradient magnetometer (AGM). The samples were mounted at the end of a holder by vacuum grease, and subjected to a fixed direct current (DC) field with an alternating field gradient.

3.4 X-ray Powder Diffraction

X-ray powder diffraction (XRD) is an analytical technique mainly used for identifying a material’s crystal structure and phase fraction[61][62]. The basic process for
XRD can be described as three steps[56][57]. Firstly, X-rays are generated in cathode ray tube via heating a filament, then these X-rays are filtered by foils or crystal monochromators to produce monochromatic X-rays. Finally, these X-rays are collimated and directed to the sample. When the incident X-ray satisfies Bragg’s Law, constructive interface leads to an observable intensity peak. A detector records this X-ray signal and counts the number of incoming X-rays at each angle. In this thesis, a PANalytical Empyrean diffractometer (Cu Kα radiation, λ=0.1541 nm, 45 kV and 40 mA) was used for XRD characterization.

Bragg’s Law is classic principle used for XRD, which gives angle for coherent and incoherent scattering from a crystal lattice[63]. X-rays are scattered from lattice planes with interplanar spacing d, when the scattered waves interfere constructively, they remain in phase. It is because path length of every wave is equal to an integer multiple of the wavelength, which can be expressed by the equation 4. Here λ represents the wavelength of X-rays, n is a positive integer, d represents interplanar spacing, and θ represents diffraction angle.

\[ n\lambda = 2dsin\theta \]  

(4)
Figure 22. Bragg diffraction. Two beams with identical wavelength and phase approach a crystalline solid and are scattered off two different atoms within it. The lower beam traverses an extra length of $2d \sin \theta$. Constructive interference occurs when this length is equal to an integer multiple of the wavelength of the radiation[63].

3.5 Metallography

Metallography is a field of study on the physical structure and components of metals[64]. In our metallographic preparation process, Alnico ribbons were clamped by stainless steel corning for a cross-section examination, and then were hot mounted by BUEHLER SIMPLIMET 1000 with hot compression thermoset resin. After mounting, specimens were wet ground successively by SiC sandpapers with 400, 600, 800, 1200 grit to get a relatively smooth surface. Following with polishing by 1 micrometer Alpha Alumina powder to make sure there is no obvious scratches on the surface.

Light optical microscopy is a field of study using light microscope to view objects and areas of objects that cannot be resolved by naked eyes[65]. It magnifies view of
samples by passing visible light transmitted through or reflected from samples via a single or multiple lenses[66]. A Leica light optical microscope was used to examine the microstructures of Alnico ribbons.

### 3.6 Scanning Electron Microscopy

Scanning electron microscopy (SEM) is a technique that uses a focused electron beam to scan a sample. Through interaction of the electron beam and the sample, various signals are generated, such as secondary electrons, back-scattered electrons, and characteristic X-rays. Secondary electrons provide useful information about topography of the sample, while back-scattered electrons show atomic number contrast. The SEM is equipped with energy dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (EDS) to reveal the composition of the sample by using characteristic X-rays. In this thesis, all SEM images and EDS data were acquired by an FEI Helios NanoLab 660 operating at 10 kV and a working distance of 6.5 mm in imaging mode. Figure 23 shows the FEI Helios NanoLab 660.

![Figure 23. FEI Helios NanoLab 660](image)
Chapter 4 Effect of Heat Treatment

4.1 Isothermal Heat Treatment

The coercivity of Alnico magnets arises from shape anisotropy, which depends on microstructure, such as the aspect ratio of $\alpha_1$ phase, composition of $\alpha_2$ phase, and interface microchemistry controlled by alloy composition and heat treatment process. Therefore, we report the effect of alloy composition and annealing on magnetic properties of Alnico in this chapter. The compositions similar to Alnico 8 and 9 were designed due to their potential for high coercivity and energy product. First of all, we described isothermal heat treatment process, which significantly controls microstructure. Then, we presented magnetic properties of the samples for different annealing processes.

The Alnico with compositions listed in table 3 were prepared for our study. Sample 1 and sample 2 are supposed to have high energy product and high coercivity[67], respectively. Sample 3 is typical Alnico 9. All of them were prepared by arc melting, and then melt spinning with the wheel speed of 40 mps. The width and thickness of the ribbons are about 2 mm and 30 $\mu$m, respectively. The melt-spun ribbons were wrapped with tantalum foil and then sealed in a quartz tube filled with argon. Some titanium granules were put into the quartz tube to prevent oxidation. The samples were isothermally heat treated at 780-830 °C for 10 minutes, followed with secondary annealing at 650 °C for 12 hours, and final annealing at 580 °C for 6 hours, as can be
seen in Figure 24.

Table 3. Compositions of Alnico Samples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Al</th>
<th>Ni</th>
<th>Co</th>
<th>Cu</th>
<th>Ti</th>
<th>Fe</th>
<th>Nb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1(wt%)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2(wt%)</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3(wt%)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 24. Schematic diagram for isothermal heat treatment process-temperature.
Figure 25. Effect of isothermal heat treatment temperature on magnetic properties of (a) sample 1, (b) sample 2 and (c) sample 3.

Figure 25 shows the effect of isothermal heat treatment (IHT) temperature on the magnetic properties of three Alnico samples. We can see that coercivity depends on IHT temperature, which first increases and then decreases with IHT temperature. Remanence and energy product gradually decrease with increasing temperature. The highest coercivity of the samples were obtained at 800 °C, 790 °C, 790 °C, respectively. It is because shape anisotropy is driven by microstructural evolution, which not only depends on spinodal decomposition but also particle coarsening.

The composition fluctuation can be described by a sum of sinusoidal waves with various wavenumbers β[34], as be seen in equation 5. In the early stage of spinodal
decomposition, the sinosoidal wave with specific wavenumber will be selectively amplified, dominating the decomposed structure [68][35]. For ferromagnetic materials, the wavenumber is determined by free energy, elastic energy and magnetic energy term [69][34].

\[
\Delta c = c - c_0 = \sum \beta \cos \beta r + B \sin \beta r \quad (5)
\]

where \( \Delta c \) is composition fluctuation, \( c \) is composition, \( c_0 \) is original composition, and \( A \) and \( B \) are coefficients [34].

\[
\beta_m^2 = - \left[ \left( \frac{\partial^2 f_0}{\partial c^2} \right)_0 + 2 \eta^2 Y_{100} + 4\pi \left( \frac{\partial M}{\partial c} \right)_0^2 \right] / (4K) \quad (6)
\]

here \( \beta_m \) is the maximum wavenumber, \( f \) is the free energy per unit volume of a homogeneous alloys of composition \( c \), \( K \) represents a gradient energy coefficient, \( \eta \) is the fractional change in lattice parameter per unit composition change, and \( Y_{100} \) represents a specialized elastic constant in the <100> direction [34].

\[
K = N_v k T_c r_0^2 / 3 \quad (7)
\]

where \( N_v \) is the number of atoms per unit volume, \( k \) is the Boltzmann constant, \( T_c \) is spinodal decomposition temperature, and \( r_0 \) represents interatomic distance [34].

As we can see from equation 5 to 7, the microstructure is controlled by alloy compositions and temperature, which explains various optimal isothermal heat treatment temperature of the three samples.

An increase in characteristic length scale during microstructural evolution is called coarsening [35]. Actual spinodal decomposition structures are irregular, which show particle coarsening [70]. Equation 8 shows the evolution of the mean particle size [35].
\[ < R(t) >^3 - < R(0) >^3 = \frac{8\bar{D}\gamma\Omega^2 C_{eq}(\infty)}{9kT} t = K_D t \]  

where \( R(t) \) is the mean particle size, \( R(0) \) is original particle size, \( \bar{D} \) is diffusivity, \( \gamma \) is interfacial energy, \( \Omega \) is thermodynamic potential, \( C_{eq} \) is the solubility of B atom in matrix phase for a system with a planar \( \alpha/\beta \) interface, \( T \) is temperature, \( t \) is time, \( K_D \) is the rate constant for diffusion-limited coarsening.

The diffusivity increases with temperature exponentially[36]. When the isothermal temperature is high, the microstructural evolution will develop dramatically. This could coarsen \( \alpha_1 \) phase, and ruin shape anisotropy. Therefore, the balance between spinodal decomposition and particle coarsening is the key to optimal magnetic properties, which is determined by alloy compositions and heat treatment.

Since the optimal coercivity is achieved about 50-70°C below the spinodal decomposition temperature[44], we can conclude that Co could improve spinodal decomposition temperature while it is decreased by Ti.

We also investigated the effect of isothermal heat treatment time on magnetic properties of the Alnico samples. Schematic diagram of heat treatment process is shown in Figure 26. The optimal isothermal heat treatment time for sample 1, 2, and 3 is 20 minutes, equal to or less than 5 minutes, and 10 minutes, respectively. The coercivity trends for sample 1 and sample 3 are the same. Both of their optimal heat treatment time is between 5 and 10 minutes. However, the optimal annealing time for sample 2 is equal to or less than 5 minutes. Sample 1 has more Co content when compared with sample 3, which improves spinodal decomposition temperature. In addition the IHT temperaure
here (790 °C) is lower than the optimal one (800 °C), so more time is needed to complete spinodal decomposition for obtaining optimal magnetic properties. Sample 2 has more Ti content when compared with sample 1, which could reduce the spinodal decomposition temperature. Thus, annealing time is shortened. By comparing sample 2 and sample 3, we can see that IHT time is shortened for the sample with high Co and high Ti contents, indicating Ti is more effective than Co to control IHT time.

Figure 26. Schematic diagram for isothermal heat treatment process-time.
4.2 Secondary annealing

Secondary annealing (SA) or draw is a process used to sharpen $\alpha_1$ phase. During secondary annealing, Fe-Co content in $\alpha_1$ phase increase with decreasing temperature, while Fe-Co in $\alpha_2$ phase decreases with decreasing temperature[41]. According to equation 2 and 3, this will increase the saturation magnetization difference between $\alpha_1$ and $\alpha_2$ phase, following with the improvement of coercivity. This can effectively improve magnetic properties, especially for coercivity, after isothermal heat treatment. Sample 1, sample 2 and sample 3 were isothermally heat treated at 790 °C for 10 minutes, and then
annealed at 630 °C to 670 °C for 12 hours, and finally annealed at 580 °C for 6 hours, as can be seen in Figure 28. Figure 29 shows magnetic properties of the samples for different SA temperature. As can be seen, there is no general trend, and the coercivity has no discernable difference among them. It suggests diffusion and coarsening is limited at these temperatures. It is also possible that the real trend is overshadowed by microstructure variations among these ribbons, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The effect of SA time on magnetic properties was also studied. The samples were isothermally heat treated at 790 °C for 10 minutes, and then annealed at 650 °C for 8 hours to 28 hours, and with final annealing at 580 °C for 6 hours. As can be seen in Figure 31, magnetic properties of the samples are almost independent of SA time.

Figure 28. Schematic diagram for secondary annealing process-temperature.
Figure 29. Effect of draw heat treatment temperature on magnetic properties of (a) sample 1, (b) sample 2 and (c) sample 3.

Figure 30. Schematic diagram for secondary annealing process-time.
Figure 31. Effect of draw heat treatment time on magnetic properties of (a) sample 1, (b) sample 2 and (c) sample 3.
Chapter 5 Effect of Grain Microstructure

5.1 Wheel Speed

Magnetic properties of ferromagnetic alloys not only depend on intrinsic properties, but also microstructure, such as grain size, content of main phase, and phase distribution. For example, magnetic properties of neodymium magnets vary with the change of microstructure controlled by fabrication methods. In general, the coercivity of a neodymium magnet increases as the grain size decreases[71]. This is because that when the grain size is the same order of dimension as that of single domain particle, the domain wall is pinned at the grain boundaries, and a magnetic field higher than the pinning force is required to reverse the single-domain particle, following with higher coercivity[72]. This sheds light on our study of Alnico magnets. Although the origin and the improvement of magnetic properties of Alnico is different from neodymium magnets, it is possible that grain microstructure of Alnico influences its magnetic properties. In this chapter, we will study how grain microstructure controls magnetic properties of Alnico magnets by changing wheel speed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample (wt%)</th>
<th>Al</th>
<th>Ni</th>
<th>Co</th>
<th>Cu</th>
<th>Ti</th>
<th>Fe</th>
<th>Nb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We varied wheel speed, since it can change cooling rate, following with variation in microstructures. Ingots with compositions in Table 4 were prepared by arc melter, and then melt-spun with wheel speed at 10 mps, 15 mps, 20 mps, 30 mps and 40 mps, respectively. Interestingly, we found that ribbons spun at 10 mps, 15 mps and 20 mps are relatively brittle, while the ribbons spun at 40 mps are relatively ductile. The ribbons spun at 30 mps have both characteristics. These may influence their magnetic properties, which will be discussed later. As-spun ribbons were collected for microstructure characterization. The crystal structure and phase components of free side and wheel side of the as-spun ribbons were examined by XRD. For magnetic hysteresis loop measurement, the ribbons are sealed in argon, and isothermal heat treated at 790 °C for 10 minutes, and then rapidly quenched to room temperature, following with secondary annealing at 650 °C for 8 hours and third annealing at 580 °C for 18 hours.

Figure 32 shows variation of magnetic properties with increasing wheel speed. It is clear that the coercivity first increases and then decreases, which approaches to the maximum at 20 mps. The ribbons spun at 30 mps have relatively large standard deviation. Their remanence and energy product have no significant difference. There are two possible reasons for coercivity variation. Firstly, it is likely that coercivity of Alnico is grain microstructure dependent. Secondly, it could result from synergy of γ phase and grain microstructure. γ phase may form in our preparation process, especially for low wheel speed. Since we did not solutionize our samples, it is possible that αγ phase exists in our annealed samples. The content of γ phase is inversely proportional to the wheel
speed. The increase of coercivity may arise from the reduction of \( \gamma \) phase content, while the decrease of coercivity may be attributed to the formation of equiaxed crystals. The competition of these two factors lead to the appearance of maximum coercivity at 20 mps.

**Figure 32. Effect of wheel speed on magnetic properties.**

XRD patterns in Figure 33 shows diffraction peaks of ribbons spun at 10 mps, 20 mps and 40 mps, respectively. It seems there is no obvious difference among these samples, expect for the free side of 10 mps, which shows strong diffraction at \{200\} peak, indicating texture. Importantly, there is no \( \gamma \) phase diffraction peak at 10 mps, which suggests there is no or minor \( \gamma \) phase formation in these samples.

Light optical microscope photomicrographs in Figure 34 show cross-sectional microstructure of as-spun ribbons spun at 10 mps, 15 mps, 20 mps, 30 mps (ductile and
brittle) and 40 mps, respectively. We can see brittle ribbons spun at 30 mps have similar microstructure with ribbons spun at 15 mps, and microstructure of ductile ribbons spun at 30 mps is similar to the one spun at 40 mps, corresponding to their magnetic properties. Therefore, the large standard deviation of coercivity for the ribbons spun at 30 mps could result from the microstructure changes. However, the microstructures of the ribbons spun at 10 mps and 20 mps are comparable. For both of them, equiaxed grains composed of upper part, while columnar grains formed in the middle part of the ribbon. The difference is that columnar grains of the ribbons spun at 20 mps are aligned better than 10 mps, and the ribbons spun at 20 mps have more columnar grains. These could be beneficial for magnetic properties. It is also likely that there is a small amount of $\gamma$ phase formation in the ribbons spun at 10 mps, due to its low cooling rate.
Figure 33. XRD pattern of the as-spun ribbons spun at 10 mps, 20 mps and 30 mps.
Figure 34. Cross-sectional light optical microscope photomicrographs of the as-spun ribbons spun at 10 mps, 15 mps, 20 mps, 30 mps (B: brittle and D: ductile) and 40 mps.

In conclusion, the coercivity of Alnico alloys is microstructure dependent. We can improve coercivity of Alnico alloys by tuning their microstructure. The optimal magnetic properties are obtained at 20mps.

5.2 Fabrication of Alnico with crystallographic texture

As we discussed in section 2.6.2, crystallographic texture in permanent magnet is beneficial for magnetic properties. We tried to further improve magnetic properties of Alnico by fabricating columnar grains. However, it is very difficult to get columnar grains in Ti-containing Alnico alloys unless texture enhancers are added. In order to get texture, two requirements must be satisfied, which are a steep temperature gradient and a
slow solidification rate[57]. Melt spinning is unfavorable for texture fabrication, due to its high cooling rate, which is on the order of $10^4$ - $10^7$ Kelvin per second[58]. Therefore, we set up a casting system to satisfy above requirements, as can be seen in Figure 35. The container of the mold was made by an alumina crucible. The bottom of the alumina crucible was machined to be open. The inner shell of the mold was made by the mixture of plaster, sand and water. The volume ratio for the mixture is plaster : sand : water = 21 : 21 : 15. The mixture was poured into the alumina crucible, and then a disposable centrifuge tube was used to make the center of the mold. The induction heat from the melt-spinner was employed to heat our sample. The sample was heated for over 5 minutes to make it reaches a temperature around or over 200 °C above its melting temperature. The mold was preheated to 1200 °C before pouring the molten Alnico. In this case, the heat was released into the chill copper. However, it should be stressed that the heat was also released into atmosphere by radiation and convection. The as-casted sample was ground and polished to remove the oxidation shell, and chill end of the sample was cut for characterization. Table 5 shows normal composition of the sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Al</th>
<th>Ni</th>
<th>Co</th>
<th>Cu</th>
<th>Ti</th>
<th>Fe</th>
<th>Nb</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(wt%)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 36 shows XRD pattern of the as-casted sample. It is clear that \{200\} diffraction peak is dominant peak, indicating crystallographic texture was formed in our sample. For magnetic properties measurement, the sample was isothermally heat treated at 790 °C for 10 minutes, and then was rapidly quenched to room temperature, following with tempering at 650 °C for 8 hours and 580 °C for 18 hours, respectively. Both hysteresis loops with magnetic field parallel and perpendicular to the sample surface were measured, as can be seen in Figure 37. However, it seems the magnetic properties of textured Alnico are not as good as melt-spun ones. There is slightly difference between the parallel hysteresis loop and perpendicular one, which means the sample is slightly anisotropic or isotropic. It is likely that the simple casting system may not generate strong texture in Ti-containing Alnico because of heat transfer to atmosphere. Furthermore, a continuous casting is not practical in small scale experiment. Therefore, a steep temperature gradient is not available during the process. In addition, slow solidification rate resulted in the formation of \(\gamma\) phase in our sample, and the magnetic properties were further deteriorated by S addition.

In summary, we successfully fabricated textured Ti contained Alnico alloy by setting up a casting system. However, the comparison between the parallel and perpendicular hysteresis loop shows its slightly anisotropic or isotropic character. This is because a stable temperature gradient is not available in our simple casting system, following with tilt of columnar crystals. Moreover, its magnetic properties have no further improvement when compared with melt-spun ones, which results from the deleterious effect of \(\gamma\) phase.
and S addition.

Figure 35. Schematic diagram of casting system.

Figure 36. XRD pattern of textured Alnico 9.
Figure 37. Hysteresis loop of textured Alnico 9.
Chapter 6 Avoidance of gamma phase by alloying addition

γ phase is a FCC phase, which is detrimental to magnetic properties of Alnico. As seen in Figure 38, γ phase is stable at temperature range from 860 °C to 1200 °C. In order to avoid γ phase, researchers tried to quench Alnico alloys from their homogenized state, which effectively avoids γ phase transformation. However, the solutionization requires high temperature furnace. This is not cost-effective for industry production. Furthermore, as we discussed in section 2.5, it is hard to solutionize high Co-containing Alnico alloys without destroying grain microstructures, since the temperature range of γ phase almost coincides with the solidus of Alnico. Here, we were interested in alloying addition, which could also avoid γ phase formation in Alnico without high temperature solutionization.

![Phase diagram of Alnico alloys](image)

**Figure 38. Phase diagram of Alnico alloys[41].**
6.1 Effect of Sn addition

Compositions of the Alnico alloys are shown in Table 6, x is in the range of 0 to 3 wt%. The effect of Sn addition on magnetic properties of Alnico were characterized by hysteresis loop after the heat treatment 1: the ribbons were isothermally heated at 790 °C at 10 minutes and then quenched to room temperature, following with secondary annealing at 650°C for 8 hours and third annealing at 580 °C for 18 hours. To investigate the effect of Sn on γ phase avoidance, we did γ heat treatment (the heat treatment 2): ribbons were heated at 1100 °C for 1 h to generate more γ phase, and then quenched to room temperature, following with heat treatment 1. The schematic diagrams for the heat treatment 1 and 2 are shown in Figure 39.

![Schematic diagram of heat treatment 1 and 2.](image-url)
Table 6. Compositions of the samples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Al</th>
<th>Ni</th>
<th>Co</th>
<th>Cu</th>
<th>Ti</th>
<th>Nb</th>
<th>Sn</th>
<th>Fe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(wt%)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>balance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 40. Effect of Sn on magnetic properties of the Alnico alloys.

Figure 40 shows variation of magnetic properties of the Alnico alloys with increasing Sn addition after heat treatment 1. It is clear that magnetic properties have no obvious change when x < 0.5 wt%, while magnetic properties monotonically decrease with increasing Sn when x > 0.5 wt%. It is possible that Sn enters $\alpha_1$ phase, which reduces the difference in saturation magnetization between $\alpha_1$ and $\alpha_2$ phase, resulting in coercivity deterioration.

Figure 41 shows magnetic properties of the Alnico samples versus increasing Sn
content after heat treatment 2. As we can see, coercivity increases monotonically when x range from 0 to 1 wt%. However, it drops when x>1. Remanence and energy product are not sensitive to Sn addition. This suggests that 0 to 1 wt% addition of Sn is effective to remove γ phase in Alnico alloys. It is likely that Sn could avoid the formation of γ phase or narrow the temperature range where γ phase is stable, following with better magnetic properties. When x>1, there might be some phases formed which have deleterious effect on magnetic properties. It is also possible that Sn enters α₁ phase, lowering shape anisotropy, which overshadows its effect of γ phase avoidance. In order to investigate the reasons, we performed XRD, SEM and EDS.

XRD patterns in Figure 42 show that there is a diffraction peak from γ phase for γ phase heat treated Alnico without Sn addition. In contrast, there is no diffraction peak corresponding to γ phase for 1 wt% Sn-containing Alnico. The XRD pattern of Alnico with 3 wt% Sn addition is different from above, suggesting there was an impurity phase formed. We can also see that diffraction peak corresponding to α₂ shifts towards lower 2θ with increasing Sn, which suggests Sn dissolves into α₂ phase.

Figure 43 shows cross-sectional SEM pictures of Sn-containing Alnico ribbons. It is clear that there was a impurity phase formed with increasing Sn content. Figure 44 shows EDS spectra of the area with the impurity phase and the area without the impurity phase. It seems that there is no obvious difference between the compositions of the area with impurity phase and the area without impurity phase. It is very likely that the impurity phase is too small, so EDS does not only collect characteristic X-rays from the impurity
phase, but also surrounding areas without the impurity phase.

Figure 41. Effect of Sn on magnetic properties of γ heat treated Alnico alloys.

Figure 42. XRD pattern of γ heat treated Alnico alloys.
Figure 43. Cross-sectional SEM images of Sn-containing Alnico ribbons. Alnico ribbons with (a) 0.5 wt%, (b) 1 wt%, (c) 1.5 wt%, (d) 2 wt%, (e) 2.5 wt% and (f) 3 wt% Sn.

Figure 44. Cross-sectional SEM image and EDS spectra of Alnico ribbons with 3 wt% Sn. (a) SEM image, (b) EDS spectra of the area without impurity phase and (c) with
impurity phase.

Table 7. Compositions of the area with impurity phase and the area without impurity phase.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Al (wt%)</th>
<th>Ni (wt%)</th>
<th>Co (wt%)</th>
<th>Cu (wt%)</th>
<th>Ti (wt%)</th>
<th>Nb (wt%)</th>
<th>Fe (wt%)</th>
<th>C (wt%)</th>
<th>Sn (wt%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>1(wt%)</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2(wt%)</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.2 Effect of Ge addition

We also found Ge has a similar effect on restraining the generation of γ phase. The composition of our samples is shown in Table 8. The specimens were heat treated in two different ways, as in section 6.2. For heat treatment 1, the samples were heat treated at 810 °C for 10 minutes, followed by secondary annealing at 650 °C for 12 hours, and final annealing at 580 °C for 6 hours. For heat treatment 2, the samples were heat treated at 1100 °C for 1 hour, and then quenched to room temperature, followed by heat treatment 1. The schematic diagram for the heat treatments is shown in Figure 45.
### Table 8. Compositions of the samples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Al (wt%)</th>
<th>Ni (wt%)</th>
<th>Co (wt%)</th>
<th>Cu (wt%)</th>
<th>Ti (wt%)</th>
<th>Ge (wt%)</th>
<th>Fe (wt%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (wt%)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (wt%)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (wt%)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>balance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 45. The schematic diagrams of heat treatment 1 and 2.
Figure 46. Effect of Ge on magnetic properties of Alnico alloys. (a) full and (c) second quadrant hysteresis loops of the samples after heat treatment 1, (b) full and (d) second quadrant hysteresis loops of the samples after heat treatment 2. (black square represents control, red dot represents 1 wt% Ge-containing sample, blue triangle represents the 5 wt% Ge-containing sample)

As can be seen in Figure 46 (a)(c), 1 wt% Ge addition slightly reduces coercivity of Alnico by about 100 Oe. However, 5 wt% Ge addition decreases the coercivity about 43%. As for heat treatment 2, we generate more γ phase in the samples. Therefore, we can determine how effective the Ge is by comparing them. Figure 46 (b) (d) show the sample with 5 wt% Ge has the best coercivity, followed by the 1 wt% Ge-containing sample. This suggests that Ge is effective in suppressing the formation of γ phase in Alnico magnets.
In addition, we compared the XRD patterns of these samples, as can be seen in Figure 47. The relative intensity of diffraction peak from $\gamma$ phase decreases with the increase in Ge content, indicating that $\gamma$ phase gradually decreases with Ge addition. It implies that Ge addition suppressed the formation of $\gamma$ phase in Alnico magnets.

Figure 47. XRD pattern of the Alnico samples after heat treatment 1 and 2. (HT1 indicates heat treatment 1, HT2 indicates heat treatment 2)
Chapter 7 Effect of Field Annealing

\( \alpha_1 \) phase spontaneously aligns in crystallographic \(<100>\) direction, since it’s an energy-favorable direction\[34\]. However, \(<100>\) is the family of \([100], [010], [001]\) directions, which means Fe-Co rich phase will align in three directions without applied magnetic field. In order to obtain anisotropy, a magnetic field is applied so that \( \alpha_1 \) grows in only one of the three \(<100>\). This will not only improve coercivity, but also remanence and energy product. Therefore, we investigated the effect of magnetic field on magnetic properties of melt-spun Alnico alloys.

![Field annealing set up.](image)

Figure 48. Field annealing set up.
Table 9. Compositions of the samples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Al (wt%)</th>
<th>Ni (wt%)</th>
<th>Co (wt%)</th>
<th>Cu (wt%)</th>
<th>Ti (wt%)</th>
<th>Nb (wt%)</th>
<th>Fe (wt%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1(wt%)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2(wt%)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3(wt%)</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4(wt%)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>balance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 48 shows the set up for field annealing. The field is applied by the magnetic pole piece of a vibrating sample magnetometer (VSM). The samples with compositions in Table 9 were field annealed from 770 °C to 810 °C for 10 minutes. 9000 Gauss magnetic field was applied for the whole process. Samples were furnace cooled and their magnetic properties were measured after field annealing.

Figure 49 shows the effect of magnetic field on coercivity of the Alnico samples. It is clear that magnetic field decreases optimal IHT temperature. The presence of a magnetic field during spinodal decomposition may change the magnetic energy term. This could control microstructural evolution, as can be seen in equation 6. Therefore, the optimal temperature is lowered. This can also be used to explain that the magnetic field improves shape anisotropy at relatively low IHT temperature, but destroys it at relatively high IHT temperature. As we can see, the effectiveness of magnetic field also depends on composition of the samples. For sample 1 and sample 2, it seems that the magnetic field
cannot improve their coercivity. In contrast, the presence of a magnetic field improves coercivity of sample 3 and 4 when IHT temperature is below 790 °C. This may result from composition variation of $\alpha_1$ phases in these samples, followed by different ferromagnetic properties. The effects of magnetic field on remanence and energy product are shown in Figure 50 and Figure 51, respectively. As can be seen, both remanence and energy product are improved by the presence of magnetic field.

![Figure 49](image)

**Figure 49.** Effect of magnetic field on the intrinsic coercivity of (a) sample 1, (b) sample 2, (c) sample 3, and (d) sample 4.
Figure 50. Effect of magnetic field on the remanence of (a) sample 1, (b) sample 2, (c) sample 3, and (d) sample 4.
Figure 51. Effect of magnetic field on the energy product of (a) sample 1, (b) sample 2, (c) sample 3, and (d) sample 4.
We selected sample 3 and 4 for full heat treatment (FHT), since they have better magnetic properties. The heat treatment process is shown in Figure 52. As can be seen in Figure 53, sample 3 has a 30% improvement in coercivity, while sample 4 has a 15 to 30%. Remanence has no obvious change. Energy product has minor improvement. Figure 54 shows hysteresis loop of sample 4, a maximum coercivity of 1416 Oe can be obtained.

In summary, field annealing is an effective method to improve magnetic properties of Alnico alloys. The presence of magnetic field decreases optimal IHT temperature, and its effectiveness on magnetic properties varies with chemical composition and IHT temperature.
Figure 53. Magnetic properties of sample 3 and sample 4 after field annealing (FA) and full heat treatment (FHT). Coercivity of (a) sample 3 and (b) sample 4 vary with IHT temperature. Remanence of (c) sample 3 and (d) sample 4 vary with IHT temperature. Energy product of (e) sample 3 and (f) sample 4 vary with IHT temperature. (red lines indicate field annealing, blue lines indicate full heat treatment)
Figure 54. Hysteresis loop of sample 4 after FHT.

IHc=1416 Oe
BR=6.8 KG
(BH)max=2.79 MGOe
Jr/js=0.68
Chapter 8 Conclusion

In conclusion, we tried to improve magnetic properties of Alnico by controlling shape anisotropy and grain microstructure. For shape anisotropy, different alloy compositions and heat treatments were investigated. We found its coercivity is highly sensitive to isothermal heat treatment temperature and time. Co increase spinodal decomposition temperature while it is decreased by Ti. Although secondary and tertiary heat treatments further improve magnetic properties of Alnico while they are not sensitive to heat treatment temperature and time. It is because shape anisotropy has mainly been developed during isothermal heat treatment. For grain microstructure, we found that magnetic properties of melt-spun Alnico ribbons were controlled by wheel speed. Spinning speed at 20 mps yields optimal magnetic properties. We fabricated textured Alnico by setting up a simple casting system. However, its magnetic properties were not improved. Since a steep temperature gradient is not stable during casting process, resulting in a tilt of columnar crystals. In addition, the deleterious effects of γ phase and S may overshadow the benefit of texture.

We studied the effect of alloying additions on the avoidance of γ phase, and found 0 to 1 wt% Sn effectively suppress the formation of γ phase. It is likely that Sn is an α phase stabilizer or tend to decrease the temperature range where γ phase is stable. Ge has a similar effect. However, both of them have deleterious effects on magnetic properties. It is likely that they will ruin shape anisotropy or form impurity phases in Alnico.
We also examined the effect of field annealing on magnetic properties of Alnico. We found that the presence of magnetic field decreases IHT temperature. It is likely that a magnetic field promotes spinodal decomposition. Therefore, the optimal temperature is decreased. For the melt-spun Alnico 9 sample, the maximum coercivity of 1416 Oe can be obtained after FHT.
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84


