

***In situ* ion irradiation of amorphous TiO₂ nanotubes**

Chao Yang¹, Tristan Olsen², Miu Lun Lau³, Kassiopeia A. Smith⁴, Khalid Hattar⁵, Amrita Sen¹,
Yaqiao Wu^{2,6}, Dewen Hou², Badri Narayanan⁷, Min Long³, Janelle P. Wharry^{1,*}, Hui Xiong^{2,6,*}

1 School of Materials Engineering, Purdue University, 205 Gates Road, West Lafayette
IN 47906

2 Micron School of Materials Science & Engineering, Boise State University, 1910
University Drive, Boise ID 83725

3 Department of Computer Science, Boise State University, 1910 University Drive,
Boise ID 83725

4 Fifth Gait Technologies, Colorado Springs CO 80919

5 Sandia National Laboratories, Albuquerque NM 87185

6 Center for Advanced Energy Studies, 995 MK Simpson Blvd, Idaho Falls ID 83401

7 Department of Mechanical Engineering, University of Louisville, 332 Eastern Parkway,
Louisville KY 40292

*Corresponding authors: jwharry@purdue.edu (J. Wharry); clairexiong@boisestate.edu (H.
Xiong)

Abstract

Understanding of structural and morphological evolution in nanomaterials is critical in tailoring their functionality for applications such as energy conversion and storage. Here we examine irradiation effects on the morphology and structure of amorphous TiO₂ nanotubes in comparison with their crystalline counterpart (anatase TiO₂ nanotubes) using high-resolution transmission electron microscopy (TEM), *in situ* ion irradiation TEM, and molecular dynamics (MD) simulations. Anatase TiO₂ nanotubes exhibit morphological and structural stability under irradiation due to their high concentration of grain boundary as defect sinks. On the other hand, amorphous TiO₂ nanotubes undergo irradiation-induced crystallization, with some tubes remaining only partially crystallized. The partially crystalline tubes bend due to internal stresses associated with densification during crystallization as suggested by MD calculations. These results present a novel irradiation-based pathway for potentially tuning structure and morphology of energy storage materials.

Key words

Irradiation, nanotubes, TiO₂, amorphous, crystallization, molecular dynamics

1.0 Introduction

Titanium dioxide (TiO_2) has attracted intensive research interest in a variety of fields due to its outstanding properties such as high dielectric constant, high chemical stability, and high refractive index [1-5]. Nanostructuring of TiO_2 has further led to enhanced performance due to the high surface-to-volume ratio [6-10]. For example, TiO_2 nanotubes ($\text{TiO}_2\text{-NT}$) demonstrate enhanced electrochemical properties as a negative electrode material for rechargeable lithium ion batteries, compared to its bulk TiO_2 counterpart [10]. Research [11-29] has shown that the morphology of $\text{TiO}_2\text{-NT}$ can greatly alter its properties, and researchers have attempted to modify the morphology of $\text{TiO}_2\text{-NT}$ through various approaches such as controlling time and washing treatment in hydrothermal synthesis [30], or electrolyte concentration and water content in electrochemical anodization synthesis [31].

It is well established that ion irradiation introduces defects and regional lattice disorder in solid materials [32]. Theoretical studies of proton irradiation in TiO_2 have shown that grain boundaries in both anatase and rutile polymorphs act as sinks for irradiation induced point defects [33,34]. Nanostructured crystalline TiO_2 has a large volume fraction of surfaces and grain boundaries, which may contribute to a higher resistance to radiation damage. Previous studies have shown that proton irradiation improves the electrochemical performance of both amorphous and anatase $\text{TiO}_2\text{-NTs}$ by creating point defects and extended defects while maintaining the original morphology [35,36]. Nevertheless, limited work has investigated the morphological changes of $\text{TiO}_2\text{-NTs}$ in response to heavy ion irradiation, even though ion beam modification is an effective means of nanomaterial synthesis [37] and morphological tailoring of one-dimensional nanomaterials such as carbon nanotubes [38-40], as well as some two-

dimensional nanomaterials [41,42]. Ion irradiation damage is initiated through a flux of energetic particles, leading to the ionization and displacement of atoms within a target material. Ion irradiation affects the material by transferring energy from the incident projectile to the solid, either through electronic or nuclear stopping, as described in ref. [43]. The atomic structures of metal oxide ceramics are complex [44], leading to a variety of atomic processes in ceramics under irradiation that are not thoroughly understood.

Herein, we report a transmission electron microscopy (TEM) *in situ* Au⁻ ion irradiation study in which we monitor the ion irradiation-induced morphological and structural changes in amorphous and anatase TiO₂-NTs. Post-irradiation high-resolution TEM (HRTEM) characterization reveals irradiation-induced amorphous-to-crystalline transformations. Complementary molecular dynamics (MD) simulations confirm that these irradiation-induced phase transformations have significant implications on the overall structure and morphology of initially amorphous TiO₂-NTs. This work fills the knowledge gap of how ion irradiation affects the morphology of TiO₂-NTs and more generally, provides insight into the potential applications of ion irradiation for tuning the morphological stability of one-dimensional ceramic nanomaterials.

2.0 Results

2.1 Irradiation-Induced Structural & Morphological Changes

A single nanotube in each specimen is tracked throughout the *in situ* irradiation. Figure 1 shows still-frames from TEM videos (complete videos are available in the Supplementary Information) showing the behavior of an amorphous and an anatase TiO₂ nanotube under Au⁻

ion *in situ* irradiation. Both tubes are initially straight with wall thickness of ~ 10 nm and outer diameter ~ 60 nm, which is consistent with their dimensions previously confirmed by SEM and TEM [35]. Almost immediately upon irradiation, the amorphous nanotube begins to bend, and its radius of curvature continues to decrease over a duration of 80 s, until a relatively steady-state curvature is achieved. The nanotube wall thickness and outer diameter do not change appreciably during the irradiation-induced curvature. By contrast, the anatase TiO_2 -NT is dimensionally and morphologically stable over the same irradiation period. While some changes in contrast (circled in Figure 1(b)) are produced in the anatase nanotubes, these features are too small to resolve as defects or phase changes; these features do not appear to accumulate likely due to the high sink strength of the single-walled nanotube surface area [45,46].

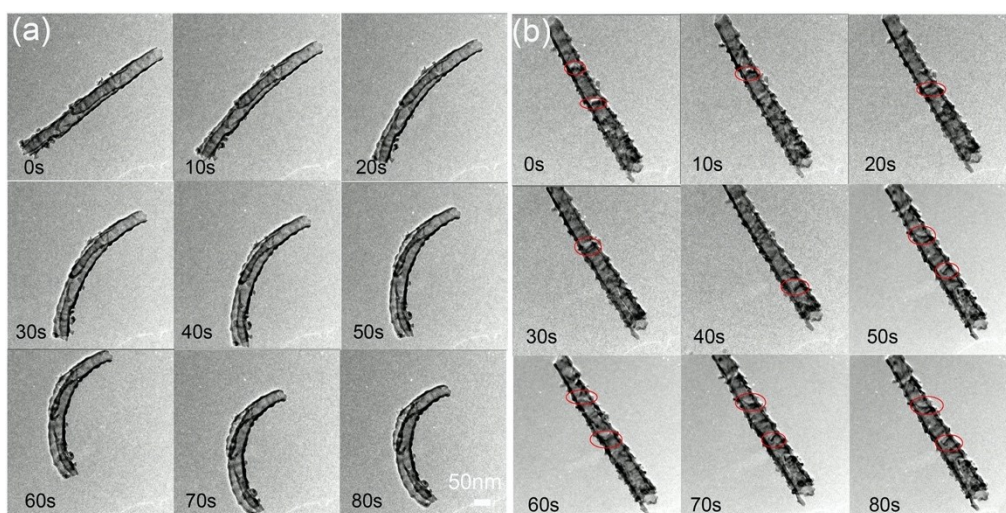


Figure 1: TEM still frames taken at 10 s intervals from 0 to 80 s, showing behavior of an (a) amorphous and (b) anatase TiO_2 nanotube under *in situ* 46 keV Au^- ion irradiation.

After *in situ* irradiation, lower magnification TEM imaging provides a general overview of the aggregate behavior of the amorphous and anatase TiO_2 -NTs upon irradiation (Figure 2). All tubes in the anatase TiO_2 specimen remain straight, and their dimensions appear unaffected by irradiation. Meanwhile only $\sim 15\%$ of the amorphous tubes are bent like the individual tube

tracked during *in situ* irradiation (highlighted with red ovals in Figure 2(a)). There is no apparent correlation between amorphous nanotube length or position, and the tendency to exhibit irradiation-induced curvature. It should also be noted that the curved nanotubes do not have an obvious bending preference, neither concentrically nor toward a specific direction.

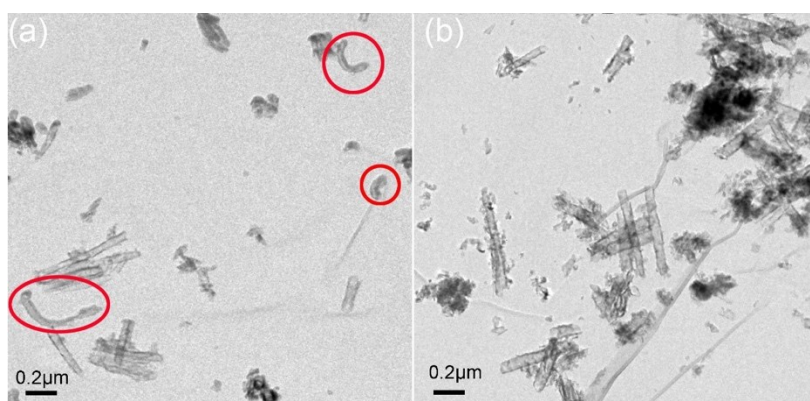


Figure 2: Bright field TEM image of (a) amorphous and (b) anatase TiO₂ nanotubes after irradiation, with irradiation-induced nanotube curvature circled.

HRTEM at various positions along the length of the amorphous nanotubes post-irradiation provides further insight into the mode of curvature. We look first at a typical straight tube in the amorphous sample after irradiation, Figure 3(a). Selected points of examination along the nanotube are labeled and their corresponding HRTEM images are provided in Figure 3(b)-(j); insets provide FFTs and enlarged HRTEM images of the white framed regions to show the lattice spacing. The tube is fully crystallized at all points examined along the nanotube. Although crystal structure cannot be definitively confirmed through HRTEM lattice spacing, the interplanar distance is 3.52 Å, which is at least consistent with the (101) plane of anatase TiO₂. Additional TEM images of straight tube in the amorphous sample after irradiation are provided in the Figure S3 (Supplementary Information), revealing that the amorphous tubes consistently exhibit irradiation-induced crystallization.

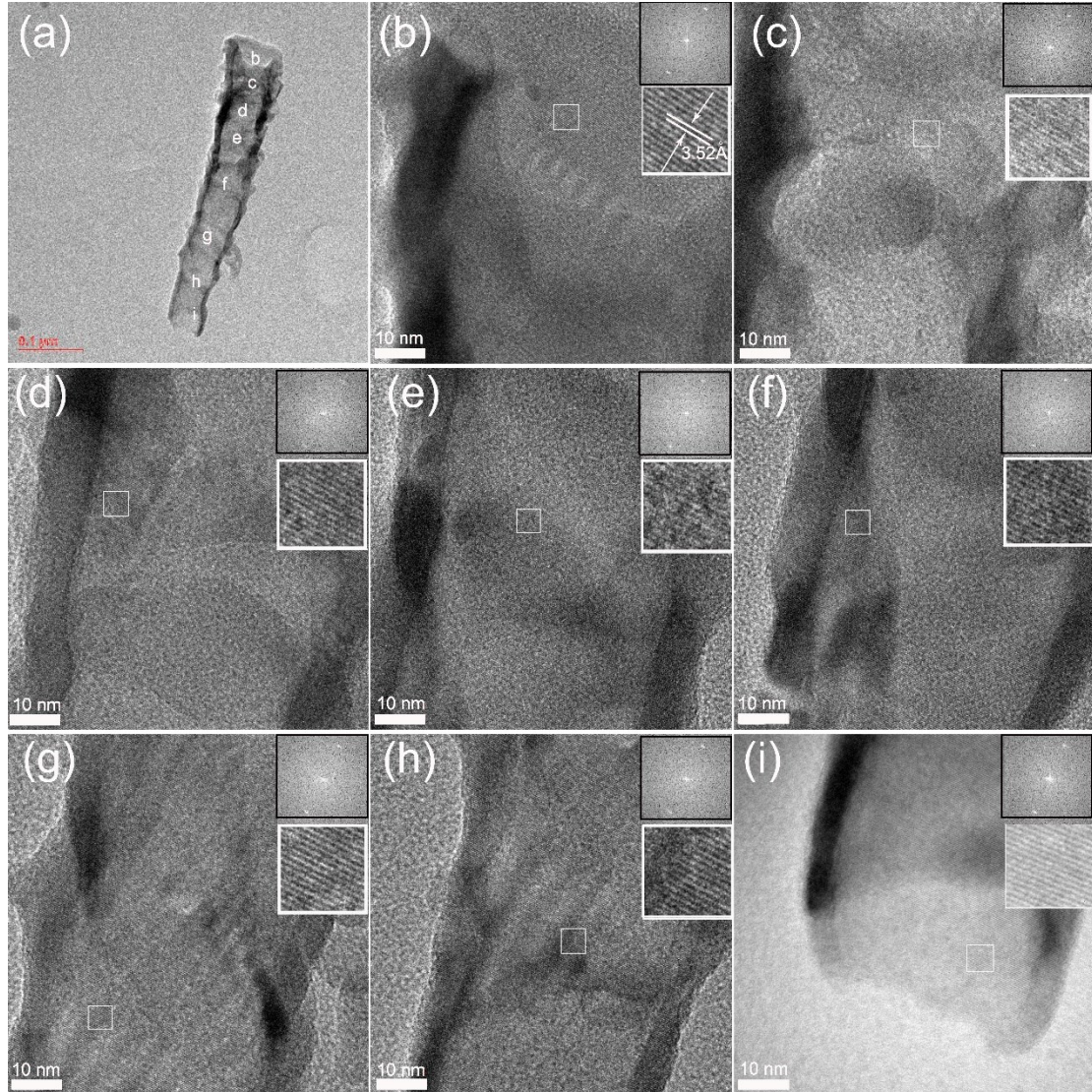


Figure 3: (a) TEM image of a typical straight tube in amorphous sample after irradiation, (b)-(f) HRTEM images corresponding to labels b-f marked in (a). Insets on HRTEM images show FFT and high magnification lattice structure of the white boxed regions, which reveal irradiation-induced amorphous-to-anatase crystallization.

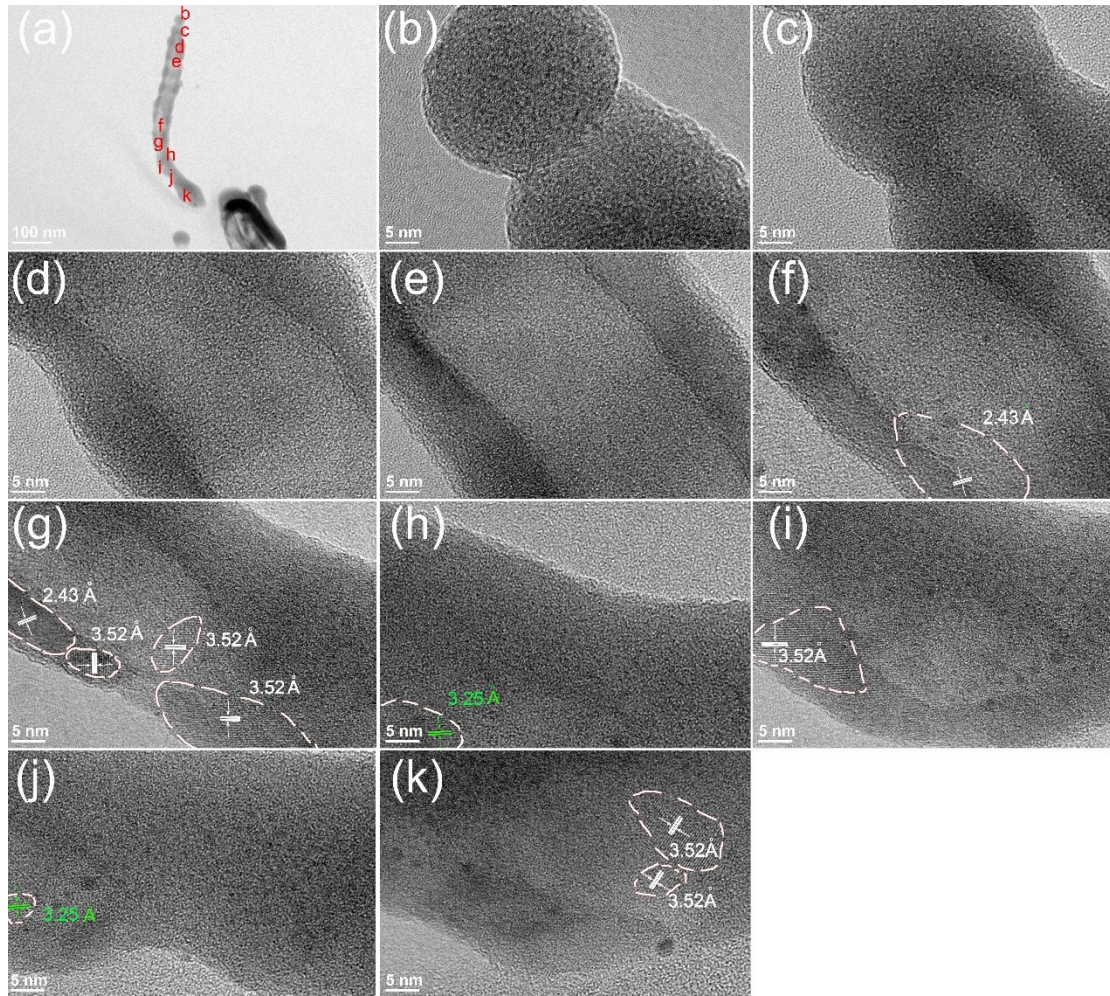


Figure 4: (a) TEM image of a typical curved tube in amorphous sample after irradiation, (b)-(k) HRTEM images corresponding to labels b-k marked in (a). HRTEM images show the nanotube remains amorphous at positions (b)-(e) and undergoes partial crystallization at positions (f)-(k), with dashed lines encircling crystalline regions.

A typical curved tube in the amorphous sample after irradiation is shown in Figure 4(a), with selected points of examination labeled and their corresponding HRTEM images are provided in Figure 4(b)-(k). The portion of the tube that remains straight (i.e. regions b-e) are still amorphous. However, the curved portion of the tube (i.e. regions f-k) has partially crystallized into nanosized crystalline regions, encircled by white dashed lines. The interplanar distance measured from the HRTEM images indicates that the majority of the nanocrystals may be anatase, with interplanar distance 3.52 Å for (101) planes and 2.43 Å for

(103) planes, all identified in white (Figure 4(f),(g),(i),(k)). A small portion of nanocrystals may be rutile, with interplanar distance of 3.25 Å for (110) planes, marked in green (Figure 4(h),(j)). Additional TEM images of curved tubes in the amorphous specimen after irradiation are provided in Figures S4-S5 (Supplementary Information), confirming that the curved nanotubes retain amorphous regions that remain straight and their curved regions are partially crystallized.

2.2 Volume Calculations

Figure 5 shows snapshots of the CMD simulations of equilibrated anatase and amorphous TiO_2 . The results show that the equilibrated anatase TiO_2 has a simulation cell volume of $72.6 \times 10^6 \text{ Å}^3$ at 300 K (cell dimensions $526.8 \text{ Å} \times 476.1 \text{ Å} \times 271.9 \text{ Å}$). Meanwhile, the amorphous TiO_2 cell volume is $116.7 \times 10^6 \text{ Å}^3$ at 300 K (cell dimensions $632.9 \text{ Å} \times 573.9 \text{ Å} \times 321.4 \text{ Å}$). This represents a 60% volume increase from anatase to amorphous at the same conditions. The result is consistent with experimental findings considering the atoms in an amorphous phase are not closely packed, with considerable free volume existing between atoms.

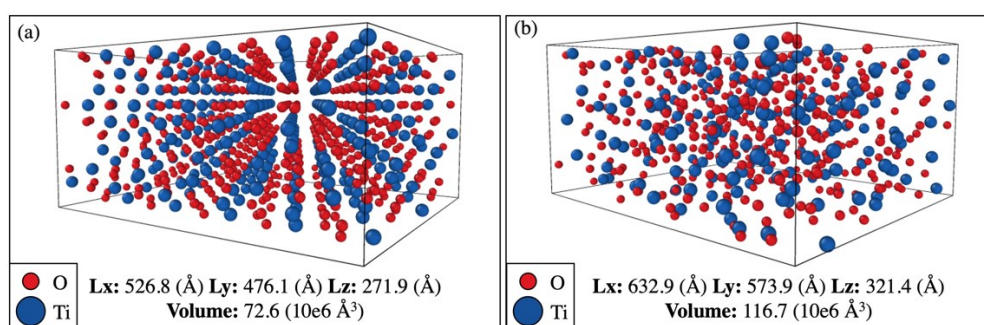


Figure 5. Comparisons of volume between (a) anatase and (b) amorphous TiO_2 in the CMD simulations at 300 K, with L_x , L_y , and L_z showing cell dimensions in x, y, and z directions.

3.0 Discussion

3.1 Irradiation-Induced Crystallization

Ion and electron irradiation have been shown to generate highly localized nanocrystalline domains (~10 nm) in amorphous materials in 10s-100s of seconds [47-50]. The nanocrystallites observed in the curved nanotubes are consistent with these reports. Qin, et al. [51] presents a foundational theory on the mechanism of irradiation-induced nucleation of nanocrystallites in an amorphous material that involves a competition between energy injection and export. This mechanism is in contrast to the classical nucleation theory, which simply involves minimization of the Gibbs free energy. Qin's theory states that irradiating particles *inject* a total energy, ΔE_n , into the material, which is dissipated through:

$$\Delta E_n = \Delta E_{dis} + \Delta E_{sto} \quad (3)$$

where ΔE_{dis} is the energy released to the environment by atomic rearrangement, and ΔE_{sto} is the energy stored as point defects that create additional disorder in the system. But at the same time, the original amorphous phase is a high-energy metastable state, which will *export* energy as the atoms will tend to rearrange into a lower-energy (i.e. crystalline) configuration. This crystalline ordering will tend to occur during the time intervals between the arrival of two successive irradiating particles and will occur through thermal conduction from the irradiated region to the surrounding amorphous matrix. This exported energy, ΔE_r is:

$$\Delta E_r = \Delta E_{dis} + \Delta E_{rea} \quad (4)$$

where ΔE_{rea} is the difference in free energy between the original amorphous state and the post-rearrangement crystalline state. Thus, the total energy change in the irradiated region is

$$\Delta E_t = \Delta E_r + \Delta E_n$$

in which the negative and positive terms represent energy export and injection, respectively. Crystallization will occur if sufficient numbers of atoms rearrange

themselves during irradiation, such that energy export exceeds energy injection, according to the inequality:

$$AE_T > AE_{TP}, \text{ i.e. } AE_{T\text{reg}} > AE_{SLD} \quad (5)$$

By virtue of the tube nanostructure, the large surface-area-to-volume ratio promotes enhanced defect annihilation at the amorphous nanotube surfaces, resulting in reduced defect storage in the tubes. Irradiation additionally increases atomic mobility in amorphous materials [52,53], and thus there is an even greater likelihood of energy dissipation. Hence, the inequality tends toward $AE_{T\text{reg}} \gg AE_{SLD}$, which can explain the predominant behavior of complete crystallization.

In order to explain the heterogeneous behavior in which some of the amorphous nanotubes form nanocrystalline domains (rather than complete crystallization), one must also account for the ion implantation profiles (i.e. ion range) and the energy loss mechanisms.

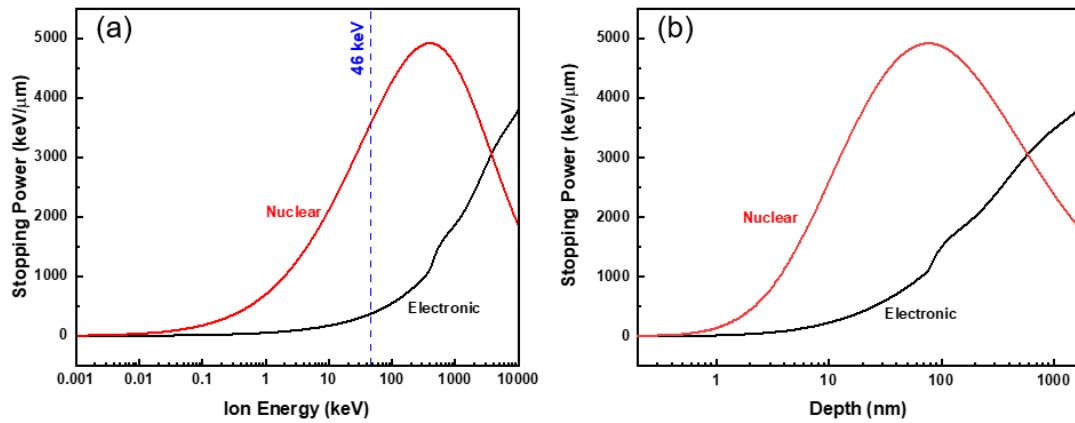


Figure 6: Electronic and nuclear stopping power for Au ions in anatase TiO_2 as a function of (a) ion energy, and (b) ion target depth.

Ions incident on a target material lose energy along a continuum through nuclear stopping and electronic stopping [43, 54]. Nuclear stopping [55] involves direct ion-atom

collisions and is understood through the binary collision approximation, in which a displacement cascade is generated and produces Frenkel type defects in ceramics. On the other hand, electronic stopping [56] involves inelastic collisions between the incident ion and valence electrons in the target material, resulting in excitation of the incident and target ions. Electronic stopping is typically understood through two models: the Coulomb explosion model [57,58] or the inelastic thermal spike model [54,59]. Electrostatic potential energy generated by ionizations along the ion trajectory is converted: in the former model, to atomic kinetic energy, and in the latter model, converted through electron-phonon coupling to effectively produce local heating along the ion trajectory. The extent of irradiation-induced crystallization – and the size of nanocrystallites formed – decreases with increasing electronic stopping [60,61]. Thus, partial crystallization may occur when the ions incident on a given nanotube primarily undergo electronic energy losses. The SRIM simulation for Au⁺ ions incident on TiO₂ shows that nuclear stopping is approximately an order of magnitude greater than electronic stopping at the irradiation energy of 46 keV, Figure 6. This predominance of nuclear stopping, which generates sufficient rearrangements to satisfy the inequality in Eq. (3), produces the majority of fully crystallized nanotubes, while fewer partially crystallized nanotubes form through electronic stopping. Alternatively, because the nanotubes are randomly dispersed onto the carbon TEM grid, they are randomly oriented relative to the incident ion beam.

The SRIM simulation shows that the 46 keV Au⁺ ion implantation peak in amorphous TiO₂ is located near 30 nm, Figure 7. Since nanotube wall thickness is ~10 nm, many of the incident ions will completely pass through the target if the angle of incidence is normal to the lateral

direction of the nanotube. Such a configuration would inherently limit the extent of nanocrystallite formation and could thus explain the partial crystallization of some tubes.

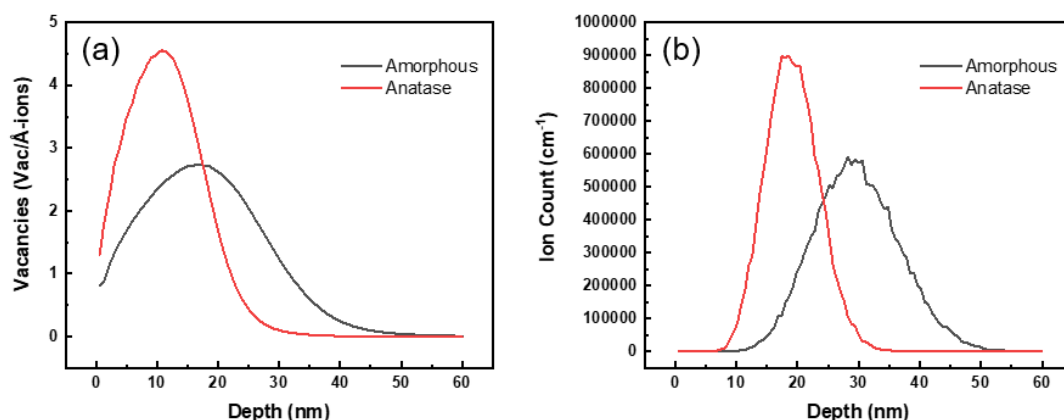


Figure 7: Comparison of (a) vacancy production and (b) ion implantation distributions for 46 keV Au ions in amorphous and anatase TiO₂ as calculated using SRIM in detailed calculation mode with full damage cascades.

3.2 Nanotube Bending Mechanism

Stress is needed for any solid-state material to deform. As shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4, curved tubes have partially crystallized under irradiation, while straight tubes are fully crystallized from the initially amorphous phase. Thus, the bending likely occurs due to internal stresses generated during irradiation-induced partial crystallization in the amorphous tubes. This is supported by the MD volume calculations, which confirm that significant densification (i.e. volume decrease) occurs during the amorphous-to-crystalline transformation. If the irradiation-induced crystallization occurs unevenly or heterogeneously – as in the partially crystallized nanotubes – internal stress can build up as different regions of the nanotube densify to differing extents. Consequently, sufficient torque can build up in the middle (lengthwise) of the tubes so as to induce bending into a “C”-shape (the crystallization-induced internal stresses

are more easily relaxed near the free ends of the nanotube, thus the bending is confined to the central region along the length of the tubes). The amorphous nanotubes that experience complete crystallization are not bent, because they lack amorphous-crystalline interfaces where internal stresses would have arisen due to volume differences between the amorphous and crystalline phases.

Ion irradiation-induced densification is a well-known phenomenon that has been observed principally in oxide ceramics, as well as other ceramic [62] and metallic [63,64] materials. This densification is sometimes associated with deformation, as in work from Snoeks, et al. [65], who conducted a 4 MeV Xe^{4+} ion irradiation on amorphous silica (SiO_2) thin films containing 5 μm trenches. Their trenches exhibited dramatic macroscopic contraction in the direction of the ion beam, and expansion perpendicular to the ion beam; these deformations did not saturate with irradiation fluence. This deformation-densification mechanism has been attributed to local heating and thermal expansion around ion tracks [65-67], similar to the established phenomenon of ion irradiation-induced deformation in glasses under extreme ion energies ($\sim 100\text{s MeV}$) [68]. Alternatively, irradiation-enhanced Newtonian plastic shear flow associated with local melting [69] has also been suggested as a mechanism for stress relaxation that can generate macroscopic deformations. However, materials that undergo ion irradiation-induced densification – namely, amorphous silica [65-67] and amorphous hydroxyapatite thin films [62] – remain amorphous even upon densification. Although the crystal structures of TiO_2 differ from those observed to densify under ion irradiation, there is nevertheless support for a novel ion irradiation-induced densification mechanism via phase transformation (i.e. crystallization) observed herein.

Most similar to the phase transformation mechanism in the present study may be the electron irradiation-induced densification study in silica glass from Buscarino, et al. [70]. They observed polyamorphic transformations under electron irradiation, which were associated with the nucleation of localized regions containing high defect concentration and high density, dispersed throughout the material volume. Nevertheless, the irradiating particle – i.e. electrons – cannot alone explain the transformations, as other reports show that electron irradiation does not induce phase transformations in amorphous silica [70,71] and amorphous silica nanoballs [72]. Finally, it is also worth noting that irradiation-enhanced densification has also been observed [73,74] and modeled [75,76] in crystalline UO_2 oxide nuclear fuel, generally under neutron irradiation. That mechanism is also unique: in UO_2 , reduction of micro-macroscale porosity (associated with nuclear fission gas bubbles) occurs through a sintering and bubble-closure mechanism [75].

Other factors beyond phase transformation and atomic-level stresses may also influence the nanotube curvature observed in this study. Physical constraints from surrounding nanotubes within a cluster of nanotubes could help maintain the structural integrity of a given nanotube, as previously suggested for proton irradiated anatase TiO_2 [35]. Additionally, the nanotubes are randomly scattered on a carbon membrane TEM grid. Differences in the amount and nature of the physical contact between a tube and the carbon membrane could lead to different thermal conduction behaviors. For example, tubes having greater contact area with the carbon membrane may be able to more effectively conduct heat (generated by the incident irradiation) away from the tube. Finally, the high surface energy of TiO_2 -NTs may also contribute to the driving force for crystallization.

4.0 Conclusion

In situ TEM ion irradiation was carried out on amorphous and anatase TiO₂ nanotubes, with complementary molecular dynamics simulations to calculate the volume of amorphous and anatase TiO₂. Anatase TiO₂ nanotubes exhibit morphological stability throughout irradiation. Amorphous TiO₂ nanotubes undergo irradiation-induced crystallization. While the majority of the initially amorphous tubes become fully crystallized, some tubes remain only partially crystallized. These partially crystalline tubes also bend during irradiation, due to internal stresses associated with the densification that occurs through crystallization, as confirmed by MD calculations. This mechanism presents a novel irradiation-based pathway for tuning the structure and morphology of advanced energy storage anode materials.

5.0 Methods

5.1 Materials

The TiO₂ nanotubes were synthesized by electrochemical anodization; details of this process can be found in previous works [35, 36]. In brief, pure titanium foil (0.127 mm, 99.8%, Alfa Aesar) was electropolished [77], followed by a three-step sonication cleaning in acetone, isopropanol, and deionized (DI) water each for 5 min. The anodization was done in a two-electrode cell with Ti foil as the working electrode and a Pt mesh as the counter and reference electrode. The back of the Ti foil was covered by protective tapes to ensure uniform current distribution. The anodization was carried out for 10 min under a constant voltage of 15 V in an electrolyte of 0.36 M ammonium fluoride (Aldrich) in 95 vol% formamide (Fisher) and 5 vol%

DI water. The anodized specimens were then ultrasonically cleaned in DI water for 30 s. The as-prepared specimens were amorphous, as confirmed by X-ray diffraction (XRD) and TEM with selected area electron diffraction (SAED) shown in Figures S1 and S2, respectively (Supplementary Information). The crystalline specimens were prepared by annealing the as-prepared specimens in a mixture of 20% O₂ and 80% Ar at 450°C for 4 h.

5.2 Irradiation & Characterization

Both amorphous and anatase TiO₂ nanotube samples for *in situ* Au ion irradiation with TEM were prepared by scraping the nanotubes off the Ti substrates and then suspending them on carbon-stabilized formvar film 300 mesh TEM grids. *In situ* TEM irradiation was performed at the I³TEM housed in the Ion Beam Laboratory at Sandia National Laboratories. The I³TEM is a highly modified JEOL 2100 TEM operated at 200 kV with a port for ion beamlines perpendicular to the electron beam [78], enabling ion irradiation or implantation concurrent to real-time TEM imaging. For this experiment, a 6 MV High Voltage Engineering Europa Tandem accelerator was used to generate a 46 keV Au⁺ ion beam. A 25 nA beam was incident over a 0.20 cm² area on the TiO₂ nanotubes at ambient temperature. The beam flux was 7.7×10^{11} ions/cm²-s, and was maintained for ~5 min, to a total fluence of $\sim 2.3 \times 10^{14}$ ions/cm². Bright field TEM videos were captured of individual nanotubes throughout the duration of *in situ* irradiation (~few minutes).

Nuclear and electronic stopping powers were calculated as a function of incident Au⁺ ion energy for anatase TiO₂ (density 3.89 g/cm³) using the “Stopping/Range Tables” module in Stopping and Range of Ions in Matter (SRIM) [79]. For 46 keV Au ions specifically (as in the

case of the present experiment), vacancy and ion implantation profiles were determined using SRIM in “Detailed Calculation with full Damage Cascades” mode based upon recent recommendations from Agarwal, et al. [80] regarding the accuracy of this mode for calculating vacancy production. The displacement energies for Ti and O atoms in SRIM were set to the default values of 25 and 28 eV, respectively. A simulated anatase TiO₂ layer was created by setting the SRIM target density to 3.89 g/cm³ [81]. For simulated amorphous TiO₂, the density was set to 2.43 g/cm³, based on an estimate calculated by:

$$\rho_{amorph} = \rho_{ana} \left(\frac{V_{ana}}{V_{amorph}} \right) \quad (1)$$

where ρ_{ana} is the density of anatase TiO₂, and V_{ana} and V_{amorph} are the molecular dynamics calculated unit cell volumes for anatase and amorphous TiO₂, respectively (see Section 5.3). Figure 7 provides the SRIM detailed calculation results for vacancy production and ion implantation; Figures S3 and S4 (Supplementary Information) are shown for a comparison of damage profiles across various SRIM calculation modes. The density difference between the amorphous and the anatase TiO₂ results in the vacancy production and ion implantation peaks being separated by ~100 Å.

Post-irradiation TEM characterization was used to provide information on the yielded morphology and structure. This work was conducted on a FEI (now Thermo Fisher Scientific) Tecnai TF30 FEG TEM operated at 300 kV at the Microscopy and Characterization Suite (MaCS) in the Center for Advanced Energy Studies (CAES) as well as on a FEI Tecnai TF20 FEG TEM operated at 200 kV at Purdue University. The irradiated nanotubes were characterized using bright field TEM and HRTEM.

5.3 Molecular Dynamics

Classical Molecular Dynamics (CMD) simulations were performed to compute the difference in volume between amorphous and anatase phase of TiO_2 using LAMMPS. A reactive force field (ReaxFF) was employed to describe the interactions between Ti and O atoms [82]. To assess the suitability of ReaxFF for investigating TiO_2 , we computed the cohesive energy and oxygen vacancy formation energy of anatase TiO_2 . The O-vacancy formation energy E_v was calculated by the following equation as:

$$E_v = E_{\text{TiO}_2, v} - E_{\text{TiO}_2} - \frac{E_{\text{O}_2}}{2} \quad (2)$$

where $E_{\text{TiO}_2, v}$ is the energy of a TiO_2 supercell containing 10 unit cells and one O-vacancy, E_{TiO_2} is the energy of pristine TiO_2 supercell containing 10 unit cells, and E_{O_2} is the binding energy of an isolated O_2 molecule. The ReaxFF predictions for cohesive energy (-19.08 eV/ TiO_2) and O-vacancy formation energy (5.12 eV/ TiO_2) of anatase TiO_2 were close to those obtained from previous density functional theory calculations with hybrid screened exchange functional [83].

All CMD calculations were performed using LAMMPS [84] to compute the difference in volume between anatase and amorphous TiO_2 phases under ambient conditions. To construct a representative configuration for amorphous TiO_2 , a computational supercell of anatase (55.67 nm $\times$ 47.09 nm $\times$ 26.89 nm, or 20250 atoms) was prepared by replicating the unit cell (taken from Materials Project [85]) ten times along each lattice vector. Periodic boundary conditions were employed along all directions. Thereafter, the super cell was equilibrated at 5000 K for 200 ps with a timestep of 1.0 fs, before quenching to 300 K at a cooling rate of 2.5×10^{13} K using isothermal-isobaric (NPT) ensemble. The amorphous configuration was

equilibrated for an additional 100 ps at 300 K with a timestep of 1.0 fs within the canonical ensemble. The radial distribution functions of the as-prepared amorphous structured were similar to previous reports. The volume was calculated using LAMMPS internal subroutines by multiplying the length of the box in each axis direction.

Data Availability Statement

All data generated or analysed during this study are included in this published article (and its supplementary information files).

Conflicts of interest/Competing interests

None.

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