

# 基于双光子 3D 打印的 pH 响应型微尺度柔性单关节加工方法

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**摘要** 微型软体机器人通常具有结构尺寸小、柔性可变形等特征,在生物传感以及靶向载药等方面具有广阔的应用前景。刺激响应型水凝胶材料对外界刺激具有膨胀收缩的能力,是一种优异的微型软体机器人本体材料。目前针对提升微型软体机器人变形能力的研究主要聚焦于材料性能的提升和加工工艺的优化上,而通过微型软体机器人关节结构优化来提升其变形性能的研究相对较少。鉴于此,笔者提出了一种基于双光子聚合加工的双层膜弧形关节的设计方法,有效提升了双层膜关节的形变能力。通过改变双光子聚合过程中的激光功率和扫描速度,可有效调节 pH 响应材料的溶胀响应特性,进而获得双层膜关节的变形或驱动能力。进一步,笔者制备了圆心角不同的双层膜弧形关节,结果表明:不同圆心角的双层膜弧形关节在 pH 响应下的形变能力具有明显差异,当圆心角为 240° 时形变率最大,形变率是传统直角形双层膜关节的 6.73 倍。基于双层膜设计和构建的弧形关节具有良好的稳定性和形变能力,为微型机器人的高效驱动提供了新的设计思路。

**关键词** 激光技术; 双光子聚合; 微尺度; 双层膜; 变形性能

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## 1 引言

微型软体驱动器通常具有结构尺寸小、柔性可变形等特征,在载药运输、组织修复等生物医学领域展现出了巨大的应用潜力,受到了研究人员越来越多的关注<sup>[1-3]</sup>。水凝胶具有良好的生物兼容性,通过化学修饰或者物理掺杂的方式可以使其具有外界刺激响应特性,因此水凝胶被认为是制备微型软体驱动器的理想材料之一<sup>[4]</sup>。水凝胶不仅可以通过掺杂和化学修饰的方法来获得刺激响应特性,还可以通过对其结构进行优化设计,使其成为具备一定变形或驱动功能的微型软体驱动器<sup>[5]</sup>。

部分刺激响应型水凝胶具有受激吸水溶胀的性质,但是如果仅利用溶胀特性来制作驱动器,则其可控性和变形能力都难以满足需求<sup>[6-7]</sup>。Podstawczyk 等<sup>[8]</sup>采用掺杂磁性纳米粒子的水凝胶油墨打印了具有梯度磁响应特性的软驱动器;Gregg 等<sup>[9]</sup>制备了由碳纳米管和 p-NIPAAm 组成的复合水凝胶结构,其中的碳纳米管具有高光吸收性和导热性,在光照下可实

现水凝胶的快速可逆化驱动。一方面,掺杂粒子能够赋予水凝胶全新的理化性质,如光学、热学、磁性等性质,或改变水凝胶自身的特性,如流变特性、杨氏模量等,使其具有更大的变形能力或刺激响应速度<sup>[10-11]</sup>;另一方面,过度掺杂或掺杂不均会导致所制作的微型化驱动器的机械稳定性有所下降,进而降低了微型驱动器的使用寿命与普适性。

针对上述问题,研究人员提出了采用双层异质结构来制作微型驱动器和执行器的方案<sup>[12-14]</sup>。该方案的基本原理是:在同一外界刺激下,不同打印参数加工的双层结构具有不同的溶胀特点,导致双层结构的应力应变不匹配,结构向溶胀率较小的一侧弯曲,从而具备驱动能力<sup>[15-18]</sup>。Li 等<sup>[19]</sup>利用掩模光刻的方法制备了半径约为 3 mm 的“花瓣”形双层异质结构,并利用该结构在 pH 约为 9.58 的溶液中实现了对磁性微球的捕获。Ma 等<sup>[20]</sup>利用超分子胶水将热响应水凝胶与 pH 响应水凝胶相结合制备了具有双重刺激响应能力的驱动器,其最大可以实现 720° 的弯曲变形。此外,Cheng 等<sup>[21]</sup>通过诱导液晶网络取向实现了具有光

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热响应的类毛虫结构的驱动器,并实现了其在发丝上的爬行运动。

在微型驱动器制造方面,双/多光子聚合方法具有极佳的精度和良好的可编程性<sup>[22-26]</sup>。研究表明,通过改变聚合参数(如激光强度和扫描速度)调整双层膜结构交联密度差异的方式,双光子聚合能够实现可重构的微驱动器在单一材料中的一步打印<sup>[18]</sup>。然而,微型驱动器关节结构本身的形状对其形状变形能力影响的研究目前还比较缺乏。

基于双光子聚合技术,结合现有的微型机器人双层膜关节设计,笔者设计了一种弧形双层膜关节结构。这种弧形结构具有良好的稳定性和更强的形变能力,相较于传统的直边双层膜关节结构,其形变能力提升了 673%。笔者基于这种双层膜弧形关节设计了多种微型结构,并展示了其形变能力。本研究结果表明,这种关节结构具有更大的形变量和较为稳定的结构状态,为微型机器人的高效驱动提供了新的设计思路。

## 2 实验材料和方法

### 2.1 实验材料

pH 响应水凝胶是制作微型机器人常用的材料之一<sup>[7, 24, 27]</sup>。丙烯酸(AAc)的羧基基团具有在碱性溶液中离子化、在酸性溶液中去离子化的特性,为维持水凝胶内部的局部电中性,溶液中的离子在碱性条件下进入水凝胶导致水凝胶内部渗透压升高从而吸水溶胀,在酸性条件下排出水凝胶导致内部渗透压下降从而去溶胀<sup>[18]</sup>。实验中使用 pH 响应水凝胶作为弧形双层膜的加工材料。

pH 响应水凝胶制备材料包括丙烯酸(AAc,纯度为 99%)、N-异丙基丙烯酰胺(NIPAAm)、聚乙烯吡咯烷酮(PVP)、乳酸乙酯(EL,纯度为 98%)、4,4-二(二乙氨基)二苯甲酮(EMK,纯度为 97%)、N,N-二甲基甲酰胺(DMF,纯度为 99.5%)、二季戊四醇五丙烯酸酯(DPEPA,含 $\leq 650$  mg/L MEHQ 稳定剂)、三乙醇胺(TEA)。

pH 响应水凝胶制备过程:在实验室温度(25 °C)下,将 4.0 g N-异丙基丙烯酰胺(NIPAAm)、2.0 mL 丙烯酸(AAc)和 0.375 g 聚乙烯吡咯烷酮(PVP)添加到 2.5 mL 乳酸乙酯(EL)中,室温下搅拌 12 h 使之完全溶解。取 2 mL 所得溶液、0.32 mL 二季戊四醇五丙烯酸酯(DPEPA)、0.4 mL 三乙醇胺(TEA)和 80  $\mu$ L EMK/DMF 溶液(溶液中 EMK 的质量分数为 20%)混合,搅拌均匀,反应 12 h。pH 响应水凝胶制成后,将其保存于黄光条件下,避免光照。

### 2.2 实验设备和方法

实验加工设备为双光子打印机(型号 Photonic professional GT2, Nanoscribe GmbH, 德国),其输出激光的波长 780 nm,脉冲宽度为 80~100 fs。

实验表征设备为荧光显微镜(型号 ECLIPSE Ti-E, Nikon, 日本)、扫描电子显微镜(SEM, 型号 Quattro S, ThermoFisher Scientific, 美国)。

首先,为了探究激光功率( $P$ )和扫描速度( $S$ )这两个打印参数对加工结构响应的 pH 阈值是否有影响,通过改变打印参数加工了一组微手型结构,其中,扫描速度( $S$ )为 10000~25000  $\mu$ m/s(扫描速度步长为 2500  $\mu$ m/s),激光功率为 15~35 mW(功率间隔为 5 mW),如图 1(a)所示。图 1(b)、(c)为微手型结构的光学图片和 SEM 图片。通过改变激光功率与扫描速度得到了 35 组数据,所用 pH 响应材料的响应阈值范围为 7~8,如图 1(d)、(e)所示。通过增大激光功率或减小扫描速度打印的致密层可以增加水凝胶中羧基基团的交联密度,通过减小激光功率或增大扫描速度打印的疏松层可以减小水凝胶中羧基基团的交联密度,这使得致密层和疏松层在相同的 pH 环境下可以实现差异性溶胀<sup>[18]</sup>。从图 1(d)、(e)可以看出:当功率相同时,在 10000  $\mu$ m/s 和 22500  $\mu$ m/s 扫描速度下打印的微手型结构的膨胀值差别最大;当扫描速度相同时,35 mW 和 20 mW 激光功率下打印的微手型结构的膨胀值差别最大,而且当激光功率大于 30 mW 后,加工过程中结构易被破坏。因此,实验中选择激光功率 25 mW、扫描速度 10000  $\mu$ m/s 作为致密层(交联密度较大)的加工参数,选择激光功率 20 mW 和扫描速度 22500  $\mu$ m/s 作为疏松层(交联密度较小)的加工参数。

## 3 实验结果与讨论

### 3.1 弧形关节结构的加工与优化

对于弧形关节而言,关节的初始形状会对实验中的形变产生影响。实验中采用的弧形关节的长度为 50  $\mu$ m,此时弧的半径可以通过对应的圆心角  $\alpha$  的大小进行计算,如表 1 所示。在弧形结构设计过程中,当环境 pH 值改变时,薄的微结构比厚的微结构的响应速度更快,因此将疏松层和致密层的厚度比设置为 2:1<sup>[18, 28]</sup>。为了减小基底摩擦力的影响,在弧形结构的致密层中间位置增加了一个圆形固定支点,它可避免弧形结构在显影结束后与玻璃基底粘连<sup>[29]</sup>。支点与致密层的交联密度相同,且不会影响弧形结构的溶胀响应,如图 2(a)所示。这样就可以观察弧形结构在近似自由状态下的形变能力。图 2(b)为圆心角不同的弧形结构示意图。图 2(c)为弧形结构在去离子水中的初始形态。水凝胶结构处于水中时会发生一定程度的溶胀,因此其形态与图 2(b)所示的设计结构会有所差异。弧形关节在实验过程中进行了多次收缩膨胀,为了观察微结构的完整性,拍摄了其 SEM 图。从 SEM 图中可以观察到弧形关节的双层膜特征保留完好,如图 2(d)所示。上述实验表明,在弧长度相同的情况下,弧的初

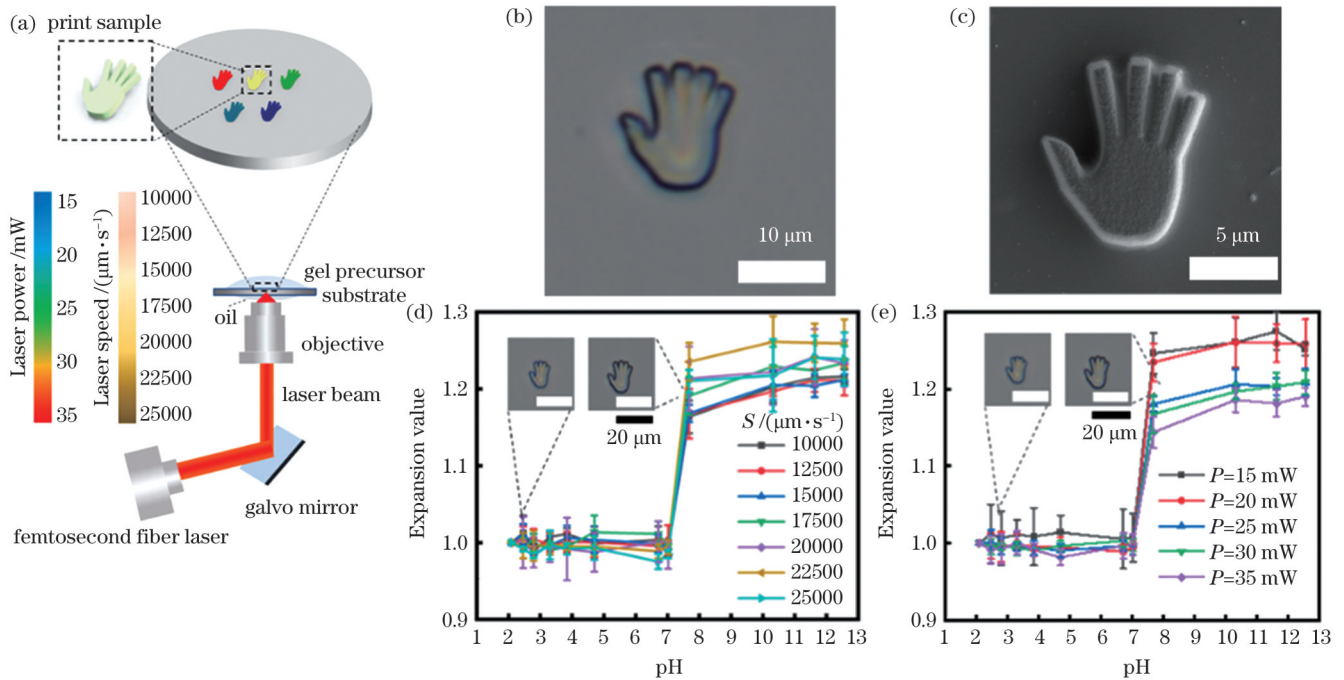


图 1 基于双光子聚合的 pH 响应型水凝胶的加工以及结构的 pH 响应能力。(a) 双光子聚合技术打印示意图；(b) 打印手型结构的光学图片；(c) 打印手型结构的 SEM 图片；(d) 激光功率为 20 mW 时，不同扫描速度下加工的手型结构的 pH 响应能力与特性；(e) 打印速度为 22500  $\mu\text{m}/\text{s}$  时，不同激光功率下加工的手型结构的 pH 响应能力与特性

Fig. 1 Processing of pH-responsive hydrogels based on two-photon polymerization and pH responsiveness of the structures. (a) Schematic diagram of printing by two-photon polymerization; (b) optical images of printed hand-shaped structures; (c) SEM image of the printed hand-shaped structures; (d) pH responsiveness and properties of the hand-shaped structure processed with different scanning speeds at the laser power of 20 mW; (e) pH responsiveness and characteristics of the hand-shaped structure processed with different laser powers at the scanning speed of 22500  $\mu\text{m}/\text{s}$

始弯曲程度对弧形双层膜关节的形变能力有很大影响。

表 1 弧形结构对应的圆心角  $\alpha$  和半径

Table 1 Corresponding central angle  $\alpha$  and radius of the curved structure

No.	Central angle / ( $^\circ$ )	Radius / $\mu\text{m}$
1	60	47.74
2	120	23.87
3	180	15.91
4	200	14.32
5	220	13.02
6	240	11.94
7	300	9.55

为进一步探究初始弯曲程度对弧形双层膜关节形变性能的影响，对不同弧形结构的形变性能进行了对比。图 3(a) 是弧形结构的初始状态，此时由于水凝胶浸入水中，圆心角为  $60^\circ \sim 240^\circ$  的弧形结构的初始形态发生微小的溶胀变化。当圆心角为  $300^\circ$  时，由于弧形关节本身结构的影响，其两端遇水膨胀后触碰在一起。图 3(b) 是加入碱性溶液后弧形关节结构的状态。由于圆心角为  $300^\circ$  的弧形关节本身结构的影响，其两端

遇水膨胀后抵在一起，因此加入碱溶液后其没有明显的先收缩后膨胀的形态变化。圆心角为  $60^\circ$  的弧形关节由于其本身结构的限制，形态无明显变化。对于圆心角为  $120^\circ \sim 240^\circ$  的弧形关节来说，随着角度增大，整个结构向内弯曲的状态越来越明显，其中圆心角为  $240^\circ$  的弧形关节的两端可以相互触碰。图 3(c) 显示了弧形关节最终的溶胀状态。圆心角为  $60^\circ$  的弧形关节的状态与其初始状态、膨胀过程中的状态相似，但其形变能力很弱；圆心角为  $300^\circ$  的弧形关节的状态与其初始状态、溶胀过程中的状态相比，圆弧的两端已分离，但其相比其他弧形关节缺少向内收缩的过程，从而导致其形变能力同样较弱；圆心角为  $120^\circ \sim 240^\circ$  的弧形关节的最终状态与其初始状态、膨胀过程中的状态相比，在经过先向内收缩之后向外膨胀的形态变化后，向外张开的形态更明显。

结果显示，弧形关节并不是单纯的膨胀或收缩，整体结构先向内定向收缩弯曲，然后恢复至原有状态，之后再膨胀。产生这种现象的原因如下：弧形结构的致密层与疏松层之间的响应能力和力学性能的差异，导致两层结构出现逐层响应形变，并随着环境 pH 增加产生不同的应力，最终导致弧形结构产生弯曲形变<sup>[28]</sup>。

为了优化弧形关节的动态形变能力，这里定义弧

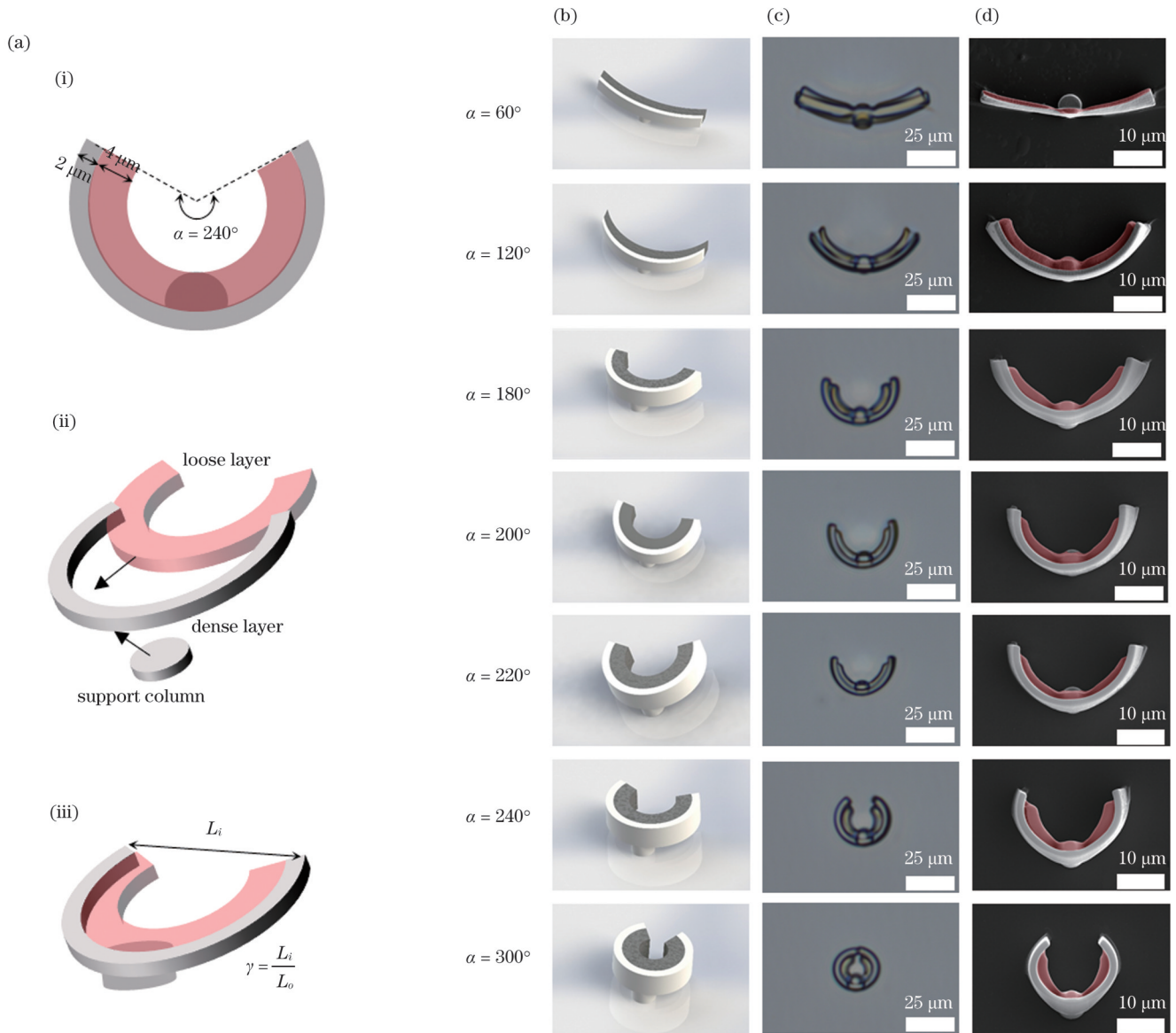


图 2 长度相同但对应圆心角不同的弧形关节的示意图及光学图。(a)弧形关节的设计过程以及致密层和疏松层的位置、厚度；(b)弧形关节的设计图；(c)弧形关节的光学图；(d)弧形关节的 SEM 图

Fig. 2 Schematic diagrams and optical images of the curved joints with the same length and different central angles. (a) Design process of the curved joint, as well as the position and thickness of the dense and loose layers; (b) design diagram of the curved joint; (c) optical diagrams of the curved joint; (d) SEM images of the curved joint

形结构两侧端点之间的距离为  $L_i$  (单位为  $\mu\text{m}$ , 即溶胀收缩过程中两侧端点的距离), 初始状态下两侧端点的距离为  $L_0$ , 距离的变化值 (形变差, 最大形变率与最小形变率之差) 为  $\gamma$ ,  $\gamma$  的计算公式为

$$\gamma = \frac{L_i}{L_0} \quad (1)$$

统计了各个弧形关节两端距离的变化, 取 8 组实验数据的平均值与标准差, 如表 2 所示。圆心角为  $60^\circ$  的弧形关节两端距离的变化值为一条较为平滑的直线, 这表明该结构不具备良好的弯曲形变能力。圆心角为  $120^\circ \sim 240^\circ$  的弧形关节都有较为明显向内弯曲的形变过程, 而圆心角为  $300^\circ$  的弧形关节在初始状态到中间状态的过程中没有表现出明显的由结构导致的向

内弯曲的形变过程, 如图 3(d) 所示。

弧形关节在溶胀过程中两端距离最大变化与距离最小变化的差值如表 2 所示。圆心角为  $60^\circ$  的弧形关节向内弯曲的能力很小, 圆心角为  $120^\circ \sim 240^\circ$  的弧形关节都有明显的向内弯曲的能力, 其中: 圆心角为  $180^\circ$ 、 $200^\circ$ 、 $220^\circ$  的弧形结构的形变性能差距不大, 其原因是圆心角的角度相差不大, 没有发生较大的形状改变, 因此形变性能差距不大; 圆心角为  $240^\circ$  的弧形关节的差值最大, 其形变性能最优, 如图 3(e) 所示。针对微型驱动器的需求, 可选择不同圆心角的弧形结构作为其关节, 当需要很明显的形变或位置移动时, 可将圆心角为  $240^\circ$  的弧形结构作为主要关节; 若只需要执行器有很微小的改变, 则可选择圆心角为  $60^\circ$  或  $120^\circ$  的弧

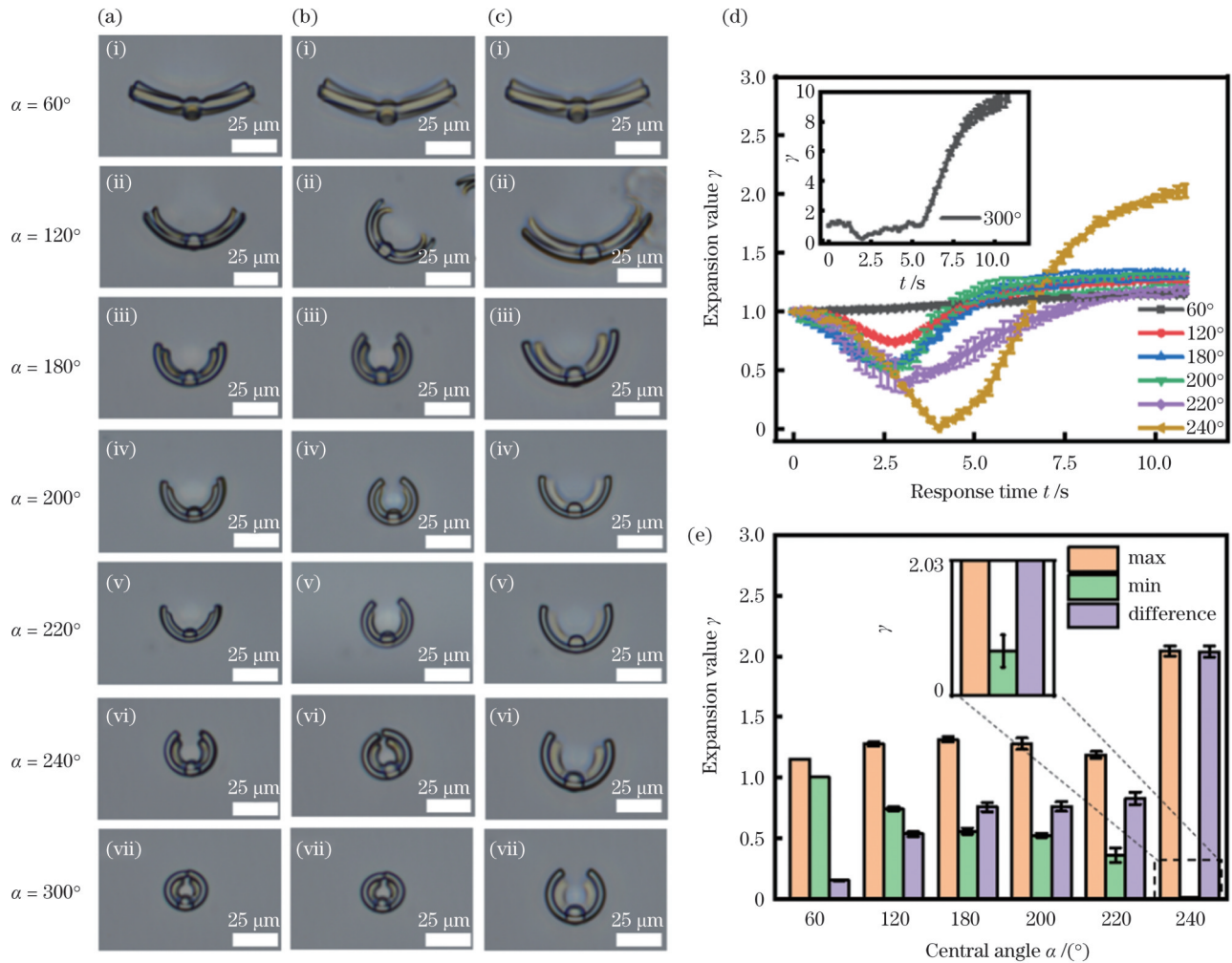


图3 弧形关节溶胀过程中的状态及性能。(a)弧形关节的初始状态;(b)弧形关节溶胀过程中的中间状态;(c)弧形关节溶胀后的最终状态;(d)弧形关节的溶胀曲线;(e)弧形关节最大两端距离与最小两端距离对比以及它们的差  
 Fig. 3 State and properties of the curved joint during the swelling process. (a) Initial state of the curved joint; (b) intermediate state during the curved joint swelling; (c) final state after the curved joint swelling; (d) swelling curve of the curved joint; (e) comparison and difference between the maximum and minimum two-end distances of the curved joint

表2 弧形结构的形变值

Table 2 Deformation values of the curved structures

Central angle / (°)	<i>n</i>	Maximum $\gamma$	Std of maximum $\gamma$	Minimum $\gamma$	Std of minimum $\gamma$	Difference	Std of difference
60	8	1.15012	0.00268	1	0	0.15012	0.00268
120	8	1.27596	0.01898	0.74065	0.01668	0.53531	0.02123
180	8	1.31310	0.02296	0.55638	0.02555	0.75672	0.03716
200	8	1.27844	0.04708	0.51752	0.01475	0.76092	0.03926
220	8	1.18628	0.02689	0.35828	0.06008	0.82800	0.05130
240	8	2.04266	0.04532	0.00659	0.00238	2.03607	0.04649
300	8	9.45071	0.49263	0.64510	0.03362	8.80561	0.45900

形结构作为关节。

### 3.2 直边关节结构的参数表征

为了验证弧形关节弯曲形变性能的优越性,设计了直边关节,使用与弧形关节相同的表征方法表征直边关节的弯曲形变性能。与弧形关节相同,直边关节

的长度为  $50 \mu\text{m}$ ,其夹角  $\beta$  的取值范围为  $45^\circ \sim 180^\circ$ 。直边关节在水中的初始状态同样发生了一定的膨胀,夹角为  $180^\circ$  的直边关节此时已有向内弯曲的趋势,如图 4(a) 所示。加入碱试剂后,夹角为  $45^\circ$  的直边关节与初始状态相比,两端出现了向内弯曲,但不明

显;夹角为  $90^\circ$ 、 $135^\circ$ 、 $180^\circ$  的直边关节都发生了明显的收缩,而且直边都出现了一定的弧形变化,如图 4(b) 所示。经过收缩膨胀形变后,夹角为  $45^\circ$  的直边关节的溶胀状态与初始状态基本保持一致,夹角为  $90^\circ$ 、 $135^\circ$  的

直边关节有不太明显的形变,而夹角为  $180^\circ$  的直边关节的形变最为明显,其恢复为  $180^\circ$  夹角状态,如图 4(c) 所示。采用扫描电镜对实验后的直边关节进行拍摄,发现其双层膜结构特征保存完好,如图 4(f) 所示。

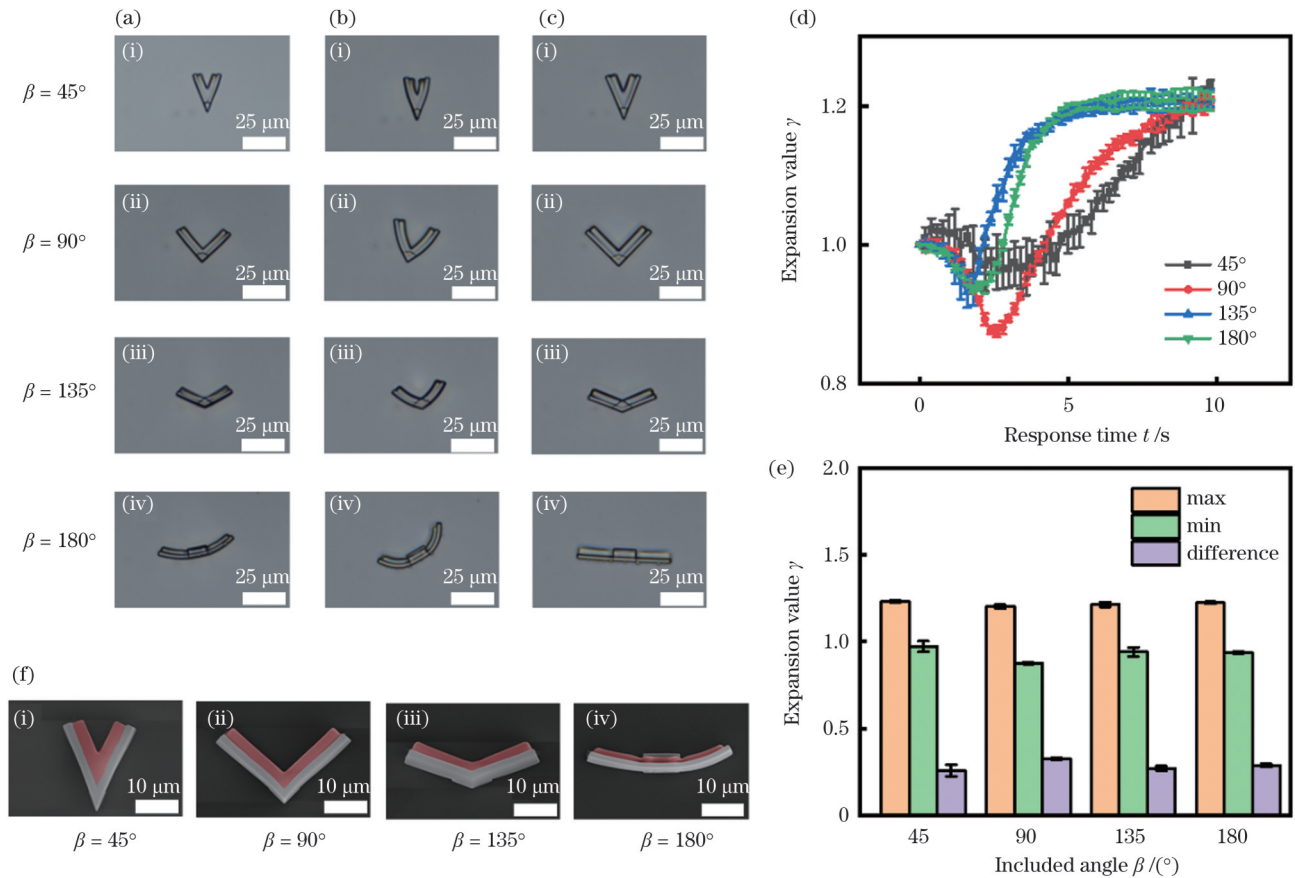


图 4 直边关节溶胀过程中的状态及性能。(a)直边关节的初始状态;(b)直边关节溶胀过程中的中间状态;(c)直边关节溶胀后的最终状态;(d)直边关节的溶胀曲线;(e)直边关节最大两端距离与最小两端距离对比以及它们的差;(f)直边关节的 SEM 图  
Fig. 4 State and performance of the straight-edge joint during the swelling process. (a) Initial state of the straight-edge joint; (b) intermediate state of the straight-edge joint during the swelling process; (c) final state of the straight-edge joint after swelling; (d) swelling curve of the straight-edge joint; (e) comparison and difference between the maximum and minimum two-end distances of the straight-edge joint; (f) SEM images of the straight-edge joint

8 组实验数据的平均值与标准差如表 3 所示。 $45^\circ$  直边关节虽然有向内弯曲的形变过程,但相较于整体的变化趋势而言,这种向内弯曲并不明显。相较于  $45^\circ$  直边关节, $90^\circ$ 、 $135^\circ$ 、 $180^\circ$  直边关节发生了较为明显的向内收缩弯曲的形变,其中  $180^\circ$  直边关节由于水凝胶的溶胀特性,在初始状态时就发生了一定的弯曲,其整体的溶胀过程也符合文献中的关节结构特性<sup>[28]</sup>,如

图 4(d) 所示。通过直边关节在溶胀过程中最大两端距离与最小两端距离的差值可以看出,直边关节两端距离的变化很小,说明直边关节向内弯曲形变的能力较差,但  $90^\circ$  直边关节的弯曲性能相比之下优于其他角度的直边关节,如图 4(e) 所示。总体来说,直边关节的形变能力不强,可用于具有较小形变需求的驱动器设计中。

表 3 直边结构的形变数值  
Table 3 Deformation values of the straight-edge structure

Included angle $\beta / (^\circ)$	$n$	Maximum $\gamma$	Std of maximum $\gamma$	Minimum $\gamma$	Std of minimum $\gamma$	Difference	Std of difference
45	8	1.23008	0.00528	0.97317	0.03069	0.25691	0.03527
90	8	1.20125	0.01007	0.87588	0.00473	0.32537	0.00644
135	8	1.21294	0.01349	0.94129	0.02621	0.27165	0.01308
180	8	1.22363	0.00667	0.93632	0.00389	0.28731	0.00884

### 3.3 弧形关节与直边关节的性能对比

为了更直观地展示弧形关节优异的变形能力,分别统计了形变最大的弧形关节和直边关节的相关数据,并将它们放在一起进行了对比。图 5(a)是圆心角为  $240^\circ$  的弧形关节与  $90^\circ$  直边关节的形变差变化曲线,可见,直边关节的变化曲线相对于弧形关节更为平缓;

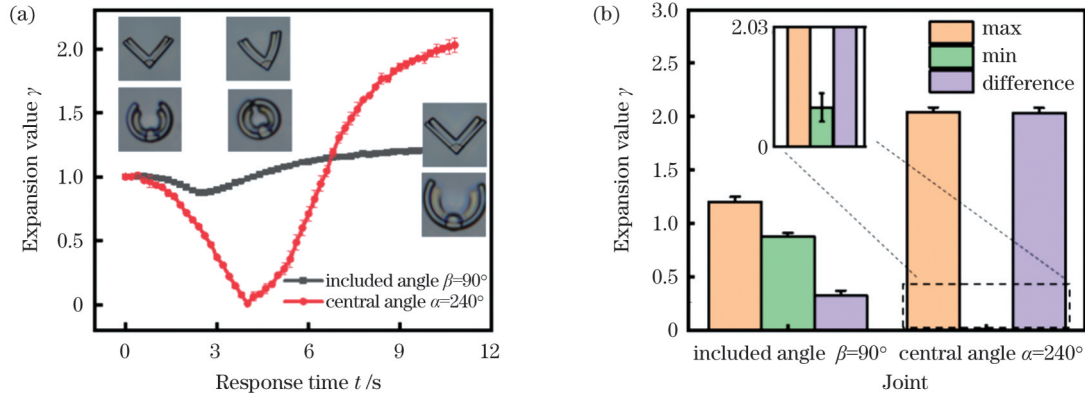


图 5 变化程度最大的直边关节与弧形关节的性能对比。(a)溶胀曲线;(b)最大两端距离与最小两端距离对比以及它们的差  
Fig. 5 Performance comparison between straight-sided and curved joints with the greatest degree of variation. (a) Swelling curve; (b) maximum two-end distance compared with minimum two-end distance and their difference

### 3.4 无双层膜和有双层膜弧形关节的性能对比

为了确定弧形关节在无双层膜状态下是否会发生向内弯曲的形变,将无双层膜并且圆心角为  $240^\circ$  的弧形关节与有双层膜并且圆心角为  $240^\circ$  的弧形关节进行了对比。通过 SEM 图可以看出,这两种结构在脱水状

态下表现基本一致,如图 6(a)所示。通过对其两端距离的变化曲线进行对比可以发现,无双层膜结构的弧形关节由于切向溶胀同样表现出了微弱的先收缩后膨胀现象,如图 6(b)所示。因此,pH 响应材料的圆弧的切向溶胀可能是增强弧形关节形变能力的主要原因。

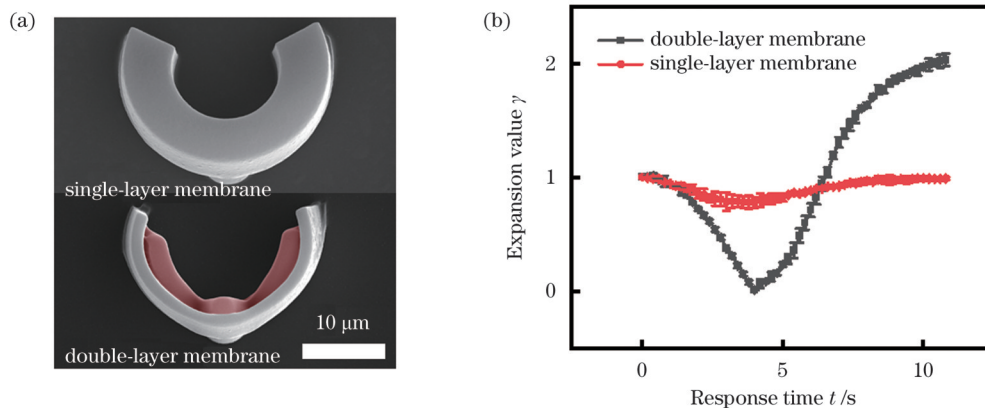


图 6 有双层膜和无双层膜弧形关节的性能对比。(a)无双层膜和有双层膜弧形关节的 SEM 图;(b)无双层膜和有双层膜弧形关节两端距离的变化曲线  
Fig. 6 Performance comparison of the curved joints with and without double-layer membrane. (a) SEM images of the curved joints with and without double-layer membrane; (b) two-end distance change curves of the curved joints with and without double-layer membrane

### 3.5 优化弧形关节在结构设计中的应用

为了观察弧形关节在结构设计中的应用,利用弧形关节设计了 4 组结构不同的微驱动器,并获得了其溶胀过程的光学图像序列。

图 7(a)是圆心角为  $240^\circ$  的弧形关节组成的“吃豆人”结构,图中“吃豆人”结构在溶胀收缩过程中的弯曲效果良好。图 7(b)是以圆心角为  $60^\circ$  的弧形结

构为外层、圆心角为  $240^\circ$  的弧形结构为内层组成的菊花结构,在溶胀收缩过程中,该结构外层的弯曲效果较差,但内层具有明显的弯曲形变。图 7(c)所示菊花结构的内层和外层均是由圆心角为  $120^\circ$  的弧形结构组成的,在溶胀收缩过程中,内外层的弯曲程度相同,但弯曲效果不明显。图 7(d)是由圆心角为  $180^\circ$  的弧形结构组成的花环结构,在溶胀弯曲过程

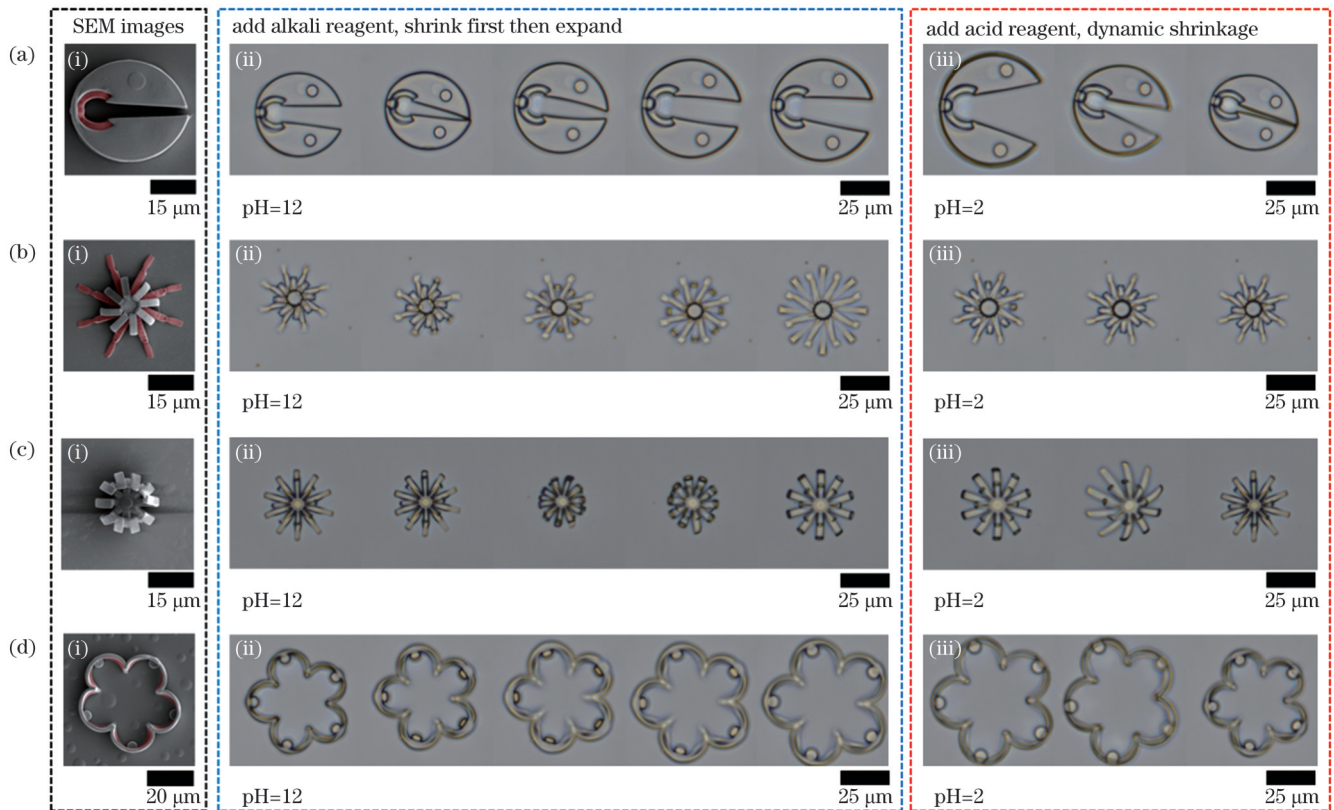


图 7 由圆弧关节设计的结构的溶胀收缩展示。(a)圆心角为 $240^\circ$ 的弧形关节组成的“吃豆人”结构的 SEM 图与光学图;(b)圆心角为 $60^\circ$ 的弧形关节和圆心角为 $240^\circ$ 的弧形关节组成的菊花结构的 SEM 图与光学图;(c)圆心角为 $120^\circ$ 的弧形关节组成的菊花结构的 SEM 图与光学图;(d)圆心角为 $180^\circ$ 的弧形关节组成的花环结构的 SEM 图与光学图

Fig. 7 Structural dissolution and contraction demonstration of the structures designed with curved joints. (a) SEM and optical images of “Pac-Man” structure composed of  $240^\circ$  curved joints; (b) SEM and optical images of daisy structure composed of  $60^\circ$  and  $240^\circ$  curved joints; (c) SEM and optical images of daisy structure composed of  $120^\circ$  curved joints; (d) SEM and optical images of wreath structure composed of  $180^\circ$  curved joints

中,花环圆弧的弯曲不明显,因此,弧形结构不能组成闭合环。

## 4 结 论

利用双光子聚合打印技术,通过改变双光子聚合加工的激光功率、扫描速度,制备了多种双层膜弧形关节。系统地分析了弧形结构长度相同情况下,加工参数对弧形双层膜结构形变的影响,进而对弧形双层膜关节进行了优化设计。实验结果表明,弧形双层膜关节具有更大的形变弯曲能力。当弧形结构长度相同时,形变性能随着所对应的弧形双层膜关节结构的圆心角度的增大而增强。本文研究的弧形结构可应用的圆心角范围为 $180^\circ\sim 240^\circ$ ,当圆心角为 $240^\circ$ 时,结构具有最佳的变形能力。与传统的直边关节相比,弧形关节无论是在变形能力上还是在循环变形次数上,都表现得更好。因此,弧形关节结构为 pH 响应及其他响应的微型机器人关节结构设计提供了一种新选择,在基于微型软体机器人的载药、组织修复等生物医学领域具有巨大的应用潜力。

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## Processing of Two-Photon 3D Printed pH-Responsive Microscale Soft Joints

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### Abstract

**Objective** Soft microactuators, usually characterized by a small structural size and flexibility, have good application potential in biomedical fields, such as in drug delivery and tissue repair, and have therefore received significant attention from researchers. Hydrogels have good biocompatibility and are considered to be ideal materials for fabricating miniature flexible actuators. Hydrogels can not only be doped and chemically modified to impart stimulus responsiveness but also used to fabricate microscale soft actuators with certain deformation or actuation functions by optimizing their structural design. However, significant research efforts have focused on enhancing the material performance and optimizing the process, and only few studies have explored the effect of the actuator structure itself on its shape deformation capabilities. In this study, the design of a curved double-layer membrane structure is proposed based on the two-photon polymerization technology combined with the existing micro-robot bilayer membrane joint structure. A curved double-layer structure prepared from a pH-responsive hydrogel using optimized parameters exhibited 573% improvement in the deformation capacity compared with that of a straight-sided joint. This study provides a new design concept for

the efficient driving and wide application of micro-robots.

**Methods** First, the effects of the laser power and scanning speed on the performance of the machined structures were explored. We varied the parameters to process a set of microhand-shaped structures. As shown in Fig. 1(a), the scanning speed was varied from 10000 to 25000  $\mu\text{m/s}$  at 2500  $\mu\text{m/s}$  intervals, and the processing power was varied from 15 to 35 mW at 5 mW intervals. Figures 1(b), (c) show the optical and SEM images of the microhand-shaped structure. By varying the processing power and scanning speed, 35 sets of data were obtained with pH response thresholds between 7 and 8 for the pH-responsive materials used in the study [see Figs. 1(d), (e)]. Different laser powers or scanning speeds allow the printing of sparse and dense layers with different crosslinking densities. The dense layer printed by increasing the laser power or decreasing the scanning speed increases the cross-linking density of carboxyl groups in the hydrogel, while the sparse layer printed by decreasing the laser power or increasing the scanning speed decreases the cross-linking density of carboxyl groups in the hydrogel. This allows the dense and sparse layers to undergo differential swelling in the same pH environment. In this study, the dense layer was processed using a processing power of 25 mW and a scanning speed of 10000  $\mu\text{m/s}$ , and the sparse layer was processed using 20 mW power and a scanning speed of 22500  $\mu\text{m/s}$ .

**Results and Discussions** First, the initial degree of bending of the arc has a significant effect on the deformation capacity of the curved double-layer joint with the same arc length (Fig. 2). To further investigate the effect of the initial bending degree on the deformation performance of the curved double-layer joint, the deformation performances of different curved structures were compared (Fig. 3). Second, to verify the superiority of the bending deformation performance of the curved joints, we designed straight-sided joints and characterized the bending deformation of the latter using the same characterization method as that of the curved joints (Fig. 4). In addition, to demonstrate the superior deformation capability of the curved joints, the data for the curved and straight-sided joints with the greatest deformation were obtained separately and compared (Fig. 5). Furthermore, the dissolution curves of the curved joints with and without the double-layer structure were compared (Fig. 6). Finally, the application of the curved joints in the structural design is demonstrated (Fig. 7).

**Conclusions** In this study, various curved double-layer joint structures were prepared by varying the laser power and scanning speed of a two-photon polymerization process of the two-photon polymerization printing technology. The effect of processing parameters on the deformation of the curved double-layer structure with the same length of the curved structure was systematically analyzed, and then the design of the curved double-layer joint was optimized. The experimental results reveal that the curved double-layer membrane joint has a greater bending ability. When the length of the curved structure is the same, the deformation performance increases with increasing central angle of the corresponding curved double-layer joint structure. The curved structure studied in this investigation can be applied with a central angle range of  $180^\circ$ – $240^\circ$  and exhibits the best deformation capability (central angle is  $240^\circ$ ). The curved joints perform better than the conventional straight-sided joints, both in terms of the deformation capacity and number of cyclic deformations. Therefore, it is inferred that the arc-shaped joint structure can be a novel alternative for designing micro-nano-robotic joint structures that respond to pH and other stimuli, and they have good prospects in biomedical applications based on micro-nano soft body robots (e. g. , drug delivery and tissue repair).

**Key words** laser technique; two-photon polymerization; microscale; double-layer membrane; deformation properties