

Nodeless High- T_c Superconductivity in the Highly Overdoped CuO_2 Monolayer

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We study the electronic structure and superconductivity in a CuO_2 monolayer grown recently on the d -wave cuprate superconductor $\text{Bi}_2\text{Sr}_2\text{CaCu}_2\text{O}_{8+\delta}$. Density functional theory calculations indicate a significant charge transfer across the interface such that the CuO_2 monolayer is heavily overdoped into the hole-rich regime yet inaccessible in bulk cuprates. We show that both the Cu $d_{x^2-y^2}$ and $d_{3z^2-r^2}$ orbitals become important and the Fermi surface contains one electron and one hole pocket associated with the two orbitals, respectively. Constructing a minimal correlated two-orbital model for the e_g complex, we show that the spin-orbital exchange interactions produce a nodeless superconductor with extended s -wave pairing symmetry and a pairing energy gap comparable to the bulk d -wave gap, in agreement with recent experiments. The findings point to a direction of realizing new high- T_c superconductors in ozone grown transition-metal-oxide monolayer heterostructures.

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The commonly held belief of the high- T_c cuprate superconducting (SC) state [1] is that the superconductivity originates from two-dimensional copper-oxide (CuO_2) planes with a nodal d -wave pairing symmetry [2–4]. In a recent attempt to directly probe the SC state in the copper-oxide plane, a CuO_2 monolayer on $\text{Bi}_2\text{Sr}_2\text{CaCu}_2\text{O}_{8+\delta}$ ($\text{Bi}2212$) has been grown successfully by state-of-the-art ozone molecular beam epitaxy (MBE) [5]. In contrast to the widely observed V -shaped local density of states (LDOS) typical of a nodal d -wave pairing gap in bulk cuprates, scanning tunneling microscopy (STM) on the CuO_2 monolayer reveals a robust U -shaped LDOS characteristic of a nodeless SC gap, which is further shown to be insensitive to nonmagnetic impurities [5]. Several theoretical scenarios have been proposed for this remarkable observation, largely based on the SC proximity effect but with the d -wave nodes avoided by different Fermi surfaces or coexisting magnetism in the monolayer [6–9]. Here, we propose a different scenario. We argue that the CuO_2 monolayer has a new electronic structure due to interface charge transfer and exhibits an intrinsic nodeless, s -wave SC state. Thus, while the monolayer may not be representative of the bulk CuO_2 layers, it has potentially realized the direction of finding new and novel forms of high- T_c superconductors in transition-metal-oxide heterostructures by interface charge transfer.

The main findings are summarized in the schematic phase diagram shown in Fig. 1. The left side of Fig. 1 has been realized by hole doping the antiferromagnetic (AFM)

parent state in bulk cuprates, where the $3d^9$ Cu^{2+} has three e_g electrons ($n_e = 3$) occupying the well-split $d_{x^2-y^2}$ (d_{x^2}) and $d_{3z^2-r^2}$ (d_{z^2}) orbitals due to Jahn-Teller distortion. The d -wave superconductor emerges under the SC dome with a maximum T_c around an optimal doping concentration $x_h \sim 0.16$. Experiments show that the metallic state in bulk cuprates has a single band of the d_{x^2} character [10] crossing the Fermi level. Note that heavy overdoping is difficult and the region with $x_h > 0.3$ has not been accessible in bulk cuprates.

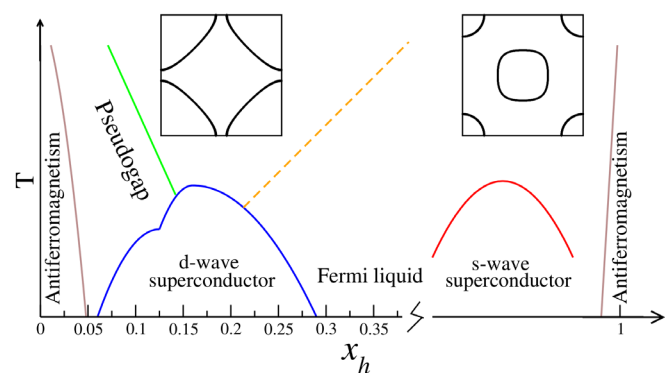


FIG. 1. Schematic phase diagram as a function of hole doping x_h , contrasting the single-band d -wave SC phase realized in bulk cuprates (left side) with the two-orbital nodeless SC phase in the hole-rich monolayer $\text{CuO}_2/\text{Bi}2212$ (right side). The corresponding FS is shown in the insets.

The right side of Fig. 1 is conjectured for the monolayer CuO₂/Bi2212. Based on the experimental evidence suggesting that the monolayer crystallizes into CuO₂ [5], a significant charge transfer must occur between the CuO₂ monolayer and the Bi2212 substrate in order to maintain charge neutrality. We will show that this is indeed supported by density functional theory (DFT) calculations and charge-transfer correlations. Thus, the CuO₂ monolayer is highly overdoped and reaches a regime yet inaccessible in bulk cuprates. As shown in Fig. 1, this hole-rich regime approaches $3d^8$ (Cu³⁺) with $n_e = 2$ in the two e_g orbitals. We show that both d_{x^2} and d_{z^2} orbitals become active and the electronic structure requires a minimal two-band description with one electron FS enclosing Γ and one hole FS around M (Fig. 1). Constructing a two-orbital Hubbard model and studying its SC properties using both the weak- and strong-coupling approaches, we find that the hole-rich CuO₂ monolayer is a multiband nodeless superconductor driven by both spin-spin and spin-orbital-entangled (super)exchange interactions. The pairing energy gaps are comparable in magnitude to the bulk d -wave gap and exhibit a sign change on the two FSs, analogous to Fe-based superconductors. The calculated STM conductance displays the U -shaped spectrum consistent with the experimental observations.

We first carry out a DFT calculation to simulate a CuO₂ monolayer on Bi2212 using the Vienna *ab initio* simulation package (VASP) [11–15]. The details are given in Supplemental Material [16]. As illustrated in Fig. 2(a), due to the missing apical oxygen in the unbalanced octahedron, the cation Cu attracts the bottom anion oxygen (O_a) and shortens the out-of-plane Cu–O_a distance at the interface to 2.11 Å, after relaxation. This value is close to the in-plane Cu–O bond length of 1.92 Å, which is much shorter than the 2.82 Å Cu–O_a distance in the bulk. The point group symmetry D_{4h} also breaks down to C_{4v} . There are two immediate consequences. (i) The p_z orbital of the bottom O_a strongly hybridizes with the Cu d_{z^2} orbital. This leads to a d_{z^2} -like bonding orbital and transfers charges to the oxygen in the BiO layer. The excess charge transfer causes the Cu valence in the monolayer to approach $3d^8$ (Cu³⁺) with two electrons occupying the e_g orbitals. (ii) The crystal field splitting between the d_{x^2} and d_{z^2} orbitals is significantly reduced compared to in the bulk.

These phenomena show up in the calculated band structure shown in Fig. 2(b). The band highlighted by red markers contains the d_{x^2} orbital mixed with the antisymmetric combination of the in-plane oxygen p_x and p_y orbitals [10]. We label this band as the d_{x^2} band, which is heavily overdoped and electronlike near the zone center Γ . The green markers indicate the d_{z^2} band of the Cu d_{z^2} orbital mixed with the anion oxygen p_z orbital. It is holelike near the zone corner M , with its band top very close to the Fermi level. Thus, the monolayer CuO₂/Bi2212 has a different electronic structure than

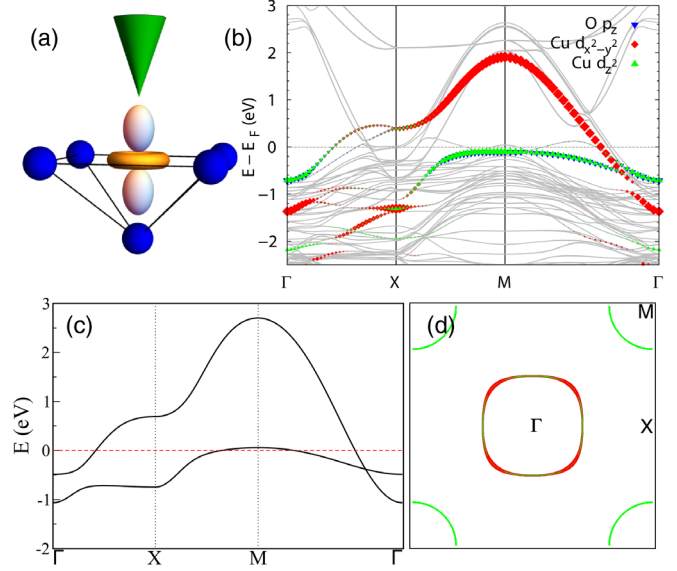


FIG. 2. (a) Atomic structure of the CuO₂ monolayer. The copper d_{z^2} orbital is shown in gold and silver (d_{x^2} not shown). Blue balls are oxygen ions. The oxygen (O_a) at the bottom of pyramid is in the BiO₂ layer of the Bi2212 substrate. (b) Band structure of the monolayer CuO₂/Bi2212 obtained using DFT. The orbital content of dispersions is color coded with red (d_{x^2}), green (d_{z^2}), and blue (p_z strongly hybridized with d_{z^2}). (c) Band dispersion of the two-orbital TB model with the FS shown in (d) at $x_h = 0.9$ in the same color scheme.

the CuO₂ layer in the bulk. Note that, in the experiments [5], the CuO₂ monolayer is MBE grown on Bi2212 substrates that are optimally hole doped by the excess oxygen dopants, of which a substantial fraction resides near the BiO layers [17,18]. Their density is further increased in the top BiO layer in the ozone environment. As a result, an additional charge transfer takes place via the oxygen dopants hole doping the CuO₂ monolayer across the interface, which further stabilizes the CuO₂ structure and pushes the chemical potential into the d_{z^2} band. Consequently, the doped holes physically occupy both d_{x^2} and d_{z^2} orbitals, giving rise to one electron FS pocket around Γ and one hole pocket around M at the Fermi energy. In the cuprate terminology, the CuO₂ monolayer corresponds to the heavily overdoped, hole-rich region yet unreachable in bulk materials where the d_{z^2} orbital and d - d excitations play only a limited role [19–28].

We next construct a minimal two-orbital Hamiltonian $H = H_t + H_I$ for the CuO₂ monolayer, where H_t is a tight-binding (TB) model for the band structure and H_I describes the electronic correlations. Using $d_{\alpha\sigma}$, $\alpha = x, z$ to denote a spin- σ electron in the d_{x^2} and d_{z^2} orbitals,

$$H_t = \sum_{k\alpha\beta\sigma} \epsilon_k^{\alpha\beta} d_{k\alpha\sigma}^\dagger d_{k\beta\sigma} + e_z \sum_{k\sigma} d_{kz\sigma}^\dagger d_{kz\sigma}, \quad (1)$$

where e_z is the crystal field splitting between the two orbitals. We consider up to third nearest neighbor hopping

such that the kinetic energy of intraorbital hopping in Eq. (1) is $\varepsilon_k^{\alpha\alpha} = -2t_\alpha\gamma_k - 4t'_\alpha\alpha_k - 2t''_\alpha\gamma'_k$ with lattice harmonics of A_1 symmetry $\gamma_k = \cos k_x + \cos k_y$, $\alpha_k = \cos k_x \cos k_y$, and $\gamma'_k = \cos 2k_x + \cos 2k_y$. Because of the different orbital symmetry, the interorbital hopping leads to $\varepsilon_k^{xz} = 2t_{xz}\beta_k + 2t''_{xz}\beta'_k$, with B_1 harmonics $\beta_k = \cos k_x - \cos k_y$ and $\beta'_k = \cos 2k_x - \cos 2k_y$. The parameters of the TB model are given in Supplemental Material [16], and the chemical potential is treated as an independent variable. The TB band structure is shown in Fig. 2(c) at doping $x_h = 0.9$ or $n_e = 2.1$. It describes the DFT results in Fig. 2(b) very well. The FS is plotted in Fig. 2(d), showing one electron pocket around Γ and one hole pocket around M . Since ε_k^{xz} has d -wave form factors, the FS around Γ is mostly d_{x^2} -like around nodal but of a mixed character around antinodal directions. The hole pocket around M is mainly d_{z^2} -like, since the bands are well separated in energy there. The smaller overlap of out-of-plane orbitals makes the d_{z^2} band narrow with a small bandwidth, consistent with the DFT dispersions.

The correlation part follows from the standard two-orbital Hubbard model [29,30] for the e_g complex:

$$H_I = U \sum_{i,\alpha} \hat{n}_{i\alpha\uparrow} \hat{n}_{i\alpha\downarrow} + \left(U' - \frac{1}{2} J_H \right) \sum_{i,\alpha < \beta} \hat{n}_{i\alpha} \hat{n}_{i\beta} - J_H \sum_{i,\alpha \neq \beta} \mathbf{S}_{i\alpha} \cdot \mathbf{S}_{i\beta} + J_H \sum_{i,\alpha \neq \beta} d_{i\alpha\uparrow}^\dagger d_{i\alpha\downarrow}^\dagger d_{i\beta\downarrow} d_{i\beta\uparrow}, \quad (2)$$

where the intra- and interorbital Coulomb U and U' , respectively, are related to Hund's coupling J_H by $U = U' + 2J_H$.

The emergence of the low-energy d_{z^2} band and the hole FS pocket around M enables an analogy to multiorbital nodeless Fe-pnictide superconductors [31–39], particularly when the correlation effects in Eq. (2) are treated using weak-coupling approaches. Since perfect nesting between the electron and hole pockets is absent, the only logarithmic divergence is in the Cooper channel. Following Ref. [34], we performed a two-patch renormalization group analysis and found that the nodeless s -wave superconductivity is the leading instability. Moreover, the relevant pair scattering across the electron and hole FS, i.e., the u_3 channel [34], drives a sign-changing s_\pm gap function on the two FS pockets.

An important difference between the Fe-based and cuprate superconductors is, however, that the former are p - d charge-transfer metals, whereas the latter are charge-transfer insulators [39]. Indeed, the nodeless SC state of the monolayer $\text{CuO}_2/\text{Bi2212}$ emerges [5] inside a charge-transfer gap of similar magnitude as in bulk cuprates [40]. It is thus necessary to carry out a strong-coupling study of the two-orbital Hubbard model. To this end, we derive in Supplemental Material the general spin-orbital superexchange interactions of the Kugel-Khomskii type [16,29,41]:

$$H_{J-K} = \sum_{\langle ij \rangle} \left(J \mathbf{S}_i \cdot \mathbf{S}_j + \sum_{\mu\nu} I_{\mu\nu} T_i^\mu T_j^\nu + \sum_{\mu\nu} K_{\mu\nu} (\mathbf{S}_i \cdot \mathbf{S}_j) (T_i^\mu T_j^\nu) \right), \quad (3)$$

where \mathbf{S}_i is the spin-1/2 operator and T_i^μ , $\mu = 0, x, y, z$, are the orbital pseudospin-1/2 operators in the orbital basis $(|x^2 - y^2\rangle, |z^2\rangle)^T$ [41]. In Eq. (3), the J term is the SU(2) invariant Heisenberg spin exchange coupling, while the terms proportional $I_{\mu\nu}$ and $K_{\mu\nu}$ describe the anisotropic orbital and spin-orbital-entangled superexchange interactions, respectively, since the orbital or pseudospin rotation symmetry is broken by the generic hoppings and crystal field in H_I . We thus arrive at an effective two-orbital strong-coupling model

$$H = P_G H_I P_G + H_{J-K}, \quad (4)$$

where P_G stands for the Gutzwiller projection of states with multiple occupations. Hereafter, we consider Eq. (4) as an effective low-energy theory for the hole-rich regime of the CuO_2 monolayer and study the emergent SC state due to the spin-orbit superexchange correlations. The Gutzwiller projection is treated in Supplemental Material [16] using the variational Gutzwiller approximation [42–44] for a generic set of interactions $U = 2.5$ eV and $J_H = 0.1U$.

The intersite quantum spin-orbital fluctuations described by Eq. (3) can be projected into the spin-singlet channel by $P_{ij}^s = \mathbf{S}_i \cdot \mathbf{S}_j - 1/4$ and written in terms of the pairing operators $\Delta_{ij}^{\alpha\beta\dagger} = d_{i\alpha\uparrow}^\dagger d_{j\beta\downarrow}^\dagger - d_{i\alpha\downarrow}^\dagger d_{j\beta\uparrow}^\dagger$. Since the d_{x^2} and d_{z^2} orbitals are split by the crystal field, there is an orbital order that causes the operator T_{iz} in Eq. (3) to take on its expectation value 1/2. As shown in Supplemental Material [16], this leads to a spin exchange interaction corresponding to that of the Heisenberg term in the t - J model [2] with the familiar result $J_s(\mathbf{S}_i \cdot \mathbf{S}_j - \frac{1}{4} n_i n_j) = -(J_s/2) \sum_{\alpha\beta} \Delta_{ij}^{\alpha\beta\dagger} \Delta_{ij}^{\alpha\beta}$. We set $J_s = 120$ meV, the commonly accepted value for bulk cuprates [2]. However, the T_{iz} order does not quench the transverse orbital fluctuations represented by T_i^\pm that contribute to pairing. Remarkably, such spin-orbit-entangled, quadruple exchange interactions in Eq. (3) generate a new pairing contribution

$$K P_{ij}^s (T_i^+ T_j^+ + \text{H.c.}) = -\frac{K}{2} (\Delta_{ij}^{xx\dagger} \Delta_{ij}^{zz} + \text{H.c.}), \quad (5)$$

which captures the physics of the interorbital pair scattering. This is the strong-coupling counterpart of the inter-FS pocket pair scattering in weak-coupling approaches [20,34]. We considered all spin-singlet pairing in Supplemental Material [16] and determined the expectation values of the pairing fields $\langle \Delta_{ij}^{\alpha\beta} \rangle$ self-consistently in the Gutzwiller approximation. The latter has the form

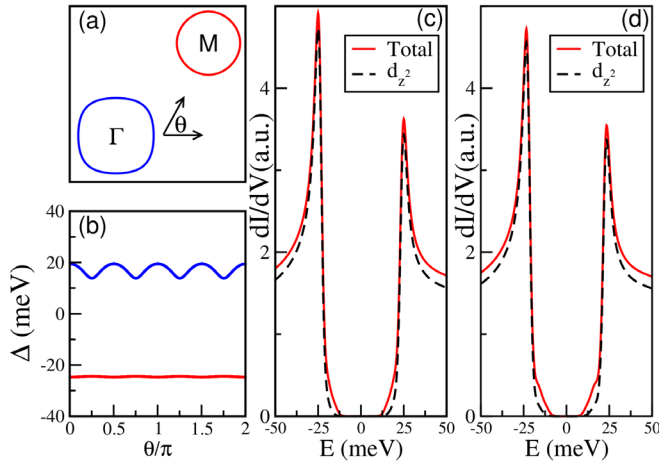


FIG. 3. (a) Normal state FS at $x_h = 0.9$. (b) SC pairing energy gaps at $K = 80$ meV along FS pockets with angle θ defined in (a). (c) U -shaped total LDOS (red solid line) showing a nodeless gap of about 25 meV. The LDOS from the d_{z^2} orbital is shown as dashed lines. (d) The same as in (c) obtained for $K = 60$ meV.

$$\langle \Delta_{ij}^{\alpha\beta} \rangle = \frac{1}{N_s} \sum_{\mathbf{k}, \alpha\beta} \Delta_{\alpha\beta} b_{\alpha\beta}(\mathbf{k}) e^{i\mathbf{k}(r_i - r_j)}, \quad (6)$$

where N_s is the number of lattice sites and $b_{\alpha\beta}(k)$ the form factors of different symmetries in the C_{4v} point group of the crystal. For nearest neighbor pairing, $b_{\alpha\alpha}(k) = \gamma_k$ and $b_{\alpha z}(k) = \beta_k$ in the A_1 symmetry channel, whereas $b_{\alpha\alpha}(k) = \beta_k$ and $b_{\alpha z}(k) = \gamma_k$ in the B_1 channel. Our results show that the variational ground state in the strong-coupling theory is a nodeless superconductor with A_1 symmetry in the hole-rich regime where the FS contains both electron and hole pockets. Moreover, the pairing fields are dominated by the intraorbital $\Delta_{\alpha\alpha}$ with extended s -wave form factor $b_{\alpha\alpha} = \gamma_k$ in Eq. (6). In Figs. 3(a) and 3(b), we show the FS at $x_h = 0.9$ and the pairing energy gaps as a function of the angle along the two FS pockets for $K = 80$ meV. The nodeless s_{\pm} gap function with opposite signs and comparable magnitude is a remarkable consequence of the spin-orbital-entangled exchange pairing interaction K in Eq. (5). The momentum space anisotropy of the gap function is small and more apparent on the electron pocket around Γ , which is larger and less circular. Such a nodeless multiorbital superconductor in the hole-rich regime is proposed in Fig. 1 for the monolayer $\text{CuO}_2/\text{Bi2212}$.

To compare to STM, we calculate the LDOS for each orbital $N_{\alpha}(\omega) = \sum_{k\sigma} \text{Im} \int_0^{\beta} e^{i\omega\tau} \langle T_{\tau} d_{k\alpha\sigma}(\tau) d_{k\alpha\sigma}^{\dagger}(0) \rangle$. The total LDOS, $N(\omega) = N_x(\omega) + N_z(\omega)$, is shown in Fig. 3(c). It has a U -shaped spectrum with a pair of coherence peaks demarcating a nodeless energy gap around 25 meV, in good agreement with STM observations [5]. The LDOS from the d_{z^2} orbital, also shown in Fig. 3(c), has a slightly larger onset spectral gap and the majority of the total differential conductance due to the large DOS of the

d_{z^2} band. Figure 3(d) shows the LDOS spectra obtained for a smaller $K = 60$ meV. The smaller onset spectral gap associated with the d_{x^2} orbital is visible, but the tunneling conductance, especially that into the d_{z^2} orbital, continues to exhibit the U -shaped spectrum. The tunneling matrix element on top of the monolayer also favors a path through the out-of-plane Cu $3d_{z^2}$ orbital as depicted in Fig. 2(a). The overall agreement with the STM findings supports our conjecture that the electronic structure and correlation in the monolayer $\text{CuO}_2/\text{Bi2212}$ produce an intrinsic two-orbital nodeless s -wave SC state.

The proposed two-orbital nodeless SC state near Cu $3d^8$ is different from the single-orbital extended s -wave pairing state known to arise with a very small pairing amplitude in the overdoped single-band t - J model [2,45]. To verify this point, we studied the intermediate doping regime $0.3 < x_h < 0.7$, where the d_{z^2} hole pocket has disappeared following a Lifshitz transition and the FS contains a single d_{x^2} electron pocket enclosing Γ [Fig. S1(c) in Supplemental Material]. The SC state indeed has extended s -wave pairing amplitudes that are 2 orders of magnitude smaller due to the suppression of orbital fluctuations. The electron pocket grows with reducing doping and transitions to a large hole FS around M for $x_h < 0.3$, where the nodal d -wave SC state is recovered as in the bulk cuprates. Finally, when the two-orbital model is studied at $x_h = 1$, i.e., in the Cu $3d^8$ limit with two electrons in the e_g complex, the Gutzwiller projected Hamiltonian $P_G H_t P_G$ has an insulating ground state with AFM long-range order for our parameters as indicated in the phase diagram in Fig. 1. This is consistent with the high-spin Mott insulating state of the two-orbital Hubbard model at half filling [46–49], where the AFM spin moments from the two orbitals are ferromagnetically aligned by J_H [50].

In conclusion, we proposed that the ozone MBE grown CuO_2 monolayer on Bi2212 is heavily overdoped due to interface charge transfer, reaching the hole-rich regime yet inaccessible in bulk cuprates. The resulting electronic structure involves holes occupying both Cu $3d_{x^2}$ and $3d_{z^2}$ orbitals. The quantum fluctuations of the spin-orbital superexchange interaction are shown to produce a two-orbital nodeless superconductor with a U -shaped LDOS and a comparably sized pairing gap as in bulk Bi2212 near optimal doping, providing a natural explanation of the STM experiments [5]. Although the SC proximity effect between a d -wave cuprate and a normal metal is difficult to achieve in c -axis-oriented junctions [51] and more detailed studies are necessary, it is reasonable to expect the intrinsic nodeless SC state of the CuO_2 monolayer to establish phase coherence with the bulk d -wave superconductor through inhomogeneous Josephson coupling at the interface. A possible mechanism to facilitate the interface charge transfer is through the type- B oxygen dopants in Bi2212 [17], residing close to the BiO layer as observed by STM [18]. Ozone MBE growth can increase significantly the type- B

dopants on the surface BiO layer, which in turn provide heavy hole doping for the capping CuO₂ monolayer. The predictions can be tested experimentally by measuring the quasiparticle band dispersion using angle-resolved photoemission spectroscopy or STM quasiparticle interference on samples with large enough coverage of a high-quality CuO₂ monolayer. Indeed, interface charge transfer and the change of FS topology have been observed recently with enhanced T_c in FeSe monolayer superconductors grown on a SrTiO₃ substrate [52–55]. It would also be interesting to probe and study the phonon dynamics and electron-phonon coupling at the interface [56]. The findings presented here provide insights for a new direction of searching for high- T_c superconductors in extended doping regimes and with liberated orbital degrees of freedom in ozone MBE grown transition-metal-oxide heterostructures.

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