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Localized polarons and conductive charge carriers: understanding $\text{CaCu}_3\text{Ti}_4\text{O}_{12}$ over a broad temperature range

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$\text{CaCu}_3\text{Ti}_4\text{O}_{12}$ (CCTO) has a large dielectric permittivity plateau near the room temperature due to several dynamic processes. Here, we consider the combined effects of localized charge carriers (polarons) and conductive charge carriers using a recently proposed statistical model [Phys. Rev. B **96**, 054115 (2017)] to fit and understand its permittivity measured at different frequencies over a broad temperature range. We found that, at the lowest temperature, the small permittivity is related to frozen polarons, and the increase at higher temperature is associated with the thermal excitation of polarons that gives rise to the Maxwell-Wagner effect. The final rapid increase at the highest temperature is attributed to the thermally activated conductivity. Such analysis enables us to separate the contributions from localized polarons and conductive charge carriers and quantify their activation energies, which also explains the permittivity plateau near the room temperature. In particular, we show that the subtle balance between the number of activated polarons and their polarizability cause CCTO to have a permittivity plateau with small dielectric loss.

I. INTRODUCTION

Materials with high dielectric permittivity have attracted much attention due to their numerous technological applications. $\text{CaCu}_3\text{Ti}_4\text{O}_{12}$ (CCTO) has a cubic perovskite structure and a giant relative permittivity of $10^4 \sim 10^6$ near the room temperature. While the dielectric permittivity of CCTO exhibits little temperature dependence between 100 K and 600 K, it drops rapidly to a value of ~ 100 below 100 K.¹⁻¹⁰ This overall behavior of CCTO is very different from either relaxors or normal ferroelectrics. It is established that the origin of the high permittivity near room temperature is an extrinsic effect related to grains and grain boundaries. Therefore polycrystalline CCTO is often modeled after the internal barrier layer capacitor (IBLC), consisting of semiconducting grains separated by thin insulating grain boundaries. Furthermore, the interface effect from electrodes or domain walls is also suggested to contribute to the high permittivity in single crystals.

The remarkable dielectric properties of CCTO also depend on the probing frequency, which approximately follows the Arrhenius behavior. Similar phenomenon was also found in many manganites, cuprates, and nickelates, such as $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ca}_x\text{MnO}_3$,¹¹ $\text{Pr}_{0.7}\text{Ca}_{0.3}\text{MnO}_3$,¹² Tb/EuMnO_3 ,¹³⁻¹⁵ CuTa_2O_6 ,¹⁶ LaCuLiO_4 ,¹⁷ LaSrNiO_4 ,¹⁸ Li/Ti -doped NiO ,^{19,20} and $\text{Ba}(\text{Fe}_{0.5}\text{Nb}_{0.5})\text{O}_3$.²¹⁻²⁵ Therefore, a better understanding of CCTO will also help to explain the dielectric properties of a large group of materials. For these materials, their low-temperature dielectric relaxation has been attributed to hopping of polarons, which are localized charge carriers interacting with phonons²⁶, between lattice sites with a characteristic timescale. The step-function-like decrease in the permittivity-versus-temperature curve suggests a freezing temperature in

the relaxation process.

However, some important questions regarding this type of materials remain unanswered. For instance, while it is known that the polaronic relaxation usually involves either a variable range hopping (VRH) or a nearest-neighbor hopping conduction process,^{27,28} an estimation of the activation energy, which is a key parameter for such process, is still missing. At higher temperatures, the permittivity of such materials also include the contribution from thermally activated conducting electrons. Meanwhile, the non-local conductivity causes high dielectric loss that increases with the dielectric permittivity at low frequencies. However, it is unclear how important such contribution is to the total permittivity, which contains the effects of both thermally activated polarons and conductive charge carriers. In fact, for the permittivity of such materials, a complete description of their temperature dependence is unavailable over the temperature range accessible to experiments. We note that the Maxwell-Wagner model alone is not enough to understand the permittivity over the broad temperature range (see Eq. (6) below). In addition, while these materials may be modeled by a parallel RC equivalent circuit, resulting in the Arrhenius equation,²⁹ the physics underlying such phenomenon needs to be understood to establish the connections between the RC circuits and the charges and/or dipoles inside. Another remarkable feature of CCTO is its permittivity plateau, which is desirable since it has excellent temperature stability and small dielectric loss. As a matter of fact, such properties has been actively sought and investigated by many researchers³⁰⁻³². However, not knowing the underlying mechanism for the plateau, the searching or design of such materials could be blind.

In this paper, we will answer the aforementioned questions using a statistical approach, which is based on macroscopic

and phenomenological considerations to decompose the contributions from polarons and conductive charge carriers in CCTO. Using this statistical approach, we propose an explicit formula to fit the permittivity over a broad temperature range, which in turn enables us to separate the contributions from polarons and conductive charge carriers. Such separation finally allows us to estimate the activation energies of polarons, as well as conductive charge carriers. Since the analysis separates these two effects and offer some details regarding them, it helps us to understand the permittivity plateau and enhance our understanding of CCTO and similar materials, and will provide useful clues to design or improve this type of materials.

This paper is organized as the follows. In Sec. II, we show the experimentally obtained dielectric properties of CCTO, which will be analyzed in the following sections. In Sec. III, we propose an explicit formula to fit the permittivity of CCTO over the whole temperature range and use it to analyze the contributions to the permittivity from different origins. In Sec. IV, we discuss the origins that all contribute to CCTO's dielectric properties. Finally in Sec. V, we give a brief summary.

II. EXPERIMENT

$\text{CaCu}_3\text{Ti}_4\text{O}_{12}$ (CCTO) powder was prepared by the molten salt method.³³ The obtained CCTO powder was pressed into pellets of 15mm in diameter and ~ 1 mm in thickness. The pellets were sintered at 1060 °C in the air for 30 h. X-ray diffraction shows that the powder is of pure cubic perovskite phase. Both sides of the samples were first polished and then brushed with silver conductive paste, which is followed by a heat treatment at 550 °C for 30 min. Dielectric measurements were performed with an applied voltage of 500 mV using an Agilent 4294A impedance analyzer over the frequency range of 100 Hz to 1 MHz and for temperature from 90 K to 500 K.

A. Dielectric loss

The loss factor of the CCTO sample versus temperature (Fig. 1) shows two regions of large dielectric loss. The Debye-like loss peaks below ~ 300 K shift to high temperature with the probing frequency, while the other one increases rapidly with temperature, suggesting a thermally activated process.

To understand the relaxation below ~ 300 K, we first analyze the behavior of the dielectric dissipation. The inset in Fig. 1 shows the temperature dependence of the relaxation frequency of CCTO, $\ln \omega$ vs $1/T^{1/4}$ (open squares), where ω is the position of the loss peak in the $\tan \delta$ versus $\ln \omega$ plots. We can clearly see that there is a good linear relation between $\ln \omega$ and $1/T^{1/4}$.

On the other hand, if we plot $\ln \omega$ as a function of $1000/T$ (open circles), the result shows an approximate Arrhenius relation. According to this relation, the approaching frequency (when $1000/T = 0$) is 3.59×10^8 Hz and the activation energy 130 meV, respectively. These values are in

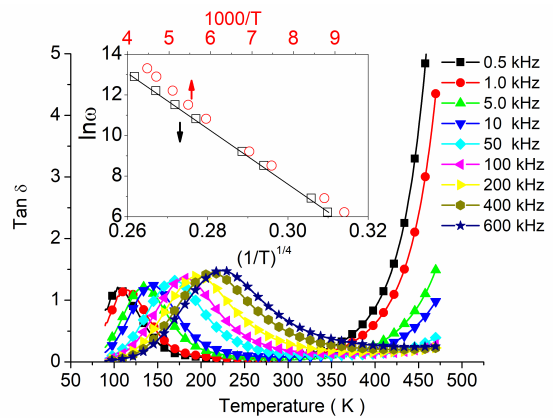


Figure 1. Temperature dependence of $\tan \delta$ of the permittivity of CCTO at various frequencies. Inset: temperature-dependent relaxation frequency ω scaled for thermally activated nearest-neighbor hopping of charges (open circles, top and left axes) and VRH (open squares, bottom and left axes). The solid line is the fitting curve of the experimental data (open squares) according to Eq. 1.

good agreement with that of perovskite materials³⁴, related to the localization process of charge carriers. However, it is notable that a deviation from the Arrhenius relation exists above ~ 200 K. Such a deviation has been found in polaron related relaxations of certain materials, such as CCTO^{26,27,35} and $\text{Sr}_{0.998}\text{Ca}_{0.002}\text{TiO}_3$.³⁶ The reason for the deviation from the Arrhenius law is likely the transition from a grain boundary-limited to bulk-limited conduction, consistent with the widely held "barrier layer model".^{37,38}

Therefore, according to our results, Mott's variable-range-hopping (VRH) model,³⁹ i.e.,

$$f = f_1 \exp \left[- (T_1/T)^{1/4} \right] \quad (1)$$

can better fit the relaxation frequency, where f_1 and T_1 are two constants. The solid line in the inset of Fig. 1 is the fitting result of our experimental results according to Eq. (1). The values of f_1 and T_1 are determined to be 1.68×10^{21} Hz and 3.56×10^8 K, respectively. The value of T_1 of CCTO is similar to those of Li-doped La_2CuO_4 ⁴⁰ and Cu-doped BaTiO_3 ⁴¹ while f_1 is much higher. According to the IBLC model, the relaxation frequency is related to the dc conductivity and grain-boundary capacitance of CCTO²⁷, where f_1 has an approximate linear relation with the dc conductivity of the material. Therefore, f_1 does not represent the hopping frequency of polarons.

Since the VRH mechanism describes the low-temperature dielectric relaxation of CCTO ceramics well, it supports the idea that disorder effects dominate the relaxation behavior of CCTO's semiconducting phases. At this phase, the kinetic energy (due to the thermal excitation) is insufficient to excite charge carrier across the electronic band gap, therefore Eq. (1) is mostly due to the hopping of charge carriers within small regions. Figure 1 thus provides strong evidence for the existence of (hopping) polarons in CCTO.

B. Permittivity

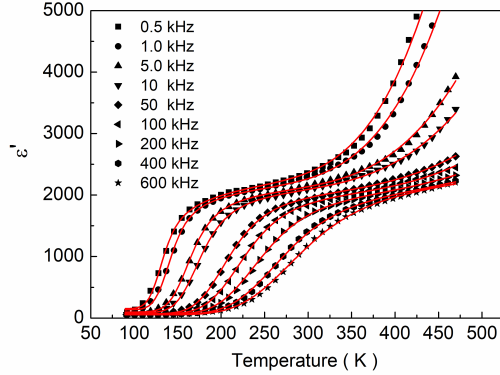


Figure 2. Temperature dependence of the real dielectric permittivity of the CCTO with different frequencies. The solid lines are the fitting results according to the Eq (4).

Figure 2 shows the temperature dependence of CCTO's permittivity measured at different frequencies. The rapid increase in the low-temperature region is intimately related to the polaron hopping. Overall the curves in Fig. 2 have four stages: (i) A region with tiny permittivity at the lowest temperatures (the exact temperature depends on the probing frequency; at 1 kHz, $T < 90$ K), where polarons are frozen and the permittivity is below 100. (ii) As the temperature increases, the dielectric permittivity rises rapidly (at 1 kHz, $90 < T < 150$ K), which is related to the thermal excitation of polarons inside grains. The polaron hopping leads to semiconducting grains, where charge carriers are able to move inside grains (but not beyond the grain boundaries), resulting in the Maxwell-Wagner effect, which significantly enhances the dielectric permittivity. (iii) A plateau region exists at even higher temperatures (at 1 kHz, $150 < T < 350$ K). (iv) Another rapid increase of dielectric permittivity at the highest temperatures, which can be attributed to the thermally activated conductivity over the bulk.

Interestingly, Fig. 2 and the above analysis demonstrate some similarities to the temperature dependent permittivity of relaxors⁴², where the contributions to the permittivity from different origins have varying weight over the whole temperature range. As we will show below, the statistical approach adopted in Ref. [42] can also be used to understand the dielectric response of polarons in CCTO as well.

III. FITTING PERMITTIVITY

To understand the dielectric CCTO's properties over the whole temperature range, it is important to know the effective permittivity, based on which we can propose proper formula to fit it.

A. Effective permittivity

The Maxwell-Wagner model can be simplified to consider two slabs representing grain and grain boundary. The two slabs have different dielectric permittivity (ϵ_g and ϵ_{gb} for grains and grain boundaries, respectively), conductivity (σ_g and σ_{gb} for grains and grain boundaries, respectively) and widths (l and d corresponding to the thickness grains and grain boundaries, respectively and $L = l + d$). Then, one can obtain the effective permittivity with respect to the frequency ω as^{43,44}

$$\begin{aligned} \epsilon^* &= \frac{L}{l/(\epsilon_g - i\sigma_g/\omega) + d/(\epsilon_{gb} - i\sigma_{gb}/\omega)} \\ &= \epsilon_\infty + \frac{\epsilon_0 - \epsilon_\infty}{1 + i\omega\tau} - i\frac{\sigma(\omega)}{\epsilon_0\omega}, \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

where

$$\begin{aligned} \epsilon_\infty &= \frac{L}{l/\epsilon_g + d/\epsilon_{gb}}, \\ \epsilon_0 &= \frac{L(\sigma_{gb}\epsilon_g + \sigma_g\epsilon_{gb})}{l\sigma_{gb} + d\sigma_g}, \\ \tau &= \frac{l\epsilon_{gb} + d\epsilon_g}{l\sigma_{gb} + d\sigma_g}, \\ \sigma(\omega) &= \frac{L\sigma_g\sigma_{gb}}{(l\sigma_{gb} + d\sigma_g)(1 + i\omega\tau)}. \end{aligned}$$

The dielectric permittivity shown in Eq. (2) consists of three contributions. The first term is a constant determined by the permittivity of both the grain and its boundary. The second contribution is of Debye type with the relaxation time determined by the conductivity and permittivity. The third term describes the contribution from the conductivity of grains and grain boundaries.

Equation (2) shows how the dielectric permittivity depends on the properties of grains and grain-boundaries within the IBLC model. Since the size of grains and boundaries is difficult to estimate, Abdelkafi *et al*⁴⁵ proposed to use a modified Cole-Cole relaxation by introducing the conductivity to describe dielectric anomaly of perovskite oxides at high temperature as following:

$$\epsilon^* = \epsilon_\infty + \frac{\epsilon_0 - \epsilon_\infty}{(1 + i\omega\tau)^{1-\alpha}} - i\frac{\sigma^*}{\epsilon_0\omega}, \quad (3)$$

where τ is the mean relaxation time, α is the Cole-Cole parameter, and σ^* ($\sigma^* = \sigma_1 + j\sigma_2$) is the complex conductivity, where σ_1 (σ_2) is due to free charge carriers (space charges within a given region, such as a grain), which suggests that the conductivity has contributions to both the real and imaginary parts of the permittivity^{46,47}.

B. Broad temperature range

Having shown the effective permittivity, we are able to propose a phenomenological model to understand how the per-

mittivity changes with temperature. In this model, individual polarons are categorized into two groups. Our assumption is that the polarons need to be thermally excited to overcome a local energy minimum before they can have large contributions to the grain conductivity σ_g and permittivity ε_g . When the temperature is sufficiently low, most of the polarons charge can only move around its equilibrium position, their contribution to grain conductivity and permittivity is small and can be taken as a constant. As the temperature increases, while still bounded by grain boundaries, more and more of them can move on a larger spacial scale (but still bound by grain boundaries), jumping from one energy minimum to others, with their contribution to the conductivity and permittivity becoming much larger.

Similar to our statistical model for relaxors⁴², here we employ the Maxwell-Boltzmann distribution to estimate the number of active polarons relative to the inactive ones. A potential well of average depth E_b is introduced to account for the constraint on the polarons. Here the polarons correspond to dipoles in relaxors. Practically, the number of polarons with a kinetic energy exceeding the potential well $[N_1(E_b, T)]$ is given by

$$N_1(E_b, T) = N \sqrt{\frac{4}{\pi}} \sqrt{\frac{E_b}{k_B T}} \exp\left(-\frac{E_b}{k_B T}\right) + N \operatorname{erfc}\sqrt{\frac{E_b}{k_B T}}, \quad (4)$$

where N is the total number of polarons in the system, k_B is the Boltzmann constant, T is the temperature (in Kelvin), and erfc is the complementary error function. The total dielectric permittivity is then given by

$$\varepsilon(T, \omega) = \varepsilon_1(T, \omega) P_1(E_b, T) + \varepsilon_2(T, \omega) P_2(E_b, T), \quad (5)$$

where $\varepsilon_1(T, \omega)$ and $\varepsilon_2(T, \omega)$ describe the dielectric responses from the aforementioned two polaron groups, ω is the probing frequency, and $P_1(E_b, T) = N_1(E_b, T)/N$, $P_2(E_b, T) = 1 - P_1(E_b, T)$ account for the proportion of polarons in each group. We note that, according to Eq. (2), the permittivity in Eq. (5) not only results from the intrinsic polarization of polarons, but also the grain conductivity associated with the distribution of the thermally activated polarons, which is often described by the Maxwell-Wagner effect.

Microscopically, the functions $\varepsilon_1(T, \omega)$ and $\varepsilon_2(T, \omega)$ are related to the *polarizability* of each group of the polarons. For the ‘‘inactive’’ polarons, $\varepsilon_2(T, \omega)$ can be chosen as a constant; while the thermally activated polarons, its dynamics under external electric field can be modeled by Debye relaxation, i.e., $\varepsilon_1(T, \omega) \sim 1/(1 + \omega^2 \tau_0^2)$ ^{42,48} was chosen, where τ_0 is the temperature-dependent relaxation time. For a thermally activated process, it follows the Arrhenius law. Consequently, $\varepsilon_1(T, \omega) \sim 1/[1 + A^2 \omega^2 \exp(2E_a/T)]$, which was discussed by Jonscher⁴⁹ and follows the approach shown in Ref. [42]. In addition to the above analysis, we also need to consider the high-temperature dielectric response induced by the conductivity due to the thermally activated non-localized conductive charge carriers⁵⁰. To account for this effect, we use the last term in Eq. (3).

Therefore we propose the following equation to fit the permittivity of CCTO over a broad temperature range:

$$\varepsilon(T) = \frac{\varepsilon_1}{1 + b \exp(-\theta/T)} P_1(E_b, T) + \varepsilon_2 P_2(E_b, T) + \frac{\sigma \exp(-E_{\text{con}}/k_B T)}{\varepsilon_0 \omega}, \quad (6)$$

where ε_1 , ε_2 , b and θ are constants at a given frequency ω , ε_0 is the vacuum permittivity, σ is the thermally activated conductivity including contribution from the conductive charge carrier, and E_{con} is the activation energy for conductive charge carrier’s migration and transport. The above equation has clear physical meanings: (i) The first and second terms are the same as in Ref. [42] except that the analysis applies to polarons; (ii) The third term or the RHS is the contribution of conductive charge carriers, which is often associated with a thermal activation process.

C. Results from fitting

Having shown the explicit formula to describe the dielectric permittivity versus temperature, we now use Eq. (6) to fit $\varepsilon(T)$ of CCTO at different frequencies and show the results in Fig. 2 (solid line) where the fitting curves agree well with experimental results.

The fitting results show that the value of E_b exhibits very little dependence on the probing frequency and we find $E_b = 0.19$ eV with a simple averaging procedure and use this value for all the fittings at different frequencies. The activation energy for the conducting charge carriers E_{con} usually relate more to the composition rather than the probing frequency. From our fitting results, $E_{\text{con}} = 0.25$ eV is also obtained with simple averaging. The value of θ is 2100 K, which only slightly changes with the probing frequency.

The fitting in Fig. 2 shows the importance of polaronic conduction in the grains, whose relaxation was likely induced by the charge accumulation at the grain boundaries, which reveals some connections between polarons and the IBCCL model. We also note that the fitting parameters (e.g., E_{con}) depend on samples, especially their grain sizes and composition as discussed in Ref. [33].

To understand the dielectric response of CCTO, we also show $P_1(E_b, T)$, $P_2(E_b, T)$ and the function

$$w_1(T) = \frac{1}{1 + b \exp(-\theta/T)} \quad (7)$$

in Fig. (3a). Clearly, $P_1(E_b, T)$ and $P_2(E_b, T)$ show little change as the temperature increases, which is different from typical ferroelectric relaxors, such as $\text{Ba}(\text{Ti}_{1-x}\text{Zr}_x)\text{O}_3$ for $x > 0.3$, which has smaller E_b [e.g., $\text{Ba}(\text{Ti}_{0.6}\text{Zr}_{0.4})\text{O}_3$ has $E_b = 0.035$ eV].⁵¹ This feature indicates that the number of ‘‘active’’ polarons which can overcome the potential confinement remain small (P_1 is small) over the experimental temperature range. However, the large value of ε_1 (1.25×10^6

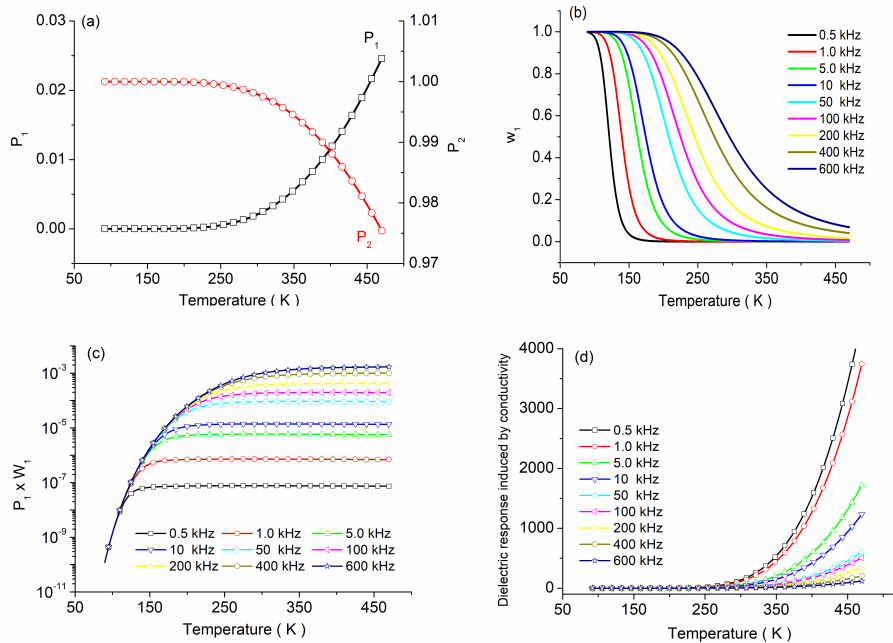


Figure 3. Decomposition of the contribution to the total permittivity: (a) P_1 and P_2 versus temperature; (b) w_1 versus temperature; (c) $P_1 w_1$ versus temperature shows a rise and a plateau; (d) The dielectric response induced by conductivity.

to 8.97×10^9 depending on the probing frequency, which is much larger than that of typical relaxors) indicates that those polarons are highly correlated and can make an important contribution to the total permittivity once they overcome E_b . The function $w_1(T)$ describes the ability of polarons (which can overcome the potential well) to align with each other under thermal fluctuations. Figure 3(b) shows that it is similar to the Fermi-Dirac function. That is, at low temperature the value is close to one but close to zero at high temperatures.

Figure 3(d) shows the permittivity induced by conductivity [the 3rd term in Eq. (6)]. The contribution of conductivity is small below 200 K but increases rapidly beyond this point. At higher temperatures, due to the thermal activation, conductive charge carriers start to have a large contribution to the dielectric permittivity. At room temperature, the contribution is about 5% of the total dielectric permittivity of CCTO, which suggests that, at room temperature, Maxwell-Wagner effect induced by thermal activated polarons makes the most important contribution to the total permittivity.

IV. DISCUSSION

In Sec. III, we have shown that separating the contribution to the permittivity will enable us to fit it over the whole temperature range. In the following, we discuss the underlying mechanism that makes such separation necessary and the origin of the permittivity plateau that can be seen in Fig. 2.

A. Polarons and conductive charge carriers

Zhang *et al.*²⁷ considered that traces of Ti^{3+} exist in CCTO due to the loss of oxygen from the grains during the high-temperature sintering,²⁷ where the Ti^{3+} and Ti^{4+} can form $\text{Ti}^{3+}\text{-O-Ti}^{4+}$ bonds. The Ti-3d electrons in Ti^{3+} ions can thus hop to Ti^{4+} under an applied electric field. Moreover, the formation of Ti^{3+} ions distorts CCTO lattices since the ionic radius of Ti^{4+} is smaller than that of Ti^{3+} , therefore producing a polaronic distortions. The relaxation time of polarons is longer than that of free electrons because of the polaronic distortion.

At low temperatures, polarons stay in more localized states due to the Anderson localization resulting from atom alloying and strain.²⁶ Therefore, E_b of CCTO is larger, comparable to that of ferroelectric $\text{Ba}(\text{Ti}_{0.9}\text{Zr}_{0.1})\text{O}_3$ ($E_b = 0.24$ eV) and $\text{Ba}(\text{Ti}_{0.8}\text{Zr}_{0.2})\text{O}_3$ ($E_b = 0.19$ eV) as discussed in Ref. [51]. In this respect, the dynamic behavior of polarons in CCTO is similar to that of dipoles of normal ferroelectrics. However, the polarization changes in CCTO (due to hopping of polarons) are conceivably much larger than that of ferroelectrics (due to ion displacements on each lattice site), making the permittivity of CCTO very large. Furthermore, the hopping of charge carriers (polarons) leads to semiconducting grains, which in turn leads to the Maxwell-Wagner effect. The proposed model here helps us to identify the activation energy, and estimate the relative dielectric strength from a different groups of polarons. From this perspective, if we want to increase the polaron contribution, one effective way is to decrease E_b so that more polarons can be excited at room temperature.

It is important to bear in mind that polarons are not the only contribution to the permittivity of CCTO. The conductivity inside grains increases with temperature (which eventually make a large contribution to the permittivity at high temperatures). Therefore, the Maxwell-Wagner effect, which results in giant dielectric permittivity, starts to be important at the room temperature (see Fig. 1). Further increasing the temperature, the diffuse dielectric anomaly is observed, where the electrical conductivity with thermally activated electrons from Ti-3d electrons in Ti^{3+} ions (the activation energy E_{con} is much lower than that of oxygen vacancies) overcome the confinement of grain boundaries, becoming high enough to be prominent and need to be included as shown in the last term of Eq. (6). While such effects push the permittivity of CCTO to even larger values, the accompanying dielectric loss is so severe that some balance shall be considered to avoid this situation in the design of dielectric materials similar to CCTO.

B. Permittivity plateau

Figure 2 shows that, for each probing frequency, the permittivity of CCTO has a plateau region with large values and excellent temperature stability. More importantly, Fig. 1 shows that the plateau regions also have rather small dielectric loss. These two factors make it important in the search of high- k materials with good temperature stability, which are often used as green tapes in the multilayer electronic circuits architecture fabricated using low-temperature co-fired ceramics (LTCC) to enhance functionality and reduce the size of a device⁵². CCTO was also proposed as an alternative dielectric material for multilayer ceramic capacitor (MLCC) applications due to its low sintering temperature, high dielectric permittivity, and temperature stability^{31,53}. In fact, CCTO based compounds with better performance are very attractive for researcher and have been continuously sought. For instance, CCTO-based compounds with $\Delta\epsilon'$ satisfying the X8R and X9R standards⁵⁴ have been reported^{55,56}. Consequently, understanding the permittivity plateau shown in Fig. 2 becomes very important for developing such materials. In fact, results in Fig. 3 reveal the underlying mechanism.

Figure 3(c) shows that for a large temperature range (the range depends on the probing frequency), $P_1 w_1$ is essentially a constant. This result is remarkable considering the fact that both $P_1(T)$ and $w_1(T)$ are rather complex functions that some combination of parameters can make $P_1 w_1$ a constant is surprising. Figures 3(a) and (b) reveal that such combination do exist in real materials such as CCTO.

Figure 3 also shows that activated polarons are responsible for this permittivity plateau as the first two terms in Eq. (6) are from the contribution of polarons. Interestingly, it can

be seen from Fig. 3(a) and (b) that, for a large temperature range, the population increase of active polarons exactly compensates their polarizability decrease, making the permittivity plateau possible. Since the activation energy for polarons is large (0.19 eV), the increase in P_1 [Fig. 3(a)] is different from the steep increase seen in relaxors⁴². The analysis here indicates that, when making new CCTO-based compounds, the dopants (or alloying components) shall fulfill two factors: (i) Not to changing the activation energy of CCTO dramatically (e.g., making it a relaxor by doping); (ii) Not to alter the dynamics of active polarons within grains. The ultimate trick is probably to balance P_1 and w_1 perfectly while trying to increase their values.

According to the oxygen vacancy hopping model proposed by Ang *et al*⁵⁷, long-range motion of charge carriers leads to the *dc* conduction and only contribute to dielectric loss, the short-range hopping is similar to the reorientation of the dipoles that leads to a dielectric peak. Here since the polarons are responsible for the permittivity plateau, unlike conductive charge carriers (since they exercise short-range hopping), the dielectric loss due to polaron dynamics is more like relaxors, explaining why it can be small at the plateau region.

V. CONCLUSION

We have investigated the low frequency 0.5-600 kHz dielectric properties of CCTO over a large temperature range (90 – 500 K). We have proposed an explicit formula to fit the temperature dependence of the dielectric permittivity at different frequencies. Our statistical model can explain the low temperature step-function-like dielectric relaxation of CCTO and has estimated the activation energy of polarons and also shows that the permittivity plateau arises from the balance of the population and the polarizability of active polarons. The contribution from conductive charge carriers at high temperatures also plays a key role on the dielectric behavior. We hope that our model and the fitting results will deepen the understanding of the behavior of CCTO resulting from the interplay between the localization and conduction of charge carriers.

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