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> Phys. Rev. Lett. **122**, 117204 — Published 21 March 2019 DOI: 10.1103/PhysRevLett.122.117204

Coexistence of ferromagnetic and stripe antiferromagnetic spin fluctuations in $SrCo_2As_2$

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(Dated: February 26, 2019)

We use inelastic neutron scattering to study energy and wave vector dependence of spin fluctuations in SrCo₂As₂, derived from SrFe_{2-x}Co_xAs₂ iron pnictide superconductors. Our data reveals the coexistence of antiferromagnetic (AF) and ferromagnetic (FM) spin fluctuations at wave vectors $\mathbf{Q}_{AF}=(1,0)$ and $\mathbf{Q}_{FM}=(0,0)/(2,0)$, respectively. By comparing neutron scattering results with those of dynamic mean field theory calculation and angle-resolved photoemission spectroscopy experiments, we conclude that both AF and FM spin fluctuations in SrCo₂As₂ are closely associated with a flat band of the e_g orbitals near the Fermi level, different from the t_{2g} orbitals in superconducting SrFe_{2-x}Co_xAs₂. Therefore, Co-substitution in SrFe_{2-x}Co_xAs₂ induces a t_{2g} to e_g orbital switching, and is responsible for FM spin fluctuations detrimental to the singlet pairing superconductivity.

Flat electronic bands can give rise to a plethora of interaction-driven quantum phases, including ferromagnetism [1], Mott insulating phase due to electron correlations [2], and superconductivity [3]. Therefore, an understanding how the flat electronic bands can influence the electronic, magnetic, and superconducting properties of solids is an important topic in condensed matter physics. In iron pnictide superconductors such as $AFe_{2-x}Co_xAs_2$ (A = Ba, Sr) [Figs. 1(a)-1(d)], the dominate interactions are stripe antiferromagnetic (AF) order, and superconductivity, which has singlet electron pairing, arises by doping electron with Co-substitution to suppress static AF order [4–6]. While AF spin fluctuations and superconductivity in iron pnictides are believed to arise from nested hole Fermi surfaces at Γ and electron Fermi surfaces at M [Fig. 1(e)] [7], the density functional theory (DFT) calculations suggest the competing ferromagnetic (FM) and AF spin fluctuations with the balance controlled by doping [8, 9]. For Co-overdoped ACo_2As_2 [10, 11], where the DFT calculations find a tendency for both the FM and AF order, neutron scattering revealed only the AF spin fluctuations [12] while angle resolved photoemission spectroscopy (ARPES) experiments found no evidence of the Fermi surface nesting [13, 14]. On the other hand, nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) measurements on $AFe_{2-x}Co_xAs_2$ provided evidence for FM spin fluctuations at all Co-doping levels in addition to the AF spin fluctuations [15, 16]. In particular, strong FM spin

fluctuations in $AFe_{2-x}Co_xAs_2$ are believed to compete with AF spin fluctuations and prevent superconductivity for Co-overdoped samples [15, 16], contrary to the Fermi surface nesting picture where superconductivity is suppressed via vanishing hole Fermi surfaces with increasing Co-doping [7, 17]. Finally, action of physical, chemical pressure, or aliovalent substitution in BCo_2As_2 (B =Eu, Ca) can drive these AF materials into ferromagnets [18]. In particular, CaCo_{1.84}As₂ with a collapsed tetragonal structure [19] forms A-type AF ground state with coexisting FM spin fluctuations within the CoAs layer and A-type AF spin fluctuations between the CoAs layers [20]. These features are different from those of Ca(Fe_{1-x}Co_x)₂As₂ [21, 22] and $AFe_{2-x}Co_xAs_2$ [6].

Iron pnictides have five nearly degenerate d orbitals which split into t_{2g} and e_g orbitals in a tetrahedral crystal field [Figs. 1(b), 1(c)]. The electronic structure of the system is dominated by Fe 3d t_{2g} orbitals near the Fermi level with hole-electron Fermi surfaces at Γ and M, respectively [Fig. 1(e)]. The presence of multiple Fe 3d orbitals near the Fermi level results in varying orbital characters on different parts of the Fermi surfaces [23], and orbital-dependent strengths of electronic correlations [24–28]. The electronic band structures of $\mathrm{SrCo}_2\mathrm{As}_2$ calculated by the DFT combined with dynamic mean field theory (DMFT) [29, 30] reveal the presence of a flat band near M point with mixture of the d_{z^2} and $d_{x^2-y^2}$ orbitals [Fig. 1(d)]. If $\mathrm{SrCo}_2\mathrm{As}_2$ has strong ferromagnetism aris-

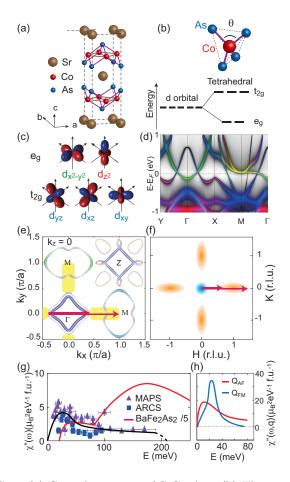


FIG. 1: (a) Crystal structure of $SrCo_2As_2$. (b) The tetrahedron of $Fe(Co)As_4$ and the resulting *d*-orbital splitting. (c) Wave functions of the five d-orbitals. (d) Band structure of SrCo₂As₂. Green(Red) represents $d_{x^2-y^2}(d_{z^2})$ orbital and blue is the contribution from the t_{2g} (d_{xz}, d_{yz}, d_{xy}) orbitals. Yellow is the mixture of red (d_{z^2}) and green $(d_{x^2-y^2})$. (e) Fermi surfaces from DFT+DMFT calculations. The shading vellow area corresponds to the flat band (vellow part) in Fig. 1(d) and arrows represent scattering wave vectors associated with the flat band. The colors represent the same orbital characters as in (c) and (d). (f) Schematics of the low energy FM (blue) and AF (orange) spin fluctuations in $SrCo_2As_2$. (g) Energy dependence of integrated $\chi''(E)$ of SrCo₂As₂ in absolute units normalized by using a vanadium standard [35]. The red solid line is $\chi''(E)/5$ of BaFe₂As₂ [37]. The black solid line is a guide to the eye. (h) The measured AF and FM fluctuations at \mathbf{Q}_{AF} and \mathbf{Q}_{FM} [35].

ing from the flat band as suggested from NMR [15, 16], one should be able to extract its energy and wave vector dependence by neutron scattering and determine its role to the suppressed superconductivity in Co-overdoped $SrFe_{2-x}Co_xAs_2$ [4–6].

In this Letter, we combine neutron scattering, ARPES and DFT+DMFT methods to study $SrCo_2As_2$, an electron-doped end member of $SrFe_{2-x}Co_xAs_2$ exhibiting no structural, magnetic, or superconducting transitions [11]. Besides confirming the longitudinally elongated AF

spin fluctuations at wave vector $\mathbf{Q}_{AF} = (1,0)$ [Figs. 1(f) and 2] [12], we successfully observed the in-plane FM spin fluctuations at $\mathbf{Q}_{\text{FM}} = (0,0)$ and its equivalent (2,0) positions [Figs. 2 and 3]. From the DFT+DMFT calculations and ARPES measurements, we find a flat band consisting of the e_a orbitals along the Γ -M direction right above the Fermi level [Fig. 1(d)], leading to a prominent peak in the density-of-state (DOS) near Fermi level responsible for both the FM and AF spin fluctuations [Figs. 4(a)-4(d)]. Orbital analysis of the dynamic spin susceptibility $\chi''(\mathbf{Q}, E)$ in the DFT+DMFT calculations suggests that magnetism in $SrCo_2As_2$ is dominated by the e_q orbitals [Figs. 1(d), 1(e), 4(e), 4(f)]. These results are beyond the prevailing orbital selective Mott picture in iron pnictides, where the t_{2q} orbitals are most strongly correlated [23, 27, 31–33] and electron (Co) doping monotonously reduces correlations in all five d orbitals [24, 25]. In addition, the FM spin correlations in SrCo₂As₂ are similar to the A-type AF order in $CaCo_{1.86}As_2$ [34]. Therefore, our observation is consistent with the proposal that FM fluctuations are detrimental to superconductivity in Cooverdoped $AFe_{2-x}Co_xAs_2$ and may be responsible for the hole-electron asymmetry of the superconducting dome in iron pnictide families [16].

We begin by showing constant-energy slices of $\chi''(\mathbf{Q}, E)$ on SrCo₂As₂ at T = 5 K [Figs. 2(a),(c),(e),(g)] [32, 35]. At E = 8 meV, the AF spin fluctuations at $\mathbf{Q}_{AF} = (1,0)$ are longitudinally elongated similar to that in hole-doped $BaFe_2As_2$ [Fig. 2(a)] [17]. With increasing energy, spin fluctuations along the longitudinal direction are further elongated while they barely change along the transverse direction, different from the transversely elongated spin fluctuations in $AFe_{2-x}Co_xAs_2$ [6, 17]. At $E \geq 50$ meV, there are magnetic intensities at both the $\mathbf{Q}_{AF} = (1,0)$ and $\mathbf{Q}_{FM} = (2,0)$. Spin fluctuations form ridges of scattering across the whole Brillouin zone (BZ) forming a square network [Figs. 2(e), 2(g)], similar to those in $CaCo_{2-y}As_2$ [20]. Along the transverse direction, we observed a linearly broadening of the halfwidth at half-maximum (HWHM) of AF spin fluctuations with increasing energy at the speed of $\Delta HWHM/\Delta E \approx$ $1/(440 \text{ meV} \cdot \text{\AA})$ [35] and no peak splitting was identified.

We used the DFT+DMFT calculations to understand the electronic band structure [Fig. 1(d)] and spin dynamics of SrCo₂As₂ [24, 35, 36]. Figures 2(b), 2(d), 2(f) and 2(h) show the DFT+DMFT calculated results for E = 10, 20, 50, 70 meV. Although the calculated results look remarkably similar to experimental data in Figs. 2(a), 2(c), 2(e), and 2(g), there are also important differences. First, the AF spin fluctuations are weaker than the FM spin fluctuations in the DFT+DMFT calculation at E = 10 meV, while they are stronger in experiments. This is mostly because the calculations are exceedingly sensitive to the position of the flat band with respect to the Fermi level. Second, the calculation suggests that FM spin fluctuations originating from Γ

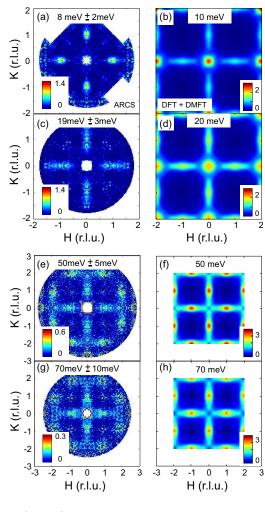


FIG. 2: (a,c,e,g) Two-dimensional images of measured dynamic spin susceptibility of $SrCo_2As_2$ in the [H, K] plane at $E = 8 \pm 2$, 19 ± 3 , 50 ± 5 , and 70 ± 10 meV, respectively. Radially symmetric backgrounds were subtracted to visually enhance the weak magnetic signal. (b,d,f,h) The corresponding results from the DFT+DMFT calculations [35].

(and equivalent) point merge into AF spin fluctuations at $\mathbf{Q}_{\mathrm{AF}} = (\pm 1, 0)/(0, \pm 1)$ around 50 meV [Fig. 2(f)], while there is no clear evidence of FM spin fluctuations at E = 8, 19 meV [Figs. 2(a), 2(c)] [35]. Figure 1(g) shows energy dependence of local dynamic susceptibility $\chi''(E)$, obtained by integrating both the FM and AF signal within the area of $(0,0) \rightarrow (1,1) \rightarrow (2,0) \rightarrow$ $(1,-1) \rightarrow (0,0)$ [6], and its comparison with those of BaFe₂As₂ [37]. The total fluctuating moment is approximately $\langle m^2 \rangle \approx 0.4 \pm 0.1 \ \mu_B^2/\text{f.u.}$ [35, 37], compared with $0.5 \ \mu_B^2/\text{f.u.}$ from the calculation. Due to the diffusive nature of the magnetic scattering, it is rather difficult to experimentally separate the integrated FM and AF signal and compare with that of the DFT+DMFT calculations.

To conclusively determine the FM signal in $SrCo_2As_2$, we carried out polarized neutron scattering experiments with the neutron polarization directions x, y, and z

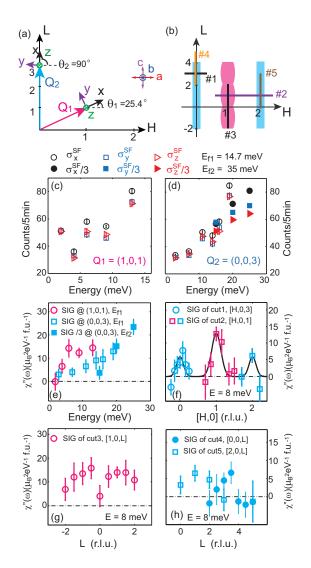


FIG. 3: (a) Schematic of the [H, 0, L] scattering plane for neutron polarization analysis. The AF and FM wave vectors are labeled as \mathbf{Q}_1 and \mathbf{Q}_2 , respectively. The neutron polarization directions are along the x, y, and z. (b) Locations of FM (blue) and AF (magenta) spin fluctuations in reciprocal space. Lines indicate scan directions. (c,d) Constant- \mathbf{Q} scans of $\sigma_x^{SF}, \sigma_y^{SF}$, and σ_z^{SF} at \mathbf{Q}_1 and \mathbf{Q}_2 , respectively, at T = 1.5K. (e) Constant-Q scans of pure magnetic scattering intensity at \mathbf{Q}_1 and \mathbf{Q}_2 . (f,g,h) The AF (magenta) and FM (blue) scattering at E = 8 meV along the H and L directions as marked in (b). The values of *SIG* are converted into absolute units by assuming the polarized data at $\mathbf{Q}_{AF} = (1, 0, 1)$ and E = 8 meV is comparable with the integrated intensity in 0.975 < H< 1.025 and -0.1 < K< 0.1 in Fig. 2(a).

shown in Fig. 3(a), which correspond to neutron spinflip (SF) scattering cross sections σ_x^{SF} , σ_y^{SF} , and σ_z^{SF} , respectively [38–43]. The magnetic scattering of SrCo₂As₂ should then be $SIG = \sigma_x^{SF} - (\sigma_y^{SF} + \sigma_z^{SF})/2$ [39–43]. Figures 3(c) and 3(d) show the energy scans at $\mathbf{Q}_1 = (1, 0, 1)$ and $\mathbf{Q}_2 = (0, 0, 3)$ [Fig. 3(a)]. Figure 3(e) shows energy dependence of *SIG* at \mathbf{Q}_1 and \mathbf{Q}_2 , confirming the presence of magnetic fluctuations at the AF and FM wave vectors, respectively.

At \mathbf{Q}_1 [Fig. 3(c)], $\sigma_u^{SF} \approx \sigma_z^{SF}$ implies that the AF spin fluctuations are isotropic in spin space, different from the anisotropic spin fluctuations in $BaFe_{2-x}Co_xAs_2$ induced by spin-orbit coupling [39–43]. These results suggest that the spin-orbit coupling in $SrCo_2As_2$ is weaker than that of $BaFe_2As_2$. At Q_2 [Figs. 3(d), 3(e)], magnetic scattering increases with increasing energy with no spin gap above E = 3 meV, providing direct evidence for the FM spin fluctuations in $SrCo_2As_2$ [15, 35]. To further demonstrate the coexisting FM and AF spin fluctuations, we performed constant-energy scans along the [H, 0, 3] and [H, 0, 1] directions at E = 8 meV [Fig. 3(b)]. Figure 3(f) indicates that the FM spin fluctuations are confined near (0, 0, 3) and are about half the size as that of the AF signal around (1,0,1). The DFT+DMFT calculations predict the dominant FM spin fluctuations around 10 meV [Fig. 2(b)]. Constant-energy scans along the [1, 0, L] [Fig. 3(g) and [0, 0, L] [Fig. 3(h)] directions reveal weakly L dependent scattering at both the AF and FM positions, respectively, confirming the quasi-two-dimensional nature of the magnetic scattering. Figure 1(h) shows energy dependence of $\chi''(\mathbf{Q}, E)$ at \mathbf{Q}_{AF} and \mathbf{Q}_{FM} , where the peak in \mathbf{Q}_{FM} near 25 meV should be associated with the Van Hove singularity of the flat band.

To understand the origin of the FM and AF spin fluctuations in $SrCo_2As_2$ [Fig. 4(a)], we measured its band structure by ARPES and compared the outcome in Fig. 4(c) with the DFT+DMFT calculations in Fig. 4(d). Around the Γ point, one shallow electron-like α band and one highly dispersive hole-like β band were observed. Another electron-like band at the M point was also found. These results agree well with the DFT+DMFT calculation in Fig. 4(d), supporting the existence of a flat band along Γ -M direction right above the Fermi level [Figs. 1(d) and 4(d)] [35]. Further ARPES data collected along the Z-A direction with a different photon energy reveals the presence of the flat band (or band bottom) touching the Fermi level at A point, mainly arising from the $d_{x^2-y^2}$ orbital hybridized with the d_{z^2} [Fig. 1(d)] [35]. In particular, the partial DOS of the Co $3d_{x^2-y^2}$ orbital in the DFT+DMFT calculation exhibits a peak at about 35 meV above the Fermi level, similar to the maximum scattering of the FM spin fluctuations [Fig. 1(h)], suggesting a close relationship between the flat band and FM instability.

Flat electronic bands with high DOS near the Fermi level can influence the electronic and magnetic properties of solids through tuning the electron-electron correlations [1–3]. In SrCo₂As₂, the flat band might affect spin fluctuations in two ways. First, the $d_{x^2-y^2}$ band (α) dispersive along the Γ -X/Y direction but flat along the Γ -M direction [Fig. 1(d)] might lead to high DOS near the Fermi level and Stoner FM instability similar to that of Sr₂RuO₄ [44, 45]. Both the DFT+DMFT calculations and ARPES experiments reveal a prominent

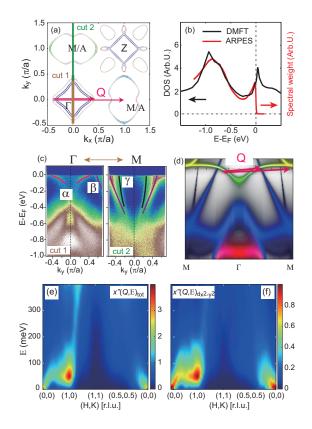


FIG. 4: (a) Fermi surfaces of SrCo₂As₂ from the DFT+DMFT calculations. (b) Calculated electronic DOS and integrated spectral weight from ARPES. (c) Intensity plots of the band dispersion along the Γ -M direction ($E_{photon} = 22$ eV). (d) Calculated band structure along the M- Γ -M direction. Arrows indicate possible wave vectors from occupied to empty states on the flat band. (e) Total $\chi''(\mathbf{Q}, E)$ from the DFT+DMFT calculation. (f) Calculated $\chi''(\mathbf{Q}, E)$ from the $d_{x^2-y^2}$ orbital.

peak in DOS near the Fermi level [Fig. 4(b)], supporting the existence of flat-band related FM fluctuations. Second, the flat band above the Fermi level provides many electron scattering channels as shown by the arrows in Fig. 4(d). These scattering processes result in the longitudinally elongated spin fluctuations extending from Γ to M [Fig. 1(f)]. This is different from the longitudinally elongated low-energy spin fluctuations in hole-doped BaFe₂As₂, where the longitudinal elongation is driven by mismatched sizes of the hole-electron Fermi surfaces [17, 46-48]. Figures 4(e) and 4(f) plot the DFT+DMFT calculated total dynamic spin susceptibility and contributions from the $d_{x^2-y^2}$ orbital [35]. Surprisingly, both the AF and FM spin fluctuations are dominated by the e_g orbitals (Fig. S5) [35], different from the majority t_{2g} contributions to the spin dynamics in iron pnictides [36]. In $SrFe_{2-x}Co_xAs_2$, the presence of AF spin fluctuations [12] is responsible for the superconductivity. The appearance of FM spin fluctuations in $SrCo_2As_2$ and their competition with the stripe AF spin fluctuations might be responsible the absence of superconductivity in heavily over-doped $\text{SrFe}_{2-x}\text{Co}_x\text{As}_2$. The underlying orbital characters might also be an important factor for superconductivity in iron pnictides.

The work at Rice is supported by the US NSF DMR-1700081 and the Robert A. Welch Foundation grant No. C-1839 (P.D.). ZPY was supported by the NSFC (Grant No. 11674030), the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (Grant No. 310421113), the National Key Research and Development Program of China grant 2016YFA0302300. The calculations used high performance computing clusters at BNU in Zhuhai and the National Supercomputer Center in Guangzhou. ZHL acknowledges the NSFC (Grant No. 11704394), and the Shanghai Sailing Program (Grant No.17YF1422900). We acknowledge the support of the HFIR/SNS, a DOE User Facility operated by ORNL. Experiments at the ISIS were supported by a beam time allocation from the STFC.

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