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Spin coherence in a Mn$_3$ single-molecule magnet

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Spin coherence in single crystals of the spin $S = 6$ single-molecule magnet (SMM) [Mn$_3$O(O$_2$CEt)$_3$(mpko)$_3$]$^+$ (abbreviated Mn$_3$) has been investigated using 230 GHz electron paramagnetic resonance spectroscopy. Coherence in Mn$_3$ was uncovered by significantly suppressing dipolar contribution to the decoherence with complete spin polarization of Mn$_3$ SMMs. The temperature dependence of spin decoherence time ($T_2$) revealed that the dipolar decoherence is the dominant source of decoherence in Mn$_3$, and $T_2$ can be extended up to 267 ns by quenching the dipolar decoherence. © 2016 AIP Publishing LLC. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1063/1.4940437]

Single-molecule magnets (SMMs) are nanoscale magnets that possess large magnetic moments and an anisotropy energy barrier between their spin-up and spin-down states at the molecular level. The energy barrier prevents spin reversal, leading to slow magnetization relaxation and hysteresis (bistability) at low temperatures.$^{1,2}$ The quantum mechanical nature of their nanomagnetism also emerges at low temperatures, with behaviors such as quantum tunneling of magnetization (QTM)$^{3-5}$ and quantum phase interference of two tunneling paths (Berry phase).$^{6-8}$ Various types of SMMs with different sizes of magnetic moments and energy barriers have been synthesized, including SMMs made from several transition metal ions,$^{1,2,9-14}$ a dimer of SMMs,$^{15,16}$ and mononuclear SMMs based on lanthanides.$^{17-20}$ The nanomagnetism and spin physics of SMMs have been extensively investigated on large ensembles of SMMs.$^{1-6,21-23}$ In addition, it has been demonstrated that an individual SMM or a small ensemble of SMMs can be placed on a surface with some retention of their magnetic behavior,$^{24-30}$ therefore, SMMs are also candidates for potential applications in dense quantum memory, quantum computing, and molecular spintronics.$^{29,31,32}$

In spite of wide interest in the quantum nature of SMMs, decoherence effects that ultimately limit such behavior have yet to be fully understood. Until now, coherent manipulation of spin states in SMMs has been experimentally demonstrated only in a very few cases, including Fe$_8$, Fe$_4$, and Cr$_7$M (M = Ni and Mn)$^{33,34}$ systems. In particular, even though Mn-based SMMs have been extensively studied for over two decades, no coherent manipulation on Mn-based SMMs has been reported to date. Recent investigations have shown that there are three main decoherence mechanisms present in SMMs: spins can couple locally (1) to phonons (phonon decoherence); (2) to many nuclear spins (nuclear decoherence); and (3) to each other via dipolar interactions (dipolar decoherence).$^{33,34,36,37}$ In particular, the long-range nature of dipolar interactions is a major problem in many SMMs. Interestingly, recent experimental investigations have demonstrated that dipolar decoherence is significantly suppressed using high-frequency electron paramagnetic resonance (HF-EPR) spectroscopy at low temperature.$^{33,34,40}$

In this paper, we investigate spin coherence in single crystals of the SMM [Mn$_3$O(O$_2$CEt)$_3$(mpko)$_3$](ClO$_4$), abbreviated Mn$_3$, which has a ground state spin of $S = 6$.$^{41,42}$ In addition, quantum mechanical couplings between different

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**FIG. 1.** (a) A schematic of the structure of Mn$_3$. (b) A photo of sample A. (c) 230 GHz EPR cw spectrum of Mn$_3$. The $m_S = -6 \leftrightarrow -5$ transitions from each orientation are indicated by arrows (labeled 1 and 2). In the simulation, $\theta = 75^\circ$ and $\phi = 0^\circ$ for group 1 and $\theta = 69^\circ$ and $\phi = 74^\circ$ for group 2, where $\theta$ and $\phi$ are azimuthal and polar angles of the molecular axis, respectively ($\mathbf{B}_0$ is along the $z$-axis).
Mn$_3$ SMMs have recently been demonstrated with synthesis of a covalently linked dimer$^{43}$ and tetramer$^{44}$ while retaining the intrinsic magnetic properties of each Mn$_3$ SMM. Therefore, the Mn$_3$ system is clearly a potentially great testbed for investigating quantum coherence in Mn-based SMMs. The investigation was performed with continuous-wave (cw) and pulsed EPR spectroscopy at 230 GHz. Using 230 GHz cw EPR spectroscopy, we first identified the EPR transition between the $m_S = -6$ and $m_S = -5$ states, and then performed spin echo measurements to probe the coherence in Mn$_3$ SMMs. At resonance, the energy difference between the $m_S = -6$ and $m_S = -5$ states is 11 K, so Mn$_3$ spins are almost completely polarized to the $m_S = -6$ ground state below 2.0 K. This complete polarization significantly reduces the dipolar decoherence. At 1.6 K, the spin decoherence time ($T_2$) of Mn$_3$ was measured to be 205 ns. Upon raising the temperature to 2.2 K, the $T_2$ decreased by nearly one order of magnitude. As temperature increases, so do magnetic fluctuations caused by the magnetic dipole interaction between SMMs; thus, $T_2$ is reduced. An excellent agreement between the observed temperature dependence of $T_2$ and the dipolar decoherence model strongly supports that a major source of the spin decoherence is dipolar decoherence. In addition, we will show that there exist other decoherence sources which limit the maximum $T_2$ to be 260 ns.

The Mn$_3$ SMM consists of three Mn$^{III}$ atoms each with spin $S = 2$. These are ferromagnetically coupled to each other to give the total spin of $S = 6$. A schematic of the molecular structure is shown in Figure 1(a). The following Hamiltonian is sufficient to describe the magnetic properties of Mn$_3$ SMMs

$$H = \mu_B g S \cdot B_0 + D(S_z^2 - S_y^2) + E(S_x^2 - S_y^2).$$  \hspace{1cm} (1)

The first term of the Hamiltonian (Equation (1)) is the electronic Zeeman interaction, where $\mu_B$ is the Bohr magneton, $g$ is the isotropic $g$-factor which equals assume to be 2.00, $S$ is the spin operator, and $B_0$ is the applied magnetic field. The second and third terms represent zero-field interaction terms corresponding to axial and rhombic anisotropies, which are $D = -10$ GHz and $E = 0.3$ GHz, respectively.\footnote{Higher order terms in the spin Hamiltonian have been excluded in this study. It is important to note that having a large negative $D$-value and a high spin quantum number ($S = 6$) leads to large zero-field splittings within Mn$_3$ (110 GHz for the $m_S = -6$ and $-5$ states). In addition, it has been shown in previous studies that a single crystal of Mn$_3$ consists of two spin sub-groups where the easy axes of each group are oriented with an angle of $\sim 70^\circ$.}\footnote{Both crystals were slab-shaped (see Figure 1(b) for sample A) and placed on a conducting end-plate in the sample holder where the orientation of the quasi-optics, a superheterodyne detection system, and a 12.1 T superconducting magnet. Details of this spectrometer can be found elsewhere.\footnote{Both crystals were slab-shaped (see Figure 1(b) for sample A) and placed on a conducting end-plate in the sample holder where the orientation of the magnet was recorded as 173 ns. (c) EDFS data from sample A. Spin echo intensity at $2\tau = 400$ ns recorded as a function of $2\tau$. This snapshot of the oscilloscope trace was taken at $2\tau = 800$ ns. The signal was averaged 16 times. (b) Spin echo decay at 1.69 K. Intensity of the echo peak plotted as a function of $2\tau$. Data were fitted by a single exponential and $T_2$ was extracted as 173 ns. (d) EDFS data from sample B. Spin echo intensity at $2\tau = 500$ ns recorded as magnetic field sweeps. For this measurement, $\pi/2$ and $\pi$ pulses were 100 ns and 150 ns, respectively. The $m_S = -6 \leftrightarrow -5$ transitions are labeled by arrows. (d) EDFS data from sample B. Spin echo intensity at $2\tau = 500$ ns recorded as magnetic field sweeps. For this measurement, $\pi/2$ and $\pi$ pulses were 100 ns and 150 ns, respectively. The $m_S = -6 \leftrightarrow -5$ transitions are labeled by arrows.}

FIG. 2. Spin echo measurements of Mn$_3$ crystals. (a) The echo signal at 1.69 K. The optimal pulse widths in the spin echo sequence were found to be $\pi/2 = 60$ ns and $\pi = 90$ ns by adjusting the pulse length to maximize the echo intensity. Shown pulse widths are highly exaggerated due to the free induction decay (FID). This snapshot of the oscilloscope trace was taken at $2\tau = 800$ ns. The signal was averaged 16 times. (b) Spin echo decay at 1.69 K. Intensity of the echo peak plotted as a function of $2\tau$. Data were fitted by a single exponential and $T_2$ was extracted as 173 ns. (c) EDFS data from sample A. Spin echo intensity at $2\tau = 700$ ns recorded as magnetic field sweeps. For this measurement, $\pi/2$ and $\pi$ pulses were 100 ns and 150 ns, respectively. The $m_S = -6 \leftrightarrow -5$ transitions are labeled by arrows. (d) EDFS data from sample B. Spin echo intensity at $2\tau = 500$ ns recorded as magnetic field sweeps. For this measurement, $\pi/2$ and $\pi$ pulses were 80 ns and 100 ns, respectively. The $m_S = -6 \leftrightarrow -5$ transitions are labeled by arrows.
external magnetic field ($B_0$) is perpendicular to the crystal plane. Figure 1(c) shows a 230 GHz cw EPR spectrum taken at 10 K. The applied microwave excitation power and the field modulation intensities were carefully tuned to prevent distortions in the EPR lineshape. As shown in Figure 1(c), the simulated EPR spectrum using Equation (1) agrees fairly well with the experimental spectrum. The two EPR signals at 9.6 T and 8.9 T (labeled 1 and 2) originate from the $m_S = -6 \leftrightarrow -5$ transition of the two different spin groups in the Mn$_3$ crystal.

Next, we investigated spin decoherence in Mn$_3$ using 230 GHz pulsed EPR spectroscopy. For the measurement, the magnetic field was first set to 9.6 T, which corresponds to the $2m = 6$ transition of the two different spin groups in the Mn$_3$ crystal. Figure 1(c) shows a 230 GHz cw EPR spectrum taken from sample B, as shown in Figure 2(d). Using the previously reported model, the temperature dependence of the decoherence rate ($1/T_2$) is given by

$$1/T_2 = A \exp (-\hbar \gamma_{\text{Larmor}}/k_B T) + \Gamma,$$

where the first term is the dipolar decoherence rate, $A$ is a constant, and the second term is the residual decoherence rate, i.e., phonon and nuclear decoherence. As shown in Figure 3(b), a fit of the temperature dependence to Equation (2) agrees well, and the analysis indicates that the dipolar decoherence is dominant in the higher temperature regime. The obtained value of $A$ is $1785 \pm 149 \mu$s$^{-1}$. It is important to note that a similar strength of the dipolar decoherence was found in a single crystal of Fe$_8$ SMMs ($A \sim 3000 \mu$s$^{-1}$). The dipolar decoherence is dominant in the higher temperature regime.

Finally, in order to identify the major sources of spin decoherence in Mn$_3$, we studied $T_2$ as a function of temperature. As shown in Figure 3(a), $T_2$ at 1.58 K was measured to be 205 $\pm$ 6 ns for sample A, then $T_2$ decreases rapidly as the temperature was increased. $T_2$ was extracted up to 2.2 K ($T_2 = 59 \pm 30$ ns). Above 2.2 K, $T_2$ became too short to measure due to the limitation in the time resolution of the EPR spectrometer. The temperature dependence of $T_2$ is summarized in Figure 3(a). At low temperature ($k_B T \ll \hbar \gamma_{\text{Larmor}}$, where $k_B$ is the Boltzmann constant and $T$ is temperature), the dipolar decoherence is caused by the interaction between the $k = 0$ magnon, which is excited by the microwave excitation, and a thermally excited magnon ($k \neq 0$ magnon); therefore, the decoherence rate ($1/T_2$) is highly dependent on the population of the thermally excited magnon. At 230 GHz and such low temperatures, the Mn$_3$ polarization is above 99%, which almost eliminates the thermally excited magnon. Using the previously reported model, the temperature dependence of the decoherence rate ($1/T_2$) is given by

$$1/T_2 = A \exp (-\hbar \gamma_{\text{Larmor}}/k_B T) + \Gamma,$$
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