High-Resolution Faraday Rotation and Electron-Phonon Coupling in Surface States of the Bulk-Insulating Topological Insulator Cu$_{0.02}$Bi$_2$Se$_3$

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High-resolution Faraday rotation and electron phonon coupling in surface states of bulk-insulating topological insulator Cu$_{0.02}$Bi$_2$Se$_3$

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We have utilized time-domain magneto-terahertz spectroscopy to investigate the low frequency optical response of topological insulator Cu$_{0.02}$Bi$_2$Se$_3$ and Bi$_2$Se$_3$ films. With both field and frequency dependence, such experiments give sufficient information to measure the mobility and carrier density of multiple conduction channels simultaneously. We observe sharp cyclotron resonances (CRs) in both materials. The small amount of Cu incorporated into the Cu$_{0.02}$Bi$_2$Se$_3$ induces a true bulk insulator with only a single type of conduction with total sheet carrier density $\sim 4.9 \times 10^{12}$ cm$^{-2}$ and mobility as high as 3500 cm$^2$/V.s. This is consistent with conduction from two virtually identical topological surface states (TSSs) on top and bottom of the film with a chemical potential $\sim 145$ meV above the Dirac point and in the bulk gap. The CR broadens at high fields, an effect that we attribute to an electron-phonon interaction. This assignment is supported by an extended Drude model analysis of the zero field Drude conductance. In contrast, in normal Bi$_2$Se$_3$ films two conduction channels were observed and we developed a self-consistent analysis method to distinguish the dominant TSSs and coexisting trivial bulk/2DEG states. Our high-resolution Faraday rotation spectroscopy on Cu$_{0.02}$Bi$_2$Se$_3$ paves the way for the observation of quantized Faraday rotation under experimentally achievable conditions to push chemical potential in the lowest Landau Level.

Topological insulators (TIs) are a newly discovered class of materials characterized by an inverted band structure caused by strong spin-orbit coupling. In the ideal case, they have an insulating bulk and only conduct via topologically protected massless Dirac topological surface states (TSSs). Spin-momentum locking in their electronic structure makes TIs promising platforms for spintronics applications. Progress in this field has been hampered by the fact that all discovered TIs to date are slightly doped and have a conducting bulk. For instance, the proposed topological magneto-electric effect and quantized Faraday rotation remains unobserved. Tuning the chemical potential towards the Dirac point and enhancing mobility was shown to be very successful in probing many-body interactions with plasmons and phonons in graphene and similar advancements are expected in TIs, but have not yet been realized.

The band structure of Bi$_2$Se$_3$ is one of the simplest of the 3D TIs with only a single Dirac cone at the center of the Brillouin zone. Unfortunately, native grown Bi$_2$Se$_3$ is known to have a conducting bulk due to defects from the growth. Suppression of the bulk carrier density has been achieved by chemical doping methods. Nevertheless, these samples still have significant densities of bulk carriers or impurity states that are pinned near E$_F$. Recently it was found that $\sim 2\%$ Cu doping in thin films suppresses the bulk carriers and allows a true insulating state to be realized. Here we investigate these copper doped bulk insulating thin films and their decoupled TSSs via magneto-terahertz spectroscopy. These films were capped by a thin insulating amorphous Se layer. Details of the growth can be found in the supplementary information (SI) section I and Ref. 9.

Cyclotron resonance (CR) experiments using THz spectroscopy are a powerful tool to study Dirac fermions and probe many-body interactions. CR is also one of the most accurate measures of effective mass. In previous work, a large Kerr rotation in bulk-conducting Bi$_2$Se$_3$ films was reported, but no obvious resonance was observed. Cyclotron resonance has been reported in In$_2$Se$_3$ capped films, but current understanding is that significant Indium diffusion from In$_2$Se$_3$ to Bi$_2$Se$_3$ destroys the simple non-TI/TI boundary at the interface, as a topological phase transition occurs at low Indium concentrations ($\sim 6\%$).

In the present work, we used time-domain magneto-terahertz spectroscopy with the polarization modulation technique (0.5 mrad resolution, see SI section I for experimental details) to observe sharp cyclotron resonances in Faraday rotations from both Cu$_{0.02}$Bi$_2$Se$_3$ and pure Bi$_2$Se$_3$ thin films. We demonstrate that Cu$_{0.02}$Bi$_2$Se$_3$ can be described by a single Drude component with total carrier density $n_{2D} \sim 4.9 \times 10^{12}$ cm$^{-2}$. This Drude contribution is consistent with pure surface state transport with an E$_F$ $\sim$ 145 meV above the Dirac point (75 meV below the conduction band edge), which makes Cu$_{0.02}$Bi$_2$Se$_3$ a true topological insulator. CR broadening at high field is attributed to an electron phonon interaction. In contrast, we find two channel conduction in pure Bi$_2$Se$_3$ films. We determine that the large Faraday rotation is induced by a dominant high-mobility TSSs channel with an E$_F$ $\sim$ 350 meV. However, a weaker low-mobility second Drude term is also required to fit the data. This subdominant term most likely derives from trivial states (bulk and/or
\[ G(\omega) = e_0 d \left( -\frac{\omega_p^2}{i \omega - \Gamma_p} - \frac{i \omega \omega_p^2}{\omega_p^2 - \omega^2 - i \omega \Gamma_p} - i (\epsilon_\omega - 1) \omega \right) \]  

Here \( \Gamma_p \) are the scattering rates, \( \omega_p \)'s are plasma frequencies, and \( d \) is the film thickness. The spectral weight \( (\omega_p^2 d) \) is proportional to the integrated area of each feature in the real part of the conductance. It gives the ratio of carrier density to an effective transport mass.

\[ \frac{2}{\pi e_0} \int G(d\omega) d\omega = \omega_p^2 d = \frac{n_{2D} e^2}{m^* e_0} \]  

This expression assumes the single channel conduction originates in two nominally identical TSSs. From the spectral weight analysis, having determined \( k_F \), we can then calculate both \( n_{2D} \) (proportional to \( k_F^2 \)) and \( m^* \). From these Drude-Lorentz fits, we find a total sheet carrier density \( n_{2D} \sim 5.0 \times 10^{12}/cm^2 \), \( m^* \sim 0.14 \), and \( E_F \sim 145 \pm 5 \) meV according to Eq. 5.

We can estimate the carrier density and mass by the zero-field spectra alone because both can be expressed as a function of \( k_F \). Below we determine the mass in a model free fashion through CR experiments. The signature of CR is a peak in the real part of the conductance (Fig. 1(b)), an inflection point in real part of Faraday rotation \( \theta_F \) (Fig. 1(c)) and a dip in the imaginary part of Faraday rotation \( \theta''_F \) (Fig. 1(d)). Its full width at half maximum (FWHM) is the scattering rate. Field dependent complex Faraday rotation data are shown in Fig. 1(c)(d). One can see that an edge feature around an inflection point in \( \theta_F \) and a dip in \( \theta''_F \) shifts to higher frequency with increasing field, which is consistent with CR. We fit the data by a Drude-Lorentz model accounting for the field dependence of the Drude term and constraining the parameters of the phonon and \( \epsilon_\omega \) by the values extracted from the zero-field conductance fits. The conductance in a magnetic field can be described by the expression:

\[
G_z = -ie_0 d \left( \frac{\omega_p^2}{\omega^2 - i \omega \Gamma_p} + \frac{\omega_p^2}{\omega_p^2 - \omega^2 - i \omega \Gamma_p} + (\epsilon_\omega - 1) \right)
\]  

Here the \( \pm \) sign signifies the response to right/left-hand circularly polarized light, respectively, \( \omega_E \) is the CR frequency to be defined below. The Faraday rotation can be expressed as \( \tan(\theta_F) = -i(t_+ - t_-)/(t_+ + t_-) \). Note that the Faraday equation is a complex quantity because, in addition to rotations, phase shifts that are different for right/left-hand polarized light can be accumulated. The imaginary part is related to the ellipticity.

The fits to this model for the Faraday rotation are shown for a representative field of 7 T in Fig. 1(f) (see SI section II for fits to all fields). In this plot, the dashed curves are from a fit with the spectral weight and scattering rate \( \sim 0.4 \) THz set by the zero-field conductance fit (e.g. only \( \omega_p \) allowed to vary). One can see that although the gross features

2DEG).

In Fig. 1(a), we compare the zero field THz conductance of a 64 QL Cu0.02Bi2Se3 film to a pure 64 QL Bi2Se3 film. The Cu incorporated sample’s spectra are characterized by a reduced total spectral weight and slightly lower scattering rate than the pure Bi2Se3. The spectra can be well fit by an oscillator model with only a Drude term describing free electron-like motion, a Drude-Lorentz term modeling the phonon and a lattice polarization \( \epsilon_\omega \) term that originates from absorptions above the measured spectral range.

\[ \theta_F''(\omega) = \frac{\omega_0^2}{\frac{1}{\omega^2 - 2i \omega \Gamma_p} + \frac{1}{\omega_0^2 - \omega^2 - i \omega \Gamma_p} + (\epsilon_\omega - 1)} \]  

where \( \Gamma_p \) is the CR frequency to be defined below. The Faraday rotation can be expressed as \( \tan(\theta_F) = -i(t_+ - t_-)/(t_+ + t_-) \). Note that the Faraday equation is a complex quantity because, in addition to rotations, phase shifts that are different for right/left-hand polarized light can be accumulated. The imaginary part is related to the ellipticity.
of the spectra are reproduced, using the zero field scattering rate entirely fails to reproduce certain aspects of the Faraday rotation, including the value of the minimum in $\theta'$. A much better fit (solid line) can be obtained by letting the scattering rate vary with field, while keeping other parameters (except for $\omega_c$) fixed. The origin of this field dependent scattering rate will be addressed below. The fits allow us to extract the cyclotron frequency as a function of field; it is exhibited by the raw spectra as the minimum in $\theta'_c$. As shown in Fig. 1(c), a linear fitting using the expected relation between mass and the resonance frequency $\omega_c = eB/2m^*$ gives an effective mass of 0.14 $m_e$. By using Eq. 2 and spectral weight obtained from fitting Faraday rotation, we can extract a total sheet carrier density $n_{2D} \approx 4.9 \pm 0.1 \times 10^{12}/cm^2$. With the known band structure of Bi$_2$Se$_3$, this charge density, and the observation of a single kind of charge carrier is only consistent with two essentially identical TSSs and an $E_F \sim 145$ meV above the Dirac point. We can conclude that Cu$_{0.02}$Bi$_2$Se$_3$ has an insulating bulk and for the sample highlighted here a high mobility $\mu = e/(2\pi^2 k_F^2 m^* \sim 4000cm^2/V\cdot s$. The features were robust to sample aging as the samples (with the amorphous Se cap) maintain bulk-insulating and high mobility after sitting in air for eight months (see SI section II [10]).

Films of Cu$_{0.02}$Bi$_2$Se$_3$ can be contrasted with films of pure Bi$_2$Se$_3$, which is known to have the surface chemical potential pinned in the bulk conduction band [20][21]. We develop a self-consistent data analysis method and use our high-resolution magneto-terahertz spectroscopy to precisely determine the contribution of the subdominant bulk. In Fig. 2(a), we show zero field conductance spectra from a typical 100 QL Bi$_2$Se$_3$ film. It has higher spectral weight than Cu$_{0.02}$Bi$_2$Se$_3$, consistent with a higher charge density. For the same reason, the plateau-like Faraday rotation at 7 T at low frequencies in Fig. 2(f) is as large as ~0.25 radians while the value for the Cu$_{0.02}$Bi$_2$Se$_3$ sample is ~0.07 radians.

In Figs. 2(b)-(d), one can see that the CR is exhibited at lower frequencies, which indicates that Bi$_2$Se$_3$ has a higher CR mass. In Fig. 2(e), the linear fit of $\omega_c$ vs. $B$ gives an effective mass ~$0.20 m_e$. We believe that this derives from TSSs, as this mass is inconsistent with the accepted values for the bulk bands [22] or band bending induced surface 2DEG bands [23]. Note that the value of CR mass in Bi$_2$Se$_3$ we determine here is different than that given in our previous work [14]. The reason for this discrepancy is discussed at length in the SI section VI [10].

One can see from Fig. 2(f) that fits of the Faraday rotation using only a single Drude term are reasonably good. As before we use the spectral weight and carrier mass by Eq. 2 to extract a total sheet carrier density $n_{2D} \sim 1.9 \pm 0.1 \times 10^{12}/cm^2$. This compares favorably to a density of $n_{2D} \sim 2.0 \times 10^{13}/cm^2$, a mass of ~$0.20 m_e$, and an $E_F \sim 350$ meV that we can determine purely from an analysis of the spectral weight using the TSS dispersion by Eq. 3. We determine a mobility of $\mu \sim 3200$ cm$^2$/V·s of the TSSs.

However, while the fits to the Faraday rotation with a single Drude term are excellent, significant discrepancies arise if we use the resulting parameters to fit the conductance data. In Fig. 2(a), one can see that the single Drude component fit significantly underestimates the conducance by a roughly constant amount over the entire spectral range. As $E_F$ is in the bottom of the conduction band, it is reasonable to ascribe this difference to a subdominant low mobility conduction channel originating in bulk or 2DEG. Adding a second term with a large scattering rate ($\Gamma \gg 4$ THz such that the contribution here to the real conductance is a constant offset) improves the conductance fit dramatically. If literature values for the bulk or 2DEG mass are used, this channel has carrier density $n_{2D} \sim 8.0 \times 10^{12}/cm^2$ and low mobility $\mu < 300$cm$^2$/V·s. The second flat Drude term only adds a featureless small background to the Faraday rotation. The ratio $G_{TSS}/G_{Total} \gg 90\%$ at low frequencies confirms that TSSs dominate transport as inferred in previous THz measurements [14][17].

Having identified the transport channels in these films and their relevant parameters, we can look in more detail at the magnetic field dependence of the scattering rates. As shown in Fig. 3(a) the scattering rate $\Gamma_D$ in Cu$_{0.02}$Bi$_2$Se$_3$ increases with cyclotron frequency/field, displaying a maximum near a cyclotron frequency of 0.9 THz ± 0.1 THz. As discussed

FIG. 2: (Color online) (a) Real conductance of 100 QL Bi$_2$Se$_3$ comparing single and two component Drude fits as detailed in text. The inset enlarges the low frequency regime. (b) Field dependent conductance at 5K. (c) The real and (d) imaginary parts of the complex Faraday rotation data at different fields at 5K. (e) The cyclotron resonance frequency versus field. The inset is a cartoon indicating $E_F \sim 350$ meV above the Dirac point. (f) Complex Faraday rotation data with one and two component Drude fits at 7 T. The dashed and solid curves are one and two Drude fits respectively.
we find the general trend and energy scales of the scattering rate from the EDM are about the same as those from the CR fit. One can see that the result from EDM is a sharper version of the curve from the CR fit, which may be expected because the CR fit assumed a frequency independent scattering rate, and as such means it is an average over a (weakly) frequency dependent quantity.

For the first time we have demonstrated a correspondence between the spectral features in a CR experiment and EDM analyses, which indicates the magnetic field itself is not the source of the CR broadening. We propose electron-phonon coupling as cause of these effects \[29–32\] as the energy scale of the threshold in the scattering rate matches that of a number of electron-phonon scales in this system. The value is close to the scale of the previously observed Kohn anomaly of the surface $\beta$ phonon, 0.75 THz at $2k_F$ \[30\] \[33\]. It also matches closely the scale of the maximum acoustic phonon energy that can couple to cross Fermi surface scattering $c \times 2k_F/2\pi \sim 0.6$ THz (where $c$ is the acoustic phonon velocity) \[31\]. The coupling strength $\lambda$ extracted by EDM is close to the value $\sim 0.43$ by analysis of the Kohn anomaly \[34\], and also agrees with calculation $\lambda \sim 0.42$ for acoustic phonons in thin film geometry \[32\]. The coupling constant we observed is within the different values ARPES give \[35–37\]. The energy scale of the 3 meV mode found via ARPES in Ref.\[37\] agrees well with the characteristic energy here. The lower coupling strength we observed may be due to the lower chemical potential of our sample than that used in Ref.\[37\].

Looking forward our results demonstrate the possibility of observing a quantized Faraday rotation in such films of a TI. For the quantized Faraday rotation of a film on a substrate one has $\tan(\theta_F) = \frac{2\alpha}{\pi}(\nu + 1/2) \sim 3.5 mrad (\nu + 1/2)$ for each surface state in the quantum regime, where $\alpha$ is the fine structure constant, $\nu$ is the filling factor and $n$ is the sublattice index of refraction. The Landau level spectrum will be $E(\pm \nu) = \pm \nu F \sqrt{2\hbar c B |\nabla| }$. In order to reach the lowest LL in this true topological insulator $\text{Cu}_0.08\text{Bi}_2\text{Se}_3$ will require 150T, which may be achievable for future THz experiments at pulse field facilities. Electric field gating the present samples in a THz compatible arrangement would bring down this field threshold. We hope our high-resolution Faraday rotation spectroscopy will enable the observation of the long-sought quantized Faraday rotation and topological magneto-electric effect \[4–5\].

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In principle, the Zeeman effect and orbital effect should increase from vacuum to substrate [48].

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