Anomalous behavior of the quasi-one-dimensional quantum material Na$_2$OsO$_4$ at high pressure

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Abstract

Na$_2$OsO$_4$ is an unusual quantum material that, in contrast to the common 5$d^2$ oxides with spins $\frac{1}{2}$, owns a magnetically silent ground state with spin $S = 0$ and a band gap at Fermi level, attributed to a distortion in the OsO$_6$ octahedral sites. In this semiconductor, our low-temperature electrical transport measurements indicate an anomaly at 6.3 K with a power-law behavior inclining through the semiconductor-to-metal transition observed at 23 GPa. Even more peculiarly, we discover that before this transition, the material becomes more insulating instead of merely turning into a metal according to the conventional wisdom. To investigate the underlying mechanisms, we applied experimental and theoretical methods to examine the electronic and crystal structures comprehensively and conclude that the enhanced insulating state at high pressure originates from the enlarged distortion of the OsO$_6$. It is such a distortion that widens the band gap and decreases the electron occupancy in Os’s t$_{2g}$ orbital through an interplay of the lattice, charge, and orbital in the material, which is responsible for the changes observed in our experiments.

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The structure of Na$_2$OsO$_4$ is characteristic of quasi-one-dimensional anisotropy, reflecting a notable chain structure in which each chain comprises edge-shared OsO$_6$ octahedra [1,2]. In such a system, Fermi liquid (FL) theory no longer applies because of the strongly correlated electronic behavior confined in the narrow channels [3,4]. Thus, the properties initiated from the collective behaviors of particles may appear unlike the effects from constituent individuals. Having a hexagonal lattice, Na$_2$OsO$_4$ is comparable to stoichiometrically equivalent Ca$_2$IrO$_4$ [5], but the magnetic and electrical measurements revealed its electrically semiconducting and non-magnetic behavior. This result notably contradicted expectations, given that Os has a 5$d^2$ electronic configuration, which usually leads to unpaired spin moments and some contributions from orbital moments. The absence of magnetic moments was examined experimentally, and a remarkable distortion of the OsO$_6$ octahedra was found, even though Os$^{6+}$ is not strongly Jahn–Teller active [2,6]. Thus, it became clear that the degeneracy of the 5$d_{xy}$ and 5$d_{xz} - 5$d$_{yz}$ orbitals is broken, and Na$_2$OsO$_4$ is magnetically silent in its ground state because of spin pairing ($S = 0$). This fact was also supported using ab initio electronic structure calculation [1]. The scientifically intriguing aspect is that the energy gap ($E_g$) in such a simple system is triggered by the axial compression of the OsO$_6$ octahedra with a negligible role of SOC.
Under normal conditions, in the non-distorted octahedra, the 5d orbitals are splitted into $e_g$ (with $d_{xy}$ and $d_{xz}$ two orbitals being degenerate) and $t_{2g}$ (with $d_{xy}$, $d_{xz}$, and $d_{yz}$ three orbitals being degenerate). The two 5d electrons fill into $t_{2g}$ orbital with two parallel spins according to the Hund’s rules. This configuration gives a total local spin $S = 1$ for each OsO$_6$ octahedral site. However, the octahedral distortion further splits the $t_{2g}$ orbitals into three different energy levels, $d_{xy}$, $d_{xz}$, $d_{yz}$, leaving two 5d electrons in the lowest level ($d_{xy}$) with a pair of antiparallel spins. Correspondingly, the total local spin $S = 0$, which is magnetically the silent state for each OsO$_6$ octahedral site in Na$_2$OsO$_4$. At high pressure, once the $e_g$ and $t_{2g}$ orbitals become overlapped, the two 5d electrons are no longer confined in the $t_{2g}$ orbitals but become delocalized into the both $e_g$ and $t_{2g}$ orbitals; then, the total local spin is decreased and form a band-like magnetism. Because the magnetically silent state was directly related to the OsO$_6$ octahedra, physical or chemical pressure may render a significant impact on the structure by removing the OsO$_6$ distortion that exists at normal conditions. During compression, narrow $E_g$ semiconductors usually switch to metals, and the non-magnetic $S = 0$ state could transform to a magnetic $S = 1$ state because the OsO$_6$ distortion can be removed or suppressed by pressure [7,8]. To search for the predicted quantum state, we combined high-pressure electrical transport, synchrotron X-ray absorption (XAS), and X-ray diffraction techniques (XRD) in line with first principles calculations to study the electronic and crystal structure at high pressure comprehensively. Contrary to expectations, however, we discovered that Na$_2$OsO$_4$ becomes increasingly insulating up to the 11 GPa and then gradually transforms into a metallic state at 23 GPa. According to our theoretical modeling, we concluded that the increased insulating state originates from the pressure-enhanced distortion of the OsO$_6$ octahedra up to 11 GPa, which is also responsible for the unusual changes observed in the electrical transport and XAS experiments.

Fig. 1 shows the temperature-dependent electrical transport properties of Na$_2$OsO$_4$. The $R(T)$ curves represent semiconducting behavior up to ~ 23 GPa (see Fig. 1a and data given in the Supporting Information). However, in this range, the activation energy ($\alpha_T$) deduced from the slope of the linear part of the electrical resistance for higher temperature region indicates non-linear curve (Fig. 1b and Fig. 54). The $\alpha_T(P)$ shows a maximum at 11 GPa, distinctly manifesting anomalous behavior at this pressure. Furthermore, at very low temperatures (from ~6.3 K), the conductance ($G$) exhibits clear power-law behavior, $G \propto T^\alpha$, which refer to the Luttinger liquid or 1-D Wigner crystal formation typical for 1-D systems (Fig. 1c and d). Therefore, we postulate that the observed phenomenon at low temperatures originates from the domain, which in turn causes the tunneling effect among different Luttinger liquids.

It is worth mentioning that the power-law does not extend to all temperature as pressure increases, as seen in some nanomaterials [9,10]. The obtained exponential values $\alpha$ were also relatively small ranging near 0 (see Fig. 1c and d). The compression rapidly decreased $\alpha$ following a polynomial trend where the power-law in metallic state (pressures > 23 GPa) appeared to be with an opposite sign (Fig. 1e). As mentioned previously, the interacting fermions in one spatial dimension do not obey FL theory; however, the possibility of the deconfinement transition induced by interchain hopping [11] or a transition to a weakly disordered FL [12] for more higher pressures cannot be neglected as $\alpha$ alters with pressure strongly toward the FL state. Thus, such unique behavior at low temperature and high pressure can be further addressed by using more specific techniques.

For the underlying mechanisms at room temperature and specifically at 11 GPa, we carried out X-ray absorption near edge structure (XANES) measurements. Fig. 2a and b show the Os L$_{2,3}$-edges captured at room temperature up to 28 GPa, respectively. The white-line (WL) energy position of Na$_2$OsO$_4$ Os L$_{2,3}$-edge...
corresponded well to the 5d\(^2\) samples [13,14], confirming the Os\(^{6+}\) valence state at ambient pressure. Nevertheless, both the \(L_3 (2p_{3/2} \rightarrow 5d)\) and \(L_2 (2p_{1/2} \rightarrow 5d)\) absorption edges showed significant and unusual changes during compression. The intensity of the WL at the \(L_2\) manifested a strong decrease during compression from 1 bar to 11.2 GPa and a strong increase from 11.2 GPa to 28.0 GPa (see Fig. 2c). The \(L_2\) absorption edge did not indicate such a significant intensity change.

The changes under compression were also noticed in the Os WL position at the \(L_3\) edge (Fig. 2c). The WL shift was observed in Na\(_2\)OsO\(_4\) powders, which is also confirmed by measuring several single crystals with appropriate thicknesses. The WL shifts gradually to higher energies while under pressure up to 11.2 GPa and then reverts to its original position if more pressure is applied. As the WL position defines the valence, its shift to higher energies indicates its increase. A spectral shift at the Os \(L_3\) edge of approximately 1.0(1) \(eV\) to higher energy indicates an increase of valence by 1+ state [14]. Based on this fact, we consider the increase of the Os valence (according to the WL position shift from powder data) from 6+ to 6.724+ during compression from 1 bar to 11.2 GPa and vice versa, a decrease of Os valence from 6.724+ to 6+ during further compression from 11.2 GPa to 28 GPa. The increase and decrease of the Os valence might be associated with the OsO\(_6\) octahedral deformation as it is known that there is an inverse relationship between the extent of the edge energy and the average bond length [16,17].

Meanwhile, the integrated intensities \(I(L_3)\) and \(I(L_2)\) of the WL for each pressure were extracted from the raw data, as shown in Fig. 2d. It is known that the ratio \(I(L_3)/I(L_2)\) (also called branching ratio [BR]) for 5d transition metal oxides increases with electron occupancy, and for a small electron number, the BR is less affected by SOC [18]. However, the BR is related to the ground state expectation value of the angular part of the spin-orbit coupling, \(\langle L \cdot S \rangle\). Therefore, in the 5d manifold, \(\langle L \cdot S \rangle = n_h (BR - 2)/(BR + 1)\), where \(n_h\) is the number of empty holes [19]. As is common, the \(\langle L \cdot S \rangle\) barely changes within low pressure; therefore, it indicates that the electron-hole density (or electron occupancy) increases (or decreases). These results are consistent with the WL position measurements.

In addition to the XAS, we also investigated the structural changes at high pressure using diffraction methods; the results are shown in Fig. 3. There are no observable symmetry changes in the diffraction patterns up to 35 GPa in agreement with our optical measurements (for more details see Supporting Information). However, our structural refinement reveals that the OsO\(_6\) octahedral distortion remains at high pressure and even increases with pressure up to 11 GPa, preserving \(S = 0\) state. Although this particular pressure range corresponds with the solidification of neon gas at ambient temperature, the transition is consistent with the measurements performed by using other pressure mediums. The evolution of the traced osmium – oxygen bond lengths under high pressure is shown in Fig. 3b–d. During compression up to 11 GPa, the atoms O1 and O2 moved away from the osmium, giving
bond distances of 2.126 Å (Os-O1) and 2.388 Å (Os-O2), respectively. Meanwhile, the O3 atoms were found to move continuously closer to the osmium. The Os-O3 bond length reaches the minimum with a very low value of approximately 1.5 Å at 11 GPa. Further compression above 11 GPa showed opposite behavior of all the atoms, and the difference in the octahedral bonds was always greater than that at the ambient conditions. The distortion in the OsO6 site was characterized at selected pressures by calculating octahedral strain tensor parameter $\delta$ according to the following equation [20]:

$$\delta = \sqrt{\frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^{n} (d_i - \bar{d})^2}$$

Here, $d_i$ is the average bond length, $d_i$ is the individual bond length, and $n$ is the number of bonds in the octahedra. The parameter $\delta$ indicates the degree of distortion away from the regular octahedron ($\delta = 0$). The larger the value of $\delta$, the more the distortion of the OsO6 (similarly, the defined equivalent equation—called bond-length distortion [21]—can also be used in this case). At ambient pressure, Na2OsO4 has $\delta = 0.122$ distortion, which is considerably greater than the isostructural Ca2IrO4, $\delta = 0.038$. However, we found that $\delta$ increases strongly with pressure until 11 GPa. Further increase of pressure forces distortion to drop and proceed with more or less a stable value $\delta = 0.2 \pm 0.02$.

Finally, to understand the interplay among the lattice, charge, and orbitals, we performed first-principles calculations based on the density functional theory. The structural data obtained from the diffraction measurement were used for the calculations. The pressure-dependent orbital resolved partial density of states (PDOSs) foremost confirms that $E_g$ is opened at the Fermi level ($E_F$) between $d_{xy}$ and $d_{yz} - d_{zx}$ of the $t_{2g}$ band (see Fig. 4). This indicates that Na2OsO4 is characteristic of a narrow band-gap insulator (or semiconductor), rather than a Mott insulator. The low-lying $d_{xy}$ states due to the distorted OsO6 are fully occupied by two electrons, which is also consistent with the non-magnetic configuration. When the pressure increases, the $d_{xy}$ and $d_{xz}$ bands move toward high energy, whereas the $d_{xy}$ band moves toward lower energy; this enlarges the band gap (the extracted activation energy follows this trend similarly), which reaches a maximum at 11 GPa. This result explains why the Na2OsO4 becomes more insulating at high pressure and the $E_g$ reaches its maximum at 11 GPa. At the same time, the electron occupancy of the $d_{xy}$ band decreases with pressure. Such a reduction of the electron occupancy in the $t_{2g}$ band of Os explains why the WL of $L_3$ edge shifts to higher energy in the XANES spectra and why the BR decreases with pressure reaching a minimum at 11 GPa.

In addition to the change in the $t_{2g}$ band, the $e_g$ band split into $d_{xy}$ and $d_{x^2-y^2}$. When the pressure increases, the $d_{xy}$-$d_{x^2-y^2}$ bands move toward lower energy, while the $d_{xz}$ moves in the opposite direction. However, when the pressure goes beyond the 11 GPa, all the bands reverse their directions and eventually the $d_{xy}$ and $d_{yz} - d_{zx}$ merge together closing the $E_g$, which results in a metallic state at 23 GPa. This result finally explains why Na2OsO4 becomes more insulating up to 11 GPa but then gradually turns into a more metallic state and eventually turns into a metal at 23 GPa. The band structure calculations successfully reproduce the observations, basically indicating that the electronic structure of Na2OsO4 at high pressure is governed by the structure, especially the distortion of OsO6. Na2OsO4 could have several more features in metallic phase, which are significant for low dimensions, such as the Kondo effect [22], electron fractionalization [23,24], or superconductivity at very low temperature, $T_c < 2$ K [25].

**Experimental and computational methods**

The Na2OsO4 single crystals were obtained using the high-pressure apparatus and route described in Ref. [2]. The average crystal size was 0.1–0.3 mm, and the shape was needle-like and...
black in color. Before using the crystals, after washing several times with an ultrasonic bath, XRD test was carried out using Cu Kα radiation in SmartLab, RIGAKU to confirm no damage.

A Mao-type symmetric diamond anvil cell (DAC) with 400 μm culet sized anvils was used for the Raman and high-pressure XRD experiments. A stainless steel gasket was precompressed to a 35 μm thickness, and a hole of 150 μm was drilled to load the sample, a ruby for pressure determination, and neon gas to serve as a pressure-transmitting medium [26]. The Raman spectra up to ~40 GPa were measured on a Renishaw inVia spectrometer with a 488 nm laser wavelength. The data collection time was 90 s and laser power of 15 mW was maintained for each spectrum. The in situ high-pressure XRD measurements were carried out in an angle-dispersive mode at beamline 16-BM-D of the Advanced Photon Source (APS), Argonne National Laboratory. The incident monochromatic X-ray beam energy was set to 29.2 keV (λ = 0.4246 Å), where the sample-detector distance was 318 mm. The wavelength of the X-ray was periodically calibrated using a CeO2 standard. Diffraction patterns were recorded on a MAR345 image plate and then integrated using DIOPTAS software [27]. Indexing and Rietveld refinements were carried out in EXPO2014 [28] and GSAS-II [29].

High-pressure XAS experiments were performed for osmium by investigating the XANES at beamline 20-BM-B of the APS. A panoramic DAC with 400 μm diamonds was used to collect spectra at both the L2 and L3 absorption edges for the Na2OsO4 powders. To avoid contamination of the XANES spectra by Bragg peaks from the diamond anvils, XANES measurements were performed in transmission geometry where the X-ray beam goes through a beryllium gasket. The gasket was initially precompressed to ~70 μm, and then

Fig. 4. The partial density of states for the Os1 atom (with consideration of its local axis) in Na2OsO4. For other Os atoms, the P-DOSs are just the same considering their own local axis. The 1g bands at ambient pressure (marked here as P = 0) originate in the region from -1.4 to 1.05 eV, and e bands lay in the conduction band from 2.6 to 7.4 eV. The narrow gap is opened at the top of the valence band in the t2g structure. The E0 is denoted by the dotted line. The P-DOS of the dxy orbital exactly matches the P-DOS of the dxz orbital. P-DOS, partial density of states.
the whole cut area was drilled and replaced by boron nitride (BN) powder, which was compressed again to make a 60 μm diameter hole drilled at the center of the BN insert. The sample, together with a ruby sphere and mineral oil (ACROS Organics™) as a pressure medium, were then all loaded into the prepared hole. The XANES spectra were double checked by measuring the Na2OsO4 single crystals. In these measurements, we used a symmetric DAC with nanodiamond anvils. A stainless steel gasket was used to make a hole for a sample, ruby, and mineral oil. The collected data were processed and analyzed using programs from the Demeter package [30].

The electronic transport properties under high pressure and low temperature were investigated via the four-probe electrical conductivity method in a DAC made of CuBe alloy. The pressure was generated by a pair of diamonds with a 300-μm ductility method in a DAC made of CuBe alloy. The pressure was temperature were investigated via the four-probe electrical conduction method. A 100 μm-diameter center hole in the insulating layer was used as the sample chamber. NaCl powder was used as the pressure-transmitting medium. An extension spring was used to prevent the diamonds in the DAC to monitor the exact sample temperature. The measurements were performed using the Mag Lab system, which controls the temperature automatically. The pressure was measured via the ruby fluorescence method at room temperature before and after cooling. It is worth mentioning that in all the experiments, the pressure value is the average value determined before and after the measurement. In all cases, the error does not exceed ±0.5 GPa.

Electronic structure calculations were performed by the OpenMX software package [31], which is based on the linear combination of pseudo-atomic-orbital basis formalism. The exchange-correlation energy was calculated within the local density approximation functional [32]. Spin-orbit coupling was treated in the fully relativistic j-dependent pseudopotential and non-collinear scheme [33]. The 6 × 6 × 12 Monkhorst-Pack k-point grid and the 400 Ry energy cut-off were used for momentum-space and the real-space integration. The theoretical calculation for the band gap verification was also performed for the volume optimized cell following a similar approach applied earlier on the Na2OsO4 sample [34]. Calculations were double checked with the full-potential linearized augmented plane wave method as implemented in the Wien2k software along with the Perdew-Burke-Ernzerhof parameterized generalized gradient approximation [35]. The Rkmax was set to 7 (R is the radius of the smallest muffin-tin sphere, and km is the largest k vector in the plane wave expansion). A mesh of 729 k-points in the irreducible part of the Brillouin zone was used. The iteration halted when the criterion for the difference in the eigenvalues was less than 0.0001 between the steps of convergence.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mtphys.2018.12.001.

Data availability statement

The raw data required to reproduce these findings are given in the Appendix.

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