Magnitude and Spatial Distribution Control of the Supercurrent in Bi$_2$O$_2$Se-Based Josephson Junction

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ABSTRACT: Many proposals for exploring topological quantum computation are based on superconducting quantum devices constructed on materials with strong spin–orbit coupling (SOC). For these devices, full control of both the magnitude and the spatial distribution of the supercurrent is highly demanded, but has been elusive up to now. We constructed a proximity-type Josephson junction on nanoplates of Bi$_2$O$_2$Se, a new emerging semiconductor with strong SOC. Through electrical gating, we show that the supercurrent can be fully turned ON and OFF, and its real-space pathways can be configured either through the bulk or along the edges. Our work demonstrates Bi$_2$O$_2$Se as a promising platform for constructing multifunctional hybrid superconducting devices as well as for searching for topological superconductivity.

KEYWORDS: Bi$_2$O$_2$Se nanoplate, supercurrent, spatial distribution, Josephson junction

Superconducting proximity effect (SPE) allows a normal metal to superconduct when placed adjacent to a superconductor. It plays a central role in the extensive applications of superconducting quantum devices. Recently, the search for topological superconductivity has utilized SPE as a primary mechanism to construct hybrid heterostructures, since intrinsic topological superconductors (TSCs) are scarce in nature.1–8 Apart from being a novel topological phase of matter, TSCs afford platforms to hold Majorana zero modes (MZMs) which could be used for building fault-tolerant quantum computers.9–11 On this fascinating blueprint, SPE has been realized in various topological materials and semiconductors with strong spin–orbit coupling (SOC), and TSCs and MZMs have been unveiled among these hybrid structures.2–4,12–16 In spite of this rapid progress, for the development of electrically tunable superconducting quantum devices, control of both the magnitude and the spatial distribution of the supercurrent in nanoscale superconducting devices is a crucial ingredient. In superconductor–normal metal–superconductor (SNS) Josephson junctions, the control of the ON/OFF of the supercurrent through electrical gating (namely supercurrent transistor) has been demonstrated in quantum dots, nanowires/nanotubes, and others.17–19 However, the flow path of Cooper pairs is predefined by the geometry of the devices. Regarding regulating the spatial distribution of the supercurrent, in bulk-insulating SNS junctions, Cooper pairs flow naturally on the nontrivial two-dimensional (2D) surfaces of three-dimensional (3D) topological insulators and semimetals or on the helical edges of 2D topological insulators.20–24 However, the supercurrent is difficult to turn OFF by gating due to the gapless nature in these topological materials. Efforts have also been put toward monitoring of the supercurrent distribution in ferromagnets and semiconductors such as InAs and graphene.25–31 Nevertheless, simultaneous regulation of both the magnitude and the real-space pathways of the supercurrent in SNS junctions has been elusive, especially in semiconductors with strong SOC. From a fundamental viewpoint, SOC is essential to lift the spin degeneracy and is a prerequisite for most of the materials (trivial or nontrivial) explored so far to establish TSCs.1–4,6,13–15,20 In this work, we address this issue and demonstrate the full control of the supercurrent through electrical gating in the Josephson junction device on a new emerging star material with strong SOC–Bi$_2$O$_2$Se nanoplates. 2D materials such as graphene, phosphorene, transition metal dichalcogenides, and topological insulators have

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Recent research on a new layered semiconductor Bi₂O₂Se has been booming thanks to its superior electronic properties such as ambient stability, ultrahigh electron mobility (~2.8 × 10⁵ cm²/V·s at 2 K), and a tunable bandgap.³⁵⁻⁴¹ The existence of strong SOC, suppression of backscattering, as well as high-performance field-effect transistors and optoelectronics, has been experimentally demonstrated in Bi₂O₂Se thin films.³²⁻⁴⁶ Coherent surface states have also been examined in Bi₂O₂Se nanowires,⁴⁷ and a large Rashba SOC was further predicted to be present on the polar or nonpolar surfaces due to the intrinsic band bending.⁴⁰ These surface states reside partially in the bulk band gap, leaving appropriate space for multifunctional electrical tuning. Given these intriguing properties, Bi₂O₂Se provides opportunities to manipulate SPE and is a promising platform to engineer TSCs.

In this work, we study a Josephson junction constructed on a Bi₂O₂Se nanoplate and demonstrate the full control of the magnitude and the spatial distribution of the supercurrent through electrical gating. By employing superconducting interferometry techniques, we found that the supercurrent can be fully turned ON and OFF, and meanwhile, the supercurrent flow can be configured either through the bulk or only along the edges. Two alternative mechanisms of the bulk to edge supercurrent transition are presented.

Bi₂O₂Se nanoparticles were synthesized by means of chemical vapor deposition in a horizontal tube furnace.³⁵,⁴⁸ Figure 1a shows an optical microscope image of the as-grown nanoplates, viewed perpendicular to the mica substrate. The nanoplates take a rectangular shape, and either lie down on the substrate or grow vertically as indicated by the red arrows in Figure 1a. The standing Bi₂O₂Se nanoplates can be easily transferred onto SiO₂/Si substrates in a purely mechanical way instead of a vapor deposition process.³⁵,⁴⁸,⁴⁻⁷ Bi₂O₂Se nanoplate (dark blue) forming a proximity-type Josephson junction. The circuit displays the quasi-four terminal measurement configurations. Correspondence between the supercurrent–density profile, Jₓ(x), in a Josephson junction (left column) and the superconducting interference pattern, i.e., the dependence of critical supercurrent between the ON and OFF states. Figure 2a,b presents the gate tuning of the magnitude of the one-slit Fraunhofer-like pattern (top right).

\[ I_\text{c}(B_y) \] presents a one-slit Fraunhofer-like pattern following the form \( \sin(\pi \Phi / \Phi_0) / (\pi \Phi / \Phi_0) \), where \( \Phi = L_{\text{eff}} B_y \) is the flux, \( L_{\text{eff}} \) and \( W \) are the effective length and width of the junction, respectively, and \( \Phi_0 = h / 2 e \) is the flux quantum (\( h \) is the Planck constant, \( e \) the elementary charge). The central lobe of \( I_\text{c}(B_y) \) has a width of \( 2 \Phi_0 \), and the side lobes of \( \Phi_0 \). In addition, the height of the lobes shows an overall 1/\( B_y \) decay. When the supercurrent flows along the two edges (bottom row), the single junction mimics a superconducting quantum interference device (SQUID) and presents a two-slit interference pattern with the form \( \cos(\pi \Phi / \Phi_0) \). The lobes in this case have a uniform width of \( \Phi_0 \) and a weak overall decay (the decrease mainly results from the suppression of the superconductivity in the contacts and a finite width of the edge modes). In the intermediate regime, the bulk and edge supercurrent coexist, and \( I_\text{c}(B_y) \) exhibits a one-slit to two-slit transition. Generally speaking, \( I_\text{c}(B_y) \) and \( J(x) \) can be extracted quantitatively from each other through integration or Fourier transform.

We first present the gate tuning of the magnitude of the supercurrent between the ON and OFF states. Figure 2a,b shows the differential resistance \( dV / dI = V_{\text{ac}} / I_{\text{ac}} \) as a function of gate voltage \( V_g \) and dc bias current \( I_{\text{dc}} \). To reach a high contrast and a clear view of the color map, we divided the full \( V_g \) range of −10 to 60 V into these two subranges and plotted.
them in two different color scales. The dV/dI peaks, as indicated by the white arrows, correspond to the critical current $I_c$ separating the zero-resistance state (uniform blue color) at low $l_{0,k}$ from the normal state at high $l_{0,k}$. Two typical line cuts are plotted in Figure 2d, taken at $V_g = 20$ V (blue) and 40 V (red), respectively. Figure 2c shows the gate voltage dependence of the normal-state resistance $R_N$ and $I_c$ extracted from Figure 2a and b. When sweeping $V_g$ from 60 V to $-10$ V, $R_N$ increases monotonically toward infinite ($\sim 50$ kΩ at $V_g = -20$ V, data not shown), which is expected as the electrons are depleted. Meanwhile, $I_c$ decreases also monotonically from 223 nA at $V_g = 60$ V to 0 nA around $V_g = -7$ V. Therefore, the supercurrent can be fully turned ON/OFF by gating. Note that the black arrows in Figure 2a,c indicate the upturn of $I_c$ around $V_g = 15$ V.

Next, we switch to the superconducting interference and disentangle the bulk and edge supercurrent. To do so, a perpendicular magnetic field $B_z$ was applied to the junction. Figure 3a shows the differential resistance dV/dI as a function of both $B_z$ and $I_{dc}$ at $V_g = 60, 40, 20$, and 0 V, respectively. The whitish envelope characterizes the critical current $I_c$ and separates the superconducting and normal states. At $V_g = 60$ V, $I_c$ presents a one-slit Fraunhofer-like pattern, with a central lobe of width roughly twice the side lobes and also a global fast decay. The average period of $\Delta B_z \approx 5.1$ G agrees with the analysis above can also be investigated by using the Dynes–Fulton approach to extract the supercurrent density profile. Figure 3b displays the position ($x$) dependence of $J_s(x)$ at different $V_g$ obtained from the Fourier transform of the $I_c$ vs $B_z$ curves retrieved from Figure 3a accordingly. Note that $x = 0$ corresponds to the center of the junction. The bulk-dominated supercurrent at $V_g = 60$ and 40 V, the bulk to edge transition at $V_g = 20$ V, and the edge-dominated supercurrent at $V_g = 0$ V can be immediately recognized. Therefore, through electrical gating, we realized the configuration of the supercurrent pathways.

We now discuss the underlying mechanism of the gate tuning of the supercurrent distribution. Although the Fraunhofer to SQUID evolution and the supercurrent density profiles demonstrate the “bulk” to edge supercurrent transition, it is ambiguous that if the “bulk” is the 3D bulk or, alternatively, the top and bottom surfaces. These two scenarios arise from the Se or Bi termination-sensitive surface states in Bi$_2$O$_2$Se.

For Se-terminated (001) surface, Figure 4a sketches the band structure (not to scale) around the Γ point, including the spin-split subbands (blue) close to the valence band. Regarding the fact that when sweeping $V_g$ from 60 V to $-10$ V, the normal state resistance increases monotonically toward infinite, the conduction band of the (3D) bulk undertakes the electron transport, as indicated by the blue shaded region. However, the
bulk to edge supercurrent transition suggests the existence of edge states, presumably due to downward band bending at the edges.\textsuperscript{26,40,45} Figure 4b displays such band bending and the formation of the edge states (at energy $E'$), as illustrated by the red dashed line in Figure 4a. Consequently, edge supercurrent dominates when the Fermi level $E_F$ sits between $E'$ and the bottom of the conduction band $E_C$ (bottom panel of Figure 4c). The upturn of the critical current around $V_{g} = 15$ V, as guided by the black arrows in Figure 2a and c, corresponds to the onset of the 3D bulk supercurrent when $E_F > E_C$ (top panel of Figure 4c), consistent with the observation of finite $I_c$ in the bulk at $V_{g} = 20$ V (Figure 3).

The scenario for Bi-terminated top/bottom surface is completely different.\textsuperscript{46} Figure 4d sketches the band structure (not to scale) around $\Gamma$ point, including the two spin-split subbands (blue) on (001) surface. According to ref 40, the separation between the subband bottoms is $E_1 - E_0 \approx 0.34$ eV. We assign $V_{g} = -10$ V to correspond to a Fermi level position just below $E_0$, since the junction tends to be insulating. Thus, the Fermi level position $E_F(V_{g}) = \pi \hbar^2 n/(2m^*E_1) + E_1$, where $n$ is the 2D electron density induced by the gate, a factor of 2 denotes an equal footing of the top and bottom surfaces, $\epsilon$ is the dielectric constant of SiO$_2$, $d = 300$ nm is the thickness of SiO$_2$, and $m^*$ = 0.14$m_0$ the effective electron mass of Bi$_2$O$_2$Se ($m_0$ is the electron mass).\textsuperscript{35} At $V_{g} = 60$ V, $E_F$ sits slightly below $E_0$, far below $E_1$ and the conduction band $E_C$. Hence, in the gate-voltage range studied, as indicated by the blue shaded region in Figure 4d, electrons are only induced on the surfaces of the Bi$_2$O$_2$Se nanoplate, but not in the 3D bulk. Consequently, the “bulk” supercurrent mentioned above flows actually through the top and bottom surfaces. We would like to note that there can be a difference between these two surfaces due to the gate being at the bottom and the contacts being on the top.

Similarly, the bulk to edge transition indicates a slightly different $E_1$ (onset energy) between the top/bottom surfaces and the edge surfaces. Under this assumption, Figure 4e illustrates such effective band bending and the formation of the subbands. When $E_F$ sits above $E_0$, the top and bottom surfaces dominate the supercurrent with relatively small contributions from the side surfaces considering the small thickness of 15 nm (top panel of Figure 4f). However, within the narrow energy window between $E_1$ and $E_0$, the side surfaces dominate (bottom panel of Figure 4f). Again, the upturn of $I_c$ around $V_{g} = 15$ V implies the onset of the supercurrent on the top and bottom surfaces.

For both Se and Bi terminations, however, the full width at half-maximum (fwhm) of the supercurrent density peak, $\sim$570 nm (see bottom right panel in Figure 3b), is much larger than the typical thickness of surface states, say, several nanometers.\textsuperscript{40,52} This can be explained by the extension of the 2D electron waves from the edge to the 3D bulk for the Se-terminated case (from side surfaces to the top and bottom surfaces for Bi-terminated case) with an order of the Fermi wavelength, as observed in graphene.\textsuperscript{57} Such an explanation is further corroborated by the decay of the supercurrent density from the edge toward the center of the junction (see Supporting Information). Notably, these two scenarios are very interesting, although the current study could not differentiate between the Se- or Bi-terminated surfaces, and alternative interpretations for the edge supercurrent may also apply. Therefore, detailed studies are required to nail down more exquisite physical pictures. Note that the crystal structure, the thickness, and the edge characteristics of Bi$_2$O$_2$Se nanoplates are different from gapped graphene, so that the mechanism for the transition of the supercurrent distribution belongs to different scenarios.\textsuperscript{3,46}

In summary, we fabricated a Josephson junction device on a Bi$_2$O$_2$Se nanoplate and realized a superconducting proximity effect. Through electrical gating, the supercurrent can be fully turned ON and OFF, and simultaneously, the supercurrent spatial distribution can be configured in the bulk or along the edges. The termination-sensitive surface states render plentiful mechanisms and various possible configurations, and leave extensive room for multifunctional electrical tuning. Considering the remarkable properties and the strong spin–orbit coupling, Bi$_2$O$_2$Se is a promising platform for studying numerous novel phenomena, such as constructing gate controllable hybrid superconducting devices,\textsuperscript{18} supercurrent field-effect transistors,\textsuperscript{19} nanoscale SQUID,\textsuperscript{53} superconducting optoelectronics,\textsuperscript{54} Josephson laser,\textsuperscript{20} Cooper-pair beam splitter,\textsuperscript{21} and engineering topological superconductors.\textsuperscript{2,3,6}

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**Associated Content**

**Supporting Information**

The Supporting Information is available free of charge at https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.nanolett.0c00025.
Synthesis and characterization of Bi$_2$O$_2$Se nanoplates; Device fabrication; Low-temperature transport measurement; Extraction of the supercurrent–density profile; Comparison between different devices (PDF)

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**Author Contributions**

L.L. and F.Q. supervised the overall research. J.Y. and R.J. synthesized the material. J.Y. fabricated the device and carried out the measurement with the assistance from J.H., G.Y., M.L., Z.L., X.Z., H.L., K.Z., R.J., Z.J., J.F., C.Y., X.J., G.L., L.L., and F.Q. All authors participated in the analysis of the data. F.Q., J.Y., and L.L. wrote the paper under constructive discussions with all other authors.

**Notes**

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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