Continuously tunable ferroelectric domain width down to the single-atomic limit in bismuth tellurite

Emerging functionalities in two-dimensional materials, such as ferromagnetism, superconductivity and ferroelectricity, open new avenues for promising nanoelectronic applications. Here, we report the discovery of intrinsic in-plane room-temperature ferroelectricity in two-dimensional Bi₂TeO₅ grown by chemical vapor deposition, where spontaneous polarization originates from Bi column displacements. We found an intercalated buffer layer consist of mixed Bi/Te column as 180° domain wall which enables facile polarized domain engineering, including continuously tunable domain width by pinning different concentration of buffer layers, and even ferroelectric-antiferroelectric phase transition when the polarization unit is pinned down to single atomic column. More interestingly, the intercalated Bi/Te buffer layer can interconvert to polarized Bi columns which end up with series terraced domain walls and unusual fan-shaped ferroelectric domain. The buffer layer induced size and shape tunable ferroelectric domain in two-dimensional Bi₂TeO₅ offer insights into the manipulation of functionalities in van der Waals materials for future nanoelectronics.

Ferroelectric (FE) materials, showing switchable electrical polarizations under external electric fields, have shown great potential in applications of non-volatile memories, field-effect transistors, transducers, actuators and other devices. In recent years, two-dimensional (2D) FEs are emerging candidates for their diverse FE tunability. Unlike conventional three-dimensional (3D) FEs, 2D FEs avoid the inevitable dangling bonds at the surface which drastically reduce the surface energy and help achieve smaller size of devices. Moreover, epitaxial growth of conventional 3D FE thin films requires suitable substrates with small lattice mismatch. Whereas in 2D materials, layers with distinct structural properties can be stacked and utilized for FE heterostructure devices without limitation of substrate epitaxy, providing a wide range of tunability of the FE properties. 2D ferroelectricity, as predicted by theory, can be generated by functionalizing graphene with hydroxyl groups, symmetry breaking structural distortions in 1 T monolayer MoS₂, and reversible shifting of VI layers.

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in III-V compounds like In$_2$Se$_3$, interlayer translation in bilayer 2D ferromagnets$^{12}$; etc. Later on, in-plane ferroelectricity was experimentally discovered in 2D SnTe flakes$^{13}$, while out-of-plane ferroelectricity was found in 2D CuInP$_2$S$_6$$^{14,15}$, α-In$_2$Se$_3$$^{16}$, and distorted 1 T (dIT) MoTe$_2$ down to monolayer limit, respectively. In addition, emerging interfacial ferroelectricity coupled to lateral sliding was predicted in 2D hexagonal boron nitride and also experimentally demonstrated$^{17,18}$.

Besides, as the counterpart of ferroelectricity, the nature of antiferroelectric (AFE) ordering is also of great significance for fundamental understanding and corresponding applications in nanoelectronics$^{19,20}$. The presence of AFE ordering in 2D materials was firstly reported in lamellar compounds CuBiP$_2$Se$_6$, AgBiP$_2$Se$_6$ and AgBiP$_2$S$_6$, in which an AFE phase transition induced by cooperative Cu$^+$ and Bi$^{3+}$ ion motion was suggested by density functional theory (DFT) calculations. Besides, group-V (As, Sb, and Bi) monolayer can also host an AFE phase as predicted by theory$^{21}$. Recently, AFE phase of layered CuInP$_2$Se$_6$ was experimentally found at low temperature by piezoresistance force microscopy (PFM)$^{22}$. Antiparallel polarizations between neighboring nanostripes were visualized at the atomic scale in 2D layered β-In$_2$Se$_3$, giving new insight into the AFE ordering in reduced dimension.

The demand for further device miniaturization and fast access speed calls for smaller size of domains and easier control of polarizations in 2D FE materials. Thus, domain and phase engineering become essential in 2D FE materials. In conventional 3D FE thin films, the domain structure is determined by the energy competition among electrostatic, strain and domain wall energies. Therefore, FE domains can be tuned by changing the sample thickness, epitaxial strain and bottom electrodes$^{27,28}$, while FE-AFE phase transitions can be induced by chemical substitution$^{29}$, high pressure$^{30}$, epitaxial strain$^{31}$, interfacial oxygen octahedral coupling$^{32}$, etc. As another building block, FE properties$^{33}$, β-In$_2$Se$_3$ and high pressure$^{34}$, whereas in the 2D limit, the van der Waals (vdW) gap between each FE layer adds more complexity in controlling the energy competition of the FE domains, which calls for new tuning strategy. As pioneering work, theory predicted that FE polarization in 2D materials can be modulated by external strain$^{35,36}$. A vdW-interaction-control FE to AFE transition was reported in 2D CuInP$_2$Se$_6$ and CuInP$_2$S$_6$.

More recently, experimental results prove an electric-field-induced reversible AFE to FE transition in 2D α-GeSe$_3$. However, realization of continuous FE domain tunability and FE/AFE transition in vdW materials is still challenging.

In this work, we reported the successful growth of few-layer 2D Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ flakes on mica by chemical vapor deposition (CVD) method. Combining PFM, aberration-corrected scanning transmission electron microscopy (STEM) and first-principles calculations, we unambiguously identified intrinsic in-plane ferroelectricity in few-layer Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ flakes, which originates from the Bi$^{3+}$ cation polarization in the BiO$_5$ cages. We discovered an intercalated buffer layer consist of mixed Bi/Te columns that serves as 180° domain wall, which can be facilely intercalated into the FE matrix and lead to continuously variable polarized domain sizes. As the ultimate intercalated concentration where individual polarization domain approaches to half unit cell limit, a FE to AFE transition occurs. Moreover, unusual fan-shaped FE domain was observed, which resulted from the interconversion of Bi/Te buffer layers to polarized Bi columns, making step “shift” of the domain wall and therefore an inclined terraced shape of FE domains. Our findings provide insights into the FE domain engineering in multi-functional 2D FE materials.

**Results and discussion**

**Growth of layered 2D Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ with in-plane room temperature ferroelectricity**

The reported bulk structure of Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ at room temperature is a polar crystal of orthorhombic symmetry with the Amem2 space group and unit cell parameters $a = 5.5245$ Å, $b = 16.458$ Å and $c = 11.572$ Å$^{37,38}$. It can be illustrated as a fluorite-type cubic unit cells tripled and doubled along $b$ and $c$ axes correspondingly$^{39}$. We adopted CVD to grow the 2D Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ flakes (see Supplementary Fig. 1a). An optical image of typical quadruple Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ flakes on mica was shown in Fig. 1a (enlarged view in Supplementary Fig. 1b), while long stripes or other irregular shape are experimentally observed (Supplementary Fig. 1c). The as-grown 2D Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ maintains the same structure with its bulk counterpart in the reduced dimension, as verified by Raman spectrum (Supplementary Fig. 1d), electron diffraction pattern of lattice symmetry and atomically resolved energy dispersive spectroscopy (EDS) (Supplementary Fig. 2). Figure 1b displays an atomic force microscopy (AFM) topographic image. A height difference of 1.2 nm across a step on the flake surface is consistent with the c lattice constant of Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ unit cell, indicating a layered structure. A cross-sectional HAADF-STEM image (Supplementary Fig. 3) was further used to confirm the layered structure of the Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ thin flakes, yielding an interlayer spacing of 1.6 Å. The strong power-dependent second-harmonic generation (SHG) intensity shown in Supplementary Fig. 4a-c reveals a non-centrosymmetric characteristic of the 2D Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ flakes, consistent with the previous results reported in its bulk form$^{40}$. Besides, a board photoluminescence (PL) peak residing at 344 nm suggests an optical bandgap of $\sim 2.28$ eV for Bi$_2$TeO$_5$, agreeing well with the band value of 2.27 eV (Supplementary Fig. 4d, e). Figure 1c depicts the lateral PFM image of Fig. 1b, which clearly shows domains with diverse electric polarization directions (Lateral PFM images under different sample rotation angles are shown in Supplementary Fig. 5). This compellingly indicates in-plane ferroelectricity in 2D Bi$_2$TeO$_5$, which is air-stable at room temperature, possessing application potentials in ultrathin nonvolatile electronic devices. In previous studies, the bulk Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ crystal is reported to have piezoelectricity$^{41}$, photovoltaic effect$^{42}$ and non-linear optical properties$^{43}$, but not ferroelectricity. Such discrepancy is presumably attributed to the randomly oriented crystals in the bulk form. The difference between the domain size and random orientation in bulk may affect the observations of macroscopic dielectric loop and FE domains. In addition, the well-defined crystal orientation ensures that polarizations are all along in-plane direction, which enables the observation of FE domains in 2D Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ flakes.

DFT calculations were performed to unveil the origin of ferroelectricity in Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ flakes. As shown in Fig. 1d, we first considered its bulk counterpart with a vdW gap width of 1.4 Å. A glide-mirror symmetry $M_{1} | 0, 1/2, 0$ can be found in each Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ monolayer, where the mirror planes are marked with green dashed lines. The two glide mirrored rows along $a$ axis are bridged by shared oxygen single rows (marked with black dashed circles). Bi$^{3+}$ cations in surface sublayers near the vdW gaps (marked with purple circles) are coordinated with five adjacent O$^-$ anions, forming a rectangular pyramid (marked with light-blue pyramid). The 0.11 Å displacements of Bi$^{3+}$cations along $a$ axis and 40° rotation of BiO$_5$ cages around $b$ axis lead to an in-plane polarization along $a$ axis, yielding a significant electric dipole moment of 3.6 e·Å/µC (5.57 µC/cm$^2$), which is comparable to the in-plane polarization of In$_2$Se$_3$ in two different phases (2.36 and 7.13 e·Å/µC, respectively), and even an order of magnitude larger than the out-of-plane value of 0.11 e·Å/µC for In$_2$Se$_3$. For better understanding the origin of ferroelectricity in Bi$_2$TeO$_5$, we constructed a highly symmetric structure model where all BiO$_5$ cages are not rotated and each Bi$^{3+}$ cation is free-of-displacement, which is a non-polar phase verified using our DFT calculations (Supplementary Fig. 6). The non-polar structure is, indeed, the transition state between the two polar structures showing opposite polarization directions. It yields a switching barrier of 1.64 eV per BiO$_5$ (Supplementary Fig. 6d), consistent with our experimental observation that the FE phase persists up to the room-temperature.

As shown in Fig. 1f, the Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ structure along $c$ axis can be described as a periodic arrangement of “B-A-B” rows, where the atom...
rows comprised of Bi$^{3+}$ sites in the BiO$_5$ cages are named as A-rows, and
the Bi$^{3+}$ and Te$^{4+}$ cations beside the mirror plane are distinguished as
B-rows. The Bi$^{3+}$ cation displacements ($D_{Bi}$) and lattice rotation angle
($\theta$) are used to characterize the polarization feature (enlarged green
rectangle in Fig. 1f), which can be directly acquired and mapped
experimentally by using aberration corrected STEM as shown in Fig.1g.
Simulated HAADF-STEM images in the inset image con
firm the orthorhombic structure of Bi$_2$TeO$_5$. Using a routine two-dimensional
Gaussian peaks fitting scheme, the positions of the Bi$^{3+}$ and Te$^{4+}$
cations can be accurately determined, in which the $D_{Bi}$ and $\theta$ are
directly extracted from atomic STEM images. The retracted $D_{Bi}$ and $\theta$
are plotted as a function of lattice columns in Fig. 1h. An average $D_{Bi}$
around 0.14 Å appears in every A-rows, consistent with the calculated
0.11 Å. On the contrary, B-rows shows almost zero displacements. The
angle $\theta$ also shows a periodic feature which matches the change of $D_{Bi}$
along $a$ axis. The spatial distribution of $D_{Bi}$ is demonstrated in Fig. 1i,
where the yellow arrows display an upper polarization direction of the
Bi$^{3+}$ cations. Supplementary Fig. 7 demonstrates an atomically resolved
HAADF-STEM image and corresponding calculated site displacements
color map in a much larger area, showing a uniform polarization dis-
tribution in the whole region. Thus, our CVD-grown air-stable 2D
Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ thin
flakes are proved to maintain robust in-plane ferroelec-
tricity originated from atomically aligned Bi$^{3+}$ cation polarization.

**Intercalated buffer layer as domain wall in Bi$_2$TeO$_5$**

Striped FE domain configuration is observed in lateral PFM images in
Fig. 2a. Within the spatial resolution of PFM, the smallest domain width
is around 20 nm. Corresponding AFM topography in Supplementary
Fig. 8 rules out the height contribution to the lateral phase image. The
atomic structure of the striped domain is unveiled in atomic STEM

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**Fig. 1 | CVD growth of layered 2D Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ single crystals with ferroelectricity.**

a Optical image of Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ single crystals. b, c AFM topography and corresponding
lateral PFM images of single Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ flake. Height profile in b shows a step of 1.2 nm,
consistent to the thickness of monolayer Bi$_2$TeO$_5$. d Schematic of Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ crystal
structure along $a$ axis. e Top oblique view of layered Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ crystal structure. The
blue pyramids correspond to the BiO$_5$ cages. The blue arrows represent the
polarization direction of BiO$_5$ cages. The sandwiched Bi-O-Bi sublayers are not
shown here for better presentation. f Schematic of Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ crystal structure along $c$
axis. An enlarged image in green rectangle shows the calculated Bi displacements
($D_{Bi}$) and lattice rotation angle ($\theta$). g Atomically resolved HAADF-STEM image of
Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ along $c$ axis. Lower left inset: Simulated STEM image of Bi$_2$TeO$_5$. Oxygen
columns are invisible due to their weak scattering. h Extracted $D_{Bi}$ and $\theta$ distribu-
tion in g. The error bars correspond to the standard deviation of $D_{Bi}$ and $\theta$.
i Superposition of Bi$^{3+}$ displacement vectors with g. For simplicity, only the large
displacements of Bi$^{3+}$ sites (A-rows) are depicted in the image.
Quantitative analysis reveals that the directions of Bi\textsuperscript{3+} cations (A-row) at the two sides (Fig. 2d). Note that the formation of 180° domain wall with opposite polarization (Fig. 2c) change inversely across the buffered B-row, further confirming the connectivity of BiO\textsubscript{6} networks. Generally speaking, the compromise between the electrostatic energy and the elastic energy leads to the formation of domains separated by the buffer rows. However, direct formation of anti-parallel polarized domains requires a huge energy cost of 448 meV per BiO\textsubscript{3}, which is much larger than the energy gain of forming the 180DW-AFE surface domains (See the structure models of typical 180° domain wall in 1 × 2 × 1 supercell without the buffer layer in Supplementary Fig. 9 and corresponding total energies in Supplementary Table 1, here the “180DW-AFE” refers to the macroscopic antiferroelectricity formed by period 180° domain walls). However, the intercalation of B-rows, as a buffer, reduces the energy cost to 279.6 meV, which, together with the lowered electrostatic energy, gives rise to a more stable configuration comprised of surface 180DW-AFE domains (Fig. 2f) than that of pure FE domains at the Te-rich extreme (See Supplementary Fig. 10 and Supplementary Table 2). Apart from this, Bi\textsubscript{2}TeO\textsubscript{5} flakes with 90° domain walls are occasionally found and shown in Supplementary Fig. 11, which is similar to traditional FE perovskite that mediates perpendicular polarizations, yet without any buffer layer structure at the domain wall region.

**Continuously variable domain size engineering and FE-AFE phase transition by intercalated buffer layer**

Different than other perovskites, the unique intercalated buffer 180° domain wall would cause local chemical composition fluctuation in Bi\textsubscript{2}TeO\textsubscript{5}. Decreasing the Bi/Te ratio in precursor would introduce large amount of Te\textsuperscript{3+} cations, which may tailor the domain density. We changed the precursor (Bi\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{3} and Te) ratio and still got 2D flakes with...
similar morphology. Moreover, we indeed observed a wide range of tunable domain size depending on the Bi/Te ratio. The PFM images (Supplementary Fig. 12 a, b) show a decrease of domain size from averagely 500 nm to 30 nm as the Bi/Te ratio decrease from 1.54 to 1.33. Figure 3 shows finer tuning of the domain size by color mapping the opposite polarizations in atomic resolution HAADF images. The image shows the domain can vary from tens of nanometers (Fig. 3a) to 5 nm (Fig. 3b), 2 nm (Fig. 3c) and even down to 1 nm (Fig. 3d) as further...
The formation mechanism of the unique AFE phase induced by introducing intercalated B-rows, leading to a stabilized AFE state. The lattice constant variation and elastic energy are largely reduced by the kink formation at 180° domain wall. This is verifiable by DFT calculations (Fig. 4b inset) based on this model well reproduces all features observed in the experiment. We also did SHG measurements on the AFE phase of Bi₂TeO₅, which show a substantial difference from the FE one (as shown in Supplementary Fig. 15a–c). The negligible SHG signal in the AFE phase in comparison with that in the FE one indicates a structural transition with an inversion symmetric center. This is indeed the case in the AFE phase, since the antipolarized BiO₅ cages are uniformly distributed in the whole flake, where the intercalated buffer domain walls serve as the centrosymmetric center, as depicted in Supplementary Fig. 15e.

We further use DFT calculations to investigate the role of Bi₂O₃ vs. Te ratio in tuning the density of the intercalated buffer domain wall. The formation enthalpy of the unique AFE phase is calculated using the total energy method and is defined as Eq. (1):

\[
\Delta H_{form} = E_{AFE} - E_{FE} - n \times \mu_{Te} - m \times \mu_{O}
\]  

Where \( \mu_{Te} \) and \( \mu_{O} \) are the chemical potential of the added Te and O atoms to form the AFE phase. The formation enthalpy \( (H_{form}) \) of the AFE phase is plotted as a function of Te and O chemical potential in Supplementary Fig. 16a. The formation enthalpy range is between -0.13 and 6.89 eV and shows a decreasing trend with the increase of Te and O potential. At the Te-rich and O-rich limit, the formation enthalpy approaches zero, which corresponds to the spontaneous transition to the AFE phase with sufficient Te and O supply and is consistent with our experiments. Moreover, an enlarged formation enthalpy ranging from -1.28 to 11.28 eV would be generated by introducing one more
additional Bi-row at the boundary, indicating single layer Bi-row intercalation is energetically favored in AFE phase with a reasonable Te and O concentration (Supplementary Fig. 16b). Therefore, the intercalated buffer layer is proved to act as a single unit to control the domain size continuously in Bi$_2$TeO$_5$, and a robust FE-AFE transition could occur by altering the Bi/Te ratio to reach the maximum limit of the intercalated buffer layers.

**Intercalated buffer layer induced terraced domain wall**

Besides domain size engineering, the intercalated buffer layer also plays a vital role in controlling the domain shape. A rather unusual fan-shaped domain configuration, where the edge of the FE domain has an inclined angle against the polarization, is observed in Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ flakes synthesized using a low Bi/Te ratio (see the lateral PFM images at different rotation angles in Fig. 5a, b and Supplementary Fig. 17). Zoom-in image of the domain edge reveals numerous kinks which formed terraced domain walls (Fig. 5c). The atomically resolved HAADF-STEM images and corresponding polarization distribution at the kink are illustrated in Fig. 5d, e. Since the 180° domain wall is always accompanied by buffered B-rows, a clear “shift” of the intercalated buffer layer normal to the domain wall is observed at the kink (see the white dotted lines in Fig. 5d). Moreover, the gradual contrast resolution between A and B rows indicates the interlayer interaction of the buffered Bi/Te to polarized Bi columns. Figure 5e shows disordered displacements both in A and B rows at the kink (highlighted by red dashed rectangle), which is due to the local strain fluctuation caused by composition redistribution. The formation of kinks seems a common phenomenon in Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ flakes and formed irregular domain shape in macroscopic view, the mechanism of which was thus explored using DFT. Figure 5f shows an atomic model of a single kink which is formed by gliding the buffering B-row (the domain wall, green ribbons) across the boundary by one BiO$_5$ cage unit (blue or orange areas), as verified in Fig. 5d. The formation enthalpy of this one-cage-width kinks resides in a range from ~0.76–2.37 eV (Fig. 5g), which indicates that it could be spontaneously formed at the Te-rich limit and is even more preferred under an additional O-rich condition. The glided domain wall effectively introduces a one-cage-width boundary between two oppositely polarized BiO$_5$ cages along the A row (within the black dotted box in Fig. 5d), which appreciably changes the local polarization distribution as experimentally observed in Fig. 5e.

In summary, we observed a robust room temperature in-plane ferroelectricity induced by Bi$^{3+}$ displacements along a axis and BiO$_5$ cages rotation around b axis in 2D Bi$_2$TeO$_5$, grown by CVD method. We found an additional B-row can intercalate in the FE phase as buffer layer and change the polarization, serving as 180° domain wall, which is unique building blocks to continuously tune the domain size in Bi$_2$TeO$_5$. The control of domain wall concentration is realized by changing the ratio of the Bi$_2$O$_3$/Te precursors. An AFE phase with zero net polarization is even obtained as the intercalated buffer domain wall approaches the ultimate concentration limit, forming planar pinning sites for antiparallel polarizations between adjacent Bi$^{3+}$ rows. Besides, terraced domain wall can be formed through kinked intercalated buffer layers, which effectively regulate the shape of the FE domain. The intercalated buffer domain wall provides a new paradigm in controlling the size and shape of the FE domains and FE-AFE transition in 2D FE materials, which tailors the functionalities in vdW materials and brings benefit for future utilizations in electronics.

**Methods**

**Synthesis of Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ flakes**

Ultrathin 2D Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ nanoplates were synthesized on mica substrate by a home-made ambient pressure CVD system. The reaction process was conducted in a heating furnace (Thermo Scientific (HTF5332CC)) equipped with a 1.2 m length, 2 inch outer diameter quartz tube. Bismuth oxide powder (Bi$_2$O$_3$, 99.999%, Sigma Aldrich) and tellurium powder (Te, 99.997%, Sigma Aldrich) were used as the precursors. 200 mg Bi$_2$O$_3$ powder was located in the hot zone of the tube furnace center. 1 g Te powder was placed 5 cm upstream while mica substrate (1 cm × 2 cm) 3 cm downstream from the hot center of the furnace for Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ deposition. In a typical process, the CVD system was purged with 300 standard cubic centimeters per minute (scm) argon for 5 min. After that, the tube furnace was heated to 680 °C within 20 min and kept at 680 °C for 5 min. Last, the sample was cooled to ambient temperature under the protection of argon. 300 scm Ar was maintained for the whole growth process.

**Film transfer**

The as-grown Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ flakes were transferred to Au grid for TEM characterization. After covered by polyeleimethacrylate (PMMA) and subsequent baking procedure (80 °C for 5 min), the Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ flakes was peeled off from the mica substrate utilizing the hydrophobic nature of PMMA. The PMMA film was then placed directly on Au grid and baked at 80 °C for 5 min. After that, the PMMA was removed by immersing the Au grid with Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ onside in acetone overnight.

**Atomic force microscopy**

Vertical and Lateral PFM images were performed on Asylum Research Cypher S system under Dual AC Resonance Tracking (DART) mode. Ti/Ir coated tips with contact frequencies around 300 kHz (for vertical PFM) and 760 kHz (for lateral PFM) were used during the PFM measurements.

**First-principles calculation**

DFT calculations of bismuth tellurite were performed using the generalized gradient approximation for the exchange correlation potential, the projector augmented wave (PAW) method and a plane wave basis as implemented in the Vienna ab-initio simulation package (VASP). In VASP calculations, a kinetic energy cutoff of 700 eV for the plane wave basis was adopted and a uniform k-mesh of 4 × 2 × 2 was adopted to sample the first Brillouin zone of the unit cell of the bulk structure of Bi$_2$TeO$_5$. The van der Waals forces were considered at thevdW-DF level, with the optB86b functional for the exchange potential. The shape and volume of each supercell were fully optimized and all atoms were allowed to relax until within 0.01 eV/Å residual force per atom. Berry phase method was used to evaluate the in-plane electric polarization in Bi$_2$TeO$_5$.

**TEM and HAADF-STEM characterization**

Free-standing TEM samples were prepared using a routine PMMA-assisted wet transfer method. The electron diffraction patterns along different projection directions were acquired in single Bi$_2$TeO$_5$ flake which rotated to corresponding zone axis in FEI Tecnai G2 F30 TEM microscope, being operated at 300 kV. Aberration-corrected TEM equipped with Cs double corrector and monochromator (FEI Tian Themis) was used to acquired high resolution HAADF-STEM images and EDS mappings. The semi convergence angle of the probe and collection angle of the detector were 25.1 mrad and 38 mrad, respectively. The atom site positions were determined by fitting them as 2D Gaussian peaks using the Matlab software.

**HAADF-STEM image simulations**

The HAADF-STEM image simulations were conducted by using QSTEM software based on frozen phonon multi-slice methods. The parameters used were set according to the experiment conditions, which is shown as follows: acceleration voltage is set as 300 kV, the spherical aberration Cs is set as 0 nm, the semi convergence angle is set as 21.4 mrad, the defocus is set as 0 nm, the source size is of 0.8 Å and the chromatic aberration Cc is set as 1 mm. The calculated inner and outer angles for HAADF-STEM images are 50 and 200 mrad, respectively.
Spectroscopic characterization
The as-obtained Bi2TeO3 nanoplatelets on mica substrate were further transferred on SiO2/Si substrate (300 nm oxide thickness) for spectroscopic characterization. Raman spectroscopy and photoluminescence (PL) spectra were performed on a commercial WITEC alpha 300 R Confocal Raman system equipped with a manual rotation stage with 0.1 degrees resolution. The Raman spectra were recorded using a 532 nm laser as the excitation source, while the PL spectra were excited with a 488 nm laser. The direction of polarization was controlled by a half-wave plate, which is located in front of the objective.

The second harmonic generation (SHG) measurement was performed in a back-reflection geometry system with an exciting laser wavelength of 800 nm, which is generated from a Ti:Sapphire femtosecond laser (Chameleon Ultra II). The repetition rate is 80 MHz while the pulse width is 150 fs. The exciting light was focused onto the sample by a long-working-distance objective with a magnification of 50x. The back-scattered SHG signal was collected with the same objective. After passing through a 700 nm short-pass filter, it was then focused on the entrance slit of a spectrometer equipped with a nitrogen-cooled charge-coupled device (CCD). In order to measure the linearly polarization-resolved SHG signals, the polarization direction of the fundamental wave is tuned by a 1/2 wave-plate (wavelength range of 310–1100 nm). Then the reflected SHG signals were directed sequentially through the same 1/2 wave-plate and a non-polarized beam splitter before focusing on the spectrometer slit. By rotating the fast axis of the 1/2 wave-plate, the intensity of SHG as a function of the excitation polarization against the crystalline axis.

Reporting summary
Further information on experimental design is available in the Nature Research Reporting Summary linked to this paper.

Data availability
The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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**Author contributions**

M.H. and J.L. conceived the project. M.H. conducted the AFM and STEM characterizations. K.N. and Q.Y. performed partially PFM test. C.W. and W.J. performed the DFT calculations. X.Z. and J.D. helped with the spectroscopic characterizations and data analysis. Y.W., X.M., C.S.W., and J.W. helped with the data analysis. L.K. helped with the sample preparation and spectroscopic characterization. J.L. and W.J. supervised the project. M.H., C.W., W.J., and J.L. wrote the manuscript with comments from all authors.

**Competing interests**

The authors declare no competing interests.

**Additional information**

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