Charge and spin interplay in a molecular-dimer-based organic Mott insulator

Natalia Drichko,1,2 Shiorki Sugiura,3,4 Minoru Yamashita,2 Akira Ueda,2,5 Shinya Uji,3,4 Nora Hassan,1 Yoshiya Sunairi,2 Hatsumi Mori,2 Elena I. Zhilyaeva,6 Svetlana Torunova,6 and Rimma N. Lyubovskaya6

1Institute for Quantum Matter and Department of Physics and Astronomy, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD 21218, USA
2The Institute for Solid State Physics, The University of Tokyo, Kashiwa, Chiba 277-8581, Japan
3National Institute for Materials Science, Tsukuba, Ibaraki 305-0003, Japan
4Graduate School of Pure and Applied Sciences, University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba, Ibaraki 305-8577, Japan
5Department of Chemistry, Faculty of Advanced Science and Technology, Kumamoto University, Kumamoto 860-8555, Japan
6Institute of Problems of Chemical Physics RAS, Chernogolovka, Moscow region, 142432 Russia

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Triangular lattice quasi-two-dimensional Mott insulators based on BEDT-TTF molecule and its analogies present a possibility to produce exotic phases by coupling charge and spin degrees of freedom. In this work we discuss magnetic properties of one of such materials, $\kappa$-(BEDT-TTF)$_2$Hg(SCN)$_2$Cl, which is found at the border of the phase transition between a Mott insulator into a charge ordered state. Our magnetic susceptibility and cantilever magnetisation measurements demonstrate how the charge degree of freedom defines magnetic properties for few different charge phases observed in this material as a function of temperature. Between $T_{CO} = 30\,\text{K}$ and $T_S = 24\,\text{K}$ we observe charge and spin separation due to one-dimensional charge stripes formed in this material below $T_{CO} = 30\,\text{K}$. Below $T_S = 24\,\text{K}$ charge and spin degrees of freedom demonstrate coupling. Spin singlet correlations develop below 24 K, however melting of charge order below 15 K prevents the spin singlet state formation, leaving the system in the inhomogeneous state with charge ordered spin singlet domains and charge and spin fluctuating ones.

I. INTRODUCTION

Research in frustrated magnetism is already for some time focused on a search for a quantum spin liquid4,10. The simplest models of this state consider Heisenberg interactions and magnetic or lattice frustration, where triangular lattice is the simplest frustrated lattice. Dimensionality of magnetic system is another parameter defining a behaviour of a frustrated system2. Additionally, there are theoretical predictions for obtaining this quantum states by coupling spins to other fluctuating degrees of freedom. Example of that are spin-orbital liquids, where spins are coupled to fluctuating orbital degrees of freedom2 or quantum dipole liquid5,6. The latter state can be realized in organic Mott insulators, where on-site fluctuating electrical dipole moments are coupled to the spin degree of freedom5,6. Some experimental results suggest a realization of these fluctuating dipole moments, and associated with them quantum dipole liquid state5,6. An experimental evidence of coupling of electric dipoles to the spin degree of freedom is necessary to prove that this path to a spin liquid state is possible at all.

Studies of the $\kappa$-(BEDT-TTF)$_2$Hg(SCN)$_2$Cl ($\kappa$-HgCl) in the insulating state can provide the answer to this question. This material is known to form a ferroelectric order of electric dipoles at temperatures between $T_{CO} = 30\,\text{K}$ and 15 K, which melts on cooling to the lower temperatures. NMR measurements suggest the absence of spin order in this material down to 25 mK. Using SQUID magnetic susceptibility, and cantilever torque magnetometry measurements we follow the temperature evolution of magnetic properties in $\kappa$-HgCl from metallic into dipole ordered state, and further into the melting of the dipole order. We observe the evidence of decoupled charge and spin degrees of freedom below $T_{CO} = 30\,\text{K}$ the temperature of the transition into the charge ordered state characterized by charge stripes, while below $T_S = 24\,\text{K}$ the coupling of charge and spin degrees of freedom defines magnetic properties. No magnetic order is detected in this system down to at least 120 mK, while the exchange interactions are on the order of at least 100 K.

The crystal structure of $\kappa$-HgCl, which allows electrical dipole formation on the lattice sites, with $S=1/2$ associated with each site is shown in Figs. 1 and 3a. In the layered crystal structure of this material, (BEDT-TTF)$_2$ dimers form a triangular lattice in the BEDT-TTF-based layer, with charge +1e and $S=1/2$ per dimer achieved by a charge transfer between anion and cation layers. On the charge ordering transition, a charge difference of $\Delta n=0.2e$ between charge-poor and charge rich molecules of a dimer leads to a dipole solid state.9,11 This charge distribution is schematically indicated by the red and blue colors in the (BEDT-TTF)$_2$ dimers in Fig. 2. The charge order transition drives a large increase of d.c. resistivity9,11 and a notable feature in heat capacity (Fig. 2). While the lattice response is detected on this first order phase transition9,11 no structural phase transition has been observed by the XRD studies so far9,11.

On the charge ordering transition the electronic system changes dimensionality from 2D to 1D due to the formation of the charge stripes along the c axis9,11. Calculations confirm that the charge order in $\kappa$-HgCl results in the existence of stripe-spin and charge-spin singlet ground states within the mean-field approximation.8

The magnetic susceptibility of the sample was measured using a Quantum Design PPMS-9000 with SQUID magnetometer. The magnetic field was applied along the c axis of the crystal in order to suppress magnetization on the a-b plane. The temperature was decreased at a rate of 0.1 K/s. The magnetization measurements were made in the temperature range of 0.5 to 300 K. The magnetic susceptibility is defined as $\chi = M / H$, where $M$ is the magnetic moment and $H$ is the magnetic field.

The cantilever torque magnetometry measurements were performed with a micromechanical cantilever magnetometer developed at the Institute for Solid State Physics, The University of Tokyo, Kashiwa, Chiba. The cantilever was made of silicon and had a mass of 0.005 g. The sample was mounted on the cantilever and the magnetic field was applied along the c axis of the crystal. The magnetic field was decreased at a rate of 0.1 T/s. The cantilever torque was measured as a function of temperature and magnetic field.

The magnetic susceptibility and cantilever torque magnetometry measurements are used to determine the magnetic phases of the $\kappa$-(BEDT-TTF)$_2$Hg(SCN)$_2$Cl. The magnetic phases are determined by analyzing the temperature and field dependence of the magnetic susceptibility and cantilever torque. The magnetic phases are characterized by the onset of magnetic ordering, the temperature and field at which the magnetic susceptibility and cantilever torque reach a maximum, and the temperature and field at which the magnetic susceptibility and cantilever torque reach a minimum.
in a high in-plane anisotropy of magnetic exchange interactions $J$, leading to a suggestion of an effectively 1D magnetism for $\kappa$-HgCl$\text{[2]}$. Two scenarios for the ground state of these effectively 1D antiferromagnetic (AF) chains are possible: In the absence of coupling to the lattice, the 1D stripes can evolve into a 1D spin liquid, presenting another possible way to reach a spin liquid state for $\kappa$-HgCl$\text{[15,16]}$. A strong coupling of spin degrees of freedom to the lattice can result in a formation of a spin singlet state$\text{[17]}$ as observed, for example, in $\theta$-(BEDT-TTF)$_2$RbZn(SCN)$_4$$\text{[13,19]}$.

Melting of the charge order in $\kappa$-$\text{HgCl}$ below 15 K$\text{[20]}$ can lead to the charge disorder and an appearance of domain walls. An interplay of disorder and low-dimensionality is an important direction of research for spin liquid materials. Some materials, a recent example of which is a triangular lattice magnet YbMgGaO$_4$, have the intrinsic structural disorder control of the magnetic ground state$\text{[20]}$. In order to study structural disorder effects in a controlled fashion, disorder is introduced by X-ray irradiation$\text{[21]}$ or doping$\text{[22]}$. $\kappa$-$\text{HgCl}$ provides a unique situation where charge inhomogeneities are present only in the temperature range below 15 K, and their scale is temperature dependent.

Following magnetic properties of $\kappa$-$\text{HgCl}$ below 50 K in these different charge phases allows us to demonstrate how the charge degree of freedom defines magnetic properties of the system. Charge order below $T_{\text{CO}} = 30$ K resulting in 1D charge stripes leads to a decoupling of charge and spin degrees of freedom in the limited temperature range. Spin singlet correlations in the chains develop at $T_S = 24$ K, however the long range spin singlet formation is prevented by the charge order melting below 15 K. As a result, $\kappa$-$\text{HgCl}$ shows no long range magnetic order down to 120 mK, and can be understood as an inhomogeneous a mix of spin-singlet and spin fluctuating domains, where the inhomogeneous state is a consequence of the system being close to the phase border with the ferroelectric state$\text{[22]}$.

II. EXPERIMENTAL

Single crystals of $\kappa$-(BEDT-TTF)$_2$Hg(SCN)$_2$Cl ($\kappa$-HgCl) were prepared by electrochemical oxidation of the BEDT-TTF solution in 1,1,2-trichloroethane (TCE) at a temperature of 40° C and a constant current of 0.5 $\mu$A. A solution of Hg(SCN)$_2$, [Me$_4$N][SCN·KCl, and dibenzo-18-crown-6 in 1:0.7:1 molar ratio in ethanol/TCE was used as supporting electrolyte for the $\kappa$-HgCl preparation. The composition of the crystals was verified by electron probe microanalysis and X-ray diffraction.

Temperature dependence of heat capacity in the temperature range from 50 K to 200 mK was measured using Quantum Design PPMS system equipped with the DR the option for crystals of the mass 2-4 mg. Temperature dependence of magnetic susceptibility $\chi_M(T)$ of a polycrystal sample of m=2.451 mg was measured using Quantum Design MPMS in field of 1 T in the temperature range from 2 to 300 K. Magnetic torque of single crystals was measured using magnetic cantilever setup in the temperature range down to 120 mK and magnetic fields up to 18 T. The setup and the details of the data analysis are discussed in$\text{[21]}$.

III. RESULTS

On the metal-insulator transition in $\kappa$-$\text{HgCl}$ at $T_{\text{CO}} = 30$ K, heat capacity shows a distinct peak (see Fig. 2(a)). No other phase transition is detected down to 200 mK (see inset in Fig. 2). The extrapolation down to 0 K suggests a negligible linear component of $\gamma$ term in heat capacity $C_p = \beta T^3 + \gamma T$ (see Supplemental Material (SM)).

Magnetic susceptibility $\chi_M(T)$ of a polycrystal sample of 2.451 mg measured at 1 T (Fig. 2(b)) reveals a complex temperature dependence. Above $T_{\text{CO}} = 30$ K $\kappa$-HgCl shows Pauli susceptibility of about 4.10$^{-4}$ emu/mol. This value is close to that of the other BEDT-TTF-based organic conductors$\text{[23]}$. At the charge order transition magnetic susceptibility $\chi_M(T)$ does not show any change within the noise of the measurements. Instead, magnetic susceptibility starts to decrease abruptly on cooling below about 24 K$\text{[33]}$. Decreasing susceptibility in the temperature range between 24 K and 15 K can be fit by a magnetic susceptibility of a gapped system $e^{-\Delta T^2}$, which yields a gap $\Delta \approx 36$ K=1.5 $T_c$ (see Appendix) with the assumption that susceptibility of a charge ordered system will become $\chi_{\text{CO}} = 0$ on cooling. Magnetic susceptibility starts to rise again on cooling the sample below 15 K, and saturates below about 5 K, with the saturation values of about 3.5x10$^{-4}$ emu/mol. No indication of magnetic ordering is found in $\chi_M(T)$ of $\kappa$-$\text{HgCl}$ down to 2 K.

BEDT-TTF-based crystals are typically very small, and posses very low magnetic susceptibility (Fig 2). In order to understand the nature of the low temperature magnetic state, we performed measurements of the can-

![FIG. 1: (a) A projection of the structure of (BEDT-TTF)$_2$ layer of $\kappa$-(BEDT-TTF)$_2$Hg(SCN)$_2$Cl on bc crystallographic plane. Dashed line circles indicate dimers of (BEDT-TTF)$_2$. (b) A schematic representation of the 2D layer of (BEDT-TTF)$_2$ dimers. Thick black lines represent BEDT-TTF molecules bound in a dimer by a shared orbital (grey oval). In both (a) and (b) the red triangle show a unit of triangular lattice.](image-url)
30 K and below this temperature, but detect an abrupt increase of torque amplitude \( \tau_{2\theta} \) at \( T_{CO} = 30 \) K, as shown in Fig. 3. Torque amplitude \( \tau_{2\theta} \) for the rotation in the \( ab \) plane at 1 T roughly follows the temperature dependence of magnetic susceptibility, with a decrease at about 20 K, and an increase below 15 K. The phase \( \theta_2 \) for the rotation in the \( ac \) plane follows this temperature behavior as well, while the amplitude stays constant on cooling. These effects are weak, and are suppressed at 3 T.

FIG. 2: (a) Temperature dependence of the specific heat \( C_p(T) \) of \( \kappa \)-(BEDT-TTF)\(_2\)Hg(SCN)\(_2\)Cl at 0 T. The inset shows heat capacity in the range 200 mK - 3 K. Note \( \gamma = 0 \) within the error of the measurements. (b) Temperature dependence of \( \chi_M(T) \). Three regimes related to the charge degree of freedom are indicated by color. Schematic charge distribution on the orbital of (BEDT-TTF)\(_2\) dimer is shown, where grey indicates homogeneous charge in the metallic state above \( T_{CO} = 30 \) K, red is charge-rich, and blue is charge-poor molecules in the charge ordered insulating state. Low temperature mixed state below 15 K consists of components with homogeneous charge distribution, and dimers where charge order is preserved as static or slowly fluctuating, as depicted by blurred colors.

Cantilever torque magnetization for single crystals of \( \kappa \)-HgCl. This method proved to be the most sensitive to detect magnetic order, and was successfully applied to organic Mott insulators.\(^{20,29}\) Magnetic torque signal measured for \( \kappa \)-HgCl is described well by the following equation:

\[
\tau = \tau_0 + \tau_0 \sin(\theta - \theta_1) + \tau_{2\theta} \sin(2(\theta - \theta_2))
\]

In \( \kappa \)-HgCl torque response, \( \tau_0 \sin(\theta - \theta_1) \) component does not change with the applied magnetic field at all measured temperatures (see Appendix). We conclude that it fully corresponds to the gravity force, no ferromagnetic component of torque was detected. The \( \tau_{2\theta} \sin(2(\theta - \theta_2)) \) component in the torque response of \( \kappa \)-HgCl corresponds to the paramagnetic response.

Cantilever torque magnetization measurements show the persistence of the paramagnetic response when \( \kappa \)-HgCl is cooled through the charge order transition at

Magnetization is probed by measuring the torque amplitude dependence on magnetic field \( H \) at an angle where the amplitude of the torque is maximum, see Fig. 4. At temperatures \( T = 20, 10, 5, 1.9 \) K for the field up to \( H = 5 \) T torque \( \tau \) shows parabolic dependence \( \tau \propto H^2 \), suggesting a purely paramagnetic state. The \( \tau \propto H^2 \) behavior of magnetization was confirmed at \( T = 120 \) mK in magnetic field up to 17.5 T (Fig. 4).

IV. DISCUSSION

A picture of an exotic spin and charge behavior in \( \kappa \)-HgCl forms when we put together the results obtained with these different probes. An absence of a change of magnetic susceptibility at \( T_{CO} = 30 \) K and purely paramagnetic torque response below the transition are unexpected: The character of \( \chi_M(T) \) should change from Pauli to a behavior of an insulator with unpaired spins or a spin singlet state. However, the charge ordering transi-
tion only leads to a jump in the paramagnetic component of the torque amplitude $\tau_{2g}$ at 30 K, which is a measure the anisotropy of g-factor and responds to the change of the electronic structure on the transition.

$\chi_M(T)$ starts to decrease on cooling only below $T_S = 24 K$, suggesting a development of spin singlet correlations. This decrease it in agreements with the previous results of ESR measurement. Heat capacity does not show any indication of a phase transition at 24 K, but it is known to be not a sensitive indicator of a magnetic transition neither in 1D, nor in 2D organic-based systems.

The development of a spin singlet state is one of the expected consequences of the charge stripes formation. Striking here is a decoupling of the charge order transition temperature ($T_{CO} = 30 K$) and the temperature of the spin singlets formation $T_S = 24 K$. It demonstrates the decoupling of charge and spin degrees of freedom in this temperature range as a consequence of 1D electronic structure. Such a decoupling is common in 1D TMTTF-based materials, which undergo a transition into an antiferromagnetically ordered or spin-Peierls state at temperatures of about ten times lower than the temperature of a metal-insulator transition.

To the best of our knowledge, it is observed for the first time in a layered system as a result of a dimensional crossover associated with 1D charge stripes formation.

A signature of a singlet state in magnetic torque would be a decrease of torque amplitude $\tau_{2g}$ down to zero. We observe that magnetic torque of $\kappa$-HgCl preserves its paramagnetic character below 24 K and shows only a slight decrease of the torque amplitude $\tau_{2g}$ in the $ab$ plane. A decrease of $\chi_M$ without a detectable long range order suggests that AF order or spin singlet pairs which will posses $\chi_{CO}=0$ are formed with a certain correlation length in the temperature range between 24 and 15 K, without long range order. Changes of the phase values of torque in the $ac$ plane observed at 1 T (Fig. 2) follow the susceptibility behavior and are apparently due to orphan spins appearing as a result of short range AF or spin single correlations.

At temperatures below 15 K, the charge order starts to melt and magnetic susceptibility increases again. In the resulting inhomogeneous system depicted schematically in Fig. 2 the charge order melted fraction $\rho$ would provide $\chi_M = \rho \chi_H + \chi_D$, where $\chi_H$ corresponds to the response of the charge melted fraction with finite susceptibility, and $\chi_D$ is the susceptibility of domain walls between fractions with $\chi_H$ and $\chi_{CO}=0$. According to our previous results, the charge melted fraction $\rho$ increased on cooling from $\rho = 0$ in the charge ordered state to $\rho = 1/3$ at 2 K. The increase of both $\rho \chi_H$ and $\chi_D$ components on melting of the charge order can add to the increase of the total $\chi_M$ of the sample as the temperature is lowered from 15 to 2 K.

The system where charge order is melting is intrinsically inhomogeneous. If paramagnetic spins of inhomogeneities are non-interacting, they would produce Curie-like response. However, the increase of magnetic susceptibility below 15 K differs from a simple Curie-like response: Instead of diverging as $1/T$, $\chi_M(T)$ shows a weaker temperature dependence and flattens below 5 K. The increase of torque amplitude $\tau_{2g}$ is observed only in the $ab$ plane, showing that the system preserved some anisotropy, and is also weaker than pure Curie response. We can conclude, that paramagnetic spins of the melted charge order and domain walls are interacting and present a more complicated picture than orphan spins of defects (Ref. and references therein).

Recently it was suggested that two spins on the ends of fluctuating charge order chains interacting through a non-charged-ordered dimer could interact ferromagnetically. It worth noting, that the increase and saturation of $\chi_M(T)$ below 15 K in $\kappa$-HgCl is similar to the dipole liquid candidate $\kappa$-(BEDT-TTF)$_2$Hg(SCN)$_2$Br magnetic susceptibility, but on a much smaller scale. Other models developed for quantum paraelectrics also suggest an increase of magnetic susceptibility due to fluctuating electric dipoles.

If the increase of the $\chi_M(T)$ on cooling and the temperature dependence of torque at low fields are produced by the interacting domain walls, they become fully polarized already at 3 T according to the torque measurements. This result is in agreement with a suppression of a peak in $T^{-1}$ in NMR response by the magnetic field directed perpendicular to BEDT-TTF-based layers, and suggests that the origin of the peak is the response of the domain walls. According to the Raman data in magnetic field in this direction, the charge distribution itself does not change in field up to 30 T.

No indication of magnetic ordering is observed in the magnetic cantilever torque studies of $\kappa$-HgCl down to 120 mK. The paramagnetic torque amplitude $\tau_{2g} \propto H^2$ up to 17.5 T, and the phase is constant with field. This shows the absence of magnetic order or of a spin singlet state in the fraction of the $\kappa$-HgCl crystal where charge order is melted and lattice cites possess one unpaired electron (S=1/2) with estimated magnetic exchange J of the order of 100 K or higher. This part of the system provides
the response suggestive of a spin liquid state from NMR measurement.

The low temperature magnetic state of both charge ordered and charge melted fractions in $\kappa$-HgCl has signatures very different from the other spin liquid candidates triangular 2D dimer Mott insulators. In $S=1/2$ triangular lattice organic Mott insulators with-...nations close to phase border. In this work we demonstrate, that the ordered vs fluctuating domains are these parameters. The formation of domains at low temperature is the smaller intradimer integral in $\kappa$-HgCl, which results in a weaker dimerization and active charge degree of freedom. The relevant phase diagram of the $\kappa$-phase organics with the intra dimer transfer integral serves as a tuning parameter, tuning a system from an antiferromagnetic Mott insulator at high dimerization to a charge order ferroelectric at low dimerization is theoretically discussed in Ref.\cite{9,11}. We have already shown that $\kappa$-HgCl is found on the border between these two phases and experiences a re-entrant charge order melting transition due to the competition of electronic repulsion which leads to charge order and antiferromagnetic interactions.\cite{9,11,12}

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A seemingly similar material $\kappa$-ET$_2$Cu$_2$(CN)$_3$ that shows a very close magnetic susceptibility values of $\chi_M = 5 \times 10^{-4}$ emu*mol$^{-1}$ at 30 K is not the right compound to compare to. This system shows magnetic excitations spectrum of a two-dimensional triangular lattice of ET-dimers, and lacks any charge disproportionation. However, in any case, $\chi_M(T)$ of $\kappa$-HgCl decreases faster than a triangular lattice $S=1/2$ magnetic susceptibility.
VII. APPENDIX

Magnetic susceptibility

Fig. 5 shows magnetic susceptibility data in the whole measured range. The figure also demonstrated a curve of $\chi_{dimer} = Ae^{-\frac{\Delta}{k_BT}}$ which can describe $\chi_M(T)$ in the temperature range between 24 and 15 K, and $\chi_{Curie} = C/T$ to compare to the low-temperature behavior of $\chi_M(T)$.

Cantilever magnetic torque measurements

Fig. 6 presents an example of analysis of the cantilever magnetic torque data. The full torque $\tau$ (black curve) is reproduced well by the sum of $\tau_0 \sin(\theta - \theta_1)$, and $\tau_2 \sin(2(\theta - \theta_1))$ components. Calibration of the cantilever response by gravity signal is discussed in details in Ref. 24.
FIG. 6: Upper panel: Cantilever magnetic torque data analysis, and example for the data for the rotation in $ab$ plane at 5 K in magnetic field of 5 T. The figure shows original data, and $\tau_\theta \sin(\theta - \theta_1)$, and $\tau_{2\theta} \sin^2(\theta - \theta_1)$ components with the respective fitting curves. Lower panel: Raw data of $\kappa$-(BEDT-TTF)$_2$Hg(SCN)$_2$Cl obtained by cantilever magnetic torque measurements. Measurements are done for rotation in $ab$ plane, $H= 5T$. Angle dependence of $\tau_{2\theta}$ extracted from these measurements is presented in Fig. 3(b)