Quantum Diffusion of H/Ni(111) through Monte Carlo Wave Function Formalism

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We consider a quantum system coupled to a dissipative background with many degrees of freedom using the Monte Carlo Wave Function method. Instead of dealing with a density matrix which can be very high-dimensional, the method consists of integrating a stochastic Schrödinger equation with a non-hermitian damping term in the evolution operator, and with random quantum jumps. The method is applied to the diffusion of hydrogen on the Ni(111) surface below 100 K. However, this approach is not practical for condensed matter systems considered on the surface and the number of vibrational states included at each site. Typically, the density matrix would have dimensions at least of the order of $10^4$, rendering a direct numerical solution of the master equation unfeasible.

The study of a quantum system coupled to a large background reservoir that leads to thermal fluctuations and dissipation in the dynamical evolution of the system, is of central importance in such fields as quantum optics [1], electronic conduction in nano-structures [2], and diffusion of light adatoms on surfaces [3–5]. The standard formalism for this problem is through the master equation [6]:

$$\dot{\rho}_S = -\frac{i}{\hbar}\left[H_S - \frac{i\hbar}{2}\sum_\mu C_\mu^+ C_\mu\right] \rho_S - \frac{1}{2}\sum_\mu \left( C_\mu^+ \rho_S C_\mu - C_\mu \rho_S C_\mu^+ - C_\mu^+ \rho_S C_\mu^+ \right)$$

The equality between $\bar{C}\rho_S\bar{C}^+$ and $\rho_S$ holds at all times $t$, provided that it holds at $t = 0$. The particular form of the collision operators chosen in Eq. (1) is the most general one that preserves the normalization and positive definiteness of the corresponding $\rho_S(t)$.

It is the purpose of the present Letter to demonstrate how the MCWF method can be used to tackle important transport problems in condensed matter physics in cases where the number of degrees of freedom is large enough ($N \gtrsim 10^4$) to make the density matrix approach unfeasible. We consider here the case of a light adatom moving on a metal surface under conditions where classical activated hopping rate between potential wells is negligible compared with the corresponding tunnelling rate. At present, there does not exist a clear consensus on the details of the crossover from the classical activated behavior to the quantum tunnelling regime. In the Field Emission Microscopy (FEM) study [3] for Ni and W substrates and in the latest STM study for H/Cu(001) [5], a sharp crossover from classical diffusion to very weak temperature dependence of diffusion was observed at a temperature in the range of $60–100$ K. However, the Quasielastic...
Helium Atom Scattering study for H/Pt(111) \cite{11} yields no crossover down to $T \approx 100K$. For the H/Ni(111) system, recent optical studies \cite{12} showed a crossover behavior from the classical regime to a \textit{second activated regime} with a lower activation energy below $T \approx 100K$. This is in contradiction with the FEM data on the same system, which showed a crossover to a temperature independent diffusion at low temperatures \cite{11}. Thus, while there is strong evidence that diffusion proceeds through quantum tunnelling at low temperatures, the detailed mechanisms for hydrogen diffusion on different substrates are not yet understood. Previous theoretical works do suggest that the details of the crossover is sensitive to the shape of the adsorption potential and not just determined by the barrier alone \cite{11,14}.

We will apply here the MCWF method to study the dynamics of H/Ni(111). The low temperature activated behavior with a barrier of about 90 meV has been attributed to small polaron type activated tunnelling \cite{11}. In our view, this is a highly implausible explanation. First, the polaron activation energy for H/Cu(001) \cite{11} was determined to be $\sim 3$meV, then the relaxation energy due to the adatom for H/Ni(001) has been calculated to be 2.72meV \cite{11}, and in our recent calculations for H/Pt(111) \cite{11} we also find a relaxation energy of just a few meV; the polaron activation energy is a fraction of the relaxation energy \cite{12}. We will show instead that the data can be explained in terms of tunnelling from the first excited vibrational states of the H adatom.

We construct a semi-empirical potential $U(r)$ based on available data as follows. The lowest energy adsorption sites are assumed to be the fcc sites forming a 2D triangular lattice \cite{11} \cite{13} with a lattice constant $a = 2.581 \text{ Å}$ (see Fig. 1). Also, the neighboring hcp sites at a distance of $s = 1.49 \text{ Å}$ \cite{11} are taken to be equal in energy \cite{11} (this is also supported by a recent \textit{ab initio} calculation \cite{14}). Second, we fix the barrier between the fcc and hcp sites close to the value of 196 meV found in experiments \cite{14}. We use the vibrational excitation energy of 94 meV known from \cite{13,14}. $U(r)$ is constructed from localized Gaussians at both the fcc and hcp sites and adjust the Gaussian parameters, obtaining a fitting with a band gap between the centers of the $A_0 \oplus A_1$ and the $E_0 \oplus E_1$ bands of $\Delta = 96$ meV and a separation between the lowest band and the top of the barrier between fcc and hcp sites of 207 meV.

The adiabatic Hamiltonian $H_S$ for our model is characterized by Bloch states $\{|n,k,m\}\rangle$ with corresponding energy $\{e_{k,m}\}$. Here $m$ is the band index and $k$ the 2D wave vector. The center positions and the bandwidths for the first few bands are listed in Table I. The first two branches form 1D representations ($A_0$ and $A_1$) of the symmetry group of the 2D triangular lattice, while the next four form 2D representations ($E_0$ and $E_1$).

We describe the H adatom as a linear superposition of energy eigenstates:

$$|\Psi(t)\rangle = \sum_{m,k} b_{k,m}(t)|k,m\rangle,$$

with $\sum_{m,k} |b_{k,m}|^2 = 1$. The frictional coupling to the substrate through electronic and phononic excitations is modelled by a general collision operator $C_S(\mu)$, through which we model both intraband and interband transitions. It is represented as

$$C_{m_1,m_2,q} = \Gamma_{m_1,m_2}^{1/2} \sum_k |k+q,m_1\rangle\langle k,m_2|,$$

where $\Gamma$ is a (yet unspecified) transition rate, and $\mu$ in Eq. (1) now becomes a multiple index with two band indices, $\mu=(m_1,m_2,q)$. Thus the probabilities for scattering $\delta p_\mu$ are given by

$$\delta p_\mu = \langle \Psi(t)|C_\mu^+C_\mu|\Psi(t)\rangle \delta t = \sum_k |b_{k,m_2}|^2 \Gamma_\mu \delta t.$$

An important feature of the model is that for the low energy bands of interest, $A_0 \oplus A_1$ and $E_0 \oplus E_1$, the composite bandwidths are much smaller than the energy gap $\Delta$ separating them (see Table I). This means that we need to consider only two kinds of transitions: intraband transitions between the bands in the two groups, and interband transitions within each group. Since we do not have microscopic expression for the scattering rates $\Gamma_{\text{intra}}$ and $\Gamma_{\text{inter}}$ we make one further simplification that $\Gamma_{\text{intra}} = \Gamma_{\text{inter}} = \Gamma$. Below, we will show that the magnitude of $D$ is controlled by the parameter $\gamma = h\Gamma/\Delta_E$, where $\Delta_E$ is the width of the upper composite band defined above.

In our numerical calculations, the substrate is represented by a 2D hexagonal box consisting of 180 $\times$ 180 unit cells, with fully periodic boundary conditions. The size of the system is chosen such that the H adatom does not spread outside the boundary during the observation time $t$. To calculate the spatial $\alpha\beta$ elements of the tracer diffusion coefficient of H, we used the expression

$$D_{\alpha\beta}(t) = \lim_{t \to \infty} \frac{1}{2t} \langle (\hat{x}_\alpha - \langle \hat{x}_\alpha \rangle_0)(\hat{x}_\beta - \langle \hat{x}_\beta \rangle_0) \rangle,$$

where $\hat{x}$ is the position operator. The average $\langle ... \rangle$ in Eq. (8) represents both the quantum mechanical average in a given state as well as the ensemble average over different initial states. Statistical averages to compute $D$ were performed with 1500 $\sim$ 6000 initial states, for time intervals containing up to $10^6$ collisions. With a code parallelized on 4 processors, one point on the Arrhenius plot takes 2 $\sim$ 4hrs, depending on the collision rates.

The symmetry of the lattice implies that the diffusion tensor $D_{\alpha\beta}$ is diagonal. Fig. 2 shows the temperature dependence of $D$ for $\gamma = 1.5$, and 10 on an Arrhenius plot. There is clear activated behavior $D \propto e^{-E_a/k_BT}$, with an activation energy $E_a = 98.1 \pm 0.5$ meV. This is in excellent agreement with the experimental data of
shown in Fig. 2 as well, in the temperature regime below 100 K where $E_a \simeq 105$ meV. Obviously, with the inclusion of only the lowest bands in the present calculation, we cannot account for the classical high temperature region above 100 K where $E_a \simeq 196$ meV. We can give a good qualitative description of the quantum regime, though, where the numerical results above indicate that the observed Arrhenius behavior for $D$ corresponds to activated quantum tunnelling.

The result for the temperature dependence can be understood from the values of the bandwidths listed in Table 1. The bandwidths of the $\{E_0, E_1\}$ states are more than one order of magnitude larger than for the lower bands (the delocalization was observed also in a recent experiment [13]). Thus, diffusion proceeds mainly via a collisions excitation to the upper band, followed by tunnelling to neighboring sites and de-excitation to the lower bands again. It is the Bose-Einstein factor $n(\omega) (\hbar \omega = \Delta)$, needed to ensure detailed balance in thermal equilibrium, that leads naturally to the activated Arrhenius behavior with an activation energy close to the energy gap $\Delta$. Although the Arrhenius behavior of $D$ does not depend on the ratio $\gamma$, its absolute magnitude is best fit to the experimental data by choosing $\gamma \approx 10$. This should be taken only as an effective ratio between tunnelling and scattering, because e.g. polaron effects which lead to a broadening of the levels and a reduction in the tunnelling rate have been left out in the present calculation.

The MCWF methods gives insight into the quantum dynamics by allowing to follow the dynamics of wave packets in real space and time. In Fig. 1 we show two typical trajectories, tracing the evolution of $\langle \hat{r} \rangle$ for a wave packet. The larger length scale for the trajectory at 110K reflects the larger value of the diffusion coefficient, which is due to a higher excitation rate into the upper bands. The trajectory at 70 K has points where the particle is in the ground state for a longer time and, by comparison to the trajectory at 110 K, it has less coherent propagation intervals in the upper band. The other point to note is that there are coherent propagation regions with tunnelling through several sites before a de-excitation. This can be quantified by studying the tunnelling length distribution $P_\ell$. We define the tunnelling length $\ell$ as the distance travelled by a wave packet in the upper band before it suffers a collision. It is found that asymptotically $P_\ell$ decreases exponentially with $\ell$, while it obeys a Poisson-like distribution at small values of $\ell$ ($\ell \ll s$). This is similar to the jump distribution in the classical regime [20].

Regarding the dependence of $D$ on $\gamma$, we have done simulations at $T = 70$ K and $T = 110$ K in the range 0.1 $\leq \gamma \leq 10$ and found that $D \propto \gamma^{-1}$ in this range. This inverse power law dependence on $\gamma$ is similar to the dependence of $D$ on the microscopic friction $\eta$ in the classical regime [21][22]. However, the influence of the geometrical factor on the dependence of the jump distribution on $\gamma$ seems rather different from the classical case. The crossover of the dependence on $\gamma$ or $\eta$ from the quantum to classical behavior is a subject worthy of further investigations.

To summarize, we have demonstrated through a model study of H diffusion on Ni(111) that the MCWF method is a powerful tool in the study of quantum transport problems with many degrees of freedom. In addition, the real space nature of the method allows one to extract interesting information about the dynamics of wave functions, not easily available in other means. As opposed to the small polaron mechanism suggested earlier [14], ours results suggest that the low temperature diffusion behavior observed in the work of Cao et al. for H/Ni(111) has its origin in the tunnelling of the hydrogen adatom from the first vibrational excited state. We plan to apply the same MCWF formalism to investigate other quantum diffusion systems, such as H/PT(111) and H/Cu(001), which show qualitatively different behaviors from H/Ni(111). The key is to start with a reliable adsorption potential through a combination of first-principle calculation and empirical inputs.

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**TABLE I.** Bandwidths $\Delta \epsilon_m$ and band centers $\epsilon_m$ for branches 1 – 6. Groups 1 – 2 and 3 – 6 form the composite bands $A_0 \oplus A_1$ and $E_0 \oplus E_1$.

| $m$ | $\Delta \epsilon_m$(meV) | $\epsilon_m$(meV) |
|-----|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1 ($A_0$) | 0.008 | 104.487 |
| 2 ($A_1$) | 0.008 | 104.497 |
| 3 ($E_0$) | 0.017 | 200.346 |
| 6 | 0.017 | 200.721 |
| 4 ($E_1$) | 0.146 | 200.446 |
| 5 | 0.146 | 200.621 |

**FIG. 1.** (a) Trajectories at $T = 70$ K (smaller set) and 110 K (larger set). $\gamma = 1$ and the observation time was $3.1 \times 10^{-2}$ s. (b) Details of the path at $T = 70$ K. The black circles are excitations or de-excitations. Between two such consecutive points there are usually several random changes of the momentum.

**FIG. 2.** Temperature dependence of $D$ between 80 K and 140 K, for $\gamma = 1, 5, 10$. The Arrhenius behavior is evident. The experimental data of Cao et al. [9] are shown for comparison. For $\gamma = 10$, a prefactor $D_0$ of $2.71 \times 10^9 \AA^2$/s is obtained. The experimental value of the prefactor $D_0$ is $2.4 \times 10^9 \AA^2$/s [9].
