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Zhang, Xiaoqian, Ambhire, Siddhesh C., Lu, Qiangsheng et al. (11 more authors) (2021) Giant Topological Hall Effect in van der Waals Heterostructures of CrTe₂/Bi₂Te₃. ACS Nano. 15710–15719. ISSN: 1936-0851

<https://doi.org/10.1021/acsnano.1c05519>

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Giant topological Hall effect in optimized van der Waals heterostructures of CrTe₂/Bi₂Te₃

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Abstract:

Discoveries of interfacial topological Hall effect (THE) provide an ideal platform for exploring novel physics arising from the interplay between topology and magnetism, which is closely related to the Dzyaloshinskii-Moriya interaction (DMI) at interface and topological spin textures. However, it is difficult to achieve a sizable THE in heterostructures due to the stringent constraints on the constituents of THE heterostructures. Here we report the achievement of a giant THE signal of $1.39 \mu\Omega\cdot\text{cm}$ in the van der Waals heterostructures of $\text{CrTe}_2/\text{Bi}_2\text{Te}_3$ fabricated by molecular beam epitaxy, a prototype of two-dimensional (2D) ferromagnet (FM)/topological insulator (TI). This large magnitude of THE is attributed to an optimized combination of 2D ferromagnetism in CrTe_2 , strong spin-orbit coupling in Bi_2Te_3 and an atomically smooth interface. Our work establishes an efficient route to achieving large interfacial THE in hybrid systems, which could be utilized to develop quantum science and high-density information storage.

Keywords: two-dimensional ferromagnets, topological insulators, van der Waals epitaxial growth, topological Hall effect

Over the past decade, real-space magnetic chiral spin textures have generated enormous attention for featuring novel Berry curvature physics and inherent magnetic stability.¹⁻³ Generally, the topological spin texture with scalar spin chirality in real-space provides an emergent field, which acts on charge carriers and consequently generates the topological Hall effect (THE).^{4,5} THE induced by chiral spin textures in real-space is distinct from the anomalous Hall effect (AHE) in ferromagnets (FMs), which comes from the Berry phase in reciprocal space. Skyrmion lattice was firstly observed in noncentrosymmetric chiral-lattice magnets like B20-type MnSi/MnGe⁶⁻⁸ and Fe_{0.5}Co_{0.5}Si,⁹ which showed prominent THE responses in transport measurements due to spin-orbit coupling (SOC) and broken inversion symmetry by crystal lattice. Since then, THE has been considered as the experimental signature of topological charges with novel non-coplanar spin textures.

The robustness of the delicate chiral spin textures depends on the strength of Dzyaloshinskii-Moriya interaction (DMI). A practical way to induce DMI is to construct heterostructures with spin ordering, strong SOC and broken inversion symmetry at interface. Advances in fabricating artificial structures based on thin-film deposition techniques enable the design and tunability of emergent topological phenomena, *e.g.*, Néel-textured skyrmions generated in hybrid systems, including FM/heavy-metal (HM)^{2, 10-12}, FM/topological insulator (TI)¹³⁻¹⁵, TI/magnetic insulator (MI)¹⁶ and HM/MI^{5, 17} heterostructures with strong interfacial DMI (Figure 1). For instance, a two-dimensional (2D) skyrmion lattice was revealed in monolayer Fe on Ir surface, originating from the co-interplay of four-spin interaction and DMI.¹² Moreover, interfacial DMI and skyrmions has been observed in (BiSb)₂Te₃/GdFeCo heterostructures,¹⁵ benefiting from the strong SOC in TIs. Among all the research framework of interfacial hybrid systems with magnetic skyrmions, 2D FM/TI, a van der Waals (vdW) heterostructure, remains largely unexplored. Compared with conventional hybrid systems involving three-dimensional (3D) metals, vdW heterostructures hold many advantages, including reduced sample dimension (with thickness down to a few atomic layers), flexibility in stacking order, and the atomically sharp interface between vdW components. Those features favor the formation of strong interfacial DMI and chiral spin textures such as skyrmions. Therefore, optimization of vdW heterostructures provides a promising opportunity for exploring interfacial skyrmion physics.

Recent progresses of 2D vdW magnets with intrinsic ferromagnetic order preserved in monolayer sample provides new opportunities for probing the THE. The strong uniaxial magnetic anisotropy (K) is vital for the formation of 2D ferromagnetism. However, it also raises the threshold of the chiral spin generation ($D_c = 2\sqrt{2JK}/\pi$, where D_c represents the critical DMI value, and J is the exchange interaction coefficient).¹⁸ TI can serve as the other component in a bilayer heterostructure to provide strong SOC that can link spins in real space spin.¹⁵ In addition, the topological surface states (SS) of TI can mediate the interfacial DMI.^{19, 20} It has been demonstrated that Néel-type skyrmions exist in mechanically exfoliated 1T'-WTe₂/Fe₃GeTe₂ heterostructures with the benefit of strong SOC in 1T'-WTe₂.²¹ Very recently, room-temperature intrinsic ferromagnetism has been observed in CrTe₂ epitaxial films grown by molecular beam epitaxy (MBE),²² indicating that CrTe₂ is a promising spin host for THE heterostructures. Furthermore, the epitaxial thin films are critically significant for spintronics device applications as they offer the opportunity to fabricate wafer-size heterostructures and superlattices with thickness down to atomic layers. As a prototypical TI, Bi₂Te₃ features a single Dirac cone at Γ point, which can act as nontrivial SS with novel electromagnetic properties.²³⁻²⁵ Moreover, compared with Ta, W and Pt compounds, Bi₂Te₃ possesses a much larger SOC,^{26, 27} due to the facts that Bi is the heaviest nonradioactive element and the atomic SOC is proportional to the fourth power of atomic number, Z^4 . Besides 2D spin order in CrTe₂ and strong SOC in Bi₂Te₃, CrTe₂ and Bi₂Te₃ also share three crucial features for realizing strong interfacial DMI: 1) vdW interlayer coupling, 2) simple telluride compounds, and 3) hexagonal surface lattice symmetry, which facilitate formation of an atomically smooth interface between the two compounds. Therefore, CrTe₂/Bi₂Te₃ heterostructure presents an optimal condition for stabilizing interfacial THE effects.

Here, we report the realization of the optimal THE heterostructure, CrTe₂/Bi₂Te₃, as demonstrated by angle-resolved photoemission spectroscopy (ARPES) and scanning tunneling microscopy (STM) and magneto-transport measurements. The epitaxial heterostructures were grown by MBE with thickness down to a few atomic layers. A pronounced THE signals of $\sim 1.39 \mu\Omega\cdot\text{cm}$ was observed at 10 K, and persisted up to 100 K, indicating a highly robust topologically non-trivial chiral spin texture at the interface.

Results and Discussion

2D FM/ TI heterostructures. 10 quintuple layers (QLs) of Bi₂Te₃ thin films on sapphire (Al₂O₃) substrates by MBE technique (see Methods), followed by 10 triple layers (TLs) of CrTe₂ on top. 1T-CrTe₂ has a layered trigonal crystal structure with the space group of $p\bar{3}m1$ and lattice constants $a=3.8$ Å and $c=6.1$ Å²⁸. A schematic of CrTe₂/Bi₂Te₃ bilayer is shown in Figure 2a, in which the red arrows represent the magnetic moments of Cr. Few-layer CrTe₂ is a ferromagnetic material with strong perpendicular magnetic anisotropy (PMA). The magnetic moments of neighboring Cr atoms in adjacent layers are ferromagnetically coupled with an atomic value of $\sim 3 \mu_B/\text{atom}$. The 2D crystalline thin films were characterized by STM (Figure 2c-2f). Bi₂Te₃ and CrTe₂ surfaces are identified via comparisons of their respective step edge heights and atomic lattice distances. Figure 2c and 2e are the large-scale STM images of atomically flat Bi₂Te₃ and CrTe₂ thin films with the line profiles (inset) showing different layers. The hexagonal atomic lattices of top Te atoms on Bi₂Te₃ and CrTe₂ surfaces with a spacing of 0.44 nm and 0.38 nm are shown in Figure 2d and 2f, respectively. A typical layer-by-layer growth mode of CrTe₂/Bi₂Te₃ bilayers with atomically flat surfaces and the same Te terminated layers endows the system with emergent phenomenon and tunable functionality.

ARPES measurements were performed to visualize the band structure of the heterostructures. The band spectra of Bi₂Te₃ and CrTe₂ thin films along M–Γ–M direction are shown in Figure 2g and 2h, respectively. The “M” shape bulk valence band (BVB) of Bi₂Te₃ locates at the bottom. The clear linear band dispersion confirms the massless Dirac SS, which do not disperse with photon energy (see Figure S1). The Dirac point is located at ~ 0.25 eV below the Fermi level. These typical features are in agreement with previous works.^{23, 29} In the spectrum of CrTe₂, two hole pockets locate near the Fermi level, corresponding to the majority and minority spin bands, respectively.²² The spin band structure verifies the intrinsic ferromagnetism in CrTe₂ thin layers. The coexistence of intrinsic topological SS with strong SOC and magnetic states at the interface establishes that the CrTe₂/Bi₂Te₃ bilayer, as a 2D magnet/TI vdW heterostructure, is a viable platform to study the THE.

Berry phase effect in real space: THE. The CrTe₂/Bi₂Te₃ bilayers were patterned into a Hall bar geometry for magnetotransport measurements. The schematic diagram of the experimental set up is illustrated in Figure 3a. Figure 3b shows the Hall resistivity

(ρ_{xy}) as a function of the magnetic field. At low temperature, the hysteresis loops show a pronounced square shape, which is a hallmark of robust ferromagnetism with strong out-of-plane magnetic anisotropy. The remanent ρ_{xy} and coercive field (H_C) vanish at around 280 K, indicating a Curie temperature (T_C) near this temperature.

The positive slope at high field suggests the dominant hole carriers, echoing the electronic structure of CrTe₂ where the hole pockets in the valence band cross the Fermi level. Apart from that, an anomaly in ρ_{xy} is noticed below 120 K. There is a sharp antisymmetric peak near H_C followed by a smooth suppression at the high field. The emergent hump and dip features indicate an additional contribution to the Hall signal, which shares similarity with the THE response. When the spin-polarized electrons at the interface pass through a chiral spin texture, they pick up the real-space Berry phase by aligning their spins with the local magnetic moments, giving rise to the THE contribution to the Hall resistivity.

In general, the Hall resistivity of a ferromagnetic conductor consists of three contributions: an ordinary Hall effect (OHE) term due to the Lorentz force acting on the charge carriers, the AHE term proportional to the magnetization and the THE term resulting from the real-space Berry phase. Therefore, ρ_{xy} can be expressed as:

$$\rho_{xy}(H) = R_0 H + R_s M + \rho_{\text{THE}}.$$

Where R_0 is the ordinary Hall coefficient determined from a linear fitting of ρ_{xy} at high magnetic field. R_s is the anomalous Hall coefficient of the ferromagnetic component. ρ_{THE} is the topological Hall contribution. THE and AHE contributions should be separated to unambiguously understand the temperature evolution of THE and AHE. Two main approaches are utilized to single out THE component. One is using a step function, $M_0 \tanh\left(\frac{H}{a_0} - H_0\right)$ to extract the AHE contribution.¹⁸ At a high magnetic field, all the spins align ferromagnetically, leading to the absence of spin chirality. Under this circumstance, ρ_{xy} is only attributed to the AHE and ordinary Hall term. When the magnetization starts to change orientation near H_C , the ρ_{xy} curve deviates from AHE behavior and develops into a broad hump superposing on the AHE loops. An example of the AHE background subtraction based on the fitting function of $M_0 \tanh\left(\frac{H}{a_0} - H_0\right)$ is exhibited in Figure 3c. The topological Hall term is highlighted by green patches. The other method is taking the difference of resistivity between upward and downward field scan.³⁰ Considering the positive field region at 50 K, the CrTe₂/Bi₂Te₃ system is

in a topologically trivial ferromagnetic state without any spin chirality during the downward field sweep. When the sweep direction changes from downward to upward, the system evolves into an intermediate chiral spin texture during the process of magnetic transitions. Therefore, ρ_{THE} can be extracted by taking the difference between the hysteresis loops under upward and downward field sweeps. We have used both of the methods mentioned above, and the fitting results are equivalent. The temperature-dependent contributions from AHE and THE are shown in Figure S2.

Temperature and field evolution of AHE and THE. After subtracting the OHE and THE term, the net AHE signal is displayed in Figure 3d. Nonlinear field dependence of ρ_{AHE} with a negative value emerges at 280 K. Upon cooling, a pronounced hysteresis loop appears, indicating the formation of ferromagnetic order. In particular, the AHE changes its polarity again with decreasing temperature below 50 K (Figure 3e), at which ρ_{xy} is dominated by the THE signal. We now discuss possible origins of the polarity change of AHE in $\text{CrTe}_2/\text{Bi}_2\text{Te}_3$. Since the magnetization (M) is positive at a high positive magnetic field, the negative AHE is definitely due to the sign-change of R_s . R_s is the ratio of the anomalous Hall resistivity to the M , which consist of contributions from extrinsic dynamical processes such as skew scattering and side-jump, and intrinsic Berry curvature of the band structure. The extrinsic mechanisms, such as skew scattering or side-jump, depend on the impurities, scattering time, and density of states at the Fermi level.³¹ The origin of intrinsic AHE has been clarified to the integral of the Berry curvature over the Fermi sea.³² Similar sign-change of AHE was previously observed in ferromagnetic SrRuO_3 crystals and $\text{Cr}_x(\text{Bi}_{1-y}\text{Sb}_y)_{2-x}\text{Te}_3/(\text{Bi}_{1-y}\text{Sb}_y)_2\text{Te}_3$ heterostructures, which is theoretically shown to result from the magnetic monopoles in momentum space³² and Rashba splitting at bulk bands,³³ respectively. In addition, temperature dependent sign-change of ρ_{AHE} has been reported in Co/Pd multilayers,³⁴ in which the phonons/magnons scattering have a crucial contribution. The variation of momentum-space Berry curvature around the Fermi level is also a possible explanation for the polarity change of AHE in $\text{CrTe}_2/\text{Bi}_2\text{Te}_3$. Considering the longitudinal resistivity of CrTe_2 increases with increasing temperature, the enhanced ρ_{AHE} with temperature is likely due to the growing electron-phonon or magnons scattering. When temperature further increases above 120 K, ρ_{AHE} reduces obviously, corresponding to the suppressed magnetization at high temperatures. The interplay of ferromagnetism, topology and spin-dependent scattering leads to complex AHE behaviors.

The magnetic-field dependence of THE shows a hysteresis behavior in Figure 4a. At 10 K, THE reaches its maximum at 7.9 kOe and decays gradually to zero at high fields. The THE signal persists up to 100 K, despite the decreased intensity at high temperature. Above this temperature, only AHE is present. Note that the THE features with a similar critical temperature can be reproduced in another CrTe₂/Bi₂Te₃ bilayer sample (see Figure S3). To further study the characteristics of the Hall anomaly, we extracted the peak value of ρ_{THE} ($\rho_{\text{THE}}^{\text{max}}$), H_C and peak position of humps (H_T) in Figure 4b. $\rho_{\text{THE}}^{\text{max}}$, the maximal amplitude of THE signal, manifests a pronounced value of $\sim 1.39 \mu\Omega\cdot\text{cm}$ at 10 K, and decreases monotonically at elevated temperature. Remarkably, the observed $\rho_{\text{THE}}^{\text{max}}$ in CrTe₂/Bi₂Te₃ is the largest among interfacial and bulk skyrmion systems known to date, including Ir/Fe/Co/Pt ($0.03 \mu\Omega\cdot\text{cm}$),¹¹ SrIrO₃/SrRuO₃ ($0.2 \mu\Omega\cdot\text{cm}$),³⁵ Pt/Y₃Fe₅O₁₂ ($0.3 \mu\Omega\cdot\text{cm}$)³⁶ and bulk MnSi ($0.04 \mu\Omega\cdot\text{cm}$),⁷ as summarized in Table 1. We note that the THE amplitude observed in this work is lower than the magnetic bubbles system Ca_{0.99}Ce_{0.01}MnO₃ ($120 \mu\Omega\cdot\text{cm}$)⁴. The amplitude of the topological Hall resistivity reflects the strength of the coupling between electric current and the spin structure.³⁷ For metallic systems, the reduced electron mean free path and the large charge carrier density usually lead to a significant reduction of THE contribution to Hall resistivity because the resistivity is sensitive to the disorder.³⁸ However, in the CrTe₂/Bi₂Te₃ systems, the nontrivial SS of TI provides nearly dissipationless spin transport, which enhances the electron mean free path. Additionally, the atomically sharp interface and vdW interaction are also favorable for interfacial DMI and THE.

The temperature dependence of H_T and H_C are summarized in Figure 4c. The curve of H_T at which ρ_{THE} reaches its maximum follows the trend of H_C , suggesting that the spin chirality is induced when the magnetic moments of Cr atoms start to be reversed. Note that the THE response is developed when carriers pass through the emergent magnetic field, that is, a fictitious field derived from the Berry phase in real-space. The topological Hall feature is the strongest at low temperature, then monotonically decreases at elevated temperature and disappears above 120 K. Although this critical temperature is lower than that of magnetic skyrmion multilayers composed of heavy-metal thin films (usually above room temperature), it is significantly higher than typical TI-based skyrmion systems, like MnTe/(Bi,Sb)₂Te₃ (20 K),¹⁴ Mn-Bi₂Te₃ (14 K)¹⁹ and Cr₂Te₃/Bi₂Te₃ (20 K).¹³ It is comparable with other vdW interfacial DMI systems, such

as $\text{Fe}_3\text{GeTe}_2/\text{WTe}_2$ (100 K).²¹ Moreover, the sign of THE remains positive in the entire temperature window, irrespective of the sign change of AHE. It indicates that the origin of THE is entirely different from that of AHE. The THE is associated with carrier density and DMI strength, while AHE is involved with resistivity and magnetization.

How electric currents can manipulate chiral spin textures in hybrid systems remains elusive. To investigate it, experimental depinning and motion of spin chirality by applying current pulses were conducted in $\text{CrTe}_2/\text{Bi}_2\text{Te}_3$, as exhibited in Figure 4e. Upon passing a current of $-j_e$ through the device, the left of the device develops dense chiral spin textures, giving rise to the increased Hall voltage, and vice versa. Since the topologically trivial magnetic textures could only shrink or elongate driven by current, it clearly manifests that the topologically nontrivial spin textures in $\text{CrTe}_2/\text{Bi}_2\text{Te}_3$ system with well-defined chirality can be efficiently manipulated, including depinning and motion.

Quantitative agreement between transport and theoretical simulations.

Combining the THE signals for all temperatures and magnetic fields, a phase diagram is plotted in Figure 5a. As temperature decreases, the THE amplitude increases and can exist in a stronger magnetic field. It is because THE is induced by the thermodynamic stability of the chiral spin texture, which is enhanced by lowering the temperature. Therefore, a stronger magnetic field is needed to eliminate this nontrivial spin texture. The large amplitude of THE at low temperatures manifests a stronger fictitious magnetic field induced by Berry phase effects in real space. The emergence of THE humps across a wide range of temperature from 10 K to 100 K, suggests that the topological spin structure is robust. The THE effects exists only below the T_C of CrTe_2 , which rules out the possibility of spin chirality driven by thermal fluctuation.¹⁸ Moreover, the THE is absent in the transport properties of pure CrTe_2 thin films,²² implying the important role of TI in the formation of spin chirality.

To understand spin chirality and the experimental phase diagram in $\text{CrTe}_2/\text{Bi}_2\text{Te}_3$ hybrid system, we calculated the energy landscapes of various magnetic states, which arise from the competition between exchange coupling, uniaxial anisotropy, and DMI in this system.³⁹ Figure 4c shows a magnetic phase diagram in the plane of out-of-plane magnetic field and temperature calculated by using zero-temperature saturation magnetization ($M_0 = 362 \text{ emu/cm}^3$), experimental perpendicular anisotropy coefficient

($K_u = 3.16 \times 10^5 \text{ J/m}^3$), and taking the DMI coefficient⁴⁰ as $D(T) = D_0 \left[1 - \left(\frac{T}{T_c} \right)^{\frac{3}{2}} \right]^5$ with $D_0 = 6 \times 10^{-3} \text{ J/m}^2$ and the T_c of CrTe_2 being 280 K. The Ginzburg-Landau model⁴¹ is employed in the calculation (Supporting Information Section 5). At low magnetic fields, a helical phase with zero net out-of-plane magnetization is energetically favorable. When the out-of-plane magnetic field is increased to a window of intermediate field strength, a skyrmion lattice phase prevails over the helical phase as the out-of-plane magnetization in the skyrmion core areas lowers the Zeeman energy. Further increasing the magnetic field leads to a ferromagnetic phase (Figure 5d) with magnetization uniformly aligned with the external magnetic field.

To compare with the experimental phase diagram for the THE resistivity, we also calculated topological charge density as a function of the magnetic field and temperature (Figure 5b) based on the same materials parameters used in the calculation of Figure 5c. Comparing with Figure 5a, we find the calculated magnetic-field window for finite topological charge density is relatively narrower, which could be attributed to the following reasons. In our theoretical calculation, we only considered closely-packed hexagonal skyrmion lattice whereas in reality there may exist other topological spin structures such as a disordered skyrmion phase⁴² that may contribute to the measured THE as well. In addition, derivation from the linear dependence of the topological Hall resistivity on the topological charge density may take place in the presence of strong SOC⁴³ and diffusive scattering.⁴⁴ Except the width of THE window, the calculated diagram of topological charge density is in good agreement with the experimental phase diagram of THE.

The spin-chiral structure responsible for the observed interfacial THE is most likely the Néel-textured magnetic skyrmions stabilized by DMI. In contrast to Bloch-type skyrmions in bulk DMI materials with ρ_{THE} typically between 5~100 nΩ·cm and narrow temperature-field range near T_c ,^{6,7} Néel-type skyrmions usually exhibit a more pronounced ρ_{THE} and a wider temperature-field range,⁴⁵ as seen in $\text{CrTe}_2/\text{Bi}_2\text{Te}_3$. Similar THE behaviors induced by Néel-type magnetic skyrmions were also observed in $\text{Cr}_2\text{Te}_3/\text{Bi}_2\text{Te}_3$,¹³ Pt/TmIG ,⁵ $\text{La}_{0.7}\text{Sr}_{0.3}\text{MnO}_3/\text{SrIrO}_3$ ⁴⁶ and $(\text{Bi,Sb})_2\text{Te}_3/\text{MnTe}$ heterostructures.¹⁴

In order to rule out the possibility of two-channel AHE responses,^{47,48} which could lead to similar hump-dip features in Hall resistivities, we did two-channel AHE fitting

using a double-tanh function (see Figure S4). A simple linear superposition of two magnetic hysteresis loops can't match the ρ_{xy} - H curves, especially for the hump-like features. It suggests that the hump features are not due to the mixed magnetic signals from two AHE responses with different H_C .

Calculation of skyrmion size. In skyrmion systems, reducing the skyrmion size is critical to maximizing its potential for device applications of energy-efficient and high-density information storage. A single skyrmion can be treated as one magnetic flux quantum, $\phi_0 = h/e$, where h is the Plank constant and e is the electronic charge. When charge carriers flow through a conductor, the skyrmion density (n_{sk}) gives rise to the emergent electromagnetic field. Therefore, ρ_{THE} can be represented by the following formula³⁸

$$\rho_{THE} = PR_0 n_{sk} \phi_0,$$

where R_0 is the ordinary Hall coefficient representing the total density of mobile charge and n_{sk} is the 2D skyrmions density (assuming each skyrmion carries a topological charge $|Q_{sk}| = 1$, and skyrmions form a regular 2D lattice). P denotes the spin polarization of carriers. Assuming $P = 1$, we can estimate the length scale of one single skyrmion ($n_{sk}^{-1/2}$) to be around 34 nm, which is the upper limit of skyrmion size. This value is comparable to that of bulk B20 alloys^{6-8, 49} and SrRuO₃-SrIrO₃ bilayers.^{35, 50} Since the skyrmion density is proportional to the magnitude of the emergent magnetic field, skyrmions with smaller size is essential to optimize the relationship between spin dynamics and electric charge. Most recently, magnetic bubbles have aroused researchers' enthusiasm owing to the observation of an extremely large THE in (Ca,Ce)MnO₃,⁴ ten thousand orders-of-magnitude larger than the THE in MnSi.⁷ However, the size of magnetic bubbles is typically around 0.1-10 μm , which is too large for practical applications in information storage. Unlike magnetic bubbles, the skyrmions stabilized by the DMI scale around sub-100-nm, either in bulk or interface. Here, the estimated maximum value of skyrmion size in CrTe₂/Bi₂Te₃ system is ~ 34 nm, much smaller than the size of magnetic bubbles. Furthermore, skyrmions can easily be moved by a low-threshold electric current/field, while magnetic bubbles require a large magnetic field for to manipulate.

The observed THE magnitude is the largest among all the bilayer systems hosting skyrmions.^{6, 11, 35, 36, 51} The pure vdW staking in CrTe₂/Bi₂Te₃ heterostructures explored in this work is totally different from the traditional magnetic bilayer systems. The vdW

coupling between adjacent layers in CrTe₂/Bi₂Te₃ heterostructures facilitates the layer-by-layer stacking and the formation of a clean interface, without suffering from interfacial hybridization and diffusion, strain, surface reconstruction and electronic redistribution.⁵² Common Te atoms in both of TI and 2D FM permit the topological SS to extend into the 2D FM. Combined with the out-of-plane spin-polarized CrTe₂ surface, efficient magnetic exchange coupling could be introduced at the CrTe₂/Bi₂Te₃ interface, giving rise to a gapped TI SS and the dissipationless chiral edge conductive channel. Due to the fact that the DMI is determined by magnetic interactions within a single atomic layer, the atomically sharp vdW interface together with asymmetric exchange interaction and dissipationless spin transport, as well as strong SOC in Bi₂Te₃ provide an optimal environment for the formation of interfacial DMI. The DMI energy parameter can be defined as: $E_{DMI} = Dt$ with $D = 6 \times 10^{-3} \text{ J/m}^2$ and t (6 nm) representing the thickness of CrTe₂ layer. This leads to an enhanced DMI strength in CrTe₂/Bi₂Te₃ of size $\sim 36 \text{ pJ/m}$, which is one or two orders larger than that of traditional heavy-metal skyrmion systems such as Pt/TmIG (0.02 pJ/m)⁵ and Ir/Co/Pt (0.96 pJ/m).⁵³ These results indicate that the interfacial DMI at 2D FM/TI heterostructures is one of the promising ways to produce large THE, and therefore higher recording density.

Conclusions

In summary, we have synthesized high-quality CrTe₂/Bi₂Te₃ bilayers, a prototype vdW 2D FM/TI heterostructure by MBE, which shows the largest THE among bilayer systems. It is driven by an enhanced interfacial DMI as consequence of an optimal combination of strong SOC in Bi₂Te₃ and an atomically sharp interface with asymmetric exchange interaction. It is also worth noting that the 2D FM/TI hybrid system possesses topologically nontrivial spin textures in both real space and reciprocal space, namely, chiral spin textures and spin-polarized topological SS of TI. This work opens a platform to explore and manipulate the interplay among magnetism, spin textures, and Berry phase in a class of unexplored bilayers for the development of energy-efficient nanoscale spintronic devices.

Experimental Section

The deposition of CrTe₂/Bi₂Te₃ heterostructures on Al₂O₃(0001) substrates were carried out in a MBE chamber with a base pressure of 2×10^{-10} mbar. Prior to sample growth, substrates were raised to 800 °C, and leave for 30 mins to outgas. Bi₂Te₃ thin films were firstly grown on Al₂O₃ at a low temperature of ~240 °C. During the growth of CrTe₂ thin films, the Bi₂Te₃/Al₂O₃ substrates were maintained at 350 °C. To avoid possible contamination, a 10 nm thick Te layer was deposited on CrTe₂/Bi₂Te₃/Al₂O₃ structures at room temperature prior to taking samples out of the MBE chamber for *ex-situ* measurements.

The ARPES spectra were collected with a SPECS PHOIBOS 150 hemisphere analyzer with a SPECS UVS 300 helium discharge lamp at 107 K. The He I α (21.2 eV) and He II α (40.8 eV) resonant line was used to excite photoelectrons. The energy and angular resolution were 40 meV and 0.2° under 107 K, respectively. The topography of the materials' surface was *in-situ* mapped by an Aarhus STM placed in the growth chamber.

The samples were patterned into Hall bar structures with width of 10 μ m using standard photo-lithography and an ion milling system. Ti (5 nm)/Au (150 nm) was then deposited in the Hall bar contact areas for electrical contact. The magnetic and electro-transport properties of the film were measured in a Quantum Design physical property measurement system supplemented with two lock-in-amplifiers, a preamplifier and two Keithley meters.

We have performed theoretical calculations for the free energies in the skyrmion density map based on a Ginzburg-Landau model. The skyrmion density map of magnetic field and temperature was obtained by free energy calculations using following parameters: $D_0 = 0.006 \text{ J/m}^3$, $T_C = 280 \text{ K}$, $M_0 = 362 \text{ emu/cm}^3$, $k_d = 2.62 \times 10^5 \text{ J/m}^3$, $k_u = 3.16 \times 10^5 \text{ J/m}^3$, $A_{\text{ex}} = 6.5 \times 10^{-11} \text{ J/m}$, and $n = 2$, where D_0 , M_0 , k_d and k_u , represent the DMI coefficient at 0 K, saturated magnetization, demagnetizing coefficient and uniaxial anisotropy coefficient, respectively. This phase diagram was collected for various profiles of magnetization field for the skyrmion phase which are overlaid on top of each other.

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Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

Acknowledgments

This work is supported by the National Key Research and Development Program of China (No. 2016YFA0300803, No. 2017YFA0206304), the National Basic Research Program of China (No. 2014CB921101), the National Natural Science Foundation of China (No. 61427812, 11774160, 11574137, 61474061, 61674079, 11904174), Jiangsu Shuangchuang Program, the Natural Science Foundation of Jiangsu Province of China (No. BK20140054, BK20190729), NUPTSF (Grant No. NY219024), the Natural Science Foundation of the Jiangsu Higher Education Institutions of China (19KJB510047). G.B. is supported by the US National Science Foundation (NSF-DMR#1809160). S.S.-L.Z. is supported by the College of Arts and Sciences, Case Western Reserve University.

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Figures

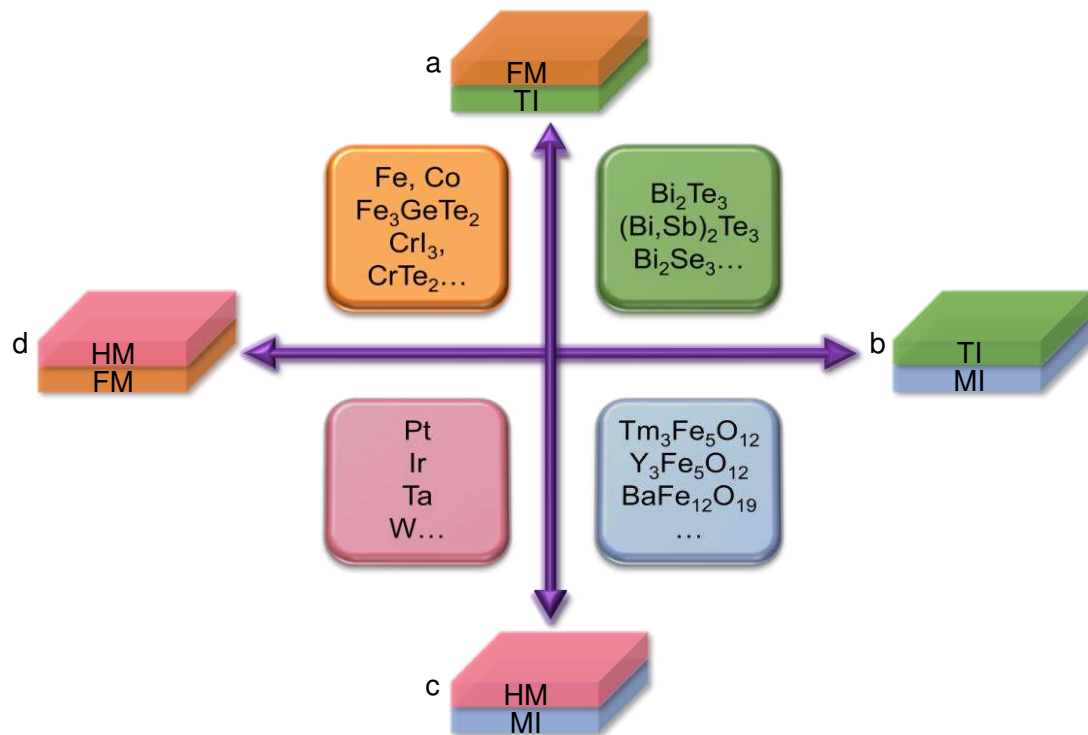


Figure 1. Research frameworks of interfacial magnetic skyrmions in hybrid systems. (a-d) Four categories of heterostructures with interfacial magnetic skyrmions, including FM/TI ($\text{Cr}_2\text{Te}_3/\text{Bi}_2\text{Te}_3$ ¹³) (a), TI/MI ($\text{Bi}_2\text{Se}_3/\text{BaFe}_{12}\text{O}_{19}$ ¹⁶) (b), HM/MI ($\text{Pt}/\text{Tm}_3\text{Fe}_5\text{O}_{12}$ ^{5, 17}) (c) and HM/FM ($\text{Ir}/\text{Fe}/\text{Co}/\text{Pt}$ ^{10, 11}) (d). The orange, green, blue and pink squares represent FM, TI, MI and HM, respectively. The area of 2D FM/TI remains unexplored, and this work will address it.

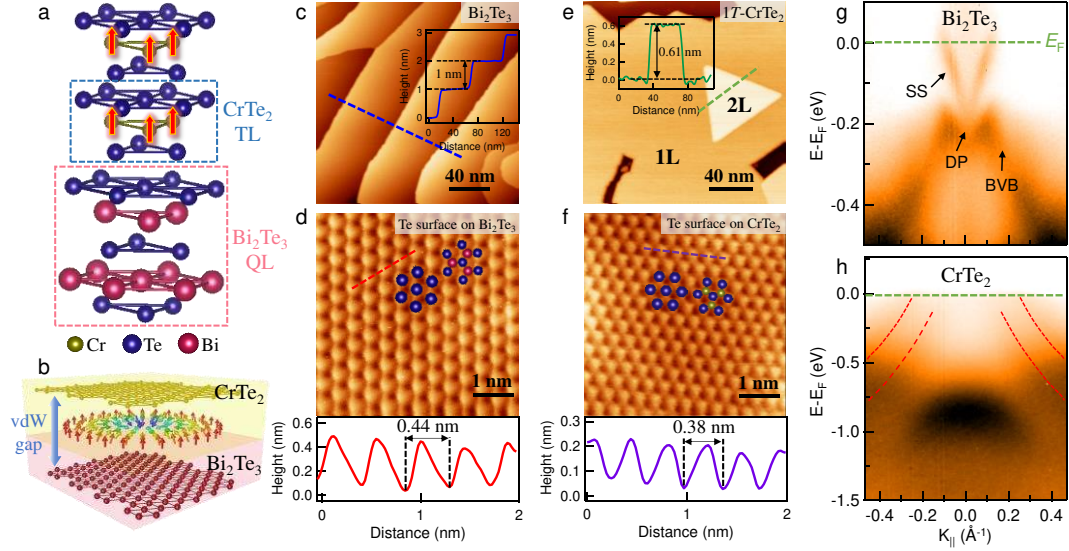


Figure 2. Atomic-scale growth and ARPES characterization of CrTe₂/Bi₂Te₃ heterostructure. (a) Crystal structure of the CrTe₂/Bi₂Te₃ heterostructure. (b) Schematic picture of CrTe₂/Bi₂Te₃ bilayer with vdW gap. (c,e) Surface morphologies of 10 QL Bi₂Te₃ (c) and 2 TL CrTe₂ grown on Bi₂Te₃ (e) (tunneling condition $V = 1000$ mV, $I = 0.01$ nA). Inset: Cross-sectional profile of QL Bi₂Te₃ and TL CrTe₂ flakes along the blue and green dashed line, respectively. (d,f) Atomically resolved Te surfaces of Bi₂Te₃ (d) and CrTe₂ (f) with corresponding atomic lattice structures ($V = 10$ mV, $I = 0.2$ nA). The panel below indicates the lattice unit distance calculated from line-cut profile. (g,h) ARPES spectra of Bi₂Te₃(111) (g) as well as CrTe₂ thin film on Bi₂Te₃ (h) taken with a photon energy of 21.2 eV.

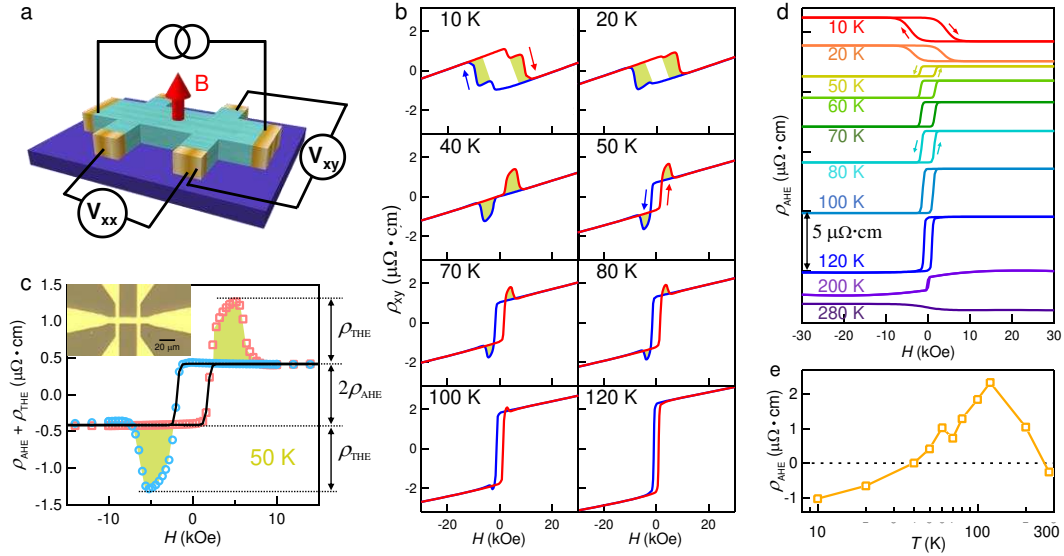


Figure 3. Hall resistivity of CrTe₂/Bi₂Te₃ bilayer with a perpendicular magnetic field. (a) Schematic diagram of the experimental set up for transport measurements. (b) Magnetic-field dependence of ρ_{xy} at various temperatures for the CrTe₂/Bi₂Te₃ sample. Curves are antisymmetrized to remove the ρ_{xx} component. The positive slope at high field indicates hole carriers. Red (blue) curve represents the process of increasing (decreasing) magnetic field. The humps on the shoulder of AHE loops are highlighted in light green. (c) Detailed view of the Hall resistivity at 50 K with subtraction of ordinary Hall term. Contribution from AHE (black solid lines) and THE term (light green area) is marked, where the AHE contribution is fitted by a $M_0 \tanh(\frac{H}{a_0} - H_0)$ function to represent the magnetization, where M_0 , a_0 and H_0 is a fitting parameter. Inset: An optical image of a Hall bar device with a 20 μm scale bar. (d) Field-dependent anomalous Hall loops of the bilayer at different temperatures obtained by fitting with function of $M_0 \tanh(\frac{H}{a_0} - H_0)$. An unexpected transition of AHE component occurs with temperature decreasing below 50 K. (e) The magnitude of the AHE (ρ_{AHE}) at different temperatures extracted from (d).

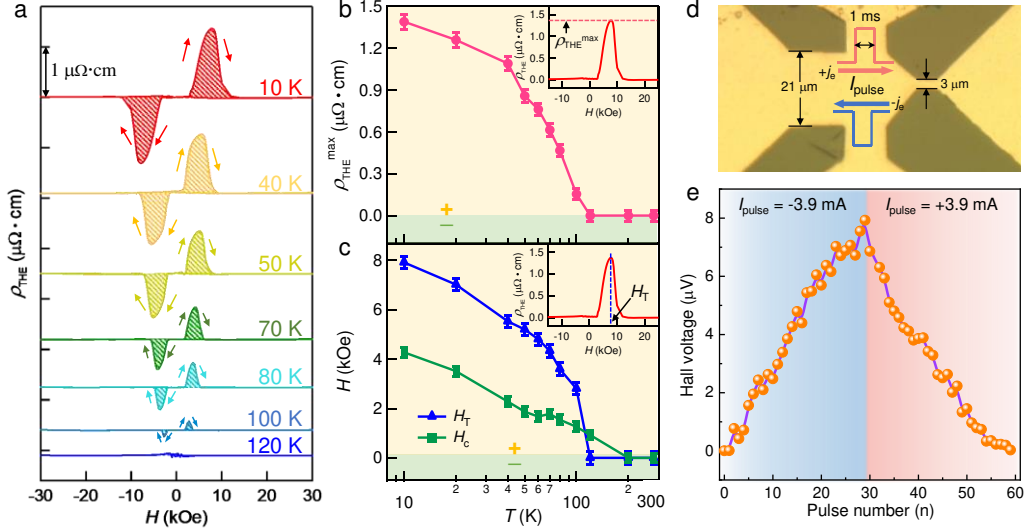


Figure 4. Interfacial coupling induced topological Hall effect and effective manipulation of magnetic skyrmions. (a) Typical pairs of magnetic-field dependence of the topological Hall resistivity at various temperatures generated after subtracting the AHE term (loops at different temperatures are offset vertically for clarity). (b,c) Temperature-dependent topological Hall effect. Red and blue solid symbols represent the amplitude ($\rho_{\text{THE}}^{\text{max}}$) and the field (H_T) at which the topological Hall resistivity reaches its maximum (top inset), respectively. Green squares are the H_C of AHE, which scale quite well with H_T . (d) An optical image of a Hall bar device structure, in which a geometrical constriction is introduced for giving rise to an inhomogeneous current distribution. (e) Hall voltages recorded after repeated 1-ms-long current pulses ($j_e = \pm 3.9 \text{ mA}$).

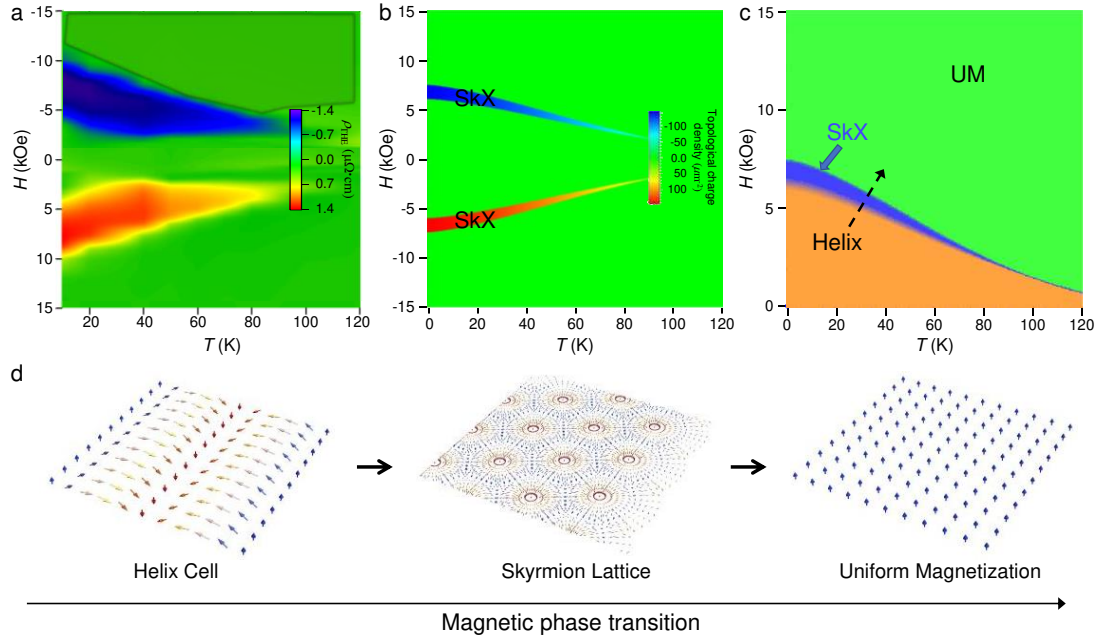


Figure 5. Topological Hall resistivity, topological charge density, magnetic phase diagram and spin ordering. (a) Experimental color map of ρ_{THE} in the temperature-magnetic field plane. A larger THE amplitude at lower temperature indicates a higher density of Néel skyrmions. (b) Calculated topological charge density as a comparison with the measured topological Hall resistivity. (c) Calculated magnetic phase diagram in the plane of temperature and out-of-plane magnetic field. The colored regions correspond to the uniform FM (green), the helix (orange), and the skyrmion lattice (SkX; blue) phases, respectively. (d) Schematic spin structures of helix phases, closely-packed hexagonal SkX, and uniform ferromagnetic phase.

Table 1. Maximal THE amplitude ($\rho_{\text{THE}}^{\text{max}}$) in various skyrmion systems from literatures^a

Material	Maximal THE ($\mu\Omega\cdot\text{cm}$)	Ref.	System
CrTe ₂ /Bi ₂ Te ₃	1.39	[*]	Interfacial skyrmion
Fe ₃ GeTe ₂ /WTe ₂	1.3	21	Interfacial skyrmion
Cr ₂ Te ₃ /Bi ₂ Te ₃	0.53	13	Interfacial skyrmion
Pt/Y ₃ Fe ₅ O ₁₂	0.3	36	Interfacial skyrmion
SrIrO ₃ /SrRuO ₃	0.2	35	Interfacial skyrmion
Ir/Fe/Co/Pt	0.03	11	Interfacial skyrmion
Fe _{0.7} Co _{0.3} Si	0.5	9	Bulk skyrmion
MnGe	0.16	6	Bulk skyrmion
MnSi	0.04	7	Bulk skyrmion

^a Typical values of $\rho_{\text{THE}}^{\text{max}}$ from reports. Our work [*] has demonstrated a relatively large $\rho_{\text{THE}}^{\text{max}}$ among them.