Giant magnetoresistance induced by spin-correlation scattering in magnetic thin films and other compounds

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We present the study of the giant magnetoresistance effect in ferromagnetically ordered thin film and bulk based on the Hund’s rule coupling between the mobile $d$ electron and the core spin of Mn ions. It has been shown that the resistivity is proportional to the spin–spin correlation functions, a maximum resistivity appears near the critical point in absence of magnetic field and an applied field drives the resistivity peak to higher temperature and reduces the peak value, which is in agreement with the experiments. The giant magnetoresistance effect in thin film is attributed to the spin-correlation-dependent scattering and the low-dimensional character. © 1996 American Institute of Physics. [S0021-8979(96)51808-2]

I. INTRODUCTION

Recently negative magnetoresistance (MR) has been found in perovskitelike ferromagnetic semiconductive thin films, such as in the films of La$_{1-x}$Ba$_x$MnO$_3$, La$_{1-x}$Sr$_x$MnO$_3$, La$_{1-x}$Ca$_x$MnO$_3$ (Ref. 3) and Nd$_{1-x}$Sr$_x$MnO$_3$. Their MR ratios $[(R_B - R_0)/R_0]$ reported are much larger than those found in magnetic multilayers. Especially, in epitaxial La$_{1-x}$Ca$_x$MnO$_3$ and Nd$_{1-x}$Sr$_x$MnO$_3$ thin films, MR ratios are found to be $\approx 10^3$–$10^4$ under magnetic field $B = 6$ T. More recently a giant MR ratio is also found to be in excess of $10^5$ for polycrystalline La–Y–Ca–Mn–O compounds. These remarkable findings can provide promising industrial applications in devices. It also brings us an interesting problem, namely, the mechanism of exhibiting such a giant MR in these ferromagnetic transition-metal–oxide compounds.

Some mechanisms$^{1–8}$ have been suggested to explain the experimental findings. These studies provide in depth investigations for the problem of interest. However, it seems to us that these proposed mechanisms do not provide a satisfactory answer. The double exchange and magnetic polaron transfer mechanism suggested by some authors$^{1–5}$ can explain qualitatively the semiconductive behavior in conduction and the negative temperature coefficient of the resistivity above $T_c$ in the La$_{1-x}$R$_x$MnO$_3$ compounds. However, as pointed out by Millis et al.,$^6$ there exist crucial quantitative discrepancies between the experiments and the theory for the resistivity behavior in an external field, besides, it seems to be hard to form magnetic polaron in the heavy doped La–R–Mn–O and Nd–R–Mn–O systems. In the spin-disorder scattering mechanism,$^7$ the huge MR ratio is attributed to the alignment of the canting of manganese spins in the strong external field. However, as indicated by the experiments,$^{3,4}$ the magnetization saturates in a not large magnetic field, and increasing magnetic field further does not change the spin configurations any more, so the spin-disorder scattering mechanism is not responsible for the change of resistivity by several orders in magnitude under the high magnetic field.

In this article, we present another possible mechanism of the giant MR in these ferromagnetic semiconductive materials. The model and formalism is described in Sec. II, the theoretical curves is calculated in Sec. III, the discussion and conclusion is given in Sec. IV.

II. MODEL HAMILTONIAN

In the La–R–Mn–O or Nd–R–Mn–O compounds, the three 3$d$ electrons of Mn$^{4+}$ ions at the low level, $t_g$, can be considered as the localized spin $S_i$ of the ferromagnetic background, the outer-shell 3$d$ electron of Mn$^{4+}$ ions at the high level, $e_s$, can hop and transfer between different Mn sites as an itinerant one, and is responsible for the electric conduction. In such a model, the outer $d$ electron interacts with the core localized spin through the Hund’s rule coupling, the Hamiltonian can be expressed as

$$H = H_0 + V,$$  

$$H_0 = \sum_{k\sigma} (e_k - \epsilon_{\mu} B) c_{k\sigma}^\dagger c_{k\sigma} - \sum_{(i)} A S_i \cdot S_j$$  

$$- \sum_i g \mu_B B S_i^z;$$  

$$V = - J \sum_{kq} \sum_{\mu\nu} e^{iq \cdot \mathbf{R}_i} c_{k+q\mu}^\dagger c_{k\nu}^\dagger A \epsilon_{\mu} \epsilon_{\nu}.$$  

Here $\epsilon_i$ is the energy spectrum of conduction electrons with respect to the chemical potential $\mu$, $A$ the effective ferromagnetic exchange constant between manganese ions, and only
the nearest-neighbor interaction is considered, \( g \mu_B B \) is Zeeman energy of the Mn ions in the magnetic field \( B \); the conduction electron is scattered from state \( k \) spin \( \uparrow \) to state \( k+q \) spin \( \mu \) by the localized spin \( S_i \) of the magnetic Mn ions. \( J \) denotes the coupling between the itinerant electron and the localized spin of Mn 3d electrons. One notes that under the external magnetic field and in the internal molecular field of ferromagnetically ordered state, the band of the itinerant electrons will split, this splitting will shift the position of the conduction band with respect to the chemical potential. The spectrum of the conduction electrons with state \( |s,k\rangle \) is

\[
\varepsilon_s = \epsilon_k = \sigma (\mu_B B + J \langle S^z \rangle).
\]

The scattering rate of the conduction electrons scattered by the localized spins is

\[
\omega = \frac{2 \pi}{\hbar} \sum_m |\langle f|V|m \rangle|^2 \delta(E_f - E_m),
\]

where \( |f \rangle \) refers to the final equilibrium state and \( |m \rangle \) the intermediate state of the system during the scattering process. Summing over all the intermediate states at a temperature of \( T \), one gets

\[
\omega = \frac{\pi^2 J^2 D(0)}{4} \sum_{q,\alpha} f_{k\alpha}(1-f_{k\alpha})f_{k+q\alpha}(1-f_{k+q\alpha})
\]

\[\times \langle \langle S_\alpha^{+} S_{-\alpha}^{+} \rangle + \langle S_\alpha^{+} S_{-\alpha}^{-} \rangle + 8 \langle S_\alpha^{+} S_{-\alpha}^{+} \rangle \rangle,\]

(5)

where \( D(0) \) is the density of states of the conduction electrons near the chemical potential, \( f_k = \frac{1}{\cosh q - \cosh q} + 1 \) is the Dirac–Fermi distribution function. The lifetime of the conduction electron between two scatterings is \( \tau = \omega^{-1} \), and the resistivity can be obtained by the Drude formula, \( \rho = n \tau e^2 \sigma = m^* \omega / ne^2 \), where \( n \) denotes the carrier density, \( m^* \) the effective mass of carriers. One could obtain the temperature–and field-dependent resistivity \( \rho(T,B) \) as

\[
\rho(T,B) = \sum_q F(q,T,B) \left[ \langle S_\alpha^{+} S_{-\alpha}^{-} \rangle + 8 \langle S_\alpha^{+} S_{-\alpha}^{+} \rangle \right],
\]

where the factor \( F(q,T,B) \)

\[
F(q,T,B) = \frac{\pi D(0) m^* f^2}{4 \hbar n e^2} \sum_{k,\alpha} f_{k\alpha}(1-f_{k\alpha})f_{k+q\alpha}
\]

\[\times \left( 1 - f_{k+q\alpha} \right).\]

(6)

(7)

III. RESULTS

In order to obtain quantitative results, the concrete forms of the transverse and the longitudinal spin–spin correlation functions over all the temperature range and in any magnetic field are needed. However, such an exact correlation function is not available for two- and three-dimensional Heisenberg ferromagnets. In this article, the approximate forms of the longitudinal and transverse correlation functions \((T<T_c)\) (Ref. 8) and the longitudinal correlation function \((T>T_c)\) (Ref. 9) are adopted. The resistivity and the magnetization are measured in reduced units.

A. For three-dimension cases

We first consider the bulk material of La–Sr–Mn–O, the lattice constant \( a = 3.8 \) Å, and the coordinate number \( z \) is 6. The theoretical curves are evaluated for La–Sr–Mn–O compounds.

In the three-dimension case, the order–disorder transition occurs within a narrow temperature range. When approaching the critical point \( T_c \), the spin–spin correlation function changes dramatically from the long-range correlation to short-range one. The temperature dependence of magnetization, the resistivity and the MR in the bulk La–Sr–Mn–O with the magnetic filed \( B = 8 \) T is shown in Fig. 1, these quantities exhibit step fall when temperature \( T \) exceeds the Curie point \( T_c \), which can be attributed to the weaken of the spin–spin correlation and the reduction of spin-correlated fluctuation scattering. The MR exhibits a maximum, which is similar to results of Fisher et al.\(^{10}\)

The field-dependence of the MR below Curie temperature is shown in Fig. 2. The MR decreases monotonously with increasing magnetic field. The MR ratio in the bulk case is \( 1600\% \) for \( B = 8 \) T. The behavior of the MR above and below \( T_c \) does not agree with the experiment very well.\(^{11}\) That indicates that some other scatterings are needed to be considered.

J. Appl. Phys., Vol. 79, No. 8, 15 April 1996

Zou et al. 5163
resistivity in very well.1–4

spins. These theoretical results agree with the experiments different sites, thus reduces the spin-correlated fluctuation
tions and the spin fluctuation are large.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

B. For two-dimension cases

In the quasi-two-dimensional systems, such as in thin films, the lattice constant is chosen to be the same as in the three-dimensional case, and the coordinate number is \( z = 4 \). The temperature dependence of the magnetization and the resistivity in La–Sr–Mn–O thin film are shown in Fig. 3. The magnetization is calculated self-consistently under an external magnetic field \( B = 1 \) T. Because of the reduction of the dimension, the transition temperature is broadened. The spin order–disorder transition occurs within a wide range (see Fig. 3). Correspondingly, the resistivities under different magnetic fields exhibit maxima within the transition region, since the spin-correlation scattering rate \( \omega \) is very large near the transition point. When the magnetic field is increased, the resistivity peak moves to higher temperature and the maximum value is reduced (see curves 2 and 3 in Fig. 3). This could be interpreted as that a strong field aligns all spins in the system and suppresses the correlation between spins at different sites, thus reduces the spin-correlated fluctuation scattering between the conduction electrons and the localized spins. These theoretical results agree with the experiments very well.1–4

The field-dependence of the MR for a quasi-two-dimension system is shown in Fig. 4. One can see that the magnetoresistance also decreases monotonously with increasing field in the strong field region. This fact coincides with the experiments.1–4 The MR ratio \( \Delta R_{B}/R_{B} \) in field \( B = 6 \) T can be as high as 1000%.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The resistivity due to the interaction Eq. (3) was studied for bulks by Fisher et al.11 Fisher’s work doesn’t consider the spin-splitting of the conduction electrons caused by the external magnetic field and the internal molecular field, which may be important for the MR effect in an external magnetic field and magnetically ordered state. Our study has shown that the spin correlation scattering is essential in the thin films and should be responsible for the giant MR near \( T_{c} \), where the long-range or the short-range spin–spin correlations and the spin fluctuation are large.

From this study we can summarize several results. (a) If the measurement temperature is below or above far away from the critical point \( T_{c} \), the MR change \( \Delta R_{B} \) is small. However, the MR behaviors below and above \( T_{c} \) may be dramatically different since the former is dominated by the fluctuation scattering of the long-range spin-correlation, the latter is by that of short-range correlation. (b) If the critical transition range is wide, a giant MR could be observed within a wide temperature range, this property is useful for the applications. It suggests us that if we want to find a new kind of material which could be used in room temperature for magnetic recording and sensitive detect, then the Curie critical point of this material should be near the room temperature, and it should be in a low-dimension system, such as in thin film. It also indicates that in the case of magnetic multilayers, if measured temperatures near \( T_{c} \), a more high giant MR may be found. Further experiments are extremely desired to verify these predictions.

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