All-electrical spin control in low-symmetry materials

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The existence of the quantum spin Hall (QSH) insulator has boosted opportunities for spintronics and quantum metrology, given the ability of topologically protected states to convey spin information over long distances at ultralow dissipation rate. QSH is a manifestation of strong spin-orbit coupling. However, even in time-reversal symmetric systems, the lack of a spin conservation axis in QSH insulators allows backscattering effects for edge states, limiting their ballistic transport. In some situations, the emergence of a phenomenon known as persistent spin texture (PST) enforces spin conservation and favors long spin lifetimes even in the presence chemical disorder and structural imperfections. Such an effect is deeply rooted in the underlying symmetries of the system and opens promising prospects for spintronics when combined with the manifestation of dissipationless chiral edge states. The recent prediction and experimental observations of a PST-driven canted quantum spin Hall effect in low-symmetry monolayer WTe_2 provide new ingredient for the use of topological materials in spintronic applications.

This work reports on the possibility of a fully controllable variation of up to 90 degrees rotation of the spin polarization of chiral edge-states, dictating the canted QSH effect, while preserving spin conservation. By combining density functional theory (DFT) with tight-binding methods and quantum transport simulations, we show that the emerging PST can be continuously varied from in-plane to out-of-plane under electric fields below 0.1 V/nm, making this effect experimentally accessible. The experimental confirmation of such fully electrically tunable spin-polarized topological currents would establish a new milestone towards replacing magnetic components in spintronic devices and all-electric spin circuit architectures, as well as optimized resistance

References

[1] J. H. Garcia,inxuan You, Mónica García-Mota, Peter Koval, Pablo Ordejón, Ramón Cuadrado, Matthieu J. Verstraete, Zeila Zanolli, and Stephan Roche. Physical Review B 106, L161410 (2022)