

Itinerant metamagnetic transition in the ferromagnet LuCo_3 induced by high field: Instability of the $3d$ -electron subsystem

D. S. Neznakhin ^{1,*} D. I. Radzivonchik,² D. I. Gorbunov,³ A. V. Andreev,⁴ J. Šebek ⁴
A. V. Lukoyanov ^{2,1} and M. I. Bartashevich ¹

¹Ural Federal University, 620002 Ekaterinburg, Russia

²M.N. Miheev Institute of Metal Physics, Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 620108 Ekaterinburg, Russia

³Hochfeld-Magnetlabor Dresden (HLD-EMFL), Helmholtz-Zentrum Dresden-Rossendorf, 01328 Dresden, Germany

⁴FZU Institute of Physics, Czech Academy of Sciences, 18221 Prague, Czech Republic



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LuCo_3 is an itinerant ferromagnet whose magnetic properties strongly depend on the position of the $3d$ electronic states relative to the Fermi level. Here, we report on the magnetization of a LuCo_3 single crystal in pulsed magnetic fields up to 58 T. We find a field-induced phase transition just below 50 T from a low-spin to a high-spin state. The transition shows a pronounced anisotropy of the magnetization jump and hysteresis. A series of *ab initio* calculations based on the density functional theory show that the transition is due to a significant change in the occupancies of the Co $3d$ electronic states. At the same time, some features in the majority spin density of the Co $3d$ states are slightly modified and pass through the Fermi level when the spin state is changed, which leads to the instability of the $3d$ -electron subsystem. Thereby, the applied magnetic field causes a significant redistribution in the majority and minority spin states in the Co $3d$ subsystem, which results in the sharp change in the magnetization.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Binary intermetallic compounds based on rare-earth (R) elements and cobalt combine two principally different types of electrons. The $4f$ electrons are localized, whereas the $3d$ electrons are partly itinerant and participate in conduction. As such, the Co atoms carry different ordered magnetic moments as a function of the stoichiometry due to a variable filling of the $3d$ band [1]. The R -rich compounds ($R_3\text{Co}$) show a paramagnetic behavior where R is a nonmagnetic element, e.g., Y, La or Lu [2]. On the other hand, the Co-rich compounds ($R_2\text{Co}_{17}$) with Y and Lu are ferromagnetic with a magnetic moment of $1.6 \mu_B/\text{Co}$ (metallic cobalt has $1.7 \mu_B/\text{Co}$). The compounds with an intermediate Co content ($R\text{Co}_2$ and $R\text{Co}_3$) show the most interesting physics. Here, the Co magnetic moment substantially depends on the R sublattice. The $R\text{Co}_2$ compounds are paramagnets for $R = \text{Y}, \text{Ce}, \text{Lu}$ [3–5], ferromagnets for $R = \text{Pr}, \text{Nd}$ [5], and ferrimagnets for $R = \text{Gd}, \text{Tb}, \text{Dy}, \text{Ho}, \text{Er}, \text{Tm}$ [5]. The strong dependence of the Co moment on the R sublattice can be observed most clearly for ErCo_2 . The ferrimagnetic order of this material abruptly collapses at the Curie temperature, $T_C = 31$ K, when the Er $4f$ states can no longer sustain the induced magnetic moment of the Co $3d$ electrons [4]. Ferri- or ferromagnetic ordering can also be realized in the $R\text{Co}_3$ [6,7] compounds. The magnetic moments of the f and d elements and f - d exchange interaction play a major role in the formation of the magnetic state in $R\text{Co}_3$ too.

In this respect, the $R\text{Co}_2$ and $R\text{Co}_3$ compounds are of great interest. It is necessary to know the magnetic properties of the Co sublattice to understand those of the R sublattice in $R\text{Co}_3$.

The magnetic properties of the Co sublattice can be studied, e.g., on YCo_3 since Y is nonmagnetic. This material crystallizes in a trigonal structure of PuNi_3 type (space group $R\bar{3}m$) in which the Co atoms occupy three inequivalent positions. YCo_3 is a ferromagnet with the Curie temperature of 301–310 K [6,8,9]. Neutron-scattering measurements revealed a strong dependence of the Co moment on local surroundings, with the Co moments varying from about 0.4 to $1.0 \mu_B$ [8,10]. Magnetization measurements of a polycrystal in fields up to 110 T uncovered two metamagneticlike anomalies at 60 and 82 T [11]. It was suggested that the first-order transitions occur successfully on different Co sites. In Ref. [10] it was shown that for YCo_3 , both the ferrimagnetic and ferromagnetic ground states can be realized since their energies have similar values. For ferrimagnetic YCo_3 the magnetic transitions occur in two stages: magnetic moments of Co atoms in one of three inequivalent positions change from antiparallel to nonmagnetic at the first transition and then to ferromagnetic at the second transition. It was also suggested that all cobalt atoms are in a ferromagnetic state and the transitions occur due to a change in the state of cobalt from a low-spin (LS) state to a high-spin (HS) state [9,11]. For example, transitions from the LS to the HS state are observed in the ThCo_5 [12], $\text{Y}(\text{Co}, \text{Ni})_5$ [13] and YCo_5 [14] ferromagnets. Magnetostriction measurements of the $(\text{Y}_{1-x}\text{Nd}_x)\text{Co}_3$ compounds can be another confirmation of the ferromagnetic state in YCo_3 . In the system $(\text{Y}_{1-x}\text{Nd}_x)\text{Co}_3$ the critical fields

*D.S.Neznakhin@urfu.ru

of the metamagnetic transitions are reduced as compared to YCo_3 due to the influence from the exchange field from the magnetic Nd sublattice. It was found that the volume magnetostriction is positive at both transitions [15]. This supports the earlier interpretation that the Co magnetic moment increases at both transitions. In the case of the collapse of the Co moment, as suggested in Ref. [11] for the first metamagnetic transition, one can expect negative volume magnetostriction, as observed in $(\text{Er}_{1-x}\text{Lu}_x)\text{Co}_2$ [16].

It is more appropriate to study the LuCo_3 compound to elucidate the magnetic properties of the Co sublattice in $R\text{Co}_3$ materials with magnetic heavy rare-earth elements. The reason is the atomic radius of Lu (1.75 Å), being closer to those of Er and Tm (1.75–1.76 Å), as compared to the atomic radius of Y (1.81 Å). Such a small difference could be important for the exchange interactions. The magnetic properties of LuCo_3 were studied rather briefly on polycrystals. It has a spontaneous magnetic moment of about $M_s = 1.8 \mu_B$, an uniaxial magnetic anisotropy with anisotropy field $\mu_0 H_a = 10$ T at 20 K and Curie temperature $T_C = 362$ K [17]. Indeed, the significantly higher Curie temperature of LuCo_3 as compared to YCo_3 shows how sensitive cobalt is to the local coordination.

Investigations of strongly anisotropic materials require single crystalline samples. We grew a LuCo_3 single crystal and performed magnetization measurements in pulsed magnetic fields up to 58 T. We found field-induced phase transitions for field applied along the easy and hard magnetization directions just below 50 T. Our density functional theory calculations suggest that the transitions are due to feature in the majority density of the Co $3d$ states near Fermi level.

II. EXPERIMENTAL AND CALCULATION DETAILS

A LuCo_3 single crystal was grown by a modified Czochralski method in a three-arc furnace from the high-purity elements Lu (99.9%) and Co (99.99%). The pulling of the crystal was done under argon protecting atmosphere at a speed of 15 mm/h, a tungsten rod was used as a seed. The result was a single crystal with a diameter of 5 and a length of 15 mm. X-ray powder diffraction analysis and energy-dispersive x-ray spectroscopy showed that the synthesized compound has less than 0.5 wt. % of the impurity phase LuCo_2 . LuCo_3 has a trigonal crystal structure of PuNi_3 type (space group $R\bar{3}m$) with the lattice parameters $a = 4.956$ Å and $c = 24.126$ Å. The Lu and Co atoms occupy two and three crystallographically nonequivalent sites, respectively [Fig. 1(a)]. A backscattered Laue diffraction pattern along the [001] axis of the crystal is shown in Fig. 1(b). The [001] axis is a threefold axis (identical directions are shown by arrows), which confirms the trigonal structure of LuCo_3 .

Magnetization measurements in static magnetic fields up to 7 T between 2 and 380 K were performed using MPMS-XL7 EC. Magnetization in pulsed fields up to 58 T was measured at the Dresden High Magnetic Field Laboratory by the induction method using a coaxial pickup coil system. Absolute values of the magnetization were calibrated using static-field data. The high-field magnetometer is described in detail in Ref. [18].

To investigate the electronic and magnetic properties of LuCo_3 , the QUANTUM ESPRESSO software package [19,20]

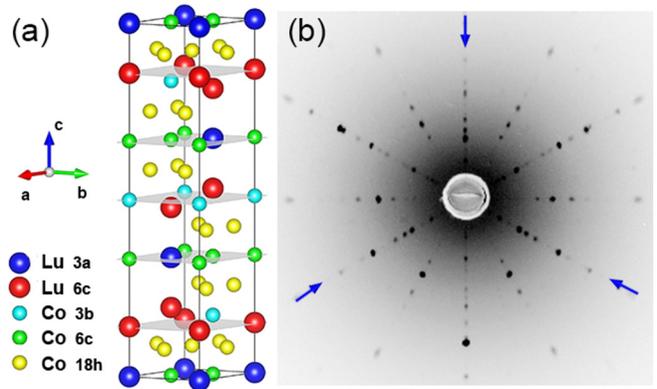


FIG. 1. Crystal structure of LuCo_3 (a) and backscattered Laue diffraction pattern of the LuCo_3 single crystal along the [001] axis (b).

was used. The Perdew-Burke-Ernzerhof generalized gradient approximation for the exchange-correlation potential with spin polarization and projector augmented wave method were employed. The energy limit of 60 Ry for plane waves was used for achieving sufficient convergence in the self-consistency cycle in our calculation. The integration in reciprocal space was performed by tetrahedron method of the Blochl's version over an $8 \times 8 \times 8$ k -point grid.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Magnetic measurements

LuCo_3 displays a uniaxial magnetic anisotropy. The spontaneous magnetic moment along the easy [001] axis is $M_s = 1.77 \mu_B$ [Fig. 2]. This gives $0.59 \mu_B$ for the average Co magnetic moment. For comparison, the spontaneous magnetic moment is $1.8 \mu_B$ for polycrystalline YCo_3 [11], for a single crystal this value is lower, $M_s = 1.50 \mu_B$ [9]. However, given the strong sensitivity of the ordered magnetic moments to the local surroundings, Co atoms in different crystallographic positions of LuCo_3 likely carry different moments, similar as

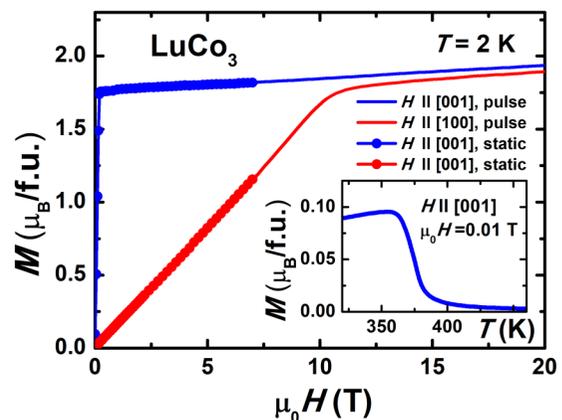


FIG. 2. Magnetization for field applied along the [100] and [001] axes of LuCo_3 at 2 K. The inset shows temperature dependence of magnetization of LuCo_3 for field applied along the [001] axis at $\mu_0 H = 0.01$ T.

was found for YCo_3 [8,10]. The [100] axis is the hard magnetization direction. At 2 K, the anisotropy field is $\mu_0 H_a = 10.5$ T, which is larger than that of YCo_3 , $\mu_0 H_a = 8.2$ T [11].

The Curie temperature is determined from $M(T)$ measurements in a field of 0.01 T. It is equal to 376 ± 5 K [inset in Fig. 2], which is close to the value obtained for a polycrystalline LuCo_3 sample, 362 K [17]. As pointed out in Ref. [21], the Curie temperature of LuCo_3 decreases with increasing pressure at a rate of $dT_C/dP = -2.3$ K/0.1 GPa due to a weakening of the exchange interactions with decreasing volume of the unit cell. Since the unit cell volume of LuCo_3 is smaller than that of YCo_3 , it is logical to expect that T_C of the latter compound should be higher, which is not observed in experiment. In R -Co compounds, T_C is approximately proportional to the square of the Co moment [22]. According to a molecular field theory, $T_C \sim S_{\text{Co}}(S_{\text{Co}} + 1)$, where S_{Co} is the quasispin of a $3d$ ion, which is proportional to the average Co magnetic moment [5]. Therefore, $T_C \sim M_s^2$. Since $M_s(\text{LuCo}_3) > M_s(\text{YCo}_3)$, then $T_C(\text{LuCo}_3) > T_C(\text{YCo}_3)$, as confirmed in experiment.

LuCo_3 shows a field-induced magnetic transition centered at about 47 T for field applied along both, the easy and hard directions [Fig. 3(a)]. The transition displays hysteresis and is of first order. Although the critical fields are very close for both field directions, one observes a pronounced anisotropy of the transition. The anomaly for field applied along the easy [001] axis is more pronounced. For this direction, the magnetization jump is from 2.22 to $3.90 \mu_B$, whereas for the hard [100] direction the magnetization changes from 2.25 to $3.57 \mu_B$. The transition for the easy axis shows a broader hysteresis as well.

The high-field magnetization of LuCo_3 contrasts strongly with that of YCo_3 [11]. The former shows a single transition, whereas two transitions were found for the latter. Given that both compounds have close magnetization values above the transitions, 3.57 – $3.90 \mu_B$ for LuCo_3 and $3.69 \mu_B$ for YCo_3 , one may assume that LuCo_3 will show no additional anomalies above 58 T. Alternatively, the difference in the high-field magnetization is due to the magnetic anisotropy related to the existence of nonquenched orbital moments [23–25].

With increasing temperature, the transition becomes less pronounced [Figs. 3(a)–3(e)]. The critical field (H_{cr}) of the phase transition for field applied along the [100] axis increases from 45.2 to 48.5 T between 2 and 120 K [Fig. 4]. H_{cr} for a field applied along the [001] axis is almost temperature independent. The H_{cr} values were determined as the middle point between the ascending and descending branches of the transition [inset in Fig. 4]. The hysteresis (ΔH_{cr}) at the transition gradually decreases for both directions and goes to zero above 80 K [Fig. 4].

In Refs. [26–28] it was shown that the critical field of itinerant system with a field induced metamagnetic transition from the paramagnetic ground state to the ferromagnetic state depends on the lattice parameters. H_{cr} increases if the lattice parameters reduce. However, in the case of LuCo_3 and YCo_3 , the atomic size of the rare-earth element plays a key role, since the lattice parameters of LuCo_3 are smaller than those of YCo_3 , but $H_{\text{cr}}(\text{LuCo}_3) < H_{\text{cr}}(\text{YCo}_3)$. The critical field of a metamagnetic transition from para- to ferromagnetic state should be proportional to T^2 according to the theory of

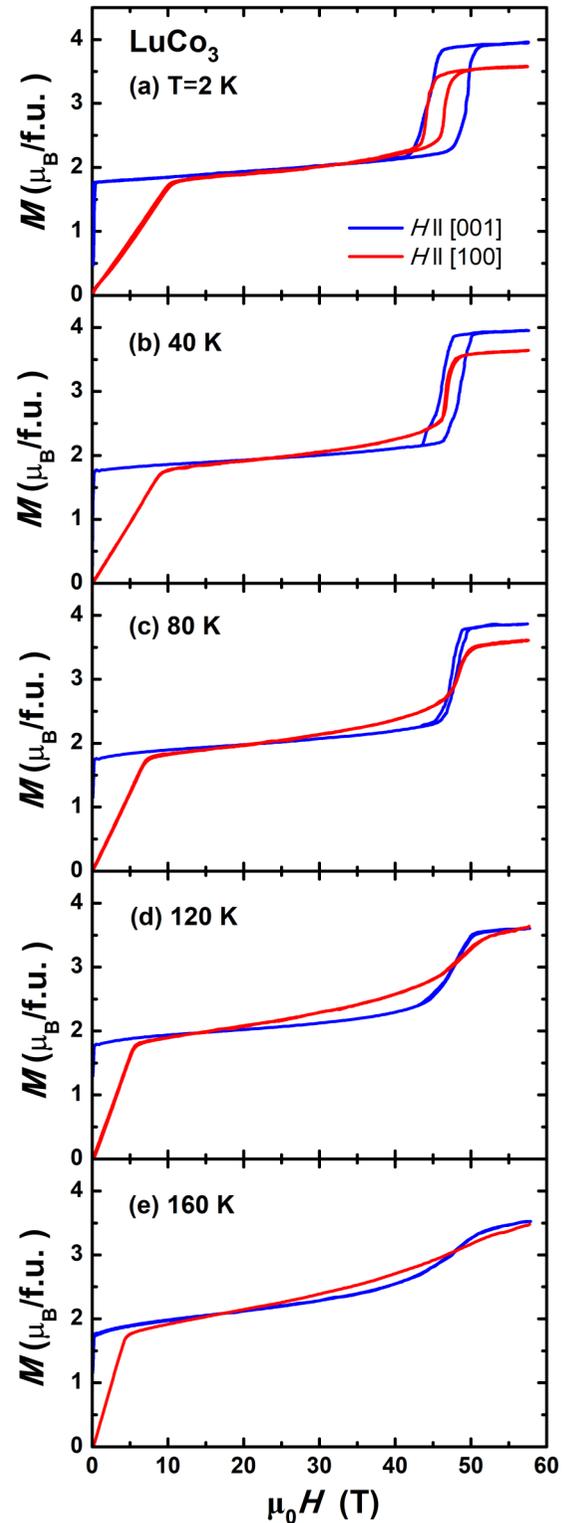


FIG. 3. High-field magnetization for field applied along the [100] and [001] axes of LuCo_3 at (a) 2, (b) 40, (c) 80, (d) 120, and (e) 160 K.

thermal fluctuations [29]. However, only a linear growth of H_{cr} is observed for LuCo_3 along the [100] direction [Fig. 4]. Such feature of the $H_{\text{cr}}(T)$ dependence can be attributed to the effect of exchange field of the Co sublattice in LuCo_3 , that

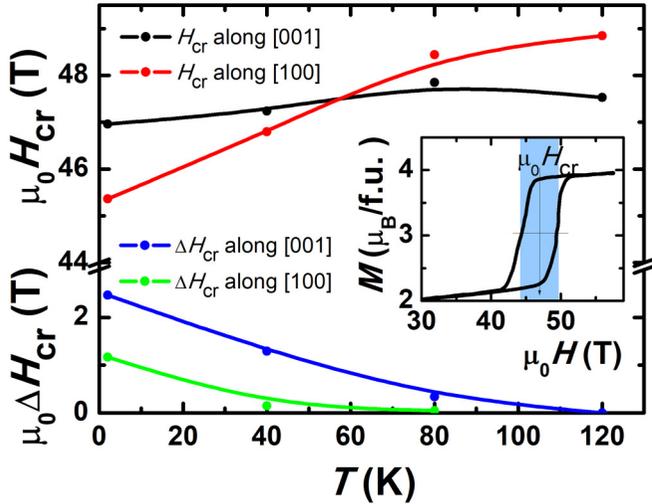


FIG. 4. Temperature dependences of the critical field, H_{cr} , and hysteresis, ΔH_{cr} , of the field-induced transition for field applied along the [001] and [100] axes of LuCo_3 .

changes with temperature. Thus, it can be concluded that the theories developed for classical metamagnetic transitions are not fully applicable to LuCo_3 .

B. Theoretical studies of the electronic structure

As already shown above, for a LuCo_3 single crystal, an abrupt increase in the magnetic moment occurs when a magnetic field $\mu_0 H = 47 \text{ T}$ [Fig. 3(a)] is applied. In terms of the electronic subsystem, such a transition in a ferromagnet can be considered as a manifestation of a spin phase transition from the LS to the HS of electrons. To understand the nature of this transition, we performed a series of *ab initio* calculations based on the density functional theory (DFT) for different unit cell volumes obtained by isotropic changes of the crystal cell parameters. In previous studies of the related $R\text{Co}_5$ compounds [30], it was concluded that a change in the unit cell volume and an increase in the magnetic field effectively impact the electronic subsystem in a very similar way and should generally lead to qualitatively similar results. The main effect of these external influences on the electronic structure is expected to be the broadening of the electronic bands with some shift electronic states with respect to the Fermi energy, while the general structure of the electronic states is not significantly changed.

The results of the calculated averaged (over the sublattices) magnetic moment of the cobalt atoms depending on the relative volume $\nu = V/V_0$, where V and V_0 are the current and experimental (with zero compression) cell volumes of the LuCo_3 single crystal, respectively, are shown in Fig. 5. In fact, from the *ab initio* calculations we obtained two distinctive HS and LS states in LuCo_3 with a drastic change between them. It can be seen that there is only one abrupt transition with a significant change in the Co magnetic moment by approximately $0.5 \mu_B$, which corresponds to the average experimental value of $0.56 \mu_B$. Excluding hysteresis, the calculated dependence generally corresponds to the shape of the high-field part of the $M(H)$ curve, shown in Fig. 3(a). Note that the hysteresis is

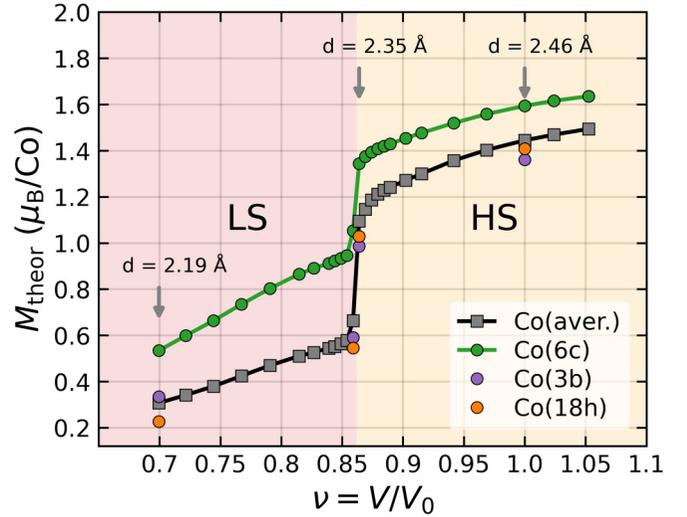


FIG. 5. Calculated averaged and partial magnetic moment of cobalt atoms as a function of the relative volume $\nu = V/V_0$. To facilitate visualization, we give only a few points for $\text{Co}(3b)$ and $\text{Co}(18h)$ sublattices. The arrows indicate the $\text{Co}(6c)$ - $\text{Co}(18h)$ interatomic distances (d) for the corresponding relative volumes.

not realized in the calculation, since there is an unambiguous determination of the global minimum total energy at the given parameters in DFT. The calculated averaged magnetic moments for the two relative volumes $\nu = 0.85$ and 0.87 , which are closely located in the transition region, see Table I, have values of 0.58 and $1.15 \mu_B$, respectively, and have a good correlation with the experimental values of 0.74 and $1.30 \mu_B$. Thus, the modeled HS and LS states in LuCo_3 and the character of the spin transition are found in a very good agreement with experimental data. Additionally, in our calculations we found that the calculated equilibrium cell volume for LuCo_3 is only 3% less than the one corresponding to the experimental crystal structure parameters.

Figure 5 also provides insight of the behavior of the magnetic moments in the cobalt atoms sublattices. For the experimental volume ($\nu = 1$), the $\text{Co}(6c)$ atom has the largest magnetic moment, which is $1.6 \mu_B$. In our calculations, the averaged magnetic moment of the Lu atoms is $-0.50 \mu_B$ for this volume ($\nu = 1$) mostly due to the $5d$ contribution equal to $-0.34 \mu_B$, whereas in the LS state ($\nu = 0.85$) the corresponding Lu moments are -0.19 and $-0.12 \mu_B$, respectively. Because the $5d$ states are very extended in energy and hybridize with both the majority and minority spin electronic $3d$ states of the Co atoms almost equally. The small magnetic moment of Lu is aligned in the opposite direction to the Co magnetic moments. Directions of magnetic moments

TABLE I. Averaged Co magnetic moments, M_{theor} , in LuCo_3 calculated at the relative unit cell volumes near the spin transition and experimentally determined moments, M_{exp} , for the [001] direction.

Spin state	V/V_0	$M_{\text{theor}}, \mu_B/\text{Co}$	$M_{\text{exp}}, \mu_B/\text{Co} (T = 2 \text{ K})$
LS	0.85	0.58	0.74
HS	0.87	1.15	1.30

in $4f$ - $3d$ intermetallics are determined by a number of factors including the type of R and $3d$ atoms, values of moments, hybridization, and various types of exchange interactions in the $4f$ - $3d$ compounds [5,31,32]. The Co(3b) and Co(18h) atoms have the similar magnetic moments equal to $1.4 \mu_B$, and have the same shape as the averaged Co moment, for this reason, in Fig. 5 only a few values for these two types of Co are given. Figure 5 shows that all sublattices undergo a large jump in the transition region. The main contribution to magnetization in the HS state is given by the Co(18h) atoms, as is easy to see, owing to the small difference between the magnetic moments of the sublattices. The dominant contribution to the LuCo₃ magnetism is determined by the atoms of the Co(6c) and Co(18h) sublattices. Co(6c) atoms are located between two pure Co(18h) layers. The Co(6c)-Co(18h) interatomic

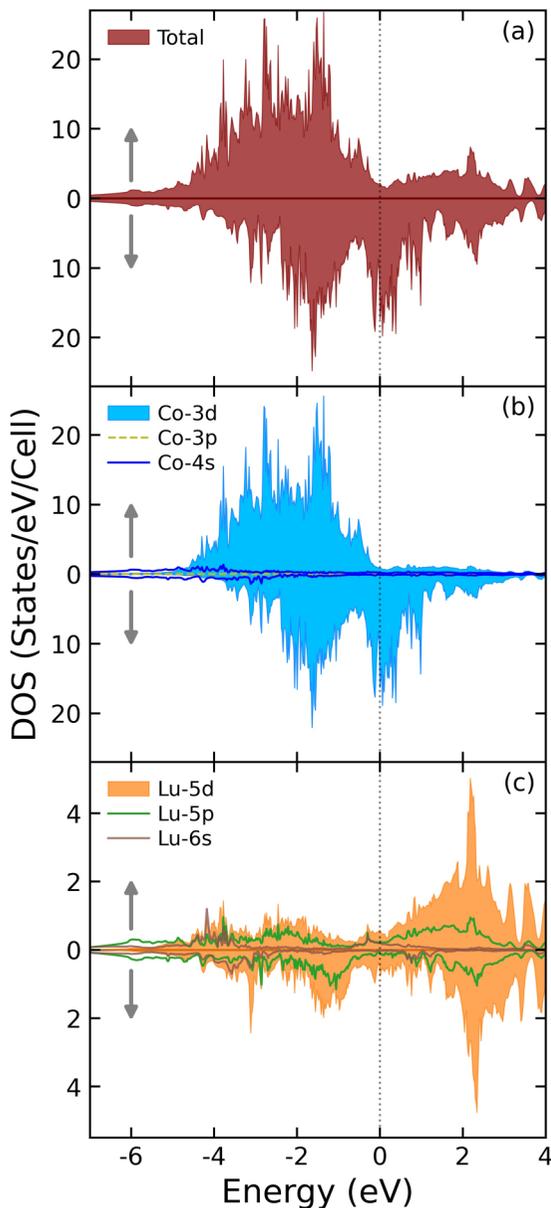


FIG. 6. Spin-polarized total and partial density of states of the Lu and Co atoms for the experimental lattice parameters ($\nu = 1$, HS).

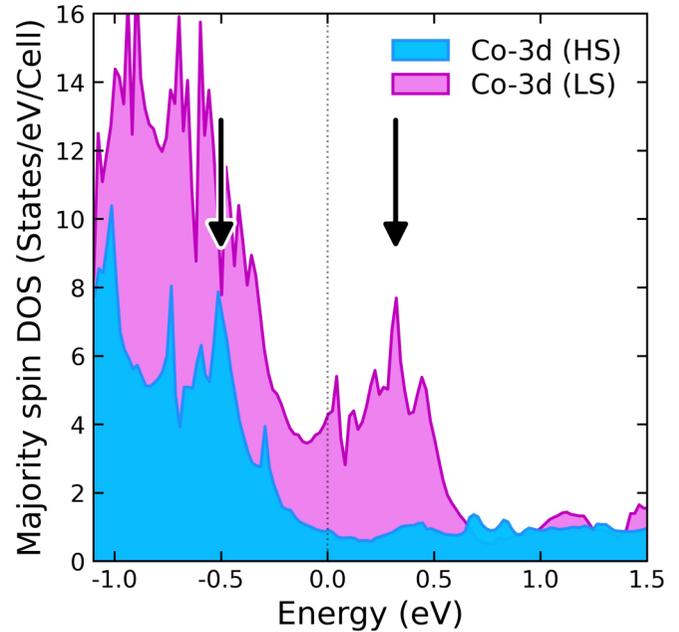


FIG. 7. The majority density of states of the Co atoms for the relative unit cell volumes $\nu = 1$ (HS) and $\nu = 0.85$ (LS).

distance is minimal in LuCo₃ and is $d = 2.46 \text{ \AA}$ at $\nu = 1$ (the distances for other ν are indicated in the Fig. 5). This distance defines the characteristic interatomic scale in LuCo₃, since the Co(18h)-Co(18h) and Co(3b)-Co(18h) distances, are only slightly (about 0.01 \AA) larger than the Co(6c)-Co(18h) one. Note that in LuCo₂, the minimum distance of Co-Co atoms is 2.54 \AA (based on data [33]), which is greater than the one in LuCo₃.

The behavior of the magnetic characteristics of LuCo₃ can be understood through its electronic structure analysis for different volumes. Since we have not found calculations of the electronic structure for LuCo₃ in the literature, we first present its general structure. The spin-polarized total and partial density of states of the Lu and Co atoms in the energy range from -7 to 4 eV for the experimental lattice parameters ($\nu = 1$) are shown in Fig. 6. The main contribution to the filled d band and, consequently, the total filled density of electronic states [Fig. 6(a)] is formed by the $3d$ states of the Co atoms [Fig. 6(b)], which are approximately located in the energy range from -5 eV to 0 eV. The second largest contribution to the total density of states is formed by the $5d$ states of the Lu atoms [Fig. 6(c)]. Other states contribute less to this energy range.

Let us now compare the majority (\uparrow) density of states of the Co atoms for the relative unit cell volumes $\nu = 1$ (HS) and $\nu = 0.85$ (LS) [Fig. 7]. Both densities of states near the Fermi level have a sharp peak, namely, about -0.5 eV for $\nu = 1$ and 0.35 eV for $\nu = 0.85$. The main contribution to this peak is formed by the electrons with the symmetry $d_{xz,yz}$. A sharp decrease of the Co magnetic moment is equivalent to the peak in the $3d$ band passing through the Fermi level [Fig. 5].

The positions of the majority and minority spin states with respect to the Fermi level is controlled by external magnetic

field. If the system is in the LS state, the sharp peak in the majority density of the Co states moves upward in energy with magnetic field, approaching to the Fermi level. At the same time, the minority density of the Co states remains high near the Fermi level. According to the generalized Stoner criterion [34,35], the high density for both spin states, $(n_{\uparrow}(E_F))^{-1} + (n_{\downarrow}(E_F))^{-1} > 4I$, where $n_{\uparrow,\downarrow}(E_F)$ is the spin density of states at the Fermi level and I is the Stoner parameter, leads to an instability of the system. In fact, the instability causes the peak to instantly pass (“overjump”) through vicinity of the Fermi level in order to realize a stable HS state. This leads in turn to an abrupt increase (decrease) in the number of electrons in the majority (minority) spin state and, as a consequence, to an abrupt increase in the magnetic moment, which is observed in experiment.

IV. CONCLUSION

LuCo₃ is an itinerant ferromagnet (Curie temperature 376 ± 5 K) with a large uniaxial magnetic anisotropy. We found a magnetic field-induced phase transition just below 50 T for magnetic field applied along the easy and hard magnetization directions. The transition shows a pronounced anisotropy of the magnetization jump and hysteresis. Our *ab initio* calculations based on the DFT reveal that a strong sensitivity of magnetic subsystem of LuCo₃ to magnetic field is due to the significant change of the occupancies of the Co 3*d* electronic states. In the theoretical calculations, two

distinctive HS and LS states of the Co atoms in LuCo₃ for different Co-Co distances are found with a drastic change between them of approximately $0.5 \mu_B$, which is in a good agreement with the average experimental value of $0.56 \mu_B$ for this jump. The reason for this drastic change we relate to the presence of instability in the Co 3*d* density of states. The magnetization jump reflects a transition from a LS to a HS state as a sharp peak in the majority density of the Co 3*d* states passes through the Fermi level. It was also found that the magnetic moments of all three types of the Co atoms have a similar type of behavior during the spin transition. The magnetic moments of the Co(3*b*) and Co(18*h*) atoms are very close to the average value of the Co magnetic moment, the magnetic moment of the Co(6*c*) has the higher value but also shows the characteristic spin transition change.

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