

Multiple topological phases in tetradymite compounds $M_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ ($M = \text{Ti, Zr, or Hf}$)M. J. Pan^{1,2,*}, B.-X. Li^{1,2,*}, H. Wang^{3,4,*}, J. D. Liu^{1,2}, F. M. Chen^{1,2}, J. R. Huang^{1,2}, G. X. Qu^{1,2}, S. Y. Gao^{1,2},
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Since the advent of time-reversal-invariant topological insulators, the generalization of topology concepts has led to the discovery of a wide range of topological states. These topological states may undergo topological phase transitions (TPTs) accompanied by discontinuous changes in topological invariants. In this Letter, by combining time- and angle-resolved photoemission spectroscopy measurements with first-principles calculations, we have demonstrated the existence of distinct TPTs in the unoccupied states above the Fermi level in the $M_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ ($M = \text{Ti, Zr, or Hf}$) family. These TPTs arise from the inversion of the transition metal d and Te p orbitals due to the enhancement of spin-orbit coupling and variation in crystal fields, as the transition metal changes from $3d$ to $4d$ and then to $5d$. Eventually, dual topological states are achieved in the $5d$ system $\text{Hf}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$, where a type-III Dirac semimetal state coexists with a strong topological insulator state. Finally, we reveal a rapid relaxation process in the nonequilibrium population of the Dirac surface state due to the presence of an additional interband scattering channel in the bulk.

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Topological insulators represent a class of novel states of quantum matter characterized by gapless boundary states traversing the bulk band gap, protected by nontrivial topology within the bulk [1–11]. They are categorized based on topological invariants, such as strong and weak topological insulators distinguished by the Z_2 topological invariant [5]. Another important class of topological states, topological semimetals, feature protected band crossings between valence and conduction bands, categorized by the number and dimensionality of band degeneracy, such as Dirac and Weyl semimetals with four- and twofold degenerate points, respectively [12–24]. The degenerate points with a nonzero Chern number exhibit exotic surface Fermi arcs connecting their surface projections [12]. Topological phase transitions (TPTs) may occur between different types of topological states by varying various parameters, such as spin-orbit coupling (SOC) strength, lattice constants, time-reversal symmetry,

and crystalline symmetries, as observed in ZrTe_5 [25–27], $\text{TlBi}(\text{S}_{1-x}\text{Se}_x)_2$ [28,29], and EuB_6 [30–32]. TPTs could lead to substantial changes in topological effects, offering potential applications in topological electronic devices. Furthermore, multiple topological states can coexist in a single material. For instance, previous studies have identified both topological insulator and Dirac semimetal (DSM) states in the iron-based superconductors $\text{Li}(\text{Fe,Co})\text{As}$ [33], and both three-component fermions and two-component Weyl fermions in MoP [21]. The coexistence of multiple topological states provides a platform to study the interplay between topological quantum phenomena.

Tetradymite structural compounds, exemplified by Bi_2Se_3 , have garnered significant attention due to their remarkable topological properties [9–11], where the introduction of transition metals has led to the emergence of intriguing topological effects, such as the quantum anomalous Hall effect [34,35]. First-principles calculations have predicted that the involvement of transition metal d orbitals can lead to rich topological properties in the $M_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ ($M = \text{Ti, Zr, or Hf}$) family of tetradymite structure [36–39]. Angle-resolved photoemission spectroscopy (ARPES) measurements have revealed unusual surface Dirac node arcs with nontrivial spin

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textures in all compounds of this family [37–42]. However, many crucial topological characteristics reside in the unoccupied states above the Fermi level (E_F) and cannot be accessed with conventional ARPES experimental techniques.

In this Letter, we have conducted a comprehensive exploration of the topological properties in the unoccupied states of $M_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ ($M = \text{Ti}, \text{Zr}, \text{or Hf}$) using time-resolved ARPES (tr-ARPES) combined with first-principles calculations. Our findings provide direct evidence for the existence of TPTs resulting from the inversion of the transition metal d and Te p orbitals due to the enhancement of SOC and variation in crystal fields. Remarkably, we unveil a type-III DSM state coexisting with a strong topological insulator (STI) state in $\text{Hf}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$, in which the Dirac point (DP) is composed of a flat band and a dispersive band. In addition, the nonequilibrium population of the Dirac surface state exhibits a rapid decay towards the equilibrium state, distinct from the behavior in the well-known STI Bi_2Se_3 .

High-quality single crystals of $M_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ were synthesized using the chemical vapor transport method [36,43]. Sample surfaces for ARPES measurements were obtained by *in situ* cleavage under ultrahigh vacuum conditions. The tr-ARPES experiments were performed at the Institute of Physics, Chinese Academy of Sciences, using pump laser pulses of 1.2/2.4 eV and probe laser pulses of 6/7.2 eV at a repetition rate of 500 kHz [44]. We used a configuration with an energy resolution of 10 meV and a time resolution of ~ 300 fs for unoccupied state measurements. For dynamic measurements, we used a configuration with an energy resolution of 30 meV and a time resolution of ~ 100 fs. Synchrotron ARPES experiments were performed at the ‘‘Dreamline’’ beamline of the Shanghai Synchrotron Radiation Facility. All ARPES data were taken at 10 K. First-principles calculations were performed using a plane-wave basis set and the projector augmented-wave method [45], implemented in the Vienna *ab initio* simulation package [46,47] for electronic structure calculations. The exchange-correlation functional employed was the generalized gradient approximation with the pseudopotential parametrized by Perdew, Burke, and Ernzerhof [48]. Slab calculations were performed using the WANNI90 [49,50] software to construct a tight-binding model that fits with the band structure obtained from the first-principles calculation software VASP. Fermi surfaces (FSs) were computed using the open-source code WANNIERTOOLS [51] with the iterative Green’s function method.

We take $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ as an example to illustrate the crystal structure and electronic structure of the $M_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ family in Fig. 1. Figure 1(a) shows that $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ has a layered crystal structure, consisting of quintuple layers stacked via van der Waals forces. Each quintuple layer has a stacking sequence of Te-Zr-P-Zr-Te atomic layers. Because of weak interlayer coupling, the electronic structure exhibits a quasi-two-dimensional character. In Fig. 1(c), the FSs are composed of large elliptical electronlike pockets centered at the Brillouin zone (BZ) boundary and small circular holelike pockets surrounding the BZ center. Figure 1(d) exhibits that although there are no global band gaps in the electronic structure of $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$, direct gaps exist throughout the BZ when considering SOC. We focus on the topological properties of two direct gaps, $\Delta 1$ and $\Delta 2$, as indicated in Fig. 1(d). The slab

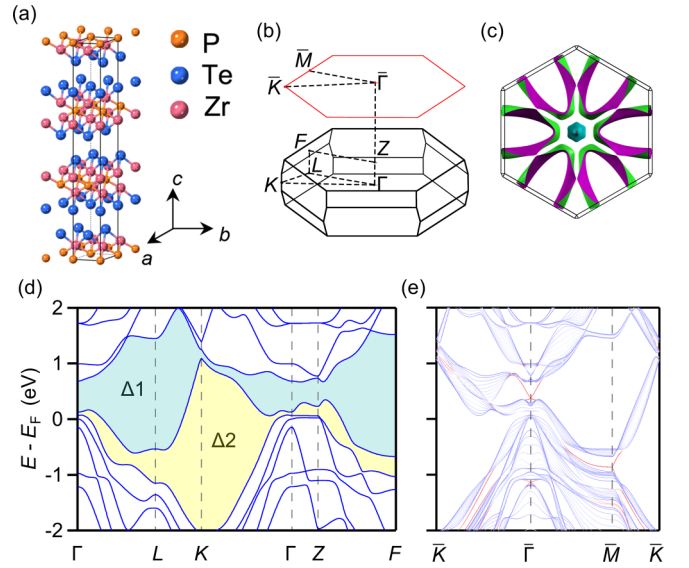


FIG. 1. (a) Crystal structure of $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ with black lines indicating the conventional unit cell. (b) Bulk and (001) surface BZs. (c) Calculated FSs of $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$. (d) Calculated bulk band structure of $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ along high-symmetry lines with SOC. Light blue and yellow regions represent the continuous band gaps $\Delta 1$ and $\Delta 2$, respectively. (e) Calculated band structure along high-symmetry lines of a slab of ten quintuple layers of $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$. Red and blue lines represent surface and bulk bands, respectively.

calculations in Fig. 1(e) reveal the presence of Dirac-like surface states at the time-reversal-invariant momenta (TRIM) $\bar{\Gamma}$ and \bar{M} in the two gaps, indicating nontrivial topological properties. The surface bands within $\Delta 2$ are almost degenerate along $\bar{\Gamma}$ - \bar{M} , resulting in surface Dirac node arcs, which have been observed in previous ARPES experiments [37–42]. The surface Dirac cone at the $\bar{\Gamma}$ point within $\Delta 1$ lies above E_F and awaits experimental confirmation.

We investigate the changes in the topological properties upon replacing the transition metal in the $M_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ family. Since the crystal structure possesses inversion symmetry, Z_2 topological invariants can be derived by analyzing the parity eigenvalues of all occupied bands at eight TRIM, namely, Γ , Z , three L , and three F points [5]. The calculated parity eigenvalues for $\Delta 1$ and $\Delta 2$ are listed in Table I. For $\Delta 1$, the Z_2 topological invariant ($\nu_0; \nu_1 \nu_2 \nu_3$) in $\text{Ti}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ is (0; 000), signifying its trivial topological property. In contrast, $\Delta 1$ has a strong topological invariant $\nu_0 = 1$ in $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ and $\text{Hf}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$. In the case of $\Delta 2$, it has a strong topological invariant $\nu_0 = 1$ in $\text{Ti}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ and $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$. A previous study suggested that $\Delta 2$ has a weak topological invariant in $\text{Hf}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ based on parity analysis at the TRIM [39]. However, our band calculations

TABLE I. Parity products of all occupied bands for $\Delta 1$ and $\Delta 2$ at eight TRIM in $\text{Ti}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$, $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$, and $\text{Hf}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$.

Sample	Γ	Z	$3F$	$3L$	$(\Delta 1)$	Γ	Z	$3F$	$3L$	$(\Delta 2)$
$\text{Ti}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$	–	+	–	+	Trivial	–	–	–	+	STI
$\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$	–	–	–	+	STI	–	–	–	+	STI
$\text{Hf}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$	–	–	–	+	STI					No gap

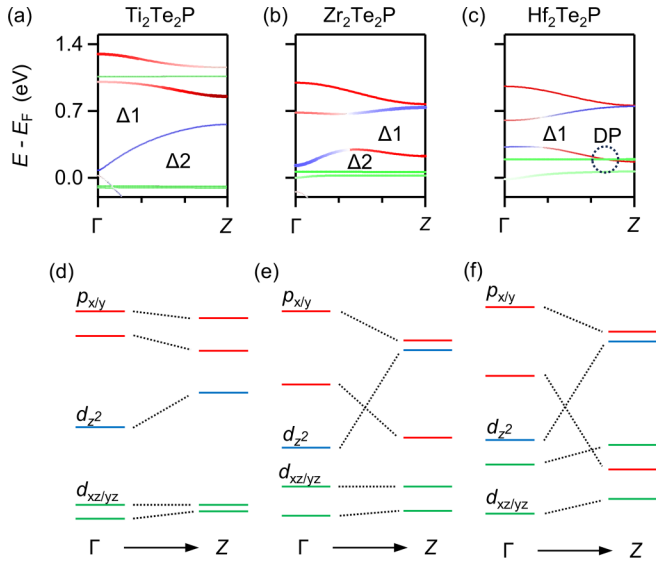


FIG. 2. (a)–(c) Calculated bulk bands along Γ -Z with SOC for (a) $\text{Ti}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$, (b) $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$, and (c) $\text{Hf}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$. Red, blue, and green colors represent the components of the $p_{x/y}$, d_{z^2} , and $d_{xz/yz}$ orbitals, respectively. The dashed circle in (c) indicates the DP on Γ -Z. (d)–(f) Schematic plots of band inversion along Γ -Z for (d) $\text{Ti}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$, (e) $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$, and (f) $\text{Hf}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$.

reveal that $\Delta 2$ is closed in $\text{Hf}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ due to the presence of a band crossing along Γ -Z [Fig. 2(c)], rendering the parity analysis no longer applicable. The band crossing results in a DSM state in $\text{Hf}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$. The parity analysis and band calculations demonstrate the existence of TPTs in both $\Delta 1$ and $\Delta 2$ of the $M_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ family.

To elucidate the origin of the TPTs, we analyze the evolution in the band structure along Γ -Z upon replacing the transition metal in Fig. 2. The related bands are dominantly formed by the Te $p_{x/y}$ and transition metal d_{z^2} and $d_{xz/yz}$ orbitals, represented by red, blue, and green colors, respectively. Figures 2(a) and 2(d) show that there is no band inversion along Γ -Z in $\Delta 1$ for $\text{Ti}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$, consistent with its trivial topological property. In Figs. 2(b) and 2(c), the $p_{x/y}$ bands shift downward due to the variation in crystal fields associated with an increase in lattice constants in $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ and $\text{Hf}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$. Consequently, a band inversion occurs between the lower $p_{x/y}$ band and the d_{z^2} band along Γ -Z, resulting in a TPT from a trivial insulator state to a STI state in $\Delta 1$. This TPT is manifested by the appearance of a surface Dirac cone at the $\bar{\Gamma}$ point within $\Delta 1$ in the slab calculations (Fig. S1 in Supplemental Material [52]).

While the parity analysis reveals a strong topological invariant $\nu_0 = 1$ for $\Delta 2$ in $\text{Ti}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ and $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$, there is no band inversion along Γ -Z in $\Delta 2$ in Figs. 2(a) and 2(b). The STI property of $\Delta 2$ originates from the band inversion at the L point, manifested by the Dirac surface state at the \bar{M} point (Fig. S1 in Supplemental Material [52]). Figure 2(c) shows that the enhancement of SOC in the $5d$ orbitals increases the splitting of the $d_{xz/yz}$ bands, resulting in an upward shift of the upper $d_{xz/yz}$ band. Consequently, a band inversion occurs between the upper $d_{xz/yz}$ band and the lower $p_{x/y}$ band along Γ -Z in $\text{Hf}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$. Since the two bands on Γ -Z belong to different

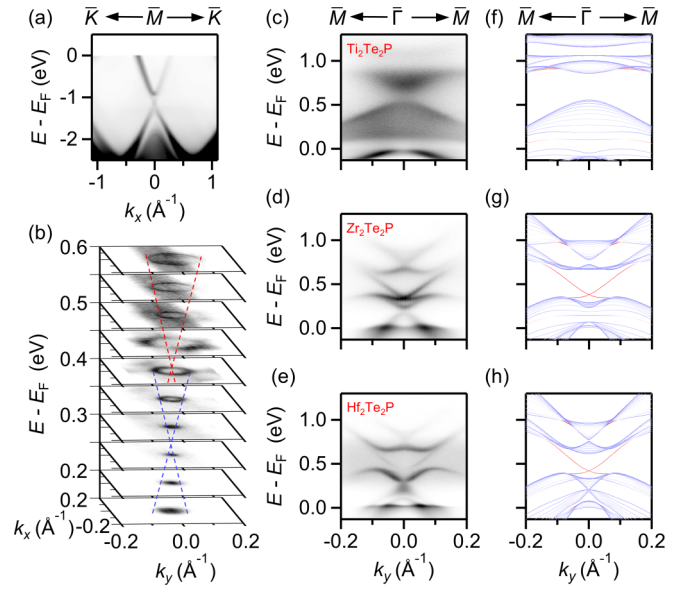


FIG. 3. (a) ARPES intensity plot along \bar{M} - \bar{K} for $\text{Hf}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$. The data were collected with synchrotron light at a photon energy of 94 eV. (b) Stacking intensity plot of tr-ARPES data at different constant energies above E_F for $\text{Hf}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$, showing the coexistence of the DSM state and Dirac surface state. Red and blue lines are guides to the eye that indicate the band dispersions of surface and bulk Dirac cones, respectively. (c)–(e) The tr-ARPES intensity plots along $\bar{\Gamma}$ - \bar{M} of (c) $\text{Ti}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$, (d) $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$, and (e) $\text{Hf}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ at zero delay time. The data in (b), (d), and (e) were collected with a 2.4-eV pump and 6-eV probe, and in (c) were collected with a 2.4-eV pump and 7.2-eV probe because the results obtained with the 6-eV probe include not only the unoccupied states but also image potential state (Fig. S4 in the Supplemental Material [52]). (f)–(h) Calculated band structures along $\bar{\Gamma}$ - \bar{M} of a slab of ten quintuple layers of (f) $\text{Ti}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$, (g) $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$, and (h) $\text{Hf}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$. Red and black lines represent surface and bulk bands, respectively.

irreducible representations under \hat{C}_3 rotation symmetry, the hybridization between them is avoided, forming a DP, as indicated in Fig. 2(c). This results in a TPT from a STI state to a DSM state in $\Delta 2$. We note that the DP is composed of a dispersive band and an extremely flat band along Γ -Z. It is referred to as type-III DP, representing the critical state at the Lifshitz transition between type-I and type-II DPs. The type-III DP serves as the contact point between linelike electron and hole FSs along Γ -Z. The distinctive linelike FSs are protected by a nontrivial topological invariant and can lead to unique physical properties, such as a critical chiral magnetoresistance [22].

The calculations indicate that while the topological characteristics in $\Delta 1$ and $\Delta 2$ are distributed in both occupied and unoccupied states, the TPTs originates from the band inversions along Γ -Z in the unoccupied states above E_F . In Fig. 3(a), the band dispersions of $\text{Hf}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ measured with synchrotron light exhibit a Dirac surface state at the \bar{M} point within $\Delta 2$ below E_F , in agreement with previous ARPES results and band calculations [36–42]. The Dirac surface state is observed in all compounds of the $M_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ family, in agreement with the slab calculations (Figs. S1 and S2 in Supplemental Material [52]), demonstrating that the band inversion at the L point remains unchanged with element

substitution. However, the synchrotron ARPES data do not provide any evidence of the TPTs, since the band inversions are expected to occur in the unoccupied states above E_F . Therefore, we employed time-resolved ARPES with the pump-probe method to investigate the theoretically proposed TPTs.

Figures 3(c)–3(e) display band dispersions along $\bar{\Gamma}$ – \bar{M} in the unoccupied states of $M_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ ($M = \text{Ti, Zr, or Hf}$). In Fig. 3(c), the ARPES data for $\text{Ti}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ reveal two gaps located around 0.6 and 0.05 eV above E_F , corresponding to $\Delta 1$ and $\Delta 2$, respectively. The gap size of $\Delta 1$ at the $\bar{\Gamma}$ point being 240 meV (Fig. S3 in Supplemental Material [52]). The broad distribution of spectral intensity above E_F is attributed to the surface projection of the bulk band continuum with finite k_z dispersions. We mention that the samples are of high quality since our synchrotron ARPES data show clear band dispersions below E_F for $\text{Ti}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ (Fig. S2 in Supplemental Material [52]). Despite a minor discrepancy with the calculations in gap size, the experimental and calculated topological properties agree. No Dirac surface state is observed within $\Delta 1$ of $\text{Ti}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$, consistent with its trivial topological property. In contrast, the ARPES data for $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ and $\text{Hf}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ in Figs. 3(d) and 3(e) distinctly exhibit a surface Dirac cone at the $\bar{\Gamma}$ point within $\Delta 1$, in agreement with the slab calculations in Figs. 3(g) and 3(h). These findings provide direct evidence of the TPT from a trivial insulator state to a STI state in $\Delta 1$.

We proceed to examine the TPT in $\Delta 2$. Compared to $\text{Ti}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$, $\Delta 2$ in $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ is narrowed and shifts upward to around 0.2 eV above E_F in Fig. 3(d). No Dirac surface state is observed at the $\bar{\Gamma}$ point within $\Delta 2$ for both $\text{Ti}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ and $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ in Figs. 3(c) and 3(d). Given the presence of one surface Dirac cone at the \bar{M} point (Fig. S2 in Supplemental Material [52]), there are a total of three surface Dirac cones within $\Delta 2$ in the whole surface BZ, manifesting the STI property of $\Delta 2$ in $\text{Ti}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ and $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$. In the case of $\text{Hf}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$, the ARPES data in Fig. 3(e) reveal that $\Delta 2$ is closed, forming a gapless Dirac cone located around 0.3 eV above E_F at the $\bar{\Gamma}$ point. This observation agrees well with the slab calculations showing a bulk Dirac cone in Fig. 3(h), except for a slight underestimation of the energy position of the DP in the calculations. This Dirac cone exhibits a broad distribution of spectral intensity, in contrast to the Dirac surface state with well-defined band dispersions in $\Delta 1$ in Fig. 3(e). Therefore, the Dirac cone around 0.3 eV above E_F is attributed to the surface projection of the bulk band continuum with finite k_z dispersions. The observation of a bulk Dirac cone demonstrates the TPT from a STI state to a DSM state in $\Delta 2$. In Fig. 3(b), the three-dimensional plot of the tr-ARPES data above E_F illustrates the coexistence of surface and bulk Dirac cones at the $\bar{\Gamma}$ point in $\text{Hf}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$. As the calculations show that the type-III DP is composed of a dispersive band and a flat band along $\bar{\Gamma}$ – \bar{Z} , its projection along the [001] direction results in an almost isotropic Dirac cone in agreement with the experimental results. In addition, unusual surface Dirac node arcs have been observed along $\bar{\Gamma}$ – \bar{M} [37–42]. These results indicate that $\text{Hf}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ exhibits rich and exotic topological properties.

We further investigate the dynamic process of the nonequilibrium state above E_F , using $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ as an example because the dynamical properties exhibited by the other materials are

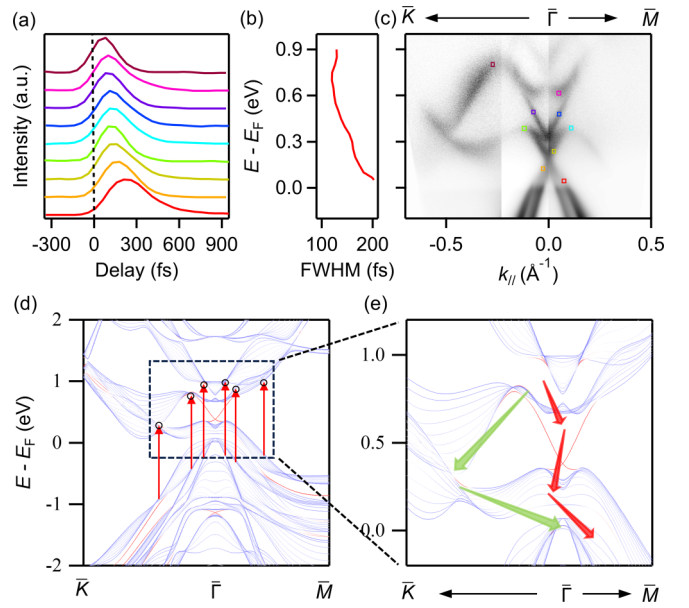


FIG. 4. (a) Delay time dependence of tr-ARPES spectral intensity of $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$, whose energy and momentum positions are indicated in (c). The data were collected using 1.2-eV pump and 6-eV probe with an improved time resolution of ~ 100 fs. (b) The curve depicting full width at half maximum (FWHM) values in (a) with respect to energy level. (c) The tr-ARPES intensity plot along \bar{K} – $\bar{\Gamma}$ – \bar{M} of $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ at zero delay time, collected with a 1.2-eV pump and 7.2-eV probe. (d) Accessible channels for optical excitation under a 1.2-eV pump are indicated by red arrows in the slab calculations of $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$. (e) Schematic representation for the relaxation process of photoexcited electrons back to the equilibrium state via electron-electron scattering. Red and green arrows indicate bulk-to-bulk and bulk-to-surface interband scattering channels, respectively.

nearly identical. Figure 4(a) shows the variation of spectral intensity with delay time at different energy-momentum positions of the unoccupied state. The relaxation curves of high-lying states exhibit a Gauss-like shape with its width close to the time resolution, indicating a rapid decay towards the equilibrium state. Figure 4(b) exhibits that the relaxation time moderately increases at lower-energy positions. The relaxation process remains consistently rapid whether for surface or bulk states in $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$, in contrast to the long-lived population of the Dirac surface state observed in the well-known STI Bi_2Se_3 [53–56]. The large bulk band gap in Bi_2Se_3 renders electron-phonon coupling incapable of recombining electrons with the valence bands, leading to a metastable population at the bulk conduction band edge, which feeds a nonequilibrium population of the surface state persisting for >10 ps [54]. Our tr-ARPES data with a larger momentum range along $\bar{\Gamma}$ – \bar{K} in Fig. 4(c) reveal a band overlap in $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$, caused by the projection along k_z of the bulk bands, as shown in the slab calculations in Fig. 4(e). Figure 4(d) illustrates that direct optical excitation by a 1.2-eV pump results in a nonequilibrium population of high-lying states in the bulk. After excitation, electrons relax back to the occupied state through intra- and interband scattering. As illustrated in Fig. 4(e), unlike in Bi_2Se_3 [54], the Dirac surface state is not the only channel in the relaxation process in $\text{Zr}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$, since

the band overlap provides an additional interband scattering channel in the bulk. Therefore, although the topological surface state observed in $\Delta 1$ closely resembles that in Bi_2Se_3 , the additional scattering channel leads to distinct behavior in the relaxation process.

In summary, we have clearly revealed the existence of multiple topological states in the $M_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ family. The transition metal d orbitals play a crucial role in these topological states. As the transition metal changes from $3d$ to $4d$ and then to $5d$, the d - p type band inversions occur successively, resulting in distinct TPTs in different bulk band gaps. The band inversion in $\text{Hf}_2\text{Te}_2\text{P}$ results in a type-III DP composed of a flat band and a dispersive band. This marks the identification of a topological semimetal state in tetradymite structural compounds, where many well-known topological insulators have been discovered. The coexistence of type-III DPs with surface

Dirac nodal arcs and an almost isotropic surface Dirac cone in a single topological material provides a promising platform for studying the interplay between different types of Dirac fermions at different locations in energy-momentum space.

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