

## Thermodynamic nature of the antiferromagnetic transition in $\text{Na}_x\text{CoO}_2$

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High-resolution thermal expansion measurements of single-crystalline  $\text{Na}_{0.80}\text{CoO}_2$  reveal continuous behavior of the paramagnetic-antiferromagnetic phase transition at  $T_M=21.7(1)$  K with critical exponent  $\alpha=0.18(2)$ . The thermal expansion is found to be highly anisotropic. Thermodynamic analysis provides the hydrostatic pressure derivative  $dT_M/dP=+4.6(2)$  K/GPa. Similar measurements and analysis are presented for  $\text{Na}_{0.75}\text{CoO}_2$ .

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The compound  $\text{Na}_x\text{CoO}_2$  exhibits intriguing magnetic and transport properties.<sup>1-7</sup> Intercalation with water induces superconductivity<sup>8-10</sup> with critical temperature  $T_c$  near 5 K for  $\text{Na}_{0.3}\text{CoO}_2 \cdot 1.4\text{H}_2\text{O}$ . Despite the relatively low  $T_c$ , this compound offers a new window into the study of transition-metal oxide superconductivity because of similarities to the (high- $T_c$ ) cuprate superconductors including an anisotropic structure consisting of transition-metal ion/oxygen layers and a compositional phase diagram where antiferromagnetism resides nearby to superconductivity.<sup>10</sup> Although the antiferromagnetic ordering temperature,  $T_M \sim 22$  K, is low compared to that of the cuprates,<sup>4,7,8,10-12</sup> it has been suggested that spin fluctuations mediate the superconductivity.<sup>9,13,14</sup> For these reasons, determining the fundamental nature of this antiferromagnetism is important since it will constrain theoretical models.

Herein two questions are addressed regarding the thermodynamic nature of the antiferromagnetic phase transition of  $\text{Na}_x\text{CoO}_2$ . (1) Is the transition continuous (second order) and (2) if so, what is the magnitude of the critical exponent  $\alpha$  associated with the specific heat? To answer these questions, high-resolution thermal expansion and heat capacity measurements are utilized. Simultaneous application of these techniques can establish whether or not a phase transition is continuous<sup>15</sup> and reveal anisotropies associated with the phase transition. In addition, the extremely high relative resolution of our thermal expansion technique<sup>15,16</sup> reveals new details about the general physical behavior of  $\text{Na}_x\text{CoO}_2$ .

The single crystals, grown by the optical float-zone method, have lattice parameters  $a=2.83$  Å,  $c=10.88$  Å ( $x=0.75$ ) and  $a=2.83$  Å,  $c=10.84$  Å ( $x=0.80$ ), consistent with published values.<sup>5-7,17</sup> Heat capacity and dc-magnetization measurements were performed using a Quantum Design Physical Properties Measurement System. A fused-quartz dilatometer<sup>16</sup> was used to measure linear thermal expansion along the  $a$  and  $c$  axes; it can detect 0.1 Å length changes. Thermal expansion is measured on warming from 6 K at a rate of 0.20(1) K/min; for the present data, the samples were cooled at less than 1.1 K/min. In the course of this study, thermal expansion was measured along each axis on two separate crystals removed from the  $x=0.80$  single crystal boule; one of these was measured twice. One  $x=0.75$  crystal

was measured; its thermal expansion was measured three times along each axis. In all of these measurements, the features discussed below reproduced well. The  $x=0.75$  and 0.80 crystals used to acquire the data shown below had thicknesses of 1.342 and 1.191 mm ( $a$  axis), and 2.329 and 1.015 mm ( $c$  axis), respectively.

Magnetic susceptibility  $\chi$  vs temperature was measured with field parallel to the  $a$  and  $c$  directions. The data (not shown) display signatures of antiferromagnetic ordering at  $T_M=21.8(2)$  K for both samples. Above  $T_M$ ,  $\chi$  decreases with increasing temperature and is approximately field independent indicating a paramagnetic state. Other reports<sup>2,3</sup> agree with our measurements. Linear behavior is observed in  $\chi^{-1}$  vs temperature ( $50 \text{ K} < T < 200 \text{ K}$ ) for the  $a$  and  $c$  directions. Using the Curie-Weiss law [ $\chi=C/(T-\Theta)$ ,  $C$  is the Curie constant], it was possible to determine  $\Theta$  from the  $a$  axis data as  $-251$  and  $-257$  K and the  $c$  axis data as  $-149$  and  $-195$  K for  $x=0.75$  and 0.80, respectively. Negative  $\Theta$  values are consistent with antiferromagnetic order<sup>2,18</sup> below  $T_M$ . The large magnitude of the  $\Theta$  values indicate a high degree of Na order.<sup>18</sup>

Heat capacity at constant pressure  $C_p$  (insets of Fig. 1) for  $x=0.80$  and 0.75 clearly reveals the antiferromagnetic transition at  $T_M$ . The absolute values of  $C_p(T)$  are of the same magnitude as reported previously.<sup>2,3,18</sup> Our high-resolution linear thermal expansion results are shown in Fig. 1 where  $\Delta L/L_{300 \text{ K}}$  is plotted for the  $a$  and  $c$  directions. The shrinkage along  $c$  is one order of magnitude larger than along  $a$  in the temperature range  $6 \text{ K} < T < 300 \text{ K}$ . This anisotropy is common in layered hexagonal structures<sup>16,20,21</sup> which are significantly stiffer along the  $a$  direction. An interesting feature occurs around 220 K in both the  $a$  and  $c$  axes (the feature is most prominent in the  $c$  axis data of the  $x=0.75$  sample). This effect seems correlated with the deviation of the Curie-Weiss law above  $\sim 200$  K. Its origin may be related to Na-ion mobility as reported by others.<sup>4,5,17,18</sup> We found that cooling our samples at rates higher than 1.1 K/min had a strong influence on this feature in the  $x=0.75$  sample, suggesting that it is first-order in nature.

Figure 2 highlights the behavior of  $\Delta L/L_{300 \text{ K}}$  in the vicinity of  $T_M$ . Distinct changes in slope resulting from the paramagnetic-antiferromagnetic phase transition occur at  $T_M$ .

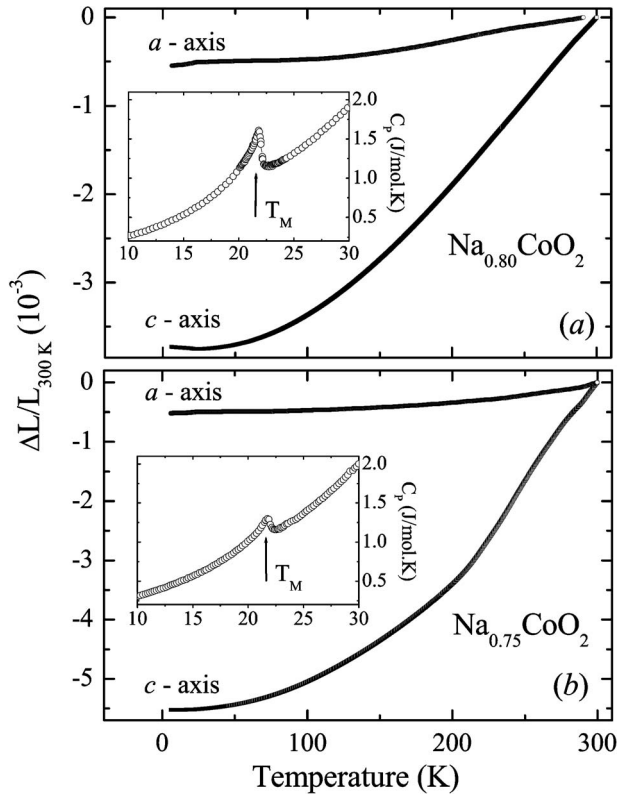


FIG. 1. Linear thermal expansion  $\Delta L/L_{300\text{ K}}$  for (a)  $\text{Na}_{0.80}\text{CoO}_2$  and (b)  $\text{Na}_{0.75}\text{CoO}_2$ . Insets show  $C_p$  near  $T_M$ .

These thermal expansion data possess more than four orders of magnitude higher *relative* resolution than thermal expansion data from x-ray or neutron diffraction.<sup>19</sup> They are raw data, corrected for the thermal expansion of fused quartz,<sup>16</sup> with no other processing or averaging. The 100 Å bar in the upper panel of Fig. 2 illustrates this resolution; it represents an *absolute* length scale for the 2.329 mm long sample along *a* and reveals the Å-scale resolution.

Figure 3(a) shows the linear ( $\mu_a$  and  $\mu_c$ ) and volumetric ( $\Omega$ ) thermal expansion coefficients for  $x=0.80$  near  $T_M$ . They were obtained by differentiating  $\Delta L/L_{300\text{ K}}$  using a method described previously.<sup>16</sup> The volume thermal expansion was calculated through the relation  $\Omega=2\mu_a+\mu_c$ . The shape of the magnetic phase transition is reminiscent of a  $\lambda$ -transition.<sup>21</sup> A negative  $\mu_c$  is observed below  $T_M$ . Negative thermal expansivities are common in the *c* direction of layered hexagonal structures.<sup>20,21</sup> The thermal expansion coefficients of the  $x=0.75$  crystal [Fig. 3(b)] behave in a similar fashion although the negative thermal expansion along *c* does not occur near  $T_M$  and *slightly* negative values of  $\mu_c$  occur only below 8 K; the sharpness of the peak in  $\mu_c$  was influenced by the cooling rate which suggests that Na diffusion among vacancies<sup>5</sup> may affect the magnetic transition in this sample. This effect was not observed in the  $x=0.80$  sample.

It is significant that according to the third law of thermodynamics,  $\Omega$ ,  $\mu_a$ , and  $\mu_c$  must tend to zero as  $T$  approaches zero; the hypothetical behavior is indicated by the dashed lines in Fig. 3 for  $\Omega$ . Distinct curvature toward zero is visible in our data for  $x=0.75$  and 0.80 below  $\sim 6.2$  K, which coincides with downturns in  $C_p$  as reported previously.<sup>18</sup> The

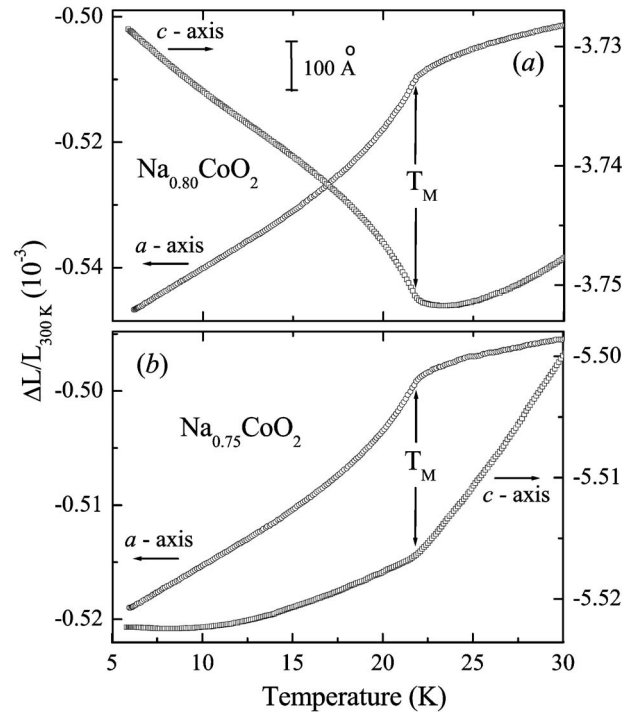


FIG. 2.  $\Delta L/L_{300\text{ K}}$  near  $T_M$  for (a)  $\text{Na}_{0.80}\text{CoO}_2$  and (b)  $\text{Na}_{0.75}\text{CoO}_2$ . The 100 Å scale indicates the *absolute* length change along *a* for our 2.329 mm  $\text{Na}_{0.80}\text{CoO}_2$  sample.

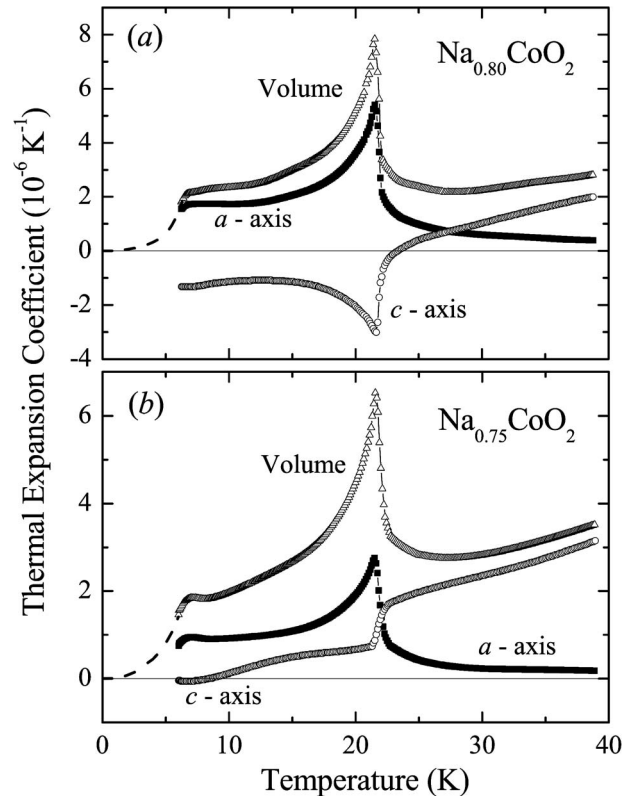


FIG. 3. Linear ( $\mu_a$  and  $\mu_c$ ) and volume ( $\Omega=2\mu_a+\mu_c$ ) thermal expansion coefficients for (a)  $\text{Na}_{0.80}\text{CoO}_2$  and (b)  $\text{Na}_{0.75}\text{CoO}_2$ . Dashed lines (one curve per panel) indicate behavior expected from the third law of thermodynamics.

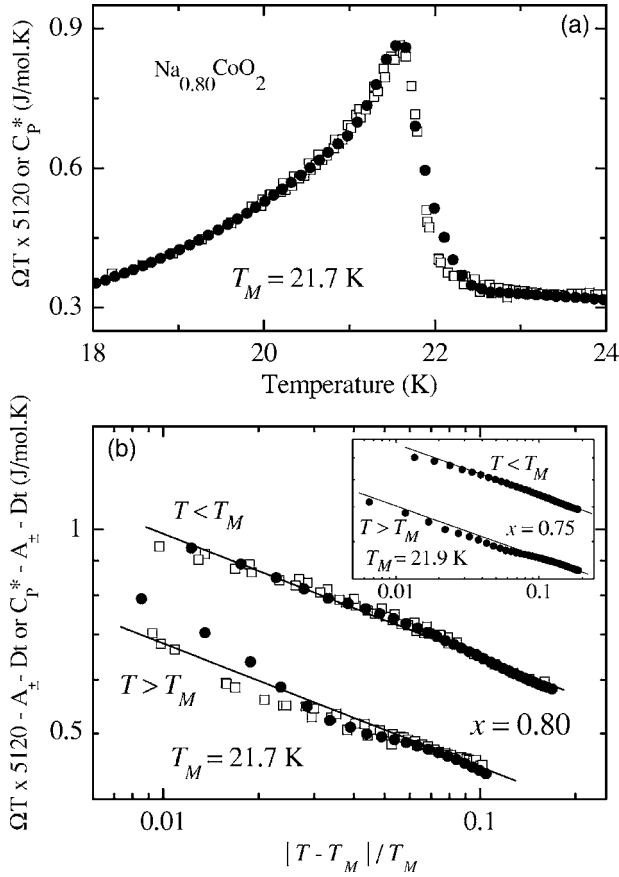


FIG. 4. (a) Overlap of  $\Omega T$  (closed symbols) and  $C_p^*$  (open symbols) for  $x=0.80$ . (b) The critical behavior above and below  $T_M$  using  $\Omega T$  and  $C_p^*$  on a log-log plot. Linear least-squares fitting (solid line) reveals the same exponent  $\alpha=0.18(2)$  above and below  $T_M$ . The inset shows  $\Omega T$  (arbitrary scale) for  $x=0.75$  which yields  $\alpha=0.18(1)$ .

physical origin of these features are unclear. Perhaps another phase transition occurs at 6.2 K or this feature might simply be due to a few anomalous phonon modes.

The phase transition's nature is now evaluated using a recently reported thermodynamic approach.<sup>15</sup> According to this method, if  $\Omega T$  and  $C_p$  reveal good overlap after subtraction of a term linear in  $T$  from  $C_p$  near the phase transition [ $C_p^* = C_p - (aT + b)$ ], the transition is continuous. The results are shown in Fig. 4(a) for  $x=0.80$ . Excellent overlap with  $\Omega T$  in the vicinity of  $T_M$  is obtained, thus the paramagnetic-antiferromagnetic phase transition is continuous (second-order). Analysis of the  $x=0.75$  crystal also revealed good overlap (not shown) and continuous behavior.

In the vicinity of the phase transition, the one-parameter scaling theory of critical phenomena for continuous phase transitions<sup>15</sup> predicts that  $C_p^*$  and  $\Omega T$  must scale as  $\sim |t|^{-\alpha_{\pm}}$ , where  $t \equiv (T - T_M)/T_M$ , with the same critical exponent above (+) and below (-)  $T_M$ . Rather than use a complicated background subtraction, we allow only a subtraction linear in  $t$  and two constant shifts  $A_{\pm}$ . That is, we assume that when  $T > T_M$  ( $T < T_M$ ),  $\Omega T$  can be fitted by the expression  $A_{\pm} + (B_{\pm}/\alpha)|t|^{-\alpha} + Dt$ . Making a grid for  $0 \leq A_{\pm} \leq 0.5$ ,  $-1 \leq D \leq 0$  and  $21 \text{ K} \leq T_M \leq 22.5 \text{ K}$  and plotting  $|t|$  vs

$5120\Omega T - A_{\pm} - Dt$  (or  $2297\Omega T - A_{\pm} - Dt$  for  $x=0.75$ ) on a log-log scale, we choose the set of  $A_{\pm}$ ,  $D$ , and  $T_M$  that maximize the power-law fittable temperature range and minimize the deviation within the fitted range ( $18 \text{ K} < T < 24 \text{ K}$ ). Using the optimal  $A_{+}=0.20(1)$ ,  $A_{-}=0.097(5)$ ,  $D=-0.79(4)$ , and  $T_M=21.7(1)$ ,  $C_p^*$  and scaled  $\Omega T$  vs  $t$  are plotted in Fig. 4(b). Linear least-squares fitting of these data reveals the same exponent  $\alpha=0.18(2)$  above and below  $T_M$ , thus providing further support that the transition at  $T_M$  is continuous. An exponent  $\alpha=0.18(1)$  was obtained for the  $x=0.75$  specimen using  $A_{+}=0.041(2)$ ,  $A_{-}=0.081(4)$ ,  $D=-0.25(1)$ , and  $T_M=21.9(2)$  [see inset of Fig. 4(b)].

The overlap of  $C_p^*$  and  $\Omega T$  is now used to estimate the pressure dependence<sup>15</sup> of  $T_M$  with

$$\frac{dT_M}{dP} = \frac{v\Omega T_M}{C_p^*}. \quad (1)$$

Using  $\Omega=7.8(2) \times 10^{-6} \text{ K}^{-1}$ ,  $C_p^*=0.86(2) \text{ J/mol K}$ ,  $T_M=21.7(1) \text{ K}$ , and the specific volume  $v=2.32 \times 10^{-5} \text{ m}^3/\text{mol}$  from our crystallographic data,  $dT_M/dP=+4.6(2) \text{ K/GPa}$  is determined for the sample with  $x=0.80$ . This result is comparable to  $dT_M/dP=+4.4(3) \text{ K/GPa}$  and  $+2.5(2) \text{ K/GPa}$  for  $x=0.70$  and  $0.75$ , respectively.<sup>22,23</sup> Similar analysis for the  $x=0.75$  sample [ $\Omega=6.6(2) \times 10^{-6} \text{ K}^{-1}$ ,  $C_p^*=0.33(1) \text{ J/mol K}$ , and  $T_M=21.9(2) \text{ K}$ ] yields  $dT_M/dP=+10.0(7) \text{ K/GPa}$ .

The highly anisotropic nature of the data in Fig. 3 illustrates that the transition into the antiferromagnetic state leads to a strain along  $c$  that is opposite to the strain along  $a$ . Although similar anisotropic strains in high- $T_c$  superconductors have been used to estimate uniaxial stress (pressure) derivatives,<sup>24</sup> careful analysis must be applied to correctly consider the stress along one axis, the resulting strains and induced stresses along other axes, and how they affect the transition temperature. This analysis requires knowledge of the elastic constants and will be addressed in future work.<sup>25</sup>

The key findings herein are the continuous nature of the antiferromagnetic phase transition and the critical exponents. The critical exponent  $\alpha$  is larger than typical for standard antiferromagnets, which have  $\alpha$  values closer<sup>26</sup> in magnitude to 0.1. One might associate this difference with the two-dimensionality of  $\text{Na}_x\text{CoO}_2$  or the triangular Co lattice, which could lead to magnetic frustration.<sup>27,28</sup> However, the A-type structure of  $\text{Na}_x\text{CoO}_2$  ( $0.75 \leq x \leq 0.82$ ), with Co magnetic moments oriented parallel to the  $c$  axis,<sup>3,12</sup> would be less susceptible to frustration than triangular lattice systems with *in-plane* magnetic moment orientation.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, the metallic electrical conductivity of  $\text{Na}_x\text{CoO}_2$  ( $0.75 \leq x \leq 0.82$ ) leads to ferromagnetic double-exchange within the Co-O planes that coexists with superexchange interactions along the  $c$  axis.<sup>14</sup> Thus a more likely scenario is that the large  $\alpha$  can be attributed to the simultaneous existence of these distinctly different magnetic exchange interactions. A better understanding of the large observed value of  $\alpha$  will help to constrain theoretical models for novel superconducting compounds.

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