Magnetic Order-Induced Polarization Anomaly of Raman Scattering in 2D Magnet CrI₃

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Supporting Information

ABSTRACT: The recent discovery of 2D magnets has revealed various intriguing phenomena due to the coupling between spin and other degrees of freedoms (such as helical photoluminescence, nonreciprocal SHG). Previous research on the spin-phonon coupling effect mainly focuses on the renormalization of phonon frequency. Here we demonstrate that the Raman polarization selection rules of optical phonons can be greatly modified by the magnetic ordering in 2D magnet CrI₃. For monolayer samples, the dominant A₁g peak shows an abnormally high intensity in the cross-polarization channel at low temperatures, which is forbidden by the selection rule based on the lattice symmetry. For the bilayer, this peak is absent in the cross-polarization channel for the layered antiferromagnetic (AFM) state and reappears when it is tuned to the ferromagnetic (FM) state by an external magnetic field. Our findings shed light on exploring the emergent magneto-optical effects in 2D magnets.

KEYWORDS: 2D magnets, Raman spectroscopy, CrI₃, magneto-optical effect

The discovery of 2D van der Waals magnets has attracted a lot of attention in both fundamental physics and potential applications. Among these 2D magnetic materials, CrI₃ is the most intensively studied, where the weak interlayer AFM coupling can be manipulated by the magnetic field, electric field, doping, and pressure, leading to many interesting potential applications, such as magnetoresistive memories, spin filters, and spin transistors. The recent experiment shows that the AFM bilayer CrI₃ exhibits giant nonreciprocal second-harmonic generation due to the inversion symmetry breaking induced by the layered AFM order, but how this magnetic ordering affects the inelastic light scattering is still unclear. Moreover, the Raman scattering in monolayer and other thin CrI₃ layers with a different magnetic ordering is elusive as well.

Raman spectroscopy is a versatile tool to probe magnetic materials and can provide information on energy, symmetry, and statistics of magnetic excitations, such as fluctuations of magnetic energy density (quasi-elastic scattering), magnons, and spinons. It has been widely used in the study of magnetic phase transitions. Besides the magnetic excitations, Raman spectroscopy can be used to study the phonon behavior induced by magnetic order, including spin-phonon coupling, concomitant structural phase transition, and Brillouin zone folding. In the study of recent 2D magnets, Raman spectroscopy was first used to study AFM order in 2D materials and subsequently used to probe the FM phase transition in Cr₂Ge₂Te₆ and CrI₃.

In this work, we study the magneto-optical effect of CrI₃ thin layers by probing the phonon properties through polarized Raman spectroscopy. For the monolayer, the dominant Raman mode at about 128 cm⁻¹ displays an abnormally high intensity in the cross-polarization channel at low temperatures. Moreover, an abrupt intensity change in both parallel (XX) and cross (XY) polarization channels is observed with the spin flip driven by the external magnetic field. However, this peak (at about 129 cm⁻¹ for bilayer) is absent in the XY channel for the AFM bilayer and reappears when the bilayer is tuned to the...
FM state by a magnetic field. A new peak at around 127 cm\(^{-1}\), presumably due to the Davydov splitting, can be observed in the AFM bilayer, though it is silent in the FM state due to the inversion symmetry changes. This anomalous polarization behavior cannot be explained by the lattice symmetry, and the magnetic ordering must have been taken into account. By group theory analysis, we highlight that the polarization selection rule of optical phonons can be greatly modified by the magnetic order. Furthermore, we also demonstrate that Raman spectroscopy can probe the magnetic order transitions in 3- and 4-layer CrI\(_3\), and this polarization anomaly gets weaker as the number of layers increases.

We first investigated the Raman spectrum of CrI\(_3\) monolayers as a function of temperature. Representative Raman spectra of a monolayer sample at 1.7 K is displayed in Figure 1a, with four Raman modes labeled as A\(_1\), A\(_2\), E\(_2\), and E\(_1\), similar to previous studies.\(^{37-41}\) The dominant Raman peak A\(_2\) only shows up in the XX channel above the critical temperature (T\(_C\), about 45 K),\(^1\) as shown in Figure S1. After the sample is cooled down below T\(_C\), this A\(_2\) peak starts to show up in the XY channel, and its intensity is even higher than that of the XX channel at 1.7 K. Such polarization change indicates strong coupling between this phonon and the magnetic order. Note that this work mainly focuses on the behavior of this A\(_2\) mode.

We next explored the effect of the applied out-of-plane magnetic field. Figure 1b−e shows the evolution of the Raman spectra of the monolayer sample from both XX and XY channels with an increasing (Figure 1b,d) and decreasing (Figure 1c,e) magnetic field. We can clearly see a sudden increase (decrease) of the intensities in both XX and XY channels at around 0.075 T (−0.075 T) with an increasing (decreasing) magnetic field. We plot the total intensity (from both XX and XY channels) versus the magnetic field together with the reflective magnetic circular dichroism (RMCD) signal in Figure 1f, where the observed hysteresis loop is direct evidence showing the spin flip driven by the external magnetic field. The spin-direction-dependent Raman scattering may result from the resonant effect by using a 633 nm laser.\(^3\) The coercive field extracted from the Raman hysteresis loop (about 0.075 T) is less than that from the RMCD measurement (about 0.2 T), which is probably due to the higher laser power used in our Raman measurement (see details below).

The crystal structure of monolayer CrI\(_3\) belongs to the D\(_{3d}\) point group, and the A\(_2\) peak is assigned as an A\(_2\)g mode, associated with the symmetrical breathing mode between the upper and lower iodine layers as shown in the inset of Figure 1a.\(^{39}\) From the selection rule based on lattice symmetry, the scattering signal should only appear in the XX channel. One possible reason for the appearance of the Raman signal in the XY channel is a new Raman mode with the same frequency as the A\(_2\) mode, such as magnon.\(^{37}\) We performed Raman measurements on the monolayer sample at a high magnetic field up to 8 T. However, no observable shift or splitting was detected for this mode, as shown in the Figure S2, suggesting a different origin. Given the fact that the intensities from the XX and XY channels show similar behaviors under a magnetic field, we conclude that they are associated with the same phonon mode. This assignment can be further verified by the group theory analysis.

On the basis of the group theory below, we demonstrate that the polarization selection rules of optical phonons can be modified when the crystal undergoes a transition from a paramagnetic to a magnetic state as the time-reversal symmetry is broken. The monolayer CrI\(_3\) has the crystallographic symmetry D\(_{3d}\) = \{e, 2C\(_y\), 3C\(_2\), i, 2S\(_0\), 3S\(_2\), \} and the Raman tensor of the A\(_2\) mode is derived as eq 1a. If there is out-of-plane FM spin alignment, the corresponding magnetic point group is D\(_{3d}(S_0)\) = \{e, 2C\(_y\), 3C\(_2\), i, 2S\(_0\), 3S\(_2\), \}, where R is the time-reversal operator. According to the group theory, the Raman tensor of the optical phonon in the magnetically ordered state will have the same form as that of the optical magnon because they are constrained by the same symmetry. Therefore, the Raman tensor of this phonon mode will turn into eq 1b in the FM state.\(^{35,43}\)

\[
A_{1g} = \begin{pmatrix} a & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & a & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & c \end{pmatrix} \quad (1a) \quad A_{2g} = \begin{pmatrix} a & i b & 0 \\ -i b & a & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & c \end{pmatrix} \quad (1b)
\]

where \(a-c\) are constants and \(i = \sqrt{-1}\). Obviously, the imaginary antisymmetric terms in the Raman tensor caused by the magnetic order can account for the Raman scattering signal observed in the XY channel (for details, see Figure S3).

For the CrI\(_3\) samples with two and more layers, we observed a new peak at the lower frequency side of the A\(_2\) peak at the temperature below T\(_C\), which is consistent with a previous report.\(^{37}\) Figure 2a,b show the evolution of the Raman spectra of a bilayer sample in the XX and XY channels, respectively, with an increasing magnetic field from −1.5 to 1.5 T. In the XY channel, we observe that the original A\(_2\) peak (129 cm\(^{-1}\)) disappears and the split peak at about 127 cm\(^{-1}\) emerges at B = −0.65 T. As the magnetic field increases, the situation is reversed at B = 0.65 T. As shown in Figure 2d, RMCD plots
Recent theoretical and experimental studies show that the thin layer CrI$_3$ has the structure of the monoclinic phase (space group C2/m) other than the rhombohedral phase (space group R3) for the bulk crystal at a low temperature,\textsuperscript{15,14,44,45} which contributes to the interlayer AFM coupling. Because the lateral interlayer translation breaks most of the symmetries in the monolayer, the CrI$_3$ bilayer only has the following symmetry: $C_{3h} = \{ e, C_2, i, \sigma_b \}$. When the bilayer is at the AFM (FM) state, the corresponding magnetic point group is $C_{3h} = \{ e, R_i, R_y \}$ ($C_{3h} = \{ e, R_{C_2}, i, R_{\sigma_b} \}$), and the Raman tensor of this phonon mode has the form of eq 2a (2b),\textsuperscript{42,43}

$$ A = \begin{pmatrix} a & 0 & d \\ 0 & f & 0 \\ h & 0 & c \end{pmatrix} \quad (2a) \quad A_g = \begin{pmatrix} a & i b & d \\ i e & f & i g \\ h & i k & c \end{pmatrix} \quad (2b) $$

where $a$--$h$ and $k$ are constants. For van der Waals materials, the Raman spectra that originated from a single phonon process can usually be understood by their monolayer structure because the Van de Waals interaction between the layers is weak, and the lattice stacking order only has a small impact on the Raman spectrum. As a consequence, we have $f \approx a$, $e \approx -b$, and $d, h, g, k \approx 0$, and Raman tensor 2a (2b) turns into 1a (1b) (for details, see Figure S5). Consequently, for the AFM bilayer, the Raman scattering in the XY channel is prohibited but allowed for the FM bilayer, which is fully consistent with our experimental observation.

In comparison to the monolayer, there exists interlayer coupling in multilayer CrI$_3$; thus, the original $A_g$ mode of the monolayer splits into $N$ modes in $N$-layer CrI$_3$. Such splitting is termed as Davydov splitting.\textsuperscript{46,47} Given the facts of the spectrum weight transfer behavior and small frequency difference between the split and original $A_2$ modes, we suggest that the split new peak at 127 cm$^{-1}$ is originated from the Davydov splitting. To confirm our assignment, we performed the first-principles calculation within the density functional theory on bilayer CrI$_3$ to determine the frequencies of its vibrational modes (for details, see Figure S6). The calculated frequency difference between those two modes that originated from the $A_2$ mode is about 1.8 cm$^{-1}$, which agrees very well with our experimental value of 2.0 cm$^{-1}$. From the symmetry analysis, the $A_2$ mode ($A_{2u}$) splits into an $A_3$ (Raman active) and $B_{2u}$ (Raman inactive) mode in bilayer CrI$_3$. With a layered AFM spin order, the $B_{2u}$ mode turns into a Raman active $B$ mode due to the inversion symmetry breaking; as of the FM spin order, on the other hand, this mode turns into a Raman inactive $A_3$ mode. Such mode assignments are in good agreement with our experimental findings that the split peak can only be observed in the AFM phase. Assuming a weak interlayer coupling, we can predict that this split peak can only show up in the XY channel (for details, see Figure S5).

The field-dependent measurements demonstrate that the Raman spectra of the monolayer and bilayer CrI$_3$ strongly depend on their magnetic ordering, making Raman spectroscopy a sensitive probe for layered magnetism. We then apply the Raman technique to investigate CrI$_3$ with an increasing number of layers. Figure 3a,b shows the Raman spectra from the XY channel for a trilayer (3L) and a four-layer (4L) sample at $B = -2.0$, $-1.0$, 0 (for 3L, two different spectra for increasing and decreasing magnetic fields), 1.0, and 2.0 T, along with the RMCD plots in the insets. For both samples, the split peak at around 126 cm$^{-1}$ is suppressed at the fully polarized FM state, and the intensity ratio between the split and original peaks changes with interlayer spin configuration.

The 3L sample shows different Raman spectra at $B = 0$ T for the increasing and decreasing magnetic fields, originating from its FM ground states. Moreover, no hysteresis is observed for the 4L sample.

According to the previous group theory analysis, when the multilayer CrI$_3$ is tuned to the FM state, the polarization selection rule of the $A_2$ Raman mode is the same as that of the

Figure 2. Magnetic field dependence of the polarized Raman spectra for bilayer (2L) CrI$_3$. (a, b) Color plots of the polarized Raman spectral intensity versus Raman shift and an increasing magnetic field for bilayer CrI$_3$ in the XX and XY channels, respectively. In the XX channel, only the original $A_2$ peak at 129 cm$^{-1}$ can be resolved, and its intensity undergoes an abrupt change during the magnetic phase transition between the AFM and FM states; in the XY channel, the $A_2$ peak can be observed at the FM state but disappears at the AFM state, and the situation is reversed for the split peak at 127 cm$^{-1}$. (c) Raman spectra in the XY channel at $B = -1.0$, 0, and 1.0 T: line-cut profiles indicated by the purple, green, and red lines in panel b, respectively. (d) RMCD (red) and the ratio of the total intensity (blue) between the split and original $A_2$ peaks over a cycle of the magnetic field.
The split peak at around 126 cm$^{-1}$ where the magnetic order can be deduced from the RMCD plot of fully polarized CrI$_3$ samples with different layers. The sensitivity of the Raman spectrum depends strongly on the magnetic order in thin layer CrI$_3$. The polarization properties of the Raman peak associated with the monolayer, and the magnetic order induces the Raman scattering signal in the XY channel. To investigate the dimensional effect of this behavior, we plot the Raman spectra of fully polarized CrI$_3$ samples with different layers in both XX and XY channels in Figure 4.

The inset shows the Raman intensity ratio of the A$_2$ peak between the split and original A$_2$ peaks changes with the interlayer magnetic order.

**Methods**

Sample Fabrication. Bulk CrI$_3$ crystals were grown by the chemical vapor transport method by using the recipe described in ref 48. Thin layer CrI$_3$ samples were mechanically exfoliated on Si substrates with a 285 nm thick SiO$_2$ layer. The flakes were then encapsulated by hBN flakes using a polymer-assisted transfer technique. All of the above-mentioned fabrication processes were carried out inside a glovebox with an Ar atmosphere to avoid sample degradation by moisture and oxygen. The numbers of layers were initially estimated by optical contrast and later confirmed by both the atomic force microscopy (AFM) measurements and RMCD measurements.

Reflective Magnetic Circular Dichroism (RMCD). RMCD was performed in an autoDRY 2100 cryostat with a base temperature of 1.7 K. A HeNe laser at 633 nm was coupled to the cryostat by using free-space optics. The laser beam was first tuned by a chopper with a frequency of 800 Hz and then passed through a photoelastic modulator (PEM), which operated at 50.2 kHz with a maximum retardance of $\lambda/4$. The modulated laser beam was focused onto the sample by a low-temperature objective with a power less than 5 $\mu$W, and the reflected light was collected by the same objective and detected by a photodiode. The RMCD signal was given by the ratio of ac component at 50.2 kHz and 800 Hz (both measured by lock-in amplifiers).

Polarized Raman Spectroscopy. Polarized Raman spectroscopy was performed using a home-built microscope system in the backscattering geometry. A HeNe laser at 633 nm was used as the excitation laser, and the power was kept below 80 $\mu$W to avoid potential sample damage. The laser beam was focused onto the CrI$_3$ samples along the out-of-plane direction by a 40x low-temperature objective. The low temperature and magnetic field were provided by an AttoCube closed-cycle cryostat (autoDRY 2100). The scattering light was collected by the same objective and detected by a spectrometer with an 1800 groove/mm grating and a TE-cooled CCD. The excitation light passed through a linear polarizer, and a second polarizer was used for the scattered light to select the component either parallel (XX channel) or perpendicular (XY channel) with respect to the incident light polarization. For the measurement under a magnetic field, the polarizer on the scattered light beam was adjusted to compensate for the Faraday rotation angle caused by the low-temperature objective, and we polarized our zero-field cooled samples before taking the valid data to avoid the domain effect.

Please note that, during the finalizing stage of our manuscript, we are aware that two related works about the magneto-Raman of CrI$_3$ were reported by other researchers.

**ASSOCIATED CONTENT**

Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge at https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.nanolett.9b04634.

Temperature dependence of Raman spectra of monolayer CrI$_3$. Raman spectrum of monolayer CrI$_3$ under a high magnetic field, the polarization of the A$_2$ mode in monolayer CrI$_3$, the polarized Raman spectra for bilayer CrI$_3$ at a decreasing magnetic field, extended group theory analysis for bilayer CrI$_3$, and density functional theory calculation of Davydov splitting for bilayer CrI$_3$ (PDF)
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Author Contributions
Y.Z. and X.W. contributed equally. M.H. and Y.Z. conceived and initiated this project. L.W. and J.M. synthesized and characterized the bulk CrI₃ single crystals. T.T. and K.W. provided hBN crystals. S.Z., Q.L., and M.H. performed the group theory analysis. M.W. and L.H. conducted the DFT calculations. X.W., B.L., J.C., and C.Z. fabricated and characterized the few-layer samples. Y.Z. and M.J. performed the Raman and RMCD measurements. M.H., Y.Z., H.Y., Y.C., and X.W. analyzed the data. M.H. and Y.Z. wrote the paper, and all authors participated in the discussions of the results.

Notes
The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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