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Negative and zero thermal expansion in α -(Cu_{2-x}Zn_x)V₂O₇ solid solutions

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Negative or zero thermal expansion (NTE, ZTE) of materials is intriguing for the controllable thermal expansion. We report a series of orthorhombic α -Cu_{2-x}Zn_xV₂O₇ ($x = 0, 0.1, 0.2$), in which the volumetric coefficients of thermal expansion are successfully tuned from $-10.19 \times 10^{-6} \text{ K}^{-1}$ to $-1.58 \times 10^{-6} \text{ K}^{-1}$ in the temperature range of 100 - 475 K by increasing content of Zn²⁺. It has been revealed that the transverse vibrations of oxygen bonded with vanadium are dominant the contraction in the bc plane leading to the overall volume NTE in α -Cu₂V₂O₇. The introduction of Zn²⁺ densifies the crystal structure, which is presumed to suppress the space of transverse vibrations and results in the ZTE in α -Cu_{1.8}Zn_{0.2}V₂O₇. This work presents an effective method to realize ZTE in anisotropic framework systems.

Thermal expansion is a conventional phenomenon in solid materials, which is induced by anharmonicity of atom vibrations. The behavior of thermal expansion could be a drawback influencing performance and lifetime when the devices are applied in a large temperature fluctuation environment^{1,2}. The discovery of negative thermal expansion (NTE) provides a solution to this problem. A series of NTE materials have been found in the last two decades, including oxides³⁻⁶ fluorides^{7,8}, nitrides^{9,10}, alloys^{11,12}, Prussian blue analogous^{13,14}, and metal organic frameworks^{15,16}. Diverse factors can induce abnormal NTE, mainly summarized as low frequency transverse motions, charge transfer, magneto volume effect, ferroelectric polarization, and size effect. Usually, transverse motions of atoms dominate the NTE behavior of framework structure materials, in which structure

possesses high flexibility benefiting from the existence of corner-shared polyhedra. This kind of material has a relatively wide NTE temperature range compared with electron-driven NTE materials. To satisfy different thermal expansion demands, people try to tune the inherent coefficient of thermal expansion (CTE) in the framework structure NTE materials by the methods of chemical substitution^{8,17}, local structure distortion¹⁸, and guest molecular or ions intercalation^{19,20}. As for the control of thermal expansion, zero thermal expansion (ZTE) is expected to be achieved by proper control of NTE materials to eliminate the influence of thermal expansion.

Most recently, a burgeoning NTE material of Cu₂V₂O₇ arouses attention. Cu₂V₂O₇ with framework structure has been found to crystallize in four different polymorphs, in which stable α -phase (space group *Fdd2*) and β -phase (space group *C2/c*) were reported to exhibit NTE^{5,21-22}. Orthorhombic α -phase shows a volume contraction below 500 K while monoclinic β -phase persists NTE in the whole temperature range. Several works have been carried out to investigate the NTE mechanism and tune the thermal expansion of β -Cu₂V₂O₇ by divalent cation substitution for Cu²⁺, but the volumetric CTE still maintains an obvious negative value which is far from zero²²⁻²⁴. Compared with β -Cu₂V₂O₇, elaborate studies on the inherent NTE mechanism of α -Cu₂V₂O₇ are rare, and it prefers to adopt a monoclinic phase after the chemical substitution²⁵. No study on α -Cu₂V₂O₇ thermal expansion control has been reported to date as the best of our knowledge.

Herein, a series of α -Cu_{2-x}Zn_xV₂O₇ ($x = 0, 0.1, 0.2$) have been synthesized by an appropriate solid state method. The partial substitution of Cu by Zn can successfully maintain the orthorhombic α -Cu₂V₂O₇ phase. The volumetric thermal expansion is tuned from negative to zero with an increasing ratio of Zn substitution from 100K to 475K, and the anisotropy of thermal expansion is reduced. The NTE mechanism of α -Cu_{2-x}Zn_xV₂O₇ has been revealed by the combined temperature dependence of high-resolution synchrotron X-ray diffraction (SXRD) and extended X-ray absorption fine structure (EXAFS). It is found that in α -Cu₂V₂O₇ the transverse vibration of O atoms,

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especially the O atoms bonded with V, gives rise to the coupled rotations of corner-shared VO_4 tetrahedra pairs and edge-shared CuO_5 polyhedra, accounting to the overall NTE. With increasing content of Zn cation with larger size, the free space for O atom transverse vibration and rotation motions of polyhedra in the framework structure is reduced, leading to the weakened NTE along the b axis and achieving ZTE in $\alpha\text{-Cu}_{1.8}\text{Zn}_{0.2}\text{V}_2\text{O}_7$.

The solid solutions of $\alpha\text{-Cu}_{2-x}\text{Zn}_x\text{V}_2\text{O}_7$ ($x = 0, 0.1, 0.2$) were prepared by the solid state method under the careful controlled condition (see Supporting Information). The crystal structure of $\alpha\text{-Cu}_{2-x}\text{Zn}_x\text{V}_2\text{O}_7$ at ambient condition was determined by powder X-ray diffraction (PXRD) and SXRD (Fig. S1). It can be seen that the Zn substituted solid solutions have similar XRD spectra with pure $\alpha\text{-Cu}_2\text{V}_2\text{O}_7$, indicating no phase transition or impurity generated after the Zn substitution. The SXRD patterns of all samples can be refined well with $Fdd2$ space group. Fig. S2 illustrates the crystal structure of $\alpha\text{-Cu}_{2-x}\text{Zn}_x\text{V}_2\text{O}_7$. The network of $\alpha\text{-Cu}_{2-x}\text{Zn}_x\text{V}_2\text{O}_7$ is composed of pairwise corner-connected VO_4 tetrahedra and $(\text{Cu/Zn})\text{O}_5$ zigzag columns formed by edge-shared $(\text{Cu/Zn})\text{O}_5$ distorted quadrangular pyramids. The $(\text{Cu/Zn})\text{O}_5$ columns are aligned to the diagonals of bc plane, forming the $(\text{Cu/Zn})\text{O}_5$ layers perpendicular to the a axis. The layers of $(\text{Cu/Zn})\text{O}_5$ columns are alternately arranged with the $(\text{Cu/Zn})\text{O}_5$ layer A and B along the a axis (Fig. S2b). In the same layer the $(\text{Cu/Zn})\text{O}_5$ columns are connected by the VO_4 tetrahedra, while the $(\text{Cu/Zn})\text{O}_5$ layers are linked at both ends of the VO_4 pairs. The lattice parameters of pure $\alpha\text{-Cu}_2\text{V}_2\text{O}_7$ at room temperature are obtained as follows: $a = 20.670 \text{ \AA}$, $b = 8.402 \text{ \AA}$, $c = 6.444 \text{ \AA}$, and $V = 1119.141 \text{ \AA}^3$. With increasing content of Zn substitution, the unit cell expands along the a and c axes while shrinks dramatically in the b axis, resulting in the overall volume contraction (Fig. S3).

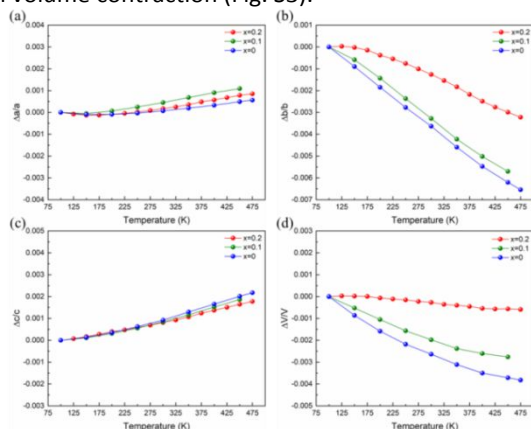


Figure 1. Temperature dependence of lattice parameters of $\alpha\text{-Cu}_{2-x}\text{Zn}_x\text{V}_2\text{O}_7$ ($x = 0, 0.1, 0.2$).

Thermal expansion properties and structure evolutions of $\alpha\text{-Cu}_{2-x}\text{Zn}_x\text{V}_2\text{O}_7$ ($x = 0, 0.1, 0.2$) series were determined by the temperature dependence of SXRD (100 - 475 K). There is no phase transition or decomposition within the measurement temperature range. As shown in Fig. 1, it can be seen that from 100K to 475K $\alpha\text{-Cu}_2\text{V}_2\text{O}_7$ shows positive thermal expansion (PTE) along the a and c axes, while strong contraction along the b axis,

resulting in the NTE ($\alpha_v \sim -10.19 \times 10^{-6} \text{ K}^{-1}$, 100 - 475K). This anisotropic thermal expansion behavior is in accordance with the previous report²¹. It is intriguing to observe that the introduction of Zn has a very limited impact on the thermal expansion properties of a and c axes while a strong role in the b axis, meaning the suppressive anisotropy thermal expansion. When the amount of Zn reaches 10%, the contraction of b axis can counteract the thermal expansion of a and c axes. Consequently, the volumetric thermal expansion of $\alpha\text{-Cu}_{1.8}\text{Zn}_{0.2}\text{V}_2\text{O}_7$ achieves the interesting ZTE over a wide temperature range ($\alpha_v \sim -1.58 \times 10^{-6} \text{ K}^{-1}$, 100 - 475K). It is comparable with the ZTE composite of $\alpha\text{-Cu}_2\text{V}_2\text{O}_7/10\text{wt}\% \text{Al}$ ($\alpha_v \sim -1.47 \times 10^{-6} \text{ K}^{-1}$, 300 - 780K)²⁶, $\text{Zr}_{0.5}\text{Hf}_{0.5}\text{VPO}_7$ ($\alpha_v \sim -1.77 \times 10^{-6} \text{ K}^{-1}$, 310 - 673K)²⁷, and MgZrF_6 ($\alpha_v \sim -2.38 \times 10^{-6} \text{ K}^{-1}$, 300 - 675K)²⁸. The detailed CTEs of the three samples are listed in Table S1.

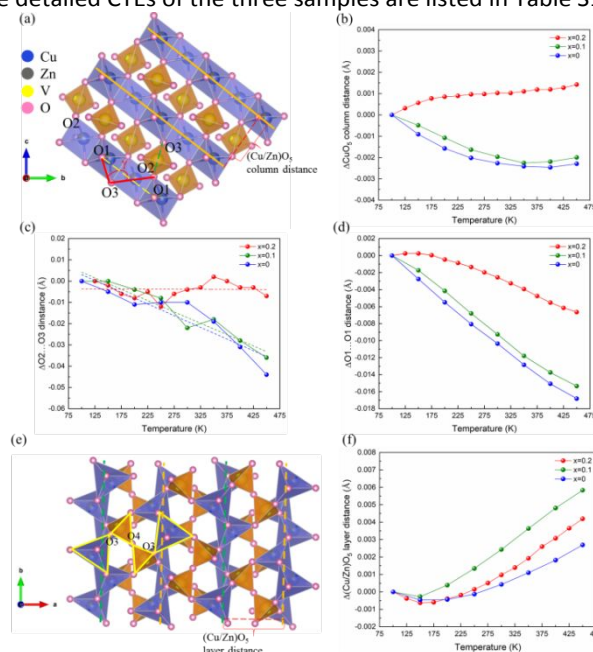


Figure 2. (a) The illustration of crystal structure in a single $(\text{Cu/Zn})\text{O}_5$ layer from the view of the axis a . Orange lines refer to the arrangement direction of $(\text{Cu/Zn})\text{O}_5$ columns. The temperature dependence of (b) the adjacent $(\text{Cu/Zn})\text{O}_5$ columns distances, (c) $\text{O}2 \cdots \text{O}3$ distances of VO_4 tetrahedra (the green line in (a)), and (d) $\text{O}1 \cdots \text{O}1$ distances of the $(\text{Cu/Zn})\text{O}_5$ columns (the yellow line in (a)). (e) Diagram of $(\text{Cu/Zn})\text{O}_5$ layers from the view of axis c . The colored dashed lines refer to the different arrangement directions of $(\text{Cu/Zn})\text{O}_5$ columns. (f) Temperature dependence of adjacent $(\text{Cu/Zn})\text{O}_5$ layers distance.

Why does the unit cell shrink in the direction of the b axis and expand along the a and c axes? According to the feature of crystal structure, it can be analyzed from the aspects of the bc plane contraction and the thermal expansion along with c axis (Fig. S4a), involving evolutions and rotations among polyhedra. From the view of the axis a , $(\text{Cu/Zn})\text{O}_5$ columns are aligned parallel to the diagonal of bc face in a $(\text{Cu/Zn})\text{O}_5$ layer (Fig. 2a). It is interesting to find that the distance of adjacent $(\text{Cu/Zn})\text{O}_5$ columns decreases with rising temperature for both $x = 0$ and 0.1 , while for the composition of $x = 0.2$, the distance variation is small (Fig. 2b). Correspondingly, the edge of $\text{O}2 \cdots \text{O}3$ of VO_4 tetrahedra (the green dotted line in Fig. 2a), which connect the adjacent $(\text{Cu/Zn})\text{O}_5$ columns, shrinks for $x = 0$ and 0.1 , while it maintains a relatively stable value with a slight fluctuation in the

composition of α -Cu_{1.8}Zn_{0.2}V₂O₇ (Fig. 2c). Furthermore, the shrinkage of the (Cu/Zn)O₅ columns is observed, which is believed to be related to polyhedra rotations. The CuO₅ polyhedra rotation can be indicated by the decreasing degree of angle O1-O3-O2 (the red angle γ in Fig. 2a, Fig. S4b). The rotation motions can lead to the compression of zigzag (Cu/Zn)O₅ columns, as reflected by the reduction of O1...O1 (Fig. 2d). Consequently, the (Cu/Zn)O₅ columns evolution results in the contracted trend of the area of the *bc* plane, and by comparison, the introduction of Zn²⁺ reduces the related structure evolutions

On the contrary, the separation of neighboring (Cu/Zn)O₅ layers along the *a* axis becomes expanded when heating up (Fig. 2e and f). As the linkage between (Cu/Zn)O₅ layers, corner-connected VO₄ pairs are straightened, as evidenced by increasing degree of angle O3-O4-O3 (Fig. S5). Straightened VO₄ pairs push the neighboring (Cu/Zn)O₅ layers away, which correlates very well with the expansion of unit cell parameter *a* (Fig. 1a).

The behavior of polyhedral units is studied for further investigation. Different from "rigid unit modes" (RUM) which is often applied to explain NTE in framework structure²⁹, in α -Cu_{2-x}Zn_xV₂O₇, (Cu/Zn)O₅ and VO₄ polyhedra are not rigid during heating. As shown in Fig. S6 (a) and (b), the volume of (Cu/Zn)O₅ expands obviously, while that of VO₄ tetrahedra shrinks with increasing temperature. With increasing content of Zn, the volume of (Cu/Zn)O₅ performs the fastest increase rate, with VO₄ volume decreasing with a relatively slower rate for *x* = 0.2. These results suggest that with increasing content of Zn the volume of polyhedra is more likely to expand, which may also contribute to the weakened NTE. It needs to be noted that both (Cu/Zn)O₅ and VO₄ units are not rigid but show deformations. As shown in Fig. S6c,e, one can see that for the CuO₅ polyhedra of α -Cu₂V₂O₇, the length of the side of O3(long)...O3(short) shortens while that of O2(long)...O3(short) elongates, indicating a non-rigid character of CuO₅ polyhedra, which contributes the contraction of the *b*-axis and expansion of the *c*-axis. Similar deformation behavior can also be observed in the VO₄ tetrahedra (Fig. S6d). The above analyses indicate that the volume variations of non-rigid polyhedra are concomitant with internal deformation. Since the expansion in the (Cu/Zn)O₅ volume overcomes the shrinkage of the VO₄ volume, the single factor of polyhedral volume evolution fails to the NTE explanation. The rotations between polyhedral mentioned before play a key role leading to the ultimate NTE.

To shed light on the inherent driving force giving rise to the coupled polyhedral rotation of NTE, temperature dependent EXAFS measurements for Cu K-edge and V K-edge of Cu₂V₂O₇ were employed. The mean bond length of the four nearest-neighbor O atoms around Cu, and the mean V-O bond length in VO₄ polyhedra have been extracted from EXAFS as well as SXRD (Fig. 3a, b). The thermal expansion of the Cu-O bond is in a similar trend derived from both EXAFS and SXRD. However, it is interesting to find an opposite thermal expansion trend for the V-O bond, where the "apparent" bond length resulting from SXRD shrinks while the "true" bond length determined from EXAFS expands. Such phenomenon is not unusual in those

framework structure, such as fluorides and Prussian blue analogues^{14,30-31}. It indicates that there is a large transverse vibration of O atoms in VO₄. Then we calculated the atomic mean-square relative displacements (MSRDs) for both Cu-O and V-O bonds to investigate the dynamic vibrations. As shown in Fig. 3c and 3d, one can clearly see that perpendicular MSRD is larger than parallel MSRD in not only Cu-O but also V-O bonds, suggesting the O atoms bonding with Cu or V possess larger transverse vibrations than longitudinal vibrations. It is interesting to find that the transverse vibration in V-O bonds is much more pronounced than that in Cu-O bonds, which can be quantitatively revealed by the anisotropy (γ , perpendicular MSRD / parallel MSRD) of the relative average thermal vibrations of Cu-O and V-O pairs. At 300K the value of γ is around 4.9 for Cu-O while that of V-O is 13.5, which is as large as three times of Cu-O. Consequently, we can obtain that the transverse vibration of O atoms linking V atoms dominates the NTE behavior of α -CuV₂O₇ solid solutions.

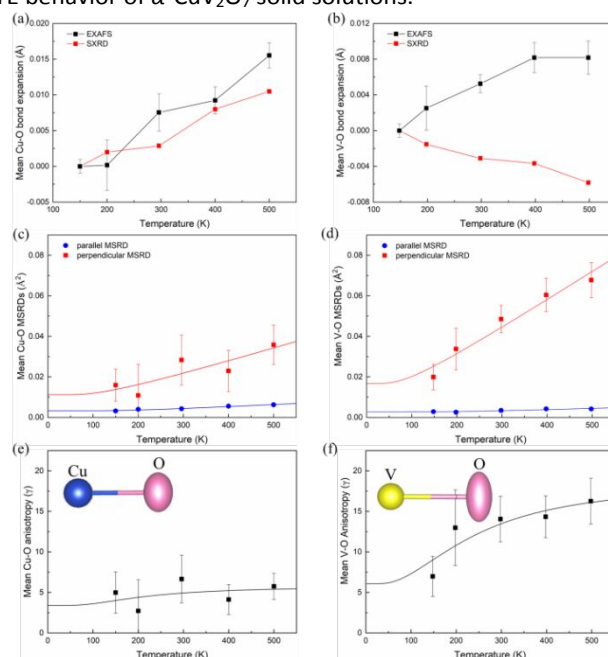


Figure 3. (a) Mean Cu-O bond expansion measured by EXAFS (black symbols) and SXRD (red symbols) (b) Mean V-O bond expansion measured by EXAFS (black symbols) and SXRD (red line). Parallel and perpendicular MSRDs of (c) Cu-O and (d) V-O pairs of Cu₂V₂O₇. Anisotropy of the relative average thermal vibrations of (e) Cu-O and (f) V-O pairs in Cu₂V₂O₇. The solid lines are the corresponding best-fitting with an Einstein model. The insets are schematics of average thermal vibrations of Cu-O and V-O bonds, respectively.

Empirically, in many framework NTE systems, the chemical substitution by larger ions leads to an increase in the unit cell volume, and NTE can be enhanced in a given structure^{8,32-34}. However, in the present α -Cu_{2-x}Zn_xV₂O₇ system the unit cell volume decreases linearly by the chemical substitution of larger Zn²⁺ ($r_{\text{Zn}^{2+}}=0.82\text{Å}$) for smaller Cu²⁺ ($r_{\text{Cu}^{2+}}=0.79\text{Å}$) (Fig. S3). It is deduced that the structure becomes denser after the Zn substitution. Most recently, a new concept of average atomic volume (AAV) was proposed that in those framework materials the NTE is suppressed as the value of AAV decreases³¹. Obviously, in the present α -Cu_{2-x}Zn_xV₂O₇ system the value of AAV is reduced by the chemical substitution of Zn. In addition,

the volume of CuO_5 and VO_4 polyhedra expand after the introduction of Zn (Fig. S6), which also means the free space outside the polyhedra is reduced. As a result, the free space for atom dynamic vibrations is compressed, which inhibits the flexibility of structure and results in weakened NTE.

In conclusion, thermal expansion from negative to zero has been realized in the $\alpha\text{-Cu}_{2-x}\text{Zn}_x\text{V}_2\text{O}_7$ solid solutions from 100 to 475K. It is the first time to reveal the NTE mechanism of $\alpha\text{-Cu}_2\text{V}_2\text{O}_7$ from the perspective of atomic dynamic vibration by joint SXR and EXAFS analyses. It is found that transverse vibrations of O atoms exist in the Cu-O and V-O bonds, in which those O atoms bonded with V show dominating role of transverse vibrations to NTE. The coupled rotations occur among the non-rigid polyhedra, which brings the shrinkage of the *bc* plane and accounts to the anisotropic NTE. Chemical substitution of small Cu by large Zn reduces the value of AAV, which decreases the free space for the transverse vibrations. Ultimately, the NTE of the *b* axis of $\alpha\text{-Cu}_{1.8}\text{Zn}_{0.2}\text{V}_2\text{O}_7$ is much weakened to achieve the interesting ZTE.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

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