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Vacuum ultraviolet photochemistry of the conformers of the ethyl peroxy radical†

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We study the conformers of the ethyl peroxy radical ($C_2H_5O_2$), the simplest peroxy radical having more than one conformer, by combining synchrotron radiation vacuum ultraviolet (VUV) photoionization mass spectrometry with theoretical calculations. The ethyl peroxy radical is formed in a microwave discharge flow tube through the reaction of the ethyl radical (C_2H_5) with oxygen molecules, where C_2H_5 is generated via the hydrogen-abstraction reaction of ethane with fluorine atoms. Two kinds of C2H5+, originating from photoionization of C₂H₅ and from dissociative photoionization of C₂H₅O₂, whose cation is not stable, have been identified and separated in photoionization mass spectra. The photoionization spectrum corresponding to C₂H₅O₂ is obtained and assigned with Franck-Condon calculations. The present findings show that the gauche conformer $(G-C_2H_5O_2)$ of $C_2H_5O_2$ has favorable Franck-Condon factors in the ionization transitions, whereas the contribution of the trans conformer $(T-C_2H_5O_2)$ to the photoionization spectrum is minor or negligible due to its large geometric changes in the photoionization process. Moreover, the reason for the instability of $C_2H_5O_2^+$ and its detailed dissociation mechanisms have been unraveled with the aid of the calculated potential energy curves.

1. Introduction

Peroxy radicals (RO₂) are very important reaction intermediates that play crucial roles in the low temperature oxidation of organic compounds in combustion and atmospheric chemistry. 1-3 In the atmosphere, peroxy radicals are formed via the reaction of alkyl radicals (R) with oxygen molecules. Then the formed peroxy radicals can undergo bimolecular reactions with various species, such as NOx (NO and NO₂), HO₂ and other peroxy radicals, selfreaction and unimolecular reaction. These key processes make an important contribution for the production of secondary pollutants such as ozone and secondary organic aerosols (SOA).^{2,3} Thus the direct measurement of peroxy radicals is a fundamental issue in atmospheric chemistry.

The spectroscopy and structure of peroxy radicals are of considerable importance for understanding their reactivity, sources and sinks in the atmosphere. In the past decades, benefiting from the constant development of analytical methods such as absorption spectroscopy,4,5 cavity ring-down spectroscopy (CRDS), 6-9 photoionization mass spectrometry (PIMS)10,11 and photoelectron photoion coincidence spectroscopy (PEPICO), 12,13 a great deal of advance has been made to unravel their spectroscopy and structures. Among them, PIMS and PEPICO in particular combined with tunable synchrotron radiation as the photoionization light source have attracted attention and are considered as universal and sensitive methods to probe and analyze such elusive species. 14-16 For example, Meloni et al. studied the vacuum ultraviolet (VUV) photoionization of alkylperoxy radicals at the Advanced Light Source by using PIMS and found most of their cations unstable except for the methyl peroxy radical (CH3O2).10 The ionization energy (IE) of CH₃O₂ and the appearance energy (AE) of the CH₃⁺ fragment ion in dissociative photoionization of CH3O2 were measured using PEPICO by Voronova et al. at the Swiss Light Source and Tang et al. at SOLEIL, France. 12,13

With the increase in mass, the structure of peroxy radicals becomes complex, having several isomers or conformers. For instance, the ethyl peroxy radical has two conformers, the gauche conformer (G-C₂H₅O₂) with its CCOO dihedral angle of $\pm 60^{\circ}$ and the trans conformer $(T-C_2H_5O_2)$ with the CCOO

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Paper

dihedral angle of $\pm 180^{\circ}$, and the propyl peroxy radical has two isomers, 1-C₃H₇O₂ and 2-C₃H₇O₂, each of which also has several conformers.6 The knowledge on the isomers or conformers of peroxy radicals is very limited, and identifying them is still a challenge. Recently, using the method of PEPICO at SOLEIL, two isomers of C₃H₇O₂ were successfully identified and assigned in our publication.¹⁷

Here we focus on the ethyl peroxy radical, C2H5O2, and its two conformers, G-C₂H₅O₂ and T-C₂H₅O₂. The ethyl peroxy radical is the simplest peroxy radical having more than one conformer, and has attracted attention. 18-21 Previous theoretical calculations showed that G-C₂H₅O₂ is the global minimum with an energy of $\sim 80 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ lower than $T-C_2H_5O_2$. Upon photoionization, the nascent C₂H₅O₂⁺ cation is not stable and dissociates to C₂H₅⁺ and O₂ fragments. 10,11 To explain the instability of C₂H₅O₂⁺, Meloni et al. suggested the cation has a hyper-conjugation structure. 10 The AE of the C₂H₅⁺ and O₂ fragments was measured at 10.0 \pm 0.1 eV in the photoionization spectrum by these authors.

In this work, VUV photoionization of C₂H₅O₂ has been investigated in detail by using synchrotron-based PIMS complemented by high-level theoretical calculations on the IEs, structures and spectra. After distinguishing two different sources of C₂H₅⁺, originating from the photoionization of the ethyl radical (C2H5) and from the dissociative photoionization of C₂H₅O₂, the photoionization spectrum corresponding to C2H5O2 is acquired and has been assigned with Franck-Condon calculations. The present findings will demonstrate that the G-C₂H₅O₂ conformer has favorable Franck-Condon factors in the ionization transition, whereas the contribution of T-C₂H₅O₂ to the photoionization spectrum is minor or negligible due to its large geometric changes in the photoionization process.

2. Methods

The experiments were carried out on the combustion and flame beamline at National Synchrotron Radiation Laboratory (NSRL) in Hefei, China.²² A fast flow tube was employed as the reactor to generate free radicals and initiate their chemical reactions.²³ A home-made photoionization orthogonal acceleration reflectron time-of-flight (TOF) mass spectrometer was installed to probe and analyze reactants, reaction intermediates and products inside the fast flow tube.²⁴ The detailed configurations of the synchrotron beamline, the fast flow tube and the TOF mass spectrometer have already been introduced before and only a brief description is presented here. 22-24

Briefly, on the beamline, synchrotron photons emitted from an undulator were dispersed by a monochromator equipped with two gratings, 200 and 400 l mm⁻¹, covering the photon energy range of 5-21 eV. A gas filter presently filled with Ar gas was adopted to suppress high-order harmonic radiations from the undulator, and the absolute photon energy was calibrated within an accuracy of ± 10 meV using the resonant absorption lines of Ar in the gas filter.²⁵ The synchrotron photon flux was

measured using a photodiode (SXUV-100, IRD Inc.) and used to normalize ion signals in the photon energy scans.

The fast flow tube mainly including a main tube and a coaxial movable injector was installed inside the source chamber of the TOF mass spectrometer.²³ Fluorine atoms were generated from 1% diluted F2 gas in helium using a 2.45 GHz microwave discharge generator (GMS-200W, Sairem, France) and introduced into the fast flow tube to initiate chemical reactions. Other reactant gases such as ethane and oxygen, together with helium bath gas, were injected via the arms of the main tube or the injector. The total pressure inside the flow tube was monitored using a capacity gauge and fixed at 2 Torr by using a closed-loop feedback throttle valve.

After passing through one skimmer (1 mm diameter), the gas mixture in the fast flow tube was sampled and entered into the ionization chamber of the TOF mass spectrometer, crossing a synchrotron photon beam at a right angle and then being ionized. A cage-shaped photoionization source connected with an Einzel lens was developed to extract and focus ions, and then to enhance the detection sensitivity of the setup.²⁴ The TOF mass spectrometer with an orthogonal acceleration and reflectron structure was employed to analyze the mass of ions. The total ion flight length was ~ 1 m and the mass resolving power of the TOF mass spectrometer was measured to be $M/\Delta M \sim 2000$ (FWHM, the full width at half maximum).²⁴

To provide further insights into the experimental data, theoretical calculations have been performed to study the adiabatic ionization energies (AIEs), the potential energy curves and the Franck-Condon factors, using the Gaussian 16 package and MOLPRO 2015 software.26,27 The geometric structures of the two conformers of C₂H₅O₂ and their cations were optimized by using the M06-2X/aug-cc-pVTZ theoretical methods. The AIEs of the two conformers were calculated using the explicitly correlated coupled cluster single-double and perturbative triple excitations approach, (R)CCSD(T)-F12/aug-cc-pVTZ.27 The potential energy curves of the low-lying electronic states of neutral C2H5O2 and its cation along the C-O coordinates have been calculated at the M06-2X/aug-cc-pVTZ level. In order to assign the photoionization spectrum of C₂H₅O₂, the Franck-Condon factors in the ionization transitions have been calculated at the M06-2X/augcc-pVTZ level too, using the time-independent adiabatic Hessian Franck-Condon model in the Gaussian program.²⁶

Results and discussion

The experiments were performed in sequence and can be divided into two parts. At first, the experiment was carried out without adding oxygen gas into the fast flow tube, and the ethyl radical (C_2H_5) was produced via the hydrogen-abstraction reaction of ethane with fluorine atoms.

$$F + C_2H_6 \rightarrow C_2H_5 + HF$$
 (1)

Secondly, with the addition of oxygen gas, the nascent ethyl radical reacted with oxygen to generate the products, C₂H₅O₂,

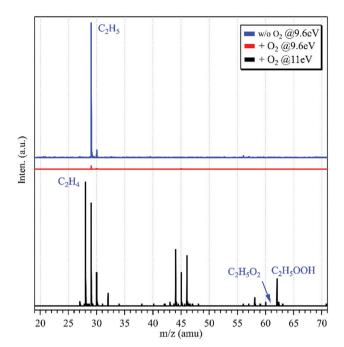


Fig. 1 Photoionization TOF mass spectra acquired without (in blue, $h\nu$ = 9.6 eV) and with (in red, $h\nu$ = 9.6 eV; in black, $h\nu$ = 11.0 eV) the addition of oxygen into the fast flow tube.

ethylene (C₂H₄) and the hydroperoxy radical (HO₂), via the following two reactions. 19,28

$$C_2H_5 + O_2 \rightarrow C_2H_5O_2$$
 (2a)

$$\rightarrow C_2H_4 + HO_2 \tag{2b}$$

The photoionization mass spectrum in the absence of oxygen in the fast flow tube was acquired at the photon energy of $h\nu$ = 9.6 eV and is presented as a blue line in Fig. 1. An intense peak is observed at m/z = 29 and has been assigned as C_2H_5 produced from the above mentioned hydrogen-abstraction reaction (1). Another mass peak at m/z = 30 is observed in the mass spectrum too, and can be ascribed to the ¹³C₂H₅ isotopic ethyl radical with an intensity of about 4% of the m/z = 29 peak. The IE of ethane locates at 11.52 eV, ²⁹ above the present photon energy of 9.6 eV, indicating that ethane does not contribute to the m/z = 30 peak.

The photoionization spectrum of C₂H₅ has been measured by scanning the synchrotron photon energy with a step size of 0.05 eV, and is presented as black squares in Fig. 2(a). The overall shape of the photoionization spectrum is similar to the literature results of Ruscic et al.,30 and the difference might be due to the different internal energies of the produced ethyl radicals and the different photo-flux calibrations in the two experiments. Presently the cationic signal appears at $h\nu$ = 8.33 \pm 0.05 eV in the photoionization spectrum, in accordance with the IE of C₂H₅.^{29,31}

After adding oxygen gas into the flow tube, the intensity of the m/z = 29 mass peak declines, nearly approaching the baseline of the mass spectrum, as shown using a red line in Fig. 1. In addition, almost no other peaks can be observed in the mass spectrum. Previous results have shown that the reaction of

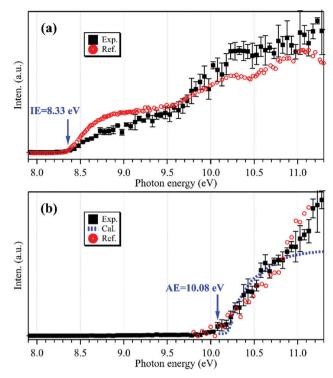


Fig. 2 Photoionization spectra of the m/z = 29 cations acquired without (a) and with (b) the addition of oxygen gas into the flow tube, together with the reference data of C_2H_5 (a, in red) reprinted from Ruscic et al. 30 (with the permission of AIP Publishing), the reference data of C₂H₅O₂ (b, in red) adapted from Meloni et al. 10 (Copyright 2021 American Chemical Society), and the calculated results of $C_2H_5O_2$ (b, in blue).

 C_2H_5 with oxygen is fast with a rate constant of $2 \times 10^{-12} \text{ cm}^3$ molecule $^{-1}$ s $^{-1}$ at 298 K, 32 and can generate the products of $C_2H_5O_2$, C_2H_4 and HO_2 . The $C_2H_5O_2^+$ cation is not stable and the AE of the C₂H₅⁺ and O₂ fragments was measured at $10.0 \pm 0.1 \text{ eV}$, ¹⁰ above the present photon energy of 9.6 eV. For the other products, C₂H₄ and HO₂, their IEs locate at 10.5138 and 11.359 eV,29 respectively, and thus they are not observed in the mass spectrum.

The synchrotron photon energy was increased to $h\nu = 11.0$ eV, and the photoionization mass spectrum was acquired and is presented as a black line in Fig. 1. Similar to the previous results, 10,11 still no signal could be observed at m/z = 61 $(C_2H_5O_2^+)$ in the mass spectrum. But, presently the m/z = 29 mass peak appears again and this reappearance should have a different source as that of the above C₂H₅ obtained in the absence of O₂. In addition, the product of C_2H_4 (m/z = 28) from the reaction of C_2H_5 with oxygen has been observed in the mass spectrum. Some other peaks are observed in the mass spectrum too and can be ascribed to the secondary reactions occurring in the flow tube.33 For example, the m/z = 30 mass peak is ascribed to the secondary reaction product of HCHO whose IE is measured at 10.83 \pm 0.05 eV in the photoionization spectrum (Fig. S1, ESI†), and the m/z = 62mass peak can be assigned as C2H5OOH, the product of the reaction of $C_2H_5O_2$ with HO_2 .

To explain the reappearance of the m/z = 29 peak in the mass spectrum, its photoionization spectrum was acquired (with the

addition of oxygen) and is presented as black squares in Fig. 2(b), together with the literature data of Meloni et al. 10 Unlike the case in Fig. 2(a), presently the m/z = 29 cation does not appear until at $h\nu = 10.08 \pm 0.05$ eV in the photoionization spectrum, agreeing well with the literature, $AE(C_2H_5^+) = 10.0 \pm 0.1$ eV in dissociative photoionization of C₂H₅O₂ measured by Meloni et al., ¹⁰ and thus should be ascribed to the contribution of C₂H₅O₂.

The neutral C₂H₅O₂ at the X²A" ground electronic state has an open-shell electronic configuration of $(11a')^2(12a')^2(3a'')^2(13a')^2$ (4a")^{1,34} Theoretical calculations show that removing an electron from the 13a' orbital or from the 4a" orbital through photoionization can lead to the X³A" ground electronic state or the a¹A' first excited electronic state of C₂H₅O₂⁺, respectively. The geometric structures of the two conformers of C2H5O2, G-C2H5O2 and T-C₂H₅O₂, in the X²A" ground state are optimized at the M06-2X/ aug-cc-pVTZ level of theory and presented in Fig. 3, together with the optimized structures of their individual cations in the X³A" and a¹A' electronic states after checking their individual wavefunction stablity.²⁶ It is shown that G-C₂H₅O₂ takes a C₁ point-group symmetry and T-C2H5O2 has a Cs symmetry. For consistency, in the following text we do not change and will still use the symbols X²A", X³A" and a¹A' (instead of X²A, X³A and a¹A) to describe the electronic states of G-C2H5O2 and its cation. We can see that upon photoionization the structure of the two conformers, i.e. their C-O bond length or the CCOO dihedral angle, changes somewhat. This will be discussed in detail in the following paragraphs.

The potential energy curves of the low-lying electronic states of the neutral ethyl peroxy radical (the minimal conformer G-C₂H₅O₂) and its cation have been calculated at the M06-2X/ aug-cc-pVTZ level of theory, and are presented in Fig. 4.26 Concretely, their structures have been re-optimized at each C-O coordinate and then their energies have been computed. It is shown that the neutral X²A" ground state is bound with a C-O equilibrium bond length of 1.446 Å. The cationic X³A"

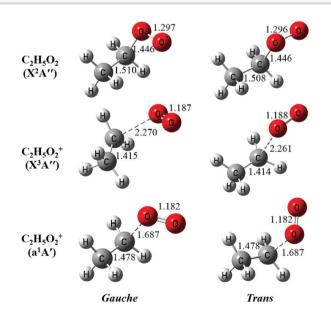


Fig. 3 The optimized structures of the gauche and the trans conformers of $C_2H_5O_2$ and their cations. The bond lengths are in Å.

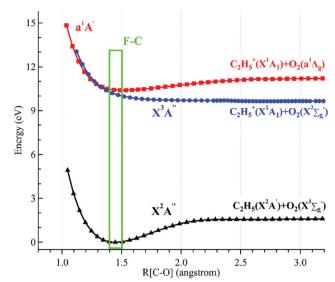


Fig. 4 Potential energy curves of the ethyl peroxy radical $(G-C_2H_5O_2)$ and its cation along the C-O coordinates. The Franck-Condon (F-C) region is displayed using a green rectangle

ground state of C₂H₅O₂⁺ is calculated to be a quasi-bound state with a very shallow well and a substantially elongated C-O bond at 2.270 Å, which is out of the Franck-Condon region reached by ionization transitions, as shown using a green rectangle in Fig. 4. The singlet a^1A' first excited state of $C_2H_5O_2^+$ is a bound state with a C-O bond length at 1.687 Å, close to that of the neutral X²A" ground state, and should be majorly populated in the photoionization process.

Theoretical calculations in particular using energy and charge distribution analyses show that the cationic X3A" ground state adiabatically correlates to the $C_2H_5^+(X^1A_1)$ + $O_2(X^3\Sigma_g^-)$ dissociation limit, and the a^1A' first excited state of $C_2H_5O_2^+$ correlates to the $C_2H_5^+(X^1A_1) + O_2(a^1\Delta_g)$ dissociation limit, not to the $C_2H_5(X^2A') + O_2^+(X^2\Pi_g)$ dissociation limit. ¹⁰ In addition, as shown in Fig. 4, the potential energy curve of the a¹A' excited state crosses that of the X³A" ground state at ~1.3 Å and their mutual interaction, e.g. via the spin-orbit coupling, can cause the singlet a¹A' electronic state to predissociate into C₂H₅⁺ and O₂ fragments along the potential energy curve of the triplet X3A" ground state. This predissociation should be a major reason why the C₂H₅O₂⁺ cation is not observed and why only the C2H5+ fragment ion is observed in the mass spectra. 10,111 In the schematic potential energy diagram of Meloni et al., 10 the a A" repulsive state, which also adiabatically correlates to the C2H5+(X1A1) + $O_2(X^3\Sigma_g^-)$ dissociation limit, was proposed to cross with the a1A' excited state at a larger C-O coordinate and this predissociation might also cause the C2H5O2+ cation to be unstable. Presently the vertical ionization energy (VIE) of the second triplet electronic state, A³A", of G-C₂H₅O₂⁺ is calculated to be at 12.24 eV at the TD-M062X/aug-cc-pVTZ level of theory, 26 as listed in Table 1.

The AIEs and the VIEs of the two conformers of C₂H₅O₂, corresponding to their individual cationic X3A" and a1A'

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Table 1 The ionization energy (IE) of $C_2H_5O_2$ and the appearance energy (AE) of the $C_2H_5^+$ and O_2 fragments in the dissociative photoionization of $C_2H_5O_2$

	State	Species	IE/AE (eV)	Method	Reference
Calc.	X^3A''	$C_2H_5O_2^{+}$	9.58 ^a	$QCISD(T)/\infty$	10
		G - $\mathrm{C_2H_5O_2}^+$	$9.60^a/10.40^b$	CCSD(T)-F12/aug-cc-pVTZ	This work
		T - $\mathrm{C_2H_5O_2}^+$	$9.59^a/10.39^b$	CCSD(T)-F12/aug-cc-pVTZ	This work
	a^1A'	$C_2H_5O_2^{+}$	10.01^a	$QCISD(T)/\infty$	10
		G - $\mathrm{C_2H_5O_2}^+$	$10.13^a/10.42^b$	CCSD(T)-F12/aug-cc-pVTZ	This work
		T-C ₂ H ₅ O ₂ ⁺	$10.13^a/10.47^b$	CCSD(T)-F12/aug-cc-pVTZ	This work
	b^1A''	G-C ₂ H ₅ O ₂ ⁺	11.80^{b}	TD-M062X/aug-cc-pVTZ	This work
		T - $C_2H_5O_2^+$	11.89^{b}	TD-M062X/aug-cc-pVTZ	This work
	A^3A''	G - $C_2H_5O_2^+$	12.24^b	TD-M062X/aug-cc-pVTZ	This work
		$T-C_2H_5O_2^+$	12.18^{b}	TD-M062X/aug-cc-pVTZ	This work
Exp.		$C_2H_5^+$	10.0 ± 0.1^c	PIMS	10
		$C_2^{-1}H_5^+$	10.08 ± 0.05^{c}	PIMS	This work

^a The adiabatic ionization energy. ^b The vertical ionization energy. ^c The appearance energy.

electronic states, have been calculated at the (R)CCSD(T)-F12/ aug-cc-pVTZ level of theory and are listed in Table 1 too, together with the literature data. 10 The calculated AIEs of the two conformers are very close, as the difference between their two cationic states is within 0.01 eV. In addition, the experimental AE of the C₂H₅⁺ and O₂ fragments is close to the calculated AIE of the a¹A' electronic state of C₂H₅O₂⁺, in good accordance with the above results of the potential energy curves.

In order to assign the photoionization spectrum in Fig. 2(b), the Franck-Condon factors for the photoionization of C₂H₅O₂ have also been calculated at the M062X/aug-cc-pVTZ level.²⁶ Theoretical calculations show that the G-C₂H₅O₂ conformer has favorable Franck-Condon factors in the photoionization transition, from the neutral X²A" ground electronic state to the cationic a¹A' first excited state, whereas the Franck-Condon factors of the T-C₂H₅O₂ conformer are calculated to be too low to be reliable. The Franck-Condon factors for the transitions to the cationic X³A" ground state can be neglected, and its large VIE-AIE difference (0.8 eV), as listed in Table 1, is also an indicator for the negligible ionization cross section. The simulated photoelectron spectrum (PES) of G-C₂H₅O₂ is generated from the Franck-Condon factors by convolving the stick spectrum with a Gaussian function (HWHM = 200 cm⁻¹, half width at half-maximum), shown in Fig. S2 (ESI†). The simulated photoionization spectrum is then obtained by the integration of the PES and presented as a blue dotted line in Fig. 2(b). The simulated photoionization spectrum has been energetically shifted (~90 meV) to match the experimental data. We can see that the simulated photoionization spectrum satisfactorily agrees with the experimental data, although some differences can be observed at higher energy. One possible reason for the discrepancy is that, besides the a¹A' electronic state, the excitations of other higher excited states of G-C₂H₅O₂⁺ such as the b¹A" and A³A" states listed in Table 1 might also have contributed to the photoionization spectrum at higher energy. Another possible reason is that the experimental photoionization spectrum is directly obtained from the signal of the C₂H₅⁺ fragment ion and thus its dissociation mechanisms might also have influences on the ion intensity, all of which need to be theoretically investigated in detail in the future.

The above favorable Franck-Condon transition can be understood from the optimized geometric change in the photoionization processes too. Previous theoretical predictions showed that the G-C₂H₅O₂ conformer is the minimum with an energy of $\sim 80 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ lower than $T-C_2H_5O_2$. ¹⁸⁻²¹ So under the present experimental conditions (~ 298 K), both the $G-C_2H_5O_2$ and T-C₂H₅O₂ conformers should have already been prepared and populated in the near effusive gas beam sampling from the fast flow tube at 2 Torr, and then both of them should have contributed to the photoionization spectrum. But, as shown in Fig. 3, for the T-C₂H₅O₂ conformer, its C-O bond length of 1.446 Å at the neutral X²A" ground state should be increased upon ionization to 2.261 Å at the cationic X3A ground state, or its CCOO dihedral angle of $\pm 180^{\circ}$ at the X^2A'' ground state should be changed to $\pm 60^{\circ}$ at the cationic $a^{1}A'$ excited state. Our theoretical calculations on the torsional potential energy curves (not presented here) also show that the vertical transition of the T-C₂H₅O₂ conformer from the neutral X²A" ground state is to the top of the torsional barrier of the cationic a¹A' excited state, whereas the vertical transition of the G-C₂H₅O₂ conformer is close to the minima of the a¹A' state. The calculated VIE difference (0.05 eV) of the a¹A' excited state of the two conformers, as listed in Table 1, can somewhat reflect the height of the torsional barrier, 34 which also needs to be studied in detail in the future. These large geometric changes will result in poor Franck-Condon factors and thus will not favor their ionization transitions.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, we have studied the VUV photoionization of C₂H₅O₂ by using a home-made photoionization TOF mass spectrometer at Hefei synchrotron complemented with theoretical calculations. The ethyl peroxy radical was produced in a microwave discharge fast flow tube via the reaction of C2H5 with oxygen molecules, whereby C2H5 was generated via the hydrogen-abstraction of ethane with fluorine atoms. The present experiments and theoretical calculations show that the $C_2H_5O_2^+$ cation is not stable and dissociates to $C_2H_5^+$ and O_2

fragments in the photoionization process. Thus, two kinds of C₂H₅⁺, one from the photoionization of C₂H₅ and one from the dissociative photoionization of C2H5O2, have been clearly identified and confirmed in the photoionization mass spectra. The calculated potential energy curves show that the C₂H₅O₂⁺ cation is firstly prepared at the a¹A' first excited electronic state and then pre-dissociates to the C₂H₅⁺ and O₂ fragments via the spin-orbital coupling of the a¹A' state with the X³A" ground state, which is a quasi-bound state with a very shallow well and adiabatically correlates to the C₂H₅⁺ and O₂ dissociation limit.

The photoionization spectrum corresponding to $C_2H_5O_2$ is obtained and assigned with the aid of the Franck-Condon calculations. Of the two possible conformers for C₂H₅O₂, our present findings show that the G-C₂H₅O₂ conformer has favorable Franck-Condon factors, from the neutral X²A" ground state to the cationic a¹A' first excited electronic state, whereas the contribution of the T-C₂H₅O₂ conformer to the photoionization spectrum is minor or negligible due to its large geometric changes in the photoionization process. The present work provides a prototype using synchrotron-based photoionization mass spectrometry to probe the spectroscopy and structure of peroxy radicals plus their isomers or conformers involved in complex reactions. Some other complex peroxy radicals are being investigated and will be reported in forthcoming papers.

Author contributions

Conception and design: X. T.; acquisition of data: Z. W., X. T., C. W., C. Z., J. Y., and X. G.; theoretical calculation: X. L., B. L., and W. Z.; analysis and interpretation of data: Z. W., X. L., and X. T.; writing—original draft preparation: X. T.; writing—review and editing: all authors; all authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

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