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Coherent Population Trapping-Ramsey Interference in Cold Atoms *

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We demonstrate an experimental observation of coherent population trapping-Ramsey interference in cold ^{87}Rb atoms by employing the time-domain separated oscillatory fields' method. The interference fringe with line width of 80 Hz is obtained. We propose a novel method to measure the cold atom number. The measurement is insensitive to the pump beam intensity, the single photon detuning and even the initial state population. We use this method to normalize the interference signal and to improve the signal-to-noise ratio significantly.

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Coherent population trapping (CPT) is a phenomenon that occurs when two laser fields interact with a three-level atomic system. When the detuning of the laser frequencies satisfies the two-photon resonance condition, atoms will be coherently trapped in the dark state, and will stop absorbing laser fields. This phenomenon has been investigated by many groups,^[1-6] and has numerous applications. One can use counter-propagating coherent beams to drive zero-velocity atoms into the dark state and cool atoms below the single-photon recoil energy.^[7] One can also use CPT to measure the ground state Zeeman splitting and realize a sensitive magnetometer.^[8,9] CPT signal reflects the energy level information of the ground state, and the 0-0 transition of ^{87}Rb atoms is insensitive to the magnetic field in the first order, so we can use the CPT signal to implement an atomic frequency standard. In recent years, the vapor cell CPT atomic clocks have become a new type of commercial atomic clock.^[1-4] Unlike the traditional microwave-optical double resonance atomic clock, a passive CPT atomic clock has an all-optical configuration. It neither needs the microwave cavity nor the spectrum lamp, therefore having small size and low power cost.^[2,10] To build a vapor cell CPT atomic clock, researchers usually use microwave field to modulate the current of a vertical-cavity surface-emitting laser (VCSEL) and to create sidebands as the coherent beams. The disadvantage of this method is that the two sidebands cannot be separated, and they will pump atoms into a dipole forbidden trap state, this will decrease the contrast of the CPT signal.^[1] To overcome this problem, several schemes have been proposed, for example, the push-pull scheme,^[11] the orthogonal circular polarization

with counter-propagating waves,^[12] and the orthogonal linear polarization CPT beam.^[13]

However, due to the thermal atomic motion and collision between alkali metal atoms and the background gases, the line width of CPT peak in hot atoms is broaden and the central frequency of the CPT signal is shifted. This leads to decreasing the frequency stability and accuracy of the atomic clock. Using laser cooling and magnetic-optical trapping (MOT), one can easily cool atoms below 1 mK, then the above temperature related effects will be greatly depressed.^[14,15] More importantly, the coherent time of the CPT state is much longer in cold atoms than in the hot gas. As we know, coherent pulses can be used to produce CPT-Ramsey fringes,^[13] and the fringe width depends only on the transit time T as $1/2T$. Thus long coherent time means that we can increase the transit time, and obtain a very narrow CPT-Ramsey fringe width which could not be achieved in hot atoms. In this work, we use the lin \perp lin CPT beams to prepare CPT state in cold ^{87}Rb atoms, and use the time-domain separated oscillatory fields' method to obtain narrow CPT-Ramsey fringe.

We use a relatively long coherent pulse to completely pump the cold atoms to the CPT state. After waiting for a transit time T , we turn on a much shorter coherent pulse again. This pulse interferes with the first pulse through the atoms in the CPT state. Thus if we scan the frequencies detuning of the coherent beams, we can obtain a CPT-Ramsey fringe with a width of $1/2T$. The first pulse, defined as preparation pulse, pumps atoms into the dark state. The second pulse, named as detection pulse, interfering with the first pulse and inducing the fluorescence. Unlike the

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traditional $\pi/2$ - $\pi/2$ pulse sequence, the preparation pulse is more like a π -pulse, and the detection pulse is much shorter. This is because if the detection pulse is long enough, it will pump the atoms into the dark state again, and will eliminate the interference of the two pulses.

The experimental setup is shown in Fig. 1, it includes a MOT, coherent beams, fluorescence collection system, time sequence control and data acquisition system.

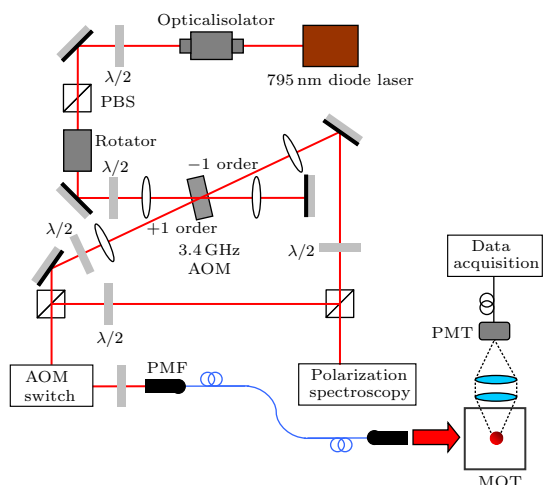


Fig. 1. Experimental setup. MOT: magneto-optical trap; PMT: photo multiplier tube; PMF: polarization-maintaining fiber; AOM: acousto-optical modulator; PBS: polarization beam splitter.

One advantage of the CPT atomic clock is the small clock size. To maintain this advantage in cold atom device, we built a single-beam mini MOT to minimize the experimental system.^[16] Two sets of homemade 780 nm external-cavity diode lasers were used as the cooling and repumping lasers. The frequencies of trapping lasers were stabilized using polarization spectroscopy. A 110-MHz acousto-optical modulator (AOM) was used to shift the frequency and to switch the trap beams. Then we coupled the laser beams to a single-mode polarization-maintaining fiber (PMF) and sent them to the mini MOT. About 10^7 ^{87}Rb atoms were successfully cooled and trapped in the mini MOT.

The CPT lasers were generated by an external-cavity diode laser and an AOM. The 795 nm laser beam double-passed the 3.4 GHz AOM to create ± 1 order beams, and the 3.4 GHz AOM was driven by a signal generator. We locked the frequency of -1 order beam to the peak of the $F = 2 \rightarrow F' = 1$ transition, and then combined the two diffraction beams with a polarization beam splitter (PBS) to form the $\text{lin} \perp \text{lin}$ coherent beams. We used two 80 MHz AOMs to switch the coherent beams without change their frequencies. The $1/e$ diameter of output beams was

4 mm and all of the cold atoms in the mini MOT were included in the beams. Three pairs of Helmholtz coils were used to eliminate the stray magnetic field, only leaving a 300 mG uniform magnetic field along the coherent beams as the quantization axis.

An optical collection system with a designed solid angle 0.28 was used to collect the fluorescence. The fluorescence was detected by a photo multiplier tube (PMT). A multifunction data acquisition card was used to record the signal and to control the AOM drivers, signal generator and the quadrupole magnetic field.

The CPT state is very fragile, so we have to shut off the MOT to prepare the CPT state. We turned on the MOT and the coherent beams alternately with a 1 s duty cycle, 990 ms for the MOT, and 10 ms for the coherent beams. After turning off the MOT, we waited for 0.5 ms to let the quadrupole magnetic field attenuated to zero, and turned the coherent beams on for 2 ms to completely pump atoms into the ground CPT state $F = 2, m_F = 0$ and the $F = 1, m_F = 0$. After a few ms, we turned on the coherent beams again for 100 μs . Then we detuned the laser frequency and recorded the fluorescence induced by these two pulses in each cycle.

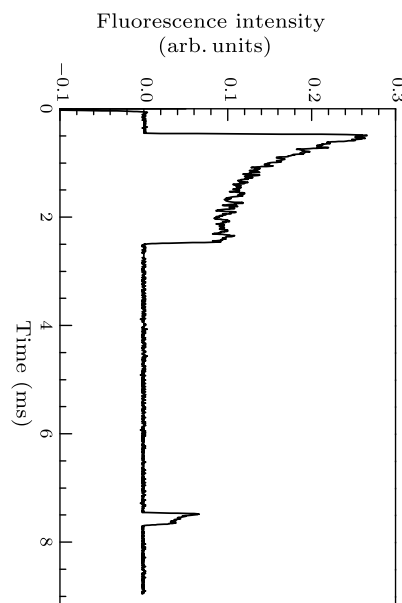


Fig. 2. Fluorescence signal of the cold ^{87}Rb atoms induced by the preparation and detection CPT pulses.

A typical fluorescence signal is shown in Fig. 2. The two steps are fluorescence induced by the preparation and detection pulse. We can see that fluorescence of the first pulse turns to zero because the atoms are pumped to the CPT state. The CPT-Ramsey fringe signal is shown in Fig. 3. This fringe is normalized by the cold atom number, and we will discuss it later. The fringe's line width is about 80 Hz. It is much

narrower than the traditional CPT line width in hot vapor which is in the order of kHz,^[1] and it can also be narrower than the hot vapor CPT-Ramsey line width which is mainly limited by the coherent time.^[13]

Due to the fluctuation of cold atom number, the signal to noise ratio (SNR) of the Ramsay fringe is poor. The maximum fluctuation is about 10%. We need to normalize the detection fluorescence signal and to eliminate the noise caused by the atom number fluctuation.

Usually, atom number was measured by a resonant probe beam if the cross section and the intensity of the probe field are known. The cross section depends on laser detuning, polarization, line width and Zeeman shift, so it is difficult to determine the atom number accurately. To overcome this disadvantage, we can use the optical pumping process to determine the cold atom number.^[17,18] This method does not depend on the probe beam intensity, detuning, polarization and etc. CPT is a kind of optical pumping process too, so we would like to calculate the fluorescence photon number emitted during the CPT pumping process and to find whether it can give the information of the atom number.

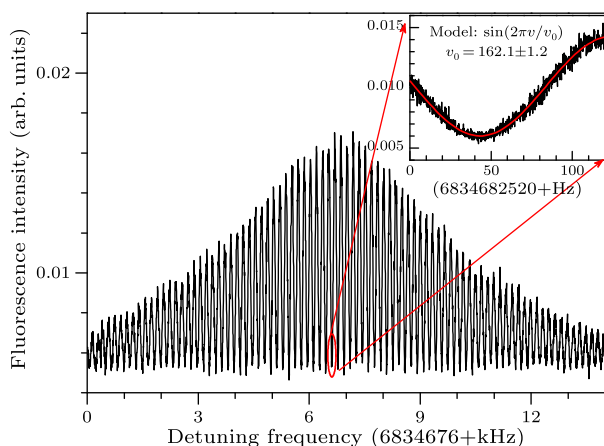


Fig. 3. Large range scan of the CPT-Ramsey fringe and detail range scan of the fringe, the total coherent beams intensity is $20 \mu\text{W}$, and the transit time is $T = 6 \text{ ms}$. A line width about 80 Hz is obtained.

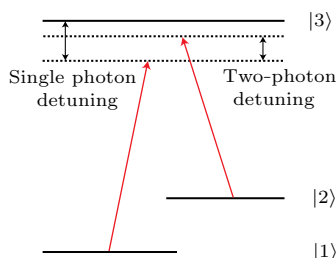


Fig. 4. Schematic diagram of an ideal Λ type three-level and two mode fields model.

As shown in Fig. 4, the fluorescence photon number induced by the CPT pumping process can be ex-

pressed as

$$N = \int_0^{\infty} n\Gamma\rho_{33}(t)dt, \quad (1)$$

where n is the cold atom number, Γ is the excited state decay rate, $\rho_{33}(t)$ is the density matrix element of the excited state $|3\rangle$. If the single photon detuning is zero and all the atoms are initially populated in the state $|1\rangle$, we can find an approximate analytical expression for $\rho_{33}(t)$ from the density matrix equation

$$\rho_{33}(t) = \frac{\Omega^2}{\Gamma^2} \exp^{-\frac{\Omega^2}{\Gamma}t}. \quad (2)$$

Substitute Eq. (2) into Eq. (1), then $N = n$. This means that the total photon number is exactly the same as the atom number. It depends neither on the Rabi frequency Ω of the pumping beams nor the excited state decay rate.

Define N/n as photon coefficient. When the single photon detuning is not zero or the initial state population is a superposition of the ground state $|1\rangle$ and $|2\rangle$, we numerically solve the density matrix equation to obtain $\rho_{33}(t)$, then substitute it to Eq. (1) to solve the coefficient. We find that the photon coefficient is still 1, it depends on neither the initial state population nor the single photon detuning when this detuning is in the range of the natural line width.

In our experiment, we simply divided the detection pulse fluorescence signal by the preparation pulse fluorescence signal in each cycle. By doing this we can suppress the noise caused by the atom number fluctuation. This method can significantly increase the SNR of the Ramsay signal. Figure 5(a) is a typical CPT-Ramsey fringe without normalization, and Fig. 5(b) is the same fringe after normalization. We can see that this effect is depressed.

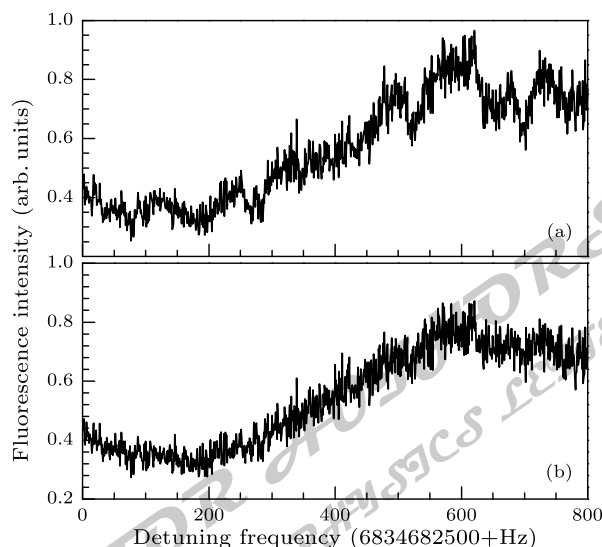


Fig. 5. CPT-Ramsay fringe before (a) and after (b) normalizing the cold atom number. The total coherent beams intensity is $20 \mu\text{W}$, and the transit time is $T = 1 \text{ ms}$.

The SNR of the CPT-Ramsey signal is still low even after normalizing the atom number. This is mainly because the length of detecting pulse is only 100 μ s, which means that frequency noise of the coherent beams below 10 kHz cannot be averaged during the measurement.

In summary, CPT-Ramsey fringe line width as narrow as 80 Hz has been obtained in cold ^{87}Rb atoms, and a novel method to eliminate the signal noise caused by the cold atom number fluctuation is proposed and realized. This will help for improving the clock frequency stability of cold ^{87}Rb atomic clocks.

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Chinese Physics Letters

Volume 27

Number 11

2010

GENERAL

- 110201 **A Simple Method for Generating Discrete Multi-Component Integrable Hierarchy**
YAO Yu-Qin, ZENG Yun-Bo
- 110202 **Liquid Film on Unsteady Stretching Sheet with General Surface Temperature and Viscous Dissipation**
R. C. Aziz, I. Hashim
- 110301 **Analytical Solutions of the Manning-Rosen Potential In the Tridiagonal Program**
ZHANG Min-Cang, AN Bo
- 110302 **Evolution of a Thermo Vacuum State in a Single-Mode Amplitude Dissipative Channel**
WANG Chang-Chun, FAN Hong-Yi
- 110303 **Six-State Quantum Key Distribution Using Photons with Orbital Angular Momentum**
LI Jun-Lin, WANG Chuan
- 110304 **Bound and Resonant States of the Hulthén Potential Investigated by Using the Complex Scaling Method with the Oscillator Basis**
FENG Jun-Sheng, LIU Zheng, GUO Jian-You
- 110501 **A New Scheme to Projective Synchronization of Fractional-Order Chaotic Systems**
WANG Jun-Wei, CHEN Ai-Min
- 110701 **Progress in AMS Measurement of ^{182}Hf at CIAE**
DONG Ke-Jun, HE Ming, LI Zhen-Yu, WANG Xiang-Gao, LI Chao-Li, YOU Qu-Bo, BAO Yi-Wen, WU Shao-Yong, SHEN Hong-Tao, GUAN Yong-Jing, ZHANG Wei, FAN Jin-Long, YANG Lei, SUN Hong-Qing, DING You-Qian, HE Guo-Zhu, LI Shi-Zhuo, GONG Jie, HE Xian-Wen, LU Li-Yan, WANG Wei, HU Yue-Ming, YUAN Jian, ZHANG Sheng-Dong, CHANG Yong-Fu, JIANG Shan

NUCLEAR PHYSICS

- 112101 **Band Interaction between Chiral Doublet Bands**
QI Bin, ZHANG Shuang-Quan, WANG Shou-Yu, MENG Jie
- 112301 **Half-Lives of Proton Emitters With a Deformed Density-Dependent Model**
QIAN Yi-Bin, REN Zhong-Zhou, NI Dong-Dong, SHENG Zong-Qiang
- 112401 **Study of Fusion Dynamics Using Skyrme Energy Density Formalism with Different Surface Corrections**
Ishwar Dutt, Narinder K. Dhiman
- 112402 **A Modified Proximity Approach in the Fusion of Heavy Ions**
Ishwar Dutt, Rajni Bansal
- 112901 **Theoretical Design of a 104 MHz Ladder Type IH-RFQ Accelerator**
NIE Yuan-Cun, LU Yuan-Rong, CHEN Jia-Er, YAN Xue-Qing, GAO Shu-Li, ZHU Kun, LIU Ke-Xin, GUO Zhi-Yu

ATOMIC AND MOLECULAR PHYSICS

- 113201 **Coherent Population Trapping-Ramsey Interference in Cold Atoms**
CHEN Xi, YANG Guo-Qing, WANG Jin, ZHAN Ming-Sheng
- 113202 **Time-Resolved Measurement of Radiatively Heated Iron $2p-3d$ Transmission Spectra**
ZHAO Yang, SHANG Wan-Li, XIONG Gang, JIN Feng-Tao, HU Zhi-Min, WEI Min-Xi, YANG Guo-Hong, ZHANG Ji-Yan, YANG Jia-Min
- 113301 **Optically Forbidden Transition of $A^3\Delta_u \leftarrow X^3\Sigma_g^-$ in Oxygen**
ZHU Lin-Fan, XU Wei-Qing, SUN Jian-Min, ZHANG Wen-Yao

(Continued on inside back cover)

- 113401 **Differential and Integral Cross Sections for Electron Impact Excitation of Lithium**
YANG Ning-Xuan, JIANG Jun, DONG Chen-Zhong
- 113402 **Coherent Phase Control in e-Ar Scattering in a Bichromatic Laser Field in the Second Born Approximation**
ZHOU Bin, LI Shu-Min
- 113403 **Proton Inelastic Mean Free Path in a Group of Organic Materials in 0.05–10 MeV Range**
TAN Zhen-Yu, XIA Yue-Yuan, ZHAO Ming-Wen, LIU Xiang-Dong
- 113404 **Single-Electron Detachment for Ti^- , Fe^- , Co^- , Ni^- and Cu^- in Collision with Ar**
BAI Xue, ZHAO Jun, WEI Bao-Ren, ZHANG Xue-Mei
- FUNDAMENTAL AREAS OF PHENOMENOLOGY(INCLUDING APPLICATIONS)**
- 114101 **(2+1)-Dimensional Envelope Solitons in Nonlinear Magnetic Metamaterials**
CUI Wei-Na, ZHU Yong-Yuan, LI Hong-Xia, LIU Su-Mei
- 114201 **High Characteristic Temperature InGaAsP/InP Tunnel Injection Multiple-Quantum-Well Lasers**
WANG Yang, QIU Ying-Ping, PAN Jiao-Qing, ZHAO Ling-Juan, ZHU Hong-Liang, WANG Wei
- 114202 **High Power Continuous-Wave Actively Mode-Locked Diode-Pumped Nd:YAG Laser**
LING Wei-Jun, ZHANG Shao-Gang, ZHANG Ming-Xia, DONG Zhong, LI Ke, ZUO Yin-Yan, GUO Xiao-Hua, JIA Yu-Lei
- 114203 **LD Side-Pumped Passive Mode-Locked TEM₀₀ Nd:YAG Laser Based on SESAM**
ZHANG Ling, GUO Lin, XIONG Bo, YU Hai-Juan, SUN Lu, HOU Wei, LIN Xue-Chun, LI Jin-Min
- 114204 **Laser-Diode End-Pumped Nd:YVO₄ Slab Laser under Direct Pumping into the Emitting Level**
CUI Li, ZHANG Heng-Li, XU Liu, LI Jing, YAN Ying, DUAN Can, SHA Peng-Fei, XIN Jian-Guo
- 114205 **Laser Damage Mechanisms of Amorphous Ta₂O₅ Films at 1064, 532 and 355 nm in One-on-One Regime**
XU Cheng, QIANG Ying-Huai, ZHU Ya-Bo, GUO Li-Tong, SHAO Jian-Da, FAN Zheng-Xiu
- 114206 **Electrical Property of Infrared-Sensitive InAs Solar Cells**
DENG Hui-Yong, WANG Qi-Wei, TAO Jun-Chao, WU Jie, HU Shu-Hong, CHEN Xin, DAI Ning
- 114207 **Analysis of Detectors and Transmission Curve Correction of Mobile Rayleigh Doppler Wind Lidar**
TANG Lei, WANG Yong-Tao, SHU Zhi-Feng, DONG Ji-Hui, WANG Guo-Cheng, XU Wen-Jing, HU Dong-Dong, CHEN Ting-Di, DOU Xian-Kang, SUN Dong-Song, CHA Hyunki
- 114208 **A Novel Ce³⁺/Tb³⁺ Codoped Phosphate Glass as Down-Shifting Materials for Enhancing Efficiency of Solar Cells**
HE Dong-Bing, YU Chun-Lei, CHENG Ji-Meng, LI Shun-Guang, HU Li-Li
- 114209 **Giant Enhancement of Second Harmonic Generation at Photonic Band Gap Edges**
MA Dong-Li, REN Ming-Liang, DOU Jun-Hong, LI Zhi-Yuan
- 114210 **Theoretical Study on a Cluster-Seven-Core Photonic Crystal Fiber with High Nonlinearity and High-Power Endurance**
CHENG Tong-Lei, CHAI Lu, HU Ming-Lie, LI Yan-Feng, WANG Ching-Yue
- 114211 **A Novel Photonic Quasicrystal Fiber with Broadband Large Negative Dispersion**
LI Yu-He, FAN Wan-De, SHENG Qiu-Qin
- 114212 **Time-Domain Measurement of Optical True-Time Delay in Two-Dimensional Photonic Crystal Waveguides**
ZHANG Geng-Yan, ZHOU Qiang, CUI Kai-Yu, ZHANG Wei, HUANG Yi-Dong
- 114213 **A Clock Enhanced Loop for Simultaneous Error-Free Demultiplexing and Clock Recovery of 160 Gb/s OTDM Signal Single-Channel Transmission over 100 km**
JIA Nan, LI Tang-Jun, ZHONG Kang-Ping, WANG Mu-Guang, CHEN Ming, LI Jing, CHI Jian-Feng

- 114214 Surface Emitting Distributed Feedback Quantum Cascade Laser around 8.3 μm**
 GUO Wan-Hong, LIU Jun-Qi, LU Quan-Yong, ZHANG Wei, JIANG Yu-Chao, LI Lu, WANG Li-Jun,
 LIU Feng-Qi, WANG Zhan-Guo
- 114215 Room-Temperature Continuous-Wave Operation of InGaN-Based Blue-Violet Laser Diodes with a Lifetime of 15.6 Hours**
 ZENG Chang, ZHANG Shu-Ming, JI Lian, WANG Huai-Bing, ZHAO De-Gang, ZHU Jian-Jun,
 LIU Zong-Shun, JIANG De-Sheng, CAO Qing, CHONG Ming, DUAN Li-Hong, WANG Hai,
 SHI Yong-Sheng, LIU Su-Ying, YANG Hui, CHEN Liang-Hui
- 114301 Theoretical and Experimental Investigation of Flexural Wave Propagating in a Periodic Pipe with Fluid-Filled Loading**
 WEN Ji-Hong, SHEN Hui-Jie, YU Dian-Long, WEN Xi-Sen
- 114302 Three-Dimensional Mode Coupling around a Conical Seamount and the Use of Random Discretization**
 LUO Wen-Yu, SCHMIDT Henrik
- 114303 Matched Bearing Processing for Airborne Source Localization by an Underwater Horizontal Line Array**
 PENG Zhao-Hui, LI Zheng-Lin, WANG Guang-Xu
- 114701 Active Mixing in a Microchannel**
 GUO Chun-Hai, TAN Jun-Jie, REN Deng-Feng, ZHANG Yu-Cheng, WANG Fu-Hua
- PHYSICS OF GASES, PLASMAS, AND ELECTRIC DISCHARGES**
- 115101 Numerical Studies of s-Polarized Surface Plasmon Polaritons at the Interface Associated with Metamaterial**
 YAN Bao-Rong, LV Jian-Hong, KONG Ling-Hua, HU Xi-Wei
- 115201 Structures and Dynamics of Two-Dimensional Dust Lattices with and without Coulomb Molecules in Plasmas**
 HUANG Feng, LIU Yan-Hong, YE Mao-Fu, WANG Xue-Jin, WANG Long
- CONDENSED MATTER: STRUCTURE, MECHANICAL AND THERMAL PROPERTIES**
- 116401 Fragile-to-Strong Transition in Al-Ni-M (M=La, Pr, Nd) Metallic Glasses**
 ZHANG Chun-Zhi, HU Li-Na, BIAN Xiu-Fang, YUE Yuan-Zheng
- 116801 Production of ZnO Nanobelts and Meso-Scale Study of Mechanical Properties**
 NI Heng-Kan, ZOU Qiang, FU Xing, WU Sen, WANG Hui, XUE Tao
- CONDENSED MATTER: ELECTRONIC STRUCTURE, ELECTRICAL, MAGNETIC, AND OPTICAL PROPERTIES**
- 117301 Effect of Dopant Properties on the Microstructures and Electrical Characteristics of Poly(3-Hexylthiophene) Thin Films**
 MA Liang
- 117401 Enhancement of Critical Current Density and Flux Pinning in Acetone and La_2O_3 Codoped MgB_2 Tapes**
 GAO Zhao-Shun, MA Yan-Wei, WANG Dong-Liang, ZHANG Xian-Ping, AWAJI Satoshi,
 WATANABE Kazuo
- 117501 Magnetic Properties of Ni-Zn Ferrite Prepared with the Layered Precursor Method**
 ZHOU Xin, HOU Zhi-Ling, LI Feng, QI Xin
- 117502 Excellent Magnetocaloric Effect in $\text{Er}_{60}\text{Al}_{18}\text{Co}_{22}$ Bulk Metallic Glass**
 HUI Xi-Dong, XU Zhi-Yi, WANG En-Rui, CHEN Guo-Liang, LU Zhao-Ping
- 117503 Evolution of Structural and Magnetic Properties of $\text{BaFe}_{12}\text{O}_{19}$ with B_2O_3 Addition**
 Ugur Topal

- 117801 Inverted Bottom-Emission Organic Light Emitting Diode Using Two n-Doped Layers for the Enhanced Performance**
CHENG Cui-Ran, CHEN Yu-Huan, QIN Da-Shan, QUAN Wei, LIU Jin-Suo
- 117802 Planar Metamaterial Absorber Based on Lumped Elements**
GU Chao, QU Shao-Bo, PEI Zhi-Bin, ZHOU Hang, XU Zhuo, BAI Peng, PENG Wei-Dong, LIN Bao-Qin
- CROSS-DISCIPLINARY PHYSICS AND RELATED AREAS OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**
- 118501 Effect of In Composition on Two-Dimensional Electron Gas in Wurtzite AlGa_N/InGa_N Heterostructures**
KIM Bong-Hwan, PARK Seoung-Hwan, LEE Jung-Hee, MOON Yong-Tae
- 118502 InAlAs/InGaAs Pseudomorphic High Electron Mobility Transistors Grown by Molecular Beam Epitaxy on the InP Substrate**
HUANG Jie, GUO Tian-Yi, ZHANG Hai-Ying, XU Jing-Bo, FU Xiao-Jun, YANG Hao, NIU Jie-Bin
- 118503 Influences of Interface States on Resistive Switching Properties of TiO_x with Different Electrodes**
JIA Ze, WANG Lin-Kai, REN Tian-Ling
- 118701 Photon-Measurement Density Function of Fluorescence Molecular Tomography Based on Direct Method**
QUAN Guo-Tao, GONG Hui, FU Jian-Wei, DENG Yong
- 118702 An RNA Base Discrete State Model toward Tertiary Structure Prediction**
ZHANG Jian, ZHANG Yu-Jie, WANG Wei
- GEOPHYSICS, ASTRONOMY, AND ASTROPHYSICS**
- 119501 Is Low-Frequency-Peaked BL Lac Object OJ 287 a TeV Emitter?**
CHEN Liang, BAI Jin-Ming
- 119601 Model for Formation of Dunes at the North Martian Pole**
ZHU Jie, CHEN Chu-Xin
- 119801 Neutron Star Motion in the Disk Galaxy**
WEI Ying-Chun, A. Taani, PAN Yuan-Yue, WANG Jing, CAI Yan, LIU Gao-Chao, LUO A-Li, ZHANG Hong-Bo, ZHAO Yong-Heng

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