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Possible High T_c Superconductivity in the Ba-La-Cu-O System

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Metallic, oxygen-deficient compounds in the Ba-La-Cu-O system, with the composition $\text{Ba}_x\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Cu}_2\text{O}_{3(1-y)}$ have been prepared in polycrystalline form. Samples with $x=1$ and 0.75, $y>0$, annealed below 900 °C under reducing conditions, consist of three phases, one of them a perovskite-like mixed-valent copper compound. Upon cooling, the samples show a linear decrease in resistivity, then an approximately logarithmic increase, interpreted as a beginning of localization. Finally an abrupt decrease by up to three orders of magnitude occurs, reminiscent of the onset of percolative superconductivity. The highest onset temperature is observed in the 30 K range. It is markedly reduced by high current densities. Thus, it results partially from the percolative nature, but possibly also from 2D superconducting fluctuations of double perovskite layers of one of the phases present.

I. Introduction

"At the extreme forefront of research in superconductivity is the empirical search for new materials" [1]. Transition-metal alloy compounds of *A15* (Nb_3Sn) and *B1* (NbN) structure have so far shown the highest superconducting transition temperatures. Among many *A15* compounds, careful optimization of Nb-Ge thin films near the stoichiometric composition of Nb_3Ge by Gavaley et al. and Testardi et al. a decade ago allowed them to reach the highest $T_c=23.3$ K reported until now [2, 3]. The heavy Fermion systems with low Fermi energy, newly discovered, are not expected to reach very high T_c 's [4].

Only a small number of oxides is known to exhibit superconductivity. High-temperature superconductivity in the Li-Ti-O system with onsets as high as 13.7 K was reported by Johnston et al. [5]. Their x-ray analysis revealed the presence of three different crystallographic phases, one of them, with a spinel structure, showing the high T_c [5]. Other oxides like perovskites exhibit superconductivity despite their small carrier concentrations, n . In Nb-doped SrTiO_3 , with $n=2 \times 10^{20} \text{ cm}^{-3}$, the plasma edge is below the highest optical phonon, which is therefore unshielded

[6]. This large electron-phonon coupling allows a T_c of 0.7 K [7] with Cooper pairing. The occurrence of high electron-phonon coupling in another metallic oxide, also a perovskite, became evident with the discovery of superconductivity in the mixed-valent compound $\text{BaFb}_{1-x}\text{Bi}_x\text{O}_3$ by Sleight et al., also a decade ago [8]. The highest T_c in homogeneous oxygen-deficient mixed crystals is 13 K with a comparatively low concentration of carriers $n=2-4 \times 10^{21} \text{ cm}^{-3}$ [9]. Flat electronic bands and a strong breathing mode with a phonon feature near 100 cm^{-1} , whose intensity is proportional to T_c , exist [10]. This last example indicates that within the BCS mechanism, one may find still higher T_c 's in perovskite-type or related metallic oxides, if the electron-phonon interactions and the carrier densities at the Fermi level can be enhanced further.

Strong electron-phonon interactions in oxides can occur owing to polaron formation as well as in mixed-valent systems. A superconductivity (metallic) to bipolaronic (insulator) transition phase diagram was proposed theoretically by Chakraverty [11]. A mechanism for polaron formation is the Jahn-Teller effect, as studied by Höck et al. [12]. Isolated Fe^{4+} , Ni^{2+} and Cu^{2+} in octahedral oxygen environment