

On the Structure of α -BiFeO₃

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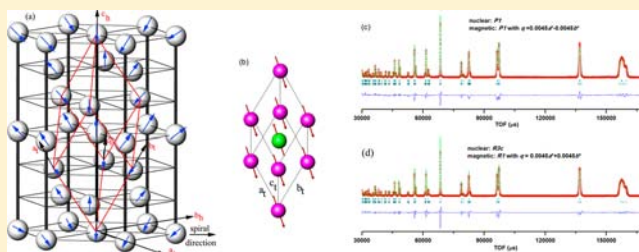
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S Supporting Information

ABSTRACT: Polycrystalline and monocrystalline α -BiFeO₃ crystals have been synthesized by solid state reaction and flux growth method, respectively. X-ray, neutron, and electron diffraction techniques are used to study the crystallographic and magnetic structure of α -BiFeO₃. The present data show that α -BiFeO₃ crystallizes in space group *P*1 with $a = 0.56317(1)$ nm, $b = 0.56384(1)$ nm, $c = 0.56370(1)$ nm, $\alpha = 59.33(1)^\circ$, $\beta = 59.35(1)^\circ$, $\gamma = 59.38(1)^\circ$, and the magnetic structure of α -BiFeO₃ can be described by space group *P*1 with magnetic modulation vector in reciprocal space $\mathbf{q} = 0.0045\mathbf{a}^* - 0.0045\mathbf{b}^*$, which is the magnetic structure model proposed by I. Sosnowska¹ applied to the new *P*1 crystal symmetry of α -BiFeO₃.



1. INTRODUCTION

BiFeO₃ has been extensively studied as a very promising multiferroic^{2–5} with antiferromagnetic ordering at $T_N \approx 643$ K and ferroelectric dipole ordering at about 1100 K.^{6–8} As reported, in bulk BiFeO₃ three phases are identified: namely α , β , and γ .^{9–11} It is well accepted that at room temperature α -BiFeO₃ is thermodynamically stable, and crystallizes in the polar space group *R*3c ($a = 0.55788$ nm, $c = 1.38693$ nm)^{12–15} with a G-type antiferromagnetic ordering.^{16–21} In this case, there is only one crystallographic independent Fe atom in the unit cell, which disagrees with the Mössbauer spectra of α -BiFeO₃⁸ showing two kinds of Fe atoms in the unit cell. Recently, with the help of high resolution synchrotron radiation, I. Sosnowska et al.²² suggest a monoclinic space group *C*c ($a = 0.9796$ nm, $b = 0.5580$ nm, $c = 1.3875$ nm, $\beta = 160.79^\circ$) to describe the structure of α -BiFeO₃. These indicate that the structure of α -BiFeO₃ is complicated and more studies are needed. Below, our studies on the structure of α -BiFeO₃ are presented, which shows that α -BiFeO₃ crystallizes in *P*1 with two crystallographic independent Fe atoms in the unit cell.

2. EXPERIMENTAL SECTION

Powder α -BiFeO₃ has been synthesized using the method similar to that suggested by G. D. Achenbach:²³ the Bi₂O₃ (A. R.) and Fe₂O₃ (A.

R.) were mixed in a 2: 1 molecular ratio and pressed into pellets to heat at 800 °C for 2 h in an alumina crucible, and then the product was crushed and washed with dilute HNO₃ until only peaks corresponding to α -BiFeO₃ were found in the X-ray diffraction patterns of the sample. The composition of the sample were confirmed by chemical titration as Bi:Fe:O = 1:1:3 (the details were presented in Supporting Information (SI)). Single crystals of α -BiFeO₃ were grown using flux method.²⁴

Single-crystal X-ray diffraction data for α -BiFeO₃ were carried out at room temperature on a STOE IPDS diffractometer, equipped with an imaging plate system, using graphite-monochromatic Mo *K* α radiation ($\lambda = 0.071073$ nm) from a rotating anode generator. Powder X-ray diffraction (PXRD) data were collected on a Bruker D8 Advance diffractometer with Cu *K* α 1 ($\lambda = 0.154056$ nm) radiation (2θ range, 10–120°; step, 0.0197°; scan speed, 30 s/step) at 50 kV and 40 mA. High resolution synchrotron powder diffraction data were collected using beamline 11-BM at the Advanced Photon Source (APS), Argonne National Laboratory, using an average wavelength of 0.04195 nm, with data points collected every 0.001° 2θ and scan speed of 0.01°/s.

Neutron powder diffraction (NPD) data were collected on the instrument Echidna at the OPAL reactor (Lucas Heights, Australia) in Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO) at

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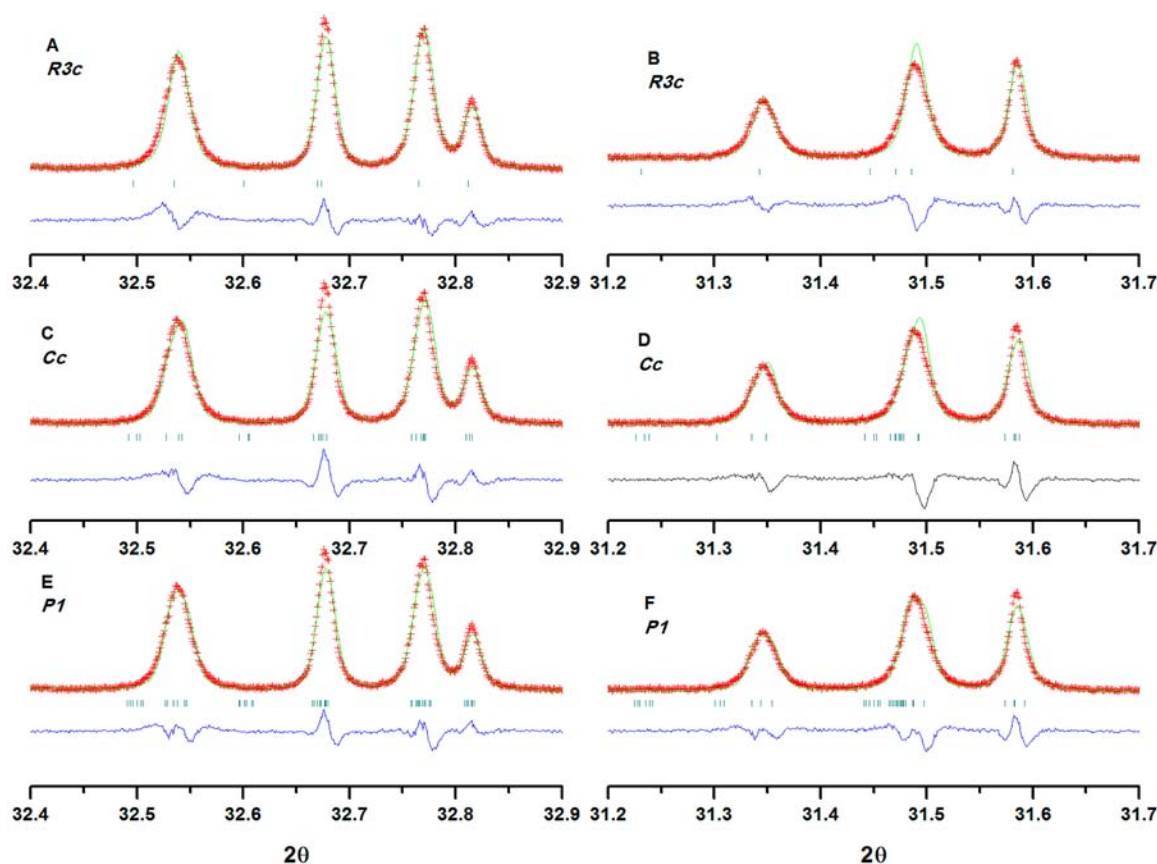


Figure 1. Rietveld plots of the powder X-ray diffraction pattern collected from beamline 11-BM at the Advanced Photon Source (APS) ($\lambda = 0.041$ 395 nm) for α -BiFeO₃ in space group *R3c* (A, B), *Cc* (C, D), and *P1* (E, F). The symbol + represents the observed value, solid line represents the calculated value; the marks below the diffraction patterns are the calculated reflection positions, and the difference curve is shown at the bottom of the figure.

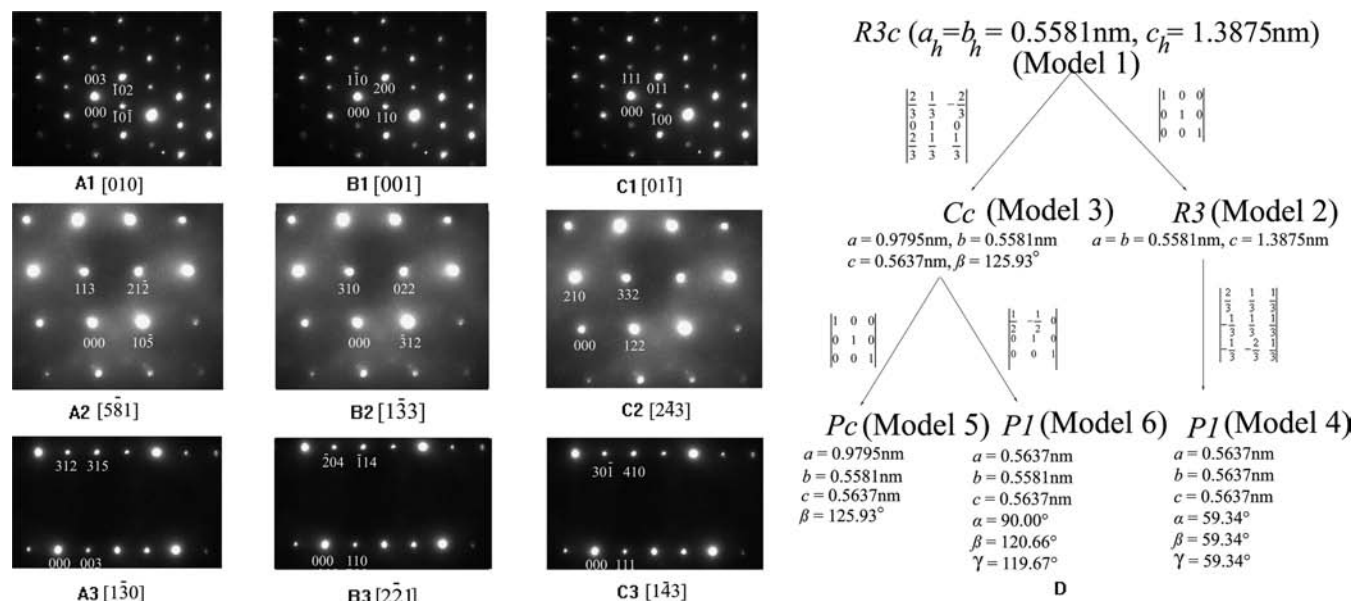


Figure 2. SAED patterns of α -BiFeO₃ along three different directions with interpretations in three different settings of space groups: A1, A2, A3, *R3*, $a = 0.55807(1)$ nm, $c = 1.38754(2)$ nm; B1, B2, B3, *Cc*, $a = 0.97983(1)$ nm, $b = 0.55792(1)$ nm, $c = 0.56349(1)$ nm, $\beta = 125.91(1)^\circ$; C1, C2, C3, *P1*, $a = 0.56350(1)$ nm, $b = 0.56384(1)$ nm, $c = 0.56368(1)$ nm, $\alpha = 59.32(1)^\circ$, $\beta = 59.37(1)^\circ$, $\gamma = 59.34(1)^\circ$; D, the scheme for the transition from *R3c* to *R3*, *Cc*, *Pc*, or *P1*.

$\lambda = 0.24395$ nm. Sample was placed in 9 mm diameter vanadium can, and data were collected over 4 h per sample. High resolution neutron

powder diffraction (NPD) data were collected on a super high resolution powder diffractometer (SuperHRPD) in time-of-flight

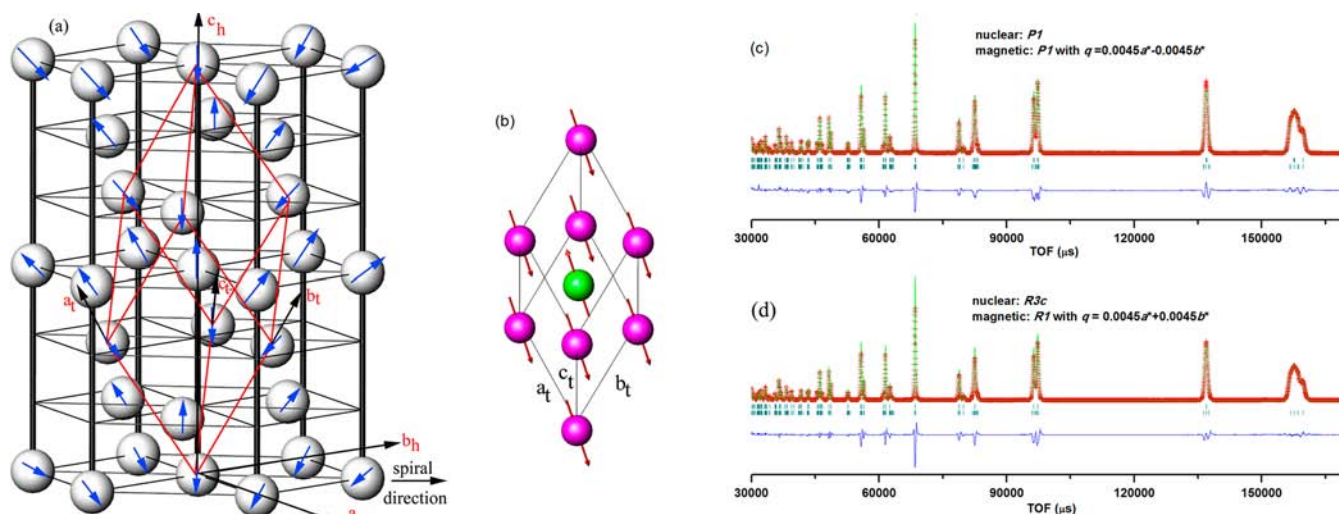


Figure 3. Hexagonal and triclinic lattices for α -BiFeO₃ (a), the arrangement of magnetic moment of α -BiFeO₃ in space group $P1$ (b), and Rietveld plot of the powder neutron diffraction pattern collected from super high resolution powder diffractometer (SuperHRPD) in time-of-flight mode at the Materials and Life Science Experimental Facility in the Japan Proton Accelerator Research Complex for α -BiFeO₃ in nuclear space group $R3c$ and magnetic space group $R1$ (c), and nuclear space group $P1$ and magnetic space group $P1$ (d). The symbol + represents the observed value, solid line represents the calculated value; the marks below the diffraction patterns are the calculated reflection positions (up for nuclear diffraction, down for magnetic diffraction), and the difference curve is shown at the bottom of the figure.

mode with the highest possible resolution of 0.03%, which is located at about 100 m from a thin side of a decoupled poisoned moderator at the Materials and Life Science Experimental Facility in the Japan Proton Accelerator Research Complex (J-PARC).

The powder X-ray and neutron diffraction data were analyzed by using GSAS software^{25,26} or Fullprof software²⁷ (only in the case related to modulated magnetic structure).

Selected area electron diffractions (SAED) were carried out on JEM2100F with an accelerating voltage of 200 KV.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It is well accepted that at room temperature the space group for the nuclear structure of α -BiFeO₃ is $R3c$ ($a = 0.55788$ nm, $c = 1.38693$ nm),^{12–15} which was noted as model 1. The X-ray diffraction data of the sample α -BiFeO₃ from a Bruker D8 Advance diffractometer with Cu K α 1 ($\lambda = 0.154056$ nm) radiation can be fitted well with model 1 (see Figure S2 and Table S2 in SI); however, the high resolution synchrotron powder diffraction data from beamline 11-BM at the Advanced Photon Source (APS) are not fitted well as indicated in Figure 1A with some peaks misfit. For example, the peaks around the 2θ range about 32.5° were not fit well as shown in Figure 1A: there are two or three peaks around 32.5° but only one peak is expected by the space group $R3c$. It is obvious that the symmetry of the lattice structure for α -BiFeO₃ may be different from $R3c$, which is mentioned by I. Sosnowska et al.²²

It is known that the selected area electron diffraction (SAED) patterns are very useful to determine the structure of solids.^{28,29} Figure 2 shows the SAED patterns of α -BiFeO₃. The spots corresponding to the $d \approx 0.45$ nm are obtained, which could not be indexed by the $R3c$ with $a = 0.55788$ nm, $c = 1.38693$ nm. The subgroups of $R3c$, such as $R3$ ($a = 0.55788$ nm, $c = 1.38693$ nm), $P3c1$ ($a = 0.55788$ nm, $c = 1.38693$ nm), and Cc [$a = 0.97983(1)$ nm, $b = 0.55792(1)$ nm, $c = 0.56349(1)$ nm, $\beta = 125.91(1)^\circ$ (this is the same as that suggested by I. Sosnowska et al.²²)] have been tried. The transition of $R3c$ to $R3$ or Cc is performed by the matrix shown in Figure 2d. $R3$ and Cc can permit the presence of the spots corresponding to the $d \approx 0.45$ nm. As shown in Figure 2, the SAED patterns can

be indexed by $R3$ and Cc . However, the spots of $d \approx 0.69$ and 0.48 nm expected by the space group $P3c1$ ($a = 0.55788$ nm, $c = 1.38693$ nm) are not found in the SAED patterns. Therefore, the space groups $R3$ (model 2) and Cc (model 3) are suggested for further analysis.

It is found that the high resolution synchrotron powder diffraction data are also not fitted well with model 2: two or more peaks are found around 32.5° , but only one peak is expected by the space group $R3$ (see Figure S4B in SI). The synchrotron data are fitted better with model 3 than model 2. Figure 1C shows that the peaks around 32.5° can be fitted well by model 3, but there are about three peaks around 31.35° with only two peaks expected by model 3 as shown in Figure 1D. Then, the subgroups of $R3$ or Cc , $P1$ ($a = 0.56350$ nm, $b = 0.56384$ nm, $c = 0.56368$ nm, $\alpha = 59.32^\circ$, $\beta = 59.37^\circ$, $\gamma = 59.34^\circ$, model 4), Pc ($a = 0.97983$ nm, $b = 0.55792$ nm, $c = 0.56349$ nm, $\beta = 125.91^\circ$, model 5), and $P1$ ($a = 0.5637$ nm, $b = 0.5581$ nm, $c = 0.5637$ nm, $\alpha = 90.00^\circ$, $\beta = 120.66^\circ$, $\gamma = 119.67^\circ$, model 6), are suggested to describe the structure of α -BiFeO₃. The matrix for the corresponding transition is shown in Figure 2D. The expected spots of $d = 0.793$ nm and $d = 0.558$ nm for model 5 could not be found in SAED patterns of α -BiFeO₃. So, model 5 is not used for further analysis. Model 6 and model 4 are the same. We prefer model 4 because it is similar to a rhombohedra cell. The synchrotron data can be fitted well with model 4 as shown in Figure 1E,F. That is to say, the symmetry of α -BiFeO₃ at room temperature may be $P1$. It is lucky that in this case there are two crystallographic independent Fe atoms in the unit cell (see Table S2 in SI), which agrees well with the Mössbauer spectra of α -BiFeO₃⁸ and the ²⁰⁹Bi NMR spectrum of BiFeO₃ observed by A. A. Bush et al.³⁰ In addition, the single crystal data obtained for α -BiFeO₃ can also be explained by the space group $P1$ (the corresponding CIF file is presented in SI).

When the nuclear structure of α -BiFeO₃ is described by the space group $P1$, the magnetic structure of BiFeO₃ needs to be described on the basis of $P1$. As is well-known, the magnetic structure of α -BiFeO₃ has been studied extensively.^{1,17–21} An

Table 1. Magnetic Phase Used to Fit the Neutron Diffraction Data of α -BiFeO₃ Obtained from J-Parc

	model 1m ^a	model 4m ^a
magnetic space group	R1	P1
lattice params	$a = 0.558\ 00(1)\ \text{nm}, c = 1.386\ 86(2)\ \text{nm}$	$a = 0.563\ 17(1)\ \text{nm}, b = 0.563\ 84(1)\ \text{nm}, c = 0.563\ 70(1)\ \text{nm}, \alpha = 59.33(1)^\circ, \beta = 59.35(1)^\circ, \gamma = 59.38(1)^\circ$
atom	$(x, y, z)/(R_x, R_y, R_z)^b/U_{\text{iso}}(\text{\AA}^2 \times 100)$	$(x, y, z)/(R_x, R_y, R_z)^b/U_{\text{iso}}(\text{\AA}^2 \times 100)$
Fe1	$(0.0000, 0.0000, 0.2206(1))/(2.10(1), -2.10(1), 3.60(1))/0.49$	$(0.2213(1), 0.2209(1), 0.2202(1))/(4.39(1), 1.52(1), -1.62(1))/0.59$
Fe2	$(0.0000, 0.0000, 0.7206(1))/(-2.10(1), 2.10(1), -3.60(1))/0.49$	$(0.7187(1), 0.7241(1), 0.7196(1))/(-4.39(1), -1.52(1), 1.62(1))/0.59$
q	$0.0042a^* + 0.0042b^*$	$0.0045a^* - 0.0045b^*$
R factor ^c	$R_F^m = 0.030$	$R_F^m = 0.023$

^aThe coordinations of other atoms are listed in Table S1 in SI. ^b R_x, R_y, R_z components along the crystallographic axis of the magnetic moments, in units of Bohr magnetons. X -axis coincides with the crystallographic a -axis, Y -axis belongs to the plane a - b , and Z -axis is perpendicular to the plane a - b . Therefore, it should be mentioned that the directions of R_x, R_y, R_z are different when the lattices used are different. ^c R_F^m , magnetic R -factor.

antiferromagnetic G-type spin configuration was first assigned by Kiselev et al.¹⁷ in 1962, where each Fe³⁺ is surrounded by six antiparallel nearest neighbors. After that, I. Sosnowska et al.¹ in 1982 suggested a modified model: a spiral structure with a period of 62 nm to explain magnetic diffraction peaks obtained by high-resolution time-of-flight diffractometer, where the spins are cycloidal modulated along the $[110]_h$ direction under the hexagonal notation for α -BiFeO₃ ($a = 0.557\ 88\ \text{nm}$ and $c = 1.386\ 93\ \text{nm}$) as shown in Figure 3a with $\mathbf{q}_h = 0.045\mathbf{a}_h^* + 0.045\mathbf{b}_h^*$ (noted as model 1m). Our model is very similar to the rhombohedral notation for α -BiFeO₃ ($a = b = c = 0.563\ 45\ \text{nm}, \alpha = \beta = \gamma = 59.347^\circ$) but $a \neq b \neq c$, and $\alpha \neq \beta \neq \gamma$. The lattice can be chosen as shown in Figure 3a, which permits the modulation along the $[-110]_t$ direction under the triclinic notation for α -BiFeO₃ with $\mathbf{q}_t = 0.045\mathbf{a}_t^* - 0.045\mathbf{b}_t^*$ (noted as model 4m). With the help of Fullprof, the high resolution neutron powder diffraction (NPD) data obtained from J-Parc for α -BiFeO₃ can be fitted well as shown in Figure 3d using model 4m with the magnetic parameters listed in Table 1 (the nuclear structural parameters are listed in Table S3 in SI). The obtained magnetic moments $(4.39, 1.52, -1.62)_v, (-4.39, -1.52, 1.62)_t$ at the sites $(0.2213, 0.2209, 0.2202)_t$ and $(0.7187, 0.7241, 0.7196)_v$, respectively, by model 4m agree well with the $P1$ symmetry as shown in Figure 3b. The amplitude of this magnetic moment is about $4.92\ \mu_B$, which is reasonable for Fe³⁺. It should be mentioned that the high resolution neutron powder diffraction (NPD) data can be also fitted well with model 1m as shown in Figure 3c with the parameters listed in Table 1. For the reason that no full magnetic space group can be used well in software Fullprof,²⁷ the space group R1 is used to describe the magnetic structure of α -BiFeO₃ in model 1m, which should be R3 (or R3c). The amplitude of the magnetic moment is about $4.67\ \mu_B$, which is reasonable for Fe³⁺. However, the obtained magnetic moment $(2.1, -2.1, 3.6)_h$ at the site $(0, 0, 0.2217)_h$ (in the hexagonal note) does not agree with the 3-fold symmetry as mentioned by I. Sosnowska et al.²² Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest model 4m describes the magnetic structure of α -BiFeO₃. The neutron diffraction data of α -BiFeO₃ collected on the instrument Echidna at the OPAL reactor (Lucas Heights, Australia) can also be fitted well with model 4m (the details are listed Table S4 in SI).

4. CONCLUSION

We claim that the space group $P1$ is more appropriate to describe the real structure of α -BiFeO₃. From the high resolution synchrotron powder diffraction data of α -BiFeO₃, we observe triple-splitting of the reflections belonging to the $P1$

group, which are single in the $R3c$ group, or double-splitting in the Cc group. Single crystal diffraction data and the selected area electron diffraction (SAED) patterns agree well with the $P1$ group. With the help of the high resolution neutron powder diffraction (NPD) data obtained from J-PARC (obtained just before the 311 Earth quack) and the neutron diffraction data obtained from ANSTO, the magnetic structure of α -BiFeO₃ is solved in $P1$ group with $a \approx 0.56344\ \text{nm}, b \approx 0.56370\ \text{nm}, c \approx 0.56363\ \text{nm}, \alpha \approx 59.32^\circ, \beta \approx 59.36^\circ, \gamma \approx 59.33^\circ$, and $\mathbf{q} \approx 0.0045\mathbf{a}^* - 0.0045\mathbf{b}^*$. Two crystallographically independent Fe³⁺ ions are found in the unit cell, which make the understanding of the Mössbauer spectra⁸ and the ²⁰⁹Bi NMR spectrum³⁰ of α -BiFeO₃ more comfortable. The magnetic moments contributed by the two Fe³⁺ ions are $(4.29, 1.80, -1.68)_t$ and $(-4.29, -1.80, 1.68)_v$, respectively, which agree well with the $P1$ symmetry.

■ ASSOCIATED CONTENT

Supporting Information

Additional figures, tables, and details. Crystallographic data in CIF format. This material is available free of charge via the Internet at <http://pubs.acs.org>.

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Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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