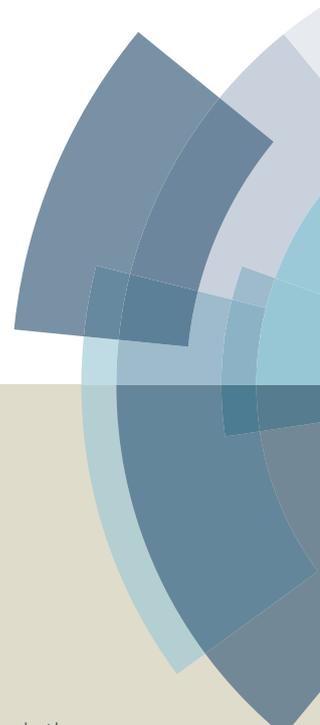
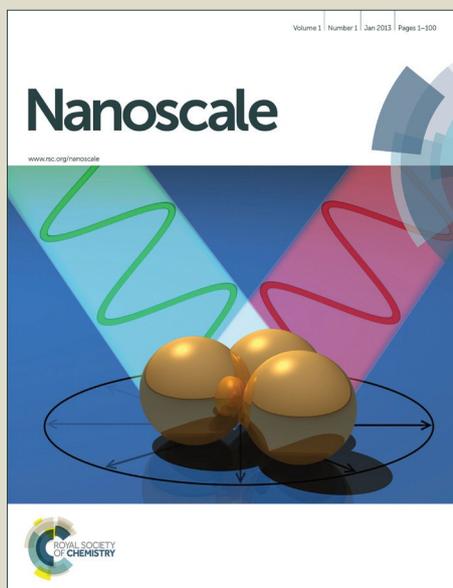


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## Electronic Structure of Au<sub>25</sub> Clusters: Between Discrete and Continuous

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**Here, an approach based on synchrotron resonant photoemission is employed to explore the transition between quantization and hybridization of the electronic structure in atomically precise ligand-stabilized nanoparticles. While the presence of ligands maintains quantization in Au<sub>25</sub> clusters, their removal renders increased hybridization of the electronic states at the vicinity of the Fermi level. These observations are supported by DFT studies.**

Ligand-stabilized metallic nanoparticles contain a metallic core with a continuous electronic conduction band in which the electrons move freely. However, quantization of the electron energy has been observed when nanoparticles become ultra-small (<2 nm in diameter).<sup>1, 2</sup> This transition is important as many of the physical and chemical properties – such as nature of energy spectra (continuous band to discrete), optical, crystal structure, chirality, magnetism, redox potential, femto-second dynamics and charge states of metallic nanoparticles – are altered when confined to this ultra-small size regime.<sup>1</sup> Unraveling the size-dependent physical, chemical, electronic and magnetic properties of ligand-stabilized metallic nanoparticles is of critical importance to understanding their catalytic properties.<sup>3, 4</sup> Although there are many studies on ultra-small metal nanoparticles,<sup>2, 5, 6</sup> to our knowledge, no investigations have studied the transition between the widely observed discrete (consisting of atomic and molecular orbital like states) and continuous or band like electronic structure (i.e. strongly hybridized states with band width). Here, synchrotron-

based resonant photoemission spectroscopy (schematically represented in Fig. S1) and density functional theory (DFT) are combined to investigate this transition in the ligand-stabilized Au<sub>25</sub> cluster [Au<sub>25</sub>(PPh<sub>3</sub>)<sub>10</sub>(SC<sub>12</sub>H<sub>25</sub>)<sub>5</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>]<sup>2+</sup> (denoted herein as Au<sub>25</sub>-bi) which is compared with [Au<sub>25</sub>(SCH<sub>2</sub>CH<sub>2</sub>Ph)<sub>18</sub>] – (Au<sub>25</sub>-i).

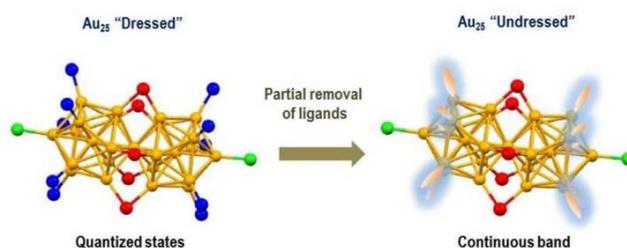


FIG.1 A schematic representation of transition from quantized states to hybridized band in [Au<sub>25</sub>(PPh<sub>3</sub>)<sub>10</sub>(SC<sub>12</sub>H<sub>25</sub>)<sub>5</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>]<sup>2+</sup> – (Au<sub>25</sub>-bi) on partial removal of ligands (for simplicity only phosphine ligands shown removed). Yellow – Au, red – S, blue – P, green – Cl.

These Au<sub>25</sub> clusters were selected because the phosphine ligands on Au<sub>25</sub>-bi are easily removed under UHV conditions at room temperature, without aggregation or any major structural changes to the Au<sub>25</sub> cores (based on experimental evidence as discussed below) to provide *in situ* generation of partially “undressed” gold cores and further comparison to the completely “dressed” Au<sub>25</sub>-i clusters. Significantly, that “undressing” method is proven to be exclusively passive toward possible UHV assisted alteration (at least for the larger Au<sub>38</sub> clusters<sup>7</sup>) – the only condition left under consideration in reported herein study which might influence the Au<sub>25</sub> core.

The approach reported here is based on resonant photoemission enhancement from the 5*d* level of gold. Gold is a filled 5*d*<sup>10</sup> system. Thus, resonant enhancement cannot be observed for atomic and molecular-like states due to the forbidden photoemission transition to a fully occupied 5*d* state at the 4*f*<sub>7/2</sub> and 4*f*<sub>5/2</sub> gold thresholds (Fig. S1). The resonant enhancement can only take place if 5*d* states hybridize with *s* and/or *p* state orbitals i.e. the atomic level broadens into hybridized band. This situation leads to a partial depletion of the *d*-band, permitting a photoemission resonant transition to a (*s*/*p*)-*d* hybridized) 5*d* state (Fig. S1). The core-hole

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decays through non-radiative Auger emission, enhancing direct photoemission but resulting in the same final state (see for details ESI, page 8). This resonance allows one to unambiguously determine if gold clusters still exhibit bulk metallic properties or have lost metallicity and instead exhibit molecular-like properties.  $\text{Au}_{25}(\text{SR})_{18}$  clusters were chosen for this case study as they are molecularly monodisperse and one of the smallest NCs with well-known structure, optical, chemo-physical properties, and established synthetic protocols.<sup>8-13</sup> X-ray crystallographic analysis of the  $\text{Au}_{25}(\text{SR})_{18}$  cluster revealed an icosahedral  $\text{Au}_{13}$  core, capped by an exterior shell composed of twelve Au atoms which are complexed with eighteen thiolate ligands.<sup>11</sup>  $\text{Au}_{25}$  clusters exhibit multiple molecular-like transitions in their optical absorption spectrum (see Fig. S2), with at least three well-defined bands at 1.8, 2.75, and 3.1 eV, consistent with literature report.<sup>11</sup> The study of its electronic structure by time-dependent DFT determined that the three lowest unoccupied MOs are mainly composed of  $6sp$  hybrid atomic orbitals of gold, comprising the  $sp$  band, whereas the HOMO-1 through HOMO-5 are mainly weighted from the  $5d^{10}$  atomic orbitals of gold and thus constitute the  $d$ -band.<sup>11</sup> Single-crystal X-ray crystallographic analysis of *mixed* thiol/phosphine protected  $\text{Au}_{25}(\text{PPh}_3)_{10}(\text{SC}_{12}\text{H}_{25})_5\text{Cl}_2$  ( $\text{Au}_{25}\text{-bi}$ ) revealed that the core of the  $\text{Au}_{25}$  cluster is comprised of two vertex-shared  $\text{Au}_{13}$  icosahedra<sup>14</sup>, i.e., a bi-icosahedron (see schematic on Fig.1). Recently the same group revealed a  $\text{Au}_{25}$  isomer, specifically that the cluster can include the same two vertex-shared icosahedra but rotated along a shared axis, forming the “twisted” rotamer.<sup>15</sup> The overall structure<sup>14</sup> can be described as four layers of Au pentagons having a staggered-eclipsed-staggered configuration, with ten  $\text{PPh}_3$  ligands coordinated on top of peripheral Au atoms in layers one and four, five ethanethiolates bridging two of the  $\text{Au}_{25}$  pentagon rings in layers two and three, and two chlorides coordinating to two apical Au atoms.

In general, studies of the electronic structure of ligand-stabilized clusters exhibit a high level of complexity, wherein the *overall* electronic structure is strongly influenced by the Au core-ligand interaction.<sup>16-20</sup> Therefore, to gain insight into this ligand effect, we compared two  $\text{Au}_{25}$  clusters: the fully thiolated  $\text{Au}_{25}(\text{SCH}_2\text{CH}_2\text{Ph})_{18}$  ( $\text{Au}_{25}\text{-i}$ ) cluster and the mixed thiol/phosphine  $\text{Au}_{25}(\text{PPh}_3)_{10}(\text{SC}_{12}\text{H}_{25})_5\text{Cl}_2$  ( $\text{Au}_{25}\text{-bi}$ ) cluster. Both clusters were synthesized using established synthetic protocols with slight modifications.<sup>14,21</sup> Importantly, in the case of  $\text{Au}_{25}\text{-bi}$ , we found that ligand desorption could be facilitated simply in UHV, partially “undressing” the gold core and opening an avenue to study the surface of pristine, undressed clusters as well.

Sedimentation velocity-analytical ultracentrifugation (SV-AUC)<sup>22</sup> was used to confirm size uniformity, where the majority of species, ca 85%, are  $\text{Au}_{25}$  clusters (Fig. S3), assuring that the main contribution to the valence band photoemission signal is from  $\text{Au}_{25}$  species.

Photon energy dependent photoemission was employed to study the electronic structure of ligand-stabilized  $\text{Au}_{25}\text{-bi}$  and  $\text{Au}_{25}\text{-i}$  clusters. The photoemission spectra of both types of Au clusters deposited on the  $\text{SiO}_2$  support were acquired at room temperature. The spectra acquired for the  $\text{Au}_{25}\text{-bi}$  cluster revealed shallow  $4f_{7/2}$  and  $4f_{5/2}$  core levels, observed at 84.25 and 87.82 eV, respectively (Fig. 2a, Fig. S4); two valence band features are observed at about

of 4.0 and 6.0 eV (Fig. 2b, Fig. S5). In general the electronic structure of thin films supported on various substrates is affected by

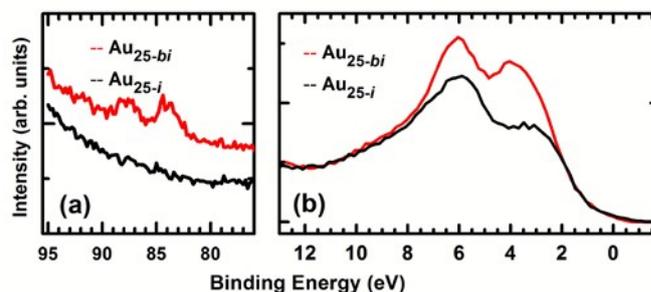


FIG.2 Core level (a) and valence band photoemission spectrum (b) of gold mixed-ligand bi-icosahedral-structure ( $\text{Au}_{25}\text{-bi}$ ) and thiol-stabilized icosahedral core-shell-structure ( $\text{Au}_{25}\text{-i}$ ) clusters drop casted on  $\text{SiO}_2$  native oxide surface of  $\text{Si}(111)$ . Photon energy was (a)-120 eV and (b)-84 eV. Spectra were recorded at room temperature

film-substrate interaction. To exclude any influence from the substrate on the VB structure of the Au NC film, the films were made several hundreds of nanometers thick, i.e. three orders of magnitude thicker than the (ultra)thin film limit, at which the substrate might affect the interaction. Moreover the photon energy range that was used in the synchrotron photoemission experiments was selected to provide the highest surface sensitivity, limiting the sample probing depth to the topmost layers only. The XPS (which probes deeper layers compared to UPS) VB structures of the Au NC thick films deposited on various substrates looked virtually identical (Fig. S6), proving that the substrates were fully screened by Au cluster films.

Strongly enhanced photoemission at both the Au  $4f$  core level and Au  $5d$  valence band region observed for the  $\text{Au}_{25}\text{-bi}$  cluster compared to the  $\text{Au}_{25}\text{-i}$  cluster (Fig. 2, S5). This is due to enhanced phosphine (compared to thiol) ligand desorption from the gold clusters under the UHV conditions, which is consistent with much weaker Au-P, compared to Au-S, bonds.<sup>23, 24</sup> The desorption of weakly bound phosphine ligands results in freeing Au orbitals of  $\text{Au}_{25}\text{-bi}$  cluster and hence the observed photoemission enhancement. This enhancement clearly supports the role of ligand-controlled hybridization in determining the transition to continuous spectrum, as a significant portion of initially quantized gold valence band becomes delocalized when freed from gold-ligand bonding.

The stoichiometry of the Au cluster, investigated by X-ray core level photoemission (XPS), confirms a 1.4 Au/S ratio for the  $\text{Au}_{25}\text{-i}$  cluster (Fig. S11), as expected. In the case of the  $\text{Au}_{25}\text{-bi}$  cluster, measured ratios of Au/S=1 and Au/P=10 were obtained, indicating desorption of approximately 50% the thiol ligands and 80% of phosphine ligands, i.e. 11 out of 15 ligands have desorbed (Fig. 1, Fig. S10). That significant difference in ligand-to-core ratios remains after mild annealing (Fig. S4, Fig. S5) while demonstrating (similarly to room temperature) suppressed intensity of the valence band features as well as  $4f$  gold core levels by thiol ligands (cluster  $\text{Au}_{25}\text{-i}$ ) in comparison to  $\text{Au}_{25}\text{-bi}$  cluster capped by mixed ligands. The chemistry of phosphines is dominated by their strong nucleophilicity and reducing character.<sup>25</sup> The presence of

nucleophilic phosphines in vicinity to the thiols weakens Au-S bonds in Au<sub>25</sub>-*bi*, so about of half of thiol ligands desorb as well. The measured S 2p<sub>3/2</sub> BE which is lower in Au<sub>25</sub>-*bi* comparing to Au<sub>25</sub>-*i* supports this picture (see Fig. S10, S11).

The great advantage of UHV-assisted ligand removal is the possibility to “undress” Au<sub>25</sub>-*bi* clusters, allowing the electronic structure of the Au metal core to be probed *exclusively*, without any contribution from the ligand shell. This reduced level of complexity makes the study of the resonant photoemission enhancement from the gold valence band at the 4f<sub>7/2</sub> and 4f<sub>5/2</sub> threshold possible, which is indicative of an *f*-to-*d* transition. As mentioned, resonant enhancement of valence states in the photoemission spectra cannot be observed in *atomic* gold, as gold has fully occupied 5*d* orbitals. The photoemission resonance can only occur if *s*-*p*-*d* hybridization occurs, leading to partial depletion of the valence 5*d* bands in Au<sub>25</sub>. Such resonant enhancement of the valence band photoemission was observed for Au<sub>25</sub>-*bi* at photon energies corresponding to the gold 4f<sub>7/2</sub> and 4f<sub>5/2</sub> thresholds, indicative of an *f*-to-*d* transition (Fig. 3). The under-coordinated Au orbitals liberated upon ligand desorption, tend to

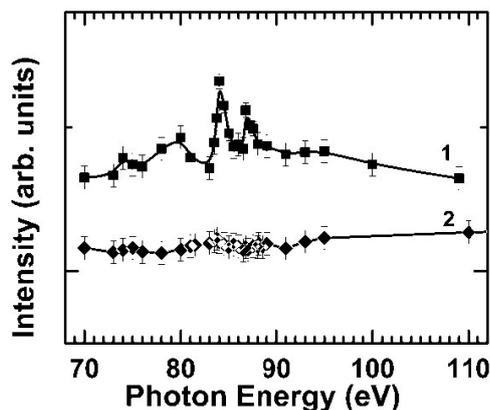


FIG. 3. Photoemission intensities at binding energies of 3.5 eV versus photon energy, for gold mixed-ligand bi-icosahedral-structure Au<sub>25</sub>-*bi* (1) and thiol-stabilized icosahedral Au<sub>25</sub>-*i* clusters (2) deposited from solution on SiO<sub>2</sub> native oxide surface prepared on Si(111).

couple with each other partially depleting the valence 5*d* band and resulting in allowed *f*-*d* transitions. The photoemission studies of completely ligand free Cu, Ag and Au clusters<sup>26, 27</sup> reveal such hybridization effects through the formation of a continuous valence band for just 20 atoms per all clusters studied (the smallest 7 gold atoms cluster<sup>27</sup> was reported to exhibit either molecularlike or bulklike properties). Similarly, completely ligand free Au clusters very likely lose high symmetry geometry and demonstrate *s*-*d* hybridization.<sup>28</sup> The surface Au orbitals do not intercouple for Au<sub>25</sub>-*i* because they are engaged in the core-thiolate ligand bonds. Thus, the resonance enhancement observed for Au<sub>25</sub>-*bi* clusters is strongly suppressed for thiolate-protected Au<sub>25</sub>-*i* clusters (Fig. 3, see for more detailed explanation SM, sections Ultraviolet Photoelectron Spectroscopy and Resonant Photoemission). This finding is in agreement with the superatom picture<sup>29</sup> extended by Häkkinen and co-workers to account for the closed electronic shell structure of gold-phosphine and gold-thiolate clusters.<sup>30</sup>

One might argue that the observed photoemission resonance originates from the larger size species comprised of agglomerated Au<sub>25</sub>-*bi* clusters, caused by ligand desorption under vacuum in “undressing condition”. To rule out this possibility, we performed grazing incident wide-angle X-ray scattering (GIWAXS) study that probes the sample’s inter-particle distance on the macroscopic scale. The study revealed that the thin film formed by Au<sub>25</sub>-*bi* clusters deposited onto the SiO<sub>2</sub>, followed by UHV treatment, exhibits an ordered structure in the (001) orientation, with the (001) and (002) peaks along the q<sub>z</sub> direction (Fig. S12). The interparticle spacing is 1.91nm from the (001) peak in GIWAXS pattern, whereas the nominal size of Au<sub>25</sub> is 2.1 nm (including ligand shell).<sup>22</sup> The result confirms unaltered size of the Au<sub>25</sub>-*bi* clusters and absence of any noticeable agglomeration after UHV treatment. Note, that for GIWAXS experiments we used the same sample that was previously characterized with XPS i.e. after the exposure to X-ray radiation under UHV. The cluster stability is also supported by observed *d*-band size trend and reduced DOS at the Fermi level (Fig. S7, S8), consistent with previously reported theoretical and experimental findings.<sup>31-37</sup>

DFT calculations were also conducted to probe the hybridization in gold and found to be consistent with the results from resonant photoemission. The DFT calculations were performed for a simple model, where the “undressed” Au<sub>25</sub> cluster was adsorbed on SiO<sub>2</sub> (111) surface. The optimized structure of the Au<sub>25</sub>:SiO<sub>2</sub> model is shown in Fig. S13. The Au<sub>25</sub> cluster was found to be slightly positively charged. The projected density of states (PDOS) at the vicinity of the Fermi level (Fig. 4) reveals that electronic structure is intermixed with comparable density of 6*s* states, along with

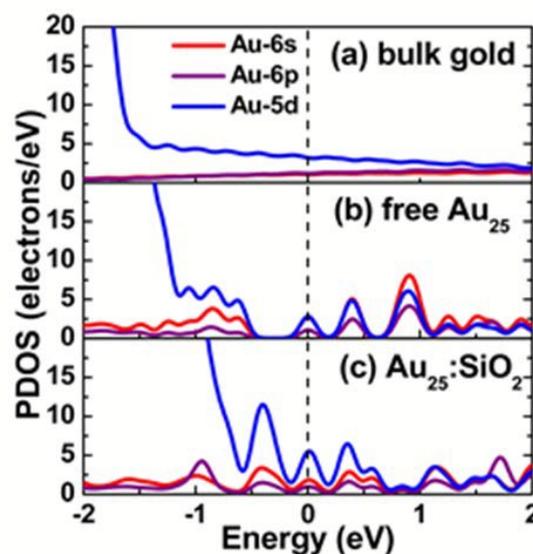


Figure 4. Projected 6*s*, 6*p*, and 5*d* density of states for Au atoms in (a) bulk gold, (b) gas phase free Au<sub>25</sub> cluster, (c) Au<sub>25</sub> adsorbed on SiO<sub>2</sub>(111) surface. The dashed line indicates the Fermi level placement.

noticeable contributions from the Au 6*p* states. We also found clear overlaps between the occupied and unoccupied Au 6*s*, 6*p*, and 5*d* states in the vicinity of the Fermi level (Fig. 4) for bulk gold, the free Au<sub>25</sub> cluster, and Au<sub>25</sub>:SiO<sub>2</sub>, suggesting the existence of *s*-*p*-*d* hybridization. PDOS away from Fermi region is dominated by Au 5*d* states (Fig. S14). It is worth noting that the substrate contribution to

the Au<sub>25</sub> cluster electronic structure (one cluster thickness) deliberately was not excluded from our model, but even for such condition a significant mixing of gold 5*d* and 6*s* states at Fermi level along with notable density of 6*p* states emerges in calculation. This 6*p* and 6*s* somewhat weaker hybridization channel likely may supplement stronger *s-d* hybridization that facilitates the catalysis.

## Conclusions

The synchrotron-based resonant photoemission spectroscopy revealed enhanced valence band photoemission that is much stronger at the 4*f* and weaker at the 5*p* core level Au thresholds (i.e. photoemission resonance enhancements) in partially “undressed” Au<sub>25</sub>-*bi* clusters (a manifestation of *s-p-d* hybridization) while strongly suppressed in the “dressed” Au<sub>25</sub>-*i* clusters. This observation unambiguously proves that noble metal clusters, even ultra-small size just of 25 gold atoms, still retain some bulk properties of gold. The DFT calculations that reveal overlap between these states in the vicinity of the Fermi level are in good agreement with the observed resonance, supporting partial depletion of the Au 5*d* states – a necessary condition for the photoemission resonance to occur. While the investigations reported here are the first attempts to study the influence of ligands in effecting the transition from hybridized band to discrete states in Au<sub>25</sub> clusters, the methodology and the experimental techniques are broadly applicable to not only different sizes of Au clusters stabilized by various ligands but also to other types of metallic clusters. This approach is anticipated to pave new avenues for designing materials in correlation with their atomic or electronic constituents.

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