Novel high-pressure calcium carbonates

Xi Yao,1,2 Congwei Xie,1,3,* Xiao Dong,4,5,1 Artem R. Oganov,1,3,6,1 and Qingfeng Zeng2

1International Center for Materials Discovery, School of Materials Science and Engineering, Northwestern Polytechnical University, Xi’an, Shaanxi 710072, People’s Republic of China
2Science and Technology on Thermostructural Composite Materials Laboratory, School of Materials Science and Engineering, Northwestern Polytechnical University, Xi’an, Shaanxi 710072, People’s Republic of China
3Skolkovo Institute of Science and Technology, 3 Nobel Street, Moscow 143026, Russia
4School of Physics, Nankai University, Tianjin 300071, People’s Republic of China
5Center for High Pressure Science and Technology Advanced Research, Beijing 100193, People’s Republic of China
6Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology, 9 Institutskiy Lane, Dolgoprudny City, Moscow Region 141700, Russia

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Calcium and magnesium carbonates are believed to be the host compounds for most of the oxidized carbon in the Earth’s mantle. Here, using the evolutionary crystal structure prediction method USPEX, we systematically explore the MgO-CO2 and CaO-CO2 systems at pressures ranging from 0 to 160 GPa to search for thermodynamically stable magnesium and calcium carbonates. While MgCO3 is the only stable magnesium carbonate, three calcium carbonates are stable under pressure: well-known CaCO3, and previously unknown Ca3CO5 and CaC2O5. MgCO3 polymorphs are found to contain isolated orthocarbonate CO4 tetrahedra, and are stable at relatively low pressures (>11 GPa), whereas CaC2O3 is stable above 33 GPa and its polymorphs feature polymeric motifs made of CO4 tetrahedra. Detailed analysis of the chemical stability of CaCO3, Ca3CO5, and CaC2O5 in the environment typical of the Earth’s lower mantle reveals that none of these compounds can exist in the Earth’s lower mantle. Instead, MgCO3 is the main host of oxidized carbon throughout the lower mantle.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Behavior of carbon in the Earth’s mantle is important for the global carbon cycle. The generally accepted view is that mantle carbon exists in a number of reduced, neutral, and oxidized forms (i.e., Fe3C cementite, diamond, carbonates) [1]. Over the past few decades, magnesium and calcium carbonates (MgCO3 and CaCO3) have received considerable attention because they are believed to be the host compounds for most of the oxidized carbon in the mantle [2–6]. The zero-temperature calculations of Pickard and Needs predicted that CaCO3 will become more favorable than MgCO3 at pressures above 100 GPa at mantle pressures, we have explored the MgO-CO2, CaO-CO2, Mg-C-O, Ca-C-O, and MgO-CaO-CO2 systems using the to the pressure of the core-mantle boundary (136 GPa), both MgCO3 and CaCO3 will experience several interesting phase transitions. For example, it was predicted that while polymorphs of CaCO3 stable below 76 GPa [6] (or 75 GPa according to our calculations) feature CO3 triangles, chains of CO4 tetrahedra are present in the higher-pressure form of CaCO3.

At ambient pressure and temperature, the carbon atom in CO2 has sp hybridization with linear geometry and twofold coordination, while in CO32− it has sp2 hybridization resulting in planar triangular geometry and threefold coordination. sp3 hybridization (resulting in CO4 tetrahedra) is unfavorable due to the very small size of the C4+ cation compared to the O2− atom: At realistic (very short) C-O distances, steric O-O repulsion would be too high. However, at high pressure, carbon prefers to be in the sp2 state and behaves in many ways akin to silicon at normal pressure. High coordination gives a volume advantage, which offsets the steric effects.

In this work, we assess the traditional assumption of CaCO3 and MgCO3 stoichiometries of calcium and magnesium carbonates. As will be detailed below, previously unknown carbonates are indeed predicted, and we examine their stability at different pressures and temperatures, and in the chemical environment of the lower mantle of the Earth.

II. COMPUTATIONAL METHODOLOGY

To search for stable magnesium and calcium carbonates at mantle pressures, we have explored the MgO-CO2, CaO-CO2, Mg-C-O, Ca-C-O, and MgO-CaO-CO2 systems using the...
variable-composition evolutionary algorithm (EA) technique, as implemented in the USPEX code [11–14]. Here we performed EA crystal structure predictions in the pressure range from 0 to 160 GPa with up to 40 atoms in the primitive unit cell. The first generation of structures was created randomly. In all subsequent generations, structures were produced by heredity (40%), symmetric random generator (20%), softmutation (20%) and transmutation (20%) operators, and the best 60% of the previous generation was used as parents to generate the next generation of structures. For all structures generated by USPEX, structure relaxations and total energy calculations were performed using the VASP code [15] in the framework of density functional theory [16]. In these calculations, we used the Perdew-Burke-Ernzerhof generalized gradient approximation functional (PBE-GGA) [17] to treat exchange-correlation, and the all-electron projector augmented wave (PAW) [18] method to describe core-valence interactions—\(3s^2 3p^4 4s^2\), \(3s^2, 2s^2 2p^2\), and \(2s^2 2p^4\) shells were treated as valence for Ca, Mg, C, and O, respectively. The plane-wave kinetic energy cutoff of 600 eV and uniform \(k\)-point meshes for sampling the Brillouin zone with reciprocal-space resolution of \(2\pi \times 0.05 \text{ Å}^{-1}\) were employed. Once stable compounds and structures were found, their properties were computed with denser \(k\)-point meshes, which had reciprocal-space resolution of \(2\pi \times 0.03 \text{ Å}^{-1}\).

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### A. Phase stability at mantle pressures

We have performed crystal structure predictions at 0, 15, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100, and 160 GPa for the CaO-CO\(_2\) system; at 0, 60, 100, and 160 GPa for the MgO-CO\(_2\) system; and at 25, 50, 100, and 130 GPa for the ternary systems Mg-C-O, Ca-C-O, and MgO-CaO-CO\(_2\). At a given pressure, stable compounds were determined by the thermodynamic convex hull construction. As shown in Fig. 1(a), among all possible magnesium carbonates, only MgCO\(_3\) was found to be on the convex hull. This indicates that, besides MgCO\(_3\), no other magnesium carbonates can be thermodynamically stable at mantle pressures. At the same time, in the CaO-CO\(_2\) system, besides the well-known CaCO\(_3\) we discover two thermodynamically stable calcium carbonates, Ca\(_2\)CO\(_5\) and CaC\(_2\)O\(_5\) (and one near-ground-state compound Ca\(_2\)CO\(_4\)), as shown in Fig. 1(b). Phonon calculations show that these two stable calcium carbonate phases are dynamically stable; i.e., they have no imaginary phonon frequencies, as shown in Fig. 2. Unexpectedly, we also found that three high-pressure forms of CaC\(_2\)O\(_5\) (P\(_c\), F\(_{dd}d\), and C\(_2\)) and C\(_{mcm}\)-Ca\(_3\)CO\(_5\) can maintain dynamical stability at 0 GPa; see Fig. S1 in the Supplemental Material [10]. This means that Ca\(_3\)CO\(_5\) and CaC\(_2\)O\(_5\) may be quenchable to ambient pressure at low temperature. Lattice parameters and enthalpies of formation of stable and metastable calcium carbonates are listed in Table S3 in the Supplemental Material [10]. For the well-known CaCO\(_3\), we have also listed available experimental and theoretical values for comparison [19–21].

By calculating enthalpy-pressure curves for all stable compounds in the CaO-CO\(_2\) and MgO-CO\(_2\) systems (see Fig. S2 in the Supplemental Material [10]), we have obtained their pressure-composition phase diagrams at pressures up to 160 GPa (see Fig. 3). As shown in Fig. 3, stable phases and phase transition pressures in MgO, CaO, CO\(_2\), MgCO\(_3\), and MgO-CaO-CO\(_2\) at pressures up to 160 GPa.
and CaCO₃ are in good agreement with previous studies [3,5,6,22–24]. We note that, for CaCO₃, Smith et al. recently proposed a new $P_{21}/c$-II phase which is stable between 27.2 and 37.5 GPa [25], but did not report its structural parameters. Considering the extremely small enthalpy difference between the $P_{21}/c$-II and $P_{21}/c$-I phases of CaCO₃, we should say that omission or inclusion of the $P_{21}/c$-II phase of CaCO₃ will not affect our results. Phase transformations of Ca₃CO₅ and CaC₂O₅ are as follows: (1) For Ca₃CO₅, the orthorhombic $Cmcm$ phase is predicted to become stable at 014108-3

FIG. 2. Phonon dispersion curves of the predicted calcium carbonates at high pressures and zero temperature.
FIG. 3. Pressure-composition phase diagrams of MgO-CO$_2$ and CaO-CO$_2$ systems at zero temperature.

11 GPa, and to transform to the tetragonal $I4/mcm$ phase at 55 GPa; (2) for CaC$_2$O$_5$, above 33 GPa, four stable phases (low-pressure $P_{cc}$ and $Fdd2$, high-pressure $Pc$ and $C2$) are predicted. Structural transformation from the low-pressure $Pc$ phase to the $Fdd2$ phase occurs at 38 GPa, and from the $Fdd2$ phase to the high-pressure $Pc$ phase at 72 GPa, and then to the $C2$ phase at 82 GPa. Figure 4 shows the computed equations of state (EOS) of all stable calcium carbonates. One can see that pressure-induced phase transitions in CaCO$_3$ and Ca$_3$CO$_5$, but not in CaC$_2$O$_5$, are accompanied by large volume discontinuities.

It should be possible to synthesize the predicted calcium carbonates (Ca$_3$CO$_5$ and CaC$_2$O$_5$). Several phases of MgCO$_3$ and CaCO$_3$, previously predicted by our method and similar techniques, have already been confirmed by experiment, such as the $C2/m$ [5] and $P2_1$ [5] phases of MgCO$_3$, and $P2_1/c$ [6,25], $Pmmm$ [3,21], and thermodynamically metastable $P-1$[3,26] phases of CaCO$_3$. Considering hundreds of papers where it was assumed that CaCO$_3$ is the only possible calcium carbonate, and the importance of calcium carbonate for fundamental chemistry and physics and the hot ongoing quest for $sp^3$ (tetrahedral) carbonates, we believe that our predicted calcium carbonates will stimulate experiments.

B. Crystal structures of stable calcium carbonates

Crystal structures of the predicted stable and metastable calcium carbonates, visualized by the VESTA package [27], are shown in Fig. 5. At mantle pressures, crystal structures of CaCO$_3$ have been carefully studied before [3,6]. With the increase of pressure, CaCO$_3$ successively adopted five phases (calcite $R-3c$, aragonite $Pnma$, low-pressure $P_{21}/c$, postaragonite $Pmmm$, and high-pressure $P2_1/c$). As shown in Figs. 5(a)–5(e), the former four phases contain triangular CO$_3^{2-}$ ions with $sp^2$ hybridization, while the fifth phase adopts a pyroxene-type structure with chains of corner-linked CO$_4^{4-}$ tetrahedra above 75 GPa.

High-pressure phases of CaCO$_3$ (>75 GPa) and MgCO$_3$ (>83 GPa) contain CO$_4^{4-}$ tetrahedra. In CaCO$_3$ above 75 GPa, we see chains of corner-sharing tetrahedra. In MgCO$_3$ above 83 GPa, CO$_4^{4-}$ tetrahedra form C$_3$O$_9^{6-}$ rings, and above 180 GPa form chains [5,6]. The differences between CaCO$_3$ and MgCO$_3$ come from different sites of Ca and Mg. Ca$^{2+}$ is much larger than Mg$^{2+}$, and requires the anion sublattice to have more open space to fit it.

On the Ca-rich side, our predicted phases include stable $Cmmm$-Ca$_3$CO$_5$, $I4/mcm$-Ca$_3$CO$_5$, and metastable $P2_1/m$-Ca$_2$CO$_4$, all of which contain isolated CO$_4^{4-}$ tetrahe-
dra, as shown in Figs. 5(f)–5(h). Our calculations predict that calcium orthocarbonate Ca$_3$CO$_5$ becomes stable at very low pressure (11 GPa), which is much lower than the formation pressure of orthocarbonic acid (314 GPa) [28]. Chemically, Ca$_3$CO$_5$ can be represented as CaO : Ca$_2$CO$_4$ with coexistence of both O$^{2-}$ and CO$_4^{4-}$ anions, while metastable Ca$_2$CO$_4$ is a typical orthocarbonate. Stability of Ca$_3$CO$_5$ at a surprisingly low pressure of 11 GPa means that the CO$_4^{4-}$ units may also be present at such pressures in carbonate melts. Phonon calculations show that Ca$_3$CO$_5$ can be quenchable to ambient conditions at low temperatures.

Unlike Ca$_3$CO$_5$ and Ca$_2$CO$_4$, with higher CO$_2$ content in CaC$_2$O$_5$, CO$_2^{4-}$ tetrahedra are connected into two-dimensional (2D) sheets in Pc-CaC$_2$O$_5$ and C2-CaC$_2$O$_5$, and into a three-dimensional (3D) framework in Fdd2-CaC$_2$O$_5$, as shown in Figs. 5(i)–5(k). Polymerization of CO$_3^{2-}$ can be described as a transformation from carbonyl (C=O) functional groups to ether bonds (C-O-C), as shown in Fig. 6(a). The charged oxygen atom bonded to carbon is a nucleophilic site, whereas carbon atoms in CO$_2$ molecules are positively charged. This makes an electrophilic reaction possible, with polymerized CO$_3^{2-}$ sharing one electron pair with CO$_2$ upon formation of a polymeric framework C$_2$O$_5^{2-}$ anion, as shown in Fig. 6(b).

As discussed in previous work [29], the oxygen sharing by CO$_3^{2-}$ and CO$_2$ can be described as the oxo-Grotthuss mechanism. Here the formation of CaC$_2$O$_5$ is its enhanced version. The combination of CO$_3^{2-}$ and CO$_2$ offsets the electrostatic repulsion between CO$_3^{2-}$ anions. This is why the participation of CO$_2$ greatly decreases the polymerization pressure (compared with CaCO$_3$) from 75 to 33 GPa.

### C. Are Ca$_3$CO$_5$ and CaC$_2$O$_5$ possible in the Earth’s lower mantle?

By means of the quasiharmonic approximation (QHA), we first explored thermodynamic stability of all calcium carbonates in the pressure range from 80 to 160 GPa and a temperature of 2000 K. We note that, under such pressure and temperature conditions, CO$_2$ is expected to be solid [30]; its Gibbs free energy can thus be accurately computed based on
FIG. 7. Thermodynamic convex hulls for the CaO-CO₂ system at 2000 K and various pressures. Filled symbols denote stable structures, open symbols—metastable structures. Gibbs free energies of formation from oxides are normalized to one oxide unit.

the crystalline structure. As shown in Fig. 7, temperature has a small effect on the Gibbs free energy of formation of each calcium carbonate, and all three calcium carbonates (Ca₃CO₅, CaCO₃, and CaC₂O₅) that are stable at 0 K are still stable at 2000 K, indicating that they will not decompose at the Earth’s lower mantle conditions.

Then, we studied the chemical stability of stable Ca₃CO₅, CaC₂O₅, and CaCO₃ and metastable Ca₂CO₄ by exploring their possible reactions with the compounds MgSiO₃, CaSiO₃, SiO₂, and MgO—we remind the reader that (Mg,Fe)₂SiO₃, CaSiO₃, and (Mg,Fe)O are the dominant compounds of the Earth’s lower mantle, in their most stable forms at relevant conditions (e.g., [31]). These reactions are listed below:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ca}_3\text{CO}_5 + 3\text{SiO}_2 &= 3\text{CaSiO}_3 + \text{CO}_2, \\
\text{Ca}_3\text{CO}_5 + \text{MgO} &= \text{MgCO}_3 + 3\text{CaO}, \\
\text{Ca}_3\text{CO}_5 + 3\text{MgSiO}_3 &= 3\text{CaSiO}_3 + \text{MgCO}_3 + 2\text{MgO},
\end{align*}
\]

Figure 8 shows the computed Gibbs free energy of each reaction in the pressure range from 80 to 160 GPa and a temperature of 2000 K. Ca₃CO₅ and CaC₂O₅ cannot exist in the Earth’s lower mantle: as shown in Figs. 8(a) and 8(b), Ca₃CO₅ will always react with MgSiO₃ and SiO₂; CaC₂O₅ will react with MgO. We found that CaCO₃ will not react with MgO, SiO₂, and MgSiO₃ at zero temperature and pressure above 90 GPa (see Fig. S3 in the Supplemental Material [10]), in agreement with previous results [5,6]. However, at 2000 K, there is a big change in the behavior of reaction (11)—CaCO₃ will always react with MgSiO₃ at pressures below 140 GPa, as shown in Fig. 8(c). Figure 9 shows the phase diagram for reaction (11). It shows that CaCO₃ will never exist in the Earth’s lower mantle (i.e. at pressures in the range 24-136 GPa, temperatures >1800 K, and excess of MgSiO₃). MgCO₃ is the only stable carbonate in the lower mantle. Therefore, we conclude that throughout the Earth’s lower mantle polymorphs of MgCO₃ are the main hosts of oxidized carbon.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In summary, evolutionary crystal structure predictions have been performed for MgO-CO₂ and CaO-CO₂ systems with the aim of exploring stable magnesium and calcium carbonates at pressures ranging from 0 to 160 GPa. For the MgO-CO₂ system, we found that there is only one stable magnesium
carbonate, MgCO$_3$. For the CaO-CO$_2$ system, in addition to CaCO$_3$, we also report two previously unknown stable calcium carbonates, Ca$_3$CO$_5$, Ca$_2$C$_2$O$_5$, and one near-ground-state compound Ca$_2$CO$_4$.

Ca$_3$CO$_5$ can be represented as CaO · Ca$_2$CO$_4$, and is a calcium orthocarbonate, and is stable at a remarkably low pressure of 11 GPa. This is the lowest-pressure material with CO$_4$ tetrahedra. CaC$_2$O$_5$ is the product of an electrophilic reaction: CO$_3^{2-}$ + CO$_2$ and an enhanced version of the oxo-Grotthuss mechanism, which greatly decreases the polymerization pressure of CO$_3^{2-}$: 33 GPa, compared to 75 GPa in CaCO$_3$.

We have checked the chemical stability of Ca$_3$CO$_5$ and CaC$_2$O$_5$ in the Earth’s lower mantle environments by investigating possible chemical reactions involving MgCO$_3$, CO$_2$, MgSiO$_3$, CaSiO$_3$, SiO$_2$, CaO, and MgO. Our results indicate that MgCO$_3$ is the only carbonate that can exist in the Earth’s lower mantle.

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