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Key Points:

- The *h*-type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ is stable to 120 GPa and 2100 K, but undergoes a pressure-induced spin transition
- Spin transition causes a significant reduction in γ_0 and α_0 , and the thermal equation of state of *h*-type non-magnetic $\text{Fe}_7(\text{C},\text{N})_3$ is determined
- The density profile and seismic features of a planetary core could be altered across the spin transition, which may affect core dynamics

Supporting Information:

Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article.

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Thermoelastic Anomaly of Iron Carbonitride Across the Spin Transition and Implications for Planetary Cores

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Abstract Carbon and nitrogen are considered as candidate light elements present in planetary cores. However, there is limited understanding regarding the structure and physical properties of Fe-C-N alloys under extreme conditions. Here diamond anvil cell experiments were conducted, revealing the stability of hexagonal-structured $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ up to 120 GPa and 2100 K, without undergoing any structural transformation or dissociation. Notably, the thermal expansion coefficient and Grüneisen parameter of the alloy exhibit a collapse at 55–70 GPa. First-principles calculations suggest that such anomaly is associated with the spin transition of iron within $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$. Our modeling indicates that the presence of ~1.0 wt% carbon and nitrogen in liquid iron contributes to 9–12% of the density deficit of the Earth's outer core. The thermoelastic anomaly of the Fe-C-N alloy across the spin transition is likely to affect the density and seismic velocity profiles of (C,N)-rich planetary cores, thereby influencing the dynamics of such cores.

Plain Language Summary A significant amount of light elements are believed to be present in the cores of Earth and other planets to explain the density difference between iron-nickel alloys and geophysical observations. This study used experiments at high-pressure and high-temperature conditions and theoretical simulations to investigate a specific candidate phase of the core called $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$, which has a hexagonal structure, at high pressures similar to those in planetary cores. This phase did not undergo any major structural changes under the conditions investigated. However, its properties related to the thermoelastic behaviors showed significant changes between 55 and 70 GPa. Theoretical calculations indicate that this anomalous behavior is linked to the magnetic transition within *h*-type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$. These findings suggest that the characteristics of a planetary core would be altered in the transition region, leading to a more complex thermal evolution than previously believed. This study provides insights into the behavior of light elements in planetary cores and its implications for planetary dynamics.

1. Introduction

The Earth's core is predominantly composed of iron (Fe) with approximately 5 wt% nickel (Ni) and 5–10 wt% light elements, which are necessary to account for the core density deficit (Birch, 1964; Hirose et al., 2021 and references therein). Carbon (C) is considered one of the primary candidate light elements in the Earth's and planetary cores due to its strong affinity for Fe and its high abundance in chondrites (Dasgupta & Walker, 2008; Wood, 1993). When significant amounts of carbon are alloyed with Fe to form Fe carbides, they possess ultralow shear wave velocity and high Poisson's ratio, similar to the Earth's solid inner core (Chen et al., 2014, 2018; Prescher et al., 2015). Nitrogen (N), regarded as a minor light element in planetary cores, becomes increasingly siderophile under elevated pressures (Jackson et al., 2021), suggesting its concentration in planetary cores may have been significantly underestimated. Both C and N share similar cosmochemical properties and may coexist in Fe-rich phases (Kaminsky & Wirth, 2017). Therefore, understanding the phase relations and properties of the Fe-C-N system at high pressure-temperature (*P-T*) conditions is crucial for constraining the compositions of the Earth's and planetary cores.

The phase stability of Fe carbides has been widely investigated up to pressures exceeding 200 GPa at high temperatures. The crystal structure of Fe_7C_3 under high *P-T* conditions has been proposed to be either hexagonal ($P6_3mc$, denoted as *h*-type) (Figure S1 in Supporting Information S1) or orthorhombic (*Pbca*), and the relative

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stabilities of these structures are still a subject of debate (Chen et al., 2012; Nakajima et al., 2011; Prescher et al., 2015). Nevertheless, the high stability and melting temperature of Fe_7C_3 have been confirmed, making it a strong candidate component for the planetary core (Liu, Lin, et al., 2016; Mashino et al., 2019). It was found that Fe-rich nitrides with diverse stoichiometries dissociate into *h*-type Fe_7N_3 above 40 GPa at elevated temperatures (Minobe et al., 2015). Our recent experiments revealed that trigonal ($P3_{12}$, denoted as ϵ -type) $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ transforms into an orthorhombic Fe_3C -type phase ($Pnma$, denoted as σ -type) at ~ 27 GPa, and then into the *h*-type phase at ~ 40 GPa (Huang et al., 2021). However, the sub-solidus phase stability of ternary $\text{Fe}_7(\text{C},\text{N})_3$ remains unclear beyond 60 GPa. Understanding the phase stability of $\text{Fe}_7(\text{C},\text{N})_3$ at higher pressures is crucial for advancing our knowledge of the composition of C and N species within the planetary core.

Fe carbides and nitrides exhibit magnetic transitions under high pressure. Spectroscopic measurements have confirmed that *h*-type ferromagnetic (FM) Fe_7C_3 undergoes a transformation into a paramagnetic (PM) phase between 5.5 and 7.5 GPa, followed by a transition to a non-magnetic (NM) phase at ~ 53 GPa at room temperature (Chen et al., 2012). The second transition is associated with a spin transition of Fe in Fe_7C_3 (Chen et al., 2014). However, due to their unquenchable nature at ambient conditions, the spin crossover of Fe in *h*-type Fe_7N_3 or $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N},\text{C})_3$ has not been experimentally determined. The spin transition in ϵ -type Fe_7N_3 has been observed to complete at ~ 43 GPa and 300 K (Lv et al., 2020). Elastic properties of these binary alloys have been investigated to core pressures at room temperature (Chen et al., 2012; Lv et al., 2020; Minobe et al., 2015), revealing a magneto-elastic coupling in Fe-C-N materials. Across the spin transition, the isothermal bulk modulus (K_T) is reduced by $\sim 15\%$ in *h*-type Fe_7C_3 , while it is elevated by $\sim 20\%$ in ϵ -type Fe_7N_3 (Chen et al., 2012; Lv et al., 2020). The thermoelastic behaviors of the *h*-type phase, however, remain largely unknown. Nakajima et al. (2011) have measured the thermal equation of state (EoS) of PM- Fe_7C_3 up to 30 GPa and 2000 K, while there are only nine high-temperature data from 40 to 130 GPa available for deriving the thermal EoS of *h*-type Fe_7N_3 (Kusakabe et al., 2019). The impact of the spin transition on the thermoelastic properties of the *h*-type phase and the thermal EoS of NM- $\text{Fe}_7(\text{C},\text{N})_3$ remain unresolved. These challenges limit our ability to establish accurate density profiles of Fe-C-N alloys across wide P - T ranges relevant to planetary cores.

In this study, we investigated the phase stability, thermoelastic properties, and spin transition of *h*-type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{C},\text{N})_3$ up to 120 GPa and 2100 K using synchrotron-based X-ray diffraction (XRD) in laser-heated diamond anvil cells (LHDAC) and first-principles calculations based on density functional theory (DFT). These results help to uncover the effects of spin transition and compositional variation on the thermoelastic properties of the *h*-type phase, providing new insights into the compositions and dynamical processes of the planetary cores.

2. Methods

The sample, ϵ -type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$, was synthesized at 9 GPa and 1400 K using a 2000-ton multi-anvil press. Detailed information on starting materials, the synthesis process, and sample characterization could be found in Huang et al. (2021). Symmetric DACs equipped with diamond culets of 200 μm (in run-1) and 150 μm (in run-2) in diameter were used to generate high pressures. Rhenium gaskets, initially 250 μm thick, were pre-indented into 20–25 μm in thickness. Sample chambers of 80–100 μm in diameter were laser drilled in the gaskets. Different sample loading arrangements were applied in two experimental runs (Figure S2 in Supporting Information S1). In run-1, a piece of $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ foil with a thickness of $\sim 15\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ was placed on a KCl plate. Neon gas was loaded as a pressure-transmitting medium (PTM) and a pressure indicator (Fei et al., 2007). In run-2, the sample of $\sim 10\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ in thickness was sandwiched between two KCl plates, which acted as a thermal insulator, a PTM, and a pressure indicator (Chidester et al., 2021). The sample size ($15 \times 20\text{ }\mu\text{m}^2$) was comparable to that of the laser, which could minimize the effect of temperature gradient on the element diffusion. Note that in run-2, a small amount of MgO (capsule material for the synthesis of $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$) was loaded into the sample chamber along with the sample, which could be identified in XRD patterns. Both runs of synchrotron XRD experiments were carried out at beamline 13-IDD, advanced photon source (APS), Argonne National Laboratory. The incident X-ray beam with a wavelength of 0.3344 \AA had a focal spot size of $3 \times 4\text{ }\mu\text{m}^2$. The samples were heated by a double-sided laser heating system with a flat-top heating spot size of $\sim 15\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ in diameter (Prakapenka et al., 2008). Temperature was determined by fitting the thermal radiation data using the Planck radiation function under the gray body approximation. Uncertainties in temperature due to temperature gradient are estimated to be $\sim 10\%$ of the measured value (Kavner & Duffy, 2001). The XRD patterns were collected before, during and after heating. We followed the method proposed by Campbell et al. (2009) to estimate the effective temperature of KCl:

$$T_{\text{KCl}} = \frac{3 \times T_{\text{meas}} + 300}{4} \pm \frac{T_{\text{meas}} - 300}{2} \quad (1)$$

The XRD data were processed and analyzed using Dioptas (Prescher & Prakapenka, 2015) and GSAS + EXPGUI software (Toby, 2001). The P - V and P - V - T data were fitted using EoSFit7c software (Angel et al., 2014).

DFT-based first-principles calculations were performed in the Vienna ab-initio simulation package (VASP) using the projected augmented wave (PAW) method (Kresse & Joubert, 1999). The Perdew-Burke-Ernzerhof (PBE) version of the generalized gradient approximations (GGA) was chosen to treat the exchange-correlation potential (Perdew et al., 1996). Since the PBE version could predict the physical properties of Fe-rich alloys consistent with experimental results, the DFT + U method was not included in this study (Huang et al., 2021; Mookherjee et al., 2011). The spin-polarization of Fe without spin-orbit coupling was considered in our simulations. The FM and NM states were calculated for candidate phases. A $1 \times 1 \times 2$ supercell was constructed to simulate the intermediate $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ phase. The corresponding k -points grids were set as $5 \times 5 \times 7$ for the unit-cell and $5 \times 5 \times 3$ for the supercell, respectively. Calculations were performed at various volumes, where the sub-lattice magnetic moments, atomic coordinates, and cell parameters were allowed to relax. The kinetic energy cutoff was set to 1,000 eV. The energy convergence criterion was 10^{-6} eV for the electronic self-consistent calculations.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Synthesis and Stability of h -type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$

Our recent experiments indicated that ϵ -type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ transforms into the h -type structure above 40 GPa and this transition is inhibited at room temperature (Huang et al., 2021). Therefore, we first synthesized h -type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ in DACs at 40–50 GPa under high temperature. In run-1, the sample was directly compressed to \sim 42 GPa at ambient temperature and then laser-heated at \sim 1500 K. The new diffraction peaks could be assigned to the h -type structure with lattice parameters $a = 6.573(2)$ Å, $c = 4.272(4)$ Å, and $V = 159.8(2)$ Å 3 at 48.1(1.0) GPa and 300 K (Figure 1a). In run-2, h -type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ was synthesized at \sim 50 GPa and \sim 1400 K (Figure 1b). Its lattice parameters were $a = 6.562(2)$ Å, $c = 4.255(1)$ Å, and $V = 158.66(7)$ Å 3 at 52.0(1.0) GPa after quenching.

After successfully synthesizing h -type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$, we investigated its stability at higher P - T conditions. In run-1, we performed XRD mapping on the heating area of 18×24 μm^2 and selected one position with the strongest diffraction peaks of the sample. The h -type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ was compressed at room temperature to 74.1(5) GPa. In run-2, we conducted five sets of heating cycles in the pressure range from 50 to 120 GPa. No new Bragg peaks appeared in XRD patterns in both experimental runs, indicating no structural transformation or dissociation up to 118 GPa and 2100 K (Figure 1, Figure S3 and Text S1 in Supporting Information S1).

3.2. Thermoelastic Anomaly of h -type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$

The lattice parameters of h -type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ at extreme conditions are summarized in Tables S1–S2 in Supporting Information S1. Compared with our previous results (Huang et al., 2021), the volumes obtained in this study are 0.1–0.5% larger than those obtained in the externally-heated DAC experiment but well consistent with those in the LHDAC experiment, which should be primarily attributed to the small variation (the total contents of C and N ranging from 29.7 at% to 30.7 at%) in chemical compositions of the sample, and secondarily to different PTMs (Figures S4–S6 and Text S2 in Supporting Information S1). Since previous LHDAC data are consistent with the present results, they are used in the EoS fitting. The pressures at high temperatures are re-calibrated based on the thermal EoS of KCl reported by Chidester et al. (2021) (Figure S7 in Supporting Information S1).

The unit-cell volumes of h -type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ at 300 K decrease with increasing pressure without any obvious discontinuity up to 112 GPa (Figure S5 in Supporting Information S1). In contrast, the normalized stress (F_E) versus Eulerian strain (f_E) plot displays a slope change at $f_E = 0.049$ (corresponding to \sim 53 GPa) (Figure S8a in Supporting Information S1), which is similar to the case of h -type Fe_7C_3 (Chen et al., 2012). This indicates that h -type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ likely undergoes a second-order PM–NM transition at \sim 53 GPa and 300 K. The data below 53 GPa and above 53 GPa are fitted to the Birch–Murnaghan (B–M) EoS for the PM and NM phases, respectively (Text S3 in Supporting Information S1). Due to limited data below 53 GPa, we assume that the zero-pressure isothermal bulk modulus (K_0) and its first pressure derivative (K_0') of PM- $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ are the same

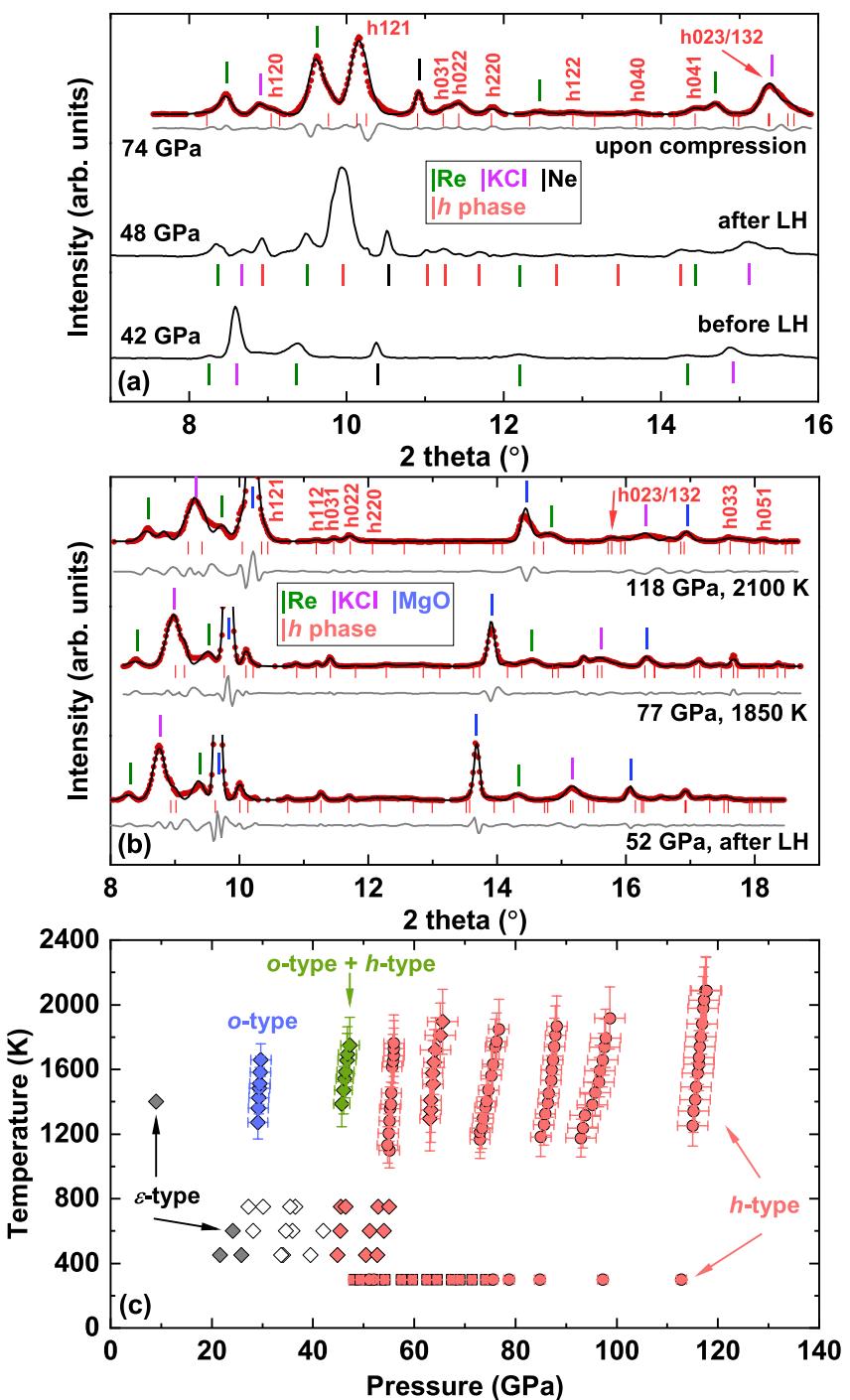


Figure 1. Representative measured X-ray diffraction (XRD) patterns of $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ in run-1 (a) and run-2 (b). Le Bail refinements (black curves) of observed XRD data (red dots) were carried out after background subtraction. The red, pink, black, green, and blue ticks represent Bragg peaks of h-type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$, KCl, Ne, Re, and MgO phases, respectively. The red numbers represent the characteristic peaks of h-type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$. Full peaks of h-type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ are displayed by red ticks only for those shown with Le Bail refinements. Otherwise, only characteristic peaks of each phase are displayed by ticks. (c) Phase diagram of $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ at high P - T conditions. The ϵ -type, o -type, and h -type represent the $P3_{12}$, Fe_3C -type ($Pnma$), and Fe_7C_3 -type ($P6_{3}mc$) phases, respectively. Diamond symbols represent data extracted from Huang et al. (2021).

as those of PM- Fe_7C_3 ($K_0 = 201$ GPa and $K_0' = 8.0$) (Chen et al., 2012), and get zero-pressure volume (V_0) as $183.8(2)$ Å³. For the NM phase, K_0' is fixed to 3.2 using the same value as NM- Fe_7C_3 (Chen et al., 2012), and the fitted parameters for NM- $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ are $V_0 = 182.4(5)$ Å³ and $K_0 = 302(7)$ GPa.

Having established the room-temperature EoS, we further derive the thermoelastic parameters of *h*-type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ by fitting *P*-*V*-*T* data using the thermal pressure model. The thermal pressure is obtained with two different approaches: (a) The αK_T model and (b) the Mie-Grüneisen-Debye (MGD) model. Figure S8b in Supporting Information S1 demonstrates that the F_E values of the high-temperature data above 70 GPa are much lower than those below 70 GPa, indicating that these data cannot be fitted to a single EoS.

In the αK_T model, the αK_T value is considered to be constant above the Debye temperature if the anharmonic and electronic contributions could be neglected (Text S3 in Supporting Information S1). The thermal pressure increases almost linearly with temperature, implying no temperature dependence of αK_T (Figure 2a). However, our experimental data demonstrate a pressure dependence of the thermal pressure. The thermal pressures at ~ 55 GPa are close to those at ~ 45 GPa. They reduce by 20–25% at ~ 65 GPa, and by $\sim 50\%$ above 70 GPa. These results indicate that under high temperature iron in *h*-type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ should be in the high-spin (HS) state at 45–55 GPa, in the mixed-spin (MS) state at ~ 65 GPa and in the low-spin (LS) state above 70 GPa. A least-squares fit to the data yields a slope (αK_T) of $0.011(1)$ GPa/K for the HS phase and $0.0059(1)$ GPa/K for the LS phase. The corresponding zero-pressure thermal expansion coefficient α_0 is calculated from αK_T and K_0 values to be $5.4(4) \times 10^{-5}$ K⁻¹ for the HS phase and $2.0(2) \times 10^{-5}$ K⁻¹ for the LS phase, respectively. The α_0 of HS- $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ is comparable to previous results for PM- Fe_7C_3 ($3.5 \sim 4.7 \times 10^{-5}$ K⁻¹) (Lai et al., 2018; Litasov et al., 2015), but much larger than that of LS- $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$. This indicates a considerable reduction in α_0 due to the spin transition.

The *P*-*V*-*T* data were also fitted to the MGD EoS (Text S3 in Supporting Information S1) (I. Jackson & Rigden, 1996). The data collected above 70 GPa were fitted for the LS phase (Figure 2b). The Debye temperature θ_0 of *h*-type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ is assumed the same as that of pure Fe (417 K), similar to the previous studies for other Fe-rich alloys (Dewaele et al., 2006; Thompson et al., 2020). A least-squares fit gives the ambient Grüneisen parameter $\gamma_0 = 1.3(2)$ and $q = 1.0(4)$. The data collected at 45–55 GPa were fitted for the HS phase, yielding $\gamma_0 = 2.6(3)$ with a fixed q value of 1.0. The γ_0 of HS- $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ is also close to that of PM- Fe_7C_3 (Nakajima et al., 2011), but nearly twice the γ_0 of LS- $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$. This implies a significant drop in γ_0 across the HS-LS transition. Kusakabe et al. (2019) report that γ_0 and q of Fe_7N_3 are $2.1(3)$ and $4.5(9)$, respectively, much larger than our results. We notice that their volume data at 40–60 GPa are abnormally larger than those above 70 GPa. Fitting these data to a single EoS should be thermodynamically invalid.

To further look into the effect of pressure on the thermoelastic properties of *h*-type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$, the thermal expansion coefficients of a^3 and c^3 are calculated (Figure 2c, Figures S9–S10 and Text S4 in Supporting Information S1). The thermal expansion coefficients are $\alpha_a = 2.3\text{--}3.0 \times 10^{-5}$ K⁻¹ and $\alpha_c = 1.6\text{--}2.6 \times 10^{-5}$ K⁻¹ at 45–55 GPa. At ~ 65 GPa, α_a significantly decreases and α_c slightly reduces. Above 70 GPa, α_a and α_c are $\sim 1.2 \times 10^{-5}$ K⁻¹ and $\sim 1.0 \times 10^{-5}$ K⁻¹, respectively.

In summary, our experimental results have shown that the thermal expansions of volume and two axes and Grüneisen parameter of *h*-type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ collapse between 55 and 70 GPa. In particular, the thermal expansion contrast between two axes considerably reduces above 70 GPa.

3.3. Mechanism for Thermoelastic Anomaly of *h*-type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$

To reveal the mechanism for the thermoelastic differences observed in our data between 55 and 70 GPa, we have performed ab initio calculations to study the magnetic properties of the *h*-type solid solution. The average magnetic moments collapse at 74 GPa for Fe_7N_3 , at 76 GPa for $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ and at 80 GPa for Fe_7C_3 (Figure S11a in Supporting Information S1). Correspondingly, the magnetic moments of Fe at each equivalent site drop to zero indicating the spin transition of Fe from the HS state to the LS state (Figure S11 in Supporting Information S1). The substitution of C by N in the *h*-type phase slightly reduces the transition pressure.

The predicted spin transition pressure of Fe_7C_3 is consistent with the previously calculated result (Mookherjee et al., 2011). FM- Fe_7C_3 is reported to transform into the PM state at 7–20 GPa at room temperature (Chen et al., 2012; Prescher et al., 2015). We did not consider the PM state in static calculations. But note that Fe of PM- Fe_7C_3 is still in the HS state. Our predicted spin transition pressure of Fe_7C_3 is higher than the experimental result

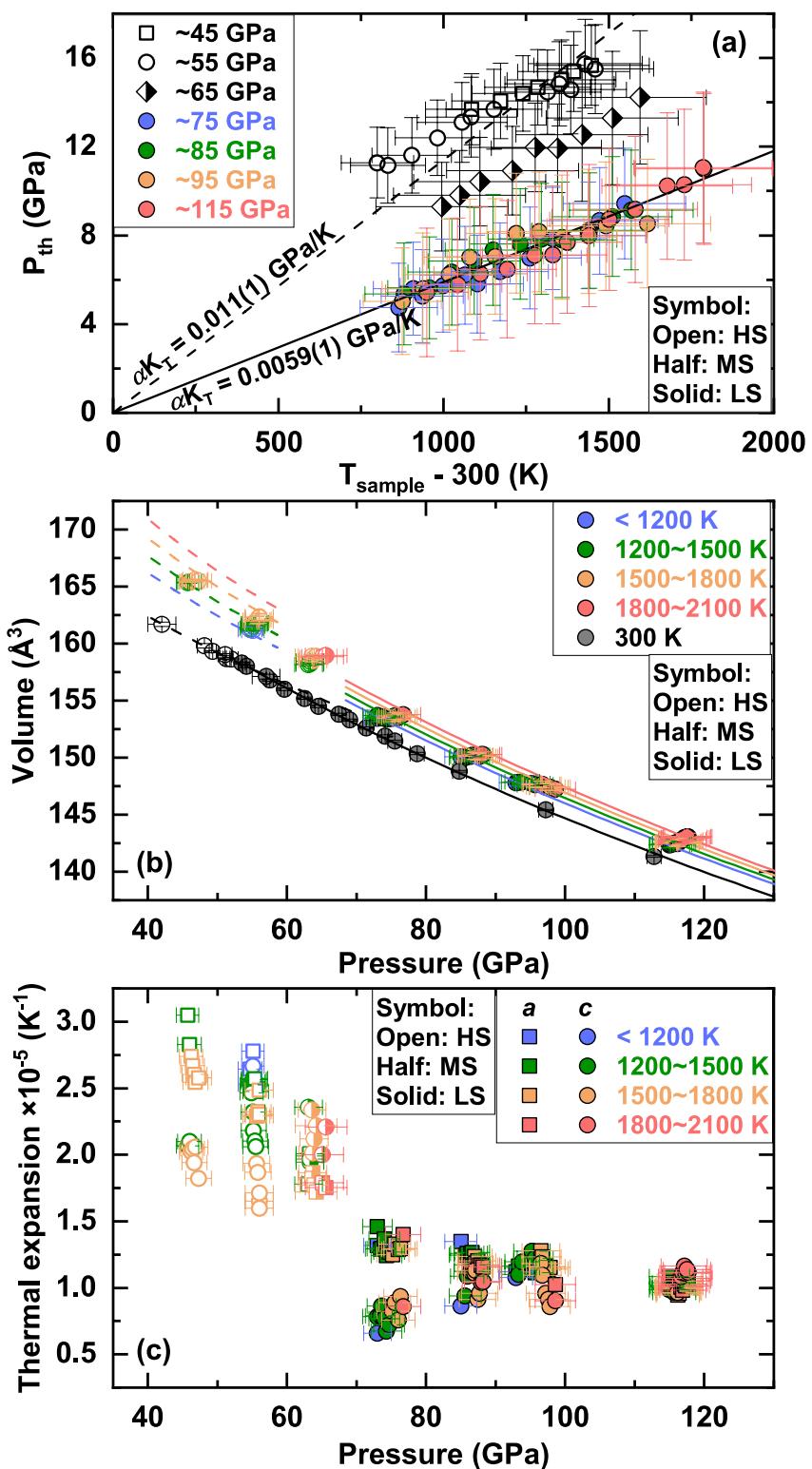


Figure 2. (a) Thermal pressure as a function of ΔT ($\Delta T = T_{\text{sample}} - 300$). The dashed and solid lines in panel (a) are calculated using the linear equation. (b) P - V - T data of h -type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$. The dashed and solid curves plotted in panel (b) are calculated using the MGD equation of state parameters of h -type HS- and LS- $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$, respectively. (c) Thermal expansion of a^3 and c^3 of h -type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ as a function of pressure. HS, MS and LS represent the high-spin, mixed-spin and low-spin states, respectively.

(~53 GPa) obtained at 300 K (Chen et al., 2014). The zero-pressure magnetic moment of Fe_7C_3 is calculated to be $1.7 \mu_B$ at 0 K, larger than the value ($1.3 \mu_B$) measured at ambient conditions (Tsuzuki et al., 1984). This phenomenon is also found in other Fe-rich alloys, such as ϵ -type $\text{Fe}_3\text{N}_{1+x}$ and Fe_3P (Gu et al., 2014; Huang et al., 2021; Lei et al., 2018; Lisher et al., 1974). This may indicate that DFT simulations are likely to overestimate the stability field of the FM state of Fe-rich alloys or that the temperature effect tends to suppress the spin of Fe (Gu et al., 2014; Tagawa et al., 2022). Therefore, the spin transition pressure predicted by static DFT simulations would be higher than that measured at room temperature. Moreover, the calculations show that the compositional variation has a negligible effect on the transition pressure. Taking all these effects into account, our calculated results support the experimental observation that h -type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ undergoes a spin transition at ~53 GPa at 300 K.

Our calculations show that the Fe-Fe distance in the *ab* plane (i.e., 2.403 \AA at ~49 GPa) is shorter than that along the *c* axis (i.e., 2.498 \AA at ~49 GPa) in the *h*-type structure, indicating stronger magnetic interactions in the *ab* plane than along the *c* axis for the HS state. Therefore, α_a is much larger than α_c for HS- $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$, resulting in a considerable increase in the *a/c* ratio with increasing temperature at 45–55 GPa (Figure S10 in Supporting Information S1). α_a becomes comparable to α_c after the spin transition of Fe because the magnetic interactions collapse. Correspondingly, the *a/c* ratio is nearly independent of temperature above 70 GPa (Figure S10 in Supporting Information S1).

4. Geophysical Implications

The Earth's liquid outer core is ~10% less dense than liquid Fe, suggesting that a substantial amount of light elements are present in the liquid core (Birch, 1964; Hirose et al., 2021 and references therein). Here we consider the scenario at the Earth's core-mantle boundary (CMB). This analysis requires only small extrapolations in pressure and temperature to apply our EoS parameters of the *h*-type LS phase at conditions of the CMB. The density of the outer core is 9.9 g/cm^3 at the CMB based on the PREM model (Dziewonski & Anderson, 1981). The pressure and temperature of the outer core at the CMB are taken to be 135.8 GPa and $4,000 \pm 500 \text{ K}$, respectively. In addition, we apply a 1–2% volume expansion upon melting for Fe and Fe-rich alloys at the CMB pressure (Anderson, 2003). To account for the outer core's density deficit, the liquid core should contain a total concentration of 8.9–10.2 wt% C and N for a 2% volume change on melting or 10.2–11.7 wt% for a 1% volume change on melting (Figure 3a). However, the total concentration of C and N in the bulk core might be an order of ~1.0 wt% based on their partitioning behaviors during core-mantle differentiation (Dalou et al., 2017; Fischer et al., 2020; Grewal et al., 2019, 2021; Jackson et al., 2021). The presence of ~1.0 wt% C and N decreases the density of liquid Fe by $0.09\text{--}0.11 \text{ g/cm}^3$, contributing to 9–12% of the outer core's density deficit. If the thermal EoS of the HS phase were applied in the extrapolation, liquid Fe would be less dense by 15–19% with the incorporation of ~1.0 wt% C and N. In this case, the contribution of C and N to the density deficit of the Earth's outer core is overestimated by approximately 50%. Our modeling results not only show that C and N cannot be the dominant light elements in the Earth's liquid core but also underline the significance of using proper thermodynamic parameters to extrapolate low-pressure results to more extreme conditions.

The solidification of the *h*-type phase from the Earth's liquid core requires a content of 2–3 wt% C and N in the Earth's outer core (Fei & Brosh, 2014; Mashino et al., 2019). This value is much higher than that derived from the metal-silicate partitioning data, making *h*-type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{C},\text{N})_3$ unlikely a dominant constituent in the Earth's inner core. However, if a terrestrial planet is accreted predominantly from (C,N)-rich building blocks (i.e., carbonaceous chondrites), such planetary core may have sufficient amounts of C and N to form *h*-type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{C},\text{N})_3$. Furthermore, astrophysical evidence has shown that in the extra-solar system, some stars have high C/O ratios such that the planets that they host would have a carbide-enriched metallic core (Bond et al., 2010). The alteration of physical properties of the *h*-type phase will have significant effects on the characteristics and evolution of such planets.

We have plotted the density profiles of *h*-type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ at different temperatures (Figure 3b). The density of *h*-type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ increases with increasing pressure at 300 K without any observable discontinuity. In contrast, the evolution of the density with pressure is not smooth under high temperature since the thermal expansion is reduced substantially after the spin transition. The density of the LS phase is 9.24 g/cm^3 at 70 GPa and 1500 K and that of the HS phase is extrapolated to be 9.11 g/cm^3 at the same conditions. The density is elevated by 1.4% across the spin transition. At 70 GPa and 2100 K, the densities are calculated to be 9.17 g/cm^3 and 9.00 g/cm^3 for the LS and HS phases, respectively, presenting a 1.8% density contrast. Such abrupt density

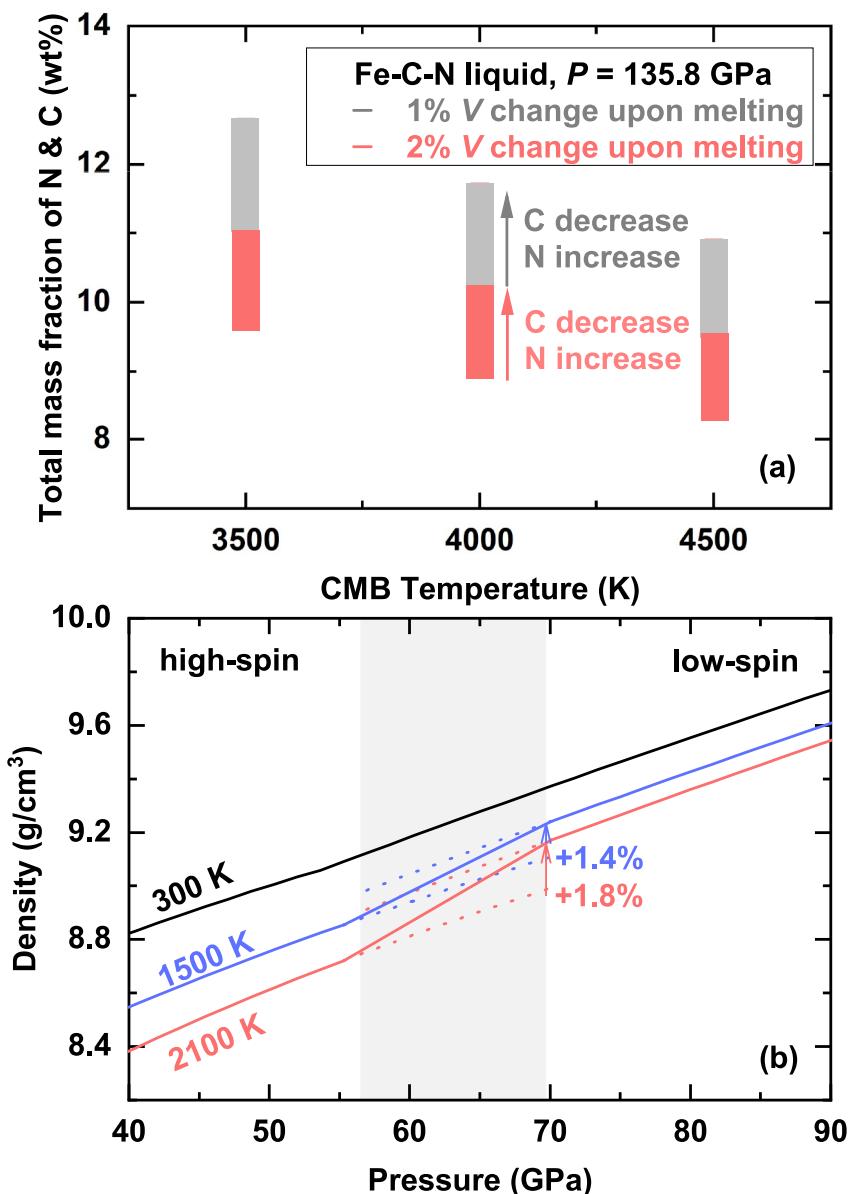


Figure 3. (a) Trade-off between temperature and the total amount of N and C required in liquid Fe to match the density deficit of the Earth's outer core at conditions of the core-mantle boundary. (b) Calculated isothermal density profiles of *h*-type $\text{Fe}_7(\text{N}_{0.75}\text{C}_{0.25})_3$ based on this study as a function of pressure at 300 K (black), 1500 K (blue), and 2100 K (red).

jump may not be observed as the spin transition is supposed to broaden significantly under high temperature. Instead, the slope of the density evolution with pressure changes considerably across the spin transition, which may be seismically detectable. This transition also leads to elastic softening in *h*-type Fe_7C_3 with large decreases in K_T and seismic velocities at 300 K (Chen et al., 2012, 2014). The adiabatic bulk modulus (K_S) is equal to $K_S = K_T(1 + \alpha\gamma T)$. Provided that both α and γ collapse after the spin transition, the reduction in the P wave velocity ($V_P = \sqrt{(K_S + \frac{4}{3}G)/\rho}$) of the *h*-type phase is anticipated to be enhanced under high P - T conditions. Furthermore, the thermal conductivity (κ) in the planetary core plays a key role in controlling the core dynamics. It is accepted that a large γ normally indicates a low κ , though the quantitative relationship between two parameters remains to be determined (Zhou et al., 2022 and references therein). The κ of the *h*-type phase is, therefore, likely to increase after the spin transition. If the *h*-type phase is one of the dominant phases in a planetary core and the

spin transition occurs in this region, the thermal evolution and cooling history of such planetary core should be more complex.

Finally, it is reported that the α_0 of NM- Fe_3S is $\sim 30\%$ smaller than that of the FM phase (Thompson et al., 2020). In terms of FeH, the temperature-induced volume expansion above 40 GPa is much smaller than that at 40 GPa, at which it undergoes a spin transition (Tagawa et al., 2022). These results together indicate that the spin transition-induced thermoelastic anomaly is likely a universal phenomenon in Fe-rich alloys, but the extent of such anomaly should vary for Fe-rich compounds alloying with different light elements. Investigating the effect of spin transition on the elastic and transport properties of other Fe-rich alloys at simultaneous high-pressure and high-temperature conditions will contribute to a better understanding of the evolution of the cores of various types of planets.

Data Availability Statement

All the data necessary to produce the results are available at Huang, S. et al. (2024).

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