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First-principles XANES simulations of spinel zinc ferrite with a disordered cation distribution

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Theoretical calculations of Zn K and Fe K x-ray absorption near-edge structures (XANES) using a first-principles method have been performed to evaluate the degree of cation disordering in spinel zinc ferrite (ZnFe₂O₄) thin film prepared by a sputtering method, ZnFe₂O₄ thin films annealed at elevated temperatures, and ZnFe₂O₄ bulk specimen prepared by a solid-state reaction. Using the full-potential linearized augmented plane-wave + local orbitals method, a theoretical spectrum is generated for the tetrahedral and octahedral environments for each of the two cations. The experimental XANES spectrum of the thin film annealed at 800 °C as well as that of bulk specimen is successfully reproduced by using either the theoretical spectrum for Zn²⁺ on the tetrahedral site (A site) or that for Fe³⁺ on the octahedral site (B site), which is indicative of the normal spinel structure. For the as-deposited film, on the other hand, excellent agreement between theoretical and experimental spectra is obtained by considering the presence of either ion in both the A and B sites. The degree of cation disordering, x, defined as [ZnₓFe₂⁻Fe³⁺]₆[Zn₁₋ₓFe₂⁺Fe³⁺]₁₆O₄, is estimated to be approximately 0.6 in the as-deposited film, which is consistent with the analysis of the extended x-ray absorption fine structure on the Zn K edge. Curious magnetic properties as we previously observed for the as-deposited thin film—i.e., ferrimagnetic behaviors accompanied by large magnetization at room temperature and cluster spin-glass-like behavior—are discussed in connection with disordering of Zn²⁺ and Fe³⁺ ions in the spinel-type structure.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The stable phase of zinc ferrite (ZnFe₂O₄) possesses a normal spinel structure—i.e., [Zn²⁺]₆[Fe₂⁺³]₁₆O₄, where the subscripts A and B denote the tetrahedral and octahedral sites in a face-centered-cubic close-packed oxygen sublattice, respectively. It is well known that the normal spinel ZnFe₂O₄ behaves like an antiferromagnet with a Néel temperature of 10 K (strictly speaking, ZnFe₂O₄ with ideal normal spinel structure is a three-dimensional spin frustrated magnet, so that the long-range magnetic order is not accomplished down to 1.5 K at least). The magnetic transition at very low temperature results from the weak superexchange interaction between Fe³⁺ ions in the B sites. The fact that the stable phase of ZnFe₂O₄ has a normal spinel structure is due to the strong tendency for Zn²⁺ ions to occupy the A sites in the spinel structure. However, nonequilibrium processing, including mechanical milling,4,5 coprecipitation method,6 rapid quenching,7,8 sputtering9–12 and pulsed-laser-deposition (PLD),13 induces the metastable phase of ZnFe₂O₄ with the arrangement of Zn³⁺ and Fe²⁺ ions being disordered. The general formula of disordered ZnFe₂O₄ is represented as [ZnₓFe₂⁻Fe³⁺]₆[Zn₁₋ₓFe₂⁺Fe³⁺]₁₆O₄, where x is an inverse coefficient corresponding to the degree of cation disordering. The magnetic properties of ZnFe₂O₄ vary with x, depending significantly on the synthetic method and/or postprocessing history. We recently reported that ZnFe₂O₄ thin films composed of nanocrystalline particles using the sputtering method exhibit the curious magnetic properties, such as ferrimagnetic properties accompanied by high magnetization even at room temperature, spin freezing at a temperature higher than room temperature, and so on.9,12 Such behaviors are caused by the formation of the metastable phase via rapid cooling of vapor phases, since the strong superexchange interaction between Fe³⁺ ions in the A and B sites can lead to the ferrimagnetic properties. Low-temperature magnetization measurements suggested that x ∼ 2/3; i.e., the chemical formula was very close to [Zn₀.₃₃Fe₀.₆₇³⁺]₆[Zn₀.₆₇²⁺Fe₁.₃₃³⁺]₁₆O₄ with completely disordered distribution of Zn²⁺ and Fe³⁺ ions, although no distinct proof was provided.

Although many researchers ascribed the ferrimagnetic behaviors observed for the metastable ZnFe₂O₄ to cation disordering, only a few quantitative studies have been reported on the degree of cation disordering. By using Rietveld refinement of x-ray diffraction (XRD) data, it is difficult to deduce the degree of cation disordering, due to the similar scattering strength of Zn and Fe. In the case of nanoparticles such as our samples, the problem is more serious because of the broadness of the diffraction peaks. Mössbauer effect measurements are useful for determining the bond covalence and symmetry around Fe, but provide no direct information on Zn. Because of these, extended x-ray absorption fine structure (EXAFS) analysis, which offers structural parameters concerning ambient atoms, such as coordination numbers and interatomic distance, has been used to determine the degree of cation disordering in various spinel ferrites including NiZn ferrite,14,15 MnZn ferrite,16,17 and Cu ferrite.18 On the other hand, x-ray absorption near-edge structure (XANES) analysis provides information about the electronic state and chemical bond of a specific atom. Since EXAFS and XANES give us complementary information, the combina-
tion of both spectral analyses should be more effective in clarifying the local environment of a specific atom. However, the powerful combination was not performed to examine the degree of cation disordering until recently, presumably due to the lack of reliable tools to analyze XANES, in contrast to EXAFS.

Recently, Mo and Ching\textsuperscript{19,20} carried out the first-principles orthogonalized linear combinations of atomic orbitals (OLCAO) method for a variety of oxides, such as α-SiO\textsubscript{2}, α-Al\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{3}, MgO, and MgAl\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{4}, and achieved quantitative reproduction of experimental XANES and energy-loss near-edge structure (ELNES) spectra. In their calculation, a core hole is introduced by removing one electron from the core orbital and putting one electron to the unoccupied orbital. Similarly, Tanaka and co-workers\textsuperscript{21–23} demonstrated quantitative reproduction for experimental pre-edge fine structures of SrTiO\textsubscript{3} and BaTiO\textsubscript{3} as well as for experimental quantitative reproduction for experimental pre-edge fine structures of SrTiO\textsubscript{3} and BaTiO\textsubscript{3}.

In this paper, first-principles calculations are carried out in order to obtain the theoretical XANES spectra for ZnFe\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{4} with arbitrary cation disorder and the spectral analysis is utilized to determine the degree of the cation disordering, x, in ZnFe\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{4} thin film prepared by the sputtering method, the annealed ZnFe\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{4} thin films, and ZnFe\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{4} bulk specimen prepared by a conventional solid-state reaction. Our particular intention is to make a systematic investigation of the cation disordering and to see if the XANES calculations are really hopeful or hopeless for analyzing the cation disorder from the standpoint of theoretical computations. ZnFe\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{4} is suitable for such purposes because one will be able to alter systematically the cation disorder in the range of \(x = 0\) (normal spinel) to 2/3 (completely disordered spinel) according to the synthetic procedure, as mentioned above. We demonstrate that the \(x\) values derived from first-principles XANES simulations agree well with those from EXAFS analysis. Also, we discuss the magnetic properties of ZnFe\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{4} on the basis of the deduced cation disorder.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Experimental procedure

A radio-frequency sputtering method was used to prepare ZnFe\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{4} thin films. A film was deposited on a glass substrate (Corning 7059 or silica glass) in an O\textsubscript{2} atmosphere (referred to as as-deposited thin film). Some of the resultant thin films were annealed at 350, 400, 500, and 800 °C for 3 h in air (annealed thin films). The details of the sample preparation were described elsewhere.\textsuperscript{9,10} According to XRD analysis, the as-deposited thin film was composed of ZnFe\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{4} nanocrystals with an average size of 10 nm. It was also ascertained by energy-dispersive x-ray fluorescence spectroscopy that the cation ratio of Zn to Fe was 1.07:2, meaning that the thin film was almost stoichiometric ZnFe\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{4}. The thermal annealing at elevated temperatures led to grain growth in a stepwise manner, while keeping a single phase of spinel-type ZnFe\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{4}. For comparison, a ZnFe\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{4} polycrystalline pellet prepared by the conventional solid-state reaction was also studied; the mixture prepared from reagent-grade Fe\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{3} and ZnO was sintered at 1100 °C for 15 h in air and then cooled to room temperature at a rate of about 110 °C/h. The XRD pattern of the resultant pellet revealed a single phase of ZnFe\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{4}. The ZnFe\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{4} polycrystal thus obtained will be often called the bulk specimen to distinguish it from thin-film specimens.

Magnetic properties of as-deposited and annealed ZnFe\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{4} thin films and ZnFe\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{4} bulk specimen were investigated using a superconducting quantum interference device (SQUID) magnetometer (Quantum Design, MPMS2). The temperature dependence of dc magnetization was measured under field-cooled (FC) and zero-field-cooled (ZFC) conditions at an external magnetic field of 50 Oe.

XANES and EXAFS data at Zn- and Fe K absorption edges were obtained for the as-deposited and annealed ZnFe\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{4} thin films and the ZnFe\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{4} bulk specimen utilizing synchrotron radiation from the beamline BL-12 of Photon Factory, National High Energy Institute of Japan. The electron beam energy was 2.5 GeV, and the maximum stored current was 330 mA. X-ray absorption spectra were recorded in the x-ray-fluorescence-yield mode at room temperature using a 19-element pure-Ge solid-state detector. Spectral data were collected in the range of 9200.0–10 760.0 eV for Zn and in the range of 6900.0–7260.0 eV for Fe using an Si(111) double-crystal monochromator.

B. Computational procedure

First-principles calculations based on density functional theory have been carried out to simulate XANES spectra using the full-potential linearized augmented plane wave + local orbitals (FLAPW+lo) package WIEN2k. Two kinds of spinel-type structure were adopted for the theoretical calculation as illustrated in Fig. 1. One is the ideal normal spinel ZnFe\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{4} structure with space group \(Fd\overline{3}m\) [Fig. 1(a)] and the other the ZnFe\textsubscript{2}O\textsubscript{4} with cation disorder [Fig. 1(b)], with a
Zn²⁺ ion residing on the B site at (1/2 1/2 1/2), and an Fe³⁺ ion on the A site at (1/8 1/8 1/8). Each of the conventional cells contains 56 atoms. Lattice and oxygen parameters were fixed at the values reported in the literature—i.e., 8.416 Å and 0.380, respectively. Calculations were performed for a Zn²⁺ ion on the A site (Zn₁), and an Fe³⁺ ion on the B site (Fe³⁺) in the normal spinel structure, and a Zn²⁺ ion on the B site (Zn₂) and an Fe³⁺ ion on the A site (Fe³⁺) in the disordered spinel structure. We also performed the calculation for a Zn₂⁺ in the disordered spinel structure in order to compare the theoretical spectrum with that for a Zn₂⁺ in the normal spinel structure. In each calculation, the initial ground state and the final transition state were computed separately. The final state is characterized by the excitation of an electron on a 1s core orbital to unoccupied 4p orbital. The other conditions are as follows: the muffin-tin radii $R_{MT}$ for Fe, Zn, and O were set to 1.75 a.u., and a product of muffin-tin radius and the maximum reciprocal space vector $K_{max}$—i.e., the plane-wave cutoff—was fixed at 6.0 (atomic unit Ry$^{1/2}$). The $k$-point sampling mesh in the reciprocal space was $3 \times 3 \times 3$. Theoretical XANES spectra were obtained by a product of the projected partial density of state (p-PDOS) for unoccupied 4p orbital in the final state and the radial part of the transition matrix elements. The p-PDOS was broadened by a Gaussian function of a full width at half maximum (FWHM) of 1 eV, as demonstrated in previous papers. The FWHM of 1 eV was chosen for a fair comparison between experimental and calculated spectra; the use of the Gaussian function with larger FWHM, which tends to mask the fine details of theoretical spectra, may lead to an accidental agreement with experimental spectra. The theoretical transition energy was calculated as the difference in total energy between initial (ground) and final (core-hole) states.

We also analyzed the EXAFS spectra at the Zn K edge following well-established procedures. First, the extended absorption fine structure at the Zn K edge was isolated and normalized to the edge-step height and energy. The resultant data were then converted to photoelectron wave vector ($k$) space and Fourier transformed to radial coordinates ($r$ space). The $k$ range of 3–12 Å⁻¹ with a $k^3$ weighting was employed in the Fourier transformation. At this stage in the analysis, the data were not corrected for electron phase shifts, and therefore, the Fourier peaks did not correspond directly to the bond distances of near neighbors but were instead shifted to lower $r$ values. The theoretical standards were generated by ab initio calculations using the FEFF code of Rehr et al. and fitted to the uncorrected experimental data in the $r$ space range of 1–4 Å.

FIG. 2. Temperature dependences of ZFC (solid symbols) and FC (open symbols) magnetizations measured at an external magnetic field of 50 Oe for (a) ZnFe₂O₄ bulk specimen, (b) as-deposited thin film, and thin films annealed at (c) 350 °C, (d) 400 °C, (e) 500 °C, and (f) 800 °C.

III. RESULTS
A. Magnetic properties of ZnFe₂O₄

Before discussing the main topic of this paper—i.e., XANES results—it is important to characterize our ZnFe₂O₄ samples, because the cation disorder of ZnFe₂O₄ is significantly affected by the synthetic procedures. Here, our ZnFe₂O₄ samples are characterized through the magnetic properties which are sensitive to the cation disorder. Figure 2 depicts the temperature variations of ZFC and FC magnetizations, $M_{ZFC}(T)$ and $M_{FC}(T)$, measured at an external magnetic field of 50 Oe for bulk specimen, as-deposited thin film, and the thin films annealed at temperatures between 350 and 800 °C. The solid and open symbols in each of the figures represent the ZFC and FC magnetizations, respectively. For the bulk specimen as shown in Fig. 2(a), a cusp is observed at around 11 K in $M_{ZFC}(T)$ and $M_{FC}(T)$. Although the appearance of the cusp allows one to believe that ZnFe₂O₄ with normal spinel structure is antiferromagnetic with a Néel temperature of about 10 K, recent studies of a single crystal using neutron scattering demonstrated that the long-range magnetic order is not attained in normal spinel ZnFe₂O₄ even at a very low temperature of 1.5 K or so because of three-dimensional geometrical spin frustration. Namely, normal spinel ZnFe₂O₄ crystal is not an antiferromagnet but an intrinsically spin-frustrated magnet. The presence of a small amount of structural disorder suppresses the spin frustration, leading to the finite-range magnetic order. This is signified by the discrepancy between $M_{ZFC}(T)$ and $M_{FC}(T).$ A close inspection at Fig. 2(a) reveals only a slight discrepancy between $M_{ZFC}(T)$ and $M_{FC}(T)$ at temperatures below the spin-freezing temperature. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the cation distribution of bulk specimens is approximately equivalent to that of ZnFe₂O₄ with normal spinel structure.
As for the as-deposited thin film [see Fig. 2(b)], on the other hand, a maximum in \( M_{\text{ZFC}}(T) \), which corresponds to the spin freezing, is observed at a temperature higher than room temperature, while \( M_{\text{TC}}(T) \) increases monotonically with decreasing temperature. The great discrepancy between \( M_{\text{ZFC}}(T) \) and \( M_{\text{TC}}(T) \) as well as the high spin-freezing temperature is mainly due to the formation of the metastable phase with a highly disordered cation distribution as will be mentioned below. Depending on the annealing temperature, the magnetic properties are gradually changed as shown in Figs. 2(c)--2(f). As the annealing temperature is increased, the spin-freezing temperature is shifted to lower temperatures accompanied by a decrease in magnetization in the measured temperature ranges. The \( M_{\text{ZFC}}(T) \) and \( M_{\text{TC}}(T) \) for the film annealed at 800 °C exhibit a behavior similar to that of bulk specimens, indicating that the annealing at 800 °C leads to an almost complete redistribution of Zn\(^{2+}\) and Fe\(^{3+}\) ions toward the normal spinel structure. Thus, it is considered that the variation of magnetic properties with annealing temperature reflects the gradual decrease in cation disorder, by which the superexchange interaction between Fe\(^{3+}\) ions in the A and B sites, \( J_{\text{AB}} \), weakens to decrease the spin-freezing temperature and magnetization and instead the superexchange interaction between Fe\(^{3+}\) ions in the B sites, \( J_{\text{BB}} \), becomes dominant to bring about antiferromagnetic behavior.

B. XANES spectra of ZnFe\(_2\)O\(_4\)

For the aforementioned, well-characterized samples, we obtained experimental XANES spectra at Zn and Fe K edges. Figure 3 shows the experimental Zn K-edge XANES spectra for the as-deposited thin film, the thin film annealed at 800 °C, and the bulk specimen. The XANES spectra result from the parity-allowed 1s-4p transitions of Zn. In Fig. 3 are also displayed the theoretical XANES spectra for Zn\(^{2+}\) in ideal normal spinel ZnFe\(_2\)O\(_4\), Zn\(^{2+}\) in disordered ZnFe\(_2\)O\(_4\), and Zn\(^{2+}\) in disordered ZnFe\(_2\)O\(_4\), which are represented by thin dashed-dotted, dashed, and solid lines, respectively. Theoretical transition energies are deviated from the experimental energy by \(-37 \text{ eV} (\Delta E/E=0.38\%)\), which are corrected in Fig. 3 by translation. The theoretical spectrum for Zn\(^{2+}\) in ideal normal spinel ZnFe\(_2\)O\(_4\) is essentially identical to that for Zn\(^{2+}\) in the disordered ZnFe\(_2\)O\(_4\) structure, indicating that the overall spectral shape is mainly determined by the first-nearest coordination structure. The experimental XANES spectra for ZnFe\(_2\)O\(_4\) bulk specimen as depicted in the top of Fig. 3 can be decomposed into five peaks, denoted as A–E, and the relative positions and intensities of these peaks are well reproduced by the theoretical calculation for Zn\(^{2+}\). It indicates that Zn\(^{2+}\) ions occupy the A sites in the bulk specimen. This is consistent with the result derived from the magnetic properties, as described in Sec. III A; namely, the cation distribution is approximately expressed as \([\text{Zn}\,]_{A}\,[\text{Fe}\,]_{B}^{3+}\)[\(\text{O}\,]_{D}^{4-}\)--i.e., normal spinel ZnFe\(_2\)O\(_4\). A close look at the top of Fig. 3 reveals that some additional peaks which are not observed in the experimental spectra appear in the theoretical spectra between peaks C and D as well as between peaks D and E. An appropriate explanation for these peaks cannot be provided at present, but the use of larger supercell sizes may improve the theoretical spectrum. On the other hand, the experimental Zn K-edge XANES spectra for the as-deposited ZnFe\(_2\)O\(_4\) thin film, as shown in the bottom of Fig. 3, can be decomposed into four peaks. Apparent differences in the experimental spectra between as-deposited thin film and bulk specimen are as follows: (i) A peak at around 9667 eV is the most intense in the as-deposited thin film as denoted by G, while the corresponding peak for the bulk specimen, denoted by B, is relatively weak. (ii) The transition energy of peak G is slightly lower than that of peak B. (iii) A peak at around 9677 eV is prominent only in the bulk specimen, as denoted by D. Thus, the experimental XANES spectra of as-deposited thin film cannot be reproduced by using only the theoretical spectrum for Zn\(^{2+}\). The theoretical spectrum for Zn\(^{2+}\) has an intense peak around 9667 eV, which corresponds to peak G in the experimental spectrum of as-deposited thin film. In addition, the theoretical spectrum for Zn\(^{2+}\) manifests no detectable peak at around 9677 eV. Obviously, the calculation for Zn\(^{2+}\) gives remarkable improvement in fitting the theoretical spectrum to the experimental one, although the agreement between the experimental data and calculation is not so good yet, especially at around the transition energy corresponding to peak...
spectra, together with the theoretical spectrum calculated for can be decomposed into five peaks, denoted as spectrum of bulk specimen as depicted in the top of Fig. 4. Similarly to the case of Zn K-edge XANES spectra, the Fe K-edge XANES spectral shape for the thin film annealed at 800 °C (see the middle of Fig. 4) is almost identical to that for the bulk specimen. For the as-deposited thin film as shown in the bottom of Fig. 4, on the other hand, the Fe K-edge XANES spectrum is decomposed into six peaks, denoted as $F-K$, and cannot be explained by considering only the contribution from Fe$^{3+}$. Spectral differences between the bulk specimen or the annealed thin film and as-deposited film are as follows. (i) The pre-edge peak at about 7112 eV is relatively intense in the as-deposited thin film as denoted by $F$, compared to the corresponding peak for the bulk specimen, denoted by $A$. (ii) The shoulder peak at around 7120 eV, denoted by $G$, appears in the as-deposited thin film. (iii) The relative intensity of peaks at 7130 eV is more intense in the as-deposited thin film, as denoted by $J$ and $K$, than in the bulk specimen, as denoted by $D$ and $E$. The theoretical spectrum for Fe$^{3+}$ has a relatively intense pre-edge peak and exhibits some peaks at around 7120 and 7136 eV which correspond to the peaks $G$ and $J$ for the as-deposited thin film, respectively. A combined sum of contributions from Fe$^{3+}$ and Fe$^{3+}$ is thus required to obtain a satisfactory agreement for the as-deposited thin film, indicating that some of the Fe$^{3+}$ ions occupy the A site in the spinel structure.

For the purpose of clarifying the degree of cation disordering in ZnFe$_2$O$_4$, we tried to combine the theoretical XANES spectra for A- and B-site environments. Here, it should be stressed that when there exist crystallographic nonequivalent sites in a crystal, such as Al sites in garnet Y$_3$Al$_5$O$_{12}$ crystal and Si sites in cubic spinel Si$_3$N$_4$ crystal, a weighted sum of contributions from the different sites has been successful in reproducing the experimental XANES or ELNES spectra. Figure 5 shows the experimental Zn K-edge XANES spectra for the as-deposited thin film and those annealed at elevated temperatures, along with the different weighted sums of contributions from theoretical spectra for Zn$_{0.4}^{2+}$ and Zn$_{0.6}^{2+}$ in the disordered ZnFe$_2$O$_4$. The combined spectrum with the cation distribution of Zn$_{0.4}^{2+}$Zn$_{0.6}^{2+}$Zn$_{0.4}^{2+}$Zn$_{0.6}^{2+}$ of Zn$_{0.4}^{2+}$Zn$_{0.6}^{2+}$Zn$_{0.4}^{2+}$Zn$_{0.6}^{2+}$ of Zn$_{0.4}^{2+}$Zn$_{0.6}^{2+}$Zn$_{0.4}^{2+}$Zn$_{0.6}^{2+}$ provides the best agreement with the measured spectrum of as-deposited thin film. The variation of XANES spectra with annealing temperature is also explained well by the gradual decrease in $x$ from 0.6 to 0. As a result, Zn K-edge XANES spectra can be utilized to determine $x$ in ZnFe$_2$O$_4$. In Fig. 6, Fe K-edge XANES spectra for the as-deposited thin film and those annealed at elevated temperatures are compared to the different weighted sums of contributions from theoretical spectra for Fe$^{3+}$ and Fe$^{3+}$ in disordered ZnFe$_2$O$_4$. Again, the relative intensities of peaks including pre-edge peaks for the experimental spectrum of as-deposited films are found to be reproduced by the theoretical spectrum at around $x=0.6$. Compared to the case of Zn K-edge XANES spectra, the variation of Fe K-edge XANES spectra with annealing temperature is small. This is presumably due to the fact that only 33% of Fe$^{3+}$ ions occupy the A
sites in the completely disordered spinel structure. Namely, the contribution from Fe$^{3+}$ ions in the $B$ sites dominates the Fe $K$-edge XANES spectra.

C. EXAFS analysis

In this section, we perform an EXAFS analysis in order to manifest the validity of $x$ values derived from XANES calculations. As previously reported for ZnFe$_2$O$_4$, the EXAFS analysis of Zn $K$-edge spectra was found to be even more straightforward compared to that of Fe $K$-edge spectra.\cite{4,17}

Figure 7 displays the Fourier transforms of Zn $K$-edge EXAFS spectra for the as-deposited thin film, thin film annealed at 800 °C, and the bulk specimen. Considerable differences between the bulk specimen or the annealed thin film and as-deposited thin film are found in the peaks due to second-nearest neighbors in the range of 2–4 Å. The shape of the peaks in this range depends on whether Zn$^{2+}$ ions occupy $A$ or $B$ sites in the spinel structure. The Fourier transforms for bulk specimen and annealed thin film show just one intense peak at around 3.1 Å. Similar results have been observed for polycrystalline ZnFe$_2$O$_4$ produced by the solid-state reaction.\cite{6,8} The peak observed at 3.1 Å originates from Zn$_A^{2+}$–Zn$_A^{2+}$, Zn$_A^{2+}$–Fe$_B^{3+}$, and Zn$_A^{2+}$–O$^{2-}$ pairs, which is indicative of the normal spinel structure where Zn$^{2+}$ ions reside on the $A$ sites. For as-deposited thin film, on the other hand, two peaks were observed at around 2.6 and 3.1 Å. The peak observed at 2.6 Å corresponds to the contributions from Zn$_B^{2+}$–Zn$_B^{2+}$ and Zn$_B^{2+}$–Fe$_B^{3+}$ pairs and gives evidence for the occupancy of $B$ sites by Zn$^{2+}$ ions, as demonstrated in EXAFS analyses on ultrafine ZnFe$_2$O$_4$ particles prepared by the coprecipitation method\cite{16} and mechanical-milled ZnFe$_2$O$_4$ powder\cite{4} as well as on spinel ferrites such as spin-sprayed NiZn-ferrite\cite{14} and MnZn-ferrite nanoparticles prepared by the reverse micellar method.\cite{16} A feature characteristic of the present as-deposited ZnFe$_2$O$_4$ thin film is that the relative amplitude of the peak at around 2.6 Å to that at around 3.1 Å is much stronger compared to the results for the ZnFe$_2$O$_4$ thin film.

FIG. 5. Variation of experimental Zn $K$-edge XANES spectra with annealing temperature. Theoretical spectra obtained by different weighted sums of contributions from Zn$^{2+}$ ions at $A$ and $B$ sites in the spinel structure are also shown for comparison.

FIG. 6. Variation of experimental Fe $K$-edge XANES spectra with annealing temperature. Theoretical spectra obtained by different weighted sums of contributions from Fe$^{3+}$ ions at $A$ and $B$ sites in the spinel structure are also shown for comparison.

FIG. 7. (Color online) Fourier transforms of Zn-$K$ EXAFS data collected from the bulk specimen, the as-deposited thin film, and the thin film annealed at 800 °C (solid lines). Corrections for phase shift have not been included in the Fourier transformation. The dashed line is a theoretical one showing the best fit to the experimental data in the range of 1–4 Å for the Fourier transform of as-deposited thin film.

C. EXAFS analysis

In this section, we perform an EXAFS analysis in order to manifest the validity of $x$ values derived from XANES calculations. As previously reported for ZnFe$_2$O$_4$, the EXAFS analysis of Zn $K$-edge spectra was found to be even more straightforward compared to that of Fe $K$-edge spectra.\cite{4,17} Figure 7 displays the Fourier transforms of Zn $K$-edge EXAFS spectra for the as-deposited thin film, thin film annealed at 800 °C, and the bulk specimen. Considerable differences between the bulk specimen or the annealed thin film and as-deposited thin film are found in the peaks due to second-nearest neighbors in the range of 2–4 Å. The shape of the peaks in this range depends on whether Zn$^{2+}$ ions occupy $A$ or $B$ sites in the spinel structure. The Fourier transforms for bulk specimen and annealed thin film show just one intense peak at around 3.1 Å. Similar results have been observed for polycrystalline ZnFe$_2$O$_4$ produced by the solid-state reaction.\cite{6,8} The peak observed at 3.1 Å originates from Zn$_A^{2+}$–Zn$_A^{2+}$, Zn$_A^{2+}$–Fe$_B^{3+}$, and Zn$_A^{2+}$–O$^{2-}$ pairs, which is indicative of the normal spinel structure where Zn$^{2+}$ ions reside on the $A$ sites. For as-deposited thin film, on the other hand, two peaks were observed at around 2.6 and 3.1 Å. The peak observed at 2.6 Å corresponds to the contributions from Zn$_B^{2+}$–Zn$_B^{2+}$ and Zn$_B^{2+}$–Fe$_B^{3+}$ pairs and gives evidence for the occupancy of $B$ sites by Zn$^{2+}$ ions, as demonstrated in EXAFS analyses on ultrafine ZnFe$_2$O$_4$ particles prepared by the coprecipitation method\cite{16} and mechanical-milled ZnFe$_2$O$_4$ powder\cite{4} as well as on spinel ferrites such as spin-sprayed NiZn-ferrite\cite{14} and MnZn-ferrite nanoparticles prepared by the reverse micellar method.\cite{16} A feature characteristic of the present as-deposited ZnFe$_2$O$_4$ thin film is that the relative amplitude of the peak at around 2.6 Å to that at around 3.1 Å is much stronger compared to the results for the ZnFe$_2$O$_4$ thin film.
specimens as reported previously. This can be related to such a spinel-type structure that a rather large fraction of Zn\(^{2+}\) ions is present in the B sites. Following the method as described in Ref. 14, a least-squares fitting was performed over the uncorrected r-space range of 1.0–4.0 Å for the Fourier transform of the as-deposited thin film. The theoretical standards for Zn\(_{A}\)\(^{2+}\) and Zn\(_{B}\)\(^{2+}\) in the spinel Zn\(_2\)Fe\(_2\)O\(_4\) were generated by ab initio calculations using the FEFF code of Rehr et al.\(^{27}\) Here, Zn K-edge EXAFS analysis is refined using the ATHENA and ARTEMIS code of Ravel\(^{30}\) and Newville,\(^{31}\) respectively, in order to estimate the cation distribution of the as-deposited thin film. The best fit to the experimental data is shown by a dashed curve in the bottom of Fig. 7. Approximately 64% of Zn\(^{2+}\) ions are found to occupy the B sites in the spinel-type structure. Namely, the cation distribution of the as-deposited thin film is represented as [Zn\(_{0.36}\)Fe\(_{0.64}\)\(^{2+}\)][Zn\(_{0.64}\)Fe\(_{1.36}\)\(^{3+}\)]\(_{B}\)O\(_4\), which is close to the spinel structure with a completely random cation distribution (x=2/3). Consequently, the x values derived from XANES simulations agree well with those from the EXAFS analysis, indicating that the XANES calculations are useful for determining the degree of cation disordering in the spinel structure.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

From the theoretical simulations of XANES and EXAFS spectra at the Zn K edge, it is concluded that about 60% of Zn\(^{3+}\) ions reside on the B sites in the as-deposited ZnFe\(_2\)O\(_4\) thin film, despite a strong tendency for Zn\(^{3+}\) ions to occupy the A sites in the spinel-type structure. The occupancy of B sites by Zn\(^{2+}\) ions displaces some Fe\(^{3+}\) ions from the B to A sites to produce the disordered distribution of Fe\(^{3+}\) ions as demonstrated in the spectral analysis of Fe K-edge XANES spectra (see Figs. 4 and 6). The magnetic properties of ZnFe\(_2\)O\(_4\) are significantly affected by the cation disordering, depending on x, as shown in Fig. 2. If x is very small, the magnetic structure is still dominated by the superexchange interaction between Fe\(^{3+}\) ions on the B sites, \(J_{BB}\), and antiferromagnetic behavior is observed. As x is increased over 0.33, the superexchange interaction between Fe\(^{3+}\) ions in A and B sites, \(J_{AB}\), becomes dominant, and hence, ferrimagnetic behavior appears. A further increase in x strengthens \(J_{AB}\) to bring about a large magnetization even at room temperature.\(^9\) Such a highly disordered cation distribution, however, gives rise to a frustration due to the competition between \(J_{AB}\) and \(J_{BB}\). As a result, the as-deposited thin film exhibits the magnetic transition as observed for cluster spin-glass systems, as can be seen from Fig. 2(b)—that is, a discrepancy between \(M_{\text{FC}}(T)\) and \(M_{\text{ZFC}}(T)\). The spin-freezing phenomenon above room temperature is caused by the strong \(J_{AB}\) because the spin-freezing temperature is considered to be proportional to the strength of the superexchange interaction. Our previous results of linear and nonlinear ac susceptibility for as-deposited thin film also showed that superparamagnetic blocking of the clusters accompanied by intercluster interactions takes place at around the magnetic transition temperature (~325 K).\(^9\) The rather high degree of disorder may be characteristic of the thin-film structure that results from nonequilibrium processing such as a sputtering method and a PLD technique. In fact, it has been reported for some spinel-type oxides that the site distribution in thin-film structure prepared via vapor phases is largely different from that in the stable phase.\(^{32}\) XANES analyses utilizing first-principles calculations that include the core-hole effect, when combined with other techniques, promise to be an important tool in determining the structure of magnetic materials.

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