

Theoretical Insights into the Dynamics of Gas-Phase Bimolecular Reactions with Submerged Barriers

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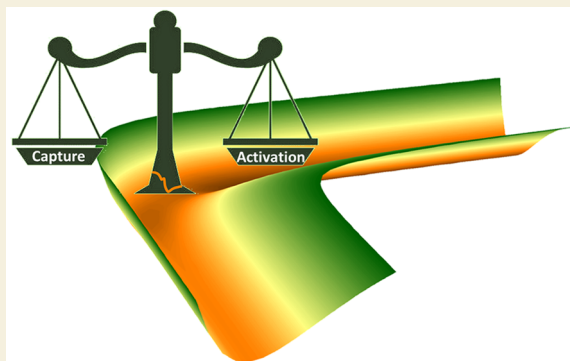
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ABSTRACT: Much attention has been paid to the dynamics of both activated gas-phase bimolecular reactions, which feature monotonically increasing integral cross sections and Arrhenius kinetics, and their barrierless capture counterparts, which manifest monotonically decreasing integral cross sections and negative temperature dependence of the rate coefficients. In this Perspective, we focus on the dynamics of gas-phase bimolecular reactions with submerged barriers, which often involve radicals or ions and are prevalent in combustion, atmospheric chemistry, astrochemistry, and plasma chemistry. The temperature dependence of the rate coefficients for such reactions is often non-Arrhenius and complex, and the corresponding dynamics may also be quite different from those with significant barriers or those completely dominated by capture. Recent experimental and theoretical studies of such reactions, particularly at relatively low temperatures or collision energies, have revealed interesting dynamical behaviors, which are discussed here. The new knowledge enriches our understanding of the dynamics of these unusual reactions.

KEYWORDS: submerged barrier, bimolecular reaction, mode specificity, product energy disposal, rate coefficient, quantum effect, non-Arrhenius behavior



1. INTRODUCTION

Most bimolecular chemical reactions involve an activation barrier due to the simple fact that an old bond is broken as a new bond is formed. In the gas phase, these reactions are typically characterized by Arrhenius kinetics, in which the rate coefficient increases exponentially with temperature.¹ This so-called Arrhenius behavior suggests the existence of a barrier along the reaction path (see Figure 1); overcoming this barrier requires a certain amount of energy. As a result, such reactions are more facile at high temperatures. The activation energy can be derived from the slope of the Arrhenius plot, where the log of the rate coefficient is a linear function of the inverse temperature. Investigations of the dynamics of such reactions in the gas phase have revealed that the activation can be enabled by the relative kinetic energy of the collision partners.^{2–7} Indeed, the corresponding reaction cross section typically increases with collision energy, which improves the chances of crossing the reaction barrier.⁸ In addition, the activation can also be facilitated by excitation in internal degrees of freedom of reactants, such as vibration and in some cases rotation, provided the energy can help to overcome the barrier. This has been demonstrated by preparing specific excited reactant internal states using, for example, lasers.⁹ Importantly, the efficacy of different reactant modes in promoting reactivity may differ, leading to mode specificity,^{10–13} which, along with the related

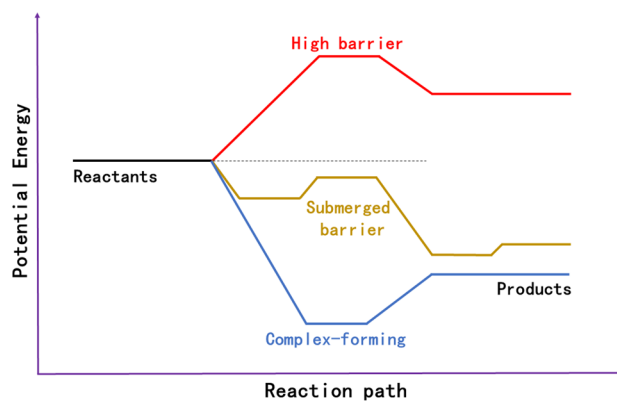


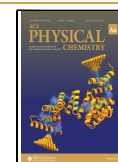
Figure 1. Schematic diagram of the reaction paths of different types of bimolecular reactions.

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bond selectivity, is a result of dynamics. The relative efficacy of a reactant mode can be rationalized by Polanyi's rules,¹⁴ which state that a reaction with an "early" barrier is best promoted by collision energy, while a reaction with a "late" barrier is helped more effectively by reactant vibrational excitation. Here, the "early" or "late" barrier refers to the similarity of the transition state with either the reactant or the product configuration. Recently, we proposed the sudden vector projection (SVP) model^{15,16} to better understand and predict mode specificity, and it has been shown to be quite successful for many activated gas-phase reactions.^{17,18} Within the SVP model, the efficacy of a reactant mode in promoting the reaction is attributed to its coupling with the reaction coordinate at the transition state, quantified by the overlap between the two corresponding normal mode vectors. The SVP model is amenable to reactions involving polyatomic reactants which have multiple vibrational modes. It is also applicable to rotational modes.

There also exists another class of bimolecular reactions that need no activation. The rate coefficient of such a reaction typically decreases with temperature (negative temperature dependence), defying the Arrhenius norm.^{19,20} Obviously, such reactions are of great importance in low-temperature environments such as interstellar media, but they may also play important roles in many other situations, including planetary atmospheres, plasmas, and combustion. The nonactivated nature stems from the fact that the reaction path is barrierless, as schematically shown in Figure 1, which is common for ion–molecule reactions and reactions involving free radicals. Many kinetic and dynamical studies of such reactions have been carried out in recent years.^{21–27} Most such reactions are dominated by long-range interactions, which allow the two reactants to be captured by a deep potential well supporting a reaction intermediate.^{19,28} As a result, the corresponding reaction cross section often has no threshold and decreases with increasing collision energy, due to the long-range capture with large impact parameters.⁸ In fact, the kinetics can be reliably described by simple capture theories,^{28–31} such as that of Langevin.³² If the intermediate is long lived, significant energy randomization may occur among all of the internal degrees of freedom in the reactive system, which could erase all memory of the reactants. Hence, dynamical features such as mode specificity are typically absent, and the reaction is often amenable to a statistical treatment.^{33–36}

In this Perspective, we discuss an interesting case between the two extremes mentioned above. In such a reaction, there exists no intrinsic barrier on the potential energy surface (PES) along the reaction coordinate, but the reaction is controlled by a submerged saddle point (SP) along the reaction path, which provides a bottleneck. As illustrated in Figure 1, the submerged SP is flanked by pre- and post-SP wells, which could be due to chemical bonding,³⁷ hydrogen bonding,^{38,39} or weak covalent interactions such as three-electron two-center hemibonds.^{40,41} Hence, such a reaction might share some characteristics of a barrierless capture reaction such as negative temperature-dependent rate coefficients but might also have some features in common with an activated reaction such as mode specificity. These behaviors underscore the competition between different microscopic reaction mechanisms which might coexist for these reactions. It is worth noting that these characteristics might also be present for reactions with very low barriers. Importantly, such reactions are commonly seen in low-temperature astronomic and atmospheric environments and have received increasing attention in recent years.^{29,42,43} In this Perspective, we focus on

several prototypical reactions of this type and review recent theoretical advances in understanding the corresponding dynamics using quantum mechanical and/or classical methods. We will strive to present the discussion in the context of available experimental data. We will also restrict our discussion to adiabatic systems in which the rearrangement of chemical bonds occurs on a single Born–Oppenheimer PES. The reader is referred to recent reviews on nonadiabatic dynamics for bimolecular reactions in the literature.^{44,45}

2. THEORETICAL METHODS

2.1. Potential Energy Surfaces

Theoretical studies of chemical dynamics rely on accurate global PESs, which can be constructed from high-level electronic structure calculations. For small reactive systems with relatively light atoms, it is now possible to construct chemically accurate (errors < 1 kcal mol⁻¹) PESs. This is typically done with the calculation of the electronic energy at different nuclear geometries using a high-level ab initio method, such as the coupled cluster (CC) or multireference configuration interaction (MRCI) method.⁴⁶ However, it should be noted that, in most cases, chemical accuracy is still difficult to achieve. The energies at discrete points are then represented by an analytic function of the nuclear coordinates using, for example, a machine learning method such as one based on neural networks.⁴⁷ Much progress has been made in recent years, and excellent reviews have been published for the construction of global PESs for reactive systems.^{48–56} For this reason, we will not provide a thorough discussion here.

2.2. Quantum Reactive Scattering

Since molecular systems are intrinsically quantum mechanical, the ultimate characterization of the reaction dynamics can only be achieved using a quantum scattering method. A major challenge in reactive quantum scattering is the exponential increase of computational costs with respect to the size of the problem.⁵⁷ There are two approaches to quantum dynamics (QD), solving either the time-independent (TID) or the time-dependent (TD) Schrödinger equation.⁵⁷ The TID method requires matrix inversion and thus scales cubically with the dimensionality. On the other hand, the TD approach is more efficient as it solves an initial value problem by propagating a wave packet, which has better scaling laws with respect to the size of the problem. The TD approach can also be formulated using the Chebyshev propagation method, in which the effective time is given by the Chebyshev order.^{58,59} In this Perspective, we will thus discuss only the wave packet approaches.

The wave packet approaches for computing initial state-selected total reactivity^{60,61} are intuitive and relatively straightforward. Here, we take a penta-atomic reactive system X + YABC to briefly introduce the method considering that most of the discussed reactions in this Perspective involve five atoms. The full-dimensional Hamiltonian in the reactant Jacobi coordinates with a given total angular momentum J_{tot} can be written as ($\hbar = 1$ hereafter)^{62,63}

$$\begin{aligned} \hat{H} = & -\frac{1}{2\mu_R} \frac{\partial^2}{\partial R^2} - \frac{1}{2\mu_1} \frac{\partial^2}{\partial r_1^2} - \frac{1}{2\mu_2} \frac{\partial^2}{\partial r_2^2} - \frac{1}{2\mu_3} \frac{\partial^2}{\partial r_3^2} \\ & + \frac{(\hat{J}_{\text{tot}} - \hat{J})^2}{2\mu_R R^2} + \frac{\hat{l}_1^2}{2\mu_1 r_1^2} + \frac{\hat{l}_2^2}{2\mu_2 r_2^2} + \frac{\hat{j}_3^2}{2\mu_3 r_3^2} \\ & + \hat{V}(R, r_1, r_2, r_3, \theta_1, \theta_2, \theta_3, \varphi_1, \varphi_2) \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

where R is the Jacobi vector from the center of mass (COM) of the YABC molecule to the atom X, r_1 is the vector from the COM of ABC to the atom Y, r_2 is the vector from the COM of BC to the atom A, and r_3 is the vector from atom C to atom B, with μ_R , μ_1 , μ_2 , and μ_3 as their corresponding reduced masses. \hat{j}_3 is the rotational angular momentum operator of the moiety BC, and \hat{l}_2 is the orbital angular momentum operator along r_2 . The coupling of \hat{l}_3 and \hat{l}_2 gives rise to \hat{j}_{23} . \hat{l}_1 is the orbital angular momentum operator along r_1 , and its coupling with \hat{j}_{23} generates \hat{J} . \hat{J}_{tot} is the total angular momentum operator of the system.

This Hamiltonian has been successfully used in treating the dynamics of the H + NH₃ reaction,^{62,64,65} and more recently the F + NH₃ reaction.⁶⁶

The parity (ε) adapted wave function is expanded in terms of the body-fixed (BF) ro-vibrational basis functions

$$\Psi_{\text{tot}}^{J_{\text{tot}}Me}(\mathbf{R}, \mathbf{r}_1, \mathbf{r}_2, \mathbf{r}_3) = \sum_{n,\nu,j,K} C_{n\nu j K}^{J_{\text{tot}}Me} u_n^{\nu}(R) \phi_{\nu_1}(r_1) \phi_{\nu_2}(r_2) \phi_{\nu_3}(r_3) \Phi_{jK}^{J_{\text{tot}}Me}(\hat{R}, \hat{r}_1, \hat{r}_2, \hat{r}_3) \quad (2)$$

where $C_{n\nu j K}^{J_{\text{tot}}Me}$ are expansion coefficients, $u_n^{\nu}(R)$ are sine translational basis functions, ν denotes the vibrational basis indices (ν_1, ν_2, ν_3), and $\phi_{\nu_i}(r_i)$ is obtained by solving the one-dimensional (1D) reference Hamiltonians defined as

$$\hat{h}_i(r_i) = -\frac{1}{2\mu_i} \frac{\partial^2}{\partial r_i^2} + V_i^{\text{ref}}(r_i), \quad i = 1, 3 \quad (3)$$

where $V_i^{\text{ref}}(r_i)$ are the corresponding 1D reference potentials and j represents (l_1, l_2, j_3, j_{23}, J). $\Phi_{jK}^{J_{\text{tot}}Me}$ in eq 2 is the parity-adapted coupled BF total angular momentum eigenfunction, which can be written as⁶²

$$\Phi_{jK}^{J_{\text{tot}}Me} = (1 + \delta_{K0})^{-1/2} \sqrt{\frac{2J_{\text{tot}} + 1}{8\pi}} [\bar{D}_{K,M}^{J_{\text{tot}}} Y_{l_1 l_2 j_3}^{JK} + \varepsilon(-1)^{l_1 + l_2 + j_3 + J + J_{\text{tot}}} \bar{D}_{-K,M}^{J_{\text{tot}}} Y_{l_1 l_2 j_3}^{J-K}] \quad (4)$$

where $D_{K,M}^J$ is the Wigner rotation matrix,⁶⁷ M is the projection of J_{tot} on the space-fixed (SF) z axis, K is the projection of J_{tot} on the BF z axis, which is defined to coincide with the vector \mathbf{R} , and $Y_{l_1 l_2 j_3}^{JK}$ is the eigenfunction of the angular momentum operator \hat{J} , which is defined as

$$Y_{l_1 l_2 j_3}^{JK} = \sum_{\omega} \bar{D}_{K\omega}^{J_{\text{tot}}} \sqrt{\frac{2l_1 + 1}{2J + 1}} \langle j_{23} \omega l_1 0 | J \omega \rangle Y_{l_1 l_2 j_3 \omega}(\hat{r}_2, \hat{r}_3) \quad (5)$$

and

$$Y_{l_1 l_2 j_3 \omega}(\hat{r}_2, \hat{r}_3) = \sum_m \bar{D}_{\omega m}^{j_{23}} \sqrt{\frac{2l_2 + 1}{2j_{23} + 1}} \langle j_3 m l_2 0 | j_{23} m \rangle y_{j_3 m}(\hat{r}_3) \quad (6)$$

where y_{jm} denotes spherical harmonics and ω is the projection of the angular momentum J on the vector \mathbf{r}_1 . Note the restriction that $\varepsilon(-1)^{l_1 + l_2 + j_3 + J + J_{\text{tot}}} = 0$ for $K = 0$ in eq 4.

The initial wave packet $|\chi_i\rangle$ is built as a direct product of a Gaussian wave packet along the scattering coordinate R and a specific ro-vibrational state of the reactant YABC in the BF representation

$$|\chi_i\rangle = \left(\frac{1}{\pi\delta^2}\right)^{1/4} e^{-(R-R_0)^2/2\delta^2} e^{-ik_0 R} |v_0 j_0 \tau; J_{\text{tot}} K E\rangle \quad (7)$$

where R_0 and δ are the mean position and width of the initial Gaussian function and $k_0 = \sqrt{2\mu_R E_i}$ is the mean momentum. v_0, j_0 , and τ denote the initial vibrational state, total angular momentum, and parity of the reactant YABC, respectively.

Two evolution operators are often employed to propagate the wave packet: the second-order split-operator method⁶⁸ and the real Chebyshev propagator.^{69–71} In the former, the time evolution operator is approximated in the short time limit by the second-order split-operator propagator implemented as follows

$$|\Psi(t + \Delta)\rangle = \exp(-i\Delta\hat{T}/2) \exp(-i\Delta\hat{V}) \exp(-i\Delta\hat{T}/2) |\Psi(t)\rangle \quad (8)$$

in which Δ is the time step and the approximation arises from the noncommutativity of \hat{T} and \hat{V} .

The Chebyshev propagator is a cosine evolution operator in the Chebyshev order domain, which can be transformed to the energy domain via a discrete cosine Fourier transform.^{70,72} In the Chebyshev order domain, the wave packet is propagated as follows

$$|\Psi_{k+1}\rangle = D(2\hat{H}_{\text{scaled}} |\Psi_k\rangle - D |\Psi_{k-1}\rangle), \quad k \geq 1 \quad (9)$$

where $|\Psi_1\rangle = D\hat{H}_{\text{scaled}} |\Psi_0\rangle$, $|\Psi_0\rangle = |\chi_i\rangle$, and D is a damping function (vide infra). The scaled Hamiltonian is defined as $\hat{H}_{\text{scaled}} = (\hat{H} - H^+)/H^-$ to avoid the divergence of the Chebyshev polynomials outside the range $[-1, 1]$.⁷³ Here, the spectral medium and half-width of the Hamiltonian $H^\pm = (H_{\text{max}} \pm H_{\text{min}})/2$ are calculated from the spectral extrema H_{min} and H_{max} . The discrete Chebyshev propagator is exact and typically more efficient,⁷⁴ since the time propagator requires some forms of approximation.

The total reaction probability from a specific initial state is calculated by

$$P_{v_0 j_0 \tau K_0}^{J_{\text{tot}} E}(E_c) = \langle \chi_i^+(E) | \hat{F} | \chi_i^+(E) \rangle \quad (10)$$

in which E_c is the collision energy. The flux through the dividing surface $S(r_1 = r_1^\ddagger)$ is calculated from the energy-dependent scattering wave function $|\chi_i^+(E)\rangle$ that is obtained by Fourier transforming the wave packet on a dividing surface.⁷⁵

The total reaction integral cross section (ICS) from a specific initial state is computed by summing the reaction probabilities over all relevant partial waves

$$\sigma_{v_0 j_0 \tau}(E_c) = \frac{1}{(2j_0 + 1)} \sum_{K_0} \frac{\pi}{k^2} \sum_{J_{\text{tot}} \geq K_0} (2J_{\text{tot}} + 1) P_{v_0 j_0 \tau K_0}^{J_{\text{tot}} E}(E_c) \quad (11)$$

where $k = \sqrt{2\mu E_c}$ and μ is the reduced mass between the reactants. The differential cross section (DCS) can, in principle, be computed from the S -matrix elements,⁵⁷ but the calculation of the latter involves complex coordinate transforms and is rarely attempted beyond tetratomic systems.^{5,6,76}

The initial state-specific rate coefficient is calculated by thermal averaging the collision energy of the corresponding ICS as

$$k_{v_0 j_0 \tau}(T) = \sqrt{\frac{8k_B T}{\pi\mu}} \frac{1}{(k_B T)^2} \int_0^\infty dE_c E_c \exp(-E_c/k_B T) \sigma_{v_0 j_0 \tau}(E_c) \quad (12)$$

where k_B is the Boltzmann constant. The thermal rate coefficient is then obtained by Boltzmann averaging of the initial state-specific rate coefficients as

$$k(T) = \frac{\sum_{v_0 j_0} (2j_0 + 1) k_{v_0 j_0 \tau}(T) \exp(-E_{v_0 j_0}/k_B T)}{\sum_{v_0 j_0} (2j_0 + 1) \exp(-E_{v_0 j_0}/k_B T)} \quad (13)$$

2.3. Quasi-Classical Trajectory

While a quantum mechanical treatment of the reactive scattering is preferred, the numerical cost of such calculations quickly becomes unaffordable as the size increases.⁵⁷ As an inexpensive alternative, quasi-classical trajectory (QCT) methods have been widely applied to study reactions.^{77,78} In the QCT approach, the atomic coordinates and momenta of reactants are prepared in specific quantum states using ad hoc quantization conditions, and the subsequent classical dynamics on the PES is followed by solving the Hamilton's equations. Such a QCT method has been implemented in software such as VENUS 96.⁷⁹ Unlike quantum dynamics, the reactivity is simulated using a statistical approach in which a swarm of trajectories with a random sampling of initial conditions is propagated and the final state distributions are averaged over the reactive trajectories. Although QCT cannot describe quantum effects, such as tunneling and resonances, a large number of studies have demonstrated its reasonable accuracy for a wide range of reactions, particularly for highly averaged quantities such as rate coefficient and total cross section.^{23,80–84}

In the QCT approach, the ICS of the reaction is calculated by

$$\sigma_r(E_c) = \pi b_{\text{max}}^2 \frac{N_r}{N_{\text{tot}}} \quad (14)$$

where N_r and N_{tot} are the numbers of reactive and total trajectories at a collision energy E_c . The impact parameter (b) is sampled from a uniformly distributed random number $\zeta \in [0, 1]$ according to $b =$

$b_{\max} \zeta^{1/2}$, where the maximum impact parameter b_{\max} is determined by small batches of trajectories with trial values at each specified initial condition. The relative statistical error is given by $\Delta = \sqrt{(N_{\text{tot}} - N_r)/N_{\text{tot}}N_r}$.

The DCS is computed by

$$\frac{d\sigma_r}{d\Omega} = \frac{\sigma_r P_r(\theta)}{2\pi \sin(\theta)} \quad (15)$$

where $P_r(\theta)$ is the normalized reaction probability and Ω is the scattering solid angle. The scattering angle θ is defined as

$$\theta = \cos^{-1} \left(\frac{\vec{v}_i \cdot \vec{v}_f}{|\vec{v}_i| |\vec{v}_f|} \right) \quad (16)$$

in which \vec{v}_i and \vec{v}_f denote the initial and final relative velocities. $P_r(\theta)$ is calculated by

$$P_r(\theta) = \frac{\sum_{\theta \geq \theta' - \Delta\theta'}^{\theta < \theta' + \Delta\theta'} N_r(\theta')}{N_r} \quad (17)$$

The rate coefficient at temperature T is then obtained by

$$k(T) = \left(\frac{8k_B T}{\pi\mu} \right)^{1/2} \pi b_{\max}^2 \frac{N_r}{N_{\text{tot}}} \quad (18)$$

Here, the initial rovibrational energies of the reactants and the collision energy are sampled according to the Boltzmann and Maxwell–Boltzmann distributions, respectively, while the sampling of the impact parameter is the same as that discussed above.

One issue associated with all trajectory-based dynamical methods is the treatment of the quantization of product internal modes. Since classical mechanics does not observe energy quantization, binning of trajectories is needed. The simplest way is to use the histogram binning (HB) method, in which the classical action variable is binned to the closest integer.⁷⁷ However, the HB approach does not discriminate different action variables in the same binning box, and this can sometimes be problematic for zero-point energy (ZPE)-violating trajectories. A more reasonable approach is the Gaussian binning (GB),^{85–87} in which a Gaussian weight is assigned to each trajectory depending on the difference between the calculated action variable and the nearest quantum number. There is ample evidence indicating that GB is more accurate than HB.⁸⁷ For polyatomic molecules, the original GB scheme becomes very computationally demanding, and simplified approaches have been proposed.^{88–90}

3. PROTOTYPICAL REACTIONS

For a chemical reaction with a submerged barrier, as mentioned above, there exist pre- and post-SP wells along the reaction path. In this work, we focus on reactions with relatively shallow pre- and post-SP wells, since if the pre- and/or post-SP well(s) are too deep, the reaction tends to behave statistically. Table 1 lists the barrier heights and depths of pre- and post-SP wells of some prototypical reactions, most of which have been investigated by both experiment and theory. We will discuss below important dynamical (and kinetic to a lesser extent) features of these reactions using these examples.

3.1. Differential and Integral Cross Sections

Barrierless capture reactions typically manifest forward–backward DCSs and monotonically decaying ICSs as a function of the collision energy, while activated reactions often feature forward or backward domination of the DCS and monotonically increasing excitation function. For reactions with a submerged barrier, there is sometimes competition between these two coexisting mechanisms.

An example that attracted much recent attention is the highly exoergic hydrogen abstraction of ammonia by a fluorine atom, F

Table 1. Energies (in kcal mol^{−1}) of the Submerged Barrier, Pre- and Post-SP Wells, and Products of a Selected Group of Reactions with Submerged Barriers^a

reactions	pre-SP well	SP	post-SP well	products
NH ₂ [−] + H ₂ → H [−] + NH ₃	−4.24 ^b	−1.39 ^b	−14.57 ^b	−5.79 ^b
OH ⁺ + H ₂ → H + H ₂ O ⁺	−10.92 ^c	−5.58 ^c	−29.61 ^c	−23.70 ^c
H ₂ O ⁺ + H ₂ → H ₃ O ⁺ + H	−7.36 ^d	−4.64 ^d	−43.60 ^d	−40.63 ^d
NH ₂ ⁺ + H ₂ → NH ₃ ⁺ + H	−3.10 ^e	−2.83 ^e	−30.78 ^e	−28.85 ^e
HO + CO → CO ₂ + H	−2.26 ^f	−0.58 ^f	−29.59 ^f	−22.62 ^f
F + NH ₃ → HF + NH ₂	−13.73 ^g	−11.77 ^g	−36.16 ^g	−26.19 ^g
OH + HO ₂ → H ₂ O + O ₂	−3.25 ^h	−1.60 ^h	−	−70.57 ^h
OH + H ₂ S → H ₂ O + SH	−3.36 ⁱ	−0.10 ⁱ	−32.67 ⁱ	−29.68 ⁱ
F + CH ₃ OH → HF + CH ₃ O	−6.70 ^j	−5.04 ^j	−36.56 ^j	−28.52 ^j

^aThe energies are given with respect to the reactant asymptote.

^bReference 104, at the level of UCCSD(T)/aug-cc-pVTZ', with Z' denoting an additional diffuse basis set for the N atom. ^cReference 114, at the level of MRCI+Q/aug-cc-pVQZ. ^dReference 110, at the level of UCCSD(T)-F12b/aug-cc-pVTZ. ^eReference 126, at the level of UCCSD(T)-F12a/aug-cc-pVTZ. ^fReference 101, at the level of UCCSD(T)-F12b/aug-cc-pVTZ. ^gReference 39, at the level of UCCSD(T)-F12/aug-cc-pVTZ. ^hThe lowest triplet state, ref 95, at the level of CCSD(T)-F12a/aug-cc-pVTZ. ⁱReference 122, at the level of UCCSD(T)-F12a/aug-cc-pVTZ. ^jReference 106, at the level of UCCSD(T)-F12a/aug-cc-pVTZ.

+ NH₃ → HF + NH₂. This reaction has a barrierless reaction path with a submerged barrier flanked by a pre-SP and a much deeper post-SP well,^{39,91} as shown in Figure 2. Since the

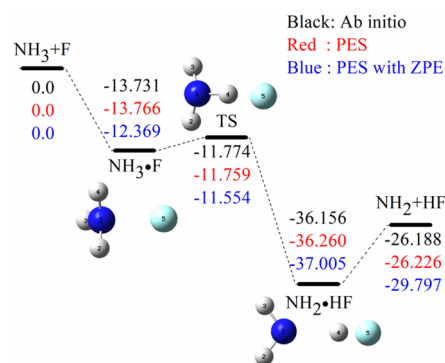


Figure 2. Schematic diagram of the reaction path for the F + NH₃ → HF + NH₂ reaction. The ab initio energies of the stationary points at the level of UCCSD(T)-F12/aug-cc-pVTZ (black), the values of the fitted PES (red), and the zero-point energy-corrected values (blue) are shown below the corresponding geometries. All energies are given in kcal mol^{−1} and relative to the reactant asymptote. Reproduced with permission from ref 39. Copyright 2019 Royal Society of Chemistry.

submerged barrier is merely 11.774 kcal mol^{−1} below the reactant asymptote and slightly higher than the pre-SP well, the reaction can proceed directly or undergo trapping in the pre- and/or post-SP wells. The trapping leads to indirect mechanisms.

Experimentally, the measured DCSs at relatively low collision energies show a strong forward bias, with non-negligible sideways and backward components.⁹² The dominant forward scattering can be attributed to a direct stripping mechanism, in which the incoming F picks up an H with large impact parameters, while the backward scattering is due apparently to direct rebound with small impact parameters. As shown in

Figure 3, these behaviors were reproduced by QCT calculations on full-dimensional PESs.^{39,91} On the other hand, most indirect

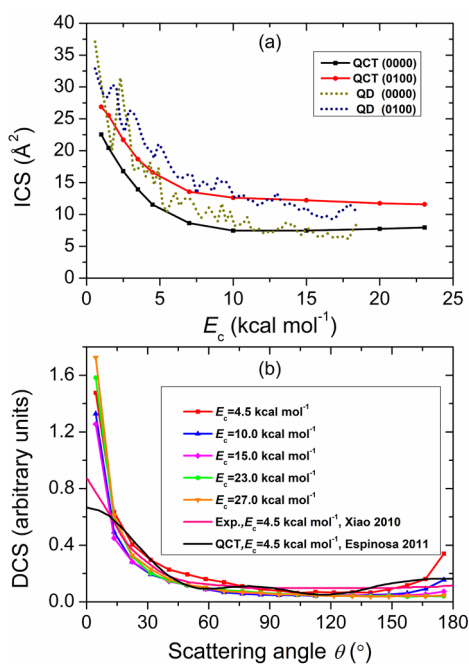


Figure 3. (a) QD and QCT ICSs of the $F + \text{NH}_3 \rightarrow \text{HF} + \text{NH}_2$ reaction from the ground and fundamental states of NH_3 as a function of the collision energy. The four quantum numbers ($\nu_1, \nu_2, \nu_3, \nu_4$) in parentheses denote excitation in the symmetric stretching, umbrella, asymmetric stretching, and asymmetric bending modes of NH_3 , respectively. (b) The corresponding DCSs from the ground state with the collision energy E_c fixed at 4.5, 10.0, 15.0, 23.0, and 27.0 kcal mol⁻¹ together with Xiao et al.'s experimental results⁹² and Espinosa-García et al.'s theoretical results.⁹¹ Adapted with permission from refs 39 and 66. Copyrights 2019 and 2021 Royal Society of Chemistry.

trajectories originate from large impact parameter collisions, for which the shallow pre-SP well plays a more significant role than the post-SP well in trapping the colliders. These indirect trajectories produce a near-isotropic angular distribution, superimposed on the DCS from the direct channel, consistent with the experimental observation.⁹² These indirect trajectories suggest possible existence of metastable quantum resonances, which have been identified in a more recent joint experiment–theory study of the $[\text{FNH}_3]^-$ photodetachment.⁹³

The excitation function for this reaction, namely, the dependence of the reactive ICS with collision energy, has not been measured experimentally, but the QCT results shown in Figure 3 suggest an initial fast decay of the ICS as a function of the collision energy, followed by a slight rise above 15 kcal mol⁻¹.³⁹ This is consistent with the coexistence of direct and indirect mechanisms, as discussed above, on the anisotropy of the DCS. Indeed, as the collision energy increases, the forward scattering is enhanced, indicating the decreased importance of the indirect channel, in agreement with the rise of the ICS. The excitation function was studied by the quantum wave packet method as well.⁶⁶ The QD ICS has a similar overall collision energy dependence to the QCT result, which initially decreases sharply and then levels off with the increase of collision energy. Nevertheless, there exist significant oscillations in the QD ICS, implying again the possible existence of quantum resonances. In addition, both QD and QCT ICSs suggest an enhancement of

reactivity with the excitation of the bending (0100) mode of NH_3 .

More recently, a combined experimental and theoretical study of photodetachment of the $[\text{FNH}_3]^-$ anion, which probes the dynamics of the neutral reaction near its transition state, has provided strong evidence of Feshbach resonances in both wells near the transition state.⁹³ Calculated resonance wave functions showed that most resonances are associated with the significant HF vibrational excitation, coupled with excitation of soft modes such as the HF– NH_2 translational mode, pseudorotation of HF, and the torsional modes of NH_2 . Interestingly, some high-energy resonances were found across the transition state and extended into the pre-SP well, which may impact the bimolecular reaction dynamics. These results are consistent with the oscillatory ICS observed in the previous QD study,⁶⁶ although a more thorough investigation of the bimolecular reaction dynamics is needed to elucidate the role of the resonances.

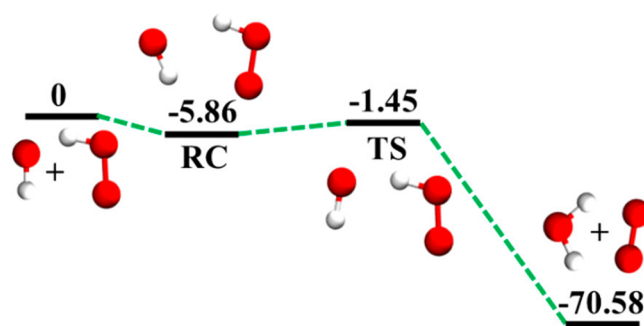


Figure 4. Schematic energetics for the $\text{OH} + \text{HO}_2 \rightarrow \text{H}_2\text{O} + \text{O}_2$ reaction on the lowest triplet state PES. Energies are in kcal mol⁻¹ and relative to the $\text{OH} + \text{HO}_2$ asymptote. Reproduced with permission from ref 96. Copyright 2020 American Chemical Society.

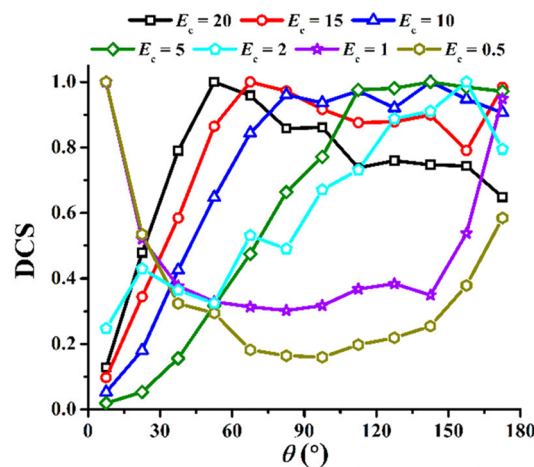


Figure 5. QCT DCSs at different E_c (in kcal mol⁻¹) for ground-state reactants for the $\text{OH} + \text{HO}_2 \rightarrow \text{H}_2\text{O} + \text{O}_2$ reaction. Reproduced with permission from ref 96. Copyright 2020 American Chemical Society.

Another recent example is the $\text{OH} + \text{HO}_2 \rightarrow \text{H}_2\text{O} + \text{O}_2$ reaction, which has important implications in atmospheric chemistry.⁹⁴ Similar to the $F + \text{NH}_3$ case, this reaction features a slightly submerged barrier, as shown in Figure 4.⁹⁵ QCT studies on a full-dimensional ab initio based PES⁹⁵ showed (Figure 5) a dramatic transition from an indirect complex-forming mechanism at low collision energies, evidenced by near-symmetric backward–forward DCSs, to forward-dominated DCSs at

higher collision energies, resulting apparently from an increasing importance of the direct stripping mechanism.⁹⁶ Similar to the F + NH₃ reaction discussed above, the excitation function displays an initial decay followed by a slight rise at higher collision energies.

It is interesting to note that the existence of a submerged barrier does not always lead to meaningful competition between the two mechanisms. In the OH + CO → CO₂ + H reaction, which plays a key role in combustion and the atmosphere,⁹⁷ the dominant reaction channel is controlled by two bottlenecks, TS1 and TS2, as shown in Figure 6. The QCT reaction

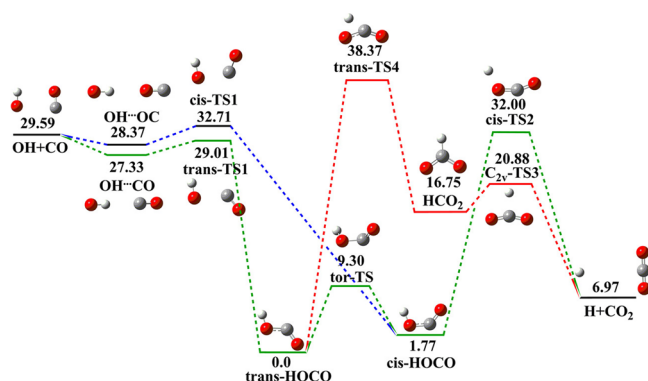


Figure 6. Energetics of the reaction pathways for the HO + CO → H + CO₂ reaction. The ab initio energies of the stationary points are given in kcal mol⁻¹ relative to the *trans*-HOCO minimum. Reproduced with permission from ref 154. Copyright 2012 American Chemical Society.

probability first increases monotonically and then becomes more or less flat with the increasing collision energy. In contrast, the QD probability shows many narrow resonances apparently due to the long-lived HOCO.^{98,99} The QCT ICS shown in Figure 7 is a monotonically increasing function of the collision energy. The measured DCS (Figure 7) shows a near-isotropic distribution with a slight forward bias,¹⁰⁰ which is satisfactorily reproduced by QCT calculations. This can be understood in terms of the energy of the submerged SP, which is barely below the reactant asymptote.^{101,102}

Similar behaviors of DCSs and ICSs have also been found in many reactions with submerged barriers, such as NH₂⁻ + H₂ → H⁻ + NH₃,^{103,104} OH⁺ + H₂ → H + H₂O⁺,¹⁰⁵ and F + CH₃OH → HF + CH₃O.¹⁰⁶

3.2. Rate Coefficients

A characteristic feature of a barrierless capture reaction is a negative temperature dependence of its thermal rate coefficient. This non-Arrhenius behavior can be attributed to the lack of an activation barrier and the long-range attractive interaction, which favor capture at very low collision energies.¹⁰⁷ Such kinetics is related to the monotonically decaying excitation function.⁸ For reactions with a submerged barrier, the temperature dependence of the rate coefficients can be more complex, containing both negative and positive temperature dependences in different temperature regions. This phenomenon is prevalent in chemical kinetics,^{29,30} as highlighted by a recent combined experimental and theoretical study of oxygen-atom reactions with alkenes at low temperatures.¹⁰⁸

The ion–molecule H₂O⁺ + H₂ → H₃O⁺ + H reaction, which is believed to be involved in the interstellar water formation,¹⁰⁹ has no intrinsic barrier, but its reaction pathway features a submerged SP, as shown in Figure 8.¹¹⁰ Experimentally, the

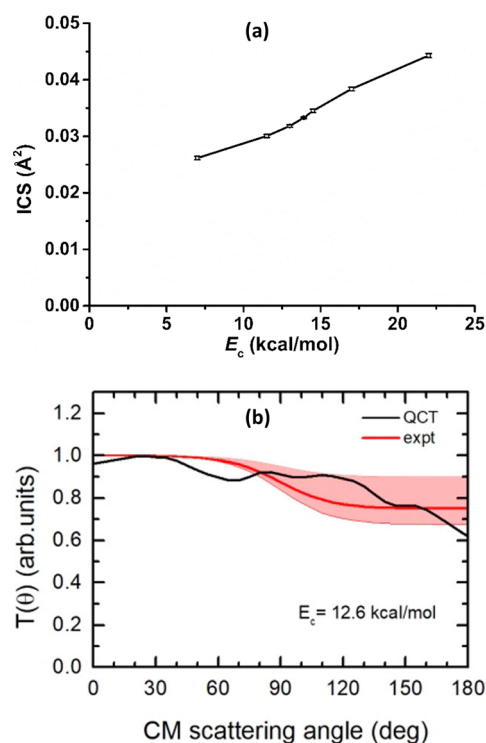


Figure 7. (a) QCT ICSs for the OH + CO → H + CO₂ reaction as a function of the collision energy. (b) Best-fit CO₂ angular distribution and comparison with QCT results at $E_c = 12.6$ kcal mol⁻¹. Adapted with permission from ref 100. Copyright 2018 American Chemical Society.

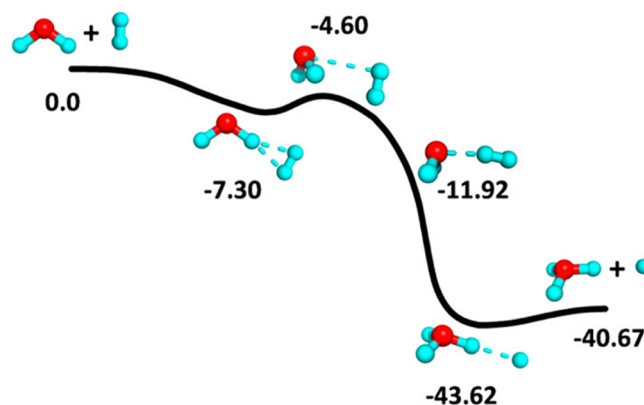


Figure 8. Schematic depiction of the PES along the reaction coordinate for the H₂O⁺ + H₂ → H₃O⁺ + H reaction. The geometries and energies (in kcal mol⁻¹) of the stationary points are provided. Reproduced with permission from ref 111. Copyright 2014 American Chemical Society.

measured rate coefficient exhibits weak and complex temperature dependence between 100 and 600 K with a maximum at ~350 K, as shown in Figure 9.¹¹¹ The experiment was reproduced by QCT calculations¹¹¹ on an ab initio-based PES.¹¹⁰ This complex temperature dependence cannot be explained by the excitation function, which decays monotonically with the collision energy.^{112,113} Instead, it was rationalized by the competition between an enhancement of reactivity (vide infra) by low-lying rotationally excited states of H₂O⁺ and a general decrease in efficiency at higher collision energies for this barrierless reaction. Specifically, the slightly positive temperature dependence at low temperatures results apparently from rotational enhancement of the rate coefficient. On the other

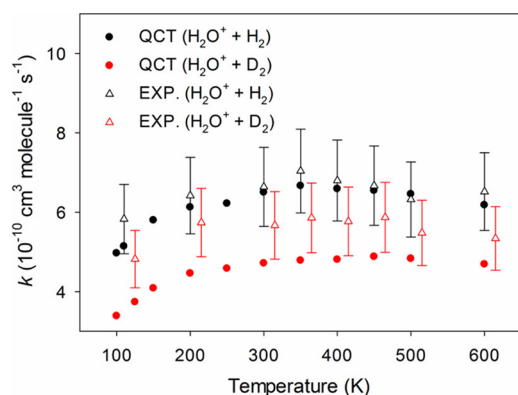


Figure 9. Comparison of the measured and computed rate coefficients for the $\text{H}_2\text{O}^+ + \text{H}_2$ and $\text{H}_2\text{O}^+ + \text{D}_2$ reactions, with 15% relative error bars shown. The experimental data for D_2 have been offset for clarity. Reproduced with permission from ref 111. Copyright 2014 American Chemical Society.

hand, the decrease of the rate coefficient at higher temperatures is attributable to the submerged barrier, which rises with the increasing orbital angular momentum. It was found that the dissociation of the pre-SP complex back to reactants through the loose entrance channel increases faster than its decomposition to products over the tighter transition state as the collision energy increases, resulting in a decreasing rate coefficient.¹¹¹ Similarly, the thermal rate coefficient of the $\text{OH}^+ + \text{H}_2 \rightarrow \text{H}_2\text{O}^+ + \text{H}$ reaction calculated on an ab initio PES¹¹⁴ also exhibits weak temperature dependence from 200 to 600 K.¹¹⁵

Complex and non-Arrhenius rate coefficients have been observed in several other reactions with submerged barriers, including the $\text{F} + \text{NH}_3 \rightarrow \text{HF} + \text{NH}_2$,^{39,116} $\text{F} + \text{CH}_3\text{OH} \rightarrow \text{HF} + \text{CH}_3\text{O}$,¹¹⁷ $\text{Cl} + \text{CH}_3\text{OH} \rightarrow \text{HCl} + \text{CH}_2\text{OH}$,¹¹⁸ and $\text{OH} + \text{HO}_2 \rightarrow \text{H}_2\text{O} + \text{O}_2$ reactions.⁹⁵

3.3. Mode Specificity

Since a barrierless capture reaction does not have an intrinsic barrier, it typically possesses no strong dependence on the type of energy imparted into the reactants,²⁴ in sharp contrast to an activated reaction. However, the lack of mode specificity does not always hold when the reaction has a submerged barrier, because the effective barrier could emerge above the reactant asymptote at large impact parameters due to the centrifugal potential. This effective barrier provides a reaction bottleneck which might induce mode specificity.

An interesting example is the $\text{H}_2\text{O}^+ + \text{H}_2 \rightarrow \text{H}_3\text{O}^+ + \text{H}$ reaction, which was found experimentally to have strong rotational mode specificity. Specifically, the ICS of the reaction is enhanced by H_2O^+ rotational excitation.^{119,120} Apparently, this rotational enhancement effect is also responsible for the observed temperature dependence of the rate coefficient, as discussed above.¹¹¹ As shown in Figure 8, this reaction has a submerged barrier, which could serve as a bottleneck for the reaction. To understand the surprising mode specificity, QD and QCT calculations have been performed on an ab initio PES, and they reproduced the experimental observations satisfactorily, as shown in Figure 10.^{112,121} The mode specificity can be understood with the SVP model,¹⁷ which attributes the ability of a reactant mode to enhance the reaction to its coupling with the reaction coordinate at the relevant transition state. In the sudden limit, such coupling can be quantified by the projection of the reactant mode onto the reaction coordinate. In this case, the submerged barrier can be considered as the transition state.

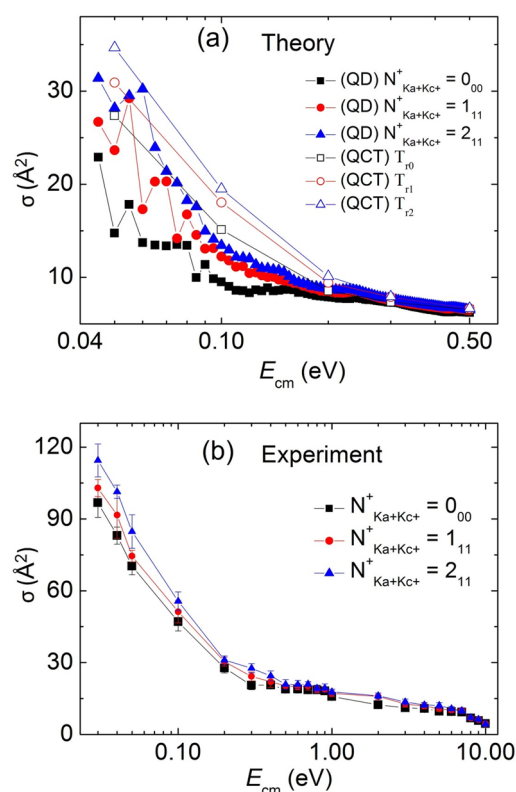


Figure 10. (a) Theoretical QD and QCT ICSs $\sigma(\text{H}_3\text{O}^+; 000; 0_{00}, 1_{11}, \text{and } 2_{11})$ values in \AA^2 calculated at $E_c = 0.04\text{--}0.50$ eV. For QCT calculations, the 0_{00} , 1_{11} , and 2_{11} energies are specified by the rotational temperatures, T_{r0} , T_{r1} , and T_{r2} , respectively. (b) Experimental $\sigma(\text{H}_3\text{O}^+; 000; 0_{00}, 1_{11}, \text{and } 2_{11})$ values in \AA^2 obtained at $E_c = 0.03\text{--}10.00$ eV. Reproduced with permission from ref 112. Copyright 2016 Royal Society of Chemistry.

The SVP model revealed that the rotational modes of H_2O^+ are strongly coupled with the reaction coordinate, thus leading to the promotional effect.¹¹² We note in passing that such rotational mode specificity cannot be easily explained by the Polanyi rules.

Vibrational mode specificity was also experimentally observed for this reaction.^{112,119,120} In contrast to the promotional effect of the rotational modes, the excitation of H_2O^+ vibrational modes inhibits the reactivity. QCT calculations successfully reproduced the experimental observations,¹¹² but a simple explanation of the large inhibitory effects remains elusive. (Note that the SVP model cannot predict inhibitory effects.) This example underscores the potential role played by a submerged barrier for mode-specific reaction dynamics.

Mode specificity has also been examined for the $\text{F} + \text{NH}_3 \rightarrow \text{HF} + \text{NH}_2$ reaction using both QD and QCT methods.⁶⁶ These calculations showed that excitation of every NH_3 vibrational mode promotes the reaction. Surprisingly, the low-frequency umbrella mode has the largest efficacy compared to the other three normal modes. The significant promotional effect of the umbrella mode was explained by the enlarged attractive interaction between F and NH_3 that increases the chance of capturing F by NH_3 in the pre-SP well and the modulation of the submerged barrier that enhances the direct reaction. This is confirmed by the SVP model, showing that the umbrella mode has the largest projection on the reaction coordinate at the submerged transition state, followed by the asymmetric and symmetric stretching modes.

A surprising mode specificity was recently reported for $\text{OH} + \text{HO}_2 \rightarrow \text{H}_2\text{O} + \text{O}_2$.⁹⁶ QCT calculations showed that the excitation of the H–OO stretch has a significant promotional effect, due apparently to the motion of the breaking OH bond in HO_2 . Excitations in the H–O–O bend and O–O stretch present smaller enhancement effects on the reactivity at low collision energy. Surprisingly, vibrational excitation of the OH reactant, which is considered a spectator for the reaction, shows a significant enhancement effect at collision energies below 5.0 kcal mol⁻¹. The unusual enhancement effect, which is not predicted by the SVP model, was ascribed to the increased dipole of the vibrationally excited OH, which increases its attractive interaction with HO_2 and thus effectively deepens the pre-SP well. The deepening of the pre-SP well favors the capture of the colliders at low collision energies, therefore enhancing the reactivity. This mode specificity thus differs from the ones discussed above.

We note that mode specificity has also been found in other reactions with submerged barriers, including the neutral $\text{OH} + \text{H}_2\text{S} \rightarrow \text{H}_2\text{O} + \text{SH}$ ^{122,123} and $\text{OH} + \text{CO} \rightarrow \text{H} + \text{CO}_2$ reactions^{124,125} and ion–molecule $\text{OH}^+ + \text{H}_2 \rightarrow \text{H} + \text{H}_2\text{O}^+$,¹⁰⁵ $\text{H}_2 + \text{NH}_2^- \rightarrow \text{H}^- + \text{NH}_3$,^{103,104} and $\text{H}_2 + \text{NH}_2^+ \rightarrow \text{H} + \text{NH}_3^+$ reactions.¹²⁶

3.4. Product Energy Disposal

Many barrierless reactions involve the formation of a reaction intermediate, typically supported by one or more deep wells. Since the lifetime of the intermediate can be quite long, vibrational energy randomization often takes place. A complete energy randomization leads to statistical distributions of the scattering angle and product internal states, which can thus be described by statistical theories.^{24,127,128} However, many such reactions do not always lead to statistical product distributions for various reasons, even when there are no submerged barriers.^{129–132} For reactions with submerged barriers, as discussed below, this may also be true. This is mostly due to the insufficient lifetime of the intermediate for complete energy randomization.

The product energy disposal of the $\text{F} + \text{NH}_3/\text{ND}_3$ reactions was investigated by a QCT method.³⁹ It was found that the available energy largely flows into the vibrational mode of HF, followed by the translational mode and the vibrational modes of NH_2 . On the other hand, energy cannot effectively channel into the rotational modes of HF and NH_2 . These theoretical results were consistent with earlier experimental observations.^{133,134} Furthermore, the HF product is largely populated in the fundamental and first overtone states, followed by the ground and second overtone states. In contrast, the product NH_2 is mainly populated in the ground state, followed by the fundamental state of the bending mode. The propensity can be explained by the SVP model, which stipulates that the energy flow is largely determined by the projection of the product mode onto the reaction coordinate at the transition state.¹⁷ Since the reaction is dominated by a direct stripping mechanism and most of indirect trajectories are trapped in the shallow pre-SP well, the intermediate complex in the post-SP well is apparently not sufficiently long lived to lead to complete energy randomization.

We want to emphasize that the nonstatistical product distribution is not unique to reactions with submerged barriers. Rather, it is a reflection of the extent of energy randomization in the reaction intermediate in all complex-forming reactions.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

A direct activated reaction typically manifests unique characteristics, including Arrhenius kinetics, a monotonically increasing ICS, a strongly anisotropic DCS, mode specificity, and possibly nonstatistical product internal state distributions. These features are clearly the result of an activation barrier, which controls both the reaction dynamics and the kinetics. On the other hand, a barrierless capture reaction often behaves completely differently, with negative temperature dependence of the reaction rate, a monotonically decaying ICS, a forward–backward symmetric DCS, and/or statistical product distributions. These characteristics result from the barrierless reaction path with one or more potential wells that are capable of supporting long-lived reaction intermediate(s).

Different from both the activated and the barrierless capture archetypes, reactions with a submerged barrier might exhibit seemingly contradicting behaviors, such as a forward–backward symmetric DCS coexisting with a decaying excitation function. The discussion in this Perspective demonstrates the rich dynamical and kinetic signatures of submerged barrier reactions, dictated by the unique reaction path with a submerged saddle point flanked by pre- and post-SP minima. This submerged barrier could serve as the activation barrier in certain conditions, leading to features belonging to an activated reaction. Such behaviors typically dominate at high collision energies. The barrierless entrance channel and the potential minima, on the other hand, may endow the reaction with traits of a capture process, especially at low collision energies. The quantitative topography of the PES, particularly the relative energy of the stationary points, apparently controls the presence of the competition between direct and indirect mechanisms, which are manifested in differential and integral cross sections, mode specificity, product energy disposal, and temperature dependence of thermal rate coefficients. Several prototypes are discussed in this Perspective to illustrate these unique features.

We mention in passing that the choice of reactions discussed in this Perspective is by no means exhaustive, but we strive to provide a panoramic view of the recent advances with a small number of prototypes. An obvious omission is gas-phase $\text{S}_\text{N}2$ -type reactions, which bear many similarities to those discussed in this Perspective. The reason that such ion–molecule reactions are not included here is that excellent reviews are already available in the literature.^{25,27,135}

We also emphasize that the close collaboration between theory and experiment offers significant synergy in gaining deep insights into the dynamics and kinetics of such reactions. Theoretically, recent advances in quantum chemistry and fitting PESs with machine learning methods have revolutionized our ability to tackle difficult problems that were impossible to imagine a few decades ago. However, there is still a long way to go before we achieve complete understanding of the relevant physics. Since reactions with submerged barriers often are not statistical, their chemical dynamics needs be explicitly characterized. Quantum mechanical treatments are still challenging because of the exponential scaling; classical methods are often sufficient to provide mechanistic insights. New theoretical advances on quantum dynamics are highly desired to provide accurate and efficient characterization of reaction dynamics in full dimensionality.

It is important to note that the reactions discussed in this Perspective are all assumed to be adiabatic, involving a single PES. In reality, many such reactions might involve more than

one electronic state, and transitions between different electronic states might impact the reactivity, sometimes in a significant way. Examples of such nonadiabatic bimolecular reactions include the reactive quenching of electronically excited OH(A) by H₂,¹³⁶ which is facilitated by derivative coupling, and the F(²P) + CH₄ reaction,¹³⁷ which is facilitated by spin–orbit coupling. Because nonadiabatic transitions are a quantum effect, the dynamics should be treated quantum mechanically, as reported in several recent studies.^{138,139} However, a full quantum treatment is very challenging, so approximate methods for handling nonadiabatic transitions are highly advantageous.¹⁴⁰ Such nonadiabatic reaction dynamics is of current research interest, but discussion of nonadiabatic reactions with a submerged barrier has so far remained scarce. Taking the F + NH₃ reaction as an example, the F(²P) reactant has three spin–orbit sublevels, which are correlated to three electronic states that are coupled via spin–orbit coupling. Future work on such systems will be needed to assess the impact of the breakdown of the Born–Oppenheimer approximation.

Another exciting new frontier is cold and ultracold chemistry,^{107,141–147} in which the reactions necessarily require the absence of an intrinsic reaction barrier.^{148,149} So far, many cold collision studies have focused on nonreactive scattering,^{142,147} but progress has already been made for cold reactive scattering.^{107,146} For instance, the reactivity of the slightly exoergic KRb + KRb → K₂ + Rb₂ reaction has recently been elucidated at the state-to-state level near 200 nK.^{150,151} This reaction proceeds without a barrier via an extremely long-lived intermediate in which energy randomization is likely to be close to completion.¹⁵² While most of the measured state-to-state reaction probabilities¹⁵¹ are in reasonably good agreement with statistical theory predictions,¹⁵³ there are some outliers that are not fully understood. New experimental techniques for preparing chemically relevant reactive species at cold and ultracold temperatures will inevitably lead to future challenges to theory, and the role played by a submerged barrier in low-temperature reactivity can be explored in a pure quantum regime.

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H.S. and H.G.: conceptualization (lead), funding acquisition (lead), resources (lead), supervision (lead), data curation (lead), writing—original draft (lead), writing—review and editing (lead). CRediT: **Hongwei Song** conceptualization (equal), funding acquisition (equal), investigation (equal), methodology (equal), project administration (equal), resources (equal), supervision (equal), writing—original draft (equal), writing—review & editing (equal); **Hua Guo** conceptualization

(equal), funding acquisition (equal), investigation (equal), methodology (equal), project administration (equal), resources (equal), supervision (equal), writing—original draft (equal), writing—review & editing (equal).

Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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