Quantum Nonlinear Sigma Model for Arbitrary Spin Heisenberg Antiferromagnets

Jianhui Dai\textsuperscript{a} and Wei-Min Zhang\textsuperscript{a,b,c}
\textsuperscript{a} Zhejiang Institute of Modern Physics, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou 310027, China
\textsuperscript{b} Department of Physics, National Cheng Kung University, Tainan 701, Taiwan
\textsuperscript{c} National Center for Theoretical Science, Taiwan

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In this Letter, we derive a quantum nonlinear sigma model (QNLSM) for quantum Heisenberg antiferromagnets (QHA) with arbitrary $S$ (spin) values. A upper limit of the low temperature is naturally carried out for the reliability of the QNLSM. The $S$ dependence of the effective coupling constant and the spin wave velocity in the QNLSM are also obtained explicitly. The resulting spin wave velocity for 2-dim spin-1/2 QHA highly concurs with the experimental data of high $T_c$ compound La$_2$CuO$_4$. The predicted correlation lengths for 2d QHA and spin-gap magnitudes for 1d QHA also agrees with the accurate numerical results.

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Quantum magnetism in low dimensional strongly correlated systems is a central issue in modern condensed matter physics. For example, the parent compounds of the cuprate high $T_c$ superconductors are essentially antiferromagnetic Mott insulators described by a two-dimensional spin-$\frac{1}{2}$ QHA. Such a low-dimensional QHA system has not been fully solved quantum mechanically. Only in the large $S$ limit has Haldane shown that the lattice QHA can be described by the QNLSM. Since then, the QNLSM has become a good candidate for the phenomenological description of the low-dimensional QHA at low temperatures for various $S$ values.

However, two crucial questions remain for the QNLSM approach: (1) Why are the predictions of QNLSM obtained in the large-$S$ limit coincidently consistent with experimental data of the low energy QHA with small $S$ values? and (2) What is the upper limit of the low temperature for the reliability of QNLSM? These two questions, along with other difficulties for the QNLSM, have been addressed in some recent literatures. But, they have not yet been satisfactorily solved in a simple, consistent approach. In this Letter, with the topologically invariant spin variable path integral approach, we resolve these problems by deriving a QNLSM from the lattice QHA for arbitrary $S$ values.

Let us first briefly recall the large-$S$ approach of the QNLSM. The partition function of a spin system is usually expressed in terms of the spin variable path integral as follows (in the unit $\hbar = k_B = 1$):

$$Z = T \exp -\beta H = \int \mathcal{D}[\Omega] \exp \int_0^\beta d\tau (iS A \cdot \dot{\Omega} - \langle \Omega | H | \Omega \rangle),$$

(1)

where the first term in the exponent $iS \int_0^\beta d\tau A \cdot \dot{\Omega} = \int_0^\beta d\tau \dot{\Omega} |_{\Omega = A}^\beta \equiv iS \omega(\Omega)$ is a topological Berry phase, $A$ is a U(1) monopole potential; $\Omega$ is a spin coherent state while $\dot{\Omega}$ is a unit vector along which the spin operator with spin quantum number $S$ is maximally aligned in $\Omega$. For the lattice Heisenberg model (HM), $H = J \sum_{\langle ij \rangle} S_i \cdot S_j$ ($J > 0$), Eq. (1) becomes

$$Z_H = \int \mathcal{D}[\Omega] e^{iS A \cdot \dot{\Omega} - \langle \Omega | H | \Omega \rangle}.$$  

(2)

By minimizing $H(\Omega) = JS^2 \sum_{\langle ij \rangle} \Omega_i \cdot \Omega_j$, one can find the classical ground state (Néel state) which spontaneously breaks the SO(3) symmetry. Then by expanding the action around the ground state, the spin-wave theory (SWT) of HM, which describes the long wavelength spin modes, can be easily derived.

By the Mermin-Wagner’s theorem, no symmetry can be spontaneously broken in one- or two-dimensional HM for a finite $T(> 0)$. To derive an effective long wavelength action that retains the full spin rotational symmetry, Haldane considered the large-$S$ limit. In the large-$S$ limit, the path integrals of Eq. (2) are dominated by the semiclassical equation: $iS \Omega \times \dot{\Omega} = \partial H(\Omega)$. By separating the semiclassical solution $\Omega_i$ into a slowly varying Néel order unit vector ($\langle 1 \rangle$) $n(x_i)$ plus a slowly varying magnetization density field perpendicular to $n(x_i)$ (Haldane’s mapping), and then taking the continuous limit and integrating out the magnetic density field, Haldane shows that Eq. (2) is reduced to a QNLSM,

$$Z_H = \int \mathcal{D}[n] e^{i2\pi S \theta[n] - (\lambda \tau^2/2g_0)} \int d^{d+1}x \partial \nabla^\mu n \nabla_\mu n,$$

(3)

defined in the $d+1$-dimensional space $(x^1, \cdots, x^{d+1}) = (x^1, \cdots, x^d, c_0 \tau)$. Where, $g_0 = 2\sqrt{d}/S$ is a dimensionless coupling constant, $c_0 = 2\sqrt{dJSa}$ the spin wave velocity and $\Lambda = a^{-1}$ the inverse of the lattice spacing. The imaginary time (temperature) variable $\tau$ ranges from 0 to $\beta = 1/T$. The exponent $\theta[n]$ in Eq. (3) is a topological factor associated with the Berry phase.

However, as we will elaborate, the derivation of the QNLSM based on the large-$S$ expansion should be improved from the very beginning. As a long-standing problem in the construction of generalized phase space path integrals, the Eq. (1) is not well defined.
The main problem arises from the assumption, used in deriving Eq. (11), that $\Omega(t + \delta t) - \Omega(t)$ is of order $O(\delta t)$. Although this assumption has been widely used in the application of generalized phase space path integrals, it has never been justified. In fact, in effective field theories, there always exist simultaneous rapidly and slowly varying paths in the path integral formalism that are associated with short and long range quantum fluctuations, respectively. The effective action for slowly varying motions can be properly obtained by integrating over short range quantum fluctuations. However, in Eq. (1), only slowly varying motions are retained; the short range quantum fluctuations have been simply ignored.

To overcome the shortcomings involved in the derivation of Eq. (1), we begin with the discrete form of the partition function obtained exactly from the coherent state representation:

$$Z = \lim_{N \to \infty} \prod_{k=1}^{N} d\mu(\Omega^k) \exp \left\{ \frac{1}{\epsilon} \sum_{k=1}^{N} \ln(\langle \Omega^k \rangle \Omega^{k-1}) \right\},$$

where $|\Omega^N\rangle = |\Omega^0\rangle$ because of the periodicity of the trace, $\epsilon = \beta/N$ is infinitesimal as $N \to \infty$. The slowly varying motion means that $\langle \Omega^k \rangle - \langle \Omega_{k-1} \rangle$ varies smoothly in the interval $\epsilon$ such that it can be written as a time derivative $\dot{\Omega}$. The rapidly varying motion of $\langle \Omega^k \rangle - \langle \Omega_{k-1} \rangle$ in the interval $\epsilon$ is related to the short range quantum fluctuations, we label it as $\delta \Omega$. The assumption of $|\Omega^k\rangle - |\Omega^{k-1}\rangle$ being of order $O(\epsilon)$ only keeps the slowly varying motions $\Omega$, while the short range fluctuations $\delta \Omega$ is ignored. Thus, the continuous-time limit of (4) results in the conventional spin variable path integral of Eq. (1).

To include the contribution of the short range fluctuations, one should expand the nearby coherent state overlap to the second order terms that either are exclusively slowly varying motions or include at least one rapidly varying motion. The topologically invariant terms $\lim_{N \to \infty} \sum_{k=1}^{N} \ln(\langle \Omega^k \rangle \Omega^{k-1})$ can then be uniquely expressed by

$$S \int_{0}^{\beta} d\tau \left\{ iA \cdot \dot{\Omega} + i\Omega \cdot (\Omega \times \delta \Omega) - \frac{1}{\tau_A} \delta \Omega \cdot \delta \Omega \right\},$$

where $\tau_A = 1/T_A$ is an intrinsic short-time scale (an upper limit of low temperature) for distinguishing the slowly varying and rapidly varying motions. We will later discuss this timescale in detail. The second and third terms in Eq. (5) are usually ignored in the conventional derivation of phase space path integrals. For the Hamiltonian term in Eq. (4),

$$\lim_{N \to \infty} \sum_{k=1}^{N} \frac{\langle \Omega^k \rangle \delta \Omega \delta \Omega^k}{\Omega \Omega},$$

since it is already proportional to $\epsilon$, we only keep the off-diagonal expansion up to the quadratic order of $\delta \Omega$:

$$\int d\tau \left\{ \frac{\partial H[\Omega]}{\partial \Omega} \cdot \delta \Omega + \frac{\partial^2 H[\Omega]}{\partial \Omega \partial \Omega} \delta \Omega \delta \Omega \right\},$$

where $\alpha, \alpha'$ are indices of spin components. Substituting Eqs. (5) into Eq. (1), one gets

$$Z = \int D[\Omega] D[\delta \Omega] \exp \int_{0}^{\beta} d\tau \left\{ iS A \cdot \dot{\Omega} - H[\Omega] \right\} + \left[ iS \Omega \times \dot{\Omega} - \delta H[\Omega] \right] \cdot \delta \Omega \right\} \delta \Omega, \right.$$
The topological phase factor $2\pi S \Theta[n] = 2\pi S \sum_{\mathbf{x}} (-1)^{\mathbf{A}(\mathbf{x})} \cdot \mathbf{n}(\mathbf{x})$ remains the same as in Haldane’s derivation.

In the large-$S$ limit for fixed $T_\Lambda$, $g_s \to 2\sqrt{d}/S, c_s \to 2\sqrt{d}JSa$. This reproduces the large-$S$ QNLSM. The difference between \cite{9} and \cite{11} primarily comes from the contribution of the short range fluctuations, the $1/\tau_\Lambda = T_\Lambda$ term in \cite{17} which cannot be included in Haldane’s mapping \cite{2}. However, this term plays an important role in the derivation of a consistent semiclassical dynamics \cite{13}. Indeed, $T_\Lambda$ is an upper limit of the low temperature scale for the reliability of the QNLSM. Usually one assumes that there should be no intrinsic cutoff for the imaginary time variable $\tau$ because quantum fluctuations exist on all time scales in path integrals \cite{3}. But a low energy effective theory constructed from path integral is defined by integrating over high energy quantum fluctuations above certain energy scale \cite{11}. Without such an intrinsic cutoff, namely, let $\tau_\Lambda \to 0$ ($T_\Lambda \to \infty$), Eq. (11) reduces to

$$Z_H \propto \int D[n] e^{i2\pi S \Theta[n]} \exp \left\{ -\frac{\rho_s}{2T} \int d^d x |\nabla_x n|^2 \right\},$$

where $\rho_s = JS^2 a^{2-d}$ is the spin stiffness. Except for the topological phase, this is the classical $d$-dimensional NLSM rather than a quantum $d + 1$-dimensional NLSM that Haldane obtained \cite{2}. This is because in the limit $\tau_\Lambda \to 0$, the strong canonical fluctuation in Eq. (15) smears the dynamical fluctuation of Eq. (11) so that only the classical Hamiltonian Eq. (8) remains.

Now, let us discuss how to consistently determine this timescale. The lattice spacing $a$ indicates the existence of an intrinsic momentum cutoff $\Lambda$ in the $d$-dimensional momentum space: $\Lambda = 2\sqrt{\pi} \Gamma(d/2+1)^{1/d}/a \equiv L/a$. Using the energy-momentum relation of the spin wave, $E = c_s k$, one can find the intrinsic energy cutoff (the inverse of the shortest time scale $\tau_\Lambda$) $T_\Lambda = c_s \Lambda/2\pi S$. Combined with Eq. (12), we get

$$\frac{T_\Lambda}{J} = \frac{S L^2}{4\pi^2} \left( 1 + \frac{1 + 16\pi^2 d}{L^2} \right).$$

For $d = 2$ and $S = 1/2$, we have $L = 2\sqrt{\pi}$ and thus $T_\Lambda/J \approx 0.97$. This determines quantitatively a low temperature upper limit for the reliability of QNLSM to the 2-dim spin-$1/2$ QHA: $0 < T/J < T_\Lambda/J \approx 1.0$. Meanwhile, the spin wave velocity $c_s$ can also be explicitly determined from Eq. (12) and (14). For La$_2$CuO$_4$, which is a typical 2-dim spin-$1/2$ QHA with $a = 3.79\AA$ and $J \approx 1500K$, we obtain (keeping $\hbar$) $h c_s = 2JSa \sqrt{d + \frac{T_\Lambda}{T_\Lambda/J}} \approx 0.85$ eV $\AA$. This is in excellent agreement with the experimental data $h c_s = 0.85 \pm 0.03$ eV $\AA$ \cite{14}.

Our main results, i.e., Eqs. (12) and (14), can be further tested against the known results for the 2d QHA, among which the quantum Monte Carlo data is almost exact. Up to the three-loop correction, the QNLSM predicts \cite{13} the asymptotic scaling behavior of the correlation length in the renormalized classical regime as

$$\xi_3 = A \exp(1/t[1 - 0.5 t + O(t^2)]),$$

where, $A = \frac{c_s^2}{2\pi \rho_\ast}$ is a temperature-independent pre-factor, $t = \frac{T}{T_\Lambda}$ is the dimensionless temperature, and $\rho_\ast$ and $\rho_s$ are the renormalized spin-wave velocity and spin stiffness which can be consistently determined by large-$S$ expansion. The predicted formula $\xi_3$ is extremely sensitive to the spin stiffness and is consistent with the QMC data \cite{16, 17} at very large correlation lengths (low temperatures) for $S = 1/2$ when the best-fit value $\rho_\ast = 0.1800$ is used. However, at moderate correlation lengths, highly accurate QMC data \cite{16, 17} and series expansions \cite{17} indicate a significant discrepancy which rapidly increases with $S$.

The asymptotic scaling at the three-loop sets in at correlation lengths larger than $10^5$ for $S = 1/2$ \cite{15} and cosmological lengths for larger $S$.

Quite strikingly, according to the basic assumption of the large-$S$ approach, the discrepancy between the theory and numerics, if it exists, should be significant only for small $S$. By contrast, in our derivation, the asymptotic scaling behavior Eq. (15) holds for arbitrary $S$ at low temperatures, provided the effects of the intrinsic scale $T_\Lambda$ are correctly taken into account. Note that the temperature dependence in Eq. (15) comes from a simple assumption that at nonzero temperature $T$ the correlation length is much larger than the finite extent $\sim L/a$ along the Euclidean time direction in the renormalized classical regime \cite{3, 4}. In our case, the time extent is replaced by $c_s(1/T - 1/T_\Lambda)$, making the assumption more reasonable. Therefore, we only need to replace $T$ by the re-scaled temperature $\tilde{T} = \frac{T}{T_\Lambda}$ in Eq. (16). The validity of this simple re-scaling requires that $\tilde{T} < 2\pi \rho_\ast$, or $T < 0.5 J$ for $S = 1/2$. Interestingly, the re-scaling does not change the two-loop asymptotic scaling behavior. On the other hand, the shifts in $c_s$ and $g_s$ only modify the pre-factor $A$ but keep $\rho_\ast$ unchanged. Figure 1 shows the deviations of various results from two-loop asymptotic scaling (1/f) as a function of $t$. The three-loop results of Eq. (15) in terms of $t$ and $\tilde{T} = \frac{T}{2\pi \rho_\ast}$ are plotted as the 3-loop old (dashed) line and the 3-loop new (solid) line, respectively. For our three-loop result, the scaling regime begins at roughly $\xi \approx 10^5 - 10^9$, when $T \approx 0.3 J$. As a comparison, a suggested four-loop (dotted) line \cite{15} is plotted by adding the correction $O(t^2)$ in Eq. (15) before re-scaling. The coefficient of this term is $-0.75$ by fitting the highly accurate QMC data which is apparently too large to be obtained within reasonable four-loop corrections \cite{15}.

Our results can also be tested against the known results for the 1d QHA. Note that in 1d, the topological term plays a crucial role, leading to the quantum critical and disordered phases for half integer and integer spins, respectively \cite{2, 15}. In the disordered phase, $T_\Lambda$ can be determined by using the relation $E^2 = c_s^2 k^2 + \Delta_c^2$. This only leads to a correction $O((\Delta_c^2)^2)$ to Eq. (14). For $S = 1/2, 1, 3/2$ and 2, the accurate numerical re-
FIG. 1: Deviations of various results from two-loop asymptotic scaling as a function of $t$. The QMC result is obtained from Ref. [13].

results for the values of $c_s/(aJ)$ obtained by the Density Matrix Renormalization Group (DMRG) [12, 20, 21] are 1.57, 2.49, 3.87 and 4.65 respectively, which show a systematic deviation from $2S$. While, by Eq. (12), they are 1.28, 2.55, 3.84 and 5.00 respectively, providing much better predictions. The 1d QNLSM also predicts gap [18] in the disordered phase as $\Delta_1 = Bc_s \exp(-2\pi/g_s)$, where $B$ is a $S$-independent fitting parameter of order of 1. The DMRG results are $\Delta_1 = 0.411J$ for $S = 1/2$; $\Delta_2 = 0.085J$ for $S = 3/2$. By using the best-fitting parameter, $B \approx 2$, we find that our derivation gives $\Delta_1 = 0.438J$ and $\Delta_2 = 0.076J$, respectively, while the large-$S$ approach gives $\Delta_1 = 0.172J$ and $\Delta_2 = 0.015$, respectively. Therefore, the present 1d QNLSM provides a better approximation for the spin-gap magnitudes in the 1d integer QHA.

In conclusion, by using a topologically invariant spin variable path integral approach, we resolve the two crucial problems in the QNLSM description of QHA as mentioned in the beginning of this Letter. The basic parameters in the QNLSM are unambiguously defined for arbitrary spin values. The primary tests discussed above show that the quantum fluctuations in the QHA, which are usually underestimated in the large-$S$ approach, are now more properly described. It should be emphasized that the construction of a low energy effective field theory from the extended phase space path integrals developed in this Letter is a general approach, in which the shortest time scale plays a crucial role for self-consistency. This approach can be applied to other generalized phase space path integrals [12] for the study of low energy physics in various strongly correlated systems.

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