Three-Particle Correlations from Parton Cascades in 
Au+Au Collisions

G. L. Ma\textsuperscript{a} Y. G. Ma\textsuperscript{a}, S. Zhang\textsuperscript{a,b}, X. Z. Cai\textsuperscript{a}, J. H. Chen\textsuperscript{a,b}, Z. J. He\textsuperscript{a}, H. Z. Huang\textsuperscript{c}, J. L. Long\textsuperscript{a}, W. Q. Shen\textsuperscript{a}, X. H. Shi\textsuperscript{a,b}, C. Zhong\textsuperscript{a}, J. X. Zuo\textsuperscript{a,b}

\textsuperscript{a} Shanghai Institute of Applied Physics, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Shanghai 201800, China
\textsuperscript{b} Graduate School of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing 100080, China
\textsuperscript{c} Department of Physics and Astrophysics, University of California, Los Angeles, CA90095, USA

Abstract

We present a study of three-particle correlations among a trigger particle and two associated particles in Au + Au collisions at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$ GeV using a multi-phase transport model (AMPT) with both partonic and hadronic interactions. We found that three-particle correlation densities in different angular directions with respect to the triggered particle (‘center’, ‘cone’, ‘deflected’, ‘near’ and ‘near-away’) increase with the number of participants. The ratio of ‘deflected’ to ‘cone’ density approaches to 1.0 with the increasing of number of participants, which indicates that partonic Mach-like shock waves can be produced by strong parton cascades in central Au+Au collisions.

Key words: Three-particle correlation, Mach cone, Parton cascade, Hadronic rescattering, AMPT
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I. Introduction

Ultra-relativistic heavy ion collisions may provide conditions sufficient for the formation of a deconfined plasma of quarks and gluons [1]. Experimental results from RHIC indicate that a strongly-interacting partonic matter (termed sQGP) has been created in the early stage of central Au + Au collisions at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$ GeV at RHIC [2]. Jet-like azimuthal correlation is one of the important hard probes to explore the natures of the newly formed matter. The disappearance [3] and reappearance [4] of back-to-back high transverse momentum ($p_T$) particles from jets have been proved to result from the interactions between jet-partons and the hot and dense medium created in central Au+Au collisions. Recently, an interesting splitting of the away side peak has been observed in the di-hadron azimuthal angle ($\Delta \phi$) correlation distribution between soft associated particles and high $p_T$ trigger particles in central Au + Au collisions at RHIC [5,6,7]. Such a double peak structure on the away-side is consistent with preferential conic emission of particles from jets and/or shock-wave induced collective motion from jet-medium interactions. We will refer to the observed double peaks on

Email address: ygma@sinap.ac.cn.
Corresponding author (Y. G. Ma\textsuperscript{a}).
the away-side as the Mach-like structure
without necessary implication on the dy-
namical mechanism.

Several theoretical interpretations about
the Mach-like structure have been pro-
posed. For instances, Stöcker et al. pro-
posed the Mach-like structure from jets
traversing the dense medium as a probe of
the equation of state (EOS) and the speed
of sound in the medium [8]. Casalderrey-
Solana and Shuryak et al. argued a shock
wave generation because jets travel faster
than the sound in the medium [9]. They
fitted the broad splitting structure on the
away side in di-hadron azimuthal correla-
tion with a Mach-cone shock wave mecha-
nism. Vitev has shown that the cancella-
tion of collinear bremsstrahlung in QCD
medium can lead to large angle emission of
gluons [10]. Koch and Wang et al. used a
Cherenkov radiation model with negative
dispersion relation to produce the Mach-
like structure [11]. In Ref. [12], Armesto
proposed that the medium-induced gluon
radiation could be affected by the collective
flow in the medium. It has also been
argued by Müller et al. that a Mach-like
structure can appear via the excitation of
collective plasmon waves by moving color
charges associated with the leading jet [13].
Renk and Ruppert found that in order to
reproduce the experimental data a large
fraction (about 90%) of the lost energy of
jet has to be channelled to excite a shock
wave in a dense medium at a soft point of
EOS [14]. Satarov et al. investigated Mach
shocks induced by partonic jets in expand-
ing quark-gluon plasma [15]. However,
Chaudhuri and Heinz reported no observa-
tion of Mach-like structures in di-hadron
$\Delta \phi$ correlations from jet quenching dynam-
ically in a hydrodynamic QGP fluid [16]. A
consistent dynamical picture for the gener-
ation of the Mach-like structure in particle
correlations has yet to emerge and further
investigations are needed.

In order to shed light on the puzzle of the
dynamical origin of the splitting structure
on the away-side, three-particle correla-
tion has been proposed to look at the multi-
particle correlation in the emission
pattern of particles. The di-hadron corre-
lation cannot distinguish different emis-
sion scenarios since correlation only deals
between emitted and the trigger particle.
However the three-particle correlation is
capable of distinguishing the different sce-
cnarios when simultaneous emission of two
particles are investigated with the trigger
particle. If the splitting structure of away-
side is from large angle gluon emission or
deflection due to strong collective flow in an
event, the two associated particles will
be clustered in a narrow cone on a single-
side of the away-jet direction. However, if
the production mechanism is Mach-cone
shock wave or Cherenkov gluon radiation,
the partons in the shock-wave front or
Cherenkov gluons will be emitted conically
around the away-side jet center in single
event. In this case, the two associated par-
ticles can be simultaneously on both sides
of the $\Delta \phi = \phi_{assoc} - \phi_{trig}$ distribution with
respect to the opposite direction of the
trigger particle. Experimental studies of
the three-particle correlations have been
reported by both the STAR [17,18,19] and
the PHENIX [20] collaborators.

In our previous work, we reported obser-
vation of Mach-like structure in di-hadron
correlations from Au+Au collisions using
a multi-phase transport model (AMPT)
where both partonic and hadronic in-
teractions are included [21]. Both par-
ton cascades and hadronic rescatterings
can produce apparent di-hadron correla-
tions with Mach-like structures. But the
hadronic rescattering mechanism alone
cannot reproduce the observed experi-
mental amplitude of Mach-like structure on
the away-side, which indicates that parton
cascade processes are indispensable. How-
ever, detailed dynamical mechanisms for
the Mach-like structure still await to be
determined. In this Letter, we present a
study of three-particle correlation among
one trigger particle and two associated par-
ticles in Au + Au collisions at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$
GeV with the AMPT model. Three par-
ticle correlations in regions of azimuthal
angular directions of ‘cone’, ‘deflected’,
‘center’, ‘near’ and ‘near-away’, which will
be defined later, will be presented for Au
+ Au collisions from AMPT. With de-
creasing number of participants, ‘center’ correlations become more dominant, and ‘cone’ and ‘deflected’ correlations seem to disappear. Our results indicate that the three-particle correlations in central collisions are mainly produced by partonic Mach-like shock wave effect, while in peripheral collisions deflected jet effect also contributes to the Mach-like structure. Effects of hadronic rescatterings and parton cascades on three-particle correlation are also investigated.

II. Brief Description of the AMPT Model

AMPT model [22] is a hybrid model which consists of four main processes: the initial conditions, partonic interactions, the conversion from partonic matter into hadronic matter and hadronic interactions. The initial conditions, which include the spatial and momentum distributions of minijet partons and soft string excitations, are obtained from the HIJING model [23]. The excitation of strings will melt strings into partons. Scatterings among partons are modelled by Zhang’s parton cascade model (ZPC) [24], which at present includes only two-body scatterings with cross section obtained from pQCD calculation with screening mass. In the default version of AMPT model (we briefly call it as “the default AMPT” model) [25], partons are recombined with their parent strings when they stop interactions, and the resulting strings are converted to hadrons using the Lund string fragmentation model [26]. In the string melting version of the AMPT model (we briefly call it as “the melting AMPT” model)[27], a quark coalescence model is used to combine partons to form hadrons. Dynamics of the subsequent hadronic matter is then described by A Relativistic Transport (ART) model [28]. Details of the AMPT model can be found in a recent review [22]. Previous studies [22,27,29] demonstrated that the partonic effect cannot be neglected and the melting AMPT model is much more appropriate than the default AMPT model in describing nucleus-nucleus collisions at RHIC. In the present work, the parton interaction cross section in the AMPT model is assumed to be 10 mb consistent with previous calculations [22,29].

III. Analysis Method

The mixing-event technique has been used in our three-particle correlation analysis. The $p_T$ window cuts for trigger and associated particles were selected as $2.5 < p_T^{trig} < 4$ GeV/$c$ and $1.0 < p_T^{assoc} < 2.5$ GeV/$c$, respectively. Both trigger and associated particles were required to be within a pseudo-rapidity window of $|\eta| < 1.0$, where $\eta$ is the pseudo-rapidity of hadrons in the center-of-mass frame of Au+Au collisions. In the same events, raw 3-particle correlation signals in $\Delta \phi_1 = \phi_1 - \phi_{trig}$ versus $\Delta \phi_2 = \phi_2 - \phi_{trig}$ were histogrammed. Figure 1(a) shows the raw 3-particle correlation distribution in the top 10% central Au+Au collisions at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$ GeV in the melting AMPT model with hadronic rescattering. Three classes of background contributions are expected to contribute to the raw signal. The first one is the hard-soft background which comes from a jet-induced trigger-associated pair combined with a background associated particle from
bulk medium. We reproduced it by mixing a trigger-associated pair with another associated particle from a different event (Figure 1(b)). The second one is soft-soft background which comes from an associated particle pair combined with an uncorrelated trigger particle. We constructed this background by mixing an associated particle pair from one event with a trigger particle from a different event (Figure 1(c)). The third one is a random combinatorial background, which was produced by mixing a trigger particle and two associated particles respectively from three different events (Figure 1(d)). We required that the mixed events are all from very close collision centralities which can be determined by impact parameters in simulations. In order to subtract the backgrounds from the raw signals, we set the signal at 0.8 < |Δφ_{1,2}| < 1.2 to be zero. Figure 2 (a) and (b) give background subtracted 3-particle correlations in the top 10% central Au+Au collisions at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$ GeV for the melting AMPT model with hadronic rescattering. In order to observe the 3-particle correlations among a trigger particle and two away-side associated particles clearly, the 3-particle correlations in $1 < |Δφ_{1,2}| < 5.28$ region are shown with an expanded scale in Figure 2 (c) and (d).

IV. Results and Discussions

We divide the three-particle correlation distribution into several regions based on the possible origin of the particle emission pattern as shown in Figure 2a. The first one is ‘center’ region ($|Δφ_{1,2} - π| < 0.5$) where the three-particle correlation mainly comes from one trigger particle and two associated particles in the center of away side. The ‘center’ correlations represent penetration ability of away-side jet. The second one is ‘cone’ region ($|Δφ_{1} - (π ± 1)| < 0.5$ and $|Δφ_{2} - (π ± 1)| < 0.5$) where three-particle correlation would form splitting peaks in di-hadron $Δφ$ correlation due to a conical emission pattern from away-side jet. It was predicted that this conical emission may be produced by a Mach-cone shock wave effect when a jet propagates faster than the speed of sound in the medium creating shock wave front in the cone region. The third one is ‘deflected’ region ($|Δφ_{1,2} - (π ± 1)| < 0.5$) where associated particles are emitted in the same side-ward region of the away-side jet in one event. The ‘deflected’ region three-particle correlations can also yield splitting peaks on the away-side of two-particle correlation distribution because though within one event the away-side jet is deflected to one side only, but inclusively with many events both sides of the jet direction can be populated. The fourth region is the ‘near’ area ($|Δφ_{1,2}| < 0.5$) where three-particle correlation represents the correlation among trigger particle and associated particles on near side of the trigger direction. The fifth one is ‘near-away’ correlation region ($1 < |Δφ_{1,2}| < 5.28$ and $|Δφ_{2,1}| < 0.5$), which reflects the correlation among trigger particle, one associated particle on near side and another associated particle.
on away side. The five regions have been marked with different numbers in panel (a) of figure 2 for clarity. We will examine three-particle correlations in the above five regions.

Figure 3 shows three-particle correlation distribution in the \(1 < \Delta \phi_{1,2} < 5.28\) area from Au+Au collisions at \(\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200\) GeV with different centralities using the melting AMPT model, and p+p collisions at \(\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200\) GeV using the default AMPT model before and after hadronic rescattering. Here we chose the default AMPT model to simulate p+p collisions at \(\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200\) GeV, since the string melting mechanism has little effect on p+p collisions which has also been demonstrated previously [22]. Three-particle correlations in all ‘center’, ‘deflected’ and ‘cone’ regions can be observed in central Au+Au collisions with the melting AMPT model regardless of the inclusion of hadronic rescatterings. As the collisions become more peripheral, the ‘deflected’ and ‘cone’ region correlations gradually disappear until only the ‘center’ correlations remain in the most peripheral Au+Au collisions and p+p collisions.

In order to quantitatively express three-particle correlation strength in these different regions, region-averaged three-particle correlation density \(\rho\) is defined according to the following equation:

\[
\rho = \frac{\int \int_{\text{region}} \frac{d^2N}{N_{\text{part}} d\Delta \phi_1 d\Delta \phi_2} d\Delta \phi_1 d\Delta \phi_2}{\int \int_{\text{region}} d\Delta \phi_1 d\Delta \phi_2}.
\]

The top panel of Figure 4 shows three-particle correlation densities \(\rho\) in different regions as a function of \(N_{\text{part}}\) (number of participants) for Au+Au collisions at \(\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200\) GeV in the melting AMPT model before and after hadronic rescattering.

Our results show that three-particle correlation densities decrease after hadronic rescattering process, which indicates hadronic rescatterings could weaken three-particle correlation strength. However dihadron correlation is almost unchanged in
Fig. 4. The correlation density analysis for Au+Au collisions at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$ GeV in the melting AMPT model before and after hadronic rescattering. Top panel: the average three-particle correlation densities $\rho$ at different regions as a function of $N_{\text{part}}$; Bottom panel: ratios of average three-particle correlation density ('center'/‘deflected' and 'center'/'cone') as a function of $N_{\text{part}}$: The insert of the bottom panel: ratio of average three-particle correlation density ('deflected'/‘cone') as a function of $N_{\text{part}}$. Note that some points have been shifted slightly in $N_{\text{part}}$ axis for clarity.

In the insert of Figure 4, the ratio of ‘deflected’/‘cone’ slightly decreases with $N_{\text{part}}$ and approaches 1.0 in central collisions. The Mach-cone shock wave and the Chrenkov gluon radiation scenarios predicted almost equal strength in the three-particle correlations in the ‘deflected’ ($\pi \pm D, \pi \pm D$) and ‘cone’ ($\pi \pm D, \pi \mp D$) regions, where $D$ is the splitting parameter of away side (i.e. half distance between two peaks on away side in di-hadron $\Delta \phi$ correlation function). Our observed three-particle correlations in the central Au+Au collisions from the AMPT model are consistent with these model predictions. Such a consistency may be related to the hydrodynamic-like behavior in the AMPT model due to strong parton-parton couplings and interactions.

More comments on the origin of the three-particle correlations in the AMPT model are in order. The melting AMPT model was shown to produce good descriptions of elliptic flow of identified hadrons and even yielded the correct mass ordering of elliptic flow [27,29], which has been considered an important feature of hydrodynamics models. Such an agreement can be attributed to the large parton-parton interaction cross section in the AMPT model, which leads to strong parton cascades that couples partons together inducing the onset of hydrodynamical behavior [30]. However, in another hydrodynamic model [16] the signal of Mach-cone shock waves can hardly be observed in the di-hadron correlations. It appears that the large strength of parton cascades and coupling of partons as described in the AMPT model bring about the conic emission pattern on the away-side
prominently. The linearized hydrodynamical approximation may not be adequate for the strong jet-medium interaction region where the medium also experiences rapid variation of energy density and without sufficient thermalization [9]. On the other hand, the observed three-particle correlations may partly stem from deflected jets (represented by $\frac{P_{\text{deflected}}}{P_{\text{cone}}} - 1$) in peripheral collisions where ‘center’ correlation becomes dominated. In the AMPT model there is no inclusion of large angle gluon bremsstrahlung mechanism [10] which may also play a role in real collisions. In addition, we note that the backward jet may also be distributed over a wide rapidity range [10,31] beyond our narrow $\eta$ window cut. In our model, we used LO pQCD cross sections from HIJING model for the minijet production, which has successfully described the suppression of back-to-back jets [32]. Our selection of the $\eta$ window cut was to match the detector acceptance of the RHIC experiments.

In addition, we studied the effect of parton cascades on three-particle and di-hadron correlation by comparing the results of the default AMPT model and the melting AMPT model. Figure 5(a) and (b) give three-particle correlations in selected $(1 < \Delta \phi_{1,2} < 5.28)$ regions for the melting AMPT model and the default AMPT model. Note both cases are the results after hadronic rescattering in the top 10% Au+Au collisions at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$ GeV. Though with large statistical errors, the default AMPT model seems to produce a three-particle correlation, but the three-particle correlation area is considerably less than that from the melting AMPT model. It is consistent with the results of di-hadron correlation in our previous work (see Figure 5(c) and (d)) that concluded that hadronic rescattering alone cannot reproduce a splitting parameter of Mach-like structure on away side large enough to match the experimental measurements [21].

The nuclear modification factor, $R_{cp}$, is also considered a useful probe of the energy loss of high $p_T$ partons in the dense medium created in nucleus-nucleus collisions. Figure 6 shows the transverse momentum dependences of nuclear modification factor $R_{cp}$ of charge hadrons in the melting and default AMPT model with hadronic rescattering. The $R_{cp}$ is defined by following formula:

\[ R_{cp} = \frac{dN/dy}{dN/dy_{lab}} \]

Fig. 6. The $p_T$ dependences of nuclear modification factor $R_{cp}$ of charge hadrons for 0-10%/40-60% in Au+Au collisions at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$ GeV in the melting and default AMPT model with hadronic rescattering. The experimental data come from Ref. [33].
\[ R_{cp} = \frac{N_{\text{bin}|c}}{N_{\text{bin}|p}} \times \frac{\frac{d^2N}{d^2p_T} |_{C}}{\frac{dN}{dp_T} |_{p_T}} \]

where the Central and the Peripheral collision centralities are 0-10% and 40-60%, and the respective number of binary collisions \( N_{\text{bin}} = 939.4 \) (0-10%), 93.7 (40-60%).

The \( R_{cp} \) in the melting AMPT model is of similar shape of experimental data, which can match experimental data well if scaled by a factor 1.2. However the \( R_{cp} \) from the default AMPT model seems to be independent of \( p_T \) and inconsistent with experimental data. The partonic interactions in the melting AMPT model appear essential to describe the shape of nuclear modification factor as a function of \( p_T \) in Au+Au collisions. Furthermore, \( R_{cp} \) is suppressed more heavily in higher \( p_T \) range (\( p_T > 3.5 \) GeV/c) in the melting AMPT model than in the default AMPT model, which may indicate that more energies are lost into the medium by parton cascade mechanism especially for high \( p_T \) particles, which is expected to be in favor of the formation of partonic Mach-like shock waves.

V. Conclusions

Three-particle correlations have been extracted by using event-mixing technique in a multi-phase transport model with both partonic and hadronic interactions. Correlations in different azimuthal angular regions with respect to the trigger jet direction, so called ‘center’, ‘deflected’, ‘cone’, ‘near’ and ‘near-away’, have been discussed for Au+Au collisions at \( \sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200 \) GeV. The AMPT results with and without hadronic rescattering are also compared. The ‘center’ three-particle correlation becomes more and more dominant with the decreasing of number of participants, which may reflect the centrality dependence of partonic density and the strength of partonic interactions. The density ratio of ‘deflected’/‘cone’ approaching 1.0 in central collisions indicates that the three-particle correlation in central collisions is mainly produced by a partonic Mach-like shock wave mechanism, and in peripheral collisions deflected jet mechanism also contributes. The partonic Mach-like shock wave mainly originates from strong partonic interactions in dense partonic matter. The three-particle correlations are also sensitive to hadronic rescatterings, therefore the effect of hadronic rescattering may need to be considered in quantitative studies. The default AMPT model, where only the hadronic rescattering mechanism plays a dominant role, produces a three-particle correlation area much smaller than the melting AMPT model which includes both parton cascade and hadron rescattering mechanisms. Our AMPT calculation of three-particle correlations re-affirms our previous conclusion from di-hadron correlation studies that hadronic rescattering alone cannot produce an amplitude of Mach-like cone on away side large enough to match the experimental data. Parton cascade mechanism is essential and important in order to describe the amplitude of observed experimental Mach-like structure.

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