Exactly solvable pairing model for superconductors with a $p + ip$-wave symmetry

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We present the exact Bethe ansatz solution for the two-dimensional BCS pairing Hamiltonian with $p_x + ip_y$ symmetry. Using both mean-field theory and the exact solution we obtain the ground-state phase diagram parameterized by the filling fraction and the coupling constant. It consists of three phases denoted weak coupling BCS, weak pairing, and strong pairing. The first two phases are separated by a topologically protected line where the exact ground state is given by the Moore-Read pfaffian state. In the thermodynamic limit the ground-state energy is discontinuous on this line. The other two phases are separated by the critical line, also topologically protected, previously found by Read and Green. We establish a duality relation between the weak and strong pairing phases, whereby ground states of the weak phase are "dressed" versions of the ground states of the strong phase by zero energy (Moore-Read) pairs and characterized by a topological order parameter.

PACS numbers: 74.20.Fg, 75.10.Jm, 71.10.Li, 73.21.La

In 1957, Bardeen, Cooper and Schrieffer published an epoch defining paper giving a microscopic explanation of the properties of superconducting metals at low temperatures [1]. The model was based on a reduced Hamiltonian which describes the pairing interaction between conduction electrons. The original study of the BCS model was formulated in the grand canonical ensemble and solved with a mean-field approximation. In 1963 Richardson derived the exact solution of the reduced BCS Hamiltonian with s-wave symmetry in the canonical ensemble [2]. This solution was largely unnoticed until its rediscovery in the theoretical studies of ultrasmall metallic grains in the 1990's, where it was employed to understand the crossover between the fluctuation dominated regime and the fully developed superconducting regime (for a review see [2]). The exact solution for the s-wave BCS model is related to the Gaudin spin Hamiltonians and their integrability can be understood in the general framework of the Quantum Inverse Scattering Method [1, 2]. These later developments allowed for an exact computation of various correlators [2, 4, 5], and led to generalizations of the Richardson-Gaudin models with applications to condensed matter and nuclear physics [2, 5, 6].

In this Letter we analyze the two-dimensional BCS model where the symmetry of the pairing interaction is $p_x + ip_y$ (hereafter referred to as $p + ip$). The Hamiltonian of the model is

$$H = \sum_k \frac{k^2}{2m} c_k^\dagger c_k$$

$$-\frac{G}{4m} \sum_{k \neq k'} (k_x - ik_y)(k'_x + ik'_y) c_k^\dagger c_{-k'}^\dagger c_{-k'} c_k,$$

where $c_k, c_k^\dagger$ are destruction and creation operators of 2D spinless or polarised fermions with momentum $k$, $m$ is their mass and $G$ is a dimensionless coupling constant which is positive for an attractive interaction. The $p + ip$ model has attracted considerable attention due to the connection with the Moore-Read pfaffian state arising in the quantum Hall effect at filling fraction 5/2 [9], which has been proposed to support non-abelian anyons allowing for topological quantum computation [10, 11]. Motivated by these considerations, concrete proposals for engineering the $p + ip$ form of the pairing interaction have been formulated in the context of cold fermi gases [12, 13]. Here we will study the model through the exact Bethe ansatz solution, which is presented for the first time. We remark that exact solvability holds independent of the choice for the ultraviolet cut-off, which we denote as $\omega$, and independent of the distribution of the momenta $k$. In particular this means that a one-dimensional system is obtained by simply setting all $\omega_k = 0$. Unless stated otherwise, all discussions below deal with finite particle numbers in a finite-sized system.

Using the standard mean-field theory approach Read and Green have shown the existence of a second-order phase transition governed by the chemical potential $\mu$ [14]. Adopting the terminology of [14], this transition takes place between a weak pairing phase ($\mu > 0$), the ground state (GS) of which behaves as the Moore-Read pfaffian state at long distances, and a strong pairing phase ($\mu < 0$). The spectrum of Bogoliubov quasiparticles is gapless at $\mu = 0$. The GS of the weak pairing phase also has a non-trivial topological structure in $k$-space, as shown by Volovik [13]. However in the mean-field analysis the weak pairing GS is continuously connected to the weak coupling BCS GS [14].

Our goal is to re-examine the properties of the $p + ip$ model. Through this study we will achieve the following: i) From the mean-field results the ground-state phase diagram will be determined, comprising of the weak coupling BCS, weak pairing, and strong pairing phases; ii) A duality relation between the weak pairing and strong pairing phases will be shown to exist; iii) From the Bethe ansatz solution the duality will be formulated in terms of a dressing relation involving zero energy Moore-Read...
(MR) pairs; iv) Dressing of the vacuum will be seen to give the boundary line between weak coupling BCS and weak pairing phases, representing a zeroth-order quantum phase transition when the thermodynamic limit is taken (cf. \cite{17} for analogous zeroth-order thermal phase transitions); iv) The weak pairing phase will be shown to have a non-trivial topological structure, related to the dressing operation, which will be quantified by a winding number.

Before presenting the exact solution of the Hamiltonian we first extend the mean-field results reported in \cite{14}. The BCS order parameter associated to (1) is

$$\tilde{\Delta} = \frac{G}{m} \sum_k (k_x + i k_y) \langle c_{-k} c_k \rangle$$

in terms of which the Hamiltonian \cite{11} can be approximated as (up to an additive constant)

$$H = \sum_k \xi_k c_k^\dagger c_k - \frac{1}{4} \sum_k \left( \tilde{\Delta} (k_x - i k_y) c_k^\dagger c_{-k}^\dagger + \text{h.c.} \right)$$

where\(\xi_k = k^2/2m - \mu/2\) and \(\mu/2\) is the chemical potential. This Hamiltonian can be diagonalized by a Bogoliubov transformation. The gap \(\Delta = |\tilde{\Delta}|\) and chemical potential are the solutions of the equations

$$\sum_{k \in K_+} \frac{k^2}{\sqrt{(k^2 - \mu)^2 + k^2 \Delta^2}} = \frac{1}{G}$$

$$\mu \sum_{k \in K_+} \frac{1}{\sqrt{(k^2 - \mu)^2 + k^2 \Delta^2}} = 2M - L + \frac{1}{G}$$

where we have set \(m = 1, L\) is the total number of energy levels and \(M\) is the number of Cooper pairs. The set \(K_+\) denotes the set of momenta where \(k_x > 0\) and any \(k_y\), so that we avoid overcounting of energy levels. The mean-field expression for the GS energy is (accounting for the constant term missing in (3))

$$E = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{k \in K_+} k^2 \left( 1 - \frac{2k^2 + \Delta^2 - 2\mu}{2\sqrt{(k^2 - \mu)^2 + k^2 \Delta^2}} \right).$$

Projection of the grand-canonical GS wave function onto a fixed number of \(M\) pairs gives

$$|\psi\rangle = \left[ \sum_{k \in K_+} g(k) c_k^\dagger c_{-k} \right]^M |0\rangle$$

where \(g(k) = (2E(k) - k^2 + \mu)/(k_x + i k_y)\tilde{\Delta}^*)\) and \(E(k)\) is the quasiparticle energy spectrum

$$E(k) = \frac{1}{2} \sqrt{(k^2 - \mu)^2 + k^2 \Delta^2}.$$  

Note that the spectrum is gapless at \(\mu = 0\) as \(|k| \to 0\).

Furthermore, the behaviour of \(g(k)\) as \(k \to 0\) depends on the sign of \(\mu\) \cite{14},

$$g(k) \sim \begin{cases} k_x - i k_y, & \mu < 0, \\ 1/(k_x + i k_y), & \mu > 0. \end{cases}$$  

In real space the state (7) takes the form of a pfaffian

$$\psi(r_1, \ldots, r_{2M}) = \mathcal{A}[g(r_1 - r_2) \cdots g(r_{2M-1} - r_{2M})]$$

where \(\mathcal{A}\) denotes the antisymmetrization of the positions and \(g(r)\) is the Fourier transform of \(g(k)\). We will refer to the case \(\mu = 0\) as the Read-Green (RG) state. For \(\mu > 0\) the large distance behaviour is \(g(r) \sim 1/(x + iy)\), which asymptotically reproduces the MR state \cite{14}.

The solution of the equations (4,5) for \(L\) energy levels and \(M\) number of pairs can be classified, with the corresponding phase diagram given in fig. 1 parameterized by the filling fraction \(x = M/L\) and the rescaled coupling constant \(\mu = GL\). We now demonstrate how the topological aspects of the phase diagram can be deduced in a transparent manner. From (5) we see that \(\mu = 0\) imposes the relation \(x_{\text{RG}} = (1 - g^{-1})/2\). This result is completely independent of the momentum distribution and choice of cut-off, reflecting the topological nature of the transition discussed in \cite{14}, i.e., the boundary line is protected from perturbations of the system which alter the distribution of momenta. Furthermore we identify a second topological boundary by setting \(\mu = \Delta^2/4\), which from (6) gives \(E = 0\), again independent of the momenta. Using (4,5) it is found this occurs when \(x_{\text{MR}} = 1 - g^{-1}\). Later we will show that in this instance the GS is a discrete analogue of the MR state mentioned earlier, which in the thermodynamic limit is exactly the MR state.

A further notable \(k\)-independent property of the phase diagram is the existence of a “duality” between a point \((g,x_I)\) in the weak pairing regime and another point \((g,x_{II})\) in the strong pairing regime related by

$$x_I + x_{II} = x_{MR} \equiv 1 - \frac{1}{g},$$

which necessarily can only hold for rational values of \(g\). In the mean-field analysis this duality means that the
corresponding solutions are related by \( \mu_1 = -\mu_{II} \) and \( \Delta_2^2 - 2\mu_1 = \Delta_{II}^2 - 2\mu_{II} \), such that the GS energies satisfy \( E_1 = E_{II} \) according to \( \Theta \). The RG state is self-dual, whereas the MR state is dual to the vacuum. This duality is apparent in the exact solution where it will be shown to be related to a dressing operation mentioned in the introduction.

The detailed derivation of the exact Bethe ansatz solution will be presented elsewhere. Here we simply mention that the technical aspects follow the derivation of the s-wave model solution through the Quantum Inverse Scattering Method, as described in \(^4, 5\). The only fundamental difference is that the \( R \)-matrix solution of the Yang–Baxter equation used to solve the \( p + ip \) model is the trigonometric \( XXX \) solution, in contrast to the rational \( XXX \) solution used for the s-wave model.

We again set \( m = 1 \). The exact eigenstates of the Hamiltonian with \( M \) fermion pairs are given by

\[
|\psi\rangle = \prod_{j=1}^{M} C(y_j)|0\rangle, \quad C(y) = \sum_{k \in \mathbb{K}_+} \frac{k_x - ik_y}{k^2 - y} c_+^k c_-^{-k} \tag{12}
\]

where the rapidities \( y_j, j = 1, ..., M \) satisfy the Bethe ansatz equations (BAE)

\[
\frac{q}{y_j} + \frac{1}{2} \sum_{k \in \mathbb{K}_+} \frac{1}{y_j - k^2} - \sum_{l \neq j}^{M} \frac{1}{y_j - y_l} = 0, \tag{13}
\]

with \( 2q = 1/G - L + 2M - 1 \). The total energy of the state \( |12\rangle \) is given by

\[
E = (1 + G) \sum_{j=1}^{M} y_j \tag{14}
\]

Moreover the \( M_S \) non-zero roots satisfy the BAE \( |13\rangle \) in the strong pairing region. Altogether this implies that given an eigenstate, say \( |S\rangle \), in the strong pairing regime then one can dress it with the MR pairs (as given by \( |13\rangle \)) obtaining an eigenstate \( |W\rangle \) in the weak pairing phase with the same energy, i.e.

\[
H|S\rangle = E|S\rangle \implies H|W\rangle = H|C(0)|M_0|S\rangle = E|W\rangle.
\]

Noticing that the filling fraction of the strong pairing state is \( x_S = M_S/L \) and that of the weak pairing state is \( x_W = (M_0 + M_S)/L \), we find that eq. \( |13\rangle \) coincides with the duality relation \( |11\rangle \). The physical picture we obtain from this discussion is that the fermion pairs forming the GS in the weak pairing phase are of two types: strong localized pairs with negative energy and the delocalized MR pairs with zero energy. This picture is substantially different from the projected mean-field wavefunction \( |4\rangle \), which is more akin to a condensate of Cooper pairs in the same one-particle state. An exception to this occurs on the MR line, where the projected mean-field and exact wavefunctions are identical. We see from \( |12\rangle \) that when all roots of the Bethe ansatz equations are zero, the GS is a discrete analogue of the MR state with zero energy in agreement with mean-field theory.

We reiterate that until now all our analysis has been in the context of finite-sized systems, and in particular the topological (i.e. \( k \)-independent) nature of the duality \( |11\rangle \) is not dependent on taking the thermodynamic limit. In going to the thermodynamic limit we take \( L, M \to \infty \), \( G \to 0 \) with \( x = M/L \) and \( g = GL \) fixed. A peculiar feature of the MR line is the discontinuity of the GS energy \( E(g, x) \) in the thermodynamic limit as the filling fraction \( x \) approaches the value \( x_{MR} \) from the weak pairing region. To derive this result, for finite \( L \) we take the one-pair state and dress it to give the dual GS in the weak...
pairing region. The filling $x_I$ of the dressed state is given by (14), setting $x_{II} = 1/L$, i.e. $x_I = x_{MR} - 1/L$, which approaches $x_{MR} = 1 - 1/g$ as $L \to \infty$. Since the MR pairs carry no energy, the GS energy of the dressed state coincides with the one-pair energy. To compute this energy we consider the BAE for one Cooper pair and take the continuum limit (i.e. eq. (13) with $M = 1$). Setting $\epsilon = k^2$ and $\omega$ as the cut-off, for simplicity we take the momentum distribution to be that for free particles in two dimensions, i.e. $\rho(\epsilon) = \omega^{-1}$. This leads to

$$L - \frac{1}{G} - 1 = \sum_{k \in \mathbf{K}_+} \frac{y}{y - k^2} \Rightarrow 1 - \frac{1}{g} = y \int \frac{d\epsilon}{\omega} \frac{1}{\omega - \epsilon}.$$ 

This equation has a unique negative energy solution $y < 0$ satisfying

$$1 - \frac{1}{g} = \frac{y}{\omega} \log \left( \frac{y}{y - \omega} \right)$$

which we denote as $y = \mathcal{E}(g)$. From here one derives the aforementioned discontinuity on the MR line $x_{MR} = 1 - g^{-1}$,

$$\lim_{L \to \infty} E(g, x_I) = \mathcal{E}(g) \neq E(g, x_{MR}) = 0,$$

which may be described as a zeroth-order quantum phase transition. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first example of a zeroth-order quantum phase transition in a many-body system. We have also numerically analyzed the excited states on the MR line obtained by blocking the energy levels which are occupied by unpaired electrons. These excitations have a gap whose value agrees with the mean-field result, suggesting that only the RG line is gapless, consistent with mean-field theory predictions.

As mentioned in the introduction, the mean-field solution shows that the weak pairing phase has a non-trivial topological structure in $k$-space [14, 13]. This structure can be characterized by the winding number $w$ of the mean-field wavefunction $g(k) = g_x(k) + ig_y(k)$, and it is given by,

$$w = \frac{1}{\pi} \int_{\mathbb{R}^2} dk_x \, dk_y \, \frac{\partial g_x(k) g_y(k) - \partial g_y(k) g_x(k)}{(1 + g_x^2 + g_y^2)^2}.$$ 

(16)

One finds that $w = 0$ for $\mu < 0$ (i.e. strong pairing phase), while $w = +1$ for $\mu > 0$ (i.e. weak pairing and weak coupling BCS phases) [14, 15]. The existence of an exact solution of the model calls for a generalization of $w$ applicable to the many-body wavefunction of the model $\psi(k, \ldots, k_M)$, where $k_i$ ($i = 1, \ldots, M$) are the distinct momenta of the pairs. This generalization consists in replacing $g(k)$ in (14) by $\psi(k + c_1, \ldots, k + c_M)$, where $c_j \neq c_l \forall j, l$ are a set of distinct constants. With this definition we find that $w$ vanishes for the exact ground-state wavefunction except in the weak pairing region where it coincides with the number of MR pairs. Hence $w$ provides a non-trivial topological order parameter for the weak pairing phase which is zero in the other two phases.

In summary, we have provided the exact Bethe ansatz solution for the BCS model with $p + ip$ pairing. Using this we have investigated the ground-state phase diagram, whose structure is richer than previously supposed. We have found that the weak pairing region is dual to the strong pairing region, the duality being encoded in a dressing transformation between GS of the two phases by means of zero energy MR pairs. The MR state obtained by dressing the vacuum is the exact GS on a line in the phase diagram. The MR line separates the weak pairing and weak coupling BCS regions, and while the gap does not vanish on it, the GS energy is discontinuous in the thermodynamic limit. We have also found a topological order parameter that characterizes the weak pairing phase. An important future issue is to explore how vortices (e.g. see [10]) can be incorporated into a similar model to the one studied in this Letter.

Acknowledgments- M.I. and G.S. are supported by the CICYT project FIS2004-04885. G.S. also acknowledges ESF Science Programme INSTANS 2005-2010. J.L. and S.-Y.Z. are funded by the Australian Research Council through Discovery Grant DP0663772. We thank N. Read and G.E. Volovik for helpful comments.

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