Optimal work of quantum Szilard engine

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(Dated: January 9, 2014)

We have found the optimal condition of the work performed by the quantum Szilard engine (SZE) containing multi-particles. Usually the optimal work of a cyclic engine is achieved when the whole thermodynamic process is reversible. Although the quantum SZE inherently contains an irreversible process, we can still define effectively reversible protocol based upon the force of time-forward and time-backward processes.

PACS numbers: 03.67.-a,05.70.Ln,05.70.-a,89.70.Cf,05.30.-d

Maxwell was the first man that asked a deep physical question on the nature of information using his famous demon [1]. Szilard then recognized the connection between information and entropy, which is demonstrated by his thought experiment called as the Szilard engine (SZE) [2]. It tells us that one can extract work from a cyclic engine with a single heat bath by exploiting information. It seems to violate Carnot’s version of the second law of thermodynamics. However, it is now widely accepted that the SZE does not violate the second law, but the Carnot’s principle is necessary to modify [3]. The SZE has been realized in various experiments [4,5,6].

The thermodynamic cycle of the SZE containing \( N \) particles in the one-dimensional box of the length \( L \) consists of four stages as shown in Fig. 1; (i) to insert a wall at \( x = l \) (\( 0 \leq l \leq L \)), (ii) to measure how many particles are in the left side, whose outcome is expressed as \( m \), (iii) to perform isothermal expansion, where the wall stops at \( x = x_m^0 \), differing in \( m \), and (iv) to remove the wall to complete the cycle. It has been found that the quantum mechanical work done by the SZE is given by [8]

\[
W = -k_B T \sum_{m=0}^{N} f_m(l) \ln \left[ \frac{f_m(l)}{f_m^*(x_m)} \right] \tag{1}
\]

with \( f_m(l) = Z_m(l)/Z(l) \), \( f_m^*(x_m) = Z_m(x_m)/Z(x_m) \) and \( Z(y) = \sum_m Z_m(y) \). Here \( Z_m(y) \) denotes the partition function of the case that \( m \) particles are in the left side of the wall, i.e. \( N - m \) particles are in the right side, when the wall is located at \( y \). Note that \( l \) is freely chosen when the wall is inserted, while \( x_m^0 \) is determined from the force balance, \( F^L + F^R = 0 \). The generalized force of the left (right) side of the wall is defined as

\[
F^{L(R)} = \sum_n P_n^{L(R)} \left[ \frac{\partial E_n^{L(R)}}{\partial x} \right], \tag{2}
\]

where \( P_n^{L(R)} \) and \( E_n^{L(R)} \) represent the occupation probability and the eigenenergy of the \( n \)th energy level of the left (right) side, respectively.

The work of the classical SZE is also expressed as Eq. 1, which is derived by using the dissipative work theorem of classical non-equilibrium thermodynamics [9]. The reason why the non-equilibrium thermodynamics is taken into account is that it is an irreversible process that the wall separating particles into two parts is removed. This is nothing but free expansion. Even though both quantum and classical SZE have the equivalent mathematical form of the work, Eq. 1, the partition functions differ in classical and quantum mechanics so that the amount of work of the quantum SZE is distinct from that of the classical one [9]. Note that information itself is inherently classical both in the quantum [5] and in the classical SZE [6]. Recently the heat engine exploiting purely quantum information is proposed [10].

Strangely enough in the quantum SZE, however, it has been found that the work of Eq. 1 in the low-temperature limit can be negative as shown in Fig. 2 implying one should do work on the engine instead of extracting work from it [11]. Later it is found that it is not optimal to stop the wall at the force balance originally proposed in Ref. [12]. Instead one can numerically find the optimal condition. In a usual heat engine, the optimal condition of work gain is achieved when the whole thermodynamic process is reversible. As far as the quan-

![Figure 1. Schematic diagram of the thermodynamic processes of the quantum SZE. (See the text for the details.)](image-url)
The work at the optimal condition is thus obtained from
forward process is equivalent to the
condition of the quantum SZE is.

A question on what the physical meaning of the optimal
is inherently irreversible as mentioned above. It raises
it fully reversible since the stage of removing the wall
wall stops at \( x^0_m \) (the force balance point). For low tempera-
ture the work becomes negative.

Figure 2. The work of the quantum SZE containing three
bosons with \( t = L/2 \) as a function of temperature when the
wall stops at \( x^0_m \) (the force balance point). For low tempera-
ture the work becomes negative.

The optimal work gain of the
quantum SZE is concerned, however, it is unlikely to make
it fully reversible since the stage of removing the wall
is inherently irreversible as mentioned above. It raises
a question on what the physical meaning of the optimal
condition of the quantum SZE is.

In this paper we show the optimal work gain of the
quantum SZE is achieved if we stop and remove the wall
at the location where the force on the wall of the time-
forward process is equivalent to the average force right af-
ter inserting the wall for the time-backward process. Note
that the time-backward process of removing the wall is
simply inserting the wall. For the time-backward process
after inserting the wall one cannot automatically return
to the original state of the time-forward process, i.e. \( m \)
particles in the left, since it is an irreversible process to
remove the wall in the time-forward process. Thus it is a
reasonable way to define the force of the time-backward
as the average over all possible cases with different \( m \).
Briefly speaking, the optimal condition is then achieved
when the time-forward force is equivalent to the time-
backward force. In some sense this effectively recovers
the reversibility of the inherently irreversible heat engine
not because the process itself is reversible but because
the forces are reversible. It gives us a new insight on the
optimal condition of irreversible heat engines.

The work of Eq. (1) is a function of \( l \) and \( \{ x_m \} \) with
\( m = 0, 1, \ldots, N \), namely \( W(l, \{ x_m \}) \). The optimal (max-
imum) condition is thus obtained from \( \partial W/\partial l = 0 \) and
\( \partial W/\partial x_m = 0 \) \cite{13}. From Eq. (1) the latter is shown to
be \( \partial \ln f_m^\ast(x_m)/\partial x_m = 0 \), which is also rewritten as
\begin{equation}
\frac{1}{Z_m} \frac{\partial Z_m}{\partial x_m} = -\beta \frac{\partial f_m}{\partial \beta}
\end{equation}
with \( Z(y) = \sum_m Z_m(y) \). The partition function \( Z_m \) is
given as
\begin{equation}
Z_m(y) = \sum_\sigma e^{-\beta \epsilon_m^\sigma(y)}
\end{equation}
with \( \epsilon_m^\sigma = \sum_n (E_n^L m_n^\sigma + E_n^R q_n^\sigma) \), where \( m_n^\sigma \) and \( q_n^\sigma \) represent the number of particles occupying the \( n \)th energy
level of the left and the right side, respectively, satisfying
\( m = \sum_n m_n^\sigma \) and \( N - m = \sum_n q_n^\sigma \). Here \( \sigma \) denotes the configuration of particles over all the energy levels for a
given \( m \).

The left-hand side of Eq. (3) represents the net force
on the wall multiplied by the inverse temperature when \( m \) particles are in the left side due to
\begin{equation}
\frac{1}{Z_m} \frac{\partial Z_m}{\partial x_m} = -\beta \frac{\partial \epsilon_m}{\partial \beta} \equiv \beta F_m
\end{equation}
with \( \beta = 1/k_B T \). Note that \( F_m(x^0_m) = 0 \) gives rise to
the force balance condition. On the other hand, the right-
hand side of Eq. (3) is expressed as
\begin{equation}
\frac{1}{Z} \frac{\partial Z}{\partial x_m} = -\beta \sum_p \frac{Z_p}{Z} \langle \frac{\partial \epsilon_p^\ast}{\partial x_m^\ast} \rangle \equiv \beta \langle F_p \rangle^\ast_p.
\end{equation}

The force \( \langle F_p \rangle^\ast \) of Eq. (6) is obtained from averaging \( F_p \). It
is emphasized that every \( F_p \) is calculated with the
equivalent \( x_m \) at which \( F_m \) of Eq. (3) is obtained. To un-
derstand the physical meaning of this force let us consider
the time-forward and back-ward process of removing the
wall in detail. Note that the time-backward process of
removing the wall is inserting it. For the time-forward
the number of particles on the left, \( m \), is determined once
the measurement is performed, and then is kept constant
before we stop the wall at \( x_m \) and remove it. For the
time-backward, however, one finds \( m \) to vary from 0 to
\( N \) when the wall is inserted at \( x_m \). \( \langle F_p \rangle_p \) is regarded as the
title legitimate average force at \( x_m \) for the time-backward
since we inevitably confront such a situation when we
perform the reverse thermodynamic process of the quan-
tum SZE.

From Eqs. (3) and (4), the optimal condition Eq. (3)
reads
\end{equation}

The optimal \( x_m^\ast \) is obtained from the condition that the
force of the time-forward is equivalent to that of the
time-backward. It gives an insight on the optimal condi-
tion of the heat engine. Usually the optimal work of a heat engine is attained if
the whole thermodynamic process is performed in a re-
versible way. Equation (7) tells us that the thermody-
namically irreversible quantum SZE becomes optimal if
the process is effectively reversible, i.e. the forces are reversible.
The force is important since the work, which we intend to make optimal, is given by integrating force
over coordinate.

The work at the optimal condition is positive. It is re-
called that the observation that the work obtained from
the force balance, \( F_m(x^0_m) = 0 \), can become negative
in the low temperature initiates this research. Mathemat-
ically \( f_m \) is equivalent to \( f_m^\ast \) in their form, namely
\( f_m(y) = f_m^\ast(y) \). Since the optimal work is obtained from

maximizing\( f_m^* \) [See Eq. 11], i.e. \( \partial \ln f_m^*(x_m)/\partial x_m = 0 \), we find \( f_m(l) = f_m^*(l) \leq f_m^*(x_m^{op}) \) irrespective of\( l \). It immediately implies that the work of Eq. 11 at maximum is positive.

In fact, it is the quantum effect that \( x_m^0 \) of the force balance differs from \( x_m^{op} \) of the optimal condition. If we consider classical particles satisfying ideal gas law implying pressure is proportional to density, one finds

\[
\langle F_p(y) \rangle_p = \sum_{p=0}^N P(p) \left( \frac{p}{y} - \frac{N-p}{L-y} \right) = 0 \quad (8)
\]

for any \( y \in (0, L) \) with

\[
P(p) = \left( \frac{y}{L} \right)^p \left( \frac{L-y}{L} \right)^{N-p} \begin{pmatrix} N \\ p \end{pmatrix} . \quad (9)
\]

The optimal condition is thus achieved simply by the force balance since the right-hand side of Eq. 7 always vanishes. Note that \( x_m^0 \) of the classical particles are different from that of the quantum ones; They coincide only in the high temperature limit. This will be discussed below in detail.

In some sense it looks weird to have \( \langle F_p(x_m^{op}) \rangle_p \neq 0 \) in quantum mechanics. This is simply the net force exerted on a wall when we insert the wall into a box containing particles kept in equilibrium during the process in time-backward process. The non-zero net force cannot be spontaneously developed as far as only quasi-static process of inserting the wall is concerned in classical thermodynamics. We emphasize that it is the quantum effect. Interestingly this seems to be similar to the Casimir effect [14]. If the wall is inserted at \( x \neq L/2 \), the structures of energy levels of the left and the right sides become different so do the corresponding generalized forces of Eq. 2, namely \( \sum_n P_n^L (\partial E_n^L/\partial x) \) and \( \sum_n P_n^R (\partial E_n^R/\partial x) \).

So far we have discussed the optimal condition of \( \{x_m\} \). The optimal condition of \( l \) is rather subtle. Intuitively one expects the symmetric point \( l = L/2 \) satisfies the optimal condition. At least we can show that the work 11 has an extremum at \( l = L/2 \). In general, however, the work does not always exhibit a global maximum at \( l = L/2 \). We set \( x_m = x_m^{op} \) since \( x_m^{op} \) has nothing to do with \( l \). Then we obtain from \( \partial W/\partial l = 0 \)

\[
\langle W_m(l, x_m^{op}) \rangle_m = \langle W_p(l, x_m^{op}) \rangle_p \langle F_q(l) \rangle_q \quad (10)
\]

with \( W_m(l, y) = -\ln [f_m(l)/f_m^*(y)] \). Both the left and the right hand sides of Eq. 10 vanishes at \( l = L/2 \) according to \( f_{N-m}(L/2) = f_m(L/2) \), \( W_{N-m}(L/2, x_m^{op}) = W_m(L/2, x_m^{op}) \) and \( F_{N-m}(L/2) = -F_m(L/2) \), so that the work exhibits an extremum at \( l = L/2 \). However, this is not a unique solution. For example, Figure 3 shows that a single maximum of the work of the SZE containing two spinless fermions splits into two peaks as temperature decreases although the work remains extremum at \( l = L/2 \). This splitting is associated with the accidental degeneracies of the problem and the exclusion principle of fermions [15]. The optimal condition of the work of \( l \) thus depends on tem-
temperature and the number of particles in fermions, so that it is not easy to find its simple mathematical expression. However, we set $l = L/2$ below since it is the optimal condition for fermions except extremely low temperature and bosons. Moreover, the inherent irreversibility of the SZE is associated with $x_m$, at which the wall is removed, rather than $l$.

Now let us consider the quantum SZE containing three particles as an example. The wall is inserted at $L/2$. The box is described by the infinite potential well. Recall that the optimal work is obtained when each $f_m^p(x_m)$ is maximized. For $m = 0$ and $m = N$ the optimal condition is trivially achieved when $f_0^p = f_N^p = 1$ with $x_0 = 0$ and $x_N = L$, respectively. Moreover, due to the symmetry the situation with $m = 1$ is equivalent to that with $m = 2$, so that it is enough to consider the work of only $m = 1$ of Eq. (1), namely $W_1(L/2, x_1)$. Figure 4(a) shows that in the low temperature $W_1$ of the quantum SZE containing three bosons is negative at the force balance, $x_1 = x_1^0 \approx 0.443$. However, the positive optimal work is obtained at $x_1 = x_1^{op} \approx 0.490$ where two curves $F_1(x_1)$ and $(F_p(x_1))_p$ are crossed. It is shown in Fig. 4(b) that for rather higher temperature $W_1$ is not only positive but $x_1^{op}$ also becomes closer to $x_1^0$. The reason is that quantum partition functions become equivalent to the classical ones, so do $f_m^p$’s, which implies $(F_p(y))_p \rightarrow 0$ as $T \rightarrow \infty$ according to Eq. (8). Figure 5 shows for both three bosons and three fermions $x_1^{op}$ approaches $x_1^0$ and finally converges to the classical result, $L/3$, as temperature increases.

In summary, we have found the physical meaning of the optimal condition of the work done by quantum SZE containing multi-particles and shown that the optimal work is positive. The optimal condition is satisfied if the wall is stopped and removed when the force on the wall of time-forward process is equivalent to that of time-backward. It sheds some light on the optimal condition of the irreversible information heat engine.

This research was supported by Basic Science Research Program through the National Research Foundation of Korea(NRF) funded by the Ministry of Science, ICT and future Planning (2009-0087261 and 2013R1A1A2011438).

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