Emergent spin excitations in a Bethe lattice at percolation

Hitesh J. Changlani, 1,* Shivam Ghosh, 1 Sumiran Pujari, 2 and Christopher L. Henley 1

1Laboratory of Atomic And Solid State Physics, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853, USA
2Laboratoire de Physique Théorique, Université Paul Sabatier, 31062 Toulouse, France

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We study the spin 1/2 quantum Heisenberg antiferromagnet on a Bethe lattice diluted to the percolation threshold. Dilution creates areas of even/odd sublattice imbalance resulting in “dangling spins” (L. Wang and A. W. Sandvik, Phys. Rev. Lett. 97, 117204 (2006); Phys. Rev. B 81, 054417 (2010)). These collectively act as “emergent” spin 1/2 degrees of freedom and are responsible for the creation of a set of low lying “quasi degenerate states”. Using density matrix renormalization group (DMRG) calculations, we detect the presence and location of these emergent spins. We find an effective Hamiltonian of these emergent spins, with Heisenberg interactions that decay exponentially with the distance between them.

Introduction—Quantum spins on percolation clusters [1] provide an ideal testbed for studying the interplay between geometrical disorder and quantum fluctuations. The Hamiltonian for these problems is

\[ \mathcal{H} = \sum_{\langle ij \rangle} J \mathbf{S}_i \cdot \mathbf{S}_j \]  

where \( \mathbf{S}_i \) are Pauli spin 1/2 operators and the sum runs over nearest-neighbor occupied sites, and \( J > 0 \). Theoretical [2–5] and experimental [6] studies of quantum spins on diluted square lattices have focused on the question of whether long range order survives up to the classical percolation threshold \( p_c \). A numerical study [4] has settled this question and found long range order to be robust to quantum fluctuations, surviving all the way up to \( p_c \).

The excitations are less straightforward. For uniform lattices with number of sites \( N \), the lowest energy scale consistent with Néel order breaking a continuous symmetry is \( \sim J N^{-1} \), corresponding to a “tower” of states: mixtures of symmetry-broken states that become degenerate in the thermodynamic limit [7–9]. However a Quantum Monte Carlo study by Wang and Sandvik [10] discovered a somewhat “anomalous” finite size scaling of the spin gap \( \Delta_{\text{low}} \): \( \Delta_{\text{low}} \approx N^{-2} \) (for clusters with a singlet ground state) or \( \Delta_{\text{low}} \approx N^{-1.5} \) (for generic clusters, most with a non-singlet ground state). A strong correspondence was shown [10] between these low lying states and places on the cluster where there is a local imbalance between the number of even and odd sites. It was conjectured that, in each such place, a spin degree emerges which is effectively decoupled from the antiferromagnetic order and hence was called a “dangling spin.”

The goal of this Letter is to characterize the dangling-spin degrees of freedom numerically, relating their nature to the local geometry of the cluster, and to explain the observed low energy spectrum in terms of mediated interactions between dangling spins. Our Hamiltonian is (1) on clusters obtained by randomly diluting the Bethe lattice of coordination 3 at its percolation threshold, \( p_c = 1/2 \) (see examples of small clusters in Fig. 1). The lack of loops in the Bethe lattice is conducive for using the Density Matrix Renormalization Group (DMRG) [11] algorithm, as adapted to generic tree graphs [12], to obtain ground and (some) excited states.

In the rest of this Letter, we first show that a typical percolation cluster’s spectrum has a clearly separated low energy component, with a multiplicity consistent with the expected number of weakly coupled spin-1/2 (sometimes spin-1) dangling spins. We next show that each dangling spin is somewhat delocalized over a few sites: on the one hand, we model it as an unpaired spin in a dimerized background to predict the dangling spin’s nature from the local geometry; on the other hand, by processing spin expectations we obtain the explicit “localized state wavefunction” for each dangling spin. Finally, for each cluster we construct the effective Hamiltonian of the emergent dangling spins, consisting of pairwise, unfrustrated exchange interactions decaying exponentially with separation, mediated by the background of almost dimerized spins on the balanced parts of the cluster; this accurately reproduces the details of that cluster’s low-energy spectrum.

Exact correspondence between dangling spins and low energy spectrum—We carried out DMRG calculations for several hundred balanced clusters (i.e. having equal number of

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*Present address: Department of Physics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, Illinois 61801, USA
even and odd sublattice sites) [13] for sizes up to $N = 100$, targeting multiple excited states in the low energy spectrum. Since the number of low energy states was found to increase rapidly with an increase in the number of dangling spins, we restricted our analysis to the case of four dangling spins [14].

In a typical percolation cluster, we observed a distinct set of low-lying energy levels we shall call "quasi-degenerate" (QD) [15] since (we claim) they would be exactly degenerate in the limit that the dangling spins are fully decoupled from the rest of the sites. The QD states are separated from the continuum of higher energy states by a finite size gap we call $\Delta$ (specifically defined as the difference between the mean of QD levels and the lowest non-QD level). The set of QD states are identified by looking at the difference in energies of consecutive states up to the Quantum rotor excitation and finding the pair of states with the largest gap. The lower energy state in this pair and all states below that make up the QD spectrum [16]. The energy scale characterizing the spread of the QD states, $\sigma_{\text{QD}}$, is defined to be the standard deviation of the QD energies from their mean value. The ratio $r = \langle \sigma_{\text{QD}} / \Delta \rangle$ (where $\langle \ldots \rangle$ indicates an average over disorder) was found to be small (for example $r = 0.17 \pm 0.1$ for $N = 50$), justifying our notion of a separation of scales.

Fig. 1 also shows a striking correspondence between the number of low lying QD states, $N_{\text{QD}}$, and the number of dangling spins $n_d$ on the percolation cluster. We find that $N_{\text{QD}} = 2^{n_1/2}3^{n_1}$, where $n_{1/2}$ and $n_1$ are integers and $n_{1/2} + 2n_1 = n_d$. Our interpretation of this multiplicity is that 2-dangling spins pair up so as to form a spin-1, while the others remain as spin-half degrees of freedom. There is thus a one-to-one correspondence between the low-energy (QD) eigenstates and the Hilbert space of the posited continuum of higher energy states by a finite size gap we call $\Delta$. Since the number of low energy states was found to increase rapidly with an increase in the number of dangling spins, we connect the cluster into “spans” at the “prong” bonds, as indicated by the (red) cut lines. The (blue) dashed loops indicate regions with non zero monomer density. The thickness of the (grey) bonds is directly proportional to $\omega_{ij}$ (with the thickest bonds having a value of $\approx -0.67$). Spatial profiles associated with “dangling spins”, are shown on the subclusters marked (a)-(d). The area of the black circles is proportional to $\omega_{ij}$ given by Eq. (4). (a) shows a “fork” (b) shows a site surrounded by two “prongs” (c) shows a subcluster where two monomers on the same sublattice are present forming an effective spin-1. The (blue) arrows indicate the monomer is free to hop around (delocalize) within the subcluster. (d) shows a region where the spins are “inert” (largely dimerized).

Given any cluster, there are two operations which cut it down to a smaller cluster or clusters, such that all optimal dimerizations on the smaller cluster(s) are in 1-to-1 correspondence with some of the dimerizations on the larger one. The first operation is that, wherever two sites have coordination 1 or 2, we can remove both (given the dimerization on the smaller cluster, just insert another dimer to get the dimerization on the larger one). The second operation is that, wherever we find a pair of adjacent sites with respective coordinations 3 and 1 (a “prong”), we can always place a dimer on that pair, which fragments the rest into two subclusters (Fig. 2); a very common special case is the fork (Fig. 2(a)), at which we can arbitrarily choose either side to be the “prong”. These two operations can be used recursively till only isolated sites remain, each corresponding to one monomer in the original cluster. Furthermore, any other optimal dimerization is accessible from the special one we constructed, by repeatedly exchanging a monomer with an adjacent dimer.

A monomer can thus “hop” to sites on the lattice via such local monomer-dimer rearrangements as shown in Fig. 2(c). Our rule-of-thumb is that two monomers (of the same sublattice) form a spin-1 if and only if they can approach the minimal separation of two steps [17].

Our second way to capture the spatial nature of a dangling
spin degree of freedom starts from the idea that it could be adiabatically connected to an uncoupled spin, analogous to the Landau quasiparticle that is adiabatically connected to a free electron. Thus, our program is to label each emergent spin-1/2 degree of freedom by a “quasi spin” operator $T_\alpha$, where the index $\alpha$ labels each region on the cluster with a local spin imbalance. The $T_\alpha$’s are idealized as having a spin-half algebra. The actual “quasi spin” excitation is a composite object involving multi-spin excitations, localized on a few sites.

Our assumption is that the quasi-spin quantum numbers are sufficient to label all the QD states; furthermore, we expect the action of any spin operator $S_\alpha$, when restricted to the QD states, practically reduces to a linear combination of $T_\alpha$’s acting on the quasi spins. Specifically, let $P_{\text{QD}}$ be the projection operator onto the QD subspace. Let $S_{i,\text{QD}} \equiv P_{\text{QD}} S_i P_{\text{QD}}$ Then,

$$S_{i,\text{QD}} \approx \sum_{\alpha} u_{i}^{(\alpha)} T_\alpha$$

where each mode $u_{i}^{(\alpha)}$ has most of its weight on sites within the region $\alpha$ and is expected to decay rapidly outside [18].

Two operators $\hat{P}, \hat{Q}$ are said to be orthogonal when their Frobenius inner product $(\hat{P}, \hat{Q})_F = \text{Tr}(\hat{P}^\dagger \hat{Q})$ is exactly zero. In this sense, the $T_\alpha$ operators are orthogonal to each other. Since each $T_\alpha$ is a quasi-spin 1/2 operator its inner product with itself is 1/2 (for each spin component).

In light of Eq.(2), we can also construct a good approximation $\tilde{T}_\alpha$ to each operator $T_\alpha$, by choosing any representative site $i$ in the region of $\alpha$ and normalizing the restriction of its spin operator to the QD states:

$$\tilde{T}_\alpha \equiv S_{i,\text{QD}} / (\sqrt{2} ||S_{i,\text{QD}}||)$$

where $||\hat{O}|| \equiv \langle \hat{O}, \hat{O} \rangle_\hat{P}^{1/2}$ is the norm of any operator $\hat{O}$. Note that the $\tilde{T}_\alpha$’s are not orthogonal to each other. A procedure to construct the $\tilde{T}_\alpha$’s from the $T_\alpha$’s will be discussed later.

Given the proposed relationship of the bare spins to the quasi spins, we discuss two related but independent measurements to recover the mode vectors $u_{i}^{(\alpha)}$ from numerically evaluated expectations. First, we consider the operator overlap $\omega_{ij}$ between two spins $i$ and $j$ on the lattice, defined to be,

$$\omega_{ij} \equiv \left(S_{i,\text{QD}}^+ S_{j,\text{QD}}^+\right)_F$$

We substitute our ansatz (2) into (4) and use the operator orthogonality of the $T_\alpha$‘s, to get $\omega_{ij} = \sum_{\alpha} u_{i}^{(\alpha)} u_{j}^{(\alpha)}$. If we consider a site $i$ to be well within a dangling region $\alpha$ (i.e. $u_{i}^{(\alpha)}$ is relatively large) then the amplitude on the remaining sites $j$ (but far away from other dangling regions) is approximately $u_{i}^{(\alpha)} u_{j}^{(\alpha)}$. Thus, the relative amplitudes of the mode vector can be recovered by this method.

Our second measurement involves computation of the intersite spin susceptibility matrix,

$$\chi_{ij} = \int_0^\infty \left(\langle \hat{S}_i^z(\tau) \hat{S}_j^z(0) \rangle\right)_{GS} d\tau = \sum_n \frac{\langle 0|\hat{S}_i^z|n\rangle\langle n|\hat{S}_j^z|0\rangle}{E_n - E_0}$$

where $\tau$ is imaginary time, $|0\rangle$ denotes the ground state and $E_n$ is the energy of an excited state $|n\rangle$ [21].

Though the sum runs over all excited states, it can be well approximated by taking only the states in the QD subspace. Then $\chi_{ij}$ can also be expressed in terms of the mode profiles $u_{i}^{(\alpha)}$,

$$\chi_{ij} = \sum_{\alpha\beta} u_{i}^{(\alpha)} u_{j}^{(\beta)} X_{\alpha\beta}; \quad X_{\alpha\beta} \equiv \sum_{n\in\text{QD}} \frac{\langle 0|\tilde{T}_\alpha^\dagger |n\rangle\langle n|\tilde{T}_\beta |0\rangle}{E_n - E_0}$$

Consider site $i(j)$ in dangling region $\alpha (\beta)$. From Eq. (6) it follows that $\chi_{ij} \approx u_{i}^{(\alpha)} u_{j}^{(\beta)} X_{\alpha\beta}$, where the last factor is independent of sites $i, j$ (so long as we stay within those regions).

Within this approximation, the susceptibility matrix breaks up into blocks of rank 1 from which we can immediately pull out the $u_{i}^{(\alpha)}$ and $u_{i}^{(\beta)}$ modes.

Effective Hamiltonian in the Quasi degenerate subspace—According to our ansatz (2), there is a one-to-one correspondence between the QD Hilbert space and the Hilbert space of a set of abstract “quasi spin” operators $T_\alpha$. (For simplicity, assume they all have spin 1/2.) The latter are labeled using an Ising basis $|\phi_\alpha\rangle$, where $t$ stands for the quantum numbers $\{t_1, t_2, ..., t_n\}$, with $t_\alpha = \pm 1/2$. We want to find the unitary matrix $M$ of coefficients expressing the QD states $|l\rangle$ (in eigenenergy basis) in terms of the quasi-spin basis, $|l\rangle = \sum_{t} M_{lt} |\phi_t\rangle$.

Using $T_\alpha$ from (3), we define $\tilde{Q}_\alpha^{\pm 1/2} \equiv (\tilde{T}_\alpha \pm \tilde{T}_\alpha^\dagger)$, which is almost a projection operator, and let $|\tilde{\phi}_t\rangle \propto \prod_{\alpha=1}^{n} \tilde{Q}_\alpha^{t_\alpha} |n\rangle$ where $|n\rangle$ could be any QD state (that is not annihilated by the operator prefactors) and $|\tilde{\phi}_t\rangle$ is normalized. Finally, define a matrix $\Omega$ by $\Omega_{tt'} \equiv \langle \tilde{\phi}_t | \tilde{\phi}_{t'} \rangle$ which is almost the identity matrix – and construct the orthonormal quasi spin basis of the QD states as $|\phi_{t}\rangle \equiv \sum_{t'} (\tilde{\Omega}^{-1/2})_{tt'} |\phi_{t'}\rangle$. The quasi spin operators $T_\alpha$ are then defined so as to have the appropriate matrix elements in this basis.

Now consider the effective low energy Hamiltonian written in terms of the many body eigenstates $|l\rangle$,.

$$\hat{H}_{\text{eff}} \equiv \sum_{l\in\text{QD}} E_l |l\rangle \langle l| = \sum_{tt'} h_{tt'} |\phi_{t}\rangle \langle \phi_{t'}|,$$

where $E_l$ is the eigenenergy of QD state $|l\rangle$, and the matrix elements $h_{tt'}$ can be calculated since we know the transformation between the bases $\{|l\rangle\}$ and $\{|\phi_{t}\rangle\}$. Every term $|\phi_{t}\rangle \langle \phi_{t'}|$ can be uniquely expressed as a polynomial in the spin operators $\{T_\alpha^\dagger\}$ and $\{T_\alpha\}$.

The effective Hamiltonian (7) then takes a new form:

$$\hat{H}_{\text{eff}} \equiv \sum_{\mu,\nu} J_{\mu,\nu} T_\mu \cdot T_\nu + \text{multi spin terms.}$$

(The two-spin terms must have this Heisenberg form due to the exact rotational symmetry retained by the QD states.)

Although the magnitude of $J_{\mu,\nu}$ depends on the detailed geometry of the cluster along the path connecting dangling regions $\mu$ and $\nu$, roughly speaking it decays exponentially with distance (using as metric the number of steps within the Bethe...
lattice, the so-called "chemical" distance). This is quantified by the scatter plots in Fig. 3, for an ensemble limited to clusters of equal size $N = 100$ [22] each having two dangling spin-1/2 spins ($n_d = n_{1/2} = 2$). Since each dangling region is, in general, spread out over multiple sites, we must define an "effective distance" $d_{ij} \equiv \sum_{\nu} |u^{(\mu)}| |u^{(\nu)}|^2 d_{ij}$ between two of them, where $d_{ij}$ is the distance between sites $i$ and $j$ belonging to dangling regions $\mu$ and $\nu$, and the amplitudes $u^{(\alpha)}$ for mode $\alpha$ are normalized.

Fig. 3 shows that indeed $J_{\mu\nu} \approx J_0 e^{-d_{ij}/\xi}$, where $(J_0, \xi) \approx (0.18(3), 4.64(2))$ for an even/odd pair of dangling spins, which are always antiferromagnetically coupled, or $(-0.33(2), 4.61(3))$ for a pair on the same sublattice. In the ferromagnetic case, choosing to fit to clusters which do not form a spin-1 gives parameter values closer to the antiferromagnetic case.

We considered another ensemble (not plotted) of clusters with $N = 50$ having four dangling spins ($n_d = 4$) and obtained the effective Hamiltonian using the same prescription. In it, we found, the non-pair terms in (8) typically account for a weight of at most 5% (using the Frobenius norm), confirming that the effective Hamiltonian is well approximated by pairwise Heisenberg exchange (at least in the limit of dilute monomer concentration).

**Conclusion**—The spin 1/2 Heisenberg antiferromagnet on Bethe lattice percolation clusters has (composite) low-energy degrees of freedom with the quantum numbers of a spin, arising wherever there is a local imbalance between the even and odd sublattices [10]. (A similar imbalance determines the low energy spectra of regular Cayley trees [12].) Each of these emerging "dangling spins" is associated with a profile ($u^{(\alpha)}$ in the text) that plays the role of a "spinon wavepacket wavefunction" [23]. We leave to a future publication [20] the fundamental reason why a dangling spin decouples from the rest of the cluster.

Our picture of "dangling spins" can be tested experimentally using local probes. For example, NMR at a temperature scale between the mediated interactions in (8) and the bare interactions in (1), in the presence of a field, gets a line shape mirroring the dangling-spin profile $u_{ij}$, while zero-field muon spin resonance can detect the absence of an order parameter on sites away from the dangling spins.

The dangling spins interact via small, unfurled ineffective Heisenberg couplings. If one adopts the fitted exponential decay from Fig. 3 as our definition of the effective Hamiltonian, it should be possible to study clusters with thousands of sites and finally explain the scaling of the spin gap $\Delta_{\text{low}}$, with cluster size found in Refs. [10], by use of the strong disorder renormalization group method [24].

Finally, we found that spin correlations decay exponentially in balanced regions, which are dimerized, but revived on the dangling spins. This suggests locally unbalanced regions may be crucial for the propagation of long range antiferromagnetic order on percolation clusters.

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