Measurement of the branching fraction and decay asymmetry of $\Lambda \to n\gamma$
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Weak radiative transitions of hadrons are governed by the interplay of the electromagnetic, weak, and strong interactions [1] and involve parity violating (p.v.) and parity conserving (p.c.) amplitudes. According to Hara’s theorem [2], the p.v. amplitude of radiative hyperon decays, $B_i \rightarrow B_f \gamma$, vanishes in the limit of SU(3) flavor symmetry. Taking into account the breaking of this symmetry in the quark model, the decay asymmetry $\alpha_\gamma$, given by the interference between p.v. and p.c. amplitudes, is expected to be positive for decays such as $\Sigma^+ \rightarrow \rho^+ \gamma$, where the $s$ quark in the initial state baryon decays to a $d$ quark. It was, therefore, a surprise when several experiments reported a large negative value of the decay asymmetry for this process [3–7]. For other radiative hyperon decays, measurements have found non-vanishing positive decay asymmetries [8, 9]. The disagreement between theoretical expectation and experimental results provoked wide interest in these processes, and various solutions to the puzzle were proposed [10–16]. It was suggested that the validity of Hara’s theorem could be confirmed by determining the sign of the $\Lambda \rightarrow n\gamma$ decay asymmetry [17], a positive value indicating the theorem’s violation [18–20].

In the three previous measurements of $\Lambda \rightarrow n\gamma$ performed by two fixed target experiments [21–23], the branching fraction (BF) was obtained from the ratio
$B_{\Lambda \to n\gamma}/B_{\Lambda \to n\pi^0}$. Only the result from Ref. [23] is considered by the Particle Data Group (PDG) [24]. The decay asymmetry of $\Lambda \to n\gamma$, however, which is essential for the test of the Hara theorem, has not been measured so far.

At BESIII, a measurement of the $\Lambda \to n\gamma$ decay utilizing the large yield of $\Lambda\Lambda$ pairs from $J/\psi \to \Lambda\Lambda$ [25] is accomplished using a double-tag (DT) technique [26]. The $J/\psi \to \Lambda\Lambda$ events are identified by reconstructing the pionic decay $\Lambda \to \bar{p}\pi^+ (\Lambda \to p\pi^-)$, denoted as single-tag (ST). Then a DT event consisting of an ST $\Lambda$ ($\Lambda$) candidate accompanied with a $\Lambda \to n\gamma$ ($\bar{\Lambda} \to \bar{n}\gamma$) candidate is selected. The absolute BF of the decay $\Lambda \to n\gamma$ is given by

$$B_{\Lambda \to n\gamma} = \frac{N_{\mathrm{DT}}/\varepsilon_{\mathrm{DT}}}{N_{\mathrm{ST}}/\varepsilon_{\mathrm{ST}}},$$

where $N_{\mathrm{ST}}$ ($N_{\mathrm{DT}}$) and $\varepsilon_{\mathrm{ST}}$ ($\varepsilon_{\mathrm{DT}}$) are the ST (DT) yield and the corresponding detection efficiency. Here and throughout this letter, charge-conjugate channels are implied unless stated otherwise.

A previous BESIII study [27] showed that the $\Lambda$ from $J/\psi \to \Lambda\Lambda$ is transversely polarized with a magnitude reaching 25%. This polarization can be used to determine the decay asymmetry $\alpha_\gamma$, in the $\Lambda \to n\gamma$ decay from the angular distribution of the daughter baryons from the $J/\psi \to \Lambda\Lambda$ process [28]. Generally, the joint angular distribution $W$ of $J/\psi \to \Lambda(\to \bar{p}\pi^+)\Lambda(\to n\gamma)$ can be expressed as:

$$W(\xi; \alpha_\gamma, \Delta\Phi, \alpha, +) = 1 + \alpha_\gamma \cos^2 \theta_\Lambda + \alpha_\gamma (1 + \alpha_\gamma) \sin^2 \theta_\Lambda (n_1^x n_2^x - n_1^y n_2^y)$$

$$+ \cos^2 \theta_\Lambda \cos \theta_\Lambda (n_1^y n_2^z - n_1^z n_2^y)$$

$$+ \alpha \sin \theta_\Lambda \cos \theta_\Lambda (n_1^x n_2^y + n_1^y n_2^x)$$

$$+ \sqrt{1 - \alpha_\gamma^2} \sin (\Delta\Phi) \sin \theta_\Lambda \cos \theta_\Lambda (n_1^x n_2^y + n_1^y n_2^x),$$

where $\mathbf{n}_1$ ($\mathbf{n}_2$) is the unit vector in the direction of the neutron (anti-proton) in the $\Lambda$ ($\bar{\Lambda}$) rest frame. The components of $\mathbf{n}_1$ and $\mathbf{n}_2$ are $(n_1^x, n_1^y, n_1^z)$ and $(n_2^x, n_2^y, n_2^z)$, in a coordinate system where the $z$ axis of both the $\Lambda$ and the $\bar{\Lambda}$ rest frame is oriented along the momentum $\mathbf{p}_\Lambda$ at an angle $\theta_\Lambda$ with respect to the $e^-$ beam direction. The $y$ axis is perpendicular to the production plane and oriented along the vector $\mathbf{k}_\perp \times \mathbf{p}_\Lambda$, where $\mathbf{k}_\perp$ is the $e^-$ beam momentum in the $J/\psi$ rest frame. For each event, the full set of kinematic variables ($\theta_\Lambda, \mathbf{n}_1, \mathbf{n}_2$) is denoted by $\xi$. Furthermore, $\alpha_\gamma$ and $\Delta\Phi$ denote the absolute ratio of the two helicity amplitudes of $J/\psi \to \Lambda\Lambda$ and their relative phase, respectively, and $\alpha_\gamma$ ($\alpha_\gamma$) is the decay asymmetry of $\Lambda \to n\gamma$ ($\bar{\Lambda} \to \bar{n}\gamma$).

In this letter, we report the absolute BF and the decay asymmetry of $\Lambda \to n\gamma$ from (10087 ± 44) × 10^6 $J/\psi \to \Lambda\Lambda$ events [29] collected at the BESIII detector [30, 31] operating at the BEPCII collider [32]. A detailed description of the BESIII detector can be found in Ref. [30]. Simulated data samples produced with GEANT4-based [33] Monte Carlo (MC) software, including a detailed geometric description of the BESIII detector and the detector response, are used to determine detection efficiencies and estimate background contributions. The $J/\psi$ resonance is generated by KKMC [34], incorporating the effects of the beam energy spread and the initial state radiation in the $e^+e^-$ annihilation. The subsequent decays are modeled with EvoGEN [35] using the BFs taken from the PDG [24] for known decays and LUNDCHARM [36] for remaining unknown decays. A sample of simulated $J/\psi$ decay events (the inclusive MC sample), corresponding to the luminosity of data, is used to study background events. Signal MC samples, including a sample of 5.6 × 10^7 $J/\psi \to \Lambda(\to \bar{p}\pi^+)\Lambda(\to n\gamma)$ and a sample of 4 × 10^5 $J/\psi \to \Lambda(\to \bar{p}\pi^+)\Lambda(\to n\gamma)$, are generated to estimate the ST and DT signal efficiencies, respectively. The joint angular distributions are generated according to Eq. (2), where $\alpha_\gamma$ is adopted from this analysis and $\alpha_\psi = 0.461 ± 0.006 ± 0.007$, $\Delta\Phi = 42.4 ± 0.6 ± 0.5^\circ$ and $\alpha_\psi = -0.758 ± 0.010 ± 0.007$ from Ref. [27]. Moreover, a sample of 2 × 10^4 $J/\psi \to \Lambda(\to \bar{p}\pi^+)\Lambda(\to n\pi^0)$ events is generated to study the dominant background.

The ST $\Lambda$ candidate is reconstructed through the dominant decay mode $\Lambda \to \bar{p}\pi^+$. Charged tracks are detected in the main drift chamber (MDC) and must satisfy the condition $|\cos \theta| < 0.93$, where $\theta$ is the polar angle with respect to the MDC symmetry axis. The momenta ranges of pions and anti-protons from the $\bar{\Lambda}$ decays are well separated, thus the tracks with momenta less than 0.5 GeV/c are assigned to be pions, otherwise anti-protons. In addition, measurements of the specific ionization energy loss in the MDC and the flight time by the time-of-flight system are combined to perform particle identification for the (anti-)proton candidate. They are required to have the largest likelihood for the particle type selected among the pion, kaon and proton hypotheses. Events with at least one anti-proton and one positively charged pion are selected. A vertex fit is performed to each $\bar{p}\pi^+$ pair, and the one with the minimum $\chi^2_{\mathrm{vis}}$ of the vertex fit is regarded as the $\bar{\Lambda}$ candidate for further analysis. The $\bar{\Lambda}$ candidate is required to have $\chi^2_{\mathrm{vis}}$ less than 20, an invariant mass within 8 MeV/c^2 of the nominal $\Lambda$ mass [24] and a decay length relative to the interaction point larger than twice of its resolution.

To identify events with $J/\psi \to \Lambda\Lambda$ and reduce the background contributions from $J/\psi \to \bar{\Lambda}$, a recoil mass $M_{\Lambda}^{\mathrm{rec}} = \sqrt{(E_{\mathrm{c.m.}} - E_{\Lambda})^2 - P_{\Lambda}^2}$ is defined, where $E_{\mathrm{c.m.}}$ is the center-of-mass (c.m.) energy, $E_{\Lambda}$ is the energy and $P_{\Lambda}$ the momentum of the ST $\Lambda$ candidate. This mass is required to be within $1.03 < M_{\Lambda}^{\mathrm{rec}} < 1.18$ GeV/c^2. The distribution of $M_{\Lambda}^{\mathrm{rec}}$ is shown in Fig. 1, where only few background events are observed. A maximum likelihood fit is performed to determine the signal yield, where the signal and background distributions are represented by
shapes obtained from signal MC and inclusive MC samples. The MC shapes are convolved with a Gaussian function to account for imperfect simulation of the detector resolution. The charge conjugate channels are analyzed with the duplicate processing method, and the yields of ST Λ and ¯Λ candidates from the fits are summarized in Table I. The background contribution is less than 1%, which is also validated by the inclusive MC sample.

On the signal side we search for Λ → nγ from the residual neutral particles in the ST Λ candidates. For a neutral shower, the deposited energy in the electromagnetic calorimeter (EMC) should be larger than 25 MeV in the barrel region (|cos θ| < 0.80) or 50 MeV in the end cap region (0.86 < |cos θ| < 0.92). To reject secondary showers originating from charged tracks, the shower candidates are required to be apart from the charged tracks with an opening angle of 10° for pion and proton tracks and 20° for anti-proton tracks. To suppress electronic noise, the interval between the EMC response time and the event start time is required to be within 700 ns.

There are two neutral particles in the final states of the signal process Λ → nγ (Λ → ¯nγ), the photon and the (anti-)neutron. The radiative photon produces a shower in the EMC with deposited energy less than 400 MeV. With a probability of 0.65, the ¯n annihilates in the EMC and produces several secondary particles. The most energetic shower with energy deposit larger than 0.4 GeV is regarded as an ¯n candidate. The n, meanwhile, is difficult to identify due to its low interaction efficiency and its small energy deposition, and is treated as a missing particle. Therefore, only the γs and ¯n are selected in this analysis. At least one shower is required as a γ candidate in an event for Λ → nγ, and at least two showers as γ and ¯n in an event for Λ → ¯nγ. For the reconstruction of Λ → nγ, a one-constraint (1C) kinematic fit is applied by imposing energy-momentum conservation of the candidate particles in the hypothetical J/ψ → Λnγ process, where the neutron is set as a missing particle.

On the other hand, for the reconstruction of Λ → ¯nγ, a 3C kinematic fit is imposed for the J/ψ → Λnγ process, where the direction of the ¯n is measured and the energy is unmeasured. For events with multiple photon candidates, the combination giving the minimum χ^2_{1C} (χ^2_{3C}) is retained for the analysis. Furthermore, χ^2_{1C} (χ^2_{3C}) is required to be less than 10 (15).

Detailed MC studies show that the dominant background contribution comes from the Λ → nπ^0 decay with its large BF, while other background processes are almost negligible. The background can be classified into two categories: first, events with the detected photon from the π^0 decay in Λ → nπ^0, denoted as BG A, and second, events with the detected photon not from the π^0 decay, denoted as BG B. In the latter case, the photons arise from noise or a shower from secondary products of other particles. In order to suppress BG A, a 1C (3C) kinematic fit under the hypothesis J/ψ → Λnγγ (J/ψ → Λnγγ) is performed, and events surviving the kinematic fit and with a γγ invariant mass within 20 MeV/c^2 of the π^0 nominal mass [24] are rejected. To suppress BG B, the detected photon is required to have an energy larger than 150 MeV and an opening angle larger than 20° from the (anti-)neutron candidate. Additionally, for BG A and BG B a boosted decision tree (BDT) is applied on the detected photon to discriminate signal photons from other showers, based on the measured variables, i.e. deposited energy, secondary moment, number of hits, Zernike moment (A2), and deposition shape [37]. The response of the BDT output is required to be larger than 0.3, after which 86.8% (92.8%) of the BG A and 99.5% (99.7%) of the BG B events are rejected with 44.6% (48.4%) loss of the signal efficiency for the Λ → nγ (Λ → ¯nγ) process.

The distribution of the photon energy in the Λ rest frame E_γ^Λ after all selection criteria is shown in Fig. 2 for the decay Λ → nγ (Λ → ¯nγ), where the predominant peak around 0.13 GeV is from BG A, and the second peak around 0.15 GeV corresponds to the signal. To determine the DT signal yields, an unbinned extended maximum likelihood fit is performed to the E_γ^Λ distributions. The signal and BG A are modeled by the MC simulated shape convolved with a Gaussian function. Since BG B involves a fake photon and is difficult to be modeled by the MC simulation, its lineshape is obtained by a data-driven approach with a control sample of Λ → nπ^0(→ γγ), and the photon candidates used in the kinematic fit are from noise photons in the EMC rather than the two signal photons from π^0 → γγ. The DT yields obtained from fits are summarized in Table I. The BFs determined according to Eq. (1) are found to be consistent for the two charge-conjugate modes. Therefore, a simultaneous fit, assuming the same BF for the two modes, is performed, and the results are given in bold font in the Table I.

The systematic uncertainties on the BF measurement stem from the photon and anti-neutron detection efficiency, kinematic fit, invariant M_γγ mass selection window, opening angle between photon and (anti-)neutron,
FIG. 2. Distributions of $E^\Lambda_0$ for (a) $\Lambda \to n\gamma$ and (b) $\bar{\Lambda} \to \bar{n}\gamma$ in the $\Lambda$ and $\bar{\Lambda}$ rest frame, respectively. The black dots with error bars represent data. The red solid, blue dashed, orange dotted, and green dash-dotted lines denote the fit result, signal, BG A, and BG B contributions, respectively. The green histograms indicate the BG B from an inclusive MC sample. The insets show the details of the fit in the signal region.

TABLE I. The results for the decays $\Lambda \to n\gamma$ and $\bar{\Lambda} \to \bar{n}\gamma$. The BF and $\alpha_\gamma$ values are given both for individual and simultaneous fits. The first (second) uncertainties are statistical (systematic).

| Decay Mode | $\Lambda \to n\gamma$ | $\bar{\Lambda} \to \bar{n}\gamma$ |
|------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| $N_{ST}$ (×10^3) | 6853.2 ± 2.6 | 7036.2 ± 2.7 |
| $\varepsilon_{ST}$ (%) | 51.13 ± 0.01 | 52.53 ± 0.01 |
| $N_{ST}$ | 723 ± 40 | 498 ± 41 |
| $\varepsilon_{ST}$ (%) | 6.58 ± 0.04 | 4.32 ± 0.03 |
| BF (×10^-3) | 0.820 ± 0.045 ± 0.066 | 0.862 ± 0.071 ± 0.084 |
| $\alpha_\gamma$ | 0.16 ± 0.10 ± 0.05 |

The BF output for the photon, MC model due to $\alpha_\gamma$, and fit procedure. The uncertainties associated with ST selection almost cancel based on Eq. (1). There is only one photon for the signal process, and the uncertainty associated with the photon detection efficiency is 1% according to Ref. [38]. The uncertainty of the anti-neutron detection efficiency is negligible after correcting the efficiency by a data-driven method [39]. To estimate the uncertainty due to the kinematic fit, we change the value of the $\chi^2_{PC}$ ($\chi^2_{3C}$) by ±1 and investigate the fluctuation on the BF, which is taken as a systematic uncertainty. The uncertainty from the $M(\gamma\gamma)$ mass window requirement is studied with the control sample of $J/\psi \to \Lambda (\to p\pi^+)\Lambda (\to n\pi^0)\pi^0 (\to \gamma\gamma)$, and the difference of the efficiency between the data and MC simulation, 1.2%, is taken as the uncertainty. The uncertainty from the requirement of the opening angle between photon and (anti)-neutron is estimated to be 2.0% by varying the selection criteria by two degrees. The uncertainty associated with the BDT for the photon is negligible after correcting the efficiency using the control sample of $J/\psi \to \rho\pi (\to \pi^+\pi^-\gamma)$. The uncertainty of the MC model due to the input decay asymmetry $\alpha_\gamma$ is estimated to be 0.6% by varying the input value of $\alpha_\gamma$ by its uncertainty. The systematic uncertainties from the fit of the $E^\Lambda_0$ distribution include those associated with the fit range and the modeling of the signal and background shapes. An alternative fit of the $E^\Lambda_0$ distribution in the (0.09, 0.23) GeV range is performed, and the resultant difference in signal yield, 0.3%, is taken as the uncertainty. The uncertainties associated with the shape modeling of the signal and BG A, are estimated by varying the width of the Gaussian resolution function within the uncertainties. The resulting differences of the yields, 0.4% for the signal and 1.0% for BG A, are assigned as the systematic uncertainties. To estimate the shape modeling uncertainty of BG B, ensembles of pseudo-data are generated according to modified BG B distributions as allowed by the uncertainties, and the resulting standard deviation of the signal yields, 4.8%, is taken as the systematic uncertainty. The systematic uncertainty associated with the extraction of the ST yield is estimated by varying the width of the Gaussian resolution function within its uncertainties for signal shape modeling and replacing the inclusive MC shape with a second order polynomial function. The resulting difference in the ST yield of 2.3% is taken as the systematic uncertainty. By adding all these values in quadrature, the total systematic uncertainty is estimated to be 6.5%.

The decay asymmetry $\alpha_\gamma$ is determined using Eq. (2) with a maximum likelihood fit. A total of 1994 candidate events within a range of (0.145, 0.17) GeV around $E^\Lambda_0$ are used in the fit, with an estimated fraction of background events of 43.3%. In the fit of $\alpha_\gamma$, the likelihood function of the $i$-th event is calculated through the probability density function (PDF):

$$P(\xi; \alpha_\gamma, \Delta\Phi, \alpha_\gamma, \alpha_+) = CW(\xi; \alpha_\psi, \Delta\Phi, \alpha_\gamma, \alpha_+)e(\xi),$$

where $C^{-1} = \int W(\xi; \alpha_\psi, \Delta\Phi, \alpha_\gamma, \alpha_+)e(\xi)d\xi$ is the normalization factor evaluated by a phase space (PHSP) MC sample, and $\alpha_\psi, \Delta\Phi, \alpha_+$ are fixed to the values in Ref. [27]. The BG A and BG B contributions to the likelihood value are estimated with MC samples and subtracted in the calculation of the likelihood function. We fit the $\Lambda \to n\gamma$ and $\bar{\Lambda} \to \bar{n}\gamma$ decay modes individually, and the results agree within statistical uncertainties as summarized in Table I. A simultaneous fit, assuming the same magnitude of $\alpha_\gamma$ but with opposite sign for the charge-conjugate modes, is used to determine the decay asymmetry, yielding $\alpha_\gamma(\Lambda \to n\gamma) = -0.16 \pm 0.10$, where the uncertainty is statistical. The polarization is strongly dependent on the $\Lambda$ direction $\cos \theta_\Lambda$ and indicates the amplitude of the decay asymmetry. The $n_1^\Lambda$ ($n_2^\Lambda$) moment

$$\mu(\cos \theta_\Lambda) = \frac{m}{N} \sum_{i=1}^{N_\Lambda} n_{1(2)}^i,$$

is proportional to the product of the $\Lambda$ polarization and its decay asymmetry. It is calculated for $m = 10$ bins.
in \(\cos \theta_\Lambda\). Here, \(N\) is the total number of events in the data sample and \(N_k\) is the number of events in the \(k\)-th \(\cos \theta_\Lambda\) bin. Figure 3 shows the projection of the global fit together with data and PHSP MC results. The fit result for \(\Lambda \rightarrow \bar{p}\pi^+\) clearly deviates from the PHSP curve while the one for \(\Lambda \rightarrow n\gamma\) is consistent with PHSP. The uncertainty associated with the requirement of the opening angle between photon and \(\Lambda\) is estimated by varying each parameter by its resolution, and the resulting differences 0.004, 0.09, 0.00, 0.03 are assigned as the uncertainties. The total systematic uncertainty of \(\alpha_\gamma\) is estimated to be 0.05 by adding all these uncertainties in quadrature.

In summary, based on the double-tag method, we report the first measurement of the absolute BF of \(\Lambda \rightarrow n\gamma\) of \([0.832 \pm 0.038 \text{(stat.)} \pm 0.054 \text{(syst.)}] \times 10^{-3}\). The measured value of the BF is a factor of two smaller than the previous measurement of \((1.75 \pm 0.15) \times 10^{-3}\) \([23]\). By analyzing the joint angular distribution of the decay products, the decay asymmetry \(\alpha_\gamma\) is determined for the first time, at a value of \(-0.16 \pm 0.10 \text{(stat.)} \pm 0.05 \text{(syst.)}\).

This analysis is the first measurement of radiative hyperon decays at an electron–positron collider experiment, making use of the huge number of polarized hyperons produced in \(J/\psi\) decays with clean background. The results for the asymmetry do not agree well with predictions such as the broken SU(3) pole model \([19]\), Chiral Perturbation Theory \([40]\), or the non-relativistic constituent quark model \([20]\). Our BF value is consistent with the lower unitary bound obtained by considering contributions of \(\Lambda \rightarrow p\pi^-\) and \(\Lambda \rightarrow n\pi^0\) weak hadronic decays together with \(p\pi^- \rightarrow n\gamma\) and \(n\pi^0 \rightarrow n\gamma\) scattering, respectively \([41]\).

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