Lecture notes on topological insulators

Ming-Che Chang

Department of Physics, National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei, Taiwan

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I. 2D $p$-WAVE SUPERCONDUCTOR

We now consider spinless $p$-wave SC in 2D. Two pioneering works on this topic are Read and Green, 2000 and Ivanov, 2001, from which many of the discussions in this Chap are based. Spinful $p$-wave SC in 1D and higher dimensions will be investigated in later chapters.

A. Lattice model

Consider the following lattice model with real $\Delta_0$,

$$
H = \sum_{mn} \left[ -t(c_{m+1,n}^\dagger c_{mn} + c_{m,n+1}^\dagger c_{mn}) + h.c. \right]
- (\mu - 4\Delta_0) c_{mn}^\dagger c_{mn}
+ \Delta_0 c_{m+1,n}^\dagger c_{mn} + i\Delta_0 c_{m,n+1}^\dagger c_{mn} + h.c. \right].
$$

(1.1)

With the Fourier transform,

$$
c_{mn}^\dagger = \frac{1}{\sqrt{N}} \sum_k e^{i(k_m+m+n)c_{k,m,n}},
$$

(1.2)

where $N$ is the total number of lattice sites, one gets $\{c_{k}\}$ is simply written as $c_{k}$

$$
H = \frac{1}{2} \sum_k (c_k^\dagger c_{-k}) H(k) \left( \begin{array}{c} c_k \\ c_{-k}^\dagger \end{array} \right),
$$

(1.3)

where

$$
H = \begin{pmatrix}
\varepsilon(k) & 2i\Delta_0(\sin k_x + i \sin k_y) \\
-2i\Delta_0(\sin k_x - i \sin k_y) & -\varepsilon(k)
\end{pmatrix}
$$

\varepsilon(k) = -2t(\cos k_x + \cos k_y) - (\mu - 4t).

The Hamiltonian matrix $H(k)$ has the same form as that of the QWZ model in Eq. (1.2). One only needs to identify

$$
2t = t_{QWZ}, \quad \mu = -m, \quad \text{and} \quad 2i\Delta_0 = \lambda.
$$

(1.4) For simplicity, we study the edge state in the continuum limit. In the small-$k$ limit, the Hamiltonian matrix reduces to

$$
H(k) = \begin{pmatrix}
tk^2 - \mu & 2i\Delta_0(k_x + ik_y) \\
-2i\Delta_0(k_x - ik_y) & -tk^2 + \mu
\end{pmatrix}.
$$

(1.5)

Note: The second-quantized Hamiltonian is

$$
H = \sum_{s=\pm} \varepsilon_k c_{ks}^\dagger c_{ks} + 2i\Delta_0(\varepsilon_{\phi k} c_{k\downarrow}^\dagger c_{k\uparrow} - h.c.),
$$

(1.6)

where $\varepsilon_k = tk^2 - \mu, \phi_k = \angle(k, x)$ This will be referred to in a later chapter.

Assume the chemical potential has a profile similar to $\mu(x) = \tanh x$, then the topological SC occupies the

![FIG. 1 The energy dispersion of the chiral edge state inside a SC gap.](image)

It has the eigen-energies,

$$
E_{\pm}(k) = \pm \sqrt{M(k)^2 + 4\Delta_0^2(\sin^2 k_x + \sin^2 k_y)}.
$$

(1.7)

Based on our understanding of the QWZ model, we know that the system has 3 distinct quantum phases: when $\mu < 0$ or $\mu > 4$, it is a trivial phase. When $0 < \mu < 2$, it is a topological SC phase. When $2 < \mu < 4$, it is another topological SC phase with opposite chirality.

The topological number is characterized by the first Chern number. Given

$$
\mathcal{H}(k) = h(k) \cdot \sigma,
$$

(1.8)

one has

$$
C_1 = \frac{1}{4\pi} \int_{BZ} d^2k \frac{1}{\hbar^2} \frac{\partial h}{\partial k_x} \times \frac{\partial h}{\partial k_y}.
$$

(1.9)

However, since the electric charge is not conserved, the topological phases have no quantized Hall conductance.

B. Edge state

\varepsilon(k) = -2t(\cos k_x + \cos k_y) - (\mu - 4t).

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where $\varepsilon_k = tk^2 - \mu, \phi_k = \angle(k, x)$ This will be referred to in a later chapter.

Assume the chemical potential has a profile similar to $\mu(x) = \tanh x$, then the topological SC occupies the
space with \( x > 0 \). Because of the translation symmetry along \( y \), the eigenstate is of the form \( \psi(x)e^{ik_y y} \). We now substitute \( k_x \) by \( (1/i)(d/dx) \), neglect \( k^2 \) terms, and solve for

\[
\left( -2i\Delta_0 \left( \frac{\partial}{\partial x} + ik_y \right) \right) \psi(x) = \varepsilon_{k_y} \psi(x).
\]

(1.12)

Again it’s easier to make a guess at the edge state. Try

\[
\psi(x) = e^{-\frac{1}{i\Delta_0} \int_0^x dx' \mu(x')} \psi_0,
\]

(1.13)

then we will get

\[
\psi_0 = \left( \frac{1}{-1} \right),
\]

(1.14)

with the eigen-energy \( \varepsilon_{k_y} = 2\Delta_0 k_y \) (see Fig. 1).

The energy dispersion of the edge state is roughly linear at small \( k \). Furthermore, it is chiral. Therefore, the 2D \( p \)-wave SC is sometimes called as the **chiral superconductor**.

The Bogoliubov QP for the edge state is

\[
\gamma_{k_y} = \int d^2r \left[ u^*(r) \psi(r) + v^*(r) \psi^\dagger(r) \right]
\]

(1.15)

\[
= \int d^2r e^{ik_y y} e^{-\frac{1}{i\Delta_0} \int_0^x dx' \mu(x')} \left[ e^{-i\pi/2} \psi + e^{i\pi/2} \psi^\dagger \right],
\]

where we have removed an overall phase \( e^{i\pi/2} \). Therefore,

\[
\gamma_{-k_y} = \gamma_{k_y}.
\]

(1.16)

When \( k_y = 0 \), \( \gamma_0 = \gamma_0 \) and the zero mode is a Majorana mode. However, not being gapped from edge states at higher energy, it can be easily damaged by thermal effect. In the next Sec, we’ll see that the Majorana mode inside a vortex is gapped, thus can avoid this problem (to some extent).

**C. Vortex and its bound states**

In the Ginzberg-Landau (GL) theory of SC, the SC state is described by a macroscopic wave function \( \Psi(r) \). This effective theory works near the SC transition, and can be derived from the microscopic BCS theory. In fact, one can show that \( \Psi(r) \approx \Delta(r) \) (e.g., see Fetter and Walecka, 1971), differing only by a multiplicative factor. The current density in the GL theory is given as \( (q^x = -2e, m^* = 2m) \),

\[
\mathbf{j} = \frac{q^*}{2m^*} \left[ \Psi^\dagger \left( \frac{\hbar}{i} \nabla - q^* \mathbf{A} \right) \Psi + c.c. \right]
\]

(1.17)

\[
= -\frac{e\hbar}{2mi} \left( \Psi^\dagger \nabla \Psi - \Psi \nabla \Psi^\dagger \right) - \frac{2e^2}{m} |\Psi|^2 \mathbf{A}.
\]

(1.18)

Therefore, if \( \Delta(r) = |\Delta(r)|e^{-i\xi(r)} \), where \( \xi(r) \) is a single-valued function, then

\[
\mathbf{j} \propto \frac{\hbar}{2e} \nabla \xi - \mathbf{A}.
\]

(1.19)

The phase of \( \Delta \) is adjustable via a gauge transformation. For example, if

\[
\Delta \rightarrow \Delta' = \Delta e^{i\chi},
\]

(1.20)

then \( \xi \rightarrow \xi' = \xi - \chi \),

(1.21)

and \( \mathbf{A} \rightarrow \mathbf{A}' = \mathbf{A} - \frac{h}{2e} \nabla \chi \).

(1.22)

The current density is gauge invariant, as it should be. Also, you can check that the BdG equation is invariant under the following gauge transformation,

\[
\begin{pmatrix} u \\ v \end{pmatrix} \rightarrow \begin{pmatrix} u' \\ v' \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} e^{i\chi/2} u \\ e^{-i\chi/2} v \end{pmatrix}.
\]

(1.23)

Far away from a vortex, the circulating current density \( \mathbf{j}(r) \) drops to zero, such that for a large loop \( C \),

\[
\oint_C d\mathbf{r} \cdot \mathbf{j} = 0.
\]

(1.24)

Therefore,

\[
\oint_C d\mathbf{r} \cdot \mathbf{A} = \frac{h}{2e} \left[ \xi(2\pi) - \xi(0) \right]
\]

(1.25)

\[
= \frac{h}{2e} n, \ n \in Z,
\]

(1.26)

in which \( \xi(2\pi) - \xi(0) = 2\pi n \), since \( \xi \) is single-valued. Thus the magnetic flux through a SC vortex needs be quantized in units of \( \hbar/2e \). In the case of \( n = 1 \), one can choose \( \xi = \theta \), the polar angle.

We now choose \( \chi = \xi = \Omega \theta \) to remove the SC phase, so that \( \Delta' = |\Delta| \). Consequently, after a \( 2\pi \) rotation of \( \theta \),

\[
\begin{pmatrix} u' \\ v' \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} e^{i\xi/2} u \\ e^{-i\xi/2} v \end{pmatrix}
\]

(1.27)

\[
= (-1)^n \begin{pmatrix} u \\ v \end{pmatrix}.
\]

(1.28)

To avoid possible mis-steps, one can add a “branch-cut” emanating from the vortex, so that after circling a vortex (and crossing the branch-cut) once, a phase factor \( (-1)^n \) is added.

We now study the bound states inside a vortex. First write the BdG equation in polar coordinate. Recall that

\[
\frac{\partial}{\partial x} = \cos \theta \frac{\partial}{\partial r} - \sin \theta \frac{\partial}{\partial \theta},
\]

(1.29)

\[
\frac{\partial}{\partial y} = \sin \theta \frac{\partial}{\partial r} + \cos \theta \frac{\partial}{\partial \theta}.
\]

(1.30)

Therefore,

\[
i(k_x + i k_y) \rightarrow \frac{\partial}{\partial x} + i \frac{\partial}{\partial y} = e^{i\theta} \left( \frac{\partial}{\partial r} + i \frac{\partial}{\partial \theta} \right).
\]

(1.32)
Neglecting \( k^2 \) terms, then we have (\( \Delta_0(r) \in R \)),
\[
\left( 2\Delta_0 e^{-i\theta} \left( -\frac{\mu}{\partial r} + i \frac{\partial}{\partial \theta} \right) - \frac{2\Delta_0}{\mu} e^{i\theta} \right) \left( u_n \middle/ v_n \right)
= E_n \left( u_n \middle/ v_n \right). \tag{1.33}
\]

One can verify that the following is an zero-energy solution,
\[
\left( u_0 \middle/ v_0 \right) = \frac{i}{\sqrt{\Gamma}} e^{-i\int_{\mu}^{\gamma} dr' \frac{n}{2\pi} \gamma} \left( -e^{i\theta/2} \middle/ e^{-i\theta/2} \right). \tag{1.34}
\]

The corresponding Bogoliubov QP is,
\[
\gamma_0 = \int d^2 r \left[ u^*_0(r) \psi(r) + v^*_0(r) \psi^\dagger(r) \right]
= \int d^2 r \ i g(r) \left[ e^{-i\theta/2} \psi(r) - e^{i\theta/2} \psi^\dagger(r) \right]. \tag{1.35}
\]

Such a zero-mode bound state is a Majorana mode, \( \gamma_0^\dagger = \gamma_0 \).

A few remarks: First, for a \( p \)-wave SC, near the core of a vortex, \( E_n \approx nh_\omega r \) at low energy, where \( \omega_0 \simeq \Delta_0^2/\varepsilon_F \ll \Delta_0 \), and \( n \) is the angular momentum of the QP (see, e.g., Tewari et al., 2007). However, for a \( s \)-wave SC, \( E_n \simeq (n+1/2)h_\omega r \) for zero-energy bound states (see p. 155 of de Gennes, 1989). The lowest one has energy \( h_\omega r \), thus there is no zero mode.

Second, candidate host materials for Majorana fermions are: the ruthenate (Sr2RuO4), which is a \( p \)-wave SC with spin, the \( A \)-phase of superfluid He-3, and the fractional quantum Hall phase with filling fraction \( \nu = 5/2 \) (the Moore-Read state). It is also possible to find them in the hybrid structure of 3D TI+s-wave SC (Fu and Kane, 2008), or 2D Rashba+s-wave SC (Alicea, 2010; Sau et al., 2010).

### D. Topological qubit

Like the MF in a Kitaev chain, two MFs (\( \gamma_1, \gamma_2 \)) in the \( p \)-wave SC can store one qubit of information:

\[
f_1 = \frac{1}{2} (\gamma_1 + i\gamma_2),
\]
\[
f'_1 = \frac{1}{2} (\gamma_1 - i\gamma_2),
\]
\[
\rightarrow f'_1 f_1 = \frac{1 + i\gamma_1\gamma_2}{2} \sim 0, 1. \tag{1.38}
\]

Recall that \( -i\gamma_1\gamma_2 \) is the fermion parity operator. Such a qubit composed of 2 spatially separated MFs is robust against local decoherence.

In order to understand how to manipulate such qubits, we now consider a system with multiple MFs. For a MF located at \( R_j \), we have (Nayak et al., 2008),
\[
\gamma_j = \int d^2 r \left[ h_j(r) e^{-i\theta_j/2} \psi_j(r) + h^*_j(r) e^{i\theta_j/2} \psi^\dagger_j(r) \right]. \tag{39}
\]

1. **Braiding 2 Majorana fermions**

To exchange the locations of 2 MFs, \( \gamma_1 \) and \( \gamma_2 \), we can move \( \gamma_2 \) around \( \gamma_1 \) in 2 ways (see Fig. 2(b),(c)). The results are different, because of the branch cut. In Fig. 2(b), \( \gamma_2 \) crossed the branch cut of \( \gamma_1 \), and we have
\[
\gamma_1 \rightarrow \gamma_2, \tag{1.42}
\]
\[
\gamma_2 \rightarrow -\gamma_1. \tag{1.43}
\]

In Fig. 2(c), \( \gamma_2 \) does not cross the branch cut of \( \gamma_1 \), but \( \gamma_1 \) crossed the branch cut of \( \gamma_2 \), and we have
\[
\gamma_1 \rightarrow -\gamma_2, \tag{1.44}
\]
\[
\gamma_2 \rightarrow \gamma_1. \tag{1.45}
\]

For clockwise rotation, we can write
\[
\gamma_j \rightarrow B_{12} \gamma_j B^\dagger_{12}, \tag{1.46}
\]

\[\text{FIG. 2 (a) Attach a branch cut to each vortex. The position of the branch cut is gauge dependent. (b) Exchange the locations of 2 MFs by moving } \gamma_2 \text{ counter-clockwise around } \gamma_1. \text{ (c) Exchange the locations of 2 MFs by moving } \gamma_2 \text{ clockwise around } \gamma_1.\]
It follows that, then (see Eq. (1.38))
both MFs change sign since each of them crossed a branch cut once.

A full circle is composed of 2 half circles, and

\[ B_{12} = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} (1 + \gamma_1 \gamma_2) \]  

(1.47)
is called the braiding operator.

A full circle is composed of 2 half circles, and

\[ B_{12}^2 = \gamma_1 \gamma_2. \]  

(1.48)
It follows that,

\[ \gamma_j \to B_{12}^2 \gamma_j (B_{12}^\dagger)^2 = -\gamma_j. \]  

(1.49)
Both MFs change sign since each of them crossed a branch cut once.

Write the states with fermion numbers 0, 1 as \(|0\rangle, |1\rangle\), then (see Eq. (1.38))

\[
\begin{align*}
|1\rangle &= f_1^\dagger |0\rangle, \\
\{ f_1^\dagger f_1 |0\rangle &= 0, \\
f_1^\dagger f_1 |1\rangle &= |1\rangle. 
\end{align*}
\]

(1.50)
(1.51)
Also,

\[
\begin{align*}
-\gamma_1 \gamma_2 |0\rangle &= |0\rangle, \\
-\gamma_1 \gamma_2 |1\rangle &= -|1\rangle. 
\end{align*}
\]

(1.52)
It follows that,

\[
\begin{align*}
B_{12} |0\rangle &= \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} (1 + i) |0\rangle = e^{i\pi/4} |0\rangle, \\
B_{12} |1\rangle &= \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} (1 - i) |1\rangle = e^{-i\pi/4} |1\rangle. 
\end{align*}
\]

(1.53)
(1.54)
That is, the braiding operator does not switch the states \(|0\rangle, |1\rangle\), it only shifts the phases of the states.

2. Braiding 4 Majorana fermions

We now consider a 2-qubit system with 4 MFs,

\[
\begin{align*}
f_1 &= \frac{1}{2} (\gamma_1 + i \gamma_2), \\
f_2 &= \frac{1}{2} (\gamma_3 + i \gamma_4). 
\end{align*}
\]

(1.55)
(1.56)
The basis of the Hilbert space are \{\(|00\rangle, |01\rangle, |10\rangle, |11\rangle\}.

For *intra*-fermion braiding, we have, for example,

\[
\begin{align*}
B_{12} |00\rangle &= \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} (1 + i) |00\rangle, \\
B_{34} |00\rangle &= \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} (1 + i) |00\rangle. 
\end{align*}
\]

(1.57)
(1.58)
For *inter*-fermion braiding, one has, for example,

\[
\begin{align*}
B_{23} |00\rangle &= \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} (1 + \gamma_2 \gamma_3) |00\rangle \\
&= \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} ((|00\rangle + i |11\rangle). 
\end{align*}
\]

(1.59)
\[ \text{Note that the fermion parity, } n_1 + n_2 \text{ (mod 2), is not changed by these braiding.} \]

In general, under the basis \((|00\rangle, |01\rangle, |10\rangle, |11\rangle)^T\), these braiding operators can be written as,

\[
\begin{align*}
B_{12} &= e^{i\frac{\pi}{4} \sigma_z \otimes 1} = \begin{pmatrix} e^{i\pi/4} & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & e^{i\pi/4} & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & e^{-i\pi/4} & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & e^{-i\pi/4} \end{pmatrix}, \\
B_{34} &= e^{i\frac{\pi}{4} \sigma_z \otimes 1} = \begin{pmatrix} e^{i\pi/4} & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & e^{-i\pi/4} & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & e^{i\pi/4} & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & e^{-i\pi/4} \end{pmatrix}. \\
B_{23} &= \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 & 0 & i \\ 0 & 1 & i & 0 \\ -i & 1 & 0 & 0 \\ -i & 0 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}. 
\end{align*}
\]

(1.60)
(1.61)
(1.62)
Two braiding operations that act on different fermions would commute,

\[ [B_{12}, B_{34}] = 0. \]  

(1.63)
However,

\[ [B_{j-1,j}, B_{j,j+1}] = \gamma_j - 1 \gamma_{j+1}. \]  

(1.64)
Because the commutator does not vanish, the order of braiding matters, as shown in Fig. 3.

Since the braiding operations do not change the fermion parity. They could only connect \(|00\rangle\) and \(|11\rangle\) (or \(|10\rangle\) and \(|01\rangle\)) in a 2D Hilbert sub-space. That is, with braiding only, one can only access 1 qubit out of the two-qubit system. Define the new qubit as,

\[ |0\rangle \equiv |00\rangle, \quad |1\rangle \equiv |11\rangle, \]  

(1.65)
then

\[
\begin{align*}
B_{12} &= B_{34} &= e^{i\frac{\pi}{4} \tau_z}, \\
B_{23} &= e^{i\frac{\pi}{4} \tau_x}. 
\end{align*}
\]

(1.66)
(1.67)
They rotate a single qubit by an angle \(\pi/2\) around either \(z\)-axis or \(x\)-axis.
The universal quantum computation cannot be achieved by braiding operations alone. It requires logical gates that could change the fermion parity, such as the Controlled NOT gate,

$$CNOT = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix},$$

which changes $|10\rangle$ to $|11\rangle$, and $|11\rangle$ to $|10\rangle$.

References


