Rapid Collapse of Spin Waves in Nonuniform Phases of the Second Landau Level

Trevor D. Rhone,1 Jun Yan,1 Yann Gallais,2 Aron Pinczuk,1,3 Loren Pfieffer,4 and Ken West4
1Department of Physics, Columbia University, New York, New York 10027, USA
2MPQ, UMR CNRS 7162, Universite Paris Diderot, 75205 Paris, France
3Department of Applied Physics and Applied Mathematics, Columbia University, New York, New York 10027, USA
4Department of Electrical Engineering, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey 08544, USA

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The spin degree of freedom in quantum phases of the second Landau level is probed by resonant light scattering. The long wavelength spin wave, which monitors the degree of spin polarization, is at the Zeeman energy in the fully spin-polarized state at \( \nu = 3 \). At lower filling factors, the intensity of the Zeeman mode collapses, indicating loss of polarization. A novel continuum of low-lying excitations emerges that dominates near \( \nu = 8/3 \) and \( \nu = 5/2 \). Resonant Rayleigh scattering reveals that quantum fluids for \( \nu < 3 \) break up into robust domain structures. While the state at \( \nu = 5/2 \) is considered to be fully polarized, these results reveal unprecedented roles for spin degrees of freedom.

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Samples are mounted in a dilution refrigerator with a base temperature of 40 mK inserted into a superconducting magnet. The magnetic field perpendicular to the sample is $B = B_T \cos \theta$ as shown in the inset in Fig. 1(a). Light scattering measurements are performed through windows for optical access. The energy of the linearly polarized photons, $\omega_L$ (incident) and $\omega_S$ (scattered), is tuned close to fundamental optical transitions of the $N = 1$ spin up LL, $E_{1,\uparrow}$ [see Fig. 1(b)]. Because of resonance enhancements, light scattering spectra have a marked dependence on $\omega_L$—displayed in Fig. 2(a). The power density is kept less than $10^{-4}$ W cm$^{-2}$ to avoid heating of the electron gas. Scattered light is dispersed and recorded by a spectrometer with a resolution of 30 $\mu$eV. RILS data focus on spectral weight with nonzero energy shifts from $\omega_L$, while RRS data comprise only the spectral weight of elastically scattered light.

The striking collapse of the SW intensity at $E_Z$ for $\nu \leq 3$ is shown in Fig. 1(a). The color plot shows RILS spectra, taken at different $B$ fields at the resonance value of $\omega_L$ (the value for $\omega_L$ that induces resonance enhancement varies with the cyclotron energy and $E_{1,\uparrow}$). All the features appear predominantly in the depolarized configuration (VH) which, according to light scattering selection rules, indicates their spin origin [23]. While Larmor’s theorem requires that the SW’s energy remains at the bare Zeeman energy, its overall spectral weight is expected to depend sensitively on the degree of spin polarization [21]. The collapse of the SW is thus interpreted as the reduction of spin polarization in the $N = 1$ LL from its maximum value at $\nu = 3$. While a reduced SW intensity is expected for $\nu > 3$ (both $N = 1, \uparrow$ and $N = 1, \downarrow$ are populated, reducing the overall spin polarization), the attenuation of the SW for $\nu < 3$ is surprising ($N = 1, \uparrow$ depopulates as $B$ increases) and suggests a rapid loss of spin polarization below $\nu = 3$.

Tuning $\omega_L$ results in striking spectral changes that are due to differences in resonance enhancements. This is illustrated in Fig. 2(a), which shows the metamorphosis of the sharp SW at $E_Z$ to a broad continuum of lower energy excitations at $\nu = 2.9$ when tuning $\omega_L$. The continuum extends from well below $E_Z$ to 0.3 meV. In Fig. 2(b), the evolution of the continuum (main panel) and SW (inset) intensities is shown as a function of the filling factor. Since the intensity of the SW and continuum resonate at different values of $\omega_L$, RILS spectra are shown for values of $\omega_L$ corresponding to their maximum resonant enhancement: $E_{1,\downarrow}$ for the continuum and $E_{1,\uparrow} + \delta E$ for the SW. While the SW is clearly reduced for $\nu \leq 3$, the continuum intensity, absent at $\nu = 3$, gains in strength away from $\nu = 3$, indicating its link with the loss of spin polarization. Moreover, in contrast to the $N = 0$ LL, where Skyrmions proliferate at $\nu \sim 1$ [21], we surmise that the continuum of low-lying excitations at $\nu \leq 3$ has a different origin. We speculate that the continuum is a novel type of spin excitation associated with loss of polarization. This interpretation is bolstered by the absence of continua for

![FIG. 1 (color online). Evidence of loss of spin polarization away from $\nu = 3$. (a) Color plot of resonant inelastic light scattering spectra with varying magnetic field shows the SW at the Zeeman energy $E_Z$. The intensity of the SW attenuates away from $\nu = 3$ ($B_T = 5.32$ T). The top inset shows the light scattering geometry. The bottom inset exhibits a spectrum at $\nu = 3.01$. (b) $N = 1$ optical emission involved in resonance enhancement of light scattering ($B_T = 5.3$ T, $\theta = 20^\circ$, $T = 40$ mK). The left inset shows the two step inelastic light scattering process for the SW. The right inset is the energy level diagram for optical emission from the $N = 1, \uparrow$ LL.](Image 1)

![FIG. 2 (color online). Coexistence of novel quantum phases with the ferromagnetic SW. (a) Tuning $\omega_L$ for excitations at a filling factor slightly away from $\nu = 3$ ($\nu = 2.9$, $B_T = 5.5$ T, $T = 40$ mK) induces the collapse of the SW and the emergence of a continuum of low-lying energy excitations. The SW resonance is at higher $\omega_L$ than that of the continuum. (b) We monitor the behavior of the continuum while tuning the filling factor [30]. We track two distinct modes below $\nu = 3$—the SW and continuum. The insets show the SW collapse, while the main panel shows the emergence of the continuum. The continuum is resonant at slightly lower laser energy $\omega_L(B)$ than the SW.](Image 2)
ν ≤ 3 in the polarized configuration (HH) while still being present in the depolarized configuration (VH).

Figure 3 shows the temperature dependence of the RILS spectra at three filling factors reaching to 5/2. At ν = 2.85, the continuum at 40 mK melts entirely at 1 K, while the SW intensity at $E_Z$ remains or even gains in strength. At ν ≈ 8/3, the continuum dominates at low temperature, begins to melt at 1 K, and is destroyed by 2 K. The SW at $E_Z$ reemerges at 1 K and is fully recovered by 2 K. While the spectral weight of the continuum at ν ≈ 8/3 is greater in VH than in HH, they are the same in both VH and HH at ν = 5/2, indicating a more complex excitation spectrum at ν = 5/2, possibly involving both charge and spin degrees of freedom (data not shown to avoid clutter).

The temperature dependence for excitations at ν ≈ 5/2 is remarkable. As the temperature is raised to 1.5 K, the continuum begins to melt and is still present, albeit reduced, at 2 K. In addition, a small bump is seen at $E_Z$—hinting at a reemerging SW. We note that the continuum does not seem to be a unique feature of the magic filling factors or gapped quantum Hall states. However, it is a feature of the quantum fluids of the 2nd LL and appears to grow more robust as ν is tuned below three.

The spectra in Figs. 2 and 3 suggest competing quantum phases. One phase is associated with a SW at $E_Z$ and the other with the continua of excitations. To further explore these behaviors we measured RRS spectra. Figure 4 reports the results at several filling factors: RRS spectra at ν = 5/2 and 8/3 show marked resonance enhancements at energies that coincide with the maximum resonance enhancement of the continuum and contrasts with the unremarkable RRS profile of the ferromagnetic state at ν ≈ 3.

RRS is linked to spatial inhomogeneities (domains) which are on the order of the photon wavelength [24]. RRS results demonstrate formation of domains in the quantum fluid at ν ≤ 3 that are consistent with transport measurements showing the competition between nearly degenerate quantum phases in the 2nd LL which include spatially inhomogeneous ones associated with a reentrant integer quantum Hall effect [8].

The temperature dependence of RRS shown in Fig. 5 shows a weakening of the RRS upon increasing temperature and supports the picture that at low temperatures an inhomogeneous electron condensate forms at 5/2 and 8/3. We interpret the attenuation of RRS at higher temperatures as the melting of puddles of quantum phases. The inset in Fig. 5 shows that a Langmuir adsorption isotherm [Eq. (1)], that interprets the formation of inhomogeneous integer quantum Hall fluids [24], also describes results at 5/2 and 8/3. In this framework, we describe nucleation of “quantum puddles” to binding sites—forming domains in the quantum fluid. The areal intensity of the RRS, $I_{\text{RRS}}$, is given by

$$I_{\text{RRS}}(T) = \frac{I_{\text{RRS}}^0}{1 + CT \exp(-E_b/kT)}.$$  

$E_b$ is the binding energy of particles to binding sites, and $C = 2\pi M k_b/N_p h^2$, where $N_p$ is the density of binding sites and $M$ as the mass of the bound particle. A fit to data shown in the inset in Fig. 5 yields an estimate of $N_p \sim 5 \times 10^9$ cm$^{-2}$, with $M$ as the composite fermion (CF) mass of about 10 times the effective electron mass [25]. $E_b$ is 0.06 meV. The presence of domains in the quantum fluid in the $N$ = 1 LL has implications for the spin properties of the system. The formation of domains has the potential to destroy the long range magnetic order and its associated long wavelength excitations. Consequently, the SW at $E_Z$

![FIG. 3 (color online). Temperature dependence measurements at various filling factors of low-lying modes. The continuum (black lines) melts at elevated temperature. The SW (red lines) reemerges at elevated temperature for ν ≈ 8/3 ($B_T = 6.0$ T) and 5/2 ($B_T = 6.42$ T; in the red spectrum at 2 K, there is a glitch at $E_Z$ not visible on the scale shown). The dashed line in the lower left panel is a guide to the eye.](image1)

![FIG. 4 (color online). RRS resonance profiles for ν = 3.01, 2.9, 2.66, and 2.49. No resonance enhancement is seen for the ferromagnetic state at ν = 3. At ν = 2.9, some structure in the resonance profile develops. At ν = 2.66 and ν = 2.49, a resonance is seen at $E_{1/2}$. Black dashed lines represent optical emission, while colored peaks represent elastically scattered light intensity. Diamonds (stars) represent the spectra in which the SW (continuum) has a maximum resonance.](image2)
FIG. 5 (color online). Temperature dependence of the RRS profile for $\nu \sim 5/2$. Optical emission spectra (continuous lines) along with the laser peak heights (scatter plots) of RRS intensity are displayed. A peak in the resonance enhancement of the elastically scattered light coincides with the maximum intensity of the continuum and is attenuated at elevated temperatures. The inset shows the relationship between $I_{\text{RILS}}$ and temperature. The solid line is a fit to the data using the Langmuir isotherm [24].

A possible mechanism for the formation of continua of spin excitations as reported here could be similar to that of spin-flip excitations in the $N = 0$ LL [23], whose spectral weight below $E_g$ emerges if the CF Fermi energy is greater than the CF spin reversal gap energy.

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Our work suggests that unpolarized, together with polarized, domains may be a general feature of the quantum fluids in the 2nd LL (including at $\nu = 5/2$)—continua being linked to partially polarized or unpolarized domains. A possible mechanism for the formation of continua of spin excitations reported here could be similar to that observed in spin-flip excitations in the $N = 0$ LL [23], whose spectral weight below $E_g$ emerges if the CF Fermi energy is greater than the CF spin reversal gap energy.

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