

Topological Superconductivity

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(Dated: April 10, 2022)

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I. INTRODUCTION

One of the earliest breakthroughs allowed by quantum mechanics is the description of metals and insulators with band theory [2] which saw light in 1930. This theory brought a microscopic understanding of the distinction between these two classes of materials and led to incredible technological advances such as the discovery of the transistor by John Bardeen and Walter Brattain in 1947 [3]. Beyond its incredible success, band theory rapidly came in contact with a myriad of intriguing quantum mechanical effects such as the integer quantum Hall effect discovered in 1980 [4]. In 1982, Thouless et al. [5] figured out the topological nature of the effect and, in term, brought topology closer to band theory. Although the integer quantum Hall effect (QH) requires a strong external

magnetic field, it was theorised in 2005 by Charles Kane and Eugene Mele [6] that similar topological properties could be intrinsically realised through the quantum spin Hall effect (QSH) [1]. Experiment then showed in 2007 [7] that HgTe/CdTe quantum wells (mercury telluride heterostructure) could produce a QSH effect. The theory and experiment of QSH effect led to a deeper classification of solids with topological band theory [8]. When applied to insulators, the upgraded band theory creates a separation between the trivial and the *topological insulators* (TI). The latter is generally characterised by a metallic boundary and an insulating bulk [9] as opposed to trivial insulators which are insulating everywhere. The present review will focus on basic properties of time reversal symmetric topological insulators based on the mercury telluride example. Sec.II presents an overview of important ideas from topological band theory. In sec.III, the main properties of the QSH state are given and compared to the QH effect. Finally, a model of HgTe/CdTe quantum is studied in sec. IV.

II. ELEMENT OF TOPOLOGICAL BAND THEORY

This sections aims to describe the notion of topological invariant and its consequence on the band structure.

A. Topological equivalence of insulators

In a periodic lattice potential, electrons are described by Bloch states $|n, \mathbf{k}\rangle$ where n is a discrete quantum number and \mathbf{k} is the crystal momentum in the Brillouin zone [10]. Each of those states is associated to an energy $E_{n, \mathbf{k}}$. As it varies with \mathbf{k} , the energy sweeps a continuous range called a band labeled with the number n . Bands are often separated by energy gaps where there are no associated states. Trivial insulators have a gapped ground state meaning that low energy excitations are forbidden by the presence of the gap. On the contrary, topological insulators have metallic (gapless edge states)[11] and different from trivial insulators in a fundamental way.

Small modifications of the Hamiltonian of a trivial insulator will change its band structure while leaving it in its ground state. The *deformation* is said to yield equivalent insulators if the gap doesn't close [11]. This equivalence is topological in the same way the continuous deformation from a torus to a coffee mug is. Just like the coffee mug cannot be continuously deformed into a sphere, a trivial insulator cannot be continuously

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disformed into a topological insulator.

For the coffee mug and the sphere, a single number tells if there is topological equivalence or not. This number is called the genus (the number of holes) and it as analogues for topological insulators [12]. The central property of genus is that it only changes when the torus is broken into a sphere in a necessarily discontinuous way. Therefore, the genus is a topological invariant for the sphere and torus. For the QH effect the topological invariant indicating the persistence of the edge states upon deforming the Hamiltonian is the Chern number. For the QSH effect, the \mathbb{Z}_2 invariant is involved [11]. In the following section, the link between time reversal symmetry and this last invariant is detailed. Mixing symmetry, topological invariants and dimensionality allows for a classification of topological insulators [13].

B. Time reversal symmetry

Time reversal symmetry (TRS) plays an important role in QSH topological insulators: it protects the gapless edge states [11]. While the QH effect requires a magnetic field to occur (breaking of TRS), the QSH effect doesn't and it preserves TRS[5].

C. \mathbb{Z}_2 invariant

III. HALL EFFECTS

One of the defining properties of topological insulators is the presence of conducting edge states with an insulating bulk. The example considered here in sec. IV is a two dimensional material and its edge is therefore one-dimensionnal. The QH and QSH effects both involve one-dimensionnal conduction. In one dimension, electrons can either move forward or backward on the edge of the sample and this restriction is central for Hall effects. [1].

A. QH

B. QSH

IV. HGTE/CDTE HETEROSTRUCTURE

The first observed topological insulator is a mercury telluride heterostructure consisting of a stacking of thin HgTe layers between $\text{Hg}_x\text{Cd}_{1-x}\text{Te}$ [14]. If the thickness of the HgTe layers is right, a spin Hall effect arises. To model this system, the

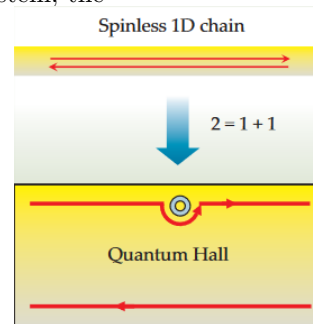


FIG. 1. Schematic representation of the conduction channels in a spinless quantum Hall system.[1]

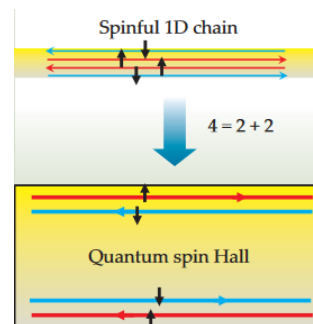


FIG. 2. Schematic representation of the conduction channels in a spinful quantum Hall system.

V. CONCLUSION

1. Opening on other topological systems (topological Superconductivity and charge pumps)

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