

How to Solve the Stochastic Six Vertex Model

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Introduction

These are lecture notes for **PANEM-2023** at Texas A&M on the integrability and asymptotics of the stochastic six vertex model.

1 Lecture I. Six vertex model through different lenses

In the first lecture, we describe the stochastic six vertex model from two diverse perspectives — as a model of statistical mechanics, and as a stochastic particle system.

1.1 Gibbs measures and the six vertex model

1.1.1 Finite-volume Gibbs measures

We begin with describing the useful framework of *Gibbs measures*. For simplicity, we work on the two-dimensional lattice \mathbb{Z}^2 . Let $\Lambda \subset \mathbb{Z}^2$ be a finite subset (for example, a rectangle). We are interested in *spin configurations* inside Λ which are encoded as $\omega = \{\sigma_e : e \text{ is an edge in } \Lambda\}$, where $\sigma_e \in \{0, 1\}$. By an “edge in Λ ” we mean that both endpoints of this edge must be inside Λ . Each spin configuration is equipped with boundary conditions, which are fixed spins on all the boundary edges of Λ (an edge is called boundary if it connects Λ to $\mathbb{Z}^2 \setminus \Lambda$).

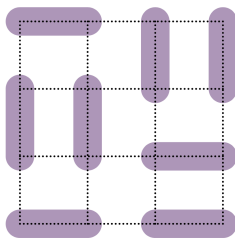
With each spin configuration ω , we associate its energy $H(\omega) \in \mathbb{R}$. This energy may depend on global parameters (e.g., inverse temperature) and local parameters (e.g., edge capacities or vertex rapidities). If a particular spin configuration ω is forbidden, we have $H(\omega) = +\infty$.

Definition 1.1. A (finite-volume) *Gibbs measure* in Λ with fixed boundary conditions and the energy function $H(\cdot)$ is the probability distribution on spin configurations whose probability weights have the form

$$\text{Prob}(\omega) = \frac{1}{Z} \exp \{-H(\omega)\}.$$

Here Z is the *partition function*, which is simply the probability normalizing constant.

Example 1.2 (Domino tilings on the square grid). A *perfect matching* on Λ is any subset M of its edges such that every vertex is covered by exactly one edge from M . For example, here is a perfect matching on the four by four rectangle:

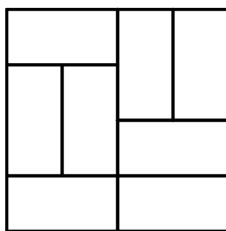


If the set of allowed spin configurations is the set of perfect matchings (with $\sigma_e = 1$ if the edge is included in the matching, and $\sigma_e = 0$ otherwise), and

$$H(\omega) = \begin{cases} 0, & \omega \text{ is a perfect matching;} \\ +\infty, & \omega \text{ is not a perfect matching,} \end{cases}$$

then the corresponding Gibbs measure is the uniform distribution on the space of *domino tilings*. That is, we identify each covered edge with a 2×1 domino. The domino tiling corresponding to

the above perfect matching is



Exercise 1.1. Compute the number of domino tilings of the thin rectangles

- (a) $2 \times n$;
- (b) $3 \times (2n)$.

Computing partition functions of various Gibbs measures may be challenging. For example, the number of domino tilings of the 8×8 chessboard is 12,988,816, but its theoretical computation (not via a computer program) requires several nontrivial steps [Kas61], [TF61].

Parameter-dependent partition functions represent many important quantities across all of mathematics, including various families of symmetric functions (such as Schur or Hall-Littlewood functions), and related objects.

1.1.2 Infinite-volume Gibbs measures

Besides Gibbs measures on configurations on a finite space as in Definition 1.1 with fixed boundary conditions (“boxed distributions”), we are interested in *infinite-volume* Gibbs measures.

Definition 1.3. A probability measure on spin configurations on an infinite subset $\Lambda_\infty \subseteq \mathbb{Z}^2$ (we will mainly consider the whole plane and the quarter plane $\mathbb{Z}_{\geq 0}^2$) is called (infinite-volume) Gibbs if for any finite $\Lambda \subset \Lambda_\infty$, the configuration inside Λ conditioned on the configuration in $\Lambda_\infty \setminus \Lambda$ is a finite-volume Gibbs measure in the sense of Definition 1.1 (with boundary conditions imposed by the outside configuration in $\Lambda_\infty \setminus \Lambda$).

Out of all possible infinite-volume Gibbs measures, we are interested in measures with special properties, such as translation invariant and/or ergodic. A Gibbs measure on \mathbb{Z}^2 is called *translation invariant* if its distribution does not change under arbitrary space translations. A Gibbs measure is called *ergodic* (equivalently, *extremal*) if it cannot be represented as a convex combination of two other such measures. Gibbs measures which are translation invariant and ergodic (within the class of translation invariant measures) are called *pure states*.

Classifying pure states for a given energy function $H(\cdot)$ is a very nontrivial problem, and an explicit answer is rarely available. For the general six vertex model (defined in Section 1.1.3 below), the answer is only conjectural [Res10].

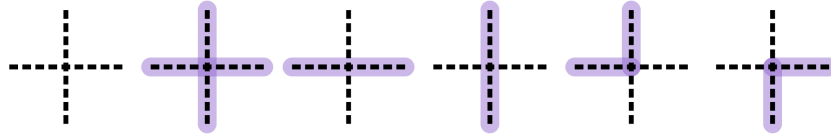
On the other hand, pure states of the six vertex model under a special *free fermion condition* (which includes the domino model from Example 1.2) admit a very explicit description through determinantal point processes (i.e., all correlation functions of these measures are diagonal minors of an explicit function in two variables), which follows from [She05], [KOS06]. One of the goals of these lecture notes is to discuss the tools and results one would require to extend this classification beyond the free fermion case.

Remark 1.4. Certain families of non translation invariant infinite-volume Gibbs measures (under the free fermion condition) power the classification of irreducible representations of infinite-dimensional unitary group and other classical groups [Voi76], [VK82], [BO12], [Pet14]. This subject is closely related to symmetric functions arising as partition functions of Gibbs measures with varying parameters (rapidities) along one of the lattice coordinate direction which we discuss in the second lecture (Section 2). There is also a direct link between these Gibbs measures and totally nonnegative triangular or full Toeplitz matrices for characters of the infinite symmetric group or, respectively, the infinite-dimensional unitary group, see [AESW51], [Edr53], [Boy83].

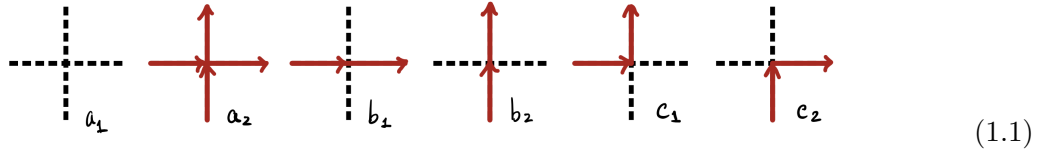
1.1.3 Six vertex model

The most general Gibbs property we consider in these notes is that of the *asymmetric six vertex model*. The six vertex model was introduced by Pauling to model the residual entropy of ice [Pau35] (see also [ASLW⁺15] for recent experiments with square ice between two graphene sheets, and Remark 1.5 below for an exact connection). The model has received a lot of attention since the seminal Bethe Ansatz solutions obtained in the 1960's in [Lie67], [YY66]. We refer to the book [Bax07] for an introduction, and also to [Res10] for a more recent survey of the model.

Under the asymmetric six vertex model, the allowed spin configurations on the two-dimensional lattice are such that locally around each vertex there can be one of the following six configurations:



Viewing the edges with spin $\sigma_e = 1$ as parts of up-right paths, we can think of six vertex model configurations as up-right path configurations on the lattice, where paths are allowed to touch at a vertex. We denote the six vertex types by $a_1, a_2, b_1, b_2, c_1, c_2$:



See Figure 1, right, for an example of a global configuration of up-right paths in a rectangle.

Abusing the notation, we also think of $a_1, a_2, b_1, b_2, c_1, c_2 \geq 0$ as the Gibbs weights e^{-H} assigned to each local vertex. That is, the six vertex model Gibbs measure in a rectangle Λ with given boundary conditions (that is, with prescribed spin configurations at all edges connecting Λ to $\mathbb{Z}^2 \setminus \Lambda$) has probability weights

$$\text{Prob}(\omega) = \frac{a_1^{\#\{a_1 \text{ vertices}\}} a_2^{\#\{a_2 \text{ vertices}\}} b_1^{\#\{b_1 \text{ vertices}\}} b_2^{\#\{b_2 \text{ vertices}\}} c_1^{\#\{c_1 \text{ vertices}\}} c_2^{\#\{c_2 \text{ vertices}\}}}{Z(a_1, a_2, b_1, b_2, c_1, c_2)}.$$

Here $\#\{a_1 \text{ vertices}\}$ is the number of vertices of type a_1 in the configuration ω , and so on.

Remark 1.5 (Connection to square ice). In the square ice, the oxygen atoms should form a perfect square grid, and each edge contains a hydrogen atom. The hydrogen atom on an edge is connected to one of the adjacent oxygens by the chemical bond, and to another oxygen by a weaker hydrogen bond. This allows to distinguish two types of edges, and assign “spins” 0 and 1 to them. Since each oxygen must have exactly two hydrogen atoms attached to it by chemical bonds, we get six possible local configurations around a vertex. See Figure 1 for an illustration.

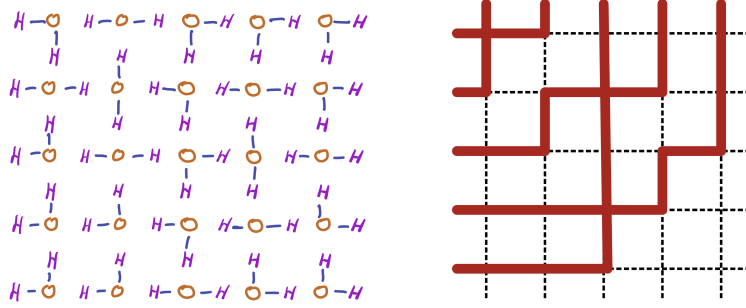


Figure 1: Left: a configuration of the square ice. Right: the corresponding configuration of the six vertex model in the square grid.

The quantity

$$\Delta := \frac{a_1 a_2 + b_1 b_2 - c_1 c_2}{2\sqrt{a_1 a_2 b_1 b_2}} \quad (1.2)$$

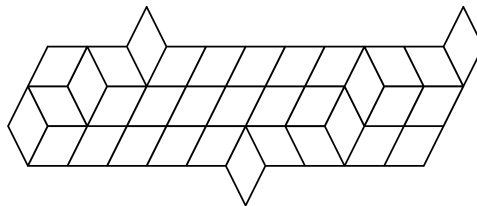
plays an important role in the (mostly conjectural) description of pure phases of the asymmetric six vertex model. Depending on Δ , there are several regimes of the model:

- Ferroelectric: $\Delta > 1$;
- Anti-ferroelectric: $\Delta < 1$;
- Disordered: $-1 < \Delta < 1$;
- Free fermion point: $\Delta = 0$.

Example 1.6 (Free fermion specializations). Specializing the weights $a_1, a_2, b_1, b_2, c_1, c_2$ in two different free fermion ways, we obtain the following particular cases:

- If $a_1 = a_2 = b_1 = b_2 = 1$ and $c_1 = c_2 = \sqrt{2}$, one can map six vertex configurations into domino tilings from Example 1.2. This map is not a bijection between configurations, but instead it splits a c -type vertex into two equivalent local configurations of the domino tilings, while preserving the configuration weights. This idea goes back to [EKLP92], see also [ZJ00], [FS06]. A multiparameter generalization of the domino tiling model coming from the free fermion six vertex model was considered in [ABPW21], see also [Nap23].
- When $a_2 = 0$ and $a_1 = b_1 = b_2 = c_1 = c_2 = 1$, we forbid the intersection of paths. This model can be bijectively mapped into a model of *lozenge tilings* (e.g., see [Gor21] for the definition),

with configurations like



Exercise 1.2. (a) Work out the details of the mapping from the free fermion six vertex model with $a_2 = 0$ and $a_1 = b_1 = b_2 = c_1 = c_2 = 1$ to lozenge tilings. What happens to the boundary conditions?

(b) If we set $b_1 = c_1 = u_x v_y$, where (x, y) are the lattice coordinates of a vertex, then six vertex configurations start depending on the parameters u_i, v_j (which we assume to be generic complex numbers). How do these weights translate into the lozenge tiling picture?

In the next Section 1.2 we consider another important particular case — the *stochastic six vertex model*, which is no longer free fermion.

Remark 1.7 (Alternating sign matrices). There are other very interesting specializations of the six vertex model which are not stochastic nor free fermion. Let us only mention that when $a_1 = a_2 = b_1 = b_2 = c_1 = c_2 = 1$ (so $\Delta = 1/2$, which is in the disordered regime), the six vertex Gibbs property becomes uniform (on configurations of up-right paths which are allowed to touch at a vertex). There is a bijection from six vertex configurations to *alternating sign matrices*. This bijection allowed to compute the number of alternating sign matrices from a partition functions of the six vertex model. We refer to [Kup96] and [Pro01] for details.

1.2 Stochastic six vertex model and its particle system limits

1.2.1 Stochastic six vertex model

Sampling six vertex configurations by Glauber dynamics (which proceeds by random local flips) can be exponentially slow under some conditions on the parameters [FR19]. Here we consider a case of parameters under which the sampling (in the case when the top and the right boundaries are “free”) can instead be done by running a Markov chain just once.

Definition 1.8. The six vertex model with parameters $a_1, a_2, b_1, b_2, c_1, c_2$ (1.1) is called *stochastic* if

$$a_1 = a_2 = 1, \quad b_1 + c_1 = b_2 + c_2 = 1, \quad b_1, b_2 \in [0, 1]. \quad (1.3)$$

The stochastic six vertex model depends on the two remaining parameters (b_1, b_2) .

Let us explain how conditions (1.3) simplify the sampling of the model. Take a finite rectangle $\Lambda \subset \mathbb{Z}^2$, and equip it with *free outgoing boundary conditions*, for which the locations of outgoing paths on the right and the top boundaries of the rectangle are not specified. Due to the stochasticity condition (1.3), the partition function of the stochastic six vertex Gibbs measure in Λ with these boundary conditions is simply equal to 1.

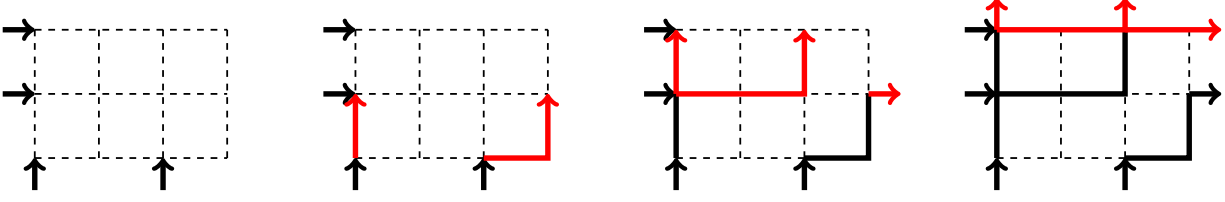


Figure 2: Sampling the configuration of the stochastic six vertex model in a rectangle Λ with free outgoing boundary conditions by the row-to-row Markov chain. At each step, we perform the sequential update (from left to right) in a single row using the incoming paths from the left and from the row below. For example, after one step the probability of getting the displayed configuration is equal to $b_2 c_2 c_1$.

The stochastic six vertex configuration in Λ can be sampled by running a row-to-row Markov chain based on the vertex weights, see Figure 2 for an illustration.

The stochastic six vertex model was introduced in [GS92]. The stochastic specialization of the parameters allows to study this particular case of the six vertex model using the toolbox from stochastic interacting particle systems [Lig05], by treating the vertical direction as time. In Sections 1.2.3 and 1.2.4 below we consider two limits of the stochastic six vertex model to more familiar continuous time interacting particle systems.

1.2.2 Limit shape

We are now in a position to formulate the limit shape result for the stochastic six vertex model whose proof will be given in Section 3 in the last lecture. This limit shape result was first proven in [BCG16] by adapting the techniques from the ASEP (Asymmetric Simple Exclusion Process) pioneered in [TW08], [TW09]. Our goal in these lecture notes is to present another proof which highlights the use of several other integrability techniques, most importantly, the Yang–Baxter equation and symmetric functions (discussed in the second lecture, Section 2).

Consider the stochastic six vertex model in the quadrant $\mathbb{Z}_{\geq 0}^2$ with the *infinite domain wall* boundary conditions. That is, there are incoming arrows at each edge along the left boundary of the quadrant, and no incoming arrows at the bottom boundary.

The stochastic six vertex model in this infinite domain can be sampled by running a Markov chain as in Figure 2. See Figure 4, right, for an example of a configuration.

Define the height function of the vertex model at the discrete level by

$$H(x, y) := \#\{\text{up-right paths to the right of the point } (x, y)\}, \quad (x, y) \in \mathbb{Z}_{\geq 0}^2. \quad (1.4)$$

See Figure 3 for an example.

Let $b_1 > b_2$ and

$$u := \frac{1 - b_1}{1 - b_2}. \quad (1.5)$$

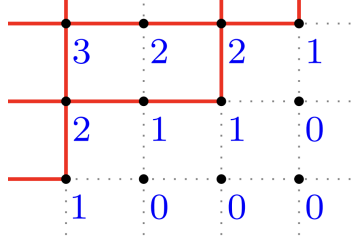


Figure 3: Height function of the stochastic six vertex model with infinite domain wall boundary conditions.

Define the following function on $\mathbb{R}_{\geq 0}^2$:

$$\mathfrak{h}(x, y) := \begin{cases} y - x, & \text{if } \frac{y}{x} > \frac{1}{u}; \\ \frac{(\sqrt{y} - \sqrt{ux})^2}{1 - u}, & \text{if } u < \frac{y}{x} < \frac{1}{u}; \\ 0, & \text{if } \frac{y}{x} < u. \end{cases} \quad (1.6)$$

Theorem 1.9 (Limit shape of the stochastic six vertex model [BCG16]). *We have convergence in probability for any $(x, y) \in \mathbb{R}_{\geq 0}^2$:*

$$\lim_{\varepsilon \rightarrow 0} \varepsilon H([\varepsilon^{-1}x], [\varepsilon^{-1}y]) = \mathfrak{h}(x, y),$$

where the limiting height function \mathfrak{h} is given by (1.6).

The condition $b_1 > b_2$ in Theorem 1.9 is important, as for $b_1 \leq b_2$ the up-right paths will not travel macroscopically far to the right, and the limit shape function is simply $y - x$ when $y > x$. In the symmetric case $b_1 = b_2$, there should be a limit shape result on the scale $\varepsilon^{-1/2}$ instead of ε^{-1} (for example, see [IMS21] and references therein to related work).

Remark 1.10. Along with Theorem 1.9, we will show that the fluctuations of the height function H around its limit \mathfrak{h} have order $\varepsilon^{-1/3}$, and are given by the GUE Tracy–Widom distribution F_2 . This was also obtained in [BCG16]. The GUE Tracy–Widom fluctuations were first observed in random matrix theory [For93], [TW94]. For the stochastic six vertex model, these fluctuations manifest the fact that the model belongs to the *KPZ universality class* named after the seminal work of Kardar–Parisi–Zhang [KPZ86]. See, for example, [Cor12] for a survey on KPZ universality.

1.2.3 Diagonal limit to ASEP

Let us take the limit of the stochastic six vertex model with the infinite domain wall boundary condition as $b_1, b_2 \rightarrow 0$, but their ratio $b_2/b_1 = q$ stays fixed. When $b_1 = b_2 = 0$, each up-right path performs a deterministic staircase motion. However, in the limit as $b_1, b_2 \rightarrow 0$, as we take a large domain of the size proportional to b_2^{-1} , the staircases will occasionally move “up” or “down”. More precisely, let us view the diagonal direction as the new time axis:

Then, in the Poisson type scaling limit when the discrete diagonal time becomes continuous, the staircases may be mapped to interacting particles on the line:

The motion of the particles is as follows. In continuous time, each particle has two independent exponential clocks with rates 1 and q . Clocks of different particles are independent from each other. By “exponential clocks of rate λ ” we mean a clocks which rings after an exponential random time T with $\text{Prob}(T > s) = e^{-\lambda s}$. Due to the memorylessness of the exponential distribution, the ringing of one clock does not affect all other clocks. When a clock of rate q or 1 at a particle rings, it jumps left or right by one, respectively, under the condition that the destination is not occupied. If the destination is occupied, the jump is suppressed.

This particle system (Markov process on particle configurations on \mathbb{Z}) is called the Asymmetric Simple Exclusion Process, or *ASEP*, for short. It was introduced over 50 years ago in biology [MGP68], [MG69] and probability [Spi70].

In our limit from the stochastic six vertex model, the initial condition for ASEP is the *step initial condition*, under which all negative sites of \mathbb{Z} are occupied. However, ASEP can start from an arbitrary particle configuration on \mathbb{Z} , and the existence of the process can be established using Harris’ graphical construction [Har78]. In the particular case $q = 0$, ASEP turns into TASEP (Totally Asymmetric Simple Exclusion Process), in which particles jump only to the right.

1.2.4 Hall-Littlewood PushTASEP limit

[Spi70], [DLSS91], [DW08], [BF08]
[BBW16], [Gho17]

1.3 Gibbs properties of the stochastic six vertex model

Amol’s lemma

1.4 Basic coupling and colored (multispecies) models

??? did not explain in the lecture

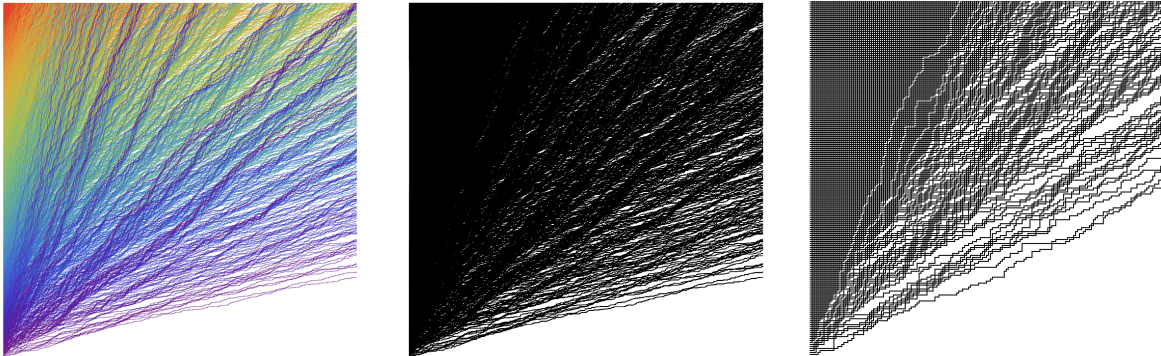


Figure 4: Colored stochastic six vertex model, its monochrome version, and a smaller simulation of the monochrome six vertex model.

1.5 Stationary distributions and hydrodynamics

This should be fine, but maybe not too short

Bernoulli is Stationary; also for all the limits we had.

1.6 Limit shape and fluctuation problem

2 Lecture II. Integrability

3 Lecture III. Asymptotics

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