The measurement of the Hubble Constant: beyond the cosmic ladder

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A precisely determined Hubble's constant H_0 would have an overarching effect on any feature of cosmological theory: the age or critical density of the Universe, or with the formation of cosmic structure. Producing a conclusive value for H_0 is difficult as absolute distances on the cosmic scale are difficult to measure. Inhomogeneous gravitational acceleration generates motion which does not follow the simple expansion as described by Hubble's Law $v = H_0 d$. An uncertainty arises due to the discrepancy between the methods to connect local distances to the smooth large-scale Hubble flow (Fukugita et al. 1993).

Several approaches for cosmic distance measurement should therefore be used to reduce systematic errors. These measurements can form the "rungs" of a *cosmic distance ladder*, where large extragalactic distances (> 1000 Mpc) are informed and calibrated by techniques which have smaller ranges (Carroll and Ostlie 2007). Astronomers may employ a variety of methods in tandem, therefore the ladder could instead be expressed as several pathways (Figure 1).

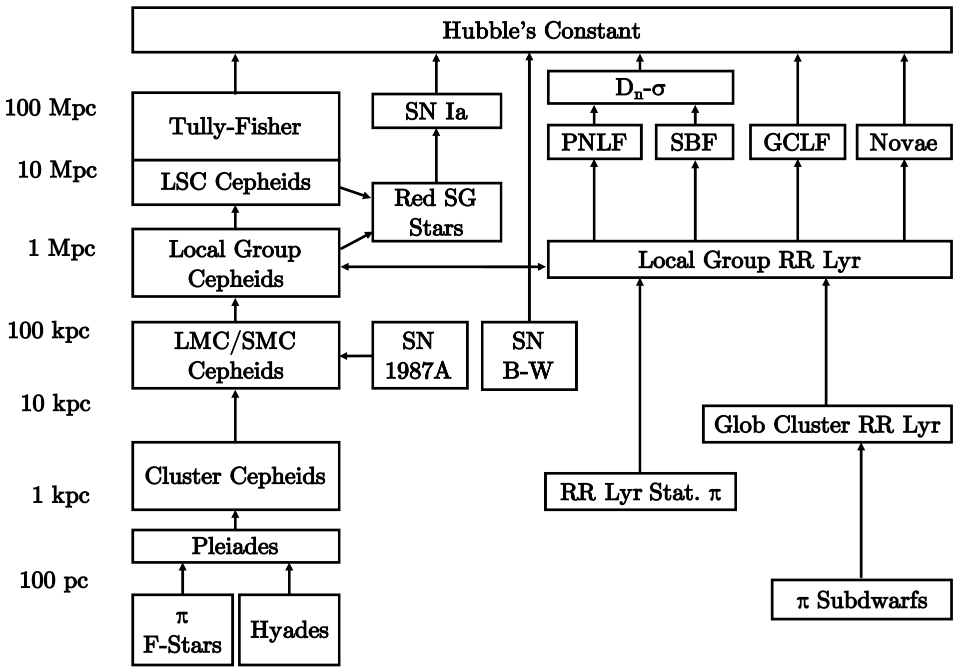

Figure 1: Adapted from Jacoby et al. (1992), this diagram illustrates the various approaches to calculate H_0, each technique is roughly placed at the approximate range it operates at. One can see that there is not one strict "cosmic ladder", rather multiple pathways. For reference, the acronyms used are: B-W - Baade-Wessenlink; GCLF - Globular-Cluster Luminosity Function; LSC - Local Super Cluster; PNLF - Planetary Nebula Luminosity Function; SBF - Surface-Brightness Fluctuations; SG - Super Giant; SN - Supernovae; π - parallax.

The Hubble Space Telescope (HST) H_0 Key Project was an effort in the early 2000s to determine H_0 by calculating distances to Cepheid variables in local galaxies ($\leq$ 20

Mpc) then applying them as a calibration to 5 secondary independent distance indicators. Described by Freedman et al. (2001), four of the methods (Type Ia supernovae, Tully-Fisher relation, surface-brightness fluctuations, and Type II supernovae) were able to produce $70 \leq H_0 \leq 72$ kms^{-1} Mpc^{-1} and the remaining technique (fundamental plane for elliptical galaxies) $H_0 \approx 82$ kms^{-1} Mpc^{-1}. Over the next decade, the methodology would be refined and the sample of Cepheids and Type Ia supernovae improved (better observations and other data types) $H_0 = 73.48 \pm 1.66$ kms^{-1} Mpc^{-1} (Riess et al. 2018, 2011, 2016). These results set a standard benchmark for H_0, they were found by taking steps along the cosmic ladder and whilst they have high accuracy, it would be beneficial to directly calculate H_0 at large distances without the need for Cepheid-based calibration.

One alternative is measuring Cosmic Microwave Background (CMB) anisotropies. Through analysing all-sky temperature and polarisation maps, ΛCDM cosmology models can be fitted which constrain cosmological parameters. Surveys of the CMB have included those performed by the spacecraft COBE, WMAP, and more recently, Planck. The results of the latter include $H_0 = 67.5 \pm 0.5$ kms^{-1} Mpc^{-1} (Planck Collaboration et al. 2018), this is of particular importance as it is discrepant when compared to the most recent HST-based result (Riess et al. 2018). Investigations of potential systematics in either methods have concluded that some arise due to the modelling of the Cepheids (Follin and Knox 2018) and residual systematics from certain spectra used in the Planck likelihood calculation (Spergel et al. 2015). However the tension between the H_0 values still exists, therefore it would be beneficial to explore other methods for calculating the constant, especially those which are able to function immediately at large cosmic distances.

Still considering the CMB, the Sunyaev-Zel'dovich effect (SZE) leads to a change in the apparent brightness of the CMB towards a cluster of galaxies or for any reservoir of hot plasma (Birkinshaw 1999, Carlstrom et al. 2002). Combined with X-ray emission from intracluster gas, the SZE can be used as a tracer for cosmological parameters. Birkinshaw (1999) describes the technique to be a comparison of the angular size of a galaxy cluster with a measure of the line-of-sight size of the cluster. With spectra data at hand, the emission of gas in a galaxy cluster can be described by the X-ray surface brightness, and the gas absorption by the measurement of the thermal SZE (an intensity change). The surface brightness and intensity change can be re-expressed in terms of physical constants and angular structure factors, this then leads to a single expression for calculating the angular diameter distance,

$$d_A = \left(\frac{N_{SZ}^2}{N_X}\right)\frac{\Lambda_{e0}}{4\pi(1+z)^3[I_0\Psi_0\sigma_T]^2}. \tag{1}$$

The full derivation and definitions for Equation 1 can be found in Holzapfel et al. (1997).

Employing this equation with values for cluster redshifts z and the deceleration parameter q_0, H_0 can be obtained in a direct and alternate way which is independent of the chain of distance estimators. The South Pole Telescope Sunyaev-Zel'dovich (SPT-SZ) survey was a programme which made use of the SZE to detect galaxy clusters (Chang et al. 2009). Multiple analyses have been performed to constrain cosmological parameters using the resulting SPT-SZ datasets, the majority of which tested variations of the ΛCDM model (de Haan et al. 2016, Hou et al. 2014). Hou et al. (2014) examined models which were constrained single or double parameters, for example constraining neutrino mass. They combined external data sets (WMAP7, BAOs and previous calibrations for H_0) with their SPT-SZ data and they were able to achieve $H_0 = 68.3 \pm 1.0$ kms^{-1} Mpc^{-1} which agrees with HST and Planck results, therefore showing the validity of the method.

The CMB can therefore be utilised in a variety of ways for the calculation of H_0. In a similar vein, the effects of the gravity can be explored and employed as a method for measuring Hubble's constant without the need for the cosmic ladder. The manifestation of which is in the form of gravitational lensing and gravitational waves.

Optical observations of the night sky may sometimes reveal multiple arcs of light surrounding a central object, this effect is more commonly known as *gravitational lensing.* It occurs when light travelling towards us from a distant bright object, for example a quasar, is curved by the space-time of a much massive object, say a galaxy cluster or hypothetical MACHOs, in the foreground which acts as a lens and produces the arcs of light (Carroll and Ostlie 2007). If the initial source, such as an active galactic nucleus or a supernovae, varies in luminosity then this variability can be viewed from the aberrations albeit with a time delay as a result of the different light paths (Suyu 2017). This time delay can be related to the distribution of the lens mass and the "time-delay distance" $D_{\Delta t}$, where the latter is multiplicative combination of three angular diameter distances: observer-source distance D_s, observer-lens distance D_d, and lens-source distance D_{ds} (Shajib et al. 2018, Suyu 2017). The application to cosmology arises as $D_{\Delta t}$ is inversely proportional to H_0 plus weakly dependent on other cosmological constants.

The gravitational lensing method is consequently quite powerful as it is independent of any standard candle and works at truly cosmic distances.

In conclusion, this discussion has explored a variety of methods which can be employed to measure and calculate Hubble's constant H_0 without the need to climb the cosmic ladder. From Cosmic Microwave Background based methods to those employing the effects of gravity, one can successfully calculate and measure H_0 without the "traditional" standard candle techniques. These promising alternatives still require research, but no doubt as more observations are made, the accuracy and precision of H_0 will surely improve.

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