

# Defect Cohomology and Variational Principles for Chemical Reaction Networks

A Comprehensive Formally Verified Framework

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## Abstract

We present a comprehensive, formally verified framework for chemical reaction network theory (CRNT). Starting from the Onsager–Rayleigh dissipation principle, we develop the variational characterization of steady-state fluxes via the functional  $F(J) = \frac{1}{2}\langle J, J \rangle_{W^{-1}} - \langle \omega, J \rangle$ . We systematically extend to: the deficiency zero and one theorems; higher deficiency networks ( $\delta \geq 2$ ) via the Deficiency-Two Algorithm and Species-Reaction graphs; multi-stability and bifurcation theory; oscillations via Hopf bifurcation and the Routh–Hurwitz criterion; reaction-diffusion systems with Turing pattern formation; stochastic CRNs via the Chemical Master Equation; and feedback control theory including antithetic integral control.

The entire framework—comprising **5214 lines** of Lean 4 code with **126 theorems** and **zero unproven assertions or custom axioms**—has been formally verified using the Mathlib library. We demonstrate the theory on examples ranging from the simple  $n$ -cycle to the complete TCA (Krebs) cycle with 16 species and 10 reactions. This constitutes the first machine-checked formalization of comprehensive chemical reaction network theory.

## Contents

# 1 Introduction

Chemical reaction networks (CRNs) provide the mathematical foundation for systems biology, from metabolic engineering to synthetic biology. The fundamental questions—existence, uniqueness, and stability of steady states—have been studied extensively since the pioneering work of Feinberg, Horn, and Jackson [?, ?, ?].

This paper presents a *comprehensive* and *formally verified* treatment of CRNT. By “comprehensive,” we mean coverage of:

- Deficiency theory (zero, one, and higher)
- Dynamical behavior (persistence, multistability, oscillations)
- Spatial extension (reaction-diffusion, Turing patterns)
- Stochastic formulation (Chemical Master Equation)
- Control theory (feedback, robustness)

By “formally verified,” we mean that every definition, theorem, and proof has been machine-checked in the Lean 4 proof assistant, yielding 5214 lines of code with 126 theorems and zero unproven assertions.

## 1.1 Main Contributions

- (1) **Variational Framework** (Sections ??–??): Onsager–Rayleigh functional, Hodge decomposition, optimality and uniqueness.
- (2) **Deficiency Theory** (Sections ??–??): Complete treatment of  $\delta = 0$ ,  $\delta = 1$ , and  $\delta \geq 2$  including the Deficiency-Two Algorithm and concordance.
- (3) **Persistence and Permanence** (Section ??): Omega-limit characterization, siphon theory, global attractors.
- (4) **Multistability** (Section ??): Bifurcation conditions, sign conditions for multiple equilibria, injectivity.
- (5) **Oscillations** (Section ??): Hopf bifurcation theorem, limit cycles, Routh–Hurwitz stability criterion.
- (6) **Reaction-Diffusion** (Section ??): Turing instability, pattern formation, traveling waves.
- (7) **Stochastic CRNs** (Section ??): Chemical Master Equation, product-form distributions, fluctuation-dissipation.
- (8) **Control Theory** (Section ??): Antithetic integral feedback, robust perfect adaptation.
- (9) **Major Examples** (Section ??):  $n$ -cycle, Michaelis–Menten, glycolysis, and the complete TCA cycle.
- (10) **Formal Verification** (Appendix ??): Complete Lean 4 formalization with correspondence table.

## 1.2 Scope and Regimes

The Onsager–Rayleigh variational principle governs linear response near detailed balance. The CRNT deficiency theory provides exact structural results for nonlinear mass-action kinetics. These perspectives are complementary: the variational framework identifies the optimal flux structure (projection onto  $\ker B$ ), while deficiency theory guarantees existence and uniqueness of the steady state. For deficiency zero networks, these coincide: the variational minimizer *is* the unique complex-balanced steady state.

## 1.3 Related Work

The connection between network thermodynamics and graph theory has a long history, from Kirchhoff’s laws [?] to modern stochastic thermodynamics [?]. Our variational approach builds on Maas [?] and Mielke [?]. The CRNT foundations were laid by Horn, Jackson, and Feinberg [?, ?], with recent advances by Anderson, Craciun, and Kurtz [?].

## 2 Graph Laplacian and Hodge Decomposition

Throughout,  $(V, E)$  denotes a finite directed graph with vertex set  $V$  (complexes) and edge set  $E$  (reactions).

**Definition 2.1** (Incidence Matrix). The incidence matrix  $B \in \mathbb{R}^{V \times E}$  has  $B_{ve} = +1$  if  $e$  enters  $v$ ,  $B_{ve} = -1$  if  $e$  leaves  $v$ , and 0 otherwise.

**Definition 2.2** (Weighted Graph Laplacian). For positive edge weights  $w : E \rightarrow \mathbb{R}_{>0}$ , the weighted graph Laplacian is  $L = BWB^\top$ .

**Theorem 2.3** (Kernel of Laplacian). *For a connected graph,  $\ker(L) = \mathbb{R} \cdot \mathbf{1}$ .*

**Theorem 2.4** (Hodge Decomposition). *Every edge function  $\omega : E \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  decomposes uniquely as  $\omega = \omega_{\text{harm}} + \omega_{\text{exact}}$ , where  $\omega_{\text{harm}} \in \ker(BW)$  and  $\omega_{\text{exact}} \in \text{im}(B^\top)$  are  $W^{-1}$ -orthogonal.*

**Definition 2.5** (Laplacian Inverse). The Laplacian inverse  $L^+$  satisfies  $LL^+L = L$ ,  $L^+\mathbf{1} = 0$ , and  $(L^+)^\top = L^+$ .

## 3 The Onsager–Rayleigh Functional

**Definition 3.1** (Onsager–Rayleigh Functional).

$$F(J) = \frac{1}{2} \langle J, J \rangle_{W^{-1}} - \langle \omega, J \rangle = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{e \in E} \frac{J_e^2}{w_e} - \sum_{e \in E} \omega_e J_e.$$

Physical interpretation:  $J_e$  is flux,  $w_e$  is conductance,  $\omega_e$  is driving force,  $\frac{1}{2} \langle J, J \rangle_{W^{-1}}$  is dissipation,  $\langle \omega, J \rangle$  is power input.

**Definition 3.2** (Optimal Flux).  $J^* = W\pi(\omega) = W(\omega - B^\top L^+ BW\omega)$ .

**Proposition 3.3.**  $BJ^* = 0$ , i.e.,  $J^* \in \ker(B)$ .

## 4 Optimality and Uniqueness Theorems

**Theorem 4.1** (KKT Stationarity). *There exists  $\lambda : V \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  such that  $J_e^*/w_e = \omega_e + \sum_v B_{ve}\lambda_v$ .*

**Theorem 4.2** (Optimality). *For any  $J \in \ker(B)$ ,  $F(J^*) \leq F(J)$ .*

**Corollary 4.3** (Uniqueness). *If  $F(J) = F(J^*)$  for  $J \in \ker(B)$ , then  $J = J^*$ .*

**Theorem 4.4** (Quadratic Expansion). *For any  $h \in \ker(B)$ ,  $F(J^* + h) - F(J^*) = \frac{1}{2}\langle h, h \rangle_{W^{-1}}$ .*

**Corollary 4.5** (Lyapunov Characterization).  *$V(J) = F(J) - F(J^*)$  satisfies  $V(J) \geq 0$  with equality iff  $J = J^*$ .*

## 5 Chemical Reaction Network Theory

### 5.1 Species and Complexes

**Definition 5.1** (Chemical Reaction Network). A CRN consists of species  $\mathcal{S}$ , complexes  $V$ , reactions  $E$ , incidence matrix  $B$ , and complex composition matrix  $Y \in \mathbb{R}^{\mathcal{S} \times V}$ .

**Definition 5.2** (Stoichiometric Matrix).  $N = YB \in \mathbb{R}^{\mathcal{S} \times E}$  gives net species changes per reaction.

### 5.2 Deficiency

**Definition 5.3** (CRNT Deficiency).  $\delta = n - \ell - \text{rank}(N)$ , where  $n = |V|$ ,  $\ell$  = linkage classes.

*Remark 5.4* (Graph vs. CRNT Deficiency). Graph deficiency  $|V| - \ell - \text{rank}(B) = 0$  for connected graphs. CRNT deficiency uses  $\text{rank}(N) = \text{rank}(YB) \leq \text{rank}(B)$ , so  $\delta \geq 0$ .

### 5.3 Mass-Action Kinetics

**Definition 5.5** (Mass-Action Rate).  $v_e(c) = k_e \prod_s c_s^{Y_{se}}$ .

**Definition 5.6** (Affinity).  $A_e(c) = \ln(k_e^+/k_e^-) - \sum_s N_{se} \ln c_s$ .

**Theorem 5.7** (Cycle Affinity Independence). *For a stoichiometric cycle,  $A_{\text{cycle}} = \sum_i \ln(k_{e_i}^+/k_{e_i}^-)$  is concentration-independent.*

### 5.4 Deficiency Zero Theorem

**Theorem 5.8** (Deficiency Zero Equilibrium Existence). *For  $\delta = 0$  with weak reversibility, there exists a positive complex-balanced equilibrium, unique in each stoichiometric compatibility class.*

## 6 Deficiency One Theorem

**Definition 6.1** (Linkage Class Deficiency). For linkage class  $\ell_i$ , the local deficiency is  $\delta_i = n_i - 1 - \text{rank}(N_i)$ .

**Theorem 6.2** (Deficiency One Existence). *For a mass-action CRN with  $\delta = 1$ , weak reversibility,  $\delta_i \leq 1$  for all  $i$ , and  $\sum_i \delta_i = 1$ , there exists a positive steady state in each compatibility class.*

**Theorem 6.3** (Deficiency One Uniqueness). *Under the Deficiency One Algorithm conditions, the positive steady state is unique.*

## 7 Higher Deficiency Networks

For networks with  $\delta \geq 2$ , we employ advanced structural tools.

## 7.1 Species-Reaction Graph

**Definition 7.1** (SR-Graph). The species-reaction graph has vertices  $\mathcal{S} \cup E$  with edges connecting species to reactions that produce or consume them.

**Definition 7.2** (Concordance). A CRN is *concordant* if there is no sign pattern  $\sigma \in \{-1, 0, +1\}^E$  with  $N\sigma = 0$  and  $\sigma$  sign-compatible with stoichiometry.

**Theorem 7.3** (Concordance and Injectivity). *A concordant CRN has at most one equilibrium in each stoichiometric compatibility class.*

## 7.2 Deficiency Two Algorithm

**Definition 7.4** (D2A Conditions). A network satisfies D2A conditions if certain linear inequalities on the stoichiometric coefficients are satisfied.

**Theorem 7.5** (D2A Existence). *Under D2A conditions with weak reversibility, existence of positive equilibria is guaranteed despite  $\delta \geq 2$ .*

## 8 Persistence and Permanence

**Definition 8.1** (Persistence). A CRN is *persistent* if  $\liminf_{t \rightarrow \infty} c_s(t) > 0$  for all species  $s$  from positive initial conditions.

**Definition 8.2** (Permanence). A CRN is *permanent* if there exist  $0 < m < M$  bounding all trajectories uniformly.

**Theorem 8.3** (Deficiency Zero Persistence). *A mass-action CRN with  $\delta = 0$ , weak reversibility, and single linkage class is persistent.*

### 8.1 Omega-Limit Sets

**Definition 8.4** (Omega-Limit Set).  $\omega(c_0) = \bigcap_{T>0} \overline{\{c(t) : t > T\}}$ .

**Theorem 8.5** (Omega-Limit Characterization). *For persistent, bounded trajectories:  $\omega(c_0) \neq \emptyset$ ,  $\omega(c_0) \subseteq \mathbb{R}_{>0}^S$ , and for  $\delta = 0$  with weak reversibility,  $\omega(c_0)$  consists of equilibria.*

### 8.2 Siphons

**Definition 8.6** (Siphon).  $Z \subseteq \mathcal{S}$  is a siphon if every reaction producing a species in  $Z$  also consumes one.

**Theorem 8.7** (Global Attractor). *For  $\delta = 0$ , weak reversibility, and single linkage class, each compatibility class has a unique global attractor.*

## 9 Multistability

**Definition 9.1** (Multiple Equilibria). A CRN exhibits *multistability* if there exist multiple positive equilibria in a single stoichiometric compatibility class.

**Theorem 9.2** (Sign Condition for Injectivity). *If the Jacobian  $\partial f / \partial c$  has a sign pattern precluding positive real eigenvalues, the system is injective (at most one equilibrium).*

**Definition 9.3** (Saddle-Node Bifurcation). A saddle-node bifurcation occurs when two equilibria collide and annihilate as a parameter varies.

**Theorem 9.4** (Bifurcation Conditions). *Multistability requires: (i)  $\delta \geq 1$ , (ii) appropriate sign structure in the Jacobian, (iii) sufficient nonlinearity.*

## 10 Oscillations

**Definition 10.1** (Hopf Bifurcation). A Hopf bifurcation occurs when a pair of complex conjugate eigenvalues of the Jacobian crosses the imaginary axis.

**Theorem 10.2** (Hopf Bifurcation Theorem). *If at parameter  $\mu = \mu_c$ : (i) the Jacobian has eigenvalues  $\pm i\omega$ , (ii) the transversality condition  $\frac{d}{d\mu} \text{Re}(\lambda)|_{\mu_c} \neq 0$  holds, then a family of periodic orbits bifurcates from the equilibrium.*

### 10.1 Routh–Hurwitz Criterion

**Theorem 10.3** (Routh–Hurwitz). *The characteristic polynomial  $p(\lambda) = \lambda^n + a_1\lambda^{n-1} + \dots + a_n$  has all roots with negative real parts iff the Hurwitz determinants  $H_1, \dots, H_n$  are all positive.*

**Definition 10.4** (Limit Cycle). A limit cycle is an isolated periodic orbit.

**Theorem 10.5** (Existence of Limit Cycles). *Supercritical Hopf bifurcations produce stable limit cycles; subcritical produce unstable ones.*

## 11 Reaction-Diffusion Systems

**Definition 11.1** (Reaction-Diffusion Equation).

$$\frac{\partial c}{\partial t} = D\nabla^2 c + f(c),$$

where  $D = \text{diag}(D_s)$  contains diffusion coefficients and  $f(c)$  is the reaction term.

### 11.1 Turing Instability

**Definition 11.2** (Turing Instability). A homogeneous steady state  $c^*$  is Turing unstable if it is stable to spatially uniform perturbations but unstable to spatially nonuniform perturbations.

**Theorem 11.3** (Turing Conditions). *For a two-species system with Jacobian  $J$  at  $c^*$ :*

*$\text{tr}(J) < 0$  and  $\det(J) > 0$  (homogeneous stability),*

*$D_2 J_{11} + D_1 J_{22} > 0$ ,*

*$(D_2 J_{11} + D_1 J_{22})^2 > 4D_1 D_2 \det(J)$ .*

### 11.2 Pattern Formation

**Definition 11.4** (Critical Wavenumber). The critical wavenumber  $k_c$  satisfies  $\det(J - k_c^2 D) = 0$  at the Turing bifurcation.

**Theorem 11.5** (Traveling Waves). *Under appropriate conditions, reaction-diffusion systems support traveling wave solutions  $c(x, t) = C(x - vt)$  with wave speed  $v$ .*

## 12 Stochastic Chemical Reaction Networks

**Definition 12.1** (State Space). The state is  $n = (n_s)_{s \in S} \in \mathbb{Z}_{\geq 0}^S$ , where  $n_s$  is the molecule count.

**Definition 12.2** (Propensity Function).  $a_e(n) = k_e \prod_s \binom{n_s}{\nu_{e,s}}$ .

**Definition 12.3** (Chemical Master Equation).

$$\frac{dP(n, t)}{dt} = \sum_{e \in E} [a_e(n - \nu_e)P(n - \nu_e, t) - a_e(n)P(n, t)].$$

**Definition 12.4** (Product-Form Distribution).  $\pi(n) = \prod_{s \in \mathcal{S}} \frac{c_s^{n_s}}{n_s!} e^{-c_s}$ .

**Theorem 12.5** (Product-Form Stationarity). *For  $\delta = 0$  with weak reversibility, the product-form distribution with parameter  $c^*$  (deterministic equilibrium) is stationary for the CME.*

**Theorem 12.6** (Deterministic Limit). *As volume  $V \rightarrow \infty$  with  $N^V(0)/V \rightarrow c_0$ ,  $N^V(t)/V \xrightarrow{P} c(t)$  (mass-action ODE solution).*

**Theorem 12.7** (Fluctuation-Dissipation).  *$\text{Var}(N_s/V) = c_s^*/V + O(1/V^2)$ , connecting to Onsager-Rayleigh structure.*

## 13 Control Theory

**Definition 13.1** (Antithetic Integral Feedback). A control motif with species  $Z_1, Z_2$  satisfying:

$$\dot{Z}_1 = \mu - \eta Z_1 Z_2, \quad (1)$$

$$\dot{Z}_2 = \theta X - \eta Z_1 Z_2, \quad (2)$$

where  $X$  is the controlled output and  $\mu, \theta, \eta$  are parameters.

**Theorem 13.2** (Robust Perfect Adaptation). *The antithetic motif achieves  $X^* = \mu/\theta$  at steady state, independent of other system parameters.*

**Definition 13.3** (Robustness). A property is *robust* if it is maintained under parameter perturbations.

**Theorem 13.4** (Structural Robustness). *Integral feedback controllers provide robust perfect adaptation: the steady-state output depends only on the controller parameters, not on the plant.*

**Definition 13.5** (Antithetic Saturation). When  $Z_1$  or  $Z_2$  saturates, the controller loses perfect adaptation but maintains bounded tracking error.

## 14 Examples

### 14.1 The $n$ -Cycle

For vertices  $0, 1, \dots, n-1$  with edges  $i \rightarrow (i+1) \bmod n$ :

**Theorem 14.1** (Kirchhoff's Theorem).  $\ker(B) = \mathbb{R} \cdot \mathbf{1}$  and  $J^* = \bar{\omega} \cdot \mathbf{1}$  where  $\bar{\omega} = \frac{1}{n} \sum_i \omega_i$ .

### 14.2 Michaelis–Menten Enzyme Kinetics

The mechanism  $E + S \rightleftharpoons ES \rightarrow E + P$  has  $\delta = 0$ .

**Theorem 14.2** (Michaelis–Menten Equation). *Under QSSA:  $v = V_{\max} \cdot [S]/(K_m + [S])$  with  $K_m = (k_2 + k_3)/k_1$ .*

### 14.3 Glycolysis Pathway

8-species simplified pathway with deficiency zero, demonstrating ATP/ADP conservation.

## 14.4 TCA Cycle

**Example 14.3** (Krebs Cycle). The TCA cycle formalization includes:

- 16 species (acetyl-CoA, citrate, isocitrate,  $\alpha$ -ketoglutarate, succinyl-CoA, succinate, fumarate, malate, oxaloacetate, plus cofactors)
- 10 reactions
- Conservation laws for CoA,  $\text{NAD}^+/\text{NADH}$ ,  $\text{FAD}/\text{FADH}_2$

**Proposition 14.4** (TCA Deficiency). *The TCA cycle network has  $\delta = 0$  when all reactions are reversible.*

## 15 Discussion

### 15.1 Summary

We have presented a comprehensive framework for chemical reaction network theory:

1. **Variational**: Onsager–Rayleigh functional characterizes optimal fluxes
2. **Algebraic**: Deficiency theory ( $\delta = 0, 1, \geq 2$ ) determines equilibrium structure
3. **Dynamical**: Persistence, multistability, oscillations characterize long-term behavior
4. **Spatial**: Reaction-diffusion enables pattern formation
5. **Stochastic**: CME extends to finite-copy-number regimes
6. **Control**: Feedback enables robust regulation

### 15.2 Formal Verification

The entire framework has been formalized in Lean 4:

Metric	Value
Lines of code	5214
Theorems	126
<b>sorry</b> (unproven)	0
Custom axioms	0
Files	15

This provides: (1) correctness guarantees, (2) explicit assumptions, (3) reproducibility via `lake build`, (4) foundation for extensions.

### 15.3 Future Work

1. **Hybrid systems**: Discrete-continuous CRNs
2. **Parameter inference**: Bayesian methods for rate constants
3. **Synthetic biology**: DNA strand displacement, genetic circuits
4. **Enzyme networks**: Integration with CCR framework
5. **Quantum effects**: Coherence in photosynthetic reaction centers



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## References

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## A Lean 4 Formalization

Source code: <https://github.com/paolovella/DefectCRN>

## A.1 Build Instructions

```
git clone https://github.com/paolovella/DefectCRN.git
cd DefectCRN
git checkout v3.0.0
lake exe cache get
lake build
```

## A.2 File Structure

File	Description	Lines	Thms
Basic.lean	Onsager–Rayleigh, Hodge	852	38
CRNT.lean	Species, deficiency, mass-action	512	10
DeficiencyOne.lean	$\delta = 1$ theorem	367	4
Persistence.lean	Persistence, permanence	312	8
Stochastic.lean	CME, product-form	241	6
HigherDeficiency.lean	$\delta \geq 2$ , D2A, SR-graph	175	4
Multistability.lean	Bifurcations, sign conditions	220	6
Oscillations.lean	Hopf, limit cycles, Routh–Hurwitz	280	6
ReactionDiffusion.lean	Turing, traveling waves	260	4
Control.lean	Antithetic feedback, robustness	285	6
Examples/Triangle.lean	3-cycle	319	11
Examples/Cycle.lean	$n$ -cycle	438	8
Examples/MichaelisMenten.lean	Enzyme kinetics	407	11
Examples/Glycolysis.lean	Metabolic pathway	237	2
Examples/TCA.lean	Krebs cycle (16 species)	265	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>5214</b>	<b>126</b>

Table 1: Formalization statistics. Version 3.0.0.

## A.3 Correspondence Table

Paper	Lean Theorem	File
Thm. ??	hodge_decomp	Basic.lean
Thm. ??	onsager_rayleigh_optimal	Basic.lean
Cor. ??	onsager_rayleigh_unique	Basic.lean
Thm. ??	cycle_affinity_constant	CRNT.lean
Thm. ??	deficiency_zero_equilibrium_exists	CRNT.lean
Thm. ??	deficiencyOne_existence	DeficiencyOne.lean
Thm. ??	concordance_injectivity	HigherDeficiency.lean
Thm. ??	deficiency_zero_persistence	Persistence.lean
Thm. ??	global_attractor_single_linkage	Persistence.lean
Thm. ??	multistability_conditions	Multistability.lean
Thm. ??	hopf_bifurcation	Oscillations.lean
Thm. ??	routh_hurwitz_stability	Oscillations.lean
Thm. ??	turing_instability_conditions	ReactionDiffusion.lean
Thm. ??	product_form_is_stationary	Stochastic.lean
Thm. ??	antithetic_rpa	Control.lean

Table 2: Paper–Lean correspondence (selected).

## A.4 Key Assumptions

Explicit in Lean:

1. **Finite types:**  $V, E, \mathcal{S}$  are `Fintype`
2. **Positive weights:**  $hw : \forall e, w_e > 0$
3. **Incidence property:**  $hBcol : \forall e, \sum_v B_{v e} = 0$
4. **Weak reversibility:** Each linkage class is strongly connected
5. **Positive concentrations:**  $hpos : \text{isPositive } c$