

Neutrino quantum kinetics and r -process nucleosynthesis in stellar explosions

Meng-Ru Wu (Institute of Physics, Academia Sinica)

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中央研究院物理研究所
INSTITUTE OF PHYSICS, ACADEMIA SINICA



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NCTS

Outline

- Collective neutrino (ν) oscillations and neutrino quantum kinetics
- Numerical solutions of neutrino quantum kinetic equation
- r -process nucleosynthesis – nuclear heating and neutrino annihilation
- Summary

please feel free to enter your inputs for the discussion session on “Neutrino oscillations” by scanning this QR code



ν transport in core-collapse supernovae and neutron star mergers

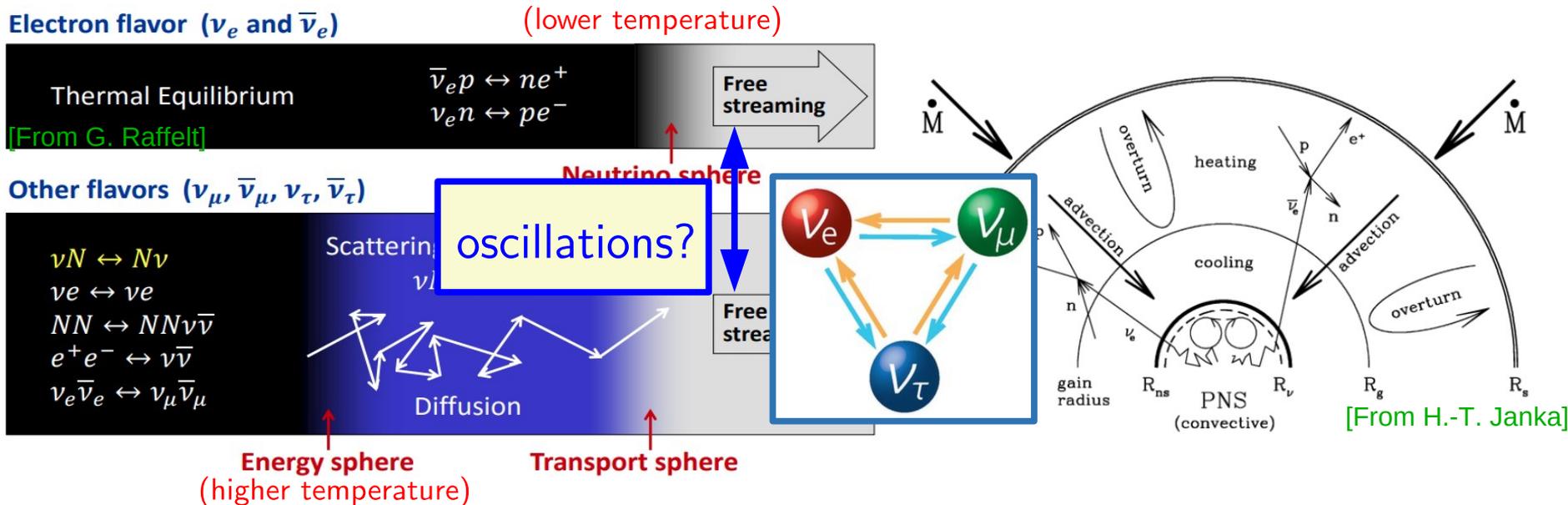
$$E_\nu \sim E_G \gtrsim 10^{53} \text{ erg} \gg E_{\text{expl}} \sim 10^{51} \text{ erg}$$

→ accurate modeling of non-equilibrium, multi-species ν transport is needed

Most (nearly all) supernova & neutron star merger simulations assume that neutrinos stay in their “flavor eigenstates” after production and remain so in propagation

$$(\partial_t + \mathbf{v} \cdot \partial_{\mathbf{x}} + \mathbf{F} \cdot \partial_{\mathbf{p}}) f_{\nu_\alpha}(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{p}, t) = \mathcal{C}$$

Can flavor oscillations occur in SN's or merger's deep interior to affect the dynamics?
 If so: How do they occur? How to incorporate them in simulations? What's the impact?



The oscillation “problem”

Oscillations (quantum nature of ν) \rightarrow density matrix $\rho(t, \mathbf{x}, \mathbf{p}) = \begin{bmatrix} f_{\nu_e} & \rho_{e\mu} & \rho_{e\tau} \\ \rho_{e\mu}^* & f_{\nu_\mu} & \rho_{\mu\tau} \\ \rho_{e\tau}^* & \rho_{\mu\tau}^* & f_{\nu_\tau} \end{bmatrix}$

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\rightarrow requires solving (at least) the **neutrino quantum kinetic equation (ν QKE)**:

$$(\partial_t + \mathbf{v} \cdot \partial_{\mathbf{x}} + \mathbf{F} \cdot \partial_{\mathbf{p}})\varrho(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{p}, t) = -i \left[\underbrace{H_{\text{vac}} + H_{\text{m}}}_{\text{function of } |\mathbf{p}| \text{ and } n_e, \text{ no non-linearity, nearly diagonal}} + \overbrace{H_{\nu\nu}}^{\text{sourced by medium correction to neutrino's dispersion relation}}, \varrho(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{p}, t) \right] + \mathcal{C}(\varrho)$$

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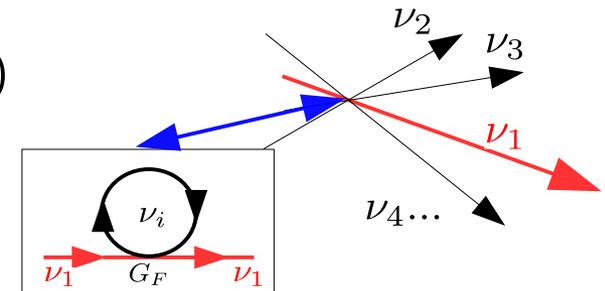
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function of $|\mathbf{p}|$ and n_e , no non-linearity, nearly diagonal

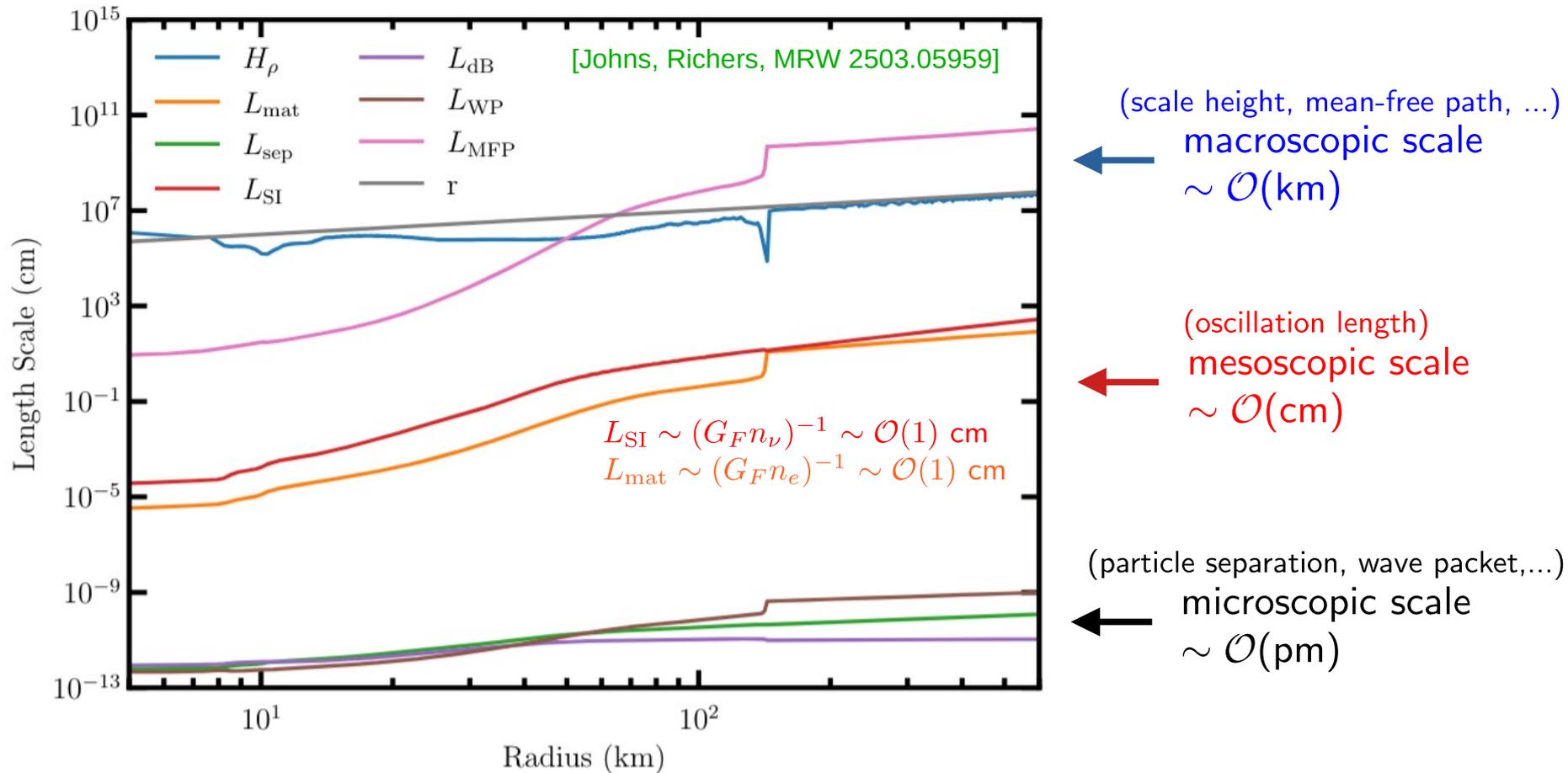
Neutrino-neutrino forward scattering:

$$H_{\nu\nu}(\mathbf{x}, \hat{\mathbf{p}}, t) = \frac{\sqrt{2}G_F}{(2\pi)^3} \int d^3q (1 - \hat{\mathbf{p}} \cdot \hat{\mathbf{q}}) [\varrho(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{q}, t) - \bar{\varrho}^*(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{q}, t)]$$

- non-linear (depends on the integral of ρ of all momenta)
- carries strong directional dependence
- introduce a scale $L_{\text{SI}}^{-1} \sim G_F n_\nu \gg |H_{\text{vac}}|$



The oscillation “problem”



A “complete” modeling of neutrino flavor oscillations in SNe & mergers requires resolving the mesoscopic oscillations at length scale of $L_{\text{SI}} \sim (\sqrt{2}G_F n_\nu)^{-1} \sim \mathcal{O}(1) \text{ cm}$

The oscillation “problem”

$$H_{\nu\nu}(\mathbf{x}, \hat{\mathbf{p}}, t) = \frac{\sqrt{2}G_F}{(2\pi)^3} \int d^3q (1 - \hat{\mathbf{p}} \cdot \hat{\mathbf{q}}) [\rho - \bar{\rho}^*]$$

Q: Neutrinos are produced in flavor eigenstates, shouldn't $H_{\nu\nu}$ be nearly diagonal and do not matter?

A: Unfortunately no – the system can be “collectively unstable” against small perturbations in $\rho_{\alpha\beta}$

Collective neutrino flavor oscillations

Assuming $|\rho_{\alpha\beta}|/f_{\nu_\alpha} \ll 1$, linearization of the EoM allows to find the dispersion relation of **collective modes**:

[Banerjee+ 2011, Raffelt+ 2013, Izaguirre+ 2017...]

$$|\varrho_{\alpha\beta}| \propto \exp(ik^\mu x_\mu) \longrightarrow \text{EoM} \longrightarrow \mathcal{D}(\omega, \vec{k}) = 0$$

complex frequency \leftrightarrow unstable collective modes

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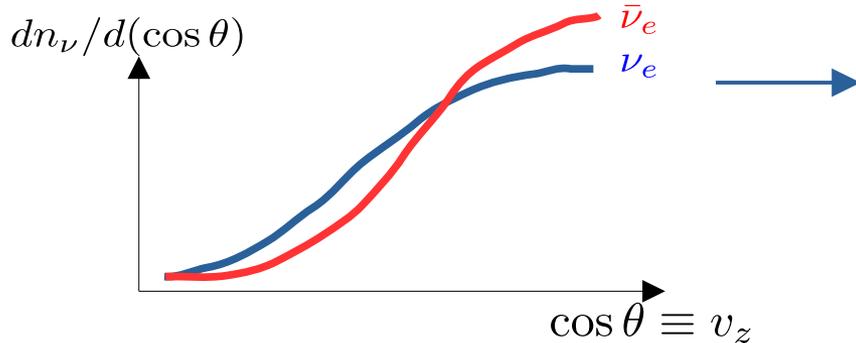
[Banerjee+ 2011, Raffelt+ 2013, Izaguirre+ 2017...]

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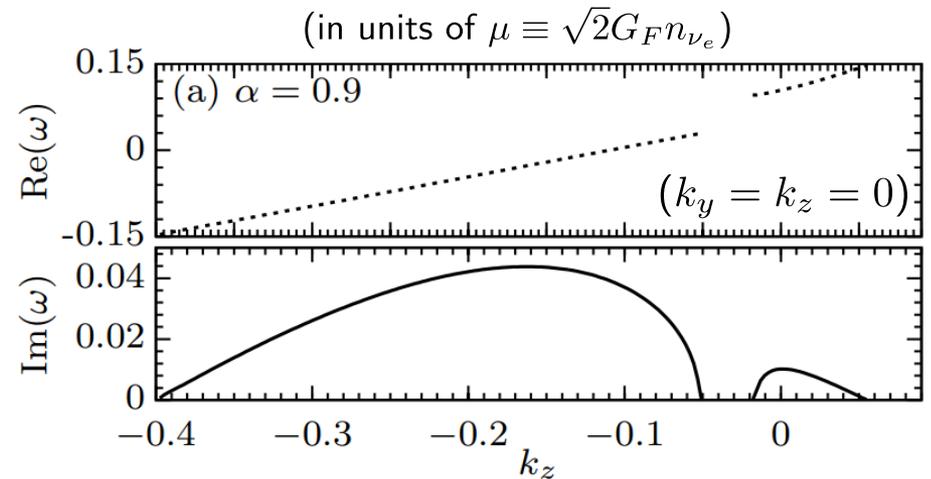
complex frequency \leftrightarrow unstable collective modes

An example: existence of a “crossing” in neutrino angular distributions

(fast flavor instabilities / conversions)



[MRW, George, Lin, Xiong 2108.09886]



Collective neutrino flavor oscillations

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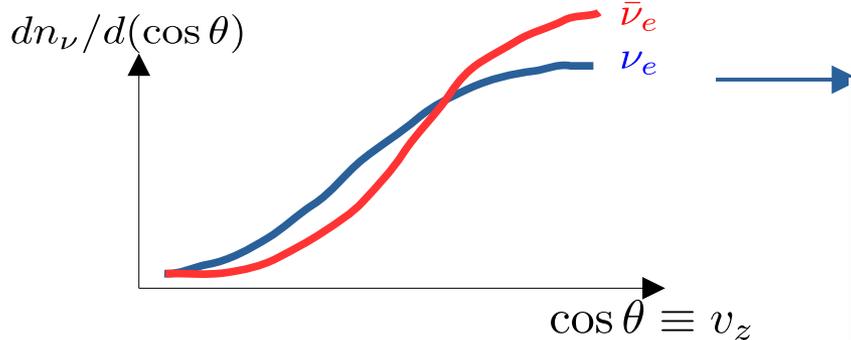
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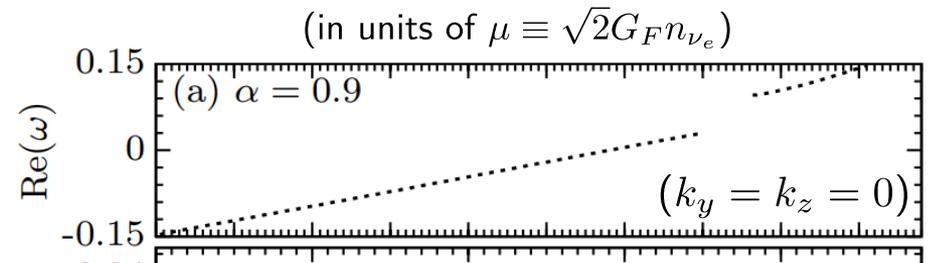
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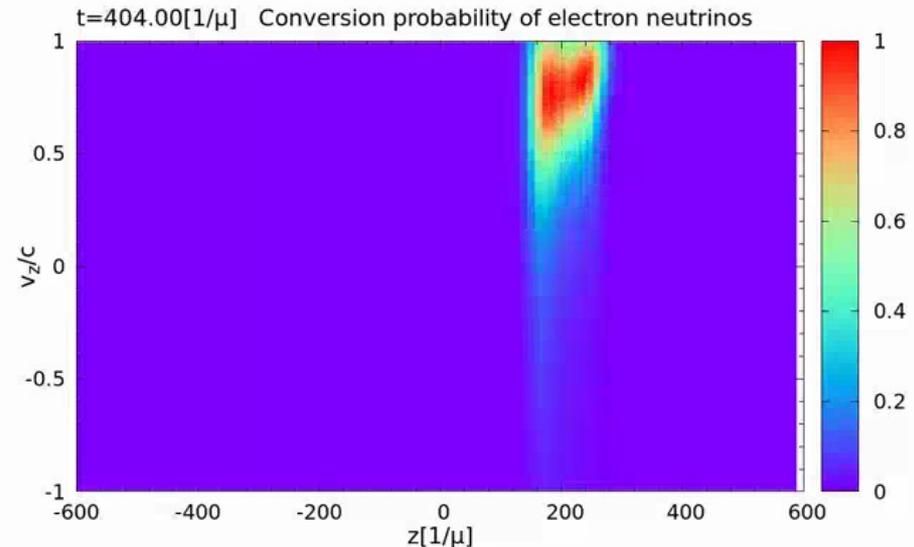


[MRW, George, Lin, Xiong 2108.09886]



these collective unstable modes can grow in nanoseconds and lead to “flavor waves” of centimeter wavelengths (mesoscopic scale!)

[See Fiorillo & Raffelt, 2502.06935 for the language of “flavomon” + a very nice series of papers using plasma physics approach]

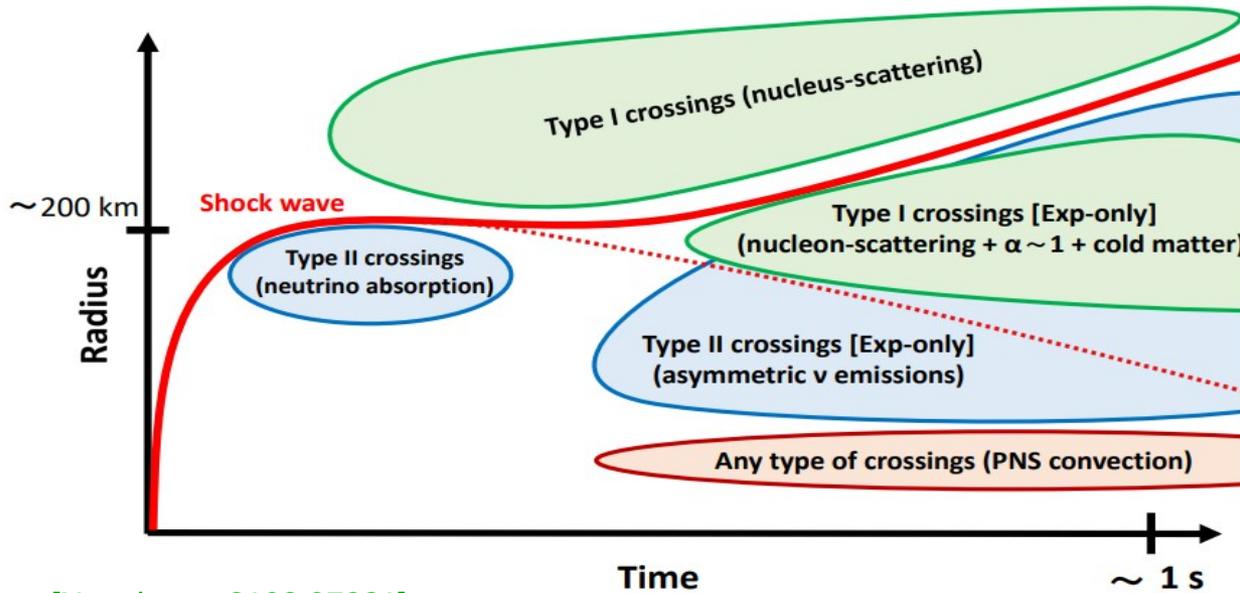


Fast flavor instabilities in SNe?

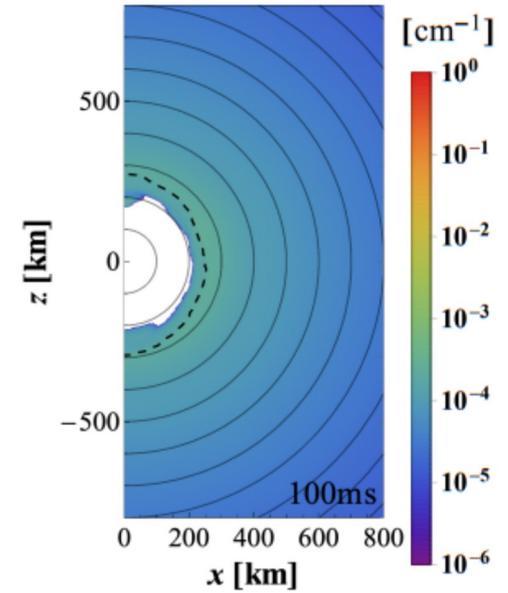
Post-processing analyses based on SN simulation snapshots WITHOUT including oscillations suggest the presence of neutrino angular crossings hence the fast instabilities

[Abbar+, Glas+, Nagakura+, Akaho+, ...]

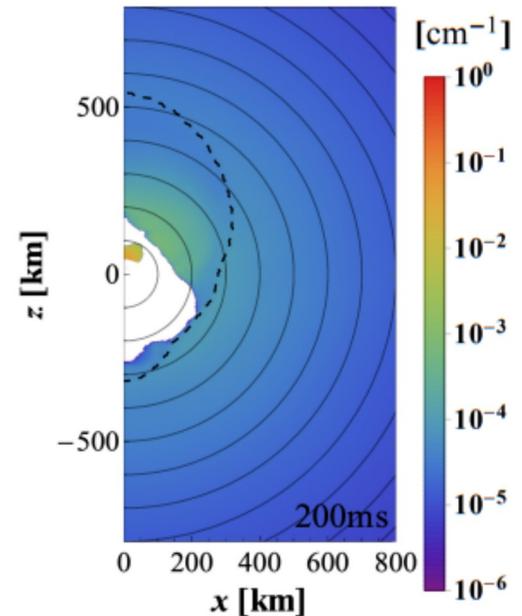
Space-time diagram of ELN-angular crossings in CCSNe



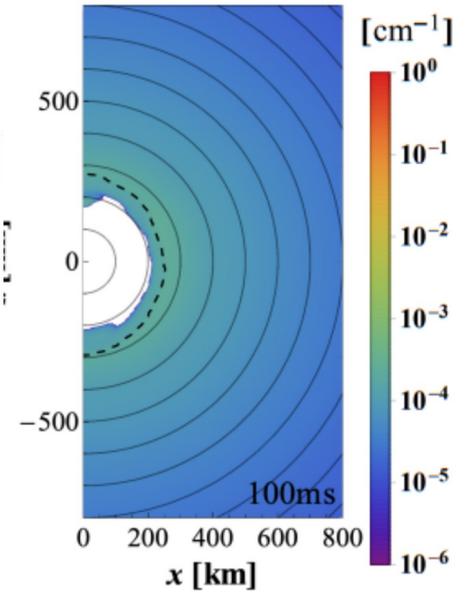
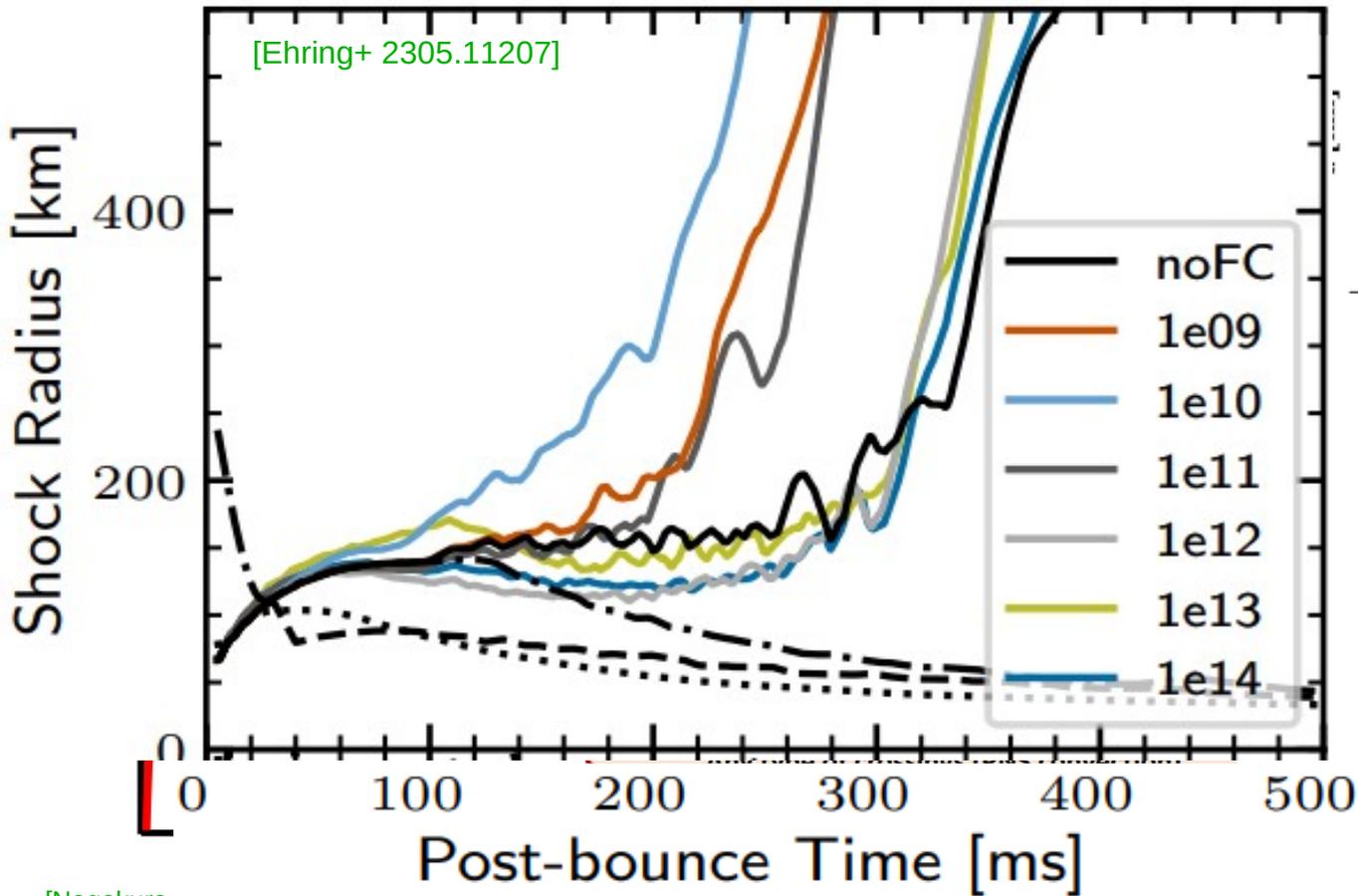
[Nagakura+ 2108.07281]



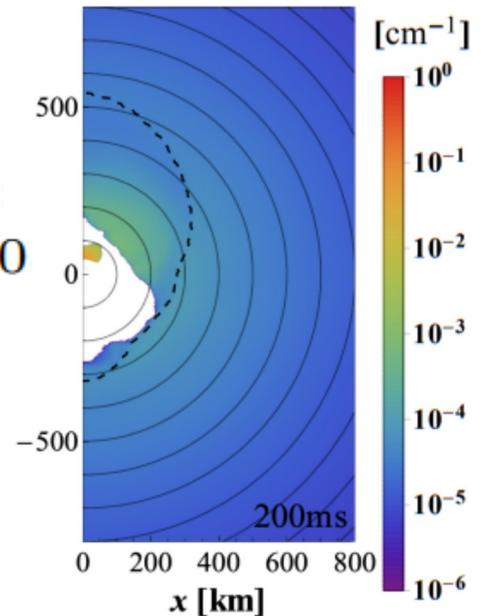
[Nagakura+ 1910.04288]



Fast flavor instabilities in SNe?



[Nagakura+ 1910.04288]



[Nagakura-

preliminary studies suggest potential impact on explosion, nucleosynthesis, pulsar kick, neutrino & GW signals...

[Ehring+, Mori+, Wang+, Xiong+, Nagakura+, Akaho+,...]

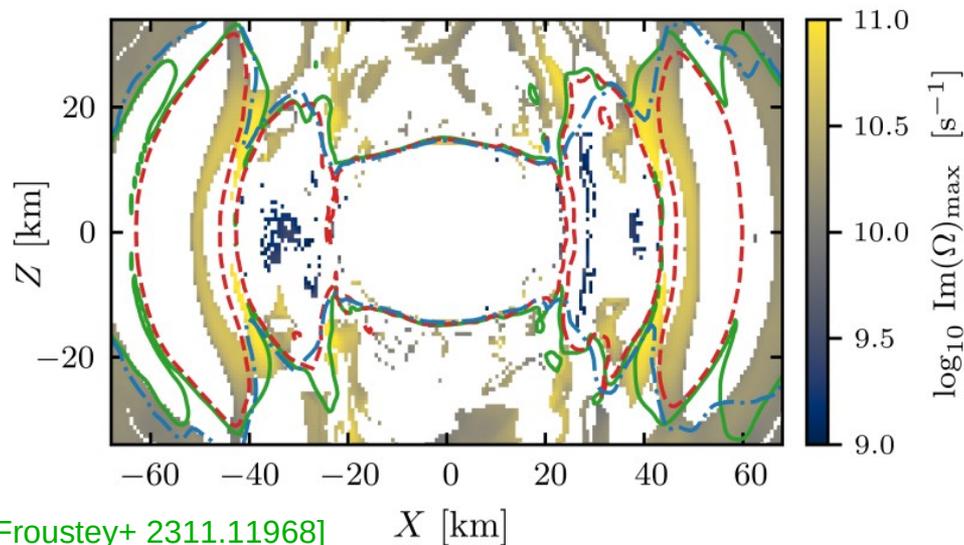
(see Jakob Ehring's talk)

Fast flavor instabilities in NSM?

Similar analyses indicate that fast flavor instabilities exist even more robustly in NSM remnants, related to their “protonization”

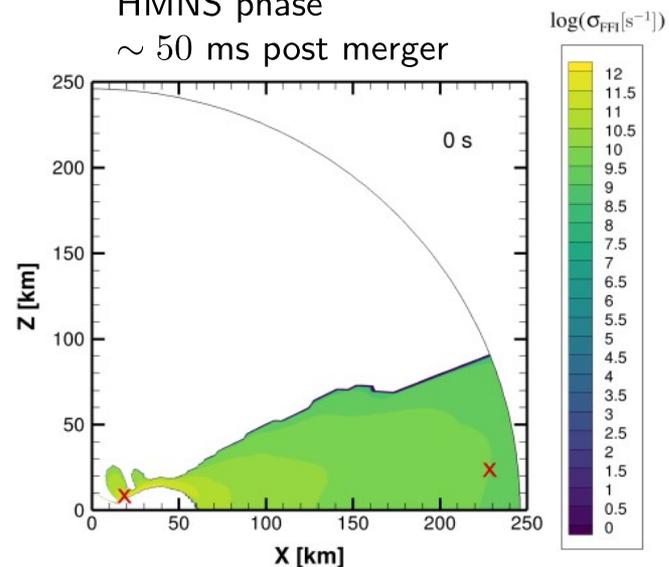
[MRW+, Abbar+, Richers+, Froustey+, Nagakura+,...]

dynamical phase ~ 5 ms post merger



[Froustey+ 2311.11968]

HMNS phase
 ~ 50 ms post merger

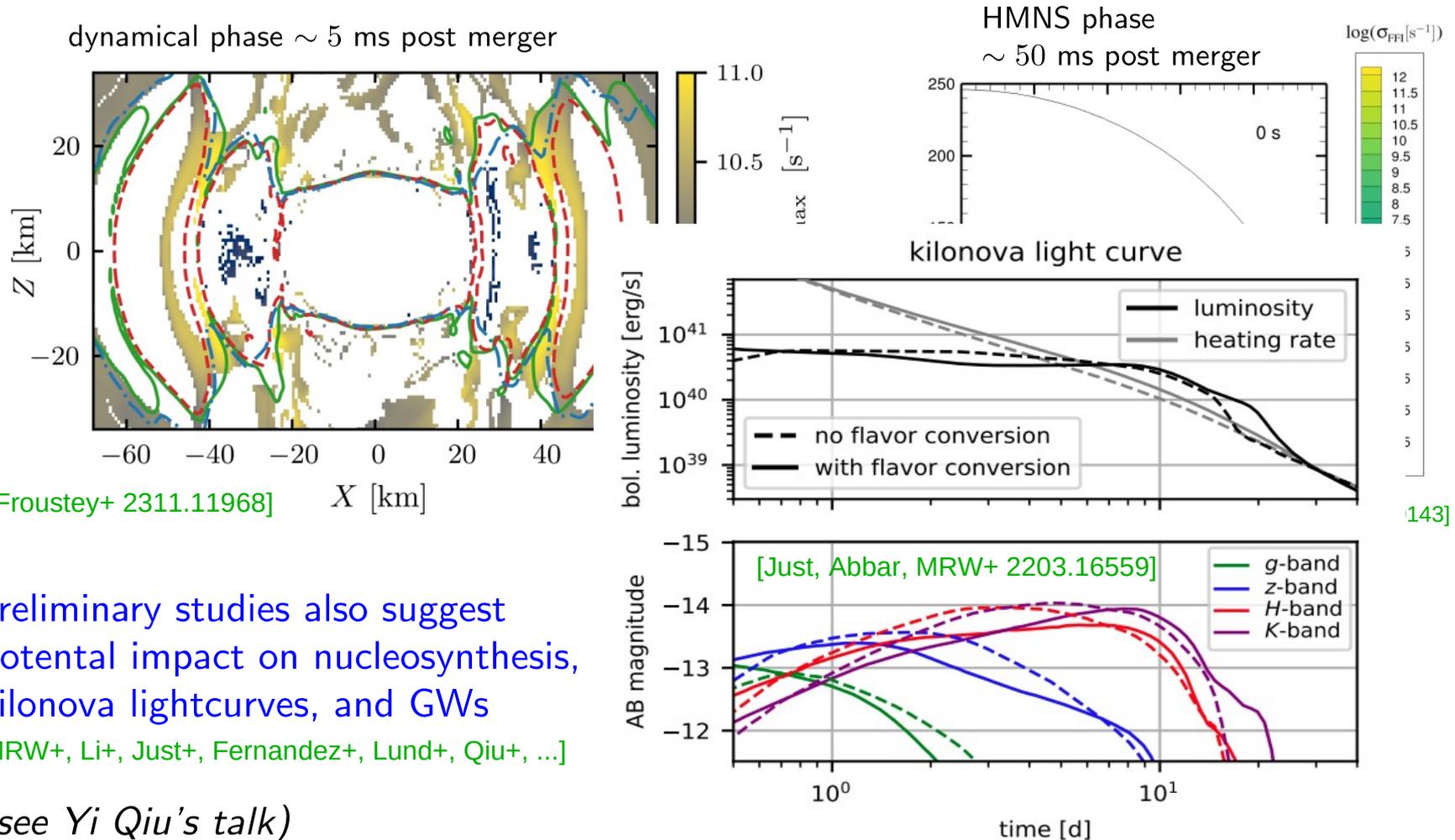


[Nagakura+ 2504.20143]

Fast flavor instabilities in NSM?

Similar analyses indicate that fast flavor instabilities exist even more robustly in NSM remnants, related to their “protonization”

[MRW+, Abbar+, Richers+, Froustey+, Nagakura+,...]



preliminary studies also suggest potential impact on nucleosynthesis, kilonova lightcurves, and GWs

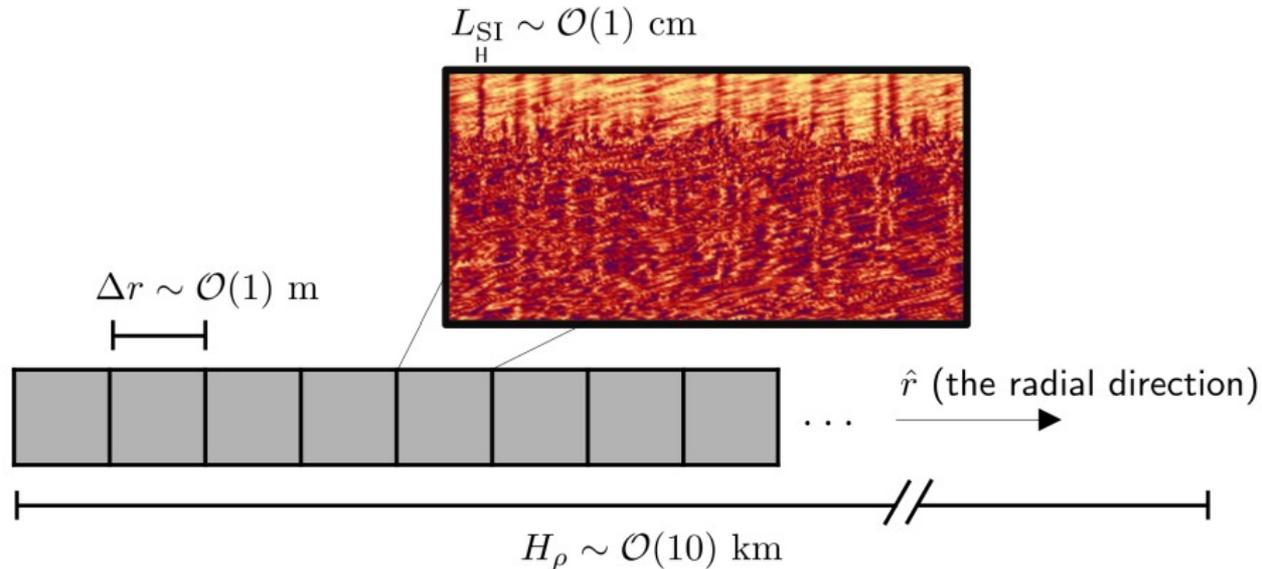
[MRW+, Li+, Just+, Fernandez+, Lund+, Qiu+, ...]

(see Yi Qiu's talk)

Approaches to resolve the “oscillation problem”

Q: Obviously it's not possible to directly solve the ν QKE in SN or NSM simulations, can one construct surrogate models that incorporate oscillation physics in a satisfactory way?

→ likely will involve the development of **subgrid-scale** models.



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- understand QKE dynamics and study their coarse-grained properties.

→ numerical studies:

- local periodic-box (nearly homogeneous) simulations [Martin+, Bhattacharyya+, Richers+, MRW+, Nakagura+, Zaizen+, Fiorillo+, Liu+,...]
- local or global simulations taking fixed (Dirichlet) boundaries [Nakagura+, Shalgar+,...]
- “realistic” global simulations [Nakagura+, Xiong+, Shalgar+,...]

→ analytical advancement:

- quasi-linear theory [Fiorillo+]
- “misci-dynamics” [Johns+]

- explore new closure relations for QKE.

- analytical “quantum M1” closure relations [Kneller+, Grohs+, Froustey+,...]

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Numerical exploration of ν QKE dynamics

Local quasi-equilibrium state of fast flavor conversion

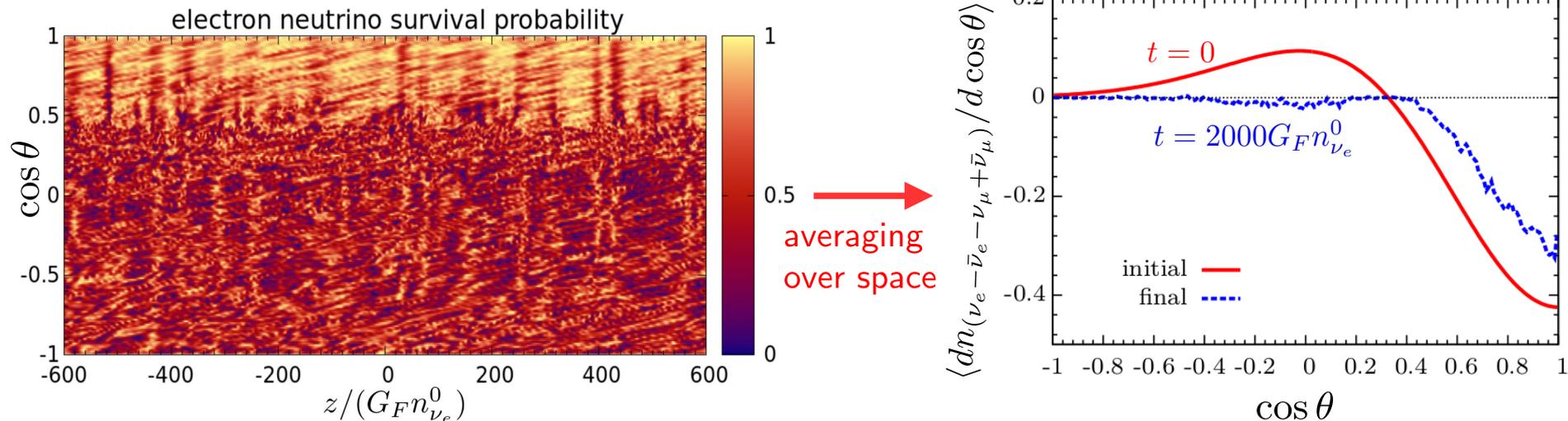
Simulations of fast flavor conversions in “local” periodic boxes found:

- nonlinear flavor wave interaction
- kinematic decoherence
- coarse-grained equilibrium
- near flavor equipartition in one side of the angular domain

[see also Bhattacharyya+, Richers+, Nagakura+, Cornelius+, Delfan Azari+, ...]

$$\left\langle \frac{dn_{\nu_e}}{d \cos \theta} \right\rangle_z \simeq \left\langle \frac{dn_{\nu_\mu}}{d \cos \theta} \right\rangle_z, \quad \left\langle \frac{dn_{\bar{\nu}_e}}{d \cos \theta} \right\rangle_z \simeq \left\langle \frac{dn_{\bar{\nu}_\mu}}{d \cos \theta} \right\rangle_z \quad \text{for } \cos \theta \lesssim 0.35$$

[MRW, George, Lin, Xiong, 2108.09886]



Is this the general outcome?

Local quasi-equilibrium state of fast flavor conversion

Net electron-minus-muon neutrino number is a conserved quantity:

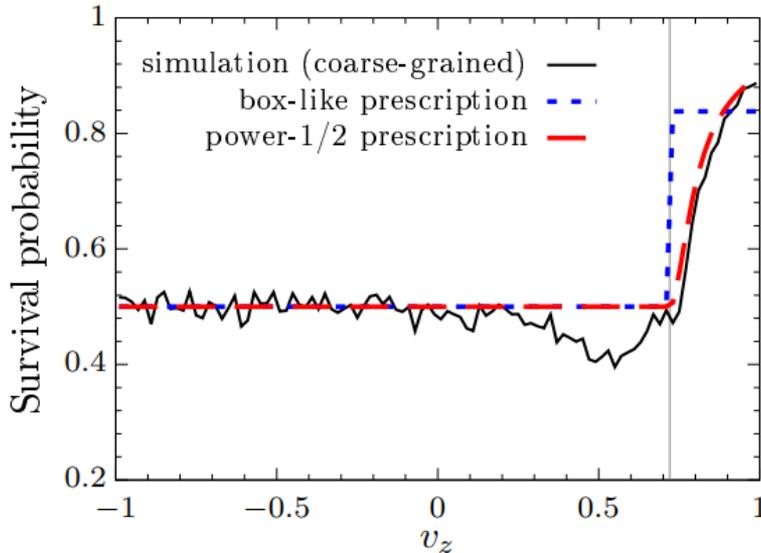
$$\int d(\cos \theta) \langle dn_{(\nu_e - \bar{\nu}_e - \nu_\mu + \bar{\nu}_\mu)} / d \cos \theta \rangle_z = \text{constant (with periodic b.c.)}$$

→ allows analytical parametrization for the coarse-grained survival probability $\langle P_{ee} \rangle$:

[Zaizen+, Xiong+, Bhattacharyya+, Richers+,...]

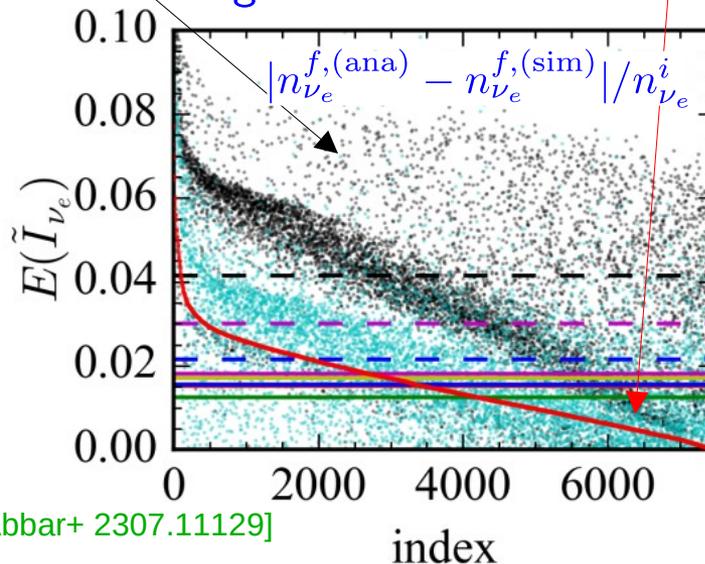
– on the flavor-equipartition side: $\langle P_{ee} \rangle = 0.5$

– on the other side: $\langle P_{ee}(v_z) \rangle = 1 - 0.5h(|v_z - v_c|/a)$, where $h(x) = (x^2 + 1)^{-1/2}$ (power-1/2)
or = *constant* (box-like)



[Xiong, MRW, Abbar+ 2307.11129]

For $\sim 10^4$ different initial angular functions:



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Moving beyond local box – global ν QKE simulations

Although it is not possible to fully solve ν QKE with required resolution, one can **artificially quench** $H_{\nu\nu}$ to solve the ν QKE with static SN profiles [Nagakura+, Xiong+, Shalgar+]

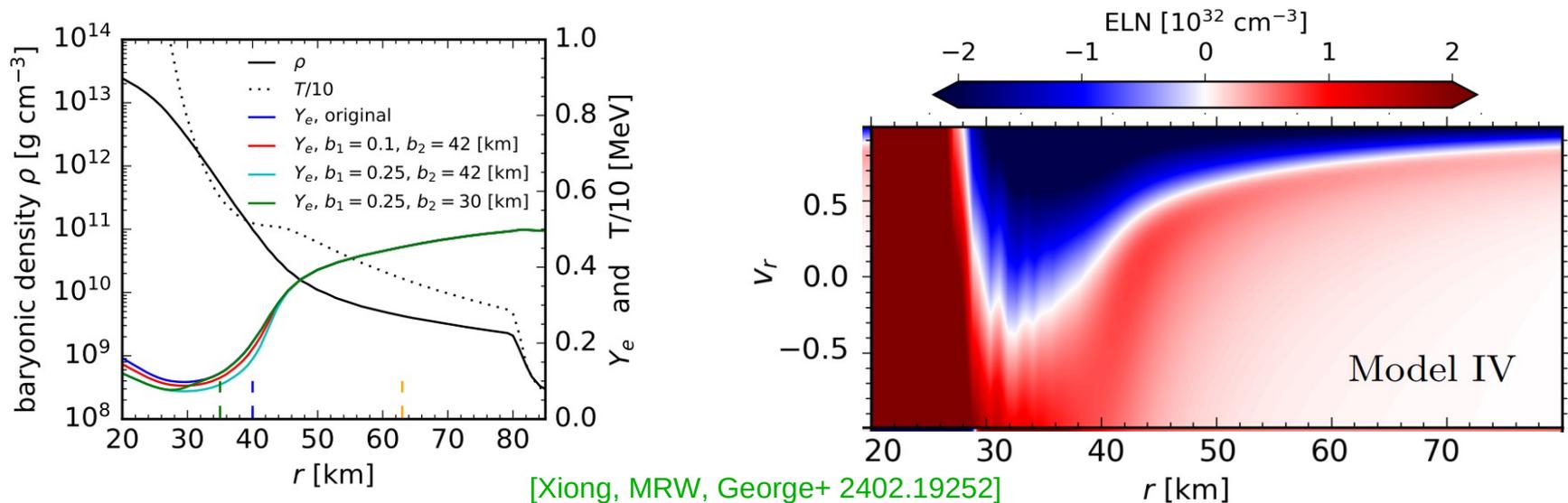
– Take SN matter background profiles (ρ_b, T, Y_e, \dots) from spherically symmetric SN simulations

– Solve classical neutrino transport equations to obtain neutrino distributions without considering flavor oscillations

$$(\partial_t + v_r \partial_r + \frac{1-v_r^2}{r} \partial_{v_r}) f_\nu = \mathcal{C}$$

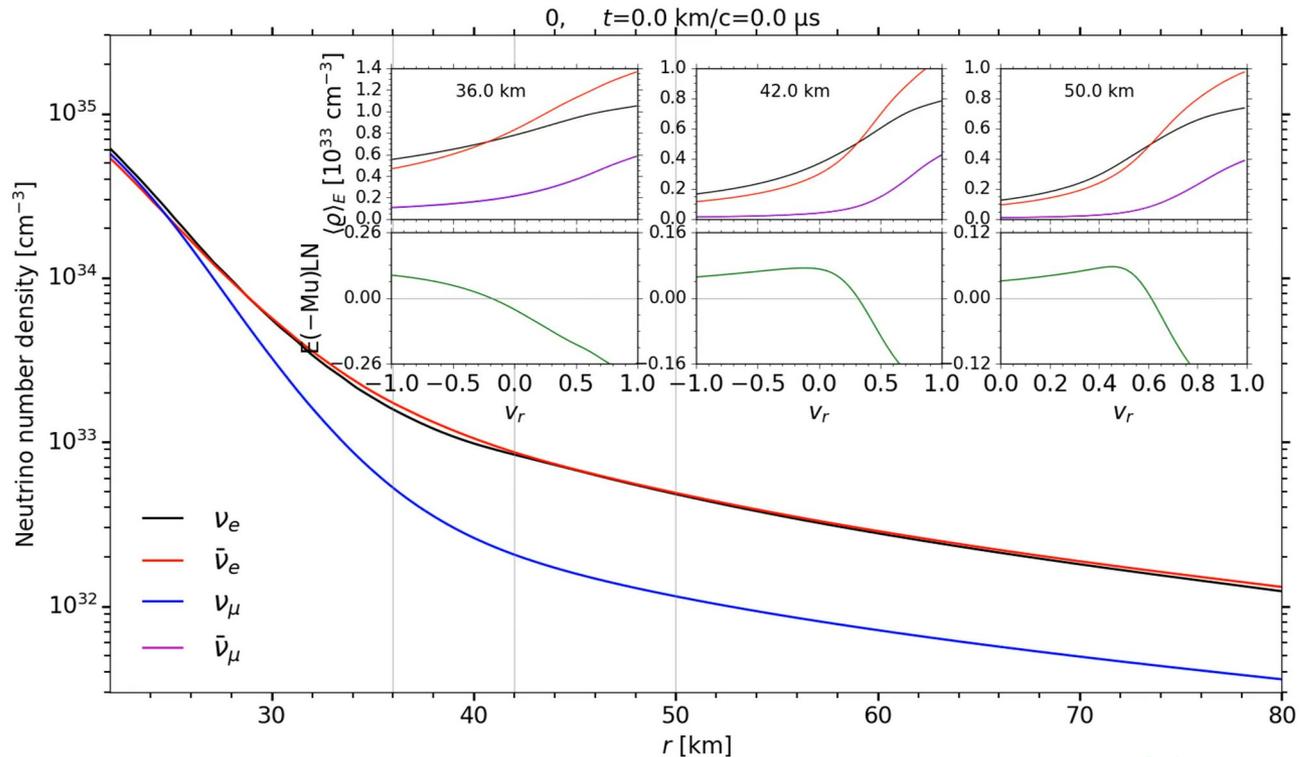
– Use the above steady-state solution as initial condition for ν QKE simulations

$$(\partial_t + v_r \partial_r + \frac{1-v_r^2}{r} \partial_{v_r}) \varrho_\nu = -i[H_{\text{vac}} + H_m + a H_{\nu\nu}, \varrho_\nu] + \mathcal{C} \text{ with } a \sim 10^{-3}$$



Moving beyond local box – global ν QKE simulations

- FFC occurs promptly and erase $e - \mu$ crossings across all radii
- neutrino emissions/absorptions inside the neutrinosphere replenish ν_e and $\bar{\nu}_e$, driving gradual evolution of $e - \mu$ distributions, but no new $e - \mu$ crossings appear



[Xiong, MRW, George+ 2402.19252]

Local state of the system seem to be well described by the local quasi-equilibrium states found with periodic boundary condition

Is this the nature consequence of scale separation?

Effective classical transport model including FFC

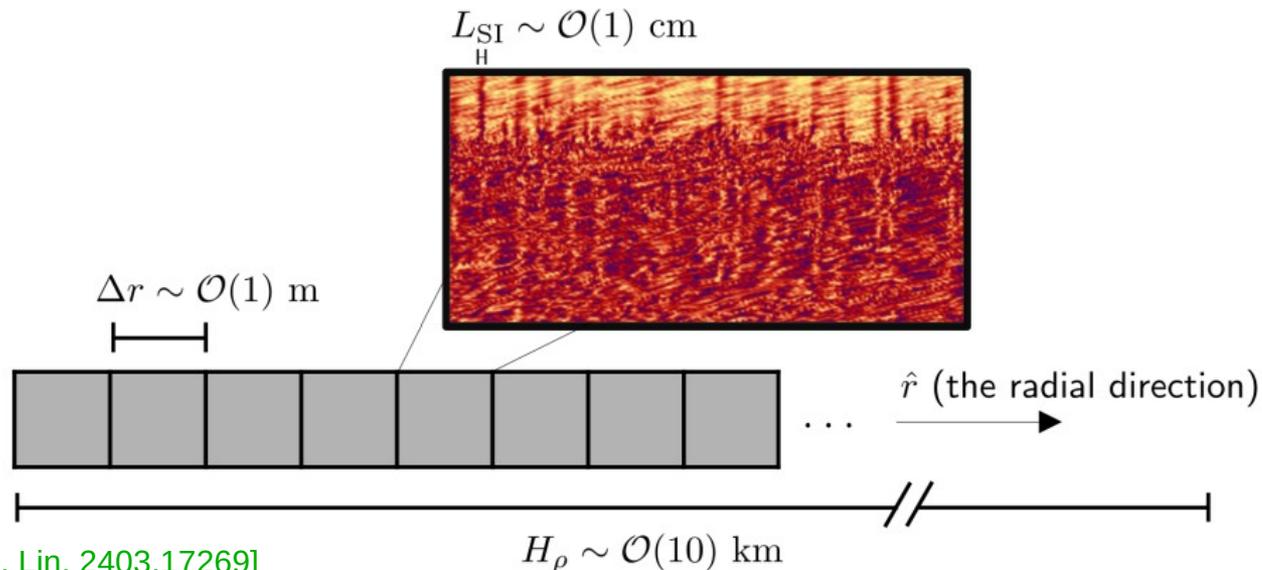
- **Full ν QKE:** solves $(\partial_t + v_r \partial_r + \frac{1-v_r^2}{r} \partial_{v_r}) \varrho_\nu = -i[H_{\text{vac}} + H_m + H_{\nu\nu}, \varrho_\nu] + \mathcal{C}$

$$H_{\nu\nu}(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{p}, t) = \frac{\sqrt{2}G_F}{(2\pi)^3} \int d^3q (1 - \hat{\mathbf{p}} \cdot \hat{\mathbf{q}}) [\varrho - \bar{\varrho}^*], \quad \varrho(t, \mathbf{x}, \mathbf{p}) = \begin{bmatrix} f_{\nu e} & \varrho_{e\mu} & \varrho_{e\tau} \\ \varrho_{e\mu}^* & f_{\nu\mu} & \varrho_{\mu\tau} \\ \varrho_{e\tau}^* & \varrho_{\mu\tau}^* & f_{\nu\tau} \end{bmatrix}$$

- **Effective transport:** solves $(\partial_t + v_r \partial_r + \frac{1-v_r^2}{r} \partial_{v_r}) f_\nu = \mathcal{C}$ with:

f_ν replaced by f_ν^{eq} computed using the analytical formula at each time and location where $e - \mu$ crossing is found

(a special case of Bhatnagar–Gross–Krook model; see also Nagakura+ 2312.16285)



Effective classical transport model including FFC

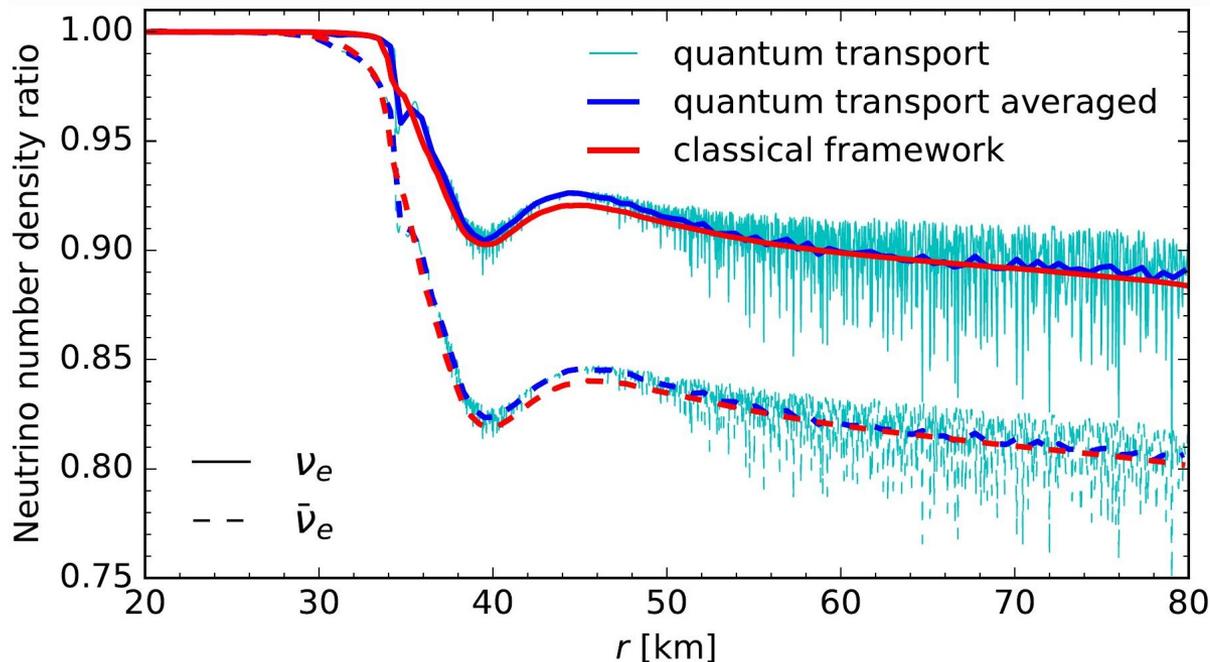
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[Xiong, MRW, George, Lin, 2403.17269]



Is this generally valid?

Other collective flavor instabilities

$$(\partial_t + \mathbf{v} \cdot \partial_{\mathbf{x}} + \mathbf{F} \cdot \partial_{\mathbf{p}})\varrho(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{p}, t) = -i[H_{\text{vac}} + H_{\text{m}} + H_{\nu\nu}, \varrho(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{p}, t)] + \mathcal{C}(\varrho)$$

The fast instability is driven by the presence of angular crossing & $H_{\nu\nu}$

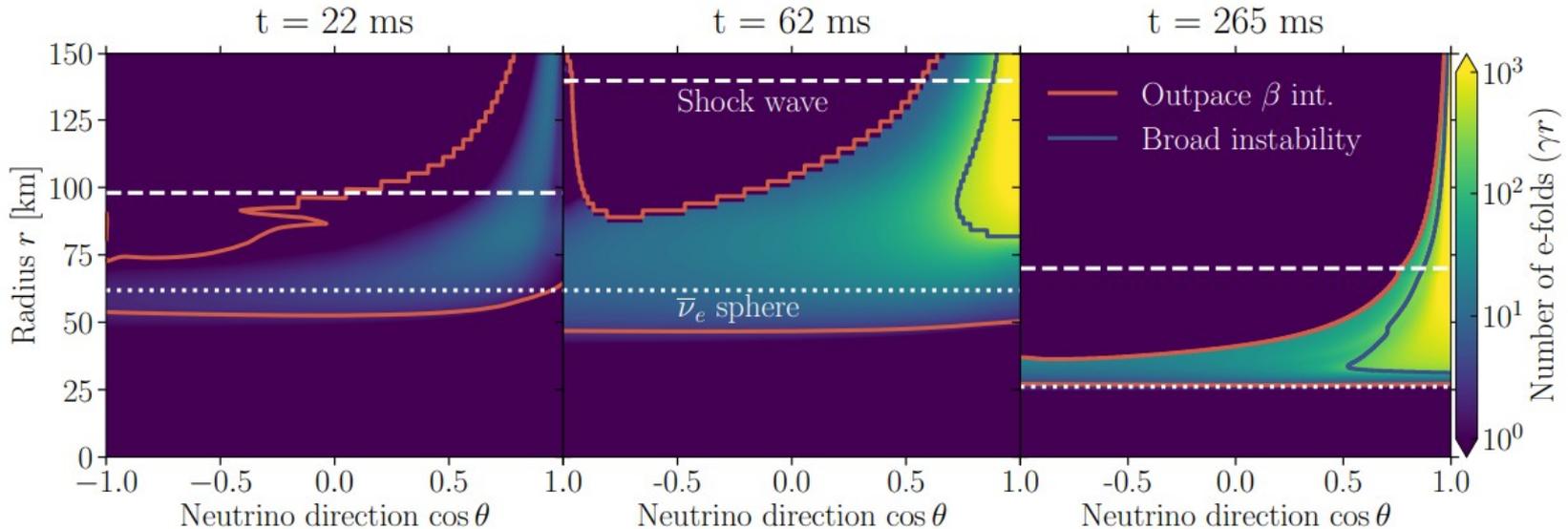
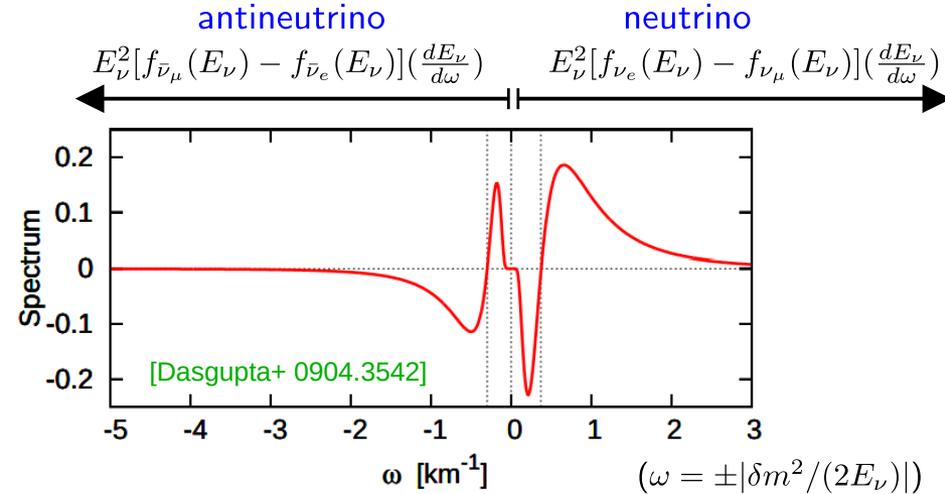
Q: is the system always “stable” when no angular crossings exist?

Other collective flavor instabilities

$$(\partial_t + \mathbf{v} \cdot \partial_{\mathbf{x}} + \mathbf{F} \cdot \partial_{\mathbf{p}})\varrho(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{p}, t) = -i[H_{\text{vac}} + H_m + H_{\nu\nu}, \varrho(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{p}, t)] + \mathcal{C}(\varrho)$$

Crossings in the neutrino “inverse energy” spectrum can trigger “slow” flavor instabilities

perhaps the first instability that appears in SNe? How about mergers?



[Fiorillo+ 2507.22985]

Local equilibration solution of slow flavor conversion?

Q: Does slow flavor conversion also lead to a similar local equilibrium state?

Local equilibration solution of slow flavor conversion?

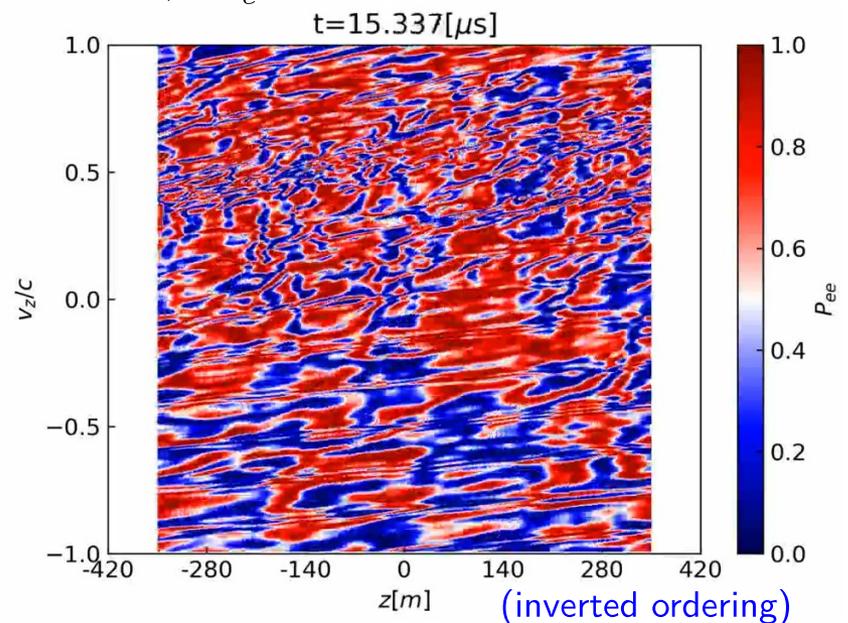
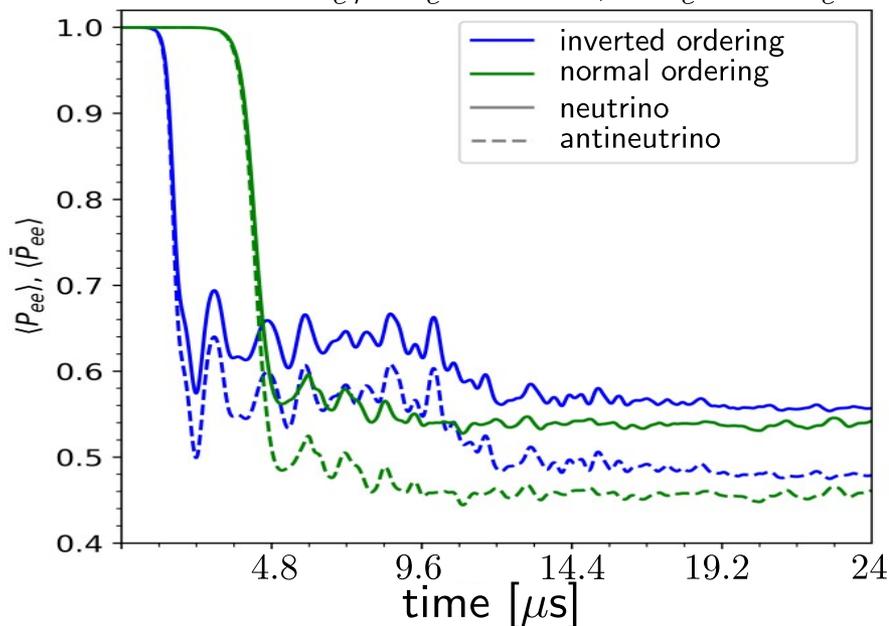
Q: Does slow flavor conversion also lead to a similar local equilibrium state?

Set-up: a (small) box + periodic boundary condition + homogeneity (except for small perturbation), no $(e - \mu)$ LN angular crossing

→ coarse-grained equilibration driven by phase-space kinematic decoherence also occurs within $\sim \mathcal{O}(1 - 10) (\delta m^2 / (2E_\nu))^{-1} \sim$ sub-millisecond to remove the instability

[Padilla-Gay, Chen, Abbar, MRW, Xiong, 2505.11588]

$$\alpha = n_{\bar{\nu}_e} / n_{\nu_e} = 0.85, E_{\nu_e} = E_{\bar{\nu}_e} = 9.5 \text{ MeV}, n_{\nu_e} \simeq 10^{29} \text{ cm}^{-3}$$



Is this a general outcome? Can this be any useful for global transport modeling?

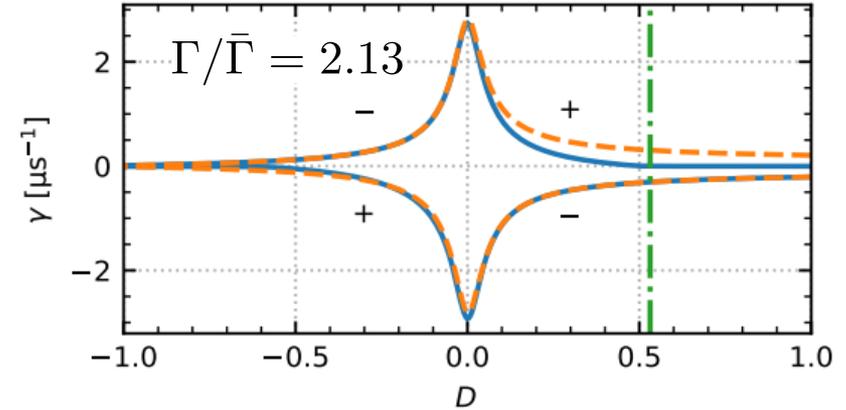
Collision-induced flavor instabilities

$$(\partial_t + \mathbf{v} \cdot \partial_{\mathbf{x}} + \mathbf{F} \cdot \partial_{\mathbf{p}})\varrho(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{p}, t) = -i[H_{\text{vac}} + H_{\text{m}} + H_{\nu\nu}, \varrho(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{p}, t)] + \mathcal{C}(\varrho)$$

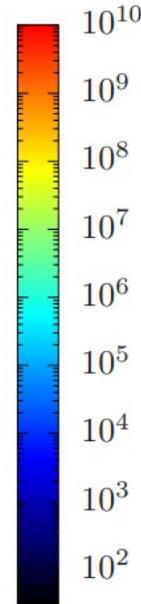
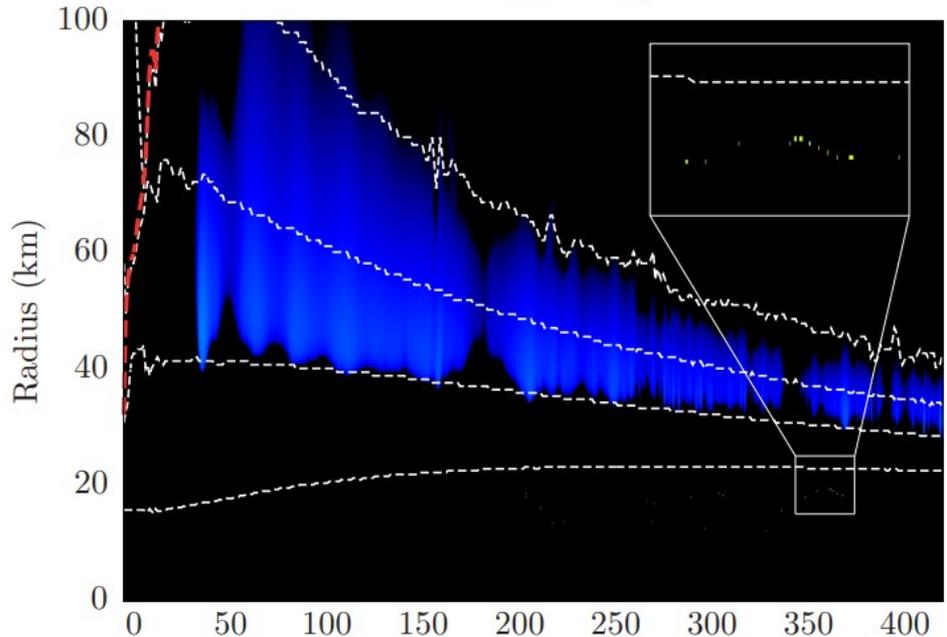
[Xiong, Johns, MRW, Duan, 2212.03750]

Asymmetry in collision rates of neutrinos and antineutrinos can curiously drive the “collisional flavor instability”

[Johns+, Xiong+, Liu+,...]



$\theta = 45^\circ$



Γ : averaged neutrino emission/absorption rate
 $\bar{\Gamma}$: averaged antineutrino emission/absorption rate
 $D = 1 - (n_{\bar{\nu}_e} - \bar{\nu}_{\bar{\nu}_\mu}) / (n_{\nu_e} - n_{\nu_x})$

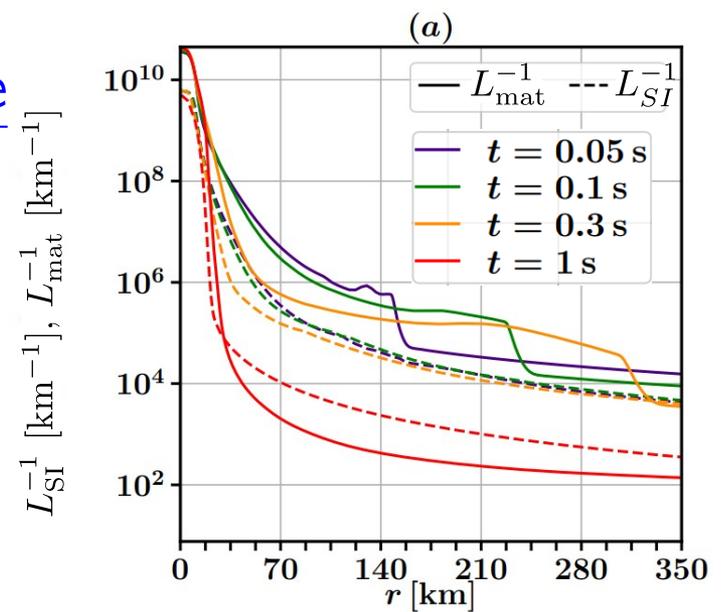
the detail dynamics and relevance are under intense study

[Akaho+ 2311.11272] Time after bounce (ms)

Impact of inhomogeneous matter profile

In SNe, the ν -matter forward scattering potential ($L_{\text{mat}}^{-1} \sim G_F n_e$) may be $\mathcal{O}(10)$ larger than the ν - ν self-interacting potential $L_{\text{SI}}^{-1} \sim G_F n_\nu$

If the spatial variation rate of λ is too large to be ignored, how does it affect flavor conversion?



[Bhattacharyya, MRW, Xiong, 2504.11316]

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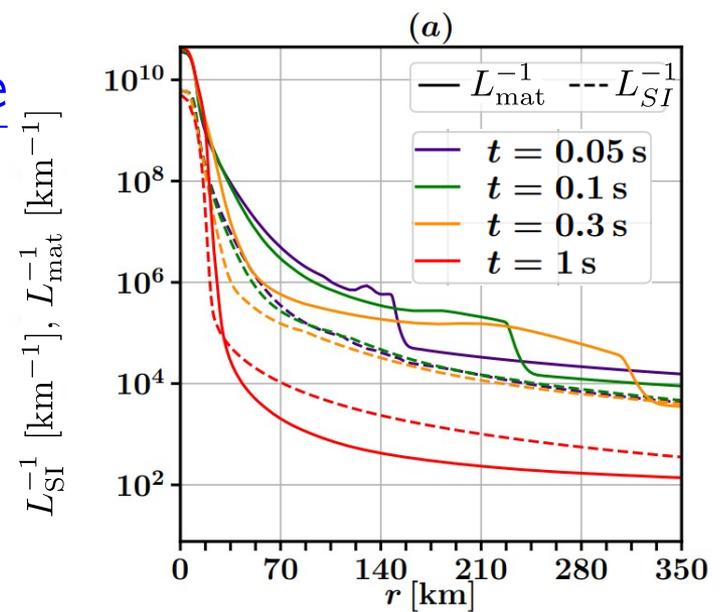
If the spatial variation rate of λ is too large to be ignored, how does it affect flavor conversion?

Approximating $L_{\text{mat}}^{-1} \propto mr$ as a linear function, we found a critical m_c , above which the spatial dependence of L_{mat}^{-1} suppresses flavor conversions

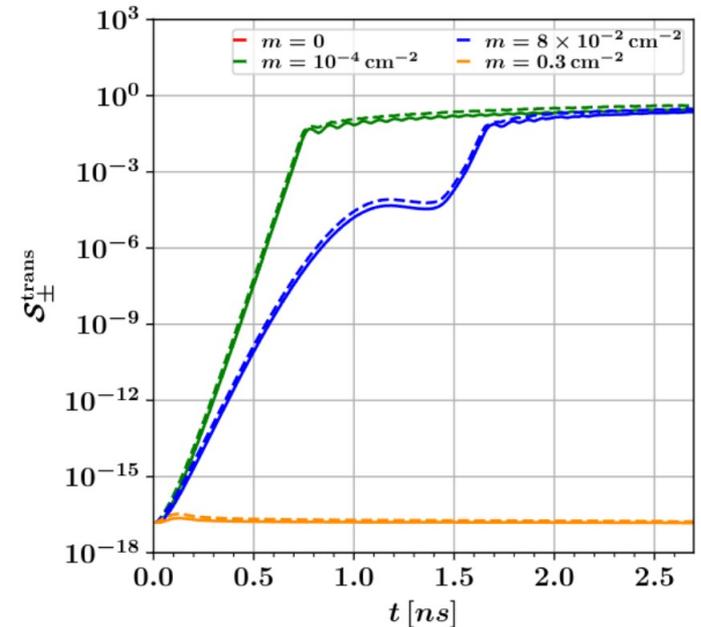
$$m_c \sim \Omega(\Delta K)$$

(Ω : growth rate of flavor instability
 ΔK : characteristic unstable K range in Fourier space)

→ implies that the gradient of matter potential cannot be simply neglected



[Bhattacharyya, MRW, Xiong, 2504.11316]



Collective Neutrino Oscillations in Supernovae and Neutron Star Mergers

23–27 Mar 2026

Institute of Physics, Academia Sinica, Taiwan

Asia Taipei time zone

Enter your search term



- to discuss very rapid progress in this field:
- various approaches to overcome the multi-scale challenge,
 - possible ways to integrate flavor conversions in hydro simulations,
 - potential impact on physical observables,
 - ...

<https://indico.phys.sinica.edu.tw/event/345/>

registration deadline: Feb 8, 2026



Invited speakers

(In alphabetical order)

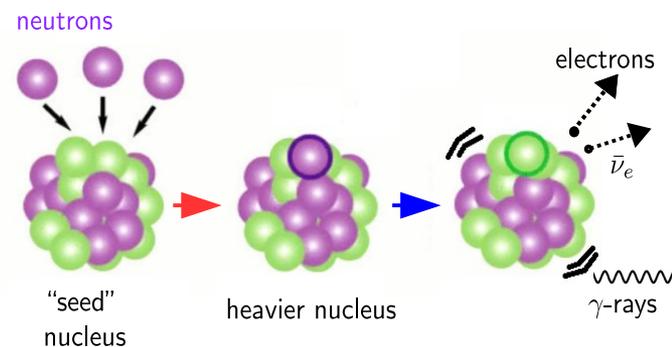
- Sajad Abbar (MPP Munich)
- Damiano Fiorillo* (DESY)
- Tobias Fischer (Wroclaw U of Science and Technology)
- Julien Froustey* (IFIC Valencia)
- Marie Cornelius Hansen (NBIA)
- Thomas Janka (MPA Garching)
- Oliver Just (GSI)
- Jim Kneller (NCSU)
- Jiabao Liu (Waseda U)
- Gabriel Martinez-Pinedo (GSI)
- Kanji Mori (NAOJ)
- Hiroki Nagakura (NAOJ)
- Ian Padilla-Gay (UCSD/UC Berkeley)
- David Radice (PSU)
- Sherwood Richers (U Tennessee, Knoxville)
- Akaho Ryuichiro (Waseda U)
- Tianshu Wang (UC Berkeley)
- Zewei Xiong (GSI)

*to-be-confirmed

Some topics related to r -process nucleosynthesis

r -process and their decay product

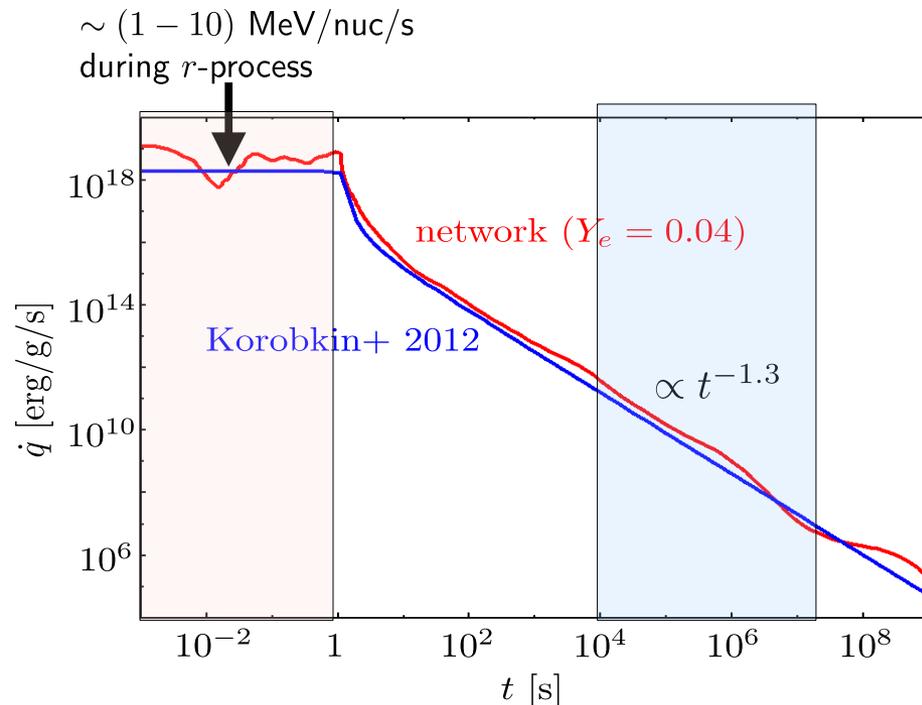
For $M_{ej} \sim 0.05 M_{\odot}$, the available nuclear energy amounts to $\sim 6 \times 10^{50} \text{ erg} \times (1 - 2Y_e^0)$



→ comparable to the inferred kinetic energy of GW170817
(specific kinetic energy of $0.1c \simeq 4.5 \times 10^{18} \text{ erg/g}$)

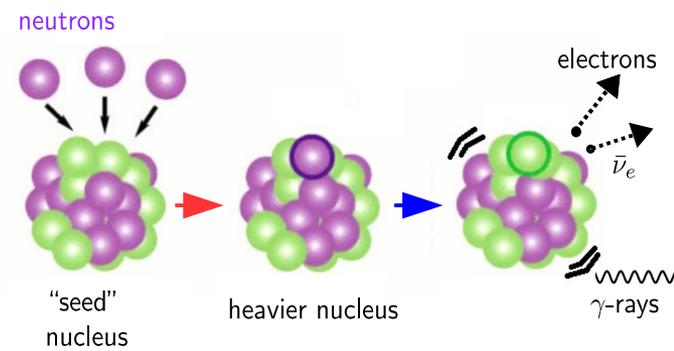
The late-time decay heating powers the kilonova emission at \gtrsim days.

Q: Any potential impact at earlier times?



r-process and their decay product

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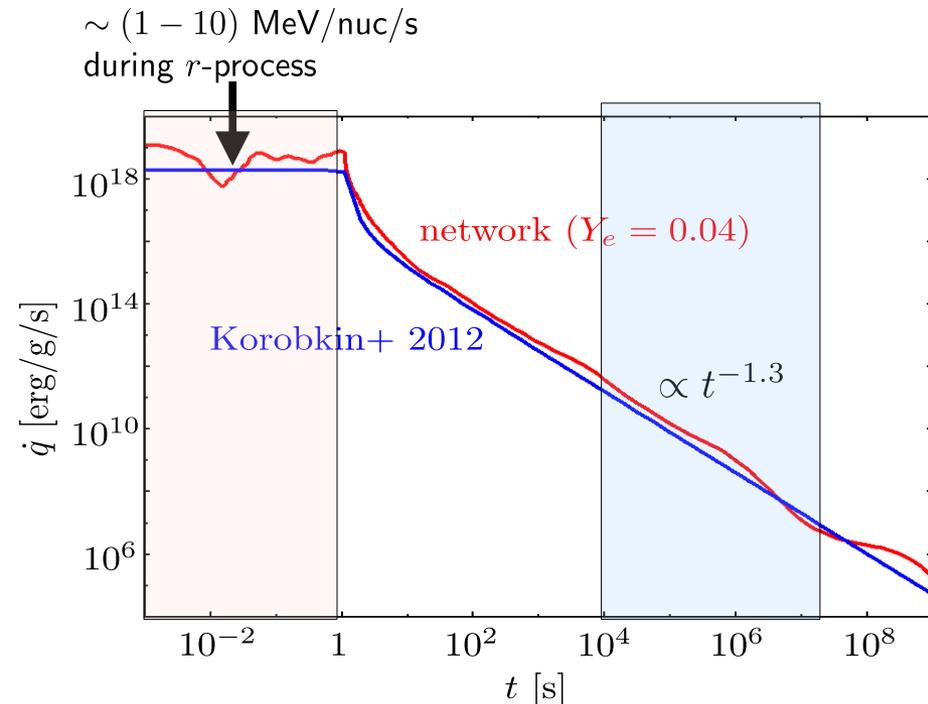
Q: Any potential impact at earlier times?

- How does the early-time nuclear energy release affect the ejecta property?

[MRW+, Klion+, Foucart, Haddadi, Kawaguchi+, Just+, Ma+,...]

- How may decay antineutrinos affect the high-energy neutrinos co-produced at the same site?

[Guo, Qian, MRW, 2212.08266]



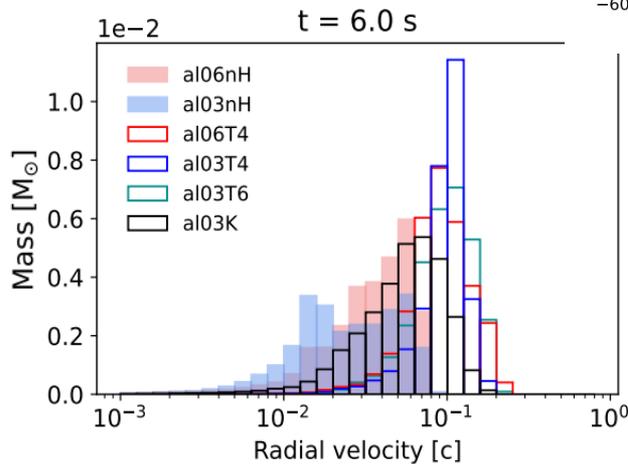
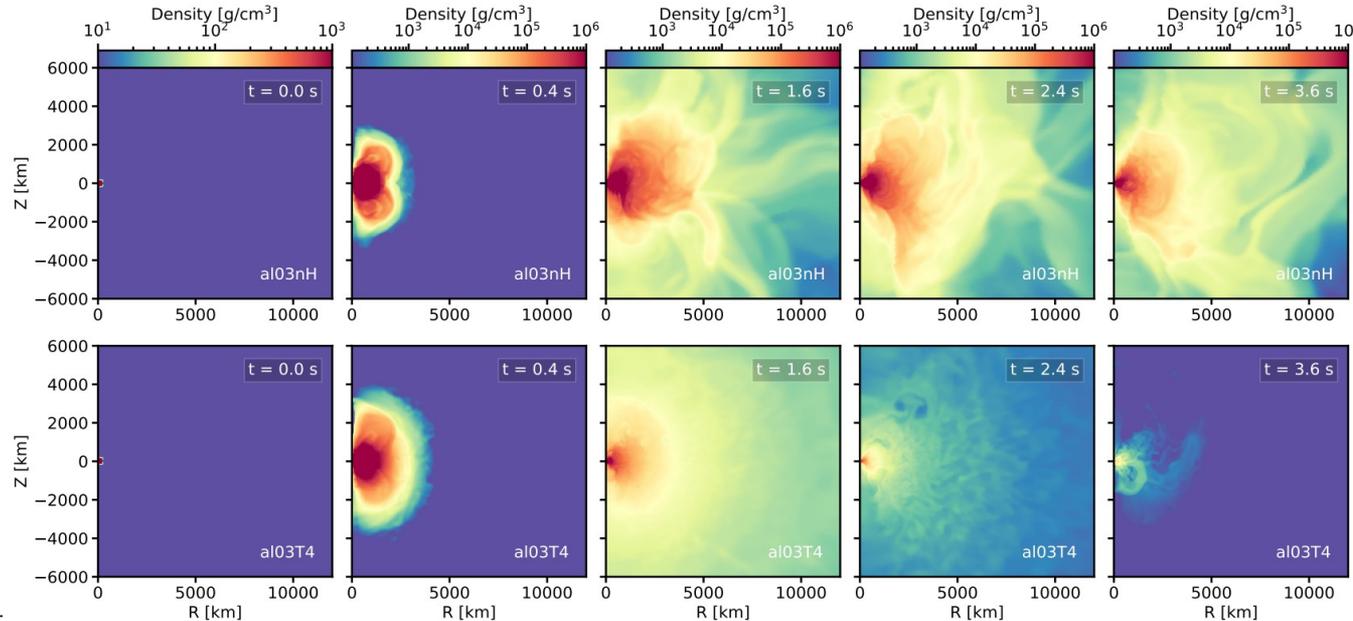
r -process heating and ejecta kinematics

We couple a composition and temperature dependent r -process heating rate given by tracer particles with hydrodynamical simulations of post-merger black-hole accretion disks

[Ma, Pan, MRW, Fernandez, 2508.15288]

without r -process heating

with r -process heating



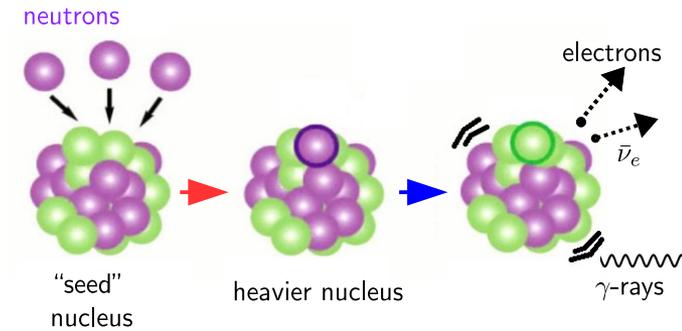
r -process heating enhances the ejecta velocity by \sim a factor of 2 and mass by $\sim 10\%$

(broadly consistent with Just+ 2025; see O. Just's talk)

Annihilation of low- and high-energy neutrinos?

The decay of r -process nuclei also produce $\bar{\nu}_e$ with $E_L \sim 5 - 10$ MeV

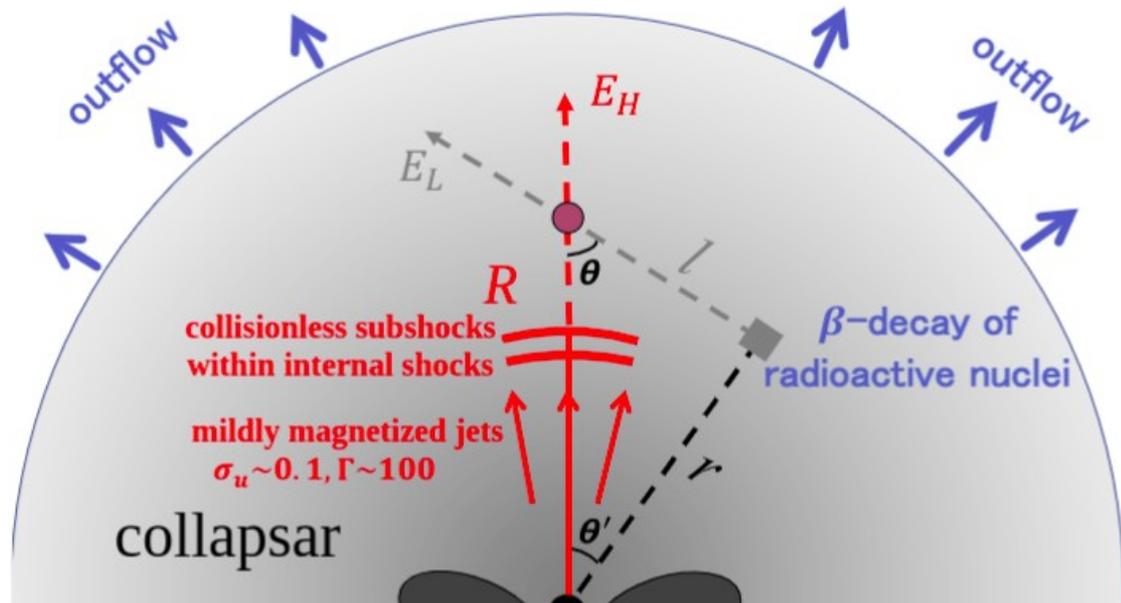
They can oscillate to different flavors and annihilate resonantly with HE neutrinos of $E_H \sim 100 - 1000$ TeV if HE neutrinos can be produced at $\sim 10^{10}$ cm



At $R \sim 10^{10}$ cm, $n_{\bar{\nu},LE} \sim 10^{23} \text{ cm}^{-3} \left(\frac{\dot{M}}{0.02 M_{\odot}/\text{s}} \right) \left(\frac{0.05c}{v_{ej}} \right) \left(\frac{10^{10} \text{ cm}}{R} \right)^2$

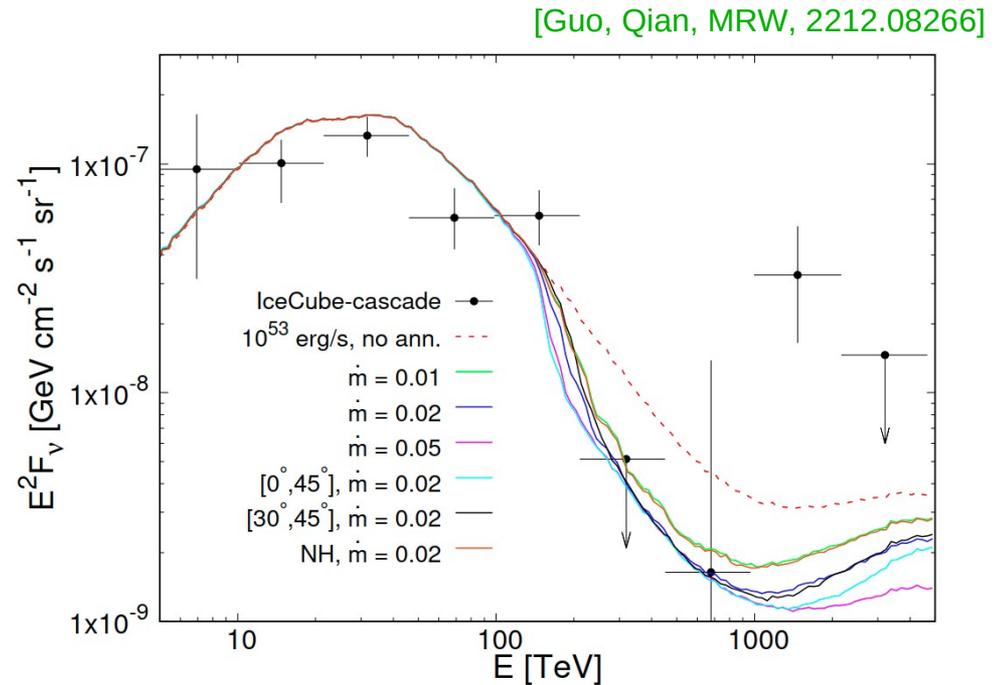
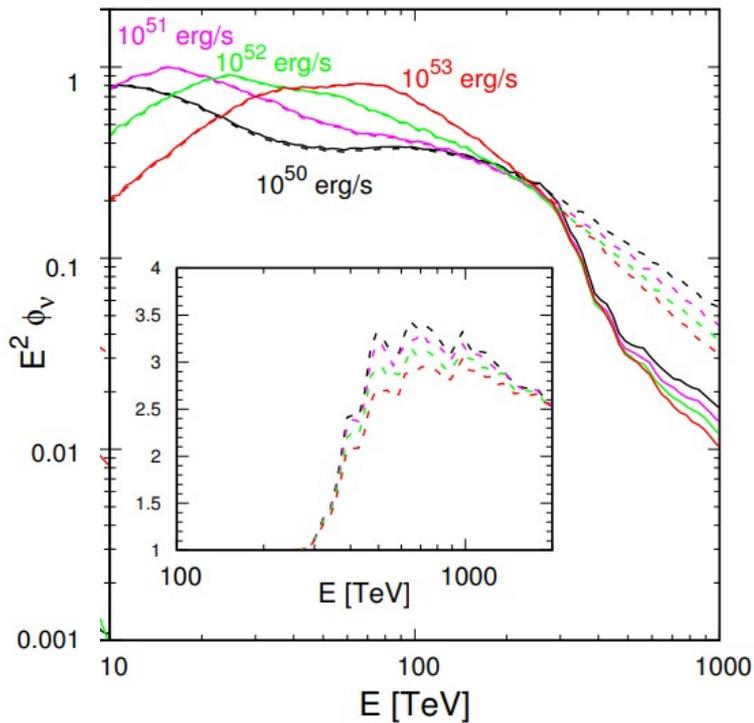
With $\sigma_{\text{res}} \sim 10^{-31} \text{ cm}^2$ for $2E_H E_L \simeq m_Z^2$

$\rightarrow \sigma_{\text{res}} n_{\bar{\nu},LE} R \gg \mathcal{O}(1)$
efficient annihilation



Potential effect of ν pair annihilation on HE ν ?

For a wide range of jet power or different \dot{M}_{ej} , annihilation can suppress the HE ν flux substantially above $\sim 200 - 300$ TeV



Can this be relevant for potential HE neutrino productions associated with mergers or other scenarios?

Take-home-messages

- Collective neutrino flavor oscillations driven by **various instabilities** can occur deep inside the supernova and neutron star merger remnants. The associated **length scale is sub-centimeter**, which makes a direct inclusion of neutrino quantum kinetic equation in astrophysical simulations challenging.
- Significant progress has been carried to not only understand the detailed **dynamics and equilibration**, but also trying to find alternative ways (probably some kind of **sub-grid models**) to overcome the multi-scale challenge.
- The r -process **decay heating** not only dominates the kilonova lightcurves at late times, but can also **affect the the ejecta property** from early times. The decay **antineutrinos** can potentially also introduce interesting **annihilation** effects, if **high-energy neutrinos** are produced close enough to the central engine.