

Guest Editorial: Dynamics of Quantum Plasmas

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The year 2025 had been designated by UNESCO as the International Year of Quantum Science and Technology. In 1925-27 quantum mechanics was developed by Schrödinger, Heisenberg, Bohr, Pauli, Dirac, Born, Fermi and many others. By now, quantum mechanics is the theoretical foundation of most fields of physics and chemistry, and it is the basis for modern nanotechnology. In plasma physics as well quantum effects play an important role. While this concerns in one way or the other nearly all areas of plasma physics, quantum effects are particularly prominent in dense plasmas and warm dense matter where they govern the dynamics of plasma electrons. The present special issue contains 19 original articles that cover quantum effects in dense plasmas, including inertial fusion. The papers are concerned with the equation of state, transport, optical properties and collective excitations, as well as various state of the art simulation methods.

I. INTRODUCTION

The year 2025 was designated by UNESCO as *The International Year of Quantum Science and Technology* to reflect on the dramatic progress that has been made in many areas of physics since the discovery of quantum mechanics in 1925-1927 by Heisenberg, Schrödinger, Born, Bohr, Pauli, Fermi, Dirac and many others. With the development of the mathematical framework of quantum mechanics, quantum concepts quickly became the fundamentals of modern physics – of the microworld of atoms, molecules, solids and liquids as well as of nuclear and elementary particle physics. But even at cosmic scales quantum physics is at the heart of many phenomena and processes, including the structure of planets and compact stars and the evolution of the early universe following the Big Bang, as imprinted in the Planckian nature of the cosmic microwave background radiation [1].

The year 2025 has also been the occasion to have a deeper look at quantum effects in plasmas and on their growing importance for the future of the field which has been the motivation of the present special issue. In plasmas, quantum effects arise primarily in the behavior of the lightest particles. Quantum effects of the plasma electrons are relevant either at sufficiently high density and/or low temperature where the degeneracy parameters $\chi > 1$ or $\Theta < 1$, for a definition, see Eqs. (1) and (2). This is the case in highly compressed plasmas, in warm dense matter (WDM), and high energy density plasmas (HEDP). At the same time, even in low-pressure plasmas where electrons are non-degenerate, quantum effects occur, for a recent review, see Ref. [2].

The articles in the present special issue are mostly concerned with WDM – a field on the border of plasma

physics and condensed matter physics that has been of growing importance in recent years, e.g., [3–6]. Examples of WDM are the interior of the Earth [7], brown and white dwarf stars [8–10], giant planets, e.g., [11–16], and the outer crust of neutron stars [17, 18]. On the other hand, WDM is routinely produced via laser or ion beam compression or with Z-pinch, e.g. [19, 20]. The key experimental facilities include the National Ignition Facility (NIF) at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory [21, 22], the Z Pulsed Power Facility at Sandia National Laboratories [23, 24], the OMEGA Laser Facility at the Laboratory for Laser Energetics [25], the Linac Coherent Light Source (LCLS) at SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory [26–28], the European free-electron laser facilities FLASH and XFEL in Hamburg, Germany [29–31] and the Shenguang-II laser facility in Shanghai, China [32, 33].

The most important technological application of quantum plasmas is inertial confinement fusion [21–23]. In recent experiments at the NIF, major breakthroughs were achieved. For the first time the Lawson criterion for ignition was exceeded [34] and later a target gain greater than unity was reported [35]. In these experiments electronic quantum effects are expected to be crucial, primarily during the initial phase of the target implosion. Aside from dense plasmas, many condensed matter systems, such as the electron gas in metals or electron-hole plasmas in semiconductors or quantum materials, exhibit WDM behavior – if they are subject to strong excitation, e.g., by lasers or free electron lasers [36, 37].

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II. BACKGROUND

Quantum plasmas have evolved into an important sub-field of plasma physics. Quantum effects are important in a broad variety of systems of current importance – from astrophysics to laboratory systems and technologically relevant plasmas, such as inertially confined fusion plasmas. Here we present a very short introduction to the relevant parameters and to the occurrences of quantum plasmas that are useful in order to understand the articles of this special issue. For a broader overview, we refer to recent reviews [2, 38, 39] and the references cited therein.

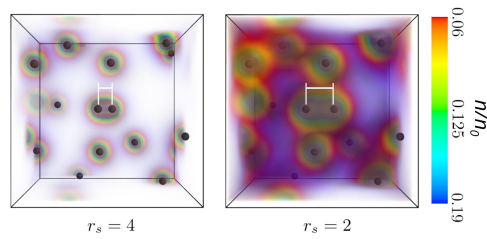


Figure 1. Illustration of one of the key quantum effects – the finite spatial extension of microparticles. Shown are *ab initio* path integral Monte Carlo results for the electronic density in the external field of a fixed snapshot of protons at the electronic Fermi temperature, $\Theta = 1$ [Eq. (1)]. We note the finite extension of the electron clouds around the protons even at low density ($r_s = 4$, cf. Eq. 6). The electrons would collapse into the proton, due to the Coulomb attraction, if classical mechanics would be valid. In the right panel, the density is increased by a factor 8 leading to pressure dissociation of molecules and to strong delocalization of the electrons shown by the bluish background color. Taken from Moldabekov *et al.* [40] with the permission of the authors; licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0).

Before proceeding, we briefly recall the peculiarities of quantum effects. It is important to realize that quantum plasmas differ qualitatively from classical plasmas. Therefore, they should not be seen as a “classical plasma with some quantum correction”. Therefore, dedicated quantum methods are needed to theoretically describe of simulate quantum plasmas. An illustration of the essence of quantum behavior of electrons is presented in Fig.1: electrons are not point particles but exhibit a finite spatial extension (delocalization), and different electrons can overlap. The figure shows two snapshots from the simulation box of a fermionic path integral Monte Carlo simulation of hydrogen. In this parameter range the physical properties of the quantum plasma change drastically. In the left plot the plasma contains predominantly bound states: hydrogen atoms and molecules; one molecule is depicted in the center with two protons being approximately $1.4a_B$ apart. In the right panel, the density is increased by a factor of 8 and the temperature

is increased by a factor of 4 [cf. the definitions (6) and (1)]. Correspondingly, the electron clouds of individual atoms start to overlap significantly, leading to a breakup of bound states and an increase of the degree of ionization. Physically, electrons are still weakly attached to protons, but there is a high electron density between the protons, shown by the blue background color.

A. Parameters and occurrence of quantum plasmas

The basic parameters of dense quantum plasmas and warm dense matter are [41–45]: the electron degeneracy parameters

$$\Theta = \frac{k_B T}{E_F}, \quad (1)$$

$$\chi = n\Lambda^3, \quad (2)$$

that contain characteristic length and energy scales – the thermal de Broglie wavelength, and the Fermi energy of electrons (in 3D), respectively:

$$\Lambda = \frac{h}{\sqrt{2\pi m k_B T}}, \quad (3)$$

$$E_F = \frac{\hbar^2}{2m} (3\pi^2 n)^{2/3} = k_B T_F, \quad (4)$$

where n and T are the free electron density and temperature. Quantum degeneracy effects of the ions are important only in plasmas that are very strongly compressed, e.g. [2, 46]. The reason is that the degeneracy parameter of the ions is a factor $(mT/m_i T_i)^{3/2}$ smaller than the one of the electrons. The second important parameter in dense plasmas is the classical coupling parameter of ions

$$\Gamma_i = \frac{Q_i^2}{a_i k_B T_i}, \quad (5)$$

where Q_i is the ion charge, and a_i is the mean interionic distance. Further, the Brueckner parameter of electrons (quantum coupling parameter in the low-temperature limit) is

$$r_s = \frac{a}{a_B}, \quad a_B = \frac{\hbar^2 \epsilon_b}{m_r Q_i e}, \quad (6)$$

where $a = (4/3\pi n)^{-1/3}$ denotes the mean distance between two electrons, a_B is the Bohr radius, $m_r = mm_i/(m + m_i)$ is the reduced mass, and ϵ_b is the background dielectric constant. For hydrogen plasmas, $m_r \approx m$, $\epsilon_b = 1$, and $a_B = 0.529177\text{\AA}$. Alternatively, the coupling strength in the degenerate limit is defined by

$$\Gamma_q^2 = \frac{(\hbar\omega_{pl})^2}{E_F^2} = r_s \cdot \frac{16}{9\pi} \left(\frac{12}{\pi}\right)^{1/3} \approx 0.88 \cdot r_s, \quad (7)$$

where the plasma frequency is defined in Eq. (9) below. An interpolation between the classical and strongly degenerate limits is possible with the modified coupling parameter

$$\Gamma = \frac{e^2/a}{[(k_B T)^2 + E_F^2]^{1/2}} = \frac{e^2}{ak_B T} \frac{1}{(1 + \Theta^{-2})^{1/2}}. \quad (8)$$

In parts of the literature, in particular, papers using quantum hydrodynamic (QHD) models, the coupling parameter Γ_q is denoted H and occasionally misinterpreted as a measure of quantum diffraction effects, e.g., Sec. III B and Ref. [47].

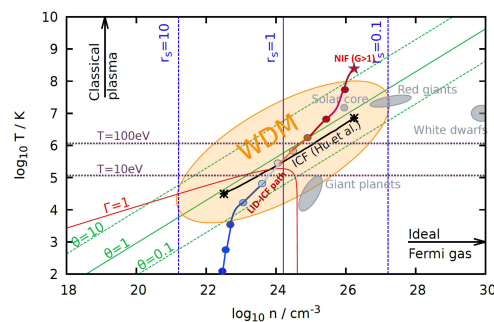


Figure 2. Density-temperature plane around the warm dense matter (WDM) regime with a few relevant examples. Electronic *quantum effects* are observed for $\Theta \lesssim 1$, cf. Eq. (1). Strong coupling of the electrons is observed inside the line $\Gamma = 1$, Eq. (8). Note that the values of Θ and r_s refer to jellium (electrons in fully ionized hydrogen). The density-temperature path of the D-T shell for laser-indirect-drive (LID) ICF is added to illustrate that the in-flight shell conditions are mostly in the quantum strongly coupled regime before reaching ignition with fusion gain larger than one on the National Ignition Facility; the colors demonstrate the temperature increase; for more details, see Ref. [2]. Adapted from Ref. [39]; licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY NC ND) license.

The relevance of quantum effects in plasmas is indicated in Fig. 2. Quantum effects are important below the green line $\Theta = 1$ which applies to many astrophysical objects such as giant planets or white dwarf stars. At high temperatures the plasma behaves as an ideal classical gas, whereas, at high density, electrons exhibit ideal Fermi gas behavior. At the same time, Coulomb coupling effects are strong inside the line $\Gamma = 1$, cf. Eq. (8). Interestingly, the recent successful inertial fusion experiments at the NIF went right through the strong coupling and quantum plasma ranges, during their initial compression phase. Fig. 1 shows *ab initio* path integral Monte Carlo results for the electronic density of hydrogen for two relevant density at $\Theta = 1$ [40]. These results nicely illustrate the quantum delocalization of the electrons even for the

lower density ($r_s = 4$, left panel), whereas classical electrons would simply collapse into the protons due to the Coulomb attraction.

B. Dynamic properties

While quantum effects in plasmas in thermal equilibrium have been subject of a recent review article [2], the present special issue concentrates on dynamic properties. This comprises frequency-dependent phenomena, both in equilibrium and nonequilibrium, as well as nonequilibrium relaxation processes. Dynamic processes are characterized by the relevant intrinsic frequencies of the plasma and the associated time scales. The central eigenfrequency is the plasma frequency

$$\omega_{pl} = \sqrt{\frac{4\pi n e^2}{m}}, \quad (9)$$

describing collective modes in the limit of large wave length. Excitations on smaller scales (larger wave number q) exhibit larger frequencies which in the collisionless limit (random phase approximation, RPA) has positive quadratic and quartic contributions

$$\frac{\omega^2(q)}{\omega_p^2} = 1 + \frac{\langle v^2 \rangle}{\omega_p^2} q^2 + \left\{ \frac{(\Delta v^2)^2}{\omega_p^2} + \frac{\hbar^2}{4m^2} \right\} \frac{q^4}{\omega_p^2}, \quad (10)$$

that depend on density and temperature, for details, see Ref. [48]. If the plasma is strongly correlated, the dispersion may become non-monotonic, eventually forming a roton-like minimum [49]. In addition to the electronic plasmon there is also a well pronounced mode at lower frequencies – the ion acoustic mode. Its linear dispersion is governed by the ion sound speed which depends on the plasma properties and is a sensitive experimental diagnostic.

From the theory side, collective plasma properties follow from the dynamic structure factor $S(q, \omega)$ or the dielectric function, $\epsilon(q, \omega)$. Closely related to the dielectric properties are transport and optical properties, e.g. [6, 39, 50]. These quantities, for warm dense matter and inertial fusion applications, are in the focus of many of the papers in this issue.

Another group of dynamic properties is related to nonequilibrium quantum plasmas that are excited e.g. by laser pulses. There is a large variety of relaxation, dissipation and thermalization processes that drive the plasma back into thermal equilibrium. This is topic of high current interest in dense quantum plasmas [6] and is subject of several contributions in this special issue.

III. SUMMARY OF AREAS COVERED

This special issue comprises a total of 19 papers, including 17 original papers devoted to a variety of topics

that we discuss in more detail below. In addition, there is a review article by V. Karasiev *et al.* [51], cf. Sec. III G, and an article devoted to the memory of Dr Fernando Haas [52], cf. Sec. III B.

A. Numerical Methods, Verification and Validation in Plasma Physics

In this topical area there are three original papers.

1. The first is by Roden *et al.*, “Thermalization of optically excited Fermi systems: Electron–electron collisions in solid metals” [53]. It derives an expression for the full Boltzmann collision integral in the random-k approximation and then compares it to various relaxation-time approaches in the context of the thermalization of a degenerate plasma subsequent to femtosecond excitation. The authors report that a constant relaxation time works well for electrons close to the Fermi energy, but the importance of capturing energy-dependent relaxation plays an important role at higher energies.
2. The second article in this topic is by Kononov *et al.*, “Real-time time-dependent density functional theory for high-energy density physics” [54]. It is both a review of the theoretical formalism underlying real-time TDDFT and a tutorial that describes many of the practical computational details for calculating three different response properties relevant to HED plasmas. These details will be useful to practitioners learning to run real-time calculations.
3. The third paper is by Padilla-Gomez *et al.*, “Quantum kinetic modeling of KEEN waves in a warm-dense regime” [55] and is devoted to application of quantum kinetic theory to KEEN waves. The authors present solutions of the quantum Vlasov equation demonstrating that quantum diffraction weakens electron trapping.

B. Quantum Hydrodynamics

Quantum Hydrodynamics (QHD) has emerged as a theoretical approach to quantum plasmas following the paper by Manfredi and Haas [56]. QHD is independent from first-principles methods [38] that are discussed in the other sections of this editorial. The main idea of QHD is to extend classical hydrodynamics to the quantum domain where the focus lies mainly on linear and nonlinear oscillations and waves, for a recent discussion, see [44].

1. The article by Manfredi *et al.*, “Obituary: Fernando Haas (1970–2024)” [52] is devoted to the scientific legacy of Fernando Haas who introduced,

together with G. Manfredi, the concept of quantum hydrodynamics into plasma physics [56]. The authors discuss the scientific achievements of F. Haas and also share personal recollections underlining, both, his scientific rigor and remarkable personality.

2. The paper by Sarkar *et al.*, “Ion-acoustic wave propagation with Bohm quantum potential near and at supercritical values in degenerate plasmas” [47] studies nonlinear waves in relativistic degenerate electron-positron-ion plasmas thought to exist in white dwarf stars.

C. Inertially Confined Plasmas, Dense Plasmas, Equations of State

This topical area comprises 9 original articles that are devoted to theory and simulation of the equation of state, collective and transport properties of dense quantum plasmas. Of particular interest is the broad variety of concepts and approaches that are highly complementary. Many of the results reported are of methodological relevance for inertial confinement fusion.

1. The article by Gawne *et al.*, “Spectral deconvolution without the deconvolution: Extracting temperature from x-ray Thomson scattering spectra without the source-and-instrument function” [57] explores a new approach for the model-free interpretation of X-ray Thomson scattering (XRTS) experiments in the imaginary-time domain [58, 59] that eliminates the need for explicit knowledge of the source-and-instrument function of the experimental set-up. This is achieved by combining measurements at multiple scattering angles and confirmed on the basis of extensive ray-tracing simulations.
2. The paper by Röpke, “The virial expansion of plasma properties: Benchmarks for numerical results” [60] is devoted to analytical low-density expansion of thermodynamic functions, dielectric function and conductivity. The author derives analytical benchmarks for the uniform electron gas and for hydrogen and compares them to recent fermionic path integral Monte Carlo (PIMC) results of Dornheim *et al.* [5] and Filinov *et al.* [61].
3. The paper by Böhme *et al.*, “Correlation function metrology for warm dense matter: Recent developments and practical guidelines” [62] gives a practical hands-on recipe for the model-free interpretation of XRTS experiments using the recent imaginary-time Laplace transform method [58, 59]. As a practical example, they consider a recent XRTS measurement on optically heated diamond [63].

4. The article by Ebeling and Röpke, "On the foundation of the quantum statistics of thermal plasmas from Planck and Unsöld to recent developments" [64] gives an introduction into quantum statistics with an overview on the ionization equilibrium in hydrogen and helium. It discusses quantum statistical results and compares to PIMC simulation data.
5. Kononov *et al.*, "Nonlinear effects in light-ion stopping powers within real-time time-dependent density functional theory" [65] compares the results of real-time TDDFT calculations to effective charge models for low-Z stopping in warm dense matter. It examines nonlinear effects near and below the Bragg peak, finding that even proton stopping powers can show subtle and complex deviations from linear-response theory.
6. The paper by White *et al.*, "Quantum fluctuations in dense plasma simulations" [66] describes an excited states molecular dynamics (ESMD) model that accounts for transitions among different excited electronic configurations among pseudoatoms. Fluctuations among configurations with finite lifetimes are shown to impact predictions of various observables in steady-state plasmas.
7. The paper by Kählert, "Structural and dynamic properties of dense hydrogen plasmas from semiclassical molecular dynamics simulations" [67] uses the improved Kelbg potential [68, 69] to compute, among others, the plasmon dispersion and ion-acoustic mode for dense hydrogen. Comparison to first principles simulations confirms the high accuracy of the method.
8. Sharma *et al.*, "Mixed stochastic-deterministic density functional theoretic decomposition of Kubo-Greenwood conductivities in the projector augmented wave formalism" [70] applies the recently developed and highly efficient mDFT formalism to the calculation of optical conductivities for low-Z warm dense matter. Both Kubo-Greenwood and real-time mDFT calculations are compared to results from the traditional (and less efficient) Kohn-Sham formulations.
9. Toliás *et al.*, "Exact series expansion for even frequency moments of the dynamic structure factor" [71] presents explicit expressions for the even frequency moments in terms of odd frequency moments of the dynamic structure factor. The latter can be evaluated from the sum rules, and the new relations thus provide a systematic pathway towards the characterization of all frequency moments.

D. Radiation: Emission, Absorption, Transport

1. The original article by Preising and Redmer, "Electronic opacities of Jupiter's and Saturn's interior from ab initio simulations" [72] presents the electronic opacity for two prototypical gas giant planets based on a combination of the Kubo-Greenwood formula with *ab initio* DFT simulations. These results are important for the understanding of, e.g., thermal evolution and thus help to refine planetary models.

E. Basic Plasma Phenomena, Waves, Instabilities

1. Bakri *et al.*, "Wave-particle interactions in a spin polarized plasma" [73] analyzes a spin-Vlasov-Poisson-Landau-Lifshitz model in which itinerant electrons and fixed ions interact through Coulomb and magnetic exchange interactions. A magnon-electron resonance is identified, through which damping or instability of the attendant spin wave can occur.
2. Pagiazitis *et al.*, "Path integral molecular dynamics: A high-fidelity approach to quantum dynamics of electrons" [74] studies the weakly coupled non-degenerate uniform electron gas using ring-polymer molecular dynamics to account for quantum diffraction. Benchmark data for the equation of state and diffusivity are reported along the quantum-classical crossover and a microscopic mechanism by which binary collisions are softened by quantum effects is corroborated.

F. Plasma-Based Accelerators, Beams, Radiation Generation

The article by Ming Zi *et al.*, "Quantum stochasticity effects on angular distributions in electron-beam collision with laser pulse" [75] presents quantum electrodynamics particle-in-cell simulations of a laser-wakefield accelerated electron beam interacting with an ultra intense laser field. The study reveals three distinct manifestations of quantum stochasticity effects, including double-peak positron distributions.

G. Review Article

The paper by Karasiev *et al.*, "Thermal exchange-correlation functionals: Capturing quantum electron behavior in warm, dense plasmas" [51] presents a comprehensive review of cutting-edge developments in density functional theory simulations. It is devoted to thermal exchange-correlation (XC) functionals that are explicitly

designed for simulations of warm dense quantum plasmas. The authors highlight the importance of consistent XC functionals that take into account thermal XC and spatial inhomogeneity on the same level of sophistication. The review provides clear instructions for current practitioners and outlines a pathway upwards on Jacob's ladder of functional approximations [76] for future developments.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK

The present special issue presents an overview on quantum plasmas with a focus on dynamic properties and nonequilibrium effects. It demonstrates the diversity of applications and questions as well as of theoretical and simulation concepts. Most of the articles are devoted to dense quantum plasmas and warm dense matter since this field has attracted particular attention, primarily, due to the impressive recent progress in inertial confinement fusion. At the same time, many questions regarding the properties and relaxation behavior of dense quantum plasmas are still poorly understood or cannot yet be accurately predicted. This requires further strong research efforts both, in experiment and simulation, in particular, to resolve rapid processes. We hope that readers will obtain an excellent overview and that this special issue will stimulate further research in the field of quantum plasmas.

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