

Running coupling corrections and nonlinear QCD evolution at small-x

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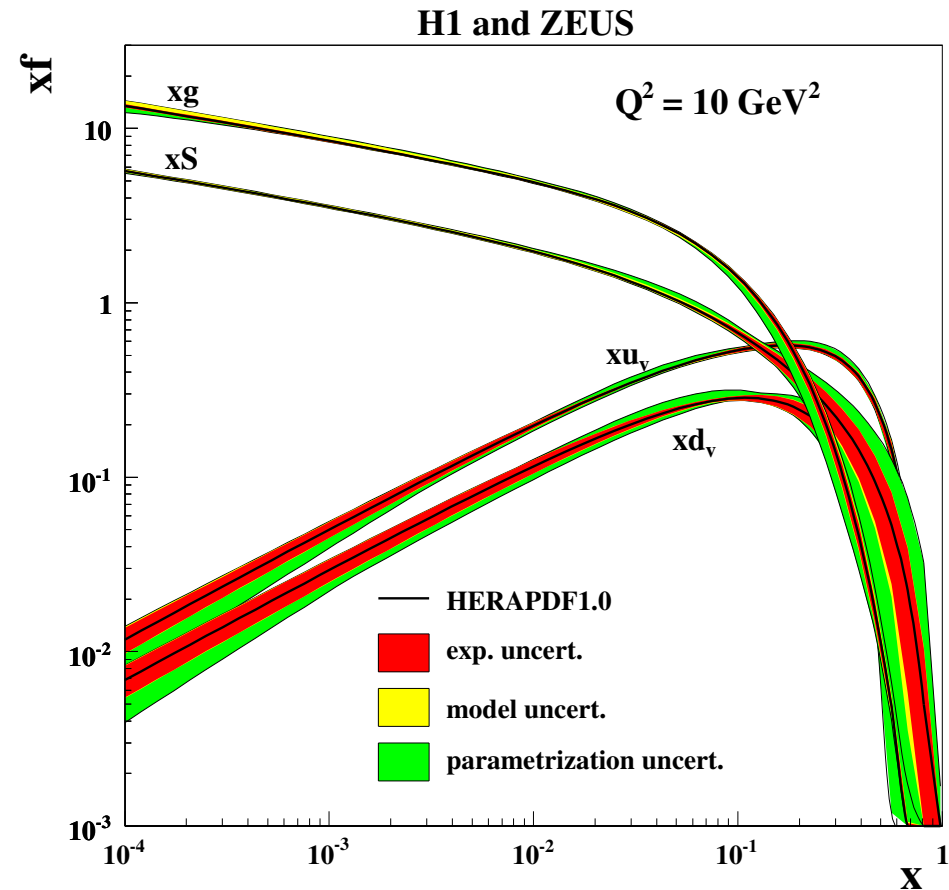
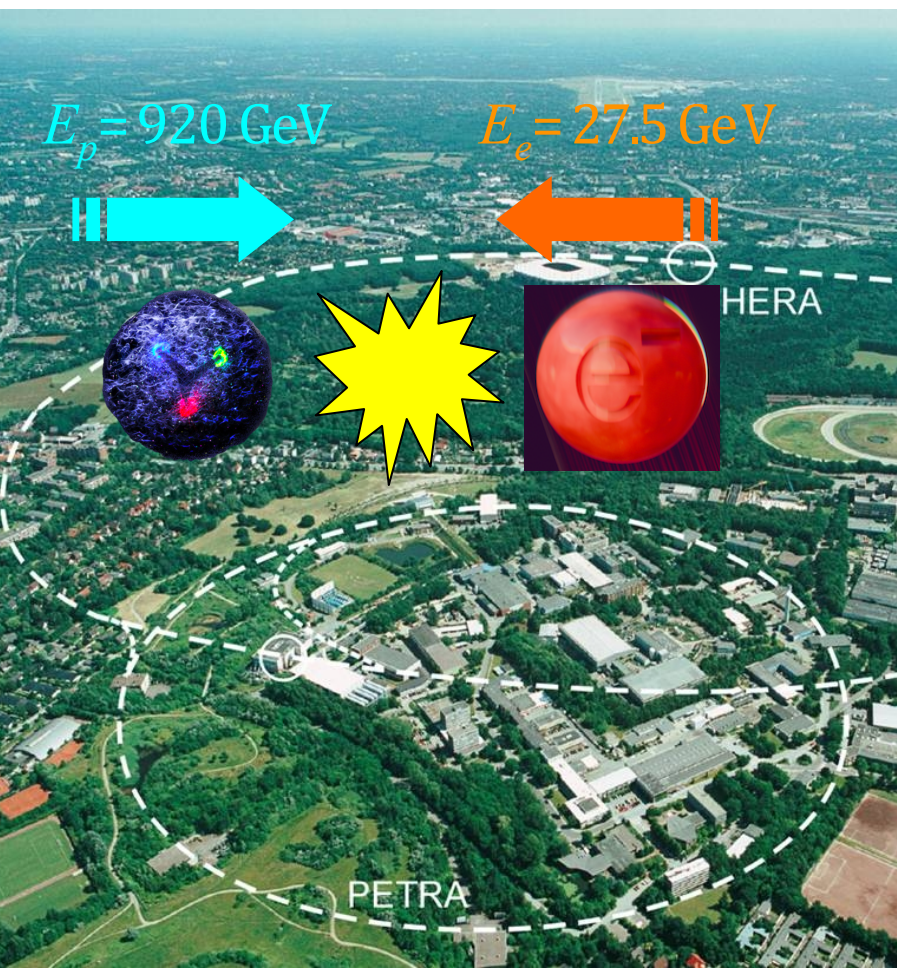
C. Contreras, J. Garrido, E. Levin: [arXiv:2503.19771](https://arxiv.org/abs/2503.19771) [hep-ph]

6th WS on Nonperturbative Aspects of QCD, Valparaíso, Chile, December 1-5, 2025

Introduction

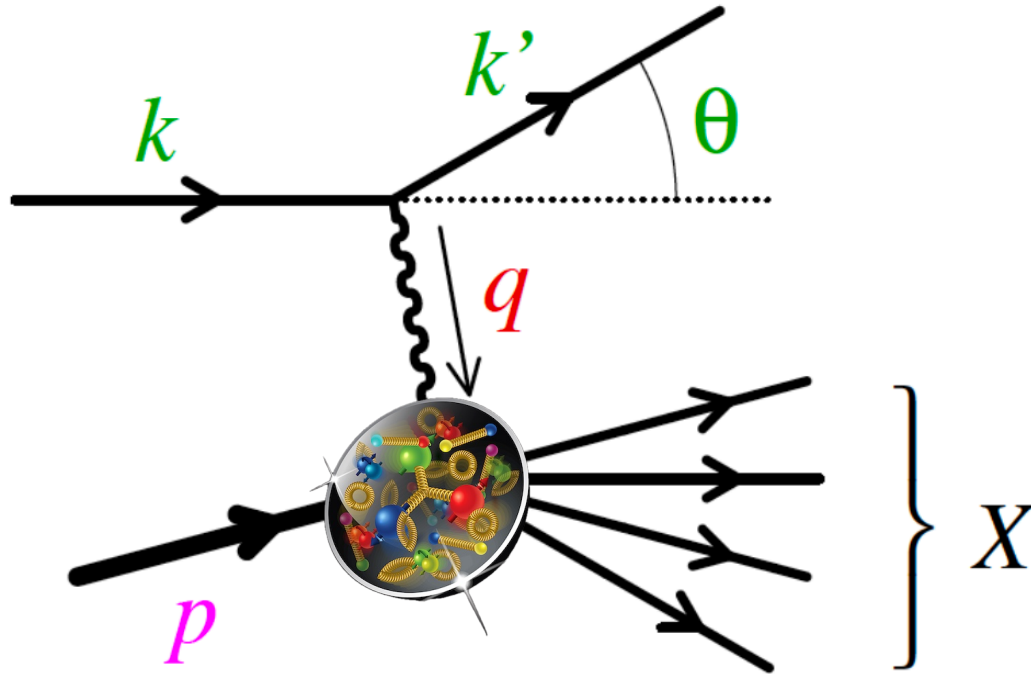
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A key lesson from the HERA $e^\pm p$ DIS collider: “Gluons and sea quarks dominate the proton wave-function at high energies



Deep Inelastic Scattering (DIS)

Kinematics:



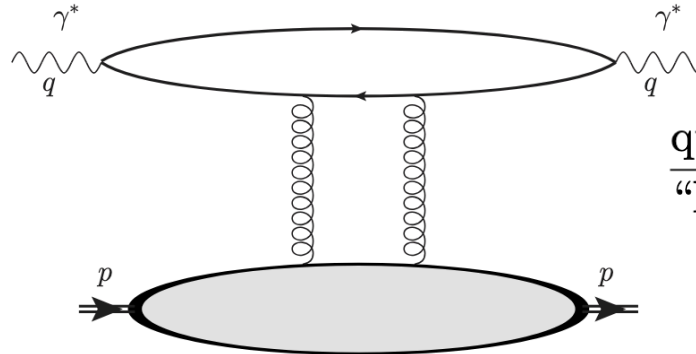
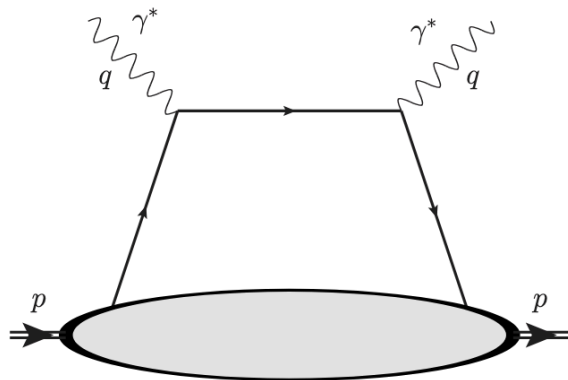
$$s = (P + q)^2$$

$$x = \frac{Q^2}{2P \cdot q}$$

$$Q^2 = -q^2 = (k - k')^2$$

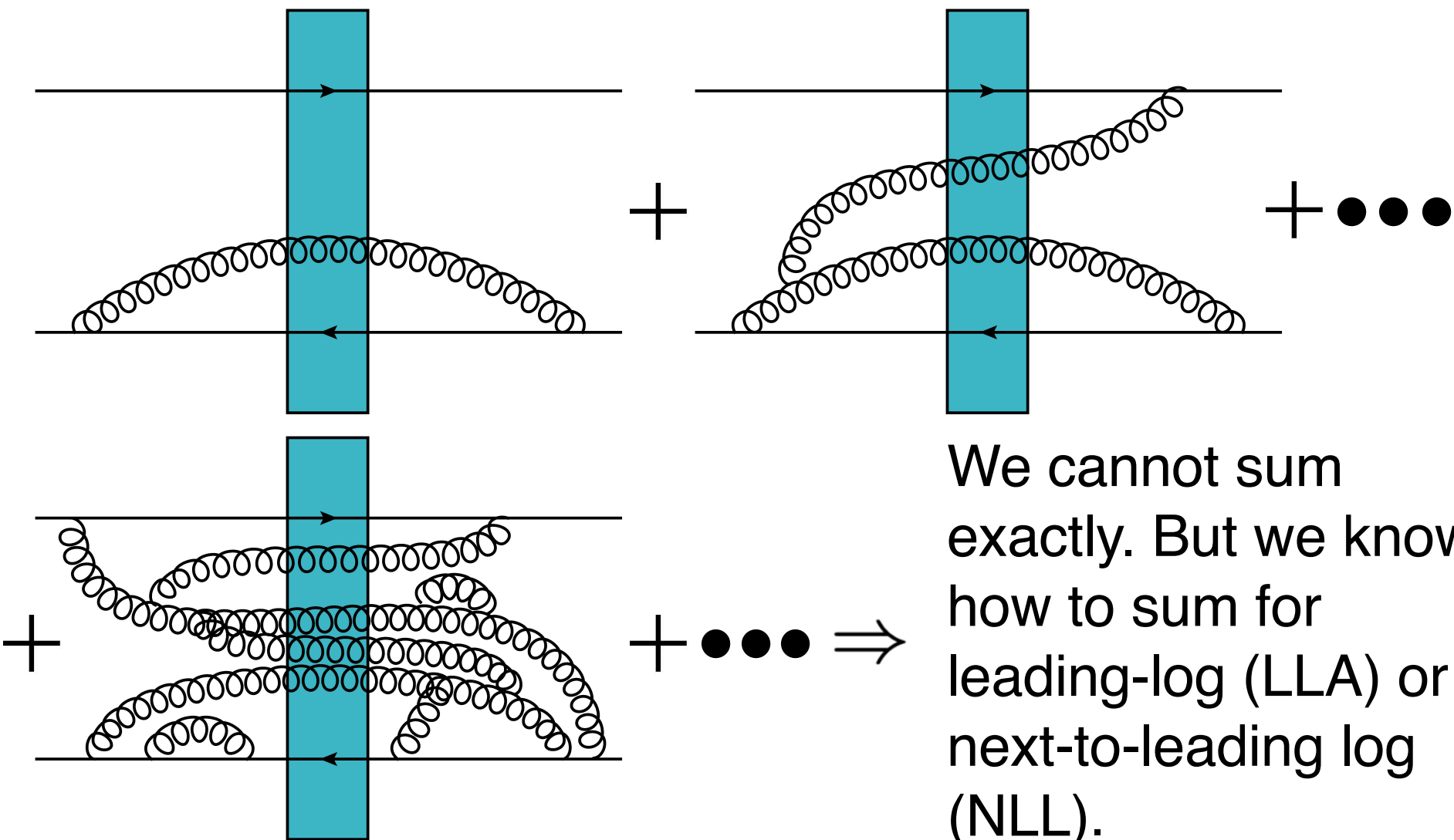
$$y = \frac{Q^2}{sx}$$

Small- $x \Leftrightarrow$ High energy s



$$\frac{\text{quark loop diagram}}{\text{"handbag" diagram}} \propto \frac{\alpha_s}{x}$$

Quantum corrections:

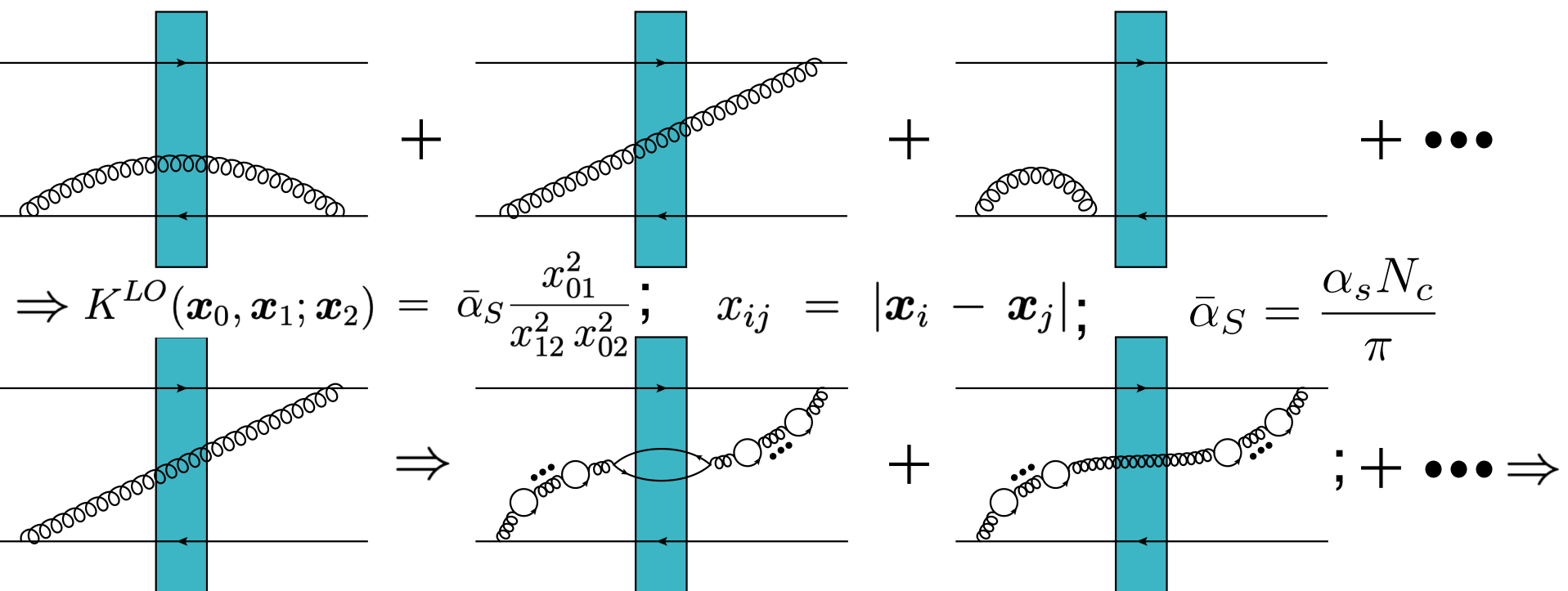


Wee partons ($x \ll 1$) are intrinsically non-perturbative.

Introduction

The sum was first calculated by I. Balitsky '96 (effective lagrangian) and Y. Kovchegov '99 (large N_c QCD):

$$\frac{\partial N(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_1; Y)}{\partial Y} = \frac{1}{2\pi} \int d^2 \mathbf{x}_2 K(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_1; \mathbf{x}_2) \times \left[N(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_2; Y) + N(\mathbf{x}_2, \mathbf{x}_1; Y) - N(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_1; Y) - N(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_2; Y)N(\mathbf{x}_2, \mathbf{x}_1; Y) \right]$$



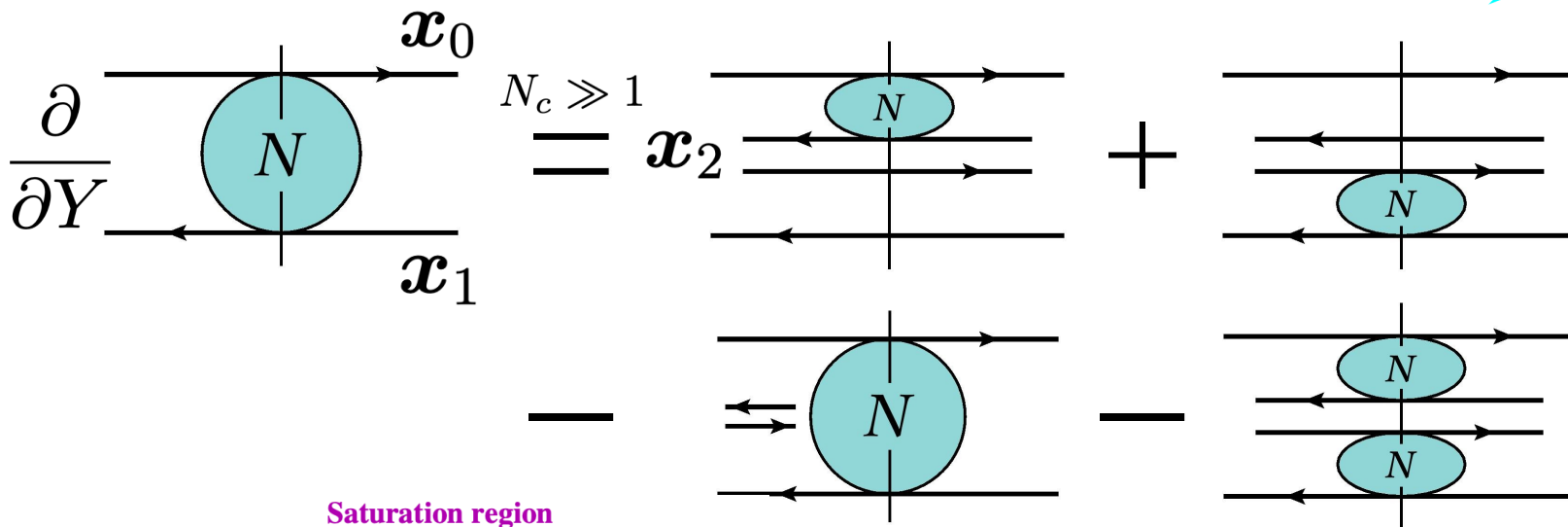
$\Rightarrow K^{LO}(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_1; \mathbf{x}_2) = \bar{\alpha}_S \frac{x_{01}^2}{x_{12}^2 x_{02}^2}; \quad x_{ij} = |\mathbf{x}_i - \mathbf{x}_j|; \quad \bar{\alpha}_S = \frac{\alpha_s N_c}{\pi}$

$K_{\text{rcBK}}^{\text{Bal}}(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_1; \mathbf{x}_2) = \bar{\alpha}_S(1/x_{01}^2) \left[\frac{x_{01}^2}{x_{12}^2 x_{02}^2} + \frac{1}{x_{12}^2} \left(\frac{\bar{\alpha}_S(1/x_{12}^2)}{\bar{\alpha}_S(1/x_{02}^2)} - 1 \right) + \frac{1}{x_{02}^2} \left(\frac{\bar{\alpha}_S(1/x_{02}^2)}{\bar{\alpha}_S(1/x_{12}^2)} - 1 \right) \right]$

Introduction

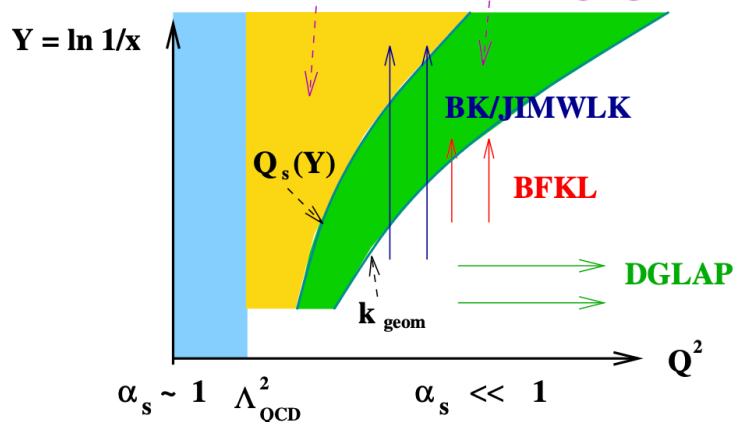
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$N_c \gg 1$



Saturation region
Color Glass Condensate

Extended Geometric
Scaling region



The breakdown of the linear regime occurs when

$$N(r = 1/Q_s(Y), Y) = \text{const}$$

which gives

$$\kappa \equiv \frac{\chi(\gamma_{cr})}{1 - \gamma_{cr}}$$

$$Q_s^2(Y) = Q_{s0}^2 \exp \left\{ \bar{\alpha}_S \kappa Y - \frac{3}{2(1 - \gamma_{cr})} \ln \bar{\alpha}_S Y + \mathcal{O} \left(\frac{1}{\sqrt{Y}} \right) \right\}; \quad \gamma_{cr} = 0.37$$

Introduction

Solution in the extended geometric region

$$\frac{\partial N(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_1; Y)}{\partial Y} = \frac{\bar{\alpha}_S}{2\pi} \int d^2 \mathbf{x}_2 \frac{(\mathbf{x}_0 - \mathbf{x}_1)^2}{(\mathbf{x}_0 - \mathbf{x}_2)^2 (\mathbf{x}_2 - \mathbf{x}_1)^2} \times [N(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_2; Y) + N(\mathbf{x}_2, \mathbf{x}_1; Y) - N(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_1; Y)]$$

$$\Rightarrow N(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_1; Y) = N_0 \left(r^2 Q_s^2(Y) \right)^{1-\gamma_{cr}}$$

Approximate solution in the saturation region: We simplify the kernel by taking into account only log contributions

$$\Rightarrow \frac{\partial N(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_1; Y)}{\partial Y} = (1 - N(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_1; Y)) \int_{1/Q_s^2(Y)}^{r^2} \frac{dx_{02}^2}{x_{02}^2} N(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_2; Y)$$

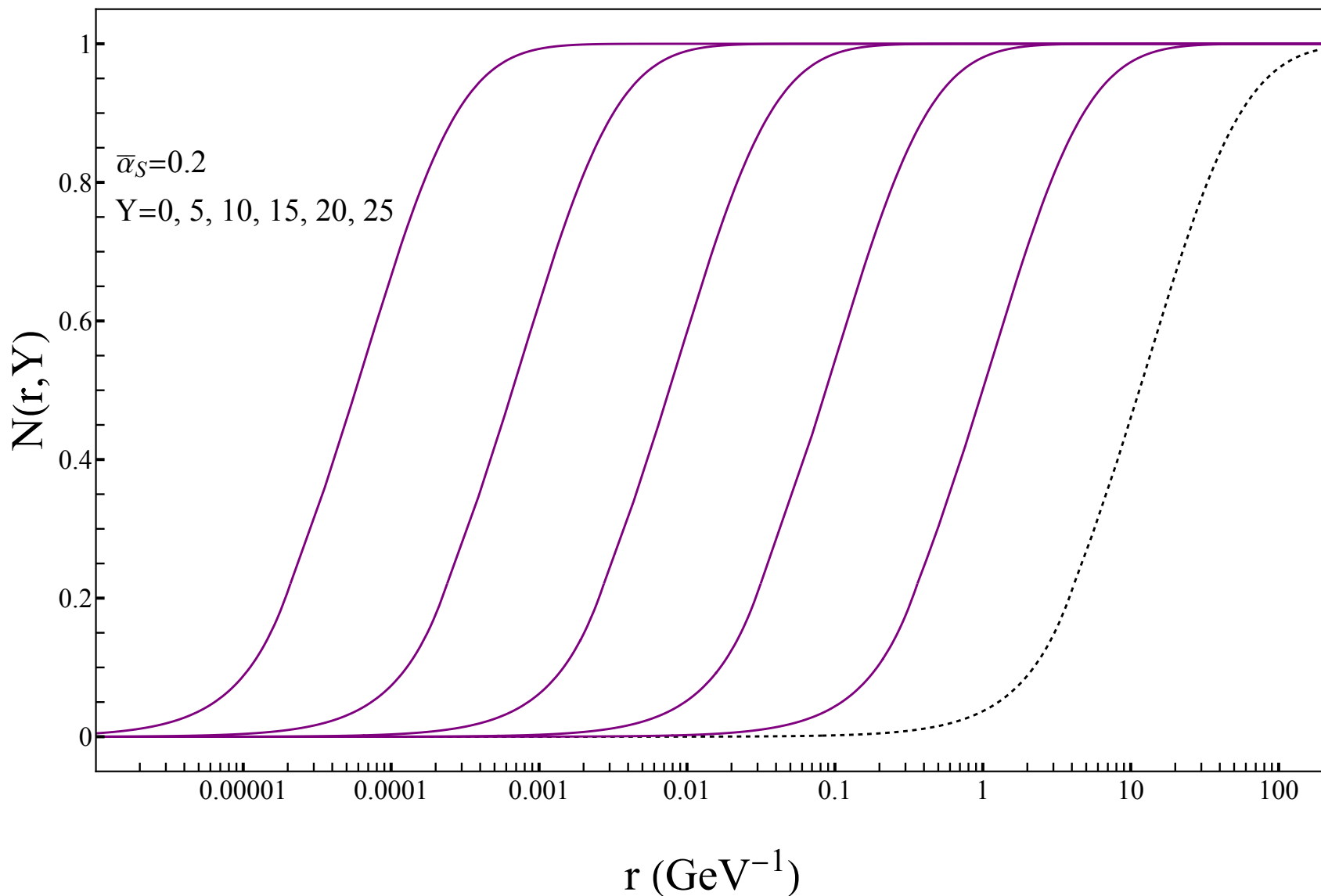
with solution

$$N(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_1; Y) = 1 - e^{-\Omega(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_1; Y)}; \quad \Omega(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_1; Y) = \mathcal{U}^{-1}(\bar{\gamma}z);$$

$$\mathcal{U}(\Omega) = \int_{\Omega_0}^{\Omega} \frac{d\Omega'}{\sqrt{\Omega_0^2 \left(1 - \frac{1}{\bar{\gamma}^2 \kappa}\right) + \frac{2}{\bar{\gamma}^2 \kappa} (-1 + \Omega' + e^{-\Omega'})}}$$

Introduction

$$N(r, Y) = N_0 \left(r^2 Q_s^2(Y) \right)^{\bar{\gamma}} \theta(1 - r Q_s(Y)) + \left(1 - e^{-\Omega(r, Y)} \right) \theta(r Q_s(Y) - 1)$$



Starting from

$$\frac{\partial N(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_1; Y)}{\partial Y} = \frac{1}{2\pi} \int d^2 \mathbf{x}_2 K_{\text{rcBK}}^{\text{Bal}}(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_1; \mathbf{x}_2) \times \left[N(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_2; Y) + N(\mathbf{x}_2, \mathbf{x}_1; Y) - N(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_1; Y) - N(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_2; Y)N(\mathbf{x}_2, \mathbf{x}_1; Y) \right]$$

In the vicinity of the saturation scale where

$$x_{01}^2 \approx x_{12}^2 \approx x_{02}^2 \approx 1/Q_s^2$$

we can consider $\bar{\alpha}_S(1/x_{ij}^2) \rightarrow \bar{\alpha}_S(1/x_{01}^2)$ so that

$$K_{\text{rcBK}}^{\text{Bal}}(\underline{x}_0, \underline{x}_1; \underline{x}_2) \approx \bar{\alpha}_S(1/x_{01}^2) \frac{x_{01}^2}{x_{02}^2 x_{12}^2}$$

And taking only the log contributions, it reduces to

$$\frac{\partial N(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_1; Y)}{\partial Y} = (1 - N(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_1; Y)) \int_{1/Q_s^2(Y)}^{r^2} \frac{dx_{02}^2}{x_{02}^2} \bar{\alpha}_S(1/x_{02}^2) N(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_2; Y)$$

From the equations that determine the saturation momentum it is found

$$Q_s^2(Y) = \Lambda_{QCD}^2 e^{2.44 \bar{\alpha}_S Y} \quad Q_s^2(Y) = \Lambda_{QCD}^2 e^{\sqrt{39Y/3}}$$

(fixed) (running)

We are not able to find a solution with geometric scaling (GS) $z = \ln(r^2 Q_s^2(Y))$. What we found instead is

$$N(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_1; Y) = 1 - e^{-\Omega(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_1; Y)}; \quad \Omega(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_1; Y) = \Omega_\zeta(\zeta) + \Omega'(Y, \zeta)$$

$$\Rightarrow \zeta \frac{d^2 \Omega_\zeta(\zeta)}{d\zeta^2} + \frac{d\Omega_\zeta(\zeta)}{d\zeta} = 1 - e^{-\Omega_\zeta(\zeta)}$$

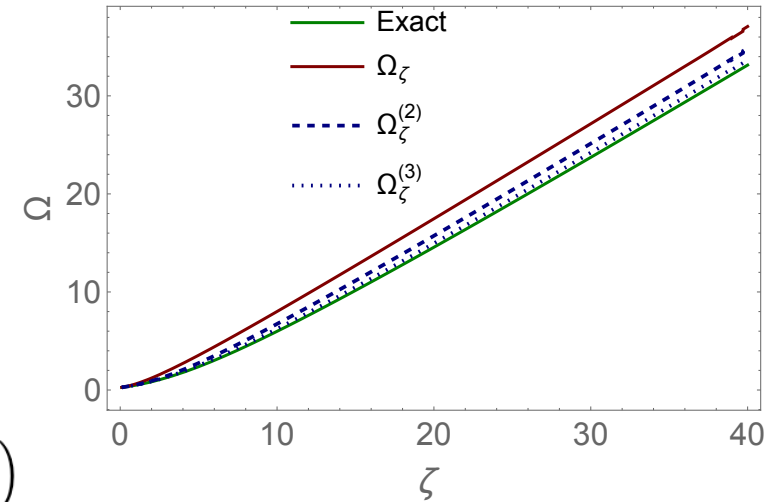
$$\Rightarrow \frac{\partial^2 \Omega'(\zeta, l - l_s; b)}{\partial Y \partial(l - l_s)} = e^{-\Omega_\zeta(\zeta)} \Omega'(\zeta, l - l_s; b); \quad l - l_s = -\frac{4N_c}{b_0} \ln\left(\frac{-\xi}{\xi_s}\right)$$

$$\zeta = -\frac{4N_c}{b_0} Y \ln(\bar{\alpha}_S(Q_s^2(Y))/\bar{\alpha}_S(1/r^2))$$

$$\zeta \frac{d^2 \Omega^{(0)}(\zeta; b)}{d\zeta^2} + \frac{d\Omega^{(0)}(\zeta; b)}{d\zeta} = 1$$

$$\zeta \frac{d^2 \Omega^{(1)}(\zeta; b)}{d\zeta^2} + \frac{d\Omega^{(1)}(\zeta; b)}{d\zeta} = -e^{-\Omega^{(0)}(\zeta; b)}$$

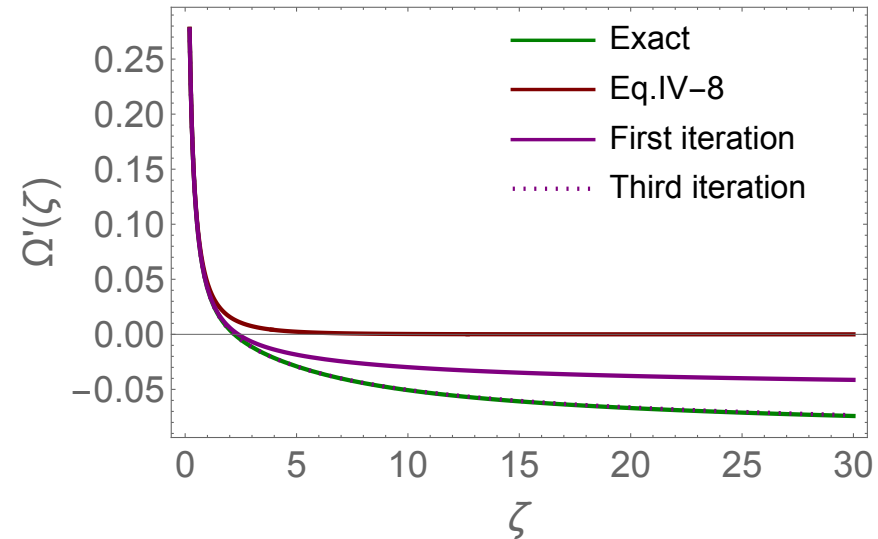
$$\frac{d}{d\zeta} \left(\zeta \frac{d}{d\zeta} \Omega^{(i+1)}(\zeta; b) \right) = \exp \left(- \sum_{l=0}^{i-1} \Omega^{(l)}(\zeta; b) \right) \left(1 - e^{-\Omega^{(i)}(\zeta; b)} \right)$$



Iterative solution or numerical

$$\Omega'(\zeta, l - l_s; b) = \mathcal{Z}(\zeta) \mathcal{L}(l - l_s)$$

$$\frac{3}{2} \mathcal{Z}_\zeta(\zeta) + \zeta \mathcal{Z}_{\zeta, \zeta}''(\zeta) = e^{-\Omega_\zeta(\zeta)} \mathcal{Z}(\zeta)$$



$$\Delta^{(i)} \mathcal{Z}(\zeta) = \int_0^\zeta \frac{dt}{t^{3/2}} \int_0^t dt' \sqrt{t'} e^{-\Omega_\zeta(t')} \Delta^{(i-1)} \mathcal{Z}(t') = -2 \int_0^\zeta dt \left(\sqrt{\frac{t}{\zeta}} - 1 \right) e^{-\Omega_\zeta(t)} \Delta^{(i-1)} \mathcal{Z}(t)$$

To solve this last eq. we apply the homotopy perturbation method (HPM):

$$\mathcal{L}[u] + \mathcal{N}_{\mathcal{L}}[u] = 0$$

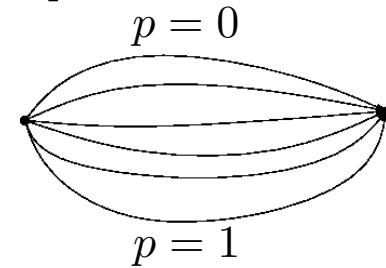
Homotopy: One can be "continuously deformed" into the other.

Integro-differential operator

Non-linear part; arbitrary form

We construct a homotopy $u_p : \Omega \times [0, 1] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ such that

$$\mathcal{H}(p, u) = \mathcal{L}[u_p] + p \mathcal{N}_{\mathcal{L}}[u_p] = 0$$



where $p \in [0, 1]$ is an embedding parameter. The sol. is

$$u_p(Y, \underline{x}_{01}, \underline{b}) = u_0(Y, \underline{x}_{01}, \underline{b}) \left(1 + p \frac{u_1(Y, \underline{x}_{01}, \underline{b})}{u_0(Y, \underline{x}_{01}, \underline{b})} + p^2 \frac{u_2(Y, \underline{x}_{01}, \underline{b})}{u_0(Y, \underline{x}_{01}, \underline{b})} + \dots \right)$$

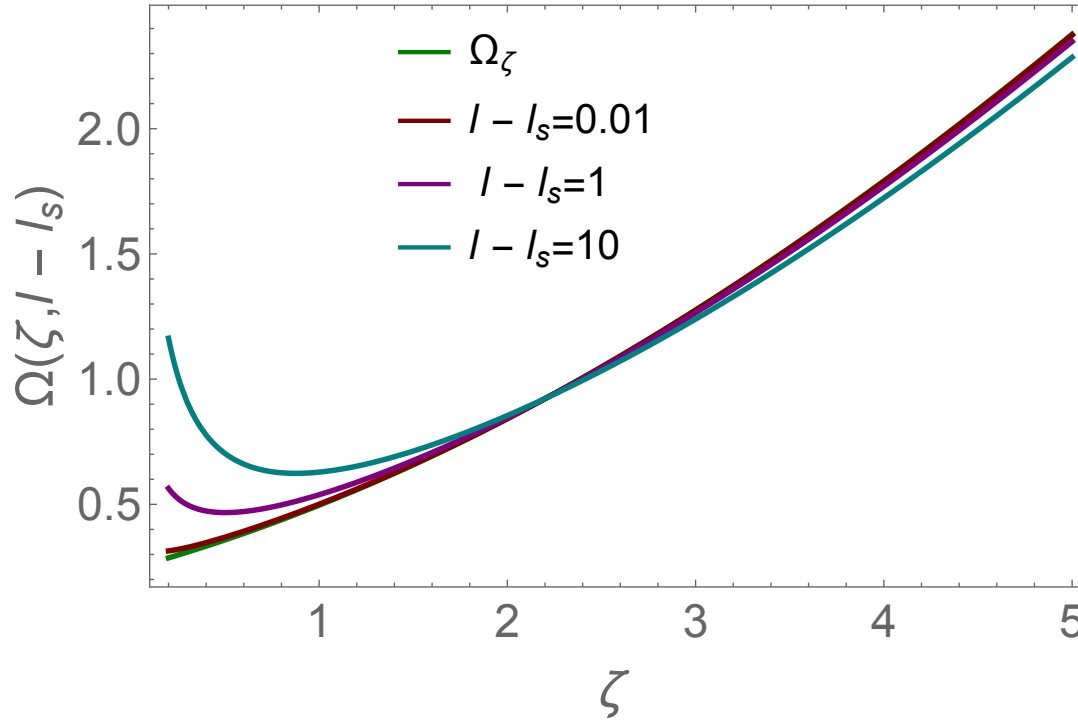
For $u = \lim_{p \rightarrow 1} u_p = u_0 + u_1 + u_2 + \dots$ it gives the solution to the nonlinear equation (J.H. He, 1999)

Defining $\mathcal{L}[\Omega^{(p)}] = \frac{\partial^2 \Omega^{(p)}(Y, r, b)}{\partial Y \partial l} - 1 + e^{-\Omega^{(p)}(Y, r, b)}$

$$\mathcal{N}_{\mathcal{L}}[\Omega^{(p)}] = \int_{r_1 > r}^{1/\Lambda_{QCD}} \frac{d^2 r_1}{2\pi} K(r; r_1, r_2) \exp \left(-\Omega^{(p)} \left(r_1, Y; \mathbf{b} - \frac{1}{2} \mathbf{r}_2 \right) - \Omega^{(p)} \left(r_2, Y; \mathbf{b} - \frac{1}{2} \mathbf{r}_1 \right) \right)$$

For the zero iteration it gives

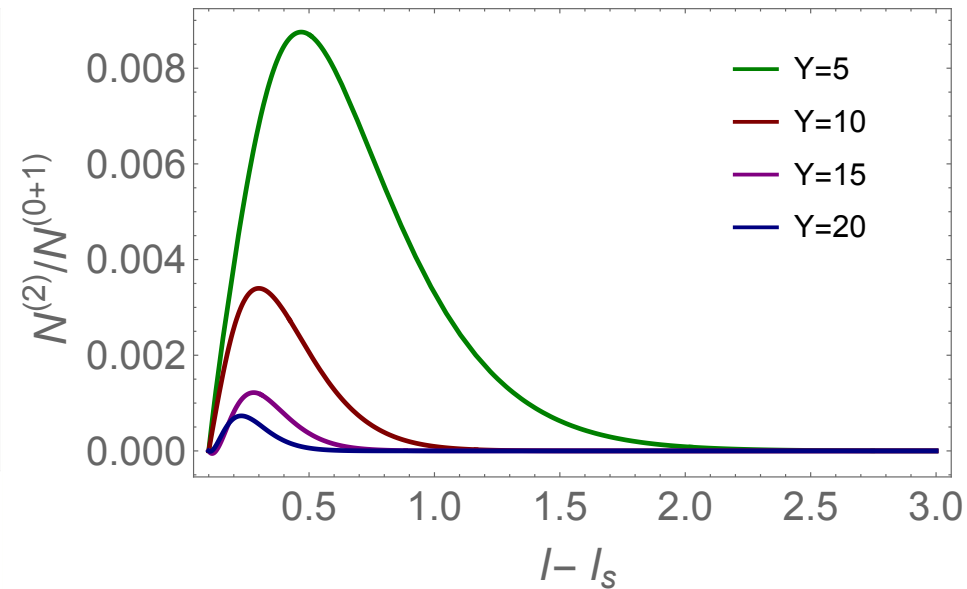
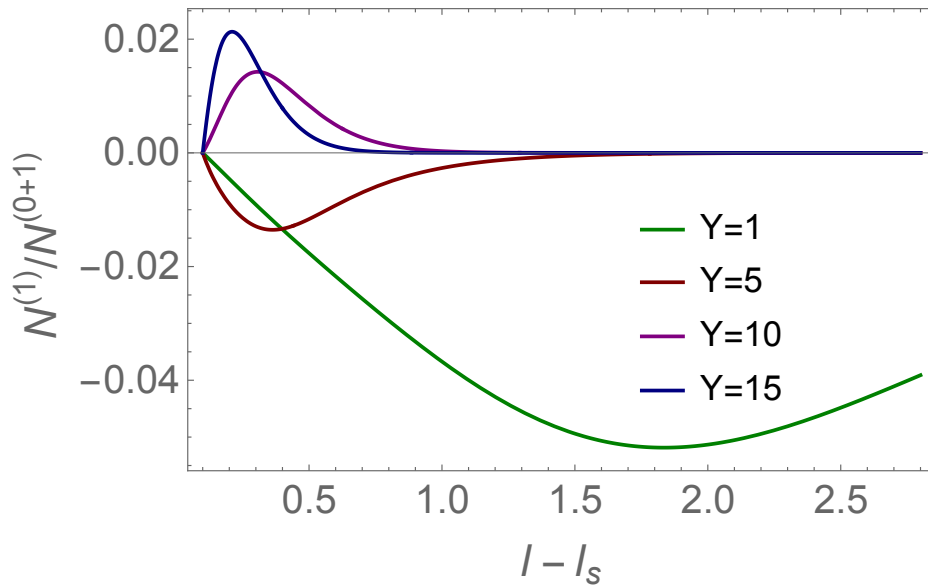
$$\Omega^{(0)}(\zeta, l - l_s) \equiv \Omega_{\zeta}^{(3)}(\zeta) + \Omega'(\zeta, l - l_s)$$



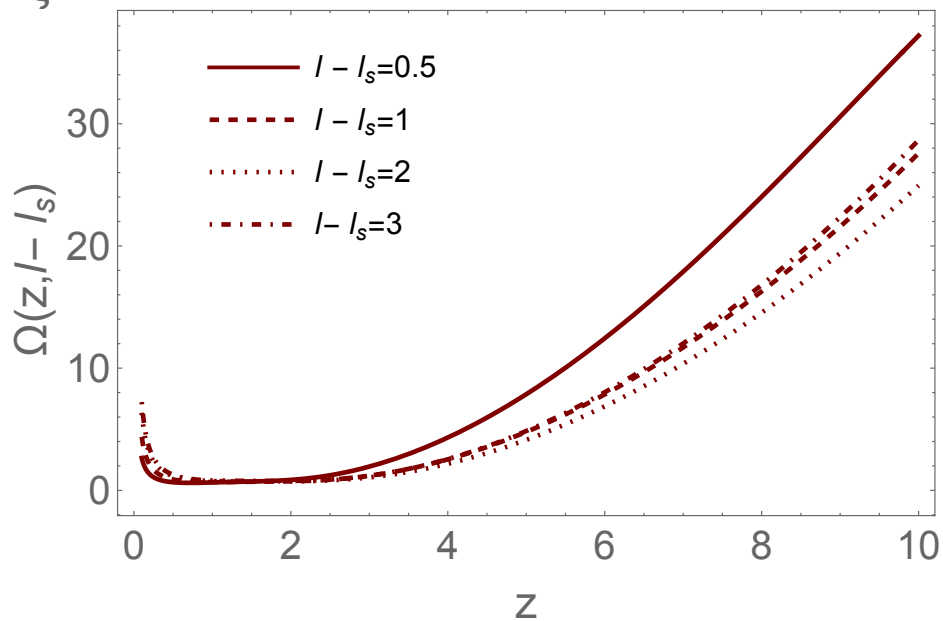
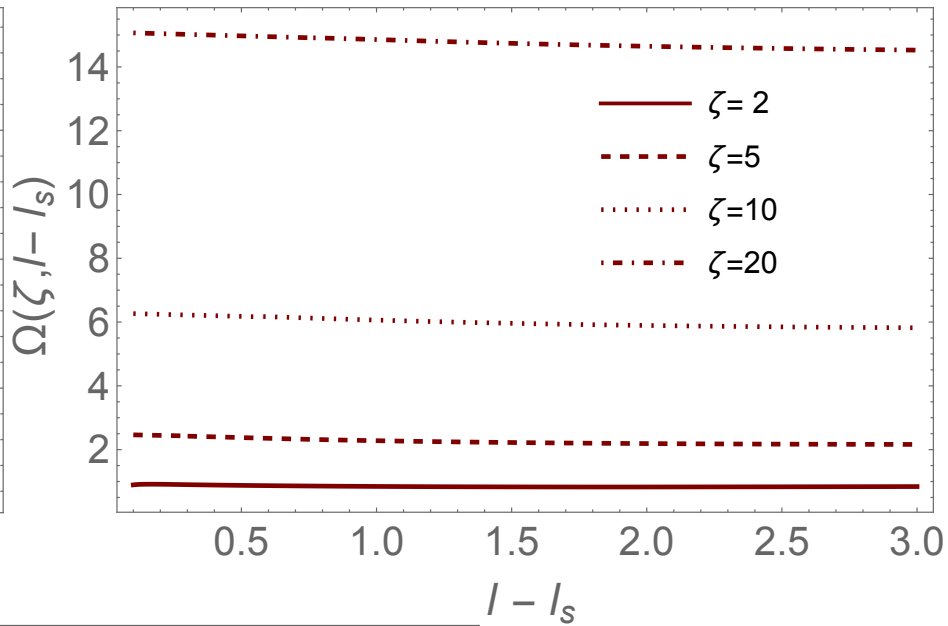
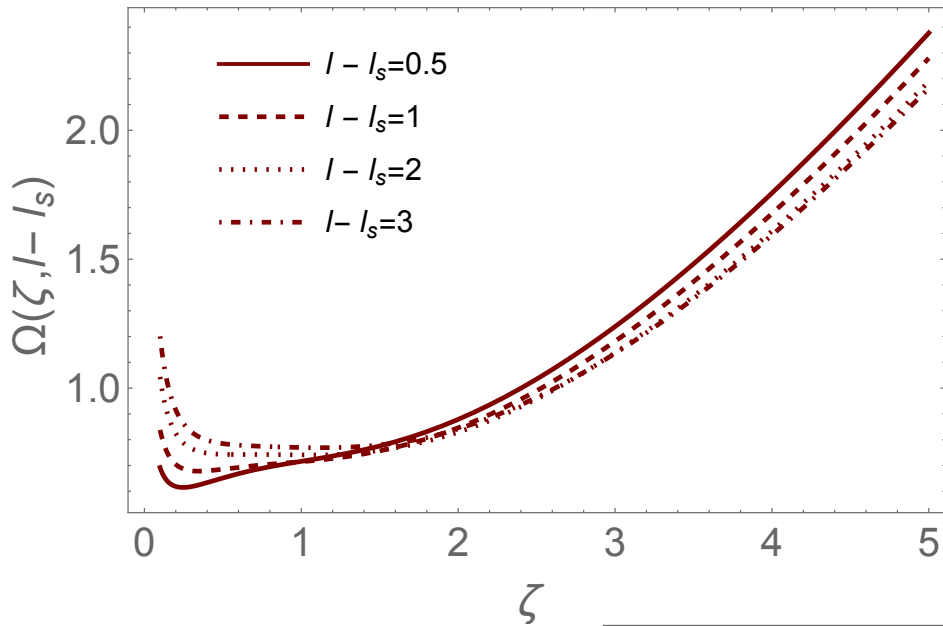
And for the corrections it gives

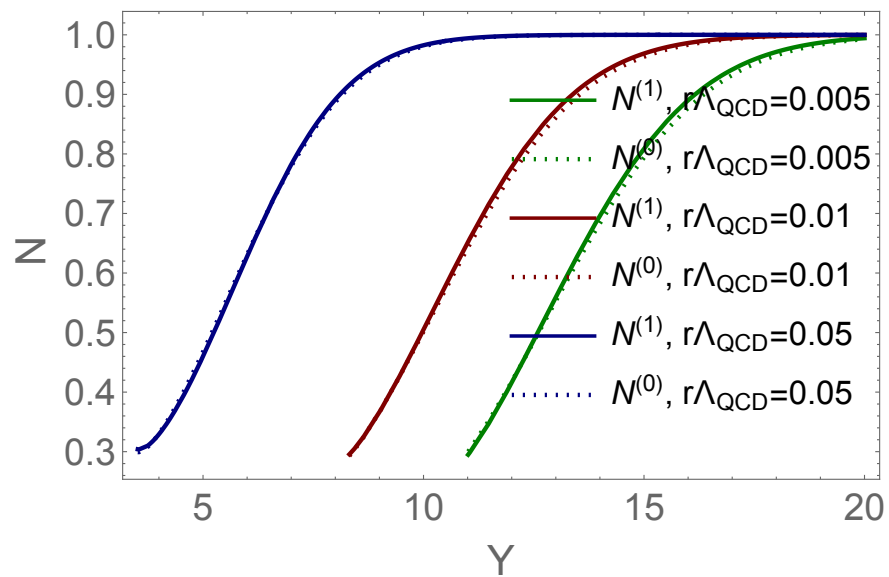
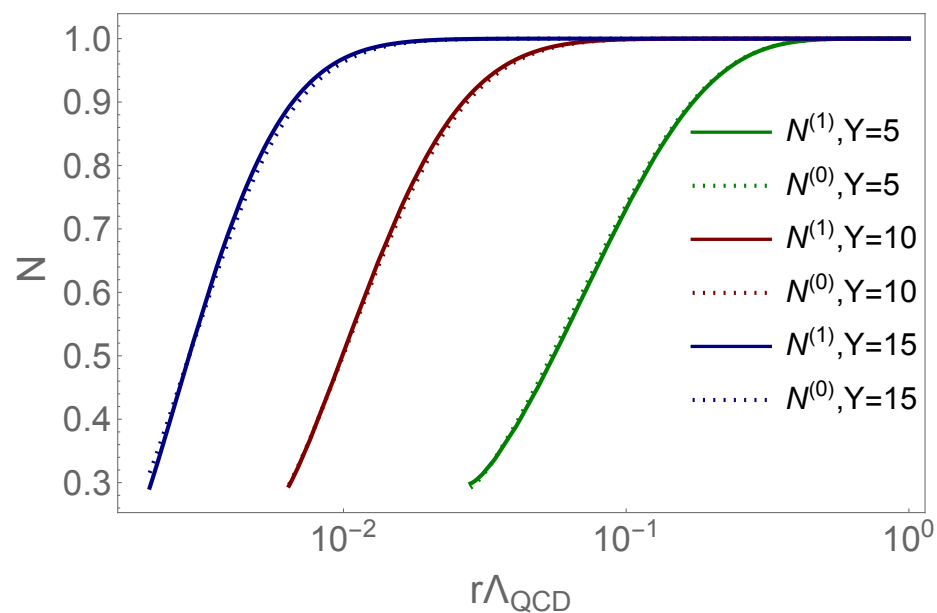
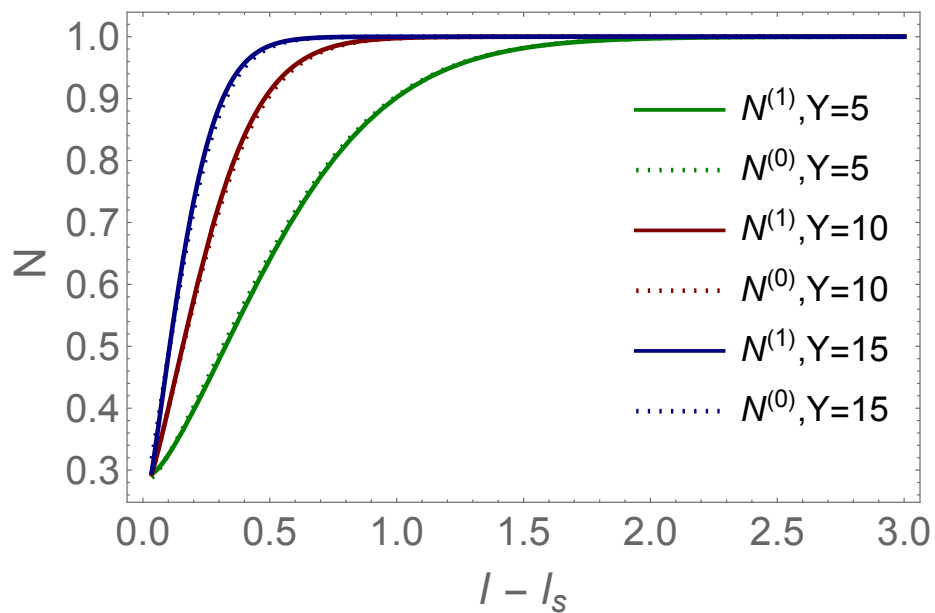
$$\frac{\partial^2 \Omega^{(1)}(Y, l - l_s)}{\partial Y \partial l} = \left(1 - e^{-\Omega^{(1)}(Y, l - l_s)}\right) e^{-\Omega^{(0)}(Y, l - l_s)} - \underbrace{\frac{\partial}{\partial l} \left(e^{\Omega^{(0)}(Y, l - l_s)} \mathcal{N}_{\mathcal{L}}[\Omega^{(0)}] \right)}_{DH^{(0)}(Y, l - l_s)}$$

$$\frac{\partial^2 \Omega^{(2)}(Y, l - l_s)}{\partial Y \partial (l - l_s)} = \Omega^{(2)}(Y, l - l_s) e^{-\Omega^{(0)}(Y, l - l_s) - \Omega^{(1)}(Y, l - l_s)} - \underbrace{\frac{\partial}{\partial (l - l_s)} \left(e^{\Omega^{(0)}(Y, l - l_s) + \Omega^{(1)}(Y, l - l_s)} \mathcal{N}_{\mathcal{L}}[\Omega^{(0)} + \Omega^{(1)}] \right)}_{DH^{(1)}(Y, l - l_s)}$$



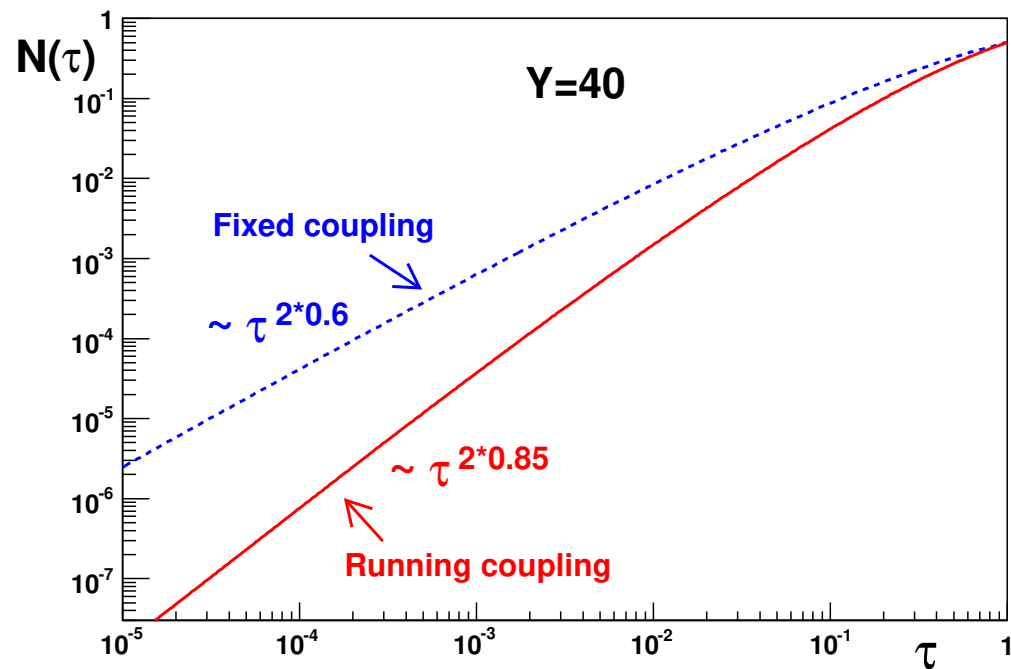
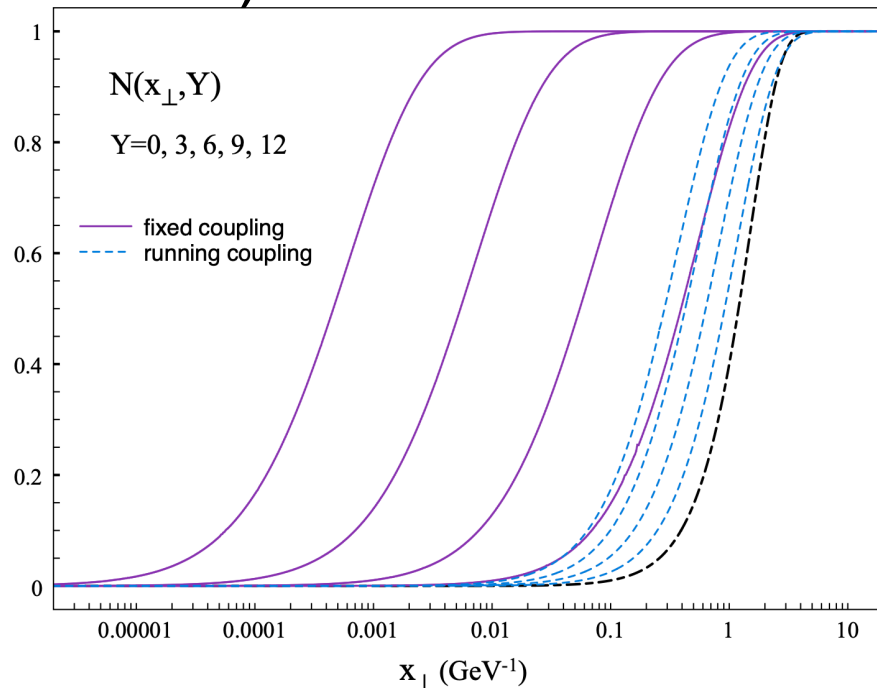
Not only studying the homotopy approach to nonlinear QCD, but also studying the scaling variable in this case





Things to do

- 1.) Connect with BFKL solution for $rQs(Y) < 1$ for a full picture, and compare with the fixed coupling case
- 2.) Check once again the geometric scaling behavior (since the numerical solution shows geometric scaling it seems)



(pictures from J. Albacete and Y. Kovchegov)



Thanks for listening!