

# Running coupling corrections and nonlinear QCD evolution at small-x

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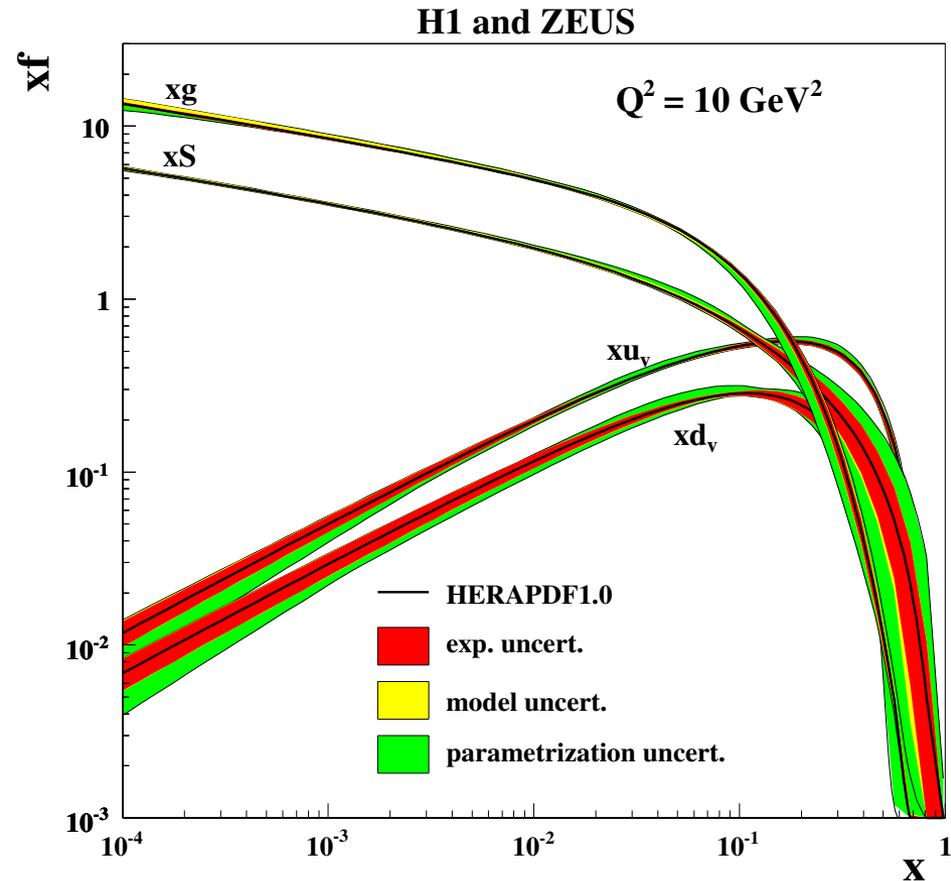
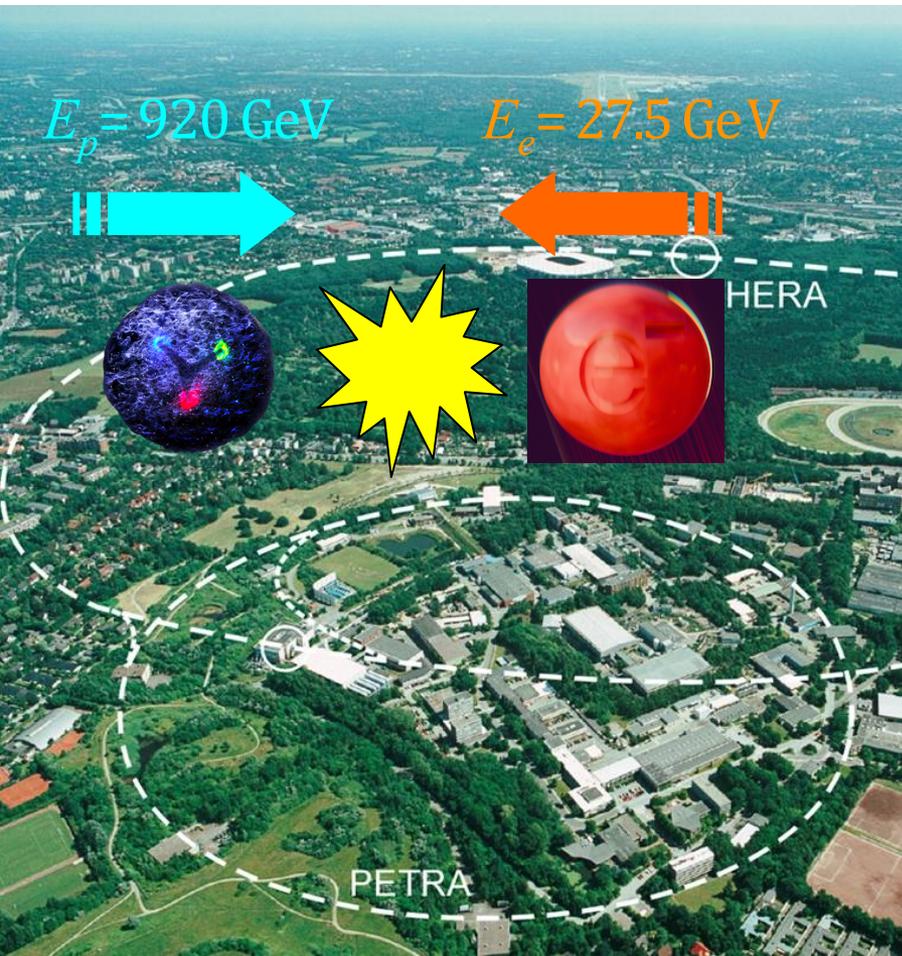
C. Contreras, J. Garrido, E. Levin: [arXiv:2503.19771](https://arxiv.org/abs/2503.19771) [hep-ph]

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

# Introduction

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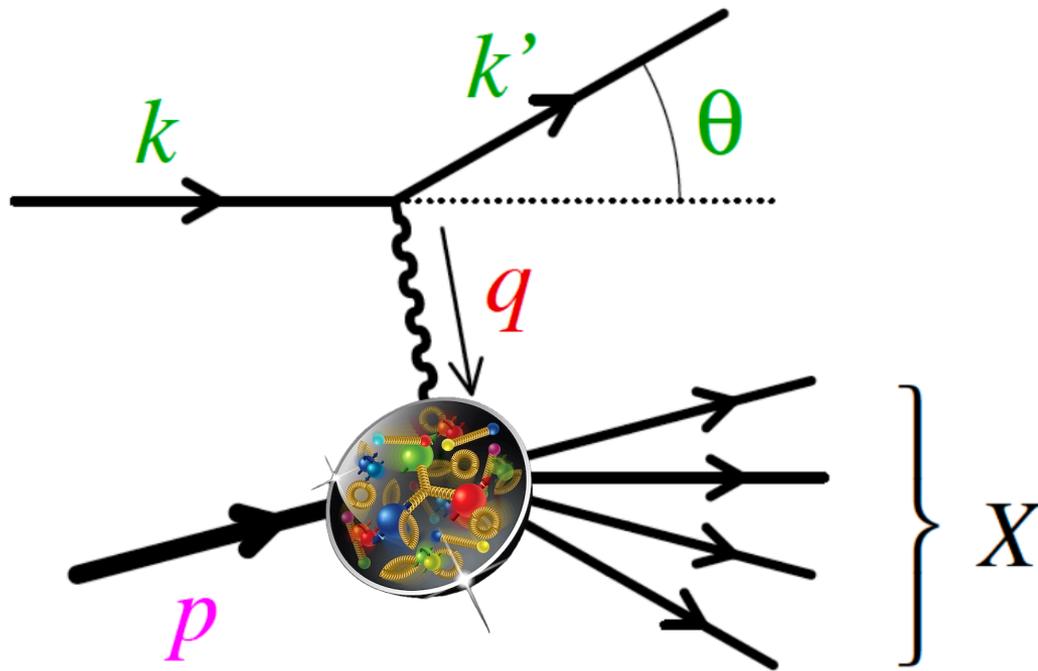
A key lesson from the HERA  $e^\pm p$  DIS collider: “Gluons and sea quarks dominate the proton wave-function at high energies



# Introduction

## Deep Inelastic Scattering (DIS)

## Kinematics:



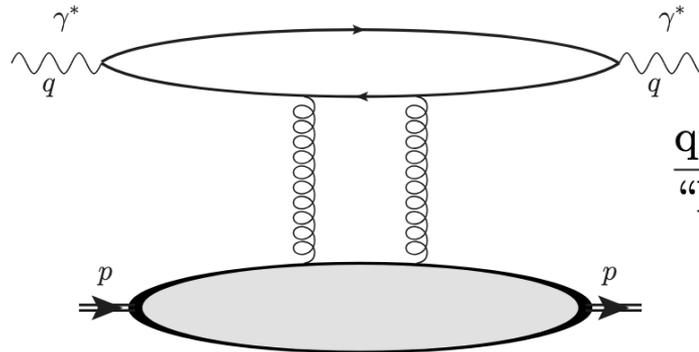
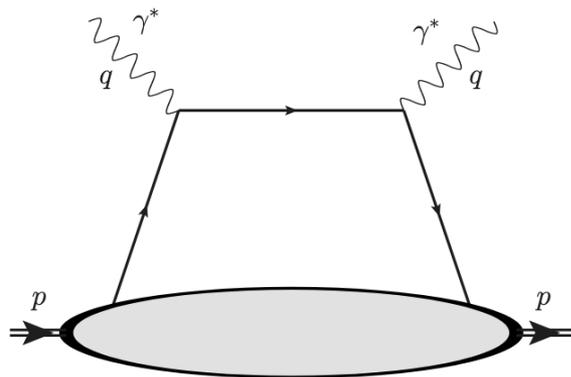
$$s = (P + q)^2$$

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

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

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

Small- $x \Leftrightarrow$  High energy  $s$

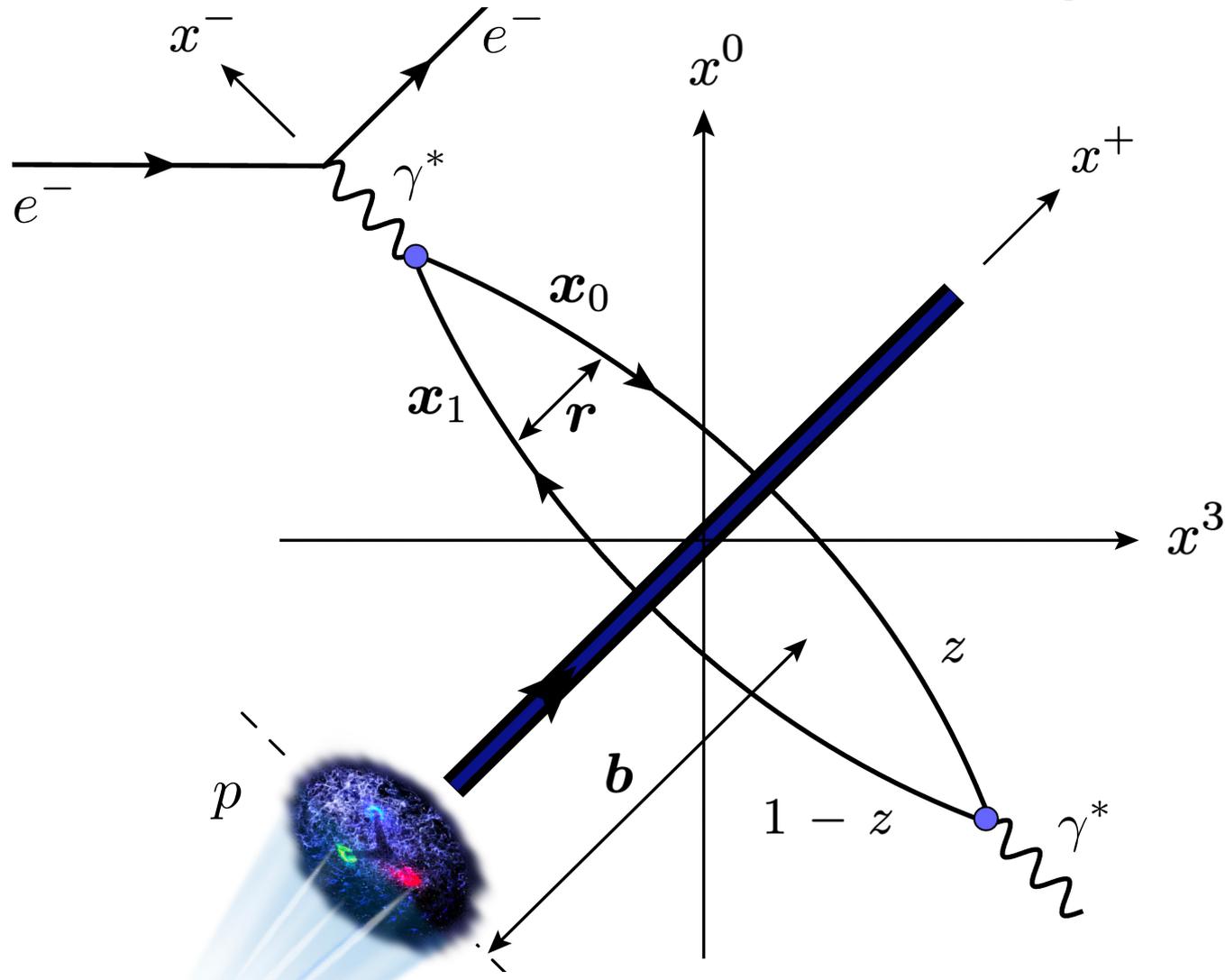


$$\frac{\text{quark loop diagram}}{\text{"handbag" diagram}} \propto \frac{\alpha_s}{x}$$

# Introduction

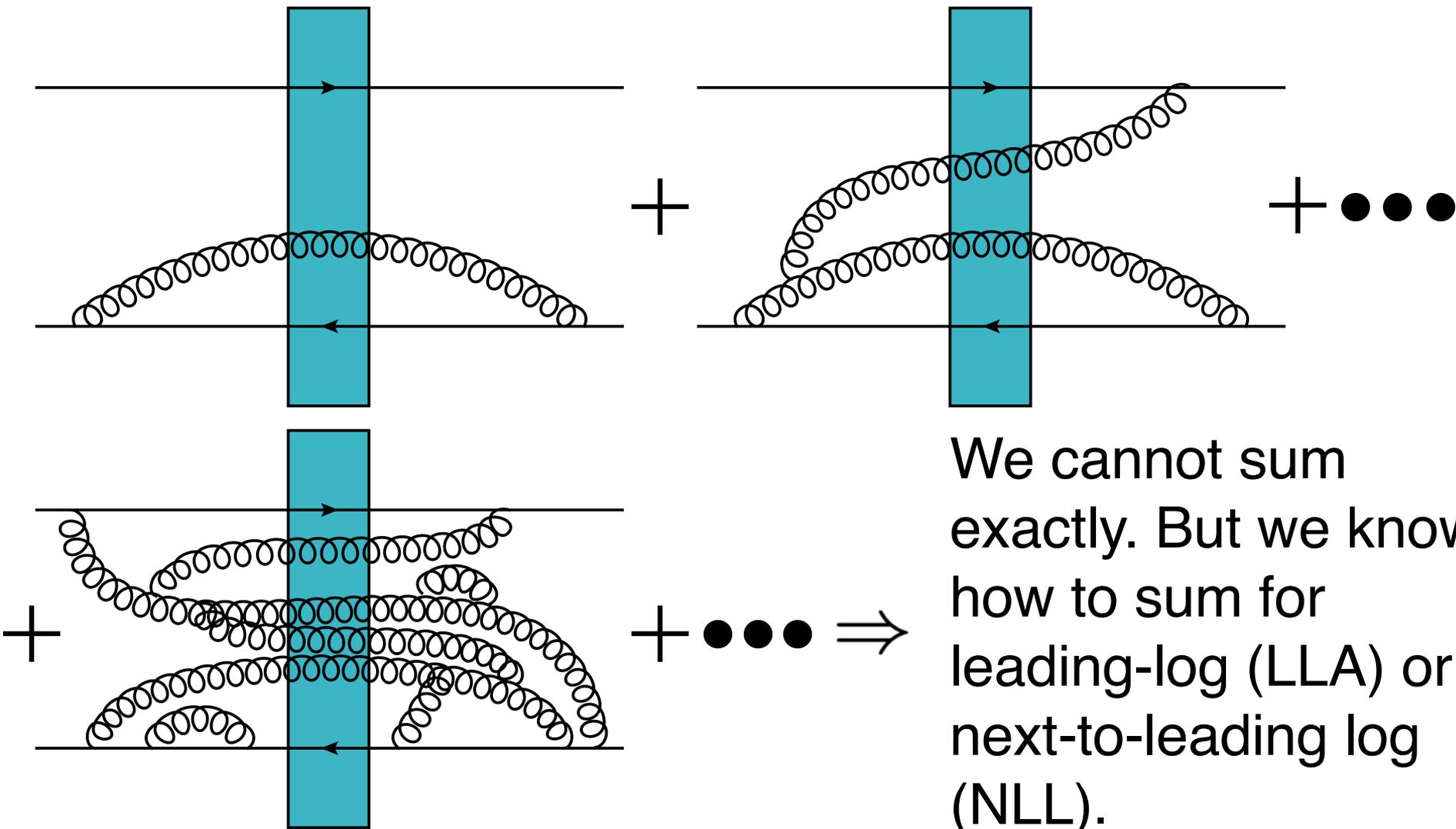
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For  $x < 0.01$ , the  $1/x$  enhancement overcomes the  $\sim \alpha_s$  suppression factor, and the quark loop diagram dominates



# Introduction

Quantum corrections:



We cannot sum exactly. But we know how to sum for leading-log (LLA) or next-to-leading log (NLL).

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

# Introduction

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

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

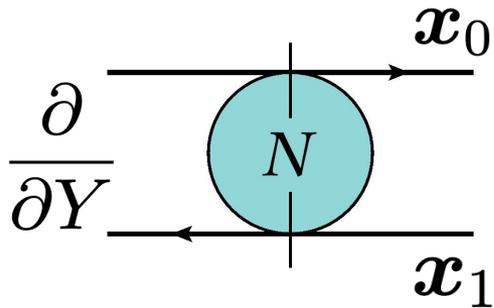
The diagrammatic expansion shows the kernel  $K^{LO}(\mathbf{x}_0, \mathbf{x}_1; \mathbf{x}_2)$  as a sum of terms. The first row shows the leading order term (a gluon exchange between two vertical lines) and its higher-order corrections (a gluon exchange with a self-energy loop on the upper line, a gluon exchange with a self-energy loop on the lower line, and a gluon exchange with a self-energy loop on the vertical line). The second row shows the next-to-leading order terms, which involve a gluon exchange with a self-energy loop on the vertical line and a gluon exchange with a self-energy loop on the vertical line, plus higher-order terms.

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

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

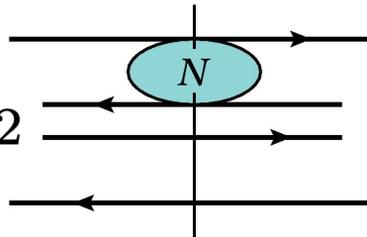
# Introduction

$$N_c \gg 1$$

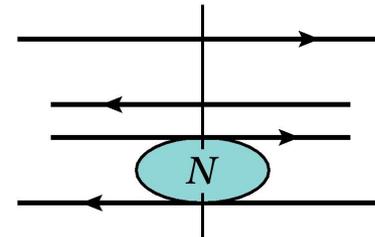


$$N_c \gg 1$$

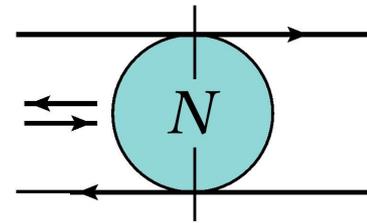
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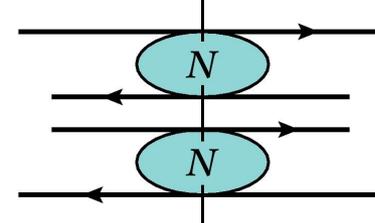
$$+$$



$$-$$

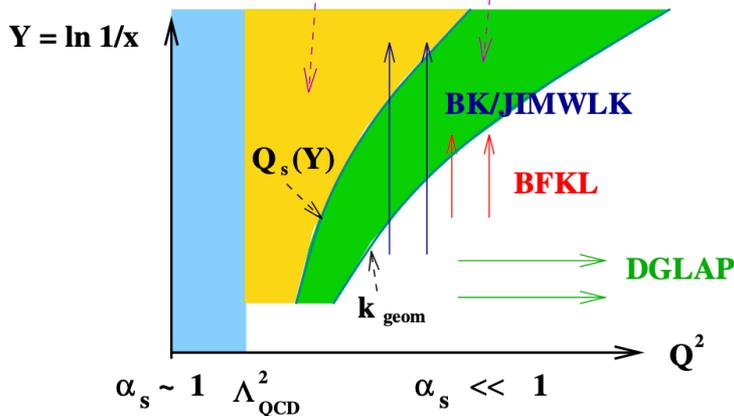


$$-$$



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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

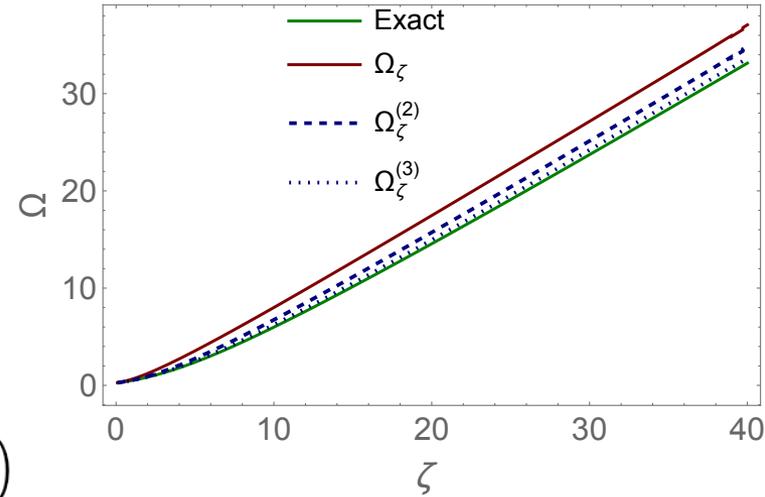
$$\Rightarrow \frac{\partial^2 \Omega'(\zeta, l - l_s; b)}{\partial Y \partial(l - l_s)} = e^{-\Omega_\zeta(\zeta)} \Omega'(\zeta, l - l_s; b); \quad l - l_s = -\frac{4N_c}{b_0} \ln\left(\frac{-\xi}{\xi_s}\right)$$

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

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

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

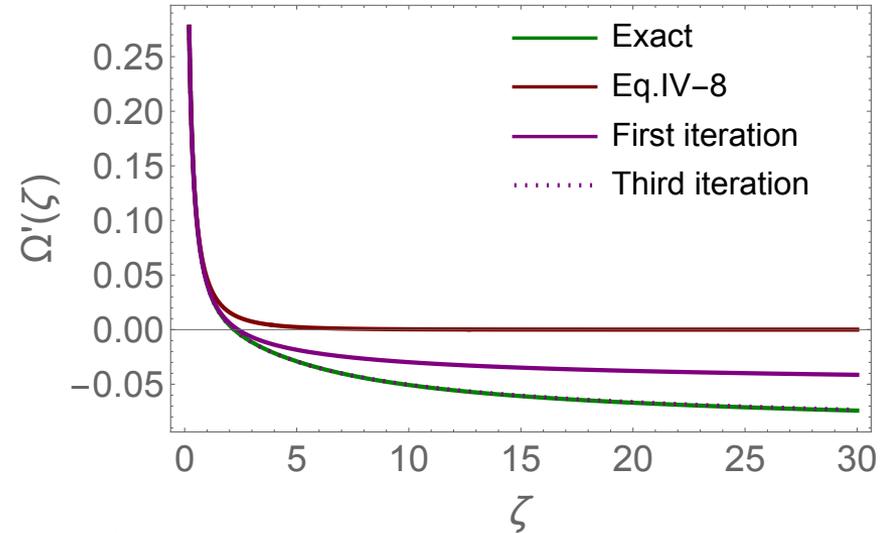
$$\frac{d}{d\zeta} \left( \zeta \frac{d}{d\zeta} \Omega^{(i+1)}(\zeta; b) \right) = \exp \left( - \sum_{l=0}^{i-1} \Omega^{(l)}(\zeta; b) \right) \left( 1 - e^{-\Omega^{(i)}(\zeta; b)} \right)$$



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):

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

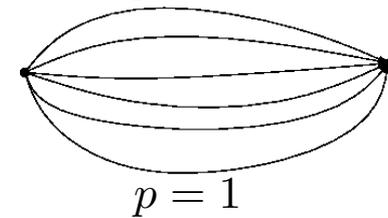
Integro-differential operator

Non-linear part; arbitrary form

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

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

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

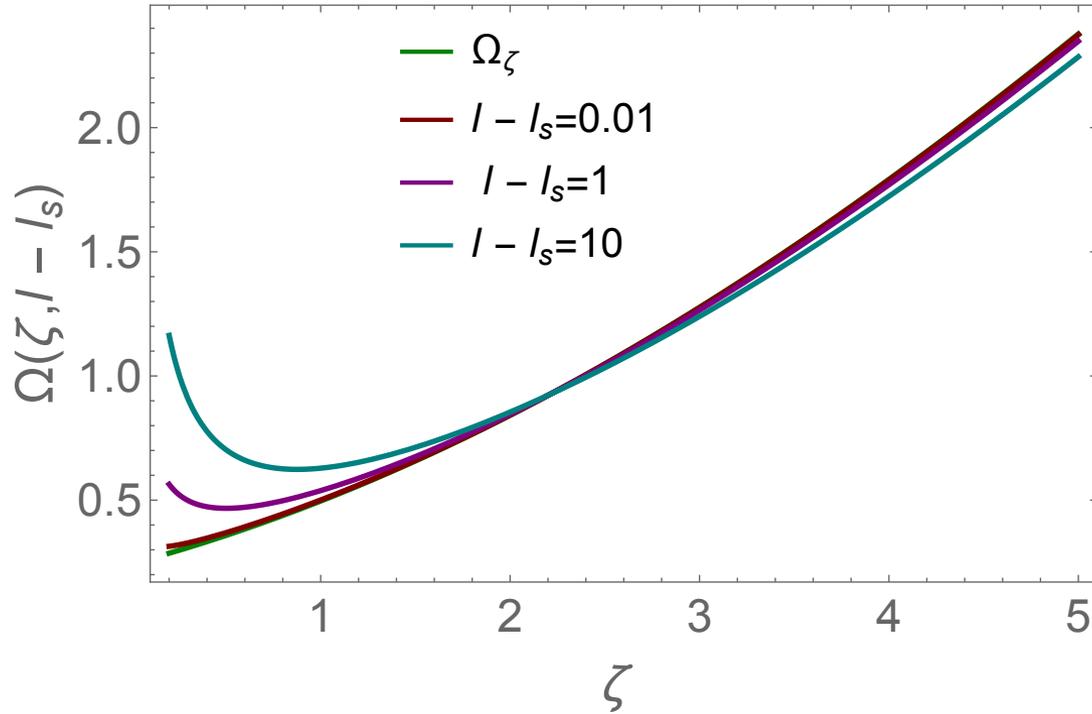
For  $u = \lim_{p \rightarrow 1} u_p = u_0 + u_1 + u_2 + \dots$  it gives the solution to the nonlinear equation (J.H. He, 1999)

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

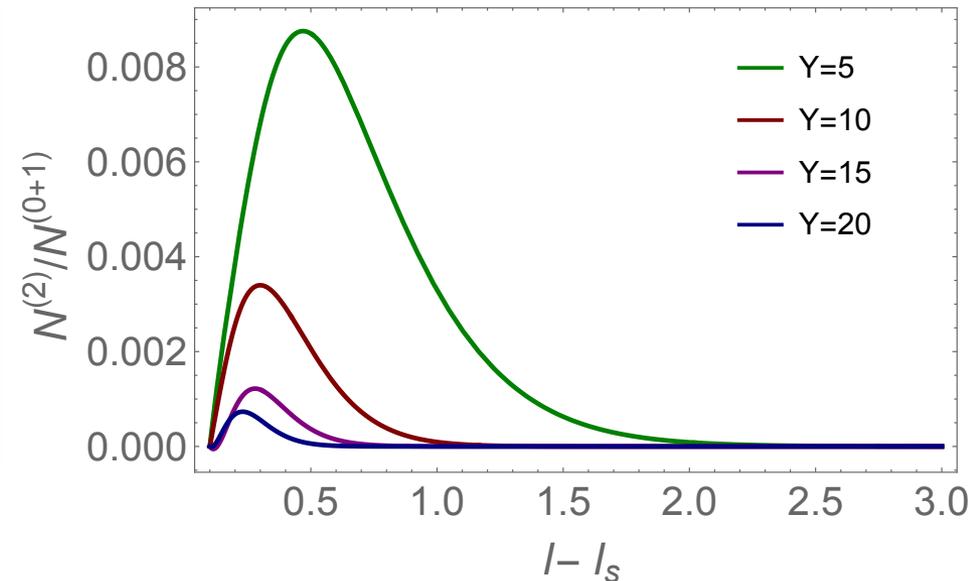
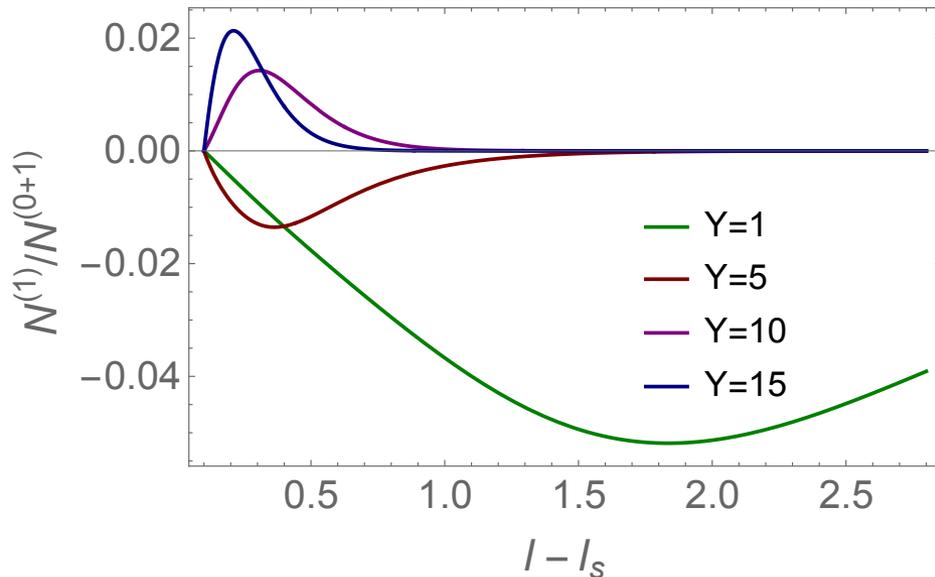
$$\Omega^{(0)}(\zeta, l - l_s) \equiv \Omega_{\zeta}^{(3)}(\zeta) + \Omega'(\zeta, l - l_s)$$



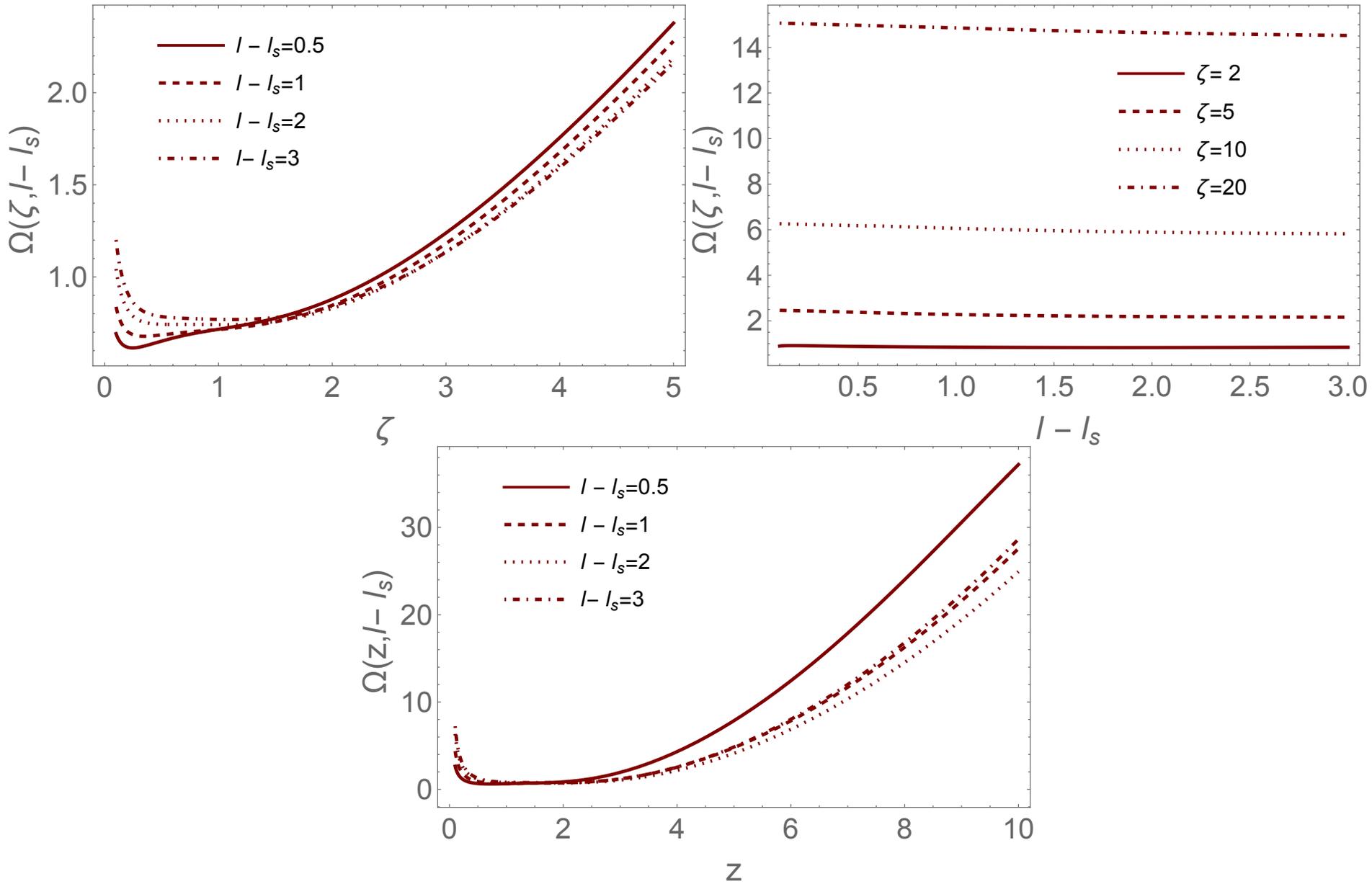
And for the corrections it gives

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

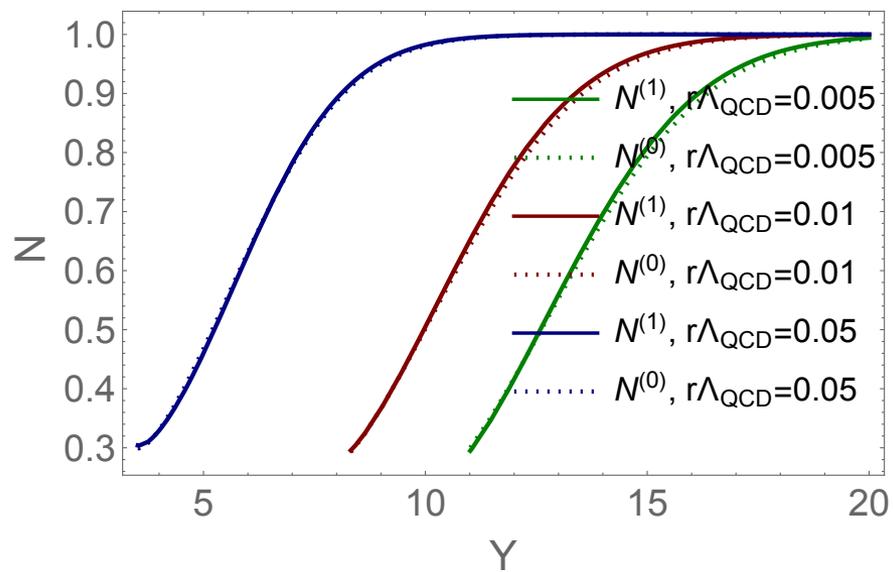
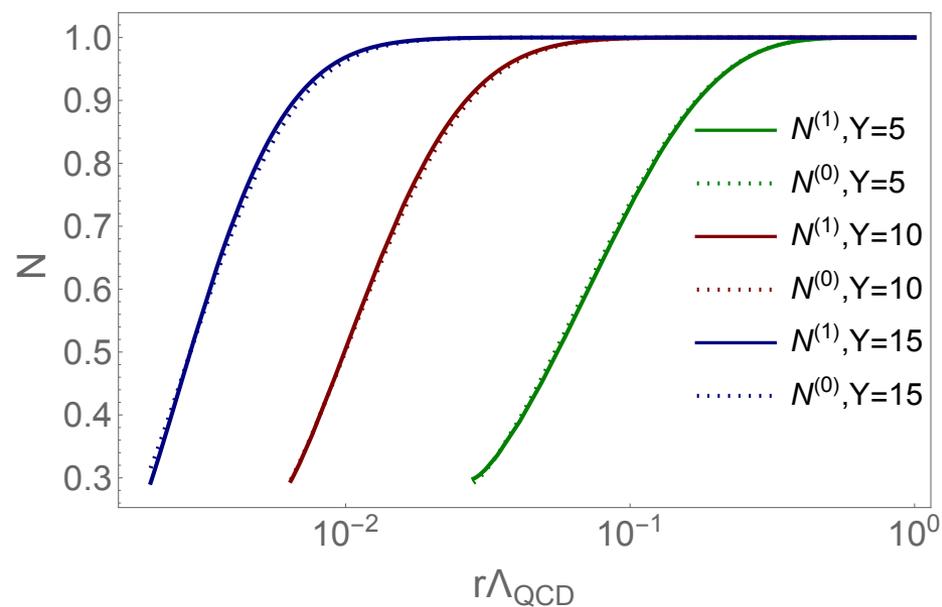
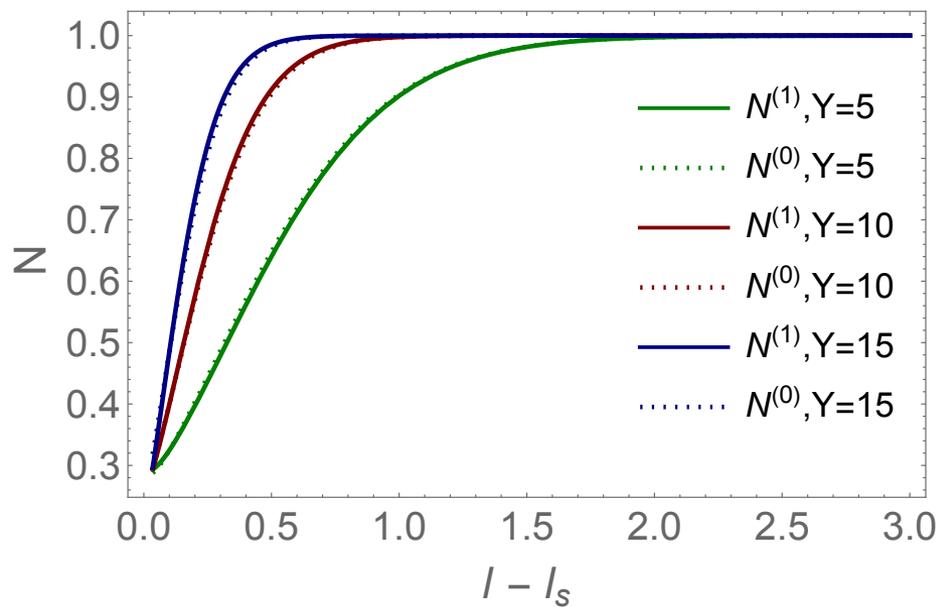
$$\frac{\partial^2 \Omega^{(2)}(Y, l - l_s)}{\partial Y \partial (l - l_s)} = \Omega^{(2)}(Y, l - l_s) e^{-\Omega^{(0)}(Y, l - l_s) - \Omega^{(1)}(Y, l - l_s)} - \underbrace{\frac{\partial}{\partial (l - l_s)} \left( e^{\Omega^{(0)}(Y, l - l_s) + \Omega^{(1)}(Y, l - l_s)} \mathcal{N}_{\mathcal{L}}[\Omega^{(0)}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



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



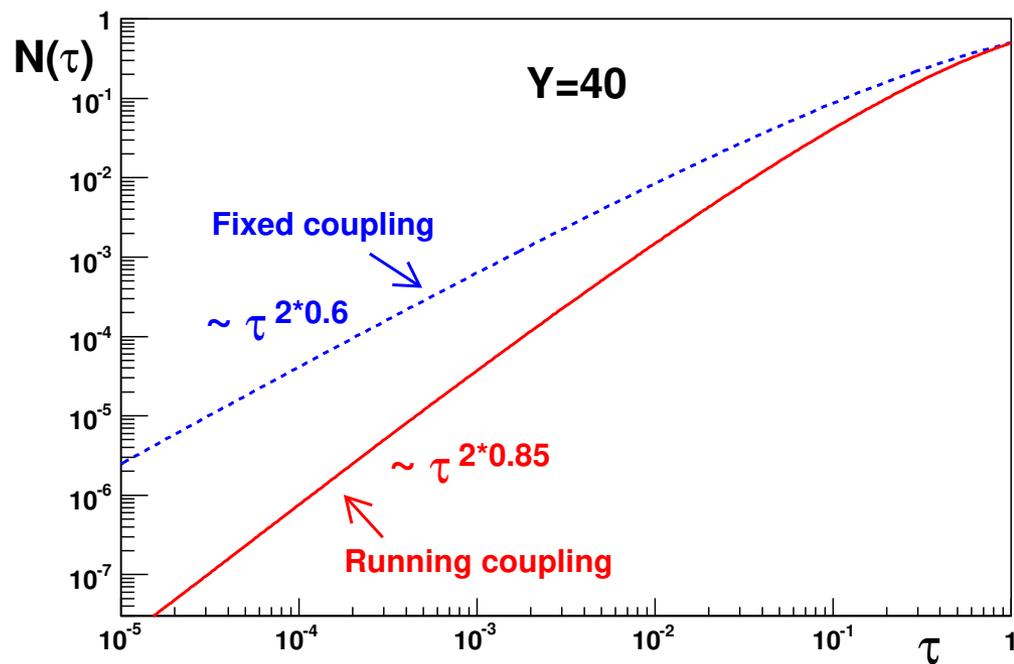
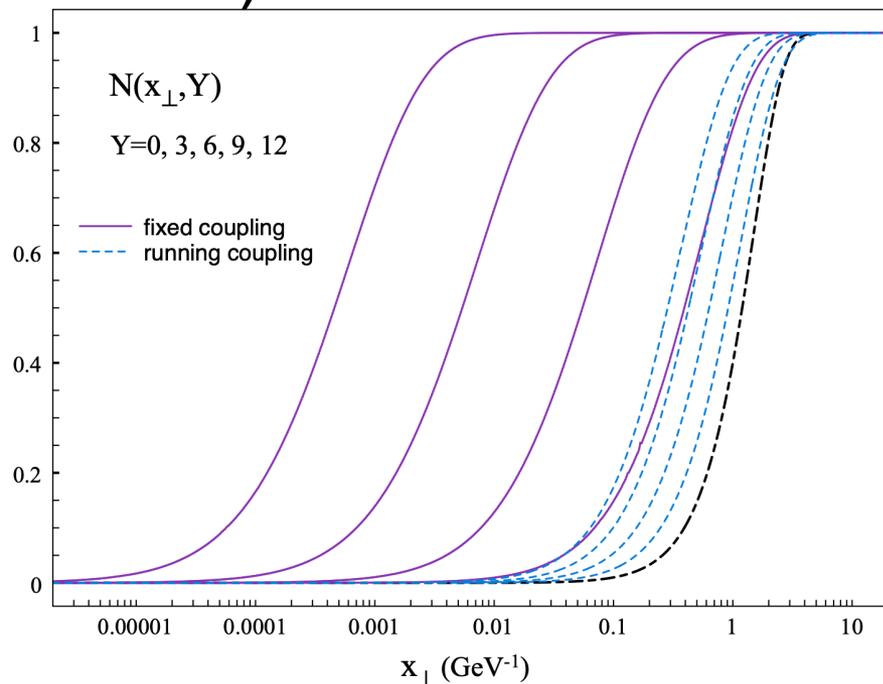
## RC BK



# Things to do

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- 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!**

- Thanks to Fondecyt (Chile) grant No. 1231829 and to Dirección de Postgrado (DP), UTFSM for support.