Realizing exactly solvable SU(N) magnets with thermal atoms

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We show that \( n \) thermal fermionic alkaline-earth-metal atoms in a flat-bottom trap allow one to robustly implement a spin model displaying two symmetries: the \( S_n \) symmetry that permutes atoms occupying different vibrational levels of the trap and the SU(\( N \)) symmetry associated with \( N \) nuclear spin states. The symmetries make the model exactly solvable, which, in turn, enables the analytic study of dynamical processes such as spin diffusion in this SU(\( N \)) system. We also show how to use this system to generate entangled states that allow for Heisenberg-limited metrology. This highly symmetric spin model should be experimentally realizable even when the vibrational levels are occupied according to a high-temperature thermal or an arbitrary nonthermal distribution.

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The study of quantum spin models with ultracold atoms [1,2] promises to give crucial insights into a range of equilibrium and nonequilibrium many-body phenomena from quantum spin liquids [3] and many-body localization [4] to quantum quenches [5–7] and quantum annealing [8]. While other approaches exist [9–12], the most common approach taken to implement a quantum spin model with ultracold atoms relies on preparing a Mott insulator in an optical lattice, where the internal states of atoms on each site define the effective spin [1,13–19]. Virtual hopping processes to neighboring sites and back then give rise to effective superexchange spin-spin interactions. Since the superexchange interactions are typically very weak (\(~<\)kHz) [1] (unless the traps are operated near surfaces, which can reduce spacings and increase energy scales [20–22]), it is a significant challenge in experimental cold-atom physics to achieve temperatures and decoherence rates low enough to access superexchange-based quantum magnetism.

Since ultracold atoms can be prepared in specific internal (i.e., spin) states with extremely high precision, spin temperatures that can be realized are much lower than the experimentally achievable motional temperatures. It is therefore tempting to circumvent the problem of high motional temperature by constructing a spin model in such a way that the motional and spin degrees of freedom are effectively decoupled. We provide a recipe for such a decoupling and hence for realizing spin models with thermal atoms.

The first crucial ingredient for implementing such a spin model is to depart from second-order superexchange interactions and use contact interactions to first order [23–32]. As shown in Fig. 1(a), this can be achieved if all atoms sit in different orbitals of the same anharmonic trap and remain in these orbitals throughout the evolution, which is a good approximation for weak interactions [23–25,30,31]. In that case, the occupied orbitals play the role of the sites of the spin Hamiltonian. However, because of high motional temperature in such systems, every run of the experiment typically yields a different set of populated orbitals and hence a different spin Hamiltonian [30]. Thus, unless the dynamics are constrained to states symmetric under arbitrary exchanges of spins [30], every run of the experiment would lead to different spin dynamics.

The second crucial ingredient to decouple spin and motion is therefore to use an infinite one-dimensional square-well potential as the anharmonic trap, with the motion frozen along the other two directions. The interaction terms in the spin Hamiltonian \( \hat{H} \) are proportional to the squared overlap of pairs of distinct sinusoidal orbitals, and are thus all of equal strength. Therefore \( \hat{H} \) is independent of which orbitals are occupied, leading to spin-motion decoupling and temperature-independent predictions, as well as opening up the possibility of precise control. Moreover, since \( \hat{H} \) is invariant under any relabeling of the \( n \) occupied orbitals, \( \hat{H} \) has \( S_n \) permutation symmetry.

Alkaline-earth-metal atoms enrich the symmetry. In such atoms, the vanishing electronic angular momentum \( J \) in the electronic clock states \( g = \text{odd} \) and \( e = \text{odd} \) results in the decoupling of the nuclear spin \( I \) from \( J \) [Fig. 1(b)]. This endows \( \hat{H} \) with an additional SU(\( N \)) spin-rotation symmetry, where \( N \) can be tuned between 2 and 2\( I + 1 \) by choosing the initial state [33–38]. Restricted to \( g \), \( \hat{H} \) is just the sum of spin swaps over all pairs of occupied orbitals and can be diagonalized in terms of irreducible representations of the group of symmetries \( G = S_n \times \text{SU}(N) \).

Motional-temperature-insensitive spin models can also be realized using long-range interactions between ions in Paul traps [39] and Penning traps [6,7,40], and also between molecules [41–44] or Rydberg atoms [12] pinned at different sites of an optical lattice. However, the realization of SU(\( N \))-symmetric spin models in such systems requires a great deal of fine tuning [45].

Motivated by the exploration of how quantum systems evolve after quantum quenches and whether (or how) they equilibrate and/or thermalize [46], especially in the presence of long-range interactions [6,7], we first study spin diffusion [44,47,48] in a system of \( g \) atoms only. Due to the crucial use of representation-theoretic techniques, our calculations not only are exponentially faster than naive exact diagonalization but also, for \( N = 2 \), yield a closed-form expression for all \( n \). We
For a fixed set of occupied orbitals, $\hat{H}$ has $N^n$ basis states $|p_1, p_2, \ldots, p_n\rangle$ with $p_j \in 1, \ldots, N$.

Exact eigenenergies and eigenstates. For $N = 2$, the spin swap can be written in terms of the Pauli operators, $\hat{S}_j = 1/2 + (\hat{\sigma}_j^x + \hat{\sigma}_j^y + \hat{\sigma}_j^z)/2$, allowing Eq. (1) to be written as $\hat{H} = -U|\vec{S}|^2 + \frac{S}{2}(n - 4)$, where $\vec{S} = 1/2 \sum_j \hat{S}_j$. The eigenstates of $\hat{H}$ for $N = 2$ are the well-known Dicke [51] states $|S, S, k\rangle$, with energies $E(S) = -U(S + 1) + \frac{S}{2}(n - 4)$. The quantum number $k$ labels distinct states with the same $\vec{S}^2$ and $\vec{S}$ eigenvalues. We now describe the general case for arbitrary $N$, but defer derivations and detailed explanation to the Supplemental Material [52].

Equation (1) has two obvious symmetries: permutations in $S_n$ of the $n$ occupied orbitals, and application of the same unitary in $\text{SU}(N)$ to all of the spins giving a group $G = S_n \times \text{SU}(N)$ of symmetries. From Schur-Weyl duality [53], we conclude that for each integer partition $\vec{\lambda} = (\lambda_1, \lambda_2, \ldots, \lambda_N)$ such that $\sum_j \lambda_i = n$ and $\lambda_1 \geq \lambda_2 \geq \cdots \geq \lambda_N$, there is a subspace of constant energy $E(\vec{\lambda})$. The $\vec{\lambda}$ subspaces (called irreducible representations of $G$) are orthogonal and span the full Hilbert space.

A Young diagram is a pictorial representation of $\vec{\lambda}$ consisting of a row of $\lambda_1$ boxes above a row of $\lambda_2$ boxes, which is above a row of $\lambda_3$ boxes, etc. It is also useful to define $\vec{y} = (y_1, y_2, \ldots, y_n)$ as the column heights of the Young diagram $\vec{\lambda}$. Figure 2(a) shows an example with $n = 7$ and $N = 3$.

To create an eigenstate in any $\vec{\lambda}$ subspace, first consider the basis state

$$|T \rangle = |1, 2, \ldots, y_1\rangle |1, 2, \ldots, y_2\rangle \ldots |1, 2, \ldots, y_n\rangle,$$

which is chosen by associating orbitals with boxes of the Young diagram as in Fig. 2(b), and putting those orbitals in spin states as in Fig. 2(c). We form $|\vec{\lambda}\rangle$ (which is one of many [52]) eigenstates in the $\vec{\lambda}$ subspace) by antisymmetrizing $|T \rangle$ over orbitals associated with boxes in each column of $\vec{\lambda}$:

$$|\vec{\lambda}\rangle = |A\{12 \ldots y_1\}\rangle |A\{12 \ldots y_2\}\rangle \ldots |A\{12 \ldots y_n\}\rangle,$$

where $|A\{\ldots\rangle$ antisymmetrizes its argument, for example, $|A\{123\rangle = |123\rangle + |312\rangle + |231\rangle - |132\rangle - |321\rangle - |213\rangle$. The normalization constant is fixed by $\langle \vec{\lambda}|\vec{\lambda}\rangle = y_1!y_2! \ldots y_n!$. We see that the Young diagram associates symmetry with rows and antisymmetry with columns.

From $\hat{H}|\vec{\lambda}\rangle = E(\vec{\lambda})|\vec{\lambda}\rangle$ one can prove $E(\vec{\lambda})(-U) = \sum_{i=1}^N |\vec{\lambda}_i\rangle - \sum_{j=1}^N |\vec{\lambda}_j\rangle$; the number of ways of choosing two boxes in the same row of $\vec{\lambda}$, minus the number of ways of choosing two boxes in the same column [52]. This is in line with the intuition that the swap picks up $-U$ for each symmetric pair and $+U$ for each antisymmetric pair in the Young diagram. In terms of $\vec{\lambda}$,

$$E(\vec{\lambda}) = -\frac{U}{2} \sum_{i=1}^N (\lambda_i - 2i + 1)\lambda_i.$$

Figure 2(d) illustrates the eigenvalues and eigenstates of $\hat{H}$ for the simple case of $n = 4$ and $N = 3$, along with the corresponding Young diagrams. There is an equivalence for the $\text{SU}(2)$ case between the Young diagram $(\lambda_1, \lambda_2)$ and the angular
are found using the prescribed construction to be initial state orbitals in spin state momentum quantum number $S$ given by $S = (\lambda_1 - \lambda_2)/2 = (2\lambda_1 - n)/2$.

Spin diffusion dynamics. Spin diffusion is the process by which evolution under a generic spin Hamiltonian causes initially ordered states to diffuse [44,47,48]. We take the initial state $|\psi(0)\rangle = \Pi_{j=1}^n |1\rangle^{\otimes m_1} |2\rangle^{\otimes m_2} \cdots |N\rangle^{\otimes m_N}$. Note that any computational basis state can be changed to this form by reordering occupied orbitals. We consider the time evolution of observable $\hat{Q} = \sum_{j=1}^{m_1} |1\rangle \langle 1|^j$, the number of the first $m_1$ orbitals in spin state $|1\rangle$. This is the simplest observable capturing the broken symmetry of the initial state. The expectation of $\hat{Q}$ evolves according to $Q(t) = |\langle \psi(t) | \hat{Q} | \psi(0) \rangle|$, omitting $h$ where convenient from here on.

Calculating $Q(t)$ for a generic Hamiltonian requires matrix diagonalization, which scales exponentially with $n$ (for fixed $N$). Using the symmetry of Hamiltonian (1) and the Wigner-Eckart theorem for $SU(N)$, we obtain an explicit sum [see Eq. (S11) in Ref. [52]] for $Q(t)$ in terms of Clebsch-Gordan and recoupling coefficients. For the case of $N = 2$, with the initial state of $m_1 = m$ spin-up and $m_2 = n - m$ spin-down orbitals, using well-known closed forms for the Clebsch-Gordan and recoupling coefficients:

$$Q(t) = m + \sum_{S=\lfloor n/2 \rfloor}^{n/2} \gamma(S) \cos(2SUt) - 1,$$

where $\gamma(S) = \frac{4S(S-2m^2)}{4S} \frac{n}{(n/2+S)}(\frac{n}{n-S})/(n-m)$. For $N > 2$, closed forms for the required coefficients are not known to the authors, but can be calculated efficiently using standard algorithms as in Ref. [54]. In Fig. 3, we compare the evolution of the same operator and total particle number for initial states with $N = 2$ and $N = 3$ spin states. The oscillations are much less pronounced and spin diffusion occurs more fully ($Q$ drops lower) for the latter state. With this model, looking at times away from the multiples of the revival time $2\pi/Ut$, one could study apparent near-equilibration of some observables (such as $Q$ in the $N = 3$ case) acting on the first $m_1$ spins. Perturbations could be added to the system to remove revivals and potentially allow thermalization of the first $m_1$ spins.

GHZ state preparation. Highly entangled states could lead to short-term applications in metrology [50,55], and long-term applications in quantum information [56,57]. It is particularly timely to design ways for implementing entanglement-assisted—and hence more accurate—clocks with alkaline-earth-metal atoms [58,59] since such atoms recently gave rise to the world’s best clock and have nearly approached the quantum projection noise limit for unentangled atoms [60,61]. We now show our system offers a natural way to produce medically relevant entanglement (in the form of GHZ states) in alkaline-earth-metal clock experiments. It is the experimental realization of quantum spin models in alkaline-earth-metal clock experiments [30] and the potential application of these spin models to improve the clocks that motivated this work.

To create a GHZ state, we allow atoms in the excited electronic state $e$ with energy $\omega_{eg}$ above the ground electronic
FIG. 4. (a) System prepared in $|1g1...1g\rangle$. Spatially inhomogeneous pulse (1) results in equal superposition of this state and $|1e1...1g\rangle$, containing one $e$ atom. An interaction blockade prevents coupling to states with two $e$ atoms. Pulse (2) flips the spins of the all-$g$ state. The initial pulse is reversed in pulse (3), resulting in the GHZ state. (b) Relevant energy levels of the Hamiltonian with $e$ and $g$ states and the magnetic field. Note that pulses (1) and (3), which involve states $|1g1...1g\rangle$ and $|1e1...1g\rangle$, do not couple to state $|1e1...1g\rangle$ since there is a blockade of $2U_{1e1g}$. Similarly, during pulse (2), blockade prevents excitation of $|1e1...1g\rangle$.

state $g$ [see Fig. 1(b)]. First assume $N = 2$. An applied magnetic field adds Zeeman spin splittings $B_g \neq B_e$ [62] to both $g$ and $e$ states. To first order in the interaction strength, the spin Hamiltonian is [52]

$$\hat{H} = \hat{H}_q + \sum_{a < \beta} U_{a\beta} \hat{n}_a \hat{n}_\beta - \sum_{j,k} \tilde{\epsilon}_{aj} \hat{c}_j^{\dagger} \hat{c}_j \tilde{\epsilon}_{kj} \hat{c}_k^{\dagger} \hat{c}_k. \tag{5}$$

The single-particle Hamiltonian is $\hat{H}_q = \omega_q \hat{n}_e + B_g (\hat{n}_e - \hat{n}_g) + B_e (\hat{n}_g - \hat{n}_e)$, where $\sum \alpha < \beta$ is over distinct pairs of $1g, 1e, 2g$, and $2e$. Constants $U_{\alpha\beta}$ are derived in terms of (electronic-state-dependent) scattering lengths $U_{\alpha\beta}$ [52]. Note that $\hat{n}_g, \hat{n}_2g, \hat{n}_e$, and $\hat{n}_2e$ are separately conserved by Hamiltonian (5). As shown in Fig. 4, to create the $n$-particle GHZ state $\langle 1g1...1g \rangle + |2g2...2g\rangle$ from $|1g1...1g\rangle$, three consecutive pulses should be applied:

1. Spatially inhomogeneous, weak, many-body $\pi/2$ pulse $e^{-\imath \omega_q t} \sum_{\alpha \beta} \Omega_{\alpha\beta}^g |\langle 1e1\rangle + \langle 2e2\rangle| + \text{H.c.}$ with frequency $\omega_q = \omega_{eg} + (B_e - B_g) + nU_{1e1g}$.

2. Spatially uniform, weak, single-atom $\pi$ pulse $e^{-\imath \omega_{eg} t} \sum_{j,k} |\langle 2e2\rangle| + \text{H.c.}$ with frequency $\omega_{1e1g}$.

3. (Pulse 1), but for pulse area $\pi$, not $\pi/2$.

The frequency of the first pulse picks out an effective two-level system consisting of $|1g1...1g\rangle$ and $|1e1...1g\rangle$. The pulse frequency $\omega_q$ and $\omega_{1e1g}$ are chosen to satisfy $\omega_{eg} < \omega_{1e1g}$ such that $\hat{H}_q$ and $\hat{H}_1$ are diagonal with respect to $\hat{n}_e$ and $\hat{n}_g$, respectively.

To meet these requirements, we propose an optical lattice potential formed by two magic-wavelength (813 nm) [68] orthogonal standing waves in $x$ and $y$. This could be achieved with a pair of angled beams [69] for each standing wave, in bow-tie configuration (see Fig. 5).

An additional blue-detuned optical potential at 394 nm, the Sr blue magic wavelength, is applied to form approximate 1D square wells from the resulting tubes. The potential could be formed from a projected image of a Gaussian beam with waist $\sigma = 30 \mu m$ and total power 400 mW screened in the center by a rectangular mask of width $L = 10 \mu m$. Imperfect cap potentials, along with a finite curvature of the flat potential, contribute to $\Delta U$ and are analyzed in the Supplemental Material [52].

With these parameters and $a_{eg} = 5.1$ nm [70], one obtains $U/\hbar \approx (4\pi a_{eg} \omega_{1e1g})/L \approx 2\pi \times 10 \text{ Hz}$, and should be able to meet all three of the aforementioned key requirements with $\lesssim 20$ atoms in a single tube. Further details are included in the Supplemental Material [52]. Such values of $U_{1e1g} \sim U_{1e1g}$ can potentially allow the preparation of the GHZ state on a time scale comparable to the 1 s experimental cycle time for state-of-the-art clocks [60], and may thus provide a practical advantage over the use of unentangled atoms.

To observe spin diffusion, the initial state could be formed by cooling a spin-polarized system to the limit where the lowest $n$ orbitals are occupied. One could potentially consider taking advantage of large $N$ for better cooling [71,72]. One could address different orbitals either spatially with spin-changing...
FIG. 5. Layout of suggested experimental implementation. (a) A bow-tie beam arrangement of two pairs of beams aimed at a vacuum chamber. In each pair, the two beams have different \( k \) vector directions of \( \theta = 30^\circ \), forming an in-plane standing wave perpendicular to that pair’s net \( k \) vector direction. The pair of perpendicular standing waves forms an attractive lattice. (b) The two-dimensional lattice of attractive-potential tubes forms with transverse vibrational frequency \( \omega_z \) and lattice constant \( \Delta x \). The finite beam width results in a weak potential in the \( z \) direction with vibrational frequency \( \omega_z \). Gravity is in the beam plane to avoid a potential gradient along the tubes. Blue-detuned light outside the central region of width \( L \) forms caps for the tubes. Following the Supplemental Material [52], we obtain \( \omega_z \approx 2\pi \times 10 \text{ kHz}, \Delta x \approx 3 \mu \text{m}, \omega_z \approx 2\pi \times 100 \text{ Hz}, \) and \( L \approx 10 \mu \text{m} \).

pulses which only couple to certain orbitals (for example, using pulses focused on the center of the well and hence decoupled from orbitals that vanish there), or energetically by temporarily transferring atoms to another electronic state subject to a different potential. To observe spin diffusion with thermal atoms, one could rely on the fact that about half of the occupied orbitals are odd and the other half are even, which becomes statistically more accurate for larger \( n \). It is possible to address only the even orbitals by using a beam focused at the center of the well, since the odd orbitals vanish there. This could be extended to larger \( N \) by using additional beams focused on other points in the well.

**Outlook.** The proposed system opens a wide range of research and application avenues beyond those discussed above. For the case of \( N = 2 \), our \( S_n \times SU(N) \)-symmetric Hamiltonian can be used for decoherence-resistant entanglement generation [73], a method whose generalization to \( N > 2 \) we postpone to future work. Furthermore, by comparing the exact solutions presented here with those derived in the limit of strong interactions [74,75], one could verify the performance of the proposed experimental system as a quantum simulator. The system could then be used to reliably study more general regimes where complexity theory might rule out efficient classical solutions. In particular, deviations from the square-well potential will break \( S_n \) [but not \( SU(N) \)] symmetry. This will, for example, lift the degeneracy of the most antisymmetric spin state (highest energy eigenspace for \( U > 0 \)). Depending on how this degeneracy is lifted, exotic many-body states might arise [76,77].

Finally, thanks to its high \( S_n \times SU(N) \) symmetry, the present system allows one to implement powerful quantum-information protocols, such as the density matrix spectrum estimation protocol of Keyl and Werner [78,79].

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