Photonic Gauge Potential in One Cavity with Synthetic Frequency and Orbital Angular Momentum Dimensions

Luqi Yuan, Qian Lin, Anwei Zhang, Meng Xiao, Xianfeng Chen and Shanhui Fan

School of Physics and Astronomy, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Shanghai 200240, China
Department of Applied Physics, Stanford University, Stanford, California 94305, USA
Department of Electrical Engineering, and Ginzton Laboratory, Stanford University, Stanford, California 94305, USA

(Received 7 November 2018; published 1 March 2019)

We explore a single degenerate optical cavity supporting a synthetic two-dimensional space, which includes the frequency and the orbital angular momentum (OAM) axes of light. We create the effective gauge potential inside this synthetic space and show that the system exhibits topologically protected one-way edge states along the OAM axis at the boundaries of the frequency dimension. In this synthetic space, we present a robust generation and manipulation of entanglement between the frequency and OAM of photons. Our Letter shows that a higher-dimensional synthetic space involving multiple degrees of freedom of light can be achieved in a “zero-dimensional” spatial structure, pointing towards a unique platform to explore topological photonics and to realize potential applications in optical communications and quantum information processing.

DOI: 10.1103/PhysRevLett.122.083903

The synthetic dimension in photonics has been explored with great interest in the past few years [1–6]. Various degrees of freedom of photons, such as their frequency [5–14] and their orbital angular momentum (OAM) [4,15–18], have been used to construct the synthetic space. By combining the spatial dimension with either the frequency or the OAM dimension, one can use a one-dimensional array of optical cavities to create a two-dimensional synthetic space [4–6]. In such synthetic spaces, it is possible to explore various high-dimensional physics effects with a low-dimensional physical structure, including the photonic gauge potential [4–6], topological photonics [8,9,12,16,17], and photonic physics with parity-time symmetry [13]. Furthermore, these constructions enable not only the control of light propagation along the spatial dimension, but also the manipulation of either the frequency or the OAM of light. Such capabilities lead to various potential applications in the fields of optical communications and quantum information processing [1,19–24].

In most previous proposals towards two- or higher-dimensional systems with one of the dimensions being a synthetic dimension, the spatial dimension is still required in terms of the use of multiple cavities [4–6,8,9,14–16]. The use of multiple cavities adds significant complexity to experimental implementations. For example, in multivavity systems one needs to align all resonant frequencies in each cavity with respect to one another. In this Letter, we show that it is possible to achieve a two-dimensional synthetic space with only one single degenerate optical cavity. The synthetic space is composed of one frequency dimension and one orbital angular momentum dimension of light. No spatial dimension is required.

We also propose to create a photonic gauge potential in such a synthetic space. The concept of an effective gauge potential for photons was first proposed in real space, and it provides new capabilities in controlling the spatial flow of light [25–31]. One important consequence of the photonic gauge potential is the creation of an effective magnetic field for photons [25–28]. Such effective magnetic field breaks time-reversal symmetry and creates topologically protected one-way edge states, which is robust to a variation of system details [32,33]. The photonic gauge potential can also be implemented in a synthetic space with an array of cavities [4,5]. We explore the effective gauge potential in the synthetic space in our proposal. A secondary cavity is used to create artificial frequency boundaries. The frequency of a resonant mode in the secondary cavity is aligned with one resonant mode in the main cavity, so it provides a hard cutoff at the corresponding frequency. Topologically protected one-way edge states are found to be located at the boundaries in the frequency dimension and propagating unidirectionally along the OAM axis. Because of the connectivity between the frequency and OAM axes, one can achieve a topologically protected manipulation of entangled photon states. Our work creates a synthetic space including more than one degree of freedom of light in a zero-dimensional spatial structure, which provides a unique platform to explore the photonic gauge potential and to manipulate the quantum state of light, which is potentially important for quantum optical communication.

We start by considering a single degenerate optical ring cavity, shown in Fig. 1(a). The optical elements are chosen to have cylindrical symmetry, so the transverse profile of
resonant modes with frequencies each round-trip due to passing through the EOM gives where

\[ \omega = \Omega_n - \Omega \]

\[ \Omega = \frac{n_\text{cl} \omega_\text{mt}}{l} \]

\[ \frac{d}{dt} c_{l;n} = i \kappa (c_{l+1;n} e^{i\theta} + c_{l-1;n} e^{-i\theta}) \]

where \( \kappa \ll \Omega \) denotes the rate for the change between two nearest-neighbor OAMs after the field passes through the auxiliary path.

Thus, the system in Fig. 1(a) can be described by the Hamiltonian

\[ H = \sum_{l,n} g (a_{l;n+1}^\dagger a_{l;n} + a_{l;n-1}^\dagger a_{l;n}) + \kappa (a_{l+1,n}^\dagger a_{l;n} e^{i\theta} + a_{l-1,n}^\dagger a_{l;n} e^{-i\theta}) \]

Equation (4) presents a two-dimensional synthetic space defined by the frequency and the OAM axes of light [see Fig. 1(b)]. The distribution of hopping phases follows the Landau gauge and generates a uniform magnetic flux \( \theta \) in each unit cell. The modulation detuning \( \Delta \) gives an effective electric field along the synthetic frequency dimension. One can therefore manipulate both the OAM and the frequency of light simultaneously in this synthetic space by controlling the effective electric and magnetic fields for light.

We first explore the topological effect due to the presence of the effective magnetic field in the synthetic space.
For this purpose, we set \( \Delta = 0 \) and \( \kappa = g \). The eigenspectrum of the Hamiltonian (4) exhibits the Hofstadter butterfly pattern [39], as shown in Fig. 2(a), where we plot the eigenspectrum with different \( \theta \). The eigenvalue \( \varepsilon \) is obtained by diagonalizing Eq. (4). An input optical field with the frequency shift \( \varepsilon \) regarding to an arbitrary \( \omega_n \) may excite a propagating mode in the synthetic space for the system, provided that \( \varepsilon \) lies outside the band gap [4–6]. In our design, \( \theta \) is related to \( \delta \) and can be tuned by changing the lengths of two arms. We restrict \( \delta L < L \) so that \( \theta / 2\pi < 1 \). We plot the eigenspectrum up to \( \theta / 2\pi = 0.8 \), where the design of the cavity is physically feasible.

In our setup, \( \theta \) can be continuously tuned and therefore can assume any number. Thus, one can realize an effective magnetic field incommensurate with the lattice. As an illustration, we choose \( \theta / 2\pi = (\sqrt{5} - 1)/2 \) [which corresponds to the red line in Fig. 2(a)]. For this system, the Hamiltonian of Eq. (4) is still periodic along the OAM axis. Therefore, we plot the projected band structure vs \( k_l \), which is the wave vector reciprocal to the synthetic OAM dimension. (c) The corresponding eigenstates for the field intensity at \( (k_l/\pi, \varepsilon/g) = (0,0) \) (black), \((0.5,0.9) \) (blue), and \((-0.5,0.9) \) (green) labeled in (a), respectively.

We then perform the simulation to observe the evolutions of edge states in the synthetic space. To create the artificial boundaries in the frequency dimension, we couple the optical cavity with a secondary cavity as shown in Fig. 1(c), which is designed to be resonant with the frequency \( \omega_{\pm(N+1)} \) (where \( N \) is a large positive integer), but to be off resonant with all other frequencies in between, i.e., \( \omega_n \in [\omega_{-N}, \omega_N] \). Such a secondary cavity then creates artificial boundaries at \( \omega_{\pm N} \). Input-output channels are also introduced so that one can inject light into and extract light out from the main cavity. The coupled-mode equations for this system read [38,40,41]

\[
\frac{dc_{l,n}}{dt} = -\gamma c_{l,n} - ig(c_{l,n-1} + c_{l,n+1}) - ig(c_{l-1,n}e^{i\theta} + c_{l+1,n}e^{-i\theta}) - inf_{l,N+1}\delta_{n,N+1} - inf_{l,-(N+1)}\delta_{n,-(N+1)} + \sqrt{\gamma} d_{l,n}^{in},
\]

\[
\frac{df_{l,\pm(N+1)}}{dt} = -i\eta c_{l,\pm(N+1)},
\]

\[
d_{l,n}^{out} = \sqrt{\gamma} c_{l,n}.
\]

Here \( \eta \) is the coupling constant between the main cavity and the secondary cavity, \( \gamma/2 \) is the decay rate through the coupling between the main cavity and the input-output channel. \( f_{l,n} \) and \( d_{l,n}^{in} \) \( (s_{l,n}^{out}) \) are the modal amplitudes for the mode in the secondary cavity and the input (output) amplitudes, respectively, at the frequency \( \omega_n \) and OAM \( l \).

In the simulation, we consider a synthetic space consisting of 31 frequency components \( n = -15, \ldots, 15 \) and
In the Supplemental Material, we show that one can control to construct a sharp OAM boundary by following the there is no boundary along the OAM axis. It is also possible both in Figs. 3(a) and 3(b). In Fig. 3(a), the edge mode designed to excite the topologically protected one-way localized at the frequency boundaries of negative direction in Fig. 3(b). The edge modes are propagates unidirectionally along the positive direction with the same parameters but cavity. As a comparison, we also perform the simulation frequency axis can be created by introducing a secondary case, the coupling due to the secondary cavity is weak and the artificial boundary is inefficient. No edge state is created. Therefore, one requires a large coupling η to create an artificial boundary in the frequency dimension. (c) η = g, where the artificial boundary is inefficient and no edge state is created. The desired artificial boundaries are labeled by blue dashed lines. Red arrows denote modes (n and l) of initial excitations from the input source.

51 OAM components (l = −25,...,25). For the secondary cavity, we set N = 5 and vary η to achieve the artificial boundaries at ω±N. The input-output channel couples with the main cavity at a rate γ = 0.14g and the input source is a monochromatic field with l = 0. All other parameters are the same as those in calculating the band structure in Fig. 2. In both Figs. 3(a) and 3(b), we plot the steady-state solution for the normalized intensities |s_{l,n}^{\text{out}}|^2 in the synthetic space from simulating Eqs. (5)−(7) with η = 10g. In Fig. 3(a), we set the input source s_{l,n}^{\text{in}} = δ_{l,0}δ_{n,N}e^{-igt}. In Fig. 3(b), we set s_{l,n}^{\text{in}} = δ_{l,0}δ_{n,N}e^{-igt}. The small frequency shift term e^{-igt} is designed to excite the topologically protected one-way edge mode shown in Fig. 2. We can see the edge modes both in Figs. 3(a) and 3(b). In Fig. 3(a), the edge mode propagates unidirectionally along the positive direction of the synthetic OAM axis, while it propagates along the negative direction in Fig. 3(b). The edge modes are localized at the frequency boundaries of ω±N, demonstrating that the artificial boundary along the synthetic frequency axis can be created by introducing a secondary cavity. As a comparison, we also perform the simulation with the same parameters but η = g in Fig. 3(c). In this case, the coupling η due to the secondary cavity is weak and the artificial boundary is inefficient. No edge state is created. The amplitudes are instead localized near the source since the frequency is in the band gap for the bulk. Therefore, one requires a large coupling η to create an artificial boundary in the frequency dimension.

The intrinsic cavity loss γl can also be set as a parameter. In the Supplemental Material, we show that one can control the evolution of edge states by changing γl [42]. In Fig. 3, there is no boundary along the OAM axis. It is also possible to construct a sharp OAM boundary by following the method proposed in Ref. [17], and hence create a synthetic two-dimensional lattice that is finite along both dimensions. The simulation in this square lattice shows the edge state can propagate unidirectionally through the corner of the frequency and OAM edges, which indicates the robustness due to topological protection [42]. The phenomena of the edge states, alternatively, might be described from the perspective of the phase accumulation of a detuned input from the resonance once it circulates after round-trips. Besides probing the edge states, we can also probe the bulk property of our system, such as the transmission property in the synthetic space, which provides a direct way to measure the eigenspectrum shown in Fig. 2(b) [42].

One potential application of our system is the generation of an entangled pair of photons with different OAMs. Such an entangled photon pair is of great importance in the field of optical quantum communication and quantum information processing [19]. The typical method to prepare the entangled photon pair is to use the spontaneous parametric down-conversion, and the generated entangled state is

\[ |\Psi^\perp\rangle = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} (|1_{\omega_A}1_{\omega_B}\rangle \pm |1_{\omega_B}1_{\omega_A}\rangle) \]

where \(1_{\omega_{A(B)}}\) means that one photon is excited at the frequency \(\omega_{A(B)}\). Thus, the entanglement occurs between photons with different frequencies. In our synthetic space, one can transfer this entanglement to photons with different OAMs, in a fashion that is topologically protected.

To demonstrate it, we use the same parameters as those in the simulation of Fig. 3(a). We choose the input entangled photon pair with \(\omega_A = \omega_{-N} + g, \omega_B = \omega_{N} + g\), and its OAM \(l = 0\). In Fig. 4(a), we plot the simulation result. One sees that a pair of edge modes propagate along the positive or negative direction of the OAM axis with the same speed. The two-photon state thus evolves to a new state \(|\Psi^\parallel\rangle = \sum_{l \in \mathbb{Z}} \alpha_l (|1_{\omega_A}1_{\omega_B}\rangle \pm |1_{\omega_B}1_{\omega_A}\rangle)\), where \(\alpha_l\) represents the transfer coefficient. This state is a multidimensional entangled state for two photons, which has a
fundamental importance in quantum communication [19,43–45]. For this state, the entanglement exists between photons with opposite OAMs. Alternatively, we can also create a state where the entanglement occurs between photons with the same OAM. For this purpose, in Fig. 4(b), we perform the simulation where the initial input photon pair has \(\omega_A = \omega_{-N} - g\) and \(\omega_B = \omega_N + g\). In this case, the edge modes that are excited both propagate along the positive OAM axis. The generated new state becomes \(|\Psi_2^+\rangle = \sum_{l \geq 0} t_l (|l\omega_{-l}\rangle|l\omega_l\rangle + |l\omega_l\rangle|l\omega_{-l}\rangle)\). The transfer between the frequency entanglement and OAM entanglement is a robust process due to the topological protection, providing the potential application towards the quantum entanglement of two different degrees of freedom of photons, which is of fundamental importance in quantum optics [46].

To implement our concept experimentally, we consider free-space optics, which provides many choices for EOMs and SLMs. The operation frequency for the SLM is \(\omega_0 \sim 100\) THz. The length of the optical cavity is on the order of 1–10 m, which sets the mode spacing and the modulation frequency of the EOM at \(\Omega \sim 10–100\) MHz \(\ll \omega_0\). This makes the resonant modes spectrally dense. The SLM therefore works fine for resonant modes at frequencies near \(\omega_0\). The modulation strength \(g\) shall be much smaller than \(\Omega\), i.e., \(g \sim 0.5–5\) MHz, which also makes \(\eta < \Omega\). Loss in the cavity includes transmissions through the input-output channels (mirrors), as well as intrinsic losses associated with reflections on mirrors, modulations in the EOM and SLMs, and also traveling through the additional path. One can compensate for the loss and tune \(\gamma_i\) [42] by placing an amplifier in the optical path inside the main cavity, operated with a lower gain without inducing lasing, which dramatically increases the quality factor of the optical cavity [47].

In summary, we propose a two-dimensional synthetic space in a single degenerate optical cavity including the frequency and the OAM axes of light, where the photonic gauge potential can be created. A secondary cavity is used to create artificial boundaries in the synthetic frequency dimension. We show that such a system supports topologically protected one-way edge states at the boundaries of the frequency dimension propagating unidirectionally along the OAM dimension. Our system hence provides a unique platform to explore two-dimensional topological physics in a zero-dimensional spatial structure. Compared with previous works that use a one-dimensional array of cavities to simulate two-dimensional physics [1,4–6], our system here is easier to implement, since there is no longer a need to align the resonances of multiple cavities. Moreover, our system provides a connection between the OAM and the frequency of photons. With this connection, one can demonstrate a topologically protected manipulation of entangled photon states, which is potentially useful for applications in quantum optical communications.

The authors acknowledge stimulating discussions with Dr. Avik Dutt. This work is supported by the National Key R&D Program of China (2018YFA0306301 and 2017YFA0303701). This work is also partially supported by the U.S. Air Force Office of Scientific Research Grant No. FA9550-17-1-0002, as well as the U.S. National Science Foundation Grant No. CBET-1641069.

*Corresponding author. yuanluqi@sjtu.edu.cn
Corresponding author. xfchen@sjtu.edu.cn
Corresponding author. shanhui@stanford.edu

K. Fang and S. Fan, Effective magnetic field for photons based on orbital angular momentum of light, Nat. Commun. 8, 16097 (2017).


K. Fang, Z. Yu, and S. Fan, Realizing effective magnetic field for photons by controlling the phase of dynamic modulation, Nat. Photonics 6, 782 (2012).


See Supplemental Material at http://link.aps.org/supplemental/10.1103/PhysRevLett.122.083903, which includes simulations of the influence of the intrinsic loss of the cavity, the propagation of the edge state in a synthetic square lattice, and studies of the transmission property of our system.


A. Dutt, M. Minkov, Q. Lin, L. Yuan, D. A. B. Miller, and S. Fan, Experimental band structure spectroscopy along the synthetic frequency dimension (to be published).