類星體與暗物質的關聯

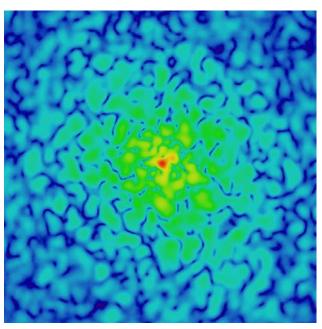
類星體(quasar)是誕生在宇宙早期、亮度極高的天體。科學家一般相信,這麼高的亮度是源自於大量氣體被吸入星系核心的黑洞時,所釋放出的巨大能量。目前觀測到最早的類星體出現在宇宙初期約四千萬年,這僅是目前宇宙年齡的三十分之一。如何在這麼短的時間產生巨大質量的黑洞?這仍是一個近代天文物理學中重大的謎。

臺灣大學天文所關志鴻教授領導的研究團隊,在2014年12月出版的頂尖國際期刊《物理評論快報》(Physical Review Letters)中發表論文,指出由該團隊不久前提出的極輕暗物質模型,可進一步為此謎團提供重要的線索。利用論文第一作者、物理所薛熙于博士後研究員所開發的超高速、超高解析度電腦模擬,研究團隊發現每個星系的中心均有一個超高密度的核心,謂之孤立子(soliton)。該重要發現有助於解釋類星體的形成。因為孤立子的質量可重達太陽的數十億倍,能有效的吸引周圍氣體,聚集在星系核心約幾百光年的距離,幫助氣體落入黑洞的引力範圍,最終被黑洞吞噬。在被吞噬前,掙扎的氣體溫度會增高,如同炙熱的燈泡發出強光,造成類星體的現象。

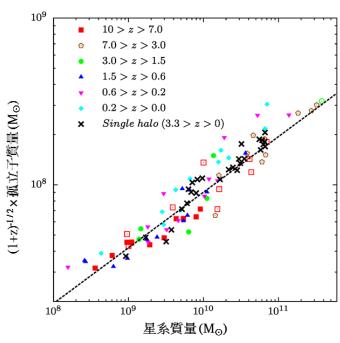
此論文的主要成果,是發現孤立子的質量與星系的質量和年齡有緊密的相關性。星系愈重,其中心的孤立子就愈重;宇宙愈早期的星系,其孤立子也愈重。因此,早期星系中心的重孤立子能迅速吸引大量氣體餵食黑洞,足以解釋類星體的形成。

不但如此,星系核心孤立子亦能幫助宇宙晚期活躍星系核(active galactic nucleus)的形成。其實早期的類星體和晚期的活躍星系核是類似現象,差別主要在發光的強度不同。類星體需大量的氣體被吞噬才能發出超強的光,反之活躍星系核只需較少的氣體。這和極輕暗物質的預測符合;早期星系才有大質量的孤立子,而晚期星系的孤立子質量相對小,因此吸引數量不同的氣體,造成發光強度不一的星系核。

關志鴻教授最後表示,位於星系中心的黑洞,需餵食氣體才能成長,所以極輕暗物質極可能是超重黑洞成長的要素。目前的成果,只是往這個研究方向邁進的一小步,未來的研究工作若更進一步找到極輕暗物質和超重黑洞關聯的直接證據,就能把極輕暗物質的新概念推向新里程碑!



圖一:極輕暗物質電腦模擬中的暗物質暈(dark matter halo),孤立子位為中心高密度的紅色區域。



圖二:孤立子和星系的質量關係。黑色虛線為理論預測, 資料點為電腦模擬結果, Z 是宇宙紅位移。



圖三:七位作者中之五位, 目前皆服務於台大物理系

由左至右: (前排) 闕志鴻教授/黄偉彦教授; (後排) 黄承光博士/薛熙于博士/胡德邦博士

Understanding the Core-Halo Relation of Quantum Wave Dark Matter from 3D Simulations

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We examine the nonlinear structure of gravitationally collapsed objects that form in our simulations of wavelike cold dark matter, described by the Schrödinger-Poisson (SP) equation with a particle mass $\sim 10^{-22}$ eV. A distinct gravitationally self-bound solitonic core is found at the center of every halo, with a profile quite different from cores modeled in the warm or self-interacting dark matter scenarios. Furthermore, we show that each solitonic core is surrounded by an extended halo composed of large fluctuating dark matter granules which modulate the halo density on a scale comparable to the diameter of the solitonic core. The scaling symmetry of the SP equation and the uncertainty principle tightly relate the core mass to the halo specific energy, which, in the context of cosmological structure formation, leads to a simple scaling between core mass (M_c) and halo mass (M_h) , $M_c \propto a^{-1/2} M_h^{1/3}$, where a is the cosmic scale factor. We verify this scaling relation by (i) examining the internal structure of a statistical sample of virialized halos that form in our 3D cosmological simulations and by (ii) merging multiple solitons to create individual virialized objects. Sufficient simulation resolution is achieved by adaptive mesh refinement and graphic processing units acceleration. From this scaling relation, present dwarf satellite galaxies are predicted to have kiloparsec-sized cores and a minimum mass of $\sim 10^8 M_{\odot}$, capable of solving the smallscale controversies in the cold dark matter model. Moreover, galaxies of $2 \times 10^{12} M_{\odot}$ at z = 8 should have massive solitonic cores of $\sim 2 \times 10^9 M_{\odot}$ within ~ 60 pc. Such cores can provide a favorable local environment for funneling the gas that leads to the prompt formation of early stellar spheroids and quasars.