



Heavy-Quark Symmetry Implies Stable Heavy Tetraquark Mesons $Q_i Q_j \bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l$

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For very heavy quarks Q , relations derived from heavy-quark symmetry predict the existence of novel narrow doubly heavy tetraquark states of the form $Q_i Q_j \bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l$ (subscripts label flavors), where q designates a light quark. By evaluating finite-mass corrections, we predict that double-beauty states composed of $bb\bar{u}\bar{d}$, $bb\bar{u}\bar{s}$, and $bb\bar{d}\bar{s}$ will be stable against strong decays, whereas the double-charm states $cc\bar{q}_k\bar{q}_l$, mixed beauty + charm states $bc\bar{q}_k\bar{q}_l$, and heavier $bb\bar{q}_k\bar{q}_l$ states will dissociate into pairs of heavy-light mesons. Observation of a new double-beauty state through its weak decays would establish the existence of tetraquarks and illuminate the role of heavy color-antitriplet diquarks as hadron constituents.

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Following the discovery of the charmonium-associated state $X(3872)$ by the Belle Collaboration [1], experiments have led a renaissance in hadron spectroscopy [2].

Many of the newly observed states invite identification with compositions less spare than the traditional quark–antiquark meson and three-quark baryon schemes [3]. Tetraquark states composed of a heavy quark and antiquark plus a light quark and antiquark have attracted much attention. The observed candidates all fit the form $c\bar{c}q_k\bar{q}_l$, where the light quarks q may be u, d , or s . No such states are observed significantly below threshold for strong decays into two heavy-light meson states $\bar{c}q_l + c\bar{q}_k$; all have strong decays to $c\bar{c}$ charmonium + light mesons.

In this Letter we examine the possibility of tetraquark configurations for which all strong decays are kinematically forbidden. We show that, in the heavy-quark limit, stable—hence, exceedingly narrow— $Q_i Q_j \bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l$ mesons must exist. To apply this insight, we take into account corrections for finite heavy-quark masses to deduce which tetraquark states containing b or c quarks should be stable. The most promising example is a $J^P = 1^+$ isoscalar double- b meson, $\mathcal{T}_{[\bar{u}\bar{d}]}^{(bb)^-}$.

In the heavy-quark limit, the lowest-lying tetraquark configurations resemble the helium atom, a factorized system with separate dynamics for the compact heavy color- $\bar{\mathbf{3}}$ $Q_i Q_j$ “nucleus” and for the light quarks bound to the stationary color charge. (We recall that the one-gluon-exchange interaction is attractive for two quarks forming a color antitriplet, with half the strength of the attraction between a quark and antiquark bound in a color singlet.) At large $Q_i - Q_j$ separations, which become increasingly

important as the heavy-quark masses decrease, the light $\bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l$ cloud screens the $Q_i Q_j$ interaction, so that the $Q_i Q_j \bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l$ complex may rearrange into a pair of heavy-light mesons [4]. For heavy quarks $Q_i Q_j$ bound in a color $\bar{\mathbf{3}}$ by an effective potential of the “Cornell” Coulomb + linear form at half strength for both components [5], the rms core radii are $\langle r^2 \rangle^{1/2} = 0.28$ fm(cc), 0.24 fm(bc), and 0.19 fm(bb), all considerably smaller than the size of the associated tetraquark states. Hence the core-plus-light (anti)quarks idealization should be a reliable guide to the masses of ground-state tetraquarks containing charms and bottoms.

The ground state of the attractive $\bar{\mathbf{3}}$ $Q_i Q_j$ configuration may have total spin $S_{Q_i Q_j} = 1$ for identical quarks ($i = j$) or for quarks of different flavors ($i \neq j$) in a symmetric flavor configuration $\{Q_i Q_j\}$ or total spin $S_{Q_i Q_j} = 0$ for quarks of different flavors ($i \neq j$) in an antisymmetric flavor configuration $[Q_i Q_j]$. To construct a color-singlet $Q_i Q_j \bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l$ state, the light $\bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l$ must be in a color- $\mathbf{3}$. For the tetraquark ground state, both the heavy $Q_i Q_j$ and light $\bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l$ pairs must be in ($\ell = 0$) s waves. To satisfy the Pauli principle, the flavor-symmetric $\{\bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l\}$ state must have total (light-quark) spin $j_\ell = 1$, whereas the flavor-antisymmetric $[\bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l]$ must have $j_\ell = 0$.

Stability in the heavy-quark limit.—For very heavy quarks, a hadron mass receives negligible contributions from the motion of the heavy quarks and spin interactions. Accordingly, the following relations hold among the masses of heavy-light mesons and heavy-heavy-light baryons [6]:

$$\begin{aligned}
 m(\{Q_i Q_j\}\{\bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l\}) - m(\{Q_i Q_j\}q_y) &= m(Q_x\{q_k q_l\}) - m(Q_x \bar{q}_y), \\
 m(\{Q_i Q_j\}[\bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l]) - m(\{Q_i Q_j\}q_y) &= m(Q_x[q_k q_l]) - m(Q_x \bar{q}_y), \\
 m([Q_i Q_j]\{\bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l\}) - m([Q_i Q_j]q_y) &= m(Q_x\{q_k q_l\}) - m(Q_x \bar{q}_y), \\
 m([Q_i Q_j][\bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l]) - m([Q_i Q_j]q_y) &= m(Q_x[q_k q_l]) - m(Q_x \bar{q}_y).
 \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

(In the limit, a heavy core is a heavy core.)

It is easy to see that the dissociation of $Q_i Q_j \bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l$ into two heavy-light mesons is kinematically forbidden, for sufficiently heavy quarks. The Q value for the decay is

$$Q \equiv m(Q_i Q_j \bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l) - [m(Q_i \bar{q}_k) + m(Q_j \bar{q}_l)] \\ = \Delta(q_k, q_l) - \frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{2}{3} \alpha_s \right)^2 [1 + O(v^2)] \bar{M} + O(1/\bar{M}), \quad (2)$$

where $\Delta(q_k, q_l)$, the contribution due to light dynamics, becomes independent of the heavy-quark masses, $\bar{M} \equiv (1/m_{Q_i} + 1/m_{Q_j})^{-1}$ is the reduced mass of Q_i and Q_j , and α_s is the strong coupling. The velocity-dependent hyperfine corrections, here negligible, are calculable in the non-relativistic QCD formalism [7]. For large enough values of \bar{M} , the middle term dominates, so that the tetraquark is stable against decay into two heavy-light mesons.

The other possible decay channel is to a doubly heavy baryon and a light antibaryon,

$$(Q_i Q_j \bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l) \rightarrow (Q_i Q_j q_m) + (\bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l \bar{q}_m). \quad (3)$$

By Eq. (1), we have

$$m(Q_i Q_j \bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l) - m(Q_i Q_j q_m) = m(Q_x q_k q_l) - m(Q_x \bar{q}_m). \quad (4)$$

In the heavy-quark regime, the flavored-baryon–flavored-meson mass difference on the right-hand side of Eq. (4) has the generic form $\Delta_0 + \Delta_1/M_{Q_x}$. Using the observed mass differences, $m(\Lambda_c) - m(D) = 416.87$ MeV and $m(\Lambda_b) - m(B) = 340.26$ MeV, and choosing effective quark masses

$m_c \equiv m(J/\psi)/2 = 1.55$ GeV, $m_b \equiv m(\Upsilon)/2 = 4.73$ GeV, we find $\Delta_1 = 176.6$ MeV² and $\Delta_0 = 303$ MeV; hence, the mass difference in the heavy-quark limit is 303 MeV. All of these mass differences are smaller than the mass of the lightest antibaryon, $m(\bar{p}) = 938.27$ MeV, so we conclude that no decay to a doubly heavy baryon and a light antibaryon is kinematically allowed. This completes the demonstration that, in the heavy-quark limit, stable $Q_i Q_j \bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l$ mesons must exist.

Beyond the heavy-quark limit.—To ascertain whether stable tetraquark mesons might be observed, we must estimate masses of the candidate configurations. Numerous model calculations exist in the literature [8], but it is informative to make estimates in the spirit of heavy-quark symmetry.

The leading-order corrections for finite heavy-quark mass correspond to hyperfine spin-dependent terms and a kinetic energy shift that depends only on the light degrees of freedom,

$$\delta m = S \frac{\vec{S} \cdot \vec{j}_\ell}{2\mathcal{M}} + \frac{\mathcal{K}}{2\mathcal{M}}, \quad (5)$$

where $\mathcal{M} = m_{Q_i}$ or $m_{Q_i} + m_{Q_j}$ denotes the mass of the heavy-quark core for hadrons containing one or two heavy quarks and the coefficients S and \mathcal{K} are to be determined from experimental data summarized in Table I. The spin splittings lead directly to the coefficients S tabulated in the last column. The pattern of the spin coefficients is entirely consistent with the expectations of heavy-quark symmetry.

TABLE I. Representative masses [9], in MeV, and derived quantities for ground-state hadrons containing heavy quarks.

State ^a	j_ℓ	Mass ($j_\ell + \frac{1}{2}$)	Mass ($j_\ell - \frac{1}{2}$)	Centroid	Spin splitting	S (GeV ²)
$D^{(*)} (c\bar{d})$	$\frac{1}{2}$	2010.26	1869.59	1975.09	140.7	0.436
$D_s^{(*)} (c\bar{s})$	$\frac{1}{2}$	2112.1	1968.28	2076.15	143.8	0.446
$\Lambda_c (cud)_{\bar{3}}$	0	2286.46	...	...	...	...
$\Sigma_c (cud)_6$	1	2518.41	2453.97	2496.93	64.44	0.132
$\Xi_c (cus)_{\bar{3}}$	0	2467.87	...	...	...	...
$\Xi'_c (cus)_6$	1	2645.53	2577.4	2622.82	68.13	0.141
$\Omega_c (css)_6$	1	2765.9	2695.2	2742.33	70.7	0.146
$\Xi_{cc} (ccu)_{\bar{3}}$	0	3621.40 ^b	...	...	...	...
$B^{(*)} (b\bar{d})$	$\frac{1}{2}$	5324.65	5279.32	5313.32	45.33	0.427
$B_s^{(*)} (b\bar{s})$	$\frac{1}{2}$	5415.4	5366.89	5403.3	48.5	0.459
$\Lambda_b (bud)_{\bar{3}}$	0	5619.58	...	...	...	...
$\Sigma_b (bud)_6$	1	5832.1	5811.3	5825.2	20.8	0.131
$\Xi_b (bds)_{\bar{3}}$	0	5794.5	...	...	...	...
$\Xi'_b (bds)_6$	1	5955.33	5935.02	5948.56	20.31	0.128
$\Omega_b (bss)_6$	1	6046.1	...	...	...	...
$B_c (b\bar{c})$	$\frac{1}{2}$	6329 ^c	6274.9	6315.4 ^c	54 ^c	0.340 ^c

^aSubscripts denote flavor-SU(3) representations for heavy baryons.

^bFrom the LHCb observation, Ref. [10].

^cInferred from the lattice QCD calculation of Ref. [11].

The kinetic energy shift due to light quarks will be different in $Q\bar{q}$ mesons and Qqq baryons. By comparing the centroid [or center-of-gravity (c.g.)] masses for the charm and bottom systems we can extract the difference of the kinetic-energy coefficients \mathcal{K} for states that contain one or two light quarks, viz., $\delta\mathcal{K} \equiv \mathcal{K}_{(ud)} - \mathcal{K}_d$. For example,

$$\{[m[(cud)_{\bar{3}}] - m(c\bar{d})] - \{m[(bud)_{\bar{3}}] - m(b\bar{d})\}\} = \delta\mathcal{K} \left(\frac{1}{2m_c} - \frac{1}{2m_b} \right) = 5.11 \text{ MeV}, \quad (6)$$

from which we extract $\delta\mathcal{K} = 0.0235 \text{ GeV}^2$. The resulting mass shifts are

$$\begin{aligned} m[\{cc\}(\bar{u}\bar{d})] - m(\{cc\}d) &: \frac{\delta\mathcal{K}}{4m_c} = 2.80 \text{ MeV}, \\ m[(bc)(\bar{u}\bar{d})] - m(\{bc\}d) &: \frac{\delta\mathcal{K}}{2(m_c + m_b)} = 1.87 \text{ MeV}, \\ m[\{bb\}(\bar{u}\bar{d})] - m(\{bb\}d) &: \frac{\delta\mathcal{K}}{4m_b} = 1.24 \text{ MeV}. \end{aligned} \quad (7)$$

These values are small—only slightly larger than the isospin breaking effects that we neglect as too small to affect the question of stability [12].

Combining the heavy-quark-symmetry relations of Eq. (1) with the leading-order corrections, we obtain the masses of ground-state $Q_i Q_j \bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l$ tetraquarks summarized in Table II [13]. As inputs for the doubly heavy baryons not yet experimentally measured, we use the model calculations of Karliner and Rosner [14].

Narrow tetraquark states.—As we explained in the discussion surrounding Eq. (4), strong decays of $Q_i Q_j \bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l$ tetraquarks to a doubly heavy baryon and a light antibaryon are kinematically forbidden for all the

ground states. Strong decay to a pair of heavy-light mesons will occur if the tetraquark state lies above the threshold. For $J^P = 0^+$ or 2^+ , a $Q_i Q_j \bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l$ meson might decay to a pair of heavy-light pseudoscalar mesons, while for $J^P = 1^+$ the allowed decay channel would be a pseudoscalar plus a vector meson. According to our mass estimates, the only tetraquark mesons below threshold are the axial vector $\{bb\}[\bar{u}\bar{d}]$ meson, $\mathcal{T}_{[\bar{u}\bar{d}]}^{\{bb\}-}$, which is bound by 121 MeV, and the axial vector $\{bb\}[\bar{u}\bar{s}]$ and $\{bb\}[\bar{d}\bar{s}]$ mesons bound by 48 MeV. We expect all the other $Q_i Q_j \bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l$ tetraquarks to lie at least 78 MeV above the corresponding thresholds for strong decay [16]. Promising final states include $\mathcal{T}_{[\bar{u}\bar{d}]}^{\{bb\}-} \rightarrow \Xi_{bc}^0 \bar{p}$, $B^- D^+ \pi^-$, and $B^- D^+ \ell^- \bar{\nu}$ (which establishes a weak decay), $\mathcal{T}_{[\bar{u}\bar{s}]}^{\{bb\}-} \rightarrow \Xi_{bc}^0 \bar{\Sigma}^-$, $\mathcal{T}_{[\bar{d}\bar{s}]}^{\{bb\}0} \rightarrow \Xi_{bc}^0 (\bar{\Lambda}, \bar{\Sigma}^0)$, and so on.

As others have noted [8,17], unstable doubly heavy tetraquarks might be reconstructed as resonances in the “wrong-sign” combinations of DD , DB , and BB . The doubly charged $\mathcal{T}_{[\bar{d}\bar{s}]}^{\{cc\}++} \rightarrow D^+ D_s^+$, etc., would stand out as *prima facie* evidence for a non- $q\bar{q}$ level.

While the production of $Q_i Q_j \bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l$ mesons is undoubtedly a rare event, we draw some encouragement for near-term searches from the large yield of B_c mesons recorded in the LHCb experiment [18] and the

TABLE II. Expectations for the ground-state tetraquark masses, in MeV.^a The column labeled “HQS relation” is the result of our heavy-quark symmetry relations and is explicitly given by the sum of the right-hand side of Eq. (1) and the kinetic-energy mass shifts of Eq. (7). Here q denotes an up or down quark. For stable tetraquark states the \mathcal{Q} value is highlighted in a box.

State	J^P	j_ℓ	$m(Q_i Q_j q_m)$ (c.g.)	HQS relation	$m(Q_i Q_j \bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l)$	Decay channel	\mathcal{Q} (MeV)
$\{cc\}[\bar{u}\bar{d}]$	1^+	0	3663 ^b	$m(\{cc\}u) + 315$	3978	$D^+ D^{*0}$ 3876	102
$\{cc\}[\bar{q}_k \bar{s}]$	1^+	0	3764 ^c	$m(\{cc\}s) + 392$	4156	$D^+ D_s^{*-}$ 3977	179
$\{cc\}\{\bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l\}$	$0^+, 1^+, 2^+$	1	3663	$m(\{cc\}u) + 526$	4146, 4167, 4210	$D^+ D^0, D^+ D^{*0}$ 3734, 3876	412, 292, 476
$[bc][\bar{u}\bar{d}]$	0^+	0	6914	$m([bc]u) + 315$	7229	$B^- D^+ / B^0 D^0$ 7146	83
$[bc][\bar{q}_k \bar{s}]$	0^+	0	7010 ^d	$m([bc]s) + 392$	7406	$B_s D$ 7236	170
$[bc]\{\bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l\}$	1^+	1	6914	$m([bc]u) + 526$	7439	$B^* D / B D^*$ 7190/7290	249
$\{bc\}[\bar{u}\bar{d}]$	1^+	0	6957	$m(\{bc\}u) + 315$	7272	$B^* D / B D^*$ 7190/7290	82
$\{bc\}[\bar{q}_k \bar{s}]$	1^+	0	7053 ^d	$m(\{bc\}s) + 392$	7445	DB_s^* 7282	163
$\{bc\}\{\bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l\}$	$0^+, 1^+, 2^+$	1	6957	$m(\{bc\}u) + 526$	7461, 7472, 7493	$BD / B^* D$ 7146/7190	317, 282, 349
$\{bb\}[\bar{u}\bar{d}]$	1^+	0	10 176	$m(\{bb\}u) + 306$	10 482	$B^- \bar{B}^{*0}$ 10 603	-121
$\{bb\}[\bar{q}_k \bar{s}]$	1^+	0	10 252 ^c	$m(\{bb\}s) + 391$	10 643	$\bar{B} \bar{B}_s^* / \bar{B}_s \bar{B}^*$ 10 695/10 691	-48
$\{bb\}\{\bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l\}$	$0^+, 1^+, 2^+$	1	10 176	$m(\{bb\}u) + 512$	10 674, 10 681, 10 695	$B^- B^0, B^- B^{*0}$ 10 559, 10 603	115, 78, 136

^aMasses of the unobserved doubly heavy baryons are taken from Ref. [14]; for lattice evaluations of b -baryon masses, see Ref. [15].

^bBased on the mass of the LHCb Ξ_{cc}^{++} candidate, 3621.40 MeV, Ref. [10].

^cUsing the s/d mass differences of the corresponding heavy-light mesons.

^dEvaluated as $\frac{1}{2}[m(c\bar{s}) - m(c\bar{d}) + m(b\bar{s}) - m(b\bar{d})] + m(bcd)$.

not-inconsiderable rate of double- Υ production observed in 8-TeV pp collisions by the CMS experiment, $\sigma(pp \rightarrow \Upsilon\Upsilon + \text{anything}) = 68 \pm 15$ pb [19]. The ultimate search instrument might be a future electron-positron tera-Z factory, for which the branching fractions [9] $Z \rightarrow b\bar{b} = 15.12 \pm 0.05\%$ and $Z \rightarrow b\bar{b}b\bar{b} = (3.6 \pm 1.3) \times 10^{-4}$ offer hope of many events containing multiple heavy quarks.

Concluding remarks.—We have shown that, in the heavy-quark limit, stable $Q_i Q_j \bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l$ tetraquarks must exist. Our estimates of tetraquark masses lead us to expect that strong decays of the $J^P = 1^+ \{bb\}[\bar{u}\bar{d}]$, $\{bb\}[\bar{u}\bar{s}]$, and $\{bb\}[\bar{d}\bar{s}]$ states are kinematically forbidden, so that these states should be exceedingly narrow, decaying only through the charged-current weak interaction. Observation of any of these states would signal the existence of a new form of stable matter, in which the doubly heavy color- $\bar{3}$ $Q_i Q_j$ diquark is a basic building block. The unstable $Q_i Q_j \bar{q}_k \bar{q}_l$ tetraquarks—particularly those with small Q values—may be observable as resonances decaying into pairs of heavy-light mesons, if they are not too broad to stand out above backgrounds.

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Note added.—We recently learned of interesting calculations of tetraquark masses that also highlight the likelihood of a stable doubly heavy tetraquark [20].

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