A Factorization Method Approach to the Biharmonic Transmission Problem in Absorbing Media

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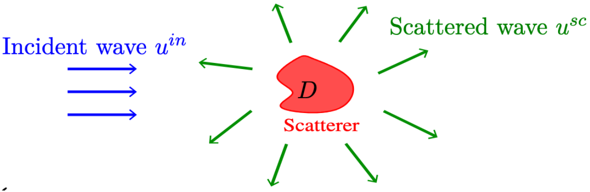
SIAM Conference on Analysis of Partial Differential Equations (PD25)
November 19, 2025

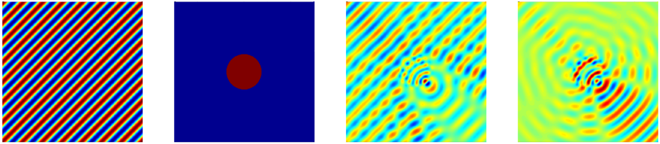
Registration and travel support for this presentation was provided by the Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics.

Paper on arXiv:

Direct & Inverse Scattering



1. **Direct Problem:** Given incident wave u^{in} and scatterer D, find the scattered wave u^{sc}.
2. **Inverse Problem:** Given the (far-field) of scattered wave u^{sc}, find the scatterer D.



u^{in} scatterer u u^{sc}

Kirchhoff–Love Plates and Flexural Waves

- A **Kirchhoff–Love thin plate** models out-of-plane bending of a homogeneous elastic plate of small thickness h.
- Transverse displacement $u(x)$ satisfies the **biharmonic wave equation**

$$\mathcal{D}\,\Delta^2 u - \rho h\,\omega^2 u = 0, \qquad \mathcal{D} = \frac{Eh^3}{12(1-\mu^2)}.$$

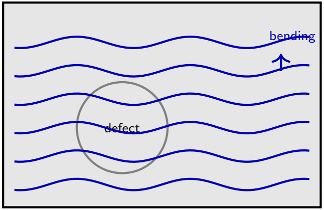
  - E :Young's modulus– measure of stiffness, resistance
  - ρh :mass per unit area
  - $\mu \in (0, 1/2]$:Poisson's ratio
- Flexural waves obey

$$\kappa^4 = \frac{\rho h\,\omega^2}{\mathcal{D}}, \qquad u = u^{\text{in}} + u^{\text{sc}}.$$

- A localized defect/inclusion modifies the rigidity:

$$\mathcal{D}(x) \neq \mathcal{D} \quad \text{in defect.}$$

- Leads to a **transmission problem for bending waves**.



Setting: Biharmonic Transmission Problem

- Out-of-plane displacement $u = u^{\text{in}} + u^{\text{sc}}$ satisfies

$$(\Delta^2 - \kappa^4 n(x))\, u(x) = 0 \quad \text{in } \mathbb{R}^2, \qquad n \in L^\infty(\mathbb{R}^2),\ \operatorname{supp}(n-1) = \overline{D}.$$

- Incident field:

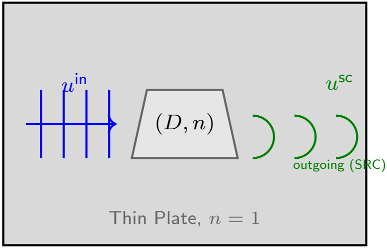
$$u^{\text{in}}(x, d; \kappa) = e^{i\kappa x \cdot d}, \qquad d \in \mathbb{S}^1.$$

- **Transmission conditions on ∂D:**

$$[\![u]\!] = [\![\partial_\nu u]\!] = [\![\Delta u]\!] = [\![\partial_\nu \Delta u]\!] = 0.$$

- **Sommerfeld radiation conditions** for the biharmonic operator:

$$\lim_{r\to\infty} r^{1/2} \left(\partial_r u^{\text{sc}} - i\kappa u^{\text{sc}}\right) = 0, \qquad \lim_{r\to\infty} r^{1/2} \left(\partial_r (\Delta u^{\text{sc}}) - i\kappa\, \Delta u^{\text{sc}}\right) = 0.$$



Absorbing Scatterer Condition and Well-Posedness

Direct Problem: Given the incident field u^i, find the scattered field u^s for a known penetrable medium (n, D):

$$(\Delta^2 - \kappa^4 n(x))\, u^{\text{sc}} = \kappa^4 (n(x) - 1) u^{\text{in}} \quad \text{in } \mathbb{R}^2, \quad u^{\text{sc}} \,\&\, \Delta u^{\text{sc}} \text{ satisfies SRC.}$$

- Well-posedness (Fredholm of index zero) is established via a variational approach.
- **Uniqueness:** In the biharmonic case, requires the **absorbing scatterer condition**

$$\boxed{\Im(n(x)) \geq \alpha > 0 \quad \text{a.e. } x \in D}$$

which is *not* necessary in the acoustic case.

Theorem (Ceja-Ayala,R., Harris, I. & Sánchez-Vizuet, T., 2025)

For a penetrable medium (n, D) satisfying $\Im(n) \geq \alpha > 0$ a.e. in D and a given incident field u^{in}:

- The direct scattering problem has a unique solution u^{sc}.
- The solution operator is Fredholm of index zero.
- The scattered field u^{sc} satisfies the estimate

$$||u^{\text{sc}}||_{H^2(D)} \leq C||u^{\text{in}}||_{L^2(D)}$$

Lippmann–Schwinger Type Representation

Goal: Express the **unique** scattered field solution u^{sc} in terms of volume integral

Idea: Apply the Green's theorem for x in both the *interior* and *exterior* of the scatterer D. (Note χ_D is characteristic function over D)

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Interior ($x \in D$)

$$u^{\mathsf{sc}}(x)\chi_D = \int_D G(x,z;\kappa)[\kappa^4 u^{\mathsf{sc}}(z) - \Delta^2 u^{\mathsf{sc}}(z)]\,\mathrm{d}z + \text{boundary terms on } \partial D.$$

Exterior ($x \notin D$)

$$u^{\mathsf{sc}}(x)(1-\chi_D) = \text{boundary terms on } \partial D \cup \partial B_R.$$

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Combine both: adding the interior and exterior representations gives

Lippmann-Schwinger (L-S) Type Equation

$$\boxed{u^{\text{sc}}(x,d) = \kappa^4 \int_D (n(z)-1)\,G(x,z;\kappa)\,[u^{\text{in}}(z,d) + u^{\text{sc}}(z,d)]\,\mathrm{d}z.}$$

Interpretation:

- $G(x,z;\kappa)$ is the Green's function of biharmonic operator $(\Delta^2 - \kappa^4)$.

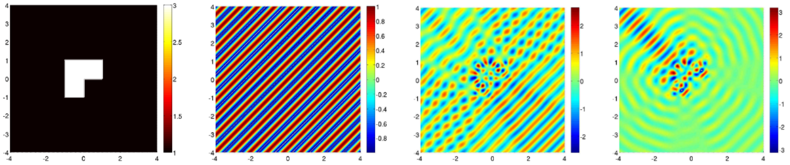
The Inverse Problem

Far-field intuition: Far from the scatterer, the scattered wave behaves like an outgoing cylindrical wave. Its amplitude and phase in each observation direction define the far-field pattern.

$$u^{\text{sc}}(x,d) = \frac{e^{i\pi/4}}{\sqrt{8\pi\kappa}} \frac{e^{i\kappa|x|}}{\sqrt{|x|}} u^{\infty}(\hat{x},d;\kappa) + O(|x|^{-3/2}), \quad |x| \to \infty,\ \hat{x} = \frac{x}{|x|}.$$

- $u^{\infty}(\hat{x},d;\kappa)$: measured far-field pattern in direction of observation $\hat{x}$ for incident waves $d \in \mathbb{S}^1$
- Inverse problem: Recover the **'absorbing' penetrable scatterer** characterized by the pair $(n, D = \text{supp}(n-1))$ — its shape, size, and location — given the full far-field data

$$\{u^{\infty}(\hat{x},d;\kappa) : \hat{x} \in \mathbb{S}^1,\ d \in \mathbb{S}^1\}.$$



Obstacle | Incident wave | Total wave | Scattered wave

Adapted from: A. Lechleiter, *Making the Invisible Visible: Imaging Techniques for Inverse Problems* (2009)

We now define the (compact!) far-field operator as $F : L^2(\mathbb{S}^1) \to L^2(\mathbb{S}^1)$

$$(Fg)(\hat{x}) = \int_{\mathbb{S}^1} u^\infty(\hat{x}, d; \kappa) g(d)\, ds(d).$$

Fg is far field corresponding to the incident field (Herglotz wave function)

$$v_g(x) = \int_{\mathbb{S}^1} e^{i\kappa x \cdot d} g(d)\, ds(d)$$

Note: v_g refers to superposition of plane waves.

Inverse Problem

The **inverse problem** also reads: given F find $D = \text{supp}(n-1)$!

How to reconstruct D from F? Nonlinear optimization, local linearization, domain decomposition... **time-consuming!, Requires forward solver!**

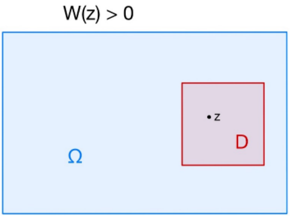
Qualitative/Sampling Methods

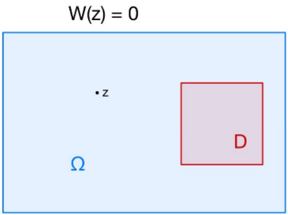
Class of Reconstruction Methods

Qualitative Methods: Construct a binary criterium that decides whether a grid point z belongs to the support of the region in a computational simple manner.

- **Advantages:** Requires **little a priori** information on the scatterer. Very fast, no forward solver needed, fully direct method.
- **Disadvantages:** requires a lot of data, can only recover qualitative information.

e.g., linear sampling method (Colton-Kirsch, 1996), factorization method (Kirsch, 1998), probe method (Ikehata, 1999), singular source method (Potthast, 2000), etc.





The Range Test Property

Define the **Herglotz wave operator**

$$(Hg)(x) = v_g(x), \quad x \in D, \quad L^2(\mathbb{S}^1) \to L^2(D) \quad \text{bounded}$$

and its adjoint

$$(H^*\varphi)(\hat{x}) = \int_D e^{-i\kappa\hat{x}\cdot y}\,\varphi(y)\,dy, \quad \hat{x} \in \mathbb{S}^1, \quad L^2(D) \to L^2(\mathbb{S}^1) \quad \text{bounded}$$

For a sampling point $z \in \mathbb{R}^2$, consider the **range test equation**

$$H^*\varphi = \phi_z, \quad \text{where } \phi_z(\hat{x}) = e^{-i\kappa\hat{x}\cdot z}.$$

Note: ϕ_z is a **test function** and far-field pattern for the fundamental solution of the Helmholtz equation

Lemma (Range Test Property), cf. Theorem 4.6 (Kirsch-Grinberg book)

Let $D = \text{supp}(n-1)$ be a bounded open set with connected complement. Then,

$$\boxed{\phi_z \in \text{Range}(H^*) \iff z \in D.}$$

Key. Proof via a unique continuation argument.

H^* is a **bounded operator** depending on the (unknown) domain D.

Key Question

Can we relate $\text{Range}(H^*)$, which depends on the unknown D, to the **known far-field operator** F?

Preliminaries for Factorization

Scattered field formulation. Let w solve the inhomogeneous biharmonic scattering problem

$$(\Delta^2 - \kappa^4)w = \kappa^4(n-1)(w+f) \quad \text{in } \mathbb{R}^2,$$

with Sommerfeld radiation conditions for w and Δw. Then w admits the Lippmann-Schwinger representation

$$\boxed{w(x) = \kappa^4 \int_D (n(y)-1)\, G(x,y)\, [w(y)+f(y)]\, \mathrm{d}y.}$$

Biharmonic Green's function. The outgoing fundamental solution of

$$(\Delta^2 - \kappa^4)G(\cdot, y) = \delta_y$$

is

$$G(x,y) = \frac{i}{8\kappa^2}\Big[H_0^{(1)}(\kappa|x-y|) - H_0^{(1)}(i\kappa|x-y|)\Big].$$

Far-field asymptotics as $|x| \to \infty$. Let $r = |x|$, $\hat{x} = x/r$. Then

$$G(x,y) \sim \frac{e^{i\kappa r}}{\sqrt{r}} \underbrace{\frac{\gamma}{2\kappa^2}\, e^{-i\kappa \hat{x}\cdot y}}_{\text{far–field term}}, \qquad \gamma = \frac{e^{i\pi/4}}{\sqrt{8\pi\kappa}}.$$

Factorization of F via Lippmann–Schwinger

Starting point:

$$w(x) = \kappa^4 \int_D (n(y) - 1)\, G(x,y)\, [w(y) + f(y)]\, \mathrm{d}y.$$

Using the asymptotic form of $G(x,y)$ as $|x| \to \infty$:

$$G(x,y) \sim \frac{e^{i\kappa r}}{\sqrt{r}} \underbrace{\frac{\gamma}{2\kappa^2}\, e^{-i\kappa \hat{x}\cdot y}}_{\text{far–field term}}, \quad \gamma = \frac{e^{i\pi/4}}{\sqrt{8\pi\kappa}}$$

Then the far–field pattern becomes:

$$w^\infty(\hat{x}) = \frac{\kappa^2}{2} \int_D e^{-i\kappa \hat{x}\cdot y} (n-1)\, [f(y) + w(y)]\, \mathrm{d}y.$$

Hence, for a Herglotz incident field $f = Hg$,

$$(Fg)(\hat{x}) = \frac{\kappa^2}{2} \int_D e^{-i\kappa \hat{x}\cdot y} (n-1)\, [Hg(y) + w(y)]\, \mathrm{d}y.$$

Recognizing the operator structure:

$$F = H^* \, T \, H, \qquad Tf = \tfrac{\kappa^2}{2}(n-1)(f + w).$$

Factorization Method Works by Factorization!

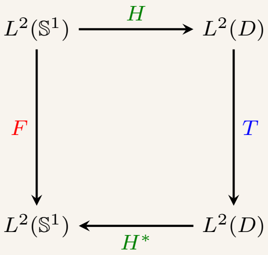
- Herglotz wave operator: $H : L^2(\mathbb{S}^1) \to L^2(D)$, $Hg = v_g|_D$
- Define $T : L^2(D) \to L^2(D)$ by

$$Tf = \frac{\kappa^2}{2}(n-1)(f + w(f)|_D)$$

where $(\Delta^2 - \kappa^4 n(x))w = \kappa^4(n-1)f$ in $\mathbb{R}^2$ + (SRCs)

Theorem

$$F = H^* T H$$



Task: Relate the Range(H^*) to the known operator F.

Key Property of the Middle Operator T

Operator factorization:

$$F = H^* \, T \, H, \qquad T f = \frac{\kappa^2}{2} \, (n-1)\,(f+w)$$

Define the imaginary parts:

$$\Im(F) := \frac{F - F^*}{2i}, \qquad \Im(T) := \frac{T - T^*}{2i},$$

which are self-adjoint & positive.

$$\Im(F) = H^* \, \Im(T) \, H$$

We have: Range$((\Im(F))^{1/2})$=Range(H^*), which follows from the following result.

Theorem ((Ceja-Ayala,R., Harris, I. & Ozochiawaeze, G. (2025))

Let the scatterer $D = \text{supp}(n-1)$ *be* **absorbing**, *i.e.,*

$$\Im(n(x)) \geq \alpha > 0 \quad \textit{a.e. } x \in D.$$

Then the middle operator $\Im(T)$ *is* **coercive** *on* $L^2(D)$, *that is,* $\exists\, \mu > 0$ *so that*

$$(\Im(T)f, f)_{L^2(D)} = \Im(Tf, f)_{L^2(D)} \geq \mu ||f||^2_{L^2(D)}$$

for all $f \in L^2(D)$.

Key. Proof by contradiction, exploit biharmonic wave decomposition for w obtained from factoring $(\Delta^2 - \kappa^4)w = (\Delta + \kappa^2)(\Delta - \kappa)w$

Reconstruction of D by the FM

We have the positive definite, compact operator

$$\Im(F) := \frac{F - F^*}{2i} : L^2(\mathbb{S}^1) \to L^2(\mathbb{S}^1).$$

We also have

$$\text{Range}((\Im(F))^{1/2}) = \text{Range}(H^*)$$

so

$$z \in D \iff \phi_z \in \text{Range}((\Im(F))^{1/2})$$

The Factorization Method (FM)

Let the pair $(\lambda_j, \psi_j) \in \mathbb{R}^+ \times L^2(\mathbb{S}^1)$ be the orthonormal eigensystem of $\Im(F)$. Then by the Picard range criterion we have:

$$z \in D \iff W(z) = \left[\sum_{j=1}^{\infty} \frac{\left| (\phi_z, \psi_j)_{L^2(\mathbb{S}^1)} \right|^2}{\lambda_j} \right]^{-1} > 0.$$

Thus, we have complete characterization of penetrable scatterer D:

$$\chi_D(z) = \text{sgn}(W(z)) := \begin{cases} 1, & x \in D \\ 0, & x \notin D \end{cases}$$

Born Approximation for Weak Scatterers

Integral operator:

$$(Kf)(x) := \int_D G(x,y)\,(n(y)-1)\,f(y)\,dy$$

$$\text{Assume } ||K|| < 1, \qquad (|D| < 1).$$

L-S Type Equation then becomes:

$$u^s = Ku^{\text{in}} + Ku^{\text{sc}} \iff u^s = (I-K)^{-1}Ku^{\text{in}}$$

Born approximation:

$$u^{\text{sc}} \approx \underbrace{Ku^{\text{in}}}_{\text{first-order}}$$

Far-field (linearized):

$$\begin{aligned} u^\infty(\hat{x},d) &\approx \frac{\kappa^2}{2}\int_D (n-1)\,e^{-i\kappa\hat{x}\cdot y}\,u^{\text{in}}(y)\,dy \\ &= \frac{\kappa^2}{2}\int_D (n-1)\,e^{-i\kappa\hat{x}\cdot y}\,e^{i\kappa d\cdot y}\,dy \\ &= \kappa^2/2\cdot\widehat{(n-1)}(\xi), \quad \xi := \kappa(d-\hat{x}) \end{aligned}$$

Key intuition: small/weak scatterer ⇒ far-field ≈ Fourier transform of contrast.

Comparing Exact Far-Field & Born Approximation

Assume a small disk scatterer $D = B_\epsilon$, $0 < \epsilon \leq 1$, with constant material parameter $n = 1.0 + 1.5i$. The direct scattering problem reads:

$$\Delta^2 u^{\mathsf{sc}} - \kappa^4 u^{\mathsf{sc}} = 0 \quad \text{in } \mathbb{R}^2 \setminus \overline{B_\epsilon}, \quad \Delta^2 u - \kappa^4 u = 0 \quad \text{in } B_\epsilon,$$

with boundary (transmission) conditions at $r = \epsilon$:

$$u^{\mathsf{sc}} - u = -u^{\mathsf{in}}, \quad \partial_r u^{\mathsf{sc}} - \partial_r u = -\partial_r u^{\mathsf{in}}, \quad \Delta u^{\mathsf{sc}} - \Delta u = -\Delta u^{\mathsf{in}}, \quad \partial_r \Delta u^{\mathsf{sc}} - \partial_r \Delta u = -\partial_r \Delta u^{\mathsf{in}}.$$

Expand incident plane wave via Jacobi–Anger:

$$u^{\mathsf{in}}(r, \theta) = \sum_{\ell=0}^{\infty} i^\ell J_\ell(\kappa r)\, e^{i\ell(\theta - \phi)}, \quad d = (\cos\phi, \sin\phi)$$

Separation of variables and the boundary conditions at $r = \epsilon$ give a linear system:

$$\mathbb{M}\mathbf{u} = \mathbf{f}, \quad \mathbf{u} = [a_\ell, b_\ell, c_\ell, d_\ell]^T, \quad \mathbf{f} = [-J_\ell(\kappa\epsilon), -\kappa J'_\ell(\kappa\epsilon), \kappa^2 J_\ell(\kappa\epsilon), \kappa^3 J'_\ell(\kappa\epsilon)]^T.$$

Once solved, the exact biharmonic far-field pattern is

$$u^\infty(\theta, \phi) = \frac{4}{\mathsf{i}} \sum_{\ell=0}^{\infty} a_\ell\, e^{i\ell(\theta - \phi)}.$$

Computing the Matrix $\mathbb{M}$ for a Disk Scatterer

Fourier Series Ansatz for the Scattered Field.
We decompose u^{sc} and u into propagative $((\Delta+\kappa^2)$ and evanescent $(\Delta-\kappa^2)$ components:

$$u_{\mathsf{H}}(r,\theta)=\sum_{|\ell|=0}^{\infty} i^{\ell} a_\ell H_\ell^{(1)}(\kappa r)e^{i\ell(\theta-\phi)},\quad u_{\mathsf{M}}(r,\theta)=\sum_{|\ell|=0}^{\infty} i^{\ell} b_\ell H_\ell^{(1)}(i\kappa r)e^{i\ell(\theta-\phi)}.$$

Inside the Scatterer.
The total field $u=u_{\text{pr}}+u_{\text{ev}}$ is expanded as

$$u_{\text{pr}}(r,\theta)=\sum_{|\ell|=0}^{\infty} i^{\ell} c_\ell J_\ell(\kappa n^{1/4} r)e^{i\ell(\theta-\phi)},\quad u_{\text{ev}}(r,\theta)=\sum_{|\ell|=0}^{\infty} i^{\ell} d_\ell J_\ell(i\kappa n^{1/4} r)e^{i\ell(\theta-\phi)}.$$

Key Observation.

$$\Delta u_{\text{pr}}=-\kappa^2\sqrt{n}\,u_{\text{pr}},\quad \Delta u_{\text{ev}}=\kappa^2\sqrt{n}\,u_{\text{ev}}.$$

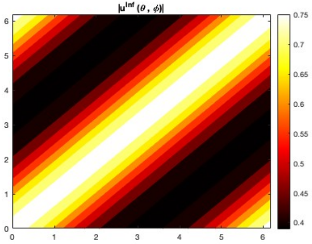
Linear System from Boundary Conditions.
At $r=\epsilon$, the four boundary conditions give

$$\mathbb{M}\mathbf{u}=\mathbf{f},$$

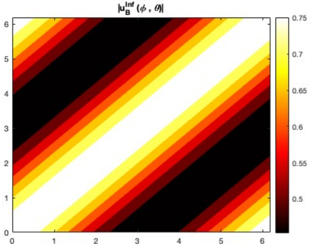
which determines the coefficients $a_\ell, b_\ell, c_\ell, d_\ell$.

Biharmonic Far-Field Pattern vs Born Approximation ($\varepsilon = 0.5$)

Exact Far-Field Pattern



Born Approximation



$$\mathbf{F}_{\text{exact}} = [u^{\infty}(\theta_i, \phi_j)]_{i,j=1}^{64}, \quad \mathbf{F}_{\text{Born}} = [u_{\text{B}}^{\infty}(\theta_i, \phi_j)]_{i,j=1}^{64},$$

$$\hat{x} = (\cos\theta, \sin\theta), \quad d = (\cos\phi, \sin\phi), \quad n = 1.0 + 1.5i$$

Absolute Error $\|\mathbf{F}_{\text{exact}} - \mathbf{F}_{\text{Born}}\|_{\infty}$ for Small Disks B_ϵ

ϵ	Error
1.00	0.6480
0.90	0.5008
0.80	0.3784
0.70	0.2774
0.60	0.1935
0.50	0.2134

FM Discretization and Imaging Functional

Algorithm 1 Factorization Method

Input: Wavenumber κ, will fix regularization $\alpha = 10^{-5}$, noise level δ.

Step 1: Sample Directions.

Compute 64 equally spaced angles $\theta_i = 2\pi(i-1)/64$, $\hat{x}_i = d_i = (\cos\theta_i, \sin\theta_i)$.

Step 2: Assemble Far-Field Matrix.

Evaluate $\mathbf{F}(i,j) = u^\infty(\hat{x}_i, d_j)$ and form $\mathbf{F} \in \mathbb{C}^{64\times 64}$.

Step 3: Add Noise (optional).

$\mathbf{F}^\delta(i,j) = \mathbf{F}(i,j)\big(1 + \delta\,\mathbf{R}(i,j)\big), \quad \mathbf{R} \in \mathbb{C}^{64\times 64}$(error matrix)

Step 4: Compute SVD of Imaginary Part.

$\Im(\mathbf{F}) = \frac{\mathbf{F}-\mathbf{F}^*}{2i} = \sum_j \sigma_j\, \mathbf{u}_j \mathbf{v}_j^*$.

Step 5: FM Indicator.

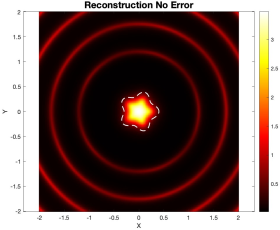
$$W_{\mathrm{FM}}(z) = \left[\sum_j \frac{\phi^2(\sigma_j;\alpha)}{\sigma_j} |(\mathbf{u}_j, \boldsymbol{\ell}_z)|^2\right]^{-1}, \quad \boldsymbol{\ell}_z = [e^{-i\kappa\hat{x}_i\cdot z}].$$

Tikhonov Filter Function

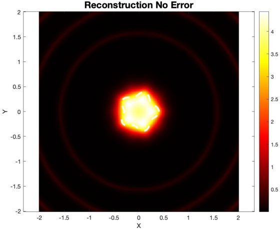
Tikhonov regularization: $\phi(t;\alpha) = \dfrac{t^2}{t^2+\alpha}, \quad \alpha = 10^{-5}$

FM Reconstruction: Star-shaped Scatterer (Penetrable, $n = 2.5 + 1.5i$)

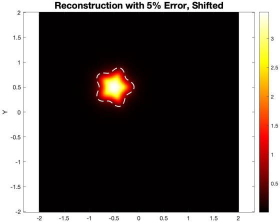
$k = 2\pi$ (no noise)



$k = 3\pi$ (no noise)



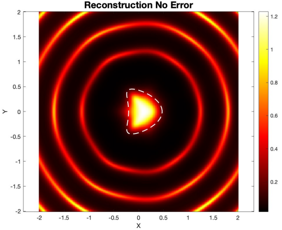
(5% noise, shifted (-0.5, 0.5))



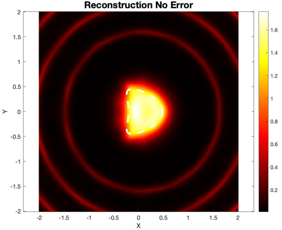
(5% noise, shifted (1, 1.5)

FM Reconstruction: Kite-shaped Scatterer (Penetrable, $n = 2.5 + 1.5i$)

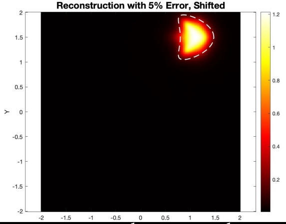
$k = 2\pi$ (no noise)



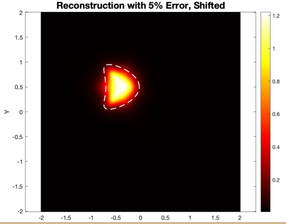
$k = 3\pi$ (no noise)



5% noise, shifted $(-0.5,\ 0.5)$

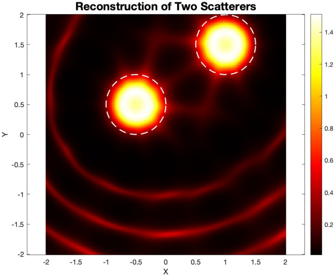


5% noise, shifted $(1,\ 1.5)$

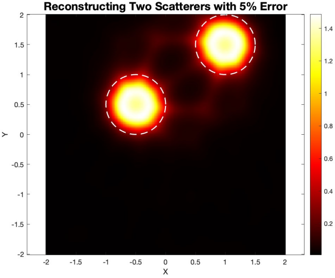


FM Reconstructions: Disk Scatterers (Penetrable, $\kappa = 2\pi$, $n = 2.5 + 1.5i$)

Reconstruction (No Noise)



Reconstruction (5% Noise)



FM reconstructions of a small disk scatterer $D = B_{1/2}$.

Conclusion

- Extended the **Factorization Method** (FM) to **biharmonic scattering** in **penetrable, absorbing media**.
- Provided **numerical reconstructions** showing FM's effectiveness for small scatterers and limited/noisy data.
- verified heuristically Born approximation valid first order linearization for weak scatterers.
- Open problems / future directions:
  - FM for **biharmonic scattering by impenetrable cavities** is still open.
  - Extending reconstruction methods to **near-field biharmonic scattering** for a penetrable medium remains open.
- Overall, FM provides a **qualitative reconstruction framework** beyond classical acoustic, elastic, & electromagnetic scattering, with extensions to complex media feasible.

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