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Phys. Rev. B **107**, 165159 — Published 28 April 2023

DOI: [10.1103/PhysRevB.107.165159](https://doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevB.107.165159)

# Sources of quantized excitations via dichotomic topological cycles

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We demonstrate the existence of a conceptually distinct topological pumping phenomenon in 1-dimensional chains undergoing topological adiabatic cycles. Specifically, for a stack of two semi-infinite chains cycled in opposite directions and coupled at one edge by a gapping potential, we derive a higher-order bulk-boundary correspondence that relates the bulk Chern number associated to the adiabatic cycle of a single infinite chain and the number of electrons transferred between the semi-infinite chains. The relation is formulated using the relative index of two projections and proven using K-theoretic calculations. The phenomenon is exemplified using the Rice-Mele model and possible experimental implementations with classical and quantum degrees of freedom are discussed.

Forty years ago, Thouless predicted that topological quantized pumping of charge can occur under an adiabatic cycle in a 1-dimensional insulating bulk system with uniformly filled valence bands [1]. He arrived at this conclusion via a bulk calculation involving the physical observables and the states of the infinite system. Thouless never considered a physical boundary, because his calculation was all about the flow of charge through a theoretical section of the infinite system. Nevertheless, Thouless pumping is often presented as the quantum analogue of the Archimedean screw (see *e.g.* [2]), which loads water at one end and spills water at the other end every time the screw is cranked up. For this to happen at the quantum level, it is often suggested that a half-infinite Thouless chain needs to be put in contact with a metal, though the precise phenomenon of such an experiment is impossible to formalize by a clean calculation as in [1], because one is now dealing with a hybrid ungapped system. In this work, we present an experimentally verifiable scenario in which topological quantized pumping is achieved at the contact between a Thouless chain and an empty and spectrally gapped system. This is interesting because the pumped electrons or the excitations are not mixed with the Fermi sea of the metal. For this reason, we claim that our proposed mechanism supplies the principle for a genuine source of quantized excitations. Furthermore, the effect can be observed in phonons and photonic crystals as well.

There are two types of pumpings observed in experiments recently. The first type involves Thouless quantized pumping in the bulk of 1-dimensional systems with ultra-cold fermionic and bosonic atoms [8, 9]. The second type is the edge-to-edge pumping which relies purely on the spectral flow and on the adiabatic theorem [10–13]. In such experiments, the spectral bands are empty and a localized mode is loaded at one end of a chain. Upon an adiabatic deformation of the system, the mode follows the spectral flow and ends up at the other side of the finite system. This type of pumping relies on the bulk-boundary correspondence principle which warrants a chiral spectral flow, and this is all needed for

the success of such experiments. We mention this type of experiments because the setting is that of a finite chain in contact with vacuum, but it will also work if the contact is with an insulator. However, the physical processes are very different from those involved in Thouless pumping. Specifically, there is no dynamics of bulk states because the spectral bands are empty at the start.

A topological pumping phenomenon similar to the one presented here was discovered in [5], in the context of 3-dimensional condensed matter systems displaying the quantized magneto-electric effect. In this work, we demonstrate that this topological pumping effect also occurs in weakly coupled 1-dimensional chains under topological adiabatic cycles. Since these systems are much easier to handle in a laboratory, we hope that our present theoretical work will eventually lead to an experimental realization. The proposed set-up, illustrated in Fig. 1, consists of a stack of two semi-infinite Rice-Mele chains [3] driven in opposite topological adiabatic cycles. By unfolding, the system can also be thought of as two interfaced half-infinite Rice-Mele chains driven by identical adiabatic cycles. We, however, will work with the folded configuration which transforms an interface problem into a bulk-edge problem, for which there exist

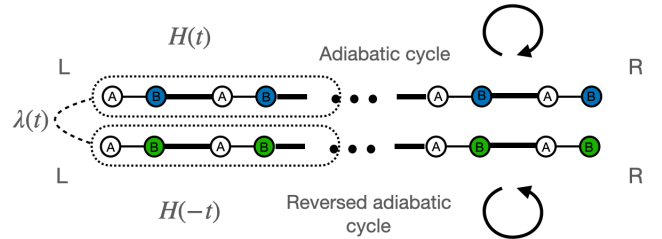


FIG. 1. Illustration of our coupled Rice-Mele chains adiabatically driven in opposite topological cycles, with the two sub-lattice sites  $A$  and  $B$  of unit cells labeled. At  $t = 0$ , the valence bands of the top chain (blue) are uniformly filled and the bottom chain (green) is completely empty. The coupling  $\lambda(t)$  switches on the edge potential  $V_{\text{edge}}(t)$ , defined by (5), which couples the chiral edge bands of the top and bottom chains.

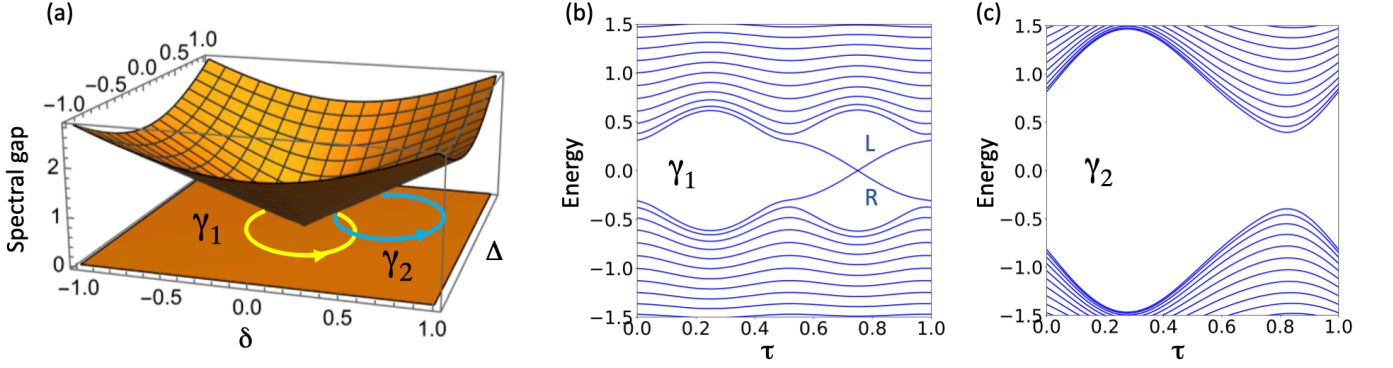


FIG. 2. (a) Spectral gap of the Hamiltonian (2) as a function of the parameters  $(\delta, \Delta)$ , together with two adiabatic cycles, of which  $\gamma_1 = (\delta = 0.3 \sin(2\pi\tau), \Delta = -0.3 \cos(2\pi\tau))$  circles and  $\gamma_2 = (\delta = 0.4 + 0.3 \sin(2\pi\tau), \Delta = 0.4 - 0.3 \cos(2\pi\tau))$  does not circle the gap singularity at  $\delta = \Delta = 0$ . (b,c) The energy spectrum of the Hamiltonian (2) as a function of the adiabatic parameter  $\tau$  for  $\gamma_1$  and  $\gamma_2$ , respectively. Both spectra are generated with chains of 20 sites. Two chiral modes located at opposite left (L) and right (R) ends of the chain are visible in panel (b). These chiral modes are absent for the adiabatic cycle  $\gamma_2$ .

many tools of analysis. Now, at  $t = 0$ , the valence bands of the top chain are uniformly filled and all energy bands of the bottom chain are completely empty, and the two chains are decoupled. As the adiabatic cycles progress, the coupling between the chains is turned on and then off towards the end of the cycles. For this hybrid system, suppose  $\widehat{\Pi}_0$  is the projection onto the populated states at  $t = 0$  and  $\widehat{\Pi}_1^A$  is the adiabatic time evolution of this projection after a complete cycle, we show that

$$\text{Index}(\widehat{\Pi}_1^A, \widehat{\Pi}_0) = \text{Ch}_\gamma, \quad (1)$$

where on the left we have the relative index of Avron, Seiler and Simon [20–22] and on the right is the Chern number (3) associated to the adiabatic cycle of a single infinite chain. This identity connects a 2-dimensional topological invariant and a 0-dimensional invariant related to the interface, hence it is a higher-order bulk-boundary correspondence. It tells us that a  $\text{Ch}_\gamma$ -number of electrons has been pumped in the system and, since the top chain had all the available states occupied, this extra electrons must have been pumped into the bottom chain. Note that a relation similar to (1) is needed to rigorously justify the analogy mentioned at the beginning between pumping into a metal and the Archimedean screw, but no such relation has been derived. This shows how poor our understanding of Thouless pumping in the presence of physical interfaces is, and hopefully it clarifies the importance of the step taken by our work.

Let us start our analysis by first considering a single Rice-Mele Hamiltonian [3]

$$H = - \sum_x (J_1 |x, B\rangle \langle x, A| + J_2 |x+1, A\rangle \langle x, B| + h.c.) \quad (2) \\ + \Delta \sum_x (|x, A\rangle \langle x, A| - |x, B\rangle \langle x, B|),$$

where  $A$  and  $B$  denote the sublattice sites of the  $x$ -th unit cell,  $J_{1/2} = 1 \pm \delta$  and  $\Delta$  denote the tunneling couplings and energy offset between neighboring sites, respectively. Fig. 2(a) shows its spectral gap mapped as function of the parameters  $\delta$  and  $\Delta$ , together with two adiabatic paths parametrized by the circle  $\mathbb{S}^1 = \mathbb{R}/\mathbb{Z}$ , of which  $\gamma_1$  encloses the gap singularity while  $\gamma_2$  does not. The Chern number for a closed and spectrally gapped loop  $\gamma$  is [4]

$$\text{Ch}_\gamma = i \int_{\mathbb{S}^1} d\tau \text{Tr}_L \left( P(\tau) \left[ \partial_\tau P(\tau), i[X, P(\tau)] \right] \right), \quad (3)$$

where  $P(\tau) = \chi_{(-\infty, E_F]}(H(\gamma_\tau))$  is the spectral projector onto the lower energy bands below the gap,  $X$  is the position operator and  $\text{Tr}_L$  is the trace per length. Throughout,  $\chi_A$  denotes the characteristic function of the set  $A$ .  $\text{Ch}_\gamma$  is written in real-space rather than  $k$ -space to convey that it is well defined in the presence of disorder [14]. The difference between  $\gamma_1$  and  $\gamma_2$  is that  $\text{Ch}_{\gamma_1} = 1$  while  $\text{Ch}_{\gamma_2} = 0$ . The expected chiral edge modes traversing the spectral bulk gap for  $\gamma_1$  are illustrated in Fig. 2(b).

We now consider a stack of two infinite Rice-Mele chains and an adiabatic cycle  $\gamma$ , but we run the adiabatic cycle in opposite directions for the two blocks, namely

$$H_0(t) = \begin{pmatrix} H(\gamma_\tau) & 0 \\ 0 & H(\gamma_{-\tau}) \end{pmatrix}, \quad \tau = \frac{t}{T}, \quad (4)$$

with  $t$  the real time and  $T$  the total duration of cycle. It will be convenient to use  $T$  as the unit of time, in which case  $t$  and  $\tau$  coincide and we can use the latter throughout. Hamiltonian  $H_0(\tau)$  will play the role of the bulk Hamiltonian. Throughout, our convention will be to bold all operators related to the double-chain system. Now, if one calculates the total Chern number of the lower energy bands, one will find a trivial value, regardless if  $\gamma$  encloses the critical point or not. As such, one

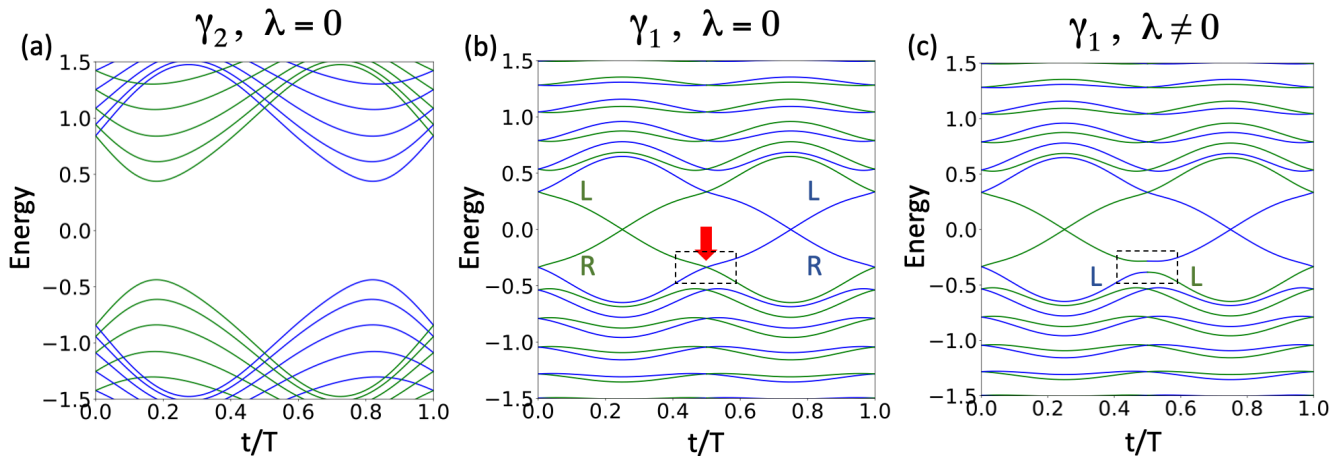


FIG. 3. Spectral flow of the Hamiltonian (4) reduced on finite-size chains with open boundary conditions, when adiabatically deformed along (a) the cycle  $\gamma_2$  and (b) the cycle  $\gamma_1$ . (c) Same as panel (b) but for the Hamiltonian (7). The labels L/R indicate the spatial localization of the chiral bands to either left (L) or right (R) edge of the system. Marked with an arrow in panel (b) is the crossing of the chiral bands localized at the left edge of the system. The window drawn with a dashed line indicates the energy and time ranges where the edge potential (5) is defined. The data is generated with finite chains containing 10 sites and  $\lambda(t)$  for panel (c) is turned up to 0.05. The blue and green colors represent the overlap with the top and bottom states respectively.

will be inclined to proclaim that all topological characteristics are lost. Our main message is that this is not the case at all! Let us examine the spectral flows reported in Figs. 3(a,b) of the Hamiltonian (4), when it is reduced to finite-size with open boundary conditions. The results in Fig. 3(a) for the contour  $\gamma_2$  are not very interesting, but an opportunity presents itself for contour  $\gamma_1$  in Fig. 3(b). Indeed, two opposite chiral bands spatially localized at the *same* edge intersect each other as indicated by the arrow. Then a generic edge potential hybridizes these bands and gaps the system at that edge, potentially resulting in a quantized spectral flow from the top to the bottom chain. Let us point out that Eq. (1) prohibits the emergence of other band splittings un-doing the effect.

To exemplify that the effect is possible, we design an edge potential that hybridizes only the two chiral bands from the left edges, leaving the rest of the spectrum *intact*. This irrefutably proves that the transfer of quantized excitations from one chain to the other is possible. The topological character of the process, that is, its robustness against deformations of the bulk models and edge potentials as well as the inclusion of disorder, is a separate question. They will be addressed in the second part of our work. In the following computations, all Hamiltonians are assumed finite and with open boundary conditions. Now, let us consider an energy window  $\Delta E = [E_-, E_+]$  around the band crossing (see Fig. 3b) and let  $P_{\Delta E}(\tau) = \chi_{[E_-, E_+]}(H(\gamma_\tau))$  be the corresponding spectral projection of the top chain. Then our proposed edge potential takes the form

$$V_{\text{edge}}(\tau) = \lambda(\tau) \begin{pmatrix} 0 & P_{\Delta E}(\tau)P_{\Delta E}(-\tau) \\ P_{\Delta E}(-\tau)P_{\Delta E}(\tau) & 0 \end{pmatrix}, \quad (5)$$

where  $\lambda(\tau)$  is a smooth on-off switch that is zero outside the small window shown in Fig. 3b centered at the crossing point. Note that  $P_{\Delta E}(\tau)$  displays discontinuities when the chiral bands cross the edges of interval  $\Delta E$ , but those discontinuities disappear once the smooth on-off switch is included. More, the spectral projection of  $H_0(\tau)$  on the interval  $\Delta E = [E_-, E_+]$ ,

$$Q_{\Delta E}(\tau) := \chi_{[E_-, E_+]}(H_0(\tau)) = \begin{pmatrix} P_{\Delta E}(\tau) & 0 \\ 0 & P_{\Delta E}(-\tau) \end{pmatrix}, \quad (6)$$

commutes with our specially designed edge potential and this assures us that only the states inside the spectral interval  $[E_-, E_+]$  are affected by  $V_{\text{edge}}(\tau)$ .

The spectral flow of the full Hamiltonian

$$H(\tau) = H_0(\tau) + V_{\text{edge}}(\tau), \quad \tau = t/T, \quad (7)$$

illustrated in Fig. 1, is depicted in Fig. 3c. As expected, the spectrum has been modified only inside the marked window where one can clearly distinguish a splitting of the left-localized chiral bands. Outside the marked window, the two Rice-Mele chains are decoupled, hence the eigenstates have a well defined top/bottom index, which is color labeled in Fig. 3. Based on this concrete spectral flow, the following statement holds: If at  $t = 0$  one fully populates the states below the bulk spectral gap of the top chain and leaves the states of the bottom chain completely empty, then exactly one normalized state will be detected on the bottom chain after one full adiabatic cycle.

It then becomes clear that the adiabatic cycle described above acts like a valve that releases one excitation per cycle into the bottom chain. Hence, our proposed set-up

supplies the design principle for on-demand sources of quantized excitations. Here are two possible laboratory implementations. The first one involves phonons. In this context, the sites of the Rice-Mele chains harbor identical mechanical resonators which are coupled as indicated by our Hamiltonian (7). This will require fast dynamic reconfigurability to a level where the pumped signals do not succumb to dissipation and the effect can be revealed. The edge-to-edge pumping experiments mentioned in the beginning have demonstrated that this is now under control in metamaterials. With the chains decoupled, the upper chain is excited with a broad spectrum source such that all phonon modes below the spectral gap are uniformly excited. After one turn of our proposed cycle, a *single* phonon will be detected propagating to the right on the lower mechanical chain. The situation is more difficult with electrons because populating and de-populating energy bands is a more involved process. Still, we believe that the effect can be implemented with a half-filled virtual spin-Chern insulator. By applying a strong upward magnetic field, we can populate the up-spin states and completely depopulate the down-spin states. The magnetic field can then be abruptly turned off and the adiabatic cycle is initiated. After one turn of the adiabatic cycle, one should observe a quantized spin-down excitation moving to the right. Of course, all these will take place in the background of the relaxation process back to the equilibrium state. Hence, the success of such enterprise requires the adiabatic cycle to be shorter than the relaxation time. The recent cold-atom simulations of spin-Chern insulators [15] show a level of control that we believe is sufficient for implementing and observing the effect proposed here.

We now address the topological character of the process and show that the phenomenon is independent of the particular form of the coupling potential. To derive the bulk-edge correspondence, we send the right edge to  $\infty$ , hence the adiabatically cycled system is now semi-infinite. By doing so, we clear up the spectral gap of the right chiral bands and, as such, we can apply the adiabatic theorem to the lower spectrum. To distinguish between the bulk and half-space operators, we will place a hat on the latter. Hence, the Hamiltonian (7) becomes  $\widehat{H}(\tau)$ . Furthermore, the operators with matrix elements decaying to zero away from the edge will carry a tilde. Hence, the potential (5) becomes  $\widetilde{V}_{\text{edge}}(\tau)$ . If  $\widehat{U}_\tau$  is the physical time evolution operator, *i.e.* the unitary solution of the equation,  $i\partial_\tau \widehat{U}_\tau = T\widehat{H}(\tau)\widehat{U}_\tau$ ,  $\widehat{U}_0 = \mathbf{1}$ , then it is well-known [17] that  $\widehat{U}_\tau$  can be approximated by the adiabatic time evolution  $\widehat{U}_\tau^A$  (see Supplemental Material [18]). Then our task is to compare the projections

$$\widehat{\Pi}_0 = \begin{pmatrix} \widehat{P}(0) & 0 \\ 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \quad \text{and} \quad \widehat{\Pi}_1^A = \widehat{U}_1^A \begin{pmatrix} \widehat{P}(0) & 0 \\ 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \widehat{U}_1^{A*}, \quad (8)$$

encoding the initial and final states of the two-chain sys-

tem for large  $T$ . Here,  $\widehat{P}(0) = \chi_{(-\infty, E_F]}(\widehat{H}(\gamma_0))$  is the spectral projection of the top chain at the beginning of the cycle and  $E_F$  lies in the spectral gap of  $\widehat{H}(\gamma_\tau)$ .

Let us point out again the unusual character of the setting. On one hand, the bulk topology, prompted by the non-zero Chern number  $\text{Ch}_{\gamma_1}$ , exists in the  $(1+1)$ -dimensional space (one real and one virtual dimension). On the other hand, Eq. (8) compares projections on a semi-infinite quasi-one dimensional system because time does not appear as a variable in Eq. (8). As we shall see, this comparison provides a topological invariant that is associated to the edge physics of the semi-infinite static system. Hence, our task is to connect the bulk topology of a  $(1+1)$ -dimensional system with the edge topology of a quasi 1-dimensional system, and this is a jump from a 2-dimensional system to a 0-dimensional one. Thus, we are dealing with a higher-order topological phenomenon.

Now, the bulk Hamiltonians, such as  $H$  or  $\mathbf{H}_0$ , belong to the algebra of periodic operators and are denoted by  $\mathcal{A}$  in the following (adding or multiplying periodic operators preserves this property). The adiabatically driven Hamiltonians, such as  $H(\gamma_\tau)$  or  $\mathbf{H}_0(\tau)$ , then belong to the algebra  $\mathcal{A}^{\mathbb{S}^1}$  of maps from the circle  $\mathbb{S}^1$  to the algebra  $\mathcal{A}$ . The operators with matrix elements concentrated around the edge live in the edge algebra  $\widetilde{\mathcal{A}}$  (indeed, the sums and products of edge operators remain edge operators). In between  $\mathcal{A}$  and  $\widetilde{\mathcal{A}}$  is the algebra  $\widehat{\mathcal{A}}$  of half-space operators whose elements are periodic half-infinite Hamiltonians with clean open boundary conditions plus any elements from the edge algebra, *i.e.*  $\widehat{H} = \mathbf{H}_{\text{open}} + \widetilde{V}_{\text{edge}}$ . The projections from Eq. (8) belong to  $M_2 \otimes \widehat{\mathcal{A}}$ , where  $M_N$  denotes the algebra of  $N \times N$  matrices. Two projections are said to be homotopic if they can be deformed continuously into each other without leaving the algebra they belong to. Since in condensed matter physics and metamaterial science we always work with effective models, it is more appropriate to include additional trivial bands, accounting for the neglected orbitals or degrees of freedom, and allow the deformations to spill out into these additional bands. In other words, to allow the deformations to take place in  $M_\infty \otimes \widehat{\mathcal{A}}$ , where  $M_\infty$  is the algebra of arbitrary rank matrices. In this case, one talks about stable homotopy and the K-theoretic group  $K_0(\widehat{\mathcal{A}})$  classifies the projections with respect to this equivalence relation. Note that the stable homotopy class  $[\Pi]_0$  of a projection from  $M_\infty \otimes \widehat{\mathcal{A}}$  is the *complete* topological invariant associated to  $\Pi$  [19]. All the above algebras can be trivially extended to include weak disorder, and more details on the algebras can be found in the Supplemental Material [18].

A K-theoretic calculation detailed in the Supplemental

Material [18] shows that the difference

$$\left[\widehat{\Pi}_1^A\right]_0 - \left[\widehat{\Pi}_0\right]_0 \quad (9)$$

actually lands in the K-theoretic group  $K_0(\widetilde{\mathcal{A}})$  of the edge algebra. Among other things, this implies that the difference between the projections from Eq. (8) belongs to the simple algebra  $M_\infty$ . It is an important detail because it enables us to connect to the work by Avron, Seiler and Simon on the relative index of projections [20–22]. Their original application was on a comparison between the Fermi projections of 2-dimensional systems with and without Dirac fluxes piercing the plane of the sample. The mathematical concept supplied a rigorous framework for Laughlin’s pumping argument for the integer quantum Hall effect [23]. In our context, the relative index of the projections (8) is a numerical topological invariant derived from the complete topological invariant (9), which measures their relative dimension.

We are now ready to state our main result: For any edge potential  $\widetilde{V}_{\text{edge}}(\tau)$  that gaps the spectrum for the entire duration of the cycle and vanishes for  $\tau$  in small interval  $[-\epsilon, \epsilon]$  around the initial/final points, we have the relative index

$$\text{Index}(\widehat{\Pi}_1^A, \widehat{\Pi}_0) = \text{Ch}_\gamma, \quad (10)$$

where on the right is the Chern number (3) associated to a single infinite chain. The above identity follows from a relation derived in [18] between the complete invariant (9) and the complete topological invariant  $[\tau \mapsto P(\tau)]_0 \in K_0(\mathcal{A}^{\text{S}^1})$ , which carries the Chern number  $\text{Ch}_\gamma$ . It takes the form

$$\left[\widehat{\Pi}_1^A\right]_0 - \left[\widehat{\Pi}_0\right]_0 = (\text{Ind} \circ \theta^{-1})\left([\tau \mapsto P(\tau)]_0\right), \quad (11)$$

where  $\theta$  is the theta map appearing in the Bott periodicity theorem and  $\text{Ind}$  is the K-theoretic connecting map associated to the exact sequence of algebras  $\widetilde{\mathcal{A}} \rightarrow \widehat{\mathcal{A}} \rightarrow \mathcal{A}$  (see Supplemental Material [18]). Small disorder is automatically included in these calculations.

In terms of the spectral flows depicted in Fig. 3, we can interpret these predictions in the following way. Note that for  $\gamma_1$  in Fig. 3c, there is an additional swap between an occupied and an un-occupied state for the top chain. But this swap takes place at the right edge and, when the right edge is sent to  $\infty$ , an observer operating at the origin will not be able to detect it. To this observer, it will appear that one state below the gap has been populated during the adiabatic cycle, without de-populating any other states. As such, this newly populated state must be residing on the bottom chain. In contrast, for  $\gamma_2$ , while an edge potential can still hybridize top and bottom non-chiral edge bands, there will be an equal number of top-bottom and bottom-up swaps of states, all taking place at the left edge. Hence, the observer will not detect any net

increase in the population of the states. Furthermore, the non-topological edge bands are unstable and can disappear under deformations.

In conclusion, we have discovered a distinct pumping process which can lead to new applications of topology in condensed matter physics and metamaterial science. Based on our rigorous statements, we can assure the experimentists that no fine-tuning of the edge potential is required to achieve the quantized effect because a generic edge potential will typically gap the spectrum. Furthermore, the effect is robust against deformations and inherent small design imperfections.

E. P. acknowledges support from the National Science Foundation grants DMR-1823800 and CMMI-2131760.

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- [18] See Supplemental Material at [URL will be inserted by publisher] for the formalism and analysis supporting our statements in the main text. Appendix 1. contains the adiabatic theorem and defines the adiabatic time evolution. Appendix 2. describes the algebras of our physical operators and their relations via exact sequences. Appendix 3. details the K-theoretic calculations to derive the bulk-edge correspondence for our system and its connection to the relative index. The calculations prove our main result. The Supplementary Material also contains Refs. [5–7, 16, 17, 20, 24].
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