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Thermodynamics of QCD with quarks and multi-quark clusters

We present a generalized Beth-Uhlenbeck approach to thermodynamics of QCD, which treats hadrons as color singlet multi-quark clusters in medium with a background gluon field coupled to the underlying chiral quark dynamics. Colored multi-quark clusters are treated on the same footing. The confining aspect of QCD is modeled by the property of color SU(3) center symmetry within the Polyakov gauge and by a large vacuum quark mass motivated by a confining density functional approach. The spectrum of multi-quark clusters consists of a bound and a scattering continuum states. For the corresponding cluster-cluster phase shifts we discuss simple ansätze that capture the Mott dissociation of multi-quark clusters. This allows us to demonstrate the role of the continuum correlations and introduce an improved model that includes them in a generic form. We calculate thermodynamic properties such as baryon density and entropy and compare them to the results of lattice QCD. A striking result is the suppression of the abundance of colored multi-quark clusters at low temperatures by the coupling to the Polyakov loop and their importance for a quantitative description of lattice QCD thermodynamics at non-vanishing baryochemical potentials. We demonstrate that the limits of a hadron resonance gas at low temperatures and perturbative QCD at high temperatures are correctly reproduced. A comparison with lattice calculations shows that the model provides a unified and systematic description of the properties of the quark-gluon-hadron system.

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