From Structure Formation to Accelerating Expansion: The Impact of Dark Matter and Dark Energy on the Universe's Ultimate End

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Abstract. Modern cosmology's central challenge lies in elucidating the nature of dark matter (27%) and dark energy (68%), which collectively constitute 95% of the universe's mass-energy content. Dark matter's gravitational scaffolding for cosmic structure formation is supported by four empirical pillars: anomalous galactic rotation curves, gravitational lensing mass discrepancies (e.g., Bullet Cluster), CMB angular power spectrum measurements (Planck data), and large-scale structure simulations validated by SDSS observations of the cosmic web. Dark energy, driving accelerated expansion as a repulsive gravitational source, is inferred from Type Ia supernova luminosity-distance anomalies ($z \approx 1.7$), CMB flatness constraints requiring dark energy dominance, and baryon acoustic oscillation scale compressions (BOSS: 0.8% anisotropy). The ΛCDM model, integrating these findings, faces three unresolved paradoxes: a 120-order-of-magnitude mismatch between quantum vacuum energy predictions and observations; ambiguous dark matter particle properties (no direct detection in XENONnT); and debates over dark energy equation-of-state evolution (Quintessence models challenged by DES). Future probes via LSST (Vera C. Rubin Observatory), Euclid satellite, and deep underground detectors aim to identify non-gravitational dark sector couplings, potentially overturning the ΛCDM paradigm and advancing new physics to resolve cosmic origins, evolution, and ultimate fate.

Keywords: Dark Matter, Dark Energy, Fate of Universe.

1. Introduction

Cosmological exploration traces its origins to ancient philosophical constructs such as the Gaitian (Canopy Heaven), Huntian (Celestial Sphere), and geocentric models, which relied on metaphysical reasoning. This intellectual journey advanced significantly with Einstein's general relativity-based expanding universe framework and culminated in the 20th-century Big Bang theory. Humanity's quest to decipher cosmic evolution persists unabated, particularly regarding the universe's ultimate fate. Among proposed scenarios, the "heat death" hypothesis, articulated by William Thomson (Lord Kelvin), remains widely discussed. Critically, all modern cosmological theories must confront the enigmatic roles of dark matter and dark energy.

A central objective of contemporary cosmology is to unravel the origin, evolution, and final state of the universe. Since the establishment of the Big Bang paradigm, observational data and theoretical modeling have delineated a coherent narrative: from an early homogeneous, high-energy primordial plasma to the formation of galaxies, galaxy clusters, and other large-scale structures, culminating in the observed accelerated expansion. However, this framework is punctuated by two unresolved phenomena—dark matter (27% of the universe's total mass-energy) and dark energy (68%)—which collectively dominate the cosmos yet elude direct detection or theoretical reconciliation within the Standard Model of particle physics. Their intrinsic properties and interactions not only governed cosmic evolution over the past 13.8 billion years but will also determine the universe's ultimate destiny.

Dark matter's gravitational attraction counteracts the kinetic energy of cosmic expansion, decelerating the rate of spatial stretching, as predicted by Friedmann equations. In the absence of dark energy, this gravitational dominance could eventually lead to a "Big Crunch," wherein the universe ceases expanding and collapses. Conversely, dark energy manifests as a negative-pressure component driving accelerated expansion. It may correspond to Einstein's cosmological constant (Λ, a static energy density embedded in his field equations) or a dynamic entity such as quintessence (a time-evolving scalar field). If dark energy behaves as Λ, exponential expansion will prevail, culminating in either "heat death" (thermal equilibrium) or a "Big Rip". Evidently, these components embody opposing roles: dark matter mediates gravitational aggregation, while dark energy drives repulsive spatial expansion. Their relative densities and distributions directly dictate cosmic trajectories.

Although dark matter and dark energy operate through distinct mechanisms—the former clustering structures via gravity, the latter accelerating expansion via anti-gravity—their energy-density ratio has not remained constant throughout cosmic history. At redshift z≈0.7z≈0.7, dark energy began dominating the cosmic energy budget, marking a phase transition from decelerated to accelerated expansion. This shift profoundly impacts structure formation: dark energy's repulsive effect suppresses clustering at galaxy cluster scales, resulting in fewer observed high-mass structures than predicted by dark matter-only models [1].

Of greater significance are potential non-gravitational couplings between the two components. Modified gravity theories (e.g., f(R)f(R) gravity) and interacting dark energy (IDE) models posit energy exchange mechanisms between dark matter and dark energy, which would alter predictions for the universe's age, structure growth rate, and final state [2]. For instance, in models where energy transfers from dark matter to dark energy, accelerated expansion could intensify, hastening a Big Rip. Conversely, reverse energy flow might delay structural disintegration. Such interactions challenge the standard Λ-Cold Dark Matter (ΛCDM) framework, necessitating rigorous observational tests through galaxy surveys, cosmic microwave background anisotropy measurements, and redshift-space distortion analyses.

2. The Discovery of Dark Matter, Evidence and its Role in the Structure of the Universe

2.1. The Prototype and Discovery of Dark Matter

Modern cosmology has revealed a striking fact: approximately 85% of the universe's matter exists in a mysterious form—dark matter. This non-luminous entity, undetectable through electromagnetic interactions, has remained one of physics' most profound unsolved mysteries since its conceptualization in 1933. Beyond governing galactic rotation, dark matter serves as the primary architect of cosmic large-scale structures, fundamentally reshaping humanity's understanding of material composition. Defined by its exclusive gravitational interaction with baryonic matter—eschewing electromagnetic forces entirely—dark matter particles (if they exist) neither participate in atomic structure nor emit electromagnetic radiation, rendering direct observation exceptionally challenging. Nevertheless, gravitational anomalies have progressively confirmed its existence.

In 1933, Swiss astronomer Fritz Zwicky identified discrepancies while studying the Coma Cluster. Applying the virial theorem, he calculated that visible matter generated only 1/400 of the gravitational binding energy required to stabilize the cluster's observed velocities, necessitating vast quantities of unseen "missing mass." This revolutionary insight languished for decades due to observational limitations until the 1970s, when Vera Rubin's kinematic study of the Andromeda Galaxy (M31) delivered conclusive proof. Contrary to Newtonian predictions—wherein orbital velocities of stars should decline with galactocentric distance—Rubin observed flat rotation curves (~220 km/s) in the Milky Way's outskirts. This anomaly implied an extended, spherical distribution of invisible matter—the conceptual foundation of "dark matter halos. "Contemporary cosmology has established a robust evidential framework for dark matter, supported by four mutually reinforcing pillars.

2.2. Conclusive Evidence of the Existence of Dark Matter

Gravitational lensing: Observations of the Bullet Cluster (1E 0657-558) in 2006 demonstrated spatial separation between collisional baryonic matter (localized via X-ray emissions) and total mass (reconstructed via lensing), directly proving dark matter's existence and weak interaction cross-section [3].

CMB anisotropies: Planck satellite data in 2018 revealed acoustic peaks in the cosmic microwave background's angular power spectrum at ~1° scales, corresponding to sound wave oscillations in the primordial plasma [1]. Simulations confirm that these fluctuations' amplitudes align exclusively with cold dark matter (CDM) models, where gravitational amplification of primordial density perturbations is indispensable.

Large-scale structure evolution: The Sloan Digital Sky Survey (SDSS) mapped a cosmic web of galaxies—a sponge-like network spanning billions of light-years [4]. Hydrodynamic simulations demonstrate that baryonic matter alone cannot reproduce observed structures within 13.8 billion years; CDM's inclusion generates realistic cosmic webs, with dark matter halos forming gravitational scaffolds for galaxy assembly.

Baryon acoustic oscillations (BAO): Fossilized sound waves from the recombination era imprint a characteristic scale (~480 million light-years) in galaxy clustering. Dark matter's gravitational modulation of these oscillations mirrors ripple distortions caused by submerged obstacles, as quantified by galaxy surveys such as BOSS and eBOSS.

2.3. The Shaping Effect of Dark Matter on the Structure of the Universe

As a "gravitational scaffold," dark matter exponentially amplified quantum density fluctuations in the early universe. Post-recombination (~380,000 years after the Big Bang), it decoupled from radiation drag, initiating hierarchical halo formation. These potential wells later trapped baryonic gas, enabling star and galaxy formation—a process delayed by ~100 million years ("structure formation a synchronicity"). For instance, the Milky Way's dark matter halo, with a mass of 1.5×10121.5×1012 solar masses and a diameter of 300,000 light-years, sustains the Solar System's 220 km/s orbital velocity—a value inconsistent with visible mass alone. Cosmologically, dark matter suppressed the fragmentation of primordial structures, resolving the "missing satellites problem"—the observed deficit of dwarf galaxies relative to CDM predictions.

This translation maintains technical precision, eliminates redundancies, and ensures grammatical rigor while preserving logical coherence and academic tone [5].

3. The Discovery of Dark Energy, Evidence and its Role in the Structure of the Universe

3.1. The Concept of Dark Energy

The concept of dark energy emerged from two revolutionary breakthroughs in humanity's cosmic perspective. In 1917, Einstein introduced the "cosmological constant" (Λ) into his field equations to preserve a static universe model—a parameter he later deemed his "greatest blunder," yet it became pivotal to explaining dark energy eight decades later. In 1929, Hubble's discovery of the proportional relationship between galaxy redshifts and distances confirmed cosmic expansion, though prevailing theories assumed gravitational deceleration. This paradigm shifted in 1998 when two independent teams—the Supernova Cosmology Project and the High-Z Supernova Search—observed Type Ia supernovae and detected accelerated cosmic expansion. These "standard candles," characterized by uniform explosion masses, revealed that high-redshift supernovae ($z \approx 0.5$) were 25% dimmer than predicted under uniform expansion models, implying greater distances. The data unequivocally demonstrated a transition from decelerated to accelerated expansion ~5 billion years ago—a pivotal "watershed" in cosmic history [6].

3.2. Current Evidence for Dark Energy

Type Ia supernova distance measurements: These provide the most direct evidence. Nobel laureate Adam Riess's 2011 Hubble Space Telescope observations of distant supernovae ($z \approx 1.7$) confirmed accelerated expansion occurred ~7 billion years ago. The luminosity data align with a constant dark energy density, consistent with the cosmological constant.

Cosmic microwave background anisotropies: Planck satellite data revealed a flat universe ($\Omega\_total = 1.00 \pm 0.02$). Given known baryonic (4.9%) and dark matter (26.8%) densities, dark energy must constitute 68.3% to maintain flatness. The CMB acoustic peak positions, highly sensitive to dark energy density, match ΛCDM predictions. Notably, the integrated Sachs-Wolfe effect—caused by CMB photons traversing late-time dark energy potential wells—has been confirmed by the South Pole Telescope (SPT).

Baryon acoustic oscillations and galaxy distribution: The Sloan Digital Sky Survey (SDSS) identified a characteristic 480-million-light-year scale in galaxy clustering—a relic of primordial sound waves. Dark energy alters the observed radial versus transverse scale disparity due to its influence on expansion rates. The BOSS project (2012) detected a 0.8% compression perpendicular to the line of sight, a distinctive "fingerprint" of dark energy-driven expansion.

3.3. The Manipulator of the Universe's Fate

As the arbiter of cosmic destiny, dark energy's equation-of-state parameter $w=P/\rho w=P/\rho$ determines the universe's ultimate fate. Current observations yield $w\approx-1.03\pm0.03w\approx-1.03\pm0.03$, close to the cosmological constant ($w=-1w=-1$) [7]. If this persists, the universe will evolve toward a "Big Freeze": galaxy clusters will exit each other's horizons within 10 billion years, star formation will cease, black holes will evaporate via Hawking radiation, and temperatures will asymptote to absolute zero. Alternatively, if $w<-1w<-1$ ("phantom dark energy"), a "Big Rip" will ensue, tearing apart galaxies, planets, and even atoms in finite time.

On large scales, dark energy suppresses structure formation by modulating gravitational potential depths. During the accelerated expansion epoch ($z\approx1z\approx1$, ~8 billion years ago), dark energy began dominating the cosmic energy budget, reducing galaxy cluster growth rates by 30% over the past 5 billion years—a finding corroborated by the extended Baryon Oscillation Spectroscopic Survey (eBOSS). Joint analyses of supernovae, CMB, and BAO data have established a geometric-dynamic model of the universe. Dark energy-induced spatial curvature variations produce unique angular diameter distance signatures for distant objects. For example, quasars at 12 billion light-years exhibit host galaxies 15% larger than flat-universe predictions, directly reflecting dark energy's spatial stretching effect.

This translation maintains academic rigor, technical precision, and logical coherence while adhering to requirements for concision and grammatical accuracy.

4. The Emergence of Cosmic Structures: From Small-scale to Large-scale Structures

The universe constitutes a hierarchical system of structures spanning from subatomic particles to galaxy cluster networks, with matter distribution and interactions at each scale collectively shaping cosmic evolution. The formation of these structures is inextricably linked to dark matter and dark energy, which govern the interplay between gravitational collapse and spatial expansion.

At quantum scales (~10^{-15} meters), quarks bind via the strong interaction to form protons and neutrons, while nuclear forces assemble these nucleons into atomic nuclei. Electrons, attracted electromagnetically to nuclei, construct atoms—the fundamental units of matter. Atoms further combine through chemical bonds into molecules (e.g., H_2), which aggregate within interstellar media as molecular clouds. These clouds, modulated by dark matter's gravitational potential wells, serve as stellar nurseries. Dark matter—potentially composed of Weakly Interacting Massive Particles (WIMPs), axions, or other non-electromagnetic particles—exerts gravitational influence without participating in atomic interactions, seeding density fluctuations critical for cosmic structure formation [8].

At stellar and galactic scales, molecular clouds undergo gravitational collapse, igniting nuclear fusion in their cores to form stars. Stellar evolution, marked by supernova explosions, disperses heavy elements into interstellar space, enriching subsequent generations of stars and planets. Observations of galactic rotation curves reveal a profound discrepancy: the orbital velocities of stars in galaxy outskirts exceed predictions based on visible mass alone. This anomaly, resolved only by invoking dark matter, demonstrates that galaxies are embedded within massive dark matter halos constituting over 85% of their total mass. These halos act as gravitational scaffolds, channeling baryonic gas into disk-like structures (e.g., the Milky Way) and regulating star formation efficiency.

On cosmological scales, galaxies coalesce into groups (e.g., the Local Group) and superclusters (e.g., Laniakea), tracing a filamentary network of dark matter—the cosmic web. Vast voids, spanning hundreds of millions of light-years, punctuate this web, reflecting regions where gravitational collapse was suppressed. The Planck Collaboration in 2020 confirmed that dark matter's gravitational pull initially dominated cosmic dynamics, facilitating the growth of large-scale structures. However, at redshift $z \approx 1z \approx 1$ (~8 billion years ago), dark energy began to dominate the cosmic energy budget, initiating accelerated expansion. This transition reduced the growth rate of galaxy clusters by 30% over the past 5 billion years, as dark energy's repulsive effect counteracted gravitational aggregation.

The emergence of cosmic structures epitomizes the duality of dark components: dark matter provides the gravitational framework for structure assembly, while dark energy dictates the universe's expansive fate. Ordinary matter, though constituting only ~5% of the cosmic mass-energy budget, orchestrates the formation of stars, planets, and life within this dark-matter-dominated architecture. Resolving the nature of these "invisible forces" remains pivotal to unraveling the universe's origin and ultimate destiny.

This translation adheres to academic standards, maintaining technical precision, grammatical rigor, and logical coherence while eliminating redundancies and subtitles as requested.

5. Duel between Dark energy and Dark matter

The cosmic confrontation determining the universe's fate is an inevitable duel between dark matter and dark energy, fundamentally manifesting as a contest between gravitational attraction and repulsive antigravity. For the first 9 billion years following the Big Bang, dark matter prevailed dominantly, with its gravitational attraction decelerating cosmic expansion while providing gravitational scaffolding for galaxy formation. However, as cosmic expansion drove a progressive decline in matter density, dark energy's repulsive antigravity emerged. Approximately 5 billion years ago, dark energy overpowered dark matter's gravitational influence, propelling the universe into its current phase of accelerated expansion.

This confrontation's outcome directly manifests in cosmic structural evolution:

Accelerated expansion driven by dark energy promotes increasingly diffuse matter distribution, suppressing new galaxy cluster formation and inhibiting small-scale structure development. Should dark energy density persistently escalate (as in phantom dark energy models with equation-of-state parameter $w<-1w<-1$), its repulsive force could surpass fundamental atomic binding forces, culminating in the disintegration of galaxies, stars, and even atoms through a "Big Rip" scenario, thereby fragmenting large-scale structures. Current observational evidence confirms dark energy's established undisputed dominance. If its properties remain stable (as posited by the cosmological constant paradigm), infinite cosmic expansion will ensue, characterized by exponential divergence of intergalactic distances, ultimately resulting in a frigid, dark "Big Freeze" terminus.

These evolutionary trajectories—whether culminating in structural dissolution ("Big Rip") or entropic stagnation ("Big Freeze")—are dictated by dark energy's equation-of-state parameter ww, currently measured at $w \approx -1.03 \pm 0.03w \approx -1.03 \pm 0.03$. Precision cosmology missions like Euclid and

DESI aim to constrain ww's temporal variability, potentially resolving whether the universe's fate aligns with ΛCDM predictions or demands exotic physics beyond the Standard Model.

6. The Unsolved Mysteries of Dark Matter and Dark Energy and Subsequent Explorations

6.1. Verify the Practical Schemes for Dark Energy and Dark Matter

For dark matter, although the evidence for its existence is conclusive, the nature of its particles remains an unsolved mystery. Scientists around the world are conducting research and development through three major channels.

The first type is direct detection experiments: Deep underground (such as beneath the 2,400-meter rock layer at the Jinping Laboratory in China), scientists use liquid xenon or germanium crystal detectors to search for rare collisions between dark matter particles and atomic nuclei. This type of experiment requires extreme shielding of cosmic ray interference, and its sensitivity has reached the energy (about 1 keV) that can detect the recol of a single xenon nucleus. At present, the most advanced XENONnT experiments have ruled out some theoretical models, but no conclusive signals have been found yet [9].

The second type, indirect detection method: Capturing the secondary products of dark matter annihilation through space telescopes. For example, the Fermi Gamma-ray Satellite continuously monitors the gamma-ray excess at the center of the Milky Way, while the Alpha Magnetic Spectrometer (AMS-02) precisely measures the abnormal ratio of antiprotons to positrons in cosmic rays on the International Space Station. The 3.5 keV X-ray anomaly radiation detected in 2014 was once regarded as a signal of inert neutrino annihilation, but subsequent observations failed to confirm it [10].

The third type is the collider creation experiment: The Large Hadron Collider (LHC) attempts to generate dark matter particles through proton collisions. Although the collision energy of 13 TeV has covered most of the theoretical prediction range of WIMPs (Weakly Interacting Massive Particles), no phenomenon beyond the standard model has been found so far. The muon anomaly discovered in the LHCb experiment in 2021 might suggest the existence of new physics.

The ΛCDM (Cold Dark Matter + Dark Energy) model has successfully explained numerous observational phenomena, but there are still sharp contradictions. For example, the distribution of dark matter density at the centers of dwarf galaxies is flatter than theoretical predictions (core-spike problem); Some galaxy cluster collisions suggest that dark matter may have weak self-interactions (which conflicts with the "cold dark matter" hypothesis) [11]. These contradictions have given rise to alternative theories such as Modified Newtonian Dynamics (MOND), but so far no theory has been able to explain the observational data as comprehensively as the dark matter model. In the next ten years, a new generation of observation equipment may bring breakthroughs. The Vera C. Rubin Observatory will map the dynamic images of 30 billion celestial bodies through the Time-Space Heritage Survey (LSST) [12]. The Euclid satellite will measure the large-scale structure of the universe with unprecedented precision. The Chinese "Wukong" dark matter satellite has obtained the fine structure of electronic cosmic rays in the TeV energy band. Perhaps, as physicist Lisa Randall said, "Dark matter is not only the invisible architect of the universe, but also the key to opening the door to new physics."

For dark energy, the situation is much more complex than that of dark matter. Here are three key challenges.

The first one, the cosmological constant dilemma. The absurd value of 10^{112} erg/cm^3 obtained from the calculation of vacuum energy density by quantum field theory differs from the observed value of 10^{-8} erg/cm^3 by 120 orders of magnitude. This "worst theoretical prediction" implies that the existing theory has fundamental flaws and new physics such as supersymmetry or extra dimensions may need to be introduced.

Second, the dynamic dark energy model. To explain the possible evolution of the w value, scientists have proposed the Quintessence field model. The potential energy function V(φ) of this scalar field evolves over time, resulting in w>-1 [13]. However, the DES (Dark Energy Survey) observations of 3,000 galaxy clusters show that w has changed by no more than 5% in nearly 8 billion years, which poses a challenge to dynamic models.

The third one is to modify the theory of gravity. Some theories attempt to explain accelerated expansion by modifying Einstein's gravitational equation, such as the f(R) gravitational theory. However, such models are difficult to simultaneously meet the observational constraints of the solar system scale (Cassini ranging) and the cosmological scale. The gravitational waves and optical afterglow from the merger of two neutron stars in 2017 arrived simultaneously, confirming that the speed of gravitational waves was consistent with that of light. This ruled out many modifications to the theory of gravity.

6.2. For Future Development and Exploration

Of course, the exploration of dark energy goes far beyond this. We can use various special equipment in the future, such as the Euclid satellite, the Vera Rubin Observatory or the China Space Station Survey Telescope (CSST), etc. The discovery of dark energy has revealed the deep crisis of the Standard Model: the dominant components of the universe are actually completely unknown to us. Just as Nobel laureate David Gross said, "The dark energy problem may trigger the greatest revolution in physics since the birth of quantum mechanics." From the rise and fall of the quantum vacuum to the end of the universe's fate, dark energy has pushed the contradiction between general relativity and quantum mechanics to its peak.

7. Conclusion

The cosmic odyssey from ancient cosmological paradigms to modern cosmology reveals humanity's enduring quest to decode the universe's ultimate fate. Central to this narrative are dark matter and dark energy—two enigmatic components constituting 95% of the cosmos—that simultaneously shape cosmic evolution and defy complete understanding. While dark matter's gravitational scaffolding enables galactic assembly through four observational pillars dark energy's repulsive dominance drives accelerated expansion, dictating a binary cosmological outcome: a "Big Freeze" under a cosmological constant or a catastrophic "Big Rip" if phantom dark energy emerges

The ΛCDM framework, while successful in explaining observational data, faces critical challenges: the cosmological constant discrepancy, ambiguous dark matter particle properties (no direct detection in XENONnT experiments), and static dark energy parameterizations inconsistent with dynamic models like Quintessence. Emerging observational frontiers—Vera C. Rubin Observatory's LSST, Euclid's precision cosmology, and deep underground detectors—promise to probe non-gravitational dark sector interactions, potentially revolutionizing physics beyond the Standard Model.

Future breakthroughs hinge on resolving three frontiers: direct detection of dark matter via xenon/germanium detectors or collider signatures, mapping dark energy's equation-of-state evolution through baryon acoustic oscillations and supernova cosmology, and reconciling quantum gravity theories with general relativity. As we stand at the threshold of a new cosmological paradigm, these endeavors will not only illuminate the universe's origin and destiny but also unveil the fundamental symmetries governing spacetime and matter—a testament to humanity's unyielding pursuit of cosmic truth.

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