



# Detection of the diffuse supernova neutrino background with JUNO

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As an underground multi-purpose neutrino detector with 20 kton liquid scintillator, Jiangmen Underground Neutrino Observatory (JUNO) is competitive with and complementary to the water-Cherenkov detectors on the search for the diffuse supernova neutrino background (DSNB). Typical supernova models predict 2-4 events per year within the optimal observation window in the JUNO detector. The dominant background is from the neutral-current (NC) interaction of atmospheric neutrinos with <sup>12</sup>C nuclei, which surpasses the DSNB by more than one order of magnitude. We evaluated the systematic uncertainty of NC background from the spread of a variety of data-driven models and further developed a method to determine NC background within 15% with *in situ* measurements after ten years of running. Besides, the NC-like backgrounds can be effectively suppressed by the intrinsic pulse-shape discrimination (PSD) capabilities of liquid scintillators. In this talk, I will present in detail the improvements on NC background uncertainty evaluation, PSD discriminator development, and finally, the potential of DSNB sensitivity in JUNO.

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#### 1. Introduction

The integrated flux of neutrinos from all past core-collapse supernovae in the visible universe form the diffuse supernova neutrino background (DSNB), which carries valuable information on the cosmic star-formation rate, the average core-collapse neutrino spectrum, and the rate of failed SNe. The existing and future large water-Cherenkov (wCh) and liquid-scintillator (LS) detectors have good potential to observe the DSNB via the inverse-beta-decay (IBD) reaction,  $\overline{v}_e + p \rightarrow e^+ + n$ , which consists of a prompt signal of positron and a delayed signal of neutron capture. The event rate of the DSNB is very rare. So far, no appreciable IBD signal events of the DSNB  $\overline{v}_e$  have been found in wCh and LS detectors.

Comparing to the wCh detectors, the LS detectors have lower energy thresholds, higher energy resolution, and more than 99% neutron tagging capability. The dominant background is from the neutral-current (NC) interactions of atmospheric neutrinos with the carbon nuclei in LS. JUNO [1, 2] consists of a 20 kt liquid scintillator (LS) detector. Depending on the DSNB model, we expect about 2–4 IBD events per year in the energy range above the reactor  $\overline{\nu}_e$  signal. Given the excellent light yield, the delayed signal from neutron capture on hydrogen in the LS offers a efficient tag for background reduction, while pulse-shape discrimination helps to suppress the background from atmospheric neutrino NC interactions. Hence, JUNO is competitive with and complementary to the wCh detectors like SuperK-Gd.

## 2. DSNB signal prediction

The DSNB signal spectrum in detector in terms of the measured energy  $(E_{prompt})$  is given by:

$$\frac{dS(E_{\text{prompt}})}{dE_{\text{prompt}}} = N_p \times \sigma(E_\nu) \times J(E_\nu) \times \frac{d\phi}{dE}(E_\nu), \qquad (1)$$

where,  $N_p$  is the number of protons of JUNO LS.  $\sigma(E_v)$  is the energy dependent IBD cross section [3].  $J(E_v)$  is the Jacobian factor, which is used to convert  $dS(E_v)/dE_v$  to  $dS(E_{prompt})/dE_{prompt}$ . The last term is the DSNB flux, which can be obtained by

$$\frac{d\phi}{dE_{\nu}} = \int_0^5 R_{\rm SN}(z) \frac{dN\left(E_{\nu}'\right)}{dE_{\nu}'} (1+z) \left|\frac{cdt}{dz}\right| dz,\tag{2}$$

where *c* is the speed of light,  $|dt/dz|^{-1} = H_0(1+z)[\Omega_{\Lambda} + \Omega_m(1+z)^3]^{\frac{1}{2}}$  includes the Hubble constant  $(H_0 = 70 \text{ km} \times \text{s}^{-1} \times \text{Mpc}^{-1})$  and the ratios of the energy density of matter and the cosmological constant  $(\Omega_{\Lambda} = 0.7 \text{ and } \Omega_m = 0.3)$ . Due to the red shift effect, a neutrino received at the energy  $E_\nu$  was emitted at a higher energy  $E'_{\nu} = E_{\nu}(1+z)$ . Hence, the factor (1+z) on the spectrum accounts for the compression of the energy scale.  $dN/dE_\nu$  is the average SN neutrino spectrum, which has the contributions from successful and failed SNe. The average SN neutrino spectrum is in terms of average neutrino energy  $(\langle E_\nu \rangle)$ , fraction of failed SNe  $(f_{BH})$  and core-collapse supernova rate  $(R_{SN}(0))$ . However, these parameters are uncertain. Hence, we take a reference set  $(\langle E_\nu \rangle = 15 \text{ MeV}, f_{BH} = 0.27 \text{ and } R_{SN}(0) = 1 \times 10^{-4} \text{ yr}^{-1} \text{ Mpc}^{-3}$ ) and scan of a broad parameter region for sensitivity study.

### 3. Background prediction

The background sources are from the near reactor  $\overline{\nu}_e$ 's, fast neutron, cosmogenic <sup>9</sup>Li/<sup>8</sup>He and atmospheric neutrino NC/charge current (CC) interactions, for which the NC interaction of atmospheric neutrinos with <sup>12</sup>C is one of the most significant source of the backgrounds, approximately one order magnitude of the DSNB signal [1].

Fast neutron background is induced by untagged muons that most of them only pass through the surrounding rock. The water as the protective aquifer is used to shield the fast neutrons, leading that most of fast neutrons capture in the top and equator region of the LS. Hence the spatial distribution of simulated fast neutron background dominates the fiducial volume. Via the balance of fast neutron background rate and target mass, a fiducial volume within Z and  $r_{XY}$  cut < 16 m is used in DSNB analysis. Due to total reflection ( $R \equiv \sqrt{X^2 + Y^2 + Z^2} > 16$  m) and external radioactivity, there are two FV regions, one is FV1 (R < 16 m) and the other is FV2 (R > 16 m and Z and  $r_{XY} < 16$  m), in which target mass is 14.7 kt and 3.6 kt, respectively.

The NC interactions of atmospheric neutrinos with <sup>12</sup>C, where the emission of one neutron together with a prompt energy deposit, may be able to mimic the IBD coincidence signal of DSNB. We have performed a systematic study of the NC background induced by atmospheric neutrinos [4], which can be applied in the large LS detectors, such as JUNO for the DSNB study. The left panel of Fig. 1 illustrates the event rates and spectra of atmospheric NC backgrounds for the representative models. In the visible prompt energy window [12, 30] MeV, we obtain the total event rate of the IBD-like signals of the atmospheric NC interactions, as shown in the right panel of Fig. 1. Moreover, in the energy window, the right panel of Fig. 1 summarizes the exclusive event rates for six representative models, which have been categorized by the final-state products. The average rate of NC background of six models is estimated to  $(3.0 \pm 0.5)$  kt<sup>-1</sup> yr<sup>-1</sup> for energy window from 12 MeV to 30 MeV. Note that the associated uncertainty is about 20%, representing the model variations.



**Figure 1:** Event rates of the NC background as a function of the prompt energies (left panel). Event rates for the NC background within prompt energy window [12, 30] MeV in the exclusive channels (right panel).

Reducing the uncertainty of the NC background prediction is of prominent importance for the search for the DSNB at JUNO. The most crucial channel of the NC backgrounds is the <sup>11</sup>C channel

 $(v_x + {}^{12}\text{C} \rightarrow v_x + n + {}^{11}\text{C})$ , which has triple-coincident signals in LS, typically consisting of a prompt signal by fast-neutron recoil, a delayed signal by neutron capture on hydrogen and an additional signal from the unstable  ${}^{11}\text{C}$  decaying at a later time. We develop a maximum-likelihood method to allow an *in situ* measurement of the NC interactions with a triple-coincidence signature after JUNO starts operation [5]. With JUNO data, we can evaluate the NC background uncertainty of the NC background for the DSNB search. Fig. 2 shows the relative uncertainty of NC background over JUNO running time (exposure), which is reproduced from the summary of Ref. [5]. The shaded bands represents the variations due to different scenarios on the LS radio purity and the rate of residual cosmogenic  ${}^{11}\text{C}$ . According to it, we can assume that for 1-3 years, 4-9 years, 10-20 years of JUNO running, the uncertainty of the background in DSNB sensitivity study is around 35%, 25% and 15%, respectively.



**Figure 2:** Relative uncertainty of NC background as a function of exposure.



Figure 3: PSD efficiency in terms of prompt energy.

### 4. Background suppression

The typical predicted rate of DSNB signals in JUNO is about one order of magnitude smaller than the atmospheric NC background. However, the intrinsic pulse shape discrimination (PSD) capabilities of LS can suppress the NC background to an acceptable level, which is necessary to ultimately achieve an unambiguous discovery of the DSNB signal. Multivariate data analysis with ROOT (TMVA) [6] is applied for the PSD study. The characteristics from raw time profiles are extracted as variables, including the peak, tail shapes and the position-dependency. If the average residual NC background level is around 1% in the prompt energy window [12, 30] MeV, the DSNB signal efficiency is about 91% and 80% for FV1 and FV2, respectively. Given that the PSD performance is energy-dependent, it is necessary to estimate the PSD efficiency as a function of energy, which is taken for the sensitivity study. Hence, if the average inefficiency for NC background is about 1% in the prompt energy window [12, 30] MeV, the energy-dependent PSD efficiency is shown in Fig. 3, in which the shade bands represent the statistical uncertainty.

For the PSD study, the associated uncertainty is evaluated via the data samples similar to the atmospheric NC background and the DSNB signal from the future JUNO experimental data. From the MC study, we have obtained the statistics of such samples for different detector operation periods, i.e., 1 year, 3 year, 9 year. Based on the PSD 1% inefficiency, the statistical uncertainty of these residual samples are about 40%, 20%, 10%, respectively. Therefore, the statistical uncertainty dominates in the study, and we evaluate the PSD uncertainty based on this uncertainty for different operation time.

#### 5. Sensitivity

Fig. 4 summarizes the energy spectra of the DSNB signal and background before and after event selection, which includes the muon veto and energy-dependent PSD cut for FV1 and FV2 and triple-coincidence (TC) cut for the NC background associated with <sup>11</sup>C for FV1 only because of the quite high level of accidental background in FV2. It should be noted that the TC cut is independent of the prompt spectra but relied on the decay information of <sup>11</sup>C. The observation window for the prompt events is between 12 MeV to 30 MeV. One can note that after the event selection, the DSNB signal becomes visible in the observation window. The ratio of signal to background (S/B) is about 4.76 and 2.04 for FV1 and FV2, respectively, improving two order magnitude with the event selection.



**Figure 4:** DSNB signal( $R_{SN}(0) = 1.0 \times 10^{-4} \text{ yr}^{-1} \text{Mpc}^{-3}$ ,  $\langle E \rangle = 15 \text{ MeV}$ ,  $f_{BH} = 0.27$ ) and background spectrum in FV1(top) and FV2(bottom) in JUNO (left)without and (right)with event selection.

In order to calculate the DSNB sensitivity, we employ the Possion-type log likelihood ratio (denoted as  $\chi^2$ ) as our test statistics, which is an energy-dependent fit of signal and background

spectra. The Asimov data set is used to define the medium sensitivity. In our case, the DSNB discovery sensitivity is defined as the difference between the minimal values of  $\chi^2$  with and without the DSNB signal after marginalization of other nuisance parameters and physical parameters.

In Fig. 5, we show the preliminary DSNB discovery potential as a function of the running time (within the fiducial volumes FV1 and FV2). For the nominal model,  $\langle E_{\nu} \rangle$  is chosen as 15MeV,  $R_{CCSN} = 1.0 \times 10^{-4} \text{yr}^{-1} \text{Mpc}^{-3}$  and  $f_{BH} = 0.27$ , represented by black solid line and black circle point in first panel and last two panels, respectively. For 1-3 years, 4-9 years and 10-20 years of running, the uncertainty of the background is assumed as 50%, 30% and 20%, respectively, which are the quadratic summation of uncertainties from the NC background calculation and the PSD efficiency. From the plots, one can see that, for the nominal model, the DSNB discovery potential can be achieved  $3\sigma$  after 3 years data taking assuming 50% background uncertainty.



Figure 5: Sensitivity of DSNB as a function of the running time (within the fiducial volume 18.3 kt).

#### 6. Summary

JUNO has great potential to detect the DSNB signal with its 20 kt LS and we have performed a systematic study of the detection of the DSNB with JUNO. The dominant background is from the NC interaction of atmospheric neutrinos with <sup>12</sup>C, which surpasses the DSNB by more than one order of magnitude. The NC background is precisely predicted from the spread of variety of datadriven models. A novel method of *in situ* measurement with 10 years of JUNO data can constrain the NC background rate within 15%. Besides, the PSD of LS as a powerful tool is developed to suppresses the atmospheric NC background and fast neutron background to be an acceptable level. The DSNB discovery potential can be achieved  $3\sigma$  after 3 years data taking assuming the reference model of DSNB and 50% background uncertainty.

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