

Existence of solutions for a degenerate nonlinear evolution equation

A. Sanih Bonfoh

Abstract. We consider a model of generalized Cahn-Hilliard equations with a logarithmic free energy and a degenerate mobility, and obtain a result on the existence of solutions

Existencia de soluciones para una ecuación no lineal degenerada

Resumen. En este trabajo se considera un modelo de ecuaciones Cahn-Hilliard generalizadas con energía libre logarítmica y movilidad degenerada, y se obtiene un resultado sobre la existencia de soluciones

1 Introduction

We set $\Omega = \prod_{i=1}^n]0, L_i[$, $L_i > 0$, $i = 1, \dots, n$, $n = 2$ or 3 , and consider the following system:

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} - a \cdot \nabla \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} - \operatorname{div}(A \nabla \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t}) = -\nabla \cdot J, \\ J = -B(\rho) \nabla w, \\ w - b \cdot \nabla w - \operatorname{div}(C \nabla w) = -\alpha \Delta \rho + f'(\rho) + \beta \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} + c \cdot \nabla \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} - \operatorname{div}(D \nabla \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t}), \\ \rho|_{t=0} = \rho_0, \\ \rho \text{ and } J \text{ are } \Omega - \text{periodic;} \end{array} \right. \quad (1)$$

where $\alpha, \beta > 0$, a, b, c are vectors in \mathbb{R}^n , ρ is the order parameter, w is the chemical potential, A, C, D are three n -dimensional symmetric and positive definite matrices with constant coefficients, and $B(\rho)$ is a degenerate symmetric and positive matrix (B is called the mobility tensor). For the sake of simplicity, we assume that $B(\rho) = \kappa(\rho)I$, I being the identity matrix and κ the function defined by:

$$\kappa(\rho) = (1 - \rho^2) \bar{\kappa}(\rho), \quad (2)$$

where $\bar{\kappa} : [-1, 1] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ satisfies:

$$\bar{\kappa} \in \mathcal{C}^1(\mathbb{R}), \quad 0 < \bar{\kappa}_0 \leq \bar{\kappa}(s) \leq \bar{\kappa}_1, \quad \forall s \in \mathbb{R}. \quad (3)$$

The free energy $f : [-1, 1] \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ is given by:

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} f(s) = \frac{1}{2}(1 - s^2) + \frac{\theta}{2}[(1 + s) \ln(\frac{1+s}{2}) + (1 - s) \ln(\frac{1-s}{2})], \quad s \in]-1, 1[, \\ f(-1) = f(1) = 0, \end{array} \right. \quad (4)$$

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with $0 < \theta < 1$.

The above problem is based on constitutive equations proposed by M. Gurtin in [8]. This system is a generalization of the Cahn-Hilliard equation, which describes very important qualitative features of two-phase systems, namely the transport of atoms between unit cells (see [3] and [4]). In his derivations, M. Gurtin takes into account the work of the internal microforces, the anisotropy and also the deformations of the material that are neglected here (see [7] and [10] where full nonlinear partial differential equations have been derived). Most of the mathematical literature on the Cahn-Hilliard equation (and also generalized Cahn-Hilliard equations) has concentrated on a polynomial nonlinearity and/or a constant mobility (see for instance [2], [10] and [11]). Some results concerning the Cahn-Hilliard equation with a logarithmic potential and/or a non-constant mobility can be found in [1], [5] and [6]. We propose in this paper to study the existence of solutions of the above problem.

For the mathematical setting of the problem, we denote by $\|\cdot\|$ and (\cdot, \cdot) the usual norm and scalar product in $L^2(\Omega)$ (and also in $L^2(\Omega)^n$). For each $\rho \in L^1(\Omega)$, $m(\rho)$ stands for the average of ρ , that is, $m(\rho) = \frac{1}{|\Omega|} \int_{\Omega} \rho(x) dx$. For a space X , we denote by \dot{X} the space $\{q \in X, m(q) = 0\}$, and by X' the dual space of X . We define $L_1 q = q - a \cdot \nabla q - \operatorname{div}(A \nabla q)$, $L_2 q = q - b \cdot \nabla q - \operatorname{div}(C \nabla q)$ and $Nq = -\Delta q$, for all $q \in H_{per}^2(\Omega)$. The operator N is linear, self-adjoint, strictly positive with compact inverse N^{-1} on $\dot{H}_{per}^2(\Omega)$. We set $\Omega_T = \Omega \times]0, T[$, $\bar{q} = q - m(q)$; and denote by $L^2(\Omega_T)$ both spaces $L^2(0, T; L^2(\Omega))$ and $L^2(0, T; L^2(\Omega)^n)$. We endow $(\dot{H}_{per}^1(\Omega))'$ with the norm $\|\cdot\|_{-1}$ defined by $\|q\|_{-1} = \|N^{-\frac{1}{2}}q\|$, $\forall q \in (\dot{H}_{per}^1(\Omega))'$. There exist two positive constants c_1 and c_2 such that $c_1 \|\bar{q}\|_{-1} \leq \|\bar{q}\| \leq c_2 \|\nabla q\|$, $\forall q \in H_{per}^1(\Omega)$.

If $b = 0$, then the linear operator L_2 is self-adjoint, strictly positive with compact inverse L_2^{-1} on $H_{per}^2(\Omega)$. We can then introduce the following weak formulation of the problem:
Find $(\rho, J) : [0, T] \rightarrow H_{per}^1(\Omega) \times L^2(\Omega)^n$, such that $\rho(0) = \rho_0$, and for a.e. $t \in [0, T]$, $\forall T > 0$,

$$\frac{d}{dt}(L_1 \rho, q) = (J, \nabla q), \quad \forall q \in H_{per}^1(\Omega), \quad (5)$$

$$(J, q) = (\kappa(\rho) \nabla L_2^{-1}(-\alpha \Delta \rho + f'(\rho) + \beta \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} + c \cdot \nabla \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} - \operatorname{div}(D \nabla \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t}), q), \quad (6)$$

$$\forall q \in H_{per}^1(\Omega)^n.$$

Throughout this paper, the same letter C shall denote positive constants that may change from line to line.

2 Preliminary results

In this section, we assume that A and C are not necessarily symmetric and positive definite and that the mobility κ is such that

$$\kappa \in \mathcal{C}(\mathbb{R}), \quad 0 < \kappa_0 \leq \kappa(s) \leq \kappa_1, \quad \forall s \in \mathbb{R}. \quad (7)$$

We further assume that the potential f satisfies the following conditions:

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} f \in \mathcal{C}^1(\mathbb{R}), \\ f(s) \geq -c_1, \quad c_1 > 0, \quad \forall s \in \mathbb{R}, \\ |f'(s)| \leq c_2 |s|^q + c_3, \quad c_2, c_3 > 0, \quad \forall s \in \mathbb{R}, \end{array} \right. \quad (8)$$

where $q \geq 1$ if $n = 2$ and $q \in [1, 6]$ if $n = 3$.

Now, we consider the following weak formulation:

Find $(\rho, w) : [0, T] \rightarrow H_{per}^1(\Omega) \times L^2(\Omega)$, such that $\rho(0) = \rho_0$, and for a.e. $t \in [0, T]$, $\forall T > 0$,

$$\frac{d}{dt}(L_1 \rho, q) = -(\kappa(\rho) \nabla w, \nabla q), \quad \forall q \in H_{per}^1(\Omega), \quad (9)$$

$$(L_2 w, q) = \alpha(\nabla \rho, \nabla q) + (f'(\rho), q) + \beta \left(\frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t}, q \right) + (c \cdot \nabla \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t}, q) - (\operatorname{div}(D \nabla \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t}), q), \quad (10)$$

$$\forall q \in H_{per}^1(\Omega).$$

We note that $a \cdot \nabla$ is antisymmetric on $H_{per}^1(\Omega)$, that is, $(a \cdot \nabla p, q) = -(p, a \cdot \nabla q)$, $\forall p, q \in H_{per}^1(\Omega)$. We take $q = 1$ in (9) and observe that the average of ρ is conserved:

$$m(\rho(t)) = m(\rho_0), \quad \forall t \geq 0. \quad (11)$$

We now take $q = 1$ in (10) and obtain

$$m(w) = m(f'(\rho)). \quad (12)$$

Under assumptions (7) and (8) we prove the following result.

Theorem 1 *We assume that $\rho_0 \in H_{per}^1(\Omega)$, $a + b = 0$ and that $A = C$. Then, there exists a pair of functions (ρ, w) solution of (9)–(10) such that $\rho \in \mathcal{C}([0, T]; H_{per}^1(\Omega))$, $w \in L^2(0, T; H_{per}^1(\Omega))$ and $\frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} \in L^2(0, T; H_{per}^1(\Omega))$.*

PROOF. The existence follows from standard arguments, using Galerkin approximations and then passing to the limit (see for instance [9] and [11]). In order to derive a priori estimates, we formally take $q = w$ in (9) and $q = \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t}$ in (10). We obtain

$$\int_{\Omega} L_1 \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} w \, dx + \int_{\Omega} \kappa(\rho) |\nabla w|^2 \, dx = 0; \quad (13)$$

and

$$\frac{d}{dt} \int_{\Omega} \left(\frac{\alpha}{2} |\nabla \rho|^2 + f(\rho) \right) dx + \beta \int_{\Omega} \left| \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} \right|^2 dx + \int_{\Omega} |D^{\frac{1}{2}} \nabla \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t}|^2 dx - \int_{\Omega} \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} L_2 w \, dx = 0, \quad (14)$$

noting that $(c \cdot \nabla \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t}, \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t}) = 0$. Assuming that $a + b = 0$ and $A = C$, we have $(L_1 \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t}, w) = (\frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t}, L_2 w)$, therefore

$$\begin{aligned} & \int_{\Omega} \left(\frac{\alpha}{2} |\nabla \rho|^2 + f(\rho) \right) dx + \beta \int_{\Omega_T} \left| \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} \right|^2 dx dt + \int_{\Omega_T} |D^{\frac{1}{2}} \nabla \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t}|^2 dx dt \\ & + \int_{\Omega_T} \kappa(\rho) |\nabla w|^2 dx dt = \int_{\Omega} \left(\frac{\alpha}{2} |\nabla \rho_0|^2 + f(\rho_0) \right) dx. \end{aligned} \quad (15)$$

Since $\rho_0 \in H_{per}^1(\Omega)$, we obtain

$$\int_{\Omega} \left(\frac{\alpha}{2} |\nabla \rho|^2 + f(\rho) \right) dx + \beta \int_{\Omega_T} \left| \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} \right|^2 dx dt + \int_{\Omega_T} |D^{\frac{1}{2}} \nabla \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t}|^2 dx dt + \int_{\Omega_T} \kappa(\rho) |\nabla w|^2 dx dt \leq C; \quad (16)$$

hence

$$\|\rho\|_{L^\infty(0, T; H_{per}^1(\Omega))} \leq C, \quad \left\| \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} \right\|_{L^2(0, T; H_{per}^1(\Omega))} \leq C, \quad \|w\|_{L^2(0, T; H_{per}^1(\Omega))} \leq C; \quad (17)$$

using Sobolev embedding theorems and Poincaré's inequality. Finally, the fact that $\rho \in \mathcal{C}([0, T]; H_{per}^1(\Omega))$ follows from standard compactness results (see [9] and [11]). ■

Remark 1 *Theorem 1 is still true if, instead of $a + b = 0$ and $A = C$, we consider the following assumption: there exists a positive constant c_0 such that $\beta x^2 + \kappa(s)|y|^2 + Dz \cdot z + (A - C)y \cdot z + (a + b)yx \geq c_0(x^2 + |y|^2 + |z|^2)$, $\forall s, x \in \mathbb{R}, \forall y, z \in \mathbb{R}^n$. □*

3 A regularized problem

We denote by ψ and ϕ the functions

$$\psi(s) = \frac{\theta}{2} \left[(1+s) \ln \left(\frac{1+s}{2} \right) + (1-s) \ln \left(\frac{1-s}{2} \right) \right], \quad (18)$$

and $\phi(s) = \psi'(s)$, for $s \in]-1, 1[$. We then have $f(s) = \frac{1}{2}(1-s^2) + \psi(s)$ and $f'(s) = -s + \phi(s)$.

The major difficulty in the study of problem (1)–(4) is that κ degenerates and $\phi(s)$ is singular at $s = \pm 1$ and, therefore, has no meaning if $\rho = \pm 1$ in an open set of non-zero measure. To overcome this difficulty, we consider a regularized problem as in [1] and [6]. The mobility κ is replaced by the non-degenerate function κ_ϵ defined by:

$$\kappa_\epsilon(s) = \begin{cases} \kappa(-1 + \epsilon) & \text{if } s \leq -1 + \epsilon, \\ \kappa(s) & \text{if } |s| \leq 1 - \epsilon, \\ \kappa(1 - \epsilon) & \text{if } s \geq 1 - \epsilon; \end{cases} \quad (19)$$

and the logarithmic free energy $f(\rho)$ is replaced by the twice continuously differentiable function $f_\epsilon(s) = \frac{1}{2}(1-s^2) + \psi_\epsilon(s)$, where $\epsilon \in]0, 1[$, and

$$\psi_\epsilon(s) = \begin{cases} \frac{\theta}{2}(1-s) \ln \left[\frac{1-s}{2} \right] + \frac{\theta}{4\epsilon}(1+s)^2 + \frac{\theta}{2}(1+s) \ln \left[\frac{\epsilon}{2} \right] - \frac{\theta\epsilon}{4} & \text{if } s \leq -1 + \epsilon, \\ \psi(s) & \text{if } |s| \leq 1 - \epsilon, \\ \frac{\theta}{2}(1+s) \ln \left[\frac{1+s}{2} \right] + \frac{\theta}{4\epsilon}(1-s)^2 + \frac{\theta}{2}(1-s) \ln \left[\frac{\epsilon}{2} \right] - \frac{\theta\epsilon}{4} & \text{if } s \geq 1 - \epsilon. \end{cases} \quad (20)$$

The monotone function $\phi_\epsilon = \psi'_\epsilon$ has the following properties (see [1]):

- for all r, s , $f'_\epsilon(s)(r-s) \leq f_\epsilon(r) - f_\epsilon(s) + \frac{1}{2}(r-s)^2$; (21)

- $\forall \epsilon \leq \frac{1}{2}$, $\begin{cases} \theta(r-s)^2 \leq (\phi_\epsilon(r) - \phi_\epsilon(s))(r-s), & \forall r, s, \\ \frac{\epsilon}{\theta}(\phi_\epsilon(r) - \phi_\epsilon(s))^2 \leq (\phi_\epsilon(r) - \phi_\epsilon(s))(r-s), & \forall r, s; \end{cases}$ (22)

- for ϵ sufficiently small, e.g. if $\epsilon \leq \epsilon_0 = \frac{\theta}{8}$, then

$$f_\epsilon(s) \geq \frac{\theta}{8\epsilon}([s-1]_+^2 + [-1-s]_+^2) - 1 \geq -1 \quad \forall s, \quad (23)$$

where $[\cdot]_+ = \max\{\cdot, 0\}$.

We now study the corresponding regularized problem of (5)–(6):

Find $(\rho_\epsilon, J_\epsilon) : [0, T] \rightarrow H^1_{per}(\Omega) \times L^2(\Omega)^n$, such that $\rho_\epsilon(0) = \rho_0$, and for a.e. $t \in [0, T]$, $\forall T > 0$, $J_\epsilon = -\kappa_\epsilon(\rho_\epsilon)\nabla w_\epsilon$ and

$$\frac{d}{dt}(L_1\rho_\epsilon, q) = (J_\epsilon, \nabla q), \quad \forall q \in H^1_{per}(\Omega), \quad (24)$$

$$(J_\epsilon, q) = (\kappa_\epsilon(\rho_\epsilon)\nabla L_2^{-1}(-\alpha\Delta\rho_\epsilon + f'_\epsilon(\rho_\epsilon) + \beta\frac{\partial\rho_\epsilon}{\partial t} + c \cdot \nabla\frac{\partial\rho_\epsilon}{\partial t} - \text{div}(D\nabla\frac{\partial\rho_\epsilon}{\partial t}), q), \quad (25)$$

$$\forall q \in H^1_{per}(\Omega)^n.$$

We prove the following result.

Lemma 1 *We assume that $\rho_0 \in H^1_{per}(\Omega)$ with $\|\rho_0\|_{L^\infty(\Omega)} \leq 1$, $a = b = 0$ and that $A = C$. Then, for all $\epsilon \leq \epsilon_0$, there exists a pair of functions $(\rho_\epsilon, J_\epsilon)$ solution of (24)–(25) such that*

$$\|\rho_\epsilon\|_{L^\infty(0,T;H^1_{per}(\Omega))} \leq C, \quad \|J_\epsilon\|_{L^2(\Omega_T)} \leq C, \quad \left\| \frac{\partial\rho_\epsilon}{\partial t} \right\|_{L^2(0,T;H^1_{per}(\Omega))} \leq C, \quad (26)$$

and

$$\|[\rho_\epsilon - 1]_+\|_{L^\infty(0,T;L^2(\Omega))} + \|[-\rho_\epsilon - 1]_+\|_{L^\infty(0,T;L^2(\Omega))} \leq C\epsilon^{\frac{1}{2}}, \quad (27)$$

where C is independent of ϵ .

PROOF. Since κ_ϵ and f_ϵ satisfy assumptions (7) and (8) respectively, we deduce from Theorem 1 that, for all $\epsilon > 0$, there exists a solution $(\rho_\epsilon, w_\epsilon)$ for the regularized counterpart of (9)–(10) such that $\rho_\epsilon \in \mathcal{C}([0, T]; H_{per}^1(\Omega))$, $w_\epsilon \in L^2(0, T; H_{per}^1(\Omega))$ and $\frac{\partial \rho_\epsilon}{\partial t} \in L^2(0, T; H_{per}^1(\Omega))$. As in the proof of Theorem 1, the solution $(\rho_\epsilon, w_\epsilon)$ further satisfies the following estimate

$$\begin{aligned} & \int_{\Omega} \left(\frac{\alpha}{2} |\nabla \rho_\epsilon|^2 + f_\epsilon(\rho_\epsilon) \right) dx + \beta \int_{\Omega_T} \left| \frac{\partial \rho_\epsilon}{\partial t} \right|^2 dx dt + \int_{\Omega_T} |D^{\frac{1}{2}} \nabla \frac{\partial \rho_\epsilon}{\partial t}|^2 dx dt \\ & + \int_{\Omega_T} \kappa_\epsilon(\rho_\epsilon) |\nabla w_\epsilon|^2 dx dt \leq \int_{\Omega} \left(\frac{\alpha}{2} |\nabla \rho_0|^2 + f(\rho_0) \right) dx \leq C, \end{aligned} \quad (28)$$

hence, $\text{ess sup}_{t \in [0, T]} \|\nabla \rho_\epsilon\| \leq C$, $\|[\kappa_\epsilon(\rho_\epsilon)]^{\frac{1}{2}} \nabla w_\epsilon\|_{L^2(\Omega_T)} \leq C$, $\|\frac{\partial \rho_\epsilon}{\partial t}\|_{L^2(0, T; H_{per}^1(\Omega))} \leq C$, and

$$\text{ess sup}_{t \in [0, T]} \int_{\Omega} ([\rho_\epsilon - 1]_+^2 + [-1 - \rho_\epsilon]_+^2) dx \leq C\epsilon, \quad (29)$$

which follows from (23); noting that $f_\epsilon(\rho_0) \leq f(\rho_0)$ for ϵ sufficiently small. Since $m(\rho_\epsilon) = m(\rho_0)$, Poincaré's inequality yields $\text{ess sup}_{0 \leq t \leq T} \|\rho_\epsilon\|_{H_{per}^1(\Omega)} \leq C$, where the generic constant C does not depend on ϵ , $\epsilon \leq \epsilon_0$, for a sufficiently small ϵ_0 . ■

Theorem 2 *Let the assumptions of Lemma 1 hold. Then, there exists a solution (ρ, J) of (5)–(6) such that $\rho \in \mathcal{C}([0, T]; H_{per}^1(\Omega))$, $J \in L^2(\Omega_T)$, $|\rho| \leq 1$ a.e. in Ω_T and $\frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} \in L^2(0, T; H_{per}^1(\Omega))$.*

PROOF. It follows from Lemma 1 that there exists a subsequence (which we still denote by $(\rho_\epsilon, J_\epsilon)_{\epsilon > 0}$) and a pair of functions (ρ, J) such that

$$\begin{aligned} \rho_\epsilon, \nabla \rho_\epsilon &\rightharpoonup \rho, \nabla \rho && \text{strongly in } L^2(\Omega_T) \text{ and a.e. in } \Omega_T, \\ \frac{\partial \rho_\epsilon}{\partial t} &\rightharpoonup \frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} && \text{weakly in } L^2(0, T; H_{per}^1(\Omega)), \\ J_\epsilon &\rightharpoonup J && \text{weakly in } L^2(\Omega_T). \end{aligned}$$

We then pass to the limit in the regularized problem (24)–(25) (see [6] for more details). ■

Remark 2 *The more interesting case is when $a + b \neq 0$ and $A \neq C$. But, we are unable to deal this situation. The technique used in the proof of Theorem 2 failed.* □

Remark 3 *Theorem 2 is still true even if $D = 0$ and $\beta = 0$. Indeed, we have $\|q\|^2 + \|A^{\frac{1}{2}} \nabla q\|^2 = (L_1 q, q) \leq c \|L_1 q\|_{-1} \|\nabla q\|$, $c > 0$, $\forall q \in \dot{H}_{per}^1(\Omega)$, and therefore there exist two positive constants c_1, c_2 such that $c_1 \|\nabla \frac{\partial \rho_\epsilon}{\partial t}\|_{L^2(\Omega_T)} \leq \|\frac{\partial L_1 \rho_\epsilon}{\partial t}\|_{L^2(0, T; (H_{per}^1(\Omega))')} \leq c_2 \|J_\epsilon\|_{L^2(\Omega_T)}$, $\forall \epsilon > 0$, which leads to the result together with the other estimates.* □

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A. Sanih Bonhof
University Kuala Lumpur,
Malaysia France Institute,
Sec 14, Jln Teras Jernang,
43650 Bdr Baru Bangi,
Selangor D.E., Malaysia
sanbonf@yahoo.fr