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Research Article

# A Weierstrass approach to the analysis of rarefaction solitary waves in tensegrity mass-spring systems

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## Abstract

The Weierstrass' theory of one-dimensional Lagrangian systems and a quasi-continuum approach are employed to study the propagation of solitary waves in tensegrity mass-spring chains, which exhibit softening-type elastic response in the large displacement regime and are subject to external pre-compression. The presented study analytically derives the shape of the traveling rarefaction pulses, and limiting values of the speeds of such pulses. Use is made of a tensegrity-like interaction potential that captures the main features of the real force-displacement response of the examined units. The Weierstrass approach is validated through numerical applications that establish comparisons between the theory developed in the present work and previous results available in literature.

Keywords: Tensegrity, Solitary waves, Rarefaction pulses, Weierstrass' theory

## 1. Introduction

Tensegrity structures are formed by networks of tensile members (cables) linked to compressive members (bars). These structures are not only lightweight but are also significantly tunable, presenting stiffness properties that can be adjusted by changing mechanical, geometrical, and prestress variables [\[1–](#page-8-1)[3\]](#page-8-2). The geometrically-nonlinear response of minimal tensegrity prisms formed by three bars (T3 units) and truncated tensegrity octahedrons has been employed to show that mass-springs systems formed by such units support the propagation of solitary waves with tunable wave width  $[4–8]$  $[4–8]$ . Stiffening-type units have been shown to support the propagation of compression solitary waves  $[4-6]$  $[4-6]$ , while softening-type units have been employed to form systems traversed by rarefaction solitary pulses, which are able to suitably reduce an initial state of external pre-compression of the system [\[7,](#page-8-6)[8\]](#page-8-4). Compression solitary pulses can be profitably used to fabricate novel acoustic lenses with tunable focus [\[9\]](#page-8-7), while rarefaction pulses can be employed to develop next-generation impact mitigation devices that do necessarily rely on energy dissipation phenomena [\[7\]](#page-8-6).

This paper applies the nonlinear tensegrity-like potential proposed in [\[6\]](#page-8-5) to develop a Weierstrass approach [\[5,](#page-8-8)[6\]](#page-8-5) to the existence and properties of rarefaction solitary waves in pre-compressed chains of minimal tensegrity regular prisms with softening response [\[7\]](#page-8-6). The presented study includes analytic formulae for the wave speed range that supports such waves, as well as an analytic description of the shape of the rarefaction pulses. A different approach has been followed in [\[6\]](#page-8-5), making use of a more standard, quadratic approximation to the force-displacement response of tensegrity prisms with softening-type behavior. The paper is organized as follows. Section [2](#page-1-0) describes the tensegrity-like interaction potential used to model the mechanical response of the analyzed tensegrity prisms units. The quasi-continuum limit of the equations of motion of chains of softening tensegrity prisms alternating with lumped masses are presented in Sect[.3,](#page-2-0) while the Weierstrass' analysis of the solitary pulses traveling in such systems is presented in Sect. [4.](#page-5-0) Section [5](#page-6-0) illustrates some numerical simulations that establish comparisons between

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the predictions of the present theory and the results presented in [\[7\]](#page-8-6). The paper ends in Sect. [6](#page-7-0) with the presentation of some concluding remarks and directions for future research.

## <span id="page-1-0"></span>2. A nonlinear tensegrity-like interaction potential

The present section analyzes the following tensegrity-like potential to capture the main features of the axial response law of T3 prisms

<span id="page-1-1"></span>
$$
(1) \tV(u) = \alpha_1 u^2 \frac{\alpha_2 + u}{\alpha_3 + u}
$$

In Eqn.  $(1)$ , V is the elastic potential of the prism, u is the relative axial displacement between the terminal bases, assumed positive in compression, while the quantities  $\alpha_1, \alpha_2$  and  $\alpha_3$  represent constitutive parameters. The above potential has already been employed in [\[6\]](#page-8-5) to describe the stiffening-type response of chains of truncated tensegrity octahedrons. We will show in short that it is also able to describe a softening response, under a suitable identification of the constitutive parameters. The constitutive response relating the (compression) axial force  $F$  acting to the terminal bases of the prism to the axial displacement u is obtained as follows

(2) 
$$
F(u) = \frac{dV}{du} = -\frac{\alpha_1 u^2 (\alpha_2 + u)}{(\alpha_3 + u)^2} + \frac{\alpha_1 u (2\alpha_2 + 3u)}{\alpha_3 + u}
$$

and for the axial stiffness coefficient  $k$  one gets

<span id="page-1-2"></span>(3) 
$$
k(u) = \frac{dF}{du} = \frac{2\alpha_1 u^2 (\alpha_2 + u)}{(\alpha_3 + u)^3} - \frac{2\alpha_1 u (2\alpha_2 + 3u)}{(\alpha_3 + u)^2} + \frac{\alpha_1 (2\alpha_2 + 5u)}{\alpha_3 + u}
$$

The (initial) tangent stiffness  $k_0$ , for  $u = 0$ , is easily computed as follows

$$
(4) \t\t k_0 = 2 \frac{\alpha_1 \alpha_2}{\alpha_3}.
$$

Eqn.[\(3\)](#page-1-2) shows that  $k(u)$  tends to a horizontal asymptote  $k = k_f$  for  $u \to \infty$ , with  $k_f$  given by

(5) 
$$
k_f = 2 \alpha_1 = \frac{\alpha_3}{\alpha_2} k_0
$$

The same equation reveals that it is possible to model a softening-type response when it results in  $\alpha_1 > 0$ ,  $\alpha_2 \geq 0$ ,  $0 < \alpha_3/\alpha_2 < 1$ . In the special case with  $\alpha_2 = 0$ , one in particular gets  $k_0 = 0$ , that is, a model with zero initial stiffness (absence of external and internal prestress, cf. [\[7\]](#page-8-6)). Fig. [1\(](#page-2-1)a, b, c) visually illustrate the V vs. u, F vs. u and k vs. u laws, derived from Eqns.[\(1\)](#page-1-1)-[\(3\)](#page-1-2), for specific values of the constitutive parameters  $\alpha_1$ ,  $\alpha_2$  and  $\alpha_3$ . The green and the red curves correspond to softening-type responses, while the blue curves refer to a stiffening-type behavior, which is included for the sake of comparison with the results presented in [\[6\]](#page-8-5). Let us introduce the strain variable  $\xi = u/h_0$ , and rewrite the potential [\(1\)](#page-1-1) as follows

(6) 
$$
\hat{V}(\xi) = V(u(\xi)) = \hat{\alpha}_1 \xi^2 \frac{\xi + \hat{\alpha}_2}{\xi + \hat{\alpha}_3}.
$$

where

(7) 
$$
\hat{\alpha}_1 = \alpha_1 h_0^2, \quad \hat{\alpha}_2 = \frac{\alpha_2}{h_0}, \quad \hat{\alpha}_3 = \frac{\alpha_3}{h_0}
$$

We now move on to fit the tensegrity-like model to the response of a micro-scale T3 prism analyzed in [\[7\]](#page-8-6), which is composed of bars additively manufactured using the Ti6Al4V titanium alloy (0.80 mm diameter, 120 MPa Young modulus) and Spectra fiber cables (0.28 mm diameter, 5.48 MPa Young modulus). Such a prism exhibits a height of 5.63 mm in the undeformed configuration under zero external

<span id="page-2-1"></span>

tensegrity-like model for given values of  $\alpha_1$ ,  $\alpha_2$  and  $\alpha_3$ .

force, and is supposed to be subject to a initial pre-compression force  $F_0 = 31.70$  N that produces an initial compression strain  $\epsilon_0 = 0.15$ . Let u be identified with the axial displacement measured from the pre-compressed configuration of the prism, and let  $\bar{u}$  denote the axial displacement measured from the undeformed configuration. Furthermore, let  $\bar{F}_{tens}$  denote the axial force acting in the current deformation of the prism and set  $F_{tens} = \bar{F}_{tens} - F_0$ . Fig. [2](#page-3-0) shows the  $\bar{F}_{tens}$  vs.  $\bar{u}$  and the  $F_{tens}$  vs. u laws numerically obtained for the T3 prism under examination, which show a tangent slope decreasing with the axial displacement, that is, an elastically-softening response.

Employing a set of 44 fitting points spaced along the u-axis of the  $F_{tens}$  vs. u curve, for  $u \in [-1.15, 1.15]$ mm, we were able to fit the tensegrity-like model to the response depicted in Fig. [2\(](#page-3-0)d), obtaining the following best fit parameters:  $\alpha_1 = 5.607 \times 10^{-3} \text{ N/m}$ ,  $\alpha_2 = 8.485 \times 10^3 \text{ m}$  and  $\alpha_3 = 4.855 \times 10^{-3} \text{ m}$  (use was made of the Mathematica<sup>®</sup> v.1[3](#page-3-1).2 function 'FindFit'). Fig. 3 shows a very good matching between the tensegrity-like model and the  $F_{tens} - u$  response.

## <span id="page-2-0"></span>3. Quasi-continuum limit of the equations of motion

The present section develops the quasi-continuum limit of the equations of motion of a mass-spring chain equipped with T3 prisms that feature an interaction law described by Eqn. [\(1\)](#page-1-1). We analyze a chain composed of an infinitely large number of units and we let  $u_{i-1}$ ,  $u_i$  and  $u_{i+1}$  denote the displacements exhibited by the masses  $i - 1$ , i and  $i + 1$ , respectively. The equation of motion of the i-the mass in the

<span id="page-3-0"></span>

<span id="page-3-1"></span>Figure 2: Force-displacement responses of T3 prisms with elastically softening behavior [\[7\]](#page-8-6).



Figure 3: Fitting of the tensegrity-like model (red dashed curve) to the  $F_{tens}$  vs. u response (green-solid curve).

longitudinal direction is written as follows

<span id="page-4-0"></span>(8) 
$$
m\ddot{u}_i = V_u (u_{i-1} - u_i) - V_u (u_i - u_{i+1})
$$

By introducing a longitudinal coordinate x along the axis of the chain, we now write the displacement of the *i*-th mass the realization of a continuous function  $u(x, t)$  in correspondence to the current time t and the initial position  $x_i$  of such a mass (i.e.,  $u_i = u(x_i, t)$ ). Next, we use a discrete-to-continuum approach, which consists of employing fourth-order Taylor series expansions for  $V_u (u_{i-1} - u_i)$  and  $V_u (u_i - u_{i+1})$ into Eqn. [\(8\)](#page-4-0).

(9) 
$$
\frac{m}{h_0^2}u_{tt} = \mathcal{L}\{[V_u(u(x,t))]_{xx}\},\,
$$

where  $\mathcal{L} \approx 1 + \frac{1}{12} h_0^2 \partial_{xx}$  is a differential operator.

<span id="page-4-1"></span>By considering  $\epsilon \ll 1$  and  $u \sim \epsilon u$ , the Taylor expansion of Eqn. [\(1\)](#page-1-1) with respect to  $\epsilon$  is given by

(10) 
$$
V(u) \approx \alpha_1 \frac{\alpha_2}{\alpha_3^3} \epsilon^2 u^2 - \alpha_1 \frac{\alpha_2 - \alpha_3}{\alpha_3^4} \epsilon^3 u^3 + \dots,
$$

We shall now introduce this approximation in Eqn. [\(9\)](#page-4-1). As we are dealing with a quasi-continuum approximation, where  $h_0$  can be considered small, we can neglect the terms of order greater than  $\mathcal{O}(\epsilon^3 h_0^2)$ . We end up with the Boussinesq equation

<span id="page-4-3"></span>(11) 
$$
u_{tt} = \frac{h_0^2}{m} \left( \frac{\alpha_1 \alpha_2}{\alpha_3} u_{xx} - 3\alpha_1 \frac{\alpha_2 - \alpha_3}{\alpha_3^2} (u^2) xx \right) + \gamma uxxxx,
$$

where

(12) 
$$
\gamma = \frac{h_0^4 \alpha_1 \alpha_2}{6\alpha_3 m}
$$

This equation allows us to use the well-known sech-<sup>2</sup> solution of the Boussinesq Equation [\[10\]](#page-8-9). However, if we do not want to assume any approximation on the form of the potential, we can use Rosenau's [\[11\]](#page-8-10) idea to invert the operator  $\mathcal{L}$ , obtaining

<span id="page-4-2"></span>
$$
\mathcal{L}^{-1} \approx \left(1 - \frac{1}{12} h_0^2 \partial_{xx}\right)
$$

Applying such an inverse operator in Eqn. [\(9\)](#page-4-1), we arrive at the following modified Boussinesq Equation

(13) 
$$
u_{tt} = \frac{h_0^2}{m} [V_u]_{xx} + \frac{1}{12} u_{xxtt}
$$

The advantage of equation  $(13)$ , over the more standard equation  $(11)$ , is that it is well-posed mathematically. Additionally, it allows us to preserve the form of the elastic potential proposed in the present work.

It is useful to introduce the following modified potential, which is a function of the dimensionless variable  $\xi$  introduced in the previous section

<span id="page-4-4"></span>(14) 
$$
\tilde{V}(\xi) = \frac{\hat{V}(\xi)}{m} = \tilde{\alpha}_1 \xi^2 \frac{\tilde{\alpha}_2 + \xi}{\tilde{\alpha}_3 + \xi},
$$

with

(15) 
$$
\tilde{\alpha}_1 = \frac{\hat{\alpha}_1}{m} = \frac{\alpha_1 h_0^2}{m}; \quad \tilde{\alpha}_2 = \hat{\alpha}_2; \quad \tilde{\alpha}_3 = \hat{\alpha}_3
$$

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A simple manipulation of Eqn.  $(13)$ , with the aid of Eqn.  $(14)$ , leads us to the differential equation

(16) 
$$
\xi_{tt} = \left[\tilde{V}_{\xi}\right]_{xx} + \frac{1}{12} \xi_{xxtt}
$$

We now consider a  $\xi$ -wave traveling with speed v, by setting  $\xi = \phi(x-vt)$ , where  $\phi$  is a scalar function to be determined. By restricting our attention to cases in which the rarefaction pulse does not produce the complete loss of the initial pre-compression of the system, we rquire that it results in  $\phi \in [\xi_{lim}, 0]$ , where  $\xi_{lim} = -u_0/h_0$ . Using the change of variable  $z = x - vt$  and the prime notation for the differentiation with respect to z, we rewrite Eqn.  $(16)$  as follows

<span id="page-5-2"></span>(17) 
$$
v^2 \phi'' = \left[\tilde{V}_{\phi}\right]'' + v^2 \frac{1}{12} \phi''''
$$

A double integration of Eqn. [\(17\)](#page-5-2) with respect to z and the use of asymptotic boundary conditions leads us to write

<span id="page-5-3"></span>(18) 
$$
v^2 \frac{1}{12} \phi'' = v^2 \phi - \left[\tilde{V}_{\phi}\right].
$$

Multiplying Eqn. [\(18\)](#page-5-3) by  $\phi'$  on both sides and carrying a new integration with respect to z, we finally obtain

<span id="page-5-4"></span>(19) 
$$
\mathcal{F} = \frac{1}{v^2} \left( v^2 \phi^2 - 2\tilde{V} + C \right),
$$

where  $C$  is an integration constant, and we have set

<span id="page-5-5"></span>
$$
\mathcal{F} = \frac{1}{12} \phi'^2.
$$

which easily shows us that it results in  $\mathcal{F} \geq 0$  for any  $\phi \in [\xi_{\text{lim}}, 0].$ 

## <span id="page-5-0"></span>4. Weierstrass analysis of solitary pulses

We adopt the methodology outlined [\[5](#page-8-8)[,6\]](#page-8-5) to construct a Weierstrass analysis of the solutions of Eqn. [\(19\)](#page-5-4) [\[12,](#page-8-11)[13\]](#page-8-12). By substituting Eqn. [\(14\)](#page-4-4) into Eqn. (19) and setting the integration constant C to zero, we can write

<span id="page-5-6"></span>(21) 
$$
\mathcal{F} = \phi^2 \left[ 1 - \frac{2}{v^2} \tilde{\alpha}_1 \frac{\tilde{\alpha}_2 + \phi}{\tilde{\alpha}_3 + \phi} \right].
$$

According to Weierstrass' theory, we can relate the existence of solitary pulses to the presence of two asymptotic points and an inversion point of  $\phi$  [\[12](#page-8-11)[,13\]](#page-8-12), where it results  $\phi' = 0$ . Eqn. [\(20\)](#page-5-5) show that these points actually coincide with zero points of  $\mathcal F$ . On the other hand, Eqn. [\(21\)](#page-5-6) shows that the points where  $\phi = 0$  are zero points of order two for F, that is, asymptotic points of the wave profile. As  $\phi$  approaches zero, it is clear from Eqn. [\(21\)](#page-5-6) that the limitation  $\mathcal{F} \ge 0$  implies that the wave speed v must be greater than the following lower bound

(22) 
$$
v_{min} = \sqrt{2\tilde{\alpha}_1 \frac{\tilde{\alpha}_2}{\tilde{\alpha}_3}} = c_0,
$$

where  $c_0 = h_0 \sqrt{\frac{k_0}{m}}$  denotes the speed of sound in the linear response regime [\[14\]](#page-8-13).

We shall call  $\phi = \phi^*$  the inversion point of the solitary pulse, which is computed by setting to zero the term in square brackets on the right hand side of Eqn. [\(21\)](#page-5-6), obtaining

<span id="page-6-1"></span>(23) 
$$
\phi^* = \frac{\tilde{\alpha}_3 v^2 - 2\tilde{\alpha}_1 \tilde{\alpha}_2}{2\tilde{\alpha}_1 - v^2}.
$$

Since we are studying a softening regime with  $\alpha_2 > \alpha_3$  (see Sect. [2\)](#page-1-0), we observe from Eqn. [\(23\)](#page-6-1) that it result  $\phi^*$  < 0 (negative wave peak) in the present case. Such a noticeable result implies that the solitary pulse supported by the system under consideration is actually a rarefaction pulse, which reduces its initial state of pre-compression. By setting  $\phi^* = \xi_{lim}$  in Eqn. [\(23\)](#page-6-1), we obtain the maximum wave speed  $v_{max}$  at which the rarefaction wave can propagate, while the system remains in a compressed state. It is an easy task to obtain for such wave speed the following expression

(24) 
$$
v_{max} = \sqrt{2\tilde{\alpha}_1 \frac{\tilde{\alpha}_2 + \xi_{lim}}{\tilde{\alpha}_3 + \xi_{lim}}}.
$$

We shall now determine the wave form of the solitary pulse, by introducing the inverse function  $f = \pm z$ . From Eqn. [\(20\)](#page-5-5), we deduce  $\frac{d\phi}{dz} = \sqrt{12\mathcal{F}}$ , which allow us to write

<span id="page-6-2"></span>(25) 
$$
f := \int \sqrt{\frac{1}{12 \mathcal{F}}} d\phi
$$

The insertion of Eqn. [\(21\)](#page-5-6) into Eqn. [\(25\)](#page-6-2) leads, after some calculations, to the following result

(26) 
$$
f = \frac{v}{\sqrt{3}} \frac{\psi \tan^{-1} \left(\frac{x}{\rho}\right) - \rho \tan^{-1} \left(\frac{x}{\psi}\right)}{\psi \rho}
$$

where

(27) 
$$
\chi = \sqrt{v^2 - 2\tilde{\alpha}_1 \frac{\phi + \tilde{\alpha}_2}{\phi + \tilde{\alpha}_3}}, \qquad \rho = \sqrt{c_0^2 - v^2}, \qquad \psi = \sqrt{2\tilde{\alpha}_1 - v^2}
$$

We will see in the next section that a simple reversal of the axes of the graph of  $f(\phi)$  allows us to visualize the shape of the pulse  $\phi(f)$ .

## <span id="page-6-0"></span>5. Numerical applications

We now compare the predictions of the tensegrity-like model presented in the previous section with the numerical results obtained in [\[7\]](#page-8-6) for the propagation of rarefaction pulses in a chain formed by 1400 T3 prisms exhibiting the properties analyzed in in Sect. [2.](#page-1-0) Such prisms are alternated with lead discs showing 2 mm thickness and 25 g mass. Let  $h = 7.63$  mm denote the undeformed height of the unit formed by a T3 prism and a lead disc, and let  $\bar{\xi} = \bar{u}/\bar{h} = \xi + \epsilon_0(1 - \xi)$  denote the total axial strain of the unit. We computed the wave speeds and wave width of the tensegrity-like model making use of Eqn. [\(23\)](#page-6-1), and assuming a cutoff of  $\xi$  equal to 0.02  $\epsilon_0$ . Comparisons between the predictions of the tensegrity-like model and the numerical solutions obtained in [\[7\]](#page-8-6) are presented in Tab. [1,](#page-7-1) considering both the speed and the width of the traveling pulses in the mass-spring chain under consideration. A good matching can be observed between the two analyzed approaches. The waveform of the tensegrity-like pulses is shown in Fig. [4](#page-7-2) for different wave speeds v, which range from a value close to  $v_{min}$  (1.02  $c_0$ ), up to  $v_{max}$  (1.13  $c_0$ ). One observes that the peak strain markedly increases with the wave speed, while the wave width slightly reduces.

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<span id="page-7-1"></span>Table 1: Predictions of the tensegrity-like model for the velocity and amplitude of rarefaction pulses traveling in a mass-spring chain with softening response, compared to the numerical results presented in [\[7\]](#page-8-6).

peak amplitude $\phi^* + \epsilon_0 (1 - \phi^*)$		wave speed	wave width
0.122	Present model	1.02 $c_0$	10.13 $h_0$
	Reference [7]	1.00 $c_0$	12.00 $h_0$
0.040	Present model	$1.10\ c_0$	6.79 $h_0$
	Reference [7]	1.08 $c_0$	$10.00 h_0$
	Present model	1.13 $c_0$	6.10 $h_0$

<span id="page-7-2"></span>

Figure 4: Shapes of the rarefaction pulses predicted by the tensegrity-like model for different values of the wave speed.

## <span id="page-7-0"></span>6. Concluding remarks

By deriving the quasi-continuum limit of the equations of motion of a tensegrity-like model of a mass-spring system with softening-type response, and conducting an analysis  $\dot{a}$  la Weierstrass [\[12](#page-8-11)[,13\]](#page-8-12), we have predicted the occurrence of rarefaction pulses in chains formed by pre-compressed tensegrity units and lumped masses. The presented results confirm those obtained through a different analytic approach in [\[8\]](#page-8-4), as well as the numerical results presented in [\[7\]](#page-8-6) for tensegrity mass-spring chains formed by a large number of units. It is worth noting that the presence of rarefaction pulses in tensegrity mass-spring chains paves the way to the development of a radically new concept for the protection of bodies from the effects of compressive disturbances, which makes use of the solitary wave dynamics of such systems, without necessarily requiring the dissipation of mechanical energy. Such 'metamaterial' behaviors of tensegrity lattices will be studied through future research, in association with bandgap-type responses [\[15\]](#page-8-14) and superelastic effects [\[16\]](#page-8-15). Another potential avenue for future research involves studying the dynamics and stability of innovative transversely isotropic metamaterials consisting of tensegrity chains embedded in a porous matrix [\[17,](#page-8-16)[18\]](#page-8-17).

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