

A supersymmetric nonlinear sigma model analogue of the ModMax theory

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ABSTRACT: A decade ago, it was shown that associated with any model for $U(1)$ duality-invariant nonlinear electrodynamics there is a unique $U(1)$ duality-invariant supersymmetric nonlinear sigma model formulated in terms of chiral and complex linear superfields. Here we study the $\mathcal{N} = 1$ superconformal σ -model analogue of the conformal duality-invariant electrodynamics known as the ModMax theory. We derive its dual formulation in terms of chiral superfields and show that the target space is a Kähler cone with $U(1) \times U(1)$ being the connected component of the isometry group.

KEYWORDS: Sigma Models, Superspaces, Supersymmetry and Duality

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Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Chiral formulation	3

1 Introduction

Ten years ago, we proposed a family of U(1) duality-invariant $\mathcal{N} = 1$ supersymmetric nonlinear sigma models [1]. Such a σ -model is realised in terms of a chiral scalar Φ , a complex linear scalar Σ , and their conjugates, $\bar{\Phi}$ and $\bar{\Sigma}$,

$$\bar{D}_{\dot{\alpha}}\Phi = 0, \quad \bar{D}^2\Sigma = 0. \tag{1.1}$$

The action is of the form

$$S_{\text{CCL}} = \int d^4x d^4\theta L(\Phi, \bar{\Phi}, \Sigma, \bar{\Sigma}). \tag{1.2}$$

The equations of motion for Σ and Φ are

$$\bar{D}_{\dot{\alpha}} \frac{\partial L}{\partial \Sigma} = 0, \quad \bar{D}^2 \frac{\partial L}{\partial \Phi} = 0. \tag{1.3}$$

We see that the equations of motion have the same functional form as the off-shell constraints but with Φ and Σ interchanged. As a result, “duality” rotations that mix Φ and $\partial L/\partial \Sigma$, and Σ and $\partial L/\partial \Phi$, leave the constraints and the equations of motion invariant.

With the notation $X := (\Phi, \bar{\Phi}, \Sigma, \bar{\Sigma})$, the U(1) duality-invariant supersymmetric nonlinear σ -models are characterised by continuous duality rotations of the form

$$\begin{pmatrix} \Phi' \\ \frac{\partial L(X')}{\partial \Sigma'} \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} \cos \lambda & \sin \lambda \\ -\sin \lambda & \cos \lambda \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} \Phi \\ \frac{\partial L(X)}{\partial \Sigma} \end{pmatrix} \tag{1.4a}$$

and

$$\begin{pmatrix} \Sigma' \\ \frac{\partial L(X')}{\partial \Phi'} \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} \cos \lambda & \sin \lambda \\ -\sin \lambda & \cos \lambda \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} \Sigma \\ \frac{\partial L(X)}{\partial \Phi} \end{pmatrix}. \tag{1.4b}$$

As demonstrated in [1], duality invariance of the theory implies that the Lagrangian $L(X) = L(\Phi, \bar{\Phi}, \Sigma, \bar{\Sigma})$ must obey the differential equation

$$0 = \Phi \Sigma + \bar{\Phi} \bar{\Sigma} + \frac{\partial L}{\partial \Phi} \frac{\partial L}{\partial \Sigma} + \frac{\partial L}{\partial \bar{\Phi}} \frac{\partial L}{\partial \bar{\Sigma}}. \tag{1.5}$$

Any nonlinear σ -model of the form (1.2), which involves chiral and complex linear (CCL) superfields, has a purely chiral formulation which is obtained by performing a superfield Legendre transformation that dualises the complex linear superfield Σ and its

conjugate $\bar{\Sigma}$ into a chiral scalar Ψ and its conjugate $\bar{\Psi}$. It is worth recalling its derivation. Starting from the σ -model (1.2), we introduce a first-order action

$$S_{\text{first-order}} = \int d^4x d^4\theta \left\{ L(\Phi, \bar{\Phi}, \Sigma, \bar{\Sigma}) + \Psi \Sigma + \bar{\Psi} \bar{\Sigma} \right\}, \quad (1.6)$$

where Σ is taken to be an unconstrained complex superfield, while the Lagrange multiplier Ψ is chosen to be chiral,

$$\bar{D}_{\dot{\alpha}} \Psi = 0. \quad (1.7)$$

The original CCL σ -model (1.2) is obtained from (1.6) by integrating out the Lagrange multipliers Ψ and $\bar{\Psi}$. Instead, we can integrate out the auxiliary superfield Σ and its conjugate $\bar{\Sigma}$ using the corresponding equation of motion

$$\frac{\partial L}{\partial \Sigma} + \Psi = 0 \quad (1.8)$$

and the conjugate equation. This leads to the chiral formulation

$$S_{\text{chiral}} = \int d^4x d^4\theta K(\Phi, \bar{\Phi}, \Psi, \bar{\Psi}), \quad (1.9)$$

where the corresponding Lagrangian K is the Legendre transform of L ,

$$K(\Phi, \bar{\Phi}, \Psi, \bar{\Psi}) = L(\Phi, \bar{\Phi}, \Sigma, \bar{\Sigma}) + \Psi \Sigma + \bar{\Psi} \bar{\Sigma}. \quad (1.10)$$

The dual Lagrangian $K(\Phi, \bar{\Phi}, \Psi, \bar{\Psi})$ is the Kähler potential for a Kähler target space.

In the chiral formulation, the condition of $U(1)$ duality invariance (1.5) was shown [1] to become the requirement that $K(\Phi, \bar{\Phi}, \Psi, \bar{\Psi})$ is invariant under rigid $U(1)$ transformations

$$\delta \Phi = -\lambda \Psi, \quad \delta \Psi = \lambda \Phi, \quad \lambda \in \mathbb{R}. \quad (1.11)$$

Thus the isometry group of the target Kähler space is nontrivial, since it contains the $U(1)$ subgroup of transformations (1.11).

An important class of duality-invariant nonlinear σ -models (1.2) is described by a Lagrangian of the form

$$L(\Phi, \bar{\Phi}, \Sigma, \bar{\Sigma}) = L(\omega, \bar{\omega}), \quad (1.12)$$

where the complex variable ω is defined by

$$\omega = \bar{\Phi} \Phi - \bar{\Sigma} \Sigma + i(\Phi \Sigma + \bar{\Phi} \bar{\Sigma}) = (\Phi + i\bar{\Sigma})(\bar{\Phi} + i\Sigma). \quad (1.13)$$

For such σ -models, the condition for duality invariance, eq. (1.5), was shown [1] to take the form

$$\text{Im} \left\{ \omega - 4\omega \left(\frac{\partial L}{\partial \omega} \right)^2 \right\} = 0. \quad (1.14)$$

Building on the influential 1981 work by Gaillard and Zumino [2], the general theory of $U(1)$ duality-invariant models for nonlinear electrodynamics in four dimensions was developed in the mid 1990s [3–6] and the early 2000s [7–9] (see also [10]), including the case

of duality-invariant theories with higher derivatives [11]. In general, nonlinear electrodynamics is described by a Lagrangian of the form

$$L_{\text{NLED}}(F_{ab}) = L(\omega, \bar{\omega}), \tag{1.15}$$

where we have introduced

$$-\omega := F_{\alpha\beta}F^{\alpha\beta} = \frac{1}{4}F^{ab}F_{ab} + \frac{i}{4}F^{ab}\tilde{F}_{ab}, \tag{1.16}$$

with F_{ab} being the electromagnetic field strength. The Gaillard-Zumino-Gibbons-Rasheed condition for U(1) duality invariance of nonlinear electrodynamics (1.15) is

$$\tilde{G}^{ab}G_{ab} + \tilde{F}^{ab}F_{ab} = 0, \quad \tilde{G}^{ab}(F) := \frac{1}{2}\varepsilon^{abcd}G_{cd}(F) = 2\frac{\partial L(F)}{\partial F_{ab}}, \tag{1.17}$$

originally given in [3, 5, 6].¹ As shown in [11], this condition for U(1) duality invariance of nonlinear electrodynamics can be expressed in the form of (1.14) with a ω replaced by ω . This means that any U(1) duality-invariant Lagrangian for nonlinear electrodynamics will also generate a U(1) duality-invariant supersymmetric σ -model by replacing ω defined in (1.16) by ω defined in (1.13).

Three years ago, a unique conformal U(1) duality-invariant nonlinear electrodynamics was constructed [13] (see also [14]) and called the ModMax theory. It is described by the Lagrangian

$$L_{\text{conf}}(\omega, \bar{\omega}) = \frac{1}{2}(\omega + \bar{\omega}) \cosh \gamma + \sqrt{\omega\bar{\omega}} \sinh \gamma, \tag{1.18}$$

with γ a coupling constant. This model does not possess a weak-field expansion, which is why such theories had not been considered earlier.² The $\mathcal{N} = 1$ supersymmetric extension of the ModMax theory (1.18) was constructed in [16], and alternative derivations of the resulting theory were given in [15] using the approaches advocated in [11, 17, 18]. It should be mentioned that every U(1) duality-invariant nonlinear electrodynamics described by the relations (1.15) and (1.17) is contained in a U(1) duality-invariant model for the $\mathcal{N} = 1$ vector multiplet proposed in [11, 17].

2 Chiral formulation

Our aim in this paper is to study the supersymmetric σ -model analogue³ of the ModMax theory (1.18),

$$L(\omega, \bar{\omega}) = \frac{1}{2}(\omega + \bar{\omega}) \cosh \gamma + \sqrt{\omega\bar{\omega}} \sinh \gamma, \tag{2.1}$$

where ω is defined by (1.13). In terms of the original dynamical variables $X = (\Phi, \bar{\Phi}, \Sigma, \bar{\Sigma})$, the Lagrangian is given by

$$L(X) = (\Phi\bar{\Phi} - \Sigma\bar{\Sigma}) \cosh \gamma + \sqrt{(\Phi^2 + \bar{\Sigma}^2)(\bar{\Phi}^2 + \Sigma^2)} \sinh \gamma. \tag{2.2}$$

¹Actually, the self-duality equation was derived for the first time by Bialynicki-Birula [12], but unfortunately his work was largely unnoticed.

²Using the Ivanov-Zupnik formalism [7–10], this theory was re-derived in appendix A of [15].

³Inspired by the Australian cinematographic tradition, it seems suitable to call (2.1) the MadMax σ -model, although we will not pursue this terminology.

It is a superconformal field theory. In the framework of [19], the superconformal transformation laws of Φ and Σ are given by eq. (6.1).

As discussed in the Introduction, we can perform a Legendre transformation to dualise the complex linear superfield Σ and its conjugate $\bar{\Sigma}$ into a chiral scalar Ψ and its conjugate $\bar{\Psi}$. In terms of the superfields $X_D := (\Phi, \bar{\Phi}, \Psi, \bar{\Psi})$, the dual formulation is determined by the action

$$L_D(X_D) = L(X) + \Psi\Sigma + \bar{\Psi}\bar{\Sigma}. \tag{2.3}$$

The equation of motion $\frac{\partial L_D(X_D)}{\partial \Sigma} = 0$ yields

$$\Psi = \bar{\Sigma} \cosh \gamma - \frac{i}{2}(\Phi + i\bar{\Sigma}) \left(\frac{\bar{\omega}}{\omega}\right)^{\frac{1}{2}} \sinh \gamma + \frac{i}{2}(\Phi - i\bar{\Sigma}) \left(\frac{\omega}{\bar{\omega}}\right)^{\frac{1}{2}} \sinh \gamma \tag{2.4}$$

$$= \bar{\Sigma} \cosh \gamma - \Sigma \left(\frac{\Phi^2 + \bar{\Sigma}^2}{\bar{\Phi}^2 + \Sigma^2}\right)^{\frac{1}{2}} \sinh \gamma. \tag{2.5}$$

Defining

$$X = \left(\frac{\Phi^2 + \bar{\Sigma}^2}{\bar{\Phi}^2 + \Sigma^2}\right)^{\frac{1}{2}} \tag{2.6}$$

and noting that $\bar{X} = \frac{1}{X}$,

$$\begin{pmatrix} \Psi \\ \bar{\Psi} \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} \cosh \gamma & -X \sinh \gamma \\ -\frac{1}{X} \sinh \gamma & \cosh \gamma \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} \bar{\Sigma} \\ \Sigma \end{pmatrix}. \tag{2.7}$$

Inverting this relation,

$$\begin{pmatrix} \bar{\Sigma} \\ \Sigma \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} \cosh \gamma & X \sinh \gamma \\ \frac{1}{X} \sinh \gamma & \cosh \gamma \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} \Psi \\ \bar{\Psi} \end{pmatrix}. \tag{2.8}$$

Substituting the expression above for Σ and $\bar{\Sigma}$ into the definition (2.6) of X , one obtains the quadratic equation

$$X^2 = \frac{\Phi^2 + \Psi^2}{\bar{\Phi}^2 + \bar{\Psi}^2} \Rightarrow X = \pm \left(\frac{\Phi^2 + \Psi^2}{\bar{\Phi}^2 + \bar{\Psi}^2}\right)^{\frac{1}{2}}. \tag{2.9}$$

This therefore allows us, using equation (2.8), to express the complex linear superfields Σ and $\bar{\Sigma}$ in terms of the chiral superfields $\Phi, \bar{\Phi}, \Psi$ and $\bar{\Psi}$, as required.

In order to compute the dual Lagrangian $L_D(X_D)$, we note that using the original definition (2.6) of X , we can write

$$\sqrt{\omega\bar{\omega}} = X(\bar{\Phi}^2 + \Sigma^2), \tag{2.10}$$

and equivalently,

$$\sqrt{\omega\bar{\omega}} = \frac{1}{X}(\Phi^2 + \bar{\Sigma}^2). \tag{2.11}$$

Thus we can express $\sqrt{\omega\bar{\omega}}$ in the symmetric form

$$\sqrt{\omega\bar{\omega}} = \frac{X}{2}(\bar{\Phi}^2 + \Sigma^2) + \frac{1}{2X}(\Phi^2 + \bar{\Sigma}^2). \tag{2.12}$$

Substituting this into

$$L_D(X_D) = \frac{1}{2}(\omega + \bar{\omega}) \cosh \gamma + \sqrt{\omega \bar{\omega}} \sinh \gamma + \Psi \Sigma + \bar{\Psi} \bar{\Sigma} \quad (2.13)$$

and using the expressions (2.8) for Σ and $\bar{\Sigma}$, we can obtain the Kähler potential $L_D(X_D) = K(\Phi, \bar{\Phi}, \Psi, \bar{\Psi})$. The result is

$$K(\Phi, \bar{\Phi}, \Psi, \bar{\Psi}) = (\Phi \bar{\Phi} + \Psi \bar{\Psi}) \cosh \gamma + \sqrt{(\Phi^2 + \Psi^2)(\bar{\Phi}^2 + \bar{\Psi}^2)} \sinh \gamma. \quad (2.14)$$

The target space of the σ -model is a Kähler cone, following the terminology of [20], in particular the Kähler potential obeys the homogeneity condition

$$\left(\Phi \frac{\partial}{\partial \Phi} + \Psi \frac{\partial}{\partial \Psi} \right) K(\Phi, \bar{\Phi}, \Psi, \bar{\Psi}) = K(\Phi, \bar{\Phi}, \Psi, \bar{\Psi}). \quad (2.15)$$

With the notation $\phi^i = (\Phi, \Psi)$ and $\bar{\phi}^{\bar{i}} = (\bar{\Phi}, \bar{\Psi})$, the Kähler metric $g_{i\bar{j}}(\phi, \bar{\phi})$ is

$$g = (g_{i\bar{j}}) = \mathbb{1}_2 \cosh \gamma + \frac{\phi \phi^\dagger}{\sqrt{\phi^T \phi \phi^\dagger \phi}} \sinh \gamma, \quad (2.16)$$

where ϕ is viewed as a column-vector. A short calculation gives

$$\det(g_{i\bar{j}}) = \cosh^2 \gamma + \frac{\Phi \bar{\Phi} + \Psi \bar{\Psi}}{\sqrt{(\Phi^2 + \Psi^2)(\bar{\Phi}^2 + \bar{\Psi}^2)}} \cosh \gamma \sinh \gamma. \quad (2.17)$$

For $\gamma \neq 0$, the matrix elements of (2.16) are nonsingular in the domain $\Phi^2 + \Psi^2 \neq 0$, which we identify with the target space \mathcal{M}^4 of the σ -model. It follows from (2.16) and (2.17) that the metric is positive definite on \mathcal{M}^4 provided $\gamma > 0$. It is interesting that the condition $\gamma \geq 0$ also naturally occurs for the ModMax theory [13], since for $\gamma < 0$ superluminal propagation becomes possible.

The connected component of the isometry group G of the Kähler cone \mathcal{M}^4 is $U(1) \times U(1)$. It consists of holomorphic transformations of the form

$$\phi \rightarrow g\phi, \quad g = e^{i\alpha} e^{-i\lambda\sigma_2}, \quad \alpha, \lambda \in \mathbb{R}, \quad (2.18)$$

where σ_2 is one of the Pauli matrices $\sigma_I = (\sigma_1, \sigma_2, \sigma_3)$. The λ -transformation is a finite version of (1.11). The α -transformation is generated by the homothetic conformal Killing vector

$$\chi = \chi^i \partial_i + \bar{\chi}^{\bar{i}} \partial_{\bar{i}}, \quad \chi^i = \phi^i, \quad \partial_i = \frac{\partial}{\partial \phi^i}, \quad \partial_{\bar{i}} = \frac{\partial}{\partial \bar{\phi}^{\bar{i}}}. \quad (2.19)$$

In general, a Kähler cone possesses a homothetic conformal Killing vector with the properties [20]

$$\nabla_j \chi^i = \delta_j^i, \quad \nabla_{\bar{j}} \chi^i = 0, \quad (2.20)$$

with ∇ the torsion-free covariant derivative on \mathcal{M}^4 . In particular, χ is holomorphic. The properties of χ include the following:

$$\chi_i := g_{i\bar{j}} \bar{\chi}^{\bar{j}} = \partial_i K, \quad \chi^i \partial_i K = K \quad \implies \quad K = g_{i\bar{j}} \chi^i \bar{\chi}^{\bar{j}}. \quad (2.21)$$

The Kähler potential (2.14) is positive in the domain $\Phi^2 + \Psi^2 \neq 0$.

The isometry group G of \mathcal{M}^4 also includes a discrete holomorphic transformation that may be chosen as $g = \sigma_1$.⁴ By multiplying σ_1 with certain elements of the subgroup $U(1) \times U(1) \subset G$, one observes that G also includes the following group elements: $\pm\sigma_I$ and $\pm i\sigma_I$. In particular, the isometry group includes the non-abelian quaternion group $Q_8 = \{\pm i\sigma_I, \pm \mathbb{1}_2\}$.

For completeness, we reproduce the component version of the σ -model action (1.9), see e.g. [21] for the technical details:⁵

$$S = - \int d^4x \left\{ \partial^a \varphi^i g_{i\bar{j}} \partial_a \bar{\varphi}^{\bar{j}} + i \lambda^{\alpha i} g_{i\bar{j}} \nabla_{\alpha\dot{\alpha}} \bar{\lambda}^{\dot{\alpha}\bar{j}} - \hat{F}^i g_{i\bar{j}} \bar{F}^{\bar{j}} - \frac{1}{4} (\lambda^i \lambda^j) (\bar{\lambda}^{\bar{k}} \bar{\lambda}^{\bar{l}}) R_{i\bar{k}j\bar{l}} \right\}. \quad (2.22)$$

Here we have defined the component fields of ϕ^i in the conventional way

$$\varphi^i := \phi^i|, \quad \lambda_\alpha^i := \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} D_\alpha \phi^i|, \quad F^i := -\frac{1}{4} D^2 \phi^i| \quad (2.23)$$

and have made use of the complex field

$$\hat{F}^i := F^i - \frac{1}{2} \Gamma_{jk}^i \lambda^j \lambda^k \quad (2.24)$$

which transforms covariantly under holomorphic reparametrisations. The Kähler metric in (2.22) depends on the physical scalar fields, $g_{i\bar{j}}(\varphi, \bar{\varphi})$.

The formalism of [1] admits a natural extension to $\mathcal{N} = 1$ supergravity. In particular, the superconformal sigma model (2.2) and its dual (2.14) can be coupled to conformal supergravity.

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⁴The isometry group G also includes the anti-holomorphic discrete transformation $\phi \rightarrow \bar{\phi}$.

⁵We recall that the Christoffel symbols Γ_{jk}^i and the curvature tensor $R_{i\bar{j}k\bar{l}}$ are given by the expressions $\Gamma_{jk}^i = g^{i\bar{l}} \partial_j \partial_k \partial_{\bar{l}} K$ and $R_{i\bar{j}k\bar{l}} = \partial_i \partial_k \partial_{\bar{j}} \partial_{\bar{l}} K - g^{m\bar{n}} \partial_i \partial_k \partial_{\bar{n}} K \partial_{\bar{j}} \partial_{\bar{l}} \partial_m K$.

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