

Dynamic characterization of micro-particle
systems

Thesis by
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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy



CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
Pasadena, California
2016
(Defended June 22, 2015)

Acknowledgements

I would first like to acknowledge and thank my advisor and mentor, Professor Chiara Daraio. I appreciate all of her contributions of time, ideas, and funding to make my Ph.D. a truly positive experience. Her passion and enthusiasm for and immense knowledge of science and research provided an excellent example of a successful scientist and professor. I also appreciate her extremely motivating attitude during my thesis work. Without her enormous amount of support for and patience regarding this project, I would not have been able to complete it.

Besides my advisor, I would also like to thank the other members of my thesis committee: Professor Michael Cross, Professor Melany Hunt, and Professor Kenneth Libbrecht.

I also thank my family for the unconditional support and understanding that they provided me.

I additionally need to express my appreciation to the people who have contributed to this work. My sincere thanks go to the following individuals: Gladia Hotan, a Caltech undergraduate, for her contribution to most of the dry particle experiments and the development of the experimental protocol; Jinwoong Cha, an ETH Ph.D. student, for his work on modeling and the numerical simulation of the colloidal experiments; Dr. Ivo Buttinoni, Professor Isa Lucio, and Dr. Stephane Job, who are our collaborators in the project on micro-colloidal system; Dr. Alexandre Charles, for his help in the optimization of the numerical fitting; Professor Nesterenko and Professor Molinari, for their helpful discussions; Melissa Melendes, for her help in the fabrication of the micro-structure; and Petros Arakelian, Joe Haggerty, and Jean-Claude Tomasina, who all contributed to a large part of the experimental setup's construction.

I would also like to thank the entire Daraio group, which is made up of the most friendly, helpful, and supportive people I have ever known. And to my roommates in Zurich, Luca Bonanomi and Marc Serra Garcia: your heartwarming friendship and understanding made my life in Europe an enjoyable experience.

Finally, I would like to express special thanks to the following funding agencies: AFOSR, ARO MURI, Sloan Fellowship, ONR YIP, and NSF MRSEC.

Abstract

Ordered granular systems have been a subject of active research for decades, due to their rich dynamic response and nonlinearity. For example, their extraordinary wave propagation properties, shock absorption ability, and tunability are of interest for different scientific communities that range from condensed matter physics to applied mathematics to engineering. Thanks to their unique nonlinear properties, ordered granular systems have been suggested for several applications, such as solitary wave focusing, acoustic signals manipulation, and vibration absorption. Most of the fundamental research performed on ordered granular systems has focused on macro-scale examples. However, most engineering applications require these systems to operate at much smaller scales (for example, to affect acoustic signals in the ultrasound regime within acoustic imaging applications). Very little is known about the response of micro-scale granular systems, primarily because of the difficulties in realizing reliable and quantitative experiments. These experimental difficulties originate from the discrete nature of granular materials and their highly nonlinear inter-particle contact forces. The discreteness and accompanying micro-scale sizes require efficient means to assemble the particles precisely, to excite them, and to measure their dynamic response. The high nonlinearity in these systems requires particularly high precision, and imperfections can be extremely important in controlling the dynamic response of the entire system.

In order to characterize micro-scale, ordered, granular systems, it is necessary to understand the fundamental physical mechanisms that govern their response. For example, do the same physical laws that govern the macro-scale granular response apply? Does the Hertzian elastic contact theory hold? What is the role of the particle/substrate interactions? How does stress propagate through micro-scale particle systems and what are the main defects that affect these systems?

In this work, we address these questions by designing an innovative experimental platform that allows us to assemble, excite, and characterize ordered micro-granular systems. This new experimental platform employs a laser system to deliver impulses with controlled momentum and incorporates non-contact measurement apparatuses (including high-speed optical microscopy and laser interferometry) to detect the particles' displacement and velocity. We first built and programmed a computer-controlled micro-manipulator that can position and assemble steel micro-particles in

configurations that are desired for testing. We then fabricated microstructures to guide and confine the micro-particle assembly. Next we tested and demonstrated the capability of the laser excitation system to deliver controlled momentums to systems of dry (stainless steel particles of radius $150\ \mu\text{m}$) and wet (SiO_2 particles of radius $3.69\ \mu\text{m}$, immersed in fluid) micro-particles, after which we analyzed the stress propagation through these systems.

To describe the fundamental dynamic mechanisms governing the response of dry and wet micro-particle systems, we derived the equations of motion governing the dynamic response of dry and wet particles on a substrate, which we then validated in experiments. We then measured the losses in these systems and characterized the collision and friction between two micro-particles. We next assembled one-dimensional dry chains of micro-particles and investigated the mechanical wave propagation properties as well as the influence of defects in these systems. We also studied wave propagation in two-dimensional colloidal systems immersed in fluid. Finally, we experimentally characterized the wave-attenuation and its relation to the viscosity of the surrounding fluid and performed computer simulations to establish a model that captures the observed response.

The findings of the study offer the first systematic experimental and numerical analysis of wave propagation through ordered systems of micro-particles. The experimental system designed in this work provides the necessary tools for further fundamental studies of wave propagation in both granular and colloidal systems. The findings also offer fundamental insights for the miniaturization of highly nonlinear granular devices.

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