

Fallback Accretion Model for the Years-to-Decades X-ray Counterpart to GW170817

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ABSTRACT

A new component was reported in the X-ray counterpart to the binary neutron-star merger and gravitational wave event GW170817, exceeding the afterglow emission from an off-axis structured jet. The afterglow emission from the kilonova/macronova ejecta may explain the X-ray excess but exceeds the radio observations if the spectrum is the same. We propose a fallback accretion model that a part of ejecta from the neutron star merger falls back and forms a disk around the central compact object. In the super-Eddington accretion phase, the X-ray luminosity stays near the Eddington limit of a few solar masses and the radio is weak, as observed. This will be followed by a power law decay with index $-5/3$. The duration of the constant luminosity phase conveys the initial fallback timescale t_0 in the past. The current multi-year duration requires $t_0 > 3\text{--}30$ sec, suggesting that the disk wind rather than the dynamical ejecta falls back after the jet launch. Future observations in the next decades will probe the timescale of $t_0 \sim 10\text{--}10^4$ sec, around the time of extended emission in short gamma-ray bursts. The fallback accretion has not been halted by the r -process heating, implying that fission is weak on the year scale. We predict that the X-ray counterpart will disappear in a few decades due to the r -process halting.

Keywords: hydrodynamics — accretion, accretion discs — gamma-ray burst: general

1. INTRODUCTION

Gravitational waves from the first binary neutron star merger event (BNS merger) GW170817 were observed by the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) and the Virgo Consortium (LVC) (Abbott et al. 2017a). This event was accompanied by a short-duration gamma-ray burst (sGRB) GRB 1780817A (Abbott et al. 2017b). The superluminal motion of the jet hotspot was detected, indicating that the relativistic jet was launched from the merged compact stars (Mooley et al. 2018; Ghirlanda et al. 2019) in the off-axis direction (e.g., Ioka & Nakamura 2018, 2019). In addition, a kilonova/macronova is also associated with GW170817 (Arcavi et al. 2017; Chornock et al. 2017; Coulter et al. 2017; Cowperthwaite et al. 2017; Drout et al. 2017; Kasen et al. 2017; Kasliwal et al. 2017; Kilpatrick et al. 2017; McCully et al. 2017; Nicholl et al. 2017; Shappee et al. 2017; Smartt et al. 2017; Soares-Santos et al. 2017; Tanaka et al. 2017; Tanvir et al. 2017). From the modelling of the kilonova/macronova (e.g., Cowperthwaite et al. 2017; Kasen et al. 2017; Kasliwal et al. 2017; Villar et al. 2017; Kawaguchi et al. 2018), it is suggested that the merger ejecta consists of at least two components: the dynamical ejecta and the post-merger ejecta. The former is released promptly after coalescence in the dynamical timescale (e.g., Bauswein et al. 2013; Hotokezaka et al. 2013; Radice et al. 2016; Sekiguchi et al. 2015, 2016; Bovard et al. 2017; Dietrich et al. 2017), and the latter is released in the secular viscous timescale (e.g., Fernández & Metzger 2013; Just et al. 2015; Fernández et al. 2019; Fujibayashi et al. 2020b).

In GRB 170817A, an off-axis afterglow where an off-axis relativistic jet interacts with circumstellar medium (CSM), has been observed (Haggard et al. 2017; Margutti et al. 2018; Troja et al. 2017). The temporal evolution of the afterglow shows a much slower brightening than seen in usual sGRB afterglows, which is understood to be an afterglow from a structured jet (e.g., Lamb et al. 2019; Ghirlanda et al. 2019; Troja et al. 2019; Beniamini et al. 2020; Takahashi & Ioka 2020, 2021). The modeling of the afterglow has been successful, constraining not only the physical quantities of the jet (e.g., opening angle of the jet, jet luminosity, and structure), but also the density of CSM (e.g., Margutti et al. 2018; Alexander et al. 2018; Lamb et al. 2019; Troja et al. 2019; Takahashi & Ioka 2021).

Recently, the X-ray flux was observed several years after the coalescence (Hajela et al. 2019, 2020a,b, 2021a; Troja et al. 2020; Balasubramanian et al. 2021). It has been reported that a 2–3 σ excess component over the prediction of the jet afterglow model (Hajela et al. 2019; Balasubramanian et al. 2021; Hajela et al. 2021a). Hajela et al. (2019) argued that this is a kilonova/macronova afterglow, which is generated by the interaction of the merger ejecta with CSM (Nakar & Piran 2011; Kyutoku et al. 2014; Takami et al. 2014; Asano & To 2018; Hotokezaka et al. 2018; Kathirgamaraju et al. 2019). This model expects an increase of synchrotron emission also in the radio band. However, no such radio re-brightening has been observed (Hajela et al. 2019; Balasubramanian et al. 2021). This may imply a different spectral index.

In this Letter, we present an alternative interpretation for the X-ray excess in GW170817. As shown by many theoretical studies, a part of the ejecta from the BNS merger is inevitably gravitationally bounded, regardless of whether they are dynamical or post-merger ejecta. Since the mass M of the central object of GW170817 is estimated as $M = 2.74_{-0.01}^{+0.04} M_{\odot}$ (Abbott et al. 2017a), its Eddington luminosity is as follows:

$$L_{\text{edd}} = \frac{4\pi GMm_p c}{\sigma_T} \sim 3.4 \times 10^{38} \text{ erg s}^{-1} \left(\frac{M}{2.7M_{\odot}} \right), \quad (1)$$

where m_p is the mass of the proton and σ_T is the Thomson scattering cross section. This is consistent with the X-ray excess luminosity within a factor, implying that the X-ray excess could come from an accretion disk near the central compact object. However, it is not clear whether the fallback accretion in the BNS merger can maintain a super-Eddington accretion for a few years or not¹. Thus, in this Letter, by constructing a X-ray light curve model from fallback accretion, we investigate whether the re-brightening is possible or not. We also constrain the r -process heating rate from the X-ray light curve by applying the semi-analytic model of the mass accretion inhibited by radioactive heating due to the r -process elements developed in Ishizaki et al. (2021).

2. FALLBACK RATE OF THE EJECTA

In this section, we estimate the fallback accretion rate for each of the two types of ejecta: the dynamical ejecta and the post-merger ejecta. The accretion rate of dynamical ejecta, which is released promptly in the dynamical timescale after the merger when neutron stars are destroyed by tidal forces or the impact of the collision, can be modeled based on the numerical simulations. On the other hand, the fallback rate of the post-merger ejecta, which is the subsequent disk wind launched mainly by viscous heating in the accretion disk in the secular timescale, is theoretically unclear, because the numerical relativity simulations of BNS mergers have not been calculated long enough to capture these fallback accretion (see Fujibayashi et al. 2020b, for the best effort). Therefore, for the post-merger ejecta, we estimate the mass accretion rate by constructing a simple model.

The fallback accretion rate decays in proportion to $t^{-5/3}$ after some initial time (Rees 1988; Michel 1988). Thus we write the mass accretion rate as the following simple power-law form,

$$\dot{M}(t) = \frac{2}{3} \frac{M_{\text{tot,fb}}}{t_0} \left(\frac{t}{t_0} \right)^{-5/3}, \quad (2)$$

where t_0 is the initial fallback time when the fallback accretion starts, and $M_{\text{tot,fb}}$ is the total fallback mass of the ejecta, which satisfies

$$M_{\text{tot,fb}} = \int_{t_0}^{\infty} \dot{M}(t) dt. \quad (3)$$

¹ In fact, Margutti et al. (2018) applied the fallback accretion model to the early X-ray emission from the jet afterglow and concluded that the emission from the accretion flow never dominates the X-ray emission from GW170817. However, the parameter they adopted corresponds to the fallback of the dynamical ejecta, which is not appropriate for considering light curves on an annual scale, as we will see later.

In [Ishizaki et al. \(2021\)](#), the accretion rate is calculated based on the profile of the dynamical ejecta derived from the numerical relativity simulation in [Kiuchi et al. \(2017\)](#). The fallback accretion rate of the dynamical ejecta with zero temperature calculated using the same method as in [Ishizaki et al. \(2021\)](#) is fitted by Equation (2) with $M_{\text{tot,fb}} = 4.0 \times 10^{-3} M_{\odot}$ and $t_0 = 4$ msec. We find that the simple power-law model describes well the expected accretion rate after $t > 1$ sec.

As mentioned earlier, the fallback accretion rate for the post-merger ejecta is theoretically unclear. The state-of-the-art study by [Fujibayashi et al. \(2020b\)](#) showed that the post-merger ejecta mass is about $0.05\text{--}0.2 M_{\odot}$ and its velocity is about $v = 0.01c\text{--}0.1c$. [Kawaguchi et al. \(2020\)](#) calculated the long term evolution of the post-merger ejecta using the result of [Fujibayashi et al. \(2020b\)](#) as initial conditions. While the disk outflow is blowing ($t \lesssim 8$ sec), the resultant angle-averaged mass density profile of the ejecta is approximately proportional to the power-law of a radial distance $r^{-2.4}$ for the ejecta with velocity less than about $0.04c$ ([Kawaguchi et al. \(2020\)](#), private communication, see also [Fujibayashi et al. \(2020b\)](#)). Hence, we assume that the mass density distribution of the post-merger ejecta is proportional to $r^{-2.4}$.

In order to estimate the fallback mass for the post-merger ejecta, we calculate the boundary radius between the gravitationally bounded and unbounded parts. At this radius r_{esc} , the kinetic and gravitational energies are balanced. If the ejecta at r_{esc} moves under the energy conservation law, the radius r_{esc} evolves in time according to the following differential equation:

$$\frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{dr_{\text{esc}}}{dt} \right)^2 - \frac{GM}{r_{\text{esc}}} = 0. \quad (4)$$

Integrating this over time and evaluating it at $t = t_0$, we obtain

$$r_{\text{esc}} = \left(\frac{9}{2} GM t_0^2 \right)^{1/3}, \quad (5)$$

where we assume that r_{esc} at t_0 is sufficiently large relative to the initial position. At $t = t_0$, the mass inside $r = r_{\text{esc}}$ is the total mass to fall back $M_{\text{tot,fb}}$. Given the mass density distribution $r^{-2.4}$, the ratio of the fallback mass to the total mass M_{ej} of the post-merger ejecta, f_{fb} , can be calculated as

$$f_{\text{fb}} = \frac{M_{\text{tot,fb}}}{M_{\text{ej}}} = \frac{\int_0^{r_{\text{esc}}} \rho_{\text{esc}} (r/r_{\text{esc}})^{-2.4} 4\pi r^2 dr}{\int_0^{v_{\text{ej}} t_0} \rho_{\text{esc}} (r/r_{\text{esc}})^{-2.4} 4\pi r^2 dr} = \left(\frac{r_{\text{esc}}}{v_{\text{ej}} t_0} \right)^{0.6}, \quad (6)$$

where ρ_{esc} is the mass density at $r = r_{\text{esc}}$ and v_{ej} is the velocity of the post-merger ejecta. The numerical evaluation of the quantities in the post-merger ejecta is as follows:

$$r_{\text{esc}} \sim 3.43 \times 10^9 \text{ cm} \left(\frac{t_0}{5 \text{ sec}} \right)^{2/3} \left(\frac{M}{2.7 M_{\odot}} \right)^{1/3}, \quad (7)$$

$$f_{\text{fb}} \sim 0.72 \left(\frac{t_0}{5 \text{ sec}} \right)^{-0.2} \left(\frac{M}{2.7 M_{\odot}} \right)^{0.2} \left(\frac{v_{\text{ej}}}{0.04c} \right)^{-0.6}, \quad (8)$$

$$M_{\text{tot,fb}} \sim 5.72 \times 10^{-2} M_{\odot} \left(\frac{t_0}{5 \text{ sec}} \right)^{-0.2} \left(\frac{M}{2.7 M_{\odot}} \right)^{0.2} \left(\frac{M_{\text{ej}}}{0.08 M_{\odot}} \right) \left(\frac{v_{\text{ej}}}{0.04c} \right)^{-0.6}. \quad (9)$$

The time t_0 at which the fallback starts in the post-merger ejecta is for example the time when the outflow from the central object stops blowing and the fallback cannot be supported by the ram pressure of the outflow. However, because the theoretical understanding of the fallback accretion of the post-merger ejecta is not enough as mentioned above, the exact value of t_0 is not known. Therefore we treat t_0 as a free parameter in this study. For the mass M_{ej} and velocity v_{ej} of the ejecta, we adopt the values that are consistent with the kilonova/macronova light curve used in [Kawaguchi et al. \(2020\)](#), who properly treat the radiation transfer across the different ejecta components.

3. X-RAY LIGHT CURVE OF THE FALLBACK ACCRETION IN BNS MERGER

The ejecta that falls back onto the central object forms an accretion disk, and emits mainly X-rays as will be discussed later. Here, we assume that the central object collapses to a black hole (BH) with mass $M = 2.7 M_{\odot}$ at least at the time $t \sim 1$ yr. These X-rays are only observable if they are not absorbed by the kilonova/macronova ejecta in

the line of sight (Kisaka et al. 2016; Murase et al. 2018; Margutti et al. 2018). According to Murase et al. (2018), the time required for the dynamical ejecta to become optically thin is estimated as follows:

$$t_{\text{thin}} = \left(\frac{3\hat{K}_X M_{\text{ej}}}{4\pi v_{\text{ej}}^2} \right)^{1/2} \sim 0.65 \text{ yr} \left(\frac{\hat{K}_X}{100 \text{ cm}^2 \text{ g}^{-1}} \right)^{1/2} \left(\frac{M_{\text{ej}}}{0.08 M_\odot} \right)^{1/2} \left(\frac{v_{\text{ej}}}{0.1c} \right)^{-1}, \quad (10)$$

where \hat{K}_X is the typical opacity for a 10 keV X-ray photon. For lower energy X-ray photons, \hat{K}_X is much larger, and the expected bound-free opacity of neutral or singly ionized heavy r -process nuclei is about $\hat{K}_X \sim 10^3 \text{ cm}^2 \text{ g}^{-1}$ (e.g., Metzger 2017; Margutti et al. 2018). In Equation (10), the value is evaluated for the post-merger ejecta, because the dynamical ejecta has less mass and higher velocity than the post-merger ejecta. Here, we adopt $v_{\text{ej}} = 0.1c$ not $0.04c$ to evaluate Equation (10). The geometric configuration of GW170817 is such that the line of sight direction is close to the axial direction (i.e., the viewing angle θ_v is about $\theta_v \sim 25 \text{ deg}$ (Mooley et al. 2018)). According to Kawaguchi et al. (2020), ejecta on the polar direction are about twice as fast as those in the equatorial plane, so that we evaluate them with the parameter $v_{\text{ej}} = 0.1c$. On the other hand, if the viscous parameter $\alpha \sim \mathcal{O}(0.01)$, since the post-merger ejecta is expected to have a large electron fraction (see Fujibayashi et al. 2020b) than that of the dynamical ejecta, heavy r -process nuclei would be less formed and then the value of \hat{K}_X would be smaller (For details, see the mass energy-transfer coefficient data provided by NIST²). Then, after a year, the kilonova/macronova ejecta is expected to become optically thin to X-rays.

The fallback ejecta converts its gravitational energy into radiation by viscous heating in the accretion disk. Initially the mass accretion rate is much larger than the Eddington accretion rate. In this super-Eddington accretion phase, the luminosity is roughly limited by the Eddington luminosity L_{edd} . Many theoretical calculations of the radiative transport in super-Eddington accretion show that the isotropic bolometric luminosity seen by slightly off-axis observers (i.e., for GW170817, $\theta_v \sim 25 \text{ deg}$) is about twice that of L_{edd} (e.g., Ohsuga et al. 2005; Sądowski & Narayan 2016; Ogawa et al. 2017; Abarca et al. 2018; Kitaki et al. 2021). Hence, we estimate the bolometric luminosity in the super-Eddington phase as follows:

$$L_{\text{bol}} = f_{\text{edd}} L_{\text{edd}}, \quad (11)$$

where f_{edd} is a constant and we adopt $f_{\text{edd}} = 2$. As the mass accretion rate becomes small, the radiative transfer effect becomes less effective and the radiative efficiency increases. For the mass accretion rate smaller than the Eddington accretion rate, the bolometric luminosity can be estimated as follows:

$$L_{\text{bol}} = \eta \dot{M} c^2 \quad (12)$$

where η is the radiative efficiency and we adopt $\eta = 0.1$ (e.g., Ohsuga et al. 2005). Combining Equations (11) and (12), we estimate the luminosity with the following simple formula:

$$L_{\text{bol}} = \min \left(\eta \dot{M} c^2, f_{\text{edd}} L_{\text{edd}} \right). \quad (13)$$

Note that the isotropic luminosity already accounts for the beaming effect.

In order to convert the bolometric luminosity L_{bol} to the observed X-ray luminosity L_X in Chandra band (0.3–10 keV), we estimate the conversion factor f_X from theoretical calculations of the emission spectrum of super-Eddington accretion flow. According to the Monte-Carlo simulation based on hydrodynamic simulations of the super-Eddington flow, the spectrum with $10 M_\odot$ BH as a central source has a peak at a few keV, not depending largely on the accretion rate, and has approximately $f_X \sim 0.5$ – 0.8 (e.g., Kawashima et al. 2012; Schnittman et al. 2013; Narayan et al. 2017; Kitaki et al. 2017; Kawanaka & Mineshige 2020). The spectral energy distributions (SEDs) obtained by these simulations show a flat frequency dependence centered at a few keV, corresponding to $\Gamma \sim 2$. Hajela et al. (2019) reported a photon index of $\Gamma = 1.23_{-1.03}^{+1.05}$ for the X-ray emission two years after the merger, which is consistent with the X-ray from super-Eddington flow within the uncertainty. Kitaki et al. (2017) investigated the dependence of the spectrum on the BH mass with 10 – $10^4 M_\odot$, and found that the larger the BH mass, the broader the spectrum centered at a few keV. This implies that the smaller the BH mass, the larger f_X tends to be. Therefore, extrapolating the result of Kitaki et al. (2017) to the case for the BH mass $2.7 M_\odot$, we adopt $f_X = 0.7$. Furthermore, we should also take into

² <https://www.nist.gov/pml/x-ray-mass-attenuation-coefficients>

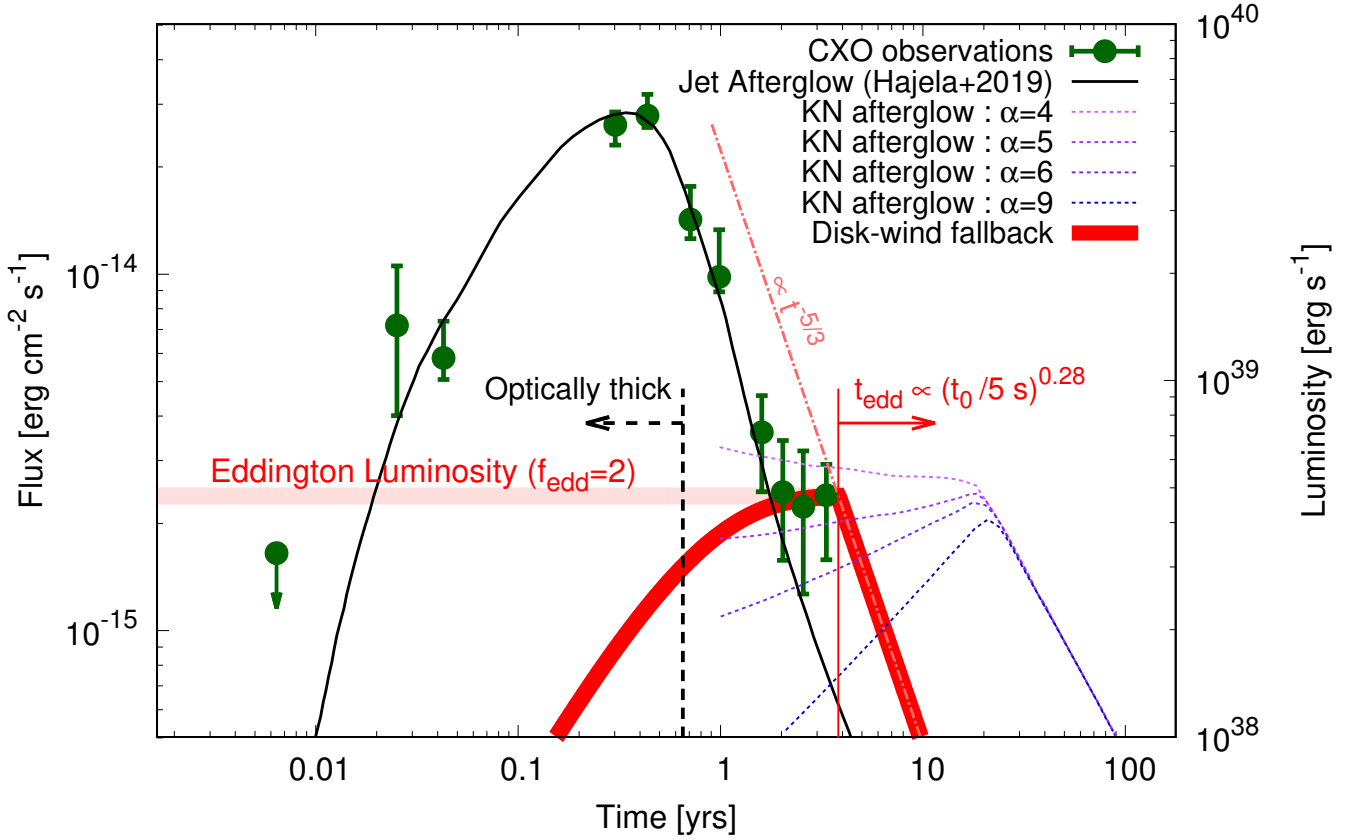


Figure 1. The red thick curve shows the X-ray flux from the fallback accretion of the post-merger ejecta (disk wind), and the light red thick curve represents the X-ray flux before the absorption (approximately the Eddington flux). The thin red dashed-and-dotted line is the power-law of time ($t^{-5/3}$), corresponding to the X-ray emission simply proportional to the mass accretion rate (i.e., ignoring the radiative transfer and the absorption). The black dashed thick line shows the time before which the ejecta is optically thick to the X-rays (see Equation (10)). The parameters used in the calculation of the post-merger ejecta are the total mass of the ejecta, $M_{\text{ej}} = 0.08M_{\odot}$, the velocity of the ejecta, $v_{\text{ej}} = 0.04c$, the mass of the central object, $M = 2.7M_{\odot}$, and the initial fallback time, $t_0 = 5$ sec. The break of the thick curve corresponds to the transition time from the super-Eddington regime to the sub-Eddington regime (see Equation (16)). The green points are the results of the Chandra observations performed by Hajela et al. (2019, 2020a,b); Troja et al. (2020). The thin black curve is the model curve for the jet afterglow by Hajela et al. (2019). The thin dotted curves are the model curves of the X-ray emission from the kilonova/macronova afterglow by Hajela et al. (2019), and the difference in color indicates the difference in density distribution of the fast tail.

account the X-ray absorption by ejecta. Evaluating the amount of absorption using the timescale t_{thin} in Equation (10), the observed X-ray luminosity is written as

$$L_X = f_X \left(1 - e^{-t/t_{\text{thin}}}\right) L_{\text{bol}}. \quad (14)$$

In Figure 1, the X-ray luminosity associated with the fallback accretion of the post-merger ejecta in Equation (13) is shown by the red curve. The dashed line indicates the time before which the kilonova/macronova ejecta is optically thick and the X-rays are absorbed. The X-ray light curve shows a constant luminosity up to a certain time t_{edd} , after which it declines in proportion to $t^{-5/3}$. The time t_{edd} corresponds to the time when Equations (11) and (12) are equal. For the dynamical ejecta, we have

$$t_{\text{edd}} \sim 16 \text{ days } \eta_{0.1}^{3/5} f_{\text{edd},2}^{-3/5} \left(\frac{t_0}{4 \text{ msec}}\right)^{2/5} \left(\frac{M}{2.7 M_{\odot}}\right)^{-3/5} \left(\frac{M_{\text{tot,fb}}}{4 \times 10^{-3} M_{\odot}}\right)^{3/5}. \quad (15)$$

For the post-merger ejecta, we calculate using Equations (2) and (9) as follows:

$$t_{\text{edd}} \sim 1395 \text{ days } \eta_{0.1}^{3/5} f_{\text{edd},2}^{-3/5} \left(\frac{t_0}{5 \text{ sec}} \right)^{0.28} \left(\frac{M}{2.7 M_\odot} \right)^{-0.48} \left(\frac{M_{\text{ej}}}{0.08 M_\odot} \right)^{3/5} \left(\frac{v_{\text{ej}}}{0.04c} \right)^{-0.36}. \quad (16)$$

As can be seen from Equation (15), the X-rays from the fallback of the dynamical ejecta is absorbed by the ejecta on a timescale earlier than a year, and this cannot be the main component explaining the X-ray excess. On the other hand, the X-rays associated with the fallback of the post-merger ejecta can explain the X-ray excess.

4. IMPLICATION TO *R*-PROCESS HEATING

Ishizaki et al. (2021) showed that the mass accretion in fallback is suppressed by the heating due to the decay of *r*-process elements. According to Ishizaki et al. (2021), the mass accretion rate decreases to 10% compared to the usual power-law behavior $t^{-5/3}$ (see Equation (2)) on a timescale called the halting time t_{halt} , which is determined as the solution to the following equation,

$$t_{\text{halt}} = K \left[\frac{(GM)^2}{\dot{q}(t_{\text{halt}})^3} \right]^{1/5}, \quad (17)$$

where $K \sim 6$ is a constant obtained from numerical calculations (see Ishizaki et al. 2021, for details), and $\dot{q}(t)$ is the radioactive heating rate per unit mass. With the typical heating rate $\dot{q} \sim 10^{10} \text{ erg g}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1} (t/1 \text{ day})^{-1.3}$, which is suggested by the nucleosynthesis calculations and the kilonova/macronova modelings (e.g., Wanajo et al. 2014; Tanaka et al. 2017), the halting time can be estimated as

$$t_{\text{halt}} \sim 1.1 \times 10^7 \text{ sec} \left(\frac{M}{2.7 M_\odot} \right)^{1.82} \left(\frac{\dot{q}(t = 1 \text{ day})}{10^{10} \text{ erg g}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}} \right)^{-2.72}. \quad (18)$$

The halting time is sensitive to the uncertainty of the radioactive heating rate. As reported by Barnes et al. (2020), due to the uncertainty of nuclear physics, there is one order magnitude uncertainty of the heating rate at $\mathcal{O}(1)$ day. The corresponding uncertainty of the halting time is a factor of ~ 30 (see Equation (18)). Furthermore, after $\mathcal{O}(10)$ days of the coalescence, the gamma-rays emitted by radioactive decay can escape from the ejecta without ejecta heating. For example, for the heating rate calculated by Wanajo et al. (2014), the effective heating rate drops to about half after $\mathcal{O}(10)$ days. Note that the fraction of gamma-rays in radioactive heating is also affected by the uncertainty of nuclear physics. Combining the effects of the insufficient thermalization and the uncertainty of the heating rate, the uncertainty of the halting time ranges about 10^5 – 10^9 sec (see Ishizaki et al. 2021).

After the halting time t_{halt} , the mass accretion rate decreases more rapidly than $t^{-5/3}$. If the heating rate can be written as a simple power-law form $\dot{q} \propto t^{-p}$, the temporal evolution of the mass accretion rate after the halting time can be written as

$$\frac{\dot{M}}{\dot{M}_0} = \left(\frac{t}{t_{\text{halt}}} \right)^{(3p-15)/10} \exp \left[-\frac{5}{5-3p} \frac{3\sqrt{2}}{\beta_0^3 K^{1/2}} \frac{f_1}{f_0} \left(1 - \left(\frac{t_{\text{halt}}}{t} \right)^{\frac{5-3p}{10}} \right) \right], \quad (19)$$

where \dot{M}_0 is the mass accretion rate at $t = t_{\text{halt}}$ and is about 10% of the value expected from the usual power-law behavior at $t = t_{\text{halt}}$, and $\beta_0 \sim 0.43$ and $f_1/f_0 \sim 0.5$ are the parameters of the semi-analytical model of Ishizaki et al. (2021) calibrated using numerical simulations for a GW170817-like event. According to this formula, at $t \sim 2t_{\text{halt}}$, the mass accretion rate decreases rapidly to about 1% for $p = 1.1$ – 1.5 . Therefore we predict that the X-ray light curve fades very steeply at least in a few decades, regardless of the duration of the super-Eddington phase.

Figure 2 shows the heating rate and the conditions above which the accretion is halted. The red line shows the simple power-law heating $\dot{q} \sim 10^{10} \text{ erg g}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1} (t/1 \text{ day})^{-1.3}$. Since the current X-ray light curve suggests the super-Eddington phase, the halting time has not likely been reached yet. This suggests that the heating rate at a few years is $\dot{q} \lesssim 5 \times 10^5 \text{ erg g}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$, which is about two times below the power-law extrapolation of the heating rate necessary for the kilonova/macronova emission. Note that this factor two is explained by the gamma-ray escape as mentioned above. According to Barnes et al. (2020), when the fission contributes effectively, the heating rate becomes relatively large after $\mathcal{O}(10)$ days, so that our result supports a model in which the fission is not significant.

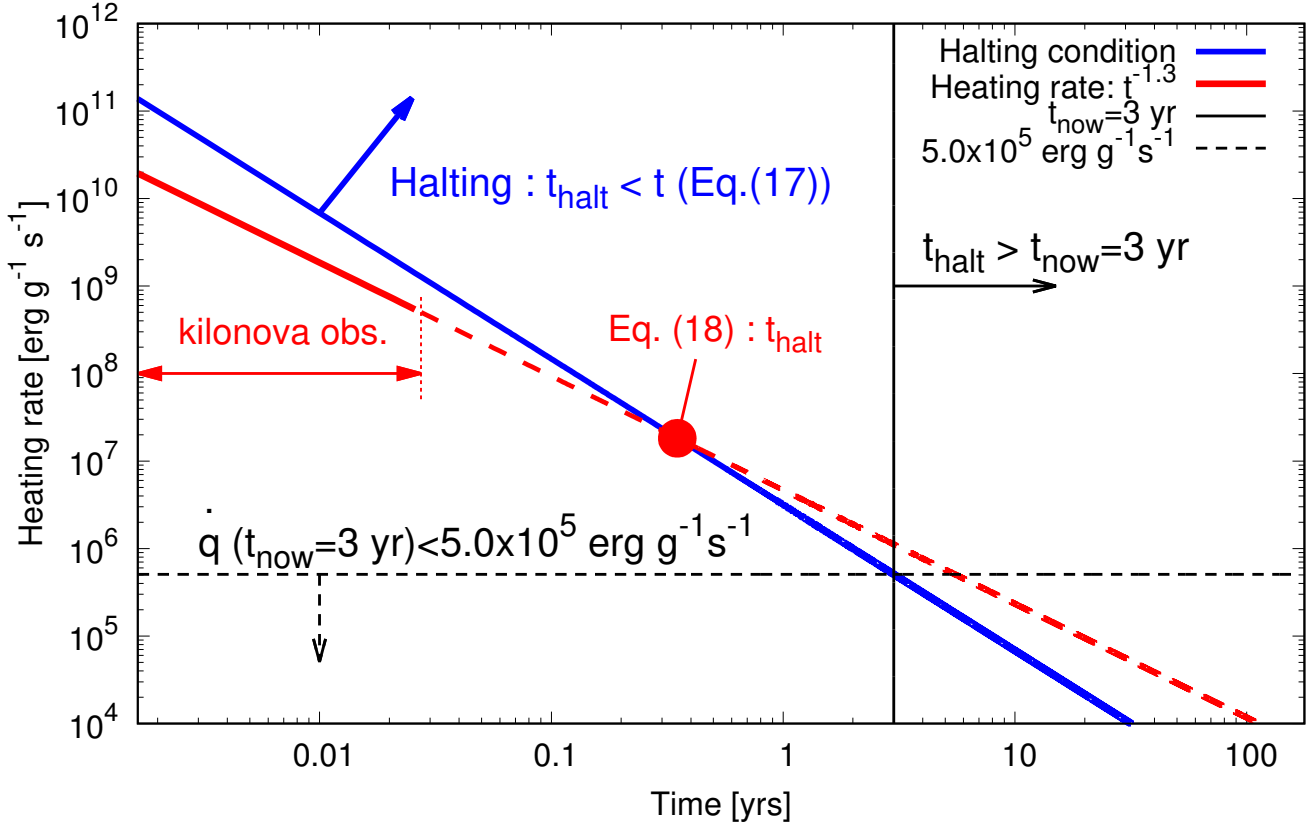


Figure 2. The blue line shows the condition above which halting occurs, and if the heating rate is higher than this line, the mass accretion rate decreases rapidly (i.e., the halting). The red line is a simple power-law approximation of the radioactive heating rate, as suggested by the modeling of the kilonova/macronova of GW170817. If this simple power-law heating continues for $\mathcal{O}(10)$ days, the halting time will be the value shown in Equation (18) (indicated by the red circle). In order for halting not to have occurred, at the current time $t_{\text{now}} = 3$ yr (solid black line), the current heating rate must be less than $5 \times 10^5 \text{ erg g}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$ (dashed black line).

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

We have found that the year-scale X-ray excess in GW170817 can be explained by the X-ray from the fallback accretion of the post-merger ejecta (most likely disk wind). The observed X-ray flux is consistent with that in the super-Eddington regime. In this model, the X-ray flux will remain constant or diminish, but never increase, in contrast to the kilonova/macronova afterglow. In general, although it depends on the temperature distribution of the accretion disk, the emission spectrum from the accretion flow is much softer than the broad non-thermal spectrum such as the kilonova/macronova afterglow (see Narayan et al. (2017); Kitaki et al. (2017); Kawanaka & Mineshige (2020) for accretion flow, and see Hajela et al. (2019); Balasubramanian et al. (2021) for the kilonova/macronova afterglow). This is consistent with the fact that the radio emission of GRB 170817A does not show any re-brightening (Balasubramanian et al. 2021). In addition, by using the fact that the accretion is still in the super-Eddington phase, we have obtained a constraint on the current radioactive heating rate. If the heating continues as suggested by the modeling of kilonova/macronova emission, the mass accretion rate will completely fade due to the halting process shown in Ishizaki et al. (2021), so that the super-Eddington regime can not maintain. This suggests that the thermalization of the gamma-ray due to the radioactive decay of r -process elements becomes insufficient after $\mathcal{O}(10)$ day. Furthermore, our model favors models in which the heating rate is relatively small after $\mathcal{O}(10)$ days. According to Barnes et al.

(2020), in such models, the fission is not significant after $\mathcal{O}(10)$ days. Future X-ray observations will further limit the uncertainty of nuclear physics.

As seen in Equation (16) and Figure 1, if we adopt the observation- and simulation-based value of parameters (i.e., $M_{\text{ej}} = 0.08M_{\odot}$, $v = 0.04c$), the time t_0 when the fallback accretion starts is about 5 sec or more. According to Fujibayashi et al. (2020b), for the BH torus system with the viscosity parameter $\alpha = 0.05$, the duration of the viscously driven wind is about 1 sec. This is characterized by the viscous timescale, which varies inversely with the viscosity parameter α . If $t_0 = 5$ sec corresponds to this viscous timescale, our result implies $\alpha \sim 0.01$. Furthermore, Fujibayashi et al. (2020a) showed that for an accretion disk with $\alpha = 0.04$, the disk material with a mass of about $0.1M_{\odot}$ at the inner edge of the disk accretes to the central object in about 1 sec after coalescence. Since this also corresponds to the viscous timescale, a similar value $\alpha \sim 0.01$ makes the accretion last for 4–5 sec. This is consistent with the activity time of the jet driving the sGRB (e.g., Hamidani et al. 2020).

Assuming that the super-Eddington phase is still ongoing, we can estimate the initial fallback timescale t_0 by using Equation (16), namely

$$t_0 \sim 3.9 \text{ sec } \eta_{0.1}^{-2.14} f_{\text{edd},2}^{2.14} \left(\frac{t_{\text{edd}}}{1300 \text{ day}} \right)^{3.57} \left(\frac{M}{2.7 M_{\odot}} \right)^{1.71} \left(\frac{M_{\text{ej}}}{0.08 M_{\odot}} \right)^{-2.14} \left(\frac{v_{\text{ej}}}{0.04c} \right)^{1.29}. \quad (20)$$

If we adopt phenomenological ejecta parameters $M_{\text{ej}} \sim 0.08M_{\odot}$ and $v_{\text{ej}} \sim 0.1\text{--}0.2c$ which are directly derived from the kilonova/macronova light curve (e.g., Chornock et al. 2017; Cowperthwaite et al. 2017; Kasliwal et al. 2017; Villar et al. 2017) rather than simulations that take ejecta morphology into account, such as in Kawaguchi et al. (2020), the initial fallback time t_0 is required to be greater than about 30 sec. Furthermore, as can be seen from Equation (20), future X-ray observations will give us the opportunity to explore the properties of the accretion system on longer time scales (e.g., $t_0 \sim 100\text{--}1000$ sec in 10 years of observation). It is interesting to note that the initial fallback timescale of $t_0 \sim 30\text{--}10^4$ sec approximately coincides to the typical timescale of extended emission seen in sGRB (Rowlinson et al. 2013; Kisaka et al. 2017; Kagawa et al. 2019). More work is needed to find the connection of the post-merger ejecta in the BNS merger and sGRB.

Note added: As this Letter was being completed, we learned of an independent study by Hajela et al. (2021b). The excess becomes $\sim 3.5\text{--}4.3\sigma$.

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