

THREE STRUCTURE THEOREMS IN SEVERAL COMPLEX VARIABLES

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The purpose of this article is to describe three recent structure theorems in the theory of several complex variables and to point out a few of the many applications of these three theorems. In the first section we discuss a characterization of those currents (defined on an open subset of C^n) which correspond to integration over complex subvarieties. The second section is concerned with the structure of positive, d -closed currents. Finally, in the third section, a characterization of boundaries of complex subvarieties of C^n is discussed. A common thread in the techniques of proof involves "potential theory" for several complex variables.

1. Recognizing currents that correspond to integration over complex subvarieties. Suppose V is a complex subvariety of an open set in C^n with each irreducible component of V of dimension k . It is sometimes useful to consider, instead of the point set V , the linear functional "integration over V ", which we denote by $[V]$. More precisely, for each compactly supported smooth form φ of degree $2k$, define $[V](\varphi)$ by integrating φ over the manifold points of V . A basic fact about complex subvarieties is that in a neighborhood of a singular point the $2k$ -volume of the manifold points is finite (see [4], [16], or [24]). Therefore $[V](\varphi)$ is locally estimated by a constant times the supremum of the coefficients of the form φ . This implies that $[V]$ is a current (of real dimension $2k$ or (real) degree $2n-2k$). In fact, this estimate implies that the current $[V]$ viewed as a differential form with distribution coefficients actually has measures for coefficients.

There are several ways of recognizing which currents are of the form $[V]$ where V is a complex subvariety. The most elementary result of this kind says that if V is a real $2k$ dimensional submanifold of $C^n \cong \mathbf{R}^{2n}$ and at each point of V the tangent space to V , considered as a real linear subspace of $\mathbf{R}^{2n} \cong C^n$, is in fact a complex linear subspace, then V is a complex submanifold. It will shed light on later results to reinterpret this elementary result as follows. Suppose u is a current of degree $2(n-k)$ (dimension $2k$)

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corresponding to integration over a smooth $2k$ dimensional oriented submanifold V of an open set in $\mathbf{R}^{2n} \cong \mathbf{C}^n$. Then V is a complex submanifold if and only if u is of bidegree $n-k, n-k$ (or bidimension k, k); where a current u is said to be of *bidegree* $n-k, n-k$ (*bidimension* k, k) if $u(\varphi) = 0$ for all $\varphi = f dz^I \wedge d\bar{z}^J = f dz_{i_1} \wedge \cdots \wedge dz_{i_p} \wedge d\bar{z}_{j_1} \wedge \cdots \wedge d\bar{z}_{j_q}$ except when $p=q=k$ (where f is a smooth compactly supported function). The proof of the above fact easily reduces to the trivial case where V is a real linear subspace of $\mathbf{R}^{2n} \cong \mathbf{C}^n$.

Another way of recognizing currents corresponding to integration over subvarieties is provided by a special case of a real-variable result of Federer (see [4, 4.1.15 p. 373]). This result implies that if a current of real dimension $2k$ defined on an open subset of \mathbf{C}^n is, closed under exterior differentiation, supported on an irreducible complex subvariety V , and of a special type called locally flat, then the current is a constant multiple of $[V]$ (see King [14, Proposition 3.1.3]). For an example of an application of this result suppose that f is a holomorphic function. Then $\log|f|$ is plurisubharmonic (and hence locally integrable) and in fact pluriharmonic outside $V = \{z: f(z) = 0\}$ (see [12] or [18] for a discussion of plurisubharmonic functions). A *pluriharmonic function* is a function which is annihilated by all of the operators $\partial^2/\partial z_i \partial \bar{z}_j$. Therefore $(i/\pi) \partial \bar{\partial} \log|f|$ is a current supported on V . Using the result mentioned above it is easy to see that:

$(i/\pi) \partial \bar{\partial} \log|f|$ is the current $\sum m_j [V_j]$ where $\{V_j\}$ is the family of irreducible components of V and each $m_j \in \mathbf{Z}^+$ is the multiplicity of f vanishing on V_j .

This formula is of fundamental importance in several complex variables (for example in Nevanlinna theory and residue theory).

Next we examine special properties of currents of the form $[V]$ (where V is a complex subvariety), or more generally of integral linear combinations. Suppose $\{V_j\}$ is a sequence of irreducible subvarieties of dimension k , which satisfy the condition that only a finite number of them intersect any given compact set, and that $\{m_j\}$ is a sequence of integers. Then the sum $\sum m_j [V_j]$ is called a *holomorphic k -chain*. (If $k=n-1$ this notion is equivalent to the classical notion of a divisor.) If, in addition, each m_j is positive then $\sum m_j [V_j]$ is called a *positive holomorphic k -chain*.

Now we list some of the properties of a holomorphic k -chain $u = \sum m_j [V_j]$.

- (1) u is of bidimension k, k (bidegree $n-k, n-k$).
- (2) u is d -closed.

Here d denotes exterior differentiation. This condition can be interpreted geometrically as saying that each V_j has no boundary, and is rigorously deduced from the fact that du must be supported in the singular

points of the V_j (i.e., a set of real dimension $\leq 2k-2$) which is too small to support a $2k-1$ dimensional boundary (see Federer [4] for the details).

(3) u has measure coefficients and the $2k$ -density $\Theta_{2k}(u, z)$ is a positive integer at each point z in the support of u .

Here $\Theta_{2k}(u, z) \equiv \lim_{r \rightarrow 0^+} M_{B(z,r)}(u) / c_{2k} r^{2k}$, where: c_{2k} is the volume of the unit ball in \mathbb{R}^{2k} , $B(z, r)$ is ball about z of radius r , and $M_\Omega(u) \equiv \sup\{|u(\varphi)|: \varphi \text{ is a smooth } 2k \text{ form with compact support in } \Omega \text{ and } \|\varphi\|_\infty \leq 1\}$ denotes the $2k$ -volume or mass of u on Ω . For a proof that the above limit exists see Lelong [18]. For example, if $V = \{z \in \mathbb{C}^2: z_1^2 - z_2^3 = 0\}$ and $u = [V]$ then $\Theta_2(u, z)$, the density of u at z , is equal to zero on $\mathbb{C}^2 - V$, one on the manifold points $V - \{0\}$, and two at $z=0$. The integer $\Theta_{2k}([V], z)$ is, in fact, always the multiplicity of V at z (Draper [3]).

STRUCTURE THEOREM I. *Given a current u on an open subset of \mathbb{C}^n which satisfies (1), (2), and (3) above then u is a holomorphic k -chain.*

See Harvey and Shiffman [11] for the proof. Various results of geometric measure theory are employed in this proof. One of the important steps (assume $k=n-1$) is to construct a meromorphic function f with $(i/\pi) \partial \bar{\partial} \log |f| = u$.

If $u = \sum n_j [V_j]$ is a positive holomorphic k -chain, then in addition to properties (1), (2), and (3) above, the following holds:

(4) u is positive.

By definition this means that for each smooth compactly supported function $\varphi \geq 0$ and for each choice of linear coordinates $z = (z_1, \dots, z_n)$, the quantity $u(\varphi(i/2) dz_1 \wedge d\bar{z}_1 \wedge \dots \wedge (i/2) dz_k \wedge d\bar{z}_k)$ is greater than or equal to zero.

COROLLARY 1.1. *Under the hypothesis of Theorem I if u also satisfies (4) then u is a positive holomorphic k -chain.*

This very important special case of Theorem I was conjectured by Lelong [17] and is due to King [14].

One of the most interesting applications of Theorem I, which is not also a consequence of the Corollary, is a theorem of Lawson and Simons [15]. They prove that every stable current on complex projective n -space is a holomorphic chain. See [11] for other applications. (In particular, note the uniqueness result, Theorem 3.6, for a special class of Plateau problems in \mathbb{C}^n .)

A current u of the form $\sum c_j [V_j]$ with $\{V_j\}$ as above and each c_j a positive real number is called a *positive holomorphic k -chain with real coefficients*. These currents can be characterized as follows (see Harvey and King [8]).

THEOREM 1.2. *Suppose u is a current defined on an open subset of \mathbb{C}^n which is positive, of bidimension k , k, d -closed, and $\Theta_{2k}(u, z)$ is bounded*

below by a positive constant on each compact subset of the support of u . Then u is a positive holomorphic k -chain with real coefficients.

Although this theorem naturally belongs in this section, its proof (entirely unlike that of Theorem I) depends on a fundamental result of Bombieri [1] and [2] which is the basis for structure Theorem II of the next section.

2. Density points of positive, d -closed currents of bidimension k, k . The currents which satisfy: (1) bidimension k, k (bidegree $n-k, n-k$), (2) d -closed, and (4) positive, need not correspond to integration over subvarieties. For example $(i/2) \partial\bar{\partial}|z|^2 = \sum_{j=1}^n (i/2) dz_j \wedge d\bar{z}_j$, $i \partial\bar{\partial} \log(1+|z|^2)$, and $i \partial\bar{\partial} \log|z|^2$ ($n > 1$), are d -closed, positive currents of bidegree 1, 1 (bidimension $n-1, n-1$) which do not correspond to integration over subvarieties. More generally if φ is any plurisubharmonic function then $i \partial\bar{\partial}\varphi$ is a positive current (which is also d -closed and of bidegree 1, 1). In fact this can be taken as the definition of a plurisubharmonic function. Suppose φ is a distribution and

$$i \partial\bar{\partial}\varphi = \sum \frac{\partial^2 \varphi}{\partial z_j \partial \bar{z}_k} i dz_j \wedge d\bar{z}_k$$

is positive. (For 1,1 currents $u = \sum u_{jk} i dz_j \wedge d\bar{z}_k$ is positive if and only if $\sum u_{jk} \lambda_j \bar{\lambda}_k$ is a positive measure for each $\lambda \in \mathbb{C}^n$.) One can prove that φ is locally integrable and that if one defines φ pointwise by $\tilde{\varphi}(z) = \text{ess lim}_{w \rightarrow z} \varphi(w)$, then $\tilde{\varphi}$ is classically plurisubharmonic. See Lelong [18] or Vladimirov [25] for a full discussion.

Locally every d -closed positive current of bidegree 1, 1 arises as in the above discussion. That is, given such a current u on the ball $B(0, r)$ in \mathbb{C}^n there exists a solution φ to $i \partial\bar{\partial}\varphi = u$ (see [11] for example).

The present section is concerned with the points of high concentration, or density, of a positive current u . Interestingly, for positive, d -closed currents u ,

$$\Theta_{2k}(u, z) = \lim_{r \rightarrow 0^+} \frac{M_{B(z,r)}(u)}{c_{2k} r^{2k}}$$

not only exists, but is the limit of a function which is decreasing as r decreases (see Lelong [18, Proposition 10], and Federer [4, Theorems 5.4.3 and 5.4.19]). Consider the example $u = (i/\pi) \partial\bar{\partial} \log|z|$ mentioned above. Then $\Theta_{2n-2}(u, z) = 0$ for $z \in \mathbb{C}^n - \{0\}$ and $\Theta_{2n-2}(u, 0) = 1$.

The next structure theorem is due to Siu [22]. This result was conjectured by Harvey and King [8].

STRUCTURE THEOREM II. *Suppose u is a positive, d -closed current of bidimension k, k (bidegree $n-k, n-k$) on an open subset of C^n . Then for each $c > 0, E_c = \{z: \Theta_{2k}(u, z) \geq c\}$ is a complex subvariety of dimension $\leq k$.*

This structure theorem depends on a fundamental result of Bombieri [1] and [2].

STRUCTURE THEOREM II'. *Suppose φ is a plurisubharmonic function on the ball $B(0, r)$ in C^n . Then for each $c > 0$ the set $I_c = \{z \in B(0, r): e^{-\varphi/c}$ is not integrable in any neighborhood of $z\}$ is a proper subvariety of $B(0, r)$.*

Bombieri [2] also made the following estimates.

THEOREM 2.1. *Suppose φ is given as in the above theorem and let $u = (i/\pi) \partial\bar{\partial}\varphi$ on $B(0, r)$. Then $E_{2nc} \subset I_c \subset E_{\gamma c}$ for each $c > 0$, where γ is a constant depending on n .*

These results are used in [8] to prove Theorem 1.2 of the last section.

REMARK. Skoda [23, Proposition 7.1] has shown that γ can be chosen equal to 2. This result, $I_c \subset E_{2c}$, is sharp since for $\varphi = \log|z_1|^2$ and $u = (i/\pi) \partial\bar{\partial}\varphi = 2[(z_2, \dots, z_n)$ hyperplane], $e^{-\varphi} = |z_1|^{-2}$ is not integrable near the origin while u has density 2 at the origin.

Skoda [23] obtained the following very important generalization of Theorem 2.1 from positive currents of bidimension $n-1, n-1$ to positive currents of general bidimension.

THEOREM 2.2. *Suppose u is a positive, d -closed current of bidimension k, k (bidegree p, p where $p+k=n$) defined near the origin in C^n . Then there exists a plurisubharmonic function φ such that $E_c(u) \subset I_1(\varphi) \subset E_{2c/n}(u)$.*

In other words, $E_c(u)$ is contained in a subvariety $I_1(\varphi)$ which is not much bigger than $E_c(u)$ in the sense that $I_1(\varphi)$ is contained in $E_{2n/c}(u)$.

Siu's proof of Structure Theorem II proceeds from the above results. Let me illustrate one of the ideas of the proof by considering the following special case. Suppose u is a positive d -closed current of bidegree 1, 1 (bidimension 1, 1) defined in a neighborhood of the origin in C^2 and assume $c > 0$ is given. By Theorem II' and Theorem 2.1 above, E_c is contained in a complex curve V near the origin. For the sake of simplicity assume that V is a connected complex manifold. If $E_c = V$ the proof is complete, so assume that $E_c \subsetneq V$, or equivalently that $c' = \inf\{\Theta_2(u, z): z \in V\}$ is $< c$. First consider the case where $c' = 0$. By Theorem 2.1 and the Remark we have $E_c \subset I_{c/4} \subset E_{c/2}$. Choose $z \in V$ with $\Theta_2(u, z) < c/2$. Then $z \notin E_{c/2}$ and hence $z \notin I_{c/4}$. Therefore $V \cap I_{c/4}$ is a complex subvariety of dimension zero which contains E_c . This proves that if $c' = 0$ then E_c is a finite point set (i.e., a zero dimensional subvariety). Finally, assume $c' > 0$ and let $v = u - c'[V]$. Suppose for the moment we have shown that v is positive. Then

$\Theta_2(u, z) \geq c$ implies that $\Theta_2(v, z) = \Theta_2(u, z) - c' \geq c - c'$, that is $E_c(u) \subset E_{c-c'}(v)$. By the argument given above applied to v , $E_{c-c'}(v)$ is a zero dimensional subvariety. Therefore, if $E_c \not\subset V$ then E_c is a zero dimensional subvariety. To complete the proof we must show that $u - c'[V]$ is positive. This is a result of Siu of independent interest which holds in greater generality.

PROPOSITION 2.3. *Suppose u is a d -closed positive current of bidimension k, k , and that V is a pure k dimensional subvariety with irreducible components $\{V_i\}$. Let $c_i = \inf\{\Theta_{2k}(u, z) : z \in V_i\}$. Then $u - \sum c_i[V_i]$ is positive.*

A sketch of the proof is given for $k = n - 1$ (the case needed above). For simplicity assume V is irreducible. The general case is reduced to this case. Define a measure μ by $\mu(\Omega) = M_\Omega(u)$ (μ is the volume measure of u). Let σ denote $2n - 2$ dimensional volume measure induced by V (i.e., $\sigma(\Omega) = M_\Omega([V])$, which is the same as the $2n - 2$ Hausdorff measure of $\Omega \cap V$). Since $\Theta_{2n-2}(u, z) \geq c$ on V , a generalization of the Lebesgue differentiation theorem (Federer [4, 2.10.19(3)]) says that $\mu - c\sigma$ is a positive measure on V (and hence a positive measure). Next solve $i \partial \bar{\partial} \varphi = u - c[V]$. Then φ is plurisubharmonic outside V . One can show that $\frac{1}{4} \Delta \varphi = \mu - c\sigma$ (see [18] or [4] for example). Since $\mu - c\sigma$ is a positive measure φ must be subharmonic. Therefore φ is locally bounded above. Since φ is plurisubharmonic outside V and locally bounded above across V , it follows that φ is plurisubharmonic (see, for example, Harvey [6, part c of the theorem on p. 132]). Therefore $u - c[V] = i \partial \bar{\partial} \varphi$ is positive.

By using both Proposition 2.3 and Structure Theorem II a strengthened version of Theorem 1.2 can be obtained.

THEOREM 2.4. *Suppose u is a positive, d -closed, current of bidegree $(n - k, n - k)$ (bidimension k, k) on an open subset of \mathbb{C}^n . There exist irreducible subvarieties $\{V_j\}$ and positive constants c_j such that $u = \sum c_j[V_j] + v$ where $\sum c_j M_\Omega([V_j]) < \infty$ for each relatively compact Ω and where v is positive with the complex varieties $E_c(v)$ of dimension $\leq k - 1$. The above representation is unique.*

PROOF. Let $c_1 = \sup\{c : \dim_C E_c = k\}$ and let V_1 denote the union of the components of E_{c_1} of dimension k . By definition $E_{c_1} = \bigcap_{c < c_1} E_c$, which implies that $E_{c_1} = E_c$ for some $c < c_1$ (see, for example, Narasimham [19, Theorem 2, p. 70]). This proves that E_{c_1} is of dimension k , or that $V_1 \neq \emptyset$, unless $c_1 = 0$. By Proposition 2.3, $u_1 \equiv u - c_1[V_1]$ is positive. Let $c_2 = \sup\{c : \dim_C E_c(u_1) = k\}$ and let V_2 denote the union of the components of $E_{c_2}(u_1)$ of dimension k . As above, either $c_2 = 0$, in which case the proof is complete, or $u_2 \equiv u - c_1[V_1] - c_2[V_2]$ is positive. Continuing we have $u_N = u - \sum_{j=1}^N c_j[V_j]$ is positive. One can easily show that the coefficients

of the currents u_N (which are measures) converge weakly in measure. Let v denote the limit of the u_N . Then v is positive, and d -closed. Also since

$$M_{\Omega}\left(\sum_1^N c_j[V_j]\right) = M_{\Omega}(u - u_N) = M_{\Omega}(u) - M_{\Omega}(u_N) \leq M_{\Omega}(u) < \infty,$$

$M_{\Omega}(u_N - v) = M_{\Omega}(\sum_{N+1}^{\infty} c_j[V_j])$ converges to zero; that is, u_N converges to v is the mass norm.

Bombieri's original use of a global version of Theorem II' in "algebraic values of meromorphic maps" [1] provides a fascinating application of the results in this section. Siu uses his results in this section to prove an extension theorem for meromorphic maps conjectured by Griffiths [5]. (See Siu [21] for the full strength of the result and the proof.)

THEOREM 2.5. *Suppose A is a subvariety of a complex manifold X of a codimension ≥ 2 , and that Y is a compact Kähler manifold. Every meromorphic map f from $X - A$ to Y extends to a meromorphic map f from X to Y . (Cf. Griffiths [5], Shiffman [20], and Harvey [7].)*

3. Recognizing boundaries of complex varieties. First suppose that a compact oriented, $2k-1$ dimensional smooth submanifold M of C^n is the boundary of a complex k dimensional manifold V . Then $T_z(V) = T_z(M) \oplus [v]$ where $[v]$ is the real line spanned by the normal to M (with respect to V) at z . Therefore, the orthogonal complement in the complex vector space $T_z(V)$ of the complex line spanned by v , is a complex vector space of complex dimension $k-1$ lying in $T_z(M)$. That is

$$\dim_{\mathbb{C}}(T_z(M) \cap iT_z(M)) = k - 1 \quad \text{for all } z \in M.$$

If this condition is satisfied M will be called *maximally complex*. (Analogously with §1 one can show that the current $u = [M]$ is of bidimension $(k, k-1)$ union $(k-1, k)$ if and only if M is maximally complex.)

STRUCTURE THEOREM III. *Let M be a compact, orientable, $(2k-1)$ dimensional real submanifold of C^n of class C^r with $k, r \geq 2$. If M is maximally complex, then M is the boundary (as a current) of a uniquely determined bounded complex subvariety V of $C^n - M$.*

For details about boundary regularity and further results see the announcement [9]. Detailed proofs are to appear in Harvey and Lawson [10].

The analogue of Theorem III for $k=1$ (i.e., M a real curve) is a known result. It is obtained by replacing the vacuous hypothesis that M be a maximally complex real curve by the condition that $\int_M \omega = 0$ for all holomorphic 1-forms on C^n . The question of which one dimensional real curves bound complex curves of one dimension has received a lot of

attention beginning with fundamental results of Wermer [26] dealing with real-analytic curves. (In most of the works the focus is on finding analytic structure in the spectrum of function algebras.)

Theorem III includes, as the special case where M is the graph of a function defined on the boundary of an open set in C^{n-1} , Bochner's infinitesimal version of Hartogs' phenomenon (cf. Hörmander [12, Theorem 2.3.2' and Theorem 2.6.13]).

See Hunt and Wells [13] for some local extension results employing the connection made in [10] between extending manifolds and extending functions.

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