2.4 Points on modular curves parameterize elliptic curves with extra structure

2.4.1 Elliptic curves over the complex numbers

The classical theory of the Weierstass $\wp$-function sets up a bijection between isomorphism classes of elliptic curves over $\mathbf{C}$ and isomorphism classes of one-dimensional complex tori $\mathbf{C}/\Lambda$. Here Λ is a lattice in $\mathbf{C}$, i.e., a free abelian group of rank 2 such that $\mathbf{R}\Lambda = \mathbf{C}$.

Any homomorphism φ of complex tori $\mathbf{C}/\Lambda_1 \to \mathbf{C}/\Lambda_2$ is determined by a $\mathbf{C}$-linear map $T : \mathbf{C} \to \mathbf{C}$ that sends Λ_1 into Λ_2.

Lemma 2.4.1. *Suppose $\varphi : \mathbf{C}/\Lambda_1 \to \mathbf{C}/\Lambda_2$ is nonzero. Then the kernel of φ is isomorphic to $\Lambda_2/T(\Lambda_1)$.*

Proof. Use the snake lemma applied to the morphism from the short exact sequence $0 \to \Lambda_1 \to \mathbf{C} \to E_1 \to 0$ to the short exact sequence $0 \to \Lambda_2 \to \mathbf{C} \to E_2 \to 0$. □

Lemma 2.4.2. *Two complex tori $\mathbf{C}/\Lambda_1$ and $\mathbf{C}/\Lambda_2$ are isomorphic if and only if there is a complex number α such that $\alpha\Lambda_1 = \Lambda_2$.*

Proof. Any $\mathbf{C}$-linear map $\mathbf{C} \to \mathbf{C}$ is multiplication by a scalar $\alpha \in \mathbf{C}$. □

Suppose $\Lambda = \mathbf{Z}\omega_1 + \mathbf{Z}\omega_2$ is a lattice in $\mathbf{C}$, and let $\tau = \omega_1/\omega_2$. Then $\Lambda_\tau = \mathbf{Z}\tau + \mathbf{Z}$ defines an elliptic curve that is isomorphic to the elliptic curve determined by Λ. By replacing ω_1 by $-\omega_1$, if necessary, we may assume that $\tau \in \mathfrak{h}$. Thus each point $\tau \in \mathfrak{h}$ determines an elliptic curve

$$E_\tau = \mathbf{C}/\Lambda_\tau$$

and every elliptic curve is of this form.

Proposition 2.4.3. *Suppose $\tau, \tau' \in \mathfrak{h}$. Then $E_\tau \cong E_{\tau'}$ if and only if there exists $g \in \mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbf{Z})$ such that $\tau = g(\tau')$.*

Proof. Suppose $E_\tau \cong E_{\tau'}$. Then there exists $\lambda \in \mathbf{C}$ such that $\lambda\Lambda_\tau = \Lambda_{\tau'}$, so $\lambda\tau = a\tau' + b$ and $\lambda 1 = c\tau' + d$, where $a, b, c, d \in \mathbf{Z}$. The matrix $g = \left(\begin{smallmatrix} a & b \\ c & d \end{smallmatrix}\right)$ has nonzero integer determinant, and this determinant is positive because $g(\tau') = \tau$ and $\tau, \tau' \in \mathfrak{h}$. Thus $\det(g) = 1$, so $g \in \mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbf{Z})$.

Conversely, suppose $\tau, \tau' \in \mathfrak{h}$ and $g = \left(\begin{smallmatrix} a & b \\ c & d \end{smallmatrix}\right) \in \mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbf{Z})$ is such that $\tau = g(\tau')$. Let $\lambda = c\tau' + d$, so $\lambda\tau = a\tau' + b$. Since $\det(g) = 1$, the scalar λ defines an isomorphism from Λ'_τ to Λ_τ, so $E_\tau \cong E'_\tau$, as claimed. □

Let $E = \mathbf{C}/\Lambda$ be an elliptic curve over $\mathbf{C}$ and N a positive integer. Using Lemma 2.4.1, we see that

$$E[N] := \{x \in E : Nx = 0\} \cong \left(\frac{1}{N}\Lambda\right)/\Lambda \cong (\mathbf{Z}/N\mathbf{Z})^2.$$

If $\Lambda = \Lambda_\tau = \mathbf{Z}\tau + \mathbf{Z}$, this means that τ/N and $1/N$ are a basis for $E[N]$.

Suppose $\tau \in \mathfrak{h}$ and recall that $E_\tau = \mathbf{C}/\Lambda_\tau = \mathbf{C}/(\mathbf{Z}\tau + \mathbf{Z})$. To τ, we associate three "level N structures". First, let C_τ be the subgroup of E_τ generated by $1/N$. Second, let P_τ be the point of order N in E_τ defined by $1/N \in \Lambda_\tau$. Third, let Q_τ be the point of order N in E_τ defined by τ/N, and consider the basis (P_τ, Q_τ) for $E[N]$.

Let E be an elliptic curve over $\mathbf{C}$. Theorem 2.4.5 below asserts that the non-cuspidal points on $X_0(N)$ correspond to isomorphism classes of pairs (E, C) where C is a cyclic subgroup of E of order N, and we consider two such pairs (E, C), (E', C') isomorphic if there is an isomorphism $\varphi : E \to E'$ such that $\varphi(C) = C'$. Likewise, the non-cuspidal points on $X_1(N)$ will correspond to pairs (E, P) where P is a point on E of exact order N, and we call two such pairs (E, P) and (E', P') isomorphic if there is an isomorphism $\varphi : E \to E'$ such that $\varphi(P) = P'$. Finally, the non-cuspidal points on $X(N)$ will correspond to pairs (E, P, Q) where P, Q are a basis for $E[N]$ and two pairs (E, P, Q) and (E, P', Q') are isomorphic precisely when there is an isomorphism $\varphi : E \to E'$ such that $\varphi(P) = P'$ and $\varphi(Q) = Q'$.

Proposition 2.4.4. *Let E be an elliptic curve over $\mathbf{C}$. If C is a cyclic subgroup of E of order N, then there exists $\tau \in \mathfrak{h}$ such that (E, C) is isomorphic to (E_τ, C_τ). If P is a point on E of order N, then there exists $\tau \in \mathbf{C}$ such that (E, P) is isomorphic to (E_τ, P_τ). If P, Q is a basis for $E[N]$ then there exists $\tau \in \mathbf{C}$ such that (E, P, Q) is isomorphic to (E_τ, P_τ, Q_τ).*

Proof. We prove only the first statement, since the other proofs are similar. Choose a basis ω_1, ω_2 for a lattice in $\mathbf{C}$ that defines E in such that a way that $E = \mathbf{C}/(\mathbf{Z}\omega_1 + \mathbf{Z}\omega_2)$ and C is the subgroup generated by ω_2/N. Let $\tau = \omega_1/\omega_2$, and if $\mathrm{Im}(\tau) < 0$ replaced ω_1 by $-\omega_1$ so that $\tau \in \mathfrak{h}$. Then multiplication by $1/\omega_2$ defines an isomorphism from E to $E_\tau = \mathbf{C}/(\mathbf{Z}\tau + \mathbf{Z})$ that carries C onto the subgroup C_τ generated by $1/N$. □

The following theorem asserts that the noncuspidal points on the curves $X_0(N)$, $X_1(N)$, and $X(N)$ parameterize elliptic curve with level N structure, as claimed above.

Theorem 2.4.5. *Suppose $\tau, \tau' \in \mathfrak{h}$. Then (E_τ, C_τ) is isomorphic $(E_{\tau'}, C_{\tau'})$ if and only if there exists $g \in \Gamma_0(N)$ such that $g(\tau) = \tau'$. Also, (E_τ, P_τ) is isomorphic $(E_{\tau'}, P_{\tau'})$ if and only if there exists $g \in \Gamma_1(N)$ such that $g(\tau) = \tau'$. Finally, (E_τ, P_τ, Q_τ) is isomorphic $(E_{\tau'}, P_{\tau'}, Q_{\tau'})$ if and only if there exists $g \in \Gamma(N)$ such that $g(\tau) = \tau'$.*

Proof. We prove only the first assertion, since the others are proved in a similar way. Suppose (E_τ, C_τ) is isomorphic to (E'_τ, C'_τ). Then there is $\lambda \in \mathbf{C}$ such that $\lambda\Lambda_\tau = \Lambda_{\tau'}$. Thus $\lambda\tau = a\tau' + b$ and $\lambda 1 = c\tau' + d$ with $g = \left(\begin{smallmatrix} a & b \\ c & d \end{smallmatrix}\right) \in \mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbf{Z})$ (as we saw in the proof of Proposition 2.4.3). Dividing the second equation by N we get $\lambda\frac{1}{N} = \frac{c}{N}\tau' + \frac{d}{N}$, which lies in $\Lambda_{\tau'} =$

$\mathbf{Z}\tau' + \frac{1}{N}\mathbf{Z}$, by hypothesis. Thus $c \equiv 0 \pmod{N}$, so $g \in \Gamma_0(N)$, as claimed. For the converse, note that if $N \mid c$, then $\frac{c}{N}\tau' + \frac{d}{N} \in \Lambda_{\tau'}$. □

2.5 Genus formulas

Let N be a positive integer. The aim of this section is to describe the idea behind computing the genus of $X_0(N)$, $X_1(N)$, and $X(N)$, and to give (without proof) formulas for these genera.

The groups $\Gamma_0(1)$, $\Gamma_1(1)$, and $\Gamma(1)$ are all equal to $\mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbf{Z})$, so $X_0(1) = X_1(1) = X(1) = \mathbf{P}^1$. Since $\mathbf{P}^1$ has genus 0, we know the genus for each of these three cases. For general N we obtain the genus by determining the ramification of the corresponding cover of $\mathbf{P}^1$ and applying the Hurwitz formula, which we assume the reader is familiar with, but which we now recall.

Suppose $f : X \to Y$ is a surjective morphism of Riemann surfaces of degree d. For each point $x \in X$, let e_x be the ramification exponent at x, so $e_x = 1$ precisely when f is unramified at x, which is the case for all but finitely many x. Let $g(X)$ and $g(Y)$ denote the genera of X and Y, respectively.

Theorem 2.5.1 (Hurwitz Formula). *Let $f : X \to Y$ be as above. Then*

$$2g(X) - 2 = d(2g(Y) - 2) + \sum_{x \in X} (e_x - 1).$$

If $X \to Y$ is Galois, so the e_x in the fiber over each fixed $y \in Y$ are all equal, then this formula becomes

$$2g(X) - 2 = d\left(2g(Y) - 2 + \sum_{y \in Y}\left(1 - \frac{1}{e_y}\right)\right).$$

Let X be one of the modular curves $X_0(N)$, $X_1(N)$, or $X(N)$ corresponding to a congruence subgroup Γ, and let $Y = X(1) = \mathbf{P}^1$. There is a natural map $f : X \to Y$ got by sending the equivalence class of τ modulo the congruence subgroup Γ to the equivalence class of τ modulo $\mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbf{Z})$. This is "the" map $X \to \mathbf{P}^1$ that we mean everywhere below.

Because $\mathrm{PSL}_2(\mathbf{Z})$ acts faithfully on $\mathfrak{h}$, the degree of f is the index in $\mathrm{PSL}_2(\mathbf{Z})$ of the image of Γ in $\mathrm{PSL}_2(\mathbf{Z})$ (see Exercise XXX). Using that the map $\mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbf{Z}) \to \mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbf{Z}/N\mathbf{Z})$ is surjective, we can compute these indexes (Exercise XXX), and obtain the following lemma:

Proposition 2.5.2. *Suppose for simplicity that $N > 2$. The degree of the map $X_0(N) \to \mathbf{P}^1$ is $N\prod_{p\mid N}(1+1/p)$. The degree of the map $X_1(N) \to \mathbf{P}^1$ is $\frac{1}{2}N^2\prod_{p\mid N}(1-1/p^2)$. The the degree of the map from $X(N) \to \mathbf{P}^1$ is $\frac{1}{2}N^3\prod_{p\mid N}(1-p^2)$.*

Proof. This follows from the discussion above, Exercise XXX about indexes of congruence subgroups in $\mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbf{Z})$, and the observation that for $N > 2$ the groups $\Gamma(N)$ and $\Gamma_1(N)$ do not contain -1 and the group $\Gamma_0(N)$ does. □

Proposition 2.5.3. *Let X be $X_0(N)$, $X_1(N)$ or $X(N)$. Then the map $X \to \mathbf{P}^1$ is ramified at most over ∞ and the points corresponding to the two elliptic curves with extra automorphisms (i.e., the two elliptic curves with j-invariants 0 and 1728).*

Proof. Since we have a tower $X(N) \to X_1(N) \to X_0(N) \to \mathbf{P}^1$, it suffices to prove the assertion for $X = X(N)$. Since we do not claim that there is no ramification over ∞, we may restrict to $Y(N)$. By Theorem 2.4.5, the points on $Y(N)$ correspond to isomorphism classes of triples (E, P, Q), where E is an elliptic curve over $\mathbf{C}$ and P, Q are a basis for $E[N]$. The map from $Y(N)$ to $\mathbf{P}^1$ sends the isomorphism class of (E, P, Q) to the isomorphism class of E. The equivalence class of (E, P, Q) also contains $(E, -P, -Q)$, since $-1 : E \to E$ is an isomorphism. The only way the fiber over E can have cardinality smaller than the degree is if there is an extra equivalence $(E, P, Q) \to (E, \varphi(P), \varphi(Q))$ with φ an automorphism of E not equal to ± 1. The theory of CM elliptic curves, shows that there are only two isomorphism classes of elliptic curves E with automorphisms other than -1, and these are the ones with j-invariant 0 and 1728. This proves the proposition. □

Theorem 2.5.4. *For $N > 4$, the genus of $X_0(N)$ is*

$$g(X_0(N)) = 1 + N\prod_{p\mid N}(1+1/p) - \frac{1}{2}\sigma(N) - \frac{1}{4}\mu_{1728}(N) - \frac{1}{3}\mu_0(N).$$

Here $\sigma(N) = \sum_{d\mid n}\varphi(d)\varphi(N/d)$, $\mu_{1728}(N) = 0$ if $4 \mid N$ and $\mu_{1728}(N) = \prod_{p\mid N}(1+(-4/p))$ otherwise (where $(-4/p)$ is the quadratic reciprocity symbol). Also, $\mu_0(N) = 0$ if $2 \mid N$ or $9 \mid N$, and $\mu_0(N) = \prod_{p\mid N}(1+(-3/p))$ otherwise.

For $N > 4$, the genus of $X_1(N)$ is

$$1 + \frac{1}{2}N^2\prod_{p\mid N}(1-1/p^2) - \frac{1}{2}\sigma^*(N),$$

where $\sigma^*(N) = \frac{1}{2}\sum_{d\mid n}\varphi(d)\varphi(N/d)$. For example, when $N \geq 5$ is prime, the genus of $X_1(N)$ is $(N-5)(N-7)/24$.

For $N > 1$, the genus of $X(N)$ is

$$g(X(N)) = 1 + \frac{N^2(N-6)}{24}\prod_{p\mid N}(1-p^2).$$

Proof. We only prove the theorem for $X(N)$ here (a proof for $X_0(N)$ is Section 1.6 of [3] and a proof for $X_1(N)$ is in Section 9.1 of [1]).

Since $X(N)$ is a Galois covering of $X(1) = \mathbf{P}^1$, the ramification indexes e_x are all the same for x over a fixed point $y \in \mathbf{P}^1$; we denote this common index by e_y. The fiber over the curve with j-invariant 0 has size one-third of the degree, since the automorphism group of the elliptic curve with j-invariant 0 has order 6, so $e_0 = 3$. Similarly, the fiber over the curve with j-invariant 1728 has size half the degree, since the automorphism group of the elliptic curve with j-invariant 1728 is cyclic of order 4, so $e_{1728} = 2$.

To compute the ramification degree e_∞ we use the orbit stabilizer theorem. The fiber of $X(N) \to X(1)$ over ∞ is exactly the set of $\Gamma(N)$ equivalence classes of cusps, which is $\Gamma(N)\infty, x_2\Gamma(N)\infty, \ldots, x_r\Gamma(N)\infty$, where $x_1 = 1, x_2, \ldots, x_r$ are left coset representatives for $\Gamma(N)$ in $\mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbf{Z})$. By the orbit-stabilizer theorem, the number of cusps equals $\#(\Gamma(1)/\Gamma(N))/\#S$, where S is the stabilizer of $\Gamma(N)\infty$ in $\Gamma(1)/\Gamma(N) \cong \mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbf{Z}/N\mathbf{Z})$. Thus S is the subgroup $\{\pm \left(\begin{smallmatrix} 1 & n \\ 0 & 1 \end{smallmatrix}\right) : 0 \leq n < N - 1\}$, which has order $2N$. Since the degree of $X(N) \to X(1)$ equals $\#(\Gamma(1)/\Gamma(N))/2$, the number of cusps is the degree divided by N. Thus $e_\infty = N$.

The Hurwitz formula for $X(N) \to X(1)$ with $e_0 = 3$, $e_{1728} = 2$, and $e_\infty = N$, is

$$2g(X(N)) - 2 = d\left(0 - 2 + \left(1 - \frac{1}{3} + 1 - \frac{1}{2} + 1 - \frac{1}{N}\right)\right),$$

where d is the degree of $X(N) \to X(1)$. Solving for $g(X(N))$ we obtain

$$2g(X) - 2 = d\left(1 - \frac{5}{6} - \frac{1}{N}\right) = d\left(\frac{N-6}{6N}\right),$$

so

$$g(X) = 1 + \frac{d}{2}\left(\frac{N-6}{6N}\right) = \frac{d}{12N}(N-6) + 1.$$

Substituting the formula for d from Proposition 2.5.2 yields the claimed formula.

□

References

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