A. Frank, A. Schrijver

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Edge-Disjoint Circuits in Graphs on the Torus

A. Frank  
Department of Computer Science,  
Eötvös Loránd University,  
Múzeum krt. 6-8,  
1088 Budapest,  
Hungary

A. Schrijver  
Centrum voor Wiskunde en Informatica,  
Kruislaan 413,  
1098 SJ Amsterdam,  
The Netherlands

Abstract. We give necessary and sufficient conditions for a given graph embedded on the torus, to contain edge-disjoint cycles of prescribed homotopies (under the assumption of a 'parity' condition).

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1. Introduction

We prove a theorem on edge-disjoint cycles of prescribed homotopies in an undirected graph embedded on the torus. It forms a sharpening (integer version) of a theorem proved in [1] for general compact orientable surfaces.

Let $G = (V, E)$ be an undirected graph embedded on the torus $T$, and let $C_1, \ldots, C_k$ be closed curves on $T$. We are interested in conditions under which:

$$\text{there exist pairwise edge-disjoint cycles } \tilde{C}_1, \ldots, \tilde{C}_k \text{ in } G \text{ so that } \tilde{C}_i \text{ is freely homotopic to } C_i, \text{ for } i = 1, \ldots, k.$$ (1)

Here by embedding we mean: without intersecting edges. We will identify an embedded graph with its image in $T$. A closed curve on $T$ is a continuous function $C : S_1 \rightarrow T$, where $S_1$ is the unit circle in the complex plane.

A cycle in $G$ is a sequence $(v_0, e_1, v_1, \ldots, e_d, v_d)$ so that $e_i$ is an edge connecting $v_{i-1}$ and $v_i$ ($i = 1, \ldots, d$), with $v_0 = v_d$. In a natural way we can identify such a cycle in $G$ with a closed curve on $T$. We call a collection of cycles pairwise edge-disjoint if no two cycles have an edge in common, and moreover, no cycle traverses the same edge more than once.

Two closed curves $C$ and $\tilde{C}$ on $T$ are called freely homotopic, in notation: $C \sim \tilde{C}$, if there exists a continuous function $\Phi : S_1 \times [0, 1] \rightarrow T$ so that $\Phi(z, 0) = C(z)$ and $\Phi(z, 1) = \tilde{C}(z)$ for each $z \in S_1$. (So there is no point fixed.)

A necessary for (1) is the following cut condition: for each closed curve $D$ on $T$, intersecting $G$ only a finite number of times and not intersecting $V$, one has:

$$\text{cr}(G, D) \geq \sum_{i=1}^{k} \min \cr(C_i, D).$$ (2)

Here we use the notation (for closed curves $C$ and $D$):

$$\text{cr}(G, D) := |\{z \in S_1 \mid D(z) \in G\}|,$$

$$\text{cr}(C, D) := |\{(y, z) \in S_1 \times S_1 \mid C(y) = D(z)\}|,$$

$$\min \cr(C_i, D) := \min \{\text{cr}(\tilde{C}, \tilde{D}) \mid \tilde{C} \sim C, \tilde{D} \sim D\}.$$
Condition (2) is not sufficient for (1), as is shown by the following example, where the wriggled lines indicate closed curves $C_1$ and $C_2$ and where the torus arises by identifying the two segments $\alpha$ and identifying the two segments $\beta$:

![Figure 1](image1)

A second example arises by taking for $G$ a graph consisting of two vertices, each attached with a loop (pairwise disjoint and nonnullhomotopic), and for $C_1$ a closed curve going twice around one of the loops:

![Figure 2](image2)
We show that (2) is sufficient for (1) if each $C_i$ is simple (i.e., is a one-to-one function), and the following parity condition holds:

(parity condition) for each closed curve $D$ on $T$, not intersecting vertices of $G$, the number of crossings of $D$ with edges of $G$, plus the number of crossings with $C_1, \ldots, C_k$, is an even number.

One easily checks that the parity condition implies that each vertex of $G$ has even degree.

**Theorem.** Let $G = (V, E)$ be a graph embedded on the torus $T$, and let $C_1, \ldots, C_k$ be simple closed curves on $T$, such that the parity condition holds. Then there exist pairwise edge-disjoint closed cycles $C_1, \ldots, C_k$ in $G$ so that $C_i \sim C_i$ ($i = 1, \ldots, k$), if and only if the cut condition holds.

(We do not require the $C_i$ to be simple – they may have self-intersections at vertices of $G$.)

Figures 1 and 2 show that we cannot delete the parity or the simple-ness condition. For general compact, compact orientable surfaces the cut condition only implies the existence of a ‘fractional’ solution to (1).

2. Closed curves on the torus and their crossings

Before proving the theorem (in Section 3), we show an inequality for the function $\text{mincr}(C, D)$ defined in (3). This inequality is essential in our proof, and does not hold for compact orientable surfaces other than the sphere and the torus.

Let $D_1, D_2 : S_1 \to T$ be closed curves on $T$ with $D_1(1) = D_2(1)$. Let $D_1 \cdot D_2$ denote the concatenation of $D_1$ and $D_2$. That is, $D_1 \cdot D_2 : S_1 \to T$ is defined by: $(D_1 \cdot D_2)(z) := D_1(z^2)$ if $\text{Im} z \geq 0$ and $(D_1 \cdot D_2)(z) := D_2(z^2)$ if $\text{Im} z < 0$. Then:

**Proposition.** $\text{mincr}(C, D_1 \cdot D_2) \leq \text{mincr}(C, D_1) + \text{mincr}(C, D_2)$.

**Proof.** Identify the torus $T$ with the product $S_1 \times S_1$ of two copies of the unit circle $S_1$ in the complex plane $\mathbb{C}$. For $m, n \in \mathbb{Z}$ we define the closed curve $C_{m,n} : S_1 \to S_1 \times S_1$ by:

$$C_{m,n}(z) := (e^{2\pi i m}, e^{2\pi i n}) \quad \text{for } z \in S_1.$$  

The closed curves $C_{m,n}$ form a system of representatives for the free homotopy classes of closed curves on $T$. Now for $m, n, m', n' \in \mathbb{Z}$:

$$\text{mincr}(C_{m,n}, C_{m',n'}) = |\det \begin{pmatrix} m & n \\ m' & n' \end{pmatrix}| = |mn' - m'n|.$$  

To see the Proposition, we may assume that $D_1 = C_{m',n'}$ and $D_2 = C_{m'',n''}$ for some $m', n', m'', n'' \in \mathbb{Z}$. Then $D_1 \cdot D_2 \sim C_{m'+m'',n'+n''}$. Hence choosing $m, n$ so that $C \sim C_{m,n}$:

$$\text{mincr}(C, D_1 \cdot D_2) = |m(n' + n'') - (m' + m'')n|$$

$$\leq |mn' - m'n| + |mn'' - m'n| = \text{mincr}(C, D_1) + \text{mincr}(C, D_2).$$


3. Proof of the theorem

The cut condition clearly is necessary. To see sufficiency, suppose the cut condition is satisfied, but cycles as required do not exist. We assume that we have a counterexample $G = (V, E)$ with

$$(8) \quad \sum_{v \in V} 2^{\deg(v)}$$

as small as possible. Here $\deg(v)$ denotes the degree of vertex $v$.

We first show:

$$(9) \quad \text{each vertex of } G \text{ has degree at most 4.}$$

Suppose to the contrary that vertex $v$ has degree $2d \geq 6$:

![Figure 3](image1)

Replace it by:

![Figure 4](image2)

where there are $d - 2$ parallel edges connecting $v'$ and $v''$. For the new graph $G'$ again the cut condition holds (as we may assume that the cut $D$ does not intersect the 'new' edges in Figure 4, since we can make a detour through the original edges without increasing
cr(\(G', D\)). However, for \(G'\) the sum (8) has decreased (since \(2^{2d-2} + 2^{2d-2} + 2^4 < 2^{2d}\)). So in \(G'\) cycles as required exist. This directly gives cycles as required in the original graph \(G\), contradicting our assumption. This shows (9).

We next show that in each vertex \(v\) of \(G\) of degree 4 the following holds. Consider a neighbourhood \(N \simeq C\) of \(v\) not containing any other vertex than \(v\):

![Figure 5](image)

Here \(F_1, \ldots, F_4\) stand for the intersections of faces with \(N\). Then there exist a closed curve \(D : S_1 \rightarrow T \setminus V\) such that:

\[
\begin{align*}
(i) & \quad D \text{ contains a subcurve contained in } N \text{ connecting } F_1 \text{ and } F_3; \\
(ii) & \quad cr(G, D) = \sum_{i=1}^{k} \text{ mincr}(C_i, D).
\end{align*}
\]

(10)

Suppose such a curve does not exist. Replace \(N\) as in Figure 5 by:

![Figure 6](image)

Since any packing of cycles as required in the new graph \(G'\) would yield a required packing in the original graph \(G\), and since for \(G'\) the sum (8) has decreased, the cut condition does not hold for \(G'\). That is,
\[(11) \quad \text{cr}(G', D) < \sum_{i=1}^{k} \text{mincr}(C_i, D)\]

for some closed curve \(D\) not intersecting any vertex of \(G'\). We may assume that \(D\) does not traverse \(v\). Let \(p\) be the number of (pairwise disjoint) subcurves of \(D\) contained in \(N\) and connecting \(F_1\) and \(F_3\) (in one direction or the other). As \(\text{cr}(G', D) < \text{cr}(G, D)\) we know \(p \geq 1\). Choose \(D\) so that \(p\) is as small as possible. We show \(p = 1\). Assume \(p \geq 2\).

Let \(P\) be any curve in \(N\) from \(F_1\) to \(F_3\) not intersecting \(v, v'\) or \(v''\), and only crossing \(e_1\) and \(e_2\). Then we may assume that:

(i) \(D = P \cdot D_1 \cdot P \cdot D_2\) where \(D_1\) and \(D_2\) are paths from \(F_3\) to \(F_1\),

or (ii) \(D = P \cdot D_1 \cdot P^{-1} \cdot D_2\) where \(D_1\) is a path from \(F_3\) to \(F_3\), and \(D_2\) is a path from \(F_1\) to \(F_1\).

\((P^{-1}\) denotes the path reverse to \(P\). If (12)(i) holds, then (using the Proposition):

\[(12) \quad \text{cr}(G', D) = \text{cr}(G', P \cdot D_1) + \text{cr}(G', P \cdot D_2)\]

\[(13) \quad \geq \sum_{i=1}^{k} \text{mincr}(C_i, P \cdot D_1) + \sum_{i=1}^{k} \text{mincr}(C_i, P \cdot D_2) \geq \sum_{i=1}^{k} \text{mincr}(C_i, D),\]

since \(P \cdot D_1\) and \(P \cdot D_2\) are closed curves containing fewer than \(p\) subcurves in \(N\) connecting \(F_1\) and \(F_3\).

If (12)(ii) holds (again using the Proposition):

\[(14) \quad \text{cr}(G', D) \geq \text{cr}(G', D_1) + \text{cr}(G', D_2)\]

\[\geq \sum_{i=1}^{k} \text{mincr}(C_i, P \cdot D_1 \cdot P^{-1}) + \sum_{i=1}^{k} \text{mincr}(C_i, D_2) \geq \sum_{i=1}^{k} \text{mincr}(C_i, D),\]

since \(D_1\) and \(D_2\) are closed curves containing fewer than \(p\) subcurves in \(N\) connecting \(F_1\) and \(F_3\).

Both (13) and (14) contradict (11). So \(p = 1\). Hence \(\text{cr}(G', D) = \text{cr}(G, D) - 2\). Therefore, by (11), \(\text{cr}(G, D) < 2 + \sum_{i=1}^{k} \text{mincr}(C_i, D)\). It follows by the parity condition that \(D\) satisfies (10).

Now by the ‘homotopic circulation theorem’ in [1], the cut condition implies the existence of a ‘fractional’ packing of cycles. That is, there exist cycles

\[(15) \quad C_{1,1}, \ldots, C_{1,t_1}, \ldots, C_{2,1}, \ldots, C_{2,t_2}, \ldots, C_{k,1}, \ldots, C_{k,t_k}\]

in \(G\) and rational numbers

\[(16) \quad \lambda_{1,1}, \ldots, \lambda_{1,t_1}, \lambda_{2,1}, \ldots, \lambda_{2,t_2}, \ldots, \lambda_{k,1}, \ldots, \lambda_{k,t_k} \geq 0\]

satisfying:

(i) \(C_{i,j} \sim C_i\) \quad (i = 1, \ldots, k; j = 1, \ldots, t_i),

(ii) \(\sum_{j=1}^{t_i} \lambda_{i,j} = 1\) \quad (i = 1, \ldots, k),

(iii) \(\sum_{i=1}^{k} \sum_{j=1}^{t_i} \lambda_{i,j} e^{\nu}_{\gamma} (e) \leq 1\) \quad (e \in E).
Here $\chi^C(e)$ denotes the number of times cycle $C$ traverses edge $e$.

We may assume that no $C_{i,j}$ after arriving in a vertex $v$ via an edge $e$, it immediately returns over the same edge $e$ backwards.

We show:

\begin{equation}
\text{for each } i, j, \text{ if } C_{i,j} \text{ arrives in a vertex } v \text{ via edge } e, \text{ say, then next leaves } v \text{ via the edge opposite to } e.
\end{equation}

(If $e_1, e_2, e_3, e_4$ are the edges incident to $v$ in cyclic order, then $e_1$ and $e_3$ are called opposite; similarly for $e_2$ and $e_4$.) To see this, suppose that cycle $C_{1,1}$ say, contains $\ldots, e_1, v, e_2, \ldots$ (where $v, e_1, e_2, e_3, e_4$ are as in Figure 5). Let $D : S_1 \rightarrow T \setminus V$ be a closed curve satisfying (10). We may assume that $D$ crosses $e_1$ and $e_2$ successively.

However, since $C_{1,1}$ contains $\ldots, e_1, v, e_2, \ldots$, we know

\begin{equation}
\text{cr}(C_{1,1}, D) > \text{mincr}(C_{1,1}, D).
\end{equation}

This gives the contradiction

\begin{equation}
\text{cr}(G, D) \geq \sum_{i=1}^{k} \sum_{j=1}^{t_i} \lambda_{i,j} \text{cr}(C_{i,j}, D)
\end{equation}

\begin{equation}
> \sum_{i=1}^{k} \sum_{j=1}^{t_i} \lambda_{i,j} \text{mincr}(C_{i,j}, D) = \sum_{i=1}^{k} \text{mincr}(C_i, D).
\end{equation}

This proves (18). It follows from (18) that any two of the $C_{1,1}, \ldots, C_{k,t_k}$ are pairwise edge-disjoint or are the same (up to cyclic permutation and reversion). (No $C_{i,j}$ makes more than one orbit of a cycle, as it is homotopic to a simple closed curve $C_i$.) This implies that we can select from $C_{1,1}, \ldots, C_{k,t_k}$ pairwise edge-disjoint cycles as required.

Reference


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