

# On recent progress in distance-regular graphs

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(Based on joint work with Hongjun Ge, Chenhui Lv, Qianqian Yang, Alexander Gavrilyuk, Mamoon Abdullah, Brhane Gebremichel, Jae-Ho Lee, Shuangdong Li, Yun-Han Li, Xiaoye Liang and Ying Ying Tan. Some of it is still ongoing. )

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# Outline

- 1 Distance-regular graphs
  - Definitions
  - Examples
  - DRG with classical parameters
- 2 DRG with classical parameters
  - Known classification results
- 3 Bounding the parameters  $\alpha, \beta$ 
  - $\alpha$
  - $\beta$
- 4 1-Homogeneous graphs
  - 1-Homogeneous graphs
  - Main result
- 5 Thin DRG
  - Definitions

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# Notations

## Definition

Graph:  $\Gamma = (V, E)$  with vertex set  $V$  and edge set  $E \subseteq \binom{V}{2}$ .

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- The **adjacency matrix**  $A$  of  $\Gamma$  is the matrix whose rows and columns are indexed by its vertices, such that  $A_{xy} = 1$  if  $xy$  is an edge and 0 otherwise.
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- $d(x, y)$ : the distance between  $x$  and  $y$ .
- $D(\Gamma)$ : diameter of  $\Gamma$ , if  $\Gamma$  is connected.
- $\Gamma_i(x) = \{y \mid d(x, y) = i\}$ ,  $\Gamma(x) = \Gamma_1(x) = \{y \mid x \sim y\}$ .
- The subgraph induced on  $\Gamma(x)$  is the **local graph** of  $\Gamma$  at  $x$ , denoted by  $\Delta(x)$ .





# Distance-regular graphs (DRG)

$\Gamma$  is regular with valency  $b_0 = |\Gamma_1(x)|$  for any  $x \in V(\Gamma)$ , and

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For a DRG  $\Gamma$  with diameter  $D$ , its **intersection array** is

$$\iota(\Gamma) := \{b_0, b_1, \dots, b_{D-1}; c_1, c_2, \dots, c_D\}.$$

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# Hamming graphs

## Definition

- $q \geq 2, n \geq 1$  integers.
- $Q = \{1, \dots, q\}$
- The **Hamming graph**  $H(n, q)$  has vertex set  $Q^n$
- $\mathbf{x} \sim \mathbf{y}$  if they differ in exactly one position.
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- Diameter equals  $n$ .
- $H(n, 2) = n$ -cube.
- DRG with  $c_i = i$ .
- Gives an algebraic frame work to study codes, especially bounds on codes.
- For example: the Delsarte linear programming bound and the Schrijver bound.

# Johnson graphs

## Definition

- $1 \leq t \leq n$  integers.
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- The **Johnson graph**  $J(n, t)$  has vertex set  $\binom{N}{t}$
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  - Grassmann graphs,
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  - dual polar graphs (The vertices are the maximal totally isotropic subspaces on a vector space over a finite field with a fixed (non-degenerate) bilinear form).

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  - dual polar graphs (The vertices are the maximal totally isotropic subspaces on a vector space over a finite field with a fixed (non-degenerate) bilinear form).
- Distance-regular graphs give a way to study these classical objects from a unified combinatorial view point.

## Some more examples

There are four known infinite families (with unbounded diameter) of vertex-transitive but not distance-transitive DRGs, namely

- the Ustimenko graphs;
- the Hemmeter graphs;
- the Doob graphs;
- the quadratic forms graphs.

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There are four known infinite families (with unbounded diameter) of vertex-transitive but not distance-transitive DRGs, namely

- the Ustimenko graphs;
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- the quadratic forms graphs.

There is only one infinite family known (with unbounded diameter) which is not vertex-transitive, namely the twisted Grassmann graphs (discovered in 2005 by Van Dam and K.). They have two orbits under their full automorphism group.

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We say that a distance-regular graph  $\Gamma$  of diameter  $D$  has *classical parameters*  $(D, b, \alpha, \beta)$  if the intersection numbers of  $\Gamma$  satisfy

$$c_i = \begin{bmatrix} i \\ 1 \end{bmatrix}_b \left( 1 + \alpha \begin{bmatrix} i-1 \\ 1 \end{bmatrix}_b \right), \quad (1)$$

$$b_i = \left( \begin{bmatrix} D \\ 1 \end{bmatrix}_b - \begin{bmatrix} i \\ 1 \end{bmatrix}_b \right) \left( \beta - \alpha \begin{bmatrix} i \\ 1 \end{bmatrix}_b \right), \quad (2)$$

where  $\begin{bmatrix} j \\ 1 \end{bmatrix}_b = 1 + b + b^2 + \dots + b^{j-1}$  for  $j \geq 1$  and  $\begin{bmatrix} 0 \\ 1 \end{bmatrix}_b = 0$ .



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We note that  $b \neq 0, -1$  by the following result.

### Lemma

*Let  $\Gamma$  be a distance-regular graph with classical parameters  $(D, b, \alpha, \beta)$  and the diameter  $D \geq 3$ . Then,  $b$  is an integer such that  $b \neq 0, -1$ .*

There are many examples of DRG with classical parameters namely:

- Hamming graphs and Doob graphs,
- Johnson graphs,
- Grassmann graphs and twisted Grassmann graphs,
- bilinear forms graphs,
- sesquilinear forms graphs,
- quadratic forms graphs,
- dual polar graphs,
- the Ustimenko graphs,
- the Hemmeter graphs.

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- An important subproblem of Bannai's problem is to classify the DRG with classical parameters, as they are  $Q$ -polynomial.
- This is a very hard problem as the twisted Grassmann graphs do exist.
- All the known infinite families of DRG with valency at least three and with unbounded diameter have classical parameters or are very closely related to an infinite family of DRG with classical parameters, like the folded hypercubes and the doubled Grassmann graphs.

- If  $b$  is negative then they are essentially classified by C.-W. Weng. There is still one infinite family of feasible parameter sets, for which we do not have any idea whether they exist or not.



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- Terwilliger in the 1980's classified the DRG with classical parameters with  $b = 1$ .
- He obtained:

### Theorem

*Let  $\Gamma$  be a DRG with classical parameters  $(D, b, \alpha, \beta)$  where  $b = 1$  and  $D \geq 4$ . Then  $\Gamma$  is a Hamming graph, a halved cube, a Johnson graph or a Doob graph.*

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# The Grassmann graphs

## Theorem (Metsch(1995))

The Grassmann graphs  $J_q(n, D)$  ( $n \geq 2D$ ) are characterized by their intersection array if  $n \geq \max\{2D+2, 2D+6-q\}$  and  $D \geq 3$ .

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- What happens for  $n = 2D, n = 2D + 1$ ?
- Van Dam and K. (2005) found the twisted Grassmann graphs. They have the same parameters as  $J_q(2D + 1, D)$ , so the Grassmann graph  $J_q(2D + 1, D)$  is not determined by its intersection array.

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- Gavriluk (in progress): The Grassmann graphs  $J_2(2D + 2, D)$  are uniquely determined if  $D \geq 3$  and  $D$  odd.
- He uses the vanishing Krein parameters to obtain some extra conditions on the  $c_2$ -graph.

# Bilinear forms graphs

Metsch, building on earlier work of Sprague, Ray-Chaudhuri, Huang and Cuyper, showed:

## Theorem (Metsch (1999))

The bilinear forms graph  $\text{Bil}(D \times e, q)$  is characterized by its intersection array if  $q = 2$  and  $e \geq D + 4$  or  $q \geq 3$  and  $e \geq D + 3$ .

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Gavrilyuk and K. (2018): The bilinear forms graph  $\text{Bil}(D \times e, q)$  is characterized by its intersection array if  $q = 2$  and  $e = D$ .

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Let  $\Gamma$  be a DRG with classical parameters  $(D, b, \alpha, \beta)$  such that  $D \geq 3$ ,  $b \geq 2$  and it is not a Grassmann graph, or a bilinear forms graph. Then  $\beta$  is bounded by  $b^{2D+4}(\alpha + 1)^2$ .

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We think the upper bound for  $\beta$  should be something like  $Cb^D$  where  $C$  is a constant only depending on  $\alpha$  and  $b$  and not on  $D$ .

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Can we obtain a bound of  $\alpha$  in terms of  $b$ ?

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- By looking at the integrability of  $p_{22}^4$  we obtain  $\alpha \leq 5b^8$ , if  $D \geq 4$ .

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- If  $\alpha = 0, \beta \neq 0, b \geq 2, D \geq 4$  and locally the disjoint union of cliques, the graph must be a dual polar graph.
- This result is based on work by Brouwer and Wilbrink, De Bruyn, Cameron, Cohen and others.

Our result on bounding the parameter  $\alpha$ .

## Theorem

*Let  $\Gamma$  be a DRG with classical parameters  $(D, b, \alpha, \beta)$  such that  $D \geq 9$ , and  $b \geq 2$ . Then  $\alpha \leq b^2(b + 1)$ .*

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For  $b = 2$ , this shows that we have only 7 choices for  $\alpha$ . Several of them can be removed by looking at the integrability of  $p_{ii}^{2i}$ . This is still work in progress with H. Ge, C. Lv, and Q. Yang.

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Our result on bounding the parameter  $\alpha$ .

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*Let  $\Gamma$  be a DRG with classical parameters  $(D, b, \alpha, \beta)$  such that  $D \geq 9$ , and  $b \geq 2$ . Then  $\alpha \leq b^2(b+1)$ .*

*Moreover, if  $b = 2$  and  $D \geq 12$ , then  $\alpha \leq 2$ .*

For  $b = 2$ , this shows that we have only 7 choices for  $\alpha$ . Several of them can be removed by looking at the integrability of  $p_{ij}^{2i}$ . This is still work in progress with H. Ge, C. Lv, and Q. Yang. Mr. Ge talked about this earlier in this workshop.

As I already said, all the known DRG with classical parameters and positive  $b$  have  $\alpha \leq b + \sqrt{b}$ , if  $D$  is at least 8. We wonder whether this is the right bound.

# Outline

- 1 Distance-regular graphs
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# Partial linear spaces

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Some definitions.

- An *incidence structure* is a tuple  $(\mathcal{P}, \mathcal{L}, \mathcal{I})$  where  $\mathcal{P}$  and  $\mathcal{L}$  are non-empty disjoint sets and  $\mathcal{I} \subseteq \mathcal{P} \times \mathcal{L}$ . The elements of  $\mathcal{P}$  and  $\mathcal{L}$  are called *points* and *lines*, respectively.

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- If  $(p, \ell) \in \mathcal{I}$  we say that  $p$  is *incident* with  $\ell$ , or that  $p$  is on the line  $\ell$ . The *order of a point* is the number of lines it is incident with and similarly for lines.

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- The *point-line incidence matrix* of  $(\mathcal{P}, \mathcal{L}, \mathcal{I})$  is the  $|\mathcal{P}| \times |\mathcal{L}|$ -matrix such that the  $(p, \ell)$  is 1 if  $p$  is incident with  $\ell$  and 0 otherwise.

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- The point graph  $\Gamma$  of an incidence structure  $(\mathcal{P}, \mathcal{L}, \mathcal{I})$  is the graph with vertex set  $\mathcal{P}$  and two distinct points are adjacent if they are on a common line. Note that lines are cliques in  $\Gamma$ .

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## Theorem

*Let  $\Gamma$  be a DRG. Assume that there exists a positive integer  $s$  such that the following two conditions are satisfied:*

- $(s + 1)(a_1 + 1) - k > (c_2 - 1) \binom{s+1}{2}$ ;
- $a_1 + 1 > (c_2 - 1)(2s - 1)$ .



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- $a_1 + 1 > (c_2 - 1)(2s - 1)$ .

*Define a line as a maximal clique with at least  $a_1 + 2 - (c_2 - 1)(s - 1)$  vertices. Then  $X = (V(\Gamma), \mathcal{L}, \epsilon)$  is a partial linear space, where  $\mathcal{L}$  is the set of all lines, and  $\Gamma$  is the point graph of  $X$ . Moreover, every vertex is in at most  $s$  lines.*

- For a DRG with classical parameters  $(D, b, \alpha, \beta)$  with  $b \geq 2$  and  $D \geq 3$ , the result of Metsch means that if  $\beta > b^{D+5}$ , then the graph is the point graph of partial linear space with large lines with  $s \leq \frac{3}{2}b^D$ .

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- Although a twisted Grassmann graph is the point graph of a partial linear space, its lines are not the maximum cliques. The twisted Grassmann graphs have  $\beta > b^D$ .

# Geometric DRG

We first need the Delsarte bound for cliques for a DRG with classical parameters.

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## Lemma

*Let  $\Gamma$  be a distance-regular graph with classical parameters  $(D, b, \alpha, \beta)$  with  $D \geq 3$  and  $b \geq 2$ . Then the order  $c$  of a clique  $C$  in  $\Gamma$  is bounded by  $c \leq \beta + 1$ . If equality holds, the number of neighbours in  $C$  of a vertex not in  $C$  is  $1 + \alpha$  or  $0$ .*

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- A clique with equality in the lemma is called a *Delsarte clique*.

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- A clique with equality in the lemma is called a *Delsarte clique*.
- A DRG  $\Gamma$  is called *geometric* if it is the point graph of a partial linear space with Delsarte cliques as its lines. This is equivalent with the condition that we can partition the edge set of  $\Gamma$  into Delsarte cliques.

Using the method of Metsch, he used in his bilinear forms graph paper in 1999, with some modifications and simplifications, we were able to show:

### Theorem

*Let  $\Gamma$  be a DRG with classical parameters  $(D, b, \alpha, \beta)$  such that  $D \geq 9$ , and  $b \geq 2$ .*



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### Theorem

*Let  $\Gamma$  be a DRG with classical parameters  $(D, b, \alpha, \beta)$  such that  $D \geq 9$ , and  $b \geq 2$ . Then there exists a constant  $C_1 = C_1(\alpha, b)$  such that if  $\beta \geq C_1 b^D$ , then  $\Gamma$  is geometric. In particular  $0 \leq \alpha \leq b$  is an integer.*

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The  $C_1$  is something like  $b^6$  and the twisted Grassmann graphs are not geometric.

- With some extra work we were able to show that the local graphs are the  $\alpha$ -clique-extension of a  $\frac{\beta}{\alpha} \times \frac{b^D-1}{b-1}$ -grid when  $\alpha \neq 0$ .
- The  $s$ -clique-extension of a graph  $G$  is replacing each vertex  $x$  by a clique  $C_x$  of order  $s$  and if  $x \sim y$  in  $G$  then all the vertices of  $C_x$  are adjacent to all vertices of  $C_y$ .

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- For  $\alpha = 0$  we were able to show that the local graphs are disjoint union of cliques of order  $\beta$ .
- This leads to the question whether it is possible to classify the geometric DRG which are locally the clique extension of a grid.
- This seems to be a difficult problem.

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- Let  $\Gamma = (V, E)$  be a graph.
- A set  $\pi$  of subsets of  $V$ ,  $\pi = \{C_1, \dots, C_t\}$  is called a partition of  $V$  if

$$\forall_i C_i \neq \emptyset,$$

$$\bigcup_1^t C_i = V$$

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- A partition  $\pi$  of  $V$  is called *equitable* if there exist numbers  $\beta_{ij}$  ( $1 \leq i, j \leq t$ ) such that any  $x \in C_i$  has exactly  $\beta_{ij}$  neighbours in  $C_j$ .
- We denote by  $B = (\beta_{ij})$  the *quotient matrix* of  $\pi$ .



- We say a connected graph  $\Gamma$  has the *1-homogeneous* property if, for every pair of vertices  $x$  and  $y$  at distance 1, the partition of the vertex set of  $\Gamma$  according to the path-length distance to both  $x$  and  $y$  is equitable, and the parameters corresponding to equitable partitions are independent of the choice of  $x$  and  $y$ .

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- Graphs with the 1-homogeneous property are simply said to be 1-homogeneous.
- Note that a 1-homogeneous graph is always DRG.

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Nomura 1990's showed the following result:

### Lemma

*Let  $\Gamma$  be a 1-homogeneous distance-regular graph with diameter  $D \geq 2$  and  $a_1 \geq 1$ . Then  $\Gamma$  is locally disconnected if and only if  $\Gamma$  is a regular near  $2D$ -gon.*



The following result gives a classification of the regular near  $2D$ -gons if  $D \geq 4$ . It is based on the work of many people including Brouwer, Wilbrink, Cohen, Cameron, De Bruyn, and so on. I already mentioned it before.

### Theorem

*Let  $G$  be a regular near  $2D$ -gon with  $D \geq 4$  and  $a_1 \geq 1$ . If  $c_2 \geq 3$  or  $c_i = i$  ( $i = 2, 3$ ), then  $G$  is either a dual polar graph or a Hamming graph.*

K., B. Gebremichel, M. Abdullah, J.H. Lee (2024+) showed.

## Theorem

*Let  $\Gamma$  be a 1-homogeneous distance-regular graph with diameter  $D \geq 5$  and  $a_1 \geq 1$ . Define  $b = b_1/(\theta_1 + 1)$ . Then, either  $c_2 = 1$ , or  $b \geq 1$  and one of the following holds:*

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- $\Gamma$  is a folded halved  $(4D)$ -cube.
- The valency  $k$  of  $\Gamma$  is bounded by a function  $F(b)$  of  $b$ , i.e.,  $k \leq F(b)$ , where  $F(b) = 16(b + 1)^{10} + O((b + 1)^9)$ , and  $b \geq 2$ .

The proof consists of three parts:

- Let  $b \geq 1$  be fixed.
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- Last step. Show that if the valency is large enough, then  $c_2 \in \{(b+1)^2, b(b+1)\}$ . In the talk by Dr. Gebremichel, he will discuss this part.

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- We call a DRG  $\Gamma$   **$\mu$ -graph-regular** if there exists a  $t$  such that the subgraph induced on the common neighbours of two vertices  $x$  and  $y$  at distance 2 is  $t$ -regular, not depending on the pair  $x, y$ .

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- Terwilliger (1990's) showed that a thin DRG with classical parameters is  $\mu$ -graph-regular, if the diameter is at least 5.
- The bilinear forms graphs are non-thin DRG with classical parameters, but they are still  $\mu$ -graph-regular.

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- In this case, we obtain that  $\Gamma$  is a Hamming graph, a Johnson graph, a halved cube, a dual polar graph, or  $D \leq 9$ , by the results on 1-homogeneous DRG.



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### Theorem

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**Thank you for your attention.**