

Quantum Bruhat Graphs and Tilted Richardson Varieties

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Abstract. The quantum Bruhat graph is a weighted directed graph on a finite Weyl group first defined by Brenti–Fomin–Postnikov. It encodes quantum Monk’s rule and can be utilized to study the 3-point Gromov–Witten invariants of the flag variety. In this paper, we provide a combinatorial formula for the minimal weights between any pair of permutations on the quantum Bruhat graph, and consequently obtain an Ehresmann-like characterization for the tilted Bruhat order. We define the tilted Richardson variety $\mathcal{T}_{u,v}$, with a stratification that gives a geometric meaning to intervals in the tilted Bruhat order. We prove some fundamental geometric properties of this new family of varieties, including their dimensions, closure relations, irreducibility, and a Deodhar-like decomposition. We demonstrate their equivalence to the two-point curve neighborhoods of Schubert varieties X_u and X^v in the minimal degree, and relate their cohomology classes to quantum products of Schubert classes.

Keywords: quantum Bruhat graphs, quantum Schubert calculus, Richardson varieties.

1 Introduction

Hilbert’s fifteenth problem, Schubert calculus, concerns the full flag variety

$$\mathrm{Fl}_n = \{0 \subset V_1 \subset \cdots \subset V_{n-1} \subset \mathbb{C}^n \mid \dim V_i = i \text{ for } i = 1, \dots, n-1\}$$

and its Schubert decomposition $\mathrm{Fl}_n = \bigsqcup_{w \in S_n} X_w^\circ$. The cohomology ring $H^*(\mathrm{Fl}_n)$ has a linear basis given by the Schubert varieties $\{[X_w]\}_{w \in S_n}$. The corresponding structure constants $c_{u,w}^v$ ’s, also referred to as the *generalized Littlewood–Richardson numbers*, are known to be nonnegative integers from transversal intersection. It has been a long standing open problem to find a combinatorial interpretation of these numbers. The study of flag varieties, Schubert varieties and the structure constants is central in algebraic geometry and algebraic combinatorics.

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The small quantum cohomology ring $QH^*(\text{Fl}_n)$ is a deformation of the cohomology ring. The structure constants of $QH^*(\text{Fl}_n)$ with respect to the Schubert basis are known to be the *3-point genus-0 Gromov–Witten invariants*. They extend the generalized Littlewood–Richardson numbers in the “quantum” direction.

The problem of multiplying Schubert classes in $QH^*(\text{Fl}_n)$ can be naturally encoded via the *quantum Bruhat graph*, first defined by Brenti–Fomin–Postnikov [1] and utilized by Postnikov [13]. The quantum Bruhat graph can be seen as a graphical representation of the *quantum Monk’s rule* and enjoys very rich algebraic and combinatorial properties. In particular, the minimal degree q^d that appears in the quantum product $[X_u] \star [X_v]$ is the weight of any shortest directed path from u to v [13]. The quantum Bruhat graph directly gives rise to the *tilted Bruhat order* [1]. These are our main combinatorial objects of interest for this paper.

Our first set of main results are about the weights in the quantum Bruhat graph. Specifically, we provide:

1. An explicit combinatorial formula for the minimal weight between any pair of permutations u to v (Theorem 2.6).
2. An Ehresmann-like characterizaition for the tilted Bruhat order (Theorem 2.12).

We remark that Theorem 2.6 was also obtained via a combination of Postnikov’s toric Schur polynomials [12] on the quantum cohomology ring of the Grassmannian, and a geometric result by Buch–Chung–Li–Mihalcea [4] (see also [7]). Our proof is independent and purely combinatorial.

While weights on the quantum Bruhat graph encode important information in the quantum cohomology of the flag variety, we present a novel geometric interpretation of intervals in the tilted Bruhat order with a more classical flavor. For any pair of permutations $u, v \in S_n$, we define the *tilted Richardson variety* $\mathcal{T}_{u,v}$ and the *open tilted Richardson variety* $\mathcal{T}_{u,v}^\circ$ (Definition 3.2), which reduces to the well-known (open) Richardson variety if $u \leq v$ in the Bruhat order.

The tilted Richardson varieties are our central geometric objects of study. Our second set of results concern geometric properties of tilted Richardson varieties (Theorem 3.7). We prove:

1. a stratification $\mathcal{T}_{u,v} = \bigsqcup_{[x,y] \subseteq [u,v]} \mathcal{T}_{x,y}^\circ$ that relates the tilted Bruhat order;
2. $\dim \mathcal{T}_{u,v} = \dim \mathcal{T}_{u,v}^\circ =$ the length of any shortest paths from u to v in the quantum Bruhat graph;
3. the closure relation $\overline{\mathcal{T}_{u,v}^\circ} = \mathcal{T}_{u,v}$;
4. irreducibility of $\mathcal{T}_{u,v}^\circ$ and $\mathcal{T}_{u,v}$.

Deodhar [6] introduced his decomposition of open Richardson varieties as a tool for understanding *Kazhdan–Lusztig polynomials* [10]. As a key ingredient in proving irreducibility of the tilted Richardson varieties, we introduce a decomposition of $\mathcal{T}_{u,v}^\circ$, generalizing Deodhar’s decomposition. The decomposition also allows us to compute the $\mathbb{F}_q$ -point count of open tilted Richardson varieties, a generalization of R-polynomials. More specifically, we give:

1. A decomposition of the (open) tilted Richardson varieties into simple pieces of the form $(\mathbb{C}^*)^a \times \mathbb{C}^b$, extending Deodhar’s decomposition (Theorem 4.5);
2. A formula for the $\mathbb{F}_q$ -point counts of open tilted Richardson varieties using Hecke algebras (Theorem 4.7).

In [2], Buch–Chaput–Mihalcea–Perrin introduced the *two-point curve neighborhoods* $\Gamma_d(X_u, X^v)$ in their study of the quantum cohomology ring $QH^*(\mathrm{Fl}_n)$ (see also [3]). They encode information about the Gromov–Witten invariants of degree d , but little in the way of explicit descriptions of the curve neighborhoods was known [11, 5]. We present the first concrete combinatorial description in the minimal degree case by establishing a connection with tilted Richardson varieties. We show that:

1. The tilted Richardson variety $\mathcal{T}_{u,v}$ is equal to the minimal degree two-point curve neighborhood $\Gamma_{d_{\min}}(X_u, X^v)$ (Theorem 5.1);
2. The cohomology classes $[\mathcal{T}_{u,v}] = [\Gamma_{d_{\min}}(X_u, X^v)] \in H^*(\mathrm{Fl}_n)$ are equal to the minimal quantum degree component in the quantum product $[X_u] \star [X^v]$ (Theorem 5.2).

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Alex Postnikov for introducing us to quantum Bruhat graphs. We thank Grant Barkley, Sara Billey, Anders Buch, Sergey Fomin, Allen Knutson, Thomas Lam, Leonardo Mihalcea, Melissa Sherman-Bennett, Lauren Williams, Weihong Xu and Alexander Yong for many helpful conversations.

2 Minimal weights in the quantum Bruhat graphs

Let S_n be the symmetric group on n elements, generated by the *simple transpositions* $\{s_1, \dots, s_{n-1}\}$. We typically write a permutation w using its *one-line notation* $w_1 w_2 \cdots w_n$. For $w \in S_n$, let $\ell(w)$ be the *Coxeter length* of w , which is the smallest ℓ such that $w = s_{\alpha_1} \cdots s_{\alpha_\ell}$ is a product of ℓ simple transpositions. Let $t_{ij} = (i\ j)$ be a transposition in S_n .

Definition 2.1 ([1]). The **quantum Bruhat graph** Γ_n is a weighted directed graph on S_n with the following two types of edges:

$$\begin{cases} w \rightarrow wt_{ij} \text{ of weight } 1 & \text{if } \ell(wt_{ij}) = \ell(w) + 1, \\ w \rightarrow wt_{ij} \text{ of weight } q_i q_{i+1} \cdots q_{j-1} & \text{if } \ell(wt_{ij}) = \ell(w) + 1 - 2(j - i), \end{cases}$$

where $1 \leq i < j \leq n$. Write $\text{wt}(w \rightarrow wt_{ij}) \in \mathbb{Z}[q_1, \dots, q_{n-1}]$ for the weight.

The quantum Bruhat graph for $n = 3$ is shown in Figure 1.

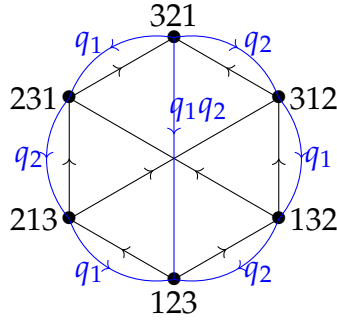


Figure 1: Quantum Bruhat graph Γ_3 (unlabeled edges have weight 1)

Definition 2.2. For a directed path $P : w^{(0)} \rightarrow w^{(1)} \rightarrow \cdots \rightarrow w^{(k)}$ in Γ_n , we say that P has length k , with weight

$$\text{wt}(P) := \prod_{i=1}^k \text{wt}(w^{(i-1)} \rightarrow w^{(i)}).$$

For $u, v \in S_n$, let $\ell(u, v)$ be the length of a shortest path from u to v .

Postnikov [13] established nice properties regarding weights of shortest paths. Write q^d for $q_1^{d_1} \cdots q_{n-1}^{d_{n-1}}$.

Lemma 2.3 ([13]). *For any $u, v \in S_n$, all shortest paths from u to v have the same weight $q^{d_{u,v}}$. Moreover, the weight of any path from u to v is divisible by $q^{d_{u,v}}$.*

Remark 2.4. The weight $q^{d_{u,v}}$ is the unique minimum quantum degree that appears in the quantum product of two Schubert classes $\sigma_u \star \sigma_{w_0 v}$ in the quantum cohomology ring $QH^*(\text{Fl}_n)$ [13]. We further discuss this connection to $QH^*(\text{Fl}_n)$ in Section 5.

Our first theorem provides an explicit formula that computes the minimal weight $q^{d_{u,v}}$ for any pair of permutation $u, v \in S_n$.

Definition 2.5. For $A, B \subset [n]$ with $|A| = |B|$, we construct a lattice path $P(A, B)$ starting at $(0, 0)$ and ending at $(n, 0)$ with n steps as follows. For each $i = 1, \dots, n$, the i^{th} step is

- an upstep $(1, 1)$ if $i \in A$ and $i \notin B$,
- a downstep $(1, -1)$ if $i \notin A$ and $i \in B$,
- a horizontal step $(1, 0)$ if $i \in A \cap B$ or $i \notin A \cup B$.

Define its **depth**, denoted as $\text{depth}(A, B)$, to be the largest number $y \geq 0$ such that $P(A, B)$ passes through $(x, -y)$ for some x .

Theorem 2.6. Let $u, v \in S_n$. All shortest paths from u to v in the quantum Bruhat graph Γ_n have weight $q^{d_{u,v}} = q_1^{d_1} \cdots q_{n-1}^{d_{n-1}}$ where $d_k = \text{depth}(u[k], v[k])$. Here, $w[k] := \{w_1, \dots, w_k\}$.

Example 2.7. Consider $u = 7364152$ and $v = 2513746$ in S_7 . To figure out $d_4(u, v)$, we need to construct a lattice path $P_4(u[4], v[4])$ with upsteps $u[4] = \{3, 4, 6, 7\}$ and downsteps $v[4] = \{1, 2, 3, 5\}$, as shown in Figure 2 with $\text{depth}(u[4], v[4]) = 2$. In the end, we arrive at $q^{d_{u,v}} = q_1 q_2 q_3^2 q_4^2 q_5 q_6$.

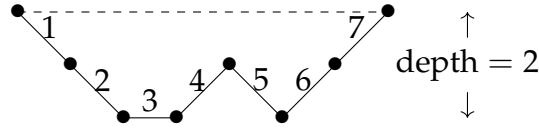


Figure 2: The lattice path $P(u[4], v[4])$

Definition 2.8 ([1]). For $u \in S_n$, define the **tilted Bruhat order** D_u to be the graded partial order on S_n such that $w \leq_u v$ if

$$\ell(u, w) + \ell(w, v) = \ell(u, v). \quad (2.1)$$

Equivalently, $w \leq_u v$ if there is a shortest path in the quantum Bruhat graph from u to v that passes through w . For $w \leq_u v$, define the **tilted Bruhat interval** to be

$$[w, v]_u = \{x \in S_n : w \leq_u x \leq_u v\}.$$

The tilted Bruhat order D_{132} is shown in Figure 3.

Remark 2.9. It follows from (2.1) that $[w, v]_u = [w, v]_{u'}$ as long as $w \leq_u v$ and $w \leq_{u'} v$. Since $w \leq_w v$, we omit the subscript and write $[w, v]$ instead of $[w, v]_u$ from now on.

Remark 2.10. When $u = id$, the tilted Bruhat order D_u is the strong Bruhat order.

Our second theorem provides a combinatorial criterion for the tilted Bruhat order.

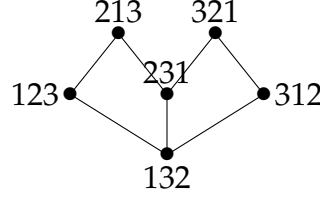


Figure 3: The tilted Bruhat order D_{132}

Definition 2.11. For $r \in [n]$, let $\leq_r$ be the **shifted linear order** on $[n]$ given by $r <_r \cdots <_r n <_r 1 <_r \cdots <_r r-1$. Define the **shifted Gale order** $\leq_r$ on $\binom{[n]}{k}$ as

$$\{a_1 <_r \cdots <_r a_k\} \leq_r \{b_1 <_r \cdots <_r b_k\} \iff a_i \leq_r b_i \text{ for all } i \in [k].$$

For a sequence $\mathbf{a} = (a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n) \in [n]^n$, define the **a-shifted order** $\leq_{\mathbf{a}}$ on S_n as

$$u \leq_{\mathbf{a}} v \iff u[k] \leq_{a_k} v[k] \text{ for all } k \in [n].$$

Theorem 2.12. For $u, v, w \in S_n$, the following are equivalent:

1. $w \leq_u v$;
2. $w \in [u, v]$;
3. for any sequence $\mathbf{a} = (a_1, \dots, a_n)$ such that $u \leq_{\mathbf{a}} v$, we have $u \leq_{\mathbf{a}} w \leq_{\mathbf{a}} v$;
4. there exists a sequence $\mathbf{a} = (a_1, \dots, a_n)$ such that $u \leq_{\mathbf{a}} w \leq_{\mathbf{a}} v$.

Example 2.13. Let $u = 132$, $w = 123$, $v = 213$. From Figure 3, we can see $w \leq_u v$. Let $\mathbf{a} = (1, 3, 1)$, we have $u \leq_{\mathbf{a}} w \leq_{\mathbf{a}} v$ since

$$\{1\} \leq_1 \{1\} \leq_1 \{2\} \quad \{3, 1\} \leq_3 \{1, 2\} \leq_3 \{1, 2\} \quad [3] \leq_1 [3] \leq_1 [3].$$

Alternatively, $u \leq_{\mathbf{a}'} w \leq_{\mathbf{a}'} v$ also for $\mathbf{a}' = (3, 3, 2)$ since

$$\{1\} \leq_3 \{1\} \leq_3 \{2\} \quad \{3, 1\} \leq_3 \{1, 2\} \leq_3 \{1, 2\} \quad [3] \leq_2 [3] \leq_2 [3].$$

3 Tilted Richardson varieties

Let $G = GL_n(\mathbb{C})$ and $B, B_- \subset G$ be the Borel and opposite Borel subgroup of G consisting of invertible upper and lower triangular matrices respectively. Let $T = B \cap B_-$ be the maximal torus of diagonal matrices in G .

The *complete flag variety* is defined to be $\text{Fl}_n = G/B$. Fixing a basis of $\mathbb{C}^n$, we can identify a point $gB \in G/B$ with a *flag* $F_{\bullet} = 0 = F_0 \subsetneq F_1 \subsetneq F_2 \subsetneq \cdots \subsetneq F_{n-1} \subsetneq F_n = \mathbb{C}^n$ where $F_k \in \text{Gr}(k, n)$ is the span of the first k column vectors of any $n \times n$ matrix representative $M_F \in gB$.

Definition 3.1. For $a, b \in [n]$, define the **cyclic interval** $[a, b)_c := \{a, \dots, b-1\}$ if $a \leq b$ and $[a, b)_c := \{a, \dots, n\} \cup \{1, \dots, b-1\}$ if $a > b$.

Motivated by our characterization of tilted Bruhat order ([Theorem 2.12](#)), we define the (open) tilted Richardson varieties:

Definition 3.2. For S any subset of $[n]$, let $\text{Proj}_S : \mathbb{C}^n \rightarrow \mathbb{C}^{|S|}$ be the projection onto the coordinates with indices in S . For $u, v \in S_n$ and a sequence $\mathbf{a}$ where $u \leq_{\mathbf{a}} v$, define the **tilted Richardson variety** by:

$$\mathcal{T}_{u,v,\mathbf{a}} = \left\{ F_{\bullet} \in \text{Fl}_n : \begin{array}{l} \dim(\text{Proj}_{[a_i, j)_c}(F_i)) \leq \#\{u[i] \cap [a_i, j)_c\}, \forall i, j \in [n] \\ \dim(\text{Proj}_{[j, a_i)_c}(F_i)) \leq \#\{v[i] \cap [j, a_i)_c\} \end{array} \right\}, \quad (3.1)$$

and the **open tilted Richardson variety** $\mathcal{T}_{u,v,\mathbf{a}}^{\circ}$ by replacing all " $\leq$ " with " $=$ " in (3.1).

Example 3.3. Let $u = 4231, v = 3142$ and $\mathbf{a} = (4, 2, 2, 3)$. Then $u \leq_{\mathbf{a}} v$. In [Figure 4](#), the $\star$ and $\bullet$ represent u and v respectively, and the red horizontal line segment in column k represents the cutoff of $[n]$ under $\leq_{a_k}$ for each $k \in [4]$.

For $F_{\bullet} \in \mathcal{T}_{u,v,\mathbf{a}}$, there are 8 rank conditions imposed on F_2 as in (3.1). These conditions can be interpreted as rank conditions on submatrices of M_F in the first two columns with (cyclically) consecutive rows starting or ending at the red line. For example, the condition $\dim(\text{Proj}_{\{1,2,3\}}(F_2)) \leq 2 = \#\{v[2] \cap \{1,2,3\}\}$ is interpreted as the rank of the shaded submatrix of M_F in [Figure 4\(A\)](#) being at most 2, the number of $\bullet$ in said region. The condition $\dim(\text{Proj}_{\{2,3\}}(F_2)) \leq 1 = \#\{u[2] \cap \{2,3\}\}$ is the rank of shaded submatrix in [Figure 4\(B\)](#) being at most 1, the number of $\star$ in said region.

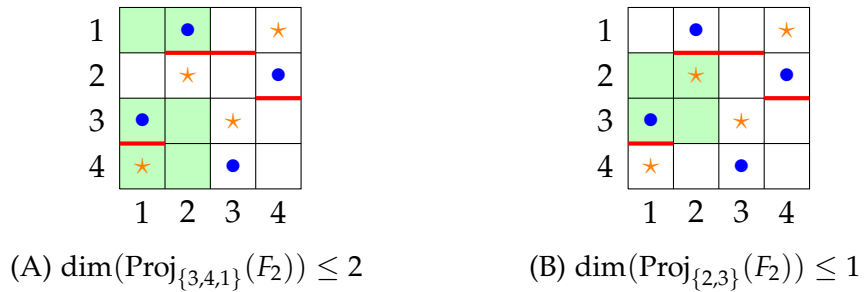


Figure 4: Rank conditions on $\mathcal{T}_{u,v,\mathbf{a}}$ for $u = 4231, v = 3142$, and $\mathbf{a} = (4, 2, 2, 3)$

It follows immediately from [Theorem 2.12](#) that the set of T -fixed points on $\mathcal{T}_{u,v,\mathbf{a}}$ is

$$\{e_w := wB/B \in \mathcal{T}_{u,v,\mathbf{a}}\} = [u, v]. \quad (3.2)$$

In particular, $e_w \in \mathcal{T}_{u,v,\mathbf{a}}$ is independent of the choice of $\mathbf{a}$. In fact,

Proposition 3.4. $\mathcal{T}_{u,v,\mathbf{a}}$ and $\mathcal{T}_{u,v,\mathbf{a}}^{\circ}$ are both independent of $\mathbf{a}$ as long as $u \leq_{\mathbf{a}} v$.

As a result, we omit the index $\mathbf{a}$ and write $\mathcal{T}_{u,v}^\circ$ and $\mathcal{T}_{u,v}$ for the (open) tilted Richardson varieties.

Remark 3.5. If $u \leq v$ in strong Bruhat order, namely $u \leq_{\mathbf{a}} v$ where $\mathbf{a} = (1, \dots, 1)$, then $\mathcal{T}_{u,v}^\circ$ and $\mathcal{T}_{u,v}$ are the (open) Richardson variety $\mathcal{R}_{u,v}^\circ$ and $\mathcal{R}_{u,v}$ respectively.

Remark 3.6. In [9], we give three other equivalent definitions of the (open) tilted Richardson varieties using cyclically rotated Grassmannian Richardson varieties, vanishing loci of multi-Plücker coordinates, and intersections of tilted Schubert cells.

We prove the following geometric properties of the tilted Richardson varieties, analogous to those of the classical Richardson varieties.

Theorem 3.7. For $u, v \in S_n$,

- (1) (stratification) $\mathcal{T}_{u,v} = \bigsqcup_{[x,y] \subseteq [u,v]} \mathcal{T}_{x,y}^\circ$;
- (2) (dimension) $\dim(\mathcal{T}_{u,v}^\circ) = \dim(\mathcal{T}_{u,v}) = \ell(u, v)$;
- (3) (closure relation) $\mathcal{T}_{u,v} = \overline{\mathcal{T}_{u,v}^\circ}$;
- (4) (irreducibility) $\mathcal{T}_{u,v}$ and $\mathcal{T}_{u,v}^\circ$ are irreducible.

4 Tilted Deodhar decomposition

In [10], Kazhdan–Lusztig introduced the *Kazhdan–Lusztig R -polynomial* $R_{u,v}(q)$ for $u \leq v$. They are used to give a recursive formula for the *Kazhdan–Lusztig polynomials*. The polynomial $R_{u,v}(q)$ is determined by $\mathbb{F}_q$ -point counts on the open Richardson varieties

$$R_{u,v}(q) = \#\mathcal{R}_{u,v}^\circ(\mathbb{F}_q).$$

For any pair of permutations $u, v \in S_n$, we define a generalization called **tilted R -polynomial** $R_{u,v}^{\text{tilt}}(q)$, which gives the $\mathbb{F}_q$ -point counts on open tilted Richardson varieties

$$R_{u,v}^{\text{tilt}}(q) = \#\mathcal{T}_{u,v}^\circ(\mathbb{F}_q).$$

To understand $R_{u,v}(q)$, Deodhar [6] introduced a decomposition of $\mathcal{R}_{u,v}^\circ$ into simple pieces D_α that are isomorphic to $\mathbb{C}^a \times (\mathbb{C}^*)^b$. This gives an explicit formula for $R_{u,v}(q)$:

$$\mathcal{R}_{u,v}^\circ = \bigsqcup_{\alpha} \mathbb{C}^a \times (\mathbb{C}^*)^b \implies R_{u,v}(q) = \sum_{\alpha} q^a (q-1)^b.$$

In this section, we extend Deodhar’s decomposition to tilted Richardson varieties

$$\mathcal{T}_{u,v}^\circ = \bigsqcup_{\mathbf{u} \prec \mathbf{v}} D_{\mathbf{u}, \mathbf{v}}, \tag{4.1}$$

This decomposition allows us to prove irreducibility of tilted Richardson varieties, and give an explicit formula for the tilted R-polynomials (Corollary 4.6).

We now define the *tilted reduced expression* $\mathbf{v}$ and the *distinguished subexpression* $\mathbf{u}$ indexing the pieces in (4.1). Let $\mathbf{a} = (a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n) \in [n]^n$ be a sequence. Define

$$J_{\mathbf{a}} = \{j_1 > j_2 > \dots > j_t\} := \{j \in [n] : a_j \neq a_{j+1}\}, \quad (a_{n+1} = 1).$$

Definition 4.1. An $\mathbf{a}$ -tilted reduced expression $\mathbf{v}$ for $v \in S_n$ is a sequence of black or blue (overlined) simple transpositions, whose product is v and of the form

$$\mathbf{v} = s_{\alpha_1} s_{\alpha_2} \dots s_{\alpha_{N_1}} \overline{s_{\alpha_{N_1+1}} \dots s_{\alpha_{N_2}}} s_{\alpha_{N_2+1}} \dots s_{\alpha_{N_3}} \overline{s_{\alpha_{N_3+1}} \dots s_{\alpha_{N_4}}} \dots s_{\alpha_{N_{2t}+1}} \dots s_{\alpha_N}$$

satisfying the following properties:

1. $\mathbf{v}$ is the concatenation of $2t + 1$ subexpressions, alternatively colored black and blue, such that each subexpression is a reduced expression for some permutation;
2. for all $k \in [t]$, $\alpha_i < j_k$ if $i > N_{2k-1}$;
3. let $v_{(d)} = \prod_{i=1}^d s_{\alpha_i}$. Then the first j_k entries of $v_{(N_{2k-1})}$ are increasing under the shifted order $<_{a_{j_k+1}}$, and the first j_k entries of $v_{(N_{2k})}$ are increasing under the shifted order $<_{a_{j_k}}$, for all $k \in [t]$.

Definition 4.2. Given an $\mathbf{a}$ -tilted reduced expression $\mathbf{v} = s_{\alpha_1} s_{\alpha_2} \dots s_{\alpha_N}$, a **distinguished subexpression** for $u \in S_n$ is a sequence $\mathbf{u} = u_1 \dots u_N$ whose product is u and each factor $u_i \in \{1, s_{\alpha_i}, \overline{s_{\alpha_i}}, \widetilde{s_{\alpha_i}}\}$ satisfies the following rules:

$$u_i = \begin{cases} 1 \text{ or } s_{\alpha_i} & \text{if } s_{\alpha_i} \text{ is black in } \mathbf{v} \text{ and } \ell(u_{(i-1)} s_{\alpha_i}, v_{(i)}) = \ell(u_{(i-1)}, v_{(i-1)}), \\ \widetilde{s_{\alpha_i}} & \text{if } s_{\alpha_i} \text{ is black in } \mathbf{v} \text{ and } \ell(u_{(i-1)} s_{\alpha_i}, v_{(i)}) > \ell(u_{(i-1)}, v_{(i-1)}), \\ \overline{s_{\alpha_i}} & \text{if } \overline{s_{\alpha_i}} \text{ is blue in } \mathbf{v}. \end{cases}$$

Here we set $u_{(i)}$ to be the product of the leftmost i factors of $\mathbf{u}$. We write $\mathbf{u} \prec \mathbf{v}$ if $\mathbf{u}$ is a distinguished subexpression of $\mathbf{v}$.

Example 4.3. If $v = 246513$ and $\mathbf{a} = (5, 5, 5, 1, 1, 1)$, the set $J_{\mathbf{a}} = \{3\}$, and an example of an $\mathbf{a}$ -tilted reduced expression for v is $\mathbf{v} = s_3 s_4 s_5 s_1 s_2 s_3 s_4 s_3 \overline{s_2 s_1} s_1 s_2$. There are 4 distinguished subexpressions for $u = 512346$:

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{u} &= 111111 s_4 s_3 \overline{s_2 s_1} 11 & \mathbf{u} &= 111 s_1 11 s_4 s_3 \overline{s_2 s_1} 1 \widetilde{s_2} \\ \mathbf{u} &= s_3 11111 \widetilde{s_3} s_4 s_3 \overline{s_2 s_1} 11 & \mathbf{u} &= s_3 11 s_1 1 \widetilde{s_3} s_4 s_3 \overline{s_2 s_1} 1 \widetilde{s_2} \end{aligned}$$

Unfortunately, we don't know whether $u \leq_{\mathbf{a}} v$ will ensure the existence of a distinguished subexpression for u in $\mathbf{v}$. This motivates the following Lemma/Definition, which gives a sufficient condition.

Lemma/Definition 4.4. For any $u, v \in S_n$, there exists $\mathbf{a}$ such that $u \leq_{\mathbf{a}} v$, and $u[k] \leq_{a_{k+1}} v[k]$ for all $k \in [n]$. We say such $\mathbf{a}$ is **flat**. In this case, any $\mathbf{a}$ -tilted reduced expression $\mathbf{v}$ has a distinguished subexpression for u .

For each $j \in [n-1]$, define $y_j(p)$, $x_j(m)$ and $\dot{s}_j \in GL_n$ to be

$$y_j(p) = \phi_j \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ p & 1 \end{pmatrix}, \quad \dot{s}_j(p) = \phi_j \begin{pmatrix} 0 & -1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}, \quad x_j(m) = \phi_j \begin{pmatrix} 1 & m \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix},$$

where $\phi_j \begin{pmatrix} a & b \\ c & d \end{pmatrix}$ replaces the 2×2 block of the identity matrix in the j and $(j+1)$ -th row/column by $\begin{pmatrix} a & b \\ c & d \end{pmatrix}$. The following is our main theorem of this section.

Theorem 4.5. Let $u \leq_{\mathbf{a}} v$ where $\mathbf{a}$ is flat. Let $\mathbf{v}$ be an $\mathbf{a}$ -tilted reduced expression for v . Then

$$\mathcal{T}_{u,v}^{\circ} = \bigsqcup_{\mathbf{u} \prec \mathbf{v}} D_{\mathbf{u},\mathbf{v}}, \text{ where each } D_{\mathbf{u},\mathbf{v}} \cong (\mathbb{C}^*)^{\#1\text{'s in } \mathbf{u}} \times \mathbb{C}^{\#\widetilde{s_{\alpha_i}}\text{'s in } \mathbf{u}}.$$

Each tilted Deodhar cell $D_{\mathbf{u},\mathbf{v}}$ for $\mathbf{u} = u_1 \cdots u_N \prec \mathbf{v}$ is parametrized by

$$D_{\mathbf{u},\mathbf{v}} := \left\{ gB = g_1 g_2 \cdots g_N B \left| \begin{array}{ll} g_i = y_{\alpha_i}(p_i), & \text{if } u_i = 1 \\ g_i = \dot{s}_{\alpha_i}, & \text{if } u_i = s_{\alpha_i} \text{ or } \overline{s_{\alpha_i}} \\ g_i = x_{\alpha_i}(m_i) \dot{s}_{\alpha_i}^{-1}, & \text{if } u_i = \widetilde{s_{\alpha_i}} \end{array} \right. \right\} / B.$$

Here $p_i \in \mathbb{C}^*$ and $m_i \in \mathbb{C}$ are parameters.

Corollary 4.6. There is a unique tilted Deodhar cell $D_{\mathbf{u},\mathbf{v}}$ of maximal dimension $\ell(u, v)$, hence $\mathcal{T}_{u,v}^{\circ}$ is irreducible. The $\mathbb{F}_q$ -point counts of $\mathcal{T}_{u,v}^{\circ}$ is

$$R_{u,v}^{\text{tilt}}(q) = \#\mathcal{T}_{u,v}^{\circ}(\mathbb{F}_q) = \sum_{\mathbf{u} \prec \mathbf{v}} (q-1)^{\#1\text{'s in } \mathbf{u}} \times q^{\#\widetilde{s_{\alpha_i}}\text{'s in } \mathbf{u}}.$$

We give an alternate formula for $R_{u,v}^{\text{tilt}}(q)$ using Hecke algebra, generalizing classical results for $R_{u,v}(q)$ (see [8, Section 2.3]). The Hecke algebra $\mathcal{H}$ of S_n is a $\mathbb{C}[q^{\pm 1}]$ -algebra generated by the set $\{T_i\}_{i \in [n-1]}$ satisfying the braid relations and the Hecke relation:

$$(T_i + q)(T_i - 1) = 0 \text{ for } i \in [n-1].$$

For $w \in S_n$, let $T_w := T_{\alpha_1} T_{\alpha_2} \cdots T_{\alpha_{\ell(w)}}$ for any reduced expression $w = s_{\alpha_1} \cdots s_{\alpha_{\ell(w)}}$. The set $\{T_w : w \in S_n\}$ forms a $\mathbb{C}[q^{\pm 1}]$ -basis of $\mathcal{H}$. The trace map $\epsilon : \mathcal{H} \rightarrow \mathbb{C}[q^{\pm 1}]$ is the $\mathbb{C}[q^{\pm 1}]$ -linear map defined by

$$\epsilon(T_w) = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } w = id \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}.$$

For an expression $\mathbf{w} = s_{\alpha_1} s_{\alpha_2} \cdots s_{\alpha_N}$, denote $T_{\mathbf{w}} := T_{\alpha_1} T_{\alpha_2} \cdots T_{\alpha_N}$.

Theorem 4.7. Fix $u \leq_{\mathbf{a}} v$ where $\mathbf{a}$ is flat. Let $\mathbf{u}, \mathbf{v}$ be $\mathbf{a}$ -tilted reduced expressions for u, v respectively. We have

$$R_{u,v}^{\text{tilt}}(q) = q^{\ell(u,v)} \epsilon(T_{\mathbf{v}}^{-1} T_{\mathbf{u}}).$$

5 Curve neighborhoods and the cohomology classes $[\mathcal{T}_{u,v}]$

For $w \in S_n$, define the *Schubert variety* $X^w = \overline{BwB}/B$ and the *opposite Schubert variety* $X_w = \overline{B_-wB}/B$. Let $\rho_i \in H_2(\text{Fl}_n)$ be the homology class of X^{s_i} . For an effective degree $d = \sum_{i=1}^{n-1} d_i \rho_i \in H_2(\text{Fl}_n)$, the *Kontsevich moduli space* $\mathcal{M}_d = \overline{\mathcal{M}}_{0,3}(\text{Fl}_n, d)$ parametrizes the set of degree d , genus zero stable curves in Fl_n with 3 marked points. We will represent d by the vector $(d_1, \dots, d_{n-1})$. The space $\mathcal{M}_d$ is naturally equipped with evaluation maps $ev_i : \mathcal{M}_d \rightarrow \text{Fl}_n$ sending a curve to its i -th marked point for $i = 1, 2, 3$.

The *quantum cohomology ring* $QH^*(\text{Fl}_n) \cong H^*(\text{Fl}_n) \otimes_{\mathbb{Z}} \mathbb{Z}[q_1, \dots, q_{n-1}]$ is a free $\mathbb{Z}[q]$ -module generated by the Schubert classes $\{\sigma_w := [X_w] : w \in S_n\}$, where the products are given by

$$\sigma_u \star \sigma_v = \sum_{w \in S_n, d \in \mathbb{N}^{n-1}} \langle \sigma_u, \sigma_v, \sigma_{w_0 w} \rangle_d q^d \sigma_w. \quad (5.1)$$

Here $\langle \sigma_u, \sigma_v, \sigma_{w_0 w} \rangle_d$ are the *Gromov–Witten invariants* of the flag variety defined as

$$\langle \sigma_u, \sigma_v, \sigma_{w_0 w} \rangle_d = \int_{\mathcal{M}_d} ev_1^*(\sigma_u) \cdot ev_2^*(\sigma_v) \cdot ev_3^*(\sigma_{w_0 w}).$$

Informally, these invariants count the equivalence classes of degree d rational curves passing through the given Schubert varieties in general positions.

Fulton–Woodward [7] initiated the study of minimal quantum degrees d appearing in (5.1). Postnikov [13] showed that $d_{u, w_0 v}$ is the unique such minimal degree. Our Theorem 2.6 gives an explicit combinatorial description for this degree.

In their study of the quantum K-theory of homogeneous spaces G/P , Buch–Chaput–Mihalcea–Perrin [3] introduced the *Gromov–Witten variety* $M_d(X_u, X^v) := ev_1^{-1}(X_u) \cap ev_2^{-1}(X^v)$ and the *curve neighborhood* $\Gamma_d(X_u, X^v) := ev_3(M_d(X_u, X^v))$. These varieties encode information about the Gromov–Witten invariants [2].

The main theorems of this section relate tilted Richardson varieties with curve neighborhoods and quantum Schubert calculus.

Theorem 5.1. *For any $u, v \in S_n$, $\Gamma_{d_{u,v}}(X_u, X^v) = \mathcal{T}_{u,v}$.*

Theorem 5.2. *The cohomology class $[\mathcal{T}_{u,v}] = [\Gamma_{d_{u,v}}(X_u, X^v)] \in H^*(\text{Fl}_n)$ is equal to*

$$[q^{d_{u,v}}] \sigma_u \star \sigma_{w_0 v} = \sum_{w \in S_n} \langle \sigma_u, \sigma_{w_0 v}, \sigma_{w_0 w} \rangle_{d_{u,v}} \sigma_w. \quad (5.2)$$

Proof Sketch. For Theorem 5.1, we first show that the two varieties share the same set of T -fixed points $\{e_w : w \in [u, v]\}$, using (3.2) and results in [7]. We then prove $\mathcal{T}_{u,v}$ is the largest T -invariant subvariety of Fl_n with T -fixed points $[u, v]$, hence $\mathcal{T}_{u,v} \supseteq \Gamma_{d_{u,v}}(X_u, X^v)$. Finally, the theorem follows from the fact that both varieties have the same dimension and $\mathcal{T}_{u,v}$ is irreducible (Theorem 3.7 and [7]).

For [Theorem 5.2](#), by the projection formula,

$$[\mathcal{T}_{u,v}] = [\Gamma_{d_{u,v}}(X_u, X^v)] = \frac{1}{c} [q^{d_{u,v}}] \sigma_u \star \sigma_{w_0 v} \text{ for some } c \in \mathbb{Z}_{>0}.$$

Postnikov [\[13\]](#) gave a polynomial representative of [\(5.2\)](#) using *path Schubert polynomials* $\mathfrak{S}_{u,v}(x, q)$. We show that the leading monomial of $\mathfrak{S}_{u,v}(x, q)$ has coefficient 1, implying $c = 1$. $\square$

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