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► **To cite this version:**

Oleg Ogievetsky, Senya Shlosman. Plane partitions and their pedestal polynomials. *Matematicheskie Zametki / Mathematical Notes*, 2018, 103 (5-6), pp.793-796. 10.1134/S0001434618050115. hal-01777548

**HAL Id: hal-01777548**

**<https://hal.science/hal-01777548>**

Submitted on 24 Apr 2018

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# Plane partitions and their pedestal polynomials

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## Abstract

Given a partially ordered set  $\mathcal{S}$ , we define, for a linear extension  $P$  of  $\mathcal{S}$ , a multivariate polynomial, counting certain reverse partitions on  $\mathcal{S}$  called  $P$ -pedestals. We establish a remarkable property of this polynomial: it does not depend on the choice of  $P$ . For  $\mathcal{S}$  a Young diagram, we show that this polynomial generalizes the hook polynomial.

## 1 Introduction

Let  $\mathcal{S}$  be a partially ordered set. In this work we associate to  $\mathcal{S}$  a multivariate polynomial  $\mathfrak{h}$ . When  $\mathcal{S}$  is a Young diagram, the principal specialization of  $\mathfrak{h}$  coincides with the hook polynomial, see section 4.

Our construction of  $\mathfrak{h}$  begins with defining a polynomial  $\mathfrak{h}_P$ , where  $P$  is an arbitrary linear extension of  $\mathcal{S}$ . Then we show that in fact  $\mathfrak{h}_P$  does not depend on  $P$ . The proof uses the equality (4) (precise definitions are given in sections 2 and 3), which is implied by the bijection between the set of reverse partitions on  $\mathcal{S}$  and the product of the set of  $P$ -pedestals on  $\mathcal{S}$  and the set of Young diagrams with at most  $|\mathcal{S}|$  rows.

To facilitate the exposition we take for  $\mathcal{S}$  the set of nodes of a Young diagram  $\lambda$ . In this situation, linear extensions of  $\mathcal{S}$  correspond to standard Young tableaux of shape  $\lambda$ , see Definition 1. Our results and proofs work in the same way for general  $\mathcal{S}$  (and linear extensions of  $\mathcal{S}$  instead of standard Young tableaux).

After this work was completed, we were informed that the coefficients of our polynomial are values of the “ $\beta$ -function”, in the terminology of Stanley’s book [3], theorem 3.13.1. Our approach uses very different ideas, in particular, the factorization property (4).

## 2 Main result

Let  $\lambda = (\lambda_1, \dots, \lambda_l) \vdash n$ ,  $\lambda_1 \geq \dots \geq \lambda_l > 0$ , be a partition of  $n$ ,  $\lambda_1 + \dots + \lambda_l = n$ . We identify  $\lambda$  with its Young diagram, that is, the set of nodes

$$\alpha = (i, j) \text{ with } j = 1, \dots, \lambda_i \text{ for each } i = 1, \dots, l.$$

A *standard Young tableau of shape  $\lambda$*  is a bijection  $Q: \lambda \rightarrow \{1, \dots, n\}$  such that the function  $Q(i, j)$  increases in  $i$  and  $j$ . We denote the set of these standard Young tableaux by  $\mathfrak{st}_\lambda$ .

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**Definition 1.** Let  $\preceq$  be the minimal transitive partial order on  $\lambda$ , containing  $(i, j) \prec (i+1, j)$  and  $(i, j) \prec (i, j+1)$  for all possible  $(i, j)$ . A standard Young tableau of shape  $\lambda$  can be identified with a linear extension of  $\preceq$ , that is, a linear order, compatible with the partial order  $\preceq$ . We denote by  $\preceq_P$  the linear order associated to a standard tableau  $P$ .

Let  $\mathbb{Z}_{\geq 0}$  be the set of non-negative integers. A reverse plane partition of shape  $\lambda$  is a function  $\mathfrak{Q}: \lambda \rightarrow \mathbb{Z}_{\geq 0}$ , non-decreasing in  $i$  and  $j$ . It is *column-strict* if it increases in  $j$ . We visualize reverse plane partitions by placing the number  $\mathfrak{Q}(i, j)$  in the node  $(i, j)$  for each  $(i, j) \in \lambda$ . We denote by  $|\mathfrak{Q}|$  the volume of  $\mathfrak{Q}$ ,  $|\mathfrak{Q}| = \sum_{(i,j) \in \lambda} \mathfrak{Q}(i, j)$ .

Let  $\bar{\mathcal{S}}_\lambda$  be the set of reverse plane partitions of shape  $\lambda$ , and  $\mathcal{S}_\lambda \subset \bar{\mathcal{S}}_\lambda$  the subset of reverse column-strict plane partitions of shape  $\lambda$ . Recall that the Schur function  $s_\lambda$  is the formal power series in infinitely many variables  $\mathbf{x} = (x_0, x_1, x_2, \dots)$ , given by

$$s_\lambda(\mathbf{x}) = \sum_{\mathfrak{Q} \in \mathcal{S}_\lambda} \prod_{\alpha \in \lambda} x_{\mathfrak{Q}(\alpha)} .$$

We need the similarly defined formal power series  $\bar{s}_\lambda$ ,

$$\bar{s}_\lambda(\mathbf{x}) = \sum_{\mathfrak{Q} \in \bar{\mathcal{S}}_\lambda} \prod_{\alpha \in \lambda} x_{\mathfrak{Q}(\alpha)} .$$

The Schur function  $s_\lambda(\mathbf{x})$ , unlike our ‘wrong’ Schur function,  $\bar{s}_\lambda(\mathbf{x})$ , is symmetric (see, e.g. [4]).

To define the pedestal polynomial we proceed as follows. Let  $P, Q \in \mathfrak{st}_\lambda$  be two standard Young tableaux of shape  $\lambda$ . We are going to compare the corresponding linear orders  $\preceq_P$  and  $\preceq_Q$  on the set of the nodes of  $\lambda$ . Let  $\alpha_1 = (1, 1) \prec_Q \alpha_2 \prec_Q \dots \prec_Q \alpha_n$  be the list of all the nodes of  $\lambda$ , enumerated according to the order  $\preceq_Q$ . We say that a node  $\alpha_k$  is a  $(P, Q)$ -disagreement node, if  $\alpha_{k+1} \prec_P \alpha_k$  (while, of course,  $\alpha_k \prec_Q \alpha_{k+1}$ ). We define the reverse plane partition  $q_{P,Q}$  of shape  $\lambda$  by

$$q_{P,Q}(\alpha_k) = \#\{l : l < k, \alpha_l \text{ is a } (P, Q)\text{-disagreement node}\} . \quad (1)$$

Indeed, the function  $q_{P,Q}$  is non-decreasing with respect to the order  $\preceq_Q$ , hence  $q_{P,Q}$  is a reverse plane partition.

The reverse plane partition  $q_{P,Q}$  thus defined is called  $P$ -pedestal of  $Q$ , see [2]. Let  ${}^\lambda M$  be the matrix, whose rows and columns are indexed by the standard tableaux of shape  $\lambda$ , with the entries

$$({}^\lambda M)_{P,Q} := \prod_{\alpha \in \lambda} x_{q_{P,Q}(\alpha)} . \quad (2)$$

We finally define the polynomial  $\mathfrak{h}_P(\mathbf{x})$  by

$$\mathfrak{h}_P(\mathbf{x}) = \sum_{Q \in \mathfrak{st}_\lambda} ({}^\lambda M)_{P,Q} . \quad (3)$$

The set (as  $Q$  runs over  $\mathfrak{st}_\lambda$ ) of  $P$ -pedestals depends on  $P$ . However, the polynomial  $\mathfrak{h}_P$  has the following surprising property.

**Theorem 2.** *The function  $\mathfrak{h}_P(\mathbf{x})$  does not depend on  $P$  from  $\mathfrak{st}_\lambda$ .*

**Definition 3.** *We call the function*

$$\mathfrak{h}_\lambda(\mathbf{x}) = \mathfrak{h}_P(\mathbf{x}) \ ,$$

where  $P$  is any standard Young tableau  $P$  of shape  $\lambda$ , the **pedestal polynomial**.

Our theorem states that the pedestal polynomial is well-defined. For example,  $\mathfrak{h}_{(3,2)}(\mathbf{x}) = x_0^5 + x_0^4 x_1 + x_0^3 x_1^2 + x_0^2 x_1^3 + x_0^2 x_1^2 x_2$ .

### 3 Proof of Theorem 2

Let  $R_n$  be the component of degree  $n$  of the ring of formal power series in variables  $\mathbf{x} = (x_0, x_1, x_2, \dots)$  with integer coefficients. The element  $u(\mathbf{x})$  of  $R_n$  is a sum,

$$u(\mathbf{x}) = \sum_{i_1 \leq i_2 \leq \dots \leq i_n} a_{i_1 i_2 \dots i_n} \mathbf{x}_{i_1, i_2, \dots, i_n} \ , \quad \mathbf{x}_{i_1, i_2, \dots, i_n} := x_{i_1} x_{i_2} \dots x_{i_n} \ ,$$

where  $i_1, i_2, \dots, i_n$  are non-negative integers, and the coefficients  $a_{i_1 i_2 \dots i_n}$  are integer. For example, the functions  $s_\lambda(\mathbf{x})$  and  $\bar{s}_\lambda(\mathbf{x})$  belong to  $R_n$ .

The function  $\bar{s}_{(n)}$ , corresponding to the one-row partition  $\lambda = (n)$ ,

$$\bar{s}_{(n)}(\mathbf{x}) = \sum_{i_1 \leq i_2 \leq \dots \leq i_n} \mathbf{x}_{i_1, i_2, \dots, i_n} \in R_n$$

will play a special role in our argument.

We define the  $*$ -product on monomials by

$$\mathbf{x}_{i_1, i_2, \dots, i_n} * \mathbf{x}_{j_1, j_2, \dots, j_n} := \mathbf{x}_{i_1 + j_1, i_2 + j_2, \dots, i_n + j_n}$$

and extend it by linearity to the ring structure on  $R_n$ . The ring  $(R_n, *)$  is isomorphic to a subring of the ring  $\mathbb{C}[[y_1, \dots, y_n]]$  of formal power series in  $n$  variables, via the monomorphism  $\varphi_n : R_n \rightarrow \mathbb{C}[[y_1, \dots, y_n]]$ , defined by

$$\varphi_n(\mathbf{x}_{i_1, i_2, \dots, i_n}) = y_1^{i_1} \dots y_n^{i_n} \ .$$

In particular,  $(R_n, *)$  inherits from  $\mathbb{C}[[y_1, \dots, y_n]]$  the property of having no zero divisors.

Fix a standard Young tableau  $P \in \mathfrak{st}_\lambda$ . We will prove now the identity

$$\bar{s}_\lambda(\mathbf{x}) = \mathfrak{h}_P(\mathbf{x}) * \bar{s}_{(n)}(\mathbf{x}) \ , \tag{4}$$

which implies, due to the absence of zero divisors in  $(R_n, *)$ , the assertion of the theorem, since the first and the last terms in the identity do not depend on  $P$ .

The bijective proof of the identity (4) follows from [2]. Relations (46), (48) and (50) of that paper describe bijections  $b_{St}$ ,  $b_{St}^{-1}$  between the set of reverse plane partitions of shape  $\lambda$  and the product of the set of  $P$ -pedestals and the set of Young diagrams with at most  $n$  rows. Let  $\mathfrak{Q}$  be

a reverse plane partition and  $b_{St}(\mathfrak{Q}) = (q, \mu)$ , where  $q$  is a  $P$ -pedestal and  $\mu$  a Young diagram. The construction of  $b_{St}$  (see below) implies that the monomial, corresponding to  $\mathfrak{Q}$  in  $\bar{s}_\lambda(\mathbf{x})$  is the  $*$ -product of the monomial corresponding to  $q$  in  $\mathfrak{h}_P(\mathbf{x})$  and the monomial corresponding to  $\mu$  in  $\bar{s}_{(n)}(\mathbf{x})$ , and the proof of (4) follows. A particular case of these bijections was used earlier by D. Knuth in [1].

The bijections  $b_{St}, b_{St}^{-1}$  are defined as follows.

Let  $\mathfrak{Q}$  be a reverse plane partition of shape  $\lambda$ . We define the partition  $\Pi(\mathfrak{Q})$  of  $|\mathfrak{Q}|$  by just listing all the entries of the two-dimensional array of values of  $\mathfrak{Q}$  in the non-increasing order. Note that  $\Pi(\mathfrak{Q})$  has at most  $n$  rows.

To every reverse plane partition  $\mathfrak{Q}$  we associate the standard Young tableau  $Q(\mathfrak{Q}) \in \mathfrak{st}_\lambda$  as follows. Define the linear order  $\prec_{\mathfrak{Q}}$  on the nodes of  $\lambda$  by

$$\alpha' \prec_{\mathfrak{Q}} \alpha'' \text{ if } \mathfrak{Q}(\alpha') < \mathfrak{Q}(\alpha'') \text{ or if } \mathfrak{Q}(\alpha') = \mathfrak{Q}(\alpha'') \text{ and } \alpha' \prec_P \alpha'' .$$

Then  $Q(\mathfrak{Q})$  is defined by the relation:  $\prec_{Q(\mathfrak{Q})} = \prec_{\mathfrak{Q}}$ . Now the bijection  $b_{St}$  is defined by

$$b_{St}(\mathfrak{Q}) = \left( q_{P, Q(\mathfrak{Q})}, \Pi \left( \mathfrak{Q} - q_{P, Q(\mathfrak{Q})} \right) \right) ,$$

where the reverse plane partition  $\mathfrak{Q} - q_{P, Q(\mathfrak{Q})}$  is given by

$$\left( \mathfrak{Q} - q_{P, Q(\mathfrak{Q})} \right) (\alpha) = \mathfrak{Q}(\alpha) - q_{P, Q(\mathfrak{Q})}(\alpha), \alpha \in \lambda .$$

To construct the inverse bijection,  $b_{St}^{-1}$ , we first associate to every standard Young tableau  $Q \in \mathfrak{st}_\lambda$  and every partition  $p = (\Lambda_1, \Lambda_2, \dots, \Lambda_n)$  the reverse plane partition  $\mathfrak{Q}_{Q,p}$  of shape  $\lambda$ , by

$$\mathfrak{Q}_{Q,p}(i, j) = \Lambda_{Q(i, j)} .$$

Then

$$b_{St}^{-1}(q_{P, Q}, p) = q_{P, Q} + \mathfrak{Q}_{Q,p} .$$

The proof is finished. □

## 4 Discussion

The identity (4) is of independent interest. The principal specialization,  $x_i \mapsto x^i$ , turns the ‘wrong’ Schur function  $\bar{s}_\lambda(\mathbf{x})$  into the generating function  $\sigma_\lambda(x)$  for the number of reverse plane partitions of shape  $\lambda$ , given by the Mac-Mahon–Stanley formula

$$\sigma_\lambda(x) = \frac{1}{\prod_{\alpha \in \lambda} (1 - x^{h_\alpha})} ,$$

where  $h_\alpha$  is the hook length of a node  $\alpha$  of  $\lambda$ . The term  $\bar{s}_{(n)}(\mathbf{x})$  turns into the generating function of Young diagrams with at most  $n$  rows:

$$\sigma_{(n)}(x) = \frac{1}{(1-x)(1-x^2)\dots(1-x^n)} .$$

Finally, the function  $\mathfrak{h}_\lambda(\mathbf{x})$  turns into the generating polynomial  $\pi_\lambda(x)$  of the sequence  $\{p_{\lambda,k}\}$  with  $p_{\lambda,k}$  the number of  $P$ -pedestals of volume  $k \geq 0$  (for any  $P \in \mathfrak{st}_\lambda$ ). We obtain

$$\frac{1}{\prod_{\alpha \in \lambda} (1 - x^{h_\alpha})} = \frac{\pi_\lambda(x)}{(1-x)(1-x^2)\dots(1-x^n)}. \quad (5)$$

It follows from (3) that the function

$$\pi_\lambda(x) = \sum_{Q \in \mathfrak{st}_\lambda} x^{|q_{P,Q}|} \quad (6)$$

does not depend on the choice of  $P$  while the contribution of an individual standard Young tableau  $Q$  does.

The formula (5) can be found in [4], but there the polynomial  $\pi_\lambda(x)$  is given by any of two other expressions:

$$\pi_\lambda(x) = x^{-l(\lambda)} \sum_{Q \in \mathfrak{st}_\lambda} x^{\text{maj}(Q)} \quad \text{and} \quad \pi_\lambda(x) = x^{-l(\lambda)} \sum_{Q \in \mathfrak{st}_\lambda} x^{\text{comaj}(Q)},$$

where  $l(\lambda) = \sum_{(i,j) \in \lambda} (i-1)$ . It is interesting to note that in general neither of the two functions on  $\mathfrak{st}_\lambda$ ,  $\text{maj}(\cdot) - l(\lambda)$  and  $\text{comaj}(\cdot) - l(\lambda)$ , nor their partners for the transposed to  $\lambda$  Young diagram, belong to our family  $\{\text{vol}(q_{P,*}) : P \in \mathfrak{st}_\lambda\}$ . For example, take  $\lambda = (3, 2, 1)$ .

**Acknowledgements.** Part of the work of S. S. has been carried out in the framework of the Labex Archimede (ANR-11-LABX-0033) and of the A\*MIDEX project (ANR-11-IDEX-0001-02), funded by the ‘‘Investissements d’Avenir’’ French Government programme managed by the French National Research Agency (ANR). Part of the work of S. S. has been carried out at IITP RAS. The support of Russian Foundation for Sciences (project No. 14-50-00150) is gratefully acknowledged by S. S. The work of O. O. was supported by the Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University and by the grant RFBR 17-01-00585.

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