A Combinatorial Proof of Andrews' Smallest Parts Partition Function

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Submitted: Jan 14, 2008; Accepted: Mar 19, 2008; Published: Apr 10, 2008
Mathematics Subject Classification: 05A17, 11P81

Abstract

We give a combinatorial proof of Andrews' smallest parts partition function with the aid of rooted partitions introduced by Chen and the author.

1 Introduction

We adopt the common notation on partitions as used in [1]. *A partition* λ of a positive integer n is a finite nonincreasing sequence of positive integers

$$\lambda = (\lambda_1, \lambda_2, \ldots, \lambda_r)$$

such that $\sum_{i=1}^{r} \lambda_i = n$. Then λ_i are called the parts of λ. The number of parts of λ is called the length of λ, denoted by $l(\lambda)$. The weight of λ is the sum of parts, denoted by $|\lambda|$. We let $\mathcal{P}(n)$ denote the set of partitions of n.

Let $spt(n)$ denote the number of smallest parts in all partitions of n and $n_s(\lambda)$ denote the number of the smallest parts in λ, we then have

$$spt(n) = \sum_{\lambda \in \mathcal{P}(n)} n_s(\lambda). \tag{1.1}$$

Below is a list of the partitions of 4 with their corresponding number of smallest parts. We see that $spt(4) = 10$.

$\lambda \in \mathcal{P}(4)$	$n_s(\lambda)$
(4)	1
$(3,1)$	1
$(2,2)$	2
$(2,1,1)$	2
$(1,1,1,1)$	4

The rank of a partition λ introduced by Dyson [6] is defined as the largest part minus the number of parts, which is usually denoted by $r(\lambda) = \lambda_1 - l(\lambda)$. Let $N(m,n)$ denote the number of partitions of n with rank m. Atkin and Garvan [4] define the kth moment of the rank by

$$N_k(n) = \sum_{m=-\infty}^{+\infty} m^k N(m,n). \tag{1.2}$$

In [2], Andrews shows the following partition function on $spt(n)$ analytically:

Theorem 1.1 (Andrews)

$$spt(n) = np(n) - \frac{1}{2}N_2(n), \tag{1.3}$$

where $p(n)$ is the number of partitions of n.

At the end of the paper, Andrews states that "In addition the connection of $N_2(n)/2$ to the enumeration of 2-marked Durfee symbols in [3] suggests the fact that there are also serious problems concerning combinatorial mappings that should be investigated." In this paper, we give a combinatorial proof of (1.3) with the aid of rooted partitions introduced by Chen and the author [5], instead of using a 2-marked Durfee symbols.

A rooted partition of n can be formally defined as a pair of partitions (α, β), where $|\alpha| + |\beta| = n$ and β is a nonempty partition with equal parts. The union of the parts of α and β are regarded as the parts of the rooted partition (α, β).

Example 1.2 *There are twelve rooted partitions of* 4*:*

$$\begin{array}{cccc}
(\emptyset,\ (4)) & ((1),\ (3)) & ((3),\ (1)) & ((2),\ (2)) \\
(\emptyset,\ (2,2)) & ((1,1),\ (2)) & ((2,1),(1)) & ((2),(1,1)) \\
((1,1,1),\ (1)) & ((1,1),\ (1,1)) & ((1),\ (1,1,1)) & (\emptyset,\ (1,1,1,1))
\end{array}$$

Let $\mathcal{RP}(n)$ denote the set of rooted partitions of n.

2 Combinatorial proof

In this section, we will first build the connection between rooted partitions and ordinary partitions, and then interpret $np(n)$, $\frac{1}{2}N_2(n)$ in terms of rooted partitions (see Theorems 2.2 and 2.5). In this framework, a combinatorial justification of (1.3) reduces to building a bijection between the set of ordinary partitions of n and the set of the rooted partitions (α, β) of n with $\beta_1 > \alpha_1$.

We now make a connection between rooted partitions and ordinary partitions by extending the construction in [5, Theorems 3.5, 3.6].

Lemma 2.1 *The number of rooted partitions of n is equal to the sum of lengths over partitions of n, namely*

$$\sum_{(\alpha,\beta)\in\mathcal{RP}(n)} 1 = \sum_{\lambda\in\mathcal{P}(n)} l(\lambda). \tag{2.4}$$

Proof. For a given partition $\lambda = (\lambda_1, \lambda_2, \ldots, \lambda_l) \in \mathcal{P}(n)$, we could get $l(\lambda)$ distinct rooted partitions (α, β) of n by designating any part of λ as the part of β and keep the remaining parts of λ as parts of α. Assume that d is a part that appears m_d times ($m_d \geq 2$) in λ, we then choose β as the partition with d repeated i times, where $i = 1, 2, \ldots, m_d$. Conversely, for a rooted partition (α, β), we could get an ordinary partition λ by uniting the parts of α and β. It's clear to see that there are *exactly* $l(\lambda)$ distinct rooted partitions corresponding to λ in $\mathcal{RP}(n)$. ∎

For example, there are five partitions of 4: (4), $(3,1)$, $(2,2)$, $(2,1,1)$, $(1,1,1,1)$, and the sum of lengths is twelve. From Example 1.2, we see that there are also twelve rooted partitions of 4.

We are ready to interpret $np(n)$ in terms of rooted partitions using the construction in Lemma 2.1.

Theorem 2.2 *$np(n)$ is equal to the sum of β_1 over all rooted partitions (α, β) of n, that is*

$$np(n) = \sum_{(\alpha,\beta)\in\mathcal{RP}(n)} \beta_1. \tag{2.5}$$

Proof. As $np(n) = \sum_{\lambda\in\mathcal{P}(n)} |\lambda|$, it suffices to prove

$$\sum_{\lambda\in\mathcal{P}(n)} |\lambda| = \sum_{(\alpha,\beta)\in\mathcal{RP}(n)} \beta_1. \tag{2.6}$$

From Lemma 2.1, one sees that for $\lambda \in \mathcal{P}(n)$, there exists exactly $l(\lambda)$ distinct rooted partitions (α, β) corresponding to it in $\mathcal{RP}(n)$. Furthermore, the sum of β_1 over these $l(\lambda)$ distinct rooted partitions equals to $|\lambda|$, this is because that β is obtained by designating some equal parts of λ as its parts. Thus we get the identity (2.6). ∎

For the combinatorial explanation of $\frac{1}{2}N_2(n)$ in terms of rooted partitions, we first reinterpret $\frac{1}{2}N_2(n)$ in terms of ordinary partitions. Here we need to define the conjugate of the partition. For a partition $\lambda = (\lambda_1, \ldots, \lambda_r)$, the conjugate partition $\lambda' = (\lambda'_1, \lambda'_2, \ldots, \lambda'_t)$ of λ by setting λ'_i to be the number of parts of λ that are greater than or equal to i. Clearly, $l(\lambda) = \lambda'_1$ and $\lambda_1 = l(\lambda')$. It's therefore straightforward to verify the following partition identity:

$$\sum_{\lambda\in\mathcal{P}(n)} \lambda_1^2 = \sum_{\lambda\in\mathcal{P}(n)} l(\lambda)^2. \tag{2.7}$$

We have the following lemma:

Lemma 2.3

$$\frac{1}{2}N_2(n) = \sum_{\lambda\in\mathcal{P}(n)} l(\lambda)^2 - \sum_{\lambda\in\mathcal{P}(n)} [\lambda_1 \cdot l(\lambda)]. \tag{2.8}$$

Proof. From the definition of rank and the moment of rank, we know that

$$\frac{1}{2}N_2(n) = \sum_{\lambda\in\mathcal{P}(n)} \frac{(\lambda_1 - l(\lambda))^2}{2}, \tag{2.9}$$

and

$$\sum_{\lambda\in\mathcal{P}(n)} \frac{(\lambda_1 - l(\lambda))^2}{2} = \frac{1}{2}\sum_{\lambda\in\mathcal{P}(n)} \lambda_1^2 + \frac{1}{2}\sum_{\lambda\in\mathcal{P}(n)} l(\lambda)^2 - \sum_{\lambda\in\mathcal{P}(n)} [\lambda_1 \cdot l(\lambda)]. \tag{2.10}$$

Thus we obtain the combinatorial explanation (2.8) for $\frac{1}{2}N_2(n)$ when substitute (2.7) into (2.10). ∎

We next transform Lemma 2.3 on ordinary partitions to the following statement on rooted partitions by the construction in Lemma 2.1.

Lemma 2.4

$$\frac{1}{2}N_2(n) = \sum_{(\alpha,\beta)\in\mathcal{RP}(n)} [l(\alpha) + l(\beta)] - \sum_{(\alpha,\beta)\in\mathcal{RP}(n)} h(\alpha,\beta), \tag{2.11}$$

where $h(\alpha,\beta)$ denote the largest part of the rooted partition (α,β), that is $h(\alpha,\beta) = \beta_1$ if $\alpha_1 \le \beta_1$; otherwise $h(\alpha,\beta) = \alpha_1$.

Proof. From Lemma 2.1, it's known that for $\lambda \in \mathcal{P}(n)$, we will get exactly $l(\lambda)$ distinct rooted partitions (α,β) corresponding to it in $\mathcal{RP}(n)$. Furthermore for each of these $l(\lambda)$ distinct rooted partitions (α,β), we have $l(\alpha) + l(\beta) = l(\lambda)$ and $h(\alpha,\beta) = \lambda_1$.

Therefore, the sum of $l(\alpha)+l(\beta)$ over all $l(\lambda)$ rooted partitions (α,β) is equal to $l(\lambda)^2$, and we deduce that

$$\sum_{\lambda\in\mathcal{P}(n)} l(\lambda)^2 = \sum_{(\alpha,\beta)\in\mathcal{RP}(n)} [l(\alpha) + l(\beta)]. \tag{2.12}$$

Furthermore, the sum of $h(\alpha,\beta)$ over all $l(\lambda)$ rooted partitions (α,β) is equal to $\lambda_1 \cdot l(\lambda)$, so we have

$$\sum_{\lambda\in\mathcal{P}(n)} [\lambda_1 \cdot l(\lambda)] = \sum_{(\alpha,\beta)\in\mathcal{RP}(n)} h(\alpha,\beta). \tag{2.13}$$

Hence we deduce (2.11) from Lemma 2.3, (2.12), and (2.13). ∎

When applying the conjugation into α in the rooted partition (α,β), we see that each rooted partition (α,β) with $l(\alpha)$ corresponds to a rooted partition (α',β') with α'_1 such that $l(\alpha)=\alpha'_1$. Thus we obtain the following partition identity:

$$\sum_{(\alpha,\beta)\in\mathcal{RP}(n)} l(\alpha)=\sum_{(\alpha,\beta)\in\mathcal{RP}(n)} \alpha_1. \tag{2.14}$$

Similarly, when employing the conjugation to β in (α,β), we find that each rooted partition (α,β) with $l(\beta)$ corresponds to a rooted partition (α',β') with β'_1 such that $l(\beta)=\beta'_1$. So we have:

$$\sum_{(\alpha,\beta)\in\mathcal{RP}(n)} l(\beta)=\sum_{(\alpha,\beta)\in\mathcal{RP}(n)} \beta_1. \tag{2.15}$$

When subscribe (2.14) and (2.15) into (2.11), we obtain the following combinatorial interpretation for $\frac{1}{2}N_2(n)$ in terms of rooted partitions.

Theorem 2.5 *$\frac{1}{2}N_2(n)$ is equal to the sum of α_1 over all rooted partitions (α,β) of n with $\alpha_1<\beta_1$, add the sum of β_1 over all rooted partitions (α,β) of n with $\alpha_1\geq\beta_1$, namely*

$$\frac{1}{2}N_2(n)=\sum_{\substack{(\alpha,\beta)\in\mathcal{RP}(n)\\ \alpha_1<\beta_1}} \alpha_1+\sum_{\substack{(\alpha,\beta)\in\mathcal{RP}(n)\\ \alpha_1\geq\beta_1}} \beta_1. \tag{2.16}$$

Based on Theorems 2.2 and 2.5, we may reformulate Andrews' smallest parts partition function (1.3) as the following theorem:

Theorem 2.6

$$\sum_{\lambda\in\mathcal{P}(n)} n_s(\lambda)=\sum_{(\alpha,\beta)\in\mathcal{RP}(n)} \beta_1-\left[\sum_{\substack{(\alpha,\beta)\in\mathcal{RP}(n)\\ \alpha_1<\beta_1}} \alpha_1+\sum_{\substack{(\alpha,\beta)\in\mathcal{RP}(n)\\ \alpha_1\geq\beta_1}} \beta_1\right]. \tag{2.17}$$

Proof. Evidently, the proof of this theorem is equivalent to the proof of the following partition identity:

$$\sum_{\lambda\in\mathcal{P}(n)} n_s(\lambda)=\sum_{\substack{(\alpha,\beta)\in\mathcal{RP}(n)\\ \alpha_1<\beta_1}} [\beta_1-\alpha_1]. \tag{2.18}$$

We now build a bijection ψ between the set of ordinary partitions of n and the set of rooted partitions (α,β) of n with $\alpha_1<\beta_1$. Furthermore, for $\lambda\in\mathcal{P}(n)$ and $(\alpha,\beta)=\psi(\lambda)$, we have $n_s(\lambda)=\beta_1-\alpha_1$.

The map ψ: For $\lambda\in\mathcal{P}(n)$, we will construct a rooted partition (α,β) where $\beta_1>\alpha_1$. Assume that $l(\lambda)=l$ and $\lambda_1=a$, consider its conjugate $\lambda'=(\lambda'_1,\lambda'_2,\ldots,\lambda'_a)$ where $\lambda'_1=l$. Supposed that the largest part of λ' repeats m_l times, that is, there are m_l parts of size l in λ'. We then have $n_s(\lambda)=\lambda'_1-\lambda'_{m_l+1}$. Define β as the partitions with parts of size l repeated m_l times, and keep the remaining parts of λ' as parts of α.

From the above construction, one could see that $\alpha_1 = \lambda'_{m_l+1}$ and $\beta_1 = \lambda'_1$, that is $\beta_1 > \alpha_1$. Also, $n_s(\lambda) = \lambda'_1 - \lambda'_{m_l+1} = \beta_1 - \alpha_1$. Hence the map ψ satisfies the conditions and one can easily see that this process is reversible. Thus we complete the proof of Theorem 2.6. ∎

For example, there are five partitions of 4: (4), (3, 1), (2, 2), (2, 1, 1), (1, 1, 1, 1). We also have five rooted partitions (α, β) with $\alpha_1 < \beta_1$.

$$(\emptyset,\ (4))\ ((1),\ (3))\ (\emptyset,\ (2,2))\ ((1,1),\ (2))\ (\emptyset,\ (1,1,1,1)).$$

Applying the above bijection, we get the following correspondence:

$$(4) \leftrightarrows (\emptyset,\ (1,1,1,1)) \quad (3,1) \leftrightarrows ((1,1),\ (2)) \quad (2,2) \leftrightarrows (\emptyset,\ (2,2))$$
$$(2,1,1) \leftrightarrows ((1),\ (3)) \quad (1,1,1,1) \leftrightarrows (\emptyset,\ (4)).$$

Acknowledgments. I would like to thank the referee for helpful suggestions. This work was supported by the 973 Project, the PCSIRT Project of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Science and Technology, and the National Science Foundation of China.

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