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| Author(s)    | Iosifescu, M.; Kraaikamp, C.  |
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Osaka University

## ON DENJOY'S CANONICAL CONTINUED FRACTION EXPANSION

M. IOSIFESCU and C. KRAAIKAMP

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### 1. Introduction

Let  $x$  be a real non-integer number with (regular) continued fraction expansion

$$(1) \quad x = a_0 + \frac{1}{a_1 + \frac{1}{a_2 + \ddots}},$$

where  $a_0 \in \mathbb{Z}$  is such that  $x - a_0 \in [0, 1)$ , and  $a_n \in \mathbb{N}$  for  $n \geq 1$ . As is well-known, the regular continued fraction (RCF) expansion of  $x$  is finite if and only if  $x \in \mathbb{Q}$ . In this case there are two possible expansions, otherwise the expansion is unique.

Apart from the RCF expansion there are very many other continued fraction expansions: the continued fraction expansion to the nearest integer, Nakada's  $\alpha$ -expansions, Bosma's optimal expansion ... in fact too many to mention (see [6] and [3] for some background information).

One particular expansion, which attracted no attention whatsoever, and which is quite different from the continued fraction expansions mentioned above, is Denjoy's *canonical continued fraction expansion* (see [2], or [1], p. 275–6 for the original paper by Denjoy). In [2], Denjoy stated that every real number  $x$  has continued fraction expansions of the form

$$(2) \quad x = [d_0; d_1, d_2, \dots],$$

where  $d_0 \in \mathbb{Z}$  is such that  $x - d_0 \geq 0$ , and the digits  $d_n$  are either 0 or 1. Such a continued fraction expansion of  $x$  is called a *canonical continued fraction (CCF) expansion* of  $x$ . Since

$$(3) \quad a + \frac{1}{0 + \frac{1}{b}} = a + b,$$

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Denjoy noted that the RCF expansion (1) can be changed into a CCF expansion (2).

In this note we will prove Denjoy's claims, and also obtain the ergodic system underlying Denjoy's CCF expansion.

## 2. Insertions

Denjoy's remark (3) can be 'translated' into two 'operations' (called *insertions of type  $i$* , where  $i = 1, 2$ ) on the digits of any continued fraction expansion. They are based on the following two equations. If  $a, b \in \mathbb{Z}$ ,  $b \geq 2$ , and  $\xi \geq 0$ , then

$$a + \frac{1}{b + \xi} = a + \frac{1}{1 + \frac{1}{0 + \frac{1}{b - 1 + \xi}}}$$

and

$$a + \frac{1}{b + \xi} = a - 1 + \frac{1}{0 + \frac{1}{1 + \frac{1}{b + \xi}}}$$

In the first case we inserted  $1/(1+1/(0+))$  into  $a+1/(b+\xi)$ , while in the second case  $1/(0+1/(1+))$  was inserted.

Now let  $x \in \mathbb{R} \setminus \mathbb{Z}$ , with RCF expansion (1), and let  $d_0 \in \mathbb{Z}$  be such that  $x - d_0 \geq 0$ . Setting  $k = a_0 - d_0$ , in case  $k > 0$  we can apply the second insertion to (1) just before  $a_1$ . Doing so, we get

$$x = [a_0 - 1; 0, 1, a_1, a_2, \dots]$$

as a continued fraction expansion of  $x$ . Repeating this procedure  $k - 1$  times we find

$$x = [a_0 - k; (0, 1)^k, a_1, a_2, \dots],$$

where  $(0, 1)^k$  is an abbreviation for the string  $0, 1, \dots, 0, 1$  of 0's and 1's of length  $2k$ . For  $k = 0$  this string is empty, i.e., we have

$$x = [a_0 - 0; (0, 1)^0, a_1, a_2, \dots] = [d_0; a_1, a_2, \dots].$$

(This would be the case if  $a_0 = d_0$ ; note that  $d_0 > a_0$  is impossible since  $a_0 = \lfloor x \rfloor$ .)

Next let  $i \geq 1$  be the first index for which  $a_i > 1$ . Applying the first insertion before  $a_i$  yields

$$x = [d_0; (0, 1)^k, 1^{i-1}, 1, 0, a_i - 1, a_{i+1}, \dots],$$

where  $1^k$  is an abbreviation for the string  $1, \dots, 1$  consisting of  $k$  1's, which is empty if  $k = 0$ . Repeating this procedure  $a_i - 2$  times we find

$$x = [d_0; (0, 1)^k, 1^{i-1}, (1, 0)^{a_i-1}, 1, a_{i+1}, \dots].$$

Note that we would have obtained the same result if the second insertion was used  $a_i - 1$  times 'behind'  $a_i$ .

Repeating this procedure, we find for any  $d_0 \in \mathbb{Z}$  with  $d_0 \leq x$  the following CCF expansion of  $x$ :

$$(1) \quad x = [d_0; (0, 1)^{a_0-d_0}, (1, 0)^{a_1-1}, 1, (1, 0)^{a_2-1}, 1, (1, 0)^{a_3-1}, 1, \dots].$$

In this expansion, never two consecutive digits will both equal 0. It follows from (1), that if  $x$  is irrational, then any CCF expansion of  $x$  is infinite and unique once  $d_0$  is given. In case  $x$  is rational, any CCF expansion of  $x$  is finite. However, with  $d_0$  given, two possible CCF expansions exist in this case.

Note that the first  $n$  RCF digits  $a_1, \dots, a_n$  of  $x$  yield  $a_1 + \dots + a_n$  CCF digits equal to 1 and  $a_1 + \dots + a_n - n$  CCF digits equal to 0. Let  $Z_k$  be the number of 0's among the first  $k$  CCF digits  $d_1, \dots, d_k$  of  $x$ , i.e.,  $Z_k = \#\{1 \leq i \leq k: d_i = 0\}$ , and let  $W_k$  be the number of 1's. Then due to Khintchine's classical result (see [7]), that for almost all  $x$  (with respect to Lebesgue measure  $\lambda$ ):

$$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{n} \sum_{j=1}^n a_j = \infty,$$

we deduce that

$$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \frac{Z_k}{W_k} = \lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \frac{\sum_{j=1}^n a_j - n}{\sum_{j=1}^n a_j} = 1 \quad (\text{a.e.})$$

So in spite of the fact that the CCF expansion of  $x \in \mathbb{R} \setminus \mathbb{Z}$  always has more 1's than 0's, we see that for almost all  $x$  there are asymptotically as many 0's as 1's. We conclude this section by noting that the CCF expansion of an  $x \in \mathbb{Z}$  is

$$(4') \quad x = [d_0; (0, 1)^{x-d_0}]$$

for any  $d_0 \in \mathbb{Z}$  with  $d_0 \leq x$ .

### 3. On quadratic irrationalities and Hurwitzian numbers

An old and classical result states that a number  $x$  is a quadratic irrationality (that is, an irrational root of a polynomial of degree 2 with integer coefficients) if and only if  $x$  has an RCF expansion which is eventually periodic, i.e.,  $x$  is of the form

$$(1) \quad x = [a_0; a_1, \dots, a_p, \overline{a_{p+1}, \dots, a_{p+l}}], \quad p \geq 0, l \geq 1,$$

where the bar indicates the period, see [4], [8] or [9] for various classical proofs of this result. It follows from (1) that  $x$  has an eventually periodic RCF expansion of the form (1) if and only if  $x$  has a CCF expansion of the form

$$\begin{aligned}
 x &= [d_0; (0, 1)^{a_0-d_0}, (1, 0)^{a_1-1}, 1, \dots, (1, 0)^{a_p-1}, 1, \\
 &\quad \underbrace{(1, 0)^{a_{p+1}-1}, 1, \dots, (1, 0)^{a_{p+l}-1}, 1}_{\text{period}}, \underbrace{(1, 0)^{a_{p+1}-1}, 1, \dots, (1, 0)^{a_{p+l}-1}, 1, \dots}_{\text{period}}], \\
 &= [d_0; (0, 1)^{a_0-d_0}, (1, 0)^{a_1-1}, 1, \dots, (1, 0)^{a_p-1}, 1, \overline{(1, 0)^{a_{p+1}-1}, 1, \dots, (1, 0)^{a_{p+l}-1}, 1}],
 \end{aligned}$$

where  $d_0 \in \mathbb{Z}$  is such that  $x - d_0 \geq 0$ . Again the bar indicates the period. Thus we see that  $x$  is a quadratic irrationality if and only if the CCF expansion (1) of  $x$  is eventually periodic for every  $d_0 \in \mathbb{Z}$  with  $d_0 \leq x$ .

A nice generalization of the concept of eventually periodic expansions are the so-called *Hurwitzian numbers*. A number  $x$  is called Hurwitzian if and only if  $x$  has an RCF expansion of the form

$$x = [a_0; a_1, \dots, a_p, \overline{K_1(k), \dots, K_l(k)}]_{k=0}^\infty, \quad p \geq 0, \quad l \geq 1,$$

where  $a_0$  is an integer, the  $a_i$ 's are positive integers, and  $K_1(k), \dots, K_l(k)$  are polynomials with rational coefficients which take positive integral values for  $k = 0, 1, \dots$ , and at least one of these polynomials is non-constant, see [9]. A well-known example of a Hurwitzian number is  $e = [2; \overline{1, 2k + 2, 1}]_{k=0}^\infty$ . Again it is immediate from (1) that a number  $x$  is Hurwitzian if for every  $d_0 \leq x$  the CCF expansion of  $x$  is given by

$$\begin{aligned}
 x &= [d_0; (0, 1)^{a_0-d_0}, (1, 0)^{a_1-1}, 1, \dots, (1, 0)^{a_p-1}, 1, \\
 &\quad \overline{(1, 0)^{K_1(k)-1}, 1, \dots, (1, 0)^{K_l(k)-1}, 1}]_{k=0}^\infty.
 \end{aligned}$$

#### 4. Canonical continued fraction convergents

Let  $x \in \mathbb{R}$ , and let  $d_0 \in \mathbb{Z}$  be such that  $x - d_0 \geq 0$ . Furthermore, let (1) (or (4')) be a CCF expansion of  $x$ . Finite truncation yields the sequence of CCF convergents  $(C_n)_{n \geq 0}$  of  $x$ :

$$C_n := d_0 + \frac{1}{d_1 + \frac{1}{d_2 + \dots + \frac{1}{d_n}}} = [d_0; d_1, d_2, \dots, d_n], \quad n \geq 0.$$

The value of  $C_n$  is computed using the rules  $1/0 = \infty$  and  $1/\infty = 0$ . For  $n \geq 2$  this implies that  $C_n$  equals  $C_{n-2}$  when  $d_n = 0$ . This means that  $C_n$  can equal  $\infty$  ( $= 1/0$ ). In order to study the CCF convergents  $C_n$  of  $x$ , we define matrices  $A_n, M_n$ , for  $n \geq 0$

by

$$A_0 := \begin{pmatrix} 1 & d_0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}, \quad A_n := \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & d_n \end{pmatrix}, \quad M_n := A_0 A_1 \cdots A_n.$$

Setting

$$M_n := \begin{pmatrix} r_n & p_n \\ s_n & q_n \end{pmatrix},$$

it follows from  $M_n = M_{n-1} A_n$  that

$$M_n = \begin{pmatrix} p_{n-1} & p_n \\ q_{n-1} & q_n \end{pmatrix},$$

whence  $q_n \geq 0$ ,  $p_n$  and  $q_n$  are relatively prime, and

$$\begin{aligned} p_{-1} &= d_0, & p_0 &= 0, & p_n &= d_n p_{n-1} + p_{n-2}, \\ q_{-1} &= 0, & q_0 &= 1, & q_n &= d_n q_{n-1} + q_{n-2}. \end{aligned}$$

These recurrence relations show again that  $d_n = 0$ , for some  $n \geq 1$ , implies that  $p_n = p_{n-2}$  and  $q_n = q_{n-2}$ . In particular, if  $a_0 - d_0 > 0$ , then

$$\begin{aligned} p_1 &= p_3 = \cdots = p_{2(a_0-d_0)-1} = 1, \\ p_2 &= d_0 + 1, & p_4 &= d_0 + 2, \dots, & p_{2(a_0-d_0)} &= a_0, \end{aligned}$$

and

$$\begin{aligned} q_1 &= q_3 = \cdots = q_{2(a_0-d_0)-1} = 0 \\ q_2 &= q_4 = \cdots = q_{2(a_0-d_0)} = 1. \end{aligned}$$

Defining the Möbius-transformations  $M_n: \mathbb{R}^* \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^*$  by

$$M_n(t) := \frac{p_{n-1}t + p_n}{q_{n-1}t + q_n}, \quad n \geq 1,$$

we see by induction that

$$C_n = M_n(0) = \frac{p_n}{q_n}.$$

For the RCF expansion matrices similar to  $A_n$  and  $M_n$  can be defined. For  $x \in \mathbb{R} \setminus \mathbb{Z}$  with RCF expansion (1), setting

$$B_0 := \begin{pmatrix} 1 & a_0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}, \quad B_n := \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & a_n \end{pmatrix}, \quad N_n := B_0 B_1 \cdots B_n,$$

one has that

$$N_n = \begin{pmatrix} P_{n-1} & P_n \\ Q_{n-1} & Q_n \end{pmatrix},$$

where  $Q_n > 0$ ,  $P_n$  and  $Q_n$  are relatively prime, and

$$\frac{P_n}{Q_n} = [a_0; a_1, \dots, a_n],$$

see [6]. Since

$$\begin{pmatrix} 1 & a_0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & d_0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \left( \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \right)^{a_0 - d_0}$$

and

$$\left( \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \right)^{a_i - 1} = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ a_i - 1 & 1 \end{pmatrix},$$

we conclude (see also (1)) that

$$M_{k(n)} = N_n,$$

where  $k(n) = a_0 - d_0 + 2(a_1 - 1) + 1 + \dots + 2(a_n - 1) + 1$ , which implies that the sequence  $(P_n/Q_n)_{n \geq 0}$  of RCF convergents of  $x$  is a subsequence of the sequence  $(C_n)_{n \geq 0}$  of CCF convergents of  $x$ .

Now let  $a_{n+1} > 1$  for some  $n \geq 1$ . Since  $d_{k(n)+2j} = 0$  for  $1 \leq j \leq a_{n+1} - 1$ , we already saw that  $C_{k(n)} = C_{k(n)+2j} = P_n/Q_n$  for these values of  $j$ . This also follows from the fact that

$$\begin{aligned} M_{k(n)+2j} &= N_n \left( \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \right)^j = \begin{pmatrix} P_{n-1} & P_n \\ Q_{n-1} & Q_n \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ j & 1 \end{pmatrix} \\ &= \begin{pmatrix} jP_n + P_{n-1} & P_n \\ jQ_n + Q_{n-1} & Q_n \end{pmatrix}. \end{aligned}$$

What can we say about  $C_{k(n)+2j-1}$  for  $1 \leq j \leq a_{n+1} - 1$ ? Since

$$M_{k(n)+2j-1} = M_{k(n)+2j} \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}^{-1} = \begin{pmatrix} P_n & jP_n + P_{n-1} \\ Q_n & jQ_n + Q_{n-1} \end{pmatrix},$$

we see that  $C_{k(n)+2j-1}$  is a mediant convergent of  $x$ , i.e.,

$$C_{k(n)+2j-1} = \frac{jP_n + P_{n-1}}{jQ_n + Q_{n-1}}.$$

Thus we see that the collection  $\{C_n : n \geq -1\}$  consists of the integers  $d_0, \dots, a_0$ , of  $1/0$ , and of all RCF and mediant convergents of  $x$ . Note that every RCF convergent  $P_n/Q_n$  of  $x$  appears  $a_{n+1}$  times as a CCF convergent of  $x$ .

**5. The Denjoy map  $T_d$**

One way of finding the RCF expansion (1) of  $x$  is by using the so-called *Gauss-map*  $T : [0, 1) \rightarrow [0, 1)$ , defined by

$$T(x) := \frac{1}{x} - \left\lfloor \frac{1}{x} \right\rfloor, x \in (0, 1); T(0) := 0.$$

For  $x \in \mathbb{R}$  given by (1) or (4'), let  $d_0 \in \mathbb{Z}$  be such that  $x - d_0 \geq 0$ . Setting  $\xi = x - d_0$ , it is clear that

$$\xi = [0; d_1, d_2, \dots].$$

Similarly to the RCF case, this CCF expansion of  $\xi$  can easily be obtained from a suitable map  $T_d$ , which we call the *Denjoy-map*. Let  $T_d : [0, \infty) \rightarrow [0, \infty)$  be defined by

$$T_d(x) := \begin{cases} \frac{1}{x} - 1, & x \in (0, 1], \\ \frac{1}{x} - 0, & x \in (1, \infty), \\ 0, & x = 0. \end{cases}$$

Furthermore, setting

$$d_1 = d_1(\xi) := \begin{cases} 1, & \xi \in (0, 1], \\ 0, & \xi \in (1, \infty), \end{cases}$$

and

$$d_n = d_n(\xi) := d_1(T_d^{n-1}(\xi)), \quad n > 1,$$

we find in case  $T_d^k(\xi) \neq 0$  for  $k = 0, 1, \dots, n - 1$ , that

$$\begin{aligned} \xi &= \frac{1}{d_1 + T_d(\xi)} = \frac{1}{d_1 + \frac{1}{d_2 + T_d^2(\xi)}} = \dots \\ &= \frac{1}{d_1 + \frac{1}{d_2 + \dots + \frac{1}{d_n + T_d^n(\xi)}}}. \end{aligned}$$



There are several algorithms yielding the RCF convergents and mediants, see for instance [3] or [5], where such algorithms together with the underlying ergodic systems are described. In [5], for any  $x \in [0, 1)$ , the RCF convergents and mediants of  $x$  are ‘generated’ in the same order — but without the duplication of the RCF convergents — as in the case of the CCF expansion of  $x$ . The underlying map  $S: [0, 1] \rightarrow [0, 1]$  in [5] is given by

$$S(x) = \begin{cases} \frac{x}{1-x}, & x \in \left[0, \frac{1}{2}\right), \\ \frac{1-x}{x}, & x \in \left[\frac{1}{2}, 1\right], \end{cases}$$

and  $\nu$  is a  $\sigma$ -finite, infinite  $S$ -invariant measure with density  $g$ , given by

$$g(x) = \frac{1}{x}, \quad \text{for } x \in (0, 1).$$

Moreover, Ito showed in [5] that the dynamical system  $([0, 1), S, \nu)$  is ergodic.

It is easy to find by direct calculation that

$$S(x) = \begin{cases} T_d^2(x), & x \in \left[0, \frac{1}{2}\right), \\ T_d(x), & x \in \left[\frac{1}{2}, 1\right], \end{cases}$$

i.e.,  $S$  can be seen as a *jump transformation* of  $T_d$ . Due to this, the ergodic properties of  $S$  can easily be carried over to  $T_d$ . Note that  $T_d^2$  is used to avoid duplication of RCF convergents. Of course, since

$$T(x) = T_d^{2(k-1)+1}(x), \quad \text{for } x \in \left[\frac{1}{k+1}, \frac{1}{k}\right), \quad k \in \mathbb{N},$$

which follows from (1) or by direct calculation, the ergodic properties of  $T_d$  can also be obtained from the ergodic properties of the RCF expansion.

We have the following result.

**Theorem 1.** *The Denjoy-map  $T_d$  has a  $\sigma$ -finite, infinite invariant measure  $\mu$  with density  $f$ , given by*

$$f(x) = \frac{1}{x} 1_{(0,1)}(x) + \frac{1}{1+x} 1_{(1,\infty)}(x), \quad x \in [0, \infty),$$

and the dynamical system  $([0, \infty), T_d, \mu)$  is ergodic.

Proof. By Theorem 1.1 from [10], to prove that  $T_d$  is  $\mu$ -measure preserving, it is enough to show that

$$\mu(T_d^{-1}(A)) = \mu(A),$$

for every interval  $A \subset [1, \infty)$ . Let us first assume that  $A \subset [0, 1]$ . In this case  $\mu(A) = \log(b/a)$  if  $A = [a, b]$ , and

$$\begin{aligned} \mu(T_d^{-1}(A)) &= \int_{1/(b+1)}^{1/(a+1)} \frac{dx}{x} + \int_{1/b}^{1/a} \frac{dx}{1+x} \\ &= \log \frac{b}{a} = \mu(A). \end{aligned}$$

Next assume that  $A \subset (1, \infty)$ . In this case

$$\mu(A) = \int_a^b \frac{dx}{1+x} = \log \frac{b+1}{a+1},$$

and

$$\mu(T_d^{-1}(A)) = \int_{1/(b+1)}^{1/(a+1)} \frac{dx}{x} = \log \frac{b+1}{a+1} = \mu(A).$$

Let  $A$  be a  $T_d$ -invariant Borel set, i.e.,  $T_d^{-1}(A) = A$ . In order to show that  $T_d$  is ergodic with respect to Lebesgue measure  $\lambda$  (and therefore also ergodic with respect to  $\mu$ , since  $\lambda$  and  $\mu$  are equivalent), we should show that either  $\lambda(A) = 0$  or  $\lambda(A^c) = 0$ , where  $A^c = [0, \infty) \setminus A$ .

Setting  $A_1 = A \cap [0, 1]$ ,  $A_2 = A \cap (1, \infty)$ , we have

$$A_1 = (T_d^{-1}(A_1) \cap [0, 1]) \cup T_d^{-1}(A_2),$$

and

$$A_2 = T_d^{-1}(A_1) \cap (1, \infty).$$

Then

$$S^{-1}(A_1) = A_1,$$

i.e.,  $A_1$  is an  $S$ -invariant set. Since  $([0, 1), S, \nu)$  is an ergodic dynamical system we see that either  $\nu(A_1) = 0$  or  $\nu([0, 1) \setminus A_1) = 0$ , which implies that either  $\lambda(A_1) = 0$  or  $\lambda([0, 1) \setminus A_1) = 0$ . In case  $\lambda(A_1) = 0$  we clearly have  $\lambda(A_2) = 0$ , hence  $\lambda(A) = 0$ . In case  $\lambda([0, 1) \setminus A_1) = 0$ , it follows from  $(T_d^{-1}([0, 1) \setminus A_1)) \cap (1, \infty) = (1, \infty) \setminus A_2$  that  $\lambda((1, \infty) \setminus A_2) = 0$ , hence  $\lambda([0, \infty) \setminus A) = 0$ .  $\square$

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M. Iosifescu  
 Romanian Academy  
 “Gheorghe Mihoc” Centre for Mathematical Statistics  
 Casa Academiei Romane, Calea 13 Septembrie nr. 13  
 RO-76117 Bucharest 5, Romania  
 e-mail: miosifes@valhalla.racai.ro

C. Kraaikamp  
 Technische Universiteit Delft, ITS (CROSS)  
 Thomas Stieltjes Institute for Mathematics  
 Mekelweg 4, 2628 CD  
 Delft, the Netherlands  
 e-mail: c.kraaikamp@its.tudelft.nl