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Green’s problem on additive complements of the squares

Yuchen Ding

Abstract. Let $A$ and $B$ be two subsets of the nonnegative integers. We call $A$ and $B$ additive complements if all sufficiently large integers $n$ can be written as $a + b$, where $a \in A$ and $b \in B$. Let $S = \{1^2, 2^2, 3^2, \cdots \}$ be the set of all square numbers. Ben Green was interested in the additive complement of $S$. He asked whether there is an additive complement $B = \{b_n\}_{n=1}^\infty \subseteq \mathbb{N}$ which satisfies $b_n = \frac{\pi^2}{16} n^2 + o(n^2)$. Recently, Chen and Fang proved that if $B$ is such an additive complement, then

$$\limsup_{n \to \infty} \frac{\frac{\pi^2}{16} n^2 - b_n}{n^{1/2} \log n} \geq \sqrt{\frac{2\pi}{\log 4}}.$$

They further conjectured that

$$\limsup_{n \to \infty} \frac{\frac{\pi^2}{16} n^2 - b_n}{n^{1/2} \log n} = +\infty.$$

In this paper, we confirm this conjecture by giving a much more stronger result, i.e.,

$$\limsup_{n \to \infty} \frac{\frac{\pi^2}{16} n^2 - b_n}{n} \geq \frac{\pi}{4}.$$

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1. Introduction

Two subsets $A$ and $B$ of nonnegative integers are said to be additive complements if their sum

$$a + b \ (a \in A, \ b \in B)$$

contains all sufficiently large integers. If $A$ and $B$ are additive complements, we also call $B$ an additive complement of $A$. For any set $L$ of nonnegative integers, let $L(x)$ be the number of elements in $L$ which are no greater than $x$. As usual, $[x]$ and $(x)$ denote the integral part and fractional part of $x$ respectively.

Let $S = \{1^2, 2^2, 3^2, \cdots \}$ be the set of all square numbers. Given a positive integer $N$, let $T = \{t_1, t_2, t_3, \cdots, t_l\}$ be a subset of nonnegative integers such that every positive integer $n \leq N$
can be represented by the sum of the elements of $S$ and $T$. It is sure that $l\sqrt{N} \geq N$. In [6], Erdős asked whether there exists a positive constant $c$ such that

$$l\sqrt{N} > (1 + c)N$$

for all sufficiently large $N$. It was answered affirmative by Moser [8] with $c = 1.06$. Later the constant was improved by Balasubramanian [1] to 1.15, by Balasubramanian and Soundararajan [3] to 1.245. The best result of the constant $c$ up to now is $\frac{4}{\pi}$ which was obtained by Cilleruelo [5], Habsieger [7], Balasubramanian and Ramana [2] respectively.

Based on the above rich literature, Ben Green posed a problem to Fang about the additive complements of the squares during her visit to the Mathematical Institute, University of Oxford in 2016 [4]. He asked whether there exists a positive constant $c$ such that

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for all \( n > n_1 \). Thus there exists an integer \( n_2 \geq n_1 \), such that

\[
b_n \geq \frac{\pi^2}{16} \left( n - \frac{2}{\pi} + \frac{4}{\pi^2} \delta \right)^2
\]

for all \( n > n_2 \). This implies that

\[
B(n) \leq \frac{4}{\pi} \sqrt{n + \frac{2}{\pi} - \delta_1}
\]

for all \( n > n_2 \), where \( \delta_1 = \frac{4}{\pi} \delta \) is a positive constant. Let \( R(n) = \#(m, b : n = m^2 + b, b \in B) \) be the representation function of \( n \). For any positive integer \( N \), we have

\[
\sum_{n=1}^{N} R(n) = \sum_{n^2+b\leq N} 1 = \sum_{n \leq \sqrt{N}} \sum_{b \leq N-n^2} 1 = \sum_{n \leq \sqrt{N}} B(N-n^2)
\]

(2)

\[
\leq \sum_{n \leq \sqrt{N}} \left( \frac{4}{\pi} \sqrt{N-n^2} + \frac{2}{\pi} - \delta_1 \right) + O(1)
\]

\[
= \frac{4}{\pi} \sum_{n \leq \sqrt{N}} \sqrt{N-n^2} + \left( \frac{2}{\pi} - \delta_1 \right) \sqrt{N} + O(1),
\]

where the implied constant depends only on \( n_2 \).

Now we consider the summation \( \sum_{n \leq \sqrt{N}} \sqrt{N-n^2} \). For square integer \( N = K^2 \), Euler–Maclaurian formula with \( f(t) = \sqrt{N-t^2} \) shows that

\[
\sum_{n \leq \sqrt{N}} \sqrt{N-n^2} = \sum_{n=0}^{K} f(n) - f(0)
\]

\[
= \frac{f(K) - f(0)}{2} + \int_{0}^{K} f(t) dt + \int_{0}^{K} f'(t) \left( t - \frac{1}{2} \right) dt
\]

(3)

\[
= -\frac{K}{2} + \frac{\pi}{4} K^2 - \int_{0}^{K} \frac{t \left( \left( t - \frac{1}{2} \right) \right)}{\sqrt{K^2-t^2}} dt
\]

\[
= -\frac{K}{2} + \frac{\pi}{4} \sqrt{N} - \sum_{k=0}^{K-1} \int_{k}^{k+1} \frac{t \left( \left( t - \frac{1}{2} \right) \right)}{\sqrt{K^2-t^2}} dt.
\]

Note that \( \frac{t}{\sqrt{N-t^2}} \) is a monotone increasing function on \([0, \sqrt{N}]\). We have

\[
\int_{k}^{k+1} \frac{t \left( \left( t - \frac{1}{2} \right) \right)}{\sqrt{K^2-t^2}} dt = \int_{-\frac{1}{2}}^{\frac{1}{2}} \frac{\left( k + \frac{1}{2} + x \right) \left( \left( k + \frac{1}{2} + x \right) - \frac{1}{2} \right)}{\sqrt{K^2 - \left( k + \frac{1}{2} + x \right)^2}} dx
\]

(4)

\[
= \int_{-\frac{1}{2}}^{\frac{1}{2}} \frac{\left( k + \frac{1}{2} + x \right)}{\sqrt{K^2 - \left( k + \frac{1}{2} + x \right)^2}} dx
\]

\[
= \int_{0}^{\frac{1}{2}} \frac{\left( k + \frac{1}{2} + x \right) \left( \sqrt{K^2 - \left( k + \frac{1}{2} + x \right)^2} - \frac{k + \frac{1}{2} - x}{\sqrt{K^2 - \left( k + \frac{1}{2} - x \right)^2}} \right)}{\sqrt{K^2 - \left( k + \frac{1}{2} - x \right)^2}} dx \geq 0.
\]
Combining (3) with (4) gives
\[ \sum_{n \leq \sqrt{N}} \sqrt{N - n^2} \leq \frac{\pi}{4} N - \frac{\sqrt{N}}{2}. \] (5)

Hence
\[ \sum_{n=1}^{N} R(n) \leq N - \left( \frac{2}{\pi} - \left( \frac{2}{\pi} - \delta_1 \right) \right) \sqrt{N} + O(1) = N - \delta_1 \sqrt{N} + O(1) \] (6)

for square integers \( N \) with \( N > n_2 \). Recall that \( B \) is an additive complement of the squares, so there is an integer \( n_3 > 0 \) such that
\[ R(n) \geq 1 \]

for all \( n \geq n_3 \). It yields that
\[ \sum_{n=1}^{N} R(n) \geq \sum_{n=n_3}^{N} R(n) \geq N - n_3. \]

This obviously contradicts to equation (6) when \( N \) is a sufficiently large square integer. \( \square \)

**Remark 2.** As one can see that the idea in the proof of our Theorem 1 is simple but very effective. We use nothing but the trivial estimate on \( R(n) \), i.e., \( R(n) \geq 1 \) for all sufficiently large integers. At the end of this short note, we formulate a conjecture similar to the one of Chen and Fang: If \( B = \{ b_n \}_{n=1}^{\infty} \) is an additive complement of \( S \), then
\[ \limsup_{n \to \infty} \frac{\pi^2 n^2 - b_n}{n} = +\infty. \]

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