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# Representation Theory of

## Semisimple Groups

### Representation Theory of Semisimple Groups

ANTHONY W. KNAFF

The Central Group Theory and Representation

Algebraic Theory of Semisimple Groups

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# *Representation Theory of Semisimple Groups*

AN OVERVIEW BASED ON EXAMPLES

*With a new preface by the author*

ANTHONY W. KNAPP

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*To Susan  
and  
Sarah and William  
for their patience*

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION	viii
PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION	xv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xvii

**PART I. THE GROUP THEORY**

1. The Group Theory	1
2. Group Operations	7
3. Homomorphisms	10
4. Cosets and Lagrange's Theorem	14
5. Normal Subgroups and Quotient Groups	18
6. Applications of the Homomorphism Theorem	21
7. Isomorphisms	23

**PART II. REPRESENTATIONS OF  $GL(2, \mathbb{C})$  AND  $SL(2, \mathbb{C})$**

8. The Group $GL(2, \mathbb{C})$	28
9. Irreducible Finite-Dimensional Complex Linear Representations of $GL(2, \mathbb{C})$	30
10. Finite-Dimensional Representations of $SL(2, \mathbb{C})$	31
11. Nontrivial Irreducible Representations of $SL(2, \mathbb{C})$	32
12. The $SL(2, \mathbb{C})$	33
13. Irreducible Representations	34
14. Summary	35

**PART III.  $C^*$ -ALGEBRAS AND THE THEORY OF  
NONCOMMUTATIVE GEOMETRY**

15. Historical Development	40
16. Norms and Normed Linear Spaces	40
17. $C^*$ -Algebras	42
18. Ideals and Quotients	43
19. $K$ -Modules	44



## Contents

PREFACE TO THE PRINCETON LANDMARKS IN MATHEMATICS EDITION	xiii
PREFACE	xv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xix
CHAPTER I. SCOPE OF THE THEORY	
§1. The Classical Groups	3
§2. Cartan Decomposition	7
§3. Representations	10
§4. Concrete Problems in Representation Theory	14
§5. Abstract Theory for Compact Groups	14
§6. Application of the Abstract Theory to Lie Groups	23
§7. Problems	24
CHAPTER II. REPRESENTATIONS OF $SU(2)$ , $SL(2, \mathbb{R})$ , AND $SL(2, \mathbb{C})$	
§1. The Unitary Trick	28
§2. Irreducible Finite-Dimensional Complex-Linear Representations of $\mathfrak{sl}(2, \mathbb{C})$	30
§3. Finite-Dimensional Representations of $\mathfrak{sl}(2, \mathbb{C})$	31
§4. Irreducible Unitary Representations of $SL(2, \mathbb{C})$	33
§5. Irreducible Unitary Representations of $SL(2, \mathbb{R})$	35
§6. Use of $SU(1, 1)$	39
§7. Plancherel Formula	41
§8. Problems	42
CHAPTER III. $C^\infty$ VECTORS AND THE UNIVERSAL ENVELOPING ALGEBRA	
§1. Universal Enveloping Algebra	46
§2. Actions on Universal Enveloping Algebra	50
§3. $C^\infty$ Vectors	51
§4. Gårding Subspace	55
§5. Problems	57



## CHAPTER IV. REPRESENTATIONS OF COMPACT LIE GROUPS

§1. Examples of Root Space Decompositions	60
§2. Roots	65
§3. Abstract Root Systems and Positivity	72
§4. Weyl Group, Algebraically	78
§5. Weights and Integral Forms	81
§6. Centralizers of Tori	86
§7. Theorem of the Highest Weight	89
§8. Verma Modules	93
§9. Weyl Group, Analytically	100
§10. Weyl Character Formula	104
§11. Problems	109

## CHAPTER V. STRUCTURE THEORY FOR NONCOMPACT GROUPS

§1. Cartan Decomposition and the Unitary Trick	113
§2. Iwasawa Decomposition	116
§3. Regular Elements, Weyl Chambers, and the Weyl Group	121
§4. Other Decompositions	126
§5. Parabolic Subgroups	132
§6. Integral Formulas	137
§7. Borel-Weil Theorem	142
§8. Problems	147

## CHAPTER VI. HOLOMORPHIC DISCRETE SERIES

§1. Holomorphic Discrete Series for $SU(1, 1)$	150
§2. Classical Bounded Symmetric Domains	152
§3. Harish-Chandra Decomposition	153
§4. Holomorphic Discrete Series	158
§5. Finiteness of an Integral	161
§6. Problems	164

## CHAPTER VII. INDUCED REPRESENTATIONS

§1. Three Pictures	167
§2. Elementary Properties	169
§3. Bruhat Theory	172
§4. Formal Intertwining Operators	174
§5. Gindikin-Karpelevič Formula	177
§6. Estimates on Intertwining Operators, Part I	181
§7. Analytic Continuation of Intertwining Operators, Part I	183
§8. Spherical Functions	185
§9. Finite-Dimensional Representations and the $H$ function	191



§10. Estimates on Intertwining Operators, Part II	196
§11. Tempered Representations and Langlands Quotients	198
§12. Problems	201

## CHAPTER VIII. ADMISSIBLE REPRESENTATIONS

§1. Motivation	203
§2. Admissible Representations	205
§3. Invariant Subspaces	209
§4. Framework for Studying Matrix Coefficients	215
§5. Harish-Chandra Homomorphism	218
§6. Infinitesimal Character	223
§7. Differential Equations Satisfied by Matrix Coefficients	226
§8. Asymptotic Expansions and Leading Exponents	234
§9. First Application: Subrepresentation Theorem	238
§10. Second Application: Analytic Continuation of Intertwining Operators, Part II	239
§11. Third Application: Control of $K$ -Finite $Z(\mathfrak{g}^{\mathbb{C}})$ -Finite Functions	242
§12. Asymptotic Expansions near the Walls	247
§13. Fourth Application: Asymptotic Size of Matrix Coefficients	253
§14. Fifth Application: Identification of Irreducible Tempered Representations	258
§15. Sixth Application: Langlands Classification of Irreducible Admissible Representations	266
§16. Problems	276

## CHAPTER IX. CONSTRUCTION OF DISCRETE SERIES

§1. Infinitesimally Unitary Representations	281
§2. A Third Way of Treating Admissible Representations	282
§3. Equivalent Definitions of Discrete Series	284
§4. Motivation in General and the Construction in $SU(1, 1)$	287
§5. Finite-Dimensional Spherical Representations	300
§6. Duality in the General Case	303
§7. Construction of Discrete Series	309
§8. Limitations on $K$ Types	320
§9. Lemma on Linear Independence	328
§10. Problems	330

## CHAPTER X. GLOBAL CHARACTERS

§1. Existence	333
§2. Character Formulas for $SL(2, \mathbb{R})$	338
§3. Induced Characters	347
§4. Differential Equations	354
§5. Analyticity on the Regular Set, Overview and Example	355

§6. Analyticity on the Regular Set, General Case	360
§7. Formula on the Regular Set	368
§8. Behavior on the Singular Set	371
§9. Families of Admissible Representations	374
§10. Problems	383
<b>CHAPTER XI. INTRODUCTION TO PLANCHEREL FORMULA</b>	
§1. Constructive Proof for $SU(2)$	385
§2. Constructive Proof for $SL(2, \mathbb{C})$	387
§3. Constructive Proof for $SL(2, \mathbb{R})$	394
§4. Ingredients of Proof for General Case	401
§5. Scheme of Proof for General Case	404
§6. Properties of $F_f$	407
§7. Hirai's Patching Conditions	421
§8. Problems	425
<b>CHAPTER XII. EXHAUSTION OF DISCRETE SERIES</b>	
§1. Boundedness of Numerators of Characters	426
§2. Use of Patching Conditions	432
§3. Formula for Discrete Series Characters	436
§4. Schwartz Space	447
§5. Exhaustion of Discrete Series	452
§6. Tempered Distributions	456
§7. Limits of Discrete Series	460
§8. Discrete Series of $M$	467
§9. Schmid's Identity	473
§10. Problems	476
<b>CHAPTER XIII. PLANCHEREL FORMULA</b>	
§1. Ideas and Ingredients	482
§2. Real-Rank-One Groups, Part I	482
§3. Real-Rank-One Groups, Part II	485
§4. Averaged Discrete Series	494
§5. $Sp(2, \mathbb{R})$	502
§6. General Case	511
§7. Problems	512
<b>CHAPTER XIV. IRREDUCIBLE TEMPERED REPRESENTATIONS</b>	
§1. $SL(2, \mathbb{R})$ from a More General Point of View	515
§2. Eisenstein Integrals	520
§3. Asymptotics of Eisenstein Integrals	526
§4. The $\eta$ Functions for Intertwining Operators	535
§5. First Irreducibility Results	540
§6. Normalization of Intertwining Operators and Reducibility	543
§7. Connection with Plancherel Formula when $\dim A = 1$	547

§8. Harish-Chandra's Completeness Theorem	553
§9. $R$ Group	560
§10. Action by Weyl Group on Representations of $M$	568
§11. Multiplicity One Theorem	577
§12. Zuckerman Tensoring of Induced Representations	584
§13. Generalized Schmid Identities	587
§14. Inversion of Generalized Schmid Identities	595
§15. Complete Reduction of Induced Representations	599
§16. Classification	606
§17. Revised Langlands Classification	614
§18. Problems	621
CHAPTER XV. MINIMAL $K$ TYPES	
§1. Definition and Formula	626
§2. Inversion Problem	635
§3. Connection with Intertwining Operators	641
§4. Problems	647
CHAPTER XVI. UNITARY REPRESENTATIONS	
§1. $SL(2, \mathbb{R})$ and $SL(2, \mathbb{C})$	650
§2. Continuity Arguments and Complementary Series	653
§3. Criterion for Unitary Representations	655
§4. Reduction to Real Infinitesimal Character	660
§5. Problems	665
APPENDIX A: ELEMENTARY THEORY OF LIE GROUPS	
§1. Lie Algebras	667
§2. Structure Theory of Lie Algebras	668
§3. Fundamental Group and Covering Spaces	670
§4. Topological Groups	673
§5. Vector Fields and Submanifolds	674
§6. Lie Groups	679
APPENDIX B: REGULAR SINGULAR POINTS OF PARTIAL DIFFERENTIAL EQUATIONS	
§1. Summary of Classical One-Variable Theory	685
§2. Uniqueness and Analytic Continuation of Solutions in Several Variables	690
§3. Analog of Fundamental Matrix	693
§4. Regular Singularities	697
§5. Systems of Higher Order	700
§6. Leading Exponents and the Analog of the Indicial Equation	703
§7. Uniqueness of Representation	710

**APPENDIX C: ROOTS AND RESTRICTED ROOTS FOR CLASSICAL GROUPS**

§1. Complex Groups	713
§2. Noncompact Real Groups	713
§3. Roots vs. Restricted Roots in Noncompact Real Groups	715
NOTES	719
REFERENCES	747
INDEX OF NOTATION	763
INDEX	767



## *Preface to the Princeton Landmarks in Mathematics Edition*

I am pleased that Princeton University Press has decided to reprint in its Landmarks in Mathematics series *Representation Theory of Semisimple Groups: An Overview Based on Examples*. The original hardback edition of the book has been out of print for two years, and the book continues to be in demand.

The subject matter is at least as important today as it was at the time of the book's original publication in 1986. Two of the fields of application—automorphic forms and analysis of semisimple symmetric spaces—have undergone remarkable advances, and the theory in the book has been indispensable for both. Newer fields, such as Kac-Moody algebras and quantum groups, show promise of using more and more of this theory. And attempts at solving the key problem in Chapter XVI—that of finding all the irreducible unitary representations for all semisimple groups—have led to new approaches and new problems in the subjects of algebraic groups and geometric group actions.

Even with all these advances, the approach taken in the hardback edition continues to be an appropriate one for learning the subject. None of the text has been changed in the Landmarks edition, and thus it remains true to this approach.

A.W.K.

April 2001



## *Preface*

The intention with this book is to give a survey of the representation theory of semisimple Lie groups, including results and techniques, in a way that reflects the spirit of the subject, corresponds more to a person's natural learning process, and stops at the end of a single volume.

Our approach is based on examples and has unusual ground rules. Although we insist (at least ultimately) on precisely stated theorems, we allow proofs that handle only an example. This is especially so when the example captures the idea for the general case. In fact, we prefer such a proof when the difference between the special case and the general case is merely a matter of technique and a presentation of the technique would not contribute to the goals of the book. The reader will be confronted with a first instance of this style of proof with Proposition 1.2. In some cases later on, when the style of a proof is atypical of the subject matter of the book, we omit the proof altogether.

Another aspect of the ground rules is that we feel no compulsion to state results in maximum generality. Even when the effect is to break with tradition, we are willing to define a concept narrowly. This is especially so with concepts for which one traditionally makes a wider definition and then proves as a theorem that the narrower definition gives all examples. Thus, for instance, a semisimple Lie group for us has a built-in Cartan involution, whereas traditionally one proves the existence of a Cartan involution as a theorem; since the involution is apparent in examples, we take it as part of the definition.

An essential companion to this style of writing is a careful guide to further reading for people who are interested. The section of Notes and its accompanying References are for just this purpose—so that a reader can selectively go more deeply into an aspect of the subject at will.

Twice we depart somewhat from our ground rules and proceed in a more thorough fashion. The first time is in Chapter IV with the Cartan-Weyl theory for compact Lie groups. The theory is applied often, and its general techniques are used frequently. The second time is in Chapter VIII and Appendix B with admissible representations. The heart of this theory consists of two brilliant papers by Harish-Chandra [1960] on the role of differential equations, a fundamental contribution by Langlands



[1973] on the classification of irreducible admissible representations, and a striking application of the theory by Casselman [1975]. The original papers are unpublished manuscripts, although Harish-Chandra's have been included in his collected works and parts of all the papers have been incorporated into the books by Warner [1972b] and by Borel and Wallach [1980] and into the paper by Casselman and Milićić [1982]. Since the original papers are not otherwise widely accessible, since they have been simplified somewhat by several people, and since their content is so important, we have chosen to go into some detail about them.

The finite-dimensional representation theory of semisimple groups is due chiefly to E. Cartan and H. Weyl. The infinite-dimensional theory began with Bargmann's treatment of  $SL(2, \mathbb{R})$  in 1947 and then was dominated for many years by Harish-Chandra in the United States and by Gelfand and Naimark in the Soviet Union. Although functional analysts such as Godement, Mackey, Mautner, and Segal made early contributions to the foundations of the subject, it was Harish-Chandra, Gelfand, and Naimark who set the tone for research by using deeper structural properties of the groups to get at explicit results in representation theory. The early work by these three leaders established the explicit determination of the Plancherel formula and the explicit description of the unitary dual as important initial goals. This attitude of requiring explicit results ultimately forced a more concrete approach to the subject than was possible with abstract functional analysis, and the same attitude continues today. More recently this attitude has been refined to insist that significant results not only be explicit but also be applicable to all semisimple groups. A group-by-group analysis is rarely sufficient now: It usually does not give the required amount of insight into the subject. To be true to the field, this book attempts to communicate such attitudes and approaches, along with the results.

Bruhat's 1956 thesis was the first major advance in the field by another author that was consistent with the attitudes and approaches of the three leaders. Toward 1960 other mathematicians began to make significant contributions to parts of the theory beyond the foundations, but the goals and attitudes remained.

Beginning with Cartan and Weyl and lasting even beyond 1960, there was a continual argument among experts about whether the subject should be approached through analysis or through algebra. Some today still take one side or the other. It is clear from history, though, that it is best to use both analysis and algebra; insight comes from each. This book reflects that philosophy. To present both viewpoints for compact groups, for example, we begin with Cartan's algebraic approach and switch abruptly to Weyl's analytic approach in the middle. The reader will notice other instances of this philosophy in later chapters.

The author's introduction to this subject came from a course taught by S. Helgason at M.I.T. in 1967, a seminar run with C. J. Earle, W.H.J. Fuchs, S. Halperin, O. S. Rothaus, and H.-C. Wang in 1968, a course from Harish-Chandra in the fall of 1968, and conversations with E. M. Stein beginning in 1968. Some of these first insights are reproduced in this book. More of the book comes from lectures and courses given by the author over a period of fifteen years. There are a few new theorems and many new proofs.

All of this material came together for a course at Université Paris VII in Spring 1982, and the notes given for that course constituted a preliminary edition of the present book.

Prerequisites for the book are a one-semester course in Lie groups, some measure theory, some knowledge of one complex variable, and a few things about Hilbert spaces. For the one-semester course in Lie groups, knowledge of the first four chapters of the book by Chevalley [1947] and some supplementary material on Lie algebras are appropriate; a summary of this material constitutes Appendix A. In addition to these prerequisites, existence and uniqueness of Haar measure are assumed, as is the definition of a complex manifold; references are provided for this material. Other theorems are sometimes cited in the text; they are not intended as part of the prerequisites, and references are given.

Beginning at a certain point in one's mathematical career—corresponding roughly to the second or third year of graduate school in the United States and to the troisième cycle in France—one rarely learns a field of mathematics by studying it from start to finish. Later courses may be given as logical progressions through a subject, but the alert instructor recognizes that the students who master the mathematics do not do so by mastering the logical progressions. Instead the mastery comes through studying examples, through grasping patterns, through getting a feeling for how to approach aspects of the subject, and through other intangibles. Yet our advanced mathematics books seldom reflect this reality.

The subject of semisimple Lie groups is especially troublesome in this respect. It has a reputation for being both beautiful and difficult, and many mathematicians seem to want to know something about it. But it seems impossible to penetrate. A thorough logical-progression approach might require ten thousand pages.

Thus the need and the opportunity are present to try a different approach. The intention is that an approach to representation theory through examples be a response to that need and opportunity.

A.W.K.

August 1984





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