Complexification

Daniel Miller

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So far we have only considered real Lie groups, even though some of our examples, like $\mathrm{GL}(n, \mathbf{C})$, seem like they should be "complex" objects in some way. So, without further ado, we make a definition.

Definition 1. A *complex Lie group* is a group which is also a complex manifold, such that all the group operations are analytic maps.

With this definition, it is easy to see that $\mathrm{GL}(n, \mathbf{C})$ is a complex Lie group, as is $\mathrm{Sp}(2n, \mathbf{C})$. Clearly, every complex Lie group can be made into a real Lie group in a trivial way, by forgetting the complex structure. That is, we have a kind of map (a functor, for those in the know)

$$(-)^{\mathrm{real}} \colon \{\text{complex Lie groups}\} \to \{\text{real Lie groups}\}.$$

It would be nice for there to be a kind of "inverse" map in the opposite direction (an adjoint functor, for those who care). That is, given a real Lie group G, we would like there to be a complex Lie group $G_{\mathbf{C}}$, together with a homomorphism $G \to G_{\mathbf{C}}$, such that for any complex Lie group H and a homomorphism $f \colon G \to H$, there exists a unique extension $\widetilde{f} \colon G_{\mathbf{C}} \to H$. We call $G_{\mathbf{C}}$ the *complexification* of G.

(Brief interlude on universal properties and uniqueness.)

Theorem 1. *Let $G \to H$ be a map from a real Lie group to a complex one, both connected, that induces an isomorphism $\mathfrak{g}_{\mathbf{C}} \to \mathfrak{h}$. If $\pi_1(H) = 1$, then H is a complexification of G.*

Proof. We only need to check that H satisfies the universal property. Let H' be an arbitrary complex Lie group together with a homomorphism $f \colon G \to H'$. This gives us a real Lie algebra map $\mathrm{d}f \colon \mathfrak{g} \to \mathfrak{h}'$, which uniquely extends to a complex Lie algebra map $(\mathrm{d}f)_{\mathbf{C}} \colon \mathfrak{g}_{\mathbf{C}} \to \mathfrak{h}'$. Equivalently, $\mathrm{d}f$ extends uniquely to a complex Lie algebra map $\widetilde{\mathrm{d}f} \colon \mathfrak{h} \to \mathfrak{h}'$. Since H is simply connected, we get a unique homomorphism of real Lie groups $\widetilde{f} \colon H \to H'$, extending f. Since $\mathrm{d}\widetilde{f} = \widetilde{\mathrm{d}f}$, a $\mathbf{C}$-linear map, $\widetilde{f}$ is in fact complex analytic. $\square$

As an example, since $\pi_1(\mathrm{SL}(n, \mathbf{C})) = 1$, the inclusion $\mathrm{SL}(n, \mathbf{R}) \hookrightarrow \mathrm{SL}(n, \mathbf{C})$ makes $\mathrm{SL}(n, \mathbf{C})$ the complexification of $\mathrm{SL}(n, \mathbf{R})$.

Theorem 2. *Let K be a compact connected Lie group. Then the complexification of K exists.*

Proof. We know there is an embedding $K \subset \mathrm{U}(n)$ for some $n \geqslant 1$. Put $\mathfrak{k} = \mathrm{Lie}(K)$, $P = \exp(i\mathfrak{k})$, and $G = K \cdot P \subset \mathrm{GL}(n, \mathbf{C})$. $\square$