

# Computation of the Character Table of the Symmetric Group

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# Introduction

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# Introduction

## Character Table

## Background

- Character Table

**Definition.** If  $V$  is a representation of a group  $G$ , its *character*  $\chi_V$  is the complex-valued function on the group defined by

$$\chi_V(g) = \text{Tr}(g|_V)$$

where  $\text{Tr}(g|_V)$  is the trace of  $g$  on  $V$ .

**Definition.** For representation  $G \rightarrow GL(V)$  the character table is a square matrix:

1. the first row lists the conjugacy classes of  $G$ ,
2. the first column lists the irreducible representations of  $V$ ,
3. the rest entries are character values each corresponding the conjugacy class and irreducible representation.

# Introduction

## Character Table

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- Character Table

**Theorem 1.** The conjugacy classes of symmetric group  $S_n$  are determined by partitions.

**Theorem 2.** The irreducible representations of symmetric group  $S_n$  are determined by partitions.

**Example.**  $S_3 : \{ (123), (132), (12), (13), (23), () \}$

Partition	Conjugacy Classes	Irreducible Representations
(1,1,1)	()	alternating
(2,1)	(12), (13), (23)	standard
(3)	(123), (132)	trivial

# Introduction

## Character Table

## Background




- Character Table

**Example.**

The character table of symmetric group  $S_3$

	(1,1,1)	(2,1)	(3)
trivial	1	1	1
standard	2	0	-1
alternating	1	-1	1

Character Table of  $S_3$

-  The first row lists the *conjugacy classes* of  $S_3$ .
-  The first column lists the *irreducible representations* of  $S_3$ .
-  The rest entires are *character values* each corresponding the conjugacy class and irreducible representation.

# Introduction

## Character Table

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- Background

Character Table is very useful!

In chemistry, crystallography, and spectroscopy, character tables of point groups are used to classify e.g. molecular vibrations according to their symmetry, and to predict whether a transition between two states is forbidden for symmetry reasons.

Many university level textbooks on physical chemistry, quantum chemistry, spectroscopy and inorganic chemistry devote a chapter to the use of symmetry group character tables.

---- Wikipedia

## Problem

Sagemath, GAP, etc., are too slow to compute the table.  
We need a specific algorithm to reduce computation time.

# Introduction

## Character Table

## Background

- Background

### Test Results for Sagemath

Symmetric Group  $S_n$  ( $n = 20, 25, 30$ )

```
In [8]: start = time.time()
SymmetricGroup(20).character_table()
print("spend time: ", time.time() - start, "s")

spend time: 16.497802019119263 s
```

```
In [9]: start = time.time()
SymmetricGroup(25).character_table()
print("spend time: ", time.time() - start, "s")

spend time: 162.95479273796082 s
```

```
In [10]: start = time.time()
SymmetricGroup(30).character_table()
print("spend time: ", time.time() - start, "s")

spend time: 1615.2928960546875 s
```

$S_n$	Time spent (s)
$S_{20}$	16.49
$S_{25}$	162.95
$S_{30}$	1615.29



# How To Compute

# How To Compute

Nakayama's rule

Young Diagram

Young Tableau

Border Strip

Border Strip Tableau

- Murnaghan–Nakayama Rule

Since partition can determine the conjugacy class and irreducible representation of  $S_n$ , we let partition  $\lambda$  specify the conjugacy class, and  $\rho$  the irreducible representation,  $\chi_\rho^\lambda$  the corresponding character value.

Then we have Murnaghan–Nakayama Rule:

**Non-Recursive Version**

$$\chi_\rho^\lambda = \sum_{T \in BST(\lambda, \rho)} (-1)^{ht(T)}$$

**Recursive Version**

$$\chi_\rho^\lambda = \sum_{\mu \in BS(\lambda, \rho_1)} (-1)^{ht(\mu)} \chi_{\rho \setminus \rho_1}^{\lambda \setminus \mu}$$

with stop condition:  $\chi_0^0 = 1$ .

# How To Compute

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## Murnaghan–Nakayama Rule

### Non-Recursive Version

$$\chi_{\rho}^{\lambda} = \sum_{T \in BST(\lambda, \rho)} (-1)^{ht(T)}$$

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- Young Diagram

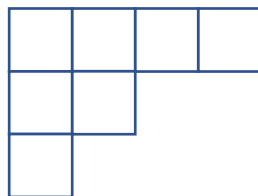
**Definition.** A **partition** is a sequence  $\lambda = (\lambda_1, \lambda_2, \dots, \lambda_l)$  of nonnegative integers in decreasing order:  $\lambda_1 \geq \lambda_2 \geq \dots \geq \lambda_l > 0$ ,  $l$  is the length of  $\lambda$ ,  $|\lambda| = \sum_{i=1}^l \lambda_i$  is the size of  $\lambda$ .

**Example.** (size: 7)

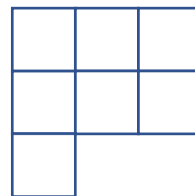
$$\lambda = (4, 2, 1), \mu = (3, 3, 1), \rho = (4, 1, 1, 1)$$

**Definition.** **Young diagram** is a finite collection of boxes, which contains  $\lambda_i$  boxes in row  $i$  for a given partition  $\lambda$ .

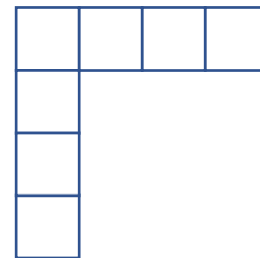
**Example.**



(4,2,1)



(3,3,1)



(4,1,1,1)

# How To Compute

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Murnaghan–Nakayama Rule

Non-Recursive Version

$$\chi_{\rho}^{\lambda} = \sum_{T \in BST(\lambda, \rho)} (-1)^{ht(T)}$$

Recursive Version

$$\chi_{\rho}^{\lambda} = \sum_{\mu \in BS(\lambda, \rho_1)} (-1)^{ht(\mu)} \chi_{\rho \setminus \rho_1}^{\lambda \setminus \mu}$$

stop condition:  $\chi_0^0 = 1$

- Young Tableau

**Definition.** A **Young tableau** is obtained by filling in the boxes of the Young diagram with symbols taken from some ordered alphabet. We say it is **standard** (SYT) if the entries in each row and each column are increasing.

**Example.**

2	1	3	4
7	5		
6			

(4,2,1)

1	2	3
4	5	6
7		

(3,3,1)

1	5	6	7
2			
3			
4			

(4,1,1,1)

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## Murnaghan–Nakayama Rule

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### Recursive Version

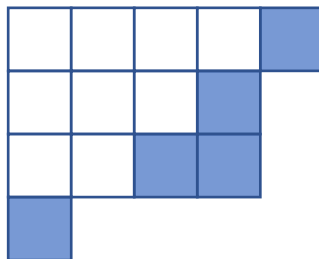
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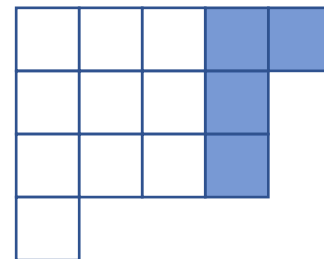
- Border Strip (BS)

**Definition.** Let  $\lambda, \mu$  be partitions with  $\lambda \supseteq \mu$ , then the set-theoretic difference  $\lambda \setminus \mu$  is called a **skew diagram**. A skew diagram is border strip if it is connected (two boxes have a common edge) and does not contain a  $2 \times 2$ -block of boxes. The height  $ht(\lambda)$  of a border strip is the number of rows it touches minus one. We define  $BS(\lambda, l)$  as the set of all border strips with length  $l = |\lambda \setminus \mu|$  in partition  $\lambda$ .

**Example.**



$(5,4,4,1) \setminus (4,3,2)$



$(5,4,4,1) \setminus (3,3,3,1)$

The height of border strip  $\rho = (5,4,4,1) \setminus (3,3,3,1)$

$$ht(\rho) = 3 - 1 = 2$$

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## Murnaghan–Nakayama Rule

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$$\chi_{\rho}^{\lambda} = \sum_{T \in BST(\lambda, \rho)} (-1)^{ht(T)}$$

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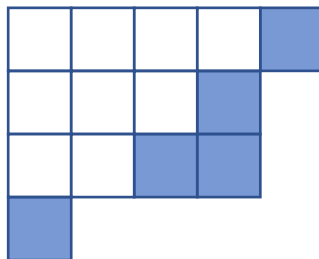
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stop condition:  $\chi_0^0 = 1$

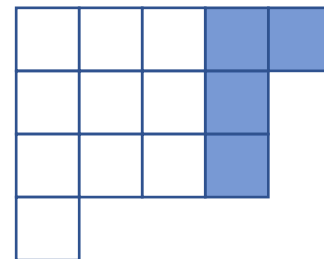
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## Murnaghan–Nakayama Rule

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stop condition:  $\chi_0^0 = 1$

## • Border Strip Tableau (BST)

**Definition.** The border strip tableau  $T(\lambda, \rho)$  of a partition  $\lambda$  and a weight partition  $\rho$  is a filling of the Young diagram  $\lambda$  such that exactly  $\rho_i$  boxes are labeled  $i$ , and rows and columns are non-decreasing. Moreover, for each  $i$  the boxes labeled  $i$  must form a border strip. The height  $ht(T)$  is the sum of the heights of the border strips in tableau  $T(\lambda, \rho)$ , i.e.,  $ht(T) = \sum_{\mu \in T(\lambda, \rho)} ht(\mu)$ . We define  $BST(\lambda, \rho)$  as the set of all possible border strip tableaux determined by partition  $\lambda$  and  $\rho$ . i.e.,  $BST(\lambda, \rho) = \{T_1(\lambda, \rho), T_2(\lambda, \rho), \dots\}$ .

**Example.** (size: 8)  $\lambda = (5, 2, 1)$ ,  $\rho = (3, 3, 1, 1)$

1	1	1	3	4
2	2			
2				

$T_1$

1	1	2	2	2
1	3			
4				

$T_2$

1	1	2	2	2
1	4			
3				

$T_3$

1	2	2	3	4
1	2			
1				

$T_4$

1	2	2	2	4
1	3			
1				

$T_5$

1	2	2	2	3
1	4			
1				

$T_6$

The height of  $T_1$ :  $ht(T_1) = \sum_{\mu \in T_1(\lambda, \rho)} ht(\mu) = 0 + 1 + 0 + 0 = 1$

# How To Compute

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Young Diagram

Young Tableau

Border Strip

Border Strip Tableau

## Murnaghan–Nakayama Rule

### Non-Recursive Version

$$\chi_{\rho}^{\lambda} = \sum_{T \in BST(\lambda, \rho)} (-1)^{ht(T)}$$

### Recursive Version

$$\chi_{\rho}^{\lambda} = \sum_{\mu \in BS(\lambda, \rho_1)} (-1)^{ht(\mu)} \chi_{\rho \setminus \rho_1}^{\lambda \setminus \mu}$$

stop condition:  $\chi_0^0 = 1$

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1	1	1	3	4
2	2			
2				

$T_1$

1	1	2	2	2
1	3			
4				

$T_2$

1	1	2	2	2
1	4			
3				

$T_3$

1	2	2	3	4
1	2			
1				

$T_4$

1	2	2	2	4
1	3			
1				

$T_5$

1	2	2	2	3
1	4			
1				

$T_6$

The height of  $T_1$ :  $ht(T_1) = \sum_{\mu \in T_1(\lambda, \rho)} ht(\mu) = 0 + 1 + 0 + 0 = 1$



# Examples

# Example

Non-Recursive Version: (size: 8)  $\lambda = (5,2,1)$ ,  $\rho = (3,3,1,1)$

1	1	1	3	4
2	2			
2				

$T_1$

1	1	2	2	2
1	3			
4				

$T_2$

1	1	2	2	2
1	4			
3				

$T_3$

1	2	2	3	4
1	2			
1				

$T_4$

1	2	2	2	4
1	3			
1				

$T_5$

1	2	2	2	3
1	4			
1				

$T_6$

$$ht(T_1) = \sum_{\mu \in T_1(\lambda, \rho)} ht(\mu) = 0 + 1 + 0 + 0 = 1$$

$$ht(T_2) = \sum_{\mu \in T_2(\lambda, \rho)} ht(\mu) = 1 + 0 + 0 + 0 = 1$$

$$ht(T_3) = \sum_{\mu \in T_3(\lambda, \rho)} ht(\mu) = 1 + 0 + 0 + 0 = 1$$

$$ht(T_4) = \sum_{\mu \in T_4(\lambda, \rho)} ht(\mu) = 2 + 1 + 0 + 0 = 3$$

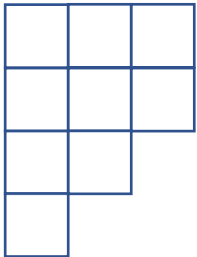
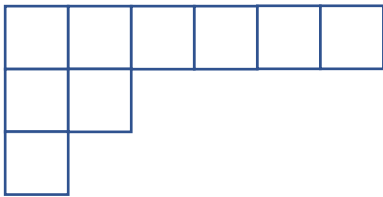
$$ht(T_5) = \sum_{\mu \in T_5(\lambda, \rho)} ht(\mu) = 2 + 0 + 0 + 0 = 2$$

$$ht(T_6) = \sum_{\mu \in T_6(\lambda, \rho)} ht(\mu) = 2 + 0 + 0 + 0 = 2$$

$$\begin{aligned} \chi_{(3,3,1,1)}^{(5,2,1)} &= \sum_{T \in BST(\lambda, \rho)} (-1)^{ht(T)} \\ &= (-1)^1 + (-1)^1 + (-1)^1 + (-1)^3 + (-1)^2 + (-1)^2 \\ &= -2 \end{aligned}$$

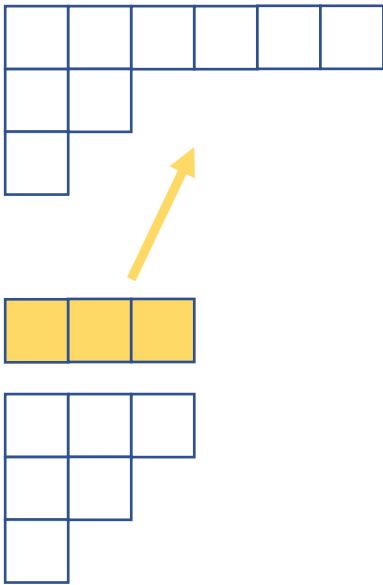
# Example

Recursive Version: (size: 9)  $\lambda = (6,2,1)$ ,  $\rho = (3,3,2,1)$



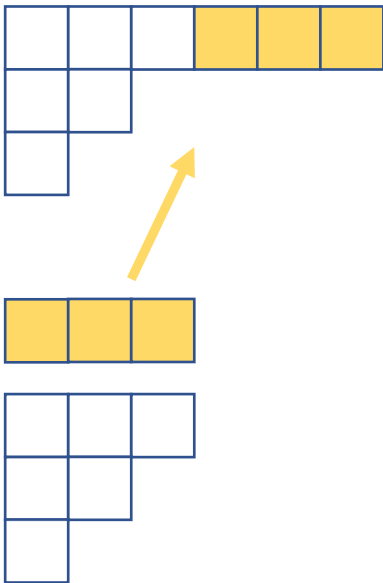
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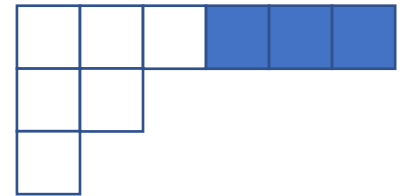
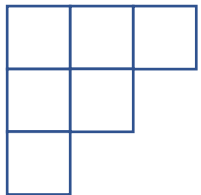
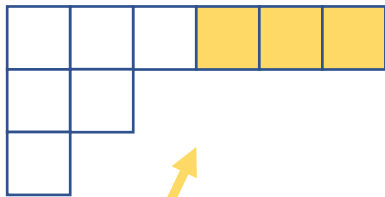
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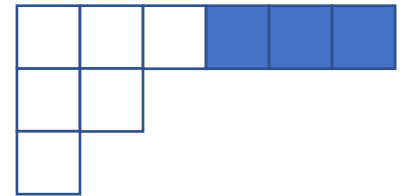
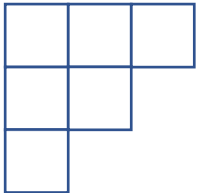
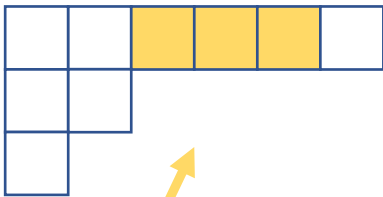
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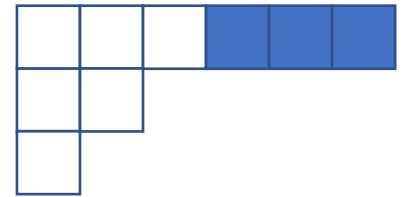
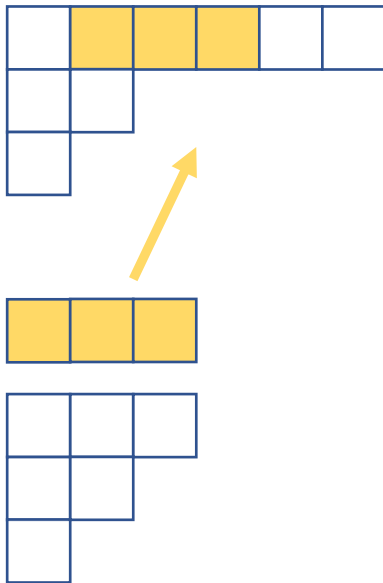
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# Example

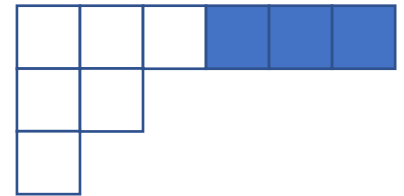
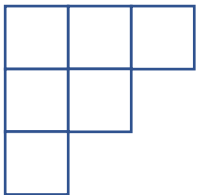
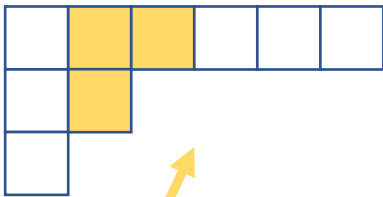
Recursive Version: (size: 9)  $\lambda = (6,2,1)$ ,  $\rho = (\boxed{3}, 3, 2, 1)$





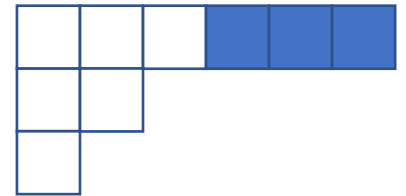
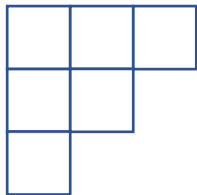
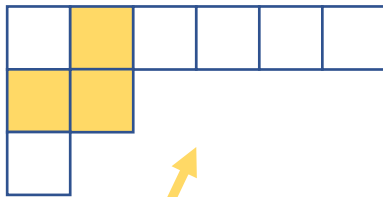
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Recursive Version: (size: 9)  $\lambda = (6,2,1)$ ,  $\rho = (3,3,2,1)$



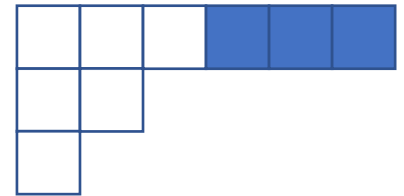
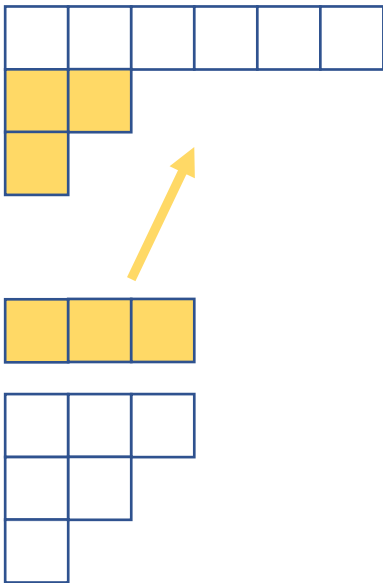
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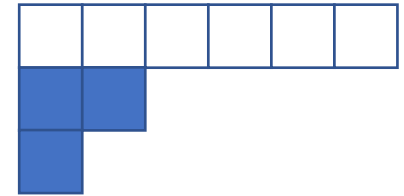
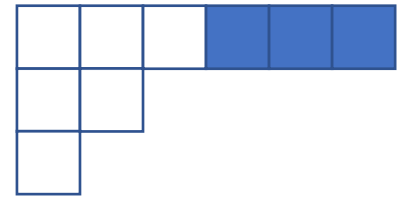
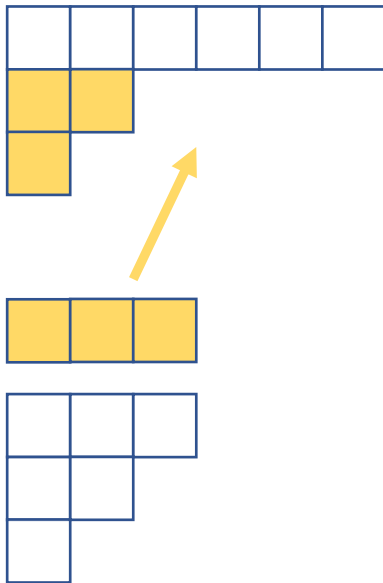
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Recursive Version: (size: 9)  $\lambda = (6,2,1)$ ,  $\rho = (3,3,2,1)$



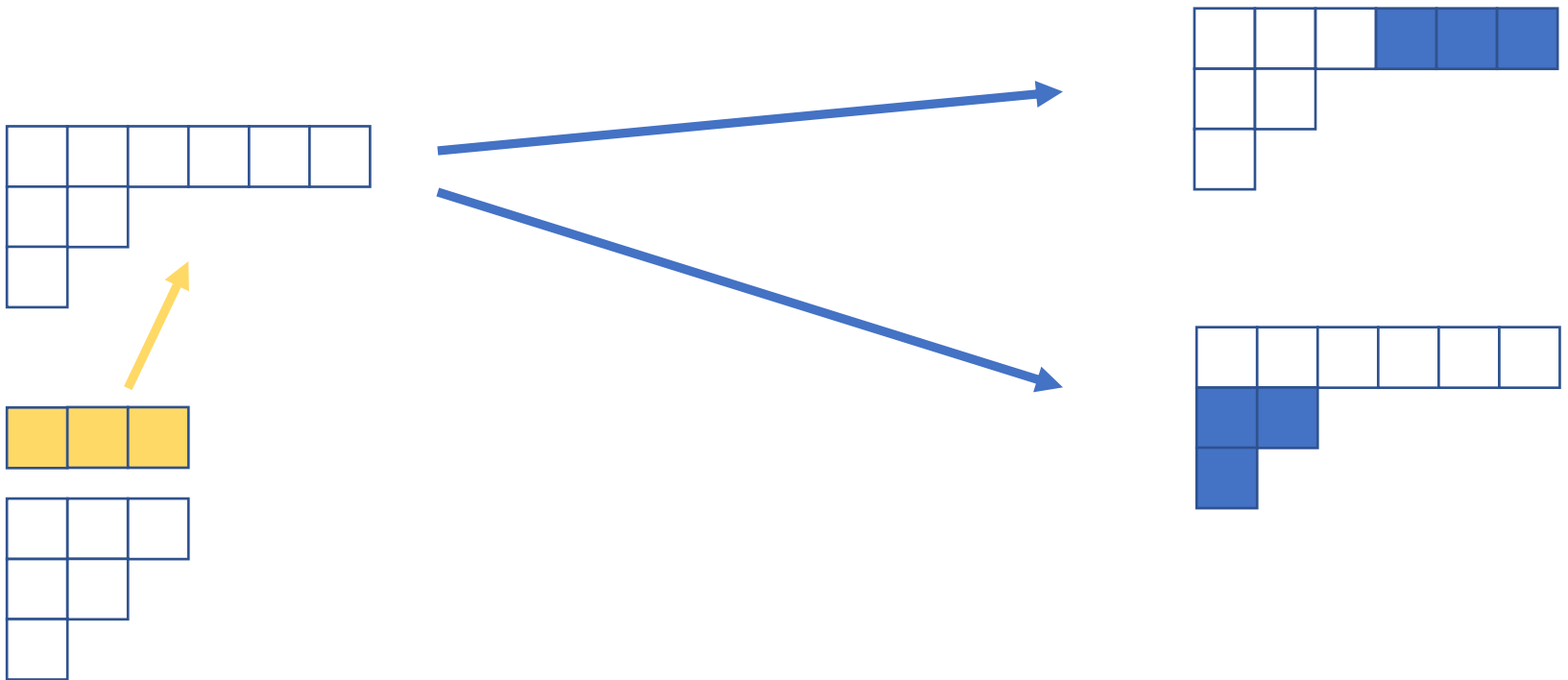
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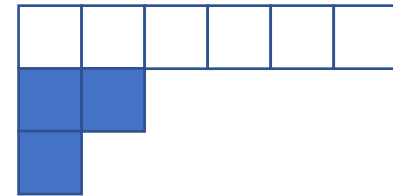
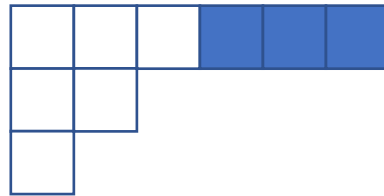
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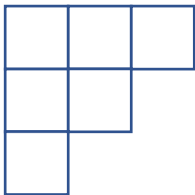


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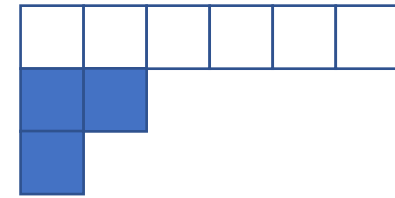
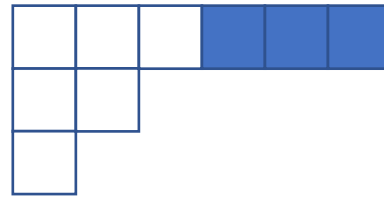
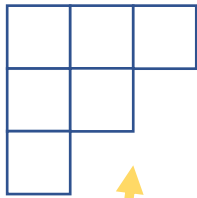


$$\chi_{(3,3,2,1)}^{(6,2,1)} = (-1)^0 \chi_{(3,2,1)}^{(3,2,1)} + (-1)^1 \chi_{(3,2,1)}^{(5)}$$

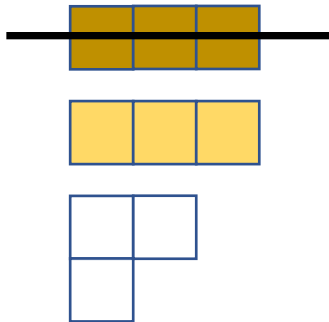


# Example

Recursive Version: (size: 9)  $\lambda = (6,2,1)$ ,  $\rho = (3\boxed{3}2,1)$

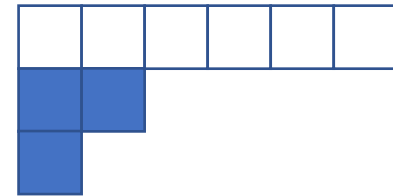
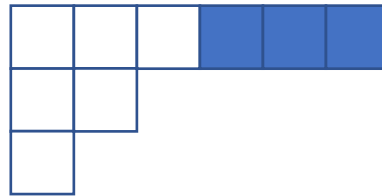
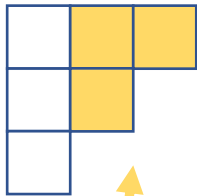


$$\chi_{(3,3,2,1)}^{(6,2,1)} = (-1)^0 \chi_{(3,2,1)}^{(3,2,1)} + (-1)^1 \chi_{(3,2,1)}^{(5)}$$

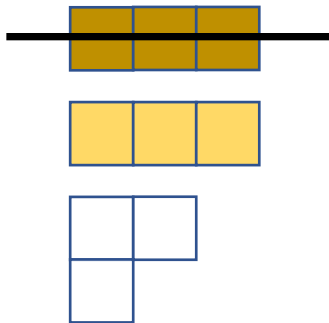


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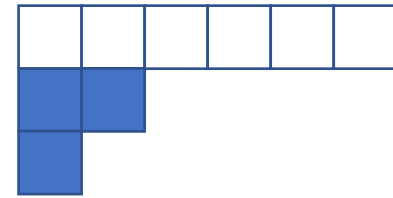
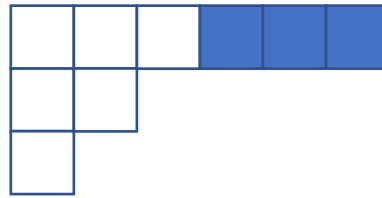
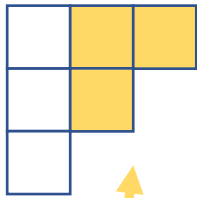
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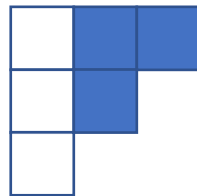
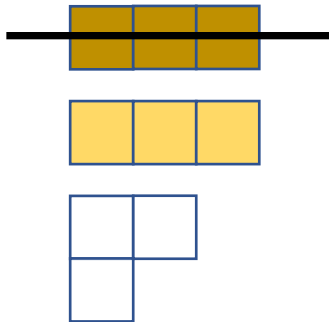


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Recursive Version: (size: 9)  $\lambda = (6,2,1)$ ,  $\rho = (3, \boxed{3}, 2, 1)$

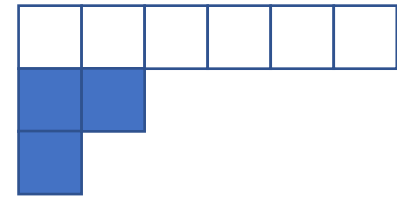
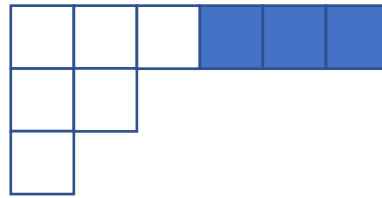
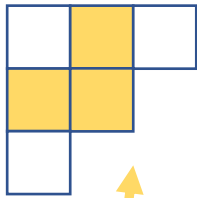


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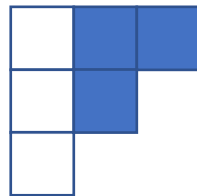
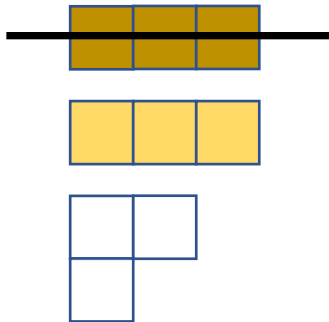


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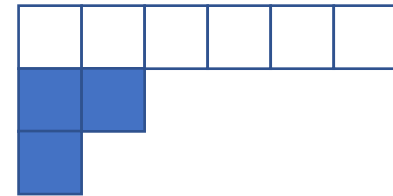
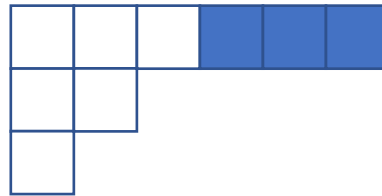
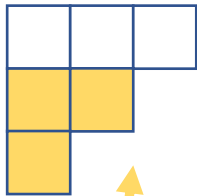


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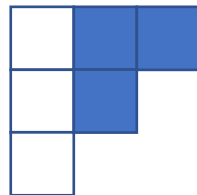
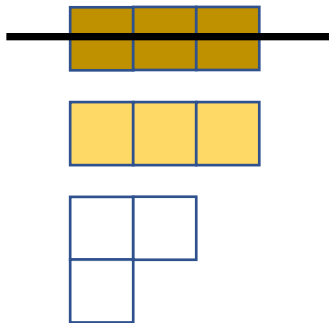


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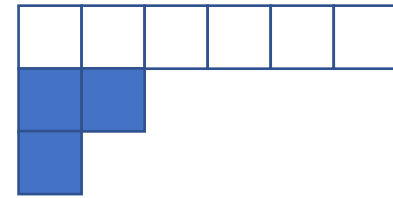
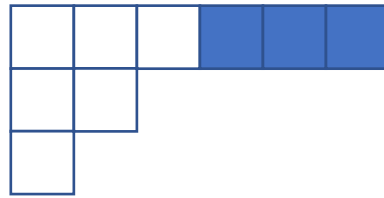
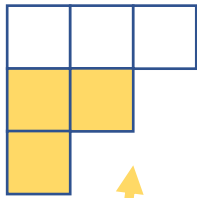


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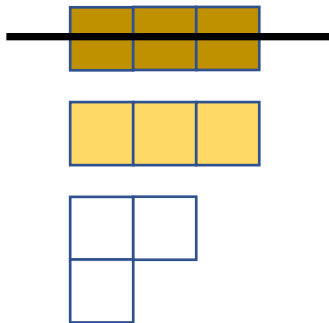
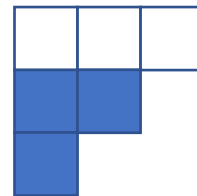
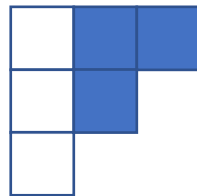


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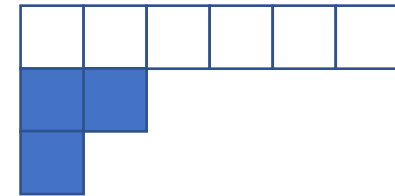
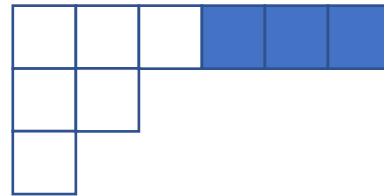


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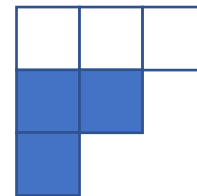
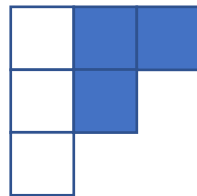
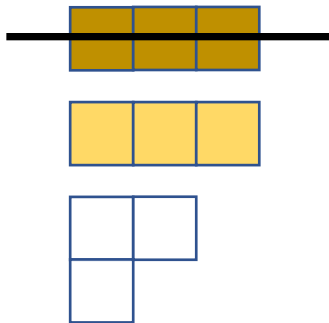


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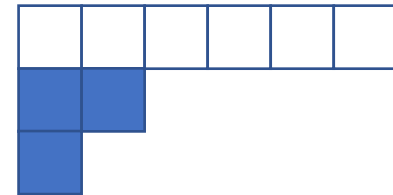
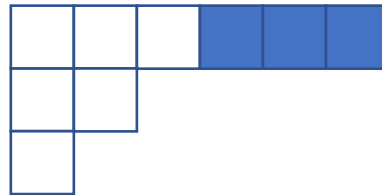


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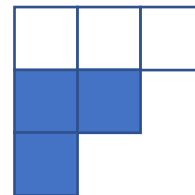
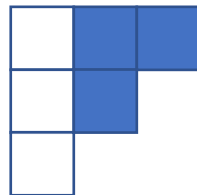
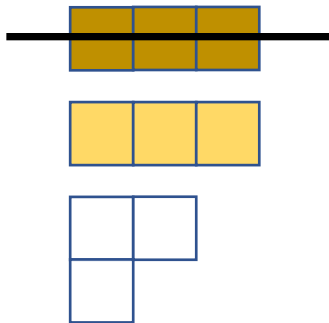


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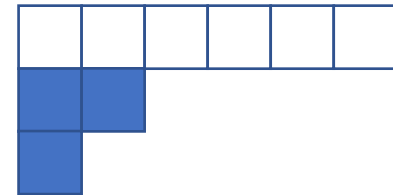
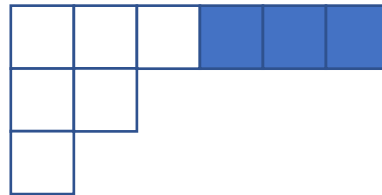


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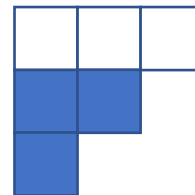
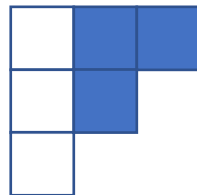
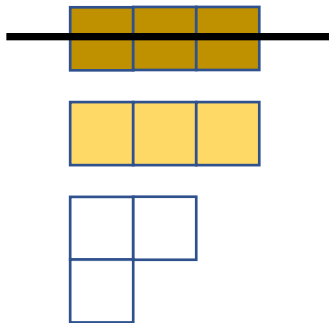


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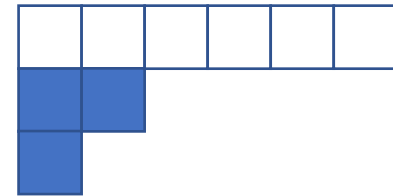
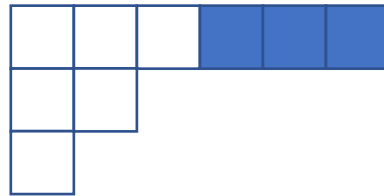


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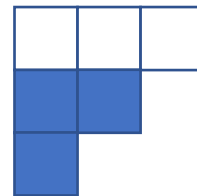
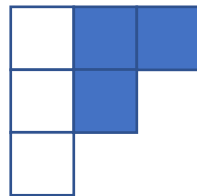
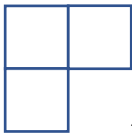


# Example

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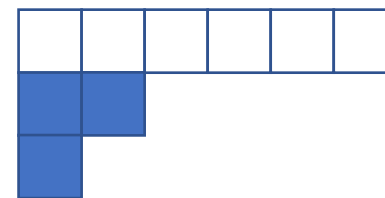
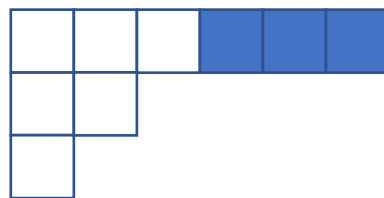


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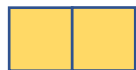
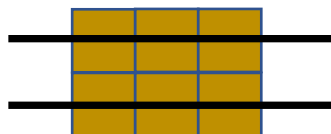
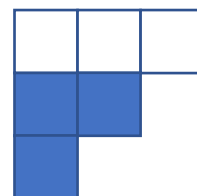
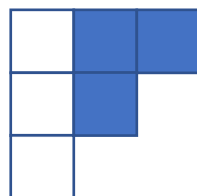


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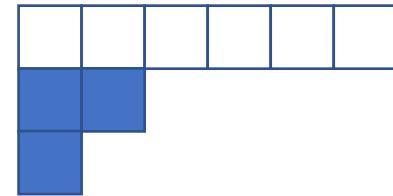
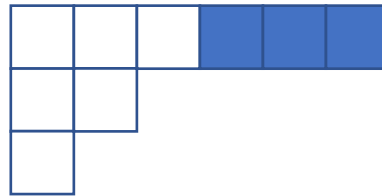
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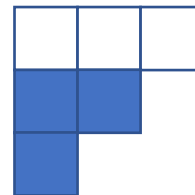
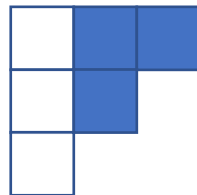
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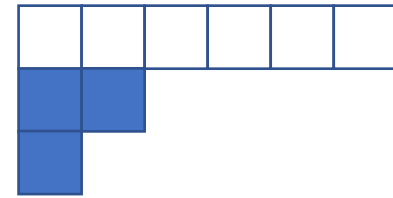
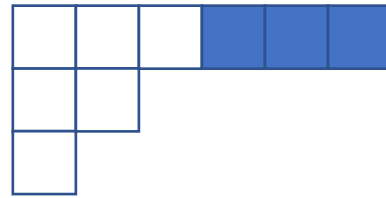
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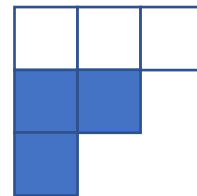
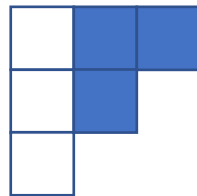
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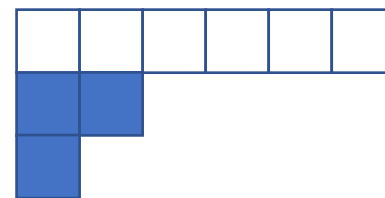
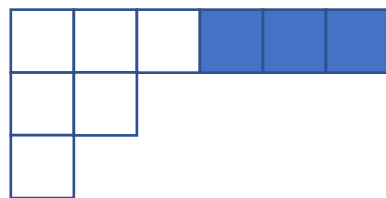
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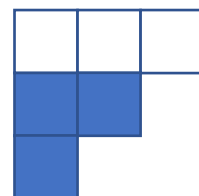
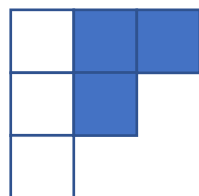
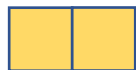
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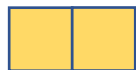
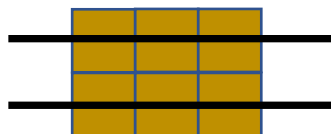
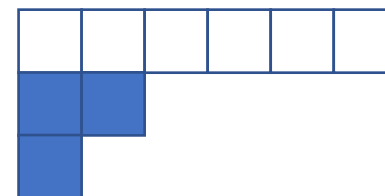
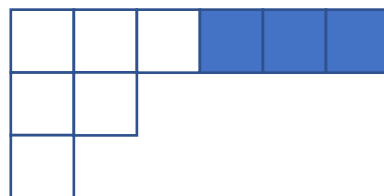


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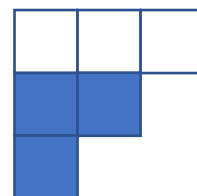
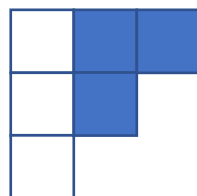


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$$\chi_{(3,3,2,1)}^{(6,2,1)} = (-1)^0 \chi_{(3,2,1)}^{(3,2,1)} + (-1)^1 \chi_{(3,2,1)}^{(5)}$$

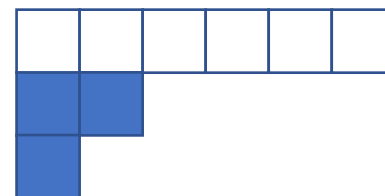
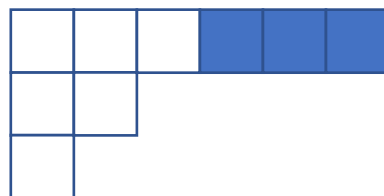


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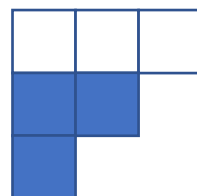
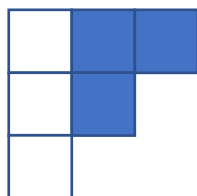
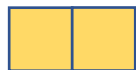
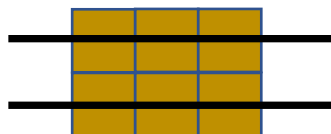


# Example

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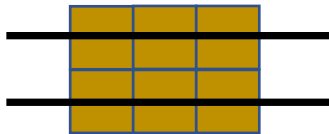
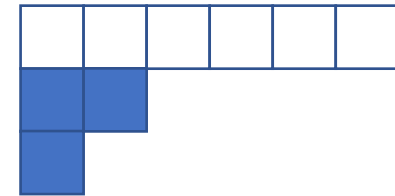
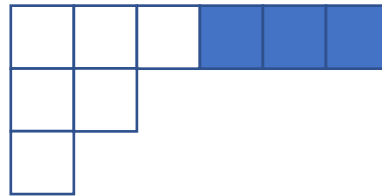


$$\chi_{(3,3,2,1)}^{(6,2,1)} = (-1)^0 [ (-1)^1 \chi_{(2,1)}^{(1,1,1)} + (-1)^1 \chi_{(2,1)}^{(3)} ] + (-1)^1 [ (-1)^0 \chi_{(2,1)}^{(3)} ]$$

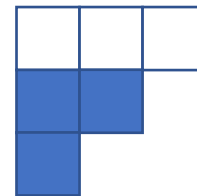
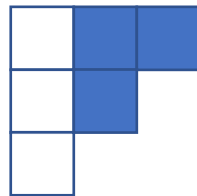


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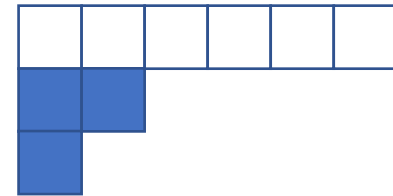
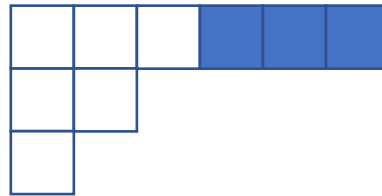


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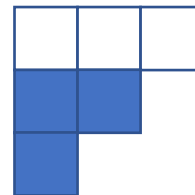
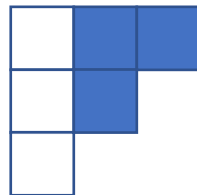


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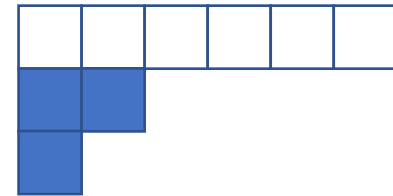
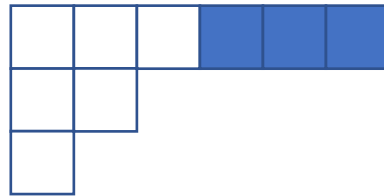
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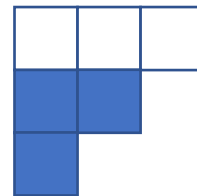
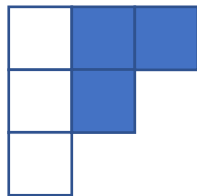


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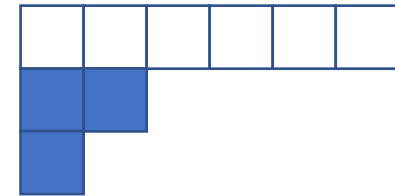
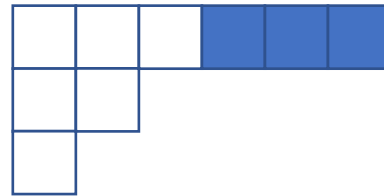


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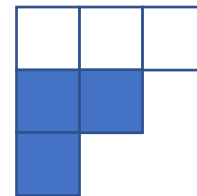
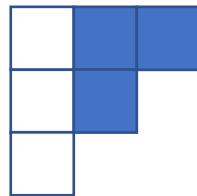


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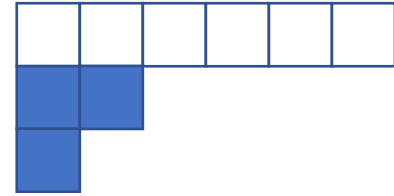
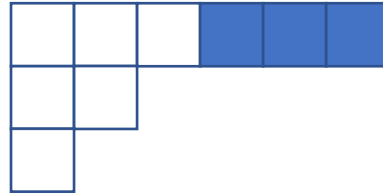


$$\chi_{(3,3,2,1)}^{(6,2,1)} = (-1)^0 \chi_{(3,2,1)}^{(3,2,1)} + (-1)^1 \chi_{(3,2,1)}^{(5)}$$

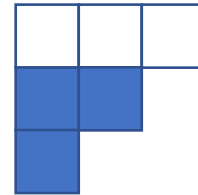
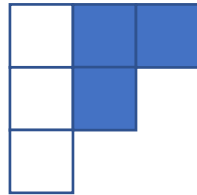


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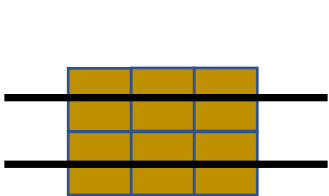




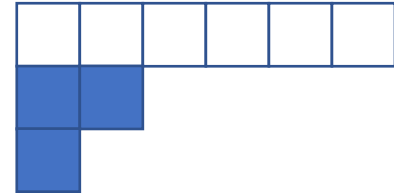
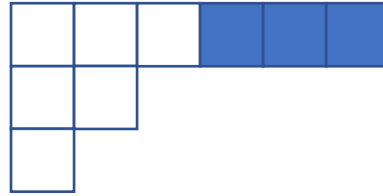
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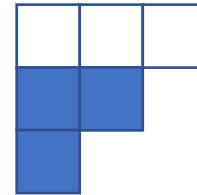
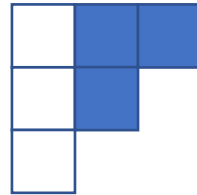
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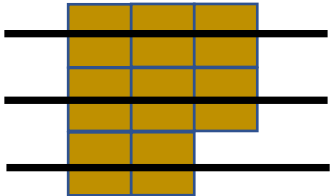
$$\begin{aligned} \chi_{(3,3,2,1)}^{(6,2,1)} = & (-1)^0 \{ (-1)^1 [ (-1)^1 \chi_{(1)}^{(1)} ] + (-1)^1 [ (-1)^0 \chi_{(1)}^{(1)} ] \} \\ & + (-1)^1 \{ (-1)^0 [ (-1)^0 \chi_{(1)}^{(1)} ] \} \end{aligned}$$



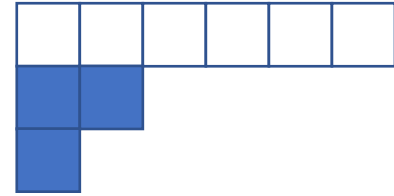
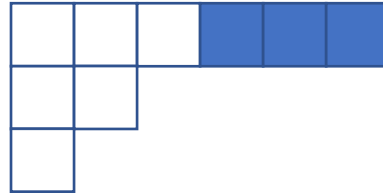
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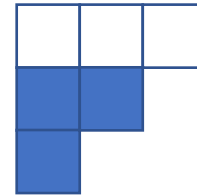
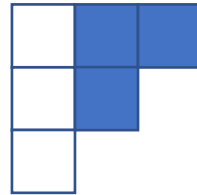
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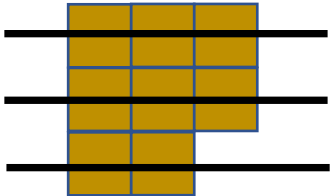
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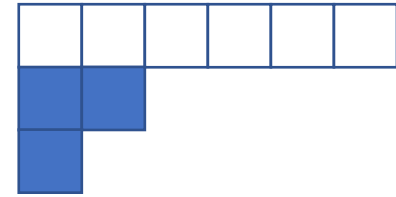
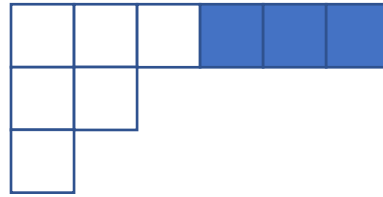


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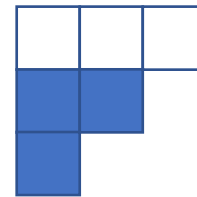
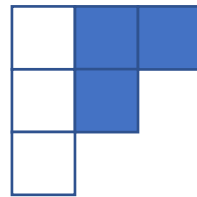


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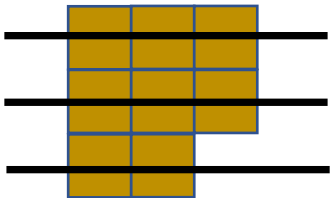
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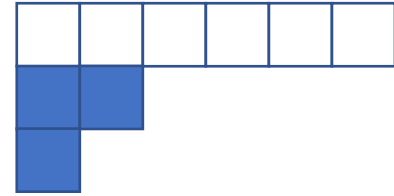
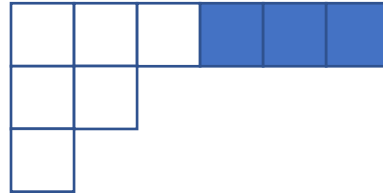


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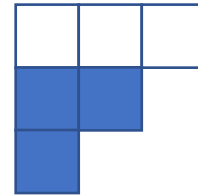
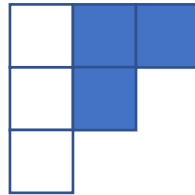


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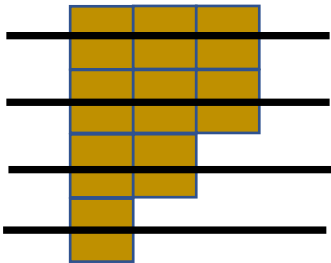




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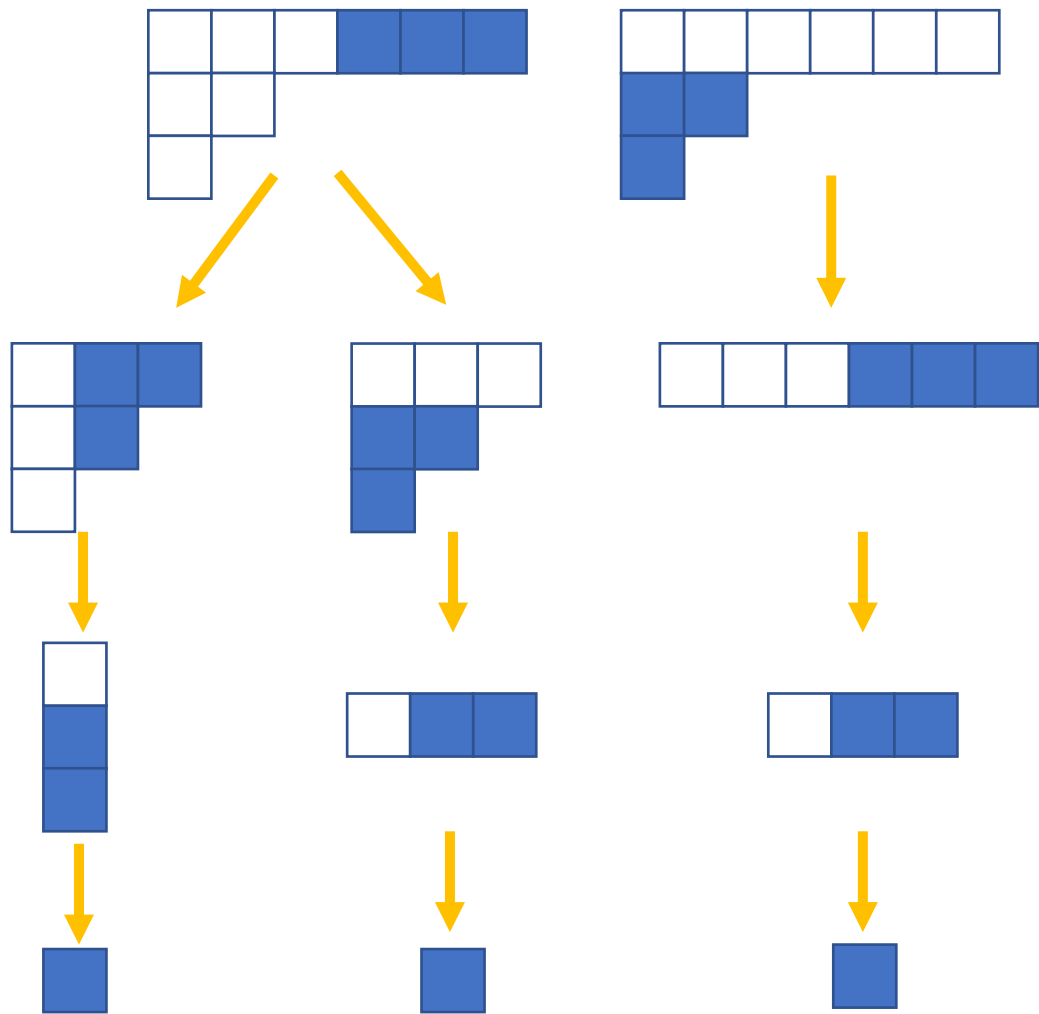


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$$\begin{aligned}
 \chi_{(3,3,2,1)}^{(6,2,1)} &= (-1)^0 \{ (-1)^1 [ (-1)^1 \ 1 ] + (-1)^1 [ (-1)^0 \ 1 ] \} + (-1)^1 \{ (-1)^0 [ (-1)^0 \ 1 ] \} \\
 &= 1 \times [ (-1)(-1) + (-1)1 ] + (-1)(1 \times 1) \\
 &= -1
 \end{aligned}$$



# Algorithm

---

**Algorithm 1** Non-Recursive Version

---

```
function CALCULATE( $\lambda, \rho$ )  
   $Sum \leftarrow 0$   
  for  $Tableau \in BST(\lambda, \rho)$  do  
    if  $ht(Tableau)$  is even then  
       $Sum \leftarrow Sum + 1$   
    else  
       $Sum \leftarrow Sum - 1$   
    end if  
  end for  
  return  $Sum$   
end function
```

---

▷ equivalent to  $(-1)^{ht(\cdot)} = 1$

# Algorithm

---

**Algorithm 2** Recursive Version

---

```
function CALCULATE( $\lambda, \rho$ )  
  if  $\lambda = ()$  &  $\rho = ()$  then  
    return 1  
  end if  
   $CacheValue \leftarrow CACHE(\lambda, \rho)$  ▷ use cache to avoid heavy computation  
  if  $CacheValue \neq null$  then  
    return  $CacheValue$   
  end if  
   $Length \leftarrow \rho_1$   
   $SubWeightPartition \leftarrow \rho_{i>1}$   
   $Sum \leftarrow 0$   
  for  $BorderStrip \in BS(\lambda, Length)$  do  
     $RestTableau \leftarrow \lambda \setminus BorderStrip$   
    if  $ht(BorderStrip)$  is even then  
       $Sum \leftarrow Sum + CALCULATE(RestTableau, SubWeightPartition)$   
    else  
       $Sum \leftarrow Sum - CALCULATE(RestTableau, SubWeightPartition)$   
    end if  
  end for  
   $CACHE(\lambda, \rho) \leftarrow Sum$   
  return  $Sum$   
end function
```

---

# Optimization

---

# Optimization

## Problem

## Partition Map

- Problem

We developed several versions...

Version	Language	Problem
1	Python	Slow (when $n > 25$ )
2	Java	<code>java.lang.OutOfMemoryError</code> (when $n > 30$ )
3	Golang	Hashmap does not work well
4 # final	Golang	-

# Optimization

## Problem

## Partition Map

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4 # final	Golang	-

Since we can not use partition directly as the **key** of the **map** in Golang, and using **string** as the key is very inefficient even though we can easily turn a partition into a string.

We then need to construct an injection or bijection from partition to integer.

# Optimization

## Problem

## Partition Map

- Partition Map

**Definition.** (Ordering of Partition) For the same size partitions  $\lambda, \rho$ , if the number of rows of  $\lambda$  is less than or equal to  $\rho$ , we say partition  $\lambda > \rho$  if the first different row (denote the index by  $j$ ) satisfy  $\lambda_j > \rho_j$ .

Then for partitions  $\{\mu^{(i)}\}$  of  $n$ , we have an increasing sequence  $\{\mu^{(i)} \mid \mu^{(i+1)} > \mu^{(i)}\}$  by the compare method above, we say  $i$  is the index of such sequence, where  $i$  starts from 0.

**Example.** ( $n=4$ )

$$(1, 1, 1, 1) < (2, 1, 1) < (2, 2) < (3, 1) < (4)$$

The index of  $(2, 1, 1)$  is 1.

# Partition Map

- |  |                |          |
|--|----------------|----------|
|  | $I_n(\lambda)$ | Size $n$ |
|--|----------------|----------|

# Results

---




# Test Results



$n$	number of partitions	spend time (non-recursive version, ms)	spend time (non-recursive version, multiple threads, ms)	spend time (recursive version, ms)	spend time (Sagemath)
5	7	0	0	0	13
10	42	1	0	1	101
15	176	17	4	21	1342
20	627	151	46	270	16497
25	1958	1524	434	2886	162954
30	5604	12254	3294	24189	1615291
35	14883	92343	25044	216933	-









(Test Device: MacBook Pro 13, 2.4 GHz 4-Core Intel Core i5, 8 GB 2133 MHz LPDDR3)




**Up to 400 times faster than Sagemath!**




# Codes & Tables

 youxingz / **symmetric\_group\_character** Public













 Unpin  Unwatch 1









 **Code**  Issues  Pull requests  Actions  Projects  Wiki  Security  Insights

 master  1 branch  1 tag

 Go to file  Add file  Code

**cocode** add doc de3401a on Mar 29 6 commits

	alg	reset	2 months ago
	alg_bigint	alg_slice version	2 months ago
	alg_slice	alg_slice version	2 months ago
	doc	add doc	2 months ago
	output	reset	2 months ago
	partition	reset	2 months ago
	CITATION.cff	reset	
	calculator.go	alg_slice version	
	go.mod	reset	
	pk.go	reset	
	pr.go	reset	
	readme.md	update readme	

名称 ↑	上次修改日期	文件大小
 character table 35-38.zip 	2022年3月28日	1.66 GB
 character table 39.zip 	2022年3月28日	1 GB
 character table 40.zip 	2022年3月28日	1.47 GB
 character_table (2-34).zip 	2022年3月24日	416.5 MB

# Next

- Use GPU to speed up (50 times faster than current)
- Merge code into Sagemath

# Reference

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Thank you!

Q&A