THE MOVABLE CONE VIA INTERSECTIONS

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Abstract. We characterize the movable cone of divisors using intersections against curves on birational models.

1. Introduction

Cones of divisors play an essential role in describing the birational geometry of a smooth complex projective variety $X$. A key feature of these cones is their interplay with cones of curves via duality statements. The dual of the nef cone and the pseudo-effective cone of divisors were determined by [Kle66] and [BDPP04] respectively. We consider the third cone commonly used in birational geometry: the movable cone of divisors.

Definition 1.1. Let $X$ be a smooth projective variety over $\mathbb{C}$. The movable cone $\text{Mov}^1(X) \subset N^1(X)$ is the closure of the cone generated by classes of effective Cartier divisors $L$ such that the base locus of $|L|$ has codimension at least 2. We say a divisor is movable if its numerical class lies in $\text{Mov}^1(X)$.

A natural candidate for the dual of the movable cone is the closure of the cone generated by irreducible curves that deform to cover a codimension 1 subset of $X$. Such a curve is said to be movable in codimension 1, or a mov$_1$-curve. However, as demonstrated by [Pay06, Example 1], these two cones are not dual in general.

Nevertheless, Debarre and Lazarsfeld have asked whether one can formulate a duality statement for movable divisors and mov$_1$-curves. This has been accomplished for toric varieties in [Pay06] and for Mori Dream Spaces in [Cho10] by taking other birational models of $X$ into account. Our main theorem proves an analogous statement for all smooth varieties. The statement involves the divisorial Zariski decomposition $L = P_\sigma(L) + N_\sigma(L)$ where $P_\sigma(L)$ is the movable part of $L$ and $N_\sigma(L)$ is the “fixed” part of $L$ (see Definition 2.2).

Theorem 1.2. Let $X$ be a smooth projective variety over $\mathbb{C}$ and let $L$ be a pseudo-effective divisor. $L$ is not movable iff there is a mov$_1$-curve $C$ on $X$ and a birational morphism $\phi : Y \to X$ from a smooth variety $Y$ such that

$$(P_\sigma(\phi^*L) + \phi_*^{-1}N_\sigma(L)) \cdot \tilde{C} < 0$$

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where $\tilde{C}$ is the strict transform of a generic deformation of $C$ and $\phi_{x}^{-1}$ denotes the strict transform of a divisor.

There does not seem to be an easy way to translate Theorem 1.2 into a statement involving only intersections on $X$. This is a symptom of the fact that the natural operation on movable divisors is the push-forward and not the pull-back.

Conceptually, the term $P_{\sigma}(\phi^{*}L) + \phi_{x}^{-1}N_{\sigma}(L)$ in Theorem 1.2 represents the “movable pullback” of $L$. For convenience we codify this as a definition.

**Definition 1.3.** Let $X$ be a smooth projective variety over $\mathbb{C}$ and let $L$ be a pseudo-effective divisor on $X$. Suppose that $\phi : Y \to X$ is a birational map from a smooth variety $Y$. The movable transform of $L$ on $Y$ is defined to be

$$\phi_{x}^{-1}mov(L) := P_{\sigma}(\phi^{*}L) + \phi_{x}^{-1}N_{\sigma}(L)$$

where $\phi_{x}^{-1}$ denotes the strict transform.

Note that the movable transform is not linear and is only defined for pseudo-effective divisors. Since

$$\phi_{x}^{-1}mov(L) = \phi^{*}L - N_{\sigma}(Y/X, L)$$

where $N_{\sigma}(Y/X, L)$ denotes the relative divisorial Zariski decomposition of \cite{Nak04}, the movable transform precisely discounts the “extra” contributions to non-movability given by pulling-back.

**Example 1.4.** For surfaces Theorem 1.2 reduces to the usual duality of the nef and pseudo-effective cones. It is instructive to verify Theorem 1.2 directly in this case. Let $L$ be a pseudo-effective divisor on a smooth surface and write the Zariski decomposition of $L$ as $L = P + N$. There may be a component $E$ of $N$ such that $L \cdot E > 0$ (see \cite{BDPP04} 6.3 Remark). However, choose a birational map $\phi : S^{'} \to S$ such that the components of the strict transform $\phi_{x}^{-1}N$ are disjoint. As $\phi_{x}^{-1}N \leq N_{\sigma}(\phi^{*}L)$, any component $\tilde{E}$ of $\phi_{x}^{-1}N$ satisfies

$$(P_{\sigma}(\phi^{*}L) + \phi_{x}^{-1}N) \cdot \tilde{E} < 0$$

by the orthogonality of the Zariski decomposition and the negative-definiteness of the self-intersection matrix of $N_{\sigma}(\phi^{*}L)$.

**Example 1.5.** If $L$ is effective then $\phi_{x}^{-1}mov(L)$ is not far from the strict transform of $L$. For example, the two divisors coincide when $P_{\sigma}(L)$ does not contain any $\phi$-exceptional center.

When $X$ is a smooth Mori dream space, the movable and strict transforms coincide for a divisor $L$ general in its $\mathbb{Q}$-linear equivalence class. Furthermore, the movable transform of $L$ on any sufficiently high birational model of $X$ is the pull-back of a divisor on a small modification of $X$. Thus we recover the statements of \cite{Pay06} and \cite{Cho10}: for a smooth toric variety or Mori Dream Space $X$, a divisor class is movable iff its strict transform class on every small modification $X'$ has non-negative intersection with every $mov^{1}$-curve on $X'$.
In fact, the proof of Theorem 1.2 yields a slightly more precise statement. Recall that the restricted base locus $B_-(L)$ measures the base locus of a divisor $L$ perturbed by small ample divisors:

$$B_-(L) = \bigcup_{A \text{ ample}} \left( \bigcap_{D \geq L+A, D \geq 0} \text{Supp}(D) \right).$$

**Corollary 1.6.** Let $X$ be a smooth projective variety over $\mathbb{C}$ and let $L$ be a pseudo-effective divisor. Suppose that $V$ is an irreducible subvariety of $X$ contained in $B_-(L)$ and let $\psi : X' \to X$ be a smooth birational model resolving the ideal sheaf of $V$. Then there is a birational morphism $\phi : Y \to X'$ from a smooth variety $Y$ and an irreducible curve $\tilde{C}$ on $Y$ such that

$$\phi_{\text{mov}}^{-1}(\psi^* L) \cdot \tilde{C} < 0$$

and $\psi \circ \phi(\tilde{C})$ deforms to cover $V$.

In particular, although $B_-(L)$ may not be covered by curves that have negative intersection with $L$, Corollary 1.6 shows that this is true in some birational sense.

**Remark 1.7.** Debarre and Lazarsfeld have also asked about the relationship between the closure of the cone of divisors whose stable base locus has codimension $k$ and the closure of the cone of irreducible curves that deform to cover a codimension $k + 1$ subset (for $0 < k < \dim X$).

Corollary 1.6 yields a birational formulation of this duality. For toric varieties and for $2 < k < \dim X$, [Pay06, Theorem 1] proves a slightly stronger statement. The main difference is that in [Pay06] it is unnecessary to first resolve $V$. It is unclear whether this stronger version should hold in general.

2. **Background**

Throughout $X$ will denote a smooth projective variety over $\mathbb{C}$. The term “divisor” will always refer to an $\mathbb{R}$-Cartier divisor unless otherwise qualified. The volume of a divisor $L$ is

$$\text{vol}_X(L) = \limsup_{m \to \infty} h^0(X, [mL]) / m^{\dim X}.$$ 

2.1. **Divisorial Zariski decomposition.**

**Definition 2.1** ([Nak04]). Let $L$ be a pseudo-effective divisor on $X$. For any prime divisor $E$ on $X$ define

$$\sigma_E(L) = \max_{A \text{ ample}} \left( \min_{D \equiv L+A, D \geq 0} \text{ord}_E(D) \right).$$
For any pseudo-effective $L$, [Nak04] shows that there are only finitely many prime divisors $E$ on $X$ with $\sigma_E(L) > 0$. Thus we can make the following definition.

**Definition 2.2** ([Nak04]). Let $L$ be a pseudo-effective divisor on $X$. Define

$$N_\sigma(L) = \sum \sigma_E(L)E \quad \quad P_\sigma(L) = L - N_\sigma(L)$$

The decomposition $L = N_\sigma(L) + P_\sigma(L)$ is called the divisorial Zariski decomposition of $L$.

For our purposes, the key fact about the decomposition is that $P_\sigma(L)$ is a movable divisor ([Nak04]), so its restriction to any prime divisor $E$ is pseudo-effective.

2.2. Numerical dimension and orthogonality. Given a pseudo-effective divisor $L$, the numerical dimension $\nu(L)$ of [Nak04] and [BDPP04] is a numerical measure of the “positivity” of $L$. There is also a restricted variant $\nu_{X|V}(L)$ introduced in [BFJ09]; since the definition is somewhat involved, we will only refer to a special subcase using an alternate characterization from [Leh10].

**Definition 2.3.** Let $L$ be a pseudo-effective divisor on $X$. Fix a prime divisor $E$ on $X$ and choose $L' \equiv L$ whose support does not contain $E$. We say $\nu_{X|E}(L) = 0$ if

$$\liminf_{\phi} \text{vol}_E(P_\sigma(\phi^*L')|_{\tilde{E}}) = 0$$

where $\phi : \tilde{X} \to X$ varies over all birational maps and $\tilde{E}$ denotes the strict transform of $E$.

The connection with geometry is given by the following (slightly weaker) version of the orthogonality theorem of [BDPP04] and [BFJ09].

**Theorem 2.4.** Let $L$ be a pseudo-effective divisor. If a prime divisor $E \subset X$ is contained in $\text{Supp}(N_\sigma(L))$ then $\nu_{X|E}(L) = 0$.

3. Proof

The proof of Theorem 1.2 is to reinterpret the orthogonality theorem of [BDPP04] using the techniques of [Leh10].

**Proof of Theorem 1.2:** Suppose that $L$ is not movable. Denote by $E$ a fixed divisorial component of $N_\sigma(L)$.

Fix a sufficiently general ample divisor $A$ on $X$ and choose $\epsilon$ small enough so that $E$ is a component of $N_\sigma(L+\epsilon A)$. Applying the orthogonality theorem of [BDPP04], we see there is a birational map $\phi : Y \to X$ so that

1. $\tilde{E}$ is smooth.
2. $\text{vol}_E(P_\sigma(\phi^*(L+\epsilon A))|_{\tilde{E}}) < \text{vol}_E(A|_E) = \text{vol}_E(\phi^*A|_{\tilde{E}})$.
3. The strict transform of every component of $N_\sigma(L)$ is disjoint.
There is a unique expression

\[ P_\sigma(\phi^*(L + \epsilon A)) = P_\sigma(\phi^*L) + \phi^*A + \alpha(\epsilon)\tilde{E} + F \]

where \( \tilde{E} \) is the strict transform of \( E \), \( F \) is an effective divisor with \( F \leq N_\sigma(\phi^*L) \) and the support of \( F \) does not contain \( E \), and \( \alpha(\epsilon) \) is positive and goes to 0 as \( \epsilon \) goes to 0. By shrinking \( \epsilon \) we may ensure that \( \alpha(\epsilon) < \sigma_E(L) \).

Condition (2) above, along with Lemma 3.1, show that the restriction \( (P_\sigma(\phi^*L) + \alpha(\epsilon)\tilde{E})|_E \) is not pseudo-effective for any \( \epsilon > 0 \). Since \( \alpha(\epsilon) < \sigma_E(L) \), we also have that \( (P_\sigma(\phi^*L) + \sigma_E(L)\tilde{E})|_E \) is not pseudo-effective. As the strict transform of components of \( N_\sigma(L) \) are disjoint, the restriction of \( P_\sigma(\phi^*L) + \phi_{*}^{-1}N_\sigma(L) \) to \( \tilde{E} \) is still not pseudo-effective.

By \cite{BDPP04} 0.2 Theorem] there is a movable curve \( \tilde{C} \) on \( \tilde{E} \) such that

\[ (P_\sigma(\phi^*L) + \phi_{*}^{-1}N_\sigma(L)) \cdot \tilde{C} < 0. \]

Since \( \tilde{E} \) is not \( \phi \)-exceptional, \( C = \phi(\tilde{C}) \) is a mov\(^1\)-curve.

Conversely, if \( L \) is movable, then \( \phi_{mov}^{-1}(L) = P_\sigma(\phi^*L) \) is also movable for every \( \phi \). Thus every movable transform has non-negative intersection with the strict transform of every mov\(^1\)-curve general in its family. \( \square \)

**Lemma 3.1.** Let \( X \) be a smooth projective variety and let \( L \) and \( L' \) be pseudo-effective divisors on \( X \). Then \( \text{vol}_X(L + L') \geq \text{vol}_X(L) \).

**Proof.** We may assume \( L \) is big since otherwise the inequality is automatic. Then for any sufficiently small \( \epsilon > 0 \) we have

\[ \text{vol}_X(L + L') = \text{vol}_X((1 - \epsilon)L + (\epsilon L + L')) \geq (1 - \epsilon) \text{dim}X \text{vol}_X(L) \]

since \( \epsilon L + L' \) is big. \( \square \)

**Proof of Corollary 1.6.** Let \( E \) be the \( \psi \)-exceptional divisor dominating \( V \). Since \( \tilde{E} \subset \text{Supp}(N_\sigma(\psi^*L)) \), we may argue as in the proof of Theorem 1.2 for \( \psi^*L \) and \( \tilde{E} \) to find a birational map \( \phi \) such that \( \phi_{mov}^{-1}(\psi^*L)|_{\tilde{E}} \) is not pseudo-effective.

\cite{BDPP04} 2.4 Theorem] shows that there is some curve \( \tilde{C} \) on \( \tilde{E} \) with \( \phi_{mov}^{-1}(\psi^*L) \cdot \tilde{C} < 0 \) such that \( \tilde{C} \) deforms to cover \( \tilde{E} \) and is not contracted by any morphism from \( \tilde{E} \). Choosing \( \tilde{C} \) on \( \tilde{E} \) to satisfy this stronger property, we obtain the statement of Corollary 1.6. \( \square \)

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