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Bipartite complements of circle graphs

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ABSTRACT

Using an algebraic characterization of circle graphs, Bouchet proved in 1999 that if a bipartite graph G is the complement of a circle graph, then G is a circle graph. We give an elementary proof of this result.

A graph is a *circle graph* if it is the intersection graph of the chords of a circle. Using an algebraic characterization of circle graphs proved by Naji [6] (as the class of graphs satisfying a certain system of equalities over GF(2)), Bouchet proved the following result in [1].

Theorem 1 (*Bouchet [1]*). *If a bipartite graph G is the complement of a circle graph, then G is a circle graph.*

The known proofs of Naji's theorem are fairly involved [3,4,6,7], and Bouchet [1] (see also [2]) asked whether, on the other hand, Theorem 1 has an elementary proof. The purpose of this short note is to present such a proof.

We will need two simple lemmas. Given a finite set of points $X \subset \mathbb{R}^2$ of even cardinality, a line ℓ *bisects* the set X if each open half-plane defined by ℓ contains precisely $|X|/2$ points. The following lemma is an immediate consequence of the 2-dimensional *discrete ham sandwich theorem* (see e.g. [5, Corollary 3.1.3]), and is equivalent to the *necklace splitting problem* with two types of beads. In order to keep this note self-contained, we include a short proof.

Lemma 2. *Let $X, Y \subset \mathbb{R}^2$ be disjoint finite point sets of even cardinality on a circle C. Then there exists a line ℓ simultaneously bisecting both X and Y.*

Proof. Let $p_0, \dots, p_{2n-1}$ be the points of $X \cup Y$ in cyclic order along C. For $0 \le i \le 2n-1$ we denote by I_i the set $\{p_i, p_{i+1} \dots, p_{i+n-1}\}$ (here and in the remainder of the proof, all indices are considered modulo $2n$). Clearly, for every $0 \le i \le n-1$, there exists a line ℓ_i in $\mathbb{R}^2$ bisecting the points of $X \cup Y$, with I_i on one side of ℓ_i and I_{i+n} on the other side. For $0 \le i \le 2n-1$, define $f(i) = |X \cap I_i| - \frac{1}{2}|X|$. Note that since X has even cardinality, each $f(i)$ is an integer.

To prove the lemma, it suffices to show that $f(i) = 0$ for some $0 \le i \le n-1$, for then $|X \cap I_i| = \frac{1}{2}|X|$ and $|Y \cap I_i| = \frac{1}{2}(|X| + |Y|) - |X \cap I_i| = \frac{1}{2}|Y|$. If $f(0) = 0$ then we are done, so let us assume that $f(0) \ne 0$. Without loss of generality $f(0) < 0$, and hence $f(n) = -f(0) > 0$. Since $f(i+1) - f(i) \in \{-1, 0, 1\}$ for all $0 \le i \le n-1$, there exists $1 \le i \le n-1$ such that $f(i) = 0$, as required. □

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Lemma 3. *Consider a set of pairwise intersecting chords $c_1, \ldots, c_n$ of a circle C, with pairwise distinct endpoints. Then any line ℓ that bisects the $2n$ endpoints of the chords intersects all the chords $c_1, \ldots, c_n$.*

Proof. Assume for the sake of contradiction that some chord c_i does not intersect ℓ. Then c_i lies in one of the two open half-planes defined by ℓ, say to the left of ℓ. Since ℓ bisects the $2n$ endpoints of the chords, it follows that there is another chord c_j that does not intersect ℓ and which lies in the half-plane to the right of ℓ. This implies that c_i and c_j do not intersect, which is a contradiction. □

We are now ready to prove Theorem 1.

Proof of Theorem 1. Consider a bipartite graph G such that its complement $\overline{G}$ is a circle graph. In particular, for any vertex v_i of $\overline{G}$ there is a chord c_i of some circle C such that any two vertices v_i and v_j are adjacent in $\overline{G}$ (equivalently, non-adjacent in G) if and only if the chords c_i and c_j intersect. Since G is bipartite, the vertices $v_1, \ldots, v_n$ (and the corresponding chords $c_1, \ldots, c_n$) can be colored with colors red and blue such that any two chords of the same color intersect. We can assume without loss of generality that the endpoints of the n chords are pairwise distinct, so the coloring of the chords also gives a coloring of the $2n$ endpoints with colors red or blue (with an even number of blue endpoints and an even number of red endpoints). Since the $2n$ endpoints lie on the circle C, it follows from Lemma 2 that there exists a line ℓ simultaneously bisecting the set of blue endpoints and the set of red endpoints.

On one side of ℓ, reverse the order of the endpoints of the chords $c_1, \ldots, c_n$ along the circle C. Observe that crossing chords intersecting ℓ become non-crossing, and vice versa. By Lemma 3, ℓ intersects all the chords $c_1, \ldots, c_n$, and thus the resulting circle graph is precisely G. It follows that G is a circle graph, as desired. □

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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