

Lectures on Finsler Geometry

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Preface

In 1854, B. Riemann introduced the notion of curvature for spaces with a family of inner products (Riemannian metrics). There was no significant progress in the general case until 1918, when P. Finsler studied the variation problem for spaces with a family of norms (Finsler metrics). Meanwhile, A. Einstein used Riemannian geometry to present his general relativity. By that times, however, the geometry of Finsler spaces was still at its infant stage. Until 1926, L. Berwald extended Riemann's notion of curvature to Finsler spaces and discovered a new non-Riemannian quantity using his connection. In his Paris address in 1900, D. Hilbert formulated 23 problems, the 4th and 23rd problems being in Finsler's category. Finsler geometry has broader applications in many areas of natural science [AIM] and will continue to develop through the efforts of many geometers around the world [BCS3].

This book comes out of a series of lecture notes based on my work at IHES (*Curvature, distance and volume in Finsler geometry*, preprint, 1997). Viewing Finsler spaces as regular metric spaces, we discuss the problems from the modern geometric point of view. The book is intended to provide basic materials for Finsler geometry including Riemannian geometry. The presentation is aimed at a reader who has completed a one-year graduate course in differential geometry, and who knows the elements of homotopy theory in topology.

The first four chapters cover some basic theories on regular metrics (Finsler metrics) and regular measures (volume forms) on manifolds.

In Chapter 5, we introduce the notion of geodesics via the calculus of variation. Using the geodesics, we define the Chern connection. The Chern connection is an important tool to investigate the geometric structure of Finsler spaces.

In Chapter 6, we introduce the notion of Riemann curvature via geodesic variation. This is different from Riemann's and Berwald's approaches. We discuss the dependence of the Riemann curvature on geodesics. In Chapter 7, we introduce various non-Riemannian quantities (e.g., the Chern curvature, the Landsberg curvature and the S-curvature, etc) and their geometric meanings.

In Chapters 8 and 9, we use Cartan's exterior differential method to discuss various curvatures and relationships. In particular, we discuss Finsler spaces of constant curvature. Several important examples are studied. These examples make Finsler geometry more fruitful.

Starting with Chapter 10, we study the metric properties of Finsler spaces and metric-measure properties of Finsler m spaces. We first derive the second variation formula of length and show the geometric meaning of the T-curvature. Then in Chapters 11 and 12, we discuss the index form, Jacobi fields, exponential maps and their relationship. The discussion leads to some basic comparison theorems that are discussed in Chapter 13.

In Chapters 14, 15 and 16, we use a distance function to study the global geometric structure of Finsler spaces and Finsler m spaces. We obtain several

estimates on the geometry of level sets of distance functions. The geometric meaning of the S-curvature lies in the volume comparison theorem.

In Chapters 17 and 18, we apply the Morse theory to the canonical energy functional on the loop space. In particular, we prove a vanishing theorem for the homotopy groups of Finsler spaces with pinched curvature.

In the last chapter, we view a Finsler space as a point of a space of Finsler spaces equipped with the Gromov-Hausdorff distance. We briefly discuss the precompactness and finiteness of certain classes of Finsler spaces.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank several people in my personal life and academic life. First, I would like to thank my thesis advisor Detlef Gromoll for his help and advice in Riemannian geometry during my graduate study in SUNY at Stony Brook, and thank another advisor after the thesis, S.S. Chern for bringing me to a wider field — Finsler geometry. I thank Bart Ng for providing me with a good research environment at my current institution. Finally, I thank my wife, Tianping, for her consistent support and understanding. Without them, I would not have written this book, for sure.

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Contents

Preface	ii
1 Finsler Spaces	1
1.1 Metric Spaces	1
1.2 Minkowski Spaces	5
1.3 Finsler Spaces	10
2 Finsler m Spaces	17
2.1 Measure Spaces	17
2.2 Volume on a Finsler space	19
2.3 Hyperplanes in a Minkowski m space	23
2.4 Hypersurfaces in a Finsler m Space	26
3 Co-Area Formula	31
3.1 Legendre Transformations	31
3.2 Gradients of Functions	35
3.3 Co-Area Formula	40
4 Isoperimetric Inequalities	47
4.1 Isoperimetric Profiles	47
4.2 Sobolev Constants and First Eigenvalue	50
4.3 Concentration of Finsler m spaces	54
4.4 Observable Diameter	59
5 Geodesics and Connection	63
5.1 Geodesics	63
5.2 Chern Connection	68
5.3 Covariant Derivatives	74
5.4 Geodesic Flow	76
6 Riemann Curvature	79
6.1 Birth of the Riemann Curvature	79
6.2 Geodesic Fields	82
6.3 Projectively Related Finsler Metrics	84

7	Non-Riemannian Curvatures	89
7.1	Cartan Torsion	89
7.2	Chern Curvature	93
7.3	S-Curvature	97
8	Structure Equations	105
8.1	Structure Equations of Finsler Spaces	105
8.2	Structure Equations of Riemannian Metrics	109
8.3	Riemann Curvature of Randers Metrics	112
9	Finsler Spaces of Constant Curvature	115
9.1	Finsler Metrics of Constant Curvature	115
9.2	Examples	118
9.3	Randers Metrics of Constant Curvature	122
10	Second Variation Formula	129
10.1	T-Curvature	129
10.2	Second Variation of Length	131
10.3	Synge Theorem	136
11	Geodesics and Exponential Map	139
11.1	Exponential Map	139
11.2	Jacobi Fields	141
11.3	Minimality of Geodesics	144
11.4	Completeness of Finsler Spaces	147
12	Conjugate Radius and Injectivity Radius	151
12.1	Conjugate Radius	151
12.2	Injectivity Radius	154
12.3	Geodesic Loops and Closed Geodesics	160
13	Basic Comparison Theorems	163
13.1	Flag Curvature Bounded Above	163
13.2	Positive Flag Curvature	168
13.3	Ricci Curvature Bounded Below	169
13.4	Green-Dazord Theorem	171
14	Geometry of Hypersurfaces	173
14.1	Hessian and Laplacian	173
14.2	Normal Curvature	178
14.3	Mean Curvature	182
14.4	Shape Operator	185

15 Geometry of Metric Spheres	191
15.1 Estimates on the Normal Curvature	191
15.2 Convexity of Metric Balls	195
15.3 Estimates on the Mean Curvature	197
15.4 Metric Spheres in a Convex Domain	200
16 Volume Comparison Theorems	203
16.1 Volume of Metric Balls	203
16.2 Volume of Tubular Neighborhoods	209
16.3 Gromov Simplicial Norms	212
16.4 Estimates on the Expansion Distance	215
17 Morse Theory of Loop Spaces	219
17.1 A Review on the Morse Theory	219
17.2 Indexes of Geodesic Loops	222
17.3 Energy Functional on a Loop Space	224
17.4 Approximation of Loop Spaces	225
18 Vanishing Theorems for Homotopy Groups	231
18.1 Intermediate Curvatures	231
18.2 Vanishing Theorem for Homotopy Groups	232
18.3 Finsler Spaces of Positive Constant Curvature	237
19 Spaces of Finsler Spaces	241
19.1 Gromov-Hausdorff Distance	241
19.2 Precompactness Theorem	243
Bibliography	247
Index	255