

# On the Minimum Trapping Distance of Repeat Accumulate Accumulate Codes

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**Abstract**—We consider the ensemble of codes formed by a serial concatenation of a repetition code with two accumulators through uniform random interleavers. For this ensemble, asymptotic expressions for the normalized minimum trapping distance are derived. We employ a variant of the Gallager-Zyablov-Pinsker bit flipping decoding algorithm on a binary symmetric channel, where the analysis is based on the factor graph of the code. In particular, we show that the minimum trapping distance can be determined by solving a non-linear optimization problem. As a result we find that the minimum trapping distance grows linearly with block length for code rates of  $1/3$  and smaller, albeit with very small growth rate coefficients.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The serial concatenation of constituent codes combined with iterative decoding has led to powerful code constructions. The simplest construction is the repeat-accumulate (RA) code [1], which consists only of a repetition code, an interleaver, and an accumulator. These codes have lower decoding complexity than serially concatenated constructions with more complex constituent codes. An even more important benefit is that RA codes have an extremely low encoding complexity of  $O(1)$ , which makes them well suited for power-limited environments. However, as shown in [2–5], RA codes are not asymptotically good, i.e., their minimum distance does not grow linearly with block length, which has a significant impact on the performance in the error-floor regime.

In this paper, we consider repeat-accumulate-accumulate (RAA) codes, which are comprised of the serial concatenation of an outer repetition code with two accumulators connected through random interleavers. It was shown in [5], [6] that, for rates equal to  $1/3$  or smaller, the resulting code ensemble is asymptotically good, where in [5] the exact growth rate coefficients are determined. While this result is useful in assessing the error-floor behavior for maximum-likelihood (ML) decoding, it does not provide an accurate characterization of the low bit error rate (BER) performance regime in conjunction with iterative decoding.

In particular, for low-density parity check (LDPC) codes, *stopping set* [7] and *trapping set* [8], [9] classifications have been proposed to characterize the error-floor properties for the binary erasure channel (BEC) in the former case and,

more generally, for non-erasure channels in the latter case, assuming belief-propagation (BP) iterative decoding. Trapping sets were first introduced as so-called *near codewords* in [8]. This concept was extended in [9], where trapping sets were used to predict the error floor performance in the very-low BER regime. An  $(a, b)$  trapping set for a given parity check matrix and its corresponding Tanner graph is defined in [9] as a collection of  $a$  variable nodes for which the subgraph induced by the  $a$  variable nodes contains  $b$  check nodes with odd degree. The intuition behind this definition is that, if  $a > b$ , potentially unreliable messages within the induced subgraph may not be corrected by reliable messages from outside the trapping set due to the relatively small number of odd degree check nodes within the subgraph. Further, the work in [10] proposes a method of deriving stopping and trapping set weight enumerators and analyzes the corresponding asymptotic behavior of a BP decoder. Recently, a variation of the trapping set definition has been stated in the form of *absorbing sets* [11], [12] in order to separate the effects of oscillatory behavior in the decoder from convergence to a non-codeword.

In the following, we present an analysis of the minimum trapping distance for an RAA code ensemble. As pointed out above, even though related work has been carried out in the context of LDPC codes in [10], such a characterization does not seem to exist for double serially concatenated ensembles such as the RAA ensemble<sup>1</sup>. In this initial study, we focus solely on communicating over a binary symmetric channel (BSC). For decoding, we employ a variant of the majority-logic (bit flipping) iterative decoding algorithm introduced by Gallager [14] and Zyablov and Pinsker [15], resp., for LDPC codes on a factor graph representation of the RAA code. It was shown in [15] that, for LDPC codes of block length  $N$ , this algorithm has complexity  $O(N \log N)$  and is able to correct  $O(N)$  channel errors on a BSC. Thus, for small enough channel error probabilities, the block error probability goes to zero exponentially in  $N$  as  $\exp(-O(N))$ .

The paper is organized as follows. In Section II we address the encoder and the corresponding factor graph for the RAA code. Section III presents the bit flipping decoding algorithm,

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<sup>1</sup>However, a stopping set analysis of RAA codes has recently been proposed in [13].

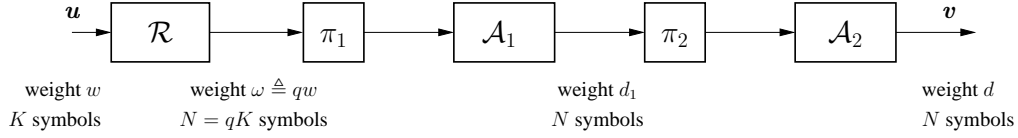


Fig. 1. Repeat accumulate-accumulate encoder, rate  $R = 1/q$ .

and in Section IV a lower bound on the minimum trapping distance is derived, and numerical results are presented.

## II. FACTOR GRAPH REPRESENTATION OF RAA CODES

In this section we introduce a factor graph representation of RAA codes, where the RAA encoder is depicted in Fig. 1. The binary input sequence  $\mathbf{u} = [u_1, u_2, \dots, u_K]$  of length  $K$  has weight  $w$ ,  $\mathcal{R}$  denotes the repetition code of rate  $R = 1/q$ , which leads to a code sequence of weight  $qw$  and length  $N = qK$ . We consider the ensemble of all possible interleavers  $\pi_1$  and  $\pi_2$  by using the uniform interleaver approach [16], where each possible interleaver realization has the same probability  $1/N!$ . The permuted interleaver output sequences are applied to the recursive convolutional codes  $\mathcal{A}_{1/2}$  with generator polynomials  $g(D) = 1/(1 + D)$  (accumulator), leading to sequences of weight  $d_1$  and  $d$ , respectively.

For decoding, we consider a factor graph representation of the RAA code, which is shown in Fig. 2 for  $q = 3$ . The small boxes represent check nodes, the circles variable nodes, and  $\pi_1$  and  $\pi_2$  denote the interleavers, respectively. The received code symbols  $r_n, n = 1, 2, \dots, N$ , appear as variable nodes in the first layer. At the output of the first layer, the sequence  $\tilde{\mathbf{v}}_1 = [\tilde{v}_{1,1}, \tilde{v}_{1,2}, \dots, \tilde{v}_{1,N}]$  is

All boxes represent check nodes, the circles variable nodes and  $\pi_1$  and  $\pi_2$  denote the interleavers, respectively. The code symbols  $r_n, n = 1, 2, \dots, N$ , appear as variable nodes in the first layer. At the output of the first layer, the sequence  $\tilde{\mathbf{v}}_1 = [\tilde{v}_{1,1}, \tilde{v}_{1,2}, \dots, \tilde{v}_{1,N}]$  is

check nodes, the circles variable nodes, the interleave, respectively. The  $n = 1, 2, \dots, N$ , appear as variable nodes in the output of the first layer, the sequence  $\tilde{\mathbf{v}}_1 = [\tilde{v}_{1,1}, \tilde{v}_{1,2}, \dots, \tilde{v}_{1,N}]$  is

circles variable nodes, respectively. The

as variable

5 1.49414 Td [(,42695 1.4.n265.15(s)-0.3547194h)0.4339TJ /R41 6.893t)-0.2(-);-0.140.9789 0 Td4547194h)0.4 9.26992 1.8 Td (y)0-267. 0 T



different ways.

The proof follows from the definition of  $\nu$ . By combining (7) and Lemma 4 we obtain the following lemma.

**Lemma 5.** For a given sequence  $\tilde{\mathbf{u}}$  of weight  $\omega$ , the sequence  $\eta$  can be chosen in

$$\sum_{\nu: \sum_{\ell=0}^q \nu_\ell = K, \sum_{\ell=0}^q \ell \nu_\ell = \omega} \binom{K}{\nu_0, \nu_1, \dots, \nu_q}$$

different ways.

We now prove the following key lemma.

**Lemma 6.** Given a sequence  $\tilde{\mathbf{u}}$  of weight  $\omega$  and a sequence  $\eta$  with constraint composition  $\nu$ , there are

$$\frac{\omega!(N-\omega)!}{\prod_{\ell=0}^q (\ell!(q-\ell)!)^{\nu_\ell}}$$

ways to arrange the edges connecting the second and third levels in the factor graph of the code.

*Proof:* The proof is analogous to the proof of Lemma 1. First, the variable nodes corresponding to  $\eta_k = 0$  can only be connected to check nodes associated with symbols  $\tilde{u}_k = 0$  in

$$\frac{(N-\omega)(N-\omega-1)\cdots(N-\omega-q\nu_0+1)}{(q!)^{\nu_0}} \quad (8)$$

different ways. We fix these edges in the factor graph. Then, the variable nodes associated with  $\eta_k = 1/q$  consist of a single edge associated with  $\tilde{u}_k = 1$  and  $q-1$  edges with  $\tilde{u}_k = 0$ , so we have

$$\frac{(N-\omega-q\nu_0)(N-\omega-q\nu_0-1)\cdots(N-\omega-q\nu_0-(q-1)\nu_1+1)}{((q-1)!)^{\nu_1}} \cdot \frac{\omega(\omega-1)\cdots(\omega-\nu_1+1)}{(1!)^{\nu_1}} \quad (9)$$

different sets of edges. Now, we continue with the values  $\eta_k = \ell/q$ ,  $\ell = 2, \dots, q-1$  in the same way, and by fixing all those edges, for  $\eta_k = 1$  we end up with

$$\frac{\left(\omega - \sum_{\ell=1}^{q-1} \nu_\ell\right) \cdots 2 \cdot 1}{(q!)^{\nu_q}} \quad (10)$$

different ways of arranging the edges between the variable nodes associated with  $\eta_k = 1$  and the corresponding check nodes for  $\tilde{u}_k = 1$ . By combining the cases represented by (8), (9), and (10), and the corresponding equations for  $\ell = 2, \dots, q-1$ , the lemma is proved.  $\blacksquare$

We now enumerate all possible combinations of weights  $w_H(\mathbf{r}) = d$ ,  $w_H(\mathbf{v}_1) = d_1$ , and  $w_H(\tilde{\mathbf{u}}) = \omega$  for a given information sequence  $\mathbf{u}$  with constraint composition  $\nu$  using an input-output weight enumerator function (IOWEF)  $\bar{A}_{d,d_1,\omega}(\nu)$ . Here, we assume that  $\nu$  satisfies the conditions of (7). An expression for the ensemble average IOWEF

$\bar{A}_{d,d_1,\omega}(\nu)$  can then be obtained by combining Lemmas 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6, which gives rise to the following theorem.

**Theorem 1.** The ensemble-average IOWEF  $\bar{A}_{d,d_1,\omega}$  for an RAA code ensemble with rate  $R = 1/q$  and a given constraint composition  $\nu = (\nu_0, \nu_1, \dots, \nu_q)$  equals

$$\bar{A}_{d,d_1,\omega}(\nu) = \frac{\binom{d_1-1}{\lceil \frac{\omega}{2} \rceil - 1} \binom{N-d_1}{\lfloor \frac{\omega}{2} \rfloor} \binom{d-1}{\lceil \frac{d_1}{2} \rceil - 1} \binom{N-d}{\lfloor \frac{d_1}{2} \rfloor}}{\binom{N}{\omega} \binom{N}{d_1}} \cdot \frac{(q!)^K}{\prod_{\ell=0}^q (\ell!(q-\ell)!)^{\nu_\ell}}. \quad (11)$$

The following corollary immediately follows from the above theorem.

**Corollary 1.** The ensemble-average IOWEF  $\bar{A}_{d,d_1,q,w}(\nu)$  with  $\nu = (K-w, 0, \dots, 0, w)$  from Theorem 1 is equivalent to the (unconstrained) ensemble-average IOWEF for the RAA code derived in [5].

In the following, we employ Theorem 1 to derive a lower bound on  $d_{\text{trap}}$ . It can be seen from the factor graph in Fig. 2 that each flipping of a symbol  $r_n$  in the first level causes the flipping of at most four symbols in the sequence  $\tilde{\mathbf{u}}$ . Since we have assumed that the transmitted sequence is the all-zero sequence and the received sequence  $\mathbf{r}$  is a BSC error pattern of weight  $d$ , we do not need to consider the case that a flipping candidate  $r_n$  is connected to a variable node on the third level of the factor graph corresponding to  $\eta_k = 0$ , which would lead to an increase of the syndrome weight. Thus, only the following cases need to be considered:

- 1) There is a connection between a flipping candidate  $r_n$  and a variable node corresponding to the value  $\eta_k = 1/q$ . In this case, since the all-zero codeword has been sent, we again only need to address the case where the syndrome weight is decreased, i.e., where the corresponding symbol  $\tilde{u}_n$  changes its value to zero.
- 2) There is a connection between a flipping candidate  $r_n$  and a variable node corresponding to the value  $\eta_k = \ell/q$ ,  $2 \leq \ell \leq q-1$ . In this case, the syndrome weight cannot increase and we assume in the following that the syndrome weight is always unchanged<sup>2</sup>.
- 3) There is a connection between a flipping candidate  $r_n$  and a variable node corresponding to the value  $\eta_k = 1$ , whose flipping increases the syndrome weight.

Since case 2) above does not lead to an increase of the syndrome weight, we only need to focus on cases 1) and 3). Thus, if the number of check nodes  $\tilde{u}_n = 1$  sharing an edge with a variable node  $\eta_k = 1/q$  is larger than the number of

<sup>2</sup>Here we neglect the case that the  $\ell$  corresponding values in  $\tilde{\mathbf{u}}$  could be changed to zero at the same time by a single flip of  $r_n$  and therefore decrease the syndrome weight, since the probability of this event typically is very small.

check nodes  $\tilde{u}_n = 1$  sharing an edge with a variable node  $\eta_k = 1$ , i.e.,

$$\nu_1 - q\nu_q > 0, \quad (12)$$

then at least one received symbol  $r_n$  can always be identified as a flipping candidate such that the syndrome weight is decreased. As a consequence, (12) represents a sufficient condition for the absence of a trapping set.

We now employ the result in (12) to define the ensemble average weight enumerating function (WEF) for received sequences of weight  $d$  that constitute trapping sets as

$$\bar{A}_d = \sum_{\omega=1}^N \sum_{d_1=1}^N \sum_{\substack{\nu: \sum_{\ell=0}^q \nu_\ell = K \\ \sum_{\ell=0}^q \ell \nu_\ell = \omega \\ \nu_1 - q\nu_q \leq 0}} \bar{A}_{d,d_1,\omega}(\boldsymbol{\nu}). \quad (13)$$

From (13), we obtain

$$\bar{A}_d \leq N^2 \max_{1 \leq d_1 \leq N, 1 \leq \omega \leq N} \sum_{\substack{\nu: \sum_{\ell=0}^q \nu_\ell = K \\ \sum_{\ell=0}^q \ell \nu_\ell = \omega \\ \nu_1 - q\nu_q \leq 0}} \bar{A}_{d,d_1,\omega}(\boldsymbol{\nu}), \quad (14)$$

and we can derive an upper bound for the sum in (14) as

$$\begin{aligned} & \sum_{\substack{\nu: \sum_{\ell=0}^q \nu_\ell = K \\ \sum_{\ell=0}^q \ell \nu_\ell = \omega \\ \nu_1 - q\nu_q \leq 0}} \bar{A}_{d,d_1,\omega}(\boldsymbol{\nu}) \leq \\ & \min_{s, \lambda < 0} \underbrace{\sum_{\nu} \bar{A}_{d,d_1,\omega}(\boldsymbol{\nu}) \exp \left[ s \left( \sum_{\ell=0}^q \ell \nu_\ell - \omega \right) \right] \exp[\lambda(\nu_1 - q\nu_q)]}_{\triangleq \bar{M}_{d,d_1,\omega}(s, \lambda)}, \end{aligned} \quad (15)$$

where  $s$  and  $\lambda < 0$  are auxiliary variables and the summation is carried out over all  $\boldsymbol{\nu}$  such that  $\sum_{\ell=0}^q \nu_\ell = K$ . In order to obtain a tight upper bound, the right hand side in (15) must be minimized over  $s$  and  $\lambda < 0$ . The quantity  $\bar{M}_{d,d_1,\omega}(s, \lambda)$  in (15) represents a modified ensemble-average IOWEF. Thus, the ensemble-average WEF  $\bar{A}_d$  can be upper bounded as

$$\bar{A}_d \leq N^2 \max_{1 \leq d_1 \leq N, 1 \leq \omega \leq N} \min_{s, \lambda < 0} \bar{M}_{d,d_1,\omega}(s, \lambda). \quad (16)$$

For the sake of brevity, we now restrict ourselves to the case  $q = 3$ . By combining (11) and (15) and subsequently employing the multinomial theorem,  $\bar{M}_{d,d_1,\omega}(s, \lambda)$  can be written as

$$\begin{aligned} \bar{M}_{d,d_1,\omega}(s, \lambda) = & \frac{\binom{d_1-1}{\lceil \frac{\omega}{2} \rceil - 1} \binom{N-d_1}{\lfloor \frac{\omega}{2} \rfloor} \binom{d-1}{\lceil \frac{d_1}{2} \rceil - 1} \binom{N-d}{\lfloor \frac{d_1}{2} \rfloor}}{\binom{N}{\omega} \binom{N}{d_1}} \\ & e^{-s\omega} \cdot \left( 1 + 3e^{s+\lambda} + 3e^{2s} + e^{3(s-\lambda)} \right)^K. \end{aligned} \quad (17)$$

Using the asymptotic form of Stirling's approximation, (17) yields

$$\bar{M}_{d,d_1,\omega}(s, \lambda) = \exp[(F(\alpha, \beta, \rho, s, \lambda) + o(N))N], \quad (18)$$

where  $\alpha \triangleq \omega/N$ ,  $\beta \triangleq d_1/N$ , and  $\rho \triangleq d/N$  are normalized weights, and the function  $F(\cdot)$  is defined as

$$F(\alpha, \beta, \rho, s, \lambda) \triangleq f(\alpha, \beta, \rho) + g(\alpha, s, \lambda), \quad (19)$$

where

$$\begin{aligned} f(\alpha, \beta, \rho) = & -H(\beta) - H(\rho) + H\left(\frac{\beta - \alpha/2}{1 - \alpha}\right)(1 - \alpha) \\ & + \alpha \ln 2 + H\left(\frac{\rho - \beta/2}{1 - \beta}\right)(1 - \beta) + \beta \ln 2 \end{aligned} \quad (20)$$

and

$$g(\alpha, s, \lambda) = \frac{1}{3} \ln \left( 1 + 3e^{s+\lambda} + 3e^{2s} + e^{3(s-\lambda)} \right) - s\alpha. \quad (21)$$

The derivation of  $F(\alpha, \beta, \rho, s, \lambda)$  can be extended to the case  $q > 3$  in a straightforward way. The only difference is that the function  $g(\alpha, s, \lambda)$  must be modified: for example, for  $q = 4$ ,  $g(\alpha, s, \lambda)$  becomes

$$g(\alpha, s, \lambda) = \frac{1}{4} \ln \left( 1 + 4e^{s+\lambda} + 6e^{2s} + 4e^{3s} + e^{4(s-\lambda)} \right) - s\alpha. \quad (22)$$

We now define the function

$$r_{\text{trap}}(\rho) \triangleq \lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{N} \ln \bar{A}_{\rho N}, \quad (23)$$

where  $r_{\text{trap}}(\rho)$  has the following interpretation: if the function is negative for some  $\rho$ ,  $\rho_{\text{trap}} > \rho > 0$ , then crosses zero and is positive for  $\rho > \rho_{\text{trap}}$ , it follows that, for almost all codes in the ensemble, the minimum trapping distance is lower bounded by  $d_{\text{trap}} \geq \rho_{\text{trap}}N$  as the block length  $N$  tends to infinity.

By combining (16), (18), and (19), and inserting the resulting expression for  $\bar{A}_d$  in (23), we obtain the following theorem and corollary.

**Theorem 2.** *The function  $r_{\text{trap}}(\rho)$  can be upper bounded as*

$$\begin{aligned} r_{\text{trap}}(\rho) & \leq \hat{r}_{\text{trap}}(\rho) \\ & = \max_{0 < \alpha < 0.5, 0 < \beta < 0.5} \left( f(\alpha, \beta, \rho) + \min_{s, \lambda < 0} g(\alpha, s, \lambda) \right), \end{aligned} \quad (24)$$

where the function  $f(\cdot)$  is given by (20) and the function  $g(\cdot)$  is given by (21) (or the corresponding expressions for  $q > 3$ ).

**Corollary 2.** *Let  $\rho_0 > 0$  be such that  $\hat{r}_{\text{trap}}(\rho_0) < 0$ . Then almost all RAA codes in the ensemble do not contain trapping sets of weight  $\rho_0 N$  or less.*

In order to compute a lower bound  $\rho'_{\text{trap}}$  on the asymptotic normalized minimum trapping distance  $\rho_{\text{trap}}$ , we must find the zero crossing of  $\hat{r}_{\text{trap}}(\rho)$  by numerically solving (24) with constrained non-linear optimization techniques. Table I shows the resulting lower bounds for  $q \geq 3$ . We see that the minimum trapping distance  $d_{\text{trap}} = \rho_{\text{trap}}N$  grows linearly with block length, even though the growth coefficients are very small.



The reason is that the employed bit flipping decoder has only moderate error correcting capabilities and is inferior to performing BP decoding on the factor graph or iterative decoding on the constituent codes. Note that, for  $q = 2$ , we are

TABLE I  
LOWER BOUND  $\rho'_{\text{TRAP}}$  ON THE ASYMPTOTIC NORMALIZED MINIMUM TRAPPING DISTANCES FOR THE RAA CODE ENSEMBLE, A BIT FLIPPING DECODER, AND DIFFERENT RATES  $R = 1/q$ .

$q$	$\rho'_{\text{trap}}$
3	$3.00 \cdot 10^{-8}$
4	$9.50 \cdot 10^{-8}$
5	$1.05 \cdot 10^{-6}$
6	$4.70 \cdot 10^{-6}$
7	$1.33 \cdot 10^{-5}$
8	$2.70 \cdot 10^{-5}$
9	$4.41 \cdot 10^{-5}$
10	$6.15 \cdot 10^{-5}$

not able to obtain linear minimum trapping distance growth, which is consistent with the fact that linear minimum distance growth cannot be proved either in this case [5]. Finally, Fig. 3 displays the values of  $\rho'_{\text{trap}}$  from Table I versus the inverse code rate  $q = 1/R$ .

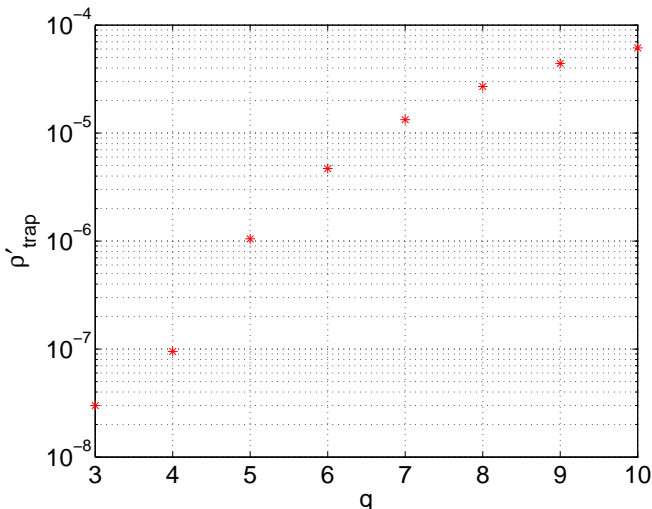


Fig. 3. Lower bound  $\rho'_{\text{trap}}$  on the normalized asymptotic trapping distance for the RAA code ensemble versus the inverse rate  $q = 1/R$ .

## V. CONCLUSION

In this paper we have addressed the asymptotic minimum trapping distance of an RAA code ensemble, where a variant of the Gallager-Zyablov-Pinsker bit flipping decoding algorithm on the factor graph of the code was employed. In particular, we have proposed a complete trapping set characterization for the bit flipping decoder on the BSC. The lower bound on the normalized minimum trapping distance for the RAA code ensemble is obtained by employing a uniform interleaver approach and combining the resulting expression with a decoder condition for the existence of trapping sets. Finally, a numerical evaluation is obtained via a constrained nonlinear

optimization approach. The main result is that, for all rates smaller than or equal to  $R = 1/3$ , the minimum trapping distance grows linearly with block length, although the growth rate coefficients are very small.

Future work will include a further analysis of the bit flipping decoder; in particular, investigating the effects of introducing errors by the flipping of correctly received symbols. We will also focus on extending the results to AWGN channels, and on performing trapping set analyses for different decoders, such as BP and iterative decoding of the individual constituent codes, for which the results of this paper could serve as initial performance benchmarks.

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