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Clean Quantum and Classical Communication Protocols

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In a communication task, two players, Alice and Bob, receive inputs \( x \) and \( y \) and wish to calculate the value of some function \( f \). To achieve this, messages will have to be exchanged between them, and, depending on the resources available to them, these may consist of classical or quantum communication in the form of bits and qubits, respectively. Typically, in such scenarios one is interested in minimizing the amount of communication that has to take place to evaluate the function, and the number of bits (qubits) that must be exchanged to do this is referred to as the classical (quantum) communication complexity [1,2].

A protocol for calculating a function will act on three distinct types of registers. Each player will receive an input register, containing \( x \) or \( y \), and an ancillary working space, initialized in some standard state such as a string of bits all set to 0, a number of qubits provided in the \( |0\rangle \) state, or possibly containing entangled states shared between the parties. The final type of register is the answer register, which will contain the value of \( f(x, y) \) at the end of the protocol. On the completion of a generic protocol for computing \( f \), the input and ancillary registers will no longer be in their starting states and will depend upon both \( x \) and \( y \).

However, leaving these registers in such states can be problematic. First, if Alice and Bob wish to keep private the particular protocol that they ran, then discarding these unclean states may leak information regarding this to a third party. Second, in the quantum setting, if the players wish to run the protocol over a superposition of input states (perhaps as a subroutine of a larger computation), then allowing the ancillary registers to end up in some unclean, input-dependent state and then discarding them can lead to a loss of coherence in the superposition over answers. Finally, the players’ computational space may be in short supply, and without knowing the registers’ final states they cannot easily use them for future calculations.

To avoid such issues, we can demand that a protocol (in addition to computing \( f \)) returns the input and ancillary registers to their starting state. Following Ref. [3], we call such a protocol clean, and the minimum number of bits or qubits that a clean protocol needs to exchange to compute a given function is the clean communication complexity. We shall denote these quantities by \( C_{\text{clean}}(f) \) and \( Q_{\text{clean}}(f) \). In the case where the players have access to preshared entanglement (which they must restore at the end of the protocol), the associated cost will be written \( Q_{\text{clean}}' \). We focus on the scenario where the players must compute the function exactly.

In all three scenarios, an unclean communication protocol can be converted into a clean one at the cost of doubling the communication. To do this, the players run the unclean protocol, copy the output to another location, and then run the unclean protocol backwards. At first glance, it may appear that clean, classical protocols are even easier to construct: The players keep a copy of their input and then simply erase all ancillary bits once the protocol is complete. However, Landauer’s principle [4–6] implies that such irreversible manipulations will generate heat or else cost work. As such, if one is interested in avoiding such costs, it makes sense to consider protocols where all operations must be reversible. In light of these considerations, it is natural to ask: Do more efficient clean protocols, without this doubling in communication, exist?

We first focus on the clean communication complexity of computing the inner product of two distributed bit strings of length \( n \), showing that (without preshared entanglement) this can be done by exchanging \( n + 3 \) qubits. As a clean
protocol for this function must exchange at least $n + 1$ qubits, this is very close to tight. We also provide a clean, classical protocol that computes the inner product while exchanging only $n + O(\sqrt{n})$ bits. This provides a saving over the most obvious protocol which, as we shall show, is close to optimal for the clean, classical computation of most functions.

A variation on our quantum protocol can be used to implement $n$ copies of a CNOT gate in parallel by exchanging $n + 1$ qubits. In a quantum computing architecture consisting of distributed clusters of highly controllable qubits linked by quantum communication (such as that envisaged in Ref. [7]), it is prudent to minimize the number of qubits exchanged. Our implementation is optimal.

Next, we turn to the clean communication complexity of random functions on inputs of length $n$. We show here that, in contrast to the inner product, nearly all functions are such that $C_{\text{clean}}(f)$ is close to the maximal $2n$: The simple method of generating clean protocols discussed above is near optimal. On the quantum side, we find that $Q_{\text{clean}}(f)$ is close to $n$ for most functions. As superdense coding [8] allows all functions to be uncleanly computed while exchanging $n/2$ qubits when the players preshare entanglement, this is again close to maximal. Whether similarly $Q_{\text{clean}}(f)$ is close to $2n$ remains an open question.

Appendices can be found in Supplemental Material [9].

Clean protocols.—Clean protocols have a long history in proving bounds in the model of quantum communication complexity with free entanglement assistance [16]. For example, considering clean, quantum protocols for the inner product function was used to imply that any entanglement-assisted quantum protocol for this function must use at least $\lceil n/2 \rceil$ qubits [3]. Clean protocols have also been used to lower bound the entanglement-assisted, quantum communication complexity [17] and to show that, in this model of communication, most functions have complexity that scales linearly in $n$ [18]. Cleanliness has also been used to analyze privacy among honest players [19], to bound the amount of quantum communication required to implement distributed quantum computation [20], and for constructing resource inequalities that carefully account for the way protocols can be combined [21,22].

More formally, a clean, quantum protocol for computing a function $f : \{0, 1\}^n \times \{0, 1\}^m \rightarrow \{0, 1\}$ is defined as follows [3]. The initial state at the beginning of the protocol is of the form

$$|x\rangle_A |0\rangle_{A_0} |y\rangle_B |0\rangle_{B_0} |\Phi\rangle_{A_f B_f} |z\rangle_{B_{ans}},$$

where $|x\rangle_A = \bigotimes_{i=1}^n |x_i\rangle_{A_i}$ and $|y\rangle_B = \bigotimes_{i=1}^m |y_i\rangle_{B_i}$ are Alice and Bob’s respective inputs stored in $n$ qubits, $|0\rangle_{A_0}$ and $|0\rangle_{B_0}$ their qubit ancillas, $|\Phi\rangle_{A_f B_f}$ their preshared entanglement (if supplied), and $|z\rangle_{B_{ans}}$ is the initial state of the answer register with $z \in \{0, 1\}$. Throughout this Letter, we will assume that at the beginning and end of a protocol the answer register is held by Bob.

Players then take turns to act on their share of the qubits. In each turn, a player will apply a unitary transformation to the qubits in their possession and then send some subset of them to the other player. The protocol computes $f$ cleanly if the final state of the qubits is

$$|x\rangle_A |y\rangle_B |\tilde{0}\rangle_{B_0} |\tilde{\Phi}\rangle_{A_f B_f} |\tilde{z}\rangle_{B_{ans}} \oplus f(x, y)|\tilde{y}\rangle_B,$$

where the addition in the answer register is modulo 2. Clean classical protocols are defined similarly but with registers and communication given in terms of bits rather than qubits and no entanglement. All transformations must be reversible.

Inner product.—The specific function that we shall focus on in this paper is the inner product function $IP_n$. This is defined by

$$IP_n : \{0, 1\}^n \times \{0, 1\}^n \rightarrow \{0, 1\},$$

$$IP_n(x, y) = \sum_{i=1}^n x_i \cdot y_i \mod 2.$$ 

It is well known that, for both players to know the answer, at least $n$ bits of classical communication are needed to (uncleanly) compute $IP_n$ exactly (Example 1.29 in Ref. [23]). For quantum strategies in which the players preshare entanglement, $\lceil n/2 \rceil$ qubits must be sent [3] to achieve the same goal. In Ref. [3], it is also shown that clean, quantum protocols for computing $IP_n$ must exchange at least $n$ qubits. The quantum communication required to uncleanly compute $IP_n$ without prior entanglement is unknown (though it must lie between $\lceil n/2 \rceil$ and $n$). For quantum protocols that are allowed to err with a fixed probability less than $1/2$, the complexity is still $\Omega(n^2)$ [24].

Here we examine the clean communication complexity of $IP_n$ without entanglement assistance. To this end, we first consider the quantum communication complexity of implementing the transformation:

$$|x\rangle_A |y\rangle_B \mapsto (-1)^{x\cdot y} |x\rangle_A |y\rangle_B,$$

i.e., the distributed computation of the inner product of $x$ and $y$ in the phase. Such a transformation corresponds to performing controlled-Z gates across $n$ pairs of qubits, and by a suitable local basis change this can be converted into an implementation of $n$-fold CNOT gates.

In Ref. [25], it was shown that two qubits of communication together with sharing four ebits is exactly equivalent as a resource to the ability to implement two CNOT gates and sharing four ebits. As such, this provides a protocol for implementing $IP_n$ in the phase using $n + 8$ qubits of communication and eight ancilla qubits (for even $n$). This can be adapted to give a protocol requiring $n + 2$ qubits of communication for even $n$ and $n + 3$ qubits when $n$ is odd. In the following lemma, we give an improved, optimal protocol.
Lemma 1.—The clean, quantum communication complexity of exactly implementing $IP_n$ in the phase satisfies

$$Q_{\text{clean}}(IP_n \text{phase}) = n + 1.$$  (5)

One ancilla qubit is required. (Without using ancilla qubits, $n + 1$ qubits for odd $n$ and $n + 2$ for even $n$ suffice.)

Proof.—The $n + 1$ qubit protocol for even $n$ is as follows. Alice initially prepares an ancilla qubit in the state $|x_1\rangle$ and sends it to Bob, who applies a phase of $(-1)^{y_2}$ and sends it back to Alice in the state $|x_1 \oplus y_2\rangle$. Now, Alice sends her previous communication by subtracting $x_1$ from the communication and then uses the value of $y_2$ to apply the phase $(-1)^{x_1 y_2}$. She then adds $x_3$ to the communication qubit to leave it in the state $|y_2 \oplus x_3\rangle$ and sends it back to Bob. A schematic of these first rounds is given in Fig. 1.

The players then proceed similarly, with each round of communication being used to convey a new bit to the other party and send a received bit back in order to clean the ancilla qubit. After $n$ rounds, the global phase will be $(-1)^{x_1 y_2}$, and Alice will hold the communication qubit in the state $|y_n\rangle$. She sends this back to Bob, who cleans it, completing the protocol using $n + 1$ qubits of communication and the change in ownership of one ancilla qubit. For odd $n$, Alice will perform the final cleaning step. The protocol to implement the transformation without an ancilla qubit is given in Appendix B1 [9].

The lower bound is proved in Appendix C3 [9]. It uses the concept of information complexity [26] to show that in a clean protocol for implementing Eq. (4) $n$ bits of information must flow in each direction. Without preshared entanglement, we show that $n$ qubits of communication cannot achieve this.

The above lemma provides the optimal method for implementing $n$ C\!\!Z gates in parallel while exchanging $n + 1$ qubits. Such a protocol would prove useful for quantum computing architectures where quantum communication is used to interface and implement gates between clusters of highly controllable qubits. As an example, in quantum error correction one could imagine using the Steane code [27] to protect two logical qubits using two spatially separated clusters of seven physical qubits. To implement a C\!\!Z gate between the logical qubits requires seven C\!\!Zs to be performed in parallel between the physical qubits.

Our protocol achieves this while exchanging only eight qubits, whereas the naive protocol would send 14. Protocols based solely on shared entanglement and classical communication [28–30] use seven pairs of ebits, 14 bits of communication, and the implementation of 14 measurements, while their coherent counterpart [25] requires one shared ebit and eight qubits of communication.

In Appendix B2 [9], we give a clean quantum protocol for computing $IP_n$.

Theorem 2.—The clean, quantum communication complexity of exactly computing $IP_n$ satisfies

$$n + 1 \leq Q_{\text{clean}}(IP_n) \leq \begin{cases} 
    n + 3 & \text{for } n \text{ odd,} \\
    n + 2 & \text{for } n \text{ even.} 
\end{cases}$$  (6)

No ancilla qubits are required. By adapting the protocol from Lemma 1, $IP_n$ can be computed cleanly using two qubits and $n + 1$ bits. We give this protocol in Appendix B3 [9].

Our novel quantum communication protocols inspire a classical protocol for the inner product (given in Appendix B4 [9]) which is near optimal and for which only the naive $2n$ protocol was known before.

Theorem 3.—The clean, classical communication complexity of exactly computing $IP_n$ satisfies

$$n + 1 \leq C_{\text{clean}}(IP_n) \leq n + 4\sqrt{n} + \frac{1}{\sqrt{n} - 1} + 2.$$  (7)

No ancilla bits are required.

Generic functions.—In contrast to Theorem 3, we will show that nearly all Boolean functions on $n$-bit inputs require $2n - O(\log n)$ bits of classical communication to compute cleanly. The proof follows from the following two lemmas. In what follows, $X$ and $Y$ are the random variables for Alice and Bob’s inputs, and $A$ and $B$ are the random variables received by Alice and Bob, respectively, over the course of the protocol. By $|a|$ and $|b|$, we denote the number of bits received by Alice and Bob.

Lemma 4.—Consider picking uniformly at random a Boolean function $f_n$ on $n$-bit inputs. Then with probability $1 - o(1)$, all protocols that compute $f_n$ exactly are such that either 1. Alice must receive

$$|a| \geq n - \log (n + 1) - 2$$  (8)

bits and there exists a uniform distribution over at least half the pairs of inputs such that

$$I(Y:AX) \geq n - \log (n + 1) - 3,$$  (9)

or 2. Bob must receive

$$|b| \geq n - \log (n + 1) - 2$$  (10)

bits and there exists a uniform distribution over at least half the pairs of inputs such that

\[\text{(10)}\]
To prove the first two bounds, begin by noting that the protocol for computing $f$ that partitions $M_f$ into large rectangles, the Kolmogorov complexity of $M_f$ is low. (b) For $M_f$ to have high Kolmogorov complexity, all protocols for computing $f$ must partition $M_f$ into either very narrow or very thin rectangles. To produce the bound in Eq. (9), we take a distribution over the larger set, we induce a direction into very thin as shown in Fig. 2(b). In fact, they cannot be larger than $2^n \times 4(\alpha + 1)$ (as shown in the figure) and the distribution over $x$ and $y$ is formed by picking Alice and Bob’s inputs uniformly at random from such rectangles. Then, at the end of the protocol, Alice will know that Bob received one of at most $4(n + 1)$ inputs and Eq. (8) will hold. Hence,

$$I(X:AY) = H(Y) - H(Y|AX) \geq n - \log (n + 1) - 3,$$

as required.
\[ C_{\text{clean}}(f_n) \geq 2n - 2\log(n + 1) - 7. \] (14)

In the case of quantum protocols, a similar result holds in the entanglement-assisted case. Proving this result (Appendix C2 [9]) makes use of the fully quantum notion of information complexity introduced in Ref. [26]. The proof follows a similar structure to the classical result: arguing that for most functions close to \( n \) bits of information have to flow from Alice to Bob and for the protocol to be clean an equivalent amount of information has to be returned.

**Theorem 7.**—Consider exactly computing a Boolean function \( f_n \) on \( n \)-bit inputs that has been picked uniformly at random. Then with probability \( 1 - o(1) \)

\[ Q^s_{\text{clean}}(f_n) \geq n - \log n. \] (15)

**Conclusion.**—In this Letter, we have initiated the study of how big an overhead in communication cleanliness requires. For the inner product function (and the task of implementing \( n \) C2 gates in parallel), we have exhibited quantum and classical protocols for which the overhead is low. For most Boolean functions, however, we have shown that the additional cost incurred by demanding cleanliness is close to maximal for the classical and entanglement-assisted complexities. Many questions remain. For example, what are the clean complexities of other notable functions such as equality and disjointness?

As Theorems 6 and 7 show that the clean, classical, and entanglement-assisted communication complexity for most functions is close to maximal, one can ask: Does something similar hold for \( Q_{\text{clean}}(f) \)? We leave this as an open question but conjecture it to be close to \( 2n \), as the inner product appears somewhat special in its ability to reuse a single ebit efficiently. However, the concept of information cost is blind to sending ebits, so the technique used for the entanglement-assisted case does not immediately generalize to proving a bound potentially larger than \( n \).

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