A Brief Chronicle of the Levi (Hartogs' Inverse) Problem, Coherence and an Open Problem

Junjiro Noguchi[*]

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Abstract

Here we chronologically summarize briefly the developments of the Levi (Hartogs' Inverse) Problem together with the notion of coherence and its solution, shedding light on some records which have not been discussed in the past references. In particular, we will discuss K. Oka's unpublished papers *1943* which solved the Levi (Hartogs' Inverse) Problem for unramified Riemann domains of arbitrary dimension $n \geq 2$, usually referred as it was solved by Oka IX in *1953*, H.J. Bremermann and F. Norguet in *1954* for univalent domains, independently.

At the end we emphasize an open problem in a ramified case.

1. Introduction

There are now a number of interesting and invaluable comments/surveys on the developments of the titled Problem and Coherence in complex analysis of several variables such as, e.g., H. Cartan's comments in [38], H. Grauert's Commentary of [10] Part II, I. Lieb [20]. The purpose of the present article is to recall briefly the developments of the problem and the solution together with the notion of coherence, shedding light on some records and unpublished manuscripts of K. Oka that have not been discussed very much in the former references. We will see that the original Levi (Hartogs' Inverse) Problem itself was historically solved for unramified Riemann domains over $\mathbf{C}^n$ in Oka's unpublished papers 1943 (cf. [31] **Theorem I** at p. 27), and then observe how the notion of "*Coherence*" ("*Idéaux de domaines indéterminés*" in Oka's terms) evolved from the problem: Here there is a new point, for those two issues have been discussed independently in the past references (cf., e.g., [12] Introduction, [20]).

As we will see in §2, the turn of years "*1943/44*" was indeed a watershed in the study of analytic function theory of several variables. In 1943 K. Oka finished the Three Big Problems in the survey monograph of Behnke–Thullen 1934 (see items 5, 10 in §2). In the next year 1944 K. Oka began to study the arithmetic property of analytic functions of several variables by investigating Weierstrass' Preparation Theorem ([39]) which later led to the notion of "coherence" in 1948 ([33]), and in the same year 1944 H. Cartan wrote an experimental paper [4] (cf. item 11 in §2).

We will employ commonly used notion and terminologies in analytic function theory of several variables without definitions (cf., e.g., [13], [17], [11], [21], [22]) except for a *Riemann domain X* over $\mathbf{C}^n$ (resp. $\mathbf{P}^n(\mathbf{C})$), which in the present note is a possibly singular reduced complex space X together with a holomorphic map $\pi : X \to \mathbf{C}^n$ (resp. $\mathbf{P}^n(\mathbf{C})$) such that the fibers $\pi^{-1}\{z\}$ are discrete for all $z \in \mathbf{C}^n$ (resp. $\mathbf{P}^n(\mathbf{C})$): If π is locally biholomorphic, then X is called an *unramified* Riemann domain over $\mathbf{C}^n$ (resp. $\mathbf{P}^n(\mathbf{C})$) (X is necessarily non-singular in this case).

2. Levi (Hartogs' Inverse) Problem and coherence

Karl Weierstrass proved his famous Preparation Theorem about *1860* (cf. [12] p. 38). According to K. Oka, K. Weierstrass considered that the theory of analytic functions of two or more variables would be quite similar to that of one variable, and in particular that the shape of singularities of those functions should be arbitrary; this observation had lasted for quite a while. Then, however, different phenomena had been found, as the subject had been studied more.

It is noted that the following list is far from being complete:

1. Friedrich Hartogs [14], *1906*: He found a phenomenon of simultaneous analytic continuation of complex analytic functions of two or more variables (Hartogs' phenomenon).
2. Eugenio Elia Levi [18]/[19], *1910/11*: With the boundary regularity he made clear the pseudoconvexity property of the boundary of a domain of holomorphy.
3. Henri Cartan–Peter Thullen [6], *1932*: They proved the equivalence of domains of holomorphy and holomorphically convex ones. Then, K. Oka systematically used the property of holomorphic convexity.
4. Wahlter Rückert [40], *1933*: Here, Rückert's Nullstellensatz, which is sometimes called the Hilbert–Rückert Nullstellensatz, was proved. This result played later a fundamental role in the study of singular complex analytic spaces and the coherence, but at the beginning the importance was not recognized very much.
5. Heinrich Behnke–P. Thullen [1], *1934*: In this monograph they surveyed the research state of the theory of several complex variables and raised the *Three Big Problems* in several complex variables, on which they put a special importance:

   (a) Levi (Hartogs' Inverse) Problem[1] ([1] Chap. IV).
   (b) Cousin I/II Problems ([1] Chap. V).
   (c) Problem of developments (Approximation problem of Runge type) ([1] Chap. VI).

   The monograph was of a special importance for K. Oka to change his research direction to these problems[2].
6. Kiyoshi Oka I—III [26], [27], [28], *1936–1939*: He solved Problems (b) and (c) above, introducing a principle (method) termed "Jôku-Ikô"[3]. The well-known "Oka Principle" is in Oka III.
7. Henri Cartan [3], *1940*: H. Cartan introduced the algebraic notion of ideals, congruence, etc. into the theory of analytic function theory, and proved his matrix decomposition theorem.[4]
8. K. Oka [29], *1941*: This is an announcement of the affirmative solution to the Levi (Hartogs' Inverse) Problem for univalent domains (subdomains) of $\mathbf{C}^2$.
9. K. Oka VI [30], *1942*: This is the full paper of the former one with a remark on the validity of the result in all dimensions $n \geq 2$. The key of the proof was the so-called Oka's Heftungslemma

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[1] K. Oka termed the problem as Hartogs' Inverse Problem (cf. [29], [30], [35]). Hartogs' Inverse Problem is of a more primitive or more general form than the Levi Problem in the sense that the latter assumes a C^2 boundary regularity of a given domain, whereas the first does not.

[2] At that time he had been writing an unpublished paper titled "Fonctions algébriques permutables avec une fonction rationnelle non-linéaire", pp. 97, which was typed in French (cf. [39]).
It is also interesting to note that K. Oka solved these problems in the reversed order in time.

[3] This is a method or a principle of K. Oka all through his series of papers [26]—[35] such that to solve a problem on a difficult domain one embeds the domain into a higher dimensional polydisk, extends the problem on the polydisk, and then solves it by making use of the simple shape of the polydisk (cf. [22]).

[4] This paper was the last one for the research communications that K. Oka had until the end of the war (1940–'45).

which was proved by means of Weil's integral formula in two dimensional case. Here he dealt with the Hartogs pseudoconvexity, so that he put no condition on the regularity of the boundary of the domain, while the notion of Levi pseudoconvexity needs at least C^2-regularity.

In the course of the proof he used a modified Levi pseudoconvexity by introducing a new class of real-valued functions called "fonctions pseudoconvexes" in Oka VI §11, which were also called "fonctions plurisousharmoniques" by Pierre Lelong around the same time.

10. K. Oka [39], [31], *1943*, Research reports to Teiji Takagi (in Japanese, unpublished) (cf. §3): In this year just after Oka VI, *Oka proved the Levi (Hartogs' Inverse) Problem for unramified Riemann domains of general dimension ≥ 2* in a series of five research reports of pp. 109 in total, sent to Teiji Takagi (Tokyo, well known as the founder of class field theory). The reports were written in Japanese and unpublished; they are now available in [39] (Japanese). Let us quote the most main result of the papers (see [31][5], p. 27):

> **Theorem I.** *A pseudoconvex finite domain[6] with no interior ramification point is a domain of holomorphy.*

He remarked this fact three times in his published papers, first in his survey note [32] (1949), in VIII [34] (1951), and in IX [35] (1953).

Comparison to Oka VI (1942): The method of the proof was very different from the previous one of Oka VI. In these reports he proved Heftungslemma by the combination of Jôku-Ikô and Cauchy's integral formula (in fact, it is a half of Cauchy integral called the *Cousin integral*) in place of Weil's integral formula, which was not obtained on an unramified Riemann domain over $\mathbf{C}^n$ (cf. [31], [35] §24).

Comparison to Oka IX (1953): It is the same in both solutions to construct a continuous plurisubharmonic exhaustion function on a pseudoconvex unramified Riemann domain, but in 1943 the coherence theorems of K. Oka VII/VIII (see item 13) used in Oka IX was not yet invented, and hence not used. It is also noted that in the course he proved a *sort of coherence theorem* in a special case (cf. §3 below).

N.B. As H. Cartan wrote in Oka [38], p. XII,

> "Mais, il faut avouer que les aspects techniques de ses démonstrations et le mode de présentation de ses résultats rendent difficile la tâche du lecteur, et que ce n'est qu'au prix d'un réel effort que l'on parvient à saisir la portée de ses résultats, qui est considérable."

> "But, one must admit that the technical aspects of his demonstrations and the mode of presentation of his results make it difficult for the reader, and that it is only at the price of a real effort that one can grasp the extent of his results, which is considerable." (transl. by the author)

it is yet not easy to read these unpublished papers. But, in fact, it is possible to complete the proofs of the Three Big Problems without Weierstrass' Preparation Theorem (essential in the proof of coherence), or the theory of sheaf cohomologies of Cartan–Serre, nor $L^2-\bar\partial$ method of Hörmander (if interested, cf. [24]).

11. H. Cartan [4], *1944*: Let us quote from Grauert–Remmert [12] Introduction 2 —

[5] For convenience, the present author translated the most important last one among the five into English.
[6] Here "finite domain" means "domain over $\mathbf{C}^n$".

Of greatest importance in Complex Analysis is the concept of a coherent analytic sheaf. Already in 1944 CARTAN had experimented with the notion of a coherent system of punctual modules. He posed the fundamental problem, whether for any finite system of holomorphic functions the derived module system of punctual relations is coherent. This is exactly the problem, whether the sheaf $\mathcal{O}_{\mathbf{C}^n}$ of germs of holomorphic functions on complex n-space is coherent. In 1948 OKA gave an affirmative answer; in 1950 CARTAN simplified OKA's proof, introducing the terminology "faisceau cohérent". This paper was not known in Japan, in particular to K. OKA by the interruption caused by the war.

12. Shin Hitotsumatsu [15], *1949*: He generalized Oka's Heftungslemma to the n-dimensional case with arbitrary $n \geq 2$, so that *he solved the Levi (Hartogs' Inverse) Problem in the case of univalent domains of $\mathbf{C}^n$ with $n \geq 2$*. The proof relied on Weil's integral formula in n-variables. This was published in Japanese and has not been referred in the former references.

13. K. Oka VII/VIII [33]/[34], *1948[7]/51*: He proved his three coherence theorems (1'st, $\mathcal{O}_{\mathbf{C}^n}$; 2'nd, $\mathscr{I}\langle A \rangle$, ideal sheaves of analytic subsets A, also proved by H. Cartan [5]; 3'rd, Normalization Theorem). Here, *Oka's aim of "coherence" was to prove the Levi (Hartogs' Inverse) Problem obtained in 1943 (item 10) for singular ramified Riemann domains over $\mathbf{C}^n$*.

This intention of K. Oka, which later countered by J.E. Fornæss' example (see item 20), might have two aspects: One was the ten years delay of the publication of the solution to the Levi (Hartogs' Inverse) Problem, and the other was the motive locomotive of the study that led to the completely new concept of "Coherence" (Idéaux de domaines indéterminés) in 1948/51.

Nowadays we can find *two versions of Oka VII*; one is [33], and the other original is in [37]. The English translation of Oka VII in [38] is based on the original in [37].

Probably, the most notable part of the difference in the two versions is the last part of the introduction, where in the original [37] VII he wrote:

> Or, nous, devant le beau système de problèmes à F. Hartogs et aux successeurs, voulons léguer des nouveaux problèmes à ceux qui nous suivront; or, comme le champ de fonctions analytiques de plusieurs variables s'étend heureusement aux divers branches de mathématiques, nous serons permis de rêver divers types de nouveaux problèmes y préparant.

English translation from [38] (only added "Now" at the beginning):

> Now, having found ourselves face to face with the beautiful problems introduced by F. HARTOGS and his successors, we should like, in turn, to bequeath new problems to those who will follow us. The field of analytic functions of several variables happily extends into diverse branches of mathematics, and we might be permitted to dream of the many types of new problems in store for us.[8]

The paragraph above was completely deleted from the published paper without notification to K. Oka. As K. Oka knew the differences between the published [33] and the original [37] VII, he thought it would be necessary to publish the original VII, once again in a journal, recognizing that

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[7] This is the year of the received date of Oka VII [33] which was in fact published in 1950; it took rather long time for publication. In a number of references it is referred so that K. Oka proved his First Coherence Theorem (the coherence of $\mathcal{O}_{\mathbf{C}^n}$) in *1948* just as in item 11. Here we followed it.

[8] One should notice that when K. Oka wrote these words, he had already finished the Three Big Problems of Behnke–Thullen five years before (cf. item 10).

it is of an extremely exceptional case. Thus, he wrote an article, "*Propos postérieur*" [36], which he would have wished to put as an "Appendix" to his original VII (however, in [37] VII there is no "Appendice").

It is really interesting to learn how deeply he was concerned with this problem of the motivation and how he developed his innovative study. (Cf. [22] Chap. 9 "On Coherence" for more comparisons.)

14. K. Oka, IX [35], *1953*: He solved affirmatively the Levi (Hartogs' Inverse) Problem for unramified Riemann domains over $\mathbf{C}^n$. As mentioned in the paper, the proof was essentially the same as in his 1943 unpublished papers (item 10), and so it was very different from that in Oka VI. The most essential part, his Heftungslemma, was here proved by making use of his First and Second Coherence Theorems, Jôku-Ikô, and the Cousin integral (cf. item 10 and [35]) in place of Weil's integral formula which was used in Oka VI but not available on unramified Riemann domains over $\mathbf{C}^n$ (see [35] §23).

    Here he called the problem "*Hartogs' Inverse Problem*"; in fact, he put no condition on the boundary regularity of the domain. In the course, he proved (b) and (c) of item 5 on a holomorphically convex unramified Riemann domain over $\mathbf{C}^n$.

    He left two open problems ([35] §23): 1) the Levi (Hartogs' Inverse) Problem for unramified Riemann domains over $\mathbf{P}^n(\mathbf{C})$; 2) the Levi (Hartogs' Inverse) Problem for *ramified* Riemann domains over $\mathbf{C}^n$ or over $\mathbf{P}^n(\mathbf{C})$.

15. Hans J. Bremermann [2]; François Norguet [25], *1954*: They proved independently the Levi (Hartogs' Inverse) Problem for univalent domains of $\mathbf{C}^n$ with arbitrary $n \geq 2$ by proving Oka's Heftungslemma in the n-dimensional case with Weil's integral formula, as in Hitotsumatsu [15] 1949 (see item 12).

16. Hans Grauert [9], *1958*: He gave a considerably simplified proof of Oka's Theorem (IX) (item 14) by his well-known "Bumping Method" combined with L. Schwartz's finite dimensionality theorem[9].

17. H. Grauert, about *1960*: A counter-example to the Levi (Hartogs' Inverse) Problem for a ramified Riemann domain over $\mathbf{P}^n(\mathbf{C})$.

18. Reiko Fujita [8], *1963*; Akira Takeuchi [41], *1964*: Independently, they affirmatively proved the Levi (Hartogs' Inverse) Problem for unramified Riemann domains over $\mathbf{P}^n(\mathbf{C})$ with at least one boundary point.

19. Lars Hörmander [16], *1965*: He proved the Levi (Hartogs' Inverse) Problem by solving directly the $\bar{\partial}$-equations with an L^2-method. At the beginning of Chap. IV of his well-known book [17] L. Hörmander wrote: "In this chapter we abandon the classical methods ..... Instead, ... the Cauchy–Riemann equations where the main point is an L^2 estimate ....."

    $\vdots$

20. John Eric Fornæss [7], *1978*: He gave a counter-example to the Levi (Hartogs' Inverse) Problem by constructing a smooth 2-sheeted ramified Riemann domain $X \xrightarrow{\pi} \mathbf{C}^2$, which is locally Stein but not globally: Here being locally Stein is defined as for every $z \in \mathbf{C}^2$ there is a neighborhood U of z such that $\pi^{-1}U$ is Stein.

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[9] The proof of this theorem has been known to be rather long and involved by making use of the dual spaces. Now a very simple proof of it in a slightly generalized form is available (see [22] §7.3.4.).

3. Oka's unpublished papers 1943 and ramified Riemann domains

K. Oka solved affirmatively the Levi (Hartogs' Inverse) Problem for univalent domains of $\mathbf{C}^2$ in 1942 ([30]) and for unramified Riemann domains over $\mathbf{C}^n$ (arbitrary $n \geq 2$) in 1943 by writing five research reports to T. Takagi (Tokyo) (cf. §2, item 10):

1) On analytic functions of several variables: VII – Subproblem on congruence of holomorphic functions, pp. 28.
2) On analytic functions of several variables: VIII – The first fundamental lemma on finite domains without ramification points, pp. 11.
3) On analytic functions of several variables: IX – Pseudoconvex functions, pp. 30.
4) On analytic functions of several variables: X – The second fundamental lemma, pp. 11.
5) On analytic functions of several variables: XI – Pseudoconvex domains and finite domains of holomorphy, Some theorems on finite domains of holomorphy, pp. 29.

It is noteworthy that in the above VII he proved a special case of *coherence property* (for the so-called Oka maps used in Jôku-Ikô) already in 1943.

He did not translated these handwritten manuscripts into French for publications, but immediately began to study the Levi (Hartogs' Inverse) Problem for Riemann domains with ramifications. He subsequently wrote the following in the same series as above:

6) On analytic functions of several variables: XII – Representation of analytic subsets, pp. 24, 1944.
7) On analytic functions of several variables: XII – Extension of the Cousin II problem, pp. 16, 1945.
8) XIII – On a condition in Weierstrass' preparation theorem, pp. 67, 1945.

Here in 6) XII above, he first used Weierstrass' Preparation Theorem for the study of the congruence problem of holomorphic functions: The purpose was to deal with singular Riemann domains with ramifications, and this study motivated and led him to invent the *"Coherence"* (*"Idéaux de domaines indéterminés"* in Oka's terms) of holomorphic functions ([33], [34]).

In a talk titled "On analytic functions of several variables" at Yukawa Institute for Theoretical Physics, Kyoto University 1964, K. Oka put a special emphasis again on the problem of ramified Riemann domains (cf. [39], Unpublished manuscripts, No. 19), telling that:

> As for Hartogs' Inverse Problem .... And the problem to allow ramification points remains completely unsolved. I have worked on this for a rather long time, but I am obstinately keeping the position to prove it unconditionally. For I have been doing so up to the present, so otherwise, it is a pity ..... H. Grauert wrote a paper such that there is an algebraic ramified domain which is a domain of holomorphy but not pseudoconvex ....

H. Grauert also emphasized the Levi (Hartogs' Inverse) Problem for ramified Riemann domains in the talk at Memorial Conference of Kiyoshi Oka's Centennial Birthday, Kyoto/Nara 2001, which we now formulate as follows.

Problem. Let $\pi : X \to \mathbf{C}^n$ be a ramified Riemann domain (cf. the beginning of §1). Assume that for every point $a \in \mathbf{C}^n$ there is a neighborhood U of a in $\mathbf{C}^n$ such that $\pi^- U$ is Stein (locally Stein). Find sufficient or necessary conditions for X to be Stein.

The problem above is open even for non-singular X (cf. [23] for some affirmative result).

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Graduate School of Mathematical Sciences
University of Tokyo (Emeritus)
Komaba, Meguro-ku, Tokyo 153-8914
Japan
e-mail: noguchi@ms.u-tokyo.ac.jp