

Public-Key Cryptography Based on Tropical Circular Matrices

Huawei Huang ^{1,*} , Chunhua Li ² and Lunzhi Deng ¹¹ School of Mathematical Sciences, Guizhou Normal University, Guiyang 550025, China; denglunzhi@163.com² School of Science, East China Jiaotong University, Nanchang 330013, China; chunhuali66@163.com

* Correspondence: 201307045@gznu.edu.cn; Tel.: +86-177-8415-1752

Abstract: Some public-key cryptosystems based on the tropical semiring have been proposed in recent years because of their increased efficiency, since the multiplication is actually an ordinary addition of numbers and there is no ordinary multiplication of numbers in the tropical semiring. However, most of these tropical cryptosystems have security defects because they adopt a public matrix to construct commutative semirings. This paper proposes new public-key cryptosystems based on tropical circular matrices. The security of the cryptosystems relies on the NP-hard problem of solving tropical nonlinear systems of integers. Since the used commutative semiring of circular matrices cannot be expressed by a known matrix, the cryptosystems can resist KU attacks. There is no tropical matrix addition operation in the cryptosystem, and it can resist RM attacks. The new cryptosystems can be considered as a potential post-quantum cryptosystem.

Keywords: cryptographic algorithm; key exchange protocol; public-key encryption scheme; tropical algebra; tropical circular matrices



Citation: Huang, H.; Li, C.; Deng, L. Public-Key Cryptography Based on Tropical Circular Matrices. *Appl. Sci.* **2022**, *12*, 7401. <https://doi.org/10.3390/app12157401>

Academic Editors: Weipeng Jing, Xin Wang, Bo Peng and Gang Wang

Received: 22 June 2022

Accepted: 20 July 2022

Published: 23 July 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Public-key cryptography was introduced by Diffie and Hellman [1]. In a public-key cryptosystem, the key for encryption is public and the key for decryption is private. Since then, public-key cryptography has been booming and has been widely used in modern communications. Modern public-key cryptography relies mainly on the integer factorization problem (IFP) [2] and discrete logarithm problem (DLP) [1,3]. However, Shor [4] proposed a quantum algorithm that can solve the integer factorization problem and discrete logarithm problem in polynomial time on a quantum computer. So, it is a research area focused on public-key cryptography to design public-key cryptosystems that can resist quantum attacks [5].

In the past two decades, different algebraic structures have been recommended to improve the existing public-key cryptosystems. Some researchers considered non-abelian groups to design public-key cryptosystems such as matrix groups [6–9], braid groups [10,11], inner automorphism groups [12], and ring structures [13] for cryptographic primitives. However, many successful attacks on such cryptosystems have been published [14–17].

Maze, Monico, and Rosenthal proposed one of the first cryptosystems based on semi-groups and semirings [18], using some ideas from [10], as well as from their previous article [19]. However, it was broken by Steinwandt et al. [20]. Atani published a cryptosystem using semimodules over factor semirings [21]. Durcheva applied some idempotent semirings to construct cryptographic protocols [22]. A survey on semirings and their cryptographic applications was carried out by Durcheva [23].

Grigoriev and Shpilrain proved that the problem of solving the systems of min-plus polynomial equations in tropical algebra is NP-hard and suggested using a min-plus (tropical) semiring to design a public-key cryptosystem [24]. An obvious advantage of using tropical algebras as platforms is high efficiency because, in tropical schemes, one does not have to perform any multiplication of numbers since tropical multiplication is the

usual addition. However, “tropical powers” of an element exhibit some patterns, even if such an element is a matrix over a tropical algebra. This weakness was exploited by Kotov and Ushakov to propose a fairly successful attack on the public-key cryptosystem in [25]. Then, Grigoriev and Shpilrain improved the original scheme and proposed the public-key cryptosystems based on the semi-direct product of the tropical matrix semiring [26]. However, some attacks on the improved public-key cryptosystem have been suggested by Rudy and Monico [27] and Isaac and Kahrobei [28]. As we know, most of these tropical public-key cryptosystems have security defects because they adopt a public matrix to construct commutative semirings or there is a tropical matrix addition operation in the cryptosystems. A review of the tropical approach in cryptography was carried out by Ahmed, Pal and Mohan [29].

Our contribution: This paper provides new public-key cryptosystems based on tropical t -circular matrices. The security of the cryptosystem relies on the NP-hard problem of solving tropical nonlinear systems of integers. Since the used commutative semirings of circular matrices cannot be represented by a known matrix and there is no tropical matrix addition operation in the cryptosystem, these cryptosystems can resist all known attacks such as KU attacks and RM attacks. Our results show that these cryptosystems are secure when the computational two-side tropical circular matrices action problem (CTCMAP) and the decisional two-side tropical circular matrices action problem (DTCMAP) are hard. It seems that our cryptosystems based on tropical circular matrices can be considered as potential post-quantum cryptosystems.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: We focus on some definitions as fundamental key notions of tropical matrix algebra in Section 2. In Section 3, we present the new public-key cryptosystems based on tropical circular matrices. Then, in Section 4, parameter selection and efficiency of the cryptosystems are discussed. Finally, the conclusion and further research are given in Section 5.

2. Tropical Matrix Semiring over Integer

The definition of a semiring was first given by Vandiver [30]. These are structures that satisfy all the properties of a ring, except for the existence of additive inverses. Imre Simon, a Brazilian mathematician and computer scientist, discovered what is now known as the tropical semiring [31].

Definition 1. ([32]) Let R be a non-empty set with binary operations “+” and “.”; then, R is called a semiring if it satisfies the following conditions:

- (1) $(R, +)$ is a commutative semigroup with an identity element 0;
- (2) (R, \cdot) is a semigroup with an identity element $1 \neq 0$;
- (3) Multiplication satisfies the left and right distribution law for addition;
- (4) $(\forall a \in R) a \cdot 0 = 0 \cdot a = 0$.

If (R, \cdot) is commutative, then the semiring is called a commutative semiring.

Definition 2. ([24]) The integer tropical commutative semiring is the set $\mathcal{Z} = \mathbb{Z} \cup \{\infty\}$ with addition and multiplication as follows:

$$(\forall x, y \in \mathbb{Z}) x \oplus y = \min(x, y), \quad x \otimes y = x + y.$$

∞ satisfies the following equations:

$$(\forall x \in \mathbb{Z}) \infty \oplus x = x, \quad \infty \otimes x = \infty.$$

It is clear that $(\mathcal{Z}, \oplus, \otimes)$ is a commutative semiring whose zero element and unitary element are ∞ and 0, respectively.

Let $M_k(\mathcal{Z})$ be the set of all $k \times k$ matrices over \mathcal{Z} . We can also define the tropical matrix \oplus and \otimes operations.

$$\left(\forall A = (a_{ij})_{k \times k}, B = (b_{ij})_{k \times k} \in M_k(\mathcal{Z})\right) A \oplus B = (a_{ij} \oplus b_{ij})_{k \times k}, A \otimes B = \left(\sum_{l=1}^n a_{il} \otimes b_{lj}\right)_{k \times k}$$

Example 1.

$$\begin{pmatrix} 4 & -5 \\ 27 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \oplus \begin{pmatrix} 10 & 3 \\ 1 & 9 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} 4 & -5 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$$

$$\begin{pmatrix} 4 & -5 \\ 27 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \otimes \begin{pmatrix} 10 & 3 \\ 1 & 9 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} -4 & 4 \\ 1 & 9 \end{pmatrix}$$

$$\begin{pmatrix} 10 & 3 \\ 1 & 9 \end{pmatrix} \otimes \begin{pmatrix} 4 & -5 \\ 27 & 0 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} 14 & 3 \\ 5 & -4 \end{pmatrix}$$

Let t be an integer. If a matrix A has the following form,

$$A = \begin{pmatrix} a_0 & a_{k-1} \otimes t & a_{k-2} \otimes t & \cdots & a_1 \otimes t \\ a_1 & a_0 & a_{k-1} \otimes t & \cdots & a_2 \otimes t \\ a_2 & a_1 & a_0 & \cdots & a_3 \otimes t \\ \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ a_{k-1} & a_{k-2} & a_{k-3} & \cdots & a_0 \end{pmatrix},$$

then it is called an upper t -circular matrix. We denote A by $[a_0, a_1, \dots, a_{k-1}]_k^t$ or $[a_0, a_1, \dots, a_{k-1}]^t$. Let $C_k^t = \{A \in M_k(\mathcal{Z}) \mid A \text{ is upper } t\text{-circular matrix}\}$.

Proposition 1. For any integer t , C_k^t is a commutative sub-semiring of $M_k(\mathcal{Z})$.

3. Public-Key Cryptography Using Tropical T-Circular Matrices

3.1. Key Exchange Protocol Based on Tropical Circular Matrices

Definition 3. Let s and t be two integers. Let $P \in C_k^s$, $Q \in C_k^t$, and $Y \in M_k(\mathcal{Z}) \setminus (C_k^s \cup C_k^t)$. Suppose that $N = PYQ$. The two-side tropical circular matrix action problem (TCMAP) is to find two matrices $P \in C_k^s$, $Q \in C_k^t$ such that $N = PYQ$, given the matrices N and Y .

Protocol 1. Let k, s, t be three positive integers. Let $Y \in M_k(\mathcal{Z}) \setminus (C_k^s \cup C_k^t)$. In addition, k, s, t and Y are public.

- (1) Alice selects at random two matrices $P_1 \in C_k^s$ and $Q_1 \in C_k^t$, and computes $K_a = P_1 Y Q_1$. In addition, she sends to Bob the matrix K_a .
- (2) Bob selects at random two matrices $P_2 \in C_k^s$ and $Q_2 \in C_k^t$, and computes $K_b = P_2 Y Q_2$. He sends to Alice the vector K_b .
- (3) Alice computes $K = P_1 K_b Q_1$. In addition, Bob computes $K = P_2 K_a Q_2$.

Since C_k^s and C_k^t are commutative sub-semirings of $M_k(\mathcal{Z})$, we have $P_1 P_2 = P_2 P_1$, $Q_1 Q_2 = Q_2 Q_1$ and

$$P_1 K_b Q_1 = P_1 (P_2 Y Q_2) Q_1 = (P_1 P_2) Y (Q_2 Q_1) = (P_2 P_1) Y (Q_1 Q_2) = P_2 (P_1 Y Q_1) Q_2 = P_2 K_a Q_2$$

Then, Alice and Bob share a secret key K .

Definition 4. Let k, s, t be three positive integers. Let $P_1, P_2 \in C_k^s$, $Q_1, Q_2 \in C_k^t$ and $Y \in M_k(\mathcal{Z}) \setminus (C_k^s \cup C_k^t)$. Suppose that $K_a = P_1 Y Q_1$ and $K_b = P_2 Y Q_2$. The computational two-side tropical circular matrix action problem (CTCMAP) is to find a matrix $K \in M_k(\mathcal{Z})$ such that $K = P_1 P_2 Y Q_1 Q_2$, given the matrices K_a, K_b and Y .

Proposition 2. An algorithm that solves TCMAP can be used to solve CTCMAP.

Theorem 1. Finding the common secret key from the public information of Protocol 1 is equivalent to solving CTCMAP.

We give a practical example of Protocol 1 with small parameters in Appendix A.

Remark 1. Protocol 1 is simplified. It can only resist passive attacks, but not active attacks, such as intruder-in-the-middle attacks. To avoid these attacks, it is desirable to have a procedure that authenticates Alice and Bob's identities to each other while the key is being formed. A standard way to stop an intruder-in-the-middle attack is the station-to-station (STS) protocol, which uses digital signatures.

The extended protocol makes use of certificates that, as usual, are signed by a TA (trusted authority). Each user U will have a signature scheme with a verification algorithm Ver_U and a signing algorithm Sig_U . The TA also has a signature scheme with a public verification algorithm Ver_{TA} . Each user U has a certificate

$$\text{Cert}(U) = (ID(U), \text{Ver}_U, \text{Sig}_{TA}(ID(U), \text{Ver}_U)),$$

where $ID(U)$ is certain identification information for U .

Protocol 2. The public domain parameters consist of k, s, t and Y as Protocol 1.

(1) Alice selects at random two matrices $P_1 \in C_k^s$ and $Q_1 \in C_k^t$, and computes $K_a = P_1 Y Q_1$. She sends $\text{Cert}(A)$ and K_a to Bob.

(2) Bob selects at random two matrices $P_2 \in C_k^s$ and $Q_2 \in C_k^t$, and computes

$$K_b = P_2 Y Q_2, K = P_2 K_a Q_2 = P_2 P_1 Y Q_1 Q_2, y_b = \text{sig}_B(ID(A) || K_b || K_a).$$

Then, Bob sends $\text{Cert}(B)$, K_b and y_b to Alice.

(3) Alice verifies y_b using Ver_B . If the signature y_b is not valid, then she "rejects" and quits. Otherwise, she "accepts" and computes

$$K = P_1 K_b Q_1 = P_1 P_2 Y Q_2 Q_1, y_a = \text{sig}_A(ID(B) || K_a || K_b),$$

and she sends y_a to Bob.

(4) Bob verifies y_a using Ver_A . If the signature y_a is not valid, then he "rejects"; otherwise, he "accepts".

3.2. Public-Key Encryption Scheme Based on Tropical Circular Matrices

Cryptosystem 1.

- (1) **Key generation:** Let k, s, t be three positive integers. Let $P_1 \in C_k^s$, $Q_1 \in C_k^t$ and $Y \in M_k(\mathcal{Z}) \setminus (C_k^s \cup C_k^t)$. Suppose that $K_a = P_1 Y Q_1$. k, s, t, Y are public. Alice's public key is K_a . Alice's secret key is P_1, Q_1 .
- (2) **Encryption:** Bob wants to send a message $M \in M_k(\mathbb{Z})$ to Alice.
 - (i) Bob chooses at random $P_2 \in C_k^s$, $Q_2 \in C_k^t$ and computes $R = P_2 Y Q_2$ as a part of the ciphertext.
 - (ii) Bob computes $S = M + P_2 K_a Q_2$ as the rest of the ciphertext, where "+" is the ordinary integer matrix addition.
 - (iii) Bob sends the ciphertext (R, S) to Alice.
- (3) **Decryption:** Alice receives the ciphertext (R, S) and tries to decrypt it.
 - (i) Using her secret key P_1, Q_1 , Alice computes $T = P_1 R Q_1$.
 - (ii) Alice computes $S - T$, where "-" is the ordinary integer matrix subtraction.

Since

$$\begin{aligned}
 S - T &= M + P_2K_aQ_2 - P_1RQ_1 \\
 &= M + P_2(P_1YQ_1)Q_2 - P_1(P_2YQ_2)Q_1 \\
 &= M + P_2P_1YQ_1Q_2 - P_1P_2YQ_2Q_1 \\
 &= M + P_1P_2YQ_1Q_2 - P_1P_2YQ_1Q_2 \\
 &= M,
 \end{aligned}$$

Alice obtains the plaintext messages M .

Definition 5. Let k, s, t be three positive integers. Let $P_1, P_2 \in C_k^s$, $Q_1, Q_2 \in C_k^t$ and $Y, E \in M_k(\mathcal{Z}) \setminus (C_k^s \cup C_k^t)$. Suppose that $K_a = P_1YQ_1$ and $K_b = P_2YQ_2$. The decisional two-side tropical circular matrix action problem (DTCMAP) is to decide whether $E = P_1P_2YQ_1Q_2$, given Y, K_a, K_b, E .

Proposition 3. An algorithm that solves CTCMAP can be used to solve DTCMAP.

Theorem 2. An algorithm that solves DTCMAP can be used to decide the validity of the ciphertexts of Cryptosystem 1, and an algorithm that decides the validity of the ciphertexts of Cryptosystem 1 can be used to solve DTCMAP.

Proof of Theorem 2. Suppose first that the algorithm \mathcal{A}_1 can decide whether a decryption of Cryptosystem 1 is correct. In other words, when given the inputs $Y, K_a, (R, S), M$, the algorithm \mathcal{A}_1 outputs “yes” if M is the decryption of (R, S) and outputs “no” otherwise. Let us use \mathcal{A}_1 to solve the decisional two-side tropical circular matrix action problem. Suppose you are given $Y, K_a (= P_1YQ_1), K_b (= P_2YQ_2)$ and E , and you want to decide whether or not $E = P_1P_2YQ_1Q_2$. Let K_a be the public key and $R = K_b$ be the first part of the ciphertext. Moreover, let $S = E$ be the second part of the ciphertext and $M = 0_{k \times k}$ be the zero matrix in $M_k(\mathcal{Z})$. Input all of these into \mathcal{A}_1 . Note that, in the present setup, P_1, Q_1 are the secret keys. The correct decryption of (R, S) is $S - P_1RQ_1 = E - P_1P_2YQ_1Q_2$. Therefore, \mathcal{A}_1 outputs “yes” exactly when $M = 0$ is the same as $E - P_1P_2YQ_1Q_2$, namely, when $E = P_1P_2YQ_1Q_2$. This solves DTCMAP.

Conversely, suppose an algorithm \mathcal{A}_2 can solve DTCMAP. This means that if you give \mathcal{A}_2 inputs $Y, K_a (= P_1YQ_1), K_b (= P_2YQ_2)$ and E , then \mathcal{A}_2 outputs “yes” if $E = P_1P_2YQ_1Q_2$ and outputs “no” if not. Let M be the claimed decryption of the ciphertext (R, S) . Input the public key K_a and input $R = P_2YQ_2$ as K_b . Input $S - M$ as E .

Note that M is the correct plaintext for the ciphertext (R, S) if and only if $M = S - P_1RQ_1 = S - P_1P_2YQ_1Q_2$, which happens if and only if $S - M = P_1P_2YQ_1Q_2$. Therefore, M is the correct plaintext if and only if $E = P_1P_2YQ_1Q_2$. Therefore, with these inputs, \mathcal{A}_2 outputs “yes” exactly when M is the correct plaintext. \square

4. Security and Parameter Selection

Through Theorem 1, Proposition 3, and Theorem 2, an efficient algorithm for solving the two-side tropical circular matrix action problem can be used to attack Protocol 1 and Cryptosystem 1.

Proposition 4. TCMAP can be reduced to the problem of solving a tropical nonlinear system of equations.

Proof of Proposition 4. Let $P \in C_k^s$, $Q \in C_k^t$ and $Y \in M_k(\mathcal{Z}) \setminus (C_k^s \cup C_k^t)$. Suppose that $N = PYQ$. Now, we can try to find two matrices, $P \in S_1$ and $Q \in S_2$, such that $N = PYQ$, given N and Y .

Suppose that $P = [x_0, x_1, \dots, x_{k-1}]^s$ and $Q = [y_0, y_1, \dots, y_{k-1}]^t$. Then,

$$[x_0, x_1, \dots, x_{k-1}]^s \cdot Y \cdot [y_0, y_1, \dots, y_{k-1}]^t = N$$

Since Y and N are known, we obtain a tropical nonlinear system of equations about $x_0, x_1, \dots, x_{k-1}, y_0, y_1, \dots, y_{k-1}$ with $2k$ unknowns and k^2 equations. \square

As we know, the problem of solving a tropical nonlinear system of equations is usually NP-hard [24]. We present an algorithm for solving the two-side tropical circular matrix action problem with exponential computational complexity.

Proposition 5. *There exists an algorithm for solving the two-side tropical circular matrix action problem with computational complexity $O\left(k^4 + 6k^3 \cdot \binom{k^2}{2k}\right)$.*

Proof of Proposition 5. With Proposition 4, we obtain a tropical nonlinear system of equations about x_0, x_1, \dots, y_{k-1} with $2k$ unknowns and k^2 equations. Note that every term of the equations is the form of $x_i y_j$ ($i, j = 0, 1, \dots, k - 1$). Denote $z_0 = x_0 y_0, z_1 = x_0 y_1, \dots, z_{k^2} = x_{k-1} y_{k-1}$. Then, we obtain a tropical linear system of equations with k^2 unknowns z_i and k^2 equations.

After solving the tropical linear system of equations of z_i , we can obtain a system of nonlinear equations

$$x_0 y_0 = z_0, x_0 y_1 = z_1, \dots, x_{k-1} y_{k-1} = z_{k^2}$$

Since multiplication in tropical algebra is an ordinary addition, it is actually a system of linear equations over an integer ring. The linear equations have $2k$ unknowns and k^2 equations. Generally, the system of linear equations has no solution. However, if the $2k$ equations in these k^2 equations have a solution, it is possible to find x_0, x_1, \dots, y_{k-1} such that

$$[x_0, x_1, \dots, x_{k-1}]^s \cdot Y \cdot [y_0, y_1, \dots, y_{k-1}]^t = N.$$

Using the algorithm in [33], the complexity of solving the tropical linear system of equations with k^2 unknowns z_i and k^2 equations is $O(k^4)$. The number of possible choices for selecting $2k$ equations from k^2 equations is $\binom{k^2}{2k}$. The complexity of solving integer linear equations with $2k$ equations and $2k$ unknowns is $O((2k)^3)$. Therefore, the computational complexity of the above algorithm is $O\left(k^4 + 6k^3 \cdot \binom{k^2}{2k}\right)$. \square

An example of solving TMCAP with small parameters is given in Appendix B.

4.1. KU Attack

Because the commutative semiring used in our cryptosystems is the semiring of all t -circular matrices, this is different from that of Grigoriev and Shpilrain’s public-key cryptosystem I [24]. They used two public tropical matrices M_1, M_2 and ($M_1 M_2 \neq M_2 M_1$) and then adopted the commutative semiring $\mathcal{Z}[M_1], \mathcal{Z}[M_2]$. Let $p_1(M_1) \in \mathcal{Z}[M_1], p_2(M_2) \in \mathcal{Z}[M_2]$ and $p_1(M_1) Y p_2(M_2) = U$. The security of their cryptosystem relies on the difficulty of the problem of finding $S_1 \in \mathcal{Z}[M_1]$ and $S_2 \in \mathcal{Z}[M_2]$ such that $S_1 Y S_2 = U$. (Note that S_1 may not be equal to $p_1(M_1)$ and S_2 may not be equal to $p_2(M_2)$.) Because the secret matrix can be represented by a polynomial of M_1, M_2 , Kotov and Ushakov [25] designed an efficient algorithm to attack the key exchange protocol in [24]. Suppose that

$$S_1 = \sum_{i=0}^D x_i M_1^i, S_2 = \sum_{i=0}^D y_i M_2^i,$$

where unknowns $x_i, y_j \in \mathcal{Z}$, and D is the upper bound for the degree of polynomials.

$S_1 Y S_2 = U$ gives $\sum_{i=0}^D \sum_{j=0}^D x_i y_j M_1^i Y M_2^j = U$. This translates to

$$\min(x_i + y_j + T_{rs}^{ij}) = 0, \forall 1 \leq r, s \leq k$$

where $T^{ij} = M_1^i Y M_2^j - U$. A specific description of KU attack is presented as Algorithm 1.

Algorithm 1: KU Attack algorithm

Input: $M_1, M_2, U (= p_1(M_1) Y p_2(M_2))$.

Output: $x_1, \dots, x_D, y_1, \dots, y_D$, such that $S_1 Y S_2 = U$, where $S_1 = \sum_{i=0}^D x_i M_1^i, S_2 = \sum_{i=0}^D y_i M_2^i$.

(1) Compute $m_{ij} = \min_{i,j} (T_{rs}^{ij})$ and $P_{ij} = \{(r, s) \mid T_{rs}^{ij} = m_{ij}\}$;

(2) Among all minimal covers of $\{1, 2, \dots, k\} \times \{1, 2, \dots, k\}$ by P_{ij} , that is, all minimal subsets $C \subseteq \{0, 1, \dots, D\} \times \{0, 1, \dots, D\}$ such that

$$\bigcup_{(i,j) \in C} P_{ij} = \{1, 2, \dots, k\} \times \{1, 2, \dots, k\}$$

find a cover for which the system

$$\begin{cases} x_i + y_j = -m_{ij}, & \text{if } (i, j) \in C \\ x_i + y_j \geq -m_{ij}, & \text{if } (i, j) \notin C \end{cases}$$

is solvable.

Experimental results show that the attack algorithm can succeed in a short amount of time when the parameters are small ($k \leq 40, D \leq 40$, and the entries of matrices and the coefficients of polynomials are integers in $[-10^{10}, 10^{10}]$).

Since tropical t -circular matrices cannot be represented by a known matrix, our cryptosystem can resist KU attacks.

4.2. RM Attacks

Grigoriev and Shpilrain [26] improved the original scheme and proposed a public-key cryptosystem based on the semidirect product of the tropical matrix semiring. Let $S = (M_k(\mathcal{Z}), \oplus, \otimes)$ be the tropical semiring of $k \times k$ tropical matrices over \mathcal{Z} . It can be seen that $S \times S$ is a semigroup under the operation \circ given as

$$\begin{aligned} & (\forall (M_1, H_1), (M_2, H_2) \in S \times S) \\ (M_1, H_1) \circ (M_2, H_2) &= ((M_1 \oplus H_2 \oplus M_1 \otimes H_2) \oplus M_2, H_1 \oplus H_2 \oplus H_1 \otimes H_2). \end{aligned}$$

Using the semigroup $(S \times S, \circ)$, Grigoriev and Shpilrain proposed an improved tropical public-key cryptosystem. However, cryptanalysis of the improved tropical public-key cryptosystem was successfully implemented using a simple binary search by Rudy and Monico [27]. A partial order on S is defined as

$$(\forall X, Y \in S) X \leq Y \text{ if } x_{ij} \leq y_{ij} \forall i, j \in \{1, \dots, k\}.$$

It can be easily observed that for the operations \circ , if $(M, H)^p$ is denoted by (M_p, H_p) , then the sequence $\{M_p\}$ is monotonically decreasing, i.e., $M_1 \geq M_2 \geq M_3 \geq \dots$ and so on. Algorithm 2 gives the pseudocode description of RM attack.

Algorithm 2: RM Attack algorithm

Input: $M, H, A \in S$, where $(M, H)^m = (A, H^m)$, for some positive integer $m (1 \leq m \leq r)$.

Output: m .

(1) Let $left = 1$ and $right = r$;

(2) Execute the following loop when $left \leq right$.

(i) $mid = left + (right - left) / 2$

(ii) Compute $(M, H)^{mid} = (P, Q)$.

If $P < A, right = mid - 1$;

If $P > A, left = mid + 1$;

If $P = A, output m = mid$.

In our cryptosystems, there is no tropical matrix addition operation \oplus and the partial order cannot be used. Thus, our cryptosystems can resist RM attacks. We compare the

security among relevant cryptosystems in [24,26] and our proposed cryptosystem. The comparison results are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison among relevant tropical schemes.

Schemes	Mathematical Problems	KU Attack	RM Attack
Grigoriev et al. [24]	Two-side matrix action problem	×	✓
Grigoriev et al. [26]	Semidirect product problem	✓	×
Our scheme	Two-side tropical circular matrix action problem	✓	✓

Note that ✓ means that the scheme can resist the corresponding attack, while × means it does not.

4.3. Parameter Selection

Table 2 shows the performance comparison of the cryptosystem under some different parameters, where the entries of the matrices are integers in $[0, 2^{64})$.

Table 2. Performance comparison under some different parameters.

k	Size of sk (kB)	Size of pk (kB)	Complexity of Solving TCMAP
10	0.0781	0.7813	$O(2^{81})$
20	0.1563	3.1250	$O(2^{199})$
30	0.2344	7.0313	$O(2^{331})$
40	0.3125	12.5000	$O(2^{472})$
50	0.3906	19.5313	$O(2^{620})$
60	0.4688	28.1250	$O(2^{775})$

Note that “sk” means secret key and “pk” means public key.

In Table 3, we list the computation time for related cryptographic operations in our cryptosystem on different platforms, where $k = 50, s = t = 100101$, and the entries of the matrices are integers in $[0, 2^{64})$.

Table 3. Timings for cryptographic operations in our cryptosystem.

Experimental Platform	Key Generation	Encryption	Decryption
Intel (R) i7-8550 1.80 GHz	0.984 s	1.018 s	0.513 s
Intel (R) i5-5200 2.20GHz	0.624 s	0.594 s	0.297 s
Intel (R) i7-4700 2.40GHz	0.363 s	0.346 s	0.187 s

We recommend using the parameters $k \geq 50, s, t \in (0, 2^{32})$, and the entries of the matrices of integers in $[0, 2^{64})$ to avoid potential heuristic attacks similar to KU attacks.

5. Conclusions and Further Research

In this paper, we present a new key exchange protocol and a new public-key encryption scheme based on tropical matrices. We use a class of tropical commuting matrix, that is, the tropical t -circular matrix, other than matrix powers or matrix polynomials. The security of new public-key cryptosystems relies on a two-side tropical circular matrix action problem (TCMAP). The use of t -circular matrices allows us to share less information with the attacker. Since tropical circular matrices cannot be represented by a known matrix, our public-key cryptosystems can resist KU attacks. There is no addition of tropical matrices in our schemes. So, the attack method proposed by Rudy and Monico does not work for our public-key cryptosystems. Our public-key cryptosystem can resist all known attacks. As we know, the best way to solve TCMAP is to solve a tropical nonlinear system of equations, which is NP-hard. So, the new cryptosystems can be considered as a potential post-quantum cryptosystem.

Future works worth studying include the following:

- (1) A possible algorithm for solving TCMAP. If we can find some algorithms for solving the systems of min-plus polynomial equations, then they can be used to attack our schemes.
- (2) Other cryptographic applications of TCMAP. For example, we can try to design digital signature schemes and identity authentication schemes based on TCMAP.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, H.H. and C.L.; methodology, H.H. and L.D.; software, H.H. and L.D.; validation, H.H. and L.D.; formal analysis, H.H., C.L. and L.D.; writing—original draft preparation, H.H. and L.D.; writing—review and editing, H.H., C.L. and L.D. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This work is supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of China (No. 61962011, 61462016) and the Science and Technology Foundation of Guizhou Province (QIANKEHEJICHU-ZK [2021] 313).

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notations

In this paper, the matrix is generally denoted by capital letters. Frequently used notations are listed below with their meanings:

\mathbb{Z}	set of integers;
\mathcal{Z}	tropical semiring of integers $\mathbb{Z} \cup \{\infty\}$;
$M_k(\mathcal{Z})$	set of all $k \times k$ tropical matrices over \mathcal{Z} ;
C_k^t	set of all $k \times k$ tropical upper t -circular matrices over \mathcal{Z} ;
TCMAP	two-side tropical circular matrix action problem;
CTCMAP	computational two-side tropical circular matrix action problem;
DTCMAP	decisional two-side tropical circular matrix action problem.

Appendix A. An Example of Protocol 1 with Small Parameters

We choose the parameters $k = 5$ and $s = t = 9361$ and the entries of the matrices in $[0, 2^{15})$. The public matrix Y is as follows:

$$Y = \begin{pmatrix} 8630 & 29,391 & 21,921 & 18,968 & 25,014 \\ 15,306 & 5461 & 18,973 & 800 & 1786 \\ 7986 & 27,430 & 22,510 & 11,233 & 30,900 \\ 2398 & 6071 & 25,269 & 27,186 & 4328 \\ 18,306 & 10,527 & 16,873 & 11,565 & 9569 \end{pmatrix},$$

- (1) Alice selects at random two t -circular matrices P_1, Q_1 as follows:

$$P_1 = [297, 21,730, 15,290, 10,135, 19,522]^{9361}$$

$$Q_1 = [21,654, 19,077, 27,810, 23,876, 1267]^{9361}$$

Alice computes $K_a = P_1 Y Q_1$. She sends the matrix K_a to Bob.

$$K_a = \begin{pmatrix} 26,578 & 19,555 & 38,342 & 32,846 & 29,893 \\ 3350 & 25,959 & 16,386 & 21,160 & 11,725 \\ 24,783 & 18,911 & 30,607 & 33,184 & 22,158 \\ 5892 & 13,323 & 16,996 & 23,702 & 26,279 \\ 11,133 & 29,231 & 21,452 & 27,798 & 21,563 \end{pmatrix}.$$

- (2) Bob selects at random two t -circular matrices P_2, Q_2 as follows:

$$P_2 = [1059\ 4901\ 20,575\ 21,400\ 4378]^{9361}$$

$$Q_2 = [8556\ 14,895\ 30,549\ 31,378\ 15,257]^{9361}$$

Bob computes $K_b = P_2 Y Q_2$. He sends the matrix K_b to Alice.

$$K_b = \begin{pmatrix} 18,245 & 27,756 & 29,434 & 23,095 & 24,081 \\ 18,102 & 15,076 & 16,754 & 10,415 & 11,401 \\ 17,601 & 18,918 & 20,596 & 14,257 & 15,243 \\ 12,013 & 15,686 & 31,029 & 20,282 & 13,943 \\ 15,855 & 19,528 & 26,488 & 21,180 & 17,785 \end{pmatrix}.$$

- (3) Alice computes $K = P_1 K_b Q_1$. Bob computes $K = P_2 K_a Q_2$.

$$K = \begin{pmatrix} 25,645 & 29,170 & 38,681 & 40,359 & 34,020 \\ 12,965 & 29,027 & 26,001 & 27,679 & 21,340 \\ 16,807 & 28,526 & 29,843 & 31,521 & 25,182 \\ 15,507 & 22,938 & 26,611 & 33,317 & 31,207 \\ 19,349 & 26,780 & 30,453 & 37,159 & 31,178 \end{pmatrix}.$$

Appendix B. An Example of Solving TMCAP with Small Parameters

We choose the parameters $k = 3$ and $s = t = 23$ and the entries of the matrices in $[0, 100]$. The public matrix Y is as follows:

$$Y = \begin{pmatrix} 81 & 24 & 82 \\ 5 & 52 & 98 \\ 3 & 2 & 69 \end{pmatrix},$$

Alice selects at random two t -circular matrices P_1, Q_1 as follows:

$$P_1 = [08\ 31]^{23}, \quad Q_1 = [68\ 06]^{23}.$$

Alice computes $K_a = P_1 Y Q_1$. She sends the matrix K_a to Bob.

$$K_a = \begin{pmatrix} 24 & 63 & 53 \\ 32 & 34 & 28 \\ 2 & 32 & 26 \end{pmatrix},$$

The attacker knows k, t, Y and obtains K_a . They try to find P_1 and Q_1 . Let $P_1 = [x_0\ x_1\ x_2]^{23}$ and $Q_1 = [y_0\ y_1\ y_2]^{23}$. Then,

$$[x_0\ x_1\ x_2]^{23} \begin{pmatrix} 81 & 24 & 82 \\ 5 & 52 & 98 \\ 3 & 2 & 69 \end{pmatrix} [y_0\ y_1\ y_2]^{23} = \begin{pmatrix} 24 & 63 & 53 \\ 32 & 34 & 28 \\ 2 & 32 & 26 \end{pmatrix} (\#).$$

From it, they can obtain the tropical linear equations,

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} 81x_0y_0 \oplus 24x_0y_1 \oplus 82x_0y_2 \oplus 26x_1y_0 \oplus 25x_1y_1 \oplus 92x_1y_2 \oplus 28x_2y_0 \oplus 75x_2y_1 \oplus 121x_2y_2 = 24 \\ 24x_0y_0 \oplus 82x_0y_1 \oplus 124x_0y_2 \oplus 25x_1y_0 \oplus 92x_1y_1 \oplus 49x_1y_2 \oplus 75x_2y_0 \oplus 121x_2y_1 \oplus 51x_2y_2 = 63 \\ 82x_0y_0 \oplus 124x_0y_1 \oplus 47x_0y_2 \oplus 92x_1y_0 \oplus 49x_1y_1 \oplus 48x_1y_2 \oplus 121x_2y_0 \oplus 51x_2y_1 \oplus 98x_2y_2 = 53 \\ 5x_0y_0 \oplus 52x_0y_1 \oplus 98x_0y_2 \oplus 81x_1y_0 \oplus 24x_1y_1 \oplus 82x_1y_2 \oplus 26x_2y_0 \oplus 25x_2y_1 \oplus 92x_2y_2 = 32 \\ 52x_0y_0 \oplus 98x_0y_1 \oplus 28x_0y_2 \oplus 24x_1y_0 \oplus 82x_1y_1 \oplus 124x_1y_2 \oplus 25x_2y_0 \oplus 92x_2y_1 \oplus 49x_2y_2 = 34 \\ 98x_0y_0 \oplus 28x_0y_1 \oplus 75x_0y_2 \oplus 82x_1y_0 \oplus 124x_1y_1 \oplus 47x_1y_2 \oplus 92x_2y_0 \oplus 49x_2y_1 \oplus 48x_2y_2 = 28 \\ 3x_0y_0 \oplus 2x_0y_1 \oplus 69x_0y_2 \oplus 5x_1y_0 \oplus 52x_1y_1 \oplus 98x_1y_2 \oplus 82x_2y_0 \oplus 24x_2y_1 \oplus 82x_2y_2 = 2 \\ 2x_0y_0 \oplus 69x_0y_1 \oplus 26x_0y_2 \oplus 52x_1y_0 \oplus 98x_1y_1 \oplus 28x_1y_2 \oplus 24x_2y_0 \oplus 82x_2y_1 \oplus 125x_2y_2 = 32 \\ 69x_0y_0 \oplus 26x_0y_1 \oplus 25x_0y_2 \oplus 98x_1y_0 \oplus 28x_1y_1 \oplus 75x_1y_2 \oplus 82x_2y_0 \oplus 125x_2y_1 \oplus 47x_2y_2 = 26 \end{array} \right.$$

where ax_iy_j denotes $a \otimes x_i \otimes y_j$. After solving the tropical linear equations, the attacker can obtain a solution, for example:

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} x_0 \otimes y_0 = 39 \quad (A1) \\ x_0 \otimes y_1 = 0 \quad (A2) \\ x_0 \otimes y_2 = 6 \quad (A3) \\ x_1 \otimes y_0 = 38 \quad (A4) \\ x_1 \otimes y_1 = 8 \quad (A5) \\ x_1 \otimes y_2 = 14 \quad (A6) \\ x_2 \otimes y_0 = 9 \quad (A7) \\ x_2 \otimes y_1 = 7 \quad (A8) \\ x_2 \otimes y_2 = 12 \quad (A9) \end{array} \right.$$

where “+” denotes the ordinary addition.

It is easy to verify that (A1)–(A6) have no solution. (A2)–(A7) also have no solution.

The attacker keeps looking for a combination that may have a solution until they find a combination that has a solution. For example, they find that combinations (A1)–(A3), (A5), (A6), and (A8) have a solution $x_0 = 0, x_1 = 8, x_2 = 7, y_0 = 39, y_1 = 0, y_2 = 6$. The attacker substitutes this solution into (#) to verify that it is a true solution of (#). An attacker can find a solution by trying, at most, $\binom{9}{6}$ cases.

References

- Diffie, W.D.; Hellman, E. New directions in cryptography. *IEEE Trans. Inf. Theory* **1976**, *22*, 644–654. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Rivest, R.L.; Shamir, A.; Adleman, L. A method for obtaining digital signatures and public-key cryptosystems. *Commun. ACM* **1978**, *21*, 120–126. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- ElGamal, T. A public key cryptosystem and a signature scheme based on discrete logarithms. *IEEE Trans. Inf. Theory* **1985**, *31*, 469–472. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Shor, P. Polynomial-time algorithms for prime factorization and discrete logarithms on a quantum computer. *SIAM J. Comput.* **1997**, *26*, 1484–1509. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Bernstein, D.J.; Lange, T. Post-quantum cryptography. *Nature* **2017**, *549*, 188–194. [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)
- Baumslag, G.; Fine, B.; Xu, X. Cryptosystems using linear groups. *Appl. Algebra Eng. Commun. Comput.* **2006**, *17*, 205–217. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Kahrobaei, D.; Koupparis, C.; Shpilrain, V. Public key exchange using matrices over group rings. *Groups-Complex. Cryptol.* **2013**, *5*, 97–115. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Rososhok, S.K. New practical algebraic public-key cryptosystem and some related algebraic and computational aspects. *Appl. Math.* **2013**, *4*, 1043–1049. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Rososhok, S.K. Modified matrix modular cryptosystems. *Br. J. Math. Comput. Sci.* **2015**, *5*, 613–636. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Anshel, I.; Anshel, M.; Goldfeld, D. An algebraic method for public-key cryptography. *Math. Res. Lett.* **1999**, *6*, 287–291. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Garber, D. Braid group cryptography. In *Braids: Introductory Lectures on Braids, Configurations and Their Applications*; World Scientific: Singapore, 2010; pp. 329–403.
- Paeng, S.H.; Ha, K.C.; Kim, J.H.; Chee, S.; Park, C. New public key cryptosystem using finite non Abelian groups. In Proceedings of the 21st Annual International Cryptology Conference, Santa Barbara, CA, USA, 19–23 August 2001; Springer: Berlin/Heidelberg, Germany, 2001; pp. 470–485.

13. Hoffstein, J.; Pipher, J.; Silverman, J.H. NTRU: A ring-based public key cryptosystem. In Proceedings of the International Algorithmic Number Theory Symposium, Portland, OR, USA, 21–25 June 1998; Springer: Berlin/Heidelberg, Germany, 1998; pp. 267–288.
14. Eftekhari, M. Cryptanalysis of some protocols using matrices over group rings. In Proceedings of the 9th International Conference on Cryptology in Africa, Dakar, Senegal, 24–26 May 2017; Springer: Cham, Switzerland, 2017; pp. 223–229.
15. Steinwandt, R. Loopholes in two public key cryptosystems using the modular group. In Proceedings of the 4th International Workshop on Practice and Theory in Public Key Cryptosystems, PKC 2001, Cheju Island, Korea, 13–15 February 2001; Springer: Berlin/Heidelberg, Germany, 2001; pp. 180–189.
16. Hofheinz, D.; Steinwandt, R. A practical attack on some braid group based cryptographic primitives. In Proceedings of the 6th International Workshop on Theory and Practice in Public Key Cryptography, Miami, FL, USA, 6–8 January 2003; Springer: Berlin/Heidelberg, Germany, 2003; pp. 187–198.
17. Gentry, C.; Szydlo, M. Cryptanalysis of the revised NTRU signature scheme. In Proceedings of the International Conference on the Theory and Applications of Cryptographic Techniques, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 28 April–2 May 2002; Springer: Berlin/Heidelberg, Germany, 2002; pp. 299–320.
18. Maze, G.; Monico, C.; Rosenthal, J. Public Key Cryptography based on semigroup Actions. *Adv. Math. Commun.* **2007**, *1*, 489–507. [[CrossRef](#)]
19. Maze, G.; Monico, C.; Rosenthal, J. A Public Key Cryptosystem Based on Actions by Semigroups. In Proceedings of the IEEE International Symposium on Information Theory, Lausanne, Switzerland, 30 June–5 July 2002; pp. 266–289.
20. Steinwandt, R.; Corona, A. Cryptanalysis of a 2-party key establishment based on a semigroup action problem. *Adv. Math. Commun.* **2011**, *5*, 87–92. [[CrossRef](#)]
21. Atani, R.E. Public Key Cryptography Based on Semimodules over Quotient Semirings. *Int. Math. Forum* **2007**, *2*, 2561–2570. [[CrossRef](#)]
22. Durcheva, M. Public Key Cryptosystem Based on Two Sided Action of Different Exotic Semirings. *J. Math Syst. Sci.* **2014**, *4*, 6–13.
23. Durcheva, M. *Semirings as Building Blocks in Cryptography*; Cambridge Scholars Publishing: Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, 2020.
24. Grigoriev, D.; Shpilrain, V. Tropical cryptography. *Commun. Algebra* **2014**, *42*, 2624–2632. [[CrossRef](#)]
25. Kotov, M.; Ushakov, A. Analysis of a key exchange protocol based on tropical matrix algebra. *J. Math. Cryptol.* **2018**, *12*, 137–141. [[CrossRef](#)]
26. Grigoriev, D.; Shpilrain, V. Tropical cryptography II-Extensions by homomorphisms. *Commun. Algebra* **2019**, *47*, 4224–4229. [[CrossRef](#)]
27. Rudy, D.; Monico, C. Remarks on a Tropical Key Exchange System. *J. Math. Cryptol.* **2021**, *15*, 280–283. [[CrossRef](#)]
28. Isaac, S.; Kahrobaei, D. A closer look at the tropical cryptography. *Int. J. Comput. Math. Comput. Syst. Theory* **2021**, *6*, 137–142. [[CrossRef](#)]
29. Ahmed, K.; Pal, S.; Mohan, R. A review of the tropical approach in cryptography. *Cryptologia* **2021**, 1–25. [[CrossRef](#)]
30. Vandiver, H. Note on a simple type of algebra in which the cancellation law of addition does not hold. *Bull. Am. Math. Soc.* **1934**, *40*, 914–920. [[CrossRef](#)]
31. Speyer, D.; Sturmfels, B. Tropical mathematics. *Math. Mag.* **2009**, *82*, 163–173. [[CrossRef](#)]
32. Gupta, V.; Chaudhari, J.N. Monic ideals in a groupsemiring. *Asian-Eur. J. Math.* **2011**, *4*, 445–450. [[CrossRef](#)]
33. Litvinov, G.L.; Rodionov, A.Y.; Sergeev, S.N.; Sobolevski, A.N. Universal algorithms for solving the matrix Bellman equations over semirings. *Soft Comput.* **2013**, *17*, 1767–1785. [[CrossRef](#)]