Applications of $\mathcal{M}$ultivariate $\mathcal{Q}$uadratic Public Key Systems

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Abstract: In this article, we investigate the class of multivariate quadratic ($\mathcal{MQ}$) public key systems. These systems are becoming a serious alternative to RSA or ECC based systems. After introducing the main ideas and sketching some relevant systems, we deal with the advantages and disadvantages of these kinds of schemes. Based on our observations, we determine application domains in which $\mathcal{MQ}$-schemes have advantages over RSA or ECC. We concentrate on product activation keys, electronic stamps and fast one-way functions.

Keywords: Multivariate Quadratic Equations, Public Key Schemes, Applications

1 Introduction

Public key cryptography is used in e-commerce systems for authentication (electronic signatures) and secure communication (encryption). The security of using current public key cryptography centres on the difficulty of solving certain classes of problems. The RSA scheme relies on the difficulty of factoring large integers, while the difficulty of solving discrete logarithms provide the basis for ElGamal and Elliptic Curves [MvOV96]. Given that the security of these public key schemes relies on such a small number of problems that are *currently* considered hard, research on new schemes that are based on other classes of problems is worthwhile. Such work provides greater diversity and hence forces cryptanalysts to expend additional effort concentrating on completely new types of problems. In addition, important results on the potential weaknesses of existing public key schemes are emerging as techniques for factorisation and solving discrete logarithm continually improve. Polynomial time quantum algorithms [Sho97] can be used to solve both problems and hence, the existence of quantum computers in the range of 1000 bits would be a real-world threat to systems based on factoring or the discrete log problem. This points to the importance of research into new algorithms for asymmetric encryption. We want to stress at this point that there are not many results known about the vulnerability of cryptographic hard problems against quantum algorithm. We are only aware of [Sho97] at this point. Hence, more research effort in this direction seems to be imperative if we assume the existence of quantum computers within the next decades.

In addition, we want to point out that different types of schemes have different kinds of properties: with schemes based on ECC, rather short signatures in the range of 320 bits (cf [MvOV96]) are possible, in comparison to 1024–4096 for RSA. On the other hand, the patents on RSA have expired, while there are still patents guarding the use of ECC (cf [MvOV96]). Hence, applications which require a patent-free algorithm are likely to prefer RSA while the requirement for short signatures would lead to the use of ECC. There are other properties of schemes such as verification time, signature creation time, public and private key size. All of them play an important role when choosing a specific algorithm for a particular application domain. Hence, having secure schemes based on different problems, increases the variety of algorithms and hence gives the users of cryptographic primitives more choice. In turn, this increases the chance to have the "right fit" for a particular problem and reduces the necessity to make compromises — either in terms of speed, memory, or security.

One proposal for secure public key schemes is based on the problem of solving $\mathcal{M}$ultivariate $\mathcal{Q}$uadratic equations ($\mathcal{MQ}$-problem) over finite fields. In the last two decades, several such public key schemes have been proposed, *e.g.*, [MI88, Pat96b, KPG99]. All of them use the fact that the $\mathcal{MQ}$-problem (cf Fig. 1) is difficult, namely $\mathcal{NP}$-complete (cf [GJ79, p. 251] and [PG97, App.] for a detailed proof)). Here, we mean with $\mathcal{MQ}$-problem finding a solution $x \in \mathbb{F}$ for a given system of quadratic polynomials (cf Fig. 1) and a given vector $y \in \mathbb{F}^m$. We will introduce the $\mathcal{MQ}$-problem more formally in Sect. 2.1. In this context,

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{rcl} y_1 & = & p_1(x_1, \ldots, x_n) \\ y_2 & = & p_2(x_1, \ldots, x_n) \\ & \vdots & \\ y_m & = & p_m(x_1, \ldots, x_n)\,, \end{array} \right.$$

Figure 1: Example of an $\mathcal{MQ}$-problem with n variables and m equations

we want to stress that linear or affine polynomial equations can be solved in polynomial time, *e.g.*, using Gaussian elimination. The knapsack cryptosystem is also based on an $\mathcal{NP}$-complete problem (cf [MvOV96]). Due to unexpected properties of these kinds of schemes, it was possible to break most of the proposals in this area. Therefore, basing a scheme on an $\mathcal{NP}$-complete problem does not guarantee its security. But in the case of $\mathcal{MQ}$-schemes, much research has been done on the average complexity of solving the corresponding equations with trapdoor. Although some schemes have been broken (*e.g.*, [Pat95, CSV97, KS98, KPG99, KS99, FJ03, WBP04]), the area is vital and promises efficient algorithms — at present mostly for signing, but encryption should be possible, too, at least from a theoretical point of view.

In this paper, we introduce the basic concepts of multivariate quadratic schemes and investigate for which types of applications they are particularly suitable. This paper is organised as follows: after introducing the necessary mathematical notation in Sect. 2, we give a concise overview of proposed schemes and discuss their advantages and disadvantages in Sect. 3. Then, we move on to possible applications such as fast one-way functions, electronically signed stamps, and product activation keys (Sect. 4). This paper concludes with Sect. 5.

2 Basic Concepts

2.1 Mathematical Background

Let $\mathbb{F}$ be a finite field of prime characteristic with $q := |\mathbb{F}|$ elements; hence q is a prime-power [LN86]. Moreover, using a polynomial $i(t)$, irreducible over $\mathbb{F}$, we can define an extension field $\mathbb{E} := \mathbb{F}[t]/i(t)$ over $\mathbb{F}$. We have the degree of $i(t)$ to be n and hence, $\mathbb{E}$ is an n-dimensional extension of the ground field $\mathbb{F}$. Addition in $\mathbb{E}$ is the coefficient-wise addition of polynomials and multiplication corresponds to the multiplication of polynomials, performed modulo the generating polynomial $i(t)$. In this context, we want to recall that we have $x^q = x$ for any $x \in \mathbb{F}$ in the finite field. Consequently, the operation X^q for $X \in \mathbb{E}$ is linear in the extension field $\mathbb{E}$. With these preliminaries, we are now able to define the $\mathcal{MQ}$-problem more rigorously.

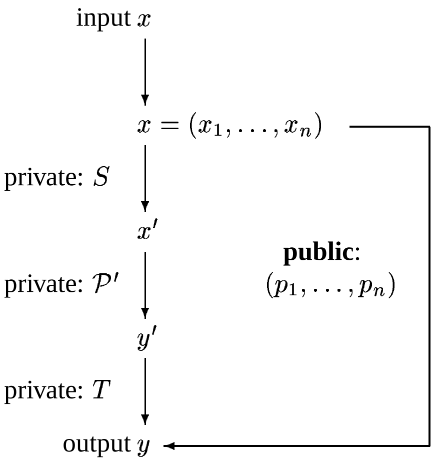

Figure 2: Graphical Representation of the $\mathcal{MQ}$-trapdoor $(S, \mathcal{P}', T)$

In the multivariate system of equations $\mathcal{P}$ (cf fig. 1 and 2), the polynomials p_i have the form

$$p_i(x_1, \ldots, x_n) := \sum_{1 \le j \le k \le n} \gamma_{i,j,k} x_j x_k + \sum_{j=1}^{n} \beta_{i,j} x_j + \alpha_i \,,$$

for $1 \le i \le m$ and $\alpha_i, \beta_{i,j}, \gamma_{i,j,k} \in \mathbb{F}$ (constant, linear, and quadratic terms), *i.e.*, they form an instance of an $\mathcal{MQ}_m(\mathbb{F}^n)$-problem with m equations in n variables $x_1, \ldots, x_n$ each. For the ease of notation, we define the polynomial-vector $\mathcal{P} := (p_1, \ldots, p_m)$. Each coefficient p_i is a quadratic polynomial in the n variables $x_1, \ldots, x_n$. In this polynomial vector $\mathcal{P}$, the constants $\alpha_1, \ldots, \alpha_m$ are obtained by subtracting coefficient-wise the knowns $y_1, \ldots, y_m$ (cf fig. 1 and 2) from the constant part of the original $\mathcal{MQ}$-problem.

With these terms defined, we are now able to express the private key as the triple $(S, \mathcal{P}', T)$ where $S \in \mathrm{AGL}_n(\mathbb{F}), T \in \mathrm{AGL}_m(\mathbb{F})$ are affine transformations and $\mathcal{P}' \in \mathcal{MQ}_m(\mathbb{F}^n)$ is a polynomial-vector $\mathcal{P}' := (p'_1, \ldots, p'_m)$ in m polynomials; each polynomial depends on the input variables $x'_1, \ldots, x'_n$. To obtain a difficult $\mathcal{MQ}$-problem, it is necessary that the polynomials $p'_1, \ldots, p'_m$ are of degree 2 at least. For efficiency reasons, they should be of degree 2 at most. Throughout this paper, we denote components of this private vector $\mathcal{P}'$ by a prime $'$. In addition, the affine transformation S can be represented in the form of an invertible matrix $M_S \in \mathbb{F}^{n \times n}$ and a vector $v_s \in \mathbb{F}^n$, *i.e.*, we have $S(x) := M_S x + v_s$. Similarly, we have $T(x) := M_T x + v_t$ for $M_T \in \mathbb{F}^{m \times m}$ an invertible matrix and $v_t \in \mathbb{F}^m$ a vector.

In contrast to the public polynomial vector $\mathcal{P} \in \mathcal{MQ}_m(\mathbb{F}^n)$, the design goal for public key schemes based on the $\mathcal{MQ}$-problem is to have a private polynomial vector $\mathcal{P}'$ which allows efficient inversion, *i.e.*, the computation of $x'_1, \ldots, x'_n$ for given $y'_1, \ldots, y'_m$. At least for secure $\mathcal{MQ}$-schemes, this is not the case if the public key $\mathcal{P}$ together with knowns $y_1, \ldots, y_n$ alone is given. The main difference between $\mathcal{MQ}$-schemes lies in their special construction of the central equations $\mathcal{P}'$ and consequently the trapdoor they embed into a specific class of $\mathcal{MQ}$-problems.

2.2 Public Key Generation

In all $\mathcal{MQ}$-schemes, the public key $\mathcal{P}$ is computed as function composition of the affine transformations $S : \mathbb{F}^n \to \mathbb{F}^n$, $T : \mathbb{F}^m \to \mathbb{F}^m$ and the central equations $\mathcal{P}' : \mathbb{F}^n \to \mathbb{F}^m$, *i.e.*, we have $\mathcal{P} = T \circ \mathcal{P}' \circ S$. By construction, we have $\forall x \in \mathbb{F}^n : \mathcal{P}(x) = T(\mathcal{P}'(S(x)))$. Efficient algorithms for computing the public key for a given private key can be found in [MI88, Wol04]. Decomposing $\mathcal{P}$ into $(S, \mathcal{P}', T)$ is called the “Isomorphism of Polynomials” (IP), cf [Pat96b]. For $\mathcal{P}, \mathcal{P}'$ without structure, *i.e.*, in particular random equations for $\mathcal{P}'$, it is considered to be a hard problem in itself. Security evaluations for IP can be found in [PGC98, GMS02, LP03].

2.3 Decryption/Signing

To decrypt for a given $y \in \mathbb{F}^m$ (or to compute its signature, respectively), we observe that we have to invert the computation of $y = \mathcal{P}(x)$. Using the trapdoor-information $(S, \mathcal{P}', T)$, cf Fig. 2, this is easy. First, we observe that transformation T is a bijection. In particular, we can compute $y' = M_T^{-1}(y - v_t)$. The same is true for given $x' \in \mathbb{F}^n$ and $S \in \text{AGL}_n(\mathbb{F})$. Using the LU-decomposition of the matrices M_S, M_T, this computation takes time $O(n^2)$ and $O(m^2)$, respectively. Hence, the difficulty lies in evaluating $x' = \mathcal{P}'^{-1}(y')$. We will discuss different strategies in Sect. 3.

2.4 Encryption/Verification

In contrast to decryption/signing, the encryption/verification step is the same for all $\mathcal{MQ}$-schemes: given a vector $x \in \mathbb{F}^n$, we evaluate the polynomials

$$p_i(x_1, \dots, x_n) := \sum_{1 \le j \le k \le n} \gamma_{i,j,k} x_j x_k + \sum_{j=1}^{n} \beta_{i,j} x_j + \alpha_i \, ,$$

for $1 \le i \le m; 1 \le j \le k \le n$ and given $\alpha_i, \beta_{i,j}, \gamma_{i,j,k} \in \mathbb{F}$. Obviously, all operations can be efficiently computed, in particular if the field $\mathbb{F}$ is of characteristic 2. Assuming uniform costs for the finite field operations, we obtain a total of $O(mn^2)$ steps for evaluating the public key.

3 Schemes based on the $\mathcal{MQ}$-problem

As explained in the previous section, all schemes based on the $\mathcal{MQ}$-problem have the same structure for the public key. Hence, their key-sizes can be computed using the same formula. First, we define

$$\tau(n) \quad := \quad \begin{cases} 1 + n + \frac{n(n-1)}{2} = 1 + \frac{n(n+1)}{2} & \text{if } \mathbb{F} = GF(2) \\ 1 + n + \frac{n(n+1)}{2} = 1 + \frac{(n)(n+3)}{2} & \text{otherwise .} \end{cases}$$

The first row in the above expression comes from the fact that we have $x_i^2 = x_i$ for $\mathbb{F}$ = GF(2) and $1 \le i \le n$, *i.e.*, quadratic terms of the form x_i^2 over GF(2) reduce to linear terms.

Using the above formula, we obtain $m\tau(n) = O(mn^2)$ for the number of coefficients and hence a memory requirement of $log_{256}(q) m\tau(n)$ byte. For a secure $\mathcal{MQ}$-system, the public key polynomials should behave similar to random equations. Therefore, we do not expect to find efficient compression techniques for these keys.

3.1 C*

3.1.1 General Scheme

In 1988, Matsumoto and Imai developed the scheme C* [MI88]. It is one of the oldest multivariate schemes. Therefore, its own security and also the security of its variations is well understood. In C*, the central equation $\mathcal{P}'$ has the form

$$P'(X') := X'^{q^\lambda+1}$$

over the extension field $\mathbb{E}$ and with $\lambda \in \mathbb{N}$ such that $\gcd(q^n - 1, q^\lambda + 1) = 1$. The main point is that C* mixes operations over the ground field $\mathbb{F}$ with operations in the extension field $\mathbb{E}$: the first is used for the affine transformations S, T and the latter for the private key equations $\mathcal{P}'$. We inspect now how we can express $P'(X')$ over the ground field $\mathbb{F}$. We observe that $X^q = X$ is a linear transformation in the extension field $\mathbb{E}$, and notice that we hence can express $P'(X')$ using multivariate quadratic polynomial equations $p'_1, \ldots, p'_m$ over the ground field $\mathbb{F}$ = GF(q). This way, we are able to construct an $\mathcal{MQ}_m(\mathbb{F}^n)$-problem from the equation over the extension field $\mathbb{E}$. Moreover, the condition $\gcd(q^n-1, q^\lambda+1) = 1$ ensures that the equation $h.(q^\lambda + 1) \equiv 1 \pmod{q^n - 1}$ has exactly one solution $h \in \mathbb{N}$ with $h < q^n - 1$. Given h, we can solve $Y' = P'(X')$ as $(Y')^h \equiv X'^{[h.(q^\lambda+1)]} \equiv X'$ by raising Y' to the power of h. Note that these operations take place in the extension field $\mathbb{E}$. All in all, this approach is similar to RSA. However, the hardness of C* is not based on the difficulty of finding exponent h but in the intractability to obtain transformations S, T for given polynomial equations $\mathcal{P}, \mathcal{P}'$. A more detailed discussion of C* can be found in [MI88]. We want to point out that the basic C* has been broken in [Pat95, FJ03]. However, its variation C^{*--} [Pat96a] is still unbroken and leads to a very efficient signature scheme. In this context, we also want to mention the variation PMI of [Din04], which would allow even better constructions than C^{*--}. Unfortunately, it is only known since this year and we hence do not recommend its use at this point in time.

3.1.2 C^{*--}

We move on to a description of C^{*--} [Pat96a]. Its name is motivated by the fact that many of the public key polynomials are “subtracted”. Less loosely speaking, we use the idea of a projection $\pi : \mathbb{F}^n \to \mathbb{F}^{n-r}$ for $n, r \in \mathbb{N}$ and $r \geq 1$. The overall construction of the public key becomes $\mathcal{P} = \pi \circ T \circ \mathcal{P}' \circ S$. This means in particular that we obtain the function $\mathcal{P} : \mathbb{F}^n \to \mathbb{F}^{n-r}$ for the public key by removing the last r polynomials $p_{n-r+1}, \ldots, p_n$ from the public key. Hence, for solving the equation $\mathcal{P}(X) = Y$ for a vector $Y \in \mathbb{F}^{n-r}$ and unknown $X \in \mathbb{F}^n$, we add r random elements from $\mathbb{F}$ for the missing components $y_{n-r+1}, \ldots, y_n$ before inverting the transformation T. The rest of inversion of $\mathcal{P}$ works as for C*. In terms of cryptanalysis, the new scheme has a strength of q^r (cf [Pat96a, CGP03]). In particular, the construction of C^{*--} has been used in the signature scheme Sflash$^{\text{v3}}$. It uses the parameters $q = 128, n = 67, r = 11$. This leads to a private/public key size of 112.3/7.8kB. In [CGP03, Sect. 8], the time to verify or generate a signature is empirically obtained to be less than 1 ms on a PC, without giving further details on the hardware used.

3.2 Hidden Field Equations

The Hidden Field Equations (HFE) are a generalisation of the C*-scheme. They have been proposed by Patarin [Pat96b]. The central map has the form

$$P'(X') \quad := \quad \sum_{\substack{0\leq i,j\leq d \\ q^i+q^j\leq d}} C'_{i,j} X'^{q^i+q^j} + \sum_{\substack{0\leq k\leq d \\ q^k\leq d}} B'_k X'^{q^k} + A'$$

$$\text{where} \begin{cases} C'_{i,j} X^{q^i+q^j} & \text{for } C'_{i,j} \in \mathbb{E} \text{ are the quadratic terms,} \\ B'_k X^{q^k} & \text{for } B'_k \in \mathbb{E} \text{ are the linear terms, and} \\ A' & \text{for } A' \in \mathbb{E} \text{ is the constant term} \end{cases}$$

for $i, j \in \mathbb{N}$ and a degree $d \in \mathbb{N}$. As the degree of the polynomial P' is bounded by d, this allows efficient inversion of the equation $P'(X') = Y'$ for given $Y' \in \mathbb{E}$, cf [Pat96b, Sect. 5] for an overview of possible algorithms for this problem. In any case, HFE is not a bijection but with 7 additional bits and with probability $1 - 2^{187}$, we are able to find a pre-image for any given Y', cf [Pat96b, CGP01] for details.

A Cryptanalysis of HFE can be found in [KS99, Cou01]. A signature scheme based on HFE called “Quartz” has been proposed in [CGP01] but broken in [FJ03]. A version of Quartz which is resistant against all known attacks is discussed in [WP04, Sect. 4.3]. They use $q = 2$, $n = 107$ and remove $r = 7$ equations (cf minus modification of C*, Sect. 3.1.2). Using the values of [CGP01, Sect. 8], we obtain a public/private key size of 71/3kB, a signature verification time of less than 1 ms but a signature generation time of 10 s on a Pentium II 500 MHz.

3.3 Unbalanced Oil and Vinegar

Due to space limitations in this paper, we will only quote results for UOV and refer the reader to the corresponding papers for the construction of the central equations.

As C^{*--}, the Unbalanced Oil and Vinegar schemes (UOV) can only be used for signing [KPG99]. With the parameters from [KPG03], we have $q = 16$, $m = 16$, $n = 32/48$ and a public key of 9/16kB (for $n = 32/48$). The corresponding private key is 512/1152 Byte. Unfortunately, we are not aware of empirical measurements for the signing or verification time. However, based on the results given in [CGP03], we estimate for both a timing of less than 1 ms on a PC. Attacks against UOV can be found in [KPG03, CGMT02, BWP05].

3.4 Other Schemes

The schemes from this section have been proposed recently. They have nice characteristics in terms of speed and key size, but they are all rather new and hence, their security is not well understood yet. Therefore, we do not recommend them for current constructions. In addition, we point out broken proposals to give the reader a bibliography for the corresponding cryptanalysis.

The Tame Transformation Method (TTM) was proposed in [Moh99]. Practical versions of it have been broken in [GC00, DS04]. A signature scheme based on TTM has been proposed in [YC04]. Its security is an open problem but its authors claim that it is immune against all known attacks. According to [YC04], an earlier version of this scheme has been broken in [DY04]. RSE(2)PKC and its generalisation RSSE(2)PKC was proposed in [KS04b, KS04a]. This scheme has been further generalised to STS [WBP04] and this generalisation has been broken in the same paper.

3.5 General Characteristics of $\mathcal{MQ}$-schemes

As we saw in the previous sections, multivariate quadratic schemes have rather large public keys in the range of 8kB – 71kB. The private key can be smaller, *e.g.*, down to 512 byte in UOV. In terms of signature or message sizes, we can go down until 128 bits (Quartz). In any case, signature verification and encryption take less than 1 ms on a PC while the time for signature generation reaches 10 s (Quartz), but is usually in the range of 100 ms for the other schemes. Hence, the strong points of multivariate quadratic schemes are short signatures, low message overhead/short signature sizes and fast encryption/signature verification. Unfortunately, the only suitable candidate for a practical encryption scheme based on the $\mathcal{MQ}$-problem is PMI. As its security is only studied since this year, we do not recommend it at present.

4 Applications

Starting from the observations from the previous section, we develop applications based on multivariate quadratic schemes. All proposals in this section have an expected security level of 2^{80} — based on our current knowledge of cryptanalysis. A level of 2^{80} 3-DES computations has been identified in the European project [NES] as an adequate security level for nowadays cryptographic applications. The security level of 2^{80} in our proposals is not “tight”, *i.e.*, a more rigorous discussion would show that they also fulfil the NESSIE requirement of 2^{80} 3-DES computations. However, due to space limitations in this paper, we chose this more loosely approach, still keeping the stricter NESSIE requirement in mind.

4.1 Electronic Stamps

The idea here is to replace the current stamping machines by digitally signed stamps which can then be printed on any normal printer — if they are printed more than once, the person who has bought the stamp will be caught, cf [NS00, PV00] for a thorough discussion of this idea. In a nutshell, we have two objectives in this context. First, we want the corresponding signature to be as short as possible — for example, using message recovery techniques, cf [MvOV96]. Second, the signature verification time should be low as the post service has to verify the signed stamps on a rather high rate.

Table 1: Proposed Scheme for Electronic Stamps

Hash [bit]	Parameter	Priv. Key [kByte]	Pub. Key [kByte]	Sign [ms]	Verify [ms]	Expansion [bit]
160	$q = 128$ $n = 67$ $r = 11$	7.8	112.3	< 1	< 1	237

The characteristics of our proposal are summarised in Table 1. We base our proposal on Sflash^{v3} as this is a bijection and hence, we will be able to obtain a valid signature in any case. The overall idea is to compute a 160-bit hash of the whole message, using a hash function from, *e.g.*, [FIP, DBP96]. The remaining 392-160=232 bits are used to encode a part of the message to sign. Hence, the overall message expansion becomes 77 + 160 = 237 bits although the whole signature has — strictly speaking — a size of 469 bits, cf [CGP03] for details on Sflash^{v3}.

4.2 Product Activation Keys

For product activation keys, nowadays mostly symmetric key techniques are used. To the knowledge of the authors, the idea to use public key techniques for this problem is due to [Ber03]. In contrast to symmetric key techniques, crackers cannot retrieve the symmetric key and hence, they are not able to compute valid activation keys — even if they manage to get a copy of the (public) key of the corresponding product. Therefore, techniques based on asymmetric cryptology are clearly superior — if they allow similar size and speed as their symmetric counterparts. In this paper, we propose to use a construction based on HFE- as outlined in [CGP01] and with the tweaks proposed in [WP04]. In particular, we suggest to compute an 80-bit hash from a user-ID of 20/40 bits. The product activation key is then the signature of the 100/120 bits concatenation of the user-ID and the corresponding hash. In symbols: $m := i \mid\mid h(i)$ where m is the 100/120 bit message to be signed, i the 20/40-bit user-id, $h(\cdot)$ a cryptographically secure hash function (*e.g.*, [FIP, DBP96]) and $\cdot||\cdot$ the concatenation of bit-strings. In this context we want to point out that this proposal is not vulnerable to the birthday paradox and hence, we do not need a hash-length of 160

Table 2: Proposed Schemes for Product Activation Keys

User-ID [bit]	Key [char]	Parameter	Priv. Key [byte]	Pub. Key [kByte]	Gen. [s]	Ver. [ms]	Signature [bit]
20	21	q=2, n=107, r=7	3264	71	≈ 10	< 1	107
40	25	q=2, n=127, r=7	4509	119	≈ 15	< 2	127

bits to achieve a security level of 2^{80}. To distinguish different products, we suggest to use different public (and hence private) keys for each product as this rules out attacks using valid signatures for one product for another product. We want to stress that a public key size in the suggested range is not a problem to be put on a product CD/DVD and hence the additional memory requirement is negligible. Finally, we give the length of the corresponding activation key in characters, assuming a code with 36 symbols. For information: Microsoft uses a 25 character code for its products. The verification and signature timings are extrapolations from [CGP01].

4.3 Fast One-Way functions

The last application we see are fast but secure one-way functions. In this case, we do not need a trapdoor but merely the intractability of the $\mathcal{MQ}$-problem. Hence, we suggest to generate random $\mathcal{MQ}$-polynomials with the parameters as suggested in Table 3. As for Table 1, the evaluation timings are based on [CGP03]. A similar construction — but based on sparse polynomials over large finite fields — has been used by Purdy in [Pur74] to construct a kind of hash function. While this proposal is based on the intractability of univariate polynomial equations of large degree, our proposal is based on the difficulty of solving polynomial-equations of small degree, but with a high number of variables. Although the construction we propose here is difficult to invert, it is not resistant against collisions. The reason is a general attack from [Pat96b, Sect. 3, “Attack with related messages”] against $\mathcal{MQ}$-schemes which can be applied here.

Table 3: Proposed Schemes for One-Way functions

Seed [bit]	Parameter	$\mathcal{MQ}$-System [kByte]	Evaluation [ms]
259	$q = 128, n = 37$	23	< 1
469	$q = 128, n = 67$	134	< 1

5 Conclusions

In this paper, we gave a concise overview of an alternative class of public key schemes, called “$\mathcal{M}$ultivariate $\mathcal{Q}$uadratic” schemes. In particular — using the variations HFE- and C^{*--} — we developed practical instantiations for the problems of fast one-way functions, electronic stamps, and product activation keys. In all cases, the short signature verification times and also the rather short signature generation times (resp., encryption and decryption) are a clear advantage over schemes based on RSA and ECC. In particular, the authors is not aware of patent-restrictions for HFE- and C^{*--}. Hence, they are also a good alternative for projects where patent royalties are a serious consideration. We also want to point out that the predecessor of Sflash^{v3}, *i.e.*, Sflash^{v2} has been recommended by NESSIE for special application domains. Similar, Quartz was a recommendation in NESSIE for applications which require particularly short signatures.

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A Perturbated Matsumoto-Imai

In a nutshell, PMI is a variation on the C* scheme. Unfortunately, the security of PMI is not investigated as thoroughly as the security of, *e.g.*, HFE- or C^{*-}. But as it allows very interesting solutions, we think its worthwhile to include its description in this paper. As already stressed previously, we do not recommend its use at present as the scheme is far too new. We start with a description of the original system and then move on to possible choices of parameters.

A.1 PMI

For PMI [Din04], the idea used is different from C^{*--}: we add n quadratic random polynomials $\pi'_1, \ldots, \pi'_n$ in r variables to the central equations $\mathcal{P}'$ rather than removing r equations (cf below). This acts as an internal perturbation, hence its name. After introducing the new components of PMI, we give a formal definition of the system.

Let $s : \mathbb{F}^n \to \mathbb{F}^r$ be an affine transformation where $r < n$. Moreover, denote with $M_s \in \mathbb{F}^{n \times r}$ a matrix of rank r and with $v_s \in \mathbb{F}^n$ a vector. Now we have $s(x) := M_s x + v_s$ a (non-invertible) transformation of degree 1. Moreover, let $\pi'_1, \ldots, \pi'_n$ be multivariate quadratic equations in r variables each:

$$\pi_i(z'_1, \ldots, z'_r) \quad := \quad \sum \tilde{\gamma}_{i,j,k} + \sum \tilde{\beta}_{i,j} + \tilde{\alpha}$$

for $1 \leq i \leq n$, $1 \leq j, k \leq r$ and $\tilde{\gamma}_{i,j,k}, \tilde{\beta}_{i,j}, \tilde{\alpha} \in_R \mathbb{F}$. Denote $\tilde{\mathcal{P}}(\tilde{X}) := \tilde{X}^{q^\lambda+1}$ the C* transformation with $\lambda \in \mathbb{N}$ defined as above. We can now write the public key equation as

$$\mathcal{P} := T \circ (\tilde{\mathcal{P}} \circ S + \Pi \circ s)$$

where $\Pi := (\pi_1, \ldots, \pi_n)$ and "+" is vector-addition of quadratic polynomials. To invert this function, [Din04] proposes two methods: first, we can use brute-force for the values $z'_1, \ldots, z_r$ and obtain an extra complexity of q^r. Hence, q^r cannot be too big using this method. The second approach is to use the cryptanalysis of [Pat96a] against C* for the **central** equations alone. This way, we are able to solve PMI quicker in most cases. We refer to [Din04] for details but want to stress that this does **not** imply that the original cryptanalysis of [Pat96a] is applicable against PMI. According to [Din04], parameters of $q = 2$, $r = 5$ and $n = 96$ lead to a secure version of PMI. According to our own estimations, an increase of the parameter r to 6 allows to reduce the value for n to 87. In any case, PMI is no longer a bijection. But using the same trick as for HFE, we are able to invert PMI with 7 additional bits and a probability of $1 - 2^{187}$, cf [Pat96b] for details.

A.2 Product Activation Keys

As in Sect. 4.2, we suggest a proposal based on the $\mathcal{MQ}$-problem. We see that this proposal, based on PMI, allows much smaller product activation keys. As the user's cooperation will considerably drop with the length of such a product activation key, we want to stress the importance of this fact. The construction proposed here is the same as in Sect. 4.2, but with smaller product activation keys.

Table 4: Proposed Schemes for Product Activation Keys

User-ID [bit]	Key [char]	Parameter	Priv. Key [Byte]	Pub. Key [kByte]	Gen. [ms]	Ver. [ms]	Signature [bit]
17	19	q=2, n=97, r=6	2462	56.3	$<$ 80	$<$ 1	97
33	22	q=2, n=113, r=6	3320	88.9	$<$ 100	$<$ 2	113

A.3 Session Keys

Again, we base our proposal for the submission of session keys on the scheme PMI. Our results are summarised in Table 5. In this table, "Key" is the size of the session key. For these sizes, we follow the recommendation of NIST for the AES [FIP01]. "Parameter" is our choice for the corresponding PMI scheme. The fields "Priv." and "Pub." show the size of the corresponding private/public key. The timings are extrapolated from the values in [CGP01, Din04]. We want to stress that PMI is the only known variant at the moment which allows to use the $\mathcal{MQ}$-problem in the context of encryption and hence, for the exchange of session keys. All other proposals only allow the construction of signature schemes.

Table 5: Proposed Schemes for Session Key Transmission

Key [bit]	Parameter	Priv. Key [Byte]	Pub. Key [kByte]	Encr. [ms]	Decr. [ms]	Expansion [bit/ratio]
128	n=137, r=6	2347	158	$<$ 2	$<$ 100	9/1.07
192	n=199, r=6	4951	483	$<$ 6	$<$ 120	7/1.04
256	n=263, r=6	8647	1114	$<$ 16	$<$ 160	7/1.03