ON GROMOV’S THEOREM AND $L^2$-HODGE DECOMPOSITION

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Using a functional inequality, the essential spectrum and eigenvalues are estimated for Laplace-type operators on Riemannian vector bundles. Consequently, explicit upper bounds are obtained for the dimension of the corresponding $L^2$-harmonic sections. In particular, some known results concerning Gromov’s theorem and the $L^2$-Hodge decomposition are considerably improved.

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1. Introduction. Recall that Hodge’s decomposition theorem provides a representation of the de Rham cohomology by the space of harmonic forms over a compact Riemannian manifold. A useful consequence of this theorem is that the $p$th Betti number $b_p$ coincides with the space dimension of harmonic $p$-forms. This enables one to estimate $b_p$ using analytic approaches. A very famous result in the literature is the following Gromov’s theorem [15] (see [5] for extensions to Riemannian vector bundles). Throughout the paper, let $M$ be a connected complete Riemannian manifold of dimension $d$.

**Theorem 1.1** (Gromov’s theorem). If $M$ is compact and oriented with diameter $D$, then there is a positive constant $\eta$ depending only on $d$ such that

$$b_1 \leq d \text{ provided } D^2 \text{Ric} \geq -\eta. \quad (1.1)$$

This theorem has already been extended to a Riemannian vector bundle of rank $l$ (cf. [5] and the references therein). Furthermore, an explicit $\eta$ has been provided by Gallot in [12, 13] for such a theorem to hold. It is not difficult to see that the $\eta$ given there decays at least exponentially fast in $l^{1/2}$ as $l \to \infty$ (for the first Betti number, it decays exponentially fast in $d^{3/2}$ as $d \to \infty$), see Remark 1.3 for details. In this paper, we provide a more explicit number $\eta$ of order $l^{-2}$ (see (1.5)).

Let $\Omega$ be a Riemannian vector bundle of rank $l$ over the manifold $M$. Denote by $\mathcal{M}$, $\Gamma(\Omega)$, and $\Gamma_0(\Omega)$, respectively, the measurable (with respect to the $dx$-complete Borel $\sigma$-field), the smooth, and the compactly supported smooth sections of $\Omega$. Let $\langle \cdot, \cdot \rangle_x$ denote the inner product on $\Omega_x$, and for $f \in \mathcal{M}$, let $|f|(x) = |f(x)|_x := \langle f(x), f(x) \rangle_x^{1/2}$.

For $V \in C^2(M)$, we consider the operator

$$\tilde{L} := \Box + \nabla_V^2 - R, \quad (1.2)$$

where $\Box$ denotes the horizontal Laplacian on $\Gamma(\Omega)$, $\nabla_V$ the usual covariant derivative along $V$, and $R$ a symmetric measurable endomorphism of $\Omega$. Let $\mu(dx) = e^V dx$, etc.
where $dx$ denotes the Riemannian volume element. We assume that $\langle L, \mathcal{D}(L) \rangle$ is a bounded-above selfadjoint operator on $L^2_D(\mu) := \{ f \in \mathcal{M} : \mu(|f|^2) := \int_M |f|^2 d\mu < \infty \}$ with the usual inner product. In particular, $\tilde{L}$ is bounded above when $R$ is bounded below. Finally, let

$$R(x) = \inf \{ \langle R \omega, \omega \rangle_x : \omega \in \Omega_x, |\omega|_x = 1 \}, \quad x \in M. \quad (1.3)$$

Our first result is the following theorem.

**Theorem 1.2.** Let $M$ be compact with diameter $D$. Let $b(\tilde{L})$ denote the space dimension of the $\tilde{L}$-harmonic space $\ker \tilde{L} := \{ f \in \mathcal{D}(\tilde{L}) : \tilde{L} f = 0 \}$. Assume that $\text{Ric} - \text{Hess}_V \geq -K$ for some $K \geq 0$. If $R \geq -c$ for some $c \in \mathbb{R}$, then

$$b(\tilde{L}) \leq l \inf_{t>0} e^{cD^2(t+1)} \left( 1 + \frac{1}{4t} \exp \left[ \frac{KD^2}{8} + \frac{KD^2}{1-e^{-Kd^2}} \right] \right). \quad (1.4)$$

Consequently, $b(\tilde{L}) \leq l$ provided $D^2 \inf R > -\eta$, where

$$\eta := \sup_{t>0} \frac{1}{1+t} \log \frac{l+1}{l(1+(1/4t)\exp[KD^2(1/8+1/(1-e^{-Kd^2}))])} \geq \frac{1}{1+l \exp[KD^2(1/8+1/(1-e^{-Kd^2}))]} \log \frac{l+1}{l+1/4}. \quad (1.5)$$

In particular, when $M$ is oriented, $b_1 \leq d$ if there exists $V \in C^2(M)$ such that

$$D^2(\text{Ric} - \text{Hess}_V) \geq -\frac{\log [(d+1)/(d+1/4)]}{1+d(1+1/d)^{d+9/8}}. \quad (1.6)$$

**Remark 1.3.** In the case where $V = 0$, it was proved by Bérard et al. [5] that there is $\eta > 0$ depending only on $l$, $KD^2$, and $d$ such that $b(\tilde{L}) \leq l$ provided $D^2 \inf R > -\eta$. More precisely, [13, Corollary 3.2] provided an explicit $\eta := \epsilon^2 c(l)^{-2}$, where $\epsilon \leq 1/2$ is a positive constant depending only on $d$, and (see [12, page 333] and [13, page 365])

$$c(l) > 2t^{-1/2} \int_0^{t^{1/2}} (\cosh t)^d-1 dt = O\left( t^{-1/2} \exp \left[ \frac{(d-1)t^{1/2}}{2} \right] \right) \quad (1.7)$$

for large $t$. Therefore, if $d > 1$, then $c(l)^{-2}$ is at least exponentially small in $t^{1/2}$. In particular, for the first Betti number, one has $l = d$, and thus the $\eta$ given in [12, 13] has the main order $\exp[-d^{3/2}]$. On the other hand, Theorem 1.2 provides more explicit $\eta$ of order $l^{-2}$. Finally, we mention that there exist examples to show that $b_1$ can be as big as one likes in the absence of any restriction on $D^2K$. Also, the above theorem of Gromov does not hold with $D^2$ being replaced by $[\text{vol}(M)]^{2/d}$ (see, e.g., [3, pages 138–139] for details).
The proof of Theorem 1.2 is based on lower bound estimates of eigenvalues of $-\bar{L}$. Indeed, when, for example, $\sigma_{\text{ess}}(\bar{L}) = \emptyset$, letting $\lambda_1 \leq \lambda_2 \leq \cdots$ denote the eigenvalues of $-\bar{L}$ counting multiplicity, one has

$$b(\bar{L}) \leq \inf \{n - 1 : \lambda_n > 0\}. \quad (1.8)$$

Here and in what follows, $\sigma(\cdot)$ and $\sigma_{\text{ess}}(\cdot)$ denote, respectively, the spectrum and the essential spectrum of a linear operator. This leads us to study the eigenvalue estimation in Section 2. In fact, this study should be interesting in itself.

On the other hand, however, when $M$ is noncompact, it is interesting to study the finiteness of $b(\bar{L})$. To show that $b(\bar{L})$ is finite, it suffices to prove $0 \notin \sigma_{\text{ess}}(\bar{L})$. Moreover, when $-\bar{L}$ is a weighted Hodge Laplacian on differential forms, the feature that $0 \notin \sigma_{\text{ess}}(\bar{L})$ implies an $L^2$-Hodge decomposition (see, e.g., [7, Theorem 5.10, Corollary 5.11]). Therefore, the results obtained in Section 2 also imply the following theorem which improves a result by Ahmed and Stroock [1] who used a different approach. For oriented $M$, let $\Omega = \Lambda^p := \Lambda^p T^* M$ be the bundle of $p$-forms (i.e., the exterior $p$-bundle). Consider $\Delta^p_\mu = d^* d + d d^*_\mu$, where $d^*_\mu$ is the $L^2(\mu)$-adjoint of the exterior derivative $d$. Let $(\Delta^p_\mu, \mathbb{D}(\Delta^p_\mu))$, $(d^*_\mu p, \mathbb{D}(d^*_\mu p))$, and $(d^p, \mathbb{D}(d^p))$ denote, respectively, the corresponding operators on $L^2_{\text{H}}(\mu)$ with domains.

**Theorem 1.4.** Let $M$ be noncompact and oriented. Let $\mathcal{R}$ be the curvature term in the Weitzenböck formula on $\Omega := \Lambda^p$. Assume that $\mu(dx) := e^\mathcal{R} dx$ is a finite measure and $\mathcal{R} - \text{Hess}_{\mathcal{R}}$ is bounded below. If there exists a positive function $U \in C^2(M)$ such that $U + V$ is bounded, $\{U \leq N\}$ is compact for each $N > 0$, $|\nabla U| \to \infty$ as $U \to \infty$, and

$$\limsup_{U \to \infty} \frac{\Delta U}{|\nabla U|^2} < 1,$$

then $\sigma_{\text{ess}}(\Delta^p_\mu) = \emptyset$. Consequently, $\text{im} d^{p-1}$ is closed and

$$L^2_{\text{H}}(\mu) = \text{im} (d^*_\mu)^{p+1} |_{\mathbb{D}(d^*_\mu)^{p+1}} \oplus \text{im} d^{p-1} |_{\mathbb{D}(d^{p-1})} \oplus \ker \Delta^p_\mu |_{\mathbb{D}(\Delta^p_\mu)},$$

$$\alpha := \inf \left\{ \langle \phi, \Delta^p_\mu \phi \rangle_{L^2_{\text{H}}(\mu)} : \phi \perp \ker \Delta^p_\mu |_{\mathbb{D}(\Delta^p_\mu)}, \|\phi\|_{L^2_{\text{H}}(\mu)} = 1 \right\} > 0. \quad (1.10)$$

**Remark 1.5.** Ahmed and Stroock have proved (1.10) under some stronger conditions (cf. [1, Theorem 5.1]). Indeed, their conditions (e.g., (1.1) and the second part of (2.8) in [1]) imply that $\limsup_{U \to \infty} (\Delta U / |\nabla U|^2) \leq 0$ which is stronger than (1.9). Moreover, their conditions also imply the ultracontractivity of the semigroup generated by $\Delta + \nabla V$ on $M$, which is rather restrictive so that some important models are excluded. For instance, Theorem 1.4 applies to $V = -|x|^2$ on $M = \mathbb{R}^n$, but [1, Theorem 5.1] does not since it is well known that the Ornstein-Uhlenbeck semigroup is not ultracontractive (see, e.g., [21] and the references therein). On the other hand, however, the Gaussian measure is crucial in infinite-dimensional analysis; in particular, it plays a role as the Riemann-Lebesgue measure does in finite dimensions, see [16, 22] for details.

In Section 2, by virtue of semigroup domination and the super Poincaré inequality introduced in [28], estimates of eigenvalues obtained in [29] are extended to the present setting. Indeed, we are able to establish analogous results on Hilbert bundles which are...
2. Spectrum estimates on Riemannian vector bundles. Let \{X_i\} be a locally normal frame and \(\nabla_{X_i}\) the usual covariant derivative along \(X_i\). Then the horizontal Laplacian reads \(\square = \sum_{i=1}^d \nabla_{X_i}^2\), which is naturally defined on \(\Gamma(\Omega)\). Let \(\mu(dx) = e^{V(x)}\,dx\) for some \(V \in C^2(M)\), where \(dx\) denotes the Riemannian volume element.

Consider the operator
\[
\tilde{L} = \square + \nabla_{\nabla V} - R,
\] (2.1)

where \(R\) is a symmetric measurable endomorphism of \(\Omega\) such that \((\tilde{L}, \Gamma_0(\Omega))\) is essentially selfadjoint on \(L^2_0(\mu)\) and is bounded above, that is, \(-\tilde{\mathcal{E}}(f,f) := \mu((f, \tilde{L}f)) \leq C\mu(|f|^2)\) for some \(C \in \mathbb{R}\) and all \(f \in \Gamma_0(\Omega)\). Recall that \(\langle f,g \rangle_x := \langle f(x), g(x) \rangle_x\) and \(\mu(u) := \int_M u\,d\mu\) for any \(x \in M, f, g \in \Omega,\) and any \(u \in L^1(\mu)\). Let \((\tilde{L}, \mathcal{D}(\tilde{L}))\) be the unique selfadjoint extension of \((\tilde{L}, \Gamma_0(\Omega))\) which is also bounded above. Let \(R(x) = \inf\{(R\omega, \omega)_x : \omega \in \Omega_x, |\omega| = 1\}, x \in M\). We assume that \(R \in L^1_{\text{loc}}(dx)\) and there exists \(C \geq 0\) such that \(\mu(|\nabla u|^2) + \mu(Ru^2) \geq -C\mu(u^2)\) for all \(u \in C^0_0(M)\). Then the following form is closable and let \((\mathcal{E}, \mathcal{D}(\mathcal{E}))\) denote its closure (see, e.g., [17, Corollary VI.1.28]):
\[
\mathcal{E}(u,v) := \mu(\langle \nabla u, \nabla v \rangle) + \mu(Ruv), \quad u, v \in C^0_0(M).
\] (2.2)

Note that the boundedness from below of \((\mathcal{E}, C^\infty_0(M))\) does not imply that of \(R\), see, for example, [19, Remark 2.4]. Let \((L, \mathcal{D}(L))\) be the smallest closed extension (i.e., the Friedrichs extension) of \((\Delta + \nabla V - R, C^\infty_0(M))\) (which is selfadjoint by [17, Theorem VI.2.6]) and \(P_{\tilde{L}}^R\) the corresponding strongly continuous semigroup. Below, we will write \(L = \Delta + \nabla V - R\) for simplicity.

To study the essential spectrum of \(\tilde{L}\), we follow the line of [28] to use the following.

**Donnelly-Li’s decomposition principle.** If \(R\) is bounded below, then \(\sigma_{\text{ess}}(\tilde{L}) = \sigma_{\text{ess}}(\tilde{L}|_{B^c})\) for any compact domain \(B\), where \(\tilde{L}|_{B^c}\) denotes the restriction of \(\tilde{L}\) on \(B^c\) with Dirichlet boundary conditions.

Although the principle in [10] was given for the Laplacian on functions, its proof indeed works also for our present case. To see this, let \(\{f_n\}_{n=1}^\infty \subset \mathcal{D}(\tilde{L})\) be such that \(\mu(|f_n|^2) = 1\) and \(\tilde{\mathcal{E}}(f_n, f_n) \leq c_1\) for some \(c_1 > 0\) and all \(n \geq 1\); we have \(\sup_n \mu(|\nabla f_n|^2) < \infty\) since \(R\) is bounded from below. Moreover, since \(V\) is locally bounded, we obtain \(\sup_n \int_B |\nabla f_n|^2\,dx < \infty\). Therefore, by Sobolev embedding theorem, \(\{1_B f_n\}\) is relatively compact on \(L^2_0(\mu)\) (recall that \(\text{supp} f_n \subset B\) and \(V\) is bounded on \(B\)). Hence Donnelly-Li’s argument applies.

In order to study the spectrum of \(\tilde{L}\), we compare \(\tilde{\mathcal{E}}(f,f)\) with \(\mathcal{E}(|f|, |f|)\) and then use known results for functions. A convenient way to do so is to compare \(\tilde{P}\) with a semigroup on \(L^2(\mu)\). This trick has been widely used in spectral geometry, especially
in the study of the Hodge Laplacian on differential forms over compact manifolds, see, for instance, [3, 4] and the references therein.

**THEOREM 2.1.** (1) For any $t > 0$,

$$|\tilde{P}_t f| \leq P^R_t |f|, \quad f \in L^2_\mu(\mu). \tag{2.3}$$

(2) For any $t > 0$, $\tilde{P}_t$ and $P^R_t$ have smooth transition densities with respect to $\mu$ denoted by $\tilde{p}_t(x, y)$ and $p^R_t(x, y)$, respectively, which satisfy $\|\tilde{p}_t(x, y)\|_{op} \leq p^R_t(x, y), x, y \in M$, where $\|\tilde{p}_t\|_{op}$ denotes the operator norm of the linear operator $\tilde{p}_t(x, y) : \Omega_y \rightarrow \Omega_x$.

(3) For any $f \in \Gamma_0(\Omega)$, one has $\tilde{\mathcal{E}}(f, f) \geq \mathcal{E}(|f|, |g|).

**PROOF.** (1) By [3, Theorem 16] (cf. Theorem A.5 below), it suffices to show that for any $f, g \in \Gamma_0(\Omega)$ satisfying $\langle f, g \rangle_{L^2_\mu(\mu)} = \mu(|f| \cdot |g|)$, one has

$$|\tilde{\mathcal{E}}(f, g)| \geq \mathcal{E}(|f|, |g|). \tag{2.4}$$

Since $\langle f, g \rangle \leq |f| \cdot |g|$ but $\langle f, g \rangle_{L^2_\mu(\mu)} = \mu(|f| \cdot |g|)$, we have $\langle f, g \rangle = |f| \cdot |g|$, $\mu$-a.e. and hence pointwise since $f$ and $g$ are continuous. Thus, $f = |f| g / |g|$ on $\{|g| > 0\}$. By Kato’s inequality, we have $|\nabla |g|| \leq |\nabla g|$, $\mu$-a.e. for all $g \in \Gamma_0(\Omega)$ (cf. [3, Lemma VI.31] and its proof). Moreover, since any order derivatives of $g$ are zero on $\{|g| = 0\}$, we obtain

$$\tilde{\mathcal{E}}(f, g) = -\mu(\langle f, \tilde{L} g \rangle) \geq -\mu(\langle f, (\Box + \nabla \nabla V) g \rangle) + \mu(R |f| \cdot |g|)$$

$$= \mu(1_{\{|g| > 0\}} \langle \nabla |f| g / |g|, \nabla g \rangle) + \mu(R |f| \cdot |g|)$$

$$= \mu\left(1_{\{|g| > 0\}} \frac{|f| g}{|g|} |\nabla g|^2 \right)$$

$$+ \frac{1}{2} \mu(1_{\{|g| > 0\}} \nabla (\frac{|f| g}{|g|}) \langle g, g \rangle) + \mu(R |f| \cdot |g|)$$

$$\geq \mu\left(1_{\{|g| > 0\}} \frac{|f| \cdot |\nabla |g||^2}{|g|} \right)$$

$$+ \mu\left(|g| \langle \nabla \frac{|f|}{|g|}, \nabla |g| \rangle \right) + \mu(R |f| \cdot |g|)$$

$$= \mu(\langle \nabla |f|, \nabla |g| \rangle) + \mu(R |f| \cdot |g|)$$

$$= \mathcal{E}(|f|, |g|).$$

Therefore (2.4) holds.

(2) Since $\cap_{n=1}^\infty \mathcal{D}(\tilde{L}^n) \subset \Gamma(\Omega)$ and $\cap_{n=1}^\infty \mathcal{D}(\Delta + \nabla V - R)^n \subset C^\infty(M)$, by the argument in the proof of [9, Theorem 5.2.1], we conclude that $\tilde{P}_t$ and $P^R_t$ have smooth transition densities. Moreover, for any $x, y \in M$ and any $\omega \in \Omega_y$ with $|\omega|_y = 1$, let $f \in \mathcal{M}$ be such that $f(\gamma) = \omega$ and $|f| = 1$. Then $\tilde{p}_t(x, \cdot) f(\cdot)$ and $p^R_t(x, \cdot)$ are bounded and continuous in a neighborhood $N_y$ of $y$. Let $\{h_n\}$ be a sequence of nonnegative continuous functions
with supports contained in $N_y$ such that $h_n\mu \to \delta_y$ weakly as $n \to \infty$. By (2.3), we obtain
\[
\left\| \int_M \left[ \tilde{p}_t(x,z)f(z) \right] h_n(z)\mu(dz) \right\|_x
= \left| \tilde{p}_t(h_n f)(x) \right|_x \leq p^R_t h_n(x) = \int_M p^R_t(x,z)h_n(z)\mu(dz).
\] (2.6)

By letting $n \to \infty$, we arrive at $| \tilde{p}_t(x,y)\omega |_x \leq p^R_t(x,y)$. Therefore, $\| \tilde{p}(x,y) \|_{op} \leq p^R_t(x,y)$.

(3) Recall that $\mu(\langle f, \tilde{P}_t f \rangle) = \mu(\langle \tilde{P}_t/2 f, \tilde{P}_t/2 f \rangle)$ for any $f \in \Gamma_0(\Omega)$; it follows from (2.3) that
\[
\mathcal{E}(f,f) = - \frac{1}{2} \lim_{t \to 0} \frac{\mu(|\tilde{P}_t f|^2) - \mu(|f|^2)}{t}
\geq - \frac{1}{2} \lim_{t \to 0} \frac{\mu((p^R_t f)^2) - \mu(|f|^2)}{t}
= \mathcal{E}(f,f).
\] (2.7)

From now on, we let $P^0_t$ denote the strongly continuous semigroup on $L^2(\mu)$ generated by $\Delta + \nabla V$, and $p^0_t(x,y)$ its transition density with respect to $\mu$ which is positive since $M$ is connected. Let $\hat{\lambda} = \inf \sigma_{ess}(-\tilde{L})$, where we put $\inf \emptyset = \infty$ as usual. When $\hat{\lambda} > \lambda_1 := \inf \sigma(-\tilde{L})$, let $\lambda_1 \leq \lambda_2 \leq \cdots$ be all the eigenvalues (counting multiplicity) of $-\tilde{L}$ contained in $[\lambda_1, \hat{\lambda}]$.

To estimate the number $b(\tilde{L})$ by using Theorem 2.1, we need the following lemma.

**Lemma 2.2.** Let $\{f_i\}$ be an orthonormal family in $\mathcal{D}(\tilde{L})$ such that $\tilde{L} f_i = -\delta_i f_i$ with $\{\delta_i\}_{i=1}^n$ satisfying $\delta_1 \leq \delta_2 \leq \cdots \leq \delta_n$. Then
\[
l \int_M \| \tilde{p}_{t/2} (\cdot, y) \|_{op}^2 \mu(dy) \geq e^{-\delta_n t} \sum_{i=1}^n |f_i|^2.
\] (2.8)

**Proof.** For any $1 \leq j \leq l$ and $x \in M$, let
\[
g_j(y) = \sum_{i=1}^n \langle f_i(x), e_j(x) \rangle_x f_i(y), \quad y \in M,
\] (2.9)

where $\{e_j\}_{1 \leq j \leq l}$ is an orthonormal basis on $\Omega_x$. We have
\[
e^{-\delta_n t/2} \sum_{i=1}^n |f_i|^2(x) \leq \sum_{j=1}^l \langle \tilde{p}_{t/2} g_j, e_j \rangle(x)
= \sum_{j=1}^l \int_M \langle \tilde{p}_{t/2}(x, y)g_j(y), e_j(x) \rangle_x \mu(dy)
\leq \left( l \int_M \| \tilde{p}_{t/2}(x, y) \|_{op}^2 \mu(dy) \right)^{1/2} \left( \sum_{j=1}^l \|g_j\|_{L^2_0(\mu)}^2 \right)^{1/2}.
\] (2.10)
The proof is completed by noting that
\[
\sum_{j=1}^{l} \|g_j\|^2_{L^2(\mu)} = \sum_{j=1}^{l} \sum_{i=1}^{n} \langle f_i, e_j \rangle^2(x) = \sum_{i=1}^{n} |f_i|^2(x). \tag{2.11}
\]

**Theorem 2.3.** (1) If \( \inf \sigma(R - \Delta - \nabla V) > 0 \), then \( b(\tilde{L}) = 0 \).

(2) Assume that \( \mu \) is a probability measure. If \( R \geq 0 \), then \( b(\tilde{L}) \leq l \). Moreover, for any \( f \in \ker \tilde{L} \), \(|f|\) is constant.

(3) Assume that \( R \) is bounded from below. Then \( \tilde{\lambda} \geq \inf \sigma_{\text{ess}}(-(\Delta + \nabla V) + R) \). Consequently, let \( \rho(x) \) be the Riemannian distance between \( x \) and a fixed point \( o \in M \), if \( \delta := \lim_{\rho \to \infty} R + \inf \sigma_{\text{ess}}(\Delta - \nabla V) > 0 \), then \( \tilde{\lambda} \geq \delta > 0 \) and hence \( b(\tilde{L}) < \infty \).

**Proof.** (1) Let \( f \in \ker(\tilde{L}) \). If \( a := \inf \sigma(-\Delta - \nabla V + R) > 0 \), then
\[
\mu(|f|^2) = \mu(|\tilde{P}_t f|^2) \leq \mu\left(\left(\left\langle P_{t}^a\right\rangle\right|^2\right) \leq e^{-2at} \mu(|f|^2) \to 0
\tag{2.12}
\]
as \( t \to \infty \), hence \( f = 0 \), \( \mu \)-a.e.

(2) For fixed \( n = b(\tilde{L}) \), let \( \{f_1, \ldots, f_n\} \subset \ker \tilde{L} \) be an orthonormal family. If \( R \geq 0 \), by the proof of Theorem 2.1 we have \( |\tilde{P}_t f| \leq P^0_t |f| \) for all \( f \in L^2(\mu) \) and hence \( \|\tilde{P}_t(x,y)\|_\text{op} \leq p^0_t(x,y) \). Then by Lemma 2.2 (note that \( \delta_n = \lambda_n = 0 \) in the present case), for any compact set \( B \subset M \),
\[
\sum_{i=1}^{n} \int_B |f_i|^2 \, d\mu \leq l \int_B p^0_t(x,x) \mu(dx)
\tag{2.13}
\]
holds for all \( t > 0 \) and any compact set \( B \subset M \). We now intend to show that \( p^0_t(x,x) \downarrow 1 \) as \( t \uparrow \infty \) for all \( x \in M \). Observing that
\[
\frac{d}{dt} p^0_t(x,x) = -\int_M |\nabla p^0_{t/2}(x,\cdot)|^2(y) \mu(dy) \leq 0,
\tag{2.14}
\]
then \( p^0_t(x,x) \) is decreasing in \( t \). Next, noting that the Dirichlet form for \( \Delta + \nabla V \) is irreducible since \( M \) is connected, we have \( \|P^0_t u - \mu(u)\|_{L^2(\mu)} \to 0 \) as \( t \to \infty \) for any \( u \in L^2(\mu) \) (see, e.g., the appendix in [2]). For fixed \( x \in M \), letting \( u(y) = p^0_t(x,y) \), we obtain
\[
|P^0_t u - \mu(u)|^2_{L^2(\mu)} = \mu\left(\left(\left\langle P^{0}_{t+1}\right\rangle\right)^2\right) = p^0_{2(t+1)}(x,x) - 1.
\tag{2.15}
\]
Therefore, \( p^0_t(x,x) \to 1 \) as \( t \to \infty \). Now by first letting \( t \to \infty \) and then \( B \to M \), we obtain from (2.13) that \( n \leq l \), hence \( b(\tilde{L}) \leq l \) since \( n \) is arbitrary. Moreover, for \( f \in \ker \tilde{L} \), we have (note that \(|f|\) is continuous)
\[
|f|(x)^2 = |\tilde{P}_t f|(x)^2 \leq p^0_{2t}(x,x) \mu(|f|^2).
\tag{2.16}
\]
By letting \( t \to \infty \), we obtain \( |f|(x)^2 \leq \mu(|f|^2) \) and hence \( |f|^2 = \mu(|f|^2) \) pointwise since \(|f|\) is continuous.
(3) By Donnelly-Li’s decomposition principle mentioned above, we have

\[
\inf \sigma_{\text{ess}}\left( -(\Delta + \nabla V) + R \right) = \lim_{n \to -\infty} \inf \sigma\left( [ -(\Delta + \nabla V) + R ] \right|_{B_0(n)^c} \right)
\]

(2.17)

and the same formula holds for \( \hat{L} \) in place of \( -(\Delta + \nabla V) + R \). Then the proof is completed by Theorem 2.1(3) and by noting that \( \inf \sigma([-(\Delta + \nabla V) + R] \mid_{B_0(n)^c}) \geq \inf_{B_0(n)^c} R + \inf \sigma(-(\Delta + \nabla V) \mid_{B_0(n)^c}) \).

\[
\square
\]

We remark that Theorem 2.3(1) has already been known by Elworthy and Rosenberg [11] for differential forms. Moreover, as is well known in Hodge’s theory, Theorem 2.3(2) is optimal in the sense that there exist examples such that \( b(\hat{L}) = l \) and \( R \geq 0 \); for instance, the Betti numbers on torus (see, e.g., [15]).

We are now ready to estimate \( \lambda_n \) and then use the basic estimate (2.18) to obtain more estimates of \( b(\hat{L}) \).

**Theorem 2.4.** Assume that \( \mu \) is a probability measure and \( R \geq -c \) for some \( c \in \mathbb{R} \). If \( p^0_t(x,x) \) is integrable with respect to \( \mu \) for some \( t > 0 \), then \( \bar{\lambda} = \infty, \sigma_{\text{ess}}(\hat{L}) = \emptyset, \) and

\[
\lambda_n \geq \sup_{t > 0} \frac{1}{t} \log \frac{n e^{-ct}}{\int_M p^0_t(x,x) \mu(dx)}, \quad n \geq 1.
\]

(2.18)

In the case that \( p^0_t(x,x) \) is not integrable, let \( \delta_{s,t} = \mu(\{ x : p^0_t(x,x) > s \}) \). If there exists some positive \( \beta \) defined on \((0, \infty)\) such that

\[
\mu(|u|^2) \leq r \mu(|\nabla u|^2) + \beta(r) \mu(|u|^2), \quad r > 0, \ u \in C^\infty_0(M),
\]

(2.19)

then \( \bar{\lambda} = \infty \) and

\[
\lambda_n \geq \sup \left\{ \left( \frac{1}{t} \log \frac{n e^{-ct}}{st} \right) \wedge \sup_{r > 0} \frac{1}{r} \left[ 1 - c r - 2 \beta(r)(\varepsilon + \delta_{s,t}) \right] : \varepsilon \in (0,1), \ s,t > 0 \right\}.
\]

(2.20)

Especially, if (2.19) holds for \( \beta(r) = \exp[\alpha(1 + r^{-1/\delta})] \) for some \( \alpha > 0 \) and \( \delta > 1 \), one has \( \lambda_n \geq \lambda(\log n - \theta + \delta)^\delta \) for some \( \lambda, \theta > 0 \) and all \( n \geq 1 \).

**Proof.** If \( p^0_t(x,x) \) is integrable with respect to \( \mu \), then \( p^0_t \) (and hence \( p^R_t \)) is uniformly integrable in \( L^2(\mu) \). Recall that a linear operator \( P \) on \( L^2(\mu) \) is called uniformly integrable if \( \sup_{\|u\|_2 \leq 1} \mu(\|Pu\|_2 \mid_{\{ Pu \geq \beta \}}) \to 0 \) as \( \beta \to \infty \). Therefore, by [29, Theorems 2.2 and 3.1] (see also [14]), we have \( \sigma_{\text{ess}}(-(\Delta + \nabla V) + R) = \emptyset \). Thus, \( \bar{\lambda} = \infty \) according to Theorem 2.3(3). Next, let \( \hat{L} = \Delta + \nabla V + \lambda \). For the same reason, we have \( \sigma_{\text{ess}}(\hat{L}) = \emptyset \). Let \( \lambda_\alpha \leq \lambda_\beta \leq \cdots \) denote all eigenvalues of \( -\hat{L} \) counting multiplicity. Since \( -\hat{L} \geq -\hat{L}^\alpha \), it follows from the max-min principle that \( \lambda_n \geq \lambda_\alpha^\alpha \) for all \( n \geq 1 \) (see, e.g., [20, problem 1, page 364]). Therefore, it suffices to prove (2.18) for \( R = -c \). In this case, if \( f_i \) are the \( L^2 \)-unit eigenvectors for \( \lambda_i \), then, by Lemma 2.2,

\[
I \int_M \| \bar{p}_{t/2}(x,y) \|^2 \mu(dy) \geq e^{-\lambda_n t} \sum_{i=1}^{n} |f_i|^2(x), \ \ x \in M.
\]

(2.21)
Then Theorem 2.3(2) yields that
\[ n e^{-\lambda nt} \leq l e^{ct} \int_M p^0_t(x, x) \mu(dx). \]  
(2.22)

This proves (2.18).

If (2.19) holds for \( \beta(r) = \exp[\alpha(1 + r^{-1/\delta})] \) for some \( \alpha > 0 \) and \( \delta > 1 \), by [28, Corollary 5.2] we have \( p^0_t(x, x) \leq \exp[\lambda(1 + t^{-1/(\delta-1)})] \) for some \( \lambda > 0 \) and all \( t > 0 \). Then by (2.18),
\[ \lambda_n \geq \sup_{t > 0} \frac{1}{t} \log \frac{n e^{-ct}}{t \exp[\lambda(1 + t^{-1/(\delta-1)})]}. \]  
(2.23)

Taking \( t = \varepsilon^{-1} (\log n)^{1-\delta} \) for small \( \varepsilon > 0 \) and \( n \geq 2 \), we obtain
\[ \lambda_n \geq \varepsilon (1 - \lambda \varepsilon^{1/(\delta-1)}) (\log n)^{1-\delta} - c - \varepsilon (\log l + \lambda) (\log n)^{\delta-1}, \quad n \geq 2. \]  
(2.24)

Therefore, the last assertion follows by taking \( \varepsilon \in (0, \lambda^{1-\delta}) \).

It remains to prove (2.20). The proof is similar to that of [29, Theorem 3.2]. Let \( A_{s,t} = \{x : p^0_t(x, x) \leq s\} \). By Theorem 2.1(2) and inequality (2.21), we obtain
\[ e^{-\lambda nt} \sum_{i=1}^{n} 1_{A_{s,t}} |f_i|^2 \leq l e^{ct} p^0_t(\cdot, \cdot) 1_{A_{s,t}} \leq l e^{ct} s. \]  
(2.25)

This implies that
\[ \lambda_n \geq \frac{1}{t} \log \left[ \frac{1}{ls e^{ct}} \sum_{i=1}^{n} \mu(1_{A_{s,t}} |f_i|^2) \right] \geq \frac{1}{t} \log \frac{n \varepsilon}{ls e^{ct}} \]  
(2.26)

provided \( \mu(1_{A_{s,t}} |f_i|^2) \geq \varepsilon \) for all \( 1 \leq i \leq n \). On the other hand, if there exists \( i \) such that \( \mu(1_{A_{s,t}} |f_i|^2) < \varepsilon \), we have
\[ \mu(\cdot |f_i|^2) = (\mu(1_{A_{s,t}} |f_i^\perp|^2) + \mu(1_{A_{s,t}} |f_i|^2))^2 \leq 2(\varepsilon + \delta_{s,t}). \]  
(2.27)

Combining this with (2.19), we obtain
\[ 1 = \mu(\cdot |f_i|^2) \leq r \mu(\cdot |f_i|^2) + \beta(r) \mu(\cdot |f_i|^2) \]
\[ \leq r \tilde{\mu}(f_i, f_i) + cr + 2 \beta(r)(\varepsilon + \delta_{s,t}) \]
\[ = r \lambda_i + cr + 2 \beta(r)(\varepsilon + \delta_{s,t}), \quad r > 0. \]  
(2.28)

Therefore,
\[ \lambda_n \geq \lambda_i \geq \sup_{r > 0} \frac{1}{r} [1 - cr - 2 \beta(r) (\varepsilon + \delta_{s,t})]. \]  
(2.29)

Combining this with (2.26), we prove (2.20).
To estimate $p^0_t(x,x)$, we assume that
\[(\text{Ric} - \text{Hess}_V)(X,X) \geq -K|X|^2, \quad X \in TM,\] (2.30)
for some $K \geq 0$. By the dimension-free Harnack inequality obtained in [25], we have (cf. [29, page 277])
\[p^0_t(x,x) \leq \mu(B_o(r)) \exp \left[ K(\rho(o,x) + r)^2 \right] \] (2.31)
for some $K \geq 0$.

Therefore, there exist $c_1, c_2 > 0$ such that
\[A_{s,1} = \{x : p^0_t(x,x) \leq s\} \supset \{x : \rho(x) \leq c_1 \sqrt{\log s - c_2}\} \quad \text{for all } s > 1.\]

Corollary 2.5. Assume that $\mu$ is a probability measure and (2.30) holds. If $R \geq -c$ and (2.19) holds, then
\[\lambda_n \geq \sup_{\varepsilon \in (0,1), s > 1} \left\{ \left( \log \frac{n \varepsilon e^{-c}}{sl} \right) \wedge \sup_{r > 0} \frac{1}{r} \left[ 1 - cr - 2\beta(r) \left( \frac{\varepsilon + \mu(\rho > c_1 \sqrt{\log s - c_2})}{1 - e^{-Kt}} \right) \right] \right\} \] (2.32)
for some $c_1, c_2 > 0$ and all $n \geq 1$. Consequently, if, in addition, (2.19) holds for $\beta(r) = \exp[\alpha(1 + r^{-1/\delta})]$ for some $\alpha, \delta > 0$, then $\lambda_n \geq \lambda(\log n - \theta) / \delta$ for some $\lambda, \theta > 0$ and all $n \geq 1$.

Proof. By Theorem 2.4, it suffices to check the second assertion for $\delta \in (0,1]$. By [28, Corollary 6.3], there exists $\alpha_1, \alpha_2 > 0$ such that $\mu(\rho \geq c_1 \sqrt{\log s - c_2}) \leq \alpha_1 \exp[-\alpha_2 (\log s)^{1/(2-\delta)}]$ for all $s > 1$. Then the proof is completed by some simple calculations.

Now we come back to estimate $b(\tilde{L})$ by using (2.18).

Corollary 2.6. Assume that $\mu$ is a probability measure and $R \geq -c$ for some $c \in \mathbb{R}$. Then
\[b(\tilde{L}) \leq \inf_{t > 0} e^{ct} \int_M p^0_t(x,x) \mu(dx). \] (2.33)
If (2.30) holds, then
\[b(\tilde{L}) \leq \inf_{t > 0, r > 0} \frac{le^{ct}}{\mu(B_o(r))} \int_M \exp \left[ \frac{K(\rho(x) + r)^2}{1 - e^{-Kt}} \right] \mu(dx). \] (2.34)
If, in particular, $M$ is compact, then
\[b(\tilde{L}) \leq \liminf_{t > 0} \exp \left[ ct + \frac{KD^2}{1 - e^{-Kt}} \right]. \] (2.35)
Proof. Assume that the right-hand side of (2.33) is finite; by Theorem 2.3 one has \( \bar{\lambda} = \infty \) and hence \( b(\bar{L}) < \infty \). Let \( n = b(\bar{L}) \), we have \( \lambda_n = 0 \). Then (2.33) follows from (2.18). Moreover, (2.34) follows from (2.33) and (2.31). Finally, by (2.31) with \( r = D \) and \( o = x \), we obtain

\[
p_l^0(x,x) \leq \exp \left[ \frac{KD^2}{1 - e^{-Kt}} \right], \quad x \in M.
\]

Then (2.35) follows from (2.33).

To conclude this section, we consider the following two examples on noncompact manifolds.

Example 2.7. Let \( M \) be noncompact and \( \mu = e^V \, d\mu \) a probability measure. If there exists \( \alpha > 0 \) such that \( \lim_{\rho \to \infty} (\Delta + \nabla V) \rho \leq -\alpha \), where the limit is taken outside of the cut locus of \( o \), and \( \lim_{\rho \to \infty} R > -\alpha^2/4 \), then \( 0 \notin \sigma_{\text{ess}}(\tilde{L}) \) and hence \( b(\tilde{L}) < \infty \). Indeed (see, e.g., [27, (2.8)]), we have \( \lim_{n \to \infty} \inf \sigma((\Delta + \nabla V) \mid_{B(0)(n)}) \geq \alpha^2/4 \). By Donnelly-Li’s decomposition principle [10], we have \( \inf \sigma_{\text{ess}}(\Delta + \nabla V) \geq \alpha^2/4 \). Therefore, by Theorem 2.3(3), \( 0 \notin \sigma_{\text{ess}}(\tilde{L}) \) provided \( \lim_{\rho \to \infty} R > -\alpha^2/4 \).

Example 2.8. Let \( M \) be noncompact with Ricci curvature bounded from below and \( \delta > 1 \) a constant. Let \( V = -\alpha \tilde{\rho} \) for some \( \alpha > 0 \) with \( \tilde{\rho} \in C^\infty(M) \) such that \( \rho^\delta - \tilde{\rho} \) is bounded and \( \mu \) is a probability measure, where \( \rho \) is as above. The existence of \( \tilde{\rho} \) is guaranteed by a classical approximation theorem and the volume comparison theorem. By [28, Corollary 2.5], (2.19) holds with \( \beta(r) = \exp[c_1 (1 + r^{-\delta/(2(\delta - 1))})] \) for some \( c_1 > 0 \). Therefore by Theorem 2.4, if \( R \) is bounded from below, then there exist \( \lambda, \theta > 0 \) such that

\[
\lambda_n \geq \lambda \left( [\log n - \theta]^+ \right)^{2(\delta - 1)/\delta}, \quad n \geq 1,
\]

provided \( \delta > 2 \). If, in addition, (2.30) holds, then (2.37) holds for all \( \delta > 1 \).

3. Proofs of Theorems 1.2 and 1.4

Proof of Theorem 1.2. Obviously, we may assume that \( \mu \) is a probability measure since it is finite. Let \( x \in M \) be fixed. For any \( y \in M \), let \( u(y) = p^0_{D2}(x,y) \). We have

\[
p^0_{D^2(t+1)}(y,x) = p^0_{D^2}, u(y).
\]

Since, by (2.36), \( \|u\|_\infty \leq \exp[KD^2/(1 - e^{-KD^2})] \), applying [26, Theorem 4.4] with \( \lambda = 0 \) we obtain

\[
\left| \nabla p^0_{D^2(t+1)}(\cdot,x) \right|(y) \leq \frac{1}{4D^2t} \exp \left[ \frac{KD^2}{1 - e^{-KD^2}} \right] \int_0^D \exp \left[ \frac{Kr^2}{8} \right] dr.
\]

Therefore by (2.36),

\[
\left| \nabla p^0_{D^2(t+1)}(\cdot,x) \right|(y) \leq \frac{1}{4D^2t} \exp \left[ \frac{KD^2}{1 - e^{-KD^2}} \right] \int_0^D \exp \left[ \frac{Kr^2}{8} \right] dr.
\]

Finally, by (2.31) with \( r = D \) and \( o = x \), we obtain

\[
p_l^0(x,x) \leq \exp \left[ \frac{KD^2}{1 - e^{-KD^2}} \right], \quad x \in M.
\]
Since \( \int_M p_{D^2(t+1)}^0(\gamma,x)\mu(dy) = 1 \), there exists \( \gamma \in M \) such that \( p_{D^2(t+1)}^0(\gamma,x) \leq 1 \). We obtain

\[
p_{D^2(t+1)}^0(x,x) \leq 1 + \frac{1}{4t} \exp \left[ KD^2 \left( \frac{1}{8} + \frac{1}{1 - e^{-KD^2}} \right) \right].
\]  

(3.2)

Then (1.4) follows from (2.33).

If \( D^2 \inf R > -\eta \), then there exist \( t_0 > 0 \) and \( \epsilon > 0 \) such that

\[
D^2 \inf R \geq \epsilon - \frac{1}{t_0+1} \log \frac{l+1}{l(1 + (1/4t_0) \exp [KD^2/8 + KD^2/(1 - e^{-KD^2})])}.
\]  

(3.3)

Therefore, we may apply (1.4) when \( t = t_0 \) and

\[
c := -\frac{\epsilon}{D^2} + \frac{1}{D^2(t_0+1)} \log \frac{l+1}{l(1 + (1/4t_0) \exp [KD^2/8 + KD^2/(1 - e^{-KD^2})])}
\]  

(3.4)

to obtain

\[
b(\tilde{\mathcal{L}}) \leq le^{-(1+t_0)} \frac{l+1}{l} < l+1.
\]  

(3.5)

This implies \( b(\tilde{\mathcal{L}}) \leq l \) since \( b(\tilde{\mathcal{L}}) \in \mathbb{Z}_+ \). Moreover, taking \( t = l \exp[KD^2/8 + KD^2/(1 - e^{KD^2})] \), we obtain the desired lower bound of \( \eta \) from its definition.

Finally, let \( \Omega = \Lambda^1 \) and \( \tilde{\mathcal{L}} = -\Delta^1_\mu \); we have \( R = \text{Ric} - \text{Hess}_V \) (cf. (3.7) and (3.10)) and \( l = d \). Let \( \eta \) be defined by (1.5); we have \( \eta < \log((d+1)/d) \). If \( -KD^2 := D^2 \inf R \geq -\eta \), then \( KD^2 < \log((d+1)/d) \) and hence

\[
\eta > \frac{\log [(d+1)/(d+1/4)]}{1 + d \exp [(\log ((d+1)/d))(1/8 + 1/d)]} =: \eta'.
\]  

(3.6)

Therefore, if \( D^2 \inf R \geq -\eta' \), then \( D^2 \inf R > -\eta \) and hence \( b(-\Delta^1_\mu) \leq d \). Then the proof is completed by noting that \( b_1 = b(-\Delta^1_\mu) \) since \( M \) is compact (see [7, Theorem 5.12]).

To prove Theorem 1.4, we fix \( p \in [0,d] \cap \mathbb{Z}_+ \), and let \( \Omega = \Lambda^p \) be the exterior \( p \)-bundle over the oriented manifold \( M \). We have \( l = d!/(p!(d-p)) \). Consider \( -\tilde{\mathcal{L}} = \Delta^p_\mu := d^*_\mu d + dd^*_\mu \). We have (see [7]) \( d^*_\mu = \delta - i_V \) and hence

\[
\Delta^p_\mu = \Delta^p - \mathcal{L}_{\mathcal{V}} = -\Box - \mathcal{L}_{\mathcal{V}} + \mathcal{R},
\]  

(3.7)
where $\Delta^p := \delta d + d\delta$ and $\mathcal{R}$ denote, respectively, the usual Hodge Laplacian and the curvature term involved in the Weitzenböck formula on $p$-forms, and $L_X = d_i X + i_X d$ is the Lie differentiation in the direction $X$. Moreover, $(\Delta^p_\mu, I_0(\Lambda^p))$ is essentially selfadjoint, see, for example, [7, page 692].

Let $\{E_j\}_{j=1}^d$ be a locally normal frame with dual $\{\omega_j\} \subset \Lambda^1$. We have, for any differential form $\phi$,

$$i_{\nabla V} d\phi = \sum_{i,j=1}^d i_{(\nabla V, E_i)} (\omega_j \wedge \nabla_{E_j} \phi) = \nabla_{\nabla V} \phi - \sum_{i,j=1}^d \langle \nabla V, E_i \rangle \omega_j \wedge (i_{E_i} \nabla_{E_j} \phi),$$

(3.8)

$$d i_{\nabla V} \phi = \sum_{i,j=1}^d \text{Hess}_V (E_i, E_j) \omega_i \wedge (i_{E_j} \phi) + \sum_{i,j=1}^d \langle \nabla V, E_j \rangle \omega_i \wedge (i_{E_j} \nabla_{E_i} \phi).$$

Therefore,

$$L_{\nabla V} = \sum_{i,j=1}^d \text{Hess}_V (E_i, E_j) \omega_i \wedge (i_{E_j} \phi) + \nabla_{\nabla V} := \text{Hess}_V + \nabla_{\nabla V}.$$  (3.9)

Combining this with (3.7), we obtain

$$\Delta^p_\mu = -\Box - \nabla_{\nabla V} + \mathcal{R} - \text{Hess}_V.$$  (3.10)

Let $C^\infty_{\mu,p} := \cap_{n=1}^\infty \mathcal{R}(\Delta^p_\mu)^n$. By [7, Theorem 5.3], $C^\infty_{\mu,p} \subset \Gamma(\Lambda^p)$. Let $d|_{C^\infty_{\mu,p}}$ (resp., $d^*|_{C^\infty_{\mu,p}}$) denote the restriction of $d$ (resp., $d^*$) on $C^\infty_{\mu,p}$. We have the following general result.

**Theorem 3.1.** Let $R = \mathcal{R} - \text{Hess}_V$. If either

$$\inf \sigma (-\Delta - \nabla V + R) > 0 \quad \text{or} \quad \lim_{\rho \to \infty} R > \sup_{\sigma \in \sigma_{\text{ess}}(\Delta + \nabla V)},$$  (3.11)

where we put $\sup \emptyset = -\infty$ as usual, then $\text{im} d^{p-1}$ is closed and

$$L^2_{\Delta^p}(\mu) = \text{im} (d^*_\mu)|_{_{\mathcal{R}(\Delta^p_\mu)^{p+1}}} \oplus \text{im} d^{p-1}|_{_{\mathcal{R}(d^{p-1})}} \oplus \ker (\Delta^p_\mu)|_{_{\mathcal{R}(\Delta^p_\mu)}},$$

$$C^\infty_{\mu,p} = \text{im} d^*_\mu|_{C^\infty_{\mu,p+1}} \oplus \text{im} d|_{C^\infty_{\mu,p-1}} \oplus \ker (\Delta^p_\mu)|_{_{\mathcal{R}(\Delta^p_\mu)}},$$

$$\ker (\Delta^p_\mu)|_{_{\mathcal{R}(\Delta^p_\mu)}} \cong \frac{\ker d^*|_{_{\mathcal{R}(d^{p-1})}}}{\text{im} d^{p-1}|_{_{\mathcal{R}(d^{p-1})}}} \cong \frac{d^*|_{_{C^\infty_{\mu,p-1}}}}{\text{im} d|_{C^\infty_{\mu,p-1}}},$$  (3.12)

**Proof.** By Theorems 2.1(1) and 2.3(3), each condition in Theorem 3.1 implies $0 \notin \sigma_{\text{ess}}(\Delta^p_\mu)$. Then the proof is completed by some classical results (see, e.g., [7, Theorem 5.10, Corollary 5.11] and [8, Corollary 10]).

**Proof of Theorem 1.4.** We have

$$(\Delta - \nabla U) e^{\varepsilon U} = \varepsilon [\Delta U - |\nabla U|^2 + \varepsilon |\nabla U|^2] e^{\varepsilon U}, \quad \varepsilon > 0.$$  (3.13)
If (1.9) holds, then there exists $\varepsilon \in (0,1)$ such that $\Delta U - (1-\varepsilon)|\nabla U|^2 \to -\infty$ as $U \to \infty$. By the proof of Theorem 1.2 in [25] (or the paragraph after it), we have

$$\inf \left\{ \int_M |\nabla u|^2 e^{-u} \, dx : 0 \neq u \in C^\infty_0(M), \ u = 0 \text{ on } \{U \leq n\} \right\}$$

$$\geq \varepsilon \inf_{U \geq n} \{(1-\varepsilon)|\nabla U|^2 - \Delta U\} \to \infty$$

as $n \to \infty$. Since $U + V$ is bounded, we have $\inf \sigma(-\Delta V)|_{\{U > n\}} \to \infty$ as $n \to \infty$. Therefore, $\sigma_{\text{ess}}(\Delta + \nabla V) = \emptyset$ by Donnelly-Li’s decomposition principle, and hence $\alpha > 0$. The proof is completed by Theorem 3.1.

Finally, we would like to introduce one more example to check Theorem 3.1, for which Theorem 3.1 applies but Theorem 1.4 (hence [1, Theorem 5.1]) does not.

**Example 3.2.** Let $M$ be oriented noncompact with a pole $o$, and $\rho$ the Riemannian distance function to $o$. Assume that the Ricci curvature is bounded below by $-k$ for some $k \geq 0$, and the sectional curvatures are nonpositive. Take $V \in C^2(M)$ such that $V = -c_1 \rho^\delta + c_2$ outside a neighborhood of $o$, where $c_1 > 0$, $\delta \geq 1$, and let $c_2 \in \mathbb{R}$ be such that $\mu$ is a probability measure. By Hessian comparison theorem, we have $\limsup_{p \to \infty} \text{Hess}_V \leq 0$. Moreover, by Laplacian comparison theorem, one has $\limsup_{p \to \infty} L\rho \leq \sqrt{k(d-1)} - c_1$ for $\delta = 1$ but $\limsup_{p \to \infty} L\rho = -\infty$ for $\delta > 1$, where $L := \Delta + \nabla V$. Then, by Example 2.7 and Theorem 3.1, we have $0 \notin \sigma_{\text{ess}}(\Delta^p)$ and hence the decompositions in (3.12) hold provided at least one of the following is fulfilled:

1. $\delta > 1$ and $R$ is bounded below.
2. $\delta = 1$ and $\liminf_{p \to \infty} R > -(1/4) (c_1 - \sqrt{k(d-1)})^2$.

**Appendix**

**Spectrum estimates on Hilbert bundles.** Let $(E, \mathcal{F}, \mu)$ be a complete measure space and $H := \{(H_x, \langle \cdot, \cdot \rangle_x) : x \in E\}$ a family of separable real Hilbert spaces (i.e., a Hilbert bundle over $E$). Assume that there is a (possibly finite) sequence $\{e_j\} \subset \prod_{x \in E} H_x$ such that for $\mu$-a.e. $x \in E$, $\{e_j(x)\}$ is an orthonormal basis in $H_x$. Set

$$\mathcal{M} = \left\{ f \in \prod_{x \in E} H_x : \langle f, e_j \rangle \text{ is } \mathcal{F}\text{-measurable for all } j \right\},$$

where $\langle f, e_j \rangle(x) := \langle f(x), e_j(x) \rangle_x$. We call $\mathcal{M}$ the space of $\mathcal{F}$-measurable sections of $H$.

For $p \geq 1$, let $L^p_H(\mu) = \{ f \in \mathcal{M} : \|f\| \in L^p(\mu) \}$, where $L^p(\mu)$ denotes the $L^p$-space of real-valued functions. As usual, we denote $\mu(u) = \int_E u \, d\mu$ for $u \in L^1(\mu)$ and regard $f = g$ in $L^p_H(\mu)$ provided $f = g$ $\mu$-a.e. Then $L^1_H(\mu)$ is a Hilbert space with the inner product $\langle f, g \rangle_{L^2_H(\mu)} := \mu(\langle f, g \rangle)$. We refer to [24] for more information on Hilbert bundles.

Recall that $A \subset L^p_H(\mu)$ is said to be $L^p$-uniformly integrable if

$$\lim sup_{r \to \infty} \{ \mu(\|f\|^p 1_{\{|f| > r\}}) : f \in A \} = 0.$$
A linear operator $P$ on $L^p_H(\mu)$ is called $L^p$-uniformly integrable if $\{Pf : \mu(|f|^p) \leq 1\}$ is so. Moreover, denote by $\sigma(P)$ and $\sigma_{\text{ess}}(P)$, respectively, the spectrum and the essential spectrum of a linear operator $P$.

Let $(\hat{\mathcal{E}}, \mathcal{D}(\hat{\mathcal{E}}))$ be a positive-definite symmetric closed form on $L^2_H(\mu)$, and let $\tilde{P}_t$ and $(\tilde{L}, \mathcal{D}(\tilde{L}))$ denote, respectively, the associated contraction semigroup and its generator. It is well known that $\tilde{L}$ is selfadjoint and negative defined on $L^2_H(\mu)$, and (cf. [17] or [18])

$$\hat{\mathcal{E}}(f, g) = -\mu((Lg, f)), \quad f, g \in \mathcal{D}(\hat{\mathcal{E}}),$$

and

$$\frac{d}{dt}\tilde{P}_tf = \tilde{L}\tilde{P}_tf = \tilde{P}_tL_f, \quad t \geq 0, \quad f \in \mathcal{D}(\tilde{L}).$$

We will study the essential spectrum of $\tilde{L}$ by using the following Poincaré-type inequality:

$$\mu(|f|^2) \leq r\hat{\mathcal{E}}(f, f) + \beta(r)\mu(|f|^2), \quad f \in \mathcal{D}(\hat{\mathcal{E}}), \quad r > r_0,$$

where $r_0 \geq 0$ is a constant and $\beta$ is a positive function defined on $(r_0, \infty)$. We may assume that $\beta$ in (A.4) is decreasing since the inequality remains true with $\beta$ replaced by $\hat{\beta}(r) := \inf \{\beta(s) : s \in (r_0, r]\}$ for $r > r_0$. A key step of the study is the following lemma, which extends Lemma 3.1 in [14] and hence an earlier result due to Wu [30, 31].

**Lemma A.1.** Assume that $\mu$ is a probability measure and $p \geq 1$ is fixed. Let $P$ be a bounded linear operator on $L^p_H(\mu)$ with transition density $p(x, y)$, that is, for $\mu$-a.e. $x, y \in E$, $p(x, y) : H_y \rightarrow H_x$ is a bounded linear operator such that

$$Pf(x) = \int_E p(x, y)f(y)\mu(dy), \quad f \in L^p_H(\mu).$$

Suppose that for $\mu$-a.e. $x \in E$,

$$\sum_j \left(\int_E |p(x, y)^* e_j(x) | \mu(dy)\right)^2 < \infty,$$

where $p(x, y)^*$ is the adjoint operator of $p(x, y)$. If $\{Pf : \|f\|_{\infty} \leq 1\}$ is $L^p$-uniformly integrable, then $P(A) := \{Pf : f \in A\}$ is relatively compact in $L^p_H(\mu)$, for any $L^p$-uniformly integrable set $A \subset L^p_H(\mu)$.

**Proof.** We will use the following Bourbaki theorem (see [6, page 112]). “A bounded set in the dual space $B'$ of a separable Banach space $B$ is compact and metrisable with respect to the weak topology $\sigma(B', B)$.” If $P(A)$ is not relatively compact in $L^p_H(\mu)$, then there exist $\varepsilon > 0$ and a sequence $\{f_n\}_{n=1}^\infty \subset A$ such that $\|Pf_n - Pf_m\|_{L^p_H(\mu)} \geq \varepsilon, n \neq m$. Since $P$ is bounded and $A$ is $L^p$-uniformly integrable, we may take $K > 0$ such that

$$\|Pf_n - Pf_m\|_{L^p_H(\mu)} \geq \varepsilon/2, \quad n \neq m,$$
where \( f_{n,K} = f_n 1_{|f_n| \leq K} \). We fix a version of \( f_n \) for each \( n \) and let \( \mathcal{F}' \) be the \( \mu \)-completion of the \( \sigma \)-field \( \sigma(\{(f_{n,K}, e_j) : n, j \geq 1\}) \) which is \( \mu \)-separable. Let

\[
\mathcal{M}' = \left\{ f \in \prod_{x \in X} H_x : (f, e_j) \text{ is } \mathcal{F}'\text{-measurable for all } j \geq 1 \right\} \subset \mathcal{M}. \tag{A.8}
\]

Let \( L_{\mu}^p(\mu)' \) be defined as \( L_{\mu}^p(\mu) \) for \( \mathcal{F}' \) and \( \mathcal{M}' \) in place of \( \mathcal{F} \) and \( \mathcal{M} \), respectively, which is separable since \( \mathcal{F}' \) is \( \mu \)-separable. For \( f \in L_{\mu}^1(\mu)' \), let \( \mu(f|\mathcal{F}') = \sum_j \mu(\langle f, e_j \rangle | \mathcal{F}') e_j \), where \( \mu(\cdot|\mathcal{F}') \) is the conditional expectation with respect to \( \mu \) under \( \mathcal{F}' \). By Bourbaki theorem with \( B = L_{\mu}^1(\mu)' \), there exists \( f \in L_{\mu}^\infty(\mu)' \) such that \( f_{n_i,K} \to f \) weakly for some \( n_i \uparrow \infty \), that is, for any \( g \in L_{\mu}^1(\mu)' \), one has \( \mu(\langle f_{n_i,K}, g \rangle) \to \mu(\langle f, g \rangle) \). Noting that for any \( g \in L_{\mu}^1(\mu) \) and any \( f' \in L_{\mu}^1(\mu)' \), one has \( \mu(\langle f', g \rangle) = \mu(\langle \mu(g|\mathcal{F}'), f' \rangle) \), we obtain \( \mu(\langle f_{n_i,K}, g \rangle) \to \mu(\langle f, g \rangle) \) for all \( g \in L_{\mu}^1(\mu) \). Then for \( \mu \)-a.e. \( x \),

\[
\frac{\| Pf(x) - Pf_{n_i,K}(x) \|_X^2}{X} = \sum_j \langle Pf_{n_i,K}(x) - Pf(x), e_j(x) \rangle_X^2 \\
= \sum_j \left( \int_E \langle f_{n_i,K}(y) - f(y), p(x,y) e_j(x) \rangle_y \mu(\mathrm{d}y) \right)^2 \\
\leq (K + \| f \|_\infty)^2 \sum_j \left( \int_E | p(x,y) e_j(x) |_y \mu(\mathrm{d}y) \right)^2.
\]

By (A.6) and the dominated convergence theorem, we obtain, for \( \mu \)-a.e. \( x \),

\[
\lim_{n_i \to \infty} \frac{\| Pf(x) - Pf_{n_i,K}(x) \|_X^2}{X} = \sum_j \lim_{n_i \to \infty} \mu(\langle f_{n_i,K} - f, p(x,\cdot) e_j(x) \rangle) = 0. \tag{A.10}
\]

Since \( \{ \| Pf_{n_i,K} \| : i \geq 1 \} \) is uniformly integrable and \( \mu \) is a probability measure, \( Pf_{n_i,K} \to Pf \) in \( L_{\mu}^p(\mu)' \). This is a contradiction to (A.7). \( \square \)

Directly following an argument in [14] (see also [29, Theorem 3.1]), we obtain the following result.

**Theorem A.2.** Assume that \( \mu \) is a probability measure. If \( \sigma_{\text{ess}}(-\tilde{L}) \subset [\tau_0^{-1}, \infty) \) for some \( \tau_0 > 0 \), then (A.4) holds for some \( \beta \in C(\tau_0, \infty) \). Conversely, if \( \tilde{P}_t \) has transition density satisfying (A.6) for each \( t > 0 \), then (A.4) implies \( \sigma_{\text{ess}}(-\tilde{L}) \subset [\tau_0^{-1}, \infty) \).

Next, we turn to estimate eigenvalues of \( \tilde{L} \). Let \( \lambda = \inf \sigma_{\text{ess}}(-\tilde{L}) \), where we put \( \inf \emptyset = \infty \). Assume that \( \sigma(-\tilde{L}) \cap [0,\lambda) \neq \emptyset \), where \( \sigma(-\tilde{L}) \) denotes the spectrum of \( -\tilde{L} \). We list all eigenvalues of \( -\tilde{L} \) (counting multiplicity) in \( [0,\lambda] \) as follows: \( \lambda_1 \leq \lambda_2 \leq \cdots \leq \lambda_n \leq \cdots \). We will follow the line of [29] where the eigenvalues estimation was studied on real-valued function spaces.

**Lemma A.3.** Let \( \tilde{\lambda} \) and \( \{ \lambda_n \} \) be as above. Assume that \( \tilde{P}_t \) has transition density \( \tilde{p}_t(x,y) \) and there exists \( l \in \mathbb{N} \) such that \( \dim H_x = l, \mu \)-a.e. \( x \). Let \( \{ f_i \} \) be the family of normalized
eigenvectors for \(\{\lambda_i\}\). Then

\[
I_E \|\tilde{\phi}_{t/2} (\cdot, y)\|_{\text{op}}^2 \mu(dy) \geq e^{-\lambda_n t} \sum_{i=1}^n |f_i|^2
\]

(A.11)

for any \(n \leq \# \{i : \lambda_i < \tilde{\lambda}\}\).

**Proof.** Let \(x \in E\) be such that \(l = \dim H_x\) and \(\{e_j(x)\}\) is an orthonormal basis in \(H_x\). The proof is then similar to that of Lemma 2.2.

**Theorem A.4.** In the situation of Lemma A.3, assume that \(\mu\) is a probability measure. If there exists \(t > 0\) such that

\[
C(t) := \int_{E \times E} \|\tilde{\phi}_{t/2} (x, y)\|_{\text{op}}^2 \mu(dx) \mu(dy) < \infty,
\]

(A.12)

then \(\sigma_{\text{ess}}(\hat{L}) = \emptyset\) and hence \(\tilde{\lambda} = \infty\); equivalently, (A.4) holds for \(r_0 = 0\) and some \(\beta \in C(0, \infty)\) by Theorem A.2. Moreover,

\[
\lambda_n \geq \frac{1}{t} \log \frac{n}{lC(t)}, \quad n \geq 1.
\]

(A.13)

Consequently, \(\# \{i : \lambda_i \leq \lambda\} \leq lC(t) e^{\lambda t}\) for each \(\lambda \geq 0\).

**Proof.** If \(C(t) < \infty\), then \(\tilde{\phi}_{t/2}\) is \(L^2\)-uniformly integrable. By Lemma A.1, \(\tilde{\phi}_{t/2}\) is compact and hence \(\sigma_{\text{ess}}(\hat{L}) = \emptyset\). Next, by (A.11) we obtain \(lC(t) \geq n e^{-\lambda_n t}\). \(\Box\)

A natural way to apply the above results is to compare \(\hat{\omega}\) and \(\tilde{\phi}\) with the correspondences on the \(L^2\)-space of functions, so that known results on functions can be used. The next result is implied by [3, Theorem 16] (see also [23] for related results), and the final one is a result on the existence of transition density for operators on \(L^2(\mu)\).

**Theorem A.5.** Let \((\hat{\omega}, \mathcal{D}(\hat{\omega}))\) be a symmetric closed form on \(L^2(\mu)\) which is bounded from below. Assume that the associated semigroup \(P_t\) is positivity-preserving. Then the following two statements are equivalent:

1. \(|\hat{\phi}_t f| \leq P_t |f|\) for all \(t > 0\) and \(f \in L^2_{\text{H}}(\mu)\);
2. if \(f \in \mathcal{D}(\hat{\omega})\), one has \(|f| \in \mathcal{D}(\hat{\omega})\) and \(\mathcal{E}(|f|, |g|) \leq |\hat{\omega}(f, g)|\) for all \(f, g\) in a core of \(\hat{L}\) such that \((f, g)_{L^2_{\text{H}}(\mu)} = \mu(|f| \cdot |g|)\).

**Proposition A.6.** Assume that \(\mu\) is a probability measure. Let \(\hat{P}\) be a bounded linear operator on \(L^2(\mu)\) and \(p\) a nonnegative measurable function on \(E \times E\) such that

\[
Pu = \int p(\cdot, y) u(y) \mu(dy)
\]

(A.14)

provides a bounded linear operator \(P\) on \(L^2(\mu)\). If \(l := \# \{e_j\} < \infty\) and \(|\hat{\phi}_t f| \leq P_t |f|\) for any \(f \in L^2_{\text{H}}(\mu)\), then \(\hat{P}\) has transition density \(\hat{p}\) satisfying \(\|\hat{p}(x, y)\|_{\text{op}} \leq l p(x, y)\).

If, in addition, \(E\) is a metric space and for each \(x \in E\), \(\hat{p}(x, \cdot)\) and \(p(x, \cdot)\) are continuous and locally bounded on the support of \(\mu\), that is, for any \(y\) in the support of \(\mu\) and any unit \(\omega \in H_y\), there exists \(e \in \mathcal{M}\) with \(e(y) = \omega\) such that, in a neighborhood of \(y\), one has \(|e| = 1\) and \(\hat{p}(x, \cdot)e(\cdot), p(x, \cdot)\) are bounded and continuous, then \(\|\hat{p}(x, y)\|_{\text{op}} \leq p(x, y)\).
Proof. For any \(i,j \in \mathbb{N}\) with \(i,j \leq l\), let \(\mu^{ij}\) be a set function on \(\mathcal{F} \times \mathcal{F}\) defined by

\[
\mu^{ij}(A) = \int_{A} \langle e_{i}(x), \tilde{P}(1_{A(x)}e_{j})(x) \rangle \mu(dx), \quad A \in \mathcal{F} \times \mathcal{F},
\]

where \(A_{1} = \{x \in E : \text{there exists } y \in E \text{ such that } (x,y) \in A\}\) and \(A(x) = \{y \in E : (x,y) \in A\}\). Since \(\tilde{P}\) is bounded, it is easy to check that \(\mu^{ij}\) is a signed measure. Moreover, by Jordan’s decomposition theorem and that \(|\tilde{P}f| \leq P|f|\) for any \(f \in L^{2}(\mu)\), we have \(|\mu^{ij}| = (\mu^{ij})^{+} + (\mu^{ij})^{-} \leq p\mu \times \mu\). Then \(\mu^{ij}\) is absolutely continuous with respect to \(\mu \times \mu\) with density \(p^{ij}\) satisfying \(|p^{ij}| \leq p\). Define \(\tilde{p}(x,y) : H_{x} \rightarrow H_{y}\) by

\[
\tilde{p}(x,y)\omega = \sum_{i,j=1}^{l} p^{ij}(x,y) \langle \omega, e_{j}(y) \rangle e_{i}(x), \quad \omega \in H_{y}.
\]

(A.16)

It is easy to check that \(\|\tilde{p}(x,y)\|_{op} \leq l p(x,y)\) for any \(x,y \in E\) and \(\tilde{p}\) is a transition density of \(\tilde{P}\). Indeed, for any \(f,g \in L^{2}_{H}(\mu)\), we have

\[
\langle g, \tilde{P}f \rangle_{L^{2}_{H}(\mu)} = \sum_{i,j=1}^{l} \int_{E} \langle \tilde{P}(\langle f,e_{j}\rangle e_{j}), \langle g,e_{i}\rangle e_{i} \rangle d\mu
\]

\[
= \sum_{i,j=1}^{l} \int_{E \times E} \langle f,e_{j}\rangle(y) \langle g,e_{i}\rangle(x) \mu^{ij}(dx dy)
\]

\[
= \sum_{i,j=1}^{l} \int_{E \times E} p^{ij}(x,y) \langle f,e_{j}\rangle(y) \langle g,e_{i}\rangle(x) \mu(dx) \mu(dy)
\]

\[=
\]

\[
\langle g, \tilde{P}(\cdot,y)f(y) \mu(dy) \rangle_{L^{2}_{H}(\mu)}.
\]

(A.17)

Next, let the additional conditions hold. For \(x \in E\), \(y\) in the support of \(\mu\), and any \(\omega \in H_{y}\) with \(|\omega|_{y} = 1\), let \(e \in \mathcal{M}\) be such that \(e(y) = \omega\), \(|e| = 1\), and \(\tilde{p}(x,\cdot)e(\cdot)\) and \(p(x,\cdot)\) are bounded and continuous in a neighborhood \(N_{y}\) of \(y\). Let \(\{f_{n}\}\) be a sequence of nonnegative continuous functions with supports contained in \(N_{y}\) such that \(f_{n}\mu \rightharpoonup \delta_{y}\) weakly as \(n \rightarrow \infty\). We have

\[
\left| \int_{E} [\tilde{p}(x,z)e(z)] f_{n}(z) \mu(dz) \right|_{x} = |\tilde{P}(f_{n}e)(x)|_{x} \leq Pf_{n}(x)
\]

\[
= \int_{E} p(x,z) f_{n}(z) \mu(dz).
\]

(A.18)

By letting \(n \rightarrow \infty\), we obtain \(|\tilde{p}(x,y)\omega|_{x} \leq p(x,y)\). Therefore, \(\|\tilde{p}\|_{op} \leq p\) since we may take \(\tilde{p}(x,\cdot) = 0\) outside of the support of \(\mu\). \(\Box\)

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ON GROMOV’S THEOREM AND \( L^2 \)-HODGE DECOMPOSITION

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