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Real-Time Pipe Inspection Robot Prototype Development

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Abstract

Concrete pipes are used throughout the world in many different industries to transport wastewater. These pipes are prone to erosion which can sometimes be severe, with a large cost of repair or replacement. This presents the need to inspect the pipes for erosion. Robots that are used to detect cracks and holes in a pipe already exist, but those that are used to inspect for erosion lack the ability to inspect in real-time allowing for high-speed, fully-autonomous inspection. Furthermore, none of these systems provide a stable platform that can traverse a severely eroded pipe while passively resisting rolling. A mechanical platform capable of doing just this was designed through a mathematical study. This concept was then tested by varying key design and environmental factors such as the leg angle, starting orientation, and payload weight and offset to determine the effect on the robot's movements and ability to resist rolling. It was found that the smaller the leg angle the less likely it was for the robot to roll but the more power was required to drive the robot. A leg angle of 20 degrees was found to be a good compromise between these two factors under varying conditions, although further study should be conducted over longer pipe lengths and real operating conditions. A real-time inspection system based on triangulation of a camera image and a laser line on the pipe surface was designed and optimized for implementation on a high speed FPGA. This was then tested and it was found that the inspection system was capable of accurately measuring erosion with a 0.3-0.9mm width resolution and a 0.2-0.6mm depth resolution for pipe diameters of 200-600mm. With a longitudinal resolution of 10mm this system could inspect at five metres per minute, and this could be doubled with suitable compression. This research provides the basis for developing an accurate, real-time pipe inspection robot. It also suggests an approach for developing a prototype capable of being used in varying diameter pipes consisting of an inspection system, an anti-rolling robot platform with position sensing, and a wireless communication system, with 3D result display software. Three research articles have been published from this research. Two of the articles are based on real time image acquisition and processing [1, 2]. The third article is on pipe robot mechanical system design [3].

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Contents

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgments.....	iii
List of Figures	ix
List of Tables	xi
List of Abbreviations	xiii
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Research topic.....	3
1.3 Scope of research.....	4
1.4 Organisation of dissertation	4
Chapter 2 Literature Review	7
2.1 Pipe inspection robotic systems	7
2.1.1 Ground runner robots.....	7
2.1.2 Wall supported robots	7
2.1.3 Helical or screw robots	8
2.1.4 Inchworm robots.....	9
2.1.5 Walking leg robots	10
2.2 Measurement methods	10
2.2.1 Closed circuit television CCTV.....	10
2.2.2 Ultrasonic based systems.....	11
2.2.3 Thermography.....	11
2.2.4 Ground penetrating radar	11
2.2.5 Structured lighting	12
2.2.6 Mechanical feeler.....	12
Chapter 3 Proposed Pipe Profile Capturing System.....	15
3.1 Structured lighting working principle	15
3.2 CMOS and CCD sensors.....	17
3.3 Drive system.....	18
3.3.1 Motor considerations.....	18
3.3.2 DC motor control	21
3.3.3 Power source	22
3.4 Position sensors	24

3.5 Control & processing system	25
3.6 Communication system	27
3.7 Concept design.....	28
Chapter 4 Anti-Rolling Robot Platform Design	31
4.1 Anti-rolling mechanism design	31
4.2 Robot motor selection and battery calculations	39
Chapter 5 Image System	43
5.1 Setup	43
5.1.1 Measuring erosion	43
5.1.2 Configuration 1: Camera set vertically.....	46
5.1.3 Configuration 2: Laser set vertically.....	47
5.1.4 Configuration comparison	48
5.1.5 Mathematical model development	49
5.2 Algorithm	52
5.2.1 Algorithm development.....	52
5.2.2 High speed considerations.....	54
5.2.3 Algorithm implementation	55
5.3 Reference profile	59
5.3.1 Non-linear optimisation.....	59
5.3.2 Relationship and dependency testing.....	61
Chapter 6 Communication System and Software Development	63
6.1 Communication system	63
6.1.1 XBee module	63
6.1.2 Using RS232 for serial operation.....	65
6.2 Data compression techniques.....	68
6.3 Pipe profile reconstruction	69
Chapter 7 Results and Analysis	73
7.1 Anti-rolling mechanical system testing.....	73
7.2 Image system testing	76
Chapter 8 Discussion and Conclusions.....	83
References	89
Appendix A – C# 3D Erosion Display Application.....	97
C# Program (Program.cs)	97
3D Platform (Game1.cs).....	97

GUI Form (Form1.cs).....	104
Effects File (effects.fx).....	107
Appendix B – Matlab Optimisation Code.....	113
Optimisation - Main	113
Optimisation – Function.....	114
Calibration Results Display.....	116
Relationship Testing.....	118
Determine X and Y values for pipe radius with no erosion	124
Erosion profile to depth – calculation and use of scale factors k1 and k2	125
Appendix C – FPGA Handle-C Code.....	127
Camera.hcc	127
Display.hcc	129
Filter.hch	132
Filter.hcc.....	132
Profile.hch	132
Profile.hcc	133
Peaks.hcc.....	139
RS232.hch	141
RS232.hcc.....	141
Appendix D - Anti-rolling Test Results	145
Appendix E – Image System Scale Factors	149
Appendix F – Battery Calculation Data	156

List of Figures

Figure 1.1 – Concrete wastewater pipe with water stains showing erosion concentration	1
Figure 1.2 – Concrete wastewater pipe showing extensive erosion with entire bottom of pipe eroded	1
Figure 2.1 – Ground runner robot [3]	7
Figure 2.2 – Wall supported robot [7]	8
Figure 2.3 – Screw type robot with screw pattern shown [10]	8
Figure 2.4 – Spring type helical robot [11].....	9
Figure 2.5 – Inchworm robot with clamp and extension modules [12].....	9
Figure 2.6 – Walking pipe robot with two-link legs [15].....	10
Figure 3.1 – Structured lighting principle	16
Figure 3.2 – Laser line produced by shining laser through cylindrical glass prism [25].....	17
Figure 3.3 – Dot matrix pattern for determining object profile [26].....	17
Figure 3.4 – Operation of DC motor [30].....	19
Figure 3.5 – Operation of brushless DC motor [31].....	20
Figure 3.6 – H-bridge showing forward and reverse control [32]	21
Figure 3.7 – H-bridge with fly-back diodes and pull up/down resistors [33]	22
Figure 3.8 – Comparison of different battery types (Wh/kg vs Wh/L) [35].....	23
Figure 3.9 – FPGA hardware architecture and logic cell [44]	26
Figure 4.1 – Anti-rolling pipe robot concept.....	31
Figure 4.2 – Concept design of anti-rolling system.....	32
Figure 4.3 – θ -Normal force plot for a unit mass	33
Figure 4.4 – Mechanical platform with payload offset.....	34
Figure 4.5 – Effect on offset distance (D) of leg angle (θ) and coefficient of friction (μ).....	35
Figure 4.6 – Effect on offset distance (D) of pipe radius (R) and coefficient of friction (μ).....	36
Figure 4.7 – Effect on offset distance (D) of leg angle (θ) for different levels of friction coefficient (μ)	37
Figure 4.8 – Effect on offset distance (D) of payload weight (Wload) for different levels of friction coefficient (μ).....	38
Figure 4.9 – Effect on offset distance (D) of pipe radius (R) for different levels of friction coefficient (μ)	39
Figure 4.10 – Normal force of tyre against pipe wall.....	40
Figure 4.11 – Mass/capacity comparison of lithium and lead acid batteries	42
Figure 5.1 – Coordinate definition	43
Figure 5.2 – Pinhole Model [57].....	44
Figure 5.3 – Image coordinates definition [57].....	45
Figure 5.4 – Two primary configurations of laser and camera	45
Figure 5.5 – Image taken using configuration 1.....	46
Figure 5.6 – Image taken using configuration 2.....	47
Figure 5.7 – Comparison of occlusions occurring in configuration 1 and 2.....	48
Figure 5.8 – New coordinate definition	49
Figure 5.9 – Camera Axes.....	51
Figure 5.10 – Captured image.....	53
Figure 5.11 – Reference profile (green) and laser stripe (red)	54
Figure 5.12 – Difference between reference and laser	54

Figure 5.13 – Terasic DE0 FPGA development board [58] with Terasic D5M camera [59]	55
Figure 5.14 – Processing logic for measuring pipe profile	56
Figure 5.15 – Bayer pattern [58]	57
Figure 5.16 – Red component	58
Figure 5.17 – Green component (shown as red for comparison)	58
Figure 5.18 – Red minus green	58
Figure 5.19 – Smoothing (red) and profile (green)	58
Figure 5.20 – Processing logic to flag occlusions and derive erosion profile.....	58
Figure 5.21 – Image data (black) along with curve generated from initial parameters (red)	60
Figure 5.22 – Image data (black) along with curve generated from optimised parameters (red)	61
Figure 6.1 – Basic ZigBee network topology [59].....	63
Figure 6.2 – API packet structure [53]	64
Figure 6.3 – RS232 Procedure	65
Figure 6.4 – RS232 transmission [61].....	67
Figure 6.5 – RS232 lines including hardware handshaking [62]	67
Figure 6.6 – Pipe profile reconstruction procedure.....	70
Figure 6.7 – Pipe erosion 2D colour map	70
Figure 6.8 – 3D profile of pipe showing height colour map.....	71
Figure 6.9 – Screenshot of 3D display application	72
Figure 7.1 – Rig developed for testing anti-rolling system	73
Figure 7.2 – Definition of anti-rolling test parameters	75
Figure 7.3 – Test rig used for testing image system	76
Figure 7.4 – Reference profile from test setup (red)	77
Figure 7.5 – Cross section with of example object with measurements	77
Figure 7.6 – Generated profile of above object (blue)	78
Figure 7.7 – Generated erosion profile of example object (green)	79
Figure 7.8 – Object used for testing.....	79
Figure 7.9 – Generated erosion map of pipe and object – colour map disabled	80
Figure 7.10 – Normalised erosion profile of test object (green) in mm	81

List of Tables

Table 3.1 – H-bridge switch positions and outcomes	21
Table 3.2 – Table showing common XBee modules and specifications.....	28
Table 5.1 – Initial parameters and optimised parameters along with total error squared for each....	61
Table 7.1 – Anti-rolling test results	74
Table 7.2 – Real measurements vs profile calculated measurements	81

List of Abbreviations

AC	Alternating current
BLDC	Brushless DC
CCD	Charge-coupled device
CCTV	Closed circuit television
CMOS	Complementary metal-oxide-semiconductor
DC	Direct current
FPGA	Field programmable gate array
IC	Integrated circuit
IMU	Inertial measurement unit
MOS	Metal-oxide-semiconductor
MOSFET	Metal-oxide semiconductor field effect transistor
PAN	Personal area network
PCB	Printed circuit board
PWM	Pulse width modulation
RLE	Run length encoding
UART	Universal asynchronous receiver/transmitter
VGA	Video graphics array