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Real-time measurement of atmospheric parameters for the 127-element adaptive optics system of 1.8-m telescope

Jie Mu (母杰)1,2,3*, Wenjia Zheng (郑文佳)1,2, Mei Li (李梅)1,2, and Changhui Rao (饶长辉)1,2

1 Laboratory on Adaptive Optics, Institute of Optics and Electronics, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Chengdu 610209, China
2 Key Laboratory on Adaptive Optics, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Chengdu 610209, China
3 Graduate University of Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing 100049, China
* Corresponding author: mujiebest@163.com

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A real-time method for measuring atmospheric parameters based on co-processor field-programmable gate array (FPGA) and main processor digital signal processing (DSP) is proposed for ground-based telescopes with adaptive optics (AO) systems. Coherence length, outer scale, average wind speed, and coherence time are estimated according to closed-loop data on the residual slopes and the corrected voltages of AO systems. This letter introduces the principle and architecture design of the proposed method, which is successfully applied in the 127-element AO system of the 1.8-m telescope of Yunnan Astronomical Observatory. The method enables real-time atmospheric observations with the same object and path of the AO system. This method is also applicable to extended objects.

Atmospheric turbulence parameters are primary factors in astronomical site surveys. For instance, the site survey project in western China1,2, the telescope plans for Antarctic Dome A3,4, and the new-generation solar telescope site survey5 for astronomical observations are all based on the evaluation of atmospheric turbulence parameters. Given that atmospheric conditions rapidly change, atmospheric turbulence considerably fluctuates with time. Although adaptive optics (AO) systems can be used to correct the dynamic wave-front distortion caused by atmospheric turbulence, the resolution of a telescope continues to be affected by atmospheric turbulence6. Hence, the real-time monitoring and recording of atmospheric turbulence parameters can improve AO systems.

Outer scale $L_0$, average wind speed $v$, coherence length $r_0$, and coherence time $t_0$ are used to describe atmospheric turbulence. The traditional method of measuring atmospheric parameters is the differential image motion monitor (DIMM) method7,8, but it is suitable only for fixed objects. Moreover, the $r_0$ and $L_0$ measured by DIMM do not correspond to the same type of atmospheric turbulence, which is corrected by AO systems.

Nasmyth adaptive optics system (NAOS) uses six digital signal processing (DSPs) to calculate the abovementioned parameters9, but some frames are lost because NAOS is limited by the processing speed of DSP (TMS320C40). In standard platform for adaptive optics (SPARTA), the processor cluster is used to calculate the atmospheric parameters10, but the sampling frequency of the AO system is limited by Ethernet speed. To address these problems, we propose a real-time measurement system based on field-programmable gate array (FPGA) and DSP. In the system, open-loop data can be reconstructed rapidly by FPGA with the pipelining and multi-channel technique, after which atmospheric parameters can be calculated by DSP. This measurement method is successfully applied in the 127-element AO system installed on a 1.8-m telescope that the Yunnan Astronomical Observatory uses for stellar observations.

Measuring the atmospheric parameters in a closed-looped AO system necessitates the recovery of information on atmospheric turbulence. According to the controlling relationship in an AO system, $(k-2)$th frame open-loop Zernike coefficients $\{a_{i,rec}^{k-2}\}$ can be reconstructed from $k$th frame residual slopes $\{g_j^k\}$ and $(k-2)$th frame corrected voltages $\{u_j^{k-2}\}$:

$$\{a_{i,rec}^{k-2}\} = VZ\{u_j^{k-2}\} + SZ\{g_j^k\},$$  \hspace{1cm} (1)

where $SZ$ is the projection matrix of residual slopes and $VZ$ is the projection matrix of corrected voltages.

The continuous $L$ frames of the reconstructed open-loop Zernike coefficients $\{a_{i,rec}\}$ are regarded as a group for temporal autocorrelation $C_{i,rec}(\tau)$. Because noise and atmospheric turbulence are temporally decorrelated, $C_{i,rec}(\tau)$ can be written as:

$$\begin{align*}
\{C_{i,rec}(\tau) = \langle a_{i,rec}(t) a_{i,rec}(t + \tau) \rangle \\
C_{i,rec}(\tau) = C_{i,turb}(\tau) + \sigma_{a_{i,noise}}^2 \delta(\tau)
\end{align*},$$  \hspace{1cm} (2)

where $\sigma_{a_{i,noise}}^2$ is the noise variance and $\delta(t)$ is the Dirac function. A fit of $C_{i,rec}(\tau) > 0$ enables the estimation of $C_{i,turb}(0)$ by extrapolation. The difference between $C_{i,rec}(0)$ and $C_{i,turb}(0)$ yields $\sigma_{a_{i,noise}}^2$. Hence, we can obtain the real-time open-loop Zernike coefficient variance $\sigma_{a_{i,rec}}^2$ with the noise variance removed.

According to Noll10, atmospheric turbulence variance $\sigma_{a_{i,turb,p}}^2$ only depends on radial order $p$ (the parameter that reflects the radial spatial frequency of Zernike polynomials). Thus, it can be derived from the average of all $\sigma_{a_{i,rec}}^2$ values across radial orders. The relationship...
among $\sigma_{turb,p}^2$, $r_0$, and $L_0$ is given by\textsuperscript{11,12,13}

$$
\begin{align*}
\sigma_{turb,p=2}^2 &= 2.34 \times 10^{-2} \left( \frac{D}{r_0} \right)^{5/3} \\
\times 1 - 0.39 \times \left( \frac{2\pi D}{L_0} \right) + 0.27 \left( \frac{2\pi D}{L_0} \right)^{7/3} \\
\sigma_{turb,p=3}^2 &= 0.756(p+1) \Gamma[p-5/6] \Gamma[p+23/6] \left( \frac{D}{r_0} \right)^{5/3} \\
\times 1 - \frac{0.38}{(p-\frac{1}{2})(p+\frac{4}{3})} \left( \frac{2\pi D}{L_0} \right)^2 \\
\end{align*}
$$

(3)

where $D$ is the diameter of the telescope. To obtain $r_0$ and $L_0$, Eq. (3) should be simplified thus

$$
\begin{align*}
\left( \frac{D}{r_0} \right)^{5/3} \left( \frac{2\pi D}{L_0} \right)^{3/2} &= \left[ \begin{array}{c}
d_{1,1} \\
d_{2,1} \\
d_{1,pp-2} \\
d_{2,pp-2}
\end{array} \right] \times \left[ \begin{array}{c}
\sigma_{turb,p=3}^2 \\
\sigma_{turb,p=pp}^2
\end{array} \right],
\end{align*}
$$

(4)

where $pp$ is the maximum radial order, and matrix

$$
\begin{bmatrix}
d_{1,1} & \cdots & d_{1,pp-2} \\
d_{2,1} & \cdots & d_{2,pp-2}
\end{bmatrix}
$$

is fixed for a specific AO system; this matrix can be obtained from Eq. (3).

A cut-off period $\tau_i$ for each open-loop Zernike coefficient is derived from the $1/e$ width of its temporal autocorrelation. According to Taylor’s hypothesis of a frozen turbulence, an average wind speed $v$ can be computed from all cut-off periods $\tau_n$; this value is the average of $\tau_i$ across radial orders\textsuperscript{[11]}:

$$
v = \frac{1.15\pi D \Sigma(p+1)\tau_n^{-1}}{0.3\Sigma(p+1)^2}.
$$

(5)

Coherence time $t_0$ is calculated from $r_0$ and $v$\textsuperscript{[14]}:

$$
t_0 = 0.31r_0/v.
$$

(6)

Figure 1 shows the architecture of the AO system with the real-time measurement scheme. The wave-front distortion is detected by the wave-front sensor. Digital residual slopes and digital corrected voltages are obtained by the wave-front processor. These data are split into two channels.

In the first channel, the digital corrected voltages are passed into D/A for digital-analog conversion. The analog corrected voltages are amplified by a high-voltage amplifier. Then, a tip-tilt mirror (TM) and a deformable mirror (DM) are driven by the high corrected voltages to compensate for wave-front distortion.

In the second channel, the digital residual slopes and digital corrected voltages (residual slopes and corrected voltages hereafter for brevity) are transmitted into the real-time measurement system to calculate the atmospheric parameters in real time. These atmospheric parameters can then be transmitted to the host computer by compact peripheral component interconnect (CPCI) bus or Ethernet.

The real-time measurement system is composed of a co-processor FPGA, a main processor DSP, and memory. The types of memory available are static random access memory (SRAM), synchronous dynamic random access memory (SDRAM), and FLASH. In the proposed system, pipelining in the time dimension and multi-channel computing in the spatial dimension are applied. The open-loop Zernike coefficients are reconstructed by the FPGA on the basis of the closed-loop data on the residual slopes and corrected voltages. At the core of FPGA, the processing element consists of a multiplier and an accumulator (Fig. 2). The continuous multi-frame data on the open-loop Zernike coefficients are regarded as a group for statistical calculations, including temporal autocorrelation, noise removal, and variance. The atmospheric parameters are calculated by the DSP by using these continuous multi-frame data. Many optimization methods are used to improve the processing performance of DSP; such methods include the use of library functions, compilers, caches, enhanced direct memory access (EDMA3), and inline functions. For the seamless caching of the reconstructed open-loop Zernike coefficients, the SRAM used exhibits a ping-pong structure. SDRAM is used to store operation data on DSP. In addition, flash modules realize the booting of FPGA and DSP when power is on.

Given that FPGA and DSP are arranged in a pipeline and assuming that the continuous $L$ frames of the open-loop Zernike coefficients are a group, $(Q-1)$th group data are used in statistical calculations for atmospheric

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**Fig. 1.** Block diagram of the AO system with real-time measurement system.

**Fig. 2.** Architecture design of FPGA; $m$ is the number of valid sub-apertures; $n$ is the number of actuators; $N_i$ is the Zernike order.
parameters by DSP when Qth group data are reconstructed by FPGA. To ensure real-time computation, the processing latency of FPGA ($\Delta t_1$) should be less than $1/fs$ ($f$s is the sampling frequency of the AO system). In the meantime, the processing latency of DSP ($\Delta t_2$) should be less than $L_0/fs$. For the 127-element AO system, $\Delta t_1$ is $19.65 \mu$s when 7 parallel channels are created with a 100-MHz processing clock, and $\Delta t_2$ is $553.8 \text{ms}$ when 3700 frames of the open-loop Zernike coefficients are used for statistical calculations. The sampling frequency of the AO system is no more than 2000 Hz, indicating that the real-time measurement system satisfies the requirements of real-time computing and possesses a considerable design margin. The atmospheric parameters are refreshed at least every 1.85 s. The timing sequence is shown in Fig. 3.

The real-time measurement system is applied in the 127-element AO system of the 1.8-m telescope of Yunnan Astronomical Observatory. In the AO system, a wave-front processor with a sampling frequency of 500 to 2000 Hz, a wave-front sensor with 128 valid sub-apertures, and a DM with 127 active actuators are used. The arrangement of the wave-front sensor sub-apertures and the DM actuators is shown in Fig. 4.

Figure 5 shows the atmospheric parameter observation on $r_0$ (Fig. 5(a)), $L_0$ (Fig. 5(b)), $v$ (Fig. 5(c)), and $t_0$ (Fig. 5(d)) for a star, whose magnitude ($M_v$) is 2.56 when the AO system is in closed-loop mode. The values of $r_0$, $L_0$, $v$, and $t_0$ are between 5 and 10 cm (mean value, 7.9 cm), between 4 and 15 m (mean value, 6.4 m), between 2 and 10 m/s (mean value, 3.5 m/s), and between 2 and 13 ms (mean value, 8.8 ms), respectively. All these values are within the reasonable range of previous experimental observations. These results indicate that the system can be used for the real-time measurement of atmospheric parameters in a closed-loop AO system.

The correction effectiveness of the AO system for atmospheric turbulence is depicted in Fig. 6 at different seeing. For the first group of stars (Fig. 6(a)), the mean residual root square (RMS) of the wave-front phase is $0.22 \lambda$ at $r_0$ of 6.3 cm, and $0.16 \lambda$ at $r_0$ of 7.6 cm. For the second group of stars (Fig. 6(b)), the mean residual RMS of the wave-front phase is $0.16 \lambda$ when $r_0$ is 9.2 cm, and $0.13 \lambda$ when $r_0$ is 13.6 cm. $\lambda$ denotes the wavelength. The results show that a better seeing (large $r_0$) results in a smaller residual RMS of the wave-front phase, indicating that the ability of the AO system to compensate for atmospheric turbulence is related to the seeing of the atmosphere; that is as seeing become better, compensation for atmospheric turbulence improves.

The above-mentioned results are obtained from point objects. The method is also applicable to extended objects.

In conclusion, a real-time method for measuring the atmospheric parameters of ground-based telescopes with AO systems is proposed. The proposed method is applied in the 127-element AO system of a 1.8-m telescope to calculate outer scale $L_0$, average wind speed $v$, coherence length $r_0$, and coherence time $t_0$. The results confirm that the method is suitable for the real-time measurement atmospheric parameters in a closed-loop AO system. In addition, the ability of the AO system to compensate for atmospheric turbulence is related to seeing conditions. The processing latencies of FPGA and DSP are 19.65 $\mu$s and 553.8 ms, respectively. The time spent refreshing the atmospheric parameters is no more than 1.85 s. The method is applicable to both point and extended objects.

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