

Scene Adaptive Exposure Time Control for Imaging and Apparent Motion Sensor

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SUMMARY This paper reports the evolution and application potential of image sensors with high-speed brightness gradient sensors. We propose an adaptive exposure time control method using the apparent motion estimated by this sensor, and evaluate results for the change in illuminance and global / local motion.

key words: image sensor, exposure time control, apparent motion sensor, moving object

1. Introduction

CMOS image sensors have been developed for surveillance and industrial equipment cameras. In these applications, it is important to capture images with clear details for image recognition and object tracking. Since the exposure parameters (including exposure time, which is examined in this paper) are not appropriate, overexposure and underexposure may occur when the illuminance varies with artificial or natural light. Therefore, it is necessary to capture an image with the exposure time that is adjusted to the illuminance level of the scene. At the same time, motion blur must be suppressed when the camera or subject is moving.

Many auto exposure algorithms adopt the average brightness value of the scene to control the exposure time. The method based on the brightness value in [1] adjust the exposure time for the important object such as a moving object. The weight of the segmented moving object is higher through object tracking, and control the proper exposure time for moving objects. However, this approach probably cause motion blur When the moving subject is dark and exposure time is set long.

Imaging with a short exposure time can suppress motion blur, and the exposure time can be estimated by using motion estimation. High frame rate imaging is effective for improving the accuracy of motion estimation [2], [3]. The correlation between frames at high frame rate is so high that the computational complexity of motion estimation is reduced. However, many frames are needed to output from the image sensor to a signal processing circuit outside the sensor, and imaging at high frame rate increases the data rate. Several methods [4]–[7] mount a simple processing circuit

for estimating motion on the sensor. Since it is unnecessary to output many frames from the sensor, motion estimation can be performed without excessively increasing the data rate and motion estimation can be performed in real time. Nose et al. [4] estimate the motion by extracting the moving subject by the background subtraction method, and obtaining the displacement of the center of gravity of the moving subject between frames. They assume that the background is fixed and therefore this method is not effective when the camera or multiple subjects move.

In order to calculate motion vector for each pixel with high accuracy, we developed an image sensor that has two types of pixels, one type for acquiring images and the other type for estimating motion [7]. It can estimate apparent motion while acquiring an image. Motion estimation uses a photodiode voltage that outputs non-destructively over very short time intervals like high frame rate imaging. After the motion estimation is complete, a sufficiently accumulated voltage is read out so that it is possible to acquire an image with a high signal-to-noise ratio (SNR).

In this paper, we propose a method for controlling exposure time for this image sensor by apparent motion [8]. Whether or not there is a moving subject is determined based on the result of apparent motion. In static scenes there is no moving object, exposure time is adjusted according to the mean brightness value. In dynamic scenes, it is adjusted the longest exposure time that makes moving objects appear motionless using apparent motion.

2. Image Sensor with Apparent Motion Estimation

The image sensor [7] can estimate apparent motion while acquiring an image. The architecture of the image sensor and timing of reading start are shown in Figs. 1 and 2. The image sensor has two types of pixels, one type for acquiring images and the other type for estimating motion. The pixels for motion estimation are arranged in 2×2 cells. In cell numbers 1, 2, and 3, the voltage of the photodiode is read out non-destructively over very short time intervals, and apparent motion is estimated by the temporal variation in the voltage. After the motion estimation, the voltage of a photodiode with sufficient stored charge is read out in the pixels and cell number 4. Each readout timing is controlled by a pixel / cell selector. Because the pixels and the cells have photodiodes of different sizes, light sensitivity correction is performed outside the sensor.

Motion estimation based on the gradient method was

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In a static scene with $\|A(t-1)\| < \alpha$ (α threshold of magnitude), the camera and subject are static, and the illuminance changes between frames. Exposure time is controlled based on the mean brightness value in the method [10]. Let $\tau(t)$ be the exposure time at frame t . The mean brightness value at frame t is \bar{p}_t , and the exposure time τ is adjusted according to the previous frame:

$$\tau(t) = \tau(t-1) \times \frac{p_m}{\bar{p}_{t-1}} \quad (8)$$

where p_m represents the mid-tone value. If the illuminance changes between frames, an exposure time adjusted according to the previous frame is not appropriate. The absolute error D is given as

$$D_t = |p_m - \bar{p}_t| \quad (9)$$

To compensate the image with the adjusted exposure time, the previous and current frames are fused with the weight given in Eq. (11). D is used as the weight for the other frame so that the frame with the smaller error has the higher weight. Y_t is the output image.

$$Y_t = \begin{cases} X_t^\tau & \text{if } \theta_1 < \bar{p}_t < \theta_2 \\ X_t^{\text{comp}} & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \quad (10)$$

$$X_t^{\text{comp}} = \frac{D_t X_{t-1}^\tau + D_{t-1} X_t^\tau}{D_{t-1} + D_t} \quad (11)$$

where θ_1 and θ_2 are the thresholds of the appropriate mean brightness value ($\theta_1 < p_m < \theta_2$), and X_t^τ is the image captured with the adjusted exposure time τ .

In a dynamic scene with $\|A(t-1)\| \geq \alpha$, we assume that the camera or subject is moving. The exposure time is adjusted to suppress motion blur by using the magnitude:

$$\tau(t) = \frac{T}{\|A(t-1)\|} \quad (12)$$

4. Evaluation by Simulation

We simulated adjusting the exposure time for both static and dynamic scenes. The cell readout interval T was set to 1/1600 sec, and M , which is the total number of sub-frames in a single frame, was set to 8. The exposure time is within 1/1600–1/200 sec with an interval of 1/1600 sec. To simulate the motion estimation, we reproduced 8-bit intermediate images during exposure period and added random noise with a standard deviation 3 to these images. In the simulation, we assumed that noise was constant regardless of brightness and shot noise was not considered. The intermediate images were 512×512 pixels, and one pixel of the intermediate image corresponded to one cell in Fig. 1. The motion estimation was calculated using the brightness gradients of the intermediate images. The acquired images were the intermediate image scaled down to 256×256 pixels by the area average method, however, in the 2×2 cell,

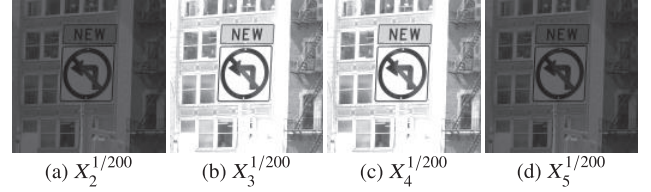


Fig. 5 Images $X_t^{1/200}$ captured at the longest exposure time 1/200 sec at frame t when exposure time is not adjusted. The illuminance changes every two frames.

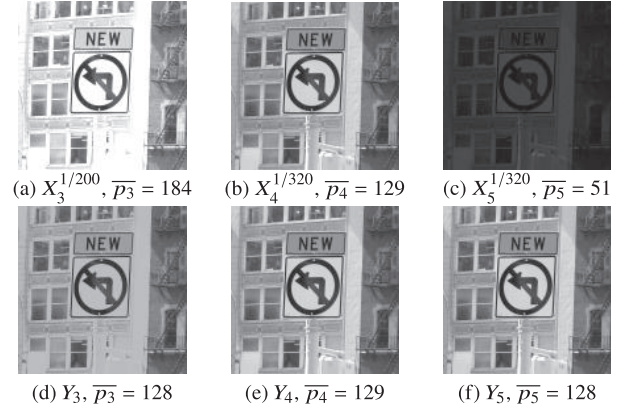


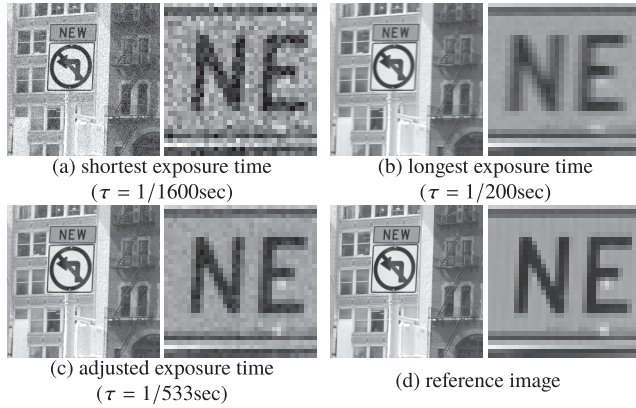
Fig. 6 Imaging results after exposure time adjustment and compensation. Images X_t^τ captured with adjusted exposure time τ (top), the output images Y_t (bottom) at frame t , and the mean brightness value \bar{p} . The \bar{p} of the output images was approximately the mid-tone value $p_m = 128$.

the brightness value of only the 4th cell was extracted because the pixels for calculating the motion vector (cells 1–4) have a different light sensitivity from the other pixels. The threshold of magnitude α was 0.1, which corresponds to an average motion of 0.1 pixel per sub-frame. The mid-tone value p_m was 128 and thresholds θ_1 and θ_2 were 78 and 179, respectively. In this motion estimation method, the local region W_i included seven block cells, as shown in Fig. 4. The number of the pixel of interest N was set to 128×128.

In a static scene, we evaluated the adjusted exposure time based on the mean brightness value when the illuminance changed every two frames. Figure 5 shows images captured with the longest exposure time, 1/200 sec, at each frame. Figure 6 shows images captured with the adjusted exposure time, the output images, and the mean brightness value \bar{p} . At $t = 4$ with no change in the illuminance, \bar{p}_4 is approximately 128 as shown in Fig. 6(b). That means the exposure time control is appropriate. For $t = 3$, and $t = 5$ with the illuminance change, the difference between \bar{p} and 128 is large as shown in Figs. 6(a) and (c). Thus, the exposure time control is not appropriate. However, as shown in Figs. 6(d) and (f), both \bar{p}_3 and \bar{p}_5 of the output images are approximately 128. Therefore, these results showed that we could properly control the exposure time and compensate the brightness in a static scene with changing the illuminance. In terms of detail, the output image in Fig. 6(d) lost the detail in the lower right region. The reason for the loss of detail was that the weight of Fig. 6(a), which was

Table 1 PSNR (dB) comparison for images captured with the different exposure time when the camera is moving.

	exposure time		
	shortest (1/1600sec)	longest (1/200sec)	adjusted (1/533sec)
whole image	20.78	20.52	25.74

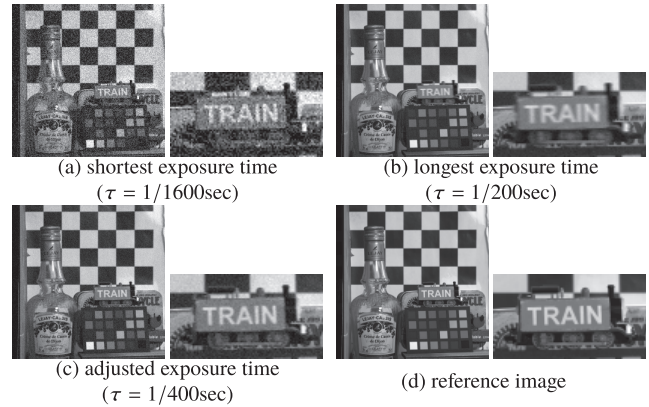
**Fig. 7** Comparison of images captured with different exposure time τ when the camera is moving. (c) contains less noise than (a), and less motion blur than (b).

overexposed in the lower right region, was high when fusing according to Eq. (11).

In dynamic scenes, we evaluated the quality of images captured with the adjusted exposure time when the camera or subject moves 0.8 pixels in 1/1600 sec. To simulate the proposed method, we added motion blur to the images. We simulated in the two type of the scenes, where the camera moved as shown in Fig. 7 and where the train moved as shown in Fig. 8. Figures 7(a)–(c) and 8(a)–(c) show images captured with the shortest, the longest, and the adjusted exposure time. Figures 7(d) and 8(d) show the reference image with noiseless and motionless. We corrected these images to the same brightness using the ratio of exposure time. The PSNR values are shown in Tables 1 and 2. In Figs. 7(a) and (c), the adjusted exposure time is longer than the shortest exposure time. As a result, the amount of noise with the adjusted exposure time is less. Also, in Figs. 7(b) and (c), the displacement at the long exposure time is 6.4 px, while that at the adjusted exposure time is 2.4 px. Thus, the image with the adjusted exposure time has less motion blur. In Table 1, the PSNR of the image with the adjusted exposure time is the highest. Likewise, the adjusted exposure time image has clear details in Fig. 8. In Table 2, although the PSNR of the image with the adjusted and the longest exposure time is almost same value, the adjusted exposure time image is highest quality in the moving area. The main reason is that the displacement at long exposure is 6.4 px, while the displacement at adjusted exposure time is 3.2 px, which suppresses motion blur. According to these results, we were able to control the exposure time that was adaptive to motion.

Table 2 PSNR (dB) comparison for images captured with the different exposure time when the train is moving.

	exposure time		
	shortest (1/1600sec)	longest (1/200sec)	adjusted (1/400sec)
whole image	20.48	29.84	29.70
moving area	19.86	19.93	21.94

**Fig. 8** Comparison of images captured with different exposure time τ when the train is moving. (c) contains less noise than (a), and less motion blur than (b).

5. Conclusion and Future Works

To improve the image quality in terms of exposure time of an image sensor with motion estimation function, we proposed a method to control exposure time to adjust to illuminance and motion. In static scenes, we controlled the exposure time using the mean brightness value, and obtained images with an appropriate brightness level. In dynamic scenes, we used motion to control the exposure time, and obtained images with less noise and less motion blur. We evaluated the effectiveness of the proposed method by simulation. The proposed method was able to capture images with clear details, which are useful for image recognition and object tracking.

In the future, we will consider reconstruction processing that improves image quality not only in moving subjects but also in static areas. In addition, we will further improve the accuracy of exposure time control by focusing on the motion vector only in the local region when there is local motion. We will also verify the proposed method in a dark scene since it is assumed that shot noise reduce the accuracy of motion estimation and affect exposure time control.

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