Learning and Controlling Dynamic Systems using Gaussian Process

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Abstract

This seminar paper is mainly about the implementation and application of the gaussian process. First we propose the dynamic system we are using. Then we use the gaussian process trying to predict the behavior of the system and further control the system.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Motivation

In the field of machine learning, the tasks are usually about the mapping from some input data to the output data. Mostly, input should be a vector (binary or numeric). And depending on the type of output, these tasks could be specified as classification problems (for binary output) or regression problems (for numeric output). Among the regression problems, a robotic problem, for example, is the problem mapping from the status (position, speed and acceleration) to the control signal (force or torque).

Normally, the input and output are denoted as \( x \) and \( y \). They usually are represented both as vectors. Representation of the input \( x \) could be pixel-values from image (as a 256-dimensional vector from a 16 \( \times \) 16 image data) or measurements from observations (sensor data from the robotic). For each input, its corresponding output \( y \) could be either discrete (in classification case) or continuous (in regression case).

In our project, the main concerns is on regression problems. In order to solve the regression problem, there are generally two approaches. The first one is to assume that the mapping function lies in a restricted class (ex. polynomial function). The second approach is based on a prior probability for each possible function and finally the function with higher probability is chosen.

However, in the first approach, we sometimes find that the data would not be well modeled by our assumption. Hence we may increase the flexibility to let the model more general which would in turn lead the model to the overfitting situation. The second approach face the problem with countless kinds of functions whose probabilities are hard to compute efficiently.
The Gaussian Process provided in [3] is a generalization of Gaussian probability Distribution. Simply speaking, the process here could be considered as a function with a very long vector. Each element in the vector could be the value of \( f(x) \) on the position \( x \). In order to reduce this infinite length to an acceptable length, only positions we ask for are taken into account. And these answers are surprisingly the same as in the infinite queries.

There are many application scenes that gaussian process may have a good performance. The application in dynamic system is one of them. Normally, the behavior of a dynamic system are described by a serious status parameters (position, speed). And in addition to the state, there may be a control signal, which results in the status change, applied to this system (sometimes in order to make the system stable).

In [1, 4, 5], various researches on the dynamic system control are covered (including robotic and human motion model). Here in our project, we choose the cart-pole control system [2] as main concerns. In this system, things that could be done would be divided into two kinds. One is to predict the system behavior by using only the initial status and the control signal that is applied to the system. Another application is to use the gaussian process to help controlling the physical system in order to avoid the system fall into an bad state (ex. pole falling in the middle of control).

The most fascinating aspect of using the gaussian process is that this method is really naive to think and still maintains the preciseness and consistency view with a computational tractability.

1.2 Work of Project

In this project, we first go through the physical dynamic system. The system we choose is the cart-pole system which a force (variable) is applied to the cart trying to let the pole on the cart to not fall down and the cart to be relatively still. After the study of how this system works, we try to use gaussian process to model the system. The learning process is based on some pre-observations of the system. In order to check the learning results, we examine the prediction of the system under the gaussian process model and compare it to the simulated behavior of the system under a physical model.

The gaussian process could also be used to control this system. In order to let the cart to be relatively still and pole to not fall down, we need to first let the gaussian process give predictions of the next state of the system resulted from several applying forces. Then, the most probable force (ex. which let the system more closed to the really stable state) will be chosen. After applying the forces and get the observation from the really physical system, the model may decide learn or not learn from the observation based on the accuracy of its prediction.

1.3 Outline

The report is structured as below. The first section give an overview of the cart-pole system and how this system change from state to state under a given forces. A general idea of how to control the system can also be found in this section. The Gaussian Process related part lies in the second section where you can find the mathematical fundamental of the gaussian process as well as the learning model for the prediction tasks and the controlling model which is devised for the purpose to let the system not "die". As all covered equations and models have already implemented in this project, the next section
is used to give the structure on the code implementation in this project. In the section 5 can you find the results analysis. The analyses are divided into two part corresponding the two usage scenario. We give our conclusion in the section 6.

2 Cart-Pole Control System

A typical Cart-Pole System consists mainly of two parts. One is cart which can move horizontally across the plane. In some control cases, there is a range restriction on the position of the cart. On the cart there is a pole which could be rotated from angle to angle. An example of the system could be found in figure 1. Initially, the system would be given a state. In this system, a state is consist of the position and the velocity of the cart, and the angle and the angle velocity of the pole.

In order to control the system, we should apply a force to the cart-pole system. Normally the force can not be zero (hence the bang-bang control). A successful control case is to let the cart remain in the range of the restriction and the pole doesn’t fall down in the control period.

So in this system the input vector is \((x_t, x'_t, \theta_t, \theta'_t, F_t, \rho)\). And the output vector, \((x_{t+1}, x'_{t+1}, \theta_{t+1}, \theta'_{t+1})\), represents the state of the system after time \(\rho\) applying force \(F_t\) to state \((x_t, x'_t, \theta_t, \theta'_t)\). In [2], the equations of accelerates for both position and angle resulted from the force are given as follow:

\[
\theta''_t = \frac{g \sin \theta_t + \cos \theta_t \left[ \frac{-F_t - m_p \theta''_t \sin \theta_t}{m_c + m_p} \right]}{l \left[ \frac{4}{3} - \frac{m_p \cos^2 \theta_t}{m_c + m_p} \right]} \tag{1}
\]

\[
x'' = \frac{F_t + m_p \left[ \theta''_t \sin \theta_t - \theta''_t \cos \theta_t \right]}{m_c + m_p} \tag{2}
\]

By using the given equations, we can easily simulate this system. First we set a small \(\rho\) (2ms) dividing the whole time sequence into small time slices. Then for each time slice, its state is the output from the input whose state are taken from the previous time slice.

Figure 1: Cart-Pole System [2]
Additionally, to achieve the bang-bang control, each time slice we need to decide which force we are giving to the cart. In a simple case, we could just drive the system with forces in the same magnitude (two directions). For the direction of the forces, we use the following equation to decide [2].

$$F_t = F_m \text{sgn}(k_1 x_t + k_2 x'_t + k_3 \theta_t + k_4 \theta'_t)$$  (5)

In this equation, $F_m$ is the constant magnitude of the forces and the sign function decide on which direction the forces should apply controlled by the parameter $(k_1, k_2, k_3, k_4)$. However, when the system is far away from the stable state, this control function could fail at last. The figure 2 gives us an example of the control’s failure.

In figure 2, the initial state of the system is too far away from stable and the forces $F_m$ is too weak, so at last, $\theta$ (angle of pole) is out of the bound $(-1, 1)$, which indicates the control is actually failed. When we set the initial state and the force at a suitable value, the system behavior would be seen like in figure 3.

### 3 Learning and Controlling the System

In this section, we will first go through the basics of the gaussian process. Then, applications of Gaussian process will be discussed. Applications in a dynamic system using gaussian process could be divided into two part. Applications of the first part are doing the learning job. They mainly try to predict the behavior of the system. Mostly, an initial state of the system is given and the applied forces at each time slice are also provided. Another part covers the applications trying to control this system. So, in these application scenes, each time slice, the state can be retrieved. The application should decide the force with its magnitude and direction. We begin the discussion with the introduction of Gaussian process.

#### 3.1 Gaussian Process

Gaussian process is a generalization of the Gaussian probability distribution. It is defined as follow [6]:

**Definition 1 (Gaussian Process)** A Gaussian process is a collection of random variables, any finite number of which have a joint Gaussian distribution.

In the above definition, we could find that though Gaussian process is a definition over an infinite dimensional data, the vector we really deal with is always a finite one. A Gaussian process is completely specified by a mean function and a covariance function.

$$f(x) \sim GP(m(x), k(x, x))$$  (6)

$$m(x) = E[f(x)], k(x, x') = E[(f(x) - m(x))(f(x') - m(x'))]$$  (7)
Figure 2: An example of failed control
Figure 3: An example of successful control
Normally, for simplicity, we take the mean function as zero and the most common used covariance function is the squared exponential covariance function.

\[ m(x) = 0, k(x, x') = e^{-\frac{1}{2}|x-x'|^2} \]  

(8)

In the regression problem, we have some sampled observations, denoted as training input set X. Its observed training output (with noise) would be y. On the other way, X* is the test input and we want to get the test output f*(x). So in this case, the joint distribution over the (y, f*(x)) according to the prior is,

\[
\begin{bmatrix}
  y \\
  f^*(x)
\end{bmatrix} \sim N(0, \begin{bmatrix}
  K(X, X) + \sigma^2 I & K(X, X^*) \\
  K(X^*, X) & K(X^*, X^*)
\end{bmatrix})
\]  

(9)

To get the posterior distribution over the function f*(x), the problem is deriving conditional distribution over the observations. So here is the key predictive equations of the Gaussian process regression.

\[ \bar{f}^* = K(X^*, X)[K(X, X) + \sigma^2 I]^{-1}y \]  

(10)

\[ cov f^* = K(X^*, X^*) - K(X^*, X)[K(X, X) + \sigma^2 I]^{-1}K(X, X^*) \]  

(11)

So far, the basics of Gaussian process have been covered. In this project, we mainly use the equations 10 and 11 to compute as the core of our Models.

### 3.2 The Learning Model

Learning the behavior of the cart-pole system is based on the training data that is observed from some pre-runs of the system. At first, we let this system run a few times with different set-ups and observe. In this way, we can get the training data which will be considered as the prior knowledge of our model.

In our learning model, state of each time slice will be alternatively predicted based on the previous time slice. And in the cart-pole system, input vectors are 6-dimensional and outputs are 4-dimensional vectors. So at each time slice, we solve each element in the output vector separately and put them all together as the output of whole one-step prediction process. Figure 4 shows the structure of the learning model.

### 3.3 The Control Model

In the control scene, the input of the model at each time slice t is the state of the cart-pole system. In response to the state, our model need to signal the magnitude and direction of the force applying to the system. So here, we denote the input as s_t. And the output is F_t.

In order to determine F_t as the output control signal. We use Gaussian process to predict the states after applying several possibilities of forces (for each force F_t applying to the system, the prediction we denoted as p_t). Among these predictions, we could choose the best one based on a criteria function CR.
Figure 4: Design of Learning Model

Figure 5: Design of Control Model
\[
F_t = \arg\min_i CR(p_i) \quad (12)
\]

\[
CR(p_i) = t_1|p_i.x'| + t_2|p_i.\theta| + t_3|p_i.\theta'| \quad (13)
\]

In the equation 13, \(t_1, t_2, t_3\) are parameters that specify the property of the choosing criteria. The larger \(t_i\) is, the more important its element would be considered. For example, when the pole fall down, the system could never get back to the valid state again. So the angel of the pole \(\theta\) could be considered as the most essential element and we can set \(t_2\) to be much larger than others.

Another issue that should be considered is that our control model initially can give nearly no training data to the Gaussian process. So it should learn from the controlling process of the cart-pole system. Hence each time slice, when our model gets the input \(s_t\), it could consider the state of the previous slice and the control sign applied \((s_{t-1}, F_{t-1})\) as a function input. And the pair \(((s_{t-1}, F_{t-1}), s_t)\) can be used as a pair of training data.

\[
s_t = f(s_{t-1}, F_{t-1}) \quad (14)
\]

However, in fact, the gaussian process model should not take all pairs as the training data. As when the data size increases, the process time would increase dramatically due to the complexity of the Gaussian process. So, the control model should also decide which data it should learn or not.

In our model, the prediction from gaussian process and the real observation will be compared (using sum of squared error). If the sum of squared error is below a certain level (for example, 0.001), the model can ignore this data. Otherwise the model should add this data to the training data, and continue to learn using the new training data. The whole process of the model could be found in figure 5.

### 4 Implementation Details

In this project, we basically run our Gaussian process based models on the cart-pole system. The parameters which are used in the system and model are show in table 1, the setting of these parameters could be find in the file ‘CommonVar.R’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(M_p)</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(M_c)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(k_1)</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(k_2)</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(k_3)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(k_4)</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\rho)</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Table of Parameters

First, we implement two processing core. One is the simulation of a real physical system. The implementation of this core is based on the equations (1) and (2). By using
(3) and (4), we could simulate the whole behavior of the system as a real physical system. Detailed implementation could be found in the file 'PhysicalCore.R'.

Another processing core is based on Gaussian process, it will take a state and force as input, and give a prediction on the state of the system after time \( \rho \). The core's implementation could be found in the file 'GaussianProcessRegression.R'. As a query of state will use the Gaussian process 4 times (each element in the output vector once), so in order to get the next state, function \( gpNextState \) in the file 'GaussianProcessCore.R' will be useful.

The running of Gaussian process needs training data. This is especially important in the learning model. The training data is obtained first by setting the initial state and the magnitude of force \( F_m \) in equation (5). Then the system is simulated using a physical core and controlled by the method in equation (5). The training data is thus retrieved from the state-to-state transformation between all time slices. The training data generation can be found in the file 'DataGeneration.R', it will save the training data in the file 'ModelData.RData'.

After the generation of training data, we could stimulate the system behavior using GaussianProcess. Our learning model simulates the system using the same control method as in the data generation process. Implementation of the simulation using Gaussian process can be found in the file 'DataSimulation.R', it will read the data from 'ModelData.RData' and save its learning results to 'GP_Results.RData'. The same time of simulation of the system using Gaussian process, we are simulate the system using the physical model at the same time in order to compare. Simulation results will be stored in file 'Sim_Results.RData'.

As for the control model, we choose forces from -5 to 5 (integers) at each step to use as the control signal. At each step, the prediction states from different forces will be compared and chosen based on the equation 13. The parameters in (13) will all be set to 1 in our case. As for decision on learning, we check the sum of squared error. If sum of squared error between states predicted by Gaussian process and real observation is larger than 0.001, we will learn the data. The implementation of this model is in the file 'ControlSimulation.R'. The result will be stored in the file 'Sim_Results.RData'.

### 5 Result Analysis

#### 5.1 Learning using Gaussian Process

In the learning model, we need to choose the training data for the gaussian process. Here, we set the same initial state for the system (see table 2). We then set \( F_m \) to different values, and let the system run several times starting from the initial state. Figure 6 shows one of the regression results. The training data for the regression result in figure

| \( \theta_{\text{initial}} \) | -0.15 |
| \( \theta'_{\text{initial}} \) | -1 |
| \( x_{\text{initial}} \) | 1 |
| \( x'_{\text{initial}} \) | 3 |

**Table 2: Unified Initial State of the Learning Process**
Figure 6: Result of the Learning Dynamic Model, the training data consist of runnings using $F_m$ from 4 to 5 (integers) and for each running the system runs for 4s (200 steps as $\rho = 0.02s$). The test is under $F_m = 4.5N$ and runs for 6s.

6 consists of 4 runs ($F_m$ is set from 2N to 5N for each). Each run of the system lasts for 4 second which, in the physical model, it iterates for 200 times. Among the figures, the red line is the regression result from the Gaussian process and the gray lines describe the confidential interval of the Gaussian process. The green line is the simulation result from the real physical model. As for the blue line, it shows the result which is from the physical model but takes the states at each time slice in Gaussian process model’s learning result as input.

As in figure 6, the size of training data is 800. We can find that, though the regression result from Gaussian process (red line) and the result from the physical model (green line) are not very identical, the regression result from Gaussian process (red line) and the result from the physical model at each step (blue line) are really closed. This means that though the regression result of Gaussian process in this case could not simulate the system as a real, its prediction at each step can be considered as fairly good. In this application
Figure 7: Result of the Learning Dynamic Model, the training data consist of runnings using $F_m$ from 3 to 6 (integers) and for each running the system runs for 4s ($200$ steps as $\rho = 0.02s$). The test is under $F_m = 4.5N$ and runs for 6s.

We then increase our training data size. We choose $F_m$ from 3 to 6 and let the system runs 4s for each $F_m$. The result is showed in figure 7. As we can see that regression result from Gaussian process and the simulated result from the physical model are much more close compare to the result showed in figure 6. Besides, in figure 7, we can hardly see the differences between the regression result and the simulated result at each step. Little error at each step accumulates for seconds which leads to obvious error after 2s compare to the simulated result.

Now, we further increase our size of training data for Gaussian process. We let the system run under $F_m$ choosing from 1 to 10 and observe its behavior for 4s. The regression result could be found in figure 8. Now the result from Gaussian process is nearly identical.
Figure 8: Result of the Learning Dynamic Model, the training data consist of runnings using \( F_m \) from 1 to 10 (integers) and for each running the system runs for 4s (200 steps as \( \rho = 0.02s \)). The test is under \( F_m = 4.5N \) and runs for 6s.

to the result from the physical simulation.

Results from the previous set-up are good, in the 4th test, we change our initial state of the regression process but leave the initial state of training data unchanged. For a training data with runs using \( F_m \) from 1 to 10 (integers) and 4s for each run, we set a new initial state for the test which can be found in table 3 (as we just slightly change the initial position \( x \)). The result is showed in the figure 9.

Result from the figure 9 is not that perfect as previous. Especially for the prediction of \( x \), the difference is big. In the first few steps, the confidence of the prediction is not that well. It is reasonable, because our Gaussian process model in this case have less knowledge around the initial state which led the prediction deviated.

So far, we find that, increasing the size of the training data is really helpful for the Gaussian process. Besides, the distribution of training data is also important. If we want to test the function value at \( X \) but there isn’t any observation near \( X \), the predicted value
Figure 9: Result of the Learning Dynamic Model, the training data consist of runnings using $F_m$ from 1 to 10 (integers) and for each running the system runs for 4s (200 steps as $\rho = 0.02s$). The test is under $F_m = 4.5N$ and runs for 6s, but with different initial state.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial State</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$\theta_{initial}$</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\theta'_{initial}$</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$x_{initial}$</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$x'_{initial}$</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: New Initial State
Table 4: MSE of $\theta$ for different training data

from the Gaussian process should be more inaccurate. In the last result from figure 9, the regression result of $\theta$ is much better than the result of $x$. The reason behind this is that $\theta$ lies in a much more small range than $x$ does and initial position $x$ is different than in the training data. When we let the system run and learn from the observations, we can say the observations 'contain' more knowledge of $\theta$ than of $x$.

At last of this subsection, we illustrate this idea with a table (see table 4) showing the relationship between the size (as well as distribution) of the training data and the mean squared error (MSE) during the regression. Generally speaking, the MSE drops when the size of training data increases. But with the same size of training data, MSE could seem to be a lot different. (All the tests is under $F_{m} = 4.5$ and run for 6s)

5.2 Controlling using Gaussian Process

As specified in the previous section, we use our control model to control a cart-pole system and get the result show in figure 10.

The control model we devised shows a successful control. In figure 11, we can find that the prediction error drops rapidly when the model continues to control the system. After 4s, the system nearly don’t need to learn from the observations.

In the control model, the prediction seems to be more accurate than in the learning model. The reason why this happens is that, after the system run for a certain period, its state lies in a relatively small vector space and stabilizes (hardly goes out of this range). So there are much training data in this range, which helps the Gaussian process to predict more accurately.

6 Conclusion

In this project, we start from the study of a physical system (cart-pole). Then we go through the Gaussian process regression. And based on the simulation core of the cart-pole system and prediction of the Gaussian process, we devised a learning model to predict the behavior of cart-pole system and a control model to make control-signal decision.

In the result analysis, we find that these two models work really well. And we can also conclude that the training data is very essential to the Gaussian process. Not only the
Figure 10: Control Result of the control model based on Gaussian process. In the model, forces from -5 to 5 (only integers) could be used. The system is simulated using the physical model.
Figure 11: Sum of Squared Error (SSE) between the prediction and the real observation during the control process. As we can see from 4s, the SSE drops to zero and nearly no additional data should be learned.

size of the training data, but also the distribution affects the regression result of Gaussian process a lot. This conclusion is also proved in the learning step of control model.

7 Acknowledgement

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References


