An iterative method for impulse noise removal

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ABSTRACT: Based on the conjugate gradient method, we propose a modified iterative method (MCG) for impulse noise removal based on the famous two-phase scheme. The noise candidates are firstly identified by the adaptive median filter, and then the MCG method recovers these noise candidates by minimizing an edge-preserving regularization function. A nice property of the MCG method is that the global convergence can be established without assuming that the objective function satisfies strong convexity under the Armijo-type line search. Numerical experiments show that the MCG method is effective to remove the impulse noise.

KEYWORDS: two-phase method, optimization, conjugate gradient method

INTRODUCTION

In practice, images are often corrupted by impulse noise during image acquisition and transmission. Thus some algorithms for removing impulse noise have been intensively investigated. For example, the median filter and some of its variants\textsuperscript{1,2} have been constructed based on the nonlinear digital filters\textsuperscript{3}. These methods firstly locate possible noisy candidates, and then replace them with medians or their variants. Furthermore, these methods can detect the noisy pixels even at a high noise level. It is a pity that they cannot restore such pixels satisfactorily because they do not take into account local image features such as the possible presence of the edges. Subsequently, Nikolova\textsuperscript{4} proposed a variational method for impulse noise removal, which can preserve details and the edges well, but the grey level of every pixel is changed including uncorrupted ones. Other types of methods have also been extensively studied\textsuperscript{5–11}.

In this paper we focus on the famous two-phase method for impulse noise removal proposed by Chan et al\textsuperscript{11}. The noisy candidates are firstly detected by the adaptive median filter\textsuperscript{1} or the adaptive centre-weighted median filter\textsuperscript{12} for different types of noise, and then the detected noisy pixels are recovered by minimizing an objective function by some optimization methods. Chan et al gave some numerical results to show that the two-phase method is powerful even for a salt-and-pepper noise ratio as high as 90%. However, the given objective function is not smooth because it includes an \(\ell_1\) data-fitting term. This implies that it is costly to obtain the minimizer in the second phase. To reduce the cost of computing, Chan et al\textsuperscript{13} showed that the non-smooth \(\ell_1\) data-fitting term can be deleted from the objective function, because only detected noisy pixels are restored in the minimizing process. Furthermore, some experiments show that the quality of the recovered images is not affected. Thus the objective function proposed in Ref. 11 can be reduced to the following function.

\[
F_\alpha(u) = \sum_{(i,j) \in \mathcal{A}} \sum_{(m,n) \in \mathcal{V}_{i,j} \cap \mathcal{N}} \varphi_\alpha(u_{i,j} - y_{m,n}) \\
+ \frac{1}{2} \sum_{(m,n) \in \mathcal{V}_{i,j} \cap \mathcal{N}} \varphi_\alpha(u_{i,j} - u_{m,n}),
\]

where \(\mathcal{V}_{i,j}\) is the set of the four closest neighbours of the pixels at the position \((i,j) \in \mathcal{A}\), \(y_{m,n}\) is the
observed pixel value of the image at the position \((m, n)\), \(u = [u_{i,j}]_{(i,j)\in\mathbb{N}}\) is a column vector of the length \(c\) ordered lexicographically in which \(c\) is the number of elements of \(\mathbb{N}\), and \(\varphi_{a}(t)\) is an edge-preserving function which has a great influence on the features of \(\mathcal{F}_a(u)\).

The objective function \(\mathcal{F}_a\) is smooth if the selected edge-preserving function \(\varphi_{a}\) is smooth. This means that some first-order optimization algorithms can be used to recover the corrupted images by minimizing (1). Cai et al\(^{14}\) used the conjugate gradient methods to recover the corrupted images without any line search. Yu et al\(^{15}\) proposed a descent spectral conjugate gradient method for impulse noise removal. A favourite property of the HZ method, i.e., the search direction generated by the MCG method satisfies the sufficient descent property independent of any line search. Under the Armijo-type line search, the global convergence of this method is established for general smooth functions. Under the Armijo-type line search, the global convergence of the SP method is established if \(\mathcal{F}_a\) is strongly convex. Liu \(^{\beta_k}\) et al\(^{16}\) constructed a spectral gradient (SP) method to remove the impulse noise. The search direction generated by the SP method satisfies the sufficient descent property independent of any line search. The search direction generated by the SP method satisfies the sufficient descent property independent of any line search.

Hager et al\(^{17}\) proposed a nonlinear conjugate gradient method where the directions are generated by the rule
\[
d_0 = -g_0, \quad d_k = -g_k + \beta_k^{HZ}d_{k-1}, \quad k \geq 1,
\]
with
\[
\beta_k^{HZ} = \frac{1}{d_{k-1}^T y_{k-1}} \left( y_{k-1} - 2d_{k-1} \frac{\|y_{k-1}\|^2}{d_{k-1}^T y_{k-1}} \right)^T g_k.
\]
Under the standard Wolfe line search, the global convergence of this method is established for strongly convex smooth functions. To prove the global convergence for general smooth functions, we set \(\beta_k^{CG} = \max\{\beta_k^{HZ}, \eta_k\}\), where
\[
\eta_k = \frac{-1}{\|d_{k-1}\| \min\{\eta, \|g_{k-1}\|\}}, \quad \eta > 0.
\]
This is the famous CG DESCENT method, which is one of the most efficient conjugate gradient methods for solving unconstrained optimization problems. In this study, we are interested in the parameter \(\beta_k^{HZ}\).

Based on the parameter \(\beta_k^{HZ}\), we propose a modified conjugate gradient (MCG) method for impulse noise removal. The MCG method inherits the nice property of the HZ method, i.e., the search direction generated by the MCG method always satisfies the sufficient descent property independent of any line search. In particular, its global convergence can be established for general smooth functions under the Armijo-type line search. Numerical experiments show that the proposed MCG method performs well for impulse noise removal.

**Algorithm and Its Global Convergence**

We start with the convergence theorem for general smooth function \(f(x)\). Firstly, we give the modified conjugate gradient method.

**Algorithm 1**

Step 1: Give \(x_0 \in \mathbb{R}^n\), \(\rho \in (0, 1)\), \(\tau > 0\), \(\delta \in (0, 1)\), \(t > 1/4\), \(\varepsilon > 0\). Set \(k = 0\).

Step 2: If \(\|g_k\| \leq \varepsilon\), stop.

Step 3: Define \(d_k\) by
\[
d_k = \begin{cases} 
-g_k, & k = 0, \\
-g_k + \beta_k d_{k-1}, & k \geq 1,
\end{cases}
\]

where \(g_k\) denotes the gradient of the objective function at the \(k\)th iterate and
\[
\beta_k = \frac{g_k^T y_{k-1}}{d_{k-1}^T y_{k-1}} - \frac{\min\{\eta, \|g_{k-1}\|\}^2}{(d_{k-1}^T y_{k-1})^2} \gamma_k d_{k-1},
\]
\(\gamma_k = 1 + \max\{0, \frac{\|g_k - g_{k-1}\|^2}{d_{k-1}^T y_{k-1} d_{k-1}^T d_{k-1}}\}\). Set \(k := k + 1\), go to Step 2.

The following result indicates that the MCG method must satisfy the sufficient descent condition without any line search.

**Lemma 1** Let the sequences \(\{d_k\}\) and \(\{g_k\}\) be generated by the MCG method. Then
\[
g_k^T d_k \leq -(1 - \frac{\delta}{\varepsilon}) \|g_k\|^2, \quad k \geq 0.
\]

**Proof:** (4) holds for \(k = 0\). For \(k \geq 1\), from (2) we have
\[
g_k^T d_k = -\|g_k\| + \frac{(g_k^T y_{k-1})(g_k^T d_{k-1})}{d_{k-1}^T y_{k-1}} - \frac{t\|y_{k-1}\|^2(g_k^T d_{k-1})^2}{(d_{k-1}^T y_{k-1})^2},
\]
To prove the global convergence of the MCG method, the following Armijo line search is needed, i.e., the step-size \( \alpha_k = \max\{\rho^i \tau |g_k^TV_k|/\|d_k\|^2, i = 0, 1, 2, 3, \ldots \} \) satisfies

\[
f(x_k + \alpha_k d_k) \leq f(x_k) - \delta \alpha_k^2 \|d_k\|^2, \quad k \geq 0. \tag{5}
\]

The following result is easily obtained under the given line search.

**Lemma 2** Assume that the level set \( \Gamma = \{x \in \mathbb{R}^n \mid f(x) \leq f(x_0)\} \) is bounded. Let the sequence \( \{d_k\} \), \( k \geq 0 \), be generated by the MCG method, and the step-size \( \alpha_k \) satisfies (5). Then

\[
\lim_{i \to \infty} \alpha_k \|d_k\| = 0. \tag{6}
\]

**Proof:** By (5), we have

\[
\sum_{i=0}^{k} \delta \alpha_i^2 \|d_i\|^2 \leq f(x_0) - f(x_{k+1}).
\]

Since the level set \( \Gamma \) is bounded, then

\[
\sum_{i=0}^{\infty} \delta \alpha_i^2 \|d_i\|^2 < \infty.
\]

This indicates that the conclusion (6) holds. \( \square \)

**Theorem 1** Assume that the level set \( \Gamma = \{x \in \mathbb{R}^n \mid f(x) \leq f(x_0)\} \) is bounded. Let the sequence \( \{d_k\} \), \( k \geq 0 \), be generated by the MCG method, and the step-size \( \alpha_k \) satisfies (5). If \( g \) satisfies the Lipschitz condition, i.e., there exists a constant \( L > 0 \) such that

\[
\|g(x) - g(y)\| \leq L\|x - y\|, \quad \forall x, y \in \Gamma, \tag{7}
\]

then we have

\[
\lim_{k \to \infty} \|g_k\| = 0.
\]

**Proof:** From the definition \( \gamma_{k-1} \) in the MCG algorithm, we have

\[
d_k^T \gamma_{k-1} = d_k^T \gamma_{k-1} + r_{k-1} d_k^T d_{k-1} \geq d_k^T \gamma_{k-1} + d_{k-1}^T d_{k-1} - d_{k-1}^T \gamma_{k-1}
\]

It follows from (4) that

\[
\|d_k\| \geq \left(1 - \frac{1}{4\tau}\right) \|g_k\|,
\]

then

\[
\alpha_k \leq \frac{\tau \|g_k\|}{\|d_k\|} \leq \frac{\tau}{1 - \frac{1}{4\tau}} = q.
\]

By (2), (7), and (8), it holds that

\[
\|d_k\| \leq \|g_k\| + \left(\frac{\|g_k\|^2}{\|d_k\|^2} + \frac{\|g_k\|^2}{\|d_{k-1}\|^2} + \frac{\|g_k\|^2}{\|d_{k-1}\|^2}\right)\|d_{k-1}\| \leq \|g_k\| + \left(\alpha_k L + q L \|d_k\|^2\right)\|g_k\| \leq (1 + \alpha_k L + q L \|d_k\|^2)\|g_k\|.
\]

Since the level set \( \Gamma \) is bounded and \( g \) satisfies the Lipschitz condition, then the sequence \( \{g_k\} \) is bounded. Hence the sequence \( \{d_k\} \) is bounded. The remaining proof is referred to the second part of Theorem 3.1 in Ref. 16. \( \square \)

As pointed out by Cai et al., if \( \varphi_a \) is convex, continuously differentiable, and first-order Lipschitz continuous, then \( \mathcal{F}_a \) is continuously differentiable and first-order Lipschitz continuous, i.e., \( \nabla \mathcal{F}_a \) is Lipschitz continuous. Thus if we select the appropriate \( \varphi_a(\tau) \), the problem (1) is solved by the MCG method. Applying the theorem to the function \( \mathcal{F}_a \), from the result in Ref. 14 we have the following global convergence results.

**Theorem 2** Assume that \( \varphi_a(\tau) \) is even, convex, continuously differentiable, and strictly increasing in \( \tau \). Let the sequence \( \{u_k\} \), \( k \geq 0 \), be generated by the MCG method applied to \( \mathcal{F}_a \). If \( \varphi_a(\tau) \) is first-order Lipschitz continuous, then there exists a subsequence of \( \{u_k\} \) converging to a global minimizer \( u^* \) of \( \mathcal{F}_a \).

**NUMERICAL EXPERIMENTS**

In this section, some experimental results are given to show the performance of the MCG method in the context of impulse noise removal impulse noise. We select the salt-and-pepper impulse noise. The test images are 256 \( \times \) 256 and 512 \( \times \) 512 grey level images. We select the parameters in the MCG
Table 1 Performance of the MCG and SP methods for restoring the images with noise level 50%.

| Image      | Method | PSNR | Time (s) | Iter. |
|------------|--------|------|----------|-------|
| Lena       | MCG (t=1) | 30.0952 | 2.7708 | 44.8 |
|            | (256 × 256) | 30.1138 | 2.6402 | 44.4 |
|            | SP      | 29.9878 | 3.5500 | 44.6 |
| Cameraman  | MCG (t=1) | 27.5288 | 3.7082 | 60.2 |
|            | (256 × 256) | 27.5246 | 3.4110 | 59.4 |
|            | SP      | 27.5182 | 4.8000 | 61.0 |
| Barbara    | MCG (t=1) | 26.4259 | 11.8686 | 41.4 |
|            | (512 × 512) | 26.4213 | 10.9560 | 40.8 |
|            | SP      | 26.4032 | 16.4437 | 41.0 |
| Banoon     | MCG (t=1) | 24.6085 | 12.0921 | 44.6 |
|            | (512 × 512) | 24.5660 | 12.0572 | 44.6 |
|            | SP      | 24.5659 | 17.7937 | 45.0 |

† Iter., the total number of iterations for the whole impulse noise removal process.

Table 2 Performance of the MCG and SP methods for restoring the images with noise level 70%.

| Image      | Method | PSNR | Time (s) | Iter. |
|------------|--------|------|----------|-------|
| Lena       | MCG (t=1) | 27.0811 | 4.0648 | 63.0 |
|            | (256 × 256) | 27.1862 | 4.0128 | 63.2 |
|            | SP      | 27.1024 | 5.2313 | 64.8 |
| Cameraman  | MCG (t=1) | 24.6753 | 5.2796 | 81.4 |
|            | (256 × 256) | 24.7377 | 5.0870 | 83.2 |
|            | SP      | 24.6262 | 6.7031 | 81.6 |
| Barbara    | MCG (t=1) | 24.5696 | 17.2668 | 54.6 |
|            | (512 × 512) | 24.5549 | 16.1910 | 53.6 |
|            | SP      | 24.5489 | 26.9312 | 63.4 |
| Banoon     | MCG (t=1) | 22.3741 | 17.7564 | 59.4 |
|            | (512 × 512) | 22.3729 | 17.9706 | 60.4 |
|            | SP      | 22.3724 | 25.9437 | 59.8 |

Table 3 Performance of the MCG and SP methods for restoring the images with noise level 90%.

| Image      | Method | PSNR | Time (s) | Iter. |
|------------|--------|------|----------|-------|
| Lena       | MCG (t=1) | 22.7776 | 10.8462 | 119.8 |
|            | (256 × 256) | 22.7800 | 11.3956 | 135.2 |
|            | SP      | 22.7748 | 12.8906 | 123.0 |
| Cameraman  | MCG (t=1) | 21.2164 | 12.6844 | 152.2 |
|            | (256 × 256) | 21.2021 | 11.7630 | 150.0 |
|            | SP      | 21.1851 | 16.7437 | 147.4 |
| Barbara    | MCG (t=1) | 22.5561 | 46.8472 | 105.8 |
|            | (512 × 512) | 22.5594 | 44.0846 | 107.6 |
|            | SP      | 22.5512 | 62.1031 | 106.0 |
| Banoon     | MCG (t=1) | 20.3252 | 42.4632 | 104.6 |
|            | (512 × 512) | 20.3118 | 43.7204 | 106.0 |
|            | SP      | 20.3075 | 59.9218 | 107.8 |

method as follows: $\delta = 0.5$, $\tau = \sqrt{\delta}/8$, $\rho = 0.5$, $t = 1.2$, $\epsilon = 10^{-4}$. In addition, we compare the performance of the MCG method with that of the SP method presented in Ref. 16. The SP method performs better than the Polak-Ribière conjugate gradient method which is the most effective among the methods considered in the numerical comparison in Ref. 14.

To solve the problem (1) by the MCG method, we select the Huber function as the edge-preserving function, which is convex and first-order Lipschitz continuous. Its definition is as follows:

$$
\varphi_{\alpha}(u) = \begin{cases} 
\frac{t^2}{\alpha^2}, & |t| \leq \alpha, \\
|t| - \frac{\alpha^2}{2}, & |t| > \alpha,
\end{cases}
$$

with $\alpha = 10$. The stopping criterion is

$$
\frac{|f(u_k) - f(u_{k-1})|}{|f(u_k)|} \leq 10^{-4}.
$$

To assess the restoration performance, we use the peak signal-to-noise ratio (PSNR), i.e.,

$$
PSNR = 10 \log_{10} \frac{255^2}{\frac{1}{MN} \sum_{i,j} (u^*_{i,j} - x_{i,j})^2},
$$

where $u^*_{i,j}$ and $x_{i,j}$ denote the pixel values of the restored image and the original image, respectively. To test the performance of both methods more fairly, the experiments are repeated for 5 different noise samples of each image, and the average of the 5 results is listed in Tables 1–3.

To a certain extent, Tables 1–3 indicate that, for the PSNR, the MCG method performs better than the SP method for most of the test images with different noise levels. Although the numbers of iterations of both methods are very similar, the MCG method is faster than the SP method, leading to about 25% saving in time. Fig. 1 lists the results restored by the methods from the corrupted images with noise level 70%. In a word, these results show that the MCG method can effectively restore the corrupted images with different noise levels.

CONCLUSIONS

In this study, we propose a modified conjugate gradient method based on the HZ method. Remarkableness of the proposed method is that its global convergence is established under the Armijo line search without assuming that the objective is strongly convex. We use the proposed method to remove the impulse noise in the two-phase method, and obtain efficient experiment results.
Fig. 1 Restoration of the images Lena, Cameraman, Barbara, and Banoon via the MCG(t=1), MCG(t=2), and SP methods. From left to right: the corrupted image, the restorations obtained by the MCG(t=1), MCG(t=2), and SP methods, respectively.

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