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ANGULAR RATE ESTIMATION FOR MULTI-BODY SPACECRAFT ATTITUDE CONTROL

William J. Palermo-Lieutenant, United States Navy
B.S., United States Naval Academy, 1992

Master of Science in Astronautical Engineering-June 2001

Aeronautical and Astronautical Engineer-June 2001

Advisor: Brij N. Agrawal, Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics

Second Reader: Harold A. Titus, Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering

Spacecraft with high performance attitude control systems requirements have traditionally relied on imperfect mechanical gyroscopes for primary attitude determination. Gyro bias errors are connected with a Kalman filter algorithm that uses updates from precise attitude sensors like star trackers. Gyroscopes, however, have a tendency to degrade or fail on orbit, becoming a life-limiting factor for many satellites. When errors become erratic, pointing accuracy may be lost during short star gaps. Unpredictable gyros degradations have impacted NASA spacecraft missions such as Skylab and Hubble Space Telescope as several DoD and ESA satellites. An alternative source of angular rate information is a software implemented real time dynamic model. Inputs to the model from internal sensors and known spacecraft parameters enable the tracking of total system angular momentum from which body rates can be determined. With this technique, the Kalman filter algorithm provides error corrections to the dynamic model. The accuracy of internal sensor and input parameters determine the effectiveness of this angular rate estimation technique. This thesis presents the background for understanding and implementation of the technique into a representative attitude determination system. The system is incorporated into an attitude simulation model developed in SIMULINK to evaluate the effects of dynamic modeling errors and sensor inaccuracies. Results are presented that indicate that real time dynamic modeling is an effective method of angular rate determination for maneuvering multi-body spacecraft attitude control systems.

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