

**DESIGN, OPTIMISATION AND FABRICATION
OF A CLIMBING SIX ARTICULATED-WHEELED
ROBOT USING THE ARTIFICIAL EVOLUTION
AND 3D PRINTING**

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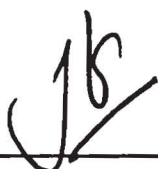
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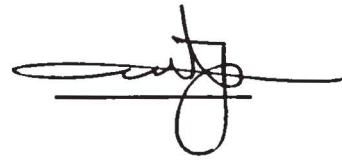
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ABSTRACT

Over the last decade, various mobile robots have been developed and widely used in myriad sectors. However, the vast majority of mobile robots are manually designed where the designers must have the preliminary knowledge of the interaction between the robots and the environment. Additionally, the high complexity involved in the design of the kinematics and controllers of a mobile robot has always been the biggest challenge for researchers and practitioners alike. Thus, the task of designing a robot can be considered very demanding and extremely challenging. In this research, an artificial evolution approach utilizing Single-Objective Evolutionary Algorithm (SOEA) and Multi-Objective Evolutionary Algorithm (MOEA) respectively are investigated in the automatic design and optimization of the morphology of a Six Articulated-Wheeled Robot (SAWR) with climbing ability. Simulations are carried out in Webots, a high fidelity physical-based robot simulator. Simulations results show that the SOEA is able to produce optimized SAWR with climbing ability while the MOEA is able to produce a set of Pareto optimal solutions which provide users with a choice of solutions for trade-off between the objectives of morphology size and climbing performance. The Pareto optimal set of solutions are the smallest SAWR with the least climbing ability to the biggest SAWR with the best climbing ability. The research continues by transferring the evolved solutions from simulation to the real world using 3D printing. The body, legs and wheels of the evolved robots are printed by a 3D printer and assembled with sensors, servos and motors for real world testing. Results show that the fabricated real world SAWRs were able to perform the climbing motion with an average accuracy of 80.9% compared to the performance in simulation.

ABSTRAK

PEREKAAN, PENGOPTIMUMAN DAN PEMASANGAN ROBOT MENDAKI YANG TERATUR BERODA ENAM MENGGUNAKAN EVOLUSI DAN PENCETAKAN 3D

Lebih sedekad yang lalu, pelbagai robot bergerak telah dibangunkan dan digunakan secara meluas dalam pelbagai sektor. Walau bagaimanapun, sebahagian besar robot bergerak direka bentuk secara manual di mana pereka mesti mempunyai pengetahuan awal interaksi antara robot dengan persekitarannya. Selain itu, kompleksiti yang tinggi yang terlibat dalam reka bentuk kinematik dan pengawal robot bergerak sentiasa menjadi cabaran terbesar bagi para penyelidik dan pengamal sama. Oleh itu, kerja merekabentuk robot yang boleh dianggap sebagai amat mencabar. Dalam kajian ini, pendekatan pengkomputeran evolusi menggunakan "Single-Objektive Evolutionary Algorithm" (SOEA) dan "Multi-Objektive Evolutionary Algorithm" (MOEA) masing-masing disiasat dalam reka bentuk automatik dan pengoptimuman morfologi robot enam kaki beroda (SAWR) dengan keupayaan mendaki. Proses simulasi dijalankan dengan menggunakan Webots, iaitu simulator robot berasaskan bentuk fizikal fideliti tinggi. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa SOEA mampu menghasilkan SAWR yang dioptimumkan dengan keupayaan mendaki manakala MOEA mampu menghasilkan satu set penyelesaian yang optimum Pareto yang memberi pengguna pilihan penyelesaian untuk keseimbangan antara objektif saiz morfologi dan prestasi memanjat. Set optimum Pareto penyelesaian adalah SAWR yang paling kecil dengan keupayaan mendaki yang berkurangan kepada SAWR terbesar dengan keupayaan mendaki yang paling tinggi. Kajian ini diteruskan dengan memindahkan penyelesaian yang dievolusi daripada simulasi kepada dunia sebenar dengan menggunakan percetakan 3D. Badan, kaki dan roda robot dievolusi dicetak oleh pencetak 3D dan dipasang dengan alat pengesan, servos dan motor untuk ujian dunia sebenar. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa SAWRs dunia sebenar yang difabrikasi dapat melaksanakan gerakan pendakian dalam persekitarannya dengan ketepatan skor keseluruhan 80.9% berbanding dengan prestasi dalam simulasi.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AM	Addictive Manufacturing
API	Application Programming Interface
ATR	All-Terrain-Rover
CAD	Computer-Aided Design
DOF	Degree-of-Freedom
EA	Evolutionary Algorithm
EP	Evolution Programming
ES	Evolution Strategies
FSM	Finite State Machine
GA	Genetic Algorithm
GP	Genetic Programming
MOEA	Multi-Objective Evolutionary Algorithm
PAW	Platform for Ambulating Wheels
PWM	Pulse Width Modulation
SAR	Synthetic Aperture Radar
SAWR	Six Articulated-Wheeled Robot
SOEA	Single-Objective Evolutionary Algorithm
VLSI	Very Large Scale Integration

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Mobile robotics has become an extremely popular research topic since the first implementation of mobile robots in World War II. By definition, a mobile robot is a machine with the capability to move in a given environment. In other words, mobile robots are able to move around in a specified environment and are not just fixed to one physical location. Mobile robotics is a field of great interest in robotics as it has a close interaction with the environment. Mobile robotics can be utilized in a wide range of applications. For example, in the service industry, military deployments, manufacturing, cleaning, entertainment and remote exploration, especially in search and rescue operations where human lives can be endangered.

1.2 Mobile Robots

Mobile robots have been showing a great success in the real-world implementation. For the first time, robots were assisting in an actual urban search and rescue mission of the World Trade Center tragedy on 11 September 2001. The team assisted by search and rescue robots had succeeded to discover more than ten victims, which are more than two percent of total victims discovered (Angela, 2002). The successful involvement of mobile robots in real life rescue missions has garnered much attention from researchers.

For ground mobile robots' locomotion, wheels and legs are the two common adopted methodologies. From a biological perspective, land animals with their sturdy legs are able to move over uneven terrains smoothly and rapidly after a long evolutionary process. On the other hand, during pre-historic times, humans invented wheels that were specialized in rolling to assist in ground locomotion. The excellent performance of wheels in both power efficiency and traveling speed can scarcely be achieved by legged mechanism. A hybrid platform with the combination of leg and wheel has excellent maneuverability on flat ground and uneven terrain.

Therefore, a hybrid platform is highly recommended for general indoor and outdoor environment operations as it is the trend for “future” mobile platforms (Shen, Li, Cheng, Lu, Wang, and Lin, 2009). The characteristics of each locomotion methodology are explained in detailed in Chapter Two.

1.3 Hybrid Mobile Robots

A hybrid mobile robot is a platform that combines both the legged and wheeled locomotion mechanisms. In recent years, hybrid mobile robots have been designed for various functionality and purposes. For example, there are hybrid mobile robots that were designed for stairs climbing purposes, performing jumping behavior, in-situ reconfiguring robots posture and adapting to uneven terrain, among others. In general, hybrid mobile robots can carry out their mission better in rough terrains compared to the traditional wheeled or legged mobile robots. Hybrid mobile robots utilize the advantages of both wheeled and legged mechanisms while compensating the downside of each other.

There are many successful examples of hybrid mobile robots, which are built and designed for a wide range of operations. A group of researchers from a few universities in Japan had developed a hybrid wheeled-legged platform through a retracting mechanism inspired by the armadillo (Tadakuma, Tadakuma, Maruyama, Rohmer, Nagatani, Yoshina, Ming, Makoto, Higashimori and Kaneko, 2009). The idea of a retractable wheeled-legged module is that the specially-designed wheels can be transformed into a legs-like mechanism. Smith, Sharf and Trentini (2006a) from the McGill University proposed PAW, a four legs robot with wheels equipped at the end of each leg. PAW is the first to combine wheeled mode locomotion with dynamically stable legged locomotion.

University Lübeck in Germany developed WheeHy, which is capable of doing in-situ reconfiguration of its posture (Bojan, Martin, Michael, and Erik, 2010). One of the key features of WheeHy is that the robot can perform adaptation of its posture during its traversal over uneven terrain. National Taiwan University proposed a Quattroped platform with hybrid legged-wheeled locomotion (Shen, Li, Cheng, Lu, Wang, and Lin, 2009). The proposed system utilizes a transformation method where the morphology of its wheels can be directly transformed into legs.

Sojourner and Rocky 7 Rover by the NASA (Volpe, Balaram, Ohm, and Ivlev, 1997) and Shrimp by the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne (Siegwart, Lamont, Estier, Lauria, and Piguet, 2002) are some other examples of hybrid mobile robots.

1.4 Artificial Evolution

The use of artificial evolution for the automatic generation and synthesis of controllers and/or morphologies for robots is one of the more recent methods in developing robots (Wang, Tan and Chew, 2006). By implementing evolutionary algorithms in designing a robot, an optimized controller and/or morphologies can be obtained where at times, these evolved solutions might be beyond the designers' design capability.

Successful examples of designing robots with artificial evolutionary approaches include walking robots designed with evolutionary computation in optimizing the morphology and controller (Rommerman, Kuhn, and Kirchner, 2009) and swarm robotics with their controllers designed using evolutionary algorithms with artificial neural networks (Kadota, Yasuda, Matsumura, and Ohkura, 2012).

1.5 Problem Statement

As been discussed earlier, there are numerous type of hybrid mobile robots that have been proposed and developed. However, as far as we aware, hybrid mobile robots are manually designed where the designers must have the preliminary knowledge of the interaction between the robots and the environment. Besides that, the extremely complexity in the kinematic and controller designing of a hybrid mobile robot has always been the biggest challenge for the researchers. Planning is an important aspect of the effort to design robots that perform their task with some degree of flexibility and responsiveness to the environment (Akerka, 2005). According to Akerka (2005), planning is a difficult problem for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the size of the space of possible sequences of moves. Even a simple robot, which can only move forward, backward, right or left has so many different ways that the robot can possibly move around in an environment. On the other hand, manually designed morphology on trial-and-error basis is not guaranteed to be optimal from the large design space (Endo, Yamasaki, Maeno,

and Kitano, 2003). Thus, the task of designing a robot can be considered demanding (Lee, 1998), especially in designing a hybrid mobile robot. Here, it raises the research question on the possibility of obtaining an optimized morphology of a climbing SAWR using an artificial evolution approach.

On the other hand, one of the biggest challenges in evolutionary robotics is to crawl out from simulation to the real-world implementation. Researches on evolutionary robotics usually stop at the simulation level where the results are not tested in the real-world environments. This might be due to the high cost in fabricating the robots as the cost of manufacturing a robot must be absorbed in mass production (Lipson and Pollack, 2000). With the invention of 3D printers, it provides a solution for rapid prototyping at a relatively low cost with almost immediate physical availability as soon as it is 3D printed. Therefore, evolved solutions in this research are to be fabricated with the aid of 3D printer and the performance of the fabricated real-world SAWRs is to be investigated.

1.6 Objectives

The objectives of this research are to obtain the fittest climbing hybrid mobile robots with evolutionary algorithms where the evolved solutions are transferred into real-world robots. The objectives are summarized as below:

- i. To propose an artificial evolution method in designing and optimizing the morphology of a six articulated-wheeled robot (SAWR) with climbing ability.
- ii. To integrate single-objective and multi-objective optimization into the evolutionary algorithm for evolving SAWRs.
- iii. To transfer the evolved robots from simulation to real world with 3D printing fabrication.

1.7 Project Scope

The scopes of the research are listed below:

- i. The controller of the SAWR is manually designed and not involved in the evolution. The objective of this research is to obtain an optimized morphology of a SAWR with climbing ability, therefore the controller is designed to be as simple as possible for each evolved individual to perform climbing motion. Thus, SAWR with the designed controller is expected to be

able to move forward only and perform a series of reconfiguration method to perform climbing motion when approaching obstacles.

- ii. The morphology design of the SAWR consists of three main parts which are the robot main body, legs and wheels. Thus, in order to obtain an optimized morphology, the parameter of these three main parts have to be minimized which are the body length, leg length and wheel radius.
- iii. Flat terrain with flat step/steps as the obstacles is designed as the task environment for the SAWR. In this research, two environments have been selected, which are single-step environment and multi-steps environment. In single-step environment, there is only a single step of 55mm in height which is to be stridden by each individual SAWR in reaching the goal. While for multi-steps environment, there are three steps in the task environment. First, a single step of 50mm in height, the second is stairs-like step of 55mm in height and the last is a single step of 80mm in height.
- iv. Evolved solutions from simulations are transferred into real-world SAWRs with 3D printing with the material of Acrylonitrile Butadiene Styrene (ABS) plastic which has the limitation of only being able to print out geometries without any overhangs.

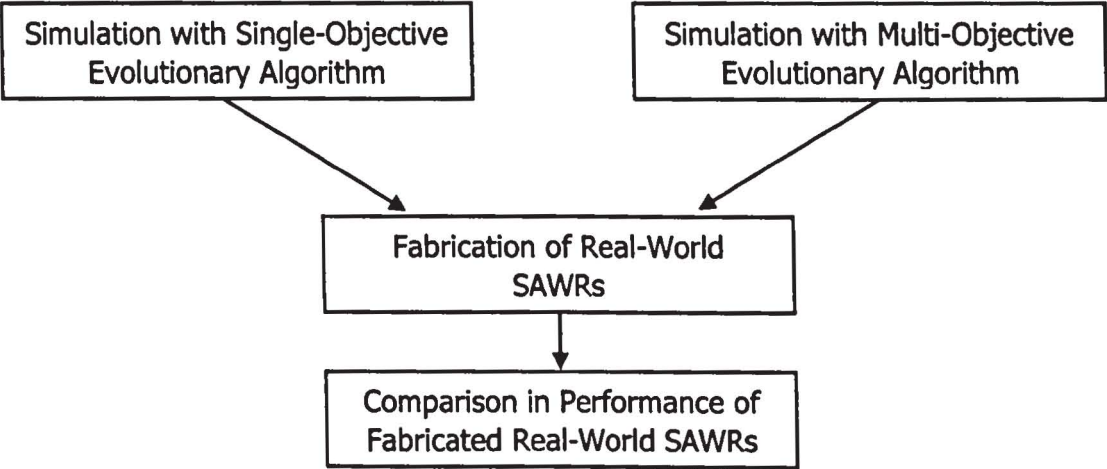


Figure 1.1: Research Overview Block Diagram.

Figure 1.1 shows the research overview block diagram. The experiment of this research was started with the simulation using the single-objective evolutionary algorithm. This was followed by the simulation with the multi-objective evolutionary

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