# PREDICTION OF FROSTING PROCESS ON COLD WALL SURFACE BASED ON ANN WITH BACK PROPAGATION ALGORITHM

by

# Jinjuan SUN<sup>\*</sup>, Zhiheng MA, and Jianhui TIAN

School of Mechatronic Engineering, Xi'an Technological University, Xi'an, China

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The ANN with back propagation algorithm is a multi-layer feed-forward neural network, which is suitable to study unsteady frost formation with multiple factors. The back propagation ANN algorithm is used to study frost layer growth on cold flat surface, where four feature variables including temperature of cold flat surface, the velocity, relative humidity, and temperature of air are adopted. The frost growth experiment generates the database, which is good for training frost growth due to its fast speed and high precision based on Levenberg-Marquardt learning rule. The establishment of neural network model in this paper can quickly and accurately predict the frost layer height on cold flat surface of different control variables, which is helpful for the implementation of defrosting.

Key words: ANN, back propagation algorithm, frosting process, frosting characteristics, frost height

## Introduction

Frost crystals formed in low temperature environment widely exist in the nature, refrigerator, heat pump, air-conditioning, aviation, *etc*. With the height and density of frost layer growing, the heat transfer resistance and flow resistance will increase, which will reduce the heat transfer efficiency, affect the normal operation of the system and cause energy consumption.

Over the past few decades, the growth and formation of frost crystals has been researched by experimental [1, 2] and physical-mathematical methods [3]. Gall *et al.* [4] established a mathematic model of frosting on cold flat surface according to a local volume averaging technique. Gong *et al.* [5] established a lattice Boltzmann model for simulating the thermal transport and phase transformation of frost growth process on the cold surface. The frost formation is an unsteady-state process of transient heat and mass transfer accompanying with phase transition as well as moving boundary. Despite several researches have been carried out, the influence of all the parameters on frosting cannot be obtained by the traditional methods. Thus, a new approach is introduced to study the growth mechanism of frost crystals.

Several methods are used for process modelling and prediction in the field of refrigeration and heat transfer [6]. Artificial neural network (ANN) is a new tool, which is applied

<sup>\*</sup>Corresponding author, e-mail: sunjinjuan@xatu.edu.cn

to predict heat and mass transfer based on both experimental and computational data [7, 8]. Zhang et al. [9, 10] make a comprehensive summary and provide fundamental guidelines how to integrate and apply machine learning methods. Hemmat et al. [11] used an ANN to optimize the dynamic viscosity of hybrid nanolubricants. Tian et al. [12] studied the influence of temperature and volume fraction of nanoparticles on thermal conductivity using ANN. He et al. [13] proposed a algorithm to calculate the best neuron number in the ANN. Ruhani et al. [14] predicted the thermal conductivity by ANN and fitting method. Esfe et al. [15] evaluated and predicted the viscosity of NF by ANN from a multilayer perceptron ANN with the Levenberg-Marquardt (LM) learning algorithm. Kalogirou [16] presented various applications of neural networks in energy problems. Temeyer et al. [17] constructed an ANN model to estimate parameters for frost deposition. Tahavvor and Yaghoubi [18] developed an ANN model to predict natural cooling on a horizontal circular cylinder. This model was also used to predict frost formation on a flat plate by Tahavvor [19]. From the literature review, it can be seen that the ANN method has rarely used to predict the physical characteristics by multiple factors of frost formation process. However, ANN with back propagation (BP) algorithm is a multi-layer feed-forward neural network according to the error BP algorithm, which is suitable for establish a frosting relationship with multiple factors. Although the neural network training consumes a large amount of computation time, it is fast and precise to predict the frost layer height on cold flat surface of different control variables once the successful network model is obtained to provide technical support for the implementation of defrosting.

## Numerical model and theory

As an adaptive non-linear dynamic system, ANN is widely interconnected by a great many of simple processing units. Neural network system has many advantages, such as strong adaptability, large-scale parallel processing, self-organization and self-learning ability, distributed information storage, *etc.* The BP algorithm is a kind of error BP algorithm, which is efficient non-linear mapping. It is one of the most extensive application and mature ANN. Moreover, the parameters of the network with great flexibility can be set according to specific conditions. It has broad application prospects in many different domains. According to the basic principle and algorithm, the frost model based on BP algorithm is established.

## Artificial neural network architecture

The ANN consists of a set of single parallel processing elements, which can generate new experience from previous experience by learning, and can complete specific functions by changing the weight of connection points. In essence, ANN is a multi-variable non-linear regression model. The specific input and corresponding output of neural network can be obtained by adjusting or training.

Figure 1 shows a very simple model of artificial neurons with and without bias. The desired results can be obtained by continuously modifying weight, w, and bias, b, based on suitable learning rules in the ANN model.

## Back propagation algorithm

Figure 2 shows that a multi-layer feed-forward neural network, and BP algorithm on the basis of LM training algorithm is the preferred choice owing to training accurately and rapidly.





The BP algorithm is mainly applied to the learning of neural network weights and thresholds. Its learning process is composed of the signal forward propagation and the error BP. In the forward propagation, the input signal is from the input layer to output layer by the hidden layer, and the output is made at the output layer. If the signal of the output layer does not desire, the error is sent to the BP process. The error is from the output layer to front layer, and the actual output of network is closer to the expected output by optimizing the network weight through error feedback. Zhang *et al.* [20] developed a general approach using the two machine learning methods where five feature variables are adopted. In this study, there are five inputs consisting of cold wall temperature, ambient temperature, air relative humidity, air-flow rate, and frosting time. The output is the frost height reflecting the growth characteristics of frost crystal.

The mapping will be finished from *n*-dimensional to *m*-dimensional space vector. The excitation function is a logistic sigmoid:

$$f(x) = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-x}}$$
(1)

which has the characteristics of continuous derivation:

$$f'(x) = f(x)[1 - f(x)]$$
(2)

When training ANN, LM algorithm is adopted as a standard technique for the non-linear least-squares problem extensively used under different fields. As an iterative technique, LM locates the minimum value of multivariate function, which is expressed as the squares sum of the non-linear real valued function solve the network weight and get accurate solutions by increasing the optimization parameters by adjusting the hidden nodes. The BP algorithm solves the function optimization problem:

$$\min_{a \le \omega \le b} E(\overline{\omega}) = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{k=1}^{n} (y_k - \hat{y}_k)^2$$
(3)

$$\hat{y}_k = f\left(\sum_{k=1}^n x_i w_i + \theta_i\right) \tag{4}$$

where f(x) is the logistic sigmoid according to eq. (1), n – the number of samples, w – the weight of network,  $\theta$  – the threshold of network,  $x_i$  – the input of samples, and  $\hat{y}_k$  and  $y_k$  are the output values of actual and expected situation, respectively. The final output value of the network can be obtained from eq. (3).

The BP algorithm based on the least-squares method is applied to simulate the average height of frost layer growth. Firstly, the selected data samples are fitted with a straight line, and then optimized by BP algorithm. Finally, a neural network sample training database is established to predict the amount of frosting. The fitting process of least-squares method is based on BP algorithm and least square method theory. The database samples are preprocessed including normalization, initial value setting, and error calculation. Among them, the original input data is normalized, and the data is transformed into [0, 1]. The normalization formula is expressed:

$$\hat{x}_i = \frac{x_i - x_{\min}}{x_{\max} - x_{\min}} \tag{5}$$

where  $\hat{x}_i$  is the dimensionless data of the samples,  $x_i$  – the raw input or output, and  $x_{max}$  and  $x_{min}$ , respectively, are the maximum and minimum values in raw data.



Figure 3. Flow chart of the present

The excitation function of the training node is the sigmoid function. The sample data is calculated by BP algorithm to obtain the expected value. Three sets of frosting experimental data under different conditions are used to train the neural network. The reliability of the neural network is tested by the calculated amount of frosting compared with the test samples. If the error is within the given range, the trained neural network is proved to be reliable. For a detailed flowchart, see fig. 3.

## **Experimental methods**

Figure 4 shows the schematic representation of an experimental system established to research the frosting process on the cold wall surface, providing experimental data for ANN. The experimental system consists of four parts: refrigeration system, wet air treatment system, micrography system, and data acquisition system.



Figure 4. Schematic representation of experimental system

In the refrigeration system, the red copper wall ( $40 \text{ mm} \times 40 \text{ mm} \times 8 \text{ mm}$ ) is cooled by a semiconductor refrigeration chip (TEC1-12710). The circulating cooling water is delivered from a low temperature cabinet, which is used to cool the hot side of semiconductor refrigeration chip.

In the wet air treatment system, an isolated wind tunnel is made of plexiglass to eliminate environment interference and facilitate observation. On the both side and top there are two quartz glass observation ports in order to conveniently observe and analyze data by the micrography system. The air temperature is regulated through finned heat exchanger. An ultrasonic humidifier (YDH-806EB) is used to control the air humidity. In order to adjust air-flow rate, a frequency converter is used to control the frequency to adjust the speed.

The micrography system includes stereomicroscope (SZX-ZB7, OLYMPUS), CCD microscope camera (Moticam2506), and cold light source (MLC-150C, MOTIC). Since the magnification of the stereomicroscope is 12-84, it can be used to observe the microscopic frost formation process. The CCD microscope camera connected with computer software can automatically capture and record the instant frosting dynamic process. The cold light source can compensate light for observation and avoid the interference of thermal radiation on frosting. The frost layer height can directly measure by using the image analysis system in the computer software.

All data in the frosting experiment system are collected through the data acquisition system (Agilent-34970A) for subsequent analysis and neural network training. An anemometer (EE65-VB5,  $\pm 0.2$  m/s) is used to monitor and record data of air-flow rate. The air temperature and humidity at the inlet and outlet are monitored and recorded by, respectively installing two contact-type digital temperature-humidity sensor (JWSH-5VBDD,  $\pm 0.5$  °C and  $\pm 3\%$  RH). Five holes are evenly punched at the same horizontal plane of 1 mm below the red copper plate. Then the T thermocouples (GBTS200,  $\pm 0.1$  °C) are inserted for measuring the temperature of cold wall surface and obtain the average value.



Figure 5. Frost growth height vs. time at different cold surface temperatures



Figure 6. Frost growth height *vs.* time and various cold surface temperatures for  $T_a = 10.8 \text{ °C}, \varphi = 41.2\%$  and u = 0.16 m/s

#### **Results and discussion**

The frosting process on the cold wall surface under a variety of parameters is simulated by BP ANN model from the experimental data.

Firstly, the experimental data of frost formation with three different surface temperatures  $T_s = -8.4 \text{ °C}$ , -16.5 °C, and -28.6 °C are used for training the neural network. Secondly, the frost layer height are calculated by trained network model with surface temperatures  $T_s = -22.5 \text{ °C}$  to evaluate its accuracy.

As shown in fig. 5, the training results through the BP algorithm are in accord with that of the experimental data under different cold wall temperatures (the air velocity u = 0.16m/s, the air temperature  $T_a = 10.8$  °C and the air relative humidity  $\varphi = 41.2\%$ ). The relative mean errors between the training results and the experiment data are 3.99%, 2.60%, 4.04%, and 1.95%, respectively. The comparison results show good consistency and it is evident that the ANN method can accurately determine frost growth height from the experiment data.

According to the developed BP algorithm, new data of frost growth height under various conditions are calculated and plotted. Figure 6 shows the frost height growth vs. time and various cold wall temperatures. The higher frost layer is on the colder surface. The lower the cold wall temperature, the higher the supersaturation

and nucleation rate, and so the more the frost crystals are formed. The growth rate at the beginning (<120 minutes) of frosting is relatively higher than that at the end period. This is because the moist air deposition leads to height rapid growth of frost layer in the beginning stage. The growth rate of frost layer gradually slows down with the height increase of frost layer, due to the nucleation rate decreases with the increase of temperature.

The air RH is another main factor affecting the frost layer growth. The following study will focus on the variation of frost height layer with time under different air RH. The

experimental data with air relative humidity RH = 50.6% and 93.7% are used for training by BP algorithm (u = 0.181 m/s,  $T_a = 24.5$  °C,  $T_s = -14.7 \text{ °C}$ ), and the curve with RH = 81.1% is calculated by trained network model to evaluate its accuracy. The relative mean errors between the training results and the experiment data are 2.08%, 1.56%, and 2.73%, respectively. The results of ANN and experiments shown in fig. 7 are the relation curves of frost height change over time. The frost height increases rapidly as the crystals grows at the beginning of frosting, but the growth rate slows down with time. Increasing the air RH leads to a significant increase in height. The greater the air RH, the earlier the supercooled water drops freeze, the shorter the freezing time, the faster the frost formation, the thicker and denser the frost layer. On the basis of the phase transformation dynamics theory, the formulation  $\varphi$  [21] reveals the important relation that the driving force of phase transformation,  $\Delta G$ , is not only related to temperature, T, but also proportional to the logarithm of supersaturated pressure ratio  $p_v/p_{sa}$ . The partial pressure of supersaturated water vapor is related to the air moisture. The greater the moisture content, the greater the partial pressure of supersaturated water vapor. Therefore, the higher the air RH, the greater the supersaturated pressure ratio, the greater the driving force of phase transformation, the easier the water vapor molecules are to undergo phase transformation, and the faster the formation and growth of frost crystal.

Figure 8 plots the frost height growth *vs.* time and various air RH by the developed BP algorithm. We can see that the frost layer gets higher with the increase of RH. This is because the supersaturation degree of water vapor gets bigger with the increase of RH, and the nucleation rate of frost crystal also increases to promote the frost height growth. It can be seen that the effect of air RH on the frost formation is very obvious. Reducing air humidity can effectively inhibit the deposition of frost crystal.







Figure 8. Frost height growth vs. time and various air RH for  $T_s = -14.7$  °C,  $T_a = 24.5$  °C, and u = 0.181 m/s



Figure 9. Frost height growth vs. time at different air temperatures

Figure 9 illustrates the training results and the experimental data of the frost height with different air temperatures vs. time. The experiment data in two cases of air temperatures  $T_a = 11.6$  and 23 °C are used for training by BP algorithm ( $T_s = -14.7$  °C,  $\varphi = 33.0\%$ , and u = 0.584 m/s), and the curve with  $T_a = -16.6$  °C is calculated by trained network model to evaluate its accuracy. The relative mean errors between the training results and the experiment data are 3.40%, 2.55%, and 2.27%, respectively.



Figure 10. Frost height growth vs. time and various air temperatures for  $T_s = -14.7$  °C,  $\varphi = 33.0\%$ , and u = 0.584 m/s

Figure 10 shows frost height growth vs. time and various air temperatures. We can see that the frost layer gets high with the increase of air temperature. When the air temperature is higher, the frost crystal grows faster and the frost layer is thicker. Based on the crystal growth theory, the growth rate of frost crystal depends on the supersaturation degree of water vapor near the growth point. When the air temperature increases, the temperature near the growth point also increases, which makes the crystal at the top of the frost layer easy to melt to restrain the frost layer growth. However, when the air RH remains constant and the air temperature increases, the saturated water vapor concentration increases correspondingly, and the air moisture content increases. When the influence ratio of the moisture content is

larger than that of the air temperature, more frost crystals will agglomerate. Therefore, the comprehensive effect of all these factors determines the speed of frost growth, and we should pay more attention reducing the environment moisture content.

The establishment of neural network model in this paper can quickly and accurately predict the frost layer height on cold flat surface of different control variables. At present, there are many defrosting control methods. The frost sensor defrost control method uses photoelectric or capacitive detector to monitor the frosting of the evaporator. When the frost layer reaches a certain height, it sends a signal to defrost. However, this method needs high quality sensor, high frequency and stable efficiency gain amplifier, which is not suitable for mass production due to its high cost. Therefore, it is only in theoretical research and has no practical significance for the time being. Through the research of this paper, the frost height can be obtained under different conditions to provide technical support for the implementation of defrosting.

#### Conclusions

By using ANN with BP algorithm, the frosting process on cold flat surface under various conditions was studied compared with the results of the experiment. Results indicate that the results of ANN agree well with the experimental results and the BP algorithm based on LM learning rule is good for training frost growth due to its fast speed and high precision.

The new results of frost height growth can be easily determined by the ANN method with the less calculation cost and time.

The frost height obtained under different conditions can be used as a technical support for the implementation of defrosting.

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#### Nomenclature

b – bias of neurons	Greek symbols
<ul> <li>h – frost height, [mm]</li> <li>G – driving force of phase transformation, [J]</li> <li>m – number of neurons</li> </ul>	$\theta$ – network threshold $\varphi$ – relative humidity
n – number of weight	Subscripts and superscripts
p - pressure, [Pa] T - temperature, [°C] t - time, [minute] u - velocity of air, [ms <sup>-1</sup> ]	a – air s – cold wall surface sa – saturation v – vapour
w – weight of network	1

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