

Design, Modeling and Control of T³-Multirotor: a Tilting Thruster Type Multirotor*

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Abstract—This paper presents a new design of multirotor, named as ‘Tilting Thruster Type’ (T³)-multirotor. The new platform is equipped with mechanically separated thrusters, which can take any fuselage posture within a specified range regardless of any direction of translational acceleration. A specially designed servo-linkage mechanism is employed for relative attitude control between the thruster and the fuselage. Mathematical modeling and analysis of the new platform are conducted to explore the control method of the dynamically complex system. For demonstrating the potential of the new T³-multirotor, an autonomous level flight is performed where the fuselage maintains zero roll and pitch angle during the entire flight. Both simulation and experimental results are provided with detailed analysis.

I. INTRODUCTION

The quadrotor, which behaves similarly to a helicopter but without complex operation principles, has become one of the representative aerial robot platforms due to its simple structure and uncomplicated dynamics. However, the oversimplification of the mechanism limits their capability in some cases. Of these, the biggest limitation is that the quadrotor can generate thrust only in the body z-direction due to the fixed motor mount. This makes the quadrotors an underactuated platform [1] that should tilt the entire fuselage to distribute body z-directional thrust to inertial X, Y, Z axes.

To address this underactuation problem, various concepts have been proposed. One line of research is to install thrust generators in multiple orientations [2]-[6]. The other line of research is to install some or all thrusters equipped with servo mechanisms to control the thrust direction during the flight [7]-[9]. Approaches of the first type have the advantage in terms of fully-actuated control in all attitude by combining multiple thrusters in various fixed directions. However, this type of multirotors suffers from efficiency since a significant portion of each motor thrust is spent to counteract the unwanted component vectors of the other motor thrusts. Also, some motors occasionally stop propeller rotation and become dead weight that does not participate in thrust generation. In the second type of approaches, specific thrust generators are tilted through the servo mechanism so



Fig. 1. T³-quadrrotor whose upper part can tilt in roll and pitch direction. A servo mechanism (Lower Right) is designed to control the relative attitude between the upper and lower parts of the quadrotor.

that those thrusters produce the required acceleration in the desired direction, while most thrust generators are oriented vertically as in conventional multirotors. Therefore, it is more efficient compared with the first type while resolving the underactuation. However, the additional servo mechanisms for each and every thrust generator escalate both the mass and the power consumption rate of the platform.

In this paper, we present a new concept of quadrotor. Named as the Tilting Thruster Type multirotor (T³-multirotor), it solves many problems of the conventional quadrotors that occur due to their underactuation by separating thrust generating part (TGP) and fuselage part (FP). As shown in figure 1, two parts are connected using a universal joint, which delivers X, Y, Z-directional force components and yaw-directional torsional force but liberates roll, pitch-directional torques. Therefore, any relative roll and pitch angle can be attained between TGP and FP. We install kinematic linkage at each of the two servo motors at the lower fuselage so that one side of linkage is attached to the horn of the servo motor while the other tip is connected to TGP. It allows us to control the relative roll and pitch angle between two parts by simple servo control. By solving the underactuation problem using only two servo motors, T³-multirotor shows better efficiency compared to other competitive platforms.

This paper is structured as follows. Section II describes the detailed design and mechanism of the T³-multirotor. In Section III, we present the mathematical model of the vehicle, and the detailed approach to control the platform in section IV. In Section V, we demonstrate the performance of

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Fig. 2. The attitudinal behavior of the thrust generation part of actual T³-quadrotor due to the servo angle (β_2) variation. Positive β_2 generates negative roll (Left), zero β_2 with zero roll (Middle), negative β_2 with positive roll attitude. During the β_2 movement, the pitch angle is not significantly changed.

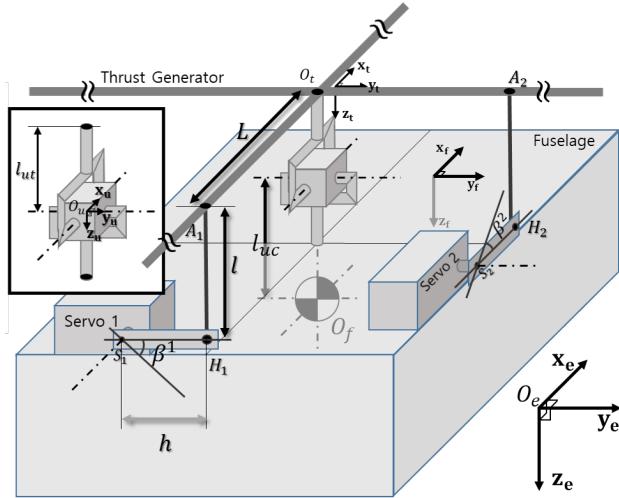


Fig. 3. A configuration diagram of T³-multirotor. Universal joint mechanism enables attitudinal freedom in ϕ_t^f and θ_t^f while two servo systems with tie rod linkage control free the attitude components with physical constraints.

the T³-multirotor by using both simulation and experimental results.

II. MECHANICAL DESIGN

In this section, we detail the design of T³-multirotor. We first define the symbols described in Fig. 3. The $\mathcal{F}_e = \{x_e, y_e, z_e\}$ with origin at O_e describes the earth-fixed frame, while $\mathcal{F}_f = \{x_f, y_f, z_f\}$ with origin at O_f is the body-fixed frame attached to the fuselage where O_f is located on the center of mass (COM) of the fuselage part (FP). The frame $\mathcal{F}_u = \{x_u, y_u, z_u\}$ has its origin O_u at the center of the universal joint. $\mathcal{F}_t = \{x_t, y_t, z_t\}$ with origin at O_t is the TGP-attached body-fixed frame. \mathcal{F}_f and \mathcal{F}_u are identical except for the location of the origin. The positions of FP and TGP with respect to the earth-fixed frame are denoted by $p_f, p_t \in \mathbb{R}^3$ and the attitudes $\Theta_t, \Theta_f \in SO(3)$, where $p_* = [x_* \ y_* \ z_*]^T$ and $\Theta_* = [\phi_* \ \theta_* \ \psi_*]^T$. S_1 and S_2 are the

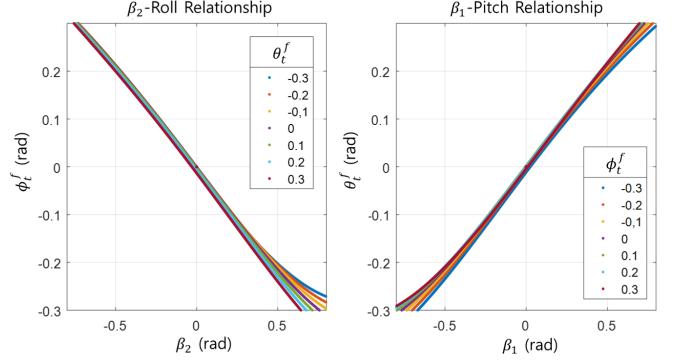


Fig. 4. Map between β_2 (Servo 2 angle) and ϕ_t^f (Left), β_1 (Servo 1 angle) and θ_t^f (Right) in various residual attitude factor condition.

positions of the rotation center of each servo motor. H_1, H_2 and A_1, A_2 are the rod-end positions of the tie rods, where H_* denotes the attach point of the servo horn and A_* the attach point on the TGP. The length of the tie rod is l , while $\overline{O_t A_*}$ is L , $\overline{O_f O_u}$ is l_{uc} and $\overline{O_u O_t}$ is l_{ut} . h is the length of the servo horn. The angles of servo 1 and servo 2 are $\beta_1 \in \mathbb{R}$ and $\beta_2 \in \mathbb{R}$ respectively.

Let $(\bullet)^*$ denote the quantity \bullet with the point of view from the starred frame. With help of the universal joint mechanism located between TGP and FP, we can freely choose $\Theta_t^f = [\phi_t^f \ \theta_t^f \ \psi_t^f]^T$, the relative attitude between TGP and FP, except for the relative yaw. As depicted in Fig. 3, Θ_t^f is controlled by two servo motors connected by a kinematic link. More specifically, the position of A_* changes with the variation of servo angle β_* because the distance between A_* and H_* is fixed by the tie-rod. The T³-multirotor's kinematic link is designed for each servo motor to control the ϕ_t^f and θ_t^f independently. In particular, β_1 is designed to dominantly control θ_t^f , while β_2 is designed to dominantly control ϕ_t^f . Fig. 4 is an experimental result showing the relationship between β and Θ_t^f . As shown in the left graph, the relationship between β_2 and ϕ_t^f is almost

linear within a certain range with respect to various values of β_1 . A similar phenomenon is also observed in the β_2 - θ_t relationship.

III. MODELLING

In this section, we build a mathematical model of T³-multirotor. To fully analyze and simulate the behavior of the T³-multirotor with relatively complex dynamic characteristics, a different approach is required instead of a simplified dynamic model for conventional multirotors. However, in case of exploring the actual control method of the platform, a simplified dynamic analysis may be better because many state variables can simply be measured through the attached sensors. In this section, we present two types of dynamic analysis, where the first investigation covers full model dedicated for simulation and the second investigation covers relatively simple analysis but better suited to provide an intuition on how to control our platform.

A. Dynamics:Udwadia-Kalaba Approach

Recently, a modeling method called Udwadia-Kalaba (U-K) approach [10] is becoming popular to solve dynamically coupled systems, which we employ in this section. Consider the dynamics of an unconstrained system

$$M\ddot{q}_u = Q \quad (1)$$

where $M \in \mathbb{R}^{n \times n}$ is a (symmetric) positive definite generalized mass matrix, $\ddot{q}_u \in \mathbb{R}^n$ is the acceleration vector describing the unconstrained movement of the object, $Q \in \mathbb{R}^n$ is a generalized force vector. When the system is subject to m constraints that are represented by sufficiently smooth equations, we can differentiate them to obtain the following form :

$$A(q, \dot{q}, t)\ddot{q} = b(q, \dot{q}, t) \quad (2)$$

where $\ddot{q} \in \mathbb{R}^n$ is the acceleration vector describing the constrained movement of the object. $A = [A_1 \ A_2 \ \dots \ A_m]^T \in \mathbb{R}^{m \times n}$, $b = [b_1 \ b_2 \ \dots \ b_m]^T \in \mathbb{R}^m$ are the matrices obtained by differentiation of the m constraints.

Considering the physical constraint, equation (1) becomes

$$M\ddot{q} = Q + Q_c \quad (3)$$

where $Q_c \in \mathbb{R}^n$ is the constraint force that hinders the unconstrained behavior \ddot{q}_u . Based on the U-K equation [10], Q_c is calculated with

$$Q_c = M^{1/2}(AM^{-1/2})^+(b - A\ddot{q}_u). \quad (4)$$

The $(\cdot)^+$ symbol describes the Moore-Penrose pseudoinverse. Then, the constrained movement of the object is described as

$$\ddot{q} = \ddot{q}_u + M^{-1/2}(AM^{-1/2})^+(b - A\ddot{q}_u). \quad (5)$$

In our case, there are two constraints to consider: the yaw angle constraint and the relative distance constraint.

1) Yaw angle constraint: The first constraint represents that the yaw angles of TGP and FP must always be the same due to the rotational constraint of the universal joint. First, we define the yaw angle difference between TGP and FP as

$$\Delta_y = Z^e(\Theta_t^e - \Theta_f^e) \quad (6)$$

where $Z^e = [0 \ 0 \ 1]$. Then, we build a constraint equation Γ_y as

$$\Gamma_y = \Delta_y - E_y \quad (7)$$

where E_y represents the desired yaw angle error between the two parts, which is zero in our case. Differentiating Γ_y twice and by organizing the resulting $\ddot{\Gamma}_y$, we get the constraint matrices A_y and b_y .

2) Relative distance constraint: The second constraint is due to the condition that TGP and FP must always be in contact with the universal joint. First, we define the distance between two attach points as

$$\Delta_p = (p_t^e + R(\Theta_t^e)p_u^t) - (p_f^e + R(\Theta_f^e)p_u^f). \quad (8)$$

Then, we build a constraint equation Γ_p as

$$\Gamma_p = \|\Delta_p\|^2 = \Delta_p^T \Delta_p - E_p^2. \quad (9)$$

where E_p represents the desired distance between the two parts, which is also zero in our case. Same as the case for Γ_y , we differentiate Γ_p twice to get the constraint matrices A_p and b_p .

Through the above two constraints, we obtain the matrices A and b needed for the construction of equation (2) as

$$A = \begin{bmatrix} A_y \\ A_p \end{bmatrix} \quad b = \begin{bmatrix} b_y \\ b_p \end{bmatrix}. \quad (10)$$

These matrices are used to calculate the constraint force Q_c in equation (4). Since the two constraints are related to relative posture and position respectively, we choose $q = [p_t \ \Theta_t \ p_f \ \Theta_f]_{1 \times 12}^T$ to fully reflect the system. Now, we combine the mechanism derived from the universal joint with the servo mechanism to derive the full model of the T³-quadrotor. Recall that the purpose of the servo mechanism is to give pushing and pulling force to the A^f point in order to generate proper torque for Θ_t^f control. Therefore, it is possible to cause an equivalent behavior by giving sufficient torque directly to x_u and y_u axes in Fig. 3. If we define those two equivalent torques as τ_x and τ_y , they act on both TGP and FP in the opposite direction due to the Newton's third law of motion. It can be written as the following generalized force vector form

$$Q_t = [0_{1 \times 3} \ [-\tau_{s,y} \ -\tau_{s,x} \ 0] \ 0_{1 \times 3} \ [\tau_{s,y} \ \tau_{s,x} \ 0]]_{1 \times 12}^T. \quad (11)$$

The full model is then

$$M_T \ddot{q} = Q_T + Q_c + Q_t \quad (12)$$

where M_T is a generalized mass matrix. The value of Q_T in the equation of motion correponds to the case when there is no constraint between TGP and FP. For TGP, the general multirotor dynamic equation is employed, while only

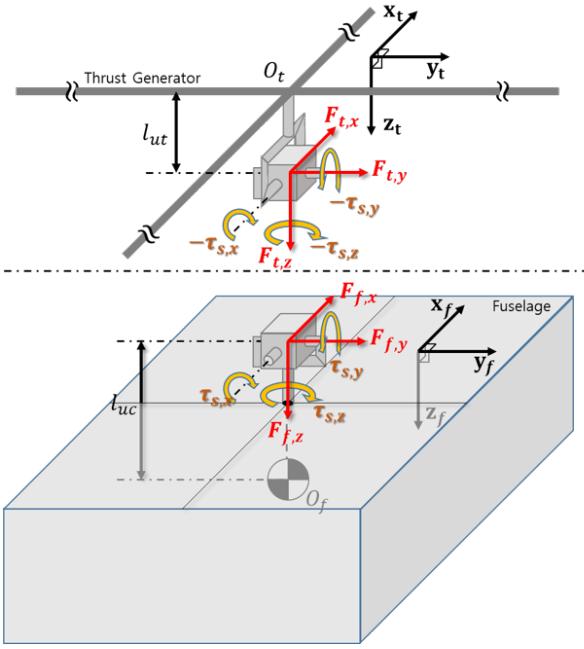


Fig. 5. Isolated configuration diagram. Internal force and servo torque are indicated.

gravitational acceleration is considered for FP which cannot generate thrust by itself.

Through this dynamic analysis, we are able to obtain the dynamic equation (12) that takes both the coupling factor and servo torque between TGP and FP into account. The next subsection covers the second dynamic analysis to find out how to achieve the desired control.

B. Dynamics:Free Body Diagram Analysis

In this subsection, we discuss dynamic analysis based on a free body diagram (FBD). Through the analysis, we aim to find the methodology to control the attitude of the dynamically coupled TGP and FP independently.

For the FBD-based model analysis, first, we isolate the thrust generator part and the fuselage part. In the process of isolating the two parts, the dynamic coupling between them is considered by marking each FBD with the internal force generated by the universal joint and the torque generated by the servo mechanism. Then, we establish the dynamic equation for each part from the FBD. To simplify the modeling process, we introduce the virtual relative attitude control torque $\tau_s = [\tau_{s,x} \ \tau_{s,y} \ \tau_{s,z}]^T$ which produces an equivalent effect to the torque generated by the servo motor mechanism. Note that unlike τ_x or τ_y , we cannot control τ_z . Instead, τ_z is determined by universal joint's axial rotation constant. Fig. 5 shows the top and bottom parts of each FBD with servo-generated τ and the internal force F .

1) *Dynamics-TGP*: TGP itself is capable of generating thrust $T_t = [0 \ 0 \ -\Sigma F_i]^T$ and torque $\tau_t = [\tau_{t,x} \ \tau_{t,y} \ \tau_{t,z}]^T$, where those two quantities are defined with respect to the \mathcal{F}_t coordinate system. F_i , $i = 1, 2, \dots, n$ are the propulsive forces generated by each of n propellers of the T^3 -multirotor.

The dynamic equations of the TGP is then

$$R(\Theta_t^e)(T_t + F_t) + M_t \vec{g} = M_t \ddot{p}_t \quad (13)$$

$$\begin{aligned} \tau_{t,total} &= \tau_t + (-\tau_s) + \vec{\lambda}_{ut} \times F_t \\ &= J_t \dot{\Omega}_t + \Omega_t \times (J_t \Omega_t) \end{aligned} \quad (14)$$

where M_t is the mass of TGP, $\vec{g} = [0 \ 0 \ g]^T$ is the gravitational acceleration vector and p_t is the position vector of the TGP measured from \mathcal{F}_e as defined before. $\tau_{t,total}$ is the total external torque applied to TGP, $\vec{\lambda}_{ut} = [0 \ 0 \ l_{ut}]^T$ is the vector from O_t to O_u . J_t is the moment of inertia (MOI) of TGP, and Ω_t is the body angular velocity of TGP.

2) *Dynamics-FP*: Compared with TGP, FP does not have its own propulsion system. Except for gravity, the only external inputs of FP are F_f and τ_s . Therefore, the dynamic equations that reflect the external inputs are

$$R(\Theta_f^e)F_f + M_f \vec{g} = M_f \ddot{p}_f \quad (15)$$

$$\begin{aligned} \tau_{f,total} &= \tau_s + \vec{\lambda}_{uf} \times F_f \\ &= J_f \dot{\Omega}_f + \Omega_f \times (J_f \Omega_f) \end{aligned} \quad (16)$$

where M_f is the mass of the FP and p_f is the position vector of the FP. $\tau_{f,total}$ is the total external torques applied to FP, $\vec{\lambda}_{uf} = [0 \ 0 \ -l_{uf}]^T$ is the vector from O_f to O_u . J_f is the MOI of FP, Ω_f is the body angular velocity of FP.

Through the second dynamic analysis, it is obvious that $\tau_{t,total}$ and $\tau_{f,total}$ should be controlled appropriately for independent attitude control of TGP and FP. However, the actual controllable elements are the τ_t and τ_s where τ_t is generated from the TGP's motors and τ_s by the servo motor. Therefore, in the next section, we will deal with a control technique that properly controls τ_t and τ_s to make $\tau_{t,total}$ and $\tau_{s,total}$ equal to our desired values.

IV. CONTROL

Prior to discussion on control, we note that F_t and F_f are terms in an action-reaction relationship expressed by the following equation :

$$R(\Theta_t^e)F_t + R(\Theta_f^e)F_f = 0. \quad (17)$$

The estimated F_f is obtained from the equation (15) as

$$\hat{F}_f = M_f R^{-1}(\Theta_f^e)(\ddot{p}_f - \vec{g}) \quad (18)$$

where Θ_f^e and \ddot{p}_f are measurable through an IMU mounted on the FP. Combining equations (17) and (18), we get

$$\hat{F}_t = -R^{-1}(\Theta_t^e)R(\Theta_f^e)F_f \quad (19)$$

where the direct calculation of F_t through equation (13) is not possible because T_t cannot be measured. On the unavailability of T_t , refer [11]. The quantity Θ_t^e is measured through the IMU on the TGP as in the case of FP.

Now, we discuss methods for controlling Θ_t^e and Θ_f^e . As discussed earlier, proper values of $\tau_{t,total}$ and $\tau_{f,total}$ should be generated to control the attitude of TGP and TP individually. However, only τ_t and τ_s are the inputs that we can control. Therefore, we need to find a way to control τ_t and τ_s that produce $\tau_{t,total}$ and $\tau_{f,total}$ as desired. Fig. 6

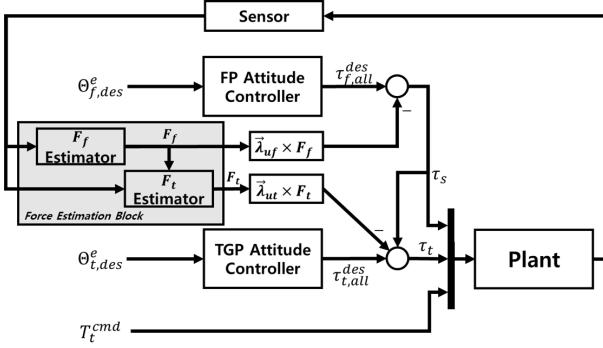


Fig. 6. Signal flow diagram of a control scheme for performing independent attitude control of TGP and FP.

shows the overall control structure of T³-multirotor. Similar to a conventional multirotor control, $\Theta_{t,des}^e$, $\Theta_{f,des}^e$ and T_t command are generated from an outer-loop controller. Once the control inputs are generated, separate attitude controllers that are responsible for FP and TGP respectively compute the desired signals $\tau_{f,tot}^{des}$ and $\tau_{t,tot}^{des}$. Meanwhile, the ‘Force Estimation Block’ in Fig. 6 continuously estimates F_t and F_f based on the equation (18) and (19). Once the internal forces are estimated, we are now ready to calculate the appropriate values for τ_s and τ_t in order to make $\tau_{t,tot}$ and $\tau_{f,tot}$ equal to their desired values $\tau_{t,tot}^{des}$ and $\tau_{f,tot}^{des}$. From equation (14) and (16), we can write τ_s and τ_t as

$$\tau_s = \tau_{f,tot}^{des} - \vec{\lambda}_{uc} \times \hat{F}_f \quad (20)$$

$$\tau_t = \tau_{t,tot}^{des} + \tau_s - \vec{\lambda}_{ut} \times \hat{F}_t. \quad (21)$$

First, we calculate τ_s by compensating the moment due to the internal force (i.e. the second term on the right hand side of equation (20)) from $\tau_{f,tot}^{des}$. Once we obtain τ_s , we calculate τ_t by compensating the effects of τ_s and the moment due to the internal force (i.e. the third term on the right hand side of equation (21)). Combining equations (20) and (21) with (14) and (16), we can see that

$$\tau_{f,tot} = \tau_{f,tot}^{des} + \vec{\lambda}_{uf} \times (F_f - \hat{F}_f) \approx \tau_{f,tot}^{des} \quad (22)$$

$$\tau_{t,tot} = \tau_{t,tot}^{des} + (\tau_s - \tau_s) + \vec{\lambda}_{ut} \times (F_t - \hat{F}_t) \approx \tau_{t,tot}^{des} \quad (23)$$

V. SIMULATION AND EXPERIMENT

This section presents the simulation and experimental result of T³-multirotor flight. As mentioned earlier in section III, the dynamic equations derived from the UK equations are used for the simulation.

A. Simulation

The simulation of T³-multirotor is performed on full dynamics equations (12) to check whether we can operate the system as desired. During the simulation, the T³-multirotor flies on a circular path shown in Fig. 7 which constantly requires to change the attitude for trajectory tracking. While the thrust generation part changes its attitude by controlling the rotation speed of motors, Q_t in equation (11) is properly

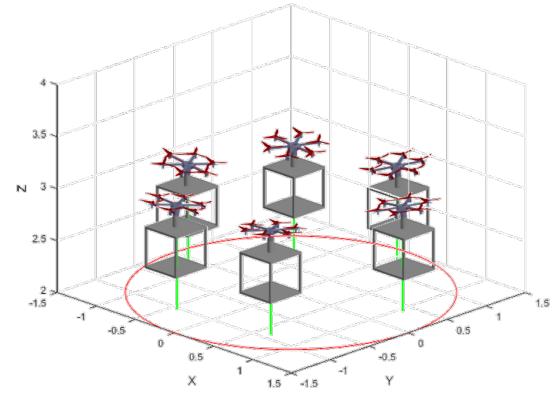


Fig. 7. Flight simulation of the T³-multirotor. The thrust generation part tilts during the flight while fuselage part remains level.

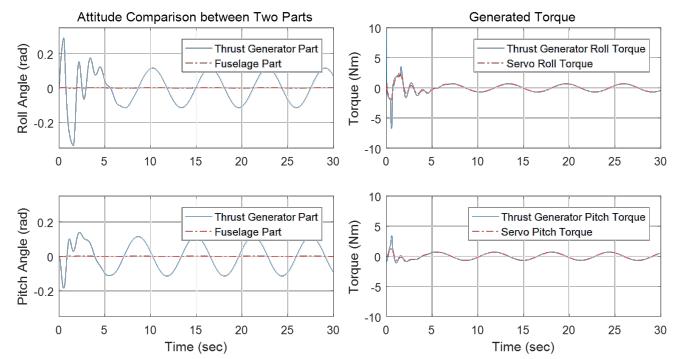


Fig. 8. Simulation results on zero roll and pitch control of fuselage part. Roll and pitch angles of TGP and FP (Left), and roll and pitch torques generated by propellers and servo mechanism (Right).

controlled to keep the attitude of the fuselage part steady. The left figures of Fig. 8 show roll and pitch attitude of two parts of T³-multirotor with respect to the earth-fixed frame for 30 seconds of simulation. The right figures show the generated torque of each part of T³-multirotor. At the initial state, it makes huge control input to follow the circular path as fast as possible. Therefore the torque produced by the thrust generation part shows large value in both roll and pitch axes. Meanwhile, the servo roll and pitch torques are generated by the relative angle controller that tries to make the fuselage part level during the flight. It is noticeable that after around 5 seconds, the torque generated by the thrust generation part and servo torque become equalized. It confirms that the overall mechanism is working correctly by cancelling the effect on FP coming from TGP using the servo motor, thus allowing the FP to maintain zero roll and pitch.

B. Experiment

The experiment of T³-multirotor is performed with the custom-made quadrotor type aerial vehicle. Fig. 9 shows the comparison between the flight without Θ_t^f control and with Θ_t^f control. As we see in the upper picture, it behaves same as the conventional underactuated multirotors that need to change the attitude for generating the desired acceleration

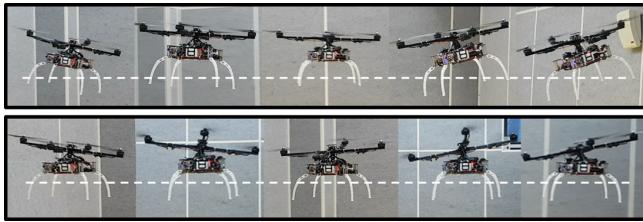


Fig. 9. The comparison between two cases of flight scenarios. The first instance (shown in the upper snapshots) demonstrates the flight with the fixed relative attitude, i.e. the relative roll and pitch are zero, same as common multirotors. The second instance (lower snapshots) demonstrates the flight with controlled relative attitude, where the attitude of the fuselage part remain level regardless of the horizontal movement of the platform.

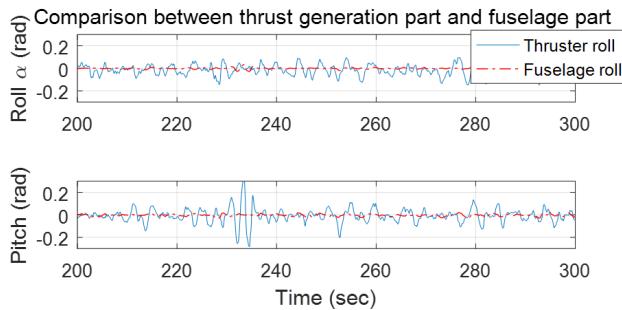


Fig. 10. The attitude comparison between the thrust generation part and the fuselage part.

vector. However, as in the lower picture, the fuselage part of the T³-quadrotor remains level regardless of the translational movement, as the relative attitude Θ_t^f is properly controlled by the servo angle control. Fig. 10 is an attitude comparison between the thrust generation part and fuselage part. As we see, the attitude of the fuselage remains near zero during the flight while the thrust generation part consistently changes the attitude to generate the desired translational acceleration.

To demonstrate the benefits of T³-multirotor design, another experiment was conducted. For many rotary aircraft, taking off from the sloped ground is highly dangerous. The reason is that most of the rotorcraft's thrust direction is fixed to the vertical direction of the fuselage, so the thrust is generated in its vertical direction to the slope. Inclined thrust generation accelerates the fuselage in the horizontal direction, creating a large horizontal motion that could cause the aircraft to roll over or even crash in extreme cases. However, in the case of T³-multirotor, the direction of thrust can be determined independently of the fuselage where the landing gear is attached, making it possible to take off stably even on a sloped area. See Fig. 11 for experimental results.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

This paper introduced a new design of a fully-actuated multirotor called T³-multirotor, where the fuselage has a full degree of freedom in any flyable condition. To build a non-underactuated multirotor, we designed a platform consisting of two major parts of thrust generation and fuselage, where the universal joint located between them provides freedom

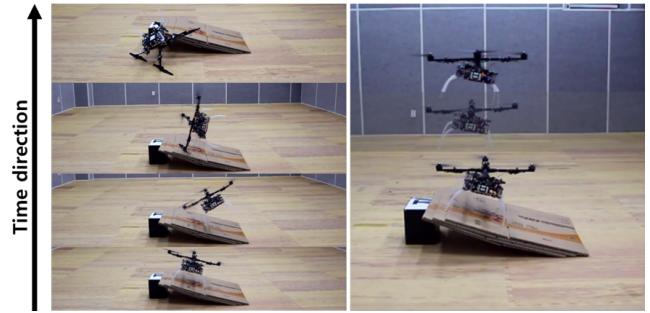


Fig. 11. Comparison of slope takeoff between conventional multirotor (Left) and T³-multirotor (Right).

in the relative roll and pitch attitude while those angles are controlled by the servo-linkage. We performed mathematical modelling of the proposed multirotor design using U-K equation for full consideration of physical constraints. Both simulation and experiment are conducted to verify the feasibility of the concept. By using the ability to control the relative position between thrust generation part and fuselage part, we expect that T³-multirotor can be applied in various scenarios such as take-off and landing on a slope, transportation of additional heavy payload, installing various payload sensors without extra systems like gimbals, which are difficult or impossible for conventional under-actuated multirotors.

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