
Physics-Informed Learning via Diffusion Framework for System State Estimation

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Abstract

We propose PILD (Physics-Informed Learning via Diffusion), a novel state estimation framework that combines a diffusion method with physical information. PILD introduces a physics-informed conditional embedding module in diffusion process, ensuring that physical observations stably guide the network’s parameter updates. Moreover, we propose a first-principle-based joint loss, achieving an elegant mathematical unification between the diffusion denoising loss and physical loss to ensure the training consistency with physical laws. Experimental results on different systems demonstrate that our PILD achieves superior accuracy, and exhibits strong generalization capability. This framework offers a promising direction for the development of more accurate and more robust engineering systems.

1 Introduction

State estimation for complex engineering systems with noise remains a challenging task mainly because of the complex nonlinear relationship between inputs and outputs [1, 2]. Physics-informed neural networks (PINNs) have demonstrated effectiveness in solving both forward (inference) and inverse (identification) partial differential equation (PDE) problems in nonlinear systems, as well as offering straightforward implementation [3, 4]. Specifically, PINNs can infer unknown parameters in PDEs and reconstruct solutions from partial observations, making them valuable for addressing

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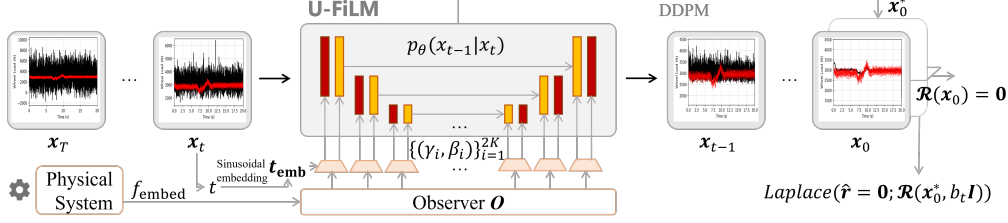


Figure 1: Overview of our PILD (Physics-Informed Learning via Diffusion) framework.

complex state estimation challenges [5]. However, PINNs often lead to non-convergence issues and low accuracy due to system uncertainty and nonlinearity [6].

Diffusion models, where data distributions are learnt by adding noise to data and training neural networks to reverse the process, effectively denoise the data and capture complex patterns [7]. Owing to their rigorous mathematical interpretability grounded in probability theory, diffusion models exhibit a strong capability to learn complex data distributions, leading to state-of-the-art (SOTA) performance across various generative tasks [8]. Even though some physics-informed diffusion models [9, 10] have been proposed to integrate denoising diffusion models with PINNs, such methods still suffer from inconsistency between data distribution and physical laws.

The main contributions of this paper are as follows:

- **PILD (Physics-Informed Learning via Diffusion) Framework** (Figure 1), which incorporates both physical priors and physical posteriors leveraging diffusion models.
- **Physics-Informed Conditional Embedding Module**, which ensures that physical priors can stably guide the update of network parameters.
- **Denoising-PINN Joint Loss**, which probabilistically models complex systems with outliers, unifying physical loss and denoising loss based on the first-principle.

2 Methodology

2.1 Physics-Informed Conditional Embedding

The physics observer O is formally defined as:

$$O = f_{\text{embed}}(\mathbf{c}, \mathbf{u}_{\text{phys}}) := [\mathbf{c}' \parallel \mathcal{S}(\mathbf{u}_{\text{phys}})], \quad (1)$$

where \mathbf{c}' is a sub-vector of salient variables from \mathbf{c} , regarded as key sensor data, \parallel denotes concatenation, and $\mathcal{S}(\cdot)$ is a standardization operator that scales the physics-based prior to have zero mean and unit variance, aligning its distribution with the internal feature space of the diffusion model. The design of this observer enables both the physical model outputs \mathbf{u}_{phys} and key sensor data \mathbf{c}' to be fed into the neural network, allowing the network to better learn the physical knowledge.

To ensure the physics observer O exerts a profound and adaptive influence, we integrate it into the network backbone using FiLM (Feature-wise Linear Modulation) [11]. Our denoising network with the residual FiLM blocks $\mathcal{G}_{\text{FiLM}}(O, \mathbf{t}_{\text{emb}})$ is equipped with a K -level-depth U-Net structure, denoted as **U-FiLM**, where \mathbf{t}_{emb} is sinusoidal embedding at timestep t . This yields a time-adaptive, scale-aware modulation: coarse physical guidance at large t refines to fine corrections as $t \rightarrow 0$.

Each residual block receives its unique pair (γ_i, β_i) as:

$$\{(\gamma_i, \beta_i)\}_{i=1}^{2K} = \mathcal{G}_{\text{FiLM}}(O, \mathbf{t}_{\text{emb}}), \quad (2)$$

and performs the affine transformation on its feature map \mathbf{h}_i :

$$\text{FiLM}(\mathbf{h}_i; \gamma_i, \beta_i) = (1 + \gamma_i) \odot \mathbf{h}_i + \beta_i, \quad (3)$$

where \odot is element-wise multiplication. Here, we adjust the coefficient to $(1 + \gamma_i)$ instead of γ_i mentioned according to 11.

2.2 Unified Physics-Informed Training Objective

Considering the complex noise present in engineering systems and the Laplace distribution's excellent modeling performance for outliers [12], we model that the virtual residual observable $\hat{\mathbf{r}}$ is sampled from a conditional Laplace distribution $q_{\mathcal{R}}(\hat{\mathbf{r}}|\mathbf{x}_0) = \text{Laplace}(\hat{\mathbf{r}}; \mathcal{R}(\mathbf{x}_0), b_t \mathbf{I})$. The probability density function of a multivariate Laplace distribution with zero mean and scale b is proportional to $\exp(-\frac{1}{b} \|\mathbf{x}\|_1)$. Minimizing the negative log-likelihood $-\log q_{\mathcal{R}}(\hat{\mathbf{r}} = \mathbf{0}|\mathbf{x}_0)$ would yield the term proportional to $\|\mathcal{R}(\hat{\mathbf{x}}_0)\|_1/b_t$. Thus, the overall training objective is interpreted as optimizing a joint log-likelihood over both the data samples and these virtual residual observables:

$$\arg \max_{\theta} \{ \mathbb{E}_{\mathbf{x}_0 \sim q(\mathbf{x}_0)} [\log p_{\theta}(\mathbf{x}_0|\mathbf{O})] + \mathbb{E}_{\mathbf{x}_0 \sim p_{\theta}(\mathbf{x}_0|\mathbf{O})} [\log q_{\mathcal{R}}(\hat{\mathbf{r}} = \mathbf{0}|\mathbf{x}_0)] \}. \quad (4)$$

Directly optimizing this joint likelihood involving sampling from $p_{\theta}(\mathbf{x}_0|\mathbf{O})$ is computationally challenging [13], our unified loss $\mathcal{L}_{\text{PILD}}$ in Equation 5 then provides a computationally tractable surrogate. The total loss $\mathcal{L}_{\text{PILD}}$ is formulated as a single expectation over the combined objectives, ensuring an elegant integration of data and robust physics:

$$\mathcal{L}_{\text{PILD}}(\theta) = \mathbb{E}_{t \sim [1, T], \mathbf{x}_0 \sim q(\mathbf{x}_0), \mathbf{O}, \epsilon \sim \mathcal{N}(\mathbf{0}, \mathbf{I})} \left[\lambda_t \|\epsilon - \epsilon_{\theta}\|^2 + \frac{1}{b_t} G(t) \|\mathcal{R}(\hat{\mathbf{x}}_0)\|_1 \right], \quad (5)$$

where $\epsilon_{\theta}(\mathbf{x}_t, \mathbf{O}, t)$ and $\mathcal{R}(\hat{\mathbf{x}}_0(\mathbf{x}_t, \mathbf{O}, t))$ have been abbreviated as ϵ_{θ} and $\mathcal{R}(\hat{\mathbf{x}}_0)$ due to typesetting constraints, λ_t is a time-dependent Min-SNR weighting [14] that naturally balances the denoising objective across different noise levels, fundamentally arising from the score matching equivalence for maximizing data likelihood [13], $b_t = B_t/c$ is a rescaled scale parameter, $c > 0$ is a single hyperparameter effectively dictating the strength of the physical penalty, B_t is the fixed variance of denoising process which has been mentioned before, $G(t) = \log(1 + \frac{T}{t})$ weakens physical penalties when t is larger, and T is total step.

2.3 Diffusion Inference and Sampling

Given the set of conditional variables \mathbf{c} , and the corresponding Physics Observer \mathbf{O} , the sampling process then proceeds as outlined in Algorithm 1.

Algorithm 1 PILD Model Sampling

Input: Trained noise prediction network ϵ_{θ} , conditional variables \mathbf{c} , number of diffusion steps T , variance schedule $\bar{\alpha}_t, \beta_t$.

Output: Generated sample \mathbf{x}_0 .

- 0: Construct Physics Observer \mathbf{O} from \mathbf{c} .
 - 0: Draw initial sample $\mathbf{x}_T \sim \mathcal{N}(\mathbf{0}, \mathbf{I})$.
 - 0: **for** $t = T$ **down to** 1 **do**
 - 0: Predict noise using the trained network: $\hat{\epsilon} = \epsilon_{\theta}(\mathbf{x}_t, \mathbf{O}, t)$
 - 0: Compute the mean of the reverse process posterior:

$$\mu_{\theta}(\mathbf{x}_t, t) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{\alpha_t}} \left(\mathbf{x}_t - \frac{1 - \alpha_t}{\sqrt{1 - \alpha_t}} \hat{\epsilon} \right)$$
 - 0: Calculate the variance for the current step: $\sigma_t^2 = \frac{1 - \bar{\alpha}_{t-1}}{1 - \bar{\alpha}_t} \beta_t$
 - 0: Sample the next state: $\mathbf{x}_{t-1} = \mu_{\theta}(\mathbf{x}_t, t) + \sigma_t \mathbf{z}$
where $\mathbf{z} \sim \mathcal{N}(\mathbf{0}, \mathbf{I})$ if $t > 1$, else $\mathbf{z} = \mathbf{0}$ for $t = 1$.
 - 0: **end for**
 - 0: **return** $\mathbf{x}_0 = \mathbf{x}_1$
-

The network training is conducted on a 4090/24G GPU. The dimensions of each layer in U-FiLM are 128, 256, 512, and 1024, respectively. Experimental verification shows that it is recommended that the time embedding dimension of the encoding network should be at least larger than the dimension of the input vector, which is set to 96 in this paper. The diffusion step count T is 200, and β_T is 0.02. In the loss function, hyperparameter c is set to 0.1.

3 Experiments

To verify the role of PILD in both providing stable physical guidance and improving physical consistency of training, we perform experiments on dynamic wheel load estimation.

Table 1: Quantitative results.

Method	Wheel Load Estimation			Trajectory Tracking					
	Aggressive $e_F \downarrow$	Smooth $e_F \downarrow$	Sporty $e_F \downarrow$	Downtown Driving $e_{x\&y} \downarrow$ $e_\psi \downarrow$ $e_{v_x} \downarrow$			Rural Driving $e_{x\&y} \downarrow$ $e_\psi \downarrow$ $e_{v_x} \downarrow$		
Basic									
FCN [15]	1257.633	601.559	794.780	9.567	7.977	14.284	9.623	6.606	10.972
ResNet [16]	1121.367	585.561	647.976	9.236	6.899	9.094	5.517	10.361	9.315
PINN									
PINN-FCN [17]	1012.849	551.508	654.644	8.824	14.488	17.287	8.279	10.349	15.251
PINN-ResNet [17]	994.7839	642.110	653.944	5.923	9.753	11.286	<u>3.729</u>	9.134	8.248
B-PINN [18]	1002.531	598.617	661.279	5.867	6.597	10.563	6.034	6.511	9.656
LSTM									
LSTM-RNN [19]	1302.589	720.567	788.163	8.953	10.199	11.298	9.643	8.831	8.168
LSTM-GA [1]	1150.434	582.840	642.638	9.019	6.579	8.442	9.005	5.994	10.837
Diffusion									
DDPM [13]	<u>980.328</u>	<u>560.796</u>	660.897	9.653	6.109	4.317	4.697	7.138	4.936
PIDM [20]	988.642	579.546	<u>630.543</u>	<u>4.845</u>	4.733	5.671	4.293	<u>5.874</u>	<u>4.061</u>
PILD (Ours)	958.578	520.631	607.274	4.796	<u>5.391</u>	3.048	3.562	5.837	3.033

3.1 Wheel Load Estimation

Since tire parameters change with temperature, we treat the tire temperature data collected by sensors as an independent variable, and thus the system is expressed as PDEs [1]. The wheel load is:

$$F_z = \mathcal{P}(D_v; c), \quad (6)$$

where D_v is the set of vehicle parameters, and c is the set of sensors' data. We evaluate our approach on a racing car chassis dynamic dataset [1] with three sets of working conditions, including aggressive, sporty, and smooth driving.

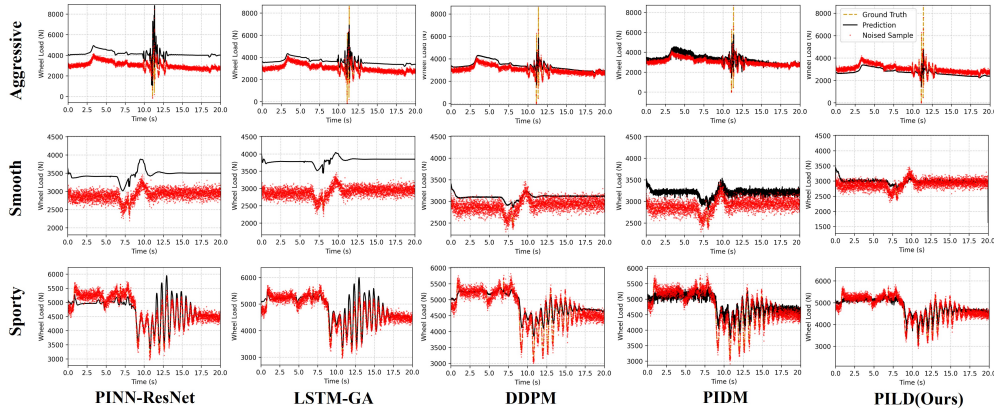


Figure 2: Experiment results on wheel load estimation tasks.

The quantitative results are presented in Table 1. The bold data is the best one and the underlined one has the second best performance. e_F is the RMSE error of wheel load (N). We select five methods for demonstration in Figure 2. Since all sensors for load estimation are installed in the vehicle chassis, the collected data contain significant noise. Different type of vehicles have totally different chassis dynamics, posing significant challenges to physical consistency.

Basic methods perform poorly in this task, as they are greatly affected by both noise and unknown model parameters. The PINN methods are also misguided by idealized physical models. The LSTM methods fail to effectively extract patterns from unknown models with noisy data. Among these methods, only the diffusion methods achieve better performance. Furthermore, we observe that the results of the PIDM method contain noise. This is because the modeling of the Gaussian distribution for physical residuals in PIDM is less effective in handling system outliers compared to the Laplace distribution used in the PILD. The proposed **PILD** method, which ensures stable physical guidance and training consistency, demonstrates the best generalizability and results.

3.2 Trajectory Tracking

Vehicle tracking requires a vehicle dynamic model to predict the future state. The Ackerman steering model is provided in the supplementary materials, including longitudinal, lateral, and yaw motions. The system is treated as an ODE system.

Using the Ackerman model, we compute the position, yaw angle, and speed of the vehicle at next time step via the following concise equations:

$$[x_{t+1}, y_{t+1}, \psi_{t+1}, v_{x_{t+1}}]^\top = \mathcal{P}(D_v; [x_t, y_t, \psi_t, v_{x_t}]^\top, \mathbf{c}), \quad (7)$$

where $[\cdot]^\top$ is the vehicle state vector (x coordinate, y coordinate, yaw angle, forward velocity), the system transfer physical model is denoted as \mathcal{P} , D_v is vehicle's parameter set, and \mathbf{c} is the set of all required sensor's data.

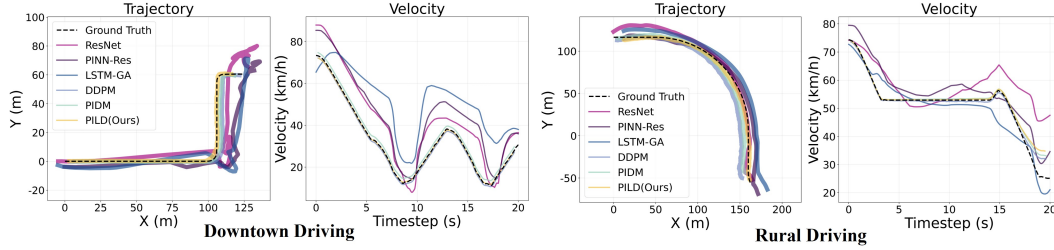


Figure 3: Experiment results on trajectory tracking tasks.

The quantitative results are presented in Table 1. $e_{\{x, y, \psi, v_x\}}$ in the table is RMSE error of position (m), yaw (deg) and velocity (km/h). We take two scenarios for demonstration in Figure 3. Results show that our method performs well in the tracking task. When dealing with vehicle parameters that have never been encountered before, the Basic methods produce large errors due to the lack of physical guidance. Meanwhile, the PINN methods may be misled by fixed physical models, preventing the network from balancing the differences between physical models and real-world data. The LSTM methods also fail to achieve optimal results due to the randomness of trajectory sequences and the uncertainty of the model itself. Compared with other diffusion methods, the **PILD** incorporates stable guidance from a physical observer and uses a Laplace distribution to model system outliers, demonstrating good results.

4 Conclusion

This paper propose a physics informed learning framework via diffusion (**PILD**), aiming to solve the state estimation problem for complex engineering systems. In our **PILD** framework, the conditional physical observer is deeply embedded, and the diffusion method is introduced to generate the system state. The proposed **PILD** loss function leverages Laplace distribution in handling outliers of complex engineering systems and unifies the physical loss and diffusion denoising loss from the first principles. The experimental results show that **PILD** can achieve favorable performance under different conditions. However, the proposed method currently has limitations: due to the complexity of its network structure, it is more computationally intensive than non-diffusion methods. Future research will focus on reducing the computational cost of our method while maintaining superior performance.

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