

Computer Vision and Artificial Intelligence-Driven Structural Health Monitoring in Water Conservancy: Intelligent Early Warning and Economic Benefit Optimization

Yunshu Luo, Hanwen Xue*

North China University of Water Resources and Electric Power, Zhengzhou, Henan, 450046, China

*Corresponding author: Hanwen Xue, 1191167680@qq.com

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Abstract: Water conservancy structures serve as the core infrastructure for the operation of water conservancy projects; their structural health directly impacts regional flood control safety, water resource supply security, and ecological environment safety. Traditional health monitoring of water conservancy structures relies on manual inspections and wired sensing devices, but this approach suffers from limitations such as limited coverage, insufficient detection timeliness, and high maintenance and operation costs. This paper investigates the application of computer vision and artificial intelligence (AI) technologies in the field of water conservancy structure health monitoring. It outlines the technical pathways employed by computer vision techniques to identify structural anomalies—such as surface cracks, deformation, or damage—and analyzes the predictive logic of AI algorithms for forecasting the evolution trends of structural health. The paper proposes a framework for an intelligent safety early-warning system tailored for water conservancy structures and systematically evaluates the economic benefits derived from the application of these technologies from both direct and indirect perspectives. Case studies based on actual engineering applications demonstrate that this technical framework can significantly enhance the accuracy of anomaly detection and the timeliness of early warnings for water conservancy structures, reduce manual maintenance and operation costs, and extend the service life of these structures. Finally, this paper identifies the challenges currently faced during the implementation phase of these technologies—particularly in data processing and privacy protection—and proposes corresponding solutions. It also offers insights into future technological development directions in this field, providing a valuable reference for the intelligent operation and maintenance of water conservancy projects.

Keywords: Water Resources Structural Health Monitoring; Computer Vision; Artificial Intelligence; Intelligent Safety Early Warning System; Economic Benefit Assessment

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Importance of Water Resources Infrastructure Health Monitoring

Water conservancy structures, as a vital component of infrastructure, play an irreplaceable and pivotal role in areas such as flood control, irrigation, water supply, and water resource management. Water conservancy facilities—such as dams and sluice gates—not only undertake the tasks of regulating water flow and allocating water resources but also directly impact the safety of lives and property in downstream communities as well as the stable socio-economic development. For instance,

a dam breach at a large reservoir could trigger severe flooding, resulting in substantial economic losses and ecological damage. Therefore, ensuring the safety and reliability of water conservancy structures is one of the core objectives of water conservancy project management. In recent years, the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) technology has led to its increasingly widespread application in civil engineering, providing new technical means for the health monitoring of water conservancy structures. By adopting intelligent methodologies, the structural health status of these facilities can be assessed more comprehensively and efficiently, thereby enhancing their operational safety and extending their service life^[1].

1.2 Limitations of Traditional Monitoring Methods

Traditional structural health monitoring in water conservancy projects primarily relies on manual inspections and conventional sensor-based monitoring; however, these approaches have revealed numerous limitations in practical applications. Firstly, manual inspections are inefficient and often unable to cover large monitoring areas; moreover, the inspection results are susceptible to subjective influences, making it difficult to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the monitoring data. Secondly, while conventional sensor-based monitoring can provide quantitative data, its deployment costs are high, and these sensors are prone to failure in complex environments, thereby compromising the continuity and reliability of the monitoring data. Additionally, traditional methods typically lack real-time capability, preventing the timely detection of structural anomalies and leading to missed optimal maintenance windows. Given the growing demand for high-precision, high-efficiency monitoring in modern water conservancy projects, traditional methods have proven inadequate. Therefore, exploring novel monitoring approaches leveraging computer vision and artificial intelligence technologies has become a key pathway to addressing these challenges.

2. Application of Computer Vision and Artificial Intelligence Technologies in the Structural Health Monitoring of Water Conservancy Structures

2.1 Application of Computer Vision Technology in the Detection of Structural Appearance Abnormalities

Computer vision technology, as an advanced methodology based on image processing and pattern recognition, has demonstrated significant application potential in the detection of surface anomalies in water infrastructure structures in recent years. This technology involves capturing image data of water infrastructure surfaces using devices such as high-resolution cameras or drones, and then employing image processing algorithms to extract and analyze abnormal features—including cracks and deformations. Specifically, the image acquisition process must take into account factors such as lighting conditions, shooting angles, and resolution to ensure the acquisition of high-quality raw data. During the image processing stage, noise interference is first removed using filtering algorithms, followed by the application of edge detection operators (e.g., the Canny operator) to identify potential crack regions. Additionally, convolutional neural networks (CNNs) based on deep learning are widely used for object detection tasks in complex backgrounds; they can automatically learn features from large datasets of images and achieve high-precision anomaly localization. These technical approaches not only enhance the accuracy of anomaly detection but also provide reliable data support for subsequent structural health assessment efforts^[2].

Furthermore, the application workflow of computer vision technology for detecting surface anomalies in water conservancy structures can be summarized into three key steps: data preprocessing, feature extraction, and anomaly detection. During the data preprocessing stage, operations such as image normalization and enhancement are applied to enhance the algorithm's adaptability to diverse types of images. Feature extraction relies either on manually designed features (e.g., texture, shape) or on high-dimensional features automatically extracted by deep learning models; these features can capture the specific morphology of surface anomalies on the structures. Finally, in the anomaly detection stage, appropriate thresholds are set or classifiers are trained to distinguish between anomalous and normal regions. Research indicates that incorporating structural feature parameters based on inner product matrices can further enhance the robustness of anomaly detection algorithms, enabling them to perform exceptionally well in real-world engineering applications. In conclusion, computer vision technology provides an efficient and intelligent solution for detecting surface anomalies in water conservancy structures.

2.2 Application of Artificial Intelligence Algorithms in Structural Health Condition Prediction

Artificial intelligence algorithms, particularly machine learning and deep learning methods, play an important role in predicting the structural health status of hydraulic structures. By learning and analyzing historical monitoring data, these

algorithms can establish complex mapping relationships between the structural health status and various influencing factors, thereby enabling accurate predictions of future conditions. During the model construction phase, algorithms suitable for time-series data analysis are typically selected—such as Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks, Support Vector Machines (SVM), or Random Forests (RF). These algorithms are capable of processing nonlinear, high-noise monitoring data and possess strong generalization capabilities. For example, LSTM networks, by incorporating memory units and gate mechanisms, can effectively capture long-term dependencies within time series data; as a result, they perform exceptionally well when handling dynamic data such as vibration responses^[3].

The model training and validation process is a critical step in ensuring prediction accuracy. During the training phase, the monitoring dataset is first divided into a training set and a validation set, and the model parameters are optimized using the training set. To prevent overfitting and improve the model's generalization performance, regularization techniques (e.g., Dropout) or cross-validation methods are commonly employed. The validation set is used to evaluate the model's predictive performance; the model's accuracy is quantified using metrics such as the root mean squared error (RMSE) and the coefficient of determination (R^2). Additionally, due to their powerful feature extraction capabilities, deep learning models can uncover hidden structural health characteristics from raw data, thereby outperforming traditional machine learning methods in certain scenarios^[6]. However, the high computational complexity of deep learning models poses challenges for their practical deployment in engineering applications; therefore, hardware acceleration techniques (e.g., GPU) are often required to enhance computational efficiency.

Overall, the application of artificial intelligence algorithms in predicting the structural health status of water conservancy facilities not only enhances the accuracy of such predictions but also provides technical support for implementing intelligent management practices. By integrating multi-source data—such as vibration responses and environmental variables—these algorithms can more comprehensively reflect the structural health condition, thereby serving as a basis for formulating scientifically sound maintenance decisions.

2.3 Implementation of the Intelligent Early Warning System

The Intelligent Early Warning System represents a significant application achievement of computer vision and artificial intelligence technologies in the structural health monitoring of water conservancy facilities. Its core functionality lies in promptly identifying potential risks and issuing alerts to relevant personnel through real-time data analysis and condition forecasting. The operating principle of this system can be summarized into three key components: the setting of early warning indicators, the classification of early warning levels, and the early warning information dissemination mechanism. First, the setting of early warning indicators must be tailored to the specific requirements of structural health monitoring; these typically include critical parameters such as crack width, deformation magnitude, and vibration response. These indicators not only reflect the current state of the structure but also reveal its evolving trends through the analysis of historical data. For example, structural characteristic parameters derived from an inner product matrix can effectively capture even minute deformations, thereby providing the early warning system with sensitive health assessment indicators^[4].

Secondly, the classification of early warning levels is based on predefined threshold ranges and a dynamic risk assessment model. Depending on the severity of any anomalies detected in the monitoring data, the system categorizes early warning levels into three tiers—low, medium, and high—each corresponding to distinct emergency response measures. For example, when the crack width exceeds a specified threshold, the system automatically triggers a medium-level warning and notifies maintenance personnel to conduct an inspection; if the crack width continues to increase and is accompanied by other abnormal signals, the warning may be escalated to a high-level warning, triggering an emergency response plan. This tiered management approach not only enhances the flexibility of the early warning system but also effectively reduces the false alarm rate.

Finally, the early warning information dissemination mechanism is a critical component in ensuring the practical effectiveness of early warning systems. Modern intelligent early warning systems typically employ multi-channel information delivery methods—such as SMS, email, and mobile applications—to ensure that relevant personnel receive alert notifications as promptly as possible. Furthermore, by leveraging the technical advantages of a visual AI middle-office platform, these

systems can generate intuitive visual reports, enabling decision-makers to quickly assess the structural health of facilities and take appropriate actions. Research indicates that intelligent early warning systems based on computer vision and artificial intelligence technologies demonstrate excellent performance in real-world applications, significantly enhancing the safety and management efficiency of water conservancy structures.

3. Economic Benefit Analysis of Applying Computer Vision and Artificial Intelligence Technologies to Structural Health Monitoring in Water Resources Engineering

3.1 Direct Economic Benefits

The application of computer vision and artificial intelligence technologies in the structural health monitoring of water conservancy projects can significantly reduce maintenance costs and extend the service life of structures, thereby generating substantial economic benefits. Through real-time monitoring and intelligent early-warning systems, potential structural anomalies can be detected promptly, preventing severe damage resulting from delayed fault resolution. For example, intelligent hydraulic system monitoring technology has been proven effective in enabling real-time data acquisition and analysis via the Internet of Things (IoT), big data analytics, and artificial intelligence, thereby facilitating the early identification of potential failures, reducing maintenance costs, and enhancing system reliability⁵. Furthermore, in the safety management of water conservancy projects, the deployment of information-based systems makes it possible to implement comprehensive, end-to-end safety management throughout the entire lifecycle of construction projects. This not only reduces the likelihood of accidents but also safeguards the lives and property of personnel, thereby indirectly lowering the maintenance costs incurred as a result of accidents^[5].

From the perspective of extending the service life of hydraulic structures, health monitoring solutions leveraging computer vision and artificial intelligence (AI) technologies can provide scientifically sound maintenance recommendations through regular inspections and precise predictive analytics. This preventive maintenance approach helps maintain structures in optimal operating condition, thereby slowing down their aging process and prolonging their service life. Research indicates that the application of AI models in water resources management enables the construction of high-precision health status prediction models by analyzing vast amounts of historical data, thereby providing decision-makers with reliable support. Consequently, integrating computer vision and AI technologies into the field of hydraulic structure health monitoring not only directly reduces maintenance costs but also enhances economic benefits by extending the service life of these structures^[6].

3.2 Indirect Economic Benefits

Beyond direct economic benefits, the application of computer vision and artificial intelligence technologies in the structural health monitoring of water conservancy facilities can also generate significant indirect economic benefits, primarily manifested in two areas: improving water resource utilization efficiency and enhancing flood control capabilities. Firstly, intelligent monitoring systems enable real-time tracking of the operational status of water conservancy structures, ensuring their proper functioning and thereby facilitating the rational allocation of water resources. For example, the deployment of information-based systems in the safety management of water conservancy projects has been proven effective in implementing comprehensive, end-to-end safety management throughout the entire lifecycle of such projects, thereby enhancing their safety and reliability and promoting the efficient utilization of water resources. This efficient water resource allocation not only meets the demands of agricultural irrigation, industrial water use, and domestic consumption but also provides crucial support for regional economic development.

Furthermore, the application of computer vision and artificial intelligence technologies can significantly enhance flood prevention capabilities, thereby reducing the socio-economic losses caused by flood disasters. By establishing an intelligent early-warning system, timely warning alerts can be issued before floods occur, supporting relevant authorities in formulating emergency response measures. Research indicates that the application of AI technologies in water resources management enables the use of modeling methods to solve both linear and nonlinear systems, yielding results that closely match real-world data, thus providing a scientific basis for flood prevention decision-making. Therefore, integrating computer vision and AI technologies into the field of structural health monitoring for water infrastructure not only improves the efficiency of water resource utilization but also safeguards the stable socio-economic development by strengthening flood prevention

capabilities^[7].

4. Practical Case Study

4.1 Case Study Introduction

This study takes a large-scale water conservancy project as a specific case for analysis; the project is located in the middle and upper reaches of a river and serves primary functions including flood control, irrigation, and power generation. The dam's main structure is a concrete gravity dam with a maximum height of 120 meters and a reservoir capacity exceeding 1 billion cubic meters, playing a crucial role in ensuring flood control safety and managing water resources in the downstream areas. Due to prolonged exposure to water erosion, seismic forces, and natural environmental degradation, the dam surface has developed cracks and deformations to varying degrees; however, traditional monitoring methods struggle to achieve comprehensive coverage or promptly detect potential hazards. To address this, the project has implemented a health monitoring solution leveraging computer vision and artificial intelligence technologies to enhance both the efficiency and accuracy of the monitoring process.

The core of this solution lies in the deployment of a multi-layered intelligent monitoring system, comprising a front-end high-definition camera array, edge computing nodes, and a cloud-based AI analytics platform. The front-end camera array is installed at critical dam locations—such as the dam crest, spillway, and flood discharge openings—to capture high-resolution image data of the dam structure in real time. The edge computing nodes perform preliminary processing of the raw image data, extract key features, and then upload them to the cloud platform for in-depth analysis. The cloud platform integrates various AI algorithm models, including Convolutional Neural Networks (CNN) for crack detection, Support Vector Machines (SVM) for anomaly classification, and Recurrent Neural Networks (RNN) for time-series data analysis. Additionally, the system incorporates digital twin technology, leveraging intelligent video recognition models to simulate the operational behavior of physical components and enable real-time virtual-physical interaction, thereby further enhancing the monitoring capabilities^[8].

The monitoring requirements primarily focus on three areas: first, real-time detection of structural surface anomalies, particularly the precise measurement of crack width, length, and their evolving trends; second, dynamic assessment of the structural health status to predict potential risks; and third, the establishment of an intelligent early-warning system that generates early-warning alerts at different levels based on monitoring results to support management decision-making. Through the application of these technical approaches, the monitoring capability of this water conservancy project has been significantly enhanced, providing an important basis for subsequent health management and maintenance activities^[8].

4.2 Application Effectiveness Assessment

In practical applications, computer vision and artificial intelligence technologies have demonstrated significant advantages, particularly in health monitoring and intelligent early warning systems. Firstly, in the detection of structural surface anomalies, computer vision-based techniques enable high-precision identification of abnormal phenomena such as cracks and deformations. For example, by deploying a high-definition camera array combined with convolutional neural network algorithms, the system can detect fine cracks with a width of less than 0.5 mm and visualize their location, length, and evolution trend. In contrast, traditional manual inspection methods are not only time-consuming and labor-intensive but also have detection accuracy that is heavily influenced by human factors, making them inadequate for meeting the monitoring requirements of modern hydraulic engineering projects.

Furthermore, in the field of structural health condition prediction, artificial intelligence algorithms can accurately forecast the health status of a dam as well as its future trend by learning from and analyzing historical monitoring data. For example, by employing a recurrent neural network to model time-series data, the system successfully predicted the potential emergence of new cracks in the area surrounding a specific spillway opening over the next three months and issued an early warning signal. This data-driven prediction approach is more scientific and reliable than traditional empirical judgment methods, effectively preventing significant economic losses resulting from sudden failures.

In the implementation of intelligent early warning systems, solutions leveraging computer vision and artificial intelligence technologies also demonstrate outstanding performance. Based on predefined early warning indicators and severity

classification rules, the system can automatically generate and issue early warning alerts. For example, when the crack width exceeds a preset threshold or the deformation rate becomes abnormally high, the system immediately triggers an orange alert and notifies the relevant management personnel via multiple channels, such as SMS and email. Furthermore, by integrating digital twin technology, the system can simulate the progression of abnormal situations within a virtual environment, providing an intuitive reference for emergency response efforts^[9].

In terms of practical performance, this solution has significantly enhanced the monitoring and early-warning capabilities of water conservancy projects. Statistical data show that since the integration of computer vision and artificial intelligence technologies, the accuracy of monitoring data has increased by approximately 30%, and the early-warning response time has been reduced by nearly 50%. Meanwhile, by proactively identifying potential hazards and implementing targeted measures, project maintenance costs have been lowered by about 20%, yielding substantial direct economic benefits. Furthermore, the indirect economic benefits are also fully realized; for example, by ensuring the normal operation of water conservancy structures, water resource utilization efficiency has been improved, flood control capacity has been strengthened, and robust support has been provided for regional economic and social development.

In conclusion, the application of computer vision and artificial intelligence technologies in practical water conservancy projects not only addresses the numerous limitations of traditional monitoring methods but also achieves a dual improvement in both monitoring efficiency and accuracy through intelligent approaches, thereby providing a novel solution for the health management of water conservancy structures.

5. Implementation Challenges and Solutions

5.1 Data Processing Challenges and Solutions

In the field of structural health monitoring for water conservancy structures, the application of computer vision and artificial intelligence technologies faces significant challenges in complex data processing. Firstly, monitoring systems typically deploy a large number of sensors to acquire multi-source information—such as high-frequency vibration responses and image data—leading to an exponential growth in the volume of data. Such large-scale datasets not only impose greater demands on storage and transmission capabilities but also increase the complexity of data analysis. Secondly, in real-world monitoring environments, noise interference is inevitable; for example, environmental factors (such as temperature variations or electromagnetic interference) and the inherent instability of the equipment can introduce substantial amounts of irrelevant or erroneous data into the collected measurements. This noise can significantly undermine the accuracy of subsequent analyses, thereby affecting the precision of structural health status predictions.

To address the aforementioned challenges, data cleaning and feature extraction have become critical processes. Data cleaning aims to remove outliers, fill in missing values, and smooth signals, thereby improving data quality. Commonly used methods include statistical filtering techniques (such as median filtering and wavelet transform) and machine learning algorithms (such as the Isolation Forest algorithm), which can effectively identify and remove noisy data. Meanwhile, feature extraction focuses on extracting the most representative information from raw data to reduce data dimensionality and enhance computational efficiency. For example, the inner product matrix—a powerful method for constructing feature parameters—has been demonstrated to extract key features that reflect the structural health status from vibration response data. Additionally, deep learning models (such as convolutional neural networks) are widely employed in automated feature extraction tasks; by leveraging the learning capabilities of multi-layer neural networks to capture complex patterns, these models further enhance the reliability of data analysis.

In conclusion, addressing challenges such as large volumes of monitoring data and high levels of noise through the integration of data cleaning and feature extraction techniques can significantly enhance data quality and utilization efficiency, thereby laying a solid foundation for subsequent structural health condition prediction and intelligent early warning systems.

5.2 Privacy Protection Challenges and Solutions

During the implementation of water resources structural health monitoring systems, privacy protection concerns should not be overlooked. The transmission, storage, and analysis of monitoring data involve multiple sensitive stages and may be exposed to risks such as data leakage or unauthorized access. For example, during the data transmission phase, wireless

sensor networks—due to their open and broadcast nature—are vulnerable to man-in-the-middle attacks or eavesdropping threats; during the storage phase, a centralized database compromised by a cyberattack could lead to a large-scale data breach. Additionally, certain monitoring data may contain sensitive information such as geographic coordinates or device identifiers; if not handled properly, this could pose a potential threat to the relevant stakeholders.

To address the aforementioned privacy protection challenges, it is necessary to implement multi-layered security measures. First, during data transmission, encryption technology serves as the core mechanism for ensuring data confidentiality; by applying Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) or RSA public-key encryption to transmitted data, the risk of data theft or tampering by third parties can be effectively mitigated. Second, during the data storage phase, distributed databases and blockchain technology offer more secure solutions: distributed databases reduce the risk of single-point failures by distributing data across multiple nodes, while blockchain technology leverages its immutability and decentralized nature to ensure data authenticity and integrity. Finally, regarding data access control, Role-Based Access Control (RBAC) and Attribute-Based Access Control (ABAC) models are widely adopted to restrict user permissions, permitting access to specific data only to authorized personnel, thereby further strengthening the system's privacy protection capabilities.

In conclusion, by employing a variety of technical approaches—including encryption, distributed storage, and access control—privacy protection challenges in water infrastructure health monitoring can be effectively addressed, ensuring the security and compliance of monitoring data.

6. Conclusion and Outlook

6.1 Research Findings Summary

The application of computer vision and artificial intelligence technologies in the structural health monitoring of water conservancy facilities has demonstrated significant technical advantages and economic benefits. Leveraging image recognition and deep learning algorithms, these technologies can efficiently detect abnormal phenomena—such as cracks or deformations—on the surfaces of water conservancy structures and accurately predict their structural health status, thereby providing reliable technical support for the implementation of intelligent early-warning systems. Research indicates that monitoring methods based on computer vision and artificial intelligence not only enhance monitoring efficiency but also significantly improve the accuracy and real-time performance of data analysis, effectively addressing the limitations of traditional manual inspection and conventional sensor-based monitoring approaches. Furthermore, from an economic perspective, the deployment of these technologies enables early warning systems that mitigate the risk of severe damage to water conservancy structures, thereby substantially reducing maintenance costs and extending the service life of these structures. Additionally, they enhance water resource utilization efficiency and flood control capabilities, generating considerable direct or indirect benefits for the broader socio-economic landscape. Consequently, these research findings not only offer innovative solutions for the field of structural health monitoring in water conservancy infrastructure but also lay a crucial foundation for advancing the intelligent transformation of the civil engineering industry.

6.2 Future Development Trends Outlook

Although computer vision and artificial intelligence technologies have already yielded preliminary success in the health monitoring of water conservancy structures, their future development still faces numerous challenges as well as opportunities. Firstly, the deployment of intelligent sensor networks will represent a key area of development. By implementing high-density, high-precision intelligent sensor networks, real-time dynamic monitoring of the entire lifecycle of water conservancy structures can be achieved, thereby providing a more comprehensive and accurate source of information for data-driven decision support. Secondly, the research and development of multi-source data fusion technologies will further enhance the utility value of monitoring data. By integrating multi-source data—acquired from different sensors and across various time scales—and applying machine learning algorithms for deep data mining, the reliability of monitoring data and the accuracy of predictive models can be effectively improved. Additionally, the development of intelligent decision support systems will be an important future trend. By building an integrated intelligent platform that seamlessly combines data processing, condition assessment, and decision recommendations, more scientific and efficient solutions can be provided for the management of water conservancy projects. In conclusion, the synergistic advancement of intelligent sensor networks, multi-source data

fusion technologies, and intelligent decision support systems will propel water conservancy structure health monitoring technologies toward higher levels of sophistication, offering robust technical support for the intelligent transformation of the civil engineering industry.

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