

BARRA Multi-Factor Model

Group: Fama's Friends

Members: Zhangjie LYU, Evan HU, Yuting FANG, Wei PENG, Antoine

1. Introduction

Financial investments deal with big data every day, for all the information of the market possesses the three V features - volume, variety and velocity. Variety can be reflected from the price, amount, time, ranking, analysts' reports and financial reports that all will be considered by analysts and portfolio managers. In order to understand the comprehensive and unbiased situations of the market, almost every piece of information related to what are listed above is required to be collected and analyzed, which naturally accumulates into a large volume. In addition, investment opportunities are momentary like written in water. Capturing them and making the trades, therefore, have to be as fast as possible, which is what velocity indicates. Quantitative investments, especially trading within one or two days, are one of the most common and powerful big data processing in financial investments. In this project, we implement the BARRA multi-factor model to clean stock data, establish α factors, test each of them separately and combine the significant and independent ones as a reference of how to form the portfolio.

2. Data and Database

In this project, we adopt the data from *Wind* containing the names, tickers, ohlc prices (daily open, high, low, close prices), total market capital, volumes, amounts, P/E ratios (trailing twelve month), whether they could be traded, whether they were in special treatment (ST), which industry they belong to, etc. of 3842 stocks in A share for 2166 trade days from 4 January, 2011 to 28 November, 2019.

All these information are matrices with their columns as stocks and rows as dates. Prices, total market capital and amounts are in US dollars. Whether they could be traded and whether they were in special treatment (ST) are boolean values, with 1 as can be traded or in ST and 0 as the opposite (see Figure 1).

projectData.stock.stTable												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	^
2	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	
3	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	
4	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	
5	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	
6	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	
7	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	
8	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	
9	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	
10	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	
11	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	>

Figure 1. stTable matrix (part)

Each of the A share stocks is classified as one of 34 Level 1 industries. The categories are proposed by SHENWAN HONGYUAN Securities, each with an assigned number in the matrix (see Figure 2). For example, 15 represents pharmaceutical and biological industry, 18 represents real estate industry and 19 represents financial service industry.

projectData.stock.sectorClassification.levelOne											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	19	18	NaN	15	18	18	21	23	18	23	18
2	19	18	NaN	15	18	18	21	23	18	23	18
3	19	18	NaN	15	18	18	21	23	18	23	18
4	19	18	NaN	15	18	18	21	23	18	23	18
5	19	18	NaN	15	18	18	21	23	18	23	18
6	19	18	NaN	15	18	18	21	23	18	23	18
7	19	18	NaN	15	18	18	21	23	18	23	18
8	19	18	NaN	15	18	18	21	23	18	23	18
9	19	18	NaN	15	18	18	21	23	18	23	18
10	19	18	NaN	15	18	18	21	23	18	23	18
11	19	18	NaN	15	18	18	21	23	18	23	18

Figure 2. Level 1 classification of stocks (part)

As we choose MATLAB as the processing language, we store all the information matrices as a MATLAB struct in a ".mat" file (see Figure 3). Struct is a very flexible MATLAB data structure that can nest multiple layers of sub-structs and the storage of structs is very compact.

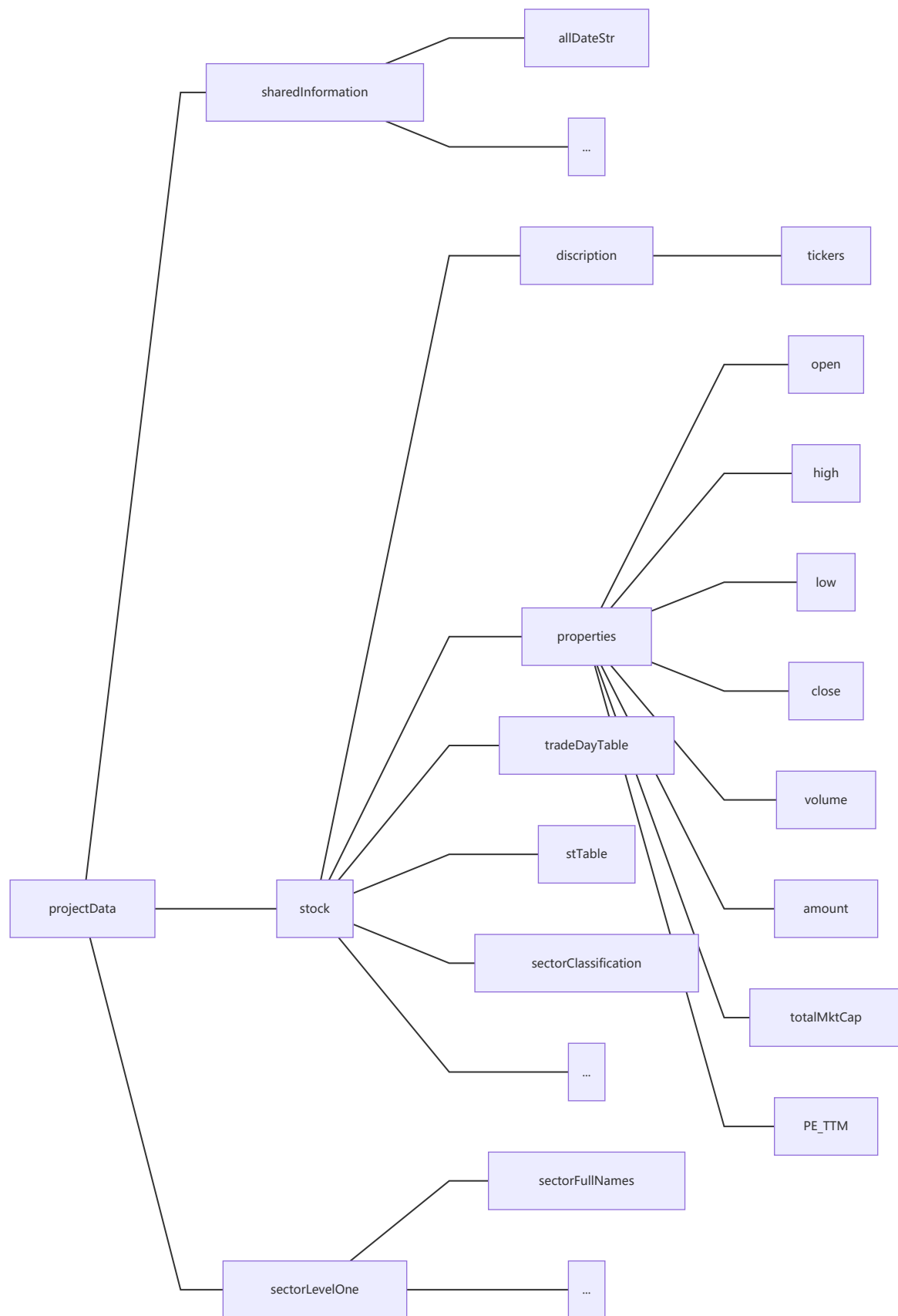


Figure 3. the structure of the data struct

3. BARRA model

The BARRA multi-factor model is one of the two commonly used multi-factor models, providing countless new alpha factors with different patterns, giving remarkable annual returns for daily investments (T+1, trade based on yesterday's data).

In BARRA model, we define a factor as an element that can explain a certain characteristic of stocks and a factor exposure as the value of a certain stock on the factor. The factor return is defined as the return of a portfolio based on the factor, which mainly is established by normalizing the factor exposures cross-sectionally, longing the top 10% or 20% and shorting the bottom 10% or 20%.

There are two sets of factors already been introduced in BARRA, namely industry factors and style factors. The industry factor exposure will only be 1 (in this industry) or 0 (not in this industry) for each stock. The number of different industries, as has been mentioned above, is 34 according to the Level 1 classification of SHENWAN HONGYUAN Securities. The style factors are divided into 9 categories. They are β , momentum, size, earnings yield, volatility, growth, value, leverage and liquidity respectively.

Assume there are N stocks, P industries and Q styles factors at time t in the market. Let r_t denotes the $N \times 1$ vector of returns; $X_{Industry} = (x_{n,t}^{I_p})_{N \times P}$ are the exposures of industry factors, $x_{n,t}^{I_p}$ is the exposure of stock n on industry I_p at time t , the value is either 0 or 1; $X_{Style} = (x_{n,t}^{S_q})_{N \times Q}$ are the exposures of different styles after normalization; u are the premiums of stock returns that cannot be explained by the above factors, which are the specific returns of stocks. Then we have

$$r_t = X_{Industry}^t f_{Industry}^t + X_{Style}^t f_{Style}^t + u_t.$$

For all the alpha factors we implement, they will try to explain part of the specific returns u_t . For every single alpha factor we find, we have

$$r_t = X_{Industry}^t f_{Industry}^t + X_{Style}^t f_{Style}^t + \alpha_t f_{\alpha}^t + u_t.$$

After the factor exposures are calculated, the factor return can be naturally acquired. For estimating stock returns at time $t + 1$, we use the exposures at time t and factor returns at time $t + 1$ to run regression. For batch processing, we combine these factor exposures and returns together

$$r_{t+1} = X^t f^t + u_t.$$

$$X^t = (X_{Industry}^t \quad X_{Style}^t \quad \alpha^t), f^t = ((f_{Industry}^t)^T \quad (f_{Style}^t)^T \quad (f_{\alpha}^t)^T)^T.$$

For every single factor, we normalize its exposures cross-sectionally and orthogonalize them with industry factor exposures and style factor exposures. Then we add them into the X^t matrix to test its significance of estimating capacity - information coefficient (IC). IC of a factor is defined as

$$IC_{\alpha}^t = corr(\mathbb{E}(u_{t+1}), u_{t+1}).$$

For all the factors that pass the single factor test, we conduct a multi-factor test to ensure that the factors are not correlated with each other. If two factors have high correlation, we can synthesize them into one or choose the one with higher returns.

At last, for every t , we use these alpha factors to estimate the stock returns the next few days. Then we can establish the portfolio with good performances.

3. Project framework

We use MATLAB as the data processing language and divide the project into several modules, as listed as follows.

1. Setting the configuration file

In this project, we implement 30 alpha factors, 34 industry factors and 10 style factors, each of which demands different market information. Therefore, we need to set a JSON configuration file to only call the information the factor needs every time instead of loading the whole dataset to process the data more efficiently.

```
{
  "alpha11":{
    "datasets":["high", "low", "close", "volume"]
  },
  "alpha31":{
    "datasets":["high", "low", "close", "volume"]
  },
  "alpha003":{
    "datasets":["high", "low", "close"]
  },
  "alpha043":{
    "datasets":["close", "volume"]
  }
}
```

Figure 4. Contents and format of "config.json" (part)

2. Writing the alpha factor functions

We choose to make the framework suitable for all circumstances, so it should be able to process the two situations - receiving data of a single date and calculating the factor exposures and returns of that day or receiving data of a certain period of time and calculating the exposures and returns throughout the period. Hence, we set the format of the factor functions as follows.

```
function [X, offsetSize] = alpha013(alphaPara)
% main function
% (HIGH * LOW)^0.5 - VWAP
% min data size: 1
% alphaPara is a structure
try
    high = alphaPara.high;
    low = alphaPara.low;
    vwap = alphaPara.vwap;
    updateFlag = alphaPara.updateFlag;
catch
    error 'para error';
end

% calculate and return all history factor
% controlled by updateFlag, call getAlpha if TRUE
if ~updateFlag
    [X, offsetSize] = getAlpha(high, low, vwap);
    return
else
    [X, offsetSize] = getAlphaupdate(high, low, vwap);
end

%-----

function [exposure, offsetSize] = getAlpha(high, low, vwap)
```

```

% function compute alpha
    exposure = (high .* low)^0.5 - vwap;
    offsetSize = 1;
end

function [exposure, offsetSize] = getAlphaUpdate(high, low, vwap)
    offsetSize = 1;
    exposure = (high .* low)^0.5 - vwap;
end

```

All the information the factor needs will be stored in the struct alphaPara so that when following procedures call the factor, the function will first load the corresponding information and catch errors if the information is not found. There is a specific indicator in alphaPara which is the updateFlag. It is a boolean value that leads the function to either call the sub-function to perform the daily calculation or the calculation of a period.

3. Cleaning the data

The dataset contains the following data.

Item	Range	Frequency
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Item	Range	Frequency
alpha factors		
open	All A share, not ST	daily
close	All A share, not ST	daily
low	All A share, not ST	daily
high	All A share, not ST	daily
average price	All A share, not ST	daily
volume	All A share, not ST	daily
turnover	All A share, not ST	daily
benchmark open		daily
benchmark close		daily
Industry classification and style factors		
<i>Industry classification</i>		
SHENWAN HONGYUAN Level 1	All A share, not ST	
<i>Style factors</i>		
size		
price of shares outstanding	All A share, not ST	daily
earnings yields		
estimate EPS	All A share, not ST	
cash earnings	All A share, not ST	quarterly
earnings TTM	All A share, not ST	quarterly
growth		
gross revenue	All A share, not ST, start from 1 Jan, 2005	quarterly
net profit attributed to the parent company	All A share, not ST, start from 1 Jan, 2005	quarterly
value		
total market capital		daily
leverage		
long-term liabilities	All A share, not ST	quarterly
total assets	All A share, not ST	quarterly

Item	Range	Frequency
total liabilities	All A share, not ST	quarterly
book equity	All A share, not ST	quarterly

This module contains several steps.

4. Alpha factory

This module calculate all the factor exposures in batches using the cleaned data from the latter phase.

5. Normalizing exposures

a. This module receives alpha loadings from the latter phase, which is a three dimensional matrix, with its first dimension as dates, second dimension as stocks and third dimension as factors.

b. This module's process contains two steps:

- Process extreme values

The factor loadings can be really big and away from the median, so we use Windsor method to compress the values whose absolute values are bigger than a setting value to certain ranges.

$$\widetilde{x}_i = \begin{cases} x_M + n \times D_{MAD}, & \text{if } x_i > x_M + n \times D_{MAD} \\ x_M - n \times D_{MAD}, & \text{if } x_i < x_M - n \times D_{MAD} \\ x_i, & \text{else} \end{cases}$$

x_i is the loading on stock i of a factor on a single date;

x_M is the median of cross-sectional loading over stocks of the factor;

D_{MAD} is the median of the sequence $|x_i - x_M|$.

- Normalize

Using z-score to normalize the processed factor loadings. Record the mean, median, skewness and kurtosis of the distribution for further examination.

- Orthogonalize (optional)

Use the normalized factor loadings to do regression with the style and industry factors to get the residuals. Returns the orthogonalized factor loadings.

c. Class: FactorNormalization

- Variable

- factorCube, a three dimensional matrix, with its first dimension as dates, second dimension as stocks and third dimension as factors.
 - Already calculated.
- styleFactorCube, a three dimensional matrix, with its first dimension as dates, second dimension as stocks and third dimension as factors.
- industryFactorMatrix, a three dimensional matrix, with its first dimension as dates, second dimension as stocks and third dimension as industries. If one stock belongs to a certain industry, the value will be 1, otherwise it is 0.

- Return

- Processed (either just normalized or plus orthogonalized) three dimensional factor loadings.

- Save

- normFactor: the processed factor loadings;
- orthedNormFactor: the orthogonalized processed factor loadings;
- meanMatrix: the all-time mean of the distribution for all factors;
- medianMatrix: the all-time median of the distribution for all factors;
- skewnessMatrix: the all-time skewness of the distribution for all factors;
- kurtosisMatrix: the all-time kurtosis of the distribution for all factors;
- date.fig: the histogram of the normFactor distribution on all dates.

6. Single factor testing

This module uses the normalized factor exposures to run regression to acquire the stock returns of each factor and test whether they are significantly effective and stable.

7. Multi-factor testing

This module tests all the factors that pass the single factor test to eliminate collinearity and estimate future returns to determine the portfolio.

8. Framework structure

As introduced above, the whole structure of the framework is

```
data  _ 00 description
      |_ 01 cleanedData
      |_ 02 styleFactor
      |_ 03 factorExposure
      |_ 04 factorNormalization
      |_ 05 singleFactorTest
      |_ 06 singleFactorReturn
```

4. Time line

29 November Practice MATLAB;

02 December Each write 6 alpha factor functions;

Code review and consensus about data cleaning details;

Consensus about the coding format;

06 December Make adjustments for codes;

Write industry factors and data cleaning module;

Write style factors: market β , momentum, volatility, CMRA, liquidity, size, E/P, DASTD;

11 December Alpha factory module;

Factor normalization module;

Consensus about encapsulation;

16 December Single factor test module;

21 December Grouping function;

Write the whole single factor test framework and debug.

5. A few thoughts

Conducting a complete framework for multi-factor models seems to be a basic work. Considering to make it applicable in as many circumstances as possible, however, makes it a systematic engineering to require developers to structure and restructure again and again to meet the demands.

In this project, we take into consideration these aspects:

- Able to read either single day's data streams or data of a period;
- Able to process either single day's data streams or data of a period using vectorized methods;
- Able to read data of different structures or different hierarchy designs because of decomposed input interfaces;
- Able to store either single day's factor values or values for a period;
- Able to add new alpha factors into the warehouse without changing the whole framework because the flexible configuration settings;
- Able to split the framework and apply single part of it because of excellent encapsulation, detailed annotation and demo for application of each module;
- Able for both personalized application and easy basic application due to many of the parameters that can be self-defined and default settings without omission.

Nevertheless, due to limited time, there are still aspects yet to explore, which can be considered as a future perspective of this project. Below are some of the interesting things we can look into.

- Rule of synthesis and reserve: What is the rule to solve two high correlated factors? And why?
- How to create new alpha factors: The BARRA factors are all quantitative factors hard to find economic explanations. So, how to create reasonable factors? And how to explain their effectiveness?
- Back test of grouping layers: Though, unlike Fama-French model, it is unnecessary for BARRA models to implement this, it may still be helpful in determining the effectiveness of alpha factors on different group of stocks. Then, how many groups should we divide the stocks into? How to divide? What should we do to abnormal stocks?
- How to combine with machine learning: There are many modules of this project that can consider implementing machine learning. The grouping in the back test can be connected with machine learning classification and clustering. Moreover, the establishment of new alpha factors can also be achieved through this method. Hence, what models of machine learning can be applied? Which features are important? How to reach a better fine-tuning?

What we have seen in this project is an even larger world of unknown for us, and these thoughts are precious because they give us directions.