



Neuronal Signal Modulation by Dendritic Geometry

by

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Thesis

Submitted to the University of Warwick

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Centre for Complexity Science

July 2018

THE UNIVERSITY OF
WARWICK

Cogito, ergo sum.

– René Descartes



Si Xu (*Thinking*). Xiaohe Lu, 2018.

Contents

Acknowledgments	iv
Declarations	v
Abstract	vi
Abbreviations	vii
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
1.1 Overview of neuroscience	2
1.2 Summary of methodology	4
1.3 Outline of thesis	7
Chapter 2 Dendritic Morphology and Electro-Physiology	9
2.1 Branching structures of dendritic trees	10
2.1.1 Digital reconstructions	11
2.1.2 Metric graphs	14
2.1.3 Point neurons	15
2.2 Mathematical models of membrane potentials	17
2.2.1 Electrical circuits	17
2.2.2 Spiking neurons	21
2.2.3 Synaptic activities	24
2.3 Cable theory on dendritic trees	26
2.3.1 Cable equations	27
2.3.2 Boundary conditions	32
2.3.3 Green's functions	34
Chapter 3 Method of Local Point Matching	39
3.1 Framework of sum-over-trips	40
3.1.1 Random walks on passive dendrites	40

3.1.2	Green's functions on resonant dendrites	44
3.1.3	Summary of sum-over-trips	48
3.2	Method of local point matching	49
3.2.1	Convergence of sum-over-trips	50
3.2.2	Derivation of local point matching	53
3.2.3	Summary of local point matching	56
3.3	Results on arbitrary dendritic trees	57
3.3.1	Properties of Green's functions	57
3.3.2	Features of local morphology	58
3.3.3	Responses at steady states	61
Chapter 4	Sum-Over-Trips with Taper	64
4.1	Mathematical models of single tapered cables	65
4.1.1	Cable equations with reducible taper	66
4.1.2	Cable equations with realistic taper	72
4.1.3	Parabolic taper and Exponential type	78
4.2	Sum-over-trips with reducible taper	81
4.2.1	Green's functions with reducible taper	81
4.2.2	Derivation of generalised node factors	83
4.2.3	Generalised sum-over-trips framework	88
4.3	Sum-over-trips with general taper	92
4.3.1	General green's functions on two realistic tapers	93
4.3.2	Sum-over-trips by finite element method	96
4.3.3	Sum-over-trips with heterogeneous electrical properties	99
Chapter 5	Response Functions and Numerical Results	103
5.1	Single neuron with single dendritic branch	104
5.2	Single neuron with "Y"-shaped dendritic tree	114
5.3	Two neurons coupled by gap junctions	118
Chapter 6	Conclusion	127
6.1	Thesis summary	128
6.2	Further works	129
6.3	Miscellaneous notes	131

Abstract

Neurons are the basic units in nervous systems. They transmit electrical signals along neurites and at synapses. Neuronal morphology, mainly dendritic geometry, is famous for anatomical diversity, and many neuronal types are named after their morphologies. Dendritic geometries, as well as distributions of ion channels on cell membranes, contribute significantly to distinct behaviours of signal filtration and integration in different types of neurons (even under the circumstances of receiving same inputs *in vitro*).

In this thesis, I mainly address the importance of dendritic geometry, by investigating its modulation on neuronal signals via mathematical and computational approaches. By “geometry”, I consider both branching structures of entire dendritic trees and tapered structures of individual dendritic branches.

The mathematical model of dendritic electro-physiology is established by generalising the classical cable theory. It forms the theoretical benchmark for this thesis to study neuronal signal modulation on branching dendrites with tapered branches. A novel method to solve for analytical response functions on such structures is developed. It permits theoretical analysis of a neuron as an electrical circuit, and enables accurate and efficient simulations on neuronal networks.

By investigating simplified but representative dendritic geometries, it is found that the tapered dendrite amplifies signals in comparison to the non-tapered dendrite. This modulation is almost a local effect, which is merely influenced by the global geometry. Nonetheless, the global geometry has a stronger impact on signal amplitudes, and even more on phases.

In addition, the methodology employed in this thesis is perfectly compatible with other existing methods, which makes it straightforward to recruit stochasticity and non-linearity into the framework. Future works of large-scale neural networks can easily adapt this work to improve computational efficiency, while preserving a large amount of biophysical details.