



To the starry nights

“来日愿有千千晚星，亮过今夜月亮”

Last month, the film *“Loving Vincent”* brought a flood of memories and emotions on my flight back to China after a four-year study in the Netherlands. Little did I know the profound experiences that lay ahead when I embarked on my Ph.D. adventure in September 2019, and this is a life chapter that I cannot fill alone. Therefore, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the people who painted a beautiful chapter in my PhD journey.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor **Prof. Bayu Jayawardhana**. Looking back to the past four years, I see how much effort and patience you have made to lead me into the research world, where people think critically, prove rigorously, present professionally, and last but not least, work happily. Thank you for accepting me as your PhD, helping me to pursue my dream and encouraging every step of my small progress in this long road. Each research discussion and paper revision with you adds significant value, I have gained immensely from your critical thinking and analytical insights. Particularly, I am grateful for your heightened sensitivity to the challenges and stereotypes faced by female researchers in STEM. Thank you for your unwavering support during my rock bottom. There have been countless moments when I fell deeply into the trap of self-certification, I appreciate your reminder that I can, and should, just be myself.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my secondary supervisor **Prof. Ming Cao**. You have been a role model for my whole PhD journey, and I am continually inspired by your persistent passion and broad vision for research. Thanks for kindly including me in the TA team, training my ability, and strengthening my experience in academia. Your constructive and kind suggestions played a pivotal role in every stage of my PhD research and career planning. Many thanks for your selfless sharing and kindness. In particular, I could not appreciate more for your unwavering trust



and inspiring words during my hardest time, thanks a million for providing your support and sharing your life experience with a young researcher.

My hearty thanks go to the reading committee: **Prof. Dimos Dimarogonas**, **Prof. Tamás Keviczky** and **Prof. Raffaella Carloni**. I greatly appreciate your precious time in reading my thesis and providing valuable comments to help improve the quality. I would like to thank **Simon Busman** and **Wouter Baar** for being my paranymphs. **Wouter**, you are a person who has a heart of gold and I am immensely grateful that you have chosen me as a friend since our first meeting. Thank you for being my first friend in Groningen and for accompanying me through all the ups and downs. Thanks for the warm help in the summary translation. **Simon**, without any words, I bet you already know how much I appreciate you, but I would love to express my gratitude once again. I spent most of my PhD days in the DTPA lab and had my best time under your protection. Thanks for always having a spot for me in the lab. I cherished every moment with you, discussing bugs, testing sensors, enjoying rock music, and sailing on the boat. All of those times with you made me heartfully safe and happy.

Next, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to **Prof. Ajay Kottapalli** and **Dr. Amar Kamat**. Ajay and Amar, I joined your meeting with Bayu on the first day of my PhD and we started the cooperation from then. The source-seeking experiment plan was interrupted due to the lockdown during the pandemic, however, we still made it a success with hard work. I would like to show all my appreciation for your hard work, persistence and kindness in that special period. As the first project of my PhD, I am very proud of that time. Besides, I would like to highlight the unconditional assistance from Simon and Martin who shared with me countless knowledge about real engineering and armed my ability in software and hardware. **Martin**, it was always fun to solve bugs, test circuit boards and discuss rock music with you. Thank you for having me in the lab. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all professors in DISC who guided me to the world of nonlinear and control. In particular, I have benefited a lot from **Prof. Harry Trentelman** who presented the most interesting math course of my lifetime.



Furthermore, my special thanks go to **Dr. Karen Voskamp**. At some point this year, I noticed that I was no longer afraid to walk alone at night, finally shedding the identity of the little girl who always clutched a sharp key tightly in her hand. Your warm encouragement and support played a pivotal role in this transformative journey. Thank you for offering me a hot black tea in that freezing summer. I would like to express my appreciation to our best secretary **Frederika Fokkens**. Dear Frederika, it still seems like yesterday when I received your beautiful garden picture during the helpless and homesick lockdown. Thank you for noticing and caring about this nobody who just started an independent life abroad without any family and friends around. Your precious sense of beauty, strong passion for life, and irreplaceable presence have been invaluable in my PhD journey.

I would like to thank friends and colleagues in DTPA group. **Matthijs**, our friendship began with a cup of your (strong) espresso, which kept me awake all night. However, you are more like the Snicker which reminds me of the happiness along with the bitterness. I appreciate your humor, positivity and kindness. **Sepide**, I may never tell you how much I love your smile, thanks for all your warm accompany in the office, DTPA lab and group. **Juan**, thank you for bringing me a sweet cake when I was an outsider in the crowd. **Rafael**, I enjoyed our wonderful tulip tour and the sweet birthday party of dear **Monyque**. Thanks for having me there. **Bahadir**, I may never forget the stressful midnight when I was preparing an interview alone and you kindly appeared beside me. Thank you for all the happiness, smiles and hugs you brought me. **Le**, I have benefited a lot from the scientific discussions with you about nonlinear control, AI and privacy, and also the non-scientific chat about interesting topics, thanks for the warm encouragement during my job hunting. **Najmeh**, your beautiful smile brings me so much healing and happiness in my last PhD days, thank you for listening to me, trusting me and being my friend. **Vaibhav** and **Arijit**, thanks for your kind support and feedback during my job hunting which helped me improve my presentation and strengthen my career confidence. My sincere thank also goes to **Anne-Men, Thiemen, Linda, Taraneh, Bahar, Marzia, Santiago** for all your joyful discussions with me. Thanks to all the members of the Robotics-TA team since



2020, **Weijia, Carlo, Liangming, Zhiyuan, Bangguo, Xinghua**, for your kind cooperation and support. I would like to thank my officemates in 5117.0122, for accompanying me in the final days of my PhD. I enjoyed the academic atmosphere, warm support and the interesting chats we shared.

My sincere gratitude goes to some former DTPA colleagues. **Miao** and **Bei**, thank you for all the warm help when I arrived in Groningen, we shared countless happy memories and thank you for letting me be your paranymp, Miao. **Xiaodong**, looking back to my PhD, you stand out as the one always willing to share your invaluable experience and engage in timely discussions with me. I deeply appreciate your persistent passion for research and life, and I am grateful to have had you as a mentor and friend throughout the entire journey. **Junjie**, I never expected such enthusiastic help and feedback when I decided to send out my first inquiring message to you. Thanks for all your generous sharing and care. **Ping**, you lighted up my starless nights and made my heart open up again to the world. Thank you for being my sweet croissant jellycat, watching my favorite FIVB volleyball women's world championship together and being my friend. My heartfelt appreciation also goes to **Zao**, it is always fun and enjoyable talking with you. **Shengxian**, you have many terrific qualities that I admire, as a researcher, a colleague and a friend. Thank you for all the encouraging words and blessings we've shared. My sincere thank also goes to **Tábitha, Yujuan, Hongyu, Carman, Anja, Agung, Zaki, Xuegang** for all the pleasant discussions.

Additionally, I would like to offer my special thanks to my amazing female friends and colleagues who kindly understood me, accompanied me and unconditionally supported me throughout this whole STEM journey. **Wei (dear V)**, every memory with you shines like a diamond in my mind. You are the most special researcher I have ever known, who always has a great passion for life and never lets the odds get you down. Your presence fills me with optimism, and I feel at home for the first time since moving to your neighborhood. Thank you for being my wonderful friend. **Yangming (doudou)**, I cannot express how grateful that we could meet and become friends in my last year in DTPA. Being of the same infj-personality, we could easily



touch the emotions that might be difficult to understand by others. Thank you for being with me, supporting me and always believing in me. The world is a vast playground, only brave people get to enjoy it. May we forever have joy. **Xuwen**, you are the one who accompanied me through the darkest days in my PhD and took me to the world of rock and roll. Real people would get hurt in the real world, thank you for allowing me to be my true self. Let us rock the world and keep it real. Last but most important, I would like to express my special gratitude to **Prof. Jacquélien Scherpen** for building such an amazing DTPA group in control.

My hearty gratitude also belongs to dear friends, **Wen (pika)**, **Wenjian**, **Xiaochen**, **Jialu**, I enjoy every moment with you, thank you for shining my life in Groningen. **Adam**, **Ting**, **Gehui**, **Lingfei**, **Tian** and **Xiaoyuan**, the visit to KTH was unforgettable for me and I enjoyed the joyful discussion with you all. Thanks for leaving a bright mark on my memory of Stockholm. **Gehui**, I feel tons of happiness being with you on this road, let us make a travel plan and meet up in the UK. **Wigger**, I would never know such a nice friendship would start from an interesting Chinese and Dutch discussion. I had lots of fun being with you, and sharing the chocolates and coffee on campus. I would like to offer my hearty thanks to **Prof. Brian Ostafin** and my classmates in mindfulness. Thanks for being with me in that beautiful Spring rain. Particularly, I am deeply grateful to my supervisors **Prof. Qinghua Yang** and **Prof. Xiaowei Tu** in the master's study. My dreams were nurtured under your protection, unconditional support and encouragement. I can never reach this moment without you, thank you for embracing and guiding me.

I would like to thank the great and small beauties in my life, the graceful and restrained Song-ci poems and Yuan opera, impressionism arts, hard rock bands, hip-hop, podcast shows, stand-up comedy, and the gorgeous sunrise and sunset, for bringing ecstasy, reliving frustrations, healing my pain and coloring my personalities in this ever-changing world.



At the end of the movie *Loving Vincent*, a message from **Vincent van Gogh** was conveyed:

*"I want to touch people with my art,
I want them to say: he feels deeply, he feels tenderly."*

Dearest Vincent, I found peace and strength countless times while walking along the paintings in your lifetime. Somehow, your joy, happiness, struggle, pain, and despair still inspire young generations after a century. But Vincent, with this thesis, I would like to thank you, in my way. Thank you for providing me with such a soul harbor in my youth in the Netherlands.

In the end, I would like to dedicate this doctoral thesis to all the starless and starry nights, to my beloved grandparents, who have the purest souls and hearts of gold in the world.

Tinghua

Groningen, The Netherlands

December, 2023