

The NIST EOS Thermal-Infrared Transfer Radiometer

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ABSTRACT

A portable Thermal-Infrared Transfer Radiometer (TXR) has been developed for use in intercomparisons and scale verifications of sources used to calibrate thermal-infrared (TIR) channels of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA's) Earth Observing System (EOS) flight instruments. The TXR is designed to measure the radiance temperature of large area blackbody sources in cryogenic vacuum environments, either at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) or at the EOS instrument calibration facilities. It can be operated in ambient conditions of room temperature and pressure, or in EOS instrument thermal/vacuum chambers at temperatures as low as 77 K. The TXR is a liquid-nitrogen cooled filter radiometer with two channels: one centered at 5 μm based on a photovoltaic InSb detector, and the other centered at 10 μm based on a photovoltaic HgCdTe (MCT) detector. The spectral, spatial and temporal characterization of the TXR using state of the art NIST ambient infrared instrumentation is reported.

1. Introduction

A program to establish radiometric traceability between NASA's EOS instrument calibration facilities and the NIST radiance scale is underway [1-3]. As part of this program, NIST will provide a portable radiometer, the TXR, for NIST-traceable radiometric intercomparisons between the cryogenic blackbody working standard sources used for EOS TIR calibrations in several different thermal-vacuum calibration facilities [4-6].

This paper describes the design and characterization of the TXR. Most of the EOS calibration facility working standards are cavity-type blackbodies having aperture sizes ranging from 4 cm to 10 cm and radiance temperature in the range of 200 K to 400 K. Typical values reported for the calculated effective emissivity are, for example, 0.9997 [4] or 0.999952 [7]. The working standard radiance scales are generally based on models that use the Planck radiation formula with modeled emissivity and temperature uniformity and the measured contact temperature of the NIST-traceable platinum resistance thermometers (PRT's) affixed to the cavity walls. The estimated uncertainty in the radiance temperature from such models is typically about 0.05 % [7]. Thus, the TXR is designed to enable radiometric intercomparisons to verify that the radiance temperature scales are within 0.05 % of each other, as the uncertainty estimates predict. Furthermore, rather than relying on a scale based on contact thermometry alone for calibration of the TXR at NIST, the TXR can be calibrated against the NIST detector-based radiometric scale. This scale uses electrical substitution radiometry to measure radiant power traceable to electrical scales [8]. As such, the TXR provides a means of absolute calibration independent of the problems associated with estimating the uncertainty of the contact-thermometry-based radiance temperature of a blackbody source. In fact, new developments at NIST will eventually enable the TXR to be calibrated absolutely without involving a blackbody source [9].

2. TXR Design

The TXR is a two-channel filter radiometer based on liquid-nitrogen-cooled semiconductor photodiode detectors. Channel 1 uses a photovoltaic InSb detector with a filter that has a nominal center wavelength of 5 μm , and Channel 2 uses a photovoltaic HgCdTe (MCT) detector with a filter that has a nominal center wavelength of 10 μm . For both channels, the nominal bandwidth is 1 μm .

The TXR is packaged in a portable liquid-nitrogen cryostat, which consists of a liquid-nitrogen reservoir, a cold plate, and a radiation shield thermally isolated from an outer vacuum shell. The cold plate forms the bottom of the nitrogen reservoir, such that its top surface is in contact with liquid nitrogen while its bottom surface is under vacuum and has a set of blind-tapped holes for mounting the various TXR components. Figure 1 shows the optical layout of these components, as viewed from the bottom of the cryostat. The inside of the aluminum radiation shield and the baffles are painted with a diffuse

infrared black paint. The radiation shield mounts onto the cold plate and encloses the components on the cold plate, allowing light to enter only through one hole facing the cryostat window. Thus, except for the cryostat window, all internal TXR components are under vacuum, are cooled by direct conduction to below 80 K, and are surrounded by surfaces having a temperature of nominally 77 K.

Light from the source enters the TXR through a plane-parallel ZnSe cryostat window (Fig. 1). It penetrates the radiation shield through a four-vane baffle tube preceding a 2 cm diameter aperture that serves as the aperture stop. Then the light passes a single-vane post-aperture-stop baffle tube and reflects off the flat fold mirror and the primary off-axis parabolic mirror. After passing through two tubeless baffle vanes, the light passes through a nominally 6 mm diameter aperture that serves as the field stop. The field stop, in combination with the aperture stop and the primary mirror, defines a beam that is 2 cm in diameter and has a 2° field of view as measured at the aperture stop. This beam is chopped by the tuning fork chopper. The light that traverses the chopper when its vanes are open reflects off the secondary off-axis parabolic and is directed toward the filter-detector stage. Both the primary and secondary off-axis parabolic mirrors have their foci at the field stop. Thus, collimated light entering the TXR would be focused by the primary parabolic to a point at the field stop and recollimated by the secondary parabolic. However, when the TXR is used to measure the radiance of an extended area source, as is the intended application, both the aperture stop and field stop are overfilled spatially with light and the beam cannot be considered collimated. Instead, the beam reaching the filter-detector stage has a divergence full-angle of about 14° , and so is roughly $f/4$.

When the beam reaches the filter-detector stage, it is split spectrally by the dichroic beamsplitter. This optic reflects light having wavelengths shorter than $5.5 \mu\text{m}$, and transmits light having wavelengths longer than $7 \mu\text{m}$. The reflected light is incident on the $5 \mu\text{m}$ center-wavelength bandpass filter and is concentrated onto the InSb detector. Meanwhile, light transmitted through the dichroic beamsplitter is incident on the $10 \mu\text{m}$ center-wavelength bandpass filter and concentrated onto the MCT detector. The non-imaging concentrators used are the θ_i/θ_o design described previously [10]. To minimize electrical pickup, both detectors each have a custom-designed cold transimpedance amplifier mounted not more than 1 cm away, so that pre-amplified, millivolt-level signals are output from the TXR cryostat.

The main purpose of the tuning fork chopper is to improve background subtraction and to enable accurate measurements of the detector signals for improved signal-to-noise ratios. Under TXR operating conditions at 77.6 K, its chopping frequency is 43.551 Hz with a measured frequency stability of ± 0.002 Hz. During the phase of the chopping cycle when the gold-coated chopper vanes obstruct the beam, they reflect the light into the beam dump. The beam dump absorbs this unwanted light, sinking its thermal load into the cold plate. The beam dump also houses a laser diode that serves as the TXR alignment source. When this is turned on, its visible red laser light reflects off the front of the chopper vanes and follows the optical path in reverse order to that described above, emerging on-axis from the TXR cryostat window. This beam can be used to align the TXR with respect to the source under test. A special constant-current driver circuit is used so that the laser diode operates at any temperature between 300 K and 77 K.

The dichroic beamsplitter, bandpass filters, concentrators, detectors, and the transimpedance preamplifiers are all mounted on a common copper stage, thermally linked to the cold plate through three brass spacers. The copper stage has an integrated electrical heater and a silicon diode temperature sensor, which are used with a commercial temperature controller to maintain the stage at temperature of nominally 78 K with a stability of about 1 mK. This is done to avoid instability resulting from the temperature dependences of the spectral transmission of the filters and the responsivity of the detectors.

3. Spectral Characterization

For preliminary measurements of relative spectral responsivity, the TXR was mounted at the output of the monochromator at the NIST Infrared Detector Spectral Comparator facility [11]. The $f/4$ beam from the monochromator was focused to a nominally 2 mm spot at the center of the TXR aperture stop. In this geometry, the aperture stop is underfilled but the field stop is overfilled. An argon-arc source at 90 A current was chopped before the input to the monochromator at 41 Hz by a rotating blade chopper. The TXR chopper was turned off during the spectral tests; its vanes are open in the off position. The resulting lock-in detected signals were measured as a function of monochromator wavelength. The data were divided by the known relative spectral distribution of flux at the output of the monochromator to provide a measure of the relative spectral responsivity (Fig. 2). In the Infrared Detector Spectral Comparator

facility, the relative spectral distribution of flux at the output of the monochromator for a given set of Arc source and monochromator parameters can in principle be measured nearly simultaneously with the detector under test (the TXR) by using a silicon bolometer having a well-characterized, nearly flat spectral response [11]. However, for the preliminary measurements reported here, the relative spectral distribution of flux at the output of the monochromator was determined instead by folding together data from previous measurements of the throughput of the monochromator and the spectral radiance of the arc source. In Fig. 2, the low signal-to-noise for Channel 2 can be improved greatly in future measurements by using a different grating in the monochromator that is better optimized for 10 μm and is known to provide more power. Note that this is an end-to-end spectral measurement of the entire TXR radiometer. For comparison, Fig. 2 also shows the relative filter transmittance of each filter. This shows that the end-to-end relative spectral responsivity, which includes the relative spectral transmission, reflectance, and responsivity of the components along the TXR optical path, is dominated primarily by the relative filter transmittance.

4. TXR Viewing a Water-bath Blackbody Source

For characterizations of detector signal versus time and detector signal versus blackbody temperature, the TXR was mounted with its aperture stop a distance of 37.3 cm from the 10.8 cm diameter exit aperture of an ambient water-bath blackbody source that is used for routine infrared calibrations at NIST [12]. In this geometry, for which the TXR is specifically designed, both the aperture stop and the field stop of the TXR are overfilled, so the measurements can be interpreted in terms of band-integrated radiance. With the TXR internal chopper on, the pre-amplified detector signals were nearly square waves with 60 % duty cycle, and 10 % to 90 % rise and fall times of 1.45 ms \pm 0.02 ms. For each channel, the chopped signal was measured simultaneously by individual digital lock-in amplifiers and the dc magnitude of the lock-in amplifier signal at the chopping frequency was recorded. To define a narrow electrical bandwidth about the chopping frequency for optimum noise suppression, a post-detection lock-in time constant of 1 s was used for both TXR channels. At each blackbody temperature, the data acquisition software for the TXR recorded the blackbody PRT reading and the dc magnitude of the signals

from the two TXR channels. For the purposes of this paper, the PRT reading is used to define the blackbody temperature.

Currently, as for the EOS sources, the radiance temperature scale for this blackbody source is established through contact thermometry, though comparisons to a gallium-point blackbody source have been done. Also, its temperature range is limited to between 278 K and 353 K. However, it provides a stable source useful for detector stability and preliminary temperature dependence studies. For calibration over a wider temperature range, tests will be performed with the TXR viewing the Large-Area Blackbody (LABB) source in the Medium Background Infrared (MBIR) facility at NIST [13]. Also, the LABB source will have a radiance temperature calibration against the NIST detector based radiometric scale [14]. For the purposes of this paper, signals are plotted against the temperature indicated by the calibrated PRT, which is in contact with the water-bath. Such data are shown in Fig. 3. Each data point was determined by averaging drift-free detector signals for at least 20 min., during which the PRT temperature was stable to within ± 0.18 mK or better.

For each channel, the data in Fig. 3 were fit to an effective wavelength approximation of the Planck radiation law as a function of temperature:

$$S(T) = a \frac{c_1}{I_o^5 \left(e^{c_2 / I_o T} - 1 \right)} + b \quad (1)$$

Here S is the detector signal (at the output of the lock-in amplifier), T is the blackbody temperature (taken as equal to the PRT temperature in the present approximation), c_1 and c_2 are the first and second radiation constants, λ_o is the center wavelength of each channel, and a and b are the slope and offset that were used as the two fitting parameters. For the fits shown in Fig. 3, $\lambda_o = 5 \mu\text{m}$ for Channel 1 and $\lambda_o = 10 \mu\text{m}$ for Channel 2. The residuals of the fits are shown in Fig. 4. That the residuals are greater than the measurement precision is an indication that a better model, incorporating the actual relative responsivity (Fig. 2), should be used.

The 1-sigma noise-equivalent temperature of the TXR channel at 300 K is about 3 mK (error bars on Fig. 4) This is a factor of ten better than the desired value of 0.01 %. With such precision, systematic effects such as the size-of-source effect and cavity loading will probably dominate the uncertainty for the

EOS intercomparisons. However, the low noise will improve the precision of the characterizations required to make corrections for these effects. For the 10 μm channel, the noise is about 50 mK, which is just below 0.02 %. Thus, the radiance temperature determined from this channel will be less precise than that from the 5 μm channel, but is still consistent with the ability to verify the typical 0.05 % uncertainty estimate for the EOS blackbodies.

5. Spatial Characterization

For point-spread response measurements in an ambient background, a soldering iron having a 2.5 mm diameter tip was mounted on an x-y scanning stage with its tip aligned along the TXR optical axis. The TXR chopped signals from Channels 1 and 2 as measured on the lock-in amplifiers were recorded via computer-controlled data-acquisition software as the heated soldering iron was translated. It was necessary to subtract the ambient temperature background and to correct for drift of the scene. An example of the corrected data are shown in Fig. 5. The solid curve accounts for the gradual rolloff near the edge of the field of view according to the following model. The aperture stop has a radius of $r_1 = 1$ cm. The half angle of the TXR field of view is, from ray tracing, 1.07° . Thus, only the cone of light from the soldering iron tip within this half-angle is within the TXR field of view. The projection of this cone onto the plane of the aperture stop forms a circle of radius $r_2 = 2.2$ cm for the position of the scanning plane of the soldering iron (118 cm from the aperture stop) used in the measurements. The radiant flux reaching the detectors is proportional to the overlap area of the circle of radius r_1 and the circle of radius r_2 as their centers are displaced. The analytical function for the overlap area of two circles is given in Ref. 15. The only fitting parameter for the curve was the signal amplitude at the plateau where the two circles completely overlap.

6. Conclusion

A version of the TXR has been built and characterized using state-of-the-art NIST ambient infrared facilities. The final version will be essentially unchanged, except that it will be built into a thermal/vacuum chamber-compatible cryostat. The contribution of random uncertainty to the total measurement uncertainty is compatible with the goal of enabling NIST-traceable radiometric

intercomparisons of EOS blackbody sources with a radiance temperature uncertainty better than the predicted uncertainty of the sources.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. Optical layout of the TXR, showing the ray trace for viewing a source in radiance mode.

Figure 2. Relative spectral responsivity of the TXR channels as measured in the NIST Infrared Detector Comparator Facility (solid lines with error bars), compared with the relative filter transmittance (dashed lines without error bars). Note that all four curves are individually peak-normalized so that their shapes can be compared.

Figure 3. TXR signals versus PRT temperature for the TXR viewing a water-bath blackbody source. The lines are fits to an effective wavelength model.

Figure 4. Residuals (Data - fit) of the fits shown in Fig. 3. The error bars are the standard deviation of the TXR signals with the source stabilized at each temperature, and thus indicate the precision of the TXR for measuring radiance temperature. The lines are a guide for the eye.

Figure 5. An example of point spread response data for the MCT channel measured by translating a heated soldering iron in the x direction (see Fig. 1) across the center of the TXR field of view. The circles are the background-subtracted and drift-corrected data. The position error bars indicate the soldering iron tip diameter, while the signal error bars indicate the standard deviation of 15 readings at each position. The solid line is a fit to the model described in the text.

TXR Optical Layout









