

面向空间引力波探测的低噪声稳频激光器

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摘要 基于未来卫星间激光干涉任务的需求,介绍了一种基于迈克耳孙光纤干涉仪稳频的 1064 nm 激光稳频系统,该系统采用全光纤器件,结构紧凑、体积小、可靠性强。通过拍频测试,得到该系统的频率噪声在 30 mHz~1 Hz 范围内小于 30 Hz/Hz^{1/2},频率稳定度在积分时间为 1 s 和 1000 s 时分别为 1.2×10^{-14} 和 3×10^{-13} 。该系统的性能满足 LISA 任务对稳频激光的需求,有望应用于未来的空间引力波探测任务。

关键词 激光光学; 稳频; 光纤干涉仪; 频率噪声

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1 引言

随着地面引力波的成功探测^[1],空间引力波探测受到全世界很多科研机构的关注,目前相关研究项目主要包括美国宇航局(NASA)和欧洲空间局(ESA)合作的 LISA^[2-3](Laser Interferometer Space Antenna)项目、欧洲 ESA 发起的 NGO^[4](New Gravitational Wave Observatory)项目、我国的“天琴”^[5]计划和“太极”^[6]计划等。空间中的引力波源频率主要集中在中低频波段^[7],即 0.1 mHz~1 Hz 波段,这对激光器在中低频波段的频率噪声有着极高的要求^[8]。例如:LISA 项目中,对激光器的频率噪声指标要求在 2.8 mHz 处不大于 300 Hz/Hz^{1/2}^[9];“天琴”计划要求在 6 mHz 处,激光器的频率噪声小于 10 Hz/Hz^{1/2}^[5];“太极”计划要求在 1 mHz 处,激光器的频率噪声小于 30 Hz/Hz^{1/2}^[6]。为了满足上述项目对激光器频率噪声的需求,通过使用激光稳频技术将激光频率锁定在一个参考腔,或某一种原子或分子的跃迁谱线,或光纤干涉仪上,可以明显降低激光器的频率噪声。

目前,性能最好、最常用的稳频方法是采用 PDH(Pound-Drever-Hall)技术的超稳腔激光稳频技术,它也最早被应用到空间激光干涉中^[10]。2018 年,GRACE follow-on(The Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment follow-on mission)项目成功发射了用于地球重力场变化测量的科研卫星,其搭载的频率基准系

统锁定在经垂直安装固定的长度为 77.5 mm 的锥形腔上^[11-13],该稳频系统的频率噪声在 1 mHz 处达到了 30 Hz/Hz^{1/2};2021 年,中山大学的 Luo 等^[14]提出一种集成一体化的光学参考腔,使用该腔进行 PDH 稳频,激光器的频率噪声在 10 mHz~1 Hz 范围内可以小于 30 Hz/Hz^{1/2},有望被应用于空间引力波探测。超稳腔稳频技术中采用空间光路的方案,要开发适用于未来空间应用的超稳腔稳频系统,就要求空间光路具有高结构稳定性,这必然增加实验器件装调的复杂性。此外,通过将激光频率锁定在某种原子或分子相应的跃迁谱线上的方式也可以实现激光稳频,例如使用 CO₂ 气体进行饱和吸收稳频^[15]、利用 ¹³³Cs₂ 气体进行调制转移光谱技术稳频^[16],这两种方法均可对激光器的频率噪声进行抑制。近期也有利用碘分子对 532 nm 光的吸收特性间接实现对 1064 nm 激光器的稳频。2017 年,Döringshoff 等^[17]报道了基于 ¹²⁷I₂ 分子稳频的准一体化稳频装置,并于 2018 年将相似的稳频系统搭载在火箭上进行试飞验证实验^[18],该稳频系统的频率稳定度在积分时间为 1000 s 时为 2×10^{-13} ,但是这类原子、分子对 1064 nm 激光的吸收率较低,为了增大鉴频信号的信噪比,往往需要更长的吸收程,这势必增大系统尺寸,不利于集成化。同时,碘分子稳频需要将 1064 nm 基频光倍频到 532 nm,这就对 1064 nm 激光器的输出功率有了一定的要求,也对系统光路的抗干扰性有更高的要求。

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光纤干涉仪激光稳频是一种可以实现全光纤超稳激光的稳频方法,它采用不等臂的外差式光纤干涉仪作为鉴频器来检测激光频率噪声并反馈至激光器进行频率稳定,不用考虑空间自由光路的调校与准直,具有体积小、质量轻、集成度高、稳定性强等特点^[19-22]。2013年,McRae等^[19]设计了基于1550 nm激光器的稳频系统,首次阐述了光纤干涉仪应用于未来空间任务的潜力。2023年,Huang等^[23]将光纤干涉仪稳频激光器的长期频率稳定度提升至1000 s积分时间时的 1.1×10^{-14} ,频率噪声在1.4 mHz处小于 $30 \text{ Hz/Hz}^{1/2}$,该结果已经可以媲美超稳腔的稳频结果。目前对光纤干涉仪稳频技术的研究,大多是基于1550 nm激光系统,鲜有针对引力波探测所用的1064 nm波长激光的相关研究。

本文利用光纤干涉仪稳频技术实现了1064 nm波长的超稳激光系统。通过使用500 m长的光纤延迟线构成的不等臂外差式光纤干涉仪进行稳频,使激光器在30 mHz~1 Hz频段内的频率噪声小于 $30 \text{ Hz/Hz}^{1/2}$,满足LISA对激光器频率噪声的要求,证明该技术可以用于未来空间引力波探测的激光稳频方案。

2 系统设计与集成

2.1 系统设计

迈克耳孙光纤干涉仪可以看作一个鉴频器,它可将激光的频率抖动 $\delta\nu(f)$ 转换为光纤外差信号的相位抖动 $\delta\phi(f)$,这种转化关系可以由传递函数^[24] $T(f)$ 表示

$$T(f) = \frac{\delta\phi(f)}{\delta\nu(f)} = \frac{1 - e^{-i2\pi f\tau}}{if}, \quad (1)$$

式中: f 为傅里叶频率; $\tau = nL_0/c$ 为光纤干涉仪两臂的时延差(n 为光纤的折射率, L_0 为干涉臂差, c 为真空中的光速)。图1所示为光纤干涉仪传递函数的频率响应,其中横坐标为以 $1/\tau$ 作归一化的傅里叶频率,纵坐标为以 $2\pi\tau$ 作归一化的幅值。在傅里叶频率较低的情况下($f \ll 1/\tau$),光纤干涉仪传递函数的幅值 $|T(f)| \approx 2\pi\tau$,这意味着在一定的带宽内,激光器的频率抖动以 $2\pi\tau$ 倍转换为外差信号的相位抖动,将该相位抖动反馈到激光器即可使激光器的频率稳定。

激光稳频系统如图2所示。系统选用商用1064 nm激光器(NKT, Y10)作为种子源,其内附压电陶瓷(PZT)后可以实现激光频率的慢速但大动态范围的调谐,同时采用声光调制器(AOM 1)实现对激光频率的快速但小动态范围的调谐。种子激光器输出光经95:5的保偏光纤分束器(coupler 1)后,其中5%的光用于激光稳频,95%的光作为输出光。为了进一步优化光路,设计了单模扩展耦合器模块(SMCM),它包括光纤干涉仪内部主要的器件,如耦合器、隔离器和法

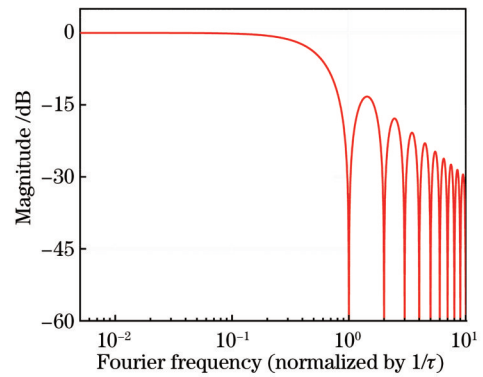


图1 光纤干涉仪传递函数的频率响应

Fig. 1 Frequency response of transfer function for optical fiber interferometer

拉第反射镜(图2)。输入SMCM的光先经过一个90:10的耦合器(coupler 2),分出10%的光经光电管(PD)探测后反馈给光路中的可变光衰减器(VOA),实现对光纤干涉仪注入光的功率控制。其余90%的光作为光纤干涉仪的输入光进入下一个50:50的耦合器(coupler 3),其输出的这两部分光被分别送往不等臂迈克耳孙干涉仪的短臂和长臂。迈克耳孙干涉仪的短臂由一段很短的光纤和法拉第镜(FM 1)构成,长臂由盘绕在光纤支架上的500 m长的光纤延迟线、AOM 2和另一块法拉第镜(FM 2)构成,干涉臂长度相差1 km。长臂上的光经过法拉第镜反射,两次经过AOM 2移频(调制频率为80 MHz),然后在coupler 3上与从短臂反射回来的光混频,经光电管探测得到二倍声光移频频率的拍频信号。利用射频频率综合器输出频率为160 MHz的拍频信号,对该拍频信号进行解调,得到反映激光频率噪声的误差信号,经伺服反馈环路(PID)将误差信号分别反馈至激光器的PZT和驱动AOM 1工作的可调压控振荡器(VCO)上,从而实现对激光频率的锁定。为了降低光链路中光的后向反射给激光器带来的危害,在coupler 2的输出端和coupler 3的拍频输出端分别加入光隔离器(isolator)。最后将光纤干涉仪放到由钛合金制成的真空腔中,以降低温度波动、声波和振动等外界因素对光纤的影响。

2.2 光纤干涉仪的集成及分析

光纤干涉仪及真空系统的结构如图3所示。光纤干涉仪由500 m长的光纤延迟线、SMCM和AOM 2组成。为了降低振动噪声对稳频激光的影响,500 m长的光纤延迟线被精密盘绕在一个特殊设计的光纤支架上,形成一个低振动灵敏度的光纤环,振动灵敏度为 10^{-11} g^{-1} ^[25]。整个光纤干涉仪被安装在一个五层热屏蔽系统中,其中光纤环和SMCM被安装在最内热屏蔽层。有热量产生的AOM 2被安装在第四层,这样可以在保证隔热效果的同时最大限度地减少AOM 2带来的热量累积。热屏蔽系统的每一层屏蔽桶均经过精加工抛光和镀金,其太阳吸收比和发射率分别为0.3和

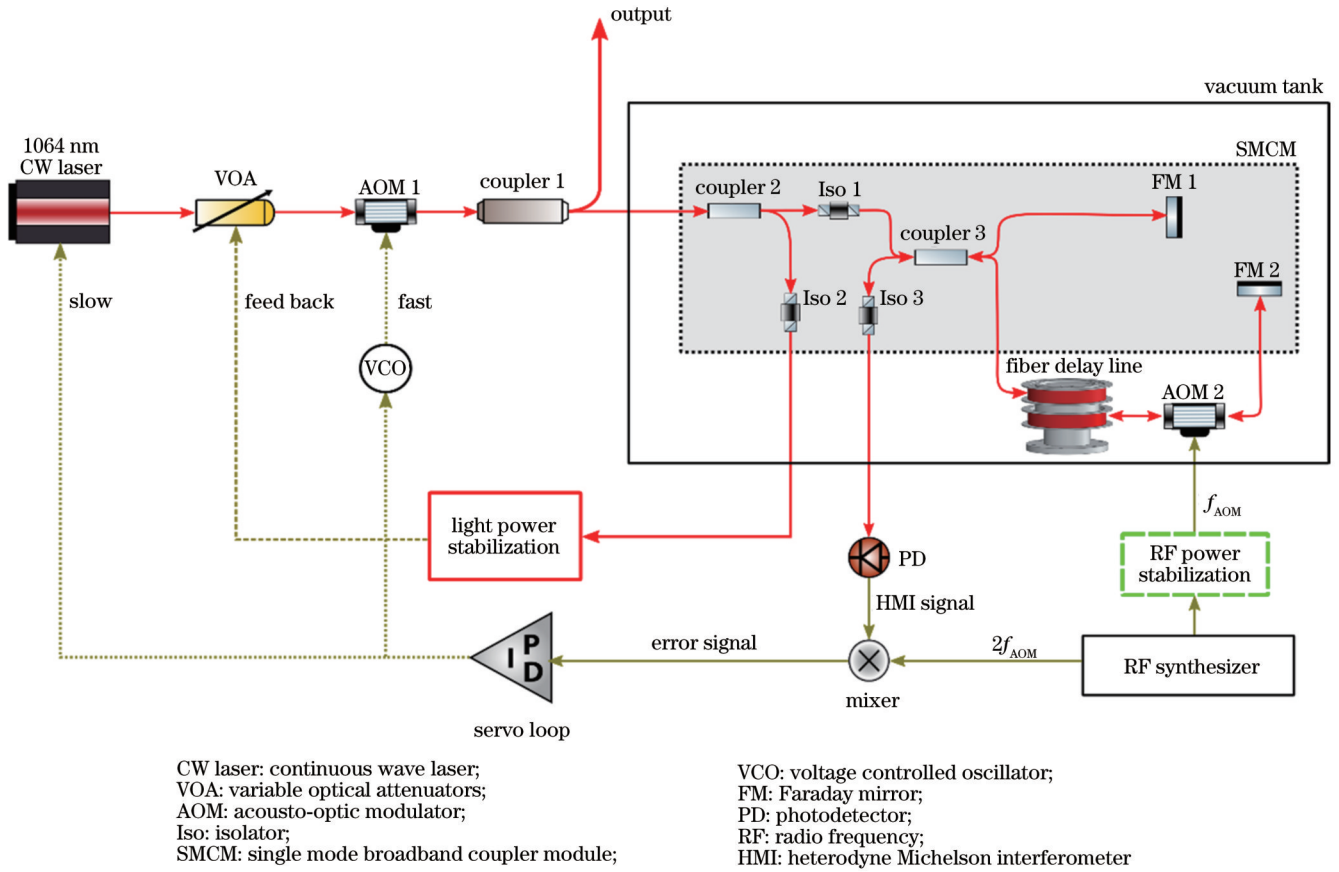


图 2 光纤干涉仪稳频激光系统示意图

Fig. 2 Schematic of fiber interferometer frequency stabilization laser system

0.003。热屏蔽层之间由钛合金垫块进行隔热,连接安装方式如图 4 所示,垫块嵌入上下热屏蔽底板的梯形槽中,仅有尖锐的边缘与梯形槽的斜面接触,这样可以最大限度地减少屏蔽层之间的热传导。由有限元仿真分析得到该热屏蔽系统结构的一阶固有频率为 204.6 Hz,表明该结构的刚度足够高,稳定性较好,相应的模态分析结果如表 1 所示。将整个光纤干涉仪及其热屏蔽系统安装在一个真空腔室内,每个光纤器件以及光纤均作除气处理,稳定后腔内真空度为 4.2×10^{-5} Pa,由一个抽速为 5 L/s 的离子泵维持。最后,整个系统采用两级温控措施:第一级采用加热片加热的方式对真空腔体进行控温,使其全天时温度波动小于 5 mK;第二级通过安装在真空腔室和热屏蔽系统之间的两块半导体制冷器(TEC)实现温度控制,使热屏蔽系统全天时温度波动小于 0.2 mK。通过对热屏蔽系统的有限元仿真分析,得到该热屏蔽系统的热时间常数为 6 h,可以将最外侧热屏蔽对内部光纤的温度波动抑制到原来的 4×10^{-7} 。由光纤温度波动转化来的激光频率噪声可以表示为 $\Delta\nu/\nu_0 = A_0\Delta T$,其中 $\Delta\nu$ 为激光频率的变化, ν_0 为激光器的频率, A_0 为光纤折射率的热系数 ($A_0 \approx 1.1 \times 10^{-5} \text{ K}^{-1}$), ΔT 为光纤上的温度波动。对于实际控温波动 0.2 mK 来说,由光纤温度变化带来的频率稳定度约为 9×10^{-16} 。整个干涉仪的真空系统

体积为 200 mm×180 mm×175 mm,总质量仅有 5 kg。

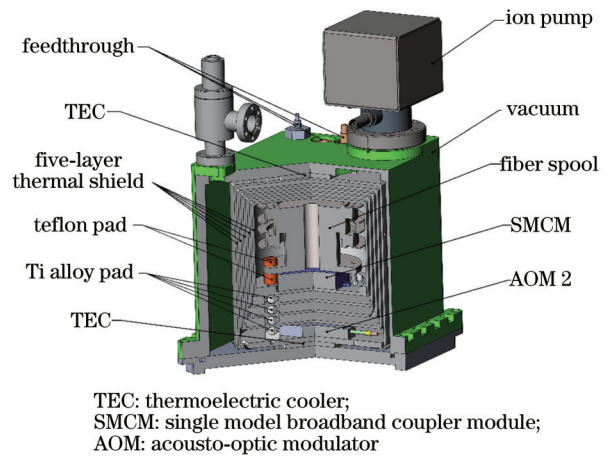


图 3 光纤干涉仪系统结构

Fig. 3 Structure of the optical fiber interferometer system

3 实验结果与讨论

为了评估该激光稳频系统的频率噪声,采用两台超稳激光器进行拍频测量,实验及其测试系统均处于温度为 $(22 \pm 1) \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ 、湿度约为 40% 的环境。将波长为 1550 nm 的超稳激光作为参考光,该超稳激光的频率

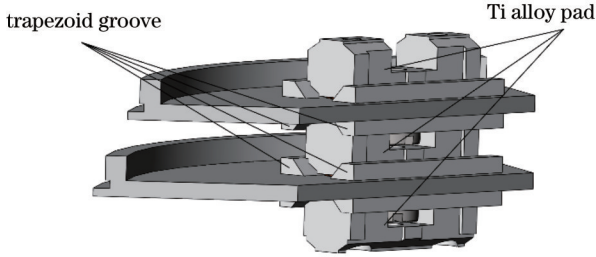


图 4 热屏蔽层间的安装结构

Fig. 4 Installation structure among thermal shields

表 1 有限元模态分析的各阶频率

Table 1 Frequency of each order of finite element modal analysis

Modal order	1	2	3	4
Frequency /Hz	204.6	278.2	407.6	435.2

噪声在 5 mHz~1 Hz 范围内小于 10 Hz/Hz^{1/2}, 在 1 mHz 处小于 40 Hz/Hz^{1/2}, 频率稳定度在积分时间为 1 s 和 1000 s 时分别为 3.2×10⁻¹⁵、1.1×10⁻¹⁴[23]。为了

实现 1064 nm 待测激光与 1550 nm 参考激光之间的频率对比, 采用光学频率梳 (MenloSystems, SmartComb) 作为光学频率转换器。测试方案如图 5 所示, 参考激光首先经过一段长约 20 m 的光纤链路传递到光学频率梳, 为了抑制光在光纤传输过程中受环境振动、温度波动等因素影响而额外产生相位噪声, 对该光纤链路进行了消噪处理。其次, 使参考激光与光学频率梳的一根梳齿进行拍频, 获得拍频信号 (f_{b1550}), 利用该拍频信号对光学频率梳的重复频率进行锁定, 同时光学频率梳的偏置频率也被锁定在一个稳定的射频信号上。这样光学频率梳的每个梳齿均可复现参考激光的频率稳定性。然后, 对光学频率梳的输出光进行扩谱, 使其产生 1~2 μm 的超连续光谱, 并用光栅型窄带滤波器将 1064 nm 的光谱成分从超连续光谱中过滤出来, 与待测激光信号进行拍频, 获得拍频信号 (f_{b1064})。最后, 使用相噪分析仪 (Symmetricom, 5125A) 和频率计数器 (Pendulum, CNT-91) 分析拍频信号, 经过计算得到待测激光的频率噪声和频率稳定度。

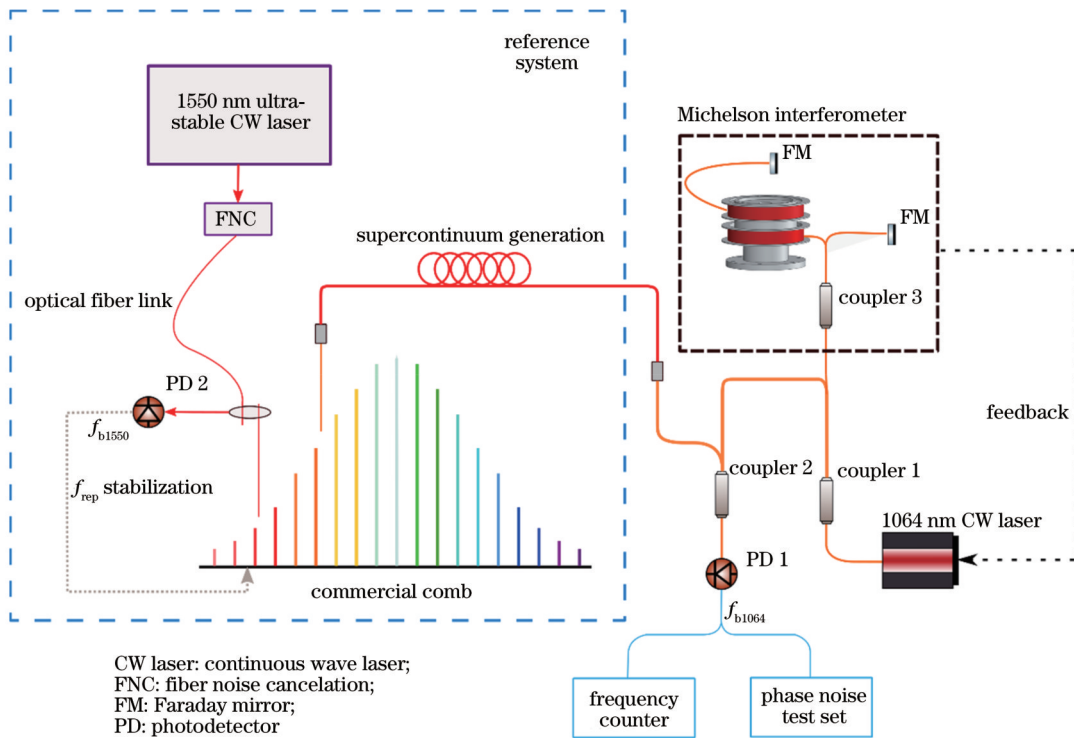


图 5 频率噪声测试原理图

Fig. 5 Schematic of frequency noise measurement

根据 Duan^[26] 的理论, 在低频波段光纤的噪声主要来源于热机械噪声, 由光纤热噪声极限限制的稳频激光频率噪声可表示为

$$S_v(f) = \nu \times \sqrt{\frac{2k_B T \varphi_0}{3\pi L E_0 A}} \times f^{-1/2}, \quad (2)$$

式中: $S_v(f)$ 为激光器的频率噪声; ν 为激光器的中心频率; k_B 为玻尔兹曼常数; T 为光纤温度; φ_0 为光纤的机械损耗; L 为光纤长度; E_0 为光纤的杨氏模量; A 为

光纤的横截面积。由式 (2) 可以得到该稳频激光系统的频率噪声极限, 如图 6 的点划线所示。为方便比较分析, 图 6 中除了待测激光的频率噪声 (实线) 外, 还列出了 LISA 任务对激光器频率噪声的要求 (划线)、参考激光的频率噪声 (点线) 以及光纤传递链路的剩余噪声 (双点划线), 所有频率噪声均换算至 1064 nm 波长。LISA 的频率噪声^[9] 可表示为

$$S_v(f) \leq 300 \text{ Hz/Hz}^{1/2} \times \sqrt{1 + (2.8 \text{ mHz}/f)^4}. \quad (3)$$

从图 6 可以看出,在 1 mHz~1 Hz 频段内,光纤链路的剩余噪声远小于光纤延迟线的热噪声极限,对 1064 nm 稳频激光的频率噪声测量贡献不大,可以忽略不计。通过相位比对测试,1064 nm 稳频激光系统在 30 mHz~1 Hz 范围内的频率噪声小于 $30 \text{ Hz}/\text{Hz}^{1/2}$,满足 LISA 对激光频率噪声的要求。图 7 给出了 1064 nm 稳频激光的阿伦方差(Allan variance),其频率稳定度在积分时间为 1 s 时为 1.2×10^{-14} ,在积分时间为 1000 s 时为 3×10^{-13} ,但该结果与由热屏蔽系统的仿真分析获得的频率稳定度结果相差约两个数量级。1064 nm 稳频系统长期稳定性变差的原因可能有两个方面:一是系统内光功率和射频功率的变化,二者随外界环境温度波动而发生变化,这会对光纤干涉仪产生额外的温度波动,从而引入额外的噪声;二是调制解调链路受温度的影响,调制解调信号的相位产生波动,这也会引入额外的噪声。

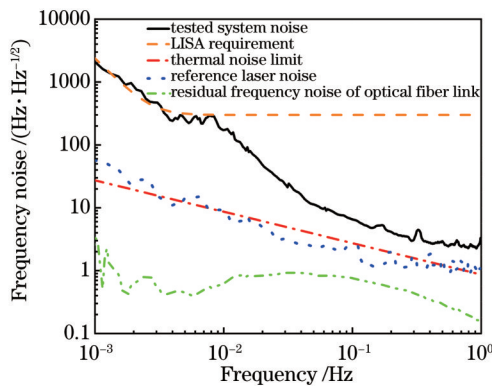


图 6 1064 nm 稳频激光的频率噪声

Fig. 6 Frequency noise of 1064 nm frequency-stabilized laser

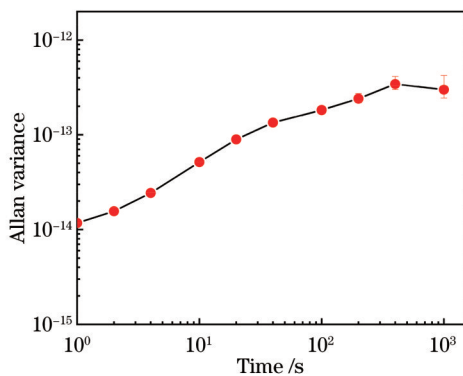


图 7 1064 nm 稳频激光的频率稳定度

Fig. 7 Frequency stability of 1064 nm frequency-stabilized laser

4 结 论

采用 500 m 不等臂长的外差式迈克尔孙光纤干涉仪,实现了对波长为 1064 nm 激光的频率稳定。该系统通过采用全光纤光学器件实现,与采用空间自由光路的稳频系统相比,具有体积小、集成性高、可靠性强

等特点。经过初步测试,该稳频激光系统的频率噪声满足 LISA 对激光器的频率噪声要求,有望被应用到未来的空间引力波探测中。

为了进一步提高稳频激光的性能,后续研究可从以下 3 个方面展开:1)对光功率稳定环路、射频功率稳定环路以及调制解调链路的温度稳定性进行精密调控,减弱光功率、射频功率和调制解调信号受温度波动的影响;2)使用热膨胀系数更小的光纤,如光子晶体光纤,从而减小光纤受温度波动的影响;3)结合其他稳频技术,如基于碘分子的调制转移光谱技术,提高稳频系统的长期稳定性。

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Low-Noise Frequency Stabilized Laser for Space-Based Gravitational Wave Detection

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Abstract

Objective With the success of ground-based gravitational wave detection, space-based gravitational wave detection has attracted wide attention from many research institutions around the world. The missions such as Laser Interferometer Space Antenna (LISA) initiated by NASA and ESA, New Gravitational Wave Observatory (NGO) initiated by ESA, and Tianqin program and Taiji program proposed by China, have high demands on the laser frequency noise at low Fourier frequencies between 0.1 mHz and 1 Hz. In order to fully meet the demands of those missions, the development of ultra-stable lasers with higher frequency stability and coherence has never been suspended. Currently, the most popular way to achieve ultra-stable lasers is to stabilize the laser frequency onto a high-finesse Fabry-Perot (F-P) cavity by using the Pound-Drever-Hall (PDH) method. However, it requires fine alignment of free-space optical components and precise spatial mode matching, which dramatically increases the complexity and bulk of the system and is easily disturbed by the external environment. Therefore, it is difficult to meet the requirements in the transportable applications of ultra-stable laser systems. In this article, an alternative approach is proposed, which uses an optical fiber-delay-line (FDL) as a frequency discriminator to stabilize the laser frequency. This approach has the advantages of high compactness, high reliability, small volume, and light weight, which make it a viable candidate for future laser-based gravitational wave detection missions.

Methods The frequency stabilization of lasers is realized by using an unequal arm heterodyne Michelson fiber interferometer composed of an optical fiber delay line of 500 m. In order to reduce the influence of vibration noises on frequency-stabilized lasers, the optical fiber delay line of 500 m is precisely coiled on a low vibration sensitivity fiber spool. Then, the entire interferometer is placed in a small vacuum chamber, where all components such as an optical delay line of 500 m, single mode broadband coupler module (SMCM), and acoustic-optic modulator (AOM) are installed in a structurally stable thermal shielding system (Fig. 3). In addition, a two-stage active thermal controller is used to reduce the temperate fluctuation on the optical fiber interferometer. The first stage temperature stabilization is applied on the

vacuum chamber with a temperature fluctuation of less than 5 mK over a 24 h period. The second stage temperature stabilization is applied on the fifth-layer thermal shield using thermoelectric coolers (TECs) mounted between the shield and the vacuum chamber, and the temperature fluctuation can be further minimized within 0.2 mK. Finally, by comparing with an independent ultra-stable laser of 1550 nm with better frequency stability via an optical frequency comb, the performance of the laser is measured.

Results and Discussions The thermal time constant of the thermal shielding system is 6 h, and the temperature fluctuation of the inner fiber caused by the outermost thermal shielding can be suppressed to the original 4×10^{-7} . For a temperature perturbation of 0.2 mK, the induced frequency instability of stabilized laser is 9×10^{-16} . By comparing with another ultra-stable laser, the measured frequency noise power spectral density is lower than $30 \text{ Hz/Hz}^{1/2}$ at Fourier frequencies from 30 mHz to 1 Hz (Fig. 6), in comparison with the pre-stabilization requirement for the LISA mission. The Allan variance of the beat note is also analyzed. As demonstrated in Fig. 7, the fractional frequency instability of 1.2×10^{-14} at averaging time of 1 s and that of 3×10^{-13} at averaging time of 1000 s are achieved. However, the result is more than two orders of magnitude higher than the calculated thermal effect. One of the possible reasons may come from the fluctuation of optical power and radio frequency (RF) power, both of which fluctuate under the influence of ambient temperature fluctuations and will produce additional temperature fluctuations for the optical fiber interferometer, thus introducing additional noises. Another possibility may come from the RF modulation and demodulation links. The phase of RF signals will vary with temperature due to the thermal-delay effect of the RF links. This phase variation also causes excess frequency noises of the stabilized laser.

Conclusions This paper reports a laser-frequency-stabilization system of 1064 nm based on an optical fiber Michelson interferometer for future inter-satellite laser interferometer missions. This system, constructed by all fiber devices, is featured with compact structure, small volume, and high reliability. The achieved performances satisfy the laser frequency stabilization requirements of the LISA mission ($\leq 300 \text{ Hz/Hz}^{1/2}$ at frequencies from 1 mHz to 1 Hz), and this technique is expected to be used in future space-based gravitational wave detection missions.

Key words laser optics; frequency stabilization; optical fiber interferometer; frequency noise