Variational Bayesian Learning Theory

Variational Bayesian learning is one of the most popular methods in machine learning. Designed for researchers and graduate students in machine learning, this book summarizes recent developments in the nonasymptotic and asymptotic theory of variational Bayesian learning and suggests how this theory can be applied in practice.

The authors begin by developing a basic framework with a focus on conjugacy, which enables the reader to derive tractable algorithms. Next, it summarizes nonasymptotic theory, which, although limited in application to bilinear models, precisely describes the behavior of the variational Bayesian solution and reveals its sparsity-inducing mechanism. Finally, the text summarizes asymptotic theory, which reveals phase transition phenomena depending on the prior setting, thus providing suggestions on how to set hyperparameters for particular purposes. Detailed derivations allow readers to follow along without prior knowledge of the mathematical techniques specific to Bayesian learning.

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Contents

	Preface	<i>page</i> ix
	Nomenclature	xii
	Part I Formulation	1
1	Bayesian Learning	3
1.1	Framework	3
1.2	Computation	10
2	Variational Bayesian Learning	39
2.1	Framework	39
2.2	Other Approximation Methods	51
	Part II Algorithm	61
3	VB Algorithm for Multilinear Models	63
3.1	Matrix Factorization	63
3.2	Matrix Factorization with Missing Entries	74
3.3	Tensor Factorization	80
3.4	Low-Rank Subspace Clustering	87
3.5	Sparse Additive Matrix Factorization	93
4	VB Algorithm for Latent Variable Models	103
4.1	Finite Mixture Models	103
4.2	Other Latent Variable Models	115
5	VB Algorithm under No Conjugacy	132
5.1	Logistic Regression	132
5.2	Sparsity-Inducing Prior	135
5.3	Unified Approach by Local VB Bounds	137

vi

	Part III Nonasymptotic Theory	147
6	Global VB Solution of Fully Observed Matrix Factorization	149
6.1	Problem Description	150
6.2	Conditions for VB Solutions	152
6.3	Irrelevant Degrees of Freedom	153
6.4	Proof of Theorem 6.4	157
6.5	Problem Decomposition	160
6.6	Analytic Form of Global VB Solution	162
6.7	Proofs of Theorem 6.7 and Corollary 6.8	163
6.8	Analytic Form of Global Empirical VB Solution	171
6.9	Proof of Theorem 6.13	173
6.10	Summary of Intermediate Results	180
7	Model-Induced Regularization and Sparsity Inducing	
	Mechanism	184
7.1	VB Solutions for Special Cases	184
7.2	Posteriors and Estimators in a One-Dimensional Case	187
7.3	Model-Induced Regularization	195
7.4	Phase Transition in VB Learning	202
7.5	Factorization as ARD Model	204
8	Performance Analysis of VB Matrix Factorization	205
8.1	Objective Function for Noise Variance Estimation	205
8.2	Bounds of Noise Variance Estimator	207
8.3	Proofs of Theorem 8.2 and Corollary 8.3	209
8.4	Performance Analysis	214
8.5	Numerical Verification	228
8.6	Comparison with Laplace Approximation	230
8.7	Optimality in Large-Scale Limit	232
9	Global Solver for Matrix Factorization	236
9.1	Global VB Solver for Fully Observed MF	236
9.2	Global EVB Solver for Fully Observed MF	238
9.3	Empirical Comparison with the Standard VB Algorithm	242
9.4	Extension to Nonconjugate MF with Missing Entries	247
10	Global Solver for Low-Rank Subspace Clustering	255
10.1	Problem Description	255
10.2	Conditions for VB Solutions	258
10.3	Irrelevant Degrees of Freedom	259
10.4	Proof of Theorem 10.2	259

Contents

Cambridge University Press 978-1-107-07615-0 — Variational Bayesian Learning Theory Shinichi Nakajima , Kazuho Watanabe , Masashi Sugiyama Frontmatter <u>More Information</u>

	Contents	vii
10.6 10.7	Exact Global VB Solver (EGVBS) Approximate Global VB Solver (AGVBS) Proof of Theorem 10.7 Empirical Evaluation	264 267 270 274
11.2	Efficient Solver for Sparse Additive Matrix Factorization Problem Description Efficient Algorithm for SAMF Experimental Results	279 279 282 284
12.2	MAP and Partially Bayesian Learning Theoretical Analysis in Fully Observed MF More General Cases Experimental Results	294 295 329 332
	Part IV Asymptotic Theory	339
13.2 13.3 13.4 13.5	Asymptotic Learning Theory Statistical Learning Machines Basic Tools for Asymptotic Analysis Target Quantities Asymptotic Learning Theory for Regular Models Asymptotic Learning Theory for Singular Models Asymptotic Learning Theory for VB Learning	341 341 344 346 351 366 382
14.2	Asymptotic VB Theory of Reduced Rank Regression Reduced Rank Regression Generalization Properties Insights into VB Learning	385 385 396 426
15.2 15.3	Asymptotic VB Theory of Mixture Models Basic Lemmas Mixture of Gaussians Mixture of Exponential Family Distributions Mixture of Bernoulli with Deterministic Components	429 429 434 443 451
16.2 16.3	Asymptotic VB Theory of Other Latent Variable Models Bayesian Networks Hidden Markov Models Probabilistic Context-Free Grammar Latent Dirichlet Allocation	455 455 461 466 470

viii

Contents

17	Unified Theory for Latent Variable Models		500
17.1	Local Latent Variable Model		500
17.2	17.2 Asymptotic Upper-Bound for VB Free Energy		504
17.3 Example: Average VB Free Energy of Gaussian Mixture Model			507
17.4 Free Energy and Generalization Error			511
17.5 Relation to Other Analyses		513	
Appendix A James–Stein Estimator 51			
Appendix B M		Metric in Parameter Space	520
Appendix C Detaile		Detailed Description of Overlap Method	525
Appe	ndix D	Optimality of Bayesian Learning	527
Bibliography			529
Subject Index			540

Preface

Bayesian learning is a statistical inference method that provides estimators and other quantities computed from the *posterior distribution*—the conditional distribution of unknown variables given observed variables. Compared with *point estimation* methods such as maximum likelihood (ML) estimation and maximum a posteriori (MAP) learning, Bayesian learning has the following advantages:

• Theoretically optimal.

The posterior distribution is what we can obtain best about the unknown variables from observation. Therefore, Bayesian learning provides most accurate predictions, provided that the assumed model is appropriate.

• Uncertainty information is available.

Sharpness of the posterior distribution indicates the reliability of estimators. The credible interval, which can be computed from the posterior distribution, provides probabilistic bounds of unknown variables.

• Model selection and hyperparameter estimation can be performed in a single framework.

The marginal likelihood can be used as a criterion to evaluate how well a statistical model (which is typically a combination of model and prior distributions) fits the observed data, taking account of the flexibility of the model as a penalty.

• Less prone to overfitting.

It was theoretically proven that Bayesian learning overfits the observation noise less than MAP learning.

On the other hand, Bayesian learning has a critical drawback—computing the posterior distribution is computationally hard in many practical models. This is because Bayesian learning requires *expectation* operations or integral computations, which cannot be analytically performed except for simple cases.

Х

Preface

Accordingly, various approximation methods, including deterministic and sampling methods, have been proposed.

Variational Bayesian (VB) learning is one of the most popular deterministic approximation methods to Bayesian learning. VB learning aims to find the closest distribution to the Bayes posterior under some constraints, which are designed so that the expectation operation is tractable. The simplest and most popular approach is the *mean field approximation* where the approximate posterior is sought in the space of *decomposable* distributions, i.e., groups of unknown variables are forced to be independent of each other. In many practical models, Bayesian learning is intractable *jointly* for all unknown parameters, while it is tractable if the dependence between groups of parameters is ignored. Such a case often happens because many practical models have been constructed by combining simple models in which Bayesian learning is analytically tractable. This property is called *conditional conjugacy*, and makes VB learning computationally tractable.

Since its development, VB learning has shown good performance in many applications. Its good aspects and downsides have been empirically observed and qualitatively discussed. Some of those aspects seem inherited from full Bayesian learning, while some others seem to be artifacts by forced independence constraints. We have dedicated ourselves to theoretically clarifying the behavior of VB learning quantitatively, which is the main topic of this book.

This book starts from the formulation of Bayesian learning methods. In Part I, we introduce Bayesian learning and VB learning, emphasizing how conjugacy and conditional conjugacy make the computation tractable. We also briefly introduce other approximation methods and relate them to VB learning. In Part II, we derive algorithms of VB learning for popular statistical models, on which theoretical analysis will be conducted in the subsequent parts.

We categorize the theory of VB learning into two parts, and exhibit them separately. Part III focuses on *nonasymptotic* theory, where we do not assume the availability of a large number of samples. This analysis so far has been applied only to a class of *bilinear* models, but we can make detailed discussions including analytic forms of global solutions and theoretical performance guarantees. On the other hand, Part IV focuses on asymptotic theory, where the number of observed samples is assumed to be large. This approach has been applied to a broad range of statistical models, and successfully elucidated the *phase transition* phenomenon of VB learning. As a practical outcome, this analysis provides a guideline on how to set hyperparameters for different purposes.

Preface

Recently, a lot of variations of VB learning have been proposed, e.g., more accurate inference methods beyond the mean field approximation, stochastic gradient optimization for big data analysis, and sampling based update rules for automatic (black-box) inference to cope with general nonconjugate likelihoods including deep neural networks. Although we briefly introduce some of those recent works in Part I, they are not in the central scope of this book. We rather focus on the simplest mean field approximation, of which the behavior has been clarified quantitatively by theory.

This book was completed under the support by many people. Shinichi Nakajima deeply thanks Professor Klaus-Robert Müller and the members in Machine Learning Group in Technische Universität Berlin for their direct and indirect support during the period of book writing. Special thanks go to Sergej Dogadov, Hannah Marienwald, Ludwig Winkler, Dr. Nico Gönitz, and Dr. Pan Kessel, who reviewed chapters of earlier versions, found errors and typos, provided suggestions to improve the presentation, and kept encouraging him in proceeding book writing. The authors also thank Lauren Cowles and her team in Cambridge University Press, as well as all other staff members who contributed to the book production process, for their help, as well as their patience on the delays in our manuscript preparation. Lauren Cowles, Clare Dennison, Adam Kratoska, and Amy He have coordinated the project since its proposal, and Harsha Vardhanan in SPi Global has managed the copy-editing process with Andy Saff.

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Nomenclature

$a, b, c, \ldots, A, B, C, \ldots$: Scalars.
<i>a</i> , <i>b</i> , <i>c</i> , (bold-faced small letters)	: Vectors.
A, B, C, (bold-faced capital letters)	: Matrices.
$\mathcal{A}, \mathcal{B}, \mathcal{C}, \ldots$ (calligraphic capital letters)	: Tensors or sets.

- $(\cdot)_{l,m}$: (l,m)th element of a matrix.
 - \top : Transpose of a matrix or vector.
- $tr(\cdot)$: Trace of a matrix.
- $det(\cdot)$: Determinant of a matrix.
 - \odot : Hadamard (elementwise) product.
 - \otimes : Kronecker product.
 - \times_n : *n*-mode tensor product.
 - |·| : Absolute value of a scalar. It applies element-wise for a vector or matrix.

sign(·) : Sign operator such that sign(x) = $\begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } x \ge 0, \\ -1 & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$ It applies elementwise for a vector or matrix.

 $\{\cdots\}$: Set consisting of specified entities.

 $\{\cdots\}^{D}$: Dfold Cartesian product, i.e.,

$$\mathbb{X}^{D} \equiv \{(x_1, \dots, x_D)^{\top}; x_d \in \mathbb{X} \text{ for } d = 1, \dots, D\}.$$

- $#(\cdot)$: Cardinality (the number of entities) of a set.
 - \mathbb{R} : The set of all real numbers.
 - \mathbb{R}_+ : The set of all nonnegative real numbers.
 - \mathbb{R}_{++} : The set of all positive real numbers.
 - \mathbb{R}^D : The set of all *D*-dimensional real (column) vectors.

	Nomenclature xii	i
	$[\cdot, \cdot]$: The set of real numbers in a range, i.e.,	
	$[l, u] = \{x \in \mathbb{R}; l \le x \le u\}.$ [\cdot, \cdot] ^D : The set of <i>D</i> -dimensional real vectors whose entries are in a	~
	$[\cdot, \cdot]^D$: The set of <i>D</i> -dimensional real vectors whose entries are in a range, i.e., $[l, u]^D \equiv \{x \in \mathbb{R}^D; l \le x_d \le u \text{ for } d = 1, \dots, D\}$	
1	$\mathbb{R}^{L \times M} : \text{ The set of all } L \times M \text{ real matrices.}$	J•
$\mathbb{R}^{M_1 imes M_2 imes}$		
14	\mathbb{I} : The set of all integers.	
	\mathbb{I}_{++} : The set of all positive integers.	
	\mathbb{C} : The set of all complex numbers.	
	\mathbb{S}^{D} : The set of all $D \times D$ symmetric matrices.	
	\mathbb{S}^{D}_{+} : The set of all $D \times D$ positive semidefinite matrices.	
	\mathbb{S}_{++}^{D} : The set of all $D \times D$ positive definite matrices. \mathbb{D}^{D} : The set of all $D \times D$ diagonal matrices.	
	\mathbb{D}^D : The set of all $D \times D$ diagonal matrices.	
	\mathbb{D}^D_+ : The set of all $D \times D$ positive semidefinite diagonal matrices	5.
	\mathbb{D}^{D}_{++} : The set of all $D \times D$ positive definite diagonal matrices.	
	\mathbb{H}_N^{K-1} : The set of all possible histograms for N samples and	
	K categories, i.e., $\mathbb{H}_N^{K-1} \equiv \{ \boldsymbol{x} \in \{0, \dots, N\}^K; \sum_{k=1}^K x_k = N \}$	•
	Δ^{K-1} : The standard $(K-1)$ -simplex, i.e.,	
	$\Delta^{K-1} \equiv \{ \boldsymbol{\theta} \in [0, 1]^K; \sum_{k=1}^K \theta_k = 1 \} \}.$	
$(a_1,.)$ $(\widetilde{a}_1,.)$	$(\dots, a_M) : \text{Column vectors of } A, \text{ i.e., } A = (a_1, \dots, a_M) \in \mathbb{R}^{L \times M}.$ $(\dots, \widetilde{a}_L) : \text{Row vectors of } A, \text{ i.e., } A = (\widetilde{a}_1, \dots, \widetilde{a}_L)^\top \in \mathbb{R}^{L \times M}.$	
$Diag(\cdot)$: Diagonal matrix with specified diagonal elements, i.e.,	
	$(\mathbf{x}_l \text{if } l = m,$	
	$(\mathbf{Diag}(\mathbf{x}))_{l,m} = \begin{cases} x_l & \text{if } l = m, \\ 0 & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$	
$diag(\cdot)$	(
	$(\operatorname{diag}(X))_l = X_{l,l}.$	
$vec(\cdot)$		ix
	into a long column vector, i.e., $\operatorname{vec}(A) = (a_1^{\top}, \dots, a_M^{\top})^{\top} \in \mathbb{R}^{LM}$	
	for a matrix $A = (a_1, \ldots, a_M) \in \mathbb{R}^{L \times M}$.	
I_D	: D-dimensional $(D \times D)$ identity matrix.	
Г	: A diagonal matrix.	
arOmega	: An orthogonal matrix.	
\boldsymbol{e}_k	: One of <i>K</i> expression, i.e., $e_k = (\underbrace{0, \dots, 0, 1}_{k \text{ th}}, 0, \dots, 0)^{T} \in \{0, 1\}^{t}$	К.
1_{K}	<i>K</i> : <i>K</i> -dimensional vector with all elements equal to one, i.e.,	
	-	
	$\boldsymbol{e}_k = (\underbrace{1,\ldots,1}_{K})^{\top}.$	

xiv

 $Gauss_D(\boldsymbol{\mu}, \boldsymbol{\Sigma})$

		μ and covariance Σ .
$MGauss_{D_1, i}$	$_{D_2}(\boldsymbol{M},\boldsymbol{\Sigma}\otimes\boldsymbol{\Psi})$: $D_1 \times D_2$ dimensional matrix variate Gaussian
		distribution with mean M and covariance $\Sigma \otimes \Psi$.
	$\operatorname{Gamma}(\alpha,\beta)$: Gamma distribution with shape parameter α
		and scale parameter β .
Inv	$Gamma(\alpha,\beta)$: Inverse-Gamma distribution with shape parameter
		α and scale parameter β .
V	$Vishart_D(V, v)$: D-dimensional Wishart distribution with scale
		matrix V and degree of freedom v .
InvV	$Vishart_D(V, v)$: D-dimensional inverse-Wishart distribution with
		scale matrix V and degree of freedom v .
Mult	tinomial(θ , N)	: Multinomial distribution with event probabilities
		$\boldsymbol{\theta}$ and number of trials N.
	$Dirichlet(\phi)$: Dirichlet distribution with concentration
		parameters ϕ .
$Prob(\cdot)$: Probability of	of an avant
. ,	•	listribution (probability mass function for discrete
$p(\cdot), q(\cdot)$	•	
		variables, and probability density function for us random variables). Typically <i>p</i> is used for a
		stribution and q is used for the true distribution.
$r(\cdot)$		bution (a variable of a functional) for approximation.
. ,		value of $f(\mathbf{x})$ over distribution $p(\mathbf{x})$, i.e.,
$\langle f(\boldsymbol{x}) \rangle_{p(\boldsymbol{x})}$. Expectation	$\langle f(\mathbf{x}) \rangle_{p(\mathbf{x})} \equiv \int f(\mathbf{x}) p(\mathbf{x}) d\mathbf{x}.$
Â	· Estimator fo	r an unknown variable, e.g., \hat{x} and \hat{A} are estimators
		tor \boldsymbol{x} and a matrix \boldsymbol{A} , respectively.
Mean(·)		indom variable.
Var(·)		a random variable.
$\mathbf{Cov}(\cdot)$		of a random variable.
$KL(\cdot \ \cdot)$		eibler divergence between distributions, i.e.,
	. Runduck EA	$\operatorname{KL}(p q) \equiv \left\langle \log \frac{p(x)}{q(x)} \right\rangle_{p(x)}.$
S(Dinos dalta f	I CO
$\delta(\mu; \widehat{\mu})$	Dirac delta I	function located at $\hat{\mu}$. It also denotes its

Nomenclature

 μ and covariance Σ .

: D-dimensional Gaussian distribution with mean

- (a, μ) . Drac denta function located at μ . It also denotes its approximation (called Pseudo-delta function) with its entropy finite.
- GE : Generalization error.
- TE : Training error.
 - F : Free energy.

Nomenclature

xv

O(f(N))	: A function such that $\limsup_{N\to\infty} O(f(N))/f(N) < \infty$.
o(f(N))	: A function such that $\lim_{N\to\infty} o(f(N))/f(N) = 0$.
$\Omega(f(N))$: A function such that $\liminf_{N\to\infty} \Omega(f(N))/f(N) > 0$
$\omega(f(N))$: A function such that $\lim_{N\to\infty} \omega(f(N))/f(N) = \infty$.
$\Theta(f(N))$: A function such that $\limsup_{N\to\infty} \Theta(f(N))/f(N) < \infty$
	and $\liminf_{N\to\infty} \Theta(f(N))/f(N) > 0$.
$O_{\rm p}(f(N))$: A function such that $\limsup_{N\to\infty} O_p(f(N))/f(N) < \infty$
	in probability.
$o_{p}(f(N))$: A function such that $\lim_{N\to\infty} o_p(f(N))/f(N) = 0$ in probability.
$\Omega_{\rm p}(f(N))$: A function such that $\liminf_{N\to\infty} \Omega_p(f(N))/f(N) > 0$
	in probability
$\omega_{\rm p}(f(N))$: A function such that $\lim_{N\to\infty} \omega_p(f(N))/f(N) = \infty$
	in probability.
$\Theta_{\rm p}(f(N))$: A function such that $\limsup_{N\to\infty} \Theta_p(f(N))/f(N) < \infty$
	and $\liminf_{N\to\infty} \Theta_p(f(N))/f(N) > 0$ in probability.

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