# A New Active Inductor and Its Application to Wide Tuning Range LC Oscillator

# Mahdi Ebrahimzadeh, Farzan Rezaei, Siavash Rezaei

Abstract— This paper presents a new structure to reduce noise in an active inductor. Our structure is based on a local common mode feedback. The proposed active inductor is used for implementation a wide tunable low phase noise LC oscillator. By varying control voltage of active inductor from 0.85 V to 1.6 V, the oscillation frequency changes from 86 MHz to 1.137 GHz. The presented structure improves the value of phase noise in the oscillator based on it about 5.5 dBc/Hz in 1 MHz offset frequency. The proposed oscillator is simulated with TSMC 0.18 µm CMOS technology.

Index Terms—Active Inductor, High Quality Factor, LC Oscillator, Wide Tuning Range, Phase Noise

# I. INTRODUCTION

Indeed, there is a critical need for inductive characteristics in high-speed applications. CMOS spiral inductors have found a broad range of applications in high-speed analog signal processing and data communications. But integrated spiral inductors have a number of limitations due to their layouts. These limitations are low quality factor, low self resonance frequency, small and non tunable inductance and need for very large silicon area [1]. Implementation of inductors with active elements, offers several attractive advantages over their spiral counterparts including large and tunable inductance and low silicon consumption. Unfortunately active inductors have high level of noise due to using a number of transistors. One of the applications of inductive characteristic is LC oscillator. Using the active inductor in LC oscillator increases the phase noise of it. Whereas the most important characteristic in an oscillator is phase noise, this high level of noise restricts use of active inductors in oscillator.

Another limitation of LC oscillators with integrated spiral inductors is their narrow tuning range. In these oscillators, frequency tuning is carried out by a varactor instead of capacitor. Theoretically, the VCO tuning range is determined by the maximum-to-minimum capacitance ratio of the varactor ( $C_{\text{var,max}}/C_{\text{var,min}}$ ). For a typical capacitance ratio in a

# Manuscript received September 11, 2011.

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standard CMOS process, the tuning range of LC-tank VCOs is approximately limited within 30% making them unattractive for wideband applications [2]-[5]. Several techniques have been proposed to enhance the tuning range of the LC-tank VCOs such as switched capacitors and switched inductors. However a wide frequency tuning range can be achieved in cost of additional circuits with considerable increase in the chip area and complexity of control mechanism [6], [7].

LC oscillators based on active inductors overcome their limitation in tuning range [9]. By utilizing a differential active inductor for the LC-tank, the circuit exhibits a very wide frequency tuning range.

In this paper we present a new active inductor with wide tuning range and low noise performance. It is shown that added local common mode feedback scheme to conventional active inductor, reduces the noise as a common mode signal in its terminal. The proposed oscillator base on new active inductor shows better phase noise performance compared to the conventional oscillators.

This paper is organized as follows. Section II discusses about basic floating gyrator— C. Section III introduces proposed active inductor and LC oscillator based on it. Section IV presents the simulation results followed by the conclusion in section V.

## II. GYRATOR- C ACTIVE INDUCTOR STRUCTURE

A gyrator consists of two back-to-back connected transconductors. When, one port of the gyrator is connected to a capacitor, as shown in Fig. 1 the network is called the gyrator-C network. If we consider the gyrator-C network shown in Fig. 1, the impedance looking from its input port is given by:

$$Z_{in} = \frac{V_{in}}{I_{in}} = \frac{V_{in}^{+} - V_{in}^{-}}{I_{in}} \Rightarrow Z_{in} = \frac{CS}{G_{m1} \cdot G_{m2}}$$
(1)

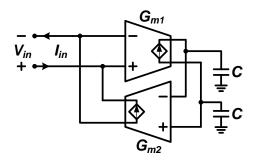


Fig. 1. Floating Gyrator– C Active Inductor Structure.



Equation (1) shows that the gyrator -C network behaves as a floating lossless inductor where its inductance is [10]:

$$L = \frac{C}{\left(G_{m1}G_{m2}\right)} \tag{2}$$

By considering (2), the inductance of gyrator - C active inductor is directly proportional to the load capacitance C and inversely proportional to the product of the transconductances of the transconductors of the gyrator. When either the input or the output impedances of the transconductors of gyrator - C networks are finite, the synthesized inductors are no longer lossless [8]. Also, the gyrator-C networks are inductive only in a specific frequency range.

## III. PROPOSED ACTIVE INDUCTOR

The proposed active inductor is shown in Fig. 2, which is based on gyrator—C structure. M1, M2 transistors are two Gm cells connected back to back. M3, M4 are in common mode configuration and act as voltage buffers. M5, M6 are current source transistors and control the transconductance of M1, M2, so control the inductance of active inductor. Parasitic capacitances of M1-M6 in nodes "a" and "b" have the role of C in gyrator—C structure. For reducing the variations of common mode signal in terminal of inductor, we employ M9-M12.

Reducing the variations of common mode signal in terminals of active inductor results in lower phase noise in oscillator based on it. This is the result of that noise is a common mode signal and our proposed structure reduces common mode variations.

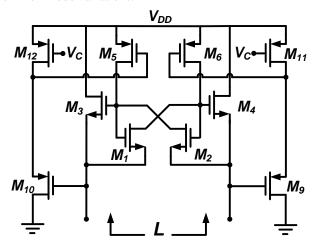


Fig. 2. Proposed active inductor

When the magnitude of common mode signal in terminal nodes of active inductor increases (due to the noise or other interference signals), the source nodes of common drain configured transistors M9 and M10 increases too. So the gate voltage of M5, M6 goes high which leads to lower magnitude of common mode signal in "a" and "b" and therefore terminal nodes. Inductance control is carried out through  $V_{\rm C}$  signal at the gate of M11, M12. Increasing  $V_{\rm C}$  leads to lower voltage in gates of M5, M6 and so increases their currents. So the transconductance of M1 and M2 increases which results in lower Inductance and therefore in an oscillator leads to a higher oscillation frequency.

The proposed tunable active inductor can be applied to realizing narrowband tunable active filters and inductance controlled oscillators. Compared with the varactor diode capacitor, the tunable active inductor has a wider frequency tuning capability because it has a wide tuning range of resistance as well as inductance. Also, it can be easily integrated with other MMIC circuits because it consists of conventional MMIC components.

As shown in Fig. 3, a tunable active inductor is implemented in the resonator of oscillator as a frequency selective element. Compared to the conventional varator controlled oscillator where the oscillation frequency is tuned by the varactor capacitance, oscillation frequency is controlled by the inductance in the presented structure. Also, it is clear that transistors M1 and M2 and capacitor provides a negative resistance.

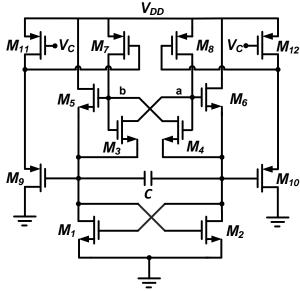


Fig. 3. LC oscillator based on the proposed active inductor

Common mode small signal equivalent circuit of oscillator is depicted in Fig. 4a. In Fig. 4a the feedback loop is opened to compute its common mode gain. Analysis of Fig. 4-b gives the common mode gain as:

$$A_{c} = -\frac{\frac{g_{m6}g_{m9}}{g_{ds11} + g_{m9}}}{g_{ds6} + (g_{m2} + g_{ds6})(g_{m8}/(g_{m2} + g_{m4}))}$$
(3)

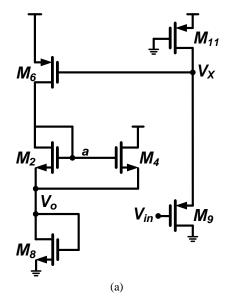
Where  $g_m$  is small-signal transconductance of transistors and  $g_{ds}$  is their drain-source conductance.

Thus the magnitude of noise in output nodes divided by this gain is:

$$v_{n,\text{new}}^2 = \frac{v_{n,\text{con}}^2}{(A_V)^2}$$
 (4)



j



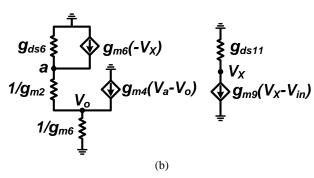


Fig. 4. (a) Opened common mode feedback loop. (b) Small signal equivalent circuit.

# IV. SIMULATION RESULTS

At first, we approximate the inductance of the active inductor with L=Im( $Z_{\rm in}$ )/ $\omega$ . Based on this equation, the value of active inductor's inductance is calculated and depicted in Fig. 5. As can be seen, the design has an inductive characteristic in frequency band of DC to 6.9 GHz. For frequencies higher than 6.9 GHz, the imaginary part of the impedance has a negative value and the design has capacitive characteristic. The oscillator based on proposed active inductor is simulated with TSMC 0.18  $\mu$ m CMOS technology by using ADS software. Tuning range of the oscillator versus control voltage is shown in Fig. 6. It can be observed that there is a wide tuning range, 171 %, from 86 MHz to 1.137 GHz which obtained by varying control voltage from 0.85 V to 1.6 V.

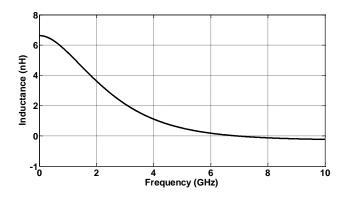


Fig. 5. Simulated inductance of the active inductor

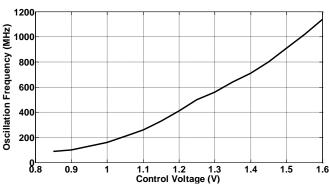


Fig. 6. Oscillation frequency versus control voltage

The simulated output phase noise using the harmonic balance in ADS is plotted as a function of the frequency offset away from the fundamental frequency as shown in Fig. 7. The phase noise of the oscillator is plotted in 100 MHz oscillation frequency. It exhibits -102 dBc/Hz phase noise at 1 MHz offset frequency.

The phase noise of the oscillator can be decreased by increasing the resonating capacitance (i.e. adding extrinsic capacitance), which must be accompanied by a reduction in the simulated inductance value to maintain the same oscillation frequency. The latter can only be achieved by increasing the bias current ( $g_m$  of the differential pairs), thus increasing the power consumption of the overall circuit. Alternatively, the active inductor based oscillator can achieve the same phase noise performance with a reduction in power consumption by employing the crystal-like LC-tank structure proposed in [11]. Generally, the phase noise of an actively tuned oscillator can be reduced at the expense of increased chip area.

Comparison results of proposed oscillator with other similar works are summarized in Table I.

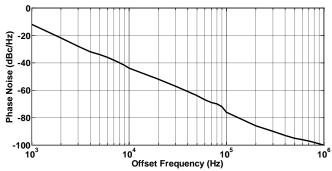


Fig. 7. Oscillator phase noise in 100 MHz oscillation frequency



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Table I. Main specifications of proposed oscillator compared with similar works

	[12]	[13]	[14]	[15]	This work
Technology	0.35 μm CMOS	1 μm FET	0.8 μm CMOS	0.2 μm CMOS	0.18 μm CMOS
Supply Voltage (V)	3	9	3	1.8	1.8
Tuning Range	100 MHz -	1.73 GHz –	450MHz - 1.16GHz	NA	86 MHz –
	900MHz	2.07 GHz			1.137 GHz
Phase Noise (dBc/Hz)	-102 at 1 MHz	-100 at 1 MHz	-92 at 1 MHz Offset	-81 at 500 kHz	-102 at 1 MHz
	Offset Frequency	Offset Frequency	Frequency	Offset Frequency	Offset Frequency

## V. CONCLUSION

In this paper, a new active inductor is presented to reduce noise in gyrator—C structure. In the proposed structure, using a common mode feedback technique, noise as a common mode signal is decreased. So the phase noise in an oscillator based on it, is reduced about 5.5 dBc/Hz. Proposed oscillator is tunable from 86 MHz to 1.137 GHz for 0.75 V variation in control signal. The circuit is simulated with TSMC 0.18 $\mu$ m CMOS technology by using ADS software.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to thank from Iran Telecommunication Research Center for financial and technical support.

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